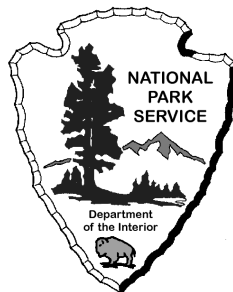


# **Grand Portage as a Trading Post: Patterns of Trade at “the Great Carrying Place”**

**By**

**Bruce M. White  
Turnstone Historical Research  
St. Paul, Minnesota**



**Grand Portage National Monument  
National Park Service  
Grand Marais, Minnesota**

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On the cover: a page from an agreement signed between the North West Company and the Grand Portage area Ojibwe band leaders in 1798. This agreement is the first known documentary source in which multiple Grand Portage band leaders are identified. It is the earliest known documentation that they agreed to anything with a non-Native entity.

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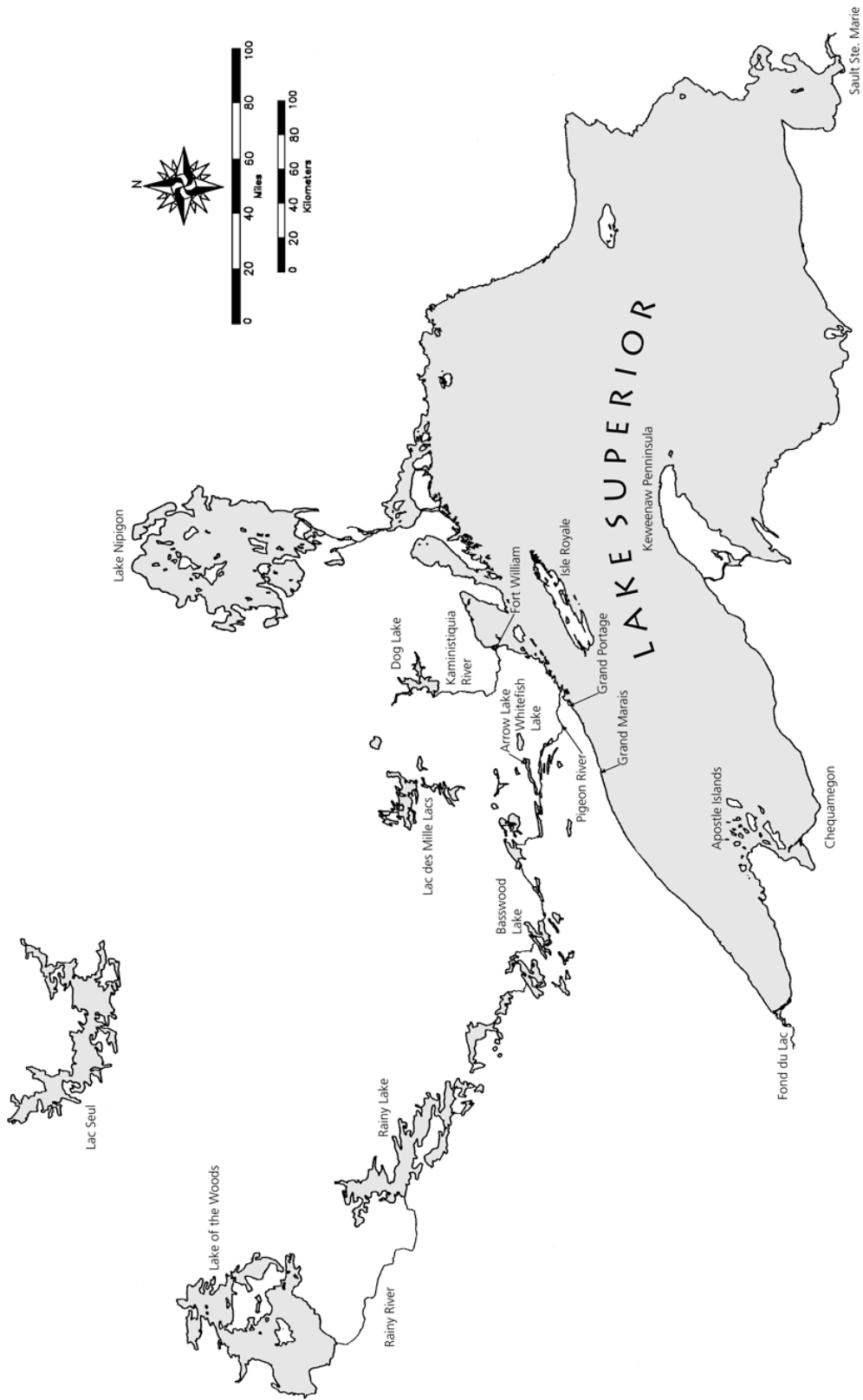
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## Preface

This study began as an attempt to say something new about Grand Portage, a place studied by many scholars over the years. The purpose was to show a different and little known aspect of a famous place. It was a daunting task to write about a place and a history already described by Solon J. Buck, Grace Lee Nute, Alan Woolworth, Erwin Thompson, Douglas Birk, and Carolyn Gilman, not to mention the very able management and staff of Grand Portage National Monument, and many others. During the course of the research and writing, a process that seemed to be never-ending, I despaired at times about whether it was even possible to give a description of what the trade was like at Grand Portage. But through this all, Timothy Cochrane and David Cooper of Grand Portage National Monument have been consistently encouraging, enormously patient, and always willing to share their own extensive knowledge of Grand Portage. I owe them an enormous debt of gratitude. I also owe a debt to Thomas Thiessen and Jeffrey Richner of the National Park Service for their extremely close reading of the manuscript and aid in publishing it. I also thank Theresa Schenck for sharing valuable information and ideas. For many years Curtis L. Roy has been a valuable “friend of Grand Portage” and he encouraged me a great deal in writing this report. Finally, I would like to acknowledge that this work was inspired in part by my time as a student of the late Louise Dechêne of McGill University, a great historian of Montreal and the fur trade, whose detailed and friendly criticism continues to be missed.



Lake Superior and the border lakes area.

## Introduction

Although known primarily in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as “the great carrying place,” a transshipment point where the company headquarters and warehouses of the North West and XY Companies were located, Grand Portage was also a trading post. It was located in the midst of a Native community, where company employees wintered, trading with surrounding Ojibwe, also known as the Anishinaabe.

The role of Grand Portage as a trading post was acknowledged indirectly around 1800 when North West Company partner Roderick McKenzie stated: “Chipeways about the Grand Portage are few in number—accustomed to opposition in trade they are extremely difficult to deal with.” The implication of this statement is that the Grand Portage Ojibwe caused special difficulties for traders. Because of trade competition they had become experienced negotiators, skillful in getting what they wanted from the trade. It could also be that their mere presence next to such an important company depot provided them with opportunities unavailable to Native people elsewhere.

The statement points to the dynamics of Grand Portage, to a special characteristic of the people, the place, and the situation. Competition was one factor which shaped the trade at Grand Portage. But geography, cultural factors, and the roles of individual Indian people and traders all came together to produce a unique set of trade patterns, ones that will be explored in detail in this report.

The purpose of this report is to describe the fur trade that took place at Grand Portage between Europeans and Native Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries. During this period Grand Portage was important for many reasons. A strategic geographical point in the trade route between the Great Lakes and the Canadian Northwest, it was best known as a trade depot and company headquarters in the period between 1765 and 1804. Grand Portage had its largest population and range of activities in the summer, when thousands of company employees passed through on their way east or west.

During the fall, winter, and spring, however, when the crowds of clerks and engagés were at distant trading posts throughout the upper country, trade occupied the time of as many as several dozen company employees at the portage and in the region surrounding it. Little has been written to describe this trade in detail. There is a major difficulty with doing so. For most of the period during which Grand Portage was used by a variety of trading companies, evidence about the actual trade process is limited and scattered. No diaries were kept to describe the detailed activities of company people at Grand Portage during the winter. What evidence exists is largely from the point of view of a few company officials who, often, did not themselves participate directly in trade. Little of it describes Native points of view about trade.

Reconstructing the trade at Grand Portage means sifting through all available sources to find the slightest references to trade there. This evidence can be used, in conjunction with descriptions of trade at other trading posts, and in the region of Grand Portage at other

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times, to arrive at some conclusions about the characteristics of the trade at Grand Portage in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Understanding the nature of this trade means understanding a variety of factors, including the culture of the Ojibwe who lived there, the social and economic organization of the traders, the nature of the physical setting of the posts, and the natural world that surrounded it. It is important to know the history of trade in the western Great Lakes, how the system of trade in use there came to be. By the time trade was established at Grand Portage in the 18th century, both the French and Ojibwe had had many generations of experience in dealing with each other. Together the Ojibwe, other Native groups, the French and later British had worked out a set of general patterns for interacting with one another.

However, if, as the geographer Trevor J. Barnes (1996: 241) writes, “one needs to understand history in order to comprehend location,” it is equally true that in order to understand the history of a place, one needs to understand the specifics of its location, in the sense in which geographers use the term, and also in a wider sense. The particular characteristics of the natural world in various geographical areas, and the culture and history of the people throughout the western Great Lakes created many local patterns. A description of the trade at Grand Portage in the late 18th century cannot be a mere recapitulation of trade or cultural practices elsewhere or during another period. Rather, to understand the trade at Grand Portage it is necessary to link the specific details of what is known about Grand Portage with the specific trade patterns and cultural situations that fit these facts, through a process of inference.

As an example, sources describe, beginning in the 17th century, a seasonal system of trade in which French traders wintered in Native communities. Detailed accounts of this wintering trade are found in the 18th century, in the Lake Superior region, involving both French and British traders. Having the details of the way the system worked in a few places provides evidence that is helpful in inferring its characteristics when traders described it in less detail in other places. Thus, if one were to have a partial description of trade at Grand Portage which did not provide a full, elaborate description of a system involving trade ceremonies, credit, or other features of the seasonal pattern described in other places, one could nonetheless infer, based on only partial evidence, that this trade pattern existed.

In doing so one would still have to take into account the special characteristics of Grand Portage. As suggested by Roderick McKenzie’s statement about the Grand Portage Ojibwe, competition between fur companies may have affected these patterns. Competition provided pressure for increased gift giving, for example, and provided greater leverage for Native people in getting what they wanted from the trader. Presents of alcohol and other items were given in larger amounts in such circumstances.

Competition was not the only pattern that affected the nature of the trade at Grand Portage. The fact of Grand Portage being a trade depot and company headquarters also had a strong role in what went on there. Though there were many similarities in the trade



patterns at Grand Portage to those at a smaller, less central trading post, in many ways Grand Portage was unique, simply because of its size and centrality.

Consider the role of Ojibwe women and men in supplying the Grand Portage depot with services, food, equipment, and other articles in exchange for goods. This is a pattern that has been little described at many trading posts. Often the trade throughout the Great Lakes between traders and Indian people has been characterized as consisting solely of exchanges of fur for merchandise between Indian men and traders, with little involvement from Indian women. There is a great deal of evidence from a variety of locations that the fur trade in many places was much more complex in terms of gender roles. This complexity proceeded from the economics of the trade itself and the problem of provisioning the trading post. A basic fact of life was that in most places it was simply impossible for traders to provision their trading posts entirely from food that they brought with them. Instead they fed themselves and the men who worked with them from food they purchased from Indian people.

Much of this food was produced by women, who in many cases were involved in the process of trading it for things they needed from the trader. In fact, a certain portion of the goods traders brought with them included goods that women wanted and which the traders gave to or traded with women. This meant that women's roles at trading posts were often extensive. They helped keep traders fed and brought them other supplies. In some cases, of course, they married traders and made the production process of food for the trading post part of the process of feeding their families.

Indian women may have had a larger role in trade than they have been given credit for. But what was the case at Grand Portage? Vast quantities of corn and other food were brought to Grand Portage every year by lake boats and by canoes to be redistributed throughout the following year with traders going west. Even after the departure of the canoe brigades, food of all sorts was stored at the post. Most of this food, of course, was intended to be sent on, but it may be that traders at Grand Portage relied in part on this food. In addition food was grown at the post. As will be shown in relation to Fort William, all of this food may have been shared at various times with the Grand Portage Ojibwe. Its availability could have had a marked effect on the role of Native women who interacted with the post. It could also have affected the Ojibwe seasonal pattern if the availability of the food at the post drew Native people there through the winter at times of need, in effect incorporating the post into the seasonal round as has often been discussed for other posts in the Northwest.

The issue of food is especially central to the history of Grand Portage because of the large population present there at various times of year. The need to understand the role that food played in the trade there is one of a number of issues that have yet to be explored in relation to specific posts throughout the upper country. A detailed study of the issue can only be undertaken on the basis of further studies like this one, exploring the role of particular posts in the fur trade. It is hoped that this study can lead to others.

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In the pages that follow, I will first consider the historical background of the trade at Grand Portage, surveying the patterns of trade throughout the early Great Lakes fur trade. I will then describe the earliest French and British use of Grand Portage, a period for which little is known of the actual trade that took place there. Following will be a description of the history of trade at Grand Portage between 1785 and 1804, as well as later trade at the post at Fort William involving individuals from the Grand Portage area. In the final section of the report, I will use the evidence presented to reconstruct a more complete picture of the trade at Grand Portage.

## Trade Patterns

The classic accounts of trade in Native communities in the Great Lakes region describe a pattern of wintering trade, with European traders arriving in or near Native communities in the fall, trading over the course of the winter and leaving for depots and major trading centers in the spring. Many of the descriptions of this pattern are from the period of British trade after 1760, when the British displaced the French in the Great Lakes region. Nonetheless, this pattern of trade is known to have arisen much earlier, during the period of French presence. This pattern of trade had many variations, depending on geographical, social, cultural, and political circumstances. In fact, this pattern of trade was not the only way in which trade took place. There were, in fact, a number of other possibilities for Native people and Europeans to carry on trade.

Native people of the Great Lakes took part in trade with Europeans in a variety of places and contexts, from the St. Lawrence River Valley to Hudson Bay and to the regions of their homes around the shores of the lakes. In these various places trade followed different forms and sometimes had different purposes. To understand the trade at any location means understanding a process, a system involving particular cultural groups trading with particular groups of traders. The kind of trade carried out depends on a variety of social, economic, and cultural factors, as well as the location, climate, and the differing power and political relationships between trading groups. The richness of factors, the varying levels of complexity that shaped the fur trade means that describing the various forms that it took in various places can never be truly exhaustive, but is of necessity based on a selection among many possibilities.

Scholars of the fur trade have emphasized specific factors as key to understanding the workings of the trade. Scholarly analyses of the trade, and the emphasis on particular factors to use to define the differences between trade systems, have been shaped to a large extent by the perspectives of the scholars undertaking them. Scholars have emphasized the geographic or economic or institutional or diplomatic aspects of the trade, but have not attempted to examine the trade holistically in all its dimensions to show the interaction of these various factors in the patterns of fur trade development.

The term “pattern” is used here to refer to any set of systematic relationships, among traders or Indian people or between them, known to have existed in a trade system. The seasonal pattern of trade, in which Indian people met traders in the fall, participated in trade ceremonies, received trade goods on credit, and repaid those credits with furs during the subsequent year, is one such pattern. The Ojibwe of Lake Superior followed this pattern when they traded with traders who lived near their communities. On the other hand when they traveled to Montreal or Hudson Bay at various times in their history, the pattern of trade was different, involving short-term relationships with trading companies, though ones that could be repeated year after year. These relationships did not involve credit or extended repayment.

Any systematic description of the factors shaping the Great Lakes fur trade must begin with the Native people who produced the furs that made the trade possible. These people

had a variety of practices that characterized their way of life, a way of living adjusted to making use of the resources in their environment for survival. They produced furs, gathered wild rice and maple sugar, and did other things that had an impact on their relations with European fur traders. This way of living is sometimes called the “seasonal round,” because it describes a pattern of the systematic use of natural resources throughout the seasons of the year (Meyer 1994: 24; Quimby 1966: 164-171). This system of resource use was not the same throughout the Great Lakes but varied according to ecological circumstances. Native people located on large lakes with valuable fisheries, in inland woodlands, or in areas especially suited for growing corn, used the seasonal environment in different ways.

The trade between Native Americans and Europeans that evolved over a period of 300 years was based on a meshing of Native seasonal patterns of resource use and production and European commercial manufacturing and enterprise. The trade was dependent both on the continuing production of furs and Native products as well as a continuing supply of goods produced in the East, in Europe, and elsewhere. Traders and Indian people were mutually dependent for exchanges that helped each other survive and prosper in the environment of the Great Lakes region. Both traders and Indian people had cultural values and practices that helped guide them in their use of the environment for survival. Ideas, values, practices were also exchanged in the course of the trade, so that each group influenced the other in subtle and complex ways that varied in depending upon the trade patterns evident in particular places and times.

Beyond the general exchange of ideas and practices that took place in the fur trade, the trade itself was shaped by cultural interaction and accommodation. If only because people have expectations about how others will act, a cultural context of some kind was necessary, a set of expected patterns that allowed for predictability for Indians and traders. Trade between these disparate peoples was only possible because each group created institutional bases of various kinds that provided security for the transaction. Without security, attempts to trade might never succeed.

Assuring security for trade transactions involved appeals to the cherished beliefs and cultural values of potential trade partners. These beliefs came to be incorporated into trade institutions. The way in which this occurred can be seen in the earliest meetings of Native peoples and the French in the Great Lakes and the valley of the St. Lawrence, described both in Native traditional accounts and French archives. Several traditional Ojibwe accounts of their people’s first meetings with the French describe the Ojibwe discovering the French rather than the other way around. In these accounts Ojibwe people expressed their wonder at European technology. The French, they believed, were *manidog*, or non-human beings of power, bringing unexplainable things, blankets, iron tools, alcohol, food, things that did not seem to be natural products of human beings. To deal with these *manidog* Native people made use of all the apparatus of belief and ceremony used in spiritual encounters prior to the arrival of the French, involving a variety of strategies, including appeals to pity, ritual abasement, ceremonies of honor for dealing with these beings and seeking their technology and the perceived power that might explain it (B. White 1994a).

Although French accounts do not correspond in all ways to the traditional Ojibwe accounts, they do describe the sense of wonder that the Ojibwe and other Great Lakes peoples had on first encountering the French and their technology. They also record that Native people soon learned that the French were not powerful in all things. The French had their flaws like other human beings. Nonetheless the processes established in those first encounters became incorporated in the full range of encounters between the French and Ojibwe for generations. This included transactions involving the actual trade of furs for merchandise, but also political encounters perceived as primarily diplomatic. In fact, the use of these practices over a broad range of interaction between the French and the Ojibwe often raises the problem of determining whether or not a particular encounter between the groups was purely trade or purely diplomacy.

This problem has confounded several generations of scholars who have looked at Native-European interaction. Much of what has been written on Indian people in the Great Lakes region has emphasized the importance of defining Indian-European interaction either as a commercial enterprise or as a form of social interaction in which Native people and Europeans negotiated political alliances. In such discussions trade is usually described as the exchange of goods for the sake of obtaining goods and is often assumed to exist when Indians and Europeans exchange goods with little ceremony except bargaining over rates of exchange (Rotstein 1967: 32-33, 38, 46; Ray and Freeman 1978: 5-6, 237-45; Ray 1977: 44-47; R. White 1991: 94-95).

Diplomacy, on the other hand, in this context is seen as the action of managing a society's political interrelationships with other societies and is often shown to exist by many fur-trade historians in a set of ceremonial practices, including rituals, speeches, and gifts, through which Europeans and Native Americans interacted. Such behavior is often described as non-economic, that is, as having no conceivable economic purpose because the behavior varies so much from what has characterized economic behavior among 20th and 21st century Americans.

In fact, the distinction between trade and diplomacy does seem to arise more out of 20th century western economic beliefs than it does with the understandings of Native people in the 17th and 18th centuries or for that matter people of varying cultures today. The idea of 20th century Americans that relationships could be divided up into rigid categories often meant that businessmen dealing with other cultures were stymied, forced to continually re-discover the social and cultural dimensions of economic interaction in order to carry on business outside or even within the United States. For Native people in the 18th and 19th centuries life consisted of a seamless web of relationships in which appeals to powerful spirit beings and trade with Europeans were directly interrelated. European traders quickly understood this fact.

Analyzing particular transactions between French and Ojibwe is often complex. Were encounters intended to obtain merchandise for use in their everyday lives or were they for the purpose of political alliances designed to aid in peace and war? Answering accurately depends a great deal on the context of an encounter. In fact, it is often difficult to say

what the primary motives of Indians and Europeans were in any particular circumstance. Sometimes what appeared to be political discussion about alliances for the purposes of war and peace were attempts to get merchandise at the best price. Sometimes requests for a material relationship was only one facet of what was envisioned as a larger political and social relationship. Motives were mixed and varied from one place and one circumstance to another.

The interaction of trade and diplomacy is not only evident in the motives and actions of the Ojibwe and other Native groups, but also in those of the French. Throughout much of the French fur trade, trade took place under government auspices, with government officials helping to inaugurate trade using some of the same items of merchandise also traded. Some government officials were also traders. As will be seen, traders of the 17th century like Radisson and Groseilliers and those who succeeded them in the Lake Superior country used a language of alliance and diplomacy to inaugurate trade encounters. Much later the British incorporated many of the same practices into their trade and diplomacy. British officials sought to foster or control the fur trade as part of governmental Indian policy. North West Company officials acted very much like government officials, making calls for loyalty and adherence to their company instead of their opposition.

The terms *trade* and *diplomacy* are, in fact, overly simplistic ways of describing the multiplicity of transactional forms used by Native people and Europeans in the Great Lakes to exchange goods. The range of possible material exchanges is comparable to the “spectrum of reciprocities” described by economic anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1972: 185-275; B. White 1998b: 191) in his work on “the sociology of primitive exchange.” Sahlins described transactions ranging from “the pure gift,” at one extreme, to “balanced reciprocity,” comparable to direct trade, and to exchanges involving “various degrees of cunning, guile, stealth” and sometimes, outright pillage or theft at the other extreme. Sahlins noted that this spectrum of possibilities corresponded to the social distance between those carrying on trade, that is, generalized reciprocity was most likely to occur among the closest kin, whereas negative reciprocity was the most “impersonal sort of exchange.”

All these kinds of transactions were possibilities in the interactions between Native peoples and Europeans in the Great Lakes. They were undertaken by traders, interpreters, and diplomats, in transactions fostered by the governments and commercial enterprises. The multiplicity and shifting nature of roles evident in such Native-European interactions follows the pattern described by Robert Paine in his analysis of patrons and brokers in East Arctic communities in the 20th century (Paine 1971: 8-21). Paine noted that individuals, including government officials and traders, managed their various roles to accomplish their purposes. Negotiations consisted in finding ways to balance the various goods and services individuals could make available to each other.

The various roles corresponded to the level of reciprocity in the transactions. Patrons were individuals who sought to convert material goods into influence by giving gifts and providing the greatest range of resources available to those they sought to influence. The

model for the patron was the relationship between human beings and God or in the case of Native societies, the powerful spirit beings who controlled the success of individuals in life. Native leaders and European diplomats sought to play this role. On the other hand, in principle, traders were brokers who dealt in more balanced transactions, avoiding the investment and expense necessary to create followership. For the trader this was the ideal role. But Paine made clear that the roles of patron and broker were not fixed and could be embraced alternatively or in combination. Thus traders might try to create the illusion of patronage to motivate Native people.

Material objects were a basic medium through which the meaning of encounters was acted out and through which the possible roles were managed. From the beginning Native people wanted merchandise. But they did not want all kinds of French merchandise equally. Rather, they wanted specific kinds of goods for specific purposes and in specific quantities. The result was that there came to be what was called a “trade assortment,” a set of goods designed for the trade which traders traveling to winter in the Ojibwe country would bring in adequate quantities to satisfy demand in a particular place (B. White 1998b). Besides fulfilling Ojibwe demand in various ways, each item of merchandise played a particular role in the trade and was exchanged in specific ways. Alcohol, tobacco, shot, gunpowder, and special military style clothing were often given away in trade ceremonies at the beginning and end of the year. In addition alcohol was often exchanged for items of food. Cloth, clothing, utensils, and tools of various kinds were usually given out on credit in the fall, designed to equip Ojibwe families at the beginning of an arduous time. A few things might be traded directly, especially at the end of the year.

It is equally important to differentiate what the Ojibwe traded in return. From the French point of view furs were the point of the trade system, but in order to survive in the Ojibwe country, the traders needed food and supplies of various kinds, including canoes and materials for repairing them, snowshoes and many other things. Native means of production helped shape who, whether men and women, exchanged these things with the traders. These same goods, both European and Native American, were common to trade ceremonies and the ceremonies of government relationships with Native groups, though the values fostered in such exchanges might be quite variable. The objects like the roles played by the participants were richly diverse, as rich in possibilities as language.

These rich possibilities have come to be characterized by the phrase applied by historian Richard White (1991: 50-51), “the middle ground.” The term is purely metaphorical, and not based on language used historically. It is intended to describe the cultural space between Native and European peoples in these Great Lakes, a space in which the full range of human relationships was contained. In White’s account, designed to counter traditional descriptions of imperialistic French and British expansion, outcomes of Native-European encounters were the product of negotiation, in which established cultural meanings sometimes clashed with the force of events. It is in the analysis of particular negotiations that White’s analysis provides a good model for examining the history of these encounters. However, his term “the middle ground” has come to be

a simplistic shorthand for a multitude of possibilities, with little intrinsic analytical power to explain what actually occurred in any particular circumstance.

Despite suggesting at various times in his analysis the difficulty of sorting out trade from diplomacy, White falls into the familiar trade/diplomacy trap, distinguishing the economic from other aspects of interaction. White's analysis of the Feast of the Dead, undertaken by the Huron, Algonquian peoples, and the French in the 17th century is a good example. As will be described later, it is difficult to pigeonhole such ceremonies into western categories such as economics, religion, or diplomacy. White, in his description of the Feast of the Dead, noted that the distribution of goods was an exchange of "a social and political nature," in which the goods given away "lost their utilitarian value." He noted that some goods in these ceremonies were buried with the dead and stated that "these gifts should not be considered some hidden form of investment. Their real significance was social. They bound people to each other" (B. White 1991: 103).

In fact, of course, investments *are* things that bind people to each other. As the economist John Maynard Keynes (1935: 219) stated: "An act of individual saving means—so to speak—a decision not to have dinner to-day. But it does *not* necessitate a decision to have dinner or to buy a pair of boots a week hence or a year hence or to consume any specified thing at any specified date." What turns a mere act of hoarding into an investment with an expected return is the way individuals are bound to return the investment by the cultural/legal/political system in which they live and the beliefs that they have. In giving goods away, even in burying goods with the dead, Native people were certainly making something like an investment in human and spiritual relationships, ones they believed would have some long term value in their lives, given the beliefs that they shared with each other. They were choosing between the short-term pleasure of consumption or use with the long term future benefits as uncertain as they may have been in some circumstances.

The point here is not to reduce ceremony to economics but rather to show the relatedness of actions usually described as economic with those usually defined as social or religious. Even more, if one were to deny the relationship, the actual exchange of goods that took place in the ceremonies, including participation in such feasts in which European trade goods were given away or traded, could have provided one strong motivation for trade with the French, if only to obtain more goods to be given away. In this way the Feast of the Dead was yet another motivation for Native people to participate in trade.

One difficulty with the "middle ground" as a concept is that it describes a cultural space without providing clues to the specific relationships developed within it. In contrast the metaphors used by Great Lakes Native people described the kind and quality of the relationships. The use of the term "milk," used by Native peoples to describe the alcoholic beverages given away in trade and diplomacy are an example of a metaphor which suggests the structure parental/patriarchal relationships established between Europeans and Native people in the Great Lakes (B. White 1982, 48: 67). The term is very specific in its meaning and in the kind of relationship it implied.



Another metaphor often used to describe the relationships between European peoples and Native peoples was the concept of the road. Perhaps because of the long travel sometimes necessary for these peoples to meet and interact, relationships between groups were often seen as a road, one that could be wide and smooth, or tortuous, filled with rocks and brambles. An Ojibwe leader from Rainy Lake named the Crane gave a speech at Fort Niagara in 1764 in which he stated to Sir William Johnson and the assembled diplomats: “Brother, we are therefore come down through a bad, and Briary Road to see the English, and to desire Trade.” The statement was about the trip taken through potentially hostile country. But it was also about the relationship he wanted to establish with the British, one that was an open road, involving open trade between the British and the Ojibwe (SWJP, 11: 298-300).

The idea of the relationship between peoples as a road, with the characteristics of a passageway like the Grand Portage itself, suggests the importance of understanding the real physical nature of the places in which the fur trade took place, something usually ignored in the concept of “the middle ground.” The available resources in places, the geographical distances necessary to reach them, and the obstacles in the way, all affected the kinds of relationships between Native peoples and Europeans that were possible. The exchanges that Great Lakes groups had with French people in Montreal and Hudson Bay were very different from those that took place in Native communities. The goods exchanged, the ceremonies involved, and the language used may often have been similar, but the kinds of relationships involved had a different long-term importance.

For these reasons it is important to note the patterned way in which the circumstances of place corresponded to different kinds of trade. Place is defined here in its richest sense to describe not only distance to other places but the hierarchical importance of place, and the role that place served in terms of European or Native politics, society, and economics. So Montreal came to be an important place because of its strategic geographical location at the headwaters of one river and the mouth of another, and because of the way the French came to use it as a central point for organizing trade shipments and for the location of government officials. French political and economic power was concentrated in Montreal, which had an important effect on the way trade could be carried out there as opposed to the villages of the western Great Lakes where Native peoples were numerically stronger and in their element. Even so, places like Montreal and Hudson Bay had a local trade that was similar in some ways to the trade of distant regions.

The development of trade in Montreal, Hudson Bay, and in Native country provides a way of defining three specific patterns taken by the fur trade involving Great Lakes people. But over time the trade evolved to reflect changing ecological, political, and economic realities. At the same time, the movement of political and military forces into the western Great Lakes meant that new kinds of trade situations came into being. Posts like Michilimackinac, Green Bay, and ultimately, Grand Portage came to provide opportunities for Native people to trade in ways that were similar to the trade of Montreal and Hudson Bay. Trade for Native people in such places appears to have been limited by the degree to which competition between traders was allowed to exist. If competition thrived it provided the means for Native people to exert greater control over the trade.



AT-TE-CONSE or the YOUNG REIN DEER

A Chippeway Chief

*Painted by J. O. Lewis.*

“At-te-conse or the Young Rein Deer” was sketched by James Otto Lewis in 1826 while witnessing the Treaty of Fond du Lac. More accurately translated as Little Caribou, he was a Grand Portage border lakes area chief attending the treaty held near present-day Duluth. Interestingly, he did not sign the 1826 treaty.

## The Invention of the Great Lakes Fur Trade

Three narratives from the people of the south shore of Lake Superior tell of discovering the French, not of being discovered by them. In one representative story recorded by the European-Ojibwe historian William Warren ([1885] 1984: 117-19; see B. White 1994a) in his book written around 1852, an old man who lived at La Pointe on Madeline Island, along the south shore of Lake Superior, had a dream in which “he beheld spirits in the form of men, but possessing white skins and having their heads covered. They approached him with hands extended and with smiles on their faces.” These people he believed lived in the east. He decided to set out on a journey in search of them. He and his wife built a canoe, hunted, cured a supply of meat, and set out in search of these spirits. After paddling along the waterways that connected the upper lakes to the Ottawa River system, they came to a clearing where they discovered a hut from the top of which arose smoke. Just as in his dream, Ma-se-wa-pe-ga was greeted by the “white spirits” with a shake of the hand.

Before their return home, the man and woman were given “presents of a steel axe, knife, beads, and a small strip of scarlet cloth,” which the man carefully deposited in his medicine bag as sacred articles. On their return to La Pointe, he collected the men of his tribe in council and told them and showed them what they had seen. The following spring a large expedition set out to return to the settlement of these “white spirits,” bringing with them beaver skins to exchange. On this trip they obtained both guns and alcohol for the first time.

Exactly when the ancestors of the present-day Ojibwe first encountered the French or French goods is not known. French documentary sources suggest that it may not have happened until the mid-17th century. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to believe that these Ojibwe peoples could have encountered French or their goods earlier than described in the written accounts. It is also likely they obtained French goods through the intermediary of other Native groups long before they actually met the French. Through these other Native groups they may have also learned some of the ways of dealing with the French later institutionalized in the rituals of trade.

The trade forms and practices found in the earliest period of French trade with the peoples in the Great Lakes prefigured and influenced what would be the subsequent fur trade of Lake Superior. That trade in turn was influenced by the dynamics of inter-tribal trade, war, and diplomacy. The precursors to the historic fur trade took place in the earliest encounters between the French and Native groups on the St. Lawrence River in the early 17th century.

Early encounters on the St. Lawrence show the French and Native peoples searching for ways to interact. The French in particular sought to make use of pre-existing trade systems including available rituals and cultural forms. Before the era of Samuel de Champlain, French trade was confined to the St. Lawrence River valley. With Champlain the French began to turn their sights to the region of Lake Huron and beyond. The first trading encounters took place at Tadoussac, downriver from present-day Quebec City,

with the Montagnais, an eastern Algonquian-speaking group. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries trade between the Algonkin<sup>1</sup> people of the Ottawa River valley had been channeled through the Montagnais who traded with the French at Tadoussac. Around 1603, a leader of the Montagnais, Anadabijou, made an alliance with Tessouat, the leader of an Algonkin community located at Morrison Island in the Ottawa valley (Trigger 1987: 230-231).

The trade expanded westward for a variety of interrelated reasons. European trade goods were attractive to a variety of Indian groups. And furs produced by Indian people were attractive to Europeans. But the mechanics of the expansion of these relationships were complex. Trigger (1987: 229) writes that by 1602 a general policy for dealing with the Indians emerged. The policy was based on three observations. The first was that it was more important to maintain good relations with the Indians living north of the St. Lawrence. This was because the furs coming from the north were of better quality than those coming from the south. The second was that “good trading relations depended upon broadly based alliances between the French and their Indian partners.” The Montagnais were at war with the Mohawk. It was necessary to help them win their wars, both to free them to engage in trade and to maintain their goodwill. It was not in the prime interest of the French to take sides in Indian wars. Rather, they were more interested in trade. But, Trigger wrote, “nothing won the confidence of these Indians more than did an offer of military assistance.” The third observation was the need to encourage contact with tribes who lived in the interior, something the French would continue to do for the next 150 years, for a variety of reasons.

Champlain first arrived in the region in 1603. In traveling up the St. Lawrence River almost as far as the island of Montreal, he encountered a Montagnais-Algonkin war party who came to fight the Iroquois in the region to the south (Trigger 1987: 231-33, 233, 236). The Algonkin claimed to have traveled on Lake Huron and were familiar with the geography of the region to the west. Champlain returned to the region in 1608-09. At that time he actually took part in a Montagnais-Algonkin war party. It was through this means that he was able to expand the trade beyond the St. Lawrence. Up until this time the French had sought to aid their trading allies by arming them. At this point they realized that if they fought the enemies of their trading partners it provided a demonstration of goodwill. Champlain spent the winter of 1608-09 at Quebec. Among the groups Champlain met at that time were the Onontchataronon, an Algonquian-speaking group from the Ottawa River valley who were allied with the Huron. At the same time, Champlain for the first time met the Huron, who were to be the chief trading partners of the French for the next forty years.

In the summer of 1609 Champlain met a mixed party of Huron, Onontchataronon, and Algonkin amounting to some two to three thousand people near the mouth of the Batiscan River. The leaders presented Champlain with “gifts of furs and asked him to have guns fired for the benefit of those who had never encountered them before” (Trigger 1987:

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<sup>1</sup> Algonkin is used here to refer to the tribe and/or the more narrowly defined language group often referred to as a dialect chain, whereas Algonquian refers to the widespread family of languages. Exceptions may occur within quotations and document titles.

248-49). They returned to Quebec with Champlain where trade took place. This involved five or six days of “eating, dancing, and trading.” Champlain announced that he would send men to fight alongside his Indian allies against the Iroquois.” At the mouth of the Richelieu River, Champlain was surprised when most Algonkin men, who, unknown to him, had never intended to accompany his expedition, continued upriver with their wives and the European merchandise they had obtained. This left around 60 warriors from the various groups who went on the war party. After the successful conclusion of the war expedition, some Algonkin and Huron departed. Champlain and the Montagnais went back down the St. Lawrence.

Throughout this period the French government vacillated between limiting and encouraging competition between various trading companies. When Champlain arrived at Tadoussac in the spring of 1610, he was told that some of the competing merchants were promising they too would send men to fight alongside them. Even though the Montagnais sought to assure Champlain that, as Trigger put it, “their greatest friendship was reserved for him. . . their behaviour suggests that they were interested in obtaining good prices for their furs and would sell them, whenever possible, to the highest bidder.” Nonetheless, the desire for alliance with Champlain may have given him the upper hand in trade competition. In a prelude of things to come, in 1609, Etienne Brulé, then eighteen years old, was sent to stay within the region of the Huron and Algonkin tribes, and a Huron returned with Champlain to France (Trigger 1987: 261-62).

Even before the arrival of the French, the Huron traded widely in the region of Lake Huron with other groups including the Ottawa, and although they trapped some furs on their own, most of the furs they obtained were from other groups with which the Huron traded their corn. This included the Algonkin of the Ottawa River valley, from whom the Huron obtained furs on their yearly journeys to Quebec and other French trading locations (Trigger 1987: 351-58).

The techniques of trading involving the Huron were greatly shaped by the techniques of intertribal trading relationships to which they were accustomed (Trigger 1987: 363, 364). As Trigger wrote, “each year when they came to the St. Lawrence, several days were devoted to speeches, feasts, and the exchange of valuable presents, both before and after the bartering took place. These ceremonies reaffirmed the treaty of friendship between the Huron and French, without which the Huron would have felt uneasy about returning to the St. Lawrence the following year.” Trigger suggests that unlike the Montagnais of the Tadoussac area, who had been trading with the French for a longer period of time, and who were exposed to greater trade competition, the Huron during this early period, “generally accepted the prices charged by the company for its goods as fair.”

Trigger also notes that the Huron were anxious to establish relations of real or fictional kinship with individual Frenchmen who visited their country. “In this and in other ways, they hoped to elicit the support of these individuals as intermediaries when they traded with the French.” Perhaps the first such Frenchman was Etienne Brulé who went to live with them in 1609.

Trigger argues that this evidence shows that “the Huron were still able to view their trade with the French in terms of a traditional system of intertribal friendship and alliance. The Huron wished to receive as many European goods as possible for their furs, but instead of haggling over individual pelts, a request for more trade goods was phrased as an appeal for further proof of friendship. The Huron regarded generosity to friends and allies as an obligation; therefore, if the French traders really were their friends, they would treat the Huron who came to Quebec generously.” Thus, bargaining took place within the framework of a political alliance and friendship (Trigger 1987:364).

Trade for the Huron in the historic period was a source not only of luxury goods, but also of meat and skins “which were vital to a population that had outstripped the resources of its nearby hunting territory” (Trigger 1987: 62, 63). This trade “was embedded in a network of social relations that were, fundamentally, extensions of the friendly relationships that existed within the Huron confederacy.” The Huron traded with other Iroquoian groups to the south for tobacco and black squirrel skins, prized for making cloaks, as well as black “Erie stones,” raccoon skin robes, wampum beads, and gourds. With Algonquian groups to the north, the Huron obtained charms, clothing, camping equipment, native copper, and buffalo robes, obviously obtained from west of the Great Lakes. The major items obtained from these northern groups were furs and dried fish. In return the northern groups obtained nets, rope, corn, and the same tobacco that the Huron themselves had gotten from other Iroquoian groups. The Huron grew surplus corn for the purpose of trade.

Trade with these northern groups was especially valued and cultivated. Trade took the form of reciprocal gift-giving in a network of social relations. Trading partners in each group modeled their relationships on those between relatives. Some partners were linked through formal adoption. Others exchanged children “as evidence of trust and goodwill and also to provide hostages” in case of a breakdown in the trading system. Some Algonquians who came to the Huron country remained there and married (Trigger 1987: 64).

In words that described a system similar to the Kula trade of the Trobriand Islanders described in Malinowski’s famous account (Malinowski 1961: 85), Trigger wrote that “visits to foreign tribes for purposes of trade were seen as hazardous adventures that had to be hedged about with many formal courtesies. Before entering a village, all the members of an expedition would paint themselves and put on their best ornaments. Feasts, speech-making, and formal exchanges of gifts between headmen normally went on for several days, both before and after the more commercial trading” (Trigger 1987: 64).

The Huron had rules governing the trade with outside groups. Rights to particular trade routes “were said to belong to the family of the man who had discovered it.” No one was supposed to trade along the route without first receiving permission from the head of the family who controlled it. Usually in the case of major trade routes, owners were under the control of leading headmen (Trigger 1987: 65). “Such control must have provided these headmen with an important means of acquiring wealth, which in turn could be used to

validate their high status within their tribes. It appears that whoever discovered a new trade route, effective control of it soon passed into the heads of the headmen of his clan segment or of an even more influential chief with his tribe.”

Throughout the period of Huron trade ascendancy, in the early 17th century, the Huron language was a *lingua franca* throughout the central Great Lakes, possibly as far west as the Winnebago of Green Bay (Trigger 1987: 65). Summer expeditions took the Huron to trade through the Georgian Bay area and to Sault Ste. Marie and the Lake Superior region (Trigger 1987: 355). The extent of these ties is one reason the Huron resisted French attempts to extend their own independent trade with other groups and regions west and north of Lake Huron. They allowed Etienne Brulé, along with a Frenchman known as Grenole, to travel to Sault Ste. Marie sometime between 1621 and 1623, but this did not result in the expansion of French trade in the region. Brulé reported the existence of the rapids which were named Sault de Gaston in honor of Louis XIII’s brother. He also brought back a bar of native copper obtained from Indians living 80-100 leagues from the Huron. It is not known whether Brulé and Grenole actually traveled beyond the Sault themselves (Trigger 1987: 372, 375; Butterfield 1898: 106-108).

Trigger suggests that French who visited the Huron were allowed to trade with neighboring tribes “in the same way that individual Huron were,” with some restrictions, including one that prevented them from wintering with any of the tribes with whom the Huron traded. “The Huron believed that while there was little danger in a short visit, in the course of a winter it might be possible for a Frenchman to win the confidence of a tribe and organize them to visit the St. Lawrence” (Trigger 1987: 376). One of these northern Algonquian groups was the Nipissing. This group did very little trading directly with the French, although some did by the 1620s. The reason had to do with corn. Every summer when Huron traders returned from the St. Lawrence the Nipissing met them as they passed through their tribal territory. “So vital was corn to the Nipissing economy that they preferred to focus most of their trading cycle on the Huron, rather than seek an extensive separate relationship with the French” (Trigger 1987: 355).

It was while initiating trade with the Huron that the French first encountered the group called the Cheveux Relevés, or Ottawa, one of the Algonquian groups to the north with which the Huron traded. These groups lived along the shores of Georgian Bay and on Manitoulin Island. On Champlain’s visit to the Huron country in 1615, he met 300 Ottawa at the mouth of the French River. Champlain was told that they were visiting the area to dry blueberries. They told him that they lived on the south shore of Georgian Bay west of the Tionnontaté, another trading partner of the Huron. He gave them an axe, which they greatly appreciated, not having seen many European goods before (Trigger 1987: 299).

While the Ottawa supplied furs to the Huron throughout the subsequent forty-some years of Huron-French trade, the French did not gradually shift their trade to obtain directly the furs they received in trade. This was because the Huron guarded their relationship with the Ottawa, and perhaps because the Ottawa needed to trade with the Huron for other items. Trigger writes that there was no evidence that the Ottawa traded directly with the

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French prior to 1653. Each summer they would meet Huron traders returning from the St. Lawrence near the same location where they met Champlain, where they exchanged furs, shell beads, pigments, and “possibly native copper which they had obtained farther west,” for the European goods that the Huron had brought back from the St. Lawrence. Gabriel Sagard reported that the Ottawa and Huron spent several days “trading and negotiating” (Trigger 1987: 353, 354; Sagard 1865: 53). The Ottawa were less dependent on the Huron for corn than were the Nipissing and the Algonkin (Trigger 1987: 354).

As shown here, the trade among the Huron was a complex system of trade and diplomacy, one in which the French found themselves grafted onto a Native trade system. Eventually the system was destroyed, but it prepared the French for the development of the more familiar patterns they and others carried on for another two hundred years and more.



## Ceremonies of Trade, Trade of Ceremonies

Among the means through which the Huron affirmed their relationships with nearby Algonquian groups was the Feast of the Dead, a complex ceremony involving feasting, gift giving, and joint mourning for deceased tribal members. It is likely that this feast was one of the ways in which many Ojibwe-speaking groups first learned of the French and their merchandise.

The French used such feasts for the purpose of expanding their contacts with groups neighboring the Huron. Jesuit priests took part in a feast among the Nipissing along the shore of Georgian Bay in 1642. There they met the Baouichitigouian, or the people of the Sault, a group ancestral to present-day Ojibwe, often referred to as one of many Proto-Ojibwe groups (Trigger 1987: 609; Thwaites 1896-1901, 23: 224-27). The name comes from the Ojibwe word for the rapids in a river, *bâwitig* (Baraga 1992, 1: 206)

The account of this feast provides some clues about the history of Algonquian-speaking peoples in the area (Kenton 1927, 1: 456-62; Thwaites 1896-1901, 23: 205-25). The Jesuit Relations for 1642-43 reports that these people, described in this case as Algonkin, “lead the nomad life of people scattered here and there, wherever the chase or the fishing may lead them,—sometimes in the woods, sometimes over rocks, or in Islands in the middle of some great lake; sometimes on the banks of rivers.” It appears that the Jesuits were not then aware of the regular seasonal subsistence patterns of these people.

The feast took place toward the end of summer. The people collected the bones of their deceased relatives and then re-interred them according to rituals “differing much from those of our Hurons.” The ceremonies involved elaborate rituals of gift giving in which the separate roles of men and women were clearly marked. The “confederated Nations” gathered on an appointed day at a bay 20 leagues from the country of the Huron.

Those of each Nation, before landing, in order to make their entry more imposing, form their Canoes in line, and wait until others come to meet them. When the People are assembled, the Chief stands up in the middle of his Canoe, states the object that has brought him hither. Thereupon each one throws away some portion of his goods to be scrambled for. Some articles float on the water, while others sink to the bottom. The young men hasten to the spot. One will seize a mat, wrought as the tapestries are in France, another a Beaver skin; others get a hatchet, or a dish, or some Porcelain beads, or other article,—each according to his skill and the good fortune he may have. There is nothing but joy, cries, and public acclamations, to which the Rocks surrounding the great Lake return an Echo that drowns all their voices.

As described here, the exchange of goods—including apparently European goods and Native manufactures—is reminiscent of the Potlatch of the Northwest Coast in the 19th century, in the careless way the chief showed his power by throwing away goods for others to fight over. More goods were exchanged in various ways in the days that followed.

After their arrival representatives of the various nations assembled and brought out the gifts they had brought, including beaver robes, the skins of otter, caribou, wild cat [or possibly raccoon], moose, as well as French trade goods such as hatchets, kettles, porcelain beads “and all things that are precious in this Country.” Then, each leader “presents his own gift to those who hold the Feast, giving to each present some name that seems best suited to it.” (It is unclear what this means.)

This was followed by a dance involving, according to the Jesuits, 40 persons who danced “to the sound of voices and a sort of drum” The dance involved three parts, the first representing combat, “one pursuing his foe, hatchet in hand, to give him the deathblow, while at the same time he seems to receive it himself, by losing his advantage; he regains it, and after a great many feints, all performed in time with the music, he finally overcomes his antagonist, and returns victorious.” Similar re-enactments of battle were done with spear, bow and arrows, and war clubs. The second dance was a group dance described only vaguely. The third dance was a women’s dance “which was as agreeable as the others, and in now wise offense to modesty.” The Jesuits wrote that the people of the Sault (who had come 120 leagues to be there) were part of this dance. A game followed involving the climbing of a greased pole to the top of which a kettle and deer skin were tied.

The Jesuits reported that the election of Nipissing chiefs then took place. These chiefs were called forth wearing their finest robes. “They gave largess of a quantity of Beaver skins and Moose hides, in order to make themselves known, and that they might be received with applause in their Offices.” This was followed by “the Resurrection of those persons of importance who had died since the last Feast; which means that in accordance with the custom of the Country; their names were transferred to some of their relatives, so as to perpetuate their memory.”

Portions of the feast were structured according to gender roles, with men and women opposed symbolically. The day after the election of the feasts, the women constructed a lodge 100 paces long, “the width and height of which were in proportion.” The women carried the bones of their dead into the room. “These bones were enclosed in caskets of bark, covered with new robes of Beaver skins, and enriched with collars and scarfs of Porcelain Beads.” Near each body the women sat in two lines facing each other. The “Captains” (meaning chiefs?) acting as stewards brought in dishes of food that were only for the women. Fires were lit at either end of the lodge. A dozen men began to sing “a most lugubrious chant, which, being seconded by the Women in the refrains, was very sweet and sad.”

The next day women distributed corn, moccasins, “and other small articles that are within their means, or the products of their industry.” They appear to have chanted “ever plaintive, and interspersed with sobs” to the “Souls of the deceased, whom they sped on their way,” while “the body of an Army could be observed descending a neighboring Mountain with frightful cries and yells, running around at first in a circle, then in an oval;

and, at last, after a thousand other figures they rushed upon the Cabin, of which they became the Masters,—the Women having yielded the place, as if to an Enemy.”

Warriors danced in victory, with each nation occupying the lodge and displaying their abilities, “until the Algonquin Captains, who acted as Masters of Ceremonies, entered ten or twelve in line, bearing flour, beavers, and some dogs still alive, with which they prepared a splendid feast for the Hurons.” The Algonkin were served apart.

Two separate gift exchanges were then held, one between the Nipissing and the Algonkin nations, the other with the Huron. The Jesuits noted that in the exchange with the Algonkin, “various presents were given, according to the extent of the Alliance that existed between the Nipissiriniens and them. The bones of the Dead were borne between the presents given to the most intimate Friends, and were accompanied by the most precious robes and by collars of porcelain beads, which are the gold, the pearls and the diamonds of this Country.” The reference to “intimate Friends” may relate to the trade partnerships that were part of the way the system of alliances worked in the region.

In dealing with the Huron, wrote the Jesuits, the Nipissing accorded them “the highest Seat, the first titles of honor, and marks of affection above all their Confederates. Here new presents were given, and so lavishly that not a single Captain withdrew empty-handed.” The feast ended with contests of physical strength, skill, and agility, with prizes for the winners. Both men and women took part.

For the French the Feast of the Dead provided an opportunity to expand their acquaintance and trade with Great Lakes peoples, which they did through ceremonies and gifts. The Jesuits used the occasion of the 1642 Feast of the Dead among the Nipissing to win the affection of the assembled peoples, by giving their own feasts and presents. It was as the result of this that the Pauoitigoueieuhak invited them to visit their own country at the Sault that same year (Trigger 1987: 609).

At the Sault the missionaries encountered 2000 “souls.” They “obtained information about a great many other sedentary Nations, who have never known Europeans and have never heard of GOD,—among others, of a Nation, the Nadouessis, situated to the Northwest or West of the Sault, eighteen days journey further away.” According to the account in the Jesuit relations, the eighteen days would take into account a nine-day journey across the lake. “These Peoples till the soil in the manner of our Hurons, and harvest Indian corn and Tobacco. Their villages are larger, and in a better state of defense, owing to their continual wars with the Kiristinons [Cree], the Irinions [Illinois], and other great Nations who inhabit the same country. Their language differs from the Algonquin and Huron” (Kenton 1927, 1: 462; Thwaites 1896-1901, 23: 225-27).

Throughout the 1640s there began to be references in the writings of the Jesuits whose missions were primarily in the Huron country to a variety of western groups, including ancestors of the present-day Ojibwe. These early references have come to be a matter of much debate among a variety of scholars seeking to explain the cultural evolution of the people. The Jesuit Relation of 1647-48 contains a list of a number of Algonquian-

speaking peoples inhabiting the eastern and northern shores of Lake Huron (Kenton 1927, 1: 501-02; Thwaites 1896-1901, 33: 149) including the Outaouakamigouek, Sakahiganiriouik, Aouasanik, Atchougue, Amikouek, Achirigouans, Nikikouek, Michisagouek, and Paoueitagoung.

This list and subsequent lists suggest the confused jumble of various tribal designations that the Jesuits and other French sources recorded indiscriminately. It is not altogether clear what these lists of names mean and how they correspond to later tribal designations. A number of scholars, beginning with Harold Hickerson (1960: 84; 1962: 76-78), have noted the similarity to totemic clan names among modern Ojibwe. For example the Amikouek who were sometimes known as the people of the beaver, could correspond to a beaver *doodem* or totem. The name Nikouek appears to refer to the otter or *nigig* (Nichols and Nyholm 1995:223). Warren lists no such totemic group, although it would be logical to suggest that there might have been such a group (see also Hodge 1912: 2: 70-71).

The last name, Paouitagoung, was yet another version of the name for the people of the Sault. The Jesuit Relations for 1647-48 noted that it was with these people that the French would have “to obtain passage if we wished to go further and communicate with numerous other Algonquin Tribes, still further away, who dwell on the shores of another lake larger than the fresh-water sea, into which it discharges by a very large and very rapid river” at “a fall that gives its name to these peoples, who come there during the fishing season.” In this statement can be seen a growing awareness of the seasonal pattern of the people of the Sault, which involved their use of the fish resources of the Sault part of the year, and use of inland resources at other times of the year (Thwaites 1896-1901, 33: 149).

According to Hickerson, the various references to these and other groups called Proto-Ojibwe suggest the existence of totemic clan-based villages or “local exogamous kindreds” that were later absorbed by the Ojibwe (Hickerson 1960: 84; 1962: 76-78; see also Schenck 1995: 37). While the evidence seems to support Hickerson’s argument about these totemic groups, the process of coalescence is less clear. The appearance of fluidity in tribal organization perceived by Hickerson may simply be an artifact of the French confusion about peoples whom they had not yet met but were describing from reports by other groups. This same lack of clarity is evident in the descriptions of the western Great Lakes themselves. One might assume that Lakes Superior and Michigan were coalescing and shifting in form based solely on the shifting evidence of French observers about the shape and configuration of the region’s geography.

There were, however, some clear changes among the ancestors of the present-day Ojibwe in the 1650s, due in part to the Iroquois destruction of the Huron communities along the shores of Lake Huron. Survivors dispersed in various directions. Ottawa and other Algonquian-speaking communities near Lake Huron were also affected. Huron, the Tionnotaté, and some groups of Ottawa were also dispersed to the west. The dispersal of the Huron is seen by Richard White (1991: 1-2, 14, 51) as a major factor in the social transformation of the region, an increasing role for the French there, and the beginnings of social interaction that White has labeled “the middle ground.” As we have seen, trade

and social interaction between the French and Native peoples of the kind White described, involving a mixture of social and economic relations, took place many years before the fall of Huronia and perhaps before the arrival of Champlain on the scene. Further, historian William J. Newbigging (1995: 132) suggests that the whole idea of the dispersal of the Ottawa is exaggerated. He argues that only the Kiskakons group of Ottawa, living on the shores of Nottawasaga Bay were dispersed with the Huron and the Tionnontaté. Other groups such as those living on Manitoulin Island were inaccessible to the Iroquois, who only had clumsy elm-bark canoes.

The destruction of Huronia changed the participants in the trade, not the basic fact of trade as a cross-cultural endeavor. The most immediate direct affect on the fur trade from the fall of Huronia was to shift the burden of trade from the Huron to the Ottawa or Odawa. Beginning in the 1650s, trading expeditions to Montreal were led by the Ottawa, and they included some of the groups that have been assumed to be ancestors of the Ojibwe. It is perhaps at this time that the earliest direct trade between Lake Superior Ojibwe and the French took place. After the destruction of Huronia, Ottawa, and possibly related Ojibwe, began coming to trade the way the Huron had done on the upper St. Lawrence. The Jesuit Relation for 1652-53 reports that instead of the usual 100 canoes laden with beaver skins, very little trade was being carried on. Warehouses at Montreal, Trois Rivières, and Quebec were empty (Innis 1956: 36-37). Innis suggests that the removal of the Huron as the major middleman group was felt by adjacent Indian groups as well, who had depended on the Huron for corn, as well as trade goods. Without corn, Innis wrote, these groups “no longer had an adequate supply of corn with which they could support themselves in the prosecution of the trade.” This was said to have led directly to the movement of French traders west to pick up where the Huron had left off.

However, as Newbigging points out, the Ottawa grew their own corn, and continued to do so at villages such as those on Manitoulin Island. They were in a good position to pick up for the Huron. An Ottawa village on Manitoulin Island was the meeting point for embarkation for trips to Montreal (Newbigging 1995: 163, see map). The first trade fleet to arrive in Montreal after the fall of Huronia came in June 1653. Indians brought beaver pelts but they also came to “inform the French of the state of affairs in the Upper Great Lakes after the fall of Huronia” (Newbigging 1995: 161; see Thwaites 1896-1901, 41: 77-79). The Kiskakons group of Ottawa and the Tionnotate came the next year with fewer furs. This time they agreed to take two young Frenchmen with them, one of whom was almost certainly Médard Chouart des Groseilliers. Pierre Radisson claimed to be the other Frenchman, but notarial records found by Grace Lee Nute suggest strongly that he was at Trois Rivières during the time of Groseilliers’s absence (Nute 1978: 21, 23, 33-34).

The two Frenchmen returned in August 1656, “accompanied by fifty canoes, laden with goods which the French come to this end of the earth to procure” (Thwaites 1896-1901, 42: 219; see also Newbigging 1995: 162). They were greeted with “universal joy,” because their return signaled a renewal of the trade. However, Newbigging suggests that unlike the Huron, “neither the Kiskakons nor the Tionnotaates were vitally interested in carrying furs on the long and dangerous trip to Montreal.” Even so almost every year

some Ottawa made their trip. Often they brought only a few furs “which were used as part of the diplomatic protocol than as an economic exchange.” Newbigging argues that “when large fur brigades arrived in the colony they were invariably accompanied by French explorers,” although it is clear that documentation was more likely to have been kept of visits involving French explorers.

There were also restrictions placed on the trade by the Ottawa. Newbigging (1995: 174, 175) writes that the Ottawa sought to prevent other groups from going to Montreal, even the Ojibwe of the Sault, their closest allies. When Daniel Greysolon, sieur Dulhut attempted to persuade the Ojibwe of the Sault to go to Montreal in 1679, he noted that they would not go “unless they are escorted by the French” and protected from other groups, particularly the Ottawa. One theory for incidents like this has been to suggest that the Ottawa sought to create and preserve a middleman status for themselves between the French and other groups. Newbigging argues strongly against this theory, suggesting that the Ottawa had, instead, a kind of gateway strategy, designed to protect their position in the transportation route through Lake Huron and their environment and resource base from encroachment by other groups, not to obtain profits from participation in the fur trade. Technology was sought in part for its military value (Newbigging 1995: 22-23, 83-84, 107, 117; DCB, 2: 262). The explanation in this case may have been that they were now trying to encourage the French to open a military post in their country at Michilimackinac.

The trade transportation infrastructure involving elaborate annual shipments by the French of goods and men from Montreal, up the Ottawa River, into the Great Lakes, was only beginning in the 1650s (Dechêne 1974: 31). Even when traders went west they were dependent, like Radisson and Groseilliers, on the Indians themselves returning with them to the St. Lawrence carrying furs like the Huron in the past. There is no complete account of all the trade expeditions to Montreal from the western Great Lakes, including how they were organized, where they went, and what happened when they reached Montreal. One of the few detailed accounts is given by the Baron Lahontan (Thwaites 1905, 1: 92-95). Writing in June 1685, he stated that sometime in the late spring there had arrived 25 or 30 canoes of *coureurs de bois* returning from the Great Lakes, laden down with beaver skins. Each canoe, he reported, held 40 packs of furs, each weighing 50 pounds. At the same time, following the canoes were 50 or more Ottawa and Huron “who come down every Year to the Colony, in order to make a better Market than they can do in their own Country of *Missilimakinac*.” On arriving at Montreal they encamped five or six hundred paces from the town. They spent the next day unloading their goods and “pitching their Tents, which are made of Birch Bark.” The following day they asked for an audience with the governor general “which is granted ‘em that same day in a publick place.”

Each nation arranged itself in a separate circle, sitting upon the ground “with their pipes in their Mouths.” The governor general, or Onontio as he was called by the Indians, sat in an armchair. An orator from one of the nations would speak, stating

That his Brethren are come to visit the Governour general, and to renew with him their wonted Friendship: That their chief View is to promote the Interest of the

French, some of whom being unacquainted with the way of Traffick, and being too weak for the transporting of Goods from the Lakes, would be unable to deal in Beaver-skins, if his Brethren did not come in person to deal with 'em in their own Colonies: That they know every well how acceptable their Arrival is to the Inhabitants of *Montreal*, in regard of the Advantage they reap by it: That in regard the Beaver-skins are much valued in *France*, and the *French* Goods given in exchange are of an inconsiderable Value, they mean to give the *French* sufficient proof of their readiness to furnish 'em with what they desire so earnestly: That by way of preparation for another Years Cargo, they are come to take in Exchange, Fusees, Powder, and Ball, in order to hunt great numbers of Beavers, or to gall the *Iroquese*, in case they offer to disturb the *French* Settlements: And, in fine, That in confirmation of their Words, they throw a Porcelain *Colier* [wampum necklace] with some Beaver-skins to the *Kitchi-Okima* (so they call the Governour-General) whose Protection they lay claim to in case of any Robbery or Abuse committed upon 'em in the Town.

The governor general hears the translation of the speech and gives “a very civil Answer, especially if the Present be valuable.” He gives them a present of “some trifling things.” The Indians return to their houses “to make suitable Preparations for the ensuing Truck,” or trade. The next day the Indians have their slaves carry their skins to the houses of the merchants. Any inhabitant of Montreal was allowed to trade with them in any commodity except wine and brandy, because of the havoc sometimes caused by those who drank to excess. Lahontan wrote that it was a “comical sight” to “see 'em running from Shop to Shop stark naked, with their Bow and Arrow.” Lahontan stated that the nicer sort of women held their fans before their eyes to avoid looking at the men’s “ugly Parts.” However, Lahontan suggested that sexual liaison between Frenchwomen and Native men was not unknown. As soon as the trade was over the Indians returned home by way of the Ottawa River.

Lahontan’s narrative shows the importance that various tools, including guns, powder, and shot were beginning to have for Great Lakes Native people. It also demonstrates the close alliance between trade and diplomacy, though with little description of the actual process of trade. Credit was not given in these annual ceremonies, although traders at Montreal appear to have given credit to local Indian people (Dechêne 1974: 22).

Around this time, the creation of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the beginnings of its posts along the Bay were beginning to draw people from the Lake Superior area. There has not been a lot written on the possible trade of Ojibwe from the Lake Superior region and elsewhere trading at Hudson Bay. Ethnohistorian Charles Bishop, in his study of the Northern Ojibwe (1974: 310-311) has the fullest discussion of this topic. He suggests that the beginnings of the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1670 and the opening of Fort Nelson and Fort Albany around 1680 lured Cree and Assiniboine who had traded with Ottawa, Ojibwe, and French in the Lake Superior region toward Hudson Bay. Ojibwe bands were “lured to Hudson Bay and James Bay to capitalize on the cheaper and better quality supplies distributed by the English.” As many as 1000 Indians awaited the arrival of an HBC ship at York Factory in 1716 (Bishop 1974: 311).

Bishop suggests that the majority of these Indians would have been Cree and Assiniboine, but that some could have been Ojibwe, proof of which “would require a more intensive scrutiny of the documents. So far it does not appear that such an examination has been done. The most likely destination for Lake Superior Ojibwe would have been Fort Albany.

Later on, in the 1740s, the HBC built Henley House on the Albany River, not initially as a trading post, but rather as a way station for Indians to get supplies on the way to Fort Albany where they were expected to trade their furs (Bishop 1974: 315). By the 1760s, the period of strongest British regulation of trade in the hinterlands, Bishop writes that the trade of the Ojibwe was “considerable and constituted the better part of that at Fort Albany.” Bishop’s sketch of Ojibwe connections with Hudson Bay suggest that further work should be done in the trade of this period to determine the connections between Indians of the Lake Superior region and the posts at Hudson Bay.

The trade methods employed by the HBC at James Bay and other Bay posts in the 18th century are described in detail by Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman (1978: 55-57). Ray and Freeman describe the organization of trade flotillas, led by Indian leaders or trading captains. In many ways this organization could have been similar to the trade expeditions that went to Montreal. Speeches were given, gifts were exchanged, including the presentation of special uniforms to the trading captains, who because of cultural rules governing generosity usually gave away these clothes to those who accompanied them. A few days were spent buying and drinking brandy, after which more gifts were given and finally, actual trade took place.

As will be seen, during the period described in the accounts given here of the trade at Montreal and the Bay the French and the people of the Lake Superior region began to develop a system of trade similar to that carried on for generations in the Huron country in which the French wintered with the communities with which they sought to trade. The system of trade differed in many respects to that at Montreal and the Bay. There was no credit given in these annual trading ceremonies, but in other ways, including the layering of gifts and the speeches, this trade system resembled what would take place in the British period. The very real possibility that Ojibwe from Lake Superior might have been among those who went all the way to Hudson Bay may help explain the similarities. These customs had become accepted throughout the region.



## The Wintering Trade

The years following the destruction of the Huron by the Iroquois saw a shift of trade westward, preparing the way for the wintering trade, in which French traders lived in Indian country rather than relying on Native trade brigades to bring cargoes of furs themselves. The first examples of this occurred not as a substitute for trade along the St. Lawrence, but rather as a result of journeys that were attempts to renew trade that had been interrupted by the wars with the Iroquois. But these accounts show the ways in which the trade system was forming and evolving.

In the summer of 1659 Groseilliers, who apparently had been to the Mississippi River, returned to Montreal with about 300 Ottawa and a large quantity of furs (see Thwaites 1896-1901 44: 111, 45: 161-63). On August 1, 1659, the Jesuits in Quebec wrote that “A Canoe arrived from three Rivers, bringing news that 33 canoes had come from inland partly attikameg [whitefish] and piskatang,—among others, 6 canoes of the nation of the Sault, misisager [Mississauga]. These six canoes of the Sault came down by inland routes, and met therein the poissons blancs [whitefish]: they were 5 months on their journey. They ask for some frenchmen to escort them on their return” (Kenton 1927, 2: 133).

This corresponds to Pierre Radisson’s own recollection that “the month of August that brings a company of the Sault, who weare come by the river of the three rivers [the Saguenay River at Trois Rivières], with incredible paines, as they said. It was a company of seaven boats.” Radisson even reports that he wrote of this arrival to the Jesuits at Quebec. He did not wait for the Jesuits to accompany them on the journey and defied orders from the government not to go, noting that “those people,” meaning the people of the Sault, “are not to be inticed, for as soone as they have done their affaire they go. . . We made guifts to the wildmen that wished with all their hearts that we might go along with them” (Radisson 1967: 175).<sup>2</sup>

This quotation is typical of Radisson’s narrative, which gives the impression of being, as Grace Lee Nute (1978: 29, 121) argues, a bad translation of an account, no longer in existence, originally written in French. It may on the other hand be simply an account written inexpertly by Radisson in English. The use of the word “affaire” may be the literal translation of “affaire,” which in this context would mean business, as in what may be a more accurate translation of the original: “as soon as they have taken care of business, they go.” In other, words, given the length of time it had taken them to get to Trois Rivières, they were anxious to conduct their business and leave.

Among others accompanying the expedition was a “Sorcerer” or Nipissing who was going to see friends who lived with the “Nation of the Fire” or Potawatomi who were now living with the people of the Sault (“Ponoestigonce”). Along the way up the Ottawa River, they joined with seven boats of Ottawa on their way back to the Great Lakes. There was an encounter with some Iroquois warriors. After 22 days, they reached Lake

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<sup>2</sup> Orthography in Radisson’s narrative has been modernized by the author to remove such anachronisms as y<sup>e</sup> for the and w<sup>th</sup> for with. Otherwise the spelling of the original narrative has been retained.

Huron. Without much food they had to stop to hunt and fish to feed themselves. Radisson wrote: "There I found the kindnesse & charity of the wildmen, for when they found any place of any quantity of it they called me and my brother to eat & replenish, showing themselves far gratefuller than many Christians even to their owne relations." The word given as "gratefuller" may have been a translation of the French word *gratuit*, meaning free or generous (Radisson 1967: 176, 178-85, 186).

At the Sault they "wanted not fish" because of the plentiful whitefish in the rapids of the St. Mary's River. In addition bears and beavers "shewed themselves often, but to their cost." The place was "like a terrestriall paradise." Radisson noted that this rapid was "formerly the dwelling of those with whome wee weare." Exactly what this means is not clear. It could be interpreted as some have concluded to suggest that the Saulteur had abandoned their former residence at the Sault because of the pressure of the Iroquois. Indeed Radisson suggests that they lamented leaving such a pleasant place to the Iroquois. But, given the seasonal pattern of these people, it could also mean that the Saulteur were elsewhere at that time of year. Or, those Saulteur who accompanied Radisson may have formerly lived at this location, a place where others may have continued to live (Radisson 1967: 186-87).

After resting for a time at the Sault, the group then traveled along the south shore of Lake Superior to locations that are clearly identifiable, including the Grand Sable Dunes, the Pictured Rocks, and the Keweenaw Peninsula. They encountered members of an unidentified nation that lived to the south: "As we came neerer them, they were surprized of our safe retourne and astoni[sh]ed to see us, admiring the rich marchandises that their confederates brought from the French, that weare hatchets and knives and other utensils very commodious, rare, precious and necessary in those countreys." They feasted with them. Separating from them they gave them gifts and received meat put up in barrels and bear and moose grease. The implication from this statement is that the French may have encountered these people before, though Radisson may only mean that those Indians accompanying the French may have known these people (Radisson 1967: 189-90).

After portaging through the Keweenaw Peninsula they came to a "place where there was a company of Christinos that weare in their cottages." They (meaning the Cree) were "transported for joy to see us come back. They made much of us and called us men indeede to perform our promise to come and see them again, We gave them great guifts which caused some suspicion for it is a very jealous nation, but the short stay that we made tooke away that jealousy." Radisson may mean here that the Ottawa and Saulteur who were leading the French into the region were jealous of the Cree, a possible indication of the way various groups in the region were vying with each other for French attention and resources (Radisson 1967: 191, 193).

Some of those accompanying the Frenchmen left, to return to their people by the shortest route, perhaps following one of the rivers that flowed into Lake Superior along the south shore east of Madeline Island such as the Ontonagon, Montreal, or Bad Rivers. The French encountered others who joined with them, so the company now consisted of 23 canoes, still including seven of the Saulteur. Radisson writes that many kept them

company “in hopes to gett knives from us, which they love better than we serve God.” This is an example of the early respect of Native people for iron and other examples of European technology (Radisson 1967: 193; Schenck 1995: 65).

After another portage they reached a bay about ten leagues long, clearly Chequamegon Bay. From here Radisson and Groseilliers were told that the journey to where the Indians’ wives were located would take them overland. But since there was uncertainty about exactly where the families were because they had been at war against the Dakota, the Frenchmen resolved to stay at Chequamegon Bay and build a fort to protect their goods and those of those they accompanied. The Indians would then send their wives to carry the goods inland (Radisson 1967: 193-94).

The next day the Indians left, although which of those accompanying the Frenchmen were among these is unclear. It has been assumed that these were the Huron who took refuge first in the area east of the Mississippi following the destruction of their nation. Radisson, however, does not mention the Huron in the narrative, only the Ottawa and the Saulteur. In two days the Frenchmen built a stockade along the shore, with a bastion designed to prevent assault. Boughs of trees were laid all around with a cord attached to bells that would alert them if there were an assault on them (Radisson 1967: 195).

Who were the Frenchmen trying to protect themselves against? It may be that all those who had come with them from Montreal had gone inland and that those that remained were peoples of the region drawn by their arrival. In this case these may have been people desiring French merchandise. Radisson’s narrative comes from a period when the French were still new and unexplainable to the Ojibwe and their neighbors the Dakota. These peoples were still seeking to learn how to deal with each other. One way or another, the Frenchmen appear not to have trusted them completely. Radisson seems to suggest this:

There we stayed still full twelve dayes without any news, but we had the company of other wildmen of other countreys that came to us, admiring our fort and the workmanship. We suffered non to goe in but one person and [they] liked it so much the better & often durst not to goe in, so much they stood in feare of our arms that weare in good order, which weare 5 guns, two musquetoons, 3 fowling-peeeces, 3 paire of great pistolettts, and 2 paire of pockett on[e]s, and every one his sword and daggar. So that we might say that a Coward was not well enough armed (Radisson 1967: 196).

Here Radisson writes ruefully of all the precautions he and Groseilliers made, telling of a time when squirrels, foxes, and other small animals “came in and assaulted us,” in one case stealing Radisson’s breech cloth which they found later a half mile from the fort in the hole of a tree, “the most part torne.”

Twelve days after the departure of their friends, 50 young men came to their fort, including some of their companions. They came to carry the Frenchmen’s goods, but in the meantime Radisson and Groseilliers had buried some of it. To impress, they told the

Indians that they had sunk it in the bay bidding their god not to let it get wet or rusted until they returned (Radisson 1967: 197).

For three days they “made good cheere.” This is the direct translation of a French expression “faire bonne chère,” meaning to live well or eat well. The Indians’ wives arrived and the Frenchmen fed them the fowl they had been shooting. According to Radisson, the Indians did not eat water fowl often, since they were difficult to shoot with bow and arrow (Radisson 1967: 198; Robert 1973: 270).

Before departure Radisson and Groseilliers set fire to the fort and their canoes (since the latter would have been stolen while they were gone). It was also intended to show anyone how the Frenchmen would have defended themselves had they been attacked. It was at this point that Radisson made his famous remark: “we were Cesars, being nobody to contradict us.” In the context of what preceded it, that is, their construction of a fort to protect themselves from an attack that only came from squirrels and foxes, this famous remark seems somewhat ironic, rather than the boastful description of how the men were held in awe by Native people. However, it may have been intended to refer to what followed, that is, Radisson’s account of the way in which many Indians gathered to watch them leave and to carry their merchandise “for the hope that they had that we should give them a brasse ring or awle or a needle.” He notes that 400 people were gathered to see them leave and admired them more than the Parisians who gathered to see their king and his wife the Infanta of Spain. He wrote: “Those made horrid noise and called Gods and Devills of the earth and heavens.” This statement simply refers to the common belief among peoples of the western Great Lakes at the time that the French were *manidog*, spirits or unexplainable beings who brought objects that were believed magical because they could not be duplicated by these Native people themselves (Radisson 1967: 198). Incidents like this demonstrate, through the course of narratives like Radisson’s, the contexts, patterns, and the coalescing of institutions in the early fur trade.

The party walked for four days through the woods, camping out very near their destination, a small lake eight leagues in circumference. It has been suggested that this was Lac Courte Oreilles in northwestern Wisconsin (Nute 1978: 61). On the shore there were a number of bark canoes which took them across the water to a village composed of 100 “cabins.” On their arrival Radisson reported “there is nothing but cries. The women throw themselves backwards upon the ground, thinking to give us tokens of friendship and of wellcome” (Radisson 1967: 198-99) This latter detail is a tantalizing reference to the role that sexual relationships may have played in encounters between the French and Native groups. Many groups were freer and more open in sexual terms than the French.<sup>3</sup>

The Frenchmen gave presents to the men, women, and children “to the end that they should remember that journey, that we should be spoaken of a hundred years after, if other Europeans should not come in those quarters and be liberal to them, which will hardly come to passe.”

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<sup>3</sup> See B. White (1999: 128-35) for further discussion of this topic.

The first [for the men] was a kettle, two hattchets [tomahawks], and 6 knives, and a blade for a sword. The kettle was to call all nations that weare their friends to the feast which is made for the remembrance of the death; that is, they make it once in seaven years; it's a renewing of friendship. . . . The hattchets were to encourage the yong people to strengthen themselves in all places, to preserve their wives, and show themselves men by knocking the heads of their ennemyes with said hattchets. The knives were to show that the French were great and mighty, and their confederats and friends. The sword was to signifie that we would be masters both of peace and of wars, being willing to help and relieve them and to destroy our ennemyes with our arms.

The second gift [for the women] was 2 and 20 awls, 50 needles, 2 gratters [scrapers] of castors, 2 ivory combs and 2 wooden ones, with red painte [vermilion], 6 looking-glasses of tin. The awls signifieth to take good courage that we should keepe their lives and that they with their husbands should come down to the French when time and season should permit. The needles for to make them robes of castor because the French loved them. The two gratters [scrapers] were to dress the skins; the combs [and] the paint to make themselves beautiful; the looking-glasses to admire themselves.

The third gift [for the children] was of brasse rings, of small bells, and rasades [beads] of divers colours, and given in this manner. We sent a man to make all the children come together. When they were there we throw these things over their heads. You would admire what a beat was among them, everyone striving to have the best. This was done upon this consideration, that they should be always under our protection, giving them wherewithal to make them merry and remember us when they should be men (Radisson 1967: 199-200).

Radisson and Groseilliers were seeking to encourage native demand for European goods and to encourage participation in the fur trade. Their gifts communicated what they sought to accomplish, as well as their understanding of Native culture. Clearly, not all of their gifts were to the point. The gift of the tools of adornment to the women, for example, ignored the fact that many later sources suggest that Ojibwe men were as much concerned with such things as Ojibwe women. Similarly, though the kettle may have been intended to symbolize the feast of the dead in which men may have been instrumental, kettles came to be used more often by women in cooking, making maple sugar, and parching wild rice. On the other hand, as indicated by the gifts of hatchets, usually called tomahawks, to the men and awls and scrapers to the women, the Frenchmen clearly understood some aspects of the gendered division of labor among the Ojibwe (see B. White 1999: 124-25).

After the presents the Frenchmen were called to a "Councell of welcome and to the feast of friendship, afterwards to the dancing of the heads" meaning a scalp dance. But, "before the dancing we must mourne for the deceased [feast of the dead], and then for to forgett all sorrow, to the dance." The Frenchmen gave four small gifts. Among these

people, said Radisson, “a gift is much, and well bestowed, but prodigality is not in esteeme, for they abuse it, being brutish” (Radisson 1967: 200).

The Frenchmen stayed in the house of the leading “captaine” who had come with them from the St. Lawrence, while these ceremonies went on. Not liking his company they moved in with the family of Menominee. “I tooke this man for my father and the woman for my mother, soe the children consequently brothers and sisters.” The chief whose house they left wondered at their departure, “but durst not speake because we weare demi-gods.” Radisson gave everyone in his adopted family a gift, “and they to mee” (Radisson 1967: 201).

Now, said Radisson, they had “disposed of our businesse” (Radisson 1967: 201). What did he mean by that? The initial presentation of tools like this through gift and credit at the beginning of a trading year would be an important feature of trade relationships between Native groups in the region for the next 200 years. Only after receiving useful tools at the beginning of the fall or winter could Indian people be expected to participate in trapping and hunting for the trade. Without such tools they would have to concentrate on supporting their families in other ways. Thus, after giving out credit, business for the trader was taken care of until Native people were able to begin to hunt and trap, producing furs to give in repayment.

The snow began to fall and everyone departed to “to seek our living in the woods. Every one gets his equipage ready. So away we goe, but not all to the same place. Two, three at the most, went one way, and so off another. They have so done because victuals were scant for all in a [single] place” (Radisson 1967: 201). This is an early description of the seasonal pattern Ojibwe communities used, families scattering in the woods during the winter because of the scattered nature of food resources. This was a regular aspect of life in the region in winter.

It is unclear where the Frenchmen went but Radisson noted that “as many as we weare in number, we are reduced to a small company.” They set a date for a rendezvous in two and a half months. At the same time they sent invitations to the various nations that “within 5 moons” a feast of the dead would be held. During this time they mainly hunted bear, in addition to only a few moose, deer, buffalo, caribou, and elk. The scarcity of other food meant “that we had no great cheare” (Radisson 1967: 201-02).

The Frenchmen went to a small lake which was the place of the rendezvous. More joined them every day. A great deal of snow fell which made hunting difficult even using the “racketts” or snowshoes. Food became scarce. A group of 150 Ottawa arrived, worse provisioned than the French. All were starving. Radisson commented on his own earlier claims to be a caesar, a demi-god: “French, you called yourselves Gods of the earth, that you should be feared, for your interest, notwithstanding, you shall tast of the bitternesse, and [be only ] too happy if you escape.” He gives a graphic picture of starvation, people eating all manner of leather, cloth, and bark, to survive and as many as 500 people dying. Richard White (1991: 6, 9) seems to believe that the events described at this point were attributable only to the Iroquois dispersal of the Huron in the early 1650s, a reflection of

a world in tatters, an example of the many hardships of a “world of horrors.” This is an unwarranted conclusion. As already noted, what occurred was part of the regular feast and famine cycle of the region in the winter. In fact, as noted in the narrative, eventually when the snow became crusted hunting improved (Radisson 1967: 203-06).

Radisson wrote that all this time they were in the country of the Dakota, the “nation of the beef,” or buffalo, “upon their land with their leave.” The narrative makes clear that the Dakota and Ojibwe were at this time participants in a trade alliance. Later evidence demonstrates that the two groups participated in this alliance for many years, trading and intermarrying, particularly in regions such as the St. Croix River which would have been near the area that Radisson visited (Warren 1984: 158, 164; Radisson 1967: 207).

Eight ambassadors came from the Dakota. They brought wild rice and corn and performed ceremonies of welcome, greasing the Frenchmen’s legs and weeping upon their heads, while smoking a calumet, perfuming their clothes with smoke. In return the Frenchmen showed the Dakota the iron arrows and hatchets they brought. To demonstrate the power of their gunpowder, they threw some into the fire (Radisson 1967: 207-09).

Subsequently a Feast of the Dead was performed in which the French, Dakota and the other groups present exchanged gifts designed to create a trade and political alliance. There was great feasting for fourteen days. Mock battles took place in the manner of those described by the Jesuits in 1641. In addition, “The renewing of their alliances, the marriages according to their country customs are made; also the visit of the bones to their deceased friends, for they keepe them and bestow them uppon one another” (Radisson 1967: 219).

During the gift exchanges Radisson wrote: “We gave them several gifts, and received many. They bestowed upon us above 300 robes of castors, out of which we brought not five to the French, being far in the country.” Radisson signaled the vast potential for trade in the region with the Dakota and other groups, which his trade in 1659-60 barely began to exploit (Radisson 1967: 219).

The feast over, everyone returned to their homes. Subsequently, according to Radisson he visited the country of the Dakota “seven small Journeys from that place” as he had promised during the feast. The word “journeys” refers to the French word *ournée*, meaning “a day.” It is certainly conceivable that a seven-day’s journey could have taken Radisson and Groseilliers to the region of Mille Lacs, in present-day Minnesota, to the homeland of the Eastern Dakota at this time.

The Frenchmen stayed with the Dakota for six weeks. Apparently, the Saulteur were still with them because Radisson notes that they came back “with a company of the people of the nation of the Sault, that came along with us, loaden with booty.” It took twelve days to catch up with others of their company who had already gone to Lake Superior. It appears that the Frenchmen now built a fort on the shore of Chequamegon. Later they

found that the Ottawa had built a fort on another point in the lake, possibly on Madeline Island. They crossed the lake to reach it (Radisson 1967: 220-21).

Later in the spring, the Frenchmen set out to visit the Cree who had come to the feast during the winter. They crossed the lake at a place 15 leagues across. The Cree were happy to see them. “They suffered not that we trod on ground; they leade us into the mid[d]le of their cottages in our own boats, like a couple of cocks in a Basquett” (Radisson 1967: 224).

This could have placed Radisson in the neighborhood of Grand Portage, although he gives no real details. At this point Radisson sketches out in only the vaguest terms a trip to Hudson Bay. In the evidence presented by Grace Lee Nute it is clear that Radisson could not have actually made this trip in the spring and summer of 1660 during the time available to him (Nute 1978: 65-66).

What may be more clearly based on actual experiences is Radisson’s account of the return to Montreal. He says that there were 700 Indians accompanying him in 360 boats, some holding as many as seven men, some as little as two. In a typically confusing account, Radisson notes that “it was a pleasure to see that imbaarquing, for all the yong women went in stark naked, their hairs hanging down; yett it is not their custom to do so. I thought it their shame, but contrary they thinke it excellent and [an?] old custom good. They sing a loud and sweetly. They stood in their boats and remained in that posture halfe a day to encourage us to come and lodge with them againe. Therefore, they are not altogether ashamed to show us all, to intice us and inanimate the men to defend themselves valliantly and come and enjoy them.” This may be a reference to the statement he made earlier suggesting the way in which the women greeted them at their arrival in the country. Or this may have had something to do with a ceremony of departure on a journey that had all the dangers of a war party (Radisson 1967: 230-31).

The party stopped at the “River of the Sturgeon” to lay in a supply of sturgeon to feed them during their journey across the lake. While passing across the lake they encountered a group of seven Iroquois. This made the party determined to turn back until the following year. The Cree, who had been allowed to accompany them, did turn back. Many others were persuaded to go on, however, and accompanied Radisson and Groseilliers through the Ottawa River canoe route, experiencing a battle with some Iroquois on the way (Radisson 1967: 230-36).

Report of the return of Radisson and Groseilliers is included in the Jesuit Relations for 1660, in which it is stated that two Frenchmen arrived from the upper countries with 300 Algonkin in sixty canoes loaded with furs. It reports that they had passed the winter on the shores of Lake Superior among the Algonkin communities and made excursions to visit the surrounding tribes, including the remnants of the Tionnontaté, or Tobacco Nation, and the Dakota. There was no mention of the Frenchmen visiting Hudson Bay, though almost simultaneously a Jesuit priest on the Saguenay, encountered 80 Indians including their leader Awatanik who had made his way from Green Bay, to Lake Superior and from there to Hudson Bay, traveling along the shore then turning south to



journey to the headwaters of the Saguenay River (Kenton 1927, 2: 139-45). This account appears to be far more detailed and accurate than the one given in Radisson's account. Radisson himself may have derived his initial knowledge of the Hudson Bay region from hearing from Awatanik.

As evidenced by Radisson's account a single trading post or the presence of French traders in the Lake Superior region at a central location such as Chequamegon could draw interest from a variety of nations around the lake. Also, his account provides useful information about the structure of the trade as it was coming to be institutionalized, involving a set of ceremonies and gifts structuring a rich economic and social exchange.

Despite Radisson's and Groseillier's efforts, trade to the western Lake Superior region did not immediately open up. There were governmental restrictions placed on the trade. Radisson and Groseillers were fined for their unauthorized trip and sought their revenge by going to England and helping to organize the Hudson's Bay Company, circumventing the French trade through Lake Superior entirely (Nute 1978: 75-76).

As will be seen, the HBC trade encouraged the French to allow traders to go west to Lake Superior. There would still be expeditions of Indian people to Montreal, but their purpose was often to help the expansion of trade. For example, in 1695, the French trader Pierre-Charles Le Sueur brought Ojibwe from Chequamegon, accompanied by leaders of their allies, the Dakota, to Montreal to meet with French leaders (O'Callaghan 1855, 9: 609-613). Some of the discussion had to do with the various factions among the western tribes, and the continuing war with the Iroquois, but much of the conversation had to do with trade. The Ojibwe leader Chingouabé presented Count Frontenac a bundle of beavers, saying that he had come in the name of the young warriors of Chequamegon Point, to pay his respects and to thank Frontenac "for having given them some Frenchmen to dwell with them." Later a Dakota chief spoke about his people's desire for French merchandise. In response Frontenac stated to Chingouabé and perhaps indirectly to the Dakota:

I am very glad to have learned by the thanks you present me for having given you some Frenchmen to reside with your nation, that you are sensible of the advantages you derive from the articles they convey you; and to behold your family now clothed like my other children, instead of wearing bearskins as you formerly were in the habit of doing.

Frontenac gave permission for Le Sueur to return to Chequamegon. A few years after this, Lesueur was sent to the Minnesota River, among the Dakota (DCB, 2: 427-428; G. Anderson 1984: 35-39).



## French Trade on Lake Superior in the 18th Century

In response to the early competition from the Hudson's Bay Company posts, the French countered this trade by establishing posts at Kaministikwia and Lake Nipigon, beginning in 1678 (Innis 1956: 49). In 1688 Jacques de Noyan may have traveled up the Kaministikwia trade route to Rainy Lake (Margry 1886, 6: 495-96; Nabarra 1980: 85-86; but see also Noble 1984). The French capture of Fort Nelson in 1697 reduced the necessity for trade in this region (Innis 1956: 50). At the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the French gave up control of the posts on Hudson Bay, which renewed interest in the region beyond Lake Superior. The post at Kaministikwia was re-established in 1717 by Lieutenant Zacharie Robutel de la Noue (Innis 1956: 84, 90; Margry 1886, 6: 501-02; Nabarra 1980: 90-94; DCB, 2: 581).

Plans also called for establishment of posts at Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods. A government official wrote: "It is believed these people would prefer our trade since they would find the merchandise carried to them instead of being obliged to go to Hudson Bay (translation from Nabarra 1980: 89; see also 87). Robutel de La Noue failed to go beyond Kaministikwia. In 1722 Jean-Daniel-Marie Viennay-Pachot again called for the Rainy Lake Post and for another in the region of the Sioux, referring to Pigeon River as the best route for reaching the interior (Nabarra 1980: 89, 97-98; Margry 1886, 6: 514-15). Pierre Gaultier de Varennes et de la Vérendrye came west in 1726, wintering that year at the mouth of the Nipigon River. In the following years he learned further information on the interior and on the Pigeon River route (DCB, 3: 246; Nabarra 1980: 22, 99). In 1731 he and his sons set out to explore the region beyond Lake Superior, through Grand Portage, and to trade in the region. Fort St. Pierre was established on Rainy Lake that year.

It is an open question as to just who exactly La Vérendrye and other French traders were trading with at this time northwest of Lake Superior. Radisson had spoken earlier of the Cree along the North Shore. Subsequent sources refer to groups less easily correlated with modern tribal definitions. A 1736 census of Indian tribes lists locations of a number of groups, along with their "armorial bearings," probably a reference to animal-named clans. On the Nipigon River were two hundred men of the Monsonis, with a Moose "device"; forty warriors of the Oskemanettigons, the kingfisher; one hundred warriors of the Abittibis and Têtes de Boule, partridge and eagle, a wandering group found all the way from Trois Rivieres to Lake Superior; 150 warriors of Namewilinis, sturgeon; and 140 warriors of the Savannas, hare. At Kaministikwia were 60 men of the Ouacé, caftish. At Tecamamiouen or Rainy Lake were 100 men of the "same as those who come to Nipigon." Other evidence would indicate that these were mainly Monsonis. South of Lake Superior at Keweenaw were 40 Saulteur, probably only counting men, including people of the crane and stag, possibly caribou. At Chequamegon were 150 warriors of an unnamed clan (WHC 1906, 17: 245-252; see also O'Callaghan 1855: 1052-1058).

Even those groups not listed in this census as Saulteur might very well be groups which would be ancestors of the present-day Ojibwe. Most scholarly studies of the Ojibwe during this period suggest that people from the Sault continued to expand westward around the north and south shores of Lake Superior during the late 17th century, allied at

various times with the Dakota to the South and the Cree to the north, gradually reaching this region only in the 18th century. More recent studies have begun to call into question this commonly accepted theory.

Adolph Greenberg and James Morrison in a 1982 study argued that Proto-Ojibwe people were in the area from Grand Portage to Rainy Lake much earlier (1982: 75-102). Others have supported this argument (see Richner 2002: 7; also for an alternative view see Bishop 2002). Timothy Cochrane (n.d., Chapter II) has noted that various groups with clan names similar to those of the 17th-century people of the Sault, as well as later Ojibwe of the Lake Superior region, were described as living northwest of Lake Superior in the 17th century. Cochrane argues that the same lack of coherence in the various names used by the French to refer to people around the Sault may be seen in the way in which the people to the west were described in French sources. There may have been a migration of peoples from the Sault in this period, but the evidence suggests that those migrating joined related peoples already in the west, in what he calls an additive process. The French themselves as they moved west perceived the cultural and linguistic similarities in these people and began to refer to them all as *Saulteur*. Similarly, the term Ojibwe came to be used for people who previously had been known by clan names.

Although many of the groups listed at the western end of Lake Superior in the 1736 census have been described as Cree, there is, as Cochrane argues, evidence to suggest that they were, like the groups listed around the Sault in the 17th century, clan-based Ojibwe or Ojibwe-Cree communities. The name Ouacé may correspond to the Awause clan described by William Warren, a broad Ojibwe group that included Catfish, Sturgeon, Pike, and other fish-named clans (Warren 1984: 46). It is significant that both Sturgeon and Catfish groups would have been found at Nipigon and Kaministikwia in the 1730s. The Monsoni, for example, who La Vérendrye described at Rainy Lake in the 1730s, were likely ancestors of the Ojibwe clan described by Warren of the Mous-o-neeg, a grouping consisting of Marten, Moose, and Caribou clans (Warren 1984: 50-52). Warren describes the existence of a Grand Portage band including Monsonis in the 1730s. According to William Warren, around 1730 the father of noted Ojibwe chief Big Foot migrated from Grand Portage Bay to La Pointe (Warren 1984: 52, 219-20, 248, 255. Clark 1999: 29). He was a member of the Caribou sub-clan of the Mous-o-neeg. The peoples of this region in this period showed a cultural fusing of both Ojibwe and Cree and in some cases Ojibwe people of the area referred to themselves as Cree (Clark 1999: 30, 32; Woolworth and Woolworth 1982: 179; Cochrane n.d., Chapter II).

An early reference in French sources to a Grand Portage band occurs in the context of the new warfare that had broken out between the Ojibwe and Dakota. In correspondence dated Oct. 12, 1742, a French government official reported that “Father Coquart, who has returned from the post of Kamanistigouia, Writes me in the 9th of last month, That, while the *Sieur de la Vérendrye*’s people were at the grand portage, the *Sauteu* of that Post came there to hold a council with a *Savage Chief* of that Place, a very influential man; That last Spring that Chief told him he had determined to strike a blow at the *Scioux*” (WHC 1906, 17: 426; Burpee 1927: 383). A strategy was worked out with the *Saulteur* of Chequamegon to mislead the Sioux living on good terms with them during the winter into

thinking that they were at peace. The people of Nipigon, Kaministikwia, and Rainy Lake, including Monsonis, Cree, and Assiniboine would then fall on them and slaughter as many as they could. This report shows the extent of increasing warfare between northern groups and the Dakota, but also demonstrates the interrelationships across Lake Superior between the various Proto-Ojibwe groups.

No evidence has been found for any explicit trade at Grand Portage during this period. The major posts in the western portion of Lake Superior were those of Kaministikwia and Chequamegon, and later Rainy Lake. During this period, the French government alternated between heavy restrictions on the trade and comparative openness. Throughout the period after 1720, military officers were sometimes involved in the exploitation of the trade at military posts throughout the western Great Lakes, although they were prohibited from doing so after 1742. Merchants formed partnerships to operate the posts, receiving goods from Montreal suppliers. Trade methods came to be perfected during this period. The familiar pattern of voyageurs manning large canoes travelling up the Ottawa River, carrying merchandise to Michilimackinac and from there to the furthest reaches of the lakes, came into being in this period. The typical trade assortment of merchandise was similar to that found in the British Period (Innis 1956: 106-12).

Documentary evidence of the nature and quantities of merchandise used can be found in a number of account books of Montreal suppliers of the 1730s and 1740s. The largest investment was in cloth, blankets, and clothing, often as much as 60 or 70 per cent of the value of the merchandise, as demonstrated in studies done by Louise Dechêne (1974) and Dean L. Anderson (1992). A specific example of the nature of the trade goods used and the way they may have been apportioned to a community on Lake Superior is given in a study done by Thomas Wien (1992: 196-209). In 1727, Charles Nolan Lamarque, supplier in Montreal, sent cargoes to the Chequamegon post under the command of Louis Denis de La Ronde, who was a business partner in this adventure. As described by Wien, Lamarque recorded in his account book the details of merchandise carried west that year in 31 bales and 12 cases and other packages of assorted goods. Around two-thirds of the merchandise, outside of food, consisted of textile products such as cloth, clothing, and blankets.

There was no record in the Lamarque account book of how these goods were distributed. However, Wien calculated that, if one assumed that the post traded with 200 families, this would mean that the merchandise would have been apportioned, as shown in Table 1. Wien notes that the figure of 200 families and the apportionment to each are arbitrary. He does not provide a basis in documentary sources for it. However, the presence of 190 Saulteur warriors at Keweenaw and Chequamegon in 1736 suggests that this figure may be accurate, if one takes into account possible trade with other nearby groups such as the Sioux also listed in this census at the head of Lake Superior (WHC 1906, 17: 247).

Wien also notes that these figures do not take into account the French people at the post. He also suggests that additional guns may have been distributed for strategic purposes at government expense. However, he suggests that unless the number of families was a great deal lower than hypothesized, the average family did not need large amounts of

**Table 1****Possible Distribution of Goods at Chequamegon, 1727-28 (200 families)**

<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
12	gunflints	per year
6	knives	per year
4	rings with large seal	per year
2	awls	per year
2	shirts	per year
1.5	files	per year
1.4	capot	per year
1	blanket	per year
1.2	mirror	per year
1.2	comb	per year
1	scraper	per 2 years
1	tomahawk	per 2 years
1	pair garters	per 3 years
1	chisel	per 3 years
1	bayonet	per 3 years
1	drum	per 3 years
1	gun	per 10 years
2 kg	gunpowder	per year
5 kg	ball and shot	per year
0.5 kg	kettle	per year
5.5 m	cloth	per year
2 liters	brandy	per year
450 g	tobacco	per year

Source: Based on information provided in Wien (1992: 203), but with some quantities altered.

annual purchases. These families “consumed moderately and bought mainly materials with which to work,” specifically cloth and tools. The list of merchandise showed in relation to textiles that there was not enough to cover everyone and it was likely that skins and furs still were worn. Similarly, the presence of awls, beads and cloth shows there was a great deal of work to be done by women, “making a mixture of old and new.”<sup>4</sup> Wien’s study demonstrates the potential for a more thorough look at merchandise brought to specific posts in the Lake Superior region.

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<sup>4</sup> Translations by the author.

One way or another, it should be noted that each family was unique and would not have sought to obtain the exact same quantities of goods every year. There may have been families in the area that were less interested in obtaining French goods than others, so that this would have placed the actual consumption of goods at a higher rate than indicated.

La Ronde and his family continued to receive government sanction to operate that post at Chequamegon for many years after this, partly on the strength of his attempts to mine copper along the south shore of Lake Superior. Many of his surviving letters in French government records concern this mining operation, as well as his attempts to prevent warfare between various Native groups. A few comments in the letters shed some light on trade practices, such as this remark in a letter of July 22, 1738 (WHC 1906, 17: 262, 278):

In the month of March, two Young men came and told me that their Father had killed a moose 15 Leagues from my Fort, and requested that I should Send for it. I despatched my son, with seven men to bring It in. He did so; and four hours afterward a Band of 100 Scioux fell upon three Cabins of Sauteux who Were at that place, Killing four men and losing five of their own, among whom was the Chief.

The purpose of this comment was to report something about warfare in the period but it incidentally communicates information about trade practices. The practice of Native families summoning trade personnel to carry meat to the post was well established by the British period.

The records left by La Vérendrye are equally as reticent about the exact methods pursued in carrying on the trade west of Lake Superior. Much of La Vérendrye's papers concern exploration and attempts to mediate relationships between various Native groups. In writing to the French government, La Vérendrye sought to emphasize these other factors instead of discussing trade. In a few cases, however, there is some suggestion of methods pursued.

Sometimes the impetus for trade came from Native people themselves. In August 1733, at Fort St. Charles, on Lake of the Woods, La Vérendrye noted that 150 canoes "with two or three men in each, Cree, and Monsoni, arrived laden with meats, moose and beef fat, bear oil and wild oats [rice], the men begging me to have pity on them and give them goods on credit, which was granted them after consultation among those interested" (Burpee 1927: 140; Hickerson 1967: 45). The use of the term pity is important here. As will be seen in other accounts, Indian people emphasized their need both for establishing trading relationships and for obtaining long-term diplomatic relationships. The term—or its Ojibwe equivalent—had its origin in Ojibwe beliefs about the proper way to deal with all-powerful beings, whether spirits or Frenchmen (B. White 1994a: 380).

The following year at the same location in May 1734, La Vérendrye (Burpee 1927:183-84; Innis 1956: 93-94) spoke to a group of assembled Cree and Monsoni contrasting the advantages of trade with the French and trade with the English. A basic difference, he

suggested, was that the English granted no credit, apparently referring to the practice of Bay posts where these people would only go once a year or less frequently. He reminded them that he had shown them and their families “pity” by arranging for them to get goods on credit. He told them:

When you deal with them you have to do as if you were their enemies; they give you no credit; they do not allow you inside their fort; you cannot choose the merchandise you want, but are obliged to take what they give you through a window good or bad; they reject some of your skins, which become a dead loss to you after you have had great trouble in carrying them to their post. It is true that our traders sell some things a little dearer, but they take all you have; they reject nothing, you run no risk, and you have not the trouble of carrying your stuff a long distance.

La Vérendrye’s speech highlighted the meaning that credit could take on in a Native community, as a kind of gift, an indication of trust in the recipient, because there was no insistence on immediate repayment. At the same time La Vérendrye sought to remind the Native people of their relationship to the French king’s representatives in Montreal, transforming what was a diplomatic relationship into something with a business purpose. At the same event, La Vérendrye told them that he was on his way to Michilimackinac. He stated:

I am going down to Michilimackinac and perhaps to Montreal to carry your message to our Father and to get a supply of things that we are short of here, such as tobacco, guns and kettles, which you will get in exchange for martens and lynxes, and not for beaver, which you will use for your other needs as I promised you in the winter.

By way of explanation, La Vérendrye noted that his purpose with these words was to motivate these people to hunt for smaller animals that they were not accustomed to hunt “and at the same time to get the women to take it up and also the children of from ten to twelve, who are quite capable of it” (Burpee 1927: 179-80; Innis 1956: 93).

La Vérendrye and his sons sought to make use of social relationships to further trade and diplomacy among the people of the region. Cree and Monsoni leaders vied with each other to adopt one of his sons (Burpee 1927: 181, 214-22, 295; Nabarra 1980: 104). After the death of one of his sons at the hands of the Sioux at Lake of the Woods in 1736, La Vérendrye noted:

The eleventh of august arrived two messengers from the Cris and Monsonis who are harvesting wild rice and who told me that they have not ceased to cry day and night, the women and the children, for the death of my son who the two nations adopted for a chief.

Further information on business organization, business methods, and individuals employed by La Vérendrye can be found in a variety of Montreal records from the 1730s



and 1740s. In notarial calendars are recorded the engagements of men hired by La Vérendrye, and others including business associates such as Eustache Gamelin, to go west to various posts including Nipigon, Lake of the Woods, and the Mer de l'Ouest (see for example the listings in the notarial register of Francois Lepailleur, Quebec 1973; also copies of particular documents in Minnesota Historical Society, Montreal Notaries collection). Further work needs to be done in these records to look for patterns in La Vérendrye's employment practices and to look for French traders of continuing importance in the region.

Business records of the Montreal supplier Alexis Lemoine-Monière may also prove to be of value in studying the merchandise that was shipped into the region of Lake Superior in the 1730s and 1740s (MHS, Montreal Merchants Records, M85, R. 2, v. 4; R. 3, v. 8). In 1742 and 1743, La Vérendrye leased the Rainy Lake post to the Giasson brothers. They were supplied that year by Monière. In 1744, La Vérendrye lost his command of the posts west of Lake Superior, but Monière's role continued in supplying them. That year Monière shipped goods to Pierre and Charles Boyer and Charles Julie Chevallier who had purchased the lease to operate the Rainy Lake post from Sieur Desnoyelles, who now had charge of the posts in the region.<sup>5</sup> The Boyers continued operating the post in 1745 and 1746. A detailed study of the goods shipped to Rainy Lake in this period by Monière has not been done.

In 1750, Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre received the appointment in charge of the posts in the region. At Rainy Lake in 1750, Saint Pierre stated that he "assembled all the Indians and highly extolled the kindness of the King, my master, in having them visited and in providing for all of their needs" (Peyster 1996: 132-33, 186-87). Later at Fort La Reine in 1752, Saint-Pierre told of attempts to intimidate him by local Assiniboine, who attempted to pillage him. In response he threatened to put a firebrand to an open keg of gunpowder, which caused a precipitous retreat by the Assiniboine. This is the earliest known of a number of such stories told throughout the fur trade. Whether or not it is accurate, it corresponded to the fears of many traders and indicates an extreme form of bargaining sometimes used with Native people (B. White 1994b).

Saint-Pierre's account says very little about Grand Portage, although he passed through the area several times. In the summers of 1751 and 1752 he went there to receive canoeloads of goods, letters, and orders delivered to him there. In 1753 he passed through there again accompanied by three Cree chiefs on their way to Michilimackinac (Peyster 1996: 183, 187, 189). This suggests that by this time Grand Portage had become a place of rendezvous between shipments from west and east.

Even while the presence of French posts may have cut into the Hudson's Bay Company trade, competition now came from another direction. Sources suggest that by the 1740s and 1750s Ojibwe from Lake Superior were trading with the British at Oswego. In 1751 a post was established at Sault Ste. Marie by the French as a safeguard (Innis 1956: 89).

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Monière hired for them two engagés named Boyer: Jean Baptiste and Michel.

## French Trade

The trade with the English was one of the concerns of the Marquis de Beauharnois in a speech to an assembled group of western nations in Montreal in July 1742. Included in this group were Saulteur from Chequamegon. Beauharnois concluded his comments to the Chequamegon group saying (WHC 1906, 17: 407-408):

My Children, here are things wherewith to cover you, and for your return home; here also are presents for your village, with a drink of milk [brandy] and wherewith to smoke quietly on your mats. Urge your young men on my behalf not to go to the English any more, because that is not the road my Children should take, and moreover they can receive naught but bad impressions there, which will spoil their Hearts and Minds.

A variety of reasons can be given for Lake Superior Ojibwe going to English posts at the same time that they were allied with the French. The desire for goods would certainly have been a reason, but political alliances did not have to be any more exclusive than economic ones. In the long run, however, the French were more durable allies and the strategies they used to win Native support paid off with Ojibwe adherence during the coming battles against the British. Chequamegon Ojibwe were part of French forces under the leadership of the Marquis de Montcalm in 1757 (Hamilton 1964: 121).

With the British conquest in 1759, there is evidence that Montreal traders continued to travel to Grand Portage or at least planned to, as though these events had not occurred. For example on July 11, 1760, Monsieur de Villebon, represented by Sieur Giasson, Sr., hired Joseph Varrin dit La Pistolet as steersman to go to Grand Portage, possibly to return during the present year (MHS, Montreal Merchants Records, M85, R. 4, v. 15, p. 55)

As we have seen, the French carried on extensive trade to the region of Lake Superior and beyond into the 1750s. Groups at Kaministikwia, Rainy Lake, Chequamegon, and in places in between were accustomed to regular trade bringing them a full assortment of goods that were distributed through credit and gift. The system continued into the British Period, in part because the French personnel continued to be the major traders in the Ojibwe country.

## **Clearing the Road: The Beginning of British Trade to Grand Portage**

In July 1767, Jonathan Carver, sent by Major Robert Rogers, commandant of Michilimackinac, to explore the region west and south of Lake Superior, arrived at Grand Portage. Gathered there at the time were a number of Ojibwe and Cree from various places, all interested in re-establishing the trade that had lapsed in the region beyond Lake Superior during the recent war between the English and French. Among those who arrived there during Carver's visit were six canoes from Michilimackinac, carrying Ojibwe from Rainy Lake, led by their chief, Nittam. About Nittam, Carver stated: "Their chief appeared a great friend to the English. They had been to Michilimackinac to see Majr. Rogers." Goddard stated that the day the six canoes came in "we assembled the Christinos and Chippawas, gave a stand of colours to the chief of the carrying-place, invited him to go see his father, as well as the Christinos, which they promised the next spring" (Parker 1976: 132, 191).

It is significant that Carver would have encountered the leader Nittam while at Grand Portage. The name, also spelled Naitam, or Nitam, means according to Father Baraga (1992, 2: 305), "the first," and it is probable that this man was the leader known as "the Premier" who would have an important role in the history of the trade at Grand Portage and the region beyond in the years to come. The Premier's role was so important that after he died his body was preserved at Grand Portage by the lakeshore on a scaffold, referred to as "the Premier's scaffold." Writing many years later William H. Keating, who accompanied the expedition of Major Stephen Long in the region in 1824, stated:

Great respect is paid by the Chippewas to the corpses of their distinguished men; they are wrapped up in cloths, blankets, or bark, and raised on scaffolds. We heard of a very distinguished chief of theirs, who died upwards of forty years since, and was deposited on a scaffold near Fort Charlotte, the former grand dépôt of the North-west Company. When the company were induced to remove their dépôt to the mouth of the Kamanatekwoya, and construct Fort William, the Indians imagined that it would be unbecoming the dignity of their friend to rest any where but near a fort; they therefore conveyed his remains to Fort William, erected a scaffold near it, and upon it they placed the body of their revered chief; whenever there is occasion for it they renew its shroud. As a mark of respect to the deceased, who was very friendly to white men, the company have planted a British flag over his remains, which attention was extremely gratifying to the Indians (Keating 1959, 2: 156).

Mackenzie said the name was a title not a personal name. In his history of the fur trade published in 1801, but based on earlier experience, Alexander Mackenzie (Lamb 1970: 106) wrote that Rainy Lake was the "residence of the first chief, or Sachem, of all the Algonquin tribes, inhabiting the different parts of this country. He is by distinction called Nectam, which implies personal pre-eminence. Here also the elders meet in council to treat of peace or war." John Macdonell wrote of August 20, 1793, that at Rainy Lake

“we found the Premier *Nectam*, with twenty young men; to whom, the Bourgeois gave a treat of Rum and Tobacco” (Gates 1965: 103).

Similar accounts of a leader named Premier, a descendant of the original Premier, are found in the HBC Rainy Lake journals of the 1820s, which would seem to suggest the accuracy of Mackenzie’s understanding of the meaning of the name (HBCA, B.105/e/9; Lovisek 1993: 288). Nonetheless, the individual that Carver met at Grand Portage in 1767 was an individual of importance, someone with a specific history who was honored for his accomplishments after his death.

The Premier’s role in relation to Grand Portage must be seen in the context of Carver’s visit, and the political and economic development that preceded it. This was a complex period after the British defeat of the French when trade had yet to be re-established with many distant peoples who had previously traded with the French. The Premier was among those who helped re-establish, and in a sense to rediscover, that trade, to the benefit both of the trading companies who ventured into the region and of the various Ojibwe groups who lived from Grand Portage west to Rainy Lake, a complex region that played many roles in the British fur trade. It is likely that the Premier was related in some way—through clan or other relationship—to the people of Grand Portage, but more than anything his renown was indicative of the way in which the region from Grand Portage and Rainy Lake was seen as an integrated whole, like the region of Lake Huron dominated by the Ottawa in earlier years, a gateway to the west. Like the Ottawa, the Ojibwe of this region did not insist on being middlemen, but rather gatekeepers who would benefit from any trade that traveled through their region. British traders were only able to proceed beyond after they recognized this fact of life.

As we have seen, the French carried on extensive trade to the region of Lake Superior, and beyond, into the 1750s. Groups at Kaministikwia, Rainy Lake, Chequamegon, and in places in between were accustomed to regular trade bringing them a full assortment of goods that were distributed through credit and gift. This system was fostered by the French government which integrated it into a wider Indian policy. Once the British defeated the French military in 1759, they were faced with devising a system of Indian-European relations to replace the French system. British traders sought to replace French traders. In the process British diplomats and traders learned from the French, made use of French personnel and in the end devised a system that resembled that of the French. In implementing the new system, the British dealt with Indian people whose demand for merchandise had not been met during the war.

One of the first British traders in the Lake Superior region was Alexander Henry the Elder. Henry left for Michilimackinac from Montreal in 1761, aided by the French trader Etienne Campion (Henry 1976: 11, 46). When he reached the post, he states “I assorted my goods, and hired Canadian interpreters and clerks, in whose care I was to send them into Lake Michigan, and the river Saint-Pierre [Minnesota], in the country of the Nadowessies; into Lake Superior, among the Chippeways, and to the Grand Portage, for the north-west.”

At the time, because of the disruption of war, there was a strong demand for goods, both around Michilimackinac and in more distant places. The nearby Ottawa, for example, objected to the plan of the traders to send goods away from Michilimackinac before the demand for them there had been satisfied. In a council with the traders they demanded 50 beaver-skins worth of merchandise to each man in credit. According to Henry, there was even a threat to kill the traders for their goods if the demand was not met. Only the support of the Canadians (that is, the French) and the arrival of 300 British troops prevented this from happening. Because of this, according to Henry, merchants were able to send out their canoes, although it was late in the year. It is not known, however, whether Henry's own outfits went out to Grand Portage and the other locations he named.<sup>6</sup>

Some trading outfits may have gone out of Montreal to Michilimackinac and beyond before the British took possession of Detroit and Michilimackinac. In June 1762 Captain Donald Campbell at Detroit wrote to Sir William Johnson, British superintendent of Indian affairs, that he had received word that "some Canoes that came from Montreal (before we took Possession of the Posts) and went to trade with the Sioux a numerous nation that inhabit the heads of the Mississippi, had been pillaged by them and some of the men killed and taken Prisoners" (SWJP, 3: 758). Exactly why they may have been pillaged is not clear, but pillage was sometimes practiced by Native groups with traders who were new to a region or who did not take the trouble to establish the relationships necessary to trade security through rituals, ceremonies, and gifts.

The arrival of British soldiers at Michilimackinac is documented in other sources. Major Robert Rogers with thirty-five rangers, five or six Frenchmen and four Indian guides attempted to reach the post in December 1760 after his arrival with troops at Detroit. They had to turn back because of ice on Lake Huron (Cuneo 1988: 138; see also SWJP, 3: 301; 10: 201). Word, however, was received from Michilimackinac late in the year of the desire of Indians there to resume trade. In Detroit, Captain Donald Campbell wrote to Colonel Henry Bouquet on December 23, 1760, "The Indians here are in great distress for want of Ammunition. I have had two of the Tribes that depend on Michillimackinac that come at a great distance—they were absolutely starving, as their whole subsistence depends on it. I was obliged to give what I could spare" (MPHC, 19: 50).

The idea of starving, as shown by Mary Black-Rogers (1987: 618-49) was a concept with many nuances. As indicated here, the literal inability to obtain enough food to survive could be brought about by a lack of adequate ammunition, even if Indian people still retained the knowledge of bow and arrow and other means of hunting. More than that, however, starvation could have a more figurative meaning, and may sometimes have been intended that way, especially in speeches that were full of such figurative statements. Indian people sometimes abased themselves ritually, since emphasis on the

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<sup>6</sup> Whether or not the Ottawa around Michilimackinac received any of the goods they requested on credit, they appear to have received goods in trade for their corn, a food item that had been and would continue to be a major source of supply for the canoes that traveled west to Grand Portage and beyond. Henry stated that he paid forty livres per bushel, equivalent in value to 8 beaver skins (Henry 1976: 54).

pitiful nature of a person was an opening gambit in an attempt to establish a relationship with people or spirits who had benefits to impart. Thus, these people could also be said to be starving for a relationship, a relationship that would involve trade and much more.

The desire of various Ojibwe bands for trade was well documented at this period. Sir William Johnson, superintendent of Indian affairs for the British government in the region, recorded a council at Niagara on July 28, 1761, with “Wabbicomicot, Chief of the Chipeweighs with several others of that nation” (SWJP, 3: 455). Johnson announced to the visitors that he was on his way to Detroit with other British officials hoping to have a meeting there in which lasting peace and trade could be established. Wabbicomicot thanked him for his speech and offered a calumet “saying that the smoke arising therefrom, would reach the Clouds and be seen by the most distant nations.”

He then begged Sir William would look at his appearance, that the dress then on him, & which would scarcely cover him— & hoped he would not be surprized that they were not able to cloath themselves by reason of their being debarred the liberty of purchasing ammuniton to kill game for their carrying on of trade, and concluded by requesting Sir Will<sup>m</sup> would take their Case into Consideration and also order them some provisions of which they stood in greatest need.

In this speech the Ojibwe leader added another nuanced metaphor to the vocabulary of Ojibwe-European relationships, the idea of nakedness. As will be seen in later encounters, there may have been as many varieties of nakedness as there were of starvation. To be pitiful was to be worthy of protection. To be clothed by a powerful being was to be blessed with their protection. In this case, Johnson responded only to the material concerns expressed in the speech and gave the men some punch, after which they withdrew. Because of his inability to see the meaning of the metaphors, Johnson must have appeared rather dense. But this could have been a strategy on Johnson’s part, a forestalling of more complex discussions. In a more formal speech two days later the same leader stated:

Brother

I hope you’ll escuse our appearing in this dress, as our poverty prevents us from coming before you in a better; You may observe the Days are now clear, & the Sun burns bright, therefore, I should be very glad to wear a hat to defend me from its heat—

Brother

I have tried several times with my Hands to catch fish for my living but found it would not answer, therefore I should be glad to have a Spear to kill them with; I am likewise prevented from hunting by reason of my Guns being broke—

Brother

I have discovered a fine Tree which I should be desirous to cut down for firing, but for want of an Axe I am necessitated to make a fire at its root in order to burn it down

Again Johnson replied only in material terms, pleading the shortage of his stores, but he promised to give them some clothing the next day, some ammunition, and to provide a blacksmith at Niagara to repair their arms in the future.

British soldiers finally reached Michilimackinac in September of 1761. On September 8, 1761, Captain Henry Balfour set out (probably from Detroit) for Michilimackinac with Lieutenant William Leslye (spelled variously) of the Royal Americans or 60th Regiment (MPHC, 19: 685, n104). Leslye was left in command at the fort while Balfour went on to Green Bay.<sup>7</sup> On September 29 and 30, 1761, Balfour had a council with assembled Ottawa and Ojibwe in which he pleaded for peace while presenting them with strings of wampum in the usual fashion (SWJP, 3: 537-545). He noted that the British king had “recommended to all his people to come amongst you, and bring you necessaries, so that you may avoid to go any distance to fetch them; and as in Consequence of these orders, a Number of Merchants are come here, as well as amongst the other Nations, by which means you can want for nothing.” One of the Indian leaders, possibly a Saulteur stated:

Brother, I am charmed to see a Day so fine, so clear and without any Clouds; but I greatly fear that we cannot enjoy it long without you take pity on us, that this fine day may not change to Dark Night. We are so poor that I have great fear our old people, our women and Children will perish with hunger. We are destitute of every thing, having neither powder, nor lead for hunting to support ourselves during the winter. We have nothing to cover us as well as our Wives and Children from the Cold, and if you have not Compassion for us, our ruin must be inevitable, and the next Winter will prove our last. You have told us that you are our Brother, can you see your blood perish so miserably, and will you not Succour them under their pressing necessitys.

#### 11 Strings of Wampum.

This speech could be interpreted in various ways. From a trader’s point of view the speech could be interpreted as a request for credit that would enable the Indians to get through the winter while trapping furs. Since the remarks were addressed to Captain Balfour this may also have been a request for gifts from the soldiers. In a more general sense it was a request for trade to resume. Balfour interpreted the remarks as a request for gifts and responded with a scolding, since the people of Michilimackinac had already received ammunition from the soldiers at Detroit. He said that he was surprised that they were so miserable. “You had plenty of peltry last spring; what is become thereof. It was more than sufficient to purchase what you wanted. How then can you complain, & have recourse to us to furnish with that which we cannot think you are in any want of. I well know it is not by misfortune you have become miserable.” He stated that they had been at Niagara and sold their furs for rum without buying ammunition. He added that the

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<sup>7</sup> In his 1761 Detroit journal, Sir William Johnson states on Sept. 9, 1761, that the Light Infantry and Royal Americans set off to garrison the upper posts. He reported giving Lieutenant Leslye 50 pounds of tobacco. On Sept. 10 Johnson added more details stating that Captain Balfour had left with 120 of Gage’s troops (SWJP, 13: 252-253). A letter to Gen. Amherst of Sept. 10, 1761, repeats this information (SWJP, 3: 524).

soldiers would give them what could be spared “and the Traders at my request are willing to give you credit for what you want. Behave yourselves towards them as honest people, and pay them for what you take, when you return from hunting.”<sup>8</sup> The British continued to ignore the general message in the figurative language of Ojibwe speeches.

Captain Donald Campbell at Detroit wrote to Colonel Henry Bouquet on October 12, 1761, that “a Detachment of the light Infantry returned from Michilimackinac. Lieut Leslye writes me they arrived just in time to save the Traders from the Indians who threatened to destroy them” (MPHC, 19: 116). This is clearly a reference to the same set of events Alexander Henry referred to, when Indian people sought to prevent traders from sending their outfits west without first supplying the demand of people around Michilimackinac.

Evidence of merchandise going to Grand Portage comes from the puzzling narrative of Thompson Maxwell (1888, 11: 215), a soldier who was part of the group of Rangers who came to Michilimackinac in the fall of 1761 and wintered there. Perhaps he was part of the group that arrived under Lieutenant Leslye. He stated that in May 1762 “we crossed Lake Superior to the Grand Portage, at the northwest corner of the Lake, guarding, as we went, the goods of the Northwest Company. There we unloaded & rested a few days and returned to Mackinaw again some time in August.” The reference to the “Northwest Company” is obviously wrong since the company did not come into existence until much later.

Further information on British soldiers traveling across Lake Superior in May 1762 has not been found although a thorough search through military records may reveal more. A letter from Lieutenant Leslye to Colonel Henry Bouquet on June 22, 1762, makes no mention of any such expedition but notes that “Capt. Campbell wrote me some time ago to procure you a few Martins and other sorts of small peltrie which I would have done before but there is no Indians as yet come here from Lake Superior & the Martins they kill here are not worth sending. I expect the Indians from that quarter soon & shall do my endeavour to procure you some of the best of each kind you want.” On July 3 Captain Campbell wrote to Colonel Bouquet saying that “Mr. Lesslye has already sent me some martins, he says he expects more fine Peltry when the canoes from Lake Superior come in” (MPHC 19: 152-54).<sup>9</sup>

This letter suggests that even if traders did not go to Lake Superior from Michilimackinac, Lake Superior Indians were expected to come to the post to trade. In any case, British policies during this period appeared to favor limiting traders to operating only at military posts. On March 20, 1762, General Thomas Gage wrote to General Jeffery Amherst on “the state of Montreal” and its trade to the west. He recommended abolishing the little trading posts and limiting trade to five major posts at

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<sup>8</sup> The text of this council, recorded originally in French was translated into English by Lieutenant Guy Johnson. Only the printed version survives; the others were destroyed by fire.

<sup>9</sup> In this same letter Campbell also wrote to Amherst that he expected “Sir Robert Davers soon, he is already returned from Lake Superior to Michill.” Campbell had written to Bouquet on April 26, 1762, that Davers was preparing to leave Detroit to make “the Tour of the Lakes” (MPHC, 19: 139).



which there would be a small detachment of troops given judicial power over the trade. He noted: “The insolence of the Indians will be checked by the presence of the Troops; the Tricks and Artifices of the Traders to defraud the Indians will meet with instant punishment.” The five posts included those to which Gage said the Indians had been accustomed to trade with the French. Among them were Michilimackinac, Green Bay, and Kaministikwia, confusingly located by Gage on Lake Huron (MPHC, 19: 17-18). Captain Campbell, writing to Colonel Bouquet on June 24, 1762, noted that “the General . . . acquaints me he means to take Posts in Lake Superior more Banishment for some unlucky fellow” (MPHC, 19: 153).

It is possible that passes were issued for trade in the Lake Superior region in 1762 or 1763 although direct evidence has not been found. Writing to Sir William Johnson on December 12, 1762, John Lottridge of Montreal stated that he had inquired of General Gage about passes issued for trade from Montreal to such places as Michilimackinac, Lake Superior, Grand Portage, and Sault Ste. Marie. He stated that “the officers Commanding at those posts are at liberty or at least take on them selves to give permission to any of the traders to go and remane in any of the indian nations for the winter, and dispose of thire goods. Many of [the] franch who live at [Michilimackinac] purchase thire goods from our Merchts. There and take thire familys with them remaine in any of the Indian villiages [for] the advantage of trade” (SWJP, 3: 969). The implication of Lottridge’s letter was that Gage had actually issued passes for Lake Superior or at least that British commanders in the region may have done so.

On July 29, 1762, Major Gladwin at Niagara wrote to Colonel Henry Bouquet, stating that he would proceed for Detroit the next day, “with Capt. Etherington’s Company, from thence I shall send him with proper parties under his command to Lake Superior, in order to take Post at Sault de St Marie[,] Gamanestiquia & Chaqumigon” (MPHC, 19: 158). Captain Campbell announced their arrival on August 26, noting that Etherington had been sent to command Michilimackinac and Lieutenant Jamet<sup>10</sup> to command the former French fort at Sault Ste. Marie (MPHC, 19: 161). Jamet’s arrival at Sault Ste. Marie was mentioned by Alexander Henry (1976: 71). During the course of the following winter the fort burned down. Jamet and the soldiers returned to Michilimackinac (MPHC, 19: 177, 687, fn 161). There is no evidence that he or any other British military went beyond the Sault that year.

One other piece of evidence suggests, however, that traders may have gone to Lake Superior in 1762. Lieutenant William Leslye reported to Colonel Henry Bouquet on September 30 that he had still not been able to obtain the marten skins Bouquet had asked for. However, he had “given commissions to several french men who are gone a wintering with the Indians & I dare say I shall be able to send them to you in the Spring.” At the same time Leslye reported on Jamet’s going to the Sault noting that this was “all that can be done this year, the season being too far advanced for goeing in to Lake Superior” (MPHC, 19: 167).

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<sup>10</sup> Variant spellings include Jemett, Jamets, and Jamaets.

Aside from these references in the narratives of Alexander Henry and Thompson Maxwell, there is little other evidence of traders traveling across the Grand Portage in the early 1760s. Alexander Henry himself wintered at Michilimackinac in 1761-62 and spent the rest of the year and early 1763 at Sault Ste. Marie. During this period he became acquainted with the Ottawa of the L'Arbre Croche area and the Ojibwe around the Sault. He also spent time at the Sault with Jean-Baptiste Cadot, Sr., who had been involved in the trade of Lake Superior during the French regime. These experiences appear to have provided Henry with a basic knowledge of the Indian culture and subsistence patterns in the region (Quimby 1966: 160-80). They were clearly helpful later in shaping the way in which Henry carried on trade.

Trade in the upper country was again disrupted by the famous attack of a united Indian group on Fort Michilimackinac in June 1763. Henry survived during the attack and in subsequent months with the aid of local Indians and French who had earlier befriended him, including Cadot, who according to Henry, had a great deal of influence over the Indians of Lake Superior. He noted, for example, that “it was by him that the Chipeways of Lake Superior were prevented from joining Pontiac” (Henry 1976: 157). It is interesting to note that the influence of Cadot may have come in part from his wife—listed in the Michilimackinac church register as Athanasie—who was a member of the Awause or Catfish clan. As noted this clan was found, among other places, concentrated on the northwest shore of Lake Superior. William Warren noted that his wife “appears to have been a woman of great energy and force of character, as she is noted to this day for the influence she held over her relations—the principal chiefs of the tribe” (Warren 1984:212-13; WHC 1910, 19: 65, 69). Cadot’s location at the Sault was a key one for any trader who wished to trade throughout the Lake Superior region. Located there he could intercept Native groups on their way to Mackinac, employing his own gateway strategy.

In 1764 Henry accompanied a group of Ojibwe who journeyed to Fort Niagara to respond to peace overtures from Sir William Johnson. The council took place in July 1764. According to an account of the council in Johnson’s papers, two canoes from Sault Ste. Marie arrived at Fort Niagara as early as July 9. Later, an Ojibwe chief was recorded stating to Johnson: “I have been away at St. Marys where I have resisted all Solicitation of your Enemys who sent me three belts of Wampum which I disregarded. . . . You shod. Not have suffered the loss you did; for my part I always endeavoured to preserve peace & have become a great Sufferer & very poor by the War.” On July 13 an Ojibwe from the Sault spread a beaver fur on the floor in front of Johnson and holding a calumet in his hand informed Johnson that they were shocked by the attack against the British:<sup>11</sup>

Brother

we are a poor & foolish People. You are wise & Yr. Speeches good. We have on our way hither cleared the road & Settled every thing, so that the Trees are not tossed about & blown down therein as of late. We left home in a great hurry in order to come & hear what you would say to us, so that we might bring yr. Words

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<sup>11</sup> In a letter to Thomas Gage on August 15, 1764 (SWJP 4: 509) stated that the “Chippewas” present at the council were “from the Falls of St. Mary, who disapproved at the Beginning of the Suprize of Michillimakinak.”

to our Nations, we have now shaken hands with you, and as soon as we hear you shall return.

Brother

we are peaceably inclined, & wish to live long, we have no evil thoughts, they are chiefly taken up in thinking of [that] Darling Water made by Man. Then said he would add nothing worth entering, only talk on Trade.

Brother

we are Indians & very poor being in want [of the?] necessarys of life, & unless allowed Trade & Ammunition [we?] & our Familys must inevitably suffer, wherefore hope [traders will?] be allowed us. We were formerly told by yr. People that they could & would always Supply us with goods for our furs & we now beg it may be so, as we have nothin ill in our hearts towards You.

Brother

we gain beg to have liberty to trade as formerly, & that you will let the Rum run a little as our People will expect on our return to taste yr. Water wh. They like above all things.  
threw down a Bundle of Bever Skins

Brother

what I have now said are ye. Sentiments of all our Nation, so that Should there more Chippawaes arrive here dureing yr. Stay, they will have nothing else to Say, as we now speak for ye. Whole.

the Speaker then took Sr. Wim. By ye. Hand & told him he had nothing further to say.

A few weeks later “the Sachims, and Chiefs of *Toughkamaawiman*,” or Rainy Lake, appeared at Niagara for their own meeting with Johnson (SWJP, 11: 298-300). Their speaker was described as “*Shuckey* al [alias?] Crane.” It is possible that the name Shuckey is a version of the Ojibwe or Cree words for crane.<sup>12</sup> Shuckey gave a lengthy speech which began with the smoking of a calumet which was then presented to Johnson.

Brother.—

On your taking this Place you then took us by the little Finger, then by two Fingers, — then the next time, you said you would take us by the large, or middle finger, and hold it fast.—Your Reception to us last night was so kind, that it gives us Hopes of your performing it.—We are sent here by all our chiefs to speak with you, and to assure you that we live quiet in our Towns, and mind nothing but Hunting, which, as there comes no Trade that way, is but of little Service to us, — for we are so poor (as you may see) that we have not a Knife to cut our Victuals,

<sup>12</sup> Nichols and Nyholm (1995: 162) give the Ojibwe word for sandhill crane as *ajijaak*. Baraga (1973, 1:62) gives the Ojibwe word for crane as *adjidjâd*, and the Cree word as *otchichâk*. William Warren (1984: 44) gives one version of the name of the crane clan as *Uj-e-jauk*.

an Ax to cut our Wood, a Kettle to boil our Victuals, so that we are Obligated to make Stones hot, and put them into Bark Vessels to boil our food.—Brother, we are therefore come down through a bad, and Briary Road to see the English, and to desire Trade.—

He then laid down a large beaver blanket and the calumet and continued to speak. He noted that previous times, even when the French were at Niagara, he and his people had visited Johnson at Oswego, even though there was plenty of everything at Niagara. He recalled that Johnson had offered them a flag at the time, “but we told you we were too Young yet to receive it, but would the next time.” He explained the beaver blanket: “I brought you this Blanket to serve you for a Bed;— You see how white it is:—My Heart is as white,—and quite free from any evil Thought—” Shuckey apparently presented a wampum belt as he noted also that it was very hard to pass through Sault Ste. Marie, because, in the figurative language of such speeches,

the Road being very full of Brush, insomuch that we were Obligated to Open it with our hands to Save our Eyes; but we resolved nothing should hinder us from coming to your great Fire Place, the Light of which is now seen far, and near.— You see our Poverty by the Smallness of our Belt. this is the Road of Peace, which we will keep open, & desire you will lay your foot on one End, as we shall *ours* on the *other*.

Before concluding he emphasized again and used the metaphor of their poverty, stating: “Nay, we are ashamed to appear before those Indians, now here, therefore hope you will Pity us, and afford us something to cover us, so that on our Return, our People may see that we were with our Brothers, the English.” Johnson who stated that he was hurried, presented them with “a Pair of Large Colors.” The next day Johnson addressed the Rainy Lake people at greater length offering them his “whole hand” (SWJP, 11: 303-04). He promised that as soon as the king’s enemies were punished, “you shall have a more plentiful Trade then ever.— ‘till then it is not Judged prudent by the King to hazard his Subjects Goods.”

Despite this and other promises to re-establish trade in the western Great Lakes, there continued to be restrictions placed by the British government on the trade in the region. For most of the 1760s trade was ostensibly limited by Sir William Johnson to operations at British military posts such as Michilimackinac. A variety of rationales were given for this restriction. Writing in July 1765, Johnson stated that although he had promised trade to the Indians in his councils with them, this trade “was only to be carried on at the *Posts*.” The reason for not allowing traders the opportunity to winter in their communities, as the French had done, was that the French “were pretty Secure of the Indian’s good will, and Friendship, which we cannot yet be supposed to have absolutely gained, and therefore as our Goods must prove a great temptation when in their Power, some of their People through Avarice, Dislike to the English, or at the Instigation of some disaffected French may at this time commit Depredations on them, or even assault the Traders themselves which must produce a War between us.” Johnson also believed that

since many of the traders at this period were French, the liberty to winter with the Indians would provide them with advantages to work against British interests (SWJP, 11: 815).

Exceptions to this policy, however, were made, if not by Johnson then by the particular officials charged with carrying out the policy. According to Alexander Henry, he himself received in 1765 the “exclusive trade of Lake Superior. Henry set out to spend the winter at Chequamegon Island along the south shore of Lake Superior. He notes that in June 1765, at the Sault he “took into partnership M. Cadotte, whom I have already had frequent occasion to name” (Henry 1976: 193).

Of the Henry-Cadot partnership, Harold Innis writes that its success “was symbolic of the necessary combination between English capital and French experience.” This may be the case, but it ignores the interaction of trade and diplomacy in the Lake Superior region. It was not to Henry that the trade of Lake Superior was given, but rather to Cadot, because of his perceived influence over the various Indian groups of Lake Superior. On June 24, 1765, Captain William Howard, the commandant of Michilimackinac, wrote to Sir William Johnson (SWJP, 11: 804-809, contemporary copy in William L. Clements Library), reporting that Cadot had brought 80 canoes of Indians from Lake Superior along with some “Creeks,” (meaning Cree) to Michilimackinac for a council. The Indians assured Howard of their peaceful intentions toward the English. Like the Ojibwe who went to Niagara in 1764, they told Howard, in familiar words, of “the Miserable Scituation they had been in for want of Trade, and begged I would send some Trader to them, and asked for Mr. Caddot.” Howard informed Johnson that he thought this was advisable:

As they are so well disposed I thought my refusing what they Asked, might offend them, and perhaps make them change their way of thinking, the Consequence of which, I know would be very detrimental to the Publick, which made me promise to send them some Goods, as soon as I could find good People to send amongst them—I propose to let Mr. Caddot go to Lapoint in Lake Superior, and to let a few English Merchants go to other Places, as Mr. Caddot will be near the Center, am Convinced that all the Indians will remain in our Interest.

Howard’s statement was testimony to the influence that Cadot was said to have among the Indians of Lake Superior. The extent of this influence can be seen in the information Howard supplied about the Indian leaders who were at this council. He mentioned that Naitam and Chaite, both leaders from Rainy Lake were there and who were said to have been among those who met with Johnson at Niagara the previous year. Chaite may very well be the chief referred to the year before as Shuckey or the Crane. Howard, in fact, referred to the hurried nature of Johnson’s meeting with the Rainy Lake people, which was, as noted above also mentioned in the transcript of the earlier meeting:

Naitam a Chief of the Rain Lake in Lake Superior told me You promised him a Commission when at Niagara, but believes the hurry of Business was the Occasion You forgot it. He has desired I would write to you for one, and to put

you in mind of the Present you promised to his Family. As he is a good Man, I gave him three Blankets and three Shirts, which was all Cloathing I gave to the Indians in Lake Superior, yet have sent all away Contented that have come here, with rum & Tobacco. . . . Chaite, a Chief of Rain Lake told me that at Niagara You offered hime a Meddal, that he then refused to be made a Chief, but that he was now ready to do what I desired him, and would take a Meddal if I desired him. As Mr. Caddot told me he was a good Man I desired he would be a Chief. He told me he would & desired me to write to You for a Meddal. If you could, I should be glad You would send me Some Meddals & Colours. For want of Colours the Indians in Lake Superior came with two French Colours and one English.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, it was as a result of Howard's confidence in Cadot and his interest in the Ojibwe of Lake Superior, that Alexander Henry was able to receive permission to trade in the Lake Superior region.

Henry's account of what occurred during his year at La Pointe provides basic information about the system of trade that had been current among the peoples of the Great Lakes during the French era, and which traders were now trying to re-establish in the region. His stock in trade consisted of merchandise worth 10,000 pounds of "good and merchantable beaver" purchased at Michilimackinac. At that time a pound of beaver was worth two shillings and sixpence per pound, so that the merchandise was worth £260. The entire cargo filled four canoes and was carried by twelve men. To feed these men, Henry purchased 50 bushels of corn at 10 pounds of beaver per bushel, from the Ottawa people at Michilimackinac (Henry 1976: 192-196).

On his arrival at Chequamegon Henry found 50 lodges of Indians there. The Indians had been affected by the cessation of trade during the recent war. Henry noted: "these people were almost naked, their trade having been interrupted, first by the English invasion of Canada, and next by Pontiac's war." Altogether there were 100 families with whom Henry dealt at Chequamegon. He noted that he was "required to advance goods on credit" to all of them. In the end he gave out 3,000 beaver skins worth of credit, or an average of 30 skins per family. The rates of exchange used by Henry valued blankets at 8 to 10 skins, axes at 2, and guns at 20, among other items. As will be seen these rates of exchange were twice as expensive as those that would become standard in the Lake Superior region by 1800. While it is not known what the rates were under the French, Henry's may have been influenced by the interruption of trade and the scarcity of goods in the region (Henry 1976: 195-96)

Whether or not Henry was aware before his arrival that credit was a necessary part of the trade, it was communicated to him in a meeting with the leaders of the community:

At a council, which I was invited to attend, the men declared, that unless their demands were complied with, their wives and children would perish; for that there were neither ammunition nor clothing left among them. Under the

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<sup>13</sup> Howard also mentions a leader named Pitawescombe, an Ojibwe leader from parts unknown.

circumstances, I saw myself obliged to distribute goods, to the amount of three thousand beaver-skins. This done, the Indians went on their hunt, at a distance of a hundred leagues. A clerk, acting as my agent, accompanied them to Fond du Lac, taking with him two loaded canoes (Henry 1976: 196).

The reference to Indians hunting 100 leagues—possibly 240 to 460 miles—away from Chequamegon may suggest the distance from which many of the Indians with whom he dealt may have come. Assuming his was the only trade operation permitted on Lake Superior at the time he may have attracted Ojibwe not only from Fond du Lac but from elsewhere in the region, including Grand Portage, just as Radisson and Groseilliers did more than a hundred years before.

Henry's account of the initial council he had with them at his arrival, suggests the ceremonial nature of such encounters. The men who spoke emphasized the effect of the war on their families, their lack of merchandise, and in the process achieved the result of receiving goods on credit to supply them with what they were lacking. The emphasis on their poverty was exaggerated to an extent for this purpose. In fact, though they may have been lacking in material goods, these people were surviving. Far from being "naked" in literal terms, as Henry himself later acknowledged, they simply wore the clothing that they had worn before they traded with Europeans:

The clothing, in which I found them, both men and women, was chiefly of dressed deer-skin, European manufactures having been for some time out of their reach. In this respect, it was not long, after my goods were dispersed among them, before they were scarcely to be known for the same people. The women heightened the colour of their cheeks, and really animated their beauty, by a liberal use of vermilion (Henry 1976: 198).

Clearly, however, there was a strong demand for trade goods, a demand that had not been met during the period of the recent wars. Such a desire sometimes provided a motive for using various ways to encourage more generosity on the part of the trader, even through intimidation. Henry later reported some "disorderly behavior" from the first hunting party that brought him furs after his granting of credit:

Having crowded into my house, and demanded rum, which I refused them, they talked of indulging themselves in a general pillage, and I found myself abandoned by all my men. Fortunately, I was able to arm myself; and on my threatening to shoot the first who should lay his hands on any thing, the tumult began to subside, and was presently after at an end. When over, my men appeared to be truly ashamed of their cowardice, and made promises never to behave in a similar manner again (Henry 1976: 199-200).

Many other accounts of trade in the region make clear that a gift of rum was expected after hunters paid back some of their debts. By the established system of trade the demand was not unreasonable. Threatening pillage was sometimes a way of enforcing the established rules of trade, which in this case Henry was violating. Threatening pillage

## British Trade

could also be a bargaining tool and a way of testing novice traders (B. White 1994b). As will be seen, pillage actually happened to traders traveling beyond Lake Superior in the 1760s. Why this happened helps explain the importance of the Premier.



## Keeping the Passage Open

There is some evidence that traders were passing across the Grand Portage in 1765, heading to Lake Winnipeg and other regions. Along the way they were impeded by Indians who wanted a share of the goods they were carrying. Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher describe the activities of traders in relation to the region west of Lake Superior in the 1760s:

The first adventurer went from Michilimakinak in the year 1765. The Indians of Lake La Pluye having then been long destitute of Goods, stop't and plundered his Canoes, and would not suffer him to proceed further. He attempted it again the year following, and met with the same bad Fortune. Another attempt was made in the year 1767; they left Goods at Lake Pluye to be traded with the Natives, who permitted them to proceed with the remainder; and the Canoes penetrated beyond Lake Ouinipique (Wallace 1934: 70).

These events are not mentioned in Alexander Henry's narrative or in other sources describing this time period. This account makes clear one of the problems that traders faced in this period. Many wished to trade in the region beyond Grand Portage. To do so they needed the permission and support of the people in the region who were themselves intent on seeing traders, not passing through their country to go beyond, but remaining to trade in the region. The people who lived at Grand Portage and in the area west to Rainy Lake, under the leadership of people such as the Premier and the Crane, in effect, controlled a gateway. To get beyond, it was necessary to deal with them, one way or another. Their power, however, may have been a motive for continuing obstacles to loosening governmental regulation of the trade.

It is not known if these traders had received licenses from William Howard or anyone else to pass beyond Grand Portage. Evidence in the papers of Sir William Johnson shows that the traders at Michilimackinac continued to feel hampered by government regulations. In August 1765 Johnson wrote to General Thomas Gage that he had received a petition from Michilimackinac merchants giving an account of the manner in which the trade was carried on from Canada by the French and noting "that the Indians being accustomed to have Traders winter amongst them, & that from the Nature & Scituation of their hunting in that Quarter, many Inds. Might perish in the snow unless a Trader was at Hand to supply their wants" (SWJP, 11: 880).

When informed of this petition, General Gage provided his own slant on the regulations, noting that "Its true that the French always did Winter with the Indians, and by that means obtained so much influence over them, and it seems to me pretty plain, that they will by continuing the same methods, Worm the English Traders entirely out of the Trade, for there is nothing so vile and bad which they will not attempt, to keep the Trade with their own Hands." He stated that if exceptions were made in the regulations that the regulations would fail because the Indians would come to expect the old system of trade (SWJP, 11: 903, Gage to Johnson, Aug. 18, 1765).

In fact, it was not just the French who objected to the regulations. Lawrence Ermatinger, who would later operate through Grand Portage, wrote to Johnson on September 17, 1765, objecting to the limit on trading locations and on the fact that some traders were allowed to winter in the Indian country while others were not (SWJP, 11: 943). Additional protests of the policy came from fifty-two Montreal merchants in a petition of March 30, 1766 (SWJP, 11: 57-61). Among them were at least sixteen British merchants including men of later prominence such as Isaac Todd, John Porteous, and Benjamin Frobisher.

Governor James Murray, on April 17, 1766, wrote to the merchants stating ambiguously that he was happy to inform them that he had extended and altered their licenses for a period of 18 months pending further changes in the licensing system. It seems that in doing so Murray either lessened or did not make clear the restrictions of Sir William Johnson's trade policy. After seeing the form of the licenses that Murray granted, Johnson wrote him on May 3, 1766 (SWJP, 11: 86-87) stating that the "manner in which Your Licenses are drawn up will admit of no exception or addition except with regard to the places where the Indian Trade is to be carried on, which in all the passes from the other Governments [in other British provinces] are confin'd to the forts and Garrison." Johnson again reiterated the rationale for this regulation. A short time later, Johnson wrote to the merchants to the same effect (SWJP, 11: 90-91).

Despite Johnson's policy, William Howard at Michilimackinac continued to make exceptions, especially for traders going to Lake Superior such as Alexander Henry, Jean Baptiste Cadot, and others whose names have not been found. Sir William Johnson learned this in a letter that has not been found, written by Howard in May 1766. Johnson described the letter writing to General Gage on June 14, 1766 (SWJP, 11: 104-105). He stated, with clear anger, that Howard had sent him

a List of the Traders whom he permitted to go to Lake Superior &ca, with his reasons for so doing namely that many of ye. Nations had complained that they could not subsist during the Winter without them, & that the Traders were extremely Sollicitous for Such permission, & represented that it might otherwise occasion a Quarrel. I see plainly how it is now throughout ye. Continent. People expect to do now as they please.

Johnson added that "if Traders are necessary in Lake Superior a Post is absolutely necessary there, but if they are permitted to trade without inspection, all our Skill will not be able to over come the indiscretion of some & the Villainy of Others."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In 1767 Johnson issued orders for the Indian trade, renewing the rules that he had argued for in previous years. In addition to the usual provision prohibiting trade outside of military posts, additional rules were added providing that traders should be careful in making use of weights and measures not to cheat the Indians, not to beat or abuse any Indian or to "draw in the Indians to trade with him or them or force away their Peltry under Pretence of their being in Debt as all Traders who voluntarily Credit the Indians must abide by the consequences" (SWJP, 12: 410-414).

Further loosening of the regulations occurred at Michilimackinac when Major Robert Rogers took charge (SWJP, 12: 17-18), Gage to Rogers, Jan. 10, 1766; Rogers to Johnson, Feb. 14, 1766). Rogers arrived there on August 10, 1766, after most of the traders permitted to trade must have left for the Indian country (Cuneo 1988: 191). Soon after he sent Jonathan Carver on the trip that eventually took him to Grand Portage. The purpose of Carver's expedition was to explore the region of the Upper Mississippi and Lake Superior, with the intention of going beyond to discover a Northwest Passage (Cuneo 1988).

Benjamin Roberts, the Indian commissary in charge of regulating the trade at Michilimackinac during Robert Rogers's tenure, wrote that 1767 was "the first year the traders were permitted to winter amongst the Indians at their villages and hunting grounds" (Innis 1956: 189, fn 70; Cuneo 1988: 208). Roberts, who during his tenure and afterwards was engaged in a protracted quarrel with Rogers, clearly emphasized his own role in opening up the western fur trade. Much later he would write that "untill I open'd the trade to the Indian villages, no person whatsoever was permitted to barter his goods but under the cannon of the establish'd posts. He noted that the traders attempted to underrate the extent of their trade for fear that a tax would be placed on it. Eleven different traders were licensed to go to Lake Superior in 1767. Another two went to Nipigon. Only three traders were licensed to go beyond Lake Superior to the west, Maurice Blondeau, Etienne Campion, and François Le Blanc (Wilson 1988: 115; Innis 1956: 190).

Soon after his arrival at Michilimackinac in 1766, Robert Rogers had several councils with Indians of various nations (SWJP, 11: 161, Johnston to Johnson, Aug. 24, 1766). Lieutenant Robert Johnston reported that:

The Chippawaighs have lately delivered up a bad Belt. although given up to Major Rogers, was wholly owing to Cadet [Jean Baptiste Cadot] that vigilant Friend of the English, who . . . was at a great deal of trouble in getting this accomplished, and for fear of Jealousies wou'd take none of the merit himself.

In this context "a bad belt" signified a belt of wampum passed from band to band with the intention of inciting violence against the British. Johnson also reported that he believed Rogers intended "giving leave, and Passes to particular Traders to winter with the Indians. This one of them told me." Daniel Claus wrote to Johnson from Montreal on October 16, 1766, stating that on Rogers's arrival at Michilimackinac he "immediately without hesitation, gave a general permit to all Traders to go wintering, for which he is vastly liked and applauded here. The Traders that came from there told me also that his behaviour towards the Indians was liked and approved of by them, as well as the people of the place" (SWJP, 11: 212). If this general opening of the trade did occur when Rogers arrived at Michilimackinac, it is likely that it would have affected Lake Superior traders only the following year.

Nonetheless, traders leaving Michilimackinac for Lake Superior and beyond in 1766 may have had some success. Alexander Henry (1976: 210) states that on July 1, 1767, there

arrived at Michilimackinac 100 canoes from the north-west, laden with beaver. Were these trader's canoes or the canoes of Indian people bringing their furs to Mackinac? Did they come from Lake Superior itself or from the region beyond? The evidence is not clear. One way or another it appears that the merchandise reaching the regions beyond Lake Superior was not adequate to fulfill the demand of the Indians in that region.

In 1767 Robert Rogers (SWJP, 13: 447-464) prepared a plan for the trade of Michilimackinac that would involve a complete opening up of the trade, to counter the official policy that continued to be one of limiting licenses. Rogers noted that if the trade were confined to Michilimackinac, "few if any Indians from the West of Lake Michigan or from the South and west of Lake Superior would ever visit that Post at all, some because they are at such a distance that they cannot possibly do it, and others because they can be Supplied at Home with every Article they stand in need of." He suggested that if the British did not supply these Indians "the Spaniards will, who have already began to Trade in the Country of the Soux & at some Posts on the Lakes Superior [and] Michigan."

Any role played by the Spanish in the trade of Lake Superior has yet to be fully described. There is some other evidence that the Spanish were located in the region of Lake Superior. A well known leader of the Grand Portage Ojibwe, known as Aysh-pay-ahng (It is High) or L'Espagnol (the Spaniard) was said to have been born of a Spanish father and Ojibwe mother, around 1783 (Cochrane 2000). No other information on the identity of the father has been found.

In June and July 1767 Rogers had council meetings with a variety of Indian groups from around the Great Lakes. These were the same meetings attended by Nittam and the other people from Rainy Lake, as mentioned in Carver's narrative. As described by historian John Cuneo (1988:202-205), these meetings began on June 15. On July 2 a Grand Council was held inside the walls of the fort. Once again a major purpose of the encounter was the establishment of trade with Europeans. All those present exchanged "Strongest assurances of Friendship and Love . . . and [promised] to use their utmost endeavors to prevent mischief on all sides for the future and to live in harmony Concord and good Agreement like Brethren and Children of the same Father, begging that they might be all Treated as children in Common, have traders sent amongst them and be Supplied with necessary goods in their Several distant Villages and Hunting grounds which I assured them should be done." Then some refreshments were distributed, probably diluted rum. Presents were distributed the next day. Over a thousand Indians were at the council, possibly including Indians from Kaministikwia, Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, Nipigon, and La Pointe.

Shortly after this meeting Jonathan Carver arrived at Grand Portage. After traveling up the Mississippi River, he passed through a chain of rivers to Lake Superior, traveling along the North Shore and arriving at Grand Portage on July 19, 1767 (Parker 1976: 130-32). They stayed there until August 7, after which time they returned to Michilimackinac. The narrative Carver and another in his party recorded provides only a few details about

Grand Portage, though these are key details about the nature of the place and its role in the trade and diplomacy of the time.

At the time of his arrival Carver was running short of food. From the Ojibwe of Grand Portage he obtained enough to sustain them, including “some rice of this people and a plenty of fish. Otherwise we would have starved to death. . . . The country verry destitute of all sorts of game, our hunters returnd dayly without success.” He added that “the country at Grand Portage is ownd by a chief of the Chipeways who has a large house and a few warriours here.”

Present also were some Cree and Assiniboine of the region to the west, including “the king of the Christenoies and several of his people who was glad to see us, and several tents of Assinipoils.” Carver noted that “these two nations seemed much connected together by frequent intermarrying and inhabit the Chipeways territories on Lake La Plue and Lake Winipek.” Interestingly, aside from Cree and Assiniboine, none of the groups identified in the census of 1736 was mentioned. While it could be argued that the change had to do with migration, it is more likely that it was simply a change in nomenclature used by Europeans. By now most, if not all, Ojibwe speakers were called Chippewas by the British.

Carver said these people had come to Grand Portage “in search of traders from Michilimackinac with a design if possible to git some of them to go into their country and winter with them. The reason they give for their coming here after traders is that they say that at Hudson’s Bay they are forced to give much more for their goods then for those they purchase of traders from Michilimackinac or Montreal.” Later on (Parker 1976: 137), Carver said that the Cree and Assiniboine lived at Lake of the Woods and Lake Winnipeg. They reported to Carver that it took them 17 days to go from their country to Hudson Bay, downstream. The return trip took 50 days.

Carver was surprised to learn that these Ojibwe might be charged more for goods at Hudson Bay than they were by the traders who came from Michilimackinac or Montreal, given what he believed was the extra expense incurred in shipping goods by way of the Great Lakes from Montreal. He said that “a factory set up at the Great Carrying Place on the north of Lake Superior and well supplied with articles for the Indian trade would in a little time draw a great part of those innocent people who are thus treated like brutes by the company at Hudson’s Bay.”

In this description of the desire of the Cree and Assiniboine for trade with traders from Michilimackinac and Montreal, and his suggestion of a post at Grand Portage, Carver seemed to be envisioning a combination trading depot and post, like the factories on Hudson Bay. If such a trading factory had been established there, could it supply goods more cheaply than they cost at HBC posts? This is not clear. In suggesting that this was possible, the Assiniboine and the Cree may have been comparing the costs they themselves paid at the closest posts they came to as they traveled east, perhaps along the south shore of Lake Superior or as far away as the Sault or Michilimackinac. Such visits would have involved diplomatic encounters with British officials, including the receipt of

presents, as well as direct trade with traders there. Because of lower overhead traders farther east would have been able to sell goods more cheaply.

It is apparent from Carver's account that these various groups took seriously their encounter with him, seeing it as one of a number of means they were undertaking to encourage traders from Michilimackinac. The day following his arrival Carver "held a counsel with the king of the Christenoes, smoaked with him in the pipe of peace" (see Carver 1956: 123-29 for a longer account). Carver noted that the Indians gave "the gods of the ellements to smoke and after that those in council. The last whiff each one took especially the chiefs they blowd the smoke up into the air holding their faces up at the same time till 'twas exausted. These ceremonies were performd just as the king of the Christenoes began his speech. In this council Captain Tute gave a belt and several presents." The next day the Cree leader called them again to "counsel." According to Carver "We smoke with him in the pipe of peace. He gave Capt. Tute a beaver blanket and several other presents."

Just as they were often prepared to go long distances to trade at Hudson Bay and Montreal, these people were now prepared to travel to Michilimackinac to request traders or to trade directly. There were, he said, now assembled at Grand Portage fourteen or fifteen huts of Cree and Ojibwe, the inhabitants of which told them that "had they had provisions for their voyage they would have gone to see their father at Michilimackinac." In fact, while Carver and his party were at Grand Portage, on July 23, six canoes came from Michilimackinac, carrying Ojibwe from Rainy Lake, led by their chief Nittam. About Nittam, Carver stated: "Their chief appeared a great friend to the English. They had been to Michilimackinac to see Majr. Rogers." Goddard (Parker 1976: 191) stated that the day the six canoes came in "we assembled the Christinos and Chippawas, gave a stand of colours to the chief of the carrying-place, invited him to go see his father, as well as the Christinos, which they promised the next spring."

The effect of the delegation from Rainy Lake can be seen in the fact that on Aug. 2, 1767, Carver and his men encountered six canoes of traders from Michilimackinac on their way to the Northwest. Later on August 7 another trader, Francois Le Blanc, licensed to go to Forts La Reine and Dauphin, arrived, bound for the same region (Innis 1956: 190).<sup>15</sup>

Despite the good wishes expressed in Carver's meetings and those of Rogers earlier, traders could not be assured that if they traveled in the western Great Lakes they would not be harassed or pillaged. The reason was simply that there was not enough merchandise to go around. Traders passing through a particular region to get to another learned that they would have to take measures to deal with the Native people. Rogers, writing to Tute (Parker 1976: 197) on June 10, 1767, says he sent Mr. Boyce to be stationed at Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods, "to keep the passage open" from Lake

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<sup>15</sup> Le Blanc brought some letters from Rogers. Carver learned that Rogers would be sending no supplies, so he and his companions set off for Sault Ste Marie, arriving there on August 27, a trip of twenty days. Le Blanc is said to have taken six canoes from Michilimackinac to Forts Dauphin and Des Prairies in 1767, possibly the first trader to reach Lake Winnipeg after 1763.

Winnipeg to Lake Superior. Rogers wrote: “Boyce is to give you any assistance that you need before Le Blanc arrival.”

Boyce may have been Charles Boyer, the same trader, who as noted earlier, was in the Rainy Lake area beginning in the 1740s. Beginning around this time Charles Boyer was in partnership with Forrest Oakes to trade beyond Lake Superior in an “Adventure to the Northwest” (NAC, MG 19, A2, Series 1, v. 3, p. 3, 6, 48, 51, 71, 79, 84, 102, 109, 123, 135, 143). They were supplied merchandise by Oakes’s own partner, his brother-in-law Lawrence Ermatinger beginning as early as 1766. In 1767 merchandise worth £1,875 was shipped from Montreal to the Northwest in four canoes. In 1769, Ermatinger’s account book gives detailed information on 55 bales, cases, and barrels of goods sent to the northwest that year, the total worth £820, with expenses. In 1771, Oakes and Boyer took on a one-third partner in the firm of Joseph Fulton and Peter Pangman. The total value of the adventure was at least £2,565. Their involvement was apparently helpful because as Ermatinger wrote to them in May 1772 while sending out the canoes to Grand Portage, “Charlo Boyez who can neither Reade nor writte you’ll also supply him [with] such Goods as you may juge most proper for my interest. I should be much obliged to you to see Boyez off. I know is a very tedious and is absolutely necessary to do every thing for him till once gone to his Winter ground” (NAC, MG 19, A2, Series 1, v. 1).

Fulton later dropped out, but the business relationship with Pangman continued until at least 1780. Ermatinger’s accounts for 1778 show merchandise worth £3,205 going out in six canoes. Expenses brought the cost of the entire outfit to £6,723. The following year the adventure was credited with only £4,911 in furs and other items (NAC, MG 19, A2, Series 1, v. 3, p. 155, 166; Series 1, v. 2, p. 130-31). It is not known if Boyer stayed at Rainy Lake this entire time. An Indian woman visiting Fort Albany in 1776 told the Hudson’s Bay Company trader that the Rainy Lake post was managed by “Francois and Michel Buoy, two old traders” (Lytwyn 1986: 29). As will be discussed later, Charles Boyer managed a North West Company post on the Rainy River in the 1790s, at which time he was described as an old man.

Exactly what Boyer would have done to keep the passage open is not clear. It may have involved trade of some sort with the people of the region. Whatever it was, it does not appear to have been enough, judging by the continuing problem faced by the traders in the region. All remnants of British trade restrictions on wintering in the Indian country were essentially done away with in 1769 through the actions of Governor Guy Carlton. As noted by Erwin Thompson (1969: 23), Carlton issued 76 trading licenses. Three were for Lake Superior and two were for the “Sea of the West.” Nonetheless the people of the region continued to be a problem. In 1769 the Indians of Rainy Lake continued to attempt to restrict British traders. It was in that year, Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher later stated, that they joined with the firm of Isaac Todd and James McGill of Montreal to carry on the trade beyond Lake Superior. Once again, according to the Frobishers (Wallace 1934: 70):

The Indians of Lake La pluye, still ungovernable and rapacious, plundered our Canoes, and would not suffer any part of our Goods to be sent further. Before we

could be acquainted with this misfortune, our Goods for the year following were at the Grand Portage, and we were then too far engaged to hesitate for a moment. A second attempt was made and we were more successful. Our Canoes reached Lake Bourbon [Winnipeg?], and thenceforward we were determined to persevere.

Even if Boyer was trading at Rainy Lake, it may not have prevented harm to other traders not associated with him. If traders wished to go beyond Rainy Lake they would first have to fulfill the demand for merchandise of those groups whom they passed on their way west. Throughout the region in this period there was a strong desire to obtain trade goods and to establish strong and durable trade for the years to come. Even later in the 1770s, traders found that in going beyond Grand Portage it was necessary to satisfy some of the demands of Indian people along the waterways leading to Lake of the Woods. This is evident in Alexander Henry's account of the region in the 1770s. Despite his experience in the Lake Superior fur trade, he himself did not actually go to Grand Portage until June 1775 when he decided to enter the Northwest fur trade.

Henry did not stay long at Grand Portage but passed quickly on to Saganaga Lake where he stated that he found only three lodges of Indians from whom he bought fish and wild rice. He noted that there had been a French post there, insisting erroneously that this had been the "hitherto post in the north-west, established by the French." He also stated that the Indian village there, "when populous," had been "troublesome to the traders, obstructing their voyages and extorting liquor and other articles," perhaps a reference to the experience of traders when going beyond Lake Superior in the 1760s (Henry 1976: 239, 241).

At the forks of the Rainy River, Henry encountered another village of fifty lodges. He bought new canoes from these people and found them eager to enter into a trading relationship:

They insisted further on having goods given to them on credit, as well as on receiving some presents. The latter they regarded as an established tribute, paid them on account of the ability which they possessed, to put a stop to all trade with the interior. I gave them rum, with which they became drunk and troublesome; and in the night I left them.

The role of ceremony in getting trade started is similar to what was described earlier at the time of re-establishment of trade. The difference in this case was that Henry was not planning to stay at Saganaga or Rainy River. He would not likely grant the Indians there credit. The transactions were limited in duration. This did not, however, remove the need for ceremony and gift-giving, especially if the Indians became troublesome at the refusal by the trader to carry on longer-term trade.

A similar experience happened at a village at the mouth of the Rainy River on Lake of the Woods. It was a village of 100 people. Here he obtained a supply of fish and wild rice. The eagerness of the villagers to trade was evident in the ceremonial way in which they greeted Henry's party:



From this village, we received ceremonious presents. The mode with the Indians is, first to collect all the provisions they can spare, and place them in a heap; after which they send for the trader, and address him in a formal speech. They tell him, that the Indians are happy in seeing him return into their country; that they have been long in expectation of his arrival; that they are in great want, being destitute of every thing, and particularly of ammunition and clothing; and that what they most long for, is a taste of his rum, which they uniformly denominate *milk*.

In return, the trader would give “one keg of gunpowder, of sixty pounds weight; a bag of shot, and another of powder, of eighty pounds each; a few smaller articles, and a keg of rum. The last appeared to be the chief treasure, though on the former depended the greater part of their winter’s subsistence.” After this, the men in the community began to drink,

while the women brought me a further and vary valuable present, of twenty bags of rice. This I returned with goods and rum, and at the same time offered more, for an additional quantity of rice. A trade was opened, the women bartering rice, while the men were drinking. Before morning, I had purchased a hundred bags, of nearly a bushel measure each. Without a large quantity of rice, the voyage could not have been prosecuted to its completion.

The next morning, Henry noted “all the village was inebriated; and the danger of misunderstanding was increased by the facility with which the women abandoned themselves to my Canadians. In consequence, I lost no time in leaving the place.”

An especially interesting facet of this encounter was its gendered nature. Men and women clearly had separate roles to play. Partly this had to do with the fact that the main item of trade, the wild rice, was the product of women’s labor. Given the fact that Henry would not stay in the community and give the people credit, the value of this rice gave the women power that they might not have had in other circumstances, to obtain a wide variety of trade goods. Even the sexual encounters that Henry found so dangerous may have had a role to play in helping to establish trade (B. White 1999).

Despite the clear demand for trade goods on the part of Ojibwe people along the waterway beyond the Grand Portage, the lure for most traders was to go beyond into the Northwest where there was a prospect of greater return of better furs. But going beyond meant acquiescing to the demands of leaders like the Premier, providing the people in the gateway region with the goods they wanted. Another way to fulfill their demands was to make them part of the trade process, giving them a major support role, in the same way that the Ottawa had done in the past. Henry’s narrative supports the conclusion that the role for Indian people in the region between Grand Portage and Lake of the Woods became a support one, supplying rice, and later corn and canoes for traders going west, as well as serving as guides and hunters.

It might be assumed that answering the needs of the people in the gateway region of Grand Portage and beyond would have caused a diminishment in the use of ceremonial diplomacy in the trade. However, as stated earlier trade and diplomacy were not separate, but were bound by the experiences and beliefs of Native people themselves. They were bound by the need for trade, in order to be durable and to create trust in both parties to transactions. By necessity, trade, in order to exist at all, had to take place within a cultural context, involving ceremonies and a formal way of interacting. This did not diminish in the years ahead.

## Grand Portage in the 1770s and 1780s

The information provided in Carver's narrative would suggest that while Grand Portage was a minor village in terms of actual population, its location was key strategically in terms of the movement of traders and Indians in the region. Others acknowledged that Grand Portage was the key to the British fur trade in the Northwest. Writing to General Frederick Haldimand in October 1784, Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher wrote that Grand Portage, "which is the only part of that Country where there is a possibility of getting to the Water Communication which leads to Lake du Bois, and thenceforward to every part of the country beyond it; from which Your Excellency will perceive the Grand Portage is the Key to that part of British America" (Wallace 1934: 72).

Going beyond Grand Portage was an expensive proposition, generally involving a great investment of time and money. These factors led to important changes in the structure of the fur trade. The history of the British traders who operated at Grand Portage is the story of increasing consolidation from the 1760s to the 1780s, culminating with the formation of the North West and later XY Companies. Many of the traders who came to form the North West Company began as sole proprietors, bringing out one or two canoe loads of merchandise every year from Montreal to be traded in the area of the western Great Lakes. Gradually—as documented by Alexander Henry himself—they moved west. As Harold Innis made clear in *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1956), the increasing distances from Montreal, and the increasing complexity of the trade logistics necessitated the consolidation of individuals into an extended partnership. This made possible the use of sailing ships and lake boats for carrying and delivering the cargoes of merchandise and furs, thus reducing unit costs.

Traders from the west came to Grand Portage every year to receive their goods and to send and receive letters from family and business partners. Such meetings and communications were crucial to the flow of information about the trade on which both traders and suppliers were dependent. Writing from Montreal in April 1787 to Joseph Frobisher after Benjamin Frobisher's death, Simon McTavish described the importance of the annual visits of partners to Grand Portage: "I should be at a loss to attend the outfits and other business here, and go every year to the Portage, which is unavoidable for any person largely interested in that country" (Wallace 1934: 76).

As traders joined together with suppliers establishing a network linking Montreal and the Northwest, Grand Portage began to take on increasing importance not only as a transshipment point and a meeting place, but also as a storage depot and a company headquarters. With the increase of trade passing through Grand Portage, traders appear to have begun construction of permanent facilities during this period. The French Montreal merchant Maurice Blondeau later recalled that on his first visit to Grand Portage in 1766 "the fort where the bourgeois were, which was not then cleared and was not cleared for two or three years thereafter and then by a man named Erskine [possibly John Askin], as he believes" (Nute 1940: 134). No further documentation of the role of Erskine or Askin in the trade at Grand Portage at this particular time has been found. Although many papers and records survive for the Detroit businessman John Askin's business, few are

from the 1760s or early 1770s. An Askin inventory for 1777 does list a bad debt consisting of Askin's "share of Debts due the old Co. of Todd, Askin, Curry & McBeath," which may have been involved in the Northwest trade (NAC, MG 19, A3, Askin Papers, v. 68).

After 1775 Askin appears to have operated mainly in the Michilimackinac area, although he had a role in shipping corn, rum, and other supplies to traders at Grand Portage in his shipping vessels. In his diary of May 1774 Askin mentioned hiring a man until the forthcoming arrival of the canoes from Grand Portage. This may have been what occurred on August 3, with the arrival of his brother-in-law Jean-Baptiste Barthe from Grand Portage. Barthe, based at Sault Ste. Marie, was at various times a partner of Jean-Baptiste Cadot. During this period he helped Askin arrange for the shipping of orders sent to traders at Grand Portage. On April 7, 1775, Askin noted the departure of "Mr. Henry . . . in a canoe for St. Marys," possibly in preparation for his departure for the Northwest that year. On May 1, 1775, Askin reported the departure of the schooner *Capt. De Peyster* for the "Great Carrying Place on Lake Superior." It is likely that this vessel was carrying the usual supplies to traders there (Quaife 1928, 1: 51, 53, 54, 55).

More familiar is Askin's involvement in the trip of the *De Peyster*, to Grand Portage in 1778, with an officer and twelve men "for the purpose of preserving order and regularity among the people who resort there" (N. Woolworth 1975: 201). The expedition was under the command of Lieutenant Thomas Bennet. Askin arranged for supplies for the trip, including tools to be used in building a facility at Grand Portage. Barthe at the Sault was involved in making arrangements, as was a clerk for the nascent North West Company, Joseph Beausoleil.

Instructions given to men under the command of Bennet included orders to see that the Indians did not "attempt to stop any Traders from passing on their lands," and that engagements of the canoemen be respected and upheld. In addition the instructions addressed the ceremonial nature of dealings between traders and Indian people in the region. Because the Indians were "formerly used to a commanding officer" making "some show and parade such as hoisting colors & firing guns at their arrival at the Posts" and giving "colours and other marks of distinction," the traders "have acted a similar part; but now such practice ought to cease, and presenting medals above all other things to be at an end," although a "few from the commanding officer will be of service" (N. Woolworth 1975: 202). It does not appear that this purpose of the trip was accomplished, since ceremonial greetings between traders and Native people, along with gifts of medals and other honoraria, continued to be important for many years.

The presence of large-scale trading operations at Grand Portage in this period led to the storage of a great many supplies of merchandise, far in excess of what would be found in a normal trading house. But the point in having these goods here was to make them available when necessary to the posts and company departments throughout the Northwest, not to trade with the local Ojibwe. It does not appear, for example, that Grand Portage ever fully operated, as Carver suggested it should, in the manner of Hudson's Bay Company factories, as a place where Indians from all over were invited to trade. But

there is no reason to believe that a place like Grand Portage, through which so many traders passed, could have precluded irregular sporadic trade with Native people who came from long distances carrying furs and wanted to trade. Only a concerted effort to monopolize—like what happened later at Grand Portage—could have prevented or limited this kind of trade from taking place.

Further, there was a local Indian population, and in this sense, despite the presence of such an important trade infrastructure, Grand Portage may have operated more like one of the many small trading posts throughout the region. How much trade did actually take place during this time period at Grand Portage? There are only a few clues to go on. As described by Jonathan Carver the band was small. He noted only that “the country at Grand Portage is owned by a chief of the Chipeways who has a large house and a few warriors here” (Parker 1976: 131). The events that Carver described mainly showed the diplomacy carried on at the time of the re-establishment of trade in the region, but did not reveal the manner or extent of the participation of Grand Portage Ojibwe in the fur trade.

When Alexander Henry (1976: 239) passed through Grand Portage in 1775, he reported that “at the Grand Portage, I found the traders in a state of extreme reciprocal hostility, each pursuing his interests in such a manner as might most injure his neighbour. The consequences were very hurtful to the morals of the Indians.” The exact nature of damage to the Indian people at Grand Portage or anywhere else is not clear, but it is likely that Henry was referring to the way in which traders in close competition sought to rival each other in generosity in a variety of trade goods including alcohol. Such generosity would lead to Indians taking a great deal for granted in their dealings with traders.<sup>16</sup>

Alexander Henry’s thoughts on the people of Grand Portage, as well as those to the west were echoed by North West Company partner Roderick McKenzie in his comment, perhaps from the 1790s (Thompson 1969: 73), stating that the “chipeways about the Grand Portage are few in number—accustomed to opposition in trade they are extremely difficult to deal with.” He also noted that “the Indians of *Lac La Pluie* are of the same tribe, and equally vicious from the same cause—but are more useful from their knowledge of constructing canoes for the company.”

As we have seen, the difficulties seen in the experience of traders in the region between Grand Portage and Rainy Lake was not originally about competition. Rather, it stemmed from the power that the people there exerted over an important gateway, power that could only be dealt with through continuing trade and giving a role to the people of the region in the transshipment of goods west.

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<sup>16</sup> Duncan McGillivray (1929: 62), writing in 1808, argued why he believed that a monopoly of trade was good for British interests: “The chief benefit in a moral or political view which is derived from the trade of the North West, being confined to a single company, is that it renders the Indians dependent; and consequently industrious & subordinate; and being subordinate they are preserved faithful to the Government, and would at their desire at any moment abandon the chase and take up the hatchet.” (In other words, they would go to war for the British if they were asked to do so.)

McKenzie's experience of the trade at Grand Portage began when he went west in June 1785 (a misprint in Masson says 1789) as a clerk for the firm of Gregory McLeod and Co., a new competitor of an early incarnation of the North West Co. McKenzie spent the following year at Grand Portage, working as a trader and manager performing various duties and interacting with Native people of the region. Many years later, in reminiscences which survive in several versions including one garbled by Louis F. R. Masson (1960), he recalled his experiences operating at the post. These accounts provide the first detailed narrative of a trading year at Grand Portage (see Appendix 1). McKenzie's journal is typical in the scattered nature of the information he provides and the way in which this information must be carefully pieced together to give a broader picture of trade at Grand Portage.

McKenzie remembered that on the trip out, at the "Tonnerre [Thunder Cape] or Pays Plat," on the north shore of Lake Superior, his party encountered Peter Pangman, who as noted earlier was the partner of Oakes, Boyer, and Ermatinger, throughout the 1770s, who had left Montreal earlier in the year with a Mr. (John) Ross. The men had erected a new establishment at Grand Portage consisting of a *hangard* or storehouse, described as "coarsely put together but sufficiently spacious for the purposes of the season," that is, to receive the goods from Montreal.<sup>17</sup> Other company members now arrived, including McKenzie's cousin Alexander Mackenzie (spelled differently), who was a partner in the company, as well as the clerks Duncan Pollock and Laurent Leroux and their apprentices James Finlay and Roderick McKenzie himself. McKenzie writes that Pollock and Leroux "did not seem to like doing the ordinary drudgery attending the general *rendez-vous*, and were seldom called upon to do it."<sup>18</sup> McKenzie leaves the impression that the work was left to him of assembling the outfits for the various posts sent out during the summer. The *comptoir*, or counter, he said, became his pillow.

Government license records for 1785 show the firm of Pangman and Ross was granted a pass by the British government to go there in 1785 with four canoes, 40 men, 350 gallons of rum, and 16 guns. Gregory and McLeod, who appear to have been associated with Pangman and Ross, were given a pass to Grand Portage for four canoes, 50 men, 400 gallons of rum, and 64 guns. Even combined, their shipments were dwarfed by those of Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher, the key partners in the North West Company who sent 25 canoes, 260 men, 3,500 gallons of rum, and 300 guns to Grand Portage, as well as an additional four canoes on a combined pass to Detroit and Grand Portage (MHS, Canada Governor General, license records).

Because of the increasing consolidation of traders to Grand Portage and beyond, there were only two other passes granted to go there. One was to Joseph Howard, who sent three canoes and 24 men; the other was for the smallest outfit, that of Donald McKay, who with the backing of Daniel Sutherland, brought two canoes and 17 men (MHS, Canada Governor General, license records). McKay, who had previously been employed

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<sup>17</sup> The version of McKenzie's narrative published in Masson (1960, 1: 10) and quoted in Thompson (1969: 46) reads this sentence as "warmly put together," which seems to make less sense than the reading given here, which is from what appears to be an early version of the narrative not edited by Masson.

<sup>18</sup> The quotation is from Masson but seems compatible with early manuscript versions of the narrative.

by John Ross and who came that year from Montreal on his own account, later wrote that attempts were made by McTavish, Frobisher and Company to prevent him from passing beyond Grand Portage, perhaps because the size of his outfit made him vulnerable to pressure. McKay claimed that presents were given to the commanding officer at Michilimackinac to detain him there for five or six days so as to slow his arrival at Grand Portage. When he did reach the portage he had difficulty getting a guide, finding only an old man “who could not see,” who was recommended by Peter Pangman. McKay engaged the man on the theory that Pangman who, with John Ross, was competing with McTavish, Frobisher and Company would have no reason to try to deceive him. As he set out across the portage, McKay discovered that McTavish, Frobisher and Company had set up pickets and would not let him pass, even though, as McKay wrote “this very road was made in the [F]rench time.” McKay, who was not to be intimidated, struck the gate with his tomahawk and after angry confrontations with the opposing company’s men along the way and at Fort Charlotte, he got his way and set off for the west (HBCA, E.223/1, 42-50).

None of this was recounted in McKenzie’s narrative, perhaps because his own company, run by Pangman and the other partners, was large enough to resist any pressure that might be brought to bear on it. McKenzie also would soon join the North West Company and would perhaps not emphasize its faults, especially by describing tactics that were so similar to those employed by the company in dealings with later competitors such as the XY Company. In the fall McKenzie was an assistant to the man left in charge after the departure of the company’s partners, Pierre L’Anniau, or possibly, Lanneau. In Masson’s published version of the narrative, he states that this man “had been for many years in that country, and was so handy that he was considered a ‘jack of all trade’; but as he knew *ni ‘A’ ni ‘B’* I was left with him, I suppose, to supply that deficiency. Eighteen *voyageurs* were placed under his command for erecting the buildings and for the purposes of the *traite*” (McKenzie 1960, 1: 11).

In a portion of the narrative left out by Masson, McKenzie wrote that during the fall he began to “perceive a gradual change for the worse in Monsr. L[’s] conduct which I made it my duty to watch” (here and below, see Appendix 1; NAC, Masson Collection, Roderick McKenzie, *Reminiscences*, various versions). Historian Erwin Thompson has interpreted the problem as having to do with L’Anniau’s use of alcohol. The unpublished versions are not as clear as he suggests, containing no reference to alcohol. McKenzie states that late in the fall a boat arrived from Montreal under the charge of Robert Thomson. Shortly after that some men were sent from the post to “make a fall Fishery” at a place called Shaquina, around 30 leagues away. This is now called Shagoina Island and is just east of Thunder Cape. It is likely that the men were fishing for whitefish or herring. There are many descriptions of fall fishing in this region of Lake Superior. J. Elliot Cabot, who came to the Thunder Bay region in the late 1840s with the geologist Louis Agassiz, noted that whitefish spawned in October and lake herring in November (Agassiz 1974: 94).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For another mention of the fall herring fishery in modern Grand Portage band oral history, see Auger and Driben (2000: 16, 45).

Some time later McKenzie was sent in a large canoe with a few men for a load of fish. The fishermen had not taken sufficient fish to make a full load so he waited until December when he and the fishermen returned together. Their return trip was arduous, since the weather was cold and ice was forming in the lake. They were “a long time on the way.”<sup>20</sup>

On McKenzie’s arrival at the post, Thomson, who had kept watch on L’Anniau, informed him that the trader’s conduct had been “irregular.” McKenzie “seeing sufficient proof. . . without hesitation . . . called Monsiur into my room. . . where I boldly told him . . . what I knew.” L’Anniau “acknowledged his error,” at which McKenzie assumed charge in his place. Another version of the narrative states that after McKenzie confronted L’Anniau in the office and L’Anniau “frankly acknowledged his errors and promised to reform. But I declined to enter into any conditions—but sent him for the Keys which he instantly brought me when I assumed charge and became master.” He wrote that all seemed pleased by the change, including L’Anniau himself, and that in the spring the company partners on their arrival found “a complete Establishment, with all the Indians of the department “incamped within our limits and . . . almost all their winter hunt in our possession.” The only exception among the Indians was “a family connection of the other Fort,” meaning the opposition company.<sup>21</sup>

Details are lacking about the exact family relationships involved, but the fact that the only Indian family not trading with McKenzie was one connected to the opposition makes clear how this might influence the trade. The role of family connections to trading posts was a key one in the fur trade, advantageous to both traders and Native people. Family connections were helpful in channeling furs, food, and supplies to particular traders or companies and merchandise to Native families. Traders or engagés connected by marriage to particular hunters sometimes wintered in the woods with their relations. If nothing else it helped feed the traders when the company’s food supplies were short.

Opposing McKenzie and his colleagues that winter was a North West Company trader named Cloutier “who was a very respectable old man.” This could be Zacharie Cloutier, who, as will be mentioned later was an interpreter at Grand Portage in 1798 and 1799. Assisting him was a Mr. Givens, new that year from Montreal. Givens “had been brought up in Detroit, spoke the principal Indian languages as well as the Indians themselves, and was a very pleasant young man.” The two opposing clerks became good friends during the following winter.

McKenzie also became good friends with the young men of the Grand Portage Ojibwe: “In the Fall, when the Indians were about the place, the young men and I became great friends, which on their return with their hunt in the spring, they did not forget.” McKenzie recounted this only as a lead-in for an account of a fight, but the statement is consistent with accounts that will be mentioned later of the seasonal patterns of the Grand Portage Ojibwe. The fight in question came about in the spring as a result of McKenzie’s

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<sup>20</sup> Much of this account is taken from an early version of the narrative, on pages numbered 23, 26, and 31. Another version is found in a series of unnumbered pages beginning “No. 5. 1785.”

<sup>21</sup> The second version is from a series of pages beginning “No. 5. 1785.”



interposing in a difficulty that L'Anniau had with one Indian. McKenzie turned him out of the fort and took his knife away from him. The man was "severely hurt in the scuffle." Later he was given his knife back but he turned to McKenzie "with an angry look" and said: "When the leaves grow large in the Portage, I will remember you."

That evening "the Indians had a drinking match" that McKenzie described in a manner similar to many accounts by fur traders of Indians drinking: "They were yelling, quarreling, fighting and making such a dreadful racket, that one might believe that all the Furies of Hell were let loose in the camp, but our gates were of course secured." In the morning a young man came and told him that five Indians were dead. "One of them I killed," he told McKenzie, "said he, he was your enemy and meant to kill you on the first opportunity" (McKenzie 1960, 1:12).<sup>22</sup>

McKenzie provided a few more details of life in the local community:

During the Spring, the Indians gave a great entertainment to which all the lodges in the camp were invited to partake. I also had an invitation. When all were assembled and seated in the Grand Lodge prepared for the purpose, each guest was served with a small bundle, neatly tied, of *original* [moose] dried meat of the best quality; but my appetite could do no justice to the whole of my *portion*. A friend close by me, observing my embarrassment, asked the rest saying "I shall manage it for you." The *festin* was a *festin* "*à tout manger* [eat-all feast]."<sup>23</sup>

The idea of the eat-all feast, which McKenzie described here, was to show proper appreciation and real need for the things eaten by consuming everything. It is likely that the spirits that allowed the hunter to be successful in his hunt would be impressed by the gesture (Brown and Brightman 1988: 100-01, 143-44).

In the spring the first traders to reach Grand Portage were Robert Grant and William McGillivray, who had wintered for the opposition on the Red River. It was Robert Grant who had, according to Donald McKay, played a role in the attempt to intimidate him the previous fall, although he had turned down McKay's challenge to give him "satisfaction" (HBCA, E.223/1, 47). McKenzie now called upon Grant and McGillivray. He was "well received," though he states that he did not learn anything from them. This was not surprising at a competitive time when knowledge about the activities of an opposing company could be helpful. McKenzie spent the summer of 1786 doing what he did the previous summer, that is, getting the outfits ready, then was sent to winter in the English River with his cousin, Alexander Mackenzie. The following June, McKenzie learned of the death of Ross by some of Peter Pond's men in the Athabasca Department. He set off to Grand Portage to bring the news. The events motivated the partners to end their opposition and join together into a new larger North West Company in 1787.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The quotations are taken from Masson's published version, but correspond closely to the early manuscript versions.

<sup>23</sup> The quotations are taken from Masson's published version, but correspond closely to the early manuscript versions. An early version on p. 35, however, states that the bundle was served on "a dish."

<sup>24</sup> Masson: 19 and a version of the narrative headed "1786. Copied."

These few details about Grand Portage in McKenzie's account are helpful in describing the nature of the fur trade at Grand Portage. The reference to McKenzie making friends with the young men while they were "about the place," and the suggestion that this was helpful when they returned with their hunts in the spring, correspond to what other sources say about the seasonal patterns of the Grand Portage Ojibwe, who did not live all winter in the area of Grand Portage, but spread out both along the lakeshore as well as inland. When McKenzie first encountered these young men they would have received their trade goods on credit before going into the woods to hunt with their families. Some traders married to their relatives might have come into the woods at various times to pick up furs or deliver goods, but a major portion of their furs would have come early in the spring, prior to the leaves having been filled out on the trees on the portage. Once they had paid off their debts they would have been rewarded with gifts of liquor. This, itself, could have contributed to the fight described by McKenzie, one of the frequently described effects of the use of liquor in the trade.

## Grand Portage in the 1790s

Few of the traders who came to Grand Portage right after Roderick McKenzie gave many details of trade there. More clues about the trade in the region are found in the journals of John McKay, a Hudson's Bay Company trader who had posts on the Rainy River between 1793 and 1797 (HBCA, B.105/a/1-4). This was the first attempt of the HBC to enter the trade of the region. In his first two years McKay was opposed by Charles Boyer, likely the same trader or a relative of the man who had been there in 1744 and the late 1760s. McKay described Boyer as a canny old man, who spoke Ojibwe fluently and was an accomplished builder of birch-bark canoes (HBCA, B.105/a/1, fo. 6) McKay noted at that date the post was the location where most of their canoes for inland travel were made. It was also the rendezvous of the Athabasca brigades who could not make it all the way to Grand Portage and back in one season. The following year McKay noted that "the Canadians never lose any thing in Indian debts at this place for what the natives cannot pay in furs they pay in canoes" (HBCA, B.105/a/2, fo. 16d).

As a novice trader in the region, McKay received an education in trade methods from Boyer and from the people of the region and in the end appears to have gotten the better of Boyer. Perhaps the thing that most surprised him was the need to use brandy to get provisions:

I had Plenty of Brandy When I left Osnaburgh according to the outfit. But the Porovisions has ruined Everything without which there would have been a poor account of me and Every one with me. I knew very well the nature of this Post before I came here although I never wintered here and told my Sentiments freely Concerning it before I set of last summer at Post where People depend entirely on the Indians For Every mouthfull they Eate Should have Brandy Exclusive of the outfit on Purpose to maintain the men (HBCA, B.105/a/1, fo. 17d).

McKay also found that because of the number of traders throughout the region from Lake Superior to the Red River, the people of the region could easily play one set off against another, or if shut out at one post, go to another to get their goods. On May 9, 1793, McKay noted (HBCA, B.105/a/1, fo. 19):

Intinwayton returned from Mr. Boyer and paid 23 Beaver which was all he had of 33 he owed me and think it very good payment. He plainly told me not to think hard of such payment for he did not care whether I gave him debt or not next fall that the country was overrun with Traders if one would not give him he would go to another. He says he did not pay the french master [Boyer] Half his debt and there was nothing said to him.

During the following year McKay learned that a trader from Mackinac had appeared at Red Lake. Many people from Rainy Lake were drawn to trade there, neglecting to pay their debts to McKay. He noted also that "the other Indians belonging to Lac La Pluis that I gave debt to last fall are most of them gone to Grand Portage." It is not known exactly what this movement of people toward Grand Portage means at this time. The people of

the region appeared highly mobile in the 1790s, just as they had been in the 1760s. Some of the people from the Rainy Lake-Lake of the Woods region migrated in this period to the Red River “a place more suitable for the support of their families (HBCA, B.105/a/1, fo. 11d; B.105/a/3, fo. 1). In the case of those who went to Grand Portage, it appears that this was a short-term or seasonal journey.

In 1796-97 Peter Grant, a former competitor of the North West Company was now the NWC trader at Rainy Lake (HBCA, B.105/a/4, fo. 5d, 7d, 10d). Grant was married to an Indian woman from the region and was able to count on the trade of brothers-in-law. At the same time, McKay noted that there were four other traders in various satellite posts around Rainy Lake representing the North West Company, including one on the “Summer Berry River,” which may be a translation of the Ojibwe name for Basswood Lake and perhaps the river that flowed out of it (Lamb 1970: 103, “lake of the Dry Berries”; Headline and Gallup 1962-63, 19: 33, “Dryberry Lake”; Upham 1969: 298, “dried blueberry lake”).

Exactly what was occurring in the trade at Grand Portage is not known. Most North West Company people passed through Grand Portage only in the summer, so they focused on the better known role of the post as a point of rendezvous and transshipment. John Macdonell in his diary of July 1793 noted that 1,000 men were at the post causing a stress to the food supplies available there. He stated that “the New Ship otter has been expected some time now and we are anxiously looking out for her; provisions have turned so scarce that near 1000 men upon the ground in the company’s service have been put upon half allowance.” A full allowance to a voyageur was a quart of “lyed” corn and an ounce of grease (Gates 1965: 95). No local produce was given out to the men by the company.

Macdonell also gave a physical description of the area. He noted the layout of the fort and the encampments of canoemen nearby. He described the proposed construction of a nearby post to be occupied by NWC competitors David and Peter Grant, prior to their joining the company. He mentioned walking over the portage with John Bennet, the captain of the North West Company’s sailing vessel, the *Otter*. At Fort Charlotte he noted that “Mr. Donald Ross has been long in charge of Fort Charlotte that he has acquired the respectable name of Governor” (Gates 1965: 97). The narrative of John MacDonald of Garth, who passed through Grand Portage several times in the 1790s was less informative. In passing, he recorded that the man in charge at Fort Charlotte around 1794 or 1795 was a Mr. Lemoine (Thompson 1969: 71-72). MacDonald was sent to relieve Lemoine, who had been charged “with some nasty tricks.” A Jacques Lemoine was a clerk in the North West Company’s Fond du Lac district, by a four year contract beginning in 1798 (NWC 1940: 55).

Alexander Mackenzie in his account of his famous voyage gives a detailed description of the summer activities at Grand Portage, dating from the 1790s. A few details help to supply a picture of the year-round uses of the fort. He noted, for example, that nothing but potatoes could be cultivated in the area of the fort, perhaps due to the “cold damp fogs of the lake” and the moisture of nearby springs. He did, however, state that there was an abundance of hay for feeding cattle. He noted that both cattle and oxen had been

tried for carrying goods over the portage in the summer, but “without success.” They were, he said, “only useful for light bulky articles; or for transporting upon sledges, during the winter, whatever goods may remain there, especially provision [sic], of which it is usual to have a year’s stock on hand.” Among these provisions were the bread, pork, butter, liquor, and tobacco with which Mackenzie stated the North men, perhaps limited to clerks and traders, were regaled on their arrival at Grand Portage. Similarly he noted that the proprietors, clerks, guides, and interpreters messed together in one large hall where they were fed “bread, salt pork, beef, hams, fish, and venison, butter, peas, Indian corn, potatoes, tea, spirits, wine &c. and plenty of milk, for which purpose several milch cows are constantly kept.” Mechanics—that is, skilled men—had similar provisions, but canoe men from the Montreal and the North were fed only Indian corn and melted fat (Lamb 1970: 97-98). Mackenzie also noted in passing that there were along the shore (possibly just the north shore) of Lake Superior not more than 150 Native families. They subsisted largely on fish because the countryside was rocky and did not support a large number of game animals. Bears were present in some numbers as were moose and “fallow deer” or caribou, but in lesser quantities (Lamb 1970: 96).

Clearly, some of the items fed the traders at Grand Portage could have been produced by Native people, although what is in doubt is the extent to which they could have produced it in large enough quantities for the many traders present. Other evidence however, suggests various attempts by Indians to produce food, even undertaking some agriculture. George Nelson, in an account of traveling southwest along the shores from Grand Portage in the summer of 1803, stated that he came to a place “called the Vieu[x] Désert[t]—where some Grand Portage indians formerly planted corn &c &c but have long since abandoned it; & from this it derived its name” (Nelson 2002: 98)

These accounts are from the point of view of traders. Only rarely was a different point of view presented about the trade of the region. A unique source of information on the activities at Grand Portage in the 1790s, especially among Native people in the area is found in the narrative of John Tanner, a white captive adopted into an Ottawa family from Michigan that traveled west to the Red River and beyond around 1793. Tanner and his adopted family came to Grand Portage from Michilimackinac. At Sault Ste. Marie they put all their baggage on board a trader’s sailing vessel. The fact that they were allowed to do so may be due to the fact that Tanner’s adopted mother was well known around Michilimackinac.<sup>25</sup> They themselves went by canoe and the wind being light reached Grand Portage ten days before the ship. Tanner’s adopted father was dying at this point from an injury he had received. His family, including Tanner, carried him across the portage in a stretcher made of a blanket and two poles. They left their canoes at the trading house and had to make small canoes on the other side. The father died there. “The old woman procured a coffin from the traders, and they brought my father’s body in a wagon to the trading-house on this side the Grand Portage, where they buried him in the burying ground of the whites” (Tanner 1830: 41, 42).

Tanner’s family started out for the Red River, but because his brother Kewatin was now also dying, they stopped at Moose Lake. There they caught fish with nets and trapped

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<sup>25</sup> She had even been given a flag there, a significant honor.

beavers, otters, and muskrats. This was in the summer and fall. But at the approach of winter the old woman told them they could not remain there by themselves, “as the winter would be long and cold, and no people, either whites or Indians near us.” Kewatin died in the early part of winter. He was buried by the side of the father. Tanner was 13 then. As the winter became more and more cold, they removed themselves from the trading house and set up a lodge in the woods. The two boys hunted two or three days’ distance from home (Tanner 1830: 42-43).

A Muskegoe or Swamp Indian—a term sometimes used for Cree or Cree-Ojibwe—named Pe-twaw-we-ninne, or the Smoker, came into the trading house and learning that they were poor invited them home with him, saying he would hunt for them. He lived two long days journey toward the west at the We-sau-ko-ta See-bee, Burnt Wood (or Brule) River, which flows into Lake Superior between Grand Portage and Grand Marais. Tanner reported that “he took us into his own lodge, and while we remained with him, we wanted for nothing. Such is still the custome of the Indians, remote from the whites. . . . If any one, who had at that time been of the family of Net-no-kwa, were now, after so many years, to meet one of the family of Pe-twaw-we-ninne, he would call him ‘brother,’ and treat him as such.” Tanner does not say how long he stayed with the man, although it is possible they spent the remainder of the winter with him (Tanner 1830: 45).

At some point later Tanner and his family returned to Grand Portage where he met another man of the same band of Muskegoes who invited them to go with him to Isle Royale “where, he said, were plenty of Caribou and Sturgeon, and where, he had no doubt, he could provide all that would be necessary for our support.” At Isle Royale Tanner described obtaining gulls’ eggs, sturgeon, beaver, otter and other game. They stayed there for an indefinite time and then went back to Grand Portage. In describing the return trip, Tanner noted that his mother’s relatives made offerings of tobacco to the Great Spirit, with the words “You. . . have made this lake, and have made us, your children; you can now cause that the water shall remain smooth, while we pass over in safety.” The use of tobacco in this way was not utilitarian in a European sense but it was a model for the use of things obtained from traders in their own Native exchange system. The ten canoes passed safely to shore. These events likely took place in spring or summer (Tanner 1830: 45-47). Later HBC records, as will be discussed later, describe a similar hunting trip taken by Indians of the area in the 1820s. In this case the Indians arrived at Grand Portage from Isle Royale on July 24, 1824 (TBHMS, Fort William Journal).

Soon after this, Tanner and his family set off for the Red River. Tanner noted that their canoe had been lent to the traders, and was sent on the route towards Red River to bring packs. This would have meant that their departure from Grand Portage occurred in early summer, possibly in June or July. Tanner stated that the family traveled with the next group of canoes leaving. “After a day or two, we met the Frenchmen with our canoe; but as they refused to give it up, the old woman took it from them without their consent, put it in the water, and put our baggage on board. The Frenchmen dared not make any resistance. I have never met with an Indian, either man or woman, who had so much authority as Net-no-kwa. She could accomplish whatever she pleased, either with the traders or the Indians; probably, in some measure, because she never attempted to do any

thing which was not right and just” (Tanner 1830: 46-47). Tanner stated that after a stopover at Rainy Lake, they reached Lake Winnipeg and the Red River in the fall.

Tanner’s narrative suggests something of the range of places around Grand Portage where Indian people made use of the resources, from the inland lakes and rivers, to the shoreline of Lake Superior, and Isle Royale. The extent of the various locations in which Indian people were scattered at various times of the year made it necessary, as in the case of many other trading posts, for traders to go *en déroutine*; that is, to travel to visit Indians in their wintering places (McDermott 1941: 66). It was also sometimes necessary for traders to establish sub-posts. Both these visits and the sub-posts were designed to Indian customers supplied with merchandise needed during the winter and prevent them from trading furs to the competition.

Other portions of Tanner’s narrative provide some insight into the relationship of Native people to traders at Grand Portage. A few years after the arrival of Tanner and his family on the Red River, they had accumulated eleven packs of forty skins of beaver each. It was their intention to take the packs back to Mackinac, along with other packs of furs that they had left in a sunjégwun or cache at Rainy Lake. They had left them there “not having confidence in the honesty of the trader.” Tanner stated that together these packs would have been “sufficient to make us wealthy,” especially if they could take them back to Mackinac where they might get better prices for them. Reaching Rainy Lake they found that the cache had been broken up, a fact which Netnokwa attributed to theft by the trader. Reaching Fort Charlotte, Tanner stated, the people working for one of the companies urged them to put the packs of furs in the wagons used to carry goods across the portage. Netnokwa suspected that if they did this they would have difficulty getting them back again. Instead they carried the packs across themselves, a task that took several days, since Netnokwa would not allow her sons to use the “trader’s road” (Tanner 1830: 69). The use of wagons to carry goods is evident here. It may have been one of the experiments in their use described by Alexander Mackenzie in his narrative.

Despite all this caution, on the other side of the portage, two traders named McGillivray and Chaboillez (Shabboyea), “by treating her with much attention, and giving her some wine, induced her to place all her packs in a room which they gave her to occupy.” At first they tried to get her to sell the furs by “friendly solicitation.” This not working, they threatened her “and at length, a young man, the son of Mr. [Chaboillez] attempted to take them by force; but the old man interfered and ordering his son to desist, reproved him for his violence. Thus the family was allowed to keep the furs and would have continued on its way to Mackinac, but one day the traders informed her that her son Wa-me-gon-a-biew had returned across the portage, having formed an attachment for a young woman at Middle Lake or Naw-we-sah-ki-e-gun. Because of this Netnokwa decided not to go back to Mackinac. She sold most of their furs to a “Mr. Laponboise,” possibly Laframboise, for a “due bill” for the amount of their value. This bill, for the amount of their value, was later lost in a fire that burned down their lodge (Tanner 1830: 69-71).

Apparently Netnokwa intended by doing this to retain the value of the furs, the equivalent of more than a year’s worth of trading power for one family, so that they would have it if

they were able later to return to Mackinac. Her disappointment at her son's behavior led her to take 120 beaver skins and a large quantity of buffalo robes for rum. Tanner notes that "it was her habit, whenever she drank, to make drunk all the Indians about her, at least as far as her means would extend," suggesting that she shared it with other Indians she met. Returning to Lake of the Woods, it was found that the relationship of Wa-megon-a-biew was "not so strong to be broken," so that Tanner concluded "it is somewhat doubtful whether the anxiety of the traders at Grand Portage, to possess themselves of our packs, had not as much to do in occasioning our return, as any thing on the part of this young man" (Tanner 1830: 71).

Netnokwa's trade of the furs in return for a due bill must have been highly unusual for Native people in this period, who, if they had accumulated furs, would have insisted on trading them directly for merchandise, rum, or other consumables. The action reflected her own view of herself as a kind of entrepreneur who sought and received consideration from traders, although she clearly mistrusted them. The behavior of the traders described by Tanner is corroborated by other sources that describe traders pillaging Native people of their goods on occasion.

Some of those traders named in Tanner's narrative can be identified. The McGillivray mentioned may be William, who was taking an increasing role at this time in the management of the North West Company, as a partner in the firm of McTavish, Frobisher and Company, beginning in 1793 (Wallace 1934: 471). He was frequently at Grand Portage at this period during summer months. In a letter written on June 9, 1795, McGillivray wrote, while on his way from Montreal to Grand Portage, of arriving at Sault Ste. Marie on June 1, 1795, where he met the *Otter* ready to return to the portage. The ship had left Grand Portage on May 6, bringing news from "Mr. Ross," possibly Donald Ross, the man John Macdonnel had noted at Fort Charlotte. It was noted that the people at the portage were all well and that Ross wrote they had already sent 11,000 pieces across the portage (NAC, MG 29 A5, v. 26, Strathcona Collection, McGillivray to McTavish, Frobisher, June 9, 1795).

There were two individuals named Charles Chaboillez in the Northwest trade. Charles Jean Baptiste Chaboillez, born in 1736, was listed in fur-trade licenses frequently between 1769 and 1787. He may have been involved in the North West Company in this period, since his daughter was married to Simon McTavish. His son, Charles Chaboillez, was born in 1772 and went to work for the North West Company in 1793, becoming a partner prior to 1799. His narrative of 1797-98 describes a meeting with Netnokwa and her family, although he does not identify Tanner (Wallace 1934: 432; Hickerson 1959, 6: 275, 199, 374) It is likely that this would have been after his encounter with her described in the Tanner narrative. The name Laframboise is recorded in sources on the Great Lakes fur trade, but no one with that name has been noted in relation to Grand Portage.

Another trader noted at Grand Portage at this time was Joseph Lecuyer. Later evidence shows that he first came to the post in 1794, in partnership with Daniel Sutherland, the agent of the North West Company, as a summer trader who traded not with Indians, but with employees of the company and their competitors. From 1795 to 1798 he was



outfitted by the North West Company. The company charged a 50% markup on the Sterling price of dry goods. Other goods and rum were charged the Montreal price. Lecuyer traded goods for buffalo robes and elk skins as well as for *bons*, essentially an order against the accounts of men with the company. He accumulated 30 to 40 packs of skins every year, but most of his profit came from *bons* (Nute 1940: 146). During his last year as a trader at Grand Portage, there was another trader at Grand Portage who operated in the same way as Lecuyer, although his name has not been recorded.

Clues to the nature of the trade taking place in the late 1790s can be found in a scattering of financial records kept by the North West Company in that period. A document entitled "General Abstract of Pieces sent into the NW Outfit 1797," includes a listing of 106 pieces for "Expenditure F. Charlotte," all of it provisions of various kinds designed to supply the many company employees traveling through there in the summer (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 4-5).

As we have seen in John Macdonell's account, food was an important factor at Grand Portage. Assuring adequate supplies of food and provisions at Grand Portage and Fort Charlotte was a major challenge to the fur companies. Calculating the amount of food required for the various posts in the Northwest was a tricky proposition. Early in 1798, William McGillivray worked out the amount of provisions needed for one year at these posts, including Grand Portage and Fort Charlotte. He noted that 1,080 bushels of corn were needed for summer expenditure at Grand Portage, another 300 for use in the winter. This was out of 4,000 needed for various departments and the transportation of the men beyond Grand Portage. McGillivray noted that 755 bushels had actually been on hand at Sault Ste. Marie in the fall of 1797, 1,349 bushels were on hand at Grand Portage, 265 at Fort Charlotte, and 148 were sent out on the last trip of the *Otter* to Grand Portage. Of these, 600 would be used in the winter, presumably including the Sault, which would mean that the company had on hand 1,917 bushels at various places. This meant that 2,083 bushels were needed for various uses during the coming year's outfit, as well as 1,100 bushels which would have to be carried across the portage during the winter for use the following year (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 6).

As for flour, McGillivray noted that Grand Portage would expend 260 bags during the summer and 50 during the winter and Lecuyer as part of his activities would use another 20, out of 520 used at various places during the year. On hand at Grand Portage the previous fall there had been 183 bags. The sailing vessel *Charlotte* had carried another 28 bags on its last trip to the portage. Seventy bags would have been expended so that there would be 141 bags on hand. Thus, 379 bags were wanted for the current year, as well as another 101 to be transported across the portage for the following year (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 7). Determining exactly how this flour and corn was used at Grand Portage is another matter worth more detailed investigation.



## **The Heyday of Grand Portage: 1797-99**

It is likely that Grand Portage was at its busiest in the 1790s and early 1800s, although this has yet to be determined statistically. The North West Company and later, the XY Company, were at their peak of competition. Dozens of canoes arrived there yearly with cargoes from Montreal. Sailing vessels docked at the fort throughout the summer. Substantial numbers of men were stationed there during the winter doing a variety of tasks including transporting goods across the portage in anticipation of the following winter's trade at posts all across the Northwest. As it happens, this period would call an end to Grand Portage's role as a major center of trade. It also happens that this period is the best documented in surviving records, both in terms of summer activities and in terms of year-round trade.

One notable source for Grand Portage is the inventory taken at the site in June 1797 (OA, NWC Inventory, June 1797). The document can provide useful information on Grand Portage, though it appears to be missing one or more pages at the end. Such inventories were done regularly at this time of year to record the goods and equipment at trading posts at the end of the trading year, usually prior to the arrival of new merchandise from Montreal. The 1797 inventory consists of 18 pages and contains a list of merchandise, supplies such as gum, bar and watape, medicines, food, including rice, barley, and green peas, utensils, cattle, and blacksmith's tools. This is intended to be a full inventory of the post rather than merely a list of merchandise, as the inclusion of objects such as kettles listed as "unserviceable" and a broken boiler and saws makes evident. Thus, while it might provide useful information to compare to the inventories of other posts, it provides no easy way to distinguish between merchandise stored at the post for trade with the Grand Portage Ojibwe and those intended to be sent to other posts throughout the Northwest.

Much of what is known about the trade at Grand Portage in the 1790s and the early 1800s come from surviving letters describing the summer activities of shipping goods and receiving furs from various posts throughout the Northwest. In passing, these letters convey information about the trade and other activities at Grand Portage. Some of the correspondence from the late 1790s concerns the attempts by the North West Company to find a new headquarters and a new canoe route west from Lake Superior.

It is often explained that this effort was due to the knowledge that Jay's Treaty in 1794 had confirmed that Grand Portage lay within United States territory. However, since the North West Company was not prepared to cease its trading operations throughout the Fond du Lac region, south of the presumed border, and did not do so until 1816, the reason for the move may have also been a competitive one, a desire to find a trade route that no other trading company was using and which it could safely monopolize with government support through a charter. Food might have been another factor. The extensive food-production facility that would later be evident at Fort William, may not have been possible within the small compass of Grand Portage or in its micro-climate.

One letter concerning the desired move was written by a company partner on August 26, 1797, to other partners from Grand Portage. It survives in a copy in the 1797-98 journal of the Red River trader, Charles Chaboillez, perhaps the same individual mentioned by John Tanner earlier (see Appendix 2; NAC, MG 19, C1, v. 1, Masson Collection, Chaboillez Journal). It may have been written by William McGillivray or Alexander Mackenzie. In it, the author of the letter noted that a Mr. McKenzie (possibly Alexander Mackenzie), had examined the Pigeon River, looking for a new route. It had been found to be “impracticable.” However, this McKenzie had heard “such accounts from the Indians of the road leading by the Roche de Bout [Standing Rock]” to the Bois Blan[c] [Basswood Lake] that he has been tempted to take a jaunt that way.” He was expected to return in eight or nine days.

This is the first mention found of the Roche Debout, a landmark referred to many times in the next 30 years. The description suggests that the place was found somewhere along the Lake Superior shore towards Fort William, although the exact location is not clear. It is possible that it was Mt. McKay or Thunder Cape, which were prominent places along the lakeshore noted by early travelers (Delafield 1943: 399, 449; Agassiz 1974: 80, 83). But there are other possibilities along the rocky shores of the bay and the lake. On present-day maps, east of Thunder Bay, there is a Roche Debout Point, adjacent to Sheesheeb Bay and Otter Cove, between Black Bay and the Nipigon Strait. A 19th-century map of the area describes the islands south to Roche Debout Point as the Roche Debout Islands (Arthur 1973: lxxiv). It is not clear, however, that this was the location referred to, since, as we will see, there are other fur-trade sources which refer to a Roche Debout closer to Grand Marais. This may mean that the term was a generic one used several different rocky formations found along the Lake Superior shore. However, it is also possible that, in the interests of establishing a monopoly on a new route west from Lake Superior, the North West Company may have sought a route that cut across from Basswood Lake to Lake Superior southwest of Grand Portage.

The search for a new route west from Lake Superior is also mentioned by Roderick McKenzie in his reminiscences, although he states that his examination of the new route occurred in the spring of the year, possibly in the spring of 1798 (NAC, MG 19, C1, v. 32A, Masson Collection, R. McKenzie, Reminiscences, 89-91; McKenzie 1960: 46). McKenzie wrote that on his first trip from Grand Portage to Rainy Lake in the spring, he met a “family of Indians at the height of land from whom I accidentally learned the existence of a water communication a little way behind [and] parallel to this, extending from Lake Superior to Lake La Pluie which is navigable for large canoes and, if adopted would avoid the Grand Portage.” He noted that this was “excellent information,” and that he immediately engaged one of the Indians to meet him at Lac la Croix to show him the new route. The Indian did not appear, but having received good instructions he proceeded on the route, arrived at a company post on the way, and was able to travel to Kaministikwia and from there go to Grand Portage, “being the first who reached there from Lac La Plouie [sic?] direct by water communication.” No mention is made of the Roche Debout in this description, so it appears that the original idea of finding a route from Basswood Lake to another place along the shore had turned out to be wrong.

The decision was made to shift the company headquarters to the mouth of the Kaministikwia River to make use of this new trade route. Perhaps to assure that the site used would be theirs exclusively, North West Company leaders negotiated a “conveyance” for land at Kaministikwia from “Chiefs and Old men of the Chipeway and Kichicamingue [kichi gami, or Lake Superior] Indians at Grand Portage,” a document signed on July 30, 1798, and later filed with the British government (NAC, MG 10, Indian Affairs, v. 266, p. 163, 028-163, 378; see also Tronrud and Epp 1995: 36). Although specified as being Grand Portage Ojibwe, it is clear that the area at Kaministikwia was considered to be part of their territory. This is in keeping with other evidence about the broad extent of the region used by Grand Portage people. In other words the people of Grand Portage were, essentially, also the people of Kaministikwia.

As shown in the illustration on the cover of this report, the agreement was signed by Duncan McGillivray, Henry Munro, Duncan Cameron, Pierre Belleau, J. C. Stewart, and Jean Baptiste Cadotte, among others representing the company. Munro, as will be seen, was in charge of Grand Portage at the time. As for the Native signers, this document is one of the few documentary sources from this period that actually names Ojibwe people of the Grand Portage region. Sorting out the information provided is complicated. Signing the document for the Grand Portage people were ten named individuals, nine of whom signed with totemic or clan mark, the usual way among the Ojibwe of indicating a public identity. Five appear to be of the Catfish clan, two of a bird which could be the Crane clan, three of the Bullhead clan, and one shows no clan mark.

The names of these individuals are given in Table 2, together with possible translations and identifications. Understanding the names given here is complicated by the inconsistencies of the way in which Ojibwe sounds were recorded by English speakers. As in the case of other such sources one must take into account widely varying possibilities for both consonants and vowels. This being said, it would appear that two of the individuals shown—Otakacoin and Essebaneoyiane—have names which bear similarities to the Ojibwe names of Peau de Chat, and Attikonse or Little Caribou, prominent leaders of the Grand Portage Ojibwe in the 19th century. It is conceivable that the Peau de Chat of the 1820s could have been old enough to have been on both lists, while it does not appear that the later Attikonse could have been a signer of this 1798 document. Another name, Ni-zotain, may correspond to the name Nizhote or Nieeshotai, or Two Hearts, a Rainy Lake leader from the 1820s. It is not known if these were the same individuals.

Ojibwe names, especially those of prominent individuals, were sometimes passed on either to their sons or to others in naming ceremonies. In addition, Ojibwe people often had more than one name used throughout their lives in various contexts. Traders often knew individuals by names other than those by which they were commonly known among the Ojibwe, either because another name was easier to say or because it referred to an honorific or an epithet they had given him. This may have been the case with the various individuals known as the Premier, who succeeded the well-known leader of the

1760s and were sometimes groomed for the role by traders and government officials.<sup>26</sup> In another case, the Peau de Chat noted at Rainy Lake in 1829 was listed with an Ojibwe name—Miskweconeá—that does not translate as “the skin of a wild cat,” but rather as “dresses in red” (miskwakanaie; Baraga 1992: 2: 251; HBCA, B.105/e/9, fo. 11d), similar to a name given to the chief Illinois, according to the Jesuit Father, Nicholas Fremiot, in 1849 (Arthur 1973: 14), a reference to the military-style coats that he received from traders twice a year. Peau de Chat is listed in 1829 as a member of the Catfish clan while the individual shown on the 1798 document bears a Bullhead symbol. It is possible that the Bullhead group was related to the Catfish clan, or that the symbols on the 1798 document were simply variations of the same clan designation.

Membership in clans, which was passed from fathers to children, may be helpful in identifying individuals. At Rainy Lake in 1829, in addition to the leader Neeshotai of the Muskrat clan, there was a younger man of the same name who was a member of the Catfish clan (HBCA, B.105/e/9, fo. 6). In principle, people of European fathers and Ojibwe mothers, such as L’Espagnol, the prominent 19th-century Grand Portage leader, would not have had a traditional clan mark, although in some areas the children of Dakota fathers were considered members of the Wolf clan and those of American fathers were part of the Eagle clan. There were other cases where individuals claimed a clan membership through a dream (Cochrane 2000). It is interesting to note that Nizotain did not sign the 1798 document with his clan mark, which could have indicated that he was of mixed European ancestry.

Although he later became a clan leader in the Grand Portage area, L’Espagnol, also known as Ays-pa-ahng (It is high), born in the 1780s, would not likely have been old enough to be a signer of this document (Cochrane 2000). There is some intriguing evidence that may link him to one of the people on the list. One of L’Espagnol’s wives was given the baptismal name of Josette Otakakisan (Timothy Cochrane, personal communication 2005). At the time her name was recorded in the mid-19th century, many Native people, through the influence of church and government, took English first names and Ojibwe last names. The last name was often the name of the individual’s father. Thus, Josette Otakakisan may have been the daughter of a man named Otakakisan. The name bears certain similarities to the Otakacoine in the 1798 agreement (Table 2). Both names are similar to the name of a later clan leader at Grand Portage, Attikons or Little Caribou (p. 12). The signer of the document could not have been this later clan leader, but names such as this, as noted, were sometimes repeated from generation to generation. One way or another, it would make sense for L’Espagnol to have been married to the daughter of an earlier leader in the community. Links like this were common. L’Espagnol’s own stepson, Patickushung, was married to a daughter of Peau de Chat (Cochrane 2000).

The role of Jean Baptiste Cadotte—the son of Jean Baptiste Cadot (usually spelled differently)—at the negotiation can be documented in other sources. As noted earlier, the

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<sup>26</sup> J. D. Cameron’s Lac La Pluie Report for 1829-30 states that Ain nee com e gish kong or Young Premier “was made a Chief by Governor Cas[s].” He was a great-grandson of the original Premier (HBCA, B.105/e/9).

**Table 2**  
**Ojibwe Signers of the 1798 Agreement**

Ojibwe Name	Clan Symbol	Possible Ojibwe Words and Meanings	Similar Names from Historical Sources
Nanjokabaoui	Catfish	nij, nijo=two nanji= I slide or fly down gâbaw=stand (Baraga 1992, 1: 243, 2: 277, )	Ma-ji-ga-bow-i, Forestanding Man, Leech Lake (Winchell 1911: 716)
Katacouigoin	Crane or other bird	kagâgi=raven migwan=feather (Baraga 1992, 1: 98, 206)	
Ache-candaga	Crane or other bird	oshki=new, recent, fresh, young andekons= young crow gondâgon=throat (Baraga 1992, 2: 32, 133, 141, 335)	Osh kau dah gance, in Grand Portage census, 1825 (MHS, Schoolcraft Papers, container 61, R. 49); possibly the same as Scundagance (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, March 29, 1824)
Otakacoine	Catfish	atikons=young reindeer (Baraga 1992, 2: 55) or little caribou	Attikonse, Little Caribou, Grand Portage chief from 1850s (WHC 1904, 3: 354-56)
Kaba-djisine	Catfish	kâgâgishib=raven-duck; cormorant kabê=--all, the whole kabe-gijig= all day (Baraga 1992, 2: 178, 179)	Kay bay ge shig, Bois Forte Ojibwe with allotment under the 1889 Nelson Act (Richner 2002: 18-19, 22, 179) Gah gay ge shig, Everlasting Day, Red Lake, 1889 (U.S. House of Representatives 1890: 29)
Ni-zotain	not given	nijo=two odê=his heart (Baraga 1992, 1: 131, 2: 288)	Neesh O tai, Old Two Hearts, Muskrat clan, who traded at Rainy Lake; also Neesh O tai, Catfish clan, Lake Vermilion; 1829-1830 (HBCA, B.105/e/9, fo. 4d)
Cououiouizine	Catfish	kwiwisens=boy (Baraga 1992, 1: 33)	Que we zewnse, Little Boy, Rattlesnake tribe, Whitefish Lake, near Lake of the Woods, 1829-30 (HBCA, B.105/e/9, fo. 8d); Que-we-zance, warrior at Red Lake, 1864 (Winchell 1911: 725)
Oguiman-suinagouse	Catfish	ogima=chief jingoss=weasel (Baraga 1992, 1: 48, 285)	
Essebaneoyiane	Bullhead	essibaniwaiân=skin of the wild cat (Baraga 1992, 1: 115)	Peau de Chat (Skin of the Cat), Grand Portage chief, (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Dec. 17, 1823); probably the same as Ace e ban e wayan, in Grand Portage census, 1825 (MHS, Schoolcraft Papers, container 61, R. 49)
Egikyzigoyby	Bullhead	gigo=fish gigik=cedar tree gijig=day or sky gâbaw =stand (Baraga 1992, 1: 45, 67, 103, 243)	

Note: These identifications are preliminary and subject to further investigation.

wife of the elder Jean Baptiste Cadot was a member of the Catfish clan. This would have allowed the younger Cadotte to claim connection through his mother to the leaders of the Grand Portage region who gathered to sign the document. According to William Warren, Cadotte, who was at that time a partner in the North West Company, served a useful role in persuading the leaders to sign the document allowing the building of the new post. They were, according to Warren, puzzled by the idea of a border dividing up their land “as they claimed the country as their own, and felt as though they had a right to locate their traders wherever they pleased.” Cadotte was said to have explained the matter to the satisfaction of the leaders and was later rewarded by Alexander Mackenzie in relieving him of an earlier indebtedness (Warren 1984: 292-93).

Warren places Alexander Mackenzie at the negotiation, even though he did not sign the document. The following year, Mackenzie lent credence to Warren’s account, in a letter to the proprietors of the North West Company of June 16, 1799, in which he noted that before he left Grand Portage the previous year he and other members of the company purchased “from the Indians a Track on either side of the River Camenestiquoia for which we got a regular deed.” Mackenzie states that the company was seeking government recognition of this land transfer and for one at Sault Ste. Marie, another means to insure that the land purchased could not be used by its competitors and part of an attempt get a government charter like that of the HBC (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 74-75).

The fact that the trading company was seeking some sort of government recognition may explain a great deal about the move by the company to Kaministikwia. It may also explain why company officials played up the move as the result of “discovering” a new route even though the route had been used earlier by the French. It is quite possible that the route had been known for some time, since it passed through Lac Des Chiens, or Dog Lake, which was part of the region where Grand Portage Ojibwe may have wintered at various times. Consequently, North West Company traders had also operated there, though they would perhaps have claimed that they did not know that it was part of a possible canoe route to the west.

Knowledge of trade in the region of Lac des Chiens was evident in the journal of David Thompson, kept during his first visit to Grand Portage in July 1797. Thompson stated that a Mr. McLellan, probably Archibald, was to be sent as a clerk to Dog Lake (OA, David Thompson Journals, R. 1, Series 1, Bound Volume 3, July 22, 1797). He noted, at the same time, that partner Simon Fraser and clerk “Mr. Munro Doctor,” obviously the signer of the 1798 agreement, were at Grand Portage. Fraser and Munro were also listed at Grand Portage in the 1798 North West Company roster, along with clerk Alexander Stewart and interpreter Zachary Cloutier (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 20-23).<sup>27</sup>

Thompson provided few other details about the trade at Grand Portage. On his departure in August Thompson noted at Partridge Carrying Place, “a very small stack of Hay—a good deal of Grass left unmowed” (OA, David Thompson Journals, R. 1, Series 1, Bound

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<sup>27</sup> The roster also lists David Thompson at Grand Portage, though his journals only show him there in the summers of 1797 and 1798.



Volume 3, Aug. 9, 1797). Thompson was at Grand Portage again in 1798, arriving on June 7 and leaving on July 14. During his stay he recorded the comings and goings of company canoes and vessels. On June 11, a competing trader L'Etang arrived with 19 packs of furs (OA, David Thompson Journals, Roll 1, Series 1, Bound Volume 5).

At this time opposition was developing at Grand Portage and throughout the region. The year 1799 saw the coalescence of the company's competitors into what would become the XY Company. A key figure on the ground for this firm and one about which little has been written was L'Etang, a trader who was mentioned at numerous places at various times, in a manner reminiscent of the famed *Scarlet Pimpernel*, of the novel by the Baroness Orczy. Jean Baptiste Perrault records that L'Etang opposed the North West Company at Red Cedar or Cass Lake in 1795, at Thief River in 1796-97, in the Red River in 1797-98, and at the Clearwater River (near Red Lake) in 1798-99 (MPHC, 37: 571, 573, 574, 575, 576).

Mackenzie described L'Etang as an "old man" who appeared to be associated with Forsyth, Richardson, & Co., at least partly, since their goods at Fort Charlotte were "stored together" (Lamb 1970: 496). A good possibility is that L'Etang was Dominique Brunet *dit* l'Etang, a man with a long history in the Great Lakes trade, but contracts or other documents recording his involvement with the XY Co. trade have not been found. The placement of L'Etang in the Upper Mississippi region in this period may suggest that he was Eustache L'Etang, who was hired by Parker, Gerrard, and Ogilvy on March 15, 1798, to go to the Mississippi (RAPQ, 1944-45, 344). However, since this contract was signed in Montreal and Perrault's L'Etang was already in the Mississippi region, this could be someone else, possibly a relative. Alexander Mackenzie wrote in the North West Company letterbook that L'Etang was trading at Sturgeon Fort on the Saskatchewan River, with Charles Oakes Ermatinger in 1798-99, but apparently not very successfully (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 52; Lamb 1970: 478). It does not appear that this could be the same L'Etang described in the Perrault narrative. François Victoire Malhiot referred to "the nephew of M. L'Etang" on the Chippewa River during the winter of 1804-05. This may have been Eustache L'Etang. Further work must be done to document the various members of the L'Etang family.

Writing to John Sayer on August 9, 1799, Alexander Mackenzie reported that L'Etang "has got a Hangard & House erected by men at a Dollar pr. Day." The construction of such a permanent structure would suggest that someone would be left to maintain these buildings during the winter, but it is likely that L'Etang himself wintered at a more distant trading post, possibly in the Fond du Lac region. Later evidence suggests that the person left in charge was Mezière La Haye. Little has been found about him thus far, aside from the fact that he was a clerk in the North West Company's Nipigon department in 1798 (NWC 1940: 55). Apparently he had joined the opposition as early as 1799, when Alexander Mackenzie (Lamb 1970: 489; NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 71) wrote to company partners about the opposing trade led by Forsyth, Richardson & Co., stating that Mezière La Haye was one of two of the firm's clerks "that ever wintered above St. Maries" an indication that in stretching to compete with the North West

Company, the new company was being forced to hire many young and inexperienced men.

In charge of the North West Company's outfit at Grand Portage by 1798 was Dr. Henry Munro (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 22). The 1799 roster shows seven men working there, although it is likely that this list included only clerks, interpreters, and other skilled men leaving out what must have been a larger number of unskilled wintering engagés (Masson 1960, 1: 66). An 1805 list, apparently consisting only of engagés or voyageurs, contains 35 men (Masson 1960, 1: 413). Details about the management of the post during the year are found in the North West Company letterbook for 1799-1802, which contains a variety of letters written by company agents Alexander Mackenzie, William McGillivray, and others from various locations, mainly Grand Portage, during the summer months. The purpose of these letters was to keep company partners informed of events both east and west. They can now be used to piece together the history of trade at Grand Portage.

On his way to Grand Portage from Montreal, while on a visit to Mackinac, Alexander Mackenzie wrote to the firm of McTavish, Frobisher and Company in Montreal on June 4, 1799, informing the company that at Sault Ste. Marie he had met with Captain Bennet of the *Otter*, which had just arrived after an eighteen-day trip from Grand Portage. Bennet had wintered at the Pigeon River. Mackenzie noted that Bennet had left the people there all well, "the business of the winter completed. We lost several head of Cattle owing to the hay having Rotted last season" (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 67-68).

Mackenzie reported the news from all departments due to the arrival of the winter's express which left Athabasca on October 1 of the previous year and arrived at Grand Portage on April 2. In addition, Dr. Henry Munro, who was in charge of Grand Portage, reported that it was a severe winter: "The Indians suffer'd much from cold & hunger however the Portage & small Posts round will make good returns" (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 48, 56).

Mackenzie returned to the Sault and left on the return trip of the *Otter*, arriving at Grand Portage on June 13 (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 67, 68, 70). He wrote to McTavish, Frobisher & Co. on that day, reporting that since his arrival he had been busy taking the inventories of the goods on hand there. He noted, in particular, that there was steel on hand, but no iron "which prevented the smith working at his Trade thro' the winter." So far the identity of the blacksmith stationed at Grand Portage that year has not been found.

Mackenzie noted that there was a quantity of wolf and moose skins and a variety of other robes and skins that would be packed up for the *Otter's* next trip. Presumably these would have been furs obtained at Grand Portage, since it would have been early in the summer for there to have been other returns from trading posts. The only wintering partner to have arrived by that date was John Sayer from the Fond du Lac department, who arrived on June 19, possibly in advance of the men and furs from his department

(NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 68; see also 80, letter of June 19 to Duncan Cameron).

Writing to William McGillivray on June 15, 1799 (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 64-65), Mackenzie provided further information on the subsidiary posts around Grand Portage, noting that “at this place there is 9 Packs exclusive of Green skins, Colin 10 Packs from Lac des Chiens [Dog Lake], parcht. [parchment] Included. Janvier 4 Packs Do. Cloutier 23 Packs Do.” Mackenzie also noted that Archy (Archibald McLellan) had arrived from Rainy Lake with 30 Packs of furs. He had heard also from La Tour, who, later evidence indicates, had wintered at Basswood Lake and obtained ten packs of furs by early May.

More can be learned about the individuals mentioned here as having charge of these subsidiary posts. Antoine Collin was employed by the company that year at a salary of 600 livres. He may have been related to Joseph Collin, an employee of the North West Company on the Assiniboine and Red Rivers around this time (Gates 1965: 130 fn; NWC 1940: 53). Collin was part of an important family of mixed ancestry associated for many years with the North West Company and later the Hudson’s Bay Company at their Fort William post, during which time he was known especially as a canoemaker. Ruth Swan and Edward Jerome suggest that Antoine Collin may have been a member of the Collin *dit* Laliberté family, recorded in the Great Lakes fur trade as early as 1713 (Swan and Jerome 1998: 313).

Antoine Collin was later known as a canoemaker at Fort William, but no evidence has been found in North West Company records prior to 1811 to record any canoemaking on his part. During this early period he was described exclusively as a trader. Antoine Collin appears to have been born around 1766, said to be the son of a Joseph Collin, possibly the same Joseph Colin *dit* Laliberté hired to go to Grand Portage in 1758. Antoine himself was married to a woman recorded in later sources as “Mishaha Weyers (Latour).” She may have been related to Charles Latour, the clerk and interpreter who manned the Basswood Lake post for the company, overseen by the Rainy Lake post. Even though a satellite of the Rainy Lake post, it may have received visits from Indians associated with Grand Portage. As noted earlier, Dog Lake, where Collin was located in 1799 was located along the later-used canoe route from Fort Kaministikwia and was accessible, according to Major Stephen Long, to Grand Portage by an inland route along the Whitefish [and Arrow] River (Kane et al. 1978: 227-28). Interestingly, one of Antoine’s sons, Michel, stated in an affidavit in 1874 that he was born at Fort William in 1799. Although there was no Fort William post at that date, his father’s presence at Dog Lake, up the Kaministikwia River from the later location of Fort William, would suggest that Michel may have been born in that area (Swan and Jerome 1998: 312).

Cloutier is clearly Zacharie Cloutier, and may very well be the same Cloutier who was in charge of the North West Company post at Grand Portage in 1785. He was employed by the company in 1799 at a salary of 600 livres. The identity of the trader named Janvier is not known. There was an employee of the North West Company named Janvier Malhiote who is credited with merchandise in a company account book for Grand Portage or

Kaministikwia in July 1803 (OA, NWC ledger). There is also a Pascal Jeanvain listed in the same account book. Cloutier and Janvier may have been at other subsidiary posts in the region.

This information shows that in 1799—with the six packs of furs from Grand Portage, the ten packs of furs from Collin at Dog Lake, Janvier’s four packs, Cloutier’s twenty four packs, and the ten packs from Latour at Basswood Lake—the Indian people of the region of Grand Portage and the area east of Rainy Lake had produced 54 packs of various kinds of furs.

In the fall of 1799, the North West Company post was to be in the charge again of Dr. Henry Munro during the winter of 1799-1800. Writing to John Sayer on Aug. 9, 1799, Alexander Mackenzie noted that: “The Dr. has been very ill these few days past. I am alarmed about the situation of this place. There will not be less than £25,000 in property here in the Course of the winter which is a great risk & heavy charge for any one man. They wont see many Indians some of them go to Lac des Chiens where I have sent old Marchard & others toward the Lac des Bois blanc where La Tour is again to winter” (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 91).

This statement is further evidence of the degree to which Indian people from Grand Portage spent the winter away from the portage at locations like Dog Lake or towards Basswood Lake. The individual named Marchard may be Michel Marchard, who was on the company’s roster at Rainy Lake in 1799. A trader named Marchard wintered at the mouth of the Fond du Lac River (present-day Duluth-Superior) in 1791-92 and was later employed by L’Etang at Lake Patchatsaban, north of Lake Winibigoshish in northern Minnesota (Masson 1960, 1: 66; Perrault 1978: 98).

Apparently stationed with Munro that winter was Charles Hesse. Writing in January 1800, McGillivray noted that he would expect a letter from Munro to be waiting for his arrival at the Sault in spring. “Be so good as to make my compliments to Mr. Hesse or any other of the Gentlemen who may be with you.” Hesse was a clerk and interpreter on the Rivière La Biche in 1798 and on the Lower Red River in 1805 (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 20-23, 100-101; Masson 1960, 1: 401).

### **Statistical Data for 1799 and After**

For the period beginning in 1799, there are few account books or other business records that would provide statistical data on the North West Company’s operation in the Grand Portage area. There are no existing records like the 1797 inventory, that would give a record of what merchandise and supplies were present at the North West Company’s Grand Portage post. However, some comparable data does survive for the XY Company. An account book for the 1799-1805 period records inventories for XY post at Grand Portage and throughout the Northwest. As shown in Table 3, aggregate data from these inventories can provide a sense of the relative importance of trading regions, including Grand Portage.

It is striking that considering only the inventory of trading posts and outfits shown on the list, Grand Portage was the most significant of all trading posts, with an inventory value of around one-third of the total for all XY posts during the 1799-1803 period. This may in part be due to the fact that goods appear to have been shipped to the post during summer and fall every year, some of them to be carried over the portage and available for early shipment west in the spring. In addition goods were kept on hand for many more activities than took place at any other trading post.

In addition to this aggregate data, specific detailed XY inventories, like the North West Company's 1797 inventory, survive in an account book for the 1799-1803 period. While these inventories do not provide an easy way to differentiate between supplies and trade goods, they do have the potential for understanding the fur trade at Grand Portage and elsewhere, providing information on the specific supplies, merchandise and food present at Grand Portage. Further work must be done to study these inventories in detail.

**Table 3**  
**XY Company Inventories**  
**(in Halifax currency)**

	1800	%	1801	%	1803	%	1804	%	1805	%
Grand Portage	2100.00	38.2	4116.62	32.8	7102.13	30.3	11008.31	40.0	7711.43	27.5
Kaministikwia		0.0		0.0	1022.37	4.4	595.22	2.2	98.50	0.4
Mailloux Inventory at Grand Portage		0.0	206.66	1.6	176.90	0.8	347.33	1.3	177.05	0.6
Fort Charlotte		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1970.24	7.0
Mille Lacs		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	191.53	0.7
Sault Ste. Marie		0.0	858.15	6.8	40.00	0.2	263.40	1.0	647.51	2.3
Michilimackinac	313.22	5.7		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
Fond du Lac [1803, 1804: & Dependencies]		0.0	130.47	1.0	270.00	1.2	853.01	3.1	436.12	1.6
Leech lake		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	309.26	1.1
Sandy Lake		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	173.24	0.6
Lac du Flambeau		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	91.35	0.3
Lac La Pluie [1803: & Dependencies]	548.09	10.0	568.99	4.5	2881.27	12.3	3111.65	11.3	2154.72	7.7
River Pic		0.0		0.0	284.15	1.2	213.95	0.8	147.25	0.5
Pic		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	69.95	0.2
Lake Nipigon		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	207.99	0.7
Lac Salle		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	298.94	1.1
Fort Dauphin		0.0	617.69	4.9	892.51	3.8	937.89	3.4	684.99	2.4
Red River	492.66	9.0	1767.40	14.1	2582.11	11.0	1683.30	6.1	1368.44	4.9
River La Biche		0.0	391.48	3.1		0.0		0.0		0.0
Portage de Lisle		0.0	57.32	0.5		0.0		0.0		0.0
Bottom River Winnipeg		0.0	35.57	0.3		0.0		0.0	93.42	0.3
River Winnipeg		0.0		0.0		0.0	66.90	0.2	83.53	0.3
Lake Winnipeg		0.0		0.0	591.15	2.5	304.85	1.1	191.69	0.7
Fort des Prairies		0.0	2262.08	18.0	2590.00	11.1	1605.50	5.8	1701.56	6.1
Rat River		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	165.00	0.6
English River		0.0	488.04	3.9	2283.22	9.8	2918.01	10.6	3571.66	12.8
River du Pas	1520.77	27.7		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
Athabasca	516.35	9.4	1042.77	8.3	2512.80	10.7	2998.39	10.9		0.0
Athabasca River		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	269.99	1.0
Lake Athabasca		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1335.04	4.8
Athabasca Mens Equipment		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1768.31	6.3
Peace River		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	1187.16	4.2
Slave Lake		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0	904.20	3.2
The Chats		0.0		0.0	180.02	0.8	174.06	0.6		0.0
Black River		0.0		0.0		0.0	27.24	0.1		0.0
Monataille		0.0		0.0		0.0	424.29	1.5		0.0
Subtotal, Trading Post Inventories	5491.08	100.0	12543.23	100.0	23408.62	100.0	27533.31	100.0	28010.06	100.0

	1800	%	1801	%	1803	%	1804	%	1805	%
Perseverance Stores									313.80	
Schooner Perseverance valued at							2737.78		2300.00	
Sundry Indian Credits									1002.08	
Forts & Buildings valued at									2221.88	
Debts due by Men	395.13		1192.00				4103.14		7162.36	
Subtotal	5886.21		13735.23		23408.62		34374.23		41010.18	
Due to Men	941.25		6284.82				14500.95		4543.83	
Total	4944.95		7450.41				19873.28		36466.35	

Source: Alexander Mackenzie & Co., Account Book, Minnesota Historical Society microfilm M60, Vol. 10; original in Baby Collection, University of Montreal. Slightly different versions of these same figures are found in Pendergast (1957: 146).





## 1800

During the course of the winter of 1799-1800, William McGillivray wrote to Henry Munro with instructions relating to the next year's trade. The letter was to be sent by express for Upper Canada and from there would reach Captain Bennet of the *Otter* which was wintering at the Sault. Writing on January 12, 1800, McGillivray stated that he hoped Munro's health was better. He referred to the goods that would be brought by Captain Bennet in the spring from the Sault. He noted that the goods should be kept back and not mixed with goods of which inventory was taken last fall. "I hope you have attended to this in keeping a part [apart] such articles as you have sent of the *Otter*'s last trip to Fort Charlotte. Other ways it will create great confusion" (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 100).

McGillivray's statement seems to suggest that goods were sent over the portage during the fall and winter, preparatory to the next year's trade. A variety of goods are listed at "the West End of the Portage," in the XY Company Grand Portage inventory for 1800, including high wines, sugar, shrub, tobacco, gunpowder, guns, and other trade goods (UM, Baby Collection). This recalls Alexander Mackenzie's statement published soon after this that both cattle and oxen had been tried for carrying goods over the portage in the summer, but "without success." They were, he said "only useful for light bulky articles; or for transporting upon sledges, during the winter, whatever goods may remain there, especially provision, of which it is usual to have a year's stock on hand" (Lamb 1970: 97-98).

McGillivray noted that "the Opposition are very industrious in picking up men and taking up a great many goods." In addition:

They have arranged with a person to go to the Portage on the footing that we have Faniant & Bouché, for the conveniency of being near our camp. It is likely they will try to build somewhere on the point, where the Montreal canoes usually pass the Summer or about the premier's scaffold. This cannot be allowed, and you had better keep possession by erecting a couple of Tents on the proper places & getting out the Montreal canoes (that are remaining there from last summer) on the point. The Fences at the other side ought to be repaired before Mr. Ogilvy's station and the Ground partly ploughed up and sown or planted; also the Picketing and Fences at this end, particularly those adjoining their buildings. Any thing else you may see necessary you will of course get done. The Roads were horribly bad last year and will require a great deal of repairs (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 100-01).

In this letter McGillivray refers to several additional men with an association with Grand Portage. Starting in 1799, Joseph Fagniant or Faniant and Jean Marie Boucher, both of Berthier, had contracted with the North West Company to guide the company's canoes from Lachine every year to Grand Portage (MHS, Gérin-Lajoie Collection, Contract between Faniant, Boucher, and NWC, Jan. 25, 1799). Fagniant may have been the individual of the same name who in 1782 was an employee of the trader Jean-Etienne

Wadden or Wadin, who was shot to death by Peter Pond or one of his men at Lac La Rouge in 1782 (Wallace 1934: 504).

Fagniant and Boucher were replacements for Lecuyer. Like him, while at Grand Portage the men would carry on a commerce with the clerks and engagés of the company, trading with them a variety of merchandise furnished by the North West Company in return for buffalo robes and moose skins and other furs that they may have been entitled to trade. They were also allowed to sell goods on credit to company employees that would be charged against their accounts with the company. Any furs or skins they obtained would be turned over to the North West Company for sale. Any profits from the enterprise would be paid a third each to Fagniant and Boucher and a third to the North West Company. After three years the contract was renewed by Boucher alone. Interestingly this later contract of December 22, 1802, states that Boucher would carry on this commerce at Kaministikwia “or farther in the lands of the North West,” an anticipation of the move of the company headquarters the following year (MHS, Canadian Notaries Collection).

In both contracts, Fagniant and Boucher were specifically prohibited from giving any credit that would be payable in furs, “either to whites or Indians, under any pretext.” This would suggest that they had little to do with the Indian people of Grand Portage, although there is a possibility that their presence may have provided Indians with an opportunity for some illegal trade.

Like Lecuyer before them much of the business of Fagniant and Boucher was earned through *bons* or charges by employees against their account with the North West Company.<sup>28</sup> William McGillivray wrote: “The greatest part of the few Robes & skins brought out of the country have been paid for Billets.” Fagniant and Boucher also aided in shipping the furs back from Grand Portage. On July 19, 1800, William McGillivray wrote that “Fagniant leaves this [place] with 8 mackinac Canoes containing 284 Packs. 5 men in each” (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 144, 159).

The person described by McGillivray as coming to compete was St. Valier Mailloux, a merchant of Berthier. Even though it appears that Mailloux came to Grand Portage in the summer of 1800, the earliest contract that has been found for Mailloux with Forsyth, Richardson & Co. dates from December 18, 1800 (MHS, Canadian Notaries Collection). In the contract Mailloux agreed to travel to Grand Portage for five years to carry on trade there. He was to be supplied merchandise and food supplies by Forsyth, Richardson & Co. at set prices. He was authorized to sell goods to all the employees of the company who had wages due them, but not to those who were in debt. To all others, meaning employees of other companies, he was permitted to sell goods on the best terms he could manage. He was forbidden to furnish goods on credit. Profits were to be divided half and half between Mailloux and the company. Mailloux’s contract also provided that he would serve the company during the winter in engaging men (Nelson 2002: 5, 6,-7, 212-13).

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<sup>28</sup> William McGillivray refers to a list of “monies paid to Fagniant & Bouche this summer.” See William McGillivray to Wintering Partners, Aug. 9, 1800, NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 159.

Why it was necessary to have a merchant whose sole duty was to trade with the company employees is not clear. It may have been that the burden of putting together the various outfits was too great for company clerks at Grand Portage and it was thought useful to contract out the functions of providing goods to the individual employees. Although it is not spelled out in his first contract, Boucher's duties extended beyond Grand Portage. In 1800 he continued on to meet the brigades of canoes coming from the Northwest through Rainy Lake. Writing to the company partners on June 11, 1800, William McGillivray wrote: "The bearer J. M. Bouché arrived here yesterday & goes off to day to meet the Canoes coming out as he is apprehensive of being followed by the people whom the opposition have in the same capacity he means to go as far as the flagon hoping to get out of their reach, should he be early enough to get that length before the Brigades come out." The Flagon or Flacon Portage, now Bottle Portage, was just east of Lac La Croix (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 129; Lamb 1970: 103).

As indicated in this letter, Boucher's traveling beyond Grand Portage was motivated by the fact of having opposition. There was a strong motivation for Boucher and Mailloux to attempt to trade with the opponent's employees. Undoubtedly, there were not the kind of restrictions on this trade that there were on the trade with the North West Company men. Whoever could meet the canoes coming from the west manned by men who were hungry for a splurge or a wanted to obtain merchandise, had a jump on the opposition. He also provided an opportunity for the bourgeois to treat their men. On return to the company headquarters now being constructed at Kaministikwia in 1803, Alexander Henry the Younger noted that at Prairie Portage, located at the Height of Land between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg, he encountered Jean Marie Boucher "who had built a Hut and Oven to bake Bread to sell to the Winterers en passant for Dressed Leather, Buffaloe Roabes &c. He had a great stock of Provisions and other articles for sale. He dun'd us with News from Canada. All of which we knew much better than himself, having met our dispatches from Montreal &c. at Lac la Pluie. Those petty traders are realy a nuisance on the route." Later at Dog Portage he found "another petty trader but he was not of so loquacious a turn of mind as Bouche. We therefore soon got rid of him by taking wherewith to treat our men of liquor and provision" (Gough 1988, 1: 143, see also Kane et al. 1978: 222). Apparently Boucher continued to operate in this manner in the region for many years, because Gabriel Franchère (1954: 264) and his companions, in traveling down the Kaministikwia River in 1812, passed over a portage below Dog Lake. He wrote: "At the foot of the rapids we found a sort of restaurant or cabaret, kept by a man named Boucher. We treated the men to a little *eau de vie* and breakfasted on some detestable sausages poisoned with salt."

A major concern of company managers at Grand Portage in 1799 and 1800 was the supply of birch-bark canoes. Obtaining enough canoes for the brigades going west, and preventing the opposition from obtaining an adequate supply was of continuing importance. Canoes were obtained from a variety of sources. Some were brought from as far away as Michilimackinac, but many, as indicated earlier by Alexander Henry and Alexander Mackenzie, were made by Indian people in the region of Grand Portage and Rainy Lake. Those purchased in the area had to be contracted for in advance. In his letter of June 16, 1799, to the wintering partners in the North West Company, Mackenzie notes

Cloutier had “made engagements” for 26 canoes at Grand Portage, while Latour had made, apparently at Basswood Lake, arrangements for nine. Canoes had also been engaged for at Rainy Lake (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 77).

There appeared to be a great deal of strategy involved in obtaining canoes. If the competition (Ogilvy & Co.) were “prevented taking Canoes coming out it will put them to the expence of sending Canoes across the Portage, but keeping them from getting canoes going in after having passed the Long Portage is saving them by saving their goods as their Mackinac Canoes are as Good if not better than the North Ones.” During the winter the supply of canoes was of concern to William McGillivray. Writing to Henry Munro in January 1800, McGillivray wrote: “You will endeavour to have all the Intelligence possible from the Land in regard to the situation where the Indians will make their canoes and secure all the makers about the Portage that are worth attending to” (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 77, 101)

Once he reached Grand Portage in June 1800, McGillivray learned that: “The Opposition have 26 Canoes [coming from] Mack. & probably more—therefore if the Indians have made many more than we want it will be an useless expence to get the whole but all on this side Saguinaga ought at all events be received—Beaulieu I suppose will exceed 50 canoes here but its poor Bark.” No details have been found on the identity of Beaulieu, but he appears to have been an employee whose sole work involved making canoes (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 124).

François Boileau was employed at Grand Portage for 1,000 livres in 1799 (Masson 1960, 1: 66). There were a number of Beaulieus associated with the North West Company in this period. Basil or Bazil Beaulieu was employed at Lac du Flambeau in 1805. This was possibly Bazile Hudon dit Beaulieu the father of later Minnesota traders Clement and Paul Beaulieu. Paul Beaulieu was licensed to trade at Lake Vermilion in 1826. There was also a Joseph Beaulieu, a foreman and summerman in the Lower Red River in 1805 (B. White 1978: 33; Masson 1960, 1: 401).

Evidence from later in 1800 suggests that Beaulieu the canoemaker wintered at Grand Portage. Writing to Kenneth Mackenzie, newly in charge at Grand Portage, from Sault Ste. Marie on August 26, 1800, William McGillivray (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 180) stated that he would “purchase some pork at St. Josephs to enable you to pay Beaulieu and some by the occasion.” This would suggest that Beaulieu was wintering there in 1800-01. Perhaps his contract stated that he would receive a certain amount of salted pork, something that might be expected with someone in a skilled occupation such as canoe making. Beaulieu may have returned to Canada in 1801, since Roderick McKenzie wrote to Peter Grant on June 5, 1802, that “Beaulieu is rotten. He comes up but will not be able to furnish the third of the canoes he undertook” (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 190).

The details about Beaulieu making as many as 50 canoes at Grand Portage corroborate to an extent George Heriot’s description of Grand Portage from the early 1800s as having a canoeyard “upon a great scale, seventy canoes per annum having been contracted for,”

an acknowledgment that canoes could not usually be purchased ready-made but had to be contracted for in advance to assure their availability at a particular time (Heriot 1807: 204; misquoted in Erwin Thompson 1969: 123). However, the evidence is that some of the canoes were made by Beaulieu and some by Indian people. It may also be that Beaulieu supervised work by Indian canoemakers. This is possible considering that canoemaking among the Ojibwe was a cooperative endeavor in which gender roles were particularly marked. There was generally a canoemaker who acted as a kind of designer, with a number of possible workers assisting. Men generally carved the wooden pieces, while women did the sewing of the bark panels (B. White 1999: 119).

In this period, there were many concerns about the difficulty of negotiating for Indian-made canoes and about the quality of the canoes made in the Grand Portage-Rainy Lake area. Reaching Saganaga on July 25, 1800, Alexander Henry the Younger stated that at Anse de Sable they “found some Indians employ’d making Canoes for sale, but finding none of them to my taste we proceeded on.” Right after this his canoe hit a sharp rock and was damaged. After drying out the contents of the canoe and presumably repairing it, he went on. At Basswood Lake, near the Pine Islands he encountered other Indians making canoes. He wrote: “My own was now in such a bad state that I could proceed no further therefore determined to wait for a new one here there being several upon the stocks. The Indians drinking and rather troublesome.” Apparently the liquor was part of an advance given for the completion of the canoe. It rained the next morning, which prevented work on the canoe from proceeding until the weather cleared at 10 AM. Even after that he wrote that the Indians who had participated in the drinking from the day before were not in a mood to work. While Henry and his men waited, the women brought some blueberries, of which there was an “abundance on the rocks which surround this Lake.” The weather became warm and sultry and the workmen began to nap. Further demands for liquor and threats by Henry appear not to have helped, and the next morning Henry got his own men to complete the canoe, though still giving the people at Saganaga a receipt for the canoe payable at Rainy Lake, to the value of 60 skins (Gough 1988: 8-10). The amount given is a substantial payment, comparable, as we will see, to the amount of credit a trapper or hunter might receive in an entire year.

There were other suggestions about the difficulty of obtaining canoes when they were partly paid for in advance. Writing to the wintering partners on August 9, 1800, William McGillivray stated that:

The canoes that have been made from this to Lac la Pluie this year are very bad & there are too many of them. The Indians by being partly paid in advance give themselves no trouble about them & the Men will always take new canoes if they are to be found even to throw away better. Instead of the £10 calculated as the cost of a canoe in the outfit it ought to be £20 if we take into the account the quantity of goods advanced for canoes that are never made & the price of those which after being changed [charged?] once or twice remain at last to rot on the Beach. Taking this abuse into consideration I wrote to Mr. Grant to engage no more than 30 canoes at Lac la Pluie & pay for none that are beyond it for these are always lost. Cloutier [at Grand Portage] is not to advance anything on Canoes.

If the Indians make them Good & we want them let us pay well for them. We do not injure the Opposition but ourselves by taking all the bad canoes that the Indians can make. 60 canoes can be depended on at this place. I think the remainder can very safely be left to chance (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 158-59).

One problem with the canoes from the area may have been that the supply of good-quality bark was not enough in the vicinity of the posts. Bark was brought in from various locations by both companies in early summer. Two sides of a single page of an account book kept by the XY Company at Grand Portage on June 21, 1804 (MHS, McKenzie and Co., Daybook leaf, June 21, 1804) contains an entry for three gallons of rum and six (gallons or pounds?) of grease “for the men who went for bark.” The next month, while camped at Grand Marais, on July 13, 1804, Francois Victoire Malhiot observed “a canoe from Fond du Lac, full of bark, traveling to Fort Kamanaitiquoya” (MUL, Malhiot Journal, 2).

Some descriptions of Native people at Grand Portage can be found in the journals of Daniel Williams Harmon, who left a first-hand account of a visit to Grand Portage in 1800 (Harmon 1957: 11, 20, 21, 22). Harmon left Montreal on April 28, arriving at Grand Portage on June 13. He was put to work in the “General Shop” where he dealt out dry goods and food. Furs were being pressed for shipment to Canada at the time. On June 28 Harmon wrote that “Last Night while drunk a Squaw stabbed her Husband, who afterwards expired—and this afternoon I went to their Tent, where a number of Indians . . . were drinking and crying over the corpse to whom they would often offer Rum and try to turn it down his throat.” As suggested earlier by Roderick McKenzie, this would have been the time of year when Indian people received alcoholic beverages, as a treat or by purchase. Violence sometimes resulted.

On July 4, Harmon wrote:

In the Daytime the Natives were allowed to Dance in the Fort, and to whom the Coy., made a present of thirty six Gallons of Shrub, etc. and this evening the Gentlemen of the place dressed & we had a famous Ball in the Dining Room, and for musick we had the Bag Pipe the violin, the Flute & the Fifte, which enabled us to spend the evening agreeable—at the Ball there were a number of this Countries *Ladies*, whom I was surprised to find could behave themselves so well, and who danced not amiss.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In the 1790s there was a bagpiper named George McKay hired in Scotland to entertain at Grand Portage. The information is recorded in an HBC journal for Portage de l’Isle in 1795 (HBCA, B. 166/a/2, p. 7. Aug. 17): “This morning the two Mr. McKays sett off after entertaining us with the bag pipes all night this George McKay was counted one of the first performers of that instrument in Scotland. Mr. McTavish gave him 50 £ p. annum & a free passage to Canada for the purpose of playing to the Inland Gentlemen at Grand Portage while they stay at that Post which is never above 6 weeks--but the company finding him a man of abilities sent him inland master with additional wages.” McKay was apparently assigned to the Portage de l’Isle post in 1796. See Lamb (1970: 459).

The dance performed by Native people at the fort could have been a begging dance, accompanied by Native music. Such dances, also described at Fond du Lac, Rainy Lake, and many other places in the region later on, were ceremonial in nature, expected to evoke the generosity of company traders and clerks. In this way the begging dance served as an assessment against the wealth of company men and visitors, forcing them to share as a way of fulfilling the roles they sought to play (Vennum 1985: 55, 61).

Who would have been the women referred to in this passage? It is unlikely that they would have been women from Grand Portage alone. There is evidence that some traders traveled with their Native wives. George Nelson, who was forced to marry the daughter of a Native man who was helpful in guiding him, came with her to Grand Portage in June 1804, where she left him for an interpreter. Nelson also notes that her father was camped outside the stockade at the same time. In this way Grand Portage may have been a social gathering place for Native women and men from all over (Nelson 2002: 171).

Details of company returns from the Grand Portage area in 1800 are not as complete as those for 1799. Writing to McTavish, Frobisher and Company on May 27 (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 115-20), William McGillivray at Sault Ste. Marie reported on the information brought by the *Otter* on its first trip of the season. He noted that at Grand Portage the North West Company would produce about 20 packs of furs, while the opposition under L'Etang would have three (although the first reference to this fact in the letterbook suggests that this figure may only refer to fine furs.) He also noted that "the other small Posts between Lake des Chiens & Lac des Bois Blanc have done better than last year."

For the following year changes appear to have been made in the posts between Grand Portage and Rainy Lake. Writing to Peter Grant of Rainy Lake on August 2, 1800, William McGillivray stated that "If you could settle it other way La Tour ought to winter with yourself. Guimod would be a more proper person at Lac du Vermilion than him. The Indians complained much of his conduct last winter. The Queue de Porcupicque [porcupine tail] came here on purpose to desire he should not winter on his lands." Queue de Porcèpic is mentioned a number of times in a journal kept at Rainy Lake in 1804-05, the so-called "Diary of Hugh Faries" (Gates 1965: 223, 230, 232, 235). Louis Guimod was listed as a clerk in the Rainy Lake department in 1806 (Wallace 1934: 221).

Kenneth McKenzie had now replaced Dr. Henry Munro who returned to Canada, but other employees and their opponents remained.<sup>30</sup> William McGillivray wrote to the wintering partners on August 9, 1800: "As there are so few men at this place to work Kenneth McKenzie & Colin remain in charge. The remaining goods are put out of the

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<sup>30</sup> Henry Munro appears to have returned to the Northwest in 1801. A letter from John Mount, a friend in Canada, dated April 28, 1802, was sent to Munro at "Grand Portage old N. West Company." Mount writes "We see with concern the hardships you ended on your passage up. . . . Your winters I find by the quantity of ice & snow you met going up must have been very severe." Later in the letter Mount referred to the recent news about the publications of Alexander Mackenzie's journals and his knighting and concludes: "So you must grease your Boots & travel up to find out the N: West passage by sea from the North to the South Sea & then you will certainly come out with the Tittle of Lord Munro Baron of the S. Sea." Copy of letter in Grand Portage pamphlet file, "GPNM—History." The location of the original is not known.

garret & every other thing secured in the best manner against fire.” As for the opposition “Mesiere La Haye remains again to pass the winter here with 10 men.” This winter L’Etang went by way of the Red River to compete with Jean Baptiste Cadotte at Red. Lake (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 153, July 28, 1800, McGillivray to McTavish, Frobisher, & Co.)

Also wintering in the Grand Portage area in 1800-01 was Captain Maxwell, the new captain of the *Otter*. Writing to Kenneth McKenzie from Sault Ste. Marie on August 26, 1800, McGillivray stated that the *Otter* was still at the Sault at that date, waiting while planks and boards necessary for completing two houses were sawed. Then the boat would proceed to Grand Portage “to be laid up.” He stated that “if Capt Maxwell gets hay cut at the River au tourte [Pigeon River] you will give him one of the Milk Cows and share with him whatever you may get from the Indians.” Indicated in this statement is the fact that despite the food supplies brought to Grand Portage, fresh game or other foods purchased from Indian people was a part of the diet of traders there (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 179-80).

Writing to Maxwell himself, McGillivray stated that after unloading the cargo at Grand Portage on his last trip there, he should proceed to the Pigeon River where the vessel would winter. The repairs should be based on his own minute examination of the boat for any rotten wood, but Maxwell was to keep in mind that he should be ready to sail by May 5, 1801:

I have agreed with two men at the Grand Portage to provide you with 16 to 20 Barrels of salt fish. Mr. Kenneth will make a fair division of the Potatoes between your people and the men of the fort after laying apart the quantity necessary for seed & for the Table next summer but as the quantity cannot be great you must deal them out sparingly In issuing the provisions to your men you ought to follow the example of the fort giving it every two days dividing the fish and corn as regular as you can (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 180-81).

Exactly who the two men were who provided the fish is not known. It does not seem likely that McGillivray would have written in this way about regular company employees with whom no “agreement” would have been necessary to direct them to provide Maxwell with fish. Another possibility is that he was referring to Indian people, although it seems more likely that McGillivray would have specifically referred to them as Indians. Another possibility is that the men in question were freemen.

McGillivray calculated that Maxwell would use about 36 bushels of corn, but he should work it out with Mackenzie (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 181-82). “Of course you will be allowed Rum to give them a glass of Grog now and then when they work well and you can take a couple Bags of flour also for their use to give them at times when you think necessary.” He should find himself a keg of butter, a keg of wine, and the flour he will require and sugar, 3 bags of the former and 100 lbs. of the latter. “Any meat the Indians may bring you will have a share of from Mr. Kenneth and any other thing that may fall in the way and you must go hand in hand in executing the intentions of the



company.” McGillivray says he ordered “a large Hog at the Portage to be falloed which you will divide with Mr. Kenneth for your winter and if you need some Hay at the River au tourte you could get one of the milk Cows which Mr. McK cannot [can?] do well without.” As will be seen, the variety of food fed to the men here is comparable to the food fed to men at Fort William in the 1820s.



## 1801-05

The North West Company letterbook contains no letters for 1801. What the arrangements of traders and employees were that year is not known. A few letters from 1802 provide some information on what was occurring that year. The opposition continued, with the addition of Alexander Mackenzie, who returned from England in the spring. The opposition now had its own sailing ship on Lake Superior, while the North West Company was building its replacement for the *Otter* (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 186, May 23, 1802, Duncan McGillivray to North West Company partners). Roderick McKenzie and John Charles Stewart, the company's agent, arrived at Grand Portage on June 3. Kenneth McKenzie appears to continue to be in charge of the posts at Grand Portage (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 187, June 3, 1802, Roderick McKenzie to John Sayer). Roderick McKenzie wrote to the partners of the company a few days later sending the letter by express despite the shortage of men at the portage (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 189, June 5, 1802, 190, 191). In another letter written that day McKenzie noted that in sending off canoes to various departments with provisions "we have only Indian guides." Guiding the express sent to Peter Grant at Rainy Lake was the wife of a man named Parisien. A Charles Leger dit Parisien testified in 1803 that he had been a guide to Grand Portage for thirty years (Nute 1940: 131). The use of a woman as a guide may appear unusual, but since women traveled long distances with husbands and families and would have known the region as well as men, they may have functioned that way both officially and unofficially.

McKenzie was especially concerned about the role of the opposition in trade against Joseph Faniant and Jean Marie Boucher. Writing to Peter Grant on June 5, he stated that "Bouche & Faniant are still in their old situation but under new restrictions after all. The less they will get the better. Mailloux is for XY and their is another opposition to both. This fellow must get nothing. We have not the means to send as we intended to break in upon these fellows measures" (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 190). It is unclear exactly what fear McKenzie had of the actions of Boucher and Faniant. It may be that they were undertaking trade for furs either with company employees or with Indian people. It is possible that, especially in their summer trade in the region beyond Grand Portage, this could have happened more easily than at Grand Portage.

The other opposition mentioned was a trader named Paul Harvieux working for the Michilimackinac firm of Dominique Rousseau and Joseph Bailly and working under a license granted by the U. S. Government. In a Montreal court case in 1803, Rousseau and Bailly sued Duncan McGillivray for the company's actions in attempting to limit the competition of their employee Paul Harvieux in the summer of 1802 (Nute 1940). According to the testimony in that case Harvieux arrived at Grand Portage around July 10-12 and set up three tents in the area of the trading places of Faniant and Boucher and Mailloux.

Duncan McGillivray did his best to discourage Harvieux, demanding that he move his tent to another location, tossing one of his packs in the air, and finally cutting up a tent that Harvieux had sold to one of the North West Company's engagés. Another trader,

Archibald Norman McLeod, pulled up the tent stakes while “a Negro of the defendant’s” caused the tent to be “torn to bits, burned and carried on the ends of sticks.” Much of the threat to Harvieux and his men, however, consisted of verbal abuse and threats of violence rather than actual physical attacks. At one point Harvieux was accused of working in the interests of Alexander Mackenzie. Despite the threats from McGillivray and McLeod, Harvieux was able to trade buffalo skins and moose skins “by night” and sometimes during the day when they could conceal themselves (Nute 1940: 124, 128, 129). However, Harvieux maintained that his trade was considerably reduced by the open threats.

These events must be seen in the context of the ratcheting up of competition due to Alexander Mackenzie’s joining the opposition that year, as well as the North West Company’s concern about the debts of its employees and how much trade all these various traders were getting. Another source, the journal and reminiscence of XY Company clerk George Nelson, describes the other actions taken by North West Company people to inhibit competition in 1802.

Nelson, a newly engaged XY Company clerk from Sorel, who had been hired in Sorel in March by St. Valier Mailloux, left Montreal along with another new clerk, William Morrison, and Mr. White, the new captain of the XY Company’s sailing vessel. They set out from Montreal in May by canoe.<sup>31</sup> Along the way they encountered Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Thomas Thain, a company clerk, traveling in a light canoe. Nelson traveled part of the way to Grand Portage in Mackenzie’s canoe. After passing Kaminstikwia, which Nelson described as a “dead Swampy flat,” they arrived at Grand Portage in June. Like most clerks, Nelson served his time in one of the storehouses “to serve the people.” He writes: “At long last they began to come in. All was business. Receiving Goods, corn, flour, port &c. &c. from Montreal & Mackinac, & furs from the differing wintering. posts.— Gambling, feasting, dancing, drinking & fighting. After a couple of weeks to rest, for the Winterers to give in their returns & accounts, & to make up their outfits, they began to return again, to run over the same ground, toils, labors, and dangers” (Nelson 2002: 6-7, 33, 34, 40, 42).

Nelson also describes an incident of that year in which a trader named Benjamin or Joseph Frobisher (not either of the famed partners of the company, but another man) and “Dr. Monroe’s brother,” that is, the brother of Henry Munro, John Munro, who had been stationed at Grand Portage, were suspected of boring two gimlet holes each in 30 kegs of high wines while XY Company men were having their usual regale at Portage la Perdrix near Fort Charlotte, prior to their departure for Fort des Prairies. Nelson states: “These were called *witty tricks*” (Nelson 2002: 43).

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<sup>31</sup> William Morrison came from Berthier, just across the St. Lawrence River from Sorel. He became an important North West Company trader in the Fond du Lac region. In one of several published versions of a letter written many years later, he wrote “I left the old Grand Portage, July, 1802, landed at Leech Lake in September. In October, I went and wintered on one of the Crow Wing streams near its source” (Brower 1893, 7: 123; William Morrison 1872, 1: 418; B. White 1978: 51).

In a more violent action, Duncan McGillivray attempted to carry off by force three former North West Company men now employed by the XY Co. in their Folle Avoine district. McGillivray got into a boat and determined to pursue Nelson and his men. Menaces, threats to fight and kill were exchanged, but McGillivray finally gave up the chase. Between the incident involving Harvieux, and this one, McGillivray was having a busy summer at Grand Portage (Nelson 2002: 45).

Around this same time it appears that McGillivray was taking on a significant symbolic role as a company figurehead. This was described in the North West Company journal of Francois Victoire Malhiot. Malhiot traded around Lac du Flambeau, south of Lake Superior. Malhiot started out from Fort Kaministikwia in mid-July 1804 (MUL, Malhiot Journal, 1, 12). Even before he reached his trading location at Lac du Flambeau he met and negotiated with Indians. While some were habitual customers of his competitor, Simon Chaurette of the XY Company, some had traded with the North West Company before. Near the mouth of the Montreal River, Malhiot gave a present of rum to a leader named Grandes Oreilles, who every spring gave the North West Company's men fish when they were traveling out of their winter place. Malhiot said the man was devoted to the North West Company. Malhiot gave other men goods on credit, and some flour, lard, and shrub as a treat. Once he reached Lac du Flambeau he continued to give presents and credit and trade for food, particularly wild rice. On August 24 Malhiot noted that some of the Indians of his competitor gave him three sacks of wild rice. In return he gave them a large barrel of rum and a fathom of tobacco. At the same time he presented one of them named Moose's Nose with a chief's clothing, speaking the following "harangue":

My Relative

I would like very much to forget what you did last year and believe that it was not your fault that we did not receive all your furs. But do not do the same in the future. The suit I give you today should show you the road you must follow. . . . I rely on all your promises. Do not deceive me. . . I not only want your furs, but also your wheat [wild rice?]. I have many children to feed. Besides which you would spoil yourself ["gater ton corps"] to take a single grain to the other fort. My orders from our father [William McGillivray] were the same for you as for the others; I was not to give you anything this fall and wait until I knew you. But after what you have just told me and what the French [other traders] have told me, I feel obliged to do what I have just done. Take courage then and think of your fort [that is, the company with which he trades].

Later that evening Malhiot gave out more barrels of rum to various Indians "for nothing, because they are devoted to the fort and are good hunters." A short time later on September 2, Malhiot dressed l'Outarde and gave him a flag and gave various marks of honor to others (MUL, Malhiot Journal, 13-14). He addressed l'Outarde in the following fashion:

My Relative

The suit I have just placed on you and sent by the Great Trader. It is in this way by this dressing that he distinguishes the greatest of a nation. The flag is a real

mark of chiefliness which glorifies you since we do not give them to every Indian. You have to be the way you are to receive one, that is to love the French as you do, to help support them and make packs of furs for them. My orders were to give you nothing this fall and wait until spring, in order to know you better, but after all I have heard of you from the French, I did not waste a moment in glorifying you, convinced that you will always be the same for the fort, that you would care for my young men to see that no dog bites them and that they will never return ashamed after going to your lodges. It is up to you as the first chief of this place to make all your efforts so that the Indians will all come here to trade in the spring. It will be to your glory to send off the canoes full to Grand Portage. Think again that the name of the Great Trader is on the flag. No matter where you go with it, no matter which of his posts you will be received with open arms. He could not give you a greater mark of his friendship. He heard your pleas and is very upset that Gauthier drank all your rum during the last year. I can assure you, Comrade, that it will not be the same this year. And the rest of you, see me, the trader who was sent. I am the one you asked for. I received speeches from three chiefs from the prairies who asked for me to return to winter on their lands, but refused them in order to support the truth of the words of the Great Trader who wished to send me here to give you charity but not to be treated badly. But I have nothing yet to reproach you for since this is the first time we have met. Be devoted then to your fort, care for it, guard its doors and I will carry good news of you to your father in the spring.

Status was important in this community and those who thought they were deserving of such marks of distinction may have sought means of ingratiating themselves to get them. Malhiot received a visit from the Eagle who left him with a pipestem and a porcelain collar for him to give to McGillivray in the spring. He wanted to show Malhiot that he was an honest man and wished to leave his pipestem at the fort as a mark of sincerity. Malhiot gave him a large barrel and said to him:

My Relative

It is with great joy that I smoke in your pipestem and receive your speech. Our Great Trader at Kaministiquia will accept it, I hope this spring, with satisfaction and will send you a mark of his friendship if you continue to do well. . . . Take courage then, be straight with us and only look at the XY Fort from a distance and you will achieve what you desire.

As seen in these excerpts, trade encounters with large trading companies sometimes resembled the earlier encounters with government officials in Montreal and elsewhere. In this case, however, William McGillivray took on the symbolic function of a government official. The similarity was that he did not direct trading himself but sought to provide the patronage necessary for trade to take place.

The journal of Alexander Henry the Younger reports that in 1802, 18 packs of furs were produced at Grand Portage by the North West Company. Nearby Mille Lac, where some Grand Portage people may have hunted, produced 25 packs. Rainy Lake, including

probably the area of Basswood and Saganaga and perhaps as far west as Lake of the Woods, produced 56 packs. Together then, the entire area between Grand Portage and Rainy Lake produced 99 packs, or about 15% of the company's entire fur output of 1,516 packs. This was about the same as the entire Fond du Lac district, not including the St. Croix River or Red Lake, which produced 101 packs. It should be noted that the returns just for Grand Portage that year were identical to the production of furs at the company's later headquarters at Fort William in 1806 (Gough 1988: 133, 189).

Evidence for the use of Grand Portage after 1802, after its abandonment as a company headquarters, is sketchy. One possible source is an account book in the Ontario Public Archives, which is said to have been kept at Grand Portage in July and August, 1803 (OA, NWC ledger). It contains ledger entries for a variety of North West Company employees who obtained merchandise from the company and from Jean Marie Boucher. As indicated by the journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, Boucher was encamped at the Prairie Portage in early July, although the accounts in question could have referred to goods obtained by canoe men on their way from Canada to Grand Portage.

The lack of detailed information about the company's move to Kaministikwia makes it difficult to be sure if the accounts are from Grand Portage. The company's partners did meet at Kaministikwia between July 6-22, 1803 (Wallace 1934: 179-94). Present there was John Charles Stewart who witnessed the accuracy of agreements signed. Since all the entries in the account book are concluded with a note signed by "JCS," indicating that the information had been entered in the company's ledger, this would suggest that the Ontario Public Archives account book could not have been kept at Grand Portage. However, the main text of the entries all appears to have been entered at an earlier date by another person.

The description by Alexander Henry the Younger of his arrival at Kaministikwia on July 3, 1803, suggests that while construction was still continuing, the storehouse and shop were completed and cargoes were being unloaded from the *Otter* and the new ship, the *Invincible*. (Gough 1988: 144). More than any other piece of information, Henry's journal would suggest that this account book could not have been kept at Grand Portage. Interestingly, a number of accounts contain references to "sundries" obtained from Dr. McLoughlin. This would appear to be the famous John McLoughlin who in that year is said to have "attached himself to the North West Company as resident physician at Fort William, on Lake Superior where he sometimes worked with the former head of the post at Grand Portage, Dr. Henry Munro" (Rich 1941: xxxii).

While the North West Company clearly shifted to Kaministikwia in 1803, the XY Company continued to operate at the older post through 1805. Thomas Verchères de Boucherville (Verchères de Boucherville 1940: 3, 10-11), wrote of signing on with Sir Alexander Mackenzie & Co. as a clerk in 1803. From Lachine he embarked in a canoe belonging to "Mr. [St. Valier] Maillou[x], a trader at Grand Portage" along with a clerk named Curotte, probably Michel Curot. From Sault Ste. Marie he sailed on board the XY Company boat *Perseverance* commanded by Captain White, along with Alexander Mackenzie himself. At Grand Portage, Verchères was put to work in the shed where

liquors were stored. He described the fort on the brow of a sloping hill over a mile from the landing. He notes that this had been built by the North West Company. Since the North West Company had vacated or was vacating Grand Portage at this time, it is possible that the XY Company was now using the North West Company's fort.

Other evidence suggests, however, that the North West Company would continue to have a presence at Grand Portage even after removing the company headquarters. It is likely that having a trading post or at least a few men at the location would have helped keep track of the activities of the other company. John McDonald of Garth in his autobiographical notes recalled that the North West Company, despite moving to Kaministikwia, continued to operate a trading post at Grand Portage (McDonald 1960, 2: 34-35). Ready for his departure from Kaministikwia for the Northwest, apparently in the summer of 1804, McDonald was short of men and was advised to revisit Grand Portage to attempt to get XY men to leave that company:

I was requested to take a well manned canoe of fourteen hands, and, with Mr. Donald McIntosh—a stout strong man, now no more,—to pay a visit to Old Grand Portage, about forty miles distant, in order to try and get some hands who might be induced to leave Forsyth, Richardson & Co. and enter our service, Sir Alexander MacKenzie acting then as head of that concern.—We still had a clerk there with two or three men, as a mere Indian trading post.—We soon got there at the rate of eight miles an hour on the smooth surface of Superior.<sup>32</sup>

Michel Curot, who was sent as a clerk to the St. Croix River in 1803, wrote of leaving Grand Portage for his wintering place on July 28. He arrived back there on June 16, 1804 (WHC 1911, 20: 396, 471; NAC, MG 19, C1, Masson Collection, v. 2, Curot Journal, 53). Thomas Verchères de Boucherville returned to Grand Portage at the end of June 1804. He traveled back to the Sault on the *Perseverance*, along with Thomas Thain, an XY Company employee (Verchères de Boucherville 1940: 41; Wallace 1934: 501). François Victoire Malhiot, a North West Company trader, left Kaministikwia for his wintering place of Lac du Flambeau on July 9, 1804. On July 12 he passed by Grand Portage and saw the XY sailing ship raising anchor for Sault Ste. Marie (MUL, Malhiot Journal, 1). Continuing on, Malhiot reached Grand Marais on July 13, where he said he and his men camped because the Indians told him that he would fish well there. They caught four handsome trout, three large siskawits, and a whitefish. They set out the next day at 5 AM and at noon encountered a canoe from Fond du Lac full of birchbark, headed for Fort Kaministikwia. Shortly thereafter, near the “Roche debout” or standing rock, Malhiot camped at a place he described as the wintering location of Collin, undoubtedly the same individual described earlier working for the North West Company in the Grand Portage area. From this description it is clear that Malhiot considered the Roche Debout to be located along the shore southwest of Grand Portage and Grand Marais.

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<sup>32</sup> Masson leaves a gap at this point. Another version of the journal, a typescript of an original that has not been found, does not include even this abbreviated account of a trip to Grand Portage (OA, McDonald of Garth, Autobiographical Notes).



A few details about activities of the XY Company at Grand Portage on June 21, 1804, are found on a single leaf from a business journal (MHS, McKenzie and Co., Daybook leaf). The business journal records individual expenditures of merchandise and food to company employees, particularly individuals from the Fond du Lac Department. Some expenditures were authorized by "Mr. Thaine." As noted earlier rum and grease were given to "the men who went for bark." Bread and butter were given to "dunken Laguard who is still employed either in the hengard [warehouse] or elsewhere." Lard was given to two men who "went for the fish." A "règal[e]" or treat was given to Trudeau, consisting of lard, sugar, tobacco, and a pipe. No references to Indian people are found in this account.

XY Company clerk George Nelson, returning from the Chippewa River, where he wintered in 1803-04, arrived at Grand Portage on June 29, around midnight. He found "every one in bed and asleep except Mr. Mailloux who received & treated us very kindly; & I need not mention I suppose that we done honour to his table." Nelson had taken as wife a Native woman, the daughter of an Ojibwe man who worked for the company, but who refused to continue to do so unless Nelson married her. He arrived at Grand Portage with both father and daughter. He said that he tried to get the woman to take a dislike for him: "I often sent her away & had it not been that I would not put up my own tent but slept in Chaurette's & under this pretext I sent her to her father's lodge—but even when I had my tent pitched in the fort with the other Clerks she yet came twice to me, but at last I got rid of her, for an interpreter took her" (Nelson 2002: 170).

Prior to abandoning their trading post at Grand Portage in 1805, the XY Company did a complete inventory, including an inventory of the accounts of their employees. The various lists were all completed by July 23, 1805. Included in surviving lists were five men employed at the Mille Lacs in present-day northwestern Ontario, indicated to be under the Rainy Lake post, who together owed the company 5,599 (livres GP?). Another list shows eight men employed at Grand Portage who owed 4,463 (UM, Baby Collection)

Another inventory item recorded by the XY Company in 1805 that provides a useful way to compare the trade of various posts was a record kept of the Indian credits due the company after the end of trade that year (UM, Baby Collection). These were the amounts of the credit given out to Indian people during the years 1803-05, and possibly earlier, that had not been paid back in furs, food, or supplies. Such debts were recorded in *plus*, or skins, the equivalent of an average beaver skin. All furs and trade items were fitted into a standard of trade that varied, but not drastically, over time. Despite the suggestion of such lists, companies did not actually lose money if portions of debts were not repaid, since a certain amount of debt was expected, and debt forgiveness was one of the ways in which a trader could show generosity. The list shows that at Grand Portage and the Roche Debout (possibly referring to the region of Kaministikwia), Indian people owed 342 plus or 1.7% of the company total, at Rainy Lake, 1692, or 8.5%, and at Mille Lacs, 80, or 0.4%, together making the total for the entire district to be 2124 or 10.7%. In comparison, the post at Fond du Lac was owed 409 plus, or 2%, and the entire Fond du Lac district, including Leech Lake, Sandy Lake and Red Lake was owed 2236 plus or 11.2%.

It is likely that the North West Company's fur returns for trade with Grand Portage Indians would have been included with those for Kaministikwia and other areas formerly included in the returns for Grand Portage. In 1806, Rainy Lake produced 102 packs, Mille Lac, 19, Dog Lake 9, and Kaministikwia, 18, for a total return of 148 packs. This was an increase over the 99 packs produced in the area a few years before, an indication of what it was possible for a company to obtain without competition (Gough 1988: 189).

In 1805 the North West Company listed 35 lower-level employees at Kaministikwia. Another 8 men were at Mille Lacs. Included in the list for Mille Lacs were some people also listed in the XY Company rosters for that year (Masson 1960, 1: 413; MUL, NWC, Men's Names at the Athabasca River Department, 1805, p. 26). That same year Alexander Henry the Younger produced a census of whites and Indians associated with trading regions exploited by the North West Company, including the posts Kaministikwia, Mille Lac, and Dog Lake (Gough 1988, 1: 188). For these posts Henry gave a total of 332 Indians, including 70 men, 84 women, and 178 children. Including as it does people away from Grand Portage, it may accurately represent the extent of the population of Indian people who traded at Grand Portage on a regular basis. It is thought that this figure includes Métis people, the children of trade marriages.

Henry's record of the white population at the three posts included 62 men, 16 women, and 36 children, for a total of 114 people. Several of the women listed as white may have been the children of such marriages now married to other traders, including individuals like the wife of Antoine Collin. Other wives of traders and engagés may have been listed in Henry's record of the Indian population. Given the time at which it was compiled, at the amalgamation of the North West and XY Companies, it likely includes men formerly employed by both companies, including some who were involved in the construction of the new North West Company post. This would suggest that the total population of whites would have been greater than that found in the earlier period at Grand Portage and the other locations working for each company separately.

## The Trade at Grand Portage After 1805

After the amalgamation of the two companies, and the transfer of all company management to Kaministikwia, or Fort William as it was soon called, it is likely that Grand Portage essentially became a sub-post, in the same way that Dog Lake, Basswood Lake, and other posts had been subsidiary to Grand Portage. Records of trade in the region are not plentiful prior to the 1820s; however, there is information on a number of individuals who were associated with Grand Portage and the wider area.

St. Valier Mailloux appears to have operated for a period of time as a trader to the engagés for the North West Company, the same role he had had for the XY Company at Grand Portage. Michel Curot, the XY trader who kept a journal on the St. Croix River in 1803-04, was hired as Mailloux's clerk for three years starting February 14, 1811. The contract spelled out the same schedule as before, going from Montreal in the spring and returning to Montreal in the fall. Whether or not he had operated in this capacity earlier, replacing or working with Jean Marie Boucher, is not known. As noted, Gabriel Franchère encountered a trader named Boucher operating a sort of canteen at Dog Lake in 1812 (Franchère 1954: 264).

Antoine Collin and his family had continued association with Grand Portage, through employment for the North West Company's Fort William post and later the Hudson's Bay Company at the same location. Ruth Swan and Ed Jerome record that the North West Company's ledger book of 1811-21 "includes Antoine Colin and his sons Michel and Jean-Baptiste; most of Antoine's income derives from canoe-building" (Swan and Jerome 1998: 314). As will be seen, Hudson's Bay Company records from the 1820s and later provide even more extensive discussion of the Collin family.

The American competitor of the two companies, Dominique Rousseau, returned to Grand Portage in 1806 and attempted to cross the portage. To prevent his use of the portage, North West Company men were said to have felled trees along it. Nute (1940, 21: 120) says that Rousseau's employee sent west of Grand Portage was Delorme and that the men listed in the 1806 roster (Wallace 1934: 221) as assigned "to watch De Lorme" were intended to keep track of him. These were Alexander McKay, "Prop," J. C. Sayer, clerk, and Ant. Vallé and Joseph Laverdiere, guides.

The presence of J. C. Sayer in the area is of special note. He was the son of former partner John Sayer. His mother was the daughter of Waubojeeg and thus had ties to the Reindeer clan at Grand Portage (B. White 1999: 134; Warren 1984: 52). He himself was married to a woman from the border area. HBC records show that John Charles Sayer was among the North West Company employees competing with them at Rainy Lake in 1817-19 (HBCA, B.105/a/5-6). With the amalgamation of the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies, Sayer became a freeman. David Thompson, who came back to the region in 1822 to help survey the border, hired Sayer to work for him (OA, David Thompson Journals, R. 4, Series 1, Bound Volume 21, letter to John Charles Sayer, Aug. 17, 1822).

The above Mr. Charles Sayer, is a Native son of Mr. Sayer one of the first Partners of the NW Coy. He was educated at Detroit. He then became a clerk of the NW Co. and for several years has had the charge of a trading post in the Countries between the Rainy Lake and the NW Coast of Lake Superior at £150 Salary. The new order of affairs by the union of the two Coy. Reduces the Salaries of all the Clerks and he is one of several others who have refused to accept less. In this state he was recommended to me by his intelligence and Education as the Person best adapted for the purpose of Interpreter, Guide, &c &c.

Thompson mentioned meeting Sayer's father-in-law at Saganaga. The next year the Rainy Lake Journal referred to Sayer's brother-in-law coming to that post from Nett Lake (HBCA, B.105/a/9, p. 22, Oct. 5, 1823).

Members of the Cadot family continued to be mentioned in relation to Grand Portage. The Chicago trader, John Kinzie, wrote to Thomas Forsyth on July 7, 1812, discussing the loyalty of Great Lakes Indians to the British. He noted that "Cadot, Dice [Dease?] & John Asking Junr. Were collecting all the principal Chiefs from the Grand Portage Fort [Fond] du lac Superior and Mackinac on Lake Huron to attend at the Island of St. Joseph this summer, and that there & then they will hear the voice of their Father" (Carter 1948: 249). It is possible that the Cadot mentioned was Jean Baptiste Cadotte, who had translated at the 1798 land purchase at Grand Portage. After leaving the North West Company, he became an Indian interpreter for the British government. Like his father, he had connections throughout the Lake Superior region.

Among the better known traders in the area after 1805 was Dr. John McLoughlin, who, as noted earlier, joined the North West Company in 1803. In 1807, a few years after the melding of the two companies, he was stationed at Kaministikwia, to be called Fort William, or one of the subsidiary posts. In 1806 he was transferred to Rainy Lake for one year. The following year, 1807, McLoughlin was sent to build a post on Sturgeon Lake, where he wintered with Daniel Williams Harmon. It is not known exactly where he was in the next few years, but between 1811 and 1814 he was in the Rainy Lake district, the first year at Lake Vermilion. Grace Lee Nute argues (1952: 36) that the location was present-day Sand Point Lake, not Little Vermilion or the present-day Lake Vermilion near Nett Lake, but there is disagreement on this point. Many references to Lake Vermilion in this period and later suggest that the place traders knew by that name was farther away from Rainy Lake than Sand Point Lake and also that it was clearly in United States territory. While it might be argued that the site of the post could not have been within United States territory, given the reasons often cited for the movement of the company headquarters to Kaministikwia, the North West Company did continue to have a presence in the south of the border, in the Fond du Lac region. Thus, McLoughlin could well have been stationed at present-day Lake Vermilion.

In a narrative describing Indian people along the canoe route between Lake Superior and Rainy Lake, McLoughlin mentioned Lake Vermilion several times. He also described subsistence practices that apply not only to Vermilion but elsewhere in the region:

Their manner of life is to be wandering continually from place to place and regulated by the seasons which in the same way regulates their food. [In] Winter they Keep in woods and live on Animals. [F]rom about the middle of April untill the middle of June they Keep along Rivers and at first live principally on Game then on fish which they spear in the Rapids. [P]art of the summer they live on flesh and fish as they can get till the Rice is Ripe, which with Game is their principal food till the Ice takes. As to those that have no Rice in their lands they live on flesh and fish but the best season for good cheer is the winter as it is the principal season for hunting all kinds of Animals and by a strange Contrarity tis then they are more subject to starve. [T]he food it is true is better but not in such Quantity as in other Seasons which is sufficiently proved by this that we hear often of Indians starving to death in the winter but never in the Summer. The Reason is very Evident the means of subsistence are diminish'd the fatigue is greater the weather colder – which causes a diminution of food to be more sensibly felt (punctuation added; MUL, McLoughlin 1806; see also Dillon 1971, 8: 5-16).

McLoughlin was made a partner of the company in 1815. He was at Rainy Lake in 1816 during the events relating to the attack by the North West Company on the Red River colony and was at Fort William when Lord Selkirk captured the post in August. McLoughlin was one of the company partners arrested and sent east for trial. He was later released and he may have been in charge of Fort William in 1817 and later. The HBC journal for Point de Meuron, upriver from Fort William, reported McLoughlin's arrival at the North West Company post on January 3, 1818. In 1820, in a conflict with William McGillivray, he was removed from his charge of Fort William and after that went to Montreal and London, where he appears to have been instrumental in bringing about the absorption of the North West Company by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. McLoughlin was made a Chief Factor and appointed charge of the Rainy Lake District in July 1822. He took charge of the district in September and served there for the next two years. His journals for this period provide information on trade methods of the period and the events taking place at the Fort William post (Rich 1941:xxxii-li).

During the period of violent competition between the North West Company and HBC, Grand Portage had a resurgence as a trade center. Lord Selkirk captured Fort William in August 1816. From there he sent men on to Rainy Lake and others to Grand Portage, which one of the de Meuron Regiment, Lieutenant Friedrich von Graffenried, described as being 18 hours from Fort William, that is, by boat. Two men named Lacroix and Bock were assigned to re-establish a post there. Graffenried accompanied them, arriving on October 17. He found "a rather well preserved house, measuring 12 feet by 12 feet, which would offer sufficient shelter for the winter once it was properly plastered with mud. Our men erected a similar one next to it." At one point, Graffenried walked across the portage where he found "an old Canadian scout" disabled with rheumatism living there (OFW, Graffenried, 22-23). Based on his visit to the area with Major Stephen Long in 1823, William H. Keating, noted that while traveling along the Kaministikwia River, they saw

“the remains of a winter road opened by [Lord Selkirk] from this river to the Grand Portage; it extends in a southerly direction, and is about thirty-six miles long.”

After Fort William was taken back by the North West Company in 1817, the Hudson’s Bay Company established a post at Pointe de Meuron, up the Kaministikwia River (J. Morrison 2001: 109, 113; HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1). Journals were kept at this post by a number of HBC traders, including a J. B. Lemoine, who may have been related to the Lemoine at Fort Charlotte in the 1790s. These journals suggest that the HBC was poorly equipped to compete with a more ruthless and better organized North West Company. As an example, on October 1, 1820, an Indian arrived from Dog Lake, reaching the post by a circuitous route through the woods “to avoid the NW guards” (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1). An American boundary commissioner, who visited the region in 1823 mentioned opposite Pointe de Meuron, high on a mountain on the opposite side of the river, “a little log hut” which likely served as a lookout for the North West Company (Delafield 1943: 449)

In the case of the Indian from Dog Lake in 1820, the man brought with him two large and four small beaver, adding up to nine pounds (lbs.), two minks, and forty-five muskrats. The trader wrote that the man “complained of being naked and wished to be paid in cloth and blankets.” Surprisingly, at this time of year the trader had very little cloth on hand, but because he did not want the man to go on to the North West Company post, he traded him all he had left, including four yards of molton, one two-point blanket, and one capot, as well as some tobacco. The Indian “then observed that what I had given him was not sufficient to keep himself and family from freezing in the winter.” He then asked for some goods in debt which he would pay off in the spring. The trader, stating that he would have more goods to give him then, credited him with some tools, a handkerchief, powder and shot, and three pints of spirits. He asked the man for some dressed skins. The man replied that deer were scarce and that the Indians did not have enough to make moccasins and snowshoes for themselves, so that they were forced to ask the North West Company traders “for skins and provisions to enable them to go on hunting excursions [sic?] any distance from their fishing place.”

The journal entry is revealing. The description of the guard put on the river to prevent Indians going to the HBC trading post is in keeping with the tactics the North West Company pursued around this time and earlier. A report from the year before had stated that the Indians were sometimes punished by being “brought into the Masters room at Fort William and there corrected and beat according to the will and pleasure of the master” (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1, Oct. 15, 1819). At the same time, the North West Company had also established a post at Mille Lacs under a trader named Chauvin, in part to prevent Indians from coming to the Pointe de Meuron post (Sept. 15, Oct. 12, 1819).

At the same time, this entry from the journal of an HBC trader shows someone seemingly unaware of the long practice of granting credit in the fall and unable to supply adequate goods to make it possible. The lack of an adequate assortment of goods appears to have made it difficult to win the trade of the local Ojibwe. Even when goods were available, it was difficult for the HBC to convince the Indians that they had any. Writing on September 30, 1818, the HBC trader wrote that his predecessor had been unable to get



“Wigemar Wasung” painted by Eastman Johnson perhaps while in Grand Portage in 1857. It is charcoal and crayon on paper and printed with permission from the St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth, Minnesota.

passing Indians even to come ashore and smoke. Managing to convince a young man to come into the storeroom he observed the Indian's "greatest exclamation of surprise," noting that the Indians had been informed that they were "objects of distress." Even so, HBC traders tried to follow at least some of the traditional procedures such as the gift of clothing to influential leaders. On December 15, 1818, the trader gave Eagle a fine hat, some blue cloth and other materials, as well as a blanket and a capot. The trader noted that the man appeared satisfied, though he looked on some of the materials as payment for work he did for Selkirk in building the road two years before. Only the blanket and capot were considered to be the gift (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1).

Another problem the HBC had was in having an adequate food supply. An important theme of trade narratives in this period was the elaborate measures taken by traders to produce their own food and have a surplus to provide to Indian people when they came to trade and at times of scarcity during the year. In December 1817, the HBC trader noted that a group of Ojibwe were leaving for Fort William. The trader said: "I am afraid they won't come back, since we have no food or drink to give them for nothing and we cannot keep them in the fort as was done last summer" (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1, Dec. 19, 1817). Supplies of potatoes grown at the trading post, corn brought in from elsewhere, and salted fish caught in the lake were a requisite for trading posts in the area. Indian hunters sometimes left their families at the trading post while they hunted, because of the scarcity of food in the woods. This added a burden to the trader beyond the need for feeding his men. In November 1818, at Fort William the men were fed six pounds of fish and a gallon of potatoes per day (Nov. 19, 1818). During the 1820 growing year the HBC post produced 153 kegs of potatoes (Oct. 13, 1820). The figure for the North West Company is not known. HBC fishing, however, was slow in the fall of that year. By October 28, fishermen working for the company produced only ten barrels of fish, three of which they kept for themselves, by agreement (Oct. 28, 1820).

Success at winning over Indians for the HBC was made difficult because of competition from south of the border. Details on who the traders were and where they were located are sketchy. Writing in the 1824 Rainy Lake Journal, John McLoughlin (HBCA, B.105/a/9, p. 85-86, March 18, 1824) recalled at least one outfit that came to the American side of Lake Superior in this period. McLoughlin discussed the important band leader L'Espagnol, or the Spaniard, who was sometimes accused of trading with the Americans when they had trading posts at Grand Portage. He noted:

I do not think he will be worth the trouble and Expence of keeping. . . . The Spaniard was always honest at least I found him so while I was at Fort William. But his young traded one year with Nolin who came in the spring along the south side of the lake from the Sault to Roche de Bout.

It is not clear exactly where this Roche Debout is located. Given the context, it would appear that this location would have been in American territory. It is also not known which Nolin is referred to here. The Nolin family was associated both with Sault Ste. Marie and the Red River colony. According to John Tanner, Louis Nolin was with Selkirk when he reached the Red River Colony in 1817. Another possibility was



Augustin Nolin, Louis's brother (Tanner 1830: 220; Chaput 1975: 15; Rich 1939: 237-38). Other references to a trader named Nolin occur in the HBC journal for 1820-21. Several references are made to "Nolin's men" in the area including a request by several to fish with HBC fishermen, which suggest some cooperation between these competitors (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1, Oct. 16, 29, 1820).

Competition between the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company ceased with the amalgamation of the two companies in 1821. Many former North West Company people south of the border did not join the new company, but continued to compete under the aegis of the American Fur Company, which had earlier purchased the North West Company posts in the Fond du Lac region. Other companies and traders competed with both the Hudson's Bay Company and the American Fur Company in the border region.

There is not much evidence to indicate that any traders were consistently located at Grand Portage in the 1820s. Instead, competition between various fur-trade companies was taking place inland at posts which were sub-posts in an earlier era, such as Whitefish Lake and along the shore at Grand Marais and Fort William. The various journals available for the border area provide an interesting perspective on trade in the Grand Portage area from various points of view. Particularly well documented are the years 1822-24, described in the journals of two American traders as well as the HBC journals for Fort William and Rainy Lake. Together they provide a unique account of the trade events of a complex region from multiple perspectives.

Mention is made of Grand Portage in a journal kept by an American competitor of the Hudson's Bay Company. In June 1822, Youngs L. Morgan left his home in Cleveland to work for John Johnston and his son George as a trader at Lake Vermilion, which is undoubtedly the present-day lake of that name in northeastern Minnesota.<sup>33</sup> It would appear that Morgan was one of those young Americans hired by fur companies to fulfill the government requirement that higher level traders not be foreign born and was perhaps not actually in charge of the outfit. Those in the outfit also included Paul Beaulieu and his wife and child, Charles La Rose, Baptist Longpre, Jean Bapt. Joinville, David Deilette, Fracois Rochelo, and Fracois Picquet. As suggested earlier, Paul Beaulieu could be related to the Beaulieu who made canoes at Grand Portage around 1800. Mention is also made in the journal of La Rose's wife (Headline and Gallup 1962-63, 19: 114).

On August 25 the traders arrived at Grand Portage. That same day, David Thompson was at the portage working on a boundary survey. He noted in his journal that "at 9 AM 2 Canoes on a trading business under a Monsr. Beaulieu arrived." This was perhaps an indication that Beaulieu may have been in charge of the outfit, not Youngs Morgan. Thompson stated: "They are outfitted by a Msr. Johns[t]on of the Sault de St. Maries. A Bateau of the American Fur Co. is expected to follow" (OA, David Thompson Journals, R. 4, Series 1, Bound Volume 21).

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<sup>33</sup> Morgan's journal states that he was hired by John Johnston, but the Morgan's license application was signed by George Johnston (Headline and Gallup 1962-63, 18: 299, 304).

Morgan himself wrote that the men took most of their goods across the portage on August 25: "I think this was the hardest Sunday's job I ever did to carry my trunk across the portage." On September 4 they reached Lake Vermilion. On September 9, Morgan stated that one of the men had gone to Rainy Lake "three or four days march from this, to get some things that were left there the year before." The man returned on September 15, bringing fresh vegetables (Headline and Gallup 1962-63, 19: 32, 33, 34).

The subsequent winter was a difficult one for Morgan and the other men. They competed at Lake Vermilion with traders for the American Fur Company at the same place and with the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Basswood Lake, right on the border. Both companies were based at Rainy Lake and had traders at other locations in the area. As noted in John McLoughlin's journal and report for the year, food was scarce because of a failure of the wild rice crop. By mid-winter Morgan and the others had run out of food. During the course of the winter they left the post and accompanied some American Fur Company people by foot to Sandy Lake. In the spring they returned to Sault Ste. Marie by way of Fond du Lac (Headline and Gallup 1962-63, 19: 227, 277).

### **The 1823-24 Trading Season**

Much more detail about the Grand Portage region comes from 1823-24. The year's trade is recorded both from American and Canadian perspectives. In September 1823, the American Fur Company trader Bela Chapman came to trade at Grand Marais, traveling from Fond du Lac in a northeasterly direction. On the title page of the journal Chapman lists other AFC men including Ambrose Davenport, George Bonga, Stephen Bonga, and Jack Bonga, some of whom may have been with him during the year. Included in the book is a journal in the form of a set of letters written to William Morrison and William Aitkin, the men in charge of the American Fur Company's Fond du Lac outfit. Mentioned also in the journal is a man named Boucher about whom Chapman had little good to say. Chapman and his men reached Grand Marais on October 3 (MHS, Sibley Papers, Chapman Journal, title page, 12).

At Grand Marais Chapman stated that he met "the first Indians since we left Fond du Lac. The chief [L'Espagnol] is here and the Grand Coquin [Big Rogue]. They have just arrived from Fort William [?] all drunk &c. We have set our nets." In meeting L'Espagnol and the Grand Coquin, also known as Shaganashens or the Little Englishman, Chapman was meeting two of a number of band leaders who traded with the HBC at this time (Cochrane, n.d., Ch. IV). Both were associated with the Grand Portage-Grand Marais area. Shaganashens was the younger brother of the older chief, Peau de Chat, who may have been one of the signatories of the 1798 agreement. It should be noted that a chief named Grand Coquin was also described at various times at the HBC post at Rainy Lake. It does not appear that this is the same individual who traded at Grand Marais. As noted earlier, L'Espagnol was born in the 1780s and was around this time attaining some prominence. By his wife Josette Otakakisan, L'Espagnol had a stepson, Patickushung, who was married to a daughter of Peau de Chat. One of his own daughters was married to a man named Nabanakacomiausking. Another stepson,

Memeskawash, as Timothy Cochrane (2000) notes, “raised a large family in the area and had descendants who became headmen at Grand Portage.”

Leaders such as these were the prime negotiators in dealing with trade companies. These chiefs, who achieved power and influence through their hunting abilities, their eloquence, and a number of other factors, negotiated credit and other aspects of trading relationships. As tributes to their power, traders gave them yearly gifts of special military-style clothing, as well as alcohol and other goods. Traders kept track of the location of these band leaders and their followers throughout the winter and sent men to find them in order to get furs they and their followers produced and to supply them with goods they needed. In trade journals family members and followers were often identified only by their relationship to the leader. In this case, because of the season of the year and the presence of alcohol there it is fairly clear that the two leaders must have recently received their supplies on credit from the Hudson’s Bay Company post.

On October 5 Chapman wrote that he had consulted with the chief “as to what place it will be best to winter and they all say that this is far the best that there is no Indians the other side of the portage and the fishing is better here than there &c.” Two days later Chapman reported work on a storehouse and that he “had an addition to my family this evening,” although he does not explain the remark. On October 12 Chapman said that the fishing had been good, as had the weather (MHS, Sibley Papers, Chapman Journal, 4).

Contemporaneous with Chapman’s journal is a journal kept at Fort William by an unidentified company clerk (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). In this journal is a rich record of trade, the comings and goings of Indian people, and the subsistence activities of company employees. Much of this material may be helpful in getting a sense of what could have occurred at Grand Portage many years before.

This HBC journal contains references to a variety of Indians from the Grand Portage area and describes in more detail some of the same events and activities mentioned by Chapman. The journal begins on October 18, after most Indians must have received their advances for the winter, though a few still came for “a few necessaries” (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Oct. 23, 1823). Among those who had not received their goods were Little Rat and his sons, who lived in the Mille Lacs region. The sons came to the post from Lac La Loge.

Around this same time at Rainy Lake, an Indian named Little Rat—who appears to have been the same Little Rat whose sons were at Fort William—was at the Hudson’s Bay Company post at Rainy Lake (HBCA, B.105/a/9, 14, Sept. 24; 17, Oct. 20; 21, Oct. 4?). Little Rat came to trade for himself, as well as representing people from Sturgeon Lake, the location where McLoughlin had wintered with Daniel Harmon in 1807-08, which was directly north of Mille Lacs, Little Rat’s home (Nute 1952: 36). These Sturgeon Lake people reached Rainy Lake by means of the Seine River. They had come to trade with the Americans the previous spring (HBCA, B.105/a/8, 25, April 12, 1823). They may have been motivated in part by changes in HBC policies that abolished the credit system in that region, though not in the region of Rainy Lake (Bishop 1974: 249-51). Contrary to

the wishes of the HBC, people sometimes left their own nearby posts to visit other posts where credit was still given, or to trade with competing companies, particularly along the border. Little Rat appears to have gone to Rainy Lake at various times. Later on, in 1829 he went to Rainy Lake to rice and it was suspected, to trade his summer hunts with the Americans (HBCA, B.231/a, Oct. 5, 1829).

When Little Rat appeared at Rainy Lake in September, 1823, he inquired on behalf of some Sturgeon Lake Indians who were about a day's march from Rainy Lake. McLoughlin wrote: "They had desired him to Enquire of me what I wished them to do—I told him to tell them to go Back to their traders—that they would get no advances from me—Indians ought not to be Encouraged to rove from one post to another as in this case the concern is cheated of their debt." McLoughlin considered these people to be "Nipigon Indians," because the traders that supplied them came from the HBC's Nipigon post (HBCA, B.105/a/9, 49, Jan. 27, 1824, letter to George Simpson; see quotation from letter of Roderick McKenzie, Sturgeon Lake, to Alexander McTavish in Nipigon House Journals, HBCA, B149/a, April 1, 1827, cited in Arthur 1973: 59).

At this time, McLoughlin continued to face opposition throughout the border region. Although the traders associated with the Johnstons had not returned to Lake Vermilion, the American Fur Company was located there and at Rainy Lake. He continued to send Simon McGillivray to Basswood Lake to counter the opposition at Vermilion (HBCA, B.105/a/9, 47, Jan. 23, 1824). At the same time McLoughlin sought to minimize giving credit in the fall, giving it mainly to Indians who hunted on the north side of the border and in smaller quantities than in previous years. McLoughlin theorized that even if he gave less credit in the fall he could still get the Indians' spring hunts by making his prices competitive or limiting the price advantage of the opposition. McLoughlin proposed to his main competitor, Cotté of the American Fur Company, after Cotté's arrival in early October, that they agree to fix the rates of exchange for their mutual benefit:

I proposed to Cote to take four martins for a skin three lynxes a skin—an otter one skin—&c. This is the price at Fond du Lac and Cote agreed to my proposition but wants to sell common strouds at four skins a fathom—I want to sell at five pr. Fathom—he is to give me an answer to morrow—My object in putting this high price on goods is to send these Sturgeon Lake Indians back to their Lands—This spring they traded with the opposition at a very cheap rate—say one cub beaver for a skin—keeping them hereabouts will give us some trouble and the expence of bringing their supplies to Sturgeon Lake would be thrown away<sup>34</sup>

Later Cotté appeared and agreed to the prices proposed by McLoughlin. On hearing of the prices to be charged, the Sturgeon Lake people left. "They said goods were at too high a price in this part and they would go back to their Lands." Little Rat who had promised also to go back to his lands was given a present of two quarts of rum and one-half a fine twist of tobacco. Whether or not he was given credit is unclear. On October 17 McLoughlin recorded giving credit to a "Little Rat Chief" in the amount of 43 skins. This

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<sup>34</sup> Later on, in a letter to Simon McGillivray, McLoughlin added that under this set of rates, a bear skin would be treated as one skin (HBCA, B.105/a/8, 35).

may not be the Little Rat of Mille Lacs, since a later list of Indians in the Rainy Lake district recorded the same individual and noted that he hunted south of the border (HBCA, B.105/e/2). This demonstrates the difficulty of identifying individuals in the region because of the duplication in names.

Meanwhile at Fort William, after the departure of Little Rat's sons, the trader Francis Grant left the fort "to give Credits to the family [of Little Rat] and arrange with them in regard for the Winter." Grant returned on November 8 because "the Small Lake [had] frozen over." A few days later men were sent to Grand Portage to see if the Americans had "any establishment there" (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Oct. 25, 1823). Surprisingly, given what we know from Chapman's journal, the men came back a few days later to report that the Americans had made no appearance (Oct. 25). Obviously they did not bother to go beyond Grand Portage.

At Fort William Indians began arriving with their first furs of the season (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Oct. 27, 1823). Some received a gift of rum as a reward (Dec. 4-5). Antoine Collin and his son Michel were involved in the fall fisheries in the islands along the lakeshore (Nov. 2, 11, 15, 16), although ice began to form along the shore which made navigation difficult. The exact locations were not always mentioned in the journal. At various times during this and subsequent years the Collins, particularly Michel, and other people working for the HBC fished at Pie Island, Thunder Cape, Rabbit Island, the Welcome Islands, and Shagoinah Island (Campbell 1976: 67). This last location would appear to be the same place, mentioned earlier, where Roderick McKenzie went to fish from Grand Portage in the fall of 1785. An undated map of the region, apparently from the late 19th century (Arthur 1973: lxxiv) places this island just to the east of Thunder Cape.

The Collin family appear to have been involved in a number of aspects of the operations of the HBC company at Fort William. Both Antoine Collin and his son Michel took part in fishing at various times of the year. As will be seen, Antoine Collin sugared every year at Grand Portage. Antoine was an expert canoemaker. Earlier in his career Antoine had been involved with trade at various locations for the North West Company. His son Michel did the same for the HBC.

Toward the end of November 1823 "the women of the fort went off to Hunt Rabbits" to good results. Included was the wife of the chief factor Haldane (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Nov. 24, 30, Dec. 2, 6, 8, 9, 1823) The men at the post were put on rations consisting of: "3 1/2 days Salt Fish and Potatoes at 5 lb. Salt Fish & 1 Galln. Potatoes pr. day—2 days Rations fresh fish at 9 lb. pr. day—and 1 1/2 days Corn and Grease at 1 qt. Corn & 1 1/2 oz Grease pr. day—for 1 Weeks Rations to each Man."

Meanwhile Chapman and his men were building their trading post and getting ready for winter. Chapman mentions making nets and fishing to put up fish (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, October 12, 23, 1823). By October 23 they had only taken trout but no whitefish. The weather, however, was beautiful for the season. Chapman plastered his house himself (Oct. 28). On October 31 Chapman labeled his location as Fort Misery, a

reference to the rains that had just started. He noted that “it rained more in the house than out.” Also he had heard reports that the Indians were starving. Fishing, he said, was over for the season. On November 13, Chapman reported he was afraid he would not have enough provisions. In the end they had caught no whitefish at all. Chapman decided to send off two of his men, presumably to stay with the Indians, since he did not have enough food for them. It was at this point that Grand Coquin’s band arrived at the post, “starving to death.” Not wishing to share, Chapman put his catch of 1200 fish “under key.” Apparently, however, he was forced to share with them during the time that followed, although at various times he sought to send off Grand Coquin’s band. Chapman used the derogatory term “hogs” to the individuals he saw as draining his food supplies, although he did not provide details of the amount of fish he gave out (Nov. 20, 27, Dec. 11, 20, 24). At the same time he tried to send off two of his men to Whitefish Lake, but they did not go, not knowing the country well (Nov. 27). They did not seem to know how to get to Whitefish Lake.

At Fort William traders made unceasing efforts to add to their food supplies and appear to have had enough to share with visiting Indians. The knowledge of the presence of American traders nearby appears to have caused the HBC to take special care in being more generous to Indians living near the post, such as Ackiwainsie and l’Homme du Sault and their families. This was “according to old Custom,” and was intended to keep these individuals and their families “until the season becomes sufficiently advanced to admit the possibility of their procuring their livelihood by hunting.” Similarly, there were “some Indian old Women who, either from inability to support themselves—or from their connection with some of the best hunters belonging to this quarter—Look for some support from this establishment.” The trader noted it was impossible to refuse to support them for fear of losing the trade of those with whom they were related. To all, the traders were supplying rations of the same fish and potatoes being fed to the men of the post (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Dec. 20, 1823).

It was not until December 15 that the HBC received word of the Americans at Grand Marais. The author of the journal reported: “Pucquitchinities arrived from the Grand Marais 40 miles beyond the Grand Portage he came to give information of the Americans being established there for the purpose of trading with the Indians. This place is upon the American territories—but on the communication by which many of the Indians of this [place] pass” (TBHMS, Fort William Journal).

A few days later the two eldest sons of the Peau de Chat arrived from White[fish?] Lake where their father and Little Englishman were encamped (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Dec. 17, 1823) As noted earlier, Peau de Chat was the older brother of the Little Englishman, Shaganshens, the same man that Chapman called the Grand Coquin and who Chapman had been trying to get to leave Grand Marais so as to reduce the burden at the trading post.

Two men, Dompierre and [Joseph?] Fanneant, were given orders to accompany the sons of Peau de Chat back to Whitefish Lake. These men left the next day taking with them “some necessaries for the Indians at White fish Lake –and 2 kegs Mixt. Rum of 2 Galls

each are bring [sic] Whatever Furs they may have at the Lodge, to the Fort. The other Indians now here. Received each a present of a little Rum this evening and went out to drink.” Joseph Fanneant may have been related to the Joseph Fagniant or Faniant, mentioned earlier, who was involved with the trade with the North West Company engagés around 1800 (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Dec. 18, 1823).

At the same time Francis Grant was sent to the Petite Pêche or little fishery, another location possibly at the end of Whitefish Lake closest to Grand Portage “where they are to remain as a guard upon the Indians in that quarter in order to prevent them from going towards the Americans established at the Grande Marais” (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Dec. 18, 1823).

In early January 1824 Chapman sent two of his men, Boucher and George, probably George Bonga, to Whitefish Lake, by way of Grand Portage. They took with them 100 skins worth of merchandise (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan. 1, 13, 1824). Later in the month his other men went to Island River to trade with an Indian who wintered there. They returned later to report that the Indian had made two packs of furs, mostly beaver, but agreed to trade for them ten days later. The weather turned bad and the men were not able to return. Chapman himself attempted to hunt and trap but was unsuccessful at both (Jan. 17, 23, 28). Chapman spent his time reading.

Meanwhile at Fort William traders and men were surviving well and able to continue to share their food with the Indians. The day before Christmas a “Christmas Regale” was given to the men, consisting of two pounds of beef, a pound of flour and a little butter. Petit Vieux (Akiwainsie) was also given some beef and flour, because he was “a good Indian and an excellent Hunter.” On January 1 the men were all given drams and two pounds of beef, one pound of flour, one half pint of Barley, and a little butter as a regale. The Indians were also given a little rum, including Petit Vieux who was also given the same amount of beef, flour and butter as the men (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Dec. 24, 1823, Jan. 1, 1824).

On January 1, 1824, the post received a request from Simon McGillivray for goods and possibly food for the Basswood Lake post. Goods were packed onto sleds and sent off a few days later (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan 5, 1824). The implication of the entry is that the goods were meant for Rainy Lake, though it is likely that they were for McGillivray himself. The year before McGillivray had been sent to Basswood as a way of competing with the Americans at Lake Vermilion, which was assumed to be in American territory. Basswood was seen as a way of blocking access to Vermilion for as much as one-third of the post's potential customers. In the spring of 1823 McGillivray brought out five packs of “very good furs” to Rainy Lake. McLoughlin noted that this was “still very little in proportion to the expence of his posts, but these expences were provisions, which he got from Fort William, were unavoidable as there was no fall fishing or Rice” (HBCA, B.105/1/8, p. 29, May 31, 1824). The rice crop was much more plentiful that fall, but the problem of competition continued.

In order to counter the competition of the Americans at Lake Vermilion that winter, McLoughlin encouraged McGillivray to be more generous in his rates of exchange as a way of making the American Fur Company pay more for the furs they received. McLoughlin would later write to McGillivray:

I think if you had an opportunity it would be as well to send Notice by an Indian to Vermilion Lake to the Indians that you will trade a Blanket 3 pts. For three skins not that you will have many to trade. But that such a report getting among the Indians will oblige the Americans to reduce their prices and as they have a good Many debts out it will cause them very great expence.

Despite the agreement with Cotté, McLoughlin had made clear from the beginning that it would be up to McGillivray as to whether he would follow the same policy. McLoughlin also proposed that instead of selling common calico shirts for 18 muskrats and the fine ones for 24, he might sell them for 12 and 18 respectively (HBCA, B.105/a/9, p. 64-66, March 3-5, 1824).

At Fort William on January 6, Petit Vieux and his family left the vicinity of the post, possibly to go to their winter hunts. He was given some rum, tobacco, fish, and potatoes to take with him. He was according to the writer of the journal, using words that he repeated often, "highly pleased with his treatment while here." The men were working on tasks around the fort, including blacksmith work, carpentry, sawing firewood, and thrashing the grain from the garden. It was reported that the produce from the farm included 23 bushels of peas, 24 1/2 bushels of oats, 23 bushels of barley and 10 1/2 bushels of oats and barley mixed (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan. 14, 1824).

Periodically, employees and Indians went back and forth between Fort William and Whitefish Lake, carrying food supplies and furs (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan. 19, 22, 1824). One band leader that had not been heard from was L'Espagnol, or the Spaniard. We know Chapman that had seen him at Grand Marais in the fall. He was now apparently hunting beyond Whitefish Lake, possibly at Arrow Lake or beyond along the old canoe route. Two men left with corn, to give some to Grant at the Petite Peche and for their journey. They were guided by Pacutchinities (Jan. 22, 23, 24).

The same day they left two men arrived from McGillivray at Basswood to get additional goods left behind by one of the men who was unable to carry them. Since the earlier group of men had left Fort William on January 5, simple calculation would suggest that a round trip between the two posts at this time of year took a maximum of 20 days or 10 days each way. However, on leaving the post a few days later the men were provided with eight and a half day's provisions, which suggests that in traveling there had been some turnaround time for rest and recovery at Basswood Lake (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan. 27, 1824).

On January 19 the Grand Coquin, or Shaganashens, arrived at Fort William with his family from Grand Marais. He, with his family, remained around the post until February 10, when he obtained "necessaries and a supply of Provisions and went off seemingly



well pleased with his reception.” He intended to join “his brother the Peau de Chat at White fish lake.” His son was to go farther to the hunting lands of L’Espagnol (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan. 19, 1824).

On January 29 three Indians (Attineau, Ochikatusk, and Washisakewaansie) arrived at Fort William, with their families, bringing in 137 skins, 110 of which were beaver. They appear to have come from the direction of Mille Lacs, having reported seeing Little Rat, who was “badly off in consequence of not having received any necessaries in the fall.” If this were the case it may have been in part because he did not succeed in obtaining credit or goods at Rainy Lake in the fall (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan. 29, 1824).

The men who did appear at Fort William all received rations of fish and potatoes for the few days they were there (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan. 29, 30, 31, 1824). Unlike Little Rat, these men had apparently received credit at Fort William in August or September. They were now given a little more, as well as a two-gallon keg of high wines, tobacco, 67 quarts of corn, some fish, and potatoes, and departed, “pleased with their reception” (Feb. 1). Meanwhile the men at the post were now on a weekly ration of 30 pounds of salt fish and a keg of potatoes for each man (Jan. 31).

At Grand Marais, according to Chapman, the “small lake or Big Toby as you may call it” froze over on February 11. This allowed Chapman’s men to begin spearing trout through the ice, allowing for one meal of fresh fish every day (MHS, Sibley Papers, Chapman Journal, Feb. 17, 1824). Chapman complained that he had “a lodge of sick to maintain and there is no possibility of their recovery.” Chapman clearly did not understand the role that was expected of a fur company trading post in this period, exemplified by the way in which the HBC post at Fort William took care of needy individuals and visitors. By the end of February Chapman reported that the ice had broken up on the lake, though the bay two leagues from the post was still frozen, enabling his men to continue to spear fish (Feb. 27).

At Fort William on February 21, the men who had gone in search of L’Espagnol returned. They had gone “to where he had left his Canoe last fall—but could find no recent traces of him.” Since the men had departed Fort William on January 23, the journey had taken them thirty days, which would suggest that they had traveled a maximum of fifteen days out from Fort William, possibly well beyond the distance traveled by the men who went to Basswood Lake. However, given the fact that they had also stopped off at Whitefish Lake, the journey was not likely to be quite this far (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Jan. 21, 1824). Since they had been unable to find L’Espagnol, they may have wandered throughout the region for some time.

On February 24, the trader sent off Joseph Fanneant and another man to the Petite Peche on Whitefish Lake with two bags of corn for Francis Grant who was located there (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Feb. 24, see also May 25, 1824). Grant was instructed to remove himself to the small house at the portage on the other side of Whitefish Lake. It may be that this other location, which would have been closer to Arrow Lake, was more

advantageous of getting the trade of Indian people who would soon be involved in spring trapping.

The weather was changing now. On March 4 it rained all day and all night. Pacutchininie appeared with the heart and tongue of a caribou. Petit Vieux had also killed a caribou. Petit Vieux later brought in most of the meat from his kill and received a small keg of rum (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, March 4, 7, 1824). Pacutchinities obtained provisions and the loan of a beaver trap, after which he went off to hunt beaver (March 9). Sansquartier and Baron, the blacksmiths, were making more traps (March 13).

Chapman at Grand Marais suffered from the rain. Everything there was “wet through and through.” His buildings were now worse than hog pens, though as luck would have it, “I have no Peltry to get wet.” By March 7 no fish had been taken since the beginning of the month. But surprisingly the sick Indians were recovering and Chapman reported that he would “do my utmost to get hold of some of the spring hunts if life and health attend” (MHS, Chapman Journal, March 7, 1824).

At Fort William it was the time for preparing to sugar. On March 6 the men returned with the news that “the Indians of that quarter are on the eve of a removing towards the Old Grand Portage” in what is clearly a regular seasonal pattern of movement (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). On March 16, the author noted that Mr. Grant himself had returned from Whitefish Lake as “the greater party of the Indians have left there and gone as usual to pass the Spring near the old Grand Portage.” Freemen of the area and women at Fort William left there on March 31 to begin making sugar. Some, such as the Collin family, went to Grand Portage. Others appear to have sugared around Mount McKay, known for its maple trees (Arthur 1973: 86, 96; Campbell 1976: 53). Men from the fort went along to erect a lodge and cut firewood (March 29, 31, April 1). The first sugar from around Fort William was brought to the post on April 27 and April 28.

At Grand Marais in March, Chapman equipped the Indian whose sick family had been at the post all winter. Chapman’s intention was “to try and make something of him if possible.” It was only now that Chapman received word of what had happened at Whitefish Lake over the winter. On March 18 he stated that an HBC clerk and two men were there “to take care of the Indians in that place” (MHS, Chapman Journal, p. 15).

They have put down the prices far below par otters for 3 skins martins 2 for a skin as they come minks also fishers are a skin foxes Lynx & wolverines also Beaver are 2 skins as they come Rats 6 for a skin Bears 2 skins &c. This is to encourage the Indians to pay their credits as they had made their credits before we arrived here. However the Indians are not two well pleased with them for all their low prices and fair promises. They say high time now they have an opposition.

Chapman also reported the ineffectiveness of his men in pursuing the trade of the Indians at Whitefish Lake. Boucher, about whom Chapman complained throughout his journal, and another man, had “found no Indians when they arrived on the Lake” (MHS, Chapman Journal, p. 16). What they had found was “an old encampment.” They returned

without trading. Had they proceeded to the other end of the lake “they would have found the Indians with Peltries. The Indians say three Pack, but I judge from their own account to be about 2 Pack.” Chapman thought he might pay a visit to the HBC clerk once the lake was open, although there does not seem to be any evidence that he did (March 18). It may be that Chapman’s men had found the wintering place at Whitefish Lake but had failed to do as Francis Grant and the other HBC men had done, to shift to the other end of the lake in the area where spring trapping was taking place.

Chapman seemed unaware that sugaring was going on in the region. On March 28 he reported “fine warm weather” (MHS, Chapman Journal). The Indians, he noted, were making no hunts. He did not know what they would do “when the spring breaks up.” Chapman noted that all the Indians there were drinking rum, but he did not seem to know how they got it. “There is in every Lodge a small Keg whether they get it on credit or have it given them I cannot say. They said it is given them and that the Great Englishman is more free with his Rum than the Traders have been heretofore. I have also been tolerable lavish with mine and too much so.” Chapman noted that despite his generosity there was “no probability of making anything more with it than to draw the trade of the Indians.” It appears from this remark that Chapman seemed to feel that alcohol might in some circumstances be a primary trade item, when in fact, in most cases it was designed to serve exactly as he described.

Chapman intended to pass the spring at Grand Portage, where he would go once his canoe had been repaired. On April 11 Chapman noted that the chief, probably meaning L’Espagnol, had arrived reporting good hunts, in all two good packs consisting of seven bears, one moose, four reindeer, 100 martens, and 150 beaver (MHS, Chapman Journal). Chapman hoped to get some furs from the man but “they have all large credits from the English. They have also small credits from me about 20 skins in all. The Chief says that he cannot trade with me unless he should kill more than his credits but his young men will probably trade the greater part with me.” Chapman said he intended to “make a bold punch for the whole.” He had not been able to get birchbark to repair his canoe but expected to get some once the weather was warmer.

Meanwhile, at Fort William, Pacutchinities brought in five martens on March 18, having caught no beaver. Petit Vieux was “attending lines on the Lake” (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, March 18, 1824). They both came in on April 3 with a few martens. Pacutchinities came in with a few more on April 13. The men at the fort were cutting firewood and getting lake ice to fill the ice house. The blacksmiths were doing various jobs, including making awls (March 20). The following week wood was carted to the canoe yard to prepare it for “summer use.”

On April 5 men came from Rainy Lake with letters from McLoughlin (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). These may have included McLoughlin’s letter to Haldane of March 18, suggesting a journey of as much as 18 days for these men. Around this same time Michel Collin had begun setting nets and two of the men from Rainy Lake were sent to change the net. They came back with 13 suckers (April 7). Men returned regularly, almost every

day until April 23, when the lines were taken up and “set nearer to the Shore as the Ice is getting weak.”

Grant returned to Whitefish Lake late in March, intending to spend the spring there (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, March 29, 1824). It would appear that some Indians remained there, perhaps to trap. On April 24, Louis Ross arrived from Whitefish Lake with a request from Grant for some goods for the Indians there. It was reported that the Americans had traded with Scundagance and Rawaytask [sic]. Possibly these are individuals identified by Chapman only by their relationship to band leaders.

The snow was melting around the fort. Two men were put to work spreading it out to help it thaw. The boats in the river were secured so that they would not be carried away when the ice in the river melted. A man attended the cattle in the meadows to keep them from crossing the river while the ice was soft (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, April 26, 1824). That night it snowed heavily, but the snow thawed during the day (April 27). The canoe wood was now put in bundles in a storeroom where it would be more secure. The blacksmiths made more beaver traps (April 28). On April 30 it froze hard during the night.

On May 1, Patcutchininies, who had not been heard of since April 13, arrived at Fort William on May 1 bringing “a Casseau of sugar wt. 43 lb” (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). Considering that he had been at Grand Marais to meet Chapman in the fall, it is possible he had been sugaring at Grand Portage. After this he “went off to shoot Wild fowl.” He and Fanneant shot ducks together on May 6.

Work was underway to fix the masonry of the boiler in the canoeyard in preparation for canoe making. The hotbed in the garden was filled with dung and other garden work was begun (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, May 3, 1824). Pechou came down the river with a few skins. The river above was now clear of ice (May 4). The next night it snowed all night, but cleared up in the morning. It was the warmest day they had had all spring (May 5). The blacksmiths worked on beaver traps. The other men cut potatoes for seed. Pacutchininies brought 8 ducks (May 6). The next night it rained. The fish casks were cleaned and put away until fall (May 7). The canoe that Grant left the previous fall at Pointe Meuron was taken to the entrance of the portage to Whitefish Lake so that Grant and his men could use it when they came out (May 8).

On May 5 Chapman and his men embarked for Grand Portage, though they were soon driven on shore by the wind. The next day they were encamped at “the small islands.” On May 7, they reached Grand Portage (MHS, Chapman Journal, May 5, 6, 7, 1824). At Grand Portage at this time were Antoine Collin’s wife and other women of the area. On May 9, it was reported in the Fort William journal that “Madm. Collin arrived at Fort William, from the Sugar Bush where they were to remain another week—She returned back this morning” (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). The ice was all cleared from the bay. At the same time Atteneau arrived with a few skins (May 9).

Chapman does not appear to have had much success in trading at Grand Portage. Reporting on several weeks for which there was “no news,” he stated on May 20 that his men had “gone in search of the Indians. This is the third time I have sent them off and they have turned back on account of snow.” He noted the passage of a canoe bound for the Red River bearing the family of Mr. Stewart, something reported in the Fort William journal on May 10 (MHS, Chapman Journal).

At Fort William on May 12 four men went to the nearby sugar bush to bring down some sugar. Fanneant visited a net and speared five fish. On May 14 Collin began making canoes, which he continued into June (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, May 14, 17, 21, June 4, 12, 23, 29, 1824). On May 17 an inventory was begun of merchandise left at Fort William and preparation of outfits for various locations that would go out later in the summer or fall. This continued for several days, after which an order was prepared for goods to be ordered from Moose Factory. Plowing began the same day (May 17, 18, 19). On May 22 some Indian women brought some sugar to trade. On May 24 work was begun planting potatoes, delayed by the spring rains. This work continued all week, until May 29.

On May 25 Francis Grant and two men arrived from Whitefish Lake, “where they have passed the Winter as a guard upon the Indians in that quarter. Mr. Grant brought the furs for several Indians which he had collected since the last he sent to the Fort.” On May 29 Michel Collin came from his fishery with 211 pounds of fish, which were immediately handed out as rations to the men (TBHMS, Fort William Journal).

Meanwhile seasonal work continued at Fort William. On May 31, all of the men except for the tradesmen were employed in sweeping and cleaning the rubbish out of the fort (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). On June 3 Little Rat of Mille Lacs arrived with all of his winter’s furs and those of his son. He had not been in communication with traders all winter and only his son had received clothing and ammunition. Surprisingly, he had made a good hunt under the circumstances, about 50 skins, although his normal take was about 90. He was rewarded the next day with his chief’s coat, hat and linen shirt. He then paid his debt of only 10 skins and traded the rest “for Goods to Clothe his family who were nearly naked—On going off a Big Keg was given him—of Mixed Rum with which he departed apparently highly pleased.”

At the same time at Grand Portage, Chapman was making another attempt to get some furs from local Indians before their departure for Fort William. On June 4, Chapman reported that the chief, that is, L’Espagnol, had left for Fort William with two good packs of furs and that his own efforts to obtain them had been to no avail. “I have tried the force of flattery & of lying & of Rum and he has withheld all that he had more than his credits. I have not far from half [a] Pack.” Apparently other Indians were expected. This ended Chapman’s journal (MHS, Chapman Journal).

The success of Chapman’s trade at Grand Marais and Whitefish Lake during the year is hard to weigh. Included with the journal are a few accounts of 13 Indians who received credit, including accounts for the Big Rogue, probably a translation of the Grand Coquin

After 1805



Untitled, painted by Eastman Johnson in October 1857 at Grand Portage. It is charcoal and crayon on paper and printed with permission from the St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth, Minnesota.

(Shaganashens, or the Little Englishman), and his lame son and second son; the Fils de la Bete (the Son of the Beast), L’Espagnol’s stepson, the Crapeau (Toad), La Chouette (Screech Owl), the Brechu’s son (Broken Tooth?), and Vieux Peau de Chat. Some of them are dated in the fall of September 1824, suggesting that Chapman returned to Grand Portage to trade again. Government license records, however, show that Chapman was licensed in 1824 to trade at Rainy Lake (U.S. Congress. House 1825: sig.2). Thus, if he traded at Grand Portage that year, it may have been on the way in to Rainy Lake. As shown in Table 4, calculations based on these records show that credits Chapman gave out per man averaged just over 33 skins. In all, he gave out 438 skins in credits. Of these accounts, the Grand Coquin, his two sons, the Crapeau, and La Chouette were the only ones credited with producing any furs. Interestingly, the Big Rogue’s second son was charged in this account with ammunition received at Fond du Lac.

L’Espagnol’s arrival with his son-in-law at Fort William was described on June 6 (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). It was reported that they had arrived to pay off their debts for the year, 100 skins for L’Espagnol, 60 skins for the son-in-law, mostly beavers and otters. The other son-in-law, Nabanakacomiausing, was still hunting but was expected soon, having sent in one pack of furs. It was reported that L’Espagnol “does not appear to have given any thing to the Americans—although he says they endeavoured to get his hunt from him.” After paying his debts he was given his “usual clothing,” probably similar to what the Little Rat received, and a big keg of mixed rum. He began drinking outside the fort, which he continued into the next day with a few Indians at the fort. On the third day he received “some necessaries such as ammunition &ca Bag of Corn and as usual two kegs Mixt Rum to take away with him—he departed well pleased.” He left for Grand Portage to pass the summer there “or in its vicinity.”

The June inventory was a feature of life at trading posts in the area. As noted earlier, an inventory of this kind took place at Grand Portage in 1797. The arrival of the Indians in June 1824 caused an interruption in the taking of the inventory at Fort William. This was now taken up again. The context would suggest that at this point an inventory was being done not of trade merchandise, but of the materials used in operating the fort, including such items as the bark in the storehouse (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, June 7, 9, 10, 11). Chief Factor Haldane left on June 27 by North Canoe for Moose Factory.

Another possible feature of Indian community life at this time of year were feasts, possibly having something to do with the Midewiwin. Such events were described by Roderick McKenzie as having taken place at Grand Portage in the spring of 1786. Nothing of this kind was mentioned in 1824; however, a June 2, 1828, entry in the HBC journal for Fort William reports the purchase by four Indians of two calves “to make a feast” (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1).

Throughout the summer there was occasional trade along with the continuing efforts to raise and store food, make equipment, and maintain and improve the post. On July 1 L’Espagnol’s stepson, Patickquscung, arrived with a few skins in addition to a bundle left by L’Espagnol for him. The Grand Coquin and the Peau de Chat’s second son also arrived but brought very little. The Petit Vieux brought bear meat. They received liquor

and went off to Sturgeon Bay where L'Espagnol was encamped. This was a location about 15 miles south of the mouth of the Kaministikwia River along the coast (July 1, 2).

By July 3, Collin was receiving help from two men sewing canoes (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). By July 5, "Old Collin" had made five new canoes and but had stopped working pending getting more wattape to complete two more canoes. The next day some women were sent to get it. On July 8 L'Espagnol and the Peau de Chat came in from Sturgeon Bay bringing gum and wattape to trade. They traded it and went off.

Until now Michel Collin's fishery continued to provide enough fish for rations to the men, but was now beginning to fall off (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, July 3, 1824). Collin now set his nets at the bottom of the river. Between that and the seine, enough fish was provided to feed the men (July 7). Soon he and some of the other men began concentrating on seining for sturgeon. On July 15 men brought in 500 pounds of sturgeon (July 12, 14, 15, 19) When there were no fish the men complained that they were unable to work on their other rations (July 20).

Indians began to receive their goods on credit for the coming winter. L'Espagnol's nephew and stepson obtained guns and ammunition. They would receive the rest of their goods when L'Espagnol came in to take his (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, July 14, 1824). On July 24 a number of Indians arrived who had been at Isle Royale, in what was another seasonal pattern, as described earlier in John Tanner's narrative. "They say there are no Caribou there this summer and suppose they all crossed to the Mainland last winter. They brought nothing but fish—principally dried White fish." They traded it for liquor on the promise to drink it away from the fort. It appeared that some Indians, including Little Rat and his son, stayed near Fort William awaiting the arrival of the canoes with merchandise from Moose Factory (Aug. 1).

On July 10, cabbages were transplanted, rutabagas were planted, and potatoes were hoed. Carpenters worked on the dwelling house, including plastering Haldane's room and putting up wainscoting while he was gone (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, July 10, 1824). Later in the month haying was begun, with assistance from Collin's family and some Indian women (July 23). The hay was spread in the field to dry, and later turned. Rain slowed the process (July 27, 30, 31). Haying continued into August. By August 12 there were 100 loads in the barn with a great deal left in the fields. Even so, it was expected that the hay would be cut and stored a month earlier than the previous year. Work was finished on August 27, producing a total of 140 loads of hay.

On August 17, the loaded canoes came from Moose Factory (TBHMS, Fort William Journal). Canoes with goods were sent to Nipigon on the way. Once the canoes arrived goods were packed up and sent to Nipigon and the Pic (Aug. 20). The first Indians to come in after that were the eldest son of Peau de Chat and the Papamason's son. They brought nothing. It was reported that both had traded their furs in the spring with the Americans, although this cannot be verified in Chapman's journal. They left soon after. Perhaps they had simply come to learn of the arrival of the merchandise from Moose Factory. Peau de Chat, his son and two others arrived on August 29. The next day they



received their “Equipments for the Winter of such necessities as they required—and a present of a large Keg of Mixt Rum with which they went off.” More Indians received credits on September 3. L’Espagnol may not have been among them. David Thompson, who arrived at Fort William on September 6, reported not having seen L’Espagnol and his band since the previous spring.

The rest of September was spent in tasks preparing for fall and winter. The fish casks were filled with water, perhaps to cause them to swell and tighten, in preparation for use once fishing started (TBHMS, Fort William Journal, Sept. 2, 1824). Planks were cut for boat building and the boat builders yard was cleaned out (Sept. 4). The blacksmiths made fish darts (Sept. 6). The catch of the fish seiners began to improve (Sept. 7, 10). A new cavreau or cellar for storing vegetables was dug, since the old one was too small (Sept. 9, 14). So ended the Hudson’s Bay Company journal for that year.

### **Later Trade in the Grand Portage Area**

Subsequent journals for Fort William describe a very similar routine of seasonal events, though with some changes depending on the nature of the weather, changes in the Native community, and the competition from across the border. Clues about what was happening can also be obtained in some American sources. As noted, Chapman was licensed to trade in 1824 at Rainy Lake. The following year, however, he received a license to trade at Grand Portage again (U.S. Congress. House 1826: sig. 2). No further record of what happened that year has been found.

In the fall of 1824 George Johnston, who, with his father had earlier hired Youngs L. Morgan, went to work for the American Fur Company and came to winter at Grand Marais. During the winter he sent men to Grand Portage, Whitefish Lake, and other wintering locations for the local Ojibwe.<sup>35</sup> During his time in the region he appears to have been as miserable, and probably as unsuccessful, as Bela Chapman the year before. Writing to his brother-in-law, the Indian agent Henry Schoolcraft in 1825, Johnston wrote that the country where he had wintered was “one of the worst and most sterile countries I ever saw without exception. I lived poorly all winter, and this spring more so, living on leeks [?] for a whole month” (MHS, Schoolcraft Papers, R. 3, July 13, 1825, Johnston to Schoolcraft).

Among the locations mentioned by Johnston in his journal was the Roche Debout, described in such a way as to suggest that it was located southwest of Grand Marais, along the lake shore toward Fond du Lac, as earlier noted in François Victoire Malhiot’s 1804-05 journal. At one point Johnston stated that he himself set out to search for men sent earlier to the Roche Debout, but that winds prevented him from going any farther than the “Salmon Trout River,” a location that has not been identified (LC, Johnston Papers, Nov. 13, Dec. 1, 1824).

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<sup>35</sup> George Johnston’s journal for the period 1824 to 1826, formerly a part of the Henry Schoolcraft Papers in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., is now cataloged separately. Theresa Schenck is currently preparing the manuscript for publication.

Johnston also provided to Schoolcraft a census of Grand Portage Ojibwe, done in the spring of 1825 (MHS, Schoolcraft Papers, container 61, R. 49, 1825). The list includes the names of 14 named Ojibwe men, along with figures for the population of the community, which at that date included 19 men, 16 women, and 26 children, for a total of 61 people. This figure appears to represent only Ojibwe of the region who resided south of the border and therefore does not represent the entire Indian population which would have traded with the North West or XY Companies.

Word of Johnston's trade reached the HBC trader at Rainy Lake, who reported that Johnston and four men remained at Grand Marais and were trading at Whitefish Lake in British territory (HBCA, B.105/e/4, fo. 3d). During this period American traders continued to operate at Rainy Lake, Basswood Lake, and Lake Vermilion. Together, the Americans had four clerks and 24 men in the border area. To counter the competition the HBC now established a post at Arrow Lake, between Whitefish Lake and the boundary, within British territory. A man came from there to Fort William on March 8, 1825, "with about 10 skins furs from the Indians of Lac des Boy Blanc [sic] who had taken debts from the American traders" (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1).

Based apparently on the text of Johnston's journal, Schoolcraft, in a later report to the U.S. Congress in 1831 stated (U.S. Congress. Senate 1831):

In the winter of 1824, persons in the service of the Hudson Bay Company carried off in trains the band of Chippeways, living near Old Grade Portage, (Lake Superior,) after the arrival of an American trader (Mr. Johnston) on the ground.

The statement is clearly an exaggeration, referring merely to the free access the Grand Portage Ojibwe had to traders on both sides of the border and the attempts by traders on both sides to poach on each other's credits. Schoolcraft's confusion appears to have been based in part on an apparent belief that Whitefish Lake was in American territory. A transcript of a November 1824 Johnston journal entry on a scrap of paper in Schoolcraft's papers reports that Johnston's men went over the border to Whitefish Lake (MHS, Schoolcraft Papers, R. 3, Jan. 14, 1825). The same scrap records a later Johnston entry from January 1825 stating that Johnston's men had gone to Whitefish Lake again, had found none of the Ojibwe people there, and had concluded that both the British traders and the Ojibwe had gone to Fort William, some by dogsled.

American traders returned to the Grand Portage region in the following years. On October 5, 1828, several Indian women came to Fort William to report that Americans had arrived at Grand Marais with a clerk, six men and a large batteau loaded with goods, liquor and provisions. They reportedly gave credit to eight Indians who traded at Fort William, members of the bands of L'Espagnol and Peau de Chat (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1, Oct. 5, 1828). The following year (1829), again at the beginning of October, a report reached Fort William of Americans building a post at the Roche Debout, "45 miles beyond Grand Marais their usual establishment" (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1). It is unclear from this description whether the Roche Debout described was 45 miles southwest, near present-day Little Marais, Minnesota, or 45 miles northeast, which would put the location

in present-day Canada, just north of the mouth of the Pigeon River. A few days after that Little Rat and his band arrived at Fort William. It appeared that he had been to Rainy Lake again, “making rice and no doubt to trade their summer hunt with the Americans. Notwithstanding I gave them a big keg reduced liquor.” There were more reports, but no sightings, of the Americans from the people at Arrow Lake. In 1830 it was also reported from Arrow Lake that the Americans were at Grand Marais (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1, Nov. 7, 1830). This could have been Duncan Ross who was licensed to go there that year. Later that winter it was reported from Arrow Lake in the HBC journal that the opposition “are on the eve of starving themselves” and could give no assistance to the Indians, who were also starving (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1, Feb. 9, 1831). On May 6, 1831, Peter McKenzie, the trader usually stationed at Arrow Lake, set out to visit Peau de Chat’s band, “who make their spring hunt between the old Grand Portage and Lake La Fleche [Arrow Lake].” Two weeks later McKenzie “arrived from his trip to the old Grand Portage, he brought 19 skins which he got from two of Peau de Chats sons.” He left a man there “to prevent them giving their skins to the opposition should they visit them” (HBCA, B.231/a, R. 1, May 13, 1831).

American Fur Company traders continued to compete with the HBC along the border until March 1833, at which time they agreed, in return for a payment of £300 per year to withdraw “from the frontiers of Lake Superior, Lac la Pluie, Winnipeg, and Red River districts” (Porter 1931, 2:771). Other American competitors, however, seem to have continued to appear all along the border. Later, in 1836, the American Fur Company returned to Grand Portage as part of a fishing operation to fish commercially for an eastern market. The fishing operations at Grand Portage and Isle Royale provided Indian people with new opportunities to obtain manufactured goods. Twenty Indians were employed at Grand Portage to fish in 1838. They were paid \$3.00 per barrel of fish. In charge of the Grand Portage post was Pierre Cotté, who had earlier operated the AFC Rainy Lake post, opposing John McLoughlin. During the time of this AFC effort, which lasted until 1841, the HBC also began fishing for the market (Nute 1926: 488, 489-90, 501; Goddier 1984: 345; Cochrane n.d., Ch. IV; NYHS, AFC roster, Grand Portage Outfit, 1838).

A trader named Joseph Morrison traded with the Grand Portage Ojibwe in the late 1840s. A trader’s claim under the treaty of 1854, said to have been attested to by Grand Portage band members themselves, records the fact that Joseph Morrison was a trader at Grand Portage between 1847 and 1852 (US OIA Special Files, MHS M289, R. 57, File 196, Claim 85). Joseph Morrison was listed on the American Fur Company rolls in 1837. He is probably the J. Morrison listed as an employee of Clement H. Beaulieu in 1848 and 1849 in his license for trade with the Chippewa (US OIA Register of Traders’ Licenses, MHS M448). A Paul Morrison, possibly his son, is listed on the 1858 Grand Portage Annuity Roll (US OIA Annuity Rolls, MHS M390, R. 1). Both Joseph, age 50 (listed as a trader), and Paul, age 22 (listed as an interpreter), are in the US census for Minnesota in Lake County in 1860. Joseph Morrison had a son named James, age 15. This may be the grandfather of the artist George Morrison. Morrison’s autobiography states that his great-grandfather (not named) was born in Grand Portage in 1804 and his grandfather, James, Sr., in 1847, which more or less fits the written record (Morrison 1998: 21, 23). Joseph

After 1805

Morrison could have been a son of William Morrison, who, as noted, arrived at Grand Portage with George Nelson in 1802 and continued to be employed as a trader throughout the Fond du Lac region until the late 1820s, before returning to Canada.

Members of the Collin family continued to be associated with Grand Portage in the 1850s. Michel Collin was listed as a member of the Maymoshcowah's band at the government annuity payments of 1854. He appears to be mentioned in a letter from Angus A. McDonald written at Grand Portage on July 7, [186?] to Paul Morrison, referring to a letter McDonald said he received in "Nijee" (the Ojibwe word for friend, sometimes used by whites to refer to Ojibwe Indians or their language) that he could not understand and discussing the state of provisions. The letter also states that "Old Michel has two new canoes finished and two more to make." It would appear that Michel Collin was continuing the craft carried on by his father for many years (MHS, Bardon Papers).



"Kay be sen way We Win," painted by Eastman Johnson in 1857. Note the many trade items worn by mother and child. It is charcoal and crayon on paper and printed with permission from the St. Louis County Historical Society, Duluth, Minnesota.

## Reconstructing the Fur Trade at Grand Portage

In previous chapters I have described what is known of the trade that took place at Grand Portage. At the same time I have sought to describe a variety of other long-term contexts which relate to the Grand Portage trade. In this chapter I will make use of what has been described in the previous chapters to do a reconstruction of the process, patterns, and rituals of trade as it may have been conducted at Grand Portage, particularly in the period during which the North West and XY Companies had their headquarters there from 1785 to 1805. It will also be necessary to introduce further contexts not described in any detail earlier, to fill out a picture of the Grand Portage trade.<sup>36</sup>

The various sources used in earlier chapters provide a picture of developing trade patterns involving the Ojibwe and other groups in the Lake Superior region from the 17th century on. In relation to Grand Portage itself, evidence is most plentiful in the period 1785 to 1805. From this period there is information available on Native people, traders and trade organization, and their interaction. In no case, however, do we have a comprehensive account of any particular trading year that records the full extent of possible information on Grand Portage.

An ideal description of trade at Grand Portage would combine the material, economic, social, and religious aspects in a full account of Indian and trader practices and beliefs. It would tell both of the way in which Indian people organized hunting and gathering and how the trade company organized its business. Unfortunately, there are few accounts of trade that even approach such completeness outside the records of the Hudson's Bay Company. The most extensive records we have on trade in the region come from the 1820s and later for Fort William. In these records is described the day-to-day interaction between trader and Indian. But these records leave out many aspects of the lives of Indian people and traders. There is little description of their existence away from the trading post, in the woods in the winter, or along the lake shore in the summer. However, if such records existed for Grand Portage at an earlier period, we would be well on our way to describing in some detail the system that operated there.

It might be tempting to simply project the trade descriptions of Fort William in the 1820s back onto Grand Portage in the 1785-1805 period, assuming that we could safely assume the details would be the same. However, while the information on Fort William is invaluable, it would be wrong to assume that in all aspects it represents the trade as it occurred at Grand Portage in the heyday of the XY and North West Companies. For one thing, by the 1820s Fort William was no longer a company headquarters, and the competing fur trade companies of that period carried on their competition across the border, an imaginary line that did not exist in the 1785-1805 period. To make use of these records it is necessary to know which pieces of information in them have validity for the 1785-1805 period at Grand Portage.

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<sup>36</sup> In this chapter, citations will be given only to information not already described in previous chapters.

As stated at the beginning of this report, to construct a picture of the trade at Grand Portage between 1785 and 1805, it is necessary to make use of available information and rely on inference to provide missing details. In order to reconstruct trade at Grand Portage, it is necessary to make use of a variety of sources, including general sources on the trade of the region, the records of other trading posts, as well as specific sources on Grand Portage itself. In addition, ethnographic sources on Ojibwe people, even if recorded after the decline of the fur trade, are helpful in reconstructing trade in the region.

There are many places to begin this kind of examination. The most useful place to start is to discuss the information available in terms of some of the broad patterns evident in the history of Ojibwe participation in the Lake Superior fur trade. Perhaps the most striking patterns seen in this history of trade are the seasonal patterns of Native subsistence and trade organization. Both the Ojibwe who traded at Grand Portage and elsewhere, and the traders with whom they traded, had definite seasonal patterns of activity, adjusted one to the other and to the year-to-year changes in weather and the cycles of animal populations.

In what follows I will first discuss the activities of Native people, then those of the traders. This will be followed by a discussion of the way in which Native people and traders interacted. Finally I will discuss the impact of the trade on the Grand Portage Ojibwe. It should be noted that the activities of Native people and traders in the Grand Portage area were linked closely together. They are discussed separately only for the purposes of discussion, not to suggest that they are entirely independent one from the other.

### **Ojibwe Seasonal Patterns**

Ojibwe seasonal patterns such as these have been described in detail in a variety of ethnographic and ethnohistorical sources. Sources as far back as the Jesuits in the 17th century described the seasonal nature of Ojibwe subsistence practices. One of the better known descriptions is that of Nodinens, published in Frances Densmore's *Chippewa Customs* (Densmore 1979: 119-23). Nodinens began her description with the words: "When I was a child everything was systematic." She went on to tell of a yearly pattern involving winter hunting in the woods, trapping, sugaring, and fishing in the spring, gardening in the summer, and ricing in late summer and early fall.

Although the account of Nodinens has been taken as a typical description of Ojibwe life, it should be pointed out that it must be viewed in terms of the specific place and time it describes. Nodinens grew up near the ricing lakes along the south shore of Mille Lacs Lake in central Minnesota during the 1840s and 1850s. The various resources she describes her family using were all available within the several townships that made up the reservation.

All these resources and their specific configuration were not available to all Ojibwe people in Minnesota or the Great Lakes region. In this sense, the Ojibwe seasonal round must always be viewed in its specific time and place. It was not the same for the Saulteur

who fished in the rapids of Sault Ste. Marie in the mid-17th century as it was for the people of Grand Portage in the late 18th. Regional variations in the seasonal round have to do with differences in climactic conditions and the presence or absence of particular plant or animal species. They also have to do with very specific places and fortuitous concentrations of resources. To describe the seasonal round at Grand Portage with complete accuracy would mean describing the particular resources and the places where they could be found. Some of this is evident in the available sources on Grand Portage, some of it must be inferred or guessed at.

As described earlier, the accounts given by Roderick McKenzie (1785-86) and John Tanner (mid-1790s) give a general sense of the way in which Ojibwe people may have made seasonal use of the habitat along the northwest shore of Lake Superior. Later evidence in North West Company letters and in the HBC journals from Fort William help fill in the details

Winter residence away from Grand Portage, along other rivers such as the Brule or at places such as Whitefish, Arrow, and Dog lakes, appears to have been typical in the late 18th century. A great deal of hunting took place inland in the winter. Later on, in late winter, as snows begin to melt, beaver and muskrat lodges are particularly easy to find; because of interior heat they melt sooner than surrounding water. Spring trapping would appear to have been important inland around such locations as Arrow and Whitefish Lakes. At the same time, the sap will have started to run in maple trees. It is likely that spring sugaring at Grand Portage was practiced by Grand Portage people in the 1790s just as it was in the 1820s. The families, especially the women, would go to the sugar bush where they have special rights to harvest. Fisheries, especially in the spring and fall on Lake Superior, but also on inland lakes, must have been an important part of subsistence for Grand Portage people. Possible annual summer trips to hunt and trap at Isle Royale—as described by Tanner from the 1790s and in the later HBC journals—would also have been a feature of life. It is not known if Grand Portage people had summer gardens, but it is likely they picked blueberries and made use of other wild plants in the summer. Nelson's description of an old garden site southwest along the shore of Lake Superior does not provide enough information to document this aspect of their subsistence.

Grand Portage people do not appear to have been as dependent on wild rice as Ojibwe people of other regions. There may have simply been less rice available, though Jonathan Carver noted that when he reached Grand Portage in 1767, running short of food, he obtained some rice from the Grand Portage people. Later, in 1775 Alexander Henry obtained rice at Saganaga, which must have been one of a number of inland lakes that supported it. Little Rat from Mille Lacs, who often traded at Fort William, went to Rainy Lake to rice and to trade in 1828. Descriptions of Grand Portage people making use of rice have not been found in any fur-trade sources. This may be because rice was available only in small quantities inland from Lake Superior and was not traded with the fur companies, which obtained greater supplies of it from the Fond du Lac region (Birk 1984: 54).

The numbers and social organization of the Grand Portage Ojibwe are hard to gauge for that period also. As discussed in more detail by Timothy Cochrane (n.d., Ch. II), there are only crude estimates for the population of the region prior to the mid-19th century. The 1736 census cited earlier listed 60 men of the Ouacé clan residing at Kaministikwia. Alexander Mackenzie estimated only 150 families living along the shore, possibly the north shore, of Lake Superior. Later figures are likely to be more complete and accurate. Based in part on the population estimates given by Fort William traders in the late 1820s, Cochrane suggests that it is likely that 150 to 200 Ojibwe resided in the Grand Portage-Fort William area around that time.

The fact that the Grand Portage post, like that of Fort William later, probably traded with people from a wide area, means that estimates of the population of people living only at Grand Portage will not give an accurate picture of those who traded there. In 1805, Alexander Henry provided a census of people associated with North West Company posts. He gives a combined figure for Kaministikwia, Mille Lac, and Dog Lake of 332 Indians, including 70 men, 84 women, and 178 children. It is likely that these figures would have included Grand Portage people as well as those people away from Grand Portage who traded regularly at the post prior to 1803.

Social organization of the Ojibwe at Grand Portage and the surrounding area appears to resemble that found in other locations. It is likely that the Grand Portage Ojibwe were organized around small bands, led, at least for trade purposes, by leaders usually called chiefs, sometimes fostered by trade companies. These small bands, made up of close relations, may have stayed together or have broken up into smaller sub-groups during winter months, possibly varying their use of particular parts of the region from year to year in response to changes in the resource base. In the spring and summer the bands came together for events such as the June Midewiwin ceremonies, described by Roderick McKenzie and in HBC journals.

### **Fur Trade Organization**

As discussed in the work of Harold Innis and others, Grand Portage was part of an elaborate trade network designed in part to solve problems of long distance trade and supply. In many ways the large fur-trade companies were modern business organizations, coordinating far flung networks of posts and men and managing the necessary shipment of goods and furs across long distances. As described by Innis, the problem of mastering long distances led to increasing consolidation, resulting in the monopoly of the Northwest by a few companies.

Well documented in the available records of Grand Portage, including the North West Company correspondence, is the round of yearly activities through which large amounts of goods and food were shipped across the Great Lakes for use at Grand Portage and at the trading posts across the Northwest. At Grand Portage and Fort Charlotte, these activities necessitated the construction of warehouses, space for lodging traders and men, inside and out, and facilities for feeding and supplying the hundreds of people who came to the post every summer. Many winter activities were also related to the maintenance of



the vast network of trade and supply. Goods and food were taken across the portage by cart and sledge in the winter to be ready for use and shipment in the spring. Work appears to have continued throughout the winter on construction and maintenance of buildings at Grand Portage, as well as sailing vessels such as the *Otter* which was repaired at the Pigeon River in the winter of 1800. During warmer months canoes for use by the brigades going to and from the post were manufactured at Grand Portage. A full blacksmith shop, with bellows, anvils, vises, and a variety of tools operated at the post in 1797, as listed in the inventory of that year.

The year-round activities at Grand Portage must have required a substantial crew of men to perform these tasks. Exactly how many men this would have been is not clear. Generally, at least one higher level trader or a partner was left in charge at the post through the winter. The 1799 roster lists seven, likely including traders, clerks, interpreters and other skilled employees. This does not provide any information on the number of lower-level engages, although it is likely there were quite a few there at the time. In 1805 the North West Company listed 35 lower-level employees at Kaminstikwia. Another eight men were at Mille Lacs. The same year the XY Company recorded similar lists of eight men for Grand Portage and five men for Mille Lacs, including some also listed on the North West Company lists (Masson 1960, 1: 66, 418; MUL, NWC, Men's Names at the Athabasca River Department, 1805, p. 26). All these sources suggest a full complement of as many as 50 employees at Grand Portage for the North West Company around 1800.

The census compiled by Alexander Henry the Younger in 1805 describes the number of whites for the combined district of Kaminstikwia, Mille Lacs, and Dog Lake of 114, including 62 men, 16 women, and 36 children. It is thought that this figure includes Métis people, the children of trade marriages. Several of the women listed as white may have been the children of such marriages now married to other traders, including individuals like the wife of Antoine Collin. Other wives of traders and engagés may have been listed in Henry's census of the Indian population. Given the time at which it was compiled, at the amalgamation of the North West and XY Companies, it likely includes men formerly employed by both companies, including some who were involved in the construction of the new North West Company post. This would suggest that the total population of whites would have been greater than that found in the earlier period at Grand Portage and the other locations working for each company.

A major challenge for the maintenance of a facility at Grand Portage was to feed the individuals located there. To meet the demand, which it may not have been possible to meet only from Native sources, corn and flour were brought to the post by sailing vessels, a less expensive means than transportation by Montreal canoe, at least when done on a large scale. William McGillivray estimated in 1798 that the Grand Portage post would use 300 bushels of corn and 50 sacks of flour during the winter. At the same time, the canoes bound for the region beyond Lake Superior would take 1,100 bushels of corn and 100 bags of flour. A portion of the food sent west would have been used on the journey of the winterers to their various posts. Thus, the winter supply of food at Grand Portage would appear not to be proportional to its place in the trade.

Corn and flour, however, were not adequate alone for feeding the men located at Grand Portage. Nor would they have tolerated such a monotonous diet. Undoubtedly there were other imported luxury foods at the post brought easily by sail or canoe, which would have varied the diets of higher level employees. Potatoes were grown at Grand Portage just as they were at Fort William, and would appear to have been a staple of the diet of engagés. Alexander Mackenzie mentioned that potatoes were the only vegetable product grown at Grand Portage. The 1797 inventory lists green peas as well as barley, which would later be grown at Fort William. In addition, as noted in the inventory, Grand Portage had livestock, including cattle, sheep, and pigs. They would have supplied meat, milk, and butter for the support of those stationed at the post.

A useful record of the use of food for feeding men in the Grand Portage area is found in William McGillivray's letters to Captain Maxwell advising him on the food supplies he and the men with him could depend upon while wintering in 1800 at the Pigeon River, repairing the *Otter*. Maxwell was instructed to get a milch cow from Grand Portage and feed it with hay cut along the river (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 179-80). McGillivray stated that he ordered "a large Hog at the Portage to be falloed" which Maxwell would divide with the people at Grand Portage. He would get 16-20 barrels of salt fish, arranged for by McGillivray. Kenneth McKenzie, in charge at Grand Portage, would make a fair division with him of the potatoes grown at the post.

McGillivray told Maxwell "You ought to follow the example of the fort giving it every two days dividing the fish and corn as regular as you can." As noted earlier, McGillivray calculated that Maxwell would use about 36 bushels of corn during the winter. He would also be allowed enough rum to give his men "a glass of Grog now and then when they work well and you can take a couple Bags of flour also for their use to give them at times when you think necessary." He should find himself a keg of butter, a keg of wine, and the flour he will require and sugar, three bags of the former and 100 lbs. of the latter. Finally, McGillivray noted that "Any meat the Indians may bring you will have a share of from Mr. Kenneth and any other thing that may fall in the way and you must go hand in hand in executing the intentions of the company and if you need some Hay at the River au tourte you could get one of the milk Cows which Mr. McK cannot [can?] do well without."

McGillivray's letter gives some sense of the rations of food needed for Maxwell and his men, suggesting food use very similar to that recorded for Fort William, though the latter post would appear to have been more self-supporting. This alone could have provided the basis for moving the company's headquarters up the shore. McGillivray also makes clear that despite the presence of large amounts of imported food and food grown and gathered at the post, hunting by Indian people was still a source of subsistence for the trading post. This fact alone makes clear that Grand Portage operated not only as a depot and a transshipment point, but also as a trading post, operating within a particular Ojibwe community.

### **Grand Portage as a Trading Post**

Exploring the role of Grand Portage as a trading post, and the various interrelationships of traders and Native people there, is, as noted, difficult because of the lack of complete information. Much of what has been written about trading posts in the Lake Superior region in the late 18th and early 19th centuries concerns small posts distant from major trade depots. Such posts, in fact, may have been the location of much of the trade of the North West Company in the region.

The trade of these small trading posts is described in the trade journals of such traders as Charles Chaboillez (1797-98) and Alexander Henry the Younger (1799-1808) on the Red River, and Michel Curot (1803-04), Francois Victoire Malhiot (1804-05), John Sayer (1804-05), and George Nelson (1802-04) in present-day northern Wisconsin and Minnesota (see Gough 1988; NAC Masson Collection, Chaboillez, Curot, and Sayer; MUL, Malhiot Journal; Nelson 2002). Earlier sources, already described here, such as the account of Radisson of his experiences in 1659-60 and Alexander Henry the Elder's account of trade at Chequamegon in 1765, describe very similar practices, indicating they represent a system of long term durability.

Typically such journals describe the departure of the trader from the company headquarters or depot (either Grand Portage or Fort William), the journey to the region of the trading post, the meeting with small groups of Indians as he reaches the center of the trading region. Indians are described as being eager to obtain the anticipated gifts and credit they receive at the beginning of the trading year. To encourage trade they emphasize their need. In some cases the traders themselves are just as eager to begin some kind of trade, especially if they wish to obtain a good supply of wild rice or other food. Usually the trader arrives in the region of trade during ricing season or shortly after. In those cases the trader will give a certain amount of liquor and other trade goods for rice, more goods being given if rice is scarce because of a poor season. To insure a good supply of food, the trader would contract with a good hunter and his family to supply them with meat. In return the trader will give them all the gifts and supplies that they would normally get from trapping for furs (White 1987b).

In the case of other Indians who are expected to supply furs, the trader will give them a few gifts of liquor and some tools and other things and will advance them with the goods: clothing, tools, utensils, and other items that they need to survive over the winter. This will be marked with a ceremony, with speeches by Indian leaders and by the trader. Such speeches will describe the friendship of trader and Indian and what each expects from the other.

After receiving the goods and the gifts, the Indians will drink their gifts of liquor, often close to the trading posts. Sometimes there will be fights and violence resulting from drinking. After recovering from the effects of the alcohol, the Indians will leave for their wintering places, where they will hunt and trap. While they are there, during the course of the winter, men working for the trader, often allied through marriage with particular Indian families, will travel to and from the Indian camps in the woods, bringing supplies

of needed goods from the trading post or carrying furs to the trading post. If the Indians have extra meat from hunting the trader's men will carry it to the trading post. This process, in which the trader is said to go *en déroutine*, is as much for competitive purposes—getting the upper hand on other trader—as for the convenience of Indian people.

Payments of debts due by Indian people will be rewarded in many ways, including with alcohol which serves mainly as an inducement or a reward, not a direct trade item. In the spring Indian people will gather at the trading post, or rather at the Indian villages where trading posts are usually located, to make further payments of furs and supplies to pay off debts. Direct trade takes place, too, involving both furs and supplies such as birch bark, gum or wattape, necessary for the trader to repair his canoes before departure in the spring. There will be further rewards of presents of various kinds, including special chiefs's clothing for Native leaders. These ceremonies and final payments may correspond to the time of year when Indian people have their own ceremonies such as the Midewiwin.

Much of this may have been the normal practice at trading posts throughout the Lake Superior region as far back as the 17th century, though there are fewer sources for some periods of trade than for others. It was clearly a system of trade established through interaction between the French and Indian people and continuing for generations.

Most aspects of the trade described in these accounts may have happened at Grand Portage in the period 1785-1805. Diplomacy continued to serve an important function in trade during this period, as a way of creating trust on both sides. From Roderick McKenzie's reminiscences and later North West Company letters and Fort William records, it seems clear that credit must have been given in summer or fall, prior to dispersal of Indian people. It is likely that gifts of alcohol, and presentations of chief's clothing must have been given out in the fall and in the spring, as well as other occasions.

Leaders such as those mentioned in the HBC journals were the prime negotiators in dealing with trade companies. It is likely that this occurred at Grand Portage earlier, in the time of the Premier. These chiefs, who achieved power and influence through their hunting abilities, their eloquence, and a number of other factors, negotiated credit and other aspects of trading relationships (Kugel 1998: 4; Smith 1973). As tributes to their power, traders gave them yearly gifts of special military-style clothing, as well as alcohol and other goods. Traders kept track of the location of these band leaders and their followers throughout the winter and sent men to find them in order to get furs they and their followers produced and to supply them with goods they needed.

The speeches recorded in such journals as François Victoire Malhiot's, in which he called upon the loyalty of Native leaders in the face of trade competition, may very well have been given at Grand Portage. It should be remembered that Malhiot described William McGillivray as the Great Trader, the leader to whom loyalty was due for trade purposes. Obviously Indian people at Grand Portage would not only have known about

McGillivray, but they would have met and interacted with him during his visits in the summer.

People from Grand Portage and the surrounding region would likely have received attention from company leaders because of the power they had shown in the past to limit or foster trade and their continuing value in helping to support the transportation network. The respect paid by the North West Company to the Premier, who would appear to have had some relationship to the Grand Portage band, is one demonstration of this. The agreement of 1798 obtaining a grant of land at Kaministikwia, though perhaps negotiated by the North West Company for cynical purposes, may be another demonstration of their respect. The great status of North West Company officials may have provided a basis for the begging dance, as described in the journal of Daniel Harmon, a way of encouraging the generosity of wealthy traders.

On the other hand Grand Portage people would have seen McGillivray and other company leaders acting ruthlessly toward competitors. It is unclear if this would have increased or reduced respect. The account of John Tanner suggests that they could be equally ruthless toward Native people. Much later, HBC traders noted in 1820 that North West Company traders were abusive towards Indian people and used various means to keep them from going to the trading houses of competitors. This, however, was after more than 10 years of virtual monopoly, at the time of the emergence of the HBC as a competitor in the region.

Between 1797 and 1803, Grand Portage would have had two trading posts with plentiful supplies of goods and provisions, vying for the business of Native people there. As shown in Tanner's narrative, in order to win their business they would have had to maintain a balance between persuasion and trickery, that is, between ceremonies, gifts, and kindness on the one hand and deceit, bullying, and even outright violence toward Native people for their furs and other goods, on the other.

The power of Native people in such situations was greater than in circumstances in which there were no nearby competitors. At other times when there were no viable competitors, trade expeditions to near and far places were the primary means of obtaining more or better merchandise. As noted in the French and early British periods, Lake Superior Ojibwe went long distances to trade at such places as Hudson Bay, Michilimackinac, Montreal, and Oswego. The proliferation of trading posts throughout the Great Lakes region did not remove the desire to travel. Rainy Lake Ojibwe went to Red Lake to trade with traders from Michilimackinac and to Grand Portage in the 1790s. Exact motivations for such trips are not easy to ascribe. Long distance trips may have been in part intended to increase the status of those undertaking such trips, especially if they returned with gifts of clothing and rum that they could share with their communities. Getting merchandise at better prices may also have been a purpose. If the rates of exchange varied between trading posts it would sometimes be worthwhile to travel for trade.

In addition there may have been other opportunities to trade for people around Grand Portage, both official and unofficial. The presence at various times of thousands of

canoemen as well as traders specifically contracted to trade with them, may have provided opportunities for informal exchange of goods with Indian people. There may have been a kind of black market at Grand Portage, including trade that went on at night, as in the case of Paul Harvieux's trade with North West Company canoemen. Such opportunities may have increased the leverage of Grand Portage people in obtaining goods and obtaining them at a good price.

With a variety of competition nearby traders sometimes altered their rates of exchange of goods and merchandise to preserve trade, in addition to giving out greater amounts of gifts. This may have been in part what Roderick McKenzie had in mind in his statement about the Grand Portage band being accustomed to competition and the difficulty that it caused. These things certainly happened with frequency along the border region in the 1820s at such places as Basswood and Whitefish Lakes. This may have happened in the 1785-1805 period. Similarly, the presence of a plentiful supply of goods at Grand Portage may have influenced traders in making them more generous.

But, while Grand Portage was, in size and in terms of the amount of merchandise available, a large trading post, the purpose of this merchandise was not to trade directly with Indian people from all over. Despite Jonathan Carver's suggestion in 1767, Grand Portage does not appear to have functioned like a Hudson's Bay Company factory, bringing Indians from all over for direct trade.

In most locations the primary means through which Native people obtained most merchandise was through the production of furs. One of the most detailed reports on fur returns for the 1785-1805 period was in 1799, when, as noted, the entire region between Lake Superior and Basswood produced 54 packs of furs. It is unclear whether there was any major competition at Grand Portage that year. In the next few years the returns would be split with the XY Company and would vary from year to year for other reasons. According to Alexander Henry, the same region produced 46 packs of furs for the North West Company in 1806.

In addition to producing furs and trading them just as they would at other posts, Ojibwe people of Grand Portage had a support role, contributing to the role of Grand Portage as a transshipment point. Canoes were one example. Canoe manufacture—done both by trade employees and by Native people on a freelance basis—was an important means of obtaining merchandise. Canoemaking was a cooperative activity involving both men and women. The returns could be substantial. As noted by Alexander Henry the Younger, he purchased a canoe, probably a North canoe, at Saganaga in July 1800 for the value of 60 skins. This would have placed the value of such a canoe as equivalent to the value of 15 prime beaver skins, according to rates of exchange for this period. Considering that canoes were produced in the spring and early summer, making them could be a way of getting merchandise at a time when there were few other profitable activities. The 1797 North West Company inventory for Grand Portage lists two new canoes as well as 95 rolls of wide bark, 159 rolls of narrow bark, 3,955 bundles of wattape, and 5,088 pounds of gum. Given that the inventory was taken in June, these supplies could have been both

part of the materials being used at that time for manufacturing canoes and for repairing the canoes that reached the post during the summer.

Mention is also made of another potential role that Indian people of the region played for fur companies in guiding canoe brigades. Roderick McKenzie wrote to the partners in June 1802, that because of the absence of men at Grand Portage, “we have only Indian guides” (NAC, MG 19, B1, v. 1, NWC Letterbook, 190, 191). Guiding the express sent to Peter Grant at Rainy Lake was the wife of a man named Parisien. The role of women as guides might appear unusual but it is likely that it occurred both formally and informally throughout this region.

As indicated by William McGillivray in 1800, Native people also provided traders at Grand Portage with some of their food. The exact quantity is not known. In addition to game, there may have been other items of food that they produced. It is likely that some of the sugar produced at Grand Portage and Kaministikwia may have been traded, although there is no record of this in the 1785-1805 period. The 1797 inventory includes seventeen and a half pounds of rice, which could have been obtained locally inland from Lake Superior or from the plentiful rice region of the Fond du Lac district to the south. The amount was small but in keeping with the season when supplies would have been low. It is also possible that the Ojibwe people at Grand Portage were involved in fishing and in occasional labor on the potato crop, as was the case at Fort William.

The role of food in the trade at Grand Portage may be one of the areas in which this post differed from other inland posts south and west of Lake Superior. Earlier journals at such trading posts, beginning with Radisson and later Curot and Nelson, suggest that when Indian people were short on food and “starving,” traders were too, simply because of their dependence on Native sources of food. A failure of the rice crop in that region could be devastating. Absent a good supply of corn or fish, this could still be the case along the border lakes in the 1820s. But the Fort William records suggest that with the presence of vast amounts of fish, potatoes and other agricultural products, and imported corn, traders were generally able to serve as a source of food for Indian people when they were short of food. This set a standard that competing traders had a hard time meeting, as in the case of Bela Chapman at Grand Marais in 1823-24.

In some ways this might be seen as an extension of the role that trading posts always played in giving Indian people fall credit, providing them with what they needed to hunt and trap during the winter. On occasion, food was clearly another necessity. Yet the Fort William journals suggest a much wider role, with the trading post being incorporated, as Laura Peers has noted for the region west of the Red River, into a place in the seasonal round (Peers 1994: 194-95). As the trader at Fort William noted in the fall of 1823 and by Bela Chapman at the same time, Indian people either so ill or so old as to be unable to care for themselves were left on Lake Superior to be fed and cared for at the trading post. Similarly, there were times in the winter when Indian people came to the trading post to eat, simply because wild food supplies were unavailable at that particular time.

Before considering whether or not Grand Portage in the 1785-1805 period actually fits what occurred at Fort William, it is important to discuss what the use of food in this way actually means in terms of the history of trade. Some would call this fact of life a kind of “welfare” system, indicating a fundamental change in the interrelationship between traders and Indian people. It certainly is a kind of welfare system if it provides for people in need. What is less clear is whether it represents an increase in the degree of fundamental dependence by Indian people on traders.

What needs to be taken into account is the degree to which Indian people actually take part in the production of the food that they are fed at the trading post. In earlier periods wild rice purchased by traders from Indian people in the fall was sometimes fed by traders to these same or other Indian people during the winter. John D. Cameron, the HBC trader at Rainy Lake in 1825-26, in an often quoted statement, described another resource that was used to feed visiting Indian people at his post (HBCA, B.105/e/6, p. 4):

When Indians make more pounded sturgeon & oil than they want, they trade the surplus with us, which we find much better and more substantial for our men when sent on trips. Besides as there are always some families more unfortunate than others in procuring food during winter, pounded sturgeon enables us to assist them at a cheap rate. When an Indian comes to the Fort, he never brings anything to eat. By having pounded sturgeon & oil—no time is lost in cooking—Nothing pleases an Indian more than in giving him something to eat immediately on his arrival. It is the Grand Etiquette of Politeness amongst themselves.

In such cases, the dependence of Indian people was not on traders to feed them out of goods that the trader had shipped into the post, but rather, with food that Indian people themselves had produced. Indian fishermen had caught the fish, harvested the hay fed to the cattle, and helped cultivate and harvest the potatoes. It is not the same as if they are fed food shipped in by the trader from elsewhere. The system is a redistributive one in which the trading post functions as a kind of storage facility for food produced in part by Indian people. Thus, in this case, traditional Ojibwe society made use of a modern economic organization to achieve its own purposes, imposing on the trading post the traditional rules of hospitality, courtesy and general welfare.

In summary, it would seem that despite the presence of a great deal of food at the Grand Portage post, the trading post was still dependent in part on Native people for food and for other support activities which would help to increase the leverage of Grand Portage people in dealing with the trading post. So far, however, in this attempt to describe the trade as it may have operated at Grand Portage, we have dealt mainly with narrative sources, descriptions of various activities involving traders and Native people. There are other ways to deal with the impact of the trade on Native people of the Grand Portage region, by using the various quantitative sources to measure the amounts and kinds of merchandise obtained by individual Native people and families and the amounts and kinds of native produce necessary to obtain them.



### **Economic Aspects of the Fur Trade at Grand Portage**

A variety of studies have been done to show the kinds of goods shipped west from Montreal during the French and British fur trades (Dechêne 1974, D. Anderson 1992, and B. White 1987a; 1998b). A problem with these studies is that they provide a picture of all goods shipped west, not merely those used in trade with Indian people. Thus, they cannot tell exactly which goods served Indian demand and which were used by the traders themselves for personal use or as equipment.

Thomas Wien, in the study cited earlier in this report for the Chequamegon post in 1727, made an attempt to determine the extent of merchandise that could have been obtained by Indian people from traders at the post. Wien based his calculation on an assumed population of 200 families. In the case of Grand Portage we may have more precise figures about the possible population of people in the region. We also know for a few years the amount of furs that were produced by Grand Portage and the surrounding area. Similarly, for a few years, we have lists of merchandise shipped to the XY post and Grand Portage, although we do not know for certain exactly how many of these goods were actually traded and how many were used by traders or shipped on to other posts. Using these various sources together, we may be able to get a better sense of the impact of traders on the lives of Native people in the region. To begin with, we must consider what might be useful quantitative questions to ask using these sources.

David Thompson, during his trip along the south shore of Lake Superior in 1799, made some calculations of family size and the extent of their participation in the fur trade (Glover 1962: 219).

The survey we had finished was on the south side, from the west, to the east end; following the shores, the distance is 671 miles, but the direct line is only 383 miles. We had met with 110 families, and allowing twenty families not seen, will give 130 families. Mr. Cadotte, who has been for many years a Trader in these parts, thought 125 families to be nearer the number. Allowing these Natives to have possession of hunting ground only to the distance of 70 miles from the Lake, the extent will be 26,810 square miles, and this divided by 130 will give to each family an extent of 206 square miles of hunting ground; yet with this wide area; the annual average hunt of each family of all kinds of furs, from the Bear down to the Musk Rat, will not exceed sixty to seventy skins in trade; allowing a Bear skin to be the value of two beavers; and eight to ten musk Rats to be the value of one beaver. Beaver are so scarce that all they kill does not furnish leather for their wants, and when the mild seasons come they all descend to Lake Superior to live by fishing. Calculation is tedious reading, yet without it, we cannot learn the real state of any country.

Thompson's point seems to be that the Ojibwe around Lake Superior were in dire straights, unable to adequately provide for themselves in trade goods or in food. The adequacy of 60 to 70 skins worth of merchandise will be discussed later. But, contrary to what is known about the history of Native use of Lake Superior, Thompson appears to be

suggesting that the normal subsistence activity for Ojibwe people living along the shores of the lake was to hunt, even though many sources—beginning with the Jesuits in the 17th century—make clear the importance of fishing as part of the regular seasonal round. Certainly this was the case at Grand Portage. Nonetheless, Thompson's calculations are provocative, in providing new ways of looking at the impact of the trade on Ojibwe people in the region.

There are a variety of sources for learning the accuracy of Thompson's estimates of Indian fur production in the Lake Superior area. One possible way to measure the participation of the people at Grand Portage and surrounding area during this period would be to calculate, based on a variety of account books, what number of furs the people of the Lake Superior shore at Grand Portage and surrounding area, may have actually produced per family. As noted in the census of Alexander Henry the Younger, there was a Native population of 332, including 70 men, with an average of 1.2 women, and a little over 2.5 children, to every man.

The actual families or groups in which the Grand Portage Ojibwe passed the winter must have been somewhat larger than this. In any case, some men may have had no wives. Others had more than one. Some women may have been unmarried. Similarly, it would be wrong to assume that the furs produced were literally only the product of men, since not all men would have been able to hunt. In some cases they may have made canoes or fished for the company in order to support themselves. Their wives or other women in the families may have contributed to supplying their families through gathering bark, gum, and wattape, or themselves participating in making canoes. Individuals also earned trade goods by guiding and hunting for traders.

However, this fictional family consisting of 1 man, 1.2 women, and a little over 2.5 children, provides a useful way to explore the furs produced by the Grand Portage Ojibwe and what they received for them in merchandise. As noted in the North West Company's letterbook for 1799, it was reported that the region between Grand Portage and Basswood Lake produced 54 packs of various kinds of furs during this time period. Competitors may have produced additional amounts in this region, although, since this was prior to the height of competition between XY and North West, it is not believed that the competitors of that time were very productive. Let us assume that the produce in the region amounted to 60 packs of furs.

Calculating the value of a pack of furs is complicated. Packs of furs generally weighed about 90 pounds and contained a variety of furs of various kinds. This is made clear in a list obtained by Lieutenant Zebulon Pike from North West Company traders at Leech Lake in 1806 (Coues 1965, 1: 284-85). The list contained a "recapitulation of Furs and Peltries, North West Company, 1804-05," showing the contents of 115 different packs produced by the company that year in the whole Fond du Lac region. As shown in this list, a 90-pound pack could hold 35 to 47 deerskins, 65-71 beaver skins, 655 muskrats, and varying numbers of small furs such as lynx, marten, mink, and otter. When originally traded the value of these furs would have been negotiated and would have varied from the standard established rates of exchange, which were calculated based on the standard

of an average *plus* or beaver skin. All in all, this means that any attempts to calculate what was contained in the 64 packs from the Grand Portage region must involve guesses. A pack containing 40 large beaver, possibly valued at 2 skins apiece, and 29 small beaver, possibly valued at 1 skin, would be worth 109 skins in all. The pack with 655 muskrats would be worth around 65 skins. Finally, a pack containing 45 large beaver, 8 small beaver, 2 lynx, 11 otters, and 13 raccoons, would be worth almost 114 skins.

To calculate the average value of the packs in the Pike list, the skin value of each pack was calculated using the rates of exchange current in the Great Lakes during the 1800-1820 period as shown in Table 4. From this it was possible to calculate a total average pack value for these packs as shown in Table 5. It was determined that for these packs the average skin value was 76.70 plus or skins.

Using this value, 76.70 skins per pack, it was possible to calculate that the estimated 60 packs of furs produced in the region in 1799 were worth 4,602 plus in exchanges with Native people. Based on Henry's population figures for 1805, these were the product of the labor of 332 people, who together made up 70 average, fictional, families consisting each of 1 man, 1.2 women, and 2.5 children. Each family can be said to have produced just under 66 plus. Interestingly, this is around the average amount given by Thompson who calculated that each family along the south shore of Lake Superior produced 60 to 70 plus.

However, the meaning of the figure comes not from its status as a raw number, but rather in what it represents in terms of the purchasing power obtained from this production. This can only be seen by considering what goods that amount of skin-value would provide. Clearly, in actual practice Ojibwe families would not all have wanted the same goods, in the same quantities at the same time. While some goods such as blankets and cloth might have been needed every year, others, such as guns and tools, were more durable and could have lasted for a number of years.

The kinds of goods that Ojibwe people in the Lake Superior region sought from the fur trade shown by the goods that the trader Bela Chapman gave out in credit in 1824, as shown in Table 4. Similar data, as shown in Table 5, is provided by Frances Densmore (1979: 138-139), who recorded the kinds of merchandise that the Ojibwe in Minnesota later remembered receiving as annuities in the 19th century. Together, these sources suggest the kinds of European merchandise that were of enduring interest to Ojibwe people in the Lake Superior region.

Based on these sources of data, Table 6 shows a list of goods which might have been used by an average family of the size discussed. An attempt has been made to show which goods might have been needed every year and which ones had longer-term durability. In addition, shown in the table are some items that might have been received as gifts. As seen in this table, it would have been possible for an average family to have obtained a number of items of clothing, jewelry, and tools needed every year, as well as a number of more durable goods, all within a total of 66 skins.

As shown in this table, some goods are never actually obtained by credit or direct exchange, so that their value in plus is not charged against the value of the furs that an individual hunter brings in. These goods obtained as gifts include some ammunition, tools, utensils, and beads, although these were sometimes purchased, as well as alcohol and tobacco, which were largely used as gifts. Chief's clothing, given to leaders, was not charged against the accounts of these men. Even blankets, clothing, and kettles, mainly trade items, might be given as grave gifts to the family of someone who died, to be buried with them.

A calculation of the purchasing power of the Native person at Grand Portage should also take into account other factors such as the ability of some Ojibwe to make canoes. As described earlier, Alexander Henry the Younger had a canoe made by some men at Saganaga for which the company paid the value of 60 skins in merchandise. This approaches the value of credit given to some Ojibwe for an entire year. It demonstrates the possibilities for value to be received in providing support services for fur companies.

It is important also to take into account the hospitality that the trader offers to the visitor and to people in need. Finally a great deal of credit is forgiven, sometimes as much as half. James Duane Doty at Sandy Lake in 1820 noted that if out of a credit of 600 skins a trader received a return of 300 "he considers himself recompensed. He frequently does not obtain even this proportion" (WHC 1908, 7: 205). So in the end each of the 70 average families described here would be likely to get on the average, a great deal more than 66 skins worth of merchandise from the trading post at Grand Portage.

The information shown here suggests that statements of David Thompson about the production of fur by Indian families in the Lake Superior region may very well be accurate for the Indian people in the area around Grand Portage. However, the idea that 60-70 skins might be inadequate for their needs may be exaggerated. The Ojibwe of the Grand Portage region could have obtained a great many trade goods through 60-70 skins worth of furs. Further, this amount of fur production is not likely to have adequately measured the amount of goods the Grand Portage people would have received in credit, since some credit was forgiven. Further, Indian people of the region had the opportunity through hunting, making canoes, and guiding, to obtain a great deal more merchandise.

**Table 4**  
**Credit Granted to 13 Grand Portage Ojibwe**  
**by Bela Chapman in 1824**

Merchandise	Value (in skins) of Credit Given
Ammunition	118
Ax	1
Ax, Half	2
Ax, small	1
Blanket, 1 pt.	3
Blanket, 2 pt.	5
Blanket, 2.5 pt.	27
Blanket, 3 pt.	24
Britch Cloth	1
Britch Cloth, gtg	1
Cap	1
Cap, cloth	1
Cap, Cloth & gartering	2
Capot	12
Capot, 1 Ell	1
Capot, 3.5 Ells	7
Capot, 4 Ells	8
Capot, Molton	15
Comb, Ivory	1
Deer Skin	1
Fil & parchment	1
File	4.5
Fish Spears, pr.	2
Flour, Bag	6
Gartering, roll	10
Kettle, Tin	4.5
Kettle, Tin, large	4
Kettle, Tin, small	1
Leggings, Small	
Scarlet, pr.	3
Looking glass	1
Maitres Rai	4
Mitasses, pr.	10
Mitasses, stroud, pr.	2
Molton, fathom	5
Ribbon, fathom	2
Scalper	2
Shot	2

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<b>Merchandise</b>	<b>Value (in skins) of Credit Given</b>
Strouds, fathoms	62
Thread, pound	8
Tobacco	8
Tomahawk	10
Traps	4
Traps, Beaver	38
Twine, Holland	9
White Beads, masses	1
Worsted, skeins	2
Total	438
Average credit per 33 men (in skins)	33.69

Source: MHS, Chapman Journal.

**Table 5****Annuity Goods Given to Ojibwe Indians by U. S. Government**

<b>Merchandise</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Children</b>
Blanket, 1 pt.			X
Blanket, 2 pt.			X
Blanket, 2.5 pt.		X	
Blanket, 3 pt.	X		
Broadcloth for breech cloth and leggings	X		
Broadcloth, torn in dress lengths		X	
Calico or Linsey woolsey for dress		X	
Calico or Linsey woolsey for shirt	X		
Cloth for dress			X
Comb	X	X	
Dishes, Tin		X	
Flannel		X	
Gun	X		
Knife	X		
Lead bars for bullets	X		
Needle		X	
Scissors		X	
Thimble		X	
Thread in skeins		X	

Source: Densmore (1979: 138-139).

**Table 6****Possible Merchandise Used by One Average Grand Portage Family, 1799**

<b>Goods Needed Every Year</b>	<b>Value in Skins</b>	<b>Durable Goods</b>	<b>Value in Skins</b>	<b>Goods Received as Gifts or for Food</b>	<b>Value in Skins</b>
Blanket, 3 pt.	4	NW Gun	10	Gunpowder	2
Blanket, 2 1/2 pt.	4	Beaver trap	4	Ball and Shot	2
Blanket, 1 1/2 pt.	1	Tomahawk	1	Tobacco, carrot	4
Blanket, 1 pt.	1	Kettle, large	4	Rum	2
Strouds, 2 fathoms	8	Kettle, small	1		
Calico, 2 fathoms	4				
Leggings, 2 pairs	4				
Capot	4				
Beads	1				
Vermillion, 1 lb.	4				
Gartering, 1 roll	2				
File	1				
Ax, half	2				
Comb, Ivory	1				
Gunpowder	2				
Ball & Shot	2				
Knives, 2 large scalping	1				
Totals	46		20		10

Source: Coues 1965, 1: 203; WHC 7 (1876): 205; Densmore (1979: 138-39, 141).



Table 7

**Rates of Exchange for Furs, Supplies, and Merchandise  
(in Plus or Skins) in the Fond du Lac District and Nearby Areas**

Source of Rate	Location	Supplier	Item	Quantity	Measure	Value (Skins or Plus)	Unit Price (Skins or Plus)
Doty	FL district	Native People	Bear: prime	1.0		2.0	2.0
Doty	FL district	Native People	Beaver: large prime	1.0		2.0	2.0
Doty	FL district	Native People	Buckskin, prime	2.0		1.0	0.5
Doty	FL district	Native People	Fishers	2.0		1.0	0.5
Doty	FL district	Native People	Lynx	2.0		1.0	0.5
Doty	FL district	Native People	Martens	3.0		1.0	0.3
Doty	FL district	Native People	Otter: large prime	1.0		2.0	2.0
Doty	FL district	Native People	Raccoons	3.0		1.0	0.3
Doty	FL district	Native People	Rice	1.0	sack	2.0	2.0
Doty	FL district	Native People	Sugar	1.0	mocock (40 lbs)	4.0	4.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Ax, half	1.0		2.0	2.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Ax, half	1.0		1.0	1.0
Anderson, Doty	FL district	Trader	Ball	30.0		1.0	0.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Beads: white	40.0	branches	1.0	0.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Beads: white	1.0	mesh	1.0	1.0
Anderson, Doty	FL district	Trader	Beaver trap	1.0		4.0	4.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Binding, worsted	1.0	piece	4.0	4.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Blanket 1.5 pt.	1.0		1.0	1.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Blanket 2 pt.	1.0		2.0	2.0
Anderson, Doty	FL district	Trader	Blanket 2.5 pt.	1.0		4.0	4.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Blanket: 3 pt.	1.0		4.0	4.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Cloth, Scarlet 8-6	?		6.0	?
Anderson, Doty	FL district	Trader	Gun, NW, NW cased	1.0		10.0	10.0
Anderson, Doty	FL district	Trader	Gunpowder	0.5	pint	1.0	2.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Hatchet	1.0		1.0	1.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Knife	1.0		1.0	1.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Knife: large scalping	1.0		0.5	0.5

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Source of Rate	Location	Supplier	Item	Quantity	Measure	Value (Skins or Plus)	Unit Price (Skins or Plus)
Doty	FL district	Trader	Leggings with ribbons and beads to garnish	1.0	pair	2.0	2.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Molton, blue and white	1.0	fathom	2.0	2.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Powder	0.5	pint	1.0	2.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Shot	1.0	handful	1.0	1.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Stroud	1.0	fathom	4.0	4.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Tobacco	3.0	plugs	1.0	0.3
Anderson, Doty	FL district	Trader	Tobacco	1.0	carrot	4.0	4.0
Anderson, Doty	FL district	Trader	Tobacco, twist	1.0	fathom	1.0	1.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Tomahawk (casse-tete)	1.0		2.0	2.0
Anderson	FL district	Trader	Vermilion	1.0	pound	4.0	4.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Wampum	250.0	grans	1.0	0.0
Doty	FL district	Trader	Wampum	5.0	branches	1.0	0.2
Malhiot	Lac du Flambeau	Native People	Mink (foutreau)	2.0		1.0	0.5
Malhiot	Lac du Flambeau	Native People	Moose	1.5		3.0	2.0
Assumed Value	Lake Superior region	Native People	Bear cub	1.0		1.0	1.0

Source: Geo. Anderson rates in Coues (1965, 1: 283); Malhiot rates in MUL, Masson accounts; Doty rates in WHC 7 (1876): 205. The value given for bear cubs is an assumed average value for the Lake Superior region, based on the known value of prime bearskins.

**Table 8****Average Value of Furs in Packs**

Pack No.	Source of Furs	Original Pack ID	Lbs. per Pack	Plus Value
1	Leech Lake	1	92	22.5
2	Leech Lake	2	92	23.5
3	Leech Lake	3	93	23.5
4	Leech Lake	4	91	22.5
5	Leech Lake	5	90	23.5
6	Leech Lake	6	91	23.5
7	Leech Lake	7	92	19.5
8	Leech Lake	8	87	20
9	Leech Lake	9	92	19
10	Leech Lake	10	91	19
11	Leech Lake	11	92	19
12	Leech Lake	12	87	19
13	Leech Lake	13	90	22
14	Leech Lake	14	92	19.5
15	Leech Lake	15	93	17.5
16	Leech Lake	16	93	20
17	Leech Lake	17	99	20
18	Leech Lake	18	88	17.5
19	Leech Lake	19	96	66.5
20	Leech Lake	20	95	61.7
21	Leech Lake	21	90	102
22	Leech Lake	22	89	99
23	Leech Lake	23	92	96
24	Leech Lake	24	92	106.5
25	Leech Lake	25	92	102
26	Leech Lake	26	92	97.5
27	Leech Lake	27	91	109.5
28	Leech Lake	28	89	112.5
29	Leech Lake	29	90	112.5
30	Leech Lake	30	90	127.5
31	Leech Lake	31	91	91.5
32	Leech Lake	32	92	90
33	Leech Lake	33	91	100.5
34	Leech Lake	34	91	111
35	Leech Lake	35	91	131
36	Leech Lake	36	99	128
37	Leech Lake	37	92	37.5
38	Leech Lake	38	93	75.5
39	Leech Lake	39	92	62.23
40	Leech Lake	40	87	53.96
41	Leech Lake	41	92	103.6
42	Leech Lake	42	93	99

## Reconstructing the Fur Trade

Pack No.	Source of Furs	Original Pack ID	Lbs. per Pack	Plus Value
43	Leech Lake	43	93	118.5
44	Leech Lake	44	90	105
45	Leech Lake	45	93	58.12
46	Leech Lake	46	91	118.5
47	Leech Lake	47	90	133.5
48	Leech Lake	48	91	103.5
49	Leech Lake	49	91	109.5
50	Leech Lake	50	87	117.99
51	Leech Lake	51	104	99.53
52	Leech Lake	52	127	114.18
53	Red Lake	1	94	123
54	Red Lake	2	91	116
55	Red Lake	3	92	122
56	Red Lake	4	92	117
57	Red Lake	5	92	139
58	Red Lake	6	92	124
59	Red Lake	7	95	43.49
60	Red Lake	8	92	71.2
61	Red Lake	9	92	144
62	Red Lake	10	90	26
63	Red Lake	11	90	61.51
64	Red Lake	12	95	125.29
65	Red Lake	13	93	58.1
66	Red Lake	14	93	81.25
67	Red Lake	15	92	35.26
68	Sandy Lake	1	86	72.8
69	Sandy Lake	2	91	53
70	Sandy Lake	3	88	109
71	Sandy Lake	4	91	106
72	Sandy Lake	5	91	104
73	Sandy Lake	6	90	99
74	Sandy Lake	7	89	102
75	Sandy Lake	8	92	115
76	Sandy Lake	9	86	103
77	Sandy Lake	10	87	104
78	Sandy Lake	11	88	110
79	Sandy Lake	12	90	110
80	Sandy Lake	13	87	108
81	Sandy Lake	14	92	109
82	Sandy Lake	15	95	139.5
83	Sandy Lake	16	92	34.23
84	Sandy Lake	17	86	16
85	Sandy Lake	18	90	15.5
86	Sandy Lake	19	91	14.5
87	Sandy Lake	20	95	16.5
88	Sandy Lake	21	87	78

Pack No.	Source of Furs	Original Pack ID	Lbs. per Pack	Plus Value
89	Sandy Lake	22	83	109
90	Sandy Lake	23	93	110
91	Sandy Lake	24	87	111
92	Sandy Lake	25	89	109
93	Sandy Lake	26	92	128
94	Sandy Lake	27	94	33
95	Sandy Lake	28	94	130.5
96	Sandy Lake	29	90	61
97	Sandy Lake	30	91	55.49
98	Sandy Lake	31	93	19.5
99	Sandy Lake	32	93	21.5
100	Sandy Lake	33	90	21.5
101	Sandy Lake	34	91	17.5
102	Sandy Lake	35	99	20.5
103	Sandy Lake	36	86	22
104	Sandy Lake	37	72	40
105	Sandy Lake	38	92	119.5
106	Fond du Lac	1	91	65.5
107	Fond du Lac	2	93	116
108	Fond du Lac	3	92	114
109	Fond du Lac	4	93	113
110	Fond du Lac	5	88	116
111	Fond du Lac	6	95	111.67
112	Fond du Lac	7	95	31.55
113	Fond du Lac	8	95	49.2
114	Fond du Lac	9	93	53.88
115	Fond du Lac	10	98	88.5
Total Weight of Packs			10,535	
Average Weight of Packs			91.6	
Total Value of Packs				8,820.73
Average Value of Packs				76.70

Source: Coues (1965, 1: 284-85),  
with rates of exchange from Table 4.



## **Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research**

What has been described in this report is only part of the story of trade at Grand Portage. As stated at the beginning, any factors chosen to be the basis of such a study will be merely a selection out of a larger range of possibilities. Further, any fur-trade study that seeks to explore a broad range of factors affecting the trade in particular places and times is made complicated by the frequent lack of records. Sometimes the questions that it is possible to answer are limited by what information is available, suggesting that if questions raised cannot be answered, new questions ought to be asked. Inevitably, then, any fur-trade study will raise new questions that need to be explored.

As described in this report, the pattern of trade at Grand Portage reflects many factors, including climate, location, Native population, and trade organization. Grand Portage was a key geographical location, a gateway to the Northwest. Native people who lived in the region sought to make use of their key location as a means for obtaining benefits from the fur trade. This meant, initially, using the tactics of war and diplomacy and later by participating in support activities and aiding fur trade companies. These factors affected the form of the trade that took place at Grand Portage.

It is to be hoped that this study can provide the basis for comparing the experience of Grand Portage with that of other trading posts throughout the territory of the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company. Further work can be done to study posts in the Fond du Lac region, including Fond du Lac itself and Sandy Lake, which both served as regional headquarters. The pattern of trade at these posts can be profitably compared to that at Grand Portage.

In addition it may be useful to compare Grand Portage to HBC posts such as James Bay, which received visits from distant Native people eager to trade and had a local Indian population whose role as the "homeguard," providing support services to the trade, may have been similar to what happened at Grand Portage (Francis and Morantz 1983). Further work needs to be done to make that comparison. Timothy Cochrane's work in progress on the Grand Portage band points the way toward greater and more complete information on Native people in the region. It is hoped that similar work will be done to study the cultural geography of the Grand Portage region and seasonal resource use by the Ojibwe throughout the fur trade era and later. Such work may finally identify the elusive Roche Debout, mentioned at so many points in this narrative.

A key point made in this study has to do with the need to use available sources in a more systematic way. Even already available sources long known and used can provide new information and new ways of looking at a topic. For example, the narrative of Roderick McKenzie's time at Grand Portage in 1785-86, which until now has been available only in a garbled form in Louis Masson's sloppy compendium of fur-trade accounts, was examined in all its overlapping versions. In doing so, new information was found to add to what was already known about Grand Portage.

## Conclusions

This suggests that instead of making use of garbled, incomplete texts, fur-trade historians need to make a concerted effort to find and make available in published or digital form accurate versions of documents currently available only in publications done over 100 years ago. In doing so they may find a great deal of new information and add to general knowledge of the trade. The example of the work done by the McGill University Library on its website “In Pursuit of Adventure: The Fur Trade in Canada and the North West Company” <<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/nwc/>>, containing facsimiles and transcripts of some of the documents collected by Louis R. Masson, is an excellent example of what can be done.

Business records, such as those used in the last section, are an example of a source of information largely unpublished and untapped for fur-trade studies. Yet, making use of such sources in a methodical and imaginative way can reveal a great deal of information about the history of trade and of trading posts.

Another example of what can be done through the methodical use of ignored sources is found in the study being done by Douglas Birk and David Cooper of the Grand Portage itself, the transshipment route across the height of land. Birk and Cooper (2001) have made use of the detailed information provided by David Thompson’s journals and other descriptions of the portage, describing and mapping the details of the portage in a precise manner, studying the portage in a way that has never been done before.

In a figurative sense, the same thing must be done with all available information, including narrative sources, business records, oral histories and other sources, mapping out what is known and what is not known about the entire history of the Grand Portage area, the trading post, the traders, the Native community. This report is merely one step along the road.



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(HBCA) Hudson's Bay Company Archives.  
B.105/a. Lac la Pluie journals.  
B.105/e. Lac la Pluie reports.  
B.166/a. Portage de l'Île journals.  
B.231/a. Fort William journals.  
E.223/1. Donald McKay Narrative.



# Appendix 1

## Versions of Roderick McKenzie's Reminiscences Relating to Grand Portage

Source: Masson Collection, MG 19, C1, Vol. 32, National Archives of Canada

The earliest versions of Roderick McKenzie's reminiscences found in the National Archives consist of various sheets, some folded to make two leaves with four sides or pages, others unfolded. These various sheets are organized in a haphazard fashion. An attempt has been made here to organize the various versions of this material as they appear to have been written, following page numbers and folded sheet numbers, arranged as they appear to have been written. In addition to what is transcribed here there are two additional versions of these narratives, described as "Memoirs," one possibly by McKenzie, the other apparently in Masson's handwriting. Words given in italics below are penciled changes made in the text by McKenzie or an editor.

### 1785 Fragment 1

17

[folded sheet marked with penciled 3, consisting of two pages with a portion of another leaf cut off]

[Page beginning "I say here Mr. Gregory, Mr. McCrae and"]

At the Tonner we met Mr. Pangman from the Grand Portage. He ~~was~~ *was* anxious ~~from the~~ *from the* ~~lateness of the season and went to look out for us~~ *for our arrival he was on the lookout* He ~~appeared~~ *and was* [?] [end of page]

18

happy to find us so near and accompanied us back to his new Establishment which ~~already~~ *already* consisted of one ~~spacious~~ *spacious* Hangard ~~or store~~ coarsely put together but sufficiently spacious for the purposes of the season. He and Mr. Ross who left Montreal *with him* early in the spring had this building erected after their arrival.

In a few days more Mr. Gregory Mr. Alexander Mackenzie and Mr. James Finlay junr. ~~from~~ *after* their visit to Michillimackinac made there appearance. Now all the Gentlemen of the New Concern were assembled at ~~their~~ *their* Headquarters & ~~commenced~~ *ready for* the Viz.

[folded sheet with only one page written on]

21

so that I necessarily became the Fag of the ~~others~~ *others* ~~whole~~ but I did not grumble though I often made the comptoir my Pillow. However the busy time did not last long. The outfits being ~~were~~ not extensive were soon dispatched for their destinations viz.

For Athabasca in charge of Mr. Ross

English River " of Mr. McKenzie

Fort des Prairies " of Mr. Pangman

Red River " of Mr. Pollock

[end of page]

[folded sheet marked 4 in ink] 23

The Grand Portage was given in charge to a Monsr. L'anniau who had been for many years in that country & was considered ~~by the Traders in the light~~ of a Jack of all Trades but ~~knew~~ *knowing* ni A ni B & I was left with him I ~~believe~~ *suppose* to supply that deficiency. Eighteen men were also left with him for building a Fort and for the purposes of ~~the Winter~~ Trade. At the beginning matters appeared to advance very well but by ~~degrees~~ & by I could perceive a gradual change for the worse in Monsr. L conduct which I made it my duty to ~~watch~~ *observe*. Late in the Fall a Boat with goods *arrived* from Montreal by the Lakes in charge of Mr. Robert Thomson *arrived*. About that time ~~a party was some men were~~ *was* dispatch [sic] to Shaguina [Maquina?] ~~a place~~ about thirty Leagues ~~above the Lake~~ off in order [end of page]

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order to make a fall Fishery. Some time after I was sent in a boat for a load of fish but the fishermen having *not* taken a sufficient *for a load* quantity I was obliged to wait until Decr. when we all *embarked* & returned together. *Then* the weather was ~~dreadfully~~ *very* cold and the ice *was* taking and we were a long time on the way. On my arrival Mr. Thomson ~~to whom I recommended to have an eye o what was going on [illegible word]~~ *who was to keep a look out in my* absence informed me ~~on my return~~ that the conduct of Monsr. Lanniau's *conduct* was *very* in every ~~in many every respect~~ *irregular in my* absence of which ~~report having no occasion for seeing glaring proof seeing sufficient proof~~ I without hesitation I called Monsieur into my room ~~where~~ I boldly told him my ~~mind~~ *what I knew*. He ~~promptly~~ [?] acknowledged his errors & I assumed ~~his charge~~ the command ~~in his place at which he gave [?] at which great~~  
[Note in margin at bottom: *All were pleased and even Lanniau himself was pleased at the change.* [end of page]

31

and necessary changes all ~~hands~~ were well pleased. The Result was that in the Spring the Proprietors found ~~a complete their~~ Establishment ~~complete~~, all the Indians of the Department abating a family *connection of the other Fort* incamped within our limits and ~~all their~~ almost all their ~~winter~~ hunt in our possession. As for Monsr. Lanneau I can not say what became of him ever after. [end of page, last page in folded sheet is not used]

[folded sheet marked 5?] 33

The old Fort was in charge of Monsr. Cloutier who was a very respectable old man. Mr. Js. Givens that year from Montreal was assistant to Mr. Cloutier the same as I was to Mr. Lanniau. Mr. Givens had been brought up at Detroit and spoke Indian the same as the Indians themselves. He was a very pleasant young man & he & I ~~were~~ though in opposition ~~were~~ always together & departed in the spring good friends. In the fall when the Indians were about the place the young men & I became good friends which on their return with their hunt in the spring they did not forget. In the spring one of the Indians had a [?] difficulty with Monsr. Lanniau. I interferred. [a number of words crossed out here] ~~The Indian got hurt. his knife was taken from him~~ [the portion crossed out at the end is hard to decipher.] [end of page]

34

He was turned out of the Fort— his Knife was taken from him & he was severely hurt in the scuffle. Several days *after* when *he was* more in his senses he called for his knife

which was given him. He turned round to me with *an* angry look saying, ~~when~~ the leaves growing large in the Portage I shall remember you. That Evening the Indians had a Drinking match. They were ~~fighting~~ yelling & quarreling & fighting and making such a dreadful noise racket that one ~~could believe~~ might think believe all the furies of Hell were let loose *in the camp but our* ~~The gates of the Fort were shut~~ *gates were soon secured.* In the morning one of the Young men came to inform me that five Indians were ~~dead~~ killed one of them I killed said ~~the young man because~~ he was your enemy and ~~he meant~~ *wanted* to kill you [at] ~~the first opportunity.~~ [end of page]

35

In the Spring the Indians gave a grand entertainment to which all the lodges of the camp were invited to partake and I also had an invitation. When all were assembled and Seated in the Grand Lodge prepared for the purpose each Guest was served with a dish containing a small bundle, neatly tied of original dried meat of the best quality. But my appetite on trial could not do justice to the whole of my portion. A friend close by me observing my embarrassment asked the rest, saying I shall manage it for you. The Festin was a Festin a tout manger. [end of page, last page of folded sheet not used]

## 1785 Fragment 2

[part of folded sheet 2]

[page beginning "with Goods for Mr. Shaw of Nipigon" with a portion left out here]

At the Pays plat we met Mr. Pangman a proprietor of company being anxious for our appearance he was looking out for us and we accompanied him to the New Establishment at Grand Portage.

He & Mr. Ross another partner who had left Montreal early in the spring had been at [end of page]

[folded sheet] 3 1785

the Grand Portage for a considerable time and of course advanced the [illegible word which looks like great] of the buildings for the reception of the goods from Montreal. A few days after our arrival Mr. Gregory & Mr. Alexander McKenzie appeared from Michillimackinac. Now all the Gentlemen of the concern abating Mr. N. MacLeod who was a dormant partner were assembled. And set to ~~work for establishing that trade in the interior~~ *at the outfits for the interior* Their clerks consisted of [end of page]

Duncan Pollock, Laurent Le Roux, James Finlay Junr. Roderick McKenzie with a few commis ~~without any education~~ *men* of an inferior *description* ~~order.~~ Mr. Le Roux and Mr. Pollock did not ~~wish like~~ to engage in the drudgery of the general Rendezvous and were not ~~often~~ *generally* called upon to ~~lend their assistance~~ *assist.* Mr. James Finlay would willingly believe that he knew very little of such [word crossed out] *coarse* work, so that I who *who* naturally could claim no ~~privilege~~ [?] [illegible word] *privilege* for any exemption became the fag of the whole nor did I grumble about it though [end of page] it often happened that the comptoir became my pillow. However our busy season was soon over. *Our outfits* ~~Outfits~~ which were *not very* numerous nor extensive were soon dispatched and disposed ~~as~~ in the *following order* [pencilled word crossed out] viz. The outfit for the Department of Athabasca was given in charge of Mr. John Ross. The outfit for *the Department* of the English River was given in charge of Mr. Alexr. Mackenzie. The outfit for *Department* of Fort des Prairies was given in charge of Mr. Peter Pangman.

The *outfit* for the *Department of Red River* was given in the charge of Mr. Pollock ~~had the charge & management~~. There were many other ~~outfits Equipments~~ of less Note. [End of page]

~~but I did not see any necessity of taking the trouble of giving the particulars at present—~~  
~~not necessary to mention particularly~~ However I ~~ought~~ it may be right to mention the Grand Portage since it became my lot to pass ~~that~~ the following winter there ~~that year~~. The Grand Portage was left under the charge of Monsr. Pierre L'anniau — a Canadian who had passed many years ~~in that country in the Indian countries~~ and was so handy & knowing [?] that he was considered a Jack of all Trades but as he could neither read nor write and I was left with him to supply ~~that deficiency~~ these deficiencies. ~~Eig-Ei-Eightee Eighteen~~ [end of page]

[folded sheet] No. 4 1785

Eighteen voyageurs were placed under his ~~charge~~ command for erecting the ~~but~~ Buildings and purposes of the Trade [could be Traite].

At the beginning matters went on very well but by degrees I could perceive a gradual change gaining ground for the worse in Monsr. L'anneau's conduct & I made it my duty to keep a sharp over ~~Monsr. Lanniau~~ my gentleman.

Late in the fall a boat with goods arrived from Montreal in charge of Mr. Robert Thomson addressed of [end of page] course to Monsr. L'aniau.

Then Mr. Lanniau sent me with a few men in a large canoe to a fishery in the Lake about thirty leagues distant. This was in Novr. The men first sent were not successful so that we had to wait and fish for a lading until far advanced in December when all the Bays were taken with ice through which we had [to] make our way home among distressing difficulties.

On my arrival at our Establishment Mr. Thomson informed me that our chief Monsr. L'anneau's conduct appeared him [here?] to him very in- [end of page]

in correct in my absence. After having inquired into the particulars I was satisfied with the truth of the report. I lost no time. I called Monsr. Lanneau [one word crossed out] into the office and expired [?] to him at full length the impropriety of his doings. He frankly acknowledged his errors and promised to reform. But I declined [word crossed out] to enter into any conditions — but sent him for the Keys which he instantly brought me when I assumed the charge and became master. This pleased all even [end of page] himself. Proper measures were adopted and the affairs of the company went on at the satisfaction of all parties and the proprietors on their arrival the following spring found a complete Establishment for all purposes — all the Indians of the Department abating one family connection of the other fort in camped within the limits of our Establishment and almost the whole of their winter hunt in our possession. As for Monsr. Lanniau I cannot say what became of him after that period. [end of page and folded sheet]

[one leaf with writing on both sides]

1785 5.

Monsr. Cloutier, who had the charge of the Establishment in opposition was a very respectable old man, though destitute of any education he had much of the gentleman about him. Mr. James Givens that year from Montreal ~~was like~~ myself was associated

with Mr. Cloutier for the season too. Mr. Givens had been brought up at Detroit and spoke the chief Indian languages of the Country as well as the Indians themselves. He was a very pleasant young gentleman. He and I though engaged in  
[new page]

opposite Interests were ~~great friends and~~ continually together and parted in the spring good friends. [The whole following section is crossed out with diagonal lines.] Soon after Mr. Givens entered the army [rose?] high in rank *left that country and afterwards was* ~~was afterward~~ appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Upper Canada ~~where he now resides competently~~ [?] ~~greatly advanced in years~~ [illegible word] ~~enjoying a Pension from government~~ where here he ~~now~~ still resides greatly advanced in years enjoying as I'm told a comfortable pension ~~from government~~.

### 1785 Fragment 3

[single page]

Present Mr. John Gregory Mr. Peter Pangman Mr. John Ross & Mr. Alexander McKenzie Partners. Mr. Norman MacLeod ~~and~~ an aged gentleman being only a Dormant partner remained in Montreal. Mr. Duncan Pollock & Mr. Laurent Le Roux were Clerks. Mr. James Finlay & myself were apprentice clerks. The Guides commis & Interpreters *were* few in number and not of the first quality. Mr. Pollock & *Mr. Le Roux* did not seem to mind working on a general scale [?]. Mr. Jas. Finlay could not find employment to suit [?] his ~~capacity~~ *mind* [nine words crossed out].

### 1786 Fragment 1

1786

*Copied*

This spring the first arrivals after the opening of the Navigation were Mr. Robert Grant & Mr. William MacGillivray who had wintered in the Red River. They *These* gentlemen were of the opposition and strangers to me but I *immediately* called upon them — ~~I heard very little from them~~ — and *I was well received*. However I do not recollect any information I had *acquired by my visit* nor do I recollect much ~~of what had past that season~~ *the transaction* [?] at the Grand Portage. ~~The business that year was when~~ [?] *the business* [?] *there was* much about the same as *the* [illegible word] *preceding year* the year before.

In ~~due time~~ *the proper season* I embarked with Mr. Alexander Mackenzie for his Department *on* the English River. Nothing worth notice must have occurred ~~in~~ *for* the ~~most part of~~ *most part of* our journey.

### 1786 Fragment 2

1786

This Spring the first arrivals after the opening of the Navigation were Mr. Robert Grant and Mr. William MacGillivray who had wintered in the Red River. These gentlemen were of the opposition and Strangers to me—but I called upon them and *was well received by them* ~~and was pleased with my reception~~.

My occupation that Summer at the Grand Portage were nearly the same as *they were* the year preceding—nor do I at this distance of time recollect much of them.

In the ~~proper~~ *due* season I embarked with Mr. Alexander Mackenzie for his department the English River. Having taken no notes I scarcely remember any thing that occurred during the first part of our voyage.

**1786 Fragment 3**

[folded sheet]

1786

No. 1

This spring the first arrivals after the opening of Navigation were Mr. Robert Grant & Mr. William MacGillivray—who had wintered in the Red River Department. These gentlemen were of the opposition & Strangers to me but I called upon them & was well pleased with my reception.

My occupations this summer at the Grand Portage were the Same as the preceeding Summer at any rate I do not recollect any thing to the contrary. [end of page]

## Appendix 2

### Letter from Grand Portage by a North West Company Partner

**Source:** Charles Chaboillez Journal, 1797-98, Masson Collection, MG 19, C1, Vol. 1, National Archives of Canada.

Grand Portage 26 Aug. 1797

Gentlemen

The Business of the Season is over here the Lac La Pluie Canoes left the other end the 21st & we have only detained La Tour to cary in this—after anxiously expecting the arrival of the Otter, she cast up the 17th but we have been disappointed in News. She brings nothing later than we already know so that you will be deprived of the beaver Sales which we meant to send you. She waited for the Charlotte a Fortnight at the Sault & was at last obliged to leave her in the River without taking part of her Cargo — fortunately we had enough for all the outfits — Finding we had upwards of 40 Men here after all Posts was supply'd we sent in 2 Canoes disassorted goods to Lac la Pluie for next year it being so much saved to the concern [—] they are engaged to come out early in the spring & with the other who winter here & those of Lac La Pluie to make a trip to Bas de la Riveier Ounipique how soon any person arrives here from Montreal. This plan will not fail of being advantageous for the concern besides taking in a stock of goods to the Bas de la Riviere for any necessary purposes, they will bring out a Quantity of Grease & save the second trip of the [illegible word, could be Lac la P or Jac R or Red R] men from Lac la Pluie. To render this plan effectual the provisions which form a part of these Loadings must absolutely remain untouched [and?] be depended upon by us—as well as any that may be made at Lac La Pluie. It will therefore be necessary that strict orders be given to the people with [wilt?] the canoes to this effect & if any of the brigades fail to make a sufficiency below the River they [must?] send for it  
[end of page]

a great part of the Follavoin made last winter at Lac la Pluie was destroyed by the people coming out and they will lay there again at some have done this year while they have provisions there at command

The gentlemen who do the business at that place complain grievously with reason of the mode of bringing out rum for the Indians. The ill tendency of this is so evident that its only necessary to mention it. I am in hopes the next season will admit of the Indians going sooner for Bark so that none of the Brigades will have occasion to wait for Canoes. Mr. Grant will wait at Lac La Pluie himself. If any one is past he will of course see made of those at the place a proper distribution & take care of the provisions. Mr. McKenzie has examined the River de Tourt & found it impracticable. But[?] we have had such accounts from the Indians of the road leading by the Roche de Bout to the Bois Blan, that he has been tempted to take a jaunt that way. He set off the day before yesterday & I expect him to return in 8 or 9 days at furthest but as the Canoes will be waiting at the Sault I sett of tomorrow for that place. the Otter will be here he returns & its very probable he will not detain us long at the Sault.

Mr. Sayer left here two days ago. he waited at Fond du Lac till L'Etan got there & he now pursues him to watch his motion during the winter. I am in greate hopes with

Appendix 2

precautions taken that this year will crush him—he has only 3 Canoes in which are only 9 or 10 Bales — Mr. Sayer reports that Ogilvie means seriously to interfere with us [&] that its Letans intention to come out this way to meet him — From my own knowledge of Ogilvies Business I dont think this is probable at least for next year—at all events it will be necessary that every proper precautions is taken—such as hiring the men & the agret [agrès, meaning equipment] Road is a bad plan [or place?] for it —  
[end of page]