Frobisher, as a strong candidate for scoundrelhood should be, was a tireless promoter and promotee of those who wanted the Queen and her richest supporters to believe that he alone knew how to reach the riches of Cathay by a shortcut—the Northwest Passage, which he called “Frobussers Straightes,” as shown in this map by Frobisher’s deputy, George Best.

Martin Frobisher also may be the only candidate for scoundrelhood who was repeatedly locked in jail for his own “protective custody.” That is, the Queen seems to have been protective of his safety when some of the others of his guild of pirates (privateers) may have been murderously jealous of his variously accumulated funds and financial support.
Here is 16th century Martin Frobisher a swashbuckling proto scoundrel from Yorkshire, and 19th century Charles Francis Hall, a devout, self-righteous, pontificating Ohio-an from Cincinnati and the publishing business. On first consideration as a scoundrel, Hall was a shoe-in, for being hopelessly self-centered, and for being such a rigid commander and disciplinarian that he appears to have been murdered in 1871, in a remote embayment in northern Greenland by an Austrian surgeon under his command. Arsenic poisoning was the verdict of investigators who exhumed Hall’s remains in 1964.

On the other hand…
…by the 1850s Charles Francis Hall was smitten by the romance of imagining that he could help solve the mystery of Franklin’s disappearance. More than that, he fancied that he had a mission to fulfill in completing the unfinished work of exploration by his late hero, Elisha Kent Kane, the most famous and beloved of American Arctophiles, whose riverborne funeral procession had passed through Ohio on its way from Cuba to Kane’s home city of Philadelphia in 1856-57.

Hall abandoned his publishing business in the late 1850s and began to raise support in behalf of his latter-day conviction that members of the Franklin Expedition remained to be found alive and rescued from the Arctic. Those efforts were not as successful as his religious fanaticism had led him to hope. Henry Grinnell had wearied of underwriting search and rescue or other Arctic expeditions, but did give ‘spiritual’ support to Hall’s zeal. In time, Hall parlayed a number of small, in-kind pledges of support into a hitchhiking venture—not to King William Island, where Franklin remains had been found—but to Baffin Island (1,200 miles from his target) by a Yankee whaler, Capt. Sidney Budington and the George Henry of New London CT.

Improvisation and euphoria took over Hall’s missionary zeal, and he resolved to make the best of being geographically misplaced far to the SE of King William Island.
Several things happened to the impressionable and volatile Charles Francis Hall on his northward hitchhiking trip with Budington in 1860. First, he was quite taken by romantic fascination with the first Inuit persons he met. They impressed him as utterly guile-less, honest, knowledgeable, and kind. In other words, innocent, childlike, and quite a contrast with the rough lot who made up the crew of the whaling ship, *George Henry*.

Second, it dawned on him that he was being tested by his creator and savior, and that his best strategy for impressing him (or them) was by the cleverness of his own improvisations with whatever fates would be dealt him.

Third, Hall had brought along his own considerable library of Arctic exploration geography and exploration history with him, such that he could consult a wide range of these accounts during his upcoming personal voyages of improvisation.

Now, the 1860 whaling season was one of a series of very stressful and unproductive years for landing Bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*). Prices for whale oil were low, profit margins small, and the always strenuous whalers’ activities were subjected to yet another harsh and short open-water season at high latitudes during a period of declining whale populations.
By prior agreement, Hall was dropped off at Frobisher’s Bay in the SW corner of Baffin Island while the *George Henry* proceeded farther north to pursue bowheads. Sydney Budington’s intent to leave Hall in the company of a trusted guide fell through, when the Inuit guide died *en route* to his home community (Ruby, 2001:109-113).

Hall had intended to travel with an Inuit guide to the northwest, seeking a route by water or land or ice to King William Island—a daunting distance for any traveller with abundant experience, not to mention for a cheechako from Ohio. Hall was destined never to come close to Franklin’s jumping off spot for a Hudson’s Bay Trading post.

Instead, he ranged around Frobisher’s “Strait” learning from a series of Inuit hunters and their wives, and gradually becoming more competent as a boater, then dogsledder, and even a participant in hunting. He chanced in November of 1861 to meet Tookoolito (aka ‘Hanna’) and her husband Ebierbung (aka ‘Joe’), the two worldliest Inuit on Baffin Island. They had met Queen Victoria during a sojourn in Britain, and Hannah spoke English tolerably and fancied printed blouses and skirts over her skin clothing. Hall fell further into step with, or under the partial spell of the Inuit.
In time, Hall gained the skills to converse with Inuit elders, either directly or with Hannah’s help translating into English. Gradually, as he did so, he began to realize that these were exceptional oral historians, who had preserved tales of Martin Frobisher and his crews, and ships and subordinates from 1576-78, or nearly 3 centuries earlier. Hall rushed back to the George Henry (which had been forced to winter over in 1860-61) to consult his history book collection about the earliest British attempts to master the NW Passage. By 1861 summer, Hall had become a recorder of oral history, artifact collector, and archeologist. The site of “Fenton’s Cottage” on Kodlunarn became a target for further study of British-Inuit contact. In Parks Canada’s description:

“Key elements that contribute to the heritage value of this site include:
- the location of the island in Frobisher Bay;
- the island’s topography in its form and extent;
- the integrity of artifacts and sites on the island related to Frobisher, including remains of the ship’s trench, the industrial area, the reservoir trench, Frobisher’s house, and other remains from the 1576-1578 period;
- the spatial relationship of in situ artifacts and sites;
- the as-found forms and materials of artifacts removed from the site;
- the associated knowledge embodied in Inuit oral traditions and practices of this site”
A few years after Alaska became a U.S. Territory, a century and a half ago, what was happening at the top of the world? Charles Francis Hall:

“There is a great, sad blot upon the present age & this is the blank on our maps & artificial globes from about the parallel 80° North up to the North Pole. I, for one, hang my head in shame when I think how many thousands of years ago it was that God gave to man this beautiful world—the whole of it—to subdue, & yet that part of it that must be most interesting and glorious remains as unknown to us as though it had never been created.” Loomis, *Weird & Tragic Shores*: 229.

Charles Francis Hall was probably poisoned by his own crew of sailors and explorers in November 1871. His ham-fisted leadership at seeking a route to the North Pole through Davis Strait, Baffin Bay and a narrow passage between Greenland and Ellesmere Island did him in. Eleven months after the murder, in October 1872, 19 members of the Hall Expedition were encamped on sea ice some distance from the *Polaris*, when a storm arose, breaking their floe loose. They drifted generally southward for 196 days (6 ½ months!) with no fuel for cooking. They subsisted on raw flesh of marine mammals, birds and fish. In
April 1873, these survivors were picked up by a sealer in Labrador and brought to St. Johns Newfoundland. News of their plight raced by telegraph to Washington DC.
This satellite image illustrates the narrowness of the slit between Greenland and Ellesmere Island.

It also illustrates how dynamic the sea ice conditions can be. Once in a great while, the perennial sea ice can be fractured and squeezed out of the Smith Sound avenue poleward (north of Ellesmere and Greenland). But not often. The conditions in 1871 were somewhere near these ideal ones imaged by satellite here in the early 21st century. Explorers in the 19th century developed visions of reaching 90°N: if they could just hit the right conditions NE of Smith Sound, they imagined clear sailing in the Arctic Ocean.
So, Charles Francis Hall in 1871 hit a great year for making it far north via Davis Strait, Smith Sound, and the narrows along NE Greenland. The ship, *Polaris*, froze in amid sea ice and pieces of icebergs, as illustrated here.

This trip was financed by Grinnell, once again. Hall’s prestige and ability to attract funds had grown as a result of his resourcefulness in Frobisher’s Bay, having adjusted its status from ‘Strait’ to “Bay” with the help of the Inuit, and having de-mystified England’s proto-scoundrel by identifying the location of Frobisher’s mine, and the first house of his aborted New World Colony. The Smithsonian Institution in the 20th century gratefully followed up on leads identified by Tookoolito and Ebierbing in 1860-61 for C. F. Hall.
But in October of 1872, 11 months after Hall died or was murdered, a huge calving of glacier ice separated the *Polaris* from part of her crew. The damaged *Polaris* stayed in place, but the ice floe with 19 people broke off, and headed to the southwest. Then down through the sounds, channels and straits that narrowly separate Greenland from modern Canada.