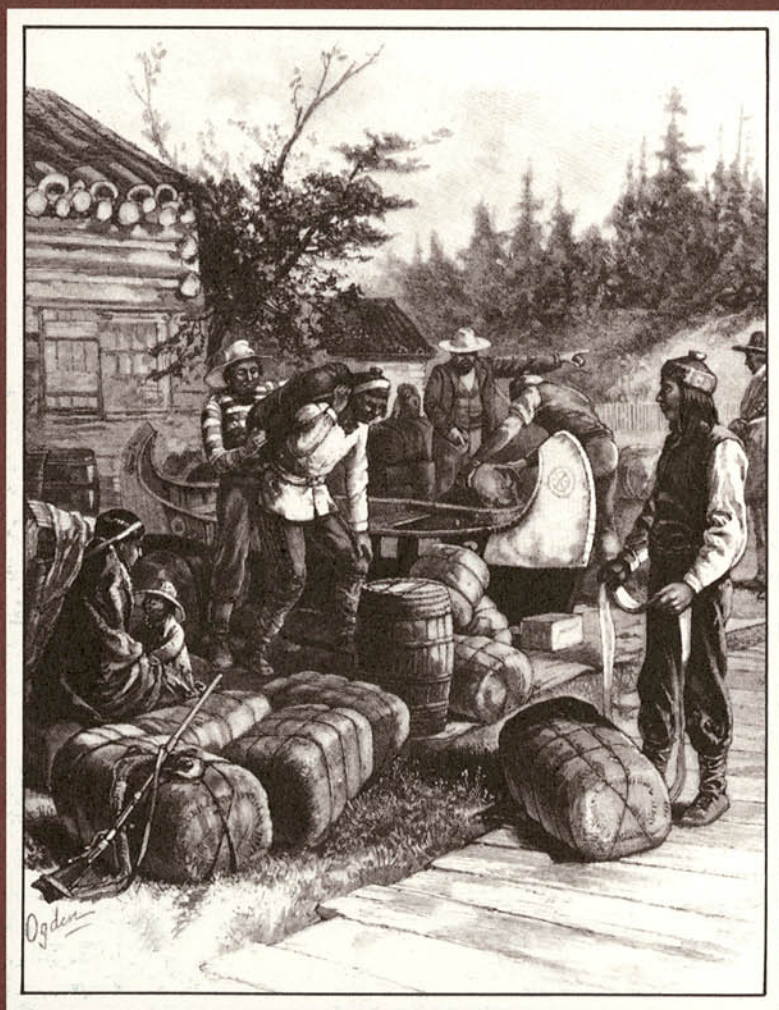


# THE FUR TRADE AND WESTERN CANADIAN SOCIETY 1670-1870

Frits Pannekoek



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## THE FUR TRADE AND WESTERN CANADIAN SOCIETY, 1670-1870

### *Introduction*

The political, economic, and social history of present day Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, was, for the first two hundred years of European contact, a product of the fur trade. At various posts along the region's principal rivers and lakes, traders would exchange such manufactured goods as blankets, beads, guns, tobacco, and axes for native supplies of beaver, marten, and muskrat pelts. In fact, beaver was so abundant that it came to be treated as a currency throughout the Canadian North West. This trading system was highly complex, involving not only the French, Scottish, and Canadian traders who came from the St. Lawrence Valley, and the British traders who came from Hudson Bay with their financial base in England, but the various native groups as well. And the history of the fur trade is not only the story of the actual trade itself, but also that of the new society created by the intermingling of fur traders and natives in the Western interior.

Such noted scholars as Harold Adam Innis and Donald Creighton have asserted that Canada exists in its present form *because* of the fur trade. Fur was the single product or "staple" — like cod fish earlier in the Maritimes or wheat on the prairies in a later period — that was so dominant as to set the tone for the nation or region's economic and social development. The settlements, transportation routes, and financial structures created in support of the fur trade, in this view, moulded the east-west geographical unity of Canada. Innis remarked of Canada that her "present boundaries were the result of the dominance of furs...."

An examination of the fur trade must first focus, therefore, on the various European thrusts into the interior from the St. Lawrence Valley and from Hudson Bay, then turn to the rival economic, social, and transportation patterns which emerged from these two traditions, and finally look at the results of their conflict and eventual merger. Moreover, the fur trade was more than the story of fur traders and their activities. Native people had a strong impact on the trade and it equally had a significant influence on native life. Likewise, a new people, the Métis, was created by the trade and had no small effect on the trade itself. Finally, new elements, perhaps best symbolized by the Christian missionaries, entered the Western interior in the nineteenth century to challenge the old supremacy of the fur trade and lead to its eventual demise.

What emerges from the study of these various themes is a portrait of a unique social and economic structure that helped to shape and continues to affect the history of Western and Northern Canada.

## *Two Fur Trade Traditions*

The fur trade conflict between the St. Lawrence and Hudson Bay traders can be divided into four distinct chronological periods: from 1670 to 1763, 1763 to 1904, 1904 to 1821, and 1821 to 1870. The first period following 1670 saw both the establishment of the British presence on the shores of Hudson Bay and the initial forays by the French from the St. Lawrence Valley into the Western interior. In 1668 Pierre Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers, two disenchanted French-Canadian fur traders, had convinced the English court and several English businessmen that easy access to the best fur land lay to the north through Hudson Bay. Within two years, the Hudson's Bay Company had been formed. It proceeded thereafter to place its posts at the mouths of the major rivers leading into the Bay, in order to entice the Indians of the interior to come to the Bay to trade. The later appearance of rival traders from New France and their Indian allies, intent upon the destruction of the British trade, precipitated a generation of aggressive conflict. Between 1731 and 1749, Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de La Verendrye, and his family established various posts in what is now Northwestern Ontario and southern Manitoba and briefly secured part of the Saskatchewan country fur trade for New France. The defeat of France by Britain in 1759-60 abruptly interrupted these pressures from the St. Lawrence, but only for the moment.

The first period of truly intense competition, which was often vicious enough to generate violence among trading rivals, followed the establishment of British control over New France in 1763 and the subsequent effort to "deregulate" the Montreal-based St. Lawrence fur trade. A new breed of independent trader emerged to replace the renowned *coureurs de bois* as fur traders. These "pedlars," of first French and then British extraction, moved north and west into the distant interior. Having established their initial base at either end of Lake Superior — Michilimackinac to the east and Kaministikwia (later Ft. William, now Thunder Bay) to the west — the pedlars took their trade goods deep into the Western interior, where they spent the winter trading with the natives for furs. Then, at an annual rendez-vous back at the Great Lakes, they would pay off their Montreal-based suppliers with the furs they had accumulated, collect new trading goods, and set off to repeat the process.

Often five or six pedlars competed for trade from what was essentially a single location. The competition among both pedlars and the various Montreal interests who supplied them was so ruinous as to force both into annual agreements or partnerships. The men in the interior soon became known as "wintering partners" or "winterers." The first major partnership of this kind occurred in 1779. This did not mean, however, that all were joined thereafter in peaceful unification. Competition continued to fan the flames of animosity and violence which remained part of the fur trade way of life. Alexander Mackenzie, the

famous explorer and trader, wrote of a particularly unpleasant situation, which led in turn to another union of interests in 1787:

After the murder of one of our partners, the laming of another and the narrow escape of one of our clerks, who received a bullet through his powder horn, in the execution of his duty, they [the Northwesters] were compelled to allow us a share in the trade. As we had already incurred a loss, this union was, in very respect, a desirable event to us....

Ultimately, a more formal and comprehensive union between a variety of the wintering and Montreal partners was forged in 1804 as the North West Company.

During this period of internecine warfare among the St. Lawrence traders, the Hudson's Bay Company had not exactly been "sleeping by the frozen sea" as its detractors charged. From the late 1760s to 1774, the HBC sent no fewer than forty-four expeditions lead by William Tomison, Samuel Hearne, William Pink, and Louis Primo, among others. These expeditions possessed no mandate to trade. Rather, they were designed to entice the Indians to journey to the posts at the bayside. Unfortunately for the Company, however, this strategy had only limited success, especially after the Montreal interests and their winterers began to bring the trade to the Indians (rather than expect the Indians to travel to them) and began to include significant quantities of alcohol in their trade goods.

In 1774 the Hudson's Bay Company finally countered by establishing an inland trading post, Cumberland House. It was located at the junction of the river systems that connected the Arctic and the Bay with the central plains. With this single stroke, the war for the interior had become even more serious and increasingly unforgiving. The economic struggle between the two giants of the Canadian fur trade lasted nearly half a century, escalating in fury with the formation of the North West Company in 1804 and subsiding only with the amalgamation of the two wearying combatants under the HBC name in 1821.

The great crisis that finally precipitated the union by bringing the violent rivalry to a head occurred in 1816 at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. It was an event from which neither company could ever completely recover. Pressed by mounting debt and the prospect of poor fur returns, the HBC had decided in the early 1800s to allow one of its principal shareholders, Lord Selkirk, a Scottish nobleman interested in bringing dispossessed farmers to North America, to establish one of his colonies at Red River, near present day Winnipeg, on the edge of the buffalo country. Not only did the Nor'Westers feel that the colony would be disruptive to the production of pemmican (dried buffalo meat in fat) that was so critical to the provisioning of the northern interior trade, settlement in general was anathema to the wintering traders of both companies.

In the spring of 1816, to forestall possible action by the North West Company, the Hudson's Bay Company actually seized the Nor'Westers' Ft. Gibraltar, located near the colony, and attempted to intercept its pemmican supply. In response, the Nor'Westers under Cuthbert Grant, a mixed blood of Scottish-Cree descent, retaliated by seizing the Hudson's Bay Company posts on the Assiniboine, and then by attacking the Hudson's Bay governor and killing twenty of his men outside Ft. Douglas (the infamous Battle of Seven Oaks). Later that winter Selkirk himself took possession of Ft. William, the greatest North West Company post which was located at the head of Lake Superior. The protracted and expensive litigation that followed, combined as will be seen with a wide variety of economic and transportation problems, were major forces that pushed the two companies to unite in 1821.

Union was achieved through a legal instrument known as the Deed Poll. By the union, the NWC in effect ceased to exist and the HBC entered into elaborate agreements with the component parts of its former rival. Essentially the Deed Poll identified two major ranks: Chief Factors of which there would be twenty-five, and Chief Traders of which there would be twenty-eight. Only Traders could become Factors and, concomitantly, only clerks could become Traders. Traders and Factors also received a share of the trade. A Factor was given  $2/85$  and a Trader  $1/85$  of 40 per cent of the profits. The trade was to be regulated through the annual meeting of Chief Factors known as the Northern Council, much as the North West Company had regulated its trade through the annual meetings at Ft. William. And in fact, despite its corporate disappearance, the North West Company's personnel dominated the new appointments, becoming fifteen of the twenty-five Chief Factors and seventeen of the twenty-eight Chief Traders.

The overriding authority in the new regime was vested in the Governor, and ultimately it was George Simpson, the new Governor of the Northern Department and after 1826 Governor of all of Rupert's Land (as all the HBC territories were called), who put his stamp on the next forty years. Simpson had joined the HBC in 1820 at age thirty-four, when the fur trade rivalry was at its zenith. Not a likeable man, he was nevertheless a thorough, tough, and uncompromising administrator. He made several exhausting and remarkable inspection trips through Rupert's Land and at one point attempted to establish a residence in the North West. Rigorous to a fault, Simpson exercised strict economy, promoted allies who he had co-opted from the North West Company, vigorously defended the Hudson's Bay Company's chartered monopoly, and fended off political attacks in Canada and Great Britain as the agricultural potential of the West became increasingly attractive to Company critics, missionaries, and settlement advocates.

## *Economics of the Fur Trade*

Beaver was central to the European felt hat that enjoyed enormous popularity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although by the mid 1800s the introduction of the silk hat spelled a major decline for the trade in Western Canada, by that time alternate uses, for example the fur coat, mitigated such vagaries of changing fashion.

In structure, beaver fur consists of a surface guard hair, about two inches in length, and an underhair of about one inch. The most valuable furs would be taken in the winter when the underhair was the thickest, and the most valuable of these would actually have been worn by the Indians, the fur side next to their skin. The guard hair would then fall out, leaving a covering of soft downy underhair, ideal for the felting process and well preserved by the natural oils of the wearer.

So important was the beaver to the economy of the North West that most trade items were calculated in terms of made (or prepared) beaver. One "made beaver" at Ft. Simpson in the 1820s could procure a hatchet, two "made beaver" a fine knife or cap, three a blanket or flannel shirt, six to ten a second-hand gun, sixteen a blue capote (a frock overcoat with hood), and twenty to twenty-five a new gun. Similarly, other pelts were also measured in "made beavers." At Ft. Simpson for instance, one made beaver was worth 1.1 to 2 lynx, 1.2 to 7.5 marten, and 9.1 to 14.3 muskrat. Of course the standard of trade by which these prices were derived could vary from year to year, from company to company, and even from post to post, depending on local conditions, markets, and the distance from York Factory or from Montreal.

Furs were traded for a wide range of goods. Powder, shot, guns, broad cloth, and twine for fish nets remained the most sought-after commodities throughout the history of the trade. Second in importance were brandy, hatchets, kettles, and tobacco, while combs, hats, beads, and buttons were usually least in demand, although these rankings could also vary from post to post. The Indians always displayed a legitimate concern for the quality of the trade goods. Guns rarely lasted more than one or two years, and were sometimes faulty enough to explode on firing, causing permanent injury or death. There are also problems with the quality of cloth and with the sizes of such manufactured items as capotes.

A great deal has been written on the trade process itself. Abraham Rotstein has argued that the fur trade was more than an exchange of items; it was a complex series of ceremonies whose principal objectives were not only economic, but social and political as well. He has asserted that the primary motive behind Indian involvement in the trade was the creation and preservation of intricate alliance systems. Other historians like Arthur Ray have argued that trade was almost entirely an economic matter. Price and value, and individual

relationships with the Indian trading captains, or relationships sometimes based on marriage alliances, were the critical factors in the evolution of the fur trade.

While the precise trade ceremony varied widely, an eighteenth-century account survives of the events at York Factory. Several flotillas of canoes assembled out of sight of the Factory, each captained by a leader. The various leaders then exchanged gifts with the Chief Factor, and in ceremonies that lasted two or three days, they made speeches and smoked the pipe. Only after these ceremonies were completed did the actual trade begin. The exchange of goods was conducted through a window in the "trade room" and only one Indian was permitted in the room at a time, although their leader was allowed behind the trade window to ensure fair measure.

Over the long term, it would appear that the fur trade was profitable. At least it has been assumed that an economic activity that survived over two hundred years must have been so. Careful examination has shown, however, that short-term profits were often illusory and that stable long-term credit was more important to survival in the trade. An analysis of the financing of the North West Company trade in the early nineteenth century clearly illustrates the problems created by the ineffective accounting and weak credit systems of the winterer partnerships. All charges, including capital costs for such major items as buildings and boats and operating costs such as wages and supplies, were made against the year in which they occurred, simply because every year or "outfit" was seen as a separate business venture. This contrasts with most commercial enterprises, which average capital costs over the expected "life" of the item in question in order to account for replacement or as an amortization of the costs. The North West Company practice created an unrealistic picture of the profits for years in which there were few capital expenditures. As a result, the expectations of profits were generally too optimistic. At the same time, because all charges were counted against the trade year to which they applied, it could take as many as five or six years for the accounts on any one outfit or trading season to be "wound up." For example, statistics on goods traded would have to be gathered from the interior posts and the English markets and then specifically attached to the proper year. Lag time in the trade made the system unworkable and the attempt to unravel the North West Company books eventually drove the accountants mad. From this perspective, the financial collapse of the North West Company was virtually inevitable, although it happened almost unknowingly.

The fur trade system that was managed out of Montreal involved little real cash. The Montreal companies purchased trade goods from British suppliers who were in turn paid in furs. Because it often took two to three years for those furs to reach the European markets, the extension of credit by these suppliers was essential; in effect, this was nothing more than an elaboration of the credit system used in the Western interior by the Indian and the wintering trader. The

real liability of the Montreal fur company, then, was not the amount owed the London supplier in cash, but rather a commitment to meet that debt in the “currency” of furs.

The Hudson’s Bay Company, the accounts of which were kept in a more traditional fashion, would appear to have operated on a thin profit margin throughout much of its history. A joint stock company, able to spread its liability over a number of years, was more effective than the limited partnerships of the North West Company, which in theory “wound up” its accounts with each outfit or trade year. The Hudson’s Bay Company suffered its longest period of no profit from 1690 to 1710, a situation which the shareholders seem to have tolerated without complaint. Firm management practices were brought to the Company in 1712 by Sir Bibye Lake, Governor until 1743. During his tenure, profits ranged from 10 to 30 per cent on an annual outlay of some £27,000. These were hardly the colossal profits suggested by the Company’s opponents, but they were certainly substantial enough for the Company to continue in operation. It was, all in all, a small, reasonably successful business.

As competition from Montreal increased in the latter half of the eighteenth century and as the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars interrupted fur markets, new and potentially serious financial problems marked the Company’s balance sheets. When Andrew Wedderburn, an established London businessman, took over the Company with his relatives in 1809, it was burdened with a £50,000 overdraft and little immediate prospect of being able to retire the debt. Wedderburn reorganized and began to cut costs. The posts were compelled to increase their reliance on local provisioning, an agricultural colony (as noted earlier) was to be introduced at Red River, and redundant personnel were to be eliminated. Although this helped retard the mounting debt, by 1820 the Company had been forced to stretch its credit to £75,000. This was somewhat offset by evidence that the inland posts were beginning to show profits. Ultimately, the Hudson’s Bay Company survived because its London Directors knew exactly where every pound was invested and the return that could be expected on each of these pounds. Unlike the NWC, the HBC was a stable organization not liable to the expiration of any agreement among independent partners, able to tap extended credit, and able to survive long periods without the payment of dividends. It can thus be argued that it was the financial structure of the Company rather than geography that determined success or failure in the staple trade. If the North West Company entered the new concern of 1821 with any strength at all, it was because it controlled about 78 per cent of the trade at the peak of competition.

It is unlikely that the debate over whether the Hudson’s Bay Company took over the North West Company or *vice versa* will ever be resolved, but the relative merits of the various financial and accounting systems must become part of the argument. It seems safe to conclude, however, that in the merger the HBC

London interests and the skilled HBC officers and NWC wintering partners in the West gained from the union, whereas the Montreal capitalists and the unskilled labourers lost.

### *Transportation Networks and Methods*

Transportation was the single largest cost incurred in the fur trade, and one of the distinguishing features between the HBC and NWC traditions. In the case of the North West Company, “conveyance” made up fully one-half of its total operating costs. The success of any fur trade concern was, therefore, often directly proportional to the ingenuity it could harness in this one area. The North West Company and its St. Lawrence predecessors had to create and maintain an extensive supply and transportation network, which started in Montreal and ended either in the Athabasca Country of the far North or in the Columbia River basin flowing towards the Pacific Ocean.

The *canot de maître* was used on the Montreal-to-Lake Superior route. It carried up to one hundred packs of ninety pounds each, a crew of ten, and several passengers, for a total of up to five tons. Usually thirty-five feet long, up to six feet wide, and about thirty inches deep, it was made of birch bark on cedar ribs sewn together with wattap (spruce tree roots). Because the *canot de maître* was labour-intensive to operate, and required constant replacement, the North West Company also made increasing use of large sailing vessels on the Great Lakes portion of the journey in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The *canot du nord* was used for all travel from the western end of Lake Superior on into the interior. Twenty-four feet long, four feet wide, and eight inches deep, it was usually paddled by four to six men, and contained about thirty-five of the large packs. The loaded canoe displaced about thirty-seven hundred pounds. Because canoes rarely lasted more than one or two seasons, approximately seventy were constructed each year.

It has been argued that the North West Company was at a distinct disadvantage in the fur trade rivalry because of the long distances from Montreal. Indeed, after the union of the two companies, the new enterprise only used the Montreal route to convey passengers and mail, thus supporting the claim. In the amalgamated company, goods and furs were shipped in the HBC tradition via York Factory on Hudson Bay and, by the 1840s, through St. Paul, Minnesota, rather than along the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence route. It could be argued, of course, that this later route, using the new technologies of the steam ship and locomotive, was merely the Montreal route revamped. It also opened the door, as will be seen, to free traders to challenge the HBC monopoly in the West, just as the NWC had done earlier.

Since the Hudson’s Bay Company used the rivers that flowed into Hudson Bay as their interior transportation network, geography dictated that they could

not rely on the canoe, for there were no birch trees at the Bayside. There was also in that area no tradition of canoe building nor experienced paddlers among the nearby native groups. A different solution was required. By the 1780s a shallow draught, dory-like vessel, later called the York Boat, had been introduced. It was particularly effective under sail on large bodies of water, and it was not susceptible to ice damage. It was, nevertheless, very heavy and extremely cumbersome to portage. Poplar logs often had to be used as rollers to move the boats over land. The boats tended to vary in size, but they usually had a twenty-eight foot keel, and were capable of carrying up to one hundred and twenty packs each weighing one hundred pounds. They were manned by a nine member crew, and carried three or four passengers plus provisions. Built of softwoods, these boats also lasted no more than two or three years. Although the boats were used well into the last decades of the nineteenth century, their eventual end was signaled in 1859-60 when the first river steamboat, the *Anson Northup*, appeared on the Red River.

Technological innovation in transportation demonstrated the ingenuity of the fur enterprises in adapting their far-flung operations to a harsh land. And while the transportation network of the “Empire of the St. Lawrence” probably overextended the resources of the NWC, it did emphasize the east-west unity of the country. The general pattern set by the Montreal canoe routes and fur trade posts was later repeated by railroads, highways, airlines, and telecommunications systems, and thus is central to understanding the nation’s historical development.

### *Social Dimensions and Labour Structures*

The fur trade of the Canadian West, even in its very early years, required a work force comprising hundreds of employees, as well as many indigenous families, Indian and mixed blood, to make clothing, moccasins, and snowshoes, and to construct and man boats, canoes, carts, and buildings. The fur traders themselves married, had families, and over time created a new way of life unique to the North West. While historians disagree over the precise nature of the society that emerged, they do agree that both the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company evolved their own social and labour structures. The important contribution of natives and Métis to these structures will be examined separately.

Historian Jennifer Brown describes the North West Company as a series of Anglo-Scots partnerships based on close personal and family associations. Within these partnerships, there was some opportunity for advancement, but a clear line divided the senior partners or “bourgeois” from the French-Canadian labourers or “voyageurs.” In 1804 the North West Company employed 839 people: 45 bourgeois, 76 clerks, 45 interpreters, 16 guides, and 657 voyageurs. The partnership structure of course evolved over time, but it was also true

that a number of the important bourgeois were related to Simon McTavish, who in 1779 joined the first major coalition of business interests that would eventually become the North West Company. His successors, the brothers William and Duncan McGillivray, were also his nephews. Close family ties between bourgeois in Montreal and the winterers who represented the Company's interests in the interior ensured a unity of purpose. Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser, Angus Shaw, and other famous Nor'Westers were also all related through marriage. The importance of the Scottish connection becomes clear when it is considered that of the 128 senior fur trade figures from 1760 to 1800, 77 had a Scottish background.

What set the bourgeois and clerks apart from the voyageurs was not only their Scots heritage and kinship ties, but their lifestyle, which even in the eighteenth and nineteenth century managed to reach luxurious and even profligate levels. When one of the bourgeois travelled in the interior, he did so in absolute comfort, often accompanied by servants, as well as his favorite foods and wine. In 1787 a number of the senior traders formed the Beaver Club, and restricted its membership to those who had wintered in the interior. All such traders actually in Montreal and able to attend were required to be present. The fare included such esoteric items of the Western interior as roast beaver and pemmican, supplemented by quantities of the finest wines and spirits. An excellent description of such a session was given by the bourgeois, George Landmann:

In those days we dined at four o'clock, and after taking a satisfactory quantity of wine, perhaps a bottle each, the married men ... retired, leaving about a dozen to drink to their health. We now began in right earnest and true highland style, and by four o'clock in the morning, the whole of us had arrived at such a state of perfection, that we could all give the war-whoop as well as Mackenzie and McGillivray, we could all sing admirably, we could all drink like fishes, and we all thought we could dance on the table without disturbing a single decanter, glass or plate.... We discovered that it was a complete delusion ... and we broke all the plates glass bottles, and the table also....

Apparently, such revelry was also evident at the annual summer meetings between the wintering and Montreal partners at Ft. William, where dinner was held in the great hall which could accommodate over two hundred. On these occasions, however, everyone in the company participated from guide to partner, although the partners did dine from the formal head table set with the best crystal and china while overlooking the trestle tables of the lower orders.

The voyageurs were for the most part French Canadians or, increasingly, of French-Cree extraction. While *en route* to or from the interior there was a clear social hierarchy in the canoes. Each was manned by a foreman, a steersman,

and several middlemen. Within the canoe the foreman was in control. Every four or six canoes had a “guide,” or pilot, who had authority over the entire brigade. Those voyageurs who paddled the Montreal-Ft. William route were known as “pork eaters,” those who paddled the interior waterways, *hommes du nord*. The considerable difference in status between a *homme du nord* and “pork eater” was reflected in their pay. In the early 1800s, for example, steersmen on the Montreal route received only slightly more than one-half the pay of their Western counterparts. Each voyageur also received appropriate provisions, but these were charged to their account. Since this was generally in deficit, a life of perpetual servitude was almost ensured. As the combativeness of the Montreal fur trade ended, the voyageurs’ wages inevitably slumped.

The Hudson’s Bay Company work and social structure was different in several important ways. For instance, until 1810, the officers did not share in the proceeds of the Company’s profits. The “Chief Factor,” who was responsible for the operation of a major post and its trading hinterland, reported directly to a “Governor,” who was in turn responsible to the London Committee. At the bayside posts, in the early eighteenth century, the Chief Factors, or the ship’s captains when in port, were invested with absolute authority. They were advised by a council of officers, which generally included the senior craftsmen and the sloopmaster. The skilled craftsmen at the post included shipwrights, carpenters, coopers, masons, and blacksmiths, all of whom were generally engaged under three- to five-year contracts. Internally, the posts were organized very much along paternalistic familial or household lines, tempered by the understandable military and naval considerations of an overseas trading operation.

By the early nineteenth century, about 80 per cent of the British labour force in the HBC had been recruited in Scotland’s northern Orkney Islands. Virtually all were drawn from the middle and lower ranks of rural parishes. The Orkneymen received a minimum annual wage of £6, plus room, board, and clothing as labourers, and as much as £20 to £30 plus room, board, and clothing for more complex occupations such as boat building. Very few worked in the fur trade for a lifetime. Most served for eight years or less, and managed to save the majority of their incomes for a farm back home. Opportunities for the Orkneymen to move up in the fur trade hierarchy were not great to begin with, and probably declined as the nineteenth century wore on. Ironically, the Orkneymen acquired an undeserved reputation for being unreliable and somewhat less than diligent. As union with the North West Company became inevitable, the Company made an effort to decrease their numbers in the trade.

Jennifer Brown has argued that in the pre-union Hudson’s Bay Company, officer recruitment was less influenced by blood connections and ethnicity than in the North West Company. At least in the early eighteenth century, it was possible for men to rise to officer status through the ranks. By the end of the century, however, the Company’s need for white collar labour had forced it to

recruit directly in Britain for clerks and writers. Such a corporate solution reduced the chance of promotion through the ranks. Like all male organizations in one measure or another, personal friendships between officers and subordinates had a great deal to do with the rise of an individual through the system. Within the Hudson's Bay Company, then, work connections rather than social class or family connection were more important considerations in upward mobility.

An equally important factor in the evolution of fur trade society was the extensive network of servant families that derived from the distinctive North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company traditions. By 1800, the North West Company alone was responsible for the feeding of twelve to fifteen hundred native women and children. At the Bayside, in defiance of Hudson's Bay Company's stringent policy against cohabitation, the officers, and probably a significant number of labourers, rather rapidly established marriage alliances with the daughters of prominent Indian leaders. Indian wives were vital help-mates whose presence not only cemented alliances, but who undertook the chores of snowshoe-making, hide preparation, and sewing. On occasion they also acted as guides and translators. There is some evidence to suggest that before 1800 some HBC officers and men even had multiple wives, although the fur traders from Montreal rarely had more than one. Marriages were solemnized with much ceremony by the chief officer, according to the custom of the country (*à la façon du pays* or *du nord*). The Indian practice of serial marriage, which in the case of the Nor'Westers could mean "turning off" wives upon retirement to Canada, did exist, but became less and less prevalent as the European influence expanded towards the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Fur traders made every effort to have their mixed blood children marry well. The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a significant increase in the number of mixed blood marriages between fur trading families. Sylvia Van Kirk and others convincingly argue that these growing ties were the foundation for the unique society that emerged in the West before 1870.

Such mixed blood marriages met their first serious challenges in the early nineteenth century. The private life of George Simpson, Governor of Rupert's Land, illustrates the changes that particularly affected mixed blood women. Simpson's marriage to his British cousin, after two liaisons with native women *à la façon du pays*, set the tone for a number of senior fur trade marriages. In 1821 he had "married" Betsey Sinclair, the mixed blood daughter of a former Company officer. In 1822, after she had borne him a daughter, he asked a friend to arrange for someone else to care for her. Later, in 1825, he took up with Margaret Taylor, the sister of his personal servant, but after two more children he "turned her off" in 1830, in order to marry his white cousin.

By the late 1820s, the status of these country wives had been further exacerbated by the arrival of new missionaries and their white wives. A general questioning of the social acceptability of mixed marriages *à la façon du pays* ensued. The social and racial struggle between white and mixed blood eventually reached a climax in Red River, the social hub of fur trade society, where a concentration of mixed bloods had settled. In 1850, the tensions culminated in an unpleasant and sensational lawsuit. Sarah Ballenden, the mixed blood wife of Chief Factor John Ballenden, was rumoured to be having an affair with a retired army officer, Captain Foss. White women in Red River, who saw themselves as the keepers of the community's morals, banished Mrs. Ballenden from their company. Because he had been implicated, Captain Foss sued for defamation and won, but this "strife of blood" was to have long-term repercussions. At the very least, it exaggerated the tensions between white and mixed blood and added to the increasing instability of the fur trade society.

It would be a mistake to assume that most of the traders' offspring became integrated into Company society. The majority at the Bayside, for example, joined their mother's Indian family and eventually formed the basis of the "homeguard." It was the homeguard natives who lived around the posts and handled much of the provisioning. They also served as a source of casual labour and became a critical component of the trading structure. Similarly, the children of the Indian women and voyageurs on the southern plains formed the nucleus of what would become the Métis peoples. While some attached themselves to the posts like the homeguards, others formed semi-nomadic communities at such places as Buffalo Lake which were strategically located for the buffalo hunt, and where they came to control the production and distribution of pemmican.

The fur traders and their families lived their lives around the fixed posts, which varied from the unique but unbearably cold stone fort at Churchill to the more functional wooden structures at York Factory or Ft. William, to the single log shelter of the pedlar. Usually these establishments were contained within pallisaded walls, which frequently collapsed from rot. At the larger posts, especially in the nineteenth century, there would be a "big house" for the senior traders and their families, the clerks' quarters, a men's house, and various warehouses. Despite their military character these forts — or factories (places where Factors traded) — were rarely used for defence. Indeed, many of the industrial buildings were outside the walls.

While fort life was generally structured and disciplined, the men's houses were incredibly untidy even by the standard of the day. The yards with their numerous dogs and garbage were a cacophony. Furniture was crude and simple. By contrast, the interior of the big houses were dressed with the best that British civilization could offer. There were excellent libraries at Ft. Garry, Ft. Chipewyan, and York Factory, and at the grander posts a pianoforte might grace the parlour.

Agriculture and horticulture were also practised on a limited scale, with gardens, fields, livestock, and barns being the norm, especially in the nineteenth century. Ft. Edmonton, for example, was well known for its fields and horse-racing track. Agricultural success was limited however, and even Red River never managed to sustain itself without the buffalo hunt.

### *Native People and the Fur Trade*

Historians and anthropologists have debated the degree to which the Indians directed or benefitted from the fur trade and the degree to which they became captives within an inevitable process of cultural erosion. It has been argued by some scholars that European technologies and the demand for furs caused permanent alteration to labour structures and Indian cultural habits. Some would further assert that the end result was a dangerous and unwarranted dependency upon European commodities that destroyed native self-sufficiency soon after first contact.

The acquisition, quantity, and consumption of trade goods played a significant role in changing the nature of native societies. Metal implements, European weaponry, and textiles soon became necessities rather than luxuries to those tribes closest to white contact. Not infrequently, the natives involved in direct trade with the companies or acting as intermediaries in distant trading networks did not procure sufficient pelts to acquire the goods that they now perceived as vital to their existence. In response, the companies or independent traders as noted before initiated a credit system, often helping their native trading partners to accumulate so stupendous a debt that it was impossible to retire. There were two sides to this system. On the one hand, the traders' personal debt structure could escalate beyond reasonable proportions itself posing either personal bankruptcy or, for the company servants, severe reprimands or possibly disengagement from the service. On the other hand, and here there was a delicate balance to maintain, a trader who refused to extend credit risked the loss of his native contacts to those who would. Ultimately, it seemed that from the traders vantage point, a manageable level of native indebtedness was an appropriate "social control" technique to create a bond of dependency between his native suppliers and himself — a socio-economic structure that might have paved the way for the inept handling of Indian affairs during the later settlement period. Of course, these bonds were not uniform. They varied from one native group to another, depending on each band's geographical position, alliance systems, and reliance on European goods as daily necessities as opposed to rejectable luxuries.

The Indians of the Western interior, particularly the Cree, rapidly adapted to the trade. In the mid seventeenth century, during the period of first contact, the Cree inhabited the Canadian Shield, possibly as far West as The Pas, in today's Manitoba. At the Bayside posts, they traded their own furs and increasingly acted as intermediaries for the natives further off in the interior. Then, as the

French explorers and traders moved deeper into the West, the Cree attempted to preserve their position by also moving westward. In the late 1700s, they numbered about three thousand in the Western interior, but were reduced to about sixteen hundred by the tragic measles epidemic of 1819. In order to maintain their position of dominance, the Cree were forced to ally themselves with the Assiniboine, the most numerous of the southern plains people. Their joint alliance against the Blackfoot Confederacy lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century and dominated the early political economy of the fur trade, even after the 1839 smallpox epidemic had altered the character of the alliance. After the Assiniboine had been ravaged by that epidemic, their territory shrank considerably. The Plains Cree, however, had by this time been vaccinated against the disease and expanded into the vacated Assiniboine lands. By the 1860s they numbered approximately ten thousand and their influence extended over much of the central plains.

The south-western plains of the interior were the territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy, which included a population of some nine thousand at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Confederacy included the Piegan, the Blood, and the Blackfeet (who gave their name to the Confederacy), their allies the Sarcee, and until 1861 the Gros Ventres. They traded with the Cree at the junction of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers near present day Prince Albert, but since they were buffalo hunters their reliance on the fur trade was always marginal. Nevertheless, the trade was not without its impact, since they also traded pack horses, pemmican, wolf and fox pelts, and buffalo hides to the HBC, along with pelts obtained from raids on American traders to the south. The trade probably tended to increase the power of the Blackfoot Chiefs, since the Company recognized them as leaders in the trade ceremonies. And the trade perhaps influenced the incidence of polygamy, since wives were of critical importance in the processing of buffalo hides.

The Athapaskan people inhabited the area north of the Cree and west along the Churchill. Their numbers included the Hare, Dogribs, Slaveys, Beaver, and Chipewyan. They were a people who favoured the forest and the river rather than the tundra or plains. The impact of the fur trade on the Athapaskans is worth noting. Direct contact began with the American pedlar, Peter Pond, when he established the first trading post in the area in 1778. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Athapaskans' basic cultural patterns seemed to have been retained. No single dimension of the trade had become important enough to alter existing cultural patterns, and the people generally remained uncommitted to the European trade system. Few of them actually made trips to the fort, and in the early 1800s one group failed to appear for two years in a row, even though it lived only two days away. Yet some changes did occur among the Athapaskans. The gun accentuated the feast-and-famine cycle, causing them to disperse further throughout their hunting areas. This probably tended to

exaggerate tensions between various families and groups as might the increasing tendency toward specialization. Entire families were employed at gathering fish or hunting caribou for the fur posts, and thus began to gather frequently at the meat and fish camps nearby. The attraction of medical assistance during the epidemics of the nineteenth century would likely have had the same centripetal effect. In the end, however, the Athapaskans remained devoted to hunting and trapping, while the trade remained a secondary pursuit.

The Assiniboine, like the Blackfoot, did not become entirely dependent upon the trade for their existence. They tended to trade for luxuries like alcohol and tobacco, or for a few unavoidable essentials such as ammunition. The Cree, however, were reputed to be almost totally dependent. As early as 1801 Daniel Harmon, a well known fur trader, noted of the Cree:

The Indians in this quarter have been so long accustomed to use European goods, that it would be with difficulty that they could now obtain a livelihood without them. Especially do they need fire arms, with which to kill their game, and axes, kettles, knives, etc. They have almost lost the use of bows and arrows; and they would find it nearly impossible to cut their wood with implements made of stone or bone.

A cycle of dependence was thus begun that, with the decline of the fur trade in the later 1800s, would find its focus shifting from the Company to the missions and ultimately to the Canadian government. Unfortunately, it was a cycle that these agencies were unable or unwilling to break and thus one that continues to the present day.

### *The Métis*

The mixed blood communities of the Western interior, so important as already seen to so many aspects of the fur trade, have too often been regarded as one group with a single identity. The situation is far more complex. In the eighteenth century, the Indian women around the Bayside factories often mated with the Company's servants and bore their children. Their mixed blood progeny, except for those who identified with their European fathers, were usually absorbed into their mother's families to form the homeguard Cree. It is difficult to determine whether English-speaking "half breeds," perhaps best identified as the Hudson Bay English, who did not become absorbed as homeguard Cree actually developed an identity of their own. After the founding of Selkirk's Red River Colony in 1812, and later with the union of the two companies and the appearance of discharged and retired servants in the settlement, the opportunity arose for such people to form a unique English-speaking mixed blood community. Because of their association with the Company, the Hudson Bay English did not, for example, side with the Métis in the opposition to the founding of Selkirk's

settlement. They were a people "in between," not certain of whether they were Indian, British, or Métis. Yet, as a result of the crises within the settlement in the 1860s and their own largely Protestant heritage, those Hudson Bay English in Red River increasingly identified with their European ancestry. Many others, however, who had moved to the interior or already lived there, such as Charles Pratt, the Church Missionary Society catechist, and his entire family, joined various Indian bands and eventually moved onto reserves with them.

The Métis, by contrast, were mixed blood resulting from unions of Cree women with the North West Company's French-Canadian voyageurs or with the NWC's Scottish bourgeois, although unions with Ojibway and Chipewyan women also occurred. As a result, the Métis were Roman Catholic and Cree- or French-speaking. As early as 1812-14, the Métis numbered several thousand. They lived a semi-nomadic existence, ranging across the plains with settlement at such places as Buffalo Lake, Ft. Carlton, Ft. Edmonton, Rocky Mountain House, and of course Red River.

The most famous of the early Métis was Cuthbert Grant of White Horse Plain. Grant's father, a Nor'Wester, had been at Ft. Chipewyan in 1789, and was later placed in charge of the North West Company's posts on the Upper Assiniboine. Here Grant was born of an Indian mother. When his father died, Cuthbert was sent away for his education, first to Montreal and then to Scotland. He returned to the Northwest in 1812, just as Selkirk was establishing the new settlement at Red River. It was Grant's leadership of the fight against the colony that precipitated a coalition of sentiment among the Métis that has often been seen, along with the Riel Resistance of 1869 and the Northwest Rebellion of 1885, as fostering and securing a Métis sense of nationhood. When it became clear that, despite the destruction of Governor Semple's party at Seven Oaks, their opposition had failed, Grant persuaded the Métis to settle on river lots along the Assiniboine near the White Horse Plain and along the banks of the Red, south of the Assiniboine. (The English-speaking settlements were a few miles to the north.)

Settled or not, the Métis economy centred on the buffalo hunt. To ensure a steady supply of pemmican as the staple provision of the fur trade, the companies had strategically established trading houses in the main bison regions. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, for example, the North West Company alone required approximately forty to sixty thousand pounds of pemmican each year. The demands of the amalgamated Company after 1821 increased dramatically, reaching approximately one hundred thousand pounds in 1840 and about double that in 1870. The Métis also supplied much of the buffalo meat required by the Red River settlement, which at even a conservative estimate would have been about two million pounds per year in 1830 and about eight million pounds in 1870.

Writing in the mid 1850s, Alexander Ross, the Red River historian, provides perhaps the best description of the Red River hunt, which was the largest on the plains:

Imagine four hundred horsemen entering at full speed a herd of some thousands of buffalo, all in rapid motion. Riders in clouds of dust and volumes of smoke, which darken the air, crossing and re-crossing each other in every direction [,] shots on the right, on the left, behind, before, here, there, two, three [,] a dozen at a time, everywhere in close succession, at the same moment. Horses stumbling, riders falling, dead and wounded animals tumbling here and there, one over the other; and this zig zag and bewildering melee continued for hours or more together in wild confusion.

Despite this apparent chaos, the hunts themselves were conducted in a structured and orderly fashion by the captain of the hunt. So critical were the hunts that one-third of the Red River Métis participated. In one afternoon in 1849, 1,776 cows were killed, yielding 1,213 bales of dried meat, 166 sacks of fat (200 lbs. each), and 556 bladders of marrow (12 lbs. each). The number of carts involved in the hunt increased from 540 in 1820 to 1,210 in 1840.

The lifestyle and sociability of the Métis, especially during the heyday of the fur trade from 1821 to 1860, generated much folklore. Unlike their European progenitors, they were not work oriented — they did not live to work. The things that were of utmost importance were their kin, their social life, and those things that allowed one to excel in the hunt — guns and horses. Most “squatted” on their long, narrow river lots, rather than bothering to take out a formal land title, and they put little time in agriculture, except perhaps to plant a few acres of barley and a patch of potatoes. The Métis built wooden homes using the Quebec post-on-sill method. A review of their income and expenditures would suggest that they took considerable pride in their clothing. Métis men could be generally found in a blue cloth capote with brass buttons, a red and black flannel shirt which also served as a waist-coat, buff-leather moccasins, an “assumption sash” around the waist, and trousers of brown and white homespun. Women dressed more conservatively in a dark shirt or dress, moccasins, and a shawl to cover the head.

The Métis saw themselves as more than mere buffalo hunters and provisioners. By the 1840s they were agitating with considerable militancy for the right to conduct their own fur trade, despite the HBC monopoly rights, and to act as independent freighters. They were strongly encouraged in this by the Catholic clergy. In 1849 the Hudson’s Bay Company in its last major effort to enforce the exclusivity of its 1670 charter arrested a Métis, Guillaume Sayer, and charged him with trafficking in furs. The Red River court found him guilty but, under considerable duress from a band of armed Métis, recommended

mercy. The Chief Factor followed by dropping all other charges. From that time on, the fur trade was in effect free, and a large number of Red River Métis began to trade and freight on their own account, taking advantage of the new transportation facilities through St. Paul to the south. It should be remembered, however, that the Company remained the overwhelming economic presence in the region and continued to act as the principal employer.

After 1850 a small Métis merchant class developed in Red River and provided leadership for the community. Louis Riel's father was an early member of that elite and his various business enterprises were symbolic of the vitality of the Métis interests. It was this small and tightly knit elite who, along with the Catholic clergy, influenced the local exercise of authority, and continued to encourage the successful opposition to the Company's monopoly, which led in turn to the final collapse of the fur trade system that had dominated the interior for nearly two centuries.

### *The Missionary Challenge*

In addition to these internal social and economic pressures in the West, external factors were injected into the region that also undermined the old order of the fur trade. Political and economic concerns in Britain, expansionists in land-hungry Upper Canada, and later politicians in Ottawa all saw the West as a golden field of opportunity, in which the fur trade would be pushed aside to accommodate their own ambitions. Foreshadowing this challenge and first on the scene were the Christian missionaries, whose external ideas soon influenced the internal dynamics of Western society.

With the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church in 1818, the Church of England in 1820, and the Methodists in 1840, the missionary became an important social force in the interior and a catalyst in the decline of the fur trade. In opposing the trade, the missionaries actively worked toward its abolition and for its replacement by agriculture. The fur trader for his part consistently opposed the missionary. In the end Simpson only allowed them into Rupert's Land because of their influence in the British parliament, where a growing concern for indigenous peoples everywhere in the Empire forced an attitude of diplomatic concession on the Company. Initially, Simpson hoped to contain the Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant missionaries within the settlement at Red River. Then in 1840, the Methodists, who appeared least antagonistic toward the Company's trade, were permitted to establish a station at Rossville near Norway House. It was there that the Rev. James Evans perfected a Cree syllabic alphabet, which is still in use today. Much to the Company's annoyance, he also fomented a degree of labour unrest about the brutal conditions on the Red River-York Factory boat brigades. At Simpson's connivance Evans was recalled in 1846.

Yet the dam had been breached. The pressure to establish agricultural mission settlements in the interior of Rupert's Land could not now be resisted. Soon the Catholics and Anglicans had stations throughout the Western Interior. In the 1840s and 1850s, successful settlements ranging from a handful to a hundred Indian or mixed blood families were established at such sites as St. Peter's (Red River), Rossville (Norway House), Stanley (Churchill River), Pigeon Lake (central Alberta), Prince Albert (central Saskatchewan), Ft. Victoria (east central Alberta), and The Pas (northern Manitoba).

Not all missionaries encouraged settlement with equal vigour. While the Methodists and most Anglicans believed that settlement must be started and agriculture learned before Christianity could be taught with any success, Presbyterians and Catholics believed that if there was resistance to the plough, Christianity could be taught in any case. Nevertheless, missionaries invariably encouraged agriculture, but with minimal success, given the soil conditions, the unsuitable planting varieties, early frosts, and a decided lack of markets. Where settlements flourished as at Rossville, they did so only because of the employment opportunities offered by the fur trade. Even Simpson realized that the concentration of native labour at the various posts, which the missionary influence had helped stabilize, could be of benefit to the Company.

The agricultural settlements probably accentuated the cycle of native dependence brought on by the fur trade. It was a common belief among missionaries that agriculture failed largely because of Indian inferiority rather than because of climatic or soil conditions. Despite mounting frustrations, exacerbated by their own ignorance of Western agricultural requirements, the missionaries continually provided new supplies for yet another try. When the fur trade collapsed in the late 1860s and early 1870s, the missionaries continued to provide their habitual assistance.

By encouraging agricultural settlement that was essentially antithetical to the wide-open nomadic life of the fur trade and the buffalo hunt and by spreading social and moral values that fragmented the community, the missionaries increased the collective tension in Red River and thus hastened the end of the old order.

### *Conclusion*

The pressures which brought on the collapse of the Western fur trade were irresistible. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the beaver hat was replaced with silk. Although the trade remained viable as new uses were found for fur, it made the trade marginally less profitable in an era when the Hudson's Bay Company and independent free traders were again in serious competition. More importantly, from the 1850's onward it was inevitable that settlement would emerge to press the trade deeper and deeper into the Canadian Shield

and further and further from the centres of population and commerce that were being developed in the south. The threat of manifest destiny from a United States looking to expand northward on the prairies prompted a greater interest in the Western interior by both imperial politicians in Britain and western expansionists in her Canadian colonies. It was therefore becoming increasingly obvious that the fur trade and its financial and social structures were marking time — and that they lacked the strength and internal cohesion to resist these other interests soon to dominate the West.

The purchase of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1862 by the International Financial Association with its own interests in settlement, and railroad and telegraph development, as much as the sale of Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada in 1869-70, marked the end of an economic and social system that had been underpinned by the fur trade. The inhabitants of Rupert's Land were not consulted over their destiny and objected strenuously enough to draw Imperial troops to Red River to oust the new provisional Métis government under Louis Riel. But the end had been inevitable for some time.

Yet, although the course of fur trade history was often determined from the metropolis, whether London or Montreal, a unique society had been formed in Rupert's Land and that society, with all of its diverse subcomponents, possessed sufficient vitality of character to affect politics, society, and ideas in Western Canada even now.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

In the last fifteen years, the fur trade has become the subject of new scholarly insights. The pre-1970 volumes which continue to survive as landmark works are A.S. Morton, *The History of the Canadian West to 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1939); E.E. Rich, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, three volumes. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960); and of course H.A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (Yale University Press, 1930, and reprinted in several editions since). The best brief if uneven synthesis remains E.E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967).

Of these early scholars, Innis has had the greatest impact on Canadian historiography, although not on fur trade studies. Fur trade historians have not used Innis' staple thesis as a theoretical framework and have instead proceeded in their respective isolated directions. This has been pointed out by Adrian Tanner in "The End of Fur Trade History," *Queen's Quarterly* (Spring 1983), pp. 176-91. Neither A.S. Morton nor E.E. Rich constructed their work on the foundation of the staple thesis. Indeed, L.G. Thomas, who has influenced many of today's fur trade historians, has pointed out in his introduction to the reprint of A.S. Morton's volume that Morton had no overriding historiographical approach, although he did attempt reinterpretations of such individuals as Selkirk and LaVerendrye. Rich for his part saw the development of the West in imperial terms and was most concerned about the politics of trade in the context of international relations.

Recently there have been two excellent surveys of the fur trade period: Daniel Francis, *Battle for the West: Fur Traders and the Birth of Western Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1982); and Glyndwr Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade: 1670-1870," *The Beaver* (Autumn 1983). Both are highly recommended in that they attempt to encompass all of the recent research in a readable form.

In recent years there has been a particular concentration on the role of the Indian in the fur trade. The best such work has been by Arthur Ray. Of particular importance, although they are very difficult reading, are his *Indians in the Fur Trade 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); and with Donald B. Freeman, *Give us Good Measure: An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978). Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay 1600-1870* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983); and Shephard Krech III, *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social Economic Adaptations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984) are useful accounts. The introductory chapters in Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) are also excellent summaries of the impact of the trade on the native populations of the plains.

Major attention has recently been devoted to the social history of the trade. The principal volumes are Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1980); and Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in the Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980). A good indication of various other work being done on labour and social history issues is contained in essays edited by Arthur Ray and Carol Judd, *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). Van Kirk argues that there was a unique Western society that recognized Indian-white relations and where native women had an important and determined role. It was the intrusion of white women beginning in the 1830s that led to the deterioration of that society. Jennifer Brown traces the differences between the fur trade social structures of the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies and redirects many earlier assumptions about the importance of family connections in the trade.

The classic work on the Métis remains M. Giraud, *Le Métis canadien* (Paris: Université de Paris, 1945). The best recent set of articles which summarizes work to date is Jennifer Brown and Jacqueline Petersen, eds., *The New Peoples* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985). Of particular interest are the articles which attempt to place the English-speaking "half breeds" in context.

Biographical works relative to the fur trade are numerous but few are outstanding. The best biography of Selkirk continues to be John Morgan Gray, *Lord Selkirk of Red River* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1964); and of George Simpson, John S. Galbraith's somewhat disappointing *The Little Emperor, Governor Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976). The best biography of a fur trade Métis leader remains Margaret Macleod and W.L. Morton, *Cuthbert Grant of Grantown* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963). Most of the material on the Nor'Westers is unfortunate, although Marjorie Wilkins Campbell *North to the Sea: A Biography of William McGillivray* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1975) is worth looking at.

Fur trade historians have set the Canadian standard for series of edited documents and journals. The best volumes are by the Hudson's Bay Record and Champlain Societies, though several others are worth consulting for their introductions. Of particular importance are W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); his *The Letters and Journals of Simon Fraser, 1806-1808* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960); and Victor Hopwood, ed., *David Thompson: Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971). Frederick

Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968 edition) is a classic account of Simpson's western travels.

The impact of the missionaries and the declension of fur trade society is outlined by Frits Pannekoek in "The Rev. Griffiths Owen Corbett and the Red River Civil War of 1869-70," *Canadian Historical Review* (June 1976); and "The Anglican Church and the Disintegration of Red River Society, 1818-1870," in Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook, eds., *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W.L. Morton* (Toronto, 1976). See also his "The Historiography of the Red River Settlement," *Prairie Forum* (Spring 1981).

Several kits are available as well from the National Museum of Man which relate to the early West. The one by Sylvia Van Kirk is a particularly useful summary. Teachers will find the Jackdaw kits on the fur trade, the North-West Passage, Selkirk, and Riel helpful explorations, but these like other school materials should be supplemented by academic readings.

