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## The price of empire: Anglo-French rivalry for the Great Lakes fur trades, 1700-1760

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*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

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THE PRICE OF EMPIRE  
ANGLO-FRENCH RIVALRY FOR THE GREAT LAKES FUR TRADES  
1700-1760

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Matthew R. Laird

1995

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APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



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Matthew R. Laird

Approved, 11 October 1995



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James Axtell



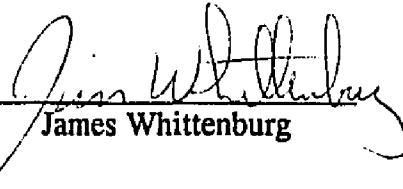
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Michael McGiffert



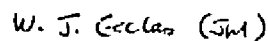
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John Selby



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James Whittenburg



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W. J. Eccles  
University of Toronto

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## ABSTRACT

As the English and French grappled for North American hegemony in the first half of the eighteenth century, trade with the Indian groups of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley transcended mere financial calculations and assumed a broader imperial significance. To the native peoples who exchanged their peltry for European manufactured goods, trade was the material manifestation of mutual obligation, political dialogue, and military alliance. If the contest for empire inevitably became a battle for the hearts and minds of potential Indian allies, the spoils of victory were most visibly reckoned in furs and skins.

Yet, despite the outspoken criticism of William J. Eccles, historians of Anglo-French trade rivalry continue to embrace the dubious claims of Cadwallader Colden and other eighteenth-century American imperialists that Canadian traders could not compete on level economic ground with their New York and Pennsylvania counterparts. Allegedly beset with shoddy and costly French goods, a jealous monopoly company that greedily fixed the price of furs and skins, and the levies and restrictions of a militaristic state, Canadians were deemed unable to match the successes of their Anglo-American competitors, who conversely reaped the benefits of cheap and superior trade merchandise in a commerce largely free of meddling monopolists and obtrusive officials.

A rigorous cross-border comparison of trade-good costs, transportation charges, and peltry prices deflates the hoary myth of Anglo-American economic superiority. With few exceptions, French-Canadian fur traders appear to have supplied goods of equal or better quality at rates of exchange competitive with their New York and Pennsylvania rivals. Purely economic considerations, however, never determined success in the trade. As frustrated Anglo-American officials readily admitted, the cohesive and scrupulously-managed French-Canadian trade network proved aptly suited to winning and maintaining Indian friendship and alliance, while unregulated and unscrupulous American traders perennially poisoned Anglo-Indian relations. The persistence of characteristically Canadian commercial practices and Indian trade loyalties despite the 1760 conquest of New France is, perhaps, the most compelling measure of French-Canadian preeminence in the eighteenth-century contest for North American trade and empire.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AIA* Peter Wraxall. *An Abridgment of the Indian Affairs contained in four folio volumes, transacted in the colony of New York, from the year 1678 to the year 1751, by Peter Wraxall*, edited by Charles Howard McIlwain. Harvard Historical Studies, vol. 21. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915.
- AN, C<sup>1</sup>A* Archives des Colonies, Archives Nationales, Aix-en-Provence. Série C<sup>1</sup>A: Canada, Correspondance générale, 1458-1784. 126 vols.
- HFIN* Cadwallader Colden. *The History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada which are dependent on the Province of New York, and are a barrier between the English and the French in that part of the World*. 2 vols. [Originally published London, 1747]. New York: Alberton Book Co., 1922.
- IHC* *Collections of the Illinois Historical Library*. Springfield, Ill.: The Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1915-40.
- MMR* Account Books of Eighteenth Century Merchants of Montreal (Montreal Merchants' Records), Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, M847-M853, M869, M1005 [microfilm at Michigan State University].
- NYCD* *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York; Procured in Holland, England and France, by John R. Brodhead*, edited by E. B. O'Callaghan. Albany, N.Y.: Parsons, Weed, 1853-87.
- WJP* William Johnson. *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, edited by James Sullivan et al. Albany: University of the State of New York, 1921-65.

**THE PRICE OF EMPIRE**

**ANGLO-FRENCH RIVALRY FOR THE GREAT LAKES FUR TRADES**

**1700-1760**

INTRODUCTION  
RECEIPTED WISDOM

What the Trade was in the time of the French, no two persons can agree about.

William Johnson, 8 October 1764<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 1712, Colonel Peter Schuyler returned to Onondaga to meet with the sachems of the Iroquois. Two years earlier, Schuyler had been sent by New York's anxious Commissioners of Indian Affairs to destroy a blockhouse that a French party had recently erected at the village. Now he came to assure the Five Nations that, contrary to the "notorious falsehoods" circulated by the French, the English were not planning to sever the "Covenant Chain" uniting them in friendship.

The sachems listened politely as the New Yorker denied the rumors and promised the delivery of gunpowder and various other items as a token of his government's sincerity. But before they addressed the content of his speech, the Iroquois leaders reaffirmed their belief in the fundamental unity of trade and alliance.

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<sup>1</sup> William Johnson, "A Scheme for Meeting Expenses of Trade," *WJP*, 4: 556.



"It is well known," they declared, "the original Foundation of their alliance with the Christians were the Advantages they received by Trading with them." Before the arrival of the Europeans, "they made use of Earthen Pots, Stone Knives & Hatchets & Bows & Arrows," but after securing "Good Arms" from the English they had "rooted out" and conquered their enemies. "Our first entering into a Covenant with you," they recalled, "was Chiefly grounded upon Trade. We then bought for a Bever a Stroud Water Blanket or Two Duffel Blankets, but since these have always been growing dearer & dearer the Pouder we now buy for a Bever is scarce worth naming." Their pleas for cheaper European goods, however, had lately fallen upon deaf ears. "We now tell you," they cautioned, "this Affair may be the occasion of breaking that Chain of Peace & Friendship which hath subsisted between us & you." Only if goods were sold cheaper, they concluded, would the Covenant Chain be preserved and the Iroquois and English "live in peace forever."<sup>2</sup>

New France, New York, and Pennsylvania were founded on fur, a commodity readily obtained from Indian hunters that found a lucrative market in Europe. The compact Canadian colony never outgrew its initial dependence on the export of beaver and a variety of other peltry; while the economies of New York and Pennsylvania eventually burgeoned into broader pursuits of pecuniary happiness, colonial Anglo-Americans continued to reap considerable economic benefits from the exchange of European manufactured goods for furs and skins. But after 1700, as the French and

---

<sup>2</sup> *AIA*, 94-95.

English vied more vigorously for North American hegemony, trade relations with the Indian peoples of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley transcended the realm of private profits and emerged as a matter of imperial importance.

Though increasingly enmeshed in a world of commodities and markets, the Indians who supplied the craving for fur refused to be reduced to mere ciphers in a transatlantic economic equation. The Iroquois sachems who censured Schuyler in 1712 spoke more broadly for every native group that was eventually drawn into trade with the rival European powers: if they were collectively reluctant to embrace the ruthless pursuit of profits with the fervor of their new commercial partners, the Indians were hardly averse to exploiting the curious European appetite for peltry to their own material and diplomatic advantage. To the Algonquians and Iroquoians who accommodated the eighteenth-century fur trades, exchange connoted more than an impersonal transaction between two parties intent on exploiting the other for maximum gain. Rather, trade was the material manifestation of mutual obligation, political dialogue, and military alliance. It was in this context that virtually every Indian group attempted--with varying degrees of success--to link the exchange of furs to the exigencies of European-Indian diplomatic relations.

If the contest for North American empire inevitably became a battle for the hearts and minds of potential Indian allies, the spoils of victory were ultimately reckoned in furs and skins. At its height, the Anglo-French commercial rivalry centered on two distinct theaters: along the shores of Lake Ontario, where the pursuit of beaver and other furs pitted the French at forts Frontenac, Toronto, and Niagara

against the New Yorkers at Oswego, the only Anglo-American stronghold on the Great Lakes; and in the western Great Lakes and Ohio Valley, where garrisoned French posts jealously guarded against the increasing incursions of Pennsylvania deerskin traders who drove their pack trains into the vast mart of the trans-Allegheny West.

Because General Montcalm was obliging enough to fall mortally wounded on the Plains of Abraham, leaving Canada open to defeat at the hands of Anglo-American invaders, it is tempting to assume--with a chauvinism worthy of Francis Parkman--that somehow New France was ripe for the plucking. After all, what was Canada if not a stunted colony, its tiny peasant population huddled in feudal fashion along the St. Lawrence and its staple economy equally subservient to the vagaries of an unpredictable European fur market? But if the British victory at Quebec owed more to inept French leadership than to the brilliance of British stratagems, it is equally evident that the conquest of Canada emphatically did not signal the triumph of vigorous American enterprise over phlegmatic French authoritarianism.<sup>3</sup> It is rare, in the smugly skeptical late-twentieth century, to stumble across a historiographical issue that is still framed by the self-serving rhetoric of centuries-dead participants. Yet this remains true of the scholarship surrounding the Anglo-French rivalry for the Great Lakes fur trades.

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<sup>3</sup> For the significance of the Conquest, as well as Parkman's influence on the historiography of French North America, see: W. J. Eccles, "The Battle of Quebec: A Reappraisal," reprinted in Eccles, *Essays on New France* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 125-133; Eccles, "The History of New France According to Francis Parkman," *Ibid.*, 16-25.

Two fundamental assumptions shaped the thinking of eighteenth-century American imperialists concerning the contest for the commercial allegiance of the Iroquoian and Algonquian peoples of the Great Lakes and Ohio country. The first dictated that, for a variety of reasons, Canadian traders could not compete on level economic ground with their New York and Pennsylvania counterparts. Beset with shoddy and costly French goods, a jealous monopoly company that greedily fixed the price of furs and skins, the levies and restrictions of a militaristic state, not to mention a river that was navigable only a few months a year, it was simply impossible for Canadians to match the success of Anglo-American traders who conversely reaped the benefits of cheap and superior trade merchandise in a commerce largely free of meddling monopolists and obtrusive officials.

Paradoxically, the second assumption granted that the French had encompassed the Indian trade of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley--and reaped the concomitant diplomatic rewards--for the very reasons that had allegedly inhibited their economic success. Detailing a deplorable record of fraud and abuses committed by their own traders, disheartened Anglo-American commentators conceded that any inherent advantages they had wielded over their northern rivals were obliterated by the absence of an effective regulatory structure. Stubbornly independent New York and Pennsylvania traders, they feared, ran dangerously amuck in the resulting vacuum of authority, drowning their hapless Indian customers in cheap rum before pilfering their peltry at egregious rates of exchange. Having enshrined the inseparability of trade and alliance in their imperial policy, however, the French had enjoyed far greater

success in monitoring the behavior of their traders, addressing native grievances, and ensuring that the pecuniary interests of merchants never overshadowed the careful conduct of diplomacy on the Canadian frontier.

Though both assumptions had widespread currency in Anglo-American imperialist circles well into the 1760s, it was the first--decreeing the dismal economic circumstances of the Canadian trade--that has proved most persistent, having been reproduced in countless incestuous variations over several historiographical generations. In fact, the only scholar to have challenged the shibboleth of an afflicted Canadian trade has been William J. Eccles. But, as Eccles himself was the first to admit, his revisions were rooted more in common sense than quantitative rigor. Peruse the dusty ledgers of rival fur merchants, he proposed, and it should become apparent that a gun, kettle, or knife cost roughly as much in Montreal as it did in Albany or Philadelphia. Under such scrutiny, the hoary myth of Anglo-American economic advantage would disintegrate like a tattered trading blanket.

Scholars have universally eschewed a comparison of the routine operations of English and French traders and so have uncritically accepted the dubious assertions of eighteenth-century polemicists--with all their bulging political baggage--that the Canadians were at a profound disadvantage in the pursuit of the Great Lakes fur trades. A careful examination of English and French trade-good prices at every nexus of exchange, however, deflates the overblown rhetoric of interested colonial agents; it is evident that Canadian merchants and traders consistently matched their Anglo-American rivals day-to-day, pound-to-livre, at their own economic game. Despite

occasional wartime disruptions to transatlantic shipping, the French-Canadian fur trade survived, and even flourished, in the decades before the Conquest for the patently non-economic reasons that Anglo-American imperialists had so shrewdly perceived. Trade-good prices mattered, but Indian loyalties ultimately ran deeper than lucre-- a lesson the British and Americans stubbornly refused to learn. Now, after nearly three centuries, the tired myths of Anglo-American supremacy in the Great Lakes fur trades should, deservedly, be laid to rest.

CHAPTER I  
THE FRENCH-CANADIAN TRADE

The scrape of heavily-laden birchbark canoes on sand marked the end of a journey of thousands of miles, from the teeming quays of La Rochelle into the heart of North America. Tearing open the carefully stitched packs of goods which for months they had alternately paddled, shouldered, and hauled into the wilderness from Montreal, weary *voyageurs* completed a cycle of manufacture, transportation, and marketing that linked the artisans, merchants, and consumers of France to the residents of its small Canadian colony on the St. Lawrence. Yet even as brandy kegs were tapped, bolts of cloth unrolled, and tobacco smoked, a parallel process was already underway. Beaver pelts, deerskins, and other furs that had been hunted, trapped, scraped, and toted by Ottawas, Potawotamis, and Crees had already begun an equally arduous passage from the forests and marshes of the western Great Lakes across the Atlantic to the busy hat-making manufactories of Paris and the genteel markets of Europe.

Only Canadians, in the elongated continuum of exchange between Europeans and the native peoples of North America, owed their fortunes overwhelmingly to the fruits of Indian-European trade. The vainest courtiers at Versailles might have

endured being stripped of their beaver hats and fur-trimmed garments, just as the great merchant houses of La Rochelle, Bordeaux, and Rouen would have sweetly prospered from their lucrative Caribbean trade alone.<sup>1</sup> In a pinch, Parisian hatters might turn to European sources of furs, and they endlessly experimented with cheaper and more readily available materials for their *chapeaux*. Astute Indian consumers of the western Great Lakes and Ohio Valley had eagerly adapted and adopted those European goods which best met their own specific needs, but they had lived without cloth, brass, and glass for centuries, and might easily do so again.

With a tiny settler population and an abbreviated agricultural season, New France came to depend on fur as the only exportable commodity that could attract specie to the otherwise cash-strapped colony. French hopes of discovering oriental wealth at the source of the St. Lawrence may soon have been dashed, but beaver swiftly supplanted gold and spices in the schemes of those seeking a Canadian fortune. Because of the unique binding properties of its barbed under hairs, beaver fur was valued by French hatters as the best material for "felting" in the process of hat manufacture. Smaller luxury furs, or *menues pelleteries*, as well as deerskins and moose hides, also had their markets, but as long as European fashion and social ritual dictated the wearing of ostentatious, broad-brimmed hats, beaver's dominance of the

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<sup>1</sup> The highest recorded annual value of Canadian furs imported at La Rochelle was 3,828,424 livres in 1754. Between 1718 and 1761 fur imports averaged one million livres annually, while imports from all French colonies totalled 140 million. A. Jean E. Lunn, "Economic Development in New France, 1713-1760" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, McGill University, 1942), 464-65; W. J. Eccles, "A Belated Review of Harold Adams Innis's, *The Fur Trade in Canada*," *Canadian Historical Review*, 60:4 (1979): 420-21.



fur market remained assured.<sup>2</sup>

In keeping with its status as the most prized of Canadian furs, beaver was classified into a Linnaean array of grades according to its perceived quality and the season in which it was harvested. Most valuable for its self-adhesive qualities was *castor gras*, literally "greasy beaver." These pelts had already been scraped and greased, then sewn together and worn by Indians as winter clothing, absorbing bodily oils and, to French noses, a distinctive aroma. Untreated beaver was known as *castor sec*, or "dry beaver," and was less valuable because it required labor-intensive treatment before it could be transformed into felt. Pelts worn as coat beaver but less slick from bodily contact were deemed *castor demi-gras*, while discriminating merchants and hatters paid least for poorer quality pelts such as the artificially-oiled *castor falsifié* and the thick-skinned *gros cuir*.<sup>3</sup>

Until the 1660s, the majority of furs traded in New France were carried to the colony by Indian middlemen and traded at Montreal's boisterous trade fairs. Whether to avoid the impositions of the *Compagnie de l'Occident*, which from 1665 retained a royal monopoly on the marketing of beaver, or the watchful eye of churchmen and *seigneurs*, each year an unknown number of young men slipped away in canoes to trade directly with the tribes of the Great Lakes. The freebooting life of these

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 12-17, 20-25; J. F. Crean, "Hats and the Colonial Fur Trade," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 28:3 (1962): 378-86.

<sup>3</sup> Lunn, "Economic Development," 113-15.

*coureurs de bois*, or "runners of the woods," was ritually condemned in sermons and royal proclamations, but to little avail. In 1672 it was estimated that some three or four hundred Canadians were living and trading in the *pays d'en haut*, or up-country, and a decade later as many as 800 had fled--in the words of alarmed administrators--"into the depths of the woods."<sup>4</sup> Fearing the depopulation of the settlements as much as the inevitable debauching of Canadians and Indians alike through mutual intercourse, religious and secular officials agreed on a licensing system in which twenty-five permits, or *congés*, were granted either to needy institutions or trustworthy traders, allowing them to transport one canoe-load of trade merchandise west. The combined efforts of both licensed and unlicensed Canadian traders at the end of the seventeenth century produced a prodigious amount of beaver for the monopoly company, so much so, in fact, that by 1695 the French fur market was glutted, leaving the company on the brink of bankruptcy with a surplus of 3,500,00 *livres* of beaver sitting unsold in its warehouse.<sup>5</sup>

In the grip of a growing economic crisis, the reflexive reaction of anxious French officials was to strangle the export of Canadian beaver by arbitrarily cutting off direct trade with the tribes of the western Great Lakes. The lease on the Canadian beaver monopoly was conveniently due to expire in 1697, and the colonial authorities dictated that no trading permits would be issued after that date. The western posts

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<sup>4</sup> W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 110.

<sup>5</sup> Eccles, *Canadian Frontier*, 124-25. For the sake of clarity, *livres* (weight) will be italicized to differentiate it from *livres* (currency).

were to be boarded up and abandoned while all Frenchmen in the *pays d'en haut* were ordered to return home. While cobwebbed Canadian canoes rotted in storage, however, it soon became apparent that the western Indians were unwilling to resume their past practice of transporting furs to Montreal as French officials had hoped. Canadian leaders, however, fully fathomed the profound diplomatic advantages that would accrue to the English from the complete severance of French trade relationships with the tribes of the western Great Lakes, and they lobbied vigorously for the resumption of at least a limited trade. Faced with a crippling oversupply of beaver, yet now aware of the potential for English encroachment in the Great Lakes region, the French government ultimately fell back on a compromise position. A handful of Illinois-Michigan posts were allowed to reopen in 1701, including Michilimackinac, St. Joseph des Miamis, and St. Louis des Illinois, as well as Fort Frontenac on the shores of Lake Ontario. This year would prove to be a watershed in the history of French expansion in North America as Louis XIV embarked on a flamboyant bid to halt the westward expansion of the English by literally encircling the seaboard colonies. With the founding of a trading settlement at Detroit designed to dominate the western Great Lakes, and the Louisiana colony to restrict the southern access to the Mississippi watershed, a new era of vigorous competition with the English for trade and empire had begun.<sup>6</sup>

Assuming that with a closer knowledge of Canadian trading conditions they would meet with greater success in controlling and marketing the beaver supply, a

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<sup>6</sup> Eccles, *Canadian Frontier*, 126-31.

coalition of colonial merchants took control of the company in 1700. The Canadians may have been more attuned to the peculiar economic and political circumstances of their colony, but they had no more influence than their predecessors over the vagaries of demand for beaver in Europe. By 1705, they too found themselves overstocked and deeply in debt. Once again the monopoly privileges of the floundering beaver company were transferred, this time to the French partnership of Aubert, Neret, and Guyot, who paid the company's debts and set about reorganizing the ailing beaver business. For the next five years no *castor gras* was to be received by the company in the hope that eventually the supply of prime Canadian beaver would be brought in line with the demand of the French hat industry. From 1712 until 1717 *gras* would once again be accepted at the price of 40 sols per pound. The less desirable *castor sec*, it was agreed, would be bought during the entire period of their lease at 30 sols per pound.<sup>7</sup>

Long before the lease of Aubert, Neret, and Guyot had expired, however, the condition of the beaver market was abruptly altered. In 1712 company officials discovered that the 400 bales of excess *castor gras* that had been sitting for years in their warehouse had been ruined by vermin. With the entire supply of Canadian beaver lost virtually overnight, Parisian hatters soon found themselves in the midst of a materials shortage so acute that they were compelled to import large amounts of fur from England and the Netherlands. In response, the beaver company immediately began buying Canadian *castor gras*, three years earlier than originally planned. In the

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<sup>7</sup> Lunn, "Economic Development," 136-37.

interim, however, Canadian sources of *gras* had virtually disappeared since Indian hunters had turned to gathering other, more lucrative peltry.<sup>8</sup>

Constant changes in ownership of the monopoly company inevitably created a highly unstable commercial environment for Canadian traders. Frustrated with irregular payments for their furs, Canadian merchants and exporters clamored continually for the reform of the beaver trade until Louis XV finally authorized the formation of the *Compagnie des Indes* in 1717. After several years of controversial experimentation with import duties, the newly-formed company settled into a stable pattern of operation which endured from 1722 to the Conquest. The company reserved the exclusive right to export all beaver traded in New France, and on the return voyages brought shipments primarily of textiles and gunpowder to supply the Indian trade. The company maintained a comptroller, an inspector, and three receivers to supervise the collection of peltry at each of the largest Canadian towns of Montreal, Quebec, and Trois-Rivières, as well as a host of lesser officials, clerks, and guards. Though all beaver arriving in New France from the *pays d'en haut* was in theory to be brought to a company office within 48 hours, in practice it tended to circulate within the colony as currency. The company also issued receipts to Canadian sellers which could later be converted into bills of exchange redeemable through its Paris treasury. These receipts, like the pelts themselves, were also commonly traded in lieu of scarce specie.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lunn, "Economic Development," 137-38.

<sup>9</sup> Lunn, "Economic Development," 148-50.

Though it has often been suggested that close regulation of the Canadian trade was a drag on the eighteenth-century commerce in furs, the beaver monopoly more likely had a benign, if not a salutary, role in the economic life of New France.<sup>10</sup> In no sense did the *Compagnie des Indes* regulate the export of all furs from Canada: its monopoly extended solely to beaver, and since the disastrous years of oversupply and unstable markets at the turn of the eighteenth century, an increasing proportion of Canadian fur exports to La Rochelle and other French ports consisted of deerskins and *menues pelleteries*, all of which were sold on the open market. In fact, during the years between 1713 and 1761 for which La Rochelle shipping records are available, it is clear that in any given year beaver comprised only about half of Canadian fur exports.<sup>11</sup> Though the company retained ultimate control over how much would be paid for the various grades of beaver brought to its offices, the Governor-General and Intendant of New France (the resident military and civil administrators, respectively), as well as Canadian exporters, had at least some voice in determining beaver prices. Despite the robust lobbying of the Parisian hatter's guild, on several occasions the company did in fact raise the price paid for beaver in Canada on the recommendation of colonial merchants and officials. It is also unlikely

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<sup>10</sup> The harshest assessment of the beaver monopoly is offered by Harold Adams Innis in *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> E. R. Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry in the Fur Trade During the 18th Century," *Culture*, 8 (1947), 434-55, reprinted in *Canadian History Before Confederation: Essays and Interpretation*, edited by J. M. Bumsted (Georgetown: Irwin-Dorsey, 1972), 145; Lunn, "Economic Development," 464-65.

that beaver prices would have been significantly higher had the trade gone unregulated. The combination of demands by French manufacturers and the need for middlemen to handle the importing and marketing of furs at La Rochelle and other French ports of entry would have acted as a continual brake on beaver prices. Under monopoly control, however, the Canadians were guaranteed a stable market for all the beaver they had to offer, as well as insurance against price fluctuations. The company was further able to dispel the old specter of oversupply through more efficient marketing of the commodity in France and the penetration of broader European markets. Though it has been suggested that the company was perhaps reaping more than its fair share of profits from the sale of Canadian beaver, it seems unlikely that the market would have performed much differently had it operated free of company influence. Considering the unpredictable nature of the European fur market, not to mention the tremendous economic and diplomatic importance of the fur trade to the survival of New France, the "limited monopoly" of the *Compagnie des Indes* was, perhaps, ultimately more necessary than evil.<sup>12</sup>

If a unique blend of free enterprise and mercantilist doctrine characterized the merchandising of furs in the eighteenth century, a similar fusion of government regulation and private enterprise shaped the exchange of furs for European manufactures on the periphery of French North America. The sale of *congés*, or

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<sup>12</sup> Lunn, "Economic Development," 151-56; Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry," 144-49. For a more critical assessment of the *Compagnie des Indes*, see Thomas Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760: The Uses of Fur-Trade Imperialism," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 1 (1990): 300-01.

trading licenses, had been a means for the Canadian government both to regulate those who headed west to trade with the Indians as well an effective method of financing the garrisoned posts of the *pays d'en haut* where the trade was conducted. Before the western trade was restricted in the mid-1690s, *congés* had been sold primarily to highly-placed individuals or institutions who in turn might sell them to others who actually conducted the trade. After the revitalization of the fur trade in the early years of the eighteenth century, however, three distinct types of trading posts came to characterize the trade. The "King's Posts" of Frontenac (1673), Niagara (1720), and Rouillé/Toronto (1720) were administered by government officials and the trade was conducted with goods supplied from the royal stores. These posts were of particular strategic value to the French since they were located in the regions of most intense competition with English fur traders. Close government regulation ensured that goods were sold to Indian customers at prices which were competitive with those offered by the English, even if that meant occasionally operating at a loss. In contrast, the bustling posts of Michilimackinac and Detroit were open to all traders who could pay the post commandant a fee of 500 livres. By the 1720s, a third form had evolved in which trade was conducted on the basis of *permis*, or permits, granted by the governor-general, the vast majority of which were sold to officers of the *Troupes de la Marine*, the colonial regulars. From this time on, much of the Canadian fur trade was conducted through a complex relationship that linked merchant capital, political influence, and government direction in what has



been described as a "military-commercial complex."<sup>13</sup>

In a typical arrangement, a commandant with access to a monopoly on trade at a given post struck a three-way commercial partnership with one or more Montreal *marchands équipeurs*, or merchant-outfitters, who supplied the goods required for trade and hired the necessary paddlers, and a *marchand voyageur*, the professional trader who oversaw the delivery of the goods and their sale to Indian consumers in the *pays d'en haut*. Furs obtained from trading with the Indians were subsequently shipped back to Montreal and sold by the merchants either to the beaver company or on the open market. For his part, the commandant was responsible for ensuring the support of the post's military garrison and buildings, while overseeing the daily conduct of the trade and dispensing gifts to Indian allies on behalf of the Canadian government for diplomatic purposes. By farming out these fur-trading posts to coalitions of individuals which linked merchant capital to agents of military and diplomatic authority, the French government was able to assert its sovereignty, at least nominally, over the vast interior of North America at very little cost in manpower or materials while simultaneously ensuring the stability of Canada's staple economy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701-1744: "A Supplement to Europe"* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1987), 160.

<sup>14</sup> W. J. Eccles, "The Fur Trade and Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 40:3 (1983): 346, 355-56; Miquelon, *New France*, 155, 157; "1747: Lease for the Post at Green Bay," and "1747: Partnership to Exploit La Baye," *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, edited by Lyman C. Draper and Reuben Gold Thwaites (Madison: The Society, 1906-08), 17: 451-55, 18: 7-10; Gratien Allaire, "Officiers et marchands: les sociétés de commerce

For all its overarching diplomatic, political, and economic importance, however, the fur trade was at root a commerce founded on the physical transfer of material goods. European manufactured goods were exchanged for beaver fur, deerskins, and other peltry, which in turn were transformed into felt hats, leather, and fur-trimmed garments in a continuous cycle of production and consumption. By the eighteenth century, the material exchange between Europeans and Indians had settled into a pattern as regular and predictable as the neatly itemized lists of trade items ordered annually by Canadian officials from the royal warehouses at the port of Rochefort, or the meticulously-kept account books of Montreal merchant-outfitters. From papers of sewing needles to bulky kegs of brandy, the various items which made their way across the Atlantic and into the Great Lakes region reveal as much about those who created them as those who used them. Some were wholly functional, others decorative or seemingly frivolous, but in every case the context and conditions of their exchange forged links between individuals and peoples in ways that both transformed and transcended their everyday use.<sup>15</sup>

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des fourrures, 1715-1760," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, 40:3 (1987): 409-428.

<sup>15</sup> One of the most exhaustive sources of information on the manufacture, trade, and use of French trade items is Marie Gerin-Lajoie's unpublished *Montreal Merchants Records Project Research Files, 1971-1975*, microfilm edition (M496), in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. *The Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* of Chadron, Nebraska, is another mine of material on the material culture of the fur trade. See also Carolyn Gilman, *Where Two Worlds Meet: The Great Lakes Fur Trade* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1982); Patricia Miquelon, "Fur Trade Goods of the Montreal Traders, 1760-1821," National Historic Sites Service [Canada], Unpublished in-house report, 1970; Robert C. Wheeler, *A Toast to the Fur Trade: A Picture Essay on its Material Culture* (St. Paul: Wheeler Productions, 1985);

**awls (*alènes*):**

Identical to those used by French shoemakers, iron trade awls were short, straight, and triangular in cross-section. Shipped by the gross without handles, these awls were hafted with wood or horn by the Indian consumer. They were used for a variety of purposes that included punching holes in leather to sew clothing and in birch bark to stitch canoes. English trade awls were almost identical, but by the eighteenth century they had introduced offset, or crooked, awl blades designed so that the user's hand would be protected should the handle split from excessive pressure. A number of other small iron implements were also commonly traded, including chisels, scrapers, scissors, and projectile points.

**axes (*haches*):**

Many sizes and styles of French axes made their way into the *pays d'en haut*, from the broad and sturdy *haches de service*, or service axes, to small hatchets (*hachettes*) with hammer heads on the opposite end. Most were iron, but some were steel-tipped (*acéré*) for added strength and durability. One of the most popular styles was the *hache biscayenne*, or "Biscayan" axe named after the Spanish region in which they

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Bruce M. White, "Montreal Canoes and Their Cargoes," in *"Le Castor Fait Tout": Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, (1985)*, edited by Bruce Trigger, Toby Morantz and Louise Dechêne (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 164-92; Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, translated by Liana Vardi (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 78-84; Miquelon, *New France*, 150-53; Peter Kalm, *Travels Into North America*, translated by John Reinhold Forster (Barre, Mass.: The Imprint Society, 1972), 489-92.

were originally produced. By the eighteenth century, however, "Biscayan" most likely referred to the characteristic shape of the blade. By the 1720s a variety of *haches du pays* were made in Canada by colonial blacksmiths to supply the trade.

**beads (*rassades*):**

Glass beads in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors, including black, white, green, red, and especially blue, were produced specifically for the Indian trade in Venice and Rouen. They were sold by the pound and used for jewelry as well as for decorating clothing and even canoes. Black and white beads were frequently sold as cheap imitation wampum.

**blankets (*couvertes*):**

Perhaps the most enduring symbol of the material culture of the fur trade was the ubiquitous woollen trade blanket, sold in a wide variety of standardized sizes, often designated by the number of "points," or stripes on the edge. The smallest blankets included the *à la capuchine* and *à berceau* (cradle) styles, while point blankets ranged in size from one to eight points and upward, with two and two-and-a-half points the most common. Many trade blankets, especially a characteristic green variety, came from Toulouse, while a variety of others were woven in Montpellier, Bordeaux, and Rouen (which produced a version made of dogs' hair). On the insistence of demanding Indian customers, government officials ensured that the quality and size of trade blankets remained consistent. Two-point blankets measured 4'11" long by 4'2"

wide, three-points 5'7" by 4'10", and four-points 5'9" by 5'5". They were shipped to Canada in bales of 150 wrapped with straw, packing linen, and cord.

***capotes:***

Heavy, hooded coats made of a woollen blanket material such as *dourgne*, *molton*, *mazamet*, or *cadis* cloth, *capotes* were often decorated with trim, braid, or decorative tape. They were made almost exclusively in Canada in a number of different sizes and colors, and were described in terms of the number of *aunes* of material that went into their construction (e.g. *une capote de trois aunes*).

***cod-line (ligne du banc):***

A heavy, untarred hempen or cotton cord used in the Atlantic fisheries, *cod-line* was sold by the pound and had a variety of uses in the trade, including tying up bales of goods and furs.

***combs (peignes):***

Combs were used for grooming as well as for hair decoration. The cheapest and most common varieties were made of boxwood, but more expensive horn and ivory combs were also traded. Different sizes were available, with varying spaces between the teeth. The manufacture of combs centered in Paris and Rouen, while ivory combs were exclusively the product of Dieppe, the center of the French ivory craft.

***dourgne:***

A relatively inexpensive twilled woollen fabric with a flannel finish, this cloth from the town of Dourgne in southern France was most commonly dyed blue or violet.

***drap:***

*Drap* was the generic name for a costly woollen cloth dyed in bright hues of red, blue, and black and used primarily for making blankets and outerwear. Designed to compete with the renowned English stroud cloth, it was imported in large amounts by the *Compagnie des Indes* and was a staple of the Canadian trade.

***eau de vie:***

Despite the persistent opposition of Canadian clerics, *eau de vie* (loosely translated as "brandy," though it could be many things, including armanac, cognac, marc, poireau, or calvados) from Charente and Aunis remained an essential, and lucrative, component of the fur-trader's assortment of goods. Since 1679 the sale of brandy to the Indians had been strictly prohibited on the grounds that alcoholism was insidiously weakening the fabric of native society. On the urging of Canadian administrators, its sale at Fort Frontenac was legalized in 1716 so that French traders might more effectively compete with rival New Yorkers who did not share Jesuit scruples about plying Indian customers with liquor. Flagrant abuses of the trade led to its prohibition once again in 1718, but with the establishment of the English trading post of Oswego on the southern shore of Lake Ontario it became clear to secular officials

that unless French traders could supply brandy they would rapidly lose their Indian customers, and allies, to the English. The trade was officially reinstated in 1727 over the dissent of the clergy. In an act of protest in 1730, the bishop of Canada, Pierre-Herman Dosquet, reserved to himself the right to absolve penitents guilty of selling or otherwise providing alcohol to Indians. Though he returned the power of absolution to the priests several years later, clerical and secular authorities remained bitterly divided over the issue until the end of the French regime.

Realizing the fantastic profits possible from the sale of brandy, the majority of traders most likely ignored the official wrangling over the legality and morality of the trade. And so, in spite of the potential spiritual penalties, brandy continued to flow freely into the *pays d'en haut*. Costs were high, since brandy was heavily taxed on entry into Canada, and in its bulky wooden casks it was difficult and expensive to transport by canoe. But it never failed to find thirsty consumers. In fact, it was one of the only goods which had an almost bottomless market among native peoples whose demand for most other European goods was notoriously inelastic.

**firesteels (*battefeux*):**

In the eighteenth century the most common implement for lighting fires was the firesteel, a small, variously shaped hand-held steel implement which produced sparks when struck against flint. These cheap, ubiquitous trade items were produced in Rouen, Amsterdam, Touraine, Brittany, and St.-Etiènne en Forest, and were shipped to Canada by the thousands.

**gunflints (*pierres à fusil*):**

With the flintlock the standard military and hunting weapon, there was a constant demand for the small, wedge-shaped flints necessary for their firing. The best French flints were manufactured in the old province of Berry at Meunes, Couffi, and other small towns surrounding Saint-Aignan.

**gunpowder (*poudre à mousquet*):**

This crucial trade item was manufactured in various locations in France, including Rouen, Brest, Limoges, Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Marseille, under strict government regulation. By law, French gunpowder consisted of 75 percent saltpetre, 12.5 percent sulphur, and 12.5 percent charcoal. Its price fixed by state decree, it was supplied to the King's powder magazines at Rochefort for export to Canada. All batches of powder were rigorously tested before shipment to guarantee its quality.

**gunworms (*tirebours*):**

An array of implements was necessary for the maintenance and effective firing of flintlock weapons, including the gunworm, a small, spring-like piece of wire that fit on the end of a ramrod. Often a hunter would find it necessary to change from smaller shot to a ball--or vice versa--in mid-hunt, depending on the type of quarry he encountered. The gunworm allowed him to quickly remove the unused charge from the barrel and reload the necessary shot. The gunworm also came in handy for cleaning the bore after repeated firings.



**handkerchiefs (*mouchoirs*):**

Perhaps the only thing truly "Indian" about the native peoples of eighteenth-century North America were the costly handkerchiefs they prized. Exotic Bernagor and Romal silks were imported by the French from India specifically for the North American trade. Though the predominant color was blue, some were checkered and others had colored borders. Inexpensive cotton handkerchiefs were also available for less discriminating noses.

**hawkbells (*grelots*):**

Small copper or brass bells, usually a half-inch in diameter, sometimes larger, were traded as novelties to be sewn onto shoes and clothing.

**hats (*chapeaux*):**

A small number of beaver hats made the long return journey to the forests of the New World from which they had originated, but many other hats, from blends of vicuna, camel, and rabbit hair to woollen felts, were cheaper and more popular in the *pays d'en haut*. Warm cloth caps better suited to the Canadian climate such as the deerstalker-style *tapabord*, with ear-flaps and turn-down brim, were assembled in Montreal before shipment west.

**kettles (*chaudières*):**

Brass, copper, and occasionally iron kettles were manufactured in a wide range of

"nesting" sizes for easy transportation. Kettles were an extremely valuable commodity in the *pays d'en haut* since they replaced the much less efficient wood, bark, and pottery vessels previously used for cooking. They were sold by weight and the iron handle, or *bail*, was attached after shipping.

**knives (*couteaux*):**

A bewildering assortment of cutlery, including razors, hunting knives, folding knives, pen knives, butcher knives, spring knives, and scalping knives, found an enthusiastic market among Indian consumers who quickly adopted European steel implements over their stone counterparts. The major center of cutlery production in France was St.-Etiènne de Forest, south-west of Lyon. By the eighteenth century, knife manufacturing was a highly specialized industry characterized by a complex and efficient division of labor that could turn out high quality knives at low prices. Knife handles were crafted by hand in Paris from boxwood and beech, a cheap, easily workable wood which took a good polish. Occasionally cow or bull horn was used, but ram's horn was the finest and most expensive material available and it was used primarily for mounting razors.

**lead/lead shot (*plomb/balles*):**

France had few lead mines in the eighteenth century, and most of the lead exported to Canada originated in England, Germany, and Poland. Roughly half of the lead shipped to New France arrived in bar form; the rest came pre-cast in a wide range of

gauges and types of shot, from balls to pellets and hunting shot.

**leggings (*mitasses*):**

Different sizes of leggings in various sturdy fabrics such as molton and mazamet were made up by Montreal seamstresses for shipment west. They were worn both for warmth and protection against thick undergrowth.

**linen (*toile*):**

Numerous weaves and styles of linen cloth, from tough hempen sail-cloth to finer and more expensive bleached weaves for shirts, were a staple of trade textiles. The finest linens were manufactured in Roux, Morlaix, Rouen, Paris, Beaufort, Laval, and Holland.

***mazamet*:**

This heavy woollen cloth, similar to molton, originated in the town of Mazamet, near Dourgne in the south of France.

**mirrors (*miroirs*):**

Mirrors of many shapes, styles and sizes were traded in great numbers in the *pays d'en haut*. The popular *miroirs de chagrin* were covered with rough-surfaced shagreen leather from horse, mule, or ass hide. Other popular trade mirrors were made of tin or had leather wallets for storage, while others had japanned or tortoise-

shell frames, or were covered in studded and decorated leather. Mirrors were reportedly most popular among native men who used them for hair-dressing, face-painting, and other preparations for war or ceremonial occasions.

***molton:***

Like its English equivalent from Melton, molton was a heavily fulled, short napped, plain cloth. Woven either entirely from wool or with a cotton warp and woollen weft, molton was a completely smooth fabric that had a tight construction and a finish that concealed all trace of the warp and weft. Like its equivalent from Mazamet, molton was generally dyed a deep blue, red, or violet.

***muskets (fusils):***

Relatively few muskets were traded by the French because most were given as gifts by the Canadian government to Indian allies. The majority of military muskets were made in Tulle, the center of French armaments production, but the *fusil de traite* (trade gun) or *fusil de chasse* (hunting/fowling piece) was fashioned in St.-Etienne. *Fusils de chasse* were popular with Indian hunters because their shorter and lighter barrels were ideally suited to wooded conditions. Trade guns came in a number of barrel lengths, the most popular being from three-and-a-half to four-and-a-half feet long. Caliber was measured by the number of ball shot per pound of lead; the standard military musket had a caliber of 18 balls per pound, the hunting piece 28.

**needles (*aiguilles*):**

Needles were sold in paper packets in a variety of sizes. Smaller ones were used with thimbles, another small but common item of trade, to sew clothing, to string beads, and even for tattooing. Larger sizes were used to stitch birch bark for canoes and the heavy *toile d'emballage*, or canvas cloth, used to wrap bales of trade goods and pelts for shipment.

**rings (*bagues à cachet*):**

A relatively inexpensive yet ubiquitous trade item were brass finger rings, often known as "Jesuit rings" after the seventeenth-century missionary practice of distributing rings bearing religious symbols to new Indian converts. By the eighteenth century, however, these mass-produced rings had lost their spiritual significance and thousands of them were carried to the *pays d'en haut* in trade-good assortments. Typical French rings had a thin brass band with a flat bezel in oval, heart-shaped, round, or octagonal form, and were often engraved with designs of crosses, bleeding hearts, priests, or initials, most commonly "IHS." French trade rings were fairly ornate compared to their English equivalents, which tended to be plain brass bands.

**shirts (*chemises*):**

Not all items used in the Indian trade necessarily came from France. Seamstresses in Montreal were often contracted by merchant-outfitters to sew various items of clothing such as shirts on a piecework basis. Shirts came in a variety of sizes,

including three for men, two for women, and the smallest for children, their price depending on the size, material, and design.

**sleeves (*manches*):**

Like shirts, woollen sleeves of molton, mazamet, or dourgne cloth were pieced together in Montreal for merchant-outfitters. Sold in pairs, the different sized sleeves allowed for a custom fit. Like leggings, sleeves offered both warmth and protection against mosquitoes and underbrush. They were generally not sewn onto the garment, but were tied by a string at the nape of the neck.

**stockings (*bas*):**

During the eighteenth century, Canada was a major consumer of Orléans hosiery. Much of it was worn by the colonists themselves, but some stockings found their way to Indian customers in the *pays d'en haut*. The most common types were the cheaper *bas de Poitou* and the more elegant *bas de Saint-Maixent*.

**thread (*fil*):**

Hempen threads from Poitou and Rennes, flaxen from Flanders, and other varieties from Holland were traded by the pound. Small amounts of false gold and silver thread were used for decorative sewing, while more durable types were used for sewing canoe sails, shoes, clothing, and fishing nets.

**tobacco (*tabac*):**

Many different varieties of tobacco had a market among Indian consumers, from the locally-grown white, to the highly prized black Brazilian imported from La Rochelle.

**tomahawks (*casse-têtes*):**

Many iron tomahawks, often with "dagger" ends, were fashioned by colonial blacksmiths for the trade. Like axes, the Indian consumer fashioned and fitted the wooden handle after purchase. The term *casse-tête*, literally "head-breaker," also referred to traditional round-headed war clubs.

**vermillion (*vermillon*):**

This bright, high quality scarlet pigment made of a compound of mercury and sulphur was a crucial element of any trade-good assortment. It was sold by weight in powdered form, and transported in small wooden boxes, leather bags, and papers. Most vermillion sent to Canada was purchased from Dutch suppliers, who in turn imported it from China. Vermilion could be rubbed into buckskin or human skin, and was usually mixed with water or grease for use as face and body paint. If blended with a bonding agent such as mucilage from boiled beaver tail, it could also serve as an effective dye for robes or wooden objects.

**wampum (*porcelaine*):**

It is often assumed that the French had no independent source of wampum, the small

black and white cylindrical shells used in strings and belts as currency and for ceremonial and diplomatic exchange. But just as much of the English wampum was not the original "quahog" variety from coastal New England, the French exported various equivalents known as *porcelaine*. French "wampum" included cowries, burgaus, periwinkle, sea-snail, *Venus mercenaria*, and purslain shells. Cowries, in particular, were purchased by French exporters from the Dutch who controlled the European market. The individual beads, which were carefully drilled with awls for stringing, were known as *grains*. There was also a market for imitation wampum manufactured from porcelain, but this artificial type was always distinguished from its shell counterpart and was sold by weight, while the "real" item was traded by unit.

**wine (*vin*):**

Though twice as much wine as brandy was shipped to Canada during the eighteenth century, it never rivalled the popularity of *eau de vie* in the fur trade. Most imported French wines were reds from Bordeaux, but a smaller amount of Spanish wine was also available.

Archaeologists of the North American fur trade have long assumed that metal implements and beads were the most important components of the trading assortments brought into the *pays d'en haut*. This misinterpretation of the relative importance of certain categories of items in the overall context of the trade is largely the result of the frequency at which only certain durable objects are recovered in the



archaeological record. The work of Dean Anderson, however, has shown that without considering "preservation bias," or the tendency of perishable goods such as cloth, wood, and other biodegradable materials to disappear almost entirely from the archaeological record, it is impossible to form a complete picture of the variety of material objects which ultimately wound up in the hands of Indian consumers. Anderson tackled this problem by juxtaposing the documentary record of goods intended for trade as itemized in the account books of eighteenth-century Montreal merchants with inventories of archaeologically-recovered trade items. He determined that certain functional categories--especially metalwares and decorative items--that were overrepresented in the archaeological record comprised a relatively small proportion of the total trade assortment based on total merchant expenditure. Similarly, clothing and textiles, which rarely appear archaeologically, comprised a significantly greater proportion of the value of trade outfits supplied by Montreal merchants to voyageurs.<sup>16</sup>

Anderson's conclusions are important in that they emphasize the degree to which the documentary record must be integrated into any analysis of the relative proportions and importance of various categories of trade items. His method of determining the relative percentage of any given item or category of goods, however,

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<sup>16</sup> Dean Lloyd Anderson, "Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives on European Trade Goods in the Western Great Lakes Region" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Michigan State University, 1992). Dechêne came to a similar conclusion for the period 1650-1720 based on inventories of Montreal merchants found in notarial records. Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 79.

unfortunately does not reflect the complexities of exchange in the *pays d'en haut*. Despite his clearly-stated concern with patterns of native consumption, he relies solely on calculations based on Montreal merchant expenditure as the gauge of how native societies integrated, and were influenced by, European goods. This approach is understandable given the paucity of records detailing the rates at which French goods were exchanged for furs. Since the only logical method for comparing the relative value of *aunes* of textiles, *pots* of brandy, and *livres* of lead shot is to divide their individual cost by the total value of the trade assortment, in examining only merchant invoices Anderson is measuring the relative value of these items to the Canadian supplier, not the Indian consumer. The fragmentary price evidence that does exist suggests that different types of trade items were sold in the *pays d'en haut* at widely varying rates of retail mark-up (Table 1.2, column VI). The usual price inflation for blankets, for example, might have been in the range of 25 percent of their Montreal value, while the cost of brandy typically shot up by almost 300 percent once it reached the western Great Lakes. Depending on the amount traded, then, the relative value of blankets and brandy to the merchant wholesaler might have been something quite different to the Indian purchaser.

A detailed account of trade goods exchanged at the King's Post of Niagara between 1729 and 1738 is preserved in the official correspondence of Canadian officials to the French Ministry of Marine.<sup>17</sup> A breakdown of the Niagara items into

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<sup>17</sup> "Etat des effets vendûs a Niagara depuis le deux May 1729 jusqu'au dernier Juin 1738," *AN, C<sup>11</sup>A*, 73: 310-12.

the same functional categories established by Anderson and the calculation of Indian expenditure on these items suggests that Anderson's model does not adequately represent native purchasing patterns (Figure 1.1). The category of clothing, including bulk textiles and blankets, finished apparel such as shirts, sleeves, leggings and stockings, as well as needles, thread, and decorative ribbon, made up the largest part of the value of goods traded at Niagara, but was relatively less important on the whole than Anderson's figures would suggest. Considering the high rates of mark-up on alcohol in the *pays d'en haut*, it comes as no surprise that *eau de vie* would comprise a significantly larger proportion of Indian expenditure in trade than its wholesale value would indicate. The same holds true for tobacco, another item with a relatively elastic demand among Indian consumers. The large discrepancy in the category of cooking and eating can be attributed to the sale of large amounts of bread at Niagara, a commodity which rarely figured in the accounts of Montreal merchants. While Anderson's ranking of items by functional category generally holds true for the Niagara data, the relative proportions of merchant and Indian expenditure differ considerably as a function of varying rates of price inflation in the *pays d'en haut*.

As the icy St. Lawrence began to buckle and heave, and the cobblestones and slate roofs of Montreal and Quebec emerged from a heavy blanket of snow, the gears of the complex transatlantic cycle of shipping, buying, and selling began to move once again. Keepers of the King's storehouses took stock of the merchandise that remained in their stores after a year of liberal gift-giving to local and visiting Indians. Quebec factors of large French trading houses braced themselves for another frantic

summer of sales to Montreal merchant-outfitters, while they in turn were busy contracting with *marchands voyageurs*, hiring crews, and provisioning canoes for the long westward journey to trade at the distant posts of the *pays d'en haut*.

The Canadian trading season was short and frenzied after a long, idle winter. Since the St. Lawrence River, the essential artery of commerce, communication, and transportation in New France, was generally only navigable between July and October, all the essential operations of the Canadian fur trade were crammed into the space of a few short months. Six or eight weeks after leaving France, merchantmen laden with European merchandise arrived at the port of Quebec and were unloaded either into the warehouses of large importers or the King's stores. A journey of four to six days in smaller sloops, barks, or bateaux brought the goods 150 miles upriver from Quebec to the shores of the island of Montreal, where the Ottawa River meets the St. Lawrence in a series of lakes and rapids, and sailing vessels gave way to birchbark canoes. Here the goods lay in the dank basements of Montreal merchant outfitters before being hauled by cart to Sault-Saint-Louis, or Lachine. Finally, the sturdy packs of trade items destined for the posts of the Great Lakes were loaded into thirty-to-forty-foot canoes capable of carrying cargoes of up to three tons. After celebrating the customary farewell mass at Ste-Anne de Bellevue at the western end of the island, the crew of four or five paddlers pushed off on an arduous two-month journey to the Great Lakes country, either by the northern route along the Ottawa and Mattawa rivers to Lakes Nipissing and Huron, or the southern passage along the St.

Lawrence and into Lake Ontario.<sup>18</sup>

As French manufactured goods intended for the western trade passed through the hands of merchants and traders from La Rochelle to Montreal, their selling price rose at every point of exchange to meet the various costs of shipping, handling, insurance, storage, and--invariably--the seller's commission. In this respect, the unique geography of the colony dictated the nature of its commerce: with Quebec the primary entrepôt and break-bulk point for transatlantic commerce, and Montreal more directly involved in provisioning and organizing the westward shipment of trade goods, the fur trade supported two distinct levels of Canadian "middlemen." Thus, by the time trade goods reached the voyageur's canoe, their value could easily have doubled.<sup>19</sup>

A substantial amount of documentary evidence remains that, if carefully examined, details the movement of trade goods through this transatlantic system of exchange in the first half of the eighteenth century. The correspondence of colonial officials with the French ministry (*AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*), as well as the day-books, ledgers, and accounts of Montreal merchant-outfitters, contain enough price information to allow a reconstruction of the cost of a wide variety of trade goods at each stage of their journey from the shops and manufactories of France to the posts of the *pays d'en haut*. Each year the Canadian government gave away thousands of livres' worth of

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<sup>18</sup> Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 65-67; Dale Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen: French Trade to Canada and the West Indies, 1729-1770* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 73.

<sup>19</sup> Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 84-89.

gifts from the King's storehouses at Quebec, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal to secure the friendship and alliance of western tribes, as well as to feed and clothe the resident *sauvages domiciliés*, or Christian Indians, of neighboring mission towns such as Sillery. In the final weeks before the first French sails appeared before Quebec, royal officials were kept busy drawing up long lists of the goods that had been disbursed from the royal stores and preparing itemized invoice orders for goods from the King's warehouses at Rochefort to replenish the Canadian stores for yet another year of gift-giving and treaty-making.<sup>20</sup> For the period roughly between 1730 and 1750, it is possible to reconstruct the average price of the most common trade items as they were supplied to the French government at Rochefort to be shipped to New France (Table 1.1, column I). By determining the mean price of each item at Rochefort and comparing it with the price at which comparable goods were delivered to the King's storekeepers at Quebec (Table 1.1, column II), it appears that the average rate of mark-up on trade items imported from France for official use was in the range of 33-34% over this period (Table 1.2, column I).

In an age in which the division between official business and private interest was less distinct, and the central government simply lacked the resources and the bureaucracy required to supply every aspect of its colonial needs, the same large

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<sup>20</sup> A typical list of merchandise taken from the King's store at Quebec and distributed as Indian gifts is the "Estat de Munitions, vivres et autres Effets qui ont été delivré des magasins du Roy à Quebec aux sauvages domiciliers et autres qui sont venus en cette ville pendant l'année 1730," *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 57: 105-20. For an example of an annual invoiced order, see "Estat des Munitions et Marchandises qu'il est necessaire d'Envoyer du port de Rochefort l'année mil sept cent trente et un pour Garnir les Magasins du Roy à Quebec," *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 53: 281-83.

merchants houses in La Rochelle, Rouen, and Bordeaux that privately shipped the bulk of goods destined for the Canadian fur trade also vied for the lucrative business of supplying the King's stores in New France. These substantial trading firms, such as Rouen's Dugard and Company, handled the bulk of the colonial trade, only part of which involved Canada, for the real money was always to be made in supplying the great sugar plantations of the Caribbean. Still, there were comfortable profits to be made in Canadian furs, and these merchant houses unfailingly sent agents to represent their commercial interests in New France.

Of the roughly one hundred Quebec shopkeepers who jockeyed for their share of the town's retail trade, only a handful could be deemed "principal traders," and nearly all of these were "metropolitans," or factors representing influential French trading companies.<sup>21</sup> While a few of these colonial agents, including François Havy and Jean Lefebvre of the Dugard company, were salaried employees of the "home office," the majority of their associates worked as commission agents, earning a profit of 5 percent on each incoming cargo they handled and 2.5 percent on the fur shipments they sent back in return. These resident factors enjoyed a great deal of prestige within the Quebec mercantile community and they frequently shuttled back and forth between France and the colony on business. Few factors put down permanent roots in the colony; most were merely serving time in a small, dreary colonial outpost until they had accumulated enough experience and capital to return home to further advance their careers in metropolitan society.

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<sup>21</sup> Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen*, 70-71.

While posted to New France, however, they were constantly occupied with the countless tasks that filled the lengthy day of the eighteenth-century merchant. When the trading ships began to arrive in the colony in mid-summer, the Quebec merchant was responsible for overseeing the unloading and storage of specially-marked bales of trade goods sent by French exporters. Before long, Montreal merchant-outfitters began to arrive in Quebec to buy up the goods they required to assemble the trading outfits to be sent to the *pays d'en haut*. Sales continued at a frenetic pace until the late summer and early fall when furs from the west began arriving in town via Montreal. The Quebec factor then donned the hat of a fur merchant, inspecting the pelts that arrived for damage and assessing their quality, delivering all beaver to the *Compagnie des Indes*, and determining the price to be paid for the remaining skins and *menues pelleteries*. He then arranged for shipment of the furs to the company in France and, based on his analysis of local market conditions, drew up and forwarded an invoice of goods necessary for the next year's trade. With the short trading season over, entries in day-books had to be transferred to ledgers, accounts balanced, and various other mundane tasks completed before the merchant could relax briefly during the quiet winter season and prepare for the coming of spring when the cycle would begin anew.<sup>22</sup>

Quebec importers sold trade goods to Montreal merchant-outfitters in an idiosyncratic commercial relationship which changed little over the course of the eighteenth century. When a Quebec factor received a shipment from France, the

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<sup>22</sup> Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen*, 73-82.



invoiced price of the goods was automatically inflated 5 or 6 percent over wholesale, a practice which went unremarked by purchasers. In addition to this hidden invoice inflation, the Quebec merchant charged an additional mark-up, known in the trade as the *bénéfice*, which covered all the charges of shipping, handling, as well as the factor's commission. The *bénéfice* rate was flexible, varying considerably from year to year, and even month to month, depending on the state of the market and shipping conditions. At the start of each new trading season, the Quebec *bénéfice* quickly found its level. According to Intendant Gilles Hocquart, the invoice prices of the La Rochelle firm of Pascaud Frères were generally accepted as the standard by all local importers.

The average *bénéfice* set by Quebec merchants during the 1730s and 1740s can be determined by comparing the mean prices of various trade goods as purchased by Montreal merchant outfitters (Table 1.1, column III) with the French wholesale prices as listed on government invoices for replenishing the King's stores in Quebec (Table 1.1, column I). This calculation produces an average *bénéfice* over the period of just over 32 percent, almost identical to the rate of mark-up on goods shipped to Canada to be used as gifts. Thus, it appears that the same cadre of French merchants who supplied goods for both the private trade and the King's stores were charging virtually the same mark-up to the government as to private purchasers.<sup>23</sup> Of course, the rate of 32 percent is only a measure of central tendency; in reality, *bénéfice* levels ranged

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<sup>23</sup> This figure of 32.389 percent is consistent with that suggested by Miquelon, who estimates that the *bénéfice* charged by Quebec merchants typically ranged between 26 and 36 percent. Miquelon, *New France*, 132, 158.

from as low as 18 or 20 percent in peacetime, to upwards of 200 percent during periods of severe disruptions in shipping occasioned by the unwanted attentions of the British Navy.<sup>24</sup> Though most goods were marked up by Quebec merchants at the same fixed rate, certain special items, particularly brandy, wine, and tobacco were subject to significantly higher rates of price inflation. Brandy and wine, in particular, were generally sold at prices as high as the local market would bear, and there is evidence to suggest that it was the sale of alcohol, above all else, that allowed French exporters to reap a healthy profit from an otherwise unspectacular Canadian trade.<sup>25</sup> Certain other goods, including foodstuffs and other local Canadian products, were generally not subject to the *bénéfice*, but were sold to Montreal merchant-outfitters at pre-arranged prices (*à prix fait*).<sup>26</sup>

The brief shipping season on the St. Lawrence not only shaped the pattern of commercial exchange within Canada, but also dictated the elaborate structure of colonial debt and credit that supported the fur trade. French merchantmen rarely arrived in the St. Lawrence before July but, in order to reach the distant inland posts before winter, the voyageurs were forced to leave Montreal by May or June. This meant that in order to buy sufficient goods from a Quebec importer to support a

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<sup>24</sup> Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> Miquelon, *New France*, 132; Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen*, 75-76; Lunn, "Economic Development," 364; Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 82-83.

<sup>26</sup> Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen*, 75. Dechêne estimates that during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Quebec importers earned a net profit of 15 percent on the value of the goods sold to Montreal merchants after deducting for the costs of freight, import duties, handling, and storage. Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 86-87.

trading expedition, the typical Montreal merchant-outfitter needed to obtain credit from his supplier, conventionally advanced at the standard French interest rate of 6 percent per annum, payable the following year once the canoes had returned with western furs. Thus, goods arriving from France often sat in Quebec warehouses for the greater part of the year, while Quebec importers waited to be reimbursed by Montreal merchants for the advance of last year's goods.

Alexis Lemoine, or Monière, as he was familiarly known to his Montreal colleagues, was a typical eighteenth-century *marchand équipeur*. As a youth he had paddled west as an *engagé*, or hired canoeman, but through a combination of family connections and thrifty saving had accumulated enough capital and credit to establish himself as a merchant-outfitter, supplying trade goods to his voyageur associates. At his death in 1754, Monière passed on to his son an estate worth 50,000 livres, a respectable sum for a merchant who had worked his entire life in a saturated and highly competitive Montreal trading market.<sup>27</sup>

Twenty years younger than his colleague, Pierre Guy was unique among his fellow *marchands équipeurs* because he had emigrated from France, while the majority of Montreal traders were native-born.<sup>28</sup> Otherwise, Guy's career from his arrival in Montreal to his early death in a comfortable, two-story stone house in the Rue Saint-Joseph followed a common trajectory. Guy was a military man as well as a

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<sup>27</sup> Louise Dechêne, "Alexis (Jean-Alexis) Lemoine, dit Monière," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography/Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*, edited by George W. Brown et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 3: 379.

<sup>28</sup> Miquelon, *New France*, 157.

merchant, serving in the local militia and eventually rising to the rank of captain. With eight children from his first marriage and another five from his second, Guy certainly had a material incentive to commercial success. By the 1740s, he presided over a successful trading business and owned several pieces of property in Montreal. Like Monière, Guy assembled and sold trading outfits to voyageurs for transportation to the *pays d'en haut*, but he also imported general merchandise--especially wine and spirits--for sale to his Montreal neighbors. Guy had a long connection with the French factors Havy and Lefebvre who represented the substantial Dugard company in Quebec and it was through them that he shipped the bulk of the furs he collected as payment from his voyageur customers. Occasionally he dealt with other Montreal merchants, and sometimes directly with France, but most often he relied on his Quebec contacts for credit, trade goods, and the latest business news.<sup>29</sup>

If in many ways the Canadian colony mirrored the social hierarchies of France, albeit on a smaller scale, then family connections, astute marriage, and access to credit necessarily played an essential role in ascending to the rank of a powerful Montreal businessman. Louis-François Hervieux rose to prominence as much for who he knew as what he knew: through his mother, brothers and sisters he was related to several important Montreal merchant families, including the Magnans, Marins de la Malgue, Pothiers, Le Contes Dupré, and La Cornes. In 1742, Hervieux married Louise Quesnel, the daughter of a local merchant, and not long after she died he wed the daughter of prominent trader Joseph-Jacques Gamelin. The fact that his

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<sup>29</sup> José Igartua, "Pierre Guy," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 3: 271-72.

daughter would later marry the son of Pierre Guy illustrates how closely-knit the Montreal merchant community was in the mid-eighteenth century. Hervieux conducted the majority of his business with his brother Jacques, as well as his two fathers-in-law. As with most Montreal merchant-outfitters, Hervieux sold dry goods on a small scale to the general public; but the real profits always came in supplying bulk trade goods to voyageurs.<sup>30</sup>

These three prominent Montreal merchant-outfitters had more in common than their mutual jostling for commerce in a tough, aggressive Montreal market, and occasionally the ties of marriage and family.<sup>31</sup> What links them most powerfully in the present is the historical accident that their business accounts survived for two hundred years, to be discovered in musty boxes in the basement of Montreal's Chateau de Ramezay Museum. These records offer a rare glimpse at the day-to-day business practices of eighteenth-century Montreal merchants, containing detailed invoices of some 70 trade outfits sent between 1715 and 1758 to a number of posts in the western Great Lakes region, including Green Bay, Rainy Lake, Detroit, Sioux Post, Michilimackinac, Ouiatanon, Nipigon, and Michipicoten.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> José Igartua, "Louis-François Hervieux," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 3: 290.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed account of the demographic peculiarities of the Montreal merchant community in the mid-eighteenth century, see José Igartua, "The Merchants of Montreal at the Conquest: Socio-Economic Profile," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 8:16 (1975): 275-293.

<sup>32</sup> This collection, which includes 36 separate volumes, is generally referred to as the "Montreal Merchants' Records," though microfilm copies of these documents are cataloged under a variety of different titles. The original documents are owned by the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society of Montreal and are on permanent loan to the

With the arrival of spring, Monière, Guy, Hervieux and their colleagues could inevitably be found assembling large outfits of trade goods, extending credit to the *marchands voyageurs* who would oversee trade in the *pays d'en haut*, purchasing canoes and provisions for the trip, as well as hiring the canoemen and paying for the *congé* or trading license required to send goods to the western posts.<sup>33</sup> Like their Quebec counterparts, Montreal merchants tended to supply complete trading assortments to their customers, although occasionally they sold smaller amounts of goods to supplement the outfits sold by fellow traders. Like their Quebec counterparts, Montreal merchants also tended to fix on a common *bénéfice* early in the trading season. On each bulk sale, goods were individually invoiced at the Quebec cost with the Montreal *bénéfice* tacked on only at the bottom. For the years

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Public Archives of Canada where they are cataloged as M847-M853, M869, and M1005. The microfilm copy of the master negative in the holdings of Michigan State University was used in this study; at MSU the collection is cataloged as "Account Books of Eighteenth Century Merchants of Montreal." For a more detailed discussion of the MMR see Anderson, "Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives," 45-68, and Gerin-Lajoie, "MMR Project Research Files."

<sup>33</sup> Bruce M. White's analysis of the account books of the Lake Superior trader Jean-Baptiste Cadot from the 1780s suggests that the various expenses of providing these services for the traders could amount to more than 40 percent of the value of the merchandise sold. Packaging, storage, and land transportation of the outfit amounted to almost 7 percent, equipment purchases and repairs accounted for more than 9 percent, and the purchase of the trading permit approximately 15 percent. By far the largest expense shouldered by the Montreal merchant, however, was the payment of the canoemen's wages and the purchase of their equipment and provisions, which came to almost 69 percent of the value of the merchandise. Bruce M. White, "Montreal Canoes and Their Cargoes," in *"Le Castor Fait Tour": Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, (1985)*, edited by Bruce Trigger, Toby Morantz, and Louise Dechêne (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 180.

between 1735 and 1747, the average annual Montreal mark-up on goods was in the neighborhood of 50 percent (Figure 1.2; Table 1.2, column III).<sup>34</sup> Certain locally-crafted goods, such as tomahawks, axes, leggings, and capotes were exempt from the *bénéfice*, as was the perennial trade essential, bulk woollen cloth. Foodstuffs such as corn, flour, and bacon, as well as the ever-popular *eau de vie* and wine were sold at specially determined rates (compare columns III and IV of Table 1.1).<sup>35</sup>

Besides the critical task of supplying and organizing the annual trade expeditions to the *pays d'en haut*, Montreal merchants formed a crucial link in the second phase of the fur trade cycle: the collection, marketing, and shipment of furs and skins once the voyageurs' canoes returned in late summer. The merchants carefully inspected all furs, assessed their fair market value, and credited them to the voyageur's account. All beaver received in the colony was eventually sold to the local *bureau de fermier* of the *Compagnie des Indes*, but the Montreal merchant was personally responsible for determining the value of all other skins and *menues pelleteries*. As a result, the seller had virtually no control over the price paid for peltry. Each fall, the *marchands équipés* met to determine the standard prices, known as the "*tarif de l'automne*," or the "*prix des marchands-équipés*," for each

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<sup>34</sup> Miquelon estimates that Montreal merchants marked up their goods by 25 to 33 percent. This may well have been true for the peace-time years of the 1720s and 1730s when goods were readily available, but rates skyrocketed during periods of shortage, or during wartime when French shipping was interrupted. See Figure 1.2.

<sup>35</sup> According to Dechêne, Montreal merchants in the latter part of the seventeenth century could expect a net profit of approximately 18 percent of the value of the goods they advanced, factoring in the costs of transporting goods upriver from Quebec, wastage, handling, and storage. Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 86-87.

type of pelt. The sum ultimately credited to the voyageur's account would be assessed on the basis of quality, with inferior grades of furs fetching a fraction of the standard price. In determining these annual prices, the Montreal merchants tended to offer a "cautious, delayed reading of La Rochelle market rates," while also considering the average quality of the year's "crop," the amount of each type on the market, and the current freight and insurance rates.<sup>36</sup> Montreal merchants made little or no profit in the purchase of furs, however, as Montreal prices appear to have matched those offered by the Quebec exporters who in turn purchased them for export.<sup>37</sup>

For as much as can be ascertained with any certainty about fur-trade operations in the *pays d'en haut*, one might as well be standing on the banks of the St. Lawrence at Lachine, watching as the heavily laden voyageurs' canoes slowly disappeared over the western horizon. So little of what transpired between voyageurs and Indians as they exchanged European merchandise for peltry was ever recorded that it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions concerning the everyday conduct of the trade in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley. Though it is commonly assumed that voyageurs sold goods in the *pays d'en haut* at 100 percent profit, it is nearly impossible to determine with any certainty the exact rates at which European items

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Wien, "Exchange Patterns in the European Market for North American Furs and Skins, 1720-1760," in *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, Mackinac Island, Michigan, 1991*, edited by Jennifer S. H. Brown, W. J. Eccles and Donald P. Heldman (East Lansing, 1994), 28.

<sup>37</sup> Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 86-87, 89; Miquelon, *New France*, 158.



were exchanged for peltry.<sup>38</sup> Fortunately, two previously unmined sources detailing frontier exchange offer a unique insight into this question. The *C<sup>1</sup>A* records contains occasional accounts of trade goods sold at the King's posts of Frontenac, Toronto, and Niagara, complete with itemized prices.<sup>39</sup> Buried in this correspondence, as well, are numerous small bills from private traders for the goods they had supplied to commandants of posts in the *pays d'en haut* for official use as Indian gifts.<sup>40</sup> In the latter case, the prices demanded by the traders were so inflated that they clearly represented the conventional rates for various goods in the *pays d'en haut*, with the addition of transportation charges and the voyageur's profit. Frequently, a frugal French official would make a correction to these bills, pencilling in a revised, and inevitably lower, price in the margin, implying that the going rates of exchange for goods in the West were somewhat standardized.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Miquelon and Dechêne both suggest a voyageur's mark-up of 100 percent. Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 86-87; Miquelon, *New France*, 158.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, the "Etat des effets vendûs à Niagara depuis le deux May 1729 jusqu'au dernier Juin 1738," *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 73: 310-312. This account of goods sold over a ten-year period at Niagara is unique in that the prices of goods are denoted primarily in "*chats*" (raccoons), worth 15 sols each. It also appears that brandy was sold to Frenchmen at Niagara at double the price paid by Indian customers. This distinction is important because it suggests the extent to which the trade at the King's posts was geared toward providing the lowest possible prices to Indians in order to sustain their business and alliance.

<sup>40</sup> A characteristic bill of this kind is the "Memoire des fournitures fait pour le Roy par ordre de M. Linctot commandant pour le Roy au poste des ou8atenons par nous gauche chateauvieux et Comp<sup>le</sup> au quicapous revenant de guerre des chicachias," *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 73: 220.

<sup>41</sup> Buried within the reams of paper sent by Canadian administrators to France is a fascinating document which amounts to no less than a "Rosetta Stone" in the analysis of trade good prices in the *pays d'en haut*. Drawn up by Intendant Gilles Hocquart in

Not surprisingly, the final selling prices of trade goods at the King's posts were consistently lower than those exchanged at the privately-leased posts in the *pays d'en haut*. The *raison d'être* of these forts was to ensure that the cost of goods could be closely monitored and adjusted in response to competition from nearby English traders at Oswego on the southern shore of Lake Ontario. Prices culled from the *CJA* correspondence make this point clearly (Table 1.1, column V). When compared with the cost of comparable goods at Quebec, the prices of items at the posts of Niagara, Toronto, and Frontenac appear to have been marked up at an average rate of around 100 percent (Table 1.2, column IV).<sup>42</sup> This markup covered the cost of transporting the goods along the shores of Lake Ontario either by canoe or in one of the King's barques, as well as the wages and provisions of the garrison troops and employees. After 1742, the French government authorized the leasing of the King's posts to merchants, who soon claimed that it was impossible to turn a profit while maintaining prices at artificially low levels. After only two trading seasons, the

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October 1729, it consists of a detailed list of trade goods sent to the posts of Frontenac and Niagara, indicating both the prices at which they were obtained by the crown in France and Quebec, as well as the prices ultimately paid by the Indian consumer. The rate of price inflation varies greatly among items, from no mark-up at all on trade guns to a staggering 700 percent on signet rings. On the basis of this information, it was possible to determine whether subsequent lists likely referred to prices current in France, Canada, or the West. Hocquart à ministre, 25 October 1729, "Estat des marchandises et munitions qui ont est envoyées au forts Frontenac et Niagara pour y faire le traite pendant l'année 1730 avec le prix qu'elles coutes au Roy et celui qu'elles doivent y etre traitées." *AN, CJA*, 51: 286.

<sup>42</sup> This figure corresponds with Hocquart's 1729 calculation of the gross profits expected from the trade at Frontenac and Niagara. *AN, CJA*, 51: 286.

discouraged lessee at Frontenac griped that if he was allowed to mark up goods only by 15 percent to cover the costs of transportation and wages he was bound to lose his *chemise*.<sup>43</sup>

If the sale of trade goods at the King's posts was closely regulated, often to the detriment of profits, the private traders and post commandants operating in the western Great Lakes and Ohio Valley were constrained only by their consciences, as tempered by the demands of their scrupulous Indian customers. Merchandise arriving in the *pays d'en haut* saw price hikes, on average, in excess of 170 percent (Table 1.2, column VI; Figure 1.3), though diverse goods were marked up at vastly different rates. Brandy, for example, garnered considerable profits, often trading hands at a price around 300 percent over Montreal cost. The same also held true for wine, tobacco, and a variety of foodstuffs and metalwares. The high frontier price of tobacco and alcohol was due in part to considerable import duties, and in the case of brandy, the sheer difficulty of transporting large quantities of liquid stocks to the interior.<sup>44</sup> The relatively elastic demand for these rapidly consumable goods, of course, further encouraged traders to sell for as much as the market would bear. Other sundry items such as soap, axes, oil for cooking and burning, firesteels,

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<sup>43</sup> François Chalet à Gilles Hocquart, 20 October 1744, *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 81: 425-26.

<sup>44</sup> The import duties on alcohol and tobacco were supposed to be 10 percent of their assessed value, but were fixed by custom at 9 livres per *barrique* for wine, 22 livres, 10 sols per *barrique* on brandy, and 5 sols per pound on tobacco. Based on the average French wholesale prices of these items (Table 1, column I), the duty in reality amounted to approximately 35 percent on brandy, 20 percent on wine, and as much as 45 percent on tobacco. Lunn, "Economic Development," 364-65.

needles, and kettles could be exchanged at even steeper rates because their initial cost was relatively low. Profits on textiles, however, appear to have significantly more moderate, in accordance with their status as an essential component of the trading assortment. If Indians could not find a bargain on the blankets and bulk cloth that comprised the single largest category of their expenditure, it was likely that they would take their pelts elsewhere, perhaps to another post or, more ominously, to the English.

As voyageurs pushed off and paddled eastward to the shelter of their homes and hearths on the St. Lawrence, and Indians settled back into their winter routine of hunting and trapping, another trading season in the life of the French transatlantic commercial world came to an end. Furs from the depths of North American forests passed through the bustling markets of Montreal, Quebec, La Rochelle, and Paris; Indians, meanwhile, set about chopping wood with iron axes, boiling water in brass kettles, and cooking the game they had hunted with guns from the armories of St.-Etienne. Nearly lost among the products of European and Caribbean trade, the neat rows of figures detailing Canadian fur imports to La Rochelle only hint at the overwhelming importance of the French-Indian trade to Canadian society. Though he would scarcely have realized it, the fashionable customer who bought a beaver hat in the latest style at a Paris shop was enmeshed in a complex cycle of trade and alliance that immeasurably shaped the history of France in North America.

## TABLES 1.1 AND 1.2

## LEGEND

## TABLE 1.1

## COLUMN

I	FR:	Cost in France.
II	QB:	Cost to Canadian government at Quebec.
III	MW:	Cost to Montreal merchant-outfitters (merchant wholesale).
IV	MR:	Montreal retail price (merchant retail).
V	KP:	Sale price at king's posts of Niagara, Toronto, and Frontenac.
VI	PAYS:	Price of goods sold by private traders in <i>pays d'en haut</i> .

## TABLE 1.2

I	$(QB-FR)/FR$ :	Mark-up on goods purchased by Canadian government.
II	$(MW-FR)/FR$ :	Mark-up on goods purchased by Quebec importers.
III	$(MR-MW)/MW$ :	Mark-up on goods sold by Montreal merchant-outfitters.
IV	$(KP-QB)/QB$ :	Mark-up on goods sold at king's posts of Niagara, Toronto, and Frontenac.
V	$(PAYS-MR)/MR$ :	Mark-up on goods sold by private traders in <i>pays d'en haut</i> .

TABLE 1.1  
PRICES OF SELECTED FRENCH TRADE GOODS, 1730-1745  
(Livres)

Sources: *AN*, *C<sup>11</sup>A*; *MMR*.

ITEM	I FR	II QB	III MW	IV MR	V KP	VI PAYS
AIGUILLES/NEEDLES (100)	0.4862	0.7699	1.0259	1.3348		3.0000
AIGUILLES A COUDRE/SEWING NEEDLES (100)	0.4257	0.8344	0.3000	0.5763		3.0000
ALENES/AWLS (GROSS)	3.1976	3.9204	2.6218	4.7735	16.3450	20.5687
BAGUES A CACHET/SIGNET RINGS (DOZ.)	0.2034	0.1917	0.2692	0.4521	0.7976	0.6667
BAS/STOCKINGS (PAIR)	2.4897	2.4208	3.0390	5.9261	2.7548	
BATTEFEUX/FIRESTEELS (DOZ.)	0.8767	1.3703	0.9458	1.8505	2.7156	6.8544
BAYONETTES (EA.)	2.0000	1.0000	1.3300	1.6225		3.7500
BISCUIT (100#)		11.8848	15.2042	15.2042	9.0000	16.1231
BLE D'INDE/INDIAN CORN (MINOT)		2.6687	3.4741	3.4741	17.4286	19.2751
CANOTS/CANOES (EA.)		81.2297	129.0000	129.0000	116.0000	180.0455
CAPOTES (EA.)		25.0873	8.8649	9.4900	18.7167	58.6364
CARISE (AUNE)	1.2459	1.8919	1.3122	2.5263	2.0151	6.0000
CASSETETES/TOMAHAWKS (EA.)		2.4783	1.8333	1.8333	2.0000	2.4750
CHAPEAUX/HATS (EA.)		3.7564	3.6505	5.2651	3.0000	6.2000
CHAUDIERES/KETTLES (#)	1.7155	2.3565	1.7208	3.1259	3.3400	6.0205
CHEMISES/SHIRTS (EA.)		5.1869	1.6093	2.5793	3.4609	8.3328
COUTEAUX/KNIVES (DOZ.)	1.8135	1.9755	1.2184	2.3877	4.0164	5.8218
COUVERTES/BLANKETS (EA.)	6.7365	6.7954	5.6036	9.6694	10.3433	12.1898
DARDS/DARTS (EA.)		0.5000	1.2000	1.2000		1.5000
DOURGNE (AUNE)	1.7272	2.0290	1.8783	3.0209	3.9991	
DRAP (AUNE)	5.7500	7.1912	8.5328	8.5328	9.0000	15.5340
ECARLATINE/STROUD (AUNE)		7.5000			9.2000	36.0000
EAU DE VIE/BRANDY (POT)	0.6032	1.2498	2.6253	2.6253	4.5366	10.3871
FARINE/FLOUR (100#)		9.1910	13.1376	13.1376		35.7073
FIL/THREAD (#)	1.6021	2.2917	1.4816	2.7210	3.5997	11.8109
FUSILS/MUSKETS (EA.)	18.1722	23.7343	13.3228	21.9454	21.3381	37.6150
GRAISSE/FAT (#)		0.4773			0.6630	0.9637
GRELOTS/HAWKBELLS (DOZ.)	0.4500	0.4413	0.5512	0.8473	0.8872	
HACHES/AXES (EA.)	1.4050	3.5500	2.0000	2.0000	2.4559	4.0494
HUILE/OIL (POT)	0.4904	0.9813				2.0000
LARD/BACON (#)	0.2849	0.3716	0.4725	0.4725	0.3497	0.8889
LIGNE DU BANC/COD LINE (#)	0.5207	0.7564	0.6304	1.3390	0.8315	3.0000
MANCHES/SLEEVES (PAIR)		3.7429	1.5267	2.6388	4.8517	14.2564
MAZAMET (AUNE)	2.0944	2.8173	1.9390	3.8340	3.9725	15.0000
MIROIRS/MIRRORS (DOZ.)	9.5857	11.8195	5.8889	7.5423	20.3812	27.0000
MITASSES/LEGGINGS (PAIR)		3.0000	2.8000	2.8000	4.7944	7.7515
MOLTON (AUNE)	2.4637	2.9754	2.5180	4.4142	4.6838	5.9325
MOUCHOIRS/HANDKERCHIEFS (EA.)		0.6074	0.5750	1.4030		
PEIGNES/COMBS (DOZ.)	2.2143	2.5007	2.2722	3.4173	5.2795	13.5224
PIERRES A FUSIL/GUNFLINTS (100)	0.7055	0.7613	0.3148	0.7658	5.0000	3.2257
PLOMB ET BALLE/LEAD AND SHOT (#)	0.2214	0.2868	0.3838	0.4945	0.7249	0.9096
POIS/PEASE (MINOT)		2.7603	3.7955	3.7955	3.9801	6.4231
POIVRE/PEPPER (#)	1.3814	1.7808	1.5571	3.0344	3.0000	
PORCELAINE/WAMPUM (1000)		42.4394		37.0000		50.2966
POUDRE A MOUSQUET/GUNPOWDER (#)	0.6331	0.7761	1.4382	1.4382	1.7399	2.0143
RASSADES/GLASS BEADS (#)	1.3437	1.1363	1.0214	1.9143	1.9104	2.7767
SAVON/SOAP (#)	0.7202	1.3293	1.1359	1.1359	1.4836	3.7500
SEL/SALT (MINOT)	1.5000	1.3911	4.7778	4.7778		29.1667
SOULIERS/SHOES (PAIR)		1.6019	3.7500	6.5357	3.8214	4.2500
TABAC/TOBACCO (#)		0.5523	0.5925	0.5925	1.0018	1.8827
TIREBOURS/GUNWORMS (DOZ.)	0.7972	0.5588	0.2277	0.9649	2.0506	2.7941
TOILE/LINEN (AUNE)	0.9359	1.4998	0.9611	1.7197	3.0087	5.5867
VERMILLON/VERMILION (#)	5.8187	6.4424	5.2985	9.4939	12.5493	15.4234
VIN/WINE (POT)	0.4197	0.7962	1.6128	1.6128	2.8725	5.6922
VINAIGRE/VINEGAR (POT)	0.2326	0.3508		1.2500		2.5875

TABLE 1.2  
PERCENTAGE MARK-UP ON SELECTED FRENCH TRADE GOODS, 1730-1745

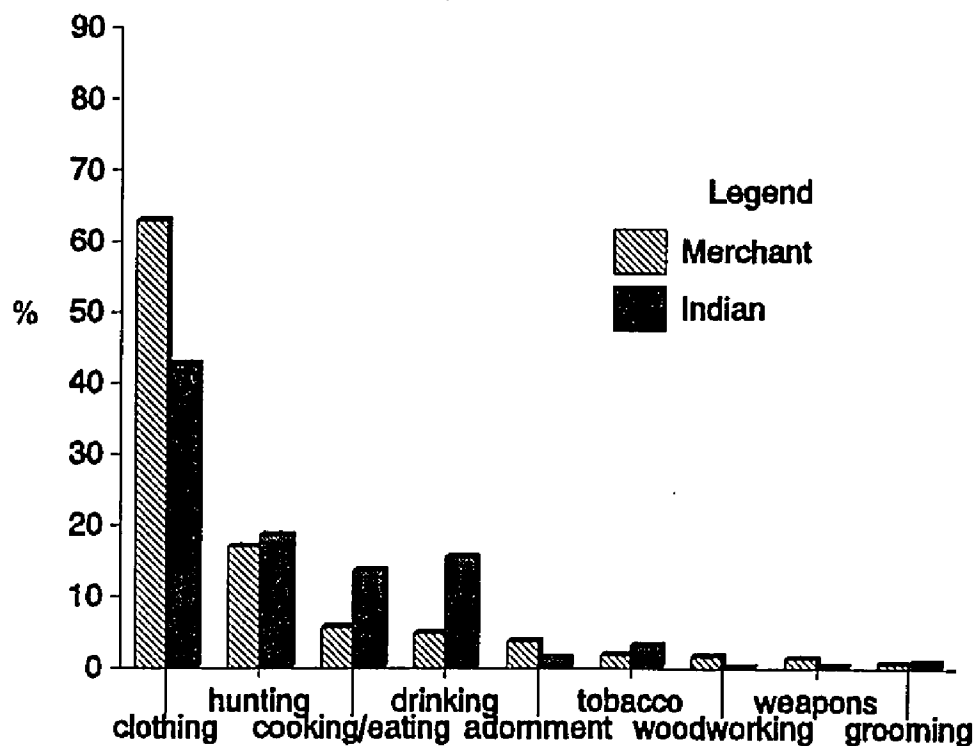
Sources: *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A; MMR.*



ITEM	I (QB-FR)/FR	II (MW-FR)/FR	III (MR-MW)/MW	IV (KP-QB)/QB	VI (PAYS-MR)/MR
AIGUILLES/NEEDLES (100)	62.464	111.0037	30.1101		124.7528
AIGUILLES A COUDRE/SEWING NEEDLES (100)	96.0066	-29.5278	92.1000		420.5622
ALENES/AWLS (GROSS)	22.6045	-18.0073	82.0898	316.9217	330.8935
BAGUES A CACHET/SIGNET RINGS (DOZ.)	-5.7522	32.3500	67.9421	318.0888	47.4674
BAS/STOCKINGS (PAIR)	-2.7874	22.0829	95.0016	13.7971	
BATTEFEUX/FIRESTEELS (DOZ.)	58.302	7.8818	95.6545	98.1756	270.4080
BAYONETTES (EA.)	-50	-33.5000	21.9925		131.1248
BISCUIT (100#)			0.0000	-24.2730	19.1980
BLE D'INDE/INDIAN CORN (MINOT)			0.0000	553.0745	454.8228
CANOTS/CANOES (EA.)			0.0000	42.8049	39.5702
CAPOTES (EA.)			7.0514	-25.3937	517.8757
CARISE (AUNE)	51.8501	5.3215	92.5240	6.5120	137.5015
CASSETETES/TOMAHAWKS (EA.)			0.0000	-19.2995	35.0025
CHAPEAUX/HATS (EA.)			44.2296	-20.1363	17.7565
CHAUDIERES/KETTLES (#)	37.3652	0.3089	81.8539	41.7356	92.6005
CHEMISES/SHIRTS (EA.)			60.2747	-33.0179	223.0644
COUTEAUX/KNIVES (DOZ.)	8.933	-32.8150	95.9701	103.3106	143.8246
COUVERTES/BLANKETS (EA.)	0.87434	-18.8173	72.5569	52.2103	26.0657
DARDS/DARTS (EA.)			0.0000		25.0000
DOURGNE (AUNE)	17.4734	8.6325	61.0030	97.0971	
DRAP (AUNE)	25.0643	48.3865	0.0000	25.1530	82.0504
ECARLATINE/STROUD (AUNE)				22.6667	
EAU DE VIE/BRANDY (POT)	107.162	335.2288	0.0000	263.0442	295.6538
FARINE/FLOUR (100#)			0.0000		171.7947
FIL/THREAD (#)	43.0435	-7.5089	83.6280	57.0755	334.0647
FUSILS/MUSKETS (EA.)	30.6077	-28.6858	64.7206		71.4027
GRAISSE/FAT (#)				38.9063	
GRELOTS/HAWKBELLS (DOZ.)	-1.9333	22.4889	53.7192	101.0424	
HACHES/AXES (EA.)	152.669	42.3488	0.0000		102.4700
HUILE/OIL (POT)	100.102				
LARD/BACON (#)	30.4317	65.8477	0.0000	-5.8934	88.1270
LIGNE DU BANC (#)	45.266	21.0678	112.4048	9.9286	124.0478
MANCHES/SLEEVES (PAIR)			72.8434	29.6241	440.2807
MAZAMET (AUNE)	34.5159	-7.4198	97.7308	41.0038	291.2363
MIROIRS/MIRRORS (DOZ.)	23.3035	-38.5658	28.0766	72.4371	257.9810
MITASSES/LEGGINGS (PAIR)			0.0000	59.8133	176.8393
MOLTON (AUNE)	20.7696	2.2040	75.3058	57.4175	34.3958
MOUCHOIRS/HANDKERCHIEFS (EA.)			144.0000		
PEIGNES/COMBS (DOZ.)	12.8341	2.6148	50.3961	111.1209	295.7042
PIERRES A FUSIL/GUNFLINTS (100)	7.90928	-55.3792	143.2856	556.7713	321.2196
PLOMB ET BALLE/LEAD AND SHOT (#)	29.5393	73.3514	28.8431	152.7545	83.9434
POIS/PEASE (MINOT)			0.0000	44.1908	69.2294
POIVRE/PEPPER (#)	28.9127	12.7190	94.8751	68.4636	
PORCELAINE/WAMPUM (1000)					35.9388
POUDRE A MOUSQUET/GUNPOWDER (#)	22.5873	127.1679	0.0000	124.1850	40.0570
RASSADES/GLASS BEADS (#)	-15.435	-23.9860	87.4192	68.1246	45.0504
SAVON/SOAP (#)	84.5737	57.7201	0.0000	11.6076	230.1347
SEL/SALT (MINOT)	-7.26	218.5200	0.0000		510.4630
SOULIERS/SHOES (PAIR)			74.2853	138.5542	-34.9725
TABAC/TOBACCO (#)			0.0000	81.3869	217.7553
TIREBOURS/GUNWORMS (DOZ.)	-29.905	-71.4375	323.7593	268.9649	189.5740
TOILE/LINEN (AUNE)	60.2522	2.6926	78.9304	100.6067	224.8648
VERMILLON/VERMILION (#)	10.7189	-8.9401	79.1809	94.7923	62.4559
VIN/WINE (POT)	89.7069	284.2745	0.0000	260.7782	252.9390
VINAIGRE/VINEGAR (POT)	50.8169				107.0000
MEAN	33.8299	32.3890	53.8704	101.6768	174.0249

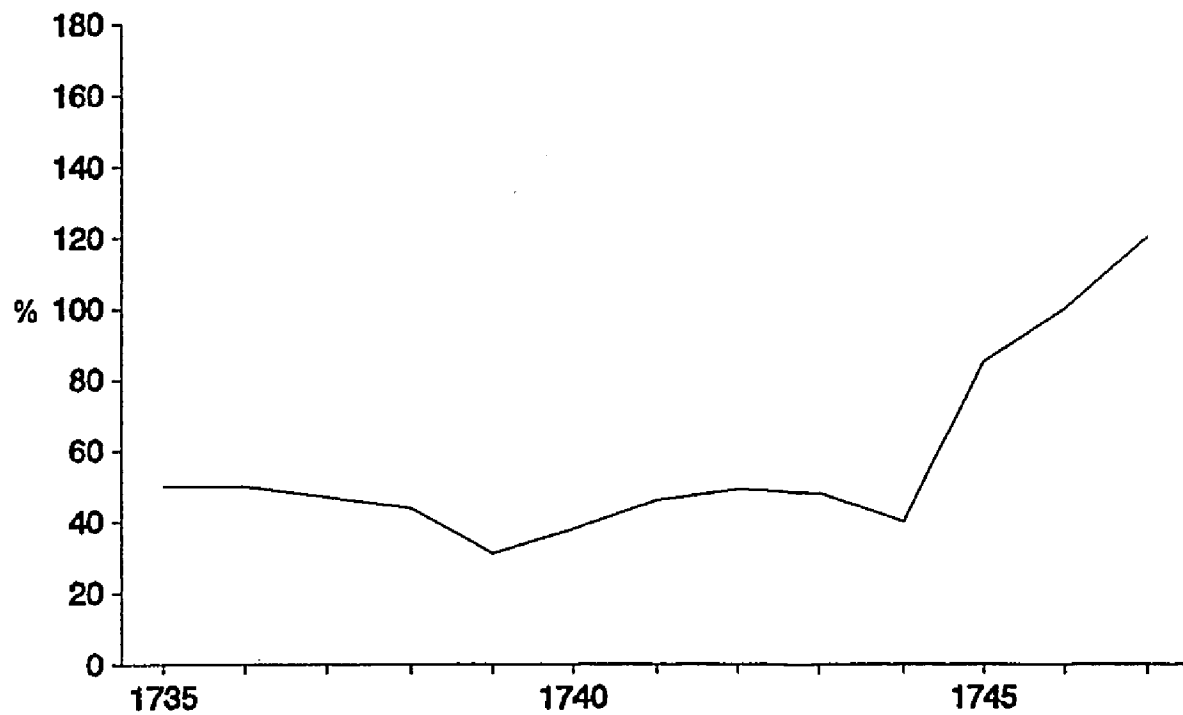
FIGURE 1.1

RELATIVE EXPENDITURE ON TRADE MERCHANDISE OF MONTREAL MERCHANTS AND INDIAN CONSUMERS BY FUNCTIONAL CATEGORY



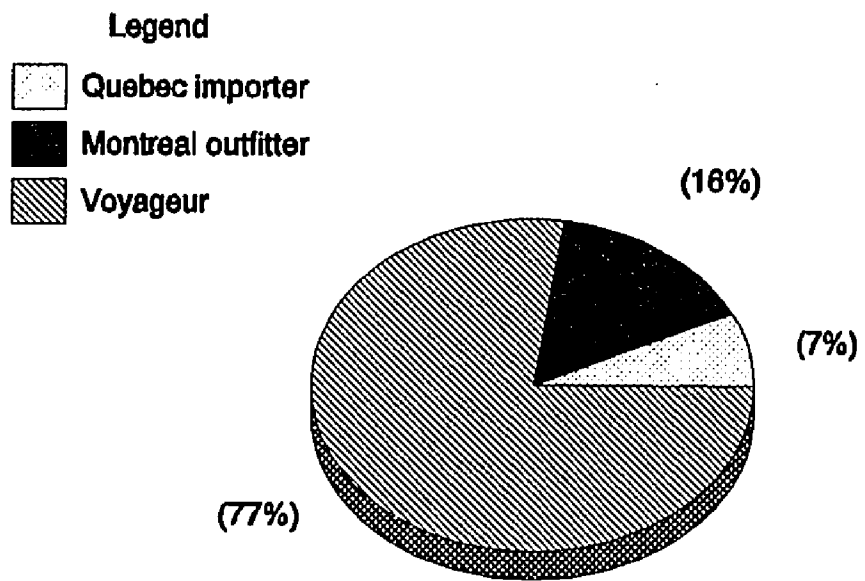
Sources: Anderson, "Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives," 116, 144; *AN*, *CIA*, 73: 310-12.

FIGURE 1.2  
BENEFICE RATES CHARGED BY MONIERE, 1735-1747



Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4,; "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*.

FIGURE 1.3  
ESTIMATED MARK-UP ON GOODS SOLD AT LEASED POSTS



Sources: AN, C<sup>1</sup>A; MMR.

## CHAPTER II THE ANGLO-AMERICAN TRADES

With a strong, steady wind at his back and a favorable tide on the mighty Hudson River, the captain of a 50-ton sloop cast off from New York's "Albany wharf." In the local grog shops he had often boasted of completing the 150-mile journey up to Albany in less than 24 hours; on this trip, he could expect to drop anchor at the walled Dutch town in about three days, perhaps even a week if the weather worsened. When he reached Albany, the local fur merchants would be waiting, eager to inspect the bales of stroud cloth, kegs of rum and gunpowder, and the array of other items they had ordered the previous year from their commercial agents in London and Amsterdam. Would the woolens be of a sturdy weave, the colors the dark hues of scarlet and blue their Indian customers preferred? What was the latest price of beaver on the London market? Would there be war with France? While the merchants chatted in Dutch with the captain, animatedly exchanging the latest news and gossip from New York, licensed cartmen rowed the merchandise ashore in canoes and skiffs, hauling it up from the riverside to the scrubbed and tidy merchants' homes, which also served as warehouses and stores.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Arthur Armour, "The Merchants of Albany, New York, 1686-1760," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Northwestern University, 1965), 200.

From its charter by the English in the 1680s until the fall of New France, Albany was a focal point of trade and diplomacy in the northern colonies. Facing competition from the French to the north, the Pennsylvanians to the south, and the traders of Schenectady and Oswego to the west, the town's fur fortunes fluctuated through the eighteenth century. Yet, as long as New York dominated the trade in furs with Great Britain and the French remained poised a mere two hundred miles from the gates of the town, Albany endured as a critical link with the powerful Iroquois nations and the citadel of Anglo-American empire in the rivalry with France for North America.<sup>2</sup>

If the Canadian fur trade of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century was characterized by an alliance of public and private interest in many significant aspects of the trade, New York's colonial fur trade was marked by bitter, ethnically tinged factionalism, and a chronically strained relationship between private interest and public purpose. The underlying diplomatic disposition of European-Indian exchange was thus frequently ignored in the political maelstrom of a notoriously factious people. Britain's Board of Trade, its gaze unflinchingly fixed on the bottom line of

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<sup>2</sup> No other Anglo-American colony ever rivalled New York's beaver exports to London. Pennsylvania generally outproduced New York in the deerskin trade as the eighteenth century progressed, but in terms of total fur and skin exports, New York went unrivalled until the 1740s. Stephen H. Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy as a Measure of Rising Imperialism: New York and Pennsylvania, 1700-1755," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 64:3 (1981): 240-44; Murray G. Lawson, *Fur: A Study in English Mercantilism, 1700-1775*, University of Toronto Studies, History and Economic Series, Vol. 9 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943), Appendix E, 108; Thomas Elliot Norton, *The Fur Trade in Colonial New York, 1686-1776* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 92-93.

import ledgers, offered little imperial support to the colony during peacetime. Safely beyond the reach of skulking French and Indian raiders, the settlers of the lower Hudson valley and Long Island were also reluctant to open their purses to provide for the defense of a distant frontier. And when the neighboring New England colonies griped that Albany's Dutch merchants callously betrayed the British cause by continuing to trade with Canada during wartime, their censure was certainly understandable. Despite the meddling efforts of imperial-minded governors and their eminent cadre of supporters, the business of Albany remained business throughout the eighteenth century, a reality rooted as much in the peculiarities of the town's fur economy as in the disposition of its leading citizens.

Chartered by the English in 1686, Albany was home to some 1,000 predominantly Dutch-speaking inhabitants, many of whose ancestors had arrived in the earliest days of settlement at the beginning of the century.<sup>3</sup> The *handlaers* or fur merchants of Albany had long thrived from the exchange of manufactured European goods for the beaver, skins, and peltry of the Iroquois nations and other skins, and the arrival of the English did little to alter generations of trade and tradition. Too intent on their ledgers to pay much heed to the transition of authority, the *handlaers* nonetheless had little reason to resent the new governing class. Explicit in the town's new charter was a provision that ensured Albany's monopoly over the colony's fur trade. In practical terms, the monopoly forbade anyone from bartering with Indians--or storing peltry--beyond the city walls. The new regulations also imposed strict

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<sup>3</sup> Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 1.

limits on the routine practices of local merchants. Though still permitted to offer credit to Indian customers, fur merchants could no longer accept pawns as collateral or lure unwary patrons into their shops with offers of gifts or a tot of rum. Finally, the *handlaers* were barred from dispatching brokers or agents with trade merchandise to the settlements of the Five Nations, and from contracting with Indians to sell Albany goods in their own villages. Trade was to be conducted only during daylight hours, and no commerce was permitted on the Sabbath. In the absence of an effective local constabulary, enforcement of these provisions would be carried out, it was conceived, through the aid of informants. Concerned citizens were encouraged to report illicit activities to the Albany authorities, if not for the sake of altruism, then for the one-third to one-half share of the resulting fine they would collect for their trouble.<sup>4</sup>

The New York beaver business was weathering a downturn in the 1680s, and the new English legislators trusted that the fur monopoly, combined with the more vigilant regulation of commerce in and around the town, would boost the ailing local economy. Every citizen of Albany was dependent in some measure on the Indian trade, from the most powerful merchant-importer to the humblest indentured servant. The new administrators quickly grasped the financial and diplomatic importance of the exchange in furs, and the 1686 ordinances were intended more to validate the town's existing commercial structure than to fundamentally reshape the trade. The new

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<sup>4</sup> *The Annals of Albany*, edited by J. Munsell (Albany: J. Munsell, 1857), 8: 205-14.



regulations, for example, recognized the three existing classes of fur merchants. Only a handful of wealthy wholesalers were permitted to import goods directly from England or the Netherlands, and they were required by law to sell their merchandise exclusively to Albany traders, not directly to the Indians.<sup>5</sup> The Navigation Acts stipulated that all foreign goods were to be transshipped through an English port, though this did not prevent Albany's Dutch merchants from preserving their trade ties with suppliers in the Netherlands, even if this meant their ships occasionally neglected to make the obligatory call at London or Bristol.<sup>6</sup>

When goods arrived at the port of New York, they were unloaded under the supervision of an agent, then transferred to the smaller river-going sloops for the final leg of the journey up the Hudson. Having reached Albany, the merchant-importers sold the same trade merchandise at an average markup of 100 percent.<sup>7</sup> Despite their legal status, many Albany importers in the early years of the eighteenth century still did not possess sufficient credit to purchase goods directly from European merchants, so instead acted as resident factors for overseas trading houses. In such instances, a European exporter shipped a cargo of merchandise at his own risk and expense; the Albany merchant then oversaw its sale in the colony, collecting a 5 percent commission for his efforts. The Albany merchant invariably paid the freight charges,

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<sup>5</sup> *Annals of Albany*, 8: 212.

<sup>6</sup> Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 51-52.

<sup>7</sup> Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 52. Norton suggests that importers reaped net profits in the range of 20 to 40 percent after deducting for costs. *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 113-14.

customs duties, and insurance premiums on the return shipment of peltry. The London correspondent completed the commercial cycle by selling the furs and skins at the current market price, in turn skimming off a 5 percent share of the gross profits.<sup>8</sup>

The Albany ordinances further distinguished between two lesser classes of *handlaers*: those who dealt primarily in relatively expensive goods, such as bulk duffel and stroud cloth, blankets, and other "big ticket" items, and merchants who traded in supplementary "smallwares," such as knives, mirrors, vermilion, awls, tobacco, flints, firesteels, brass wire, ribbon, thread, bells, beads, combs and needles.<sup>9</sup> Operating out of their homes, the *handlaers* exchanged manufactured goods for furs with the Iroquois and western Indians who travelled to Albany to trade. There were ample profits to be had in this trade, particularly when it involved dispensing rum to thirsty Indian customers. But, with the free flow of alcohol invariably came increased allegations of cheating and fraud. Albany's merchants were routinely derided by their English-speaking neighbors, who characterized them as money-grubbing, unprincipled boors who would stop at nothing to separate Indian customers from their pelts. "It is hardly possible to keep ones Pen within the Bounds of Moderation, when these Vermin come in ones way," seethed Peter Wraxall, New York's Secretary for Indian Affairs in the 1750s. "The People of Albany," he claimed, "are extremely Ignorant & Illiterate & so enslaved to the love of Money that

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<sup>8</sup> Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 51-52. For the importance of maintaining sound commercial relationships with London factors, see Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 118-20.

<sup>9</sup> *Annals of Albany*, 8: 212.

they have no other Principle of Action."<sup>10</sup> The Swedish naturalist, Peter Kalm, paid a brief visit to Albany while touring the colonies in 1749, during which he deduced that the character of the Dutch populace was tainted by their "vagabond" ancestry. Kalm deplored their alleged trickery and false-dealing, noting that "the merchants of *Albany* glory in these tricks, and are highly pleased when they have given a poor *Indian* a greater portion of brandy than he can bear, and when they can after that get all his goods for mere trifles." Since Kalm was hosted during his New York sojourn by Wraxall and his ilk, it was inevitable, perhaps, that the visitor was persuaded that "the avarice and selfishness of the inhabitants of *Albany* are very well known throughout all *North America*."<sup>11</sup>

Though the most rabid attacks on the Albany Dutch were characterized by ethnic slurs, the invective heaped upon them was primarily the byproduct of broader political antagonisms brewing within the colony. Without doubt, a certain amount of sharp dealing, perhaps even flagrant cheating, characterized the relationship between Albany traders and their Indian customers. The exaggerated allegations of critics such as Wraxall and Kalm should not be accepted uncritically, however, particularly since no Dutch rebuttals to such allegations have survived, if they were ever offered. What is apparent is that local Dutch merchants were content to conduct their business as usual, leaving others of a more imperial-minded bent to fret about the broader

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<sup>10</sup> *AIA*, 135n., 132n.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Kalm, *Travels Into North America*, translated by John Reinhold Forster (Barre, Mass.: The Imprint Society, 1972), 332-34.

diplomatic implications of the fur trade in challenging the French presence in the West.<sup>12</sup>

The French diplomatic and commercial hegemony over the western Great Lakes was indeed hampering the Albany fur trade by the end of the seventeenth century. The economic sluggishness of the 1680s was precipitated largely by the Canadians' ability to intercept virtually all the best western furs before they reached the Iroquois middlemen who traditionally carried the peltry to Albany. The fur-bearing animal populations south of Lake Ontario were already depleted by the time the English arrived in Albany, and it was obvious to the more percipient colonial officials that unless English traders penetrated the western markets, and the western Indians were encouraged to deal through Iroquois middlemen or bring their peltry directly to Albany, the prospects for continued profits in the New York fur trade were bleak.<sup>13</sup>

One of the earliest proponents of expansion in the Great Lakes region was Governor Thomas Dongan, who drew criticism from supporters of a strict Albany monopoly in the mid-1680s by sponsoring a dual trade and diplomatic mission to the western tribes. The purpose of this expedition was as much to promote New York trade interests among the Indians as to send a clear signal to Quebec that the English were now prepared to intercede in what had previously been an uncontested sphere of

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<sup>12</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> For an early expression of this position, see "Mr. Robert Livingston's Report of his Journey to Onondaga (April 1700)," *NYCD*, 4: 648-52; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 155-56.

French influence. Dongan issued licenses to Jacob Lockerman and thirty others, who ultimately journeyed as far west as Michilimackinac. Based on the success of Lockerman's expedition, which had been warmly received by Indians relieved to see a challenge to the French commercial monopoly, additional trading parties were dispatched the following year in hope of permanently extending the range of New York's influence. By 1687, Governor Dongan was confidently considering the establishment of an English fort at Niagara, while encouraging the Iroquois to make peace with their former enemies, the Hurons, and other western tribes with access to ample fur resources. Despite the early success of Dongan's imperial initiatives, the dream of extending New York's trade into the interior was soon shattered. That same year, a trading party under the command of Major Patrick Macgregory was set upon by a party of French and Indians. Their valuable stock of trade merchandise was plundered and the men sent to labor in the construction of Fort Frontenac on the north shore of Lake Ontario. In the wake of the Macgregory debacle, no comparable trade missions would be attempted for the next twenty years.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the failure of these early efforts at gaining a foothold in the western fur trade, New Yorkers never forgot the critical importance of Indian alliances to the economic stability and military preparedness of the colony. The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, a body of influential Albany merchants reporting directly to the governor, met frequently with representatives of the Five Nations at Albany,

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<sup>14</sup> Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 11-21; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 153-54.

discussing matters ranging from the cost of strouds to the necessity of curtailing French activities in the *pays d'en haut*. As fur merchants themselves, the Commissioners may occasionally have turned a blind eye to the transgressions of their colleagues. But in their speeches at least, the agents of Indian affairs generally appeared willing to address the sources of Indian complaints.<sup>15</sup>

The expressed interest of the Commissioners in maintaining good relations with their Iroquois neighbors generally coincided with the expansionist program of the budding "imperialist" faction spearheaded by the powerful Scots merchant-proprietor, Robert Livingston, and subsequently promoted by governors Dongan, Hunter, and Burnet. These "imperialists" preached active intervention through commercial, military, and diplomatic channels, to eradicate the threat of French expansion in the western Great Lakes. From their perspective, the greatest obstacle to wiping out French influence in North America was the commerce of the traitorous, rapacious Albany *handlaers*, who neglected the greater interests of the Anglo-American colonies by brazenly trading with the Canadians in peace and war alike.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *ALA*, passim.; Armour, "Merchants of Albany, 218-35; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 73-82.

<sup>16</sup> "As Trade with the Indians is the only Method of securing and extending an Influence over them," Wraxall reflected, "how pernicious this Trade from Albany to Canada must have been at this time when the French were laying the Foundation of that extensive Influence they have since obtained over the Indians . . . . I say the perniciousness of this Trade must have been no less obvious to those who helped it forwards at Albany than to every Body who in the least considered it. But those Albany men got money by it to which they would sacrifice every other consideration." *ALA*, 119n.

As early as the 1670s, a number of Albany merchants had established regular business contacts with fellow traders in Montreal, supplying them with a narrow range of goods not easily available in New France in exchange for Canadian beaver.<sup>17</sup> With the two fur-trading towns a mere 220 miles apart by way of the Richelieu River-Lake Champlain route, the temptation to bypass the *Compagnie des Indes* and dispose of at least part of their fur stocks by sending them southward was irresistible to many Canadian merchants. Albany merchants could frequently offer higher prices for Canadian beaver than the monopoly company, and the New Yorkers--unlike the discriminating French agents--paid equally for all passable grades of peltry. Montrealers could also expect to be reimbursed by their Albany contacts in a matter of weeks, while they could rarely expect returns on their bills of exchange from the Company in under a year.<sup>18</sup>

The bulk of the furs smuggled to Albany was carried by parties of converted Mohawks, whose Jesuit-founded settlement at Caughnawaga lay on the south shore of

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<sup>17</sup> The most complete record of the Albany-Montreal trade is preserved in the Letterbook of Robert Sanders, 1752-1758, in the collection of the New-York Historical Society. The Montreal merchants were far too scrupulous to leave any record of their illicit activities, but Sanders's letters to his Montreal correspondents offer a unique insight into the Anglo-French trade during the 1750s. Rarely addressing his contacts by name (he used coded symbols to identify each of them), Sanders arranged for the purchase of Canadian beaver, paying primarily in wampum, supplemented occasionally by small amounts of woolens. Norton also recognized the limited range of items traded between Montreal and Albany, noting that wampum and stroud cloth made up the bulk of northward-bound cargoes. Rum and gunpowder were rarely purchased by the Canadians. Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 89-91, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Lunn, "The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-1760," *Canadian Historical Association, Report of the Annual Meeting*, 18 (1939): 67-68.

the St. Lawrence, just upriver from Montreal. Caughnawaga had a long tradition of smuggling. The most notorious of the contraband traders were the doughty Desaulnier sisters--Marie Magdelaine, Marie Anne, and Margu rite--who facilitated much of the exchange of Canadian beaver for English goods through the Indian town between 1727 and 1752. Canadian officials perennially suspected the sisters of illicit dealings, noting that they grew noticeably wealthier each year without bringing a single beaver pelt to the Company's offices. Despite this official scrutiny, however, the Desaulniers and others continued to reap healthy profits from their illegal dealings until the Conquest.<sup>19</sup>

The hazards involved in such smuggling operations were always substantial, and the Montreal merchants customarily bore all the risks and losses associated with the trade on both treacherous legs of the journey. Armed French patrols operating out of Fort Chambly and later the fort at Crown Point policed the Montreal-Albany route throughout the spring and summer months, seizing the contents of all suspicious southward-bound canoes. It was also essential for the Canadians to employ reliable Indian carriers, due to the potential for theft along the route. Intendant Hocquart estimated that traders could expect to lose upward of 10 percent of the value of their furs over the course of a season, whether through the pilfering of Indian paddlers or confiscations at the hands of the authorities. The advantages of commerce with Albany clearly must certainly have outweighed the risks, however, for each year dozens of canoes boldly set off from Caughnawaga for Albany, loaded with the

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<sup>19</sup> Lunn, "Illegal Fur Trade," 61, 73-75.



coveted spoils of the *pays d'en haut*.<sup>20</sup>

Though the Canada trade was not illegal in New York, the imperialists were infuriated that Albany merchants continued their trade with the French, even during the bitter hostilities of Queen Anne's War. While no decisive action could be taken to restrict the trade while the conflict raged, support for strangling the Albany-Montreal commerce grew stronger after the Treaty of Utrecht. The simmering anti-Albany sentiment was fueled by two distinct sets of interests: those of the virulently anti-French imperialists and the jealous Schenectady merchant community. The imperial faction opposed any intercourse with the French during peace or wartime. Alleging that the French could not supply the Canadians with sufficient merchandise to support the Great Lakes trade, the imperialists concluded that the Albany merchants dealing with Montreal were, in effect, furnishing the Canadians with the means to maintain their stranglehold on the western trade. The only way New Yorkers could hope to rival the French in the Great Lakes was to disrupt the Canadian fur trade, and that could be accomplished only by stifling the flow of English goods to Montreal. Similarly, the merchants of Schenectady, on the Mohawk River sixteen miles northwest of Albany, were in a better position geographically to deal with the western tribes, but since the arrival of the English in 1664 had been barred from the trade.<sup>21</sup> Anticipating the potential collapse of Albany's monopoly in the New York fur trade,

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<sup>20</sup> Lunn, "Illegal Fur Trade," 69-70, 62-63.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas E. Burke, *Mohawk Frontier: The Dutch Community of Schenectady, New York, 1661-1710* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 31-32.

the Schenectady merchants were only too eager to throw their support behind the imperialist cause.<sup>22</sup>

During the tenure of Governor Robert Hunter, an ardent proponent of westward trade and expansion, the ambitions of the imperialists were wedded to the frustrations of the Schenectady merchants. The result of this pragmatic alliance was a powerful anti-Albany coalition which spared no invective in condemning the Dutch merchants for endangering the security of New York by their collusion with the French, not to mention their alleged mistreatment of Indian trading partners.<sup>23</sup> When his tenure as governor ended and he returned to England in 1719, Hunter immediately lobbied the Board of Trade for the immediate restriction of the Canada trade. The greatest achievement of the early anti-Albany campaign was Hunter's success in having William Burnet, his ideological alter-ego, named as his successor. Long before Burnet sailed for the colony, he had been convinced by the former governor

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<sup>22</sup> The most forceful expression of the argument that the Canadian trade was insupportable without supplies from Albany was offered by Cadwallader Colden. See, for example, "Report of a Committee of the Council held at New-York, November 6, 1724," and "A Memorial concerning the Furr-Trade of the Province of New York," *HFIN*, 2: 21, 44. For Schenectady resentment of the Albany monopoly, see Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 145; Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 137, 161; Burke, *Mohawk Frontier*, passim.

<sup>23</sup> Wraxall peppered his *Abridgment* with editorial condemnations of the Albany Dutch, alleging that they ignored the diplomatic repercussions of the trade in lieu of self-enrichment. "I suppose Pouders was sold by the Bag and the Albany People according to their general and usual Principle of Action had cheated the Indians and made their Bags less," he surmised. "It was by such Mean and dishonest Methods that they became Odious and Contemptible to the Indians, lost their Esteem and Confidence, and that great improvement of their Trade with the Western and farr Indians w<sup>ch</sup> might have fallen into their hands and by that means secured those Indians to our Interest." *ALA*, 61n.

that it was imperative that he terminate the Albany-Montreal commerce, a cause upon which he would remain fixated throughout his controversial administration. Shortly after his arrival in New York in 1720, Burnet launched a whirlwind campaign to persuade the assembly to outlaw the Canada trade. By the end of the year he had succeeded in convincing the legislators to accede to an act banning New Yorkers from selling what were deemed "Indian goods" to Canadians. Even those in possession of trade merchandise north of the town would be considered guilty of trading with the French. Albany's sheriff was given the authority to search all property and conveyances north of the town limits, and those convicted of participating in the forbidden trade were subject to a steep fine of £100. Their merchandise was also liable to seizure, to be handed over--along with half the fine--to any informer aiding in their apprehension.<sup>24</sup>

Albany was in no danger of becoming a second city of brotherly love in the wake of the 1720 act. Though the merchants involved in the Canada trade voiced no public opposition to the new measures, neither did they go out of their way to obey them. Within a year, in fact, it was obvious to all concerned that the act was a

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<sup>24</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 135-38. The fine of £100 New York currency would be equivalent to nearly \$7,000 U.S. in 1995. Calculation based on John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), and *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

failure.<sup>25</sup> Unwilling to sit idly by while his cherished law was flagrantly ignored, Burnet once again turned to the New York assembly for support. In 1722, he rammed through a new, harsher law that allowed Albany officials to administer an oath to suspected smugglers. Accused lawbreakers who refused to take the oath were automatically declared guilty and slapped with the £100 fine. Though the Act of 1722 admittedly made business more difficult for the Albanians still deeply involved in the Canada trade, it was still not enough to deter them from buying Canadian furs. A few of the most hardened traders simply absorbed the steep fines as part of their operating expenses, while others risked a potentially greater penalty by perjuring themselves before frustrated officials.<sup>26</sup>

After several years of official persecution and harassment, the typically apolitical Albany merchants were finally driven to take action in opposition to the restrictive acts, asking their London contacts to petition the Board of Trade on their behalf. In July, 1724, twenty London merchants, including some of the most powerful and influential players in the English fur trade--Samuel Baker and Samuel Storke among them--drafted a memorandum to the Board of Trade, laying out their rationale for the repeal of the New York acts. With the bulk of the furs arriving on London docks coming from Canada via Albany, the British fur merchants undeniably

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<sup>25</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 138-40.

<sup>26</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 141-42. "The Penalty of £ 100 -- upon being convicted of sending Strouds to Canada did not deter some," Wraxall remarked, "who paid it and yet found it a profitable Trade. Others swore themselves off, much to the astonishment of the Commiss" . . . They seem to suspect some of Perjury and I am of their Opinion." *AIA*, 159n.

had a vested interest in the decriminalization of the Canada trade. The London petitioners nonetheless mustered a convincing geopolitical argument against Burnet's laws. Cutting to the heart of the matter, the merchants attacked what they grasped to be the fallacious premise upon which the restrictive legislation was based: that the Canadians could maintain their economic and diplomatic ties with the western Indians only because they were supplied with the necessary trade merchandise by Albany merchants. This was simply not the case, they asserted, pointing to the fact that the *Compagnie des Indes* had only recently stepped up imports of imported English stroud cloth, as well as equivalent French woollens, to meet the demand generated by the severance of the Albany trade. Furthermore, they claimed, it was dangerously irresponsible to cut off the supply of Canadian furs without adequately ensuring for continued exports by expanding trade contacts. Finally, and most bitterly, the merchants lamented the contraction of fur imports, which had the deleterious effect of raising prices on the London market and upsetting the delicate balance of colonial trade.<sup>27</sup>

Whatever effect this petition may have had on a Board of Trade traditionally sympathetic to mercantile interests, it was soon counteracted by a rival memorandum drafted by Cadwallader Colden on the instructions of Governor Burnet. After scoffing at the embarrassing unfamiliarity of the London merchants with North American geography, Colden merely reiterated the imperialists' *a priori* assumption that, without English goods from Albany, the French could not sustain their presence

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<sup>27</sup> *HFIN*, 2: 1-5.

in the Great Lakes region. Burnet's trade acts were already working to New York's advantage, he claimed. If the Albany traders could be permanently prevented from supplying their Montreal correspondents, it would only be a matter of time before the Canadian regime in the Great Lakes capitulated, leaving New York free to reap ample profits.<sup>28</sup>

Realizing that the unfamiliarity of their London representatives with the minor details of the colonial fur trade was weakening their cause, the Albany merchants sent a delegation to deal directly with the Board of Trade, which appeared increasingly sympathetic to the imperialist position. In 1725, the Board finally held hearings to address the issue. Though the Lords of Trade agreed with the Colden-Burnet contention that the volume of trade between New York and Britain had not been significantly affected by the prohibition of the Canada trade, they concluded that the oath-taking provisions of the 1722 act were grounds enough for disallowing Burnet's legislation. Colonial policy should be directed at actively encouraging western trade, the Board suggested, rather than merely stifling the commerce with Canada.<sup>29</sup>

Though the Privy Council never acted on the recommendations of the Board of Trade, a politically beleaguered Burnet soon began to re-think his position on the Canada issue. Even staunch imperialists such as Robert Livingston's son, Philip, were beginning to appreciate that the trade restrictions were penalizing only those who obeyed the law, while others who flouted the authorities continued to profit from

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<sup>28</sup> *HFIN*, 13-32.

<sup>29</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 143-44.

Canadian beaver. Some worried that, in the absence of Albany merchandise, the French would be encouraged to supply comparable merchandise thus precluding any opportunity for New York to gain a foothold in the western trade. With support for his restrictive regulations dwindling, Burnet was forced to employ more subtle means when he once more attempted to resolve the thorny problem of the Canada trade in 1726. The resulting act imposed duties on all fur-trade merchandise, but the rate on goods carried north of Albany was twice that on those destined for the western trade. Strouds, for example, were taxed at either 15 or 30 shillings per piece, depending on their destination. Similarly, traders paid an additional duty of 1 or 2 shillings per gallon on rum.<sup>30</sup>

Burnet's final legislative effort aimed at stamping out the Canada trade met with little more success than its antecedents. The tax farmers who had contracted to collect the duties quickly antagonized and alienated the Albany merchant community by their overzealous collection of the duties. By this time, both sides were exhausted by years of wrangling, and when Burnet was finally transferred to Massachusetts, it became clear that the Albany merchants were on the brink of victory. The new governor, John Montgomerie, did not share his predecessor's obsession with eradicating the Canada trade, and, in 1729, the Board of Trade recommended that all

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<sup>30</sup> A "piece" of stroud generally measured 24 yards long, though strouds purchased by Croghan in Philadelphia varied in length, with some as short as 22 yards. Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 146; George Croghan Section, Cadwallader Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. On duties, see Norton, *Ibid.*, 109, 146, 170; Johnson Gaylord Cooper, "Oswego in the French-English Struggle in North America, 1720-1760," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Syracuse University, 1961), 76.

Burnet's trade legislation be disallowed. This time the Privy Council agreed. New York's brief attempt to strangle Canada by its purse strings sputtered to an end.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, not all of Burnet's legislative efforts were brushed aside by a British government weary of the relentless internecine bickering in New York. The most significant and enduring success of the governor's imperialist program was the establishment of the fortified trading post of Oswego, at the mouth of the Onondaga (later the Oswego) River, on the southeastern shore of Lake Ontario. From its establishment in 1727 until the end of the French regime, Oswego was the only English post on the Great Lakes and thus played a critical role in the Anglo-French rivalry for control of the region's Indian trade. Despite the criticism of his political opponents, Burnet had always recognized that the severance of commercial ties between Albany and Montreal would not benefit the colony unless trade with the western tribes was simultaneously encouraged. Plans for a trading post at the Oswego site had been proposed as early as 1700, but not until the end of Queen Anne's War did New York officials seriously consider the project. In the end, it was their fear that the French would soon establish a foothold on the southern shore of Lake Ontario that spurred colonial administrators to implement the long-awaited plans for imperial action.<sup>32</sup>

After a New York expedition thwarted a French attempt to construct a blockhouse at Onondaga in 1710, Governor Hunter responded by encouraging trade

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<sup>31</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 147-48.

<sup>32</sup> Cooper, "Oswego," 1-5; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 152.



and diplomatic missions to the Senecas, the westernmost of the Five Nations, in order to woo them away from the French and to encourage them to renew their trading alliances with the "Far Indians" of the western Great Lakes. When the French completed a stone trading post at Niagara in 1720, it became clear to New York imperialists that the colony would lose all possibility of competing in the western trade unless they took immediate and decisive action to challenge the French.

Already suffering from the prohibition of the Canadian trade, the Albany merchants opposed the program of western expansion. Fearing that a post on the Great Lakes would discourage the Iroquois and other western Indians from coming to trade at Albany, they were also suspicious of any belligerent action that might antagonize the French and jeopardize their longstanding commercial ties with Montreal. Initially, the Albany merchants would support only the idea of a military, not a commercial, post on Lake Ontario, but they finally acquiesced in a permanent English trading presence on the Great Lakes as their forty-year-old monopoly crumbled around them.<sup>33</sup>

Governor Burnet issued licenses to young traders and encouraged them to head west into Onondaga and Seneca country to trade in 1724, while he met with the Iroquois sachems later that year to gain their approval for a post at Oswego. The governor spent £150 on improvements to the waterway between Schenectady and Oswego and built a road on the major overland portion of the route, between the

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<sup>33</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 162-63. The Albany monopoly was finally overturned by the Supreme Court of New York in 1727 after nearly a decade of legal challenges by neighboring Schenectady traders. Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 137, 161; Norton, *Ibid.*, 57-59.

Mohawk River and Wood Creek, to facilitate the movement of trade goods and furs between Albany and Lake Ontario. By 1725, Burnet was convinced that his encouragement of the western trade was already vindicated in the fur export ledgers and set to work convincing the New York Assembly to vote the necessary funds for construction of a trading post at Oswego. The Assembly was far from unanimous, however, on the need for building a post and maintaining a garrison on Lake Ontario at public expense. The Albany merchants were never enthusiastic about supporting a trade that would inevitably rival their commerce with Canada, and the representatives from the southern counties, who had little to fear from the French, were even less convinced of the need to fund New York's imperial pretensions on the distant northern frontier. Nevertheless, Burnet's strident lobbying convinced the Assembly to vote £300 for the construction of Fort Oswego. Though this sum was not nearly sufficient to cover all the building costs--which ultimately ran to almost £1700--the governor lent his personal funds to assure that his brainchild saw completion. Fort Oswego was completed in August 1727. Built of masonry and clay, the main structure was a rectangular building, 60 feet long and 28 feet high, with a sloping roof and galleries with loopholes projecting on all sides. The entrance to the fort faced east onto the river, and with four foot-thick stone walls it could only be taken--its architects boasted--by a siege party with cannon.<sup>34</sup>

New York trade goods faced a tortuous journey of more than 160 miles from Albany storehouses to the shores of Lake Ontario. The merchandise was first loaded

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<sup>34</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 162-66; Cooper, "Oswego," 38-40.

on carts, and hauled overland sixteen miles from Albany to Schenectady. Here the bales of goods were stowed on wooden bateaux capable of carrying four to five tons of cargo and crewed by three or four men. Proceeding up the Mohawk River against the current, the bateau-men alternately used poles and ropes to propel their craft through a series of rifts and rapids until they reached Little Falls, just over 50 miles from Schenectady. At the falls, the goods were removed from the boats and heaped on wagons for carriage around the rapids. The bateaux were then carefully reloaded and the crews continued until the river turned northward. Here they faced the longest portage, at what was known as the "Great Carrying Place." The bateau-men customarily contracted with local Palatine German settlers to haul the goods and boats the mile and a half over a small ridge to Wood Creek. After re-launching their craft for a third time, the passage became increasingly difficult, with numerous obstructions in the narrow creek. Though Oneida Lake was only ten miles away, the meanderings of Wood Creek made the actual distance traveled closer to thirty miles. Once they reached Oneida Lake, the bateaux had easy sailing, but stayed close to the shore to avoid capsizing in sudden squalls. The Oswego River flowed out of the western end of the lake and into Lake Ontario, so the final run down to the fort was swift, with only one remaining obstacle, the Oswego falls, to overcome. At the fall line, the merchandise was once again laboriously unloaded, carried to the base of the rapids, then reloaded before the final twelve-mile stretch to Fort Oswego.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> François de Marbois, "Mémoire sur le commerce des fourrures et pelleteries avec les nations sauvages par la rivière du nord dans l'état de New York," *American Historical Review*, 29:4 (1924): 731-40; Philip Schuyler, Goldsbrow Banyar, and

Before the construction of a canal and lock system in the nineteenth century, the journey between Schenectady and Lake Ontario was lengthy and hazardous. The waterways were frequently blocked by fallen trees and brush and some became almost impassibly shallow during the dry summer months. There was continual danger of grounding on sand bars and hidden rifts, not to mention the arduous task of loading and reloading the bateaux countless times to bypass the series of rapids and waterfalls along the route. In the journal of their 1770 expedition to Toronto, New York traders Ferrall Wade and C. Keiuser reported that it took them nearly two weeks to reach Oswego from Schenectady by bateaux.<sup>36</sup> The upshot of these transportation woes was a corresponding increase in the expense of shipping goods from the Albany area to the lakeside post, and costs were only compounded by the threat of Indian harassment and looting along the major portage route between the Mohawk River and Wood Creek. In the summer of 1755, Sir William Johnson, the newly appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs, arranged to send an assortment of Indian gifts to Oswego. The cargo included stroud cloth, blankets, duffels, gunpowder, lead and shot, hose, caps, knives, tankards, tea pots, basins, porringers, brass wire, kettles,

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Elkanah Watson, "The Report of a Committee Appointed to Explore the Western Waters in the State of New-York for the Purpose of Prosecuting the Inland Lock Navigation," in *Documentary History of the State of New-York*, edited by E. B. O'Callaghan (Albany: Weed, Parsons & Co., 1850), 3: 1087-1103; Robert E. Hager, *Mohawk River Boats and Navigation Before 1820* (Syracuse: Canal Society of New York State, 1987); Milton W. Hamilton, *Sir William Johnson: Colonial American, 1715-1763* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press/National University Publications, 1976), 20-21; Cooper, "Oswego," 77.

<sup>36</sup> "Journal of Wade and Keiuser's Trading Expedition from Fonda to Toronto" [May 13-June 10, 1770], *WJP*, 7: 723-730.

and frying pans, together worth about £295 New York currency. Wages for the bateau-men on the trip between Mount Johnson in the Mohawk valley and Oswego amounted to £10, with another £9.10s. for the hire of the bateau and the purchase of the necessary tools and provisions. Based on Johnson's expenses it is reasonable to assume that the cost of shipping goods to Oswego generally fell in the range of 6 to 7 percent of the value of the merchandise for each leg of the trip. Considering the additional cost of overland carriage between Albany and Schenectady, merchant expenditure for transportation might easily have reached 15 percent for a round-trip trading expedition.<sup>37</sup>

The English trade on Lake Ontario developed rapidly, diverting furs from the French at Niagara. By mid-century, in fact, it is likely that the Oswego trade was producing as much peltry as the Albany commerce with Canada.<sup>38</sup> Each spring, Albany and Schenectady merchants sent assortments of trade goods to their factors at Oswego, but since no comprehensive trading records survive to detail the nature of transactions between Oswego traders and Indian customers, it is difficult to draw any certain conclusions about the rate of mark-up charged by New Yorkers on Lake Ontario. The Iroquois constantly complained to the Commissioners of Indian Affairs that they were not getting "good pennysworth" at the post and that the Oswego traders "do cheat them very much in the Sale of Rum instead of which they sell them their

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<sup>37</sup> "Johnson's Account of Indian Expenses, 27 July 1755," *WJP*, 1: 586-88.

<sup>38</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 172.

own Water w<sup>ch</sup> in a Day or two stinks & is noisome."<sup>39</sup> Wraxall could barely restrain himself when recording the diplomatic strains exacerbated by such disreputable dealings. "The Indians hold the Traders in great Contempt as a Set of Mean Dishonest Mercenary Fellows & w<sup>ch</sup> Characters they have drawn from Dear Experience," he charged. Peter Kalm similarly remarked that he himself had been witness to various shady dealings on the banks of the Oswego.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from whatever cheating and gouging may have occurred at the post, the normal rate of markup on goods sold by Oswego traders was likely in excess of 100 percent over the cost of the merchandise in Albany and Schenectady, factoring in the expense of transportation. At the end of the Seven Years' War, Johnson determined that a 100 percent gross profit was acceptable for trade at the posts of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley now under his aegis. The few remaining records of goods purchased by Johnson at Oswego for Indian gifts suggest that this figure is reliable as an average, with certain items such as rum and tobacco absorbing much higher rates of markup (Figure 2.1).<sup>41</sup> The temptation for Oswego traders to shortchange their Indian customers was supposed to be held in check, at least in theory, by the post commissary appointed by the governor on the recommendation of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs. But, as Wraxall cynically noted, the commissary himself would

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<sup>39</sup> *AIA*, 166.

<sup>40</sup> Kalm, *Travels Into North America*, 331-32.

<sup>41</sup> "A Scheme for Meeting Expenses of Trade," *WJP*, 4: 556-563; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 113. Markups in excess of 300 percent for rum and tobacco were not unusual. *WJP*, *passim*.

often bring a large quantity of goods to Oswego, despite the prohibition barring the post superintendent from trade. Implying that the the post superintendant routinely paid kick-backs to the Commissioners of Indian Affairs from the profits made in illegal trading, Wraxall suggested that "neither their Reports or Behaviour is to be depended on."<sup>42</sup>

The New York Assembly, on the other hand, was far more concerned with how they were going to pay the commissary's salary and provide for the maintenance of a military garrison at Oswego than with allegations that the traders were watering rum or jacking up prices to outrageous levels. The legislature wrestled continually with the problem of supporting the new post at Oswego and its twenty-man garrison. The Board of Trade, always wary of hampering commerce and irritating the London fur merchants, recommended that Oswego's costs be borne by a general revenue rather than a direct tax on trade. Many assemblymen disagreed, charging that it was the responsibility of the British government to provide for the colony's defense. An early effort to raise revenue through a 2 percent import duty was disallowed by the Crown, so the Assembly responded by levying a direct tax on the Oswego trade.<sup>43</sup>

As one of his first acts in office in 1729, Governor Montgomerie attempted to bypass the legislative gridlock by appointing one private supplier to provision the garrison at an annually contracted rate, yet it was still unclear who was ultimately responsible for maintaining the post in a defensible state. The Assembly was divided

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<sup>42</sup> *AIA*, 188.

<sup>43</sup> Cooper, "Oswego," 62-66.

into three opposing factions on this issue: those with an interest in the western trade suggested that Oswego be supported by a general land tax spread over the entire colony; Albany merchants, who still had substantial interests in Canadian beaver, proposed that the problem could be solved by a direct tax on the Oswego trade; a third group of assemblymen, drawn primarily from the "lower counties," remained unconvinced that New York should be meddling with imperial affairs and balked at any levies for the dubious purpose of challenging the French in the West. With the failure of a short-lived, if imaginative, tax on wig-wearers in 1731, Montgomerie admitted that a direct tariff on the western trade was the only workable solution to the problem of support. From this point, all Oswego traders were required to purchase a license, the revenue from which was to applied to the post's operating expenses. A direct tax on certain trade goods was also imposed, including 10 shillings on each piece of stroud cloth, and 1 shilling on every gallon of rum.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the efforts of the governor, assembly, and British authorities to agree on an efficient and equitable means of maintaining the post at Oswego, the commissary and traders constantly complained of a shortage of funds for the upkeep of the fort. In fact, the irregularly-paid and poorly-equipped garrison troops were perennially on the verge of mutiny. Oswego was unquestionably effective in offering at least some direct commercial competition to the Canadian fur trade, though it is likely that had the French decided to attack the fort before 1756--when it finally fell to Montcalm's assault--they would have found the fortifications crumbling and its

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<sup>44</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 109, 170; Cooper, "Oswego," 76.



miserable defenders only too willing to wend their way home.<sup>45</sup>

In the wake of the debate over how the western trade was to be conducted and the sweeping disallowance of Burnet's restrictive trade laws, the Albany merchants settled back into their comfortable old business with Montreal. Yet, ironically, the victory of the Dutch merchantss rang hollow, for it signalled the beginning of the end of the Albany-Montreal trade. By the 1730s, the French were stepping up their patrols along the Lake Champlain route and enjoying increasing success in stemming the northward flow of contraband. As well, many of the great New York shippers were losing interest in the fur trade, turning instead to the more lucrative business of supplying provisions to the sugar plantations of the West Indies.<sup>46</sup> Now supplemented by the flow of western furs through Oswego, the value of New York's fur exports to London remained constant until the beginning of the Seven Years' War, though the relative value of furs and skins as a proportion of the colony's total exports began to drop during the 1740s and 1750s.<sup>47</sup> The "golden age" of New York's fur trade was rapidly drawing to a close.

Though New York's Indian trade was in eclipse by the 1740s, the fortunes of the more aggressive Pennsylvanians were manifestly on the ascendant (Figure 2.2). Though it has habitually been referred to as a *fur* trade, the commercial relations

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<sup>45</sup> Cooper, "Oswego," 77-88; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 173.

<sup>46</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 171.

<sup>47</sup> Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," Tables 1 and 2, 240-44.

between Pennsylvania traders and Indians in the eighteenth century came to be characterized primarily by the exchange of European goods for deerskins, not peltry.<sup>48</sup>

Perpetually in pursuit of a quick "buck," enterprising Pennsylvania traders supplied the raw material for a thriving transatlantic leather industry. Long before fashionable English gentlemen developed a taste for them, deerskin breeches were worn by artisans and laborers as daily working attire. The English leather trade, centered in London and Westminster, craved North American deerskin, and in these bustling manufactories the quarry of the skilled Indian hunters of the southern Great Lakes and Ohio Valley was transformed into fine gloves, jackets, vests, breeches, shoes, and boots. Patterns of Indian hunting and the demands of the European market happened to coincide neatly in the context of the deerskin trade. Fall was the prime season for deer hunting, when bucks were fatter and easier to take in their less cautious rutting period. The Anglo-American deerskin market also favored autumn, because the deer's winter "blue" coat tends to be thicker than the summer "red" coat, making it easier to strip the unwanted hair from the valuable hide. The greater part of the deerskins amassed through the Indian trade was ultimately exported to England and Europe, but a certain amount remained in the colony, where it was consumed by the

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<sup>48</sup> Much of the historiographical confusion clouding this issue, James McClure argues, can be attributed both to the paucity of data on the scale of the Ohio Valley deerskin trade, as well as the problem of nomenclature. In the eighteenth century, he notes, "peltry" referred to any animal skins with fur still attached, while today the term is generally taken to be a synonym for "fur." McClure suggests that "skins" would be a more accurate eighteenth-century synonym for "peltry." James P. McClure, "The Ohio Valley's Deerskin Trade: Topics for Consideration," *The Old Northwest*, 15:3 (1990): 115-16.

renowned leatherworkers of Philadelphia, Germantown, and Lancaster to supply the intercolonial market.<sup>49</sup>

Though the value of Pennsylvania's deerskin exports did not even begin to rival that of New York's beaver and peltry until the 1730s, the mid-Atlantic region already had a long history of Indian-European trade by the eighteenth century.<sup>50</sup> Before the first Quaker set foot in Pennsylvania, the game animals of the Delaware Valley had already been severely overhunted by the Susquehannocks in pursuing their trade with the Swedes and the Dutch.<sup>51</sup> From the outset, William Penn believed that the Indian trade would be essential to the economic stability of the new colony, but he initially found it difficult to establish commercial contacts with the Indian nations of the area, who were already in alliance with the governments of either Maryland or New York. The Susquehanna Valley, nominally under the authority of the Iroquois, appeared the most promising arena for trade, but through the final years of the seventeenth century, New York successfully managed to restrain the Iroquois from slipping southward to deal with the upstart Pennsylvanians.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> McClure, "Deerskin Trade," 118-22.

<sup>50</sup> Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," Tables 1 and 2, 240-44.

<sup>51</sup> Francis Jennings, "The Indian Trade of the Susquehanna Valley," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 110:6 (1966): 406-424.

<sup>52</sup> Penn craved access to the Susquehanna Valley not only to establish a Pennsylvania fur trade, but also to extend settlement. His plans were initially frustrated by New York's Governor Dongan, who feared that the Pennsylvanians would upset the profitable New York trade relationship with the Iroquois. Dongan finally ceded the Susquehanna region to Penn in 1697. Gary B. Nash, "The Quest for the Susquehanna Valley: New York, Pennsylvania, and the Seventeenth-Century Fur Trade," *New York History*, 48:1 (1967):

The early Pennsylvania trade was boosted, in an ironic twist, by the efforts of a handful of renegade Canadian *coureurs de bois*. Peter Bizaillon, Martin Chartier, and Jacques Le Tort had abandoned the French in the 1680s and put down roots in the Susquehanna Valley, supporting themselves through trade with bands of Shawnees who had themselves recently settled in the area. Recognizing the value of the relationships that these Canadian traders had already established with the Indian hunters of the Susquehanna Valley, James Logan, Penn's powerful secretary and political agent, stabilized the colony's lucrative Indian trade by safeguarding the French traders against potential competitors. Never negligent of his own interests, the prescient Logan used his considerable political influence--the fact that he was Pennsylvania's Commissioner of Property notwithstanding--to purchase 8,000 acres of land in the Susquehanna Valley. When Penn was incapacitated by illness in 1712, Logan assumed virtually unchallenged authority over the colony's affairs. He was now poised to become the single most powerful Indian trader in Pennsylvania.<sup>53</sup>

At the height of his protracted reign as importer, merchant, and speculator, Logan boasted that he could double his investment within two or three trading seasons. Each year he imported a vast quantity of merchandise for the Indian trade, which he then sold on credit to more modest traders. The skins he collected in payment were sent to his agents in England, who sold them on the London market. It has been estimated that Logan earned a profit of roughly 80 percent on each shipment

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<sup>53</sup> Jennings, "Susquehanna Valley," 409-14.

of deerskins, but the most lucrative aspect of his business involved the sale of merchandise to his trader clients, which he marked up by 150 percent, on average.<sup>54</sup>

As Logan singlehandedly propelled Pennsylvania full force into the lucrative deerskin trade, the effect of his commercial and territorial aggrandizement on the native population of the Susquehanna Valley was less than benign. Under Logan's de facto monopoly the deerskin trade became synonymous with the relentless expansion of Anglo-American settlement. Logan plowed the profits from the trade into land speculation, driving westward the Indians who had helped him to amass his new fortune. Francis Jennings has gone so far as to accuse Logan of deliberately enticing various Indian bands to the Susquehanna Valley to trade, only to later thrust them out as it became more lucrative to sell their land to prospective settlers. Whatever Logan's motives, the Turnerian march of farmers in the wake of traders had the unfortunate effect of eroding the Indians' agricultural communities and encouraging them to overhunt the region's game populations.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the steady influx of English-speaking settlers into the region, the Susquehanna Valley remained the locus of the Pennsylvania deerskin trade well into the eighteenth century. It was not until the 1730s that traders began to venture beyond the Alleghenies into the rich hunting territory of the Ohio Valley. The lands west of the Ohio River had, since the Treaty of Utrecht, been considered an exclusively French domain. But as the Delawares and Shawnees began their

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<sup>54</sup> Jennings, "Susquehanna Valley," 415-16.

<sup>55</sup> Jennings, "Susquehanna Valley," 420.

westward retreat in the face of Anglo-American expansion, the Pennsylvania traders remained hot on their heels. It has been estimated that before 1755, some 300 Pennsylvania traders were operating in the Ohio Valley.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the Pennsylvania deerskin trade was the relative freedom of the individual traders, who could count on little intervention or support from distant Philadelphia and generally preferred it that way. As early as 1719, Pennsylvania's governor, William Keith, recognized that the conduct of the trade was intrinsically linked to the success of Indian-colonial relations and thus ultimately to the Anglo-French struggle for the continent. A close friend and supporter of New York's imperial-minded Governor Hunter, Keith submitted a report to the Board of Trade outlining his proposals for restructuring the deerskin trade to serve an imperial purpose. Keith suggested that the commerce be closely monitored to prevent the cheating of Indian customers; demonstrated the necessity of the westward expansion of the trade and the construction of a series of fortified posts; endorsed the creation of formal alliances with the Indian nations of the region; and solicited the extension of crown control over all aspects of the trade. Yet, as they had with Burnet's efforts to draw the New York fur trade into the orbit of imperial policy, the Privy Council ultimately shied away from involving the crown in matters

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<sup>56</sup> Albright G. Zimmerman, "The Indian Trade of Colonial Pennsylvania," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Delaware, 1966), 372; Yoko Shirai, "The Indian Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1730-1768: Traders and Land Speculation," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, 1985), 7.

it deemed best handled by local policy or private enterprise.<sup>57</sup>

Though Keith's prescient proposals were not initially adopted, the colony did see the introduction in 1722 of a licensing system formulated to regulate the Pennsylvania Indian trade, if only indirectly. The trading licenses were not easy to obtain and were clearly intended to exclude all but those with the right connections and easy access to ample resources of capital or credit. A prospective trader was required to apply for an endorsement from a county court, pay a £100 bond, and name bondsmen before the license was finally granted by the governor himself on the court's recommendation. The number of men who qualified for these licenses was deliberately limited, but this did not prevent others from participating in the potentially lucrative business. The officially licensed traders were joined by myriad others, with varying legal standing, in an elaborate arrangement which is still not entirely understood. In addition to the licensed traders were those who were officially registered as "unlicensed." Unlicensed traders were not considered illegal participants, but rather tended to be the employees of licensed traders or merchants. Because the permits were renewed annually, those who did not return regularly to the East lapsed into unlicensed status. Finally, a third group of traders were not registered at all. These men often operated as independent agents, or were hired on by licensed traders. A handful may have even been leading traders themselves or acted in partnership with registered traders. It has been suggested that these unlicensed, unregistered individuals had no official legal status but were permitted to

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<sup>57</sup> Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," 250-51.

engage in trade with the Indians as long as they were somehow associated with established traders.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the Pennsylvania government's genuine, if bewildering, attempt to regulate the behavior of its Indian traders, the "free and open trade" originally championed by Logan in the Susquehanna Valley remained the touchstone of the Ohio Valley entrepreneurs throughout the eighteenth century. Far removed from the seaboard settlements, both geographically and temperamentally, the predominantly Irish and Scots-Irish traders were a hardy, independent lot, who contended with the constant threat of depredations by hostile French and Indian competitors with no hope of red-coated protection. Still, the allure of the deerskin trade was powerful enough to overshadow the considerable risks involved. The deerskin market was booming in the 1720s and early 1730s, just as the Pennsylvania traders made their way into the prime hunting lands of the Ohio Valley. Deerskin prices rose steadily through the 1720s, reaching 20 pence per pound in 1725. Prices held through the end of the decade, peaking at 2 shillings in 1732. After a drop in the mid-1730s, when a pound of deerskin brought only 12 pence, the price leveled off at 20 pence by 1740, and remained roughly at this level through the 1750s.<sup>59</sup>

The romantic image of gaily singing voyageurs hurtling past rapids in birchbark canoes was far from the reality of the Pennsylvania deerskin traders, who led their heavily-laden pack trains through the rugged terrain of the Alleghenies into

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<sup>58</sup> Shirai, "Indian Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania," 7-8.

<sup>59</sup> Zimmerman, "Indian Trade of Colonial Pennsylvania," 375.



the heart of the Ohio country. Nevertheless, Pennsylvania traders were thick on the ground in the upper Ohio Valley by the early 1730s, as they concentrated their efforts on the Delaware and Shawnee villages of Kittanning, Kiskiminetas, Chartier's Town, Shannopin's Town, and Verango along the Allegheny River. By the 1740s, a few Pennsylvanians had ventured as far north as the shores of Lake Erie. Covering perhaps thirty miles a day in the best of conditions, it could take weeks to travel the 300 or more miles from Philadelphia to the trading hubs of Logstown and Shannopin's Town, near the present site of Pittsburgh, where the Allegheny and Monongahela flow into the Ohio River.<sup>60</sup>

One of the most flamboyant and influential, if not the most solvent, of Pennsylvania's Ohio Valley traders was the legendary George Croghan. Croghan's commercial ventures in the final decades of Anglo-French rivalry not only mirrored the course of Anglo-American western expansion, but in many respects shaped and guided it. Fleeing famine in his native Ireland in 1741, the young Croghan arrived in Philadelphia eager for opportunity. The best prospects for fortune-making in 1740s Pennsylvania clearly lay in the booming Indian trade. Croghan wasted no time in associating himself with Peter Tostee, one of the principal traders in the Indian country. Supplied with trade merchandise by the influential merchant-importer,

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<sup>60</sup> Zimmerman, "Indian Trade of Colonial Pennsylvania," 314-15; Shirai, "Indian Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania," 35-36. On an average day, a trader might cover 30 miles by pack horse but often less. They might travel twice that distance by canoe when water travel was possible. Nicholas B. Wainwright, *George Croghan: Wilderness Diplomat* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 20-21.

Edward Shippen, Croghan began his career by exchanging his wares for the deerskins of Shawnee, Mingo, and Twightwee hunters of the Ohio Valley and the Wyandots and Ottawas of the Lake Erie country.<sup>61</sup>

Within two years of his arrival in the colony, Croghan was confident enough in his prospects to purchase a tract of land in Lancaster. By 1744 he was in business for himself as a licensed Indian trader. That same year, he brought a shipment of goods to a Seneca village near the mouth of the Cuyahoga River on Lake Erie, surprising the French at Detroit by this bold incursion into what had previously been their unchallenged sphere of trade and influence. Canadian voyageurs operating out of Detroit had been drifting eastward into this area for some time and, getting wind of Croghan's presence, Detroit's post commander, Céleron de Blainville, immediately dispatched a party of Ottawas to expel him from the town. The Indians were either distracted or had second thoughts about doing the dirty work of the French, and Croghan was spared the intended assault. The village on the Cuyahoga thus became the center of Croghan's early trading operations, while he also sent goods down the Ohio and encouraged the Indians around Detroit to enter into the Anglo-American trade network. In 1745 another hostile party of French and Indians attempted to oust Croghan from the region, but he had already won the support of his Seneca neighbors and they refused to hand him over to the French. After narrowly escaping this last encounter with his scalp, he learned that Peter Tostee had also been accosted by a band of Shawnees friendly to the French and had lost a large number of deerskins,

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<sup>61</sup> Wainwright, *George Croghan*, 3-5.

along with some beaver and raccoon pelts belonging to Croghan. This was the first of many losses that Croghan would suffer to the French and their Indian allies and which would ultimately lead him to the brink of financial ruin.<sup>62</sup>

This reversal of fortune did not deter the resolute Croghan. Later in 1745 he struck a partnership with William Trent, scion of a monied Philadelphia family and former Shippen clerk. The two bought a sizable piece of property on Conegogwinet Creek, near Harrisburg, from which they conducted their joint trading operation. Though their association soon lapsed when Trent joined the Pennsylvania contingent of a colonial force planning to attack Canada in 1746, Croghan continued to broaden his trading network in the Ohio country. His successful relations with the Senecas in time yielded more than merely financial gain; in 1746, he was appointed to the Onondaga Council, the governing body of the Iroquois nation.<sup>63</sup>

By 1747, Croghan was once again living and trading at the mouth of the Cuyahoga. Self-professed diplomat as well as trader, he took ample advantage of the temporary shortage of French trade merchandise in the *pays d'en haut*, precipitated by the wartime interruption of their transatlantic shipping, to stir up Seneca resentment against the French presence at Detroit. Between the Cuyahoga River and Detroit lay Sandusky, site of a sizeable Indian settlement where Orontony or "Nicholas" had brought a splinter group of Huron-Petuns beyond the range of French influence. Orontony was only too eager to deal with the rival English and allowed Croghan the

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<sup>62</sup> Wainwright, *George Croghan*, 6-8.

<sup>63</sup> Wainwright, *George Croghan*, 9-13.

freedom to trade in his village.<sup>64</sup>

Word of Croghan's activities at Sandusky filtered back to the authorities at Detroit, who immediately recognized the danger of American traders provoking anti-French sentiment among the region's Indian groups. Events on Lake Erie came to a head in the spring of 1747, when five French traders were seized and killed at Sandusky by the Wyandots with the conspicuous aid of some Senecas from Croghan's village. The Sandusky Wyandots and the neighboring Miamis subsequently launched an uprising aimed at driving the French from the region. The revolt miscarried and Orontony led his followers to Kuskuskies on the Mahoning River, while the Twightwees settled at Pickawillany, on a branch of the Great Miami River.<sup>65</sup> With his Indian customers rapidly dispersing, and a French bounty on his scalp, Croghan found it expedient to shift his operations to the south and to concentrate on trading with the Miamis at "Pick's Town."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The Huron-Petun group that migrated to Sandusky adopted the distinguishing name of "Wyandots," an earlier synonym of "Hurons" which had since fallen out of use. For the reasons underlying this resettlement, see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 193-96.

<sup>65</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 198-99.

<sup>66</sup> In the journal of his 1752 expedition to the west, William Trent estimated the distance from Logstown--near Pittsburgh--to Pickawillany at 326 miles along the "Main Path." With an additional 300 miles from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh at a rate of thirty miles per day, it would take a pack train loaded with trade goods at least three weeks to make the arduous trek to the most distant posts of the Ohio country. William Trent, *Journal of Captain William Trent from Logstown to Pickawillany, A.D. 1752*, edited by Alfred T. Goodman (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 84n. See also Christopher Gist's journal in *The Wilderness Trail, or The Ventures and Adventures of the Pennsylvania Traders on the Allegheny Path*, edited by Charles A.

In the wake of the failed 1747 uprising, the Pennsylvania government came to appreciate Croghan's potential as an official mediator between the colony and the various Indian tribes of the Ohio Valley. At Croghan's suggestion, the Pennsylvania legislature voted a present of £400 worth of merchandise for the Indians the next year and entrusted the Irishman with its delivery and distribution. Thus began Croghan's long and distinguished career as diplomat. Respected by the Indians and the colonial authorities alike, Croghan had by this time become the most powerful and influential trader in the Ohio country. Though other prominent traders, including John Fraser, James Young, Robert Callender, Michael Teaff, and Thomas McKee, claimed their fair share of the deerskin market, Croghan was the unchallenged master of the Pennsylvania Indian trade, with perhaps a third of the 300 traders and employees in the region connected to him in some way.<sup>67</sup>

Unfortunately, the success of Croghan's far-flung trading ventures did not keep pace with his diplomatic accomplishments. Having gradually stretched his Ohio Valley operations too thin, Croghan found himself on the verge of financial ruin by 1751. Plunged into debt and facing a downturn in the London deerskin market, Croghan's waning trading empire was finally toppled when a force of Ottawas and Chippewas in alliance with the French attacked Pickawillany in June 1752. This assault, in which a trader was killed and several others were captured, marked the

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Hanna (New York, 1911), 2: 278-79; Wainwright, *George Croghan*, 20-21.

<sup>67</sup> Wainwright, *George Croghan*, 16-21; Shirai, "Indian Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania," 38.

launch of a concerted French-Indian effort to drive the American traders from the Ohio Valley. The attackers seized vast amounts of merchandise and skins belonging to the Pennsylvanians and drove the fortunate survivors eastward in rout. The next year brought an abrupt end to the Anglo-American deerskin trade in the Ohio Valley, as Duquesne's forces pushed eastward, reclaiming the Ohio country for the French. The western trade had ended virtually overnight in a paroxysm of bankruptcy and fear.<sup>68</sup>

During its brief span, the Pennsylvania trade offered a tantalizing promise of profits to all involved, from the largest merchant-importers in Philadelphia to the meanest unlicensed trader in the trans-Allegheny country. The wealthy Philadelphia merchants who supplied the deerskin trade, including Edward Shippen, Thomas Lawrence, Jeremiah Warder, Nathan Levy, and David Franks, could expect to earn gross profits of at least 100 percent on the sale of trade goods.<sup>69</sup> It is more difficult, considering the paucity of records, to come to any certain conclusions regarding the rates at which Pennsylvania traders on Lake Erie and in the Ohio country exchanged their wares for deerskins. Taking into account the post-war trading regulations established by Sir William Johnson for the Ohio posts, it is likely that individual traders marked up goods by at least 100 percent, after deducting the costs of

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<sup>68</sup> For the grisly details of the attack on Pickawillany, culminating in the cooking and consumption of the Miami leader, La Demoiselle, see White, *Middle Ground*, 230-31.

<sup>69</sup> Zimmerman, "Indian Trade of Colonial Pennsylvania," 102.

transportation.<sup>70</sup>

Shipping goods as far as 600 miles inland, much of the way by packhorse, was a time-consuming and expensive proposition. Unlike their Canadian rivals, the Pennsylvanians had to travel almost exclusively by land to reach the Ohio country because the major eastern rivers (Delaware and Susquehanna) were unsafe for navigation and there was no water passage through the Allegheny mountains. Even if reliable riverine routes had been available, canoe birch was not native to the region and so the traders would have had to rely on unwieldy dugouts--difficult to maneuver and even harder to portage--to ship their goods west. This did not mean that the Pennsylvania traders were forced to hack their way through impenetrable forests, however, because a vast network of Indian paths already crisscrossed the province. These paths certainly made the westward trek easier for the traders, but overland travel posed its own unique difficulties. Slowed by flooded trails, swollen and dangerous river fords, swamps, and windfall timber blocking the paths, the packhorse trains had difficulty enough in the warmer months and winter conditions usually brought travel to a standstill.<sup>71</sup>

Considering the hazardous and lengthy nature of the westward trip, the cost of transporting trade goods to the Ohio Valley could easily mount to 30 percent of the

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<sup>70</sup> See note 41 above.

<sup>71</sup> Paul A. W. Wallace, *Indian Paths of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1965), 2-10. Wallace offers detailed information on dozens of Pennsylvania's colonial Indian paths, including those most frequently used by the deerskin traders. See, for example, "Allegheny Path," 19-21; and "Frankstown Path," 49-54.

value of the merchandise each way (Figure 2.1).<sup>72</sup> Losses to Indian and French raiding parties were an everpresent and potentially ruinous risk of the trade and by the 1750s had reached crippling levels. In 1754, with petitions for restitution still pouring in to Philadelphia, it was estimated that the traders had lost goods and skins valued at more than £48,000 to the French and their Indian allies. Croghan alone suffered damages in the amount of £8,000, and as much as £16,000--a third of all Pennsylvania losses combined--when his many shares with trading partners were finally accounted for.<sup>73</sup>

Though focused on different geographic regions and commodities, the Indian trades of New York and Pennsylvania followed remarkably similar trajectories through the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both pre-dated English settlement and formed the basis of the early local economy. In the 1680s, William Penn and Thomas Dongan simultaneously grasped the intrinsic relationship between trade and diplomatic relations with the powerful Indian nations neighboring each colony. Both sought the westward expansion of the trade: to Dongan it represented a desire to secure New York's competitiveness with the French; for Penn it promised a

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<sup>72</sup> Wainwright notes that traders customarily charged 30 percent of the value of the goods to carry shipments of Indian gifts to the Indians of the Ohio Valley on behalf of the Pennsylvania government. Wainwright, *George Croghan*, 39. A number of invoices in Croghan's accounts corroborate this claim. Croghan Section, Cadwallader Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>73</sup> Shirai, "Indian Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania," 62. The total value of the Pennsylvania traders' losses would have exceeded \$2.5 million U.S. in 1995. See McCusker, *How Much Is That in Real Money?*, and *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook*.



firmer economic footing for the new proprietary colony and a precursor to settlement. By the early decades of the eighteenth century, administrators in both maturing colonies attempted--albeit unsuccessfully--to harness the trade in furs and skins to broader imperial and diplomatic concerns. In New York, William Burnet's lengthy campaign to stifle the Albany-Montreal commerce and to establish and maintain Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario was deliberately contrived to upset French hegemony in the Great Lakes trade. Burnet's contemporary and admirer, William Keith, similarly sought the support of the British government in formulating a coherent imperial policy which sought to suborn the colony's burgeoning deerskin trade to the cause of Pennsylvania's Indian relations.<sup>74</sup>

But, as Stephen Cutcliffe has noted, shortsighted imperial administrators proved stubbornly reluctant to harness private enterprise to imperial ends. Not until the 1750s, on the eve of war with the French, did they finally fathom the need for a unified Indian policy to replace the ramshackle, ineffectual structure of separate colonial Indian treaties.<sup>75</sup> By this time, the fur and skin trade of the northern colonies was in decline, Pennsylvania's cut brutally short by French and Indian aggression in the Ohio Valley, while New York merchants increasingly pursued more profitable markets and commodities. After decades of a scarcely salutary neglect, the British had finally grasped the link between trade and diplomacy in time to watch the French dismantle their once vast and vigorous North American enterprise and descend the

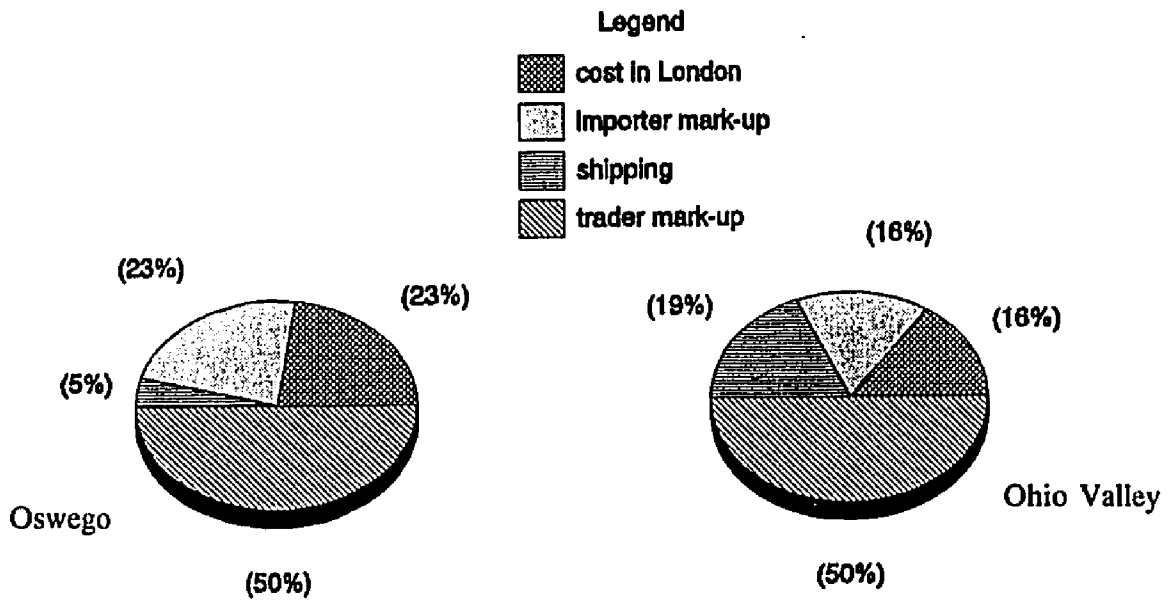
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<sup>74</sup> Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," 250-53.

<sup>75</sup> Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," 264-66.

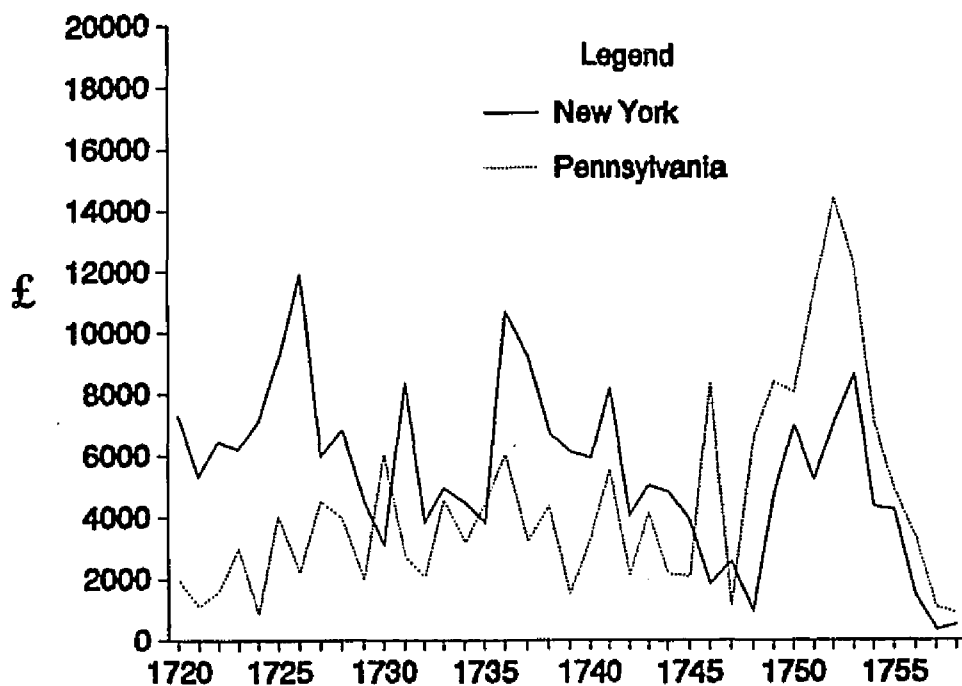
imperial stage.

FIGURE 2.1  
 ESTIMATED MARK-UP ON TRADE MERCHANDISE, OSWEGO AND OHIO  
 VALLEY (£ STERLING)



Source: Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," Table 1, 240-42.

FIGURE 2.2  
VALUE OF LONDON IMPORTS OF NEW YORK AND PENNSYLVANIA  
PELTRY (£ STERLING)



Source: Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," Table 1, 240-42.

CHAPTER III  
THE ECONOMICS OF RIVALRY

But as our Indian traders not only have a double Price for their Indian goods, but likewise buy the Goods they sell to the Indians, at half the Price the French Indian Traders do, the French traders must be ruin'd by carrying on this Trade, in Competition with the English of New-York.

Cadwallader Colden, 10 November 1724<sup>1</sup>

Pray let me know if there be a possibility of Sending me a parcel of french Blankets, Kersey whale & lettered, such as they Send to Canada for the use of the Indians, also purple & white ratteen for Stocking Stuff; all w<sup>h</sup>. they have better than ours -- & also French Guns.

William Johnson, 22 August 1752<sup>2</sup>

By most accounts, the Canadian fur trade should have been a dim memory long before Montcalm and Wolfe clashed on the Plains of Abraham. Throughout the eighteenth century, it has been widely assumed, Anglo-American traders effortlessly supplied their Indian customers with merchandise that was significantly cheaper and of better quality than the overpriced, shoddy articles offered by their Canadian

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<sup>1</sup> Cadwallader Colden, "A Memorial concerning the Furr-Trade of the Province of New-York," *HFIN*, 2:55-56.

<sup>2</sup> William Johnson to John George Libenrood, *WJP*, 1: 376-77.

counterparts.<sup>3</sup> No wonder, for Britain's burgeoning industrial and manufacturing complex had already eclipsed that of France.<sup>4</sup> The Indian hunters and traders of the

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<sup>3</sup> E. R. Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry in the Fur Trade during the 18th Century," *Culture*, 8 (1947): 434-55, reprinted in *Canadian History Before Confederation: Essays and Interpretation*, edited by J. M. Bumsted (Georgetown, Ontario: Irwin-Dorsey, 1972), 153, 154, 155; David Arthur Armour, "The Merchants of Albany, New York, 1686-1760," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Northwestern University, 1965), 64-65; Bruce Alden Cox, "Natives and the Development of Mercantile Capitalism: A New Look at Opposition in the Eighteenth-Century Fur Trade," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians*, edited by John H. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 88; Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 88; Harold Adams Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 79, 80, 84, 85, 86, 87, 114, 395; Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from its beginnings to the Lancaster Treat of 1744* (New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), 284; Jean Lunn, "The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60," *Canadian Historical Association, Report of the Annual Meeting*, 18 (1939): 76; A. Jean E. Lunn, "Economic Development in New France, 1713-1760," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, McGill University, 1942), 154, 157; Charles Howard McIlwain, *AIA*, xli-xlii; Thomas Elliot Norton, *The Fur Trade in Colonial New York, 1686-1776* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 6, 90-91; Francis Parkman, "A Half-Century of Conflict," *France and England in North America* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 2: 346, 520; Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 1: 314, 498, 501; Yoko Shirai, "The Indian Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1730-1768: Traders and Land Speculation," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, 1985), 3; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 119, 120-21, 125, 127; Thomas Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760: The Uses of Fur-Trade Imperialism," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1990), 1: 296-97; Albright G. Zimmerman, "The Indian Trade of Colonial Pennsylvania," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Delaware, 1966), 316.

<sup>4</sup> Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 64-65, 107; Hugh M. Grant, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Innis, Eccles, and the Canadian Fur Trade," *Canadian Historical Review*, 62:3 (1981): 309-10, 316; Innis, *Fur Trade in Canada*, 79, 80, 85, 389-90, 395; Innis, introduction to Murray G. Lawson, *Fur-- A Study in English*

*pays d'en haut*--with an eye for an obvious bargain--inevitably preferred English merchandise, which was better suited to their "simple economy and taste."<sup>5</sup> In fact, had the Canadians not imported or smuggled vast amounts of English trade goods from Great Britain or New York, they could not have sustained their vast trading empire in the interior of the continent.<sup>6</sup> The critical supply lines linking the French ports of La Rochelle, Rouen, and Bordeaux with the tiny colonial entrepôt at Quebec were severed at the whim of the Royal Navy. Dire consequences for the Canadian economy would ensue, including acute shortages of essential trading wares and crippling price inflation.<sup>7</sup> Though a French merchantman might complete the Atlantic crossing unscathed, its cargo faced a long and costly trek into the North American wilderness before reaching the hands of Indian consumers.<sup>8</sup> During periods of the most benign economic conditions, Montreal merchant-outfitters were still saddled with exorbitant official fees and levies, appropriated to support the colony's unwieldy

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*Mercantilism, 1700-1775*, University of Toronto Studies, History and Economics Series, Vol. 9 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943), xx; Lunn, "Economic Development," 174; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 90-91.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The British Empire Before the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), 4: 63.

<sup>6</sup> Armour, "Merchants of Albany," 107; Lunn, "Illegal Fur Trade," 76; McIlwain, *ALA*, xliin.; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 90-91, 121, 126.

<sup>7</sup> Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry," 159.

<sup>8</sup> Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry," 149, 156, 158-59; Grant, "One Step Forward," 317; McIlwain, *ALA*, xxxv, xliin.; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 90-91; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 1: 501; Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins," 296.

military establishment.<sup>9</sup> The arbitrary oversight of the monopoly *Compagnie des Indes*, moreover, prevented the chronically overtaxed and undercapitalized Canadian traders from offering as much in exchange for the furs and skins of their Indian partners as their irrepressibly independent Anglo-American rivals.<sup>10</sup>

Confronted with this litany of alleged disadvantages, it is incredible that Canadian merchants and traders did not simply throw up their hands, pack their *valises*, and catch the next ship sailing for France. Of course, they knew then what is apparent now only by peeling away the accumulated layers of half-truths, rhetoric, and misinformation obscuring the authentic nature of the Anglo-French contest for trade and empire in the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley: that the scenario outlined above, founded as it is upon an *a priori* assumption of Anglo-American superiority in virtually every aspect of the trade, is an exaggeration dangling on the brink of untruth.

As the lone voice raised in defense of the fundamental fact of Canadian competitiveness in the eighteenth-century fur trade, W. J. Eccles has long labored to deflate this myth of overwhelming American advantage and to depreciate the Anglocentric currency of conviction which has corrupted the analysis of fur-trade

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<sup>9</sup> McIlwain, *ALA*, xliin.; Reuben Gold Thwaites, *France in America* (New York: Haskell House, 1969), 136; Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins," 296; Zimmerman, "Indian Trade of Colonial Pennsylvania," 316.

<sup>10</sup> Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry," 149, 150; Innis, *Fur Trade in Canada*, 84, 114; Lunn, "Illegal Fur Trade," 67-68; Lunn, "Economic Development," 171; McIlwain, *ALA*, xlii; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 91, 125-26; White, *Middle Ground*, 120.



rivalry. By challenging the assumption that Canadian traders were at a profound commercial disadvantage wherever they were met by Anglo-American competitors, Eccles boldly inverted the historiographical equation. With France the industrial and manufacturing equal of Britain throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, he proposed, it is likely that most French-made items were not only of better quality but were often cheaper as well. The Indian groups of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley consistently chose to deal with the Canadians and preferred a variety of French wares, from the more mundane stocks of gunpowder, hardware, and tailored clothing to the sublime *eau de vie*. If they did occasionally trade with the Anglo-American upstarts in the *pays d'en haut*, he claims, it was only to keep that option open and to ensure that the French were careful to maintain their competitive edge. Canadians conquered long trade-route distances by adopting the most efficient vehicle of wilderness transport, the birchbark canoe. It is inconceivable, Eccles concludes, that the Canadians could have captured the bulk of the furs and skins of the Great Lakes-Ohio Valley regions, as the export records clearly demonstrate, without beating the Anglo-Americans at their own economic game.<sup>11</sup>

"In treating of the fur trade down to 1763," Eccles wrote of the landmark *Fur*

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<sup>11</sup> Eccles first argued the revisionist case in his article, "A Belated Review of Harold Adams Innis's, *The Fur Trade in Canada*," *Canadian Historical Review*, 60:4 (1979): 419-441. A reply in defense of Innis was offered by Hugh M. Grant in, "One Step Forward," which was in turn scathingly rebutted by Eccles in the same issue: "A Response to Hugh M. Grant on Innis," 323-329. For later restatements of Eccles's pro-Canadian position, see "The Fur Trade and Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. Series, 40:3 (1983): 341-62, and *France in America* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1990), 110n.

*Trade in Canada*, "Innis had a simple, albeit erroneous, theme that gave the work some sort of cohesion -- namely, the superiority of British industry, organization, trade goods, and routes to the interior, which not only made it impossible for the French to compete successfully but also made the conquest of New France inevitable."<sup>12</sup> Yet, as misguided and influential as his conclusions may have been, Innis was by no means the sole author of the myth of Anglo-American superiority in the eighteenth-century fur trade. The scholarship which carelessly acknowledges the inability of Canadian traders to compete with their English-speaking rivals is more prolific than Eccles's focus on Innis might suggest. These works share an incestuous reliance on a narrowly circumscribed body of evidence which leads inexorably to the same illegitimate conclusions. A threadbare handful of statements are proffered with an unsettling regularity as evidence that the Canadians could not effectively compete with their Anglo-American rivals, neither in the quality or price of trade goods nor in the value offered in exchange for peltry. The few examples include a 1689 French list of a handful of items and their price in beaver skins at Albany and Montreal; occasional memoranda concerning the price of beaver set by the *Compagnie des Indes* and requests for improvements in the quality of merchandise; pessimistic accounts of shortages and high prices at the height of the War of the Austrian Succession; and, most significantly, the reports on the Canadian trade drafted by Cadwallader Colden in aid of New York governor, William Burnet's obsessive effort to stamp out

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<sup>12</sup> Eccles, "A Belated Review," 438.

Albany's customary commerce with Montreal.<sup>13</sup>

More disconcerting than the fact that such sweeping generalizations concerning Anglo-American advantage have been offered on the basis of a mere smattering of contemporary statements is the wholly uncritical manner in which they have been wrenched out of context and offered as conclusive evidence. Neither the occasional Canadian complaints of uncompetitive fur prices and costly merchandise nor Colden's intimations that the Albany Dutch buttressed an otherwise insupportable French empire in North America should be accepted without a healthy measure of skepticism. For a variety of economic and political reasons, it suited the best interests of certain Canadian and New York factions to perpetuate the notion that the French were on the brink of losing the battle for the Great Lakes--and later the Ohio Valley--fur trade. This potent blend of exaggeration and misinformation, though perversely appropriate to its particular political and economic context, has unfortunately been captured and preserved in the amber of historiography.

Thomas Wien has proposed that the merchants of Quebec and Montreal, in league with the colonial officials who represented their interests to the Crown, cynically sought to convince the French Ministry of Marine that they were being

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<sup>13</sup> For example, see: *NYCD*, 9: 408; Pontchartrain to Denis Riverin, 3 June 1708, in *Supplement to Dr. Brymner's Report on Canadian Archives, 1899*, edited by Edouard Richard (Ottawa, 1901), 414; La Galissionière et Bigot au ministre, *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 91: 67-71; Beauharnois à ministre, 19 June 1745, *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 83: 92-93; Cadwallader Colden, "The Report of a Committee of the Council held at New-York, November 6, 1724," and "A Memorial concerning the Furr-Trade," in *HFIN*, 2: 13-57.

battered by ruthless Anglo-American competition.<sup>14</sup> Such complaints consistently stressed the calamities that would result from the inability of Canadian fur traders to match the beaver prices of their English rivals. Despite their apparent interest in the success of French diplomacy in the *pays d'en haut*, Wien claims that the Canadian merchants were never more than "lukewarm imperialists," though they were admittedly quick studies in geo-political rhetoric when it promised to fill their pocketbooks. The profit motive, not concern with Indian relations or grand strategy, most concerned the Canadians, whose fortunes largely depended on the buying and selling of beaver pelts in a highly regulated market. Canadian sellers daily faced the reality that they exerted little control over the price the monopoly company paid for their staple export commodity. It was clearly in the interest of the monopolists to keep beaver prices low in Canada, not only out of a concern for their own profit margin, but also because the powerful Parisian hat-making interest demanded comparatively inexpensive supplies of pelts. The only recourse available to disgruntled Canadian merchants, therefore, was to petition the French government to intervene in the company's pricing policy. The question that faced colonial merchants was how to convince reluctant imperial officials that such action was necessary.<sup>15</sup>

Finding no appreciable correlation between fluctuations in the beaver prices set by the *Compagnie des Indes* and fur export levels, Wien suspects the Canadian

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<sup>14</sup> Eccles similarly raised this possibility in "A Belated Review," 425, and *France in America*, 110n.

<sup>15</sup> Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins," 296-312.

merchants of exaggerating the threat of Anglo-American competition for their own commercial advantage. If, as the merchants insisted, the amount of beaver flowing into Canada from the *pays d'en haut* was truly dependent on its assessed value in Montreal or Quebec, then fluctuations in price should have been attended by noticeable peaks or shortfalls in Canadian beaver exports. Clearly, they were not, though this did nothing to prevent colonial merchants and their officials from claiming the contrary. The most effective way to seize the sympathetic attention of the ministry of marine, they grasped, was to phrase their pleas in the terms which anxious imperial administrators best understood. "The Canadians were most successful in attracting official attention," Wien notes, "when they could associate their demands with some grave threat to the French empire in North America. The possibility of Indians defecting to the enemy, a notion that had exercised French officials since the seventeenth century, fit the bill nicely." If the Canadians could draw a convincing connection between their inability to offer Indian customers "good measure" for their beaver and the rapid infiltration of Anglo-American traders into French zones of trade and influence, it was more likely that the government would apply pressure on the company to pay more for Canadian peltry. Indeed, such carefully conceived appeals bore fruit twice in the 1730s and 1740s, when beaver prices were raised.<sup>16</sup>

Each year, the *Compagnie des Indes* imported a limited range of merchandise for the Indian trade as a supplement to the bills of exchange paid for Canadian

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<sup>16</sup> Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins," 314.

beaver. Quebec importers and Montreal merchant-outfitters were by necessity discriminating consumers themselves, realizing that successful trade relations with exacting Indian customer-suppliers hinged on the availability of high quality, dependable, and reasonably priced merchandise. It is not surprising, then, that Canadians were quick to point out when certain items did not meet their expectations. Such complaints about the quality or price of certain articles imported by the company have frequently been wielded to support the assumption that French trade goods were inferior to those arriving in American ports. For example, E. R. Adair produced a letter written by Governor La Galissonnière and Intendant Bigot to the Minister of Marine in October 1748, citing it as evidence that the substandard quality and high price of French trade goods comprised a "potent disadvantage." In Adair's telling, the officials straightforwardly acknowledged that "the English have the better of us in the quality of merchandise in two important articles. The first is kettles, the second is cloth."<sup>17</sup> To begin with, this translation is misleading. What Galissonnière and Bigot actually wrote is more accurately rendered as "the English *do not* have the better of us in the quality of trade merchandise *except* in two important articles."<sup>18</sup> The shift in emphasis is apparently slight, yet it distorts the meaning of the letter. Far from admitting defeat at the hands of better-equipped English traders, the governor and

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<sup>17</sup> Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry," 154. In typical reflexive fashion, Adair lifted this citation from Innis, *Fur Trade in Canada*, 85-86.

<sup>18</sup> The original French version reads: "les anglois ne l'Emportens sur nous en qualité de marchandises de traite que sur deux articles considerables." *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 91: 67.

intendant believed that, except for two specific items, French goods were comparable or superior. Besides, the few discrepancies that did exist, they insisted, could easily be remedied in the next year's shipment.<sup>19</sup>

The perennial complaints of Canadian officials concerning the poor quality or high price of certain trade items imported by the monopoly company should not be construed as an admission of a crippling disadvantage in the fur trade. The *Compagnie des Indes* was never the sole supplier of French manufactures to colonial merchants, but rather conducted only a "caricature" of the trade. Problems with individual company shipments would thus only have had a limited effect on Canadian commerce.<sup>20</sup> If anything, the fact that officials complained so frequently about specific shoddy or overpriced goods demonstrates that immediate measures were taken to rectify any disadvantage that might jeopardize the competitiveness of Canadian traders. This stream of commentary on the undesirability of trade goods was equally characteristic of the frank letters exchanged between Anglo-American merchants and their London agents.<sup>21</sup> William Johnson never hesitated to demand better or cheaper goods from his trading contacts, often forwarding French merchandise worthy of

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<sup>19</sup> Ironically, only two years later, William Johnson complained to his London contacts about the cost and quality of a recent shipment of kettles. "I have rec<sup>d</sup>. from M<sup>r</sup>. Cromelin of Amsterdam 712 ll. of Kettles," he lamented, "the Dearest, & worst made up of any ever come to these parts." William Johnson to Samuel and William Baker, 12 September 1751. *WJP*, 1: 347.

<sup>20</sup> The company dealt almost exclusively in gunpowder, shot, and strouds. Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins," 299.

<sup>21</sup> The correspondence of factors at Hudson's Bay Company posts was similarly rife with complaints about the quality of English merchandise, from textiles to gunpowder. Eccles, "A Belated Review," 430-31.

imitation.<sup>22</sup> Nor was Johnson the only dissatisfied New York customer. "The 2 pieces of red Stripped Duffils which you sent me Last Fall are Not Worth 40/ a Piece," griped Albany trader Cornelius Cuyler to his supplier. "I believe they are made of Dogs hair." Of course, no historian has yet claimed that New York traders were doomed to fail in their contention for the Indian trade simply because the occasional shipment from London consisted of "Course Refuse," or "old musty Strouds good for nothing."<sup>23</sup>

The assumption that Canadians were handicapped by poor quality, overpriced goods springs largely, as Eccles has noted, from an anachronistic assessment of French industrial and economic capacity in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup> In his peculiarly teleological style, Innis claimed that the entire history of the North American fur trade "depended on the manufactures of Europe and the more efficient manufactures and cheaper transportation of England. Control of the fur trade was an index of world importance from the standpoint of efficient manufactures, control of markets, and consumption of luxuries. The shift from Paris to London of the fur trade was significant of the industrial growth of France and England."<sup>25</sup> Though it is

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<sup>22</sup> William Johnson sent samples of French blankets and other textiles to his English agents so that suitable imitations might be provided. William Johnson to William Baker, 24 December 1752. *WJP*, 1: 384-85. See also William Johnson to Governor George Clinton, 30 May 1747. *WJP*, 1: 95, on the necessity of supplying the Indians with the same goods as the French.

<sup>23</sup> Cornelius Cuyler to Samuel Baker, 10 June 1731 and 20 May 1732, as quoted in Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 112.

<sup>24</sup> Eccles, "A Belated Review," 430.

<sup>25</sup> Innis, *Fur Trade in Canada*, 389-90.



tempting to read Great Britain's revolutionary industrial achievements back into the earlier half of the eighteenth century, during the period of the most intense Anglo-French rivalry for the North American fur trade, the French economy was still growing as rapidly as the English, showing remarkable gains in manufacturing and trade. Until mid-century, English and French industry alike remained essentially "medieval" in character. Growth was characterized by an increasing concentration of workers rather than by great strides in technological efficiency. Though certain sectors of the British economy may have begun to outpace their French counterparts as the century progressed, it is evident that the British did not achieve the industrial prowess necessary to trounce their trading rivals with substantially cheaper, or better made, manufactures until long after the French had relinquished their North American empire.<sup>26</sup>

If the Canadians had a tangible economic interest in convincing their government that better equipped and more efficient English-speaking traders were poised to overrun the *pays d'en haut* and hasten the collapse of their North American empire, then the parallel assertions of New York imperialists were the product of even murkier, byzantine political calculations. The most comprehensive and

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<sup>26</sup> James C. Riley, *The Seven Years' War and the Old Regime in France: The Economic and Financial Toll* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 18, 22-23, 35; Pierre Léon, "Structure du commerce extérieur et évolution industrielle de la France à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Conjonctures économiques, structures sociales: Hommage à Ernest Labrousse*, edited by Fernand Braudel (Paris: Mouton, 1974), 407; Roger Price, *The Economic Modernisation of France, 1730-1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 92-93; Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse (eds.), *Histoire économique et sociale de la France* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970), 2: 527.

influential Anglo-American statement on the myriad handicaps endured by the Canadian fur traders came from the pen of Cadwallader Colden. As a respected member of the New York Council and a trusted advisor of the new governor, William Burnet, Colden was handed the task of drafting a memorandum to the Board of Trade in response to a recent petition organized by a group of London merchants calling for the reinstatement of the banned Albany-Montreal trade. Tensions were high in New York in November 1724, when Colden began work on his draft of the Council report. Four years after the official suspension of the Canada trade, a core of Albany merchants were still ignoring Burnet's interdiction and stubbornly buying Canadian beaver, even though they risked being hauled into court and forced to swear an oath to their innocence. Panicked London fur merchants, meanwhile, were vigorously lobbying an ambivalent Board of Trade for disallowance of the controversial acts.

Colden had to present a convincing case to persuade the Board of Trade to uphold Burnet's ban on the longstanding and lucrative trade between Albany and Montreal. Ironically, he did so by framing his argument to the imperial authorities in the same terms so effectively employed by his counterparts at Quebec. By linking the conduct of the fur trade with the future economic and military stability of the colony, Colden developed an impressive geopolitical rationale for severing all trade contacts with New France, a strategy, he claimed, that would virtually guarantee the collapse of the French empire in North America. To begin with, Colden proposed that the only manufactured goods suitable for the Indian trade were produced in Great Britain, particularly stroud cloth, a few other woolens, and rum. Shipping their inferior

goods to Quebec also proved far more hazardous for the French, who had to contend with navigating the St. Lawrence River, "well known to be the most dangerous of any in the world," during the few months in which it was not ice-bound. The difficulties of transportation, combined with the inability of the French to supply the colony with adequate goods to conduct a profitable Indian trade, rendered it necessary for the Canadians to smuggle the bulk of their trade merchandise from Albany. To make matters worse, he added, the agents of the "French Company" arbitrarily dictated the selling price of all Canadian furs, ensuring that the traders could never offer a competitive rate of exchange to their Indian customers. It logically followed, therefore, that if the Albany merchants could be prevented from supplying their Montreal contacts with essential trade merchandise, it would only be a matter of time before the Canadian fur trade became insupportable.<sup>27</sup>

As propaganda contrived to discount the competitiveness of the Canadian fur trade and stigmatize the Albany-Montreal trade as detrimental to the greater interests of the British in North America, Colden's arguments were a rhetorical tour de force. Without any greater knowledge of its inner workings, concerned officials at Whitehall would doubtless have been convinced that the Canadian fur trade was teetering on the brink of collapse, to be toppled only by the final shove provided by Burnet's trade restrictions. Colden's statements, however, were rife with inaccuracies, exaggerations, and miscalculations. Whether deliberate or simply the result of inaccurate information, Colden's misleading conclusions have unduly prejudiced

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<sup>27</sup> Colden, *HFIN*, 13-32, 33-57.

perceptions of the Canadian fur trade. His political opponents in the debate over the regulation of the Albany-Montreal trade easily picked holes in his assessment, yet Colden's authority on the subject has nonetheless been accepted wholeheartedly by historians.<sup>28</sup>

Colden's most enduring contribution to the myth of Anglo-American fur-trade superiority was his declaration that access to Gloucestershire stroud cloth, above all, dictated success or failure in the fur trade. Colden noted that it was impossible for the French to obtain "genuine" strouds except from England, now that the Albany trade had been restricted. "To put this out of all Controversy," he concluded,

we need only observe to your Excellency, That Strouds (without which no considerable Trade can be carried on with the Indians) are sold at Albany for 10*l.* a Piece: They were sold at Monreal before this Act took Place, at 13*l.* 2*s.* 6*d.* and now they are sold there for 25*l.*: Which is an evident Proof, that the French have not, in these four Years Time (during the Continuance of this Act) found out any other Way to supply themselves with Strouds, and likewise that they cannot trade without them, seeing they buy them at so extravagant a Price.<sup>29</sup>

It is unclear how Colden obtained this price information, but it does not accord with what is known about the export of English strouds to Canada during the years in

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<sup>28</sup> Jennings, for example, cribs from Colden on this issue: "Albany had a superior source of trade goods," he echoes. "Certain of the preferred trade goods--especially the woollens called shrouds--were made only in England, English-made goods were usually cheaper than the French, and the Hudson stayed navigable through winters when ice blocked traffic on the St. Lawrence. English manufacture and conditions of English transportation were so greatly superior to the French that English traders could sell their goods at half the French price and still make twice the French profit. This was the basic English advantage that the French could never really overcome, no matter how brilliantly they administered their colonies." Jennings, *Ambiguous Iroquois Empire*, 284.

<sup>29</sup> Colden, *HFIN*, 22.

which Albany goods were not readily available. Colden was correct in stating that the French sought European sources for English strouds. Even before Burnet's restrictive trade legislation was introduced, the French government had attempted to interest La Rochelle merchants in purchasing strouds for export to New France. In 1722, the *Compagnie des Indes* began to supply the colony with English woolens and would continue to do so for the next decade. In the first year, 100 pieces (each between 17 and 18 *aunes* in length) were sold in Canada at either 11 *livres*, 11 *livres* 10 *sous*, or 12 *livres* per *aune*. The following year the price was lowered to 10 *livres* 10 *sous*, dropping again in 1724 to 9 *livres*, and finally to 7 *livres* 10 *sous* in 1725, at which level it remained until 1731.<sup>30</sup> Contrary to Colden's claims, the price of strouds imported to Canada was steadily dropping at the time he was writing, not doubling. But how did these prices compare to those in New York? If, as Colden noted, the cost of a piece of stroud in Albany was roughly £10 New York currency, the Canadians were spending roughly the same for the woolen cloth as their New York neighbors during the years in which the Montreal-Albany trade was prohibited. When the appropriate conversions are made to correct for differing units of measurement and currencies, it appears that the French did not pay more than 15 percent extra for strouds in these years, hardly enough to run the Canadian traders out of business. Colden would also have been dismayed to learn that in 1723, Montrealers actually paid less for strouds than their Albany counterparts (Fig. 3.1).

Colden's pride in English manufactures was commendable, but it appears to

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<sup>30</sup> Lunn, "Economic Development," 159-61.

have prevented him from recognizing that France had an equally flourishing woolen industry, centered in Normandy, Picardy, and Champagne. As it continued to grow throughout the eighteenth century, the production of wool cloth accounted for fully 20 percent of French industrial output.<sup>31</sup> Though their attempts to imitate English strouds--particularly the popular *écarlatines*, or scarlet variety--may have met with mixed results, there was certainly no shortage of other high quality woolens suitable for export to the colony, including molton, mazamet, and dourgne cloth. There was clearly a constant Canadian demand for strouds throughout the eighteenth century, yet certain contemporary observers remained unconvinced that the fur trade would wither if deprived of Gloucestershire cloth. For their part, La Galissonière and Bégon supposed that the widespread assumption in Montreal merchant circles that the Indians of the *pays d'en haut* would tolerate only English woolens was perpetuated by smugglers, who had an obvious interest in boosting sales of the wares they "imported" from Albany. Furthermore, they added, if good quality and reasonably priced French textiles were squeezing their English equivalents out of the Levant market, there was no reason why they could not hold their own in North America as well.<sup>32</sup>

Though it is evident from the disgruntled correspondence of New York merchants that the famed English strouds and other woolens did not always live up to their inflated reputation, it is unlikely that any definite conclusions concerning the

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<sup>31</sup> Riley, *Seven Years' War*, 18-19.

<sup>32</sup> La Galissonière et Bégon au ministre, 15 October 1748, AN, C<sup>1</sup>A, 91: 69-70.

relative merits of English or French woolen cloth can ever be reached.<sup>33</sup> Yet, even if Indian consumers of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley did tend to favor stroud cloth over French alternatives, it was always possible for Canadian traders to obtain sufficient quantities of the English cloth at reasonable prices, whether imported from Europe or smuggled from Albany.<sup>34</sup>

Dean Anderson's examination of the ledgers of Montreal merchants reveals that bulk cloth was the single most significant category of trade goods shipped to the western Great Lakes, accounting for just over 29 percent of all merchandise purchased for re-sale by Montreal merchant-outfitters. But stroud cloth, obviously, accounted for only a portion of this total.<sup>35</sup> By analyzing the itemized records of trade goods exchanged at the French post at Niagara between 1729 and 1738, it is possible to offer a more detailed picture of Indian expenditure on cloth.<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> The Bakers informed Johnson that it was difficult for them to ensure the quality of the strouds they shipped to New York: "the Strouds we have bought we hope will prove as good as those sent you last Spring, but not at all Cheaper," they admitted. "We cannot be exact as to the quality or price till they come from Dying, which must be some time. . . ." Samuel and William Baker to Johnson, 22 January 1750. *WJP*, 1: 259. Johnson had too much experience with substandard English woolens to share in Colden's Anglocentric boosterism. Ordering imitations of French blankets, Johnson advised his agent that he hoped the next shipment would be an improvement over the last, which had included poorly dyed and woven items. Johnson to William Baker, 24 December 1752. *WJP*, 1: 384.

<sup>34</sup> Eccles, "A Belated Review," 433-34.

<sup>35</sup> Dean Lloyd Anderson, "Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives on European Trade Goods in the Western Great Lakes Region," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Michigan State University, 1992), Table 30, 143.

<sup>36</sup> "Etat des effets vendûs à Niagara depuis le deux May 1729 jusqu'au dernier Juin 1738," *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 73: 310-12.

Niagara figures happen to accord almost exactly with Anderson's findings in terms of the relative proportion of bulk textiles traded. Approximately 28 percent of the trading income at Niagara was derived from the sale of linen, cotton, and woolen fabric. Warm woolens such as molton, mazamet, dourgne, and strouds were clearly the most popular of these, making up about 77 percent of the value of all textiles and nearly 22 percent of the total worth of all goods exchanged at the post. In terms of the sheer volume traded, strouds comprised only a quarter of all bulk textiles, though they accounted for nearly half (46.5 percent) of the income from cloth due to their relatively high cost (Fig. 3.2). Overall, the exchange of stroud cloth accounted for roughly 13 percent of the gross profits at Niagara during the 1730s (Fig. 3.3).<sup>37</sup>

Selling for upwards of \$30 per yard in 1995 U.S. dollars, stroud was a costly item which would have been traded in relatively small amounts.<sup>38</sup> Textiles, including

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<sup>37</sup> Anderson's work demonstrates that the proportion of bulk cloth in the total assortment of trade merchandise could vary significantly from post to post in the western Great Lakes, depending largely on the needs and demands of the Indian consumers at various times and in different regions. The relative proportion of bulk textiles sold at Niagara in the 1730s, however, matches Anderson's aggregate total so closely that the sale of stroud cloth at Niagara is probably reflective of overall trends in consumption throughout the West. Dean Anderson, "Merchandise for the *Pays d'en Haut*: 18th Century Trade Goods and Indian Peoples of the Upper Great Lakes," Paper presented at the Canadian Archaeological Association Annual Meeting, April 24th-27th, 1986, Toronto, Ontario. Similarly, Johnson predicted that strouds would account for about 14 percent of the value of all merchandise sold in his Northern Indian Department in the mid-1760s. Johnson, "A Scheme for Meeting Expenses of Trade," *WJP*, 4: 559.

<sup>38</sup> Based on the average cost of stroud cloth sold by Monière in 1735 (Table 3.1). The final cost in the *pays d'en haut* could have been significantly higher. See John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1992).



finished blankets, clothing, and bulk fabrics, were clearly perennial staples of the Canadian fur trader's assortment of goods. Though he exaggerated for effect, Colden was on the right track in claiming that "the most considerable and most valuable Part of their Cargo consists in Strouds, Duffils, Blankets, and other Woolens."<sup>39</sup>

Considering the relatively limited profits derived from the sale of strouds alone at Niagara, however, Colden appears to have vastly overestimated their importance in the Canadian trade. The French easily supplied the majority of necessary textiles from their own domestic sources. Even with access to strouds completely restricted--a feat which the New Yorkers could never achieve--it is unlikely that the French trading system would have buckled.<sup>40</sup> What Colden neglected to mention was that Indian consumers in the *pays d'en haut* craved a wide variety of non-woolen merchandise as well, including gunpowder, shot, kettles, awls, axes, knives, vermilion, mirrors, and an array of clothing items. If La Galissonnière and Bégon are to be believed, they would hardly have refused proffered French woolens, particularly as the snow began to fall.

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<sup>39</sup> Colden, *HFIN*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> The *marchands-voyageurs* who purchased smuggled strouds in Montreal may actually have wielded a certain advantage over New York traders. The duties levied on all trade goods in New York after 1726 included a tax of either 15 or 30 shillings per piece of stroud, depending on its destination. "There is reason to think," Colden acknowledged, "that all the strouds sent to Canada, are exempted from this duty, whereby the French gain a great advantage over the English fair Traders, for those goods sold to Frenchmen are not subjected to the duty, whereby the French are enabled to sell the goods which they buy at Albany cheaper to the Indians, than the English can do at Oswego." Colden to Governor Clinton, 8 August 1751, *NYCD*, 6: 740-41.

"Generally, all the goods used in the Indian trade, except Gun-Powder and a few trinkets," Colden trumpeted, "are sold at Montreal for twice their Value at Albany."<sup>41</sup> As a result of the New Yorker's dubious brand of salesmanship, the assumption of overpriced Canadian trade merchandise has been deeply embedded in the historiography of Anglo-French fur-trade rivalry. Characteristically, Eccles was the first to chip away at this shibboleth, arguing that it defied both the facts and common sense. "That the prices of such goods in both colonies were approximately the same should occasion no surprise," he quipped. "There is no discernible reason why they should not be."<sup>42</sup> Eccles's suspicions were, he was the first to admit, based more on qualitative evidence than a rigorous analysis of Canadian and Anglo-American trade-good prices.<sup>43</sup> Yet, given the rough parity of English and French industrial and manufacturing capacities and an equally risky and expensive transatlantic passage, it is certainly conceivable that a kettle, a knife, or a pound of vermilion would have cost roughly as much in Montreal as in Albany or Philadelphia.

It has been tempting for scholars to accept Colden at his word on the relative cost of English and French merchandise in large part because it is so difficult to answer this question with absolute certainty. The documentary evidence is slim, with only a handful of Montreal, Albany, and Philadelphia account books having survived

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<sup>41</sup> Colden, *HFIN*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Eccles, "A Belated Review," 435.

<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, Eccles has called repeatedly for a comprehensive analysis of English and French trade-good prices. See "A Belated Review," 435; *France in America*, 110n.

the ravages of time. Those that do remain offer only a glimpse at market conditions over brief periods, detailing the prices of only a few of the many types of goods that exchanged hands in the fur trade. Above all, the proverbial "apples and oranges" scenario poses the most overwhelming difficulty for credible comparison. Lacking the physical evidence to compare such intangibles as size, shape, quality, appearance, durability, and effectiveness--the qualities by which all trade merchandise was scrupulously judged in the *pays d'en haut*--it is impossible to determine precisely whether individual French or English articles were ultimately the better bargain. An analysis based solely on price offers some clue, but admittedly not the complete answer. Certainly cost was often a deciding factor in the continuing process of exchange and use, but this determination clearly was--as it is today--infinitely variable by time, location, and the particular needs and tastes of the consumer. A French blanket may have cost less than its English equivalent, but might also have thinned and fallen apart more quickly. New York rum that cost half as much French brandy might have been equally intoxicating, yet could also have been adulterated with river--or trader--water. The true measure of the relative value of the array of English and French manufactures which traded hands in the eighteenth century fur trade was subjectively determined by the consumer and thus remains unquantifiable. Nonetheless, it is still possible to offer some insight into the cost of rival trade goods at Montreal, Albany, Philadelphia, and points beyond.

Though individual entries in the tattered pages of merchant accounts offer only snapshots of unseen goods at fixed moments in time, when carefully compared and fit

into the broader context of qualitative evidence they have the potential to offer some interesting and often startling implications for the debate over Anglo-American mercantile superiority. In fact, the bulk of the extant price evidence detailed in the ledgers and correspondence of Montreal, Albany, and Philadelphia merchants tends to confirm what Eccles has perennially professed: that during the years of most intense trade rivalry in North America, trade goods in Montreal cost roughly what they did in Albany and Philadelphia.

The early months of 1735 proved busy for Alexis Lemoine Monière of Montreal and Hendrick Van Rensselaer of Schenectady. England and France were at peace and both merchants profited from a flourishing trade with the Indians of the *pays d'en haut*. As the days grew longer and the snow began to melt, Monière hurried to assemble canoe-loads of merchandise for voyageurs headed west to the distant post at Michipicoton on the north shore of Lake Superior. Van Rensselaer, taking advantage of the recently revoked Albany trading monopoly, passed his hectic spring days haggling with traders over the price of the textiles, hardware, and spirits they needed for a successful summer of barter in the shadow of the new fort at Oswego. As they packed and sold bolts of woolen cloth, sets of nested kettles, and twists of tobacco, both merchants carefully itemized the cost and amount of each item, duly noting the sum their customers would owe them when they returned, laden with furs and skins, at the end of the summer, or, in Monière's case, the following

year.<sup>44</sup>

Of the wide array of trade merchandise sold by Monière and Van Rensselaer in 1735, more than two dozen items can be matched for comparison, from awls to wine (Table 3.1, Columns I-II). To facilitate this comparison, a mean price based on the relative quantity of each sub-type was determined for each category of item listed in Table 1. For instance, Monière sold a variety of different styles of knives, from small clasp knives to large butcher knives, duly noting the different price of each. Van Rensselaer, by contrast, did not always refer so precisely to the type or size of each item. Thus, the mean price calculated for Monière's "*couteaux*" does not necessarily reflect the cost of a specific type of knife, but is rather suggestive of a price range in which most of his knives fell. The same holds true for all other items variegated by price, size, or style, including axes, blankets, combs, guns, linen, mirrors, shirts, stockings, and wine.

The prices are also presented in terms of the quantities in which these items were typically sold by both merchants. The systems of weights and measures employed by Monière and Van Rensselaer were parallel, yet not identical. The appropriate conversions have thus been made, and, for the sake of uniformity, the

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<sup>44</sup> For Monière's 1735 accounts see "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, vol. 4 [microfilm reel 2], *MMR*. Van Rensselaer's ledgers are also available on microfilm: see the "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," in the collection of the New-York Historical Society, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, reel 63.

final prices listed have been calculated in terms of the more familiar English units.<sup>45</sup> Finally, all prices were converted from French *livres* and pounds New York currency to pounds sterling at the rate of exchange current in 1735.<sup>46</sup>

The results of these calculations would undoubtedly have confounded Colden, for they clearly suggest that, with a few noteworthy exceptions, Monière sold his goods for the same, if not lower, price than his counterpart in Schenectady. (Figs. 3.4a,b,c). The Montrealer clearly had an advantage in the sale of awls, gunflints, gunpowder, trade guns, lead and ready-made shot, shirts, thread, vermilion, wine, and various essential foodstuffs necessary for provisioning the paddlers, including bacon, Indian corn, and pease. Other items such as blankets, brass kettles, linen, "Jesuit" rings, glass beads, and tobacco were virtually identical in cost to Van Rensselaer's merchandise. In the case of knives, combs, mirrors, and stockings, the Montreal prices are so much lower than their Schenectady equivalents that the discrepancy is almost certainly due to a substantial difference in the quality or style of the items being compared. Monière, for example, may have dealt primarily in smaller, cheaper knives, and Van Rensselaer possibly stocked larger, costlier mirrors in more elaborate leather frames or cases. Conversely, the same phenomenon may

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<sup>45</sup> An invaluable and comprehensive source for eighteenth-century weights and measures is Lester A. Ross, *Archaeological Metrology: English, French, American and Canadian Systems of Weights and Measures for North American Historical Archaeology*, History and Archaeology Series, Number 68 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1983).

<sup>46</sup> All currency conversions have been calculated at the annual rates of exchange in John J. McCusker's, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

apply to Van Rensselaer's apparently cheaper axe blades, which may have been more modest than Monière's hefty *haches de service*. For the most part, however, the Montreal and Schenectady prices are similar enough to suggest that the quality, style, and size of most of the items were essentially comparable.

Van Rensselaer appears to have had a decisive advantage in the sale of only two items: rum and strouds. That Albany and Schenectady merchants should have procured cheap rum is not surprising, considering New York's burgeoning role in provisioning the sugar plantations of the Caribbean. Reaping the benefits of "triangular" trade with the British West Indies, New Yorkers distilled increasingly large quantities of rum from imported molasses. Though less palatable than the preferred West Indian potable, domestic American rum possessed the potent advantage of cheapness.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the fact that stroud cloth cost somewhat more in Montreal was not so much a testament to British manufacturing prowess as a reflection of the higher transportation costs involved in shipping strouds to New France via Europe or smuggling them from Albany in the canoes of Caughnawaga Mohawks. Interestingly, it appears from the surviving accounts of New Yorkers who traded with Canada that Montreal smugglers typically restricted their Albany

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<sup>47</sup> John J. McCusker, *Rum and the American Revolution: The Rum Trade and the Balance of Payments of the Thirteen Continental Colonies* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), 1: 469-70. John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 289-90.

purchases to strouds and wampum.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Colden's perception of the importance of stroud cloth in the Canadian fur trade may well have been skewed by his observation that woolens figured so prominently in the shipments of Albany merchants bound for Montreal. This detail merely confirms, however, what an examination of the account books of Monière and Van Rensselaer suggests: that Montrealers could readily obtain the vast majority of necessary trade goods at competitive prices from their own French suppliers.

But if cheaper and arguably superior English strouds had a ready market in Montreal, why did Canadian merchants pass up the opportunity to smuggle inexpensive rum from Albany? It would have been no mean feat for Caughnawaga paddlers to spirit heavy, awkward kegs past vigilant French patrols along Lake Champlain; yet if Canadians had truly coveted New York rum, the resourceful contrabandiers would undoubtedly have made the attempt. A likelier explanation for their forgoing the challenge has to do more with delectation than detection: the

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<sup>48</sup> The most important extant record of the Albany-Montreal trade is the Letterbook of Robert Sanders (1752-1758) in the collection of the New-York Historical Society [Miscellaneous Microfilms, Reel #3]. Sanders dispatched a large amount of wampum and some strouds to Canada, but little else. Similarly, Norton admits that on the whole, strouds and wampum were essentially the only commodities smuggled northward. Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 126. For a discussion of the importance of New York wampum, see Norton, *Ibid.*, 89-91. In a telling use of synecdoche, Albany merchants habitually referred to the commerce with Montreal as the "stroud trade." Commenting on the recent restriction of the Canadian commerce to his father, Philip Livingston speculated that only an oath could prevent the "Angry Stroud Company" from sending "what strouds they please" to Canada. Philip Livingston to Robert Livingston, 20 February 1721, quoted in Lawrence H. Leder, *Robert Livingston, 1654-1728, and the Politics of Colonial New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 253.



French, as well as their Indian trading partners, simply preferred the pricier and more palatable *eau de vie* or brandy.

A spirited debate over the relative merits of brandy and rum has raged since the eighteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Canadian officials boasted that the Indians preferred *eau de vie*, though this claim may have been at least partly colored by their desire to see the restrictions on its sale lifted.<sup>50</sup> More suggestive, perhaps, is the fact that Hudson's Bay Company traders to the north found it difficult to convert their Indian customers into rum drinkers because they had already cultivated a taste for the costlier brandy dispensed by rival French traders. The English could never consistently obtain adequate supplies of the French product which, in 1735, was also more than three

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<sup>49</sup> Proponents of a disconcerting "drunken Indian" school of interpretation generally admitted the superiority of French brandy, though failed to agree on the reason: "It can be doubted that the savage had a sufficiently sophisticated palate to be influenced by the subtleties of taste," Lunn suggested, "but since he drank to get drunk he doubtless soon discovered the greater potency and the more rapid effects of brandy." Lunn, "Economic Development," 170. Conversely, Francis Parkman admitted that the Indians "liked the taste of French brandy more than than of English rum; yet as their chief object in drinking was to get drunk, and as rum would supply as much intoxication as brandy at a lower price, it always found favor in their eyes." Parkman, *France and England in North America*, 2: 520. Eccles has long been the champion of *eau de vie*, however, and has rarely referred to English rum sans the acid adjectival adjunct "rot-gut." "Fur Trade and Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," 349-50; *France in America*, 110n. Eccles is, perhaps, the most reliable modern witness, having had ample opportunity to savor both varieties at first hand. Personal communication, 14 October 1994.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see Vaudreuil et Bégon au ministre, 20 September 1714, *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 34: 236. Lobbying for the lifting of the ban on the sale of *eau de vie* at the posts, the governor and intendant warned that the Indians were increasingly taking their trade to the English, who provided ample amounts of alcohol. Since the Indians were well aware of the superiority of the French libation, they claimed, it would be an easy matter to lure them back should brandy be re-introduced in the trade.

times as expensive as rum. Despite the marked difference in price, however, the Bay traders were reduced to fiddling with a dubious gin-like distillation to make it appear more like brandy.<sup>51</sup> That they retained their preference for French spirits, even when presented with a substantially cheaper alternative, suggests that Indian tipplers could and did distinguish between cheap hooch and the genuine article. Whether they were always willing to pay a higher price for the French libation must ultimately have depended--as did the exchange relationship itself--on the exigencies of personal preference, availability, local competition, and the irresistibility of any one particular item in the total complement of goods exchanged. It is worth noting, though, that while French and American rum was readily available in New France by the middle years of the eighteenth century, the Canadians consumed most of it themselves, saving brandy almost exclusively for the Indian trade.<sup>52</sup> That the Canadians chose to "export" a relatively expensive liquor to the *pays d'en haut*, despite the availability of other less costly varieties, suggests that there was a perennially eager and well-cultivated market for French brandy in the Great Lakes-Ohio Valley region.

A comparison of the prices of various trade goods drawn from the accounts of two merchants in a single year does not conclusively disprove the longstanding

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<sup>51</sup> In 1735, the HBC paid 2s. 3d. per gallon for rum, 7s. 6d. for brandy, and 2s. for "clove water," a type of raw gin, also known as "English brandy." The Bay traders first used a tincture, then molasses, to color their "brandy" to resemble authentic French version. E. E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 1: 544-45.

<sup>52</sup> Rum from the French West Indies was available as early as the 1680s, and by the 1740s was consumed in Canada in large quantities. McCusker, *Rum and the American Revolution*, 1: 521n.

assumption that New Yorkers possessed a strong material advantage over their Montreal rivals throughout the lengthy course of the eighteenth-century fur trade. Considering the relatively closed and competitive nature of both the Montreal and Albany fur markets, it is highly unlikely that the prices quoted by Monière or Van Rensselaer diverged much from the norm. But did the conditions of price competition as witnessed in 1735 extend beyond that particular year? Without a more complete series of prices for a wide variety of goods--an undertaking severely limited by the uneven nature of the sources--it is only possible to offer some tentative judgments based on the most readily available evidence.

Data extracted from Monière's accounts allow a year-by-year reconstruction of the movement of the prices of a wide range of trade items through the 1730s and 1740s. The price curves for virtually all items sold by Monière share a similar trajectory: holding relatively steady through the 1730s, prices began to rise rapidly beginning in 1744, before levelling off, and finally dropping again in the late 1740s (Fig. 3.5). The curves of the handful of goods illustrated in Figure 3.5 match the curve of the standard *bénéfice*, or retail mark-up rate, charged by Monière and his associates during the same period (Chapter 1, Fig. 1.2). This correspondence suggests that rising *bénéfice* levels were largely responsible for the increased cost of goods sold in Montreal for the western trade. The reason for the sudden hike in *bénéfice* rates is no mystery. Wartime shortages precipitated by the harassment of French shipping, culminating in the capture of Louisbourg, the bustling Cape Breton commercial entrepôt, by an Anglo-American force in 1747, severely disrupted the

normal pattern of French transatlantic shipping to Canada.<sup>53</sup> The sudden and acute dearth of trade merchandise was quickly translated into higher rates of mark-up by Quebec importers, in turn boosting the prices charged by Montreal merchant-outfitters.

Though the sudden increase in trade-good prices cut deeply into trader profits during these years, the repercussions of this rapid inflation were relatively limited.<sup>54</sup> After the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle was signed in 1748, French shipping quickly returned to normal pre-war levels, and continued to expand over the next decade.<sup>55</sup> With the outbreak of Anglo-French hostilities in the mid-1750s, French merchantmen once again began to fall prey to the Royal Navy and privateers. The British blockade of French channel ports and prohibitively high commercial insurance rates compelled many French merchants to abandon the Canada trade, though the quantity of merchandise leaving French ports appears to have increased until the final stages of the Seven Years' War.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "The war between France and England declared on 15 March 1744," Miquelon notes, "transformed the orderly trade of the Atlantic into a lottery." Dale Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen: French Trade to Canada and the West Indies, 1729-1770* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 119.

<sup>54</sup> Michilimackinac's commander reported in 1749 that the post was so flooded with trade merchandise that the traders were forced to sell at a loss. Brandy and tobacco, he noted, were particularly cheap that year. Jonquière à ministre, 20 September 1749, *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 93: 101-2.

<sup>55</sup> See Table 3, "Merchantment Sailing Between La Rochelle and New France, 1748-1759," in Gilles Proulx, *Between France and New France: Life Aboard the Tall Sailing Ships* (Toronto and Charlottetown: Dundurn Press, 1984), 26.

<sup>56</sup> J. F. Boshier, "Success and Failure in Trade to New France, 1660-1760," *French Historical Studies* (1988), 15(3): 447-48.

Notwithstanding the wartime aberrations of the late 1740s and late 1750s, it appears that, on the whole, the prices of Canadian trade goods remained relatively constant throughout the eighteenth century. When the prices of selected goods sold in Schenectady are compared with their Montreal equivalents during this period, it appears that New York prices also tended to remain relatively constant, though they, too, were not immune to the fluctuations associated with normal shifts in the levels of supply and demand (Figs. 3.6a,b,c,d).<sup>57</sup> Over time, as Montreal prices dropped and New York prices rose, the gap between the prices of various goods might narrow considerably. Though far from comprehensive, when interpreted in the context of contemporary accounts of Anglo-French competition, the data suggest that the detailed 1735 price comparisons are at least indicative of general trends in the relative cost of goods in New York and Montreal, a pattern which was skewed only briefly during the isolated wartime shortages characteristic of the late 1740s.

Unfortunately, no trading records detailing the rates of exchange of peltry and

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"Even if the traffic did remain relatively similar in wartime as in peacetime," Proulx writes, "the same did not apply to the quantity of merchandise transported." Between 1755 and 1760 the gross volume of trade between France and Canada rose dramatically. Proulx, *Between France and New France*, 28. This apparent growth may not have reflected a boom in private commerce, as much as an increase in government shipments of materiel. Jacques Mathieu, *Le commerce entre la nouvelle-france et les antilles au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Montreal: Fides, 1981), 148.

<sup>57</sup> Sources for New York trade-good prices before the 1750s are frustratingly scarce and incomplete. The scattered prices (indicated in figs. 3.6a,b,c,d) for the 1730s and 1740s have been culled from the "Account Book of Hendrick Van Renselaer," New-York Historical Society, Miscellaneous Manuscripts [Microfilm reel #63]; the Letterbook of Robert and John Sanders, 1742-43, NYHS, Misc. MSS [Reel #3]; and *WJP*, 1: passim.

merchandise at Oswego are presently available. It is only possible to speculate as to the cost of English goods on Lake Ontario after the fort's completion in 1727. Contemporary accounts set the costs of round-trip transportation between Albany and Oswego at around 15 percent.<sup>58</sup> A direct, albeit artificial, comparison between the known cost of trade items at Niagara in 1735 (Table 3.1, Column III) can be accomplished by arbitrarily increasing the cost of all merchandise sold by Van Rensselaer in that year by 15 percent (Table 3.1, Column IV). Even taking into account the fact that the Niagara prices represent the final retail price of goods traded to Indian customers, while the Oswego prices represent only estimates of their base "wholesale" cost, before the addition of government duties or final trader markup, it appears that certain French goods--including bacon, combs, corn, gunpowder, trade guns, knives, lead and shot, shirts, stockings, stroud, thread, and vermilion--actually cost less at Niagara than they did at Oswego (Figs. 3.4a,b,c). A variety of other items, such as awls, axes, blankets, glass beads, kettles, linen, mirrors, pease, pepper, rings, tobacco, and wine, cost the same (or only slightly more) *retail* at Niagara than they did *wholesale* at Oswego.

In fact, the only item which was considerably more expensive at Niagara appears to have been brandy, and much of this difference might have been eroded by the inevitably exorbitant markup on alcohol at Oswego. Again, some of the discrepancies in price may be the result of significant differences in the type or quality of certain items. The price differential in stroud cloth, however, is

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 2, note 37.

particularly noteworthy because it suggests the official manipulation of prices at the King's post to effectively meet potential Anglo-American competition. The cost of a piece of stroud at Niagara was substantially lower than in Montreal that year, indicating that the cloth was being sold, if not at a loss, then without the standard margin of profit to be expected on the retail sale of this item. This is also the case with axes and corn. The discrepancies between the Montreal cost and sale price at Niagara suggest that before the post was privately leased in 1742, the Canadian government subsidized the sale of certain attractive trade essentials, passing the savings on to the Indian consumer in an effort to preserve their commerce and loyalty in the face of trade competition from the eastern end of Lake Ontario. Without a comprehensive set of price data from Oswego during these years, it is impossible to determine with any certainty whether Niagara prices were competitive across the board with those at Oswego. It seems likely, however, that given the intervention of the Canadian government in the sale of merchandise before the early 1740s, the Oswego traders would have been hard-pressed to consistently beat the prices offered by their French rivals at Niagara.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> A decade after the privatization of the Niagara post, Oswego traders complained that their business was being siphoned off by the French at the western end of Lake Ontario. "Your favour I rec<sup>d</sup>. Yesterday together with the Goods Sent me by Johne," wrote Thomas Butler to William Johnson. "But I fear they are come to a bad Markett. We have had but one Atowawa Cannoe here this year. What hinders their Coming I cant lern -- but that the new French Fort at Nigra will stop much of this Trade is Certain. As they have all Sorts of Goods & have orders from the Gov<sup>f</sup>. of Cannada to Sell Cheap." Thomas Butler to Johnson, 29 May 1751, *WJP*, 1: 338. Similarly, the Iroquois customers who traded regularly at Oswego remarked to Governor George Clinton in 1744 that "the first Two years after that Trading House was settled Goods were sold cheap & it was a pleasure to Trade there,

Admittedly, Niagara--not to mention Detroit and Michilimackinac--was considerably further from Montreal than Oswego was from Albany. Colden was on firmer factual ground in claiming that the Canadian traders were faced with greater logistical problems arising from long trade-route distances, but once again he overshot his mark. In 1724, the English had not yet established a permanent presence on the Great Lakes, and the vast majority of furs exported from New York came either from Montreal, the neighboring Iroquois nations, or the occasional "far Indians" who came to Albany to trade. Before the establishment of Oswego, there was no parallel between the activities of the Canadian traders, who paddled hundreds of miles to the posts of the western Great Lakes where they effectively avoided all English competition, and the traders at Albany, who were content to passively gather whatever peltry drifted down the Mohawk River or Lake Champlain.<sup>60</sup> Inevitably, the expenses incurred by Montreal merchants shipping goods to Detroit, Michilimackinac, or Green Bay clearly exceeded those of their Albany counterparts, yet the French were at no such disadvantage when they encountered growing English competition closer to home. Colden's contention that it took the Canadians 20 to 40 days to journey the 180 miles from Montreal to the post at Fort Frontenac (present-day Kingston) is absurd.<sup>61</sup> Canadian paddlers could easily move goods upriver from

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but they have since been sold so dear that they do not now think that Place any Advantage to them." Wraxall, *AIA*, 234.

<sup>60</sup> See Wien's discussion of the significance of Canadian "monopoly trading zones," in "Selling Beaver Skins," 316.

<sup>61</sup> Colden, *HFIN*, 41. By contrast, Adair noted that it took the French "anything from twenty to forty days" (apparently a popular time-frame for French paddlers) to



Montreal to Frontenac in twelve to fifteen days, and make the return trip in only four or five.<sup>62</sup> And, with a freightage rate of roughly twelve percent of the value of the merchandise, the cost of transporting goods to Fort Frontenac was comparable, if not lower, than that incurred by the Oswego traders.<sup>63</sup>

Colden's connection between the higher price of French trade goods and the pattern of transatlantic shipping must also be discounted as his own invention. Noting that French ships made only a single trip to Quebec during the summer months, while both a summer and winter voyage was possible from the port of New York, Colden inexplicably leaped to the conclusion that "it is not in the power of the French to import any Goods near so cheap to Canada, as they are imported to New-York."<sup>64</sup> Since it is clear that, barring disruptions to shipping during wartime, New France received all the supplies and trade merchandise necessary for the entire year in its

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travel from Montreal to Niagara, at the opposite end of Lake Ontario. Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry," 156.

<sup>62</sup> Richard A. Preston and Leopold Lamontagne (eds.), *Royal Fort Frontenac* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1958), 66.

<sup>63</sup> During 1725 and 1726, the Canadian government shipped 12,219 livres worth of supplies from Montreal to Fort Frontenac for the construction of two barques. The freightage rate between the town and the Côte de Chine was 6 livres per 1,000 pounds of cargo, and 50 livres per 1,000 pounds from the Côte de Chine to Fort Frontenac. The total cost of transporting these goods amounted to 1,484 livres, or 12.15 percent of their value. The cost of supplying trade merchandise and supplies to the post would undoubtedly have been comparable. See the "Extrait de ce qui a été delivré des Magazins du Roy à Montréal et du fort frontenac à l'occasion et pour la Construction et Armement des deux barques qui ont etés faittes au d. fort pour Le Service de sa Majesté depuis le Sept may Mil sept cent vingt Cinq, jusques au dix aoust 1726," Montreal, 26 January 1730. *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 53: 33-37.

<sup>64</sup> Colden, *HF*, 21-22.

summer cargoes, it is unclear how Canadian prices might have been adversely affected by the colony's characteristic pattern of shipping. The Canadian fur trade clearly suffered the ill effects of interrupted transatlantic shipping during the 1740s and 1750s. Without the harassment of the Royal Navy, however, the French had to contend only with occasional losses from shipwreck and the tedium of a long, quiet winter. Colden was correct to note the inherent dangers of the final passage up the St. Lawrence faced by all merchantmen bound for Canada, but this was just another of the many difficulties of Canadian life which its colonists resolutely overcame. As hostile English fleets would discover, the St. Lawrence passage was fraught with various riverine perils, including reefs, islands, and sand bars. The journey from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the cliffs of Quebec typically took ten or twelve days, with ships dropping anchor each evening. French pilots had, of necessity, become familiar with the hazards of the route in the seventeenth century, and while Colden penned his "memorial," the Canadians were undertaking the first systematic exploration of the St. Lawrence under the authority of the Quebec harbormaster. By this time, French merchants could rely on professional Canadian pilots to guide their ships safely to their inland destination. Though shipwrecks were not unknown, the hazards of the St. Lawrence route were routinely bypassed in the course of trade between France and the colony. Contrary to Colden's claim, the river was a lifeline, not an impediment, to the Canadian fur trade.<sup>65</sup>

"We now enjoy the most favourable Time, that at any time can be hoped for,

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<sup>65</sup> Proulx, *Between France and New France*, 76-80.

in order to extend the British Commerce in North-America," Colden proposed, "while the French not only labour under the Difficulties which I have shown to be inseparable from the Situation of their Colony, but likewise under another Disadvantage, . . . by the Furr-Trade of Canada being restrained to one Company."<sup>66</sup> Of all the evidence he cited to demonstrate the inherent fragility of the Canadian fur trade, Colden's assessment of the Canadian fur market was most faithful to the facts. Because the *Compagnie des Indes* was required to pay "heavy duties" in France, he noted, it was in the monopolists' interest to keep Canadian beaver prices artificially low. While the merchants of Albany could offer 5 shillings, New York currency or 3 shillings sterling for a pound of beaver, the Canadian company paid only 2 *livres*, or 18 pence sterling, per pound. "Therefore it plainly follows," he crowed, "that our Indian traders could undersell the French Traders, tho' they were to give as great a Price for European Goods as the French do."<sup>67</sup>

It is true that, in 1724, the company did pay only 2 *livres* per pound (or slightly less, in fact, when the difference in English and French weights is considered), yet this price applied only to the less valuable *castor sec*, or parchment beaver. The company paid double that sum for coat beaver, the *castor gras* most prized by French hatters. Coat beaver, in fact, was actually worth slightly more per

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<sup>66</sup> Colden, *HFIN*, 54-55.

<sup>67</sup> Colden, *HFIN*, 55.

pound in Montreal than in New York, according to the price Colden quoted.<sup>68</sup> In 1724, albeit an atypical year, significantly more *castor gras* than *sec* was imported at La Rochelle. Over the entire period between 1718 and 1761, approximately 63.7 percent of the value of all beaver received at La Rochelle was comprised of *sec*, while 36.3 percent was *gras*.<sup>69</sup> Colden may have been correct in asserting that the bulk of Canadian beaver was purchased in Canada at a lower rate than was offered in Albany, though he overemphasized the extent of the difference by ignoring the significant difference in price between parchment beaver and the more valuable *castor gras*. The fact that Albany merchants tended to accept most grades of beaver at a uniform price would have encouraged Montreal smugglers to dump their less valuable pelts on the New York market, while dutifully bringing their remaining *gras* to the Company. Content with Canadian cast-offs, most New Yorkers, Colden included, appear not to have fully grasped the complexities of the rival beaver trade nor understood the limitations of the monopoly company, which had authority only over the marketing of beaver.

Beaver prices extracted from Montreal and Albany sources for 1735 and 1754

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<sup>68</sup> For 1724 beaver prices see Lunn, "Economic Development," 459. The price of 4 livres per French pound in Canada would have been equivalent to 3.7075 livres per English pound in Albany. At the rate of exchange current in 1724, the price for one English pound of *castor gras* was £ 0.1564 sterling (nearly 3s. 2d.), approximately 4 percent more than Colden's stated New York price of £ 0.15 sterling (or 3s.).

<sup>69</sup> In 1724, the Archives de la Chambre de commerce in La Rochelle recorded the arrival of *castor sec* valued at 77,550 *livres*, and 97,875 *livres* worth of *castor gras*. The proportion of *sec* to *gras* over the whole period was calculated from the import records in Lunn, "Economic Development," 464-65.

corroborate Colden's contention that New Yorkers paid higher prices for beaver than the monopoly company, but the differences were not necessarily as great as he claimed (Table 3.2, Fig. 3.7).<sup>70</sup> Though the price of parchment beaver in Albany was twice that in Montreal in 1735, New York merchants paid only about 17 percent more for coat beaver, a difference hardly worth the cost and risk of sending those pelts southward. In 1754, when coat and parchment beaver were accepted at the same rate by the *Compagnie des Indes*, the price difference favored the New Yorkers by some 40 percent. Though of small consolation, perhaps, to Montreal merchants, the Canadian beaver company at least offered the assurance of relatively stable beaver prices, while the New York rates could rise and fall unpredictably in response to shifting conditions on the local or London fur markets.<sup>71</sup> Occasionally, the price of

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<sup>70</sup> Montreal beaver prices for 1735 are cited in Thomas Wien, "Castor, peaux, et pelleteries dans le commerce canadien des fourrures, 1720-1790," in *Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985*, edited by Bruce Trigger, Toby Morantz, and Louise Dechêne (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 91; Schenectady prices are taken from the "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," New York Historical Society, Miscellaneous Manuscripts [Microfilm reel #63]. The source for Montreal beaver prices in 1754 is H. A. Innis, *The Fur-Trade of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1927), 153; Albany/Schenectady prices were extracted from the "Letterbook of Robert Sanders, 1752-58, NYHS, Misc. MSS. [reel #3], and the "Letterbook of John Sanders, 1749-73," NYHS, Misc. MSS., [reel #3].

<sup>71</sup> "Our Markets for Furs we think are like to Continue much as of late," wrote London factors Samuel and William Baker to Johnson in July 1750. "Now & then some particular sorts rise & others fall, according as the Quantity of each sort happens to be more or less on the Importation, sometimes also fashion alters, but in general Furs find a pretty good Demand-- Beavor is by no means so certain a Commodity, But we dont see any Reason to fear its falling for some time, the last price was 4/6 per ll. If yours proves good we will try to make more of it, this is what we reckon here a very good price, & in a Course of great many years we have

beaver in Albany dwindled so low that it was no longer profitable for Montrealers to ship any beaver south.<sup>72</sup>

The intervention of the monopoly *Compagnie des Indes* probably encouraged smuggling by maintaining beaver prices at levels that were generally uncompetitive relative to the New York market. The constant complaints of Montreal merchants and Canadian officials were generally drowned out by the warnings of the powerful Parisian hatmakers, though on occasion, declining fur receipts prompted the company to heed the advice of the colonists and raise beaver prices to counteract the alleged repercussions of Anglo-American competition. Whether the Indian trading partners of the French ever suffered from the regulated marketing of beaver in Canada, however, is doubtful. The low correlation between price and levels of production noted by Wien suggests that Canadian traders compensated for lower beaver prices, at least in part, by accepting diminished profits and continued to accept peltry from their Indian trading partners at established, competitive rates.<sup>73</sup>

Just as Colden restricted his discussion of fur marketing to the price of *castor sec*, there has been a persistent and misleading tendency in the historiography of

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seen it much lower, & very seldom higher, but at present Consumption is pretty quick. Samuel and William Baker to Johnson, 23 July 1750, *WJP*, 1: 292. See also: Thomas Armstrong to Johnson, 13 January 1748, *WJP*, 1: 127-28; Armstrong to Johnson, 31 August 1748, *WJP*, 1: 181; Johnson to Captain John B. Van Eps, 6 September 1748, *WJP*, 1: 183; Samuel and William Baker to Johnson, 22 January 1750, *WJP*, 1: 250, 259.

<sup>72</sup> Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins," 307.

<sup>73</sup> Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins," 307-12.

Anglo-French trade rivalry to equate "beaver" with "fur." Fully half the value of all peltry exported to France over the course of the eighteenth century came from sources other than beaver, including deerskins, moose hides, and a variety of other fur-bearing animals, which the French termed "*menues pelleteries*."<sup>74</sup> Though it has generally been allowed that the French possessed an inherent advantage in the marketing of these "other" furs in Europe, Wien has tendered significant evidence to the contrary. Tracing the re-export of the majority of such furs from Britain and France to other European nations, he demonstrates that there was a relatively "unified" European market for North American peltry. Furs originating in Canada, Hudson Bay, New York, or Pennsylvania thus wound up side by side in the shops of European furriers. Clearly, then, the French had no inherent "special deal" in selling their furs abroad. By comparing the selling price of Hudson's Bay Company furs on the London market, and Canadian furs at La Rochelle, Wien discovered that--with a

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<sup>74</sup> Based on the import figures cited by Lunn, 56.95% of the value of all furs arriving in La Rochelle between 1718 and 1761 was attributable to *menues pelleteries*. Lunn, "Economic Development," 464-65. Thomas Wien has suggested that furs and skins probably amounted to slightly less than half of the value of Canadian fur exports during the eighteenth century. "*Peaux and pelleteries* could account for more than half of the value of official fur exports from Québec," he admits, "but this predominance was usually illusory, as clandestine shipments of beaver to Albany and Oswego were not counted in the official totals." Wien later admits, however, that French customs officials often paid little attention to furs other than beaver, because most were simply being held in bond for re-export and so were not subject to import duties. The result, he notes, was substantial and consistent underreporting of *menues pelleteries*. Thomas Wien, "Exchange Patterns in the European Market for North American Furs and Skins, 1720-1760," in *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, Mackinac Island, Michigan, 1991*, edited by Jennifer S. H. Brown, W. J. Eccles and Donald P. Heldman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 20, 34n., 23.

few exceptions--English furs consistently fetched a higher price. Wien concludes that the quality of the pelts rather than their source ultimately determined the final selling price in Europe. In this case, the Hudson's Bay Company possessed a material advantage over its Montreal rivals: "the Canadians, after all, purchased many of their furs from Indians living and hunting south of the Great Lakes, whose wares were of lower quality than most of those delivered to the Hudson Bay posts," Wien claims.<sup>75</sup>

If the Canadians were hampered by the quality of their more "southerly" fur supply, then by the same reasoning the New Yorkers should have been even worse off. The Canadians may not have monopolized the source of the best northern peltry, but at least they had relatively easy access to such furs through their trade in the northwestern Great Lakes and the hinterland of Hudson and James Bay. At Oswego and certainly at Albany, however, the New York traders were at the mercy of their Indian suppliers, whose pelts were arguably of the lowest possible quality.<sup>76</sup> The price data for Montreal and Albany furs in 1735 and 1754, in fact, bear out this conclusion (Table 3.2, Figs. 3.7-3.8). With virtually no exceptions, the Canadian traders appear to have sold their *menues pelleteries* at prices comparable with, and frequently higher than, those received by their New York counterparts. If Wien is correct, the French may have had no "special deal" that made their peltry inherently

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<sup>75</sup> Wien, "Exchange Patterns," 32.

<sup>76</sup> Eccles notes that in the early 1750s, the expansionist impulses of the French military in the Ohio Valley were not shared by Canadian traders, who recognized that they had little to gain from access to the poor quality peltry of the region. Eccles, "Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," 356.



more valuable in Europe. They did, evidently, have access to better quality furs and skins than their neighbors to the south. Albany merchants and Oswego traders may have profited more from the marketing of beaver; but, since approximately 54 percent of the total value of New York peltry consisted of furs and skins other than beaver during the period 1718 to 1758, in no sense could New York be said to have cornered the market on gross fur profits.<sup>77</sup>

The sharp increase in Canadian trade-good prices in the mid-to-late 1740s was potentially most damaging to the French trade on the western perimeter of the Ohio country. At precisely the moment when the Canadians were losing their competitive edge as trade-good prices skyrocketed in response to wartime scarcities, Pennsylvania traders were beginning to make inroads into the Ohio Valley, for the first time competing directly for the trade and loyalty of the motley new Indian villages of the region. When George Croghan arrived laden with English merchandise at Sanduskey in the mid-1740s, he found Orontony and his fellow Wyandots eager to welcome a potential trade rival to the French. Only a few years before, the French ministry leased the posts at Miami, Green Bay, and Ouiatenon to private traders, hoping to lessen the crown's diplomatic expenses in the West. As a result, the prices of trade merchandise had begun to creep upward even before the wartime interruption of

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<sup>77</sup> This value was calculated from the British Customs Office export figures in Stephen H. Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy as a Measure of Rising Imperialism: New York and Pennsylvania, 1700-1755," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 64:3 (1981): Table 1, 240-42.

French shipping began. This trend was exacerbated by the advent of war.<sup>78</sup>

At the war's end, however, Canadian officials took various steps to prevent a recurrence of the severe shortages and price increases that had strained trade and diplomatic relations with their Indian allies in the *pays d'en haut*. Governors La Galissonière and La Jonquière successively sought to curb the most blatant abuses of the western trade by abandoning the leasing system at several critical posts in the region. Similarly, they urged the *Compagnie des Indes* to boost the price of beaver, encouraged the traders at Detroit, Niagara, and Frontenac to hold prices down to competitive levels, and made attempts to discourage the cheating of Indian consumers.<sup>79</sup>

Yet, just as the French suffered the commercial and diplomatic repercussions of trade disruptions in the late 1740s, Pennsylvania merchants and traders were themselves not entirely immune from similar wartime woes. New York's economy may have been stimulated by profits from Anglo-American privateering during King George's War, but Philadelphia merchants had little stake in raids on French shipping and may actually have lost more ships than they seized. When war broke out in 1744, Philadelphia merchants predicted that the conflict could only injure their trade.

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<sup>78</sup> Having watched merchandise prices climb following the privatization of several western posts, Indian customers were skeptical when the French traders blamed wartime shortages for increased costs. White proposes that the root of Indian discontent in the *pays d'en haut* involved more than dissatisfaction with higher trade-good costs, but was rooted in a deeper fear that the French were abandoning their customary role as mediators of the western alliance. White, *Middle Ground*, 199-200.

<sup>79</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 210.

Their fears were soon realized when shipping and insurance rates began to rise the following year. Merchandise grew increasingly scarce and prices climbed steeply. The total value of British imports in 1745, in fact, was 40 percent less than in 1741. Though the threat to Philadelphia's merchant shipping ceased with the capture of Louisbourg, the postwar business climate remained remarkably dismal. An economic slump late in 1749, followed by another "cyclical downturn" in 1753-54, drove a significant number of Philadelphia mercantile into bankruptcy. Facing aggressive French and Indian competition in the West and uncertain business prospects in the East, the Pennsylvania traders who entered the Ohio trade in the 1740s and early 1750s were hardly guaranteed commercial success.<sup>80</sup>

If the Canadians had not been temporarily handicapped by high wartime prices, it is doubtful that the Scots-Irish traders who appeared in the Ohio country would have wielded much commercial advantage over them. Scattered throughout George Croghan's business correspondence are several itemized invoices of trade goods purchased from Philadelphia merchants.<sup>81</sup> When the mean prices of a number of important trade items purchased by Croghan in 1744 are compared with similar

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<sup>80</sup> Anne Bezanson, Robert D. Gray and Miriam Hussey, *Prices in Colonial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), 273-78; Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 110, 111.

<sup>81</sup> Several lists of his 1744 purchases can be found among the eight cartons of Croghan's papers, in the Croghan Section of the Cadwallader Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. See, in particular, invoices for goods "Bo<sup>d</sup> of" Rebecca Edgell, 23 July 1744 and 25 October 1744; Jeremiah Warder, May-July (?), 1744; and Joseph Shippen, 22 October 1744.

articles sold by Monière that same year, the results once again favor the Canadian in many instances. (Table 3.3, Figs. 3.9a,b,c).<sup>82</sup> A variety of goods, including awls, beads, gunflints, gunpowder, handkerchiefs, hatchets, knives, mirrors, vermilion, and even stroud cloth, were cheaper in Montreal. Again, it is possible that some of the discrepancies in cost, particularly in the case of handkerchiefs and knives, may have been due to variations in quality or materials. But on the whole, it is clear that similar goods sold at comparable prices in both towns. Not surprisingly, rum and tobacco appear to have been the only noteworthy items that cost significantly more in Canada. Like their New York counterparts, Philadelphia merchants had abundant sources of relatively cheap West Indian, New England, and local rum, as well as direct access to Maryland and Virginia tobacco via intercolonial trade.<sup>83</sup>

In contrast to their New York neighbors, Pennsylvanians vying for the Indian trade of the Ohio Country dealt primarily in deerskins. Though beaver made up roughly half of New York's and Canada's total fur production, beaver was insignificant to Pennsylvania's export economy, comprising only about 1 percent of Pennsylvania's fur and skin exports, on average, between 1718 and 1758 (Fig. 3.10).<sup>84</sup> Deerskins, however, accounted for fully 63 percent of Pennsylvania's total profits from the Indian trade, and other furs--the French *menues pelleteries*--nearly 36

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<sup>82</sup> In 1744, Monière outfitted trading ventures to Green Bay, Rainy Lake, and Michilimackinac. See "Monière, Journal No. 4: 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," *MMR*, M849, [Microfilm reel 3].

<sup>83</sup> Bezanson et al., *Prices in Colonial Pennsylvania*, 79, 84, 186, 207-8, 210.

<sup>84</sup> Calculated from import records in Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," Table 1, 240-42.

percent.<sup>85</sup> Though the Pennsylvanians were clearly most dependent on deerskins, they appear not to have possessed any appreciable advantage over the Canadians in the price of this commodity. In fact, price information from the mid-1730s and the mid-1750s suggests that deerskins may have even brought a slightly higher price in Montreal than in Philadelphia (Fig. 3.11).<sup>86</sup>

The only distinct advantage the Pennsylvania traders might have enjoyed was the potentially shorter distance between Philadelphia and the peripheral regions of trade. Certainly, while the Pennsylvania trade was focused on the Susquehanna Valley, transportation costs remained comparatively low. When the traders finally began to expand their operations into the trans-Allegheny country in hot pursuit of

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<sup>85</sup> Calculated from data in Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," Table 1, 240-42.

<sup>86</sup> Montreal deerskin prices for 1735 are taken from Wien, "Castor, peaux, et pelleteries," 91. These were compared with the 1732 price of skins in Philadelphia (the closest available year) cited by William H. Guthman, "Indian Trade Documents," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly*, 7:2 (1971): 10. Montreal deerskin prices in 1754 are found in Innis, *Fur-Trade of Canada*, 153. For accounting and credit purposes, Croghan used an arbitrary standard value for deerskins of 7s. 6d. (£ 0.375) Pennsylvania currency, or roughly 4s. 6d. (£ 0.2227) sterling. Croghan Section, Cadwallader Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Deerskins varied considerably in weight: Richard White noted that skins traded by the Choctaws averaged 2.5 lbs., while James McClure posited a lesser weight of 2 lbs. Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 93; James P. McClure, "The Ohio Valley's Deerskin Trade: Topics for Consideration," *The Old Northwest*, 15:3 (1990): 128n. The average weight of deerskins purchased by John and Robert Sanders in the early 1740s was approximately 2.18 lbs. "Letterbook of John and Robert Sanders, 1742-43," NYHS, Misc. MSS [reel #3]. For the sake of comparison, the average weight of Croghan's deerskins was assumed to be 2 lbs., which produced a final price of 2s. 3d. (£0.1135) sterling per pound.

their Delaware and Shawnee suppliers, however, the expense of shipping goods increased considerably. Unlike the Canadian voyageurs, who had virtually uninterrupted canoe routes through the Great Lakes to Detroit and the other posts south of the Great Lakes, the Pennsylvania traders faced long overland treks into the *pays d'en haut*, hauling their goods less efficiently by pack-horse much of the way.<sup>87</sup> The experience of the French in the Ohio Valley in the period following the expulsion of the Anglo-American traders also gives some indication of the hardships faced by the English who pursued trade in the region. Even in a newly captive market, the French still found it difficult to adequately supply the trade in the Ohio country. Moving large quantities of merchandise in the region proved to be no easy matter. Forced to abandon their trusty canoes in favor of clumsy pirogues and frustrated by long, blistering portages, the French soon grasped that the business of supplying trade merchandise to the Ohio Valley was laboriously slow, as well as financially and diplomatically costly.<sup>88</sup>

With an "effective and well-established" supply network in the lower Great Lakes and a longstanding--if often tenuous--network of alliances with the various

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<sup>87</sup> The difficulties and expense of overland carriage from Pennsylvania may also have limited the types of goods brought to the Ohio country. For example, Edmond Atkin noted that the large amount of lead the Indians needed for shot was not only difficult to transport but also unprofitable, with "a Horse Load but of small value." South Carolina traders, he remarked, "naturally consulting their own greatest profit, have carried but scanty supplies of that Article, and in a great measure left it to the French." Edmond Atkin, *The Appalachian Indian Frontier: The Edmond Atkin Report and Plan of 1755*, edited by Wilbur R. Jacobs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 11.

<sup>88</sup> Eccles, "Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," 358; White, *Middle Ground*, 211.

Indian groups of the region, the French commercial presence in the western Ohio country was never seriously jeopardized by the presence of Anglo-American traders. Very few Indians ever abandoned their trade with the French, even during the worst periods of wartime price inflation.<sup>89</sup> If Croghan and his fellow Pennsylvanians succeeded briefly in gaining a foothold in the Ohio Valley, it was largely because the French trade in the *pays d'en haut* had been momentarily thrown off balance. In the absence of any extensive records of Anglo-American trade in the Ohio country in the late 1740s and early 1750s, it is impossible to determine whether the Canadians or the Pennsylvanians had any significant advantage in the terms of exchange once French prices returned to pre-war levels. Given more time and increasingly large shipments of cheap rum, the Pennsylvanians may well have been able woo more Indian customers away from the French. This question, however, is merely academic. Within a few short years, the English-speaking traders had been driven eastward by an aggressive French-Indian campaign to rid the region of British influence. With panicked and penniless traders streaming back over the Alleghenies, it was clear who had won the contest for the trade of the Ohio country.

Despite the fact that virtually all his assertions contain a potent blend of exaggeration, half-truth, and obvious error, Colden's statements in the "Report of the Committee of Council of the Province of New-York," and "A Memorial Concerning

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<sup>89</sup> Of their Indian allies, only the Mississaugas did not respond favorably to French post-war concessions. White, *Middle Ground*, 211.

the Furr-Trade of New-York," have been accepted, in lock-step, by credulous scholars. Colden's analysis has come to assume the weight of historical authority. It has fundamentally shaped the manner in which the Canadian fur has been interpreted, and essentially precluded debate over the viability of the Canadian fur trade in the face of Anglo-American competition.<sup>90</sup>

As New York's surveyor-general and a prominent member of the governor's council, Colden arguably had better access than most to information concerning the Anglo-French contest for commerce and empire. But the budding scientist's disparaging commentary on the Canadian fur trade was no disinterested treatise, marred by a few excusable inaccuracies. Rather, it was a masterfully contrived propoganda piece, carefully crafted to serve a purpose which can only be grasped by delving into the murky realm of New York politics in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Colden's critique of the Canadian fur trade was the product of a political moment, written with the patent purpose of justifying Governor Burnet's legislative efforts to sever trade between Albany and Montreal. The rationale underpinning the ban on the Canada trade was ostensibly logical. Granted the assumption that Montreal merchants depended almost wholly on English trade goods smuggled from New York, it followed that, if this supply route were to be cut off, it

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<sup>90</sup> For a recent genuflection before Colden's dogma, see White, *Middle Ground*, 120-21: "By 1720 New York officials were confident enough of success in securing direct trade to outlaw the smuggling of furs between Montreal and Albany, thus striking at the French source for what had become the most important manufactured good in the western trade-- English strouds. The high quality and low price of English blankets and strouds and the Indian demand for them," he echoes, "gave the English perhaps their greatest advantage over the French."



would be only a matter of time before the Canadian fur trade was "starved" into exhaustion and eventual collapse. In order to argue this case most effectively, Colden found it necessary to characterize the Canadian trade as inherently weak and insupportable: hence, his emphasis on the poor quality and exorbitant price of French goods, the detrimental monopoly of the *Compagnie des Indes*, and the resultingly low price paid for furs, not to mention the manifold difficulties involved in transporting goods from France to Canada and finally to the *pays d'en haut*. In Colden's scenario, the Canadian fur trade of the early 1720s was teetering on the brink of collapse and the ban on the Montreal-Albany trade was the measure perfectly calculated to lay it in its grave.

But did Colden, or his activist governor, truly believe this to be the case? It is ultimately impossible to know, but there is significant evidence to suggest that Colden and his fellow imperialists entertained specific political motives which had little to do with stemming French expansion in North America but were rooted in ardent local political antagonisms traceable back as far as the seventeenth century. In April 1730, only a few months after Burnet's restrictive legislation had finally been repealed, the Albany merchant Cornelius Cuyler reflected on the political events of the past decade in a letter to his London supplier. "I was Very glad to here [sic] that the act Imposing Dutyes fines etc. was Repealed," admitted Cuyler, who had been deeply involved in the Canada trade. "The Making of those unjust acts," he went on to speculate, "was Done out of Envy and Malice with Self Interest by Some ill

Designing persons here."<sup>91</sup> Flushed with the recent victory of the Canada traders, Cuyler might simply have lashed out at some imagined conspiracy concocted to punish the Albany merchant community. But how could Cuyler and his colleagues not have recalled the bitter invective New York imperialists with little affection for the Albany Dutch? Not surprisingly, these same men had been the most enthusiastic supporters of Burnet's ban, fully realizing the devastating financial toll it would take on the Dutch traders whose livelihoods depended on Canadian beaver.

One of the earliest and most persuasive advocates of challenging French hegemony in the western trade was Robert Livingston, the self-made merchant-proprietor who, with an estate of more than 160,000 acres, had risen to become one of the most influential spokesmen of New York's "landed" interest.<sup>92</sup> Throughout his long career, Livingston had prospered by his alliance with a series of colonial governors, and he naturally adopted their imperial and inherently anti-French perspective.<sup>93</sup> Despite his concerns about the influence of Canadian traders among the Iroquois and the tribes of the western Great Lakes, Livingston was never wholly averse to treating with his northern rivals. In the late 1690s, he made preparations to enter into commercial relations with Montreal. He also sent several of his sons to learn French in the Huguenot community of La Rochelle in the expectation that they,

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<sup>91</sup> Cornelius Cuyler to Samuel Baker, 11 April 1730, quoted in Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 148.

<sup>92</sup> Patricia U. Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 69; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 155.

<sup>93</sup> Bonomi, *Factious People*, 73; Leder, *Robert Livingston*, 47.

too, would one day enter the Canada trade.<sup>94</sup> Despite his fur-trade background and his powerful colonial allies, however, Livingston seems never to have been fully accepted by the close-knit Albany trading community and was clearly more comfortable associating with other "upriver" traders, such as the Van Rensselaers, who operated outside the pale of the Albany monopoly.<sup>95</sup>

As early as 1699, Livingston had successfully lobbied Governor Bellomont to support a program of expansion into the Great Lakes country. He recommended the construction of a chain of forts linking Albany with Detroit and the strengthening of alliances with the Iroquois and other western Indians. Acknowledging the unqualified success of the French *coureurs de bois* in cementing friendly relations with their Indian trading partners, Livingston recommended that young New Yorkers should also take to the woods as rival "bushlopers."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Leder, *Robert Livingston*, 126; Cynthia A. Kierner, "Family Values, Family Business: Work and Kinship in Colonial New York," *Mid-America*, 71:2 (1989): 57-58. The young Livingstons later profited from their early bilingual education, trading regularly with Canada. One son, John, tangled with an Admiralty Court after a sloop of which he was part-owner ran aground on Long Island on a return trip from Quebec. The cargo of French goods, including brandy, wines, furs, and textiles, was confiscated, and the vessel seized for violation of the Navigation Acts. Leder, *Ibid.*, 175-76.

<sup>95</sup> Bonomi, *Factionous People*, 73.

<sup>96</sup> "Mr. Robert Livingston's Report of his Journey to Onondaga" (April 1700), *NYCD*, 4: 648-52; Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 155-56. Livingston inadvertently acknowledged the superiority of French trade goods while recommending that young New Yorkers be encouraged to live among the tribes of the western Great Lakes. It was necessary, he counselled, "that our men have passes to go a hunting and trading towards Corlaers Lake and the eastward, as well as the French, who trade all the bever and peltry from our river Indians and decoy them to Canada, lying on every Creek upon the Lake with Brandy and other goods, by which means they spoyl us of all that trade. But it would not be advisable that they be

For a number of reasons, the Albany Dutch vigorously opposed Livingston's aggressive strategy. They feared that antagonizing the French would lead either to a renewal of the vicious border raids that they had only recently endured during King William's War, or at least the contraction of their lucrative Montreal trade.

Similarly, Livingston's proposals conspicuously ignored Albany's 1686 charter, which granted the town a monopoly over the colony's fur trade. Though the Albany merchants could easily comprehend the need for western defense, they shied away from Livingston's deliberately provocative policy.<sup>97</sup> With the onset of Queen Anne's War, however, the attention of the colony was soon diverted from Livingston's ambitious and potentially costly program. Not until the arrival of Governor Robert Hunter in 1710 would Livingston once again receive a sympathetic hearing.

A distinguished veteran of Marlborough's army, Hunter arrived in New York with an aggressive anti-French attitude that naturally drew him into association with like-minded imperialists.<sup>98</sup> If Hunter hoped to pursue an expansionist policy in New York, however, he soon realized that he would be hampered by the quotidian bickering of an assembly that refused even to grant him the customary revenue for his salary. Inevitably, perhaps, Hunter immediately came into conflict with prominent members of New York's mercantile faction. The new governor unashamedly

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permitted to go and trade with the Five Nations; there they lead a lazy life, and sell their goods dearer than the French do at Cadaracqui [Frontenac] where the goods are better." *NYCD*, 4: 651.

<sup>97</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 221-23.

<sup>98</sup> Mary Lou Lustig, *Robert Hunter, 1666-1734: New York's Augustan Statesman* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1983), 74-75.

gravitated to the colony's landed "aristocracy," and it was apparent that he shared their haughty disdain for the merchant community.<sup>99</sup> Frustrated by the legislative obstinacy of the merchant-assemblymen, the whiggish Hunter could also not have failed to note their support for the same Tory party that would soon "betray" Britain with the "pro-French" Treaty of Utrecht.<sup>100</sup> By the time Hunter met Livingston, the new speaker of the house, the governor was easily persuaded that French expansion in the West should be stifled and that the allegedly pro-French *handlaers*, who also happened to be fervent supporters of his downstate political enemies, could be simultaneously restrained.<sup>101</sup>

Considering the initial hostility of the merchant faction, Hunter's tenure as governor was remarkably successful; he managed, at least, to preside over an unseasonable "surface calm" in New York's perpetually turbulent political atmosphere.<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, a number of his mercantile opponents, most notably Peter Schuyler and Adolph Philipse, remained entrenched in the council. By the time

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<sup>99</sup> Hunter believed merchants to be "self-serving boors," Lustig claims, "inimical to Augustan tastes in manners and morals and to the attitudes of the imperial, landed ruling class of which Hunter was so prominent an example." Lustig, *Robert Hunter*, 78.

<sup>100</sup> Lustig, *Robert Hunter*, 114, 139.

<sup>101</sup> Michael Kammen has proposed that the "process of anglicization" in eighteenth-century New York took on "a special Scottish hue." Kammen, *Colonial New York: A History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 179. Bonomi further suggests that Hunter's suspicions of the predominantly Dutch merchant faction were inflamed by the ethnic antipathies he shared with his fellow prominent Scots. Bonomi, *Factionous People*, 96.

<sup>102</sup> Bonomi, *Factionous People*, 87.

he returned to England in 1719, Hunter had not succeeded in implementing Livingston's proposals for western expansion nor in executing his latest strategy of stifling the Montreal-Albany trade. Hunter did play a significant role in the selection of William Burnet as his successor, however, and cannily briefed the sympathetic incumbent administrator on the need to pursue Livingston's imperial agenda.

In the interim, tensions mounted in New York. As president of the Council, Peter Schuyler--the powerful Albany merchant, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and Canada trader--had assumed the post of acting governor in anticipation of Burnet's arrival. One of his first official acts was to replace Robert Livingston's nephew with one of his own relatives as mayor of Albany. He further exercised Hunter's supporters by ignoring the former governor's designee for mayor of New York City and by freely granting land to his friends and political supporters.<sup>103</sup> The battle lines in the debate over restricting commercial contact with Montreal were also being drawn even before Burnet set foot in the colony. Livingston was now the leading advocate of the ban on the Canadian trade, and Schuyler, his political nemesis, one of its most vocal opponents. The Hunter-Livingston faction had also found willing support for their anti-Albany program among the merchants of Schenectady. Brandishing their forty-year-old charter, the *handlaers* had made it clear that the western Indians should, by law and custom, come to trade within city limits. The Schenectady traders, who were increasingly interested in supplying these same customers, clearly resented Albany's stranglehold on the colonial fur trade. They

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<sup>103</sup> Bonomi, *Factionous People*, 87-88; Leder, *Robert Livingston*, 249-50.

were only too eager to join the ranks of the imperialists, who similarly sought to expand the western trade and demolish the Albany monopoly.<sup>104</sup>

Burnet's arrival in 1720 merely heightened the mood of suspicion and antagonism in the colony. The new governor, already steeped in Hunter's prejudices, immediately alienated the merchant faction by refusing to call the traditional assembly election. He speedily ushered an act to seal off the Montreal-Albany trade through the legislature and then replaced Peter Schuyler and his ally Adolph Philipse on the council with the more tractable Cadwallader Colden and James Alexander. In one stroke, Burnet had delivered a staggering blow to his political opposition, purging the leading members of the merchant faction from the government while effectively knocking out the underpinnings of their prosperity.<sup>105</sup>

With opposition mounting to Burnet's restrictive trade legislation, the responsibility for articulating the dubious premise underlying the ban to a confused Board of Trade devolved to Colden. Though he had only been in New York a short time, the immigrant Scot was no disinterested observer in this debate. After a brief stint in Philadelphia, Colden had caught the attention of Governor Hunter, who promised him the post of surveyor general in New York. When Colden arrived expectantly in the colony, he was dismayed to discover that Hunter had already set sail and that Schuyler had bestowed the surveyorship on a political crony. Though Schuyler's appointment was later quashed, Colden never forgave this slight. Already

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<sup>104</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 135.

<sup>105</sup> Bonomi, *Factional People*, 90.

eager to win his new patron's favor, Colden's epistolary assault on the Canada trade conceivably had a personal edge as well.<sup>106</sup>

It is certainly possible that New York's imperial spokesmen may actually have believed that Albany strouds were the sine qua non of the Canadian fur trade. They had, admittedly, consistently advocated undercutting French hegemony by promoting Anglo-American trade in the Great Lakes region. Examined in the light of the ruthless political battle they waged against the embattled merchant faction through the 1710s and 1720s, however, their rationale for severing the Albany-Montreal trade--as most eloquently articulated by Colden--appears glaringly disingenuous and self-serving. Perhaps the most damning evidence of the political reality underlying the imperial rhetoric of the restrictive legislation was the governor's own ambivalent actions. At the height of the ban, while accused Albany smugglers were being hauled into court and forced to swear oaths in their defense, Burnet blithely permitted his political allies to profit in Canadian pelts.<sup>107</sup> Thus, when Cornelius Cuyler and his associates protested that the restrictive acts were "Done out of Envy and Malice with Self Interest by some ill Designing persons," they were probably not far from the

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<sup>106</sup> "Colden neither forgave nor forgot," in the judgment of his biographer, Alice Mapelsden Keys. "Years after Schuyler's death he transmitted to his son, in the hope that it might meet the eye of the future historian, a description of his old enemy full of unalloyed bitterness, while at the same time he flung himself into an arraignment of Schuyler's administration of the Land Office that helped largely to bring about his suspension from the council." Alice Mapelsden Keys, *Cadwallader Colden: A Representative Eighteenth Century Official* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1906), 108.

<sup>107</sup> Norton, *Fur Trade in Colonial New York*, 139.



mark.

The influence of this partisan propaganda campaign on subsequent scholarship has been vastly out of proportion to its objective historical worth. It was clearly in Colden's best interest to convince the Board of Trade that the Canadian fur trade was so inherently unstable, so utterly dependent on English manufactures smuggled from New York, that the restriction of the Albany-Montreal commerce would result in nothing short of the collapse of the French regime in North America. In this context, the argument of New York imperialists curiously echoed the equally self-interested claims of their Canadian rivals. Just as Wien has shown that Montreal merchants benefitted from the appearance of uncompetitiveness in their rivalry with the Anglo-American traders, so it appears likely that Colden and his fellow imperialists had much to gain from an identical illusion. If the Canadian fur trade was inherently weak, then the Albany Dutch were all the more villainous for propping it up. And if the *handlaers'* commerce could be ruined in the name of securing Britain's North American empire, neither the imperialists nor the Schenectady traders would mourn the loss.

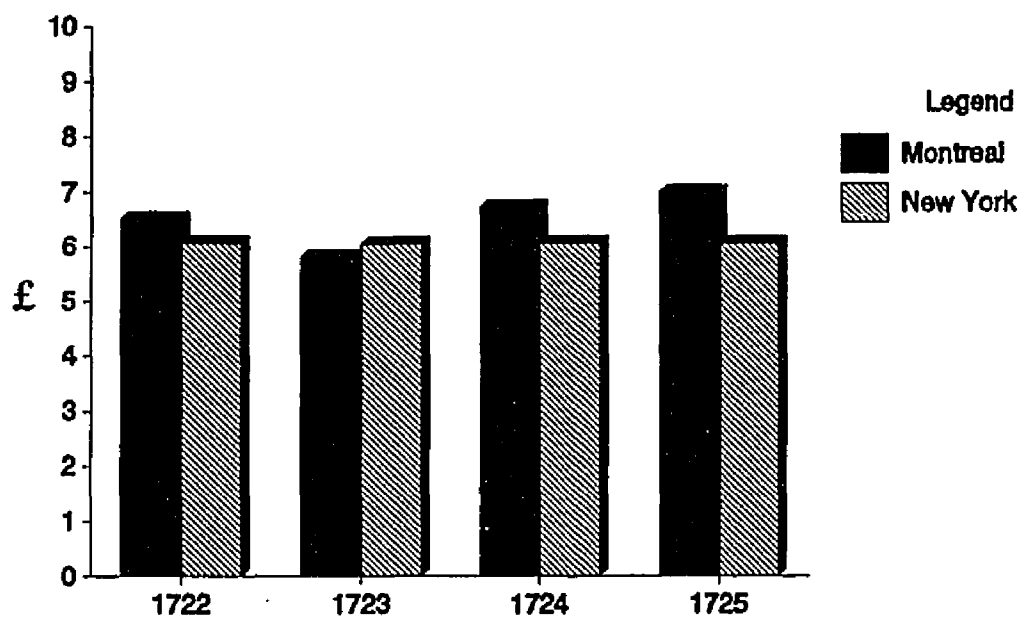
"Each party," Colden later wrote of New York politics in these years, "as they were at different times favoured by several Governors, opposed all the Measures taken by the other, while each of them were by Turns in Credit with the People or the Governor, and sometimes even prosecuted each other to Death. The publick Measures were by these Means perpetually fluctuating, and often one Day

contradictory to what they were the Day before."<sup>108</sup> In an irony that would not have been lost on the percipient Scot, the greatest legacy of Colden's rhetorical effort was not so much political as it was historiographical. Though their efforts to revile and reduce their Albany rivals ultimately misfired, the imperialists' greatest success was the establishment of a myth of Anglo-American superiority in the eighteenth-century fur trade, a legacy which has proved far more enduring than the petty colonial antagonisms which engendered it.

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<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Kammen, *Colonial New York*, 127.

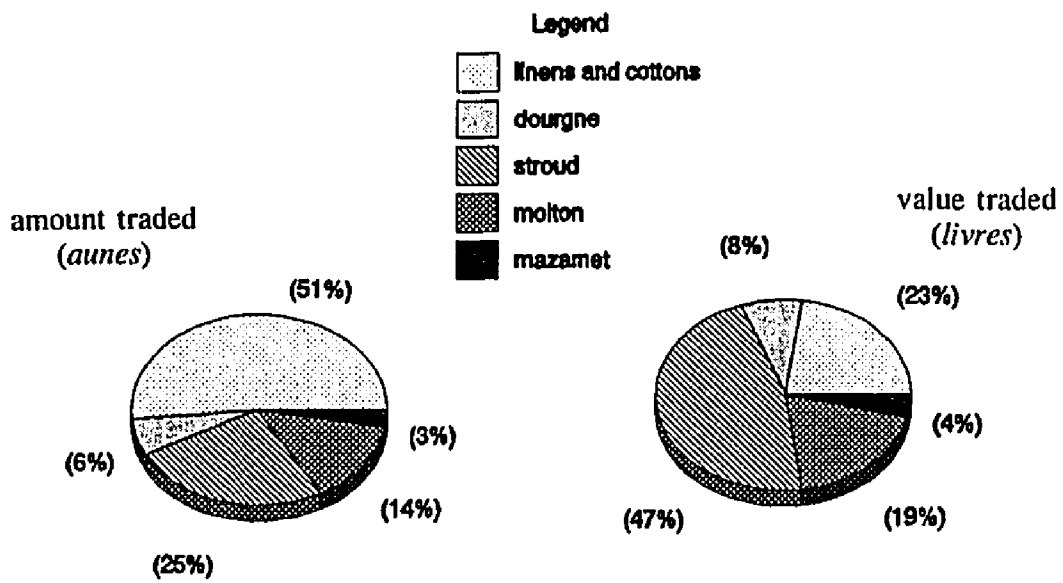
FIGURE 3.1  
PRICE OF A "PIECE" OF STROUD CLOTH IN MONTREAL AND ALBANY  
(£ STERLING)



Sources: Lunn, "Economic Development," 161; Colden, *HFIN*, 22.

FIGURE 3.2

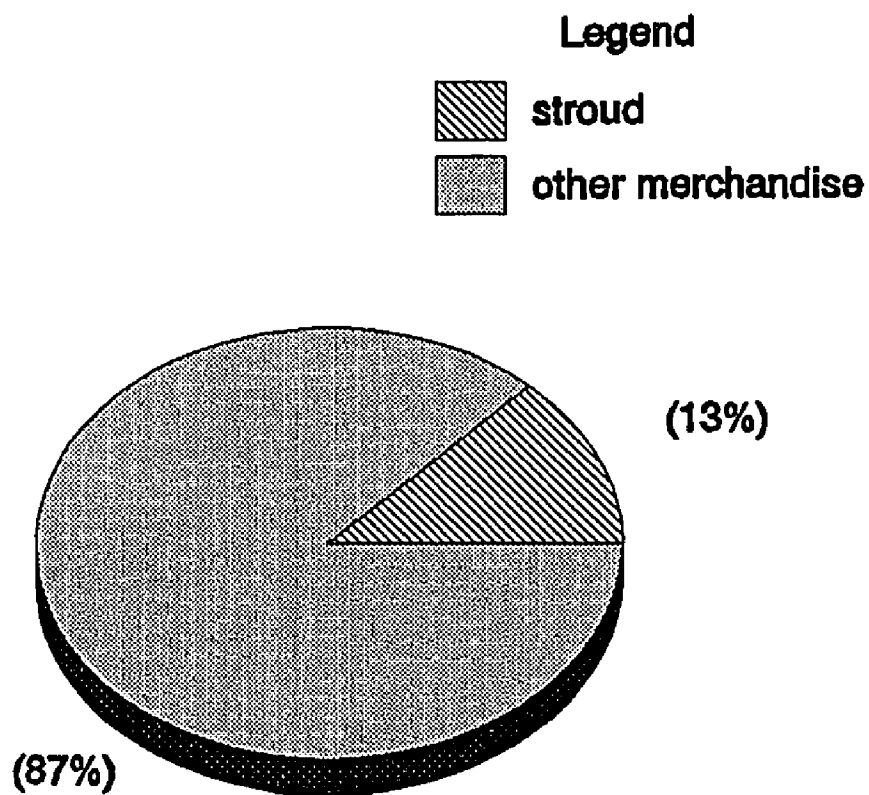
VALUE OF BULK TEXTILES TRADED AT NIAGARA, 1729-1738, RELATIVE TO TOTAL SALES



Source: AN, C<sup>1</sup>A, 73: 310-12.

FIGURE 3.3

VALUE OF ENGLISH STROUDS TRADED AT NIAGARA, 1729-1738,  
RELATIVE TO TOTAL SALES



Source: *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 73: 310-12.

TABLE 3.1

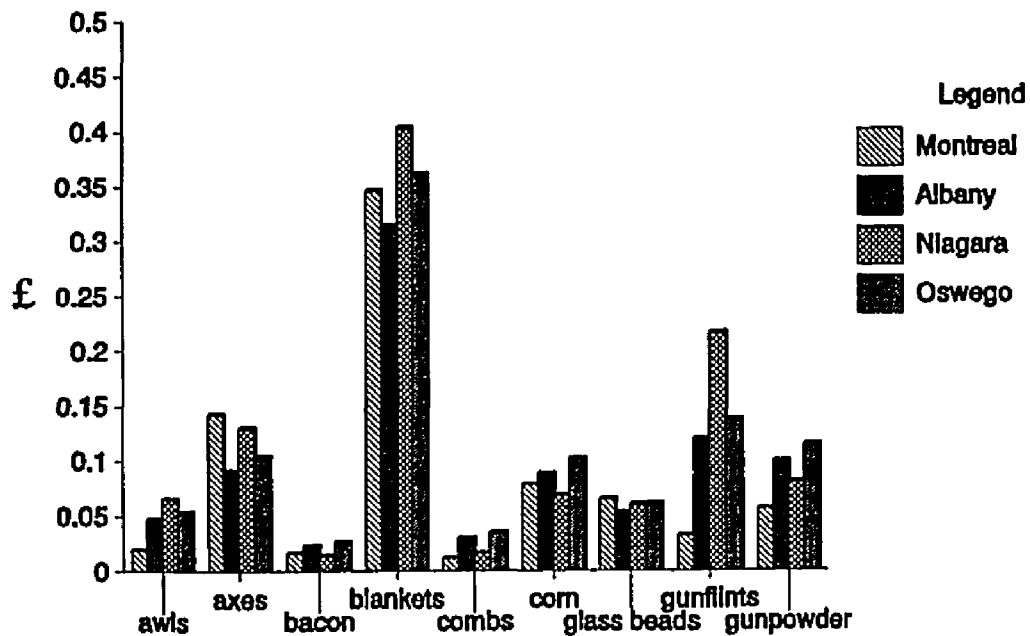
PRICES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS AT MONTREAL, SCHENECTADY,  
 NIAGARA, AND OSWEGO, 1735 (£ STERLING)

ITEM	I Montreal	II Albany	III Niagara	IV Oswego [estimated]
awls (doz.)	0.0195	0.0464	0.065	0.0533
axes (ea.)	0.1424	0.0909	0.13	0.1045
bacon (lb.)	0.0161	0.0227	0.014	0.0261
blankets (ea.)	0.3463	0.3144	0.4044	0.3616
combs (doz.)	0.0118	0.0303	0.0163	0.0348
corn (bushel)	0.0783	0.0884	0.0682	0.1017
glass beads (lb.)	0.0651	0.053	0.0603	0.0609
gunflints (100)	0.0325	0.1196	0.2167	0.1375
gunpowder (lb.)	0.0563	0.0991	0.0803	0.114
guns (ea.)	0.7803	0.8578	0.9103	0.9865
kettles (lb.)	0.1205	0.0909	0.1205	0.1045
knives (ea.)	0.0065	0.0317	0.0154	0.0365
lead/shot (lb.)	0.0181	0.0354	0.0301	0.0407
linen (yard)	0.0714	0.0727	0.1	0.0836
mirrors (ea.)	0.0126	0.0709	0.0704	0.0815
pease (bushel)	0.0783	0.0909	0.1565	0.1045
pepper (lb.)	0.1004	0.0923	0.1205	0.1061
rings (doz.)	0.0217	0.0216	0.0325	0.0248
rum/brandy (gallon)	0.1985	0.0765	0.397	0.088
shirts (ea.)	0.1235	0.1705	0.15	0.1961
stockings (pair)	0.1951	0.3939	0.1951	0.453
stroud (yard)	0.2795	0.2147	0.1334	0.2469
thread (lb.)	0.1032	0.1724	0.1205	0.1983
tobacco (lb.)	0.0201	0.0196	0.0401	0.0225
vermillion (lb.)	0.3565	0.4848	0.4821	0.5575
wine (gallon)	0.1103	0.2424	0.2646	0.2788

Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63; *AN, C<sup>1</sup>A*, 73: 310-12.

FIGURE 3.4a

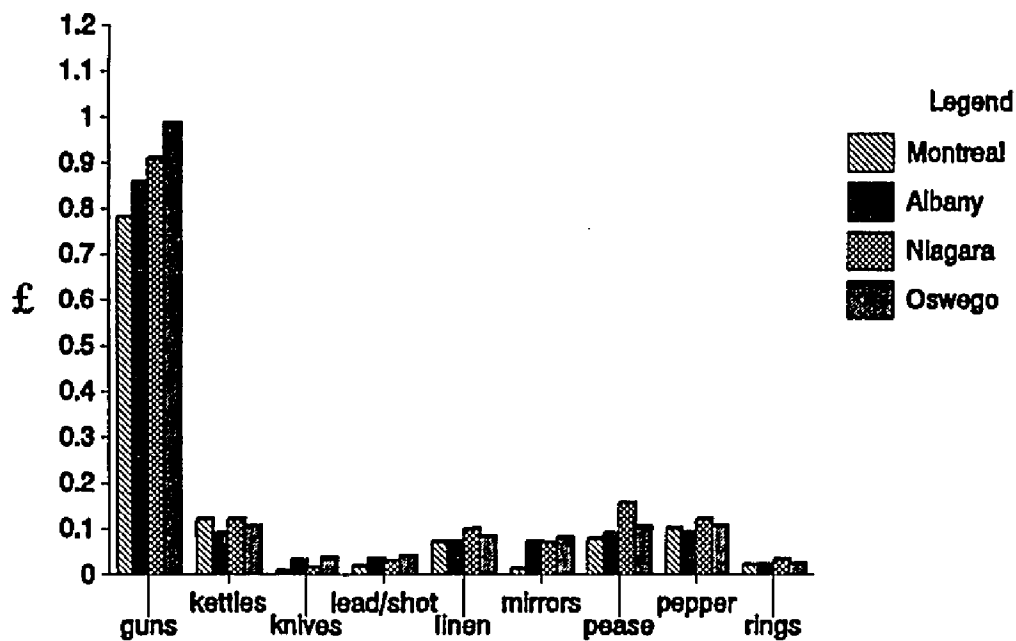
PRICES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS AT MONTREAL, SCHENECTADY,  
 NIAGARA, AND OSWEGO, 1735 (£ STERLING)



Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63.

FIGURE 3.4b

PRICES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS AT MONTREAL, SCHENECTADY,  
 NIAGARA, AND OSWEGO, 1735 (£ STERLING)

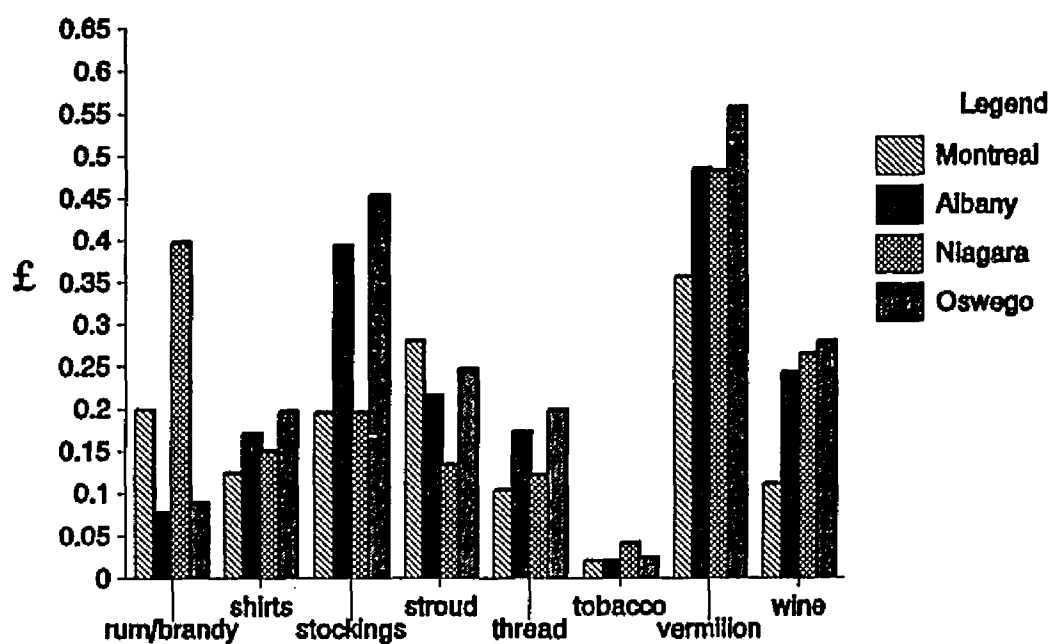


Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventés: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63.



FIGURE 3.4c

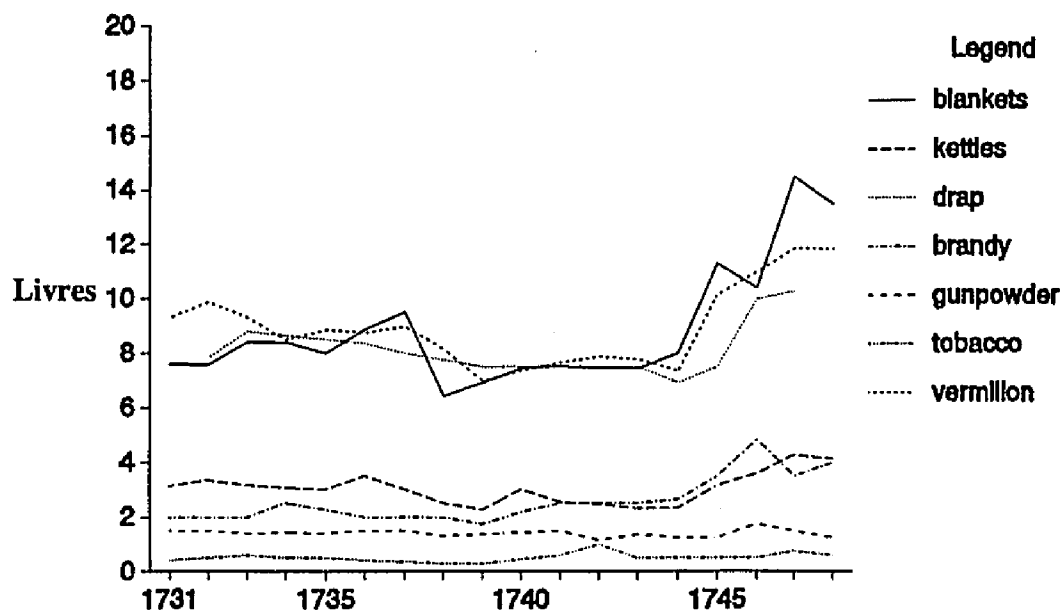
PRICES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS AT MONTREAL, SCHENECTADY,  
 NIAGARA, AND OSWEGO, 1735 (£ STERLING)



Source: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63.

FIGURE 3.5

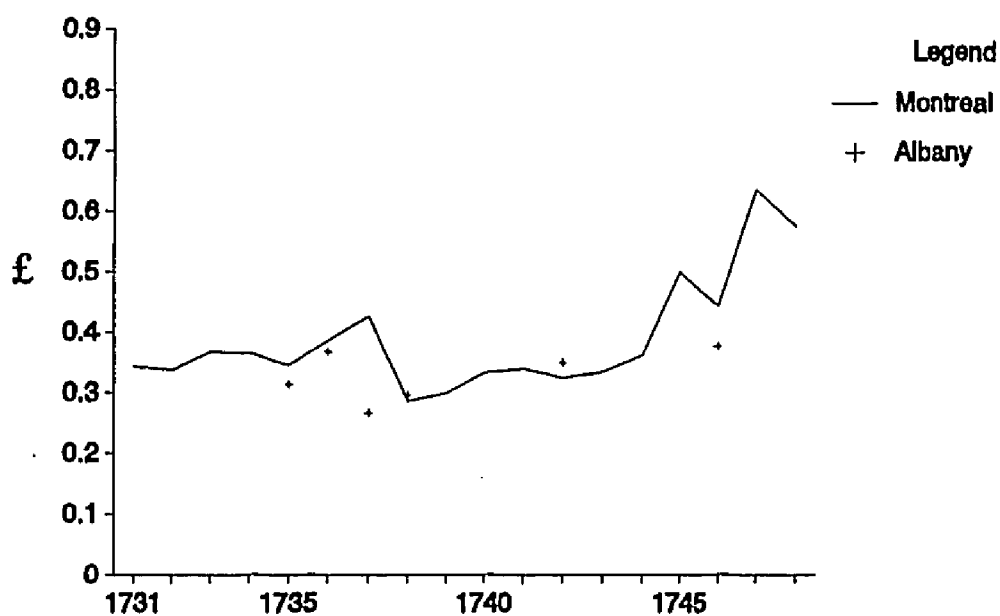
## PRICE FLUCTUATIONS OF SELECTED GOODS AT MONTREAL (LIVRES)



Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*.

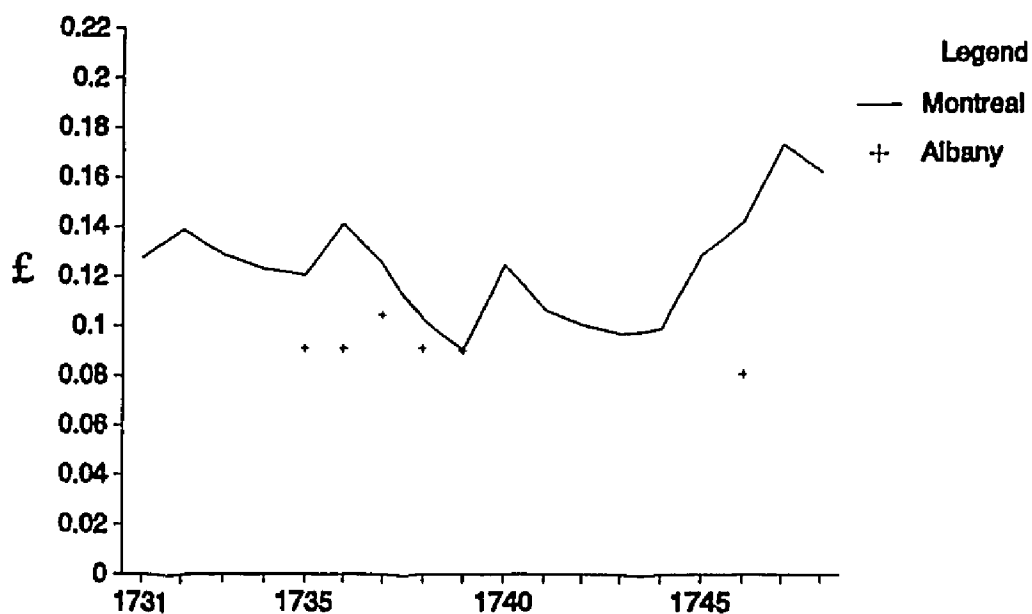
FIGURE 3.6a

PRICE OF BLANKETS AT MONTREAL AND SCHENECTADY/ALBANY  
(£ STERLING)



Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63.

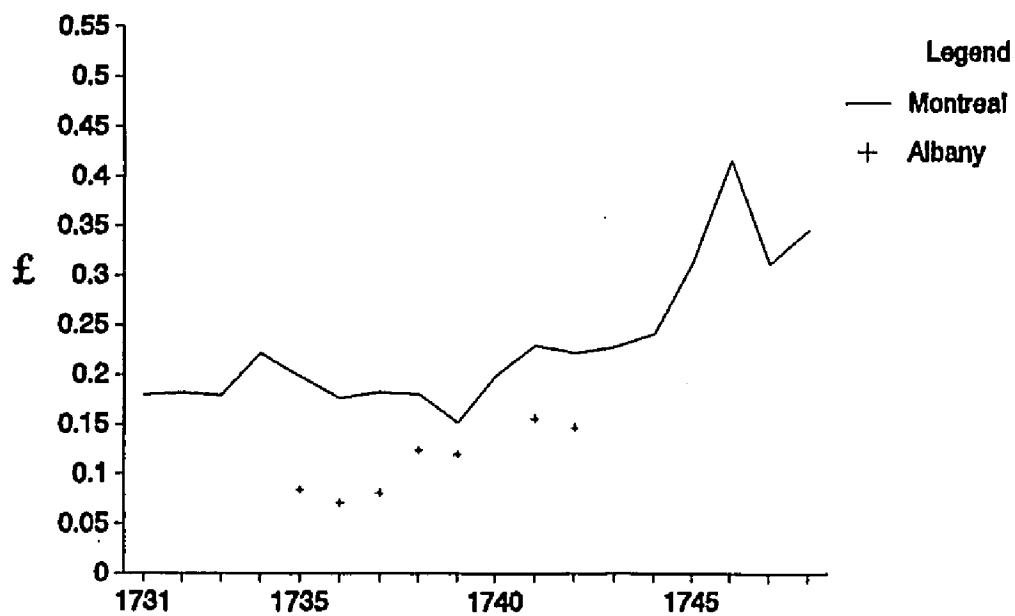
FIGURE 3.6b  
 PRICE OF KETTLES (PER LB.) AT MONTREAL AND  
 SCHENECTADY/ALBANY (£ STERLING)



Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63.

FIGURE 3.6c

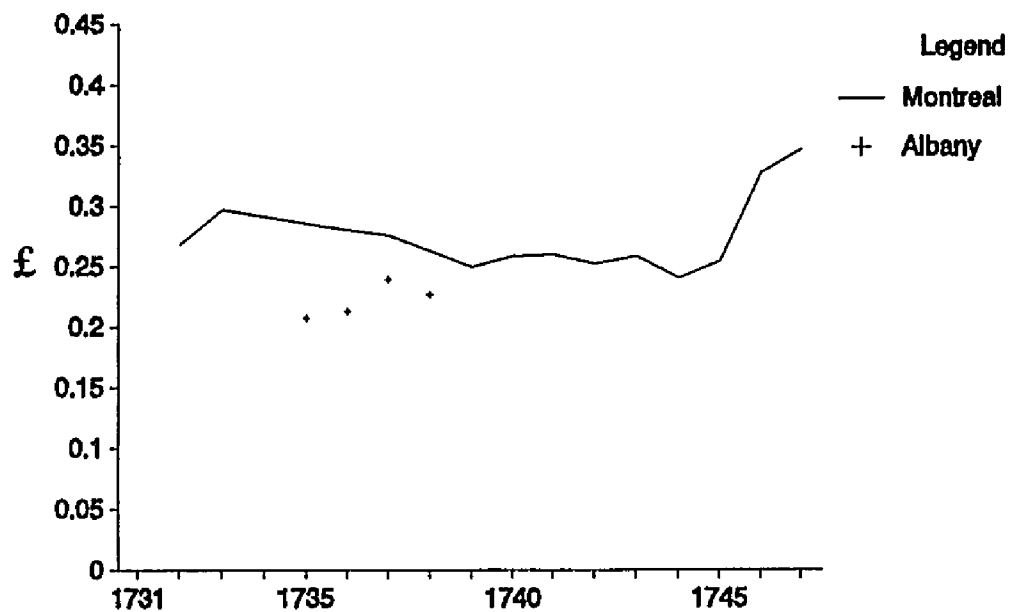
PRICE OF BRANDY/RUM (PER GAL.) AT MONTREAL AND  
SCHENECTADY/ALBANY (£ STERLING)



Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63.

FIGURE 3.6d

PRICE OF STROUD CLOTH (PER YD.) AT MONTREAL AND  
SCHENECTADY/ALBANY (£ STERLING)



Sources: "Journal #3, Monière, 1731-1737, Ventes: crédit et débit," M848, reel 2, vol. 4, *MMR*; "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63.

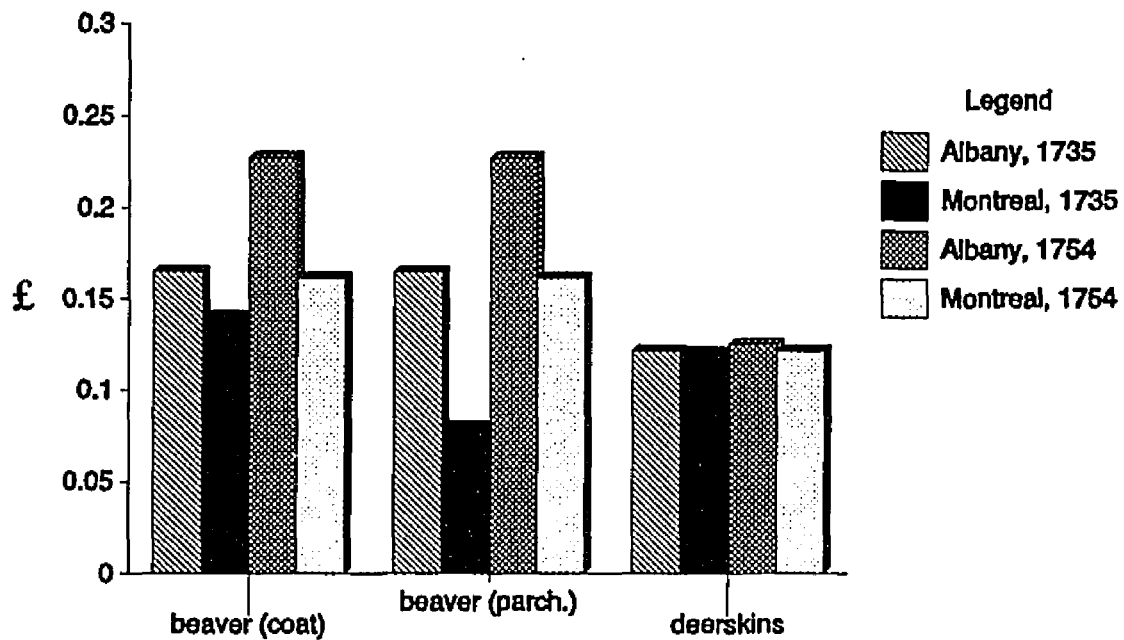
TABLE 3.2  
 PRICES OF SELECTED PELTRY AT MONTREAL AND  
 SCHENECTADY/ALBANY (£ STERLING)

	1735		1754	
	NY	Montreal	NY	Montreal
bear	0.1818	0.1734	0.2833	0.4365
beaver, coat (lb.)	0.165	0.1406	0.2274	0.1618
beaver, parchment (lb.)	0.165	0.0804	0.2274	0.1618
cat	0.0758	0.0975	0.1109	0.1746
deerskin (lb.)	0.1215	0.1205	0.1252	0.1214
fisher	0.1879	0.1951	0.2782	0.3274
fox			0.1245	0.1746
marten	0.1061	0.1084	0.1329	0.1528
mink	0.0515	0.0433	0.0867	0.1091
muskrat	0.0076	0.0108	0.0203	0.0109
otter	0.1684	0.1734	0.3519	0.4365
raccoon	0.0627	0.0607	0.0698	0.0917
wolf	0.0909	0.13	0.1013	0.2183

1735 sources: Wien, "Castor, peaux, et pelleteries," 91; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63. 1754 sources: Innis, *Fur-Trade of Canada*, 153; "Letterbook of Robert Sanders, 1752-58," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #3; "Letterbook of John Sanders, 1749-73, NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #3."

FIGURE 3.7

PRICE OF BEAVER AND DEERSKINS AT MONTREAL AND  
SCHENECTADY/ALBANY (£ STERLING)

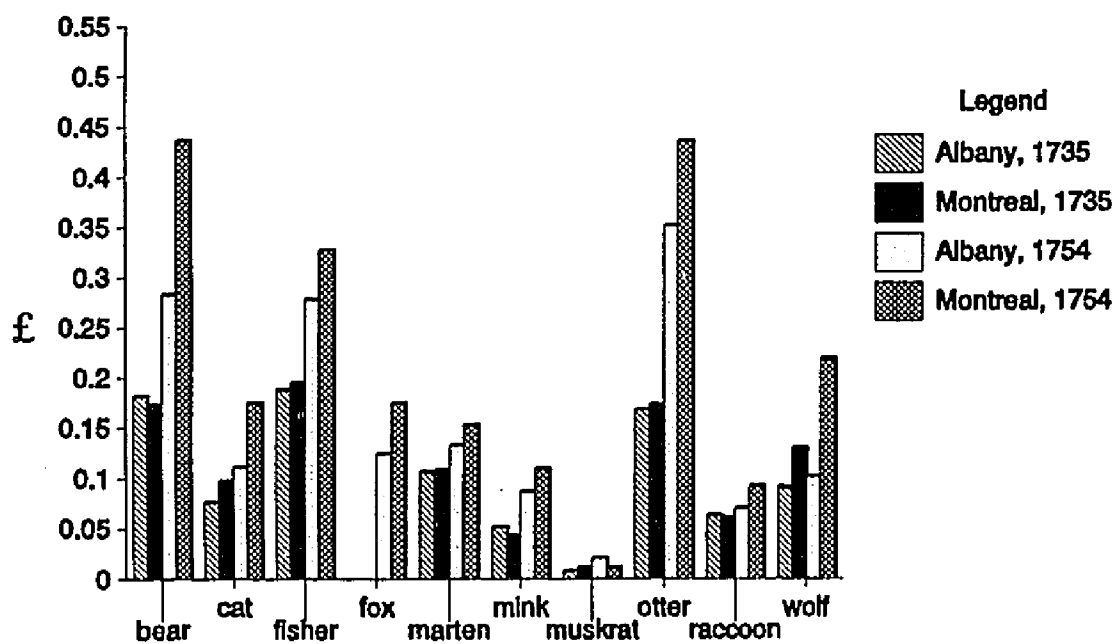


1735 sources: Wien, "Castor, peaux, et pelleteries," 91; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63. 1754 sources: Innis, *Fur-Trade of Canada*, 153; "Letterbook of Robert Sanders, 1752-58," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #3; "Letterbook of John Sanders, 1749-73, NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #3."



FIGURE 3.8

PRICE OF SELECTED PELTRY AT MONTREAL AND  
SCHENECTADY/ALBANY (£ STERLING)



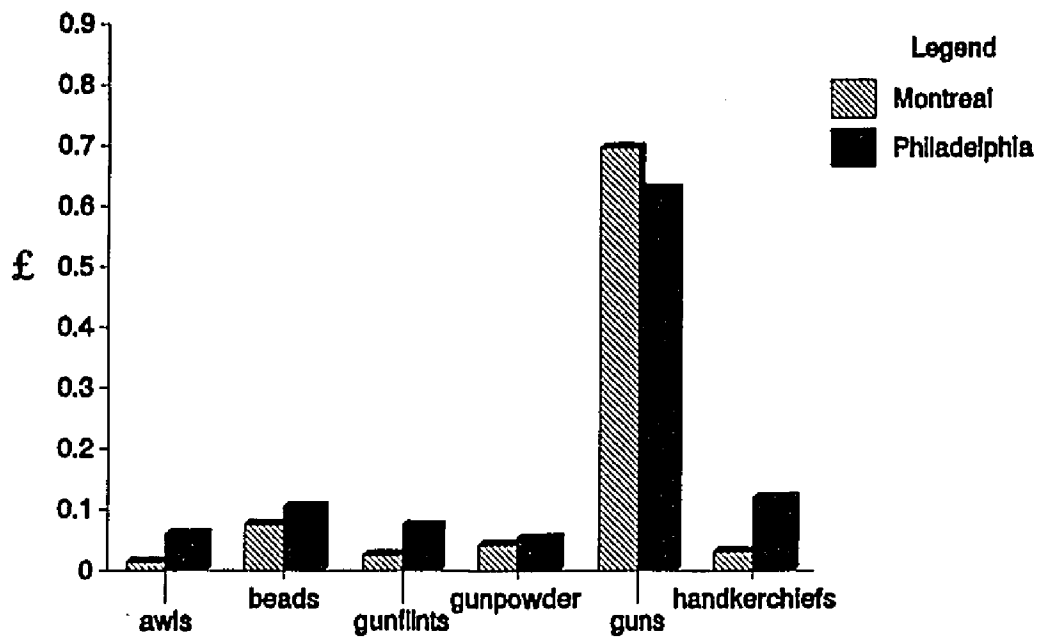
1735 sources: Wien, "Castor, peaux, et pelleteries," 91; "Account Book of Hendrick (Henry) Van Rensselaer," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #63. 1754 sources: Innis, *Fur-Trade of Canada*, 153; "Letterbook of Robert Sanders, 1752-58," NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #3; "Letterbook of John Sanders, 1749-73, NYHS, Misc. MSS., reel #3."

TABLE 3.3  
 PRICES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS AT MONTREAL AND  
 PHILADELPHIA, 1744 (£ STERLING)

ITEM	I Montreal	II Philadelphia
awls (doz.)	0.0145	0.06
beads (lb.)	0.0758	0.105
gunflints (100)	0.0254	0.075
gunpowder (lb.)	0.042	0.054
guns (ea.)	0.6973	0.63
handkerchiefs (ea.)	0.0317	0.12
hatchets (ea.)	0.0679	0.075
kettles (lb.)	0.0994	0.067
knives (doz.)	0.1176	0.255
lead (lb.)	0.0164	0.012
mirrors (ea.)	0.0217	0.04
rings (doz.)	0.125	0.06
rum/brandy (gal.)	0.2421	0.13
soap (lb.)	0.042	0.0144
stroud (yard)	0.2408	0.2609
tobacco (lb.)	0.021	0.007
vermilion (lb.)	0.3084	0.54

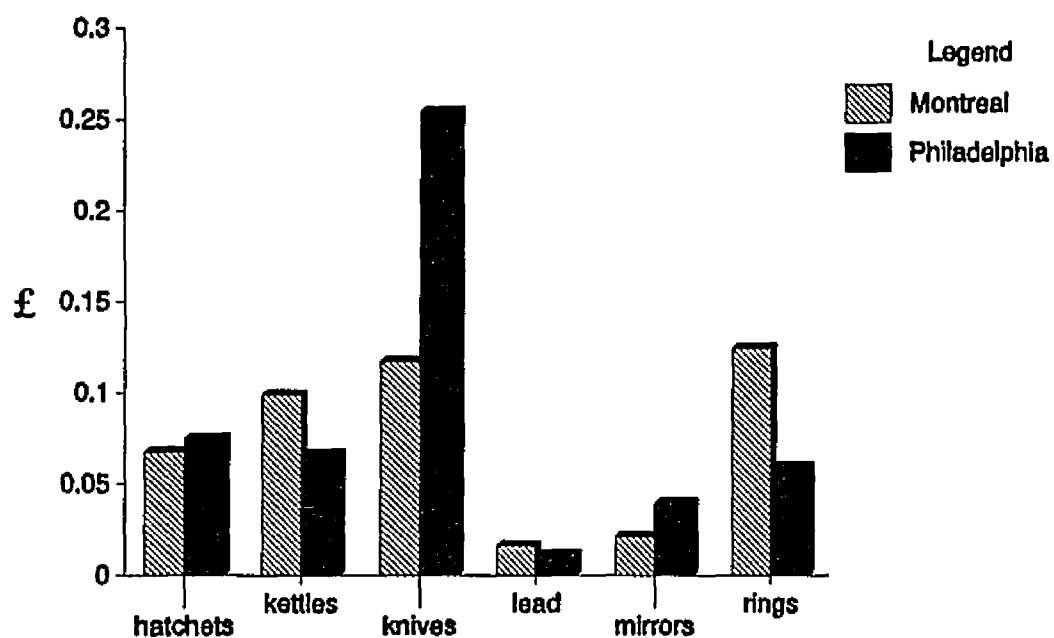
Sources: "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*; George Croghan Section, Cadwallader Collection, HSP.

FIGURE 3.9a  
 PRICES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS AT MONTREAL AND  
 PHILADELPHIA, 1744 (£ STERLING)



Sources: "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*; George Croghan Section, Cadwallader Collection, HSP.

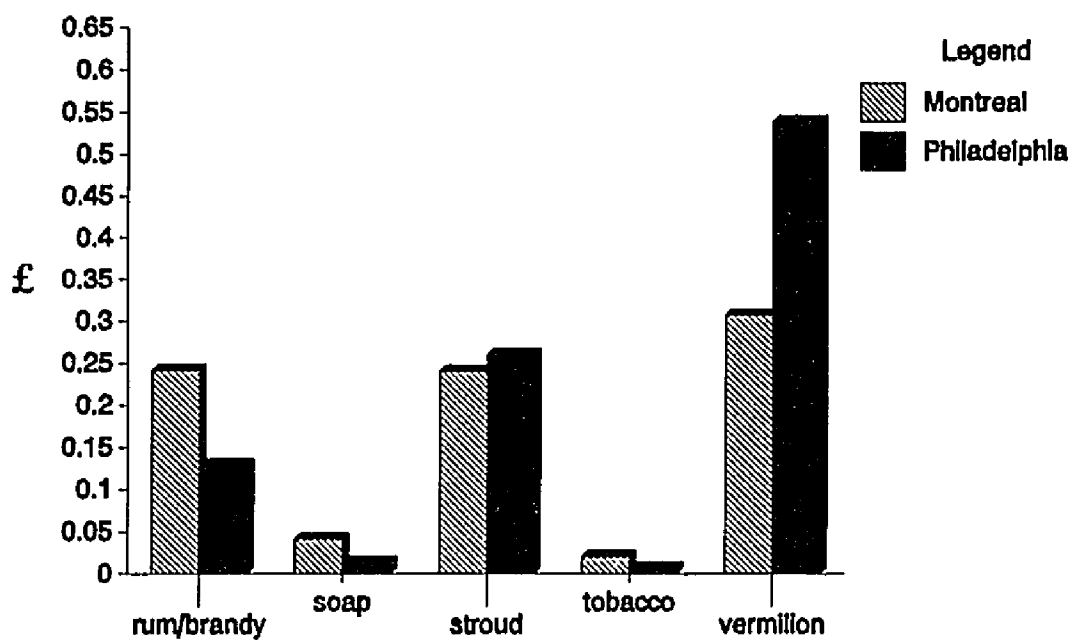
FIGURE 3.9b  
 PRICES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS AT MONTREAL AND  
 PHILADELPHIA, 1744 (£ STERLING)



Sources: "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*; George Croghan Section, Cadwallader Collection, HSP.

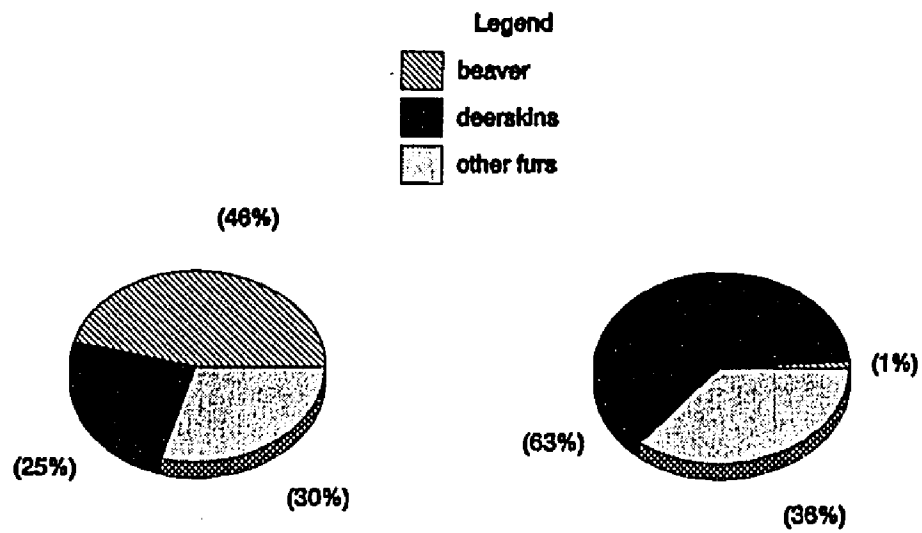
FIGURE 3.9c

PRICES OF SELECTED TRADE GOODS AT MONTREAL AND  
PHILADELPHIA, 1744 (£ STERLING)



Sources: "Journal No. #4, Monière, 1737-1748, Ventes: Crédit et débit," M849, reel 3, vol. 8, *MMR*; George Croghan Section, Cadwallader Collection, HSP.

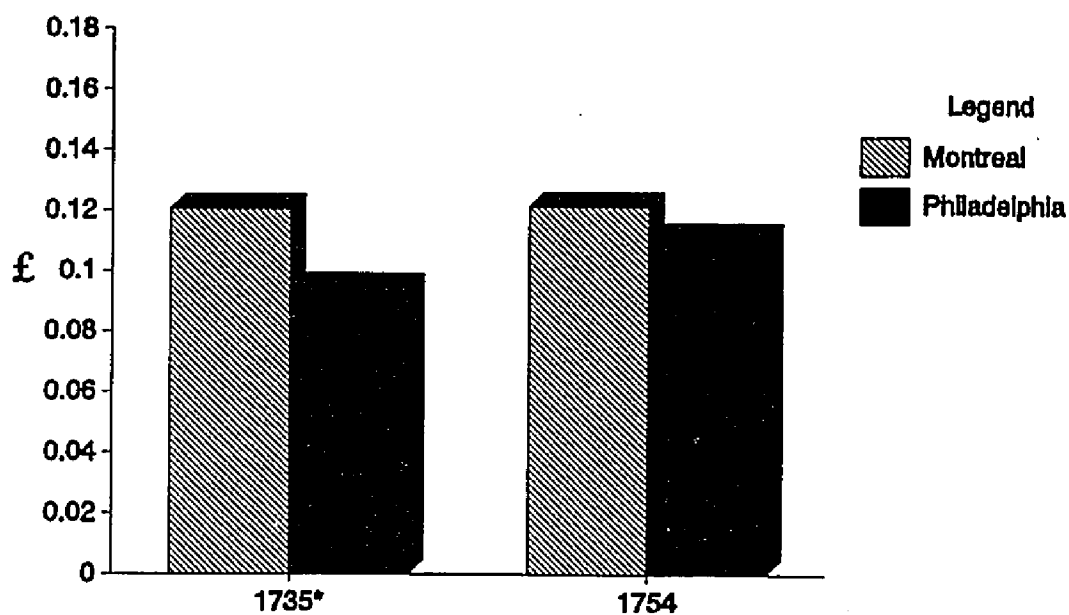
FIGURE 3.10  
 NEW YORK AND PENNSYLVANIA PELTRY EXPORTS, 1718-58



Source: Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy," Table 1, 240-42.

FIGURE 3.11

DEERSKIN PRICES AT MONTREAL AND PHILADELPHIA (£ STERLING)



Sources: Montreal, 1735: Wien, "Castor, peaux, et pelleteries," 91.  
 \*Philadelphia, 1732: Guthman, "Indian Trade Documents," 10.  
 Montreal, 1754: Innis, *Fur-Trade of Canada*, 153. Philadelphia,  
 1754: Croghan Section, Cadwallader Collection, HSP.

CHAPTER IV  
INDIAN AGENDAS

ACT I  
SCENE I  
*An Indian Trading House.*

*Enter McDole and Murphey, Two Indian Traders,  
and their Servants.<sup>1</sup>*

In the drawing rooms and coffee houses of fashionable London, Robert Rogers's homespun art breathed new life into the fabled characters of the eighteenth-century frontier. The noble and victimized Indian savage, the shamelessly rapacious Scots-Irish trader, the recently deposed yet still menacing Frenchman: all eased into their familiar roles as into a well-worn pair of moccasins, enacting an allegory of the simmering hatreds and botched relations that culminated in the shedding of real blood on the fringes of the new Anglo-American empire. For all its suspect fusion of fact and myth, Rogers's tale of Pontiac and his failed uprising nonetheless opens a window onto a swirling scene of perceptions, prejudices, and daily transactions between Indians and Europeans which, far more than the abstractions of merchant markup or peltry prices, dictated the ultimate success of the French and English in their rivalry

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Rogers, *Ponteach: Or, The Savages of America, A Tragedy* (London: J. Millan, 1766).



for the Great Lakes-Ohio Valley fur trade before 1760.

A seasoned veteran of three ferocious wars for control of the "Old Northwest," Rogers was no stranger to the fluid and often lethal world of the fur trade frontier. If he tended to paint his characters with a broad brush, it was perhaps because his real-life subjects lived so assiduously up--or, more commonly, *down--to* type. In Rogers's fictional world, at least, the lineage of Anglo-Indian conflict was not difficult to discern. Heading the long list of native grievances were the traders, frontier confidence men and rogues who, through greed and guile, had poisoned the Indians against the English long before the first land-hungry settlers broke through the Alleghenies. If bitter Anglo-Indian conflict for control of the West was inevitable, Rogers implied, the frauds and deceits of the wily, grasping traders only portended more insidious usurpations to come.

Rogers's indictment of the Anglo-American traders is embodied by McDole and Murphey, their names alone a powerful allusion--in an eighteenth-century ethnic shorthand--to inevitable fraud. As the curtain rises, the veteran McDole initiates a naive Murphey into the "secret Arts" of the "Indian Commerce," quickly disabusing him of any earnest expectations of making "an honest Living." Inspecting the newcomer's merchandise, McDole pronounces: "'Tis very well: your Articles are good:/ But now the Thing's to make a Profit from them,/ Worth all your Toil and Pains of coming hither./ Our fundamental Maxim then is this,/" he confides, "That it's no Crime to cheat and gull an *Indian*" [4]. Murphey's bewildered protest in defense of the Indians' "natural rights" raises little sympathy in the hardened dealer.

"Ah!" McDole counters. "If you boggle here, I say no more,/ This is the very Quintessence of Trade,/ And ev'ry Hope of Gain depends upon it;/ None who neglect it ever did grow rich,/" he remarks with finality, "Or ever will, or can by *Indian Commerce*" [5].

With the inherent justice of the trade immediately called into question, McDole proudly relates the sordid details of his practiced deceptions. "A thousand Opportunities present/ To Take Advantage of their Ignorance/" he admits;

But the great Engine I employ is Rum,  
 More pow'rful made by certain strength'ning Drugs.  
 This I distribute with a lib'ral Hand,  
 Urge them to drink till they grow mad and valiant;  
 Which makes them think me generous and just,  
 And gives full Scope to practice all my Art.  
 I then begin my Trade with water'd Rum,  
 The cooling Draught well suits their scorching Throats.  
 Their Fur and Peltry come in quick Return:  
 My Scales are honest, but so well contriv'd,  
 That one small Slip will turn Three Pounds to One;  
 Which they, poor silly Souls! ignorant of Weights  
 And Rules of Balancing, do not perceive [5].

When three Indians conveniently arrive on the scene eager to trade their beaver pelts for rum, McDole demonstrates his dubious skills to his skeptical companion. The fraudulent transaction comes off without a hitch, with McDole garnering an astounding ninety pounds of beaver for a mere six quarts of watered rum.<sup>2</sup> A duly impressed Murphey thanks his colleague for the lucrative advice, but

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<sup>2</sup> The tragicomic nature of this transaction would have been even more striking to contemporaries familiar with current rates of exchange. Assuming a generous price of 5 shillings per pound of beaver and 15 shillings per gallon of rum, the Indians

ponders the potentially brutal repercussions of this sharp brand of dealing. But to McDole this is only business. "Can't you avoid them?" he asks. "Let their Ven-/geance light/ On others Heads, no matter whose, if you/ Are but secure, and have the Gain in Hand," he counsels. With the trader vanished, the Indians will vent their anger on "a Stranger" or an "honest Peasant." And so the pair take their leave with a final, premonitory quip from McDole: "Such let them murder, if they will a Score," he says. "The Guilt is theirs, while we secure the Gain,/ Nor shall we feel the bleeding Victims Pain" [8].

Like the violence that threatens to erupt in response to English avarice and insult, a profound nostalgia for the French presence in the *pays d'en haut*, all the more acute for its freshness, pervades each scene of Rogers's drama. The context of Pontiac's first appearance, in fact, is a telling commentary on the fragility of Anglo-Indian relations with the French subtracted from the imperial equation. Addressing the impossibly haughty Colonel Cockum, Pontiac alludes to an ongoing, if one-sided, dialogue with the newly empowered English. "You give no Answer yet to my Complaint;/" he charges. "Your men give my Men always too much Rum,/ Then trade and cheat 'em. What! d'ye think this/ right?" [14]. Cockum's dismissive

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spent the equivalent of £22.5 for rum worth just over £1 at a vastly inflated frontier cost. For beaver prices, see Yoko Shirai, "The Indian Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania, 1730-1768: Traders and Land Speculation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Pennsylvania, 1985), 116, 145n. The price of rum in the Ohio country was always variable. Worth about 3 shillings per gallon in Philadelphia, it sold at Fort Pitt in the mid-1760s for between 15 and 20 shillings per gallon. "Account with the Crown (Croghan and Cole), 1766" in the microfilm edition of the *Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan Papers* in the Pennsylvania State Archives (MG 19), Accounts Current, 1766-1771, Volume 7: 375-425.

answer provokes another Indian chief to remark: "I thought the *English* had been better Men," to which his companion pointedly replies: "*Frenchmen* would always hear an *Indian*/ speak,/ And answer fair, and make good Promises." Overhearing this exchange, Cockum rankles at the comparison. "You may be d----d," the colonel retorts, "and all your *Frenchmen* too" [15].

Fortunately, cooler heads prevail when Sharp, a colonial governor who happens to be present, promises to make Pontiac's grievances known to the king. "Your Men make *Indians* drunk, and then/ they cheat 'em," Pontiac repeats. "I tell you plainly this will never do," he cautions, "We never thus were treated by the *French*." A conciliatory Sharp reminds him that "there's good and bad, you know, in every/ Nation. You must not mind the Conduct of a few,/ Nor judge the rest by what you see of them." Pontiac's answer is terse: "If you've some good," he suggests, "why don't you send them here?" [20].

With the English at a safe distance, Pontiac and his cohorts later reflect on the alteration in their circumstances precipitated by the expulsion of the French from the *pays d'en haut*. "Where are we now?" Pontiac asks.

The *French* are all subdued,  
 But who are in their Stead become our Lords?  
 A proud, imperious, churlish, haughty Band.  
 The *French* familiarized themselves with us,  
 Studied our Tongue, and Manners, wore our Dress,  
 Married our Daughters, and our Sons their Maids,  
 Dealt honestly, and well supplied our Wants,  
 Used no one ill, and treated with Respect  
 Our Kings, our Captains, and our aged Men;  
 Call'd us their Friends, nay, what is more, their  
     Children,  
 And seem'd like Fathers anxious for our Welfare [32-33].

These are Rogers's words, not Pontiac's, but springing as they do from the pen of one who had battled his share of Frenchmen, they are essential to understanding the greater success of his enemies in establishing and perpetuating an enduring and mutually profitable trade founded on respect and compromise, not greed and deceit. The importance of Rogers's dramatic portrait of Pontiac has little to do with his inventions of plot or dialogue or with his elevation of the Indian leader to the status of tragic hero. Rogers's work is remarkable as perhaps the most eloquent affirmation that the Anglo-American fur trade had essentially failed, not necessarily in financial terms, for clearly many traders, merchants, and agents had profited handsomely by their exchange of English manufactured goods for beaver, deerskins, and other peltry, but rather because English administrators and Americans traders blindly refused to integrate the purely pecuniary interests of the trade into a broader imperial program that recognized the fundamental unity of trade and alliance in the realm of Indian-European relations.

Rogers's *Ponteach* was a caustic commentary on the misconduct of English officers and traders in the period following the expulsion of the French and lent dramatic color to a specific set of concerns that had plagued colonial officials since the beginnings of Anglo-Indian trade. The stock characters who inhabited Rogers's fictional frontier stood as testament to the extent to which the stereotype of the unabashedly corrupt Anglo-American trader had already slipped into the colonial cultural vernacular. In a pattern all-too-familiar to his audience, Rogers's traders cheated and stole from the Indians, then blithely ignored the bloody issue of their

illegitimate dealings. Rogers was hardly the first to recognize the nexus of trade and alliance in European-Indian relations, nor was he unique in admitting that American traders had performed abysmally alongside their Canadian rivals. But in portraying Pontiac and his people as the long-suffering victims of wanton abuse at the hands of the English, Rogers unabashedly affirmed that the Indian trade, despite its potential for ensuring a peaceful coexistence, had been perverted into a breeding ground for hatred and violence.

The full extent to which the English failed to harness the fur trade to greater imperial purposes can be grasped only in reference to the relationship of commerce and alliance in the Algonquian societies of the Great Lakes-Ohio Valley region. Though it is as hazardous to posit generalizations about "Indians"--whether Ojibwas, Ottawas, Delawares, or Miamis--as to conflate the motives and methods of "Europeans," it is evident that Indians were on the whole less likely to understand the exchange of pelts and skins for manufactured goods as an exclusively "economic" transaction. As Richard White has suggested, the native conception of material exchange was enmeshed in a web of social, cultural, political, and military associations that did not allow for easy translation into the traditional European terms of markets, price, and profit. Trade satisfied far more than the basic material needs of its Algonquian participants. "The goal of the transaction was not necessarily profit-- securing the maximum material advantage," White suggests. Of greater importance was the need to "satisfy the *besoins*, or needs of each party." As such, the context in which the two parties interacted took on far greater significance than

what was actually exchanged; if no previous relationship existed between trading partners, one had to be created. The buyer's demands thus often overshadowed the opportunistic advantage of the seller. "The greater the need--provided a social relationship had been established," White notes, "the greater the claim of the buyer on the seller." In this sense the Indian conception of exchange was virtually the inverse of the European: far more than a series of self-interested transactions between virtual strangers, the fur trade implied a socially and culturally mediated exchange of material items that manifested a more complex and continuous relationship in which "buyer" and "seller" were encouraged, indeed required, to sustain a mutual respect for one another's welfare.<sup>3</sup>

The apparent divergence of Indian economic behavior from the ostensibly "rational," "buy cheap and sell dear" European norm has fueled what most scholars now consider to be a defunct dispute between a "substantivist" position that argues for a "culturally relative" approach to understanding the trade in which non-economic motives take precedence over simple calculations of profit, versus a "formalist" model in which all humans are assumed to approach the same problems of subsistence and exchange in a universally "logical" and calculating manner. This rather artificial dichotomy is not particularly useful in describing Indian-European relations in the fur trade because it slights the complexity of the ongoing process of contact and accommodation within various regions and between different groups, as well as

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<sup>3</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 94-98.

overlooking the fact that each party could subsequently reformulate or modify its conception of exchange in order to better serve its own interests. White, for example, deliberately steers clear of the substantivist-formalist debate by acknowledging that both the Indians and the French were forced to seek a "middle ground" that privileged the Indian conception of trade as symbolic of alliance and mutual responsibility as well as the French desire for profits. The Indians were thus drawn as much into a new world of transatlantic merchant capitalism as were the French into the realm of native tradition and practice.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Bruce Trigger blurs the lines between "rational" and "culturally contingent" conceptions of exchange by asserting that Indian groups with little or no experience with European technology nonetheless underwent a rapid "cognitive reorganization" that allowed them to rationally assess the usefulness of European material culture and subsequently to influence the process of exchange in order to maximize their own advantage. Fundamentally, Trigger posits a "transcendent" human reason equally operative within Indian and European modes of exchange.<sup>5</sup>

Though Indians and Europeans alike may have acted in an similarly rational

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<sup>4</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 95-96.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Trigger, "Early North American Responses to European Contact: Romantic versus Rationalistic Interpretations," *Journal of American History*, 77:4 (1991): 1195-1215. Similarly, Bruce White demonstrates that the Ojibwas and Dakotas adopted French material culture to suit their own specific needs, regardless of whether such goods were deemed "utilitarian" or "nonutilitarian" by European standards. Bruce M. White, "Encounters with Spirits: Ojibwa and Dakota Theories about the French and Their Merchandise," *Ethnohistory*, 41:3 (1994): 369-405.



manner to satisfy their own distinctly different needs, this does not mean that most Indians ever fully accepted what Europeans considered to be normative economic behavior. In fact, there is much evidence to suggest the contrary. Though increasingly implicated in the European mercantile system, the Algonquians of the *pays d'en haut* resolutely clung to certain fundamental notions that frequently baffled English and French observers. The first was a belief in the inherent, fixed value of goods that has been compared to the earlier European conception of a "just price." Though the Indians did gradually accede to the idea of "unit prices" for trade goods as expressed in skins or peltry, they remained generally unwilling to recognize that such prices might fluctuate in response to the unseen forces of supply and demand. And just as their conception of inherent value was uncompromising, so too did their craving for European merchandise remain relatively inelastic as well. The reasons underlying the unbudging nature of native consumer demand are indistinguishably cultural and pragmatic. The accumulation of personal property was generally frowned upon within Algonquian groups; rather, status was measured by generosity and the redistribution of wealth, a fact which inevitably put a fixed ceiling on consumption. Indians were also typically less concerned with stockpiling goods against future wants than their European counterparts and tended to restrict their purchases solely to those goods necessary to satisfy immediate needs. The static level of Indian demand was not solely the product of social encouragements or sanctions, however, for the simple reason that such semi-nomadic peoples were ultimately

constrained by the limits of what they could efficiently transport.<sup>6</sup>

In analyzing the eighteenth-century trading accounts of the Hudson's Bay Company, Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman have statistically demonstrated the financial consequences of a characteristically "Indian" economic mentality by plotting the correlation between fluctuations in the price of beaver and fur receipts. Noting that price and production levels at the Hudson Bay posts appear to have been inversely related, they determined that the Indians's response to improved prices was best described by a "classical backward sloping supply curve." Quite simply, when the price the company paid for beaver rose, an individual Indian consumer could supply his relatively static needs by trading fewer pelts. In so doing, native consumer-producers did not act according to company expectations. While the Europeans expected the incentive of greater "profits"--i.e. higher beaver prices--to spur an increase in fur production, the Indians failed to take advantage of the beneficial terms of trade by purchasing more goods.<sup>7</sup>

In attempting to explain to his confused Hudson's Bay Company superiors why raising the price offered for beaver would not result in greater fur receipts, the trader Andrew Graham remarked that

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<sup>6</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 115-16, 129-131; Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure": An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 161-62, 222-23.

<sup>7</sup> Ray and Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure,"* 218-19; E. E. Rich, "Trade Habits and Economic Motivation Among the Indians of North America," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 26:1 (1960): 45-49.

if the trading standard was enlarged in favour of the natives, would ruin it all; for I am certain if the natives were to get any more for their furs, they would catch fewer, which I shall make plainly appear viz. one canoe brings down yearly to the Fort one hundred made beaver in different kinds of furs, and trades with me seventy of the said beaver for real necessaries. The other thirty beaver shall so puzzle him to trade, that he often asks me what he shall buy, and when I make an answer, Trade some more powder, shot, tobacco and hatchets, etc., his answer is, I have traded sufficient to serve me and my family until I see you again next summer; so he will drink one half, and trade the other with me for baubles.<sup>8</sup>

Efforts to introduce novel items to the standard assortment of trade merchandise in hopes of inflating native consumption usually proved futile. Once their basic needs had been met, the Indians simply refused to trade their excess furs for items they considered superfluous and would probably bring fewer pelts or skins to trade the following year. Graham quickly discovered that virtually the only way to coax Indian consumption upward was to provide ample supplies of tobacco and particularly alcohol. These two commodities consistently found an eager market, because of their addictive potential and because both could be consumed in large quantities on the spot, precluding the need to transport it over long distances. Of course, the extent to which various Indian groups reacted to the availability of these products varied greatly. Ample supplies of alcohol, tobacco, or any other merchandise did not necessarily transform Indians into unrepentant consumers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91*, edited by Glyndwr Williams, Publications of the Hudson's Bay Record Society, Vol. 27 (London: The Society, 1969), 263.

<sup>9</sup> Ray and Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure,"* 128-35, 225; Rich, "Trade Habits," 45, 49-50; Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters,*

Though it has been frequently acknowledged that the Indians of the *pays d'en haut* had a relatively stable and limited demand for European goods, the question of native "dependency" in the fur trade still pervades the discussion of Indian-European commercial relations in the eighteenth century. Scholars have for the most part abandoned the earlier formulation that Indian groups succumbed swiftly and inevitably to the allure of superior European technology, in so doing becoming irrevocably dependent for their survival on English or French traders. This position, Toby Morantz insists, is inherently anachronistic because it reads the social, cultural, and economic dissolution of twentieth-century Indian societies into a period in which no such patterns yet existed.<sup>10</sup> Morantz further notes that it is impossible to generalize about Indian dependence in the eighteenth-century fur trade because the rate at which different Indian groups developed trading relationships with Europeans or integrated manufactured goods into their own material culture varied considerably. "It is erroneous to assume that all Indian societies were affected in the same way," Morantz notes, "or that the fur trade was the single cause of social transformation." Regional studies have tended to show that each native group developed its own "special social and cultural accommodations or forms of adaptation" in the trade, and in most cases the new commercial relationships may simply have reinforced "certain societal

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*Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 142-44; White, *Middle Ground*, 131.

<sup>10</sup> Toby Morantz, "Old Texts, Old Questions: Another Look at the Issue of Continuity and the Early Fur-Trade Period," *Canadian Historical Review*, 73:2 (1992): 167, 185-86.

tendencies already in existence."<sup>11</sup>

The emphasis that Morantz places on the persistence and continuity of Indian societies when confronted with the changes wrought by new choices is echoed by Richard White, who argues that the Indian peoples of the Great Lakes did not become "dependent" on European goods during the period of Anglo-French rivalry if dependency implies the "possibility that without European goods and the fur trade the Algonquians would no longer be able to feed, clothe, or house themselves."<sup>12</sup> The *besoins* of the Algonquians may indeed have been limited and the demands of subsistence would always take priority over the acquisition of trade merchandise, but White feels that perhaps the strongest argument against the possibility of Indian dependency in this era is the relatively limited extent of the French trade. Given the cargo capacity of Canadian canoes and the strictly regulated number of *congés* granted for trading expeditions to the *pays d'en haut*, White concludes that the volume of trade merchandise entering the Great Lakes region in the first half of the mid-eighteenth century was simply too modest to have triggered an insatiable demand for European goods. Though he admits that the scale of the fur trade undoubtedly expanded after the 1720s, it was probably the greater demand for woolens and cloth that fuelled the increased consumption. Despite their convenience, textiles alone could not draw Indian consumers helplessly into the snare of commercial capitalism, and French Canadians were simply not able to supply enough merchandise of any

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<sup>11</sup> Morantz, "Old Texts," 167-68, 186.

<sup>12</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 128.

kind to sustain native dependence. As a result, "a preexisting native technology survived for a remarkably long time alongside the new technology," White proposes. "Kettles boiled water, knives cut meat, and guns killed game, but they did not chain their users inevitably, inexorably, and immediately to the will of the suppliers. A far less efficient, but still serviceable, native technology remained available if trade goods were lacking."<sup>13</sup>

The rate at which an Indian group acquired and assimilated European merchandise varied in response to a number of conditions, including the frequency of European trade contact, the amount of goods available, and the degree to which a particular consumer population developed a need or desire for the new merchandise. Though it is impossible to describe with any accuracy the precise nature of individual Indian consumption of trade goods in the eighteenth century, some admittedly limited generalizations can be drawn on the basis of the few records that document Indian trading habits. One such source was unwittingly furnished by George Croghan and his trading associates William Trent, Robert Callender, and Michael Teaffe. Croghan and his fellow traders lost a considerable amount of trade merchandise and skins to the French and allied Indians in the chaotic conditions of the early 1750s. Hounded by creditors demanding payment, Croghan and his agents swore to a series of affidavits in the spring of 1756 describing the extent of their losses and noting the debts that their Indian customers had accrued before the French incursions. These documents are uniquely revealing because they record the names of individuals

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<sup>13</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 132-33.

indebted to Croghan along with the sum they owed, expressed both in deerskins (arbitrarily valued by Croghan at 7 shillings, 6 pence per skin) and Pennsylvania currency.<sup>14</sup>

On the basis of these records it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions concerning the purchasing patterns of Croghan's Indian customer-suppliers in the Ohio country.<sup>15</sup> The mean debt owed to Croghan and company by the 311 individuals identified in the lists was approximately 28 deerskins, or £10.67 Pennsylvania currency (£6.18 sterling). Because the customers are identified by a hodgepodge of names including anglicized forms ("Delaware George," "Robin Hood"), descriptive identifiers ("the Pockmarked Fellow," "the Blind Captain"), English renderings of what were probably Indian titles ("the White Elk," "the Bear"), and attempted transcriptions of native names ("Bucksenutha," "Porquenish") it is often difficult to ascertain whether the individual was male or female. That women were indebted to Croghan and company is clear from these accounts, however. Somewhat less than a

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<sup>14</sup> These affidavits are filed together in the George Croghan Section of the Cadwallader Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The total value of the traders' losses, including merchandise, skins, peltry, and Indian debts, was listed at £6,511 5s. 9d. Pennsylvania currency.

<sup>15</sup> Analysis of these records is complicated by the fact that only one of the six lists was compiled by Croghan himself; the others were drawn up and sworn to by one of Croghan's agents, including Thomas Ward, Patrick Mullen, Samuel Chambers, John Maynard, and David Handpicks. As a result, it was necessary to collate the six lists to determine whether more than one agent had "trusted out" merchandise to the same Indian customer, a process which is further confused by the tendency of various traders to have rendered what appear to be the same Indian names in different, though phonetically similar, forms (e.g. "Wageleme," "Wegalame," and "Weygelami"). When it seemed warranted, such variants were assumed to refer to the same individual and the separate debts were collapsed into a single entry.

quarter of the debtors are referred to not by their own name, but rather in reference to another individual ("the White Mingo's brother," "the Big Homini's friend"). It is possible that others with ambiguous or Indian names might have been women, but at least twelve individuals (slightly less than 4 percent of all customers) can be identified with certainty as female because they are denoted as someone's mother, sister, or daughter. The mean debt of these women, 8 skins or £3.1875 (£1.85 sterling), was significantly less than the overall average. The fact that at least a handful of women kept their own individual accounts with Croghan, however, is telling in its own right, particularly since the role of native women in the eighteenth-century fur trade is still not well understood. White speculates that the amount of time native women spent making clothing would have been substantially reduced by the availability of European textiles and finished clothing items, though to what extent this surplus time and energy would have been channeled into preparing the greater number of skins and pelts necessary to supply such cloth and woolens is unclear.<sup>16</sup> Though the women trading with Croghan would not have hunted deer, they nonetheless appear to have wielded at least some degree of personal autonomy in the realm of European-Indian exchange. Indian women of the western Great Lakes often snared small fur-bearing animals, the pelts from which they were free to trade themselves. Croghan and his agents might have credited such peltry to their accounts at a fraction of the rate for deerskins, which may partly explain why the women's debts were significantly lower

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<sup>16</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 132.



than the men's.<sup>17</sup>

Certain potential problems of interpretation arise in assessing Croghan's Indian debts. Since the debts were compiled in the form of affidavits attested to by several different traders, it is apparent that a significant number of Indians purchased goods on credit from more than one of Croghan's agents. In fact, 46 of the 311 individuals mentioned in the accounts (almost 15 percent) had commercial ties to at least two of the traders. This fact underlines the possibility that Croghan's debt records do not necessarily offer an entirely accurate picture of individual consumption patterns because Croghan or his agent may have been only one of several Anglo-American or French traders with whom an Indian dealt. The Moravian missionary David Zeisberger estimated that a single Indian hunter in the Ohio country could kill between 50 and 150 deer each year.<sup>18</sup> Given this rate of potential production, the relatively large number of skins owed to Croghan by certain Indians suggests that some, at least, must have traded almost exclusively with Croghan and company. Forty-eight of the 311 debtors (15.4 percent) owed 50 or more skins, while some 20 individuals (6.4 percent) had debts in excess of 100 skins. These comparatively high figures might suggest that Croghan and his agents allowed certain individuals' debts to accrue over a period of several seasons, but this is unlikely since Croghan and his fellow traders--themselves indebted to Philadelphia merchants--generally expected all

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<sup>17</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1980), 58-59, 71-73.

<sup>18</sup> James P. McClure, "The Ohio Valley's Deerskin Trade: Topics for Consideration," *The Old Northwest*, 15:3 (1990): 116.

advances on merchandise to be repaid immediately after the next hunting season. Many of the Indians who owed fewer than 50 deerskins might not have concentrated on hunting or had less desire or need for goods, and so it is possible that they still may have traded exclusively with Croghan despite their relatively small debts. But it is ultimately impossible, based on the scant sources detailing Indian purchasing patterns, to determine whether Croghan's debt records are representative of broader patterns of native trade-good acquisition or deerskin production. If, as Croghan's accounts suggest, the mean debt of Indian hunters in the Ohio country in the 1750s was about 28 skins, the level of native consumption was relatively moderate and would not have entailed significant alterations to the hunting or subsistence patterns of Indian groups. Evidence submitted by William Johnson in the early 1760s, however, points to the contrary.

Though Croghan and his agents did not itemize the purchases of individual consumers in their accounting of Indian debts, it is still possible to offer a suggestive picture of annual Indian consumption for a slightly later period. In an effort to determine the value of duties he could collect from the sale of trade goods in his northern Indian Department, Johnson estimated the amount and value of all trade merchandise necessary to supply roughly 10,000 Indian hunters, and their wives and children, for an entire year.<sup>19</sup> When Johnson's suggested quantities of trade goods are divided by 10,000, the results represent what each hunter and his wife could be expected to purchase, on average. This included:

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<sup>19</sup> Johnson, "A Scheme for Meeting Expenses of Trade," *WJP*, 4: 559.

2 blankets  
 3 strouds  
 4 shirts  
 4 pairs of stockings  
 1 lap  
 3 pieces of gartering  
 2 pounds of vermilion  
 2,000 grains of black wampum  
 500 grains of white wampum  
 2 knives  
 6 awls  
 1 pound of brass wire  
 0.5 pound of beads  
 1 looking glass  
 1 razor  
 5 gallons of rum  
 8 pounds of gunpowder  
 16 pounds of lead  
 (0.3 trade guns)  
 (0.5 beaver traps)  
 1 axe  
 (1 pound of kettles)  
 and a small number of miscellaneous items, including hair plates, "silver trinkets," calicoes and calimancoes, ribbons, and silk handkerchiefs<sup>20</sup>

Johnson predicted that the wholesale value of the merchandise supplied to the Indian hunters of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley would amount to £179,594

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<sup>20</sup> Obviously, no Indian would have purchased one third of a trade gun, half a beaver trap, or a one-pound kettle. Rather, these fractions represent Johnson's belief that Indian hunters would typically purchase a new gun every three years and a beaver trap biennially. English and French kettles were available in a variety of different sizes, but the Indians generally preferred them smaller and lighter for ease of mobility. The median weight of eighteenth-century trade kettles discovered in the course of underwater archaeological investigations at rapids along canoe routes is in the range of three pounds, eight ounces. According to Johnson's figures, it is reasonable to assume that a kettle might be replaced every three or four years. See Dean Lloyd Anderson, "Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives on European Trade Goods in the Western Great Lakes Region," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Michigan State University, 1992), 130-31.

sterling. Assuming, as did Johnson, that the traders earned 100 percent profit on the sale of these goods, the average annual purchase of each Indian "head of household" would have amounted to £36 sterling, six times more than the mean debt owed to Croghan a decade before. Using Croghan's standard of 7 shillings, six pence (£0.2169 sterling) per deerskin, each hunter would have been required to hunt about 166 deer to supply his family with trade merchandise, somewhat beyond the upper limit of Zeisberger's estimate of their annual potential. Johnson may have been overly optimistic about the purchasing power of the Indians in his northern department, but if his calculations were accurate they suggest that by the 1760s, at least, the Indians of the *pays d'en haut* were necessarily more reliant in the fur/skins trade than they had been earlier in the century.

Johnson's assumptions about Indian consumption otherwise hold few surprises. He reasonably expected that each year an Indian family would need a few articles of clothing, a couple of blankets, and some new tools. But two items, rum and guns, warrant greater attention because of their salience in the debate surrounding the issue of native dependency and the fur trade. Considering the extent to which both English and French observers in the eighteenth century remarked on the widespread nature of Indian alcohol abuse, Johnson's estimates of alcohol consumption seem remarkably low. If a "family" of two adults together consumed five gallons of alcohol per year, they drank less than one ounce per day each, hardly enough to sustain rampant or prolonged alcoholism. In fact, the amount of rum Johnson expected to be sold to each Indian was probably less than the average consumption of their Anglo-Americans

neighbors.<sup>21</sup> Taking into account the litany of abuses that attended the widespread use of rum in the Indian trade and his own personal desire to carefully regulate its sale, Johnson almost certainly undervalued the amount of alcohol that ultimately reached the trading posts of the Northwest. But even had far greater quantities of alcohol flowed into the *pays d'en haut*, it is unlikely that the majority of Indians consumed more alcohol per capita than their hard-drinking American neighbours.

Native drinking practices, particularly the unrestrained "bingeing" that was generally thought to be characteristic of Indian groups, has elicited intense scrutiny from outside observers, whether European colonists and missionaries or modern ethnohistorians, anthropologists, and sociologists.<sup>22</sup> Indian alcoholic behavior has been variously explained as the mimicking of the traders' own drinking patterns, a means to attain heightened spiritual awareness, a response to internal group tensions, and the expression of the frustration and anxiety associated with the breakdown of "traditional" native social and cultural life. In his analysis of the journal of François Victor Malhiot, an early nineteenth-century trader in the western Great Lakes region, Jack Waddell measured the quantity, frequency, variability, rate, duration, and

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<sup>21</sup> During the colonial period the annual per capita consumption of hard liquor (primarily rum) increased gradually to 3.7 gallons just before the Revolution, and peaked at 5 gallons in the 1820s. These figures do not include significant quantities of beer, wine, and cider. W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 7-9.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most thorough contemporary analysis of Indian alcohol abuse was offered by the Sulpician missionary François Vachon de Belmont at the end of the seventeenth century. Belmont's original text, *Histoire de l'Eau-de-Vie en Canada*, is translated in "Belmont's History of Brandy," edited by Joseph P. Donnelly, *Mid-America*, 34:1 (1952): 42-63.

context of Chippewa alcohol behavior. Waddell notes that the per capita level of alcohol consumption is less revealing than the nature of the drinking itself. Alcohol was more likely to be consumed in several concentrated episodes, not gradually over an extended period of time. Such binges heightened the potential for social disruption and violence, but only until the limited supply of liquor was exhausted. Waddell concludes that the Chippewa, at least, "were no more or no less abusive in their uses of alcohol, when it was periodically available, than any other population--including Malhiot's own workers, under similar circumstances."<sup>23</sup> As in the case of the Chippewa, the prevalence of social disruption and addiction in any other Indian group would ultimately have hinged on the availability and cost of alcohol, in addition to a variety of other social, cultural, and practical considerations, not the least of which involved the potentially negative influence of European traders.

In the popular imagination, at least, the Indians' craving for guns is believed to have been nearly as potent as their unquenchable thirst for alcohol. Despite the fact that guns, gunpowder, lead, flints, and all the peripheral equipment necessary for the use and maintenance of firearms were perennial staples of the trade, it appears that even by the early 1760s Indian hunters were hardly helpless in their absence. According to Johnson's accounting each native hunter might purchase roughly eight pounds of gunpowder annually. Firing a single shot with the standard eighteenth-century British military musket--the lethal, if wildly inaccurate, "Brown Bess"--

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<sup>23</sup> Jack O. Waddell, "Malhiot's Journal: An Ethnohistoric Assessment of Chippewa Alcohol Behavior in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Ethnohistory*, 32:3 (1985): 246-68.

expended 100 grams of powder, though trade guns may have required somewhat less depending on their size and the load used.<sup>24</sup> Eight pounds of powder might therefore have supplied the purchaser with no more than 40 or 50 shots at best. Even if he was a crack shot, an Indian primarily hunting deer could not have taken more than a third of the skins necessary to purchase Johnson's reputed "average" supply of trade goods using his gun. It is more likely that Indian consumers arrived to trade with a variety of different furs and skins, many of which had been snared in the beaver and brass-wire traps noted in Johnson's list of essential merchandise. Bow-hunting must also have continued to supplement guns notoriously prone to misfire and breakage and which rapidly exhausted costly powder supplies. Indian gun use, it appears, may have loomed larger in the anxieties of frontier settlers than in the mundane reality of production for the fur trade.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Operating any type of firearm in the eighteenth century was a potentially costly proposition, and gunpowder was the most expensive component of the hunter's arsenal. Depending on the gauge of the gun and the type of shot, 12 to 18 balls might be cast from a pound of lead. Gunflints were also essential to the effective operation of the firearm; though they were relatively inexpensive, they were rapidly depleted. It has been estimated that in ideal conditions a flintlock user could expect a misfire rate in the range of 20 to 25 percent if the flint was replaced after 15 shots, with proportionately better reliability if changed after 10 or fewer firings. See Brian J. Given, *A Most Pernicious Thing: Gun Trading and Native Warfare in the Early Contact Period* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994), 98, 109, 110.

<sup>25</sup> "It is evident that in terms of accuracy," Given claims, "rate of fire, misfire rate, availability and repairability, the bow is clearly superior to the musket." An experienced Bowman might get off five to twelve times the number of shots as a proficient gun user, and the bow itself was easier to obtain, repair, and supply with ammunition. The bow was lighter, easier to transport, and had the advantage of "reliability and silence." *A Most Pernicious Thing*, 109-110. Conversely, Ray suggests that the gun might have been more efficient in forest hunting because of its greater "stopping power," which precluded the lengthy pursuit of wounded game.

Whether purchasing alcohol, the accoutrements necessary to operating a gun, or the countless other manufactured items supplied by European traders, Indians soon became critical consumers by even the strictest European standards, carefully noting the quality, durability, and effectiveness of each item and demanding that they be given "good measure," or what they understood to be a fair price. When Johnson ordered blankets from his London supplier William Baker, for example, his niggling precision echoed the exacting standards of his Indian customers. "Please to observe the greatest fault of the Blankets formerly sent me," he warned, "was that they were woven too Close, & the Wool too Short & Coarse, besides the letters, and other marks, Selvage &ca were not exactly the same of the Pattern, nor so neat, all which the Ind<sup>ns</sup>. are verry [sic] curious In."<sup>26</sup> With well-defined expectations of both cost and value, the native consumer, far more than the merchant or trader, dictated the type and style of goods that were consumed in the trade and to some extent the rates of exchange. From the Indian perspective, the cessation of trade involved merely the inconvenience of a resort to less efficient technology, but to the trader or merchant Indian dissatisfaction spelled financial disaster. This fact was foremost in the minds of frustrated Canadian and Anglo-American merchants and colonial officials who lodged regular complaints with their suppliers concerning the minutest stylistic or technical flaws in their merchandise. Aside from whatever unique cultural and

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Regardless, once guns had been incorporated into the hunt, they became increasingly essential as Indians gradually lost their skill with bows. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 73.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson to William Baker, 24 December 1752. *WJP*, 1: 384.



economic assumptions the Indian consumers brought to the fur trade, they acted as "rationally" as any European consumer in assessing the value of manufactured goods in light of their own particular needs and experience.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the distinctive language or behavior individual Indians were likely to use in the context of trade, however, an inexperienced observer of such transactions could easily have overestimated Indian dependence on the trader when the reverse was actually the case. Though Ray interprets the typical Indian plea in the Hudson Bay trade to "take pity on us" as mere politeness, Mary Black-Rogers suggests that the self-deprecating language commonly used by Indians as a precursor to trade carried more subtly encoded meanings. Noting the frequency of recorded instances in which Indians referred to themselves as "starving," or asked for "pity" from traders, Black-Rogers understands such language in the context of a variety of different linguistic functions. Using similar phraseology, Indians could literally describe conditions of deprivation with specific reference to the disadvantageous terms of trade which forced them to neglect subsistence activities in order to produce sufficient pelts or skins for trade. But in many cases such pleas expressed more than a literal description of want. In many Indian groups the process of self-humbling was actively encouraged, while boasting of one's relative power or prestige was frowned upon as "ignoble" and, in the context of fur-trade negotiations, imprudent. If Indian-European exchange implied the creation of a relationship of mutual support, the appearance of humility or weakness had a distinct advantage to an Indian "whose

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<sup>27</sup> Ray and Freeman, *"Give Us Good Measure,"* 226-27.

cultural wisdom taught him long ago to appear powerless in order to wield power." Finally, Black-Rogers does not discount the possibility that such self-deprecatory remarks may also have been merely examples of native humor misunderstood by somber Europeans.<sup>28</sup>

An individual Indian's use of a "ritual" humility may have served the pragmatic purposes of negotiating better terms of trade, but it is also clear that similar conceptions of dependency and mutual obligation were translated into far broader and inclusive appeals in the course of Indian-European diplomatic and military relations. As viewed by White, the alliance of the French and Algonquian peoples and Europeans in the "middle ground" of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley was formulated in terms of the relationship between a French "father" or "Onontio" and his Indian "children." The exchange of material goods thus necessarily become a crucial component of their mutual responsibility. Because these obligations were met through a variety of channels besides straightforward trade, including gift-giving and other diplomatic exercises, the Algonquians conceived of the fur trade not so much as a discretely commercial relationship, but rather as a thread in the complex fabric of relations which bound the two parties together in alliance. Thus, when Indians expected to receive "good measure" or *bon marché*, they embedded their own conception of exchange into the very core of political and diplomatic relations.

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<sup>28</sup> Arthur J. Ray, "Indians as Consumers in the Eighteenth Century," in *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, edited by Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 253; Mary Black-Rogers, "Varieties of "Starving": Semantics and Survival in the Subarctic Fur Trade, 1750-1850," *Ethnohistory*, 33:4 (1986): 353-83.

"The idea of a *bon marché* was flexible enough to encompass both a French profit and the Algonquian notion of a father's generosity to his children," White proposes, "but the room to maneuver within it remained limited. To violate the compromise worked out for exchange on the middle ground and exact excessive prices threatened the entire structure of relations."<sup>29</sup> From the French perspective, the perpetuation of an equitable and mutually beneficial trade relationship was critical to the continued profitability of the trade. If traders violated the precepts of *bon marché*, they risked both the loss of commerce and the possibility of violence.<sup>30</sup> But the true engine that drove the often tenuous process of accommodation in the fur trade was not profit but rather the overarching fact of Anglo-French competition for the allegiance of the Indians of the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley. Without a properly sanctioned trade, there was no possibility of a reliable alliance with the Indians, and without alliance there was a greatly diminished chance of diplomatic or military success.

No one recognized this fundamental fact of the "middle ground" more than the Indians involved in the eighteenth-century trade, who consistently employed the fact of Anglo-French rivalry to their own advantage. Whether in the hinterlands of the northwestern Great Lakes or the hunting territories of the Ohio country, Indian groups consistently exploited the competition between rival European traders both to ameliorate the terms of trade and to ensure that the quality of manufactured goods

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<sup>29</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 97-119; quotation at 119.

<sup>30</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 57.

remained high. Those Indians with ready access to both Canadian and Anglo-American trading centers were best able to profit from competitive conditions, but usually the mere threat of taking their commerce to the "opposition" had the desired effect. If Indian consumers told the French that English woolens were superior or complained to the English that French powder was cheaper and more effective, it was because such complaints, whether true or not, made good economic sense. As long as Canadian and Anglo-American traders kept a watchful eye on the quality and price of their competitors' merchandise and accordingly strove to improve the quality of their own goods, Indian consumers gladly reaped the ultimate reward.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ray, "Indians as Consumers," 267.

## CHAPTER V

### FURS AND SKINS, HEARTS AND MINDS

The most inveterate enemies of Anglo-American officials in the eighteenth century did not speak French. In fact, far more imperialist ink was spilled decrying the misdeeds of New York and Pennsylvania traders than damning their foreign rivals. Even at the height of the European contest for trade and empire in the Great Lakes and Ohio country, the most rabidly anti-French Americans grudgingly admitted that the French Canadians had enjoyed significantly more success in reaping the benefits of an "enlightened" trade: a coherent and well-regulated enterprise directed to serve a greater diplomatic end that was notably free of the sabotaging effects of fraud and abuse so familiar in the context of the English commerce.

Those Anglo-American officials most steeped in Indian affairs--William Johnson, Cadwallader Colden, Edmond Atkin, and Peter Wraxall, among others--recognized that the French had always enjoyed every possible advantage over them in the conduct of the trade and would continue to do so after the Conquest. These men had long been suspicious of the motives and means of the French enterprise in North America but had learned to respect its results. "Far from approving all the inhuman, mean & infamous Methods they have taken to establish their present extensive

Influence in these parts of the World," Wraxall allowed, "it is however to be wished that we had looked forwards as much as they have done & been as industrious to lay a foundation for our future Security and Commerce."<sup>1</sup> It was apparent to American imperialists that, in the words of the Pennsylvanian Charles Thomson, "the *English* might easily have engrossed the Trade, and secured the Affections, of many of the *Indian* nations; whereas, by neglecting this, and suffering a Parcel of Banditti, under the character of Traders, to run up and down from one *Indian* Town to another, cheating and debauching the *Indians*, we have given them an ill Opinion of our Religion and Manners, and lost their Esteem and Friendship."<sup>2</sup>

The reasons underlying French superiority seemed obvious to those who had any experience in the conduct of Indian relations. For all their boasts of superior manufactured goods, shorter trade routes, and higher peltry prices, the colonial Americans themselves offered the most exacting and damning account of their failure to effectively challenge the French for the western trade. Even after the creation of the Indian superintendencies in 1756, the seaboard provinces patently failed to effectively regulate either their trade or their traders. In this vacuum of authority, too many self-interested and unlicensed agents had ruthlessly pursued profits at the expense of their Indian customers, flooded the frontier with rum, and brazenly ignoring the inevitable political fallout of their misconduct. Even when they did

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Wraxall, *AIA*, 180n.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Thomson, *An Enquiry Into the Causes and Alienation of the Delaware and Shawanese Indians from the British Interest, and Into the Measures Taken for Recovering Their Friendship* (London: J. Wilkie, 1759), 75.

occasionally acknowledge the intertwined nature of commerce and alliance, the traders showed a disturbing tendency to take diplomatic matters into their own hands and act at cross-purposes to their disheartened governments. Too often the trade was relinquished, by default or design, to ill-educated and overzealous underlings with little to lose and much to gain from illegitimate business practices. When not tampering with fraudulent weights and measures or championing the cause of Indian intoxication, some reckless traders used the liberal extension of credit to draw Indian customers into a web of perpetual debt before stepping casually aside when native resentment flared.

The French, meanwhile, appeared to have overcome their "inherent" economic liabilities by efficiently employing the trade to ensure the loyalty of their Indian trading partners. "We must look . . . into the Conduct and Management of the French," warned Edmond Atkin, the southern Superintendent of Indian Affairs, in his 1755 report to the Board of Trade. Only by practicing analogous "Arts," he professed, could the English hope to gain any measurable competitive advantage. "Under a Commerce clogged with a most hazardous Navigation & expensive Transportation of Goods, with the additional load of paying all the Charges of their Government, and under a total inability at any rate of supplying all the wants of the Indians," Atkin allowed, "they [the French] have still gain'd their Affections, and consequently that surprising Influence which we have felt."<sup>3</sup> Atkin may have

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<sup>3</sup> Edmond Atkin, *The Appalachian Indian Frontier: The Edward Atkin Report and the Plan of 1755*, edited by Wilbur R. Jacobs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 9.

exaggerated the handicaps facing the French, but he certainly did not overestimate their successes. Even if the New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians could somehow consistently supply better goods at cheaper rates--an unlikely supposition in itself--this ability alone hardly guaranteed the continuing commerce or ardent allegiance of native customers who were perennially cheated and scorned by unscrupulous vendors.

Unwilling to forsake the hoary doctrine that New Yorkers possessed "many natural and constitutional advantages over the French," Wraxall determined that only the "Base and Artful Measures" of the French could have enabled them to sustain a stranglehold on the trade of the western Great Lakes. "More honesty & Generosity on our side," he granted, "would have in great measure defeated the whole System of French Policy, but on the contrary we have aided their Views by our Dishonesty & Oppression with regard to our Trade with the Indians."<sup>4</sup> Atkin similarly concluded that the fraudulent dealings of English traders probably obliterated any potential commercial advantage they might have wielded over the French. Though the South Carolinian accepted the dubious premise that his New York brethren could easily furnish goods "at near half the price that the French can from Montreal," whether any savings were actually passed on to the Indians, Atkins allowed, remained "a Question."<sup>5</sup>

Years after the French had been "subdued" on paper, Anglo-American merchants and officials remained haunted by the specter of French success in the

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<sup>4</sup> Wraxall, *AIA*, 205n.

<sup>5</sup> Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 14.



West. Describing the Illinois trade in 1765, Johnson lamented that the Indians persisted in dealing almost exclusively with French-speaking traders. This dogged commercial loyalty, he speculated, was compounded by the failure of the new American traders to earn the trust of the local Indians. "His Majesties Subjects in this Country," he noted,

seem very ill Calculated to Cultivate a good understanding with the Indians, and this a Notorious proof of it, for notwithstanding the Expence of transporting Goods from New Orleans to the *Illinois* is greater than by the Lakes, and Consequently French Goods are in general dearer than ours, yet such is the Conduct of all persons under the Crown of France whether Officers, Agents, or Traders that the Indians will go much farther to buy their goods and pay a much higher price for them. This all persons acquainted with the Nature of the Commerce to the Westward can fully Evidence.<sup>6</sup>

Just as the wily McDole and Murphey took center stage in Rogers's dramatic portrayal of Pontiac's uprising, the notoriously unreliable trader figured prominently in the imagination of frustrated officials grappling with the manifold challenges of Anglo-Indian relations. Those few well-connected traders such as Croghan with considerable investments in the frontier trade were probably more scrupulous in their treatment of Indian customers. The frequency and acrimony with which American officials complained of their behavior, however, suggests that the myth of the

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson to the Lords of Trade, 16 November 1765, *IHC*, 11: 117-18.

dishonest trader was unfortunately grounded more in fact than fiction.<sup>7</sup> In Johnson's opinion, the men who gravitated to the trade were those sufficiently fluent in Indian languages but uncertain enough in their financial prospects to be attracted by cheap credit and the promise of quick and easy profits. Unfortunately, they also tended to be, in Atkins's description, "the loosest kind of People" and were accordingly "despis'd and held in great Contempt by the Indians as Liars, and Persons regarding nothing but their own Gain."<sup>8</sup>

English traders had not always been so universally unsavory. Johnson dated the precipitous decline of collective commercial character from the later 1740s, since few experienced traders had returned to the business after the disruptions of King George's War. Since that time, however, "the profits made by a few" in the trade had "induced such Numbers to embark in it, amongst Whom were the very Dregs of the people, such as discharged *Provincial Soldiers, Batteaumen &ca.*"<sup>9</sup> But most of

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<sup>7</sup> "That Croghan followed honest trading methods did not necessarily connote an innate streak of nobility in his character," Wainwright allows. "If for no other reasons, he preferred legitimate trading because it would not have paid him to indulge in sharp practices." But, if Croghan was as well-loved by the Indians as Wainwright suggests, his popularity merely underlines the unattractiveness of his fellow traders. Nicholas B. Wainwright, *George Croghan: Wilderness Diplomat* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 67. Jacobs agrees that most established traders were less aggressively opportunistic than their employees or unlicensed competitors, but even the most respected traders were not always above suspicion. "Most traders seemed to have accepted the premise," he suggests, "that the Indian trade permitted ethical standards other than those used in transactions with whites." Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Dispossessing the American Indian: Indians and Whites on the Colonial Frontier* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 32, 33-34.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, "Review of the Trade and Affairs in the Northern District in America," 22 September 1767, *IHC*, 16: 25; Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 8.

the problem of personnel predated this period; Johnson and others pointed to the fact that it had always been a relatively easy matter to obtain trade merchandise on credit and set up shop as an Indian trader, regardless of attitude or aptitude. In many instances, Atkin noted, even the established, trustworthy traders habitually left their affairs in the hands of ill-qualified servants and even "Pack horse Men," whose unsupervised behavior was easier "conceived than described."<sup>10</sup>

Most disparaging Anglo-American observers (with the emphasis on "Anglo") implied that the ethnicity of the traders was tantamount to fraud. They never failed to note that the Dutch, rivaled only by the Scots-Irish, had been among the worst offenders in the trade and were accordingly responsible for any lingering native resentment of the English. Notoriously hostile to the Albany Dutch, Wraxall peppered his abridgment of the minutes of New York's commissioners of Indian affairs with scathing rebukes of his neighbors, blaming their characteristically sharp trading practices for New York's checkered history of Indian relations.<sup>11</sup> From the earliest days of the trade, when the Iroquois and "western" tribes travelled to Albany with their furs, the *handlaers* had taken every possible advantage of their native

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 38; Thomas Elliot Norton, *The Fur Trade in Colonial New York, 1686-1776* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 214.

<sup>10</sup> Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> "The Complaints of the Indians upon the dearness of Goods & the unfair treatment they meet with from the Traders," Wraxall reported, "are so very frequent thro-ought the whole Records that tho I have several times noted 'em in these Abstracts I have more frequently omitted them." For all his self-professed restraint, however, Wraxall's anti-Dutch editorial remarks border on the pathological. Wraxall, *ALA*, 205n.

customers, he alleged. The Dutch preyed upon unwitting Indians, luring them into their houses to trade, then inciting them to drunkenness before spiriting away their furs for a pittance. In some cases, Wraxall claimed, greedy Dutchmen sank so low as to buy goods distributed as official presents to the Indians, only to sell them back within a few days at greatly advanced prices. "Our Dutch reptiles," he hissed, "considered nothing but their present profit, & were animated by no Views to Posterity, w<sup>ch</sup> is the genuine Character of true Dutchmen." Since the Indians "have often laid it down as a fundamental Maxim that their Connexions with us arose from & depended on trade," Wraxall contended, Dutch commercial abuses ultimately paved the way for the "Progress of the French."<sup>12</sup>

Though none could match Wraxall for ferocity of invective, it is clear that his fellow New York imperialists shared similar ethnic prejudices. Johnson did not go so far as to accuse New York's traders of complicity with the French, but he made it clear that being the "posterity of the Low Dutch," they were naturally frugal and so had no interest in "extending the trade" but were content merely to barter enough to maintain themselves "in idleness" for the rest of the year.<sup>13</sup> Though his criticism was more subtle than Wraxall's, Johnson's message was essentially the same. The New York fur trade had never reached its full potential as a diplomatic tool because the traders had been more interested in their own petty profits than in greater imperial transactions.

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<sup>12</sup> Wraxall, *AIA*, 132n., 180n. 205n.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 3: 25-26.

If the Dutch were the great villains of the New York fur trade, the Scots-Irish were similarly the scapegoats of Pennsylvania's equally dysfunctional frontier commerce. Described uncharitably as "a sett of the most debased banditti that ever infested a government, the greater part gaol gleaning and the refuse of Ireland," the Ohio Valley deerskin traders soon earned the derision of Philadelphia legislators driven to despair by the endless complaints of disgruntled Delaware and Shawnee emissaries.<sup>14</sup> The colonial assembly, showing increasing concern for Indian relations in the days preceding the outbreak of full-fledged war with the French, lamented "the miserable situation of our *Indian* trade carried on (some few excepted) by the vilest of our own Inhabitants and Convicts imported from *Great-Britain* and *Ireland*, by which means the *English* Nation is unhappily represented among our *Indian* Allies in the most disagreeable Manner."<sup>15</sup> It was easy, in retrospect, for prim Pennsylvanians to foist blame for the decrepit state of Anglo-Indian relations on Scots-Irish "convicts" and troublemakers. But whatever their pedigree, many deerskin traders admittedly used remarkably poor judgment--and equally remarkable quantities of liquor--in their dealings with the Indians of the Ohio Valley.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> John Baynton and Samuel Wharton to Richard Neave, 1 July 1760, quoted in Wainwright, *George Croghan*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> Thomson, *An Enquiry*, 76.

<sup>16</sup> Jennings suggests that as a result of their peculiar historical experience, the Scots-Irish more than any group in Pennsylvania's backcountry were "accustomed to the invader's role and practices" and carried with them a "hatred of both overlords and natives." Francis Jennings, *The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from its beginnings to the Lancaster Treat of 1744* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), 348-50.

Most New Yorkers believed, justifiably, that the *handlaers* had been guilty of their fair share of fraudulent dealings when the Indians had come directly to trade at Albany. They hoped, however, that the new post at Oswego could be better governed to prevent any further alienation of the colony's Indian allies and trading partners. Despite the presence of a commissioner charged with overseeing the day-to-day conditions of the trade, it soon became clear that the Oswego traders were no less likely to cheat the Indians than their much maligned Albany counterparts.<sup>17</sup> Peter Kalm, the peripatetic Swede, came away from a brief visit to the lakeside post convinced that the Indians were "frequently cheated in disposing of their goods, especially when they are in liquor" and that "sometimes they do not get one half of the value of their goods."<sup>18</sup> On a similar visit, Pennsylvania naturalist John Bartram optimistically detailed the measures recently taken at Oswego to prevent such violations, though his description of the alleged reforms reads less like a paean to the improved character of the trade than a commentary on past abuses. Bartram noted that the town consisted of about 70 houses in two opposing rows. Indians arriving for trade were lodged in their own dwellings, where all exchanges were to be conducted. "This is surely an excellent regulation for preventing the traders from imposing on the *Indians*," Bartram opined, "a practice which they have been formerly too guilty of, and which has frequently involved the *English* colonies in difficulties, and constantly

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<sup>17</sup> Governor Montgomerie to the Lords of Trade, 29 August 1729, *NYCD*, 5: 896; Montgomerie to the Lords of Trade, 21 December 1730, *NYCD*, 5: 907.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Kalm, *Travels Into North America*, translated by John Reinhold Forster (Barre, Massachusetts: The Imprint Society, 1972), 331-32.

tended to depreciate us in the esteem of the natives." Bartram further noted that the post's "chief officer" kept a watchful eye for Indians arriving by water, sending out a canoe to guide them safely to the fort to prevent any overambitious traders from offering the traditional Oswego welcome: "inciting them with spiritous liquors" and relieving them of their peltry. The commander was also vigilant to prevent the eruption of violence, ensuring that "all quarelling [sic], and even the least misunderstanding, when any happens, be quickly made up in an amicable manner," thus precluding the "disagreeable consequences of an *Indians* endeavouring to right himself by force."<sup>19</sup>

Bartram's claim that the Oswego trade had been remedied proved optimistic. While concerned New York officials agonized over how to curb continuing abuses at the only Anglo-American post on the Great Lakes, the Indians continued to suffer at the hands of ruthless traders. As filtered through English records, the Iroquois and western Indians who traded with the New Yorkers recounted an embarrassingly familiar narrative of victimization and mistreatment. To illustrate the ease with which his painstaking diplomatic efforts could be ruined by a single reckless trader, Johnson graphically recounted the most alarming instances of fraud. Drawing from a "Variety

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<sup>19</sup> Bartram seems implicitly to have grasped the interrelatedness of trade and diplomacy and the danger of ignoring this fact. The Indians "can scarcely be blamed for judging of a nation, by the behaviour of those with whom they have the most intercourse," Bartram suggested, "a judgment I am sorry to confess that has (till lately) tended much to the making them in favour rather of the French, than English." John Bartram, *Observations on the Inhabitants, Climate, Soil, Rivers, Productions, Animals, and other matters worthy of notice, Made By Mr. John Bartram, In his Travels from Pensilvania to Onondago, Oswego and the Lake Ontario, in Canada* (London: J. Whiston and B. White, 1751), 48-50.

of unheard of frauds," he recounted the tale of an influential Ottawa chief who brought his packs of peltry to an Oswego trader in order to "try the Market."

The Trader after the usual practice of deceiving him in the Weight hurried the peltry into a private room telling the Indian that all Merchandise was very dear, owing to the Severity of dutys (a Stale, but dangerous Artifice still practised) desired him to choose out what goods he wanted, the Indian having made a Choice was astonished to find that his Skins produced not one third of what he had been Accustomed to receive for the like Quantity (for the Trader had besides his Extortion on the goods reckoned the peltry at only one Third of its real weight) went away discontented but returning Said he was Ashamed to go back with Such Small returns begged for a small keg of rum which the Trader gave him as he said as a high favor but on opening the keg soon after his departure it proved to be Water.<sup>20</sup>

This incident, among others, resulted in the loss of "the Trade and Affections" of the Ottawas he had long labored to attract to Oswego. Yet another Ottawa chief, Johnson recalled, had purchased thirty small kegs of rum for a "General feast." Claiming that he would be punished for allowing them too much alcohol, the scheming trader cautioned his customers not to open them until they had returned home. When the Ottawas thirstily opened the kegs before reaching Niagara, however, they too tasted Lake Ontario's waters. "This has been often acknowledged by these Traders," Johnson claimed, "and on its coming to the knowledge of the

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<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 28-29. Fraudulent use of weights and measures was characteristic of the Anglo-American trade. Kennedy called for "proper Regulations for the Trade" that would prevent the Indians from being "so unmercifully imposed upon, both in Weight and Measure, as well as in Quality and Prices, which has almost alienated their Hearts from us." Archibald Kennedy, *Serious Considerations on the Present State of the Affairs of the Northern Colonies* (New York, 1754), 11; see also Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 26; Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 22; Peter Wraxall, "Some Thoughts Upon the British Interest in North America, More Particularly as it Relates to the Northern Confederacy Commonly Called the Six Nations," 9 January 1756, *NYCD*, 7: 27.



French, they made so good a Use of it, that these People and all their friends were ever after our most implacable enemys."<sup>21</sup>

Johnson's last woeful yarn concerned a Seneca warrior whose "influence and abilities" were legendary and who was only reluctantly won into alliance with the English. In a gesture of good will, Johnson issued a passport for the Seneca and his war party to travel to Schenectady to seek a market for their peltry. Johnson made arrangements in advance for a local fur merchant there to "use them kindly and do them the Strictest Justice," but his carefully laid plans soon went awry. The trader later confessed that "as they were Strangers he had doubled the prices of his goods and allowed them but half the Weight of their peltry." The Senecas were not amused. On their way home the chief sent Johnson a wampum belt to notify him of the treacherous transaction, the details of which were also marked on an axe handle. The chief assured Johnson that he would always have a "personal regard" for him but emphasized that he had no more patience for the English who had too often "served him so." The Seneca leader was so angered by the Schenectady incident, Johnson noted glumly, that he soon pledged his allegiance to the French "who knew how to treat them." In a few days, in fact, the Seneca chief "cut off a large Settlement" and henceforth continued to be "the most Violent Enemy" of the English.<sup>22</sup>

Examples of abuse were hardly limited to the New York trade. In fact, some of the worst examples of flagrant mistreatment were recounted by the Delawares,

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 29.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 29-30.

Shawnees, and Susquehannas who dealt with Pennsylvania deerskin traders. In the Ohio country as on the Great Lakes, most incidents of fraud involved the liberal and often illegal distribution of alcohol. Whenever rum traded hands, the potential for abuse increased markedly. Because it typically bore such a high trader markup, alcohol was virtually the only European product that enjoyed an elastic demand with notoriously tight-fisted Indian customers, and could easily be watered to increase stocks, unscrupulous traders inevitably used alcohol in their commerce.<sup>23</sup> That they frequently succeeded is evident from the Indians' appeals at virtually every colonial Indian conference. Representatives of the Cayugas and other Iroquois nations who met with Governor Patrick Gordon in Philadelphia in the summer of 1727 claimed that "there come many sorts of Traders among them . . . who all Cheat them, and tho' they get their Skins they give them very little in Pay." What the Indians wanted was more gunpowder and shot for hunting; what they received was rum sold for "at least 3 or 4 times more than it is worth."<sup>24</sup>

Fifteen years later, conditions had only worsened. Speaking through Conrad Weiser, the chiefs of the Six Nations and Delawares addressed Pennsylvania Governor George Thomas:

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<sup>23</sup> "Yet so great is the profit resulting from that Article," Johnson remarked, "and such oppertunitys were thereby furnished for Imposition, that a Great Number of the Traders used every Artifice to induce the Indians to Apply for a Toleration for that Article." Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 37. See also Ray and Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure*, 129-41.

<sup>24</sup> *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, From the Organization to the Termination of the Proprietary Government*, edited by Samuel Hazard (Harrisburg: Theophilus Fenn, 1852), 3: 274.

It is always our Way, at the Conclusion of a Treaty, to desire you will use your Endeavours with the Traders, that they may sell their Goods cheaper, and give us a better Price for our Deer-Skins. Whenever any particular Sort of Indian Goods is scarce, they constantly make us pay the dearer on that Account. We must now use the same Argument with them: Our Deer are killed in such Quantities, and our Hunting-Countries grown less every Day by the Settlement of white People, that Game is now difficult to find, and we must go a great Way in quest of it; they therefore ought to give us a better Price for our Skins; and we desire you would speak to them to do so.<sup>25</sup>

For all his evident concern, Thomas had made little progress in restraining the Ohio traders. He admitted that the Indians frequently made allegations concerning "divers gross irregularities and abuses" in the trade. Alcohol was consistently at the root of these problems. "I cannot but be apprehensive that the Indian trade as it is now carry'd on will involve us in some fatal Quarrel with the Indians," Thompson admitted.

Our Traders in Defiance of the Law carry Spiritous Liquors amongst them, and take the Advantage of their inordinate Appetite for it to cheat them of their Skins and their Wampum, which is their Money, and often to debauch their Wives into the Bargain. Is it to be wondered at then, if when they Recover from the Drunken fit they should take severe Revenges.

Though he promised to encourage more rigid enforcement of licensing laws and to renew the longstanding Pennsylvania prohibition of the transportation of alcohol to the tribes of the Ohio country, Thomas realized that these measures would "avail but little, the ill practices of these people being carry'd on in the Woods, and at such a Distance from the Seat of Government that it will be very difficult to get

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<sup>25</sup> Cadwallader Colden, *HFIN*, 2: 109-10.

Evidences to Convict them."<sup>26</sup>

From his vantage point in South Carolina, Atkin was similarly distressed by the destructive influence of rum trafficking in the Ohio country, noting its pernicious influence in weakening the fabric of native society. The "greatest disorders, and the most pernicious Consequences of all, have been introduced by the many Traders licensed and unlicensed, who have made a constant practice of carrying very little Goods, but chiefly, and for the most part intirely *Rum*," Atkin claimed. In fact, the traders made a practice of placing themselves and large liquid stocks directly in the path of Indian hunters as they returned home with their deerskins. "The poor Indians in a manner fascinated," he remarked,

are unable to resist the Bait; and when Drunk are easily cheated. After parting with the fruit of three or four Months Toil, they find themselves at home, without the means of buying the necessary Clothing for themselves or their Families. Their Domestick and inward Quiet being broke, Reflection sours them, and disposes them for mischief.<sup>27</sup>

If the Anglo-American traders were a uniformly miserable lot, ill-suited to advancing the diplomatic ends of fretting imperialists, the Canadian traders appeared infinitely better suited to winning and keeping the friendship of their Indian trading partners. In the period shortly after the conquest of Canada, Johnson came to realize that the Americans were at a profound disadvantage in competing with the French for the Illinois trade. Proposing that "there is little reason to Expect that our People in

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<sup>26</sup> *PA Council Minutes*, 4: 760-61, 740.

<sup>27</sup> Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 35.

general will ever treat the Indians with the like kindness and Civility," Johnson conceded that the French traders were more adept in the nuances of Indian trade. "By their Superior Adress and knowledge of the different Languages," Johnson noted, "they maintain their Influence, enjoy the Major part of the Trade, whilst our Traders are considered as Interlopers, and have it not in their power to acquire the good Opinion, or even a proper Acquaintance with Indians."<sup>28</sup>

Having lived and traded among the Indians, Croghan was equally familiar with the unparalleled success of the Canadians. In the wake of Pontiac's failed uprising, the veteran trader was not surprised by the allegations of French influence in encouraging the revolt. "They have been bred up Together like Children in that Country," Croghan remarked, "& the French have always adopted the Indians Customs and manners, Treated them Civily & supplied their wants generously, by which means they gained the Hearts of the Indians & commanded their Services, & injoyed the Benefit of a very large Furr Trade."<sup>29</sup> Croghan implicitly recognized a fundamental fact underlying French superiority in the eighteenth-century fur trade: Canadian traders were generally more adept than their Anglo-American rivals at maneuvering within the alien context of Indian society. Through language, habit, and marriage, the Canadians had earned the respect and alliance of their Indian partners and were accordingly less prone to view the trade as simply an economic opportunity to be exploited. No wonder, then, that the Indians preferred to trade with the French,

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<sup>28</sup> Johnson to the Lords of Trade, 16 November 1765, *IHC*, 11: 118.

<sup>29</sup> Croghan to Johnson, November 1765, *IHC*, 11: 53-54.

regardless of the supposed superiority or cheapness of English goods.<sup>30</sup>

But just as certain honest and far-seeing English traders were careful to foster Indian confidence, there were also admittedly some Canadian traders who abused and cheated their native customers. In fact, admiring Anglo-American officials undoubtedly exaggerated the harmonious nature of French-Indian relations in their effort to understand the overwhelming success of their commercial and military rivals. "There is no need to romanticize this relationship," White claims. "Indians and French abused and killed each other; they cheated each other as well as supplying each other's wants." But, he adds, the often intimate familiarity of the French and Indians "had no equivalent among the British." Though the British may have reluctantly accepted the relationship between trade and alliance on the "middle ground," this grudging compromise could not make up for the lack of the intimate day-to-day experience of living side by side on native terms.<sup>31</sup>

Though it is not necessary to laud the French for any inherently "enlightened" cultural superiority--the *génie coloniale* extolled by nineteenth-century chauvinists--it is still worth recognizing that certain peculiarities of their colonial situation encouraged the Canadians to inculcate a more accepting and often admiring attitude

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<sup>30</sup> Johnson suspected that the French must have been engaged in some form of intrigue in the Illinois country because they were buying up English trade goods at high prices and then selling them to the Indians at little or no profit. This was a clear example of what Johnson referred to as the "Indians' partiality and blindness in dealing with the French," for they evidently preferred to purchase the same goods at higher prices from the French than deal with English traders. Johnson to the Lords of Trade, 16 November 1765, *IHC*, 11: 119.

<sup>31</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 316-17.

toward the Indians that prompted them to privilege, or at least tolerate, the "non-economic" aspects of Indian exchange. In his examination of the development of French cultural attitudes toward native North Americans, Cornelius Jaenen posits that the essential structure of the Canadian experience prescribed the limits of French-Indian perceptions. The paramount importance of the fur trade in Canadian economic and social life, combined with the notable absence of an encroaching settlement frontier, had "far-reaching results," Jaenen suggests, in the formulation of both French and Indian attitudes. In fact, "the relationship between behavior and attitude was so marked in this case," he notes, that "ethnic stereotyping" resulted. While the Indians came to regard the French primarily as "trader/soldiers" who dispensed valuable manufactured merchandise but who had little interest in acquiring new territory, the French were similarly prone to imagining the Indians as "skilful hunters/wary warriors," and not the "forest fiends" who blocked the preordained expansion of settlement.<sup>32</sup>

Broad theoretical constructs aside, it is evident that the French were motivated at least as much by pragmatic considerations in acceding to native conceptions of trade and alliance. Whatever supposed intellectual tolerance the French may have exhibited relative to the Indian societies they encountered in North America, they ultimately found it necessary to "adapt and accommodate" to Indian notions of trade,

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<sup>32</sup> Cornelius Jaenen, "French Attitudes towards Native Society," in *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, edited by Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 59-63, 70.

diplomacy, and warfare in pursuit of their own self-interested economic and imperial ambitions.<sup>33</sup> Just as French officials recognized the need to fuse trade and diplomacy in their dealings with their Indian allies, so too did the Canadian traders and voyageurs shrewdly oblige the demands of their Indian customer-suppliers. At times, this "enlightened" approach was all that stood between a trader and his scalp. Having passed far beyond the protective reach of French authority, Canadian traders arrived in the *pays d'en haut* as "wealthy," defenseless strangers with no social standing in Algonquian villages. Though they never abandoned their original desire to make a profit through the trade, the Canadians quickly found that to successfully conduct their business, indeed to survive the experience, it was essential to establish some form of social and personal connection with their native hosts. And many of them invariably did, by the most convenient and gratifying means at hand.<sup>34</sup>

The intimate relations between Canadian men and native women in the *pays d'en haut*, perhaps more than any other mode of European-Indian intercourse, formed "the basis of fur trade society."<sup>35</sup> Such unions served as far more than a sexual outlet for traders and voyageurs in the absence of French women; marriage native-style--à

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<sup>33</sup> Olive Patricia Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage, and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984), 277-78; White, *Middle Ground*, 33, 115.

<sup>34</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 57, 109.

<sup>35</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, "Fur Trade Social History: Some Recent Trends," in Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (eds.), *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, edited by Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 165.



*la façon du pays*--offered more extensive benefits to French and Indians alike. The "all-encompassing" work role of Indian women attracted traders who needed a helpmate to cook, sew moccasins, make clothes, scrape pelts, stitch and caulk canoe seams, gather firewood, string snowshoes, and perform a variety of other essential domestic tasks. Native women further facilitated trade relations by informally introducing their French partners to the language and customs of a particular Indian group. Beyond its obvious practical advantages, however, marriage symbolized the formation of reciprocal and mutually beneficial bonds that integrated Europeans into familial relations with potential Indian consumer-suppliers. Traders who married Indian women gained ready-made social and trade contacts in the *pays d'en haut*, while the Indians in turn secured guaranteed access to European goods and protection.<sup>36</sup>

Post commanders and Canadian officials were quick to grasp the fact that interracial marriages bolstered otherwise tenuous trade and military alliances and they enthusiastically encouraged their subordinates to form these intimate alliances.<sup>37</sup> Their English counterparts, acknowledging the immeasurable advantages their rivals had gained through extensive intermarriage, promoted similar Anglo-Indian liaisons but with admittedly dismal results. In his 1755 report to the Board of Trade, Atkin

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<sup>36</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 64-69; Van Kirk, "Fur Trade Social History," 165; Van Kirk suggests that later in the eighteenth century the Montreal-based Nor'Westers possessed a distinct advantage over their Hudson's Bay Company rivals primarily because of the marriage alliances they had made with the Indian groups of the interior. Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 28-31, 45, 53.

<sup>37</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 69.

proposed that it would be prudent to imitate French marital practices, both to facilitate better Indian relations as well as to subdue the notoriously rambunctious traders. Anglo-Indian intermarriage would insure that the two groups did not remain "intirely Strangers to each others Persons & manners," he suggested, but that "their Knowledge and Acquaintance therewith may be introduced, preserv'd, and transferred imperceptibly." Atkin also stipulated that only those men who had taken Indian wives should be allowed to remain in the West for longer than two years, assuming that their treatment of native customers who also happened to be relatives might naturally be more circumspect.<sup>38</sup>

The following year Wraxall recommended to Johnson that in order to improve New York's trade relations with the Six Nations, traders should be encouraged to live among their Indian customers, suggesting as well that garrison soldiers might be persuaded "by some gratuities & advantages" to marry Protestant native women.<sup>39</sup> But even if the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had managed to convert enough Iroquois women to supply suitable mates for New York soldiers and traders, it was unlikely that such officially sanctioned unions would ever take place. As Johnson had noted, by the 1750s the Anglo-American trade had lost its most experienced traders, the very men most likely to have adapted to Indian practices or taken native wives. The "very dregs of the people" who increasingly populated the Anglo-American trading frontier stood little chance of duplicating the marital success of the Canadian

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<sup>38</sup> Atkins, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 80.

<sup>39</sup> Wraxall, *NYCD*, 7: 27.

traders and voyageurs. The French may have been just as eager for profits as their New York and Pennsylvania counterparts, but their economic ambitions were generally tempered by a necessary respect for the Indians with whom they lived, traded, and married. Having failed to develop similarly intimate ties, the English found their largely unregulated trade perennially in danger of lapsing into mutual distrust and violence.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the apparent ease with which Canadian traders and voyageurs assimilated themselves into Indian groups, the French could not have enjoyed such overwhelming success in the fur trade without a coherent imperial policy that presupposed a well-regulated commercial system. In 1701, while the French fur trade languished in the face of a crippling glut, Louis XIV embarked on an aggressive policy to contain the Anglo-American colonies east of the Appalachians. It is impossible to understand the eighteenth-century French trade merely as a commercial endeavor after this date, Eccles argues, because the fur trade had been "definitely subordinated to a political end." By recognizing that a mutually profitable and closely monitored trade would best preserve the Indian alliances that were crucial to French

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<sup>40</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 317; Eccles suggests that the familiarity of the French with Indian languages, material culture, and customs eased their relations with the tribes of the *pays d'en haut*. Visitors frequently commented that Canadians were "in constant association" with the Indians and had adopted their foods, dress, and habits. Both secular and clerical officials, in fact, decried the frequency with which their young men took to the woods, and the ease with which they were assimilated socially, sexually, and psychologically into Indian groups. It was because the Canadians had been "trained from infancy" to imitate native ways that their relations with the Indians were usually better than those of the Anglo-Americans. W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 89-92.

imperial aims in North America, the French were able "maintain its claim to more than half a continent" with only a small number of traders and troops.<sup>41</sup>

No one recognized the French ability to win Indian allies through commercial means better than their English rivals. "That we have lost, in great Measure, all that sincere Friendship and Attachment which did once subsist between us and our *Indians*," wrote New York legislator Archibald Kennedy, was inevitable considering the "injurious and villainous Treatment" they received at the hands of Anglo-American traders, while they were always "honestly and justly" dealt with by the French.<sup>42</sup> But if French traders were better able to win the allegiance of the Indians, it was largely due to the fact that they were not followed into the *pays d'en haut* by land-hungry settlers. "The French did not alarm them much on the Score of Lands," Johnson conceded, in striking contrast to their Anglo-American competitors. "Whilst the Traders on the Frontiers were disgusting and Defrauding the Indians," he recalled, "the Inhabitants were over-reaching them and Availing themselves of their Ignorance and passion for Liquor, daily *Stealing away their Land* as the Indians emphatically express it."<sup>43</sup> If the Indians saw Anglo-American traders as the harbingers of

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<sup>41</sup> W. J. Eccles, "The Fur Trade and Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 40:3 (1983): 341-49; "The efficiency and unity of French organization were completely victorious," Adair claimed. "And the English were not going to do anything about it that would be likely to produce results." E. R. Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry in the Fur Trade during the 18th Century," *Culture*, 8 (1947), reprinted in *Canadian History Before Confederation: Essays and Interpretation*, J. M. Bumsted (Georgetown, Ontario: Irwin-Dorsey, 1972), 162.

<sup>42</sup> Kennedy, *Serious Considerations*, 8-9.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 26, 30.

encroaching settlement, they also understood that French trading posts served a less ominous purpose. Thomson commented at length on the "different Manner" in which the English and French had treated the Indians in pursuing their divergent aims in the West. "The *English*," he noted,

in order to get their Lands, drive them as far from them as possible, nor seem to care what becomes of them, provided they can get them removed out of the Way of their present Settlements; whereas the *French*, considering that they can never want Land in *America*, who enjoy the Friendship of the *Indians*, use all the Means in their Power to draw as many into their Alliance as possible; and, to secure their Affections, invite as many as can to come and live near them, and to make their Towns as near the *French* Settlements as they can.<sup>44</sup>

The true genius of the French trade was its unique fusion of private initiative, government regulation, and military supervision. It was unwise, French officials realized, to allow Canadians to flood freely into the *pays d'en haut*; no matter how prone the traders were to becoming "Indianized," an unmonitored trade could easily breed misconduct and exploitation. Dissatisfied customers, they had learned, made poor allies. Once the *cong * system was permanently reinstated in the mid-1720s, it proved remarkably effective in financing the cost of garrisoning the trading posts of the *pays d'en haut*, as well as preventing the excesses and abuses characteristic of the Anglo-American trade.

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<sup>44</sup> Thomson, *An Enquiry*, 48. Eccles notes that the presence of a French post in the *pays d'en haut* in no way implied "sovereignty" over the Indian lands, and was tolerated only so long as it served native interests. Eccles, "Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," 349. Indians could also distinguish between a French blockhouse that "secured the trade against occasional raids" and an English fort designed to "secure its garrison against the tribe in whose territory it stood." Jennings, *Ambiguous Iroquois Empire*, 299.

Barring a brief flirtation in the 1740s with the leasing of posts to private traders, the Canadian fur trade was dominated by what has been described as a "military-commercial complex." Within the framework of this system, military officers who were granted trading monopolies at individual posts formed partnerships with Canadian merchants who possessed the capital resources and credit necessary to finance trading expeditions to the West. Though Canadian civil officials persisted in their opposition to the military dominance of the post system, its defenders countered that merchants were more interested in potential earnings--and liberal brandy sales--than the exigencies of Indian diplomacy. Military officers alone, they asserted, had the prestige and authority necessary to ensure that imperial policy, not private profit, dictated the conduct of the trade.<sup>45</sup>

While the Canadians argued over who should exercise ultimate control over trade in the *pays d'en haut*, envious English observers concluded that the military regulation of the posts had given their rivals a decided advantage. The French, Atkin declared, "employed Men of the greatest Knowledge and Experience" to oversee the trade, specifically officers "who are supported out of the Trade with the Indians, who rest their hopes of Preferment on their own Behaviour, and who on all Occasions support the Honour and Dignity of the French Nation, and watch all opportunities to turn every Occurrence to their own Advantage." He concluded that "it is no small addition to the influence of the French, that their Officers always on the Spot, both

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<sup>45</sup> Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701-1744: A Supplement to Europe* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1987), 159-62.

prevent Abuses being offer'd to the Indians by particular Persons, and also never fail to demand immediate Satisfaction for any Injuries or Insults offer'd by them; which is the more readily complied with."<sup>46</sup> Johnson agreed that the French had enjoyed greater success in the trade because they had committed Indian affairs to experienced officers. Post commanders enjoyed substantial authority over the local traders: if an Indian complained of mistreatment, the offending trader was "with (at least an appearance of) great resentment put in Irons and sent away (as they were told) to suffer death."<sup>47</sup>

In contrast, native customers who had been wronged by Anglo-American traders could rarely expect even a token show of justice. "The Cries of injured Indians against the Lesser Traders," Johnson grimly noted, "could not reach the Capitals."<sup>48</sup> The problem stemmed mainly from the fact that the Indians trading with the English had no reliable local authority figure to appeal to for restitution. In the absence of disinterested officials--Oswego's commissariat was notoriously venal--there was little chance that Indian concerns would even be heard, let alone redressed. Recognizing that "the greatest discouragement, in the management of the Indian Affairs, is by the Indians being constantly cheated by them with what they deal,"

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<sup>46</sup> Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 7-8, 12. "If a French commander violated the standards of chieftainship," White alleges, "he risked the loss of his command." White, *Middle Ground*, 177. Similarly, Eccles notes that complaints by the Indians might "jeopardize promotion or the granting of commissions to sons." Eccles, "Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," 345.

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 27, 54.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 28.

Colden struggled with the ramifications of a colonial legal system that refused to recognize Indian concerns. In order to obtain redress for any alleged fraud, Colden noted, an Indian had to take out a writ, file a declaration, then wait as long as a year for a decision. In addition, Indian plaintiffs were also responsible for all the charges of the suit. The courts were often hundreds of miles away, but making an appearance at Albany or Philadelphia would have served little purpose anyway, Colden conceded, since Indian testimony could not legally be admitted as evidence.<sup>49</sup>

Even during formal conferences, the context in which Indian concerns about trader fraud were traditionally voiced, the native complainants were more likely to obtain promises than results. Having traveled to Philadelphia in the summer of 1727, the Cayuga and other Iroquois sachems found their pleas for less rum and cheaper goods sternly rebuffed by Pennsylvania's Governor Gordon. The governor justified his refusal to intervene in commercial matters by reminding them of the "laws" of supply and demand. "As to Trade," he contended, "they know 'tis the Method of all that follow it to buy as Cheap and sell as dear as they can, and every man must make the best Bargain he can; the Indians cheat the Indians & the English cheat the English, & every Men must be on his Guard." As for the large quantities of rum flooding the Susquehanna Valley, Gordon merely maintained that "we have made divers Laws to prohibit it, & made it lawfull for an Indian to stave all the Rum that is brought to them." If problems with alcohol continued to plague their tribes, Gordon believed, it was because "the Indians are too fond of it themselves" and would not

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<sup>49</sup> Colden to Governor Clinton, 8 August 1751, *NYCD*, 6: 741.



destroy the traders' illegal stocks.<sup>50</sup> It is unlikely that Gordon's cynical lecture on the workings of capitalist exchange or his assertion that the Indians themselves were to blame for their own trading woes fell on sympathetic ears. "Can these people who are treated in this manner be supposed to be treated like friends, or like rational or human creatures?" Colden justifiably asked. "It is but too obvious what the consequences of this treatment must be."<sup>51</sup>

Though Gordon and his fellow colonial capitalists would have contended that economic competition between independent traders ultimately benefitted the Indians by keeping prices low and merchandise plentiful, it is evident that native consumers were easily alienated by the unbridled commercial rivalries that characterized the Anglo-American trade. Benjamin Stoddert, one of Johnson's agents at Oswego, admitted to his employer that he envisioned a time when a monopoly company would oversee all trade at the post. Stoddert believed that a strictly regulated commerce could still be profitable, and because it would sanction only a few trustworthy agents, such a reform could only improve the tenor of Anglo-Indian relations. "I am certain that if some such Scheme does not go on," Stoddert warned, "the Trade of this Place will soon be ruined, for their is such a Number of Traders here and such Vile Steps taken to undermine each other in his trade that it consequently cant hold Long." The veteran trader further recognized that "the little low means used in the Trade to hurt

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<sup>50</sup> *PA Council Minutes*, 3: 274-75.

<sup>51</sup> Colden to Governor Clinton, 8 August 1751, *NYCD*, 6: 741; see also Johnson, *IHC*, 3: 56, 63.

each other must give even the Savages a Damn'd mean Opinion of us; especially our Honesty &c."<sup>52</sup>

When Stoddert broached his idea for an Oswego monopoly, the reaction of the local traders was predictably hostile, with some even threatening rebellion. New York legislators were equally skeptical. No plan to reorganize the Oswego trade was seriously contemplated before the Seven Years' War, but by the unsettled mid-1760s Johnson acknowledged the wisdom in Stoddert's earlier assessment of the detrimental influence of overzealous English competition. "In Short," Johnson proposed,

the Mixed Multitude of persons trading at the posts, and in the Indian Country, many of whom have survived their Credit, and dare not come down the Country, act such a part by endeavoring to draw the Trade from one another, by selling some Articles below the first Cost, and Extorting upon others, that the Merchants who Supply the Goods must Suffer, Numbers of the Traders be ruined, and the Indians universally discontented-- The little Artifices usually practised by Low People in dealings with one another, are much more general and attended with infinitely greater circumstances of fraud in dealings with the Indians,-- The Low character of the people, their Necessity, and the Extravagance in which many of them live set them on the practice of every fraud to Support themselves, . . . and the latter not only Endeavor to force a Trade by Slandering each other, publishing and enlarging on the frauds committed by their Neighbors, but forge Stories dangerous to the publick to Account for their prices, the badness of Goods, or any other purposes of Gain."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Stoddert to Johnson, 16 July 1749, *WJP*, 1: 236-37.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 44. In assessing the effects of Anglo-French rivalry for the fur trade of the Hudson Bay region, Ray concludes that as economic competition increased, so did the potential for Indian dependence. "Because the Indians could satisfy their needs for other trade goods with less effort due to the falling prices demanded for them, they spent much more of the free time which they gained at the local trading posts drinking and smoking and leading what the traders termed the "indolent life." In this way," he concludes, "competitive conditions further strengthened the tendency toward greater addiction." Ray, *Indians and the Fur*

If Indian consumers were the ultimate victims of the ruthless competitiveness that prevailed in the unregulated Anglo-American trade, the more tightly-knit French system of posts and *congés* promised rock-solid trade relations, if not rock-bottom prices. Thomas Wien has suggested that the greatest enemies of the Canadian fur traders were not the English but other Canadian fur traders. French officials understood that trader profits and subsequently revenues from the sale of permits and post leases would be significantly reduced should French-speaking traders flood into the *pays d'en haut* en masse. By restricting the number of canoes that left Montreal and assigning traders to distinct trading regions, the state was largely successful in precluding a "bidding war" among Canadians in the West. This practice of "zoning" did not entirely prevent either licensed or unlicensed traders from commercial "trespassing," but in general the system was remarkably successful in keeping "the Canadians and their merchandise thinly strewn, and goods prices high."<sup>54</sup> Wien suggests that this policy of buffering internal competition may have ensured that French merchandise was never cheap. But considering the pitiful state of Anglo-Indian relations occasioned by full-blown trader competition, it is apparent that Colden, Johnson, and their few fellow imperialists would rather have paid the economic costs of commercial regulation than the significantly higher price of native

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*Trade*, 142. With the ample supplies of rum and low prices that attended fierce competition between Anglo-American traders, it is possible that a similar pattern of increased addiction might have also prevailed among the Ohio Indians.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760: The Uses of Fur-Trade Imperialism," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 1 (1990): 316-17.

resentment and defection.

For all their concern with economic competition, legal reform, and commercial regulation, the most perceptive English commentators intuitively grasped that the rivalry for the trade and allegiance of the Indians had an overarching spiritual dimension. This was one battle, they conceded, that the French had won long ago. Canadian traders may have married their women and post commanders heeded their complaints, but it was the Jesuit missionaries who ultimately won the trust, faith, and commerce of the Indians. Though characteristically suspicious of their motives and means, observers such as Atkin could not help but envy the Jesuits' unrivalled success. "All the World knows," he remarked, "the great share the French missionaries have in influencing the Indians, by means of their superstition; whose service is such, that they have been esteemed almost of as much Consequence as Garrisons. They have been the means of gaining as much respect from the Indians to the French," Atkin conceded, "as our Traders have caused disrespect to us, by their dissolute Lives and Manners."<sup>55</sup> No one offered a more eloquent testament to the importance of French missionary efforts in securing the affections of Indian trading partners than Johnson. "The Indians are fond of pomp and Ceremonys," he declared,

and that Religion in which they most abound is most likely to Succeed amongst them, but the French to that advantage Gained a Still more Material one in the Choice they Generally Made of Men of Spirit, Abilities, and a knowledge of the World, who lived amongst them, became Masters of their Language, acquired a thorough knowledge of their Manners, and disposition, and at length obtained a vast influence which they improved to such Advantage (without attempting to alter

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<sup>55</sup> Atkins, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 12-13.

established forms of no ill consequence, or to Wean them from hunting, in which they are usefully employed for the public) as to convince us from a View of Some Tribes under their peculiar care, that the Dutys of Religion are not incompatible with those of a Warrior, or Hunter, and that they need not cease to be the Latter in order to become to all appearances better Christians, than Numbers of their White Neighbours.<sup>56</sup>

Shining Jesuit altar silver and tinkling communion bells aside, a far greater attraction of the "Blackrobes" to many Indian customers was their resolute opposition to the sale of alcohol. When the Oswego traders first laid out their wares in the late 1720s, Canadian officials who had long opposed the clerical ban on the sale of alcohol raised the panicked--and profitable--cry that the French trade was doomed unless they could compete dram-for-dram with the rival rum-sellers. This argument may have swayed the ministry, but the Church remained steadfast in opposition to the brandy trade until the Conquest, knowing full well the pernicious effects of alcohol abuse within Indian groups.<sup>57</sup> Like the French, the Indians who participated in the trade were of two minds when it came to alcohol. Some claimed that they could not get it cheaply or plentifully enough. But more often than not, the Indians--particularly the older, and presumably wiser, men--pleaded with the colonial

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<sup>56</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 52. For a similar summary of the advantages enjoyed by French Jesuits in winning Indian converts see James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. 277-79.

<sup>57</sup> For the origins of Jesuit opposition to the brandy trade in the seventeenth century, see Jean Delanglez, *Frontenac and the Jesuits* (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit History, 1939), 69-129.

authorities to stem the flood of alcohol into their villages.<sup>58</sup> Cheap rum may have enticed some to trade at Oswego or with the peripatetic merchants of the Ohio country, but those Indians who accurately gauged the proportions of the looming social and cultural crisis undoubtedly embraced the steadfast moral stance of the Jesuits in opposition to those who would profit by alcoholic means.<sup>59</sup>

The Protestant counterparts of the Jesuits, by contrast, seemed distinctly ill-suited to the challenge of luring Indians to chapel or trading post. Having already

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<sup>58</sup> "We have been stinted in the Article of Rum in Town," claimed the Iroquois and Delaware representatives who conferred with Governor Thomas in Philadelphia in 1742. "We desire you will open the Rum-Bottle, and give it to us in greater Abundance on the Road." Colden, *HFIN*, 2: 110. In contrast, Thomson declared that the Indians of the Ohio Valley "were sensible of their own Weakness, and immoderate desire of strong Drink, by which they exposed themselves to many Abuses and Inconveniencies. They had frequently complained to the *English* Governments, and desired that some Measures might be taken to prevent Liquors being carried among them in such Quantities, but nothing was done to Purpose." Thomson, *An Enquiry*, 74, 75-76. See also Wraxall, *AIA*, 86, 139, 174-75; Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 25-26, 36; Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 37.

<sup>59</sup> By some accounts, Indian groups split into pro and anti-alcohol factions along generational lines. "The Chiefs of every Nation finding the Evil daily encreasing," Atkin remarked, "and their Young Men growing untractable in their National Concerns, have at times requested the Governours of our several Colonies to restrain the Indian Traders from carrying either too much Rum, or any at all among them." He further noted that "a licentiousness hath crept in among the *young men*, beyond the Power of the Head Men to Remedy," to the extent that "the discreet Old men Censure alike their own Young Men and us." Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 26, 36; see also Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 37; François Vachon de Belmont, "Belmont's History of Brandy," edited by Joseph P. Donnelly, *Mid-America*, 34:1 (1952): 49. Unlike the English traders who only showed concern for the younger hunters, the French shrewdly courted the favor of older, more influential members of the tribe. Atkin noted that the French would often give small gifts to the old men who could no longer hunt for themselves, who then would "repay the French largely for those Trifles, in their Harangues at the round Houses, by great Encomiums on their kindness, and recommendations of them to favour." Atkin, *Ibid.*, 10-11, 29.

"conceived such invincible Prejudices against English "Manners and Religion" by abusive traders, Thomson noted, the Shawnees on the Susquehanna quickly rebuffed the earnest proselytizing efforts of a young minister named Sergeant. Why should they accept his teachings, asked his hostile hosts, when his fellow colonists would "lie, cheat, and debauch their Women, and even their Wives, if their Husbands were not at home."<sup>60</sup> Johnson expressed a similar skepticism as to the heavy-handed missionary methods of Sergeant and his coreligionists. "The Steps taken by many probably well meaning but Gloomy people among us," he judged,

to abolish at once their most innocent *Customs, Dances, Rejoycings* at Marriages &ca and their premature proposals for bringing familys amongst them to instruct them in Agriculture &ca as well as their Arguments against Hunting alarm all Indians who hear of them with the Apprehension that it is done with design to wean them from their way of Living purely that they may be the readier induced to part with their Lands to the white people.<sup>61</sup>

A few Mohawks might have succumbed to the reasoned arguments of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel and some Delawares to the gentle teachings of the Moravians, but on the whole the Protestant performance in winning Indian hearts and minds has been aptly described as "lacklustre."<sup>62</sup>

In the contest for souls and skins, the French by all accounts emerged the victors. Those who prayed together, traded together. But Jesuit accomplishments alone were not all that Anglo-Americans hoped to emulate. Most imperialists, from

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<sup>60</sup> Thomson, *An Enquiry*, 56.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 52-53.

<sup>62</sup> Axtell, *Invasion Within*, 275-76.

New York to South Carolina, agreed with Wraxall that the French had succeeded in winning the greater part of the North American fur trade because they acted upon "a Uniform Plan," while the American colonies floundered as a result of their "divided Interests & temporary Expedients."<sup>63</sup> In the absence of any effective regulation, the Indian trade had become a diplomatic liability for the English while the French continued to harness commercial means to imperial ends. The creation of two colonial Indian superintendencies in 1756 and the subsequent appointment of Johnson and Atkin to the respective posts signaled at least some recognition that the trade and the conduct of Indian relations in general was greatly in need of "one uniform Regulation."<sup>64</sup> Though it arrived in London too late to have much effect on the shaping of colonial policy, Atkin's report to the Board of Trade outlined some of the changes he believed necessary to set the Indian commerce back on track. The prices of trade merchandise should be fixed at acceptable rates, Atkin proposed, and officers instructed to visit the posts to monitor the behavior of the traders, give a hearing to Indian complaints, and mete out justice where required. He further recommended that the Indians be provided with their own scales and weights to discourage fraud and that the traders be annually licensed and held to stringent standards of conduct by the seaboard governments.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Wraxall, *AIA*, 190n.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen H. Cutcliffe, "Colonial Indian Policy as a Measure of Rising Imperialism: New York and Pennsylvania, 1700-1755," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 64:3 (1981): 239, 266-68.

<sup>65</sup> Atkin, *Appalachian Indian Frontier*, 78-86.



By the 1750s, critics of the current state of the Anglo-Indian commerce were unanimous in their calls for "some good and sufficient Laws for the Regulation of their Trade, and for summary and severe Justice in case of Abuses."<sup>66</sup> But countless laws and ordinances had been enacted in the past by various colonial governments with little visible result. Without the support of the traders themselves, cheating and fraud would continue unabated. In the absence of reliable officers to oversee the day-to-day conduct of the trade, all legislative efforts at reform, no matter how well intentioned, were doomed to fail. New York's Governor Montgomerie had hoped to create an effective role for Oswego's chief officer at the post's inception in the 1720s but, by the beginnings of the Seven Years' War, Wraxall was still complaining that the post desperately required the supervision of a salaried "intendant of trade" who would refrain from all commercial activity and inspect all weights and measures, prevent all "Frauds & Impositions," and bring all offenders to trial."<sup>67</sup> Colden also noted that the officers could not fully enforce justice at Oswego or anywhere else on the trading frontier unless the colonial legal system was reformed "whereby the Indians, on their complaints, may get Justice done them speedily, by summary process, and that in all dealings, between Indians & Christians, Indian evidence be allowed."<sup>68</sup>

These optimistic plans for the reform of a notoriously unorganized and unjust

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<sup>66</sup> Kennedy, *Serious Considerations*, 9; see also Johnson, *IHC*, 16: 4-50; Wraxall, *AIA*, 111n.

<sup>67</sup> Wraxall, *NYCD*, 7: 27.

<sup>68</sup> Colden to Governor Clinton, 8 August 1751, *NYCD*, 6: 744.

commerce were born of one inescapable conclusion: if the Anglo-Americans were to succeed in directing the traffic in furs and skins to serve broader diplomatic and military aims, they would simply have to emulate their French rivals in virtually every aspect of the trade. In fact, in the aftermath of French defeat, the Indians of the Ohio Valley demanded as much. But with equal measures of arrogance and parsimony, the British conquerors ultimately balked at the daunting price of empire. Though its roots ran deep, to the earliest days of Anglo-French rivalry in North America, the reluctance of the British to wed trade to diplomacy would henceforth become increasingly lethal.<sup>69</sup>

*3d Warrior. These are the Scalps of those two famous Cheats  
Who bought our Furs for Rum, and sold us Water.  
[holding out the Scalps, which Ponteach takes.  
Our Men are loaded with their Furs again,  
And other Plunder from the Villains Stores.  
Ponteach. All this is brave! [tossing up the Scalps,  
which others catch, and toss and throw them about.  
This Way we'll serve them all.<sup>70</sup>*

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<sup>69</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 248, 315-17.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Rogers, *Ponteach: Or, The Savages of America, A Tragedy* (London: J. Millan, 1766), 78.

EPILOGUE  
AFTER THE CONQUEST

In the summer of 1761, less than a year after the conquest of New France, the Canadian fur trade was still in disarray. Even so, the young American Alexander Henry, arriving with the invading forces and seduced by the promise of fortune and adventure, was determined to penetrate the *pays d'en haut*. Trade merchandise was scarce in occupied Montreal and General Thomas Gage, the new British commander, sternly warned against a premature expedition into potentially hostile territory. But the enthusiastic youth could not be deterred. Stepping gingerly aboard a canoe crammed with trade goods from Albany, Henry gave the word and his crew of French-Canadian voyageurs dipped their paddles and pushed off for distant Michilimackinac.

Only a handful of Americans had ever made this westward journey. As he traveled up the Ottawa River, Henry was struck by the beauty of the northern country--the misting falls of the Rideau River and the roiling Chaudière rapids--but his reveries were soon invaded by a creeping sense of foreboding. The first Indians he encountered were Algonquins returning to their village from winter hunting. Henry amicably bought their maple sugar and a few beaver pelts, but before they parted ways the Indians were curious to know the motives of this stranger in their

midst. The English must be mad to risk their lives for beaver, they ominously remarked. Did he not realize that the "Upper Indians" would certainly have his scalp?

Henry's initial enthusiasm dissipated as he drew nearer his destination. Having been warned repeatedly that he would meet his end at Michilimackinac, he was tempted to abandon his ill-considered venture. But supplies were dwindling and return to Montreal now seemed impossible. Despite their hostile attitude toward the English, the Indians they met welcomed the Canadians with "cordial good will," and Henry realized that his only hope of survival lay in disguising his identity. Stripping off his "English" clothes, he donned the traditional attire of his Canadian companions: a breech-cloth, loose-fitting shirt, blanket coat, and large, red, worsted cap. Smearing his face with dirt and grease, and wielding a paddle as best he could, the American completed his transformation. His desperate ruse succeeded, and Henry finally arrived at Michilimackinac unscathed, though hardly the conquering adventurer of his earlier imagining.<sup>1</sup>

As Henry precipitously pursued his fortunes in the *pays d'en haut*, the course of the Canadian fur trade remained uncharted. Though now subject to British authority, local traders were not arbitrarily barred from their traditional commerce in furs. In fact, merchants who elected to remain in the country were granted all the

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Henry, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776* (originally published New York: I. Riley, 1809; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966), 1-37.

rights and privileges accorded to the "Old Subjects" of Great Britain. The formal articles of the 1760 capitulation expressly safeguarded their stores of furs and trade merchandise, authorized the *Compagnie des Indes* to transport all remaining beaver to France, and allowed the traders up to two years to retrieve any assets that remained in the West. In no sense was the French-speaking merchant community deliberately "decapitated" from the Canadian body politic after the Conquest.<sup>2</sup>

The relatively benevolent terms dictated by the British occupiers, however, did not leave the traders altogether free to conduct business as usual. Over their protests, Canadian merchants were prohibited from importing merchandise from their former suppliers in France and so were forced to seek new commercial connections in Britain. Cautious British officials also tended to discriminate against Canadians when it came to granting military contracts or trading permits to the West. But in the face of these initial setbacks, those *marchands* of Montreal who were determined to persist in the fur trade proved remarkably resilient. Before long, they had established profitable ties with London agents and neutralized opposition to their participation in the western trade by striking partnerships with newly-arrived English-speaking

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<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Gordon Jackson, "The Beginning of British Trade at Michilimackinac," *Minnesota History*, 11:3 (1930): 231-32. For a discussion of the "decapitation" hypothesis that attributed the ascendancy of an Anglo-Canadian mercantile elite to the post-conquest flight of a nascent French-speaking bourgeoisie, see S. Dale Standen, "The Debate on the Social and Economic Consequences of the Conquest: A Summary," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society*, 10 (1984): 179-80.

traders.<sup>3</sup>

Left to their own devices, it is likely that the Canadian fur merchants would have successfully continued their commerce, having made the necessary adjustments to unfamiliar merchandise and foreign suppliers. But the Canadian commercial climate was rapidly evolving beyond their control. General Gage had immediately recognized the importance of the Canadian fur trade but was intent on reforming what he viewed as an overly authoritarian structure of monopolies and permits. With a nod to enthusiastic British manufacturers, the newcomers hoped to remodel the trade after that of the American colonies, where open markets, easy credit, and competitive conditions prevailed. Despite the encouragement of British officials, relatively few prospective English or American traders arrived in Montreal before the American Revolution. Those who did venture north, however, quickly came to dominate the Montreal market.<sup>4</sup>

If a flood of British and American entrepreneurs did not engulf Canadian commerce after the Conquest, the gradual decline of investment by French-stock merchants was due rather to the advent of the cut-throat commercial conditions they had so scrupulously avoided in the past. The fur trade, though crucial to the

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<sup>3</sup> José Igartua, "The Merchants of Montreal at the Conquest: Socio-Economic Profile," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 8:16 (1975): 279-81; Igartua, "A Change in Climate: The Conquest and the *Marchands* of Montreal," *Historical Papers/Communications historiques*, Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association (1974): 116; Standen, "Consequences of the Conquest," 184.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, "Beginning of British Trade," 233-36; Igartua, "Change in Climate," 115-16.

Canadian economy, had made few Montrealers wealthy in the eighteenth century. The rigid demands of Indian consumer-suppliers, a cramped local market, and the regulatory oversight of colonial officials had dampened the potential for spectacular profits. But the Montreal merchant community had persisted for decades under these ultimately salutary constraints. The majority of French-speaking merchants, many of whom were now approaching the end of their trading careers, were reluctant to wade into the treacherous current of competition ushered in by their former rivals. Gradually, inconspicuously, the Canadians relinquished their traditional trade to the conquerors.<sup>5</sup>

As they took the reins of the Canadian fur trade, the neophyte Anglo-Americans soon perceived the advantages wielded by their French predecessors. Like their colleagues in New York and Pennsylvania, the English-speaking Montreal merchants soon found themselves floundering in a commerce geared more toward the ruthless pursuit of profits than the encouragement of stable relations with the Indians upon whom their fortunes ultimately rested. In fact, the formation of the famed North West Company in the 1780s signaled the belated recognition of the new merchants that the French "oligopolistic" system had been ideally suited to the peculiar exigencies of the fur trade. In a few years, the organization of Canadian commerce had come full circle, though the language of its masters was now English

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<sup>5</sup> Igartua, "Change in Climate," 118-22; Igartua, "Merchants of Montreal," 291; Standen, "Consequences of the Conquest," 184.

rather than French.<sup>6</sup>

Old loyalties, the British learned, could not be erased by the stroke of a pen. The military defeat of New France did not signal the death of the unique culture of the Canadian fur trade any more than it did the abandonment of the Catholic faith or the French tongue. After decades of intense rivalry for the Great Lakes fur trades, the Anglo-Americans finally beat their Canadian competitors, not by force of arms or cheapness of goods, but merely by joining them. Their victory in wresting the Canadian trade from local hands, however, ultimately proved hollow. Just as Alexander Henry survived his fateful journey to the West by shedding his English clothes, his fellow traders found themselves forced to adopt the manners and means of their erstwhile rivals. There was no better tribute, perhaps, to the hard-won success of the French-Canadian trade, the memory of which yet endured in dusty ledgers, lusty paddling songs, and the aching bones of ancient voyageurs.

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<sup>6</sup> Igartua, "Change in Climate," 122-23.



## APPENDIX

## EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

source: Ross, *Archaeological Metrology*.

ENGLISHFRENCHLiquid capacity

gallon = 4.3985 l.

*pot* = 1.86 l.Dry capacity

bushel = 35.2371 l.

*minot* = 39.03 l.Dry weight

pound = 453.6 g.

*livre* = 489.41 g.Linear measureyard = .9144 m.  
ell = 1.143 m.*aune* = 1.1884 m.

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## VITA

Matthew Robert Laird

Matthew Robert Laird was born in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, on 22 December 1968. He graduated from Lisgar Collegiate Institute in Ottawa in 1986 and received a B.A. in History from Trinity College in the University of Toronto in 1990. He completed an M.A. in early American history at the College of William and Mary and an apprenticeship in historical archaeology with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1991. That year he entered the doctoral program at the College of William and Mary as a graduate assistant. After passing his doctoral exams in 1993, he received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship and taught the history of New France at the College of William and Mary.