

The role of women in the fur trade society of the Canadian west 1700-1850.

Van Kirk, Sylvia M.

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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FUR TRADE SOCIETY ·
OF THE CANADIAN WEST, 1700-1850

by
Sylvia M. Van Kirk

Queen Mary College
University of London

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the evolution of the role played by Indian, mixed-blood and white women in the development of fur trade society in western Canada from about 1700 to 1850. The importance of the role played by women in the fur trade has been generally overlooked by historians of the subject, but such a study provides many insights into the complex interaction which took place between European and Indian as a result of this enterprise.

The men of both the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies formed liasons with women from the various tribes of western Canada. In the English company, these unions were formed in spite of official rulings to the contrary, whereas the Canadian company actively encouraged unions between its servants and Indian women. Such alliances served to cement trade ties. Indian women performed a variety of important economic tasks vital to the functioning of the fur trade besides fulfilling the role of wife and mother left void by the absence of white women.

Eventually, however, the Indian wife was to become a source of friction rather than an effective liason between Indian and white, and by the early nineteenth century, her place was being taken by a growing number of mixed-blood women.

The very child of the fur trade, the mixed-blood woman's dual heritage gave her the ideal qualifications for a fur trader's wife. It is significant that marriages contracted à la façon du pays during this period showed a marked tendency to become permanent unions.

After the union of the two companies in 1821, however, the position of native women in fur trade society was threatened by two outside forces--the missionaries and white women. While the missionaries' attack on fur trade morality was to lead to a good deal of cultural dislocation, the coming of white women presented a potent threat to the prominence of mixed-blood women in fur trade society. The resulting development of social and racial tension between these two groups of women was to erupt in a divisive scandal in Red River in 1850, which symbolized the increasing ascendancy of white women in western Canadian society.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.A.S.B.	Archives de l'archevêché, Saint-Boniface
C.M.S.A.	Church Missionary Society Archives, London
H.B.C.A.	Hudson's Bay Company Archives, London
H.B.R.S.	Hudson's Bay Record Society
P.A.B.C.	Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria
P.A.M.	Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg
P.A.O.	Provincial Archives of Ontario, Toronto
P.A.C.	Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
P.R.O.	Public Record Office, London
<u>T.R.S.C.</u>	<u>Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada</u>

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INTRODUCTION

There is a strange revolution, in the manners of the country; Indian wives were at one time the vogue, the half-breed supplanted these, and now we have the lovely tender exotic torn from its parent bed to pine and languish in the desert. ¹

So wrote James Douglas when congratulating his friend Chief Trader James Hargrave on the occasion of his marriage to a Scottish lady in 1840. This intriguing observation by Douglas has been employed as a framework for examining the development of fur trade society in western Canada. The social aspects of the fur trade which involved an extremely complex interaction between the cultures of Indian and European have been largely ignored by historians. Fundamental to the growth of a fur trade society was the widespread intermarriage between Indian women and white men, and the nature and extent of these unions have not been subjected to serious study.² The way in which fur trade society developed its own mores and customs in response to the particular circumstances which gave it birth

¹G.P. deT. Glazebrook, ed., The Hargrave Correspondence, 1821-1843 (Toronto: Champlain Society, vol. XXIV, 1938), pp. 310-11.

²The subject is treated in a very general and popular way by Walter O'Meara in Daughters of the Country: The Women of the Fur Traders and Mountain Men (New York, 1968). The useful groundwork laid by Marcel Giraud in his outstanding ethnohistory Le Métis Canadien (Paris, 1945) must be acknowledged, however.

has been little appreciated. Almost totally neglected has been the important role played by women in the fur trade, the study of which gives illuminating insights into the nature of its society. Initially the traders did not bring their own women with them into the Indian Country, but this void was quickly filled by Indian women who not only fulfilled the social role of wives and mothers but were in a position to make a unique economic contribution by performing native tasks vital to the functioning of the fur trade.

The thesis is divided into three main sections. The first deals with the relationships developed between Indian women and the men of the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies. The second part examines the role played by the mixed-blood woman and the extent to which her replacement of the Indian wife reflected the changing nature of fur trade society. Finally, the third section discusses the coming of white women and the impact which their presence was to have on fur trade society. Within this broad framework, an attempt has been made to identify as many of these women as possible and to bring out the human dimension of their individual stories instead of leaving them as lifeless statistics.

For the purposes of this thesis, the area designated as the Canadian West has been extended far beyond the present day boundaries. It is necessary to include Hudson Bay and its hinterland because it was through this region that the English penetrated into the West, and the initial contacts developed

on the Bayside set the stage for the Hudson's Bay men's relationships with Indian women inland. Also included is the area which is today the Pacific North West of the United States. The Columbia River was the most highly developed outlet to the Pacific and until 1846 was an integral part of the Canadian fur trade scene.

A clarification of certain terms used in the thesis is also necessary. Although the word "half-breed" did not carry the pejorative connotation in fur trade society which it does today, it has been decided to avoid its use except when specifically referring to persons to whom it genetically applies. Instead, the term "mixed-blood" which like the French word "métis" accommodates all gradations of racial mixture has been used generally when referring to those of mixed origin. The term "native" as employed in Chapter V is used in a very broad sense to distinguish those women born in Rupert's Land, both Indian and mixed-blood, from incoming white women. Within the context of the thesis, the word "English" is meant to be synonymous with the men of the Hudson's Bay Company while "Canadian" refers to the Nor'Westers.

The first chapter discusses the role of the Indian woman in the early history of the Hudson's Bay Company before it established its first post inland in 1774. Although the official policy of the Company prohibited its servants from forming unions with Indian women, evidence shows that this ruling was,

at best, only sporadically enforced. With white women excluded from the Bay, the English found acceptable substitutes in young Cree and Chipewyan women, and Indian sexual mores encouraged their intercourse. Officers in the Bay, on whom the implementation of Company policy depended, took the lead in forming liaisons with daughters or wives of leading Indians because they realized that such alliances were useful in cementing trade ties. The vacillating attempts to enforce the Company regulation among the lower ranks proved very unpopular and often resulted in refractory behaviour on the part of the men. The importance of the Indian woman's economic contribution in making moccasins, netting snowshoes and treating pelts became increasingly recognized by the officers. The assistance of Indian women was particularly invaluable during the few inland journeys attempted by Hudson's Bay men in this period. The Chipewyan woman Thanadelthur, for example, was responsible for the success of William Stuart's peace mission in 1715-1716, while Anthony Henday relied very much on the advice of his Cree "bedfellow" on his journey to the Blackfoot in the 1750's.

The relationship which developed on the Bayside between Indian women and Englishmen was but a microcosm of the social and economic patterns which developed once the Company moved inland in an attempt to counteract the powerful threat of the North West Company. By contrast, this company, following the traditions of its French colonial predecessors, actively

encouraged unions between its servants and Indian women. All ranks, bourgeois, clerk and engagé, were permitted to take an Indian partner, and such a policy modified the stand taken by the Hudson's Bay Company. Nor'Westers intermarried with women from nearly all the tribes they encountered as they expanded to the Pacific Coast. Marital alliances contracted among the sophisticated Chinook nation, for example, were an important factor in securing their friendship, but for the most part, wives were chosen from the populous Ojibway, Cree and Chipewyan tribes. When taking an Indian wife, a trader had to observe the marital customs of her people which usually consisted of obtaining the parents' consent and offering them a gift of trade goods and liquor. A fundamental theme of this thesis is to show, however, that fur trade society evolved its own marriage rite known as marriage à la façon du pays which combined both Indian and European attitudes toward marriage. In contrast to Indian custom, most fur trade marriages tended to be non-polygamous; but the fur trader adapted the Indian notion that marriage did not constitute an indissoluble bond to suit his own transient needs.

The problem of what to do with one's native family when retiring from the Indian Country created an agonizing personal dilemma for many fur traders. The Hudson's Bay Company forbade its servants to bring their families to Great Britain without special permission. The accepted course was for an Indian wife and children to return to her tribe, although

some provision was often made for their support. Few Nor'Westers took their Indian wives to eastern Canada, but the Company, unlike its English rival, accepted responsibility for maintaining abandoned wives and children. Furthermore, a concomitant of marriage à la façon du pays was the development of a practice known as "turning off" whereby the retiring trader passed his wife and often his children on to another. The tendency for unions contracted à la façon du pays to become increasingly permanent should be stressed, however. Many French-Canadian voyageurs became "freemen" and remained in the West, living a life akin to the Indians, rather than forsake their native families. A prominent consideration in the creation of the Red River colony was the fact that it would at last provide a place where traders could settle with their native families, an opportunity seized upon by many Hudson's Bay officers and servants. If domestic ties did much to soften the monotony and loneliness of a fur trader's existence, the Indian woman made a remarkably useful helpmate. Besides performing a myriad of routine tasks including making pemmican and collecting wattappe for sewing the canoes, they were readily available to act as guides and interpreters.

Although no Indian woman has actually left an account of what it was like to be a fur trader's wife, it is possible to assess how her life was changed by this new alternative. Evidence exists to suggest that not a few Indian women were attracted by the prospect of an easier physical existence.

Fur trade life was much more sedentary so that the Indian woman no longer had to serve as beast of burden as in nomadic Indian society. General domestic tasks were also lighter: now clothed in European garments herself, the Indian woman's main responsibilities were the manufacture of moccasins and the netting of snowshoes. Indian taboos against women were also modified by the whites; indeed, Indian women appear to have exerted a remarkable influence over their fur trader husbands. An outstanding case is that of the Chipewyan wife of the brigade guide Lamallice who used her position as the only interpreter at Fort Wedderburn to such advantage that even George Simpson was prepared to give her special privileges.

Chapter III ends, however, with a discussion of the reasons for the demise of Indian women in fur trade society. It would be quite erroneous to suggest that the Indian wife of a fur trader enjoyed an idyllic existence; certainly the desire for a white husband was not universal. Life at a fur trade post appears to have weakened the Indian woman's constitution, and she suffered from cultural dislocation. There is evidence, for example, that wives resented being "turned off" but there was little they could do about it. Although it has been emphasized that Indian women initially acted as effective liaisons between Indian and white, in the demoralizing conditions of the trade war, they later became an increasing source of friction between the two groups. It has been a concern of this

thesis to show that the reputation of the Nor'Westers for maintaining excellent relations with the Indians has been exaggerated to the detriment of the Hudson's Bay men. In the Athabasca country in the late 18th century, for example, the Nor'Westers' flagrant abuse of Chipewyan women provoked much resentment, but the Indians were not strong enough to attempt reprisals. The increasing hostility of the Indians, coupled with the fact that in well-established areas marriage alliances were no longer a significant factor in trade relations, led to a decline in the practice of taking an Indian wife. This trend was also accelerated by economic considerations as the cost of supporting families, especially of the Nor'Westers, became increasingly burdensome. In 1806, the North West Company passed a ruling prohibiting all ranks from marrying pure-blooded Indian women. Significantly, however, the regulation did not apply to mixed-blood women, a recognition of the emergence of this new group which had now begun to replace Indian women as fur traders' wives.

As discussed in Chapter IV, it is the contention of this thesis that of the three groups of women in question, the mixed-blood woman was most suited to be a fur trader's wife. She was, after all, the very child of the fur trade. Her knowledge of Indian domestic skills and language, learned from her mother, equipped her to take over the valuable economic role played by the Indian woman without becoming a potential source of friction. On the other hand, her fairer

features and greater potential for Anglicization tended to increase her desirability particularly in the eyes of the officers. As women, the only way in which mixed-blood girls could remain an integral part of fur trade society was through marriage, and the fur traders seem to have acknowledged a collective responsibility for the fate of their daughters in this regard.

By the late 18th century, it had become common for Hudson's Bay men to marry daughters of their predecessors. The fact that so many mixed-bloods were absorbed directly into the "Home Guard" bands around the Bay posts, however, has made it difficult to determine their identity and has led historians to underestimate their numbers. The most significant feature of the emerging pattern among the Nor'Westers was the extent to which the bourgeois married daughters of French-Canadian engagés or freemen--unions which cut across both class and racial lines. As mixed-blood rather than Indian wives became the rule, a definite growth in more lasting relationships becomes noticeable. Quite a number of bourgeois, for example, now took their wives with them when they retired from the Indian Country. Marriage à la façon du pays evolved increasingly toward white concepts of marriage and came to be regarded as a valid union contracted for life.

The widespread and complex pattern of intermarriage which developed between fur trade families resulted in the creation of a close-knit society. But a society which derived from two

culturally divergent roots was bound to suffer from problems of identity and instability. This fact was mirrored in the acculturation process to which the mixed-blood woman was subject. Individual fathers endeavoured to introduce their daughters to the manners and dress of British women, and the attempts at schooling begun at the Bayside posts in the early nineteenth century were partly motivated by the desire to wean mixed-blood girls away from the influences of Indian society. The conflict of social attitudes with which the mixed-blood woman had to cope--the fact that she was neither Indian nor white--often left her in a vulnerable position.

This was particularly true as a result of the changes which took place in fur trade society after the union of the two companies in 1821. With the end of the trade war, Red River came into its own as the social hub of fur trade society. Here many retired servants settled with their native families, and the establishment of churches and schools, to which active officers sent their children, meant that the colony's influence extended to the fur trade at large. The most powerful agents of social change in the post-1821 period were the newly-arrived missionaries whose attitudes were to have severe repercussions on the customs of fur trade society. The Protestant clergy, in particular, aroused considerable resentment because of their vehement attack on marriage à la façon du pays. They refused to acknowledge that the fur trade custom constituted a marital bond, denouncing such liaisons

as sinful and the women as concubines. A particularly acrimonious quarrel over this issue developed between the officers at Fort Vancouver and the Anglican missionary Herbert Beaver in the 1830's. While "the custom of the country" did gradually fall into disrepute after the coming of the missionaries, a number of old traders maintained to their dying day that no pronouncements of a clergyman could render their long-standing unions more sacred. Ultimately the legitimacy of marriage à la façon du pays was to be vindicated in the famous Connolly Case, tried in Montreal in 1867.

In the establishment of their schools in Red River, the missionaries also contributed to a growing stratification with regard to women in fur trade society. The boarding school founded for the daughters of officers, for example, was intended to provide a genteel British education which was now deemed necessary for the children of the fur trade elite. Every effort was made to estrange them from their Indian heritage, with special care being taken to inculcate the girls with European concepts of feminine virtue. The enforcement of European morality was to cause mixed-blood girls considerable cultural confusion because it was accompanied by what might be termed "the Victorian double-standard". According to the old fur trade custom, if a man formed a liason with a woman she was considered to be his wife, entitled to the recognition and support that a marital relationship implied. Now, with the insistence of the missionary that only a church marriage

had validity, the woman taken à la façon du pays was reduced to the status of mistress--someone with whom to gratify one's passions but never actually marry. There is evidence that the great emphasis put on the need for chastity at the schools in Red River caused mixed-blood girls emotional distress for in reality they could so easily be taken advantage of. Young officers coming into the trade during this period, for example, did not consider it inconsistent to indulge their fancy while studiously avoiding any marital attachment. Native women were victimized by this changing attitude, while at the same time, the blame for the perpetuation of immorality in the Indian Country was laid increasingly at their door. Chapter V ends with an examination of the histories of a number of native wives--from those caught in the vicissitudes of fur trade life such as Catherine Ermatinger and Mary Taylor to those who successfully adapted to white society such as Josette Work and Jane McDonald.

Concurrent with the efforts being made to acculturate mixed-blood women, however, was the growth of the idea that to be really civilized a Company officer must have a white wife. Because of their sex, first Indian and then mixed-blood women had been able to achieve a social status in the fur trade which was never accorded their male counterparts, but the coming of white women to Rupert's Land was to have serious implications for fur trade society. As pointed out in Chapter VI, white women were always on the periphery of fur trade

society, but very few of them actually came to the Indian Country until well into the nineteenth century. In the 1680's, the Hudson's Bay Company had allowed one officer to bring his wife and her companion to Fort Albany, but they proved such a nuisance that the Company soon expressly prohibited any white women from sailing to Hudson Bay. In the early nineteenth century, three isolated white women made their appearance in fur trade society. The circumstances of two, the Orkney lass Isabel Gunn and the English barmaid Jane Barnes, were exceptional, and only one, Marie-Anne Lajimodière, actually settled in the West. While the coming of the Selkirk settlers was to reveal the potential for prejudice against native wives, only a few traders married colonists' daughters and their influence on fur trade society was slight.

In 1830, however, the old fur trade social structure was dealt a shattering blow when Governor George Simpson and Chief Factor John George McTavish both returned from furlough with British wives, and unfeelingly cast aside their country wives. Simpson's behaviour in Red River made it evident that mixed-blood women were no longer considered suitable society for the colony's elite, a fact especially mortifying to those officers who remained loyal to their native wives. Mrs. Simpson only associated with those few white women who were the wives of officers or clergymen, and the social prestige attached to obtaining a white wife is shown by the rapidity with which

the British schoolmistresses became wives of retired Company officers. In 1840, two more prominent officers, James Hargrave and Duncan Finlayson, brought British wives to Rupert's Land.

By this time, however, Simpson's efforts to eliminate mixed-blood women from the upper strata of fur trade society had largely collapsed because most of the recently-arrived white women, including his own wife, had failed to make a successful adjustment to life in the West. In most cases, those officers who had married white women retired within a few years or moved to more amenable posts in eastern Canada. Thus, mixed-blood women were able to retain prominence in in fur trade society, but their desire to keep this position was to be increasingly challenged by incoming white women. Indicative was the social rivalry which developed at several fur trade posts between officers' and missionaries' wives.

The build up of racial and social tension which resulted from the coming of white women exploded in the Foss-Pelly scandal which shook Red River in 1850. The attack on Sarah Ballenden, the wife of the Company's chief officer in the colony, for alleged sexual impropriety can be interpreted as an attack on the English mixed-bloods' right to a place in the fur trade elite. This mixed-blood woman's bitterest enemies were the wives of the Protestant clergy and aspiring white wives of lower-ranking Company officers. Although the case against her was never proved, Mrs. Ballenden's character

was stained for life, and she was virtually hounded out of the settlement. Her fall from grace added to the growing reluctance on the part of Company officers to marry mixed-blood women because it tended to reinforce the prejudice that there was a certain moral weakness inherent in females of part-Indian extraction. While mixed-blood women were not entirely excluded from the fur trade elite, it is significant that those who retained social prominence came from highly-Anglicized or wealthy fur trade families who studiously endeavoured to disassociate themselves from every vestige of their Indian connection.

The transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada in 1870 signalled the end of the old fur trade order. With the coming of widespread settlement, the ascendancy of the white woman was assured, and the important role of native women in the early development of western Canada was to be demeaned and forgotten.

CHAPTER I

THE INDIAN WOMAN ON THE BAYSIDE BEFORE 1774

In formulating its policy toward the Indians, the Hudson's Bay Company, being primarily interested in profits, was more influenced by commercial considerations than by genuine regard for the welfare of the native population with which its servants came in contact. Though lacking any profound knowledge of Indian society, the London Committee, the governing body of the Company, nevertheless sought to devise a policy which would ensure the creation of a peaceful environment in which trade could flourish.

If, unlike their French counterparts, the English made no effort to Christianize or educate the Indians, they also refrained from taking sides in tribal warfare and saw their role rather as that of peacemakers because war was so detrimental to trade. The Committee hoped to secure the Indians' favour by adopting a policy of benevolent paternalism. As the London Committee instructed Governor Sergeant at Albany in 1683:

It is our Desire that you and all others who are employed by us in the Bay should treat the Indians with Justice and Humanity... ¹

Although the Committee continued to exhort its officers to

¹E.E. Rich, ed., Copy-Book of Letters Outward, 1679-1694 (Toronto: Champlain Society, vol. XI, 1948), p. 79.

treat the Indians "civilly" and "Trade upon an Equal Foundation", it strongly emphasized that civil treatment was not to be equated with familiarity.² In contrast to the French practice of fraternizing with the Indians, the Committee attempted to prohibit virtually all social contact. To allow its servants and the Indians to mix freely would be prejudicial to its interests, the Committee deemed, since such familiarity would render the Indians impudent and troublesome, lead to illicit trade and undermine discipline. According to Andrew Graham, a prominent Company officer in the latter half of the 18th century:

...no person is allowed to have any correspondence with the natives without the Chief's orders, not even to go into an Indian tent. And the natives are not permitted to come within the Forts but when their business requires, and then they are conducted to the Chief's house or trading room, where all business with them is transacted. ³

The strict segregation envisaged by the Committee was, however, at variance with the realities of life in Hudson Bay where the developing inter-dependence between white and Indian meant that contact was unavoidable. In the earliest years of the Company, the inexperience of its servants, coupled with the fear of French attack, led to the policy of relying upon the

²H.B.C.A., London Committee to Governor of Churchill, 18 May 1738, A.6/6, f. 12; see also London Committee to Governor of York Factory, 5 May 1748, A. 6/7, f. 139.

³Glyndwr Williams, ed., Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91, (London: H.B.R.S., vol. XXVII, 1969), p. 248. See also Edward Umfreville, The Present State of Hudson's Bay, ed. by W.S. Wallace, (Toronto, 1954), p. 61.

Indians to supply the posts with "country provisions". This resulted in the appearance of a group of Indians known as the "Home Guard", who camped close to the factory on an area known as the plantation and were chiefly employed in hunting for the Company.⁴

The "Home Guards", in turn, rapidly became dependent upon the Company. Since they were suppliers of not only furs but fresh meat, even the London Committee had to accept the necessity of saving these Indians from starvation, a constant threat in the harsh wilds of the Shield. The post journals abound with instances of Indians and their families being admitted to the factories, humanitarian as well as economic motives moving individual factors to relieve their suffering from hunger, sickness and cold. Indeed, a former servant of the Company, one J. Jones, testified at the Parliamentary enquiry of 1749:

...the Indians near the Factories Consider their Factories as their Home, The Company relieves their distresses, keep their Families for several Months together. ⁵

In practice, therefore, the rules of the Committee were often contravened. It appears that the most frequent transgressors were the Indian women who, owing to male susceptibilities, had been given ease of access to the Company's posts from its

⁴H.B.C.A., London Committee to Governor of Albany, 23 June 1702, A. 6/3, f. 53-53d. See also Samuel Hearne, A Journey to the Northern Ocean, ed. by Richard Glover, (Toronto, 1958), p. lxxv.

⁵H.B.C.A., Company Annals, No. 8, 1749, p. 16.

earliest years. In 1679, a new governor, the puritanical John Nixon, had denounced the disordered state of Charles Fort where he found the men living licentiously, spending and embezzling goods.⁶ His report prompted a shocked London Committee to form a strong prejudice against its servants having any dealings with Indian women:

We are very sensibly that the Indian Weomen resorting to our Factories are very prejudiciall to the Companies affaires, not only by being a meanes of our Servants often debauching themselves, but likewise by embeazling our goods and very much exhausting our Provisions, It is therefore our possitive order that you lay your strict Commands on every Cheife of each Factory upon forfeiture of Wages not to Suffer any woeman to come within any of our Factories and that none of our Servants may plead ignorance, Wee doe hereby require, you to cause a writeing to bee affixed in Some publick place in every Factory...and if not withstanding all this, there shall bee any refractory Persons that shall Presume to entertaine, any Weoman, let us have an account of them by first Opertunity and wee will not faile to send for them home for wee cannot never Expect good Services from such, whome neither the Lawes of God or Man can restrain from Wickedness. 7

In its attitude toward Indian women, the London Committee clearly revealed that "quaint mixture of moral reprobation and commercial caution" which Professor E.E. Rich sees as characteristic of the Company's general Indian policy.⁸ There is an almost religious tone to these early instructions which

⁶E.E. Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Vol. I, 1670-1763, (London; H.B.R.S., vol. XXI, 1958), p. 80.

⁷Rich, Letters Outward, 1679-1694, pp. 40-41.

⁸Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Vol. I, p. 493.

exhorted the men to live virtuous lives, forbade all drunkenness and gambling, and commanded that "the Common Prayer be daily read in all our Factories & that the Lds. Day be Duely observed."⁹ But however sincere the Committee's moral strictures were, it seems likely that commercial considerations took precedence. Ever mindful of the cost of maintaining its posts, the Company refused to accept the additional expense of supporting Indian women and their children. Furthermore, the Committee suspected that the mens' contact with Indian women, particularly during trading and ship time, contributed to the illicit trading in furs which remained a vexing problem in this period.

The remote eye of the Committee also observed that meddling with Indian women could provoke the Indians to acts of violence which threatened to disrupt trading relations. Such an incident had occurred at Charles Fort in 1674 when a jealous Indian, upon discovering his wife within the post, had "pull'd out a Hatchet, which he had hidden under his Coat, and given her a desparate Wound in the Head." He then fled to the woods, fearing punishment, but this outrage prompted Governor Bayly to prohibit all Indians from entering the fort except the Chiefs.¹⁰

⁹Rich, Letters Outward, 1679-1694, pp. 81, 126.

¹⁰J.B. Tyrrell, ed., Documents relating to the Early History of Hudson's Bay, (Toronto: Champlain Society, vol. XVIII, 1931), p. 387.

The Committee's belief in the validity of its policy was strengthened by reports of the tragic consequences which resulted from the liberties the French were inclined to take with Indian women during their occupancy of the English posts on the Bay. Governor Knight found York Fort in a terrible state of disrepair when he received it from the French in 1714, part of the garrison having been murdered by irate Indians for offering violence to their women.¹¹ Accounts of exactly what happened are confused, but James Isham claims to have heard directly from some of the surviving perpetrators the lurid account he gives of an attack upon the French at Fort Phéliepeaux on the Severn River, an outpost of Fort Bourbon (York):

...the Natives (women) was forc'd into the fort against their will which aggravated them to that Degree, that they fixd. upon Revenge,--they therefore unperceivd. informd. their husbands to be Ready upon a Signal they wou'd make, accordingly the women took an oppertunity to wett all the french fuzes with their 'urine, and then gave the Signal, when their husbands Gott in under cover of the Night, and put their Enemies to the rout, when the french run to their arms and found how they was betrayd, and was Kill'd for their prefidiousness, being 8 in Number. 12

Taking the French experience much to heart, the London Committee wrote urgently to Governor Knight that his men were not to "concern" themselves in any way with Indian women since that

¹¹H.B.C.A., Albany Journal, 15 May 1713, B. 3/a/4, f. 32d.

¹²E.E. Rich, ed., James Isham's Observations and Notes, 1743-49, (London: H.B.R.S., vol. XII, 1949), p. 95.

was "the occasion of so many French men being cut off by there jealousy".¹³ In 1715, the Council at York actually tried and dismissed a refractory servant Thomas Butler, one of his sins having been that of "lyeing with a Woman of this Country".¹⁴

Although in theory, the Committee's policy toward Indian women may appear eminently sensible, in practice, it was to prove largely unworkable because it failed to make allowances for the reality of fur trade life. In spite of repeated injunctions from the Committee, its regulations remained only loosely or, at best, sporadically enforced. After their surprise attack on Moose Factory in 1686, for example, the French found several Indian women in the quarters of Company servants.¹⁵

The basic cause for the development of intimate contact between Indian women and white men was, of course, sex. No white women were permitted to accompany their men to Hudson Bay which precluded the possibility of connubial comforts in the conventional sense. Although one governor's wife had been permitted to go out to the Bay in the 1680's, the Committee quickly regretted this decision.¹⁶ Thereafter, the ships' captains were ordered to put off "all ye Women from on board

¹³H.B.C.A., York Journal, 26 Sept. 1714, B. 239/a/1, f. 17.

¹⁴H.B.C.A., York Journal, 27 Dec. 1715, B. 239/a/2, fos. 11, 75-76.

¹⁵Rich, Letters Outward, 1679-1694, p. 313.

¹⁶For a discussion of the first white women to visit Hudson Bay, see Chapter VI.

ye shipp, before your departure from Gravesend."¹⁷ With white women excluded from the Bay, the Company's men inevitably turned to Indian women to satisfy their sexual needs. Especially in this early period, the calibre of officers and servants alike made them unlikely candidates for the strict, almost monastic, life envisioned by the Committee. Once in the Bay, they succumbed readily to the temptations of alcohol and women, practically the only means of tempering a harsh, monotonous existence.

Furthermore, some Englishmen found young Indian women not unattractive representatives of their sex. According to James Isham, Cree maidens were most enticing:

...very frisky when Young &..well shap'd...
their Eyes Large and Grey yet Lively and
Sparkling very Bewitchen... 18

"A very ambitious sort", the women took pains to fashion their long black hair in elaborate "Knotts & platts" often adorned with bead fringes. Their fondness for ornamenting the person gave the traders' beads and trinkets an irresistable appeal. Andrew Graham was less impressed with the intricacies of the Indian woman's toilet: "Like their sisters on the other side the Atlantic", he lamented, "they make too much use of paint".¹⁹ Owing to the drudgery and hardship imposed by her

¹⁷H.B.C.A., Sailing Orders, 1 June 1720, A. 6/4, f. 48.

¹⁸Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 79.

¹⁹Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 150.

primitive existence, however, an Indian woman's youthful beauty soon vanished. This was especially true among the penurious Chipewyan, whose women, Samuel Hearne declared, were "as destitute of real beauty as any nation I ever saw." Yet even these appear to have been acceptable as occasional bedfellows.²⁰

The development of a body of "Home Guards" around each post meant that Indian women were near at hand and the opportunity for contact frequent. For reasons of expediency and often compassion, Indian women were regularly admitted to the factories. In order to encourage the Indians to hunt for furs, some governors undertook to maintain burdensome dependents during their absence.²¹ In times of scarcity in Indian society, the women were usually the first to suffer.²² Whereas before they would often have perished, many now sought relief at the Company posts. At Albany during the hard winter of 1706, for example, Governor Beale gave shelter to three starving Cree women whose husband had sent them away as he could only provide

²⁰Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, pp. 56, 83.

²¹H.B.C.A., Albany Journal, 27 Feb. 1706, B. 3/a/1, f. 29; Churchill Journal, 8 Oct. 1724, B. 42/a/5, f. 7.

²²The choicest parts of the meat were always reserved for the men, and in times of scarcity the women were reduced to a diet of berries and roots. Samuel Hearne observed that several Chipewyan women died of starvation on the journey back from the Coppermine River in 1772: "...in times of want the poor women always come off short; and when real distress approaches, many of them are permitted to starve, when the males are amply provided for," (Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 190).

for his two children.²³ Quite a number of Indian women also received medical aid from the post surgeons. A notably successful case was that of a woman who was left at Albany in the fall of 1769 "exceeding Ill". Humphrey Marten recorded with satisfaction that the husband returned the following spring to find not only his wife but his three children "hearty and Well" thanks to "Mr Kitchen's care, and the nourishment afforded them from Your Honors Fort".²⁴ That the Company rather than the tribe had become responsible for a Home Guard's dependents by the mid-18th century is illustrated by the accidental drowning of an Indian hunter at Churchill in 1762 who left "two women and four Small Children a Burthen on the Factory."²⁵

If the accessibility of the women facilitated contact, the sexual mores of the Indians themselves encouraged the growth of intimate relations. The Committee's emphasis on the Indians' jealousy of their wives reflected a superficial understanding of their attitude toward women. In most Indian tribes, polygamy was an economic necessity, and a man's prestige was enhanced by the number of wives he could support.²⁶ An Indian took a wife with little ceremony, the European concepts of chastity

²³H.B.C.A., Albany Journal, 23 Feb. 1706, B. 3/a/1, f. 28.

²⁴H.B.C.A., Albany Journal, 7 Dec. 1770, B. 3/a/63, f. 14.

²⁵H.B.C.A., Churchill Journal, 1 August 1762, B. 42/a/56, f. 47.

²⁶Hearne gives a detailed account of the reasons for polygamy among the Chipewyan, see Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 80.

and fidelity playing no part in their notions of the married state.²⁷ Isham observed that the Cree placed little premium upon virginity: "Maidens are Very rare to be found at 13 or 14 Years, and I believe m'y Safely say none at 15..."²⁸ Both the Cree and the Chipewyan practised the custom, common among primitive peoples, of offering their wives or daughters to strangers as a token of friendship and hospitality.²⁹ The Indian was certainly not without his own moral standards. When found guilty of a clandestine amour, a wife could expect violent punishment or even death, but a husband deemed it perfectly proper to lend his wife to another man for anywhere from a night to several years, after which she was welcomed back along with any children born in the interim.³⁰ It was usually the failure of the white man to respect this distinction which provoked Indian hostility. Several Company officers such as Hearne and Isham professed themselves shocked by the Indians' sexual behaviour, but Andrew Graham made the perceptive observation that they could not fairly be judged by European standards:

²⁷Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 175; Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 101: "When a Young Man has a mind for a Wife, they do not make Long tedious Ceremony's nor yet use much formality's..."

²⁸Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 80.

²⁹Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 82.

³⁰Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 95; Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, pp. 83-84; Williams, Graham's Observations, pp. 157-58.

I cannot with propriety rank fornication and adultery (though very frequent amongst them) among their vices as they think no harm in either. 31

It was thus well within the context of their own morality for the Indians to sanction liaisons between their women and the Company's men. As Richard White, a witness at the enquiry in 1749, put it: "The Indians were a sensible People, and agreed their Women should be made use of..."³² Furthermore, it did not take the Indian long to realize that the Englishman's desire for women could be used to his own material advantage. Few of the Company's men scrupled at exploiting this situation; the Indians' craving for alcohol, in particular, ultimately resulted in the corruption of Indian morality into outright prostitution. It became common practice for an Indian to lend his wife to an Englishman for a bottle of brandy.³³ The Chipewyans were reputed to have been in the habit of taking their women hundreds of miles to the Bay for no other purpose than to satisfy the lust of the English.³⁴

³¹Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 153.

³²H.B.C.A., Report from the Committee, appointed to inquire into the State and Condition of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay and of the Trade carried on there, 24 April 1749, p. 219.

³³H.B.C.A., Andrew Graham's Observations, 1768, E. 2/4, f. 16. See also Joseph Robson, An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay from 1733 to 1736, and 1744 to 1747, (London, 1752), p. 52.

³⁴Alexander Henry, Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories, 1760-1776, ed. by James Bain, (Boston, 1901), p. 333.

On occasion, relations deteriorated into scenes of drunken debauchery. At Moose Factory, for example, such excesses had culminated in the post burning to the ground on Christmas Day 1735, the men being too inebriated to put out the fire. Twelve Indians had been in the factory at the time and one girl lost her life. A leading Indian, it was revealed, had been able to ingratiate himself with the men by his having not only two wives of his own, but "a great sway amongst all the Indian women" who had been free with their favours. "Vice was grown rampant...to a monstrous degree of wickedness," remonstrated Factor Staunton who was sent to restore order, but he felt obliged to admit that the Indians had been more corrupted than corrupting.³⁵

By the mid-18th century, several Company officers such as James Isham had become concerned about the demoralizing effect of alcohol on the Indians:

I think as others has, itt's a pittty they was allow'd to taste of that Bewitching spirit call'd. Brandy, or any other Spiritious Liquor's, - which has been the Ruing of a Great many Indians, and the Cheif Cause of their Ludness and bad way's they are now given to... 36

Although the Company endeavoured to prevent alcohol from becoming a staple of its trade during this period, competition from the French who used liberal supplies of rum, forced the

³⁵H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 26 Dec. 1735, B.135/a/6, f. 2; K.G. Davies, ed., Letters from Hudson Bay, 1703-1740, (London: H.B.R.S., vol. XXV, 1965), pp. 270-71.

³⁶Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 103.

English to make a present of a dram or two of brandy at trading time. The Home Guards, in particular, came to expect a liberal treat of liquor for procuring provisions and trapping small furs.

The Indian women, who themselves often received brandy as payment for netting snowshoes or catching martens, became rapidly addicted.³⁷ In a drunken state, they appeared prone to jealous acts of violence³⁸ and seriously neglected their children:

I have wonder'd oft'n their is not more Infants Kill'd, then what is, seeing them when Drunk, tumble about and the Child in their arms, Crying, and squaling, half starvd. with hungar; and others has sett their Children Down against a stone, or tree, and not come anigh itt for some hour's, the Liquor being infus'd in her Brain, has Laid all thoughts of the young Infant aside. 39

A few decades later Samuel Hearne confirmed the view that the Cree women had become thoroughly debauched:

So far from laying any restraint on their sensual appetites, as long as youth and inclination last, they give themselves up to all manner of even incestuous debauchery; and that in so beastly a manner when they are intoxicated...that the brute creation are not less regardless of decency.

³⁷H.B.C.A., Churchill Journal, 22 Nov. 1750, B.42/a/36, f. 20. Isham claimed that drunkenness was a more serious problem among the women, "they being Given more to Drinking than the men, Considering such is odious and not Becoming their Sex," (Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 106).

³⁸H.B.C.A., Albany Journal, 30 August 1741, B.3/a/31, p. 52d.

³⁹Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 106.

He feared that the Chipewyan women who seemed to him "the mildest and most virtuous females" in any part of the country would share the same fate; when permitted to remain at the Company's post, they readily fell into bad ways, all "for the sake of gain".⁴⁰

A most deleterious effect of the promiscuity of contact was the spread of venereal disease, which threatened to wreck havoc among the Indians. The Committee ordered that any servant suffering from the "foul Disease" should forfeit a month's wages, a punishment which caused several guilty men to endeavour to hide the nature of their distemper often with fatal consequences.⁴¹ By 1763, the Committee was so concerned that its trade would suffer by the resulting fatality at Churchill that they implored the post's surgeon "to use your utmost endeavors to Eradicate that Disease."⁴²

The London Committee, hearing only of the "irregularities & debaucheries" which sometimes characterized its servants' contacts with the Indians,⁴³ was slow to appreciate the positive contributions which Indian women could make to the development of the fur trade. The officers in the field, however, who bore

⁴⁰Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 81.

⁴¹H.B.C.A., London Committee to Governor of York, 17 May 1739, A.6/6, f. 84; York Journal, 16 March 1772, B.239/a/66, f. 37.

⁴²H.B.C.A., London Committee to Surgeon at Churchill, 31 May 1763, A. 5/1, f. 54d.

⁴³H.B.C.A., London Committee to Governor of Albany, 17 May 1723, A. 6/4, f. 144.

the responsibility for the enforcement of official Company policy, were inclined to bend the rules in light of the requirements of life on the Bay. As Andrew Graham succinctly observed, "The intercourse that is carried on between the Indian ladies and the English...is not allowed, but winked at..."⁴⁴

In fact, many of the governors (or factors as they were called) took the lead in forming liasons with Indian women, partly because they realized that such alliances were of value in cementing trade ties. In an effort to secure the Indians' allegiance, the English adopted the practice of bestowing certain marks of esteem, such as a red coat and other military regalia, upon leading hunters who were highly regarded by other Indians. The families of such men, who were designated by the title "Captain", also expected deferential treatment, and an astute trader realized that benefits could accrue from flattering the women with little presents since they appeared to exert a not inconsiderable influence where trading matters were concerned. The secret, claimed Governor Isham, was "to please the Ladys" but not so far as "to Create a Misunderstanding".⁴⁵ When Captain Sakie, a prominent Indian at Moose Factory in the 1740's, received

⁴⁴H.B.C.A., Graham's Observations, 1771, E. 2/7, f. 24d.

⁴⁵H.B.C.A., York Journal, B. 239/a/40, f. 41d.

his customary gifts at trading time, his wife was also honoured, on one occasion with such items as "a brass Coller & a stone ring" in hopes that she would bring them into fashion.⁴⁶

Such was the esteem in which Captain Sakie's wife was held, that when she died two years after her husband in 1747, both Indian and Englishman joined to bury her with solemn ceremony:

In the Afternoon We Buryed ye Queen along side of ye King her Husband after the English fashion, we put her into a Gun Chest and Covered it with a flag 4 English Carried her upon there shoulders & 4 Indian woman held up ye Pall, old Chicikitie (Sakies own Brother) & his Wife walkt next ye Corps & all ye rest of ye Indians in Order after them being about 30...I walkt before the Corps to ye Burying place when we came there & sett the Corps down Chicikitie made a short Speach after there way then we put her into ye Grave & Covered the Corps up, Chickitie Interseeded with me very much to Rail it Round like ye Englishmen's Burying place...they all seemed to be vastly pleased when I said it should be done. 47

Gifts, however, were an expensive and often unreliable means of gaining an Indian's loyalty. A more effective method of attaching the nomadic hunter to a particular post was to form an alliance with one of his women. Although the specific identity of most of the Indian women kept by the early Hudson Bay Company's factors remains unknown, it appears that they were usually the daughters or wives of leading Indians. During his governorship of Albany in the 1760's, for example, Humphrey Marten formed a union with Pawpitch, a daughter of the "Captain

⁴⁶H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 13 May 1742, B. 135/a/11, f. 62d.

⁴⁷H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 27 May 1747, B. 135/a/17, f. 16d.

of the Goose Hunters".⁴⁸ Several decades earlier, another governor Joseph Adams had had a child by an Indian woman, described as being of "ye blood Royal".⁴⁹

A few governors, it seems, even went so far as to adopt the custom of polygamy, which, however repugnant to European morality, would have enhanced their prestige in Indian eyes. James Isham, described as the "Idol of the Indians" during his rule at York in the 1740's and 50's, maintained more than one Indian lady.⁵⁰ Likewise Robert Pilgrim was reprimanded by the Committee for keeping two women with their children in his apartments at Fort Prince of Wales in the 1740's.⁵¹ One of his successors, Moses Norton, who assumed command at Churchill in 1762, was reputedly a most notorious polygamist. If the very unsavory character-sketch written by his arch-enemy Samuel Hearne is to be believed, Norton kept a selection of five or six of the finest Indian girls to satisfy his passions, being quite ready to poison anyone who dared refuse

⁴⁸H.B.C.A., Albany Journal, 24 Jan. 1771, B. 3/a/63, f. 18d.

⁴⁹H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 4 March 1744, B. 135/a/14, f. 32.

⁵⁰Parliamentary Report, 1749, p. 224. A Company servant testified that it was "one of the Governor's Ladies" who had cut the cable of the sheet anchor of the "Dobbs' Galley" one of the ships of the interloping expedition that wintered at York in 1746-47. See also Rich, Isham's Observations, pp. 322, 325.

⁵¹H.B.C.A., London Committee to Pilgrim, 6 May 1747, A. 6/7, f. 110d.

him their wives or daughters.⁵² Part of Hearne's enmity, however, stemmed from the fact that Norton, who was insatiably jealous of his own harem, went to great lengths to prevent his officers from enjoying Indian women.⁵³ Other governors

⁵²Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, pp. 39-40. The general assumption that Moses Norton was the half-breed son of former Churchill governor Richard Norton is open to doubt. He was certainly not "an Indian" as Hearne claims, but it is highly unlikely that a half-breed could have attained the position of governor in the Company's service. If Moses Norton was a half-breed, it is strange that Company records never allude to this fact as is the case for other governors' sons. Hearne himself at another point (p. 82) makes no distinction between Moses Norton and other European fathers whom he castigates for their over-indulgence of their children born in the Bay. Furthermore, Norton's own writings and actions indicate a degree of Anglicization that could not have been accomplished in the years which Hearne claims Moses spent at school in England. Moses Norton's own will (P.R.O., Prob. 11/1002, f. 374) indicates that his origin was English. He names his mother in 1769 as Mrs. Susannah Dupeer which suggests that Norton was born of a liason between this woman and Richard Norton before she married Dupeer. Richard Norton makes no mention of his son Moses in his own will (P.R.O., Prob. 11/713, f. 314), but he may have used his influence to secure the boy a position in the Company's service. In 1744, Moses was apprenticed in England to Capt. George Spurrell, in 1753 he engaged in London as the mate of the Churchill sloop and within ten years, he was governor of Fort Prince of Wales. He had an English wife named Sarah Norton to whom he made regular payments (A. 16/10, f. 51). Moses like his father, however, did show a strong propensity for Indian company, and both had native families in the Bay. In his will, Moses curiously refers to his half-breed daughter Mary as the "niece" of his sister Meo, See, tak, ka, pow. This sister may have been a half-sister by his father's Indian wife, or perhaps she was Moses' own Indian wife whom he named in this way to conceal the relationship from his English wife.

⁵³For a discussion of Hearne's thwarted love for Norton's own daughter Mary, see Chapter IV. Hearne does not appear to have lacked feminine company, however, for when describing the pet beavers he kept in his own apartments, he remarks that they were "the constant companions of the Indian women and childrenduring the Winter they lived on the same food as the women did, and were remarkably fond of rice and plum pudding" (Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 157).

such as Joseph Isbister and Ferdinand Jacobs also deemed it their perogative to entertain Indian ladies while strictly applying the Committee's rulings to subordinate officers and servants. By the mid-18th century, it had become the established practice for a Company governor to take an Indian "wife". Andrew Graham, who himself fathered at least two children during his time on the Bay, affirmed that "the Factors keeps a bedfellow within the Fort at all times."⁵⁴

The term "wife" is not inappropriate when one considers that from the Indian point of view these unions would have been equated with marriages. The appearance of such phrases as "father-in-law" and "son-in-law" in the post journals indicates that the English themselves were beginning to acknowledge a marital relationship.⁵⁵ While the temporary nature of such "marriages" was undoubtedly accepted by all parties, a tendency towards relationships of increasing duration is also evident. Children were a strong factor in cementing ties between mother and father, and the resulting semblance of domesticity must have done much to alleviate the loneliness of life in an isolated fur trade post. The intensity of Humphrey Marten's feelings for his Indian wife Pawpitch is revealed in his concern when she fell ill of a fever. He must have been watching over her when she died for he records her

⁵⁴Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 248.

⁵⁵H.B.C.A., T. Mitchell to G. Spence, 3 Feb. 1745, B.3/b/2, f. 12; Moose Journal, 16 May 1742, B.135/a/11, f. 64.

death, an unusual step in itself, as occurring at precisely ten minutes to three on the morning of 24 January 1771. The father worried about the fate of his "poor Child" now motherless; he feared to entrust the little boy to his Indian relations, as would have been customary, because Pawpitch's father was now old and already burdened with a large family.⁵⁶ Marten eventually succeeded in sending his son to England, having implored the Committee to make an exception to the ruling that no person of Indian or part-Indian extraction was to be allowed passage to England.

A direct cause of this regulation had been the action of Chief Factor Robert Pilgrim whose attachment to his Indian family had resulted in their accompanying him to England in 1750. Pilgrim not only turned a blind eye when censured for keeping Indian women, but took his favourite called Thu a Higon⁵⁷ with him on moving from Churchill to Moose Factory. Affairs at Moose sank to a low ebb under Pilgrim's misrule, but bad health forced him to retire to England at the end of one season.⁵⁸ Pilgrim took Thu a Higon and an infant son to live in Hackney near London, but it was soon evident that he was dying. On November 23, the same day that he saw his son

⁵⁶Albany Journal, 18-24 Jan. 1771, B.3/a/63, f. 18-18d.

⁵⁷Thu a Higon is the spelling given in Robert Pilgrim's will. The name is also spelt variously as Rico higin, Rue he gan, and Ruwehegan.

⁵⁸H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 3 Sept. 1750, B.135/a/20b, f. 2.

baptised "Robert", he drew up a will to provide for his family.⁵⁹ The child he committed to the care of his executors, one being his brother, but Thu a Higon was to be sent back to Hudson Bay. The executors were to see that she was supplied with everything needful for the voyage and in the interim to provide her with "all decent sufficient and convenient Maintenance Meat Drink Washing Lodging [and] Apparel". Pilgrim was buried on December 1, 1750. Whether the executors faithfully carried out his requests is not known, but Thu a Higon's very presence embarrassed and irritated the London Committee. She was sent back to York Factory on the Prince Rupert in the summer of 1751, accompanied by a strict order forbidding all ships' captains to allow "any Indian or Esquemay Man, Woman or Child to be brought as a passenger to any part of Great Britain on any Pretense whatever without Our Express order in Writing for so doing".⁶⁰ Thu a Higon arrived at York with so much baggage that she could not be sent overland to Churchill but had to wait for a passage by the sloop. She eventually arrived back home on September 5, undoubtedly to be greeted with joy and astonishment by her family who were camped close to the fort.⁶¹

⁵⁹H.B.C.A., Private file on Robert Pilgrim; P.R.O., Will of Robert Pilgrim, 23 Nov. 1750, Prob. 11/784, f. 396.

⁶⁰H.B.C.A., Sailing Orders, 16 May 1751, A.6/8, f. 54d.

⁶¹H.B.C.A., J. Isham to J. Isbister, 19 August 1751, B.239/b/7, f. 3; Churchill Journal, 5 Sept. 1751, B.42/a/38, f. 4.

Thu a Higon was, at least, spared the almost insuperable problems of adjustment she would have had to face had her husband lived. After this incident, no other Company officer appears to have endeavoured to take his Indian wife to England. Although towards the end of the 18th century an increasing number of officers begged permission to send their children overseas, the usual and accepted course had always been for an Indian woman and her offspring to return to her own relations when her Company "husband" died or left the Bay. The Indian woman kept by Joseph Adams at Albany before he retired in 1737, for example, turned up at Moose Factory several years later--the esteemed wife of a leading hunter Aurickashagon.⁶² After the death of Pawpitch, Humphrey Marten took another wife from the Albany Home Guards. She accompanied him when he was transferred to York in 1776, but before Marten went on furlough in 1781, the girl's father arrived to take care of his daughter and conduct her and two grandchildren back home to Albany.⁶³ The Indians readily adopted "the Englishmen's children" into the tribe, an act which reflected the strong kinship ties and great love of children characteristic of Indian society. Furthermore, children by white men were held in high regard because of their reputedly superior physical

⁶²H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 4 March 1744, B.135/a/14, f. 32.

⁶³H.B.C.A., York Journal, 17 July 1781, B.239/a/79, f. 45. It is not known if Marten resumed this relationship when he returned to York in 1783. He died at York in 1786.

traits:

...when any of the married women had a child by an Englishman the husband is not angry... but proud of his present. Indeed the affair rivets her firmly in his favour. 64

While the London Committee continued to remonstrate against the formation of these liasons, in practice, the governors had long since exempted themselves from the rules regarding Indian women. As early as 1739, in fact, the Committee had had to acquiesce, albeit grudgingly, when Richard Norton, governor at Churchill, refused to give up his Indian family:

As, to your own conscience in Relation to the Indian Woman and Family, we agree with you that we have no power over that but Certainly the Company ought not to be put to any Charge, or their affairs be Damaged thereby... 65

Humphrey Marten ultimately felt obliged to challenge the Committee's ruling, emphasizing that if a few Indian women were not kept in the posts the Company's interest would be "greatly hurt".⁶⁶

Indeed, the expense of maintaining an Indian woman was largely offset by her own economic contribution in performing essential tasks unique to fur trade life. Only the Indian woman was skilled in netting snowshoes and making moccasins

⁶⁴H.B.C.A., Graham's Observations, 1771, E.2/7, f. 5d; Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 145.

⁶⁵H.B.C.A., London Committee to R. Norton, 17 May 1739, A. 6/6, f. 100.

⁶⁶H.B.C.A., Governor of York to London Committee, 13 Sept. 1780, A.11/116, f. 77d.

without which the Englishman would have been immobilized in winter. Their services had early been appreciated by the officers on the Bay; even a strict disciplinarian such as Joseph Isbister stressed the necessity of admitting a few women to the factories:

...we cannot do without SnowShoes & other Necessarys for our Men who are always abroad & requires a Constant Supply of Shoes for the winter otherwise we can Kill no partridges nor, be able to provide our Selves with fireing. 67

Furthermore, owing to the division of labour in Indian society, the women took an active part in catching small fur-bearing animals such as rabbits and martens, which became particularly important to the posts on the Bay as beaver grew scarce.⁶⁸ It was because she was "very Industrious in Catching Martins" that Governor Adams' former mistress received such preferential treatment from the tyrannical James Duffield when brought in sick to Moose Factory by her Indian husband:

...relieved them with provisions, ordering our Surgeon to bleed her & sent them to our tent, giving her a bottle of warm ale to take a glass after ye operation, she having been...used to these comforts...must use them with tenderness on acct of ye Compys Interest. 69

⁶⁷H.B.C.A., Churchill Journal, 27 Nov. 1750, B.42/a/36, f. 23. See also Churchill Journal, 8 Oct. 1724, B.42/a/5, f. 7.

⁶⁸Parliamentary Report, 1749, p. 247: "The smaller Game got by Traps or Snares are generally the Employment of the Women and Children, such as Martens, Squirrels, Cats, Ermines etc...."

⁶⁹H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 4 March 1744, B.135/a/14, f. 32.

The economic usefulness of the Indian women reinforced the social motives for maintaining them in the Company's posts, a situation which fostered the development of liasons with ordinary servants as well as officers. In practice, the enforcement of the Committee's policy varied with the capability and inclination of each individual governor. Under a particularly lenient or ineffectual chief, the men took to keeping Indian women in their own quarters. More frequently they were restricted to casual contacts outside the fort walls, although "at proper times" a factor might allow an officer to entertain an Indian lady in his apartment provided she was not kept there overnight.⁷⁰ As the result of continual injunctions from the Committee, however, certain governors attempted a strict enforcement of the rules.

At Moose Factory in the 1740's, Governor Duffield claimed to have banished the "Noise, Drunkenness & Confusion" which had characterized the previous decade by instituting a rigid scheme of hard work and discipline. He himself kept a scrupulous watch to prevent "all Clandestine Intercourse" with the Indians.⁷¹ Families who had been freely admitted to the factory were now barred. This action was particularly resented by one servant Augustin Frost, who had formed a connection with the daughter

⁷⁰Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 248.

⁷¹H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 20 March 1742, B.135/a/11, fos. 46-47.

of a Home Guard called Muccatoon. Duffield repeatedly thwarted Frost's schemes for gaining access to his family, claiming that Frost's warnings that the Indians were becoming disgruntled under the new regime stemmed solely from his desire to turn Moose into "an Indian Factory, with his own wives & Numerous family both in & about it as was ye Custom before."⁷²

During the same period, Joseph Isbister was applying a similar prescription to affairs at Albany where he had specifically been commanded to curtail "the detestable Sin of Whoring".⁷³ However, his further attempts in the early 1750's to prevent the men at Churchill from consorting with Indian women provoked much ill-feeling. When forbidden open contact, some of the Company's servants took to sneaking over the walls at night. Isbister caned two such culprits, John Dunk and Charles Leth, who had stolen to the tent of some Cree Indian women when their husbands were absent hunting and had debauched them with presents of liquor.⁷⁴ The officers felt particularly embittered at being denied former privileges since Isbister continued to allow Indian women to frequent his own quarters.⁷⁵ Their resentment reached a pitch in an incident involving Thu a Higon, the returned companion of the

⁷²H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 16-18 May 1742, B.135/a/11, fos. 64-66.

⁷³H.B.C.A., London Committee to Isbister, 15 May 1742, A.6/7, f. 1.

⁷⁴H.B.C.A., Churchill Journal, 2-4 Nov. 1751, B.42/a/38, fos. 13-15.

⁷⁵H.B.C.A., Churchill Journal, 22 Nov. 1750, B.42/a/36, f. 20.

late Robert Pilgrim. Early in February 1752, Thua Higon and her mother brought a large number of partridges to the factory for which they received gun-powder and a quart of brandy destined for the hunter who had shot them. While returning to their tent, however, the women helped themselves to the liquor and were soon observed in such an intoxicated state as to be in danger of freezing to death. Isbister felt moved to rescue them, but on his way, encountered two Company officers, James Walker and Robert Bass, apparently bent on the same mission. Having sternly reprimanded Walker and Bass before for trying to take advantage of Indian women,⁷⁶ Isbister ordered them back to the fort while he and two other men proceeded up river "where we found the women in a bad Condition, Not Capable of proceeding...& being late wee Carried [them] to the factory." Isbister claimed he acted solely from humanity, but Walker and Bass made it no secret that they believed less charitable designs had prompted him to confine the two women to his own house. An angry exchange resulted, Walker giving vent to his frustration:

...he began to Vindicate himself...telling me that there are no such strictness at the other factorys as here for here a Man cannot so much as look at an Indian [woman] he is so watched.

⁷⁶In November 1750, Isbister had accused Walker, Bass and Timothy Sutton of trying to seduce two women who had been allowed to stay the night in the factory because of severe weather, (Churchill Journal, 21-22, 27 Nov. 1750, B.42/a/36. fos. 19d-20, 23).

When Isbister retorted that he could not tolerate such bad practices which he knew to be prejudicial to the Company's trade, Walker declared that he wished he might serve under Mr. Isham at York even though it would mean ten pounds a year less in wages.⁷⁷

In spite of the Committee's censure,⁷⁸ James Isham, who was one of the Company's most successful governors during this period, readily permitted his men to have the company of Indian women outside the fort at the goose tents or on short journeys where they were especially useful. More stable relationships were also allowed to develop. Some women resided within the factory in the servants' cabins, since Isham undoubtedly observed that such liasons had a conciliating effect upon the men. However, his successor Ferdinand Jacobs, who took over after Isham's death in 1761, roundly denounced such license, declaring that "the worst Brothel House in London is Not So Common a Stew as the men's House in this Factory".⁷⁹ He refused to admit the Indian women to the men they regarded as husbands, a move so unpopular that several

⁷⁷The above incident is recorded in the Churchill Journal, 5-8 Feb. 1752, B.42/a/38, fos. 26d-27d.

⁷⁸H.B.C.A., London Committee to Isham, 16 May 1751, A.6/7, f. 170. When Isham was re-appointed Chief Factor at York, the Committee commanded that in return "you do not harbour or Entertain any Indian Woman or Women in our Factory or permit others under you so to do."

⁷⁹H.B.C.A., York Journal, 22-24 Sept. 1762, B.239/a/50, f. 5-5d.

servants feigned sickness and refused to work. Yet at the same time, Jacobs appears to have felt that his own domestic relations were beyond reproach.⁸⁰

The consequences of a Factor attempting to enforce the letter of the Company's ruling, while reserving to himself the right to maintain an Indian woman, reached a tragic climax in the Albany area in the 1750's. Joseph Isbister returned from Churchill in 1752 to find that discipline at Albany had seriously lapsed during his absence. He again debarred all Indians from the post with the exception of his own two women.⁸¹ This imprudent act not only distressed the men, notably the armourer who claimed he had expended thirty pounds of his own money on his sweetheart,⁸² but it also grievously insulted the Indians. Woudby, the captain of the Home Guards, in

⁸⁰Jacobs had had a son by an Indian woman at Churchill in 1756 whom he named Samuel (Churchill Journal, 22 Feb. 1756, B.42/a/46, f. 22). This child was sent to England to be educated and eventually entered the service of the East India Company (P.R.O., Will of Ferdinand Jacobs, 30 Oct. 1782, Prob. 11/1110, f. 569). A daughter named Thucautch, however, was brought up among her mother's relations at York, although Jacobs made some provision for her when he left the Bay, see Chapter IV.

⁸¹H.B.C.A., Geo. Rushworth to London Committee, 8 Sept. 1755, All/2, f. 173d: "...yr Governour koops two favorits."

⁸²Isbister had a difficult time restraining the armourer Joseph Statton who threatened to run away and refused to do his duty after Isbister barred his mistress from the factory. When Isbister rebuked him for his "ill behaviour & Example", Statton retorted that "he did not Care & that he had Spent thirty Pounds Sterling upon an Indian woman, not at the Company's Expense but his own," (Albany Journal, 10 Sept. 1753 and 7 Jan. 1754, B. 3/a/46, fos. 5, 17).

particular, had felt entitled to enter the fort and help himself to provisions since "the Governours and Englishmen kept there Women, and the Victuals was for them as Well as for us" and he threatened revenge.⁸³ When William Lamb left Albany in 1754 to assume command of Henley House, a small outpost about one hundred miles upstream, he insisted, in spite of warnings, that it was his prerogative to keep Indian women since the Governor at Albany did. He apparently had two favourites, one called Nam,a,shis, the wife of Woudby's son, and the other Woudby's own daughter, Won,a,Wogen:

These Mr. Lamb kepted in the House all Winter at Bed and Board Eating the Provisions which the Englishmen Should have had.

Their husbands and kin were denied the comforts of the post, however, and being thus outraged and probably prompted by the French, fell upon the unwary English during the winter killing them and pillaging the house. "Women," lamented Albany's surgeon George Rushworth, "has been the destruction of Your People, Your Goods and Trade." Woudby and his accomplices were summarily tried and executed. Although Isbister was dismissed for this unauthorized measure, a shocked London

⁸³This and subsequent quotations are taken from George Rushworth's account of the "real cause" of the attack on Henley House (Geo. Rushworth to London Committee, 8 Sept. 1755, A.11/2, fos. 173-74). Isbister tried to conceal the fact that women had been involved and claimed that the French were at the botton of the "Villainous" affair (Isbister to London Committee, 14 Sept. 1755, A.11/2, f. 175). Certainly the French were implicated in the second attack on Henley House in 1759, see Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Vol. 1, p. 613.

Committee strongly reiterated the folly of making "bosom friends" of the Indians.⁸⁴ The Henley House incident served to harden the Committee's attitude at an unfortunate time since the very fact that the Company was beginning to respond to French competition accentuated both the need and the opportunity for closer contact with the Indians.

From the time of the Company's first journeys inland, Indian women had played an important role in assisting the solitary wanderings of those few Englishmen who dared to face the hazards of an uncharted wilderness. As early as 1683, the Committee had urged its servants to travel inland to contact new tribes and bring them down to the Bay to trade; but few of the Company's men, lacking as they did knowledge both of wilderness survival and native languages, could be persuaded to venture far from the security of the posts in spite of the Committee's offer of reward.⁸⁵ As a result, the Hudson's Bay Company's inland exploration during the first century of its existence was restricted to a few isolated sojourns often undertaken by young apprentices who depended entirely upon the Indians who accompanied them.

⁸⁴H.B.C.A., London Committee to Governor of Albany, 12 May 1756, A.6/9, fos. 29d-30.

⁸⁵Rich, Letters Outward, 1679-1694, pp. 75, 141.

The first Englishman to journey inland from the Bay was the apprentice Henry Kelsey, "a very active Lad delighting much in Indians Compa...",⁸⁶ who travelled southward from York in 1690 with a band of Cree to establish friendly relations with the Assiniboine. Kelsey's journals testify to the essential services performed by the Cree women, a role resulting from the division of labour in nomadic Indian society. As the man's role was concentrated on providing food, all the routine duties of camp and home fell to the woman. Besides performing the ordinary female tasks of making clothes and preparing food under the laborious conditions of her primitive environment, the Indian woman also served as a beast of burden, carrying or hauling the requirements of camp from place to place and fetching the beasts which the hunters had killed.⁸⁷ "This day we lay still for the women to fetch home the meat & Dress it", recorded Kelsey after a buffalo hunt in August 1691.⁸⁸ Kelsey was the first of several Englishmen to comment on the degraded state of the Indian woman, whose endless round of toil made her appear little more than a slave:

Now as for a woman they do not so much mind her for they reckon she is like a Slead dog or Bitch when she is living & when she dies they think she departs to Eternity but a man

⁸⁶Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Vol. 1, p. 296.

⁸⁷Williams, Graham's Observations, pp. 177-78.

⁸⁸A.G. Doughty and C. Martin, The Kelsey Papers, (Ottawa, 1929), pp. 11, 14.

they think departs to another world and lives again. 89

The next Company servant to visit the plains was Anthony Henday in 1754. He also valued the services of the Indian women in his party who were constantly employed pitching camp, drying meat, collecting berries, dressing skins for clothing and netting snowshoes.⁹⁰ In fact, inland journeys which were not accompanied by Indian women seemed doomed to failure. At Churchill, Governor Moses Norton had prevented Samuel Hearne from taking Indian women with him on his attempt to reach the Coppermine River in 1769, ostensibly to reduce the task of providing for a large party.⁹¹ But Matonabee, the remarkable Chipwyan guide of the third and successful expedition of 1771-72, emphasized that this omission had been a prime cause of the failure of Hearne's first two attempts:

...for, said he, when all the men are heavy laden, they can neither hunt nor travel any considerable distance; and in case they meet with success in hunting, who is to carry the produce of their labour? Women...were made for labour; one of them can carry, or haul, as much as two men can do. They also pitch our tents, make and mend our clothing, keep us warm at night; and, in fact, there is no such thing as travelling any considerable distance, or for any length of time, in this country,

⁸⁹Doughty, Kelsey Papers, pp. 21-22.

⁹⁰The services of Indian women are mentioned in all four versions of Anthony Henday's journal in the Company's archives (B.239/a/40; E.2/4, fos. 35-60; E.2/6, fos. 10d-38d, and E.2/11, fos. 1-40d.), but the most complete references are to be found in E.2/6 and E.2/11.

⁹¹Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 9.

without their assistance. Women...though they do everything, are maintained at a trifling expence; for as they always stand cook, the very licking of their fingers in scarce times, is sufficient for their subsistence. 92

Hearne's third expedition was, therefore, well equipped with sturdy Indian women, and the Englishman's journal provides a lively record of the trials and tribulations of Chipewyan society. The harsh northern environment accentuated the hardships of the Chipewyan women's lot, and coupled with maternal cares, rendered "the most beautiful among them old and wrinkled, even before they are thirty". Hearne declared that most of the women at that age were "perfect antidotes to love and gallantry", but he acknowledged that a Chipewyan judged his women by different standards than did a European:

Ask a Northern Indian, what is beauty? he will answer, a broad flat face, small eyes, high cheekbones,...a low forehead, a large broad chin, a clumsy hook-nose, a tawny hide, and breasts hanging down to the belt. Those beauties are greatly heightened, or at least rendered more valuable, when the possessor is capable of dressing all kinds of skins, converting them into the different parts of their clothing, and able to carry eight or ten stone in Summer, or haul a much greater weight in Winter. 93

Matonabee himself was immensely proud of his own seven valuable wives, all chosen for their strength and skill, but the manipulation of such a harem proved beyond his capacity. He was much disconcerted when the "handsomest" and most "engaging"

⁹²Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 35.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 56-57.

of his wives managed to escape back to her former husband, having chosen "to be the sole wife of a sprightly young fellow of no note...than to have the seventh or eighth share of the affection of the greatest man in the country."⁹⁴ When forced to pay blackmail to retain another of his wives, Matonabee was so offended that only Hearne's gentle persuasion prevented him from abandoning the expedition.

The ease with which Chipewyan wives changed hands resulted from the men's custom of wrestling for whomever they desired; the woman, whatever her own feelings, became the prize of the victor.⁹⁵ Hearne's chivalric attitude toward the "gentle sex" caused him to be deeply shocked by this and other cruelties which characterized a Chipewyan woman's existence. He deemed it most inhuman that the women, who were only entitled to the men's leavings, should be the first to suffer in times of scarcity. The Chipewyan attitude to childbirth seemed to him most unfeeling. Particularly pitiful was the case of one poor woman who, immediately after a very difficult confinement, was forced to travel on through water and snow carrying not only the baby but a considerable load:

Her very looks, exclusive of her moans, were a sufficient proof of the great pain she endured, insomuch that although she was a person I greatly disliked, her distress at

⁹⁴Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, pp. 66-67.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 67-69, 71.

this time so overcame my prejudice, that I never felt more for any of her sex in my life; indeed her sighs pierced me to the soul... 96

Women were usually the prize, if not the cause, of tribal warfare, slaves being a valuable addition to the labour force owing to the high rate of female mortality. Through captives held by bands living in the vicinity of the Bay, the English learned of tribes further afield. Owing to the traders' ignorance of native languages, an Indian woman sometimes found herself in the highly-prestigious role of interpreter. An outstanding example is the fascinating story of Thanadelthur or the Slave Woman, as she was always called--a Chipewyan who enabled the Company to establish contact with her people which resulted in the founding of a post on the Churchill River.⁹⁷

In November 1714, Governor James Knight at York Factory, who was anxious to expand trade to the northwest, received encouraging information from a Chipewyan woman who had been captured by the Cree during a raid the previous winter. He feared his plans for establishing a post at the mouth of the Churchill River might be thwarted by her premature death,⁹⁸

⁹⁶Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 58.

⁹⁷For published accounts of the Slave Woman, see Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay, pp. 410-13; Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. II, pp. 627-28; Alice M. Johnson, "Ambassadress of Peace", The Beaver, December 1952, pp. 42-45; Sylvia Van Kirk, "Thanadelthur", The Beaver, Spring 1974, pp. 40-45.

⁹⁸H.B.C.A., York Journal, 22 Nov. 1714, B.239/a/1, f. 25.

but two days later another "slave" woman straggled into the fort. She and another woman had recently escaped from their Cree master, hoping to reach their own country, but cold and hunger had forced them to try to seek the Company's post of which they had heard. The other woman having perished on the way,⁹⁹ this woman had eventually stumbled upon the Company's goose tent at Forty Shilling Creek and was thus brought safe but starving to the factory. Knight enthusiastically declared, "She speaks...this Country Indian [Cree] Indifferently but will be of great Service to me in my Intention."¹⁰⁰ The first step in the realization of his scheme was to establish a truce between the Cree and the Chipewyan, long inveterate foes; so in the summer of 1715, Knight sent William Stuart, accompanied by the Slave Woman and a large party of Cree, to make peace with the Northern or Chipewyan Indians. The Slave Woman was entrusted to the Englishman's special care, Knight ordering him to ensure "that none of the Indians abuse or Missuse the Slave Woman ...or take what She has...that is to be given Amongst her Country Peoples."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹York Journal, 4 Dec. 1714, B.239/a/1, f. 26. Knight initially suspected that the Slave Woman had murdered her companion to avoid starvation, but he later appears to have changed his mind (York Journal, 27 July 1716, B.239/a/2, f. 48).

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 24 Nov. 1714, f. 25.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 27 June 1715, f. 43.

In spite of the privation and hostilities which threatened the expedition, the mission was successful thanks largely to the "perpetuall talking" of the Slave Woman who was acknowledged as "the chief Instrument in the finishing of it." Governor Knight emphasized William Stuart's admiration for his courageous companion:

[Stuart] tells me that he never See one of Such a Spirit in his Life. She kept all the Indians in Awe as she went with and never Spared in telling them of their Cowardly way of Killing her Country Men...and when she came with her Country Men to them She made them all Stand in fear of her she Scolded at Some and pushing of others that they all stood in fear and forced them to ye peace. Indeed She has a Divellish Spirit. 102

After the party returned to York in early May 1716, the Slave Woman made the most of the exalted status which the English had bestowed upon her. Taking the Company's interest much to heart, she was most provoked by the attempt of one old Chipewyan to trade skins that were out of season: she "Kitched him by the nose Push'd him backwards & call'd him fool and told him if they brought any but Such as they were directed they would not be traded..."¹⁰³ Yet the Slave Woman was not without duplicity for when Knight rebuked her for having given away his present of a little kettle, she claimed it had been stolen, called him a liar and threatened

¹⁰²H.B.C.A., York Journal, 7-9 May 1716, B.239/a/2, fos. 27-29

¹⁰³Ibid., 10 May 1715, f. 29d.

that her Indians would kill him if he went to Churchill River, whereupon Knight summarily boxed her ears. The woman soon begged forgiveness, however, and restored herself to favour by hastening to assure the Governor that he was beloved of all the Indians and would never come to any harm.¹⁰⁴

Thereafter, the Slave Woman devoted herself to promoting Knight's plans for the discovery of the fabled gold and copper mines to the north and stoutly resolved to travel again to the Chipewyans in the spring of 1717 to spread the news of the proposed settlement at Churchill. Indeed, this doughty Englishman found her a most extraordinary female:

She was one of a Very high Spirit and of the Firmest Resolution that ever I see any Body in my Days and of great Courage & forecast also endued with an Extraordinary Vivacity of Apprehension Readily takeing anything right as was proposed to her & Presently Give her Opinion whether it would doo or not. 105

Unfortunately during the winter when all were suffering from the extreme cold and the scarcity of provisions caused by the non-arrival of the annual ship, the Slave Woman fell dangerously ill. She continued bravely, however; shortly before her death, she summoned the "English Boy",¹⁰⁶ who

¹⁰⁴H.B.C.A., York Journal, 5 Feb. 1717, B.239/a/3, f. 24.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., f. 23.

¹⁰⁶The "English Boy" was probably Richard Norton, who travelled to the Chipewyans the following July in the company of William Stuart and another slave woman. Stuart was instructed to keep an eye on the boy because he had early shown a fondness for Indian company, see J.F. Kenney, The Founding of Churchill (Toronto, 1932), p. 71.

was to have accompanied her to learn the language, and bid him "not to be Afraid to go Amongst their Indians for her Brother & Country People would love him and not lett him want for anything."¹⁰⁷ All were sorrowful when four days later on 5 February 1717, the Slave Woman died. Knight, much grieved because his plans now lay in ruins, gave his faithful helper a ceremonious burial, bitterly observing that although the weather was the finest yet that season the day was the "most Melancholys't by the Loss of her."¹⁰⁸ So heavily did Knight rely on the interpreting services of Chipewyan women that he managed with great difficulty to secure a replacement for the Slave Woman, though she cost him "above 60 skins value in goods."¹⁰⁹ This woman set off with Richard Norton in July of 1717 to bring the Chipewyans to the Bayside, while an advance party of Company servants journeyed to the Churchill River to begin the construction of the new post.

Indian women were also instrumental in the extension of the Company's trade to the north on both the West and East Mains where the difference in language proved a major barrier. John Potts at Richmond on the East Main in 1753 avowed that

¹⁰⁷York Journal, 5 Feb. 1717, B.239/a/3, f. 23.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., f. 24.

¹⁰⁹Kenney, Founding of Churchill, p. 63.

his sole purpose in sending for a certain woman from Albany had been her perfect understanding of the dialect which differed much from that of the West Main. She had rendered "Great Service to the Company at this Settlement as an Interpreter," having taught Potts the language so he could now make the Indians "Sensible" of his intentions.¹¹⁰

An Indian woman's domestic skills and knowledge of native tongues made her a valuable companion, particularly to an inexperienced Englishman. It became the accepted custom, therefore, for Company servants to take an Indian woman as help-mate and bed-fellow when journeying abroad. Although Joseph Robson's account of the reasons behind Kelsey's expedition is highly suspect, he was probably close to the truth in claiming that Kelsey had become so Indianized during his two-year absence that he returned to York Factory

dressed in their manner, and attended by a wife who wanted to follow him into the factory. The governor opposed this; but upon Kelsey's telling him in English that he would not go in himself if his wife was not suffered to go in, he knew him, and let them both enter. ¹¹¹

¹¹⁰H.B.C.A., Richmond Journal, 8 Sept. 1753, B.182/a/6, f. 3. Eskimo women also served as interpreters, see Richmond Journal 28 July 1757, B.182/a/9, f. 37. On the West Main, an Eskimo woman called Doll was sent from York to Churchill to accompany the sloop as interpreter on a northward journey in 1764 to acquaint the natives of "our Friendly Intentions" (Churchill Correspondence, B.42/b/9, fos. 2,4; M. Norton to London Committee, 17 July 1764, A.11/4, fos. 1-2).

¹¹¹Doughty, Kelsey Papers, p. xv. Robson claims that Kelsey ran away to the Indians because of harsh treatment, but it is obvious from Company records that his journey was openly sanctioned by Governor Geyer, see Glyndwr Williams, "Kelsey, Henday and the Prairies", The Beaver, Autumn 1970, pp. 21-23.

Anthony Henday certainly kept his own "bed-fellow", a Cree woman, when he undertook to establish contact with the Blackfoot in response to French competition in 1754. Besides performing the normal material services such as preparing his "winter rigging", this woman secretly provided him with invaluable information about the designs of her countrymen. She enabled him to avoid possible danger by advising him to stop pressing his party of Indians to hunt for furs because they intended to trade them from the Blackfoot in the spring.¹¹² Henday protected his ally from the other Indians who might have killed her had they discovered her complicity, and when the scarcity of provisions reduced most of the women to subsisting on berries, he felt obliged to give her a share of his meat.¹¹³ The Englishman obviously enjoyed his preferred status which, like that of the Indian leaders, entitled him to the lavish attentions of "Ladies of different ranks".¹¹⁴ But he almost over-stepped the mark in Indian eyes by his gallant attempts to cultivate the women, a measure he saw as "the Chiefest thing that will Encourage the Inds to Come to trade".¹¹⁵

¹¹²E.2/4, f. 52-52d. This version gives the most complete account of the warnings Henday received from his Cree helpmate, but see also E.2/6, fos. 27, 29d.

¹¹³E.2/6, 1 Sept. 1754, f. 17.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 8 August 1754, f. 14d.

¹¹⁵This remark and Isham's comment thereon only appear in the so-called official version of Henday's journal, B.239/a/40, 2 Feb. 1755, f. 80, which would have been perused by the Committee.

Isham, Henday's superior, who agreed that the women could influence trade relations, felt that Henday had missed a good opportunity when he refused a Blackfoot chief's offer of his daughter in marriage as such an alliance would have created "a firm friendship and...been a great help in Engaging them to trade."¹¹⁶

In response to the devastating competition of the Pedlars, the English eventually made frequent trips up the Saskatchewan during the decade prior to the establishment of Cumberland House in 1774, the Company's first real inland post. The London Committee, concerned that the men would "go native" ordered its Servants not "to Forget your Duty to God" and to refrain from interfering with the Indians' wives.¹¹⁷ But necessity if not inclination caused the English to adopt the Indian mode of life and travel; Indian women were a valuable asset to the Company's poorly-manned trading parties, the development of intimate relations being an inevitable corollary.

¹¹⁶ Isham was perhaps mistaken in asserting that Henday was offered the actual daughter of a Blackfoot chief. Henday himself only mentions that he declined the offer of two slave girls (E.2/4, f. 22d). Samuel Hearne suspected that the Indians often offered the whites only their undesirables: "Indeed, it is but reasonable to think that travellers and interlopers will be always served with the worst commodities though perhaps they pay the best price for what they have, (Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 82.)

¹¹⁷ H.B.C.A., York Journal, 1760, B.239/a/48, f. 47; Governor of York to London Committee, 24 August 1764, A.11/115, f. 85.

Thus, by the end of the Company's first century, it had proved impossible to prevent the development of liasons between the Company's men and Indian women in spite of the London Committee's repeated injunctions. While the Committee's fear of possible danger and expense was not without foundation, the complexities of both human and trade relations in the Bay required a more subtle approach to the problem. The Committee's segregative policy tended to retard the Englishman's adaptation to the wilderness environment. Governors on the spot such as James Isham appreciated the benefits which could accrue from taking an Indian mate, who formed an effective liason with the Indian culture. It was unrealistic for the Committee to expect that its servants would not turn to Indian women to fill the sexual void caused by the absence of white women; its attitude, which hindered the development of more stable relationships, probably accentuated the debauched excesses which characterized some of the encounters during this period.

Although the Company's regulations were frequently contravened both by officers and men, in general the rules appear to have been enforced to the extent that relations with Indian women became a function of rank. According to Andrew Graham in the later half of the 18th century, only Chief Factors were allowed to maintain Indian women permanently within the factories, but they usually allowed their officers

a good deal of license.¹¹⁸ Ordinary servants, however, were limited to chance encounters outside the posts, a measure which caused much discontent. Even these restrictions were to break down when the Company began to move inland to confront a powerful Canadian rival which actively encouraged the formation of intimate ties with the Indians.

¹¹⁸ Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 248.

CHAPTER II

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ROLE OF THE INDIAN WOMAN INLAND

The men of the Montreal-based North West Company, inheritors of the framework and traditions of the French colonial fur trade after the conquest of 1759-60, readily adopted the attitudes of their predecessors with regard to Indian women. Unlike the English who relied upon the Indians to bring their furs down to the Bay to trade, the French coureurs de bois went directly to the source of supply, taking their goods to the Indians among whom they wintered and returning to Montreal with their furs the next year. The success of the coureur de bois depended on his adaptation to the Indian way of life; by taking an Indian helpmate, his acculturation could be greatly facilitated. Besides familiarizing the Frenchman with the customs and language of her tribe, the Indian woman performed a myriad of domestic tasks essential to wilderness survival. Such an alliance also helped to secure trade ties.

By the early 18th century, French traders had formed extensive connections among the tribes as far west as Lake Superior. When occasionally a Frenchman turned up at one of the English posts on the Bay, he was invariably accompanied by an Indian woman. Governor Adams at Albany, for example, reported that one Joseph Delestre had arrived with "his Slave"

in February 1732.¹ The marriage and baptismal records of the Catholic mission at Michilimackinac in the 18th century testify to widespread intermarriage between the French and Ojibway women. In many cases, the priest sanctified a marriage which had been contracted according to Indian custom several or more years before; typical was the ceremony performed 30 August 1749 for Jean manian l'esperance and Rose, "a Sauteux woman Savage of la pointe, recently Baptized" at which their children, aged eight, six and three, were present.² A significant entry is that recording the marriage of Jean Baptiste Cadot and Marianne, "a neophyte, daughter of a nipissing" on 28 October 1756.³ Cadot, one of the most prominent traders of the late French period, owed much of his success to this alliance which secured his influence among the Ojibways. The capable daughter of a chief of one of the principal Ojibway bands, Cadot's wife, more commonly known as Anastasie, took an active part in her husband's trading operations based at Sault Ste. Marie. Cadot was the only French trader of any note to remain in the pays d'en haut after the conquest. He

¹H.B.C.A., Albany Journal, 3 Feb. 1732, B.3/a/20, f. 14.

²"The Mackinac Register of Marriages, 1725-1821," Wisconsin Historical Collections, vol. XVIII, (Madison, 1908), p. 476.

³"Mackinac Register", p. 483.

formed a partnership with an early Nor'Wester Alexander Henry the elder who noted that Madame Cadot was "very generally respected".⁴

The immediate example of the usefulness of an Indian mate was not lost on the Scottish-American traders in their reorganization of the Canadian fur trade. The officers of the North West Company, known popularly as bourgeois, adhered to the trading practices of the French-Canadians, who, for the most part, now formed the labouring class of engagés, highly prized for their skill as canoemen and knowledge of Indian life. Officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, soon painfully aware of this formidable new opposition, claimed that the Canadians' familiarity with the Indians was an important factor in their success:

The Canadians have great Influence over the Natives by adopting all their Customs and making them Companions, they drink, sing, conjure, scold with them...and the Indians are never kept out of their Houses whether drunk or sober, night or Day. ⁵

The formation of liasons with Indian women was the natural concomitant of this policy. All ranks, bourgeois, clerk and engagé, were allowed to have their women, and the North West Company accepted the responsibility for the maintenance

⁴Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 61; Walter O'Meara, Daughters of the Country: The Women of the Fur Traders and Mountain Men, (New York, 1968), pp. 276-77.

⁵H.B.C.A., T. Hutchins to London Committee, 5 July 1775, A.11/4, f. 29.

of Indian wives and families.⁶ One English company officer observing the high style in which his Canadian counterpart travelled noted that the bourgeois always had "his girl" who was carried in and out of the canoe and shared the luxury of his tent and feather bed; furthermore, if a clerk "chuses to keep a girl which most of them does the Master finds her in Apparel so that they need not spend one farthing of their Wages".⁷ Unlike their English rivals, the men of the North West Company operated under no official restraints with the result that liasons with Indian women formed a characteristic feature of the spread of their trade across the west.

The writings of the Nor'Westers abound with comments on the relative merits of the women of the various tribes. Although the traders' judgments were coloured by European standards of beauty and propriety, it is evident that many Indian women, who were the only females to be encountered for months on end, possessed considerable attractions of their own. Ojibwa maidens were noted for their soft, delicate countenance and "pretty black eyes, which they know very well how to humour in a languishing and engaging manner whenever they wish to please".⁸ In Alexander Mackenzie's view, the

⁶W.S. Wallace, Documents relating to the North West Company, (Toronto: Champlain Society, vol. XX, 1934), p. 211.

⁷J.B. Tyrrell, ed., Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor, 1774-1792, (Toronto: Champlain Society, vol. XXI, 1934), pp. 252-53.

⁸L.R. Masson, Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, (New York, 1960 [reprint]), Vol. II, pp. 247-48.

most comely Indian women were the Cree:

Their figure is generally well proportioned, and the regularity of their features would be acknowledged by the more civilized people in Europe. Their complexion has less of that dark tinge which is common to those savages who have less cleanly habits... 9

Other traders shared this opinion, remarking on the care with which Cree ladies fashioned their hair, painted their faces and decorated their garments and person. "They omit nothing to make themselves lovely," declared Alexander Henry the elder.¹⁰

An Indian woman's beauty soon faded owing to her harsh and exposed existence; according to the elder Henry, the Assiniboine way of life left the women only "tolerably handsome", but he was impressed by the modesty of their dress and demeanor and the sweetness of their voices.¹¹ In contrast, the lack of modesty exhibited by Mandan females shocked David Thompson, but he had to admit, observing their dances, that they were "a sett of handsome, tempting women."¹² Thompson maintained that a trader soon became reconciled to the hardened features of the Piegan women, and their long,

⁹W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, (Cambridge, Eng., 1970), pp. 133-34.

¹⁰Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 247.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 293, 302, 312.

¹²Richard Glover, ed., David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812, (Toronto: Champlain Society, vol. XL, 1962), p. 177.

soft robes of antelope skin showed them to advantage.¹³ A less tolerant Alexander Henry the younger acknowledged that if cleansed of grease and dirt a Blackfoot woman's features would be agreeable.¹⁴ But an Indian woman did not have to meet a trader's conception of beauty to be the object of sexual gratification. Most considered that the women of the Chinook tribes of the Lower Columbia River who flattened their heads and smeared their bodies with salmon oil had little to recommend them,¹⁵ but these scantily-clad females were particularly generous with their favours and their offers appear to have been acceptable to all but the most fastidious.

While sexual mores varied from tribe to tribe, in general the Nor'Westers encountered attitudes which sanctioned a good deal more license than would have been acceptable in their own society. Few tribes placed a premium upon virginity, wives were freely exchanged, and, as Alexander Mackenzie observed of the Cree, it was customary to offer women to

¹³Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 255.

¹⁴Elliott Coues, ed., New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814, (Minneapolis, Minn., 1965 [reprint]), pp. 525-26.

¹⁵Ross Cox, The Columbia River, ed. by Edgar I. and Jane R. Stewart, The American Exploration and Travel Series, vol. 24, (Norman, Okla., 1957), p. 71; Gabriel Franchère, Narrative of a Voyage to the Northwest Coast of America in the Years 1811, 1812, 1813, and 1814, ed. by Reuben G. Thwaites, Early Western Travels, vol. 6, (Cleveland, Ohio, 1904), pp. 325-326.

strangers as a token of hospitality.¹⁶ On his journey to the Pacific, Mackenzie refers frequently to his men sharing the beds of women of various tribes.¹⁷ The "extraordinary hospitality" of the Mandan in this regard seems to have been a potent incentive for trading parties making the long journey across the plains to their villages on the Upper Missouri.¹⁸

Indian mores were increasingly corrupted, however. The Nor'Westers' desire for women and the Indians' desire for trade goods and liquor resulted in outright prostitution. As early as 1776, Alexander Henry the elder claimed that the Indians had little need to trap furs for the Pedlars "for what with trading Provisions [and] lending their Women to Masters and Men, they obtain more necessaries than they want". He observed that both Cree and Chipewyan women received their husbands' encouragement to seek "a loose intercourse" with the traders.¹⁹ According to Duncan McGillivray, the Blackfoot who visited Fort George in 1794 were prepared to prostitute their women to gain the favour of the whites, a practice

¹⁶Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 134; see also Coues, New Light, pp. 515, 517 and Cox, Columbia River, pp. 166-67.

¹⁷Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 289.

¹⁸Coues, New Light, p. 324; Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 177.

¹⁹E.E. Rich, ed., Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journal, 1775-79, (London: H.B.R.S., vol. XIV, 1951), p. 37; Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 248, 333.

previously regarded as dishonourable.²⁰ Within a decade or so, prostitution had become widespread among the Plains Indians. Alexander Henry the younger recorded that his men were "in their glory" after a trip to a Blackfoot buffalo pound in the winter of 1809, the Indians offering plenty to eat and their wives on easy terms.²¹ Indeed, Henry declared the Piegan and the Blackfoot had become real nuisances in offering their women to the Company's men, especially when it was "all for the sake of gain, not from any regard for us." He considered the Gros Ventre or Fall Indians even more depraved; "For a few inches of twist tobacco a Gros Ventre will barter the person of a wife or daughter with as much sangfroid as he would bargain for a horse. He has no equal in such an affair..."²² Not all women came so cheaply; on an earlier occasion, one of Henry's men traded his horse, a most valuable possession, "for one single touch at a Slave girl."²³

Nowhere was prostitution more rampant than on the lower reaches of the Columbia. According to Ross Cox, large numbers of Chinook women camped outside the Company's post during the summer ready to satisfy the needs of the voyageurs who manned

²⁰A.S. Morton, ed., The Journal of Duncan McGillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-95, (Toronto, 1929), p. 46.

²¹Coues, New Light, p. 577.

²²Ibid., p. 735, see also pp. 526, 659-60, and 722.

²³Ibid., p. 235.

the brigades--a situation he compared with "their frail sisters of Portsmouth" besieging the crews of a newly-arrived East India fleet.²⁴ The younger Henry denounced such licentiousness, which resulted in the rapid spread of venereal disease, when he arrived on the Columbia in 1813. He frequently ordered "canotees" of prostitutes away from the fort, but his efforts were not supported by the other officers who took up with Chinook women immediately upon their arrival.²⁵ Yet Henry was not entirely alone in expressing concern over the demoralizing effect of white contact upon Indian sexual behaviour. David Thompson, one of the first Nor'Westers to visit the Kootenay and the Flathead, admired the high moral standards of these tribes who refused to prostitute their women; he shared Henry's belief that liquor and the lecherous propensities of many of the men themselves were responsible for the vices prevalent among tribes who had had prolonged contact with the traders.²⁶

If some of the bourgeois endeavoured to prevent casual and promiscuous encounters, they had no objection to the formation of more permanent liasons. In fact, the most important feature of the Nor'Westers' relations with Indian women was the widespread development of marriage ties contracted according to

²⁴Cox, Columbia River, pp. 166-67.

²⁵Coues, New Light, pp. 835, 890-91, 906, 910.

²⁶Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 305, 356-57; Coues, New Light, pp. 710-11.

the customs ~~of~~ the various tribes. It appeared to the traders that the polygamous Indians of the North-West conducted their marriages with remarkably little ceremony.²⁷ For the most part, the consent of a girl's parents, who would receive a few presents, was all the formality necessary; the wishes of the girl herself who was often no more than twelve or fourteen were ignored. Though fidelity was expected of a married woman, an Indian husband would commonly lend one of his wives to another man for an extended period. The elder Henry recorded that several of his men entered into arrangements with the Cree to borrow a wife for a whole season.²⁸ Furthermore, most Indians did not hold the marriage bond to be indissoluble; as David Thompson observed of the Cree, if "they cannot live peaceably together, they separate with as little ceremony as they came together, and both parties are free to attach themselves to whom they will, without any stain on their characters."²⁹

The flexibility of Indian marriage customs made them readily adaptable to the fur trade situation. The young clerk Daniel Harmon in his detailed journal of life in the Indian Country recorded the procedure by which a Nor' Wester took a

²⁷Masson, Les Bourgeois, Vol. II, pp. 251-52; Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 82, 255; Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, pp. 151-52.

²⁸Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 248.

²⁹Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 82.

wife à la façon du pays (after the fashion of the country):

when a person is desirous of having one of the Natives Daughters to live with him, he makes a present to the Parents of the Damsel, of such articles as he may suppose that will best please them, but Rum always forms a principal part of the donation, for this is what Savages in general are most fond of, and should they accept the articles offered, the Girl remains at the Fort with her lover... 30

The couple were now considered as man and wife, but should the relationship prove unhappy, it was considered acceptable for the parties to separate and seek a more congenial union. Even a moralist like Harmon, as he became more accustomed to the ways of the fur trade, conceded that this attitude had merit:

for I cannot conceive it to be right for a Man & Woman to cohabit when they cannot agree, but to live in discontent, if not downright hated to each other, as many do. 31

Both officers and men took Indian wives in this way, but a

³⁰W. Kaye Lamb, ed., Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816, (Toronto, 1957), p. 29. It is important to emphasize that a trader could not take an Indian wife without giving credence to the customs of her people. In the words of an old voyageur: "Presque toutes les nations sont pareilles, quant aux coutumes. On ne se joue pas d'une femme sauvage comme on veut....Un homme engagé et un bourgeois donnent des présents aux parents de la femme, pour l'avoir:...Il y aurait du danger d'avoir la tête cassée, si l'on prend la fille dans ce pays, sans le consentement des parents" ("Johnstone et al. vs. Connolly, Appeal Court, 7 Sept. 1869", La Revue Légale, vol. 1, p. 280; hereafter cited as "Connolly Appeal Case, 1869").

³¹Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 53.

voyageur had to obtain the consent of his bourgeois to his proposed match.³²

While the bride price varied, it usually required more than a few trifles to gain the hand of an Indian maiden. At Fort Alexandria in 1801, Payet, one of Harmon's interpreters, gave the parents of his Cree bride rum and dry goods to the value of two hundred dollars.³³ According to the younger Henry, the common medium of exchange was a horse for a wife.³⁴ The marriage of a young clerk to a comely Spokane girl in the winter of 1815 was celebrated by a generous distribution of goods--blankets and kettles to her principal relations, beads, hawk-bells and other trinkets to her lesser kindred.³⁵

In the view of the North West Company, these "country marriages" played a useful role in fostering trade relations, particularly in a competitive situation. The bourgeois appreciated that an alliance with the daughter of a leading hunter or chief could secure not only the bountiful hunt of his father-in-law but those of his relations as well.³⁶ As

³²"Connolly vs. Woolrich, Superior Court, 9 July 1867, Lower Canada Jurist, vol. XI, p. 228; hereafter cited as "Connolly Case, 1867".

³³Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 53.

³⁴Coues, New Light, p. 228.

³⁵Cox, Columbia River, p. 209.

³⁶Lamb, Sixteen Years, pp. 62-63; Morton, McGillivray's Journal, p. 41: McGillivray reported in 1794 that he had secured the furs of a chief, formerly a customer of the English, because one of his relations had become the wife of a Nor'Wester.

a young clerk in the Athabasca country in 1803, William Connolly found his influence among the Cree who frequented Rat River House much increased after he allied himself to one of the prominent chiefs by marrying his daughter, known as Suzanne Pas-de-nom.³⁷ The Indians themselves gained prestige and profit by such matches with the result that many among the Cree kept one or more of their daughters specifically to offer as wives "for the white People".³⁸ It appears that the Nor' Westers married most extensively into the Ojibway, Cree and Chipewyan tribes which inhabited a large area, but as the trade moved westward across the Rockies unions were contracted with women of more remote tribes.

Indeed, marriage alliances played a significant role in the traders' relations with the highly-developed Chinook nation. Shortly before transferring his allegiance to the North West Company, Duncan McDougall, the governor of Astoria, had successfully negotiated a match with one of the daughters of Concomely, the most powerful Chinook chief. Marriage among the Chinook was a more elaborate affair than in most tribes, involving the mutual exchange of gifts; Concomely likely provided his daughter with a rich dowery of furs, but he exacted a heavy price in return. Although McDougall had taken his bride in July 1813, according to Alexander Henry,

³⁷"Connolly Case, 1867", p. 234.

³⁸Toronto Public Library, George Nelson Papers, Journal 1810-11, pp. 41-42.

it was not until the next April that he finally discharged his debt to Concomely:

Mr. D. McDougall this afternoon completed the payment for his wife...he gave 5 new guns, and 5 blankets, 2 1/2 feet wide, which makes 15 guns and 15 blankets, besides a great deal of other property, as the total cost of this precious lady. 39

Several more of Concomely's daughters, born of his wives from various neighbouring tribes, became fur traders' consorts, the importance of such unions being recognized when the Hudson's Bay Company assumed control of the Columbia. Probably during his apprenticeship with the Nor'Westers, the clerk Alexander McKenzie had married Concomely's favourite daughter, dubbed the "Princess of Wales". Governor George Simpson who visited the Columbia in 1824-25, when emphasizing that Concomely's interest had been consolidated by this tie, declared "[Mrs. McKenzie] is much attached to us and not only leads her Husband but the whole of the Royal Family".⁴⁰ In the fall of 1823, another clerk, Archibald McDonald, had married the chief's daughter known as "Princess Raven" with great pomp and ceremony, but she had died shortly after giving birth to a son.⁴¹

³⁹Coues, New Light, p. 901. For an account of this marriage reputedly derived from McDougall's Astoria journal, see Washington Irving, Astoria, or Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains, (Norman, Okla., 1964 [reprint]), pp. 461-63.

⁴⁰Frederick Merk, ed., Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal, 1824-25, Harvard Historical Studies, vol. 31, (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), pp. 86-87, also 104-105.

⁴¹This son, Ranald McDonald, gives a detailed account of his

Although it was the established custom for the officers of the North West Company to take an Indian spouse during their fur trade days, certain individuals betrayed misgivings about forming such a connection which defied the moral precepts of their own predominantly Anglo-Saxon, Protestant background.⁴² The conflicting mores of Indian and white society with regard to male-female relationships presented the traders with a dilemma. While some acknowledged the validity of Indian marriage customs, which of course, the Indians themselves never questioned, others, especially those newly arrived in the country, viewed an Indian wife as little better than a concubine. The circumstances of fur trade life, however, usually combined to quell personal objections to such unions.

Several historians, among them A.S. Morton and Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, when referring to fur traders who had a happy relationship with an Indian woman cite Alexander Henry the younger as a prominent example. In fact, Henry's journal

41 (continued) parents' marriage as reputedly told to him by an eye witness in William S. Lewis and Naojiro Murakami, eds., Ranald McDonald: The Narrative of his early life on the Columbia under the Hudson's Bay Company's regime... (Spokane, Wash., 1923), pp. 84-85, 88-92.

⁴²The descriptions of Indian women given by such Nor'Westers as Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson and Alexander Henry the younger were coloured by European mores. To Thompson, a woman increased in comeliness to the extent that she was clothed; the Plains women with their long leather robes earned his commendation, but he was disgusted by the semi-naked state of some of the women of the Columbia. Henry was scandalized that Mandan and Chinook women should be so lacking in modesty as to bathe in full view of the men.

reveals that he took an Indian partner with great reluctance. At his post among the Ojibways in the Lower Red River district in the early 1800's, several principal men offered Henry their young daughters as wives, but the bourgeois refused, declaring that although the "Indians are very officious in wishing to provide me with a wife...my inclination does not agree with theirs in the least."⁴³ It would appear that Henry's obstinacy provoked one of these slighted damsels, a daughter of the most prominent chief, to take matters into her own hands. After the festivities of New Year's Day 1801, the Nor'Wester recorded with annoyance, "Liard's daughter took possession of my room, and the devil could not have got her out." Although she was firmly ensconced when he returned the next day from buffalo hunting, by the end of the month Henry thought he had successfully persuaded his "bed-fellow" to return to her father. However, after an absence of two days: "The lady returned."⁴⁴ In the face of such determination, Henry seems to have become reconciled to "Liard's daughter". He certainly had a wife in 1803 because he records that his father-in-law, himself the husband of three sisters, had offered him his second daughter, explaining that "all great

⁴³Coues, New Light, p. 162, also p. 58.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 163, 169.

men should have a plurality of wives."⁴⁵ But Henry, like most Nor'Westers, was not prepared to practise polygamy.⁴⁶ For the date 8 March 1806, Henry's journal contains the single cryptic entry: "Her ladyship very ill, etc.", this being the only specific reference he ever makes to his wife.⁴⁷ Apparently she recovered, for Henry's household at Fort Vermilion in 1809 consisted of one woman and three children. While Henry took his family to Rocky Mountain House in 1810, he makes no further mention of them; what happened to his country wife is unknown, but it is unlikely that she accompanied him to the Columbia, where Henry himself died in 1814.⁴⁸

The "custom of the country" initially scandalized Daniel Harmon, a young New Englander with a strict Puritan upbringing who entered the Company's service as a clerk in 1800. At Fort Alexandria in the summer of 1802, he refused a Cree chief's pressing offer of his daughter for a wife. Although he acknowledged that the match would have been in the Company's interest and that the girl herself was not wholly undesirable, Harmon's moral scruples restrained him from falling "into a

⁴⁵Coues, New Light, p. 211. Henry's in-laws were to suffer a gruesome death at the hands of the Sioux in early July 1805.

⁴⁶For economic as well as moral reasons, the Indian custom of polygamy was not incorporated into marriage à la façon du pays as practised by the Nor'Westers. See "Connolly Case, 1867", p. 239.

⁴⁷Coues, New Light, p. 274.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 55, 628.

snare laid no doubt by the Devil himself."⁴⁹ But circumstances mellowed his conscience. Four years later at South Branch House, Harmon, experiencing the loneliness of fur trade life like so many of "the Gentlemen" before him, took "a fair Partner" for connubial comfort. It is perhaps significant, however, that he accepted not a full-blooded Indian woman, but the fourteen-year-old daughter of a French-Canadian.⁵⁰

An obscure English-Canadian clerk named George Nelson⁵¹ had similar moral qualms about relations with Indian women. In 1803 while proceeding to his wintering ground in the Fond du Lac country in the service of the rival XY Company, Nelson, a raw recruit of eighteen, was urged by one of the men and their Indian guide, The Commis, to take the latter's young daughter for a wife. Such a proposal put Nelson in a quandary. Not only were the injunctions of his "stern & unyielding" father still ringing in his ears, but as a new servant in a concern struggling against formidable competition, he was not entitled to the luxury of a woman; yet The Commis, who had earned this epithet from the valuable service he had

⁴⁹Lamb, Sixteen Years, pp. 62-63.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 98-99. The word "fair" is italicized in the text, probably to emphasize the irony of the use of such a stock phrase in this situation. Harmon's well-known relationship with his country wife will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

⁵¹Although the fur trade career of George Nelson and his writings are little known, his brothers Wolfred and Robert have earned their place in Canadian history as two of the leaders of the Rebellion of 1837 in Lower Canada.

rendered the traders, became most disgruntled when Nelson declined his offer. Should the Indian desert, the party would be in desperate straits, and the men finally prevailed upon Nelson to take the girl.⁵² During the course of the winter, he tried several times to get rid of her, but The Commis or one of the men always brought her back. Then Nelson's sense of decency began to emerge; although one of his men, Herse, wanted to have the girl, Nelson deemed him too much of a brute and took her himself out to Grand Portage in the summer of 1804. There he incurred the displeasure of "The Knight" (Sir Alexander Mackenzie) for disobeying orders and resolved upon a complete separation. The girl herself seemed loathe to part with her fur trader and came several times to his tent, but Nelson ultimately found her a new husband in one of the interpreters.⁵³

Doubts still plagued Nelson when he came to take his second wife à la façon du pays. After becoming a Nor'Wester upon the merger in 1804, Nelson served for nearly a decade east of Lake Winnipeg, often at an outpost on the River Dauphine.

⁵²Toronto Public Library, George Nelson Papers, Journal 1803-04, pp. 3, 6-8.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 27-34 passim. In this version of this rather sorry tale, Nelson reveals little feeling for this Indian girl. In another version written several decades later (Journal, 1825-36, pp. 35-36, 53), he claims that had his own inclination been the only factor, he would not have been averse to taking The Commis' "very nice young daughter". Nelson also admits that his treatment of her was "anything but what it should have been."

His bourgeois, Duncan Cameron, who had an Ojibway wife, intimated to young Nelson when they met in the spring of 1808 that an orphan cousin of his wife, then living with the family, would make an admirable spouse. Again Nelson protested on moral grounds, claiming that he considered such a connection, which would horrify his parents, as "open, or public Adultery". But so much did Mr. Cameron deride his scruples and the men ridicule his prudery that by late summer, Nelson found himself once more a married man. His bourgeois gave a ball at Bas de la Rivière to celebrate the occasion, all hands making merry except the reluctant bridegroom, though he did confess, "the Sex had charms for me as it had for others."⁵⁴ Time softened Nelson's prejudices; he kept his Indian wife, who was to prove a valuable helpmate, and the bond between them was strengthened by three children.⁵⁵

Most Nor'Westers rather naively hoped to avoid the encumbrance of children,⁵⁶ but with their inevitable arrival, the majority showed themselves to be affectionate fathers,

⁵⁴Toronto Public Library, George Nelson Papers, Reminiscences, Part 5, pp. 206-07.

⁵⁵In 1815, Nelson says he had three children, the eldest five and a half years and the youngest two years old. It would appear that his country wife died sometime before he retired from the fur trade which was around 1823. In later years, he was to repent that his treatment of her had not been more kind: "...I sincerely and fervently hope...the Almighty has received & comforted her lacerated spirit."

⁵⁶Cox, Columbia River, p. 362: "Very few men wish to have any offspring by their Indian wives; a sterile woman is therefore invaluable. They are however scarce..."

much concerned about the welfare of their offspring. Even a moralizer like the bourgeois James Keith, while lamenting the weakness that had led to his connection with an Indian woman, acknowledged that it had been "the almost unavoidable consequence" of his situation as a young Nor'Wester, and he made generous provision for his two daughters.⁵⁷ For the most part, the unions between Nor'Westers and Indian women gave rise to distinct family units, the resulting domesticity being a significant feature of life in the Indian Country. Such relationships, James Douglas was to write feelingly, played an important part in reconciling a man to fur trade life:

There is indeed no living with comfort in this country until a person has forgot the great world and has his tastes and character formed on the current standard of the stage...To any other being...the vapid monotony of an inland trading Post, would be perfectly unsufferable, while habit makes it familiar to us, softened as it is by the many tender ties, which find a way to the heart. 58

⁵⁷H.B.C.A., Will of James Keith, 19 Jan. 1826, A.36/8. In the Estate Trust Files of James Keith in Aberdeen, Scotland, Keith's country wife is named as the second daughter of Jean Baptiste Cadotte. This would be Jean Baptiste Cadotte, Jr. who married an Ojibway woman like his father. He had four children, his second daughter being called Archangel (Coues, New Light, p. 930).

⁵⁸Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 381. Taking an Indian or half-breed partner remained the most common antidote to loneliness for the whole fur trade period. As W.L. Hardisty wrote to Gov. Simpson in 1849: "I begin to find the life of a Bachelor rather a solitary one, and think the society of a Wife would enable me to pass our long artic winters more cheerfully" (D.5/25, f. 89).

Unfortunately when it came time to retire from the fur trade, an Indian wife and children, comforting as they may have been at a remote post, presented a Nor'Wester with an agonizing problem. The traders had never intended to remain permanently in the Indian Country; many bourgeois were men of education who had recognized sizeable fortunes, and they intended to enjoy the comforts of the "civilized world" in Britain or Eastern Canada. An Indian family had little place in such a design; the wife in particular would be faced with the enormous problem of adjusting to an almost totally alien way of life where too often she might meet with "impertinent insult and unmerited obloquy."⁵⁹ As a result of these complex realities, it became customary to leave one's fur trade family in the "country" of their origin. Although it is true that many bourgeois sent their children east to be educated, most forsook the Indian mothers of these children and felt at liberty to marry white women upon retirement.⁶⁰

Such was the course of action followed by many of the North West Company's early wintering partners.⁶¹ Almost no specific

⁵⁹Cox, Columbia River, p. 224.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 359-361; "Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", p. 287: "There were but very few of the servants of the company who did not take women in the interior and lived with them, but there were very few who brought them into civilized society and married them".

⁶¹With regard to leaving their Indian wives behind, bourgeois of French-Canadian origin such as Nicholas Montour and Charles Chaboillez behaved in the same manner as those of English-Canadian or Scottish origin such as Peter Pangman and Angus Shaw.

information exists about their Indian wives, the only proof of their existence being their more readily identifiable children.

The Honorable Roderick Mackenzie of Terrebonne fathered at least two daughters and one son during his sojourn in the Indian Country, but he married a French-Canadian woman in 1803 shortly after his retirement.⁶² Another bourgeois, Patrick Small is reputed to have had a happy home life with his Cree wife at Isle à la Crosse in the 1780's. Three children, Patrick Jr., Nancy and Charlotte, were born of this union, but all trace of the mother is lost after Small returned to England in 1791.⁶³ The case of William McGillivray, the nephew of Simon McTavish, who ultimately became head of the North West Company is illustrative. The first "English" clerk to be sent into the interior, McGillivray took a Cree wife, whom he called Susan, some time after 1784. He had four children by her, and his twin sons Simon and Joseph, born in March 1791 at Isle à la Crosse, were subsequently baptised in Montreal and given good educations. In 1800, however, after

⁶²Wallace, Documents of North West Company, pp. 478-79; H.B.C.A., John Stuart to Roderick Mackenzie, 10 August 1831, B.4/b/1, f. 15. When Mackenzie's youngest daughter married the HBC clerk Lachlan McLean, Stuart chided her father for not providing a dowry: "She is no less your daughter than others begotten in Wedlock." The fate of the daughter Nancy or Matooskie will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI.

⁶³O'Meara, Daughters of the Country, pp. 256-57.

McGillivray had ceased to be a winterer, he married a British woman, Magdelaine McDonald, and lived an elegant life in Montreal. As for the Cree Susan, she appears to have lived out her days at Fort William; no doubt her sons placed the simple marker over her grave which read: "To the memory of Susan, the mother of Simon, Joseph and Peter McGillivray who died 26 Aug. 1819."⁶⁴

Although such cases appear to be indicative of a callous disregard of the Indian wives' feelings, the Nor'Westers do not deserve blanket condemnation for leaving them behind. In the first place, Indian custom itself did not demand that these relationships be lasting. According to the elder Henry, Cree women who had been kept by the traders received a ready welcome back to the tribe along with their progeny:

...One of the chiefs assured me, that the children borne by their women to Europeans, were bolder warriors, and better hunters, than themselves....The women, so selected, consider themselves as honoured. 65

Owing to the increasing disorientation of Indian society caused by the fur trade, however, many "widows" and their children began to remain at the posts. The North West Company accepted the responsibility for at least provisioning the families of its servants who had died or left the country, and some traders

⁶⁴Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, Lord of the Northwest (Toronto, 1962), p. 277 et passim.

⁶⁵Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 248.

allowed their families a small annuity for the purchase of cloth and other goods from the Company stores. Often the woman would become the country wife of another trader. Shortly after his arrival on the Columbia in 1814, for example, the proprietor Donald McTavish took one Mrs. Clapp "in tow", she having been formerly the consort of a clerk of that name in the defunct Pacific Fur Company.⁶⁶ Indeed, a concomitant of marriage à la façon du pays was the growth of another custom known as "turning off" whereby a trader leaving the country endeavoured to place his spouse under the protection of another. As Ross Cox explained:

When a trader wishes to separate from his Indian wife he generally allows her an annuity, or gets her comfortably married to one of the voyageurs, who, for a handsome sum, is happy to become the husband of la Dame d'un Bourgeois.⁶⁷

On the day of his marriage à la façon du pays, Daniel Harmon confided to his journal that he intended to keep his wife

as long as I remain in this uncivilized part of the world, but when I return to my native land shall endeavour to place her into the hands of some good honest Man, with whom she can pass the remainder of her Days in this

⁶⁶Coues, New Light, p. 912.

⁶⁷Cox, Columbia River, p. 361; "Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", p. 289: "L'habitude de quitter les femmes est très commune dans les pays sauvages et j'ai même connu des personnes qui donnaient de l'argent à d'autres pour prendre ces femmes comme leurs propres personnes, et aussi les charger de leur soutien et de leur famille."

Country much more agreeably, than it would be possible for her to do, were she to be taken down into the civilized world, where she would be a stranger to the People, their manners, customs & Language. 68

Harmon's statement has been dismissed as heartless rationalization,⁶⁹ but while he, like others, may be accused of wanting to enjoy the best of both worlds, there was a good deal of truth in his generally-held view that this was the kinder course of action.

Furthermore, in Harmon's case, as will be seen, when it actually came time to leave the Indian Country, he could not bring himself to part with his faithful partner of so many years.⁷⁰ Though this phenomenon was more common among Nor' Westers who espoused mixed-blood or half-breed wives, cases certainly existed of bourgeois who remained true to their full-blooded Indian mates. Traders at Sault Ste. Marie were notable in this regard. Like Jean-Baptiste Cadot before them, Charles Oakes Ermatinger and Jean-Baptiste Nolin established themselves at the Sault with their Indian wives; several contemporaries remarked on their comfortable abodes and large families.⁷¹ Around the turn of the century, Ermatinger had

⁶⁸Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 98.

⁶⁹O'Meara, Daughters of the Country, p. 268.

⁷⁰Lamb, Sixteen Years, pp. 194-95.

⁷¹Cox, Columbia River, p. 339; Franchère, Narrative of a Voyage, p. 395.

taken to wife a fifteen-year-old Ojibway girl named Charlotte Kattawabide,⁷² and over the years at least eight children were born to them. In his will drawn up in 1831, Ermatinger testified to the steadfastness of this relationship; his first bequest was an annuity of sixty pounds to "Charlotte who hath resided with me as my wife for upwards of thirty years...and still resides with me, the mother of all my children."⁷³ About this time, he had, in fact, taken his wife east to settle permanently on his property known as Elmwood on Long Pointe. Although there was little doubt as to the sanctity of his Indian marriage, Ermatinger now felt obliged to conform to civilized custom; on 6 September 1832 at Christ Church in Montreal, he and Charlotte were formally united, two of their children acting as witnesses. Details of their life in Eastern Canada are lacking, but Charlotte, who outlived her husband, died in 1850.⁷⁴

In the opinion of James Hughes, another partner, however, a marriage contracted according to Indian custom was valid in its own right. As a young clerk some time in the 1790's, he had espoused Nan-touche, possibly a Kootenay woman, as she came from "one of those [tribes] beyond the Rocky Mountains".⁷⁵

⁷²Her last name is also spelt as Cattoonalieté and Mannanowe.

⁷³P.A.C., Will of C.O. Ermatinger, 4 July 1831, Ermatinger Papers, Series 4.

⁷⁴P.A.C., Family Records, Ermatinger Papers, Series 4.

⁷⁵Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: Vancouver, Vols. I and II and Stellamaris Mission, trans. by Mikell de Lores

A prominent man in the Fort des Prairies Department, Hughes was noted for his brave and honorable conduct; when he retired in 1817, he took Nan-touche with him to the East. There this old fur trader, who eventually became an officer in the Indian Department for the district of Montreal, is reputed to have resisted pressure to have his Indian marriage "legitimized" by the church. He already considered Nan-touche to be his legal wife, and they continued to live together as man and wife as they had always done.⁷⁶ Although a Canadian court was ultimately to uphold the validity of a marriage contracted à la façon du pays,⁷⁷ few of Hughes' contemporaries took such an adamant stand on this complex question. In the face of considerable pressure from the missionaries, who first arrived in the West around 1820, many couples who had lived for years according to "the custom of the country" were to go through a church ceremony.

One such long-standing union was that between John Dugald Cameron and an Ojibway woman whom he called Mary. Cameron spent most of his early career in the early 1800's in the

75 (continued) Wormell Warner, annotated by Harriet Duncan Munnick, (St. Paul, Ore., 1972), Vanc. I, B-34, 3rd p.

⁷⁶"Connolly Case, 1867", p. 237: J.F. Laroque testified: "I knew old Hughes and his Indian wife who came to Canada. I do not think he remarried when he came to Canada. They lived together in Canada for some time." See also Catholic Church Records, A-36.

⁷⁷The famous Connolly case will be discussed in detail in Chapter V.

Nipigon district where his proficiency in the language and considerable influence among the Ojibway can largely be attributed to his marrying into the tribe.⁷⁸ Mary herself proved a resourceful, active helpmate; on one occasion during her husband's absence, she reputedly saved the people at the post from starvation by snaring small game.⁷⁹ Cameron, who became a Chief Factor in the Hudson's Bay Company after the union of 1821, remained faithful to Mary throughout his long life, and at least six children were born to them. While in Red River in the summer of 1833, the couple were formally married by one of the Anglican missionaries, shortly after Mary had been baptised.⁸⁰ In 1846, when nearly seventy, Cameron retired and settled with his Indian wife at Haldimand in Upper Canada. Here Mary showed a good deal of pioneering spirit, taking an active interest in the farming operations of her son Ranald who lived not far away. In fact, Cameron wrote to Governor Simpson in 1848, that the mother had proved the better farmer:

The Old Squaw had she control over the Farm
would conduct it much better than her son--

⁷⁸H.B.C.A., Gov. Simpson's Character Book, 1832, A.34/2, f. 2d.

⁷⁹Margaret MacLeod, ed., The Letters of Letitia Hargrave, (Toronto: Champlain Society, vol. XVIII, 1947), p. lii.

⁸⁰H.B.C.A., Red River Registers, E.4/1a, f. 99d; E.4/1b, f. 237d.

she is now actually engaged in the woods
making a new road for hawling out wood. ⁸¹

Indeed, this Ojibway woman appears to have adapted admirably to rural life in Upper Canada. Mary was frequently to be seen paying social calls on neighbours in the Cobourg area and she enjoyed a respectable old age. ⁸²

Another Nor'Wester known as Captain Roderick McKenzie ⁸³ was so tied to the Indian Country as the result of his devotion to his native family that he never left it. McKenzie, who joined the Company in 1796, spent much of his early career at a post on Lake Nipigon where he became enamoured of a chieftain's daughter known as Angélique. Although over fifty at the time of the coalition, McKenzie was to remain in the fur trade for another thirty years impelled by the need to provide for a large family. By 1835, he and Angélique had no less than twelve children. ⁸⁴ McKenzie appears to have been one who considered it unnecessary to have his union sanctioned by the church, but eventually in 1841, when he was

⁸¹H.B.C.A., J.D. Cameron to Gov. Simpson, 28 Feb. 1848, D.5/21, f. 322. It was not until the late fur trade period that the word "squaw" came into common usage. Indian wives were more frequently referred to as "my old woman", "the old lady", or "the old dame" in private correspondence.

⁸²H.B.C.A., Cameron to Simpson, 10 Oct. 1849, D.5/26, f. 258.

⁸³Also known as Roderick McKenzie, Sr. to distinguish him from another officer known as Roderick McKenzie, Jr. Wallace in his biographical dictionary in Documents of North West Company, p. 479 has these two men hopelessly confused.

⁸⁴H.B.C.A., Will of Roderick McKenzie, 21 July 1835, A.36/10.

supporting children and grandchildren at school in Red River, he formally wed Angélique, who had proved such a fond wife and mother.⁸⁵ The old trader, who had been appointed Chief Factor at Isle à la Crosse in 1830, was eventually retired from his "home" in the early 1850's and had to move his family to the Red River Settlement. Upon his death in 1859, McKenzie left to his wife, reputedly a most dignified old lady, his house known as CaberFeigh Cottage and £1,000 "for her own use and benefit."⁸⁶

Two other Nor'Westers, Robert Logan and Alexander Ross, retired early to the Red River colony with their Indian wives and families. Like so many men before him, Robert Logan was captivated by an Ojibway woman, whom he wed à la façon du pays at Sault Ste. Marie in 1809.⁸⁷ After transferring his allegiance to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1814, Logan eventually decided to turn pioneer. A visitor to the infant settlement in 1821 found him living in "a small miserable Hut" with his wife and seven children.⁸⁸ However, Logan was considered, and was to remain, one of the principal settlers

⁸⁵H.B.C.A., Donald Ross to Gov. Simpson, 15 August 1842, D.5/7, f. 199d.

⁸⁶MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. liii; H.B.C.A. Will of Roderick McKenzie, 27 June 1855, A.36/10.

⁸⁷Logan was to be censured for this action since N.W.C. policy now prohibited its servants from marrying full-blooded Indian women, see Chapter III.

⁸⁸Nicholas Garry, "Diary of Nicholas Garry," T.R.S.C., Second Series, Vol. VI, Sec. II, 1900, p. 137.

of Red River; several months earlier he had been persuaded by the Rev. John West, the first Anglican missionary in the West, to set a good example by formally marrying his Indian wife, who was called Mary. The ceremony took place at Fort Douglas on 13 January 1821, Mary and all her children being baptised at the same time.⁸⁹ Several more children were born to the Logans over the next decade, but Mary did not live to enjoy much of her husband's increasing prosperity. She died in May 1838 at the age of forty-eight.⁹⁰

Alexander Ross, who began his fur trade career on the Pacific Coast at Astoria, became a clerk in the North West Company in 1813. He was sent to an inland post among the Okanagan Indians, whose women, Ross declared, generally possessed "an engaging sweetness, are good housewives, modest in their demeanor, affectionate and chaste, and strongly attached to their husbands and children".⁹¹ Shortly after his arrival, Ross had, in fact, married the chief's daughter, a girl who appears to have possessed these good qualities in abundance. By the early 1820's, Ross, now in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, was beginning to worry about the

⁸⁹H.B.C.A., Red River Registers, E.4/1a, fos. 28d-29; E.4/1b, f. 192d.

⁹⁰E.4/1b, f. 306d.

⁹¹Alexander Ross, Adventures of the First Settlers on the Oregon or Columbia River, ed. by Reuben G. Thwaites, Early Western Travels, vol. 7 (Cleveland, Ohio, 1904), p. 280.

future of his growing family. Anxious that his children should have "a Christian education", he decided to retire from the fur trade and take up land in Red River where schools were being established. In the spring of 1825, Ross with his eldest son travelled east with Governor Simpson's party; arrangements were made for his wife, then expecting their fifth child, to make the long journey later at more leisure with the other children. Although he acknowledged that the Company would take care to ensure their safe passage, it distressed Ross to be separated from his family. Amid the bustle and pomp surrounding the Governor's departure, he wrote:

I alone was downcast. I had to leave my family behind, who had for years shared with me in the toils and dangers of my travels; this was to me a source of grief and anxiety. ⁹²

In the late summer, Sally, as Ross called his wife, set out from Fort George with a new-born son and three little girls; they wintered at Rocky Mountain House and arrived safely in Red River in the summer of 1826. Two years later, Ross "lawfully" wed his Okanagan wife on 24 December 1828 at the Anglican church.⁹³ As the mistress of a comfortable home "Colony Gardens", Sally appears to have coped admirably with

⁹²Alexander Ross, The Fur Hunters of the Far West; A Narrative of Adventures in the Oregon and Rocky Mountains, 2 vols., (London, 1855), Vol. II, pp. 160, 198, and 233.

⁹³C.H.S.A., Marriage Register, Journals of William Cockran, CCl/018, vol. 4.

the concerns of her large household. A total of thirteen children were to be born to the Rosses.⁹⁴ Shortly before he died in 1856, Alexander Ross, now one of the colony's most distinguished citizens, drew up a will which reveals the affection he bore his Indian wife. Besides their home and most of his property, he left to "my beloved wife Sally" one hundred and fifty pounds. After making careful provision for his seven surviving children, he ended with the hope that they would be "kind, dutiful and indulgent to their mother and comfort her in her declining years".⁹⁵ "Granny" Ross, as she came to be popularly known, lived to a venerable old age, dying in 1884.⁹⁶

Noteworthy as the above cases are, this handful of North West Company bourgeois forms the exception rather than the rule. By comparison, contemporary Hudson's Bay Company officers, a much smaller body of men, appear to have shown a greater tendency to develop lasting relationships with Indian women. As has been seen, it had become customary for the officers at the Bay posts to have Indian wives. In spite of the Committee's rulings against the practice, this trend was to increase as the company moved inland. Owing to the chronic shortage of experienced men, the early inland officers

⁹⁴H.P.A., Family Tree, Alexander Ross Papers.

⁹⁵H.B.C.A., Will of Alexander Ross, 5 June 1856, A.36/11.

⁹⁶W.J. Healy, Women of Red River (Winnipeg, 1967 [reprint]), pp. 18-19.

of the English company enjoyed none of the luxuries of their rivals but shared fully in the hardships of wilderness travel.⁹⁷ Their small expeditions depended upon the expertise and assistance of the Indians who accompanied them, a fact which rendered the tasks performed by the women particularly valuable. "Women," acknowledged one prominent inlander, "are as useful as men upon...Journeys."⁹⁸ Following the example of Anthony Henday, most inland officers such as Robert Longmoor, Malcolm Ross and Peter Fidler, took Indian helpmates who undoubtedly played an important part in their successful adaptation to life in the interior.⁹⁹

Apart from the economic services rendered by an Indian woman, an HBC officer found the presence of a recognized wife necessary to deal with the increasing complexities of social relations with the Indians. As has been shown, the native custom of offering women to strangers had been exploited on a wide scale by the Indians and traders of both companies. According to Philip Turnor, by 1780 English officers stationed inland, particularly from York Factory, were so besieged with offers of women that subtle psychology had to be employed to

⁹⁷ Tyrrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp. 252-3.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 275.

⁹⁹ The North West Company tried to lure some of the English company's inland officers such as Robert Longmoor and William Tomison into its service because the "Indians were very fond of them" (Tyrrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 253).

avoid the expensive, and to most, abhorrent practice of polygamy:

the Masters of most of your Honors Inland settlements...would Labour under many difficulties was they not to keep a Woman as above half the Indians that came to the House would offer the master their Wife the refusal of which would give great offence to both the man and his Wife though he was to make the Indian a present for his offer the Woman would think her self slighted and if the Master was to accept the offer he would be expected to Cloath her and by keeping a Woman it makes one short ready answer (that he has a Woman of his own and she would be offended) and very few Indians make that offer when they know the Master keeps a Woman.... 100

The expansion of the Hudson's Bay Company and the increasing mobility of its traders accentuated the economic and social need for an Indian wife which tended to foster the development of more permanent relationships. The growth of definite family ties and a marked concern for the welfare of native dependents is clearly revealed in many of the officers' wills which have survived from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. John Favell, an early inland officer in the Albany district, for example, drew up a will shortly before he died at Albany in 1784 which provided an annuity for his Indian wife Tittameg and their four children. The money was to allow his family to purchase goods needful for their support from the Company's warehouse, and Favell particularly requested that "the Honorable Company will permit this part of my Will to be put in Execution".¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Tyrrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 275.

¹⁰¹P.R.O., Will of John Favell, 19 Feb. 1784, Prob. 11/1785, f. 551.

The London Committee, who had received a few similar requests before, readily complied with Favell's wish; in fact, the administration of annuities for native families was to become a regular duty of the Company secretary in London.¹⁰²

While this course indicates that the Committee had at last accepted the existence of such families, the Company, unlike its Canadian rival, was slow to assume any of the burden of their support. Although by the turn of the century, the Committee acknowledged that the families of officers in active service might be provisioned at Company expense, it was adamant that its responsibility ceased upon the death or retirement of its employee.¹⁰³ The onus to provide for a native family, therefore, rested upon the individual; to their credit, many of the officers endeavoured to ensure that their families would continue to receive their accustomed supplies from the factory when they were left, as was customary, to live with the Home Guards. William Bolland, for example, who spent most of his career on the Eastmain where he died in 1804, left one hundred pounds in "3% reduced Annuities" in the hands of the Company for "my Helpmate Penachequay", the mother of his seven children. Similar provision was made for the children, who along with their mother received the annual interest on

¹⁰²H.B.C.A., London Committee to Wm. Tomison, 20 May 1801, B.239/b/78, f. 36.

¹⁰³H.B.C.A., London Committee to Council at York, 1 June 1796, B.239/b/78, f. 12; same to same, A.6/16, f. 246.

this investment "to find them Clothes and necessaries."¹⁰⁴
Another officer deeply attached to his Indian family was Robert Goodwin, the surgeon at Albany in the 1780's who spent most of his later years inland. Goodwin's first Indian wife was Mistigoose by whom he had three daughters. After Mistigoose died sometime in the late 1790's, he espoused the daughter of a leading hunter Pucketwanish whom he called Jenny. Jenny bore him a daughter Anne. Goodwin, as will be seen, expended a good deal in finery and luxuries for his women, and when he died at Albany in 1805 he left them each a small annuity.¹⁰⁵

Premature as were the deaths of officers who died in the active service of the Company, they were at least spared the dilemma that retirement would have posed with regard to their native families. After the experience of Pilgrim's wife Thu-a-Higon, the Committee would not allow any officers to bring their Indian spouses to Britain; until the creation of the Red River Colony, it was impossible to remain in Rupert's Land. Retiring officers, therefore, were forced to part with their native families, except for those children, usually sons, who had received the Committee's special permission to go to Britain. The example of Matthew Cocking, a prominent

¹⁰⁴H.B.C.A., Will of William Bolland, 12 July 1804, A.36/3.

¹⁰⁵P.R.O., Will of Robert Goodwin, Codicil, 22 April 1803, Prob. 11/1441, f. 299.

officer at York Factory in the 1770's and '80's, reveals the concern shown by HBC officers for the dependents they left behind.

Cocking, it appears, had accepted native custom to the extent that he practised polygamy, and his three daughters by three different women were all given Indian names. When Cocking retired to England around 1790, he made arrangements that his two wives Ke-the-tho-wisk and A-pis-taSqua-sish with their daughters Wash-E-soo-E-Squaw and Mith-coo-man-E-Squaw respectively should receive an annual supply of goods to the value of ten pounds from the Company's warehouse at York Factory.¹⁰⁶ By his will drawn up in 1797, Cocking made detailed provision for the continuation of payments to his dependents, now living among the Home Guards; an annuity of six pounds in "Goods, Merchandize or necessaries" was to be given to each daughter with her mother by the chief of the factory "where they may be stationed or come...for the purpose of Trade". The following year, he added a codicil making a similar bequest to his eldest daughter Ke-the-cow-e-com-e-coof, who had not been previously named because he had thought she was dead like her mother Le-lo-es-com long since deceased. Cocking specifically directed in his will that upon his death his executrix, who was his sister, was to present the London

¹⁰⁶H.B.C.A., Governor of York to London Committee, 26 Sept. 1791, A.11/117, f. 119; Account of Cocking's Children, 1792, B.239/d/93, f. 48d.

Committee with a copy of the part of the will relating to his native dependents, and he earnestly entreated "the Honorable Board" to carry out its provisions which "will not only be an act of humanity and kindness to my Children and their Mothers but will also be a testimonial of their esteem and regard for the memory of an old servant."¹⁰⁷ After his death in 1799, records show that the London Committee did, indeed, respect Cocking's wishes; the annuities were paid regularly to his family for at least several decades.¹⁰⁸

So attached had some of the HBC officers become to their native families, however, that they were among the first to avail themselves of the alternative to separation offered by the Red River Settlement. Miles MacDonell wrote to Lord Selkirk in 1811 that a great number of the Company's officers and servants felt an interest in the colony's success because they looked "toward it as a future asylum for themselves and their numerous offspring."¹⁰⁹

One of the earliest and most prominent settlers in Red River was Thomas Thomas, who had been appointed Governor of the Northern Department in 1814. Although he had amassed a tidy fortune in the Company's service, a few years later he

¹⁰⁷ P.R.O., Will of Matthew Cocking, 27 Jan. 1797 with Codicil, 22 August 1798, Prob. 11/1322, f. 256.

¹⁰⁸ Record of payments has been traced up to 1825, see W.H. Cook to R. Miles, 25 May 1825, B.239/c/1, f. 201.

¹⁰⁹ H.B.C.A., Miles MacDonell to Lord Selkirk, 1 Oct. 1811, Selkirk Papers, Copy No. 154, f. 49.

retired to the colony for the sake of his Indian wife and family. Rev. John West, who, as has been noted, was particularly anxious that principal settlers set a "civilized" example in the fledgling colony, persuaded Thomas to sanctify his union with Sarah, as his Indian wife was called, on March 30, 1821.¹¹⁰ Thomas Thomas died in 1828, but he left his wife and eight children in comfortable circumstances. To Sarah he bequeathed an annuity of twenty-five pounds "during her natural life" and to his six daughters a legacy of one thousand pounds each.¹¹¹

On the same day in 1821 that West had officially married the Thomases, he also succeeded in curbing the apparently polygamous tendencies of Chief Factor James Bird by lawfully uniting him to his current spouse, an Indian woman known as Elizabeth.¹¹² Elizabeth, who was born about 1790, was too young to have been the mother of Bird's eldest children (three of his sons were taken into the Company's service in 1812),

¹¹⁰Red River Register, E. 4/lb, f. 195d.

¹¹¹H.B.C.A., Will of Thomas Thomas, 30 Nov. 1827, A.36/13. Sarah Thomas died in August 1846 at the age of sixty-seven, E.4/2, f. 151.

¹¹²Red River Register, E.4/lb, f. 195d. Although it cannot be definitely proved that Bird kept more than one woman at a time, it was widely-rumoured that HBC officers were not averse to the "uncivilized" custom of polygamy, see H.B.C.A., Miles MacDonell to Lord Selkirk, 29 May 1812, Selkirk Papers, Copy No. 154, fos. 62-63. Lady Selkirk wrote to her husband in 1818: "...it is only a Scotch Clergyman that will bring more decent proceedings among Hudson's Bay traders. According to Graffenreid, the offence to Bird and Thomas was, that you disapproved of more than one Indian wife....Bird has three Indian ladies it seems," (Selkirk Papers, Copy No. 159, p. 886).

but she appears to have been his country wife from the early 1800's when Bird was in charge of the Saskatchewan River district, an area he had been active in opening to English trade. Bird settled in Red River in the early 1820's, and Elizabeth was to preside over a family of nearly a dozen children before her death in the fall of 1834.¹¹³

Another HBC officer whose Indian wife bore him a large family during the course of his career as an inland trader was Chief Factor Alexander Kennedy. Although Kennedy, an Orkneyman, sent several of his sons to Scotland to be educated, he established a home for his Indian wife and family in Red River in the late 1820's. Kennedy appears to have eschewed the necessity of receiving the Church's blessing for his union with Aggathas, the mother of his nine children; in his eyes, she was already "my beloved Wife".¹¹⁴ Kennedy died in 1832 while on a visit to Britain, but his will drawn up the previous year shows his concern to provide fairly for his wife and family.¹¹⁵

One of the most devoted relationships between an HBC officer and an Indian woman appears to have been that of Peter Fidler and his Cree wife whom he called Mary. After their

¹¹³Red River Register, E.4/lb, f. 300.

¹¹⁴H.B.C.A., Will of Alexander Kennedy, 10 Sept. 1829, A.36/8. Aggathas was also known by the English name of Mary.

¹¹⁵Will of Alexander Kennedy, 15 Sept. 1831, A.36/8.

marriage à la façon du pays, probably at York Factory in 1794, Fidler, an outstanding inlander, was usually accompanied on his wide-ranging surveying and trading excursions by his faithful Indian helpmate. She proved herself particularly useful during his beleaguered year in opposition to the Nor' Westers at Isle à la Crosse in 1810.¹¹⁶ Fidler rather touchingly kept an exact record of the birth of each of his fourteen children; his eldest Tom was born at York Factory at eight minutes past midnight on 20 June 1795, his youngest Harriett at Red River at 4:53 on 9 July 1822.¹¹⁷ A year before the birth of their last child, Fidler and his wife had been formally wed by Rev. West at Norway House on 14 August 1821.¹¹⁸ Fidler, worn out by years of hard service, died in the colony in December 1822. In his will, apart from the complicated provisions he made for his eleven surviving children, he left his wife an annuity of fifteen pounds.¹¹⁹ Mary herself did not long survive her husband, but died four years later at the age of fifty-five.¹²⁰

Towards the end of the 18th century, HBC officers, as a group, were indeed showing a marked tendency to form lasting

¹¹⁶J.G. MacGregor, Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor, 1769-1822 (Toronto, 1966), p. 92.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 252.

¹¹⁸Red River Register, E.4/lb, f. 197.

¹¹⁹H.B.C.A., Will of Peter Fidler, 6 August 1821, A.36/6.

¹²⁰Red River Register, E.4/lb, f. 290.

relationships with their Indian wives and a good deal of concern for their offspring. In this regard, they appear proportionately to have equalled or even excelled their Nor'Wester counterparts. Furthermore, the actual examination of the native ties of HBC officers does much to dispel the popular view that the English possessed an inherent prejudice against intermarriage with the natives, particularly in comparison to the French who have enjoyed the rather unbalanced reputation for much better relations with the Indians.¹²¹ Whereas Marcel Giraud, for example, claims that the HBC officers callously regarded unions with Indian women as makeshift and temporary, the evidence suggests the growth of their sincere attachment for native dependents which was not diminished by a realistic appreciation of the social problems involved.¹²²

The fact that the French-Canadians married more widely into the Indian tribes of the West than did the Anglo-Saxons was in part a function of numbers because the French-Canadian engagés constituted the largest group of white men in the fur trade. However, the affinity which these intrepid servants of the North West Company showed for Indian life was one of the more important factors; many were themselves the product of earlier French-Indian unions, a fact which emphasized the

¹²¹An attempt to dispel this view will be found in Lewis O. Saum, The Fur Trader and the Indian (Seattle, Wash., 1965), see especially pp. 83-86.

¹²²Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien (Paris, 1945), p. 416.

long tradition of miscegenation in the French colonial fur trade. The voyageur would brook little interference with his "right" to have an Indian woman, and the early policy of the North West Company, unlike that of its English rival, was to exploit the useful aspects of such liasons.

It appears that the liasons contracted by the lower ranks of the North West Company could be as effective as those of the bourgeois in gaining the friendship of the Indians. Many traders, for example, had extolled the virtues of the Flathead women who were reputed to be excellent wives and mothers, but the tribe would sanction the marriage of its women only to those men it esteemed. The skill and bravery of a Métis hunter and interpreter Pierre Michel enabled him to win the hand of the sixteen-year-old niece of the hereditary Flathead chief in the spring of 1814. The ceremony involved a liberal distribution of gifts on the part of Michel, and before being escorted to the fort, the bride was exhorted to conform to the Flathead ideal of a good wife, "to be chaste, obedient, industrious and silent." The couple lived happily according to Ross Cox, who claimed that Michel was the only Nor'Wester he knew to be so honoured by the Flathead tribe.¹²³ The first man to marry into the Carrier tribe of New Caledonia was reputedly Jean-Baptiste Boucher dit Waccan, another company interpreter, who took to wife the daughter of one of the chiefs

¹²³Cox, Columbia River, pp. 142-43.

in March 1811. Waccan was to remain a personage of considerable influence among the Carrier for nearly half a century.¹²⁴

Personal ties not only served to cement trade relations but to attach the men's interest to the Indian country, thus assuring the renewal of their contracts. An engagé had to ask the permission of his bourgeois before he took a woman à la façon du pays, but his family was housed within the post and supported at the expense of the company.¹²⁵ The domestic arrangements which Alexander Henry the younger describes for Fort Vermilion on the Saskatchewan River were probably typical. While the officers enjoyed separate quarters, the men lived communally, from four to five families sharing the same "house". Of the thirty voyageurs who wintered at the post in 1809, all but five had a wife and family.¹²⁶

Unfortunately, the voyageurs, who were mostly illiterate, have not left their own record of fur trade life, but surviving journals contain numerous references to the voyageurs' women, from the economic services they rendered to the problems they sometimes caused. The bourgeois frequently decried what they considered to be the voyageurs' excessive preoccupation with

¹²⁴Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 137. For details of Boucher's career, see A.G. Morice, The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia, (Fairfield, Wash., 1971 [reprint]), pp. 253-57.

¹²⁵A.S. Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71 (London, 1939), p. 349.

¹²⁶Coues, New Light, pp. 553-555.

sex. Officers such as Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson and the younger Henry emphasize that while it was impossible to restrain the men from enjoying the favours of women on trading excursions, they themselves abstained.¹²⁷ John McDonell denounced the irresponsibility of one of his voyageurs, who, when en derouine in the winter of 1795, had expended some of the Company's liquor and other trade goods in what proved to be a vain attempt to gain the hand of The Foutreau's daughter, a renowned beauty.¹²⁸

More frequently, however, the voyageur could only secure the means to purchase a wife by placing himself in debt to the Company. One of Alexander Henry's young men in 1802, for example, was prepared to enslave himself to work off his debts if allowed to have a certain woman. Such an occurrence was not uncommon, declared Henry; he had known others as foolish, "who would not hesitate to sign an agreement of perpetual bondage on condition of being permitted to have a woman who struck their fancy."¹²⁹ Although the bourgeois derided the extravagant habits of the engagés who were prone

¹²⁷Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, pp. 289, 368.

¹²⁸Masson, Les Bourgeois, Vol. 1, pp. 292-93. Edward Umfreville in spite of his criticisms of the Hudson's Bay Company, felt that the French-Canadians made unreliable servants: "...very few of them can be trusted with a small assortment of goods ...but it is ten to one that he is defrauded of the whole by commerce with Indian women" (Umfreville, Present State of Hudson's Bay, p. 109).

¹²⁹Coues, New Light, p. 206.

to dissipate their wages in thoughtless pleasure, they themselves were not averse to using this situation for their own advantage.¹³⁰ It appears that certain of the less scrupulous officers actually fostered the growth of a reprehensible traffic in native women to exploit the men's sexual desires. Hugh Faries at Rainy Lake in 1805 records matter-of-factly that he bought The Devil's daughter for a few presents and the cancellation of a trade debt, only to sell her to one of the voyageurs Jourdain for the exorbitant price of £500 Grand Portage Currency.¹³¹ Female slaves taken by the Indians in war were often bought and sold in this way,¹³² but the practice had apparently been at its most vicious in the Athabasca country in the 1790's where it was reported the Masters made great profits by seizing the Chipewyans' women for trade debts and then selling them to the men for 500-2000 livres.¹³³ It was not unknown for the voyageurs themselves to sell their wives. One servant Morin in 1800, when he realized that his wife did not want to remain with him, instructed James Mackenzie

¹³⁰Cox, Columbia River, p. 355; H.B.C.A., Wm. Auld's Memo Book, 1810-11, B.42/a/136a, f. 18d: "...a Canadian is ever in debt in advance to his Employers who greedily take advantage of all the propensities of their servants."

¹³¹Charles M. Gates, ed., Five Fur Traders of the Northwest (St. Paul, Minn., 1965 [revised edition]), p. 240.

¹³²Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 179: A.N. McLeod bought a slave woman in 1801 "whom next fall I shall sell for a good price to one of the men"; Masson, Les Bourgeois, Vol. 1, pp. 288, 294: John McDonnell gives several examples of men buying female slaves from the Indians.

¹³³Tyrrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp. 446n, 449.

to sell her to the highest bidder at Fort Chipewyan. The bourgeois saw such a transaction only in terms of commercial gain:

Two advantages may be reaped from this affair; the first is that it will assist to discharge the Debts of a Man unable to do it by any other Means for he is neither good Middleman, Foreman, Steersman, Interpreter or Carpenter--the next is, that it may be the means of tickling some lecherous Miser to part with some of his Hoard. I therefore kept the woman to be disposed of in the Season when the Peace River Bucks begin to rut most, I mean in the Month of May. 134

Although the unsavoury aspects of the voyageurs' contact with Indian women occasioned the most comment, it is evident (as Marcel Giraud has emphasized) that excess and debauchery were not characteristic of many relationships.¹³⁵ The very fact that the bourgeois often expressed annoyance at the extent to which the voyageurs' personal concerns could interfere with their work is proof of their attachment to their Indian mates. Alexander Mackenzie wrote to his cousin Roderic from Isle à la Crosse in 1786 that he had postponed dispatching the guide Lacerte with letters until his wife arrived from Athabasca "as the fellow is almost mad for her".¹³⁶ When George Nelson sent his men off to the fishery in 1811, he was not sanguine of success because one of the fishermen Lonquetin

¹³⁴McGill University Library, Journal of James Mackenzie, Fort Chipewyan, 9 April 1800, Masson Collection.

¹³⁵Giraud, Métis Canadien, pp. 361-62.

¹³⁶Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 423.

was so preoccupied with thoughts of his lady "as almost to deprive him of the whole or^l rest of his senses!"¹³⁷ The voyageurs were frequently very jealous of their women. A year earlier in the River Dauphine area, Duncan Cameron had found it necessary to rearrange the men's stations "to prevent any future dissensions among ourselves on women's accounts."¹³⁸ As another bourgeois was to observe:

A young luscious Rib, surrounded with Gallants, is well calculated to augment a headache, mal de coeur or even obstruction d'estomac to her Protector. 139

During his preparations for his explorations in the spring of 1806, Simon Frazer's men proved very refractory when he tried to stop them taking their women along. Frazer finally allowed his guide La Malice to keep his woman whom he had bought from the bourgeois at McLeod's Lake during the winter, but the ordinary canoemen were denied this favour.¹⁴⁰

Sometimes the desire for a woman could actually spur an engagé to greater activity. George Simpson recorded in 1820 that Cupid was primarily responsible for one Joseph Greill making a four-day journey from Beren's House to Fort Wedderburn in two and a half days. He was returning to claim "a frail

¹³⁷Nelson, Journal 1810-1811, 7 Feb. 1811.

¹³⁸Nelson, Journal 1808-1810, 19 March 1810.

¹³⁹H.B.C.A., Fort Chipewyan Journal, 7 Dec. 1823, B.39/a/22, f. 42 (Journal kept by James Keith).

¹⁴⁰W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Letters and Journals of Simon Frazer, 1806-1808 (Toronto, 1960), pp. 182-85.

fair one" who during his summer absence had put herself under "the protection" of one of the fort's officers Mr. Brown. Both men claimed her, but Simpson settled the affair by allowing the Lady herself to chose, and her return to her former husband was celebrated by the customary wedding dram to all hands.¹⁴¹ The above incident illustrates one of the major obstacles to the growth of stable relationships between ordinary servants and Indian women. Unlike the bourgeois who could transport his woman from post to post in comfort, the voyageur, if only for the sake of space, was usually forced to leave his wife behind during the long summer journey to and from the main depot. Although it was not unknown for the mens' families to follow behind the brigades in small canoes often manned by the women themselves, most of the voyageurs' wives either remained at the post or returned to the Indians for the summer.¹⁴² Other liasons unavoidably developed, particularly since there was no guarantee that the voyageur would return. As a result of such circumstances, women changed hands with frequency among the lower ranks of the North West Company.¹⁴³ Polygamy, however, was rarely practised among the engagés, indeed a penurious voyageur

¹⁴¹E.E. Rich, ed., George Simpson's Athabaska Journal and Report, 1820-21, (London: H.B.R.S., vol. 1, 1938), p. 88.

¹⁴²P.A.C., Journal of a Nor'Wester, 1798, Masson Collection, No. 15, p. 18; H.B.C.A., Isle à la Crosse Journal, 13 June 1810, B.89/a/2, f. 2.

¹⁴³"Connolly Case, 1867", p. 238.

was sometimes forced to the opposite extreme of sharing a woman.¹⁴⁴

Evidence also points, however, to the development of permanent relationships and family ties which negates sweeping generalizations such as appear in Franklin's Narrative about the licentious and demoralized conduct of the French-Canadian voyageurs.¹⁴⁵ Numerous unions undoubtedly survived the enforced separation; in 1791, for example, Fidler observed a Canadian hurrying back to his wife who had lived among the Chipewyan during his journey to Grand Portage.¹⁴⁶ An old voyageur Pierre Marois declared that he had lived with his Indian wife for twenty-three years in a relationship which he considered as binding as if they had been married in church.¹⁴⁷ Alexander Ross maintained that the affection which not only the bourgeois, but the men entertained for their native wives was "one great reason for that attachment which the respective classes of whites cherish for the Indian countries".¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴John Franklin, Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea, 1819-1822, 2 vols., (London, 1824 [3rd ed.]), p. 86: "It was not very uncommon, amongst the Canadian voyageurs, for one woman to be common to, and maintained at the joint expense of two men."

¹⁴⁵Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-22, p. 85.

¹⁴⁶Tyrrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 514.

¹⁴⁷"Connolly Case, 1867", p. 229.

¹⁴⁸Ross, Fur Hunters, vol. 1, p. 296.

Loyalty to their Indian families was, in fact, a primary cause of many voyageurs remaining in the West after leaving the service of the North West Company. By the early 1800's, they formed a significant group known as "freemen", who lived a life akin to that of the Indians, supporting their frequently large families by hunting and trading with the Company. In 1814, Franchère found one Antoine Dejarlais, a former North West guide, for example, living contentedly with his Indian wife and family at Lac la Biche on the produce of his chase.¹⁴⁹ Franchère also observed that a small community of superannuated voyageurs had sprung up around the depot of Fort William, some old servants preferring to eke out an existence for themselves and families rather than return to Lower Canada and "give their relatives and former acquaintances certain proofs of their misconduct or their imprudence."¹⁵⁰ Although the North West Company appreciated the growing need to make some provision for their former servants and their native dependents, a projected plan for a settlement at Rainy Lake came to naught owing to the bitter trade struggle.¹⁵¹ Ultimately it was the Red River settlement which came to provide a home base for the semi-nomadic life of the Métis.

¹⁴⁹Franchère, Narrative of a Voyage, pp. 366-67.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 388. According to Ross Cox, Columbia River, p. 358, the freemen adopted Indian custom to the extent of practising a limited polygamy.

¹⁵¹Lamb, Sixteen Years, pp. 5-6.

The attitude of the North West Company's engagés toward Indian women helped to soften the restrictions imposed upon the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company. While attempting to recruit skilled voyageurs into its service, the English Company was made aware that the right to have an Indian wife was not one which the Canadian would relinquish lightly. At Brandon House in 1798, for example, the Canadian Jollycoeur, who insisted on keeping a woman, informed the master that "every frenchman has a woman & why should we stop him."¹⁵² As has been seen, however, the Company's servants themselves, who were mostly Orkneymen, had already shown a tendency to develop relationships with Indian women. In 1759, in fact, the men at Moose Factory declared that if the Committee refused them advances on their wages to meet the needs of their families, they would be obliged to leave the post and seek a subsistence elsewhere.¹⁵³ Family records for the posts are almost nonexistent, but the record of baptisms at the Eastmain Factory in the early 1800's reveals a considerable, and probably typical, intermarriage between Company servants and the Indians.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵²H.B.C.A., Brandon House Journal, 13 Nov. 1798, B.22/a/6, f. 8d.

¹⁵³H.B.C.A., J. Pollexfen to London Committee, 1 Sept. 1759, A.11/43, f. 114d.

¹⁵⁴H.B.C.A., Eastmain Register, 1806-1826, B.59/z/1.

After the English moved inland, unions with Indian women became commonplace for the men as well as the officers. Joseph Smith, for instance, an early inland servant from York Factory took an Indian woman as his "canoe and tent mate" and provision was made for her after his death in 1765.¹⁵⁵ Although they adapted less readily to the inland way of life than the French-Canadians, the English company servants enjoyed good personal relations with the Indians,¹⁵⁶ and in spite of the dour, penny-pinching reputation of the Orkneymen, many appear to have been genuinely attached to their native families. Shortly before his death in 1823, for example, William Flett, who had been an inland servant for several decades, directed that all his monies be put in trust for "the sole use and benefit of my reputed wife Saskatchewan and my four reputed children."¹⁵⁷ Few Orkneymen went so far as to become "freemen" like the French-Canadians, but by the early 1800's, the social problems arising from the breakup of families upon the mens' retirement caused at least one officer to lament "the want of an Asylum in this part of the Country to which a Parent might retire with a prospect of supporting his Family and which would prevent the Miseries of a Separation and check the Increase of a Burden on the Factories."¹⁵⁸ Eventually many HBC servants

¹⁵⁵Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 275; H.B.C.A., York Journal, 9 June 1765, B.239/a/53, f. 40d.

¹⁵⁶Umfreville, Present State of Hudson's Bay, p. 109.

¹⁵⁷H.B.C.A., Will of William Flett, 9 Nov. 1823, A.36/6.

¹⁵⁸H.B.C.A., T. Thomas to Geo. Gladman, 3 March 1813, B.3/b/49a, f. 10d.

settled with their families in the Red River Colony as the Anglican Church records which abound with names such as Flett, Inkster, Loutit, Omen and Spence testify.

Thus, throughout the fur trade, Indian women had come to fill the role of wife and mother left void by the absence of white women. Significant as her social role was, however, the Indian woman also had a role of unique economic importance to play in the functioning of the fur trade. Inured to the hardships of the wilderness from childhood and skilled in the techniques of survival, she could prove a far more valuable mate than any white woman. The assistance which Indian women rendered the early Hudson's Bay men, as already discussed, was but a microcosm of her role once the trade spread inland. Indian women were to comprise an integral if unofficial part of the labour force of both the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies. The extent to which she aided both the Canadian, himself familiar with wilderness life, and even more, the inexperienced Englishmen reflects the extent to which the fur traders were compelled to adapt to the Indian way of life.

For the North West Company, in particular, the expense of importing provisions could be prohibitive. The problem of supplying its canoe brigades, however, was ideally solved by the use of the Indian food, pemmican--a nutritious, compact mixture of pounded buffalo meat and fat which kept well and took up relatively little room. Pemmican became the life staple of the fur trade, and Indian women played an active

role in its preparation. At the plains' posts, buffalo hunting and pemmican manufacture formed an essential part of the yearly routine, each post being required to furnish an annual quota for the support of the brigades. In accordance with Indian custom, once the hunters had killed the buffalo, the women's work began. They skinned the animals, cut up the meat and collected the marrow and fat for rendering later. After the produce of the hunt had been hauled to camp, the meat was sliced into thin strips to be dried on racks in the sun or over a slow fire. "The women employed all day Slicing and drying the meat" was a typical diary entry in the early summer months.¹⁵⁹ When the meat was dry, the women pounded it into a thick flaky mass. About fifty pounds of this meat would then be mixed with forty pounds of melted fat in a taureaux, a flattish sack made of buffalo hide, to make up the standard ninety-pound lot of pemmican.¹⁶⁰ The voyageurs often helped their wives to mix up the pemmican, and all hands celebrated the completion of this laborious annual task. "The men & women danced till twelve o'clock at night", recorded the bourgeois at Fort Alexander in 1801.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹P.A.C., John Porter's Journal, 11 June 1800, Masson Collection, No. 6, p. 29; H.B.C.A., South Branch House Journal, 1790, B.121/a/4, f.48d.

¹⁶⁰For one of the best descriptions of pemmican, see Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 312-13.

¹⁶¹Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 162.

Although pemmican was the staple food of the transport brigades, it was too precious a commodity to form the chief diet at the posts themselves. Fresh meat could be kept in ice houses at most of the plains' posts, but to the north where game was scarce, the people subsisted mainly on fish and fowl. Both companies on Lake Athabasca, for example, relied heavily on their fisheries. After a successful fall fishery, the women were busily occupied splitting and drying hundreds of whitefish for the winter.¹⁶² Across the Rockies, the women preserved vast quantities of salmon, the basic food for the districts of the Columbia and New Caledonia.¹⁶³ At the posts around Hudson's Bay, geese, either dried or salted by the Indian women, formed an important part of the "country" provisions.¹⁶⁴

Apart from curing the produce of the hunt, Indian women were also responsible for the collection of auxiliary food supplies which, besides adding variety to the diet, could sometimes mean the difference between life and death. In the area to the west and southwest of Lake Superior, wild rice was a staple food of the Ojibway. The women harvested the rice from the marshy shores of the lakes and rivers by shaking

¹⁶²H.B.C.A., Fort Chipewyan Journal, 5 September 1820, B.39/a/16, f. 21.

¹⁶³Franchère, Narrative of a Voyage, p. 5.

¹⁶⁴Rich, Cumberland House Journals, 1775-1779, p. 15; numerous references to the women helping with the goose hunts are to be found in the York Fort Journals, see B.239/a/131-133 (1822-25).

the ripe heads into the bottom of their small canoes. The rice was then parched and stored in fawn skins. Traders in the area frequently found themselves grateful for such food. In dire straits after the failure of his fishery in the winter of 1803-04, the XY Company officer Michel Curot had to pay dearly for a small supply:

Smith went this morning to the Lodges To get a fawn-skin of rice that a woman said he could have for a 2 1/2 pt. blanket....I resolved to give The blanket, having only one single fawn-skin of Parched rice for all our provisions. 165

Maple sugar constituted an important addition to one's diet in the Shield area. The spring trip to the sugar bush provided a welcome release from the monotony of the winter routine, the voyageurs with their families and Indian relations all enjoying the annual event.¹⁶⁶ In April 1805, as a typical instance, all the women from the Nor'Westers' post on Rainy Lake were out making sugar. "Mr. Grant's Girl" seems to have been especially expert at the job and on one occasion traded about thirty pounds of sugar for rum.¹⁶⁷ A kind of sugar, though not from the true maple, was made as far west as Fort Carleton. Chief Factor John Stuart noted in April 1825 that

¹⁶⁵ Michel Curot, "A Wisconsin Fur-Trader's Journal, 1803-04", Wisconsin Historical Collections, vol. XX, pp. 442-43.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 441.

¹⁶⁷ Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 237.

the only subject of interest was that all the women were busy making sugar, "some of it very fine".¹⁶⁸

The entire Indian Country teemed with many varieties of berries which the women looked forward to collecting annually. When the Nor'Westers were tracking up the higher reaches of the Saskatchewan, the younger Henry observed: "the women generally keep on by land, during the use of line, to gather fruit, which alleviates the labour and revives the spirits of the men".¹⁶⁹ Later at Rocky Mountain House, he reported that the women would all go off on horseback and return with great quantities of poires, raspberries and strawberries. Dried berries, especially saskatoons, were added to high-grade pemmican made for the officers, but berries were not just a luxury item. David Thompson declared that berries had kept him alive after he became incapacitated by breaking his leg in 1788:

I became emaciated till the berries became ripe and the kind hearted indian women brought me plenty...for my support. This was pure charity for I had nothing to give them and I was much relieved. 170

In New Caledonia and the Columbia, berries and "wappitoo root" gathered by the women were necessary to alleviate hunger in the spring when supplies of salmon invariably ran low.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸H.B.C.A., Fort Carlton Journal, 1824-25, B.27/a/14, f. 98.

¹⁶⁹Coues, New Light, p. 485.

¹⁷⁰Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 55.

¹⁷¹Coues, New Light, p. 859; Cox, Columbia River, p. 266.

Although the wilds of western Canada gave the appearance of providing abundant sustenance, all regions suffered from seasonal fluctuations and poorer areas faced frequent starvation. In times of scarcity, an Indian woman's skill and resourcefulness often came into their own. The women of the more northern tribes were adept fisherwomen since tending the nets was part of their traditional role. At Lake Athabasca, it was a common occurrence for the women to be sent away to the fishery when provisions ran low to support themselves and their children.¹⁷² After his fisherman deserted to the Nor' Westers during his beleaguered season at Isle à la Crosse, Peter Fidler's wife virtually saved the English from starvation since she was the only one who knew how to mend and set the nets.¹⁷³

George Nelson gives a vivid description of the invaluable service rendered by his Indian wife at a small outpost north of Lake Superior during the winter of 1815. When provisions were almost exhausted in February, she set out to snare small game. "My woman", Nelson recorded, "takes with her 94 wire snares & 73 of twine." At first, the woman had little success because wild animals were devouring her catch before she could return to the snares. After about a week, however, she came

¹⁷²H.B.C.A., Fort Chipewyan Journal, 1820, B.39/a/16, fos. 4d-13 passim.

¹⁷³H.B.C.A., Isle à la Crosse Journal, 1810, B.89/a/2, fos. 7, 10d.

in with sixteen partridges and went off with one of the men the next day to bring home the thirty hares which she had cached. Nelson's wife had been accompanied by the wife of one of his Hudson's Bay competitors, but although the Nor'Wester knew he might be censured for allowing this, he felt his wife's welfare must come before commercial considerations:

I am happy of it because it is company, she will have less trouble to chop wood & if misfortunately she cuts herself or gets otherwise sick, the others will help her.

The "she-hunters" returned with all their equipment after about three weeks, having added much to the kettles of both companies. Nelson wrote with satisfaction on March 3, "my woman brings home 8 hares & 14 Partridges, making in all 58 hares & 34 Partridges. Good."¹⁷⁴

Even a well-established post such as York Factory could run out of fresh provisions, so essential for the prevention of scurvy. In December 1818, Chief Factor James Swain was forced to send his wife and one of his daughters out to try to catch fish or rabbits. They returned a fortnight later in bitterly cold weather with grim news: there were no fish and they had had to walk many miles to secure a few rabbits.¹⁷⁵ It should be emphasized that while the Indian woman played an important part in preserving and even procuring country

¹⁷⁴The above account is taken from George Nelson's Journal, Manitonamingon Lake, 29 Jan.-23 June 1815, Nelson Papers, Toronto Public Library.

¹⁷⁵H.B.C.A., York Fort Journal, 1818-19, B.239/a/126, f. 14.

provisions, she did not fulfill the traditional female role of cook at the fur trade posts. Usually an Orkneyman or French-Canadian was specifically designated to serve as mess cook, and the men ate apart from the women in a communal dining hall.¹⁷⁶

The Indian woman not only assisted in augmenting food supplies but brought to the fur traders her skill in dressing skins and furs. One of the main tasks of the women at the provision posts was preparing buffalo hides and making them into taureaux. Their industry in the late winter months was noted in many fort journals: "Women all busy stretching buffalo hides to make pemmican bags and pack cords"--"All the women at work sewing Bags."¹⁷⁷ The women also often dressed furs traded at the posts. Peter Fidler emphasized that Indian women performed a valuable service at the Hudson's Bay posts in "cleaning and stretching Beaver skins."¹⁷⁸

The men of both companies did not generally dress in Indian style (the buckskinned mountain man was not part of the Canadian scene), but they universally adopted the Indian moccasin as the most practical footwear for the wilderness. Providing the traders with a steady supply of moccasins became perhaps the most important domestic duty performed by the

¹⁷⁶ MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 85; Cox, Columbia River, p. 360.

¹⁷⁷ Coues, New Light, pp. 582-83; Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 161. See also Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 1, p. 288.

¹⁷⁸ Tyrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 237, n. 6.

women at the posts. The first laborious step was tanning the hides, that of the moose being most commonly used for moccasins:

The skin they scrape and...take the brains of the animal and rub it upon the skin to make it pliable and soft; afterwards they smoke it well and then soak it in warm water for the night in order to render it easy to work with a piece of iron made for that purpose. 179

The leather was then cut and adroitly stitched into moccasins. The industry of the women is shown in John McDonnell's comment at Fort Esperance in 1793 that his mother-in-law had just finished making him nine pairs of shoes.¹⁸⁰ Alexander Mackenzie depended upon the wives of his two French-Canadians to keep his 1789 expedition in footwear. The women scarcely ever left the canoes, being "continually employ'd making shoes of moose skin as a pair does not last us above one Day."¹⁸¹

Closely related to the manufacture of moccasins was the Indian woman's role in making snowshoes, without which winter travel would have been impossible. Although the men usually made the frames, the women netted the intricate web of sinews which provided the support. When Samuel Hearne and his small party went inland in 1774 to establish Cumberland House, they looked to Indian women for assistance. On October 21, Hearne

¹⁷⁹P.A.C., "An Account of the Chipwean Indians", Masson Collection, No. 3, p. 22. David Thompson attested to the service performed by the Indian women in tanning hides. On one of his trips across the Rockies, his party had good luck hunting moose, but the valuable skins went to waste, "there being no women to dress them" (Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 326).

¹⁸⁰Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 1, p. 285.

¹⁸¹Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 220.

recorded that all the Indians had gone away "Except 2 or 3 Women who Stays to Make, Mend, Knitt Snowshoes &c for us during the Winter."¹⁸² Even the experienced Nor'Wester could find himself at a loss without women as illustrated by Alexander Mackenzie's well-known lament to his cousin Roderic at Fort Chipewyan in 1786:

I have not a single one at my fort that can make Rackets [racquettes]. I do not know what to do without those articles. See what it is to have no wives. Try and get Rackets--there is no stirring without them. 183

It would appear that in the North West Company Indian women played an auxiliary role to the engagés who themselves formed a large labour force skilled in wilderness techniques. To its English rival, however, with its weak and inexperienced labour force, Indian women made a particularly important contribution in undertaking tasks that "the Europeans are not acquainted with."¹⁸⁴ In 1802, the council at York Factory was moved to give a most spirited defence of the practice of keeping Indian women at the company's posts. The women, they informed the London Committee, were "Virtually your Honors Servants":

...they clean and put into a state of preservation all Beavr. and Otter skins brought by the Indians undried and in bad Condition. They prepare Line for Snow shoes and knit them also without which

¹⁸²Tyrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 125.

¹⁸³Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 424.

¹⁸⁴Tyrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 327, n. 6.

your Honors servants could not give efficient opposition to the Canadian traders they make Leather shoes for the men who are obliged to travel about in search of Indians and furs and are useful in a variety of other instances. 185

In fact, the services rendered by Indian women were recognized to such an extent that Sir Alexander Mackenzie recommended to Captain John Franklin that Indian women should accompany his overland expedition in 1819.¹⁸⁶

Apart from tasks related to the traditional female roles of making clothes and preparing food, the Indian woman was also involved in specific fur trade operations. As in Indian society, she helped in the manufacture of the birch bark canoe which the North West Company had adopted as the basis of its transport system. It was the women's job to collect wattappe (wattap), roots from the spruce tree which they split fine for sewing the seams of the canoe. The numerous references in the journals testify to the vast quantities needed: "Women raising wattap--33 women, 8 bundles each"--"Mr. Grant's Girl brought us 75 Bundles Wattap to day." On Lake Athabasca, the women at the Hudson's Bay post were expected to provide fifty bundles of wattappe each.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵H.B.C.A., York Council to London Committee, Sept. 1802, B.239/b/79, fos. 40d-41.

¹⁸⁶Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 1, p. 136; H.B.C.A., Fort Resolution Journal, 1819-20, B.181/a/2, f. 110.

¹⁸⁷Coues, New Light, p. 615; Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 217; Rich, Simpson's Athabasca Journal, p. 342.

Having collected the wattappe, the women helped to sew the seams of the canoes and then caulk them with the spruce gum which they had also collected. At Rocky Mountain House in 1810, for example, the younger Henry observed the voyageurs' wives busy gathering gum for the Columbia canoes.¹⁸⁸ A brigade could find itself in dire straits without adequate supplies of bark, wattappe and gum for repairs. One XY trader was in a desperate state coming out of his wintering grounds in 1804 because the Nor'Westers had secured all the gum ahead of him; he had to send one of his men back to offer the women presents of cloth if they would make gum, "which I absolutely must have, not being able to use any Canoe that did not at once Fill."¹⁸⁹ At York Factory the women helped to pay for their keep during the winter by making canoe sails.¹⁹⁰

Besides assisting in the manufacture of the canoes, Indian women could readily lend a hand in helping to man them. Two women helped paddle the canoes on Mackenzie's voyage in 1789,¹⁹¹ but with a large force of skilled voyageurs, it was seldom necessary for the North West Company to call upon this reserve. Such was not the case for its English rival in the early stages

¹⁸⁸Coues, New Light, p. 622; see also Gates, Five Fur Traders, pp. 250-52.

¹⁸⁹Curot, "Journal 1803-04", p. 460.

¹⁹⁰H.B.C.A., York Fort Journal, 1821-22, B.239/a/130, fos. 22d-28 passim.

¹⁹¹Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 165.

of its penetration inland. With few experienced canoemen, the women often rendered valuable assistance.¹⁹² John Thomas returning to Moose Fort in 1779 told of meeting another officer in charge of three small canoes loaded with provisions for a new inland post; each canoe was manned by an Englishman and an Indian woman, the woman acting as steersman.¹⁹³ In the 1790's Chief Factor Joseph Colen declared that one of the reasons for the declining number of canoes coming down to York Factory was that the women were no longer allowed to accompany their husbands and help paddle the canoes.¹⁹⁴ If one of Simpson's canoes had to slow down going into Athabasca in 1820 while a voyageur's wife gave birth, the woman herself helped paddle next day to make up for lost time.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹²The difficulty the Hudson's Bay Company had in securing an adequate number of good men for its posts is illustrated in the following anecdote about an Indian woman's reaction when she saw the men arrive on an annual ship sometime in the late 18th century:

...a Mr. James Spence was in charge of the Canoe, and his Indian wife looking steadily at the Men, and then at her husband; at length said, James have you not always told me, that the people in your country are as numerous as the leaves on the trees, how can you speak such a falsehood, do not we all see plainly that the very last of them is come, if there were any more would these dwarfs have come here (Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 108-09).

¹⁹³H.B.C.A., J. Thomas to London Committee, 20 September 1779, A.11/44, f. 95.

¹⁹⁴H.B.C.A., York Fort Journal, 30 June 1796, B.239/a/99, f. 18d: Colen further adds that "this occasions much murmuring among the Men and forces many to leave the Service sooner than they wished to". Unfortunately, no further information has been found to explain either the cause or ultimate outcome of this action.

¹⁹⁵Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, p. 6.

More frequently, an Indian woman acted in the elevated role of guide owing to her availability and familiarity with the terrain. The elder Henry when going into the Churchill River area in 1776 employed an Indian woman as guide, remarking that she had previously served Mr. Frobisher in that capacity.¹⁹⁶ Coming out with his canoes from Slave Lake in 1800, John Porter had to take on one of the voyageurs' wives since she was the only one that knew the way.¹⁹⁷ The importance of the Indian woman as guide is shown in the Nor'Westers' attempt to cripple the Hudson's Bay establishment at Isle a la Crosse in 1810 by intimidating the wife of a servant David Garson who was guiding their brigade. An angry Peter Fidler recorded:

When our Men passed the Frog portage McTavish frightened our pilot away and it was two Days detention to them before they got her again-- without her our men could not have come forward. ¹⁹⁸

As late as 1822 at York Factory, the English had to call on the Indian wife of one of the servants to leave her duties at the goose tent to guide a party of men to the fishery at Rock Depot.¹⁹⁹

Because of her intimate contact with the traders, the Indian woman also played a prominent role as an interpreter and teacher of language--an important aspect of her role as a liason between

¹⁹⁶Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 326.

¹⁹⁷Porter's Journal, 3 June 1800, p. 27.

¹⁹⁸B.89/a/2, fos. 9d-10.

¹⁹⁹H.B.C.A., York Fort Journal, 1822-23, B.239/a/131, f. 5.

the two cultures. By marrying into the tribes, the Canadian traders learned native languages quickly which contributed to their effectiveness as traders. The Englishmen it appears were generally less adept. Peter Fidler lamented in 1819, that although Brandon House had been established for twenty years not a single person had been able to acquire the Assiniboine language "so that we are always beholden to Indian Women to act as Interpreters".²⁰⁰ The North West Company also relied heavily on native interpreters however. During his first winter on Lake Athabasca, George Simpson soon discovered one of the reasons for the Nor'Westers' strong position:

...their Women are faithful to their cause and good Interpreters whereas we have but one in the Fort that can talk Chipewyan. ²⁰¹

As was so graphically illustrated in the case of Thanadelthur, Indian women were helpful in extending the trade to new tribes. In 1819, the bourgeois Angus Shaw feared that one of his officers James Hughes was plotting with the English to send a trade expedition to the Missouri. He suspected that the plan might be successful because Hughes' wife Nantouche was the only person in the whole department familiar with the

²⁰⁰H.B.C.A., Brandon House Report, 1819, B.22/e/1, f. 9d.

²⁰¹Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, p. 231. For a detailed account of the influence of this Chipewyan woman, Madame Lamallice, see Chapter III.

Indians from that area and could speak Blackfoot.²⁰² Early in the spring of 1821 at Fort Wedderburn, Simpson engaged a French-Canadian Pering [Perrin] to help extend the English trade to Great Slave Lake primarily because his wife was "extensively connected amongst the Yellow Knife and Chipewyan tribes in that quarter...and will be enabled to remove any prejudice that our Opponents may have instilled on their minds against us."²⁰³

It should be emphasized that Indian women also directly participated in the fur trade itself. According to the division of labour in Indian society, it was the women's responsibility to trap small fur-bearing animals:

Among the Natives the snaring of hares, and the trapping of Martens are the business of the Women and become their property for trade. 204

At the Bay posts, in particular, martens and rabbits accounted for an increasing proportion of the annual trade as the supply of beaver decreased. The trade of the women helped to offset the cost of their maintenance. When the London Committee complained in 1802 that its goods were being wasted on servants' families, they were informed that the women had

²⁰²H.B.C.A., "Extract from Mr. Shaw's Journal, 1819", F.3/2, f. 182.

²⁰³Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, p. 264; see also the similar case of Madame Andries, pp. 109-136 passim.

²⁰⁴Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 67. Thompson also states that it was the women's prerogative to trade dried provisions, p. 235.

earned the clothing which they received for themselves and their children.²⁰⁵ To this the Committee acquiesced, stating "We do not object to Women being paid for their Services in Trapping Martins."²⁰⁶ The annual reports from the Bay testify to the women's continuing contribution. "The Women belonging to and dependent on this place," wrote Chief Factor Joseph Beioley from Moose in 1816, "have traded a good many [Made] Beaver, consisting chiefly of Martins and Rabbits Skins."²⁰⁷

While the hunt of individual women was generally not large enough to be detailed, that of one Watichusksqwow at York was probably not unusual. On 27 November 1814, she traded 1 silver fox, 2 white foxes, 3 martens, 2 musquash, and 41 rabbits plus the flesh of 10; she was back a fortnight later with 18 more skins, half of them foxes.²⁰⁸ Occasionally an Indian woman excelled her husband as a trapper. In 1800 at Fort Alexandria, the bourgeois A.N. McLeod sent two men off to The Thunder's tent "to try to prevail with his wife, (the Grey mare being the better horse) to send her fine furs here."²⁰⁹ A seasoned trader such as one Cree woman called Old Courtre Oreille drove a hard bargain and was not averse to playing one concern against

²⁰⁵H.B.C.A., Council at Eastmain to London Committee, 1802, A.11/19, f. 1d.

²⁰⁶H.B.C.A., General Letter to Moose Factory, 25 May 1803, B.135/c/1, f. 269.

²⁰⁷H.B.C.A., Moose Fort Report, 1815-16, B.135/e/3, f. 9.

²⁰⁸H.B.C.A., York Fort Journal, 1814-15, B.239/a/121, fos, 8d-10.

²⁰⁹Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 129. Author's emphasis.

the other. When Charles Chaboillez heard that this old woman had a cache of 130 beaver skins, he immediately sent her a present of a pint of liquor to forestall her trading with the English. Old Courtre Oreille duly arrived, but Chaboillez felt her demands for more liquor after she had been given the ceremonial dram and piece of tobacco were exorbitant. The old woman then threatened to go to his rivals, but Chaboillez apparently gave in after she agreed to go for the furs:

The Old Courtre Oreille sett off with her
Son for her Cache gave her Four Pints M.
Rum & 1/2 Fath. Tobc to Encourage her to
return. 210

Nowhere did the women take a more active part in trading than on the Columbia. With slaves to perform the more laborious domestic tasks, Chinook women enjoyed a more elevated status than most Indian women. According to Alexander Ross, it was common to see a Chinook woman, followed by a train of slaves, trading at the fort.²¹¹

In fact, the extent to which Indian women influenced trade relations has been largely ignored. Although most Indian women seemed subject to a slave-like existence in the eyes of the traders, it was noted that they were not without power in some spheres. Even among the Chipewyan, Alexander Mackenzie observed that the women "possess a very considerable influence

²¹⁰P.A.C., Journal of Charles Chaboillez, 1797-98, Masson Collection, No. 1, pp. 30-43 passim.

²¹¹Alex. Ross, Adventures on the Columbia, pp. 106-107.

in the traffic with Europeans."²¹² The Nor'Westers soon became aware of the advantages to be gained by catering to the women's love of trinkets and finery. The astute Philip Turnor urged that the English adopt a similar policy at their inland posts in order to compete with the Canadians who gave away large quantities of lace, ribbons, rings and vermilion:

...such like presents greatly gain the Love of the Women and some of them have great influence over their Husbands particularly the Young people who would carry part of their Furs to the Canadians if it was for those trinkets only. 213

When the Hudson's Bay Company appeared reluctant to make such gifts, individual traders were moved to take the initiative themselves. After Robert Goodwin at Albany in the early 1800's ordered a considerable assortment of ribbons at his own expense to give to the women when they visited the fort, the Committee eventually consented to send out its own consignment, admitting that "the Expense is not great & these little attentions...may have good effect."²¹⁴

By exploiting the women's love of beads, rings and other trifles, the traders often secured valuable furs for next to nothing. Michel Curot recorded trading 3 martens, 3 lynx and 6 muskrats from an Indian woman for six pairs of ear bobs and a pair of cloth leggings; George Nelson sent his men off to

²¹²Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 152.

²¹³Tyrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 273.

²¹⁴H.B.C.A., London Committee to J. McNab, 31 May 1806, B.239/b/78, f. 55.

trade with the Indians supplied with liquor, tobacco and "several things of no value to trade with the women."²¹⁵ Indian women were not just anxious for luxury items, but more importantly for those labour-saving devices such as kettles and needles which alleviated the burden of their domestic tasks. "Show them an awl or a strong needle," declared David Thompson, "and they will gladly give the finest Beaver or Wolf skin they have to purchase it."²¹⁶

The role played by Indian women in the fur trade serves to illustrate the extremely complex interaction which this enterprise engendered between Indian and white. The widespread intermarriage between Indian women and the traders of both companies provided the basis for the development of a distinct fur trade society. Because a union with an Indian woman became such an integral part of a fur trader's life and was often of such lasting duration, the Canadian fur trader does not fit the stereotype of the "womanless" frontiersman. The family ties developed in the Indian country, although complicated by the circumstances of fur trade life, became a dominant consideration in the white trader's existence.²¹⁷ The important social and economic contribution which the Indian woman made

²¹⁵Curot, "Journal 1803-1804", p. 429; Nelson, Journal 1807-1808, 20 November 1807.

²¹⁶Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 45, 297, 351.

²¹⁷Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 381.

to the development of the fur trade has been emphasized. In many ways, she acted as a liason between two radically different cultures, but for the Indian woman herself, life was considerably changed once she became the partner of a white trader.

CHAPTER III

THE INDIAN WOMAN IN FUR TRADE SOCIETY

Unfortunately, no Indian woman has left her own account of what it was like to be a fur trader's wife. There can be no doubt, however, that the fur traders themselves felt that the Indian woman improved her lot considerably by marrying a white man. The Nor'Westers, almost to a man, denounced the degraded brutal manner in which Indian women seemed to be treated. The life of a Cree woman, declared Alexander Mackenzie, was "an uninterrupted succession of toil and pain."¹ Duncan McGillivray decided that the rather singular lack of affection evinced by Plains Indian women for their mates arose from the barbarous treatment the women received.² Although David Thompson found the Chipewyan a good people in many ways, he considered their attitude toward women a disgrace. Chipewyan women had to endure such hardship that it was not unknown for them to do away with female infants as "an act of kindness". When Thompson queried a woman about committing such a reprehensible act, she replied that "she wished her mother had

¹Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 135.

²Morton, McGillivray's Journal, pp. 60-61.

done the same to herself."³ Even Chinook women, although they enjoyed a much more elevated status than most Indian women, were subject to a daily routine of painful toil.⁴ Gabriel Franchère summed up the Indian woman's situation thus:

Some Indian tribes think that women have no souls, but die altogether like the brutes; others assign them a different paradise from that of men, which indeed they might have reason to prefer...unless their relative condition were to be ameliorated in the next world. ⁵

Life at a fur trade post, however, offered the Indian woman the prospect of immediate relief from the laborious duties imposed by her traditional nomadic way of life. In the first place, she now became involved in a much more sedentary routine. With a stationary home, the Indian woman was no longer required to act as a beast of burden, hauling or carrying the accouterments of camp from place to place. The traders often expressed horror and astonishment at the heavy burdens Indian women were obliged to transport⁶ and

³Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 106. Alexander Mackenzie states that infanticide was also practised for the same reason among the Cree (Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 135). Daniel Harmon claims that it was not uncommon for Indian women to commit suicide (Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 137); this was especially true among the Carrier Indians who subjected widows to excruciating tortures, see Cox, Columbia River, pp. 389-92.

⁴Franchère, Narrative of a Voyage, p. 327.

⁵Ibid., p. 227n.

⁶Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 254; Nelson, Journal 1803-04, p. 9: "It cannot be believed but by those who see it themselves the trouble & misery these poor wretches have."

occasionally felt moved to offer assistance. When David Thompson instructed one of his strongest men to help a Chipewyan woman, to the man's surprise, it took all his strength to move the sled the woman had been hauling.⁷ In fur trade society however, the unenviable role of carrier was assumed by the voyageur. In contrast to Indian practice, John Thomson writing from the Peace River country in 1798 indicated that it was not customary for the women at the fort to go for the produce of the hunt: "Made the Hunter send his Wives for Meat as I cannot allow any of the Men to go untill such time as the House is finished."⁸ The wife of a bourgeois, benefitting from her husband's rank, seems to have been exempt from all carrying duties. She herself was carried in and out of the canoe⁹ and could expect to have all her baggage portaged by a trusty voyageur. When the wife of John Sayer, the bourgeois at Fond du Lac in 1804, decided to go on a sugar-making expedition, four men went with her to carry her baggage and provisions and later returned to fetch home her things.¹⁰

Aside from no longer being treated as a beast of burden, the Indian woman's domestic duties were also lighter at the

⁷Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 125.

⁸P.A.C., John Thomson's Journal, 15 October 1798, Masson Collection, No. 7, p. 10.

⁹Tyrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 252.

¹⁰Curot, "Journal 1803-04", pp. 449, 453. "Mr. Grant's Girl" also received the same treatment, see Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 234.

fur trade post. There her energies were concentrated on making moccasins and snowshoes. As one Nor'Wester declared, with the whites, Indian women could lead "a comparatively easy and free life" in contrast with the "servile slavish mode" of their own.¹¹ It was to gain the superior comforts enjoyed by a white man's wife that some of the Spokane women were persuaded to marry voyageurs.¹² The bourgeois possessed the wealth to be an indulgent husband, often lavishing his wife with trinkets and finery. In 1814, for example, Donald McTavish took to dressing his new Chinook wife in fine black broadcloth which cost twenty-three shillings a yard!¹³ Even the voyageurs prided themselves on having well-dressed wives, a fact which no doubt contributed to their almost perpetual state of debt.¹⁴ The private orders placed by Hudson's Bay officers and servants in the 1790's reveal that they imported many luxury items for their women--gingham, calico, lace, ribbons and jewelry being among the most popular items.¹⁵

Thus, the Indian woman found her life changed both physically and materially. When taken by a trader à la façon du pays,

¹¹Nelson, Journal 1810-11, 24 April 1811, p. 41; Nelson, Reminiscences, Part 5, p. 225.

¹²Cox, Columbia River, p. 148.

¹³Coues, New Light, p. 914.

¹⁴Ross, Fur Hunters, vol. 11, p. 236.

¹⁵See H.B.C.A., Book of Servants' Commissions, 1787-1802, A.16/111.

it became common for an Indian woman to go through a "ritual", performed by the other women of the fort, which was designed to render her more acceptable to the white man. She was scoured of grease and paint and exchanged her leather garments for those of a more civilized style. At the Nor'Wester posts, wives were clothed, usually at the expense of the company, in "Canadian fashion" which consisted of a shirt, short gown, petticoat and leggings.¹⁶ Ross Cox tells of the transformation wrought on a young Spokane girl who became the bride of one of his clerks. First consigned to one of the men's wives known as "the scourer" who went to work to remove the Indian paint and grease which saturated her head and body, she was then dressed in a new set of clothes. Thus decked out, she appeared to the traders "one of the most engaging females that we had...seen of the Spokane nation."¹⁷

Furthermore, the traders did not adopt certain taboos and customs which the Indians practiced with regard to women. Among the Ojibway and other tribes, the choicest parts of the meat were always reserved for the men; death it was believed would come to any woman who dared to eat such sacred portions. The Nor'Westers paid little heed to this warning. As Duncan Cameron wryly observed: "I have often seen several women living with the white men eat of those forbidden morsels without

¹⁶Lamb, Sixteen Years, pp. 28-9.

¹⁷Cox, Columbia River, pp. 209-11.

the least inconvenience."¹⁸ A most important modification of Indian custom resulted from the white man's attitude toward polygamy. Although Hudson's Bay officers in their isolation on the Bay do not seem to have been averse to taking more than one wife, they generally felt that the women disliked the custom which gave rise to jealous and sometimes murderous quarrels.¹⁹ Some Nor'Westers professed a definite abhorrence of polygamy,²⁰ and it is significant that this practice was not accepted as part of "the custom of the country". Although an Indian chief might have many wives, in fur trade society a white man was not permitted to take more than one woman.²¹ Indeed, one observer went so far as to declare that an Indian woman was better off sharing the semi-nomadic life of a French-Canadian freeman than that of an Indian hunter:

...these men make excellent Husbands and tender fathers & content themselves with only one wife, who never receives any brutal or unkind treatment from them, nor have any of those shameful and distressing drudgeries to perform which the Indians invariably impose on their debased mal-treated and wretched partners. 22

¹⁸Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 11, p. 263.

¹⁹Glover, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 80; Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 158.

²⁰Alex. Ross, Adventures on the Columbia, pp. 280-81, Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 257.

²¹"Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", pp. 280-81.

²²P.A.C., John McNab's Journal, 1816, Selkirk Papers, vol. 49, p. 180.

Although this statement is undoubtedly exaggerated, there is ample evidence that Indian women themselves actively sought liaisons with the traders.²³ According to the elder Henry, the Cree women selected by the voyageurs considered themselves honoured, and any husband who refused to lend his wife would find himself subject to the general condemnation of the women.²⁴ Alexander Henry the younger tells an incredible and ultimately tragic story of a handsome young Indian woman's attempt to win him for a husband. As Henry was camped with his brigade on the Red River in the summer of 1800, this girl came to his tent and demanded liquor. Hoping to be rid of her in a hurry, he made her gulp down a glass of French brandy which seemed to knock her out. After reviving her with difficulty, Henry then bundled the girl back across the river as he knew her husband would be very angry should her absence be discovered. Unfortunately, the damsel soon returned dressed in her finest garments and told Henry in plain terms that she had come to live with him as she did not care for her husband or any other Indian. Henry, being opposed to such connections and fearing reprisals, pleaded with his admirer to go back to her husband who by now was aroused and was firing shots at Henry's tent.

²³Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 29: "most of them I am told are better pleased to remain with the White People than with their own Relations"; Nelson, Journal 1810-1811, 24 April 1811, p. 42: "some too would even desert to live with the white."

²⁴Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 248.

He finally had his servant forcibly drag the woman to her canoe and take her across the river. The woman continued to defy her husband, however, whereupon he burned her face with a firebrand in his jealous rage. The bourgeois, who denied that he had in any way encouraged the girl, callously concluded his account: "Thus ended a very unpleasant affair, with the ruin of a pretty face."²⁵

According to Alexander Ross, Chinook women showed a preference for living with a white man. If deserted by one husband they would return to their tribe in a state of widowhood to await the opportunity of marrying another fur trader.²⁶ A notable example of this was the case of Kilakotah, a daughter of Chief Coboway of the Clatsops. She first became the country wife of William Matthews of the Pacific Fur Company by whom she had a daughter in 1815. After Matthews left the country, she was taken by the Nor'Wester clerk James McMillan around 1820. McMillan severed his connection with Kilakotah when he left the Columbia Department in 1829, but sometime after that she became the wife of the retired engagé Louis Labonté, Sr. Kilakotah was baptised Marguerite and officially married to Labonté in 1839.²⁷

²⁵Coues, New Light, pp. 71-73.

²⁶Ross, Fur Hunters, vol. 1, pp. 296-97.

²⁷James McMillan's Family Tree (courtesy of Hugh McMillan, Public Archives of Ontario); Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest, Vanc. 1, 26th & 27th pages.

Even to the woman who did not leave her tribe, the fur trade post was the source of wondrous goods and often succor. It has already been observed that in times of famine when previously they would have been the first to starve, the women now looked to the fur traders for subsistence. The story is told of a young Carrier woman in New Caledonia who having been severely beaten by her husband managed to struggle to the nearest North West Company post. Being nearly starved, she was slowly nursed back to health and allowed to remain at the post when it became apparent that her relatives had abandoned her.²⁸ The promise of kinder treatment, coupled with the fact that the traders were the source of goods which made their lives easier, helps to explain why Indian women often became devoted allies of the whites. Post journals contain numerous references to Indian women warning the traders of impending treachery.²⁹ In 1797 Charles Chaboillez, having been warned by an old woman that the Indians intended to pillage his post, was able to nip this intrigue in the bud.³⁰

²⁸Cox, Columbia River, p. 377.

²⁹The reasons for this widespread phenomenon, which amounts to Indian women betraying their own people, awaits a fuller investigation. Similar instances can even be found in the American frontier experience, see W.C. MacLeod, The American Indian Frontier (New York, 1928), p. 260. MacLeod cites the case of Indian women in New England: "These Indian women resort often to 'the English houses, where...they do somewhat ease their misery by complaining, and seldom part without a relief.", p. 359, n.1.

³⁰Chaboillez's Journal, 13 Dec. 1797, p. 24.

George Nelson and one of his men only escaped an attack by some Indians in 1805 by being "clandestinely assisted by the women."³¹

It appears that women were particularly instrumental in saving the lives of the whites among the turbulent tribes of the Lower Columbia.³² One of the most notable allies of the traders was a well-connected Chinook princess known as Lady Calpo who was the wife of a Clatsop chief. She helped restore peaceful relations in 1814 after the Nor'Westers had suffered a raid on their canoes by giving them important information about Indian custom with regard to settling disputes.³³ Handsome rewards cemented her attachment to the traders with the result that Lady Calpo reputedly saved Fort George from several attacks by warning of the treacherous plans of the Indians. When Governor Simpson arrived at the fort in 1824, he found this proud old lady to be "the best News Monger in the Parish" and from her learned "more of the Scandal Secrets & politics both of the out & inside the Fort than from any other Source."³⁴ The Governor faced a delicate situation,

³¹Toronto Public Library, George Nelson Papers, Journal and Reminiscences 1825-36, p. 66. Nelson also claims that prior to the smallpox epidemic of 1781, "a few old women" informed the Canadians that the Indians planned to drive them out of their country. He thought they were moved to do this because in their "tender & affectionate breast (for women are lovely all the world over) still lurked compassion for the mothers of those destined to be sacrificed", p. 60.

³²Ross, Fur Hunters, vol. 1, p. 296.

³³Coues, New Light, p. 793.

³⁴Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 104.

however, when Lady Calpo endeavoured to enhance her prestige by pressing him to marry her carefully-raised daughter.

Although Simpson professed himself "equally desirous to keep clear of the Daughter and continue on good terms with the Mother", he seems to have succumbed to a temporary liason. If the Chinooks expressed sorrow at his departure, "the fair princess Chowie" was not the least grieved he suspected.³⁵

Lady Calpo herself enjoyed a long diplomatic career; this "'fast friend' of the Whites" was still living in 1843.³⁶

In spite of cultural differences, Indian women possessed those universal feminine characteristics which at once both fascinate and frustrate the opposite sex. During his stay in the Indian Country, young George Nelson found ample cause to contemplate the insoluble perplexities of womankind. He had encountered Indian maidens who in spite of their primitive environment could well serve as models of female comportment in the civilized world, but on the other hand, he had known some who were perhaps "the most cursedest vixens" that ever existed. Like women the world over, they were adept at employing feminine wiles to get what they wanted, knowing so well "how to take advantage & what use they ought to make of it."³⁷ As has been noted, in spite of their degraded situation,

³⁵Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, pp. 104-05, 122.

³⁶H.B.C.A., Ramsay Crooks to Geo. Simpson, 15 March 1843, D.5/8, f. 147.

³⁷Nelson, Journal 1810-11, 24 April 1811, pp. 41-42.

women in Indian society were not without influence. Indeed, some of the bolder ones succeeded in making themselves quite independent and "wore the breeches".³⁸ In fur trade society, the Indian woman appears to have enjoyed greater freedom and proved most adept at exerting her will over a white husband. Initially, Nelson claimed, Indian women when married to whites were incredibly attentive and submissive, but this did not last long. Once they had gained a little footing and felt secure of their position, they knew well "how to manage for what they [had] lost by their former submission & tenderness(!!!)".³⁹ The hen-pecked husband appears to have been a common phenomenon.

On one of his first trips to the interior, Nelson was considerably annoyed by the shenanigans of the Indian wife of Brunet, one of his voyageurs. A jealous, headstrong woman, she completely dominated her husband by a mixture of "caresses, promises & menaces." She would frequently stage a fit if Brunet did not give in to her desires and on several occasions persuaded him to leave his post to go and live with her relations. Not only did this woman render her husband a most unreliable servant, but Nelson also caught her helping herself to the Company's rum. Brunet's wife, Nelson fumed, was as great "a vixen & hussy" as the tinsmith's wife at the market place in

³⁸Morton, McGillivray's Journal, p. 34; Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 1, p. 256.

³⁹Nelson, Journal 1810-11, 24 April 1811, pp. 41-42.

Montreal: "I now began to think that women were women not only in civilized countries but elsewhere also."⁴⁰ A bourgeois in the Athabasca country observed that Chipewyan women when they became the wives of French-Canadians revealed that their spirit had not been broken by their former burdensome life, because they "assume an importance to themselves and instead of serving as formerly they exact submission from the descendents of the Gauls."⁴¹ In fact, the voyageurs could be persuaded to perform tasks which were considered completely beneath a man's dignity in Indian society. Such was the case of the voyageur Lambert at Fort Chipewyan who found himself subject to a good deal of ridicule for helping his wife gather a stock of moss to furbish their infant's cradle. Times had certainly changed! "Soon... he arrived with a huge load on his back, while Madame walked slowly behind, carrying nothing but her little snarling brat."⁴²

One of the most remarkable examples of a Chipewyan woman rising to prominence was the case of Madame Lamallice. During the winter of 1820-21, this woman worked herself into a favoured position at the hard-pressed English post on Lake Athabasca because she was its only interpreter and possessed considerable influence with the Indians as her husband, the brigade guide, did with the voyageurs.⁴³ Although the demands of this couple

⁴⁰This account of Brunet's wife is taken from Nelson, Journal 1803-04, pp. 10-28 passim.

⁴¹"An Account of the Chipwean Indians", p. 23.

⁴²Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 11, p. 373.

⁴³Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, p. 74.

for extra rations and preferred treatment were ill received by Chief Factor William Brown, he was overruled by the newly-arrived George Simpson who felt it necessary to humour them lest they defect to the Nor'Westers.⁴⁴ Early in December, Lamallice and his family moved into a little house just outside the fort so they could better supervise the arrival of the Indians and the activities of their opponents. But it soon became apparent that Madame Lamallice was carrying on her own private trade. Several of the post's customers insisted upon trading the better part of their provisions with this enterprising woman and the Company officers were not in a position to stop it. "It is a most disgraceful thing that the company should be opposed in their own Fort," raged Brown, but "it is dangerous to check them when they do wrong as they would immediately raise all the Indians against us."⁴⁵ As a result, the Indian wife of another voyageur Chastellain also became involved in this illegal traffic and demanded special privileges.

When provisions ran low in the spring, Lamallice and Chastellain along with other servants were ordered to support their families at the fishery, but their wives were determined otherwise. Madame Chastellain suddenly became desperately ill and Simpson, although he saw through her ruse, allowed her to stay at the fort. Madame Lamallice had a far more tangible

⁴⁴Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁵H.B.C.A., Fort Chipewyan Journal, 1820-21, B.39/a/16, f. 49d.

excuse. Simpson was astonished when she informed him that if her family were allowed to remain at the post they would not ask for any provisions for twenty days:

...it appears that in anticipation of a scarcity of provisions this thrifty amazon has out of the Rations served to her family (even when the Officers' mess was on short allowance) laid up a stock of about 200 fish; I have therefore permitted her to remain. 46

This crafty dame continued her intrigues, however, and traded quantities of pounded meat, beaver tails and moose skins.⁴⁷ The value placed on her interpreting services was shown by Simpson's reluctance to come to an open break, but Brown could not be restrained from taking some action, at least against Chastellain's wife. Confiscating a number of beaver tails, Brown remonstrated with Chastellain about the injurious nature of this private trade in provisions. The voyageur replied in an injured tone that his wife's trade was of no consequence to that of Madame Lamallice, who had actually gone to the extent of giving some of the Indians credit in the fall, trading cloth, ribbons and other articles.⁴⁸ The situation deteriorated to such an extent that by late spring it became apparent that Lamallice and his wife were sowing seeds of dissatisfaction among the Indians. Although their desertion was averted, Madame Lamallice did threaten to turn all the

⁴⁶Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, pp. 271-72.

⁴⁷B.39/a/16, fos. 6-15 passim.

⁴⁸Ibid., f. 20d.

Indians against the English before she went to summer with her people after the departure of the brigade.⁴⁹

Madame Lamallice's prestige seems to have collapsed after the union of the two companies in 1821 for nothing more is heard of her, but Governor Simpson was annoyed to encounter numerous cases in which Indian women dominated their fur trader husbands, a situation "which is more injurious to the Comp^{ys} interests than I am well able to describe."⁵⁰ He would have highly rated the services of the boatbuilder at Brandon House, James Inkster, except that this servant was under the control of his Cree wife and given to drink.⁵¹ Nor were officers exempt; the Governor, critical of James Bird's management of Red River in the early 1820's, lamented: "I find that every matter however trifling or important is discussed wh. his Copper Cold. Mate before decided on and from her it finds its way all over the Colony."⁵² Chinook women especially when married to whites often gained such an ascendancy "that they give law to their Lords."⁵³

⁴⁹B.39/a/16, f. 21-21d.

⁵⁰Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 99.

⁵¹H.B.C.A., George Simpson's Journal, 1821-22, D.3/3, f. 35. James Inkster was married to Mary, a Cree Indian woman, on 26 Oct. 1824, E.4/1b, f. 212.

⁵²Simpson's Journal, D.3/3, f. 52.

⁵³Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 99.

The alternative presented to the Indian woman of marriage to a fur trader appears to have worked to improve her position among her own people. Now she could threaten to desert to the whites or vice-versa if she felt she was not being well-treated:

She has always enough of policy to insinuate how well off she was while living with the white people and in like manner when with the latter she drops some hints to the same purpose. 54

Although Chipewyan women who had lived with the voyageurs had to resume their former domestic tasks when they returned to their own people, they reputedly evinced a greater spirit of independence.⁵⁵ According to Alexander Ross, the women of the Columbia remained "very friendly" to the whites upon rejoining their tribes and "they never fail to influence their connections to the same effect."⁵⁶

A unique example of an Indian woman who used the presence of the traders to gain influence and independence among her people was that of Ko-come-ne-pe-ca or Man-Like Woman.⁵⁷ This woman, who was probably Cree in origin, began her career as the wife of David Thompson's servant Boisverd. She lived at

⁵⁴"An Account of the Chipewyan Indians", pp. 23-24.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁶Ross, Fur Hunters, vol. 1, p. 297.

⁵⁷The fact that this woman is mentioned in five different accounts seems to conclusively establish her existence. The accounts of David Thompson, Alexander Ross, Gabriel Franchère and John Stuart basically support one another, but Captain Franklin's second-hand account appears to be considerably embellished.

various posts which Thompson had established in the Flathead and Spokane country but was of such a loose character that the moralistic Thompson eventually made Boisverd get rid of her sometime in 1808.⁵⁸ Initially, Ko-come-ne-pe-ca appears to have sought refuge with the Okanagans, for in the fall of 1809 she was part of a small party headed by an Okanagan chief which undertook a hazardous trip through the interior to establish communication with the Nor'Westers in New Caledonia.⁵⁹ Being of a strong and eccentric disposition,⁶⁰ this woman then decided to become a conjurer and declared her sex changed, adopted men's clothes and took another woman for her wife.⁶¹ Man-Like Woman and her companion, having apparently lost their way, arrived at the mouth of the Columbia in the middle of June 1811 and aroused interest among the newly-arrived Astorians because they obviously did not belong to the surrounding tribes of Indians. They brought with them a letter from Finnan McDonald in the Spokane country which they were supposed to have delivered to the bourgeois John Stuart in New Caledonia. The identity of this strange pair was revealed when David Thompson arrived at Astoria and recognized "the man", but in the meantime,

⁵⁸Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 366-67.

⁵⁹H.B.C.A., John Stuart, Miscellaneous Papers, E.24/1; see also John Franklin, Narrative of a Second Expedition to the Shores of the Polar Sea 1825-27, (London, 1828), pp. 305-06.

⁶⁰Stuart, Papers, E.24/1.

⁶¹Glover, Thompson's Narrative, pp. 366-67.

the Astorians had learned much about the interior from "the letter-bearers".⁶² At the end of July, the two Indians, who had not been well received by the Chinooks, travelled with a party of Astorians to establish their first inland posts.⁶³ Usually the pair preceded the traders, and Man-Like Woman, using Stuart's old letter as special medicine, spread the story among the tribes that white men were coming who would give them free goods and all the luxuries they could desire. The fact of her bringing such wonderful news and claiming to be a man gave Ko-come-ne-pe-ca a favoured position among the tribes and she enriched herself considerably. Alexander Ross, an eye-witness, claims that by the time the party reached the Okanagans, the women had no less than twenty-six horses loaded with "the fruits of their false reports". But their story resulted in the traders being given a remarkably cordial reception by the Indians.⁶⁴ Ko-come-ne-pe-ca appears to have remained among the Okanagan where John Stuart met her in 1813. She reputedly became a chief and distinguished herself in battle, ultimately dying of a fatal wound.⁶⁵

⁶²Franchère, Narrative of a Voyage, p. 251; Ross, Adventures on the Columbia, p. 101.

⁶³Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 367.

⁶⁴Alex. Ross, Adventures on the Columbia, pp. 153-54.

⁶⁵Stuart, Papers, E.24/1; Franklin, Narrative of a Second Expedition, pp. 305-06.

It would be entirely erroneous, however, to suggest that the Indian wife of a fur trader enjoyed an idyllic existence. The white man, it must be remembered, observed the position of women in Indian society from a biased and often uninformed viewpoint. Certainly not all Indian women looked upon the whites as desirable husbands. A perplexed George Nelson observed that some showed "an extraordinary predilection" for their own people and could not be prevailed upon under any circumstance to live with a fur trader in spite of the promise of an easier life.⁶⁶ Although the Indian wife of Chief Factor Joseph Colen was to receive every kind attention during his absence in England in the late 1790's, Colen's successor could not dissuade her from taking an Indian lover and leaving York Factory.⁶⁷

It is perhaps significant that outside observers of fur trade society in the early 1800's did not think that the Indian woman's position had been much improved. According to Dr. John Richardson of the Franklin Expedition, the whites seemed generally "to find it easier to descend to the Indian customs and modes of thinking, particularly with respect to women, than to attempt to raise the Indians to theirs."⁶⁸ The first Anglican missionary, the Reverend John West, professed

⁶⁶Nelson, Journal 1810-1811, 24 April 1811, pp. 41-42.

⁶⁷H.B.C.A., York Journal, 2 Dec. 1798, B.239/a/103, f. 14d.

⁶⁸Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, p. 101.

horror at what he considered to be the traders' uncivilized treatment of their women: "They do not admit them as their companions, nor do they allow them to eat at their tables, but degrade them merely as slaves to their arbitrary inclinations."⁶⁹ While such blanket criticisms were an inaccurate assessment of the complex interchange of cultural attitudes in fur trade society, there was certainly much truth in the claim of these observers that Indian women who lived at the fur trade posts suffered physical deterioration.

To the fur traders, thoroughly accustomed to looking upon women as "the weaker sex", the robust constitution of Indian women had been a source of never-ending amazement. They were particularly struck by the lack of attention paid to that most dangerous female condition--childbirth. Alexander Mackenzie's sentiments are typical:

The Indians, indeed, consider the state of a woman in labour as among the most trifling occurrences of corporal pain to which human nature is subject, and they may be, in some measure, justified in this apparent insensibility from the circumstances of that situation among themselves. It is by no means uncommon in the hasty removal of their camps...for a woman to be taken in labour, to deliver herself on her way, without any assistance or notice from her associates in the journey, and to overtake them before they complete the arrangements of their evening station, with her new-born babe on her back 70

⁶⁹John West, The Substance of a Journal during a residence at the Red River Colony, 1820-23 (London, 1824), p. 16.

⁷⁰Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 250. See also Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 79 and Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 1, pp. 286-87.

After observing the heavy loads of firewood which Cree women could haul soon after childbirth, James Isham was prompted to suggest that Englishwomen were unnecessarily pampered: "I think itt's only pride an ambition, that some takes in Keeping their Bed a full month, and putting a poor C--'n to Charge and Expence for aught."⁷¹ Dr. Richardson noted, however, that Indian wives at the forts suffered more from childbirth than in their former primitive state. Not only did they have children more frequently and for a longer period (a dozen children was not uncommon), but they were now more subject to the disorders and diseases connected with pregnancy and childbirth.⁷² It was as if, mused Rev. West, "the habits of civilized life" exerted an injurious influence over their general constitution.⁷³

As has been seen, Indian women were not without influence in fur trade society, but in the last analysis, they were as much at the mercy of their white husbands as ever that of their Indian. No law existed in the Indian Country to protect the rights or person of a woman, who had to rely entirely upon custom and individual conscience. Although as a general rule it seems that fur traders' wives were less likely to be subject to physical violence, individual cases of brutality

⁷¹Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 104.

⁷²Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, p. 86; among the disorders the doctor observed were "endurations of the mammae and prolapsus of the uterus."

⁷³West, Red River Journal, p. 54.

were not unknown.⁷⁴ This was particularly true during the barbarous days of the trade war when rivals sometimes even went so far as to debauch and intimidate each other's women.⁷⁵ One of the most notorious instances involved the Indian wife of Hudson's Bay servant Andrew Kirkness at Isle à la Crosse.⁷⁶ In the late summer of 1810, this woman in a fit of pique had deserted her husband and sought refuge at the Nor'Westers' post. She soon regretted her action, however, for she was kept a virtual prisoner by the Canadians, and all the efforts of Peter Fidler and his men to get her back failed. The upshot was that Kirkness himself deserted to the rival post, leaving the English in dire straits since he was their only fisherman. Kirkness and his wife were forced to remain with the Nor'Westers until spring; when Kirkness tried to return to his post, he was met with the threat that "every Canadian in their House would ravish his woman before his eyes." Although an obviously mal-treated Kirkness was eventually allowed to return to the English, his wife was detained, having been

⁷⁴Coues, New Light, p. 487: The younger Henry tells of an Indian woman who tried to hang herself after being beaten by her voyageur husband.

⁷⁵H.B.C.A., Pelican Lake Journal, 18 Jan. 1819, B.158/a/1, f. 7d: HBC servant Deshau took furs away from a NWC servant and debauched his wife in retaliation for having had his own wife debauched by a Nor'Wester earlier in the season.

⁷⁶The following account of this incident is derived from the Isle à la Crosse Journal, 1810-11, B.89/a/2, fos. 5-36d passim.

coerced into saying that she did not want to go. As the Hudson's Bay party were evacuating their post, this woman tried to escape but was dragged back kicking and screaming by the Nor'Westers and ultimately became the "property" of an engagé.

Fortunately such incidents appear to have been rare, but Indian women were more generally victimized by certain social and cultural conflicts. Although the Indians did not regard marriage as a union for life, the traders corrupted this attitude to suit their own transient needs. If a retiring Nor'Wester attempted to salve his conscience by placing his country wife under the protection of another, evidence suggests that the women themselves did not like being "turned off". Occasionally some rebelled outright. At John Thomson's post in the Peace River district in 1798, for example, the voyageur Vivier, growing tired of wintering en derouine, attempted to pass his wife and child on to another engagé who would take his place, but "Madam" would not give her consent to such an arrangement.⁷⁷ At Fort Chipewyan in the spring of 1800, an Indian brought in his daughter who had deserted from an engagé Morin at Slave Lake. Morin, however, had directed the bourgeois James Mackenzie to sell his estranged wife to the highest bidder when the annual brigades arrived. For the interim, Mackenzie decided to place the woman with one of his servants,

⁷⁷Thomson's Journal, 19 Nov. 1798, p. 20.

but she stoutly refused three different prospects and "to convince them how heartily she hated them all three, she set up her pipes at the bare mention of their names." She had evidently decided that if it was her fate to be bound to a voyageur, she might as well submit to her former one by whom she was expecting a child.⁷⁸ The classic case of an Indian wife being passed on from trader to trader was that of Betsey, the industrious washerwoman at York Factory. When Letitia Hargrave encountered her in the summer of 1840, Betsey had just been abandoned by her fourth (or perhaps even her fifth) husband who was going home to England. She was determined not to be passed on again because any new husband she felt would just be interested in her carefully-saved earnings. Within a short time, however, kind-hearted Betsey was to find herself step-mother to the family of the widowed cooper David Munro.⁷⁹

A particularly tragic example of the conflicting cultural attitudes of the traders and the Indians related to the Chinook practice of head-flattening. In Chinook society, a flat forehead, achieved by strapping a board against a baby's head when in its cradle, was a mark of class; only slaves were not so distinguished. Thus it was only natural that a Chinook woman, though married to a fur trader, would desire to bind

⁷⁸Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 11, pp. 384-85.

⁷⁹MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 72, 127.

her baby's head, but white fathers expressed abhorrence of this custom. Reputedly the insistence of some fathers that their infants' heads not be flattened resulted in the mothers murdering their babies rather than have them suffer the ignominy of looking like slaves. Under the influence of the whites, however, the practice gradually died out. When Governor Simpson visited the Columbia in the early 1820's, he reported that Chinook wives were abiding by their husbands' wishes and no cases of infanticide had been reported for some years.⁸⁰

Apart from their direct effect on the women, unions between fur traders and Indian women also had more widespread repercussions in Indian society. If some traders made the argument that they could not treat their wives with "the tenderness and attention due to every female" because the Indians would despise them for such unmanly action,⁸¹ others felt compelled to interfere with what they considered to be uncivilized treatment of women, much to the resentment of the Indians. David Thompson, for example, found the Chipewyan custom of wrestling for wives, a particularly abhorrent practice. On one occasion, Thompson and his companions intervened to prevent the wife of a young Chipewyan from being taken from him. The young man, The Crane, was devoted to his wife but

⁸⁰Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 101. For a description of head-flattening, see Paul Kane, Wanderings of an Artist (Edmonton, 1968 [reprint]), pp. 123-24.

⁸¹Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, p. 106.

lost her to a stronger man in a wrestling match at the trading post. Thompson kicked the victor out of the fort, but the man declared that The Crane had won only a temporary reprieve: "You are now under the protection of the White Men, in the summer I shall see you on our lands, and then I shall twist your neck and take your woman from you."⁸² Another young Chipewyan was outlawed and persecuted by his band because he had adopted the "white man's way" and actually shot a rival who had wrested his wife from him. When Thompson heard this story, he declared that such conduct was only honorable and that he would have done the same. But to the Chipewyan, no woman was worth killing a fellow countryman for:

Ah, that is the way you White Men...always talk and do, a Woman cannot be touched but you get hold of guns and long Knives; What is a woman good for, she cannot hunt, she is only to work and carry our things, and on no account whatever ought the ground to be made red with man's blood. Then the strong men take Women when they want them; Certainly the strong men have a right to the Women. 83

Although it has been emphasized that the Indian woman played a positive role as a liason between Indian and white, eventually the women became an increasing source of friction between the two groups. By the turn of the century, largely because of the demoralizing practices resulting from the trade war, relations between the traders, especially the

⁸²Glover, Thompson's Narrative, p. 126.

⁸³Ibid., p. 127.

Nor'Westers, and the Indians showed a marked deterioration. In what seems to have been a classic case of "familiarity breeding contempt", the Nor'Westers now retained their mastery through coercion and brute force and frequently transgressed the bounds of Indian morality. Edward Umfreville, though no friend of the English, declared that an inexperienced Orkneyman made a preferable servant to the unreliable, degenerate French-Canadian who was now despised by the Indians.⁸⁴

A particularly flagrant abuse was the Nor'Westers' exploitation of Chipewyan women at its posts in the Athabasca district. By the end of the 18th century, they had apparently built up a nefarious traffic in these women; the bourgeois themselves did not scruple at seizing Chipewyan women by force, ostensibly in lieu of trade debts, and then selling them to the men for large sums.⁸⁵ The situation became so bad that the Chipewyan began leaving their women behind when they came in to trade, and when Hudson's Bay traders appeared on Lake Athabasca in 1792, the Indians hoped to secure their support and drive out their rivals.⁸⁶ The English, however, were too weak to offer any effective check to the Nor'Westers who

⁸⁴Umfreville, Present State of Hudson's Bay, p. 109.

⁸⁵Tyrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp. 446n, 449. Indeed, the Nor'Westers had reputedly developed a widespread trade in Indian female captives. According to Matthew Cocking in 1775, "The Pedlars have always traded all the Slaves the Indians would bring them taking them down to Montreal and selling them there" (B.239/a/72, f. 36).

⁸⁶Tyrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, pp. 449-50.

continued to assault both fathers and husbands if they tried to resist the seizure of their women. In the spring of 1800, a delegation of Chipewyan begged the bourgeois James Mackenzie to stop this trade in women but received the curt rebuttal: "it was not their business to prescribe rules to us."⁸⁷ Since they were not powerful enough to mount an attack against the Nor'Westers, the Chipewyan connived at the escape of their women during the summer months when most of the men were away. Many of the women seemed to welcome any chance to slip back to their own people so that the summer master at Fort Chipewyan was almost solely preoccupied with keeping watch over the engagés' women.⁸⁸ By 1800 at least one voyageur had been killed by irate Chipewyan, and James Mackenzie threatened to offer a handsome reward for the hunting down of "any d--nd rascal" who caused a Frenchman's woman to desert.⁸⁹

The growing hostility between Indian and white was undoubtedly exacerbated by the vast amounts of liquor brought into the Indian Country during the trade war. Violent acts resulting from jealousy erupted when the Indians became inebriated.⁹⁰ Although attacks on Hudson's Bay men were rare,

⁸⁷Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 11, p. 388.

⁸⁸Tyrell, Journals of Hearne and Turnor, p. 446n; "An Account of the Chipewyan Indians", p. 23.

⁸⁹Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 11, pp. 387-88.

⁹⁰Umfreville, Present State of Hudson's Bay, p. 16; Morton, McGillivray's Journal, p. 72; Coues, New Light, p. 209.

the murder of sloopmaster William Appleby at Hannah Bay in 1788 is illustrative. Appleby, contrary to orders, had invited an Indian hunter and his wife aboard the sloop where they remained drinking all day. All three went ashore towards evening where Appleby began taking liberties with the woman and succeeded in enticing her into the bushes near the Company's tent. When the drunken Indian noticed that his wife was missing, he was seized with such a rage that he fired upon one servant by mistake and then shot Appleby dead.⁹¹

Indeed, the Indians became openly contemptuous of the white man and his so-called morality. Ferdinand Wentzel at his post in the Peace River district in the early 1800's finally lost the services of a good and loyal hunter called Pouce Coupé because his wife had been debauched by one of the servants; such was "the consequence of letting [the] men have their will with Indians."⁹² George Nelson felt forced to admit that some of the traders deserved the hatred of the Indians. In a most damning account, he reveals that the Indians had come to regard any of their women who exhibited lazy and lascivious propensities as fit partners only for the whites. As one Indian, who hoped to get rid of his good-for-nothing second wife, explained:

⁹¹H.B.C.A., J. Thomas to J. Colen, 6 July 1789, B.239/b/50, f. 18d.

⁹²P.A.C., Ferdinand Wentzel's Journal, Grand River, 13 Jan. 1805, Masson Collection, No. 8, p. 41.

...she is naturally lazy and dirty; she is so headstrong she will do only as she pleases and she is very fond of men--she is never pleased but when she has them before her. She will not do for me nor for any Indian.-- [The] best way is to give her to the white. With them she will have only snow-Shoes and maggacins to make, & with them she will have as much of men as she desires....they take women, not for wives--to use them as Sluts--to satisfy the animal lust, & when they are satiated, they cast them off, and another one takes her for the same purpose, & by & by casts her off again, and so she will go on until she becomes an old [woman], soiled by every one who chuses to use her. She is foolish--she has no understanding, no sense, no shame. 93

Alexander Mackenzie reported that the Beaver Indians, a northern tribe, had at first welcomed the Canadians but soon lost respect for them and now forbade any intercourse between their women and the traders.⁹⁴ The increasing hostility of the Indians, coupled with the fact that in well-established areas marriage alliances were no longer a significant factor in trade relations, led to a decline in the practice of taking an Indian wife. Although some officers remained constant to their Indian wives, by the turn of the century, there was a noticeable change in the traders' opinion of the value of Indian alliances.

Economic considerations accelerated this trend. The North West Company, particularly, found the cost of supporting the

⁹³Nelson, Reminiscences, Part 5, p. 225.

⁹⁴Lamb, Journals of Mackenzie, p. 255; Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, p. 388.

wives and growing families of its servants a prohibitive burden. Statistics for this period are unfortunately scarce and of doubtful accuracy, but it is estimated that by the early 1800's between twelve and fifteen hundred women and children were being fed and in many cases clothed at the expense of the North West Company.⁹⁵ The younger Henry's record of the wintering population at Fort Vermilion in 1810 gives a representative distribution of a post's population: 36 men, 27 women and 67 children.⁹⁶ With the average ration of each man being eight pounds of solid meat per day or the equivalent in fish, and each woman and child one-half and one-quarter of this amount respectively, the problem of supply and the cost of provisions for the Company's posts can be appreciated.⁹⁷ Although the Indian women made a significant economic contribution to the fur trade, the cost of maintaining large numbers of women and children now outweighed the value of their labour.

In 1806, the proprietors of the North West Company decided that some measure must be taken to at least alleviate the heavy burden of supporting its servants' dependents. Consequently, at the annual meeting in July, the wintering partners resolved that in order to

⁹⁵Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 5. The younger Henry's 1805 estimate of the Nor'Westers' women and children is more conservative, 368 and 569 respectively (Coues, New Light, p. 282).

⁹⁶Coues, New Light, pp. 553-555.

⁹⁷Cox, Columbia River, p. 354.

reduce by degrees the number of women maintained by the Company...no Man whatever, either Partner, Clerk, or Engagé,...shall henceforth take or suffer to be taken, under any pretence whatsoever, any woman or maid from any of the tribes of Indians now known or who may hereafter become known in this Country to live with him after the fashion of the North West. 98

To give teeth to the resolution, every bourgeois or partner was to be liable to a fine of one hundred pounds if he or any person in his department were found guilty of this offence.

In well-established areas, this new policy appears to have met with little opposition. There are only two recorded instances of fines actually having been levied. In 1809, one partner was fined for allowing Robert Logan to take an Ojibway wife at Sault Ste. Marie, and another Daniel Mackenzie also paid the penalty for permitting one of his men in the Lower Red River district to do the same.⁹⁹ However, the stipulation that alliances not be formed with Indian women from tribes as yet unknown became a dead letter. The important marriage alliances between the Nor'Westers and the daughters of the Chinook chief Concomely took place in 1813 and after, and Alexander Ross does not appear to have been censured for

⁹⁸Wallace, Documents of North West Company, p. 211. There is evidence that the NWC may have been influenced by its smaller rival, the XY Company, in this regard. It seems to have been a deliberate XY policy not to allow its men to take wives. George Nelson, as has been seen, was severely censured for taking an Indian woman in 1803. Just before it was absorbed into the NWC, the XY Company had a total of 520 men among whom there were only 37 women (Coues, New Light, p. 282).

⁹⁹Wallace, Documents of North West Company, p. 262.

wedding his Okanagan princess. Simon Frazer had little success in enforcing this ruling among his men when travelling into New Caledonia in 1806; although he took away the newly-purchased wife of one of his voyageurs, the next season one of his officers sold her to someone else.¹⁰⁰

The Hudson's Bay Company had, of course, never officially sanctioned unions between its servants and Indian women, but by the turn of the century, the London Committee was distressed to discover that the support of officers' women and children had grown to a considerable expense.¹⁰¹ Chief factors were ordered to keep a detailed account of all goods expended, but irregularities persisted until a new economic system was introduced in 1810 giving officers a direct share in the profits of the trade. Only then were certain officers moved to put a clamp on their wives who had previously been allowed to operate as if "the chief purpose of their existence was to dispense the property of the Company on the most undeserving of objects for the most selfish purposes."¹⁰² In 1813, the London Committee further requested complete lists of all women and children attached to its posts. With the prospect of the founding of the Red River colony which would bring civilization to Rupert's Land, several Hudson's Bay officers

¹⁰⁰Lamb, Journals of Simon Frazer, pp. 246, 249-50.

¹⁰¹H.B.C.A., London Committee to Wm. Tomison, 26 May 1802, B.239/b/78, f. 39d.

¹⁰²H.B.C.A., William Auld's Memo Book, 1810-11, B.42/a/136a, f. 2d.

expressed the view that it was no longer desirable for the Company's men to form liasons with Indian women.¹⁰³ However, George Simpson, during his first winter in the Indian Country in 1819, considered that the Company had been most remiss to discourage unions between its servants and Indian women. When devising plans to move into New Caledonia, Simpson recommended that the Gentlemen should form connections with the principal families immediately upon their arrival as "the best security we can have of the goodwill of the Natives."¹⁰⁴

Owing to the actions of the Nor'Westers in New Caledonia where they had again been guilty of ignoring Indian sensibilities, the Hudson's Bay Company was to reap a bitter legacy, however. Shortly before the union of the two companies, the bourgeois John Stuart became alarmed at the possible outcome of the men's intriguing with Carrier women; one of the servants had actually been so impolitic as to fight with a Carrier over a certain woman and Stuart strongly recommended that the old Nor'Wester ruling be enforced and only married men sent into the district.¹⁰⁵ When the Hudson's Bay Company ignored this

¹⁰³H.B.C.A., W.H. Cook to J. Swain, 17 Dec. 1811, B.239/b/82, fos. 9d-10.

¹⁰⁴Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, p. 392.

¹⁰⁵H.B.C.A., Fort St. James Journal, 1 Aug. 1820, B.188/a/1, p. 14d; J. Stuart to J. Leith, 25 Feb. 1822, E.24/1.

warning, tragedy ultimately resulted as Stuart feared. In the summer of 1823, two servants at Fort George were murdered owing to the amours of the clerk James Murray Yale. While in charge of Fort George, young Yale formed a liason with a daughter of Talphe, although she had previously been purchased by a Carrier man Tzee-aze.¹⁰⁶ Tzee-aze continued to carry on a clandestine relationship with this woman when she was living with Yale, a fact which was discovered by the interpreter Joseph Beignoit during Yale's absence from the fort. Beignoit's threat to inform Yale of this affair upon his return apparently provoked Tzee-aze and an accomplice to murder the interpreter and another servant to ensure their silence.¹⁰⁷ Yale, who was aware of the impropriety of his conduct, tried to conceal the cause of the attack but was censured by John Stuart who declared that such meddling with Carrier women would ruin the trade in New Caledonia.¹⁰⁸ Although Governor Simpson does not appear to have abandoned his belief that alliances with Indian women could prove valuable in remote areas, he was forced to admit in 1824:

It is a lamentable fact that almost every difficulty we have had with Indians throughout the country may be traced to our interference with their Women or their

¹⁰⁶H.B.C.A., Fort McLeod Journal, 13 Feb. 1824, B.119/a/1, f. 67.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., f. 59.

¹⁰⁸H.B.C.A., J. Stuart to Wm. Brown, 23 Feb. 1824, B.119/b/1, f. 77.

intrigues with the Women of the Forts in
short 9 Murders out of 10 Committed on
Whites by Indians have arisen through Women. 109

In general, by the early decades of the 19th century, the fur traders were actively discouraged from forming unions with pure-blooded Indian women.¹¹⁰ This does not mean that they were to be denied wives, however. Significantly, the Nor'Westers' resolve of 1806 had not prohibited the taking of "the Daughter of a white man" à la façon du pays.¹¹¹ It was from the growing numbers of mixed-blood girls that the fur traders were now to select their mates.

¹⁰⁹Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 127. On a later voyage in 1841, Simpson gave permission to over a dozen of the men at Fort Stikine to take Indian wives because these unions would form "a useful link between the traders and the savages" which outweighed the increased burden on provisions, see George Simpson, Narrative of a Journey Round the World during the Years 1841 and 1842, 2 vols. (London, 1847), vol. 1, p. 231.

¹¹⁰Captain Franklin stated around 1820 that both companies had "wisely prohibited their servants from intermarrying with pure Indian women, which was formerly the cause of many quarrels with the tribes" (Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, p. 162). However, no ruling specifically prohibiting HBC men from marrying pure Indian women had been found prior to 1824, when a resolution to that effect was passed but only for the Southern Department (B.135/k/1, fos. 16d-17).

¹¹¹Wallace, Documents of North West Company, p. 211.

CHAPTER IV

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MIXED-BLOOD WOMAN

Since the late 18th century, the men of both companies had, in fact, been espousing the daughters of their predecessors, an action which emphasizes the extent to which miscegenation had taken place. James Isham claimed that the progeny of Hudson's Bay men and Indian women was "pretty Numerous [sic]",¹ but owing to the restriction on marital unions in the Hudson's Bay Company, most of the marriageable mixed-blood girls were initially the daughters of former officers.² Mary, a daughter of Albany officer John Favell, for example, became the wife of John McKay of Brandon House; she died in childbirth in 1810, leaving McKay with a family of eight children.³ Humphrey Marten, a prominent governor in the 1770's was known to have had several children and it is likely that Sarah Martin [sic], the wife of Thomas Knight, the surgeon at Eastmain in the 1790's, was his daughter.⁴ Of Matthew Cocking's daughters, the eldest,

¹Rich, Isham's Observations, p. 79.

²H.B.C.A., Graham's Observations, 1771, E.2/7, f. 27.

³P.R.O., Will of John Favell, 19 February 1784, Prob.11/1785, f. 551; H.B.C.A., Brandon House Journal, 19 March 1810, B.22/a/17, f. 19d.

⁴P.R.O., Will of Thomas Knight, 27 February 1797, Prob.11/1299, f. 749.

Ke-the-cow-e-com-e-coof, became the country wife of Thomas Stayner, governor of Churchill in the 1790's while another, Agathas, married William Hemmings Cook who took charge of York Factory in the early 1800's.⁵ Both George Gladman and Thomas Vincent who began their careers as writers at Albany in the late 18th century, espoused the daughters of former sloop masters; Gladman's wife, Mary Moore, was probably the daughter of Thomas Moore, master of the Albany sloop in the 1770's, while Vincent's wife, Jane, was a daughter of Moore's successor, William Renton.⁶

Intermarriage within the Hudson's Bay Company, therefore, tended to reinforce class distinctions in contrast to the general pattern which developed in the North West Company where, from an early date, the largest group of eligible mixed-blood girls had been the daughters of the French-Canadian engagés. Many of the bourgeois wed the daughters of voyageurs and freemen in unions which cut across both class and racial lines. The young Nor'Wester John "Le Prêtre" Macdonell, for example, wed Magdelaine Poitras à la façon du pays at Fort Qu'Appelle in 1796; this girl, a daughter of the engagé André Poitras and a Cree woman, had been born at Fort des Epinette

⁵Cocking's Will, 1797; H.B.C.A., W.H. Cook to R. Miles, 25 May 1825, B.239/c/1, f. 201.

⁶H.B.C.A., Eastmain Register, 1806-1826, B.59/z/1; A.11/4, f. 82; Will of Thomas Vincent, 13 January 1826, A.36/14.

on the Assiniboine River in 1783.⁷ Similarly Marie Poitras, perhaps a sister of Magdelaine, became the wife of the bourgeois John "Le Borgne" McDonald sometime in the 1790's.⁸ Mrs. McDonald was described as "a stout good looking Dame" and evidently managed to dominate her husband "through persuasion & cunning."⁹ It was a source of pride to more than one engagé that his comely daughters had become wives of bourgeois. Ross Cox tells the story of a redoubtable old voyageur, Louis La Liberté, who felt he could address himself with familiarity to one of the Company's proprietors because he was father-in-law to three wintering partners.¹⁰

Undoubtedly one of the most famous unions was that of the pious New Englander Daniel Harmon and the métis girl Lisette Duval. After refusing several offers of an Indian wife, it is significant that Harmon ultimately consented to take the fourteen-year-old daughter of a French-Canadian at South Branch House on 10 October 1805. The girl, whose mother was from the Snake tribe which lived near the Rocky Mountains, was reputedly of "a mild disposition & even tempered", qualities which Harmon deemed necessary to make "an agreeable Woman

⁷Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 64; Biographical Notes on John Macdonell, courtesy of Hugh McMillan, Public Archives of Ontario.

⁸Wallace, Documents of North West Company, p. 463.

⁹Simpson's Journal, 1821-22, D.3/3, f. 34.

¹⁰Cox, Columbia River, p. 356.

and an affectionate Partner."¹¹ A large proportion of the bourgeois who were absorbed into the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 had country wives who were of Franco-Indian descent. The wife of Peter Warren Dease, Elizabeth Chouinard, was probably a daughter of the engagé Charles Chouinard alias Quebec.¹² A daughter of Joachim Cardinalle called Jane became the wife of former Nor'Wester Thomas McMurray,¹³ while William McIntosh married Sarah Gladue, the daughter of a freeman and his Indian wife.¹⁴ Marriageable daughters of the bourgeois themselves appear to have been scarce before the turn of the century. Notable exceptions were the daughters of Patrick Small who retired from the Indian Country in 1791; the eldest, Nancy, became the country wife of John McDonald of Garth while her sister, Charlotte, wed David Thompson at Isle à la Crosse in 1799.¹⁵

Thus, even before the passing of the Nor'Wester resolution of 1806, the taking of a mixed-blood wife instead of an Indian one had become a widespread occurrence in fur trade society. With the growth of a substantial mixed-blood population,

¹¹Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 98.

¹²Red River Register, E.4/1a, f. 168; Coues, New Light, p. 934.

¹³H.B.C.A., Will of Thomas McMurray, 18 March 1824, A.36/10.

¹⁴Red River Register, E.4/1b, f. 247d.

¹⁵Wallace, Documents of North West Company, p. 498-99; Coues, New Light, p. 581n.

this was, in fact, a natural evolution.¹⁶ In the first place, a fur trader's daughter possessed the ideal qualifications to become a fur trader's wife. A very child of the fur trade, she knew no other way of life. If she was not as hardy as her Indian mother, the mixed-blood woman was still much better able to cope with the not inconsiderable rigours of life at a fur trade post than a white woman would have been. Even in the late fur trade period, it required considerable fortitude to be a trader's wife:

They must follow [their husbands] to the most savage and remote stations, and take part in all the privations they encounter....However, like the wives of army subalterns they are mostly born to it, have looked all their days to such a vagabond life as their natural lot, and have no wishes beyond it. 17

Paul Kane was particularly impressed with Mrs. Richard Lane, the half-breed daughter of the Red River trader Andrew McDermott who proved to be one of the best snowshoers in the party with whom he travelled to the Columbia in 1846.¹⁸

From her Indian mother, the mixed-blood girl learned those native skills so valuable to the trade such as making moccasins, netting snowshoes and preparing pemmican. Their role as

¹⁶ Although traders continued to form liasons with Indian women in outlying areas, this was seen as acceptable only because mixed-blood women were not yet available (Cox, Columbia River, p. 209).

¹⁷ John Henry Lefroy, In Search of the Magnetic North: A Soldier-Surveyor's Letters from the North-West 1843-44, ed. by G.F.G. Stanley, (Toronto, 1955), p. 26.

¹⁸ Kane, Wanderings of an Artist, p. 108.

needlewomen, particularly in fashioning apparel such as mittens, caps and leggings, was an important one, and mixed-blood women were renowned for their skill, especially in executing intricate bead and quill work.¹⁹ Apart from performing these traditional Indian tasks, the women at the forts took on a more "civilized" range of domestic duties. They were responsible for at least an annual spring cleaning of the fort buildings, and washing and scrubbing--two domestic arts unknown to the leather-clad inhabitants of a dirt-floored Indian lodge--became an integral part of their routine. As the clerk James Hargrave wrote to a friend, "the Dames" at York Factory were kept "in Suds, Scrubbing & Scouring."²⁰ The women also took an active part in planting and harvesting potatoes which were the mainstay of the subsistence agriculture practiced around most posts. As far north as Moose Factory in 1830, the women with the aid of their children gathered in 196 bushels of potatoes.²¹ Throughout the fur trade period, the women of the forts, who were ultimately mostly mixed-bloods,

¹⁹Cox, Columbia River, p. 360; R.H. Fleming, ed., Minutes of Council of the Northern Department of Rupert's Land, 1821-31 (London: H.B.R.S., vol. III, 1940), p. 378: "the duty of the Women at the different Posts to do all that is necessary in regard to Needle Work."

²⁰P.A.C., Jas. Hargrave to Alex. Christie, 13 June 1832, Hargrave Correspondence, v. 21, Letterbook 7; see also Isaac Cowie, The Company of Adventurers (Toronto, 1913), pp. 213-14.

²¹H.B.C.A., Moose Fort Journal, 2 October 1830, B.135/a/136, f. 7d; see also Fort Carlton Journal, 1824-25, B.27/a/14, fos. 10, 105, 108.

constituted an important element in the labour force. At the posts along the Saskatchewan, the women became particularly renowned for their industry. According to Chief Factor John Rowand at Fort Edmonton: "the women here work very hard, if it was not so, I do not know how we would get on with the Company work."²²

Furthermore, with her knowledge of Indian customs and language, the mixed-blood woman was in a position to act as an intermediary or liason between Indian and white without becoming a source of conflict as had been the case with the Indian woman. Often, they made excellent interpreters. The daughter of an old voyageur Cayenne Grogne, for example, could speak Cree, French and Mountainy (Chipewyan) fluently which made George Simpson desirous of securing a match between her and one of his clerks.²³ On more than one occasion, mixed-blood wives were known to have saved the lives of their fur trader husbands owing to their understanding of the Indian character. The former Nor'Wester John Haldane was said to have been spared his scalp thanks to his country wife Josette Latour who had been able to intercede with some hostile Indians during an incident at Rat Portage.²⁴ Although accounts

²²H.B.C.A., J. Rowand to Geo. Simpson, 29 Dec. 1846, D.5/18, fos. 535d-536; see also Kane, Wanderings of an Artist, pp. 93, 261.

²³Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, p. 245.

²⁴H.B.C.A., Geo. Keith to Geo. Simpson, 25 Sept. 1827, D.5/20, f. 308.

of the confrontation between James Douglas, then clerk, and the Carrier Indians at Fort St. James in 1828 are confused, it is clear that the timely action of his own wife Amelia with the aid of the interpreter's wife Nancy Boucher was a decisive factor in appeasing the Indians.²⁵ In the summer of 1828, Douglas had discovered and rather brutally executed one of the perpetrators of the Fort George murders who had managed to escape detection. The Carriers, lead by Chief Kwah, came to the fort demanding compensation for this cruel act and when Douglas refused, overpowered him and threatened his life. Hearing the commotion, Douglas' young bride rushed from her apartments, grabbing a dagger from one of the Indians to come to her husband's defense. She was quickly unarmed, but as Kwah's nephew who had been pointing a dagger at Douglas' breast was about to strike, Amelia and the interpreter's wife begged the chief to have mercy on the white man and to avoid bloodshed. Promising Kwah and his followers ample restitution, the two women then rushed upstairs and began throwing down trade goods of all kinds to the crowd.

²⁵ Amelia Douglas was the daughter of Chief Factor William Connolly, then in charge of New Caledonia, and his Cree wife Suzanne Pas de Nom. Douglas had wed her à la façon du pays on 27 April 1828 at Fort St. James a few months before this incident took place. The wife of the interpreter Jean-Baptiste Boucher dit Waccan was Nancy McDougall, a daughter of James McDougall, who served for many years in New Caledonia, and an Indian woman. Boucher had likely taken her for a wife in the early 1820's after his Carrier wife had apparently died.

This action diverted the Indians, and since the "throwing" of gifts was a mark of deference according to Carrier custom, the Indians were placated and departed.²⁶

Governor Simpson commended the courage of Isabella, the half-breed wife of Charles Ross, in defending Fort McLoughlin, a coastal post in New Caledonia, during an incident in the early 1840's. While her husband was absent, some Indians when trading with her son had drawn their knives upon the boy. On witnessing this, "the lady, pike in hand, chased the cowardly rascals from pillar to post, till she drove them out of the fort."²⁷ Isaac Cowie felt that traders' wives of Indian descent deserved a sincere tribute; many Hudson's Bay gentlemen owed much of their success in overcoming difficulties and maintaining the Company's influence over the natives to "the wisdom and good counsel of their wives."²⁸

²⁶The best account of this incident is that of Father Morice in History of the Northern Interior of B.C., pp. 139-152. He corrects errors made by previous authors such as John McLean and H.H. Bancroft. Morice's account has been followed by Marion B. Smith in her article "The Lady Nobody Knows", British Columbia, A Centennial Anthology (Vancouver, 1958), pp. 473-74, but the account in N. de B. Lugin, The Pioneer Women of Vancouver Island, 1843-66 (Victoria, 1928), pp. 12-14 is inaccurate and exaggerated.

²⁷Simpson, Journey Round the World, p. 204.

²⁸Cowie, Company of Adventurers, p. 204; see also Charles Wilkes, Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-42, 5 vols. (Philadelphia, 1845), vol. 4, pp. 396-97.

On the personal side, the white man generally evinced a preference for a mixed-blood wife whose lighter skin and sharper feature more closely approximated his concept of beauty. Many of the girls were captivating with their delicacy of form, nimble movements and bright, penetrating black eyes.²⁹ An Englishman, John McNab, who accompanied a hunting expedition from Brandon House in 1816, found himself entranced by the sixteen-year-old daughter of an old French-Canadian freeman and his Indian wife. He has left an unusually detailed description of the lovely Janette, who charmed him with her rendering of many traditional voyageur songs:

She was neither bold, nor bashful, her behavior was free, unconstrain'd and remarkably modest.--She was, with regard to her person, a handsome brunette, fine black expressive eyes, arch'd eye brows, high forehead, shaded with natural ringlets of black flowing hair, an aquiline nose, pretty mouth, teeth exquisitely beautiful, and the contour of her face of an oval form.--She was tall & slender, well proportion'd but very delicate... 30

Indeed, the fairness of some of the mixed-blood girls frequently occasioned admiration and comment. Although her mother was a Cree, Amelia Connolly looked remarkably "unIndian", a fact which resulted in her being nicknamed "Little Snowbird". According to family tradition, James Douglas who was very

²⁹Ross, Fur Hunters, Vol. 1, p. 289.

³⁰McNab's Journal, 1816, p. 183.

proud of his wife's light colouring was much disappointed when she arrived at Fort Vancouver after a long summer journey from New Caledonia with a dark tan!³¹ The Nor'Wester Joseph Larocque was reputedly extremely jealous of his handsome mixed-blood wife, whose grandmother had been a Cree woman; "though not pure white, she was fairer than many who are so called in Europe."³² While not entirely divorced from their Indian heritage, mixed-blood women were also more susceptible to civilizing influences, an attribute which became of increasing concern to the officers. According to Alexander Ross:

They have made considerable progress in refinement, and with their natural acuteness and singular talent for imitation, they soon acquire all the ease and gracefulness of polished life. 33

If such personal factors tended to influence the white man's choice of a wife, the fur traders also had a collective responsibility for the fate of their daughters. While sons might find employment within the ranks of the service, the future of daughters was limited to their becoming wives and mothers.³⁴ As women, the only way in which mixed-blood girls

³¹Lugrin, Women of Vancouver Island, p. 16.

³²Cox, Columbia River, p. 235; Nelson, Journal 1819, 7 May 1819, pp. 1-5 passim.

³³Ross, Fur Hunters, vol. 1, p. 289.

³⁴Giraud, Le Métis Canadien, pp. 443-444.

could remain an integral part of fur trade society was through marriage, either to new men coming in or at least to fur traders' sons. In this regard, the Nor'Wester ruling of 1806 can be seen as an attempt to ensure that the large number of marriageable mixed-blood girls now available would find husbands.³⁵

Mixed-blood women gained a widespread reputation for being excellent wives and mothers,³⁶ and numerous examples of their lasting and devoted unions with white traders could be cited. Among the Nor'Westers in particular, there is a significant trend toward more stable relationships as mixed-blood wives became the rule. A growing number of bourgeois now took their wives and families with them when they retired to the East. David Thompson, for example, brought his faithful wife Charlotte, who had accompanied him on most of his far-flung journeys, east to Terrebonne in Lower Canada when he retired in 1812.³⁷ The bourgeois John "Le Prêtre" Macdonell, after retiring from the trade in 1814, built a large stone house called "Poplar Villa" for his wife and six children at Point Fortune near Vaudreuil. As Macdonell explained to his brother, he just could not bring himself to leave his wife in the Indian

³⁵Nelson, Journal 1810-11, 24 April 1811, pp. 41-42.

³⁶Cox, Columbia River, p. 359; Wilkes, Narrative of U.S. Expedition, vol. 4, pp. 396-97.

³⁷O'Meara, Daughters of the Country, pp. 274-75.

Country:

[she] has been my constant companion these eighteen years and under my protection since her twelfth year. I find it cruel to turn her off...and to tear her children from her. 38

Macdonell died in 1850, but his wife Magdeleine survived him by twenty years, dying in 1870 at the age of eighty-seven.³⁹

Daniel Harmon has left an unusually detailed account of his domestic life and his evolving relationship with his mixed-blood wife; his feelings (albeit in varying degrees) must have been experienced by traders throughout the Indian Country. Like most of his contemporaries, Harmon never refers to his wife by her given name, Lisette, but calls her "My Woman" or "the mother of my children." Lisette amply fulfilled the expectations Harmon had had of her on their wedding day, and she moved with him to various posts, being chiefly occupied with the needs of their growing family. Harmon, like most traders, took an active interest in his children. He experienced great delight in his first son George, born in the Nipigon country in 1807, but great sorrow over the death of twin boys, born prematurely at Dunvegan in 1810.⁴⁰ When his eldest son was

³⁸P.A.C., John Macdonell to Miles Macdonell, 27 June 1812, Miles Macdonell Papers, p. 149.

³⁹Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 65. There is an interesting tale told in E.W. Thomson, Old Man Savarin Stories (1917) which is reputedly based on the family of John Macdonell. Called "Great Godfrey's Lament", it tells the story of the estrangement of one son, Godfrey, from his brothers and sisters because he had predominantly white features while all the rest very much revealed their Indian ancestry.

⁴⁰Lamb, Sixteen Years, pp. 108, 125.

four years old, Harmon, then stationed in New Caledonia, decided that he must send the child to relatives in New England so that he might be raised in "paths of virtue" not possible in the "Savage Country".⁴¹ However well-intentioned, this action, which was typical of fur trade fathers, must have been difficult for the boy's mother to understand. Her sense of loss at having her only child taken from her may have been softened by the birth of a daughter Polly shortly after, but great was her despair when two years later, a grief-stricken Harmon had to tell his wife that he had received news that George had died:

...she looked at me with a wild stare of agony and immediately threw herself upon the bed, where she continued in a state of delirium, during the succeeding night. 42

A deeply religious man, Harmon found solace in his faith in God's inscrutable will and was gratified by his wife's response to his efforts to teach her the tenets of Christianity. Little Polly was a joy to her parents and in 1817, another daughter Sally was born. Harmon records that he usually spoke French to his wife, but that they spoke to their children in Cree because Lisette was most at home in that tongue. He tried to teach Polly to read and spell English but

⁴¹Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 138.

⁴²This quotation is taken from the original edition A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America (Andover, 1820), pp. 237-39. It differs somewhat from Kaye Lamb's edition.

soon realized the words were completely incomprehensible to her.⁴³ Harmon's concern that his daughters receive a civilized education prompted him to leave the Indian Country in 1819; it was then that he fully realized that he was bound to his wife by ties so deep that parting was unthinkable:

Having lived with this woman as my wife, though we were never formally contracted to each other, during life, and having children by her, I consider that I am under a moral obligation not to dissolve the connexion, if she is willing to continue it. The union which has been formed between us, in the providence of God, has not only been cemented by a long and mutual performance of kind offices, but, also, by a more sacred consideration....Through the merciful agency of the Holy Spirit, I trust that she has become a partaker with me, in the consolations and hopes of the gospel. I consider it to be my duty to take her to a christian land, where she may enjoy Divine ordinances, grow in grace, and ripen for glory.--We have wept together over the early departure of several children, and especially, over the death of a beloved son. We have children still living, who are equally dear to us both. How could I spend my days in the civilized world, and leave my beloved children in the wilderness? The thought has in it the bitterness of death. How could I tear them from a mother's love, and leave her to mourn over their absence, to the day of her death? Possessing only the common feelings of humanity, how could I think of her, in such circumstances, without anguish? On the whole, I consider the course which I design to pursue, as the only one which religion and humanity would justify. 44

Thus at Fort McLeod in May 1819, Harmon and his family embarked in a canoe manned by six voyageurs for a journey of thousands

⁴³Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 186.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 194-95.

of miles. At Fort William, he and his wife were able to take formal marriage vows, and shortly after arriving in Burlington, Vermont, their children Polly, Sally and John (born en route) were baptised.⁴⁵

The fate of retired Nor'Westers and their families is unfortunately obscure, but it appears that many fell on hard times. Harmon, who eventually moved his family to Montreal, was hardly solvent when he died in a smallpox epidemic in 1843. His wife lived until 14 February 1862, dying at the age of seventy-two.⁴⁶ David Thompson's family is also known to have lived a poverty-stricken existence in eastern Canada. Even those traders with a sizeable fortune appear to have found the transition difficult. According to Ross Cox, those with means purchased estates on coming to Canada with their families, but they lived in "a kind of half-Indian, half-civilized manner, constantly smoking their calumet and railing at the fashionable frivolities of the great world."⁴⁷

If mixed-blood families faced problems of cultural adjustment in the Canadas, the very fact that the traders now took them there indicates a growing recognition of the permanency of the marriage bond and family responsibilities. It is significant that with the emergence of the mixed-blood wife, marriage à la façon du pays increasingly evolved toward

⁴⁵Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. xv.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. xvi-xviii.

⁴⁷Cox, Columbia River, p. 361.

white concepts of marriage. There is much evidence to suggest that the men of both companies came to view a union contracted according to "the custom of the country" as a union for life. A respected Hudson's Bay officer, J.E. Harriott, explained that the taking of a country wife involved a solemn agreement between the father of the girl and the prospective husband. When Harriott espoused Elizabeth, a daughter of Chief Trader J.P. Pruden, he "made a solemn promise to her father to live with her and treat her as my wife as long as we both lived." He further declared that he considered such an arrangement as binding as if celebrated by an archbishop:

It was not customary for an European to take one wife and discard her, and then take another. The marriage according to the custom [of the country] was considered a marriage for life...I know of hundreds of people living and dying with the woman they took in that way without any other formalities. 48

Although it was more difficult for the lower ranks to maintain permanent unions, the engagés, in general, recognized the binding nature of a country marriage. According to one old voyageur Pierre Marois, whose marriage à la façon du pays

⁴⁸"Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", pp. 286-7. Elizabeth Pruden Harriott died in tragic circumstances in 1830; she appears to have gone mad after the accidental death of one of her children, (P.A.C., John McLoughlin to John McLeod, 1 March 1832, McLeod Correspondence, p. 297). Elizabeth's mother cannot be identified, except that she was a native woman called Nancy. In 1834, Harriott wed Nancy Rowand, the eldest daughter of Chief Factor John Rowand and Lisette Umphreville (G. Simpson to J.G. McTavish, 22 Dec. 1834, B.135/c/2, f. 139).

lasted over twenty years, "nous regardons cette union comme union de mari et femme...et union aussi sacrée."⁴⁹

Within fur trade society, "the custom of the country" had undoubtedly come to be regarded as a bona fide marriage rite. As one clerk declared, "I never knew or heard of a man and woman living together in the North-West without being married."⁵⁰ Hudson's Bay officer George Gladman insisted that Mary Moore was his "lawful wife". Like many of his contemporaries, he made generous provision for her in his will, specifically entreating his sons to see that their mother was well cared for in her old age.⁵¹ Gladman died in 1821, but his wife, who was described as a most respectable old lady, lived comfortably for many years in a small house at Moose Factory, built with the proceeds of her annuity.⁵²

Although the actual ceremony remained simple, country marriages were accorded public recognition through festivities similar to those found at European weddings. It became customary to celebrate the union with a dram to all hands and a dance which might see the fun-loving engagés jigging till morning. Marriages were quite in vogue at Fort Dauphine

⁴⁹"Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", pp. 284-85. Marois' testimony was corroborated by another engagé Amable Dupras, p. 282.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 284.

⁵¹P.R.O., Will of George Gladman, 25 March 1820, Prob. 11/1663, f. 585.

⁵²P.A.C., Jas. Hargrave to Geo. Gladman Jr., 17 Aug. 1837, Hargrave Correspondence, v. 22, Letterbook 12.

in 1808 according to George Nelson: "we were obliged to leave off and prepare for a dance (which is now the third) in honour to M^r Seraphim's wedding--M^r McDonald played the violin for us."⁵³ When the young clerk Robert Miles took Betsey Sinclair, daughter of Chief Factor William Sinclair and his native wife Nahovway, as "a Femme du Pays" at York Factory in the fall of 1822, a friend recorded that "we had a Dance & supper on the occasion, when no one but the happy Swain was allowed to go sober to bed."⁵⁴ Whereas initially a trader had been required to make a substantial present to his Indian in-laws for his bride, it was now not unusual for a fur trader to provide his own daughter with a handsome dowry.⁵⁵ Once outside fur trade society, though some maintained it was unnecessary,⁵⁶ most couples submitted to a church ceremony if only to conform to civilized convention. Such action was seen, however, as merely "un bénédiction" and not an admission that no marriage had existed before. J.E. Harriott maintained that he would have gone through "the civilized form of solemnizing marriage...to please people and

⁵³Nelson, Journal 1808-1810, 3 Sept. 1808; see also Coues, New Light, p. 571: "My neighbour [HBC at Fort Vermillion] gave a dance in honor of the wedding of his eldest daughter to one of his men."

⁵⁴H.B.C.A., Geo. Barnston to Jas. Hargrave, 1 Feb. 1823, B.235/c/1, fos. 3d-4.

⁵⁵H.B.C.A., Geo. Simpson to J.G. McTavish, 7 Jan. 1824, B.239/c/1, f. 134.

⁵⁶"Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", p. 287.

to conform to the custom of society. I would not consider myself more strongly bound to that woman than before."⁵⁷

Within fur trade society, however, marriage à la façon du pays was the accepted social norm; a custom arising from the particular needs of the fur trade environment, it accommodated both Indian and white attitudes toward marriage. The widespread and complex pattern of intermarriage which developed between fur trade families served to create a closely-knit society capable of determining its own mores and customs. A society derived from two such culturally divergent roots, however, was bound to suffer from problems of identity and instability. Although much influenced by Indian practices at first, fur trade society moved increasingly toward the adoption of the tenets of "civilized" European society. This process of acculturation was reflected in the experience of the mixed-blood woman, who was often to find herself caught between the two races which had given her birth.⁵⁸

Initially the Indian heritage of their mothers exerted a strong formative influence on fur traders' daughters. As

⁵⁷ "Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", pp. 285-87.

⁵⁸ The role of the mixed-bloods as a whole in fur trade society is outside the scope of this thesis. For a comprehensive study of the métis, see Giraud, Le Métis Canadien. Two recent studies of the position of the English mixed-bloods (the "country-born") are John E. Foster, "The Country-born in the Red River Settlement: 1820-1850" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Alberta, 1972) and Frits Pannekoek, "The Churches and the Social Structure in the Red River Area 1818-1870" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1973), a particularly important analysis.

already noted, it was customary for the offspring of Hudson's Bay men to be absorbed directly into the "Home Guard" bands from which most of their mothers had previously come. Many mixed-blood children were raised by the Indians, the Indian step-father usually proving a remarkably fond parent.⁵⁹ It is significant that in the annals of the Hudson's Bay Company in the 18th century virtually no distinction is made between "Indian" and "mixed-blood".⁶⁰ Orkney servant James Spence, for example, refers to "my Indian Wife Neskisho", but this woman was actually a daughter of the early inlander Isaac Batt.⁶¹ The frequency of Indian names among the daughters of Hudson's Bay men, such as those of Matthew Cocking, is evidence of their close ties with their mothers' people. Such girls were without doubt completely at home in the Indian tongue and skilled in native crafts. The wife of Hudson's Bay officer John Lee Lewes, a daughter of the prominent inland servant John Ballenden and a Plains Cree woman, could speak her mother's dialect perfectly.⁶² J.H. Lefroy was much impressed

⁵⁹Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 145.

⁶⁰Because the offspring of HBC men were absorbed back into Indian society, it is difficult to identify them and their numbers have probably been underestimated. It would appear that many of the "Home" Indians around the HBC posts were actually first or second generation mixed-bloods (York Journal, 7 Feb. 1801, B.239/a/105, f. 28; Albany Journal, 26 Jan. 1801, B.3/a/104, f. 8).

⁶¹H.B.C.A., Will of James Spence, 6 Nov. 1795, A.36/12.

⁶²Lefroy, In Search of the Magnetic North, p. 119. This man is not the John Ballenden who was governor of York Factory at the turn of the century.

with Mrs. Lewes when he met her at Fort Simpson in 1844; she was then a very stout woman of about forty who had retained much of her Indian upbringing:

She is the daughter of an Indian woman, and much more the squaw than the civilized woman herself, delights in nothing so much as roaming around with her children making the most cunning snares for Partridges, rabbits and so on....She is moreover very good-natured and has given me two pairs of worked moccasinsshe also gives me lessons in Cree. 63

Indeed, it was necessary that the daughters of Hudson's Bay men learn to live the Indian way of life because, after their fathers' departure from Rupert's Land, they might easily be subject to the hard life of their mothers' people. The attitude of Ferdinand Jacobs to his native-born children is illustrative. While he sent his son Samuel home to England to be educated, Jacobs deemed it best that his daughter Thucautch be brought up among the "Home Guards" where she would become accustomed to the fatigues and hardships born by Indian women.⁶⁴ But desirous as he was that Thucautch learn to fend for herself, the father on leaving the Bay in 1777 made arrangements for his daughter to receive an annual supply of goods from the Company's warehouse.⁶⁵ Thucautch's adaptation

⁶³Lefroy, In Search of the Magnetic North, p. 113. Paul Kane was also much impressed by Mrs. Lewes whom he described as "a most excellent wife for a trader, possessing great energy and decision, combined with natural kindness of disposition" (Kane, Wanderings of an Artist, p. 221).

⁶⁴Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 82n.

⁶⁵H.B.C.A., London Committee to H. Marten, 14 May 1777, A.6/12, f. 77d.

to Indian life was so complete that she became the wife of "one of York's best Indian home Guards",⁶⁶ but she was still drawing a ten pound annuity from her father's estate as late as 1800.⁶⁷

The danger inherent in over-indulging one's children, a fault of which all too many European fathers were reputedly guilty,⁶⁸ was made tragically clear in the case of Mary (Polly) Norton, a daughter of Moses Norton and an unidentified Cree woman. According to Samuel Hearne, Norton had brought up his daughter in such a fond and tender manner that she was totally dependent upon him for all her needs. Norton appears to have appreciated this because his will shows considerable concern for the future welfare of Mary. Shortly before his death in December 1773, the father, fearing that perhaps he had not made ample provision for his daughter, added a codicil to his

⁶⁶H.B.C.A., York Council to London Committee, 4 Sept. 1790, All/117, f. 60d. This is one of the few recorded cases of a fur trader's daughter marrying an Indian, and as a general rule it was not encouraged.

⁶⁷P.R.O., Will of Ferdinand Jacobs, 30 October 1782, Prob. 11/1110, f. 569; H.B.C.A., London Committee to York Council, 1800, B.239/b/78, f. 34. Thucautch's account for 1792 (B.239/d/93, f. 48d) was:

Blankets	6	£ 2- 8-0
Cloth Blue	9 yds.	2-18-6
Cloth Green	5 yds.	1-12-6
Cloth Red	8 yds.	2-12-0
Needles	4 doz.	0- 2-0
Knives Common Clasp	3	0- 1-6
Knives Yew Handle	3	0- 1-0
Twine	4 ski.	0- 4-6
		<hr/>
		£10- 0-0

⁶⁸Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 82n.

will instructing his executrix to invest enough money to ensure Mary an annuity of thirty pounds, five pounds of which she was to give to her "aunt" Meo, See, tak, ka, pow. However, Norton's executrix, his English wife Sarah, was apparently able to ignore the codicil in favour of the less generous terms of the original will and only remitted ten pounds a year to the Committee to be divided equally between Mary and her "aunt".⁶⁹

Initially, it would appear, Mary did not suffer as a result of her father's death because Samuel Hearne was at last free to pursue his desire to make her his country wife. Curiously, although Hearne professed the utmost abhorrence of Moses Norton, he fell madly in love with his daughter who, in spite of the totally debauched example set by her father and his relations, had somehow managed to grow into pure and virtuous womanhood. Surely no maiden had ever received a more rapturous testimonial:

...if an engaging person, gentle manners, an easy freedom, arising from a consciousness of innocence, an amiable modesty, and an unrivalled delicacy of sentiment, are graces and virtues which render a woman lovely, none ever had greater pretensions to general esteem and regard: while her benevolence, humanity, and scrupulous adherence to truth and honesty, would have done honour to the most enlightened and devout Christian. 70

Unfortunately when Hearne surrendered Fort Prince of Wales to the French and was taken prisoner in 1782, Mary was abandoned

⁶⁹P.R.O., Will of Moses Norton, 27 May 1769 and Codicil, 8 Dec. 1773, Prob. 11/1002, f. 374.

⁷⁰Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 81.

to her Indian relatives. During the bitter winter that followed, Hearne claims that they allowed Mary to starve to death and she perished, at the age of twenty-two, "a martyr to the principles of virtue". Hearne chose as a tribute to his Mary, a poem by one Waller which ends:

But now removed from all the ills of life
Here rests the pleasing friend and faithful
wife. 71

Although it is true that numerous Nor'Westers' children must have been brought up among their mothers' people,⁷² the fact of the North West Company supporting its servants' families, coupled with the growth of a body of "freemen", resulted in the offspring of the Nor'Westers being recognized as a group distinct from the Indians at an early date. Nevertheless, the mixed-bloods of the North West Company (usually called métis) retained a close affinity with the Indian way of life. Daughters of Nor'Westers, and particularly those of freemen, appear to have been thoroughly familiar with Indian skills and languages. In fact, the wives of some bourgeois who have always been thought of as Indian women turn out to be of mixed descent upon the discovery of their names. J.H. Lefroy was apparently the first to popularize the romantic story of how

⁷¹Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, p. 82. Cruel as it may seem, the Indians may have had little alternative but to let Mary starve. A helpless woman would have been a heavy burden on them during an extremely severe winter when many Indians perished, see p. 228.

⁷²Henry, Travels and Adventures, p. 248; Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, p. 86.

an Indian girl rescued the young Nor'Wester John Rowand after a serious fall from his horse and soon after became his wife.⁷³

While this girl may have grown up among the Cree who traded at Fort des Prairies, she was actually a métisse called Lisette Humphraville, undoubtedly a descendant of the Hudson's Bay defector Edward Umfreville.⁷⁴ Another Nor'Wester who was reputed to have had an Indian wife was Charles McKenzie.⁷⁵

His will, however, names his wife as Mary MacKay. Because of the innumerable MacKays in the fur trade, it is difficult to identify her father, but possibly he was the voyageur Alexis MacKay who accompanied McKenzie on his first visit to the Mandan in 1804.⁷⁶ Though he never progressed beyond the rank

⁷³W.S. Wallace, "Lefroy's Journey to the North-West," T.R.S.C., Third Series, vol. XXXII, Sec. 11, 1938, p. 93.

⁷⁴P.A.O., Microfilm Copy of Estate Trust Files of James Keith, Aberdeen, Scotland: James Keith was godfather to Alexander, "son of John Rowand and Lisette Humphraville", born 30 December 1818. See also Catholic Church Records, 8th & 9th pgs., where her name is given as "Louise Ompherville". Just when Rowand took Lisette for his country wife is uncertain, but it appears to have been before 1810 for in that year he is recorded as having a wife at New White Earth House, where the couple shared a tent with the métis clerk Nicholas Montour and his wife (Coues, New Light, p. 603). Significantly, Montour may have been Rowand's brother-in-law by marriage because his wife was the daughter of "Sieur Ompherville", born of a Cree woman in 1792 (Catholic Church Records, 42nd & 43rd pgs.).

⁷⁵W.S. Wallace, The Pedlars from Quebec and other Papers on the Nor'Westers (Toronto, 1974), p. 67; O'Meara, Daughters of the Country, p. 273.

⁷⁶H.B.C.A., Will of Charles McKenzie, 10 July 1841, A.36/9.

of clerk after entering the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, McKenzie was an intelligent, philosophical man whose happy marriage probably contributed to his becoming a staunch defender of the so-called "savage" life.⁷⁷ Untutored in civilized graces though she might be, the upbringing of McKenzie's wife had given her other desirable qualities. As the father wrote to one of his married daughters:

Your good Mother is advancing [in] years--but she is still as brisk as a Bee--could bear more hardships than any of her daughters... 78

Aside from their behaviour being akin to that of Indian women, it is likely that many métis girls also had predominantly Indian features since many of the engagés were part-Indian themselves. Archange, the country wife of the bourgeois James Keith, for example, was a daughter of the métis Jean-Baptiste Cadotte Jr. and an Ojibway woman and was likely indistinguishable from a full-blooded Indian woman.⁷⁹ Similarly, Elizabeth, the wife of Peter Warren Dease, was reputedly "a very black squaw".⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that while Keith's wife is referred to in the church records of Red River as an "Indian" woman, Dease's wife is recorded as a "native"

⁷⁷Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 1, pp. 318-19.

⁷⁸H.B.C.A., Charles McKenzie to Margaret (Mrs. Angus McDonald), 28 May 1841, D.5/9, f. 338.

⁷⁹Coues, New Light, p. 930; P.A.O., James Keith Files, Family Record of James Keith, B2.

⁸⁰MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 77.

woman.⁸¹ Although these terms are used interchangeably, it does appear that the term "native" was generally applied to mixed-blood women who were half-Indian or more and whose upbringing had been dominated by the Indian culture. The term "half-breed", on the other hand, which was certainly not initially a term of opprobrium, seems generally to have been applied to women who might be termed half-white or more and whose orientation was towards white society.⁸²

Even among the descendants of Englishmen brought up among the "Home Guards" a tradition was maintained that their paternity rendered them superior to true Indians.⁸³ By the late 18th century, it is clear that many Hudson's Bay officers were concerned to raise their children above their primitive Indian heritage and introduce them to English styles and manners. A fascinating glimpse of the efforts of some fathers to "civilize" their daughters is provided by the Book of Servants' Private Commissions which for the years 1790-1810 details imports from England on private account. One officer who seems

⁸¹Red River Register, E.4/1a, fos. 104d, 120.

⁸²Other women referred to as "native" were Mary Favell (McKay), Jean Ballenden (Lewes), and Jane Cardinale (McMurray). Examples of those referred to as "half-breed" are Jane Auld, a daughter of HBC officer William Auld and an Indian woman, who eventually became the wife of Chief Factor John Charles (E.4/1a, f. 57) and Betsey Sinclair, who was actually only one-quarter Indian (E.4/1a, f. 39). See also Cowie, Company of Adventurers, pp. 64-66 for a discussion of the increasing diminution of Indian blood among the English mixed-bloods.

⁸³Williams, Graham's Observations, p. 145.

to have been particularly anxious to have his daughters adopt European fashions was Robert Goodwin of Albany. On several occasions, he ordered a dozen issues of "Ladys Magazines", specifying that they show pictures of fashionable dresses, and he expended a great deal to provide his ladies with the wherewithal to begin dressmaking. In 1802, for example, the following items were requested as well as large quantities of ribbons and lace:⁸⁴

18 Yds. Callico	£ 2-14-0
20 Yds. Callico as near the pattern as possible	£ 3- 0-0
4 Yds. Deep Blue fine Cloth of about 18/p.y.	£ 3-16-0
4 pr. of Scissors for cutting Callico not very large such as Ladies use in General	£ 0- 9-0

Perhaps it was the daughter who progressed the fastest who was destined to receive "a Lady's red Morocco Book for Silk thread with Scissors &c a pretty large one."

Indeed a spirit of competition as to who could claim the most elegantly-dressed women seems to have developed at Albany; other officers such as John McKay, John Lyons and Thomas Vincent placed orders similar to Goodwin's. In addition to large quantities of cloth, mainly callico and chintz, an amazing quantity of ribbons were ordered and other finery such as broaches and earrings. William Auld at Churchill, for example, wanted "ornamental Ear rings of small value &

⁸⁴H.B.C.A., A.16/111, fos. 78d-79.

much show", while John Lyons requested "2 large Silver Buckles for the Women to fasten their Blankets."⁸⁵ The blanket was a standard article of the native woman's dress, but there seems to have been a move to replace it with the more civilized shawl. Numerous orders were placed for ladies' shawls which sold for about five shillings, and a really fashionable lady might be seen in a beaver hat with band and feather which cost £ 1-6-0. The women at Albany were further introduced to European undergarments. In 1804, for example, John McKay ordered eight ladies' shifts and six pairs of women's white stockings. European shoes seem to have been in vogue, but significantly they were to be of a "flat solid" design.⁸⁶ At Churchill, Auld endeavoured to introduce new standards of hygiene by importing nail and tooth brushes, combs and fine pumice stone, soap already being a regularly ordered item.⁸⁷

In addition to articles of wearing apparel, many officers also ordered numerous pieces of table service which indicate a desire to implement British manners. John McKay's order for 1804 was not unusual:⁸⁸

12 Cups & Saucers (Cups to hold three Gills)	£ 0-15-0
12 Handsome Table Knives and Forks	1- 8-0
12 Plated Table Spoons	1-16-0

⁸⁵A.16/112, fos. 63, 3d.

⁸⁶Ibid., fos. 12d-13, 30-31d.

⁸⁷Ibid., f. 63.

⁸⁸Ibid., fos. 12d-13.

1 Tea Kettle of 6 Quarts	0- 9-6
1 Jappan Tea Pot	0- 7-0

Particularly popular were silver teaspoons. Chief Factor William Sinclair's native wife Nahowway undoubtedly prized the set of six which her husband ordered engraved with the letter S. An extraordinary range of food stuffs such as figs, chocolate, coffee and spices was also imported. Sugar and tea (which seems to have become the national drink of the half-breeds)⁸⁹ were standard items, while large quantities of gingerbread and various kinds of nuts were ordered as special treats for the children. Part of the annuity which Matthew Cocking provided for his daughters was "laid out in Ginger Bread, Nuts &c as they have no other means of obtaining those little Luxuries, with which the paternal fondness of a Father formally provided them."⁹⁰ The difficulty and expense of transporting goods inland meant that posts on the Bay enjoyed the highest standard of living, but even there, the days of extravagant private orders seems to have come to an end with the introduction of more stringent economy measures in 1810.⁹¹

⁸⁹Alexander Ross, The Red River Settlement (Minneapolis, 1957 [reprint]), pp. 95-97, 193.

⁹⁰H.B.C.A., William Tomison to London Committee, Sept. 1799, B.239/b/79, f. 28d.

⁹¹George Nelson comments on the curtailing of the luxuries formerly enjoyed by the HBC employees in 1810 (Journal, 29 Jan.-23 June 1815, pp. 24-25); see also William Auld's observations, B.42/a/136a, f. 17d.

Nor'Westers, as has been seen, were anxious to introduce their women to "Canadian" fashion. The full adoption of civilized dress would scarcely have been practical in the Indian Country, however, and in general mixed-blood women evolved a costume which combined white and Indian features. The sketches of the Swiss colonist Peter Rindisbacher show the women wearing high-waisted, full, cloth gowns which reached almost to the ankle. The long-sleeved, jacket-like bodice was very low cut and filled in with a criss-crossed scarf arrangement apparently to facilitate the nursing of children.⁹² The outfit was not complete, however, without Indian "leggings", moccasins and usually a blanket. As Captain Wilkes described the women of Fort Vancouver:

The ladies of the country are dressed after our own by gone fashions, with the exception of leggings, made of red and blue cloth, richly ornamented. Their feet, which are small and pretty, are covered with worked moccasins. ⁹³

Although Alexander Ross acknowledged that the métisses of Red River were tidy about their person and dress, he felt they were overly fond of showy prints and finery. He also believed

⁹²See Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., The Artist was a Young Man: The Life Story of Peter Rindisbacher (Fort Worth, Texas, 1970), especially Plate XXXI entitled "A Halfcast & his two Wives".

⁹³Wilkes, Narrative of U.S. Expedition, vol. 4, p. 396; MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 126: "even ladies dont wear drawers, merely leggings of cloth embroidered with beads, fastened by a garter under the knee & worn in place of stockings."

that their retention of the primitive blanket was a most injurious fashion:

The blanket as an overall, is considered indispensable; it is used on all occasions, not only here, but throughout the continent, both at home and abroad; if a stick is wanted for the fire, or a pleasure party is to be joined away from home, the blanket is called for. This invariable habit gives them a stooping gait while walking, and the use of the same blanket, day or night, wet and dry, is supposed to give rise to consumptive complaints, which they are all more or less very subject to. 94

The blanket was important as a head covering, however, for mixed-blood women did not generally wear hats.⁹⁵ They fashioned their hair simply in a single long braid at the back which might be decorated with ribbons and beads and were very fond of jewelry such as necklaces, earrings and rings. The daughters of the country it appears were also loath to give up the unladylike Indian habit of smoking tobacco. Indeed, Rindisbacher often portrays them holding rather elegant, long-stemmed wooden pipes. The story is told of how Hudson's Bay officer P.C. Pambrun attempted to bribe his wife to stop smoking, but even the promise of a pair of diamond earrings could not make her break the habit, try as she would.⁹⁶ Even though the daughters of officers

⁹⁴Ross, Red River Settlement, p. 191.

⁹⁵Cox, Columbia River, p. 360.

⁹⁶Catholic Church Records, A-37. Pambrun's wife was Catherine Humpherville, who according to this source was a daughter of Thomas Humpherville and his native wife Anne. However, no one

in particular increasingly adopted English styles, remnants of Indian fashion persisted as can be seen in Letitia Hargrave's description of Mrs. George Gladman Jr. when she came to call in 1840:

...the lady [was] as large as a lady can be & dressed to death in a Waterloo blue Merino [gown], moccasins, a straw bonnet lined with lilac satin with a profusion of lilac blue & white ribbon & a cap border of very broad blonde, the same depth all around no gloves & a silk shawl, the old fashion white around & green pattern. 97

Anglicized as she might become, however, there was one sphere, that of maternity, in which the mixed-blood woman determinedly stuck to traditional Indian methods. Like her Indian counterpart, no self-respecting mixed-blood woman spent months languishing in bed before and after pregnancy. When taken in labour, they followed the Indian practice of sitting on their knees and leaning over some low object about two feet from the floor. This position seemed to hasten delivery, and usually within a few hours, a new-born infant would be snugly wrapped on a bed of soft moss in an Indian-style cradle.⁹⁸ Even Sophia Thomas, a daughter of Hudson's

96 (continued) by the name of Thomas Humpherville is known to have been in the employ of the HBC, although Edward Unfreville could have had a descendant by that name. According to her baptismal record (Vanc. 1, 17th & 18th pgs.), Catherine was born in 1805 which would make her too young to be an actual daughter of Edward as suggested by Wallace in Documents of NWC, p. 490.

⁹⁷ MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 73.

⁹⁸ Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 218; MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 97: "The ladies here never have a doctor, nor do they go to their bed, but sit on their knees."

Bay governor Thomas Thomas, who was educated at Red River and ultimately became the wife of Reverend William Mason used an Indian cradle for her babies. J.H. Lefroy who met Mrs. Mason in 1844 has left a delightful picture of her first baby:

...she brought out for us her little child. It was but a fortnight old, and was packed up in that peculiar Indian fashion which I think so excellent. It was so neat and compact, about fourteen inches long, unlike an ordinary baby, which may be put in ones arms, and one does not know which end one has hold of, or which is baby and which petticoat. It was made to hang up, or set upright....The outside case is made of cloth, lacing up in front, and ornamented with beads and embroidery; the inside stuffing is a soft silky moss, very abundant in this country, so that nothing can be so economical. 99

Like her Indian counterpart, the mixed-blood mother usually nursed her child until it was old enough to eat solid food. As one observer succinctly put it: "they give babies nothing but milk or else present them with a leg of goose."¹⁰⁰ Infants were unashamedly nursed in public and it was not unknown for a child of three to still be at the breast, though the traders frowned on this practice which reputedly resulted in the premature aging of the mother.¹⁰¹ Mixed-blood families were usually large, eight to twelve children being common.

⁹⁹Lefroy, In Search of the Magnetic North, p. 130. In 1851, Mrs. James Swanston, a daughter of George Keith, arrived in Scotland to visit her parents with a three-month-old baby on her back (P.A.C., Letitia Hargrave to her husband, 26 Nov. 1851, Hargrave Corres., vol. 27).

¹⁰⁰MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 87.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 94-95; Ross, Red River, pp. 95, 192.

Mixed-blood women, like Indian women, were much attached and devoted to their children,¹⁰² and they must have suffered considerable grief when fathers deemed it necessary to send away their young children to Britain or Canada so that they might receive a civilized upbringing. According to family tradition, Nahowway Sinclair was so upset at the prospect of having her youngest child Colin taken away from her that the father delayed in sending him to England as he had all his other sons. When the boy was about nine years old, however, he was virtually spirited away on one of the Company's ships. He never saw his mother again, but he must have retained a strong impression of her because many years later at Red River, he erected a memorial to her which was inscribed:¹⁰³

SACRED
to the Memory of My Mother
MARGARET NAHOWWAY SINCLAIR

This Last Token of Love and Affection Is
Erected by her Wandering Boy, Colin

1897

That a white father should desire his children to be brought up in "a Virtuous manner" is understandable, but this conflict of interest created a painful dilemma for the fur trade family. Hudson's Bay men had early shown a wish to take their children to England. The first recorded father to do so was Albany governor Joseph Adams who in 1737 took

¹⁰²Ross, Red River, p. 192; Cox, Columbia River, p. 359; "Connolly Case, 1867": "They do not care for their husbands, but they were very fond of their children."

¹⁰³W.J. Healy, Women of Red River (Winnipeg, 1923), pp. 163-66.

his three-year-old daughter Mary to England.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, Adams died shortly after his arrival in England, and although he provided for this child in his will, she may have ultimately become a burden upon the Company. In any event, it was the fear of such a possibility after a similar situation involving Robert Pilgrim which prompted the London Committee to pass the ruling of 1751 refusing any native wives or children passage to Britain without official consent. In the following decades, there were numerous pleas from fathers requesting exemption for their children so that they might be educated in Britain. While the Committee usually gave ready consent in the case of sons, it seems to have been reluctant to do so for daughters. In 1757, James Hughes, a servant at York, was flatly refused permission to send his daughter to England;¹⁰⁵ even an officer, who could guarantee that his daughter would be well provided for, had difficulty securing the Committee's approval. Andrew Graham, hoping to send his little daughter to England in 1772, appealed to the Committee:

You are many, if not all of you, Fathers,
let then what would be feelings of Your
own Paternal hearts on such an occasion,
plead in my behalf; let not humanity &
Christianity be forgot.

His request was initially refused on the grounds that a young

¹⁰⁴Davies, Letters from Hudson's Bay, p. 233, n. 3.

¹⁰⁵H.B.C.A., London Committee to Jas. Isham, 18 May 1857, A.6/12, f. 60d; see also A.11/114, f. 192.

female child required special care which the Company could not provide, but Graham himself was allowed to bring his daughter to England in 1775.¹⁰⁶

The Nor'Westers also showed considerable concern for the education of their children, and a long list of bourgeois who sent sons to school in the Canadas could be compiled.¹⁰⁷

Daughters were not entirely neglected. David Thompson, for example, paid over sixty pounds a year to board one of his daughters at a school in Lower Canada, but he was reconciled to the heavy expense:

It is my wish to give all my children an equal and good education; my conscience obliges me to it, and it is for this I am now working in this country. 108

However, while education for a son was seen as a necessary pre-requisite to his advancement in the service of the fur companies, a civilized upbringing for a daughter appears to have had the effect of totally estranging her from the fur trade way of life. Daughters of Nor'Westers educated in the

¹⁰⁶H.B.C.A., A. Graham to London Committee, 26 Aug. 1772, A.11/115, f. 144d; London Committee to A. Graham, 26 May 1773, A.5/1, f. 152d; London Committee to Capt. John Richards, 4 May 1775, A.6/12, f. 88.

¹⁰⁷A revealing account of the education of Nor'Westers' children in Canada is to be found in a letter dated 27 August 1825 from John "Le Borgne" McDonald to his brother James in Upper Canada, P.A.O., McDonald Papers, Acc. 3809, Box 6-2.

¹⁰⁸Masson, Les Bourgeois, vol. 11, p. 41 (David Thompson to Alexander Frazer, 21 Dec. 1810).

Canadas usually remained there and married into white society.¹⁰⁹
If persuaded to allow the daughters of Company officers to come to England, the London Committee, realizing that they would soon be alienated from their former life, also refused to allow "any Female Children" to return to their native land "after receiving their Education in Great Britain."¹¹⁰

By the 1790's, applications to send children to England had become so numerous¹¹¹ that the Committee decided a practical solution to the problem of education would be to provide schooling for the offspring of its employees on the Bay itself. Thus, in 1794 it sent out from fifty to one hundred spelling books and primers to each of the posts on Hudson Bay. The actual teaching was to be left to those servants with the time and inclination, but the Committee was hopeful that "much good will be the result of your care & attention to their Improvement."¹¹² Although primarily

¹⁰⁹The eldest daughter of Chief Factor John McLoughlin was educated at an Ursuline convent in Lower Canada and married an army officer W.R. Eppes in 1832, see Burt B. Barker, The McLoughlin Empire and Its Rulers (Glendale, Cal., 1959). A daughter of Charles McKenzie, after being schooled in the East, married one Angus McDonald and settled in Kingston, Ontario (D.5/9, f. 338).

¹¹⁰H.B.C.A., London Committee to John Hodgson, 25 May 1803, A.6/16, f. 159d-160.

¹¹¹H.B.C.A., London Committee to Ed. Jarvis, May 1791, A.6/14, f. 126.

¹¹²H.B.C.A., London Committee to Moose Council, 29 May 1794, A.6/15, f. 102d; shipments of books were also sent to York, Churchill, Albany and Eastmain.

concerned to provide the rudiments of education for sons who could now officially be employed in the lower ranks of the service, this early attempt at education was apparently free of sex and class discrimination.

One of the most remarkable products of this schooling was Jeanny, the wife of officer John Sutherland, who much impressed the Nor'Westers Daniel Harmon and A.N. McLeod when they met her at a Hudson's Bay post on the Assiniboine River in 1800. While Jeanny's parentage is unknown, she must have grown up at Albany, Sutherland's headquarters, where she learned to speak English and also to read and write a little. Harmon, who found Jeanny to be an interesting conversationalist, declared that she not only possessed good natural sense, but was far from being deficient in acquired knowledge.¹¹³ Skill at cribbage appears to have been among her accomplishments for McLeod recorded that during a visit to his rival he had "had the Honor of playing Cribbage with Jeanny."¹¹⁴ In fact, the Nor'Westers had much more respect for Jeanny than for her husband whom they considered a foolish drunkard.

By the early 1800's, the Committee had recognized the need to send schoolmasters out to the Bay to provide the children with more organized instruction in the 3 R's and

¹¹³Harmon's Journal [1820 edition], p. 39; see also Lamb, Sixteen Years, p. 40.

¹¹⁴Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 133. McLeod's emphasis.

the basic principles of religion.¹¹⁵ The officers, who responded most enthusiastically to this proposal, emphasized the desirability of educating girls as well as boys. They were concerned to estrange their daughters from Indian influence because it was the commonly-held view that the free manner in which Indian mothers discussed sexual matters in front of their daughters made it impossible to inculcate them with the proper feminine virtues, particularly chastity.¹¹⁶ John McNab at York Factory recommended that "a respectable Matron" be sent out to supervise the care of the children who should be boarded in a self-sufficient school:

...the female youth in particular should experience that delicacy & attention to their persons their particular situation requires--native women as attendants on these young persons seems improper--their society would keep alive the Indian language & with it, its native superstition which ought to be obliterated from the mind with all possible care. 117

The Committee had difficulty in procuring suitable schoolmasters, let alone a schoolmistress, but in 1808 it succeeded in hiring four schoolmasters who were sent out to various posts on the Bay.¹¹⁸ According to the rules laid down for the

¹¹⁵H.B.C.A., London Committee to Albany Council, 31 May 1806, A.6/17, fos. 108d-109; same to York Council, B.239/b/78, fos. 57d-58.

¹¹⁶Cox, Columbia River, p. 359; Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, pp. 85-86.

¹¹⁷H.B.C.A., John McNab to London Committee, 28 Sept. 1807, B.239/b/79, f. 53d.

¹¹⁸H.B.C.A., Minutes of London Committee, 29 June 1808, A.1/49, f. 70.

schools, all children of the age of five and over could be admitted "without discrimination", but they must first be christened by the Chief Factor.¹¹⁹ Significantly at York Factory, three out of four pupils who began school in 1808 were the daughters of officers: Harriett, daughter of former governor John Ballenden; Catherine, daughter of William Sinclair; and Mary, daughter of Thomas Bunn.¹²⁰ By 1811, fifteen children, eight girls and seven boys, were attending school at Eastmain Factory. Two of the first pupils were Elizabeth Gladman, daughter of Chief Factor George Gladman, and Margaret Moore, quite possibly a cousin, whose father was a native-born canoe builder.¹²¹

The largest school appears to have been that at Albany run by William Harper where of the twenty-three children listed in 1808-09, eight were girls between the ages of six and fourteen. One of the most promising pupils seems to have been ten-year-old Harriet Vincent, a daughter of officer Thomas Vincent and his native wife Jane Renton.¹²² In the fall of

¹¹⁹H.B.C.A., School Instructions, 1808, A.6/17, fos. 119-120.

¹²⁰Dennis Bayley, A Londoner in Rupert's Land: Thomas Bunn of the Hudson's Bay Company (Winnipeg, 1969), p. 31.

¹²¹H.B.C.A., Eastmain School Register, 29 August 1811, B.59/z/2.

¹²²Letitia Hargrave (p. 82) states that Harriet Vincent's mother was a daughter of John McNab, Chief Factor at York. But according to Thomas Vincent's own will (A.36/14), her mother was Jane Renton, and no connection with the McNabs has been discovered.

1808, Harriet was learning to read in Trimmer's Sacred History, memorizing the Church Catechism and beginning to write. Her progress was interrupted in December when her father took his family on a hunting trip, but Harriet and his sister returned to school in the new year. The "second term" saw Harriet learning selections from Dr. Watt's Divine Songs for Children, beginning arithmetic, and being chosen along with four boys "to write Copy Books to go to England". It is not known, however, whether Harriet was able to continue her schooling after the family was moved to Moose Factory in 1809 since Vincent was going home on furlough.¹²³

In fact, the success of these first schools in Rupert's Land was to be marginal because the schoolmasters showed a tendency to devote more time to the fur trade than their pupils. Ultimately, the extent to which their children were exposed to civilizing influences depended upon the initiative of individual fathers as was the case among the Nor'Westers where the Company never attempted to implement a plan of education for its servants' offspring. The efforts of fathers to teach European morality is shown by some of the books they ordered; Aesop's Fables was a common request, while Albany officer John Best even ordered a volume entitled Duties of Woman.¹²⁴ Unfortunately one is left to speculate on the

¹²³H.B.C.A., Albany School Journal, 1808-09, B.3/a/112, fos. 1-4 passim.

¹²⁴A.16/111, f. 51.

influence its precepts may have had on Best's daughter Catherine, who became the country wife of Chief Factor William Thomas.¹²⁵ Chief Factor James Sutherland apparently devoted considerable time to instructing his children; in 1823 Reverend John West found his daughter Sally "one of the best informed and most improved half-caste women he had seen."¹²⁶ According to Captain Franklin, as a result of what little education they had received, the children of Orkney servants showed a distinct improvement compared to those of the French-Canadian voyageurs.¹²⁷

Laudable as the efforts of traders to civilize their daughters might be, the conflict of attitudes with which they were confronted resulted in cultural dislocation for many mixed-blood women. The practical demands of the life-style of a fur trader's wife were scarcely compatible with the pampered, refined existence expected of a civilized lady. Initially, at least, there was little real difference between the domestic situation of the wife of an officer and that of a common servant. One observer was particularly struck by this lack of class distinction among the women:

It is curious that in this country while the distinction between the Bourgeois and the

¹²⁵H.B.C.A., Will of William Thomas, 10 January 1817, A.36/13.

¹²⁶West, Red River Journal, p. 136. Sally's mother was a native woman Jane Flett (E4/lb, f. 222d). Sally herself was married to Chief Trader Roderic McKenzie at Fort Alexander in 1823 (E.4/lb, f. 206d).

¹²⁷Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, pp. 85-86.

voyageurs and servants is properly maintained, there is very little difference between their wives and daughters....the family of the gentlemen are not ladies, as indeed it is evident they could not be, yet the distinction is new enough to one coming from civilized life. 128

As a group, the women at a fur trade post were required to function quite separately from the men. This segregation derived partly from the Indian attitude toward women and partly from the quasi-military organization of fur trade personnel. Outside observers, in particular, considered that the traders kept their mixed-blood as well as Indian wives in a servile relationship. The fact the women were not allowed to come to table was considered especially uncivilized. According to Ross Cox, mixed-blood women at some posts could be found still continuing in "the savage fashion on the ground at their meals at which their fingers supply the place of forks."¹²⁹ This was apparently long the practice at Fort Vancouver though by the time of Captain Wilkes' visit in 1842, the wives of officers were allowed to dine at a separate table in the mess hall. However, not even the wives of the chief officers, Mrs. McLoughlin and Mrs. Douglas, were present at the formal banquet held in honor of the Captain. Wilkes, who himself favoured more equality, felt that the exclusion

¹²⁸Lefroy, In Search of the Magnetic North, p. 76. See Chapter V for the attempts made at the schools in Red River to create a class consciousness among officers' children.

¹²⁹Cox, Columbia River, p. 360; West, Red River, p. 16.

of the women would "tend to prevent improvement, and retard advancement in civilization."¹³⁰ At York Factory in 1840, the half-breed wives of Nicol Finlayson and George Gladman became the first known women to dine at a company mess table. But both women found it an uncomfortable experience for they were afraid, albeit wrongly, that they were being ridiculed and soon retired to the security of their own quarters.¹³¹

The formal segregation of the sexes also was carried over into the convivial customs by which New Year's Day, the most important holiday, was celebrated throughout the fur trade. Early in the morning after firing a salute to honor the bourgeois, the men came in to wish him the compliments of the season and receive a regale; only after they were dismissed were their wives, decked out in their finest garments, allowed in to receive a similar treat. Chief Factor John Stuart gives a detailed description of the age-old custom of the Nor'Westers as enacted at Carlton House in January 1, 1825:

New Years Day was [brought] in by a Salute of Musketry fired at our doors and windows after which the people came into the Hall to wish us the Compliments of the season....they were liberally treated with Shrub, Rum and Cakes to all of which they did justice...on retiring they fired another salute, after which the Ladies paid us a visit and having first Kissed

¹³⁰Wilkes, Narrative of U.S. Expedition, vol. 4, p. 350; vol. 5, p. 129.

¹³¹MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 87.

them a la mode de pays we treated them in much the same manner as we had done their husbands, and it is but common justice to remark that though they had shrub at discretion they comported themselves decently and soon retired to the society of their Husbands in their own Houses... 132

The kiss à la mode du pays had long been the customary fur trade greeting for a woman.¹³³ It seems to have stemmed from the natural gallantry of the French-Canadian voyageurs and tends to bely the idea that fur trade husbands were reluctant to show affection for their wives for fear of the ridicule of the Indians. Indeed, one of the oaths that the young mangeur de lard took when he was initiated as a true Nor'Wester after crossing the Grand Portage was that he would never kiss a voyageur's wife against her own free will.¹³⁴ The women it appears were enthusiastic recipients of this salute which was solemnly performed on every appropriate occasion such as the departure of a brigade. J.H. Lefroy on leaving Fort Dunvegan was "much interested to see my men, each cap in hand, and with the manner of a courtier", respectfully approach the wife of the officer in charge and the other half-breed women, "and one after another bid these ladies farewell with a kiss."¹³⁵ This was a custom which Governor Simpson also seems to have studiously observed.¹³⁶

¹³²H.B.C.A., Carlton Journal, B.27/a/14, fos. 58-59.

¹³³Lefroy, In Search of the Magnetic North, pp. 91-92.

¹³⁴Gates, Five Fur Traders, p. 99.

¹³⁵Wallace, "Lefroy's Journey", p. 91.

¹³⁶H.B.C.A., Geo. Simpson to J.G. McTavish, 7 July 1831, B.135/c/2, f. 71d.

The kiss also featured in the voyageurs' dances, especially one called "Belle Rosalie" in which Lefroy participated during the holiday festivities at Fort Chipewyan. In this round dance, all joined hands, and one man led the song which the rest repeated in unison. At the last two lines, "Embracez que vous voudrez, Car j'aurai la moitié", the leader put the lady on his right (Belle Rosalie) into the ring, at the first pause she then gave a kiss to someone and rejoined the circle on the left of the leader, and so it went round. If a man was in the centre, he was called Beau Rosier.¹³⁷ Dancing was a favourite pastime of the fur traders, who took every opportunity to kick up their heels even though there was often a scarcity of female partners and only a squeaky fiddle for music. Curiously, it appears that the women, perhaps influenced by the solemn ritual of the dances performed by Indian women, adopted a grave countenance and slow step. As Captain Franklin observed, "The half-breed women are passionately fond of this entertainment, but a stranger would imagine the contrary on witnessing their apparent want of animation."¹³⁸

Although the fur traders themselves undoubtedly felt that they treated their women with appropriate gallantry, the

¹³⁷Lefroy, In Search of the Magnetic North, p. 92.

¹³⁸Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, p. 54; see also Kane, Wanderings of an Artist, p. 264.

mixed-blood woman was left in an essentially unprotected position. It is true that a sense of societal responsibility for the fate of fur traders' daughters had contributed to the increasing stability of marriage à la façon du pays, but irregularities still persisted to which mixed-blood women were particularly vulnerable. Abandonment appears to have been a very real fear for a mixed-blood wife because the alternatives open to an Indian wife were no longer feasible for her. Efforts to estrange a mixed-blood woman from her Indian heritage meant that she was unlikely to seek refuge with the Indians, and even if she did, a ready welcome could not be guaranteed. Edward Jarvis, a Hudson's Bay officer in the 1780's, was particularly concerned about his family because his wife was "the daughter of an Englishman" and had few or no Indian friends.¹³⁹ Should a trader be so lacking in conscience as to make no provision for his wife, she could be reduced to pitiable circumstances. Chief Factor John Haldane, for example, reneged on his promise of a sixty-dollar annuity to his faithful country wife Josette Latour when he retired to Scotland, and she was left to eke out a penurious existence at Moose Factory.¹⁴⁰ On occasion, this fear of abandonment seems to have manifested itself in

¹³⁹H.B.C.A., Ed. Jarvis to London Committee, 28 Sept. 1783, A.11/4, f. 210.

¹⁴⁰H.B.C.A., Geo. Keith to Geo. Simpson, 1847, D.5/20, f. 308; Moose Fort Journal, 19 March 1831, B.135/a/136, f. 28d.

particularly desperate actions. Jane Auld, the half-breed wife of Chief Factor John Charles, reputedly smothered her baby when her husband was on furlough in England, as did one of the unhappy wives of the Nor'Wester John George McTavish, a daughter of Hudson's Bay governor Thomas Thomas.¹⁴¹

Indeed, the prospect of abandonment was such that it was a fortunate wife who found herself "turned off" or placed under the protection of another. The history of the métisse Françoise Boucher, a daughter of a Canadian guide, illustrated the vicissitudes to which a young mixed-blood woman could be subject.¹⁴² Like most fur traders' daughters, she was given in marriage when very young,¹⁴³ becoming the wife of an interpreter at the age of fourteen. Her husband was killed by Indians three years later, but shortly afterward Françoise, who was reputedly good-looking, even-tempered and clever, was taken by a bourgeois, possibly John Clarke. Although they lived together for eight years, Clarke, on leaving the Athabasca district, turned over his wife, as yet childless, to his successor, the métis clerk Joseph McGillivray. McGillivray, whose father had warned him to avoid the encumbrance

¹⁴¹MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 83. It should be remembered that infanticide was not unknown in Indian society in times of famine or duress.

¹⁴²The story of Françoise Boucher is told by Ross Cox, Columbia River, pp. 363-64.

¹⁴³Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, p. 86: "The girls at the forts, particularly the daughters of Canadians, are given in marriage very young; they are very frequently wives at 12 years of age, and mothers at 14."

of a family, was soon "lamenting" his wife's new-found ability to produce sons, but their relationship seems to have been devoted because McGillivray refers to Françoise' "constant attachment and affection" in his will.¹⁴⁴ Significantly, neither the advantages of birth or education could offer protection against maltreatment, as witness the case of young Harriet Vincent. When only twelve years old, she was given by her father to one R.D. Stewart who was employed in the timber trade at Moose Factory. Harriet was a most reluctant bride and had to be dragged forcibly from her mother's room. After nine miserable years, Stewart summarily abandoned his wife, then expecting his third child, and returned to Canada. Fortunately for Harriet she soon found a suitor much more to her liking, and her marriage to George Gladman Jr. proved a lasting and happy one.¹⁴⁵

Although most traders did make some provision for their mixed-blood wives in their wills, widowhood does not appear to have been a desirable state in fur trade society. Most widows, unless too old, were expected to marry again.¹⁴⁶ After

¹⁴⁴H.B.C.A., Will of Joseph McGillivray, 1 June 1830, A.36/9.

¹⁴⁵MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 82-83.

¹⁴⁶The likelihood of women finding new husbands if widowed or left behind is revealed in the provisions of many of the traders' wills. Isabella Chalifoux, the wife of Francis Heron, for example, was to receive an annuity from the interest of one thousand pounds only as long as she remained a widow (P.R.O., Will of Francis Heron, 7 Aug. 1835, Prob.11/1932, f. 576). Thomas McMurray stipulated that his wife's annuity be reduced from fifteen pounds to six pounds if she took another man

the death of Thomas Knight in 1797, for example, his "relict" Sarah became the wife of Richard Good, an officer at Moose. She had three children by her first husband and at least three daughters by her second.¹⁴⁷ Widows who did not remarry might ultimately find themselves in distress; such was the case of the old widow of William Thomas who by 1845 was reduced to begging for charity at Albany because her annuity had dwindled to nothing and she could no longer hunt for her own provisions.¹⁴⁸ In fur trade society, therefore, it was not uncommon for a woman to have two or three husbands in her lifetime as a result of being either abandoned or widowed, but there is evidence that the women themselves felt forced into these marriages by necessity rather than their own inclination.

A curious case is that of the métisse Françoise Laurain. In November 1823 at Red River she had been formally married to the Orkney clerk Joshua Halcro.¹⁴⁹ Bad health forced Halcro

146 (continued) (McMurray's Will, A.36/10). John Warren Dease left his "Dearly Beloved Friend" Jenny Beignoit the handsome bequest of fifty pounds a year, but added the stern proviso that if she "marry or cohabit with any man during my lifetime, she then forfeits the Provision made for her" (H.B.C.A., Will of John Warren Dease, 22 Feb. 1829, A.36/6).

¹⁴⁷P.R.O., Will of Richard Good, 8 Oct. 1834, Prob.11/2125, f. 35.

¹⁴⁸H.B.C.A., Thomas Corcoran to G. Simpson, 10 Feb. 1845, D.5/13, f. 105 and reply, D.4/32, f. 90. William Thomas had died in 1818.

¹⁴⁹Red River Register, E.4/1b, f. 209; Simpson to McTavish, 7 Jan. 1824, B.239/c/1, f. 134.

to return to Britain in the fall of 1824, but he arranged for his wife to stay at York, hoping to return the following summer.¹⁵⁰ Instead, news of Halcro's death was sent to York, and his widow was given to understand that her only options were to go with the Indians or become the country wife of Chief Factor John Stuart.¹⁵¹ Françoise reluctantly chose the lesser of two evils, but although a "Grand Ball" was held to celebrate the nuptials,¹⁵² the marriage proved an immediate disaster. Stuart was forced to leave his new bride at Norway House instead of taking her to his post for she had never ceased wailing and crying and begged to be allowed to go to spend the winter with her mother. She told Stuart that she had no particular aversion to him personally but that she wanted "simply to be for a time alone." Stuart hoped for a reunion in the spring but this never materialized.¹⁵³

While it is true that "the custom of the country" allowed women as well as men to initiate separations in the case of unhappy relationships,¹⁵⁴ more often than not this lingering

¹⁵⁰P.A.C., Joshua Halcro to Jas. Hargrave, 4 Sept. 1824, Hargrave Correspondence, vol. 1, p. 33.

¹⁵¹H.B.C.A., John Stuart to Geo. Simpson, 8 Aug. 1825, B.4/b/1, f. 18.

¹⁵²H.B.C.A., York Journal, 16 July 1825, B.239/a/136, f. 173.

¹⁵³B.4/b/1, f. 18-18d.

¹⁵⁴Cases of women leaving their husbands are rare, but a singular example was that of Jane Renton who was determined not to be part of a polygamous relationship. After living

influence of Indian custom worked to the detriment of the women for it was open to blatant exploitation by the traders. While an increasingly regular code of behaviour developed, the conflict inherent in trying to blend two very different sets of cultural attitudes coupled with the transiency of the traders meant that abuses inevitably persisted. When the amalgamation of the two rival fur companies in 1821 brought an end to the all-absorbing and ruinous competition, the newly-constituted Hudson's Bay Company had to turn its attention to a legacy of social and economic problems which had been building up, particularly in the populous North West Company.

154 (continued) with Jane Renton for many years, Thomas Vincent apparently became involved with a Jane Sutherland, who had previously been married, and decided to take a second country wife. The first Jane would have none of this and left her husband, going to live with relatives at Moose Factory. Fortunately, Vincent had some sense of duty and left his first wife a legacy of two hundred pounds. See MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 82; Will of Thomas Vincent, 13 Jan. 1826, and revised will, 24 March 1832, A.36/14; London Committee to Thomas Vincent, 14 May 1817, A.6/19, f. 32.

CHAPTER V

Native¹ Women in Fur Trade Society After 1821

In his brief visit in 1821 to supervise the union of the two companies, Nicholas Garry, one of the few members of the London Committee ever to journey to Rupert's Land, saw at first hand the serious social and economic problems caused by the "immense number of Women and Children supported at the different Trading Posts, some belonging to men still in the Service and others who have been left by the Fathers unprotected and a burden on the Trade."² Amalgamation had, in fact, left the Hudson's Bay Company responsible for a large native population which constituted not only a heavy expense, but owing to their "savage Condition" perhaps an actual danger to its posts. In an effort to deal with this pressing social problem, the London Committee drew up a two-fold plan: redundant servants and their families as well as abandoned families were to be assisted to settle in Red River where they could become self-supporting, while in the fur trade at

¹The term "native" is used here in a general sense to refer to women born in Rupert's Land, both Indian and mixed-blood.

²R.H. Fleming, ed., Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert's Land, 1821-31 (London: H.B.R.S., vol. III, 1940), pp. 33-34; Garry, "Diary," p. 133.

large, employees were to assume more economic responsibility for their families.

Although the Red River Settlement since its inception had been envisaged as a place to which fur traders might retire with their native families, indeed had been tolerated by Hudson's Bay officers because of this prospect,³ the bitter struggle with the North West Company had prevented this goal from being successfully realized. After the destruction of the colony in 1815, Hudson's Bay officers Thomas Thomas and James Bird had urged the necessity of its re-establishment because they and many others had family ties which prevented their returning to Britain and "their sole hopes were in the Colony".⁴ Former employees of both companies had begun to gravitate toward the settlement before the union, but with the cessation of hostilities, a concentrated effort was made to move the redundant population, particularly of the North West Company, to Red River. Servants with families were to be given allotments of land of twenty to thirty acres and assistance to build houses and plant their first crops.⁵ The Company's officers who formed the Council of the Northern Department commended the Committee's efforts to relieve the concern of "one of its greatest burdens", and

³H.B.C.A., Miles MacDonell to Lord Selkirk, 1 Oct. 1811, Selkirk Papers, Copy No. 154, p. 49.

⁴E.E. Rich, ed., Colin Robertson's Letters, 1817-1822, (London: H.B.R.S., vol. II, 1939), p. lxvi.

⁵Fleming, Minutes of Council, pp. 3, 33-35.

by 1825 most of the surplus population at the posts had been removed to the colony, which was to become the hub of fur trade society.⁶

Turning its attention to the fur trade at large, the Committee endeavoured to divest the Company of any further responsibility for the maintenance of the families of its active personnel. While raising salaries, the Committee proposed to require each man to clothe his family on his own private account and to impose a proportional tax to cover the cost of provisions.⁷ The new governor George Simpson, who had seen little actual service in Rupert's Land and viewed the problem of families in cold, economic terms, gave active support to these intended reforms. Although he appreciated that native women could prove useful especially in remote areas, his rapid tours of established posts convinced Simpson that if the men were to be allowed to have families they should pay for their support.⁸ In order to curb the burden caused by abandoned families, which he considered a serious problem, he also proposed the creation of a prorated Benefit Fund to which officers and men would

⁶Fleming, Minutes of Council, p. 354; H.B.C.A., London Committee to Gov. Simpson, 11 March 1825, A.6/21, f. 32.

⁷Fleming, Minutes of Council, pp. 358-59.

⁸H.B.C.A., George Simpson's Journal, 1821-1822, D.3/3, fos. 35, 42.

contribute to provide for the support of wives and children in the event of their decease or retirement.⁹

According to the Governor, another major source of expense and inefficiency which had to be curbed was the old practice of allowing families, particularly those of officers, to accompany the brigades on the long summer journey to and from the main depot. Chief Factor John Clarke, for example, exasperated Simpson because of his tendency to let domestic considerations interfere with sound business management. In 1820, Clarke had even abandoned some of the goods destined for Athabasca en route to make a light canoe for the better accommodation of his half-breed wife and her servant--an extravagance which Simpson estimated to have cost the Company five hundred pounds!¹⁰ Too often delays were caused by canoes being diverted to carry women and children with "their Baggage Pots Pans Kettles & Bags of Moss."¹¹ The Governor's 1824 trip to the Columbia convinced him that it was most inexpedient to allow families to accompany the brigades across the Rockies:

We must really put a stop to the practice of
Gentlemen bringing their Women & Children
from the East to the West side of the mountains,

⁹Fleming, Minutes of Council, pp. 358-59; H.B.C.A., Scheme for a fund for the Benefit of Widows and Children of Officers & Men, 12 March 1823, A.66/2, f. 3-3d.

¹⁰Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, pp. 23-24.

¹¹P.A.C., Geo. Simpson to John McLeod, 7 July 1826, John McLeod Corres., p. 166; H.B.C.A., Allan McDonnell to G. Simpson, 30 July 1826, D.5/1, f. 236.

it is attended with much expense and inconvenience on the Voyage, business itself must give way to domestick considerations, the Gentlemen become drones and are not disposable in short the evil is more serious than I am well able to describe. 12

The following year, the annual session of the Council passed a resolution stating that Gentlemen appointed to the two districts across the Rockies were not to encumber themselves with families.¹³

Although the officers acknowledged that some economies were necessary, most resented the stringent rule which had now descended upon Rupert's Land, and they openly resisted the attempt of the London Committee aided by Governor Simpson to force them to assume responsibility for the present and future support of their families. "They are nearly all Family Men," lamented Simpson, and very much influenced by the "Sapient councils of their Squaws."¹⁴ A long list of officers petitioned the Governor in 1822, claiming that most servants could not possibly afford to pay for the support of their families and emphasizing that the services performed by the women paid for their keep.¹⁵ Even the women themselves

¹²Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 131.

¹³Fleming, Minutes of Council, p. 153. In 1827, men in the Southern Department were also prohibited from bringing their wives down to the Bay, D.5/2, f. 7.

¹⁴Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, pp. 11-12, 58. Simpson's emphasis.

¹⁵H.B.C.A., Petition of Members of Council to Governor Simpson, 18 July 1822, D.4/85, fos. 69-70.

protested; the wives at Fort Chipewyan staged a small "strike" by refusing to attend to their regular Saturday duty of cleaning out the fort. According to one observer, the ladies held an animated debate over whether their husbands should have to pay for their support and resolved "that such treatment was repugnant to former usage & held to be unfair."¹⁶ Although Simpson was persuaded to change his mind and argue the case of his Council, it took several years before the London Committee would agree to compromise on this issue.¹⁷ The imposition of specific charges for the support of families was dropped in favour of a general resolution passed by Council in 1824:

That no Officer or Servant in the company's service be hereafter allowed to take a woman without binding himself down to such reasonable provision for the maintenance of the woman and children as on a fair and equitable principle may be considered necessary not only during their residence in the country but after their departure hence. 18

Opposition from the officers also resulted in the plan for the Benefit Fund being abandoned so that it remained with

¹⁶H.B.C.A., Fort Chipewyan Journal, 14 September 1823, B.39/a/22, fos. 27d-28.

¹⁷H.B.C.A., London Committee to Simpson, 13 March 1823, A.6/20, f. 74; Simpson and Council to London Committee, 1 Aug. 1823, D.4/86, f. 16-16d; London Committee to Simpson, 12 March 1824, A.6/20, f. 136d; Simpson and Council to London Committee, 10 August 1824, D.4/87, fos. 28d-30.

¹⁸Fleming, Minutes of Council, pp. 94-95.

the individual to make adequate provision for his family's future.¹⁹

In order to standardize the practice of marriage à la façon du pays, the Hudson's Bay Company did introduce a marriage contract which emphasized the husband's economic responsibilities. By the general terms of the certificates, both parties, in the presence of the chief factor and other witnesses, affixed their signature or mark to a declaration which gave the woman the status of a legal wife. The following contract executed at Oxford House in 1830 is representative:

This is to certify that I, Magnus Harper, Native of Hudson's Bay, North America, have taken to Wife for better or for worse Peggy La Pierre, Native of Hudson's Bay, North America, and I by this document do hereby bind & promise to cherish and support the said Peggy La Pierre as my lawfull married Wife, during the term of her natural life... 20

Some contracts also contained the proviso that if the husband failed to fulfil his marital obligations, the wife would receive monetary compensation. George Ballendine, for example, was to forfeit £500 if he failed to uphold the terms of his marriage contract with Jeanny Black, a daughter of Chief Trader Samuel Black.²¹ The provisions of the marriage

¹⁹H.B.C.A., London Committee to Simpson, 16 January 1828, A.6/21, f. 151d.

²⁰H.B.C.A., B.156/z/1, f. 96. Quite a number of marriage contracts are to be found in the miscellaneous (z) file under the heading of the various posts.

²¹H.B.C.A., Marriage contract of George Ballendine and Jeanny Black, 17 July 1829, Cumberland House, B.47/z/1.

contracts drawn up in French between engagés and the father or guardian of their intended appear to have been particularly strict. When the voyageur Thomas Petit married "Jeune Vieve", a daughter of Laurent Cadotte, at Isle à la Crosse in 1825, he promised not only to treat her as "sa femme legitime", but in the event of his decease, was bound to leave all his worldly goods to his family. If he should abandon "Jeune Vieve", he would forfeit any monies which he might have in the hands of the Company which would be paid over to her.²² Charles Wilkes observed that the Company took stern measures with any servants who attempted to desert their wives at Fort Vancouver; if caught, a man could be "arrested" and forced to give security that he would not abandon his family.²³ In retrospect, since the Hudson's Bay Company was vested with judicial and legislative power over Rupert's Land, these contracts can be seen in the light of civil marriages. A couple was not now allowed to marry without official Company sanction.²⁴

Another aspect of the new spirit of concern shown for the welfare of fur trade families was the introduction of a series of regulations in 1823 designed to achieve "the more

²²H.B.C.A., B.89/z/1, f. 1; see also Marriage contract of Louis Bouchard and Charlotte Fauniant, 18 October 1828, Fort William, B.231/z/1, fos. 54-55.

²³Wilkes, Narrative of U.S. Expedition, vol. 4, p. 419.

²⁴H.B.C.A., Fort Chip. Journal, 7 Nov. 1823, B.39/a/22, f. 40.

effectual civilization and moral improvement" of families attached to Company establishments.²⁵ Although the holding of Sunday services had always been encouraged, it was now made compulsory for every man, woman and child at a post to attend religious observances to be conducted by the chief factor or another officer. The perpetuation of the Indian tongue being considered a hindrance to the enlightenment of native families, the Council ruled that "mother & children always be addressed and habituated to converse in the vernacular dialect (whether English or French) of the Father." Fathers were also instructed to devote their leisure time to teaching their children their ABC's and some short prayers, to be repeated "punctually" at bedtime. These activities it was hoped would promote decency, cleanliness and moral propriety in native families where too often the irregular and immoral habits of Indian and mixed-blood mothers had been allowed to have a formative influence on their children.

These rules for regulating behaviour at the fur trade posts were but a pale secular shadow of the events taking place in Red River. The coming of settlement to Rupert's Land was to have a profound effect upon fur trade society because it meant the creation of a base for the introduction of the basic tenets of civilization--agriculture, Christianity

²⁵Fleming, Minutes of Council, pp. 60-61. There is evidence that Chief Factor James Keith drew up these rules during the winter of 1822-23 at Fort Severn, B.198/e/6, fos. 5d-6.

and education. The chief agent of this civilization was to be the missionary. In 1818, a Roman Catholic mission had been established under the auspices of Lord Selkirk to minister to the growing French-Canadian and métis population. Two years later, thanks largely to the Evangelical sentiments of Benjamin Harrison, a prominent member of the London Committee, the Company with the help of the Church Missionary Society sent the Reverend John West to Red River to attend to the spiritual needs of the Protestant sector.²⁶

As the upholder of civilization, by which he meant the norms of British society, West found many of the practices of fur trade society reprehensible. He denounced "the custom of the country" as nothing more than living in sin, especially since a man might "turn off" his woman after having enjoyed the morning of her days. Indeed, the parson considered that the institution of Christian marriage, "the parent not the child of civil society", as one of his most important duties.²⁷ The first couple for whom West performed the rites of the Church of England were Hudson's Bay officer Thomas Bunn and his half-breed wife Phoebe, a daughter of William and Nahowway Sinclair.²⁸ The ceremony took place at Rock Depot on 9 September

²⁶Fleming, Minutes of Council, pp. 33-36. For an excellent analysis of the role of the churches in Red River, see Pannekoek, "The Churches in the Red River Area 1818-1870".

²⁷West, Red River Journal, pp. 26, 51-52.

²⁸H.B.C.A., Red River Register, E.4/1b, f. 191.

1820 as West travelled in to Red River, but once in the colony, the missionary's hostile and intolerant attack on marriage à la façon du pays provoked much resentment.²⁹ Although abuses undeniably existed, to many an old trader the pronouncements of a clergyman could add no more legality or sanctity to a country union which had existed for decades.

Resistance seems to have come from some of the most prominent settlers in the colony such as retired Hudson's Bay officers Robert Logan and James Bird who had continued to live with their Indian wives à la façon du pays. But West, being especially concerned that such men set an example to the rest of the community eventually persuaded them to take church vows. His success at least won the commendation of Nicholas Garry who considered the practices of the Indian country most demoralizing:

Mr. West had done much good in persuading these Gentlemen to marry....thus introducing more proper Feelings and preventing that Debasement of Mind which must, at last, have rooted out every honorable and right Feeling. Perhaps nothing shows Debasement of Mind so much as their having lived themselves in an unmarried state, giving up their Daughters to live the same Life as their Mothers, and this Feeling, or rather its Justification, had become general all over the Country. 30

²⁹A.N. Thompson, "John West: A Study of the Conflict between Civilization and the Fur Trade", Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society, vol. XII (Sept. 1970), p. 52: "An over zeal or a want of delicacy on this subject tends to make Mr. West extremely unpopular..."

³⁰Garry, "Diary", p. 137.

West left Rupert's Land in 1823, having performed a total of sixty-five marriages. His successors, David Jones and William Cockran, continued to rail against the immoral habits of the fur traders. Jones' dogmatic stance was hardly conciliating. It had been West's custom to baptise traders' wives immediately before the marriage ceremony, but Jones was adamant that it would be a sacrilege to pronounce "our excellent Liturgy" over persons entirely ignorant of its meaning. When several traders maintained that there would be little point in having a church marriage since their wives would still be regarded as "heathens" unless baptised, Jones declared they were merely looking for an excuse to continue "living in sin".³¹

By the end of the 1820's, however, Cockran, the assistant chaplain, was optimistic about the changing moral climate of Red River:

It is encouraging to view the growing attention of the people to divine ordinance. Many that could not be prevailed upon formerly to marry their women have now seen the sin of despising the ordinance, and have felt truly sorry for the contempt and neglect of it. 32

³¹C.M.S.A., David Jones to Rev. Pratt, 24 July 1824, CC1/039. The church seems to have refused to give any recognition to native wives who had not received the rites of baptism and marriage. Jane Auld, for example, is referred to simply as "a Half Breed Woman" until her baptism in 1831. She is not recorded as Jane Charles until after her church marriage in 1835 (E.4/1a, fos. 57, 83, 104d). In a few instances, the term "reputed wife" is used, but this was likely at the insistence of the traders themselves who demanded some acknowledgement of their existing marital relationship, see E.4/1a, f. 27.

³²C.M.S.A., William Cockran's Journal, 3 March 1829, CC1/018, vol. 3.

Equally gratifying to the missionaries was the spread of the church rite along the route between the colony and York Factory. On his way out to England in 1828, Jones was rejoiced "to unite two officers of high standing to their partners" at Oxford House. These proved to be Chief Factor Colin Robertson and his half-breed wife Theresa Chalifoux, and Clerk James Robertson and Margaret, a daughter of Chief Factor Alexander Stewart and his half-breed wife Susan Spence.³³ It also became customary for traders visiting Red River with their wives to seek religious sanction for their unions. In 1835, Reverend Jones jubilantly observed: "This laudable practice is now becoming General, in fact the revolution in these respects during the past 10 years has been immense."³⁴

Indeed, the mid-1830's mark a definite change in attitude toward "the custom of the country" in the environs of the settlement. Chief Trader Archibald McDonald emphasized that the acceptance of the church rite was now the only proper course for an honorable gentleman:

All my colleagues are now about following the example, & it is my full conviction few of them can do no better--the great mistake is in flattering themselves with a different notion too long--nothing is gained by procrastination, but much is lost by it. 35

³³C.M.S.A., David Jones' Journal, 25 Aug. 1828, CC1/039, f. 35; CC1/018, Marriage Register.

³⁴C.M.S.A., Jones' Journal, 9 June 1835, CC1/039.

³⁵P.A.B.C., Arch. McDonald to Ed. Ermatinger, 1 April 1836, Edward Ermatinger Correspondence.

After attending the annual meeting of Council, McDonald himself had had his union with his half-breed wife Jane Klyne blessed by the church in a well-attended ceremony in Red River on 9 June 1835. Yet he could not resist pointing out the humour in the solemn pronouncements of the clergy for he and his beloved Jane had lived in a most exemplary fashion since he had wed her à la façon du pays ten years before:

...[we] were joined in Holy wedlock & of course declared at full liberty to live together as man & wife & to increase & multiply as to them might seem fit--And I hope the validity of this ceremony is not to be questioned though it has not the further advantage of a Newspaper Confirmation. 36

Another notable convert was Chief Factor John Charles who, having settled his family in Red River, formally wed his half-breed wife Jane Auld on 2 February 1835.³⁷ Chief Trader Francis Heron was so happy to be reunited with his wife and family after several years separation because of his posting to the Columbia that he celebrated by sealing his union with Isabella Chalifoux on 16 July 1835.³⁸ Even old die-hards eventually gave in. Although William Hemmings Cook had retired to Red River with his wife Mary (Agathas) and family in 1815, it took until 1838 before he could be

³⁶P.A.B.C., Arch. McDonald to Ed. Ermatinger, 1 April 1836, Edward Ermatinger Correspondence, My emphasis.

³⁷H.B.C.A., Red River Register, E.4/lb, f. 243.

³⁸Ibid., f. 244. Heron's letters to James Hargrave reveal how much he regretted being parted from his family, see Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 111.

persuaded to tie the solemn knot. As one of the guests at his wedding feast sarcastically observed, old Cook had "stood manfully forth...bringing his 35 years courtship to an early close."³⁹

Just at the time when Red River was becoming firmly reconciled to the European form of marriage, a bitter feud over this issue erupted at Fort Vancouver, the headquarters of the Columbia district. The desirability of a mission to the Columbia had been suggested as early as 1824, but Governor Simpson, in enumerating the qualities such a missionary should possess, issued a prophetic warning:

...he ought to understand in the outset that nearly all the Gentlemen & Servants have Families altho' Marriage ceremonies are unknown in the Country and that it would be all in vain to attempt breaking through this uncivilized custom. 40

Simpson appears to have forgotten his own advice, however, when selecting the Company's first Pacific Coast chaplain because, in spite of his name, the Reverend Herbert Beaver could not have been a more unfortunate choice. According to Beaver, Fort Vancouver, upon his arrival in the fall of 1836 with his English wife Jane, presented a "deplorable scene of vice and ignorance."⁴¹ He refused to give any credence to "the custom of the country", styling the traders' wives

³⁹P.A.B.C., Thomas Simpson to Donald Ross, 20 Feb. 1836, Donald Ross Correspondence, S15.

⁴⁰Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 108.

⁴¹Thomas E. Jessett, ed., Reports and Letters of Herbert Beaver, 1836-38, (Portland, Oregon, 1959), p. 2.

as concubines and chastising the men for indulging in fornication.⁴² This most insulting and inappropriate assessment of the well-regulated domestic situation at the fort provoked much hostility.

No one resented Beaver's slanders on his wife's character more than the fiery-tempered ruler of Fort Vancouver, Chief Factor John McLoughlin. Around 1811 while a young Nor'Wester in the Rainy Lake area, McLoughlin had wed Margeurite Wadin McKay à la façon du pays.⁴³ Four children were born to the couple, and when McLoughlin assumed charge of the Columbia District in 1824, Margeurite and the youngest children made the long journey overland with him. McLoughlin treated his wife with respect and devotion, and the remarks of contemporaries indicate that she played her role as first lady of Fort Vancouver well. According to Chief Trader James Douglas, Madame McLoughlin was respected by all for "her numerous charities and many excellent qualities of heart."⁴⁴ Narcissa Whitman, the wife of one of the first American missionaries

⁴²Thomas E. Jessett, ed., Reports and Letters of Herbert Beaver, 1836-38, (Portland, Oregon, 1959), p. 86.

⁴³Margeurite Wadin was the daughter of the early Canadian trader Jean-Etienne Wadin and an unknown Indian woman. She was first the country wife of the Nor'Wester Alexander McKay by whom she had one son and three daughters. McKay appears to have abandoned Margeurite when he retired from the North West Company in 1808. For further details, see T.C. Elliott, "Margeurite Wadin McKay McLoughlin", Oregon Historical Quarterly, vol. 36, 1935, pp. 338-47.

⁴⁴Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, p. 141.

to reach the post, is unlikely to have been guilty of bias in describing Margeurite as "one of the kindest women in the world."⁴⁵

But to Beaver, good Mrs. McLoughlin was only a "kept Mistress" who could not be allowed to associate with respectably married females such as Mrs. Beaver.⁴⁶ He demanded that McLoughlin set an example by entering into a legal union with Margeurite. This, McLoughlin who had Catholic predilections absolutely refused to do. However, in order to silence once and for all any charge of illegality against his union, he had James Douglas, acting in his capacity of Justice of the Peace, perform a civil ceremony.⁴⁷ When Beaver and his wife, therefore, continued to heap invective upon Mrs. McLoughlin, her husband's anger reached such a pitch that on one occasion he could not refrain from giving the parson a sound drubbing with his own cane.⁴⁸

Beaver also encountered stiff opposition when he attempted to prevent the country marriage of the clerk A.C. Anderson to a daughter of Chief Factor James Birnie. Anderson, at this time stationed in New Caledonia, had commissioned Chief Factor

⁴⁵C.M. Drury, ed., First white women over the Rockies..., 3 vols., (Glendale, Cal., 1963), vol. 1, p. 111.

⁴⁶Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, p. 58.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 77. Marriage by a Justice of the Peace had, in fact, been made legal by a law of 1836 in Canada and England, pp. xxi, 46, 116.

⁴⁸Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, p. 93.

Peter Skene Ogden to conduct the girl north with the annual brigade. Beaver refused to baptise the girl prior to her departure and wrote a scathing letter to Anderson denouncing the contemplated union as "immoral and disgraceful"; he threatened to deny Anderson the church's blessing if he persisted in wilfully denying God's ordinance.⁴⁹ Ogden paid no heed to Beaver's rantings, declared that he would have the girl baptised by the American missionaries en route or do it himself and, as a Justice of the Peace, ultimately presided over Anderson's marriage.⁵⁰ Anderson himself wrote a spirited letter to Beaver giving a sophisticated defence of his action. In the first place, he claimed, legal authorities acknowledged that marriage was essentially a civil contract, the religious ceremony being merely a social convention. Scottish law, he pointed out, did not require church rites for marriages to be considered legal.⁵¹ Furthermore, laudable as Beaver's presence at Fort Vancouver might be, he was of little use to Anderson hundreds of miles away.

⁴⁹Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, pp. 48-50.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 50-51.

⁵¹H.B.C.A., A.C. Anderson to H. Beaver, 1838, B.223/b/20, fos. 62-66d. It is significant that in Scotland it was possible for a legal marriage to be contracted without the sanction of either civil or religious authority, see F.P. Walton, Scottish Marriages, regular and irregular, (Edinburgh, 1893). The fact that most of the fur traders were of Scottish origin may, therefore, help to explain their acceptance of "the custom of the country".

Even Church authorities had previously recognized that,

marriages contracted in these wild and secluded regions in positions where the intervention of a person duly ordained may not be immediately available are valid and irreproachable. ⁵²

While few officers actually denied the desirability of a church marriage when a clergyman was present, Beaver's insufferable attitude alienated even the most devout. Such was the case of James Douglas who was anxious to have his country union with Amelia Connolly ratified by the church. Thus, on 28 February 1837, Beaver performed the Church of England rite for the first, and almost last, time.⁵³ Even though she was now regularly married, Beaver still regarded the kind and gracious Mrs. Douglas as "little calculated to improve the manners of society."⁵⁴ Douglas, who was extremely sensitive to such slanders, stoutly defended the honour of the ladies of the country when he assumed temporary command of Fort Vancouver in 1838. To Beaver's accusation that the Factor's house was "a common receptacle for every mistress of an officer in the service, who may take a fancy to visit

⁵²H.B.C.A., B.223/b/20, fos. 62-66d; Company Secretary to Rev. W. Hamilton of Orkney, 17 March 1823, A.5/7, fos. 78d-79: It was the opinion of "one of the Highest Dignitaries of the Church of England" that "the custom of living together in Hudson's Bay be to all intents and purposes a valid marriage."

⁵³Marion B. Smith, "The Lady Nobody Knows", British Columbia: A Centennial Anthology, (Vancouver, 1958), pp. 473-75; "Cathedral of the Pioneers", The Beaver, Dec. 1940, p. 12. Beaver only performed nine marriages during his two-year stay at Fort Vancouver.

⁵⁴Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, p. 35.

the Fort", Douglas retorted that only the wives of officers visited the fort when their husbands were on brigade business:

I neither have nor would suffer any person, of whatever rank, to introduce loose women into this Fort, an attempt which, to the honor of every gentleman here, was never made. 55

Beaver and his wife created such friction that all were gratified when he was relieved of his post and departed with his haughty wife in the fall of 1838.

The dismal failure of Beaver was in sharp contrast to the success of the Pacific Mission established by the Catholic missionaries, F.N. Blanchet and Modeste Demers, who travelled overland to the Columbia in 1838. Although the majority of the populace at Fort Vancouver were Catholic, the priests' conciliatory attitude toward "the custom of the country" also contributed to their welcome. The Protestant missionaries at Red River had denounced their Catholic counterparts for refusing to marry persons of different religious persuasions "as though it were better for them to live in fornication, than that they should violate the rigid statutes of the Papal see."⁵⁶ Blanchet and Demers, however, had received special dispensation, and the records show that a considerable number of the marriages they performed in their progress across the country were

⁵⁵Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, pp. 120, 143-45.

⁵⁶West, Red River Journal, pp. 75-76; C.M.S.A., Jones' Journal, 13 Sept. 1824, CCl/039, f. 11.

between Protestant and Catholic.⁵⁷ Although the Catholic Church did not recognize the sanctity of a country marriage, the priests did acknowledge the existence of a marital bond by considering that every cohabiting couple was living in a state of "natural marriage". The only children stigmatized with illegitimacy were those whose parents could not be identified. Furthermore, the general tenor of the Catholic rite was that the parties were "renewing and ratifying their mutual consent of marriage" and formally recognizing the legitimacy of their children. On 19 November 1842, to the priests' undoubted satisfaction, McLoughlin, who had just turned Catholic, had his union with Margeurite, "his legitimate wife", blessed by the church:

...wishing to renew their consent of marriage in order to discharge the grave bonds on receiving the Sacrement of marriage, we priests... have received the renewal of their consent of marriage and have given them the nuptial benediction... 58

In spite of increasing pressure to conform to the norms of white society, there were a few notable officers who upheld "the custom of the country" and refused to accept the need for the church rite. Throughout the years as John Rowand

⁵⁷The following examples are taken from Catholic Church Records: 1) Patrick Small, Protestant, and Nancy Hughes, Catholic, 21 Aug. 1838 at Fort Carleton (Vanc. 1, 4th & 5th pgs); 2) J.E. Harriott, Protestant, and Nancy Rowand, Catholic, 10 Sept. 1838 at Fort Edmonton (Vanc. 1, 8th & 9th pgs); 3) William Kitson, Protestant, and Hélène McDonald, Catholic, 29 April 1839 at Fort Nisqually (Vanc. 1, 41st & 42nd pgs.)

⁵⁸Catholic Church Records, Vanc. 11, pp. 5, 6, & 7.

had risen to become the most prominent man in the Saskatchewan Department, his relationship with his country wife Lisette had remained constant. Seven children, three sons and four daughters, were born to them for whom Rowand showed a devoted concern. When the Catholic priests visited Fort Edmonton in 1838, the chief factor's four daughters were baptised and Rowand himself acted as the chief witness to the marriage of his eldest daughter Nancy to Chief Trader J.E. Harriott.⁵⁹ Significantly, however, Rowand did not feel that his own marriage needed further benediction; he and Lisette would live on as man and wife as they had always done. Perhaps there is no greater testimony to the bond that existed between them than Rowand's simple lament when he learned that his wife had died while he was returning to Fort Edmonton with the brigades in the summer of 1849: "my old friend the Mother of all my children was no more."⁶⁰

According to all accounts, Chief Factor Peter Skene Ogden continually refused the church's sanction for his union with his remarkable Flathead wife, known as "Princess Julia". "If many years of public recognition of the relation and of his children did not constitute sufficient proof," he declared, "no formal words of priest or magistrate could help

⁵⁹Catholic Church Records, Vanc. 1, 8th & 9th pgs.

⁶⁰H.B.C.A., John Rowand to Geo. Simpson, 14 Sept. 1849, D.5/25, f. 82d.

the matter."⁶¹ Ogden had wed Julia, the step-daughter of the French-Canadian trapper François Rivet, sometime in the early 1820's. She appears to have accompanied him on at least some of his arduous Snake Country expeditions where she earned a reputation for her bravery and skilled horsemanship. On one occasion during a fracas with some American mountain men, the horses, one of which carried Julia's infant son wrapped snugly in a saddlebag, were stampeded. Single-handed the young mother was reputed to have braved the American camp, rescuing not only her baby but one of the Company packhorses laden with pelts.⁶² Julia, whom Ogden affectionately referred to as "the old Lady", proved a devoted mother not only to her own five sons and daughters but also to several step-children born to Ogden of a previous alliance in his Nor'Wester days. In his will, Ogden bequeathed all his property to his wife plus an annuity of thirty pounds and made generous provision for his descendants.⁶³ In her declining years, Julia Ogden, who was to live to the age of ninety-eight, was tenderly

⁶¹"Indian Women Rise to Social Eminence", 14 Dec. 1913, Spokane, Wash. (newspaper clipping, courtesy of Mrs. Jean Cole, Peterborough, Ont.); Archie Binns, Peter Skene Ogden: Fur Trader, (Portland, Oregon, 1967), p. 355; Catholic Church Records, A-60, A-70.

⁶²Glyndwr Williams, ed., Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Country Journals, 1827-28 and 1828-29 (London: H.B.R.S., vol. XXVIII, 1971), pp. xvi-xviii; Binns, Ogden: Fur Trader, pp. 136, 142-43.

⁶³Somerset House, Eng., Will of Peter Skene Ogden, 15 June 1851, 1863 (vol. 9), f. 444.

cared for by her daughter Mrs. Archibald McKinley. One trader who visited her a few years before her death in 1886 at Lac la Hache, British Columbia claimed that she was the oldest living person of the Flathead tribe: "Her hair is white as snow, leaves her bed once a day for a short time and is very deaf."⁶⁴

If in life, as Ogden had maintained, he did not need the external constraints of "civilized" society to make him do his duty as a husband and father, in death, the old trader left his family in a vulnerable position owing to the complex question of the legal status of a country marriage. As in a few other cases, selfish relatives in Britain in tones of shocked self-righteousness were anxious to disinherit the trader's family on the grounds that his union had been unlawful and the children illegitimate. After Ogden died in 1854, his brother and sister attempted to have his will invalidated. The litigation dragged on for a number of years, but eventually a compromise settlement was reached, thanks partly to the efforts of Governor Simpson who was one of Ogden's executors.⁶⁵

Apart from the efforts of conscientious executors, such as James Keith who fought for the rights of the native family

⁶⁴Angus McDonald, "A Few Items of the West", Washington Historical Quarterly, vol. XVIII (July 1917), p. 210.

⁶⁵Binns, Ogden: Fur Trader, pp. 355-58.

of Chief Trader Samuel Black after his murder in 1841,⁶⁶ the law itself was inclined to a favourable interpretation of "the custom of the country". By his will, Chief Trader Alexander Roderick McLeod specifically stated that he considered the mother of his children to be his "legitimate wife" and emphasized that it was his "serious determination that no plea be adduced in any shape to alter my views".⁶⁷ After his death in 1840, two English lawyers gave their opinion that his union constituted a valid marriage:

This marriage took place in a remote part of the Colony, where there were no Established Clergyman, and was solemnized in Conformity to the Customs of the Country. 68

Similarly, after the death of Chief Trader Joseph McGillivray in 1832, William Smith, Secretary of the London Committee, was anxious to have the estate settled to the best advantage of his country wife Françoise Boucher. Smith felt that she was fully entitled to adopt the title widow instead of spinster, thereby saving the ten percent legacy duty levied upon "strangers in blood" because she and McGillivray had lived together "as Man & Wife in the Indian territories, according to the customs of that Country & acknowledged as such &

⁶⁶See H.B.C.A., A.38/23-26 for the voluminous correspondence related to this case.

⁶⁷H.B.C.A., Will of Alexander Roderick McLeod, 16 June 1828, A.36/10. The identity of McLeod's half-breed wife is unknown.

⁶⁸Ibid., fos. 17-19.

further that there were not any resident Clergy within some hundred miles of the places at which they resided." The attorney for the estate concurred that such was due "McGillivray's Lady" who thus entered into respectable widowhood.⁶⁹

The question of the validity of marriage à la façon du pays was to become a "cause célèbre" in the famous Connolly Case of the late 1860's in which the judges of Lower Canada displayed a degree of tolerance and humanity in sharp contrast to the pious denunciations of the clergy.⁷⁰ In 1803 William Connolly, a newly-appointed clerk in the North West Company, had contracted an alliance with Suzanne Pas-de-Nom, the fifteen-year-old daughter of a Cree chief, partly to secure his influence with this band in the Athabasca country. For the next twenty-eight years, the couple had lived together as man and wife and at least six children were born to them. According to one Hudson's Bay officer:

I often saw Suzanne at his house at different posts and he introduced her to me as Mrs. Connolly. She passed and was universally acknowledged as his wife at the different posts where I met her...her children by William Connolly were always acknowledged in public as the lawful issue of their marriage. ⁷¹

⁶⁹H.B.C.A., William Smith to F.A. Laroque, 13 Oct. 1832 and reply, 29 Nov. 1832, A.36/9, fos. 127, 132.

⁷⁰The following account has been constructed from the testimony given during the original trial of 1867 and the appeal of 1869, see Lower Canada Jurist, vol. XI, pp. 197-265 and La Revue Légale, vol. I, pp. 253-400 respectively.

⁷¹"Connolly Case, 1867", p. 231.

Connolly had, in fact, earned a reputation as one who stoutly maintained that it would be "a most unnatural proceeding" to desert the mother of one's children,⁷² and he took Suzanne and his family east with him in 1831. The family was first settled in Saint Eustache where two of Connolly's daughters were baptised and Suzanne was introduced to the community as Mrs. Connolly. Shortly after the Connollys moved to Montreal, however, Connolly inexplicably repudiated his Indian wife and married his cousin Julia Woolrich in a Catholic ceremony on 16 May 1832. Nevertheless, Connolly, now stationed at Tadousac, continued to support Suzanne in Montreal until 1840 when he arranged for her to return to a convent in Red River where she remained until her death in 1862. Connolly himself had died in 1849, but his second wife, who had always known of the existence of Suzanne and even cared for some of the children, continued to make annual payments for the Indian woman's support. Then in 1867, Connolly's eldest son by Suzanne instituted a suit against Julia Woolrich as Connolly's executrix, claiming that the marriage of his father and mother had been legal and that, therefore, by law Suzanne had been entitled to one-half of his father's estate. Upon her death, this inheritance would have passed to her children, and John Connolly maintained that, as a legitimate heir, he was entitled to one-sixth of the estate.

⁷²H.B.C.A., Geo. Simpson to J.G. McTavish, 2 Dec. 1832, B.135/c/2, f. 96.

The question as to whether a valid marriage had existed between Connolly and his Indian wife was thus the central issue of the case. On the basis of the testimony of numerous witnesses who had lived in Rupert's Land and an extensive examination of the development of marriage law, Chief Justice Monk ruled that their union constituted a valid marriage: firstly, because Suzanne had been married according to the custom and usages of her own people and secondly, because the consent of both parties which was the essential element of civilized marriage had been proved by twenty-eight years of repute, public acknowledgement and co-habitation as man and wife.⁷³ Connolly had further given his name to Suzanne and shown considerable concern for the care and education of his offspring. In a moving summation, the Chief Justice declared:

It is beyond all question, all controversy, that in the North West among the Crees, among the other Indian tribes or nations, among the Europeans at all stations, posts, and settlements of the Hudson's Bay, this union, contracted under such circumstances, persisted in for such a long period of years, characterized by inviolable fidelity and devotion on both sides, and made more sacred by the birth and education of a numerous family, would have been regarded as a valid marriage in the North West, was legal there; and can this Court, after he brought his wife and family to Canada, after having recognized her here as such, presented her as such to the persons he and she associated with, declare the marriage illegal, null and void? Can I pronounce this connection, formed and continued under

⁷³"Connolly Case, 1867", pp. 230, 248.

such circumstances concubinage, and brand his offspring as bastard....I think not. There would be no law, no justice, no sense, no morality in such a judgment. 74

Although "the custom of the country" was ultimately to be vindicated, in Rupert's Land itself the coming of the missionaries with their insistence on the prerogative of the church in the sphere of marriage made it inevitable that this practice would fall into disrepute. Even the "civil" contracts enacted by the Hudson's Bay Company contained the proviso that the union would receive the sanction of the church at the first possible opportunity.⁷⁵ The slow spread of missionary activity to more remote areas, however, meant that for many this opportunity never actually arose. As a result, official civil powers were granted to the chief officers of the Company; in 1845, the Council of the Northern Department resolved that, in the absence of a clergyman, chief factors only could solemnize marriages, but no person could take a wife without the sanction of the gentleman in charge of the district.⁷⁶

⁷⁴"Connolly Case, 1867", p. 257. The decision was appealed in 1869 by the associates of Julia Woolrich who had died in the interim. Four of the five appeal judges upheld the original ruling. Plans were then made for an appeal to the Privy Council, but the parties ultimately settled out of court.

⁷⁵See for example H.B.C.A., B.156/z/1, f. 96: "...and further I [Magnus Harper] promise and bind myself to have the very first opportunity of my so doing the Marriage Ceremony performed by a Clergyman of the Church of England, between myself and the said Peggy La Pierre...

⁷⁶H.B.C.A., Minutes of Council, 7 June 1845, B.239/k/2, f. 183d.

The introduction of Christian marriage was but an important aspect of a broad social plan which the missionaries hoped to implement for the civilization of Red River. The Church Missionary Society considered it of prime importance that the children of Indians as well as Company employees receive education and religious instruction. Reverend West drew up a plan for a school for orphan children and in 1822 a schoolmaster and schoolmistress were sent out.⁷⁷ The officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, however, having early realized that this "prospect of Civilization diffusing itself among Us" would have profound implications for fur trade society,⁷⁸ were most concerned that their own offspring should reap the benefits which the establishment of schools in the colony would provide. Although the educational efforts of the missionaries were to have been broadly based, there was a marked tendency for their energies to be concentrated on the children, notably the daughters, of the fur trade elite.

Early in 1824, a plan was circulated among the officers for the creation of a boarding school for "Female children" under the tutelage of Miss Mary Allez, a recent immigrant from Guernsey. Governor Simpson was sanguine of the political benefits of such a school for not only would it bring money

⁷⁷ West, Red River Journal, pp. 12-15, 26-27. The schoolmaster and schoolmistress George Harbidge and Elizabeth Boden were married soon after their arrival in the colony, evidently to the detriment of their pedagogical activities.

⁷⁸ H.B.C.A., W.H. Cook to James Swain, 17 Dec. 1811, B.239/b/82, fos. 9d-10.

to the colony, but it would help to secure the interest of some of the officers who had previously considered the settlement anathema to the fur trade.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, Miss Allez, like so many of her successors, proved more interested in matrimony than teaching and married the clerk Grant Forrest in September 1824.⁸⁰ Little real progress in female education was made until Ann Cockran, who had accompanied her missionary husband to Red River in 1825, set up a boarding school for ten officers' daughters in the summer of 1827. The missionaries expressed much optimism about the salutary effect such an institution would have upon the rising generation throughout Rupert's Land:

Experience has taught the Society the influence which female education is calculated to produce in an uncivilized country...The females in question are never likely to see any country but this; in the course of time they will be disposed of in marriage to persons in the service and thus stationed in different parts of the country, and may we not hope that thus we shall have female missionaries by & bye throughout the Indian territories. 81

The interest which the officers showed for their daughters' improvement, however, revealed that they were more occupied

⁷⁹Fleming, Minutes of Council, p. 95; H.B.C.A., G. Simpson to J.G. McTavish, 7 Jan. 1824, B.239/c/1, f. 132.

⁸⁰H.B.C.A., E.4/1b, f. 211.

⁸¹C.M.S.A., D. Jones to Rev. Bickersteth, 31 Jan. 1827, CC1/039; W. Cockran to Secretaries, 30 July 1827, CC1/018, v. 1.

with secular considerations.⁸² They maintained an elitist desire to make their daughters "ladies all at once" lamented Cockran, and were thus reluctant to support Mrs. Cockran's desire to establish a day school for the wider dissemination of the civilizing habits of industry and morality.⁸³ After 1831, the Cockrans did, in fact, devote most of their energies to the betterment of the children of the lower orders of Red River, but the education of the children of the fur trade gentry was raised to a new plane with the establishment of the Red River Academy under the supervision of the more genteel Reverend Jones and his wife Mary who had come out to the colony in the fall of 1829. The officers enthusiastically supported the school where for an annual cost of £30 per child they were assured of their children receiving an upbringing befitting their status.⁸⁴ The girls, to be educated separately from the boys, were to be given particular care as is shown by the requirements deemed necessary for the English governess who was to arrive in the fall of 1833. The clergy were anxious that she be a woman of "matured Christian experience" while

⁸²No complete list of the girls who attended Mrs. Cockran's school has been discovered, but they included Maria, Governor Simpson's daughter by Betsey Sinclair, and Flora McTavish, a daughter of Chief Factor J.G. McTavish.

⁸³C.M.S.A., Cockran to Secretaries, 20 July 1831 and Cockran to Rev. T. Woodroffe, 3 Aug. 1831, CC1/018, v. 1; Jones to Secretaries, 25 July 1833, CC1/039.

⁸⁴C.M.S.A., Geo. Simpson to Rev. Jones, 14 July 1832, CC1/039; H.B.C.A., Memo respecting the proposed Academy, 6 May 1833, B.235/z/3, f. 547.

the officers emphasized that she should be qualified to teach "the ornamental as well as the useful branches of Education; in short an accomplished well-bred lady, capable of teaching music, drawing &c &c, of conciliating disposition and mild temper." Governor Simpson also recommended that two respectable English women servants be sent out "as we consider it very desirable that the young ladies should have as little discourse with the native women in this country as possible."⁸⁵

Initially, the Red River Academy was hailed as a great success. Over forty children were enrolled the first fall and the governess Mrs. Mary Lowman was praised as a "clever unsurpassed Woman."⁸⁶ Old Chief Factor J.D. Cameron, on bringing his daughter to the school, especially commended the attitude of Mrs. Lowman:

She spares no pains with her pupils--she learns them to sit, to stand, to walk, and perhaps, to lie down. She appears to have their improvement very much at heart--when she reprimands them, she does it in the kind affectionate terms of a Mother. ⁸⁷

But soon the stability of the school was to be shaken by the governess' matrimonial preoccupation. By January 1835 she had married one of the "nobs" of the settlement James Bird, and the girls were abandoned to the harsh discipline of the

⁸⁵C.M.S.A., Jones to Secretaries, 14 Aug. 1832, and Geo. Simpson to Jones, 14 July 1832, CC1/039.

⁸⁶Simpson to McTavish, 22 Dec. 1834, B.135/c/2, f. 139.

⁸⁷P.A.C., J.D. Cameron to James Hargrave, 7 Feb. 1834, Hargrave Corres., vol. 4, p. 731.

boys' teacher John Macallum until a new replacement could be found.⁸⁸ The new governess was to have been a Miss Anne Armstrong who arrived in the autumn, but the officers would not accept her because she was not qualified to teach "the ornamental subjects" which were deemed so necessary to their daughters' education.⁸⁹

The girls' school was further deranged by the death of the "pleasant and amiable" Mrs. Jones in October 1836. The officers, much regretting her loss, arranged for a memorial tablet to be erected over her seat at the Upper Church in remembrance of one known throughout Rupert's Land as "the friend & benefactress of the half-caste females."⁹⁰ In 1836 an auxiliary school for girls was apparently started under the patronage of several prominent settlers by Mrs. Sarah Ingham, who had come out as companion to Mrs. Lowman; this experiment was short-lived as the lady soon married one of her patrons Robert Logan.⁹¹ In the meantime, the Academy under the

⁸⁸H.B.C.A., E.4/lb, f. 242d; Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 181.

⁸⁹H.B.C.A., Simpson to Rev. Jones, June 1836, D.4/22, f. 47; Lord Selkirk to Lady Selkirk, 5 Sept. 1836, Selkirk Papers, HBC Copy 161, p. 1254.

⁹⁰Jones' Journal, 6 Nov. 1836 as quoted in A.N. Thompson, "The Wife of the Missionary", Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society, vol. XV (June 1973), p. 40.

⁹¹Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 241; H.B.C.A., E.4/lb, f. 262.

direction of Macallum staggered on. An attempt to reinstate Miss Armstrong proved very unpopular, but another governess, Miss Allan, who arrived in 1840, proved even more unsuitable. A vain, foolish old maid, her performance did not at all accord with Macallum's ideas of discipline. He finally dismissed her in 1845 on the grounds that,

she was careless & lazy, had extraordinary peculiarities of manner wch made her the laugh of her school girls & was not sufficiently accomplished to carry on the education of young ladies. 92

In spite of these difficulties, the establishment of schools in Red River did lead to a stratification with regard to the women in fur trade society previously unknown. The officers were obviously anxious that their daughters be inculcated with a consciousness of being part of an elite. Every effort was made to estrange them from their Indian ancestry; according to one observer in the 1840's, "The ladies of this Academy are as strictly guarded from communication with other people as the inmates of a Turkish Seraglio."⁹³ Taught to adopt English dress and manners, they were being groomed to take their place in the upper echelon of society as the wives of white men, notably incoming officers and even missionaries. While it would not be inaccurate to suggest that the handsome dowries brought by officers' daughters

⁹²MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 206.

⁹³Elaine A. Mitchell, "A Red River Gossip", The Beaver, (Spring 1961), p. 9.

contributed to their desirability as wives, the young women themselves do appear to have attained considerable civilized polish.⁹⁴ Betsey Charles who married the fastidious Mr. Macallum in February 1836 was reputedly "a fine clever and accomplished girl" and "quite English in her manner,"⁹⁵ her father Chief Factor John Charles was also the wealthiest man in the settlement. Sophia Thomas, a daughter of the late governor Thomas Thomas, brought to her husband, the Wesleyan missionary William Mason, a legacy of £1,000 upon their marriage in 1843, but she had also spent most of her childhood under the care of the missionaries at Red River, proving herself an apt pupil and "a good pious girl".⁹⁶

The growing exclusiveness of the elite of fur trade society led to increasing racial tension in Red River. While a select group of carefully raised mixed-blood girls continued to be absorbed into the upper white strata, their very brothers were increasingly becoming the victims of a racial prejudice which prevented their rising to the upper ranks

⁹⁴P.A.C., Charles McKenzie to Hector McKenzie, 12 Sept. 1851, Charles McKenzie Papers: "Chief Factors are in the way of portioning their daughters very high...and they take care to monopolize all the most promising young men for Sons in law". See also Jas. Hargrave to Letitia Mactavish, 24 July 1838, Hargrave Corres., vol. 22, L.B. 13.

⁹⁵Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 229; Mitchell, "A Red River Gossip", p. 9.

⁹⁶MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 177; University of Western Ontario Arch., James Evans to Ephriam Evans, 3 July 1843, James Evans Papers.

of the Company service.⁹⁷ Open resentment flared especially when it was intimated to young English half-breeds that they did not form part of "the first rank of society" and therefore could not expect to be considered suitable husbands for their cultivated female counterparts. In 1834, William Hallett, whose father had been a Hudson's Bay officer, was much aggrieved when the Governor of Assiniboia rejected his suit for a daughter of Chief Factor Allan McDonell, in favour of that of the son of a Selkirk settler. The girl herself evidently preferred Hallett who came near to raising the whole of the half-breed population of the settlement in an attempt to rescue his sweetheart. While the intended foray came to naught and Sophia was duly married to the Scottish John Livingstone, the feelings of discrimination engendered were to have long-term repercussions.⁹⁸

If the mixed-blood woman was to be admitted to the upper echelon of fur trade society, it should be emphasized that the Indian woman was now regarded as a completely unsuitable choice for an officer's wife. The clerk James Hargrave

⁹⁷ For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Jennifer Brown, "'Halfbreed': the Entrenchment of a Racial Category in the Canadian Northwest Fur Trade", Paper presented to Central States Anthropological Society Meetings, St. Louis, Spring 1973.

⁹⁸ A. Ross, Red River Settlement, pp. 238-39; P.A.B.C., Thomas Simpson to D. Ross, 7 Dec. 1834, Ross Corres. Si 5; see also G. Simpson to A. Colville, 31 May 1824, Selkirk Papers, HBC Copy 160 (a), f. 139: Simpson comments that the best looking half-breed girls are picked up by the whites, a fact which produces everlasting jealousies.

declared that "a young Gentⁿ from Britain would as soon think of matching himself with the contemporary of his grandmother as with a pure Squaw."⁹⁹ He was therefore particularly disconcerted when in 1837 former Nor'Wester Richard Grant decided to continue in the old ways and entered into a liason à la façon du pays with an Indian woman at Oxford House. Hargrave, who considered the woman to be of notorious character, applied considerable pressure to make Grant separate from her and was much relieved when the erring fellow was posted to the Columbia in 1842:

...for his own sake I am truly glad he is gone, for his ideas about love and the sex were too primitive to suit the atmosphere of the world as it is now about Oxford and Norway House. 100

If new standards of morality were being introduced into Rupert's Land, it was not without painful repercussions in fur trade society. Native women, in particular, were to be confused and even victimized by the changing social and moral attitudes. A particular concern of the schools in Red River was to inculcate young females with the proper civilized

⁹⁹P.A.C., Hargrave to Letitia, 24 July 1838, vol. 22, L.B. 13.

¹⁰⁰P.A.C., Hargrave to Geo. Barnston, 1 Dec. 1842, Hargrave Corres., vol. 23, L.B. 19. Richard Grant had had a previous country wife, Marianne Berland, who died in 1833 (Hargrave Corres., vol. 4, p. 878). Grant's Oxford House wife was married off to a Company servant called Stater (Hargrave Corres., vol. 7, p. 1748). A few years after he moved to the Columbia, Grant wed Helen McDonald, the widow of William Kittson (Somerset House, Eng., Will of Helen Grant, 15 July 1863, 1864 (vol. 2), f. 96).

concepts of feminine virtue, especially chastity, it having been lamented that this was a point to which native women gave little heed.¹⁰¹ The obsessive concern for this subject was revealed by an unfortunate incident which threatened to derange the Jones' plans for the girls' school. In the summer of 1832, the parson and his wife were distraught to discover that one of their charges, a daughter of Chief Trader Roderick McKenzie, Jr., was pregnant and that it was she who had seduced the young Indian responsible. It was further revealed that this girl, "a poor silly stupid creature", had herself been debauched during her journey to the colony a few years before.¹⁰² Fear was expressed that the reputation of the school would be damaged by this occurrence, but Governor Simpson did his best to assure his fellow officers that the Joneses were in no way guilty of neglect, and the girl was quietly married off.¹⁰³ Though the scandal was allowed to pass, one father Chief Trader Donald Ross emphasized that it pointed up the pressing need for vigilance:

...in matters touching the fame of the female sex in particular, a parent has not only his own feelings, but the prejudices and censures

¹⁰¹Franklin, Narrative of a Journey, 1819-1822, pp. 85-86.

¹⁰²P.A.C., G. Simpson to Hargrave, 20 Dec. 1832, Hargrave Corres., vol. 4, f. 475; P.A.B.C., Simpson to D. Ross, 20 Dec. 1832, Ross Corres. La 5(1).

¹⁰³H.B.C.A., E.4/lb, f. 235: Annabella McKenzie married to John Clarke Spence in Red River on 11 Sept. 1832 by Rev. Jones.

of the multitude to consult--how unreasonable or ill founded so ever these may prove to be. 104

While strict standards of female purity were now to be demanded of women in a society which had previously been lenient about such matters, the corresponding appearance of what might be called the "Victorian double-standard" meant that no such strictures were applied to the men.¹⁰⁵ In this respect, the attack on "the custom of the country" was to place native women in a particularly vulnerable position. According to old fur trade custom, if a man formed a liason with a woman she was considered to be his wife, entitled to the recognition and support that a marital relationship implied. Now, with the insistence of the missionary that only a church marriage had validity, the woman taken à la façon du pays was reduced to the status of mistress--someone with whom to gratify one's passions but never actually marry. Fur trade mores were thus in a state of flux after the coming of the missionaries. The socializing process which had conditioned incoming whites to accept the "custom of the country" was no longer operative as can be discerned from the attitude adopted toward native women by some of the officers whose arrival in Rupert's Land roughly coincided with that of the missionaries.

¹⁰⁴P.A.B.C., D. Ross to Rev. Jones, 4 Jan. 1833, Ross Corres. R736.6.

¹⁰⁵For a general overview of the Victorian attitudes toward sex, see Ronald Pearsall, The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality (London, 1971).

The swash-buckling Governor William Williams, who was appointed to superintend the affairs of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1818, formed a liason with Sally, a daughter of old Peter Fidler, soon after his arrival in the Indian Country. While Sally herself and fur trade society at large undoubtedly considered that she was Williams' wife, in his view she was only a pleasurable mistress for he already had a wife in England. Two children were born to Sally, but Williams abruptly severed his connection with his native dependents when he was transferred to the Southern Department and his white wife came out to join him in 1822.¹⁰⁶

Significantly, Williams' successor, Governor George Simpson became the classic practitioner of this new "moral" tone. He showed a distinct lack of sympathy for the marital concerns of his associates because he did not recognize "the custom of the country". To him, Chief Factor John Clarke's half-breed wife Sapphira Spence was merely "an Indian mistress", but to most traders, she was "Madame Clarke", having been ceremoniously wed à la façon du pays.¹⁰⁷ This conflict of

¹⁰⁶H.B.C.A., Moose Fort Journal, 14 Aug. 1822, B.135/a/125, f. 15. Williams initially appears to have intended to make some provision for Sally because he arranged for Gov. Simpson to pay her fifteen pounds per annum (D.3/3, f. 21). In 1828, however, after Williams' return to England, Sally appealed to him to provide some assistance for their children which he refused to do (A.5/8, f. 314, 321). In that year, Sally Fidler also seems to have married James Hallett, a half-breed son of former H.B.C. officer Henry Hallett (C.M.S.A., Marriage register, CC1/018).

¹⁰⁷Rich, Simpson's Athabaska Journal, pp. 23-24.

attitude was clearly revealed in Simpson's liason with Betsey Sinclair, the daughter of a former Hudson's Bay officer, formed sometime during his first year in Rupert's Land. It would not be surprising if Betsey was flattered at being chosen as the wife of so distinguished a personage, but that Simpson did not consider her as such is evident. Although he took Betsey to York Factory in the fall of 1821, he had decided to be rid of her and directed his friend Chief Factor J.G. McTavish to send his "article" to her brother-in-law Thomas Bunn at Rock Depot after he embarked on an inland tour.¹⁰⁸ Many of Simpson's contemporaries considered Betsey to be his wife, however, for in a York Fort journal on 10 February 1822 it was recorded that "Mrs Simpson was delivered of a daughter."¹⁰⁹ Although the father was probably present when this child was christened Maria by Reverend West in August, he refused to acknowledge any marital responsibility.

¹⁰⁸H.B.C.A., Geo. Simpson to J.G. McTavish, 14 Dec. 1821, 25 Jan. 1822, 4 June 1822, B.239/c/1, fos. 60, 71, 83.

¹⁰⁹H.B.C.A., York Fort Journal, B.239/a/130, f. 38d. This is a curious entry for it has been crossed out by someone at a later date. In his biography of Simpson, (p. 159), A.S. Morton makes several incorrect statements about this child Maria. She was not born in October 1821 for Morton derived this date from a letter which referred to another natural daughter called Maria who was born to Simpson in Britain before he came to Rupert's Land. Nor is Margaret Taylor the mother of the mixed-blood Maria. This is conclusively proved in a letter from Robert Miles to Ed. Ermatinger dated 8 Aug. 1839 (HBC Copy No. 23, pp. 304-05) which tells of Betsey Sinclair's grief on learning that her first daughter Maria had been drowned at the Dalles on the Columbia River in the fall of 1838.

The proposal to place Betsey under the care of Thomas Bunn had been abandoned, but the Governor again left it to McTavish to settle the matter expeditiously as he set off on another extensive tour:

My Family concerns I leave entirely to your kind management, if you can dispose of the Lady it will be satisfactory as she is an unnecessary & expensive appendage, I see no fun in keeping a Woman without enjoying her charms which my present rambling Life does not enable me to do.... 110

Although Simpson gained a rather exaggerated reputation for having a woman at every post,¹¹¹ he certainly freely indulged his inclination. His behaviour, however, was not typical of officers who had had long experience in the fur trade. While it is true that the Governor's relationship in the late 1820's with Margaret Taylor did somewhat conform to the pattern of a country marriage,¹¹² it seems that he also maintained another mistress at his headquarters at Lachine. His cousin Aemileus Simpson chided him in 1828,

¹¹⁰H.B.C.A., Simpson to McTavish, 12 Nov. 1822, B.239/c/1, f. 92. Fortunately, Betsey was soon to find a true husband in the clerk Robert Miles (B.235/c/1, fos. 3d-4). She proved herself an admirable wife and mother and I have found no evidence to support the suggestion of two authors, Geneva Lent and Dennis Bayley, that she was a woman of loose character.

¹¹¹"Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", p. 288.

¹¹²For the story of Margaret Taylor, see Chapter VI.

"I do not think it improves the arrangements of your domestic economy to have a mistress attached to your Establishment-- rather have her Elsewhere."¹¹³

In his instruction to McTavish for the disposal of Betsey, Simpson expressed some concern that she should not become "a general accommodation shop to all the young bucks at the Factory."¹¹⁴ This should be regarded not as a reflection on Betsey's character, but rather as a recognition of the liberties which young men felt free to take with an unprotected female. Indeed, Simpson worried about the safety of his own daughter Maria as she became of marriageable age. When Maria was sent to Norway House in 1838, he asked Donald Ross to be on the lookout for a respectable husband for her and if none could be found to arrange for the girl to be settled some place off the main voyageur route as he did not wish "to keep her conspicuous on the communication."¹¹⁵ Old Factor Rowand

¹¹³H.B.C.A., Amileus Simpson to Geo. Simpson, 20 March 1828, D.5/3, pp. 168-169. The identity of this woman is not known but she may have been Mary Keith, a daughter of Chief Factor James Keith, and possibly the mother of James Keith Simpson. It does not seem likely that this child's mother was the country wife of James Keith as Margaret MacLeod speculated (Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 205n), but Keith certainly had an interest in the boy; in his will of 1836 he bequeathed him the sum of five pounds to buy books (A.36/8, f. 58). If James Keith Simpson was born in 1823 as MacLeod suggests it is strange that Keith does not mention him in an earlier will of 1826. It is perhaps also significant that Simpson helped to arrange the betrothal of Mary Keith to his servant Thomas Taylor in the spring of 1830 (P.A.O., Estate Files of James Keith).

¹¹⁴H.B.C.A., B.239/c/1, f. 92.

¹¹⁵P.A.B.C., G. Simpson to D. Ross, Feb. 1838, Ross Corres. La 5.

concurred that Norway House was no fit place for young ladies "housed as they were so close to young Batchelors". Indeed Maria soon did attract the rapt admiration of a young English botanist Robert Wallace on his way to the Columbia. Although there was no time to consult Maria's father, Rowand and the other officers decided that the most respectable course would be to unite the young lovers à la façon du pays.¹¹⁶

There is evidence that the great emphasis put on the need for chastity at the schools in Red River caused young mixed-blood girls emotional distress, for in reality they could easily be taken advantage of. When young Margaret Sinclair was awaiting an intended husband at York Factory in the summer of 1845, she was heard talking in her sleep about having been raped. Her rather graphic description ended with the observation that it was "a common thing"--some of her friends and even her sister had experienced a similar misfortune.¹¹⁷ Young clerks such as James Hargrave and Thomas Simpson apparently did not consider it inconsistent to indulge in "the fascinations of dark-eyed beauty" while studiously avoiding any marital attachment. Men after all

¹¹⁶ Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 274. Maria and her husband were to enjoy only a brief honeymoon for both were drowned in a serious brigade accident at the Dalles of the Columbia in the fall of 1838, see J.A. Stevenson, "Disaster at the Dalles", The Beaver, Sept. 1942, pp. 19-21.

¹¹⁷ MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 219. Margaret was a daughter of William Sinclair, Jr. and his wife Mary McKay. In 1848, she was to marry Major Darling at Norway House who took her to England.

were entitled to such pleasures; the secret was to be discreet.¹¹⁸ Such an attitude tended to reduce native women to the status of prostitutes, and the clergy seems to have been prepared to wink at such arrangements. Parson Beaver declared that in order to introduce a degree of respectability into Fort Vancouver all "loose females", by which he meant women who had not been married by church rite, should be barred from the fort. They might, however, be maintained outside the walls where the men could visit them on the sly to at least conform with the "outward decorum" which men in civilized countries observed in relation to their mistresses.¹¹⁹ Such a plan which would have completely subverted the existing state of morality provoked an angry rebuttal from Chief Trader Douglas. A wife according to "the custom of the country" bore no resemblance to a prostitute in European society:

The woman who is not sensible of violating [any] law, who lives chastely with the husband of her choice, in a state approved by friends and sanctioned by immemorial custom, which she believes strictly honorable, forms a perfect contrast to the degraded creature who has sacrificed the great principle

¹¹⁸P.A.C., Thomas Simpson to Hargrave, 27 Jan. 1839, Hargrave Corres., vol. 7, p. 1574. Hargrave who stoutly maintained that he was the epitome of the abstemious bachelor revealed in a private letter to a servant at York that he had been "obliged" by Indian women at the fort (Hargrave to John Rendall, 20 April 1837, vol. 22, L.B. 12). Indeed, prostitution seems to have been a serious problem at York, see Nichol Finlayson to Hargrave, 10 Feb. 1841, vol. 8, pp. 1925-26.

¹¹⁹Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, p. 57.

which from infancy she is taught to revere as the ground work of female virtue; who lives a disgrace to friends, and an outcast from society. 120

Nevertheless, women and not men were to be held increasingly responsible for the perpetuation of immorality in Rupert's Land. In this, Governor Simpson adopted a hypocritical stance; he apparently had two codes of behaviour, one for the Indian Country at large and one for the "civilized" colony of Red River. While playing the exemplary bachelor at Fort Garry during the winter of 1823-24, he deeply wounded the feelings of Captain Matthey, a leader of the de Meuron settlers, by refusing to allow him to introduce his wife to Mrs. Pelly, the wife of the new governor of the colony. Matthey's woman was not suitable society for an English lady, declared Simpson, because, not only was her past reputedly shady, but she was not a legal wife, having been taken à la façon du pays.¹²¹ Reverend Beaver proposed to punish the women directly for the sinful state of affairs at Fort Vancouver by denying them rations and medical attention to

¹²⁰Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, pp. 147-48.

¹²¹H.B.C.A., Simpson to McTavish, 7 Jan. 1824, B.239/c/1, f. 127. Matthey's country wife seems to have been a half-breed woman whom he wed in 1819. Although he evidently did his duty by her in Red River and during his absences in Switzerland recruiting settlers, ultimately, Matthey attempted to betray this woman in a most cruel manner. Having decided to return to Europe in 1824, he led his wife to believe that she was to accompany him. Then, upon embarkation at York, he tried to wrest their children from her and leave her behind. None of the onlookers, who were outraged by this unfeeling and deceptive action, would assist him so Matthey finally had to take his

bring them to a sense of their shame.¹²² In Red River, wives who could now claim "benefit of clergy" were taught to look upon those who could not as most debased creatures. This hypocrisy was carried to its height by the schoolmaster John Macallum, who in his zeal for social propriety forbade his pupils to have any contact with their mothers if they had been guilty of "living in sin" with their husbands. One tragic victim of this situation was the destitute Indian wife of a trader Kenneth McKenzie who had gone off to join the American Fur Company. She never saw her two daughters, who had been placed in the Academy, except when they, at risk of severe punishment, would sneak out to visit their mother who took to hiding nearby. At least one observer, however, was moved to point out the iniquity of Macallum's attitude:

This may be all very right, but it is fearfully cruel for the poor unfortunate mothers did not know that there was any distinction & it is only within the last few years that anyone was so married. Of course had all the fathers refused, every one woman in the country wd have been no better than those that are represented to their own children as discreditable. 123

Native women, it was reputed, were also inclined to infidelity in marriage. It angered Simpson to discover that

121 (continued) wife along. (H.B.C.A., Mr. Gale to Lady Selkirk, 30 October 1819, Selkirk Papers, Copy No. 159, p. 957; P.A.C., F. Matthey to Gov. Bulger, 25 March and 14 May 1822, Bulger Papers, vol. 2, pp. 71-72, 102; G. Barnston to Hargrave, 14 Nov. 1824, Hargrave Corres., vol. 1, p. 41).

¹²²Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, p. 141.

¹²³MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 177-78.

a number of his officers frequently neglected their duty in their jealous attempts to guard against "certain innocent indiscretions which these frail brown ones are so apt to indulge in."¹²⁴ In view of the fact, however, that Indian custom allowed women to terminate unhappy relationships and that the traders themselves had exploited Indian marital attitudes to suit their own temporary needs, it is not surprising that native women retained confused notions about the permanency of the marriage bond. Furthermore, when cases of unfaithfulness did occur, they were usually the result of the difficult circumstances occasioned by the peculiarities of fur trade life.

While there are very few specific instances of a country wife actually "divorcing" her husband, Josette, the métis wife of Chief Trader Cuthbert Cumming, grew so tired of her husband's prolonged absence that she eventually gave her hand to another. When posted to the Southern Department in 1826, Cumming had left his wife and seven children in Red River. He certainly intended to return to them and in the meantime conscientiously provided for his family's wants and the education of his children. Nearly a decade later, however, Cumming had still not received a northern posting, and the "old Duchess", as she was nicknamed, gave up all hope of a reunion. Cumming received the news in the summer of 1835

¹²⁴Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, pp. 58, 131-32. See also, Jessett, Beaver's Reports and Letters, pp. 119-120.

that "your old dame last winter to comfort herself for your absence got buckled to a strapping half-breed by way of a pis-aller."¹²⁵

The frequent separations between husbands and wives caused by the traders' absence with the brigades and the problems involved in transporting families left the women in a vulnerable position.¹²⁶ Sometime in the 1820's, Clerk Alexander Fisher took as a wife à la façon du pays a métis girl Angelique, who was a step-daughter of the engagé Antoine Savard. In 1829, Fisher was posted to New Caledonia and during the next decade he seems to have enjoyed a happy marital relationship which saw the birth of five children.¹²⁷ Then in 1841, much to Fisher's chagrin, he received a last minute posting to Fort Good Hope, and owing to the lateness of the season, he had to leave his wife and two youngest children (the rest being at school in the colony) to winter at Fort Chipewyan.¹²⁸ For Madame Fisher, that winter was to be a tragic and confused one. Shortly after her husband's departure,

¹²⁵P.A.C., Hargrave to C. Cumming, 6 Aug. 1835, Hargrave Corres., vol. 22, L.B. 11. Cumming's family situation can be traced in detail in his long-standing correspondence with Hargrave. In 1842, Cumming married Jane, the youngest daughter of Chief Trader Thomas McMurray (D.5/7, fos. 112d, 205d).

¹²⁶Cox, Columbia River, pp. 360-61.

¹²⁷H.B.C.A., Will of Antoine Savard, 30 Nov. 1832, A.36/12. A.A.S.B., Alexander Fisher to Henry Fisher, 29 Dec. 1840 (Microfilm, Reel 1742, pp. 23-26).

¹²⁸H.B.C.A., J.L. Lewes to G. Simpson, 26 Nov. 1841, D.5/6, f. 310; A.A.S.B., Alex. Fisher to Henry Fisher, 10 Jan. 1842, Reel 1744, pp. 4-6.

her youngest daughter Jane died. Then during the winter, the Wesleyan missionary James Evans visited the fort in part of his campaign to spread the "true" religion. He tried to impress upon the young woman the necessity of Christian marriage and baptised her on the condition that she would never more sleep with her husband until he promised that they would have the Christian rite performed at the first possible opportunity.¹²⁹ Evans' preachings seem to have made little impact on the untutored mind of Fisher's wife, but it was likely her loneliness which made her succumb to the attentions of the young postmaster William McMurray, a son of Chief Trader Thomas McMurray. Thus poor Angelique arrived to join her husband at Fort Good Hope in the summer of 1842 six months pregnant! Fisher was beside himself; he declared that his disgraced wife should have been sent to her mother at Lesser Slave Lake so he would have been spared the indignity of having to live the season with her. Writing to Simpson of his assailed and afflicted feelings, he vowed vengeance on McMurray:

...it appears that no Gentleman that is sent on Duty to a far distant Post, can leave his Family at any of our Establishments in safety on account of such spurious scamps, surely there ought to be some severe public example made, or it is futile that Missionaries come amongst us. 130

¹²⁹H.B.C.A., Alex. Fisher to G. Simpson, 15 Sept. 1842, D.5/7, fos. 261-61d and enclosure James Evans to Alex. Fisher, 1 March 1842, f. 263.

¹³⁰Ibid.

But he could not forgive Angelique either whom he summarily left on the beach at Fort Chipewyan in the summer of 1843 while he took his children out to Montreal. Sympathy was expressed for Fisher's troubles, and his discarding of his wife was considered appropriate. As Hargrave lamented, "If there is hell on this earth to a man it must be the bitter sting of a wife's infidelity."¹³¹

Indeed, society tended to frown on any husband who was willing to forgive a wife's faux pas. In 1822 the clerk Charles Ross had taken as a country wife Isabella Mainville, a daughter of a French-Canadian and an Ojibway woman. A few years later after Ross had been transferred to New Caledonia, he was mortified to discover that his wife had become involved in an illicit affair, probably during one of his absences. At first the husband resolved on separation, but his genuine love for Isabella moved him to take her back. A friend, writing of this affair, was doubtful about this change of heart: "Poor Ross had again taken back his Wife. I wish this may not lessen him in Your esteem."¹³² After this, however, Isabella proved a faithful and devoted wife. In 1838, the couple received the blessing of the church and their numerous children were baptised. Some years later, Ross wrote affectionately of Isabella to his sister:

¹³¹H.B.C.A., Hargrave to J.L. Lewes, 1 April 1843, Hargrave Corres., v. 23, L.B. 19; Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p.453.

¹³²H.B.C.A., John Tod to Ed. Ermatinger, 14 Feb. 1829, Ermatinger Corres., Copy No. 21, p. 9.

I have as yet said nothing about my wife, when you will probably infer that I am rather ashamed of her--in this, however, you would be wrong. She is not indeed exactly fitted to shine at the head of a nobleman's table, but she suits the sphere she has to move in better than any such toy...as to beauty [she is] quite as comely as her husband. 133

The chequered marital career of officer Francis Ermatinger gives ample proofs of the double standard of morality. In his youth, Ermatinger appears to have been more of a rake than usual. In the 1820's when at Fort Severn, he formed a liason with an Indian woman by whom he had a daughter.¹³⁴ Then after his posting to the Kamloops area of the Columbia district, he made an alliance with a Shushwap woman whom he dubbed "Cleopatra". His treatment of her was evidently not very praiseworthy and even after she presented him with a son he was apparently thinking of getting rid of her.¹³⁵ But when the woman herself ran away with an Indian in the spring of 1830, Ermatinger, in a jealous rage, created a scandal by instructing one of the Company's servants to punish the offending paramour by cutting off his ear.¹³⁶ This

¹³³P.A.B.C., "Isabella Ross", Charles Ross Papers.

¹³⁴Ermatinger made some provision for this daughter who married a servant David Bird in 1841 (B.198/z/1, fos. 52, 142).

¹³⁵P.A.C., F. Ermatinger to John McLeod, 14 March 1829, McLeod Papers, p. 237.

¹³⁶H.B.C.A., J. McLoughlin to G. Simpson, 16 March 1831, D.4/125, f. 78; Simpson's Character Book, A.34/2, fos. 25d-26.

impolitic act resulted in Clerk Ermatinger being transferred to Fort Vancouver, leaving behind the unhappy "Cleopatra". His friends hoped he would now settle down and make a respectable match which would help to advance his career. This advice was apparently taken to heart for Ermatinger is next to be found courting Maria, the daughter of Chief Factor McLoughlin himself.¹³⁷ Although the father rejected his suit, Ermatinger was eventually to be linked to the McLoughlin family; in 1841, as a newly-commissioned chief trader, he was given permission to marry Catharine Sinclair, a granddaughter of Mrs. McLoughlin. The marriage was solemnized on August 10 at Fort George by the Methodist missionary J.H. Frost.¹³⁸

Although Catharine was young enough to be Ermatinger's daughter, the match was considered an advantageous one, the bride being described as a fine young woman who would be a credit to her husband even in the civilized world.¹³⁹ A daughter named Frances Maria was born in June 1843, who was her father's pride and joy. In 1846, Ermatinger went on furlough to England, leaving his wife and child with her grandparents, but to his great dismay he was not allowed to

¹³⁷P.A.B.C., Archibald McDonald to Ed. Ermatinger, 20 Feb. 1831 and 1 April 1836, Ermatinger Corres.

¹³⁸Elliott, "Marguerite McLoughlin", p. 338. Catharine was a daughter of William Sinclair, Jr. and Marguerite's daughter Mary McKay.

¹³⁹H.B.C.A., J. McLoughlin to Ed. Ermatinger, 1 Feb. 1843, Ermatinger Corres., Copy No. 23, p. 249.

go back to the Columbia on his return but was posted to Fort Chipewyan. The earliest he could have hoped to see his family was in the summer of 1848, but the reunion was further postponed by his wife's ill health. Forced to remain the summer at Fort Colvile, Mrs. Ermatinger travelled over the mountains with John Lee Lewes' brigade and had to winter at Fort Edmonton.¹⁴⁰ Ermatinger's joy at being united with his family at Norway House in the summer of 1849 soon turned to despair when he discovered that his wife was pregnant. She had been led astray during the winter by young Alexander Christie Jr., the well-educated son of one of the most respected chief factors. Shortly after the birth of the child in December, Ermatinger poured out his grief to his friend Hargrave:

I am, I believe, a doomed man. My two last winters, in this quarter, were wretched by solitary but I had hope and employed myself in getting every thing snug about me and succeeded in doing so. Poor reward, I have received for all my care and anxiety. My friend, if ever a woman had a husband in this country, who indulged her every wish and spared no expense to raise her ideas above the common herd, the one with me had but I cannot dwell upon my shame. 141

He demanded that Christie be dismissed from the service, but his own resentment toward his wife seems to have abated.

¹⁴⁰P.A.B.C., John Work to Ed. Ermatinger, 23 Nov. 1847, Ermatinger Corres.; P.A.C., J.L. Lewes to Hargrave, 28 Dec. 1848, Hargrave Corres., vol. 13, p. 3971.

¹⁴¹P.A.C., F. Ermatinger to Hargrave, 22 Dec. 1849, Hargrave Corres., vol. 14, p. 4288. The baby was apparently left with a nurse at Fort Chipewyan and died in infancy.

Tongues wagged about the cordiality which existed between man and wife when the Ermatingers came out to Norway House in the summer, although they observed the formality of occupying separate rooms.¹⁴² Ermatinger did leave his wife with her father at Rainy Lake the following year while he proceeded with their daughter to St. Thomas where his brother lived, but to everyone's surprise he sent for Catharine to join him in the summer of 1851.¹⁴³ Their second reunion did not actually take place till 1852; Ermatinger retired the following year and the couple appear to have lived amicably until his death in 1858. By his will, Ermatinger left all his property to his daughter and his "beloved Wife Catharine".¹⁴⁴ It appears, however, that Mrs. Ermatinger had barely been tolerated by her husband's relatives, and after his death, life in Upper Canada became so unbearable for her that she returned to Rupert's Land. She died at Red River in November 1876.¹⁴⁵

Perhaps no story more poignantly illustrates the vicissitudes to which a young mixed-blood girl could be subject than that of Mary Taylor. Mary was one of the eight children of the

¹⁴²MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 254; H.B.C.A., Don. Ross to Geo. Simpson, 14 Aug. 1850, D.5/28, f. 425.

¹⁴³H.B.C.A., D. Ross to Simpson, 31 July 1851 and Peter McKenzie to Simpson, 30 Aug. 1851, D.5/31, fos. 198, 365.

¹⁴⁴Somerset House, Eng., Will of Francis Ermatinger, 13 May 1858, 1859 (vol. 9), f. 414.

¹⁴⁵H.B.C.A., Robert Miles to Ed. Ermatinger, 18 May 1859, Ermatinger Corres., Copy No. 23, p. 317; Elliott, "Margeurite McLoughlin", p. 340.

York sloopmaster George Taylor and an Indian woman named Jane.¹⁴⁶ Although Taylor left his wife and most of his children in the Indian Country when he retired to England in 1815, the father had apparently taken pains to introduce his family to "civilized" ways. Widow Taylor, as she was called, seems to have been widely respected, and her daughters grew up to possess those qualities considered admirable in a wife. Both Mary and her sister Margaret were cleanly, industrious and beautiful.¹⁴⁷ It was to be Margaret's misfortune to attract the roving eye of Governor Simpson, but Mary too was to be unlucky in love. She was initially betrothed to a son of J.P. Pruden, but he decided to marry another in 1826. Mary then apparently had hoped that Clerk James Hargrave would take her to wife, but that gentleman, being determined to avoid any romantic entanglements during his stay in Rupert's Land, was forced to inform Mary through an intermediary that his interest in her did not extend to marriage. Hargrave did confide to Chief Trader John McLeod, however, that had he been thus inclined: "I have scarcely see a young woman of her Caste I should have preferred before her."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶H.B.C.A., Simpson to London Committee, 1 April 1841, D.4/113, f. 146-146d.

¹⁴⁷H.B.C.A., John Stuart to G. Simpson, 1 Feb. 1830, B.4/b/1, fos. 2d-3.

¹⁴⁸P.A.C., J. Hargrave to John McLeod, 12 July 1827 and 5 Dec. 1826, Hargrave Papers, vol. 21, L.B. 1 and 2.

Thus, Mary was still single when the aging Chief Factor John Stuart cast up at Norway House in the summer of 1827, apparently now free of any previous connections.¹⁴⁹ John McLeod appears to have been instrumental in persuading Mary to accept Stuart, and the couple were wed à la façon du pays on 15 August.¹⁵⁰ Although the disparity in their ages did not augur well, Stuart was initially most happy with his young bride: "...she is uncommonly attentive to me...as caressing and anxious to please as if I was a young man."¹⁵¹ Even after Stuart was banished to the distant post of Fort Simpson on the Mackenzie River in 1832, the relationship continued harmoniously until the arrival the following year of a swashbuckling postmaster named François Noel Annance, an Abenaki half-breed of good education. Within a short time, Mary was to be in the middle of an unhappy triangle, although her true feelings for Annance are difficult to determine.

From his clandestine correspondence with Mary (who could both read and write), it appears that Annance considered himself the gallant cavalier, determined to rescue his beloved

¹⁴⁹ During his posting at Carlton House from 1824-1826, Stuart had had a country wife called Catherine La Vallé by whom he had two sons. It is possible she may have died (P.R.O., Will of John Stuart, 6 Aug. 1832, Prob. 11/2138, f. 683).

¹⁵⁰ P.A.C., Hargrave to McLeod, 8 Sept. 1827, Hargrave Corres., vol. 21, L.B. 2; H.B.C.A., Fort Simpson Journal, 19 Feb. 1834, John Stuart Papers, E.24/5.

¹⁵¹ H.B.C.A., Stuart to Simpson, 1 Feb. 1830, B.4/b/1, f. 3.

from the clutches of a lecherous and abusive old man. In accordance with Indian custom, he urged Mary that it was her right to leave Stuart if she wished:

A woman may remain with a man as long as she finds herself happy--but the moment she finds herself unhappy she can go away if she is not a Slave. 152

Mary, however, continually failed to come to an open break with her husband who remained oblivious of the affair until early February. On the night of February 7 just prior to the Stuarts' departure for a visit to Fort Liard, Annance persuaded Mary to come to his room; he would protect her and they would make a stand against Stuart once and for all.¹⁵³ But this plan collapsed for Mary obediently obeyed her husband's command to return to her own quarters when Stuart discovered her with Annance, and her paramour's blustering protests were soon quelled.¹⁵⁴ Only as a result of Mary's own startling confession on the way to Fort Liard did Stuart learn the extent of her involvement with Annance whom he had trustingly

¹⁵²H.B.C.A., Fort Simpson Journal, B.200/a/15, f. 51-51d. A series of notes from Annance to Mary were transcribed at the back of this journal as part of Stuart's evidence against Annance.

¹⁵³Ibid., f. 52-52d.

¹⁵⁴H.B.C.A., Fort Simpson Journal, 19 Feb. 1834, E.24/5. Annance's last note to Mary written after this scene has all the pathos of a tragic lover:

My dearest love, how the fatal die is cast and we part for ever....If my heart bleeds I only blame myself for having loved an object which is not for me...farewell--may you enjoy the happiness which you have refused me (B.200/a/15, f. 52d).

left in charge of the post. According to Mary, Annance had actually raped her some months before and she had then been forced to pretend some attachment for him owing to his threats of violence and blackmail.¹⁵⁵ Old Stuart was initially mortified beyond measure; his admirable Mary was now a fallen woman, "a disgrace to her sex." Though he accepted that she had been deluded and victimized by Annance, he declared that he could not continue "to love her whom I know to be unworthy of my Esteem....If she continued to wear the mask of virtue so long it was because no one thought it worth while to tempt her."¹⁵⁶

Stuart left Mary at Fort Liard while he returned to deal with Annance. The two men might indeed have come to fatal blows had they not been restrained. Both attempted to bring charges against each other before the annual meeting of Council, but the Company declined to intervene in their private feud which Simpson declared "the most disgusting, laughable & ridiculous" affair he had ever heard of.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, in spite of the demands of social propriety, Stuart became

¹⁵⁵Fort Simpson Journal, E.24/5. Stuart gave a detailed account of the whole affair in his own hand and kept this journal in his possession.

¹⁵⁶P.A.C., J. Stuart to J. McLeod, 2 March 1834, McLeod Corres, p. 356-57.

¹⁵⁷H.B.C.A., Simpson to J.G. McTavish, 9 Aug. 1834, B.135/c/2, f. 130. Annance, however, was persuaded to resign from the service. See also P.A.C., Hargrave to McTavish, 5 Aug. 1834, Hargrave Corres., vol. 22, L.B. 9.

increasingly reluctant to sever his relationship with Mary completely. When the couple came out with the Mackenzie River brigade in 1834, they were reported "more loving than ever", and Stuart returned to Fort Simpson for another season.¹⁵⁸ Upon his retirement to Britain in the fall of 1835, Stuart sent Mary to her relations in Red River, but he continued to provide for her and confessed to Hargrave: "Although the misconduct of Mary is the cause of her being now distant from me, she has more amiable qualities than any other woman I have known in the Indian Country."¹⁵⁹ Stuart had left Mary with the understanding that she was free to remarry, provided it be to a white man, but then in the fall of 1836, he wrote asking her to come to England apparently with the promise of a church marriage.

Whatever her expectations or fears as to what lay ahead, Mary could hardly have anticipated the bitter disappointment in store for her as she sailed for England in 1837. Stuart had apparently determined to spend the winter in London and as it became increasingly evident that Mary was ill-equipped to shine in the society to which he aspired, the old man decided to go back on his promise. Mary herself, however, insisted that she would not remain with Stuart in England

¹⁵⁸ P.A.C., Hargrave to J.G. McTavish, 1 Dec. 1834, Hargrave Corres., vol. 22, L.B. 10.

¹⁵⁹ P.A.C., J. Stuart to Hargrave, 29 April 1836, Hargrave Corres., vol. 6, p. 1216.

unless they were properly married with the result that the couple eventually parted for good in June of 1838.¹⁶⁰ In the opinion of some of Stuart's contemporaries, the young mixed-blood woman had been subjected to unjustifiable humiliation. Even the straight-laced Hargrave declared:

I cannot help admiring the spirit of my old friend Mary in her resolution of separating herself from Old Aesop [Stuart] when she found he boggled at the Noose Matrimonial. In that he was a fool--for with all her slips aside in this land--she was every way worthy of having this justice done her by him. 161

As a means of recompense Stuart had, however, settled £350 on Mary and paid for her outfitting and passage back to Rupert's Land.¹⁶² Arriving by the annual ship at York Factory in 1839, Mary brought a sympathetic letter from the Governor himself who asked Hargrave, then in charge, to see that her wants were provided for.¹⁶³ Although Mary was soon comfortably settled with the family of Nichol Finlayson, it pained her friends to see how she had changed, being now given to "fits of depression & despondency."¹⁶⁴ Mary moved with

¹⁶⁰P.A.C., Nichol Finlayson to Hargrave, 14 June 1838, Hargrave Corres., vol. 7, p. 1447; MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 20-21.

¹⁶¹P.A.C., Hargrave to Nichol Finlayson, 10 Dec. 1838, Hargrave Corres., vol. 23, L.B. 14.

¹⁶²Ibid., Duncan Finlayson to Hargrave, 31 May 1838, vol. 7, p. 1442.

¹⁶³Ibid., Governor Simpson to Hargrave, 20 March 1839, vol. 7, p. 1615.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., Hargrave to G. Simpson, 5 Sept. 1839, vol. 23, L.B. 15.

the Finlaysons to her old home Fort Alexander in 1840 but went to live with a brother in Red River the following year.

There she evidently firmly resisted the advances of several "needy fellows" who would have gladly married her for her money.¹⁶⁵ In 1843, Mary moved east to Lac Seul to live with another brother Thomas and his family. Upon his death in 1847, John Stuart left to Mary a legacy of £500 by the terms of his will of 1832. In his papers, however, was found a draft will which made no mention of Mary and gave more generous legacies to his two Scottish sisters. Although the sisters were unsuccessful in their suit to disinherit Mary, they did somehow manage to have her legacy reduced to £350.¹⁶⁶

It must be emphasized that the case of Mary Taylor is an extraordinary one which should not be allowed to obscure the many happy and stable relationships which developed between fur traders and their native wives. The traders themselves were at pains to point out that cases of infidelity, particularly among mixed-blood women, were rare,¹⁶⁷ and they deeply resented the aspersions cast upon fur trade society by self-righteous missionaries and other uninformed visitors. Ironically, in the days before his own misfortune, John Stuart had been one of the stoutest defenders of the ladies of the country. He

¹⁶⁵ Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 400.

¹⁶⁶ H.B.C.A., W.G. Smith to Simpson, D.5/20, f. 448; D.5/29, f. 110; D.5/30, f. 105; D.5/31, f. 482.

¹⁶⁷ Cox, Columbia River, p. 361; H.B.C.A., Wm. Sinclair to F. Ermatinger, 25 June 1850, D.4/71, f. 152-152d.

took great exception to the unflattering remarks on fur trade morals published in Captain Franklin's first narrative in 1824; just as a stranger exposed to the streets of London might suppose there was not a chaste woman in England, he declared, so the narrow experience of the visitor to the Indian Country resulted in an erroneous impression of the total society.¹⁶⁸ On another occasion, Stuart rhapsodized:

...much of my present happiness is derived from the belief, that among the human race, are to be found...women, that are equally chaste and virtuous, as they are acknowledged to be beautiful, not only among the children of nature, the savage race, but in civilized life also. 169

It is also significant that a good number of the men entering the service in the post-1821 period did not follow the precepts of others like Simpson and Hargrave in their treatment of native women. Several young clerks determinedly defended their decision to marry mixed-blood girls. Shortly after his arrival at Moose Factory in 1831, the new surgeon William Anderson fell in love with Charlotte, the comely daughter of officer Richard Good. When Simpson, who was anxious to prevent young officers being encumbered with families, refused Anderson permission to marry until the expiry of his first contract, the young man summarily resigned,

¹⁶⁸H.B.C.A., J. Stuart to Capt. Franklin, 12 Dec. 1826 and 10 Aug. 1827, E.24/4.

¹⁶⁹H.B.C.A., J. Stuart to Jas. McKenzie, 7 Aug. 1831, B.4/b/1, f. 14.

married his sweetheart and took her to live in England.¹⁷⁰ Hargrave cautioned young Archibald McKinley upon his transfer to New Caledonia in the late 1830's to avoid the foolish temptation of taking "some petticoat or no petticoat as a playmate" to alleviate his loneliness.¹⁷¹ In June 1840, however, McKinley married Sarah Julia, a daughter of Peter Skene Ogden who had been his bourgeois. He knew Hargrave would be surprised to hear of this but assured him that

the step was not taken without due consideration. I was acquainted with the now Mrs. McK upwards of four years and had sufficient time to judge for myself....so far I have every reason to be thankful for I am as happy as my most sanguine love dreams could lead me to expect. 172

Sarah Julia did indeed prove herself an excellent wife and mother, and McKinley was to enjoy a long and fruitful marriage. Hargrave had to accept the fact (which he usually did with gracious resignation)¹⁷³ that yet another of his contemporaries had followed what he really felt to be an ill-advised course.

¹⁷⁰H.B.C.A., Wm. Anderson to J.G. McTavish, 20 July 1833, D.5/4, f. 57; Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 125-26.

¹⁷¹P.A.C., Hargrave to A. McKinley, 10 Dec. 1838, Hargrave Corres., vol. 23, L.B. 14.

¹⁷²Ibid., A. McKinley to Hargrave, 7 April 1841, vol. 8, pp. 1964-65.

¹⁷³When officer John Bell married Nancy, a daughter of Chief Factor Peter Warren Dease, Hargrave did concede that the daughter of a well-established officer could be considered "a judicious and respectable choice" (Hargrave to John Bell, 6 July 1830, Hargrave Corres., vol. 21, L.B. 6).

Indeed, a decade earlier, Hargrave had seen his closest friend George Barnston renege on their mutual pledge never to marry in the Indian Country.¹⁷⁴ Shortly after his posting to the Columbia Department, Barnston became enamoured of a young mixed-blood girl called Ellen, the daughter of a former Pacific Fur Company clerk William Matthews and Kilakotah of the Clatsop tribe. Although Kilakotah had since become the country wife of Chief Factor James McMillan, it appears that Ellen was raised in the home of her relation the powerful Chief Concomely.¹⁷⁵ She could not have been more than thirteen or fourteen when Barnston wed her à la façon du pays in 1828.

In 1831, Barnston, who had a highly developed sense of justice, took his wife and little son James across the mountains, having resigned because of a falling out with Simpson.¹⁷⁶ He re-entered the service the following year but for the next decade was to be kept at an obscure post in the Albany District so that his family became a particularly important aspect of his life. "There is Love...within Doors", he wrote to Hargrave, "and while that is the Case many a

¹⁷⁴MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. xxiv.

¹⁷⁵P.A.B.C., Deposition of Mrs. George Barnston, Arch. McDonald Papers M14.1. One of the wives of Chief Concomely was a grandaunt of Barnston's wife.

¹⁷⁶H.B.C.A., Simpson to J.G. McTavish, 15 August 1831, B.135/c/2, f. 74.

bitter blast may be born from without."¹⁷⁷ Ellen seems to have adapted uncomplainingly to life in the Shield region although far removed from her relatives and the life she had previously known. Barnston remained devoted to his wife, whom he once described as "a perfect mine of happiness." He also derived much joy from his growing "tribe of Biennials", whom he attempted to imbue with the basic principles of religion and education, along with their mother.¹⁷⁸

In 1843, Barnston went on furlough, taking his eldest daughter Mary to school in England. For Ellen, left with the rest of the family at Michipicoten, it was an anxious year for she received no word from her husband during his absence.¹⁷⁹ However, Barnston returned the following summer as scheduled, and the family moved east to join him at his new post of Tadousac. Here the Barnstons encountered their first great sorrow in the death of their youngest daughter; the mother was so grief-stricken that Barnston was afraid she might lose her reason.¹⁸⁰ A few years later they were to suffer further when Mary, like so many mixed-blood children who were

¹⁷⁷ P.A.C., Barnston to Hargrave, 1 Feb. 1837, Hargrave Corres., vol. 6, pp. 1341-42.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Barnston to Hargrave, 18 March 1835, vol. 5, p. 1009; same to same, 2 Feb. 1836, vol. 6, p. 1158.

¹⁷⁹ H.B.C.A., John Swanston to Simpson, 10 April 1844, D.5/11, f. 85.

¹⁸⁰ P.A.C., Barnston to Hargrave, 25 April 1845, Hargrave Corres., vol. 12, p. 3227.

sent to England, died of a lung complaint. Her father, in lamenting his loss, revealed the pain which many fathers must have felt on leaving their children in Britain to be educated:

I still remember the parting I had with her--
Her Sobs and Tears--I did not think then, it
would be the last. God had surely shown me
we belong not to each other, but to him, may
he pardon me, my regret, my sorrow, and my
Lamentations. 181

In the 1850's, Barnston took his wife west when he assumed charge of Norway House. By now, however, she was accustomed to life in the Canadas and appears to have been quite able to cope when Barnston settled in Montreal after his retirement in 1863. Although details of her later life are lacking, Ellen Barnston is known to have survived her husband who died in 1882.

Many of the older generation of fur traders must have been gratified that new men coming in were prepared to be faithful and devoted husbands to their daughters. In numerous cases, those older men, whose period of service spanned the union of the two companies, had themselves remained loyal to their native wives. The changing social climate, however, meant that there was a tendency for such women to be kept in the background owing to their husbands' embarrassment or over-protectiveness. J.H. Lefroy, who was

181 P.A.C., Barnston to Hargrave, 7 April 1848, vol. 13, p. 3744.

more generous than most in his comments about fur trade society, noted that Company officers

have a curious aversion to allowing their wives to be seen....It seems to indicate a painful consciousness that they are not of their own rank, or an equally painful, and very false idea, that a gentleman from the settlements would ridicule their deficiencies. 182

In Red River, retired traders who had Indian wives seldom brought them into the presence of strangers, except perhaps at church. The wives of Alexander Ross and Andrew McDermott, for example, did not play a social role in accordance with their husbands' prominence in the settlement; their sphere was confined to the sympathetic circle of home and family.¹⁸³ Many an Indian woman had proved a devoted wife and mother, but few husbands paid their wives as open a tribute as did Captain William McNeill of the S.S. Beaver. Around 1830, he had married a handsome Haida woman whose eventual death in childbirth was to cause him much grief:

...the deceased had been a good and faithful partner to me for twenty years and we had twelve children together...[she] was a most kind mother to her children, and no Woman could have done her duty better, although an Indian. 184

¹⁸²Lefroy, Search of Magnetic North, p. 26.

¹⁸³Mitchell, "Red River Gossip", p. 8.

¹⁸⁴H.B.C.A., W.H. McNeill to Simpson, 5 March 1851, D.5/30, f. 364; see also P.A.B.C., J.S. Helmcken Reminiscences, 1892, p. 130.

Although mixed-blood wives generally moved more openly in fur trade society, those of the older generation, who had not enjoyed the educational advantages which would be available to their daughters, also tended to live rather secluded lives. This was certainly true of Amelia Douglas who was ultimately to find herself first lady of the fledgling colony of Vancouver Island. As has been noted, the wives of the officers at Fort Vancouver had been excluded from official social functions, and this pattern seems to have continued when Douglas moved his family to Fort Victoria in 1849. Mrs. Douglas, however, learned to run her household like a respectable Victorian matron and was preoccupied with the welfare of her six surviving children, the last of whom was born in 1854. Dr. J.S. Helmcken, the husband of Cecilia Douglas, remembered his mother-in-law as "a very active woman, energetic and industrious" but inclined to be too possessive of her children.¹⁸⁵

As Douglas' governorship progressed, his wife gradually did begin to move more in society. She was evidently reluctant to receive visitors because of her hesitant English, having been accustomed to speaking either Indian or Canadian French. Nevertheless, she made a favourable impression upon the travelling companion of Lady Franklin who described Amelia in 1861 as a gentle, simple, kindly woman who "keeps very

¹⁸⁵ P.A.B.C., J.S. Helmcken Reminiscences, 1892, pp. 41, 61; Smith, "Lady Nobody Knows", p. 478.

much (far too much) in the background."¹⁸⁶ In 1864, shortly after her husband had been knighted, Lady Douglas was an honored guest at a testimonial dinner in New Westminster.¹⁸⁷ Her increasing social activities were drastically curtailed during the years 1867 to 1869, however, when it appears that Amelia succumbed to hypochondria to escape the gossip occasioned by the Connolly Case which brought her own legitimacy into question. Sir James was greatly relieved when the favourable outcome of the case restored his wife's spirits.¹⁸⁸ He was proud of the way in which "darling, good Mamma" had learned to play her part as the chatelaine of their comfortable home on James Bay; she wore the involved Victorian fashions with grace, enjoyed fashionable pastimes such as a game of "Bataille", and "won all hearts with her kindness and geniality."¹⁸⁹

Like many other mixed-blood wives, Amelia was noted for her kindness to people in need. Helmcken recalled that she often helped to nurse the families of settlers when taken ill; according to her grandchildren, she was particularly

¹⁸⁶Smith, Dorothy B., ed., Lady Franklin visits the Pacific Northwest (Victoria: P.A.B.C. Memoir No. XI, 1974), pp. 22-23.

¹⁸⁷Smith, "Lady Nobody Knows", p. 478.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 478-79.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 479. A photograph of Lady Douglas in the B.C. Archives taken after her husband's death in 1877 well captures her quiet dignity, enveloped though she is in the customary Victorian widow's weeds.

concerned for the welfare of poor people and the Indians.¹⁹⁰ Civilized as she had become, Lady Douglas never forgot her own Indian heritage. In the long winter evenings, she delighted her children and grandchildren with the legends of the Cree, her mother's people.¹⁹¹ She is also reputed to have remained more fond of Kamas root and buffalo tongue than "the compound dishes which the rank and wealth of civilization offer her table every day."¹⁹² Although she lived on in Victoria after her husband's death in 1877, Amelia often wished she could visit the haunts of her childhood once more. She died in 1890.

Another mixed-blood woman who was to live to a venerable old age in Victoria was Josette, the wife of company officer John Work. A daughter of the voyageur Pierre Lagacé and a Spokane woman, Josette had been born in 1809 and was about fifteen years old when Work wed her à la façon du pays at Fort Colvile. Always a courageous helpmate, she accompanied her husband on most of his trading expeditions including those to the Snake Country, but Work reluctantly decided that

¹⁹⁰ P.A.B.C., Helmcken Reminiscences, pp. 41-42; Smith, "Lady Nobody Knows", p. 481.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 472: Martha Douglas, who eventually wrote down some of her mother's stories, noted nostalgically, "When written they lose their charm which was in the telling. They need the quaint songs and the sweet voice that told them ...the bright fire as the only light. Then were these legends beautiful."

¹⁹² Angus McDonald, "Items of the West", p. 225.

he must leave his wife and three little girls behind when he undertook an arduous journey to California in the fall of 1832.¹⁹³ In a few years, however, the Works were able to establish a home at Fort Simpson on the Nass River as Work had been given charge of the coasting trade. Here, Mrs. Work is reputed to have introduced rudiments of domestic husbandry among the Tsimpsean women of the area and to have exerted a moderating influence over the practice of slavery among that tribe.¹⁹⁴

The importance which Work placed on his family life shines through his correspondence with his friends. He frequently spoke of Josette:

The little Wife and I get on very well. She is to me an affectionate partner simple and uninstructed as she is and takes good care of my children & myself. We enjoy as great a share of conjugal happiness as generally falls to the lot of married people. 195

Although he worried about the burden of his growing family, which ultimately numbered eleven children, the father declared that they were "almost the only pleasure I have" and he was especially pleased when his first son was born in 1839.¹⁹⁶ Like many fur traders, Work spent much of his leisure time

¹⁹³P.A.B.C., John Work to Edward Ermatinger, 5 Aug. 1832, Ermatinger Corres.

¹⁹⁴Lugrin, Pioneer Women, pp. 62-63.

¹⁹⁵P.A.B.C., Work to Ermatinger, 15 Feb. 1841, Ermatinger Corres.

¹⁹⁶H.B.C.A., Work to Simpson, 10 Feb. 1841, D.5/6, f. 33d.

instructing his family, being particularly anxious that they should be brought up "in the fear of God, which I consider of far more importance than many other much thought of accomplishments."¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, he was so pleased when a school was established at Fort Victoria in 1849 that he took the whole family there, and on the sixth of November he and Josette had their long-standing union blessed by the new Company chaplain, Rev. Staines.¹⁹⁸

A few years later Work settled permanently near Fort Victoria where he built a commodious home for his family. John Work died in 1861; his wife survived him by over thirty years, a respected and remarkably youthful-looking matriarch.¹⁹⁹ John Tod, an old family friend who was invited to the widow's home for Christmas 1868, was much impressed by the closeness of the family:

It was a joyful sight to behold. Thirty two of our late friend's descendents all seated at the same table....my heart warmed with a glow it has seldom felt, to see them all in the full bloom of health, and so happy. 200

¹⁹⁷ P.A.B.C., Work to Ermatinger, 10 Jan. 1846, Ermatinger Corre

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., Work to Ermatinger, 10 Dec. 1849; see also Isaac Burpee, "The Story of John Work of the Hudson's Bay Company, June 15, 1814 - December 22, 1861", pp. 19-20.

¹⁹⁹ A picture of Josette Work in the B.C. Archives shows her in the full garb of a fashionable Victorian matron and in such a pose that at a glance she might be mistaken for Queen Victoria herself.

²⁰⁰ H.B.C.A., John Tod to Ed. Ermatinger, 14 Jan. 1868, Copy No. 22, p. 160.

Like Amelia Douglas, Josette was noted for her good works and kindness to incoming settlers. The oldest resident of British Columbia upon her death in 1896, Mrs. Work was remembered in a tribute by the Provincial Legislature for her "usefulness in pioneer work and many good deeds."²⁰¹

Quite a number of other mixed-blood women proved their worth as fur traders' wives, being flexible enough to withstand the rigours of an isolated post and yet acquire the social graces now considered necessary for an officer's wife in more settled regions. In 1829 at Moose Factory, Governor Simpson had presided at the marriage of Chief Trader Nichol Finlayson and Betsey Kennedy, a daughter of Chief Factor Alexander Kennedy and his Cree wife Agathas.²⁰² According to the Methodist missionary James Evans, no easy critic, Betsey was "a very fine little woman" who spoke excellent English and was "quite the lady".²⁰³ When Finlayson was appointed to the distant Ungava region in the 1830's, he was much touched by his wife's insistence that she accompany him from the start without waiting to see what hardships were

²⁰¹Lugrin, Pioneer Women, p. 64.

²⁰²K.G. Davies, ed., Northern Quebec & Labrador Journals and Correspondence, 1819-35 (London: H.B.R.S., vol. XXIV, 1963), pp. 372-73. Betsey Kennedy was Nichol Finlayson's second country wife. He had previously had five children by "a native woman", who appears to have died sometime in the 1820's.

²⁰³Fred Landon, "Letters of Rev. James Evans", Ontario Historical Society, Papers and Records, vol. XXVIII, 1932, p. 62.

in store.²⁰⁴ Ungava did indeed prove an arduous sojourn; ill health finally forced Finlayson to leave the district and in 1838 he went on furlough, taking his two young sons to school in England.²⁰⁵ Betsey who stayed at Michipicoten was plagued by the anxieties which most native wives suffered during their husbands' long absences abroad. Her friends assured her that Finlayson would hasten back to her, and indeed he returned earlier than expected.²⁰⁶

In 1839, Finlayson took temporary charge of York Factory where he made the radical step of introducing his wife to the Company mess table.²⁰⁷ The following year when he took charge of the Rainy Lake District, he decided to settle Betsey with their infant daughter in the comparative comfort of Red River where she could also be near her widowed mother. Finlayson, who visited his family as often as he could, was shattered when his wife died of dropsy during his absence in the fall of 1841. As he lamented to Hargrave:

...my heart is desolate...you have seen my departed for a short time and no doubt formed your own opinion of her, but no one knew her worth so well as I did--she

²⁰⁴P.A.C., Nichol Finlayson to Hargrave, 10 Feb. 1841, Hargrave Corres., vol. 8, p. 1924.

²⁰⁵Davies, Labrador Journals, p. 374.

²⁰⁶P.A.C., Hargrave to Nichol Finlayson, 10 Dec. 1838, vol. 23, L.B. 14.

²⁰⁷MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 87.

died too when I was absent at Lac la Pluie, I had not even the Cold Consolation of closing her eyes. 208

Perhaps no mixed-blood woman showed herself to be more adept at coping with the changing role of a fur trader's wife than Jane Klyne McDonald. A daughter of a former Nor'Wester servant Michael Klyne and his Cree wife, she became the country wife of Chief Trader Archibald McDonald in 1825. From the beginning, when McDonald took his bride to live at Fort Langley, he actively encouraged her to adopt a European life-style. He taught her to read and write, proudly informing his friends of her excellent progress.²⁰⁹ McDonald's letters to Edward Ermatinger provide many glimpses of his happy domestic life with his growing family which was eventually to number twelve sons and one daughter. While he and later his wife supervised the education of their children when young, McDonald was most concerned that they should all receive a sound education. Thus in 1834, the family travelled to Red River where the four eldest children could be placed at school and still be near their grandparents. Jane remained in the settlement while McDonald went on furlough, and she appears to have been deeply impressed by the missionaries for she remained a devout Anglican for the

²⁰⁸P.A.C., Nichol Finlayson to Hargrave, 15 Dec. 1841, Hargrave Corres., vol. 8, p. 2189; Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 400.

²⁰⁹P.A.B.C., Archibald McDonald to Ed. Ermatinger, 20 Feb. 1831 and 20 Feb. 1833, Ermatinger Corres.

rest of her life. Reverend Jones had high praise for the McDonalds, especially their sacrifice and self-denial in parting with their children for long periods in order to secure their "moral and religious improvement."²¹⁰

On his return to the Columbia, McDonald was stationed at Fort Colvile, an important agricultural post. Here, his wife worked hard at a variety of domestic chores, not being content to leave them to the regular servants. "Her Butter, Cheese, Ham & Bacon would shine in any ordinary market," declared her husband.²¹¹ Unlike many mixed-blood wives, Jane always took her place at table, and the McDonald home became renowned for its warm hospitality and good company. One visiting trader wrote:

...when seated at table with Mr. & Mrs. McDonald and their family, one cannot help thinking himself once more at home enjoying a tête-a-tête in some domestic circle. ²¹²

In 1839, an American Presbyterian mission station was established near Fort Colvile. The wives of the missionaries Myra Ells and Mary Walker, among the first white women in Oregon, stayed at the fort while their own homes were being built and soon became quite friendly with Mrs. McDonald whose kindness they much appreciated. Jane corresponded with Mrs.

²¹⁰C.M.S.A., Jones' Journal, 9 June 1835, CC1/039.

²¹¹Jean Cole, "Exile in the Wilderness", The Beaver, Summer 1972, p. 10.

²¹²Ibid.

Walker and was invited to join the Columbia Maternal Association, founded by the missionaries' wives "to seek divine assistance in discharging the accountable duties of mothers, and for the early conversion of our children."²¹³

After receiving a chief factorship in 1841, McDonald began to make plans to move his family to eastern Canada with its educational advantages. His wife, he felt sure would be able to cope with the change; indeed, several friends had remarked that the accomplished Jane was not likely to feel much at a loss anywhere.²¹⁴ The family left Fort Colville in the fall of 1844 but were to face a hazardous journey. The canoes were caught by ice in the Athabasca River and only after much difficulty did McDonald bring his wife with a new baby and seven other children to their wintering station at Fort Edmonton.²¹⁵ As they prepared to embark the following spring, tragedy struck in the form of a scarlet fever epidemic. Within a week, McDonald's beloved five-year-old twins and a younger brother had died. Poor Jane, who was nearly overcome with sorrow and fatigue, fell ill herself as

²¹³C.M. Drury, "The Columbia Maternal Association", Oregon Historical Quarterly, vol. 39, p. 101. In 1842, Mrs. Archibald McKinley became the only other mixed-blood woman to join the Association.

²¹⁴H.B.C.A., John Tod to Ermatinger, 28 Feb. 1839, Copy No. 21, p. 41.

²¹⁵H.B.C.A., J. Rowand to HBC Officers, 4 Jan. 1845, D.5/10, f. 36; P.A.B.C., J. Rowand to D. Ross, 21 Dec. 1844, Ross Corres. R78.

the brigade left The Pas and had to endure a most violent crossing of Lake Winnipeg.²¹⁶ McDonald had further difficulty securing passage for his large family from Bas de la Rivière, but they eventually arrived in Montreal and the following year settled on a large farm at St. Andrews East on the Ottawa River.

Although she had domestic help, Jane continued in her usual industrious manner. In the spring of 1849, McDonald wrote of her:

At present She is in the Sugar bush making a pretty fine harvest of it--the boiling booth is not 120 yds from the Kitchen door--Two days' Collection of Sap--360 Galls--made a good Brusé [Brassée] of 134 lbs. 217

After her husband's sudden death in 1853, Jane McDonald stayed on in St. Andrews, a respected widow. Photographs of her, always in a starched Scotch cap, reveal her dignity and capability.²¹⁸ She remained an active member of the Anglican church in St. Andrews and, characteristically, was remembered for her "little acts of kindness". She died on December 15, 1879.²¹⁹

²¹⁶H.B.C.A., Arch. McDonald to Simpson, 2 Aug. 1845, D.5/14, f. 216-216d.

²¹⁷P.A.B.C., A. McDonald to Ermatinger, 12 April 1849, Ermatinger Corres.

²¹⁸In possession of a descendant, Mrs. Jean Murray Cole of Peterborough, Ontario.

²¹⁹Lewis and Murakami, Ranald McDonald, pp. 83-84n.

Women like Jane Klyne McDonald certainly belied the objections which James Hargrave frequently raised against fellow officers taking mixed-blood wives. Although she was not even an officer's daughter, an essential prerequisite in Hargrave's opinion if one were to make such a match, this mixed-blood girl had readily acquired accomplishments that would have done honour to any Victorian matron and had proved herself well able to adapt to life in the "civilized world". According to Hargrave, a native wife tied a man to the Indian Country, obliging him to settle in a place like Red River which was "the antipodes of a paradise."²²⁰ By the 1840's and 50's, however, it had become quite common for Company officers to retire to the Canadas with their mixed-blood wives and families.

Montreal had, of course, been a favourite haunt of fur traders since the days of the Nor'Westers. In settling their families in the vicinity of the city, Archibald McDonald and George Barnston were only following the example of predecessors such as Colin Robertson, William McIntosh, Allan McDonell and Peter Warren Dease.²²¹ After a year's furlough in the early 1840's, Dease had arranged for his family to come east and retired to a country property at Côte Ste. Catherine. One

²²⁰P.A.C., Hargrave to Donald McKenzie, 5 Dec. 1826, Hargrave Corres., vol. 21, L.B. 1.

²²¹An interesting subject which needs further investigation is the lives of the fur traders in retirement, both in Canada and Great Britain.

contemporary lamented that Dease, not unlike a number of former Nor'Westers, was careless about his finances and too much under the thumb of his métis wife:

...allows himself to be entirely governed & dictated to in his own house by his Old Squaw & Sons--She holding the Purse strings & they spending the Contents par la Porte et par les fenetres.--This state of nothingness however does not seem to annoy him. 222

Other pockets of fur trade families were to be found around Cobourg and Brockville in Upper Canada. Certainly it helped the wives to overcome problems of adjustment and loneliness to have friends nearby. George Gladman, writing of his decision to settle in Port Hope, confessed that his wife Harriett was homesick for the Indian Country but,

could we prevail on any of those Gents who are coming to this Province, to locate themselves beside us, I am satisfied Madame would not wish again to enter the dangers & inquietudes of Northern travel. 223

Jacob Corrigan, another successful mixed-blood officer, retired to Cobourg in the early 1840's and was later followed by his son-in-law William Nourse, husband of his daughter Ann.²²⁴

A frequent visitor to the Nourse household was Mary, the Indian wife of J.D. Cameron who had settled in nearby Haldimand

²²²H.B.C.A., Jas. Keith to G. Simpson, 10 Aug. 1842, D.5/7, f. 274.

²²³P.A.C., Geo. Gladman to Hargrave, 11 Nov. 1846, Hargrave Corres., vol. 12, p. 3516.

²²⁴Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 313.

in 1846.²²⁵ Thomas McMurray also built a comfortable house in the area. According to a friend, "His old Lady & Daughter at first did not like the change but they have become reconciled to their new mode of life."²²⁶ McMurray was soon joined by his old friend Cuthbert Cumming who married his youngest daughter Jane in 1842.²²⁷

Prominent among the retired traders in the Brockville area was Robert Miles, who bought a large property called Horningtoft about 1860. Friends had remarked that his wife Betsey "had a good deal of the Yankey cut about her",²²⁸ and she appears to have adapted admirably to life in Upper Canada. In 1863, at the wedding of one of the daughters of James Hargrave, Mrs. Miles "figured among the aristocratic dames of Brockville with great decorum."²²⁹ Betsey's brother, William Sinclair Jr. also settled near Brockville but due to family scandal, his wife Mary, through no fault of her own, was unhappy and lonely in Upper Canada. Initially Sinclair had brought his family to St. Thomas where his daughter Catherine Ermatinger lived. As a result of her previous faux

²²⁵H.B.C.A., J.D. Cameron to Simpson, 10 Oct. 1849, D.5/26, f. 258.

²²⁶Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 437.

²²⁷P.A.C., D. Finlayson to Hargrave, 15 April 1841, Hargrave Corres., vol. 12, p. 3212.

²²⁸H.B.C.A., Robert Miles to Ed. Ermatinger, 23 July 1834, Copy No. 23, p. 298.

²²⁹P.A.C., Hargrave to Ed. Ermatinger, 29 Oct. 1863, Ermatinger Corres., vol. 1, p. 134.

pas, however, the Ermatingers would not associate with Catherine's family after her husband's death in 1859.²³⁰ Mrs. Sinclair longed to go back to Red River, and she eventually did return to the Indian Country where she died in 1876.

Although there were undoubtedly difficulties in adjusting to the rather rigid forms of nineteenth-century Canadian society, many native wives proved that they had the capacity to be successfully integrated if given the chance. The fact that most traders endeavoured to regulate their family lives according to accepted standards of Victorian domesticity while in the Indian Country helped their wives make the transition into "civilized society". Such appears to have been true of Jane, the wife of Chief Trader Murdoch McPherson. A daughter of Chief Factor Edward Smith, she had been born at Fort Chipewyan but was to end her days as chatelaine of a handsome home called "Norway House" in Pictou, Nova Scotia. In his will, McPherson stipulated that his "beloved wife Jane" was to be supported "in accordance with her station in life as my widow."²³¹

If many of the Hudson's Bay officers who refused to part with their native families decided on retirement in the Canadas as a compromise between Red River and Great Britain, there

²³⁰H.B.C.A., Mrs. Maria Calder to G. Simpson, 1 March 1859, D.5/48, f. 305-305d.

²³¹Somerset House, Will of Murdoch McPherson, 7 Dec. 1862, vol. 1864 (7), f. 344.

were a few Scotsmen who felt such a strong attachment for their motherland that they decided to risk taking their mixed-blood wives home.²³² For the wife of Chief Factor George Keith the move to Scotland was a formidable one as she could scarcely speak any English. The daughter of an obscure Nor'Wester James Sutherland and a Chipewyan woman, Nanette had become Keith's country wife early in his career as a Nor'Wester. Their first child Fanny was born in 1807, their last and ninth William in 1832.²³³ It was a happy marriage, though marred by the death of several children sent to school in England. Keith, who referred to his wife affectionately as "the Old Lady" or "the Duchess", declared that he had been "as happy all along with her--if not more so--than is the common fate of my fellow mortals in this world." Although his brother and Governor Simpson both tried to dissuade him from taking Nanette to Scotland, the old trader felt he could not in conscience part with his wife, particularly because of his responsibility for their youngest daughter who had been born mentally retarded.²³⁴

²³²In a marked change of policy after the union, the Hudson's Bay Company had lifted its ban on employees taking their native wives to Britain provided they had adequate means to support their families (A.6/20, London Committee to Simpson, 13 Mar. 1823, f. 77d).

²³³P.A.O., Family Tree of George Keith, Microfilm Copy of James Keith Trust Files; see also, H.B.C.A., Will of George Keith, 12 Oct. 1836, A.36/8.

²³⁴H.B.C.A., George Keith to G. Simpson, 29 March 1844, D.5/10, f. 549-549d.

Thus in the summer of 1844, Keith brought his wife out to Lachine where they were formally married, prior to sailing from Quebec. He had been pleasantly surprised by the reception they had received on passing through Upper Canada:

After leaving Mackinac a good deal of curiosity was excited on discovering that my Lady was of Indian extraction--but altogether very little impertinence was shown, whereas we experienced much courtesy, and a good deal of kindness and sympathy were bestowed...on account of the unfortunate Organic defections of our Little Daughter. 235

Mrs. Keith suffered badly from sea sickness for almost the entire ocean voyage, but at length the family was safely settled in Aberdeen for the winter. It soon became apparent to Keith that his wife was having difficulty adjusting to town life, so he bought a pleasant cottage with a nice garden and an acre of land a few miles outside the city.²³⁶

Although initially given to longing for "scenes & associations left behind",²³⁷ Nanette gradually became reconciled to her new home. She enjoyed tending her garden and began selling fresh produce and eggs from her flock of chickens; her native craft work was also much admired.²³⁸ Indeed, this mixed-blood

²³⁵H.B.C.A., George Keith to G. Simpson, 29 March 1844, D.5/12, f. 64-64d.

²³⁶Ibid., D.5/12, fos. 400d, 544; D.5/14, f. 381-381d.

²³⁷H.B.C.A., Robert Cowie to G. Simpson, 1 Aug. 1847, D.5/20, f. 69.

²³⁸P.A.C., Letitia to Jas. Hargrave, 28 March 1852, Hargrave Corres., vol. 27; H.B.C.A., G. Keith to Simpson, 23 July 1851, D.5/31, f. 128.

woman appears to have been accepted and liked by her neighbours. While their friends were prepared to make allowances for her deficiencies, Keith was much gratified by his wife's continuing social improvement:

...the Gud-wife...has acquired a considerable smattering of the English language, together with some comparative degree of civilized polishall things considered I think she deserves some credit for...playing her part so well as she does. 239

In 1852, Letitia Hargrave had a pleasant visit with the Keith family which at that time included a married daughter Mrs. John Swanston and her five children recently arrived from Canada. The Scottish woman's description of old Mrs. Keith and her daughter, if it does not hide her prejudices, was not intended to be unkind:

Mrs. Keith & Mrs. Swanston came to call for me....The Duchess is splendid in her own way & they both precipitated themselves upon me & declared themselves my friends.... [the old lady] is hideously black & ugly but is wonderfully lively, even hilarious in her manner....her daughter & she are too much for a small room when they express astonishment. 240

Mrs. Hargrave was also the guest of the Alexander Christies who had settled near Aberdeen in 1850. Ann Christie, a daughter of Hudson's Bay governor Thomas Thomas and his Cree wife, had

²³⁹H.B.C.A., G. Keith to Simpson, 25 Sept. 1847, D.5/20, f. 308; D.5/23, f. 88-88d.

²⁴⁰P.A.C., Letitia to Hargrave, 28 March 1852, Hargrave Corres., vol. 27. It is not known what happened to Nanette Keith after her husband died in 1859; it is possible that she may have returned to Canada to live with the Swanston family.

continually opposed her husband's plan to retire to Britain. In her opinion, Red River, where Christie had served two terms as governor, possessed "all the advantages desirable in a residence."²⁴¹ All the Christie children had been educated in Britain, but Christie brought his daughter Margaret back to the colony in 1844 especially to help persuade her mother to change her mind.²⁴² Eventually when the couple left the Indian Country by the York ship in 1849, the wife appeared more stoical than her husband:

Old Mrs. Christie got safely on board & was pleased with the ship & all connected with it. She went off quite coolly, not so the poor old man who was greatly moved. ²⁴³

Mrs. Christie was most homesick during her first winter which was spent in London, however. She suffered from the changeable moist climate and was quite terrified by the noise and bustle of the metropolis; "no argument would induce her to venture out on the streets, for fear of being crushed by the crowd."²⁴⁴ Things improved when Christie moved north to a comfortable property not too far from the Keiths. The two mixed-blood women much enjoyed each other's company, but Mrs. Christie

²⁴¹H.B.C.A., John Ballenden to Simpson, 12 Feb. 1844, D.5/10, f. 218.

²⁴²P.A.C., Alexander Christie to Hargrave, 14 June 1844, Hargrave Corres., vol. 11, p. 2975.

²⁴³MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 244.

²⁴⁴P.A.C., Duncan Finlayson to Hargrave, 6 May 1850, Hargrave Corres., vol. 15, p. 4401.

was also accepted by a respectable circle of friends who, commented Mrs. Hargrave, had raised themselves in society as the Christies had done. Always delighted to receive friends from Rupert's Land, the retired Chief Factor and his wife gave Letitia a most hospitable reception, "the old lady" being "more than agreeable".²⁴⁵

On the whole, native women proved that they were capable of adapting to the social changes which took place in the fur trade after 1821, although sometimes they were to suffer from the zealousness which the missionaries in particular displayed in attempting to introduce civilized attitudes and customs. A most significant feature of the post-1821 period, however, was the increasing stratification of fur trade society with regard to women. The officers were very much concerned that the new schools in Red River provide their daughters with a genteel British education and an awareness of being part of the social elite. Although many of the older traders did remain loyal to their Indian and mixed-blood wives, new officers were expected to restrict their choice of wives to the well-educated daughters of their predecessors.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵P.A.C., Letitia to Hargrave, 18 March 1852 and 28 March 1852, vol. 27.

²⁴⁶P.A.C., Chas. McKenzie to his son, 12 Sept. 1851, McKenzie Papers.

At the same time, however, men like Simpson and Hargrave were expressing the view that even a mixed-blood woman was no longer acceptable as an officer's wife. They eventually married British women and brought them to Rupert's Land, establishing a trend which was to have profound implications for fur trade society.

CHAPTER VI

WHITE WOMEN IN FUR TRADE SOCIETY

As wives left in Britain, white women had always existed on the periphery of fur trade life. Indeed, in the 18th century, it was not unknown for servants of the Hudson's Bay Company to attempt to maintain two families--one in Britain and one in Rupert's Land. The case of Andrew Graham is representative.¹ Having been apprenticed to the Company in his youth, Graham adapted well to life on the Bay and appears to have formed an intimate connection with an unknown Indian woman. When he visited Britain in 1769 after an absence of twenty years, however, he married one Patricia Sherer, the daughter of an Edinburgh merchant. In spite of his marriage, Graham soon returned to his country family; a little girl had been born just before or during his absence in England and a son was born in 1773. Graham took these children to England upon his retirement, but it is not known whether his British wife was subjected to the embarrassment of having to care for them.

¹See biography of Andrew Graham in Williams, Graham's Observations, pp. 333-49. Other men who had both a native and a white family were Richard Norton and his son Moses, see P.R.O., Will of Richard Norton, Prob. 11/713, f. 314 and Will of Moses Norton, Prob. 11/1002, f. 374.

It appears that the British marriage of another officer James Isham failed because of his long absences and unorthodox domestic arrangements.² Isham had wed his English wife Catherine in 1748, but after a stay of two years during which a daughter was born, he returned to his Indian wife and young son Charles at York Factory. The trader worried about his English family and provided for their support,³ but when he finally managed to visit them in 1758, it seems to have been too late for a reconciliation. Although Isham continued to make payments to his ex-wife until his death in 1761, he left his entire estate to his native son Charles.⁴

The records of the Hudson's Bay Company contain quite a number of letters from wives, particularly in the Orkneys, requesting that their husbands be allowed to come home before the expiry of their contracts. In 1807, for example, the Company refused the petition of the wives of servants John Short and Charles Hay because their husbands had only been in the service for one year.⁵ The anguish which wives suffered during their husbands' absence on the Bay was revealed by Mrs. John Ballenden. This Orkney woman had married her husband,

²Rich, Isham's Observations, pp. 322-25.

³H.B.C.A., James Isham to London Committee, 13 Aug. 1756, A.11/117, f. 192.

⁴P.R.O., Will of James Isham, 16 Feb. 1760, Prob. 11/884, f. 68.

⁵H.B.C.A., Minutes of Committee, A.1/49, f. 28d. For other cases, see fos. 15, 36, 37d.

a Company officer of long standing, when he came home to Stromness on furlough in 1796. Two years later, Ballenden returned to York Factory, having contracted to serve for five more years, but the separation proved unbearable for both parties. In April 1801, Mrs. Ballenden wrote to the Company begging that her husband be allowed to come home by the first ship. She received a firm but courteous refusal; the Company secretary advised her to "wait patiently" with the thought that when ultimately reunited, her husband's improved financial position would compensate for his long absence.⁶ Ballenden himself, although he had a native family, was much aggrieved at being kept from his "tender partner" and eventually persuaded the Company to let him retire a year early.⁷ While data is scarce, traders with dual families appear to have been rare in the 19th century. In the form of marriage contract used at Fort Churchill in the 1850's, however, the husband had to swear "that there is no Woman in life at present in Europe that has any legal claim on me."⁸

Most of the Nor'Westers entered the trade as young single men, bent on making their fortunes, and waited until they

⁶H.B.C.A., Alexander Lean to Mrs. Ballenden, 20 May 1801, A.5/4, f. 77-77d.

⁷H.B.C.A., York Council to London Committee, 21 Sept. 1801, B.239/b/79, f. 37d. Nothing is known about Ballenden's country wife, but his daughter Harriett attended school at York and eventually became the wife of John Richards McKay.

⁸H.B.C.A., Fort Churchill, B.42/z/1.

retired before marrying a white woman. According to Ross Cox, the bourgeois who returned to Lower Canada with a sizeable competence was assured of an eager welcome no matter how grizzled his countenance:

The ladies of Montreal and Quebec are immediately on the *qui vive*; invitations are numerous, the wealthy North-Wester is universally admired; bronzed features, Oxford-grey hairs, and a *dégagé tout ensemble* impart particular interest to his appearance. ⁹

After so many years in the wilderness, a trader could easily be dazzled by the looks and accomplishments of a civilized female, but according to some, too often he would discover that "a bright eye, a fair face, a sweet voice, or a tune on the piano" were poor compensation for the waste of his hard-earned fortune.

In the case of Nor'Wester Alexander Frazer, and later William Connolly, the charms of a white woman were enough to make them repudiate the native wives they had brought east with them. In 1806, Frazer had retired with his country wife Angelique Meadows and their two children to a seigneury at Rivière du Loup. Soon after, however, he took a French-Canadian woman Pauline Michaud for a wife and by her had a large family. Nevertheless, Frazer continued to maintain his Indian woman in a small house on the seigneury, a situation

⁹Cox, Columbia River, pp. 361-62.

which must have been trying for both women.¹⁰ Relations between William Connolly's white wife and his former Indian one were understandably strained. The Indian Suzanne was deeply wounded when Connolly repudiated her for the wealth and charm of his cousin Julia Woolrich: she scolded a good deal about it, deriving little comfort from the fact that the new wife "had only got her leavings".¹¹ Though Suzanne was maintained in Montreal while the Connollys lived at Tadousac, the two wives do seem to have met at least once, much to the consternation of the white woman.¹² Connolly was much relieved when, through the assistance of Governor Simpson, he was able to send Suzanne back to Red River:

...my best thanks for having allowed my Indian Family a passage to the North--they will be much happier there than here and their removal has taken a heavy weight off my mind. 13

While the extraordinary cases of Frazer and Connolly illustrate the threat which white women posed for native wives, they did not have a direct impact on fur trade society. In the Indian Country, the native woman had been able to

¹⁰Wallace, Documents of North West Company, pp. 443-444. In the 1880's, there was prolonged and complicated litigation over the rights of the native descendants to Alexander Frazer's estate, see "Jones vs. Frazer, Supreme Court, 8 May 1886," Quebec Law Reports, vol. 12, pp. 327-372.

¹¹"Connolly Case, 1867", pp. 237-38.

¹²"Connolly Appeal Case, 1869", p. 310.

¹³H.B.C.A., Connolly to Simpson, 16 April 1841, D.5/6, f. 131-131d.

retain her supremacy for decades because white women were totally absent except in a few isolated instances. In the 1680's, when the Hudson's Bay Company was apparently contemplating permanent colonization,¹⁴ Governor Sergeant had been allowed to take his wife out to Albany, accompanied by a companion Mrs. Maurice and a maidservant. In 1684, a further addition to the white women on the Bay was to have been Mrs. Hugh Verner, who was given permission to join her husband at Ruperts River provided he pay for her passage and twelve pounds a year for "her diet". Within a fortnight, however, the Committee "upon divers good Considerations" reversed its decision.¹⁵

Perhaps it had been felt that Mrs. Verner should not be exposed to the dangers occasioned by the war with France which indeed the other women were to suffer. In 1685, the anxious father of Mrs. Maurice demanded that his daughter be sent home, but the ship on which she sailed was lost in the ice and the crew had to winter at Charles Fort. Mrs. Maurice was wounded during de Troyes' attack on the fort but was attended by the French surgeon and taken back to Albany.¹⁶ Mrs. Sergeant was nearly killed in the attack on Albany, and her presence may have contributed to her husband's quick

¹⁴Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Vol. 1, p. 148.

¹⁵E.E. Rich, Minutes of Hudson's Bay Company, 1682-84, (London: H.B.R.S., vol. IX, 1945), p. 224, 230.

¹⁶Rich, Letters Outward, 1679-94, p. 144; W.A. Kenyon and J.R. Turnbull, The Battle for James Bay 1686 (Toronto, 1971), pp. 75-76, 97.

surrender. Sergeant and his "whole parcell of Women" were recalled in 1687, the Committee having firmly decided that Hudson Bay was no place for white women.¹⁷ In future, ships' captains were instructed to ensure that all women were put off the Company's vessels before they departed from Gravesend. During the next one hundred years, the only white woman known to have touched the shores of Hudson Bay was Kitty Smith, the wife of one of the captains of the Dobbs' interloping expedition, who spent several months at York Factory in the winter of 1746-47.¹⁸

In the early 1800's, three solitary white women appeared in the Indian Country, two of them in most singular circumstances. The first, a young Orkney lass whose real name was Isabel Gunn, arrived incognito at Moose Factory in the summer of 1806.¹⁹ She had disguised herself as a boy and signed on with the Company agent at Stromness under the name of John Fubbister. She was apparently intent on following a faithless lover, but fate was to keep them apart for Fubbister was posted to Albany while her lover was at Eastmain.²⁰ During her first season at Albany, the Orkney girl performed the tasks required of a servant so well that her identity remained a secret to all

¹⁷Rich, Letters Outward, 1679-94, p. 235.

¹⁸Parliamentary Report, 1749, p. 229.

¹⁹The remarkable story of Isabel Gunn has been well told by Malvina Bolus in her article, "The Son of I. Gunn", The Beaver, Winter 1971, pp. 23-26.

²⁰Ibid., p. 25.

except one John Scarth, an old Company hand who had sailed with her from Stromness. In the spring, Fubbister took an active part in the freighting operations to supply Albany's inland posts and later was part of the brigade sent to winter at Pembina under Hugh Heney.

Here, Fubbister "worked at anything & well like the rest of the men",²¹ until the morning of December 29th when to everyone's astonishment, "he" gave birth to a son, reputedly Scarth's. Alexander Henry the younger witnessed this dramatic scene since the Hudson's Bay men had been at his fort for holiday festivities. On their departure, one young recruit, apparently indisposed, asked to remain behind:

I was surprised at the fellow's demand; however, I told him to sit down and warm himself. I returned to my own room, where I had not been long before he sent one of my people, requesting the favor of speaking with me. Accordingly I stepped down to him, and was much surprised to find him extended on the earth, uttering dreadful lamentations; he stretched out his hands toward me, and in pitious tones begged me to be kind to a poor, helpless, abandoned wretch, who was not of the sex I had supposed, but an unfortunate Orkney girl, pregnant, and actually in childbirth. In saying this she opened her jacket, and displayed a pair of beautiful, round, white breasts....In about an hour she was safely delivered of a fine boy, and the same day she was conveyed home in my cariole where she soon recovered. 22

It remains a mystery how the true sex of John Fubbister could have been concealed so long, but once the truth was out, she

²¹Malvina Bolus, "The Son of I. Gunn", The Beaver, Winter 1971, p. 24.

²²Coues, New Light, p. 426.

was known by the name of Mary and sent back to Albany in the spring. For the next year, she was employed in the traditional female role of washerwoman, a task at which she did not excel, and she may also have acted as a "nurse" to the pupils of the school that was established in 1808.²³ Although reluctant to return to Orkney, Isabel Gunn alias John Fubbister was "discharged from your Honours Service" in September 1809 and sent home with her son by the annual ship. According to popular account, she was to suffer further misfortune and ended her life a vagrant.²⁴

Another woman whose stay in the Indian Country was to be short-lived was Jane Barnes, an adventurous barmaid from Portsmouth, England. She had caught the eye of Nor'Wester Donald McTavish, who decided to retain her company for the long ocean voyage to the Columbia. The arrival of a white woman at Fort George in April 1814 created a sensation, particularly among the Chinooks who were awed by her blonde hair and elaborate clothes.²⁵ But the most impressed appears to have been Alexander Henry the younger whose journal reveals that he took more than an ordinary interest in Miss Jane's welfare. He was mortified, for example, when some of the other officers began discussing Chinook women and the problem of venereal disease right in front of her.²⁶

²³Bolus, "Son of I. Gunn", p. 25.

²⁴Coues, New Light, p. 426-27n.

²⁵Cox, Columbia River, p. 157.

²⁶Coues, New Light, p. 898.

For the first two weeks, Jane lived on board the Isaac Tod, making frequent visits to the fort, while McTavish decided what to do with her. He had become enamoured of a Chinook widow whom Henry thought a poor exchange for Jane, and he gallantly offered to become her new protector. On May 6, he recorded the following transaction:

Conferred with Mr. D. McTavish regarding Jane; his three stipulations were: first, her person; second, the table; and third, to cause no misunderstanding with the young gentlemen.... my part is mainly to protect her from ill usage....I shall, therefore, make it my duty to render her situation as comfortable as possible; not as a lover, but through humanity. 27

Two days later, Jane was safely lodged in Henry's room. Although it is not clear exactly what the position of the Englishwoman was, Henry appears to have tried to give her an exalted station above the other men's wives which provoked ill feeling. He did not succeed in introducing her to the mess table, however; for all her pretensions, the barmaid had to eat with the other women of the fort--on the floor.²⁸ Indeed, several young clerks found the attempts of this coarse, illiterate woman to play the refined lady ridiculous, and they resented her disparaging and hypocritical remarks about the native women.²⁹

²⁷Coues, New Light, p. 908.

²⁸Mary Avery, "An Additional Chapter on Jane Barnes", Pacific Northwest Quarterly, vol. 42, pp. 331-32; Coues, New Light, p. 910.

²⁹Cox, Columbia River, p. 158n.

Scarcely a month after her arrival, Jane Barnes was left virtually abandoned when both Henry and McTavish were drowned in a tragic accident. A young son of Chief Concomely wanted to make her his wife, but she remained unmoved by his offer of a life of ease and luxury:

He told her that if she would become his wife he would send one hundred sea-otters to her relations; that he would never ask her to carry wood, draw water, dig for roots...that he would make her mistress over his other wives, and permit her to sit at her ease from morning to night, and wear her own clothes; that she should always have abundance of fat salmon, anchovies, and elk, and be allowed to smoke as many pipes of tobacco during the day as she thought proper... 30

In the fall of 1814, Jane sailed home to England via China; on the long voyage, she so enamoured the ship's commander, Captain Robson, that he married her.³¹ In 1819, Mistress Robson with her husband and two children made a brief return to the Columbia. According to the young clerk Alexander McKenzie, the former barmaid had not improved for all her worldly travel. "I should offend your modesty were I to mention specimens of what she intended as wit and humour during her stay with us," he wrote to a friend.³² This time, however, Jane did have the satisfaction of being permitted to sit at the mess table.

³⁰Cox, Columbia River, p. 157.

³¹Avery, "An Additional Chapter", p. 331.

³²H.B.C.A., Alexander McKenzie to J.G. McTavish, 31 March 1819, F.3/2, f. 194.

Although the prejudice toward native women displayed by Jane Barnes was to be typical of other British women who visited the Indian Country, such was not the attitude of the first white woman to settle permanently in Rupert's Land. The story of Marie-Anne Gadboury, the wife of the free trader Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière is well known.³³ During the winter of 1805, Lagimodière had returned to his hometown of Maskinongé near Three Rivers where he married Marie-Anne on 21 April 1806. He had apparently intended to settle down, but the pull of the West proved too strong and he told his new bride that he must return to the Indian Country and might be absent for several years. After all efforts to persuade him to change his mind failed, Marie-Anne decided that her only course was to go with her husband no matter what the hardships.³⁴ In the summer of 1806, the couple made the long trip with the Nor'Wester brigade to Pembina where Lagimodière joined the freemen. On January 6, 1807 at Fort Daer, Marie-Anne's first child was born whom she called Reine in honour of the Epiphany.

In the spring, the Lagimodières left Pembina by canoe for Fort des Prairies (Fort Edmonton). They travelled with three other French-Canadian freemen, Belgrade, Paquin, and Chalifou, all of whom had Cree wives.³⁵ Marie-Anne was grateful

³³ See Georges Dugas, La Première Canadienne au Nord-Ouest (Winnipeg, 1907) and "Marie-Anne Gadboury", Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. X, pp. 296-97.

³⁴ Dugas, La Première Canadienne, pp. 10-13.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

for the company of these women and wisely adopted some of their ways, such as carrying her baby in an Indian cradle. As a freeman's wife, she had to live for many weeks on the open prairie but appears to have withstood its hardships well. In August 1808 when heavily pregnant, Marie-Anne was riding her horse with young Reine tucked snugly in a saddle bag when they came upon a herd of buffalo. The horse, being a spirited buffalo runner, immediately gave chase and the young mother had a terrifying ride until finally rescued by her husband. Later that night, Marie-Anne gave birth to a son, nicknamed La Prairie, and two days later, she was to be found riding back to Fort Edmonton.³⁶

Lagemodière, who was anxious to give his growing family a home, welcomed the news that a permanent settlement was to be established at Red River and returned to the area in 1811. Owing to the rivalry between the fur companies, however, the colony in its first years was a continual scene of conflict. In the winter of 1815-16, the hardy Lagemodière made his remarkable trek from Red River to Montreal carrying dispatches for Lord Selkirk, but on his return he was arrested at Fort William. During these anxious months, his wife and children found a hospitable refuge with Chief Peguis and his Ojibway band. After their reunion in the fall of 1816, Lagemodière settled his family on a grant of land on the east bank of the

³⁶Dugas, La Première Canadienne, pp. 36-37.

Red River which he had received from Lord Selkirk.³⁷ Here Marie-Anne was to live for over fifty years, a devout and much loved member of the Catholic community. Her eight children grew up and married in St. Boniface; one of her daughters, Julie, was the mother of Louis Riel.

The coming of the Selkirk settlers brought white women to the Indian Country in unprecedented numbers. Eighteen women were among the second party of colonists who arrived at York Factory in the summer of 1812. The presence of white families was to result in an increasing prejudice against the mixed marriages of fur trade society. Miles McDonell, the leader of the colonists, was highly critical of the domestic arrangements of Hudson's Bay officers W.H. Cook and William Auld, whom he charged neglected the needs of his party to attend to the demands of their Indian squaws. He advised Lord Selkirk that it would be most advantageous if Company servants were allowed to bring white wives out to Rupert's Land and thus end "the iniquitous and scandalous connection formed with Indian women."³⁸ Commenting on the desirability of employing old Peter Fidler as the colony's

³⁷"Marie-Anne Gadboury", D.C.B., p. 297.

³⁸H.B.C.A., Miles McDonell to Lord Selkirk, 29 May 1812, Selkirk Papers, Copy No. 154, fos. 62-65. Mr. Auld at Churchill was enraged when he heard the disparaging remarks being made about his wife, and McDonell was forced to admit that he had been guilty of relying on hearsay and gossip, see f. 203.

permanent surveyor, McDonnell further showed his prejudice by stating that his "Indian family is some objection to him".³⁹

Although in general, the Scottish settlers were to remain a homogeneous group which did not integrate with fur trade society, there were several Hudson's Bay men who were tempted to take a wife from among them. The first to do so was the young clerk Donald Ross who in 1820 married Mary, a daughter of Alexander McBeath who had come from Kildonan in 1813. Another McBeath daughter, Christy, was to captivate Chief Trader Robert McVicar, while on a visit to her sister's home at Norway House in 1824. In the meantime in 1822, Chief Factor John Clarke, after the death of his half-breed wife, had taken to wife Marianne Treutter,⁴⁰ a daughter of one of the newly-arrived Swiss colonists. There is no record of any of the above marriages in the existing church registers of Red River. It is possible that Donald and Mary Ross were married by James Sutherland, an elder of the Scottish Presbyterian Church who initially acted as minister for the settlers, because the legality of their marriage was certainly never questioned.⁴¹ There was no minister present at Norway House to marry Robert and Christy McVicar, but on 18 July

³⁹H.B.C.A., McDonnell to Selkirk, 25 July 1814, f. 201.

⁴⁰The name is given variously as Mary Anne Traitley and Marian Tranclar, but this spelling is used in John Clarke's will, A.36/4.

⁴¹Ross, Red River Settlement, p. 31.

1824 they solemnly pledged to perform "all the relative duties of man and wife" and to incur "all the obligations which the institution of Matrimony enjoins" in accordance with the laws of Scotland. This transaction and a further Church of England ceremony performed by Captain Franklin at Fort Chipewyan on 28 May 1827 were recorded in a detailed document, witnessed by three Company officers.⁴² For old Nor'Wester John Clarke, however, "the custom of the country" remained enough. His apparent refusal to have a church marriage provoked acid comment from Rev. West on the need to check the "vicious" habits of the traders: "One of the Chief Factors avowedly a married man takes with him a Swiss girl into the Interior without censure from Council."⁴³ Clarke did not receive church sanction for his marriage until he took Marianne and their family out to Montreal in 1830.

If Governor Simpson had been vexed by the inconvenience and expense caused by native families, he felt the situation would become even worse if the men began taking settlers' daughters into the wilds of the interior. Writing to Committee member Andrew Colvile of these recent marriages, he suggested that a discreet admonition would help to curb this undesirable trend:

...it not only frustrates the intentions of the Company and executors, in respect of the

⁴²P.A.B.C., Marriage certificate of Robert McVicar and Christy McBeath, Ross Corres. M26.9.

⁴³Thompson, "John West", p. 53.

Colony, but is a clog on the gentlemen who take them, who cannot do their duty or be disposable, with European women in their train, native women are a serious incumbrance, but with women from the civilized world, it is quite impossible the gentlemen can do their duty. 44

Simpson was further annoyed when on 18 August 1825, Chief Factor Donald McKenzie, recently appointed governor of the colony, committed a "foolish speculation" by marrying Miss Adelgonde Droz, the twenty-year-old daughter of an indigent Swiss settler.⁴⁵ Two years previously, perhaps because he was intending to retire, McKenzie had "turned off" his mixed-blood wife Mary McKay. For a handsome sum, he appears to have persuaded William Sinclair, Jr. to marry her at Norway House in the summer of 1823.⁴⁶ McKenzie took his three native children with him to Red River, and after he was persuaded to take over the governorship, apparently hired

⁴⁴H.B.C.A., G. Simpson to A. Colvile, 11 Aug. 1824, Selkirk Papers, Copy No. 160a, f. 1157C.

⁴⁵Ibid., Simpson to Colvile, 15 Aug. 1826, fos. 1185-86; E.4/lb, f. 214.

⁴⁶Although absolute proof is lacking, all evidence points to McKenzie's country wife being Mary McKay, a daughter of Alexander McKay and Margeurite Wadin McKay McLoughlin. Clues as to the transaction which took place between McKenzie and young Sinclair are given by Simpson, who was to have cause to nettle McKenzie "on the manner in which he got rid of his own Woman" (B.135/c/2, fos. 50-51) and by Sinclair's own curious statement: "I have received some of my Wife's Property about 500 pounds which so much out of a bad bargain" (H.B.C.A., Sinclair to E. Ermatinger, 22 June 1832, Copy No. 23, f. 274). Letitia Hargrave also refers to Mrs. Sinclair as "having 2 husbands alive", p. 235.

Miss Droz to be their governess.⁴⁷ He soon decided, however, that she possessed qualities enough to be an admirable wife. Describing Adelgonde to a friend, he wrote:

She is well informed and possesses strong intellects, but you are not to think she is a muse for wit....of mild and easy simplicity of manners, sufficiently accomplished being expert with her hands in all that females are accustomed to perform on the continental parts of Europe from bonnet to slippers. She is strict and exemplary in her conduct, the acknowledged model of her sex in this quarter, industrious, studious, devout, never missing a sacrament by any chance according to the rigid tenets of Calvin, sings psalms, gets whole strings of hymns by heart and prays and meditates by herself in lonely places by moonlight....for my own part I esteem her also in consideration of her habit taciturnity for you may rely upon it that nothing can give greater comfort to a husband than the satisfaction of having a wife who is nearly mute. 48

After McKenzie's marriage, the attempts of Company men to marry settlers' daughters appear to have been effectively curtailed, perhaps because of the mass exodus of the Swiss colonists after the floods of 1826. The chief officers of the Company, however, had already taken the lead in introducing British wives to Rupert's Land. As has been mentioned, Governor William Williams had left a wife in England when he came out to take charge of the Company's affairs in 1818. Even during

⁴⁷P.A.C., R. Hamlyn to Hargrave, 3 Aug. 1825, Hargrave Corres., vol. 1, p. 62.

⁴⁸D. McKenzie to Wilson P. Hunt, 25 June 1827, W.P. Hunt Papers, Missouri Historical Society (courtesy of Jennifer Brown).

his affair with Sally Fidler, he was writing to his wife about the possibility of her joining him.⁴⁹ Mrs. Williams with her small daughter and a maidservant finally arrived at Moose Factory in August 1822 after her husband had been made governor of the Southern Department.⁵⁰ At first, the English-woman was in ill health, but by January she had recovered sufficiently to go on a short beaver hunting excursion.⁵¹ Little is known of the impact which the presence of this white woman⁵² had on the inhabitants of Moose Factory, but she appears to have associated with the mixed-blood wife of officer Thomas Vincent and to have been interested in the education of the native children. In 1825, Mrs. Williams was praised for assisting the schoolmaster by "her maternal care in superintending and cherishing [the] Love of well-doing in the young of her sex."⁵³ Governor Simpson, however, had a low opinion of both Williams and his wife, whose presence

⁴⁹H.B.C.A., W. Williams to his wife, 4 Dec. 1820 and 10 Jan. 1821, A.5/6, fos. 130, 135d.

⁵⁰H.B.C.A., Passenger List of the Eddystone, 1822, C.1/317.

⁵¹H.B.C.A., Moose Fort Journal, 1822-23, B.135/a/125, f. 21, 46-48.

⁵²Mrs. Williams was not the first white woman to live at Moose Factory. In 1818, a shipwright Edward Taylor had been allowed to bring out his wife (A.1/51, f. 109). It appears that this couple may have only stayed two years for they were both "very indifferent" travellers (T. Vincent to Gov. Williams, 17 June 1820, B.135/b/40, f. 51).

⁵³H.B.C.A., Minutes of Council of Southern Department, 5 Aug. 1825, B.135/k/1, f. 21.

he felt contributed to her husband's mismanagement of his post.⁵⁴ Williams was, in fact, recalled and sailed home with his family by the annual ship in 1826.⁵⁵

Although he objected to Williams' family, Simpson had initially considered that a competent, married man was needed to introduce order into the affairs of Red River after the chaotic administration of Governor Bulger.⁵⁶ He was, therefore, highly optimistic when Captain R.P. Pelly accompanied by his English wife arrived to take charge of the colony in the summer of 1823. Every effort was made to ensure the material comfort of the family,⁵⁷ but Mrs. Pelly's health soon deteriorated. She was "a delicate woman" and never seemed to be "quite at home" in Red River.⁵⁸ By 1825, it was apparent that the English lady's life was in danger if she did not return home for medical attention; her husband, much to Simpson's disappointment, felt compelled to resign, and the couple departed by the fall ship.⁵⁹

⁵⁴H.B.C.A., Simpson to Colvile, 15 Aug. 1826, Copy No. 161, f. 1188; Simpson to McTavish, 15 Sept. 1827, B.239/c/1, f. 329.

⁵⁵H.B.C.A., Moose Journal, 9 Sept. 1826, B.135/a/130, f. 1.

⁵⁶H.B.C.A., Simpson to Colvile, 8 Sept. 1821, Copy No. 112, f. 587.

⁵⁷Simpson to Colvile, 8 Sept. 1823, Copy No. 160a, fos. 1108-11; Simpson to McTavish, 7 Jan. 1824, B.239/c/1, f. 132.

⁵⁸Simpson to Colvile, 8 Sept. 1823, Copy No. 160a, f. 1112.

⁵⁹Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, p. 164.

The unfortunate experience of Mrs. Pelly seems to have temporarily dampened Governor Simpson's enthusiasm for a white wife of his own--in spite of his country liasons, he had certainly kept this object in view.⁶⁰ Early in 1824, he had had to be cautioned by his mentor Andrew Colvile that marriage was scarcely compatible with his present responsibilities:

A wife I fear would be an embarrassment to you until the business gets into more complete order & until the necessity of those distant journies is over & if it be delayed one or two years you will be able to accumulate something before the expense of a family comes upon you. ⁶¹

Indeed, Simpson was just setting off on an arduous tour to the Columbia, but on his return the following year, he sailed in the company of the Pellys for a furlough in England. It is not known how Simpson settled any romantic attachments he may have had in Great Britain, but he came back to Rupert's Land still a bachelor and continued to exploit "the custom of the country".

⁶⁰ Simpson to Colvile, 16 Aug. 1822, Copy 112, fos. 638-39: "...I should certainly wish to get Home for a Season if my inclination continues to lead the same way". Who the object of his affection was is not known, although it is established that Simpson had another daughter called Maria, born in Scotland before he left for Rupert's Land. Perhaps, he intended to make an honest woman of the mother of this child, or as A.S. Morton suggests in his biography, he was interested in a Miss Eleanor Pooler who is kindly remembered in Simpson's letters to her father, see pp. 124, 161.

⁶¹ Colvile to Simpson, 11 March 1824, Copy 160a, f. 1116D-E

It is now that Margaret Taylor, the comely daughter of former sloopmaster George Taylor, appears in the Governor's life.⁶² Where they met is not known, but it may have been at the instigation of Margaret's brother Thomas who was Simpson's personal servant during these years. As had been his practice when embarking on an extensive voyage, the Governor left this woman at York in the fall of 1826 under the surveillance of his friend McTavish, to whom he wrote in a crude, if jocular vein:

Pray keep an Eye on the commodity and if she bring forth anything in the proper time & of the right color let them be taken care of but if any thing be amiss let the whole be bundled about their business... 63

The lady does not seem to have warranted his suspicion, and in the spring of 1827, a son was born who was named George after his father.⁶⁴ Simpson honoured his responsibility for the support of his family at York, allowing Margaret the enjoyment of special rations such as tea and sugar and even providing financial assistance for her widowed mother.⁶⁵

⁶²A.S. Morton wrongly attributes all Simpson's native children to Margaret Taylor. She was definitely not the mother of either Maria or James Keith Simpson. His mistake has been perpetuated by other historians such as Margaret MacLeod with the result that Simpson had been credited with an exaggerated number of mixed-blood offspring. Only four can definitely be documented.

⁶³Simpson to McTavish, 28 Aug. 1826, B.239/c/1, f. 283.

⁶⁴Ibid., Simpson to McTavish, 15 Sept. 1827, f. 332. According to a York Fort journal, "G.S." was born 11 Feb. 1827, B.239/a/136, f. 111d. The baby was christened George Stewart Simpson by Rev. Jones at York on 19 August 1828, C.M.S.A., Church Register, CC1/018.

⁶⁵Memo for J.G. McTavish, B.239/c/1, f. 346.

In fact, it appears that the Governor was beginning to treat Margaret as his country wife. He took her with him on his 1828 journey to New Caledonia, although at first she was so unwell that he was afraid he might have to leave her in Athabasca.⁶⁶ She recovered, however, and proved herself a valued companion, for Simpson rapidly tired of his male companions. "The commodity", he confided to McTavish, "has been a great consolation to me."⁶⁷ While returning in the spring, he referred to Margaret affectionately as "my fair one", and although disgruntled at the conduct of her brother Thomas, acknowledged him as a brother-in-law.⁶⁸ The Governor, however, was now preparing for another trip to England via the Canadas. On his way east, he left his "wife", now far advanced in her second pregnancy, at Bas de la Rivière under the care of Chief Factor John Stuart, whose country wife was her sister Mary. There, at the end of August 1829, Margaret gave birth to another boy, later christened John McKenzie Simpson.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Simpson to McTavish, 4 Aug. 1828, B.239/c/1, f. 360. As Simpson's private correspondence proves, A.S. Morton is inaccurate in stating that domestic considerations played no part in the Governor's life at this time, see p. 162.

⁶⁷Ibid., Simpson to McTavish, 22 Sept. 1828, f. 366.

⁶⁸H.B.C.A., Simpson to McTavish, 10 May 1829, B.239/c/2, f. 10.

⁶⁹H.B.C.A., J. Stuart to Simpson, 1 Feb. 1830, B.4/b/1, fos. 2d-3. This son was baptized by Rev. Cockran at Red River on 26 Dec. 1830 (E.4/1a, f. 80).

John Stuart's letters to the Governor during his absence provide a touching picture of Simpson's country family. Young Geordy and his baby brother were thriving; "I never saw finer or for their age more promising Children," claimed Stuart. His praise of their quiet, good-natured mother was also unstinted: "...in her comportment she is both decent and modest far beyond anything I could expect--or ever witnessed in any of her countrywomen."⁷⁰ He emphasized that Margaret was counting the days until Simpson's return:

A little ago when at supper I was telling Geordy that in two months and ten days he would see his father. [His mother] smiled and remarked to her sister that seventy days was a long time and [she] wished it was over. ⁷¹

It must have been a grievous shock for the young mixed-blood woman, therefore, when the Governor did return to Rupert's Land in May 1830--a lovely young English bride at his side!

Whether Simpson had always intended to perpetrate such a cruel betrayal is difficult to determine. At one point, he may actually have contemplated taking a mixed-blood wife because in a letter dated March 1828, a relative who was also a Company man advised him against marrying in Rupert's Land:

⁷⁰Stuart to Simpson, 1 Feb. 1830, B.4/b/1, fos. 2d-3.

⁷¹Ibid., Stuart to Simpson, 20 March 1830, f. 7.

...rather look for some amiable companion in the civilized world with which to conclude your days in the true comforts of a domestic life. 72

All thoughts of Margaret, however, appear to have vanished from Simpson's mind once in the presence of his charming eighteen-year-old cousin Frances, who had been but a child when he had begun his career as a clerk in her father's London firm. "Would you believe it?", the middle-aged Governor wrote excitedly to McTavish, "I am in Love."⁷³ The wedding took place on 24 February 1830, followed by a short honeymoon in Tunbridge Wells. In his decision to take a British wife, Simpson also had the strong support of his close friend John George McTavish, who in the winter of 1829-30 was himself on furlough in Great Britain searching for a "tender exotic".⁷⁴

Before becoming a Chief Factor in the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, J.G. McTavish, the son of a Scottish chieftain, had had a long and distinguished career as a Nor'Wester. During his early days at Moose Factory, though in opposition, he formed a union with one of the daughters of Hudson's Bay officer Thomas Thomas. This appears to have been a particularly tragic relationship; the woman was driven to infanticide and

⁷²H.B.C.A., Æmileus Simpson to George Simpson, 20 March 1828, D.5/3, f. 168.

⁷³H.B.C.A., Simpson to McTavish, 26 Dec. 1829, B.135/c/2, f. 35d.

⁷⁴Ibid., Simpson to McTavish, 3 Jan. 1832, f. 76.

McTavish subsequently renounced his connection with her.⁷⁵ Around 1813, he then wed à la façon du pays young Nancy McKenzie, also known as Matooski, who was the daughter of a former prominent Nor'Wester Roderick McKenzie and an Indian woman.⁷⁶ Over the years, Nancy bore McTavish a family of seven lively daughters for whom the father seems to have had much affection. By the late 1820's, however, there were signs of a growing estrangement between himself and their mother; McTavish confided to Simpson that he contemplated packing Nancy off to Red River where her uncle Donald was now governor.⁷⁷ Although she may have felt uncertain of her husband when he went home on furlough in 1829, Matooskie fully expected McTavish to return, particularly since their young daughter Anne had accompanied him.⁷⁸ Friends kept McTavish informed of the welfare of his family, Hargrave noting specially that all spring Madame and "the little

⁷⁵MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 83. This country wife of McTavish was reputed to have smothered two children, one while he was on his way to England. See also Stuart to McTavish, 16 Aug. 1830, E.24/4: Stuart reminds McTavish that it was at Moose "you abandoned the first of your Wives."

⁷⁶It appears that John Stuart had become the guardian of McKenzie's native children, two girls and one boy, after their father retired from the Indian Country in 1803. Stuart had occasion to write to the husband of McKenzie's other daughter: "I supported her when a child and during the first twelve Years of her life, until her Sister [became] the bosom companion of Mr. McTavish, then he supported her, until she became your wife" (Stuart to Lachlin McLean, 12 Aug. 1831, B.4/b/1, fos. 15d-16).

⁷⁷Simpson to McTavish, 10 July 1830, B.135/c/2, f. 50.

⁷⁸MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 84.

Madraulikins" had been paying "a visit to the riverside to see where the road shall open for you."⁷⁹

No McTavish arrived at York Factory by the annual ship in 1830, however. Instead, with a new Scottish bride, he had made his way via Canada to take charge of Moose Factory, headquarters of the Southern Department. Having decided to desert his mixed-blood wife, the old fur trader had initially found himself ill at ease in the intricacies of genteel courtship. He received encouragement from Simpson:

I see you are something like myself shy with the fair, we should not be so much so with the Browns...muster courage "a faint heart never won a fair Lady. 80

McTavish could not persuade a certain "Miss B." to leave the security of home and friends, but early in the new year, he succeeded in winning the affection of Miss Catherine Turner, a daughter of the late Keith Turner of Turnerhall, Aberdeenshire.⁸¹ The couple were married on February 22 in Edinburgh and embarked immediately for London to join the Simpsons with whom they would travel to the Indian Country.

The news that McTavish had married a Scottish lady was greeted with astonishment throughout Rupert's Land. His country wife was so distraught after being "delicately" told

⁷⁹P.A.C., Hargrave to McTavish, 26 May 1830, Hargrave Corres., vol. 21, L.B. 5.

⁸⁰Simpson to McTavish, 5 Dec. 1829, B.135/c/2, fos. 33d-34.

⁸¹Morton, Simpson, p. 164; P.A.C., Donald Ross to Hargrave, 25 Feb. 1830, Hargrave Corres., vol. 1, pp. 214-215.

that her husband was not coming back, that even Hargrave sympathized with her plight. "The poor girl here bears up wonderfully & is fast acquiring resignation," he wrote to Donald McKenzie, but "the first blow was dreadful to witness. All your friends have used their best endeavours at consolation."⁸² Indeed, quite an opposition to McTavish built up at York; rumours were circulated that he had been guilty of mismanagement, drunkenness, and gross abuse of his former partner.⁸³ But Simpson, who had arrived at the factory early in the summer, would brook no attack on his friend's character. He decided to ship Nancy McKenzie off to Bas de la Rivière where she spent the winter under the same roof as his "old concern" Margaret. Both women, who each had two children with them, were given an allowance of thirty pounds.⁸⁴

Thus John Stuart became the temporary guardian of both cast-off wives. While Stuart did not dare to openly criticize the Governor's action, he and several other officers, especially Donald McKenzie, were loud in denouncing McTavish's deceitful behaviour. Stuart bitterly attacked McTavish for having so unfeelingly violated the custom of the country:

⁸²P.A.C., Hargrave to D. McKenzie, 1 July 1830, Hargrave Corres., vol. 21, L.B. 6.

⁸³Simpson to McTavish, 10 July 1830, B.135/c/2, fos. 50-51; P.A.C., Hargrave to McTavish, 20 May 1831, Hargrave Corres., vol. 21, L.B. 6.

⁸⁴Simpson to McTavish, 3 Jan. 1831, B.135/c/2, f. 54d.

...what could be your aim in discarding her whom you clasped to your bosom in virgin purity and had for 17 Years with you, She was the Wife of your choice and had born you seven Children, now Stigmatized with ignominy...if with a view to domestick happiness you have thus acted, I fear the Aim had been Missed and that remorse will be your portion for life...I think it is as well...our correspondence may cease. 85

McTavish, now safely isolated at Moose, had delegated Simpson to settle his affairs, and the Governor found himself at "hot war" with McKenzie and Stuart who demanded that Nancy should at least receive a large financial settlement to compensate for the years she had devoted to McTavish.

Although Simpson acknowledged the necessity of some provision for both women, he considered it both economic and honorable to solve the problem by finding them new husbands. Thus while McKenzie and Stuart raged, Simpson was busy negotiating. Early in January, he silenced his opponents by securing a written promise of marriage for Matooskie--one Pierre Leblanc, a respectable French-Canadian in the Company's service at Red River, had finally succumbed to the offered dowry of £200 sterling.⁸⁶ Leblanc was given a week off to go courting at Bas de la Rivière, and Matooskie, although she

⁸⁵Stuart to McTavish, 16 Aug. 1830, E.24/4. It should be emphasized that McTavish and Simpson had not even adhered to the old fur trade practice of "turning off" where at least arrangements were made for the old wife before a new one was taken.

⁸⁶Simpson to McTavish, 10-11 Jan. 1831, B.135/c/2, fos. 56-57.

had declared she would never take another husband, had little alternative but to accept his offer. The couple were formally married by a priest, after Nancy's baptism, at the Catholic Church of St. Boniface early in the morning on 7 February 1831, the event being duly celebrated by their friends at Red River.⁸⁷

The details of Simpson's own negotiations are unfortunately lacking. It is recorded, however, that on 24 March 1831, "Margarette" Taylor was married to French-Canadian Amable Hogue by the Rev. David Jones at the Red River Church.⁸⁸ The opinion was popularly expressed that these arrangements represented quite a come-down for both ladies, particularly the latter.⁸⁹

⁸⁷Simpson to McTavish, 10 April 1831, B.135/c/2, f. 63d. For the actual marriage contract, see B.235/z/3, f. 547a.

⁸⁸E.4/lb. f. 230d.

⁸⁹W. Sinclair to E. Ermatinger, 15 Aug. 1831, Copy 23, f. 271: "...what a down fall is here..." Little is known about Margaret Taylor after she was married to Hogue, but she appears to have lived in Red River for the rest of her life. A letter from her son George to his father in 1850 suggests that she was subject to increasing poverty:

I received a most welcome letter from my mother last fall, I understand she is in poor circumstances, and it is my duty as a dutiful son to relieve her; She shall not want as long as I have the means." (D.5/28, f. 96d)

Nancy McKenzie's life was to be one of continuing misfortune. While her marriage to Leblanc began happily enough, there were soon signs of growing friction. According to Simpson, Leblanc and "the old Lady are continually snarling at each other; she is absolutely jealous & harrasses the poor Devil out of his life." Leblanc also did not like having to look after the youngest of McTavish's children (even though their support was provided for), especially since his wife now had new family

Apart from the suffering inflicted upon their former mixed-blood wives, the action of Simpson and McTavish had wider implications for fur trade society because it reflected a growing racial prejudice. In the words of James Hargrave: "this influx of white faces has cast a still deeper shade over the faces of our Brunettes in the eyes of many."⁹⁰ The arrival of the genteel Frances Simpson made a great stir throughout Rupert's Land, especially in the upper echelon of fur trade society. It is significant that as the English woman progressed with her husband from post to post, she does not appear to have been introduced to a single native wife, whereas the officers themselves were assiduous in their attempts to be hospitable and refined. At Lac La Pluie (which some weeks later was named Fort Frances in honour of Mrs. Simpson), Chief Trader Thomas McMurray undertook to

89 (continued) concerns (Simpson to McTavish, 9 Aug. 1834, B. 135/c/2, f. 129d.). In 1838, the Leblanc family were part of a large group which embarked for the Columbia. Nancy seems to have been much influenced by the Catholic priests for her name features in the records as godmother for many of the children baptised (Catholic Church Records, A-54). It proved a fateful journey, however. In the tragic accident at the Dalles in October, her husband and three other children were drowned (P.A.B.C., Arch. McDonald to E. Ermatinger, 1 Feb. 1839). When the poor woman reached Fort Vancouver, she refused the offer of a passage back to Red River, saying there was nothing to go back for. In 1842, her daughter Grace (by McTavish) was married to Captain Charles Dodd of the S.S. Beaver, and Nancy lived with them for the rest of her life. She died at Fort Victoria on 24 July 1851 (A.36/8, fos. 222-224).

⁹⁰P.A.C., Hargrave to Charles Ross, 1 Dec. 1830, Hargrave Papers, vol. 21, L.B. 6.

play the gallant, but he was obviously ill at ease in escorting the Governor's lady on a tour of fort and garden:

...old & weatherbeaten as he was, he surpassed all the Gentlemen I had met with in these Wilds, as a Lady's Man; but altho' our walk did not occupy an hour, it quite exhausted all his fine speeches, and the poor man seemed as much relieved when we returned to the house...as if he had just been freed from an attack of the Night-Mare. 91

Few were more concerned to create a favourable impression than the obsequious John Stuart, who must have been forewarned to have Margaret Taylor out of the way, because he welcomed the Governor's bride to Fort Alexander in early June with more than an "ordinary degree of kindness".⁹² Mrs. Simpson was a most charming creature whose coming heralded improved standards of morality and gentility, he wrote rapturously to a prominent member of the London Committee:

The very first sight of her on landing at Bas de la Riviere strongly reminded me of the Picture Milton has drawn of our first Mother = Grace was in all her steps = heaven in her Eye = In all her gestures Dignity and love, while everything I have seen of her since--seems to denote her such as first Lord Lyttleton represented his first Lady to have been = Polite as all her life in courts had been = Yet good as she the world had never seen. 93

⁹¹G.L. Nute, "Journey for Frances", The Beaver, March 1954, p. 17.

⁹²Nute, "Journey for Frances", The Beaver, Summer 1854, p. 14; Simpson to Mctavish, 10 July 1830, B.135/c/2, f. 50.

⁹³J. Stuart to Nicholas Garry, 8 Aug. 1830, B.4/b/1, fos. 8d-9; see also Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 57.

On taking up residence in Red River, the Governor now endeavoured to implement the genteel British life-style to which his wife was accustomed and which befitted his station. Various refinements such as a pianoforte and an elegant, new carriage appeared, and construction was begun on an impressive stone house which was to be the official residence.⁹⁴ The accomplished Mrs. Simpson was extolled as "the brightest star" in Red River society, but her very presence tended to sharpen class and race distinctions. As one mixed-blood officer in the Company observed resentfully, "...things are not on the same footing as formerly."⁹⁵ Prominent settlers and officers who had native wives appear to have left them behind when entertained by the Simpsons,⁹⁶ and the female society of the Governor's lady was restricted to the few white women in this upper echelon, namely Adalgonde McKenzie and the missionaries' wives, Mary Jones and Ann Cockran.⁹⁷ This small circle was only augmented by the arrival of the Scottish wife of Chief Factor James McMillan in the fall of 1831.

⁹⁴Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 59; P.A.B.C., Thomas Simpson to Donald Ross, 12 March 1831, Ross Corres. S15.

⁹⁵W. Sinclair to E. Ermatinger, 15 Aug. 1831, Copy 23, f. 271; Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 58: "...Mrs. Simpson's presence here makes a change in us".

⁹⁶P.A.C., Duncan Finlayson to Hargrave, 18 Dec. 1830, Hargrave Corres., vol. 1, pp. 275-76; P.A.B.C., Thomas Simpson to Donald Ross, 19 Dec. 1831, Ross Corres. S15.

⁹⁷Simpson to McTavish, 10 April 1831, B.135/c/2, f. 64d.

Like Simpson and McTavish, James McMillan had also married a white woman, Miss Eleanor McKinley, while on furlough in Britain during the winter of 1829-30.⁹⁸ His wife's health had been too delicate for her to accompany her husband when he returned to take charge of the experimental farm at Red River in 1830, but she came out via York Factory the following summer with an infant daughter, born in the interim, and a maidservant.⁹⁹

Governor Simpson's attempt to exclude all but white women from the elite of fur trade society was to have unfortunate repercussions. Those officers who remained loyal to their native wives were placed in a difficult position. Some, aware that their "poor homespun country squaws"¹⁰⁰ would compare unfavourably with cultivated white women, merely relegated them to the background. Archibald McDonald was one of the few who took the more positive step of educating his mixed-blood wife to cope with the changing social scene. Although writing in jest to his friend Ermatinger in 1831, McDonald revealed that his wife was aware of the threat which white women posed for her kind:

⁹⁸McMillan had severed his connection with his country wife Kilakotah before he left the Columbia in 1829 (P.A.C., James McMillan to John McLeod, 21 Jan. 1828, McLeod Corres., p. 213).

⁹⁹Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 85.

¹⁰⁰P.A.C., Donald Ross to Hargrave, 25 Feb. 1830, Hargrave Corres., vol. 1, pp. 214-15.

I already feel the beneficial effects of the Govr & McTavish's marriages--[Jenny] has picked up sense enough to infer from their having changed partners, that the old ones were difficient in learning & that her own case may be the same when tis my turn to visit my Scottish cousins. 101

But several officers who went so far as to attempt to introduce their native wives to the society of the new white women were met with a scathing rebuff. Such was the mistake of Chief Factor Colin Robertson, a proud Scotsman, who had previously earned Simpson's dislike because his genuine concern for the betterment of his half-breed wife Theresa had often resulted in extravagance and a neglect of business.¹⁰² While preparing to take his family to Canada, Robertson brought his wife to Red River in 1831 to visit two of their children who were at school at the parsonage. The old trader's hope that his wife might also make the acquaintance of Mrs. Simpson was treated with contempt by the Governor:

Robertson brought his bit of Brown wt. him to the Settlement this Spring in hopes that She would pick up a few English manners before visiting the civilized World....I told him distinctly that the thing was impossible which mortified him exceedingly. 103

At Moose Factory, McTavish had similarly ruffled feelings by refusing to countenance Isabella, the mixed-blood wife of

¹⁰¹P.A.B.C., Archibald McDonald to Ed. Ermatinger, 20 Feb. 1831, Ermatinger Corres.

¹⁰²Rich, Colin Robertson's Letters, p. cxxii.

¹⁰³Simpson to McTavish, 15 Aug. 1831 and 3 Jan. 1832, B.135/c/2, fos. 73, 79.

Chief Factor Joseph Beioley.¹⁰⁴ Even Simpson expressed concern lest McTavish go too far in alienating Beioley whose capacities he rated highly, but the Governor fully sympathized with his friend that it was the height of presumption for Beioley to expect that "his bit of circulating copper" should have the society of Mrs. McTavish.¹⁰⁵ The mixed-blood, though Anglicized families of former Company officers such as that of George Gladman were highly incensed at such treatment for they considered themselves to be part of the fur trade elite. Simpson, however, encouraged McTavish to rid them of this illusion:

I...understand that the other Ladies at Moose are violent and indignant at being kept at such a distance, likewise their husbands, the young Gladmans particularlyThe greater the distance at which they are kept the better. 106

The Governor had enforced such a stand at Red River where only two half-breed women had been allowed to come near his lady, both in a menial capacity. One had been the wife of a servant who measured her foot for moccasins and the other ironically was Nancy Leblanc who helped to nurse Mrs. Simpson when she was recovering from the birth of her first child.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Isabella was a daughter of former Company officer John McKay and an unknown native woman.

¹⁰⁵Simpson to McTavish, 3 Jan. 1832, B.135/c/2, f. 78.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., Simpson to McTavish, 15 Aug. 1831, f. 74.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 74d.

In the early 1830's, it had indeed become fashionable for a Company officer to have a white wife. One old trader, commenting on the "novelty of getting H. Bay stocked with European Ladys", conjectured that a number of other men would now avail themselves of their furlough "with no other view than that of getting Spliced to some fair Belinda."¹⁰⁸ Certainly any unattached white female who had occasion to set foot in Red River attracted much interest. Such was the case of Miss Eliza Waugh, who in 1829 had accompanied Mrs. Jones out to Red River as a companion cum personal maid. She was reputed to be a fine, lively Welsh girl, tempting for even a Governor in Chief.¹⁰⁹ Simpson, of course, had placed his affections elsewhere, but he observed that several officers were "casting a sheep's eye" at the parson's maid.¹¹⁰ Miss Waugh, however, does not seem to have been enamoured of the colony because in 1834 she departed for Britain. On the same ship was newly-commissioned Chief Trader John Tod on furlough with the intent of taking a wife.¹¹¹ Romance

¹⁰⁸ Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 66.

¹⁰⁹ Stuart to Simpson, 1 Feb. 1830, B.4/b/1, f. 5.

¹¹⁰ Simpson to McTavish, 10 April 1831 and 15 Aug. 1831, B.135/c/2, fos. 64d-64, 73d.

¹¹¹ H.B.C.A., John Tod to E. Ermatinger, 21 July 1834, Copy No. 21, f. 27. Tod appears to have parted with the country wife he had had in New Caledonia. He had also previously had a son by a mixed-blood girl called Catherine Birston whom he had turned off (J. Tod to Ermatinger, 27 Feb. 1826 and 14 Feb. 1829, Copy 21, fos. 5,8).

evidently blossomed during the voyage for Tod married Miss Eliza shortly after their arrival in Britain and received permission to bring her back to Rupert's Land in the summer of 1835.¹¹²

A most dramatic illustration of the ascendancy of the white woman was the rate at which the British schoolmistresses became the wives of retired Company officers. After the death of his Indian wife in the fall of 1834, old James Bird showed unseemly haste in taking up with the widowed Mrs. Mary Lowman. The couple were married on 22 January 1835, an event which occasioned much gossip because it considerably disorganized the girls' school.¹¹³ Rumour had it that the "Old Goat" had managed to capture the attractive school marm with the promise of a very handsome marriage settlement: "A Widow with Two Children & without anything to depend upon, was not likely to let such an opportunity slip of getting £3000 secured to her."¹¹⁴ Hargrave was to note approvingly, however, that Bird had become "a reformed man in manner & vigor since his marriage to a white wife."¹¹⁵

¹¹²H.B.C.A., Company Secretary to Jas. Keith, 14 Feb. 1835, A.6/23, f. 109.

¹¹³Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 181, 187, 189.

¹¹⁴P.A.C., John Charles to Hargrave, 23 Feb. 1835, Hargrave Corres., vol. 5, p. 979. Mrs Bird's two children by her previous husband came out to Red River after their mother's marriage, and she also had a son and daughter by Bird.

¹¹⁵P.A.C., Hargrave to Donald McKenzie, 9 July 1839, Hargrave Corres., vol. 23, L.B. 15.

Mrs. Bird's former travelling companion, Mrs. Sarah Ingham, who was also a widow, likewise captivated a retired fur trader. She had been on the verge of returning to England in the fall of 1836 when several influential settlers had persuaded her to establish a minor boarding and day school at Point Douglas. But on 29 July 1839, Mrs. Ingham quite willingly abandoned her teaching duties to become the wife of her chief patron Robert Logan.¹¹⁶ Logan's Ojibway wife Mary had died the year before and her children opposed their father's new choice of a wife. To the Englishwoman's credit, she apparently worked hard at reconciliation. A friend observed in 1842:

The Logans appear to be very happy. The lady fortunately seems to have overcome the original dislike of the former children to the match,--a change in which her good sense, I doubt not, has a large share of merit. 117

When the would-be governess Miss Anne Armstrong first arrived in Rupert's Land in 1835, Hargrave had predicted that this "most amiable young lady" might one day "comfort a desolate and longing trader."¹¹⁸ Her eventual marriage to retired Chief Factor J.P. Pruden on 4 December 1839, however, was to prove less than harmonious.¹¹⁹ The match had evidently

¹¹⁶P.A.C., William Sinclair to Hargrave, 10 Dec. 1839, vol. 7, p. 1746; E.4/lb, f. 262.

¹¹⁷H.B.C.A., Adam Thom to Simpson, 8 Aug. 1842, D.5/7, f. 185d.

¹¹⁸P.A.C., Hargrave to Allan McDonnell, 10 Dec. 1835, Hargrave Corres., vol. 22, L.B. 11.

¹¹⁹E.4/lb, f. 263.

been instigated by Simpson in hopes of saving the cost of returning Miss Armstrong to England, but the recently-widowed old Indian trader seems to have been too rough and vulgar to please this fastidious lady. The discord between Pruden and his wife soon became common knowledge: one contemporary described them,

...like cat & dog, on each side of the hearth, the one spattering & the other snarling...certain it is, that their tempers are not suited to each other, & that they will never live happily together. 120

The new Mrs. Pruden also appears to have alienated her younger step-daughters who were still at home by her pretentious airs. The situation improved somewhat after the marriage of the elder, Maria, in 1841; the Englishwoman then set about making a fashionable young lady of the youngest Caroline, who was reputed to have been the most beautiful girl in Red River.¹²¹

Of all the schoolmistresses who came out to Red River in the early decades, the only one who failed to capture a retired fur trader was the eccentric, middle-aged spinster Miss Allan. The sudden death of the "old Blue" James Sutherland in 1844 apparently terminated her prospects, and she returned

¹²⁰Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 330-31; MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 28, 218.

¹²¹H.B.C.A., Adam Thom to Simpson, 8 Aug. 1842, D.5/7, f. 185d; Healy, Women of Red River, pp. 26, 42.

to England the following year.¹²² The circle was completed when on 1 February 1844, wealthy Chief Factor John Charles married Margaret Macallum, who had come out to assist her brother, the schoolmaster John Macallum, in 1839.¹²³ It will be remembered that Macallum was already Charles' son-in-law, and this peculiar relationship occasioned much comment. The marriage, however, may have been one of convenience for Charles had been especially devoted to his half-breed wife Jane who died of tuberculosis in 1841.¹²⁴

In becoming the wives of the "grandees" of the settlement, the former schoolmistresses gained considerable social prestige. With their husbands to provide them with fine houses and elegant carriages, Mrs. Bird and Mrs. Pruden, in particular, set about becoming the leaders of fashion in Red River, giving dinner parties, balls and dances.¹²⁵ Old

¹²²Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 330; MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 218.

¹²³E.4/2, f. 90.

¹²⁴P.A.C., John Charles to Hargrave, 10 Dec. 1841, Hargrave Corres., vol. 8, pp. 2172-73. Although he initially intended to settle in Red River, Charles took his wife to Scotland in 1844 and decided to stay. They were later joined by his widowed daughter, Mrs. John Macallum. Unfortunately both women were to suffer from mental disorders and had to be placed in an asylum (Jn. Swanston to Simpson, 11 July 1853, D.5/36, f. 48d).

¹²⁵MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 217-218; Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 241: "Mrs. Bird is fast rising to the top of the tree". According to one visitor, Mrs. Logan was not quite in the same league with her former mistress: "She is, however, very hospitable and endeavours to do the honours of her house as well as she can" (Mitchell, "Red River Gossip", p. 9).

James Sutherland had been quick to observe that their activities accentuated the growth of social distinctions in the colony:

We have now here some rich old fellows that have acquired large fortunes in the service, have got married to European females and cut a dash, have introduced a system of extravagance into the place that is followed by all that can afford it. 126

The Protestant clergy, with their intrinsic belief in the superiority of everything British and white¹²⁷ and also out of deference to their own wives, encouraged the Company officers in their desire to marry white women. When it was rumoured in 1835 that James Hargrave might finally succumb to a mixed-blood damsel, Reverend Cockran wrote to him in alarm; he urged him to keep in view the noble example of Chief Factor Duncan Finlayson who was almost alone among his contemporaries in having managed to evade "the snare which has ruined many of our countrymen."¹²⁸ By coincidence, both Hargrave and Finlayson were to go on furlough in 1837, apparently as much with the intention of finding a wife as seeking a cure for failing health.

While touring in Scotland, Hargrave visited the family home of friends, the young clerks William and Dugald Mactavish,

¹²⁶Glenbow Archives, James Sutherland to John Sutherland, 7 Aug. 1838, John Sutherland Papers.

¹²⁷Pannekoek, "The Churches in Red River 1818-1870", p. 52.

¹²⁸P.A.C., Wm. Cockran to Hargrave, 8 Aug. 1835, Hargrave Corres., vol. 5, p. 1078.

at Campbeltown. He had not been long at Kilchrist House before he had decided that their elder sister Letitia would make an admirable wife. The call of duty interrupted Hargrave's matrimonial plans for he was called back to York unexpectedly before he had time to present his official suit. Both proposal and acceptance were conveyed by post, and Hargrave after an impatient season returned to marry Letitia on 8 January 1840.¹²⁹

In the meantime, Duncan Finlayson, visiting in London, had lost his heart to another of the Simpson girls--Isobel, the elder sister of the Governor's wife. On May 26, 1838, this gentlemanly trader recorded in his diary:

I have this day been made the Happiest Man on earth by the declaration from the Sweet lips of the amiable & accomplished Miss Simpson that she would be mine forever. 130

The couple were married November 10 at the parish church of Bromley St. Leonard, Middlesex, Governor Simpson and Chief Factor John McLoughlin standing as witnesses.¹³¹ Isobel, however, was not well enough to accompany her husband to Rupert's Land when he returned to assume the governorship of Assiniboia in 1839. She did come out the following summer with the Hargraves to York Factory where she was met by her husband. The marriages of Hargrave and Finlayson were greeted

¹²⁹MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. xxv-xxvi, 3-5, 271-76.

¹³⁰H.B.C.A., E.12/4, f. 31.

¹³¹Copy of Marriage Certificate, E.12/1, f. 51.

with approbation throughout the Indian Country.¹³² There can be no doubting the sincerity of James Douglas' congratulations to Hargrave, but he paused to make a perceptive comment on the transition which had taken place in fur trade society:

There is a strange revolution, in the manners of the country; Indian wives were at one time the vogue, the half breed supplanted these, and now we have the lovely tender exotic torn from its parent bed, to pine and languish in the desert. 133

Indeed, "to pine and languish" had been the fate of most of the early white wives of the fur traders. As wives of Company officers, though undoubtedly exposed to inconveniences, they were not subject to the hardships experienced by many pioneer women, but few managed to adjust to life in the Indian Country. They suffered from homesickness, loneliness and ill health (real and feigned). In most cases those who married white women retired within a few years or at least moved to more amenable posts in Eastern Canada.

Of the settlers' daughters who married Company officers in the early 1820's, only one, Mary Ross, was to spend her life in the Indian Country. In 1824, John Clarke earned a reprimand from Simpson for taking elaborate precautions to ensure his wife's comfort when travelling into Lesser Slave Lake.¹³⁴ Unfortunately there is no record of how the Swiss

¹³²Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 309, 318, 332, 358-59, 361, 370-71.

¹³³Ibid., pp. 310-11.

¹³⁴Merk, Fur Trade and Empire, pp. 11-12.

Marianne fared during her years at this post except that two sons were born.¹³⁵ After three more years at Fort Pelly in the Swan River district, Clarke took his wife and family east and served at Mingan for several years before retiring to Montreal. Christy McVicar proved more hardy than most for she had to endure the rigours of the northern post Fort Resolution. One must indeed sympathize with this lone white woman on the shores of Great Slave Lake who in the fall of 1825 suffered through the birth and subsequent death of her first child.¹³⁶ After the birth of a son in January 1827, named after John Richardson of the Franklin Expedition, McVicar decided that he must leave the Indian Country for his family's sake. That spring he took his wife and infant son out to stay with her sister Mrs. Ross at Norway House while he went east to make arrangements to settle. Ill health prevented McVicar's return so that in the summer of 1828 his wife had to make the long journey east alone. She apparently withstood the fatigue of the journey "admirably" and joined her husband in Montreal at the end of October.¹³⁷

¹³⁵E.4/1a, f. 61.

¹³⁶McCord Museum, McGill University, John Richardson to Robert McVicar, 7 Sept. 1825 and 27 June 1826, Robert McVicar Papers.

¹³⁷H.B.C.A., Norway House Journal, 15 Aug. 1828, B.159/a/10, f. 4; Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 35. Both the Clarke and McVicar families were to fall on hard times in Eastern Canada.

It was perhaps the fear of life in the wilderness that drove Eliza Tod to madness. Tod was to have taken his wife to the Columbia in the summer of 1835, but they had not even reached Red River when she began to show signs of mental disorder. As a result, the couple were allowed to winter at Bas de la Rivière.¹³⁸ Hargrave, who feared that Tod's domestic burdens would affect his prospects of advancement, expressed the hope that a season's quiet rest would restore the nerves of the delicate lady who understandably "felt agitated in being drawn into scenes new to her in almost every point of view."¹³⁹ Initially, Mrs. Tod did appear to improve and gave birth to a healthy little girl in December, but by spring her condition had deteriorated so badly that her husband felt obliged to take her to England. This plan was thwarted when Tod was unexpectedly required to take charge of Oxford House. During the next season, his wife became so deranged that it was feared she would do violence to herself and child. All the inhabitants of the post were afraid to go near the mad woman, leaving the distraught Tod to tend her as best he could.¹⁴⁰ He was given a leave of absence to take his wife to England in the fall of 1837, and

¹³⁸William Sinclair to Ed. Ermatinger, 1 Aug. 1835, Copy 23, pp. 275-76; P.A.B.C., Archibald McDonald to Ed. Ermatinger, 1 April 1836, Ermatinger Corres.

¹³⁹P.A.C., Hargrave to J. Tod, 10 Dec. 1835, Hargrave Corres., vol. 22, L.B. 10.

¹⁴⁰John Tod to E. Ermatinger, 29 June 1836 and 15 July 1837, Copy 21, pp. 30, 35.

it was eventually arranged for her to be placed in an asylum. After his return to the Columbia in 1838, Tod never saw his wife again.¹⁴¹

Ironically, the Governor's lady in the relative comfort of the Red River settlement was to have a disastrous sojourn. Frances Simpson was undoubtedly a very pretty and talented young lady, but her husband in his infatuation appears to have overlooked the fact that her delicate constitution and sheltered upbringing did not augur well for a colonial life. The young woman's diary reveals that she could hardly bear to part from her large, affectionate family circle at Grove House in London:

I can scarcely trust myself to think of the pang which shot thro' my heart, on taking the last "Farewell" of my beloved Father, who was equally overcome at the first parting from any of his children--suffice it to say, that this was to me a moment of bitter sorrow. ¹⁴²

Shortly after the ship sailed from Liverpool in March 1830, Mrs. Simpson succumbed to such a violent attack of sea-sickness that her husband was prepared to bribe the captain to put her ashore in Ireland. Stormy weather foiled the landing attempt,

¹⁴¹H.B.C.A., London Committee to Simpson, 15 Feb. 1837, A.6/24, f. 85; Simpson to B. Harrison, 28 June 1843, D.4/62, f. 64; J. Tod to Simpson, 6 March 1844, D.5/10, f. 384. After this tragic experience, Tod apparently found solace in another country wife, Sophia Lolo, who was the daughter of a prominent half-breed guide at Fort Kamloops. Elize Tod died in 1857, leaving Tod free to marry Sophia after his retirement to Victoria.

¹⁴²H.B.C.A., Frances Simpson's Diary, D.6/4, f. 2.

however, and over the course of the voyage her health improved. Both she and Mrs. McTavish enjoyed the agreeable society of prominent families in New York and Montreal before embarking on the trip to the Indian Country, "the first ever undertaken by Ladies, and one which has always been considered as fraught with danger."¹⁴³ While the inconveniences and hazards of canoe travel were indeed not inconsiderable, every precaution was taken to render the two ladies as safe and comfortable as possible. This was reflected in the enthusiasm and good humour of Frances' diary of the trip; she was awed by the magnificence of the scenery, professed admiration for the strength and skill of their picked crew of voyageurs, two of whom were entrusted to carry the ladies over the portages, and was gratified by the warm reception she received all along the route to York Factory.¹⁴⁴

Mrs. Simpson's first winter in Red River began auspiciously enough, but she was soon to find herself isolated and lonely, thanks largely to her husband's prejudices. As has been mentioned, her society was restricted to a few white women, but even of these, Simpson declared, only the well-bred Mrs. Jones could be considered his wife's social equal. Mrs. Cockran he dismissed as a vixen who "shines only when talking of elbow

¹⁴³H.B.C.A., Frances Simpson's Diary, D.6/4, f. 27.

¹⁴⁴See published excerpts of Frances' diary in G.L. Nute "Journey for Frances", The Beaver, December 1953, pp. 50-54; March 1954, pp. 12-17; Summer 1954, pp. 12-18.

Grease & the scouring of pots & pans" and Mrs. McKenzie was "a silly ignorant thing". The Governor wrote to McTavish that Frances was constantly longing for the society of his wife, and he contemplated moving her to Moose as he had become heartily sick of the "high society" of the colony, largely as a result of the gossip and intrigue occasioned by the Nancy McKenzie affair.¹⁴⁵

Frances herself actually appears to have had a much more affable nature than her husband,¹⁴⁶ but she had little chance to cultivate any intimate friendships because her health rapidly deteriorated as her first pregnancy advanced in the spring of 1831. Simpson who now appears the most uxorious of husbands, was distraught at the necessity of having to leave his wife during the summer to attend the annual council at York Factory. He hurried back to Red River in time for the birth of a son from which his wife barely survived.¹⁴⁷ During the winter, Simpson was much heartened by the steady, if slow progress of both mother and child; the christening of little George Geddes in January 1832 was a considerable

¹⁴⁵Simpson to McTavish, 3 January 1831 and 10 April 1831, B.135/c/2, fos. 54, 64d-65.

¹⁴⁶Mrs. Simpson's own correspondence reveals that she regarded Adlegonde McKenzie as a friend, and she was later to recollect "her goodness to me in by gone days", see the letters reprinted in C.W. MacKenzie, Donald MacKenzie: "King of the Northwest" (Los Angeles, 1937), pp. 165-66, 194, 198-99.

¹⁴⁷Simpson to McTavish, 3 July 1831 and 3 January 1832, B.135/c/2, fos. 70, 76d-77.

social event in the colony. A few months later, however, the little boy died suddenly, plunging his parents into the depths of despair.¹⁴⁸

This tragedy further weakened Mrs. Simpson's health. Although a trip to York Factory in the summer of 1832 appears to have revived her spirits somewhat, she was a constant invalid during the following winter in Red River. The Governor had to accept that his wife, now desperately in need of skilled medical attention, would never be happy in the colony:

She has no Society, no Friend, no Relative here but myself, she cannot move wt. me on my different Journeys and I cannot leave her in the hands of Strangers...some of them very unfeeling. 149

He, therefore, took Frances home via Canada in 1833 and she never returned to the Indian Country.¹⁵⁰

Mrs. McMillan's stay in Red River was hardly more successful. She too suffered constantly from ill health, and in the spring of 1833, some months after the birth of a daughter, her husband

¹⁴⁸Simpson to McTavish, 1 May 1832, B.135/c/2, f. 83.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., Simpson to McTavish, 1 May 1832 and 4 May 1833, fos. 83, 100.

¹⁵⁰Frances Simpson was to remain a semi-invalid for the rest of her life. Her marriage was apparently not overly happy for the Governor treated her arbitrarily and he was absent for long periods (MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 25, 46). In 1845, Simpson brought his family out to live at Lachine where Frances died in 1853. A poignant insight into the Simpson marriage is to be found in the collection of letters written by Frances to her husband while on his trip round the world in 1841-42 (D.6/1).

actually despaired of her life.¹⁵¹ Like the Governor's wife, Mrs. McMillan held herself aloof from the native women; indeed McMillan found Red River society so uncongenial that he was glad to make the long journey to an eastern post in the summer of 1834.¹⁵²

The rift between Governor Simpson and Donald McKenzie also hastened the latter's desire to quit the colony. His wife had hopes that they might return to her native Switzerland, but in 1832 McKenzie went east, bent on finding a suitable place of retirement in the United States.¹⁵³ Mrs. McKenzie did not hear a word from her husband during his absence, and his enemies conjectured that he had abandoned his family.¹⁵⁴ Mrs. Droz, writing to her daughter from Switzerland, urged her to make a brave show, "My dear Adelgonde, be gay, be joyous for your dear husband and children for I believe that greatly influences character, and it is moreover our duty."¹⁵⁵ McKenzie soon cast up, however, and took his family out to settle in Mayville, New York.

¹⁵¹P.A.C., Jas. McMillan to Hargrave, 1 May 1833, Hargrave Corres., vol. 3, p. 575.

¹⁵²Ibid., Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish, 14 June 1838, vol. 22, L.B. 13; Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 143, 192. McMillan retired and took his family to Scotland in the late 1830's.

¹⁵³Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 116.

¹⁵⁴Simpson to McTavish, 4 May 1833, B.135/c/2, f. 101.

¹⁵⁵P.A.O., Mrs. Droz to her daughter Adelgonde, 22 January 1833, Miscellaneous File.

In spite of the social problems occasioned by her coming, Catherine McTavish deserves credit for her success in adapting to life at Moose Factory. A kind, sensible woman, "tho' not handsome",¹⁵⁶ she had been forgiving enough to reconcile herself to McTavish's former marital arrangements, even though her first introduction to one of her step-daughters had been most humiliating. One evening when still in Montreal, thirteen-year-old Mary, who was there at school, unexpectedly intruded upon the Governor's company:

[McTavish] rose & took her up to his wife, who got stupid but shook hands with the Miss who was very pretty & mighty impudent.... [Mrs. McTavish] got white & red & at last rose & left the room, all the party looking very uncomfortable except [her husband] & the girl. [Mrs. Simpson] followed & found her in a violent fit of crying, she said she knew the child was to have been home that night but thought she wd have been spared such a public introduction. 157

During the voyage to Moose, however, the Scottish woman became rather fond of Mary, and she also took care of her younger sisters Flora, Margaret and Anne. McTavish, who rapidly became the father of two more little girls, deeply appreciated

¹⁵⁶P.A.C., Edward Smith to Hargrave, 8 July 1834, Hargrave Corres., vol. 3, p. 813.

¹⁵⁷MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 34-36. Simpson seems to have endeavoured to spare his wife similar indignities. When recounting the above episode, Letitia Hargrave commented wryly that "Mrs. Simpson evidently has no idea that she has more encumbrances than Mrs. Mactavish, altho' she did say that she was always terrified to look about her in case of seeing something disagreeable." This may help to explain Simpson's relative neglect of his mixed-blood children in later years.

his wife's devotion. As he wrote to Hargrave, "I wish you such a wife and...then you will attain a knowledge of the terms domestic Bliss & Happiness."¹⁵⁸ After several years, the old trader who suffered from gout had had enough of the severe climate of Moose. Simpson, ever solicitous of his friend's welfare, arranged for his transfer to the more civilized comforts of the post at Lake of Two Mountains near Montreal in 1835.¹⁵⁹ Mrs. McTavish never enjoyed good health at her new home, however, and she died, apparently of cancer, in the fall of 1841.¹⁶⁰

Thus by the mid-1830's, most of those white ladies who were to have set a new tone in fur trade society had, in fact, left the Indian Country. As a result, while prejudice certainly existed, mixed-blood women were not to be effectively excluded from the top of the social hierarchy. The first break in the racial barrier which Governor Simpson worked to erect in Red River came with the appointment of Alexander Christie as Governor of Assiniboia. Simpson had initially discounted

¹⁵⁸ Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, p. 127.

¹⁵⁹ Simpson to McTavish, 10 Jan. 1834, B.135/c/2, f. 115.

¹⁶⁰ Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 277, 412; P.A.C., J.G. McTavish to Hargrave, 13 April 1842, vol. 9, pp. 2319-2320. McTavish was a marrying man, and in March 1843, he married Eppie Cameron, a lively young neice of Chief Trader Angus Cameron, who had come out to visit her uncle at Timiscamingue in 1841. After McTavish's death in 1847, she returned to Scotland (MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 156-57, 233).

Christie because he had a native family à la façon du pays,¹⁶¹ but he soon had to acknowledge that this much-respected chief factor was the best man for the job. Sometime after his arrival in the settlement, the new governor satisfied the fastidious by having his long-standing union with his half-breed wife Anne blessed by Rev. Jones in February 1835. Detail is lacking as to how Mrs. Christie featured in Red River society, but the fact that she was loath to leave the colony when her husband retired indicates that she must have been happy there. As has been mentioned, young Scotsmen coming into Rupert's Land also continued to find attractive wives among the increasingly acculturated daughters of Company officers. The marriage of Betsey to schoolmaster Macallum in 1836 appears to have brought the Charles women social acceptance.¹⁶² Another significant event in December of that year was the marriage in Red River of the promising young clerk John Ballenden to the beautiful Sarah McLeod, a daughter of Chief Factor Alexander Roderick McLeod and his native wife.¹⁶³

It was into this more tolerant society that Letitia Hargrave and Isobel Finlayson came in 1840. Certainly Hargrave,

¹⁶¹Simpson to McTavish, 29 June 1833, B.135/c/2, f. 106.

¹⁶²P.A.C., John Macallum to Hargrave, 12 Aug. 1839, Hargrave Corres., vol. 7, p. 1711.

¹⁶³Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 249-50. John Ballenden was the son of the former HBC officer John Ballenden and his Orkney wife.

as indicated in a cordial note to Mrs. Christie, was willing that his bride should make the acquaintance of the respectably married native wives of prominent officers.¹⁶⁴ Although Letitia was to live for over a decade in the isolation and bitter climate of York Factory, she undoubtedly made the most successful adjustment to fur trade life of all the early white wives. Partly because she had not been well on the voyage out, the Scottish lady's first reaction on arriving on the bleak shore of Hudson Bay was "to turn my back on the company & cry myself sick."¹⁶⁵ She was welcomed by her brother William, however, and soon adopted an optimistic, practical approach to her new life. The factory turned out to be surprisingly comfortable; Mrs. Hargrave was soon mistress of her own commodious house, which was made snug with carpets brought from England, new curtains, and "a 1st rate square piano" which had arrived in perfect condition. She was never subject to domestic drudgery as she had a personal maid, Margaret Dunnett, and later an old family servant Mary Clarke came out to York. Several Indian women were hired to do the washing and scrubbing, and the old French-Canadian butler and an Orkney cook also served the household.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴P.A.C., Jas. Hargrave to Mrs. Christie, 22 Feb. 1840, Hargrave Corres., vol. 23, L.B. 15.

¹⁶⁵MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 58.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 60-61, 127.

During the winter, the officers' mess was held in the Hargrave dining room; "the presence of a White Lady at our mess table...adds greatly to the happiness of our winter life," wrote the proud husband.¹⁶⁷ In the hectic summer season, however, when brigades were arriving from all over the Northern Department, Letitia took her meals alone, unless there were lady visitors. She found the heavy meat diet tiresome and was astonished by the prodigious appetites which the country women had.¹⁶⁸ The Scottish lady's fashionable gowns excited much admiration at York, but she wisely adapted her costume to include Indian "leggings" and moccasins. When she went out for an airing on the platforms or a ride in her elegantly-appointed dog carriole, she was snugly wrapped in furs;

I have got a beautiful collar to my Martin tippet....[Hargrave] has also given me nearly 60 ermine skins, a white fox muff [&] a new lynx boa so that I am well skinned. 169

As the wife of the chief factor at York, Mrs. Hargrave occupied an exalted position. The Indians called her "Hockimaw Erqua" meaning Chieftainess and brought her presents of flowers and berries.¹⁷⁰ The white woman was rather non-plussed by the traditional Christmas festivities at York in 1840:

¹⁶⁷P.A.C., Hargrave to Monseigneur Blanchette, 1 Dec. 1840, Hargrave Corres., vol. 23, L.B. 16.

¹⁶⁸MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 99-100, 112-113.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 89-90, 129.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., pp. xlvii, 62.

There were two balls given by the gentlemen (clerks) during the holidays. I went and sat in a room off that in which they were dancing, for a little. It was a humbling affair. 40 squaws old and young with their hair plaited in long tails, nothing on their heads but their everlasting blankets smelling of smoke and everything obnoxious. Babies almost newly born & in their cradles were with their mothers & all nursing them in the face of everyone....I was glad to come home. 171

But in accordance with her role as first lady, she did the honours by providing refreshments at her house for a select party of ten native women on New Year's Day. Although Letitia's attitude toward the Indians was always condescending, to her credit she never isolated her children from them. The Indians flocked to see her first son, born in April 1841, and the women were delighted to be able to kiss him, exclaiming "Very fat! Very white!"¹⁷² As little Joseph James grew older, his mother observed that although he would not allow many whites to lay a hand on him, he went quite readily to the Indians who visited the fort and "while they hold him in their arms they keep smoking their pipes in his face."¹⁷³

With Harriett Gladman, the only other officer's wife at York Factory, Letitia was to become quite friendly. Mrs. Gladman had been timid about calling on the Scottish lady, but she met with a kindly reception. Letitia did own that

¹⁷¹MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 94-95.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 111.

Mrs. G. was rather vulgar looking but she "speaks well & that is a great help....I rather think she is kindly disposed."¹⁷⁴

The mixed-blood woman's past misfortunes aroused Letitia's sympathies as did the fact that she had to care for a large family without the aid of a servant. Letitia also always remembered with gratitude how Mrs. Gladman helped to nurse her first child. The good woman could not persuade Letitia to adopt the Indian position for childbirth, however, and thought her confinement had been unnecessarily difficult.¹⁷⁵

The Gladmans had to leave York in the fall of 1841, but the two wives corresponded.

The death of a new-born son in December 1842 was to be Letitia's greatest sorrow while at York. She found solace in the thriving health of her eldest and in 1844 a daughter was born. Although all Hargrave's friends marvelled at his wife's ability to forbear York's severe climate, a year's furlough in Scotland in 1846 certainly provided a welcome respite. Hargrave had hoped to be returned to a more hospitable post but his services at the factory were indispensable. The next four years, which saw the birth of two more children, were to be frustrating for Letitia for she felt her husband had been worn out by the heavy duties of York while the declining state of the trade promised little reward.¹⁷⁶ Finally

¹⁷⁴ MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 73-74.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 96, 168.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. cxxviii-cxxx.

in 1851, Hargrave was given charge of the depot at Sault Ste. Marie. Letitia took a visit to Scotland before coming out to her new home; Hargrave, who deeply appreciated her long years of self-denial, instructed her to reward herself with "a fine silk velvet gown worthy of being worn by such a wife as you have been to me."¹⁷⁷

Isobel Finlayson, however, like her sister Frances before her, was not to enjoy her residence in Red River. A delicate little woman, she had come out to Rupert's Land under the firm resolve that it was "a wife's most sacred and hallowed duty to follow and share the fortunes" of her husband.¹⁷⁸ Finlayson met his wife at York and they embarked on the summer voyage to the colony by York boat. Isobel bore the discomforts of the journey, occasioned largely by the inclement weather, with good grace in contrast to the pernicky Miss Allan, also of the party, who was constantly bemoaning her fate.¹⁷⁹ Mrs. Finlayson's first sight of the stone house at Lower Fort Garry which had been her sister's brief residence, however, brought forth a flood of homesick tears.

¹⁷⁷ MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. cxlii. It was a tragic irony that two short years after her move to the Sault Mrs. Hargrave was to die in a cholera epidemic. Her body was taken to St. James Cemetery in Toronto for burial.

¹⁷⁸ H.B.C.A., Isobel Finlayson's Note Book, E.12/5, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁹ See published excerpts of Isobel's diary in "York Boat Journal", The Beaver, September 1951, pp. 32-35; December 1951, pp. 32-37.

She nevertheless found that the settlement offered more material comforts than she had expected; "the living is cheap and good, and one can obtain all necessaries." The Englishwoman appears to have held the current prejudices about the improvident habits of French-Canadians and half-breeds but noted perceptively that the Indians in the vicinity of the settlement had "a subdued and melancholy look, as if they felt the power of the "White Man", and that they were no longer the lords of the soil to which they have a right."¹⁸⁰

In the community, the Governor's lady had the companionship of newly-arrived white women such as Mrs. Adam Thom, the Recorder's wife, and Mrs. Abraham Cowley, the wife of an Anglican missionary, but both she and her husband seem to have found society in general less than congenial, there being much petty rivalry going on.¹⁸¹ Although never seriously ill like her sister had been, Isobel was frequently ailing and suffered from headaches. While she sometimes braved the cold to attend church, her husband considered her "too tender a plant to be needlessly exposed to a Siberian climate."¹⁸² In the summer of 1844, Finlayson was glad that he and his wife could resign their "exalted stations" and move east to a new

¹⁸⁰E.12/5, fos. 181-82.

¹⁸¹H.B.C.A., Duncan Finlayson to Simpson, 6 July and 10 Aug. 1842, D.5/7, f. 96d, 192.

¹⁸²P.A.C., Duncan Finlayson to Hargrave, 27 March 1841 and 18 Dec. 1841, Hargrave Corres., vol. 8, pp. 1959, 2195; J. Macallum to Hargrave, 6 June 1842, vol. 9, f. 2358.

home at Lachine.¹⁸³ It does indeed seem that attempts to ape civilized society in Red River had led to increasing social tensions; Finlayson had complained to Hargrave that it would require "Beau Nash" to regulate their fashionable movements.¹⁸⁴ The mixed-blood Mrs. Gladman, who had become "very fastidious" as to her society, was to be most unhappy during her stay in the colony, probably because she had been shunned by those to whom she felt socially equal.¹⁸⁵

That white women were responsible for exacerbating social tensions was painfully illustrated in the case of the missionaries' wives who not only displayed a good deal of racial prejudice but attempted to rival the position of the wives of the Company officers in the class hierarchy. Initially, it had been thought commendable that white women were prepared to labour with their Anglican, and later Methodist, husbands in such an inhospitable vineyard as Rupert's Land, but in most cases they were to prove such a hindrance that Catholic celibacy came to be regarded as an asset. Letitia Hargrave expressed the current attitude of the Company men toward the Protestant clergy when she wrote in 1843:

¹⁸³H.B.C.A., D. Finlayson to Simpson, 18 Dec. 1843, D.5/9, f. 374. Isobel was to make her home at Lachine, with the exception of extended trips to England, until Finlayson retired to London in the early 1860's. She died in 1890.

¹⁸⁴D. Finlayson to Hargrave, 18 Dec. 1841, vol. 8, f. 2193.

¹⁸⁵MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 106.

We are rather getting tired of Wesleyans and quite sick of Episcopalians....The Catholic clergy here let them be what they may elsewhere are exemplary. The Indians see them living perfectly alone & caring for nothing but converting them & often they think more of such men than those who come with families & bully for every luxury & complain of every appearance of neglect getting literally furious on the slightest annoyance felt by them or their accomplished ladies. 186

Ultimately even Governor Simpson was to become so exasperated that he urged that only unmarried missionaries be sent to Rupert's Land: "European ladies can seldom accommodate themselves to the want of society in Hudson's Bay and affect a supercilious air of superiority over the native wives and daughters of gentlemen in the country."¹⁸⁷

There can be no doubt that Herbert Beaver's unChristian conduct at Fort Vancouver had been compounded by his obsessive concern for his wife's position and comfort. Although they were provided with the best the fort could provide, Jane Beaver complained constantly: the food was not fit for "civilized beings", their quarters were ill-appointed and too noisy, and the courtyard too muddy for a lady to venture out.¹⁸⁸ The first feeble efforts to supervise the education of female children were abandoned, partly because Mrs. Beaver, through lack of servants, had to devote herself to domestic chores.

¹⁸⁶ MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 164.

¹⁸⁷ H.B.C.A., Simpson to Rev. Dr. Alder, 4 Dec. 1848, D.4/70, f. 219.

¹⁸⁸ "Mr. Beaver Objects", The Beaver, Sept. 1941, p. 13.

Her husband declared it highly inappropriate that an English lady should be subject to menial tasks, but he himself had rejected the services of a Sandwich Islander and his wife owing to their lack of polish.¹⁸⁹ Haughty Jane also made it clear that she felt she would be tainted by associating with the likes of Mrs. McLoughlin and Mrs. Douglas. "Shall the man, who has raised his partner by marriage to his own level," raged Beaver, "degrade himself and her, by suffering her to be put on an equality with other men's paramours?"¹⁹⁰ Having had to endure the slanders of Jane Beaver, Amelia Douglas was later to find herself slighted by Mrs. Staines, the English wife of the first Anglican minister of Fort Victoria. Helmcken recorded that the Governor's lady and the parson's wife "did not chum at all--there being too much uppishness about the latter, she being the great woman--the great complaining."¹⁹¹

If such prejudice contributed to Mrs. Douglas leading a retiring life, Mrs. Robert Miles, the wife of the officer in charge of Moose Factory in the 1840's, adopted a more defensive attitude. Reverend George Barnley, one of three Wesleyan missionaries who arrived in Rupert's Land in 1840, had made a most auspicious beginning at Moose. As a single man, he enjoyed cordial relations with the Miles family, and

¹⁸⁹Jesset, Beaver's Letters, p. 81.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁹¹Helmcken Reminiscences, p. 42.

Betsey had become an ardent Wesleyan.¹⁹² In 1844, Barnley, being under the illusion that a "pious European lady" would be of great assistance in his mission, had returned to England to find a wife. Upon her arrival at Moose, however, Mrs. Barnley adopted the same domineering and complaining attitude that Mrs. Beaver had had at Fort Vancouver. She assumed "an unpleasant tone of superiority" towards Mrs. Miles and actually expected the mixed-blood woman to be at her beck and call. The Englishwoman fussed about the monotonous diet and found such fault with the accommodation provided in the officer's house that Miles eventually had a separate house built for the missionary at considerable expense and inconvenience.¹⁹³

As her second pregnancy advanced, Barnley's wife would not deign to heed the advice of the kindly Mrs. Miles, but the native woman nursed both mother and child after the Englishwoman's confinement in October 1846. Betsey had her own large family to look after, however, and the Barnleys had been provided with servants, so that she was understandably offended when a few weeks later she was subjected to "a volley of abuse" for neglecting the missionary's wife and child.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²H.B.C.A., Simpson to Dr. Alder, 8 Nov. 1847, D.4/36, f. 95d; Robert Miles to Simpson, 10 Feb. 1849, D.5/24, f. 240.

¹⁹³The conflict between Miles and Barnley is documented in detail in H.B.C.A., A.11/46, fos. 46-69.

¹⁹⁴Miles to Simpson, 8 June 1847, A.11/46, f. 62.

An open breach developed between the two families, both sides charging the other with insult and abuse. In Robert Miles' opinion, "the studied system of arrogance, insolence and annoyance" which Barnley had pursued had been instigated by his wife "who has no more consideration than the gratification of her own wishes, be that effected at whatever sacrifice and which her hysterics seems always at hand to force him to compliance."¹⁹⁵ Only two short years after his wife had come out to Rupert's Land, Barnley abandoned his mission and they returned to England.

The pretensions of the Canadian wife of the chief Methodist missionary, Reverend James Evans, certainly contributed to her husband's ill-starred sojourn at Norway House.¹⁹⁶ The social rivalry which developed between Mrs. Evans (the former Mary Blithe Smith) and the chief factor's wife was one of class not race because Mrs. Donald Ross, it will be remembered, was the daughter of a Selkirk settler. Mary Ross had endured the life at Norway House for many long years, absorbed in the raising of a large family of nine children. The whole Ross family was proud of being one of the few white fur trade families, and if Mrs. Ross had not had much opportunity to cultivate the refined social graces, she was highly conscious

¹⁹⁵H.B.C.A., Miles to Simpson, 1 Feb. 1847, D.5/19, f. 159d; A.11/46, fos. 60-69.

¹⁹⁶For a detailed discussion of the "James Evans affair", see Pannekoek, "The Churches in Red River", pp. 118-153.

of her status as a chief factor's wife.¹⁹⁷ Resentment flared, therefore, when the Evans were installed in the best dwelling in the fort and proceeded to consume rations in excess of those allotted to a senior chief factor's family. By the spring of 1843, the two wives were so much at "open war" that Evans was required to move his family from the fort to the Indian village.¹⁹⁸ Mary Evans and her daughter Clarissa were exceedingly wrath at being deprived of the comforts of the post, but they evidently had only themselves to blame:

...the whole affair has been caused by Mrs. Evans & her daughters' successful rivalry over Mrs. Ross & her children--For they were the derision of the whole passers by for their finery and exhibition of good education and knowledge of astronomy as Mrs. E. used to say--whereas Mrs. Ross & Jane did not know the names of the commonest stars... 199

Mrs. Evans' gossiping tongue and fawning manner also alienated her from other white women in Rupert's Land. Letitia Hargrave had entertained Evans' wife at York in the summer of 1841,

¹⁹⁷ There are numerous references to the Ross family in Letitia Hargrave's letters, particularly regarding the airs of several Ross daughters who were educated in England. Their mother, though "a tender mother & careful wife", was described as "coarse in mind & natural taste, uneducated & unpolished" (Hargrave to D. Mactavish, 18 May 1838, vol. 22, L.B. 13). Mrs. Ross eventually went mad after the death of her husband in Red River in the early 1850's; perhaps as a result of the long years of isolation at Norway House, she became obsessed with the idea that her children would be murdered by Indians (John Black to Simpson, 10 Nov. 1853, D.5/38, f. 227d).

¹⁹⁸ MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 113, 142, 157-58.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 150-151; P.A.B.C., Simpson to Donald Ross, 20 Dec. 1843, Ross Corres. La5(IV): "his Wife had drawn it entirely upon them".

but, partly because she considered Methodists lower class, Letitia had been annoyed by the familiarity of the woman's letters and replied with stiff formality. Their correspondence soon ceased, and Mrs. Finlayson stopped writing to the missionary's wife because of her penchant for spreading gossip all over the country.²⁰⁰ Governor Simpson believed that Evans' attack upon the Company and its policies had resulted "from a pique originating in family affairs", and he felt little sympathy for Mrs. Evans when sexual scandal removed her husband from office in 1846.²⁰¹

When Mrs. Evans had been forced to take up her station at the Indian village of Rossville in 1843, she must have felt it an extreme insult to be slighted by the newly-married, mixed-blood wife of the other Methodist missionary, Reverend William Mason.²⁰² As the daughter of a former Company officer and sister-in-law to a Governor of Assiniboia, Sophia Thomas Mason was connected to some of the most respectable families in Rupert's Land. Even Governor Simpson was prepared to drop his racial prejudice in her case and declared that Sophia possessed all the attributes desirable in a missionary's wife.²⁰³

²⁰⁰MacLeod, Letitia's Letters, pp. 107, 182; Simpson to Donald Ross, 29 Dec. 1845, Ross Corres. La5(IV).

²⁰¹H.B.C.A., Simpson to Dr. Alder, 14 Sept 1846, D.4/35, f. 51 and 4 Dec. 1848, D.4/70, f. 221.

²⁰²H.B.C.A., Donald Ross to Simpson, 28 Aug. 1843, D.5/8, f. 484.

²⁰³Simpson to Alder, 4 Dec. 1848, D.4/70, fos. 215, 219-21.

Indeed, this half-breed woman was to leave behind her a remarkable record of dedicated service. She had been well-educated in Red River, but her real success lay in her knowledge of the Indian tongue and her sincere Christian interest in the welfare of the Indians. Although she had a delicate constitution, Sophia, apart from the care of her own family, was reputed to have devoted herself unceasingly to the operation of the Indian day school, visiting the sick, and translating hymns and scripture.²⁰⁴ Her work on a Cree bible was to be a lasting monument. In 1858, the Masons went to England, but Sophia's health deteriorated rapidly in the damp climate. A few months after giving birth to her ninth child in 1861, Sophia Mason died of tuberculosis. Her husband's journal entry for 10 October provides a touching tribute:

This morning, after uttering the word 'heaven', my dear wife passed into the presence of her Saviour, at a quarter before ten o'clock, without a single struggle, or even a groan.

Oh how great is my loss and that of the nine poor orphan children. May 'the Lord take them up.' Yet, in the midst of all, we have much to be thankful for. She has been spared to accomplish a great work, the Cree Bible; and to bear such a testimony for Jesus amongst the heathen, by the

²⁰⁴"A Short Sketch of the Life and Missionary Labours and Happy Death of Sophia Mason", Church Missionary Gleaner, 1861, p. 138.

patience with which she suffered, and her zeal and persevering labours to make known the glorious Gospel of salvation... 205

While the developing rivalry between white women and native women, between officers' wives and missionaries' wives is to be deplored, it can be seen as symptomatic of the particular social pressures to which women were subject. Certainly concern for rank and privilege was not the exclusive sphere of the female sex, but it became more damaging among women because their status was dependent on that of their husbands. Women had to vie with one another to secure their social position through marriage and tended to become overly-zealous in guarding the prerogatives which accrued to them because of their husbands' status. The bitterness of the social rivalry which could develop was well illustrated in the fate of the women behind the magnates of the North West Company, who had actively worked in Montreal to crush their Hudson's Bay opponents. In 1836, the young Lord Selkirk, touring in Canada, wrote to his mother that she could at last feel avenged on her foes, the McGillivray women:

The ladies of the family who you know were the bitterest enemies of all, as they were thwarted by the opposition in the fur trade, in their ambition of being Queens of Canada, are now living in a very poor way....when one remembers how high they used to hold their

205. "Short Sketch of Sophia Mason", p. 140; see also Rev. N. Burwash, "The gift to a nation of a written language", T.R.S.C., Third Series, Vol. V, Sec. 11, 1911, pp. 15-18.

heads, it is quite a lesson on the instability of human affairs. You know well what vixens there are about Montreal, and you may easily imagine how much these poor women suffer for their former vanity. 206

In the colonial society of Rupert's Land itself, the unsettled nature of that society coupled with the question of race tended to exacerbate the rivalry between women. Native women found themselves threatened by white women, yet white women were not completely successful in establishing their social supremacy. White women who in Britain would have been considered definitely lower class fought especially hard to maintain the enhanced status given them by marriage to a Company officer or a clergyman, the pillars of the Red River community. It is unlikely that white women who came from the respectable middle class or country gentry in Britain such as the Simpson sisters and Letitia Hargrave ever felt their position at the top of the fur trade hierarchy to be challenged. They were idolized by the fur traders themselves and brought out racial prejudice against native women to an extent not evident before. This is seen in the increasing use of the word "squaw" to describe native wives and other uncomplimentary terms which emphasize colour such as "Brown Jug", "swarthy idol", and "bit of brown".²⁰⁷ White women

²⁰⁶H.B.C.A., Lord Selkirk to Lady Selkirk, 8 Sept. 1836, Copy No. 161, f. 1260.

²⁰⁷These terms were particularly used by men who had white wives such as Donald McKenzie and Donald Ross. The traditional terms used to refer to native wives in fur trade society such as "my woman", "my girl" and "the mother of my children" had

appear to have entered Rupert's Land with their own pre-conceived prejudices against native women, resentful that they should have captured so many eligible white men. Frances Simpson was to dismiss McTavish's former country wife Nancy as "a complete savage, with a coarse blue sort of woolen gown, without shape & a blanket fastened round her neck."²⁰⁸ Letitia Hargrave denounced Mary Taylor Stuart as "an awful monster of a black woman" and ridiculed her fondness for jewelry. The Scottish woman had tolerated the society of Mrs. Gladman, but was later to confess that she could hardly bear the thought of entertaining another mixed-blood woman.²⁰⁹

Mixed-blood ladies from prominent fur trade families sometimes slighted other native women in their efforts to cultivate the society of the whites. Such was to be the case of the English-educated Margaret Christie who married the clerk John Black after her return to Red River in 1845.²¹⁰ Mrs. George Gladman, who can be accused of becoming uppity, felt it necessary to revile the poor abandoned Indian widow of trader Kenneth McKenzie because she had only been married

207 (continued) contained no racial references. Those traders who remained loyal to their native wives referred to them in terms commonly applied to white women, i.e. "the guid wife", "the good dame", "the old lady" and "Madame".

²⁰⁸ MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 34-36.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 87; P.A.C., Letitia to her mother, 27 Feb. 1854, Hargrave Corres., vol. 27.

²¹⁰ For Mrs. Black's role in the Foss-Pelly scandal, see Chapter VII.

à la façon du pays. But Mrs. Gladman herself was despised by Mrs. Donald Ross, the former Scottish crofter's daughter, who was undoubtedly aware that white women of humble origin might easily have to give precedence to acculturated mixed-blood women.²¹¹ While Mrs. Cockran was made painfully aware that her having been a "Dollymop"²¹² in England would never quite give her the respectability of the genteel Mrs. Jones, she apparently incurred the hatred of the native women in her husband's congregation because of her air of superiority.²¹³ Lower class white women, such as Letitia's maid Mary Clarke appear to have been particularly vehement in their denunciation of "squaws".²¹⁴

The potent racial and class tensions which white women had introduced into fur trade society were eventually to erupt in a scandal in Red River in 1850 which threatened to split the elite along racial lines.

²¹¹MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 109.

²¹²Simpson to McTavish, 3 Jan. 1831, B.135/c/2, f. 54.

²¹³C.M.S.A., Cockran's Journal, 13 April 1838, CC1/018:
"I had need to stay home and nurse my wife, for the Indian females had such a prejudice against European females, that they will scarcely hand them a drink of water when confined to bed."

²¹⁴MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 259-60.

CHAPTER VII

THE END OF AN ERA

The Foss-Pelly scandal, as it came to be known, was essentially an attack on a mixed-blood woman for alleged immoral behaviour.¹ It was precipitated by the bitter struggle for social eminence among women in Red River. Significantly, at the time of her disgrace, Sarah Ballenden, as the wife of the senior Company officer in the colony, was virtually at the top of the social pyramid. Nearly all her opponents were white women--those belonging to the Protestant clerical establishment who considered themselves bound to uphold the strictest standards of Victorian morality, and those who were the wives of lesser Company officers.

John Ballenden's marriage to Sarah McLeod in December 1836 had been a real love match; the young clerk was infatuated with this beautiful eighteen-year-old mixed-blood girl who had been educated in Red River.² Although some misgivings

¹For a discussion on the political repercussions of the scandal, see W.L. Morton's introduction to Eden Colville's Letters, 1850-1854 (Toronto: Champlain Society, v. XIX, 1956). Frits Pannekoek provides an interesting interpretation of the role of the Protestant clergy in the affair in "The Churches in Red River, 1818-1870", pp. 154-190.

²Since her father Alexander Roderick McLeod was often absent in distant regions, John Stuart appears to have acted as Sarah's guardian. It was he who gave his consent to her marriage and made her a present of her wedding dress, see J. Stuart to G. Simpson, 15 Aug. 1845, D.5/14, f. 275.

about Ballenden's choice were expressed,³ Hargrave, uncharacteristically, declared that Sarah was "a delightful creature" and his friend had "every reason to consider himself a happy man." He even promised Ballenden that should he have an opportunity to visit his family in Orkney in 1839 he would assure them of the merits of his wife: "Should I find any old country prejudices remaining depend on it I shall pass a sponge over them."⁴ Mrs. Ballenden seems to have been well accepted in Red River society (her first daughter was christened Anne Christie in honor of the Governor's wife), and she was loath to leave the colony in 1840 when her husband was transferred to Sault Ste. Marie.⁵ Sarah does not appear to have been overly happy at the Sault; she was frequently ailing, being especially despondent over the death of her youngest daughter in 1843.⁶ In 1848, Ballenden was given charge of the Company's affairs in Red River, but on the voyage back to the colony he suffered a tragic stroke. It was apparently only the tender nursing of his wife which saved his life and enabled him to regain some measure of health.⁷

³P.A.B.C., Thomas Simpson to Donald Ross, 31 May 1837, Ross Corres. Si5(III).

⁴P.A.C., Hargrave to Mrs. T. Isbister, 23 May 1839 and Hargrave to John Ballenden, 7 Sept. 1839, Hargrave Corres., vol. 23, L.B. 15.

⁵Ibid., Ballenden to Hargrave, 20 Jan. 1841, vol. 8, p. 1891.

⁶Ibid., Ballenden to Hargrave, 13 May 1844, vol. 11, p. 2919.

⁷H.B.C.A., Ballenden to Simpson, 30 Dec. 1850, D.5/29, f. 422; P.A.M., Records of the General Quarterly Court of Assiniboia, "Foss vs. Pelly", 16-18 July 1850, p. 218.

Sarah Ballenden was quite willing and able to play a prominent social role in the settlement as befitted the wife of the Company's chief officer. She organized dinner parties and balls, and the christening of her infant daughter (Frances Isobel Simpson) in the summer of 1849 was a "splendid entertainment with abundance of champagne."⁸ This attractive, vivacious young woman presided over the mess table at Upper Fort Garry, and it is not surprising that she attracted the admiration of its young officers. She was to have to rebuff the improper advances of the young dandy Augustus Edward Pelly, the fort's accountant,⁹ but Sarah herself was to be charmed by the gallant Irishman, Captain Christopher Vaughan Foss. Captain Foss had come out to Red River in 1848 as second in command of the Chelsea Pensioners under Major William Caldwell. Although Foss fell out with Caldwell and was suspended from duty later that year, he managed to maintain the seat which he had wangled at the Company's mess table and was well liked by the Ballendens.¹⁰

It appears that Sarah Ballenden's beauty and her prominent social position made her an object of jealousy, particularly

⁸P.A.C., Letitia Hargrave to Flora Mactavish, 1 June 1850, Hargrave Corres., vol. 27.

⁹P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", pp. 202-203.

¹⁰H.B.C.A., A. Christie to Simpson, 19 Jan. 1849, D.5/24, f. 86-86d. Ballenden wrote to Simpson, shortly after his arrival in the fall of 1848 that Foss was "an agreeable fellow and will, I daresay, become very popular," (D.5/23, f. 383).

among certain white women in Red River. Her popularity with men excited much speculation; surely her virtue must be suspect. Mrs. Logan was heard to remark that Ballenden's wife was a woman who "must always have a sweetheart as well as a husband", and Mrs. Cockran kept a sharp lookout for any sign of impropriety.¹¹ Remarks which apparently originated with Sarah's German servant girl as to the cordiality which existed between her mistress and Captain Foss were seized up and magnified until by the summer of 1849 it was widely rumoured in the colony that the Captain's attentions to Mrs. Ballenden were "of such a character as to entitle Mr. B. to a divorce."¹²

This gossip was to fall on the not unreceptive ears of two new white women who arrived in Red River in the fall of 1849. The first was Anne Clouston, the daughter of the Company's agent at Stromness, who came out to Rupert's Land to be married to the previously mentioned clerk A.E. Pelly, a nephew of the London Governor of the Company, Sir John H. Pelly.¹³ The couple were married at York Factory by the

¹¹P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", pp. 185-86, 203; P.A.B.C., Wm. Todd to Donald Ross, 20 July 1850: "the poor woman seems to have had a watch set on her from the moment of her arrival, every act word or deed was marked and commented on by certain parties." It appears that Sarah had been gossiped about in her early days in Red River, see P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", p. 206; A. Thom to Simpson, 23 July 1851, D.5/31, f. 123.

¹²MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 247.

¹³P.A.B.C., Robert Clouston to Donald Ross, 29 June 1849, Ross Corres. C62.

Reverend David Anderson, the first Bishop of Rupert's Land, who had come by the same ship as Miss Clouston. A widower with three children, the Bishop was accompanied by his sister, a strait-laced, sharp-tongued spinster, who was to look after his household and help with the running of the Academy.¹⁴

Upon her arrival at the Upper Fort, Mrs. Pelly was much disconcerted to find that in spite of her connections she was obliged to give precedence to Mrs. Ballenden, a woman who by both race and reputation she did not deem her social equal. The Scottish woman evidently intended to play the great lady for even Letitia Hargrave had been aghast by the extravagance of her trousseau:

Anne brought an immense quantity of finery
5 perfectly new bonnets besides that she
wore on board, & scarves, handkerchiefs &
shawls as if she had been going to Calcutta. 15

Instead of the deference she had expected, however, Anne Pelly found her fastidious and fainting ways the object of ridicule at the mess table, especially by Captain Foss who was evidently in the habit of casting knowing glances at Mrs. Ballenden. Pelly's wife was so incensed by the insulting manner in which she considered herself treated that she actually made herself ill, and her husband withdrew from the mess in a huff and shunned the Ballendens.¹⁶

¹⁴H.B.C.A., Adam Thom to Simpson, 5 Feb. 1851, D.5/30, f. 206.

¹⁵MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 247; P.A.C., Letitia to her mother, 14 Dec. 1851, Hargrave Corres., vol. 27.

¹⁶P.A.B.C., A.E. Pelly to D. Ross, 1 Aug. 1850, Ross Corres. P361; P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", pp. 185, 196. Pelly was no

In her eagerness to discredit Mrs. Ballenden and as a result of the rumours circulating in the colony, Mrs. Pelly viewed the friendly behaviour of Captain Foss and Mrs. Ballenden at the mess table as proof of their intimate involvement; she took it upon herself to relay all the current gossip to Major Caldwell, now Governor of Assiniboia, with the demand that such immorality should be condemned.¹⁷ Ballenden's popularity in Red River made Caldwell hesitate to take any open action, but once he had left in June to meet Governor Simpson and with the further intention of going on furlough, a concerted effort was made to exclude his wife from respectable society. The Major forbade his family to associate with Mrs. Ballenden, Miss Anderson and the Bishop refused to countenance her, as did the Cockrans who advised some of Sarah's closest friends that she was no longer fit company.¹⁸ Most humiliating of all, Mrs. John Black, a daughter of Alexander Christie, now openly cut Mrs. Ballenden, having always shown a preference for the society of Mrs. Pelly. Indeed, one contemporary was to observe that

16 (continued) friend of Captain Foss as he had reputedly lost £70 to him through gambling the winter before his wife's arrival, see MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 247.

¹⁷P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", pp. 183, 193, 213-14.

¹⁸P.A.C., Wm. Todd to Hargrave, 23 July 1850, Hargrave Corres., vol. 15, p. 4533; P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", p. 187; MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 255.

much of the ill feeling was caused by Mrs. Black's pride--
"thinks herself far above the rest of the native Ladies."¹⁹

Mrs. Ballenden was not without her supporters, however, and she took refuge with the family of her husband's friend Adam Thom whose legal aid she enlisted to clear her name. She obtained a sworn statement from her servant girl, who was about to leave the colony, denying any knowledge of an illicit relationship between her mistress and Captain Foss. Thom, as a result of his own private investigations, was able to assure the distressed Ballenden when he returned to Red River that the rumours were without foundation.²⁰ Ballenden, who did not doubt his wife's innocence, would have been happy to settle the matter privately, but he felt forced to seek public redress when Mr. Black confronted him with a sworn deposition by the mess cook John Davidson and his wife which implicated Sarah and Captain Foss. Mr. Pelly also made charges against the pair in front of Governor Simpson. The upshot was that Captain Foss brought a suit against Pelly, Davidson and their wives for having instituted a defamatory conspiracy against Mrs. Ballenden and himself.²¹

¹⁹P.A.B.C., John McBeath to Donald Ross, 6 Aug. 1850, Ross Corres. M12.2; P.A.C., John Black to Hargrave, 6 Aug. 1850, vol. 15, p. 4581.

²⁰P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", p. 207.

²¹P.A.B.C., William Todd to Donald Ross, 20 July 1850, Ross Corres. T56. Todd believed that Black hoped to disgrace Ballenden so that he would be forced to resign and Black would be given charge of the fort as he had in his superior's absence; P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", p. 199: Mrs. Davidson had been particularly

The three-day trial which began on July 16 was highly irregular from a judicial point of view, notably because the judge Adam Thom had acted for the prosecution. The evidence proved extremely vague and circumstantial; the majority of the witnesses had to admit that they had just heard rumours concerning an affair between Foss and Mrs. Ballenden. The evidence of some of the women, particularly Mrs. Cockran and Miss Anderson, was full of innuendo and hostility.²² Ultimately the jury declared that Mrs. Ballenden had been unjustly slandered, and Pelly was required to pay damages of £300, Davidson, £100.

As the trial itself is certainly open to criticism, its real importance lies in the racial animosities which it engendered. Significantly most of Sarah's supporters and indeed all the jurors were either English mixed-bloods or else married to native women. They viewed the attack on Mrs. Ballenden as an attempt to discredit mixed-blood women and to secure their exclusion from the elite of Rupert's Land society. In the words of one cogent observer, the affair really seemed to be "a strife of blood."²³ Adam Thom, whose

21 (continued) responsible for spreading vicious rumours about her employer's wife. Charges were also to have been laid against the Blacks but these were dropped (MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 255).

²²P.A.B.C., John Ballenden to Donald Ross, 1 Aug. 1850, Ross Corres. B21; Adam Thom to Simpson, 15 Aug. 1850, D.5/28, f. 437d.

²³Robert Clouston to Donald Ross, 17 Dec. 1850, Ross Corres. C62. Two of Sarah Ballenden's strongest supporters were the prominent mixed-blood Dr. John Bunn and Alexander Ross who had an Indian wife and numerous half-breed daughters. See P.A.M., "Foss vs. Pelly", p. 182 for a list of the jurors.

part in the proceedings helped somewhat to lessen his unpopularity with the mixed-bloods, declared that "altho Mrs. B. might not have so much starch in her face she had as much virtue in her heart as any exotic [Meaning not half breed] that she was the choicest specimen of native modesty & grace."²⁴ There can be no doubt that Anne Clouston's air of superiority occasioned much resentment and was a root cause of the trouble. As her brother Chief Trader Robert Clouston wrote acidly to Donald Ross:

my sister is not a native--therefore must have the ill-will of that class. She has self respect and acts in a manner entitling her to the respect of others therefore she must have the enmity of those who have lost the sense of shame. 25

Thus, largely as a result of the social rivalry between white and mixed-blood women, the elite of Red River was to find itself divided along racial lines.

An attempt to heal the breach was made by Eden Colvile who took over the governorship of the colony from the unpopular Major upon his arrival in the fall of 1850. In spite of her declared innocence, Mrs. Ballenden had continued to be shunned by "the nobs of womankind", namely Mrs. Caldwell, Miss Anderson and Mrs. Cockran, but Colvile did not exclude Sarah from the society of his English wife Jane, much to

²⁴MacLeod, Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 256.

²⁵Robert Clouston to Donald Ross, 23 Sept. 1850, Ross Corres. C62.

Ballenden's gratification.²⁶ During the months immediately following the trial, the conduct of Mrs. Ballenden, now with her husband at the Lower Fort, was so discreet and quiet that Colvile began to feel that the poor woman "had been more sinned against than sinning." He declared that the parsons and their women were "very strait-laced" and the colony "a dreadful place for scandal". When Ballenden decided that he must go to Britain for medical treatment in the fall of 1850, the Governor favoured Sarah by allowing her to remain at the fort and mess with his wife.²⁷ Although it rankled with some that Captain Foss had not had the good grace to leave the colony, peace seemed to be returning when in December the whole scandal suddenly blew up again owing to the interception of a letter, reputedly from Mrs. Ballenden to Captain Foss inviting him to visit her at the fort. While it was never actually confirmed, Foss allegedly pulled off a discreet two-day visit during Colvile's absence, and the chagrined Governor felt obliged to cease all association with Sarah. A short time later, the mixed-blood woman inextricably incriminated herself by paying an afternoon visit to the house of retired officer Donald McKenzie where Foss was living.²⁸

²⁶Rich, Colvile's Letters, p. 193; Adam Thom to Simpson, 18 Sept. 1850, D.5/28, fos. 616-617.

²⁷Rich, Colvile's Letters, pp. 195, 197.

²⁸Rich, Colvile's Letters, pp. 201-02. It would appear significant that the incriminating note was not signed. This Donald McKenzie had been a lesser officer in the Company's service and was married to a half-breed woman, Matilda Bruce (E.4/lb, f. 248).

This turn of events gave the former accusers of Mrs. Ballenden great satisfaction, though curiously they did not seek redress. To her supporters, "some of whom thought her destined to raise her whole cast above european ladies in their influence on society here", it was a shattering blow.²⁹ Both Dr. Bunn and Adam Thom felt obliged to admit that they had been wrong, and Thom deemed it necessary to write to Ballenden of his wife's falseness. Far away in Scotland, a grief-stricken and angry Ballenden contemplated divorce, but in spite of social pressure, he could not bring himself to dissolve his marriage upon his return to Red River in mid-June 1851.³⁰ After the events of December, Mrs. Ballenden, finding herself again widely shunned, had taken refuge in the settlement with a native family called Cunninghame, and in spite of undoubtedly close surveillance no one could report having seen her and Foss together.³¹ Shortly before Ballenden's arrival, his wife gave birth to their third son William.³² The husband's heart was further softened by the

²⁹H.B.C.A., James Bird to Simpson, 8 Aug. 1851, D.5/31, f. 247; John Black to Simpson, 8 Jan. 1851, D.5/30, fos. 47-53; Adam Thom to Simpson, 5 Feb. D.5/30, f. 203.

³⁰John Ballenden to Simpson, 24 March 1851 and 4 April 1851, D.5/30, fos. 457, 539-542; Adam Thom to Simpson, 30 May 1851, D.5/30, f. 820; John Black to Simpson, 26 July 1851, D.5/31, f. 143d: "Mr. B. must sever all connection with her if he wishes to remain respectable."

³¹Rich, Colvile's Letters, pp. 204, 210.

³²P.R.O., Will of John Ballenden, 19 Jan. 1854, Prob. 11/2257, f. 667.

counsel of Alexander Ross, who continued to maintain that while Sarah may have been indiscreet, there was still no concrete proof of her guilt. "After what I had seen at the trial", declared Ross, "and the unfounded malice got up in certain circles, no earthly power will convince me, that she is guilty, till that guilt be proved."³³

In the fall of 1851, Ballenden was posted to Fort Vancouver, and it appears that he would have taken his wife with him had her health been up to the journey. Instead, he endeavoured to settle Sarah comfortably in a rented house near The Rapids, but the heart-broken woman was to pass a wretched and lonely winter.³⁴ In the summer of 1852 being unable to bear Red River any longer, Mrs. Ballenden, now in very poor health, moved to Norway House where she was generously received by Chief Factor George Barnston and his wife Ellen. Barnston, who had been a friend of Sarah's father and known her since childhood, declared that "she will always find an asylum where I live. Surely utter helplessness merits aid."³⁵ In 1853, Ballenden's own poor health forced him to retire from the Columbia, and he apparently gave instructions to have his family proceed him to Scotland. There is evidence that

³³H.B.C.A., Alexander Ross to Simpson, 1 Aug. 1851, D.5/31, f. 206; Ballenden to Simpson, 5 Dec. 1851, D.5/32, f. 323.

³⁴Eden Colville to Simpson, 24 Aug. 1851, and Adam Thom to Simpson, 27 Aug. 1851, D.5/31, fos. 337, 353.

³⁵P.A.B.C., George Barnston to Donald Ross, 22 July 1852, Ross Corres. B27.

a poignant reunion took place between man and wife in Edinburgh before Sarah's death from consumption in December of that year.³⁶

Whether Sarah Ballenden was really guilty of an intimate affair with Captain Foss cannot be conclusively proved, but there can be no doubt that their friendship exceeded the bounds of middle-class Victorian morality which the Protestant clergy was endeavouring to introduce into Rupert's Land. The mixed-blood woman was, in fact, victimized by changing moral standards--now no greater stigma could attach to a woman's character than to be linked with sexual impropriety. This had been illustrated during a minor scandal in Red River in the late 1830's when an officer was alleged to have made free with Mrs. Christie's servant girl. Duncan Finlayson was anxious that the affair be hushed up for even if an investigation proved the girl's innocence, doubts would have been raised which "would attach a stain to her character, be it ever so spotless, that could not easily be washed off."³⁷ In the context of fur trade society, this attitude had unfortunate racial overtones. The Foss-Pelly scandal was to cast a further shadow over the reputation of mixed-blood

³⁶H.B.C.A., Ballenden to Simpson, 9 Aug. 1853, D.5/37, f. 501d; Simpson to Andrew McDermot, 6 Feb. 1854, D.4/74, f. 212. In a letter to his daughter Eliza, Ballenden tells her to cherish the memory of "your own dear mother", Healy, Women of Red River, p. 195.

³⁷P.A.C., Duncan Finlayson to Hargrave, 12 Aug. 1839, Hargrave Corres., vol. 7, p. 1716.

women because it reinforced the prejudice that there was a certain moral weakness inherent in females of part-Indian extraction.

Although this did not altogether prevent Company officers from continuing to take mixed-blood wives (significantly, their choice was restricted to the highly-acculturated daughters of wealthy Red River families),³⁸ it certainly strengthened the desire of some for a white wife. The famous Yukon explorer Chief Trader Robert Campbell, for example, had evidently promised Governor Simpson in 1834 that he would not encumber himself with a wife during his active years of service. By the 1850's, however, he was determined to bring an enforced and lonely bachelorhood to an end, but he declared that his choice would never fall on a native woman:

It is too well known that few indeed of those joined to the ebony and half ebony damsels of the north are happy or anything like it; and that few or none of them have pleasure, comfort, or satisfaction of their Families. 39

Campbell became engaged to a Scottish woman, Miss Elleonora Sterling, while on furlough in 1853, and she came out to Rupert's Land a few years later to be married at Fort Chipewyan.⁴⁰

³⁸In 1864, for example, William Mactavish, now Governor of Assiniboia, married a daughter of Andrew McDermot, the wealthy free trade merchant.

³⁹H.B.C.A., Robert Campbell to Simpson, 3 Aug. 1853, D.5/37, fos. 458-59.

⁴⁰For further details, see Clifford Wilson, Campbell of the Yukon (Toronto, 1970), pp. 146-53.

Those white men who continued to marry mixed-blood girls were to find themselves subject to increasing criticism. Such was the case of the long-awaited Presbyterian minister John Black who not long after his arrival in 1851 began paying court to Henrietta, one of the half-breed daughters of Alexander Ross. A "regular hue and cry" developed among the Presbyterians, largely Selkirk settlers, and although the marriage took place on 21 December 1853, it was prophesied that Black's unfortunate choice of "a native for a helpmate" would be detrimental to his ministry.⁴¹

As an increasing number of settlers came into Rupert's Land in the late 1850's and 60's and with the decline of the fur trade itself, Company officers with native wives and families began to feel increasingly threatened. In British Columbia, Governor Douglas had to endure the unfavourable comparisons made between his wife and the elegant Mrs. Moody, the wife of the Lieutenant Governor at New Westminster. One of his chief critics, Amor de Cosmos, suggested that the Governor because of his "intimate associations" might be better qualified to act as an Indian agent.⁴² Douglas' pride and sensitivity made him anxious to obscure his family's Indian heritage as is revealed in a letter to his youngest daughter

⁴¹H.B.C.A., James Sinclair to Simpson, 11 Dec. 1853, and John Bunn to Simpson, 16 Dec. 1853, D.5/38, fos. 342, 372d-373.

⁴²Smith, "Lady Nobody Knows", pp. 477-78.

Martha when at school in England:

I have no objection to your telling the old stories about "Hyass" but pray do not tell the world that they are Mamma's. 43

While James Ross, the highly-educated son of Alexander Ross, might declare defiantly "What if mama were an Indian?", his very utterance indicates an awareness that the social position of the English mixed-bloods in Red River was threatened.⁴⁴

In 1868, Charles Mair, an enthusiastic proponent of the settlement possibilities of Rupert's Land, made his ill-fated remark about the social rivalry between mixed-blood and white women in Red River. He wrote to his brother in Ontario that while a dinner party which he had attended at Alexander Begg's had been pleasant enough:

There are jealousies and heart-burnings, however. Many wealthy people are married to half-breed women, who, having no coat of arms, but a "totem" to look back to, make up for the deficiency by biting at the backs of their "white" sisters. The white sisters fall back upon their whiteness, whilst the husbands meet each other with desparate courtesies and hospitalities, with a view to filthy lucre in the background. 45

The publicity given to this letter naturally aroused the resentment of the mixed-blood women in the colony. Mrs.

⁴³Smith, "Lady Nobody Knows", p. 472.

⁴⁴W.L. Morton, Manitoba: A History, (Toronto, 1967), p. 90.

⁴⁵W.L. Morton, ed. Alexander Begg's Red River Journal and other papers relative to the Red River Resistance of 1869-70 (Toronto: Champlain Society, vol. 34, 1956), p. 396.

A.G.B. Bannatyne, a daughter of Andrew McDermot, was so provoked by the insult that she actually took a horsewhip to Mair when they happened to meet in the street. Although Mair's assessment of the social situation was not without some truth, his letter is even more significant in that it reveals his own prejudice and lack of understanding of fur trade society which was to be typical of the new settlers from Ontario. If the white woman had not been entirely successful in establishing her ascendancy in fur trade society, the demise of the trade and the spread of agrarian settlement, which was unquestioningly equated with civilization, would ultimately secure her supremacy. The transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada in 1870 symbolized the end of the old fur trade order, and the important role of native women in the early development of the Canadian West was to be demeaned and forgotten.

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Section A: Headquarters Records

A.5/1-36. London Correspondence Outwards, General Series.

A.6/1-121. London Correspondence Outwards, H.B.C. Official.

A.11/1-128. London Inward Correspondence from Posts.

A.34/1-2. Servants' Character and Staff Records.

A.36/1-15. Officers' and Servants' Wills.

Section B: Post Records

Extensive use was made of this large group of manuscripts which contains not only accounts of daily life at most of the Company's posts (Sub-section a), but correspondence between posts (Sub-section b), post accounts (Sub-section d), annual reports (Sub-section e) and miscellaneous information such as marriage contracts (Sub-section z).

Section D: Governors' Papers

D.3/3. George Simpson. Journal 1821-22.

D.4/1-127. George Simpson. Correspondence Outwards.

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