

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY IN THE EXPLORATION
AND SETTLEMENT OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY OF THE NORTH

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MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY IN THE EXPLORATION AND SETTLEMENT OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY OF THE NORTH

As beaver became scarcer in the east, the quest for *Castor Canadensis* sent traders into the northern plains. Reluctant explorers, traders looked for easier access and cheaper means of transport. Initially content to wait on the shores of the Bay, HBC was forced to meet their competitors in the natives' homelands.

The Red River Valley was easily accessed from Hudson's Bay, becoming the center of the fur trade in the northern plains. HBC helped colonize the first permanent settlement west of the Great Lakes in the Red River Valley. Allowing white women and introducing cultivation into the area was a necessary change. The influence of the fur trade in North Dakota and of the Hudson's Bay Company on the exploration and settlement of the Red River Valley cannot be overemphasized.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have benefitted from the help of many people.

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To my siblings and my children, who were convinced, more than I, that I could do this; even for the smart remarks: “Mother, no one starts a term paper in February”, or “College is supposed to be hard”. Or my Mother’s: “Why couldn’t you have done this well in school?”

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to my husband for all I have put him through these last years and for finding the patience to allow me to finish this in my own time. Though he does admit that I did show him a little about how things are on the other side of that desk!

Thank you to A. N. Korsos for permission to include the relevant portion of his map of The Posts and Forts of the Canadian Fur Trade, 1600-1870.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Lt.-Col. Roland G. Ashman and Laura (Boucher) Ashman, who more than 50 years ago insisted that their five daughters had to be prepared for careers in the same way as their two sons were. Mother is thrilled and we know that Dad would have been very proud.

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POSTS AND FORTS OF THE CANADIAN FUR TRADE 1600-1870

For over 250 years the fur trade in Canada and eventually the United States provided, not only the monetary base, but also the main incentive for the exploration of the North America continent. The major fur trading companies established bases for exploration and ultimately points of trade through the building of forts and posts. This thematic map presently includes forts and posts involved in the fur trade from the year 1600 and the year 1870. The forts and posts captured belonged to the French, Spanish the North West Company, the Hudson's Bay Company, and Canadian Independent Traders in Canada and the northern United States. American Companies are also captured along with the posts and forts of American independent traders. The American companies highlighted in this thematic map include the American Fur Company, Missouri Fur Company, Columbia Fur Company, Pacific Fur Company, Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and the Union Fur Company.

LEGEND

The Operator and Name of the Post and Fort

Operator and Name of Post/Fort
North West Company 1600
Hudson's Bay Company 1600
XY Company 1600
French 1600
Canadian 1600
British 1600
Spanish 1600
American 1600
American Fur Company 1600
Pacific Fur Company 1600
Columbia Fur Company 1600
Missouri Fur Company 1600
Rocky Mountain Fur Company 1600
Union Fur Company 1600

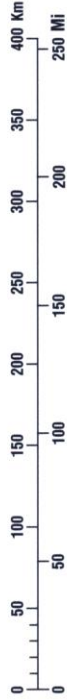
Year Post/Fort First Established

Post or Fort Site

- Labeled Post or Fort Site
- Other Post or Fort Sites

Approximate Scale

1:3,840,000



Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic

Sources: Voonhis, Ernest. Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French Regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies. (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, Hudson's Bay Company Archives (Post Records), Respective Provincial Historical Organizations, MacGregor, James, Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Explorer, 1769-1822. Huck, Barbara. Exploring the Fur Trade Routes of North America, National Atlas of Canada (4th Edition). Thompson, David. David Thompson's Narrative, 1794-1812. Glover, Richard, ed. Champlain Society, Henry, Alexander (the Younger). The Journal of Alexander Henry The Younger, 1759-1814. Volume I & II. Barry Gough, ed. The Champlain Society, Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, 1745-1792. Joseph Burr Iyrell, ed. Champlain Society, Harmon, Daniel Williams. A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America-Between the 47th and 58th Degrees of North America..., Coultier Press, Ltd, Toronto, 1911, M'Gillivray, Duncan, The Journal of Duncan McGillivray 1794-1795; Macmillan, Toronto, 1929, The Hudson's Bay Company Archives (www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/), Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. ISBN 978-0-9783707-3-2

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FIGURE 1: MAP LEGEND



FIGURE 2: MAP: POSTS AND FORTS OF THE CANADIAN FUR TRADE 1600-1860

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is not difficult to find many histories of a company which has been a viable concern for almost 350 years. The Hudson's Bay Company was chartered May 2, 1670. The older books written about the Hudson's Bay Company often show the biases and preconceptions of earlier centuries. Beckles Willson published his book in 1899. Life in the northern plains was still developing. Joseph Hargrave and H.M. Robinson also published in the final years of the twentieth century. Written histories about the area were generally uncommon. The Companies had records from their factors at the posts. The journals of the explorers were not always as accurate as one could hope. Most often stories were orally passed down to family and friends, or polished around the campfire. Charles Napier Bell was a transplanted Canadian who settled in Winnipeg in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He was profoundly interested in the history of the Red River Valley and wrote many papers which he presented to the Manitoba Historical Society between 1883 and 1928. His research was factually accurate as far as he could ascertain.

The view of the Company's history would also be colored by the status of the writer. Sir Charles Schooling's book was published in London in 1929, to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the charter. One might expect that he would be biased in the best interests of the Company. Conversely Robert Pinkerton, whose book was published in New York in 1931, hoped to give "a truer perspective"¹ of the Company. He had no great love for the "English 'Adventurers' who always remained in London."² He had factual knowledge of the area since his family lived in northern Ontario, not far from Winnipeg, in the early years of the twentieth century. There were

¹ Robert Pinkerton, *Hudson's Bay Company* (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 1931, 6

² Pinkerton, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 5

a handful of other books written in the first half of the twentieth century, including one written by a woman. Agnes Laut's book was published in 1921.

The journals of the traders and explorers, and the reports of the trading companies are from an era very different to the twenty-first century. That world was very white-man centric. Culture and mores were very narrowly defined, and natives definitely did not live up to European and *Canadien* standards.

These early books clearly show that the Europeans and *Canadiens* considered the natives to be "wild", "savage" and "amoral" according to the standards of their time. Innes notes that they were regarded as "bad people, who were armed to the teeth, and who waged war continually."³ Native men were considered "savages" and "uncivilized" with mass generalizations about the people, developed from superficial speculations. Van Diver avers in 1929 that some men were better *coureur de bois* for that "dash of Indian blood"⁴

Many terms, descriptions and ideas from the era of the fur trade would not be considered proper usage in today's literature. Even in mid-twentieth century, authors like Pritchett referred to natives by various soubriquets as "*bois brûlés*" or "charcoal faces." The children of mixed marriages were referred to as "dusky children" or "half-breeds."⁵ Peter Newman did at least put "the savages" in quotation marks in 1985.⁶ Other writers in the middle of the last century like George Bryce, Marjorie Campbell, Walter O'Meara, and Sylvia Van Kirk were more cognizant of societal changes. Van Kirk has also been a proponent in recognizing women's voices in history.

³ Harold Innes, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1930), 14

⁴ Van Diver, *The North West Company*, 60

⁵ John Perry Pritchett, *The Red River Valley, 1811-1849* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 14-15

⁶ Peter C. Newman, *Company of Adventurers* (Markham: Penguin Books Canada, 1985), 13

European women had no status and so native women were less regarded than native men. It was not until well into the twentieth century, that women's history was beginning to be considered a study that had for too long been neglected. William Healy considers that the women of the Red River Settlement were "in closer and more wounding contact than the men with the cruelly hard realities of life in such conditions."⁷ As the title of his book suggests⁸, he had interviews with women and/or their immediate families who remembered earlier days in the Red River Valley. Van Kirk brought the story of Thanadelthur to the notice of the world. The story had always been there, but it had never before been appreciated as a pivotal piece of history.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Canadian writers Peter C. Newman and J.M. Bumsted added much to the story of the Company and the Red River area. Deeper and more evolved research brings older and neglected research to the forefront and they both were able to present it in a more modern and presentable fashion.

In the twenty-first century, writers Susan Sleeper-Smith, Carolyn Podruchny, and J.M. Bumsted, among others, were adding much to the old history with more empathy to how other peoples were regarded, using terminology better suited to modern sensibilities. Newer and closer research brought new knowledge and resulted in books like Podruchny's Making the Voyageur World, or Sleeper-Smith's Rethinking the Fur Trade. Always new finds add to the old stories and modern sensitivities redirect research in areas, such as women's histories and history of native lore. Oral histories are now treated as more than stories of the past. Everything adds color and depth to the older narratives.

⁷ W.J. Healy, *Women of Red River* (Winnipeg: Peguis Publishers, 1923), 5.

⁸ *Ibid.* 5.

This thesis hopes to add to the collective. The focus is on the Red River Valley. Most histories of the Hudson's Bay Company give short shrift to the area, possibly a few pages, or at most, a chapter. It must be remembered that the Red River Valley was, for several years, the main focus of the fur trade wars between the Hudson's Bay Company and all of its competitors. The Hudson's Bay Company promoted, however reluctantly, settlement in the area. And the Red River Valley was the most important fur trading area in the Northern Plains for decades. It was the fur trade that promoted transportation from the northern plains to the rest of the world. It was the needs of the settlers that suggested a change in direction so that the Company could provide for those needs. This advocated a change towards the retail side.

The older stories were the first and perhaps the most important basis for the story of the Hudson's Bay Company. Newer research and printings take those first books and build on them. They are the first vital building blocks that history starts with, and then additions are made to flesh out the story. No piece of history, however old, can be completely obliterated by the new.

INTRODUCTION

The fur trade drove the exploration of much of inland North America. Beaver fur was much in demand in Europe, where the animal was almost extinct. Beaver seemed plentiful in the “New World” and were hunted ferociously until they retreated inland. Following them were traders, who almost accidentally became explorers. The Northern Plains was the first target for these followers of the beaver. The largest group of investors in the fur trade was the Hudson’s Bay Company. Starting out with a few outposts on the edges of Hudson Bay, the men of the Company led the way into the Northern Plains and especially the Red River Valley of the North. The Red River Valley was more easily approached for these water-borne explorers and became the center of the fur trade. Trading posts along the waterways were the first temporary settlements of the Northern Plains and the Red River was the main conduit for the fur trade. The Red River Settlement was the first permanent colony of the Northern Plains.

The Hudson’s Bay Company was the first organized fur trading company in North America. Gradually the Company overwhelmed all competitors and their history was absorbed into the annals of The Company. The competition between the various companies and HBC drove the exploration of the Red River Valley and aided settlement. It is this story of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s influence in the Red River Valley that follows.

The beaver was the principle target of the fur traders. The furs were wonderfully warm and water- and wind-repellent for newcomers to this new and often bitter climate. When the wealthy Europeans scrambled to own the expensive beaver furs, the trappers found a new and highly lucrative trade. Hats were an outward sign of an individual’s wealth and rank and would be passed down as part of the family estate.⁹ Beaver hats were extremely fashionable from the mid-sixteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century with the styles evolving as

⁹ www.hbc.com/hbcheritage/history/social/FashionPopularCulture/beaverhats/ Retrieved 7/16/09.

fashions changed. Laws in Europe prohibited using cheaper furs to make hats.¹⁰ The beaver was becoming extinct in Europe.

John Cabot had reached Newfoundland in 1497, claiming the land for England. He did not find the seaway to Asia that he sought, but he did find an abundant supply of fish. European fishing vessels flocked to the area during the summer season, catching vast amounts of fish to take back home. The summer visitors also became interested in the glossy skins that the local people wore. A number of the furs were acquired for sparkly baubles and small metal articles and taken back home where they were sold for great profit. The Europeans soon found that “The offer of a few toys and trinkets, knives or implements, was enough to induce the savages—men, women and children—to disrobe themselves and give over their furs.”¹¹ These beaver robes, though quite odiferous were well worn to a rich sheen from contact with the body of the wearer. Called *castor gras*, ‘greasy beaver’, the skins proved extremely warm on the return voyage to Europe.¹²

The demand for the furs became so great in Europe that the fishermen found that trading cheap trinkets for these lush pelts was easier and much more lucrative than their original trade.¹³ More fishermen followed the lead of the first few, and began setting up posts along the coast in which to store the goods used to trade with the natives. The furs would be stored at the posts until they could be shipped to Europe. The earliest main post for the traders was at Tadoussac where the Saguenay River joins the St. Lawrence and now regarded as the oldest continuously inhabited European settlement in Quebec. Trade expanded as exploration continued, following the St. Lawrence River into the interior. By the middle of the sixteenth century Jacques Cartier

¹⁰ Nathaniel C. Hale, *Pelts and Palisades* (Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1959), vii.

¹¹ Arthur S. Morton, “The North West Company” in *The Ryerson Canadian History Readers* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1930), 22.

¹² Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, *The North West Company* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1957), 3.

¹³ Vandiver, *The Fur-Trade and Early Western Exploration*, 17.

had sailed down the St. Lawrence as far as he could go, before the rapids stopped him at the Indian village of Hochelaga, now Montreal.¹⁴

Fishing was beginning to take second place to the trade in furs by 1581. That year a French vessel weighing thirty tons carried furs back to Europe. The next year, the ship weighed eighty tons. After that, several ships sailed every year carrying their extremely lucrative cargo.¹⁵ Those first traders were a rough and undisciplined lot with each man looking out only for himself, with special privileges given to royal favorites. These favors changed almost as often as the wind across the Atlantic. Jean-François de Roberval was given the first monopoly in January 1540.¹⁶ He was subsequently named the first Lieutenant-General of New France. In 1588, the French government granted a monopoly for twelve years to two men. The protest at such high-handedness caused the monopoly to be revoked almost immediately. Ten years later a man named LaRoche was granted the rights to trade fur within all the lands that were claimed for France. LaRoche failed at this, as it seems he had at everything else. He ended up in debtor's prison after attempting to cheat his men of their share of the profits.¹⁷ In 1599 the monopoly was given to Pierre du Quast, Sieur de Monts, rescinded in 1607, and then restored to him until 1609. From that date until 1612 there were no further restraints or fees made on the traders; they were free to trap as they might.¹⁸

In 1602, Samuel de Champlain helped to form an outpost at Acadia, on the St. Lawrence coast of Nova Scotia. He and his men explored the St. Lawrence as far as the rapids, to the point where Hochelaga had once stood, and in 1608, set up a new colony, which he named *Mont*

¹⁴ Ibid, 19.

¹⁵ Morton, *The North West Company*, 26.

¹⁶ Ernest Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French Regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies* (Ottawa: Natural Resources Intelligence Services, Department of the Interior, 1930), 16.

¹⁷ Vandiver, *The North West Company*, 18.

¹⁸ Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts*, 16.

Royal. Champlain's Company set up in 1612, formally known as the Company of Rouen and St. Malo, attempted to establish a monopoly by prohibiting trade between the colonists and the First Nations tribes. The charter was cancelled in 1620 and the next year the Company of Montmorency was formed by Guillaume de Caen and his nephew. This monopoly lasted only a year. *La Compagnie des Cent Associés*, also known as the Company of New France, established by Richelieu on April 26, 1627 did not allow for trade by the colonists; instead all furs had to be handed over to the *Compagnie*. As a member of "The Company of One Hundred Associates" Champlain held the monopoly on furs for the entire length of the St. Lawrence.¹⁹ Other explorations took him to Port Royal and further around the area, including, in 1605, as far as Plymouth Bay, some 15 years before the Mayflower landed there.²⁰

When the charter of this company was also revoked, Champlain had to leave Port Royal and he set up a post at Quebec City. He was required to explore the area and set up a colony, and let others take charge of the fur-trade. After further political machinations in France, Champlain determined to undertake more exploration. He set his base at Montreal where he could travel freely down the St. Lawrence and up the Ottawa rivers. He discovered that furs were being transported from tribe to tribe and brought for trade by intermediaries.²¹ In short order, he set up fur-trading stations which were permanently maintained along the St. Lawrence River. The French continued to trade with the local tribes; the Huron who came from the West and the Algonquin natives of the Ottawa Valley. Hearing their stories of finding other better furs, Champlain listened and learned. He yearned to find Hudson's Bay and, he hoped, the passage to Asia for which Europeans had long searched.

¹⁹ Sir William Schooling, *The Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1920* (London: The Hudson's Bay Co., 1920), 2.

²⁰ Vandiver, *The North West Company*, 21.

²¹ Morton, *History of the Canadian West 1870-71*, 25.

In 1640, the Company of *Notre Dame de Montréal* split off from the Company of New France, taking control of the northeastern part of the island of Montreal.²² The city of Montreal was established in 1642 and became the permanent and main base for explorers.

In 1645, the fur trade monopoly was transferred to the colonists, and *La Compagnie des Habitants* was established. *La Compagnie* has the dubious distinction of being the first to employ brandy as an article of trade with the Indians.²³ In 1663, all powers and privileges passed to the King of France.

Beaver was seemingly plentiful in North America. However, trappers and traders worked indiscriminately and it did not take long for the animals to become scarce in the areas of the continent where settlements first emerged. Trappers had to retreat further westward as encroaching settlements destroyed the beavers' habitats.

The explorer Henry Hudson had explored the river bearing his name in 1609, creating a route for the Iroquois to bring furs to the Dutch settlers there. There was bitter rivalry for the fur trade between the First Nations tribes who brought their pelts to the Europeans. The Huron and Algonquin around Lakes Huron and Ontario brought their furs to the French, and the Iroquois traded with the Dutch. In 1650, a bitter war between the tribes saw the total annihilation of seventeen Huron settlements between Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay, while the attacks on the Algonquin left the Ottawa River area and the shores of Lake Huron "dispeopled".²⁴ This completely shattered the French fur trade and allowed the Iroquois to take over the territory. In 1653, surviving Huron and Ottawa natives instigated forays through their old territory in an attempt to resume trade. In 1654, they returned to the Upper Lakes Country accompanied by two Frenchmen, one of whom is thought to be Médard Chouart, Sieur de Groseilliers. The

²² Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts*, 16.

²³ Ibid, 16.

²⁴ Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, 35.

Frenchmen were charged by the Governor to restart the machinery of the French fur trade.²⁵ Groseilliers spent many of the following years setting up trade with the Huron and Ottawa. In 1658, he was accompanied by his brother-in-law, Pierre Radisson, who had spent several years of his youth, from 1651 to 1654, as a captive of the Iroquois. Radisson had managed to escape with the help of the Dutch and returned to Quebec in 1657 by way of Holland. Even at this early date, their minds filled with stories of abundant beaver in the north just waiting to be taken, Radisson and Groseilliers dreamed of a fur trading empire. In 1659, they set out for the unknown lands to the west. They crossed Wisconsin and reached the Mississippi ten years before Marquette did. It is not known exactly how far they travelled, but Radisson's papers suggest it is probable that they got as far as the Missouri and visited with the Mandans.

In 1661, Radisson and Groseilliers proposed to the *Intendant*, Jean Talon that the fur trade should be extended to Hudson's Bay. The plan was soundly rejected. They set off under their own auspices into present-day northwestern Ontario, returning with a fleet of heavily-laden canoes, paddled by hundreds of First Nations tribesmen.²⁶ When they returned with some of the most luxuriant beaver pelts ever seen, their bounty was confiscated and they were heavily taxed for trading without a license. Groseilliers appealed to the French court and his money was returned.²⁷ They decided to take their proposal to the English and travelled to Boston. There, a member of King Charles II's court suggested they approach the King. Groseilliers took their plan to London, and in 1667, he was introduced to Prince Rupert, the Bohemian princely adventurer nephew of King Charles I. Escaping from Cromwell's Puritan forces, Rupert had

²⁵ Ibid, 39.

²⁶ Hale, *Pelts and Palisades*, 188.

²⁷ Elle Andra-Warner, *Hudson's Bay Company Adventures: The Rollicking Saga of Canada's Fur Traders* (Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House Publishing Company, 2009), 30.

sailed the high seas, leading the remnants of the British fleet, into the life of privateering, to no small profit.

After King Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, Rupert was given command of the Royal navy in a war against the Dutch. Rupert returned to Britain to acclamation for his success and retired to a quieter life involving art and science. Prince Rupert was pleased to help fund an English expedition to find a north-west passage into Hudson's Bay and channel into the South Sea.²⁸ Among the many other nobles and gentlemen he invited to join the enterprise was the Sea.²⁹ Among the many other nobles and gentlemen he invited to join the enterprise was the Duke of York, later to be King James II.

In 1664, the English took New York from the Dutch. The English settlers, further south, were beginning to prosper and their settlements were growing. They had jealously eyed the rich furs of the French traders. The political situation in Europe was the same as always: Britain was at war with France, Protestants fought Catholics, and the wars spilled over into the new world. The French traders managed to get along with most of the Indian tribes they met, while the English to the south took exception to the ways of Indian life and constantly quarreled with them. The sole exception to this was the Iroquois, who hated the French but allied themselves to the English. The friendship between the English and the Iroquois would be a dangerous union for the French.

In 1668, Groseilliers, outfitted with the *Nonsuch*, and Radisson with the *Eaglet*, sailed for Hudson's Bay.³⁰ The *Eaglet* turned back before reaching Hudson Strait, but the *Nonsuch* reached Hudson's Bay and sailed south. On September 29 the *Nonsuch* arrived at

²⁸ Beckles Willson, *The Great Company, Being a History of the Honorable Company of Merchants-Adventurers Trading into Hudson's Bay* (Toronto: the Copp, Clark Company, Ltd., 1899), 43.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 43.

³⁰ Schooling, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, 4.

the mouth of the newly christened Rupert River.³¹ Construction on Fort Charles began immediately, in order to survive the fast approaching winter. Within days, natives appeared and Groseilliers explained the purpose of their fort. The natives left, promising to return with furs. Within a year of arrival, the *Nonsuch* returned to England, “loaded to the waterline” to report the promising news that the French fur-trade monopoly along the St. Lawrence had been bypassed.³² They also “proved that the easiest and shortest way to the beaver empire was by salt water.”³³ In May 1669, Radisson and Groseilliers returned to Rupert River area and at Port Nelson the land was taken in the name of the English King and the royal arms were placed in proof of the fact.

The English had to have been interested in the scheme from the outset, though they did not impart that knowledge to Radisson and Groseilliers. The first Stock Book shows that three years before the Charter was given, substantial amounts of money were provided for the cause. The list of investors was headed by the Duke of York, later King James II, who donated £300 to the cause. Investors included the Duke of Abermarle, the Earls of Arlington, Craven and Shaftsbury, and several others.³⁴

On Friday May 2, 1670, a document from the King was delivered to his “dear and entirely beloved cousin” Prince Rupert.³⁵ The document recorded that he and seventeen others were incorporated into “a company, with the exclusive right to establish settlements and carry on trade at Hudson’s Bay.”³⁶ In June of that year, Lady Margaret Drex, the wife of a financier, became the first woman shareholder, making nineteen members of the company.³⁷ “The Governor and Company of Merchants-Adventurers trading into Hudson’s Bay” was granted by

³¹ Willson, *The Great Company*, 47.

³² Schooling, *The Hudson’s Bay Company*, 4.

³³ Robert E. Pinkerton, *Hudson’s Bay Company*. 12.

³⁴ Schooling, *The Hudson’s Bay Company*, 4.

³⁵ www.hbc.com/hbcheritage/collections/archival/charter/default.asp?pm=1.

³⁶ Willson, *The Great Company*, 50.

³⁷ Andra-Warner, *Hudson’s Bay Company Adventures*, 38.

the Crown to a monopoly of trading in the newly named Rupert's Land, the territory whose waters flowed into Hudson's Bay. Rupert's Land would come to cover a third of the North American continent; 3.8 million square kilometers encompassing Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, southern Saskatchewan, Alberta, the eastern part of the Northwest Territories and what is now much of Minnesota and North Dakota.³⁸ Prince Rupert remained Governor of the company until he died in 1682. He was then replaced as Governor by his cousin James, Duke of York, who served until the death of Charles in 1685 when he was crowned King James II. HBC had total control over the area, including the ability to wage war with the natives, whereas war with other Christian sovereigns required the permission of the British king.³⁹

King Charles' signature "at the bottom of the last of five huge sheets of parchment"⁴⁰, comprising "seven thousand words of hand-lettered text"⁴¹ is an enduring symbol of a time when the King ruled everything and doled it out as he pleased. Over the centuries, the Charter has defeated a multitude of efforts to overturn it, but it remains unbreakable in law. At the time, there was no objection to a charter giving unlimited powers to "an unknown, subarctic land peopled only by red savages."⁴² There was no way of knowing what it would become, how long it would last, and least of all, how important the Company would be in the discovery and settling of North America. The Company had its own flag, the Union Jack with the letters HBC on it, which some said stood for "Here Before Christ."⁴³ Peter Newman does suggest they might have better suggested "Here Before Canada."⁴⁴ The flag would fly over a vast territory for several centuries. The wealth that HBC would control over the next several centuries was simply

³⁸ Pinkerton, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 7.

³⁹ Andra-Warner, *Hudson's Bay Company Adventures*, 38.

⁴⁰ Pinkerton, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 7.

⁴¹ www.hbc.com/hbcheritage/collections/archival/charter/default.asp?pm=1.

⁴² Pinkerton, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 8.

⁴³ Walter O'Meara, *The Savage Country* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 80.

⁴⁴ Peter C. Newman, *Caesars of the Wilderness* (Markham, ON: Penguin Books Canada, 1987), xxi.

unimaginable to those eighteen men and one woman who supplied the funds to start the enterprise.

EXPLORATIONS

The Hudson's Bay Company was fortunate. The beaver that the Company traded so fiercely were found on the waterways of the nation. There was a wide variety of routes, but all eventually ran either north to Hudson Bay, or south to the St. Lawrence and thereby to the Atlantic Ocean. It was possible to make one's way from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, the northern plains and the lush woodlands of the United States via the easy transport of the birch bark canoe to the various posts and forts around Hudson Bay. The trip was not easy and could be very dangerous, but for the Indian traders there was ample reward for undertaking the journey.

The newly established Company on Hudson's Bay had an immediate effect on the French fur-trade. The French had introduced European goods which were carried further west by the First Nations middlemen who took goods in trade of beaver furs. Now those western tribes could make their way to English posts along the Bay, making a shorter trip and trading greater amounts of furs.

Even after the formation of the Hudson's Bay Company, French traders continued to carry on their trade. As the Hudson's Bay Company did little exploring, it was the French *fleur de lis* that was carried inland, and under which flag the furs were sent back up the St. Lawrence to France. For the first one hundred years, HBC had only seven posts at the mouths of the major rivers flowing into Hudson Bay or James Bay. The rivers were the venue for the First Nations tribes travelling by canoe, often a long difficult journey that could take the entire summer to reach the trading posts and return to their homes. The Englishmen who operated the posts had little to do but wait for the furs to arrive and be prepared for the trade. The employees of the Hudson's Bay Company were, for the most part, British men sent out to organize and run a

trading post. Their intent was to fulfill their contract, willing to suffer the isolation of the inhospitable north so they could return home with the wages they had saved, hoping for a better life in the old country. They were pompous and aloof from their trader tribesmen, treating them as inferior beings and often even forbidding them access to the trade room, forcing them to select their goods through a window.⁴⁵ With little competition, they were able to continue their high-handed methods and gain considerable profit. The traders of HBC saw no need to change their ways.

Many of the working men at HBC posts were Orkneymen, rugged men from the small islands north of Scotland, considered to be inured to hard work in wintry conditions very similar to those of Hudson Bay. The saying in the Orkneys was that “their sons moved to Hudson Bay to get warm.”⁴⁶ They signed on to the Company for free room and board, so that upon returning home with their payment intact, they could set themselves up for better lives.

The French continued their trade. Everything north and west of their settlements on the St. Lawrence was considered by the French as belonging to France, both by charter and because the French explored and settled the area. The Council of New France, authorized by Cardinal Richelieu, had sent a ship into “North Bay” (Hudson’s Bay), to take possession of the Bay. That record is dated August 26, 1656.⁴⁷ The English also considered their claim to be righteous. Violence ensued with success to first one then the other until 1697. In that year with the Treaty of Ryswick, England recognized France’s ownership of Hudson Bay. In 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht returned ownership of Hudson Bay to England and the Company reestablished its posts on Hudson Bay. It must be noted that neither treaty fixed distinct boundaries.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Pritchett, *The Red River Valley*, 10.

⁴⁶ Newman, *Caesars of the Wilderness*, 236.

⁴¹ Pritchett, *The Red River Valley*, 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

Though Radisson and Groseilliers were the men who brought fur trading to the notice of the English, there was a certain reluctance to put complete trust in the Frenchmen. Especially suspicious was Charles Bayly, the fanatical Quaker the king had freed from the Tower of London, in 1669, on condition that he leave the country and take the position of overseas governor of the Company. It was Bayly who established posts on the shores of Hudson Bay and worked out HBC's factory system.⁴⁹ Bayly hated the French and was determined to be rid of Radisson and Groseilliers. By the end of 1675, they had both left the Company and the Bay area. Radisson even returned to England for a visit with his wife, the daughter of Sir John Kirke, one of the original eighteen investors.⁵⁰ Both Radisson and Groseilliers joined a rival group, *La Compagnie du Nord*, which had been formed in Quebec and, by 1682 they were back on Hudson Bay. After confronting a group of New Englanders who were trying to capitalize on the northern fur trade, they advanced to meet the English. In 1683, Radisson took first Port Nelson, then Fort Bourbon, his own fort, taking the governor prisoner.⁵¹ When Radisson and Groseilliers reached Montreal they were taxed heavily on the furs they brought back, some of which they had taken from their rivals, the HBC. "Amazingly—within a year—the HBC offered to rehire both des Groseilliers and Radisson."⁵² Groseilliers returned home to Quebec. Radisson rejoined HBC and went on to become the superintendent and director of trade, but his return to HBC tagged him a traitor to France. Even the company he had joined and helped progress, *La Compagnie du Nord*, was against him.

The workhorses of the Canadian fur trade were the *coureurs de bois* and the *voyageurs*. At home on the rivers and familiar with the inland waterways they transported men, equipment,

⁴⁹ Andra-Warner, *Hudson's Bay Company Adventures*, 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 47.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 56.

⁵² *Ibid*, 58.

and their precious furs between the trading posts and Montreal. The birch bark canoe was the only means of transportation between the northwest and the ports of the east.

The *coureurs de bois*, considered savage-like renegades trading illegally, were of French and First Nations heritage, which made them excellent river men. It was believed that “The English were always far better seamen than the French but the latter, once the dash of Indian blood was added, far excelled as a river man and a canoe man.”⁵³ The natives had interconnected the waterways with overland portages and the French traders followed these paths. The French settlers had always depended on the waterways for transportation, while the English settlers preferred the overland routes. Travelling the many waterways and portages that linked the rivers enabled these hardy men to penetrate inland much more easily than fighting the forests and mountains to forge overland trails. French explorations quickly progressed further west and south. The *coureurs de bois* plied the fur trade on their own and sold their furs to the highest bidder. They set themselves up and bought their own equipment, though they might sell their services to a seller. They operated without licenses and went where they pleased. They often lived among the tribesmen, taking native wives and were regarded by their opponents as having no consciences or compunction about doing whatever it took to get money.

Voyageurs thought themselves better than the *coureurs de bois*. They were considered legitimate fur traders. They were respected as a better class of waterman; their “uncanny mastery of birch canoe navigation was a revelation even to Indians.”⁵⁴ *Voyageurs* were sponsored by one of the many merchant companies based in Montreal, with the equivalent of work permits for a season.

⁵³ Van Diver, *The North West Company*, 60.

⁵⁴ Charles M. Gates, Ed, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1965), 5.

Life for the *voyageurs* was never easy. They lived and slept outside, with minimal shelter from storms or cold. They were always on the move, needing to find the next parcel of goods for trade to satisfy the bosses in Montreal. They were virtual slaves to the Company, to the point that by 1791, it was said “900 employees of the Company owed it more than the wages of ten or fifteen year’s engagement.”⁵⁵ The *voyageurs* were vital to the running of the fur trade, and they were treated very well for their skill and knowledge of the waters they traversed, but they would never become a partner nor anything but the watermen that they were. They left Montreal as soon as the winter ice was gone, though they would often have to break ice before leaving at dawn each morning. No matter how cold the water, someone would have to jump out and steady the boat each time they stopped, for meals, or at one of the thirty-six portages between Lachine and Georgian Bay.⁵⁶ They would travel until almost dark, their only break when a *pipe* was called and they shipped their paddles for a smoke. They would measure their day’s journey by the number of *pipes* smoked.⁵⁷ A good *voyageur* could paddle forty strokes a minute maintaining that pace for the day, aside from meal breaks and the short *pipes*.⁵⁸

Occasionally, they would stage a race on a wide-open stretch of water such as Lake Winnipeg. During such races, they might reach speeds up to sixty-five strokes per minute, which speed might be maintained until exhaustion forced a stop. Such events were not common occurrences. Any voyageur that played a musical instrument was encouraged to bring it along to enliven the nightly campfires. The musical interludes were the only entertainment on the long journey and the musician would be paid extra for this skill.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts*, 25.

⁵⁶ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 43.

⁵⁹ From CTV: *History Makers: The Lord of the North*, (Alexander Mackenzie). Aired January 19, 2013.

A major fort had been built at Grande Portage on Lake Superior as a base from which they could explore and easily conduct their furs back to Montreal. Grand Portage is at the northeast corner of Minnesota, near Ontario, and at the beginning of a long portage from the Great Lakes.

There were two classes of *voyageurs*. One class of *voyageur* would paddle from Montreal to Grand Portage, and then turn around for the trip back to Montreal. Because they only knew this small part of the route they were referred to either as ‘come and go’ men or more snidely as *manguers de lard* or pork-eaters. The old hands who went the rest of the route and spent the winters in the west were known as *hivernants* or winterers.⁶⁰

Voyageurs worked in parties, some small and others were quite large. Carolyn Podruchny describes their recruitment by agents who may well have been former *voyageurs* on behalf of Montreal companies. The agent might recruit from his own parish or village, so the *voyageurs* would be known to each other and work well together. The agent would be stationed in Montreal during the winter and hope to fulfill his commissions before the trade season started. If not enough *voyageurs* had been hired, the agent would have to go out to the major trading posts in hope of finding men who willing to take on the job. The agent would be paid a commission for each man hired. Podruchny gives the example of James Frobisher who paid his agent “five shillings for everyman he hired to ‘come and go’ (pork-eaters), one guinea for each winterer.”⁶¹

These early fur traders were “rampaging free enterprisers of the North American frontier” who worked for themselves and proved themselves able to withstand whatever conditions came their way. They “followed their gutsy instincts, convinced that their unorthodox methods were

⁶⁰ Gates, *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 6.

⁶¹ Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2006), 32.

the only right way of doing things.”⁶² The Hudson’s Bay Company contemptuously referred to them as “pedlars, thieves and interlopers” in part as soubriquet for the difference in their attitudes to trade.⁶³ The traders, who worked for the various smaller companies were rugged and knowledgeable individuals who went into the Indian encampments with their trade goods. They then had to make their way back to the few posts that would accept the furs and trade for the supplies needed to survive the coming winter. The furs were sent by canoe to Montreal then taken by ship down the St. Lawrence and across the Atlantic to Europe, usually to England though many did go to France. The ‘Pedlars’ went where the furs were; they did not wait for them to be brought to them.

Early Explorations

The early traders who organized the expeditions into the northern plains were not just traders. Almost by accident, in the quest for furs, they became some of the greatest explorers the northwest would ever know. The names of some of them are legendary, with rivers, territories and other landmarks bearing their names. Their first job was to trade for the furs which would be sent to Europe for resale. But the profit margin would grow if the acquisition costs of the furs were reduced. To that end, exploration of the lands might show an easier and faster route back to the posts. Time would be saved and expenses would be smaller. Also, as the traders learned from the natives about living in this seemingly inhospitable land, they could reduce expenses by using native methods of living and eating.

One of the earliest explorations by the Hudson’s Bay Company was led by a native woman who had found her way to the post at York. The chief factor sent a party, led by Thanadelthur, out to broker a peace between the Cree and Chipewyan. She was a native of a far

⁶² Newman, *Caesars of the Wilderness*, xvii.

⁶³ Pritchett, *Red River Fur Trade*, 402.

northern tribe who had been enslaved by a rival tribe, but managed to escape to a Hudson's Bay fort. She was knowledgeable about the territory and the tensions between the rival tribes. After the peace, a fort was built at Churchill, closer to the natives' homelands.

La Vérendrye

Coueurs de bois had long used the point where the Kaministiquia River emptied into Lake Superior as a stopping point. Fur trade had been carried on in the area from the 1650s. After the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company, Indian traders had to travel past Lake Nipigon to reach the Albany River and up to the posts on Hudson Bay. In 1717 a post was established on Lake Nipigon by the French traders to disrupt the Indian route to the Hudson Bay posts. Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Vérendrye, was sent in 1727 to command the posts on Lake Nipigon. A great outdoorsman, adventurer and "a born explorer"⁶⁴ La Vérendrye embraced the opportunities that life at the edge of French civilization offered. He listened to the Indians talk about a great river flowing into the sea. Others had determined that the route lay through the lands of the Sioux, but that was too dangerous; the Sioux were a fighting tribe. La Vérendrye planned to go north.

In 1731, Sieur de la Vérendrye, with his three oldest sons and his nephew, was given permission to explore the lands from where the traders returned each year with such magnificent furs. He was 46 years old and his sons were Jean-Baptiste aged 18, Pierre 17, and François 16. His passion was the outdoors, and he hoped that his explorations would become a source of revenue, especially if he could find the fabled overland route to the Pacific. But permission from the King of France was not accompanied by any funds to outfit the expedition. Instead

⁶⁴ Lawrence J. Burpee, Ed. *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier De Varennes De La Vérendrye And His Sons* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1927), 8.

Vérendrye was given the monopoly to the fur-trade,⁶⁵ the profits of which would have to cover his expenses. He was able to convince a party of Montreal merchants to advance him the equipment he needed for a large consideration of future profits he might gain. Obviously, fur trading would have to take precedence over exploration and progress on that front would be painstakingly slow and frustrating.

La Vérendrye and his party got as far as the portage at Rainy Lake, which connects the tributaries of Lake Superior with those of Lake Winnipeg. It was too late in the year for the party to make the return journey so they spent the winter in a post they named Fort Saint Pierre. It was from here that, in 1732, he encouraged the natives from Lake Winnipeg to trade with him at Fort St. Charles at Lake of the Woods. The area of Fort St. Charles is now known as the North-West Angle, the only place in the lower 48 United States which is north of the 49th parallel, and is accessible only by boat, by air or by car through Manitoba, or in winter by ice-road.

La Vérendrye was the first white man to explore the northern plains. Intent on expanding his territory, in 1733 he sent his second son, Pierre, to the mouth of the Red River to establish a post there. In 1734, *Fort Maurepas*, named for the French Minister of the Colonies, was built near the mouth of the Red River. That same year, when La Vérendrye returned from meeting with the Governor in Quebec, he brought his youngest son, Louis-Joseph back to Fort St. Charles. In 1736, his nephew La Jemeraye died and his oldest son Jean-Baptiste, with his party of men were killed by the Sioux on an island in Lake of the Woods. Losing “his two most capable and experienced lieutenants,” was difficult for him.⁶⁶ The loss of two very experienced

⁶⁵ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁶ Burpee, *Journals and Letters of ...La Vérendrye*, 10.

men, along with the ongoing struggle to keep peace with the tribes and the constant relentless details of the fur-trade, meant that progress in his explorations was very slow.

In 1737 at the Forks of the Assiniboine, La Vérendrye “harangued the Indians” until they agreed to trade with him.⁶⁷ He extolled the advantages of trading with him rather than the English: “they give you no credit; they do not allow you inside their fort; you cannot choose the merchandise you want, they reject some of your skins, which becomes a dead loss to you after you have had great trouble in carrying them to their post.”⁶⁸ Exploring south and north, he built numerous posts dominating Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis.

In 1738, La Vérendrye chose to build *Fort la Reine* at the present Portage la Prairie, on the site of the earlier *Fort St. Pierre* because it was here that the Indians passed north to Lake Manitoba, through Lakes Manitoba, and Winnipegosis, across to Cedar Lake before starting the canoe voyage to York and the English trading posts. Morden, Manitoba boasts that La Vérendrye, with his party of fifty, while on their way to the Missouri River, passed near the site where that city sits, camping overnight at Calf Mountain.⁶⁹ La Vérendrye sent his son in 1739 to try “to prevent the Indians from going to the English.”⁷⁰ *Fort Rouge* was abandoned in 1739 as it was no longer needed after *Fort la Reine* was built. *Fort Maurepas* on the Red River was moved that same year to the mouth of the Winnipeg River. In 1747, the younger Pierre found both forts had been destroyed by Indians. However, in a paper presented to the Manitoba Historical Society in 1926, Mr. C. N. Bell, gave, as a personal opinion, the view that no post existed south of the Assiniboine.⁷¹ He postulates that because La Verendrye and his sons were so specific in their accounts of establishing posts around Lake Winnipeg, that there would have

⁶⁷ E.E Rich, *Hudson’s Bay Company, Volume I: 1670-1763*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 520.

⁶⁸ Innes, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 94.

⁶⁹ www.mordenmb.com, retrieved Nov. 2012.

⁷⁰ Innes, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 93.

⁷¹ Charles N. Bell, *Early Occupation by Fur Traders of the Upper Red River and Northern Minnesota*, 1926, 3.

been a definite record of one on the Upper Red River, if such a post had existed. Much of Bell's information on fur traders along the Red River is taken from the journals of Alexander Henry the Younger who was in charge of Northwest Company operations on the Upper Red River from 1800 to 1808.⁷² Bell notes that Alexander Henry the Elder did follow La Vérendrye's route as far as Lake Winnipeg, then continued on to the Athabasca region.

Fort Bourbon was built in 1742 on the west side of Cedar Lake with the intent of intercepting the natives travelling to the English trading posts. With the natives no longer needing to spend the summer canoeing to Hudson Bay, this ploy severely reduced trade to the Company.⁷³

La Vérendrye sent his son the Chevalier (originally thought to be Pierre, the oldest surviving son, but further evidence appears to show that Francois was known as the Chevalier, though the proof is not definitive⁷⁴) on an expedition to seek out the natives further to the west known as the '*Ouachipouennes*' or the Mandans.⁷⁵ By October 1778, they had reached the Missouri River. The Chevalier had to return to Fort La Reine for supplies, leaving some of his men behind in the hopes that they would learn the Mandan language. Hearing about a salt lake to the west, La Vérendrye sent his son to investigate, but Pierre returned the next summer without success. In 1742, both sons returned to the Mandan villages and set out with a party of natives to explore further. They crossed the area "bounded on the north by the Missouri and on the south by the Black Hills, saw the Bad Lands."⁷⁶ By June 1, 1743 Pierre stood at the foot of the Rockies. A howling blizzard drove the party back to camp, ending further exploration in the

⁷² Lauren W. Ritterbush, "Fur Trade Posts at Pembina" in *North Dakota History*, v.59 no.1 1992, 17.

⁷³ Charles N. Bell, *Henry Kelsey's Journal*, 12.

⁷⁴ Burpee, *Journals and Letters of La Vérendrye*, 13.

⁷⁵ Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870: Volume I*, 519.

⁷⁶ Van Diver, *The Fur Trade and Early Western Exploration*, 59.

area. The younger La Vérendrye had reached the foot of the Rockies a full decade before Daniel Boone found his way into Kentucky.⁷⁷

La Vérendrye and his sons, desperate to increase their revenues and insistent that the trade in furs was economically vital to the region “had systematically organized the fur trade of the Northwest”.⁷⁸ Posts were established around Lake Winnipeg, trails from Lake Superior had been improved with better access for food supplies, and arrangements made to ease financial settlements. With trade with the Cree and Assiniboine flourishing, the French were a real threat to the Hudson’s Bay Company. LaVérendrye’s posts ranged in a line: from Lake Superior to the foothills of the Rockies, then over lands where Huron, Ottawa, Sioux, Assiniboine, and dozens of other tribes dwelt.⁷⁹

Financial difficulties forced La Vérendrye to abandon some of his forts, including Fort Maurepas in 1742 with the result that the First Nations were bringing their trade to the Hudson’s Bay Company.⁸⁰ In fact, after la Vérendrye and his sons were deposed by their sponsors in Montreal, succeeding *Canadien* traders were unable to maintain their successes. La Vérendrye had managed to keep peace with the native tribes, but the traders who followed had neither the experience nor the commitment to placate the natives. This resulted in several Indian skirmishes which destroyed some posts. Lacking the vigor and vision of la Vérendryes, the *Canadien* traders who followed blamed their lack of progress on the belief “that the Indians would always remain turbulent and independent as long as they had English posts at the Bay to which they could trade.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid, 59.

⁷⁸ Innes, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 99.

⁷⁹ Walter O’Meara, *Daughters of the Country*: 6.

⁸⁰ Rich, *Hudson’s Bay Company: Volume I*, 523.

⁸¹ Ibid, 525.

Because the *Canadien* traders were successfully poaching on the Hudson's Bay Company trade, the HBC Governors felt threatened. Back in England, the Company was renewing its charter and having to justify itself. They voted to expand trade and venture away from Hudson Bay and James Bay in response to the incursions made on the Company trade by the Canadian traders and, later, the formation of the NorthWest Company.

Henry Kelsey was a Hudson's Bay man who for two years traveled across the northern prairies, the first man to explore that part of the country. In 1690, after being disciplined for flouting the strictness at Fort Nelson, he had climbed the walls and fled to live with the natives. It is not known where he spent the intervening time until early the next spring when word was brought to Fort Nelson that if Kelsey was given a pardon, he would be willing to explore further inland. Gladly Kelsey was outfitted and sent off on July 15, 1691.⁸² Agnes Laut suggests that his travels may have taken him five hundred miles west to the barren lands around Reindeer Lake. He was the first man to bring back stories of the great buffalo herds to be found on the plains. He met Mandan tribes either near the Assiniboine River or the South Saskatchewan River.⁸³ On his return he was instantly promoted, though he first had to battle with the commander over permitting his new Indian wife to accompany him into a British fortification which did not permit entry of natives.⁸⁴

Anthony Henday was another Hudson's Bay trader who, in 1754 traveled from York Factory to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, meeting with Blackfoot tribes. He tried to

⁸² Agnes Laut, *The Adventurers of England*, (NY, Macmillan Co, 1921), 43.

⁸³ Hearne, Samuel, *A Journey From Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean in the Years 1769, 1770, 1771, and 1772* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1911), 12.

⁸⁴ O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country*, 241.

persuade them to take their furs to the Hudson's Bay posts instead of selling them to the French who had already been in the area.⁸⁵

War between Britain and France divided the North American continent in the mid-eighteenth century and native tribes aligned themselves with one or the other nation. Travel between the colonies in the east and the fur-traders and their trading tribes became more dangerous and the fur-trade languished. However, some employees of the Hudson's Bay Company were encouraged to take exploratory journeys into the northwest.

Early in the 18th century, Indians had brought samples of copper to the Hudson's Bay post. In 1719, two ships set out to find the mines that were assured to be north of Churchill. Unfortunately the party disappeared. Other parties searched but were not successful and by midcentury, the search had ended. **Samuel Hearne**, who had joined the Royal Navy at the age of 12 and had seen action during the Seven Years War, joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1766. At the ripe old age of 24 he was sent out to look for a northwest passage and the storied copper mines. From his base at Churchill, he set out three times before he finally reached Coppermine River in July 1771, becoming the first European to reach the Arctic Ocean overland. In 1774 he built Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River, the first HBC post away from the Bay. As Tyrell states in his introduction to the printing of Hearne's journal, "It was he who finally set at rest the question of a north-west passage by sea to China and the Orient, south of the mouth of the Coppermine River."⁸⁶ Tyrell further avows that Hearne's journal is valuable as "an accurate, sympathetic and patently truthful"⁸⁷ record of how the Chippewa lived at that time.

David Thompson had joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1783, at the age of thirteen, for a seven year apprenticeship. Four years later he badly fractured his leg in an accident and

⁸⁵ Hearne, *A Journey From Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*, 12.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 16.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 17.

spent the several months of his recovery with the Hudson's Bay official surveyor, learning mathematics, astronomy, and surveying. When his apprenticeship was nearing the end of the contract, he asked for a sextant and some other pieces of navigational instruments. He was sent the equipment he asked for and signed to a new contract for three years.

Thompson kept careful records of the weather, native customs, plants, and animals, and became a surveyor of the land, exploring the area between the Churchill River and eastern Lake Athabasca. Thompson spent one year in Churchill, where he met Samuel Hearne. During that year he copied parts of Hearne's journal,⁸⁸ which may well have encouraged him to his explorations of the area. Thompson travelled "well over nine thousand miles of inland waterways, and surveyed some three thousand"⁸⁹ devising a route that would save the Company much time and effort. However, he received only grudging acknowledgement of his achievements, and no reward from the Company. He spent fourteen years in service to the Company, dreaming of exploration, but discouraged at every turn. In 1796, he was named "Master to the Northward"⁹⁰ which would mean management of a successful fur trade post. Unwilling to discontinue his surveying he looked for other options. He had met and liked Alexander Fraser, so, in July 1797 he was welcomed by the North West Company at Grand Portage.

Thompson's first duty for the new firm was to determine which North West Company outposts were affected by the imposition of the Jay treaty; that is which posts were on American soil. "By canoe, on foot, on horseback and by snowshoe he travelled four thousand miles during the next year."⁹¹ He followed the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, cut across to the Missouri then

⁸⁸ Ibid, 7.

⁸⁹ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 107.

⁹⁰ <http://www2.hbc.com/hbcheritage/history/people/explorers/article.asp?article=39>.

⁹¹ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 109.

back, circling Lake Superior, before arriving back at Grand Portage a year later. This was the first mapping of the northern plains. Thanks to his work, the North West Company now knew exactly where their posts lay and he had explored and gained new territory in Mandan country.

In 1799, at the age of twenty-nine, Thompson married Charlotte, the thirteen-year-old daughter of trader Patrick Small and his Cree wife. They had thirteen children and the family went with him on most of his journeys. They were married for fifty-eight years and died three months apart.

After several years as a trader in different posts in Alberta, and after Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific, Thompson was sent, in 1804, to find a route to the Pacific, so that the North West Company might also share the wealth of trade in that area. He finally reached the Pacific, with his family in tow, in July 1811, the first man to cross the continent overland. "I have fully completed the survey of this part of North America from sea to sea."⁹² He had also surveyed the mighty Columbia River, but unfortunately Astor's Pacific Fur Company had arrived at the mouth three months before him and claimed Astoria for the Americans. On arrival back at NWC headquarters in July 1812, he resigned his partnership and, surveying the north shore of Lake Superior as he travelled, he arrived in Montreal in the fall. He was 42 years old and it is estimated that he had travelled 1.9 million square miles of wilderness. The NW Company voted that he should have his share of the profits for the next three years and one hundred pounds which would enable him to finish his charts and send them to the Company.

The resultant map that Thompson drew distinctly showed the extent of the North West Company in the entire region west of Lake Superior. So accurate was his survey of the country

⁹² Ibid, 185.

that much of it remained in use for more than a hundred years. He has been labeled “perhaps the finest land geographer the world has ever known.”⁹³

Thompson was also an ardent naturalist, recording many natural phenomena, such as meteor showers (the aboriginals named him The Man Who Looks at Stars)⁹⁴ and noticed that snow blindness afflicted blue-eyed people more than those with darker eyes.

His work was never fully recognized by the Hudson’s Bay Company and he died in poverty in 1857.

Alexander Mackenzie was one of the first to dream of new territories. He was followed by McTavish’s nephew Duncan M’Gillivray, who also dreamed of the far west. Mackenzie originally joined a Montreal fur company which, in 1787, merged with the North West Company and he was sent to the Athabasca District, the junior to Peter Pond. From Pond he learned how to live in the northwest, and Pond helped Mackenzie prepare for his explorations. In 1789 he set out from Great Slave Lake, looking for a route to the Pacific to ease the cost of transporting furs overland to Montreal. Unfortunately, his “River Disappointment” now known as the Mackenzie River, ended in the Arctic Ocean.⁹⁵ In 1793 he again attempted to find a fur waterway to the Pacific. He did make his way via the Bella Coola River to the Pacific overland, arriving July 22nd 1793, the first white man to do so, and 10 years before Lewis and Clark, but it was not the easier, cheaper route that he had hoped. He found “the great fur fields on the Pacific coast,”⁹⁶ but his attempt to persuade Governor Simcoe that a joint venture between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company to the Pacific, cutting out the journey to Montreal, was unsuccessful. In 1799 Mackenzie returned to England where he published his ‘Voyages’ and

⁹³ O’Meara, Walter, *Daughters of the Country*, 4.

⁹⁴ [Hbc Heritage | David Thompson](#)

⁹⁵ Morton, *The North West Company*, 20

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

received a knighthood. In 1801, he attempted to travel the Columbia, but was unable to finish. The next year he became an agent and later, as a president in the Company, he encouraged explorations to the Pacific. Although Mackenzie had reached the Pacific overland in 1799, it was under M'Gillivray's aegis that, in 1806-1807, **Simon Fraser** explored the river that today bears his name, and that David Thompson followed the Columbia to its mouth in 1811. But before they got that far, Thompson and Mackenzie between them, "explored the Red and Assiniboine rivers to their headwaters, traced the entire course of the Saskatchewan; they discovered the Frog and Methye portages which brought them to the northwest and to the Arctic."⁹⁷ They explored the Churchill, Athabasca and Peace Rivers to their sources and opened up the plains to the far north. This was the start of the explorations to open up the North and West of the North American continent.

⁹⁷ Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading*, 24.

FUR TRADE WARS

The French and Indian War is the American name given to the conflict between France and Great Britain which was fought in North America between 1754 and 1763. In 1756 war between the two countries escalated world-wide and is generally referred to as the Seven Years War. French-Canadians know it as *La Guerre de la Conquête*.

After Britain's victory ended the Seven Years War (1756-1763), the Treaty of Paris brought British rule to Canada. The route between Montreal and Michilimackinac was now safe from attack and the fur trade started up again, in a rush. The intent was for the *Canadiens* to go further west than the Hudson's Bay Company post and thereby gain a hold on trade. While still ignoring many of the limitations imposed by a government bound to protect the English Company, the *Canadiens* did try to resolve the problem legally. Restrictions seemed to be easing when, in 1768, the government abdicated responsibility for control of trade with the First Nations. In the final event, it did not want to deal with the huge financial burden associated with legislation.

The *Canadiens* followed the trails set out by the old French traders who were now reduced to subordinates, and would never be admitted as partners in the trade that they had initiated. Partnerships were formed among the traders, one of which was that of Forest Oakes and Charles Boyer who occupied a post on the Red River—probably in the immediate neighborhood of Dynevor, Manitoba, about three miles north of Selkirk—during 1766-68. Pine Fort was built in 1768.⁹⁸ In 1770, Isaac Todd, James McGill (founder of McGill University) and Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher went to the Red River and established Lake Post, between Nettley Creek and Selkirk, probably at the Dynevor site.⁹⁹ Todd and McGill sent Thomas Corry

⁹⁸ Morton, *A History of the Canadian West*, 269.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 271.

to Cedar Lake where he set up a post on the route from Lake Winnipegosis and York Factory near the site that had been La Vérendrye's Fort Bourbon.

Many of the French traders had also been waiting to resume their trade in furs. Maurice Blondeau had reached the northern plains around 1752. By 1766, he was settled in a fort on the Assiniboine at La Reine. There were other posts on the Assiniboine, notably at Fort Dauphin and Francois le Blanc was on Lake Winnipeg. Alexander Henry (the Elder) was a New England merchant who came to Montreal to make his fortune, along with other English and United Empire Loyalist colonials who had been invited to settle by the Canadian government. At Lake Winnipeg, Henry met Peter Pond, who had arrived there in 1768, and the trader brothers of Benjamin, Martin and John Frobisher. Henry and the Frobisher brothers spent the winter of 1775-1776 at Beaver Lake, after which Henry travelled with some Assiniboine to Fort des Prairies and a bit further west before returning to Beaver Lake.¹⁰⁰

By 1778, Peter Pond had been further west than any white man had previously ventured. He wintered with the local tribes, mostly Chippewa and Cree. He was rewarded with thousands of the best beaver skins he had ever seen, so many that he had to stash some until his return the next year. He was also introduced to pemmican, a food substance for long-distance travelers. Trying to take enough food for the long trips had always been a problem, and there was no guarantee that they would find food or be able to trade for enough to see the trip through. Many explorers had had to turn back when food ran low. Pemmican was made by drying strips of buffalo meat in the sun, then pounding it into a powder on a buffalo hide. It was mixed with equal parts of buffalo grease and flavored with local berries. It could be eaten raw, broiled over a fire, or used to make stew or chowder. Packed into buffalo hide bags, it was the perfect travel food for the *voyageurs* who always had to be conscious of the weight they carried.

¹⁰⁰ Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts*, 19.

Pond drew the first map that was made of the northwest.¹⁰¹ His map of 1785 showed the Mackenzie basin and the river that he intended to follow, but he was unable to carry out his plan and Alexander Mackenzie would be the man that followed the river that carries his name. Peter Pond later became one of the original stockholders of the infant Northwest Company in 1787, holding twenty shares which he sold before 1790 to William McGillivray for £800.

Until the traders pushed so far north-west, the *voyageurs* had been able to make one trip in a single season, returning with their cargo of furs, but as explorations ventured further, it became apparent that stations would have to be built to accommodate traders on trips that took more than a year. The post was built at Grand Portage on the west shore of Lake Superior, and more *voyageurs* hired to make the trip west from that point. Men were required to operate the posts and keep track of the furs and supplies. Costs were escalating. Competition was expensive. Politics intruded. In 1778, the governor in Quebec City, the center of government, issued the fur licenses too late to allow the return trip to be completed before the rivers froze over. There was very little merchandise to send to England, and economic depression threatened. There were fears that no licenses would be issued the following year, for the governor felt “that only by such restrictions could he ensure that no goods would reach the (American) rebels.”¹⁰² Disaster for Montreal loomed. The traders made their preparations, as usual, but by the time the governor released the licenses, there was insufficient time to allow goods to be sent to the posts in the interior for the winter of 1779-1780. When the first canoes returned to Montreal in September, merchants were desperate and many had to quit the business, with some returning to England.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 37.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 16.

The North West Company 1779-1821

The North West Company never was a proper company in the modern sense; it never had a charter.¹⁰³ Rather “it was a partnership among a group of individuals, voluntarily maintained and claiming rights in the fur trade by virtue of discovery and of priority in trade.”¹⁰⁴ Fur was the major industry of North America, and the only one in Quebec. For the French, the fur trade was their chance to make it in the new world. Unlike the men who went before them, the North West Company was now known as a Company of Adventurers. Nor were they committed to the mindset that characterized the Hudson’s Bay Company: “single-minded corporate principles designed to maximize dividends, minimize personal profiles and perpetuate the powers of the royally chartered monopoly.”¹⁰⁵ In fact, apart from the fact that they traded with the First Nations, especially for furs, the North West Company was the complete antithesis of their competitors.

Several individual traders in Montreal met to form a joint-stock company, a non-chartered partnership, to pool resources and protect their interests. They also would have a lobbying voice in government, both to ameliorate the conditions under which they traded and to temper the restrictions under which they were forced to trade.¹⁰⁶ They would not continue to compete amongst themselves, but together they might be able to compete successfully against the Hudson’s Bay Company. The majority of partners and their supervising employees were Scottish Highlanders. The working men were generally *Canadiens* either of French descent or *Métis*, descended from traders and their First Nations women. The Scots were descended either from officers who had come to Canada with the British army, or families who had immigrated

¹⁰³ Ibid, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Pritchett, *The Red River Valley*, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Newman, *Caesars of the Wilderness*, xvi.

¹⁰⁶ <http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/nwc/history/06.htm> retrieved 6/12/10.

when the clans had been disrupted by the British. They were strongly clannish and not at all intimidated by the western wilderness. The clannishness meant that two families, McTavishes and McGillivrays dominated NWC, which both strengthened the solidarity of the company, but made innovation almost impossible and also made it difficult for others to become influential in the Company.

The first agreement, in 1779, was divided into 16 shares with seven partners holding two shares and two others each holding one share. Over the years, the rosters of partners would change and new agreements were made, but it remained an association of traders working together. The company flag flew for the first time in 1780.¹⁰⁷ The company's "official motto eschewed Latin subtleties, encapsulating its hopes in a one-word, no-nonsense exclamation: PERSEVERANCE."¹⁰⁸ Over the time of NWC's dominance, any and all competition was almost annihilated before being incorporated into the Company.

The NW Company grew to dominate the fur trade and stayed on top for almost four decades. Within twenty years, they controlled 78 percent of Canadian fur sales.¹⁰⁹ Simply by right of possession, the Nor'westers covered more land than Rupert's Land, which was under the HBC charter. While HBC factors stayed in their forts around Hudson's Bay and enjoyed cheaper and easier shipping through the Bay to Europe, the Nor'Westers traveled inland, on foot, by canoe or by dogsled. The Nor'Westers were constantly in motion, moving further inland as the fur stocks declined. The members ruled their own destinies and shareholders reaped rich rewards. Clerks earned yearly dividends and were in a position to rise in the company, even to partner. Out in the field, the traders in the field or the 'wintering partners' were owners as well as operators, able to formulate their own policies to increase revenues. By contrast, even the

¹⁰⁷ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Newman, *Caesars of the Wilderness*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

most highly regarded HBC factor was paid a miserly, scheduled wage and was bound to far-away investors who knew nothing of how he lived or what his work really involved. The North West Company thrived because of its organization, built on unity and co-ordination.¹¹⁰ Because each man was vested in the company, they supported each other, and even though they shipped their furs by the more expensive overland route to Montreal, they were able to compete against the older HBC, and even proved to be a threat that would cause HBC to rethink its strategy. As partners retired from the NWC, they were required to divest themselves of their stock in the company to younger members. This kept the working members interested in and for the company. All members knew the trade and conditions of the job, and had the same tales to relate. There was camaraderie among the Nor'Westers that was not possible for HBC employees who were contracted to investors only involved financially and with no working knowledge of the factor's life.

The Treaty of Versailles in 1783 was a slap to the Nor'Westers. The Quebec Act of 1774 had put the rich Ohio Valley, as well as much of Ontario, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and parts of Minnesota in Canadian territory. Now Ohio and all their western posts were in American hands. The boundary would indeed complicate their lives, so they appealed to Parliament for help against a treaty crafted in another world, by persons who neither knew, nor cared for, the interests of the natives or the traders.

In 1783-1784, Simon McTavish and the Frobisher brothers formalized a long-term agreement with other traders under the North West Company name. Simon McTavish, at the young age of twenty-five, was already a knowledgeable and trusted trader in Montreal. He had been in the business for several years, but when he and others joined in partnership, none of them

¹¹⁰ Morton, *The North West Company*, 14.

had much capital. Their investment was “made up largely of trade goods and canoes.”¹¹¹

However a larger company with some of the more prominent traders behind the name, the new Company was able to get loans to outfit their companies for the journey. They were also able to lease fur-trading rights to other areas.

McTavish would be the power behind the North West Company for almost thirty years. Ambitious and arrogant, he would also alienate many partners and his biggest rival would be a man who had been one of his foremost partners for several years. Alexander Mackenzie would later leave to develop the New North West Company, known as the XY Company; he would be a very worthy rival to his former partner.

Some traders had formed another company, The Pangman Company,¹¹² in 1784, but by 1787, after years “of bitter and ruinous competition,”¹¹³ they merged with the North West Company to form “the first joint-stock company in Canada and probably on the continent.”¹¹⁴ The North West name derived from the impressions by the traders that the place to go for the best furs was beyond the old French base at Michilimakinac into Lake Superior and on Lake Winnipeg, “to the North West.”¹¹⁵ The main headquarters for the traders to the west had originally been, in 1766, at Michilimakinac. This was the ideal post, for food was available and abundant: fish from the lake and corn grown by the First Nations tribes in the area. “The Indian corn, when mixed with a little fish or fat, afforded a light and sustaining diet for the crews of the canoes.”¹¹⁶ The post moved to Grand Portage in 1767 while the post at Michilimakinac

¹¹¹ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 20.

¹¹² Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts*, 23.

¹¹³ Pritchett, “Red River Fur Trade”, *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 403.

¹¹⁴ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Morton, Arthur, *The North West Company*, 2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

remained the center for those traders “who were not attached to the North West Company, both before and after its formation.”¹¹⁷

The young Scot, Peter Grant joined the fledging North West Company in 1784 and was sent west. He established the first North West post on the lower Red River at Pembina, before he was sent to Red Lake in 1789.¹¹⁸ Around 1793 Grant built a small seasonal post on the east side of the Red River, near present-day St. Vincent, Minnesota, with the intent of drawing the Chippewa westward from the woodlands onto the prairie. This is now considered to be “the first establishment ever built on the Red River.”¹¹⁹ About the same time, the early 1790s, Joseph Réaume another independent trader who eventually worked with the North West Company, also traded around Pembina. Other traders who may have traded at Pembina in the 1790s included Frederick Schutz (the Soldier). He and another man, Desmarais, arrived at the Forks of the Assiniboine from Pembina in May 1794.

The Chippewa had a long history of dependence on European trade goods, and they followed the trail for furs, even though it meant confronting the Sioux.¹²⁰ That they were willing to advance into Sioux territory showed the extent of that dependence. The Chippewa were adapting from a woodland habitat into the mode of the prairie. Their fish and wild rice diet evolved into life dictated by bison. They obtained horses and moved more freely, becoming more independent. Even their religious rites changed from Chippewa Midewiwin¹²¹ (Medicine Lodge) society to the Sun Dance of the plains. Gregory Camp speculates “the Chippewas underwent a significant psychological transformation ... [F]rom the sometimes introverted

¹¹⁷ Voorhuis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts*, 19.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?BioId=37535&query=grant> Retrieved 10/19/12.

¹¹⁹ Ritterbush, *Fur Trade Posts at Pembina*, 17.

¹²⁰ Camp, Gregory, “The Chippewa Fur Trade in the Red River Valley of the North, 1790-1830” in *The Fur Trade in North Dakota* (Bismarck: State Historical Society of ND, 1990) 35.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 37.

forest-dwellers,... the Plains Chippewas supposedly evolved into the self-confident hunters and trappers of the Red River Valley.”¹²² Unfortunately the post continued to suffer frequent attacks by the Sioux and could not stay financially viable.

In 1797 another North West post was built on the south bank of the Pembina River at the Red River, near the Grant site by Charles Jean-Baptiste Chaboillez IV, after he had spent the previous year near the mouth of the Rat River. However, a Hudson’s Bay Company trader, John Richards had established a post about 1 ½ miles below the river. On October 1797 Richards defected to join Chaboillez and the North West Company. HBC sent Thomas Miller from Brandon House to replace Richards. Miller arrived at Pembina on November 12 of that year.¹²³

The 1790s were a period of intense rivalry between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company. The North West Company was larger and better equipped than the HBC and Chaboillez was able to establish outposts, among the tribes, on the Salt (Forest) River and in the Hair Hills as well as the post on the Rat River.¹²⁴ After two years, the succession of attacks by the Sioux forced the post at Pembina to close. The Chippewa, both the Red/Assiniboine River and Minnesota tribes, had not moved permanently into the prairie and left after repeated attacks by the Yankton Sioux.

In September 1800, Alexander Henry, nephew of the trader/explorer of the same name, established a post at the junction of the Park and Red Rivers. However the saltiness of the water and the fears of his native partners compelled a move to Pembina the following year. The fort, built on the north bank of the Pembina River, within sight of the abandoned Grant and Chaboillez posts, was completed by August 1801. This area was also the meeting of the plains tribes and the woodland tribes. The Chippewa or Saukteaux were there, awaiting the return of

¹²² Ibid, 37.

¹²³ Ritterbush, *Fur Trade Posts at Pembina*, 18.

¹²⁴ Camp, *The Chippewa Fur Trade*, 35.

trade. This was the hub of what Henry hoped would be a series of small outposts along the Red River, on either side. He intended to trade with Sioux to the south, and the Cree and Salteux to the north. In 1802, a post was built at the present site of Grand Forks by John Cameron and in 1803 Henry established a post about 50 miles from the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. He named it Pinnacewaywining, an Indian word meaning “on the way down to the ford.”¹²⁵ It is believed that this is where Henry introduced the Red River Ox Cart,¹²⁶ which would become the staple for transporting goods and furs along the Red River and points east until the arrival of the train. Outposts were built at Turtle River in 1802-1803, Park River in 1803-1804, and Forest (or Salt) River in 1804-1805. During these years he also established outposts at Rivière aux Gratiis (Morris or Scratching River), Hair Hills, Dead River (Netley Creek).

Meanwhile the Hudson’s Bay Company post at Pembina continued trading and the XY Company also maintained a post in the vicinity until the merger of the NWC and XY companies in 1805.

John Macdonell became one of the newer partners of the Northwest Company in 1797. His brother, Miles Macdonell, who also was a trader, would leave the Northwest Company for the Hudson’s Bay Company and figure prominently in the settlement of the Red River Valley.

Each year, all the members of the Northwest Company would meet at Grand Portage in July. The partners would sit around the table to plan for the coming year and put aside the necessary capital. The profits were divided and credited to each. Each district put forth its requirements. If one post needed something, whether it was canoes or snowshoes, it would be provided. It was especially important to ensure that food stocks were available and sufficient for

¹²⁵ www.mordenmb.com, retrieved Nov. 2012.

¹²⁶ www.mordenmb.com, retrieved Nov. 2012.

the winter. Everything that might be necessary in order to keep the trade going was considered. In 1795, when the post on Green Lake ran out of fish, the men gathered the bones that had been thrown out in the fall to make a soup that barely kept them alive. Pemican was sent via dog-sled from other nearby posts. The North West Company “was the finest business machine of its time on the continent of North America.”¹²⁷

The NWC determined to win the battle for furs, by any means and “their methods were always extremely aggressive and frequently unscrupulous.”¹²⁸ It was recognized that they were particularly known “for secrecy of action, hard, sheer efficiency, and complete unity of purpose.”¹²⁹ The quest for furs and profit, translated into a bloody battle for power. “Murder and ambush, arson and theft, kidnapping and destruction of property became so common,” that Britain passed the Canada Jurisdiction Act to control the battle between the Companies, but, in actuality, “in the first eighteen years ... there is no record of anyone actually being convicted under the law – even though this was the period of the most vicious fighting.”¹³⁰

The New North West Company (XY Company) 1795-1804

It was the norm for those fur companies operating out of Montreal to make agreements among several of them to work together for a stated period of time. When the date of termination arrived, new agreements were made, usually of a different configuration. Old partners now became opponents, with old opponents becoming new partners. In 1795, several partners severed ties with the North West Company, citing the cause of the discontent to be the “strong-willed and domineering chief in Montreal – Simon McTavish.”¹³¹ Though unhappy with

¹²⁷ Morton, *The North West Company*, 12.

¹²⁸ Voorhis, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts*, 23.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

¹³⁰ Newman, *Caesars of the Wilderness*, xix.

¹³¹ Bryce, *The Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 147.

the state of affairs vis-a-vis McTavish, Alexander Mackenzie agreed, partly for his own self-interest, to a new but shorter contract with the North West.

Alexander Mackenzie had been in the Athabasca District since 1787, the junior to Peter Pond, who had helped him prepare for his explorations north. In 1789, he hoped to find a route to the Pacific and ease the cost of transporting furs overland to Montreal by following the River from Great Slave Lake. Unfortunately, the river ended up at the Arctic Ocean, and the river that is now known as Mackenzie River, he dubbed “the River Disappointment.”¹³² In 1793, he further attempted to find a fur waterway to the Pacific, but though he did find his way overland to the Pacific Ocean, the first white man to do so, he did not find the cheaper route that he had hoped. He did find, though, “the great fur fields of the Pacific coast.”¹³³ But the cost of transportation was too great. He attempted to persuade Governor Simcoe that a company comprising of both the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company would be the answer. However, using the Hudson Bay transportation corridor to the Pacific would completely bypass Montreal. Simon McTavish could not agree to this outrageous proposal. Mackenzie left the North West Company in 1799. He went back to England, returning to Canada in 1801 after publishing his ‘Voyages’ and receiving a knighthood.

Under the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, which ended the American War of Independence from Britain, the 49th parallel was deemed to be the boundary between Canada and the United States, including “the water-way from the Pigeon River on Lake Superior to what has since been defined as the North-West Angle of Lake of the Woods.”¹³⁴ At a time when no Americans lived between the Ohio Valley and the Mississippi River, the American government was not prepared to take control of the area however, so for another decade the garrisons at Detroit and

¹³² Morton, *The North West Company*, 20.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 21.

¹³⁴ Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, 486.

Michilimackinac continued to be manned by the British. The greatest blow was to the Canadian fur traders. Their water routes to Montreal were severely impacted. The Americans were eager to take over the wide fur region that should be theirs, and John Jay was sent to London to negotiate an agreement. The British Government was vitally concerned with protecting trade in Canada as far as possible while complying with the provisions of the new International Boundary. Jay's Treaty addressed the problem in the third article: "It is agreed that it shall at all times be free to His Majesty's subjects and to the citizens of the United States ... freely to pass and repass by land or inland navigation, ... to carry on trade and commerce with each other."¹³⁵ Any goods that passed through either nation's posts, provided they were immediately transported across the border, should not be taxed. There should be equal rights for trade, except for Rupert's Land, which did not belong to Canada and therefore was not subject to Canadian law. American traders were not pleased and regarded Jay's Treaty as a betrayal. They believed that the Canadians were favored by it and they resorted to any trickery to nullify the treaty, harassing the Canadian traders with heavier and illegal duties at the American posts, requiring licenses for passage, and instituting undoable regulations, like the one stating that rum could be moved only in large casks. The harassment was termed, "A Systematic Plan to drive the British Indian traders from the American Territory by every species of vexation."¹³⁶

The American treatment of the Canadian fur traders was partially the reason for the formation of the XY Company. Disaffected partners of NWC had formed the New North West Company, usually referred to as the XY Company. Other small firms, finding it almost impossible to compete against The North West Company and The Hudson's Bay Company, and with the American harassment, joined forces with the new company. Mackenzie exerted his

¹³⁵ Ibid, 487.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 487.

energy in promoting XY Company and the friction between the companies increased.

Unsurprisingly, “the Constitution and methods of business were those of the very successful old Company.”¹³⁷

The name, XY Company derived from the fact that bales destined for the North West Company were designated NW. The new company simply added the next two letters of the alphabet to their bales, hence XY Company, as they were commonly known. The Nor’westers contemptuously referred to the new rivals as *La Petite Compagnie* or the “little Company”.¹³⁸ The members of the younger company were disparagingly referred to by the older company as “Potties” a term of contempt derived from the word *potée* a pot or small measure.¹³⁹

Because they were a new and smaller company, the new company immediately felt compelled to make their presence known. In 1797, XY Company built a trading post at Grand Portage, little more than half a mile and on the other side of the stream from the North West post. When the North West Company relocated to Kaministiquia, (later named Fort William after William M’Gillivray, the Company’s agent)¹⁴⁰ the XY Company followed suit and built within a mile of the North West building. Proximity was a problem for all: “We had here, besides the Hudson’s Bay Company whose fort was within a musket shot of ours, the opposition on the other side.”¹⁴¹

By 1798, the volume of trade by the Pedlars had been noted by the Hudson’s Bay Company. The competition was about to escalate and it would be disastrous for all. Not only was there competition for the First Nations’ trade, but the building of new forts escalated, both in number and in replacement of older forts.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 510.

¹³⁸ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson’s Bay Company*, 148.

¹³⁹ Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, 509.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 510.

¹⁴¹ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson’s Bay Company*, 150.

La Petite Compagnie did represent a significant problem for both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. Branching out further to the west, among other posts, they took over the Red River and Assiniboine regions. In 1798, the XY Company set up Fort la Souris on the right hand bank of the Souris where it met the Assiniboine, opposite the North West Company's post of the same name, and the Hudson's Bay Company's Brandon House. The North West Company then moved across and immediately above, "to overawe the Indians."¹⁴² The XY Company post at Qu'Appelle, was very near Fort Espérance of NW, also their post on the Upper Assiniboine was about five miles above Fort Alexandria, there was a post at Fort Dauphin and on the Red River they built first just below, then moved beside the NW post on the Pembina River.

The years of 1801 to 1805 were a "Golden Age"¹⁴³ for the traders and their First Nations employees. This was also the period when the rivalry between companies was at its most intense and violent. The success of the North West Company prompted the Hudson's Bay Company and the upstart XY Company to step up their activities in the Red River Valley. The intensity and violence would escalate with the arrival of settlers to the fledgling Colony on the Assiniboine. The rivalry between the companies was intense, and one consequence was that liquor was the enticement to lure the First Nations tribes to the post. O'Meara states that liquor was a deliberately used for dealing with the natives. If whole tribes drank themselves to death, "It was good for business."¹⁴⁴ Alexander Henry wrote in his journal, "the drunk Indian being an easier victim than the sober, and the Indian mad with thirst for liquor the most easily cajoled of all."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, 510.

¹⁴³ Gregory Camp, "The Chippewa Fur Trade in the Red River Valley of the North", in *The Fur Trade in North Dakota*, 37.

¹⁴⁴ O'Meara, *The Savage Country*, 103.

¹⁴⁵ Laut, *The Fur Trade of America*, 261.

During the years that each Company worked in its own area, rum was not considered an important part of trade, because “The Trade’s personal interest and safety have been the best security against abuses.”¹⁴⁶ The traders were well aware that drunken men would be unable to ply their trade, and were more likely to fight among themselves compromising the safety of everyone.

When the companies entered into competition, everything changed. Life between the traders in adjoining posts, caught in a vicious game for the same prize, can be described as “a cat-and-dog life in which principles of honesty and fair play had no part.”¹⁴⁷ Innes shows how the companies used liquor as part of the competition between them. The amount of rum and spirits distributed by the Northwest Company averaged 9,600 gallons between 1793 and 1798, up to 12,340 gallons between 1799 and 1804. The amount of rum given out by the Northwest Company increased markedly during the years of competition with the XY Company, which added a further 5,000 gallons distributed to the natives. That amount decreased immediately after the companies amalgamated and further declined to about 9,000 gallons by 1808.¹⁴⁸

Violence and mayhem became the norm between the two companies, to the point that, in 1803, Parliament passed the Jurisdiction Act, which authorized named residents to act as Justices of the Peace. These officials had the power, if they deemed it necessary, to have the miscreant transported to Montreal for trial. Those named were members of the two Canadian companies; no member of the English (Hudson’s Bay) Company was authorized to exercise any such power. The territory under jurisdiction included “any of the Indian Territories or parts of America, not within the limits of either of the said Provinces of Upper or Lower Canada [therefore inclusive

¹⁴⁶ Innes, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 268.

¹⁴⁷ Morton, *History of the Canadian West*, 512.

¹⁴⁸ Innes, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 209.

of the Chartered Territory] or of any civil government of the United States of America.”¹⁴⁹

Under the vague terms of the Act, it was not unknown for “an unscrupulous trader to arrest his opponent and take him down to distant Montreal, probably to be released by the courts there ... much to the advantage of the trader who effected the arrest, for he got his rival out of the country meanwhile.”¹⁵⁰

Mackenzie had left the NorthWest Company by 1802 and exerted his energy in promoting XY Company, determined to beat out McTavish. In 1803 he reorganized the company calling it Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company, but it was still known as the XY Company.¹⁵¹ The friction between the companies increased, becoming violent and out-of-control. “At one time it seemed that the two contending companies would completely destroy each other.”¹⁵² Mackenzie and McTavish were bitter enemies with each determined that his company would prevail. McTavish had the money and vowed “to overcome at any price his opposition which he contemptuously called the “Little Company.”¹⁵³ McTavish’s death, in 1804, at the age of 54, removed some of the tension between the companies and within four short months, the XY Company united with North West Company.

While leading XY Company, Mackenzie had communicated with Edward Ellice, partner in a London firm which was interested in the XY Company. They attempted to buy HBC, in order to ease the expense of shipping furs through Montreal, but they were unsuccessful. Ellice came to Canada in 1803 and helped broker the merger of NWC and XYC. He would also be instrumental in the merger of HBC and NWC. After NWC and XYC merged, they offered HBC

¹⁴⁹ Morton, *History of the Canadian West*. 514.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 515.

¹⁵¹ http://pam.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/6882/AUTHORITY_LINK/NAME/XY~20Company?JUMP.

¹⁵² Pritchett, “Red River Fur Trade”, *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 403.

¹⁵³ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson’s Bay Company*, p.151.

£2000 per year for the opportunity to transport goods through Hudson Bay.¹⁵⁴ The offer was not accepted.

Even after the North West Company and the XY Company joined in competition against the Hudson's Bay Company, there was other competition from private traders. When the Companies joined forces, many trapper, hunters and *voyageurs* had been discharged in the effort to trim the employee roster. Instead of returning to Canada, they stayed in the Red River Valley as independents becoming a significant nuisance to the North West Company. Several bands of natives from the four major tribes in the area, Chippewa, Cree, Assiniboine and Sioux, also stayed and formed semi-permanent homes from the Red River to Lake Superior. Many of these new settlers were *Métis*, born of unions between trappers and hunters and native women

¹⁵⁴ Morton, *The North West Company*, 25.

RED RIVER COLONY

The “narrow, tortuous, and insignificant” stream (tell that to anyone who has fought consecutive hundred year spring floods!) called the “Red River of the North” cuts across the boundary between the United States and “the British North American Possessions” near the midpoint between the two great oceans which bookend the North American continent.¹⁵⁵ The Red flows north from the United States entering Canada near Pembina, North Dakota, and continuing for another one hundred miles to Lake Winnipeg. Many tributaries flow into the Red, the major one being the Assiniboine River, entering from the West about forty miles from Lake Winnipeg. This junction became the first settlement of the West and by 1820, would be the foremost economic bastion west of St. Paul.

French *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois* had made their way into the wild and unknown interior long before the Treaty of Paris in 1763 returned Canada to the English. The men, who later formed The North West Company of Montreal, spread out into the Red River area before 1783. The traders of the Hudson’s Bay Company meanwhile, stuck to their posts on the shores of Hudson Bay. The success of the North West Company in disrupting the fur trade reverberated in London and the HBC, forced to protect their trade, scrambled to send men into the interior of the continent. HBC traders and explorers are known to have entered the Assiniboine River Valley and the Red River Valley by 1793.

At the annual meeting of the company, David Thompson’s map clearly showed the partners that Lake Winnipeg was “the nerve centre of the continent’s canoe transportation system.”¹⁵⁶ Traders could travel by canoe to much of the northern continent with no more than one day’s portage. This was also the place where vital supplies of pemmican were available for

¹⁵⁵ Joseph James Hargrave, *Red River*, (Montreal: John Lovell, 1871), 47.

¹⁵⁶ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 196.

the traders. Unfortunately, the land south of Lake Winnipeg along the Red River was owned by the one man who was stubbornly intent on bringing settlers to the area, Thomas Douglas, 5th Lord Selkirk

During these years, the Red River area was shaken by the rivalry of the two Canadian fur companies, who competed not only with the Hudson's Bay Company, but forcibly against each other. The XY Company had been formed by several former North West men who were determined to win in any standoff with their former employers. First Nations tribes in the area took sides and havoc over the fur trade ensued. The determination to win brought out the worst in each and "the whole trade was carried on in a reckless, extravagant manner."¹⁵⁷ The rivalry between the two fur companies became violent, and, unfortunately, "the Red River Valley was the center of the fighting ground."¹⁵⁸

After the NW and XY companies merged in 1804, many traders had been discharged, with several deciding they could not work with former rivals. Since fur trading was their livelihood, they did not leave the area; instead, they worked "independently in the fur traffic, especially along the Pembina and Red rivers,"¹⁵⁹ These "Free Canadians"¹⁶⁰, unaffiliated with either trading company, eked out a precarious living in the area.

Several Indian nations: Cree, Saulteaux (Chippewa), Assiniboine and Sioux, as well as many *Métis*, all lived in the area of the Red River, and as far to the east as Lake Superior. The *Métis* were the offspring of the French traders and their Indian women known as "country wives". Sometimes the children were sent to Montreal for education, but they usually returned to their homelands to live with their families, away from the prejudices they experienced in

¹⁵⁷ Hargrave, *Red River*, 72.

¹⁵⁸ Pritchett, *The Red River Valley*, 12.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁶⁰ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 227.

Canada, though they were often similarly treated by their maternal relatives. Pritchett describes these men as “stalwart, muscular, and active, excitable, imaginative and ambitious, passionate and restless, easily amused and commonly devout. With the horse, gun, and the paddle they were equally skillful; they were masters of the art of trapping; and in the pursuit of the buffalo.”¹⁶¹ The *Métis* were numerous and made up much of the population of the Red River Valley, until the arrival of the Earl of Selkirk and his people.

The directors of HBC knew they had to make changes in order to compete with NWC. Not only were profits down, but HBC employees were growing increasingly dissatisfied with their lot. HBC had grown under the auspices of privileged men in Britain whose outlook was feudal. The employees of the company were ranked according to the social status they had in Britain. The practice of serving three different grades of tea to the three grades of employees¹⁶² exemplified the feudal aspect “which must necessarily exist in an orderly society.”¹⁶³ Loyalty to the company was absolutely obligatory, and those who left the company were stigmatized for personal disloyalty. It was not in any way related to the fact that they might earn five times as much as they had at HBC.

The profits for the Hudson’s Bay Company had been declining for several years. The North West Company had benefited greatly from the posts they established, while the Hudson’s Bay Company suffered from financial difficulties, preventing expansion. By 1808 dividends were half what they had been and nothing was paid to investors, neither in 1809 nor for the next five years. Stock prices dropped from £250 to £50. This would prove beneficial for Lord Selkirk.

¹⁶¹ Pritchett, *The Red River Valley*, 15.

¹⁶² Alexander Ross, *The Fur Hunters of the Far West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1956) xvii.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, xvii.

HBC introduced for the first time, a chance to share in the Company's profits, at a reduced salary of course. However no profits were being paid out! Employees were also ordered to resort to force if they perceived themselves attacked. Traditionally, HBC had sought to employ Orkneymen who were used to hard work and colder climates. Now the Company sought Scotsmen, especially from the Western Isles and the Coast, as they were seen to be "more spirited."¹⁶⁴ More alarming to the Nor'Westers was the proclamation that Hudson's Bay Company men would henceforth be expected to grow their own crops and endeavor to live off the land. This smacked of cultivation and the import of farm laborers, which would lead to settlement, all of which was seen as a serious threat to the fur trade, not to mention that any advantage would be to the Hudson's Bay Company to the detriment of the North West Company.

The Company thought that diversification would bring in needed funds. They could have started lumbering or whaling sidelines, but profits from these would depend on how long Napoleon waged war in Europe and there was no way of knowing how that would end. But "a prosperous agricultural community on the Red River might serve to lower costs substantially."¹⁶⁵ A colony would help provision the posts at a much cheaper cost than sending everything from England on the yearly shipments. Miles Macdonnell suggested that the Company men should be encouraged to bring their families. The wives could look after the comforts of the men, finding "sufficient employment in making and mending clothes, washing, cooking etc.... the men would be more contented and feel more attached to the country."¹⁶⁶ He also suggested that children growing up in Canada would be more able to do the work of the Company than those imported from England. Reorganization and the establishment of the Red River Settlement directly threatened the North West Company. At the time, the fact that an officer was accompanied by "a

¹⁶⁴ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 201.

¹⁶⁵ James A. Jackson, *The Centennial History of Manitoba* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970) 36.

¹⁶⁶ Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 163.

genteel British wife was a conspicuous status symbol for Hudson's Bay Company officer, but, ironically the white wife also presaged the ultimate decline of the fur trade."¹⁶⁷ In the Red River Colony, she symbolized settlement and agriculture.

As early as 1802, Lord Selkirk proposed a settlement for Scots crofters who had been displaced by the Highland Clearances to make way for large sheep runs: "At the Western extremity of Canada upon the Waters which fall into Lake Winnipeck &, uniting in the great River of Port Nelson, discharge themselves into Hudson's Bay is a country which the Indian Trader represent as fertile, & of a Climate far more temperate than the shores of the Atlantic under the same parallel ... Here, therefore the Colonists may with a moderate exertion of industry be certain of a comfortable subsistence"¹⁶⁸ A letter extolling the virtues of resettling his expatriated fellow Scots, promoted his ideas. "Leading to this temperate and fertile area was an excellent northern highway – the waters of Hudson Bay and the Nelson."¹⁶⁹ He was not formally discouraged by British politicians, but Napoleon was rising in France and England needed all of her men. A former North West trader consulted, informed him that the idea was "too absurd almost to be mention'd."¹⁷⁰

But Lord Selkirk, having already set up colonies of Scottish and Irish peasants in Prince Edward Island in 1803 and along Lake Erie in western Ontario in 1804, was determined to do the same in the Red River Valley. A former trader opined that the real objective was an act of philanthropy to the fur trade. Retiring traders "clogged with Indian families"¹⁷¹ could stay in the area living a more congenial and profitable manner ... under the fostering care and paternal

¹⁶⁷ Sylvia Van Kirk, *The Tender Ties: Women in the Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma 1983), 5.

¹⁶⁸ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 198.

¹⁶⁹ Louis Aubrey Wood, *The Red River Colony* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook & Company, 1915), 15.

¹⁷⁰ J. M. Bumsted, Ed., *The Collected Writings of Lord Selkirk, 1799-1809* (Winnipeg: the Manitoba Record Society, 1984), 29.

¹⁷¹ Ross, *Fur Hunters of the Far West*, 68.

influence of the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company."¹⁷² (Of course, the writer, Alexander Ross could not be totally pragmatic in this idea. After twelve years trading for HBC, he retired to the Red River Colony, a respected and model citizen until his death some thirty years later.)

After failing to interest the British government in his ideas, Selkirk set himself up as the principal stockholder in the Hudson's Bay Company. He was able, after 1806, to buy up depressed stock, after Napoleon's Berlin Decree forbid the import of British goods into European countries allied with France.¹⁷³ The furs that were intended for European markets remained stacked in HBC's London warehouse. Selkirk's marriage in 1807 to Jean Wedderburn-Colville gained him her fortune in Hudson's Bay Company stock as well as a relationship with his wife's brother, Andrew Wedderburn-Colville, recently elected to the Hudson's Bay Company committee, who had "an almost fanatical determination to reverse his firm's steadily worsening fortunes."¹⁷⁴ On earlier journeys to Canada, Selkirk had spent time in Montreal, making friends with many of the North West Company stalwarts. Later they accused him of "imposing on their hospitality by accepting their confidences without indicating his direct interest in their affairs."¹⁷⁵ In his Collected Writings of Lord Selkirk, the editor J.M. Bumsted opines that Selkirk's observations whilst in Montreal were probably no different from those he gathered on any of his visits to different locales. He did not broadcast his ideas for the North West, but he was interested in everything he saw and heard and was willing to take information where he found it.

In 1808, Selkirk had entered into a partnership with Sir Alexander Mackenzie, to purchase HBC stock for the North West Company, continuing to buy small numbers of shares into early 1809. Mackenzie was interested in the Hudson's Bay Company for its holdings,

¹⁷² Ibid, 68.

¹⁷³ Pritchett, *The Red River Valley*, x.

¹⁷⁴ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 200.

¹⁷⁵ Selkirk, *Writings*, 41.

especially access to both the interior of the Northwest, as well as the Pacific Ocean and Hudson Bay itself. In an effort to keep his name out of the negotiations for stock, which he feared would drive up prices; he colluded with Selkirk to buy stock. He never envisaged that Selkirk would become active in the Company. Taking advantage of HBC's depreciating shares, Selkirk and his friends quietly set about acquiring stock, until they owned about one-third of the company's shares, not enough stock to take control, but certainly enough to have a prominent voice in the Company's affairs. Mackenzie broke off with Selkirk, suffering as Bumsted says: "a quite unwarranted sense of having been betrayed by the man he was attempting to exploit."¹⁷⁶

The North West Company was in the act of petitioning the British courts for the rights to move their trade through Hudson Bay for the fourth time. Sir Alexander Mackenzie was able to purchase some HBC shares, which meant that he would be able to attend stockholders meetings and put his arguments forth.¹⁷⁷

Meanwhile the Hudson's Bay Company was finding business in the North West ever more expensive. The aggressiveness of the Nor'Westers was taking a toll on the amount of goods which were being brought to the outposts and escalating violence directed at their posts by the Canadian traders forced the Company to rethink their policy. The Hudson's Bay traders were milder men who did not tend to leave their posts. The conditions under which they were hired did not encourage retaliation and could not match the Nor'Westers for violence and guile. New policies for toughness and enterprise were promoted and settlement along the Red River was part of the new policy.

In 1811, HBC granted Selkirk 116,000 square miles or 74 million acres of land, including the Red River Valley and encompassing parts of North Dakota, Minnesota, Manitoba, and

¹⁷⁶ Bumsted, J. M., *Fur Trade Wars* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1999), 17.

¹⁷⁷ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 200.

Saskatchewan. “Roughly speaking, it extended from Big Island, in Lake Winnipeg, to the parting of the Red River from the head-waters of the Mississippi in the south, and from beyond the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in the west to the shores of the Lake of the Woods, and at one point almost to Lake Superior, in the east.”¹⁷⁸ Lord Selkirk was now, for the cost of ten shillings, the “greatest individual landowner in Christendom”¹⁷⁹ with “control over the lives of thousands of people – white, Métis and Indian –living in the area or dependent on it.”¹⁸⁰ He set forth a policy for his new colony: “The settlement is to be formed in a territory where religion is not the ground of any disqualification, an unreserved participation in every privilege will there be enjoyed by Protestant and Catholic without distinction.”¹⁸¹

Miles Macdonell, who had fought during the American Revolution on the New York frontier, was appointed to be the governor of the new colony, and immediately set out to recruit Irish emigrants for resettlement. A former North West employee, who had been dismissed, he was sent to his native Hebrides and the Highland, looking for suitable volunteers. Many Highlanders had relocated to Glasgow, and they also were sought as potential colonists.

Selkirk’s intention to bring settlers and set up an agricultural community was a major blow to the fur trade, for this property “was the vital region of the fur trade.”¹⁸² Half of the grant lay in what is now the province of Manitoba, the other half in the present states of Minnesota and North Dakota. (It will be understood that the boundary line between British and American territory in the North-West was not yet established. What afterwards became United States was at this time claimed by the Hudson’s Bay Company under its charter.)¹⁸³ It also held some

¹⁷⁸ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 33.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 34.

¹⁸⁰ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 202.

¹⁸¹ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson’s Bay Company*, 207.

¹⁸² Pritchett, *Red River Valley*, 405.

¹⁸³ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 33.

major North West Company pemmican-trading posts, especially Gibraltar at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, Pembina and Bas de la Rivière Winnipic.¹⁸⁴ Selkirk also retained governance over the thousands of peoples in the area. Within six months, Selkirk increased his stock in HBC fivefold.

From the day that Selkirk acquired the huge tract of land, which included the North West Company posts, and announced his intentions to introduce settlers into the area the friendship between himself and Sir Alexander Mackenzie was over. Mackenzie would later go to extreme lengths to ensure that Selkirk failed. In yet another blow to the North West Company Selkirk promised “to help to supply the Hudson’s Bay Company with labourers for its work.”¹⁸⁵

Any encroachment of settlers would directly undermine the entire North West empire. Mackenzie, Edward Ellice, and Simon McGillivray protested that the area was not fit for habitation, for the climate was not conducive and they were too remote from the any market either to buy or sell their goods.

The three men took their battle directly to the people whom Selkirk was recruiting. Letters to local newspapers extolled the dangers and hardships of the long trek, the closing winter, and the marauding Indians. The letters did have some effect: several families changed their minds about emigrating. But there were more than enough people who sought to leave their old lives behind. They were “a motley throng. Some were stalwart men in the prime of life, men who looked forward to homes of their own on a distant shore; others, with youth on their side, were eager for the trail of the flying moose or the sight of a painted redskin; a few were women,

¹⁸⁴ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 201.

¹⁸⁵ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 32.

steeled to bravery through fires of want and sorrow. Too many were wasters, cutting adrift from a blighted past. A goodly number were malcontents, wondering whether to go or to stay.”¹⁸⁶

Three ships sailed together down the Thames on July 26, 1811.¹⁸⁷ Two were fine ships from the Hudson’s Bay fleet. The third ship, the *Edward and Anne*, was “a shaky old hulk . . . her grey sails were mottled with age and her rigging was loose and worn”¹⁸⁸ Her crew consisted of sixteen men and boys, insufficient for her size. Of the one hundred and five persons in the party, seventy-six were aboard the *Edward and Anne*. “It seemed almost criminal to send such an ill-manned craft out on the tempestuous North Atlantic.”¹⁸⁹ Of the passengers on board, thirty-five were headed for the colony on the Red River.

Storms up the east coast of England delayed them; it was mid-July before they reached the Orkneys. Here, the Nor’westers had been stirring unrest. Not only that, but the customs officer, who happened to be a relative of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, citing the Dundas Act which dictated the number of passengers for varying tonnage, refused to allow the ship to leave port. Other delays followed until the vastly overcrowded old ship, with its company, finally set sail, much later than any other ship had ever attempted to make the voyage to Hudson Bay.

They arrived in Hudson Bay on September 24th 1811, after “the longest ever known & latest to H Bay”¹⁹⁰ as Macdonell wrote back to Selkirk. At York Factory, it was obvious that there was not enough accommodation for such a party. Macdonell also considered that “the factory is very ill constructed and not at all adapted for a cold country.”¹⁹¹ He proceeded to construct his ‘Nelson encampment’ some distance away. The emigrants had their first woodcraft

¹⁸⁶ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 39.

¹⁸⁷ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 38.

¹⁸⁸ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 39.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 39.

¹⁹⁰ Bumsted, *Lord Selkirk: A Life*, 205.

¹⁹¹ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson’s Bay Company*, 209.

lesson enlarging the compound and compiling firewood enough to last the winter. This was completed just in time and the colonists were introduced to their first American winter, enduring “cold of Arctic intensity.”¹⁹² It was a difficult winter. The cold was so bitter that the men had to be forced to go out in the cold to collect food at the fort. The food was the monotonous salted meat that was usual in the winter. It wasn’t long before scurvy struck. There was a remedy, unpleasant but plentiful and effective – the sap of the white spruce – which alleviated the problem and got the settlers through the winter.

William Auld, the Superintendent at York Factory had, from the beginning advised against mixing the mutually antithetic Irish and Scots, though Selkirk hoped their Gaelic roots would “unify the colonists and protect them from American influence.”¹⁹³ The different factions of the populace were soon at war with each other: Auld’s characterization of the settlers, the ‘Glasgow rascals’, the ‘lazy, spiritless, and ill-disposed Orkneymen, and the ‘worthless blackguards’ Irish, all gave Miles Macdonell endless trouble and some of the Irish were sent back to Britain. A group of thirteen rebelled and decided to live in another building apart from the rest. Their rebellious attitude kept the others in a state of nervousness for the rest of the winter. However, in June they wandered off and were cut off by the breakup of the ice, and forced to surrender to the officials at York Factory.

The remaining colonists were eager to be off, but there was much to do before they could leave. The canoes which were used for transport were too fragile and shaky for transporting the colonists and all their belongings seven hundred miles. Against the advice of Auld who was not the least welcoming of new ideas, Macdonell oversaw the building of the first version of the famed York boat, a flat-bottomed boat similar to some he had seen in on the Mohawk River in

¹⁹² Hargrave, *Red River*, 73.

¹⁹³ Bumsted, *Selkirk, a Life*, 206.

the state of New York¹⁹⁴. This would become the main means for transporting goods in the NorthWest for many years to come.

The winter of 1811-1812 had been so unduly harsh, that whereas in a normal spring, the ice would have disappeared from the rivers in May, this year the ice held solid through June.¹⁹⁵ Finally, twenty-two survivors left York Factory just before midsummer, making their way up the Hayes River to Oxford House, then down the Nelson to Norway House on upper Lake Winnipeg, then working their way against the current, up the Red River. Forty miles later, on August 30, 1812, nineteen immigrants, three men having deserted en route, reached the sharp bend in the river where their new community would grow. Here was to be home; at the midpoint of the North American continent and 1500 miles from any semblance of civilization, and “directly across the path of the North West Company.”¹⁹⁶ With them came the area’s first domestic livestock, a cow and bull acquired at Oxford House, Adam and Eve.

There was no welcome from the fur traders or the native tribes who dwelt in the area. The North West Company was convinced that colonization was a ploy by HBC to block the trade routes of its traders. Those familiar with the northwest, thought it was “little short of inhuman”¹⁹⁷ to bring settlers into the area. Not only was the climate totally inhospitable, but the *Métis* were less than hospitable for they resented cultivation of their hunting grounds. The settlers would drive away the buffalo on which everyone in the area depended, and thoroughly disrupt the fur trade. The North West Company resolved that the colonists should not succeed in settlement.

¹⁹⁴ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 51.

¹⁹⁵ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 39.

¹⁹⁶ Pritchett, *Red River Valley*, 405.

¹⁹⁷ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 197.

In actual fact, HBC was no less concerned with the settlement. Though colonization was deemed necessary on one hand, it was also thought “that the purposes of colonization and the interests of the fur trade were incompatible.”¹⁹⁸ Because of Lord Selkirk’s influence with the company, HBC had reluctantly allowed settlement, with reservations: HBC held the monopoly on the fur trade and the settlers were not permitted to attempt any manner of trade in furs. That first year, Alexander Macdonell could not see any threat in the ragtag band of immigrants. He thought it impossible for Selkirk to fulfill the terms of his grant by importing one thousand families in ten years. At first, the settlers were too involved in surviving and improving their lives and the fur trade did not impinge upon them, though HBC was to find to its chagrin that which the Nor’Westers had feared; “Agriculture destroys the fur trade.”¹⁹⁹

The settlers had hardly arrived when they were confronted with a large group of *Métis*, or *Bois Brûlés* (wood skins) from the North West Company’s Fort Gibraltar, two miles away at the ‘the Forks’. They were told that they were not welcome in the area and attempts were made in an effort to force them to move on. The settlers were regarded as emissaries of the Hudson’s Bay Company and, therefore, enemies. In direct contrast, the pure-blooded natives camping along the Red were friendly and proved to be good friends.

Alexander Macdonell, the North West Company trader, met the settlers, including his cousin Miles, at their encampment on the Red. They dined with a couple other Nor’Westers who were wintering at Gibraltar and the head of the nearby HBC post. The next day, Miles invited the others to a “ceremony and seizin’ of the land.”²⁰⁰ The ceremony opened with the firing of a small cannon which Miles dragged from Hudson Bay, then the colors were raised, and the proclamation giving the terms of Selkirk’s grant, was read out, first in English then in French.

¹⁹⁸ Pritchett, *Red River Valley*, 407.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 3.

²⁰⁰ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 205.

This was followed by reading out the appointment of Miles Macdonell as governor of Assiniboia, the name chosen by Selkirk for his new colony. Macdonell decided that the post he would build would be named Fort Douglas. In October, a group of eighty settlers arrived at Pembina, “having accomplished the feat of making their way across the ocean to Hudson Bay and up to the settlement during the single season of 1812.”²⁰¹ This group included a woman, Mrs. McLean, who had given birth to a daughter born while the ship labored during a furious storm for two days before it was able to make landfall.²⁰²

Not much in the way of organizing a colony could be done so late in the summer of 1812, and food was running low. None of the settlers had any experience in farming, but, with hoes as their only tools, they grubbed for wild roots and tried fishing for catfish. The friendly natives introduced them to buffalo meat, which was plentiful, but the settlers didn’t know how to hunt buffalo. Miles hired one of the North West Company’s most experienced *engagés* to hunt buffalo to have stores for the winter. But even the very capable Lagimodière, (or Lajimonière) whose wife had been the first white woman in the Red River territory,²⁰³ could not possibly hunt for so many in a short time. They were able to buy pemmican from Alexander Macdonell, but it was not nearly enough. The natives offered to guide them to the winter grounds of the buffalo. Five days march brought them to the junction of the Red and Pembina Rivers and preparations were made to build a fortified encampment which was named Fort Daer, one of Lord Selkirk’s titles. The fort at Pembina had been empty, but the Nor’westers reoccupied it for the sole purpose of buying any supplies²⁰⁴ they could obtain locally, then offering it at inflated prices which were out of reach for the settlers. Even so, it infuriated Macdonell that the immigrant

²⁰¹ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 58.

²⁰² Healy, *Women of Red River*, 3.

²⁰³ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 203.

²⁰⁴ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 40.

mothers were reduced to “selling their shawls to Hudson’s Bay Company servants for oatmeal to feed their children.”²⁰⁵ It required courage of the highest order on the part of the colonists to battle through the winter. With the coming of spring once more, the party “resolved never again to set foot within the gates of Fort Daer.”²⁰⁶

Before they had removed from the Forks to Pembina, the settlers had planted winter wheat, but when they returned in the spring of 1813, the crop had not sprouted, nor would this crop be successful in the future. Nor did the crops they planted over the summer survive the early frosts in the fall. Pemmican was brought in for them from Peter Fuller at HBC’s Fort Brandon, as well as a few cattle as companions for Adam and Eve. Fuller then commenced to survey the land into plots for the settlers. This action unsettled the *Métis* and irritated the Nor’Westers, who intentionally fanned the resentment felt by the natives who had lived along the Red for several generations. This would have tragic results over the next half century.

In the fall of 1813, there were still no provisions of food or shelter for the colony. Also, though the second group had driven a herd of Merino sheep that Selkirk insisted on sending, the hardship of herding the sheep made it impossible to carry the supplies they should have brought with them. The colonists were, yet again, forced to go to Pembina where Fort Daer was still a tiny cluster of huts, a scene of impending settlement which further irritated the *Métis*. This time the post at Pembina was not manned, so they were entirely on their own, but this year was different. They had survived one winter and the winter of 1813 was marginally easier so they were able to hunt buffalo for food.

While at Fort Daer, early in January 1814, Miles Macdonell issued a proclamation, “pronouncing it unlawful for any person who dealt in furs to remove from the colony of

²⁰⁵ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 206.

²⁰⁶ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 60.

Assiniboia supplies of flesh, fish, grain or vegetable.”²⁰⁷ This was aimed at the North West Company, by outlawing the taking of pemmican from the Selkirk holdings. Selkirk had cautioned Macdonell against forcing the NWC into court, because Selkirk hoped to set up British appointed courts over the Red River Settlement, instead of the courts of Upper Canada which had jurisdiction over the western territories. He was aware that the North West Company had some influence in Upper Canada.

With the War of 1812-1814 between Canada and the United States underway, Fort Churchill had become very important as a supply station for the Nor’Westers in the area. The *Métis* hunted buffalo and shipped it to Fort Gibraltar so that the warehouses were filled, ready to accompany the North West traders as they ranged to the west or returned east to Fort William. Macdonell sent Sherriff John Spencer of Red River to confiscate pemmican on the Turtle River. Pemmican being brought down the Assiniboine as well as that at Fort la Souris was also taken. The Nor’westers at la Souris were disarmed and sent on their way to Fort Gibraltar, where the inhabitants joined in the traders’ vows of violent retaliation. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed and violence was averted, though the sting endured. Macdonell, having made his point, agreed to return the confiscated items which would be delivered by the NWC to the settlement. But the embargo on pemmican, as well as the presence of the cannon at Fort Douglas proved to the traders that the settlement was a danger to their livelihood. They deliberately incited the fury of the *Métis* by proclaiming that the settlers would destroy their right to hunt. The War of 1812-1814 had ended elsewhere, but not yet in the Red River Valley.

During 1814, eighty-three more settlers arrived and Miles Macdonell redoubled his efforts to foil the Nor’Westers. He confiscated two hundred more bags of pemmican en route to Fort Gibraltar to feed the new arrivals. The settlers would remain at Fort Douglas that winter of

²⁰⁷ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 64.

1814, well supplied with pemmican. In October, notices were sent to Fort Gibraltar, where his cousin was in charge, as well as to Bas de la Rivière Winipic (known as Maurepas by La Vérendrye), and Fort Dauphin, warning them that they were trespassing on Selkirk land and that they would have six months to vacate the land. This truly enraged the traders who continued to encourage the *Métis* in the belief that the settlement would be the undoing of their way of life.

Alexander Macdonell and Duncan Cameron had returned in July 1814 from the annual meeting held at Fort William, with the news that the war was over. The North West Company had taken over the west coast fur trade, incorporating the holdings of the Astor's Pacific Fur Company, in the same way they had incorporated the XY Company in 1804 and were able to concentrate on the growing problem from the Hudson's Bay Company in the interior. NWC would no longer consider hiring any HBC employee and it was deemed necessary to strengthen the Red River posts of Fort Dauphin and the Churchill district because of "strong H.B. opposition."²⁰⁸ They were also charged to get rid of the settlers, by any means necessary. Cameron stayed at Fort Churchill and spent the winter in amiable conversation with the immigrants, speaking their native Gaelic and including "many a dram against the chill of winter."²⁰⁹ He dressed in a military style red coat, wore a sword and styled himself "Commanding Officer, Red River."²¹⁰ During the course of such conversations, there would be many reminders of the dangerous savages and harsh climate, and not so subtle suggestions that "Lord Selkirk ... and Miles Macdonell are the greatest enemies you ever had."²¹¹ Many heard the message and were eager to leave the Red River forever. They were promised safe passage and land in Canada. Such talk did not fall on deaf ears.

²⁰⁸ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 194.

²⁰⁹ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 44.

²¹⁰ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 219.

²¹¹ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 212.

During the summer of 1814, Miles Macdonell went to York Factory where he spent the winter. He had written to Selkirk, complaining of ill health and asking to be relieved of his duties. Over the winter, he did, in fact, have a breakdown which obliged the traders to relieve him of his weapons in case he should harm himself or any others. When he returned to Fort Douglas he found that the cannon had disappeared, with the help of many discouraged settlers, and the Sherriff had been arrested on a Canadian warrant and charged with illegal seizure of the pemmican. The winter had been well spent by Cameron. Alexander Macdonell returned to Fort Churchill in the spring, but he was not so successful. His attempt to incite the Indians against the settlers did not go well. A few were “well supplied with liquor to make them pot-valiant,” but the chief of the Crees visited Macdonell to smoke the peace pipe. A meeting with the Chippewas was similarly futile. On June 11th 1815, Cameron and his party, well hidden in the brush, commenced firing on the fort. The colonists, unable to see the gunmen, could not respond in kind.

Miles Macdonell surrendered to Cameron and the Nor’Westers under the promise that no further harm would come to the colonists. After he and the sheriff were taken prisoner, Cameron commanded the settlers to leave at once. One hundred and forty of the settlers obeyed, as well as all HBC people, accepting the offer of safe passage and free land, and travelled with the party to Montreal. As soon as they were out of sight, Alexander Macdonell ordered the crops flattened and the colony torched. The remaining forty or fifty settlers were harassed with gunshots, arrested on trumped up charges and finally, on June 25th raided by the *Bois Brûlés*. The few remaining settlers made a brave stand, “fighting coolly, they made their shots tell”²¹² to the dismay of the raiders. Remembering rusting cannon left at the HBC post, three colonists hauled it back to the smithy. Lacking ammunition, they chopped up cart chains and shot with good

²¹² Wood, *Red River Colony*, 77.

effect, sending the raiders off. The settlers had no recourse but to vacate the settlement and hustled out of the colony heading north in their boats to Jack River House (later called Norway House²¹³) on Playgreen Lake²¹⁴ with what few possessions they could carry and accompanied by a band of Salteaux Indians. The raiders set everything in the settlement on fire, leaving every building in ruins. Only the blacksmith shop was spared, thanks to one colonist and three men of the Hudson's Bay Company, who were able to outlast the raiders.

Selkirk's friend, the former Nor'Wester Colin Robertson was on his way to the Red River from Montreal accompanied by one hundred voyageurs. He was charged with building a trading post on Lake Athabasca. Beyond Fort William the group met the party taking Macdonell and Spencer to Canada for trial, but they learned nothing of the destruction of the colony. Hurrying to the Forks, he found that things were much better than he could have hoped. The Nor'Westers had left to follow the buffalo hunt and the crops had recovered to an astonishing extent, tended by the sole settler. Fifteen hundred bushels of wheat was the first crop of the prairies, and he was reconstructing some of the buildings.

Robertson's aide John Clarke was appointed by the governor of the Northern Territory to lead the party to Lake Athabasca with the voyageurs. Clarke founded Fort Wedderburn, but the post was doomed before it could be soundly established. Unfortunately, the party had not taken enough food supplies and, in the long, bitter winter none was to be found. Several of the party died from starvation. This only emphasized the need for sufficient supplies of pemmican and absolute control of the source.

Robertson persuaded the settlers to return from Jack River House. Energetic and decisive he was well-liked by the settlers and was an able leader. In August 1815, Robertson with 40

²¹³ Ibid, 78.

²¹⁴ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 45.

settlers and 17 HBC employees returned to the Forks. The summer of 1815 was full of promise. Crops flourished as never before and Robertson proved to be a great leader. The Nor'Westers were not around to continue their harassment, so the community soldiered on with newfound confidence. They prepared for the coming winter, preserving as much of the crops as they could and building shelters. Fish was caught and salted and the Salteaux who were sympathetic to the colonists agreed to provide meat. Robertson met with the Nor'Westers, seemingly conciliatory, with both sides hoping that the violence of the previous spring would not be repeated.

Eighty new settlers, who were all farmers, arrived that summer, infusing the group with increased enthusiasm. Robert Semple was named as Governor of the Territories and was also appointed as Governor-in-Chief of Rupert's Land by the Hudson's Bay Company, a title promoted by Selkirk in hopes that the title and prestige would be sufficient to keep the Nor'Westers under control. This placed him as superior to Miles Macdonell, who was Governor of the Red River colony only. It is estimated that at this time, there were one hundred and thirty permanent Highland settlers²¹⁵ in the colony.

Unfortunately, Semple knew nothing about the west or the fur trade. Born in America, he had been raised in England, and had never visited North America after the family decamped as Loyalists during the American Revolution. Bumsted avers that his appointment was the result of "who you knew, not what you knew."²¹⁶ Semple found the settlement prosperous and calm and totally ignored Robertson's warnings about the enmity of the North West Company. Robertson had been able to win the Indians over to his side, reversing the usual HBC policy by paying exorbitant prices for supplies and handing out gifts of blankets and goods, but the *Métis* resisted his efforts at reconciliation. Fort Douglas was not yet well enough supplied after the ravages and

²¹⁵ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 213.

²¹⁶ Bumsted, *Selkirk, A Life*, 263.

the settlers once again repaired to Fort Daer for the winter. As previously, winter was severe and there was not enough food, so the settlers continued to suffer.

Robertson had attempted in the fall of 1814 to arrest Cameron in retaliation for the arrest of Mile Macdonell, but failed. In March 1815, he was able to force his way into Fort Gibraltar and confront Cameron. He found dispatches from North West Company leaders detailing their plans for the Red River Settlement. Cameron had written to Fond du Lac (now Duluth MN) asking for help against the colonists, and other leaders vowed retribution on Selkirk and his settlers. Citing “self-defence and the security of the lives of the settlers,”²¹⁷ Semple occupied the posts at Pembina and Brandon, taking anything of value to Fort Douglas. Robertson took Cameron prisoner and left for Hudson’s Bay to take him to England to stand trial for treason and conspiracy to murder. Seventeen months later Cameron returned to Canada and sued Selkirk for false imprisonment. He was awarded £3000 in damages.

Lord Selkirk was on his way to the Red River colony. For several years he had been seeking protection for his colony. Early in 1815, he had asked Lord Liverpool to write on his behalf to Sir Gordon Drummond, the government administrator in Canada. That petition was denied. In the autumn of the same year, he set sail for Canada with his family. In Montreal, he heard what was happening between Cameron and Alexander Macdonell. The colonists who had gone back to Montreal with the Nor’Westers were upset at the treatment they had received at the hands of the traders and were willing to testify against them. Selkirk applied to magistrates in York (now Toronto) and Montreal, asking that they take testimony from the colonists to amass evidence in support of his request for protection. In November, Selkirk asked Drummond to send help to the colony. He continued his petitions throughout the winter, but the petitions were denied with no reason given, and nothing was done. At this time, Selkirk heard that the colony

²¹⁷ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson’s Bay Company*, 227.

had been restored during the summer of 1815. In April 1816, he was desperate, writing to Drummond that if he continued to do nothing, “there is a probability almost amounting to a certainty that another season must be lost before the requisite force can be sent up – during another year the settlers must remain exposed to attack, and there is every reason to expect that in consequence of this delay many lives may be lost.”²¹⁸

Meanwhile, Semple had been left in charge at Fort Douglas. Fort Gibraltar was destroyed. What could be used to fortify Fort Douglas was taken there on rafts and everything else was burned. The sight of the burning only inflamed the sense of injustice and distrust in the *Métis*, fueling them with an urgent need to protect their lands and their way of life.

Miles Macdonell freed by the courts in Canada, in May 1816 headed back to the Red River. Lord Selkirk had spent the winter in Montreal and also set out with as many men and arms as he could collect. By June he had gotten as far as Sault Ste. Marie with a party of German-Swiss mercenaries who had been fighting in the War of 1812 and some French and Polish soldiers who agreed to fight for land in the colony on the Red River. Selkirk had also managed to be commissioned as a magistrate in the Indian territory.

In May 1816 the North West Company, fully supported by the partners in Montreal and Fort William and the traders in the west, appointed a mixed blooded native who had been educated in Montreal, as “Captain General of all the half-breeds in the country.”²¹⁹ Cuthbert Grant led a party of *Métis* to a portage on the Assiniboine, where they intercepted a group of HBC boats, relieving them of the pemmican they carried. He also plundered Brandon House further up the Assiniboine, further looting supplies. This would be recompense for the pemmican that Miles Macdonell had taken earlier. Supplies would also be needed if the

²¹⁸ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 93.

²¹⁹ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 49.

Nor'Westers were to fight the settlement. In June, Grant and his party set off to meet with a company of voyageurs and *bourgeois*, including a couple of North West Company partners, coming from Fort William. The combined force of about one hundred and twenty *Métis*, French Canadians and natives did not exactly plan to attack, but they would defend themselves: "we shall commit no extravagances but we must not suffer ourselves to be imposed upon ..."²²⁰ At Portage la Prairie, they "arranged bales of pemmican to form a rude fortification, and planted two brass swivel-guns for defence."²²¹

On June 17, 1816, Semple was warned by two Saulteaux Indians that North West Company servants were gathering at Portage la Prairie, with the intention of attacking the settlement in two days.²²² He was certain that Fort Douglas was not in immediate danger. He did post a lookout; the settlers took arms with them as they set out to work the fields, and everyone stayed within the fortress walls at night. On June 19, as evening drew in, the lookout warned that it appeared that a group of about thirty-five horsemen was nearing, but seemed intent on passing to the south of the Fort. Semple led twenty-seven settlers out of the fort, leaving about one hundred and twenty older men, women and children within the fort. On foot and carrying muskets, the two groups of men met at Seven Oaks.

As Semple's group proceeded from the fort, another group galloped up from beyond the horizon. This party, made up mostly of *Métis* wore feathers and war-paint and all were armed with knives and guns. Semple immediately sent one man back to the fort to bring out the cannon. The enlarged "Indian" group closed around the settlers cutting them off from returning to the fort or escaping to the river. One horseman approached Semple, yelling at him. Semple responded by grabbing the horse's bridle and the butt of the man's gun. At that point, a shot

²²⁰ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 216.

²²¹ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 90.

²²² *Ibid*, 95.

rang out and a clerk with HBC fell to the ground. It has never been determined who fired the first shot, but the general opinion is against the North West party.”²²³ A second shot quickly followed striking Semple. The subsequent volley felled most of the settlers leaving very few still standing. Those raised their hands, begging for mercy. The first man to approach the Nor’westers was shot in the head, and then stabbed by the *Bois- Brûles*. Semple addressed Grant, indicating that he was “not mortally wounded”²²⁴ and asking for assistance to return to the fort. Grant promised that he would be seen to, then, leaving him in the care of one of his men, walked away. After Grant left, one of the natives shot Semple to death.

Then men who had stayed in the fort came running to the rescue but were fired upon. They ran back towards the fort. Two men headed for the river and escaped in a canoe, two others swam to safety, and two were taken prisoner. Twenty-three men from the colony and one Nor’Wester died in the skirmish ever after know as the “Massacre of Seven Oaks.” The rest of the wounded were butchered: “The bodies –stripped of clothing, many of them scalped or disemboweled, skulls smashed with rifle butts – were left to the wolves.”²²⁵ Indians later buried the remains.

One of the prisoners, John Pritchard realized that the danger was not passed and pleaded for the safety of the women and children back in the fort. Eventually Grant agreed to let Pritchard act as mediator. He made three trips to the fort before the agreement was made. Grant would allow the settlers to leave peacefully, if they gave up all the public property of the colony. On the 22nd of June, Grant forcibly evicted the colonists, confiscating much of their property and sending them down the Red River in canoes. Once more, the crops were trampled and buildings set on fire. Word of the victory at Seven Oaks reached Portage la Prairie: “*Sacré nom de Dieu,*

²²³ Ross, *The Fur Hunters of the Far West*, 66.

²²⁴ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 99.

²²⁵ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 51.

*bonnes nouvelles, vingt-deux Anglais de tués.*²²⁶ Great was the joy over the death of twenty-two Englishmen!

The trials of the unfortunate colonists were not over. On the river, they met one hundred armed Nor'Westers under the command of a magistrate named M'Leod. In 1803, jurisdiction in the Indian Territory had been transferred from British hands to Canada. M'Leod refused to accept the colonists' version of the massacre. Their valuables were taken and they were sent on their way, without five men who were taken prisoner and sent to Fort William.

At Fort Douglas Cuthbert Grant ceded command to Alexander Macdonell, until M'Leod took charge as the senior officer. M'Leod upbraided the Indians for daring to sympathize with the colonists and refusing to assist in their eviction. He also praised the *Métis* for their deeds and promised rewards when the canoes arrived in the autumn.

Miles Macdonell was on the Winnipeg River when he heard about the massacre from the Indians. He turned back to Sault Ste. Marie to inform Lord Selkirk about the tragedy. Selkirk immediately headed towards the North West Company stronghold at Fort William and seized it. He found confiscated HBC furs and letters and very real evidence that the North West partners would continue their attack on the Red River Settlement. He therefore arrested the partners at Fort William and sent them in three canoes to Montreal for trial. The power of the Nor'Westers, both financial and political was put behind their defense, while the HBC stood behind Selkirk. The HBC was not quite so solidly supportive of Selkirk, but the Company stood to lose too much if no punishment was meted out for the deaths of the colonists. While Selkirk has been roundly criticized for his actions in the wake of the battle at Seven Oaks and the destruction of the settlement, everything he heard and saw from the Nor'Westers convinced him that the settlement would never be safe from the North West Company.

²²⁶ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 232.

Both the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company were beginning to wonder about the wisdom of continuing the rivalry. It had become an increasingly expensive battle. Selkirk was more determined than ever that his colony should persevere, to the embarrassment of both companies. Too much blood had been shed in the quest to control the pemmican and the massacre at Seven Oaks should never have happened. The companies started discussions on uniting the firms as a solution which was both practical and financially sound.

Selkirk spent the winter at Fort William, sending Miles Macdonell, with the mercenaries to the Red River. They seized Fort Daer, proceeding early in 1817 to Fort Douglas. Crops were planted before Selkirk arrived in June. On June 20, 1817 the dispossessed settlers arrived from Norway House to once again take up residence in the colony, which they proceeded to rebuild from scratch. Selkirk bought some horses from the Indians and ordered cattle and sheep. He negotiated a treaty with the local Cree and Salteaux Indians through the chief who had always been a friend to the settlers. "By this treaty, the first between Indians and whites in what is now western Canada, Selkirk secured a reinforcing title to a strip of land along both banks of the rivers from Netley Creek south to Fort Daer and from the Forks west to Poplar Point. The strip extended back two miles from the river on each side, 'as far as can be seen under the belly of a horse on a clear day.' This treaty ensured that the NWC could not press the claims of the *Métis* and halfbreeds to the land on the basis of their Indian ancestry."²²⁷

During the four months that he spent at the Red River settlement, Selkirk laid out the plans of the colony. The mercenaries were given land across the Red, so that they would be close to Fort Douglas in an attack. The lots were ten chains (220 yards) wide and one mile long with another mile for hay. On the west bank, was set ninety acres for use as a wood lot. Land

²²⁷ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 53.

was set aside for churches, both Catholic and Presbyterian, school and a cemetery, and a grist mill was planned.

After only four months in his colony, Selkirk had to return to Montreal. Needing to avoid the North West Company men, he took the long way, down the Mississippi to St. Louis, up the Ohio, then to Montreal via Pittsburgh, New York, and Albany. He became aware that there was talk of dividing Rupert's Land and the Louisiana Purchase at the forty-ninth parallel. Fearing further attacks by the NWC, he proposed in a letter that his colony should move south into American territory for their own safety: "It may perhaps be the most prudent course to allow people to seek asylum within the American lines."²²⁸

Selkirk spent the rest of his life attempting to clear his name and to bring charges against the North West Company. He spent a year in Canada, then to England and the south of France, where he died in 1820, while making plans for new settlers to join his colony. He was eulogized as "a remarkable man who had the misfortune to live before his time."²²⁹ The problems he faced in the Red River Settlement were considered to stem from the antipathy of the North West Company rather than "any untimeliness in his emigration scheme."²³⁰

Colin Robertson once again attempted to establish Fort Wedderburn and this time with more success. He was taken prisoner by members of the NWC, but escaped to England. Before word of his escape was known, some of the mercenaries ambushed a brigade at Grand Rapids on the Saskatchewan on June 13, 1819 and took seven partners prisoner and sent them to England. This was the last illegal arrest made by either company.

The death of Lord Selkirk in 1820, forced both companies to seriously consider uniting. The costs in money and men were unbearable by either company. By the summer of 1820, they

²²⁸ Jackson, *Red River Colony*, 54.

²²⁹ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 207.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 207.

agreed to talk. Edward Ellice, the London agent of NWC, and a long time enemy had spent years attempting to discredit the Hudson Bay Company's charter. He claimed that they had the claim on the North West passage "while the HBC remained inert on the bay."²³¹ He had attempted to buy Selkirk's shares in HBC both before and after his death to end the ferocious competition between the two companies. Peace was finally brought "to the fur trade and to Assiniboia"²³² by "An Agreement Between the Governor and Company of the Hudson's Bay Company and Certain Partners of the North West Company" which was duly signed on March 16, 1821.

After the union of the two companies, life went on in the Red River Settlement. With approximately two hundred settlers and one hundred of the mercenaries brought by Lord Selkirk, there were also the resident population of French voyageurs, the free traders and the *Métis* who also took up residence. Life was very difficult. There was no other way to prosper except for farming and hunting and fishing. Unfortunately the scourge of grasshoppers continued and no crops were harvested until 1821. Before his death, Lord Selkirk had sent what supplies he could to keep the settlement going: food, clothing, tools, arms, and ammunition. Alexander Macdonell, as governor of the settlement, was the distributor and keeper of the accounts, but he had a definite affinity to favor some who lived in state and disfavor others who did not. His record of "false entries, erroneous statement and over-charges"²³³ led to the disgrace of the unpopular governor and he was dismissed in 1821.

Another group of settlers arrived in the Red River; a group of Swiss "watch and clock makers, pastry cooks and musicians,"²³⁴ even more unsuited for life in the Red River than the

²³¹ Jackson, *Red River Colony*, 55.

²³² *Ibid*, 55.

²³³ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, 347.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 347.

Scots and Irish had been. They and the German mercenaries joined forces and, after one winter in Pembina in 1822, they departed the Red River to settle in St. Paul Minnesota.

When the two fur trading companies joined forces, reorganization was needed, in great part because the excessive cost of the competition between them had financially crippled both companies. Cutting costs meant taking the shorter Hudson Bay route to send out the furs and bring in supplies on larger, steadier York boats, instead of the longer trip by the more fragile and expensive canoes from Fort William. Trading posts were reorganized and the duplicate forts at many places were closed, resulting in the termination of employment for many traders on both sides. The largest group to suffer was the many traders, who usually had large families of children who were mixed-bloods. The families were not comfortable away from the outposts, therefore many of them settled in the Red River colony, and helped enlarge the settlement. There were no more groups of organized immigrants and though Assiniboa remained under the ownership of Lord Selkirk's heirs, it was administered by the Hudson's Bay Company as part of the newly organized Northern Department of Rupert's Land. The governor appointed over this area in 1826 was George Simpson. "The 'little emperor' ruled firmly and wisely until his death in 1860."²³⁵

But it would be a long time before the settlers could rest easy. Times were difficult for many years. There was no industry but farming or that associated with the fur trade. It was necessary for another couple of years for the settlers to spend the winter at Pembina in order to hunt buffalo. Winters were long and hard and summers were not long enough. Sometimes drought or insects would attack the crops before they could be harvested. Often there was not sufficient to feed the people in the colony. Though the Red River was no longer the busy trading post it had been, it was still the main supplier of pemmican for the traders and also supplied what

²³⁵ Jackson, *Red River Colony*, 56.

agricultural products there were in the area. As far away as it was from civilization, it remained an “island colony”²³⁶ for many years. The colony struggled for many years, governed by the Hudson’s Bay Company, but not a true part of the Company. Time has proven Lord Selkirk correct in his conviction “that the soil of the prairie was fruitful and would give bread to the sower.”²³⁷ There would be for some time a semblance of peace in the area, though the *Métis* would always chafe at the loss of the land that they considered to be theirs. The city to be known as Winnipeg would rise to fly her colors in the place where “the Red River Colony battled for existence against human enemies and the obstacles of nature.”²³⁸ Other settlements would rise around the original trading posts, especially at Pembina and later Grand Forks. These colonies were also strategic in the business of fur trading and grew into important stops on the route to St. Paul.

²³⁶ Jackson, *Red River Colony*, 57.

²³⁷ Wood, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 138.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, 141.

WOMEN OF THE FUR TRADE

Women were not welcome in the North West. Many women worked as partners to their trader husbands, but they stayed in Montreal looking after the family business while the men went after the furs. Often husband and wife would see each other only every other year. Should misfortune befall the trader, the wife would not know for a year or more, and she might never know exactly what happened to him. She also would not be entitled to any recompense, because he was considered an independent trader. If their company was viable, she might be able to promote the sale of furs for other traders and support her family, but marriage to a fur trader was not considered a wonderful proposition.

The first notable woman to be involved in the fur trade was Lady Margaret Drax, the wife of a financier, who in June 1670 became the first woman shareholder²³⁹ of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The early fur-traders who entered the Red River Valley were Frenchmen sent to *le pays en haut*, or the high country to trade with the natives and block the trails of furs going to Hudson's Bay. They aligned themselves with Indian tribes in order to buy the furs they needed to send on to Europe. They often took wives from the tribe *à la façon du pays*; (verbally, without notary or priest), even if they were already married to white woman. These "country wives" incorporated their new partners into the tribe where they learned the skills they needed to survive and flourish. The traders were also more easily able to interact with those other tribes associated by blood or marriage to their wives. The French traders went out into the country, more actively interacting with the natives and forming familial ties with the tribes. Because he also helped his wife's family, he was deemed a bastion of security for the entire family. A woman married to a white man was esteemed more highly than her sister married to a tribesman.

²³⁹ Andra-Warner, *Hudson's Bay Company Adventures*, 38.

These alliances were regarded as marriages and the traders themselves would introduce their wife's family as "father-in-law" or "brother-in-law". Thus the French traders had all the comforts of home in the wilderness.

The traders of the Hudson's Bay Company also consorted with native women, but this was not as formal a matter as for the French. The Hudson's Bay Company forbade women at its posts, whether the white wives of the traders, or the native women of the tribes in the area. There had been an early experiment in the 1680s when the governor of the fort at Albany was permitted to bring "his parcel of women"²⁴⁰ with him. (Said 'parcel' consisted of the wife of Governor Henry Sergeant and her companion Mrs. Maurice.) Unfortunately, both women were caught in the attack by the French on the fort. Deciding that the Governor did not do his utmost to repel the French in his concern for his wife's safety, it was concluded that white women would be a "burdensome nuisance."²⁴¹ The directive that came down was terse: "upon forfeiture of Wages not to Suffer any woman to come within any of our Factories ..."²⁴² Because the native custom of hospitality included offering their wives or daughters to strangers, it was unlikely that traders would not take up these benefits. As native women had the necessary experience and skills "in preparing furs, netting snowshoes, foraging, securing small game and so forth"²⁴³ they were indisputably needed. They worked the skins for the moccasins and outerwear that were absolute necessities in order to survive the harsh weather around the forts.

Each fort generally attracted a small settlement of natives who called it home and worked the land and helped feed the traders. These alliances helped to make working ties with the natives and certainly made life much more appealing for the English traders stuck on Hudson's

²⁴⁰ Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 173.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 173.

²⁴² Sylvia Van Kirk, "The Custom of the Country," in *Rethinking the Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2009), 481.

²⁴³ Jennifer Brown, "Woman as Central and Symbol," in *Rethinking the Fur Trade*, 520.

Bay throughout long, dark winters. The Hudson's Bay Company's refusal to allow Indian women into the forts was challenged by one of their first successful explorers. The 20-year-old Henry Kelsey, fresh from his explorations of the Canadian west (he was the first white man to go so far west) brought back an Indian bride. The governor of York Fort would not allow the woman into the fort until Kelsey threatened to leave; "Either my wife comes in with me, or I'll go and live with her people."²⁴⁴ Before long, the directives against Indian women were ignored. A century later Sir George Simpson wrote: "Connubial alliances are the best security we can have of the good will of the natives. I have therefore recommended the Gentlemen to form connections with the principal Families immediately on their arrival,"²⁴⁵ and a marriage contract was instigated to secure the rights of the Indian women who entered into such a "service marriage". However the contract was only enforced until the trader returned to England, though Laut says that these marriages were considered valid, and upon the retirement and return to Britain of the trader, a pension administered by the Company was paid for support of the wife and especially the children, called "les petits." The pension was assured by the system of withholding one-third of the earners wages.²⁴⁶ This rule was recorded in the Company books and applied to all men, no matter what their rank in the Company. It wasn't too long before the governors also took native "wives" even espousing polygamy, which in the eyes of the tribes, increased their prestige.

Initially, though the traders were quick to accept the offering of the women in hospitality, they were unable to accept the different mores of the natives' attitude to sexual relations. As Richard White explains in The Middle Ground, "European conceptions of marriage, adultery, and prostitution just could not encompass the actual variety of sexual relations in *pays d'en*

²⁴⁴ O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country*, 241.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 241.

²⁴⁶ Laut, *Adventurers of England*, 48.

haut.”²⁴⁷ That women were free to please themselves was unfathomable to the Europeans and the Catholic missionaries were especially aghast at the interactions between the native women and the traders. White explains that by the 1690s, it was common for young single women to travel with the traders, not only for sex, but also to perform the usual housekeeping duties of cooking, washing, making clothes, and collecting firewood. The rationale for taking women on the trek was that they performed these necessary tasks more cheaply than an accompanying man would, and the women were happy with that. It was a temporary alliance; neither “country marriage” nor prostitution, and the clergy could not condone it.

In such inhospitable country, where war between tribes was common, there were usually many more women in a tribe than men and polygamy was common. When the traders appeared, more males were added to the mix. The officers of the Hudson’s Bay Company were more likely to accept this custom, even as they tried to enforce Company policy against their men consorting with the native women. Eventually policy seemed to dictate that taking of a native wife was the privilege that only officers earned. This caused friction between the governors and the junior members, but the governors were the worst offenders for keeping multiple women, even up to the establishment of the Red River Colony in 1812.²⁴⁸

It was North West Company policy to feed and help clothe the traders’ families and Sylvia Van Kirk says that it is likely that this policy meant that the traders of the North West Company were more likely to conclude “A man could have only one wife”²⁴⁹ in spite of the efforts of the tribes to solicit husbands for their young women. By 1806 during the meeting at Kaministiquia, there was much discussion about the numbers of native women and their children at the posts. The resolution posted included the statement “every practicable means should be

²⁴⁷ White, Richard, “Middle Ground”, in *Rethinking the Fur Trade*, 260.

²⁴⁸ Van Kirk, Sylvia, *Many Tender Ties*, 38.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 38.

used to reduce by degrees the number of women maintained by the company”²⁵⁰ and a fine of 100 pounds in Halifax currency was imposed. Then, because almost all those present were guilty of consorting with Indian women, they had to add the rider that taking up with the daughter of a white man would not be considered a violation. This was probably one of the most ineffectual resolutions they could have passed and in fact O’Meara wonders if the *engagés* or *voyageurs* ever heard of the Kaminsitiquia Resolution.²⁵¹

The clerics preached against polygamy, which White postulates inadvertently meant that more native women consorted with the traders. However, the missionaries found that they could influence the native women more easily and where the native women turned to Christianity, they were often instrumental in changing the sexual mores for their families and eventually the tribe, advocating purity and faithfulness. The clerics advocated that houses should be built for the natives, but whether or not they were lived in is not known.²⁵²

Most traders left their country families behind when they returned home, but many did actually respect the ties of their country families, introducing their wives as Madame, and taking responsibility for their children. The French traders sometimes sent their children back to Montreal for education.²⁵³ Occasionally, a French trader would return to Montreal with his country family, but the children often had a difficult time because they were not considered French. Even back home, such children might not be considered worthy natives either. These children of French and Indian parentage would, almost 200 years later categorize themselves as *Métis* and rebel against the Canadian government. Usually the *Métis* joined with other mixed-bloods to form communities of their own.

²⁵⁰ O’Meara, *Daughters of the Country*, 244.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 245.

²⁵² Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 215.

²⁵³ Pritchett, *Red River Valley*, 14.

The children of the Hudson's Bay Company men were often absorbed into the mother's tribe when the men left. Sylvia Van Kirk speculates that this was more often the case for the daughters. Amongst the tribal confines though, the children of the white traders were very conscious of the fact of their paternity "rendered them superior to true Indians."²⁵⁴ Occasionally the fathers were able to send the sons back to school in England on the presumption that in order to advance in the fur trade they needed an education. Seldom was a daughter sent to England for schooling and the London Committee forbid any educated native woman to return to her home in the North West.

As more men followed into the north-west, it was the daughters of the white traders and Indian women who came to be prized as wives. They learned the necessary survival skills from their mothers and the practices of "civilization" from their fathers, learning to read and dressing in European fashions which they incorporated into a "Canadian" fashion. While they might wear European style dresses, they refused to wear shoes, wearing instead the more practical moccasins. No outfit was complete without leggings under the dress and often the native blanket would be worn as well.

By the 1690s, interracial marriage was occurring more often. While the priests detested the idea, they finally had to condone such a marriage if the woman was a Christian. More traders were willing to offer marriage as a means of making enduring ties. Native families encouraged such marriages as a means of ensuring protection, assistance for hunting and providing for the family and cementing ties with the French as well as a market for fur.

There were a few brave women who ventured into the fur regions. In the annals of the Hudson's Bay Company there is one native woman who earned her place in the history of the HBC and Canada. Known as the Slave Woman, she was a Dene native, a collective of tribes

²⁵⁴ Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 96.

who spoke Athabaskan languages, though of slightly differing dialects. The Athabascans lived in the most remote and desolate parts of northwestern Canada. The Slave Woman was from the Chipewyan branch that lived east of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories. (There is a deserted Hudson's Bay Company trading post, Fort Reliance, on the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.) This young woman, Thanadelthur, had been captured in a raid by the Crees in the spring of 1713.

The Crees were the first natives to get guns from the traders. Their attacks were often directed on one branch of the Chipewyans to the point that this branch came to be known as Slaves.²⁵⁵ Thanadelthur and another woman of her tribe managed to escape their captors late in 1714. They attempted to find their way home, but cold and hunger forced them back. The other woman died and Thanadelthur stumbled into the Hudson's Bay party of goose hunters at Ten Shilling Creek and was brought to York Factory, in a desperate condition, arriving on November 24²⁵⁶.

After the Treaty of Utrecht had restored the fort to the Hudson's Bay Company from the French in 1714, the governor, James Knight worked to reestablish the fur trade and was anxious to extend trade into the north. Thanadelthur told of the rich fur resources her people had, but Knight knew that the Chipewyan would not venture so far as long as they feared the Crees. So he sent a peace delegation of one hundred and fifty people, made up of his "Home" Crees, as well as some "Upland" Crees, with one of the Company's servants, William Stuart who was under orders to ensure Thanadelthur's safety.

The trek through the Barren Lands was difficult. Sickness and starvation stalked the group. Most of the group turned back leaving only Stuart, Thanadelthur, and a party of Crees.

²⁵⁵ Van Kirk, "Thanadelthur", *The Beaver*, Spring 1974, 41.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

When they found a group of Chipewyans murdered by another band of Crees, the party, fearful of revenge, decided to turn back. Thanadelthur asked them to give her ten days to return with her people. Though both native bands feared each other, she persuaded them into accepting the peace, earning Stuart's admiration. The peace party returned to York Factory in May of 1716.

In the eyes of the traders, Chipewyan women had no status. They served only to work, and serve as beasts of burden, David Thompson was told.²⁵⁷ Samuel Hearne saw them carrying up to one hundred and fifty pounds, or pulling sleds of even greater burdens. If food was scarce, women were the first to be denied food, the rationale being that the men had to live in order to hunt.²⁵⁸ But Alexander McKenzie accounted that the women had much influence in their tribe and were always consulted over important concerns.²⁵⁹ Thanadelthur was her tribe's link to the English who could provide them with goods, especially guns for hunting and fending off enemies who had guns.

Thanadelthur continued to interpret for her people and the English, as well as the Crees. Listening to her tales of minerals, which he concluded to be copper and gold, Knight determined to build a post at Churchill in 1717 and started making plans which Thanadelthur interpreted to her people who were involved in the mission. However the very bad winter and different way of life caused sickness among the natives and Thanadelthur also took ill. She died on February 7, 1717 at approximately only 20 years of age. Knight was heartbroken to lose the woman who commanded such respect from him and was sure that her death was a considerable loss to the Company.²⁶⁰ But, determined to build the fort at Churchill, he managed to find another

²⁵⁷ Van Kirk, "Thanadelthur", *The Beaver*, 43.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid* 43.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid* 43.

²⁶⁰ <http://www2.hbc.com/hbcheritage/history/people/women/thanadelthur.asp> retrieved Aug. 3 2012.

Chipewyan woman to accompany the Hudson's Bay party to Churchill in July to start construction.

The peace forged by Thanadelthur between the two warring native tribes enabled the Hudson's Bay Company to expand their trade into the far north and it is her name which is memorialized in the annals of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Among the many women who assisted their husband's fur trading enterprises, the women of the Chaboillez family were known to be active participants in the family business. Marguerite Larcheveque Chaboillez, 29 years old and mother of five, acted as the Montreal agent while her husband, Charles Jean-Baptiste Chaboillez III travelled in the northwest. Irene Ternier Gordon mentions letters from a well-known supplier which show that she was no figurehead, but actively involved in the business. The Chaboillez family had long traded and Marguerite's father-in-law Charles Chaboillez II had a post near Michilimackinac, and had married Marie-Anne Chevalier, the daughter of merchants from Michilimackinac. Marie-Anne's mother, Mme Chevalier had also run the family business when her husband was away and it is very likely that Marie-Anne also worked in the business, as after her husband died in 1757, she moved to Montreal. She continued the business there, for records from 1765 show that her son sent furs to her there. Marie-Marguerite, the daughter of Marguerite and Charles Chaboillez III married Simon McTavish, the head of the North West Company and their son became a partner in NWC. Charles Chaboillez IV, son of Charles and Marguerite became a clerk for NWC in 1791, taking charge of the post at Pembina in 1797-1798.²⁶¹

It would be almost one hundred years after the traders wandered into the North West before the first non-native baby was born in the Red River region. Alexander Henry, the chief factor of the North West Company's post at Pembina, had black slaves, Pierre Bonza and his

²⁶¹ Irene Ternier Gordon, *People of the Fur Trade* (Heritage House Publishing, 2011), 47.

wife. Their child, was born March 12 1802, the first non-aboriginal child in this area so far away from home.

The story behind the birth of the first white child born in the northwest holds mysteries to which the answers may never be known.

In June 1806, a young man named John Fubbister had signed on with the Hudson's Bay Company for 3 years at a salary of £8 per year. Landing at Moose Factory, he spent the next year and a half, moving supplies between the posts, working as hard as any other man. For the winter of 1807, he was posted to Pembina with the rest of the brigade. On December 29th 1807, Alexander Henry, the factor at Pembina answered a knock on his door and found a young lad in distress, asking for shelter for the night. Allowing him to settle by the fire, Henry returned to his office, only to be disturbed by strange noises. He found the "young lad" in advanced stages of labor. Isabel Gunn had left her native Orkney disguising herself as a man to go out to Rupert's Land. She managed to hide her gender, except apparently from one man, John Scarth, who realized she was a woman and raped her. HBC records show that John Scarth had travelled out from Orkney on the same ship and was in several of the brigades on which she served. She gave birth to a son that December night in 1807, and spent the rest of the winter in Pembina. No longer permitted to work with the men, she was given the job of washerwoman, which she did for a year. In September 1809 she was sent back to Orkney with her son. There is much speculation about why she went to Rupert's Land including that she followed a lover who hired on with HBC. A novel by Audrey Thomas based on the few known details of her life and with much speculation about what might have been, suggests that her brother joined HBC and wrote about the adventure and excitement to be found. It must also be noted that the salary was much more than she would ever have made at home. The Hudson's Bay history site tells that when she

returned to Orkney she worked making stockings and mittens until her death in 1861 at the age of 81. Sylvia Van Kirk recounts that one popular story tells of further misfortune and that she ended up a vagrant.²⁶² Beyond the details of his birth, there is no further record of her son. Audrey Thomas speculates that he might have been left behind in the Red River Valley, but it is extremely doubtful that there would be any provision for bringing up an infant in that wild country. Nevertheless this formidable woman who took on a man's role in very inhospitable circumstances is claimed by HBC as their first female adventurer.²⁶³

The next white baby to be born in this vast land was also born at Henry's fort less than a week after Gunn gave birth to her son. The next baby was a daughter born to the wife of one of Henry's hunters. Jean Baptiste Lagimodière had left his home at the age of 21 in 1799 and travelled west as a voyageur. After he arrived in the Red River Valley, he worked at the Pembina River post. He became a skilled hunter and soon his job was to hunt for food for the post. He became an independent hunter, a freeman, who supplied the traders with pemmican, the staple food for travelers. Seven years later he returned home intending to marry and settle down. Marie-Anne Gaboury was 26 years old and worked as housekeeper for the parish priest. She was regarded as a very beautiful and bright young woman. She was literate, unusual for anyone of that era, but especially for a woman. She was paid little; possibly just her bed and board, but she probably made use of the priest's library. She had held her position for 10 years, turning off all suitors, much to her family's despair. It took only a few weeks for Jean-Baptiste to ask her family and her employer, for permission to court her. Within four months they were married.

Marie-Anne expected to settle down in their home village and live a life very much like her mother's. Her husband had promised he would not return to the fur trade. But it didn't take

²⁶² Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 177.

²⁶³ <http://www2.hbc.com/hbcheritage/history/people/women/isobelgunn.asp>.

long for Jean-Baptiste to get itchy feet. He had expected to settle into village life, but there was no land available. Lumber had become a valuable commodity. Any landowner would not sell his holdings, so the only available land was far away and deep in the bush. It would take years before a man could settle and till his own land. No other occupation appealed to the young man, and as spring approached he grew more restless for the wide open prairie. He could not settle into the more restricted life of Quebec after the wide-open spaces and absolute freedom he had enjoyed in the northwest. He resolved to go back. Marie-Anne also resolved to go with him. She had seen too many “fur widows”, those wives who, when their husbands went west, had to move into the home of the in-laws and be at their beck-and-call, unable to even enjoy running their own homes, or raise their children as they wished. Every few years, the husband would return, but soon be off again, before the next baby arrived. Marie-Anne had remained single and in charge of her own destiny long after custom dictated that she should, and she had not married to submit to life in the shadows of her in-laws. It did not take her long to make up her mind, but it took much longer to persuade her family that she was doing what she had to do. She would go into the North West with her husband.

She had eight days to prepare for a journey that forever changed her life, for though she lived to be ninety-six years old, she never saw Quebec or her family again. A true descendant of those *filles du roi* who were transported to Quebec to help populate New France, she was undaunted by the thought.

But the list of items that she packed to take showed her lack of knowledge of the journey that, in two hundred years of trading, no white woman had attempted. Each passenger was permitted only eighteen kilograms of luggage, including the food she would need for the six weeks or more it took to complete the 1800 mile journey. Not only were the clothes she

habitually wore inappropriate for the long canoe journey and the portages through the bush, but she included in her box a flatiron which weighed 1 kilogram by itself. The clothes worn by women of the time were totally unsuitable for coping with the fragile, very tippy canoes and the long portages through thick brush, or muddy bogs. Though she wore more articles of clothing than any woman today would, they could not protect her from the effects of the bright sun reflecting off the water or the biting of the mosquitoes and other insects looking for tender flesh to feed on. Long before the party reached Lake Nipigon her clothes were in tatters and she had recourse to Indian styles clothing and especially moccasins which gave her better footing.

The long trek is laid out in a book based on her journals: Marie-Anne by Maggie Siggins. One can only wonder at the dogged persistence of this woman, for whom life had never been easy, but the sheer determination to meet new challenges every day cannot have been easily found especially towards the end of the journey when morning sickness made her lot even more miserable. Perhaps it is no wonder that she never made the return journey, even after travel became somewhat easier and more commonplace. Her husband did return to Montreal several times, leaving her behind bearing the responsibilities of home and children for the extended time that such a trip took.

Upon arrival at the North West Post at Pembina, Marie-Anne's first marital home was a wigwam in the encampment of free hunters set up on one side of the fort. Jean-Baptiste was among old friends who, like him, when the North West Company did not renew their contracts set up as freemen in business for themselves. In this trade Jean-Baptiste was much respected and certainly able to support his wife. But their lives were in community with other Freemen, not within the fort's more comfortable confines. She learned from the Indian wives of the other

hunters how to make the pemmican that was the staple of the traders and the source of income for her family and how to tan the buffalo hides into the clothes they needed for winter wear.

The families followed the hunters into the field, but the idea of delivering his own child forced Jean-Baptiste to return to Fort Pembina with his very pregnant wife. Two days after they arrived at Pembina, on January 6th 1808, their daughter Reine was born in a wigwam in the hunter's camp and she was cared for in the Indian ways: swaddled in rabbit skin with dried swamp moss and put into a cradleboard.

Though the Lagimodières spent some time at other posts throughout the North West, the news of the settlement to be formed on the Red River persuaded them to return in 1811. The Lagimodière's had eight children and it was no small feat for the time, not to mention the isolation from all modern medicine that they all lived to adulthood. Though William Healy in his Women of the Red River says that it was the Lagimodiere's first daughter Reine, it has been documented that it was their seventh child Julie who would be the mother to one of Canada's iconic figures, Louis Riel, the *Métis* leader who would, during his grandmother's lifetime, lead the Red River Rebellion of 1869-1870 against the Canadian government, in an endeavor to preserve *Métis* rights and culture. Another effort, the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 also failed, and Louis Riel was arrested and executed for treason. Today he is regarded as the Father of Manitoba. MaryAnn lived to see Manitoba recognized as part of the Confederation of Canada, undreamed of during those years she spent as the only white woman following her hunter husband across the prairies.

The native women were inured to the harsh climate, and the tribes were their kinsmen, so they didn't feel the isolation that the European women felt when they arrived. Though the men, usually the traders, might journey back and forth to Montreal, the women were unlikely to

attempt the rigors again. Those very few women, who followed their men into the Red River Valley, knew that they were unlikely to see their homelands or their families again.

Those white women who followed the fur trade into the Red River Valley in the early days had to be extraordinarily strong both in body and mind and even more intrepid than any man. As difficult as their lives might have been at home, on the journey they faced hardships that they could not have dreamed, and life did not get any easier upon arrival in this new land. The most rudimentary shelter in Scotland was a palace when compared to a land where shelters were routinely made of buffalo skins, and later of sod. The upper Midwestern climate was unforgiving; colder than they could have imagined during the long winters and correspondingly hotter in the summer than the balmy green lands they had left. For those few women who dared the trek, there was no support from family or friends as there might have been at home. There was no way to buy food, nor the seed needed to grow it. There was no way to buy the warm clothing that was needed. She may have had her knitting needles, but there were no sheep to provide wool. There were no cows or chickens to give milk and eggs, or flour with which to make bread, the staples of the family table. There was no furniture to sleep on or eat off or sit on. There was only the vast expanse of flat land across which the wind blew, and the snow flew. And for too many years, it seemed only to worsen.

William Healy notes that one can only guess at how badly the women who first came to the Red River Valley suffered. He feels that the women were “in closer and more wounding contact than the men with the cruelly hard realities of life in such conditions.”²⁶⁴ He maintains that it was in many ways due to “the sustaining courage and devotion of the women”²⁶⁵ that the nation was created.

²⁶⁴ Healy, *Women of Red River*, 5.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

The harshest reality for women was childbirth. This “natural” function too often ended in tragedy. The women of the Red River Valley had few resources and only practical experience to call upon. Marie Anne Lagimodière bore and raised her children in the manner of the tribal women, for they were the only assistance she had. Isabel Gunn had only the assistance of Alexander Henry. Mrs. McLean, in the first party of Selkirk settlers bore her daughter as the ship itself labored for two days through a furious storm. When, in April 1813, the third party of settlers set out to walk the one hundred miles to their new home, they had to stop to set up a tent and supply it with food, wood and small arms so that the wife of nineteen-year-old Angus McKay might bear her child. Food was so scarce that no delay could be considered and the rest of the party moved on. As soon as mother and child could, the small family had to hurry to catch up with the main party. One can only imagine that great fear was present in every case; the fear of the parents that mother and/or baby might not live and the absolute fear of the father that he might not be able to save his family. That fear drove Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière to carry his wife back to Pembina where the native women had the skills and knowledge, in order that he would not have to deliver the child himself.

In 1812 the first party of settlers from Scotland arrived in the Red River Valley. Life in the new country bore absolutely no resemblance that the one left behind. Arriving at Churchill in September, the first winter was spent in the fort in rather rustic conditions. The next winter they could only have hoped for such conditions. A long, cold spring meant arrival at The Forks in August, much too late for any harvest, or even proper building. The settlers moved to Pembina for the reluctant assistance from the local fur traders. They existed in a state of near-starvation, struggling through blizzards in the hunt for buffalo, living in the most primitive of conditions in unrelenting freezing cold, likely longing for the miserable lives they had left

behind. Conditions were more primitive than they could have imagined. Living in animal skin teepees on the harsh, cold, wind-blown plains could never have been their dream. The traders were unfriendly and not given to helping out, giving only enough to maintain a mere existence. The women suffered for their children and the immigrant mothers were reduced to “selling their shawls to Hudson’s Bay Company servants for oatmeal to feed their children.”²⁶⁶ Their shawls were the only warmth they had against the deep cold.

Little improved in the next several years and the toll of the fur trade wars brought more devastation and death to the settlers. For the women of that time, the husband was the head of the family and the provider. The death of the man of the family brought severe hardship to the family. The women who helped to settle the Red River Colony had to be stronger and braver than could ever have been expected.

Forced to vacate the settlement in 1815 and sent up river in canoes while their fledgling settlement was destroyed, many did return to start again. In 1816 the colonists were again attacked. This time twenty-two men were killed and the rest were once again bundled out in canoes while the crops they had tended so carefully were trampled and the modest dwellings once again torched. When they thought they reached safety, their story was not believed. They were relieved of their few valuables and once again sent out in canoes.

After the wars ceased other disasters to the colony, flood, fire and pestilence dogged the small colony. In 1818, even Selkirk was discouraged when local disasters undid everything that had been accomplished over the previous six years and the group was forced to start again. Several times it seemed that the colony could not be saved. The great flood of 1826 seemed to doom the settlement, but finally by 1833 it could be said that the settlement would survive.

²⁶⁶ Campbell, *The North West Company*, 206.

The fact that the small settlement did survive was a testament to the strength and determination of the women immigrants. They suffered as much, or more, for they had the care of the family closer to their hands and hearts. No amount of gratitude or praise could ever be enough for these brave women.

SETTLEMENT

Alexander Henry hoped that the fort he built at Pembina would be the hub of a series of small North West Company outposts along the Red River. He also set up a trade route with the Indian villages along the Missouri River. Henry intended to carry on trade with the Sioux to the south and the Cree and Saulteaux to the north. A post was built at present-day Grand Forks by John Cameron. Outposts were also constructed at other sites along the Red River: at Turtle River in 1802-1803, Park River in 1803-1804, and Forest River in 1804-1805. The years 1801 to 1805 were a “Golden Age”²⁶⁷ for the traders and their Indian employees. The resounding financial success prompted both the Hudson’s Bay Company and The New North West Company, known as XY Company to step up their activities in the Red River Valley. The period was also the time that the rivalry was at its most intense and violent. Both sides abused their prisoners and on the rustic outskirts of the HBC’s Red River Colony, twenty settlers and the resident Governor were shot and their bodies mutilated by retainers of the North West Company.²⁶⁸

By this time the Chippewa were better established in the area, and trade was brisk with the Cree and Assiniboin.²⁶⁹ Unfortunately, with the influx of natives, as well as traders, there was added strain on food and game supplies. The tribes had to venture further into Sioux territory. The Chippewa were adapting from the woodland habitat to the prairie. Their fish and wild rice based diet now evolved into a life dictated by bison. They obtained horses and moved more freely, becoming more independent. There has been speculation that “the Chippewas underwent a significant psychological transformation ... [F]rom the sometimes introverted forest-

²⁶⁷ Wood, “The Chippewa Fur Trade” in *The Fur Trade in North Dakota*, 37.

²⁶⁸ Newman, Peter, *Caesars of the Wilderness*, xx.

²⁶⁹ Wood, “The Chippewa Fur Trade” in *The Fur Trade in North Dakota*, 37.

dwellers,... the Plains-Chippewas supposedly evolved into the self-confident hunters and trappers of the Red River Valley.²⁷⁰

In 1804, the North West Company and XY Co merged. Henry expanded to the south as far as the Buffalo and Pelican rivers. By 1805, game both for food and fur were showing signs of decline and profits slowed. Trade in the area lessened. Increased activity against the Chippewa and the traders by the Sioux caused great alarm, and when the fort at Pembina was attacked in 1808, Henry made the decision to leave the Red River Valley.

The first Hudson's Bay Company men lived in forts along the Bay, seldom venturing outside their area. Furs were brought to the posts and the bearers of the furs were not allowed inside. The Hudson's Bay clerks served their terms and looked forward to returning to England with money enough to set them up for the future.

In contrast the first French traders lived in the native villages, learning how to live off the land from those who had survived the harsh climate for generations. They pushed their way into the forbidding interior travelling with the tribes and exploring the lands. Life was primitive and a constant battle against the elements. Most settled with a tribe and set up families with native women.

Most outposts until the late 1790s were not built to last more than a couple of years; then the trader would return to Quebec. Another trader might come along and set up residence in the post. Or if better trade was found elsewhere, the trader would erect another temporary outpost.

It was at Henry's fort in Pembina that the first signs of settlement in the Red River Valley appeared. Though he built a fur-trading post, he intended it to be his home for several years. The stockade enclosing the usual necessary buildings for the traders to sleep in and storage for food, animals and the trappings of the trade was standard enough. Henry's home was a building

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 37.

not before seen on the prairies. The house was two stories, for he mentions coming downstairs. He had glass windows covered by curtains and his own 'library'. An enormous garden was planted to supplement the meat and fish stored for use through the harsh winter. He had to build a stockade around his potato field to stop the theft of his crop by the natives.

Over time, the stockade was enlarged to include a blacksmith's shop which also produced nails for building. By 1807, a stable to house fifty horses was built, a far cry from the pair he had when he arrived at the Red River.²⁷¹ All these buildings were treated with "white earth to white wash [my] houses,"²⁷² This white earth was brought in from in Hair Hills, which is now known as the city of Walhalla. The earth there was found to be as pure and white as lime and used for the same purpose. The first non-native babies in the land were born at Henry's fort in Pembina. There is no other record of non-native children born in the region until Selkirk's settlers arrived.

Several years into the nineteenth century, the Hudson's Bay Company had 76 posts and the North West Company had 97. As the North West Company had found when fighting with the XY Company, competition is very expensive and both companies were floundering. The North West Company was near collapse and the Hudson's Bay Company was "stretched to its credit limit with the Bank of England."²⁷³

When the US-Canada border was enforced in 1818, the Hudson's Bay Company abandoned many of their posts in the United States. Because Grand Portage, where the HBC was headquartered, was on the "wrong" side of the border, the Company moved its headquarters to Fort Kministikwia, later renamed Fort William, Ontario.

²⁷¹ Ritterbush, *Fur Trade Posts at Pembina*, 21.

²⁷² *Ibid*, 22.

²⁷³ Andra-Warner, *Hudson's Bay Company Adventures*, 121.

The death of Lord Selkirk in April 1820, helped convince both companies to seriously consider uniting. The costs in money and men had become insupportable for either company. By the summer of 1820, they agreed to talk. Edward Ellice, the London agent for NWC, was a long-time enemy of HBC and had spent years attempting to discredit the Hudson's Bay Company charter. He claimed that NWC had the right to the North West passage "while the HBC remained inert on the bay."²⁷⁴ He had attempted to buy Selkirk's shares in HBC both before and after his death, in an attempt to end the fierce competition between the two companies. On March 16, 1821 peace was finally brought "to the fur trade and to Assiniboia."²⁷⁵ "An Agreement Between the Governor and Company of the Hudson's Bay Company and Certain Partners of the North West Company" is "a complex 12,000-word document outlining a renewable contract effective for 21 years."²⁷⁶

When the two fur trading companies joined forces, reorganization was needed, in great part because the excessive cost of the competition between had financially crippled both companies. Cutting costs meant taking the shorter Hudson Bay route to send out the furs and bring in supplies on the larger, sturdier and steadier York boats, introduced by Miles Macdonnell instead of the longer trip from Fort William in the more fragile and expensive canoes. The York boats were built by Orkneymen whom the HBC recruited for the purpose, because the York boats could carry three times as much cargo as the more fragile birchbark canoes. These boats were extremely sturdy and adaptable. They were rowed by oarsmen, but could be poled in shallower water, or the mast could be raised and sailed in open water. If necessary, they could

²⁷⁴ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 55.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Andra-Warner, *Hudson's Bay Company Adventures*, 121.

be towed by the crew on shore.²⁷⁷ With the coming of the railroad, York boats were no longer needed and the last York boats sailed away in the early 1870s.

The Hudson's Bay Company traded all the land between Fort Garry and St. Paul and was the main supply of stores for the early settlers of the Red River Valley.²⁷⁸ The Red River Cart was introduced by Alexander Henry, partner in the North West Company, while he was at Pembina. The two-wheeled cart was similar to ones he had seen in Quebec. The Red River Cart became a very familiar sight in the Red River Valley. Trains of carts made the journey between Pembina and St. Paul, carrying furs to St. Paul, and then returning with supplies for the settlers. Heavy-duty and made of local materials, it could haul massive loads, "carrying an immense stock of goods."²⁷⁹ It was a very profitable route for the Company, costing less than the route by Hudson Bay.

The Red River Cart was made entirely of wood, "without a particle of iron."²⁸⁰ "You could hear them coming for miles before you could ever see them."²⁸¹ The wheels could not be greased because the dust of the track would choke up the wheels and render them immovable. The carts evolved over the years, but they continued to be made of wood: elm for the hubs, white ash or oak for the rims, because these woods could be bent into a curve, and hard maple for the axle. The bow for the oxen was ash or oak that had been boiled and pressed into shape. Strips of rawhide were soaked in water then wound around the wheel rims. When dried, the rawhide shrank and clung to the wooden rim.²⁸² In the event of a breakdown, tools were at hand to make the repairs and of course there was plenty of local material for replacement parts. There were

²⁷⁷ <http://www.hbcheritage.ca/hbcheritage/history/transportation/yorkboat/home>, retrieved 3/6/14.

²⁷⁸ Twamley, James, "The Hudson Bay Fur Company" in *History of the Red River Valley* (Grand Forks: Herald Printing Company, 1909), 372.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 375.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 372.

²⁸¹ Olive Knox, "Red River Cart", *Manitoba Pageant*, April, 1956.

²⁸² Ibid.

trees on the plains at that time, trees big enough to give, as Alexander Henry wrote: “solid wheels three feet in diameter.”²⁸³ . On one occasion, while hunting, he and his companions found seven raccoons in the hollow trunk of a tree: “The size of this tree was enormous,” wrote Henry, “it had a hollow six feet in diameter, the rim or shell being two feet thick including the bark.”²⁸⁴

The carts were very adaptable. When the wheels were removed and covered with buffalo skins, they were used as boats in order to cross the streams and rivers of the prairies. The old trails that the traders established were turned into “veritable caravan routes in a country still wild and rough and infested with hostile Indians.”²⁸⁵

Unfortunately, oxen are slow, lumbering creatures and the journey between St. Paul and Winnipeg would take a month, and only in summer. During the winter, “dog train and sled took the place of the cart and ox.”²⁸⁶ The intense cold and heavy snow of the northern plains made the journey very treacherous.

Cutting costs also meant that trading posts had to be reorganized. Duplicate forts at many places were closed, resulting in the termination of employment for many. The largest group to suffer was the many traders, who usually had large families of children with native mothers. The families were not comfortable away from the outposts, therefore many of them settled in the Red River colony, and helped enlarge the settlement.

After the union of the two companies, life went on in the Red River Settlement. After the Swiss “watch and clock makers, pastry cooks and musicians”²⁸⁷ together with the German mercenaries left the Red River Valley in 1822, there were no more groups of organized

²⁸³ Frank Hall, “A Tale of the Red River Carts”, *Manitoba Pageant*, v.12 no.2, 1969:Spring.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Pritchett, *Red River Valley*, xi.

²⁸⁶ Twamley, *History of the Red River Valley*, 371.

²⁸⁷ Bryce, *Remarkable History of the Hudson’s Bay Company*, 347.

immigrants. Although Assiniboia remained under the ownership of Lord Selkirk's heirs, it was administered by the Hudson's Bay Company as part of the newly organized Northern Department of Rupert's Land.

It would be a long time before the settlers could rest easy. Times were difficult for many years. There was no industry but farming or that associated with the fur trade. It was necessary for several more years for the settlers to spend the winter at Pembina to hunt buffalo. Winters were long and hard and summers were not long enough. Sometimes drought or insects would attack the crops before they could be harvested. Often there was not sufficient food for the people in the colony. Though the Red River was no longer the busy trading post it had been, it was still the main supplier of pemmican for the traders and also supplied what agricultural products there were in the area. As far away as it was from civilization, the "island colony" struggled for many years.²⁸⁸ The settlers were governed by the Hudson's Bay Company, but were not a true part of the Company. Time has proven Lord Selkirk correct in his conviction "that the soil of the prairie was fruitful and would give bread to the sower."²⁸⁹ That "treeless plain clothed in the richest of soils, would become a major supplier of wheat and grain to the world."²⁹⁰

There would be for some time a semblance of peace in the area, though the *Métis* would always chafe at the loss of 'their' land, but the city to be known as Winnipeg, would rise to fly her colors in the place where "the Red River Colony battled for existence against human enemies and the obstacles of nature."²⁹¹ Other settlements would rise around the original trading posts, especially at Pembina and later Grand Forks, North Dakota, where the *Métis* formed larger settlements

²⁸⁸ Jackson, *Centennial History of Manitoba*, 57.

²⁸⁹ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 138.

²⁹⁰ Pritchett, *Red River Valley*, 1.

²⁹¹ Wood, *Red River Colony*, 141.

and hunted buffalo. These colonies were also strategic in the business of fur trading and grew into important stops on the route to St. Paul. Along with the Red River carts, the Hudson's Bay Company eventually brought steamships to the Red River to facilitate the movement of furs from the north. A stage and freight line continued on to St. Paul.

By necessity, the colonists had to shift for themselves. The first need was a gristmill to produce flour for bread. The first gristmill was built in 1815, but it burned, along with most of the fledgling colony in the attacks by the Métis shortly after. That mill was not replaced until the winter of 1820-1821, but it lasted less than two years before the foundations gave way in the spring thaw. Without a functioning gristmill, grain was ground by small handmills or querns brought from Scotland. Most households owned a quern and produced their flour by the handful. It was not until 1825 that the Selkirk estate paid £1500 to erect a windmill which worked well and lasted for some years.²⁹²

Salt licks found in the area were a source of salt, and as animals were gradually introduced into the settlement, salted meat became a winter staple. Virginia Patch finds that LaVerendrye was the first to mention salt: "found five or six league from the same river [Red] there is a salt spring which forms a basin where the sun dries up the water so as to form a very white salt. They [the natives] brought me some of it and it is very good. The savages use it."²⁹³ Other explorers also commented on the presence of salt around Lakes Winnipegosis and Lake Manitoba, along the Red River. Later the Scots of the Red River Settlement brought their experience in salt-making and supplied the region with salt. They set up a family enterprise supplying the colonies with all the salt needed for salting meat and fish to last over the winter. Salt-making continued in the area until well into the twentieth century.

²⁹² Kaye, Barry, "Flour Milling at Red River", *Manitoba History*, No. 2 1981 retrieved 02/17/14

[Manitoba History: Flour Milling at Red River: Wind, Water and Steam](#)

²⁹³ Patch, Virginia, "Salt Making in Manitoba", *Manitoba History*, No. 51, 2006 retrieved 02/1/014

[Manitoba History: Salt-Making in Manitoba](#)

When the US-Canada border was enforced in 1818, the Hudson's Bay Company paid the American Fur Company the sum of £300 per annum for the rights to the fur trade in a region north of Lake Superior.²⁹⁴ The Pembina Museum states that this also held true for the Red River Valley, since The American Fur Company was not prepared to spend the money that would be needed to maintain a presence in the Valley.

After the merger of the two large fur companies, the Hudson's Bay Company was a formidable business. The company ruled the entire empire that was British North America, "except the colonies already occupied on the Atlantic shore, the St. Lawrence, and the Lower Great Lakes."²⁹⁵

Settlement grew slowly, but in the Red River Valley, as the hub of the fur trade, settlers did trickle in. Life was very difficult, but slowly agriculture took hold. Peace was difficult. Old animosities between the former traders and the *Métis* festered because the latter believed that the land was "theirs" by right. Selkirk's family continued to provide assistance to the Red River Colony for several years after Lord Selkirk's death; however it was The Hudson's Bay Company which maintained rule over the region. The Red River Valley was the center of the fur trade in the northern plains with a brisk trade route to St. Paul.

The Hudson's Bay Company had been the reluctant overseer for exploration in the Red River Valley, forced into expanding its horizons by competition from other traders. The Company had fought against colonization, but reluctantly had to agree that settlement was a necessity. The Hudson's Bay Company was the driving force behind the exploration and settlement of the Red River Valley and the facilitator for growth and economics.

²⁹⁴ G.L. Nutt in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association's Calendar of the American Fur Company's Papers*, (Washington: GPO 1945) 524.

²⁹⁵ Andra-Warner, *Hudson's Bay Company Adventures*, 122.

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APPENDIX

POSTS OF THE RED RIVER (PEMBINA) COLONY

This information is taken from two sources:

Voorhis, Ernest, *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French Regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*, Ottawa: Canada Natural Resources Intelligence Branch, 1930

In earliest times, the North West Company referred to the Red River flowing into Lake Winnipeg as Lower Red River, while the Assiniboine River was known as Upper Red River. After the Assiniboine was named, the Red was designated Upper or Lower according to its position north or south of Pembina²⁹⁶

<http://www.americanforts.com/West/nd.html> retrieved 6/10/2010

On the occasions where there are contradictory statements, further research has resulted in the final statement.

Frobisher's Fort (1774-?) Also known as Red River Fort, it was the first English fort on the Red, two or three leagues above Rivière aux Morts (now Netley's Creek) and three leagues below St. Andrews Rapids near Selkirk.

Fort Garry (1) (1822-1826)- The chief Hudson's Bay fort at Winnipeg, built at the site of the NWC's Fort Gibraltar after the merger of the two companies and destroyed by the flood of 1826

Fort Garry (2) (1835-1882)- Known as Upper Fort Garry, it was built of stone, further away from the bank of the Red. It was sold to the city of Winnipeg in 1882.

Grant's-House on the Red River-HBC fort built by Peter Grant about 1793, on the east side of the Red River, opposite the mouth of the Pembina River and opposite the site later occupied by Chaboillez House.

Grant's House on the Red River-NWC fortified post built by Cuthbert Grant about 10 ½ miles above Pembina.

Fort Pembina (1)-Fort Pambian (1797-1798)-NWC Post of Charles Chaboillez, on the west side of the Red River and south side of the Pembina. Also known as Chaboillez House. (In Selkirk Park on Stutsman Street; the buildings burned down in 1815.)²⁹⁷

Fort Pembina (2)-Henry House (2) (1801-Unknown) NWC Fort also known as Fort Henry, built by Alexander Henry, on "the north side of Pandian river at the point of land between that and the

²⁹⁶ Voorhis, 146

²⁹⁷ www.americanforts.com/West/nd.html

Red river, about 10 paces from each river.²⁹⁸ Opposite Chaboillez House on the south side. John McLeod took this fort for HBC in December 1815.²⁹⁹

Fort Pembina (3)-Hudson's Bay Company rebuilt the original 1793 fort that it had established alongside Grant's House in 1801, on the site of present day St. Vincent, Minnesota.

Fort Pembina (4)-XY Company fort built in 1801 by Crébassa.

Pembina House (1803-1823, 1845-1876) HBC Post on the south side of the rivers, on Rolette Street sometimes called Fort Pembina. The post was occupied by Minnesota Volunteers during the Sioux Uprisings in 1863.

Fort Daer (1812-1823)-HBC Post on the west bank of the Red River, at the mouth of the Pembina on the north side, at the present town of Pembina. It was named after Lord Selkirk who was also Baron Daer. Some of the worst battles with the NWC were here, and the post was briefly occupied by NWC in 1816.³⁰⁰

The Pembina or Red River Settlement was the first permanent white settlement in North Dakota, established in 1812 by British Canadians, mainly Scots, as part of the Red River Colony in Manitoba, under the aegis of HBC. Most of the settlers moved north after the border was fixed in 1818, and the rest moved after the border was confirmed by a land survey in 1823.³⁰¹

Pembina River House (1800-1805?) NWC post also known as Pembina Mountain Post and Hair Hills Post was established as a fur trade post, but became known for its vegetable gardens.

Park River Post (1800-1801?) NWC post also known as Henry House (1) built by Alexander Henry on the west side of the Red River, one-quarter mile from the mouth of the Park River.

Roy's House (1797-?) NWC post at the mouth of the Salt River, a tributary of the Red, about 8 miles south of Henry's House at the mouth of the Park River. Thompson visited it in 1798, but it was gone before Alexander Henry Jr. arrived.

LeRoy's House (1800-Unknown) Independent British post about 45 ½ miles above Pembina, 5 ½ miles south of the Salt River.³⁰² Near Warsaw, built either at the mouth of the Forest River or at the mouth of the Turtle River.³⁰³

Turtle River Post (2) (1812-Unknown)-HBC Post built on the Red River at the mouth of the Turtle River, 18 miles north of Grand Forks. In 1802, John Cameron was sent by Alexander Henry to build an "English Post" just south of the mouth of the River.

²⁹⁸ Voorhis, 136

²⁹⁹ Voorhis, 57

³⁰⁰ www.americanforts.com/West/nd.html

³⁰¹ www.americanforts.com/West/nd.html

³⁰² Voorhis, 102

³⁰³ www.americanforts.com/West/nd.html

Grand Forks Post (1807-1818?, 1875-1881)-NWC post, also known as Grand Forks House and Grande Fourches, built by Alexander Henry Jr.'s men from Pembina.³⁰⁴ HBC operated the post at the much later time.

Upper Red River House (1788-Unknown) NWC post on the Red at the junction of Red Lake River, near Grand Forks. It was abandoned a long time before Grand Forks Post was built.

From <http://www.northamericanforts.com/West/nd.html>, updated 5/15/2010, retrieved 6/10/2010

³⁰⁴ Voorhis, 76