

Moose Lake and its Neighbours

from Pre-Contact to 1821



“Still Waters” - Moose Creek, 1907

Researched and written by
Raymond M. Beaumont

Photographs/Illustrations collected by
Lori Podolsky



Frontier School Division No.48
April 2000

Cover Photo: Moose Creek, water route to Moose Lake from the south. (Charles Hall Family Collection 73, courtesy Manitoba Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

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The people of Moose Lake have ties with the Lower Saskatchewan that go back many generations. Indeed, their aboriginal ancestors travelled throughout the region in search of food and furs for as long as anyone knows, a pattern that continued long after the fur traders established permanent posts among them in the eighteenth century. Their European ancestors were also travellers. Even after Moose Lake itself was established, the traders and their men went back and forth on a regular basis to nearby settlements. Indeed, Moose Lake was located at the crossroads of communication from York Factory on Hudson Bay to the Rocky Mountains far to the west. This was the heyday of the fur trade, and Moose Lake was at the heart of events that were to change the course of Western Canadian history. This is that story.

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Acknowledgements

Moose Lake and its Neighbours continues a tradition in Frontier School Division, which over the years has fostered the creation of many Native Studies learning resources focused on the northern, and often remote, locations of its schools, as well as on the unique heritage of its mainly aboriginal students.

Many thanks to the school board for its unwavering support of this programme, and especially to its chairperson, Linda Ballantyne, who has often been involved in committee work related to its development. Thanks also to Cam Giavedoni, Area 3 Superintendent, who first initiated the idea, and to Gordon Shead, Chief Superintendent, who has maintained the same interest as his predecessors.

Thanks to Raymond Beaumont for research, writing, and mapping, as well as for editing and layout, to Lori Podolsky for finding the photographs and illustrations that accompany the text, and to Adele Lafreniere for proofreading and editorial suggestions. Finally, thanks to Manitoba Education and Training, Compensatory Grant Programme, for supplying the funds necessary to complete this project.

It is our hope that this short history will open a window into a little known part of our history and stimulate others to do research of their own.

Arnold Dysart
April 2000

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ii
<i>Photographs/Illustrations</i>	iv
<i>Teacher's Guide</i>	v
<i>Introduction</i>	vii
<i>Moose Lake and its Neighbours</i>	1
Before the White Man Came	3
Fur Trade Beginnings, 1680-1763	5
Fur Trade Expansion and its Social Consequences, 1763-1782	10
The Smallpox Epidemic, 1781-1782	15
The People of Moose Lake: Pre-and Post-1782 Populations	28
The First Permanent Posts at Moose Lake, 1805-1815	35
Fur Trade Conflict Escalates	46
Colin Robertson and the Athabasca Expedition	52
The Turbulent Summer of 1819	58
Moose Lake 1819-1820	66
Moose Lake 1820-1821	79
The Coalition of 1821	88
<i>Index</i>	91

Photographs/Illustrations

Cha cha pay tat ti's Sketch of Moose Lake, 1807	vi
A Summer Camp	2
Kelsey sees the Buffalo, August 1691	6
Henday entering the Blackfoot Camp, 1754	9
Copper Kettle, Birchbark Container, Clay Pots	10
Simon McTavish	11
"Plan of Old Fort William, undated"	12
Nine-gallon keg used for storing liquor	13
Joseph Colen, Chief of York Factory	14
Smallpox Epidemic, 1780-1782	16
Sledge/Toboggan	18
Fish Hooks	20
Made Beaver/Beaver Pelt	22
Waiting for the hunter who would never return	23
Trading Ceremony at York Factory	25
Pictographs as indicators of aboriginal health	28
Cree Migrations into the Lower Saskatchewan	33
Interior of Wigwam of Cree Indians, 1817	34
Typical NWC wintering post	37
Approximate locations of HBC/NWC posts at Moose Lake in 1805-1806	41
"Sketch of Cumberland House & Gardens," undated [1815]	45
Major transportation routes into the Lower Saskatchewan	47
York Factory, 1821	50
Colin Robertson	53
Battle of Seven Oaks, 1816	55
Simon McGillivray, ca. 1824	59
The Saskatchewan River near Grand Rapids	62
Moose Lake at the centre of a vast communication network	66
Rat Dart/Spearfishing Muskrats	71
Dr. John McLoughlin, looking appropriately grim	75
The region between Cumberland House and Moose Lake	78
Packs or bales of fur	84
Fur Press	87

Teacher's Guide

Moose Lake and its Neighbours is a useful source of information for a community study of places like Moose Lake, The Pas, Grand Rapids, and Norway House or for a regional study of the Lower Saskatchewan River System. It also provides supplementary material for the Grades 6 and 11 provincial Social Studies curricula.

Grade 6: The Provincial Social Studies Guide, *Life in Canada's Past*, introduces students to Canada's history, focusing "on how people lived and interacted with one another and with their physical environment." Sections of *Moose Lake and its Neighbours* could be used in Unit 1, especially with reference to the origins and settlement patterns of aboriginal people in the Lower Saskatchewan Region, and more particularly Moose Lake, prior to and during historic times.

This booklet is also relevant to Unit 3 of the provincial guide. Although Topic 2 "Settlement at Red River" is biased toward Southern Manitoba perspectives, *Moose Lake and its Neighbours* can still provide information to address a new question. What was the relationship between the Red River Settlement and fur trade centres like Moose Lake in what is now Northern Manitoba?

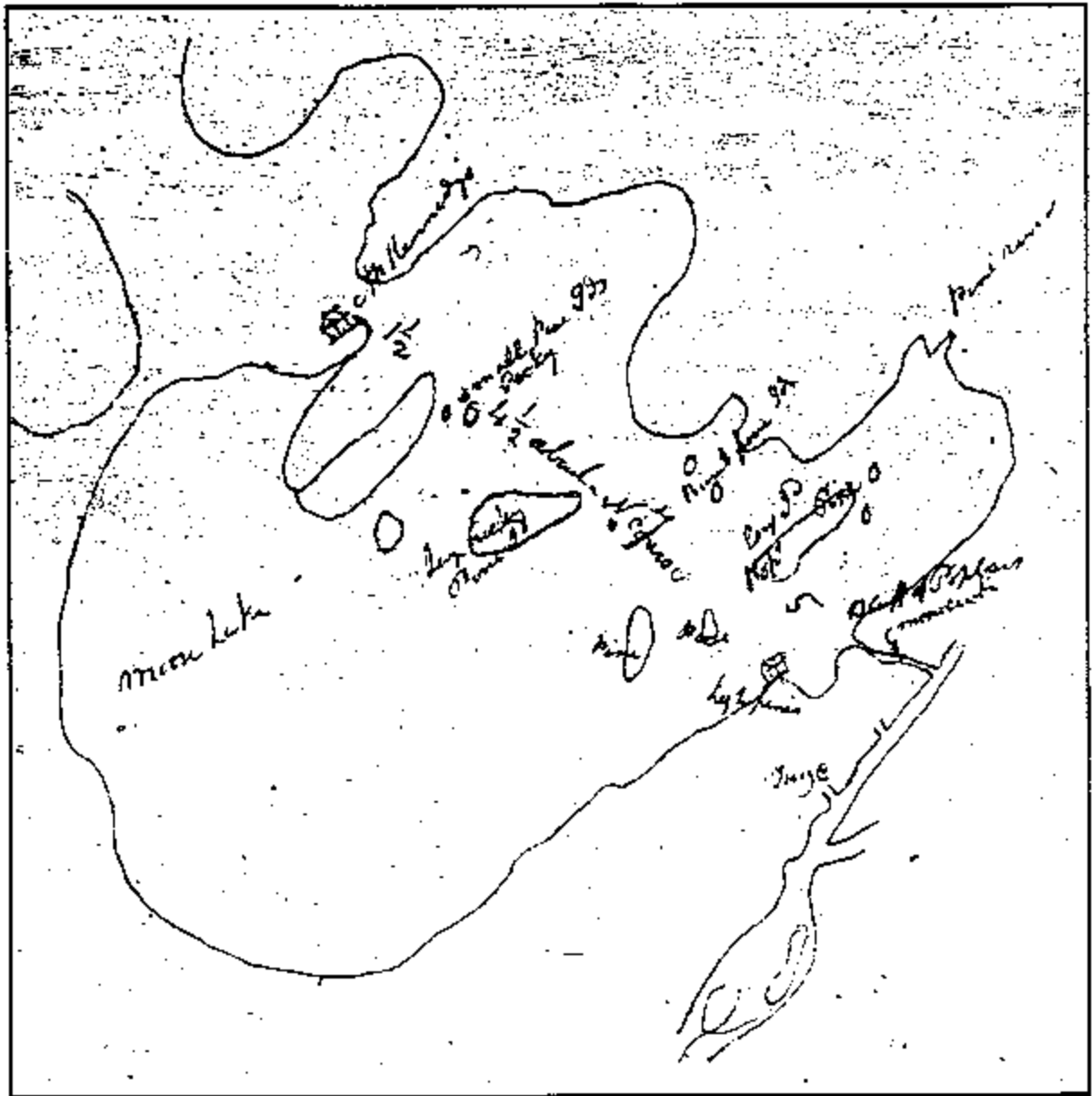
Teachers could also create a section in Unit 3, "The Fur Trade in Manitoba," and use *Moose Lake and its Neighbours* as a supporting document.

Grade Eleven: The goal of the Provincial Guide, *A Social and Political History*, is to "examine the historical development of Canada," especially its "social and political history." *Moose Lake and its Neighbours* provides material for Unit I, Section 1, "Native Peoples," particularly with reference to the question: What were the initial and long-term consequences of interaction between aboriginal people and the Europeans who came among them?

To some degree, *Moose Lake and its Neighbours* can be used in Unit II. For instance, discussion of the fur trade prior to 1760 might focus on the careers of the La Vérendryes and other fur traders in Western North America.

Unit V is devoted to Western Canada. *Moose Lake and its Neighbours* could be used in Section 1, "The Power of the Fur Trade Companies." In fact, it could be used to illuminate the long-term impact of the fur trade on the Lower Saskatchewan Region.

Cha cha pay tat ti's Sketch of Moose Lake, 1807



According to this map, travellers approaching the lake from the south in the spring of 1807 would follow a channel past "Frog C[reek]," then turn left into "moose creek," near a "Bluff of Poplars," and follow it out onto Moose Lake. To their left, they would see a house on a point of land surrounded by "large pines." This was probably the Canadian outpost built in 1805 (See Note 130). Paddling "5" miles on the "N[orth] course" across the lake, they would pass on their right "long I[sland]," now known as Big Island, with "pop[lar]" at one end and "pine" at the other. On their left would be two smaller islands covered with "Pine." Along the next "7" miles, they would pass "Burnt pine I[sland]" to the right, and a "large rocky Pine I[sland]" to the left. The next "4½" miles would take them past two "small Rocky Pine I[sland]s" to a point of land at the entrance of Crossing Bay. From there, they would travel "1½" miles to "Mr. Kennedy's."

Introduction

Moose Lake is an old community, one of the oldest in Manitoba. Located along the south-west shore of South Moose Lake in the Lower Saskatchewan River System, it has a history which goes back almost two hundred years to the days when fur was king. With those roots, it is easy to assume that it has always been where it is today. However, as the map opposite reveals, there were at least two places on the lake that could claim the name at the beginning of the nineteenth century. One of them was a North West Company (NWC) post, probably established in the fall of 1805, at or near the present site of Moose Lake. The other was a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post established by Alexander Kennedy in the fall of 1806 at a spot somewhat further to the north.

The map is interesting in its own right. Described as a "sketch of the Lower Country," it was drawn on March 25, 1807, by a Cree hunter named Cha cha pay tat ti, at the request of HBC surveyor Peter Fidler, who was in charge at Cumberland House that winter.¹ The text was probably added by Fidler himself in conversation with the hunter, and although difficult to read, it can be deciphered. "Mr. Kennedy's," for instance, is clearly marked at the top of the sketch. In all likelihood, his post was near the Opuskaw Portage, connecting North and South Moose Lake, on land that is now part of Moose Lake Indian Reserve. "Pine River" was also marked on the map. This was of course the Minago River, at the time an important link on the "Middle Track" to York Factory.² It was a route used especially during the winter months by packeteers, carrying the mail back and forth between York Factory and its inland establishments, making Moose Lake, when it was operative, the crossroad for news from all over fur trade country.

As an outpost attached to Cumberland House, Moose Lake had no independent existence; indeed, its fortunes were intimately tied to the ups and downs of the muskrat trade, and after that little animal disappeared in the winter of 1806-1807, Kennedy's post was closed. When muskrats again became abundant, an HBC outpost was established, either in 1811 or 1812, right next to the NWC post, probably on the present site of Moose Lake. For the rest of the decade, indeed, until the merger of the HBC and NWC in 1821, the traders kept close watch on each other's activities, and competed fiercely for the trade of the local hunters.

¹ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/32b, fo. 14d, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1806-1807, kept by Peter Fidler, mf. 1M40. For the sketch, see fo. 35 in the same journal.

² "Minago" is derived from *Mi'nuhi'k*, the Cree for "spruce or pine tree." See Faries, R., and Watkins, E. A., *A Dictionary of the Cree Language* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1838, reprint 1986), 326.

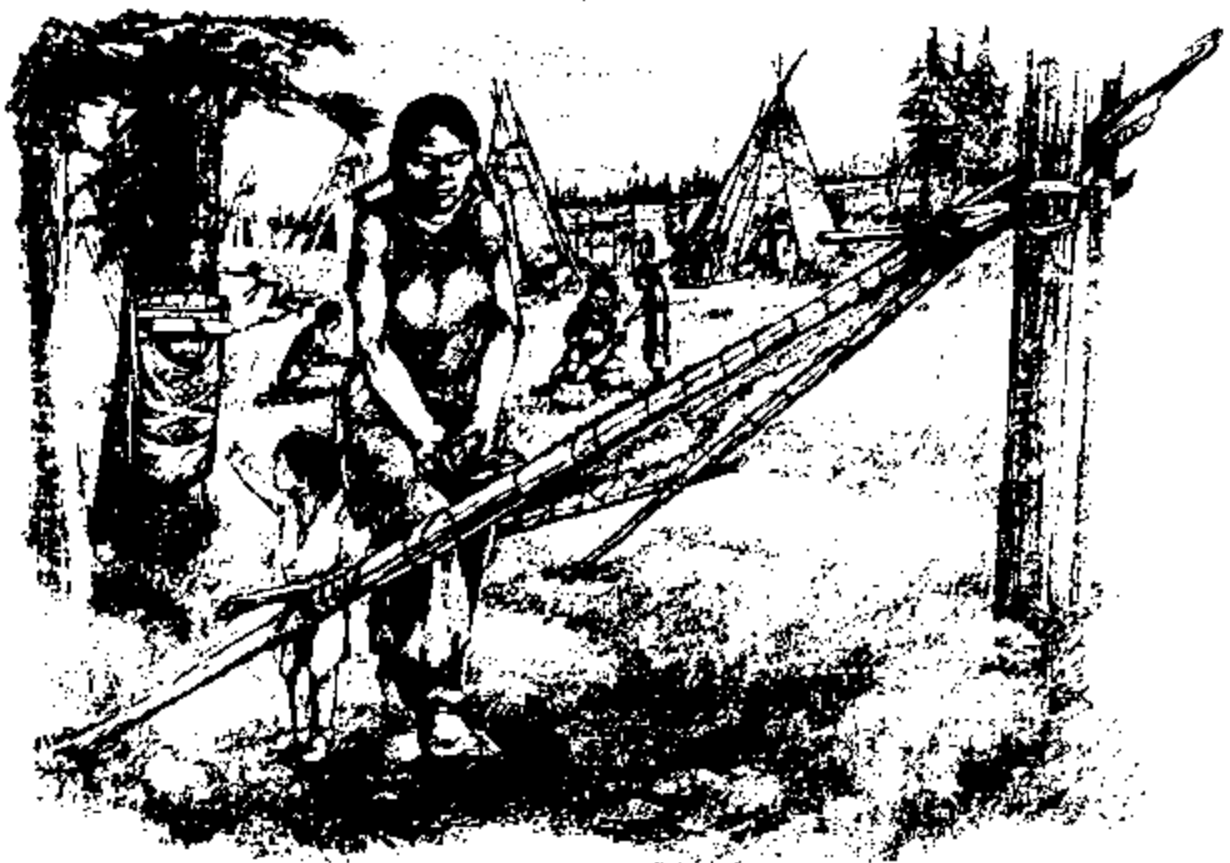
The earliest records contain some references to those hunters, including their names on occasion, but it is difficult to find any continuity in them from one decade to the next, because so many families were on the move at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is also difficult to connect them generationally, since relationships were seldom explained. Moreover, what information we have is gleaned, for the most part, from the HBC records of Cumberland House, there being only one Moose Lake journal available for this time period.³ Nevertheless, because many families travelled from one place to another on a seasonal basis, there are often bits of information about them in other HBC records, like those of York Factory, Norway House, and Swan River. From such varied sources, it has been possible to determine the extent of the smallpox epidemic in 1781-1782 and to assess the likelihood of survivors. It has also been possible to trace the movement of different groups into the region after 1800 and even to link a few of the early hunters to their living descendants today.

Fur trade records also provide details on the unfolding drama generated by the all-or-nothing struggle between the two giant fur trade companies for control of the trade. Ancestors of the present-day population of Moose Lake also include the Ballendines and the Umphervilles, fur trade families, who witnessed or participated directly in events that were to shape the course of Western Canadian history. Those same events also altered the history of Moose Lake, turning it from a hotbed of commercial antagonism into a remote outpost far removed from centres of power and decision-making. This little booklet is designed to shed some light on that period of time and to encourage readers to delve further and add to what has already been written, so that the rich cultural and historical heritage of places like Moose Lake is preserved for future generations.

Raymond M. Beaumont
January 2000

³ That was the one kept by NWC trader George Nelson during 1820-1821.

Moose Lake and its Neighbours
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JE SCOTTING MBE

July 1880/81

A Summer Camp
(courtesy Historic Resources, Manitoba
Culture, Heritage, and Recreation)

Before the White Man Came

Evidence suggests that the Cree lived in the Lower Saskatchewan region for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, before Europeans visited the country. It also indicates that as hunter-gatherers they met their needs through a complex relationship with the land and its resources.⁴ Travelling from place to place according to the seasons, they stopped at one spot because it had a good fishery, then at another because moose were plentiful, and at yet another because migrating geese were in abundance. Favourite sites might also be chosen because the ground was ideal for pitching tents, or the place had some spiritual significance. Transportation routes, on land and water, were key to this seasonal round, and home was not a reserve confined to one small dot on the map, but a whole region. Nevertheless, life was far from idyllic. People were constantly on the move in search of food and starved when they could not find it.

A regional band usually consisted of two to three hundred people, all of them related in one way or another, who gathered each year at designated spots to visit, contract marriages, and engage in religious ceremonies. We cannot be sure what these ceremonies were anciently, but in historic times the Goose Dance was associated with the Lower Saskatchewan.⁵ Comparable to the Sun Dance among the plains tribes, the Goose Dance was first described by James Isham in the 1740s among the Muskego or Swampy Cree of the Nelson and Hayes Rivers.⁶

...where was about 30 Indians very merry Dispos'd with two old men, one Drumming on a peice of parchment tied on an op'n Kettle, the other with a ste'k Like a Rattle, with parchmt. on both sides, and shott or stones on the inside to make itt Rattle, asking the Reason of all this seeming mirth, - one made answer itt was a goose fea's't as they styl' itt, when I was immediatly ask'd by the Chief of the tent to take part, accordingly being willing to Satisfie

⁴ For more detailed information on aboriginal lifeways in the region prior to European contact, see *The Oldtimers: First Peoples of the land of the North Wind* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, 1989) and Leo Pettipas, *ABORIGINAL MIGRATIONS. A History of Movements in Southern Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, 1996).

⁵ For more information on the Goose Dance, see David Meyer, "The Goose Dance in Swampy Cree Religion," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 33 (1) (April 1991): 107-118.

⁶ James Isham was an officer of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), hired as a writer in 1732 and appointed "Chief," or officer in charge, at York Factory in 1737, when he was only twenty-one years of age. Except for the years 1741-1746 when he was Chief at Churchill, Isham was in charge of York Factory until his death there, 13 April 1761. Isham is best known for his *Observations on Hudson's Bay*, in which he described the Muskego Cree culture, as well as the fur trade. His descendants by his Cree wife (or wives) include the Asham Family of Manitoba.

my Curiosity, I sits downe upon a Bundle of Ruhiggan⁷ which was handed to me; when Looking round me I see them all sett to work, some a picking, & some a trussing of Geese, downe they went to the fire, - some Roasted, some Boyl'd &c. when in two or three hour's, singing, Dancing, & talking. Every one took their seat, round the inside of the tent, when the feast was serv'd up, - Each had his goose to Devou'r, - who was to Eat the flesh of and not break the bones.⁸

By the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Goose Dance occupied a prominent place in traditional religious observances from Hudson Bay to the Lower Saskatchewan. It was even practised by some Plains Cree further upriver, perhaps borrowed from the Cree who occupied the Lower Saskatchewan prior to 1782, or introduced by the Muskego Cree who moved there after that date. Whatever the case, it became firmly established in the region. Members of the regional band would gather either in spring or fall, sometimes both, when the geese and other waterfowl were passing by on their annual migration paths. One of these gathering sites was named Pasquatinow "on the north valley rim of the Saskatchewan River, opposite the head of the Sipanok Channel."⁹ Others were located at Opaskweyaw [The Pas] and Grand Rapids, and there may even have been another near Moose Lake.¹⁰

After the usual festivities and religious rituals, the regional band would disperse into smaller groups, which would then travel off to one of their hunting grounds. In most cases, each group consisted of about fifteen to twenty individuals, usually an older couple and their children, but not always. Certainly there is evidence in the Cumberland House journals from the early nineteenth century that hunters switched from one group to another from time to time, and it is likely that they had been doing this for ages. Marriage, death, or quarrels could bring about such changes, but the reasons were undoubtedly as varied as the circumstances of individual band members. Such flexibility ensured the survival of the regional band, and for the same reason, it also encouraged alliances with surrounding

⁷ Ruhiggan was a dried meat made in the following way. Meat from the legs and thighs of a caribou was sliced off in strips, then dried, pounded into a powder, and stored in leather bags. Apparently, it would keep for several years. See E. E. Rich, ed., *Isham's Observations and Notes, 1743-49* (London: The Champlain Society for The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1949, Reprint 1968), 156.

⁸ *Isham's Observations and Notes*, 76-77.

⁹ For more information on this site, see David Meyer et al., "The Quest for Pasquatinow: An Aboriginal Gathering Centre in the Saskatchewan River Valley," *Prairie Forum* 17 (2) (Fall 1992): 201-223. Also David Meyer and Robert A. Hutton, "Pasquatinow and the Red Earth Cree," *Prairie Forum* 23 (1) (Spring 1998): 93-112.

¹⁰ According to Theodore Sanderson of Moose Lake, interviewed by Francis McKay in November 1996, the present site of Moose Lake was a summer meeting place where religious observances occurred. However, he did not state how long ago that was.

aboriginal peoples, as well as with the European traders with whom contact was made as early as the 1680s.

Fur Trade Beginnings, 1680-1763

We do not know exactly when the Cree of the Lower Saskatchewan first acquired European trade goods, but certainly they had them by the 1680s, possibly from aboriginal people to the Southeast, who were trading with the French on the Great Lakes, but more likely by direct trade with the English, who were located on Hudson Bay. News of these bayside traders probably reached the Lower Saskatchewan in 1682-3, and by 1684 the Cree and their Assiniboin allies were travelling to York Factory, the recently built Hudson's Bay Company post at the mouth of the Hayes River. Here they traded their furs for European goods, then returned upriver for the winter to acquire more furs for another trip to Hudson Bay the following spring.

In 1690, one such group, made up of Assiniboin traders, was accompanied inland by Henry Kelsey, a young Englishman in his early twenties. The party left York Factory by canoe on June 12 and travelled, in Kelsey's word, "from the house [York Factory] six hundred miles Southwest, through Rivers which run strong with falls, thirty three Carriages [portages], five lakes in all" to a point along the Saskatchewan River just below Opaskweyaw [The Pas]. Here Kelsey spent the winter, no doubt the object of much curiosity, as he was the first European to travel to this part of the country.¹¹ His appearance and manners would most certainly have set him apart from his companions, but he spoke Cree well enough to be understood, and he may also have had a native woman along to assist him.¹² Whatever the case, he got through the winter.

The following spring, Kelsey went out onto the prairies where he encouraged the Cree and others to give up warring with each other and trap beaver instead. It seems that his words fell on deaf ears. Certainly the warring continued even as he

¹¹ As far as we know, Kelsey was the first. Jean-Baptiste Chouart, nephew of Pierre Radisson, was sent inland from York Factory in the winter of 1685-86, but the distance he travelled is unknown. See Dale R. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991), 78.

¹² Joseph Robson, who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company some years later, reported a story that Kelsey had returned to York Factory from his journey to the plains, bringing a native wife with him. It may have been true. In his journal, 23 July 1691, Kelsey recorded that he gave a man some powder to take back to "the women...w[hi]ch were behind" and "an Order to receive some shott of such a woman." See *The Kelsey Papers*, With an Introduction by Arthur G. Doughty and Chester Martin, published by the Public Archives of Canada and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1920). Apparently, Kelsey had entrusted shot to one particular woman, perhaps a wife, who would give it out only on his order.

exhorted the people to end it. Moreover, his report to the Company did not result in its sending more men inland to collect the furs or set up posts closer to the Native hunters. Instead, the Company continued to expect them to travel down to Hudson Bay as they had done in the past. Such trips had few surprises, except that the Natives never knew from one year to the next whether they would be trading with the French or the English.¹³ This was especially true during the last years of the eighteenth century, as Great Britain and France fought for control of Hudson Bay. York Factory, for example, changed hands a number of times prior to 1697, when the French seized and held it until 1714, the year the English regained it permanently.



Kelsey sees the Buffalo, August 1691
As imagined by Artist, Charles W. Jefferys
(courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives,
Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

Seventeen years had passed, when the Hudson's Bay Company took back control of York Factory, but its traders resumed business in the same way they had always done it. The Cree and other aboriginal hunters still had to paddle down to Hudson Bay each year. The furs they took with them were either obtained through their own trapping or by trading their used goods for furs trapped by more remote peoples. Apparently, this middleman role was gradually assumed by the Cree, who controlled access to the Hudson Bay lowlands, and it seems to have brought prosperity to a few enterprising native traders. Nevertheless, such favourable conditions were not to last.

Gradually, the Europeans realized they could eliminate the middleman altogether and trade directly with the trappers themselves. The first to recognize the possibilities were traders from the Great Lakes. According to historians Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, French *coureurs de bois* had moved west from their

¹³ They also had no guarantee that there would be any European goods available when they got to Hudson Bay. Apparently, there were years during the French regime at York Factory, when trade goods were so few that many of the Cree and other aboriginal traders stopped travelling there altogether. See Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 90.

trade centre of Montreal to the region of Lake Winnipeg by 1716, thereby cutting off much of the inland trade of the Hudson's Bay Company posts on James Bay. However, the hinterlands of Hudson Bay were not affected until the 1730s, when the organizing skills of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de la Vérendrye, began to have an impact on the fur returns of York Factory.¹⁴ La Vérendrye and his family built a series of posts stretching from Lake Superior to the Lower Saskatchewan, including Fort Bourbon on Cedar Lake by 1742, Fort Basquia or Paskoyac at Opaskweyaw [The Pas] by 1748, and Fort à la Corne near the forks of the Saskatchewan River by 1753.¹⁵

Loss of profits and criticism in England finally forced the Hudson's Bay Company to do something to counter the threat from the French. In 1753, the London Committee gave permission to James Isham, Chief at York Factory, to find someone to go inland to assess the situation. Anthony Henday, a labourer at the post, was chosen, and in June 1754 he went with a party of Cree traders to the interior where he remained until the following year. Like Kelsey before him, he had little impact on the Cree with whom he travelled or on the Blackfoot he met on the prairies. Moreover, it became evident to him that the French traders were snatching up the most prized furs, leaving the bulkier, less valuable ones for the English. Unfortunately, this information did not reach England, because in the official journal sent home, Henday downplayed the role of the French, apparently to enhance his own importance.¹⁶ Isham recognized the discrepancies in Henday's account and added his own remarks by way of explanation, but these were ignored by the London Committee, as were his recommendations, which were based on conversations with Henday himself. One of Isham's suggestions was that an inland post be established at a lake near the French posts. According to historian Glyndwr Williams, "The exact location of this lake is not known, since Henday's 'draught' which purported to show a 'branch or River of Deep Water, free from Windings' leading to that spot is lost, but it may have been Moose Lake."¹⁷

Since Henday travelled via Cross Lake, Minago River, and Moose Lake in order to reach the Saskatchewan River, there is little doubt that he knew the area. Certainly, the Cree who lived around Moose Lake would have been aware of his

¹⁴ Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure: an economic analysis of relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 33.

¹⁵ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 53.

¹⁶ For the arguments that it was Henday himself who altered the journal, see Glyndwr Williams, "The Puzzle of Anthony Henday's Journal, 1754-55," *The Beaver*, (Winter 1978): 41-56.

¹⁷ Williams, 50.

arrival there in 1754.¹⁸ However, it is unlikely he would have generated the same interest as Kelsey had done in 1690/1. Not only were the Cree well acquainted with the French traders, who were becoming numerous in the region, but they also knew the English traders at York Factory, where they had gone for years to barter their furs. Indeed, they continued to go there, even after the French had established posts among them. They did so for goods the French could either not supply or supplied in insufficient quantities, bulky items like kettles and guns, which could be imported easily by the Hudson's Bay Company in ships from London, while the French, on the other hand, had great difficulty bringing heavy trade goods on the long canoe route from Montreal to the Saskatchewan.¹⁹

Henday was disturbed when his Cree companions traded with the French, but from their point of view it made perfect sense. Such trade gave them access to additional European trade goods, and it also enabled them to trade their used goods for furs from people living far away from York Factory. One of the earliest of these Cree traders to be named in the Hudson's Bay Company records was "Miss'sin'kee'shick," with whom at least two English traders travelled upriver from York Factory in the 1760s.²⁰ We do not know if it was Missinakeeshick's first trip, but he must have been a young man at the time, because he was still living in 1828.²¹ This "upland leading Indian" travelled inland in 1774 with Samuel Hearne, who established the first post at Cumberland House in that year, and in 1779 the "Flesh Indian Miss'nee kisock" and others built eight canoes for Robert Longmoore, the HBC trader at Hudson House, up the Saskatchewan River from Cumberland House.²² Terms like "upland leading Indian" or "Flesh Indian" are somewhat ambiguous, but it is clear from the 1828 Census that

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of Henday's travels, see Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 93-97.

¹⁹ Ray and Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure*, 33.

²⁰ See Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 97, 99. In a letter dated 31 August 1762, "Missinekishick" was the first of nine Cree men listed as York Factory's "best Leaders." See PAM, HBCA, B.239/b:23, fo. 15, York Factory Correspondence, 1761-1762, mf. 1M255. This and other records of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) are housed in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM) in Winnipeg. In spite of their evident bias, these fur trade documents contain unique eyewitness accounts of events, written down shortly after they happened. Read carefully, they can provide us with an invaluable window to the past.

²¹ For the Census of Cumberland House, June 1828, see PAM, HBCA, B.49/d:24, pp. 29-35, Cumberland House Accounts, 1827-1828, mf. 1M460. In Kennedy's 1815 report for the Cumberland District, "Messine Keeshick" was described as an old man and a chief. See PAM, HBCA, B.49/e:1, fo. 5, Cumberland House, Report on District, 1815, mf. 1M777.

²² PAM, HBCA, B.49/a:1, fo. 1, Cumberland House Post Journal, kept by Samuel Hearne, 1774-1775, mf. 1M38, and PAM, HBCA, B.49/a:9, fo. 51d, Cumberland House Post Journal, kept by William Tomison, 1779-1780, mf. 1M38.

Missinakeeshick was a “Maskegon,” meaning a Swampy or Muskego Cree.²³ These people, usually associated with the lower Nelson and Hayes Rivers of Hudson Bay, were often allies of the Hudson’s Bay Company traders.²⁴



Henday entering the Blackfoot Camp, 1754

As imagined by Artist, Franklin Arbuckle.
(courtesy Hudson’s Bay Company Archives,
Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

The inland Cree, regardless of their origins, recognized the advantages of having both French and English traders among them. They knew that the more traders there were, the greater the competition, and the better the terms for their furs. That is why they did not object to the arrival of the English on the Saskatchewan in the 1750s and 1760s.²⁵ Prior to contact with European traders, they had relied on the spear, the weir, and the bow and arrow to acquire fish and game. The introduction of the gun meant that they did not have to get as close to an animal to kill it.²⁶ The steel knife may not have been as sharp as a flint blade, but it was not as prone to

breakage. Copper kettles were more durable than clay pots, and they also eliminated the time-consuming chore of making them. Kettles also replaced the

²³ PAM, HBCA, B.49/d:24, p. 29, mf. 1M460.

²⁴ It has been assumed that these people moved inland with the traders during the late eighteenth century, and indeed there was a population shift away from the Hudson Bay lowlands at that time. However, it is possible that the Maskegons also occupied the upper portions of the Hayes and Nelson Rivers at earlier dates. According to this view, Missinakeeshick could have been a Swampy Cree, but a long time resident of the upper Nelson River system, rather than a recent arrival from the seacoast.

²⁵ William Walker, in charge of Cumberland during the summer of 1776, described the negotiating strategy of “seven Tents of Indians upon our Plantation” who claimed that “the Frenchmen gave so and so and We gave them Nothing...I [Walker] do all that lays in my Power to Please them in Moderation; But if I was for to give every thing that was in the Warehouse It would just be the same, They would still want more.” See PAM, HBCA, B.49/a:4, fo. 6, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1776-1777, mf. 1M38.

²⁶ That is not to say, however, that all other weapons became obsolete as soon as the gun was introduced. The bow and arrow continued in use for a long time afterwards because in certain circumstances it was more effective than the gun. Also, the gun was prone to mechanical failure.

birchbark containers in which water was heated to the boiling point with red-hot stones. For these reasons, women coveted them. In short, because they did not have to be manufactured locally, European trade goods reduced the work that the Cree had to do to survive. On the other hand, they also made them more dependent on the Europeans, less able to survive on their own.

The Copper Kettle



replaced
Birchbark Containers



and Clay Pots
for Cooking.
(Wheeler, 13)

Fur Trade Expansion and its Social Consequences, 1763-1782

When the Seven Years' War broke out, French involvement in the fur trade declined sharply, and, for a time, the Hudson's Bay Company had a virtual monopoly. However, after the conquest of Canada by the British in 1763, Scots, Irishmen, Englishmen, and Americans arrived in Montreal and reorganized the old French fur trade. Soon large canoes manned by French-Canadian *voyageurs* were back on the Great Lakes, and traders from Canada were again acquiring the bulk of the valuable furs as the French had done in the past. These "peddlars," as they were known to Hudson's Bay Company personnel, were no longer foreigners. They were British subjects, who had access to the same goods as the Hudson's Bay Company, especially the high quality Brazil tobacco the Cree preferred. Moreover, they were willing to travel to the heart of Cree country in order to exchange those goods for furs.

During the 1770s and 1780s, the peddlars dominated the fur trade to such a degree that the Hudson's Bay Company was finally forced to act on Isham's recommendation to build inland posts. In 1774 Cumberland House was established by Samuel Hearne upriver from the "Basquiau" [The Pas] region, which was swarming with Canadian traders. In time, others followed, but they did little to stop the Canadians, whose profits increased, as they expanded further west. By the 1770s, they also began to form partnerships that evolved in the

winter of 1783-1784 into the North West Company (NWC), dominated by Simon McTavish and the Frobisher brothers. The new company was headquartered in Montreal, with a vast transportation system connecting it via the Great Lakes and Pigeon River to a large warehouse at Grand Portage, from which trade goods were distributed throughout the west. Later, Fort William on the Kaministiquia River became its main depot. Each fall NWC trading partners with their voyageurs would take trade goods from Fort William to posts in the interior, returning the following spring with the winter's trade in furs. Describing this gathering, historian Gerald Friesen wrote,



Simon McTavish

from a painting by Sir Martin Shea, c. 1800
HBCA 1923/1/3 (N01374)
(courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives,
Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

Nothing could compare with the June rendezvous of wintering partners, Montreal traders, and canoe men at Fort William. It was a party so wild as to satisfy the rough-and-ready for a full year - brandy and rum by the gallon, roast meat by the quarter, women, fighting, tests of strength, the thrill of gambling for large sums, the laughter of old friends - and it made the isolation and the struggle worthwhile.²⁷

According to Friesen, the rendezvous brought the Montreal agents and wintering partners of the North West Company together to plan strategy and discuss profit sharing, which provided "an ideal structure for the expanding fur trade." He added, however, that the dark side of this "energetic business management" was the "murder and assault and mean exploitation" associated with its introduction to the western fur trade.²⁸

²⁷ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 58.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58-59.



"Plan of Old Fort William, undated"
 1987.363-F-67:32 (N14760)
 Credit: Old Fort William
 (print courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives,
 Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

In fact, the journal of HBC surveyor, Philip Turnor, provides evidence that such questionable trade practices predated the formation of the North West Company. In 1779, Turnor was at Hudson House, which was located up the Saskatchewan River west of Cumberland House, right next to a Canadian named William Holmes. On April 4, Holmes and his men allegedly took "a gang of stone Indians...within his stockades and locked them up and would not let them out until they had traded every skin with him," something he had "made a practice of doing all winter."²⁹ Other trade tactics of the Canadians were even worse. Stories circulated that McCormack and Gebosh, Canadians at a post "six days paddle" upriver from Hudson House, had killed a troublesome hunter named Ke-puche by giving him a "Glass of Laudanum which put him into a lasting sleep." McCormack was also said to have angered the Indians because he "cut their Tents in pieces" and robbed them of their furs after getting them drunk.³⁰

Resentment was high in April 1779 when "Twenty Five Tents came and encamped upon a Hill close above the settlement." While they were there, a horse belonging

²⁹ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a:8, p. 22, Cumberland House Post Journal, kept by Philip Turnor, 1778-1779, mf. 1M38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-27. Entry for 26 April 1779.

to a man named Cole disappeared, and he threatened to shoot the Indians' horses, unless it was returned. The following morning, an old man went to the traders and warned them that they needed to arm themselves. This only angered McCormack, who told his interpreter to tell the elder "to put on Petticoats that he was only an old Woman and that he would cut his tounge [sic] out." The interpreter refused to translate, and "McCormack then sent for Cole who was fond of such an office and fully executed the order." The old man went away, and about 10 a.m. small groups of men from the encampment came down the hill toward the fort. They stood for a while and watched the Canadians as they packed their furs, then the only one who had a gun with him "shott Cole in the Breast and killed him on the spot." When one of the men of trader Peter Pangman tried to intervene, the armed man "got his gun loaded again and shot him in the Belly of which he died in about 12 hours." Both sides immediately armed, and a gun battle ensued. Outmanned and frightened, the Canadians eventually called a truce, gave up their goods in exchange for their lives, and fled downriver to where Holmes was located.³¹

Among the goods acquired by the native hunters during that incident were "30 Kegs of Rum containing about 240 Gallons," proof of its importance as a trade item. Indeed, liquors had been introduced long before by both Canadian and HBC traders, often with devastating consequences. As early as the 1740s, Isham had commented on the social breakdown that accompanied the introduction of brandy and rum among the Cree around York Factory. However, his observations did not lead to a ban



Nine-gallon keg used for storing liquor.
The attached spigot was opened by a key.
(Illustration in Robert C. Wheeler, *A Toast to the Fur Trade*, 42.)

on its use in the trade. That was a foreign idea at the time, when the consumption of alcoholic beverages by the average Englishman, or Frenchman for that matter, was many times what it is today.³² It was equally foreign to the Cree and others who made the long trip down to York Factory with the hope of getting access to liquor. Indeed, they expected "a good boose" in reward for having come so far. Drinking, of course, could not be confined to the fort alone. Hearne described in

³¹ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

³² However, the HBC could control consumption to some degree by watering down liquor and limiting its trade. Such procedures made good business sense, because uncontrolled drinkers made poor trappers.



Joseph Colen, Chief of York Factory
Artist: Unknown, 1796
HBCA P-198 (N3132)
(courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives,
Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

detail how excessive drinking among his Cree canoeemen frustrated his trip inland during the summer of 1775.³³ So widespread was the practice that exceptions to the rule were often recorded. In 1793, for instance, Joseph Colen, Chief at York Factory, described the death of a prominent local hunter, who "was quiet and obliging, and what is singular for a Native he was sober."³⁴ However, drunkenness was not just a problem among the Cree. In the same year at York Factory, "G.D." added this telling postscript at the end of an account book that would be sent home for examination by the London Committee, "your Honors will please to Observe that ever Since this Draught Book was begun to be wrote that I have always been in a state of Intoxication

which prevented me from being so Correct as I Could wish."³⁵ That he could use drunkenness as an excuse, and hope to be forgiven for it, illustrates how common the problem was at that time.

As competition in the fur trade increased, the use of liquor also increased. The grief it caused on the Lower Saskatchewan, where competition was keenest, cannot be documented on a case by case basis, but it must have been widespread. By the 1770s and 1780s, brandy and rum were being shipped there in ever increasing volumes, and more so after 1790, when the creation of a number of new companies intensified competition. After the formation of the XY Company in 1798, the situation became worse still. In the words of historian Gerald Friesen,

West Indian rum, the 'Fery Double distilled Rum,' was now being shipped into the western interior in immense quantities to fuel the competition between traders. In 1800 alone, over 10,000 gallons of the liquor arrived in the interior, and, as the Montreal competition

³³ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/2, fo. 1-6d, Cumberland House Post Journal, kept by Samuel Hearne, 1775-1775, mf. 1M38.

³⁴ PAM, HBCA, B.239/a/95, fo. 24, York Factory Post Journal, 1792-1793, mf. 1M161.

³⁵ PAM, HBCA, B.239.d.100, York Factory Account Book, 1792-1793, mf. 1M675. A "Draught Book" usually referred to a preliminary or draft version from which the final, and presumably correct, copy was made. In this instance, "G. D." apparently never got beyond the draft stage!

increased, this figure reached over 21,000 by 1803, 16,000 by the Nor'westers and 5,000 by the XY company.³⁶

If one adds to these figures the quantities of rum supplied by the Hudson's Bay Company, it is easy to see the havoc the coveted "fire water" caused in Cree and other aboriginal communities.³⁷ However, it was not the worst feature of contact with Europeans. New diseases, to which aboriginal people had little or no resistance, took an even greater toll.

The Smallpox Epidemic, 1781-1782

In the years 1781-1782, a devastating smallpox epidemic swept through the prairies and into the parkland further to the north.³⁸ Beginning in 1780 among the Ojibway and Dakota west of Lake Superior, it spread to the villages on the upper Missouri River by the summer of 1781. From there it went north onto the plains, arriving at the forks of the Saskatchewan River in November, Cumberland Lake in December, and the region around "U.Basquiau" [The Pas/Opaskweyac] in January 1782.³⁹ William Tomison, who was in charge of Cumberland House at the time, gave a particularly graphic account of its movement into the region.

Some of the Indians who went to war last Year having met with a Tent of Snake Indians who were ill of the Small Pox, they killed & Skalp'd them. by this means they received the disorder themselves. and most of them died on their return the few that reached their own Parts communicated the Disorder to their Countrymen and since then it has run with great rapidity through the whole Country.⁴⁰

When he reached York Factory the following July, Tomison reported "that the Small Pox destroyed most of the Indians Inland...and that of the several Tribes of

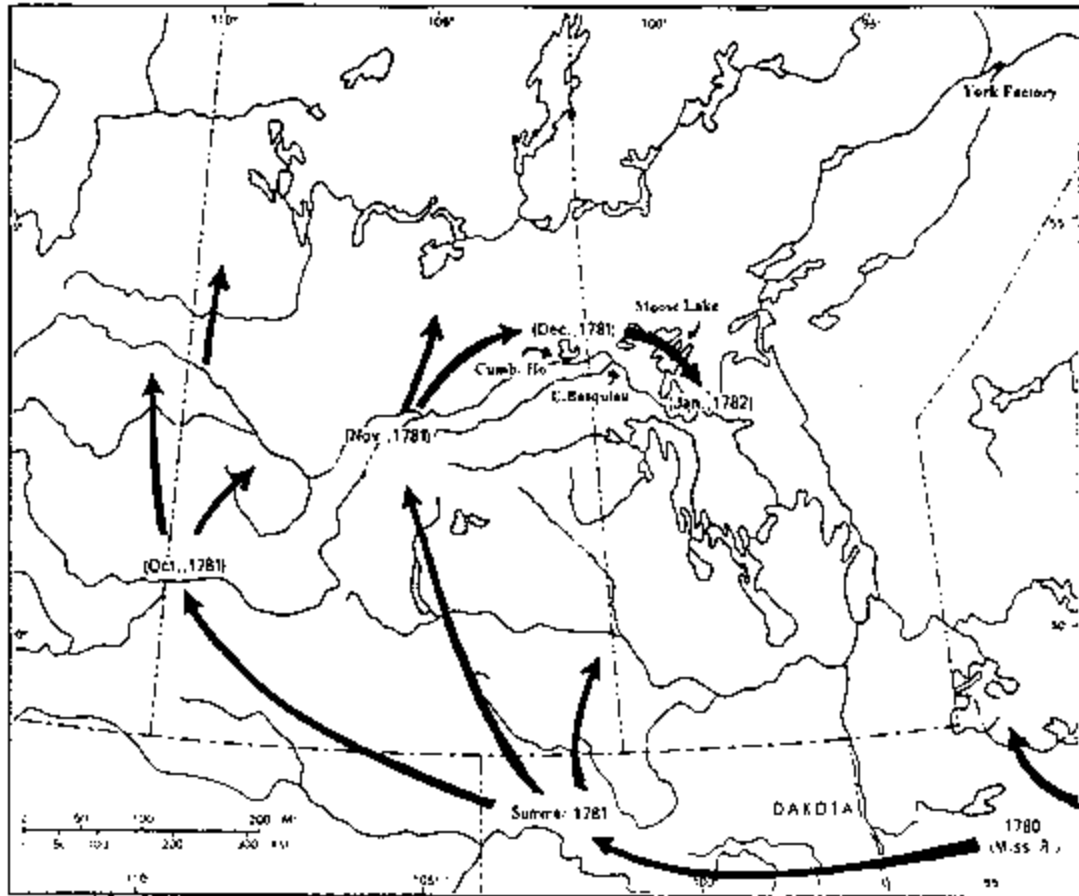
³⁶ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 65.

³⁷ On 5 June 1793, for instance, a party of Playgreen Indians told Joseph Colen, "that the Canadians came to their tents with great quantities of Liquor which was distributed very freely among them by which means while intoxicated they collected the whole of their winters hunt, amounting to 18 or 20 Bundles of Furs of 40 or 50 Beaver each, and they further told me their companions are one and all very much distressed for necessities to provide for their families." One can only imagine how difficult their lives were the following winter. PAM, HBCA, B.239/a/95, fo. 32d, York Factory Post Journal, 1792-1793, mf. 1M161.

³⁸ Smallpox was a viral disease first introduced to America by the Spanish in the sixteenth century. French colonists brought it to Quebec in 1616 and the epidemic spread to the Maritimes, James Bay, and the Great Lakes at that time. Another outbreak nearly destroyed the Hurons in 1636-1640, and there was a second outbreak in French Canada between 1755 and 1757.

³⁹ Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: their role as hunters, trappers, and middlemen in the lands southwest of Hudson Bay 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 104-105.

⁴⁰ PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/42, fo. 15d-16, York Factory Correspondence, 1781-1782, General letter to Moose Fort and Albany Fort from Matthew Cocking, York Fort, August 1782, mf. 1M255.



Smallpox Epidemic, 1780-1782

Beginning in the Upper Great Lakes Region, smallpox spread west to the Missouri River and north into the Saskatchewan, reaching the Opaskweyac-Moose Lake Region in January 1782.

Assinnee Poet[,] Pegogemew[,] and others bordering on Saskachiwan River he real[ly] believed not one in fifty have survived.⁴¹ To get an impression of the devastation caused by this epidemic, one only has to turn to Tomison's journal, in which he recorded the first signs of disease on 11 December 1781.

In the Evening three men & four Women arrived from the southward with Furs to Trade also one family came across the lake from the Westward, the former has brought the Disagreeable News of many Indians Dying, & the latter complain much for want of Food. Indeed one of those that came from the Southward does not appear to me to live long, as she is troubled with a Violent pain in her back & much inclined to Vomitting, these Inform me of seeing several Tents without any body alive in them, & some of the Dead not buried.⁴²

⁴¹ According to Peers, Tomison also reported that at least two-thirds of the Cree had died. See Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada: 1780 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 19.

⁴² PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/11, fo. 32, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1781-1782, kept by William Tomison, mf. 1M38. Following infection, there was an incubation period of twelve days, after which backache, fever, or prostration signalled the onset of the disease. It was spread via droplets from the nose and throat, either by coughing, sneezing, or other close contact.

The woman died the following day, after having been sick only four days, and was buried by the HBC servants because "those that came with Her, would not touch her, although some of them were very near relations." A few days later, men arrived from Hudson House with news "of that Devouring Disorder the small pox rageing amongst the natives, & is carrying all off before It, wherever it Comes." That was not quite true, because the men also brought news that "Charles Price Isham, has happily recovered [from] that Dreadful Disorder."⁴³

Isham, of mixed Cree and English background, was the son of James Isham, and a man Philip Turnor described as "well beloved by the Indians and taulks the Language exceeding[ly] well."⁴⁴ The survival of this HBC man, when so many of his aboriginal cousins died of the disease, requires some explanation. Although the men at Hudson House were on half rations, they still had something to eat. The nearby Cree had little or nothing. As William Walker, the master at Hudson House, reported to Tomison, there were "no Buffaloe to be found" and "them that has not taken the small pox, is frightened to look after any thing, for fear of falling in with others that is bad." He also reported that, "the Indians all Dying by this Distemper...lying Dead about the Barren Ground like rotten sheep, their Tents left standing & the wild beast, Devouring them."⁴⁵ In such circumstances, there was obviously no one to care of the sick. Isham, on the other hand, was probably in better health when he contracted the disease, and he also had healthy men nearby to look after him during his illness.

Tomison and his men were well aware of the vulnerability of the aboriginal people to smallpox, and took precautions as best they could to protect them. On December 18, the day after their arrival, Tomison recorded that the men from Hudson House were "smoaking every thing belonging to them with the Flour of Sulpher to prevent any effect from them to the Natives."⁴⁶ Such measures probably had little effect, and vaccination against the disease was still twenty years in the future, but at least the men felt they were doing something.⁴⁷ In the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, fo. 32d-33.

⁴⁴ PAM, HBCA, B.49:a:8, p. 25.

⁴⁵ PAM, HBCA, B.49:a:11, fo. 34, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1781-1782, kept by William Tomison, mf. 1M38.

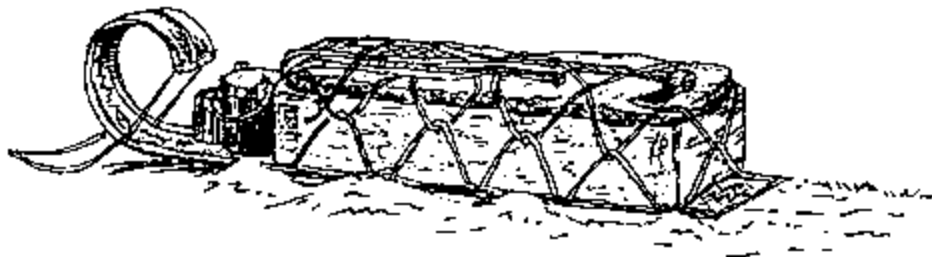
⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 34d. Long observation had taught Europeans that blankets and clothing could be contaminated, and in fact smallpox was spread by dried viral particles on blankets and clothing.

⁴⁷ Vaccination for smallpox was introduced to Canada in 1798, but resistance to the procedure kept the disease from being eliminated until the twentieth century. It was eradicated in the rest of the world in 1979 through a vigorous campaign by the World Health Organization.

meantime, the disease continued its lethal march across the prairies. On Christmas Eve, Tomison recorded,

late in the Evening five Indian Men & four Women arrived from the Southward, with a few furs to Trade, but Complain much for want of food, these also brings the melancholy news, I have already had of the small pox rageing amongst them & but few escape Death that take that Disorder. they also Inform me of one Good Indian returning back from them this Morning, having taken the aforementioned Disorder.⁴⁸

The following day, Tomison traded with them, "& made them Presents as Usual, but never expect[ed] to see them again." That same evening, "two Indian Boys arrived" bringing with them "the low Country lad on a Sledge, he was taken bad



The "Sledge" mentioned by Tomison may in fact have been a "Toboggan," as pictured above, which was a runnerless sled used by the Cree during the winter (Wheeler, 32)

last night with a Violent pain in his breast and Belly." On December 28, Tomison wrote, "one of the women was taken bad last night[,] the low country Indian still continues very ill." The next morning, "we could Observe the small pox, coming out very thick up on the sick lads heads [sic] and thighs." On December 30, "the Indian still continues very bad, he has a great stoppage in his throat, & Indeed I have no Medicines to Give him, that is fit for that Disorder." On 1 January 1782, "he turned blind last night," and on January 5, "one man making a Coffin & one man digging a Grave for the Indian lad he Died last night between 9 & 10 OClock & was for 24 hours delirious."⁴⁹

On January 6, "at noon two Indian Men and two Women arrived from above...they say there was five tents of them, but is now reduced to three and several of them bad."⁵⁰ An even worse situation was recorded on January 15.

⁴⁸ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/11, fo. 35d-36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 36-38. The "low Country lad" probably arrived from York Factory with Robert Longmoore, October 22. He had accompanied Longmoore to Hudson House, December 7, but returned ten days later with Andrew Corrigan. Tomison sent him off, December 20, with a Cree hunting party, but he became ill and had to be returned to the post by sledge [sleigh], December 26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 38-38d.

Late in the Evening a Distressed Woman & her Child came here, these are all that is alive out of one Tent, & has not Yet been ailing. the News she brings is still more & more alarming of that cruel Disorder, the small pox raging amongst them with its greatest fury, and carrying all before it. they chiefly Die within the third or fourth Night, & these that survive after that time are left to be devoured by the wild beasts.⁵¹

In spite of the woman's dire situation, Tomison could not forget business. The following day he "sent James Wass and James Banks to where the Woman came from to bring what Furs, there may be amongst those that are Yet alive, as they are all in debt. I also sent with them some Duffle to put round the Dead, & to take the Beaver Coats from them."⁵² Incredible as it may seem to modern sensibilities, Tomison saw nothing amiss in removing good leather from the dead.⁵³ In his defence, it must be said that the London Committee demanded that he do everything in his power to seek payment for the supplies he had advanced in the fall to the native hunters, especially since fur returns were already in steep decline because of the epidemic. Tough business acumen, he well knew, was required to insure his own survival in the Company service.

That is not to say, however, that he lacked compassion for the people's suffering. On January 21, he recorded that he had

sent James Wass to assist a sick Indian, & bring him to the House...& the rest digging a Grave and buried an Indian Woman that Died on the Plantation Yesterday Evening. late at Night 19 Starved Indians arrived. Indeed their Condition is too shocking to be described by pen, they have left several on the way, not able to walk & one died on the road, which they have brought here to be buried.⁵⁴

On January 22, his feelings were even more evident.

one man Net making, one digging a Grave & buried an Indian Child that was brought here last night, & the rest at the Nets. 9 Sturgeon and 6 pike, part of which Humanity, obliged me to Give to the Starved Natives. Although God knows we can but ill afford it, but I do assure your Honours it cuts me to the Heart, to see the miserable condition they are in, & not being able to Help them.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 39d-40.

⁵² *Ibid.*, fo. 40. It is probable that these Beaver coats were infected by smallpox.

⁵³ In fact, the beaver coats worn by the Indians were the most prized pelts. According to Ray and Freeman, "By wearing the pelts, the Indians greased the skin, producing a supple leather and wearing off the guard hairs, so that the wool could be easily removed from the skins and a useful leather could be obtained in the process." See Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure*, 31.

⁵⁴ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/11, fo. 41. In all likelihood, starvation made it much more difficult for the native hunters to overcome the disease.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 41-41d.

"Your Honours" were, of course, members of the London Committee, who expected Tomison's journal to justify all his actions. At noon that same day James Wass brought in "the Indian called Weeshenow" who had been in charge of bringing up some of the trade goods from York Factory in the fall. He was in a sorry state now. William Flatt and George Ross, who returned with Wass, brought in "a small Bundle of Furs & his Gun, which he had left some time agoe, in a tent beside his Wife." Tomison added that his men had "buried three since they went from here, & found several more dead, which they could not bury for want of Provisions."⁵⁶



Fish hooks were popular items in the fur trade. These date from about 1802-1803 (Wheeler, 65).

Indeed, provisions were in short supply at Cumberland House, and on January 24, Tomison "gave those that is able to walk a supply of Ammunition, Fish Hooks Etc., & they [went] away, but the rest is left here to Die in misery." No sooner had these people gone, than

five more arrived from above, these are still more wretched, they being, all Women but one, & he is very bad. the others have got over the small pox but are only left to starve in misery[.] these is all that is alive out of several tents & not one of them has been buried.⁵⁷

The following day, January 25, "at Noon another distressed Woman came having left a Young Indian man at the mouth of the little River above, which I sent two men with Sledges to haul him to the House." By now death was a daily visitor at Cumberland, and the house had been converted to a hospital of sorts. On that same day, Tomison recorded,

two men Digging a Grave & burying a Woman that Died last night, there is still nine more ailing four of which I have in the House & they have due attendance Night & Day. & yet there is but little hopes of their recovery, most of them being greatly Starved before they came here, and has not strength to Undergoe the Operation, they are Under.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., fo. 41d.

⁵⁷ Ibid. The word "above" in this context means *higher up* the Saskatchewan River toward its source.

⁵⁸ Ibid., fo. 42.

For the next two weeks, there was little else done but tend the sick and bury the dead. On January 27, for instance, "towards Evening two Indians Died" and were buried the next day. On January 30, Tomison's men "also buried the Indian Man that was hauled to the House on the 25th Instant." The following day, he "sent four men to Bury four of the Indians, that pitched from here the 23rd Instant, and there is several of them Bad."⁵⁹ Late that same evening,

three. Young Indians arrived from the U.Basquiau Leader, one of which was taken bad last night, the Disorder is raging amongst with its greatest Fury. Out of a number that has died, there is only one Woman that has recovered, they Inform me that both the Leader is taken bad as also the rest of the men. they sent for me to come to them, but as George Hudson is not at home, I cannot leave the House, but shall send three men off tomorrow to bring what furs they have at their Tents.⁶⁰

Evidently smallpox had reached U.Basquiau [The Pas/Opaskweyac] sometime after January 2, because four hunters from there had been to Cumberland House on that date, and they were unaware of the disease. At the time, Tomison had not allowed them into the fort, but rather "had a Tent pitched for them some Distance off."⁶¹ His efforts were in vain, and on February 7, three of his men returned with "the Disagreeable news of the U.Basquiau Leader and some more, having Died before they got there, and several of the rest ailing."⁶²

In the meantime, deaths continued to occur at Cumberland House. On February 1, some of his men were "employed burying three Indians that Died last night." This occasioned a great deal of work, and as Tomison explained, "Indeed it is hard labour to keep the house in fuel and bury the Dead." On February 2, "one digging a Grave and burying an Indian that Died in the night, after having been taken care of in the House, for these ten Days past." When recording this death, Tomison also made some observations about the disease itself,

there is something very malignant, that we are not sensible of, either, in the Constitution of the natives or in the Disorder. those that Die before the small pox breaks out is tormented with great pains and many of them Die. within 48 Hours.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 42d-43.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 43. The U.Basquiau Leader, a man called Catabobnow, assisted the HBC with summer transport to and from York Factory.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 37d.

⁶² *Ibid.*, fo. 44d. One wonders if the tent itself had been contaminated by smallpox.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, fo. 43d.

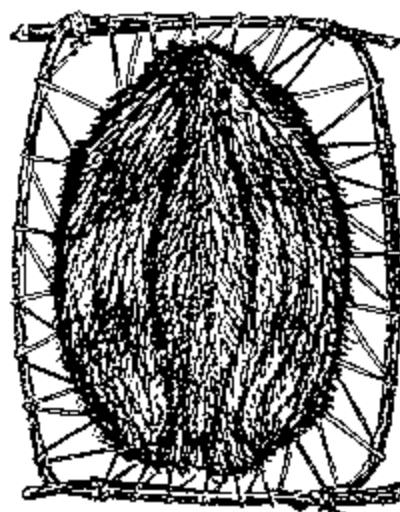
On February 3, Tomison's men "in the afternoon buried two Indians," and the following day, "one man Burying two Indians." On February 5, they "buried an Indian Child to Day," on February 6, "also buried three Indians that Died last night," and on February 7, "the rest burying four Indians, that Died in the night. one of them is Wee,shew,now. & one came here last Thurs. [January 31], both of which has been taken care of in the house since they came here."⁶⁴

In the meantime, the men, who had been sent out to collect furs, came back with sad tales of their own. On January 30, George Hudson and two other men had gone in search of hunters located somewhere above Cumberland House, presumably up the Saskatchewan River.⁶⁵ On February 5, they

return'd after four days Journey, having found those they went in search off [sic], eight of which was laying Dead at one tent place, they found 15 made Beaver in Furs, which they brought home with them, they also found 13 more Indians alive, two of which was bad.⁶⁶

Then on February 9, William Tomison himself went with James Wass to collect furs left behind when his men had visited the U.Basquiau the previous week. He returned February 14, and penned the following in his journal.

late In the Evening I returned from the Indians, with 78 Beaver in Furs, which is all that was amongst them. Except a few coats which they had for Cloathing. there was at first four tents of them, but is now reduced to two. & on my Arrival, I found three out of them Dead, and another brave Leader which Died the next Day all four which I buried, there is 19 yet alive, out of which there is only one man, two Women and three Children, that has not taken the Disorder and they are in a Starving Condition for want of Food.⁶⁷



A Made Beaver was a monetary unit equal to the value of one prime beaver pelt. All goods sold to or furs purchased from the Cree by the HBC were priced in Made Beaver (Wheeler, 51).

While Tomison was away, two Indian children died at Cumberland House, but on February 11, "four Indians arrived from across the lake" with news that four men

⁶⁴ Ibid., fo. 43d-44d.

⁶⁵ There are references to these hunters February 18 and 25, March 1 and 14, and April 7. In April, the survivors, two men, one old woman, a girl, and three boys, arrived at Cumberland House.

⁶⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/11, fo. 44.

⁶⁷ Ibid., fo. 45d-46.

in that direction had recovered from the disease. Then on February 14, six hunters arrived from below with Furs to trade and the additional good news that they had killed a moose about a day's journey from the post. Tomison sent four men for the moose meat the following day, but it was insufficient for his needs. To reduce the number of mouths he had to feed, he sent William Flatt and John Driver to live with the Cree hunters.⁶⁸ Then, on February 19, he sent back seven men who had come down to Cumberland from Hudson House in December. In his letter to William Walker, he described the effects of the epidemic and the likely consequences for the trade.

here we have buried Upwards of 30 for Which number there is only two recovered & they are but Children, the U.Basquiau Indians are all Dead & ten tents of Pegogemy and Cowinetou Indians that was pitching towards this place all Died, as to all those that went up the Sturgeon River, I have neither seen nor heard from them, since they had Debt last Autumn.⁶⁹ My Trade near 4000 made Beaver, but I do not know, where there is any more to come from, as my Debtors are all Dead. I have about 1000 Beaver out in Debts, which I believe will be all lost by Death. I am very sorry I should have such a Discount to make to their Honors but as misfortunes are unforeseen I hope their Honors, will not think me Culpable, for so doing as in all probability had the natives lived their [sic] would have been no such losses.⁷⁰



Waiting for the hunter who would never return (Wheeler, 32).

In order to make up those losses, Tomison sent his men out in all directions to collect what furs they could find among the survivors and dead alike. They also had orders to bury the dead wherever they found them. Magnus Twatt and James Tate, for instance, returned February 24 from the U.Basquiau Cree,

⁶⁸ Flatt left with one of the men who arrived on February 14; Driver went with a man and his wife who arrived on February 16. Tomison's letter to William Walker, 19 February, identified the Indians with whom they departed as Sandfly and Pusas.quet.tumen. Since the hunter of February 16 came with the HBC men sent out to pick up the moose killed by one of the hunters of February 14, it is likely he was part of that same group. Also both Flatt and Driver returned March 4, strong evidence that they had been with a single party.

⁶⁹ Tomison was overstating the case in his letter to Walker. In fact, when he left the U.Basquiau, there were still nineteen of them alive. However, with so many dying and starvation likely for the survivors, Tomison probably felt everyone was as good as dead.

⁷⁰ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/11, fo. 47d.

bringing with them, 15 Beaver in Coats & 3 in Cats, they Inform me they have buried five since they went, & one was buried before they came to them, the man that was untaken [sic] ill before I came away, died in three days after, and those that are still alive are Starving for want of food.⁷¹

The following day, James Banks and James Saunderson also came back from above Cumberland House, not finding the people for whom they had been sent, but

they had found where four Indians had died, but nothing remain'd of three except the Hair of their Heads, & a few scraps of their Coats, all which had been eat up by the wild Animals [sic]. also the fourth one so much disfigured that they could not tell who it was.⁷²

On March 1, Tomison sent James Tate and Magnus Twatt in search of the hunters Banks and Saunderson could not find. They returned two weeks later with

40 made Beaver in Coats, which they found Upon Indian Debtors, all Dead, they also found 19 made Beaver in Cats, which had been thrown away to the good Spirit [sic], that they might live...they Inform me they found 13 men Women & Children Dead all laying along the pitching track, Except one they had put Upon a Stage[.] also found two men, one old Woman, a Girl, and three boys alive six Days Journey from here.⁷³

Tate and Twatt had probably gone up the Saskatchewan River, where smallpox was rampant, but in other places the disease was still unknown. On March 1, for instance, five men and three women arrived at Cumberland House from "the Northward" with furs and provisions, having heard nothing of the epidemic. As a precaution, Tomison "had a tent, pitched in the Yard to keep them from six invalids Women and Children, that has got over the small pox, now laying on the plantation Starving, there being no friends or relations alive to take care of them."⁷⁴ Similarly, on March 13, "two Indian Women, one young lad & a small Girl arrived from the Southward...from three tents four Days Journey from here." They had also somehow avoided the smallpox, although they had been plagued with a "Bloody flux" which had kept them from hunting all winter.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid., fo. 48d. Since there were nineteen survivors when Tomison visited them between February 9-14, by February 24, that number would have been reduced to thirteen, if an additional six had died.

⁷² Ibid., fo. 49.

⁷³ Ibid., fo. 51d.

⁷⁴ Ibid., fo. 49d. The rash associated with smallpox chiefly affected the face and limbs, and often left survivors with pitted scars. It could last for as long as a few weeks, and during that time, the afflicted person could still infect close contacts.

⁷⁵ Ibid., fo. 51. The "bloody flux" was probably acute diarrhoea or dysentery. Caused by an infection, it would have left these people extremely vulnerable to smallpox, had they come into contact with it.

On March 2, Tomison sent George Hudson and William Grey to the U.Basquiau Indians that Magnus Twatt had visited in February. They returned March 11, having been unable to find them, "by reason of their pitching across large lakes, without putting Up any marks. [T]hey have brought 8 Beaver in Coat which they found on a young Indian, that was laying at one of their tent places, which they wrapped up in Duffle and buried.⁷⁶

While they were away, William "Flatt" and John Driver returned, March 4, from the hunters with whom they had been sent two weeks earlier. One of these hunters had been stricken with smallpox about February 25, then a young lad came down with the disease on February 28. They belonged to a band, probably headed by the Sandfly, who was regularly employed by the Hudson's Bay Company to take furs down to York Factory and bring back trade goods. He was settled somewhere below Cumberland House, perhaps along the Lower Saskatchewan. Although not identified in the records as belonging to the U.Basquiau leader's band, he may have lived nearby, because members of both groups went to Cumberland House, March 26.



Trading Ceremony at York Factory, no doubt witnessed by the Sandfly and other Cree hunters who travelled there in the 1770s.

Drawn by Robert Beck, 1770's, HBCA 1987-363-T-37:49 (NR5-37)
[courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba]

On that date, "a Young Indian lad, & two Women arrived from below, with a few furs & a little provisions to Trade." One of them, probably the young man, had left Cumberland House with the Sandfly, then separated from him some time after William Flatt and John Driver, because the entire band had come down with small pox. The other two, probably the women, were part of the U.Basquiau for whom George Hudson had been searching at the beginning of March.⁷⁷ They left March

⁷⁶ Ibid., fo. 49d. Based on previous calculations, the U.Basquiau had now been reduced to twelve people.

⁷⁷ References in February [7, 9, 14, 20, 24] and March [2, 11] provide strong evidence that these women were U.Basquiau. There had been other hunters at Opaskweyae in the spring, but Tomison did not send any one in search of them until May 11, and they arrived at Cumberland House the following day, May 12.

27, accompanied by William Tomison and Magnus Twatt, "in search of the Sandfly to see whether he & his Family be dead or alive[,] if Dead to take their Coats away they being all Debtors."⁷⁸ They returned April 2, not having been able to find them. Since the Sandfly disappeared from subsequent records, it is likely that he and most of his band succumbed to smallpox.

Certainly by March, it was becoming increasingly evident that most of the Cree had died. On March 23, for instance, "one Indian Woman a Boy & Girl arrived from the Swampy River, having left one man behind. [T]hese is all that is alive out [o]f 10 tents and only one buried out of the whole."⁷⁹ On April 7, "two Men, an Elderly Woman, three Boys and a Girl" came to the post, the only survivors of the Cree that James Tate and Magnus Twatt had visited at the beginning of the month. They were in poor condition as well, "one of the Boys about 14 Years of Age, has got all his toes on one foot very much froze, sometime agoe. Indeed it is so bad, I do not think we can make a Cure of it, as we have no Instrument to cut away the proud flesh."⁸⁰

The following day, April 8, "one Woman and a Girl came with a little Green flesh from below." "Green flesh" was freshly killed meat, and they had more of it at their camp. Four men were sent with them the following day to bring in that meat, and they returned, April 10. On April 11, "in the forenoon the Indians arrived that the men brought the Meat from fourteen in Number, all Women & Children, except two & one of them is only a lad."⁸¹ Unfortunately, there is no reference in the journal that would indicate to which band these people belonged, or whether they were remnants of more than one band. In the stressed circumstances of the time, it is a wonder Tomison recorded as much as he did about them.

The meat the small band brought was welcomed because, in addition to his eight men, there were at least twenty-seven Cree now at the post, and only three adult men among them to hunt.⁸² These he supplied with ammunition on April 14 to go

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 53d.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 52d.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 55.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 56.

⁸² One of these men may have been the "Indian Doctor," mentioned April 12, who bled John Driver, an HBC labourer at Cumberland House sick most of the winter. Using a lancet, a sharp-pointed surgical instrument, to remove blood from an ill person, however ineffectual, was an accepted procedure in European medicine at the time, and one adopted by many of the native hunters. It was still practised decades later in Hudson Bay. For instance, in 1827 at Oxford House, Cheemoutch, a local hunter, complained of being sick and wanted Richard Grant, the local HBC post master, to take blood from him. Grant, "unacquainted with bleeding did not like trying the experiment," but gave Cheemoutch a lancet and

across the lake in search of ducks and geese. The women remaining at Cumberland were given sturgeon from the post fishery to feed their families, and they repaid Tomison by making pitch for repairing the canoes that were to be used in transporting the furs down to York Factory.

By now the smallpox had passed, and life was beginning to return to old patterns. On May 9, for instance, "at noon two Men three Women & three Children arrived in Canoes from below, bearly [sic] paid their Debts, traded a little provisions & Got Drunk." They had "been to the Southward all the Winter, but cannot give any Account of any other Indians, as they have seen none since February." The four survivors of ten tents mentioned March 23, arrived in the evening from Swampy River, "bearly [sic] able to pay their Debts[.] Traded a few Geese for Liquor & Got Drunk." Then on May 10, there arrived "an Indian and his Family from the Beaver River to the Northward." and he, too, "paid his Debt. Traded some Brandy & Got Drunk."⁸³ Considering the horrors of the previous months, it is not much wonder that the survivors sought relief from their suffering in the few hours of forgetfulness that the brandy provided. In the fur trade culture of which they were a part, it had been standard practice for a feast and a celebration to mark the successful hunt and subsequent trade at the post. Now it was even more important to affirm the familiar, so that life could return to normal as quickly as possible.

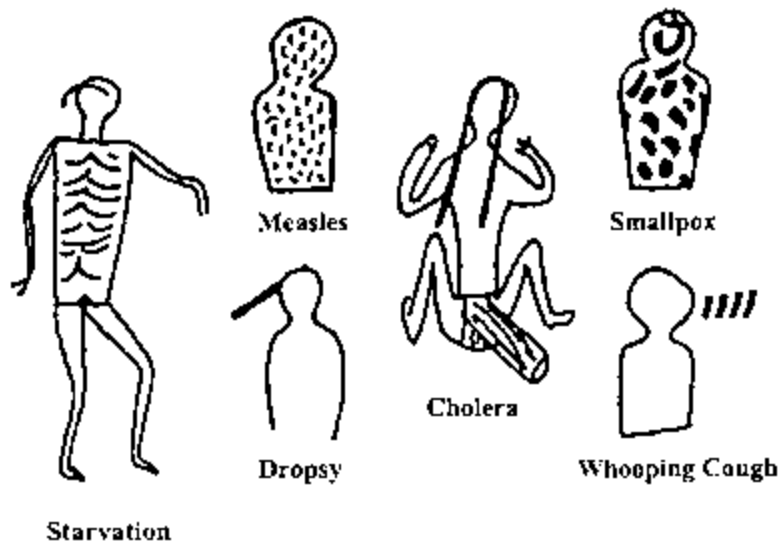
On May 12, George Hudson went with a young Indian down to U.Basquiau in search of hunters who had been there in the spring. He returned the following day in company with them, they having met each other along the way. Of the people living in the Lower Saskatchewan, however, there are no other references in the journal. On May 29, Tomison sent off "87 Bundles of Furs in Nine Canoes with 17 Englishmen & two Indian Women for York Fort." The following day, Tomison left himself, leaving George Hudson in charge of Cumberland House. As he explained in his journal, "I would have Stayed Myself, had there been Indians to Conducted [sic] the Men Down, out of all that was down last Year, there is only two Men a Young lad & two Women alive this great Misfortune Obliges me to go as the Head of the Journey Myself."⁸⁴

some medicine, because another Cree hunter, Billy Moar, "was able to bleed." PAM, HBCA, B.156/a/10, fo. 10, Oxford House Post Journal, 1827-1828, mf. 1M115.

⁸³ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/11, fo. 59d-60.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 65d. When he arrived at York Factory, Tomison reported to Matthew Cocking that "the whole tribe of U Basquiau Indians (their former assistants) are extinct except one child, and that of the several Tribes of Assinnee Poet[,] Pegogemew and others bordering on Saskachwan River he real[ly] believed not one in fifty have survived." See PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/42, fo. 15d, York Factory Correspondence, 1781-1782, mf. 1M255. Evidently, Tomison learned more about the U.Basquiau after he left Cumberland.

The People of Moose Lake: Pre- and Post-1782 Populations



The above pictographs were used in "winter counts" kept by the Dakota and others to record major events from year to year. So important was the influence of smallpox that the winter of 1779-80 was called, "Smallpox Used Them up Winter," and that of 1780-81, "Smallpox Used Them up Again Winter." However, as the pictographs reveal, smallpox was just one of the health problems faced by aboriginal people all over North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492* (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 80-81.

The available records indicate that the smallpox epidemic probably reached Moose Lake in January 1782, but we know nothing beyond that. We do not even know who was living there at that time, if anyone. The pre-1781 Cumberland House Journals contain no mention of Moose Lake by name, nor do they give much information on particular hunters coming to the post. It may be that Moose

Lake was occupied only on a seasonal basis, and that no one was living there in January 1782. The Sturgeon Cree, who traditionally worked the fishery at Grand Rapids during the summer, apparently spent their winters on the prairies.⁸⁵ The U.Basquiau [also Basquia or Pasquia] Cree spent at least part of the year at an excellent fishery near the junction of the Pasquia and lower Saskatchewan Rivers, and there are numerous references to them in Cumberland House journals during the winter of 1781-1782. Members of this band could have been in the vicinity of Moose Lake during the epidemic.

We know they moved about the country. Indeed, just how far they travelled is illustrated in the life of Saukamappee, a chief among the Peigan, who told his story to David Thompson in 1787. The old man was U.Basquiau Cree, born in the early seventeenth hundreds along the Pasquia River where his ancestors had lived for generations. At about the age of sixteen, he and his father joined a war party which had been organized by the Peigan, a Blackfoot tribe allied with the Cree, and went off to fight the Snake Indians in what is now Southern Alberta.⁸⁶ That

⁸⁵ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 140.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 87-91. Apparently, the Peigan were living somewhere around the North Saskatchewan at this time, but moved south-west into Southern Alberta after the defeat of the Snakes.

journey would have taken them approximately seven hundred and sixty-eight kilometres [four hundred and eighty miles] from their home, so it would have been nothing for them to travel to the nearby marshes around Moose Lake in search of food and fur. They probably hunted elk in the Pasquia Hills as well, and may even have gone out occasionally onto the plains in pursuit of the buffalo, depending on the season of the year.⁸⁷

If the U.Basquiau Cree occupied Moose Lake prior to the epidemic, did they continue to occupy it afterward? We simply do not know. According to Saukamappee, half of his adopted tribe, the Peigan, died in the epidemic of 1781-1782, but among his own people, the U.Basquiau, the death toll must have been much higher. At one point William Tomison recorded that all of them had died, but this was an exaggeration at the time.⁸⁸ Later, he said they had all died "except one child."⁸⁹ Whatever the case, they were never mentioned again under that name, and nearly twenty years later, 14 October 1800, William Tomison recorded at Cumberland House that "Cheag one of the best Indians belonging to this place died last summer[;] he was the only real Cumberland House Indian that Survived the small Pox in 1781."⁹⁰

If Tomison included the U.Basquiau, when he wrote "Cumberland House Indian," then most of the adult U.Basquiau hunters did indeed die. Nevertheless, although greatly reduced in numbers, there were Cree hunters trading at Cumberland House almost as soon as the epidemic had passed. Of these there was the group, consisting of fourteen individuals, which arrived, 11 April 1782, from below. "Below" meant lower down the river from Cumberland House, perhaps at U.Basquiau or thereabouts. Twelve members of this group were women and children, and of the two male hunters, one was no more than a lad. What became of these women and their children was never recorded. Perhaps they joined surviving hunters, who had lost their families. Or, they may have remained nearer Cumberland House, where they could obtain provisions in tough times. However, it is possible they and their surviving children returned to their old homes and carried on without husband or hunter. Certainly there are numerous examples in fur trade records of Cree women living on their own. Perhaps they took with them

⁸⁷ The fur trade records of Cumberland House during the 1820s and 1830s illustrate how common it was for the Cree bands to move from place to place in search of food and furs. It is unlikely that this pattern was a recent phenomenon.

⁸⁸ In a letter to William Walker, 19 February 1782, he claimed the "U.Basquiau Indians are all Dead," but remnants were mentioned February 24 and March 26.

⁸⁹ PAM, HBCA, B.239 b-42, fo. 15d.

⁹⁰ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a:30, fo. 2, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1800-1801, kept by Wm Tomison, mf. 1M40.

that "one child" Tomison claimed was the only survivor of U.Basquiau Cree. If they settled in the lower Saskatchewan, that child could be among the ancestors of the people at Moose Lake today.

The Muskego or Swampy Cree are certainly ancestors. Indeed, they may have been at Moose Lake before 1782, because they had been travelling inland on a seasonal basis for twenty years or more by that time. HBC traders, Joseph Smith and Isaac Batt, went inland in 1763 with an unidentified party of Indians, who apparently met their families along the Grass River, then continued on to Cumberland Lake and up the Saskatchewan River to the plains. The following year, Smith went inland again with a group of Muskego Cree under the leadership of Missinakeeshick, perhaps the same leader he had accompanied in 1763. Missinakeeshick and his party probably made the trip again in 1765, because they took HBC trader William Pink with them in 1766, meeting their families at Cumberland Lake.⁹¹ If these Muskego Cree were in the interior that early, it is likely that others were as well. Although the Grass River Route bypassed Moose Lake, the Minago River Route passed right through it, and was the one probably followed by migrants from Norway House, who had moved west by 1815, some of them to the region about Moose Lake itself.

Although it is quite evident that Muskego Cree settled at Moose Lake, it is equally evident that they did not all come at the same time. In his 1815 report for Cumberland House, Alexander Kennedy stated that there were "about an Hundred & Ten families" in the district, nearly half of whom were "new comers from York Factory, North river, and what we call the Rat Country...to the Northward of Cumberland."⁹² Colin Robertson, an HBC officer, mentioned this migration while travelling to York Factory in 1816. After describing the people around Knee Lake on the Hayes River as "the best disposed Indians" he had ever met, he added sarcastically, "Auld among a number of his meritorious acts as Governor of York, drove about fifty families of these industrious people into the arms of the North West Company at Cumberland house."⁹³ Later, Robertson repeated the charge that "The tyrannical and short sighted policy of Auld during the years 1811, [18]12 & [18]13 drove from this place [York Factory] sixty families, consisting of the best Hunters belonging to the River."⁹⁴

⁹¹ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 97-99.

⁹² PAM, HBCA, B.49:e/1, fo. 4d, Cumberland House, Report on District, 1815, mf. 1M777.

⁹³ PAM, HBCA, E.10:1, fo. 233d, Colin Robertson, vol. 4 of Diaries, 1814-1817. 4M121.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 261.

This was William Auld, who was stationed at Churchill during those years. Evidently, there had been an exodus of Muskego Cree from the lower Hayes and Nelson Rivers while Auld exercised influence, a migration inland which was well known, even to a man like Robertson, who was simply passing through the country at the time. Robertson did not like William Auld, whom he blamed for some of the difficulties the Selkirk Settlers had when they first arrived on Hudson Bay, but he was wrong in thinking one man could force the Muskego Cree to move from their traditional homeland.⁹⁵ It is true that Auld was a contentious man, who often quarrelled with those around him, and his abuse may have influenced some Cree to migrate. However, it was declining animal populations, coupled with exceedingly cold weather during those years, that were the chief factors forcing the Muskego Cree to move away. They left rather than starve.

Robertson was generally correct in writing that these Cree moved into the Cumberland District, and that some of them traded with the North West Company in that region. However, those who settled around Moose Lake had been preceded by earlier migrants. In a letter written at Cumberland House, 4 August 1804, James Bird told John McNab at York Factory that, "Some Indians are just arrived from below[,] they belong to Cross Lake and Jack River but talk of Wintering between this and the Cedar Lake, if they should we will be under the necessity of sending a few Men to attend them."⁹⁶ James Sutherland may have been referring to these same people, when he recorded in 1815 that the original inhabitants of Jack River had moved westward, being replaced by newcomers from the seacoast around York Factory and from the headwaters of the Severn River. Evidently, as one group was moving westward, another group was coming behind to take its place.

By 1815 then, there were quite possibly people living at Moose Lake, who could trace their ancestry to the U.Basquiau or Sturgeon Cree, and those whose roots went back to Cross Lake, Jack River (Norway House), and the Hayes and Nelson Rivers. Were there others as well? According to Kennedy's 1815 Report on the Cumberland District, half of the population was made up of newcomers from the lower Hayes and Nelson Rivers and from the muskrat country north of Cumberland, but there was nothing recorded on the origins of the remaining half. Apparently, A. J. Ray assumed that they were Ojibway, but this could not have

⁹⁵ Robertson wrote, "Governor Auld...seems by all his actions, to have been determined to thwart the views of Lord Selkirk...his language to the Emigrants on their first arrival at Churchill and York, was sufficient to make them return to Europe, such as 'did you ever hear of Hell' well! the place you are going to is just such another, and the road between here and Red River is the purgatory.'" PAM, HBCA, E.10:1, fo. 95, Colin Robertson, vol. 2 of Diaries, 1814-1817, 4M121.

⁹⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.239:b/72, fo. 66d, York Factory - Correspondence Inward, 1801-1806, mf. 1M257.

been true.⁹⁷ Thirteen years later, in the census of Cumberland District conducted in June 1828, "Ojibbaways" constituted less than six percent of the population.⁹⁸ The "Pellicans from Lac Quinipeck" were also less than six percent, and the "Freemen - European, Canadians & Half Breeds" were about seven percent of the population. The remainder consisted of "Maskegonse" (forty-one percent), Rat River Crees (fourteen percent), and Cumberland House Crees (twenty-five percent).

The Ojibway, Ottawa, and even Iroquois moved west with the fur trade during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and would have been on Cedar Lake or Moose Lake for periods of time, but they could never have constituted more than a tiny percentage of the local population in later years. Although intermarriage might bring a few into the region, their children grew up as Cree. The "Pellicans from Lac Quinipeck" may also have been around Moose Lake prior to the epidemic, but they were not indigenous to the region.⁹⁹ According to the 1823 Census for the Norway House District, "Pelicans" - fifty-seven percent of the total - lived mainly east of Lake Winnipeg. They were different enough from the "Maskegons," or Swampy Cree, and from the "Ojibbaways," or "Sotues" [Saulteaux] to be given their own category in the census records of both Cumberland House and Norway House districts.

Clues to the identity of these people can be obtained through references to a hunter named "Peke kan," who was living among the "Maskegons" at Cross Lake in 1823. However, in 1767 "Peckican" was an "Indian captain" connected to Henley House on the Upper Albany far to the east of Norway House.¹⁰⁰ If he were a young captain in 1767, say 25 years old, "Peckican" would have been 81 years of age in 1823, an "Old fellow," just as "Peke kan" was described in the Norway House journal in 1822.¹⁰¹ In 1796, a reference in York Factory correspondence

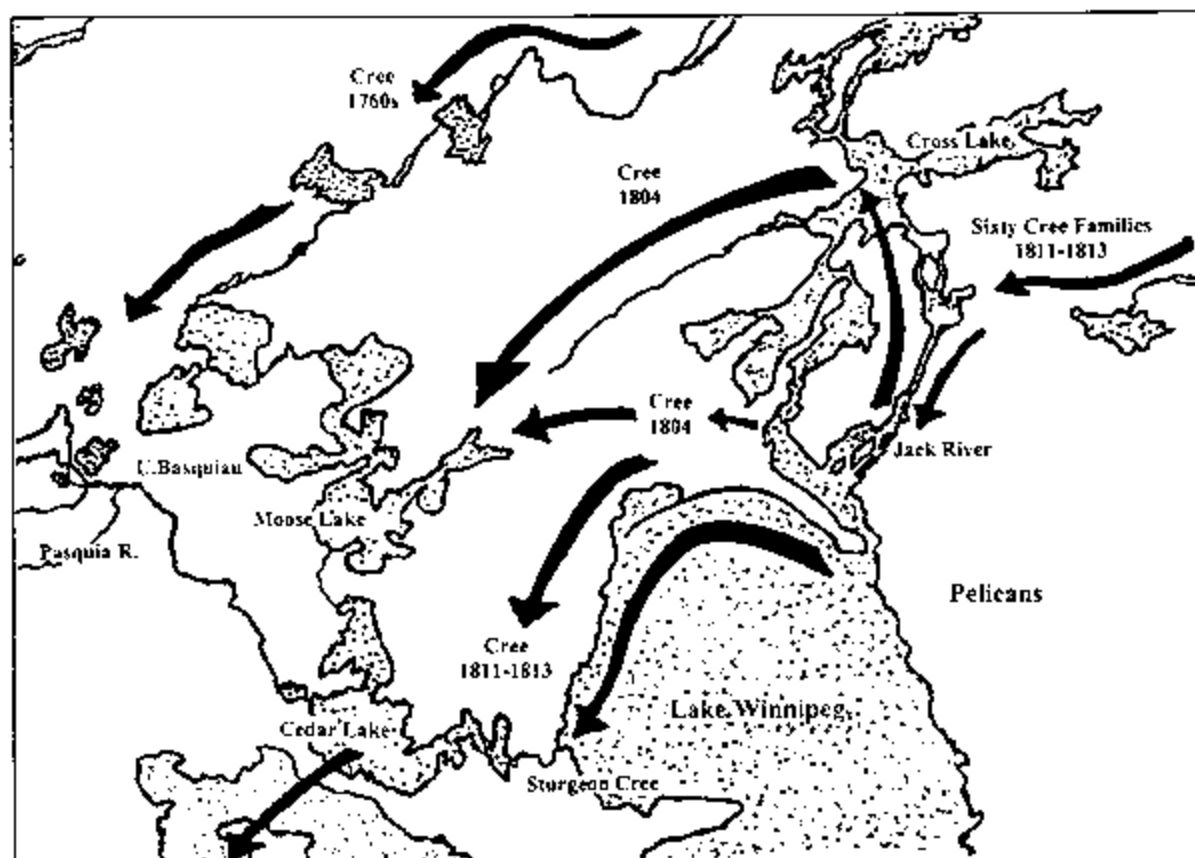
⁹⁷ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 111. Ray's statement is somewhat ambiguous. In a paragraph devoted to the early eighteenth century population of the Western Ojibway, he stated that "There were fewer than fifty-five families attached to the Cumberland District." However, he does not explain how he arrived at this conclusion.

⁹⁸ PAM, HBCA, B.49/d/24, p. 35.

⁹⁹ Russell argued convincingly in *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours* that the Cree occupied the lower Saskatchewan long before the traders arrived in the eighteenth century. Prior to his research, it was assumed that the Cree had moved west just ahead of the traders.

¹⁰⁰ See PAM, HBCA, B.86/a/14, fo. 6, Henley House Post Journal, 1767-1768, mf. 1M60; also Victor P. Lytwyn, *The Fur Trade of the Little North: Indians, Pedlars, and Englishmen East of Lake Winnipeg, 1760-1821* (Winnipeg: Rupert's Land Research Centre, 1986), 28.

¹⁰¹ PAM, HBCA, B.154/a/10, p. 32, Norway House Post Journal, 1822-1823, mf. 1M106. Entry for 23-24 November 1822.



Cree Migrations into the Lower Saskatchewan

described "Peekekan" as "Bungee," which usually meant someone of Ojibway background.¹⁰² However, the Pelicans were distinguished from the Ojibway in the early records, so they could not have been the same people. Historian Victor P. Lytwyn provided a solution. When North West Company trader George Nelson was at Rivière Dauphine [Dauphin River] in 1809-10, he traded with hunters from the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

These Indians differed in language and appearance from the 'Sauteaux' (Ojibwa) who lived near Rivière Dauphine. 'They were called Maskiegons, from the word Mash-Kieg, signifying a Swamp' (Nelson, *Reminiscences* 5:228). They cannot be assumed to be the so-called 'Swampy Cree' who lived near York Factory and along the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Nelson described their language as 'nearer the Cris than the Sauteux,' but ethnohistorians have argued that they were more closely related to the Northern Ojibwa (Bishop 1974; Rogers 1983). They may have been the same people that the Ojibwa historian William Warren described as the most northern branch of the Ojibwa who were called 'Omushke-goes, or Swamp People, derived from the nature of the country they occupy' (Warren 1974: 85).¹⁰³

¹⁰² PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/57, fo. 29d, York Factory Correspondence, 1795-1796, mf. 1M256. In a letter from J[oseph]. Colen to J[ohn]. Ballenden at Severn, 18 July 1796, it states, "No Bungee Indians have visited York this season except Peekekan and his Son."

¹⁰³ Lytwyn, *The Fur Trade of the Little North*, 125.

It appears then that the Pelicans occupied some middle ground between the Cree and the Ojibway, much like the Oji-Cree of the Island Lake District do today. They probably moved westward from the upper reaches of the Severn and Albany Rivers sometime after 1782, so it is unlikely they were living at Moose Lake when the epidemic occurred. However, Pelican families may very well have moved into the region after that date, because Norway House hunters sometimes trapped and traded at Moose Lake.

Even though some Muskego Cree may have passed through Moose Lake well before 1782, most of them had probably arrived in the region after 1790, in all likelihood to take advantage of fur trade opportunities. If any of the Basquia Cree survived, the odds are that they were among the so-called Cumberland Cree, who constituted a full twenty-five percent of the population in 1828. And undoubtedly, these people continued to travel to Moose Lake in the seasonal search for food and furs, even as their ancestors had for a thousand years or longer. Consequently, the present-day population of Moose Lake stems from many aboriginal peoples, of different origin and locality, who finally settled there permanently in response to natural forces as well as the fur trade, which in turn added European bloodlines to their already complex genealogy.



"Interior of Wigwam of Cree Indians. Strips of caribou meat hang in smoke above fire."

From Chappell's *Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 1817

HBCA RH FC 32212 CS facing p. 21 (N7602)

(courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

The First Permanent Posts at Moose Lake, 1805-1815

In the years after the smallpox epidemic, native populations rebounded. Disease was just one more thing to be endured in the harsh environment in which they lived, where most of their time was spent moving from place to place in search of food, or for furs with which to barter for the few items they wanted from the traders. Although it was difficult to control the forces of nature, in times of intense fur trade competition, they could often bargain for better prices, not only for their furs, but also for the goods they purchased. Moreover, they could demand that the traders come to them, rather than the reverse, and insist that posts be established closer to their traplines.

Such circumstances explain the construction of trading posts at Moose Lake by rival companies in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In fact, competition actually intensified in those years. After its merger with the XY Company in 1804, the North West Company, more powerful than ever, was poised to take over its one remaining competitor, the Hudson's Bay Company, a dangerous situation which would have created a monopoly and greatly reduced the bargaining power of the trappers. It did not happen. Instead, the Hudson's Bay Company went through a badly needed reorganization and began to fight back. Both companies expanded their operations into new areas and built additional outposts because they wanted to get the furs before their opposition had a chance to do so. It was during this period of ever-increasing conflict, so intense at times that it threatened to ruin the trade altogether, that the settlement of Moose Lake had its beginnings.

We are indeed fortunate to have historical documents, which can give us a glimpse into the lives of local people during those times. Both the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies kept meticulous records of their trade activities, including accounts, journals, employment registers, correspondence, and daily journals.¹⁰⁴ In the correspondence records of York Factory, for instance, there are a number of early references to Moose Lake. James Bird wrote John McNab, 4 August 1804, regarding a party of hunters from Cross Lake and Jack River, who were talking of wintering between Cumberland House and Cedar Lake.¹⁰⁵ Subsequent letters, written by Alexander Kennedy to John McNab, confirmed that "the low Country Indians" had indeed "wintered at Moose Lake" in 1804-1805, and that the

¹⁰⁴ See Note 20.

¹⁰⁵ PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/72, fo. 66d, James Bird, Cumberland House, to John McNab, York Factory, 4 August 1804, mf. 1M257.

Hudson's Bay Company received five hundred Made Beaver in furs from them.¹⁰⁶ These were probably collected by men sent out from Cumberland House to tent with the hunters, so that their furs did not fall into the hands of rival traders. There was no mention at that time of a post being built at Moose Lake.

Circumstances were quite different during the winter of 1805-1806, when Alexander Kennedy was in charge of Cumberland House. On his way up from York Factory towards the end of July 1805, Kennedy had met the "low Country Indians that wintered at Moose Lake...together with several others" who had come up during the summer "from North River."¹⁰⁷ He intended to establish a settlement among them, but with only four men beside himself at the post, and of these only John Ballendine experienced enough to go out to tent with the hunters, he was limited in what he could do. Moreover, the Canadians had increased the number of men at Cumberland House to such a degree that he was hard pressed to get the furs of the hunters in the immediate vicinity. As he explained in his report to John McNab in June 1806, "I was obliged to relinquish the Moose Lake where the Canadians wintered & from the few Indians at that place I believe made pretty good returns."¹⁰⁸

Kennedy was frustrated by this turn of events. In the same letter, he added, "could I have detained the men sent up in the Fall I could have been able to have sent [them] there [to Moose Lake] but I was obliged to send them up above at Mr. Birds express command before he left this place."¹⁰⁹ Mr. Bird had indeed directed Kennedy to send George Flett with four men up the Sturgeon River, where they had also faced fierce competition from the Canadians, returning in the spring with only two hundred and seventy Made Beaver in furs, about half of what the HBC had obtained from its Moose Lake hunters the previous year. Worse yet, the NWC had built a post at Moose Lake, probably no more than a log cabin with a couple of rooms and a small supply of trade goods, but evidence that they intended to stay.

Kennedy may have been disappointed at the loss of the trade, but he was not defeated. His June 1806 letter was read carefully by McNab, who promised in his

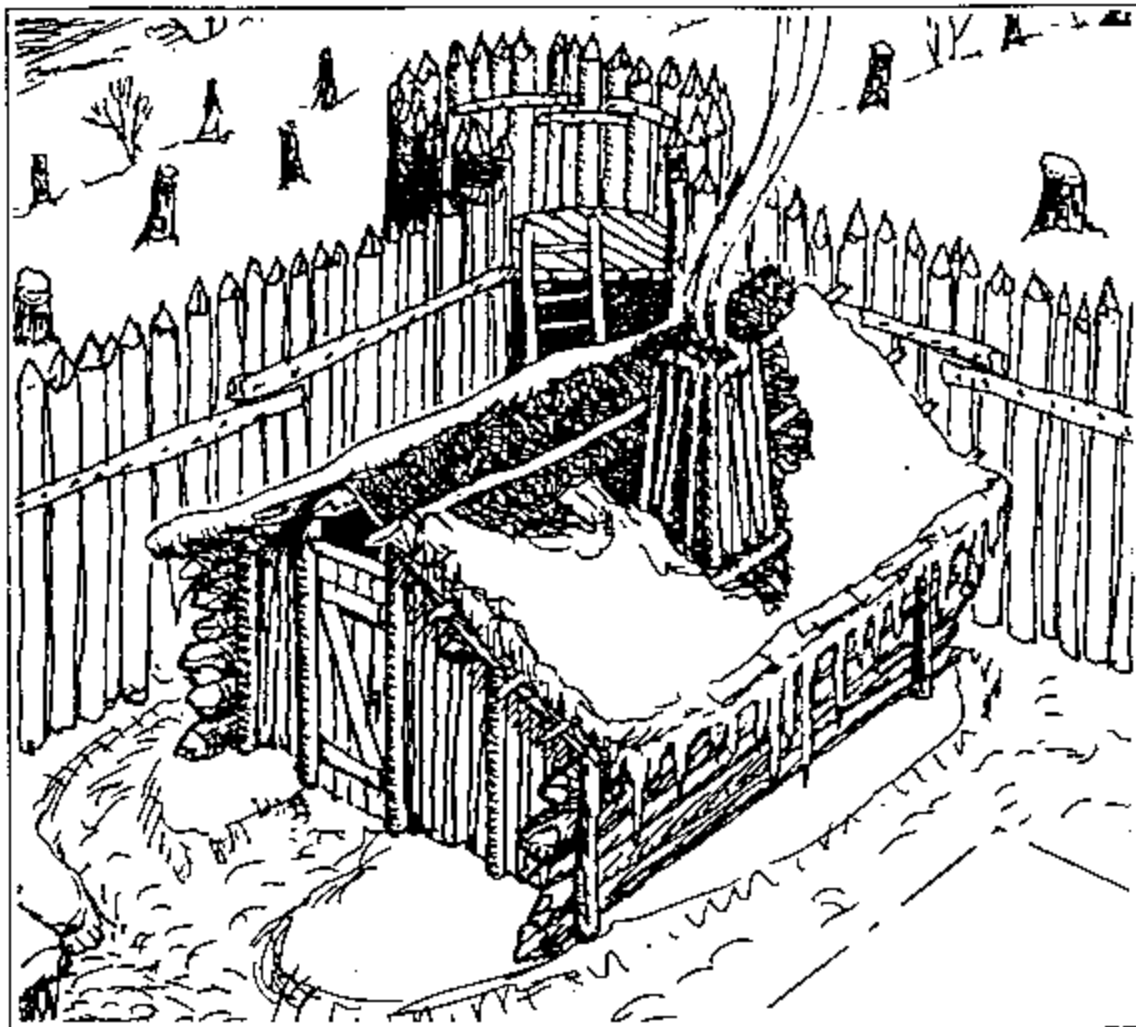
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., fo. 91d, Alexander Kennedy, Cumberland House, to John McNab, York Factory, 4 August 1805, and PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/73, p. 48, Alexander Kennedy, Cumberland House, to John McNab, York Factory, 7 June 1806, York Factory - Correspondence Inward, 1805-1806, mf. 1M157. The HBC priced every thing in *Made Beaver*, its value in prime, whole beaver pelts.

¹⁰⁷ PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/72, fo. 91d.

¹⁰⁸ PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/73, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

reply that, "If men are this year rec^d. from Europe you may expect an addition by the fall Canoes which I hope will enable you to act in every quarter against the Canadians."¹¹⁰ Kennedy, who spent the summer in charge of Cumberland House, knew then that his point had been made. Moreover, James Bird was convinced as well. In his reply to McNab, dated 2 August 1806, Kennedy wrote, "Mr. Bird informs me I am to winter at Moose Lake which I am just on the eve of depart for."¹¹¹ The time to establish a more permanent HBC presence there had finally arrived.



The above illustration is based on archaeological evidence at the site of a NWC post built in 1802 on the Yellow River in northwestern Wisconsin. It is likely that the NWC post at Moose Lake in 1805 was similar in appearance. "Such wintering posts were often crudely constructed and occupied for only a single season." (See Wheeler, 39-49.)

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 61, John McNab, Oxford House, to Alexander Kennedy, Cumberland House, 13 July 1806.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 89, Alexander Kennedy Cumberland House, to John McNab, York Factory, 2 August 1806.

Peter Fidler, who was on his upriver journey from York Factory to assume command of Cumberland House, recorded, 1 October 1806, that he “came to the Pasquia [The Pas] at 2½ PM....Mr. Kennedy left his name here 28 Sept. at 2 PM. he is gone up to Cumb. Ho. from Moose Lake.”¹¹² Evidently, Kennedy was wasting no time, having already been to Moose Lake for two months and now returning to Cumberland House for supplies. On Tuesday, 7 October 1806, the journal states, “Mr. Kennedy got every thing to go for Moose Lake,” and the following day, “At 9 am. Mr. Kennedy with 2 men & young Jas. Sandison went away to the Moose Lake to winter. They took the New Boat. He is to come here about New Years Day if the Business will allow.”¹¹³

A week later, Fidler recorded that he had sent a letter to Kennedy via a “Low Country Indian,” who was also headed to Moose Lake to winter there.¹¹⁴ Later that month, “the Bungee Boy” arrived with news of the hunters at Pasquia and Moose Lake.

In January, 1807, Mr. Kennedy and Thomas Kirkness travelled to Cumberland House, as previously instructed by Mr. Fidler, and reported on the prospects for the trade that season. In summarizing this information in a letter to John McNab, January 16, Fidler said, “There is about 25 hunters this winter at the Moose Lake but as the Country is so very poor all about there, it is a pity but they could [not] be prevailed on to go into the Low Country - where something might be expected from them.”¹¹⁵

The situation was made worse by competition from the Canadians, but there seemed to be little animosity between the rival traders at that particular time. Indeed, when Kennedy and Kirkness travelled to Cumberland House, they were accompanied by “Perrin the French Master,”¹¹⁶ whose post was not all that far from their own. This man took his orders from Mr. Harmon, the officer in charge of the NWC establishment at Cumberland House, just as Kennedy took his direction from Peter Fidler. Even though the two companies were trade

¹¹² PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/32b, fo. 3d, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1806-1807, kept by Peter Fidler, mf. 1M40.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, fo. 4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 4d. 13 Oct. 1806.

¹¹⁵ PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/74, p. 33, York Factory Correspondence, 1806-1807, mf. 1M258. The “low country” mentioned here is unclear, but may refer to the regions along the Nelson and Hayes River systems.

¹¹⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/32b, fo. 10.

opponents, their employees often travelled together. Indeed, when Kennedy and Perrin returned to Moose Lake around the middle of January, they went with one another.¹¹⁷ There were other instances of co-operation, too. On 1 February 1807, for example, Mr. Harman sent Peter Fidler a letter from Mr. Kennedy that had been brought up by NWC men from Moose Lake.¹¹⁸

When recording the contents of the letter in his journal, Fidler mentioned that Kennedy was sending William Dunnett and "Mis un ne Kis siks son" to Cross and Trout Lakes, February 24, a small matter perhaps, but typical of Fidler's attention to detail. He even named the leading hunters at Moose Lake.

Indians at Moose Lake 1806, Ta ta pew a thin, Q oo tay a thinuc, Mis tay theek, Noo ta K kan, Ma[y] ta[y] min, Pe tha sis, Mee sin e Kis sik & his Son, Kim na pik, Oo Ke mas Kis, Eap pa sis, Mis tik oo thin, Chay cha oo chan is, Mis se com es cum, Nam peck wa[y]. Nin ne Ke qu an na as, Oo pok ka[y] tew, Oo nooch e po tew, Mate ta wase, E thin nue, Pe misk a thin nis & his son, Too us Kim mik, Kok Kat tatch, Wee stis.¹¹⁹

The list is interesting because at least eleven of these men were included on the 1828 Census, four of them described as "Cumberland Cree," seven of them as "Maskegons." Of these, "Mee sin e Kis sik" we have met before, a Muskego Cree originally from the Hudson Bay Lowlands around York Factory, but one who began travelling inland from the coast at least as far back as the 1760s. However, he had not become a permanent trapper at Moose Lake in 1806. In a letter dated at Moose Lake, 20 May 1807, Kennedy mentioned

the home guards /Massinakeeshick & Mistickathenu¹²⁰/ who have wintered here....were very much disappointed in their expectations at this place they have in short done mere nothing given away the Goods they took on credits at York, been entirely dependant on me for Ammunition, Tobacco &c during the winter & are in consequence more wretched for want of Cloathing. I have barely supplied them with ammunition to take them to Oxford House where I have persuaded them to return & they are in hopes of getting a supply there to enable them to do something before they visit York.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 10d, 16 Jan. 1807.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 11d, 1 Feb. 1807. Fidler and his NWC counterpart were on good terms. On January 22, for instance, he noted that Harman "came here to play at Cards."

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 5, 18 Oct. 1806.

¹²⁰ Mistickathenu was probably "Mis tik oo thin," who was mentioned in Fidler's list, and may have been a brother or relative of "Mee sin e Kis sik." The son of "Mee sin e Kiss sik" was probably Wetiscawabbun. See PAM, HBCA, B.239/d/182, fo. 48d, York Factory Indian Debts, 1815-1816. mf. 1M682.

¹²¹ PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/74, p. 41, Alexander Kennedy, Inland Master, Moose Lake, to John McNab, 20 May 1807.

As homeguard Cree from York Factory, these men had close ties with the Hudson's Bay Company, and may have wintered at Moose Lake for that reason. On the other hand, it is possible Missinakeeshick had family ties with one or more of the HBC men in the Cumberland District. If a sister or daughter were married to an HBC officer, like Kennedy or Fidler, it would have been an incentive for her relatives to stay nearby.¹²² Such ties could ensure that family members were given seasonal jobs, or food and shelter when hunting was poor. It is possible, too, that Missinakeeshick was himself a son or grandson of a former HBC labourer or officer. As observed by James Isham, an early HBC Chief at York Factory, such mixed-bloods were already "pretty Numerous" by the middle of the eighteenth century.¹²³

Fidler also recorded the HBC men stationed at Moose Lake and at Cumberland House that year.

At Moose Lake, M^r. Kennedy, Jn^o. [John] Brough, W^m. [William] Dunnett, Mag^s. [Magnus] Clouston, Tho^s. [Thomas] Kirkness, Ja^s. [James] Sandison Jun^r., Mag^s. Spence Jun^r. Men Remaining at Cumb. Ho. Myself [Peter Fidler] M^r. Sutherland, Jno. Ballenden, Geo.[rge] Flett, Sam^l. [Samuel] Houston, Peter Bakie, Rob. [Robert] Rowland, Henry Gear, Jno. Corrigan, Jno. Budge, Ja^s. Cooper, Wm. Tate.¹²⁴

Other company records provide additional information on these men. William Dunnett, for instance, was a young man of about twenty-nine years at the time. Like so many of the labourers, who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company, he was from the Orkney Islands.¹²⁵ He had been employed by the company since 1796 and was assigned to the inland posts under York Factory. A single man when he first arrived in fur trade country, he eventually married the daughter of an older employee of the company, a common practice at the time. Her name was Sophia Ballenden, in all likelihood the eldest daughter of John Ballenden, or Ballendine, and his native wife. John was the boat builder at Cumberland House, who had been there with Kennedy in 1805-1806, and whose name also appeared on Fidler's list of employees.

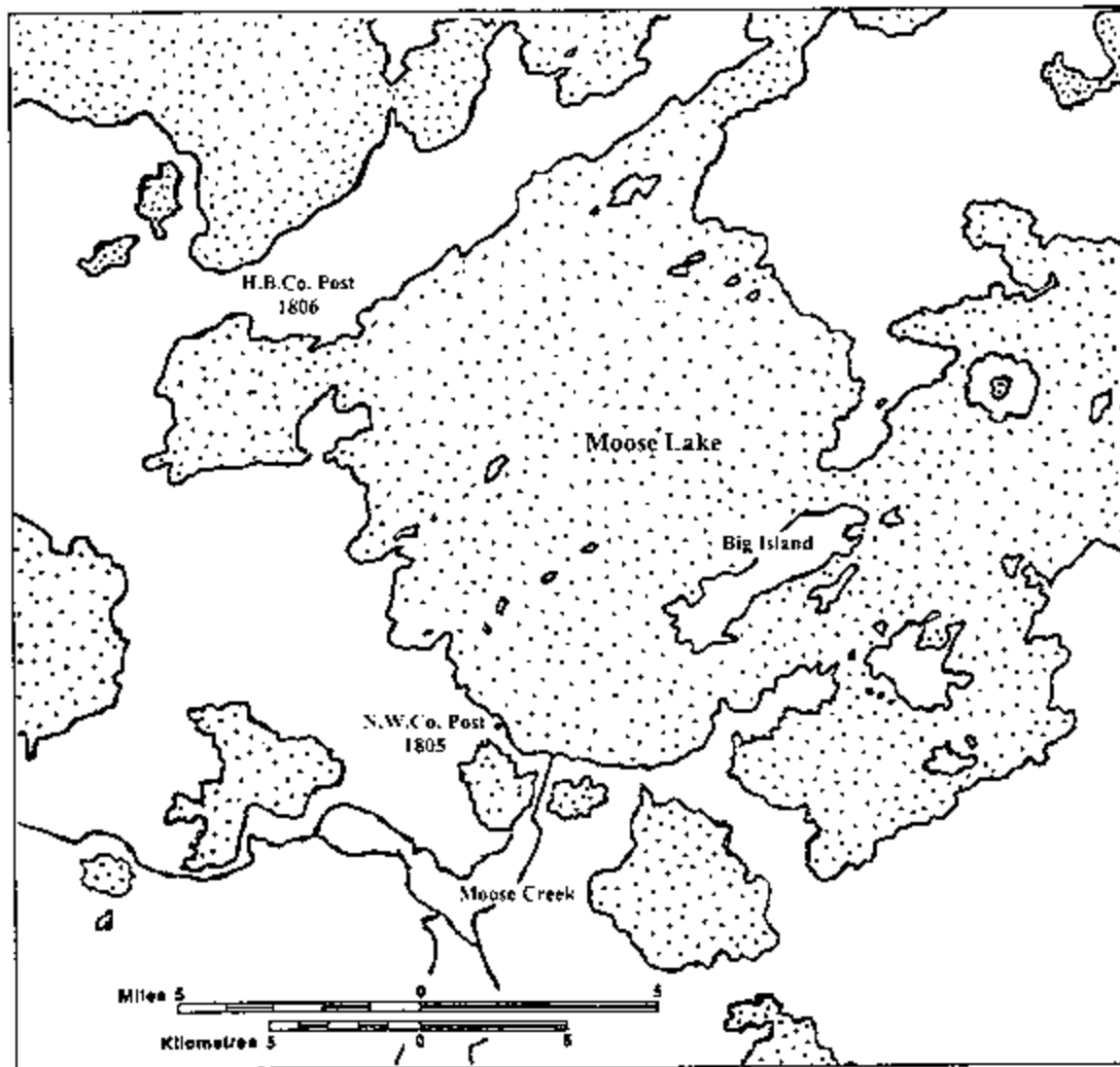
¹²² Alexander Kennedy was married to Aggathas Isbister, whose father would have been an Orkneyman employed by the HBC at an earlier date. However, Aggathas' mother could have been a daughter of Missinakeeshick, making Aggathas his granddaughter.

¹²³ Isham, 79.

¹²⁴ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/32b, fo. 4.

¹²⁵ Orkney men came from the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland. For generations, they provided the bulk of the labour force for the Hudson's Bay Company, which found them loyal, hardworking, and thrifty.

There are other references to Dunnett in the records as well. On Friday, 15 May 1807, for instance, "W^m Dunnett & family with Mag^s Clouston came here [Cumberland House] in a Canoe from Mr. Kennedy at Moose Lake - for Goods - they have been 6 Days in the Journey."¹²⁶ On the following Monday, 18 May 1807, "Jno Ballenden & W^m Dunnett digging in the west garden."¹²⁷



Approximate locations of HBC/NWC Posts at Moose Lake in 1805-1806

If Ballenden was William Dunnett's father-in-law, as evidence suggests, we can assume that Sophia Dunnett spent the summer with her parents at Cumberland

¹²⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/32b, fo. 17d.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

House. Her husband, however, was elsewhere. On 2 June 1807, he headed off on a canoe trip to the North with Peter Fidler, who recorded the following in his journal,

Tuesday, The wind abated & we got underway at 12 - Ja^s Morrowick, W^m Dunnet, Jn^o Ross & myself in a Small Canoe with 6 Bags of Pem[m]ican - to pass by the Deers Lake & from thence to the Athapesaw [sic - Athabasca] - put up ½ [way along?] the Cumb Lake - Left my woman & Children to go down to the Factory - some of our Boats & Canoes to go away tomorrow. Left Bird Hallet & Kennedy the 5th Inst. [5 June].¹²⁸

Kennedy had remained at Moose Lake until May 21. On the day before his departure for Cumberland House, he wrote a letter to John McNab, Chief at York, and gave it to Massinakeeshick and Mistickathenu with orders to take it via Cross Lake and Oxford House to York Factory. In it, he summed up the year as follows.

I have passed a tolerable winter in regard to living, plenty of fish & some meat & in respect to trade better than I expected in the fall from such a poor place. One thing and another say 700 M[ade]B[eaver][.] my Neighbours were not so powerful either in men or Goods as they were last year, and I can assure you that since the fall they have not made a pack. I leave here according to Mr. Fidlers directions two men during the summer & if amunition could be got I doubt not but a good number of Swan Skins might be procured as there will be a good many Indians here & I think no opposition for want of amunition & Brandy. I have been obliged to tent among the Indians for this month past to preserve the few skins they killed untill I could get a supply from Cumberland but their will not admit of a sufficiency during the Summer, I received yesterday what can be spared and I hope it will nearly serve untill a supply can be got from below, as I am just on the eve of embarking for Cumberland House.¹²⁹

This letter is informative on a number of accounts. There was intense competition, and Kennedy himself had to tent with the trappers to prevent them from trading their few furs with the opposition. Brandy was being used in the trade, and it was in short supply, especially among the NWC traders. Also, there was a seasonal influx of hunters from other places because of the migrating waterfowl. One can be sure that the Goose Dance was held that spring in the vicinity of Moose Lake. However, Kennedy was not there to witness the celebration. He left for Cumberland House, 21 May, and arrived there on the 26th.

at 5 pm. Mr. Kennedy with 4 men & 2 Canadians arrived in the Boat from Moose Lake - 6 Days coming up...Jno. Brough & Mags. Spence remains at Moose lake all summer - & to build a Small House to remain in near the entrance of the lake at Moose Creek.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., fo. 19.

¹²⁹ PAM, HBCA, B.239:b/73, p. 47, Alexander Kennedy to John McNab, 7 June 1806.

¹³⁰ Ibid., fo. 18d. This "Small House" is unlikely to have been the one near "moose creek" marked on Cha cha pay tat ti's map, which was sketched, 25 March 1807, several months *before* Brough and Spence built their house. In all likelihood, Cha cha pay tat ti indicated the houses which existed in March at Moose Lake. One of these, of course, was "Mr. Kennedy's," and the other belonged to the NWC opposition. It

On May 27, Fidler recorded that they had "Packed Moose Lake Furs & 11 Bundles Count^g 720 MB" and on 28 May, "3 Packing M^t Kennedys Feathers 205 lbs - & 2000 quills."¹³¹ Fidler summarized in detail the total returns of Moose Lake as follows:

Moose Lake Trade 1807. 69 whole Beaver, 22 Half Beaver, 17½ lbs Coat Beaver, 402 prime marten, 895 Rabbits, 193 Swans large, 17 Swans small, 17 Parchment Skins; 11 Parchment Brained; 16 Wolverines, 20 prime otters, 6 common otters; 20 Fishers, 78 Drest Moose, 4 Bears at 5 Bea[ver] Each; 1 Bear at 2 bea[ver] Each; 1 Bear at 1 Bea[ver]; 96 chunk salt, 68 Minks, 1 Prime Cat, 2 red foxes, 1 frizzle¹³² fox, 43 Common martins 1 Seunk [sic], N^o. Goose quills, N^o. Swans Quills, lbs Feathers. Total = 731 ¾ MB.¹³³

Interestingly, no muskrats were recorded in 1807. In a letter to John McNab, 16 January 1807, Fidler had said, "the Muskrats that has been so very numerous here of late is not now to be seen either the remarkably high water that has Overflowed the Country this summer has either drowned [sic] or swept them all away that very few is to be seen."¹³⁴ The results of the shortage were reported to McNab by James Sutherland in a letter from Cumberland House, dated 3 June 1807.

I am sorry to say the trade of this house has not turned out according to Expectation in the fall, owing to the Indians having starved the Greater part of the winter and the Country being in a great measure overflowed last summer has Destroyed the Muskrats, in which article the failure is.¹³⁵

However, the muskrat had returned by 1815, when Alexander Kennedy was in charge of the Cumberland District. In his annual report, summarizing his observations about the local region, its people, and the trade during the previous year, Kennedy provided a detailed description of Moose Lake, including its fur resources.

makes more sense that Fidler would later direct his men to build a small house *near* the NWC post, so as to better observe their movements. By 1820, the HBC and NWC posts were within easy walking distance of each other.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² The meaning of "frizzle fox" is unclear. "To frizz" can mean "to remove a thin layer of the grain side of a skin in leather manufacture." "To frizzle" means "to curl (like hair)."

¹³³ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/32b, fo. 34. Fidler did not include the number of goose and swan quills or the pounds of feathers collected at Moose Lake. "Parchment brained" refers to a type of leather manufactured by the Cree using a traditional process in which animal brain was applied to soften the hide.

¹³⁴ PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/74, p. 33.

¹³⁵ PAM, HBCA, B.239/b/76, fo. 34d, York Factory Correspondence, 1805-1808, mf. 1M258.

The Moose Lake which is the only other Lake of note in this District is situated about 100 miles below Cumberland on the north side of Saskatchewan communicating with it by a small Navigable River only 5 miles long. No Rivers of any note fall into it, but the Country round it is so low & level that in Seasons of high water it communicates [sic] in every direction with the various little Rivers & Lakes in its vicinity. This has been a fine Country for Beaver and other animals of the fur kind but is at present in a ruined state owing to its so long having been resorted to for furs, that the Beaver is now almost rooted out. The only furs at present to be found in its vicinity are muskrats & martins which constitute the principal part of the returns from this District...At Moose Lake the fishery is far less precarious and more abundant [sic] as these [at Cumberland House] at all seasons, any quantity may be caught by increasing the number of nets according to the demand - From the latter end of May till the latter end of Sept^r plenty of Sturgeon, & plenty of white fish or tickameg, Jack, parch [sic], & Succors [sic] all the year round - this part of the Country also abounds with game.¹³⁶

Evidently, the region around Moose Lake had been integrated into the fur trade for a very long time. Kennedy reported that,

There are only two [HBC] posts at present on this District viz. Cumberland House permanent & at Moose Lake a temporary one... There has been about 20 men at Cumberland and 10 at Moose Lake for this three or four winters past... [The North West Company people] occupy a permanent post at Cumberland where they have been Established this twenty years past. They have also a temporary post at Moose Lake which has been settled there seven years ago.¹³⁷

This suggests that there had been a NWC post in operation at Moose Lake as far back as 1808, and an HBC post there from about 1811 or 1812. Certainly James Sutherland mentioned an HBC post at Moose Lake in a letter to William Sinclair at Jack River, dated 12 October 1812.

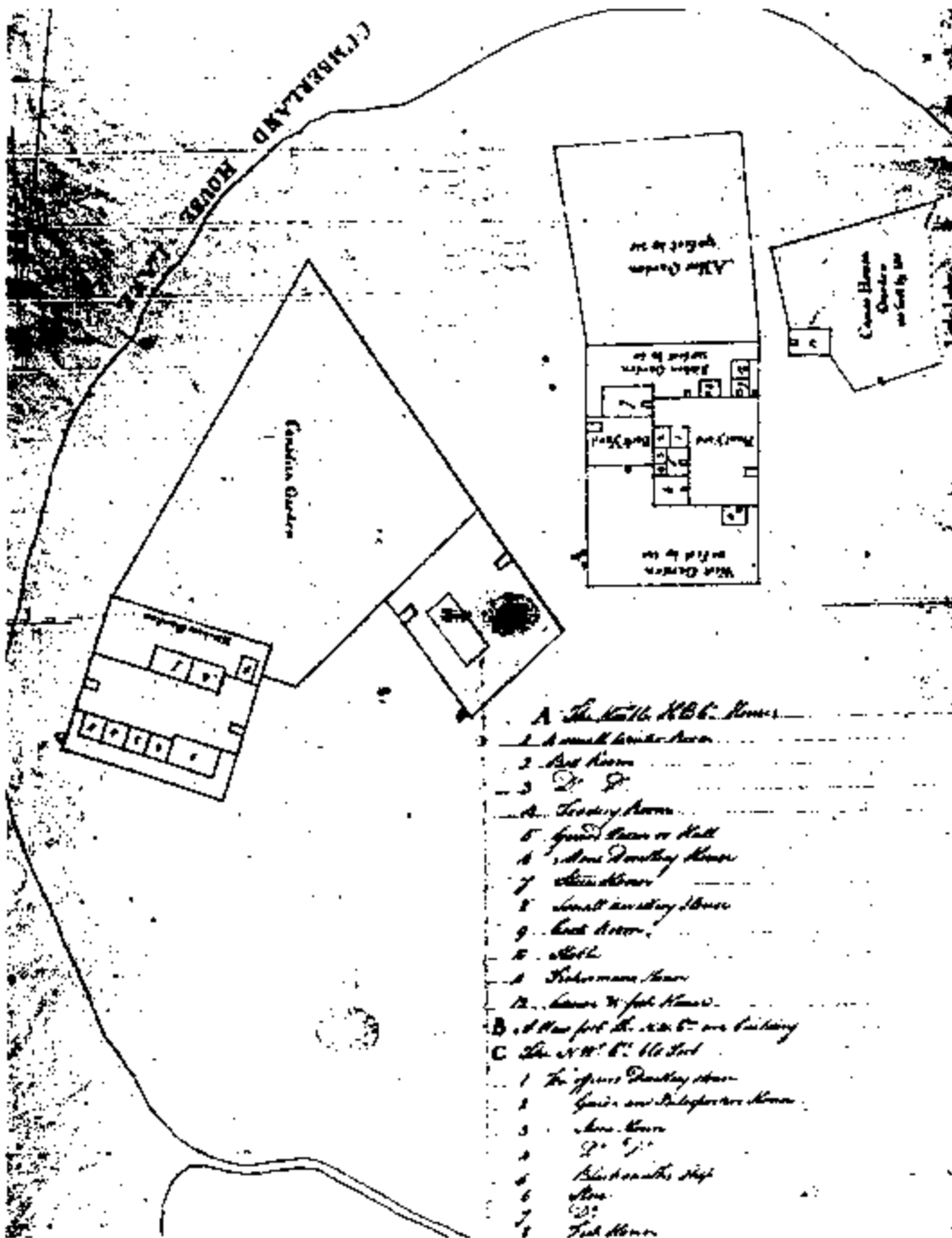
The Season of Cold is beginning to set in fast. Induces me to forward the Bearers of this [letter] to Moose Lake. George Flett & three men has been there since the 15th of Sept^r.¹³⁸

Of course, both companies had been there earlier, the North West Company in the winter of 1805-1806, and Kennedy himself the following winter. In all likelihood, both companies abandoned the place for a period of time because of the decline in muskrats, then returned when it became profitable to do so.

¹³⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.49/e/1, fo. 1-3.

¹³⁷ Ibid., fo. 3d, 4, 6.

¹³⁸ PAM, HBCA, B.154/a/5, fo. 12-12d, Norway House Post Journal, 1812-1813, 1M106. William Sinclair was in charge of Jack River, a post located where Norway House is today.



"Sketch of Cumberland House & Gardens," undated [1815]

HBCA G.1:96 (N34413)

(courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

Regarding the above illustration: The NWC and HBC posts at Cumberland House distributed goods to their respective outposts at Moose Lake and elsewhere. Trading rooms, store houses, gardens, and accommodations for the men and officers were common to both, but each also had specialized buildings, such as the NWC "Blacksmiths Shop" and HBC "Fishermans House." By way of explanation, "Do." means "ditto" or "same as above." Note also how close the two posts were to each other.

Fur Trade Conflict Escalates

Moose Lake owes its existence to competition between the fur traders. Had there been no Canadians in the vicinity, the HBC would never have established a post there in 1806, and the native trappers would have had no alternative but to trade at Cumberland House. However, a revitalized North West Company, cockier than ever after its merger with the XY Company, was exerting pressure on the Hudson's Bay Company on all sides. By 1812 the intensity of the competition was having a serious impact on the Cumberland District, and James Sutherland, the HBC man in charge there at the time, complained of the aggressive tactics of his opponents.

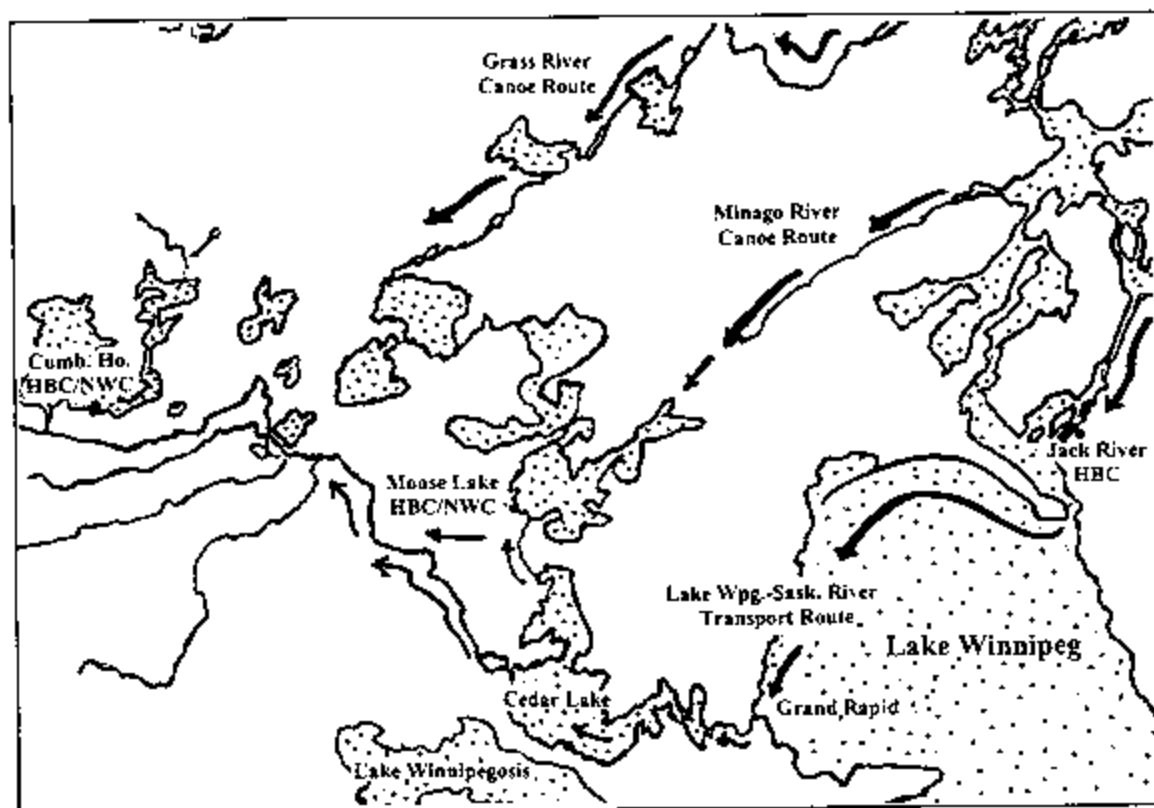
As I suspected in the Summer we are strongly opposed, the Canadians Intend to extirpate us from this part of the Country, they have no less than five Canoe Cargoes of Goods & forty men besides Officers at this place and Moose Lake...and also from the few number of men I had enables them to Harass us with the Indians at this place...for on their departure from the House they were pursued by the Canadians and Brandy ammunition and Tobacco given them as much as they would accept of & if any one consented to take a fathom of Cloth in Debt for 5 Skins they get another fathom for nothing - this you will say is Strange for a Commercial concern as they must lose by it but here they do not consider making Profit but to distress us as they know if they lose here they will make up the defficiency [sic] in the Athapescow.¹³⁹

The North West Company hoped that by increasing gifts and lowering its prices the Hudson's Bay Company would be forced to do the same, thereby losing enough profit to put it out of business in the area. The Canadians were unconcerned that they themselves might lose profits by doing this. They knew that they could make up the difference in the fur-rich Athabasca region, where they had no rivals. They were also prepared to go to other lengths as well. Sutherland wrote a second letter to Sinclair, 3 January 1813, in which he described what was happening at Moose Lake.

George Flett writes me from Moose Lake that the Canadians there have been playing some of their Isle a la Crosse tricks in pillaging the Indians, and they took one Indian out of our Peoples house - Here they have not attempted anything of the kind hitherto but I dare say they will be trying before Spring, they [have] no less than 24 Men and three Officers at this place.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 12d, 13.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 14. There was perhaps an explanation for the Canadians' behaviour. If they had supplied these trappers with European trade goods in the fall, they would have expected to be paid for them in furs at the end of the trapping season. When they did not get the furs as expected, they took them by force. The trappers, on the other hand, either owed the HBC traders for goods obtained in past years or they had also obtained goods from them in the previous fall. Having trapped insufficient furs to pay their debts to both companies, they paid just the one.



Major transportation routes into the Lower Saskatchewan

Sinclair was outraged. In his reply to Sutherland, he stated,

the information you gave in the Summer about the Canadians threatening to Drive us away from Cumberland has been correct and their behaviour at Moose Lake is another Proof of what villains they are when they see there is but few men. If George Flett had Killed or wounded some of them when they came and forced the Indian out of our House he would be justifiable in so doing. Had I been aware that such a number of Blackguard Canadians had wintered at Moose Lake I would [have] Detained some of the stoutest of the Irish men and sent them by land to oppose those Robers [sic], I cannot call them by any better name.¹⁴¹

The Irish men were among the second group of Selkirk settlers that had passed through Jack River in 1812 on their way to the Red River Colony. Sinclair viewed them as quarrelsome and insubordinate, because of their behaviour on the trip upriver from York Factory, and no doubt felt that opposition to the Canadians would be just the right occupation for them. The NWC men had no doubt overstepped the bounds by entering the HBC post and seizing the furs of a trapper they claimed was in debt to them, but the Hudson's Bay Company itself was also guilty of improper trade practices from time to time. Evidence indicates that traders on both sides were willing to use questionable methods, if they thought they could get away with them. Such cut-throat competition would continue for

¹⁴¹ Ibid., fo. 15d. The Irish were bound for the Red River Colony [present day Winnipeg-Selkirk Region].

several years, but Kennedy had recognized by 1815 that rivalry between the two companies was ruining the trade.

It does not appear to me that the Trade of this District can be much increased by any means - but by driving out the Canadians, or by being on good terms with them, the Expenses incurred in procuring the Trade might be lessened - by reducing the number of men, and by making the Indians pay for their grog, Tobacco, & ammunition which at present they drink, smoak, & fire away for nothing. ¹⁴²

"The Indians" in Cumberland District included "about an Hundred & Ten families," about half of whom were "new comers from York Factory, North river, and...the Rat Country...to the Northward of Cumberland."¹⁴³ Those who traded with the HBC at Moose Lake included "Nam pig ethinue, Cockquatatch, Nuchi poitew, Kewitin a capo, his Son, Sawenacoppa, Se u quin nass, Big Bear, White Bear, Triay? Nine Eyes, Briggan, Pe pa mi cippo, Thatus, Cha Ki Kut, Nutin a Ham, and Athimis."¹⁴⁴ Those who traded with the Canadians were "Na ne Kuk Ku neass, Hat Lugs? Upimute, Wapisk, Each ach, White Wolf, Moose Ear, Pe sis Ku at, Sawenass, Weascap, Mistabe, Musquask, Nichi Kis que bad, the Nest? The Bone, Unalisue & Rochblave's son."¹⁴⁵

The traders paid dearly for the furs they obtained from these hunters, yet the struggle between them continued unabated. Kennedy was still in charge of Cumberland House, 5 June 1818, when the following incident occurred.

Frobisher (One of the NW^t. Partners) arrived here in a light Canoe from Lac La ronge, he brought with him, James Peck a youth who was in charge for us at Pelican Lake & whom he (Frobisher) forcibly took away from his Station and Carried down here as a prisoner. - As soon as Mr. Kennedy Knew that Peck had arrived he went over to the NW^t. house to demand him, when he was immediately given up, Frobisher denied that he (Peck) was a prisoner and alledged that he only took him down here, to give his reason for debauching one of his (Frobishers) Men, which he accused Peck of having done in the course of last winter.¹⁴⁶

That same summer, another HBC man came under attack, allegedly with the encouragement of William Connolly, the man in charge of the NWC post at Cumberland House. William Williams, Governor of the Northern Department of the Hudson's Bay Company, reported the incident the following year.

¹⁴² PAM, HBCA, B.49/c/1, fo. 6d.

¹⁴³ Ibid., fo. 4d.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., fo. 5d.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., fo. 6.

¹⁴⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/34, fo. 2d, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1818-1819, mf. 1M40. Peck's alleged "debauchery" was an attempt to persuade his opponent to desert the NWC and join the HBC.

A Mr. Connolly a NW Proprietor and Master of their house at Cumberland, last year actually gave a Pistol and ammunition to an Indian with the pressing solicitations to him, that he would way lay and kill at the Big Rapids, a Man belonging to the H. Bay Co. by name Willock Ballandyne,¹⁴⁷ a steersman of a Boat coming up this fall because this Indian's wife had left him, and was cohabiting with Ballandyne, the attempt was made but by accident did not take place, the Indian [missed?] his opportunity while Ballandyne was stooping[.] attempting to execute his purpose, drawing his pistol from his back it fell from his hand which being perceived was taken up by Ballandyne and thus he miraculously escaped. All these narratives can be borne through by the most undeniable witnesses.¹⁴⁸

Williams provided no proof of his allegation, and indeed it is difficult to believe that a man in Connolly's position would have encouraged murder. What is even less believable is that he would have so openly provided a pistol and ammunition, then proposed a site for the deed. Even if he had a deep-seated grudge against Ballandyne, the risks of such action would have been too great. More likely, the wronged husband acted on his own. Nevertheless, in such a small community Connolly had to have known of the man's hostility to Ballandyne. If he did give him a pistol under those circumstances, he left himself open to accusation. There is also no question that Connolly could be aggressive, not just against HBC personnel, but also against any Indian hunter who crossed the North West Company. The HBC Journal entry for 8 June 1818 reads,

Chee Ka peg one of the Indians that came here with Mr. Holmes & who is considerably indebted to us went over to the N.W. house where he was invited by Some of his relations (who had been sent to decoy him) to partake of a pot of Rum - As soon as he entered the NW^l House, he was laid hold of and put in irons & threatened to be murdered for having traded with Mr. Holmes last winter - The North West Partners who were present at this transaction were John Duncan Campbell & Ben Frobisher - Willm. Connolly and H. Faries - Clerks.¹⁴⁹

On June 12,

Campbell & Connolly Embarked from the NW^l House in a light Canoe taking Chee Ka peg along with them in Irons they have given out to the Ind^s here that he is going to be hung for having traded with Mr. Holmes last winter.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ This was William Ballendine, a son of John Ballenden, or Ballendine, of Orphir, the boatbuilder at Cumberland House. His older brother John later became the post master at Moose Lake.

¹⁴⁸ PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 12, York Factory General Correspondence Book (Gov. Williams, 1818/1819), mf. 3M1. Gov. William Williams was writing to the Duke of Richmond, Governor in Chief of the Canadas, in response to the Duke's letter he received, 7 Oct. 1819, at Norway House.

¹⁴⁹ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/34, fo. 3.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 3d. The threat was not carried out. Chee Ka peg returned with Connolly 1 Sept. 1818. See, fo. 11.



York Factory 1821

Watercolour over pencil on wove paper by Peter Rindishacher (1806-1874)
(courtesy National Archives of Canada: C-001918)

In spite of the aggressive stance of the Nor'westers, Kennedy also left for York Factory, 22 June 1818, with the fur returns of the post, leaving Thomas Isbister in command with seven men under him.¹⁵¹ John Budge was put in charge of Moose Lake for the summer, with William Flett acting as fisherman there.¹⁵² Kennedy returned, September 1, and was at once busy preparing for the winter trade. The North West Company, which had a post within sight of Cumberland House, was already ahead of him, and on September 9, Kennedy wrote that "our opponent Connolly" had sent canoes loaded with trade goods to the NWC outposts at Cranberry Lake and Moose Lake. Connolly, one clerk, and twenty-three men remained behind to compete directly with Kennedy, who did not have his own men ready until two weeks later.

[25 Sept. 1818] Fitted Geo^d. Flett out with a supply of Goods for Moose Lake. William Flett with an Indian boy arrived in a small Canoe from the Moose Lake, he reports that the NW^t.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 4d.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, fo. 3d. Entry for 13 June 1818.

People who have arrived there, are dashing away at a great rate among the Indians, who are doing little or nothing, but drinking Rum. [26 Sept. 1818] George Flett left this in a small boat, with W^m. Flett, W^m. McKinlay, and the Ind. boy that arrived yesterday, having on board an Outfit of Goods for Moose Lake, where Ge^o. Flett is to take charge. The above compliment of men with John Budge who remains at the place, is all we can spare till our people arrive in the fall.¹⁵³

Kennedy kept in touch with Flett throughout the winter, and his journal contains references to men travelling back and forth between the two posts, even at times in company with opposition traders. On 5 April 1819, for instance, Kennedy "Sent A. Brown to Moose Lake in C^o. with two Canadians from the NW^t house with more supplies to Ge^o. Flett."¹⁵⁴ Considering the increasing competition between the two companies, it may seem odd that Brown would have travelled with his opponents. In fact, it was safer for him to do so. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for him to socialize with people other than HBC personnel. The winters were long, and men in both companies got tired of seeing the same faces day in and day out. However, they never quite forgot business. Whenever they were together, they were generally trying to find out details of the other's trade strategy. At all times, they watched each other's activities closely. If a trader left his post to go out and collect furs from one of the trappers, a man from the opposition would tail him, either to make sure he only picked up the furs from his own trappers, or to get ahead of him and obtain "opposition" furs with a little tobacco or liquor. This racing about the country went on all winter until warm weather brought the trapping season to an end.

When spring arrived, work shifted from gathering furs to preparing them for transport. At Moose Lake, George Flett and his men loaded their boats and headed for Cumberland House, arriving there, 27 May 1819, "with the returns of that place, consisting principally of Rats." The following day, "All hands employed packing & pressing furs, tied up most of the Moose Lake furs & packed 11 bundles in the Out Press" in preparation for the annual downriver trip to York Factory.¹⁵⁵

The North West Company also prepared for the trip to Fort William. In Alexander Kennedy's report, he described the strength of the opposition he had faced at Cumberland House during the winter of 1818-1819.

We were opposed here by a M^r. W^m. Connolly, a new proprietor who had under him three clerks, two guides, three interpreters and thirty-six men. Connolly wintered at Cumberland

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, fo. 13d, 14.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 29.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 34. See an illustration of a fur press on page 87.

with one Clerk one interpreter & 22 men. one M^cDonnell at Moose Lake with one guide one interpreter & 8 men and a M^r. Condin wintered at Cranberry Lake with one interpreter & 7 men. They carried out about 80 packs principally consisting of rats, etc, procured at Moose Lake & they brought in four Canoes loaded with about 84 pieces of trading goods very little of which remained in the Spring.¹⁵⁶

The lowly muskrat had become a mainstay of the fur trade in Cumberland District, making the Lower Saskatchewan a coveted prize in the ongoing struggle between the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies for control of that trade. Both Cumberland House and Moose Lake had been embroiled in the struggle, on and off, during the decade leading up to the winter of 1818-1819. Now, they were once more to be caught up in events.

Colin Robertson and the Athabasca Expedition

Although there had always been squabbling among the traders for control of the furs, the origins of the conflict that winter could be traced back to 1809, when Lord Selkirk bought a controlling interest in the Hudson's Bay Company, then established the Red River Colony in 1812. Since the settlement lay astride the main transportation route used by the Nor'westers, they feared that movement of their men and goods would be blocked and the trade ruined. Their worst suspicions were confirmed in January 1814, when Miles Macdonnell, the governor of the colony, banned the export of pemmican, which was an essential food for the *voyageurs* travelling back and forth between the posts. Perceived as an attempt to disrupt its trade, the North West Company retaliated with violence. The armed struggle peaked in June 1816 at Seven Oaks, where twenty-two people, almost all of them colonists, lost their lives in a skirmish between the two sides.

The incident was labelled a massacre by both colonists and HBC personnel, and an outraged Lord Selkirk sought redress through the courts. In the meantime, tensions remained high in fur trade country, where the struggle continued unabated. Prior to 1810, the North West Company had clearly dominated the fur trade, but after Lord Selkirk took over the Hudson's Bay Company in 1809, his brother-in-law, Andrew Colvile, reorganized from top to bottom, and it became a force to be reckoned with. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, this "new" company challenged its rival everywhere, but especially in the Athabasca, which had been under the control of the North West Company up to that time.

The man who masterminded the HBC thrust into Athabasca was Colin Robertson, a former trader for the North West Company, who presented his plan to the

¹⁵⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.49/e/2, fo. 3, Cumberland House, Report on District, 1819, mf. 1M777.

London Committee in 1809. Although rejected at the time, a revised plan was accepted in 1814, and Robertson was sent out in May on a secret mission to Montreal to hire experienced Canadian voyageurs for the expedition. After a long and arduous voyage, he finally reached Quebec in September, and spent the winter in Montreal organizing his forces. By the summer of 1815, he was ready to leave, and the Athabasca Expedition got under way with sixteen canoes and one hundred and sixty men, including John Clarke, François Decoigne, and Robert Logan, former NWC men.



Colin Robertson

Oil on canvas, artist unknown
(courtesy National Archives of Canada (C-104181))

In the meantime, the North West Company had worked hard to undermine Selkirk's colony at Red River and by the spring of 1815 had persuaded over two-thirds of the settlers to leave for Canada. Only sixty hardy souls remained, but they were soon driven out of their homes and forced to flee north to Jack River. Robertson and his men caught up with these long-suffering people at "Winipic Settlement," located near the northern outlet of Lake Winnipeg at a site cleared the previous winter by a party of Norwegian axemen.¹⁵⁷ At the time, Robertson had planned to return to England via York Factory to attend to urgent personal business, leaving John Clarke in charge of the first foray into the Athabasca region. Instead, he was persuaded to go with the colonists to re-establish the settlement, and he remained at Red River throughout the winter. Additional colonists arrived in the fall under the leadership of Governor Semple, with whom Robertson was at first on good terms. However, as the winter progressed, they became alienated, and a disillusioned Robertson left the colony, 11 June 1816, for York Factory to await the ship for England.

¹⁵⁷ PAM, HBCA, E.10/1, fo. 81, Colin Robertson, vol. 2 in *Diaries, 1814-1817*, mf. 4M121. "Winipic Settlement," was located near Warren's Landing on a site cleared in the winter of 1814-1815 by eight Norwegians under the leadership of Enner Holte. Renamed "Norway House" by 1818, it functioned as a depot until 1826, when it was moved to its present location.

After he arrived at Jack River, Robertson heard rumours that something had gone seriously wrong in Athabasca, but he could not find out the details. It was only after he had resumed his journey that Logan and Decoigne caught up with him and reported "the melancholy news of fifteen of the Companies servants being starved to Death in Peace River; in consequence of the measures adopted by the North West Company."¹⁵⁸ An intercepted letter, written by Mr. McGillivray in December 1815, revealed how deeply implicated the Canadians were in those deaths. Indeed, McGillivray bragged about how they had prevented the "Chipewyans" from supplying provisions for Mr. Campbell, an HBC trader.

...they all behaved themselves with great decorum and propriety, except two who attempted to pay Cam[p]bell a visit, for which irrefragable breach of the law, they were soundly thrashed, they evidently shewed signs of contrition, became remarkably tractable, and none of their relations were any ways inclined to undergo a similar chastisement, but on the contrary were really good boys. The Indians were at no great distance but it was entirely out of their power to assist him. (Mr. Clarke) all their provisions having been completely secured long before by the sedulous and unremitting exertions of Mr. McIntosh who had thrown every imaginable barrier in their way.¹⁵⁹

Such conduct revealed a callousness toward both the Dene hunters and the HBC men that offended Robertson deeply, but he took some comfort from the fact that it had not altogether worked.

Mr. Clarke tho' unfortunate in the Peace River, has succeeded well at Fort Wedderburn, Hay River, and the Falls. - Decoigne has done remarkable well at Lesser Slave Lake, he has brought 25 Packs of excellent Furs from there, Logan has got a tolerable footing at Isle ala Cross, at Green Lake four packs were made by our Mr. McVicar, and a number of Indians came over to us in the spring.¹⁶⁰

These successes could not compensate for the loss of lives to achieve them, nor did they exonerate John Clarke, whose mismanagement was a factor in those deaths. Clarke had attempted to establish an HBC presence in Peace River, contrary to Robertson's "positive instructions," and by "attempting too much, lost all."¹⁶¹ Still, in Robertson's view, "John Clarke, with all his faults and blunders, is the only man capable of opposing these people [NWC] on their principles of opposition." For that reason, he led a second expedition in the winter of 1816-

¹⁵⁸ PAM, HBCA, E.10/1, fo. 215, Colin Robertson, vol. 4 in *Diaries, 1814-1817*, mf. 4M121.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 219-219d. Emphasis [underlined text] is in the original.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 215.

¹⁶¹ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 135d, Colin Robertson: *Correspondence, 1814-1822*, specifically copies of letters & extracts of Letters written 1 Sep 1817 - Sep 1822, addresses not given, mf. 4M121.

1817, a venture which ran into trouble, when he was seized and imprisoned by NWC partner Archibald Norman McLeod, so that he was unable to organize a third expedition in 1817-1818.



Battle of Seven Oaks, 1816

HBC 19:4 calendar illustration by Charles W. Jefferys

HBC A P-378 (N8281)

(courtesy Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

The loss of so many lives in Athabasca in the winter of 1816-1817 was a blow to Robertson, but the deaths of Governor Semple and more than twenty of the colonists at Seven Oaks must have been more devastating still. Robertson was awaiting the ship at York Factory, when he received the "Melancholy intelligence," just one month to the day since his departure from Red River.¹⁶² Skilled as he was at dealing with the North West Company, he must have wondered if events would have been different had he remained at the colony. Certainly Seven Oaks was the result of NWC instigation and Governor Semple's incompetence, but had Robertson been present it might not have occurred at all. In any case, he returned to Jack River to assess the situation and accompanied to York Factory those settlers who had decided to return to Europe. However, the ship was late and was unable to get out of Hudson Bay because of ice in Hudson Strait. Foiled again in his attempt to return to England, Robertson and the settlers spent the winter at Eastmain and Moose Factory.

¹⁶² He received word, 11 July 1816. See PAM, HBCA, E.10/1, fo. 22.

In the spring of 1817, Robertson went to Montreal to answer charges that had been brought against him by the North West Company, and to plan for the next expedition to Athabasca. By now he felt the HBC was "too far advanced to retreat," that it had no other alternative but to "push on."¹⁶³ In the meantime, the man he had to convince was on his way to Red River. Lord Selkirk had gone west in 1816 with members of the De Meuron Regiment to provide protection for his beleaguered colonists there. On the way, he captured Fort William and discovered letters incriminating NWC officers in the recent troubles. Then in 1817 he travelled on to Red River and re-established the colony on a firmer foundation before returning to Montreal. In the spring of 1818, Colin Robertson was able to argue his case for another Athabasca Expedition, to which Lord Selkirk consented, on the condition that Robertson lead it himself.

By this time, Robertson had been acquitted of all charges against him and was free to act. Recruitment began in earnest and in the fall of 1818 he was at Norway House with "an efficient force of 130 for the reestablishment of the country beyond Cumberland House."¹⁶⁴ Here he met Clarke and others connected with the previous expeditions. He also met with James Bird, acting governor, who agreed with Lord Selkirk that Robertson himself, not Clarke, must lead the next thrust into the Athabasca. Robertson came to the same conclusion, because "Decoigne cut a miserable figure in Athabasca - Clarke was wandering about the whole winter from one post to another," and most importantly "The young gentlemen have lost their confidence in my old friend [Clarke]."¹⁶⁵ In the end, he decided that "Mr. Clarke goes up the Peace River, and pushes his Irroquois [sic] on to New Caledonia and I myself winter at Athabasca Lake."¹⁶⁶

At various times during the previous expeditions into the Athabasca, the North West Company had arrested HBC men, including Clarke himself. As annoying as these setbacks were, they were the fodder for many a humorous tale, including one that produced much laughter at the expense of Archibald Norman McLeod, a leading NWC trader in the region. Robertson told the tale with evident relish, and an amusing turn of phrase, taking great enjoyment at the chagrin of an opponent he did not admire. McLeod, whom Robertson described as a "mighty small man," was in charge of Fort Chipewyan in 1817 where some HBC men were being held as prisoners. Some time earlier, news had arrived of the capture of Fort William by Lord Selkirk, and "Archb^d. Norman considered his authority and presence, of

¹⁶³ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo.134d, Letter No. 9, Montreal, 31 Jan 181[8].

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 145d-146.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 146.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 147.

sufficient weight to crush every attempt to divulge the important secret." Nevertheless, it was McLeod himself who set the stage for the revelation of Fort William's humiliation.

In Robertson's words, "Amidst the numerous acts of wanton tyranny exercised by the chief justice [McLeod] and his colleagues - conviviality was sometimes resorted to, not to solace the pangs of unmerited oppression, but to add insult to misfortune." In other words, after a hearty meal and a few drinks, the Nor'westers gathered with their prisoners, not to ease their burdens, but to make fun of them. On one such occasion, McLeod, "the king of Athebasca [sic] as he termed himself condescended to exhibit his vocal powers" with the following couplet,

The H.B.C. came up a hill, and up a hill they came
The H.B.C. came up a hill and down they went again.¹⁶⁷

Everyone laughed, even the prisoners "in the hopes of blunting or diverting the object of the ridicule." However, one among them, a Mr. McFarlane, was bolder.

"You never ask me for a song, Mr. McLeod," says McFarlane, "If agreeable I will give you a verse of my own composition."

"Silence, gentlemen," says the Justice, "Mr. McFarlane's song."

Slyly, McFarlane proceeded.

But Douglass brave, went up a hill, and to a Fort he came
When in he pass'd, and out from thence, he was not driven again.

The reference, of course, was to the taking of Fort William by Lord Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, a fact supposedly unknown to the prisoners. It elicited an immediate response.

Rising from his chair, McLeod exclaimed, "Mr. McFarlane you shall have a hundred guineas,¹⁶⁸ if you give me the persons name who informed you of that circumstance."

"What?" says McFarlane, "for two lines of my own composing! You are really extravagant."

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., fo. 148d-149.

¹⁶⁸ A guinea was equivalent to twenty-one shillings, or one pound, one shilling. A hundred guineas would have been equal to £105, a large sum of money in 1817.

Seeing that his joke had turned back on himself, "The Justice rose enraged and the company broke up, not in the best humour."¹⁶⁹

Nor were they to be in good humour for a long time. Clarke's failures and the loss of life in Athabasca had stiffened the will of the Hudson's Bay Company, which was now more determined than ever to establish a presence there. With Colin Robertson in charge, it was finally in a position to do so.

The Turbulent Summer of 1819

Not surprisingly the Nor'westers resisted this intrusion into what had been so long their territory alone, and the first reports of that resistance reached Cumberland House in December 1818. The journal entry for December 30 reads,

M^r. Pinsonaut arrived from the Crossing Place, alias Carlton, in C^o. with two Canadians who bro^ut letters from Athabasca for the Governor by which we are informed that the North West in that quarter are going on in their old way, taking Prisoners, and putting all laws to defiance, Human & divine.¹⁷⁰

The Governor mentioned here was William Williams, a recent arrival from England, who had been appointed governor-in-chief in May 1818 and sent out that summer to Hudson Bay. At first glance, he seemed an odd choice. A naval officer who had worked previously for the East India Company, he had neither fur trade experience nor knowledge of the country. Nevertheless, he had an aggressive personality, which the London Committee viewed as useful in the ongoing battle with the North West Company. They were not to be disappointed.

Williams arrived in August at York Factory on the company ship, *Prince of Wales*, stayed briefly, then travelled inland with James Bird to Cumberland House, which he had chosen as his headquarters for the winter.¹⁷¹ Arriving there, October 9, he had only nicely settled when the news arrived from Athabasca. Acting quickly, he wrote a letter, 2 January 1819, to Lord Selkirk, explaining what the Nor'westers had done.

On the 30th of Dec^r. I received by express an account of the arrest of M^r Colin Robertson at Fort Wedderburn, the executive part being performed by Samuel Black and Simon McGillivray, aided by about fifty men under arms from the North West Fort - the rest of the

¹⁶⁹ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo.149, Letter 18, written at Norway House.

¹⁷⁰ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/34, fo. 22.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 15.

Proprietors John McTavish[,] Keith[,] and Smith not making their appearance, though in it, of course must have sanctioned this outrage as Brethren in every suggested iniquity.¹⁷²

That same day, Kennedy, master of the HBC post at Cumberland House, "Sent Tho^s. Isbister, with Amelle one of the Canadians that arrived from Athabasca on the 30th Ult^o. to Moose Lake, Amelle is to proceed to Montreal, via Norway House with an express from the Governor."¹⁷³ On January 11, Pinsonaut and one man returned to Carlton, taking with them a letter to Mr. McLeod at Isle a la Crosse. In it, Williams responded to reports of theft of HBC property by Nor'westers at that location.



Simon McGillivray, ca. 1824
oil on canvas by Richard Ramsay Reinagle
(courtesy National Archives of Canada / C-000176)

During the next six weeks, Williams thought a great deal about the course he should follow. Clearly he was determined to act, because, as he later explained, "a long passive forbearance on the part of their [HBC] Servants to retaliate on the offending, instead of checking the progress of aggression, has only encouraged the North West Company to commit further depredations." In the same letter, he added that "the tardy progress of the Law in Canada against this band of Barbarians" had further encouraged them. In his view, the North West Company had "abandoned every civilized and legal tie, and formed a Code of their own, justly entitled to the appellation of 'Felony a simple misdemeanor' and 'Killing no Murder.'"¹⁷⁴

When Williams received letters from the Red River Colony, 28 February 1819, he immediately made plans to leave, ostensibly to "visit the Posts in Red River," but

¹⁷² PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 10.

¹⁷³ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/34, fo. 22d.

¹⁷⁴ PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 29. Letter from Gov. Williams to Samuel Gale, 17 July 1819.

in fact to prepare for decisive action against the North West Company.¹⁷⁵ Apparently, he had received a letter from Duncan Graham, a man in HBC service, to whom Lord Selkirk had sent warrants the previous fall for the arrest of Nor'westers implicated in the bloodbath at Seven Oaks.¹⁷⁶ On March 1, he set out by way of Red Deer's River, accompanied by four men.¹⁷⁷

Once at Red River, Williams met with Graham and studied the warrants. Then, he acted decisively, justifying his actions on the basis of the HBC Charter, which had been granted to the company by a British Act of Parliament, and on his own authority as a magistrate of Rupert's Land.¹⁷⁸ On June 5, he wrote Captain Frederic Matthey, commander of the De Meuron Regiment, requesting his personal assistance, "aided by a party of Twenty Meurons that measures may be taken to re-establish that Peace and good order which hitherto has been so perfectly disregarded and disgracefully violated by the North West Company."¹⁷⁹ Williams appointed others as well, so that he ended up with "thirty Men as Constables whom I personally accompanied that no except[ion] beyond the reall [sic] intent of the Law should occur."¹⁸⁰

In the meantime, Cumberland House was a hub of excitement as traders arrived at both the NWC and HBC posts, coming downriver with their winter returns. With the two posts so close together, conflict was bound to occur, and John Clarke, the HBC officer, had a tense meeting, June 16, with several Nor'westers, including William Connolly and Benjamin Frobisher. They wanted a Canadian who had deserted to the HBC, claiming he still owed them service. Clarke refused to return the man, citing their ill treatment of the poor fellow and the fact that the NWC had itself taken in a number of deserters from the HBC. The Nor'westers backed

¹⁷⁵ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/34, fo. 26.

¹⁷⁶ PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 29. Letter from Gov. Williams to Samuel Gale, 17 July 1819. "I received an application from Mr. Duncan Graham to whom the legal warrants were addressed, for assistance which I readily gave him."

¹⁷⁷ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/34, fo. 26, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1818-1819, mf. 1M40. The four men included "M^r. Ross, John Ballenden, & Wm. Hourston" and "Jos^h. Colen," who was returning to Red Deers River. A son of Joseph Colen, Chief at York Factory, 1786-1798, "Colen" is ancestor to the Collins Family in the Riverton area of Manitoba.

¹⁷⁸ For Williams' justification of his actions, see PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 13-14, letter from Williams to Richmond, undated.

¹⁷⁹ PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 55, letter from Gov. Williams to Captain Matthey, The Forks, Red River, 5 June 1819. The De Meuron Regiment, consisting mostly of Swiss and German mercenaries, had accompanied Lord Selkirk to the colony in 1817 and remained to protect it from its enemies.

¹⁸⁰ PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 14, letter from Williams to Richmond, undated.

down, when they saw the HBC men prepared to fight, and Clarke and his men proceeded on their journey, taking the deserter with them.¹⁸¹

On June 19, NWC officers Shaw, McTavish, Stewart, McDonnell, McIntosh, and McGillivray arrived in three light canoes manned by thirty men, bringing with them as prisoner, "Mr. Colin Robertson...Chief of the Athabasca Department." Upon arrival, Robertson stepped "out of Mr. McTavishes Canoe, and after speaking a few words to that Gentleman,...walked up to Hon^{ble}. Hudsons Bay Companys Fort where he was most joyfully received."¹⁸² Robertson had promised McTavish that he would return and continue to Montreal as a prisoner, but once in the safety of the HBC post, he demanded a copy of the charges against him. When these were not forthcoming, "he did not think himself bound by any promise extorted from him whilst a prisoner."¹⁸³

Robertson had been planning his escape for some time, but in a letter written from Cumberland House that same day, he said, "I have accomplished this object, but all circumstances considered, not very agreeable to my feelings." An honourable man, he had promised Mr. McTavish that he would return, and he felt uncomfortable that he had broken his word, particularly to a gentleman who had treated him kindly. "However my friends may applaud the act," he added, "my conscience tells me I have not acted right."¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, he did not return to the NWC post. Nor did the Nor'westers make any attempt to retrieve him, although they outnumbered the HBC men four to one. Instead, they packed up and continued their journey the following day, June 20. They were not to go far.

While the wrangling over Robertson was going on at Cumberland House, Williams and his men were quietly moving into position at Grand Rapids. According to historian Gerald Friesen, Williams "had arranged a small cannon on a barge and another cannon and two swivel guns below the rapids."¹⁸⁵ This formidable show of force caught the Nor'westers off guard when they arrived there June 21, and they could only offer token resistance. Ben Frobisher, for example, threatened "to shoot William Brown constable in the execution of his

¹⁸¹ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/35, pp. 5-6, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1819-1820, mf. 1M40.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁴ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 163, Letter No. 25, Cumberland House, Colin Robertson: Correspondence, 1814-1822.

¹⁸⁵ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 81-82.

duty, with a cocked Pistol at his breast” and Angus Shaw used “threatening vehement Language against his Majestys Subjects, saying he would return ‘within forty days and spread carnage and Blood shed throughout the Land’”¹⁸⁶ These gestures of defiance did no good; of course, other than assuring the arrest of both men along with the others. Williams was well satisfied with the results.

I am happy to say we arrested several without difficulty, others implicated avoided passing, by this route and went back over a Portage of nine miles making a difference of seven days in their Journey. - The people who thus escaped were Alexander McDonald [McDonnell], Stewart and Simon McGillivray, Proprietors with some Canadians.¹⁸⁷

These were the immediate consequences of Williams’ forthright action, but in the view of historian Gerald Friesen, “The arrests constituted a crippling blow to the North West Company trade operations and to the company’s prestige as the dominant force in the district.”¹⁸⁸



The Saskatchewan River near Grand Rapids
Grand Rapids 10
(courtesy Manitoba Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

¹⁸⁶ PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 31-32, letter from Gov. Williams to Samuel Gale, 17 July 1819.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁸ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 82.

The long-term impact was not so clearly known in 1819. The HBC men at Cumberland House were aware that "J. McDonnell and 4 Half Breeds" had returned to the NWC post on June 23, and they duly noted the arrival of "The N. W Lesser Slave Lake Canoes 6 in number" on the 28th, the same day Colin Robertson, A. McDonald, and nine men resumed their journey downriver. However, it was not until June 29 that suspicions were recorded in the journal.

We have been given to understand that the N.W. Canoes arrived at the Dog Islands with the exception of a few that are crossing backwards and forwards to their Post they seem to be afraid to proceed downwards owing (we believe) to some not very pleasing intelligence they have received from below which is as yet a Secret to us.¹⁸⁹

Later in the day, they learned why the NWC boats were lingering at Cumberland House.

George Fletts Mother in Law and Dunnetts Wife came in from Moose Lake. G Flett informs us that a half-sized Canoe arrived at the N W fort at Moose Lake with one officer of the Name of McDonnell & four half Breeds he was given to understand by one of this N W party that Governor Williams and Captain Matthey with a party of men from the Red River had apprehended some of the N. W. Proprietors namely McTavish, Shaw, & Campbell.¹⁹⁰

McDonnell's arrival at Cumberland House on June 23 could now be understood, and feared as well. The HBC men there were concerned that McDonnell might attack them in retaliation for the arrest of NWC men at Grand Rapids. The journal entry for June 29 added that "J. McDonnell with the 4 Half Breeds...wish to Keep themselves as close as possible and are collecting some halfBreeds together at this place for what intention we cannot at present comprehend[;] however[,] we are upon our guard at this place should they make any attack upon us."¹⁹¹ The attack never came.

Colin Robertson learned of the capture of the NWC men on Cedar Lake. As he explained it,

In paddling along Lake Bourbon listening with more than ordinary pleasure to the adventures of last winter our conversation [Robertson and A. McDonald's] was interrupted with "a canoe a head" in about ten minutes after a shot was fired, when we began to arrange our pistols - the strange canoe was now directing its course towards us - what shall be done says McDonald - if enemies, the water is the best place of defence I replied - This was a moment of no small anxiety, when the canoe approached - a stranger stood up, waved his hat and exclaimed "Glorious news! All the North west partners taken at the grand rapid by Governor Williams my name is Murphy. I am sent on to Meet Mr. Robertson - compliments being

¹⁸⁹ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/35, pp. 9-10.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

exchanged, we immediately shaped our course to the point a head, when a voyaging song was struck up - the men in both canoes joining in the chorus after receiving a hearty breakfast and some European news from Mr. Murphy, who appeared to be an intelligent young man. we began to descend the current, and at about 11 A.M. arrived at our camp at the Grand Rapid, where my old friend John Clarke was standing at full length and in all his glory.¹⁹²

Robertson met with Williams briefly; then the entire company, prisoners and all, left for Norway House, where Robertson had longer conversations with the governor, not only about the state of the country, but also on the fate of the prisoners. Five men had been arrested on the Montreal warrants and six more on Williams' own warrants as magistrate.¹⁹³ Of these, William McIntosh had escaped into the woods from their campsite on Lake Winnipeg, but the rest were to be sent to York Factory under armed guard. Robertson felt most of these men should be detained, except for Shaw, whom he described as "a pompous weak man," and possibly John George McTavish. Robertson argued that, "if indulgence is to be shown he is certainly entitled to it, not only because his name is not to be found in any of the violent proceedings, but on account of his gentlemanly conduct towards myself, while under his charge."¹⁹⁴ Although Williams was unconvinced, he agreed to an interview with Shaw and McTavish. It might have gone well, except Shaw, "began to let off a flourish of trumpets by talking about 'eating a cold custard with Mr. Williams in London.'" This angered the hot-tempered Williams, and threw a damper on negotiations, even though "Mr. McTavish behaved with much propriety." Robertson believed the "ill timed custard of Shaws," would "procure him a trip to England."¹⁹⁵ Indeed, both Shaw and McTavish were sent off to London on the company ship, while five others were sent overland to Montreal via Moose Factory. Only Frobisher, Turcotte, and LePine, remained at York, to be held there until Williams received "a statement on the penalties" from England.¹⁹⁶ However, the prisoners had other ideas.

¹⁹² PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 164d, Letter No. 26, Norway House, July 1819.

¹⁹³ PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 30-31, Williams to Gale, 17 July 1819. On the Montreal warrants, Williams arrested "John Duncan Campbell and Louis Majeau, both involved in the Seven Oaks Massacre, and Pierre Bouche[r], Pierre Paul, and Joseph Paul, for burglary & robbery at Isle a la Cross." On his own warrants, Williams arrested "La Pine and Frenotte [Turcotte] for burglary and robbery at Isle a la Crosse...a Proprietor, William McIntosh, For stopping the Hudson's Bay Company's Canoe last year in the Peace River - taking Mr. Chastellain in charge of them a Prisoner...Benjamin Frobisher, for attempting a rescue, and threatening to shoot William Brown constable...John George McTavish, For taking Mr. Colin Robertson Prisoner...Angus Shaw, for threatening vehement Language against his Majestys Subject."

¹⁹⁴ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 165d-166, Letter No. 26, Norway House, July 1819.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 166.

¹⁹⁶ PAM, HBCA, D.1/1, p. 79.

On 21 September 1819, Governor Williams left for Cumberland House, and one week later Frobisher and his companions made their escape. Williams blamed Mr. Snodie, who was in charge at York, for neglect and "still more so for never having made any attempt to retake them, which might with the greatest ease, have been accomplished."¹⁹⁷ This was extremely unfair, but typical of Williams, who often jumped to conclusions and exaggerated to justify his views. In fact, Snodie only had four men at the fort, all of whom were "very much fatigued from the labour of Ship time," so that they were "unable to continue a regular watch." They had also attempted to follow the escapees, but bad weather and a leaky boat frustrated those efforts. Moreover, in the haste of escape, Frobisher and his companions had left behind their provisions, shoes, and firebag. They did not have any firearms, and the canoe they had stolen was "unfit to carry them any considerable distance." Not surprisingly, the people at York Factory concluded that the three fugitives "must fall as sacrifice to their own rashness of conduct."¹⁹⁸

In spite of the difficulties, Frobisher and his men went much further than the men at York Factory thought possible. A little more than a month later, Alexander Birston, the HBC fisherman at Jack River, saw three Canadians passing his fishery, men he "supposed to be 3 of the prisoners that were taken down to York last summer, from which place they have made their escape."¹⁹⁹ They must have been cold and hungry by this time, but nothing could persuade them to stop at an HBC post. Instead they pressed on to Moose Lake, a decision which in retrospect was foolhardy indeed. It was November 29, when the people at Cumberland House found out what had happened.

one man and a Boy arrived from the Moose Lake they brought information that Frobisher and 2 men that were prisoners at York factory in the Autumn had made their Escape the 2 men reached M Lake in a State of Starvation - Frobisher was left behind on the Long Point in the Cedar Lake he being unable to proceed farther.²⁰⁰

In a letter to the London Committee, Williams wrote, "Frobisher perished exhausted from hunger and fatigue on an Island in the Cedar Lake, having been left unable to proceed further by his companions who with the greatest difficulty reached Moose Lake in a most miserable state."²⁰¹ Colin Robertson had described

¹⁹⁷ PAM, HBCA, D.1/2, p. 22, Gov. Williams Correspondence book, Outward, 1819-1820, mf. 3M1.

¹⁹⁸ PAM, HBCA, B.239/a/27, p. 3, York Factory Journal 1819-1820, mf. 1M163, and PAM, HBCA, B.239/a/29, fo. 3, York Factory Journal 1819-1820, mf. 1M163.

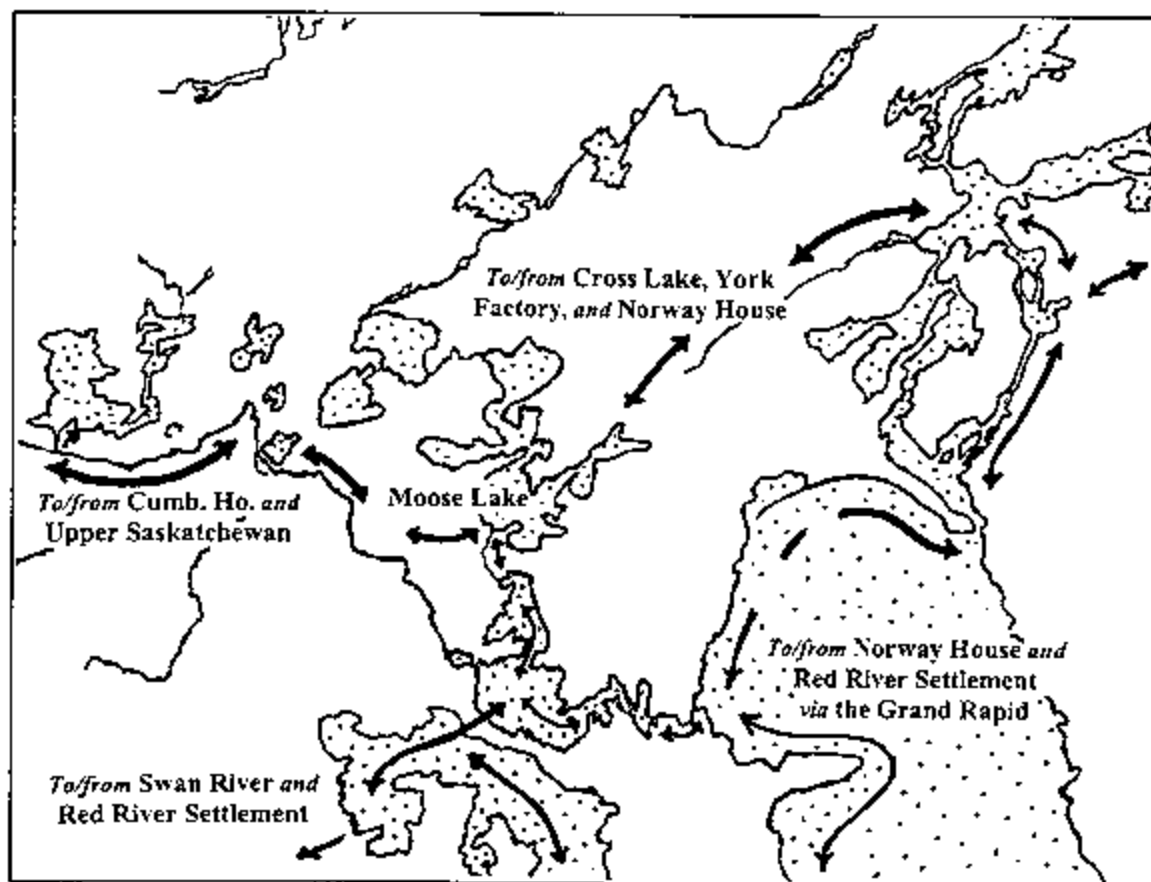
¹⁹⁹ PAM, HBCA, B.154 a/8, pp. 7-8, Norway House Post Journal 1819-1820, mf. 1M106.

²⁰⁰ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/35, p. 45.

²⁰¹ PAM, HBCA, D.1/2, p. 22.

Frobisher as "a desperate character" who treated the HBC servant "who fell into his hands with great rigour and privation."²⁰² Nevertheless, it was a sad fate for any man to have come so close to his destination and die alone, cold and hungry, on a deserted island in the wilderness. The other prisoners were much more fortunate. With friends in high places in both Montreal and London, they were able to escape prosecution, and by the summer of 1820 most of them were back in the interior.

Moose Lake 1819-1820



Moose Lake was at the centre of a vast communication network.

Moose Lake was generally well informed about happenings in the fur trade in the years leading up to 1821. Located along the major transportation route into the interior, and situated centrally between Cumberland House, Grand Rapids, and Norway House, this fur trade community was a conduit for most of the news passing up and down the Saskatchewan River. The packet carriers for both the

²⁰² PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 165d, Letter No. 26, Norway House, July 1819.

Hudson's Bay and North West Companies would stop at their respective posts there, bringing letters and newspapers from Europe or Canada, the latest gossip from neighbouring posts, and current information pertinent to the trade. As conflict escalated in the years after 1809, there were increasing reports about unfair trade practices and violent confrontations. Rumours abounded about what the opposition was going to do next, and tensions were magnified, even in small outposts like Moose Lake, which otherwise might have been quiet, out-of-the-way places.

In 1819 George Flett was in charge of the HBC post there. An Orkneyman, who had worked for the "Honourable Company" since 1796, he had deep roots in the country. Early in his fur trade career, he had married Peggy Whitford, the daughter of another HBC man, and they already had a number of children. His mother-in-law, Sarah Whitford, who was probably a Cree woman from Hudson Bay, may have been living at the post with them, or perhaps with her son Francis Whitford, who was at Cumberland House that winter. The Whitfords were among the mixed-blood families connected with the HBC. Born of British fathers and Cree mothers, with names like Whitford, Umpherville, Leask, Sutherland, and Ballandine, the mixed-bloods were becoming quite numerous in the Cumberland District. Some were freemen, who worked for the HBC on a casual basis; others were contracted labourers who worked full time for the company, but whatever their status, their knowledge of native languages and culture made them useful allies in the trade.

Having a wife and family with ties to the local community was an advantage, but it also helped to have a few good men to collect the furs directly from the native hunters. In the winter of 1819-1820, Flett had more than usual assistance. In August, he and his wife went up to Cumberland House to arrange for the upcoming year and returned September 5 accompanied by John Budge, Robert Twatt, and Pierre Majear, a Canadian. Towards the end of October five additional men were sent down to them, namely Robert Rendall, Alexander Brown, Thomas Firth, Angus McKinnon, and Peter Towers. These men were needed because the competition for furs was intense, and if the HBC did not have its men out and about among the hunters, the opposition would get there before them.

Opposing Flett was George Nelson, a seasoned Nor'wester, who had been in fur trade country for many years, but had only just arrived at Moose Lake in June 1819. Although information is skimpy, the competition that winter must have been intense. There was no shortage of men on either side to go out and tent with the hunters, who, in spite of their commitments to one company or the other, could often be enticed to switch their loyalties. John Pocock Holmes, who was in charge of Cumberland House that year, was well aware of the difficulties this practice would foster and in November "paid a visit at the N. W. House in hopes that they

would propose some arrangement respecting the Trade for this Winter.”²⁰³ Since nothing resulted, it is not surprising that both companies “debauched” the hunters of their opponents in the ensuing months. Toward the end of November, for instance, Flett asked Holmes to send two men down “to seek out Indians belonging to Moose Lake whom he has been unable to find.”²⁰⁴ Holmes complied with the request, adding, “if they succeed Mr. [Isbister] will go in search of the White Bear and will also visit the N. W Indians in the neighbourhood of the Moose Lake.”²⁰⁵

Holmes may have been provoked into this action by earlier NWC tricks. What is certain is that Isbister returned December 7 with “nothing but a little meat,” and in January 1820 William Ballendine and George Gibson were sent to Moose Lake “to retaliate on the N. W they having traded Guns, Kettles Blankets &c from our Indians.”²⁰⁶ Evidently, Nelson’s men, or Connolly’s at Cumberland House, were giving out goods to HBC hunters in an effort to get their furs at the end of the season, so to get even, Ballandine and Gibson were to seek out the NWC hunters and attempt to win them over to the HBC. A week later they “returned from their Search after French Indians they found them all in a miserable condition with the meazles and Starvation many of them died.”²⁰⁷

Indeed measles and whooping cough were rampant throughout the country in the first part of the winter. William Ballendine himself was ill with the measles when he returned in late October from Carlton, and a week later news arrived at Cumberland House from Swampy River that “all the Indians in that quarter are Sick and a good many dying of the meazles and [w]hooping cough.” Throughout November, there were more reports of hunters and their families dying of these discases. At Cumberland House, the families of Mr. Holmes and Mr. Kennedy were taken ill. The Bungee Boy, a Saulteaux hunter, died and was interred just outside the fort. William Tait came in from Rocky Lake and reported “the Sickness of all the Indians about his post and also of the Death of Some of the N W Indians.” John Ballendine was brought home ill on a sledge from “the Paw,” where he and his companions had located three “of the Indians they went in quest of viz. HuggumasKiss[,] Quesceppow[,] and Tapotums brother just recovered

²⁰³ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/35, p. 39. Alexander Kennedy was on furlough in the Orkneys that year. He had taken two of his sons, John and Samuel, with him, apparently to enrol them in school.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47 and 52.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53. “French Indians” were those who traded with the NWC.

from the measles." A few days later "Rob^t Twatt & Alex^r Brown arrived from the Moose lake they brought a letter from M^r G Flett of that Post stating the death of two Cumberland House Indians - QuesKecappow and Tapotum."²⁰⁸

Rumour often exaggerated events in the isolation of fur trade posts, where news was passed with relish from one person to another and added to in the telling. Certainly Flett seems to have been misinformed concerning the death of QuesKecappow, who was very much alive in 1826 when it was reported in the Cumberland House Journal that John McLeod of Norway House,

feared to risk the English Letters by the Indian. Who has now Joined his family at the Pas, This is Queskecapoc, Whom I Sent to YF last Summer for Medical advice. He is a good Indian & has a large family. and from his lameness, injures the hunts of Some of our best Indians. Mr. Isbester Says he is a little better and can now make use of the gun.²⁰⁹

In the 1828 Census of Cumberland House, Queskecapow was listed as a "Maskegon" with a wife and five children.²¹⁰ Although it is possible this was a reference to another man, it is more likely that his rumoured death in 1819 was simply not true.

Rumours aside, death came by disease, as well as by starvation, and there is no doubt that many people succumbed to their combined effects. Of course, whenever hunters died, the trade suffered. This may explain why both companies worked so hard to get what few furs there were. Competition intensified in the spring during the muskrat season. On March 18, Alexander Brown and Peter Towers arrived at Cumberland House for a supply of "Rat darts" because "there were a number of Indians at the Burnt Woods hunting Rats." When they left on the 20th, they were accompanied by Thomas Isbister and George Gibson "for the purpose of visiting our Indians at the Burnt Woods and afterwards to try and find out the White Bear and party whom we understand are pitching towards that place from Red Deers River." Holmes added that "G. Gibson is to remⁿ among the Indians near Moose Lake for the purpose of procuring as many Rats as possible from the N. W Indians as well as tak^e care of the hunts from our own."²¹¹

The North West Company was not idle in the face of this aggressive action. On March 22, Holmes recorded,

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 37-44.

²⁰⁹ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/42, fo. 25-25d, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1826-1827, mf. 1M41.

²¹⁰ PAM, HBCA, B.49/d/24, p. 30.

²¹¹ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/35, p. 65-66. "Rat darts" are illustrated on page 71.

The N. W. having sent a party of men with a tent to remain among our Indians for the purpose of trading meat from them Hugh Gibson & D McMillan were obliged to accompany them to prevent if possible their establishing a tent there, these men with their Dogs are in consequence under the necessity of giving in hauling meat for the present although we have a good quantity lying at the Tent - Our opponents finding themselves superior in men and more especially in Dogs and having but few Indians of their own at this place take every opportunity of harrassing us by running after our Indians in all directions.²¹²

What advantages the North West Company might have had at Cumberland House, the same was not the case at Moose Lake, where the HBC men were more than holding their own. So much so that on March 24,

This morn^g Early Mr. Conolly of the N. W Fort sent over one of his clerks to propose mak^g an arrangement respecting the Moose Lake Indians only. This proposition Mr. Holmes would by no means coincide with, well knowing that the N W anticipated some disadvantage at that place otherwise they would not propose such an arrangement at this time.²¹³

Indeed, Holmes was not far from the mark. Nevertheless, as insurance, he sent additional men and supplies to Isbister at the Burnt Woods. William Ballendine took along "an Assortment of trading goods &c. for the purpose of remaining with the Indians in that quarter during the Rat Hunt," and Holmes "sent also by him a few necessary articles for Ge^o. Flett, at Moose Lake."²¹⁴ These efforts paid off, too. By the end of May, Flett had twenty-eight packs of fur at Moose Lake, which was equal to the number that Holmes himself had gathered at Cumberland House.

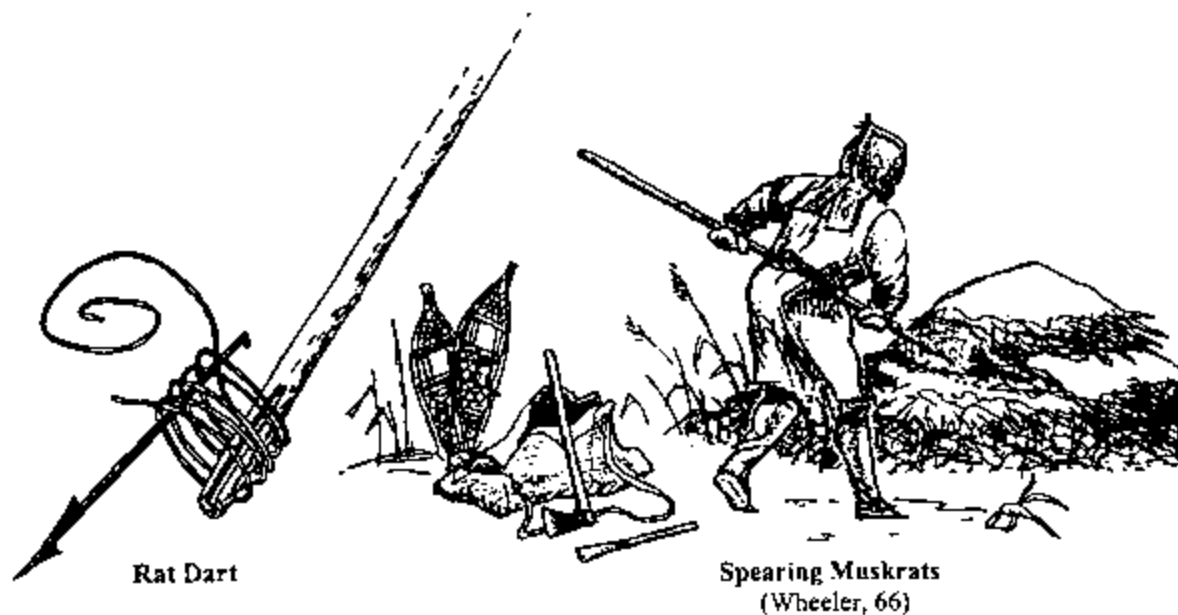
The highly charged atmosphere at Moose Lake that winter was symptomatic of the increasing struggle for control of the trade from Lake Winnipeg to Athabasca. The death of Frobisher in November 1819 was a grim reminder of the stakes involved. When Turcotte and Lepine stumbled into the NWC post at Moose Lake, both Nelson and Flett were reminded anew of the bigger issues in question. Each must have known that Frobisher's death, rather than ending the conflict, would inflame passions even more. Certainly Flett wasted no time getting word to Governor Williams, who had made Cumberland House his headquarters for a second winter.

Williams had arrived there in October 1819 with four officers and more than twenty men connected with the Northern Expedition, which was on its way overland to map the unknown arctic seacoast. Sponsored by the British

²¹² Ibid., pp. 66-67.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 67.

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 69-70.



Admiralty, and under the direction of Lieutenant Franklin, the expedition had the co-operation of the fur trade companies along its route. However, since most of its men remained at the HBC post in Cumberland House that winter, a great deal of pressure was placed on its resources. Holmes, who was in charge of the day-to-day management of the post, complained that it was difficult to meet the challenge of NWC trade opposition, because "the Expedition party oblige us to Keep the best part of our men & Dogs in procuring and hauling home provisions" when they "otherwise might be much more advantageously employed."²¹⁵

Perhaps already irritated by these circumstances, the irascible Governor Williams was more than a little annoyed when he heard of Frobisher's death. There was no room in his mind for introspection or doubts about the course he had taken in arresting Frobisher in the first place. Instead it was James Snodie's fault for having allowed the prisoners to escape. Immersed as he was in plans for his next move against the North West Company, Williams was in no mind to waver. Consequently, when George Spence arrived in March from Canada with warrants for the arrest of those who had detained Colin Robertson the previous year, the Governor was prepared to act decisively. Four men, including Spence, were sworn in as constables and sent off to Carlton, and from there Spence was "to proceed to Isle A le Crosse and Athabasca for the purpose of issuing his Warrants."²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

Spence did make the journey and succeeded in arresting most of the accused, apparently with the help of Dr. William Todd, who was stationed in Athabasca that year. In a letter, dated June 1820, Colin Robertson described those arrests.

The brigade being now off under the direction of Dr Todd, who deserves much credit for his prompt and active exertions in seizing the prisoners, not according to the prowling custom of our opponents, but by boldly entering their houses with warrants, and in the face of an armed force, putting them in execution. Black made his escape, but they seized four of the principle bullies.²¹⁷

In the same letter, Robertson said there was a report circulating "that the NW. are going to assemble a large force at the Grand Rapid but I trust and hope Governor Williams will have his eye on them."²¹⁸ However, when he arrived at Cumberland House just ahead of the Athabasca Brigade on June 24, he was exasperated that Williams had made no provision to counter this threat.

This is certainly following up the blow with a vengeance. What defence can be expected from sixty men worn down by fatigue and hunger, without an arm but those belonging to the gentlemen in charge of the prisoners - Had he even left us a couple of boats to run the rapids, which would have enabled us to make some sort of defence....The Governor cannot plead ignorance, every man at Cumberland would have pointed out these simple measures of preservation.²¹⁹

Even though Robertson asserted that Williams had "a perfect knowledge of the designs" of their opponents, there is no evidence from the Cumberland House Journal that Williams knew an attack was planned when he left there at the beginning of June. However, he would have been a fool not to have anticipated some kind of retaliation for what he had done the previous summer or that it was likely to occur at the Grand Rapid. In any case, he left on June 8 and proceeded "with 10 Boats Loaded with Furs & Provisions for York Factory," leaving Holmes, Thomas Isbister, and nine other men behind for the summer to look after the post.²²⁰

The next two weeks were busy at both the HBC and NWC posts as people came and went. On the 10th, HBC officers Clarke, McLeod, and Pinsonaut arrived from Isle a la Crosse with "McMurray a NW^t. Proprietor in Custody, who was taken on a warrant from Montreal by Spence the Constable."²²¹ They proceeded downriver

²¹⁷ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 180d, Letter No. 35, Fort Wedderburne, June 1820.

²¹⁸ Ibid., fo. 181.

²¹⁹ Ibid., fo. 182, Letter No. 37, Cumberland House.

²²⁰ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/36, fo. 2d, Cumberland Ho. Post Journal, 1820-1821, mf. 1M40.

the following day. On June 12, "6 NW Canoes with about 44 Men arrived at their Fort." They must have bragged about their plans to the HBC men, because that same day Holmes reported "our men have been informed that a party of considerable force headed by some Partners of the NWC^o had collected at the Grand Rapid for the purpose of intercepting the Governor as well as several of our Officers."²²² On June 18, two HBC canoes arrived with Mr. McDonnell from Athabasca and Mr. Lewis from Lesser Slave Lake, and they took their departure on the 19th. Colin Robertson and Robert Miles arrived on June 24 and were off on the 25th. The Athabasca Brigade of nine canoes arrived on the 28th. Under the leadership of Todd, Chastillain, Grielle, and Roy, and manned by seventy-five men, it "brought Mabbat Soucisse Lejenesse and Laroque, NW Prisoners in Custody of Spence the Constable." The following day, Grant, Henry, and McLean, NWC partners, arrived in fifteen canoes at their post, and on June 30 both brigades continued their downriver journey to the Grand Rapid.²²³

In the meantime, Robertson was on his way to Moose Lake. Williams had advised that he call on George Flett who would furnish him with a guide to conduct his canoe to Norway House by a new track. However, Robertson had little confidence in the plan because Holmes had told him that "the track recommended has not water sufficient for an Indian Canoe."²²⁴ This was confirmed when Robertson and Miles reached Moose Lake, June 17. Flett had no knowledge of the track, but understood it to be unfavourable "on account of the shallowness of the water and the number of rapids." He also had no one available to guide them by that route.²²⁵ Robertson now had to proceed to his second plan.

My only hope is in McDonald, who promised if he found any force at the Grand Rapid, to return one of his Iroquois [sic], by land and conduct me across the Point - This is a very feasible plan, which I hope to God will be put in execution.²²⁶

When they arrived at the appointed spot, there was no one there. Either McDonald "was seized or the passage was free," Robertson did not know which, but he decided to proceed and stopped "within a short distance of the Rapid." The guide would not run the rapid "unless one of the passengers and four men would debark,

²²¹ Ibid., fo. 2d.

²²² Ibid., fo. 3.

²²³ Ibid., fo. 3d-4d.

²²⁴ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 182d, Letter No. 37, Cumberland House.

²²⁵ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 221, Letter No. 67, Norway House, Dec. 1821 and Letter 68, Moose Lake, 2 Jan. 1822.

²²⁶ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 182d, Letter No. 37, Cumberland House.

each of the men taking a piece to lighten the canoe."²²⁷ Robertson and some of his men got out of the canoe and proceeded along the portage path, but had not gone far when they were surrounded. As Robertson recorded the event,

I kept my eye upon them and advanced a few paces, when Henry McKenzie the North West C^o. agent, with a party of armed clerks and other servants, rushed from the left and surrounded me - a little scuffle ensued when one Livingstone came behind me and snatched my gun out of my hand. by this time Miles arrived with the canoe, the men that accompanied me jumped on board. poor Miles seemed to linger on the hopes of my being liberated, when I made a signal for him to push off as Grant and his half breeds were going down towards the canoe as with the intention of stop[p]ing her.²²⁸

The North West Company also intercepted the Athabasca Brigade, freed the four prisoners, and arrested George Spence and one of the Des Meurons who had helped Williams the previous summer at Grand Rapids.²²⁹ In the meantime, Robertson was sent east under the care of J. D. Campbell, a talkative fellow, who told him that a union between the two companies was "just upon the eve of being formed."²³⁰ What Robertson did not know at the time, but learned when he reached Lac La Pluie, was that Lord Selkirk, who was a major stumbling block to negotiations, had died earlier in the year. Already dubious about his prospects in Montreal, Robertson knew they were made worse by the loss of so powerful an ally. Also, his business affairs in England needed his attention, so when a favourable opportunity presented itself he escaped and made his way to New York, where he took passage on the *Albion*, a ship bound for London.

By an odd coincidence, he found himself in company with two NWC officers, namely Dr. McLoughlin and Mr. Bethune, who were on their way to London as representatives of the wintering partners in the negotiations with the Hudson's Bay Company. Robertson tried to avoid both men as much as possible, but at their last meal together on the ship, an amusing incident brought them and a Roman Catholic cleric together for a few brief moments of hilarity, at least from Robertson's perspective. Later, he gleefully reported the details in a letter to a friend.

The cloth being withdrawn and the land in sight the wine went about rather freely when a subscription was set on foot for the stewards and other servants. - Our friend the Doctor had put down his name, and I took up the pen for the same purpose, but perceiving Bethune waiting I turned round to Abby Carriera come Abby put down your name, I dont like to sign

²²⁷ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 183d, Letter No. 38, Lac La Pluie.

²²⁸ Ibid., fo. 183d-184.

²²⁹ PAM, HBCA, D.1/3, p. 45, Gov. Williams Correspondence Book, Outward, 1820, mf. 3M1.

²³⁰ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 184d, Letter No. 38.

between two North Westers. Never mind Mr. R. replied Mons. Carriera - remember our Saviour was crucified between two thieves - the Doctor was in a dreadful passion, but being an honest catholic did not like to quarrel with one who stood so high in the Church.²³¹

Robertson certainly liked a good joke, especially at the expense of two NWC officers, but after arriving at London, he had reason to thank McLoughlin and Bethune. Instead of receiving a warm welcome from the London Committee, most of its members greeted him with the accusing question, "Mr. Robertson, we understood you was not to be taken, why did you not follow Mr. Williams instructions, and go by Moose lake?" In a letter dated December 1820, Robertson described these circumstances.

the only man that behaved with common civility towards me was Mr. Colville himself, and it is somewhat doubtful were it not for the letters from Canada and the timely arrival of Messrs. McLaughlin [sic] and Bethune, that I should have been considered by all, as a traitor to the cause wherein I have suffered so much. Such was the effect of the information conveyed by the Governor of Ruperts Land - information which I fear has been communicated under a perfect knowledge that it was not founded on fact.²³²



Dr. John McLoughlin, looking appropriately grim.

OrH 248, No. 707

(courtesy Oregon Historical Society)

In other words, he was accusing Governor Williams of lying. Williams, who was ever quick to blame others in order to absolve himself from culpability, had severely undermined Robertson's credibility. He did the same thing to John Pocock Holmes, who was in charge of Cumberland House during the winter of

²³¹ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 191, Letter No. 44, Pack Ship *Albion*.

²³² PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 193, Letter No. 45, London, Dec. 1820.

1819-1820, when Williams had his headquarters there. Holmes had remained at the post for the summer of 1820 after Williams left for York Factory, but in August, on "instructions from the Governor" he had to give up charge of Cumberland House and proceed to Norway House.²³³ Holmes had a good record. The post journal indicates that he was active throughout that winter, not only in carrying out the ordinary duties of a trader in charge of a post, but also in the construction of canoes. Indeed, many years later, in a letter to the Hudson's Bay Company, Holmes wrote

I built 19 Big Canoes besides several small ones which I do not count[,] the year before I returned to England I built 3 big Canoes at Cumberland House[,] one of which Hangs in your House[,] one for the Expedition Capt Franklin[,] and the other for Norway House[,] I made five pairs of Snow Shoes for Capt Franklin and party.²³⁴

Evidently, Holmes built three large canoes in the winter of 1819-1820, and there is evidence from the post journal that several others of unknown size were built as well, perhaps as many as twelve to fourteen during the months of March-June 1820. Snowshoes were also made in January and February of that year. Certainly Holmes was busy, but whether he confined his carpentry exclusively to such legitimate ends became a matter of some discussion in fur trade circles. Indeed, gossip suggested that Holmes' skill with the hammer fuelled Williams' determination to remove him from Cumberland House. In a letter written at Norway House, August 1821, Colin Robertson described the talk that had been circulating.

His [Williams'] next favourite was the athletic Dr. Holmes a powerful man in his way, and of a very ingenious turn. he often assisted the Governor in Dove tailed work, and actually began on a chest of drawers belonging to Miss Fiddler - this excited some suspicion and the Doctor was ordered from Cumberland House, and has since been accused of embezzeling the Company's property - The case was laid before Mr. Garry, who after taking a proper view of the thing decided in favour of Dr. Holmes. However, the Governor succeeded in procuring the Doctor a passage to England, which deprived the old wife of a husband and the Red River of an excellent settler.²³⁵

Robertson was of course prejudiced against Williams, but his allusions to the real reasons behind Holmes' removal from Cumberland House are illuminating. The records of the Hudson's Bay Company are generally silent on the domestic arrangements of its officers and servants, and there is no indication in the

²³³ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/36, fo. 8d.

²³⁴ PAM, HBCA, A.10/26, Letter dated 3 May 1849, Nashville, Tennessee, from John P. Holmes to Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, London.

²³⁵ PAM, HBCA, E.10/2, fo. 216, Letter No. 61.

Cumberland House post journal of any "Miss Fiddler." However, there are a number of July entries that take on new meaning once Robertson's story is known. For instance, on July 13, "Mr. Holmes assiduously employed at Carpenter work"; July 15, "Mr. Holmes working as usual"; and July 24, "Mr. Holmes working at a Chest of Drawers." What is peculiar about these references is that key words are underlined. There are only three other places in this journal where underlining occurs, two of them, on July 30 and August 1, in reference to the construction of two rooms in the "old mens house" begun on July 17 "for the accom[m]odation of Mr. Holmes." Who underlined those words is unknown, but they seemed designed to draw attention to what Mr. Holmes was doing in July.

"Miss Fiddler" was Sally Fidler, eldest daughter of the surveyor Peter Fidler and the country wife of Governor Williams. In all likelihood, she remained behind at Cumberland House during the summer of 1820, when Williams was at York Factory on company business. The chest of drawers may have been an innocent gesture, designed to please the governor, but backfired in the face of Williams' suspicious nature. Holmes was sent to Berens River the following winter, but he clashed with his superior officer, and was sent home in the fall of 1821 after sixteen years of service "For disobedience of orders & positively refusing Mr. Sutherland to join the winter post appt. him."²³⁶ That was the official reason, but Robertson believed that Holmes' fall from grace could better be traced to the allegations of 1820 and the spleen of Governor Williams.

Sally Fidler did not fare much better. When his English wife arrived in Hudson Bay in 1822, Williams discarded Sally like an old shoe and left their two children without a father. In 1828, she wrote him, requesting assistance for their children, but he ignored her. He had retired to England by this time with a pension of £300, which was a sizeable sum in those days, and he was in a position to be generous. Instead he invested his money and forgot about his responsibilities in Hudson Bay. Ironically, he had to taste his own medicine, when his investments became worthless. He was destitute by 1835 and died two years later, leaving a penniless widow and two children behind in England.

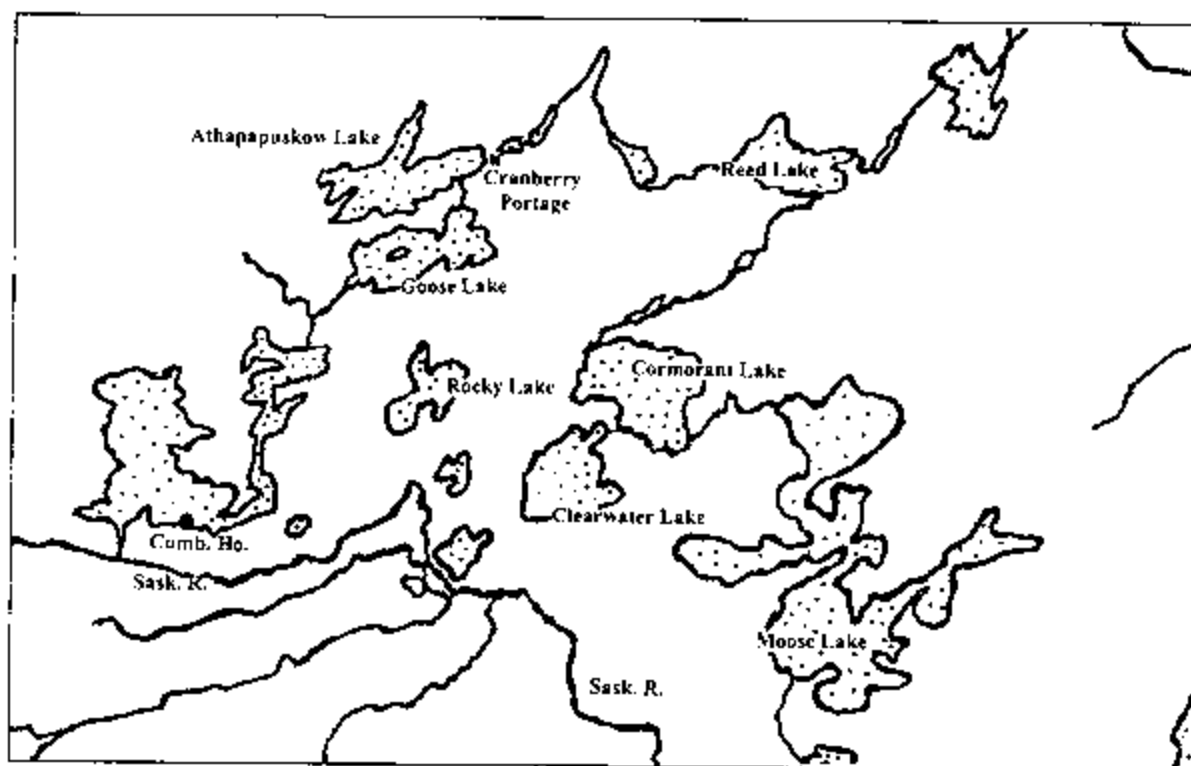
The fate of Holmes was not much different. His return to England certainly "deprived the old wife of a husband," but the blame for that could not be laid entirely at the doorstep of Governor Williams. Holmes might have gone as a settler to Red River, but instead returned to England, leaving his wife and family at Norway House. Although he later sent for his eldest son, he was never able to provide for the ones left behind. Fortunately, his wife, whose name was Ke che cow e corn e coot, had a legacy from her father, Matthew Cocking, which helped

²³⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.239/d/216a, fo. 9d, York Factory, Northern Department, Men's Accounts, 1820/1821, mf. 1M685.

to keep the wolf from the door. She died at Red River in 1835, but Holmes lived much longer. In 1849, he was in Nashville, Tennessee, to which he had gone to escape domestic troubles in England. Destitute, he wrote a pathetic letter to the Hudson's Bay Company, pleading for help on the grounds of past service.

since I have been in this Country I have had very bad health last winter I lost my left Eye the other is very weak in consequence I am now 65 years of age in a strange Land without friends & nearly blind I do not expect to live long perhaps not more than three or four years neither do I wish it for I am a poor Sickly infirm and Destitute I have but £5 and a few shillings in the world I can manage to live here upon £30 per annum I hope hon'ble Sirs you will take pitty upon a poor old broken down man & any sum you send I shall be satisfied I do not wish to trouble you any more this will be the last time. I now Close and hope Hon'ble Sirs you will pardon me for the great liberty I have taken in addressing you on such a subject.²³⁷

In 1858, after receiving a newspaper clipping on the death of Holmes, William G. Smith, Secretary of the Hudson's Bay Company, responded that the man had "suffered from the faults of others." Certainly if Holmes had remained in fur trade country, it is likely that he would have settled at Red River and died among his children, grandchildren, and extended family, including a young man named Henry Budd, who was himself to play an important role in the history of the Cumberland District and of Moose Lake. But that is another story.



The region between Cumberland House and Moose Lake.

²³⁷ PAM, HBCA, A.10:26, Letter dated 3 May 1849, Nashville, Tennessee.

Moose Lake 1820-1821

George Flett spent the summer of 1820 at Moose Lake. Except for his own family, he seemed to have been alone, which would explain why he had no one to guide Colin Robertson to Norway House. John Budge and James Spence were there briefly towards the end of June, but they only came for a supply of liquor and returned immediately to Cumberland House. Then in July Flett had to send his in-laws, Francis Whitford and his mother, to Cumberland House "for a supply of Provisions...not being able to catch many fish owing to the very high water."²³⁸ Flett could not even invite his opponent over for a cup of tea, because George Nelson had gone up to Cumberland House to look after the NWC post while William Connolly was away to Fort William.

Indeed Flett probably saw no one, except perhaps an occasional hunter, until he went up with his wife in August to get his supplies for the ensuing winter. He left Cumberland House, September 2, accompanied by only one man, George Gibson, there being no more available at the time. Shortly after his departure, Thomas Swain and his family arrived from Norway House. Then on September 12, Connolly returned to take charge of the NWC post and on the 15th "sent a Canoe down to Moose Lake with supplies for that place."²³⁹ Whether Nelson travelled with that canoe, or had already gone to Moose Lake, is unknown, but he was in charge of the NWC post there that winter.

It is difficult to know just what native hunters were at Moose Lake at the time because they were rarely identified. They also travelled from place to place quite frequently, like the Rocky Lake hunters, who moved from Reed Lake to the Burnt Woods near Moose Lake in the fall of 1821. Their route can be traced in the Cumberland House Journal. On September 20, Thomas Swain sent William Tate, accompanied by John Linklatter and Ned Pulsit, to Reed Lake in order to entice a number of NWC hunters over to the HBC.²⁴⁰ William Connolly followed him there the next day, and on his return, September 28, reportedly told some HBC hunters "that he had brought all his Indians from that quarter, fearful that W^m. Tate, might gain a footing amongst them before spring."²⁴¹ This turned out to be true, because on October 1, "eight Indian Canoes arrived at the NW^t. Fort from Rocky Lake, from this circumstance we may expect William Tate & party back

²³⁸ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/36, fo. 5d.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 12d.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 13.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 14.

here soon as there are no Indians at that place now."²⁴² Indeed, Tate and his party arrived from Rocky Lake on October 8. There is no hint of where the hunters went until November 12, when "William Tate & John Budge Started for the Burnt Woods to visit the NW^t Indians who came from Rocky Lake last fall."²⁴³

The Burnt Woods, known as "the Brulé" to the Canadians, were near Moose Lake, where competition had been fierce the previous year. Apparently worried by the possible consequences of unrestricted trade, Connolly approached Swain on November 23 to arrange some kind of compromise. The HBC journalist recorded the results.

Mr. Connolly our neighbour, came over & made some proposals for an arrangement respecting the Indians; after some consideration Mr. Swain agreed that neither party should send to Indians without giving notice to the other until such time as a final arrangement should be made. - his principal reason for so doing is our scarcity of Dogs of which our opponents have an enormous number.²⁴⁴

The cause of Connolly's concern became evident on December 1, when "W^m. Tate & J Budge returned from the vicinity of Moose lake where they have procured 1532 Rats 2 Otters & 1 martin principally from the NW^t. Rocky Lake Indians."²⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Connolly visited Swain that very day to finalize their agreement.

M^r. Connolly came over and after giving up several points of his former proposals, the arrangement was finally settled; by this agreement, neither party are to have any dealings with the Indians who Trade with the other; but may receive from them Furs for such Debts as have been contracted before this date if the Indians are inclined to pay their Debts. - and neither party is to send after Indians without 12 hours previous notice to the other.²⁴⁶

After the agreement was made, Swain reinforced Moose Lake by sending John Budge there, December 7, to remain for the winter. Apparently, William Brown was sent there as well. William Tate continued to travel among the hunters getting their furs, but apparently in keeping with the agreed arrangement. Also, men from each company began to travel with one another more frequently. On February 8, HBC men accompanied two parties of NWC traders sent out in search of hunters.²⁴⁷ On March 11, Swain sent "William Tate and John Linklatter in

²⁴² Ibid., fo. 14d.

²⁴³ Ibid., fo. 18.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., fo. 19d.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., fo. 20.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., fo. 20d.

company with a party of NW^t. Men who have gone to visit some of their Indians near the Moose Lake."²⁴⁸ The arrangement seemed to work, because on March 20, "Mr. Tate arrived from the Burnt woods, brought 3 Silver Foxes 2 Cross & 1 Red d[^m]o. 1 Cat 13 martins 128 Rats & 2 Minks."²⁴⁹

By now the spring rat season was in full swing at Moose Lake. On March 22, to make sure the HBC got its full share of the returns, Swain "Sent Will^m. Tate with William Ballandine & George McBeath down to the Burnt Woods to look after our Indians during the rat hunt."²⁵⁰ Then on March 24, he "Sent John Ballandine to the Indians beyond the Shoal Lake for the purpose of encouraging them to go down to the Burnt Woods to hunt Rats." Competition was fierce, and the rules were often violated on both sides. In one instance, a NWC man named McKay obtained some furs from one of the hunters attached to Moose Lake, and Connolly asked Nelson to return them to Flett "providing Taitt should do the same." This was a reference to furs that Tate had obtained from Rocky Lake hunters in late fall. Nelson described what happened.

I went [and] proposed it to him [Flett] immediately. but the old beast would not. So then I shall keep them, and they may settle it above as they please. To the S{outh}. of us things give a most miserable appearance indeed - the hb's to ruin the NW. [and] are driving themselves headlong to destruction. They sell their property at a most shamefully low rate.²⁵¹

Nelson had many reasons to be disgruntled. It was not just the trade that was going badly; his career seemed to be going nowhere as well. When he was at Cumberland House the previous summer, he had written a letter to the agents of the NWC with regard to his future in the company. The response was "galling to the last degree," but like so many men in the trade, he had few options.²⁵² He had lived so long in fur trade country, he did not feel comfortable anywhere else. Besides, like Flett, he had taken a native wife by whom he had children. No longer a young man, he was concerned about their future.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 25d.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 28d.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 29d.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, fo. 30.

²⁵¹ George Nelson's Coded Journal, Sunday, 15 April 1821, p. 1, transcript in the possession of Jennifer S. H. Brown, decoded from originals in the Metropolitan Library of Toronto by Sylvia Van Kirk.

²⁵² Nelson's Notebook 1820-1822, letter dated 14 June 1814, Cumberland House, to agents of the NW Co., transcript in the possession of Jennifer S. H. Brown, decoded from originals in the Metropolitan Library of Toronto by Sylvia Van Kirk.

There was little enough time to think about himself, however, because so much was going on around him. On April 19, he reported the death of one of his hunters, who had been stabbed by a young man named Kotoshe during a late night drinking bout. The following day, Flett came by to make inquiries about four men who claimed they had been in to buy ammunition from him. At least that was the story they told William Brown, one of Flett's men, who had met them about eight miles away on his way to Moose Lake. Since no one fitting that description had been at his post, Nelson made inquiries and discovered that they were "old Lacorne's sons," apparently an untrustworthy lot.

I suppose they came sneaking about the house in hopes of finding some of our young women out & stealing them off: they can very easily do it; & it is not but once that such things have happened: I cannot think they had any other intention; for they could very easily have killed every soul of us. I communicated this to the men, who keep watch all night, & shut up the Gates of our Fort.²⁵³

Nelson did not have to fear for his own family, because his wife and daughters were at Sorel, Quebec. However, some of his men did have their families with them, so it was wise to be cautious. Nelson had no fear of Flett, whom he occasionally invited over for tea and from whom he sometimes borrowed supplies, but there was danger from others in the opposition,

particularly those of River la biche this last fall incited some of my indians to take furs from my poor old Drolette, & that they of their own free will had given him to keep for me, & [the HBC men] were laughing & gig(g)ling in the neighboring lodge while they [the indians] were pounding the old fellow most unmercifully.²⁵⁴

For this reason, Nelson had told his own men that they were not to interfere if the same thing happened to an HBC man, except if his life were in danger. Just such an instance occurred in April near Moose Lake, and it was reported to Nelson on May 9 by Constant, a Métis who was a longtime employee of the company. Apparently, "one of old Cock's sons" had taken debt from Mr. Sutherland at Swan River and had promised to take his furs to him. Fearing that they might be lost, Cock's wife asked George Gibson, one of Flett's men, to take care of the furs. On the son's return, he asked for his furs, but Gibson refused, saying that he owed them to Mr. Flett. Cock's son demanded his property back on the authority of Mr. Sutherland's orders; Gibson refused, and a fight ensued. All this was observed by Constant, who had his campsite nearby, and later described to Nelson.

²⁵³ George Nelson's Coded Journal, Friday, 20 April 1821, p. 5.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., Wednesday, 9 May 1821, pp. 13-14.

All the family gathered round Gibson, & as the devil has a great share in the composition of most women, Cock's wife attempted to carry off the bundle. G. resisted, & at last was obliged to give her some blows, when her nephew & step son [Cock's son] & all the family flew upon him like Tigers, & they had at it for a long time. At last G. called Const[ant], for help, who went & after some trouble rescued him, & then returned to his fire.²⁵⁵

The fight continued, however, and during the scuffle Gibson was nearly stabbed by young Kotoshe, who had also been observing the proceedings. This was the same young man who had murdered one of Nelson's hunters three days earlier. Fortunately, Constant intervened again and disarmed the fellow, and "Cocks son carried home the bundle, took out what was his, & returned the rest; & is now off to S[wan]. River with Kotoshe to save his own bacon."

Tensions were high at that time of the year on all sides. Toward the end of April, Flett had sent William Brown and Francis Whitford to Cumberland House for supplies, and they returned with two other men on May 7 to help bring in the furs.²⁵⁶ Connolly, ever on the watch, sent "the Elder Lucier...with McKay's step son" after them, but they met François Jacques, one of Nelson's men, and "got 188 Rats" from NWC hunters along the way, so that they did not arrive until May 13, three days after the HBC men they had been following. The NWC men had to actively follow up every opportunity, or their hunters would trade with the opposition. On the 10th, for example, Nelson recorded that "Padnaude & his three Sauteux's" arrived at Moose Lake, but their hunt was "indifferent for the great means they had, & the rascals have traded clandestinely with the HB's." However, on the same day, he received 340 Rats from Jeunc Tremble, Kaybashe & Tacayette's family that "Camarere had the care of." On the 11th, Lizé and Lucier came in with 284 Rats from the hunters with whom they had been tenting.

The NWC hunters, with names like Vieu Tremble, Beau Collet, Loup-blanc, and Eskatayc, were generally not mentioned in the HBC journals. In most cases, the hunters who traded with the NWC were not the same as those who traded with the HBC, although a few did trade with both, sometimes under a different name. There was a simple explanation for this. The traders often translated a Cree name into its French or English equivalent, or invented a name based on a hunter's appearance or character. Whatever the name used in the account books, the traders knew the hunters to whom they gave debt. At all times, they kept one eye on them and the other on the opposition, because if one side let its guard down for a moment, the other was ready to take advantage of the situation. Certainly Nelson was watchful, as his May 13th entry shows.

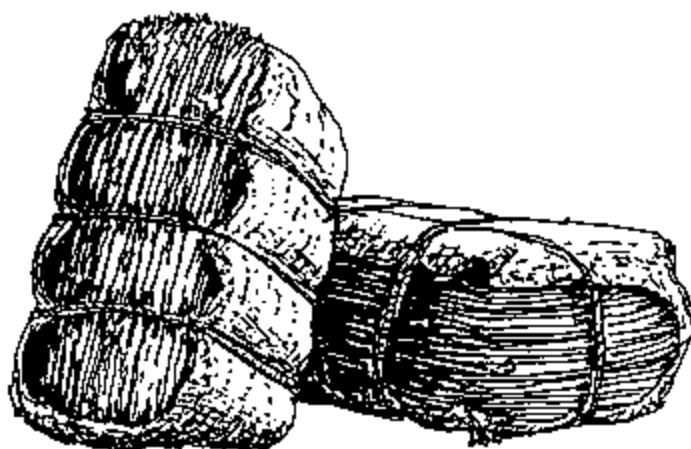
²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Wednesday, 9 May 1821, pp. 12-13.

²⁵⁶ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/36, fo. 31 and 34.

Lafreniere, Trempe & Irelande arrive about noon, --bring me 442 Rats. Pochette & La merise also arrive this afternoon: bring in a small bundle of Rats - perhaps 250. Will. Taitt & 6 HB. men came in at the same time - they bring in, Flett's men 4 Lar[ge]. & 2 very small Bundles, making about 1000 Rats. Taitt 11 bundles, perhaps 2400. They are on their way to Cumberland & came here for one of the boats.²⁵⁷

These HBC men probably had more fur than Nelson thought. When the wily Tate and his party reached Cumberland House, they had "4178 Rats 6 Foxes 8 Martins & 23 Otters." These had been obtained "last fall and this spring principally from the NW^t Indians, notwithstanding the arrangements we entered into last fall."²⁵⁸ Tate's underhanded trade practices cost Nelson some furs, to be sure, but he was holding his own. On May 15, he recorded

Finish our 23^d Pack today, & I have about 3000 Rats, still to pack, which with a few other things may make me about 28 or 29 Packs, while I all along thought to have 34 or 35. But the rats are so small that in some Packs I have 700, or more! I expected to make 40 Packs here, but I now see that I will be short of that number by 5 or 6.²⁵⁹



Packs or bales of fur usually weighed 40.83 kg or 90 lbs.

Nelson knew that Tate had not honoured the agreement, but became suspicious that Flett had also hoodwinked him. On May 20, he recorded his sentiments.

Towards the middle of this last night Nez-Croche & Okakeeke came in for rum having bro't in 8 Geese I gave 1 qu[ar]t: mixed Rum. They also bro't me 2 Carribocuf Parchments,

which belonging to Flett's indians I would not at first take; but upon reflection I kept them for an introduction to some compliments I have to pay Flett for his cheating conduct towards me. He gave me his word in the most assured manner any man could desire - to this I trusted, & with this he led me a sleep. Constant frequently told me of this: but I could not credit him, knowing him to be a liar & fearing he had some sinister end in view; after that some others of my men told me the same but as they don't understand indian a tenth part of their belly full I could not credit them either much; but by way of reproach Nez Croche told me the same this last night & explained all to me in such a manner as to leave no doubts.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ George Nelson's Coded Journal, Sunday, 13 May 1821, p. 15.

²⁵⁸ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/36, fo. 36.

²⁵⁹ George Nelson's Coded Journal, Tuesday, 15 May 1821, p. 16.

The following day, Nelson confronted Gibson, who “denied all most strenuously,” although he acknowledged that Tate made no secret of his actions. This was extremely frustrating to Nelson,

I have proofs of their cheating me, but they positively deny it & in such an ingenuous manner that I am loth to breake my word. That sneaking fellow Taitt paid a visit to Loup-Blanc & Band, the day they arrived here. Pochette & Lucier were with him the day before & he gave them the skip. such men! such bargains! & forsooth a penalty of £500 for the infractor!²⁶¹

Adding to his frustrations, was the behaviour of his man Constant, who had acted so expeditiously to save Gibson’s life, but had not been, in Nelson’s view, as energetic in serving his NWC employers. According to Nelson, the hunters complained “of his stinginess to the Men & lavishness among the women,” and he was prone to “fits of ill humor without cause.” For these reasons, and others, Nelson had informed him, May 10, that he would not be employed the following year. On the 24th, Nelson gave a most interesting account of this man, who was the “natural Son of a M^r Constant, trader about Mackinack, Lac-Huron, & what is now called York [modern day Toronto] in Upper Canada, for many years - his mother was an indian woman.”

Constant leaves this to day with all his property & family to settle at the Pas, as a Free-man. Mr. Conolly could not hire him for this post, & he would not agree for any other. But I believe & wish he may make some arrangement with Mr. Conolly for his freedom. He has for several years upon the least trifling occasion menaced to leave the Company & go to the Pas, where he thought his influence would attract all our indians & of course injure to his hearts content. He certainly has talents, but they are most ill applied. He has a very good idea of our system of trade, a competent knowledge of the ways, humors, & character of the Indians; is feared, & was so late as last year much loved by them. These qualities constitute a Trader, but to make him perfect, he must have a heart in consonance with it; must be deep, penetrating & wily - mild, affable, just, & resolute. Most of these he has, but he applies them to very wrong & contrary purposes - hence it is[,] he is now more feared for his brutality than loved for his lavishness in squandering the property that necessity & his intercession compelled me to entrust to his care. He might be of the greatest use & his value almost inestimable, was it not for the folly & viciousness of his heart that is constantly leading him into faults (some of which are unpardonable) & will ultimately be his ruin. He pretended respectful, obedient & interesting conduct before me; & behind my back instigated my men, my indians & my opponents to raise up against me by falsehoods & misrepresentations often of a black dye. Such is his character, stated in the fewest words, but just & dispassionately: he has endeavoured by every means my ruin & got on a great way with it; but I forgive him with the greatest good will, were it merely from the joy I feel in being ridded of him.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Ibid., Sunday, 20 May 1821, p. 17-18.

²⁶¹ Ibid., Monday, 21 May 1821, p. 18.

²⁶² Ibid., Wednesday, 23 May 1821, p. 19-20.

It was a harsh assessment, yet in spite of his grudge against the man, Nelson had to admit the good qualities Constant possessed. Being the son of a trader, he was not as easily pushed around as some of the local hunters seem to have been. He had ambitions to be out from under the NWC and become a trader in his own right.

Dealing with his men was just one more headache for a post manager, whose responsibilities included much more than collecting furs. During the last weeks of May, he had Drolette and Lucier building a fence and Cabanet a gate for the fort. His fisherman Laventure attempted to set some nets, but his efforts were continually frustrated by an east wind which kept blowing the pack ice into shore. There were a number of gardens to be dug and stones removed. By the time the men were finished, the original garden had been expanded three times, but it had cost a great deal of labour in the removal of stones, some of which weighed nearly a ton. Then they planted barley, potatoes, onions, beets, parsnips, and cucumbers.

At the end of May the last of the hunters arrived at the post.

Moose Ears, Loup Blanc, Pitit Français, Jeune Tremble, Kaybashe, L'homme, Nez Croche, Le veuse - son Fils, L'oiseau, Beau-Collet, &c. with their families arrive - do not give me 500 Rats between them whereas I expected at least 1500 - they bro't me 24 Geese, a swan & some ducks. Fils du Vent Nord was with them. I made presents to them all: some a complete suit, & others only a shirt, or hdkf. This came very hard upon me, my returns being so very deficient: but they suffered so much last fall & this spring upon the Rat Ground, so ill served & advised by Constant, that I had no alternative.²⁶³

In the end, Nelson got about 33 packs, which was seven less than he and Connolly had hoped, and these were duly packed and pressed. As he was preparing for the trip up to Cumberland, Flett kindly sent him some pounded meat and grease for his journey, a gesture that Nelson appreciated. Then on June 4th, he and his men left for Cumberland House, leaving old Lizé in charge of the post. On the 6th of June, he saw Tate and another man in a canoe on their way down to Moose Lake, but "did not hail them, being too vexed with Taitts mean sneaking conduct in the Brulé this spring."²⁶⁴ In fact, Tate and John Kirkness had been sent to Norway House with letters for the governor. Thomas Swain waited until June 10 before sending Pierre Pambrun and four men to Moose Lake to pick up furs at Moose Lake, then join the HBC fleet at the Grand Rapid.²⁶⁵

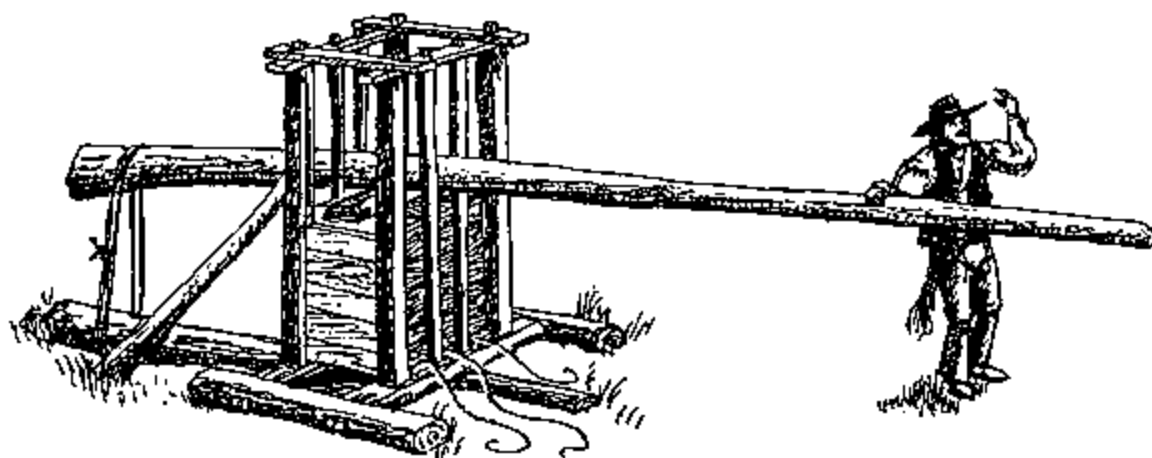
Cumberland House was a hive of activity in the first part of June as brigades came and went. The atmosphere was tense. On June 11, an HBC brigade with "Messrs

²⁶³ Ibid., Tuesday, 29 May 1821, p. 23.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Tuesday, 6 June 1821, p. 25.

²⁶⁵ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/37, fo. 1-1d, Cumberland House Post Journal, 1821-1822, mf. 1M40.

Clarke, Heron, Ross, McFarlane, Pensinault & Hutchison embarked for Norway House in company with 8 boats & three Canoes loaded with Furs and Provisions."²⁶⁶ On June 13, a large party of NWC officers, including Connolly, and their men left for the Grand Rapid. Nelson, who was left in charge at Cumberland House, observed that "In consequence of their apprehensions of Gov^t Williams, coming again & stopping them as he did 3 years ago at Gr[an]d. Rapid, they all assembled here, and left this with a great number of guns &c. &c. being determined to defend themselves against all acts of aggression of whatever nature."²⁶⁷ This observation was confirmed by Thomas Swain, who recorded that, "Thirty Canoes went off from the NW^t Fort today. They were seen to embark a great many Guns and other warlike Stores, it is presumed they anticipate being intercepted at the Grand Rapid." Then on June 16, "Mr. Simpson & party embarked for Norway House and at 8 A.M. Mr. Spence set off with his two boats for the same place."²⁶⁸ Nelson noted that the HBC were "apparently well armed, as they are apprehensive of being stopped by our people."²⁶⁹ As it turned out, there was no need for concern. No arms were required.



A fur press typical of those used by the
Hudson's Bay and North West Companies
(Wheeler, 47)

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 2.

²⁶⁷ George Nelson's Coded Journal, Wednesday, 13 June 1821, p. 27.

²⁶⁸ PAM, HBCA, B.49/a/37, fo. 2d.

²⁶⁹ George Nelson's Coded Journal, Saturday, 16 June 1821, p. 27.

The Coalition of 1821

Unknown to everyone in fur trade country, a coalition had been formed between the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies in London, news of which reached Cumberland House, June 24. On that date, Swain noticed that "one canoe arrived at the NW^t Fort from below with an Officer who we suppose to be the bearer of some important news." He was right. Nelson recorded the details. "We were very greatly surprised this evening by the arrival of M^r Jn^o. McLeod, clerk, from L'isle aux chevaux [Horse Island] in L. Ounipique, where they met M^r M^cMurray with the very pleasing information of both companies being now joined.²⁷⁰ At 8 p.m. he sent word to Mr. Swain at the HBC fort. When Tate, Kirkness, and Thomas Swain Jr. returned from Norway House on the 28th, they confirmed the report.

At first there was relief that conflict had ended, but after a few days, people began to wonder what it meant for them. The hunters were among the first to feel its effects. Nelson used "this news of the Coalition to terrify them & make them if possible pay me what they owe: it make[s] the poor wretches hang their ears."²⁷¹ Ordinarily sympathetic to the hunters, he felt ill used by those who had taken advantage of trade competition to avoid paying their bills. Such hunters took debt from both companies, then paid back only one. Others took their debt from one company, then traded their furs for rum or tobacco from the other, and had nothing left to meet their obligations. Now that the coalition had been formed, they could no longer play these games.

For other hunters, it was a sad day because of their fierce loyalty to the North West Company. Nelson told of the reaction of one man, when he was informed of the changes, 16 September 1821.

Several Indians come in today with a good deal of dry meat: one of them, The Tobacco, as he is called, on my informing that he must now go to the H.B. fort, as we were but one, expressed much surprise & real sorrow: "what is now to become of us? what shall we do! where shall we go!" & then looking towards our [NWC] house, said; "whilst that house still was, we were at least not too pitiful i.e. very wretched; oh me! oh me! what will become of us!!²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Ibid., Undated, [Sunday, 24 June 1821], p. 28.

²⁷¹ Ibid., Tuesday, 26 July 1821, p. 28.

²⁷² Ibid., Sunday, 16 September 1821, p. 41.

What made the situation particularly painful was that the new concern retained the name, Hudson's Bay Company, which was despised by every trader and hunter loyal to the NWC. Nelson was no exception. When Governor Williams ordered Swain to do an inventory at the HBC post with the assistance of the NWC clerk, Nelson complied, but recorded in his journal that he would not take his own inventory in the presence of anyone connected with the HBC until he received direct orders from his immediate supervisors. Nevertheless, he found stocktaking at the HBC post an illuminating experience.

I could not refrain from making some very serious remarks & reflections to myself upon the difference between the two companies, every thing being so hickety-pickety, upside-down; so very destitute of all order regularity, or method, that I was quite lost in astonishment when I compared this state of their affairs with their returns. "Surely" thought I "some secret power must aid & assist them, otherwise how could they possibly stand it out so long against us."²⁷³

Appalled by this evident lack of order and economy, Nelson vowed that if he were obliged to remain at Cumberland House during the winter, he would apply for his own post. In the meantime, he remained at the NWC house, awaiting developments. On July 11, Mr. Swain visited him, and from their conversation it appeared that the HBC was to be above the NWC in the new arrangement. By August 19, his suspicions were confirmed. After a conversation with Mr. Joseph McGillivray, he concluded that worry about "individual interest" had divided the wintering partners into "parties and factions always ready to split but never daring to come to an open rupture." "Fully aware of their own weakness & incapacity," they appointed two of their number [McLoughlin and Bethune] to go to England, where they "put themselves into the power of a set of people [London Council, HBC], fortunately more honorable than themselves" to the "detriment, prejudice, & hurt of their colleagues, & ruin of their old and faithful Clerks." As one of those clerks, Nelson felt particularly betrayed, because, there was "no recompense, no provision for those who ruined their health, and constitution, & who have become unfit for any other country or service!!!" Echoing poor old Tobacco, he was moved to exclaim,

Now, what shall; or can we do? we must pass the remaining of our wretched & miserable days here in a service [HBC] we almost all equally detest; & depending upon the whims of our LORDS whether we shall be turned out or not. Oh! such a trade! Oh! such a country!!!²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Ibid., Monday 2 July 1821, p. 29-30.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., Sunday, 19 August 1821, p. 34.

Nelson had reason to bemoan his fate, but he was not alone. The following day, he learned that HBC men had also been sacrificed in the new arrangement.

I paid a visit to day to my neighbour Swain: & I felt very much for him - why should I not[,] seeing he wept! Poor man he though himsel[f] beloved & respected by all of the party, whereas there is not perhaps one who has even common esteem for him. He has been left out by his masters in this new arrangement, and others, certainly far his inferiors in every respect was brought in...He expressed to me his surprise & vexation; & I frankly told him the rumours that were spread concerning him...that he was a drunkard. I was very sorry for it afterwards; but I considered myself obliged to warn him. Like all Englishmen, he is fond of his glass of grog, but he is never deranged; but in this country of Bliss & Perfection, if a man takes a glass of rum once or twice a day; he is immediately stigmatized with the epithet of drunkard...I certainly pity Mr Swain, for he has served his master with credit & fidelity for eight & twenty years.²⁷⁵

About a week later, Nelson heard a rumour from old Lizé, who had heard it from Constant - probably when he passed through The Pas on his way up to Cumberland - that an HBC man named Heron was going to take over the post at Moose Lake. This was confirmed, September 3.

M^r Heron is indeed appointed to my place, Moose Lake; a most gross insult, & unjust, & only to be equalled by their known partiality & injustice. M^r Heron has held a respectable place or post for the HB. 's; but I find myself very much hurt & injured, who am now entering my 20th year in the N.W. service & M^r Heron but 9.²⁷⁶

A disappointed Nelson remained at Cumberland House that winter, followed by one more year at Lac la Ronge, before he was retired from the service by the company. Thomas Swain passed from the stage, too. After Alexander Kennedy took command of the Cumberland District in the fall of 1821, Swain's name virtually disappeared from the journal, except during the rat hunt the following spring, when he and his family were trapping across the river from the post. The new company was bursting with extra hands made redundant by the merger, and layoffs were only just beginning. For the native hunters at places like Moose Lake, it was not clear what the long-term effects were going to be. The more astute hunters among them, especially those who had tried to exploit the competition between the two companies, must have realized the advantage they had lost, but it remained to be seen how that would affect them in the future. For the present, it was business as usual.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., Monday, 20 August 1821, p. 35.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., Monday, 3 September 1821, p. 37.

Index

- Abbé Carriera, 74
Alcohol use and abuse in the fur trade, 11, 13, 14, 15, 27, 84, 88, 90
Assiniboin, also Assinnee Poet, 5, 16, 27
Assinnee Poet. *See* Assiniboin
Athabasca, iii, 42, 46, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 61, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74
Auld, William, 31
- Ballenden, John, of Orphur, 36, 40, 49
Ballendine, John, of Cumberland House and Moose Lake, 60, 68, 81
Ballendine, Sophia, 40, 63
Ballendine, William [Willock], 49, 68, 70
Banks, James, 19, 24
Batt, Isaac, 30
Beau Collet, 83
Bethune, Angus, 74, 75, 89
Bird, James, 31, 35, 37, 56, 58
Birston, Alexander, 65
Black, Samuel, 58
Blackfoot Indians, 7, 28
Brough, John, 42
Brown, Alexander, 51, 67, 69
Brown, Jennifer S. H., historian, 81
Brown, William, 61, 64, 80, 82, 83
Budd, The Reverend Henry, 78
Budge, John, 40, 50, 51, 67, 79, 80
Bungee Boy, 38, 68
Burnt Woods, 69, 70, 79, 80, 81
- Cabanet, 86
Camerere, Pierre, 83
Campbell, John Duncan, 49, 64, 74
Catabobinow, 21
Cheag, 29
Chee Ka peg, 49
Cheemoutch, Oxford House, ancestor of the Hart Family, 26
Chouart, Jean Baptiste, nephew of Pierre Radisson, 5
Clarke, John, 53, 54, 56, 58, 60, 64, 72, 87
Cocking, Matthew, 27
Cofen, Joseph, 14, 15, 33, 60
Colvile, Andrew, 52, 75
Connolly, William, 48, 49, 60, 70, 79, 85
Constant, Joseph, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 90
Corrigal, Andrew, 18
coureurs de bois, 6
Cowinnetou Indians. *See* Cree: Cowinnetou Cree
 Cowinnetou, 23
 Home Guards, 39, 40
 Middlemen in the fur trade, 6
 Pegogemew, 16, 23, 27
 Religious observances, 3, 4, 42
 Sturgeon Cree, 28
 Technological change, 9
 Traditional gathering places, 4, 28
 Traditional lifeways, 3, 4
Cross Lake, 7, 31, 32, 35, 42
Cumberland House, 4, 8, 10, 12, 15, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 48, 50, 51, 52, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 76, 77, 79, 81, 83, 84, 86, 88, 89, 90
 1774, First HBC post, 10
 Census, 8
Cumberland House Cree, 32
- De Meuron Regiment, 56, 60, 74
Decoigne, François, 53, 54, 56
Doughty, Arthur G., 5
Driver, John, 23, 25, 26
Drolette, 82, 86
Duffle, 19, 25
Dunnett, William, 39, 40, 41
- Eskataye, 83
- Faries, H., 49
Fidler, Peter, vii, 38, 40, 42, 77
Fidler, Sally, 76, 77
Firth, Thomas, 67
Flatt, William, 20, 23, 25
Flett, George, 36, 44, 46, 47, 51, 63, 67, 73, 79
Fort à la Corne, 7
Fort Basquia. *See* The Pas
Fort Bourbon, 7
Fort William, 11, 51, 56, 57, 79
Franklin, Sir John, 71, 76
Freeman, Donald B., 6, 7, 19
French traders, v, 6
Friesen, Gerald, historian, 7, 11, 14, 15, 61, 62
Frobisher, Benjamin, 10, 48, 49, 60, 61, 64, 65, 70, 71
 Aggressive tactics, 48
 Death, 65
Fur press, 51, 87
Fur trade
 Explorations, 5, 7, 8
 Transport, 10, 11, 52, 53
Fur trade practices
 Intimidation, 12, 46, 48, 54
 Murder, 12

- Gale, Samuel, 59, 60, 62
 Gebosh, 12
 Gibson, George, 68, 69, 79, 82, 83
 Goose Dance, 3, 4, 42
 Graham, Duncan, 60
 Grant, Richard, 26
 Grey, William, 25
- Hearne, Samuel, 8, 10, 13, 14
 Henday, Anthony, 7, 8
 Heron, Francis, 87, 90
 Holmes, John Pocock, 49, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78
 Holmes, Ke che cow e com e coot, country wife of John Pocock Holmes, 77
 Holmes, William, 12, 13
 Hudson House, 8, 12, 17, 18, 23
 Hudson, George, 21, 22, 25, 27
 Hudson's Bay Company
 Inland exploration, 5, 7
 London Committee, 7, 14, 19, 20, 53, 58, 65, 75
 Trade practices, 6, 19, 35, 39, 51, 85, 89
 Hutton, Robert A., 4
- Irelande, 84
 Irishmen, 47
 Iroquois, 32
 Isbister, Aggathas, wife of Alexander Kennedy, 40
 Isbister, Thomas, 50, 69, 72
 Isham, Charles Price, 17
 Isham, James, 3, 4, 7, 17, 40
- Jack River, 31, 35, 44, 47, 53, 54, 55, 65
 Jacques, François, 83
 Jeune Tremble, 83, 86
- Kaybashe, 83, 86
 Kelsey, Henry, 5, 7
 Kennedy, Alexander, vi, vii, 30, 31, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 48, 50, 51, 59, 68, 90
 Kettles, copper, 9, 10
 Kirkness, John, 86, 88
 Kirkness, Thomas, 38, 40
 Kotoshe, 82, 83
- L'Emerise, Edouard, 84
 La Vérendrye, v, 7
 Lac la Ronge, 90
 Lacorne, 82
 Lafreniere, 84
 Laventure, 86
 Linklater, John, 79, 80
 Lizé, 83, 86, 90
- Logan, Robert, 53
 Longmoore, Robert, 8, 18
 Lord Selkirk, 31, 52, 56, 58, 60, 74
 Loup-blanc, 83
 Low Country Indians. *See* Swampy Cree
 Lucier, Amable, 83, 85, 86
 Lytwyn, Victor P., historian, 32, 33
- Macdonnell, Miles, 52
 Majeat, Pierre, 67
 Majeat/Majeau, Louis, 64
 Martin, Chester, 5
 Matthey, Captain Frederic, of the de Meuron Regiment, 60, 63
 McBeath, George, 81
 McCormack, 12, 13
 McDonnell, Alexander, 62, 63
 McFarlane, Mr., 57
 McGillivray, Joseph, 89
 McGillivray, Simon, 58, 59, 62
 McIntosh, William, 64
 McKay, Francis, 4
 McKenzie, Henry, 74
 McKinlay, William, 51
 McLeod, Archibald Norman, 55, 56, 57, 59
 McLeod, John, 69, 88
 McLaughlin, Dr. John, 74, 75, 89
 McNab, John, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43
 McTavish, John George, 61, 64
 McTavish, Simon, 10
 Measles, 68
 Meyer, David, 3, 4
 Miles, Robert, 73, 74
 Minago River Route, vii, 30
 Missinakeeshick, 8, 9, 30, 39, 40, 42
 Mistickathene, 39, 42
 Mixed-bloods, 67
 Moar, Billy, of Oxford House, 27
 Moose Ears, 86
 Moose Lake, vii, 4, 7, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 59, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 73, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 86, 90
 1806-1807, HBC men there, 40
 1806-1807, Leading hunters, 39
 1807, Fur returns, 43
 1815, Alexander Kennedy's description of region, 44
 1815, Leading hunters, 48
 1820-1821, Leading hunters, 82, 83, 84, 86
 Eighteenth-century population, 28
 First permanent fur trade posts, 35
 Important link in fur trade communication, 66
 Muskego Cree population, 34
 Origins, 35
 Murphy, Mr., 63

- Muskego Cree. *See* Swampy Cree
 Muskrats, vii, 43, 44, 52, 84
- Nelson, George, viii, 33, 67, 68, 70, 79, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90
- Nez-Croche, 84
- North West Company
 1821 Coalition, 88
 Merger with XY Company, 35
 Organization, 11
 Origins, 10
 Seven Oaks, 52
 Spring rendezvous, 11
 Trade practices, 35, 39, 46, 51, 54, 68
- Norway House, v, viii, 30, 31, 32, 34, 44, 49, 53, 56, 58, 59, 64, 65, 66, 69, 73, 76, 77, 79, 86, 87, 88
- Norwegians, 53
- Ojibway, 15, 31, 32, 33, 34
- Oji-Cree, 34
- Okakeeke, 84
- Opaskweyaw. *See* The Pas
- Orkney Islands, 40
- Orkneymen, 40
- Ottawa Indians, 32
- Oxford House, 26, 37, 39, 42
- Pambrun, Pierre, 86
- Pangman, Peter, 13
- Paskoyac. *See* The Pas
- Pasquatinow, 4
- Pasquia or Oo-paskweyaw Cree, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 34, 38
- Paul, Joseph, 64
- Paul, Pierre, 64
- Peck, James, 48
- Peers, Laura, historian, 16
- Pegogemew Indians. *See* Cree:Pegogemew
- Peigan, 28, 29
- Pekekan, 32
- Pelican Indians, 32, 34
- Pelican Lake, 48
- Pettipas, Leo, archaeologist, 3
- Pink, William, 30
- Pinsonaur, Mr., 58, 59, 72, 87
- Plains Cree, 4
- Playgreen Indians, 15
- Pochette, 84, 85
- Press, fur. *See* Fur Press
- Pulsit, Ned, 79
- Pusas.quet.tumen, 23
- Quesceppow. *See* Queskecappow
- Queskecappow, 68, 69
- Rat darts, 69, 71
- Ray, Arthur J., 6, 7, 15, 19, 31
- Red River Colony, 47, 52, 59
- Red River Settlers, 31, 47, 53, 55
- Reed Lake, 79
- Rendall, Robert, 67
- Robertson, Colin, iii, 30, 31, 52, 53, 54, 56, 58, 61, 63, 64, 65, 71, 72, 73, 76, 79
 1815, Athabasca Expedition, 52, 54
 1815-1816, Wintered at Red River Colony, 53
 1816-1817, Wintered at Eastmain and Moose Factory, 55
 1818, Arrested in Athabasca, 58
 1818, Second Athabasca Expedition, 56
 1820, Escapes NWC and travels to England, 74
 Character, 53, 54, 56, 64, 74
- Rubson, Joseph, 5
- Rocky Lake, 68, 79, 80, 81
- Ross, George, 20
- Ruhiggan, 3
- Russell, Dale R., 5, 6, 7, 8, 28, 30, 32
- Sanderson, Theodore, 4
- Sandfly, 25
- Sandison, James, 24
- Sandison, James Jr., 38, 40
- Saukamappee, 28, 29
- Saunderson, James. *See* Sandison, James
- Selkirk Settlers. *See* Red River Settlers
- Semple, Governor Robert, 53, 55
- Seven Oaks, 52, 55, 60, 64
- Seven Years' War, 10
- Shaw, Angus, 61, 62, 63, 64
- Simpson, George, 87
- Sinclair, William, 44
- Smallpox Epidemic, 1781-1782, viii, 15, 17, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 35
- Smith, Joseph, 30
- Snodie, James, 65, 71
- Spence, George, 71, 74
- Spence, James, 79
- Spence, Magnus, 42
- Sun Dance, 3
- Sutherland, James, 31, 43, 44, 46
- Swain, Thomas, 79, 80, 81, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90
- Swain, Thomas Jr., 88
- Swampy Cree, 3, 4, 8, 9, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39
 Inland migrations, 30
- Tapotum, 69
 His brother, 68
- Tate, James, 23, 24, 26
- Tate, William, 40, 79, 80, 84, 86, 88
- The Pas, v, 4, 5, 7, 10, 15, 21, 38, 90

- Thompson, David, 28
 Tobacco, a NWC hunter, 88, 89
 Todd, Dr. William, 72
 Tomison, William, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29
 Towers, Peter, 67, 69
 Trempe, Jean Baptiste, 84
 Turnor, Philip, 12, 17
 Twatt, Magnus, 23, 24, 25, 26
 Twatt, Robert, 67
- U. Basquiau Cree. *See* Pasquia or Oo-paskweyaw Cree
- Van Kirk, Sylvia, historian, 81
 Vieu Tremble, 83
 Voyageurs, 10, 11, 52, 53
- Walker, William, 9, 17, 23
 Wapisk [Wapusk Ethinuc?], 48
 Wapusk, 48, 68, 69
 Wass, James, 19, 20, 22
 Wee,shew,now. *See* Weeshcnow
- Weeshcnow, 20, 22
 Wetiscawabbun, son of Missinakeeshick, 39
 White Bear. *See* Wapusk
 Whitford, Francis, 67, 79, 83
 Whitford, Peggy, 67
 Whitford, Sarah, 63, 67, 79
 Whooping cough, 68
 Williams, Glyndwr, historian, 7
 Williams, Gov. William, 48, 49, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 87, 89
 Appointed Governor of HBC, 58
 Character, 58, 64, 71, 75
 Death in England, 77
 His country wife, Sally Fidler, 77
 Strong measures against NWC, 60, 61
- XY Company, 14, 35, 46
- York Factory, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 15, 18, 20, 21, 25, 27, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 47, 48, 50, 51, 53, 55, 58, 60, 64, 65, 72, 76, 77