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**THE NIITSITAPI TRADE:
EUROAMERICANS AND THE BLACKFOOT-SPEAKING PEOPLES,
TO THE MID-1830s**

by
DAVID SMYTH, B.A.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Department of History

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
November 2001
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Chair, Department of History

Thesis Supervisor

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Carleton University

20 December 2001

Abstract

The history of the Niitsitapi (the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples of the northern Plains) has largely been misunderstood. This thesis is a re-examination of the Niitsitapi trade, to the 1830s, principally with the North West and Hudson's Bay companies, and later with American concerns. A more rigorous examination of the documentary record and an understanding of Niitsitapi cultural and religious beliefs permit new interpretations of some key issues in their history. There was no Niitsitapi trade at York Factory in the 18th century, nor was there an Archithinue (a term that included the Niitsitapi and several other First Nations peoples) trade there either. There is insufficient evidence to support the contention of an 18th-century Niitsitapi-Cree trade and military alliance. The Niitsitapi initially refused to kill beaver for the trade because of their belief systems; only after the Hudson's Bay Company merger of 1821 and a drastic devaluation of wolf pelts did one of the three Niitsitapi peoples (the Piikani) enter the beaver trade, driven to protect their national interests in a 19th-century arms race with neighbouring enemies. Conflict with Americans resulted in part from the American failure to adapt to Niitsitapi protocols of external relations, and in part because the Americans came to Niitsitapi country as hunters and trappers, rather than as traders. Only when ex-North West and Hudson's Bay company employees joined the Missouri River trade did American attitudes change. After 1831, the bulk of the Niitsitapi trade was lost to the British. However, the American demand for and capacity to carry buffalo robes allowed the Piikani to stop killing beaver and to meet their needs through the robe trade. The three Niitsitapi peoples rationally assessed the particular approaches and practices of the three groups of Euroamerican newcomers, recognized the obstacles and opportunities presented in each set of circumstances, and then showed remarkable flexibility in the actions which they took to ensure their survival and prosperity.

Acknowledgements

I have been a historian for half of my life. For most of that time I have been fascinated by and, when time permitted, worked on the history of both the First Nations peoples of the northern Plains and the fur trade of the Missouri and the Saskatchewan. As a result, I owe a debt of gratitude to so many individuals and so many institutions that I think it best not to try to list them all here. I might inadvertently offend or hurt by the inevitable omissions caused by momentary, middle-aged forgetfulness.

Although encouraged and supported by many over the years, I have been inspired by only two people in my profession. When I was an undergraduate, Deryck Schreuder introduced me to the joy and excitement that one could experience as a historian. During my career as a government historian, the late Irene Spry recharged my batteries each time that we discussed our shared interests at the National Archives of Canada. I could never thank them enough; they showed me the pleasure, the satisfaction and the value in being a historian.

I would like to thank those colleagues, friends and family members who have supported me through the ordeal that I created for myself in writing this thesis. Along the way, some wise person told me that there are two kinds of theses: the great ones and the completed ones. This one came perilously close to being a “great” thesis. Without these people who surround me in my daily life, I might never have finished it.

I owe a great deal to Kerry Abel, my thesis supervisor. Her insights and advice improved the final product immensely, and made me a better historian in the process, as well. I know that I tested her patience to the limit.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my immediate family, to my two daughters, Krista and Jessica, and to my wife, Yvonne. More than anyone else, Yvonne knows what I went through to complete this thesis, for she shared the experiences with me. More than anyone else, she is responsible for the successful completion of the thesis.

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Glossary One. Synonymy of Current First Nations/Tribal Names.*

English Exonym	Ethnonym
Blackfoot	Siksika
Blood	Kainai
Peigan	Piikani
Arapaho	Inuna-ina
Arikara	Sahnis
Assiniboine	Nakoda
Beaver	Dunne-za
Cheyenne	Tsitsistas
Chipewyan	Dene
Coeur d'Alene	Schitsu'umsh
Cree (Western)	Nahyawak
Crow	Absaroke
Flathead	Séliš
Gros Ventre	A'aninin (or Atsina)
Hidatsa	Hiraáca
Ioway/Iowa	Baxoje
Iroquois	Haudenosaunee
Kalispel	Stlqetkomschi
Kootenay	Ktunaxa
Mandan	Nú neta
Nez Perce	Ni Mii Pu
Ojibwe	Anishinabe
Omaha	UmaNhaN

English Exonym**Ethnonym**

Oto

Chiwere

Pawnee

Chahiksichahiks

Pend d'Oreille

(see Kalispel)

Sarcee

Tsuu T'ina

Saulteaux

Anishinabe

Shoshone

Nimi

Shuswap

Secwepemc

Sioux

Western or Teton Sioux

Lakota

Eastern or Santee Sioux

Dakota

Northern or Yankton Sioux

Nakota

Spokane

Spoqín

Stoney

Nakoda

* This glossary was compiled using a wide variety of sources, including websites kept by First Nations, the *Handbook* series of the Smithsonian Institution, and others contained in the bibliography of this thesis.

Glossary Two. Terminology

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition/Explanation</u>
Tribe-People-Nation	I will use these terms interchangeably (see Chapter One).
First Nations	In Canada, the term "First Nations" has almost entirely replaced the term "bands." I will use First Nations peoples as a substitute for the word "Indians." While legally valid, "Indian" has virtually been abandoned by First Nations peoples in Canada. As there are far more First Nations today (over 600) in Canada than there ever were tribes, First Nation will not be used as a substitute for the singular entity of tribe, people or nation.
Niitsitapi/Blackfoot-speaking Peoples	Niitsitapi is the ethnonym which encompasses all three of the Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood) and Piikani (Peigan) tribes. I will use this term interchangeably with Blackfoot-speaking peoples, tribes or nations (always pluralized), to denote all three of the Siksika, the Kainai and the Piikani.
Blackfoot Alliance	This is a term which I have chosen to use to refer to the long-standing, informal alliance, or friendship relationship, between the three Niitsitapi peoples and either or both of the Gros Ventre (<i>Atsina/A'aninin</i>) and the Sarcee (<i>Tsuu T'ina</i>). The term will be qualified when used to insure clarity with respect to membership at a given time.
Plains Indians	A term used extensively by British and Canadian traders on the upper North and South Saskatchewan rivers to denote the three Niitsitapi peoples, and one or both of the Gros Ventre and the Sarcee.
Slave Indians	This term was used interchangeably by the upper Saskatchewan traders with "Plains Indians." The term "Slave" derives from a derogatory Cree appellation for the Niitsitapi and their allies, the Gros Ventre and the Sarcee (see Chapters Two and Three). The "Slave Indian" subjects of this thesis are not to be confused with the Slave or Slavey peoples of the Mackenzie Valley, who are Athapaskan-speaking.
Blackfoot Confederacy	A term widely used since the late 19th century, it describes the three Niitsitapi peoples, and often, as well, the Gros Ventre and the Sarcee. I have chosen not to use this term (see Chapter One), despite the fact that it is in common usage today, even among most Niitsitapi peoples themselves.

Euroamerican

I use this as a generic term, encompassing anyone of European origin or ancestry residing in North America, i.e. White person. It is not a reference to any one particular group; it is not used to distinguish Americans (citizens of the United States) from British or Canadian citizens.

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis will be an analysis of the Euroamerican fur trade with the Niitsitapi (the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples). From the first half of the 18th century, Euroamericans, first from Hudson Bay and the Great Lakes and then from the Missouri River, tried to tap the reputed wealth of Niitsitapi territory. The Hudson's Bay Company, French traders and explorers, the North West Company, smaller Canadian concerns and a number of American enterprises all sought at different times to establish trade relations with the Blackfoot-speaking peoples. A variety of strategies and tactics were employed to attempt to exploit these rumoured, and then confirmed, riches in beaver. The Niitsitapi peoples reacted in terms shaped by their world view and appropriate to the circumstances presented by the arrival of each particular Euroamerican group. This thesis is not a history of the Niitsitapi, or of their external relations. And although I have attempted to bring to bear sources revealing Niitsitapi attitudes and perspectives, neither is this thesis an examination of the fur trade from the Niitsitapi point of view.

The Niitsitapi are bound by a common ancestry and a common language, a shared culture and ongoing kinship ties. However, the Piikani (Peigan), the Kainai (Blood) and the Siksika (Blackfoot proper) were, prior to the mid-19th century, three politically discrete tribes. But from the late 19th century they have been four distinct First Nations, not just three. The Piikani people were split in two by the enforcement of the international boundary and by the establishment for them of a separate reserve in each of Canada and the United States. Today the four First Nations call themselves: the Blackfeet Nation (the Piikani in Montana); the Piikani Nation; the Kainaiwa Nation; and the Siksika Nation.¹ Throughout the period covered by this study these peoples occupied

¹ Blackfeet Nation, "History of a Great Nation." Online. Available: <http://www.blackfeetnation.com/history.htm>. 2 June 2001; Treaty 7 Tribal Council, "About Treaty Seven & Our Site." Online. Available: <http://treaty7.org/info/info.htm>. 3 May 2000; and, Arrowfax, *First Nations Tribal Directory: Canadian Edition* (Winnipeg, 1999), 73, 122

the territory between the North Saskatchewan and Missouri rivers. They were hunter-gatherers, whose way of life was based on the vast buffalo herds which roamed the northern Plains.

Niitsitapi actions were misunderstood or misrepresented by many of the Euroamericans who courted their favour and who sought to exploit the fur riches of their country. Among present-day students of their history, Niitsitapi behaviour remains enigmatic, with much of this same misunderstanding and misrepresentation surviving. In the context of the fur trade, to seek to comprehend and to interpret the actions and reactions of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples as logical responses to particular situations seems a challenge worth undertaking. For instance, why did the Saskatchewan traders face almost 40 years of frustration in trying to get these peoples to kill beaver for trade and then in the 1820s see the Piikani become the most productive beaver suppliers in the Hudson's Bay Company's entire domains? Why did both Canadian and British traders on the Saskatchewan enjoy a largely trouble-free, almost symbiotic relationship of consensual trade with these peoples, while Americans on and near the upper Missouri River suffered through their first 25 years of contact in a state of virtually constant hostility?

The Niitsitapi peoples had a reputation among Euroamericans for warlike independence, even for barbarity. The latter was an unjustified label. One longtime Saskatchewan fur trade company officer referred to them as "those wild animals,"² but it was another Hudson's Bay Company clerk who later offered to send his nephew in

and 142.

² John Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 5 January 1841, fo. 223, Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/5, reel 3M59, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (HBCA). This letter is incorrectly dated January 1840.

Ontario “a stuffed Blackfoot baby to play with.”³ Just who was the barbarian? However, the reputation and actions of these peoples inspired both caution and often fearful avoidance among the Euroamericans who approached or entered their territory. In the 1840s, a Roman Catholic missionary, Nicolas Point, wrote, “At the mere name of bloody Blackfeet, American travelers have visions of the worst possible things in hell.”⁴ Forty years later a traveller in the Canadian West observed, “Like Ishmael, the hand of the Blackfeet [Niitsitapi] was against every man, with every man’s hand against them.”⁵

The resolve and power of the Niitsitapi were so respected in the early 19th century that both the British-Canadian and American routes to the Rockies and to the Pacific were altered to stay well clear of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples. The Euroamericans who competed for their trade were principally the London-based Hudson’s Bay Company and the Montreal-headquartered North West Company, both operating mainly on the North Saskatchewan River, and various American concerns, which used St. Louis as their point of departure and the Missouri River as their access to these highly desired customers. Each of the three groups of Euroamerican newcomers (Canadian, British and American) who encountered the Blackfoot-speaking peoples employed different tactics and strategies to garner the wealth of Niitsitapi territory. The three Niitsitapi peoples rationally assessed the particular approaches and practices, recognized the obstacles and opportunities presented in each set of circumstances, and then showed remarkable flexibility in the actions which they took to ensure their survival and prosperity.

³ William E. “Snipes” Traill to Mary (his sister), Egg Lake (Guard Post), 25 February 1869, p. 16, File 3, Traill Family Papers, 1863-1914, M1241, Glenbow Archives. William was one of the children of renowned author, Catherine Parr Traill.

⁴ Nicolas Point, *Wilderness Kingdom, Indian Life in the Rocky Mountains: 1840-1847*, trans. and ed. Joseph P. Donnelly (New York, 1967), October 1846 journal entry, p. 111.

⁵ Stuart Cumberland, *The Queen’s Highway, from Ocean to Ocean* (London, 1887), 197.

A Note on Terminology: Tribe - Nation - People

In 1955, Alfred Kroeber stated, "What are generally denominated tribes really are small nationalities."⁶ Early writers who encountered and described First Nations peoples of the Plains used terms like tribe, nation and people interchangeably.⁷ This synonymous usage corresponds well with the concepts and language of most Plains peoples. Most make, as Douglas Parks pointed out, "only a bipartite distinction in named social levels."⁸ Band and people (tribe) were the two most common distinctions in these First Nations languages. Parks elaborated:

This bipartite native classification differs from the usual Western taxonomy, which distinguishes at least four levels: the family group or village, band, tribe, and nation. The latter set, however, is not actually more specific or precise than its Native counterpart, nor is it used systematically, either in historical sources or contemporary anthropological practice.⁹

Despite existing anthropological conventions, I will follow both the First Nations practice and that of early Euroamerican observers; I will treat as synonyms the terms people, tribe and nation. However, this position is not as isolated as it once was, as Eurocentric

⁶ Alfred L. Kroeber, "Nature of the Land-holding Group," *Ethnohistory* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1955), 303.

⁷ For example, see: for "nation," York Factory post journals, 5 June 1717, B.239/a/3, reel 1M154; and, for "tribes," 28 May 1735, B.239/a/17, reel 1M155, HBCA; and, for 1796 usage of "nation" and "people," Jean Baptiste Truteau, "Trudeau's [Truteau's] Description of the Upper Missouri," in Abraham P. Nasatir, ed., *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785-1804*, vol. 2 (Lincoln, 1990), 381.

⁸ Douglas R. Parks, "The Importance of Language Study for the Writing of Plains History," in Colin G. Calloway, ed., *New Directions in American Indian History* (Norman, 1988), 181.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

definitions of nation are now being challenged within the field of anthropology. Recently Kiera Ladner posited the existence of a centuries-old “Blackfoot Nationalism.”¹⁰

The only cause for concern or confusion would appear to be the result of the Canadian reserve system, which is based on bands, unlike the American reservation system, which isolated the larger political units, tribes. The Canadian Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has noted, “There is no legal definition of the term ‘First Nation.’ Many bands use the term instead of the word ‘band’.”¹¹ And as more Canadian Indian people opt for Nation or First Nation, instead of tribe or band, a historical oddity appears. Bands become nations, and, therefore, potentially there will be far more Aboriginal nations in Canada than there ever were tribes. As of 1997, there were 609 federally recognized First Nations/bands in Canada.¹² While in the United States the reservation system inadvertently strengthened and preserved tribal identity, the opposite is likely to prove to be the case in Canada, where the sub-unit, the band, has become not only the meaningful sociocultural unit of daily existence, but the meaningful legal political entity as well.

In a few instances in Canada, however, entire tribes were allocated individual reserves. This was true of the Siksika and the Kainai, and of those Piikani who resided in Canada. Thus the meaningful unit for these three peoples remains the tribe, though all three have adopted the politically more assertive title of Nation. Their self-ascribed proper names, as noted above, are now the Kainaiwa Nation, the Piikani Nation and the

¹⁰ Kiera L. Ladner, “Women and Blackfoot Nationalism,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 35-60.

¹¹ Canada. Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, *Working With Words: A Style Guide to Writing and Editing* (Ottawa, 1993), 21.

¹² Canada. Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, “Frequently Asked Questions about Aboriginal Peoples” (information sheet updated on 29 May 2000).

Siksika Nation.¹³ Those Piikani who lived in the United States were given their own separate reservation as well. They call themselves the Blackfeet Nation.¹⁴

What's In A Name?

I have opted to be consistently inconsistent with respect to tribal names. Throughout this thesis I have chosen to use the ethnonyms, the names in their own Aboriginal language, for the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples, but for all other First Nations peoples I have adopted Pentland's practical position of using the generally more familiar English version of Aboriginal tribal names, the exonyms.¹⁵ However, the first time that the English exonym is used, the ethnonym will also be given. While consistently using the ethnonyms for each First Nations or tribal group might be more politically acceptable, it would tend to cause confusion and uncertainty, as most of these ethnonyms have just recently come into common usage, if they have at all as yet, and they would be unfamiliar to most readers. The decision to use the exonyms, except for the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples, is in no way intended as a slight to the other First Nations peoples noted in this thesis.

There are few groups of First Nations peoples over which there has been such confusion or diversity in the apparently straightforward matter of their names, either singly or together, as the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani. The three share a common Algonkian language and a common ancestry. All of these peoples hold that they are

¹³ Treaty 7 Tribal Council, Treaty 7 Tribal Council website. Online. Available: <http://www.treaty7.org/info/info.html>. 31 August 1998.

¹⁴ Blackfeet Nation. Blackfeet Nation website. Online. Available: <http://www.blackfeetnation.com/>. 16 June 2000.

¹⁵ David H. Pentland, "North American Languages of Canada, 1534-1900," *Facsimile* 10 (November 1993), 6-7. See Glossary One for list of tribal names used in this thesis.

descended from a single people,¹⁶ what Joe Gambler, a Kainai, referred to as “the earlier people.”¹⁷ In the Blackfoot language the word for the Blood people is Kainai, which derives from *Akainai*, whose original meaning has long been lost, but which is now taken to mean “Many Chiefs.” Piikani is the name in Blackfoot, the ethnonym, for the Peigan, and comes from *Apikuni*, referring to their scabby or torn robes. Siksika, the name for the Blackfoot proper, literally means “black-footed people.”¹⁸

Purportedly, sometime in the early part of the 19th century the Piikani, the southernmost of the three peoples, divided into two. One Piikani tradition, as related by Bull Head, a South Piikani who came to live with the North Piikani, tells that when crossing a river a big flood came and separated the one people into two.¹⁹ Another Piikani tradition, as reported by Adolf and Beverly Hungry Wolf, holds that the “two groups of Pikunni separated completely in the early 1800s, after a fight between two men over a woman, although very close ties remain today.”²⁰ One of these two incidents may possibly have been the cause of the initial separation. However, it was more likely simply the result of the differing practices of two increasingly territorially definable parts of the

¹⁶ Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*, intro. Alice Beck Kehoe (Lincoln, 1995 [1909]), 23. In fact, one origin belief of the Niitsitapi holds that the three tribes were each descended from one of three sons of a single mythical/legendary forefather. See Wissler and Duvall's *Mythology*, 7, and, William Francis Butler, *The Great Lone Land* (London, 1872), 266.

¹⁷ Interview with Joe Gambler, October 1967, p. 1, AH 67.8.1, Ethnology Tapes, Acc. 78.43, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

¹⁸ Hugh A. Dempsey, *Indian Tribes of Alberta* (Calgary, 1988), 8, and, John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman, 1988 [1958]), 5-6.

¹⁹ Claude Everett Schaeffer Papers, File 159, M1100, Glenbow Archives.

²⁰ Adolf and Beverly Hungry Wolf, *Indian Tribes of the Northern Rockies* (Skookumchuck, British Columbia, 1991), 3. This same oral tradition was told by Scalp Roller, a Siksika, in 1893. It has been recorded in the R.N. Wilson Papers, vol. 2, p. 334, M4421, Glenbow Archives.

Piikani tribe, one continuing to go north to trade on the North Saskatchewan or to visit the Kainai and Siksika, and one staying closer to the Missouri and trading with the Americans, after 1831.

There is no documentary evidence of any intratribal break or ongoing dissension in the first half of the century. Clark Wissler believed that the division was merely the result of the enforced physical separation of the tribe onto two reserves, the Peigan Reserve in Canada and the Blackfeet Reservation in the United States.²¹ However, a distinction was already being made before the establishment of any significant Euroamerican presence, other than that of fur traders, in the territory of the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples, and before treaties had been signed or reserves established on either side of the border. An 1854 United States government report was apparently the first document in which the terms “North Piegan” and “South Piegan” were used. They were identified as two of the four “bands,” along with the “Bloods” and “Blackfeet,” that made up “the Blackfoot nation.” James Doty, the report’s author, went on to describe the “North Piegan,” using the term band, instead of the more appropriate tribe:

This is merely a subdivision of the great Piegan Band and differ only from the South Piegan in the fact that in the summer season they join the Bloods and Blackfeet and go to the north, but it is invariably their custom to consort with the South Piegan during the winter & Spring & to trade at fort Benton or Fort Campbell.²²

Whatever, and whenever, the original reason, the division became permanent when reserves were established on both sides of the international boundary.

²¹ Clark Wissler, *Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians*, vol. 5, pt. 1 of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1910), 7.

²² Doty to Isaac Stevens, Olympia, Washington Territory, 20 December 1854, pp. 1-2 and 9, Records of the Washington Superintendency of Indian Affairs, Letters from Employees Assigned to the Eastern District of Flathead Agency, and the Blackfeet Agency, 26 December 1853 to 30 January 1863, Roll 22, M5, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, RG75 (BIA), United States National Archives and Records Administration (USNA).

Ted Brasser has suggested that the social structure of all three of the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani tribes was arranged so as to accommodate such a split, though it actually only occurred among the Piikani. He wrote:

These data suggest that the tribal bipartition of a Blackfoot tribe and its territory provided the structure in which a split into two separate tribes could be realized if conditions favoured such a development. Once independently separated each of these tribes [Kainai/Blood, Piikani/Peigan and Siksika/Blackfoot] again organized its bands into a north and south camp. Thus, it appears that the bipartition in the tribal camp and in the tribal march formation reflected the territorial bipartition of the tribal bands.²³

If true, this was most likely preparation not so much for future rifts but for future individual tribal expansion beyond the numbers that the members might have thought workable in a single tribal unit. Perhaps such foresight had been at work at some unknown time in the past when the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani apparently peacefully emerged as separate political entities from a now unidentifiable single people.

The above quotations reveal some of the issues concerning names and identification noted at the beginning of this section. The least complex of these is the different spellings of two tribal names. Peigan is the officially accepted Canadian spelling of the name. Piegan is both the official American spelling and also the version most frequently used throughout the 19th century on both sides of the border. Similarly, Blackfoot is the accepted Canadian usage, while Blackfeet is the usual American spelling. To understand clearly the more complex matters regarding names and these three peoples, one must be aware that from at least the 1770s until the 1860s the three were virtually continuously allied with two other peoples, the Gros Ventre (*A'aninin* or *Atsina*), who spoke a different Algonkian language, and the Athapaskan-speaking Sarcee (*Tsuu T'ina*). However, just as each of these individual tribes was not a homogeneous monolith, this

²³ Ted J. Brasser, "Eekokahn: The Painted Lodges of the Blackfoot and Sarsi Indians" (Unpublished manuscript held by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1990), 101. Brasser kindly provided me with a copy of the chapter entitled, "The Camp."

five-tribe alliance was even less of one, with varying attitudes and perspectives often evident. Disagreements and disputes occasionally resulted in tensions and temporary falling-outs. As well, differing relations existed among the five tribes from time to time with Euroamericans and with neighbouring First Nations peoples.

From 1806 until 1831, as will be shown in Chapter Five, most interactions between Americans and any of the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani and Gros Ventre were usually of a hostile nature, often resulting in the death of American citizens. John Ewers pointed out: "The American trappers had never become well enough acquainted with their opponents to identify them by tribe. To them the Indian raiders were all 'Blackfeet'."²⁴ This early generic designation, this English exonym, based on a large degree of ignorance and a small amount of firsthand knowledge, stuck. For years the Gros Ventre, and sometimes the Sarcee, were included in the term Blackfeet. However, eventually Euroamericans came to use the name to encompass only the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples, the Kainai/Blood, the Piikani/Peigan and the Siksika/Blackfoot proper. Today, more often than not, when one sees the names Blackfoot or Blackfeet in a historical context, or even on a map indicating tribal locations, it most likely refers to all three Niitsitapi peoples, and not just to the Siksika.

The Saskatchewan traders were the first Euroamericans to have regular dealings with these five peoples. Even though it is obvious from existing fur trade records that they recognized the five as distinct tribes/peoples, each with its own sub-units/bands and multiple leaders, it is likewise evident that many of these Euroamericans also recognized some special bond linking the Piikani, Kainai and Siksika. In the early 1830s, when limited warfare broke out between the Kainai and the Piikani, a shocked John Rowand, longtime Saskatchewan trader, reported to the Hudson's Bay Company that they, along

²⁴ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 51.

with the Siksika, “are all in the same tribe, who all speak the same language and always looked upon one another as friends and relations.”²⁵ Twenty years later a United States Government Indian agent stated, as did many thereafter, that the “Blackfoot nation is divided into four distinct tribes or bands,” in which he included the Kainai, Siksika, Piikani and, mistakenly, the Gros Ventre.²⁶ In fact, as late as the 1870s, high-ranking government officials were still confused as to the make-up of the “Blackfeet” peoples. In the journal kept during his 1872 transcontinental trip to British Columbia, Colonel Robertson-Ross, Adjutant-General of the Canadian Militia, recorded that the “Blackfeet Nation” was divided into five “tribes”: “the Sik-si-ka or Blackfeet proper,” “the Piagan Tribe,” “the Ka-na-ans or Blood Tribe,” “the Omak-sikimi-tapix or Northern Piagan Tribe,” and “the Sar-cis or Plain Beaver Indian Tribes.”²⁷ Here Robertson-Ross identified two distinct Piikani tribes and included the Sarcee under the Blackfeet moniker. Even high-ranking Hudson’s Bay Company officials partially adopted this umbrella terminology, though the officers in the field rarely, if ever, did. In the early 1840s, Governor George Simpson wrote that “these five tribes are the Blackfoot, Piegan, Sarcee,

²⁵ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 10 January 1834, fos. 61-3d., Governor Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54, HBCA.

²⁶ John W. Whitfield report, 27 September 1854, p. 402, *Annual Report of the Office of Indian Affairs*, 1854, in *CIS US Serial Set*, H. exdoc. 1 (33-2) 777.

²⁷ A typescript of the diary is held at the Glenbow Archives. The above information was taken from the 16 September 1872 entry, written at Rocky Mountain House, pp. 8-10. Robertson-Ross used slightly different terminology, but listed the same members of the “Blackfeet tribe of Indians” in his official report, which was published the next year. Patrick Robertson-Ross, “Report of a Reconnaissance of the North-West Provinces and Indian Territories of the Dominion of Canada, and Narrative of Journey across the Continent through Canadian Territory to British Columbia and Vancouver Island,” *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 17, no. 64 (1873), 555. An extract of that report, containing this pertinent section was later published separately. See “Robertson-Ross’ Diary, Fort Edmonton to Wildhorse, B.C., 1872,” ed. Hugh A. Dempsey, *Alberta Historical Review* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1961), 5-22.

Blood Indians; and Gros Ventres or Fall Indians. These five tribes are commonly called Blackfeet, but amongst the Fur Traders [on the North Saskatchewan River] they are known as the Slave or Plain Indians.”²⁸

Why are the three labelled the Blackfoot or Blackfeet tribes, and not the Blood or Peigan tribes? Actually, one early author, the fur trader and explorer, David Thompson, did refer on one occasion to the Niitsitapi as “the three tribes of the Peeagans.”²⁹ This is the only such reference that I have ever seen. The preponderance of opinion among these peoples is that the three separate tribes or peoples emerged from a single earlier people, and not that two emerged from the third. Despite Diamond Jenness’ assertion to the contrary,³⁰ they do have a word in their language which both encompasses this unidentifiable original people and denotes the current group of three/four Blackfoot-speaking peoples. The word, depending on the source, is variously spelled: niitsitapiwa, Nitsi-tapi, Nitsitapii, Nitsitapi, or Niitsitapi. Its meanings, according to these same

²⁸ Simpson 1841 journal entry, fos. 129-9d., Simpson Journals, D.3/2, reel 3M3, HBCA. This Simpson report on these five tribes, a section of his 1841-1842 journal, was omitted when the bulk of the journal was published. George Simpson, *Narrative of a Journey Round the World, During the Years 1841 and 1842* (London, 1847). However, this fascinating piece has since been published. George Simpson, “Simpson’s Essay on the Blackfoot, 1841,” ed. Hugh A. Dempsey, *Alberta History* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1990), 1-14.

²⁹ David Thompson, *David Thompson’s Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*. Ed. Joseph B. Tyrrell (New York, 1968 [1916]), 391. Thompson had lived with Piikani for an entire winter season and it was the one of the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples with whom he was most familiar throughout his career. The Piikani were also then reportedly the largest of these three peoples. All of this may explain Thompson’s unique, one-time labelling.

³⁰ Diamond Jenness, *The Indians of Canada* (Ottawa, 1993 [1932]), 319.

authorities, are: “original people”³¹; “Real People”³²; “human members of the Blackfoot culture”³³; or, “The People who speak the same language.”³⁴ On the official Treaty No. 7 website, the name is spelled Niitsitapi, and this is the version that I will use throughout.³⁵

However, there is a tradition among these peoples that may account for the over-riding Blackfoot appellation. H.L. Scott wrote early this century that “the Blackfoot is

³¹ Personal communication, 16 May 1995, Donald G. Frantz to Smyth.

³² Dempsey, *Indian Tribes*, 8. There seems to be some disagreement on a less frequently used term. Dempsey here also stated that *Nitsi-tapi* is an older term, meaning “Real People,” but that the current term used to include all three peoples is *Soyi-tapi*, meaning “Prairie People.” Darrell Robes Kipp, of the Piegan Institute on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, asserted that sometimes “elders will use *Sokeetapi*, or ‘Prairie People’,” as the name for the Piikani, not for all three Blackfoot-speaking peoples. Darrell Robes Kipp, “Blackfoot,” in Frederick E. Hoxie, ed., *Encyclopedia of North American Indians* (Boston, 1996), 75. Donald G. Frantz and his First Nations informants directly contradict this Dempsey assertion, and indirectly the Kipp assertion as well, regarding *Soyi-tapi*, insisting that in Blackfoot it means “(under)water person,” and that it is never used to identify the three peoples together. Personal communications of 10 April and 16 May 1995, Frantz to Smyth. However, an authoritative word on this subject comes from Douglas Parks. In his draft “Blackfoot Synonymy,” prepared for the *Plains*, vol. 13 of the Smithsonian Handbook (volume published in October 2001, too late to be consulted for this thesis), and kindly provided to me, Parks stated that the more frequently used ethnonym is not Niitsitapi, but Sokitapi, or variants thereof. Despite Parks’ claim about which of these two ethnyonyms is the more frequently used, I have found the opposite to be true. The Blackfoot-speaking peoples in Canada use Niitsitapi on the official Treaty No. 7 website, and an American Blackfeet organization uses the variant spelling of this same term, Niitsitapii, on its website. See Treaty 7, Treaty 7 website, and the Blackfoot Nation, Blackfoot Nation website. Available: <http://www.blackfoot.orgnationhood.html>. 31 May 2001.

³³ Gerald T. Conaty, “Economic Models of Blackfoot Ideology,” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (1995), 405.

³⁴ Brian “Barney” Reeves, “The Fortified Village on the Siksika Nation: (The Cluny Earthlodge Village) An Archaeological Evaluation,” in R.J. Goodfellow Architects, *Proposed Earthlodge Village Development Study* (Calgary, 1992), 14.

³⁵ Treaty 7, Treaty 7 website.

considered the parent band [tribe] from which the others are offshoots.”³⁶ Wissler apparently concurred in this position, asserting that the Blackfoot proper/Siksika were “the main body,” and that the Kainai and the Piikani were of some unstated lesser status.³⁷ This minority origin-belief is also reflected in the modern-day Blackfoot language. Donald Frantz wrote, “Leroy Little Bear just told me that to distinguish the Blackfoot band/tribe (SIKSIKAWA) from the group of SIKSIKA, PIIKANI, and KAINAA, one used Siksikaitapiwa (lit. Blackfoot people) for the entire group of 3 bands [tribes].”³⁸ One Piikani historian, an American Blackfeet, Percy Bullchild, has stated that the Piikani were the parent tribe to all three peoples, but he said that this division came after the arrival of Euroamericans and the establishment of the international boundary at the 49th parallel. The three individual peoples had been identifiable and confirmed long before the arrival of any Americans in their territory. It is likely that Bullchild meant to speak of the division of the Piikani into separate First Nations, not the inception of the three peoples, the Piikani, Kainai and Siksika.³⁹

³⁶ “Blackfoot,” 16-page document by Scott, p. 1, in Blackfoot File, Box 1, H.L. Scott Papers, BAE 2932, Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives (SINAA).

³⁷ Wissler, *Material Culture*, 7.

³⁸ Personal communication of 16 May 1995, Frantz to Smyth.

³⁹ Percy Bullchild, *The Sun Came Down* (San Francisco, 1985), 1. If indeed Bullchild was describing the division of the Piikani into two separate nations/tribes/peoples, his assessment of the causes and timing would accord with that of Wissler, already described above. Wissler, *Material Culture*, 7.

From George Bird Grinnell, Walter McClintock and James Willard Schultz,⁴⁰ through Wissler,⁴¹ and to the present day, the terms Blackfoot and Blackfeet have normally been used both to include all three of the Kainai, Piikani and Siksika peoples, as well as to denote singly the Siksika, the Blackfoot proper. Three of the late 20th century's most prominent experts have stated that the three individual tribes really comprise a larger, identifiable whole. Hugh Dempsey and Ted Brasser wrote that the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani tribes are part of the "Blackfoot nation,"⁴² while John Ewers asserted that the three tribes are really "one people."⁴³ The intertribal links among the three are undeniable - religion, culture, ancestry, kinship and language - but the three were always politically independent. If virtually always allied, there were never any formal political connections among the three, each of which had its own band system, leaders, and even separate, annual tribal-wide religious and ceremonial gatherings or

⁴⁰ See for example the following works: George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People* (Lincoln, 1962 [1892]); Walter McClintock, *The Old North Trail, or Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians* (Lincoln, 1968 [1910]); and, James Willard Schultz, *Blackfeet Tales of Glacier National Park* (Boston, 1916). For a brief analysis of the works of Grinnell, McClintock and Schultz, see Hugh A. Dempsey, "Romancing the Blackfeet," *Natural History* no. 4 (April 1992), 66-7.

⁴¹ See the following works by Clark Wissler: *Material Culture*, 5-175; *Social Organization and Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Blackfoot Indians*, vol. 7, pts. 1 and 2 (New York, 1912); *Societies and Dance Associations of the Blackfoot Indians*, vol. 11, pt. 4 of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1916), 359-460; and, *The Sun Dance of the Blackfoot Indians*, vol. 16, pt. 3 of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1918), 223-70. See also Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*, vol. 2, pt. 1 of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1909), 5-163. The Wissler and Duvall work was recently published in a new edition. Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*. Intro. Alice Beck Kehoe (Lincoln, 1995).

⁴² Dempsey, *Indian Tribes*, 8, and Ted J. Brasser, "The Sarsi: Athapaskans on the Northern Plains," *Arctic Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (1991), 70.

⁴³ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 5.

celebrations, the sun dance. Since the beginning of the reserve era, the connections have undoubtedly become weaker, as the tribes were not only physically segregated from their Euroamerican subjugators, but, more important, also from each other. Though recognizing the many historical linkages at so many levels, in keeping with my above-argued position concerning the interchangeability of the terms and concepts of people, tribe and nation, I have chosen to treat each of these three tribes as individual nations, and not as parts of a larger, and questionable, sociopolitical whole.⁴⁴

A term frequently associated with the Niitsitapi is confederacy. Depending on the user, it may either be referring to the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples alone, or to them and to one or both of their longtime allies, the Gros Ventre and the Sarcee. Often the intended meaning is unclear. Many have stated that the Blackfoot Confederacy consisted of only three tribes, the Piikani, Siksika and Kainai.⁴⁵ This would seem to be the generally or officially accepted definition on the present-day Blackfeet Reservation, in Montana, as well as among the Blackfoot-speaking peoples in Canada.⁴⁶ However, even here there is not complete consensus. In a submission to the Royal Commission on

⁴⁴ Alice Kehoe has adopted this same practice. Wissler and Duvall, *Mythology* (1995), xii.

⁴⁵ For some examples, see: Jack Brink, *Dog Days in Alberta*, no. 28 of *Occasional Papers of the Archaeological Survey of Alberta* (Edmonton, 1986), 4, 5, 15 and 24; John E. Foster, "The Metis and the End of the Plains Buffalo in Alberta," *Alberta* 3, no. 1 (1992), 63; Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*, 208; Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact upon Blackfoot Culture, with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade*, no. 6 of *Monographs of the American Ethnological Society* (Seattle, 1942), 31; McClintock, *The Old North Trail*, 1; John Maclean, "Social Organization of the Blackfoot Indians," *Transactions of the Canadian Institute* 4 (1892-1893), 249; and, Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy, 1880-1920* (Albuquerque, 1987).

⁴⁶ See the following Niitsitapi websites: "The Blackfeet." Available: <http://blackfeet.3rivers.net/history.html>. 30 August 1998; and, Siksika Nation, "About Siksika Nation." Available: <http://www.treaty7.org/info/siksika.html>. 31 August 1998. This is also the position expressed in Ladner, "Women and Blackfoot Nationalism," especially 39.

Aboriginal Peoples, the Siksika-supported assertion was that the Blackfoot Confederacy, which supposedly flourished from the 17th to 19th centuries, consisted of “the Blackfoot, Blood, Piegan, and the allied Sarcee.”⁴⁷ Some who accept the pre-reserve political division of the Piikani into two tribes, therefore include four in the Blackfoot Confederacy, Kainai, Siksika, North Piikani and South Piikani, while still restricting membership to the Niitsitapi.⁴⁸ Dempsey argued that the Blackfoot nation was made up of the Piikani, Kainai and Siksika tribes, while the Blackfoot Confederacy consisted of those three, plus one or both of the Sarcee and the Gros Ventre, depending on the era at issue.⁴⁹ Others have accepted this particular two-tiered distinction.⁵⁰ Still others simply stated that the Blackfoot Confederacy consisted of the Niitsitapi, plus either or both of the Sarcee and Gros Ventre, without any reference to a smaller, more compact Blackfoot nation.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Andrew Bear Robe, et.al., “The Historical, Legal and Current Basis for Siksika Nation Governance, Including Its Future Possibilities within Canada: A Case Study in Aboriginal Governance” (Submission to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 8 December 1994), 53.

⁴⁸ Adolf and Beverly Hungry Wolf, *Indian Tribes*, unnumbered first page of Introduction. In fact, here the Hungry Wolfs refer to the Blackfoot Confederacy as being a single tribe, consisting of four divisions, the Blackfoot (Siksika), Blood (Kainai), and the North and South Peigan (Piikani).

⁴⁹ Dempsey, *Indian Tribes*, 8.

⁵⁰ Alan D. McMillan, *Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada: An Anthropological Overview* (Vancouver, 1995), 150-1; and, Dale R. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, no. 143 of *Mercury Series Papers of the Archaeological Survey of Canada* (Hull, 1991), 187. This position would seem to have considerable support among certain Niitsitapi groups as well. See Andrew Bear Robe, et.al., “The Historical,” 53 and 57.

⁵¹ Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto, 1992), 194, and, Kenneth E. Kidd, *Blackfoot Ethnography*, no. 8 of *Manuscript Series of the Archaeological Survey of Alberta* (Edmonton, 1986), 140-1.

But where did this term confederacy originate, and, no matter the number of tribes included, just what does it mean? The term confederacy implies some sort of formal political alliance or structure, something which simply did not exist among the three, four or five tribes in the pre-reserve era. Clark Wissler wrote, in 1910:

Many older writers speak of a Blackfoot confederacy composed of the Blackfoot [Niitsitapi - Piikani, Kainai and Siksika], Sarcee, and Gros Ventre.... It is true that within historical times there did exist a bond of blood due to intermarriage between the Blackfoot on one hand and the Sarcee and Gros Ventre on the other, but there is no evidence for the existence of a formal political alliance of any sort.⁵²

Marius Barbeau asserted, "The three subdivisions consisting of the Blackfoot proper or Siksika, the Bloods and the Piegan are often erroneously stated to have formed a confederacy. They merely consider themselves a family."⁵³ Oscar Lewis also considered the term only to be applicable to the three tribes, and agreed with the unsoundness of its use. He wrote, "Despite the bonds of a common language, common customs and traditions and inter-marriage, they rarely acted in unison. They had no common council and no central leaders."⁵⁴ Kenneth Kidd concurred with the lack of validity of the term confederacy. He said that it was applied to the Niitsitapi, but more often by Euroamericans to the extended group of five tribes. He argued:

⁵² Wissler, *Material Culture*, 7. Wissler here surprisingly added that the Kootenay were also "occasionally" included in this confederacy. I have seen no other reference in any source, published or unpublished, documentary or oral, to the Kootenay ever having been considered to be part of any Blackfoot Confederacy. There definitely is a tradition among the Kootenay that they were once long ago friends with the Niitsitapi. Chamberlain even used the term "confederates" in describing this one-time relationship. However, while the Niitsitapi and Kootenay may have had a checkered past of interspersed periods of friendship and enmity, Wissler remains the only source that I know who placed the Kootenay in the Blackfoot Confederacy. See "Kutenai and Blackfeet," card 1, BAE 1937, Alexander F. Chamberlain Papers, SINAA.

⁵³ Marius Barbeau 1923 quotation, reproduced in Roma Standefer, "Seasonal Changes in Social Organization among the Blackfoot Indians," p. 6, V-B-8M, Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC).

⁵⁴ Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact*, 68.

While the Siksika, Peigan and Blood are ethnically, linguistically and culturally one, there was no political unity except that of a vague confederation. Even the term "confederation" is of doubtful application, for while war probably never occurred between these kindred nations and was probably barred by mutual consent, there cannot be said to have been any formal alliance.⁵⁵

The same held true for the five-tribe, informal, mutually-understood arrangement of friends.

Kiera Ladner has, apparently, quite recently challenged this generally accepted position. In her analysis of the Blackfoot Confederacy in pre-contact times, she wrote:

while the Confederacy was comprised of sovereign, interdependent nations, the Confederacy itself acted as and exhibited characteristics of a single nation with collective nationalism and a collective identity.... it seems to me that the Siiksikaawa [Piikani, Kainai and Siksika - the Niitsitapi] was both a Confederacy of subsidiary or derivative nations and a hybrid nation in and of itself.⁵⁶

Ladner's article relied heavily on the testimony of living Niitsitapi elders. She cited virtually no anthropological, historical or archival sources specific to the Niitsitapi to back up her assertions. Similarly, Alice Kehoe has argued for the acceptance of the *polis* in pre-contact, or pre-colonial, Niitsitapi society.⁵⁷ However, the sun dance, the annual, tribal-wide gathering which Kehoe identified as the *polis*, was just that, the gathering of each individual Niitsitapi tribe or nation. As Stanton Tefft succinctly argued, these tribal-wide gatherings gave a cohesion and unity to each of the three separate Niitsitapi peoples, a unity not shared by neighbours, such as the Plains Cree, whose sun dance was held at only the band level.⁵⁸ However, apart from the testimony of present-day elders, there is

⁵⁵ Kidd, *Blackfoot Ethnography*, 140-1.

⁵⁶ Ladner, "Women and Blackfoot Nationalism," 39.

⁵⁷ Alice Beck Kehoe, "How the Ancient Peigans Lived," *Research in Economic Anthropology* 14, (1993), 93-4.

⁵⁸ Stanton K. Tefft, "From Band to Tribe on the Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* 10, no. 29 (1965), 166-70.

apparently no evidence to demonstrate an over-riding Niitsitapi *polis* or nationalism, and there is much, as will be presented later in this thesis, that contradicts such an assumption.

I have found no evidence that the term Blackfoot Confederacy (or Blackfeet Confederacy) was ever used by anyone prior to the 1870s. Philip Duke recently reiterated Oscar Lewis' 1942 assertion about the origin of that term. Duke wrote, "The so-called Blackfoot Confederacy of the three began as a construct of the fur traders."⁵⁹ Both scholars would appear to have been incorrect. The term was apparently first actually coined in 1877, but it had its genesis almost simultaneously in Canada, Great Britain and the United States earlier in that decade.

The 1870s were a terribly stressful time for the Piikani, Kainai and Siksika. Faced with rapidly declining buffalo herds, epidemics, encroaching Euroamerican settlement, an oppressive United States Army and widespread distribution of alcohol, the three peoples underwent social disruption to an extent previously unknown to them. John S. Wood became the Indian Agent on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, in January 1875. Soon after he called a council of the three tribes. However, those who attended the council on the reservation were almost exclusively its regular residents, a population which did not include the vast bulk of the Kainai and the Siksika peoples, whose territory was north of the 49th Parallel. Despite the fact that it was named the Blackfeet Reservation, the majority of its inhabitants were, and are to this day, Piikani, the South Piikani, along with some Kainai and Siksika. Wood reported on the April council:

These tribes have been separated for many years past, and seldom visited the agency in any considerable number until last spring when they had a confederate council, passed a code of laws (a copy of which was forwarded to your office) and elected three head Chiefs, viz: Little Plume, White Calf and Generous Woman.

⁵⁹ Philip Duke, *Points in Time: Structure and Event in a Late Northern Plains Hunting Society* (Niwot, Colorado, 1991), 59, and, Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact*, 68.

At this council the greater portion of the tribes were present, and were it not for the severe weather and impoverished horses at that time, I believe the entire confederate nation of Blackfeet, Bloods and Peigans would have participated. There were over Five thousand two hundred men, women and children present at the above council.⁶⁰

In his published annual report Wood wrote that representatives “of each tribe formed a confederate supreme council for the decision or sanction of all matters affecting the entire nation and the declaration of war or peace with neighbouring tribes.”⁶¹ However, despite his fondest/wildest hopes, what Wood had perhaps instigated, but had at least witnessed, was the beginning of attempts both at Aboriginal self-government and at social reorganization on one reservation, not an over-riding political organization of all of the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani peoples.

Later annual reports by Wood and his successor, John Young, confirmed the limited extent of this supposed confederacy, restricted to the Blackfeet Reservation. They also referred to the decreasing identification with their original tribes of the comparatively few Siksika and Kainai who permanently resided among the numerically dominant Piikani. In 1881, Young reported from the Blackfeet Reservation on “the consolidated tribes of Blackfeet, Bloods, and Piegans, now known as Piegans.”⁶² Though the principal residents were acknowledged as being “Piegans,” the name of the reservation remained Blackfeet, and this same misleading name eventually became attached to the people themselves. The following year Young compared the differing sociopolitical organization of these peoples on the Blackfeet Reservation in the United States and of

⁶⁰ John Wood Blackfeet Agency report, 20 September 1875, Roll 503, M234, BIA, USNA.

⁶¹ Blackfeet Agency report, 25 September 1875, p. 801, *Annual Report of the Office of Indian Affairs*, 1875, in *CIS US Serial Set*, H. exdoc. 1 (44-1) 1680.

⁶² Young Blackfeet Agency report, 31 July 1881, p. 169, *Annual Report of the Office of Indian Affairs*, 1881, in *CIS US Serial Set*, H. exdoc. 1 (47-1) 2018.

those across the border in Canada. "These Indians - Blackfeet, Blood, and Piegans - are consolidated and known as Piegans, and form part of the same family across the line in the Dominion of Canada. There, however, they are in distinct tribes."⁶³

Inappropriate English exonyms have thus created considerable confusion. The Piikani/Peigan residents of the United States are now virtually exclusively referred to as the Blackfeet, even by themselves, resulting, ironically, in the modern-day usage of the term the Northern Blackfoot or Blackfeet to distinguish the Blackfoot proper, the Siksika, from the South Peigan, the South Piikani, or, as they are now known, the Southern Blackfeet. Doty's "South Piegan" of the 1850s quickly became, and remain to this day, the Southern Blackfeet. This problem of "outside naming" has been addressed in general by Paul Chartrand and with specific reference to the Niitsitapi by Long Standing Bear Chief.⁶⁴

While agents Wood and Young were merely following the general practices of the United States Government by referring to different tribes placed on the same reservation as being confederated,⁶⁵ and while neither man used the precise term, "Blackfoot Confederacy," in 1875, James Carnegie, the 9th Earl of Southesk, came extremely close to coining it. In 1859-1860, Carnegie had been a gentleman traveller through much of

⁶³ Young Blackfeet Agency report, 11 August 1882, p. 160, *Annual Report of the Office of Indian Affairs*, 1882, in *CIS US Serial Set*, H. exdoc. 1 (47-2) 2100.

⁶⁴ Paul Chartrand, "'Terms of Division': Problems of 'Outside Naming' for Aboriginal People in Canada," *The Journal of Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1991), 1-22, and, Long Standing Bear Chief, *Ni-Kso-Ko-Wa: Blackfoot Spirituality, Traditions, Values and Beliefs* (Browning, 1992), 1-3.

⁶⁵ In fact, there are at least 10 reservations in the United States which are now home to various and sundry "Confederated Tribes," none of which is the Blackfeet Nation of Montana. See United States. Department of the Interior. Bureau of Indian Affairs, "List of Federally Recognized American Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives." Online. Available: <http://www.doi.gov/bia/tribes/entry.html>. 26 March 2001.

what is now western Canada. He kept an detailed journal, which he published in 1875.⁶⁶ Though his journal was extensively annotated, and perhaps abridged, the published text clearly distinguishes between the original 1859-1860 journal and his later, for-publication additions.⁶⁷ On 15 August 1859, he described “the Blackfeet, the Blood Indians, and the Piěgáns” as being the “three tribes of the great Blackfoot nation.”⁶⁸ In his 1870s annotations to the original journal entry of 7 November 1859, he wrote:

The Blackfeet, taken as a body, are among the most numerous and powerful of the nations that live wholly or partly in British North America. Their confederacy consists of five distinct tribes – Blackfeet (proper), Piegans, Blood Indians, and Fall Indians (or Grosventres, who live on the Missouri), these being of the same race, and the Sircees, a small but very brave and mischievous band, who are of altogether different race and language.⁶⁹

Whether Carnegie was intentionally differentiating between a supposed three-tribe “Blackfoot nation,” and a five-tribe Blackfeet “confederacy” is now impossible to tell, although, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, others have more recently made this distinction. It should be noted that despite his extensive travels in the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Saskatchewan District and despite his contacts with fur traders there, Carnegie apparently never himself met a single Niitsitapi person.

Carnegie’s 1875 publication was not the first to use the term confederacy with respect to the Niitsitapi. During the winter of 1870-1871, Lieutenant William F. Butler, late of the 1870 Wolseley Expedition to Red River, was appointed by A.G. Archibald, the

⁶⁶ James Carnegie (Earl of Southesk), *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains*. (Edmonton, 1969 [1875]).

⁶⁷ I contacted the present Earl of Southesk, who owns the original journal, but it appears to have been temporarily (one hopes) misplaced. Personal correspondence between Smyth and David Charles Carnegie, Earl of Southesk, January and February 1999.

⁶⁸ Carnegie, *Saskatchewan*, 162.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 287.

Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, to travel through Canada's newly acquired western territories to examine and report on conditions there. This journey along the established Hudson's Bay Company's route to the foothills of the Rockies resulted in an official report to the Government of Canada, as well as a book for popular consumption.⁷⁰ He was unable to travel into the country of the Niitsitapi, south of the North Saskatchewan River, but he did write extensively about these peoples. On his way from Edmonton House to Rocky Mountain House, his western-most attainment, he stated, "Close by to the south lay the country of the great Blackfeet nation—that wild, restless tribe whose name has been a terror to other tribes and to trader and trapper for many and many a year."⁷¹ He also made the following observation about the "Blackfeet"/Niitsitapi:

the three tribes of Blood, Peaginou, and Blackfeet, but in addition, for many generations, two other tribes or portions of tribes have been admitted into the confederacy. These are the Sircies, on the north, a branch, or offshoot from the Chipwayans of the Athabasca; and the Gros Ventres, or Atsinas, on the southeast, a branch from the Arrapahoe nation.⁷²

Elsewhere in his book he referred to "these Blackfeet tribes" and to "the Blackfeet and their confederates."⁷³ In his official report to Archibald, published separately in 1871, but also included in the 1872 book, while referring to "the Blackfeet tribes," he also

⁷⁰ William Francis Butler, *Report by Lieutenant Butler (69th Regt.) of His Journey from Fort Garry to Rocky Mountain House and Back under Instructions from the Lieut.-Governor of Manitoba, during the Winter of 1870-71* (Ottawa, 1871), and, *The Great Lone Land*. See also Roderick C. Macleod, "Sir William Francis Butler," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume XIII, 1901 to 1910* (Toronto, 1994), 142-4.

⁷¹ Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 265.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 266.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 272 and 281.

described the “Peagin Indians” as “one of the four nations comprised in the Blackfeet league.”⁷⁴

Perhaps the term confederacy had gained a certain general acceptance and wide use around the time of the American Civil War, which pitted the “Confederacy” against the “Union.” With respect to First Nations peoples in the United States, confederate and confederacy certainly seem to have been bandied about frequently and applied where they had not been previously. And while Butler, Carnegie and Wood had all come very close to coining the term Blackfeet Confederacy, it was an American annexationist who was apparently the very first person to do so.

Henry Martin Robinson had served in the Civil War, been a businessman in Mississippi and a fur trader in Canada.⁷⁵ He is perhaps best known, although he is certainly not well known, for his short stint during the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870 as the American, annexationist editor of a Red River newspaper, the *New Nation*.⁷⁶ As noted above, he was supposedly involved in the fur trade in British North America, but there is apparently no evidence of his ever being much west of present-day Winnipeg. Nevertheless, in 1877, in a now-obscure American literary magazine, he published an article entitled, “The Blackfeet Indians.”⁷⁷ There is no evidence that he ever met a Niitsitapi person. In fact, much of Robinson’s article is worded and organized

⁷⁴ Ibid., 360, and, Butler, *Report*, 4.

⁷⁵ There is a very brief biography of Robinson in William Coyle, ed., *Ohio Authors and Their Books: Biographical Data and Selective Bibliographies for Ohio Authors, Native and Resident, 1796-1950* (Cleveland, 1962), 535.

⁷⁶ His activities during the Resistance are best documented in Alexander Begg, *Alexander Begg’s Red River Journal and Other Papers Relative to the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870*. Ed. W.L. Morton (Toronto, 1956).

⁷⁷ Henry Martin Robinson, “The Blackfeet Indians,” *Appleton’s Journal: A Monthly Miscellany of Popular Literature* 3 (July-December 1877), 37-43.

remarkably like Butler's book. Robinson told exactly the same story about the three Niitsitapi tribes descending from the three sons and he even used the same distinctive spelling for the name of the Piikani. Robinson wrote of "the three tribes of Blood, Peaginou, and Blackfeet."⁷⁸ Robinson actually did quote from and credit Butler's *Great Lone Land*, but much of the rest of his article was obviously "plagiarized" from Butler as well, with no such credit. Robinson asserted that "the Blackfeet nation is really a confederacy of five tribes," among whose number he included the Sarcee and Gros Ventre. He used the term confederacy several times in the article, but finally wrote that before the smallpox epidemic of 1870-1871, "the Blackfeet confederacy was believed to comprise from twelve to fourteen thousand people, all included."⁷⁹ This is the first known use of the term Blackfeet Confederacy, at least known to me. Robinson may have popularized its use two years later with the publication of his own book. In the preface to *The Great Fur Land*, Robinson acknowledged his reliance on the published works of other western travellers to fill in the gaps in his own knowledge. Again his debt to Butler is ponderously evident. Robinson also noted that much of the book had already appeared in various periodicals. His section on the Niitsitapi was taken from the article in *Appleton's Journal*. In his book, Robinson wrote, "Previous to the ravages of this terrible epidemic [smallpox], the Blackfeet confederacy was believed to comprise from twelve to fourteen thousand people, all included."⁸⁰

Thus, I believe, was born the "Blackfoot Confederacy," in the 1870s. The term would appear to have originated, not with fur traders who had regularly interacted with the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, but with an English peer, a British military officer and,

⁷⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁸⁰ Henry Martin Robinson, *The Great Fur Land or Sketches of Life in the Hudson's Bay Territory* (London, 1879), 189.

ultimately, with an American journalist and businessman, none of whom may ever have personally encountered a single Niitsitapi person. Somehow the term was picked up by later writers, and by many Niitsitapi as well, all of whom have assumed and ascribed much earlier and wider usage. It was indeed the construct of Euroamericans, as Barbeau, Kidd, Lewis, Duke and others have asserted, but a construct of far more limited duration than they had ever suspected. I have never seen a single instance of the use of this term by any person involved in the fur trade with the Piikani, Kainai or Siksika peoples.

I do not intend in any way to denigrate the meaning and significance which present-day Niitsitapi people place on their concept of a Blackfoot Confederacy. It would seem that the four separate First Nations of today are attempting to work together, despite the presence of the international boundary, to forge just such an entity and to assert the rights befitting the existence of that larger nation/confederacy.⁸¹ However, like virtually all of my scholarly predecessors, I quite simply found no evidence of such a political organization in the pre-reserve era.

I will attempt to navigate through this morass of conflicting and confusing terminology in such a way as to be easily comprehended by the reader. As noted earlier, the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples, the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani, will be exclusively referred to by their ethnonyms. Since the existence in the pre-reserve era of a permanent political division of the Piikani into separate North and South Piikani tribes is debatable, and since there is no documentary record of fur traders distinguishing between two such perhaps discernible parts of that tribe, I will treat the Piikani as a single sociopolitical whole. The unqualified name Piikani will suffice.

⁸¹ For present-day examples (1999 and 2000) of concerted, unified Niitsitapi/Blackfoot Confederacy assertions of single/combined nationhood and rights, see Ladner, "Women and Blackfoot Nationalism," 57n.

As to the various combinations of tribal alignments involving not only the Piikani, Kainai and Siksika, but also the Sarcee and Gros Ventre, the term confederacy will not be used. However, the almost unbroken friendly relations of the kindred Siksika, Kainai and Piikani, coupled with their joint ancestry and distinct language, requires recognition. The almost universal usage in historical, anthropological, archaeological, and popular writing virtually necessitates continuing the traditional use of the term Blackfoot to encompass all three peoples. But it will be used conditionally. To avoid confusion with the Siksika, when employed in reference to all three peoples, I will use Blackfoot-speaking, followed by a plural noun: tribes, peoples or nations. To reinforce this distinction, in this one case I will use interchangeably both the English terminology, Blackfoot-speaking peoples/tribes/nations, and the Blackfoot ethnonym, Niitsitapi.

Regarding the wider, longtime, cooperative arrangements with the Gros Ventre and the Sarcee, the term Blackfoot alliance will be adopted. Although there is no evidence even to hint that any formal alliance structure ever existed, involving agreements, treaties or joint political organization, the long-standing friendly relations of the Blackfoot-speaking tribes with the Sarcee and the Gros Ventre warrant identification. By that act, easier interpretation and understanding will also be facilitated. The term alliance seems to convey the intended meaning with as little distortion or misrepresentation as possible. See Glossary Two for a quick reference.

A Basic Framework

This is intended to be a multi-purpose thesis. It will, of course, attempt to sustain particular arguments to help to interpret aspects of the history of the Euroamerican fur trade and the Blackfoot-speaking peoples. It will also, at its simplest level, set down the first four of the five “W”s, the “Who,” “What,” “When” and “Where” of a very large portion of the history of these diverse Niitsitapi-Euroamerican relationships. Needless to

say, the “Why” aspects of the thesis will be the most important, but I do not belittle the significance of the merely chronological aspects, for this most basic of information has never been thoroughly drawn together, let alone interpreted. There is no accurate, commonly-recognized set of “facts” upon which to hang theoretical or interpretive arguments regarding much of the history of the Niitsitapi trade. Both necessity and personal inclination will lead to a major portion of this thesis being devoted to the establishment of that missing framework.

Perhaps because the Blackfoot-speaking peoples have straddled the 49th Parallel almost certainly since before contact with Euroamericans, historians seem to have been loath to tackle the formidable task of writing comprehensive histories of either the Niitsitapi, or of their inter-relationships with Euroamericans. The history of these peoples has generated their own mostly oral records, an archaeological record and three sets of “White” national documentary records. And in the documentary heritage of the United States, Great Britain and Canada are included such published and manuscript papers as those stemming from government, business, church and private individuals. Only one general history of all of these three peoples has ever been written, that by John Ewers, in 1958.⁸² It is now in its eighth printing; it is the standard reference work and the only attempt at a comprehensive general history extending from “the dog days” to the 20th century. Ewers brought an anthropologist’s understanding of First Nations culture to his documentary research, producing one of the first true ethnohistories of any North American First Nations peoples. However, apart from published documents he did not make use of any primary British or Canadian sources. Until at least the 1850s, these sources are without doubt the best documentary record of the Niitsitapi. The only other

⁸² Ewers, *The Blackfeet*.

general histories that have been written focus on these peoples after their relegation to reserves.⁸³

Except for scattered articles over the years by historians, extensive research covering the pre-reserve era Blackfoot-speaking peoples, and their ancestors on the northern Plains, has been conducted almost exclusively by anthropologists, and, more recently, also by archaeologists and geographers. Too space-consuming to detail here, see the following works in the thesis bibliography: in anthropology, by Arima, Brasser, Hugh Dempsey, Ewers, Goldfrank, Hanks, Harrod, Lewis, Morgan, Uhlenbeck and Wissler; in archaeology, by Bonnichsen and Baldwin, Duke, Forbis, Graspointer, Kennedy, Magne, Reeves, Russell and Verbicky-Todd; and in geography, by Decker, Doige, Ray and Rinn.

Especially wanting in the study of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, and of the Euroamerican trade with the Niitsitapi, has been the use of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), the single best and most extensive source of information in existence for the pre-reserve era. Hugh Dempsey and Theodore Binnema have used these records extensively in their studies of the Niitsitapi.⁸⁴ John Jackson, an independent scholar, has

⁸³ Malcolm McFee, *Modern Blackfeet on a Reservation* (Prospect Heights, Illinois, 1986); Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy*; William E. Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival* (Seattle, 1986); and, Paul C. Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954* (Lincoln, 2001).

⁸⁴ For example, see Hugh A. Dempsey, *A History of Rocky Mountain House*, no. 6 of *Canadian Historic Sites Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History* (Ottawa, 1973), 4-53, and, three works by Theodore Binnema: "Conflict or Cooperation? Blackfoot Trade Strategies, 1794-1815" (M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Alberta, 1992); "Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands, 1794-1815," *The Canadian Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (March 1996): 1-32; and, "The Common and Contested Ground: A History of the Northwestern Plains from A.D. 200 to 1806" (Ph.D. thesis, Department of History and Classics, University of Alberta, 1998). Binnema's book, based on his doctoral thesis, has just been published (in late October 2001). See *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press). Unfortunately, it was not available before submission of my thesis.

also just published a well researched book on the Piikani, relying heavily on HBCA records.⁸⁵ Likewise, Eugene Arima has utilized this same source to a limited extent in his study of the Piikani.⁸⁶

Others, of course, have dug in the HBCA, but with respect to the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and the fur trade the miners were few. Ray, Russell and Doige have relied heavily on these records for their studies, but Arthur J. Ray's work has included the Niitsitapi only as a small part of more general fur trade or Aboriginal histories. Both Dale Russell and Gary Doige have limited their analysis of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples to their relations with these authors' principal subjects: in Russell's case, the Cree, to the 1780s, and in that of Doige, the Assiniboine, to 1809.⁸⁷

Theodore Binnema's two theses and one article have directly tackled aspects of my current study.⁸⁸ However, his master's thesis and article covered only a little over two decades, and his emphasis was on demonstrating the differing attitudes and trade

⁸⁵ John C. Jackson, *The Piikani Blackfeet: A Culture under Siege* (Missoula, Montana, 2000).

⁸⁶ Eugene Y. Arima, *Blackfeet and Palefaces: The Pikani and Rocky Mountain House: A Commemorative History from the Upper Saskatchewan and Missouri Fur Trade* (Ottawa, 1995). This is a victimization history. Arima's attitude is neatly summed up in a statement following the title page: "Plains Indian warriors at their finest--these were the Blackfeet. Gun runners and drug pushers--of alcohol and tobacco--such were the White traders who came for beaver pelts."

⁸⁷ Two examples of such works by Arthur J. Ray are: *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role As Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay* (Toronto, 1998 [1974]); and, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," *Journal of Historical Geography* 1, no. 1 (January 1975), 49-68. See also: Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*; and, Gary Blake Doige, "Warfare Patterns of the Assiniboine to 1809" (M.A. thesis, Department of Geography, University of Manitoba, 1989).

⁸⁸ Binnema, "Conflict or Cooperation," "Old Swan" and "The Common and Contested Ground."

strategies of two individual Siksika bands and their longtime leaders with Euroamerican fur traders on the North Saskatchewan River. The relations of the Kainai, Piikani, Gros Ventre and Sarcee with these same companies fell outside the scope of these two fine pieces of scholarship. His master's thesis achieved its primary goal of demonstrating the danger of assuming homogeneity of outlook, strategy and action within an individual tribe. The level of political integration and the varying degrees of consensus and homogeneity among both the Niitsitapi and the larger Blackfoot alliance will also be addressed in this thesis. Binnema's doctoral dissertation was of a much broader scope, covering the First Nations peoples of the entire northern Plains for a period of some 1,400 years. Here he took a regional approach, studying these various peoples in a shared environment. His was a most ambitious undertaking, with respect both to the geographic area and to the time period covered. While there will certainly be many areas of overlap and agreement between Binnema's work and my own doctoral endeavours, our interpretations of certain documents, events and patterns of intertribal relationships differ considerably.

The Trade Debate

The involvement of the Niitsitapi in the Euroamerican fur trade was one aspect of their external relations, an expression of their foreign policy. And external relations begin at home. To understand the significance and meaning of trade to these three First Nations peoples, and to their various Euroamerican trading partners, it is imperative to attempt to understand not only the internal culture and society of the Niitsitapi, but also the widely diverse corporate cultures of the Euroamericans who interacted with them.

Geertz used the term “thick description” to express the idea that every aspect of human behaviour has many levels of meaning.⁸⁹ It is a concept that surely applies to Aboriginal trade, whether among First Nations groups or between these peoples and Euroamericans. Wilcomb Washburn concurred that, “The term ‘trade’ is a deceptively simple word to describe a complex process.”⁹⁰ He concluded:

The North American fur trade was much more than the simple exchange of economic values. It was a way of life for individuals and for nations, differing for the nations and individuals involved. It cannot be studied in isolation as an economic phenomenon. It must be studied in terms of the cultural totality in which it was involved and approached through all the strands of meaning which explicate a society and its actions.⁹¹

However, over the last three decades individual authors have tended to ignore the many and various levels of meaning of trade and to argue their particular, single-meaning interpretations.

In 1972 Abraham Rotstein took a non-economic position. His argument was that Aboriginal people were not truly economic beings, and that trade was a collective political activity aimed primarily at tribal security. Trade equalled peace. Because political activities and trade involved the same types of ceremonial procedures, Rotstein concluded that they were one and the same thing. His emphasis on the collective whole led him to state that trade was a “tribal or clan activity rather than an individual activity.”⁹² While there is much to be said for his collective security analysis of the role

⁸⁹ Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in Paul Bohannan and Mark Glazer, eds., *High Points in Anthropology* (New York, 1988), 531-52.

⁹⁰ Wilcomb E. Washburn, “Symbol, Utility, and Aesthetics in the Indian Fur Trade,” in Dale L. Morgan et al., eds., *Aspects of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the 1965 North American Fur Trade Conference* (St. Paul, 1967), 50.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹² Abraham Rotstein, “Trade and Politics: An Institutional Approach,” *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1972), 23.

of trade, his discounting of individual initiative and personal motivations for the acquisition of material goods, wealth or status does not bear up in an examination of the history of First Nations peoples of the Plains, or, probably for that matter, Aboriginal peoples throughout North America.

Arthur J. Ray contributed invaluable to the understanding of the workings of the western fur trade. He analysed Aboriginal-Euroamerican trade as an economic activity, clearly demonstrating the different roles played by each of its groups of participants. His work, and that of those who followed in his steps, forever shattered the myth that First Nations people were the naive dupes of more sophisticated Euroamericans. Aboriginal people were clearly shown to be knowledgeable, active agents, keenly aware of their importance in the process and willing to press for every advantage.⁹³

George Hamell and Christopher Miller challenged what they considered to be the mechanistic, non-cultural approach taken by Ray and many others. They fought against the emphasis on the economic acumen of First Nations peoples in the Euroamerican trade; they did not deny it, but they asserted that this line of argument missed the boat.⁹⁴ The key point to understand, as they wrote, was “that in the initial phases of inter-cultural trade relations, the Indians in the Woodland region were trading in metaphors and that the value of trade goods was predominantly ceremonial and ideological.”⁹⁵ The European goods most sought after were those that fit into Aboriginal systems of belief and existing symbolism, not purely utilitarian items.

⁹³ Ray's ground-breaking work was *Indians in the Fur Trade*.

⁹⁴ George R. Hamell, “Trading in Metaphors: The Magic of Beads,” in Charles F. Hayes ed., *Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Trade Bead Conference* (Rochester, 1983), 5-28, and, Christopher L. Miller and George R. Hamell, “A New Perspective on Indian-White Contact: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade,” *Journal of American History* 73 (1986-1987), 311-28.

⁹⁵ Miller and Hamell, “A New Perspective,” 326.

Hamell and Miller made a strong case for the time of initial contact, but they are on shakier ground beyond that brief period. Bruce Trigger decried such approaches as "Romantic." He wrote, "I will seek to demonstrate that, while cultural beliefs may have significantly influenced Indian reactions in the early stages of their encounters with Europeans, in the long run rationalist calculations came to play a preponderant role."⁹⁶ And he did demonstrate that soon after contact utilitarian goods dominated the trade agenda. However, he may have overstepped when he stated, "The total corpus of documentary evidence that religious beliefs played an important and widespread role in influencing native behavior is in fact very limited."⁹⁷ As will be seen in later chapters, the Blackfoot-speaking peoples held particular religious beliefs concerning the killing of beaver; these beliefs did not affect their selection of trade goods, which for the most part was rationalistic, but they did for an extended period of time limit their purchasing-power of these goods. While Trigger was certainly correct in writing, "Native people were not constrained by their traditional beliefs to the extent that a rational assessment of the dangers and opportunities of the novel situations in which they found themselves was precluded,"⁹⁸ he was incorrect in asserting that in the unthreatened, day-to-day existence of First Nations peoples materialism would always prevail over other cultural considerations.

One approach which would reduce Geertz's "thick description" to meaninglessness is the Marxists' materialist perspective, which always ascribes supreme importance to economics, and secondary significance to everything else. There are

⁹⁶ Bruce G. Trigger, "Early Native North American Responses to European Contact: Romantic versus Rationalistic Interpretations," *Journal of American History* 77, no. 4 (March 1991), 1196-7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1204.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1214.

various levels of meaning, but the only one that really means anything is the economic. This position was well expressed by Albers, who wrote, "Both the internal and external features of historic Plains Indian formations become intelligible only when viewed against a backdrop of a regionally changing market whose relative influence shifted over time."⁹⁹ It would be foolish to deny the importance of economics in an activity such as Aboriginal-Euroamerican trade, but I disagree with those who hold that this single interpretation is the actual and sole explanation.

While one surely cannot ignore the significance of economic or even military considerations as oftentimes First Nations motivations, James Dempsey was certainly correct when he observed, "For Europeans, trade and the subsequent profit was an end within itself while for Natives, trade was a step in establishing and perpetuating social and political relations with individuals and groups."¹⁰⁰ Trade was often the means to attain or maintain a very personal extratribal end: friendship. Napoleon Chagnon's observations concerning the modern-day Yanomamö people of Venezuela and Brazil may also be applicable to the northern Plains of North America. He wrote that the mechanisms of peaceful interaction and friendship between groups were seen "as ends in themselves, not related to the establishment of either economic or political interdependency."¹⁰¹

In 1970, in an unrelated study, Chagnon defined the pre-industrial, Aboriginal economy "as the process whereby social groups provision themselves." He went on to

⁹⁹ Patricia C. Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War: Contrasting Forms of Intertribal Relationship among Historic Plains Indians," in John H. Moore, ed., *The Political Economy of North American Indians* (Norman, 1993), 131.

¹⁰⁰ James Dempsey, "Effects on Aboriginal Cultures Due to Contact with Henry Kelsey," in Henry Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years: Henry Kelsey's "Inland Country of Good Report"* (Regina, 1993), 132.

¹⁰¹ Napoleon A. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Last Days of Eden* (San Diego, 1992), 189.

write, "If a theory of primitive economics is ever to emerge, it will be obliged to concern itself predominantly with the appropriation and distribution of food."¹⁰² One such later attempt at providing a theory of hunter-gatherer economics posited five alliance strategies to insure full-time access to an adequate food supply, even during periods of critical local shortages. Brian Hayden wrote, "Five strategies seem likely to have been of greatest importance in hunter-gatherers' efforts to create and maintain alliances: marriage and kinship, visiting, interband sharing, rituals, and gift giving."¹⁰³ All of these are evident in the history of the Niitsitapi and their neighbours. However, a sixth important "strategy" was also practised throughout their pre-reserve history: trade. Extratribal kinship and friendship were so central to the workings of intertribal trade and First Nations-Euroamerican trade that this subject will be examined separately, immediately below.

Kinship (and Friendship) in the Fur Trade and in First Nations' External Relations

"Among the Sioux, the idiom of social discourse was that of kinship: the only people to be trusted were relatives, and kinship was freely extended and not solely dependent on the accidents of biological relatedness."¹⁰⁴ Although Raymond DeMallie was here referring specifically to the Sioux (*Lakota*), his comment could just as easily have been applied to the Niitsitapi and most, if not all, of their First Nations neighbours. During a peacemaking effort in a camp consisting of Cree and Siksika, the Siksika chief, according

¹⁰² Napoleon A. Chagnon, "Ecological and Adaptive Aspects of California Shell Money," *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of the University of California* 12 (1970), 7 and 8.

¹⁰³ Brian Hayden, *Archaeology: The Science of Once and Future Things* (New York, 1993), 161. Hayden described in some detail each of these five food-guaranteeing strategies on pages 159-71.

¹⁰⁴ Raymond J. DeMallie, "'These Have No Ears': Narrative and the Ethnohistorical Method," *Ethnohistory* 40, no. 4 (Fall 1993), 531.

to Lawrence Night Chief, told the Cree then in his tent, “‘you will have a smoke with me and a meal afterwards. Then anyone who wants to pick out a friend may do so and take him home.’ After the smoke all friends were taken in.”¹⁰⁵

For the purposes of this thesis I will limit my focus to intertribal kinship, which was established in three ways: capture, marriage and adoption. Capture provided an actual biological link between tribes. Surviving captives from one tribe were often accepted into full membership of the community of their captors, or held to be used as virtual pawns in future intertribal negotiations. Thus kinship links were established between two peoples which could be used in a variety of ways and situations. In one case, a long-held Niitsitapi captive was released by the Crow (*Absaroke*). He guided a party of that tribe into the territory of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples to arrange a peace, so that, according to Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, “the two tribes might meet as friends and brothers, to celebrate the grand event.”¹⁰⁶ Alexander F. Chamberlain wrote, “Among the Kutenai, adoption both by marriage and after a certain term of residence prevailed, and many Blackfeet [Niitsitapi] prisoners of war, etc., became members of the tribe in this way.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Lawrence Night Chief, 18 June 1941, p. 40, File 300/47, Hanks Papers, M8078, Glenbow Archives. The originals of the Hanks Papers are held by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, V-B-32M. However, I examined these records at the Glenbow, which has well-indexed photocopies of the entire collection.

¹⁰⁶ De Smet description of mid-1840s events, quoted in “Crow-Blackfoot Battle,” pp. 1-2, File 154, Claude Everett Schaeffer Papers, M1100, Glenbow Archives. This apparently was not an uncommon practice on the Plains. Albers and Kay stated, “As a matter of fact, the Hidatsa were reported to have kept enemy peoples in their midst as kin in order to open avenues for trade.” Patricia C. Albers and Jeanne Kay, “Sharing the Land: A Study in American Indian Territoriality,” in Thomas E. Ross and Tyrel G. Moore, eds., *A Cultural Geography of North American Indians* (Boulder, 1987), 74.

¹⁰⁷ “Kutenai and Blackfeet,” card 1, BAE 1937, Alexander F. Chamberlain Papers, SINAA.

Intertribal marriages also regularly occurred, during times of peace or between a captive and captor, and could and often did serve the same intertribal functions. James Schultz and Jessie Donaldson described how a potentially fatal chance-encounter between a party of Kainai and Piikani with a large camp of Assiniboiné was averted by the presence of a Kainai man who had years earlier captured an Assiniboiné woman, married her, and then moved to live with her people.¹⁰⁸ In another such instance, after a break in a battle between Kainai and Crow in the latter's territory, a Piikani who had been living with the Crow sneaked over to warn the Kainai of their imminent demise owing to the Crow determination to annihilate them, with the assistance of the Shoshone. Discretion being the better part of valour, the Kainai heeded their kinsman's warning, and his directions for undetected escape; they headed for home.¹⁰⁹

The most fascinating form of intertribal kinship on the Plains, at least to me, was that of adult adoption. It was a widespread practice. Probably documented as occurring well west of Hudson Bay as early as 1717,¹¹⁰ and certainly in existence long before this, it remained a meaningful intertribal custom or mechanism into at least the late 19th century;

¹⁰⁸ James Willard Schultz and Jessie Louise Donaldson, *The Sun God's Children* (Boston, 1930), 183-6.

¹⁰⁹ "Paul Littlewalker," pp. 53-4, Lawrence Night Chief (informant), File 300/32, Box 2, Hanks Papers, 1938-1941, M8078, Glenbow Archives.

¹¹⁰ York Factory post journal, 6 June 1717, B.239/a/3, reel 1M154, HBCA. The word "probably" was used in the text because this particular journal entry actually refers to the upcoming, but distant, adoption between two Aboriginal "Nations" of "Children one Amongst Another too be their Sons & Daughters." The adoption, "to Confirm the Peace," was almost certainly not of children, but of adults, a practice likely beyond the experience and the knowledge of the post journalist, James Knight. He was told a year earlier of this same practice carried out for the same purpose by the Swampy Cree and the Chipewyan Dene, north of his post. York Factory post journal, 7 May 1716, B.239/a/2, reel 1M154, HBCA. See also the following three pieces in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume II, 1701-1740* (Toronto, 1982): G.E. Thorman, "Thanadelthur," 627-8; Glyndwr Williams, "William Stewart," 614-6; and, Ernest S. Dodge, "James Knight," 318-20.

it is still practised today.¹¹¹ Although through much of the 19th century the Cree and the Niitsitapi were enemies, Crowfoot, the prominent Siksika leader, was the adoptive father of one of the Cree's most influential leaders, Poundmaker. One present-day Piikani (Southern Blackfeet), residing on the Blackfeet Reservation, has referred to this custom, this "sacred ceremony," as "the making of relatives."¹¹² The relationship established is sometimes referred to as "fictive kinship" or a permanent friendship relation.¹¹³ Both parties involved in the ceremony remained with their respective peoples, but a life-long, intimate bond was formed.

Although I have no doubts about the sincerity and longevity of most of these adoptive arrangements, there is great debate as to their meaning, duration and purpose. At one extreme, some argue that the entire network of intertribal kinship was of more significance than tribal membership itself.¹¹⁴ At the other, there are those who consider the practice to have been nothing more than a transparent, short-lived expedient to facilitate trade between usually warring tribes. James Ronda referred to the principals in adult adoption as "temporary fictional relatives."¹¹⁵ Joseph Jablow held a view similar to Ronda's, that adoption facilitated peace between enemies and that, as he stated, "the

¹¹¹ Hugh A. Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet* (Halifax, 1988), 25, and, Marjorie Lismer, "Adoption Practices of the Blood Indians of Alberta, Canada," *Plains Anthropologist* 19, no. 63 (1974), 27-8.

¹¹² Bear Chief, *Ni-Kso-Ko-Wa*, 12-4.

¹¹³ Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War," 98 and 119.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-132, and Albers and Kay, "Sharing the Land," 47-91.

¹¹⁵ James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln, 1984), 89 and 130.

primary purpose of the peace was to establish friendly trade relations, there seems to be little doubt.”¹¹⁶

There is some evidence to support this restrictive or cynical view, though the preponderant mass is on the side of the establishment of a genuine, lasting personal relationship. In 1806 Alexander Henry witnessed the unwillingness of a prospective adopted son lead to the breakdown of the peace process between the Cheyenne (*Tsistsistas*) and the Hidatsa (*Hiraáca*).¹¹⁷ However, even Henry understood the usual outcome and significance of intertribal adoption, recording: “This affair generally is attended with great ceremony and is considered as the most binding treaty that can be made and the more to Obligate them in ties of friendship.”¹¹⁸ In an editorial note to the Lewis and Clark journals, Reuben Gold Thwaites supported this latter view, writing, “The ceremony of adoption into a tribe or family is one which has always prevailed among the North American aborigines, and is extended to any persons (red or white) to whom they wish to show special friendship or honor.”¹¹⁹ The case of Crowfoot and Poundmaker, as noted above, confirms the intense nature of these intertribal fictive kinship relationships. After the North-West Resistance of 1885, in which Poundmaker played a prominent role, Crowfoot personally interceded with the Canadian Government

¹¹⁶ Joseph Jablow, *The Cheyenne in Plains Indian Trade Relations, 1795-1840*. Intro. Morris W. Foster (Lincoln, 1994), 47.

¹¹⁷ Alexander Henry (The Younger), *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814*, vol. 1. Ed. Barry M. Gough (Toronto, 1988), 246-75.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹¹⁹ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806*, vol. 1 (New York, 1959 [1904-1905]), 222n.

on behalf of his adopted son.¹²⁰ Poundmaker was given a three-year prison sentence; Niitsitapi tradition has it that Crowfoot saved this Cree leader from the gallows.¹²¹

Principal Questions and Debates

Besides providing a framework of the history of the Niitsitapi trade with Euroamericans, and a discussion of the issues addressed in the literature on the involvement of these three peoples in the fur trade, there are actually some major arguments which I hope to sustain. They revolve around questions about both trade in particular and external relations in general.

There is no doubt that when Euroamericans and First Nations peoples first met they held vastly different world views, not only their cosmologies, but also the meaning or role of seemingly mundane, day-to-day behaviour and activities. I will examine the beliefs and attitudes of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, and of their Euroamerican contacts, in order to determine whether, and if so, to what extent, they had differing concepts of external relations. If indeed they did, I will try to interpret how these differing concepts affected the actions and reactions of both First Nations peoples and Euroamericans in the conduct of the fur trade.

The precontact and Pre-Columbian North American Aboriginal world was not the peaceful Garden of Eden that some imagine, though it certainly must have been a quantum leap above that to which First Nations peoples had been relegated by the late 19th century. The Pre-Columbian North American Plains were not a war-free zone. In fact, recent archaeological research has indicated that the scale, if not the intensity, of warfare altered little, if at all, among First Nations peoples on the Plains with the arrival

¹²⁰ Dempsey, *Crowfoot*, 194-5.

¹²¹ File 27, pp. 2-3, Joe Little Chief Papers, M4394, Glenbow Archives.

of Europeans.¹²² Douglas Bamforth has pointed out “that something in the cultural context of the Missouri Trench after AD 1300 led native tribal groups to invest substantial effort in the construction of extensive defensive works.”¹²³ Bamforth and Hayden concur on this “something.” Besides his five alliance strategies, noted earlier, Hayden also posited a sixth strategy among hunter-gatherers to ensure continuous access to an adequate food supply. He wrote, “We know that friendships must be reinforced periodically to maintain alliances, and it may be that enmity, too, must be reinforced from time to time if a band is to be able to wipe out other bands without compunction in times of the most severe stress.”¹²⁴ He argued that “low-consequence events,” frequent hostile interactions with few casualties, were a necessary part of a more encompassing survival strategy.¹²⁵ In Hayden’s analysis, it would seem, both longstanding allies and longstanding enemies, each clearly delineated, were part of the hunter-gatherer world. This position will be tested with respect to the Niitsitapi. Since warfare not only affected a First Nations people’s ability to trade but also the partners with whom it traded, to understand the dynamics at work in the Euroamerican trade one must be aware of the patterns of alliances and the history of external relations among First Nations peoples.

Already widely accepted is the understanding that for extended periods of time there were among the First Nations neighbours of the Niitsitapi those with whom they were more often than not at war and others with whom they were generally in a state of friendly interaction. When these external relations suddenly changed, as they often did,

¹²² Douglas B. Bamforth, “Indigenous People, Indigenous Violence: Precontact Warfare on the North American Great Plains,” *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 29, no. 1 (March 1994), 95-115.

¹²³ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁴ Hayden, *Archaeology*, 176-7.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 177.

tremendous tensions must have resulted. Intertribal friendships, marriages and fictive kinship relationships were strong bonds among the few individuals involved, and could have far-reaching consequences, such as the cessation of hostilities and the establishment of peaceful intertribal intercourse. But these extratribal ties intimately bound only a small fraction of each group to the other. Surely there must have been internal group tensions when longtime enemies overnight became “friends.”¹²⁶ Just as there were these intergroup bonds at work to create a state of peace, there were even more pressures at work, one would think, to destroy this “unusual” intertribal relationship. Grieving or vengeful relatives who had suffered a loss at the other group’s hands, or young men wishing to acquire wealth or status through raiding, were all threats to any newly established peace between normally hostile peoples. If possible, I will examine the tensions and pressures on the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and the effects of this balancing act, the forces for extending friendship versus the forces for estrangement or open hostilities, on the state of their external relations with their First Nations neighbours, and also with the newly arrived Euroamericans as well.

For First Nations peoples and Euroamerican traders at and after contact their particular religious beliefs stood in stark contrast. The extent of permeation of religion in the daily lives of the Niitsitapi, in such manifestations as rituals and ceremonies, also contrasted with the practices of their Euroamerican trading partners. As John Friesen stated of these First Nations peoples of present-day western Canada, “One of the basics of

¹²⁶ In an interesting turn of phrase, one Niitsitpai person stated, “When peace made, Crees and Bft. [Blackfeet/Niitsitpai] exchanged presents **as if friends** [my emphasis].” This may have been recognition that, though this was a temporary situation in which the two groups appeared to be genuine friends, the true intergroup relationship was quite something else. Many Guns (informant), through Olive Tanning Robe, June 1939 interview, p. 34, File 300/35, Hanks Papers, M8078, Glenbow Archives.

Native culture is its inherently religious nature.”¹²⁷ I will examine to what extent this apparently simple economic exchange, the goal of the Euroamericans, was affected by Niitsitapi religious beliefs and practices, and whether it was such a straightforward and mutually understood transaction after all.

One basic question that still remains unanswered in the history of the Niitsitapi and the Niitsitapi fur trade is the time when first contact was made with Euroamericans. Early sources are limited and seem far from conclusive on this matter. As a result of these limitations, a wide range of interpretations has been presented in the literature. The Niitsitapi were among the many peoples included in the amorphous 18th-century term “Archithinue.” This was a term, derived from a Cree word, which was used by fur traders to refer to groups with which they had had little or no contact. The debates surrounding the “Archithinue” are intermeshed with the question of first contact, and also with Niitsitapi involvement in indirect trade with Euroamericans.

Also inextricably tied to an analysis of the “Archithinue” is the issue of Niitsitapi relations with the Cree and Assiniboine in the 18th century. Their relations in the 19th century are well documented; there are few gaps in the chronology and few present-day disputes over events. This is far from the case with respect to the 18th century. Accepted wisdom once held that the Cree and the Blackfoot-speaking peoples were implacable enemies throughout the 18th century, as they were throughout most of the one that followed.¹²⁸ Revisionists have now so successfully challenged this position that the

¹²⁷ John W. Friesen, “Native Cultures in a Cultural Clash,” in John W. Friesen, ed., *The Cultural Maze: Complex Questions on Native Destiny in Western Canada* (Calgary, 1991), 30.

¹²⁸ The most authoritative assertion of this position was made by David G. Mandelbaum. The study was first published in 1940, and later in an expanded text: *The Plains Cree*, vol. 37, pt. 2 of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 1940), 155-316, and, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study* (Regina, 1979).

currently accepted wisdom is that the Niitsitapi and the Cree were not only 18th-century trading partners, but military allies as well.¹²⁹ This revisionist position asserts a century-long friendship relationship between the Niitsitapi and the Cree which tied the Blackfoot-speaking peoples into a Euroamerican trade network decades before direct, face-to-face trade was established between the Niitsitapi with any Euroamericans.

For millennia the peoples of the Plains had been interacting and developing the mechanisms of social intercourse. Interlocking Aboriginal trade networks crossed the continent.¹³⁰ In 1986 Paul Thistle detailed the acculturation of Euroamerican traders on the lower Saskatchewan, their acceptance of established First Nations norms, primarily in their relations with the Cree.¹³¹ He later summarized his findings. "Indeed, it was the non-Native fur traders who adapted to the kinship and marriage systems, languages, transportation and clothing technologies, alliances, and trading practices of Native

¹²⁹ This revisionist position has been most strongly argued by: John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870* (Winnipeg, 1987); Doige, "Warfare Patterns"; Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*; and, Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground."

¹³⁰ Works on Aboriginal trade networks include: John C. Ewers, "The Indian Trade of the Upper Missouri before Lewis and Clark: An Interpretation," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 10, no. 4 (July 1954), 429-46; James H. Howard, "The Southern Cult in the Northern Plains," *American Antiquity* 19, no. 2 (October 1953), 130-8; James P. Ronda, "'The Great Mart of All This Country': Lewis and Clark and Western Trade Networks," in Barry Gough and Laird Christie, eds., *New Dimensions in Ethnohistory: Papers of the Second Laurier Conference on Ethnohistory and Ethnology*, no. 120 of *Canadian Ethnology Service Mercury Series Papers* (Hull, 1991), 175-89; William R. Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi to 1870," in Wilcomb E. Washburn, ed., *History of Indian-White Relations*, vol. 4 of William C. Sturtevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, 1988), 351-74; and, W. Raymond Wood, "Plains Trade in Prehistoric and Protohistoric Intertribal Relations," in W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty, eds., *Anthropology on the Great Plains* (Lincoln, 1980), 98-109.

¹³¹ Paul C. Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840* (Winnipeg, 1986).

peoples.”¹³² I will attempt to determine to what extent this model held with respect to Euroamerican interaction with the Blackfoot-speaking peoples.

Both the North West Company and Hudson’s Bay Company established successful trading relations with the five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance on the North Saskatchewan River in the early 1780s. The two companies had completely different corporate structures which may not only have affected their policies, but also the attitudes and actions of their officers and men in the field.¹³³ How did these corporate distinctions elicit differing responses from their First Nations customers?

Apart from one brief period of violence in the early 1790s, the Saskatchewan traders enjoyed a half-century of virtually symbiotic, consensual trade with the Niitsitapi and their allies before being seriously challenged by any American concerns. As for the Americans, until the early 1830s nearly all of their efforts to breach the territory of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples resulted in violence and the death of citizens of the United States. What were the causes of the 25 years of almost unbroken hostility of the Blackfoot alliance to Americans after their first contact with the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1806?

¹³² Paul C. Thistle, “Dependence and Control: Indian-European Trade Relations in the Post-Kelsey Era,” in Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 126.

¹³³ For general histories of the two companies, see: Edwin Ernest Rich, *The History of the Hudson’s Bay Company, 1670-1870*, 2 vols. (London, 1958 and 1959); Glyndwr Williams, “The Hudson’s Bay Company and the Fur Trade: 1670-1870,” *The Beaver* 314, no. 2 (Autumn 1983), 3-86; Marjorie Elliott (Wilkins) Campbell, *The North West Company* (Toronto, 1973[1957]); Gordon Charles Davidson, *The North West Company* (Berkeley, 1918); and, W. Stewart Wallace, ed., *Documents Relating to the North West Company* (Toronto, 1934). For comparison of the companies’ practices which affected relations with both their own employees and with their First Nations customers, see Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver, 1980), and also her “Fur Trade as Centrifuge: Familial Dispersal and Offspring Identity in Two Company Contexts,” in Raymond J. DeMallie and Alfonso Ortiz, eds., *North American Indian Anthropology: Essays on Society and Culture* (Norman, 1994), 197-219.

In a book entitled *Renewing the World*, Howard Harrod demonstrated that the religious and cultural beliefs of the Niitsitapi were regularly reinforced or renewed by the rituals and ceremonies that were integral to their existence. He argued that symbolic relations and cultural practices once changed or temporarily abandoned were renewed or reinstated, not necessarily altered or lost forever.¹³⁴ Examples of significant cultural changes and renewals will be sought, at least with respect to the Niitsitapi trade with Euroamericans; the role of the fur trade will be examined in cultural change within the Niitsitapi. However, the advent of the horse, prior to the 1740s for the Niitsitapi, will only be dealt with peripherally. Its acquisition was not the result of the fur trade, although it certainly stemmed from the presence of Europeans on the continent. Besides, the effects of the horse on Plains cultures in general, and on the Niitsitapi peoples in particular, have been dealt with at length elsewhere and often.¹³⁵

Questions, debates and misinformation abound with respect to the history of the Niitsitapi, and the history of the Euroamerican trade with these peoples. Because of the avowed sweeping nature of this thesis many items not central to the principal arguments will also be addressed. For instance, one could not leave out either the influence of the gun or the effects of numerous European-introduced epidemics. The effects of a monopoly position versus a situation of Euroamerican competition will also be compared. As well, I will examine the assertion made by many authors that the Blackfoot-speaking peoples did not want fur trade posts in their territory, and that they actually prevented

¹³⁴ Howard L. Harrod, *Renewing the World: Plains Indian Religion and Morality* (Tucson, 1992), especially 67, 89, 92, 128, 164-5 and 172.

¹³⁵ For example, see two recent, opposing interpretations of the role of horses in Niitsitapi society: David Nugent, "Property Relations, Production Relations, and Inequality: Anthropology, Political Economy, and the Blackfeet," *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 2 (May 1993), 336-62, and, in rebuttal, Conaty, "Economic Models."

their construction.¹³⁶ The corollary of this position is that the British and Canadian traders succeeded because they remained on the northern fringes of Niitsitapi territory, while the American traders failed because they attempted to enter this country.

Sources and Methodology

As stated at the outset, this will be an analysis of the history of the Euroamerican trade with the Niitsitapi, presented in roughly chronological order. I have tried to draw on a wide variety of sources. The bulk of the information has been gathered from the historian's traditional haunts, archives and libraries, in search of the White-generated documentary record. This has been done in both the United States and Canada (and elsewhere by correspondence), where the major documentary collections concerning the Blackfoot-speaking peoples have been consulted. No serious historical study of the fur trade, of the Niitsitapi or of any other First Nations peoples in the British Northwest before the 20th century could be undertaken without the use of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. As will be readily seen in my footnotes, this repository was the single most important source of documentary evidence; all others pale in comparison.

However, once unfamiliar realms were also visited. I have not only examined the published works but also the unpublished papers of many anthropologists who have conducted research in the field among the Niitsitapi. This latter undertaking has provided insights into their culture and their oral traditions which the published documentary record alone would never have permitted. The use of archaeological studies has also filled in gaps in this record. Linguistic studies have added depth to this study and

¹³⁶ See: Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact*, 24; R. Grace Morgan, "Beaver Ecology/Beaver Mythology" (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta, 1991), 16, 217 and 224; David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographic Synthesis* (Lincoln, 1979), 45; and, James Dempsey, "Effects on Aboriginal Cultures," 133.

answered questions central to this endeavour. I do not speak Blackfoot, or Cree. I have been generously aided in this project on several occasions by Algonkian linguistic experts.¹³⁷ Geographic studies have been explored, and cartography has offered valuable information completely absent from the written record.

Time, financial constraints and my permanent place of residence, half a continent away from the descendants of my principal subjects, prohibited me from conducting personal interviews in the field among these peoples of Alberta and Montana. However, I sought out the “voices” of First Nations people in several places. Published Aboriginal autohistories were carefully read. The unpublished papers of anthropologists and missionaries were extremely rewarding, often containing the actual words spoken or summaries of stories told by First Nations individuals who were alive during the 19th century. These long-silenced voices are an irreplaceable gift, though of course, like all sources, open to the same types of scrutiny and testing as other kinds of evidence.

Winter counts, records unique to the First Nations peoples of the Plains, were also used extensively. Several of these winter counts (also sometimes known as calendar histories or Native chronologies) of the Niitsitapi have survived and been transcribed. As William Farr described, the process involved “keeping a kind of pictorial calendar, either drawing a chronology of events on hides or, more frequently, anchoring in memory an event to a particular winter.”¹³⁸ Among the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples, as opposed to the situation among the Siouan peoples, where the counts were generally pictographs painted on a robe, the practice was generally to retain the count in the memory of the

¹³⁷ I would have been lost in this foreign terrain without the willing assistance of three Algonkianists, who were then complete strangers to me, Donald Frantz, H.C. Wolfart and William Cowan.

¹³⁸ Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet*, ix.

keeper, not in recorded picture form.¹³⁹ Adolf Hungry Wolf, who married into the Kainai Nation, described the mnemonic devices employed by some of the keepers of these winter counts, which could be used to keep track of various time periods. "Sometimes carved sticks were used instead of [knotted] strings. More often, the sticks represented a whole month, a whole season, or even a whole year. Since the strings or sticks were handled every night, the Keeper had no trouble remembering the meaning of each thing on them."¹⁴⁰

Winter counts were personal records kept by individuals, normally passed down for continuation to another, to a younger, trusted person. Covering a time-period which stretched from the summer or fall of one year to the same time in the next,¹⁴¹ they designated each year almost always by a single occurrence, usually the event considered most significant to the band or tribe, but perhaps a very personal experience particular to the keeper. The most extensive of these is Piikani, known as the Bull Plume Winter

¹³⁹ Hugh A. Dempsey, *A Blackfoot Winter Count. Occasional Paper No. 1* (Glenbow Museum, 1965), 3. Dempsey confirmed Wissler's 1911 observation that most, but not all, Niitsitapi winter counts were retained in their keepers' memories, not recorded in pictograph form. In fact, Dempsey here wrote of the published Bad Head Winter Count: "This is the only known instance where a Blackfoot [Niitsitapi] winter count was painted on a skin."

¹⁴⁰ Adolf Hungry Wolf, *The Blood People: A Division of the Blackfoot Confederacy* (New York, 1977), 195-6. See also Hungry Wolf's *Teachings of Nature* (Skookumchuck, British Columbia, 1991), 86-91.

¹⁴¹ There is some minor disagreement, if it can be called that, over the start and finish times of the "year" in these counts. Raczka said that the termination points were usually the annual sun dances, which were generally held in July. Paul M. Raczka, *Winter Count: A History of the Blackfoot People* (Brocket, Alberta, 1979), 25. Others have asserted that the "year" stretched from the first snowfall of one fall to the first of the next. Andrea Garnier, intro., "The Bull Plume Winter Count," *Border Crossings: A Magazine of the Arts* 11, no. 4 (December 1992), 85. Among the peoples of the northern Plains, the "year" was considered to start, according to Adolf Hungry Wolf, "with the trials of Winter," generally considered to be in October. See his *Teachings of Nature*, 91, and, *The Blood People*, 195.

Count, named after its last keeper; it covers the time from 1764 to 1924.¹⁴² Though not always reliable in nailing down a precise date, these winter counts, besides providing much information otherwise unavailable, can and do sound loud counterpoints to what many a present-day White, male historian might have chosen as the most important event of a given year or period. However, transcribed winter counts pose the often difficult problem of many original documents that have been translated and edited, the problem of identifying the meaning or text of the document's original creator(s), amidst the input of various translators, editors and commentators.¹⁴³ These issues will be addressed in the thesis.

Since the collective recorded memory, except for the few winter counts, of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples for specific historical events does not often extend back much before the mid-19th century,¹⁴⁴ I have been forced to some extent to employ the method that anthropologists refer to as "upstreaming," or what Carlo Ginzburg, the eminent Italian social historian, described as "to forecast retrospectively."¹⁴⁵ Assuming some degree of continuity of processes, one takes what is known of a present or past society and culture, and works backwards in an effort to understand the beliefs and structures of an earlier time of which much less is known, but for which some evidence does exist. The practice is fraught with potential danger, but it can be a useful tool, if employed guardedly. In the case of the Niitsitapi trade, the combined record is such that

¹⁴² Raczka, *Winter Count*.

¹⁴³ A good, brief introduction to the debates concerning the use of winter counts is Melburn D. Thurman, "Plains Indian Winter Counts and the New Ethnohistory," *Plains Anthropologist* 27, no. 96 (May 1982), 173-5.

¹⁴⁴ Harrod, *Renewing the World*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in Carlo Ginzburg, *Myths, Emblems, Clues* (London, 1990), 117.

“upstreaming” can play an invaluable role in helping to interpret this history long before the mid-point of the 19th century.

Chapter Two: Euroamericans Approach from the East

In many ways this chapter is a prelude to the history of the Niitsitapi trade. Direct contact and trade between any Euroamericans and the three Niitsitapi peoples and their allies, the Gros Ventre and Sarcee, almost certainly did not begin until the last half of the 18th century. However, many who have written on the 18th-century fur trade in the West have claimed that face-to-face contact and direct trade with members of the Blackfoot alliance happened long before this time, even as early as the 17th century. Despite the fact, or perhaps as a result of it, that there is so little documentation relating to the Blackfoot-speaking peoples before the 1780s, there has been considerable misinterpretation and much speculation, some of it quite wild and off the mark, about this time before Euroamericans regularly interacted with the Niitsitapi peoples. Although the documentary record is limited, it is easily accessible, so it is surprising that much of the interpretation and speculation has been based on inadequate research and less-than-rigorous analysis. In this chapter I examine and evaluate in some detail many of the 20th-century “sightings” of members of the Blackfoot alliance in the documentary record of the westward expansion of the Euroamerican fur trade in 17th and 18th centuries.

The chapter focusses on this Euroamerican movement into the western interior from both the St. Lawrence Valley-Great Lakes and Hudson Bay. As well, it will deal at length with the problem of the “Archithinue.” This is a generic term which was widely used in the 18th century to label a variety of First Nations peoples west of Hudson Bay. Trying to identify the Niitsitapi among the many unspecific references to the Archithinue will also involve an analysis of the significant debates concerning Niitsitapi trade and military alliances in the 18th century. I argue that there was never a Niitsitapi trade on Hudson Bay, and that no other Archithinue group ever (but on one single occasion) traded at York Factory either. I conclude that there is insufficient evidence to support

unreservedly the contention that an 18th-century Niitsitapi-Cree trade and military alliance ever existed.

Euroamerican Presence on Hudson Bay

In the late 17th century the Blackfoot-speaking peoples were almost certainly already longtime residents of the northern Plains, probably inhabiting much of at least the eastern region of the territory between the North Saskatchewan and Missouri rivers.¹ Hundreds of miles to the east in the 1780s, on the western shore of Hudson Bay, rival fur trade companies based in England, New France and New England competed at what would eventually become the most important access point on the future route connecting the Niitsitapi with Europe. Although the Hudson's Bay Company was founded and chartered in 1670, it was not until the 1780s that it turned its concerted attention from James Bay to the western shores of Hudson Bay.² In 1682, this English company, as well as "la Compagnie du Nord" of New France and a concern led by Benjamin Gillam of Boston, each established posts near the mouth of the Hayes and Nelson rivers. From that date until 1714, the fortunes of rival, often warring, European nations saw this area change hands on several occasions, the first occurring in 1683, when Pierre-Esprit Radisson, one of the founders of the Hudson's Bay Company, took control of the two rival posts for his

¹ Clark Wissler, *Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians*. Volume 5 of *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, pt. 1 (New York, 1910), 14-9 and 164, and, Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 7.

² The Hudson's Bay Company in the first year of its existence had unsuccessfully tried to establish itself near the mouth of the Hayes and Nelson rivers, but this very short-lived effort did lay the groundwork for Britain's later claim to the area. From this failed attempt to the early 1680s, the Hudson's Bay Company focussed its resources on James Bay. Edwin Ernest Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870*, vol. 1 (London, 1958), and, Michael Payne, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory: Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay Company Service, York Factory, 1788 to 1870* (Ottawa, 1989), 13-4.

then-current employer, “la Compagnie du Nord.” The next year, back in the employ of the Hudson’s Bay Company, Radisson returned the favour, taking the French furs for the English company. The New Englanders abandoned their post after 1683, but the French remained in competition there until they temporarily relinquished their post in 1685.³ In 1684, the Hudson’s Bay Company relocated its post to the north bank of the Hayes River, near its mouth; it named the new post York Fort, a post which has been almost universally known since the 1780s as York Factory.⁴

Before the French abandoned the area, they had sent men inland from Hudson Bay to encourage First Nations peoples to come down to trade. The Hudson’s Bay Company benefited from these French efforts. Cree and Assiniboine were the principal visitors to York Factory in these early years, some travelling up to 20 days by canoe downstream to the post.⁵

Henry Kelsey

Although exploration was focussed on the coast of Hudson Bay in the first years of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s existence, in order to assess the best locations for coastal depots, the company was aware that a knowledge of the interior could only benefit its trade. In 1682, when York Factory was first being established, headquarters in London

³ Grace Lee Nute, “Pierre-Esprit Radisson,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume II, 1701 to 1740* (Toronto, 1982), 537-9, and also by the same author, “Médard Chouart des Grosseilliers,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume I, 1000 to 1700* (Toronto, 1979), 223-8.

⁴ This post was officially named York Fort until its capture and destruction by the French, in 1782. The replacement post on the same site was thereafter officially called York Factory. However, I will refer to the post as York Factory throughout the thesis, to avoid confusion. Personal communication from Anne Morton, HBCA Reference Archivist, to Smyth, 20 April 2000.

⁵ Payne, *The Most Respectable Place*, 14-5.

instructed the officer in charge “to use yor dilligence to Penetrate into the Countrey to make what discoveries you can, and to gett an Acquaintance and Commerce with the Indians therabts, which wee hope in time may turne to Acct.”⁶ When circumstances finally permitted, the Hudson’s Bay Company did send one of its servants inland, Henry Kelsey, in 1690. He was away from York Factory for two years, but his controversial journal covers a period of less than two months, from 15 July to 12 September 1691. It was also written, for some unfathomable reason, in verse.⁷ Kelsey had gone to Hudson Bay as an apprentice with the company in 1684; he remained in company employ until 1722. Since the date of the journal’s first publication, there has been considerable debate over where he actually travelled and just which First Nations peoples he encountered. As will be seen later in this chapter and has been so clearly articulated by Dale Russell, not only did names applied by various Euroamericans to First Nations groups before the onslaught of the devastating 1781-1782 smallpox epidemic differ considerably from many more familiar appellations that followed, but the actual make-up of these groups may also have been drastically and irrevocably altered by that catastrophic event as well.⁸ Consistency in terminology is not a hallmark of these early records, with labels often varying with the creator of the record, or with the level of familiarity of the keeper with the subjects addressed.

⁶ Letter from Governor and Committee to John Bridgar (A.6/1, fo. 14d., in HBCA), quoted in Richard I. Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting: The Hudson’s Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870* (Montreal and Kingston, 1991), 28.

⁷ Kelsey’s journal was first published in 1929, but it has since been republished, along with the remainder of his papers. Arthur G. Doughty and Chester Martin, eds., *The Kelsey Papers* (Ottawa, 1929), and, John Warkentin, ed., *The Kelsey Papers* (Regina, 1994). See also K.G. Davies, “Henry Kelsey,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume II, 1701 to 1740* (Toronto, 1982), 307-15.

⁸ Dale R. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours* (Hull, 1991).

In his 1691 journal, Kelsey named six different First Nations groups. The identity of some is far from clear. The one group most relevant to this thesis Kelsey called the “Naywatame poets.” This precise name was never used by anyone other than Kelsey. Because of the unique name and also because of the uncertainty over the precise route taken by Kelsey in his travels, much speculation has abounded about the true identity of this First Nations group. These people have variously been identified by 20th-century authors as Mandan (*Nú neta*), Sioux (*Lakota*, *Dakota* or *Nakota*?), “Snake” (Shoshone or *Nimi*), Blackfoot (Niitsitapi), Assiniboiné (*Nakoda*) and Gros Ventre (*A'aninin/Atsina*).⁹ One historian, John Milloy, was so certain of his identification that he coined the term “Naywattame-Gros Ventre.” He had absolutely no doubt that they were Gros Ventre (*Atsina/A'aninin*); he was just as certainly wrong.¹⁰

The tricentennial of Kelsey's inland voyage prompted much renewed interest. The scholarship that stemmed from this anniversary has shed new light on this fascinating man and his unprecedented two-year journey.¹¹ It now seems clear that Kelsey travelled no farther west than east-central Saskatchewan, not into Niitsitapi or Gros Ventre territory.¹² As well, whoever the “Naywatame poets” might have been, it is a virtual

⁹ Russell provided a good summary of the historiography of this speculation. Dale Russell, “The Puzzle of Henry Kelsey and His Journey to the West,” in Henry Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years: Henry Kelsey's "Inland Journey of Good Report"* (Regina, 1993), 80-2.

¹⁰ John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790-1870* (Winnipeg, 1988). See also David Smyth, “Missed Opportunity: John Milloy's *The Plains Cree*,” *Prairie Forum* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1992), 337-54.

¹¹ The most direct results of this three-hundredth-anniversary celebration were the Warkentin edition of Kelsey's papers, noted above, as well as the publication of the proceedings of a Kelsey conference. Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years*.

¹² Allen Ronaghan, “Reconstructing Kelsey's Travels,” in Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 89-94, and Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 74-6.

certainty that they were a Siouan-speaking group. The word “poets” is derived from the Cree word for Sioux, *pwât*.¹³ In the 17th and 18th centuries, fur traders used the “poet” suffix only to identify Siouan-speaking peoples. The Assiniboiné were most often referred to in early fur trade records as the “Assinipoets,” or some such variant. This name resulted from the combining of two Cree words, “poets” and the word for stone, which Andrew Graham reported in 1775 was “Assin née.”¹⁴ With little or no doubt, the “Naywatame poets” would have been a Siouan-speaking group. All three of the Niitsitapi peoples, as well as the Gros Ventre, are Algonquian-speakers. Russell has argued that Kelsey’s “Naywatame Poets” were the Hidatsa (*Hiraáca*), a First Nations people who lived in permanent villages on the Missouri River.¹⁵ His reasoning is sound, but the data is inconclusive.

In spite of the fact that Kelsey had no intended or actual contact with any of the five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, his journal, of a trip taken some 60 years before the next such Hudson’s Bay Company inland journey, provides an early insight into attitudes and patterns of relations between Euroamericans and First Nations peoples. As would

¹³ H.C. Wolfart and Freda Ahenakew, eds., *The Cree Language Is Our Identity: The La Ronge Lectures of Sarah Whitecalf* (Winnipeg, 1993), 100 and 146; E.A. Watkins and Richard Faries, *A Dictionary of the Cree Language, As Spoken by the Indians in the Provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta* (Toronto, 1938), 171 and 444.

¹⁴ Andrew Graham’s *Observations on Hudson’s Bay*, p. 80, 1775, E.2/10, reel 4M102, HBCA. Graham was a longtime company officer (1749 to 1775) on Hudson Bay, with much of his career spent at York Factory. A predecessor of his at that post wrote that the Assiniboiné were given their name because of “the stony Country they Live in.” James Isham, *James Isham’s Observations on Hudsons Bay, 1743*. Ed. Edwin Ernest Rich (Toronto, 1949), 115. Common alternate spellings for this Cree word are *asiníy* and *u’sinne*. See Watkins and Faries, *A Dictionary*, 185, and, Earle Waugh, Nancy LeClaire and George Cardinal, eds., *alperta ohci kehetehayak nehiyaw otwestamâkewasinahikan Alberta Elders’ Cree Dictionary* (Edmonton, 1998), 6.

¹⁵ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 210-2, and, “The Puzzle,” 82-5.

always be the case decades later when other Hudson's Bay Company travellers followed in his footsteps, Kelsey travelled inland with a First Nations leader, in this instance an Assiniboine. The primary purpose of his journey, according to Kelsey, was to "bring to a Commerce the Naywatame poets," to get this group to come to trade at York Factory.¹⁶ Kelsey's travelling companions, the Assiniboine, were apparently the enemies of the "Naywatame poets," into whose territory they ventured with Kelsey in September 1691. Kelsey sought to act as a peace-maker, for he knew, as all did all fur traders, that intertribal warfare hurt the trade. He reported that he told his Assiniboine companions, "they must not go to wars for it will not be liked by y^e governer neither would he trade with y^m if they did not cease from warring."¹⁷ He encouraged the Assiniboine to spend "their time in Catching of beav our for y^e will be better liked on then their killing their Enem ies when they came to y^e factory neither was I sent there for to kill any Indians but to make peace wth as many as I could but all my arguments prevailed nothing wth y^m."¹⁸ When Kelsey finally met the "Naywatame poets," he took part in traditional ceremonies long-established among First Nations peoples of North America. Kelsey and the "Naywatame poets" smoked a pipe, made speeches and exchanged presents, Kelsey giving the leader among many other items a coat and a gun. Kelsey had been given a special pipe before leaving York Factory for just such an occasion. The "Naywatame poet" leader gave him a pipe.¹⁹ Kelsey promised to try to stop the Cree from killing them and encouraged them, unsuccessfully, to travel with him to York Factory the next

¹⁶ Warkentin, ed., *The Kelsey Papers*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 September 1691, p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6 September 1691, p. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 September 1691, p. 11.

spring.²⁰ Elsewhere, Kelsey also bemoaned the fact that those First Nations peoples who traded at York Factory were using “English guns” to “hunt their Enemies.”²¹ These would all become familiar themes preached by subsequent Hudson’s Bay Company officers and servants to any and all First Nations peoples. Make peace, not war! But if you do make war, do not use the guns that we sold you.

The French Interlude at York Factory/Fort Bourbon

Two years after Kelsey’s return to York Factory, the post was captured by the French, led by Pierre le Moyne d’Iberville. Two years after that, in 1696, the English took it back. Taking this isolated post was not difficult, as it was not heavily fortified nor heavily manned. Any enemy warship that arrived in its harbour could, and did, easily force its surrender. In 1697, the French once again captured York Factory. They held onto it until 1714.

The French renamed the post Fort Bourbon. It became the headquarters of “la Compagnie du Nord” on Hudson Bay. One of its longtime inhabitants and the onetime officer in charge, Nicolas Jérémie, left a record of the French regime at Fort Bourbon.²² While interesting and informative for a variety of reasons, Jérémie’s narrative of his 20 years at Fort Bourbon sheds no light whatsoever on the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Gros Ventre or Sarcee. The French at the fort were apparently never in a position to explore its hinterland. Jérémie, when he was in charge, did inquire of his First Nations customers

²⁰ Ibid., 8 to 12 September 1691, pp. 10-1.

²¹ Ibid., 2. This is taken from Kelsey’s 1691 report, written at the end of the first year of his 1690-1692 trip.

²² Jacques Rousseau, “Nicolas Jérémie, dit Lamontagne,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume II, 1701 to 1740* (Toronto, 1982), 296-300, and, Nicolas Jérémie, *Twenty Years of York Factory, 1694-1714: Jérémie’s Account of Hudson Strait and Bay*. Eds. R. Douglas and J.N. Wallace (Ottawa, 1926).

about the western interior and its inhabitants. He reported on what must be the Lake Winnipeg region, but his knowledge of far-distant and unnamed First Nations peoples was vague at best. He wrote:

I did all I could, while I was at Fort Bourbon, to send the natives in that direction, so as to learn if there were not some sea into which this river discharged, but they are at war with a nation which bars them from this road. I have questioned prisoners of this nation whom our natives had brought expressly to show me. They told me that they were at war with another nation in the west, much further away than their own country.²³

He also made mention of what must have been the First Nations peoples of the Missouri who resided in permanent villages. However, his resources were few. From 1708 to 1712, no supply ship reached Fort Bourbon. According to the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, signed in 1713, title to the post was given to Britain. The Hudson's Bay Company regained possession of York Factory in 1714.

The Hudson's Bay Company Digs in at York Factory

James Knight took charge of York Factory for the Hudson's Bay Company in early September 1714. He and his successors kept daily journals of activities at the post. Until the company established its first inland post in the early 1770s, the journals and other business records maintained at York Factory are by far the best documentary record in existence of fur trade and Aboriginal life west of Hudson Bay, into the Prairies. From 1714 until the founding of Cumberland House in 1774, there is only one season for which a post journal has not survived, that of 1739-1740.²⁴

²³ Jérémie, *Twenty Years*, 33.

²⁴ All of the trade with inland First Nations peoples occurred in the summer months, the bulk of it in June and July. They travelled to York Factory by canoe, and they could not begin their journeys before the rivers were clear of ice. Those travelling great distances had also to be sure that they would reach home before freeze-up in the fall. I read every entry in every York Factory post journal, until the establishment of inland

When the Hudson's Bay Company returned to York Factory in 1714, the regular routine must surely by then have been broken of various inland First Nations groups sending representatives to trade at that post. As noted above, the French at Fort Bourbon went four straight years without seeing a supply ship. The trip for distant First Nations groups was so arduous and time-consuming that it is doubtful that many would have made the journey without certainty of satisfaction upon arrival. In fact, during the first summer back at York Factory, Knight wrote that 18 canoes of Assiniboiné arrived, "who reports the Stone [Assiniboiné] Indians have not been Supply'd for sev^{al} Years past....so they would not come down."²⁵ By the next summer, 1716, word had obviously spread that a reliable trading partner was ensconced at the Bay. By 2 June, when 400 canoes of "the Uplanders" had already arrived, Knight recorded that "there had not been the like for 20 Years at this Factory."²⁶ In fact, so numerous were York Factory's First Nations customers that season that the company was soon running short of trade goods.²⁷

The Hudson's Bay Company at York Factory quickly adapted to and adopted First Nations trade protocols and practices, as undoubtedly had the French at Fort Bourbon. As noted earlier, when Kelsey met the "Naywatame poets" they smoked together and made speeches. They had shared in the calumet ceremony. Although there have been debates surrounding the origin and spread of this traditional Aboriginal ceremony, by the 18th

posts in the 1770s, from the beginning of May until the end of each journal, usually in late August or early September, when the ship from Britain would arrive. All of these records are housed in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba (HBCA), and all are available on microfilm through interlibrary loan.

²⁵ York Factory post journal, 5 June 1715, B.239/a/1, reel 1M154, HBCA. The Assiniboiné were often referred to in early fur trade records as both the Assiniboiné and the Stone Indians. As noted earlier, the name Assiniboiné derives from the Cree word for stone.

²⁶ York Factory post journal, 2 June 1716, B.239/a/2, reel 1M154, HBCA.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 June 1716.

century it was virtually a universal practice among the First Nations peoples of North America.²⁸ These were ceremonies of greeting and assertions of friendship. The pipe was smoked, speeches made and presents exchanged. Only then could trade begin. The Hudson's Bay Company, the French and then the Canadians all accepted the necessity of fitting into these existing First Nations practices and protocols.

James Knight notes the calumet ceremony at York Factory as early as June 1717, when 17 First Nations individuals came into the trading house with "their friendly Pipes."²⁹ Forty years later, James Isham, then in charge at York Factory, noted that "the Chief part of this day spent in Smoaking with the Leading Ind^s in their Grand Callimutts."³⁰ In 1769, when four canoes arrived from inland, Ferdinand Jacobs reported at York Factory that he "Clothed their Captain & his Second with fine Laced Cloths & gave them the other Usual Presents with Brandy and Tobacco," and two years later he noted that he smoked "the friendly Pipe" with both the leaders and young men of visiting First Nations trading groups.³¹ As will be seen often throughout this thesis, although Euroamerican traders often bristled at the need to partake in these ceremonies, the British and Canadians accepted the necessity of adopting these First Nations practices and protocols.

In the early years at York Factory, the identities of the summer arrivals from inland are not always readily discernible, nor can some be determined at all. This is

²⁸ Donald J. Blakeslee, "The Origin and Spread of the Calumet Ceremony," *American Antiquity* 46, no. 4 (October 1981), 759-68.

²⁹ York Factory post journal, 26 June 1717, B.239/a/3, reel 1M154, HBCA.

³⁰ York Factory post journal, 24 June 1755, B.239/a/39, reel 1M156, HBCA. See also the following year's journal, 18 June 1756, B.239/a/41, reel 1M156, and post journal of 1762-1763, 27 June and 9 July 1763 entries, reel 1M157, HBCA.

³¹ York Factory post journals, 3 July 1769, B.239/a/60, and, 25 June 1771, B.239/a/65, reel 1M158, HBCA.

principally the result of three factors. The sociopolitical units of these First Nations groups undoubtedly differed greatly from the larger units that apparently emerged as a result of the 1781-1782 smallpox epidemic. As well, many of the names with which they were identified in these very early records did not continue long in use. Finally, individual record-keepers used words with a meaning particular to their specific place and time: words, names or labels whose meanings have since been lost or misconstrued. Some names appeared only once or twice and were particular to only one writer. Kelsey's "Naywatame poets" is a case in point. These early York Factory records, and many French records of this same era, are replete with now-confusing terminology with respect to First Nations peoples. Often this unclear naming has led to mistakes and unfounded assertions from modern scholars on the trading history and practices of certain First Nations peoples. Nowhere has this been more evident than with respect to the five members of the Blackfoot alliance: the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Gros Ventre and Sarcee.

Some of the terms used by the fur traders of the early 18th century were generic; they were not intended to identify one particular First Nations group. Quite often these labels were meant to describe a very general geographic location or the lack of frequency of contact. "Uplanders" or "upland Indians" were perhaps the most commonly used such terms at York Factory. Variations of the term "upland Indians" were used quite regularly from the first summer of reoccupation of York Factory into the early 1760s.³² It very simply meant First Nations peoples who lived considerably inland from Hudson Bay, who had to travel great distances to get to York Factory and who were only briefly at that

³² Two examples of the dozens of times that these terms were used may be found in these York Factory post journals: 12 August 1715, B.239/a/1, reel 1M154, and, 29 June 1762, B.239/a/49, reel 1M157, HBCA.

post in the summer.³³ “Strange Indians,” “Stranger Indians” and “Strangers” were labels which were all used in these early years as well, probably just to describe particular groups who had never before visited York Factory.³⁴ They were literally strangers to the traders at the post. After the 1740s, a new term arose, “Archithinue,” which was derived from the Cree word for strangers, but this term will be discussed at considerable length below. I got no sense that the very early use of the term “Strange Indians” and its variations was actually connected to the specific name, “Archithinue.” Like Russell, I am reasonably certain that the relative newcomers to the shores of Hudson Bay were using the word strangers much as anyone would today, to identify people whom they themselves had not previously met.³⁵

Terms specific to a particular place and time have resulted in a great deal of misunderstanding. Today, if one uses the term “Plains Indians,” one thinks of a vast array of different First Nations peoples stretching from the Canadian Prairies to Texas. However, as already noted in Chapter One, to 19th-century fur traders on the upper North Saskatchewan River, “Plains Indians” meant at most the five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. In this same period, just downriver from Rocky Mountain House and Edmonton House, at Carlton House, on the lower North Saskatchewan River, the term encompassed different First Nations groups. Similar such examples abounded at York Factory in the 18th century. One concerns this very same term, “Plains Indians.” This is a term which

³³ Andrew Graham confirmed the generic nature of this term in the 1771 draft of his *Observations*. See Graham’s *Observations on Hudson’s Bay*, p. 22, E.2/7, reel 4M101, HBCA. For further confirmation, see also York Factory post journal, 3-6 June 1748, B.239/a/30, reel 1M156, HBCA.

³⁴ See the following entries in the York Factory post journals, HBCA: 26 May, 2 and 4 June 1715, B.239/a/1, reel 1M154; 8 and 23 May 1716, B.239/a/2, reel 1M154; 21 May 1719, B.239/a/5, reel 1M154; and, 20 July 1733, B.239/a/15, reel 1M155.

³⁵ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 135.

was used frequently in the York Factory post journals, but rather than referring to far-distant First Nations peoples of “the Plains,” it seems to have been a generic name for peoples located quite close to that post.³⁶ In fact, in one entry the journalist wrote, “plain Ind^s that is home Indians,”³⁷ by which he meant First Nations peoples who lived close to York Factory. In October 1733, the York Factory journalist wrote that “most of our men went into the Plains to Look for Deer, in the Evening Return^d having Kill^d no Deer.”³⁸ These men either made the trip into present-day southern Manitoba or Saskatchewan in world-record time, or the “Plains” to which they travelled and returned in one day were somewhat closer at hand.

In mid-July 1715, near the end of the first season of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s reoccupation of York Factory, the post journalist wrote, “5 Canoos of Muscotay [see immediately below for discussion of this term] Indians came round from up Portnellson River.”³⁹ This journal entry has been taken as the first evidence that members of the Blackfoot alliance traded at York Factory.⁴⁰ As I hope clearly to demonstrate by the end of this chapter, there is no evidence whatsoever that any more than four individuals, who just might or might not have been a Piikani, Kainai, Siksika, Gros Ventre or Sarcee person, ever traded at York Factory. There quite simply was no direct trade at York

³⁶ For examples of the term’s use in York Factory post journals, see: Memorandum of Canoos, fo. 46, 1757, B.239/a/42; Memorandum of Canoos, fos. 42d.-3, 1757-1758, B.239/a/44; Memorandum of Canoos, fo. 38, 1760, B.239/a/47; Memorandum of Canoos, fos. 45d.-6, 1761, B.239/a/48; and, 10 June, 1 and 5 July 1762 daily entries, B.239/a/49, reel 1M157, HBCA.

³⁷ York Factory post journal, Memorandum of Canoos, fo. 46, 19 May 1757 entry in memorandum, B.239/a/42, reel 1M157, HBCA.

³⁸ York Factory post journal, 28 October 1733, B.239/a/16, reel 1M155, HBCA.

³⁹ York Factory post journal, 13 July 1715, B.239/a/1, reel 1M154, HBCA.

⁴⁰ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 21 and 55.

Factory with any of these five peoples, ever. With the possible exception of these four persons (see below), there is no record that any of the member peoples of the Blackfoot alliance ever sent representatives in whatever number to York Factory to trade.

This 1715 reference is the first recorded use of the term “Muscotay.” It did not reappear in Hudson’s Bay Company records for almost 40 years. Anthony Henday, the first Hudson’s Bay Company inland traveller since Kelsey, used it several times in his 1754-1755 journal. In one journal entry, upon his first reaching the northern Plains, Henday wrote, “We are now entered Muscuty plains, and shall soon see plenty of Buffalo.”⁴¹ Kelsey had not used this term; he had referred to the Plains as “the barren ground.”⁴² Without any apparent analysis, in his 1974 study Arthur J. Ray obviously equated the five canoes of “Muscotay Indians” who arrived at York Factory in 1715 with Henday’s “Muscuty plains,” the northern Plains of current understanding, whose northeastern portion starts near the forks of the North and South Saskatchewan rivers.⁴³ It is undoubtedly the same term. But did it have the same meaning in each widely separated instance? As Dale Russell pointed out, this term derives from a Cree word, *muskotāo*, which means plain or prairie.⁴⁴ As was amply shown above, York Factory journalists often referred to the “plains” and to “Plains Indians,” neither of which was remotely connected to the present-day understanding of these terms.

⁴¹ Anthony Henday, “York Factory to the Blackfeet Country. The Journal of Anthony Henday, 1754-55,” ed. Lawrence J. Burpee. *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*. Third Series, vol. I, section II, 13 August 1754, p. 327. This is the published version of one of four different manuscript versions of Henday’s journal contained in the HBCA. The issue of Henday’s journal will be dealt with at considerable length later in this chapter.

⁴² Warkentin, ed., *The Kelsey Papers*, 22 August 1691, p. 8.

⁴³ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 21 and 55.

⁴⁴ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 132. See also, Watkins and Faries, *A Dictionary*, 139, and, Waugh, LeClaire and Cardinal, eds., *alperta ohci*, 385.

By far the weakest aspect of Ray's seminal work on the western fur trade was in its identification, or rather misidentification, of several First Nations groups. Ray assumed that the "Muscotay Indians" of 1715 were from the northern Plains of present-day Saskatchewan. He made another incorrect assumption when he stated, "These Indians would probably have been the Blood and Blackfoot."⁴⁵ Although Ray never stated it overtly, the wording of the passage from which this single sentence was quoted reads as if "Muscotay Indians" were both known by this term and readily identifiable for a prolonged period. Neither was actually the case. In his meticulous analysis of Ray's work on First Nations groups west of Hudson Bay before 1781, Russell apparently accepted that these "Muscotay Indians" were indeed from the northern Plains, but he concluded that they were likely Cree.⁴⁶ I even question this basic assumption as to the meaning/location of "Muscotay," in this one 1715 instance. However, Russell and I do concur in the argument that, since there is no Euroamerican documentary record and no Niitsitapi oral tradition of canoe-use by the Siksika, Kainai or Piikani, these "Muscotay Indians" could not have been Niitsitapi.

Ray concluded that the occupants of these five canoes were probably Kainai or Siksika, because, he argued, a term other than "Muscotay" apparently "was applied to the Gros Ventre at that time."⁴⁷ The word which Ray claimed was the name for the Gros Ventre was the "Ashkee Indians." His superficial analyses of these two terms,

⁴⁵ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 21. Ray's 1974 book was reprinted in 1976, 1983, 1988 and 1991. A new edition was published in 1998, but, unfortunately, although Ray wrote a new introduction for this edition, the rest of the book was an exact reproduction of the earlier edition. Ray did not address the issue of the identification of First Nations groups, although he did cite Russell's *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree* in the new introduction's bibliography.

⁴⁶ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 132-3.

⁴⁷ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 55.

“Muscotay” and “Ashkee,” were intermingled in his book. Likewise, in his rebuttal, Russell of necessity addressed these two terms together. In the summers of 1716 and 1717, parties of First Nations people arrived at York Factory who were variously identified as the “Uskee Indians,” the “Askee or Land Indians,” and the “Askee or Plains Indians.”⁴⁸ As well, in the summers of 1718 and 1719, there was an individual First Nations person at York Factory whose name was “Askee Ethinee” or “Ashkee Ethinee.”⁴⁹ Ray argued, based primarily on information about this person’s place of origin, “about the Mountain near Red Deer River,”⁵⁰ that the group known as the “Askee Indians” were Gros Ventre (*A’aninin/Atsina*), from the Touchwood Hills region of present-day Saskatchewan.⁵¹ Russell countered with the position that “Askee” was really only another name for “Muscatoy.” The Cree word *uske* means earth or land. He noted that York Factory records list this group as both the “Askee or Land Indians” and the “Askee or Plains Indians.”⁵² Russell argued that “Askee” and “Muscatoy” could have been used interchangeably and that these First Nations people were Cree.⁵³

⁴⁸ York Factory post journals, 1 June 1716, B.239/a/2, and, 26 and 28 June 1717, B.239/a/3, reel 1M154; and, York Factory account book, 1716-1717, fo. 7d., B.239/d/9, reel 1M666, HBCA.

⁴⁹ York Factory post journals, 21 July 1718, B.239/a/4, and, 21 July 1718 and 13 June 1719, B.239/a/5, reel 1M154; and, York Factory account book, 1718-1720, fo. 3d., B.239/d/10, reel 1M666, HBCA.

⁵⁰ York Factory account book, 1718-1720, fo. 3d., B.239/d/10, reel 1M666, HBCA.

⁵¹ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 21, 55 and 70n.

⁵² Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 133, and, York Factory account book, 1716-1717, fo. 7d., B.239/d/9, reel 1M666, HBCA.

⁵³ In fact, in one Cree dictionary, *uske* and *muskotāo* appear as synonyms. Watkins and Faries, *A Dictionary*, 139 and 491.

Two weeks after the June 1716 arrival of the “Uske Indians” at York Factory, 30 canoes of “Mountain Indians” arrived there. Considerable debate exists as to the identity of the “Mountain Indians,” a group mentioned at York Factory in the summers of 1715 through 1718.⁵⁴ Ray stated that they were Mandan, villagers from the Missouri River. Russell argued that they were a Cree group from the vicinity of the Manitoba Escarpment.⁵⁵ Russell’s case is much more convincing.⁵⁶ This debate is significant to this thesis only in that in June 1716, after the “Uske Indians” had already visited York Factory, the journalist wrote that the “Mountain Indians” had “come the furthest” of any group who had yet visited the post.⁵⁷ If the “Mountain Indians” were Cree from the area of the Manitoba Escarpment, then the “Uske” or “Askee Indians” could not possibly have been any of the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Gros Ventre or Sarcee.

David Pentland also pointed out a serious flaw in Ray’s logic, a failing that Russell overlooked. There is nothing in the York Factory records that ties the person, “Askee Ethinee” to the group, the “Askee Indians.” Pentland wrote, “Apparently recognizing that ‘Ethinu’ is the Woods Cree word for ‘man, person, Indian,’ Ray has interpreted the personal name ‘Ashkee Ethinu’ as ‘Ashkee Indian,’ thus discovering the

⁵⁴ See the following entries in these York Factory post journals in the HBCA, on reel 1M154: 12 June 1715, B.239/a/1; 15 June and 12 July 1716, B.239/a/2; 10 and 26 June 1717, B.239/a/3; and, 20 July 1718 in both B.239/a/4 and B.239/a/5.

⁵⁵ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 55-7, and, Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 133-4.

⁵⁶ I find Russell’s case quite compelling, but Binnema, whose doctoral thesis was co-supervised by Ray, dismissed Russell’s arguments and supported Ray’s contention that the “Mountain Indians” were from the permanent villages on the Missouri. Binnema stated that they were either Mandan (*Nú neta*) or Hidatsa (*Hiraáca*). Binnema, “The Common and Contested Ground,” 154 and 182-4.

⁵⁷ York Factory post journal, 15 June 1716, B.239/a/2, reel 1M154, HBCA.

tribe of which he is the chief.”⁵⁸ As Pentland described, many First Nations individuals had personal names that ended in the suffix “Ethinu.” Also, their personal names did not necessarily denote the group to which they belonged. He concluded, and I concur, that there was no reason to connect the “Askee Indians” noted elsewhere in York Factory records with the individual who also visited that post.⁵⁹ There may never really be any certainty over the identity of the “Askee Indians,” or about the group to which the man named “Askee Ethinee” belonged, but there is no logical reason whatsoever to assert that the two were connected to each other or that they were both Gros Ventre. In fact, the man, “Ashkee Ethinee,” was apparently never at York Factory in the same year as were the “Askee Indians.”

These early York Factory records are incredibly informative about relations between Euroamericans and First Nations peoples, and among different First Nations peoples. As had Henry Kelsey when he travelled inland in the 1690s, the officers in charge at York Factory assiduously encouraged intertribal peace, even among groups far removed from the Bay.⁶⁰ Post journalists also noted the practice of First Nations peoples cementing peace and friendship arrangements by the practice of adoption, likely adult adoption.⁶¹ Maintaining consistency with the views expressed during his 1690-1692 trip,

⁵⁸ David Pentland, “The Ashkee Indians,” in *Papers of the Sixteenth Algonquian Conference*. Ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, 1985), 154.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶⁰ For examples, see York Factory post journals, 14 July 1715, B.239/a/1, and, 9 and 18 June 1721, B.239/a/6, reel 1M154, HBCA.

⁶¹ York Factory post journals, 7 May 1716, B.239/a/2, and, 6 June 1717, B.239/a/3, reel 1M154, HBCA. The first reference was to peace arrangements between two longtime foes, the Swampy Cree and the Chipewyan, north of York Factory. The second was between the Cree and an unidentified people west of York Factory. In this latter instance, not only did the journalist mention that they were to meet “to Confirmm the Peace & to Adopt Children One Amongst Another too be their Sons & Daughters,” but

when an unidentified group arrived at York Factory to trade in 1718, Kelsey, then the officer in charge of that post, first lectured them against making war on their neighbours and then said, “that we did not bring Powder Guns & other necessities to destroy mankind but to kill food for them & their fam^{ly}.”⁶² He tried to get them to promise to stop going to war and to devote their energies to gathering furs for trade.

James Knight also described a practice which on the surface seems irrational, if not suicidal, but a practice that was noted in later years. In 1715, he had encouraged a group who lived far inland to make peace with another inland people. The next summer the first group returned having travelled 39 days to get to York Factory. They reported that they had indeed made peace with their traditional enemies, who lived another ten days beyond them. The leader reported to Knight that in order to confirm the peace they had given “to them Indians that were there Enemys most of there Guns Powder & Shott wth. Knives Kettles & hatchetts and that he was afraid at these returning back home without Guns Powder & Shott or anything else to Defend themselves with there Enemys may break out a Warr again wth. e’m & kill e’m with there own weapons as they had given e’m.”⁶³ The one group had apparently left itself defenceless at the hands of its onetime, perhaps even longtime, enemy, now friend, as a means of establishing that friendship and of demonstrating faith in its solidity and longevity. Despite the fact that much trepidation was soon, if not immediately, felt at the potentially disastrous outcome of this magnanimous overture, there seemed to be some cultural factor at play here that overrode what today might appear to be common sense. In the 1820s, as will be discussed in a later chapter, a Cree group on the northern Plains did much the same thing,

that the company was providing a present to be carried to the appointed place “as a Token of Friendship” for “both Nations.”

⁶² York Factory post journal, 1 August 1718, B.239/a/4, reel 1M154, HBCA.

⁶³ York Factory post journal, 18 June 1716, B.239/a/2, reel 1M154, HBCA.

trading all of their guns, during a brief period of peace, to the Niitsitapi, then their longtime enemies.⁶⁴

Arthur J. Ray has also claimed that these early York Factory journals demonstrate that the Sarcee, allies of the Niitsitapi, regularly visited that post before and after the 1730s. Ray claimed that those people identified simply as “Strange” Indians “may have been Sarsi Indians.” He offered no argument whatsoever to back up this assertion, other than that “Strange Indians” was a term generally applied to newcomers to York Factory who had travelled “from the far west.”⁶⁵ “Strange Indians,” as noted above, was indeed a generic term applied, especially prior to the 1720s, to first-time customers at the post who had travelled a great distance, but there is absolutely no reason to assume that any of them were Sarcee. Some of these “Strange Indians” came to York Factory in the summer of 1715. It is highly unlikely that a group located in present-day Alberta would have travelled that far to trade, particularly since the Hudson’s Bay Company had returned to York Factory only the previous September. There would have been no way that the Sarcee, even if they knew of the existence of that post, could possibly have known that it was then occupied by traders who actually had a supply of trade goods. As noted above, in the later years of French occupation, First Nations groups stayed away in droves because of the failure of supply ships to reach Fort Bourbon.

Ray’s second error in deducing that Sarcee traded at York Factory is more understandable. He was one of the first to try seriously to determine the identities of First Nations peoples trading at York Factory. He had little to assist him in writing his sweeping study. As a result, he did mistake the name of a Cree group for the similar variant of a name for the Sarcee. Ray wrote:

⁶⁴ Brandon House post journal, 8 November 1829, B.22/a/23, reel 1M17, HBCA.

⁶⁵ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 57.

Journal entries in later years suggest that this group did, in fact, visit the post. In 1728-9, 1729-30, 1730-1 and 1740-1, a group variously called the Shussuanna, Shusuanna, Su Hannah, and Susuhannah came to York Factory, usually in company with the Assiniboine and Western Cree (then listed as Keskatchewan Indians). Although they cannot be identified positively, considering that they came from the Saskatchewan region but were not listed as either a band of Assiniboine or Cree according to Andrew Graham, a trader at York Factory, they may well have been the Sarsi. Graham reported that this tribe was known as the Sussou in the late eighteenth century.⁶⁶

The authority cited here by Ray was Andrew Graham, whose *Observations on Hudson's Bay* went through several drafts between 1767 and 1791, and which were finally published in 1969.⁶⁷ By the 1780s, the Hudson's Bay Company was trading directly with the Sarcee in their home territory on the North Saskatchewan River. Graham was using a variant of their name.⁶⁸ The "Susuhannah" of the early York Factory journals were not the Sarcee as Ray assumed and argued, but rather a Cree group. Russell has since proved that beyond any doubt.⁶⁹ As Russell noted, and as I have confirmed, the "Susuhannah" Cree were first mentioned in York Factory records in the summer of 1730, not in 1729 as Ray stated, and were regular visitors to that post until the 1750s. They were still an identifiable group into the early 1780s.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid., 57 and 59. Ray cited the published version.

⁶⁷ Andrew Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91*. Ed. Glyndwr Williams (London, 1969), and, Glyndwr Williams, "Andrew Graham," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume V, 1801 to 1820* (Toronto, 1983), 362-3.

⁶⁸ F.W. Hodge, *Handbook of Indians of Canada* (Ottawa, 1969 [1913]), 408-10. Here Hodge gave many variants of the name Sarcee used in published works, variants which included "Sussee," "Sussekoon," "Sussez" and "Sussi," to name but a few.

⁶⁹ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 136-8.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

French Activity in the West

After the French relinquished control of Hudson Bay in 1714, they were forced to return to the lengthy inland water routes from the St. Lawrence to gain access to the regions west of the Great Lakes. As early as 1723, French traders, whom the Hudson's Bay Company then referred to as "the woodrunners," were back among York Factory's concerns.⁷¹ By the end of that decade, Cree living close to York Factory were reporting that the French had incited the Sioux to wage war on the Assiniboine, with whom the English traded.⁷² In 1732, there were reports that the French had finally entered the territory of First Nations groups who traded at York Factory. The post journal reads:

att noon 24 Cannoes of ShuSuhannah Indians and Sinepoets [Assiniboine], came here to trade by whom I Understand that most of the Sturgeon [Cree] Indians are gone to the French to trade, and will not be here this Year, and that the French wood runners came this Last Winter amongst most of our Upland Indians, and threatened to Proclaim war, Provided they did not come and Trade with them.⁷³

It is hard to imagine how either the French or the English could have carried through on such a threat, if one had actually been made, as these newcomers were vastly outnumbered in the home territory of the First Nations peoples and it was the Euroamericans who were dependent on the goodwill of their hosts for their very survival. In 1735, the traders at York Factory received the first reports, from visiting "Sturgeon" and "Keskachewan" Cree groups from the interior, that the French had built a post west of Hudson Bay, "on this Side y^e: Little Sea," or Lake Winnipeg.⁷⁴ The Hudson's Bay

⁷¹ York Factory post journal, 9 August 1723, B.239/a/8, reel 1M155, HBCA.

⁷² York Factory post journal, 12 June 1729, B.239/a/11, reel 1M155, HBCA. For another example of purported French instigation of the Sioux against "Upland Indians," see York Factory post journal, 8 June 1731, B.239/a/13, reel 1M155, HBCA.

⁷³ York Factory post journal, 16 June 1732, B.239/a/14, reel 1M155, HBCA.

⁷⁴ York Factory post journal, 4 June 1735 (and 31 May to 2 June 1735 entries, as well), B.239/a/17, reel 1M155, HBCA. This was undoubtedly a reference to either the

Company's trade at York Factory with its First Nations customers from the West was now in jeopardy.

The French fur trade west of the Great Lakes was inextricably intertwined with the search for a transcontinental route to the Pacific Ocean. As Lawrence Burpee so eloquently wrote, "The project of finding a way overland to the Western Sea dates back to the very beginnings of Canada. Like a will-o'-the-wisp, the goal receded always a little beyond the reach of those who sought it so eagerly."⁷⁵ Profits from the fur trade were supposed to finance western exploration. And the fur traders were the explorers.

By 1679, French traders had established a post on the western shore of Lake Superior, at Kaministiquia, near Grand Portage (see Figure One). Posts at or near that site, including the successor post, named Fort William, became both the depots and jumping-off points for all Canadian-based fur trade and exploration activity west of the Great Lakes and Hudson Bay, until the early 19th century. French traders had apparently made it no farther west than Lake of the Woods by 1730, despite sporadic efforts to discover "la Mer de l'Ouest." That year, Pierre de la Vérendrye was appointed by the French government to lead the search for the Western Sea. He was given no financial support from the government. Instead, he was granted a monopoly in the fur trade west

post known as "la Barrière," built about 1733, or to the first Maurepas post, built in 1734 (see Figure One).

⁷⁵ Lawrence J. Burpee, ed., *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Vérendrye and His Sons, with Correspondence between the Governors of Canada and the French Court, Touching the Search for the Western Sea* (Toronto, 1927), 4.

Figure One. Map Showing the Locations of Select French and Hudson's Bay Company Fur Trade Posts in the Northwest.

of the Great Lakes.⁷⁶ This necessitated his establishing a partnership with several Montreal merchants to finance his expedition, which finally left the St. Lawrence in the summer of 1731. The private financing also resulted in less-than-stellar achievements on the exploration side of the combined fur trade and exploration endeavours in the West over the next 30 years; the merchant partners were more concerned with immediate financial returns on their investments than with risky and costly ventures into unexplored territories.

La Vérendrye, his three sons, his nephew and their colleagues gradually and fitfully extended the reach of French knowledge and trade. By the early 1740s, there were French trading posts strung from Lake Superior to the Saskatchewan River. They were firmly entrenched in the territory of the Cree and Assiniboine who had previously of necessity travelled to trade at York Factory. In 1738, one of La Vérendrye's sons, François, led an expedition to the Mandan Villages on the Missouri River.⁷⁷ Four years later, he and his brother, Louis-Joseph, travelled with a party perhaps as far as present-day Wyoming. Yet even before the return of the brothers' expedition, the focus was shifting to the Saskatchewan River, not only as the potential route to the Western Sea, but as a prime source of furs. By 1741, there was a French trading post at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River.

La Vérendrye voluntarily relinquished command of the western posts in 1744. His replacement, who accomplished very little in his three-year tenure, was Nicolas

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1-9; Yves F. Zoltvany, "Pierre Gaultier de Varennes et de la Vérendrye," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume III, 1741 to 1770* (Toronto, 1974), 246-54; Antoine Champagne, *Les La Vérendrye et Le Poste de l'Ouest. No. 12, Les Cahiers de l'Institut d'Histoire* (Quebec, 1968); and, Antoine Champagne, *Nouvelles Études sur les La Vérendrye et le Poste de l'Ouest. No. 17, Les Cahiers de l'Institut d'Histoire* (Quebec, 1971).

⁷⁷ Antoine Champagne, "François Gaultier de Tremblay," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 288-9.

Joseph de Noyelles.⁷⁸ La Vérendrye resumed command in 1747. Upon his death in 1749, charge of the “poste de l’Ouest” was given to Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre and he in turn, in 1752, was followed by Chevalier de La Corne.⁷⁹ Although it was once believed that by the 1750s French posts had extended well beyond the forks of the North and South Saskatchewan rivers, it is now certain that the most westerly of these posts had not reached that point.⁸⁰

There is no documentary proof that the French of this period ever traded directly with the Niitsitapi. However, French records do provide some interesting material which contributes to ongoing debates about these peoples. And in these French records, 20th-century historians have sighted peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. As will be demonstrated, these sightings/this contention cannot be proven. In 1737, the result of La Vérendrye’s activities in the West, a map was produced that showed the regions west of lakes Winnipegosis and Manitoba, and that labelled this vast area as “Pays de La Nation des hiattchiritiny.”⁸¹ One can safely assume that the generic term, “Nation des hiattchiritiny,” included many First Nations peoples, among them undoubtedly members of the Blackfoot alliance (see discussion of the term “hyactchéjlini” below).

⁷⁸ S. Dale Standen, “Nicolas-Joseph de Noyelles de Fleurimont,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume III, 1741 to 1770* (Toronto, 1974), 491-3.

⁷⁹ Donald Chaput, “Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre,” and, C.J. Russ, “Louis La Corne,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume III, 1741 to 1770* (Toronto, 1974), 374-6 and 331-2.

⁸⁰ Champagne, *Nouvelles Études*, 49-57.

⁸¹ “Carte contenant Les Nouvelles découvertes de L’ouest _En Canada, mers, Rivières, Lacs, et _ Nations qui y habitent en L’année_ 1737,” H2/902/1737, NMC24559, National Map Collection, NAC. A 1912 copy of this map is also held at the NAC, H2/902/1737(1912), NMC24561. This 1737 map was reproduced in Burpee, ed., *Journals and Letters*, Map 3, facing p. 116.

In 1751, Legardeur, who made his headquarters at Fort la Reine (near present-day Portage la Prairie, Manitoba), sent his second-in-command, Joseph Boucher de Niverville,⁸² to pursue the quest for a route to the Western Sea. In a memoir of 1753, Legardeur wrote that Niverville's men established a post, Fort la Jonquière, "three hundred leagues above that of Paskoya [Basquia, near present-day The Pas, Manitoba]."⁸³ Despite Legardeur's claim, the post was almost certainly located below the forks of the Saskatchewan, probably near present-day Nipawin, Saskatchewan.⁸⁴ Niverville was so ill that he was never able to leave Basquia to join his men at the upriver post. Legardeur's description of events at Fort la Jonquière is a second-hand, if not third-hand, account. Apparently at his base at Fort la Reine, he had been trying to arrange peace between the allied Cree and the Assiniboine, and their inveterate enemies, whom he listed as "les hyactchéjlini, Les Brochets et Gros Ventres."⁸⁵ This intertribal warfare was an insurmountable obstacle to his exploration efforts. He thought that he had arranged a peace, both through the Cree and Assiniboine return of prisoners and through his generous gift-giving, but such was not to be the case. Apparently, Assiniboine and "yhatchéjllini" met at Fort la Jonquière and renewed the peace, but the Assiniboine then

⁸² Pierre Dufour, "Joseph Boucher de Niverville," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume V, 1801 to 1820* (Toronto, 1983), 97-100.

⁸³ A manuscript copy of this memoir is held by the NAC. "Memoire ou Journal Sommaire du voyage de Jacques Repentigny Legardeur de Saint Pierre Chevalier de L'ordre Royal et Militaire de S'Louis Capitaine d'une Compagnie des Troupes de detachées de la Marine en Canada chargé de la découverte de la Mer de L'Ouest." fos. 2-21d., Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Haldimand Papers, MG21, Add. MSS. 21686, reel A-615. The memoir, with exactly the same title, was published, in both English and French, in *Report on Canadian Archives, 1886* (Ottawa, 1887), clviii-clxix. The quotation above is from this published English translation.

⁸⁴ Champagne, *Nouvelles Études*, 49-51, and, Dufour, "Joseph Boucher de Niverville," 98.

⁸⁵ Legardeur, "Memoir," fo. 5d., MG21, Add. MSS.21686, A-615, NAC.

treacherously, according to the French, fell upon the outnumbered “yhatchéjllini” and killed all but a few women and children, whom they took as prisoners.⁸⁶ Legardeur had hoped that the “hyactchéjlini” would be his guides to a group located even farther west, a group which he called “les Kinouge8ilini.”⁸⁷ He wrote, “I must not conceal that it is very difficult to make use of the Indians of these quarters for the discovery with which I am entrusted, because the English, whom they fear, incite them to make war on the Nations who do not trade with them; this will always be a great obstacle to penetrating farther.”⁸⁸ Legardeur was either misinformed or misrepresenting the case. Both English and French traders asserted that the others were inciting intertribal warfare in the West. Probably neither was. It made no sense for them to do so. It would not only reduce the overall trade, but it could threaten the personal safety and lives of all Euroamericans involved in the trade.

Now just who were these various First Nations peoples named by Legardeur? The word “hyactchéjlini” (undoubtedly as well as the earlier-noted term, or variant, “hiattchiritiny”) derives from the Plains Cree word for strangers or foreigners, *ayacheyinew*.⁸⁹ The most commonly used English version of the word was “Archithinue.” It really could mean any First Nations people who were not Cree or Assiniboiné. It was a generic name. The trick has always been trying to identify the specific group, if one particular group was indeed intended to be identified by a given writer, by this less-than-revealing label. With no explanation for his conclusion, Antoine

⁸⁶ Ibid., fos. 8d.-9d.

⁸⁷ Ibid., fo. 9d.

⁸⁸ Legardeur, “Memoir,” *Report on Canadian Archives*, clxv.

⁸⁹ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 189; Watkins and Faries, *A Dictionary*, 186; and, Waugh, LeClaire and Cardinal, eds., *alperta ohci*, 8.

Champagne simply asserted that Legardeur's "Iatcheouilini" were "Pieds-Noirs," or Blackfeet (Niitsitapi, but maybe Siksika?).⁹⁰ If he was correct, then this reference to 1751 activity at Fort la Jonquière would be the first evidence of direct trade by the "Blackfeet" (Siksika, Piikani or Kainai?) with any Euroamerican traders. Lawrence Burpee quoted J.B. Tyrrell on the matter of Legardeur. Tyrrell wrote, "Yhatchejllini is a Swampy Cree word, meaning strangers or slaves, and was applied either to the Blackfeet or the Beaver [Dunne-za] Indians. Kinougo8ilini means 'pike Indians'."⁹¹ Obviously, since the Beaver were a northern people, Burpee and Tyrrell must have concluded that these particular "Yhatchejllini" were Blackfoot-speaking peoples. Dale Russell proffered no specific identification, but he concluded that these "Hyactchélini" were residents of the Missouri River.⁹² Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, onetime aide-de-camp to Louis Joseph de Montcalm, did write that the "Jatihiline" were a "nation située sur le Missouri."⁹³ Bougainville was incredibly detailed in his description of the locations of many First Nations peoples of the far West, but he himself had never been west of Lake Ontario, and he described many peoples whom no French explorer or fur trader had ever visited either.

Although Russell offered no argument for his conclusion that the "Hyactchélini" were a Missouri River group, it is apparent that it stemmed from this group's friendly association at Fort la Jonquière with the "Brochets" and the "Gros Ventre." Citing a

⁹⁰ Champagne, *Les La Vérendrye*, 408-10, and, *Nouvelles Études*, 127.

⁹¹ Joseph Burr Tyrrell, quoted in Burpee, ed., *Journals and Letters*, 35n.

⁹² Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 58 and 189-90.

⁹³ Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Mémoire de Bougainville sur l'état de la Nouvelle-France à l'époque de la Guerre de sept ans (1757)* (Paris, 1861), 578. See also Étienne Taillemite, "Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, Comte de Bougainville," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume V, 1801 to 1820* (Toronto, 1983), 102-6, and, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Adventure In the Wilderness: The American Journals of Louis Antoine de Bougainville, 1756-1760*. Ed. Edward P. Hamilton (Norman, 1990).

published La Vérendrye map, Russell did not try to identify “les Brochets,” but he did say that they apparently lived on the Missouri River, “above the Hidatsa.”⁹⁴ All three maps cited in the footnote below show “Les Brochets” on the Missouri River, above a group then known as “La Belle Nation.” The original French manuscript map, alone of these three, also shows both of these peoples upriver from the “Mantanes,” the Mandan (*Nú neta*). None of the three versions of the map shows any group labelled Gros Ventre or Hidatsa (*Hiraáca*). Two versions of another French map, dated 1742 and 1754, show a river flowing from the north into the lower Saskatchewan River, labelled as “R du Brochet.” Both show this river to be in the heart of the territory of the “Cristinaux,” the Cree,⁹⁵ and nowhere near the people called “Les Brochets” on the earlier-cited maps. However, apparently based on reports of La Vérendrye’s visit to the Missouri in the late 1730s, Bougainville wrote that “*les Kinongewiniris ou les Brochets*” lived in three villages on the Missouri River, above those of the Mandan.⁹⁶

As for Legardeur’s “Gros Ventre,” they were almost certainly, as Russell argued, the Hidatsa, and not the *Atsina/A’aninin* of the Saskatchewan region. The Mandan and Hidatsa were closely allied peoples who lived in several permanent villages next to each

⁹⁴ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 58. The undated La Vérendrye map cited by Russell is in Burpee, ed., *Journals and Letters*, facing p. 289. The published Burpee map was based on a manuscript map entitled, “Hudson’s - Bay’s Country after La Veranderie. About 1740,” H2/902/1740, NMC24562, National Map Collection, NAC. This in turn was based on a French manuscript map entitled, “Carte contenant Les Nouvelles Dé couvertes De L’ouest En Canada, Lac Rivieres Et Nations qui y habittent_ En Lannée 1740,” H3/902/1740, NMC9989, National Map Collection, NAC.

⁹⁵ “Carte Physique des Terres Les plus élevés de la Partie Occidenl du Canada. Ou l’on voit les Nouvelles Découvertes des Officiers Français a l’Ouest au Lac Supérieur, Avec les Rivieres et les Lacs don’t M. Jeremie a parle dans la relation de la Baye d’Hudson,” A/902/[1742] (1852-1853), NMC18212, and, B/902/1754, NMC13295, National Map Collection, NAC.

⁹⁶ Bougainville, *Mémoire*, 579.

other on the upper Missouri River. Unfortunately, and at times confusingly, for modern scholars, the French referred to two completely culturally and linguistically unrelated First Nations peoples as Gros Ventre. The name stuck to one people and it is the name that they today still use for themselves. These are the Gros Ventre of present-day Montana, the *A'aninin* or *Atsina*.⁹⁷ This French appellation for the Hidatsa, though out of vogue for well over a century, was for a considerable time the name by which this people was most commonly known to virtually all Euroamericans. Both distinct peoples have also often been known in the past by the English translation of this French name, Big Bellies, as well as a variety of other shared names, including Minatarees and Fall Indians.⁹⁸ Since no other group was known by this name, and since Legardeur's Gros Ventre were at Fort la Jonquière with "les Brochets," residents of the Missouri, Russell has logically reasoned that these Gros Ventre were indeed the Hidatsa, a First Nations people who lived in permanent villages close to the Mandan. Bougainville also noted that right next to the "Brochets" were "les *Macateoualasites* ou *Pieds-Noirs*."⁹⁹ These are

⁹⁷ Regina Flannery, *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part I: Social Life* (Washington, 1953), and, Loretta Fowler, *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778-1984* (Ithaca, 1987). See also Alfred W. Bowers, *Hidatsa Social and Ceremonial Organization* (Lincoln, 1992). *Atsina* is the name in Blackfoot for the Gros Ventre, a name by which they have been known for decades. *A'aninin* is the Gros Ventre ethnonym for themselves, a name not nearly so widely known or used, until quite recently.

⁹⁸ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 200-12. Here Russell provided a wonderful summary of the sources and debates concerning both peoples known as Gros Ventre, the Hidatsa and the present-day Gros Ventre (*A'aninin/Atsina*), and their presence on and about the Saskatchewan River. See also Binnema's appendix on the identification of First Nations peoples in his "The Common and Contested Ground," 405-9, and, two pieces by Thomas F. and Alice B. Kehoe, "The Identification of the Fall or Rapid Indians," *Plains Anthropologist* 19, no. 65 (August 1974), 231-2, and, "Note to 'The Identification of the Fall or Rapid Indians'," *Plains Anthropologist* 19, no. 66 (November 1974), 302.

⁹⁹ Bougainville, *Mémoire*, 579.

not any of the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples, but rather, undoubtedly, a sub-group of the Hidatsa, identified as the Blackfoot or Blackshoes into the 19th century.¹⁰⁰

This complicated, hopefully not convoluted nor confusing, examination of apparently esoteric French naming was required in order to determine, if possible, when the Niitsitapi first established direct trade with Euroamericans. However, surviving French documents do not answer this question. Legardeur's Gros Ventre may reasonably be concluded to have been the Hidatsa, not the Gros Ventre/*Atsina/A'aninin*. As for his "Hyactchéjlini," they might have been any group foreign or strangers to the Cree. There is no reason to conclude that they were definitely Niitsitapi, nor for that matter that they were not the Niitsitapi. As for the "Brochets" and the "Kinougeouilini," French sources are not only confusing but conflicting. As noted above, Legardeur had hoped to use the "Hyactchéjlini" as his guides and entree to the "Kinougeouilini." Both the "Hyactchéjlini" and the "Brochets" were at Fort la Jonquière together. But Bougainville said that the "Brochets" and the "Kinongewiniris" were one and the same people; these were just two names for one group.¹⁰¹ Legardeur's "Kinougeouilini" or "Kinouge8ilini" would appear to be Bougainville's "Kinongewiniris." If they were the "Brochets" and if the "Brochets" were already trading at Fort la Jonquière with the "Hyactchéjlini," why would Legardeur need the one to reach the yet-to-be-contacted other? It makes no discernible sense.

¹⁰⁰ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 203. Variations of this name appear in the Lewis and Clark journals. See Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, Volume 3, August 25, 1804 - April 6, 1805*. Ed. Gary E. Moulton (Lincoln, 1987), 205n. An even more well-known group than these Blackshoe Hidatsa, another people who are also totally unrelated to the Niitsitapi, are the Blackfoot Sioux.

¹⁰¹ Bougainville, *Mémoire*, 579.

Brochet is the French word for “pike,” the type of fish. “Kinougo8ilini” is apparently also the Cree word for “pike Indians.”¹⁰² Because of the French maps noted above which show “R du Brochet” as a northern tributary of the Saskatchewan, in Cree territory, Lawrence Burpee concluded that the “Brochet” were Woods Cree.¹⁰³ Pike would also appear to be the English translation of the Shoshone name for the Siksika.¹⁰⁴ However, since the French had not yet encountered any Shoshone people, it does not seem likely that this bears directly on the problem. The Kainai were also known by variants of “Kine-ne-ai-koon,”¹⁰⁵ which may be related to the name “Kinougo8ilini.” This is definitely a stretch and probably no help whatsoever in trying to pin down the identity of the “Brochets” and/or the “Kinougo8ilini.” One should conclude, not as Burpee did that these were Cree, but rather that their true identity can, or will likely, never be known. Niitsitapi may indeed have traded at Fort la Jonquière when it was founded in 1751, but no proof of that trade exists. Nevertheless, it is a virtual certainty that the French were the first Euroamericans met by the Niitsitapi, whether at a post on the Saskatchewan River or closer to their home territory. John Ewers wrote, “Whether the Blackfeet first saw them at their downriver posts on the Saskatchewan or in their own country, Frenchmen must have been the first whites these Indians met. A strong indication of this survives in the Blackfoot name for Frenchmen, ‘Real (or original) Old Man People’.”¹⁰⁶ The word in Blackfoot for Frenchman is *Niitsaapiikoan*, while that for

¹⁰² Tyrrell and Burpee, in Burpee, ed., *Journals and Letters*, 34n. and 247n.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 247n.

¹⁰⁴ Hodge, *Handbook*, 428 and 620.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁰⁶ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 24.

Whiteman is *Náápiikoan*. The adjunct *Niit* means original, real or genuine.¹⁰⁷ Just as the Niitsitapi are the real or original people, Frenchmen/*Niitsaapiikoan* are the original Whitemen, the first Whitemen encountered by the Niitsitapi.

The Archithinue Trade at York Factory?

Although no Hudson's Bay Company records from the 1730s, 1720s or earlier even hint at visits to York Factory of Kainai, Siksika or Piikani, two historians have asserted regular trading trips by representatives of at least some of these peoples, up to 1733. The supposed basis for this unfounded assertion is in the company records of the 1750s. In 1974, Arthur J. Ray wrote that all three of the Blood (Kainai), Blackfoot (Siksika) and Gros Ventre (*Atsina/A'aninin*) peoples "were known to have traded at the post [York Factory] in later years." He went on:

For instance, as late as 1758 James Isham, then in charge of York Factory, wrote to Ferdinand Jacobs at Fort Churchill and informed him that five canoes of 'Bloody Indians (or Mithcoo Ethenue) [his {Isham's} parentheses] came down to trade.' Significantly, he added, 'none of the tribe has been here since 1733.' This remark clearly implies that some Blood had the practice of coming down to the Bay during the early decades of the eighteenth century. Similarly, in 1757, the 'Earchithinues' came to York Factory in company with a large party of Assiniboine and Cree from the Saskatchewan area. The term "Earchithinue" and its more commonly used variant, 'Archithinue,' was a Cree word that was applied to the Blackfoot [Ray obviously here meant all three Niitsitapi peoples, the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani] and the Gros Ventre. Precise ethnic identification is therefore not possible.¹⁰⁸

Citing this Ray passage, but not the original Hudson's Bay Company Archives document noted by Ray, Theodore Binnema later claimed, "It was in company with one of these

¹⁰⁷ Donald G. Frantz and Norma Jean Russell, *Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Roots, and Affixes* (Toronto, 1989), 150, 152, 370 and 462.

¹⁰⁸ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 55.

Cree bands that a party of 'Bloody Indians (or Mithcoo Ethenue)' came to York Factory in 1733."¹⁰⁹ Later in his thesis, Binnema further asserted:

With the French posts abandoned because of the Seven Years' War, the Natives of the northwestern plains were forced to turn back to the HBC as sole supplier of European goods. Not surprisingly, visits from the Blood Indians, which had ceased after the French reached the Saskatchewan River, resumed in 1758 and continued occasionally until 1763. Although the Blackfoot [Binnema, like Ray, included all three of the Piikani, Kainai and Siksika in this Blackfoot appellation] visits to York Factory were probably motivated in part by curiosity - they were not routine or necessary for the Blackfoot - the fact that Blackfoot appearances at the Bay were most common when traders were absent from the interior suggests that the Blackfoot were directly affected by the withdrawal of these traders. At any rate, Blackfoot visits ceased completely after 1763 when competition resumed. The Blackfoot were evidently quite satisfied with their arrangement with their Cree suppliers.¹¹⁰

Besides the presence of the French inland posts as deterrents to these supposed visits of the Niitsitapi to York Factory, Ray also argued that the adoption of the horse by these peoples, by the 1740s, was also a determining factor. He stated:

This development, along with an increasingly grassland economic orientation which became characteristic of such groups as the Blood and Blackfoot, meant that many bands of these tribes no longer would have been able to make the journey to the Bay, since they had abandoned the use of canoes. This may have been an additional reason why the few who continued to do so travelled with the Assiniboine and Cree in later years on their trips down to York Factory. The Assiniboine and Cree could have served as helmsmen in the Blackfoot and Blood canoes though there is no evidence that this was the case.¹¹¹

Ray also asserted:

Those that did occasionally make the voyage such as the Shusuanna, Blood, and Archithinue, always arrived in company with the Assiniboine and Cree, suggesting that perhaps they were not permitted to do so without the escort of the

¹⁰⁹ Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 186 and 186n.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 197-8. Elsewhere in his thesis (p. 188), Binnema stated that "the Blood and other 'Earchethinue'" stopped visiting York Factory in the 1730s, when their guides and companions on these trips, Cree and Assiniboine, started frequenting the French inland posts, and that these same Cree and Assiniboine probably escorted the Archithinue to these French posts.

¹¹¹ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 59-60.

latter groups. Individual Cree and Assiniboiné may also have travelled as envoys with these parties. For instance, one of the leading Bloody Indian Captains (Trading Leaders) who regularly visited York Factory was an Assiniboiné. He may have served in some essentially diplomatic fashion that enabled the Bloody Indians to pass peacefully through Assiniboiné and Cree territory.¹¹²

Ray and Binnema have made some serious errors. The term, Archithinúe, and its many variants, was derived, as noted earlier, from the Cree word, *ayacheyinew*, meaning stranger or foreigner. It has also been interpreted to mean enemy or slave.¹¹³ As will be shown in Chapter Three, in the 1780s the term "Slave" replaced "Archithinúe" in the fur traders' lexicon, and soon the new term did come to be applied exclusively to the members of the Blackfoot alliance. Archithinúe was indeed applied to the three Niitsitapi peoples and the Gros Ventre, as Ray firmly asserted, but not exclusively to them, as Ray failed to mention. As will be more than amply demonstrated later in this chapter, many and varied First Nations peoples could be and were encompassed by this term. Just as all Germans are Europeans but not all Europeans are Germans, the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai and Gros Ventre were all Archithinúe, but not all Archithinúe were Niitsitapi and/or Gros Ventre. At least one very well known document unequivocally demonstrates this fact, a Hudson's Bay Company journal written in 1772-1773 which listed nine different Archithinúe peoples by name.¹¹⁴ While some original 18th-century references to Archithinúe are definitely to one or more of the Piikani, Kainai, Siksika and Gros Ventre,

¹¹² Ibid., 59.

¹¹³ As early as 1836, Albert Gallatin noted that the name "Slaves," as then longtime applied collectively to the Piikani, Kainai, Siksika, Gros Ventre and Sarcee, was a misinterpretation of the word for strangers. Albert Gallatin, *A Synopsis of the Indian Tribes within the United States East of the Rocky Mountains, and in the British and Russian Possessions in North America* (New York, 1973 [1836]), 19.

¹¹⁴ Matthew Cocking inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 1 December 1772, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA. Much more will be presented on this man and this journal later in the chapter.

and other references just might possibly be to these four peoples, some definitely are not; they are references to other First Nations peoples, either individually identifiable or simply identifiable as not being Niitsitapi or Gros Ventre. For instance, no Niitsitapai or Gros Ventre were among the "Earchithinues," noted above by Ray, who accompanied a large party of Cree and Assiniboiné on a visit to York Factory in 1757. Although their number was never given, these visiting Archithinue were elsewhere in this same post journal clearly identified as "Crow [probably *Absaroke*] Indians."¹¹⁵ Obviously, not all Archithinue were "the Blackfoot and the Gros Ventre," as Ray stated. But as will be shown later in this chapter, Ray was following in the footsteps of many who speculated on or positively asserted the identity of the Archithinue. For instance, Harold Innis, A.S. Morton, E.E. Rich and Glyndwr Williams all stated that Archithinue was a term that solely encompassed the three Niitsitapi peoples, and the Gros Ventre.¹¹⁶ Ray said that John Ewers, the renowned historian of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, indicated "that the term 'Archithinue' was a Cree word which was applied to the Blackfoot and their

¹¹⁵ On 25 June 1757, the York Factory journal entry reads, "this morning 99 Canues of pegsgoma, Keskachewan, Esinepoets and Earchithnues Came to trade." These "Earchithinue" are then clearly identified at the end of this journal, in a list of all canoes that visited the post that trading year, a section entitled, "A Memorandum of Canues from August Y^c 13th 1756 to July Y^c 1757." The entries in this list for 25 and 26 June name six different First Nations groups, "Sturgeon Indians & Crow Indians, Keskachewan, pegsgoma, Esinepoets & missinepy Ind^s." All but the "Esinepoets" and the "Crow" are readily identifiable as Cree groups. The "Esinepoets" are Assiniboiné. Therefore, the Crow must in this case be the "Earchithinues." York Factory post journal, 25 June 1757 daily entry and fo. 46, B.239/a/42, reel 1M157, HBCA. According to the daily journal, the rest of 25 June was spent with the company officers dressing and smoking with these visitors. For a detailed analysis of Cree groups of this period, see Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*.

¹¹⁶ Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (Toronto, 1970), 139; Arthur S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*. Ed. Lewis G. Thomas (Toronto, 1973), 237; Edwin Ernest Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto, 1967), 123; and, Glyndwr Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade: 1670-1870," *The Beaver* Outfit 314, No. 2 (October 1983), 14-5.

Sarsi and Gros Ventre allies as well.”¹¹⁷ Despite Ray’s assertion, what Ewers actually wrote on the exact page cited by Ray, when discussing Anthony Henday’s encounter with the Archithinue, was: “Possibly in his time the Crees may have used this general term in speaking not only of the Blackfoot tribes and their Sarsi and Gros Ventre allies, but of the hostile Shoshoni as well, for Hendry said that they comprised several tribes at war with one another.”¹¹⁸ In spite of the fact that Ewers did not conduct any research in the unpublished records of the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives and that Ray’s work was largely based on these unpublished records, Ray failed to notice the subtlety. Archithinue was not a term exclusively applied to the Niitsitapi and their allies. Nevertheless, so pervasive has this false understanding become that this overly restricted definition now even appears in Cree-produced dictionaries of their own language.¹¹⁹

As noted above, Ray asserted that the acquisition of horses by the Niitsitapi, by about the 1740s, probably caused them to abandon their use of canoes and allowed them to move out onto the Plains. Their abandonment of canoes may, he suggested, have contributed to their ceasing to frequent York Factory in their previous numbers. The Niitsitapi were already, however, well established as Plains peoples by this time, and there is absolutely no oral tradition or any other evidence of their ever having used canoes. When the Niitsitapi peoples acquired horses, they did not abandon water transportation and adopt ground transportation. Horses replaced dogs, not canoes; dogs

¹¹⁷ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 70-1n.

¹¹⁸ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 25. The name Henday was also often spelled Hendry. Clifford Wilson, “Anthony Henday (Hendey, Hendry),” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume III, 1741 to 1770* (Toronto, 1974), 285-7.

¹¹⁹ Waugh, LeClaire and Cardinal, eds., *alperta ohci*, 8. The entry reads: “**ayahciyiniw** pl. **ayachiyiniwak** (NA) A stranger or outsider, i.e.: historically Plains Cree used it to describe the Blackfoot peoples; Northern Crees use the word to indicate Slavey-speaking people.”

were their pack-animals. It was a substitution of one kind of ground transportation for another. The pre-equestrian period of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples is known to them as the “Dog Days.”¹²⁰ As for Binnema’s assertion that the Blood/Kainai, who supposedly visited York Factory in 1733, accompanied a party of Cree, that is not substantiated by any records. Neither Ray nor Isham had anything to say about who might have accompanied any 1733 party of “Bloody Indians” to York Factory.¹²¹

Ray speculated a great deal about the role of the Assiniboine and the Cree in getting these far-distant Archithinue to York Factory. Also as noted above, he described their potential functions as that of: “helmsmen,” for Plains peoples who had lost their canoeing skills; “escorts,” required by the Cree and Assiniboine to permit passage through their territory; and, diplomats (in some sort of “diplomatic function”), to facilitate and perhaps control the safe passage of Archithinue parties to York Factory. Ray emphasized one such individual in particular. In 1762, four years after the “Bloody Indians” had resumed regular visits to the Bay, Humphrey Marten, the officer then in charge at York Factory, listed several Assiniboine leaders. Among them was “Aniskapoet, one we Call the Bloody Indian Captain.”¹²² Ray read into this that an Assiniboine leader so frequently brought Blood/Kainai to York Factory that he was known to the Euroamerican traders by this function, the escorting of one particular, identifiable group of Archithinue.

¹²⁰ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*. The first chapter of this book is entitled “Dog Days,” not “Canoe Days.”

¹²¹ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 55, and, York Factory correspondence book, Isham to Ferdinand Jacobs, York Factory, 17 July 1758, fos. 3d.-4, B.239/b/16, reel 1M255, HBCA.

¹²² York Factory correspondence book, Marten to Jacobs, York Factory, 31 August 1762, fo. 15, B.239/b/23, reel 1M255, HBCA.

Neither Ray nor Binnema ever addressed an apparent conundrum clearly evident in the combination of certain Hudson's Bay Company records and the assertions by these two authors of regular and direct Archithinue trade at York Factory. It was the statement by James Isham in 1758 concerning the arrival of "Bloody Indians" at York Factory that gave the most credence to claims of direct Niitsitapi/Archithinue trade at that post. James Isham, a keen observer and recorder of life and events in and about York Factory, had arrived at the Bay in 1732. In 1743 he wrote his "Observations," which he shortly thereafter gave to the Company.¹²³ But in 1751, Isham reported that "Earchithinues are Indians that never has been brought to any trade as Yet, of w^{ch} I mentioned to your honors when I was in England (Viz) Observations on Hudsons Bay."¹²⁴ Andrew Graham, another longtime resident of York Factory and another astute recorder of life in the Northwest, later also wrote his own lengthy "Observations." In these he flatly stated that there never had been an Archithinue trade at York Factory. In a section on the "Archithinue Nation," he wrote, "However one or two have had the curiosity to come to York Fort, but never repeated the visit."¹²⁵

In fact, Hudson's Bay Company records provide evidence of at most only four voluntary Archithinue visitors to York Factory, visitors who only just might perhaps have been Piikani, Siksika, Kainai or Gros Ventre. The first mention of a visit by a possible Niitsitapi or Gros Ventre individual occurred in 1754. This person might have been a member of the Blackfoot alliance, but he was just as likely a member of some other First Nations people. James Isham wrote to Anthony Henday, who was then travelling inland

¹²³ Isham, *James Isham's Observations*, and, Edwin Ernest Rich, "James Isham," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume III, 1741 to 1770* (Toronto, 1974), 301-4.

¹²⁴ York Factory post journal, 4 July 1751, B.239/a/34, reel 1M156, HBCA.

¹²⁵ Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, 202.

to try to entice the Archithinue to come to trade at York Factory. Isham reported that “an Earchithinue that is Heare tells me there is Wild Goats Natto Apples &c in thier Country.”¹²⁶ That is the sum total of the information available on this first-time visitor. The next confirmed voluntary visit of an Archithinue who might have been a member of the Blackfoot alliance occurred in 1766. Andrew Graham reported in the York Factory post journal, “I had one Archithinne Man down here this Summer.... He told me often and at parting that his Countrymen would never come down they not knowing how to paddle.”¹²⁷ In his published *Observations*, Graham indicated that this individual was brought down to the post “by one of our prime leaders.” In an earlier draft version, he identified the Archithinue’s escort as “a trusty Keskachewan [Cree] Leader.”¹²⁸ Although not noted in his York Factory post journal, Graham did very briefly mention in a report to London and in his *Observations* that two “western Archithinue Indians” also visited that post in 1772.¹²⁹ A few Archithinue were brought to York Factory as captives or slaves of other First Nations peoples,¹³⁰ but the above-noted three occasions are the only

¹²⁶ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Isham to Henday, York Factory, 4 September 1754, fo. 181d., A.11/114, reel 188, HBCA.

¹²⁷ York Factory post journal, 19 June 1766, B.239/a/54, reel 1M157, HBCA. This fascinating journal entry is most interesting and will be discussed at greater length below.

¹²⁸ Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, 256, and, Graham's *Observations*, 1771, p. 32, E.2/7, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹²⁹ Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, 287; London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Graham general letter, York Factory, 26 August 1772, fo. 142d., A.11/115, reel 188, and, York Factory post journal (kept by Graham), 4 September 1771 to 29 August 1772, B.239/a/66, reel 1M158, HBCA.

¹³⁰ In 1741, an “Earchethithnes” slave was brought to York Factory by “Southwd. [Cree] Indians.” This slave was likely from the permanent villages on the upper Missouri River, perhaps Mandan or Hidatsa (see below). Apparently in 1764, two or three Archithinue girls were brought as slaves to York Factory by some Keskachewan Cree and sold to “Home Indians,” local Cree. One of these Archithinue women was then

documented instances of any Archithinue voluntarily visiting York Factory, at least of Archithinue who might have been Niitsitapi or Gros Ventre. The only other documented Archithinue visit to York Factory known to me was that of an unrecorded number of Crow (*Absaroke?*), as already noted, in 1757.¹³¹

The Blood/Kainai were definitely Archithinue. But if the “Bloody Indians” were documented as regular visitors to York Factory in the late 1750s and early 1760s, how is it that both Isham and Graham clearly stated that Archithinue did not trade at York Factory? This conundrum is only apparent; it is not real. The answer is quite simple and very well documented. The “Bloody Indians” were not the Blood/Kainai. The “Bloody Indians” who visited York Factory were Assiniboine, and known to be such by the traders at York Factory. Ray’s “Bloody Indian Captain” was not an Assiniboine on some diplomatic mission with another unrelated First Nations people. He was an Assiniboine leading other Assiniboine in to trade, perhaps even his own people/group; he may well have been a “Bloody Indian” himself. Ray’s mistake was perhaps understandable. Others before him had made the same assumption that these “Bloody Indians” were the “Blood Indians,” the Kainai, a Blackfoot-speaking people.¹³² Binnema’s repetition of this

apparently murdered. Isham, *James Isham's Observations*, 113; York Factory post journal, 4 July 1741, B.239/a/22, reel 1M155, HBCA; and, Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, 202n. In 1754, according to Graham, Henday was presented with “2 young Slave Girls,” undoubtedly Archithinue, one of whom was later killed at York Factory “by a home-guard [Cree] Indian,” in 1765. These last two Graham references are probably to the same woman and the same murder. Henday journal in Graham’s *Observations*, 16 October 1754 and footnote to that journal entry, fo. 22d., E.2/6, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹³¹ York Factory post journal, 25 June 1757 and Memorandum of Canoes on fo. 46, B.239/a/42, reel 1M157, HBCA.

¹³² For instance, see Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 127, and, Champagne, *Les La Vérendrye*, 458. Rinn, whose thesis on the Niitsitapi was completed a year after Ray’s book, made the same error. Dennis Lloyd Rinn, “The Acquisition, Diffusion and Distribution of the European Horse among the Blackfoot Tribes in Western Canada.” (M.A. thesis, Department of Geography, University of Manitoba, 1975), 47.

same misidentification is less understandable. Dale Russell published his meticulous study of the western Cree, and their neighbours, in 1991. Binnema did not submit his Ph.D. thesis until 1998. In his book, Russell clearly and unquestionably demonstrated that the “Bloody Indians” who traded at York Factory in the 1750s and 1760s were Assiniboine, not Kainai. And yet, Binnema did not address this issue.¹³³ He simply stated that these “Bloody Indians” were Kainai.

Although Russell did point out that Ray had incorrectly identified the “Bloody Indians” as Kainai, Russell’s primary focus was on the connection between the “Bloody” Assiniboine name appearing in some records and the name “Eagle Indians,” or “Eagle Eyed Indians,” that appeared in other 18th-century records. He clearly showed that, by whatever name, they were the same group, an Assiniboine group.¹³⁴ There is considerably more evidence than Russell presented to establish the identity of these “Bloody Indians” as Assiniboine, not Kainai. This evidence will be presented in detail here.

One of the critical passages in this matter is contained in a James Isham 1758 letter, in which he wrote, “I have had since Last [his last letter] 5 Cannoes of Bloody Indians (or Mithcoo Ethenues) down to trade and promise to bring more, none of the

¹³³ Binnema obviously knew Russell’s book, for he cited it in his Ph.D. thesis. See “The Common and Contested Ground,” 182n.

¹³⁴ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 182-4. Russell later offered additional evidence that a group of Assiniboine had long been known as the “Bloody Indians.” In an analysis of First Nations groups noted by Kelsey, Russell stated that the Assiniboine River had been called by the Cree word, *mithco*. J.B. Tyrrell had much earlier confirmed that the Assiniboine River was also known as the Blood River. See Russell, “The Puzzle,” 80, and, Joseph Burr Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor between the Years 1774 and 1792* (Toronto, 1934), 34.

Tribe has been here since 1733.”¹³⁵ Isham’s post journal recorded the exact date of their arrival, but incorrectly listed the date of their last visit. On 14 July 1758, he wrote, “5 Canues of Esinepoets, or Bloody Ind^s/, Came to trade, those have not been here since the year 1753.”¹³⁶ In the “Memorandum of Canues” at the end of this journal, only one group is identified as arriving on 14 July, “Bloody Indians.”¹³⁷ Isham’s journal unequivocally states that the “Bloody Indians” are Assiniboiné.

Three years earlier, Isham had provided the same information about the last visit of the “Bloody Indians” to York Factory. Anthony Henday, the first company servant sent inland since Henry Kelsey, kept a daily journal of his 1754-1755 trip. In the York Factory copy of his journal, Henday noted that on 31 July 1754 he met 10 tents of Assiniboiné. On 5 September 1754, after reaching the edge of the Plains, he wrote that by then he had hoped to have met “the Earchithinues, the Esinepoets are very Numerous, and the Mirtho Ind^s as they call them, but there is no odds in y^e Esinepoets and them.” By this he obviously meant that there was no difference (“odds”) between the “Mirtho”/“Bloody” Indians and the Assiniboiné. He met the “bloody Ind^s” on 16 May 1755, and the next day he noted that the “Earchithinue Joined the bloody Ind^s.”¹³⁸ As noted earlier and as will be discussed at length later in this chapter, Henday’s “journals” are something of a puzzle. There are four different versions in the Hudson’s Bay

¹³⁵ York Factory correspondence book, Isham to Ferdinand Jacobs, York Factory, 17 July 1758, fos. 3d.-4, B.239/b/16, reel 1M255, HBCA.

¹³⁶ York Factory post journal, 14 July 1758, B.239/a/44, reel 1M157, HBCA.

¹³⁷ Ibid., fos. 42d.-3. In fact, these five canoes of “Bloody Indians” are the only arrivals noted in the “Memorandum” between the 13 canoes of “Missinipe NR [Cree from the “North” or Nelson River] Indians,” on 10 July, and the one canoe of “Severn [probably Cree from Severn River] Indians,” on 17 July 1758.

¹³⁸ Anthony Henday’s inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 31 July and 5 September 1754, and, 16 and 17 May 1755, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA.

Company Archives, one in the York Factory journals, and three in Andrew Graham's papers.¹³⁹ None is the actual journal kept by Henday during his travels. The version quoted above was copied by Graham and annotated (and edited) by Isham at York Factory, in the summer of 1755. The four manuscript versions do not always agree. The lack of uniformity is often of a niggling variety, but there are substantial, even remarkably contradictory, reports given from one version to the next. The biggest differences by far exist between the York Factory copy, sent to headquarters in London in 1755, and the three later copies in Graham's papers.¹⁴⁰ Besides perhaps editing Henday's journal for political reasons, in an attempt to please his bosses in London, Isham annotated the document. While some aspects of the Isham-edited journal may be suspect, especially with respect to the purported intentions of First Nations peoples and prospects for the company's trade, there is no reason to question Isham's motives behind the presentation of the information that Isham added at the end of Henday's journal about the identity and last visit of "Bloody Indians." Isham commented on specific journal passages, here on Henday's 31 July 1854 entry:

These Esinipoets are very Numerous have plenty of Goods in their Country, kill but Little and that they Carry to y^e french, these has the knowledge & artt of making and using cannues, using such Formerly (that is to say) before the year

¹³⁹ Although Henday's journal was not published in Graham's *Observations*, it is in the various drafts of that manuscript that the three other versions of the journal may be found. See E.2/4, fos. 35-60 of 1768-1769 draft *Observations*; E.2/6, fos. 10d.-38d. of 1767-1769 draft *Observations*; and, E.2/11, fos. 1-40d. of ca. 1792 draft *Observations*, reels 4M1-2, HBCA. For some reason Graham's dates in the copy in E.2/4 are off by exactly one year; the Henday journal is there dated 1755-1756, not the correct 1754-1755.

¹⁴⁰ Henday's journal was published in 1907, based on the ca. 1792 Graham copy. Anthony Henday, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country. The Journal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-55." Ed. Lawrence J. Burpee. *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Third Series, vol. 1, section 2 (15 May 1907), 307-62. Burpee appears to have deposited his hand-written copy of the Graham (E.2/11) copy of Henday's journal in the National Archives of Canada. See Andrew Graham Fonds, MG18, D5 (R2245-0-8-E), NAC.

1733 they used to frequent York Fort to Trade, but that year in Returning back the North River Esenipoets and them had a battle up Steel River, by which y^e Captⁿ & most of his Men were killed, and have not been att any of y^e fortts since, they were very Civile to Captⁿ Henday, mightily pleased att his Coming to See them.¹⁴¹

On 14 October 1754, Henday had been in a large “Earchithinue” camp. Isham remarked on the encounter. “I observe in Captⁿ Hendeys Acc^t there is upwards of 250 Tents of English Earchithinue, and Esinepoets, besides the Bloody Ind^s which are Numerous, and differs Little from y^e Esinepoets, that might be brought to trade.”¹⁴²

The three copies of Henday’s journal in Graham’s papers offer more confirmation that the “Bloody Indians” were Assiniboiné. In two versions, on 6 September 1754, the entries are basically the same, that Henday met with five tents of “mirthco (ie bloody) Indians.” The entries then read, “I could find no difference between them and the Assenipoet Indians.”¹⁴³ In the third copy in Graham’s papers on the same date, Henday is recorded as meeting five tents “of Mekesue, or Eagle Indians,” about which he then said, “I could find no difference between them and the Asinepoet Natives with regard to the language.”¹⁴⁴ There is no comparable information at all in the York Factory copy. As noted above, in the York Factory copy, on 17 July 1755, Henday mentioned that the “Earchithinues Joined the bloody Ind^s.” In the first copy in Graham’s papers, the passage

¹⁴¹ Anthony Henday inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), fos. 38d.-9, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA.

¹⁴² Ibid., fo. 39d.

¹⁴³ Henday’s journal, in Graham’s Observations, 6 September 1754 (incorrectly dated 1755 in this version), fo. 42, E.2/4, reel 4M101, HBCA. The punctuation is slightly different in the second Graham version, but the words and meaning are identical. See E.2/6, 6 September 1754, fo. 17d., reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹⁴⁴ Henday journal in Graham Observations, 6 September 1754, fo. 11d., E.2/11, reel 4M102, HBCA.

reads, "10 tents of mirthco or bloody Indians joined the Archithinues."¹⁴⁵ The second version merely states that "Ten Tents of Bloody Indians Joined the Archithinues."¹⁴⁶ However, the third copy in Graham's papers reads, "Ten Tents of Eagle Indians joined the Archithinue Indians.... They [the Eagle Indians] are a Tribe of the Asinepoet Nation."¹⁴⁷

In the passages quoted above, the "Bloody Indians"/"Eagle Indians" - for without doubt they were one and the same group/division of the Assiniboine - were referred to as both the "mirthco" and the "Mekesue" Indians. The Cree root for both blood and the colour red is *Mi'ko* or *mihko*.¹⁴⁸ Dale Russell explained the linguistic connections between the two variants of the Cree word and also for the two English-language variations of the name for the same people, "Blood" and "Eagle":

At first sight, it is puzzling why the group is called the Eagle Indians in one place and the Bloody Indians in another. Although the term "Bloody" was used in HBC documents, Graham used the form "Mekesew" (Eagle) in his lists of trading Indians. The confusion may have been caused by the differences in the "th" and the "y" Cree dialects. In "th" dialect, blood is pronounced mithko but in "y" dialect it is mihko. In both dialects, eagle is mikisiw. Persons familiar with the "th" dialect, but not the "y" dialect to the west, may well have thought mihko (Plains Cree "blood") was simply a variant of the general Cree word mikisew (eagle).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Henday journal in Graham's Observations, 17 May 1755 (incorrectly dated as 1756), fo. 57d., E.2/4, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹⁴⁶ Henday journal in Graham's Observations, 17 May 1755, fo. 36, E.2/6, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹⁴⁷ Henday journal in Graham's Observations, 17 May 1755, fo. 36d., E.2/11, reel 4M102, HBCA.

¹⁴⁸ Watkins and Faries, *A Dictionary*, 25 and 150, and, Waugh, LeClaire and Cardinal, eds., *alperta ohci*, 261 and 399.

¹⁴⁹ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 184.

In the various drafts of his “Observations,” dating from 1768-1769 to ca. 1792, Andrew Graham produced lists of First Nations peoples. He generally divided “each of the nations and larger tribes into lesser” identifiable groups or “tribes,” while often specifying at which post, if any, they traded.¹⁵⁰ In his draft dated 1768-1769, Graham listed both “Meke sew” and “Mirthcow” as sub-groups of the “Assenepoet Indians.”¹⁵¹ His apparent confusion was not repeated in any subsequent drafts. In the ca. 1772 and 1775 drafts, Graham identified the “Me kis sew” as being a tribe of the “Asinepoet” nation.¹⁵² In a draft dating to ca. 1792, Graham called them the “Meke sew tribe” of the “Asinepoet Nation,” to the letter the same as in the 1969 published version.¹⁵³

The “Bloody Indians” of the 1750s and 1760s at York Factory were definitely Assiniboine, almost certainly Plains Assiniboine. Although the absence of this group from York Factory between the early 1730s and 1758 may have been related to the establishment of French inland posts, as Binnema suggested, the reason given by James Isham was internal Assiniboine violence, which had resulted in the death of a “Bloody” Assiniboine trading “Capt”, or leader, and most of his men.¹⁵⁴ The York Factory post journals make no reference to such an incident in the early 1730s, but there was internal Assiniboine violence in 1737. The following summer, the York Factory post journalist wrote, “Severall Cannoes of Sinepoets are gone to Churchill; they having fell out one wth

¹⁵⁰ Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, 205.

¹⁵¹ Graham's *Observations*, fo. 4, 1768-1769, E.2/5, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹⁵² Graham's *Observations*, p. 176, ca. 1772, E.2/13, and, p. 125, 1775, E.2/10, reel 4M102, HBCA.

¹⁵³ Graham's *Observations*, p. 354, ca. 1792, E.2/12, reel 4M102, HBCA, and, Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, 206.

¹⁵⁴ Isham annotation on Henday's inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), fo. 39d., 1755, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA.

another after they went from here y^e Last year, by w^{ch} accident there was Several Kill^d.”¹⁵⁵

In late June of 1738, 18 canoes of “Stone [Assiniboine] Indians” arrived to trade at Churchill.¹⁵⁶ Even though Isham, in 1754, did say that the “Bloody” Assiniboine met by Henday had not traded at any post since the internal strife of 1733,¹⁵⁷ it is possible that Isham had his dates slightly off and also that these visitors to Churchill made only this single trip to the Bay after the intratribal violence. The ongoing absence of the “Bloody Indians” was undoubtedly related to the presence of French posts closer to home, but Binnema was doubly wrong in asserting a Kainai abandonment of York Factory, triggered by the arrival of the French west of Hudson Bay. The “Bloody Indians” who arrived in five canoes at York Factory in 1758, after an absence of more than 20 years, were the same “Bloody” Assiniboine encountered by Henday four years earlier, the people whom he had encouraged to resume trading at that post.¹⁵⁸

As for the scenario portrayed by Ray of Assiniboine and Cree always acting as “helmsmen” and “escorts” for visiting Sarcee, “Shussuanna, Blood, and Archithinue,”¹⁵⁹ there is no evidence whatsoever of any Sarcee visits to the Bay, nor of any meaningful “Archithinue” trips, meaningful for York Factory’s trade returns. When the Cree or

¹⁵⁵ York Factory post journal, 30 May 1738, B.239/a/20, reel 1M156, HBCA.

¹⁵⁶ Fort Churchill post journal, 29 June to 1 July 1738, B.42/a/18, reel 1M27, HBCA.

¹⁵⁷ Isham annotation on Henday’s inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), fo. 39d., 1755, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA. Such intratribal violence, though quite unusual, was not unique. In 1767, the traders at York Factory heard that “there has been a Civil warr among the Sin’nee’poets [Assiniboine], that most of one Tribe is Kild.” York Factory post journal, 5 July 1767, B.239/a/55, reel 1M157, HBCA.

¹⁵⁸ In another letter written in 1758, Isham confirmed this. He wrote, “have had five Cannoes of those Bloody Indians Henday formerly Mentioned.” London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Isham general letter, York Factory, 16 September 1758, fo. 16, A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

¹⁵⁹ Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 59.

Assiniboine “escorted” the “Shussuanna” (Cree) and the “Bloody [Assiniboine] Indians,” they were actually bringing their own people, themselves, to trade at York Factory; it was Assiniboine with Assiniboine and Cree with Cree. There was no Archithinue trade at York Factory.

Waiting and Listening by the Frozen Sea

The first Hudson’s Bay Company records to contain real news of the Archithinue all report on warfare between them and the First Nations peoples who traded at the Bay. The Cree were the filter through which the English traders on the Bay were first introduced to distant peoples and regions. It was the Cree language that became the language of the fur trade, and it was Cree words that were used to describe and name these new peoples and regions. However, it was apparently Assiniboine who may have first brought word of the mysterious Archithinue to the traders on the Bay. The word Archithinue, the anglicized version of the Cree word *ayacheyinew*, was first written down, to the best of our knowledge, in 1738, shortly after the above-noted Assiniboine visit to Churchill. There the officer in charge wrote to company headquarters in London:

At least sixty canoes of western Indians that was with me last summer was engaged all the winter in a fierce war against the Atchue-thinnies, a people bordering near the Western Ocean who are great enemies to our inland trading Indians, and by what I can learn their reason for going against them was that the said Atchue-thinnies did take the opportunity to attack and kill many of the families of the said trading Indians, while they were coming with their goods to the factory last summer.¹⁶⁰

For the next two years the annual Churchill report contained information on the Archithinue. In 1739, Richard Norton wrote, “but as to the nations of the Atch-thin-nies we have had no manner of acquaintance with them only by report and that but a very

¹⁶⁰ Richard Norton general letter, Churchill River, 17 August 1738, reproduced in full in K.G. Davies, ed., *Letters from Hudson Bay, 1703-40* (London, 1965), 249. As one would expect, the 20th-century editor identified the Archithinue, in the index, as “Blackfoot” (see p. 435).

slight account of they being at great enmity with our friendly natives.”¹⁶¹ The company’s knowledge had increased over the year. In 1739 Norton knew that the Archithinue were more than a single people. The next year he again reported on extensive intertribal warfare.

Some time the forepart of last winter the Achue-thinnies killed several of our trading Indians as they were a beaver hunting and come on them in such numbers that above 200 of their principal men in war was obliged continually to guard the frontiers of their country while those natives that did come down hunted for supplies, and they are now gone with supplies and full resolution to destroy or drive the said Atchue-thinnies from their frontiers that they might not be annoyed for the future.¹⁶²

Warfare between these particular Archithinue groups and the Cree or Dene about whom Norton was writing would appear to have been the norm in this period. The three letters are not specific about just which of Churchill’s “trading Indians” were being discussed. Both Cree and Dene were regular customers at the Churchill River post. Not knowing the targets of the Archithinue enmity makes it even more perilous to speculate on the identity of these particular Archithinue peoples. See Figure Two for estimated tribal locations.

In 1741 at York Factory, James Isham noted even more intertribal warfare. After describing a pattern of “Sturgeon [Cree] Indian” warfare, supposedly every second year with unnamed enemies, Isham then reported: “Likewise y^e Stone [Assiniboine] Ind^s who goes to warr wth w^t we Call y^e Earchethithnes. I am very credible Inform^d talk^d wth a Slave Earchethine y^t there is a perdigious plenty of all Sorts of Beast of profit of the Largest Sort, I am [..?..] Informed, itt Lyes to y^e Westw^d of us, w^{ch} I take to be y^e west Seas.”¹⁶³ The Archithinue slave told him that his people bordered on the Western Sea, the Pacific

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Norton general letter, Prince of Wales Fort, 16 August 1739, p. 292.

¹⁶² Ibid., Norton general letter, Prince of Wales Fort, 9 August 1740, p. 318.

¹⁶³ York Factory post journal, 4 July 1741, B.239/a/22, reel 1M155, HBCA. Isham’s handwriting and many abbreviations are very difficult to decipher in this entry.

Figure Two. Map Showing the Estimated Locations of First Nations Peoples in the Northwest in the mid-18th Century.

Ocean, and that they had seen ships, but that they had had no trade with these ships as yet. This was almost certainly an exaggeration, if not a complete falsehood, or a tremendous misunderstanding/wishful thinking on Isham's part.

Based on only this journal entry, it would seem that the most likely candidates for this captive's people of origin were the Gros Ventre, Siksika, Kainai, Piikani or Shoshone (*Nimi*). However, Isham described in some detail in his *Observations* this first-time encounter with an Archithinue.¹⁶⁴ Although his geography was more than a little skewed, as was his understanding of Spanish activity in North America, he recognized that the Archithinue offered great potential for the trade. The slave told him that his people could and would come to the Bay, but that "the Sinnepoets and other Indians Going to warr with them, is a hinderance to their Coming to the English Settlements to trade." Isham then recommended to the Governor and Committee in London that company men be sent on "a Land Voyage with good Encouragem't Either to bring them to the English forts to trade; or to give such a Discription of the Country that a Settlement might be made their." He reiterated that the Archithinue "have no trade with any Nation as Yet." He suggested that if only peace could be arranged between the Assiniboine and the Archithinue, two men should be sent to the Archithinue country to bring them to trade at York Factory. He also proposed building an inland post near the forks of the Nelson River in support of these endeavours.¹⁶⁵ Based on Isham's *Observations*, it is more likely that this Archithinue captive was from the First Nations peoples who lived in permanent villages on the upper Missouri River; Isham said that this man's country had "great plenty of Indn.

¹⁶⁴ Isham, *James Isham's Observations*, 113-5, and, Isham's *Observations*, fos. 71-2d., E.2/1, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹⁶⁵ Isham, *James Isham's Observations*, 113-5.

corn,”¹⁶⁶ a crop grown at the villages of the neighbouring Mandan and Hidatsa on the Missouri.

The French presence in the interior caused a very noticeable decline in fur returns at York Factory and the other company posts on the western shores of Hudson Bay.¹⁶⁷ Despite this downturn, the Hudson's Bay Company took neither course of action proposed by Isham, sending men inland or building a post in the interior. In 1743, Henley House was built inland of Albany, the company's post at the mouth of the Albany River, on James Bay, but the small outpost was seen as a defensive measure, not as a trading venture.¹⁶⁸ The failure of the Hudson's Bay Company to move inland became the grounds in the 1740s for a challenge to its monopoly position. Arthur Dobbs led the challenge. He wrote two scathing attacks on the Hudson's Bay Company, one under his own name and another under the name of a disgruntled ex-employee of the company, Joseph Robson.¹⁶⁹ The charges that the Hudson's Bay Company was not living up to the responsibilities of its charter led to a parliamentary inquiry in 1749. The allegations that the company had left the inland territories unexplored and undeveloped were the principal grounds for contesting the charter. Robson's book best expressed this perceived abrogation of responsibility. It read, "The Company have for eighty years slept at the edge of a frozen sea; they have shewn no curiosity to penetrate farther themselves, and

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 115, and, Isham's Observations, fo. 72d., E.2/1, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹⁶⁷ This is graphically illustrated in a table in Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 52.

¹⁶⁸ John A. Alwin, "The Uncelebrated Boats of the Albany," *The Beaver Outfit* 305, No. 4 (Spring 1975), 47-53.

¹⁶⁹ Arthur Dobbs, *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay in the North-west Part of America* (New York, 1967 [1744]), and, Joseph Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay, From 1733 to 1736 and 1744 to 1747* (New York, 1967 [1752]). Robson's biographer said that recent research has shown that Dobbs actually ghost-wrote Robson's book. Glyndwr Williams, "Joseph Robson," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume III, 1741 to 1770* (Toronto, 1974), 562.

have exerted all their art and power to crush that spirit in others.”¹⁷⁰ This image of the Hudson’s Bay Company being “asleep by the frozen sea” would be one that would stick. Nevertheless, the company weathered the parliamentary and public storm of the 1740s, its charter still intact.¹⁷¹

Anthony Henday

The Hudson’s Bay Company’s returns were hit not only by the increasing competition from the French posts in the interior but also by an apparent decline in the beaver population in the territory of their best Cree and nearby Assiniboiné customers. In 1753 Isham wrote, “It is very true there are few Beaver to be had unless the Indians go to the Esinnepoets and Archithinué Country.”¹⁷² Two years earlier he had made the first recorded effort intended specifically to attract the Archithinué to trade at York Factory. When large parties of Cree and Assiniboiné were about to depart inland, Isham reported

¹⁷⁰ Robson, *An Account*, 6. Elsewhere in the book (p. 79), he (or Dobbs) wrote, “The Company not only sit down contented at the edge of a frozen sea, when they have it in their power to settle in a warm climate and fertile country, but suffer the French to come behind them, and carry off the best part of the trade.” Dobbs’ book was interesting in the amount of information that it provided for the first time in English. It was largely based on French publications and on a French informant. Dobbs’ *Account* offers no information pertinent to this study of the Niitsitapi peoples, but his 1744 book included the first written reference to the “Tete Plat Nation.” This may be a reference to the Flathead (*Séliš*), a people who when first encountered by Euroamericans were a Plateau people, living west of the first chain of the Rocky Mountains. Dobbs, *An Account*, map facing title page and 44. Dobbs also mentioned (pp. 24 and 35) the “Eagle-eyed Indians.”

¹⁷¹ Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting*, 5 and 32-3.

¹⁷² York Factory correspondence book, Isham to Thomas White, York Factory, 20 July 1753, fo. 4, B.239/b/10, reel 1M254, HBCA. Isham reiterated the message the next year, when he again reported that all of his First Nations customers were reporting a scarcity of beaver, “and what they att present Gett are obliged to Go into the Earthidinué Country and Stone Ind^s Country.” London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Isham general letter, York Factory, 8 September 1754, fo. 162, A.11/114, reel 188, HBCA.

that he “made an End of trading with the Ind^s at the sametime gave to the Leadors some knives and tobacco to give to the Earhithinues to bring them Down to trade, they assure me that a great many will be here the next year.”¹⁷³ It is questionable how sincere these leaders’ assurances were. Why would they want to cut themselves out of the lucrative middlemen roles that they had established with these distant First Nations peoples? As will be shown, many Cree and Assiniboine groups profited greatly in trading their used European goods at enormous mark-ups for furs from Archithinue, who had no direct access to Euroamerican traders.

In the face of pressure in Great Britain and falling returns in North America, the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Governor and Committee in London instructed the officers at their posts on Hudson Bay to find and encourage suitable volunteers to undertake inland travel to promote the trade. A young labourer and net-maker at York Factory was the first to volunteer. His name was Anthony Henday.¹⁷⁴ The primary goals of this first inland undertaking in some 60 years were, as Isham wrote, “not only to Exhort and Encourage the Indians to come to Trade, but to bring the Earchithinues to a Trade, who are very Numorous.”¹⁷⁵ Henday left York Factory for his year-long journey on 26 June 1754. His guide was Attickasish, a Cree leader probably from the region of the forks of the Saskatchewan River, who, Isham reported, had “Lived Long with the Eachithinues.” Henday was also escorted by a Cree from the York Factory area, Connawapa.¹⁷⁶ Apart

¹⁷³ York Factory post journal, 4 July 1751, B.239/a/34, reel 1M156, HBCA.

¹⁷⁴ Wilson, “Anthony Henday,” 285-7.

¹⁷⁵ York Factory correspondence book, Isham to Ferdinand Jacobs, York Factory, 17 August 1754, fo. 11d., B.239/b/11, reel 1M254, HBCA.

¹⁷⁶ Details of the outset of the trip and of Henday’s two First Nations companions are contained in two documents: York Factory post journal, 26 June 1754, B.239/a/37, reel 1M156, and, Isham’s 26 June 1754 instructions to Anthony Henday, in London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, fos. 172-5d., A.11/114, reel 188, HBCA. Russell

from a letter sent by him shortly after his departure, York Factory was out of touch with Henday until his return to that post in June 1755, with 46 canoes of “pegsgoma [Cree] Ind^s.”¹⁷⁷

Isham provided Henday with six pages of instructions. The items covered there encompassed many of what were to become virtually “standing orders” for subsequent inland travellers. Henday was to tell the First Nations peoples “to be at peace, and not to Warr, one against another; but to hunt and gett goods, and bring them to the fort.” Isham also told him to tell them, “I want to See them, I love the Indians.” If at all possible Henday was to bring two or three “Earchethinues” back to York Factory with him. He was to keep a journal and to record in it the names of the principal geographical features and of the peoples whom he encountered. He was also to determine if the reported “open sea” near “the Earchethinue country” was really a sea or just a lake. Henday was to take note of “the french or wood Runners.” He was instructed to learn the “Languages” of the First Nations peoples whom he met. Perhaps the most naive of all of Isham’s instructions concerned the Archithinue and canoes:

I have been Severall times inform^d that the Earchethinues who are perdigious Numerous, and which is my View in Sending you to bring them to trade. has no Knowledge, or at Least can not padle in cannoes, if this be true and you have the opportunity of seeing some of them, Let your Guides Show and Learn them, also Exhort them to practice it that they may be able to padle Down to the fort.

His final order was that Henday should be “Encouraging and Exherting the Natives to trade.”¹⁷⁸

argued that Attickasish was a Pegogamaw Cree, a group that lived near the forks of the Saskatchewan River. Attickasish later guided other Hudson’s Bay Company inland travellers. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 93-5 and 142-7.

¹⁷⁷ York Factory post journal, 23 June 1755, B.239/a/39, reel 1M156, HBCA.

¹⁷⁸ Isham’s instructions to Henday, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, 26 June 1754, fos. 172-5d., A.11/114, reel 188, HBCA.

Not all in the company shared Isham's optimism, or his naïveté. After Isham had told his fellow officer at Churchill of Henday's trip, Ferdinand Jacobs, one of the company's most experienced and astute men, replied:

I wish, Anthony Henday may meet with the success You expect, hopes he Will encourage the Indians to come and Trade, but Sir, pardon my freedom in saying I am of Opinion those Earchethinues Indians, will never be brought to Trade at either of these Factorys I Say never my reasons Stands Good they being a very Timerous People, and makes no use of Canoes, nay, nor won't be persuaded to Venture in one, besides the Indians which trades Yearly with Us gets great Quantity's of Furrs (Catt in particular) from the above said Earchethinues, and Trade from them for Our Goods, and may probably be the reason for their not encourageing them to come Down to Trade, by which means the Indians keep the Benefits of that Trade amongst them Selves.¹⁷⁹

Jacobs had hit the nail on the head. The lack of use of canoes by the Archithinue coupled with the meeting of their needs for European goods through Cree and Assiniboiné middlemen did have the results predicted by Jacobs: no direct trade at any of the posts on Hudson Bay with any Archithinue peoples.

Henday kept a daily journal during his trip. However, as discussed earlier, his journal is more than a bit of a problem. His original field journal has not survived. Instead, there are four copies of this 1754-1755 record, three of them in Andrew Graham's handwriting, including the copy sent to England in 1755. Upon Henday's return, Graham had undoubtedly transcribed the journal as part of his duties as a "writer"/clerk at York Factory. The later copies of this journal are all in Graham's draft "Observations." Graham knew Henday well and probably often discussed the trip with him; perhaps he even kept Henday's original field notes.¹⁸⁰ The variant copies of

¹⁷⁹ York Factory correspondence books, Jacobs to Isham, Fort Prince of Wales, 23 August 1754, fos. 13-3d., B.239/b/11, reel 1M254, HBCA. Shirlee Anne Smith, "Ferdinand Jacobs," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 383-4.

¹⁸⁰ Williams, "The Puzzle," 51. At the moment this article is the best single piece on the dilemma presented by the multiple and differing copies of Henday's journal.

Henday's journal warrant a full-length study of their own, but that cannot be done here. The principal areas of concern for this thesis in the variant copies have to do with the intentions and promises of the Archithinue people met by Henday. In the 1755 copy, Archithinue initially promised to go to York Factory, but then reneged. In all three later copies, there were no such Archithinue promises and Henday's efforts to get the Archithinue to travel to York Factory were portrayed as hopeless.¹⁸¹ Glyndwr Williams has argued that the three later copies are closer to Henday's lost original, whereas the 1755 copy sent to London was meant to support the recently adopted plan of sending men inland to promote the trade. Isham supported this policy, while Graham later did not. The 1755 variant held out the hope to the Governor and Committee in London that the Archithinue could eventually be persuaded to visit the Bay.¹⁸² That was a futile hope.

Henday travelled by canoe with these inland Cree north of Lake Winnipeg, where they met some Frenchmen at Basquia. Travelling up the Carrot River, the Cree traders eventually met their families. They then travelled by foot, reaching the northern edge of the Plains in mid-August and finally a large Archithinue camp near present-day Red Deer,

However, there is a book in press in which all four versions will apparently be reproduced in their entirety. The book is to be edited by Barbara Belyea. See "Barbara Belyea." Online. Available: http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/faculties/HUM/ENGL/Published/pub_belyea.html. 20 April 2000, and, "Louise Smith." Online. Available: <http://history1700sminingco.com/education/history1700s/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubaff/Research/smith.html>. 20 April 2000.

¹⁸¹ As noted earlier, the four manuscript copies of Henday's journal are in the HBCA in: the York Factory journal series, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156; and, Graham's Observations, E.2/4, fos. 35-60 of 1768-1769 draft Observations, E.2/6, fos. 10d.-38d. of 1767-1769 draft Observations, and, E.2/11, fos. 1-40d. of ca. 1792 draft Observations, reels 4M1-2. For some reason the dates in the copy in E.2/4 are off by exactly one year; the Henday journal is there dated 1755-1756, not the correct 1754-1755 dates. The ca. 1792 draft is the only version published to date. Henday, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," 307-62.

¹⁸² Williams, "The Puzzle," especially 51-6.

Alberta, in mid-October. Henday's companions, Attickasish and Connawapa, then separated from Henday, who wintered with a small Cree party near the North Saskatchewan River. In the spring, Henday's group travelled down the North Saskatchewan River below the forks, where they were rejoined by Connawapa and then Attickasish. After interacting with large camps of Archithinue, Henday's party visited two French posts, including Basquia, before completing the return trip to York Factory.¹⁸³

On 1 October 1754, Henday met the first few "Earchithinue" whom he was to encounter. Two weeks later he entered their principal encampment, probably near present-day Red Deer, Alberta. It is impossible to know for certain just who exactly this particular Archithinue people was. Undoubtedly these Archithinue were of the Blackfoot alliance, probably one of the Siksika, Kainai, Gros Ventre or Piikani peoples. All four versions of the journal describe a camp of 200 tents in two rows. Reasonable estimates of the number of people represented per tent in the equestrian era, when tents were larger, range from seven to ten individuals; this would place the camp at anywhere from 1,400 to 2,000 people.¹⁸⁴ In the 1755 copy, Henday (and Isham) referred to the Archithinue leader

¹⁸³ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 93-6. Russell provided the best and most trustworthy description of Henday's route, as well as that of the subsequent Hudson's Bay Company's travellers who followed Henday into the interior.

¹⁸⁴ John Franklin, on the North Saskatchewan River in 1820, wrote that the "tents average nearly ten inmates each." In 1823, longtime fur trade company officers Francis Heron and Donald McKenzie estimated only seven people per tent. John Ewers used an average figure of eight people per tent in his calculations. As will be seen throughout this thesis, population estimates were virtually always given in number of tents, not of individual persons. See: John Franklin, *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea, in the Years 1819-20-21-22*, intro. James P. Delgado (Vancouver, 2000 [1824]), 31 January to 5 February 1820 entry, p. 87; Bow River Expedition/Chesterfield House district report, 1822-1823, Francis Heron, for Donald McKenzie, fo. 2d., B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA; and, Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 37.

as the “King,” but he was merely the “Leader” in the later versions.¹⁸⁵ Over the next few days, presents were exchanged, “the pipe of friendship” was smoked and Henday described a great deal of the life of these Archithinue, including buffalo hunting on horseback and tobacco growing.

Henday spent about a week in the Archithinue camp. While the four versions of his journal agree on much, they also contradict each other on important matters. In the copy sent to London in 1755, the leader of the Archithinue and several other Archithinue as well were reported as promising to go to York Factory in the spring.¹⁸⁶ In the three later versions, the Archithinue were emphatic that they would never make the journey to York Factory. The Archithinue leader said that York Factory was too far away, that they could not use canoes and that “they could not live without buffaloes flesh, and that they never would leave their horses, and many other obstacles which I think very just.”¹⁸⁷ Henday also learned that these Archithinue “have other Indians beyond them who are their enemies, who are also called Archithinues, and by what I can learn talks the same language, and hath the same customs; they are like the other natives murdering one-

¹⁸⁵ Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), 14 October 1754 entry and fos. 39-40, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, and, same dated entry in variants of journal in Graham’s Observations in E.2/4, E.2/6 and E.2/11.

¹⁸⁶ Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), 16 and 18 October 1754, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA.

¹⁸⁷ Henday journal in Graham’s Observations, 15 (and 14) October 1754 (incorrectly dated in this copy as 1755), fo. 47, E.2/4, reel 4M101, HBCA. James Willard Schultz, an adopted member of the Piikani, wrote that the Niitsitapi had two words for meat, *Īk’śisakwī*, meaning simply meat, and *Nitā’piwaksīn*, meaning real food. All other foods, except berries, were known as *kī’stāpiwaksīn*, or useless food. James Willard Schultz and Jessie Louise Donaldson, *The Sun God’s Children* (Boston, 1930), 29. Buffalo was considered to be the staff of life.

another slyly.”¹⁸⁸ Henday was probably incorrect about the Archithinue enemies speaking the same language, but not about the existence of enemies of these particular Archithinue who were also known as Archithinue. To the Cree, and thus to the Hudson’s Bay Company traders who were dependent on them, Archithinue was a term that encompassed a large variety of First Nations peoples. Henday also noted that during a meeting of “all the leaders of different tribes,” which he attended, there were “4 different languages amongst us.”¹⁸⁹ Cree, Assiniboine and English may have accounted for three, if Henday was counting his own; the other one, or two, could have been Blackfoot, Gros Ventre or even Sarcee. When the camp disbanded in mid-October, the Archithinue headed south, apparently to go to war, accompanied by Attickasish and Connawapa, and a few other Cree, while a large number of Assiniboine went north.¹⁹⁰

Henday was to spend the winter with a small group of Cree. Later in October 1754, Henday remarked on the abundance of beaver and on the fact that his companions killed many. However, he observed that they could have killed more, but chose to let some live. Both Henday and Isham remarked on this, but neither seemed to value or even be aware of the ecological wisdom expressed in this practice of not exterminating entire

¹⁸⁸ Henday journal in Graham’s Observations, 15 October 1754, fo. 47d., E.2/4, reel 4M101, HBCA. The same information is given in the E.2/6 and E.2/11 copies.

¹⁸⁹ Henday journal in Graham’s Observations, 16 October 1755 (incorrectly dated 1756), fo. 47, E.2/4, reel 4M101, HBCA..

¹⁹⁰ The various copies of the journal differ greatly in the details here. The number of Archithinue is variously given as 230, 320 or 322 tents, while the number of Assiniboine is uniformly 17 tents. In the three later copies, the camp broke up on 17 October, with another 15 tents of unidentified people separating from Henday’s party on 22 October. In the 1755 copy the disbanding of the large camp did not take place until 20 October, with no mention of any later leaving by 15 tents of other people. See entries dated 17 to 22 October 1754 in all four manuscript journals.

local beaver populations.¹⁹¹ Henday's Cree companions on more than one occasion expressed the fear that they would be killed by Archithinue. They refused to trap wolves on Archithinue land in fear of Archithinue retribution. One of his companions, identified simply as his "bed fellow," told Henday that they would trade wolf and beaver pelts from the Assiniboine and Archithinue in the spring.¹⁹² In all four copies of the journal Henday met four men, presumably Cree, in early February, who reported "that the far distant Archithinues had killed 30 nigh Archithinues and 7 of our Indians, and that they were going to war again, and so left us."¹⁹³ Also contained in all four copies of the journal are many references to Cree having Archithinue prisoners and Archithinue scalps, and the trading among the Cree of captive boys and girls.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ See entries dated 22 and 23 October 1754 in all four manuscript journals. Only the copy in E.2/6 makes no mention of this conservation practice.

¹⁹² Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), 23 and 27 December 1754, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156; Henday journal in Graham's Observations, 24-27 December 1754 entry, and 28 December 1754 to 4 January 1755 entry (incorrectly dated 1755 and 1756 respectively), E.2/4, reel 4M101; Henday journal in Graham's Observations, 28 December 1754, E.2/6, reel 4M101; and, 26-27 December 1754 entry and 28 December 1754, E.2/11, reel 4M102, HBCA. In only one of the copies is the following information provided. When Henday asked his female "bed fellow" about the trading arrangements and whether they were an annual affair, she warned him that their Cree companions would be angry at this discussion. She told Henday that they would trade "from the Archithinues and Assenipoets" all the wolf and beaver pelts that they needed in the spring, for trade at York Factory. Copy in E.2/4, 28 December 1754 to 4 January 1755 entry (incorrectly dated), fo. 52, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹⁹³ Henday journal in Graham's Observations, 10 February 1755 (incorrectly dated 1756), fo. 54, E.2/4, reel 4M101, HBCA. The other three versions contain the same basic information, although Isham provided greater details of this war in his annotations. See Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), fo. 41d., B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA. Isham here said that seven of the 20 young Cree men who joined the "English Earchithinues" in their war with "the other Earchithinues" were killed and that the others had not yet been heard from before Henday set off for York Factory.

¹⁹⁴ See the following Henday journal entries in: B.239/a/40 copy, 10, 21 and 25 February 1755; E.2/4 copy, 22 and 26 February and 28 February to 1 March 1755 entry

In mid-April 1755, Connawapa rejoined Henday, with whom he had left his wife and an Archithinue girl for the winter. Later that month Henday and his party embarked downriver in canoes, meeting Attickasish at a canoe-building and gathering site on 30 April.¹⁹⁵ Over the next couple of weeks Henday's party continued downriver. In mid-May they again encountered large numbers of Archithinue. On 12 May, 100 tents of Archithinue arrived, from whom Henday's Cree companions traded more than 500 wolf pelts for old hatchets, guns and knives. Again Henday, according to all but the 1755 copy of his journal, failed in his attempt to convince any of the Archithinue to travel with him to York Factory.¹⁹⁶ Three days travel farther, another large party of Archithinue, 127 tents in all, camped opposite Henday. Again the copies of his journal vary significantly. In the 1755 copy, Henday reported that "the Earchithinues told Me they would go and See the Gov'r."¹⁹⁷ However, in the other three variant copies, the opposite and more was described, not only the refusal of the Archithinue to make the trip to York Factory, but the lack of cooperation of Henday's Cree companions to promote this undertaking.

I did my endeavour to get some of them [Archithinue] down to the fort but all in vain, and altho' the traders [Cree] promised to the chief of York Fort to talk to them strongly on that subject they scarcely opened their mouths, and have great reason to think they are rather a stoppage, for if the Archithinues and Asenepoets

(incorrectly dated 1756); E.2/6 copy, 22 February and 1 March 1755; and, E.2/11 copy, 11-27 February entry and 28 February 1755.

¹⁹⁵ Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), 21, 27 and 30 April 1755, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA. Henday wrote that he embarked "on board a new Ship."

¹⁹⁶ See 12 May 1755 entry in all four copies of the journal. The entry in the B.239/a/40 copy makes no mention whatsoever of any efforts to entice people to York Factory, while all three other copies note the failed effort.

¹⁹⁷ Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), 15 May 1755, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA.

could be brought down to trade, the others then would be obliged to trap their own furs, which at present two thirds of them does not.¹⁹⁸

Over the next few days as Henday continued downstream, he met more groups of Archithinue and of “Bloody [Assiniboine] Indians,” including the Archithinue leader with whom he had camped the previous October. Although five tents of “Bloody” Assiniboine apparently promised to accompany him to York Factory, no such commitment was made by any of the Archithinue. His journal reads:

Come to us the old Archithinue Leader, that I seed in the fall in muscuty plains, with 70 tents of His Countrymen; I smoaked with Him and did all in my power to get some of His young Men down with me to the Fort, His objections were Viz. they could not paddle; and that there were plenty of Buffalow all the year through in muscuty plains; they had not many Wolves, the pegogomaw [Cree] Indians, who were gone before us to the Fort had got them from them; We are now 60 Canoes and there are scarcely a Gun, hatchet, or knife amongst us, having Traded them with the Archithinues for Wolves.¹⁹⁹

On 23 May 1755, Henday’s party reached the uppermost French post on the Saskatchewan River, a subordinate to Basquia, probably Fort St. Louis, and then on 29 May he arrived at Basquia. At both posts Henday’s Cree and Assiniboine companions eagerly traded their best furs to the French. Although the 1755 copy of the journal provided few details, the other three copies described the increasing control that the

¹⁹⁸ Henday journal in Graham’s Observations, 15 May 1755 (incorrectly dated 1756), fo. 57, E.2/4, reel 4M101, HBCA.

¹⁹⁹ Henday journal in Graham’s Observations, 21 May 1755, fo. 36, E.2/6, reel 4M101, HBCA. Even though in none of the copies of Henday’s journal did he indicate that any Archithinue actually started down to York Factory with him, in Isham’s annotations such is stated. Isham added that two did start down in others’ canoes, but that they turned back after two or three days. This may have been a mistaken reference to the Archithinue instead of the “Bloody” Assiniboine, who did promise to go with Henday, but, as noted earlier in this chapter, none of whom actually went to York Factory until 1758. Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), Isham’s comments on fo. 40, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA. See entries in all four copies for 15, 16, 17 and 21 May 1755 for information on “Bloody” Assiniboine and Archithinue.

French were then enjoying in the fur trade of the western interior. They took only prime furs; they left wolf pelts, bear skins and lower quality and bulkier furs for the York Factory trade. Henday also noted, "The French talk several Languages to perfection. They have the advantage of us in every shape."²⁰⁰ For some inexplicable reason, the copy of the journal sent to London in 1755 remained remarkably silent on activity at the French posts. While the three later copies described in great detail First Nations trade at these two posts and the success of the French, the 1755 copy barely had a word to say on the subject. While the 31 May entry in the 1755 copy is only a one-line entry mentioning "the Ind^s are Mending their Can^s," the other versions record "the Indians would not paddle, they have kept a continual trading, and I believe many would trade all the furs and pelts they have if they could persuade them [the French] to take their heavy goods."²⁰¹ Similarly, the entries for the very next day are a one-line description of the weather in the 1755 copy against the following revealing statement: "several Assenepoets distributed their heavy furs and pelts that the French would not take, among our Indians [Cree], with directions for what to trade them for."²⁰² Henday set off from Basquia on 2 June and reached York Factory on 23 June 1755.

In a demonstration of the ultimate in gall or optimism, Isham referred to the Archithinue whom Henday met as the "English Earchithinues." He also noted that the "English Earchithinues" had a few guns acquired in trade from the Cree, but that their

²⁰⁰ Henday journal in Graham's Observations, 30 May 1755, fo. 39, E.2/11, reel 4M102, HBCA. Henday's sojourn at the two French posts is described in great detail in the three later copies of his journal in the 23 May to 1 June 1755 entries, in E.2/4, E.2/6 and E.2/11, HBCA.

²⁰¹ Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), 31 May 1755, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, and, Henday journal in Graham's Observations, 31 May 1755 (incorrectly dated 1756), fo. 59, E.2/4, reel 4M101, HBCA.

²⁰² Entries of 1 June 1755 in *ibid.*

enemies, the “forregne Earchithinues,” as yet had none. This confirms Niitsitapi oral traditions, which hold that the Niitsitapi had horses before they had guns, and that they acquired their first guns from the Cree.²⁰³ Isham was also aware of Cree self-interest in not supporting direct Archithinue trade at York Factory, for as he wrote, “it would deprive them of Getting Goods of the English Earchithinues, Which att present they do for 1/3 the value they gett such of us.”²⁰⁴ The Cree were understandably loathe to relinquish their advantageous middlemen role. Henday and Isham both supported the idea of sending men inland to promote the company’s trade and advised that doing so would garner both the Archithinue and Assiniboine trade.²⁰⁵ Perhaps the championing of this doomed course of action, sending individuals from Hudson Bay to compete against established, well-supplied French posts in the interior, was the reason for Isham and Henday downplaying the French success at their posts in the Henday journal sent to London in 1755. But even if so, why would Isham persist in his recommended course of action, if he knew that it could not really counteract the French? Perhaps his naïveté or optimism or his English ethnocentrism/racism overrode his better judgement or reason? Isham also informed the Governor and Committee in London that the leader of the Archithinue had in October apparently offered Henday his daughter in marriage. Henday refused the kind offer. Since Henday was single, Isham implied that he should have

²⁰³ See for example interview of March 1911 with Bear Skin (Piikani), pp. 318-20, vol. 2, and, interview with Three Bears (Piikani) and Heavy Runner (Kainai), pp. 621-6, vol. 3, David C. Duvall Fonds, M4376, Glenbow Archives. At the making of a peace between the Cree and the Niitsitapi, guns were exchanged for horses, with the Cree providing training in the use of firearms and the Niitsitapi teaching the Cree how to ride.

²⁰⁴ Isham comments in Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), fos. 39d. and 40, B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 40d.

accepted, as it “would have Created a firm friendship and would have been A great help in Engageing them to trade.”²⁰⁶

Ongoing Debates

Among the four versions of Henday’s journal there is apparently contradictory information concerning the relationship between the Cree and the Archithinue. Twenty Cree accompanied the Archithinue whom Henday encountered in October 1754 on a war excursion against other unidentified First Nations peoples to the south. And yet shortly thereafter, Henday’s remaining Cree companions expressed fear that the Archithinue would kill them, especially if they were to trap beaver on Archithinue land. This inconsistency would not appear to be easily dismissed by asserting that the Cree accompanied one particular people known generically as Archithinue, but were afraid of a different people who were also known as Archithinue. It is virtually certain that the Archithinue whom Henday met in October 1754 belonged to the Blackfoot alliance. They were probably Siksika, Kainai, Piikani or Gros Ventre. The exact identity of this particular Archithinue group may never be known with any certainty.²⁰⁷ After parting

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 41d. The copies of the journals vary enormously on the subject of Henday and First Nations women. The 1755 copy is the only one that states (2 February 1755) that Henday strived “to please the women, which is y^e Chiefest thing that will Encourage the Ind^s to come to trade.” However, as noted earlier, the later copies mention his female “bed fellow.” There is no such reference in the copy sent to company headquarters in 1755.

²⁰⁷ Henday’s 1754 Archithinue have generally been identified by modern scholars as Niitsitapi. Rich is quite typical of this tradition, although for some reason he labelled them as both “Blood Indians” and “Blackfeet” (Siksika or Niitsitapi?). Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 124-5. However, speculation is also a part of this tradition. For example, at the annual conference of the American Society for Ethnohistory in Minneapolis in 1998, a paper was given in which the presenter stated that there is a tradition among the Niitsitapi that Henday taught them how to use guns. When I inquired of this graduate student what his source was for this, he answered that this information was contained in a letter (which

from the large Archithinue camp in October, Henday's small party moved north towards the North Saskatchewan River, farther away from the Shoshone, another people also referred to as Archithinue and a people who were the enemies of the Niitsitapi and their allies throughout the 18th century. So, if Henday and his Cree companions felt safe in October interacting with the large group of Archithinue, undoubtedly members of the

he had not himself read) in the HBCA. The letter was written by a collateral descendant of Henday's who, at the opening of an exhibit at the Provincial Museum of Alberta, met a direct descendant of the Piikani chief, Brings Down the Sun. This Piikani descendant told the Henday descendant that Brings Down the Sun had met Henday in 1754 and that Henday had given him a gun. This was big news to me. Without doubt, if true, this would have been not only the first confirmation of the singular identity of Henday's Archithinue, but it would also have been the earliest that a real (as opposed to mythical) Niitsitapi person was identified in any Niitsitapi oral traditions. Pursuing confirmation, I contacted the HBCA and then staff at the Provincial Museum of Alberta. This letter from Henday's collateral descendant was indeed held by the HBCA and it did apparently state what the conference presenter had said. However, inquiries in Edmonton led to serious questions of the bona fides of this oral tradition. According to staff at the Provincial Museum of Alberta, the originally recorded version of the story did not specifically identify Henday as the White trader; the storyteller/informant did not claim to know the identity of the Whiteman, or that of the Piikani individual. The interpreter present at the recording of this story apparently merely suggested the possibility that this Whiteman might/could have been Henday. There was apparently no time-line involved that necessarily suggested Henday either. As one museum staff member pointed out, there was a well known man named Brings Down the Sun who was an informant of Walter McClintock at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Although many names have been passed down from one generation to the next among the Niitsitapi, it is not likely that a man identifiable as Brings Down the Sun met Henday. This traditional Niitsitapi story seems to have been very recently transformed from the story-teller describing an unidentified Whiteman, to the interpreter suggesting the possibility that he could have been Henday, to the descendant of Brings Down the Sun apparently stating unequivocally that his ancestor, Brings Down the Sun, met the named Whiteman, Anthony Henday. Although I failed to follow up and myself contact the Piikani descendant of Brings Down the Sun, a serious failure and breach of etiquette on my part, this apparent recent, if not new-found, tradition that Henday gave a gun to a named Piikani individual in 1754 remains problematic.

Blackfoot alliance, why is it that they did not feel secure two months later when even deeper in the territory of these same peoples, and farther away from the Shoshone?²⁰⁸

This question is a good introduction to two long-standing debates. The first is over the question of whether the Cree of the western interior forced their way into the territory of their neighbours during the early fur trade era, enabled to do so by their being the first to acquire European firearms. The second and closely related question concerns the relations between the Cree and the three Niitsitapi peoples during the 18th century. Were they friends or enemies?

Surviving 18th-century records demonstrate the presence of Cree people as far west as present-day Alberta, contemporary with first Euroamerican visitation. Cree seemed to reside in, or regularly make use of, every place that these 18th-century fur traders travelled. Until the 1970s, the standard wisdom was that the Cree shifted west as a result of the fur trade. This rapid migration was attributed to various consequences of the Euroamerican fur trade, which included the acquisition of firearms by the Cree, the depletion of beaver in traditional Cree territory and also the drastic reduction in the number of large game animals in their territory. The root of the rapid migration hypothesis was contained in Sir Alexander Mackenzie's 1802 book. When describing the Saskatchewan region, he wrote that about the Cree "there is no question of their having been, and continuing to be, invaders of this country, from the Eastward."²⁰⁹ He attributed their ability to succeed in this invasion by their having had sole access to firearms, of all the First Nations peoples of the area. David G. Mandelbaum turned this 19th-century

²⁰⁸ Russell, nevertheless, did argue that Henday's Cree party was then in fear of the Shoshone, not the Niitsitapi; he asserted that the Niitsitapi were the military and trading allies of the Cree. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 95.

²⁰⁹ Alexander Mackenzie, *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie*. Ed., W. Kaye Lamb (Toronto, 1970), 117.

statement (by a fur trader who had had no first-hand experience in the Saskatchewan region) into a 20th-century mantra. In his 1940 study of the Plains Cree, he asserted:

The consequences of the fur trade also affected Cree relations with other tribes. For one thing, the alliance with the Assiniboin was cemented, presumably because of the prior acquisition of guns by the Cree. Their old enemies, the Dakota [Sioux], were repulsed, and later, the wave of Cree conquest swept over the Gros Ventre [*Atsina/A'aninin*] and Blackfeet [Niitsitapi] in the west, and the Athapascans [*Dene*] to the north.²¹⁰

From the 1970s onward, a group of scholars led by James G.E. Smith, David Meyer and Dale R. Russell contested this established faith. Through new archaeological and linguistic research, combined with a reassessment of the documentary record, they argued that the presence of the Cree in the far western interior pre-dated the fur trade.²¹¹

It has since been a hot debate. Arthur J. Ray best summed up the situation:

It seems to me that population dislocations caused by the fur trade probably occurred in two waves – one was associated with the advance of the middlemen frontier and the other (later) one was triggered by spreading resource depletion....

²¹⁰ David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina, 1979), 30-1. Mandelbaum's 1940 study was reproduced in this 1979 volume, along with other material.

²¹¹ James G.E. Smith, "Chipewyan, Cree and Inuit Relations West of Hudson Bay, 1714-1955," *Ethnohistory* 28, No. 2 (Spring 1981), 133-56; James G.E. Smith, "Western Woods Cree," in June Helm, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 6, Subarctic* (Washington, 1981), 256-70; James G.E. Smith, "The Western Woods Cree: Anthropological Myth and Historical Reality," *American Ethnologist* 14, No. 3 (August 1987), 434-48; David Meyer, "Late Prehistoric Assemblages from Nipawin: The Pehonan Complex," *Saskatchewan Archaeology* 2 (1981), 4-38; David Meyer, "Comment on McCullough's View of Protohistoric Cree and Blackfoot in Alberta and Saskatchewan," *Saskatchewan Archaeology* 4 (1983), 45-6; David Meyer, "Time-Depth of the Western Woods Cree Occupation of Northern Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan," in William Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Eighteenth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa, 1987), 187-200; David Meyer and Dale R. Russell, "The Selkirk Composite of Central Canada: A Reconsideration," *Arctic Anthropology* 24, No. 2 (1987), 1-31; Dale R. Russell, "The Ethnohistoric and Demographic Context of Central Saskatchewan to 1800," in David Burley and David Meyer, eds., *Nipawin Reservoir Heritage Study, Volume 3, Regional Overview and Research Consideration* (Regina, 1982), 151-9; and, Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*. Russell's book was largely written to refute Mandelbaum's.

This may have happened in the western Cree territories of northern Saskatchewan. The movement of Cree middlemen into the territory of other Cree could explain why historical records point to migrations into the region in the early post-contact era, but the archaeological record apparently suggests a pre-contact Cree presence. It is unlikely, however, that either the archaeological or historical records will ever resolve this issue definitively.²¹²

Accepting Ray's summary of the situation, I will not further address this particular debate, but the corollary hypothesis will be a focus of this chapter. Although no author has bluntly stated the connection between the two positions, it is undeniable. If the Cree invaded Niitsitapi territory then they must have been enemies. However, if the Cree did not invade Niitsitapi territory then they could have been friends. With the challenge to the migration/invasion theory has come a change in interpretation of Cree-Niitsitapi relations from the earlier "perennial enemies" state of affairs.²¹³ Apparently unaware of the debate over Cree migration, John Milloy posited an 18th-century Cree-Niitsitapi economic and military alliance. Documented periods or episodes of violence after 1770 were seen by him as aberrations to the norm, at least until his supposed end of this alliance in 1806.²¹⁴ Gary Doige followed in Milloy's footsteps, but he argued that the Cree-Niitsitapi alliance ended much earlier, in the 1780s, with the construction of fur trade posts easily accessible to the Niitsitapi.²¹⁵ In his superb study of the Cree, Dale

²¹² Arthur J. Ray, "Some Thoughts about the Reasons for Spatial Dynamism in the Early Fur Trade, 1580-1800," in Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 122.

²¹³ Nevertheless, the theory of Cree invasion of Niitsitapi territory in the 18th century is remarkably persistent. For some historiographical examples, see: Gallatin, *A Synopsis*, 123; Hodge, *Handbook of Indians*, 118; Walter M. Hlady, "Indian Migrations in Manitoba and the West," in *Papers Read before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba* Series III, no. 17, 1960-1961 (Winnipeg, 1964), 45; and, Paul H. Carlson, *The Plains Indians* (College Station, 1998), 36.

²¹⁴ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, and, Smyth, "Missed Opportunity."

²¹⁵ Gary Blake Doige, "Warfare Patterns of the Assiniboine to 1809" (M.A. thesis, Department of Geography, University of Manitoba, 1989), and, Smyth, "Missed

Russell likewise asserted the existence of this alliance.²¹⁶ The most recent to do so was Theodore Binnema, who not only accepted the economic relationship, but asserted that there was some sort of concerted military alliance of the Niitsitapi, the Cree and the Assiniboiné, “the northeastern coalition,” against “the southwestern coalition,” dominated in turn by the Shoshone and the Crow.²¹⁷ The logic of these overlapping positions is impeccable. Prior to the arrival of Euroamerican traders in Niitsitapi territory, the Cree and Niitsitapi shared a mutuality of interests. As Binnema succinctly summarized:

The military importance of metal and guns induced the Blackfoot [Niitsitapi] bands in the eighteenth century to cultivate friendly relations with Cree and Assiniboiné suppliers. Thus, Cree and Assiniboiné bands that visited Euroamerican fur traders forged symbiotic relationships with the Blackfoot and Atsina [Gros Ventre] bands on the northwestern plains. The Blackfoot and Atsina depended on the Cree and Assiniboiné for access to European goods while the Cree and Assiniboiné relied on the Blackfoot for their horses.²¹⁸

Thus was born the “northern” or “northeastern” coalition. It does make sense, but did it actually exist?

The supporters of the hypothesis of a Cree-Niitsitapi alliance in the 18th century all point to, and quote at length from, a unique record of this time, the account of Saukamappee, or Young Man. He was a Cree from the Basquia area of the lower Saskatchewan, who was adopted into the Piikani tribe as a young adult and with whom he lived most of his life. David Thompson spent considerable time with him during the winter of 1787-1788. More than 50 years later he wrote down Saukamappee’s story in his memoirs. Thompson was about 80 when he wrote his *Narrative* around 1850; he had been 17 when he spent the winter with Saukamappee and the Piikani. At the time of their

Opportunity,” 351.

²¹⁶ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*.

²¹⁷ Binnema, “The Common and Contested Ground.”

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

meeting, Saukamappee was himself an old man.²¹⁹ Saukamappee's account tells much of the relationship between the Cree and the Niitsitapi, as well as a great deal about the spread of guns and horses in the West. When he was a teenager, he accompanied his father and a Cree party numbering about 20 in a war outing in support of the Piikani against the "Snake [Shoshone] Indians." At that time the Cree had only a few guns, and none was taken on this excursion. Probably about 10 years later, Saukamappee again joined the Piikani against the Shoshone. On this occasion he, two other Cree and seven Assiniboine all brought firearms. They played a decisive role in the Piikani defeat of the Shoshone, who by then had horses, but not guns. They had brought no horses with them to this battle, as they had done previously against the Piikani, but shortly thereafter Saukamappee did see his first Shoshone horse.²²⁰

A great deal of calculating and speculating has gone on as a result of Thompson's rendition of Saukamappee's story. All of the editions of the *Narrative* contain this same information: that Saukamappee was about 75 to 80 in 1787-1788, and that his account "went back to about 1730."²²¹ However, the chapter missing from the 1916 edition had Thompson himself speculating that Saukamappee must have been about 90 years old when they met, because Thompson thought that his stories apparently went back to about

²¹⁹ Thompson's *Narrative* was first published in 1916. Another edition, which included a chapter missing from the first, was published in 1962. Since then, the 1916 edition has been re-issued and another edition has also been published. David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*. Ed. Joseph Burr Tyrrell (Toronto, 1916 [reissued New York, 1968]); *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812*. Ed. Richard Glover (Toronto, 1962); and, *Travels in North America, 1784-1812*. Ed. Victor G. Hopwood (Toronto, 1971).

²²⁰ Thompson, *Narrative*, ed. Glover, 47-50 and 240-48. Saukamappee also provided a great deal of information on the smallpox epidemic of 1781-1782. See below.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

1700.²²² John Milloy asserted, based solely on the dates provided immediately above, that the two battles described by Saukamappee occurred in 1723 and 1732.²²³ Dennis Rinn, rather than drawing the conclusion that the conflicting dates and ages in the complete *Narrative* might demonstrate a certain lack of reliability, attempted to pinpoint the dates, to within five years, that each of the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples must have acquired horses, based on Saukamappee's history.²²⁴ While the Saukamappee account does offer unique insights and information, such precise dating is not possible; Thompson obviously was unsure of Saukamappee's age and Saukamappee was not specific about the exact years when these two events transpired. The best that one can do is to suggest that probably sometime around 1740 the Niitsitapi peoples, and shortly thereafter the Assiniboine as well, acquired their first horses. By the time Henday travelled in the West in 1754-1755, the Plains Assiniboine and Archithinue whom he encountered had large numbers of horses. Oral traditions of the three Niitsitapi peoples agree that they acquired their first horses in trade from First Nations peoples west of the Rockies, but these various histories differ wildly on the time of this first acquisition.²²⁵

²²² Ibid., 49.

²²³ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 7-8, and, Smyth, "Missed Opportunity," 343-4.

²²⁴ Rinn, "The Acquisition," 54-63.

²²⁵ John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture, with Comparative Information from Other Western Tribes* (Washington, 1985). One Niitsitapi tradition places the date of first acquisition about 1725. See Hugh A. Dempsey, *The Amazing Death of Calf Shirt and Other Blackfoot Stories: Three Hundred Years of Blackfoot History* (Saskatoon, 1994), 27. Another places it demonstrably much too late, in the early 1800s. See George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a People* (Lincoln, 1962 [1892]), 177. A radical tradition holds that there were already millions of horses in North America when the first Europeans arrived, but that the Niitsitapi, in the early 1700s, travelled to the Gulf of Mexico to obtain Arabian stallions from the Spanish to breed with their own North American mares. See Nell Kipp, *Pre-Columbian History of the Red Man (before Anglo-Saxons)* (Browning, 1980), 28-30.

Concerning the external relations of the Cree and the Niitsitapi, it is evident from Saukamappee's account that at least a few Cree, and Assiniboine, on some occasions (only twice in his story) fought alongside the Piikani against their shared enemies, the Shoshone. Milloy cited only this one source as the basis for his hypothesis of an 18th-century Cree-Niitsitapi military alliance.²²⁶ Others who proposed this hypothesis of a military alliance backed it up with more evidence,²²⁷ including the already-noted Henday journal, which described some Cree joining unidentified Archithinue (presumably members of the Blackfoot alliance) in a war excursion against another unidentified First Nations group (presumably the Shoshone) to the southwest.

Hudson's Bay Company Inland Travellers and French Inland Trading Posts

From 1754 until 1774, the Hudson's Bay Company sent men on more than 55 trips to the interior. Only 12 journals exist of these trips, largely because few of these inland travellers were literate enough to keep them. Combined, these 12 documents make up a unique record of Aboriginal life in the West in the 18th century. They are especially revealing of Cree life, for each of these company travellers was escorted by Cree guides and companions into the interior.²²⁸ However, many of these journals deal directly or indirectly with the Archithinue, and with specifically named peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. Only two of these journals have ever been published, Henday's 1754-1755

²²⁶ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 6-37, and, Smyth, "Missed Opportunity," 343-5.

²²⁷ See the Russell, Doige and Binnema works cited above.

²²⁸ Actually, one company servant, Edward Lutit, travelled inland with Assiniboine in 1766, the first to have done so, but he did not keep a journal. York Factory post journal, 19 June 1766, B.239/a/54, reel 1M157, and, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Graham general letter, York Factory, 18 August 1766, fo. 101, A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

journal and Matthew Cocking's 1772-1773 journal.²²⁹ The originals are all held in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. By far the best description and analysis of all of these journeys and journals was provided by Dale Russell.²³⁰

So pleased was Isham with the outcome of Henday's initial voyage that he sent him back inland almost immediately. Henday and another company servant, William Grover, were dispatched in late June 1755 "to gain the forreign Ind^s down to trade," but Grover's "Jaded" health resulted in a failed mission and their return to York Factory within a week.²³¹ Henday's own ill health caused yet another aborted inland trip the next summer.²³² However, two men, Joseph Waggoner and Joseph Smith were sent inland later that summer, at the invitation of the "Sturgeon [Cree] Ind^s." These inland Cree, whose trade at York Factory had been dwindling in recent times, apparently wanted some encouragement from the Hudson's Bay Company. Smith and Waggoner were to offer it. In their instructions, Isham wrote, "I hope by Your Presence and the Presents, You make with the Chief and Old Men (you having such by You for that Purpose) will Induce them all to come down with You to Trade." The two spent a year with the Sturgeon Cree.²³³

²²⁹ Henday, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country," and, Matthew Cocking, "An Adventurer from Hudson Bay. Journal of Matthew Cocking, from York Factory to the Blackfeet Country, 1772-73," edited by Lawrence J. Burpee. *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada Third Series*, vol. 2, section II (1908): 89-121.

²³⁰ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 91-119.

²³¹ York Factory post journal, 28 June and 2 July 1755, B.239/a/39, reel 1M156, HBCA.

²³² York Factory post journal, 22 and 28 June 1756, B.239/a/41, reel 1M156, HBCA.

²³³ Isham's orders to Smith and Waggoner have survived, as has Smith's journal of the trip. See: York Factory post journal, 18 and 28 August 1756 and 24 June 1757, B.239/a/42, 1M157; Joseph Smith inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 1756-1757, B.239/a/43, reel 1M157; Isham's 28 August 1756 orders to Smith and Waggoner, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, fos. 2-3, A.11/115, reel

During their sojourn, the two Englishmen met “about 20 french Men who used them very Civily,” and the Sturgeon Cree also advised on the best location for a trading post.²³⁴ The same two men returned inland in 1757, and Smith again kept a journal.²³⁵ These two trips, to the upper Assiniboine River and then the Touchwood Hills, were intended not to lure new trade to York Factory but to try to regain lost trade. Isham reported on the early success of this company practice. “I now by Experience find a great advance in the trade, by so doing [sending men inland]; It is plain to be seen, 3 years ago had but 13 Canues of those Sturgeon Ind^s, &c^a, Last year 39, and this year 57, as wide Difference, and doubt not but as further Increase in future.”²³⁶ Ten days later the first “Bloody” Assiniboine trading party arrived, after an absence of more than 20 years.²³⁷ As discussed above, they apparently returned to York Factory as a result of Henday’s visit with them three years earlier.

Except for the 1762-1763 season, when no one was sent inland, until the establishment of Cumberland House in 1774 there were always York Factory servants

188, HBCA. Gift giving was the normal, required practice. Henday had been specifically instructed to give gifts to the First Nations leaders and so was Henry Pressick in 1761. One can safely assume that all other inland travellers were so instructed (and supplied), whether in their written orders or not. London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Isham’s instructions to Henday, York Factory, 26 June 1754, fo. 172d., A.11/114, reel 188, and, Andrew Graham’s instructions to Pressick, 23 June 1761, in York Factory post journal, fo. 46, B.239/a/48, reel 1M157, HBCA.

²³⁴ York Factory post journal, 24 June 1757, B.239/a/42, and, Smith journal, 31 May 1757, B.239/a/43, reel 1M157, HBCA.

²³⁵ York Factory post journals, 30 June 1757, B.239/a/42, and, 30 June 1758, B.239/a/44; and, Joseph Smith inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 1757-1758, B.239/a/45, reel 1M157, HBCA.

²³⁶ York Factory post journal, 4 July 1758, B.239/a/44, reel 1M157, HBCA.

²³⁷ Ibid., 14 July 1758, and, Isham to Jacobs letter, York Factory, 17 July 1758, York Factory correspondence book, fos. 3d.-4, B.239/b/16, reel 1M255, HBCA.

living and travelling with First Nations people in the interior. The practice reached its peak in the last half of the 1760s, when six or seven men separately went inland from York Factory each season.²³⁸ Besides filling a diplomatic function, these inland trips permitted the Hudson's Bay Company to keep close tabs on its rivals, the French. In June of 1761, the company received the very pleasant news from its men returning to York Factory, and from visiting First Nations customers as well, that the French had left their posts the previous fall and had not returned.²³⁹ After a few years of supply and recruitment difficulties, the French Canadian traders had finally been completely cut off from the West by the Seven Years War. By default, the Hudson's Bay Company regained its monopoly position.

In the summer of 1759, Anthony Henday and Joseph Smith were sent "into the Earchithinue Country," but virtually nothing is known of this trip, except that they returned safely a year later. Neither Henday nor Smith apparently kept a journal, and York Factory's correspondence books are not much help.²⁴⁰ Dale Russell has argued that

²³⁸ See the following York Factory post journals (reels 1M157-8, HBCA): B.239/a/54, 1765-1766 (six men inland); B.239/a/55, 1766-1767 (six men inland); B.239/a/57, (six men inland); B.239/a/60, 1768-1769 (seven men inland from York Factory, plus William Tomison from Severn); B.239/a/62, 1769-1770 (only four men inland); B.239/a/65 and 66, 1770-1771 and 1771-1772 (only two men inland each season).

²³⁹ York Factory post journal, 6, 13 and 20 June, and 23 July 1761, B.239/a/48, reel 1M157, HBCA.

²⁴⁰ York Factory post journals, 28 and 29 June 1759, B.239/a/46, and, 22 June 1760, B.239/a/47, reel 1M157; and, York Factory correspondence book, Humphrey Marten to Jacobs, York Factory, 3 July 1759, fos. 2d.-3, and, Jacobs to Marten, Fort Prince of Wales, 15 August 1759, fos. 6-7, B.239/b/18, reel 1M255, HBCA. Henday and Smith were to have been accompanied by an unnamed Frenchman who had recently been the "master" at Basquia or a subsidiary French post, but he was too incapacitated to make the trip. Marten, at Churchill, considered him to be "a dangerous person." Whoever he was, this Frenchman may have been offering his services to the Hudson's Bay Company in the face of an imminent job loss, the result of the Seven Years War.

they probably wintered in present-day central Alberta.²⁴¹ In June 1761, another company servant, Henry Pressick, was sent on a "Journey to the Earchithinue Country." He was guided by Attickasish, the Pegogamaw Cree leader who had escorted Henday in 1754. According to Andrew Graham, who wrote out Pressick's orders, Attickasish was "now Designed to Visit those Natives Again," and he had promised "to Assist the Earchithinues in paddling they not being Acquainted With a Canue." Pressick was instructed: to encourage intertribal peace; to try to get the Archithinue to come to York Factory to trade; and, to do the same with "the Mithcoe, or bloody [Assiniboine] Indians," who lived east of the Archithinue. He was also told to keep a daily journal and to draw a map of his journey, but he apparently failed to do either.²⁴² Upon Pressick's departure, the post journalist wrote that they hoped that the Governor and Committee, in London, would approve of this undertaking, "which is one of the Choepest steps to Enlarge your Hon^s trade."²⁴³ Despite the fact that Humphrey Marten, temporarily in charge of York Factory after Isham's death, stated "We hope great Success therein,"²⁴⁴ nothing discernible came of this particular venture.

In June 1764, the Hudson's Bay Company at York Factory got the news from visiting First Nations peoples that its monopoly days were over. The Seven Years War had ended in 1763 in an English victory, but the Pontiac Uprising which followed the

²⁴¹ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 96.

²⁴² Pressick left York Factory in June 1761 and returned the next June. His instructions from Graham are contained in the 1761-1762 journal. York Factory post journals, 25 June and fos. 46-7, B.239/a/48, and, 18 June 1762, B.239/a/49, reel 1M157, HBCA.

²⁴³ York Factory post journal, 25 June 1761, B.239/a/48, reel 1M157, HBCA.

²⁴⁴ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Marten general letter, 2 August 1761, fo. 60d., A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA. See also Frits Pannekoek, "Humphrey Marten," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 517-9.

European peace treaty kept the pathway/waterway to the West barred until 1764. However, the successors to the French traders quickly returned to the West. These newcomers, led mostly by Scots, but with large numbers of French Canadian voyageurs, apparently quickly re-occupied the abandoned French fur trade post sites.²⁴⁵ This was a wise move on the part of the newcomers. The sites of the French posts on and near the Saskatchewan River had apparently been chosen because they were already existing rendezvous areas for the western Cree.²⁴⁶ The Canadians probably did not arrive on the Saskatchewan River until the summer of 1764. Joseph Smith's 1763-1764 inland journal made no reference to competitors, but Smith, who had travelled to the South Saskatchewan and wintered near the Eagle Hills, did note on 18 May 1764 that he had passed an abandoned French post, likely Fort St. Louis, which had been burned to the ground. Although Smith met no Archithinue that season, his journal does contain references to his Cree companions' reluctance to go into the Plains for fear of meeting the "earsheadeny." Russell asserted that these unidentified Archithinue were the "Snake" (Shoshone), not the Niitsitapi.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Ferdinand Jacobs, the officer in charge at York Factory, wrote, "I have been Informed by the Indians that Came here on Friday Last [unidentified people in 73 canoes, on 22 June] that M^r Isbister is with a Body of men of nigh 100 in 15 Large Cannoes Coming up to the back of Your Hon^{rs} # Settlements to Trade where the French had their Houses, they allso Say that Jn^o Patterson is with Him, and that Several French men are with him as Pilots & Labourers." York Factory post journal, 24 June 1764, B.239/a/51, reel 1M157, HBCA. In early July, Jacobs reiterated this information of the newcomers heading for the French posts. York Factory correspondence book, Jacobs to Moses Norton, York Factory, 2 July 1764, fo. 5, B.239/b/25, reel 1M255, HBCA.

²⁴⁶ David Meyer and Paul C. Thistle, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity in a Cree Social Geography," *Ethnohistory* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 403-44.

²⁴⁷ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 97-8, and, Joseph Smith inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 13 November 1763, B.239/a/52, reel 1M157, HBCA. For additional information on the Archithinue, see also entries dated 18

Concern about “the People of Canada,” “the People of Quebec” or “those Pedlars from Quebec” soon became paramount to the Hudson’s Bay Company. Its servants heading inland from York Factory were now instructed to find out and record all that they could about “the Pedlars.”²⁴⁸ In June 1765, one Louis Primeau arrived at York Factory and offered his services. He was a French Canadian who had lived for several years in the interior with First Nations peoples and who, although illiterate, was “a Compleat Master of the Indian Language.”²⁴⁹ Jacobs signed him to a two-year contract and sent him inland to promote the company’s trade. Until his defection to the Canadians in 1773, Primeau was considered to be by far the most valuable of all of the company’s inland travellers.²⁵⁰ Always looking for some advantage in the trade, Andrew Graham hired another Canadian, John Cole, in 1772 to go inland for the Hudson’s Bay Company. However, contrary to generally accepted wisdom both then and now that the best pelts come from the coldest climates, Cole told him that the best Archithinue furs, including beaver pelts, were to be found on the Mississippi River, and that it was from the First Nations peoples living there that the Cree and Assiniboiné traded their prime furs. But

November 1763 and 5 May 1764.

²⁴⁸ For instance, see copies of instructions given to various Hudson’s Bay Company inland servants in London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA: Jacobs to Joseph Smith, Isaac Batt and John Taylor, 24, 27 and 30 June 1764, fo. 85; Jacobs to Louis Primeau, 27 June 1765, fo. 93; and; Jacobs general inland instructions, 1769, fo. 122. Each of these sets of instructions also warned against private trade, a growing worry of the company’s with its unsupervised servants in the interior. Of course, there were the usual remonstrances against intertribal warfare.

²⁴⁹ York Factory post journal, 22, 25 and 27 June 1765, B.239/a/53, reel 1M157, HBCA, and, Sylvia Van Kirk, “Louis Primeau,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 647.

²⁵⁰ York Factory post journal, 18 June 1773, B.239/a/68, reel 1M158, and, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Jacobs general letter, York Factory, 5 September 1767, fos. 108-8d., A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

this Canadian deserter soon in turn deserted the English company and returned to the Canadians.²⁵¹ Considering his short tenure with the English company and his almost bizarre advice concerning the location of the choicest furs, one could wonder whether Cole might not have been a plant, sent by the Canadians to mislead the Hudson's Bay Company. Unwilling as yet to build posts in the interior, the company was desperate for experienced men to travel inland to attempt to augment its returns. When the company had the field to itself in the early 1760s, York Factory's returns and profits peaked, but with the coming of the Canadians in ever greater numbers from 1764, soon dwarfing anything seen during the French regime, that post's economic outlook took a nosedive.²⁵² From the mid-1760s York Factory's journals and correspondence are full of information and concerns about the Canadian Pedlars.

²⁵¹ John Cole is a most interesting case. He apparently deserted a Canadian trader, Thomas Corry, in the summer of 1772 and sought employment at York Factory. Graham engaged him for two years. Corry wrote to Graham about Cole, saying that Cole and another man, Bove (whom Cole told Graham he could recruit the next year), robbed him before deserting him. Nevertheless, Graham not only hired him on contract, but relied heavily on Cole's advice about counteracting the Canadians in the interior. Cole went inland for the 1772-1773 season, but shortly thereafter deserted the Hudson's Bay Company and returned to the Canadian fold. See the following pieces in the HBCA: York Factory correspondence book, 11, 13, 16 and 17 July 1772, B.239/a/66, reel 1M158; London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Graham general letter, York Factory, 26 August 1772, fos. 142d.-5, and, Thomas Corry to Graham, River de Cane, 2 June 1772, fos. 148-8d., and, Jacobs general letter, York Factory, 30 August 1773, fo. 53, and, Jacobs general letter, York Factory, 27 August 1774, fo. 168d., reel 188. See also Graham, *Andrew Graham's Observations*, 292n.; Richard Glover introduction in Edwin Ernest Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journal, 1775-82, First Series, 1775-79* (London, 1951), xxi-xxiv; and, Edwin Ernest Rich, "John Cole," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1741 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 160. In Graham's 26 August letter (fo. 145), he wrote "The thick pelted Beaver is Procured by the Archithinues [from the Mississippi] & bartered with the Assinepoets & other Indians; the farther to the Southward, the thicker the pelt is." Cole was killed by First Nations people at his post near the Eagle Hills on 22 April 1779. Joseph Burr Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor* (Toronto, 1934), 124n.

²⁵² See table in Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 59.

In June 1766, Andrew Graham reported on the visit of a single unidentified (by personal or tribal/group name) Archithinue man to York Factory. Graham did not specify with whom he came to the post.

Am certain great numbers of Young Fellows [First Nations men] lay up the Country strolling about amongst the Archithinnees and will not look after Furrs to come down with, This & this alone they call going to War. I had one Archithinne Man down here this Summer, He told me that he was not afraid of the Trading Indians and said they were more obliged to Him & his Country men than he was to them; He told me Furrs especially Wolves were plentiful and that the Trading Indians might get 'em and bring them down to the Fort; He was surprized to see what Tobacco Powder & Shot &c. they carry away, when his Countrymen give them 40 or 50 Wolves for an old Gun or Kettle, & Ten Wolves for a Hatchet. He traded with me 50 Wolves and a few parchment Beaver, I made him a present of several Things, but He told me often and at parting that his Countrymen would never come down they not knowing how to paddle but told me to talk to the Trading Natives to get Wolves from his Countrymen & bring them down.²⁵³

This almost unique visitor was likely a member of the Blackfoot alliance, probably a Gros Ventre, Siksika or Kainai, but it is impossible to know. Certainly the wolves that he brought to trade and the wolves abundant in his homeland strongly indicate that he was from the Plains. He made it quite clear to Graham that his visit to York Factory was an oddity, a trip made out of personal curiosity, and not one that Graham would see repeated by others of his people.

In 1766-1767, William Pink travelled inland, his first of four consecutive, annual trips. In the first of his four surviving journals, he noted meeting large numbers of mounted Assiniboiné who had never been to the Bay and later he reported on a war involving Archithinue. In the spring, while at a Cree canoe-building site on the Saskatchewan River, near the Birch Hills, he wrote:

this Day I heared by to men that Came to us, of Sevrill Bodeys of Indians Tenting farther up this River than what I am, at the plases of Bilding there Caneues; I find they has Bien at war With other Indians caled by them, Ye, arch, a, thin, a, wooke

²⁵³

York Factory post journal, 19 June 1766, B.239/a/54, reel 1M157, HBCA.

[Archithinue], in the fall of the Year or Rather in the Winter and a Great Maney Ware kiled on the other Side.²⁵⁴

Although this passage is open to interpretation, it would seem as if another, more westerly Cree group was at war with unidentified Archithinue.

Pink's second journal is much more detailed and revealing. Again he travelled inland by canoe with the Cree. They apparently left their canoes a day's journey above "the Ruiens of the uper French house," probably old Fort St. Louis.²⁵⁵ A week later they met what Pink called "our Famelyes." His use of the personal possessive pronoun perhaps suggests that he had a family of his own among the Cree; he might the year before have been married or he might have been adopted by a Cree family.²⁵⁶ He also reported on the intentions of some Cree to travel far to the west to wage war on people who lived in a region rich with beaver.²⁵⁷ That winter his group trapped wolves and foxes just south of the North Saskatchewan River, which he referred to as the "Maine River." They headed east to the canoe-building sites, where he not only eventually met Lutit his fellow inland traveller, but also, at two different times and at two separate locations, large camps of Archithinue. On 2 May 1768, 100 tents of "Yeartch, athen, a, Woóks" camped across the river from Pink's 80 tents of Cree. On 4 May Pink described changed external relations:

²⁵⁴ William Pink inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 30 April 1768, B.239/a/56, reel 1M157, HBCA. For a description and analysis of Pink's inland travels, see Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 98-103.

²⁵⁵ William Pink inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 6 and 7 August 1767, B.239/a/58, reel 1M158, HBCA, and, Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 100.

²⁵⁶ Pink mentioned "our Famelyes" on several occasions. See Pink journal, 28 July, 7, 11 and 14 August 1767, B.239/a/58, reel 1M158, HBCA.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 October and 14 November 1767.

this Day i heared of a Nother Bodey of those people Called Ye, artch, athin na; wocke Coming a way for the Maine River those people called Ye, artch, a, thyn, au, Wocks and those that i am With Some Yeares a Gow ware Most times at wars with one a Nother But Now the has Made an a Greement one with a Nother that the will be both as one none, and will not Gow to warr one with a Nother a Gaine, as Soon as i Come up a Gaine to those people the are to Gow a way up inland for to acquaint the Rest of thare Contrey people of this and Like wise for to Trap an Catch what Foxes thay Can and Give to those people that i am with Called Ne, hithe, nethyne, wock ["Nahathaway," another name for the Cree], Yeartch, e thyn, na, wocks Cannot paddle in a Caneue.²⁵⁸

It would seem that Pink had witnessed, or just missed witnessing, a new peace arrangement between this particular, unidentified and unidentifiable Archithinue people and the Cree, which was not only intended to result in the cessation of intertribal violence but in the commencement of mutually beneficial trade. Farther downriver he encountered another large party of Archithinue, a camp of 200 tents. However, when the flotilla of Pink's Cree companions approached the campsite, the "Ye, artch, e, thyn, na, wock" struck their tents and quickly moved back from the river, "being in feare of those Indanes that I am with for Some Years a Gow the ware at warr with them."²⁵⁹ The next day Pink and about 20 Cree visited this Archithinue camp and he presented them with "what few Trifling Things I had," in order to ease the tension. He then wrote, "I find that those are Diferent from them that I See at the Plase of Bilding of our Caneues the Cannot paddle. Nor kill but few Fors upon the acioount of those being at war with them Most Times and not in Couradging them to Do it."²⁶⁰ Apparently this particular Archithinue group or people was also usually at war with the Cree and they did not trade regularly with them. Pink later also reported on a Canadian house, its occupants and their intention to build

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 4 May 1768.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 13 May 1768.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 14 May 1768.

farther west, as well as the decision of many of his Cree companions to trade at this Canadian post and not to travel to York Factory.²⁶¹

After another seven men had been sent inland from York Factory in the summer of 1768, Ferdinand Jacobs, the officer then in charge there, reassessed this policy. Trade was dropping rapidly; 108 fewer canoes visited York Factory than in the previous year. He declared the practice of sending men individually to be a failure. He recommended that instead a large party of men, with "a Carefull Prudent man to Command them," should be sent to build a post to compete with the Pedlars in the interior.²⁶² He reiterated these sentiments the next summer, even, based on advice from his inland servants, asserting that the post be built at "a place Called Paw' wis' tick An'nee' cus, that is the Fall Carrying Place." He doubted that there was then a suitable person at York Factory to lead such an expedition, but he said that he would order three large canoes for this purpose for next year. He also said that he would continue to send individuals inland, but that he would gradually decrease the numbers.²⁶³ In this letter, and in another written five days later, he warned of the possible negative repercussions of changing established company practices. He advised:

We cannot at present promise to put a stop to the sending Men In Land, as the Individuals they go with who are Leading Indians of the first rank may take offence and not come to the Factory, and prevent other Indians from coming down to Trade at the Factories for they receive a considerable benefit by having these

²⁶¹ Ibid., 25 and 26 May 1768.

²⁶² London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Jacobs general letter, York Factory, 20 August 1768, fo. 116d., A.11/115, reel 188, and, York Factory correspondence book, Jacobs to Norton, York Factory, 25 July 1768, fo. 9d., B.239/b/29, reel 1M255, HBCA.

²⁶³ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Jacobs general letter, York Factory, 20 August 1769, fos. 124-4d., A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

Men in their Families, which if suddenly taken from them, may irritate them to trade their Furrs with the Pedlers.²⁶⁴

This potential offending of the “Trading Captains,” who were annual visitors to the post, might increase the trade from more distant groups at newly-built posts in the interior, but such undertakings stood to threaten the existing trade of the company’s steady customers at the Bay. Jacobs was no longer so certain that the company should stop sending individual servants inland. His wording also suggests that these men might have been adopted into the families of the Cree trading leaders.

William Pink was one of seven men sent inland from York Factory in 1768, the highest number ever sent, either before or after that year. His is the only inland journal of that season. Again, he mentioned “our Famelyes,” on his party’s way to spending most of the winter in present-day Alberta, south of the North Saskatchewan River.²⁶⁵ In mid-October, in groups of only two or three tents, Pink’s Cree companions began “now to Trap for Wouolves for the are veary plenty heare in this Open Contrey.”²⁶⁶ Two days after the wolf hunting began on the northern Plains, Pink described the precautions which his Cree companions were taking. “The Indaines heare Now Constantley Keep gard in the night time for Feare of other Indanes Caled yeartchethyn,newocks and Cene,pick we ethy newocks for Feare they Should Come upon them all on a Suden in the night time.”²⁶⁷ The first group was obviously the Archithinue. The “Cene,pick we ethy newocks” were the “Snake Indians,” the Shoshone. Matthew Cocking confirmed them to be the “Snake

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Jacobs general letter, York Factory, 25 August 1769, fo. 120.

²⁶⁵ William Pink inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 6 and 14 August 1768, B.239/a/61, reel 1M158, HBCA.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 20 October 1768.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 22 October 1768.

Indians" in 1772, in his list of nine different Archithinue peoples, which included the "Kanapick Athinneewock or Snake Indians."²⁶⁸ Somehow Dale Russell concluded from this Pink journal entry that the Cree were then not afraid "of the members of the Blackfoot Nation but, rather, their common enemies further west."²⁶⁹ Yet it seems evident that those particular Cree, in that specific place, at that precise time were definitely afraid of both the Shoshone, who lived southwest of the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, and also the Archithinue, who on this occasion must have been one or more of the Piikani, Siksika, Kainai, Sarcee or Gros Ventre. Dale Russell suggested that these specific Archithinue could have been the Sarcee or Gros Ventre, who were members of the Blackfoot alliance, but neither of whom was Niitsitapi.²⁷⁰ For the proponents of the Cree-Niitsitapi alliance hypothesis, this practice of dismissing out-of-hand the interpretation that evidence could possibly point to Cree-Niitsitapi hostility is virtually the norm. References to hostilities between Cree and Archithinue are interpreted as being between the Cree and anyone other than the three Niitsitapi peoples. Unidentified Archithinue involved in hostilities with the Cree or Assiniboine are generally credited as being the "Snake"/Shoshone. In this particular case, Russell was not alone. Binnema likewise argued that these Archithinue of Pink's "were almost certainly not Blackfoot [Niitsitapi]." Doige also suggested that they were Gros Ventre, not Niitsitapi.²⁷¹ When Pink and his compatriots arrived back at York Factory in June 1769,

²⁶⁸ Matthew Cocking inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 1 December 1772, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA.

²⁶⁹ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 101.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 197-9, and 214.

²⁷¹ Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 189n., and, Doige, "Warfare Patterns," 129.

Ferdinand Jacobs was told that James Finlay, a Canadian trader, had tried to lure these experienced Hudson's Bay Company servants into his employ.²⁷²

William Pink's journal of his last inland trip was his best with respect to non-Cree First Nations peoples; in it he specifically identified individual peoples, not once using the generic Archithinue reference. His Cree party spent most of the winter west of the Eagle Hills, around Manito Lake, near the present-day Alberta-Saskatchewan border. In mid-September 1769, Pink heard of country to the southwest which apparently abounded in beaver and wolves, but it was the home territory of the "Kenepicks,we,e,thyn,na,woc" (the "Snake Indians," or Shoshone), and the Cree would not dare venture there. The country was very open and this people "having all horses is the Reason the indaines that I am With are in Feare of them."²⁷³

In December, Pink met and identified two Niitsitapi peoples, the Kainai and the Siksika. His Cree companions were trapping wolves and foxes, when he sent tobacco to the nearby Kainai. The giving of tobacco was a traditional First Nations sign of greeting and friendship. Pink wrote, "This Day I Sent Tobacco [to] a Bodey of ye archethy nnawocks Called Mithquo thinnowocks [Blood/Kainai] for Encouradgment for to Snare Woulves for the Trap None."²⁷⁴ The day before Christmas, he made the following entry in his journal. "This Day Came and put up By us a Bodey of indaines Called Black footed." This is the first reference clearly specific to the Blackfoot/Siksika. It is also the first recorded use of the English name by which they have been known for over two

²⁷² Finlay and his operation are described at some length in a York Factory post journal, 19 June 1769, B.239/a/60, and, in Pink's journal, 16 May 1769, B.239/a/61, reel 1M158, HBCA.

²⁷³ William Pink inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 18 September 1769, B.239/a/63, reel 1M158, HBCA.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 13 December 1769. Pink's party apparently started trapping wolves and foxes on 3 December.

centuries. On 1 January 1770, Pink and the Cree “Moved a way with the Black Footed Indaines” to a place where the Siksika were going to make a pound to kill buffalo. The Cree apparently assisted at the Siksika buffalo pound, but resumed trapping wolves on 12 January, even though the Siksika continued at the pound. Pink soon after described in some detail the Siksika method of snaring wolves.²⁷⁵ On 1 February, 11 tents of “Sinnapoets”/Assiniboine passed close by on their way “to the plase of Bilding of thare Caneues.” All seemed right with the world this season, as there was no hint of troubles or tensions between the Niitsitapi and the Cree, or between the Niitsitapi and the Assiniboine. Pink and his Cree party set off themselves for the canoe-building sites 10 days later. Pink and the Cree apparently camped with the “Black Footed” people from 24 December until 11 February.

That April, at a canoe-building site and meeting place on the Saskatchewan River, Pink described warfare that had occurred during the past winter between some Cree, led by a man named “Wappe nassue,” and the “Kee,ne,pick,e,thin,a,wock” (the “Snake”/Shoshone):

these Indaines [the “Kee,ne,pick,e,thin,a,wock”] Came Down upon ours with thare horses, and Likewise Sevrill Gones [guns] that the had But they Cannot Shote well yet this is the Firs time that the See Gons with them Natives we now Not whare the Get them, for the Catch No Fores [furs], our Indaines Say that the Cary Dear Sinnares to the South ward and Trad With Some people thare But the Dos not Now how the has Killed one of our Indaines and Wounded Three, But our Indaines Killed 80 of them.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 17 January 1770. This description is reproduced in Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 103.

²⁷⁶ William Pink inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 1 April 1770, B.239/a/63, reel 1M158, HBCA. One could question the objectivity in the Cree report of the respective casualties of war. This Cree leader, whose name is given elsewhere as “Wappennessen” or “Wappenasew,” had been a stalwart of the trade at York Factory since 1755, but switched allegiances to the Canadians during the 1771-1772 season. See York Factory post journal, 7 July 1772, B.239/a/66, reel 1M158, and, most important, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Graham general letter, York Factory,

This is the first reference to the “Snake”/Shoshone having guns. Perhaps they got them directly or indirectly from the Mandan-Hidatsa trading centre on the Missouri; perhaps they traded their horses for guns.²⁷⁷

The 1769-1770 journal of William Tomison, another Hudson’s Bay Company servant, has also survived. He had been sent inland from Severn, a post on the Bay subordinate to York Factory. He travelled to present-day southern Manitoba.²⁷⁸ Twice he made reference to Archithinue. On 10 September 1769, he met some “Susanewa [Cree] Indians,” who told him that “the Archithine Indians had killed Severall of their Countary men.” On 5 June 1770, he heard reports that “one of the English men were killed in the winter by the archithine Ind^s.” Who were these particular Englishmen and who were these particular Archithinue? The former were not Hudson’s Bay Company men, for if they had been there would be considerably more information elsewhere in the company’s records. As for these Archithinue, they could have been almost anyone. Considering Tomison’s location, southern Manitoba, it is likely, as Russell has suggested, that they were First Nations peoples from the Missouri River.²⁷⁹ This literate Tomison journal

26 August 1772, fos. 142d. and 143d., A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

²⁷⁷ Two good pieces on intertribal trade networks are: John C. Ewers, “The Indian Trade of the Upper Missouri before Lewis and Clark: An Interpretation,” *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 10, No. 4 (1954), 429-46, and, William R. Swagerty, “Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West to 1870,” in Wilcomb E. Washburn, ed., *History of Indian-White Relations, Volume 4, Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, 1988), 351-74.

²⁷⁸ William Tomison inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 1769-1770, B.239/a/64, reel 1M158, HBCA, and, for a description and analysis of the journey and the journal, Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 113-5.

²⁷⁹ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 115.

contains a great deal of information about the fur trade and First Nations peoples, but offers little or nothing with respect to the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance.

By now, the value of these inland trips was being seriously questioned both at York Factory and in London. Returns were dropping, as were the numbers of First Nations customers showing up at the Bay each year. In July 1770, Jacobs reported that many of those who did arrive were “very poorly Gooded in Furs.”²⁸⁰ He also reported that four men had been sent inland, two at the specific request “of two Leading Indians,” but that next year only two men would be sent inland.²⁸¹ Only two men were sent inland during the 1771-1772 season, and in 1772-1773 only two were sent initially, with the surprise Canadian recruit, John Cole, going later.²⁸² As of the end of July 1771, 100 fewer canoes had arrived to trade at York Factory than had come by that same time in 1770.²⁸³ In early July 1772, Graham wrote that “what few furs I have received are mostly damaged and what the Pedlars inland would not take.”²⁸⁴ By late August he was reporting an even further deteriorated, “unpromising” situation.²⁸⁵ The Canadians built their posts near the gathering and canoe-building sites of the Cree, so the Hudson’s Bay Company

²⁸⁰ York Factory correspondence book, Jacobs to Norton, York Factory, 21 July 1770, fo. 10, B.239/b/31, reel 1M255, HBCA.

²⁸¹ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Jacobs general letter, York Factory, 7 September 1770, fos. 126d. and 128d., A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

²⁸² York Factory post journals, 1 and 15 July 1771, B.239/a/65, and, 27 and 29 June and 17 July 1772, B.239/a/66, reel 1M158, HBCA.

²⁸³ York Factory correspondence book, Jacobs to Norton, York Factory, 22 July 1771, fo. 8d., B.239/b/32, reel 1M255, HBCA.

²⁸⁴ York Factory post journal, 3 July 1772, B.239/a/66, reel 1M158, HBCA.

²⁸⁵ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Graham general letter, York Factory, 26 August 1772, fos. 142-5, A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA. This is a wonderful seven-page analysis of the situation with respect to the Canadian opposition, along with Graham’s proposed remedies.

got only “the refuse,” which the Canadians would not take. Graham vehemently urged that the company build a post inland, and he even nominated a couple of men who could lead such an undertaking, one of whom would soon do just that: Samuel Hearne. Graham also reported that the Canadians “in their Discourse concerning the Little North (meaning Hudson’s Bay) wondered that we lay along the Sea & did not penetrate Inland.”²⁸⁶ He warned the Governor and Committee in London that “unless Your Honours exert your selves speedily, the Trade at York Fort will be ruined.”²⁸⁷ Graham also noted that during the summer two “Western Archithinues” had visited York Factory, from whom unidentified “Indians,” likely Cree, traded furs which they in turn traded to the English. Graham showed these two visitors how properly to prepare pelts, and they apparently, according to him, “promised to bring them [the exemplary pelts] so & tell their Countrymen.”²⁸⁸ The two men may have been Niitsitpai or Gros Ventre, but there is no way of knowing for certain.

Matthew Cocking and the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Move Inland

By 1772 it was patently obvious to all that for the Hudson’s Bay Company to persist in its practice of relying on individual company servants, many of whom were illiterate and all of whom were under-equipped, to counteract the Canadian presence in the interior was not only an exercise in futility but it was economic suicide. Andrew Graham had long been a proponent of inland posts. However, he believed that the company needed more detailed and reliable intelligence on the situation in the interior. He wrote to the Governor and Committee that “the Accounts given us by Men sent Inland were

²⁸⁶ Ibid., fo. 144.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., fo. 144d.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., fo. 142d. See also Graham, *Andrew Graham’s Observations*, 256.

incoherent & unintelligible. I thought therefore that a sensible Person might Answer the Purpose much better, & make many observations which may be of Utility, & mentioning my Sentiments to M^r Cocking, he readily offered himself for any Service to promote Your Interest.”²⁸⁹ Matthew Cocking was then 29, and second-in-command to Graham at York Factory. Cocking, who had some training in surveying, or practical astronomy, was sent inland in June 1772, guided by someone identified only as “a Leading Indian,” likely, as Russell has pointed out, a Pegogamaw or Keskachewan Cree.²⁹⁰ Cocking kept an incredibly detailed daily journal of his trip to the area about present-day Saskatoon. He took longitude and latitude readings for his separate “Log Account of a Journey Inland,” and he also included at the end of his journal his “Thoughts on making a Settlement Inland.”²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Graham general letter, York Factory, 26 August 1772, fo. 144, A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.; Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 106; and, York Factory post journal, 10, 21, 24, and 27 June 1772. See also, Irene M. Spry, “Matthew Cocking,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 156-8. Practical astronomy was the mariner’s art and science of determining one’s position on the open seas. Cocking and later Hudson’s Bay Company surveyors employed the same methods in painting the big picture of geographic features and routes travelled in the western interior. See David Smyth, “David Thompson’s Surveying Instruments and Methods in the Northwest, 1790-1812,” *Cartographica* 18, no. 4 (1981), 1-17.

²⁹¹ Cocking’s complete journal, the one sent back to London in 1773, is contained in the York Factory post journals, 1772-1773, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA. The daily entries are on fos. 1-51, his thoughts on an inland settlement on fos. 49-50, and his log book on fos. 51-78. There is a greatly edited and abridged version of Cocking’s journal in the final draft manuscript of Andrew Graham’s *Observations*, ca. 1792, fos. 41-73d., E.2/11, reel 4M102, HBCA. It was this abbreviated version that was published in 1908. Matthew Cocking, “An Adventurer from Hudson Bay. Journal of Matthew Cocking, From York Factory to the Blackfeet Country, 1772-73,” ed., Lawrence J. Burpee. *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* Third Series, vol. II, section II (1908), 89-121. Burpee appears to have deposited the hand-written copy of the Graham (E.2/11) copy of Cocking’s journal in the National Archives of Canada. Andrew Graham Fonds, MG18, D5 (R2245-0-8-E), NAC.

The editor of the published version of Cocking's journal mistitled it, for Cocking never did reach "the Blackfeet Country." His westernmost progress put him on the boundary of the Gros Ventre's territory with the Cree and Assiniboiné. In early September Cocking's party was at "Mehisew Wachy or Eagle Hill," and by mid-month they were far enough to the southwest that his Cree companions were afraid of encountering "the Snake Indians," the Shoshone.²⁹² Cocking also then learned from arriving Assiniboiné that they had recently left "several Tents of Yachithinnee Indian Friends."²⁹³ There are scattered references throughout Henday's journal to the Archithinué, including to such things as their pottery, "Tobacco Plantation" and buffalo pounds.²⁹⁴ Cocking was also told by his Cree companions that "their Yeachithinnee Friends" stockpiled ammunition for use in war against their enemies, "the Snake Indians," while they still killed game animals with the traditional bow and arrow.²⁹⁵ From 21 November until the end of the month, a few "Yachithinnee" emissaries visited the buffalo pound where Cocking and his party were stopped. Finally, on 1 December 1772, a large party arrived. Cocking's journal entry for that date is one of the most important

²⁹² Cocking inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 6, 16 and 17 September 1772, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA. Burpee (see Cocking, "An Adventurer," 103n.) could not accept that Cocking's "Snake Indians" could "be the true Snakes, or Shoshones." He thought, as did Elliott Coues, that they were Sioux, even though Burpee knew that this was far outside of Sioux territory. However, there is little or no doubt that these "Snake Indians" were indeed Shoshone. Although other First Nations groups have been known as "Snakes," those referred to throughout this thesis, with virtual certainty, were all Shoshone. For a discussion of this matter of positive identification, see Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 413-7.

²⁹³ Cocking inland journal (in York Factory journal series), 18 September 1772, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7, 19 and 23 October 1772.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4 November 1772.

surviving records relating to the Archithinue. It is here given in full (minus the mandatory weather observations that started each daily entry):

Our Yeachithinnee Friends came to us and pitched on one side of the Buffalo Pound: twenty-one Tents of them, the other seven are gone another way. _ One of the Leaders is thoroughly acquainted with the Assinnee Poet Indian tongue, so that we shall be able to understand each other, my Leader being also acquainted with that tongue. _ These Natives are called Powestick Athinnewock or Water-fall Indians [Gros Ventre]. The People I am with inform me there are four Nations more which go under the name of Yeachithinnee Indians with whom they are in friendship. Viz' Mithcoo Athinnewock or Blood Indians [Kainai]; Koskiketew Wathussituck or black foot Indians [Siksika]; Pigonew Athinnewock or muddy Water Indians [Piikani] and Sussewuck or woody Country Indians [Sarcee]. Their Enemies also go under the general name of Yeachithinnee Indians, four Nations. Kanapick Athinneewock or Snake Indians [Shoshone]; Wah-tee or Vault Indians [Hidatsa?]; Kuttunnayewuck [Kootenay]; and Nah-puck Ustiquanack or flat Head Indians [Flathead] so called they tell me from their foreheads being very flat.²⁹⁶

Not only does this Cocking entry make it crystal clear that not all Archithinue were "Blackfeet," but it identifies for the very first time the alliance that lasted into the middle of the 19th century, the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance: the Piikani, Siksika, Kainai, Sarcee and Gros Ventre. Niitsitapi oral history holds that this five-tribe alliance was formed in the early 18th century.²⁹⁷ It is also quite clear that the Archithinue whom Cocking and his Cree companions met on friendly terms were the Gros Ventre (*Atsinal A'aninin*), and that these Gros Ventre and Cree communicated with each other in a language shared by the leader of each group, Assiniboine. This alone refutes Milloy's

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 1 December 1772, fo. 22d. The published, abridge version of the journal contains only the first five listed groups, the friends; it does not list the four Archithinue enemies. Cocking, "An Adventurer," 1 December 1772, pp. 110-1. Russell has argued that the "Vault Indians" are the Hidatsa, but the evidence is inconclusive. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 190 and 210-2, and, "The Puzzle," 82-5.

²⁹⁷ James Willard Schultz, who had been adopted by the Piikani, recorded this oral tradition in the early 20th century. See his *Signposts of Adventure: Glacier National Park as the Indians Know It* (Boston, 1926), 15.

argument that the Cree and the Gros Ventre were inveterate enemies throughout the 18th century.²⁹⁸

The Gros Ventre and Cocking's party camped together at the buffalo pound for more than two weeks. During that time he observed and participated in the traditional calumet ceremony with his Gros Ventre hosts.²⁹⁹ He also unsuccessfully tried to get two Gros Ventre to go to York Factory with him. Their lack of familiarity with canoes, their worries about an adequate food supply and their unwillingness to leave their families were all stated reasons for refusing.³⁰⁰ On 16 December 1772, three Archithinue arrived at the camp who solicited recruits for a war excursion, the cause of the war apparently being a shortage of food. Cocking reported:

Three Yeachithinnee Indians came from the Westward. They inform us that many of their Countrymen are sickly and Buffelo very scarce that way so as they are greatly distressed for want of food. On this account they say the War Pipe has been smooked and several are intended to go to War. They have brought a present of Tobacco to be smooked by their Friends here with a desire that they will accompany them in this Expedition.³⁰¹

The three new arrivals could have been other Gros Ventre, but it is just as likely that they were delegates from the Piikani, Kainai or Siksika. They obviously came to this

²⁹⁸ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 16. Here he wrote, "From the 1690s all through the eighteenth century, the Naywattame-Gros Ventre were excluded by the Cree, who hunted and attacked them seemingly at every opportunity."

²⁹⁹ Cocking journal (in York Factory post journal series), 5 December 1772, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 and 15 December 1772. The Gros Ventre may have had the same attitudes about meat, especially buffalo meat, as the Niitsitapi, and, therefore, have been unwilling to risk being deprived of it. See footnote above. They may also have heard of the fate of a party of their neighbours, the "Bloody" Assiniboine, who in 1762 apparently starved to death on their way home from York Factory. Not surprisingly, no representatives of this Assiniboine people/group ever returned to that post. York Factory correspondence book, Jacobs to Norton, York Factory, 25 July 1763, fo. 6d., B.239/b/24, reel 1M255, HBCA.

³⁰¹ Cocking journal (in York Factory post journal series), 16 December 1772, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA.

Archithinue buffalo pound seeking other Archithinue who would join them. Cocking provided no record of the response. The next day he and the Cree party left for the Eagle Hills, while the Gros Ventre stayed at the pound. Cocking's journal is a remarkable record of the times, but from mid-December there are no further references to the Archithinue. It is full of observations on the Pedlars, including the fact that they sent men out among the First Nations peoples from their inland posts and that they used alcohol as a prime inducement to trade.³⁰²

Cocking concluded the section of his journal on inland settlements: "As to sending Servants Inland, in the manner that has been already pursued, to encourage Trade. I am of Opinion it will Answer no end." He began that section as follows: "The Indians all in general express an earnest Desire that the Company's Servants should make a temporary Settlement near them Yearly; and seem surprized that being so near they do not as well as the Pedlers, who Paddle a great Way and undergo great Hardships."³⁰³ Not only the Canadians but the First Nations residents of the West could not understand why the Hudson's Bay Company remained glued to the shores of Hudson Bay. Although Cocking thought that an inland post might make First Nations peoples "more Indolent," he strongly supported the establishment of a post in the interior nevertheless.³⁰⁴

Surprisingly, for the first few years after the Hudson's Bay Company finally made its move inland, the Archithinue peoples virtually disappeared from company records. This was the result of several factors. The company was most concerned with establishing itself inland to counteract the Canadians, in order to regain the trade that it used to have with its longtime customers from the not-so-distant past; expanding the trade

³⁰² Ibid., especially 4 March 1773.

³⁰³ Ibid., fos. 49 and 50.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., fo. 50.

beyond its onetime customers was not the company's immediate priority, nor did it have the resources to stretch so far, so fast. The company's first two inland posts were both within Cree territory. Again, the establishment of the inland posts at first precluded much other concerted effort. The Hudson's Bay Company stopped sending men out to visit far-distant peoples in the hopes of enticing them down to its posts to trade; it did not have the men to spare. There was a brief period, from the early 1770s to the early 1780s, when the various Archithinue peoples virtually drop from view in surviving fur trade records. This being said, I will only briefly skim over the Hudson's Bay Company's undertakings in the interior which eventually led to direct and regular trade with all of the member nations of the Blackfoot alliance. Besides, this period of initial face-to-face (or post-to-post), Canadian-English competition in the western interior has already been covered extensively in many publications.³⁰⁵

By the time that Matthew Cocking had returned to York Factory in June 1773, the Governor and Committee in London had already sent orders that the company was to establish an inland post. John Cole was to have seen to the construction of two large canoes in 1772-1773, to be used for the push into the interior. He had not done so.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ For example, see: Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Samuel Hearne*; Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals (First Series, 1775-79, 1951, and Second Series, 1779-82, 1952)*; W. Stewart Wallace, ed., *Documents Relating to the North West Company* (Toronto, 1934); Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, and The Fur Trade*; Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations*; Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company"; Marjorie Elliott (Wilkins) Campbell, *The North West Company* (Toronto, 1973); Gordon Charles Davidson, *The North West Company* (Berkeley, 1918); Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*; and, Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*.

³⁰⁶ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Graham general letter, York Factory, 26 August 1772, fo. 144, A.11/115, reel 188, and York Factory correspondence book, Graham to Jacobs, Severn House, 4 January 1774, fo. 7, B.239/b/34, reel 1M255, HBCA; and, Glover in Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, First Series*, xxi-xxiii. Cole had told Graham that large birchbark canoes, like those used by the Canadians, were a necessity. Birch trees did not grow anywhere near York Factory. Perhaps in

When the ship arrived at York Factory on 22 August 1773, it was impossible to mount an inland expedition. Samuel Hearne had been appointed to lead the undertaking, but as there were no company canoes available and apparently no First Nations people then willing to take company men inland in theirs, plans were delayed for a year. Hearne was an experienced company traveller, who had recently led inland expeditions from Fort Prince of Wales (Churchill).³⁰⁷ Ferdinand Jacobs ordered preparatory work for the next year's expedition. Even before Hearne had arrived at York Factory, three company servants and three Home Guard Cree had been sent from there in late August 1773, both "to acquaint the Natives" of the company's plans to build at Basquia and to have large canoes built.³⁰⁸ Unfortunately, low water levels in the rivers forced the return of that party less than two weeks after it had left.³⁰⁹

Finally, in June and July 1774 the long-awaited big push inland to Basquia began. It was not an auspicious beginning. With no canoes or boats of its own, the Hudson's Bay Company in effect had to hitchhike inland. Gifts were presented to trading leaders visiting the post in order to secure places in their returning canoes for company men and

expectation of this need for inland transportation, or just for use close to the post, York Factory's ship's carpenter had been ordered, in August 1770, "to make a kind of a boat in form of a Canoe." York Factory post journal, 15 and 16 August 1770, B.239/a/62, reel 1M158, HBCA.

³⁰⁷ C.S. Mackinnon, "Samuel Hearne," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 339-42, and, Samuel Hearne, *A Journey from Prince of Wales Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean, in the Years 1769, 1770, 1771, and 1772*. Ed., Joseph Burr Tyrrell (Toronto, 1911).

³⁰⁸ York Factory correspondence book, Jacobs to Norton, York Factory, 23 August 1773, fo. 11, B.239/b/33, and Jacobs to Graham, York Factory, 1 September 1773, fo. 2, B.239/b/34, reel 1M255; York Factory post journal, 28 August 1773, B.239/a/68, reel 1M158; and London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Hearne to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 2 September 1773, fo. 156, A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

³⁰⁹ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Jacobs to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 26 August 1774, fo. 158, A.11/115, reel 188, HBCA.

trading goods. Not only was it not a very efficient method of mass transit, but it soon proved to be not very reliable either. Hearne and a party consisting of two company servants and two local Cree left in the canoes of “the Leading Indian” on 23 June. Two more men left in a similar fashion on 2 July, followed by Cocking (Hearne’s second-in-command) and two additional men two days later. Other men and goods were taken inland for Basquia later that month.³¹⁰ Word reached York Factory in early September that Hearne had selected a site above Basquia and was there building the company’s first inland trading post. The “Trading Indians” who brought this news were then paid to carry goods back to Hearne.³¹¹ After consulting with local First Nations leaders and after considerable personal perusing of the area, Hearne had picked a site on a bay on Pine Island Lake, about 60 miles above Basquia, where his men started building Cumberland House, on 5 September 1774.³¹² This site was strategically located close to the principal routes to York Factory, Churchill, the Saskatchewan River, the English River and the Athabasca country. The Hudson’s Bay Company had moved inland not a moment too soon, for Canadian traders had just entered the rich English River country and were then cutting deeply into the trade of Fort Prince of Wales, as they had been doing for several years to that of York Factory and the more southerly posts on Hudson and James bays.³¹³

³¹⁰ York Factory post journal, 21 June to 10 July 1774, B.239/a/70, reel 1M159; London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, two letters from Jacobs to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 26 August 1774, fo. 158, and 27 August 1774, fo. 168d., A.11/115, reel 188; and York Factory correspondence book, Jacobs to Graham, York Factory, 31 July 1774, fos. 10d.-1, B.239/b/34, reel 1M255, HBCA.

³¹¹ York Factory post journal, 7 and 11 September 1774, B.239/a/71, reel 1M159, HBCA.

³¹² Hearne’s journal of the entire year has been published. See Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Hearne*, 115.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 5 August 1774, p. 106, and, York Factory post journal, 19 June 1774, B.239/a/70, reel 1M159, HBCA.

On 7 August, Hearne noted that he had heard nothing of Cocking or of Isaac Batt, experienced inland travellers, both of whose parties he expected would have beaten him to his present location. They never did join Hearne that trading season. Batt and another company servant had been abandoned by their escorts. Cocking, who had taken a different route from that of Hearne, stumbled upon the two men. Later, however, Cocking's own First Nations companions, fearing an epidemic that apparently was sweeping through peoples farther west, refused to take Cocking to the Saskatchewan and to Hearne. Cocking ended up wintering in the upper Assiniboine River region. He arrived safely back at York Factory on 27 June 1775.³¹⁴ Hearne himself had arrived there from Cumberland House four days earlier. He had left three men at the inland post for the summer.³¹⁵

The first season at Cumberland House was a start in the struggle against the vast number of Canadians who were arrayed against the Hudson's Bay Company, and each other. Transportation problems were to pose difficulties for a considerable period of time. Obviously, the company needed its own canoes or boats. Its customers' canoes were too limiting in cargo space, and they were not reliable. They did not always go where and when the company wanted them to. When Hearne returned to York Factory, he recommended the construction of boats at Cumberland House and also that the company build another inland post, on the North Saskatchewan River, to compete with Canadians already established there. He knew that this expansion would have to wait until the company had adequate transportation resources at least to meet the minimum

³¹⁴ Matthew Cocking inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), especially 9 July and 9 August 1774 entries, B.239/a/72, reel 1M159, HBCA.

³¹⁵ Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Hearne*, 29 May and 23 June 1775, pp. 153 and 156.

requirements of Cumberland House.³¹⁶ The request for an Orkney boatbuilder to be sent to Cumberland House was made in 1779 by the officer in charge there, but to no avail.³¹⁷ Eventually the company would overcome its debilitating transportation disadvantages in the interior. The York boat, a redesign of an Orkney boat, eventually displaced canoes on most of the company's main transportation routes.³¹⁸

Cocking replaced Hearne in charge at Cumberland House for the 1775-1776 season. His replacement, in 1777, was William Tomison, the man who would orchestrate the company's opposition to the Canadians on the Saskatchewan into the 1790s.³¹⁹ In 1778, Tomison sent Robert Longmoor to build a post to compete with the uppermost Canadian posts on the North Saskatchewan. A late start precluded his attaining that goal, but he did build Upper Hudson House on the North Saskatchewan River, just above the forks, amid Canadian opponents who outnumbered him ten to one. It was a most unsuccessful winter at the English outpost.³²⁰ The next year the Hudson's Bay Company was upriver with the outfit before its Canadian rivals. An attack by First Nations peoples on the uppermost Canadian post in April 1779 had made the Euroamericans reticent to venture as high upriver.³²¹ Longmoor and Tomison started building Lower Hudson

³¹⁶ Ibid., 189 and 193-4.

³¹⁷ Richard Glover, "York Boats," *The Beaver Outfit* 279 (March 1949), 21.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 19-23, and, Alvin, "The Uncelebrated Boats."

³¹⁹ John Nicks, "William Tomison," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VI, 1821 to 1835* (Toronto, 1987), 775-7.

³²⁰ Longmoor's post journal was published in full in Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, First Series*, 307-36. The original journal is in the HBCA. See Hudson House post journal, B.87/a/1, 1778-1779, reel 1M63.

³²¹ John Cole was killed in this hostility, likely by Cree. See: Glover, in Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, First Series*, xxxiii, and 331n.-2n.; Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, 182n.; and, Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Samuel Hearne*,

House, 14 miles below the previous season's site, in early October 1779.³²² The Hudson's Bay Company occupied this post until 1787; it was its most westerly post until the mid-1780s.³²³

On 11 November 1779, a historic event occurred. Two tents of "Fall Indians" (Gros Ventre/*Atsina/A'aninin*) arrived to trade at Hudson House.³²⁴ This is the first documented instance of any member of the Blackfoot alliance, positively identifiable as such, visiting a fur trade post. Others undoubtedly had done so, perhaps as early as the 1750s at a French post, and almost definitely in the 1770s at a Canadian post, but this is the first documented case. Tomison, who had not yet returned to Cumberland House to take command there for the season, quite matter of factly wrote in the Hudson House journal, "At noon Two Tents of fall Indians arrived with a few furs and some Provisions."³²⁵ That was it. There was no surprise. They left the next day.

In February 1781, two more tents of Gros Ventre arrived at Hudson House, where Longmoor was still in charge. He reported, "two Young Men arrived for Tobacco for two Tents of fall Indians that is to come in to morrow, No Provisions but some Wolves and

224n.-5.

³²² Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House post journal (B.87/a/2, reel 1M63, HBCA), 8 October 1779, pp. 68-9.

³²³ The Hudson House post journals for the years 1779-1780, 1780-1781 and 1781-1782 were published in Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*. The original journals, stretching from 1778 to 1787 are in the HBCA. See Hudson House post journals, B.87/a/1-9, reel 1M63.

³²⁴ For confirmation of these "Fall Indians" as Gros Ventre (*A'aninin/Atsina*) see Thomas F. and Alice B. Kehoe, "The Identification," and "Note to 'The Identification'," and, Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 200-12.

³²⁵ Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House post journal (B.87/a/2, reel 1M63, in HBCA), 11 and 12 November 1779, pp. 75-6.

foxes.”³²⁶ The next, 28 February 1781, Longmoor merely recorded that “the fall Indians arrived,” and, on 2 March, that “The fall Indians went off.” About two weeks later, another small party arrived. On 11 March 1781, Longmoor wrote, “two Young Men arrived for Tobacco from the fall Indians, that is only lately brought to kill furs, but they are Starving, they have mostly Small Colour’d foxes, and but very few Wolves.” The next day, “the Indians traded and went away.”³²⁷ From Longmoor’s journal entry it is apparent that he thought that the Gros Ventre had just started “to kill furs” for trade. However, it is more than likely that they had been killing animals and trading their furs for European goods for years, but with Cree and Assiniboiné middlemen. Before the Hudson’s Bay Company or any of its Canadian rivals could further develop direct trade with the Gros Ventre, or initiate it with any of their allies (the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai and Sarcee), a terrible smallpox epidemic struck, which forever altered the human landscape in the Northwest.

Conclusions

With the exception of Dale Russell, most of those who have written about the Niitsitapi in the 18th century have generally been less than rigorous in their analysis of the surviving record; this has led to numerous false “sightings” in the 20th century of the Niitsitapi in the 18th century. Because of the extent of the misidentifications, misinterpretations and wild speculation, this chapter, really a prelude to the Niitsitapi trade with Euroamericans, had to be much longer than otherwise would have been the case. Well documented and detailed rebuttals and explanations were required; alternative interpretations were presented. Despite claims by so many scholars, there was never a

³²⁶ Ibid, (B.87/a/3, reel 1M63, HBCA), 27 February 1781, p. 181.

³²⁷ Ibid., 11 and 12 March 1781, p. 183.

Niitsitapi trade at York Factory. Apart from the visit of four unidentified individuals, and an unknown number of Crow (*Absaroke?*) in 1757, there was no Archithinue trade at York Factory either. The Blackfoot-speaking peoples were unwilling and/or unable to travel that far from their home territory to trade directly with Euroamericans. There is ample evidence that a significant trade existed at times in this period between the Niitsitapi and the Cree, with both benefiting considerably from the exchange. The Niitsitapi were definitely eager to obtain European goods, especially firearms. However, I do not believe that there is adequate evidence to support the now widely-held position that there was a Cree-Niitsitapi military alliance throughout the 18th century. The evidence is both insufficient in its extent and contradictory; it is inconclusive at best.

Just as the Niitsitapi wanted European wares, Euroamericans wanted to tap directly into the rich fur resources of Niitsitapi country. The initial success of the French in the western interior, which was followed by the extraordinary success of their Canadian successors, finally forced the Hudson's Bay Company from the shores of the Bay. After its failed experiment of sending individual company servants inland, to avoid economic disaster the English company at last established inland posts of its own to counteract the Canadians. In all of these trading endeavours - at York Factory, with individual travellers and at French, Canadian and English posts in the interior - Euroamericans accepted First Nations norms and conventions, and relied on relationships with these peoples both for their economic success and for their very survival.

Chapter Three: Rivalry on the Saskatchewan, 1781 to 1821

It is only with the establishment of fur trade posts on the lower North Saskatchewan River that direct trade really began in significant volume between Euroamericans and the five member peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. By 1785, Gros Ventre, Kainai, Siksika, Sarcee and Piikani are all documented as having visited posts on the Saskatchewan. The North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company were the primary rivals for their trade, but both were opposed throughout much of this period by numerous smaller Canadian concerns.

There is no evidence in the period covered by this chapter of any 18th-century Niitsitapi-Cree trade or military alliance. I also argue that the Gros Ventre-Siksika violence against the Euroamerican traders on the Saskatchewan was the result of: the drastic reduction in the price for wolf pelts, the principal trade item of the Niitsitapi and the Gros Ventre; Canadian trading practices, notably the free distribution of alcohol; and the aggression of the Cree against the Gros Ventre. Differing First Nations' and Euroamerican concepts and understanding of external relations were mutually misunderstood. The result was that the Gros Ventre and Siksika wreaked their vengeance for Cree aggression on the "neutral" traders who had supplied the firearms to their enemies. This period was marked both by intense rivalry among the competing companies, and by a virtually symbiotic trading relationship between these concerns and the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, even when these peoples sought to stop the expansion of the Euroamerican trade west of the Rockies.

Smallpox

The Hudson's Bay Company had barely made contact at one of its posts with a member people of the Blackfoot alliance, a handful of Gros Ventre at Hudson House, when the First Nations peoples of the Northwest were struck down by a smallpox epidemic. It was

unlike anything that Euroamericans had ever before witnessed in that part of the world. Initial reports were that entire peoples had been wiped out. This gruesome assessment was an exaggeration, but the effects of the epidemic throughout the British Northwest and on the northern Plains were devastating.

Contagious diseases such as smallpox were endemic in Europe by the 18th century. Their constant presence there resulted in immunity from previous exposure in large portions of the population. There was no such developed immunity among North American Aboriginal peoples.¹ Smallpox among North American First Nations peoples was the most deadly of all these diseases. It first reached North America, via Spanish carriers, in 1520 and soon the pandemic had spread throughout at least all the New World then known to the Spanish.² There is no way of telling whether this pandemic had the same disastrous effects throughout the biologically defenceless Aboriginal population of the entire North American continent. However, this was just the first in a seemingly endless series of European-introduced diseases that attacked First Nations peoples.

¹ The study of the effects of European diseases on North American Aboriginal populations has mushroomed in the last few decades. See Chapter One and the Bibliography for a small sample. Two good brief introductions for the layperson on the biology and ecology of smallpox may be found in: Michael K. Trimble, *An Ethnohistorical Interpretation of the Spread of Smallpox in the Northern Plains Utilizing Concepts of Disease Ecology* (Columbia, Missouri, June 1979), 5-20, and, Jody F. Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion Patterns: The Case of the 1780-82 Smallpox Epidemic Among the Indians of Western Canada," *Native Studies Review* 4, nos. 1 and 2 (1988), 3-12. A very good synopsis of the treatment of smallpox in Canada is John W.R. McIntyre, "Smallpox and Its Control in Canada." Online. Available: <http://www.cma.ca/cmaj/vol-161/issue-12/1543.htm>. 21 April 2000.

² Joanne M. Hader, "The Effects of Epidemic Illnesses on the American Indians," *Western Canadian Anthropologist* 3 (December 1986), 19, and, Henry F. Dobyns, *Their Number Become Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America* (Knoxville, 1983).

There are no documentary records nor oral traditions concerning disease among the Niitsitapi that predate 1764.³ There is certainly evidence of epidemics in the West before that time, but it is impossible to know which, if any, affected the Niitsitapi, and, if so, to what extent.⁴ The first “entry” in the Bull Plume Winter Count, a Piikani winter count, is for the year 1764, with that year described as “Big Smallpox Scare Very few escaped death by smallpox.”⁵ The last keeper of this winter count was a North Peigan/Piikani named Bull Plume, who gave the information to the count’s last recorder, the Reverend Canon Haynes. Three draft versions of the winter count have survived in the Glenbow Archives. Two of these might seriously call into question the dating in this unique Piikani record, as Haynes noted that the order and dates were uncertain. However, Paul Raczka, who prepared this winter count for publication, described how the dating problem was solved. “The proper order was finally discovered by assuming that the hide drawings were laid out in a spiral, similar to some of the Sioux winter counts still in

³ Jody Decker claimed that David Thompson was told by “an old Piegan Native” that his people had contracted smallpox from the Shoshone “around 1730,” but I believe that Decker misread Thompson’s *Narrative*. There is no such reference. Thompson did repeat the stories told to him by Saukamappee, a Cree who had been adopted by the Piikani and who lived his life with them, but his references were definitely to the 1780-1781 smallpox epidemic. Jody F. Decker, “‘We Should Never Be Again the Same People’: The Diffusion and Cumulative Impact of Acute Infectious Diseases Affecting the Natives on the North American Plains of the Western Interior of Canada, 1774-1839” (Ph.D thesis, Department of Geography, York University, 1989), 58-9, and, the version of Thompson’s *Narrative* cited by Decker, David Thompson, *David Thompson’s Narrative, 1784-1812*, ed. Richard Glover (Toronto, 1962), 234-51.

⁴ Decker, “We Should Never,” 58-9, and, Linea Sundstrom, “Smallpox Used Them Up: References to Epidemic Disease in Northern Plains Winter Counts, 1714-1920,” *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1997), 305-43.

⁵ Paul M. Raczka, *Winter Count: A History of the Blackfoot People* (Brocket, Alberta, 1979), 21.

existence. Once this was done the events fell into the proper order.”⁶ Linea Sundstrom has confirmed the existence of smallpox or measles in the northern Plains around 1762, citing both traditional sources and a Sioux winter count.⁷ Although not mentioned by either Sundstrom or Decker, there was another epidemic of some sort well inland of Hudson Bay in 1774, which may also have affected the Niitsitapi. It was apparently not noted in any surviving winter counts, but it was in Hudson’s Bay Company records.⁸

There is no such dearth of records for the smallpox epidemic that hit the northern Plains and the British Northwest in 1781. Some 18 different winter counts highlighted the catastrophe, including the Bull Plume Winter Count.⁹ This North American pandemic started in Mexico in 1779, reached the northern Plains in 1781, the Pacific Northwest in 1782 and struck its final recorded victims, the Chipewyan (*Dene*), northwest of Churchill in 1783.¹⁰ Decker and Binnema have both provided excellent histories of its spread and

⁶ Ibid., 5, and the three variations of the winter count in the Arthur Family Fonds, Glenbow Archives, M156, M4364 and M8188.

⁷ Sundstrom, “Smallpox Used Them Up,” 309, 312-3 and 330. Sundstrom was apparently unaware of the published Bull Plume Winter Count. Of the 53 winter counts used in her research, only one was Niitsitapi, the published Bad Head Winter Count (a Kainai winter count, 1810-1883). Hugh A. Dempsey, *A Blackfoot Winter Count* (Calgary, 1965).

⁸ First Nations people dying inland were noted in the York Factory post journal, 19 and 25 June 1774, B.239/a/70, reel 1M159, HBCA. Fear of this disease, apparently then rampant farther west, caused Matthew Cocking’s First Nations companions from venturing to the Saskatchewan. This prevented Cocking from reaching Cumberland House at all during the 1774-1775 season. Matthew Cocking inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 9 August 1774, B.239/a/72, reel 1M159, HBCA.

⁹ Sundstrom, “Smallpox Used Them Up,” 330-1, and, Raczka, *Winter Count*, 25.

¹⁰ Henry F. Dobyns, “Estimating Aboriginal American Population: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate,” *Current Anthropology* 7 (1966), 395-416, and 425-49; Decker, “We Should Never,” 60 and 73; Robert Boyd, “Smallpox in the Pacific Northwest: The First Epidemics,” *BC Studies* no. 101 (Spring 1994), 5-40; and, Cole Harris, “Voices of Disaster: Smallpox around the Strait of Georgia in 1782,”

effects in Rupert's Land, the Hudson's Bay Company's chartered territories west of Hudson Bay.¹¹

The first word of smallpox reached the Hudson's Bay Company at Hudson House on 22 October 1781. William Walker recorded in the post's journal, "This plaguey disorder by what I can hear was brought from the Snake [Shoshone] Indians last summer, by the Different Tribes that trades about this River."¹² Word reached William Tomison at Cumberland House on 11 December 1781 and a written account from Walker followed on 17 December.¹³ David Thompson later described one of the two routes which smallpox took in reaching the Saskatchewan River, one being from the Shoshone to the southwest and the other from the Sioux in the southeast.¹⁴ Thompson's principal sources were Mitchell Oman, who had been among the first Euroamericans to witness the effects of the epidemic in First Nations camps,¹⁵ and Saukamappee, who had lived through it.

Ethnohistory 41, no. 4 (Fall 1994), 591-626. It may also have spread to the Inuit of the Arctic.

¹¹ Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion Patterns" and "We Should Never," 55-86; and, Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 223-40.

¹² Hudson House post journal, 22 October 1781, B.87/a/4, reel 1M63, HBCA. This journal has been reproduced in its entirety in Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, 257-91, with this entry on p. 262.

¹³ Cumberland House post journal, 11 and 17 December 1781, B.49/a/11, reel 1M38, HBCA. This journal has been reproduced in its entirety in *ibid.*, 195-256, with these entries on pp. 223-6.

¹⁴ For maps of the diffusion pattern, see: Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 107; Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion Patterns," 14; and, Decker, "We Should Never," 61.

¹⁵ Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 318-44. In October 1781 Oman had been sent with four others from Hudson House to winter away from the post. Upon their return, in early December, they provided Walker with first-hand accounts of the ravages of the epidemic on the Plains. Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House journal entries of 15 October, 2 December and 5 December 1781, on pp.

Saukamappee's account confirms Hudson's Bay Company's understandings of the spread of the disease. Thompson recounted in great detail how Piikani attacked a camp of Shoshone, only to find all of its occupants dead or dying. The Piikani apparently did not touch the Shoshone, but they did take as prizes "the best of the tents, and any other plunder that was clean and good." Of course, the Piikani and then their neighbours all became infected. Saukamappee told Thompson, "We had no belief that one Man could give it to another, any more than a wounded Man could give his wound to another."¹⁶

In the York Factory post journal, Matthew Cocking, undoubtedly relying on reports from Tomison, stated that the disease had spread from an unidentified First Nations group who had killed and pillaged a tent of "Kenapick Athinewock (i.e.) Snake [Shoshone] Indians who were all ill of the Small Pox (and were supposed to have received it from the Spaniards whom tis said those people trade with)." In the same journal entry, written the day of Tomison's arrival from inland, Cocking reported, "The many different Tribes of Southern [Cree], Assinnee Poet [Assiniboine] and Yatchithinue [undoubtedly includes at least the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre] Indians are all almost wholly extinct as I am assured by Mess^s Tomison and Longmoor, for they say that they really believe of young and old not one in fifty of those Tribes are now living."¹⁷ According to Thompson, fur traders' estimates eventually put the death toll among their inland First Nations customers at three-fifths of their total population, while the First

261 and 268-70.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 336-8.

¹⁷ York Factory post journal, 2 July 1782, B.239/a/80, reel 1M159, HBCA. Word of the smallpox epidemic had not reached York Factory until 10 June 1782, and that from visiting "Pungee [Saulteaux] Indians." The same basic information is also contained in an August 1782 Cocking letter, reproduced in Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, 297-9. The original is in the York Factory correspondence book, fos. 15d.-6d., B.239/b/42, reel 1M255, HBCA.

Nations' own estimates were apparently over one-half. Saukamappee described Piikani losses to Thompson, who reported him as saying "about one third of us [Saukamappee's camp] died, but in some other camps there were tents in which every one died."¹⁸ There is really no way of calculating the fraction, percentage or total number who died from this single epidemic, although Decker estimated Cree and Assiniboine losses at 50 to 75 percent.¹⁹

The Euroamerican traders were able to provide comfort, but no cure. The journals of William Walker at Hudson House and William Tomison at Cumberland House are filled with references to these men caring for the sick and dying First Nations individuals who came to their posts, often for days on end, and then burying them after they had succumbed.²⁰ There is record of only one fur trade company employee contracting smallpox, and he recovered.²¹ And even though there were severe food shortages at both posts, food was provided to starving First Nations visitors. On one such occasion, Walker wrote, "Self Nature obliges me to give them some little supply, hoping that they will be able and willing to help me by and by."²² "Self Nature"/self-interest of a less

¹⁸ Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 322-3 and 337.

¹⁹ Decker, "We Should Never," 74-86 (p. 86 for estimate of Cree and Assiniboine losses), and, Russell Thornton, Tim Miller and Jonathan Warren, "American Indian Population Recovery following Smallpox Epidemics," *American Anthropologist* 93, no. 1 (March 1991), 28-45.

²⁰ Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Cumberland House and Hudson House post journals for 1781-1782. On 1 February 1782, Tomison wrote (p. 234), "Indeed it is hard labour to keep the House in fuel and bury the Dead." See also Shirlee Anne Smith, "William Walker," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 760-1.

²¹ Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House post journal, 4 October to 8 December 1781, pp. 264-71. This was Charles Isham, an English Métis Hudson's Bay Company servant.

²² *Ibid.*, 10 January 1782, p. 275.

enlightened kind led Tomison on several occasions to send men to fetch the beaver coats off the dead bodies of First Nations victims, many, if not all, of whom were apparently debtors to the company. However, the bodies were then wrapped in duffle and buried.²³ Tomison and Walker did not paint so favourable a picture of their many Canadian rivals. Both told of Canadians distributing vast quantities of rum, to exacerbate the condition of First Nations people even further, and even of Canadians “forcing the Skins from Indians.”²⁴

The reactions of First Nations people to this ongoing tragedy were varied. Saukamappee later said that many Piikani suffering from smallpox sought relief in cold rivers.²⁵ Many perished instantly from this added strain on their weakened bodies. Walker reported that many First Nations people saw absolutely no hope of recovering from the disease. As a result, many apparently abandoned sick relatives.²⁶ Cocking reported from York Factory, “Numbers died through want of Food or starved with colds, having no attendance, for as the complaint became general there was none left in many Tribes able to hunt for or administer to the wants of each other; many put an end to their own existence to end their pain, and others for grief at the loss of their friends.”²⁷ Even

²³ Ibid., Cumberland House post journal, entries of 16 January, 20 and 25 February, and 11, 14 and 27 March 1782, between pages 231 and 244. Company servants also brought other furs to Cumberland House that they had found near the dead. See 5 February 1782 entry, p. 235.

²⁴ Ibid., Hudson House post journal, 18 April 1782, p. 286. See also Cumberland House journal entries of 23 March and 20 May 1782, pp. 243 and 253-4, and, Hudson House journal entries of 15 January, 27 March, and 14 May 1782, pp. 275, 284 and 289-90.

²⁵ Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 337.

²⁶ Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House journal, 29 October and 9 November 1781, pp. 264-5.

²⁷ York Factory post journal, 2 July 1782, B.239/a/80, reel 1M159, HBCA.

before the epidemic struck there were food shortages; Tomison's and Walker's journals are full of references to First Nations people starving during the epidemic. Many First Nations people reported a shortage of game animals, but the traders did not believe them.²⁸ It is far more likely that the apparent shortage of game was the result of so many good hunters dying and the inability of weakened survivors at first to pursue the hunt as vigorously or as skilfully.

Thankfully, the fur traders' most extreme fears were not realized. William Walker at first thought that "in a short time I do not suppose they will hardly be a staid Indian Living."²⁹ Early on, Tomison firmly believed that "the U,Basquiau Indians are all Dead," but time proved him wrong.³⁰ However, apparently the survivors, at least according to William Walker, were "very hard to deal with."³¹ As well, the Hudson's Bay Company which relied on both First Nations canoe-makers and First Nations canoeists to transport its outfits and returns was hit by the death of so many of the individuals upon whom it relied for these services.³²

The extent of the effects of the epidemic on First Nations peoples is impossible to determine. Both David Thompson and William Walker provided evidence that adult

²⁸ Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 325, and, Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House journal, 10 January 1782, p. 275.

²⁹ Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House journal, 9 November 1781, p. 265.

³⁰ Ibid., *Cumberland House journal*, 19 February 1782, p. 238.

³¹ Ibid., *Hudson House journal*, copy of 6 May Walker letter in 7 May 1782 journal entry, p. 288.

³² Ibid., *Cumberland House journal*, 19 February 1782, p. 239, and, *York Factory post journal*, 23 June 1782, B.239/a/80, reel 1M159, HBCA.

males suffered higher mortality rates than either women or children.³³ Ted Binnema argued, "The 1781 epidemic must have so dramatically affected Native communities that most, if not all, bands on the northwestern plains did not continue to exist as autonomous communities."³⁴ Among the western Cree, there is little or no doubt that such enforced amalgamations took place; Russell has meticulously demonstrated this to have been the case.³⁵ Among the five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, it is impossible to know. Just as Decker correctly concluded that there was no data available to analyse the family structures of the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre prior to 1781,³⁶ there is also no data available to analyse any potential sociopolitical changes resulting from this smallpox epidemic. While fur trade records clearly reveal the disappearance of many Cree groups after 1781, the limited contact which these same Euroamerican traders had with the Blackfoot alliance reveals nothing about such potential changes among them. Only five distinct peoples or polities had been identified before the outbreak of smallpox and these same five groupings - Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Gros Ventre and Sarcee - existed thereafter (see Chapter Two, and rest of thesis). John Taylor has suggested, "The association of the Atsina [Gros Ventre] with the Blackfeet [Niitsitapi] subgroups during the period before 1850 may have been the same sort of phenomenon [enforced consolidation the result of

³³ Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House journal, 25 February Walker letter in 26 February 1782 journal entry, p. 279, and, Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 323.

³⁴ Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 233. Hader earlier stated much the same position, that "there was a decline in the overall number of polities." Hader, "The Effects of Epidemic Illnesses," 28.

³⁵ Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*.

³⁶ Jody F. Decker, "Depopulation of the Northern Plains Natives," *Social Science & Medicine* 33, no. 4 (1991), 388-9.

disease], although ethnic boundaries were maintained.”³⁷ If Taylor’s suggestion is correct, then the disease episodes causing this particular alliance would have had to have occurred before the 1781-1782 epidemic, because the Gros Ventre were clearly allied with the Niitsitapi before then, and perhaps had been for decades.³⁸

In early 1782, Walker recorded that some of his men near Hudson House encountered “fourteen Black foot Men, all recover’d of the Small Pox,” who were apparently travelling with some Canadians, “two frenchmen.”³⁹ About two months later, four Gros Ventre arrived at Walker’s post and stayed less than two days; they “came for Tobacco but did not bring any thing with them.”⁴⁰ The smallpox epidemic undoubtedly delayed the commencement of direct trade between the Hudson’s Bay Company and the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance.

Saukamappee revealed much more significant consequences of this epidemic. Apparently, the Shoshone, terribly weakened by smallpox, withdrew from the long-contested Bow River area of present-day southern Alberta, leaving it to the Niitsitapi.⁴¹ Saukamappee also told Thompson that another short-term effect of this epidemic was the cessation of intertribal warfare. He wrote, “Our hearts were low and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people. To hunt for our families was our sole occupation and kill Beavers, Wolves and Foxes to trade our necessities; we thought of War no

³⁷ John F. Taylor, “Sociocultural Effects of Epidemics on the Northern Plains: 1734-1850,” *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 4 (1977), 66.

³⁸ Schultz, *Signposts of Adventure*, 15.

³⁹ Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, Hudson House journal, 7 March 1782, p. 282.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2 and 3 May 1782, p. 287.

⁴¹ Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 337-8.

more.”⁴² Saukamappee said that after two or three years war resumed between the Piikani and the Shoshone. However, smallpox had changed practices. Any captured Shoshone women and children were spared death; they were to be “brought to our camps, and be adopted amongst us, to be our people, and make us more numerous and stronger than we are.”⁴³ Binnema has also argued that the smallpox epidemic of 1781-1782 temporarily strengthened the Niitsitapi with respect to their First Nations neighbours. He wrote, “On the Saskatchewan River the price traders were willing to pay for provisions appears to have gone up, at least temporarily.”⁴⁴ However, so few Niitsitapi then traded on the Saskatchewan, compared to the Cree and Assiniboine, that such a limited price increase would have had a negligible affect on any balance of power.

A further consequence of the smallpox epidemic was reported by Peter Fidler ten years later. While travelling with the Piikani in present-day southern Alberta, a party of Kootenay (*Ktunaxa*) arrived to trade. Fidler was informed that since the smallpox epidemic there were great numbers of horses running wild in Kootenay country, west of the Rockies. This may not have had anything to do with any tremendous natural increase in the overall number of horses in the region, but rather to a decrease in the human population. Many domesticated horses had undoubtedly gone feral with the death of their former owners.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid., 337.

⁴³ Ibid., 339. This same policy may have been established after the epidemic of the 1760s. Five years after the reported smallpox epidemic of 1764, the Bull Plume Winter Count marks the year, “When we took the Snake Indians wives and children.” Raczka, *Winter Count*, 22

⁴⁴ Binnema, “The Common and Contested Ground,” 239.

⁴⁵ Peter Fidler, “Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains in 1792 & 3,” 31 December 1792, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA. Fidler seems to have attributed the large wild horse population to the smallpox epidemic, which,

Direct Niitsitapi Trade Begins

William Walker remained at Hudson House for the summer of 1782, while William Tomison led the brigade down to York Factory. Again Walker complained that the survivors of the smallpox were difficult to deal with. He wrote, "The Indians being now but few to what was before it is the best bidder that must carry them between Us, which I am determined not to be sparing as far as my stock will allow."⁴⁶ In a mid-August letter to Tomison, Walker reported the poorer than expected trade in both furs and provisions, but added that the "different tribes of Yachathinue's a good many" were expected in large numbers "at the Settlements Next winter."⁴⁷ He did not have to wait that long. Within a week, some Assiniboine arrived at Hudson House along with "a few black Foots." They apparently brought little else but provisions.⁴⁸ This is the first recorded visit of any definitively identifiable Siksika to a fur trade post. A month later Gros Ventre were again there, after summer warfare with the Shoshone.⁴⁹ Apparently not everyone had given up war immediately following the epidemic.

Tomison left York Factory on 18 July and arrived at Hudson House on 4 October 1782, where he was to have charge for the season. On 21 October he received news from Cumberland House that both York Factory and Fort Prince of Wales (Churchill) had been captured by the French. Britain and France had been at war since 1778 and were on

in his words, "swept away nearly whole nations."

⁴⁶ Hudson House post journal, 14 July (and 1 June) 1782, B.87/a/5, reel 1M63, HBCA.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 12 August 1782. The word was spelled "Ea.che.thinnues" in the copy of the letter in the Cumberland House post journal. See 18 August 1782 journal entry, fo. 14, B.49/a/13, reel 1M38, HBCA.

⁴⁸ Hudson House post journal, 18 August 1782, B.87/a/5, reel 1M63, HBCA.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17 and 19 September 1782.

opposite sides of the American Revolution. Laprouse, with a fleet of three ships, had first taken Fort Prince of Wales and then York Factory, in August 1782. He confiscated furs and trade goods, destroyed the post and then sailed with his captives, leaving some food and supplies behind for the Hudson's Bay Company men who had fled inland.⁵⁰ Since Cumberland House and Hudson House had already been supplied for the winter trading season, there was no immediate impact on the inland trade, although Tomison did attempt to keep this disaster quiet.⁵¹

By the fall of 1782, visits to Hudson House by Gros Ventre were not unusual. In late October "Seven Tents" of them arrived with three tents of "Pegageme [Cree] Indians," but, according to Tomison, they "have brought little or nothing with them."⁵² In early December, he reported that "nine black Foot [Siksika] Indians arrived, two of which only came here, and the Rest went to the Canadian House. we are greatly at a Loss. as not knowing the Language of this tribe. as also the fall [Gros Ventre] Indians, and indeed never will, without Men goes, and lives with them for some Years, as that is the way, that the Canadians have acquired the Language."⁵³ Two weeks later, he noted "three tents of the Assineepoiet [Assiniboine] Indians arrived; the greater part of which went to the

⁵⁰ Edwin Ernest Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870*, vol. 2 (London, 1959), 83-9, and, tienne Taillemite, "Jean-Franois de Galaup, Comte de Laprouse," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 282-3. Humphrey Marten, in charge at York Factory, actually managed to save most of York Factory's returns and get them on their way to Britain on the company's ship, *King George*, the evening before he finally surrendered his post.

⁵¹ Hudson House post journal, 21 October 1782, B.87/a/6, reel 1M63, HBCA. As late as 10 February 1783, Tomison reported that at Hudson House only he and the messengers of 21 October knew of York Factory's fall. He probably strove to keep the news confidential for several reasons, in order: not to upset his own men; not to bolster the spirits of his competitors; and, not to lose face with his First Nations customers.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 26 October 1782.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1 December 1782.

Canadian House, all owing to one of their Men that Understands the Language.”⁵⁴ The lack of an interpreter for the Assiniboine must have been particularly vexing and embarrassing; Hudson House was in Assiniboine territory. Throughout this period the Hudson’s Bay Company was at a tremendous disadvantage with respect to its several Canadian competitors, besides the obvious handicap of having its North American supply depots sacked. Britain’s ongoing wars limited the manpower supply upon which the company could draw, while the Canadian concerns suffered no such restrictions. The previous summer, when “frenchmen” planned to build above Hudson House to cut off its trade, Walker had threatened to build in opposition to them. All involved on both sides knew that it was an idle threat; the Hudson’s Bay Company barely had enough men to maintain Hudson House.⁵⁵ Before the end of the 1782-1783 season at Hudson House, several more parties of Gros Ventre came to trade, as well as a couple of small groups of Siksika, and also the first Sarcee and Kainai to trade at any Hudson’s Bay Company post.⁵⁶ By the end of the season, Tomison had managed to improve his company’s prospects considerably by luring a Canadian, John Plum, away from one of his rivals. Plum could apparently “talk good English, as also the Black Foot and Assinipoiet

⁵⁴ Ibid., 15 December 1782. That June Walker had been forced to “fetch an Indian for to be my interpreter for the Stone [Assiniboine] Indian Language.” Hudson House post journal, 10 June 1782, B.87/a/5, reel 1M63, HBCA.

⁵⁵ Hudson House post journal, 30 and 31 May 1782, B.87/a/5, reel 1M63, HBCA.

⁵⁶ Tomison identified the Sarcee, when they visited the post at the beginning of March, as the “Susuwich, or Pelican Indians,” as well as the “Sussee Indians.” In early May, a party of 22 Kainai and Siksika arrived together to trade. See the following entries in the Hudson House post journal (B.87/a/6, reel 1M63, HBCA) for references to these members of the Blackfoot alliance: 14-15, 19, and 25-26 October, 1-2 December 1782, 4-8 and 10 February, 1-3 and 23 March, and 1 and 5 May 1783. When the Sarcee arrived at the post on 1 March, Tomison noted that “these talk a different Language, from either fall [Gros Ventre] or black foot [Siksika] Indians,” thus posing yet another interpreting problem for the Hudson’s Bay Company.

[Assiniboine] Languages.”⁵⁷ Perhaps in an attempt to bring some order to the trade, the four rival concerns trading at Hudson House had reached an agreement in the early fall, every term of which Tomison claimed the Canadians had violated during the year.⁵⁸ Not all of Tomison’s three competitors were identified in the Hudson House journal. However, Peter Pangman was.⁵⁹ He arrived in early February from the North West Company post located some 30 miles downriver, near the mouth of the Sturgeon River, to take charge of the post at Hudson House.

The North West Company was to become the Hudson’s Bay Company’s bitterest and most successful rival. It grew to dominate the fur trade in the British Northwest. After the fall of New France, the Hudson’s Bay Company was soon faced not with the few dozen French Canadians who had operated posts in the West under the French regime, but with many highly competitive opposition concerns whose men soon numbered in the hundreds. These Montreal-based enterprises were often short-lived affairs. Business partnerships and alliances changed rapidly. The most successful of these companies were run by Scots, whose family connections shaped their enterprises. French-Canadian voyageurs remained the bulk of the labour force. The Hudson’s Bay Company was a highly structured, steadily financed company, with stockholders and a

⁵⁷ Ibid., 3 and 4 May 1783. Plum’s influence was immediately felt, as it was he who left the post and returned on 4 May, having intercepted a party of First Nations people who were on their way to “the lower French House.... part of which are blood and part black foot Indians, some of which never has been into any Settlement before. There is 22 able Men, but were poorly gooded, having only got over the small pox this winter.”

⁵⁸ Ibid., 6 February 1783. The terms of the agreement reached by Tomison and the other “three Masters” called for: no sending of tobacco until approaching parties were within a day of the posts; no sending alcohol at all; freedom for First Nations customers to visit any or all posts; and, no furs to be forcefully taken from First Nations peoples.

⁵⁹ For a brief biography of Pangman, see the collaboratively authored “Peter Pangman,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume V, 1801 to 1820* (Toronto, 1983), 656-7.

board of directors. Its men in the field, both officers and servants, were salaried employees. The Montreal opposition consisted of many short-term partnerships; merchants, mostly in Montreal, shared profits with their wintering partners. As these partnerships had no corporate structure to offer any guarantee or even likelihood of longevity, there was great incentive for the partners in the field to maximize short-term profits by doing all in their power to increase immediate fur returns. Until the mid-1810s, there was no profit sharing of any kind for Hudson's Bay Company officers in Rupert's Land.

It was not unusual at all for four or five opponents to be vying for the trade at a single location, such as just noted above at Hudson House. Frequently, expediency led to short-term arrangements between rivals in the field to pool their resources and the season's profits. The impracticality of so many small operations competing for a finite fur resource eventually led to longer term partnerships. The most important of these was the 16-share North West Company, founded in 1779. It merged the interests of several large Montreal merchants and wintering partners. The initial partnership lasted for five years. In 1784 and 1787, considerable shuffling of the membership occurred in the renewed North West Company partnership arrangements.⁶⁰ Many of those who were left out of the various North West Company conglomerations remained able and active in the Saskatchewan to the end of the 18th century. Through the 1790s, it was the norm for there to be three or more competing operations at the principal trading sites in the Saskatchewan.

Unfortunately, very few records have survived from either the North West Company or its Canadian rivals. For the most part, with a few wonderful exceptions, one

⁶⁰ There are many good histories of the North West Company. For example, see: Campbell, *The North West Company*; Davidson, *The North West Company*; Wallace, ed., *Documents Relating*; and, Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, 23-50.

now sees the history of the Saskatchewan fur trade through the filter of the extensive records of the Hudson's Bay Company. This is doubly unfortunate, because for most of this period of intense rivalry, the North West Company, or other Canadian concerns, led the way on the Saskatchewan.⁶¹ Limited resources (manpower and skills) coupled with a somewhat stultifying corporate structure generally kept the Hudson's Bay Company lagging behind. However, the English company kept detailed records of its activities and operations (for the edification of the Governor and Committee in London), a large portion of which have happily survived.

Tomison left Hudson House with the brigade for York Factory in mid-May 1783, leaving Robert Longmoor in charge, with five men, including John Plum. If the smallpox epidemic and the sacking of York Factory had not already been enough to tax the Hudson's Bay Company's inland operations, the failure of a company ship to arrive at Hudson Bay in the summer of 1783 must have seemed to be the topper to Tomison. He arrived "at the place where York Fort once Stood" on 6 August 1783. He remained there a month. Struggling to feed his men and to erect a proper building to store the season's returns, Tomison finally gave up hope of a ship ever arriving and headed back inland on 8 September. Without ammunition and desperately short of food, he doubted whether they could make it safely back to Cumberland House.⁶² They did arrive intact at Cumberland House on 9 October, but throughout the 1783-1784 season, Tomison at that post and

⁶¹ A tremendous guide to the many, and often short-lived, fur trade posts on the Saskatchewan, is Terence B. Smythe, "Thematic Study of the Fur Trade in the Canadian West, 1670-1870." Unpublished agenda paper (1968-29), prepared for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (Ottawa, 1968). This study is used as a finding aid to the HBCA microfilm collection at the NAC.

⁶² Tomison's journal of his trip to York Factory and his stay there (until 5 September) is contained in the Hudson House post journal, B.87/a/6, reel 1M63, HBCA. His journal (6 September to 9 October 1783) from York Factory to Cumberland House is contained in the Cumberland House post journal, B.49/a/14, fos. 61d.-4, reel 1M39, HBCA.

Longmoor at Hudson House were dependent on basic necessities supplied by their rival, William Holmes. He was in charge on the Saskatchewan for the North West Company and stationed himself that season at the Sturgeon River site, downriver from Hudson House.⁶³

Both the Hudson House and Cumberland House journals are replete with entries and correspondence detailing the Hudson's Bay Company's reliance on and financial arrangements with Holmes that season.⁶⁴ Survival, not profits, was the ultimate concern and reality for the Hudson's Bay Company's two inland posts. They simply did not have enough trade goods to compete with the opposition. News reached Hudson House of this calamity on 22 October, with the company servants and Tomison's letter arriving the next day. On 24 October, Longmoor was preparing to head downstream to beg supplies from William Holmes. Longmoor had earlier recorded that the Canadians would not likely that season occupy the posts at Hudson House. This was confirmed on 29 October, when Holmes' men emptied their post and headed down to the Sturgeon River post.⁶⁵ During the 1783-1784 season, the Hudson's Bay Company's Hudson House was apparently the most westerly located post on the Saskatchewan. This normally would have been a tremendous advantage. However, the only reason that the Canadian concerns left the English company alone 30 miles above them was that it was not a threat; it was dependent on North West Company largesse for its very survival. Tomison and Longmoor were not utterly destitute of trade goods, but they were out of many staples.

⁶³ Arthur J. Ray, "William Holmes," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 365-6.

⁶⁴ Both of these journals are contained in the Cumberland House post journal, 1783-1784, B.49/a/14, reels 1M38-39. The Cumberland House journal is contained on the first 35 folios, and the Hudson House journal on fos. 35d.-61.

⁶⁵ Hudson House post journal, in Cumberland House post journal, 10 to 29 October 1783, B.49/a/14, reel 1M39, HBCA.

Longmoor had run out of alcohol in mid-August.⁶⁶ Tomison did manage to take 73 packs of furs to York Factory in the summer of 1784, furs traded at both of the inland posts.⁶⁷

In early September 1783, a large party of Siksika, preceded as was the custom by representatives seeking tobacco, arrived at the Hudson House posts to trade. Longmoor described this party as numbering “about forty Men & between Eighty & Ninety Women”; they apparently traded mostly at “the French House,” where the three emissaries had gone for the tobacco.⁶⁸ Shortly thereafter, Longmoor reported on the effectiveness of their recent Canadian recruit. “John Plumb has been a great deal of Service here both for the Stone [Assiniboine] Indians & Earchethinues as he has both Languages very Well.”⁶⁹ In late November, two Gros Ventre arrived for tobacco, in advance of “a large Band of Earchethinnues,” consisting of “about sixty or seventy Men. and double that Quantity of Women, and a vast Number of Horses .&. Mules.”⁷⁰ When these people, presumably all Gros Ventre, left, Longmoor reported that “the Indians went of [sic] sorrowful, as I had nothing to Trade their Skins, and I suppose it is the last I shall

⁶⁶ Ibid., 22 August 1783.

⁶⁷ Cumberland House post journal, 12 June 1784, B.49/a/14, reel 1M38, HBCA. Richard Glover argued that this trade was only possible because the extremely limited trade during and immediately after the smallpox epidemic undoubtedly left a large inventory of goods at both inland posts. See Glover introduction, in Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, lxii.

⁶⁸ Hudson House post journal, in Cumberland House post journal, 7-9 September 1783, B.49/a/14, reel 1M39, HBCA.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 13 September letter to Tomison, in 13 September 1783 entry, fo. 44d. If Plum could speak only one “Archithinue” language, it was most likely Blackfoot, as Longmoor’s glowing report came so soon after the visit of the Siksika. As noted earlier, the Gros Ventre spoke a different Algonkian language and the Sarcee were Athapaskan-speaking.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 28-30 November 1783.

see this Season, as the news is spread all over the Country I think by this time.”⁷¹ A week later, some uninformed potential customers arrived. Longmoor again reported:

three Sussee [Sarcee] Indians, and four Southern [Cree] Indians, according to what they promised in the Summer, when I advised them to go a Beaver Hunting and now here is twenty four Tents of them all well gooded, and I am in a Condition I would be glad not to see so many; as they reproach me with telling them to kill Furs, & have Nothing to give them; it is really a sad grief.⁷²

In a letter to Tomison reporting on this arrival, Longmoor identified by name the Sarcee leader of this party, “the Round Knife.”⁷³ This is the first documented identification of any individual person belonging to any member people of the Blackfoot alliance. No further visits of any Archithinue groups were noted. Much to his relief, when Tomison arrived at York Factory on 1 August 1784, he was greeted by Humphrey Marten and the newly-arrived Hudson’s Bay Company contingent.⁷⁴ Surprisingly, in the general report sent to London in September, Marten stated that the Hudson’s Bay Company had commenced trading with the Piikani, the only member of the Blackfoot alliance not specifically identified in any records to that date of Hudson House or Cumberland House. Marten wrote:

A Corrispondence in trade is now opened with two large bodies of Larchthinue Indians called Blackfoots [Siksika] and Pekeemows [Piikani] their Country abounds with Beaver, they have but little Winter.... these Indians know not the use of a Canoe their Country abounding in Horses. We hope M^r Tomison with the

⁷¹ Ibid., 30 November 1783.

⁷² Ibid., 6 December 1783.

⁷³ Ibid., 11 December Longmoor to Tomison letter, in 11 December journal entry, fos. 50d.-1. A copy of this same letter is also contained in the 25 December entry of the Cumberland House post journal in this same piece, fos. 17-8.

⁷⁴ Tomison’s journal of his 1784 trip from Cumberland House to York Factory is contained in the Cumberland House post journal, fos. 64-6d., B.49/a/14, reel 1M39, HBCA.

assistance of Plum will prevail on one or more of their great Men to visit us next year.⁷⁵

To whatever purpose, now that inland posts were established, the idea obviously still persisted of somehow drawing Archithinue down to York Factory. The Hudson's Bay Company had known of the existence of the Piikani since at least 1772, when Matthew Cocking had included them in his list of Archithinue peoples (see Chapter Two). Perhaps Longmoor or Tomison had even known of or even witnessed Piikani visiting a Canadian post. But there is no record, other than this Marten letter, of any English trade with the Piikani by September 1784. Maybe this was a mistaken reference to the trade with the Gros Ventre. Needless to say, however, the Governor and Committee in London were thrilled with the potential increase in fur returns and profits from "the Intercourse with the Blackfoots [Siksika] and Pekemow [Piikani] Indians so recently established," and encouraged Tomison to "do the utmost in his power to extend & enlarge the Company's Trade."⁷⁶

Tomison, the head of the company's inland operations, took charge of Hudson House for the 1784-1785 season. He was opposed throughout the season by at least the North West Company, whose post at Hudson House was under the command of Edward Umfreville, an ex-Hudson's Bay Company servant, who just that season had returned to the West.⁷⁷ Until the following May, of all the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, only one

⁷⁵ Marten, et.al., General Letter, York Factory, 16 September 1784, fo. 132d., item 4, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, A.11/116, reel 188, HBCA.

⁷⁶ Governor and Committee to Humphrey Marten and the York Factory Council, London, 4 May 1785, fo. 128d., item 4, London Correspondence Book Outwards - Hudson's Bay Company Official, A.6/13, reel 38, HBCA.

⁷⁷ Umfreville joined the Hudson's Bay Company in 1771 and was taken prisoner at York Factory by Lapérouse. In 1784, he was engaged by the North West Company, serving four years on the Saskatchewan. When he left the Canadian company in 1788, he was unable to agree on terms for renewed employment with the Hudson's Bay Company.

party of Gros Ventre traded at Hudson House. Tomison wrote: "at noon nine tents of fall [Gros Ventre] Indians arrived, five came here and four went to the Canadian house, they are very poor, and very hard to deal with, all owing to the Canadians sending out rum to all Indians before they come to the Houses to Trade."⁷⁸ The Gros Ventre left the next day, having traded only 60 wolves and some provisions to Tomison. He later observed that the more liquor that the First Nations peoples got, the more they wanted. He said that they were "mad for Liquor."⁷⁹

In early May 1785, small trading parties of Siksika, Kainai, Gros Ventre and Sarcee were specifically identified as trading at Hudson House. Although the arrival was not noted by Tomison, he did describe the departure, in mid-May, of the first positively identified Piikani at a Hudson's Bay Company post. He wrote that he "fitted out James Gaddy & sent him away with the Picannow [Piikani] & Blood [Kainai] Indians, to learn the Language the Indian that I have sent him in care of talks the Southern [Cree] Tongue well; as also Black foot, & seems to be a good sort of a Man I have also sent Isaac Batt to meet the Black foot [Siksika] Indians & endeavour to bring them in with Provisions in the

He published a book on his life in the West in 1790. See: Edward Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, ed. W. Stewart Wallace (Toronto, 1954 [1790]); Edwin Ernest Rich, "Edward Umfreville," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 742-3; and, David H. Pentland, "In Defence of Edward Umfreville," ed. William Cowan *Papers of the Seventh Algonquian Conference, 1975* (Ottawa, 1976), 62-104. When Tomison encountered Umfreville on the way to their rival upriver posts, Umfreville said that he had signed a five-year contract for £100 per annum. William Holmes was Umfreville's superior on the Saskatchewan, but Holmes seems to have stayed at the Sturgeon River site again that season. See Cumberland House post journal, especially 30 September 1784, fo. 40d., B.49/a/15, reel 1M39, HBCA.

⁷⁸ The Hudson House post journal is again contained in the Cumberland House post journal. See B.49/a/15, fos. 36-68d., 27 November 1784 entry, reel 1M39, HBCA.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 29 November 1784.

Sum^r.⁸⁰ So, by the spring of 1785, direct trade at fur trade posts on the Saskatchewan is documented to have commenced with all five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. Also by that time, the Hudson's Bay Company was undertaking to rectify its serious shortage of interpreters. Rather than pilfering them from the Canadians, as it had done with John Plum, it was now adopting the practice, long-established among the Canadians, of sending men to travel and live with First Nations peoples. The practice served a three-fold purpose. Not only did it train expert interpreters and foster or establish friendships between particular First Nations peoples and individual companies, but it encouraged the procuring of furs and provisions in greater amounts than might otherwise have been the case.

Since the killing of John Cole and another Canadian, likely by Cree, at a post near the Eagle Hills in April 1779,⁸¹ there had been extremely limited activity above the Hudson House site by any Euroamerican traders. That was all about to change. After Tomison departed for York Factory in late May, William Holmes led a North West Company party upriver to build a post at the Eagle Hills. This party intercepted Isaac Batt on his return with 35 tents "of different Nations," who all went to the new Canadian post.⁸² Robert Longmoor later sent men to scout out a location above the upriver Canadian settlement, but it would be another year before the Hudson's Bay Company could follow the Canadians. By the end of the summer of 1785, the North West

⁸⁰ Ibid., 15 May 1785. See also journal entries of 4 to 14 May for references to other members of the Blackfoot alliance at Hudson House.

⁸¹ Cole's brief sojourn with the Hudson's Bay Company was described in Chapter Two. His untimely death was noted by several fur traders. For examples, see especially: Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals, First Series*, 331n.-2n.; Rich, *Cumberland House Journals, Second Series*, 182n.; and, Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Samuel Hearne*, 224n.-5.

⁸² Hudson House post journal, 15, 22, 24 and 25 June, and 16 July 1785, B.87/a/7, reel 1M63, HBCA. In fact, on 22 June, Longmoor wrote that "Holmes is going to build at the Eagle Hill where Cole was Killd."

Company had established a post near the mouth of the Battle River, near the Eagle Hills, and another post on the lower South Saskatchewan River. It was opposed at both sites by representatives of Gregory, McLeod and Company, then the strongest rival of the North West Company on the Saskatchewan.⁸³ While all this activity was taking place inland, Humphrey Marten was once again reporting to London on company inroads among the Piikani and Siksika, but warned of the difficulties to be experienced with the Canadian rivals, “the Peddlars.” He also predicted poor trade out of York Factory, for, as he wrote, “Few, very few, Indians being left,” after the smallpox epidemic.⁸⁴

The Hudson’s Bay Company’s Hudson House could no longer even remotely be considered to be a post for the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. It had been supplanted by Canadian posts that were located much closer to these peoples (see Figure Three). Through the 1785-1786 season, only two parties of Gros Ventre arrived to trade with Tomison. The first, in late December, reported that “they was at war last summer against the snake [Shoshone] Indians but gained little by it; as they have now got guns as well as they. and clothed with European Goods.”⁸⁵ The source of the Shoshone’s “European Goods” and firearms was not and is not known. Tomison complained that there were then nearly 200 Canadians on the Saskatchewan and that they were virtually monopolizing the trade, or at least divvying it up among themselves.⁸⁶ Tomison was

⁸³ Ibid., 22 July, 7 August and 21 September 1785, and Smythe, “Thematic Study,” 189-90 and 202-3. For confirmation of Peter Pangman’s presence at the Pine Island site, representing Gregory, McLeod and Company, see Hudson House post journal, 5 May 1786, B.87/a/8, reel 1M63, HBCA.

⁸⁴ Marten, et.al., General Letter, York Factory, 12 September 1785, fos. 155-5d., item 4, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, A.11/116, reel 189, HBCA.

⁸⁵ Hudson House post journal, 26 December 1785, B.87/a/8, reel 1M63, HBCA.

⁸⁶ Ibid., especially entries of 12 October 1785, 12 January, and 18 and 20 February 1786.

Figure Three. Map Showing the Locations of the Principal Fur Trade Posts in the Saskatchewan District/Fort des Prairies Department, to 1795.

forced to plan to build both upriver and on the South Saskatchewan. The western trade at Hudson House had simply been cut off.

Despite having been effectively removed from the Niitsitapi trade, Tomison did receive good news at Hudson House upon the return of James Gaddy, after 11 months travelling with the Piikani. Tomison wrote:

he says that to his knowledge 14 old Beaver has been taken out of one House he also says that the Pee'ken now [Piikani] Indian tribe is much the largest of any he has seen being 250 tents in number, these with the Blood [Kainai] & Black foot [Siksika] tribes go constantly to War against the snake [Shoshone] indian tribe and many is Killed on both sides, at times the former take numbers of Horses & mules from the Latter which is the reason of their going to war he says they travelled about 150 miles along the Rocky Mountain but saw no end to it, there is two Pee,ken now and two Blood Indians come along with James Gaddy that never was seen any European Settlement before Holmes sent four. Men away last fall with Rum and tobacco to debauch the . Man that James Gaddy was with, but could not obtain his Ends, the Indian being a steady. Man, & has used James Gaddy as his own Son.⁸⁷

The two Piikani and two Kainai were generously treated at Hudson House. Tomison gave Gaddy's unnamed Piikani protector a gun and 40 Made Beaver in presents, "as encouragement for being so kind to him having used him as his own son."⁸⁸ Isaac Batt volunteered to go off with the two Kainai, and Gaddy was outfitted for another sojourn with the Piikani. However, Gaddy's horses were stolen shortly after his departure and he returned to Hudson House, leaving Batt the lone Hudson's Bay Company servant among the Niitsitapi that year.⁸⁹

Gaddy ended up going down to York Factory with the brigade, where he was interviewed by Joseph Colen, recently arrived from England.⁹⁰ Colen's report of Gaddy's

⁸⁷ Ibid., 13 April 1786.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 16 April 1786. See also all entries between 13 and 23 April.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Shirlee Anne Smith, "Joseph Colen," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume V, 1801 to 1820* (Toronto, 1983), 194-5. Colen had arrived at York Factory as a

trip added details not in Tomison's. Colen reported that "the Peekamow [Piikani] & Blackfoot & Blood Indians" all spoke the same language and that the Piikani were "by far the largest tribe & resort in a fertile Country, near the White lofty Mountains, which he [Gaddy] supposes separates Spanish America from us." Gaddy also told Colen that the Niitsitapi were "often at War with a Tribe called the Keenapuck a portiuck [?] or the Snake [Shoshone] Indians who dwell on & Inhabit the Country beyond the Mountain." Colen noted that Gaddy had travelled back with the Piikani and the four North West Company employees sent by William Holmes, and that the Canadians managed to lure the bulk of the Piikani to their upriver post at the Eagle Hills.⁹¹ According to Gaddy, the Shoshone had indeed retreated west of the Rockies by the mid-1780s, just as Saukamaptee told David Thompson. The Rocky Mountains were often referred to in the singular, as either the Rocky Mountain or Stoney Mountain.

The Archithinue and the "Slave Indians"

Isaac Batt returned to Hudson House in mid-September. William Walker, who was in charge there for the summer of 1786, wrote, "Towards Noon Isaac Batt arrived from the slave Indian Country with a good few Skins waiting for the arrival of M^r Tomison, and then to return to that Country again, to give them the News where We are to reside."⁹² This is the earliest reference that I have seen to the "Slave Indians." It was not a reference to the "Slavey Indians" (a *Dene* people) of present-day northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories. However, the origin of both names is the same.

"writer" in 1785. With Humphrey Marten's retirement in 1786, Colen was put in charge of that post.

⁹¹ Colen to Humphrey Marten, York Factory, 14 July 1786, fos. 16-6d., York Factory correspondence book, B.239/b/45, reel 1M255, HBCA.

⁹² Hudson House post journal, 15 September 1786, B.87/a/9, reel 1M63, HBCA.

As discussed extensively in Chapter Two, the term “Archithinue,” and its many variant spellings, was derived from a Cree word which literally means foreigner or stranger, but which was often translated as slave. The “slave Indian Country” noted by Walker was “Archithinue” country. The “Slave Indians” were the Niitsitapi and their allies. They were the Piikani, Kainai, Siksika, Gros Ventre and Sarcee. The Euroamerican traders on the Saskatchewan used this term exclusively in reference to these five peoples, as will be seen throughout the remainder of this thesis. Except for a rather anomalous use by a visitor to the West in 1820,⁹³ the term “Archithinue” disappeared from the fur traders’ vocabulary by the early 1780s, and was replaced with the somewhat more specific term “Slave Indians.” It was more specific because, as detailed in Chapter Two, the term “Archithinue” was a generic descriptor which could and did refer to a wide variety of First Nations peoples. Matthew Cocking listed nine in one journal entry alone.⁹⁴ To the traders on the Saskatchewan, the term “Slave Indians” referred only to the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance. As already noted in Chapter One, Governor George Simpson later wrote, “These five tribes are commonly called

⁹³ In early 1820, Captain John Franklin, at the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Carlton House on the North Saskatchewan River, while on his way to the Arctic, described the “Yatchée-thinyoowuc, which has been translated Slave Indians, but more properly signifies Strangers.” He then provided details of these five peoples and their home country; the five were: the Gros Ventre (*Atsina/A’aninin*), Piikani, Kainai, Siksika and Sarcee. See John Franklin, *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea, in the Years 1819-20-21-22*, intro. James P. Delgado (Vancouver, 2000), Franklin journal entry, 31 January to 5 February 1820, pp. 87-8. This is the last reference to Archithinue that I have seen in records from the fur trade era.

⁹⁴ Matthew Cocking inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 1 December 1772, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA.

Blackfeet, but amongst the Fur Traders [on the North Saskatchewan River] they are known as the Slave or Plain Indians.”⁹⁵

So many later writers, again as noted in Chapter One, tried to tie the Niitsitapi exclusively to the term “Archithinue,” that confusion reigned in some quarters. The connection and then entanglement of the two terms, “Slave” and “Archithinue,” with the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, resulted in one writer in the early 20th century making an incredibly inaccurate assertion. Charles Mair wrote that the name for Lesser Slave River (and Lesser Slave Lake), located in northern Alberta, which name had the same origin as the Slavey (*Dene*) people, should more accurately be called “the River of the Blackfeet.” Mair mistakenly equated the Cree word, which he spelled “Iyaghchi,” meaning stranger with “Blackfeet.” He then suggested, “This fact, to my mind, casts additional light upon an obscure prehistoric question, namely, the migration of the great Algie, or Algonquin race.”⁹⁶ Actually, the supposed Blackfoot origin of the name for these geographic features in northern Alberta casts light on nothing, except for the fact that Mair was himself confused. As a recently published Cree dictionary confirmed, the term “ayachiyiniw” meant “stranger or outsider: historically Plains Cree used it to describe the Blackfoot peoples; Northern Crees use the word to indicate Slavey-speaking people.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Simpson 1841 journal entry, fos. 129-9d., Simpson Journals, D.3/2, reel 3M3, HBCA. Just as writers in the post-fur trade era often disagreed on the composition of the Blackfoot Confederacy (see Chapter One), there was an occasional difference as to whether all five of these peoples were encompassed at all times by the term “Slave Indians.” For example, Alexander Henry seems to have reserved the term exclusively for the three Niitsitapi peoples, and not for the Sarcee and Gros Ventre, but generally it meant all five tribes. Alexander Henry (The Younger), *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814*, ed. Barry M. Gough, vol. 2 (Toronto, 1992), 376.

⁹⁶ Charles Mair and Roderick MacFarlane, *Through the Mackenzie Basin: A Narrative of the Athabasca and Peace River Treaty Expedition of 1899* (Toronto, 1908), 43-5.

⁹⁷ Waugh, LeClaire and Cardinal, eds., *alperta ohci*, 8.

There was no “Blackfoot” connection to northern Canada, as Mair thought there must have been, either with named geographic features or with the Slavey people. It was a Cree connection. The generic appellation, which was eventually translated as “Slave,” became associated with totally unrelated First Nations peoples, in widely separated parts of present-day western and northern Canada.

Expanding the Niitsitapi Trade

When the Hudson’s Bay Company finally made its move farther inland, it was definitely not alone. In the fall of 1786, Tomison saw to the construction of the company’s South Branch House, on the South Saskatchewan River, and Manchester House, above the Canadian posts built the previous year at the Battle River, near the Eagle Hills. Mitchell Oman, an illiterate Orkneyman but an experienced trader, had charge of South Branch House, where David Thompson kept the journal. They built next to two fortified opposition posts, one erected by Nicholas Montour, of the North West Company, and the other by Peter Pangman, a partner in Gregory, McLeod and Company.⁹⁸ It was slightly more crowded at Manchester House. Tomison reported that he had built at “Pine Island,” nine days upriver from Hudson House. The location for the new post had been recommended by local First Nations people in the spring. The North West Company’s Donald McKay had actually come down to invite William Walker to join him there the previous summer, in order to discourage others from doing so.⁹⁹ The tactic did not work. As Tomison reported, besides McKay’s North West Company post and his own

⁹⁸ South Branch House post journal, 24 and 25 September 1786, B.205/a/1, reel 1M143, HBCA, and, François Béland, “Nicholas Montour,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume V, 1801 to 1820* (Toronto, 1983), 602-4. The two Canadian posts were actually newly-erected replacements for the two built just the previous year. Oman passed the abandoned posts one day downriver from the new site.

⁹⁹ Hudson House post journal, 17 August 1786, B.87/a/9, reel 1M63, HBCA.

Manchester House, there were two other Canadian posts built there in the summer of 1786, as well as two more Canadian houses some 35 miles farther upriver, and another one 60 miles downriver, at the Battle River. Tomison complained that as a result of this plethora of trading posts, the “Indians has nothing to do but go from house to house, get Drunk and beg Goods on Expectation of what they are to bring.”¹⁰⁰ The proliferation of smaller Canadian trading operations on the Saskatchewan prompted one North West Company partner a decade later to refer to them: “like the Locusts of Egyth [sic] bring Devestation & Ruin along with them wherever they Winter.”¹⁰¹

South Branch House was built in Assiniboine territory. It was apparently never visited by any of the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance, not, at least, until a large party of Gros Ventre and Siksika attacked and destroyed it in 1794.¹⁰² The posts at and near Pine Island became the ones regularly visited by the Niitsitapi and their allies, at least until 1792, when the Hudson’s Bay Company built Buckingham House next to the North West Company’s Fort George, on the North Saskatchewan River near the Moose Hills, even closer to Niitsitapi territory.

While Manchester House was in the early stages of construction, Tomison wasted no time in trying to cement relations with the Piikani. He noted that he “fitted out Isaac Batt, and James Gaddy James Spence Sen^r and Robert Davey to go to the Stony Mountain with Different Articles of Trading Goods for the Pee ke,new [Piikani] Indians

¹⁰⁰ Tomison 14 November 1786 letter in *ibid.*, 23 November 1786. Edward Umfreville ran the North West Company post located upriver from Manchester House.

¹⁰¹ Angus Shaw to Joseph Colen, Fort Augustus, 10 May 1797, fo. 27d., York Factory correspondence book, B.239/b/59, reel 1M256, HBCA.

¹⁰² Although not visited by members of the Blackfoot alliance, South Branch House’s post journals are a good source of information on activities relating to these peoples. See B.205/a/1-8, 1786-1787 to 1793-1794, reels 1M143-4, HBCA.

and to bring them in, in the Spring.”¹⁰³ This sending of men from the uppermost posts to winter with the Niitsitapi became the norm for both the Hudson’s Bay and North West companies. Batt, Gaddy and the others returned to Manchester House in the late winter and early spring.¹⁰⁴ The next fall, in October 1787, Gaddy, Batt and 12 other men, including David Thompson, were sent in separate parties to winter with the Kainai and Piikani, while four men were sent to pass the season with the Sarcee.¹⁰⁵ During the winter of 1788-1789, James Gaddy and 14 other Hudson’s Bay Company servants repeated their travels with the Piikani and Kainai.¹⁰⁶

In 1789, Joseph Colen, the officer in charge at York Factory, gave this ongoing practice his official seal of approval. He wrote that James Gaddy “should continue his excursions among the Blackfoot, Blood and Peekanow Indians, in order to establish a firm friendship with those tribes.”¹⁰⁷ These Tomison-directed undertakings did not need Colen’s approval. Recognizing the overriding importance of the inland trade, in 1786 the Governor and Committee in London directed: “We have thought necessary to make an alteration in the manner of conducting our Affairs at York Factory and have determined

¹⁰³ Manchester House post journal, 21 October 1786, B.121/a/1, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 9, 12 and 13 March, and, 8 and 9 April 1787. Batt actually returned accompanied by Kainai. Gaddy apparently remained with the Piikani throughout the winter.

¹⁰⁵ Manchester House post journal, 7 to 9 and 25 October 1787, B.121/a/2, reel 1M73, HBCA. See also Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 318-71.

¹⁰⁶ Manchester House post journal, 23 October and 1 November 1788, B.121/a/3, reel 1M73, HBCA. Gaddy, his company companions and a large party of Kainai and Piikani returned to the post in late April 1789 (see 25 to 29 April entries in this journal).

¹⁰⁷ Colen to William Walker, York Factory, 24 July 1789, fo. 9d., York Factory correspondence book, B.239/b/49, reel 1M256, HBCA.

that the Principal Officer shall in future, reside inland.”¹⁰⁸ Tomison was Colen’s boss, and he had been since the inexperienced Colen had been given charge of York Factory in 1786.

Gaddy and seven men were sent from Manchester House to winter with the “Muddy River [Piikani] Indians” in October 1789, returning with a large number of them the following March.¹⁰⁹ James Tate had charge of Manchester House that season while Tomison was on leave in England. Tate was happy with the returns received from the trip to “the Stoney Mountain.” He reported that he had received from the Piikani 770 skins, mostly wolves, and another 400 skins from the company servants who had been with them. However, he noted that these same Piikani visitors also traded some 630 skins at the neighbouring North West Company post, and that the Canadians had not had any men with them that winter. Tate complained: “if it was Truth Considering my Men was wintering with them the whole winter So I cannot see the great Service they do by going only endangering their Lives as they say themselves.”¹¹⁰ The Hudson’s Bay Company apparently sent no men to spend the winter of 1790-1791 with any Niitsitapi peoples, and Tomison was prevented from doing so the next winter because so many of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s horses had been stolen during the summer of 1791.¹¹¹ In 1792, Tomison followed the North West Company up the North Saskatchewan to the Moose Hills, where he built Buckingham House. He sent Peter Fidler and John Ward, the only servant who

¹⁰⁸ [Governor and Committee] to Tomison, London, 24 May 1786, p. 268, London Correspondence Book Outwards - General Series, A.5/2, reel 27, HBCA.

¹⁰⁹ Manchester House post journal, 19, 21, 26 and 27 October 1789, and 12 to 16 March 1790, B.121/a/4, reel 1M74, HBCA.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 16 March 1790.

¹¹¹ Manchester House post journal, 30 November 1791, B.121/a/7, reel 1M74, HBCA.

could be coaxed to accompany Fidler, to spend the winter with the Piikani.¹¹² Tomison identified Fidler's Piikani protector as one "Sak e too the Muddy river Indian."¹¹³

Despite the North West Company's identical practice of sending men to live with all three of the Niitsitapi peoples, and despite James Tate's misgivings about the value of sending men to live and travel with the Piikani, the Hudson's Bay Company's concentrated efforts with this people paid long-term dividends. In the fall of 1794 at Fort George, the North West Company post next to Buckingham House, Duncan McGillivray observed, "Two Piegan Chiefs with 7 young men arrived and near twice as many went to the English:-they have got a greater proportion of this tribe than any other that frequent these Forts, owing to some old connections, betwixt them, but this Superiority is amply compensated to us, by having the trade of near 2/3 of all the other nations."¹¹⁴ These friendship "connections" had been steadfastly established between the Piikani and the

¹¹² Along with David Thompson's 1787-1788 visit to the Piikani, this Fidler visit is not only the most famous, but also the best documented. Buckingham House post journal, 6 and 8 November 1792, and 19-25 March 1793, B.24/a/1, reel 1M18, and, Peter Fidler, "Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains, in 1792 & 3," fos. 2-36, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA. Fidler's journal has been published in full: Peter Fidler, *A Look at Peter Fidler's Journal: Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains in 1792 & 3*, ed. Bruce Haig (Lethbridge, 1990). Extensive extracts have also been published: Peter Fidler, "Encounters with the Inhabitants of 'Alberta' in 1792-1793, as Recorded by Peter Fidler, Surveyor," ed. Mary Eggermont-Molenaar, *Yumtziob: Tijdschrift Over De America's* 12, nos. 1-2 (Summer 2000), 7-56. See also: James Grierson MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor, 1769-1822* (Toronto, 1966), and, Robert S. Allen, "Peter Fidler," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VI, 1821 to 1835* (Toronto, 1987), 249-52.

¹¹³ Tomison to James Tate, Moose Hills (Buckingham House), 11 November 1792, in Buckingham House post journal, fo. 42, B.24/a/1, reel 1M18, HBCA.

¹¹⁴ Duncan McGillivray, *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-5*, intro. Arthur S. Morton (Fairfield, Washington, 1989 [1929]), 41-2. See also Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Duncan McGillivray," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume V, 1801 to 1820* (Toronto, 1983), 530-2.

Hudson's Bay Company, to the long-term benefit of both. McGillivray and the North West Company could afford to be unconcerned with the Hudson's Bay Company's advantage in the Piikani trade. In 1795, the North West Company controlled eleven-fourteenths of the fur trade in British North America, while the Hudson's Bay Company had two-fourteenths and independent Canadians got the remaining one-fourteenth.¹¹⁵

The Trade

First Nations peoples traded for a wide variety of goods from the Euroamerican newcomers. There is nothing to indicate that the needs and wants of the Niitsitapi differed from those of their neighbours. Firearms, alcohol and tobacco were the most desired articles, and the items the absence of which would cause the greatest harm to a trading post. However, failure to observe trading protocols would also guarantee disaster. Euroamericans on the Saskatchewan, therefore, meticulously observed these long-established First Nations practices. In the northern Plains trade, these traditional preludes to trade and peaceful interaction were altered somewhat from those practised farther east. The calumet was smoked, speeches were made and gifts exchanged, but the Plains peoples generally sent messengers ahead of the main trading party. These delegates announced the imminent arrival of the group and were sent back from the posts with tokens of friendship: gifts of tobacco. Quite often, when the main party arrived, the approaching First Nations peoples paraded in and fired their guns in the air; the post fired a salute with its canon. Liquor was generally then provided as a gift by the Euroamerican traders. Only after a friendly greeting and celebration did the actual trade begin.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 188.

¹¹⁶ Variations of these practices have been described by many fur traders on the Saskatchewan from Duncan McGillivray in the 1790s to Hudson's Bay Company traders in the mid-19th century. For a good summary and description, see Hugh A. Dempsey,

Opinions among the Euroamerican traders of the time differed as to which of tobacco or alcohol was most sought after, but all agreed on the deleterious effects of the introduction of alcohol on First Nations peoples. Tobacco was almost always sent out as a present to incoming groups and was used in the actual trading ceremony. Alcohol, known as “white men’s water” among the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, was also initially offered as a gift and then, to the frustration of the Euroamericans, was expected to be received without charge. As Alexander Henry pointed out, unlike the Cree and other more easterly-located peoples, the Niitsitapi “will not purchase it. They cannot be made to comprehend that anything of value should be paid for what they term ‘water’.”¹¹⁷

Despite Anthony Henday’s statement in the mid-1750s, that the “Archithinue” think “nothing of my tobacco; & I set as little value on theirs: which is dried Horse-dung,” the Niitsitapi peoples, as discovered by Matthew Cocking and later confirmed by David Thompson, actually grew their own tobacco, though they ceased to do so about 1800 when they became partial to that provided by the fur traders.¹¹⁸ A shipment of the wrong type of tobacco or of poor quality tobacco could have drastic results on the trade, especially if the opposition had a good supply of the preferred type.¹¹⁹

“Western Plains Trade Ceremonies,” *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1972), 29-33.

¹¹⁷ Alexander Henry (the Younger), *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest*, vol. 2, ed. Elliott Coues (New York, 1897), 723, and, Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 34-5.

¹¹⁸ Henday, “The Journal,” 15 October 1754 entry, pp. 338-9; Cocking, “An Adventurer,” 16-19 October 1772 entries, p. 109; and, Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 365.

¹¹⁹ In 1787, William Tomison complained of how that season’s poor quality tobacco was bound to hurt the trade of the Hudson’s Bay Company, as the North West Company did have what the customers wanted. In that same journal entry, he described in detail how he tried to improve the quality of his trade tobacco, by rubbing it with sugar and then boiling it in salt water. Manchester House post journal, 12 November 1787, B.121/a/2,

In 1791, William Tomison informed London headquarters: "Nothing Prevents me from Pushing forward the Inland Trade but the want men and good Tobacco."¹²⁰ In the early 19th century, James Bird argued that the Piikani were virtually addicted to the traders' tobacco, much more so than to alcohol. He wrote that to them "Tobacco is an Article of the very first Consideration, there is not any Thing we have they value so much, in short they are nearly as much devoted to smoaking as the Crees are to drinking."¹²¹ Several months later, in April 1809, Bird reiterated the point when complaining of a shortage of trade goods at Edmonton House for the Piikani. He noted that they had to settle for "such articles as we had to give & principally Spirits, instead of those they value, viz tobacco and ammunition."¹²² Alexander Henry, Bird's North West Company rival on the Saskatchewan, flatly contradicted Bird's claim, stating that the Piikani and the other tribes of the Backfoot alliance desired liquor "above all," and that they "appear fully as much addicted to liquor as the Crees."¹²³ Both items were essential to the trade.

In the opening years of trade with the Niitsitapi, William Tomison had pointed out that the more alcohol they were given, the more they wanted.¹²⁴ The intense competition among the various rival operations on the Saskatchewan increased the use of alcohol as an inducement to trade. During the 1786-1787 season at Manchester House, Tomison condemned the Canadian practice of sending men with alcohol out into the Plains. He

reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹²⁰ Tomison to Governor and Committee, 22 July 1791, fo. 101, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, A.11/117, reel 189, HBCA.

¹²¹ Edmonton House post journal, 12 November 1808, B.60/a/8, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹²² Ibid., 24 April 1809.

¹²³ Henry, *New Light*, vol. 2, 713 and 723.

¹²⁴ Hudson House post journal, in Cumberland House post journal, 29 November 1784, B.49/a/15, reel 1M39, HBCA.

reported, “Canadians is going thro’ the barren ground [the Plains] with Rum like so many ravenous Wolves seeking whom they may devour.”¹²⁵ He feared the fate of the Piikani and Kainai when “the Canadians gets amongst them, which is the ruin of every Nation by debauching their women and destroying themselves with poisonous rum.”¹²⁶ The threat both to the health of their First Nations customers and, not the least consideration, the viability and success of their trade, finally resulted in all the concerns at Manchester House agreeing not to send alcohol onto the Plains the next winter season, for, as William Walker wrote, “it was doing much hurt to the Indians and prevented them from hunting.”¹²⁷ This one-year agreement was apparently honoured by all parties, though it did not limit distribution of alcohol at the posts themselves.

To the Niitsitapi, their allies and their enemies, European firearms, and of course powder and ammunition, were among the most sought-after articles, if not the most in demand. Guns had been introduced as trade items virtually as soon as the Hudson’s Bay Company had established itself on the shores of Hudson Bay. The Euroamerican traders’ original expectations for their use, however, did not coincide with the actual situation. In 1718, Henry Kelsey, the officer in charge at York Factory, lectured visiting First Nations people against making war on their neighbours, concluding “that we did not bring Powder Guns & other necessities to destroy mankind but to kill food for them & their fam^{ly}.”¹²⁸ However, by the end of the century the Euroamerican traders on the northern Plains and in the woodlands were fully aware of the primary use of their traded guns once in the possession of First Nations peoples. While travelling with the Piikani in the early 1790s,

¹²⁵ Manchester House post journal, 15 May 1787, B.121/a/1, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 10 April 1787.

¹²⁷ South Branch house post journal, 6 January 1788, B.205/a/2, reel 1M143, HBCA.

¹²⁸ York Factory post journal, 1 August 1718, B.239/a/4, reel 1M154, HBCA.

Peter Fidler wrote, "The Principal part of what Ammunition these Indians trade are for War - & as a principal article to barter with other Nations they are at peace with for Horses."¹²⁹ On the Plains, traditional weapons, such as the bow and arrow, were used in hunting for decades after the introduction of the gun; its almost exclusive purpose was for warfare.¹³⁰

Whatever *naïveté* might initially have existed among Euroamerican traders had long since vanished by the end of the 18th century. They knew the use to which their guns were put, and the importance which their First Nations customers placed on the acquisition of firearms. Fur trade posts became stop-off points on the way to war. For example, in March 1787 at Manchester House, William Tomison described trading with a party of Kainai: "their demand was very heavy on the Guns having traded 18 and four pistols, they inform me that they are going to War against the Snake [Shoshone] Indians."¹³¹ One month later, when his stock had been exhausted, Tomison was borrowing guns owned by Hudson's Bay Company servants to trade to the Piikani.¹³² Much to the consternation and frustration of officers in the field, the Governor and Committee apparently ordered this practice stopped; servants' guns were not to be traded when stocks ran out. Traders on the spot realized that this would hurt the trade.¹³³

¹²⁹ Peter Fidler, "Journal of a Journey, in 1792 & 3," 25 December 1792, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA.

¹³⁰ In 1806, when Alexander Henry was among the Mandan, a sedentary people on the upper Missouri, he wrote, "They never make use of fire arms for the Buffalo. The Bow and Arrow is their only weapon for that purpose." Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 1, 227.

¹³¹ Manchester House post journal, 11 March 1787, B.121/a/1, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 12 April 1787.

¹³³ Manchester House post journal, 13 March 1790, B.121/a/4, reel 1M73, HBCA.

There was an almost insatiable demand for firearms among the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance in the first years of direct trade. At the posts where they traded, at Manchester House and then Buckingham House, as well as at the Canadian opposition posts at these locations, the Euroamerican traders could not meet this demand. In March 1793, Tomison wrote that few Piikani or Kainai had been in to trade since the fall. He went on, in expectation of their arrival, "and what I am to do with them for want of Guns I know not, as I have but 5 left, it grieves me to loose Indians for want of goods." The previous November, he had traded ten of his total of 28 guns to one visiting group of Sarcee.¹³⁴ A year later, in another single trading visit, almost certainly again by Sarcee, Tomison traded 18 guns, more than half his year's supply.¹³⁵ Less than two months later, in January 1794, Tomison was unable to meet the Piikani and Kainai demand for firearms. He wrote, "Traded with the Indians & they have been very quiet to day only for want of Guns which I could not supply them with. & many Skins has been lost for want of that Article & many more will." Later that month, Tomison reported that visiting Piikani were "very troublesome," owing to the shortage of guns and other items.¹³⁶ However, despite the gun shortage at the uppermost Saskatchewan posts, the Niitsitapi must have been relatively pleased with direct access to European firearms. As Binnema has pointed out, the Niitsitapi in 1794 paid 14 Made Beaver in furs for a new gun at Fort

¹³⁴ Buckingham House post journal, Tomison to Malcolm Ross, Buckingham House, 1 March 1793, fo. 44d., and, 22 November 1792 journal entry, B.24/a/1, reel 1M18, HBCA.

¹³⁵ Buckingham House post journal, 5-8 December 1793, B.24/a/2, reel 1M18, HBCA.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18, 19 and 31 January 1794.

George, when they had been paying up to 50 Made Beaver to Cree middlemen for a used one.¹³⁷

In 1809 William McGillivray, then directing partner of the North West Company, explained the *raison d'être* of the Saskatchewan posts, primarily for his own concern, but to a large extent for the Hudson's Bay Company as well. "The Settlements are kept up principally by the NWCo to procure provisions, to enable them to carry on the trade to the northern parts of the Country."¹³⁸ Dried meat and pemmican, produced from the abundant Plains buffalo herds and traded from the various Plains peoples, supported the summer transportation systems of both the North West and Hudson's Bay companies. McGillivray went on to classify his First Nations customers into two hierarchical categories, "those who have furs and those who have none: or, the Indians of the mountainous and Woody regions, and those of the Plains. The former furnish the rich and valuable furs."¹³⁹ The five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance chiefly traded wolf pelts, and provisions, commodities which flowed naturally from their buffalo-based, hunter-gatherer way of life. They also provided horses to meet the companies' transportation needs. In 1794, William's brother, Duncan McGillivray, described the differing treatment accorded the two classes of First Nations customers. "This with little difference is ye manner in which the Beaver Hunters are treated, but with the *Gens du*

¹³⁷ Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 254.

¹³⁸ William McGillivray, "Sketch of the Fur Trade of Canada. 1809," p. 15, MG19, B4, NAC. This is a photocopy of the original, identified as being held by the Royal Colonial Society. Another hand-written version of this same document is in the HBCA: "Account of the trade carried on by the North West Company, 1809," E.114, reel 4M50. The author is not identified, but it is obviously William McGillivray. The original of this HBCA copy is held by the Royal Commonwealth Society. See also Fernand Ouellet, "William McGillivray," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VI, 1821 to 1835* (Toronto, 1987), 454-7.

¹³⁹ McGillivray, "Sketch of the Fur Trade," p. 16.

large consisting of Blackfeet, Gros Ventres, Blood Indians, Piedgans, &c., are treated with less liberality, their commodities being chiefly [sic] Horses, Wolves, Fat & Pounded meat which are not sought after with such eagerness as the Beaver.”¹⁴⁰

The English and Canadian traders, located on the northern fringes of the territory of these perceived second-class customers, offered a supplement to the economic and political life of the Blackfoot alliance. The peoples of the Blackfoot alliance derived a multiplicity of benefits, including firearms and ammunition, from this trade, which at first, apart from inadvertently spread disease and intentionally dispensed alcohol, resulted in no drastic alteration to their culture and, as many Euroamerican traders commented over the years, no real threat to their independence. Even 60 years after direct relations had been established with these peoples, Governor George Simpson could report the lack of disruptive influence that the fur trade had had on their way of life, especially when compared to other less fortunate First Nations peoples. He reported:

The Plain tribes [Piikani, Siksika, Kainai, Gros Ventre and Sarcee] as a body, are a brave & independent race, upon whom civilization has not yet made the slightest impression, & they are at this day as wild & intractable as they were when first visited. Their independence arises very much from the nature of the country they inhabit, which supplying them in the greatest abundance with the means of living & clothing, they are enabled to support themselves with ease, & are thus less anxious to obtain supplies from the Whites, & as such supplies are only to be obtained in payment for furs or provisions, which they are too proud or too lazy to spend their time in hunting, they prefer leading their ancient roving idle life, supplying their own wants, than following the example of other tribes, who have become as it were vassals or tributaries to the Fur traders.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ McGillivray, *The Journal*, 31.

¹⁴¹ George Simpson 1841 journal entry, fo. 131d., D.3/2, reel 3M3, HBCA. Besides this Simpson comment, see McGillivray, *The Journal*, 47; and, Annie Heloise Abel, ed., *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri* (Norman, 1939), 163. Confirmation of this same name and same combination of First Nations peoples may also be found in the Edmonton House post journal, 12 October 1820, B.60/a/19, reel 1M49, HBCA.

The situation described earlier by William McGillivray sounds, to a great extent, like a marriage made in heaven, with each side giving and receiving what they wanted, without great sacrifice or internal dislocation. But it was not. The peoples of the Blackfoot alliance wanted and needed more firearms. The Saskatchewan traders wanted more than just provisions and wolf skins; they wanted these five tribes to bring in beaver pelts, then the Euroamericans' most highly prized trade item. However, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries apparently only the Sarcee and one small band of Piikani, consisting of 30 or 40 tents, were actively engaged in harvesting and trading beaver,¹⁴² much to the chagrin of the Euroamerican traders, who attributed this general lack of beaver procurement, as noted above by Simpson, to laziness. This was the normal Euroamerican response when First Nations peoples did not demonstrate sufficient "industriousness" in hunting and trapping. In the particular case of the Niitsitapi, however, it represented an even greater cultural misunderstanding. Not only did these peoples not want or need most of the offered goods in the quantities available to them, but they had culturally specific reasons for not killing beaver. It was not indolence on their part which stopped them, but a combination of religious beliefs, environmental concerns and other cultural values.

The beaver played a key role in the religious beliefs of all three Niitsitapi peoples, beliefs which included adverse repercussions for killing beaver, and considerable benefits for protecting that animal. Beaver bundles were the most sacred of religious objects to

¹⁴² Henry, *New Light*, vol. 2, 723-4, and Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 32. Surviving HBCA post records from the Saskatchewan clearly demonstrate that wolves and provisions, and foxes, were the mainstay of the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre trade. The Sarcee, located the farthest north of the five allied peoples apparently harvested beaver in large numbers from the woodlands. Very occasionally, Piikani were noted as bringing in beaver. For instance, see the following entries in the Buckingham House post journals in the HBCA: 22 November 1792 (Sarcee), B.24/a/1, and, 8 December 1793 (Sarcee) and 1 February 1794 (Piikani), B.24/a/2, reel 1M18.

these peoples and were central to their most important rituals and ceremonies.¹⁴³ In her doctoral thesis, R. Grace Morgan, using various published anthropological works and other studies, analysed the religious beliefs of the Niitsitapi with respect to beaver, both the incentives and the taboos which operated against the killing of this animal.¹⁴⁴ While travelling with the Piikani in 1792, Peter Fidler observed the beliefs in action. He noted that “several of them are so full of superstition as even not to touch one; and a great many of them will neither eat of them or suffer one to be brought into their Tents.”¹⁴⁵ The Blackfoot-speaking peoples also understood and appreciated the beaver’s highly beneficial function, that of preserving an oftentimes scarce water supply. Morgan stressed the dependence of these Niitsitapi religious beliefs on the realization in the days before the advent of the horse of the beaver’s contribution to the environment, to the stabilization of the scarce and widely scattered water supply. Pedestrians needed water

¹⁴³ Theresa Schenk, “The Sacred Bundles of the Blackfeet.” Paper delivered at the annual conference of the American Society for Ethnohistory, Portland, Oregon, 9 November 1996.

¹⁴⁴ R. Grace Morgan, “Beaver Ecology/Beaver Mythology” (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta, 1991), especially 4-5, 34-5 and 59-61.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Fidler, “Journal of a Journey, in 1792 & 3,” 27 November 1792, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA. The amount of information that Fidler recorded in this remarkable journal makes one realize just how much was not then known at the fur trade posts on the North Saskatchewan River (or not recorded there), and how much we today will never know about many aspects of the Niitsitapi in this era. Despite the wonderfully complete and often detailed records of Hudson’s Bay Company posts that have survived in the HBCA, this Fidler record of a winter spent with the Piikani is unparalleled in the information that it provides. Besides the references to Piikani attitudes and actions with respect to beaver, see also below for references in this journal to joint Piikani-Shoshone and Kainai-Shoshone war efforts against the Crow, the only such references that I have ever seen.

supplies located more closely together than did equestrians. Morgan's environmental determinism is highly questionable, and will be challenged below in this thesis.¹⁴⁶

As with all societies, there was not homogeneity of beliefs within each of the three Blackfoot-speaking nations. Some individuals did indeed kill beaver and did trade them to Euroamericans. As well, some made items of clothing from beaver skins for their own personal use. However, in the early years of trade with the Niitsitapi, the companies were disappointed that those comparative few who did kill beaver would apparently only do so in the spring, summer or fall, and not in the winter, when the pelts were at their best. One Hudson's Bay Company officer commented in 1813 that "no consideration would induce them to perform the Labor requisite to kill beaver in Winter."¹⁴⁷ This is yet another example of cross-cultural misunderstanding. It was surely more than indolence, or ignorance, which dissuaded these peoples from digging into beaver houses to kill beaver, the normal winter practice of killing these animals. During the winter of 1804-1805, Charles McKenzie of the North West Company was among the Mandan and Hidatsa, on

¹⁴⁶ Morgan, "Beaver Ecology/Beaver Mythology." She asserted that these "dog days"/pre-equestrian religious beliefs were solely the result of limited mobility, which produced a heavy reliance on a widely dispersed water supply in the Plains ecosystem, a dependable water supply to which the beaver obviously contributed. She went on to argue that these beliefs became obsolete and inoperative when the Niitsitapi acquired the horse, permitting more rapid travel and thus easier access to a greater range of sources of water. This factor, she argued, along with the construction of the first American trading post for the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, in 1831, combined to eliminate the religious taboos against the killing of beaver and initiated a time of mass harvesting of beaver by the Niitsitapi. As will be demonstrated, this theory simply does not jibe with reality. The three Blackfoot-speaking tribes refrained from killing beaver for decades following their acquisition of the horse. Later practices will be shown below.

¹⁴⁷ James Bird in the Edmonton House post journal, 17 October 1813, B.60/a/12, reel 1M49, HBCA. See also Peter Fidler comment of 27 November 1792 in "Journal of a Journey, in 1792 & 3," E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA. Fidler observed that the Piikani "are very little acquainted with Killing Beaver in their houses - what few they have to Trade are generally shott by them when the rivers are open Spring, Fall & Summer."

the Missouri River. His observations there almost certainly reflect the attitude of those Niitsitapi individuals who did engage in killing beaver. McKenzie wrote:

Beavers are plentiful but the Indians will not take the trouble of attending to them. They often remarked to me that they would think it a pleasure to supply us with beavers if they could be secured the same as Buffaloes by a chase on horseback - but they consider the operation of searching for them in the bowels of the earth to satisfy the avarice of the Whites not only troublesome, but very degrading.¹⁴⁸

Besides all of these above-noted factors, at least for some Niitsitapi, though certainly not all or even the vast majority, there may also have been a stigma attached even to the act of trapping itself.¹⁴⁹

As already mentioned, the country of the three Niitsitapi peoples and the Gros Ventre abounded with wolves, which preyed on the vast buffalo herds. In 1754, Anthony Henday commented about this region that he was uncertain whether wolves "or the Buffalo are most numerous."¹⁵⁰ In the late 1780s, Edward Umfreville confirmed that it was wolves that predominated in the trade with each of the member peoples of the Blackfoot alliance.¹⁵¹

Until the late 1780s, the Hudson's Bay Company equated one prime wolf pelt to two prime beaver skins, or to two Made Beaver. In its annual "Comparative of Furs," the company set the value of all other furs and country produce, such as provisions, moose

¹⁴⁸ Charles McKenzie 1804-1805 journal, in W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, eds., *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains* (Norman, 1985), 234.

¹⁴⁹ Comments of First Nations informant, identified only as Dick S., on Piikani leader, Striped Bear, ca. 1950, File no. 152, Reel 7, Claude Everett Schaeffer Papers, M1100, Glenbow Archives.

¹⁵⁰ Henday, "York Factory," 8 October 1754, p. 336.

¹⁵¹ Umfreville, *The Present State*, 102-4. He wrote that the Gros Ventre only brought wolves and that wolves were the principal commodity of the other four peoples. His assertion about the Gros Ventre was an over-simplification, for all five peoples traded provisions, as well as foxes.

skins, etc., in relationship to the standard, one prime beaver pelt. Each item's worth to the company was expressed in terms of this standard, the Made Beaver. In turn, the goods which the company shipped to North America were evaluated for the trade as being worth so many Made Beaver. The Governor and Committee set the annual standard in London, where they were headquartered, and where their furs were auctioned each year. The annual Comparative of Furs, which instructed the officers in the field in North America as to respective values, reflected the price that the Hudson's Bay Company did, or expected to, obtain for these articles at auction. The Hudson's Bay Company was a capitalist enterprise, in business to make profits. When prices dropped in London for a particular item, that item's value in Made Beaver in the company's entire North American operation was quickly reflected in the Comparative of Furs. The beaver itself was not valued as a fancy fur, with its pelt intact, but, through a 250-year long whim of fashion, for its barbed under-layer of fur-wool, used to make felt for hats.¹⁵² Until the late 1780s, the value which the Hudson's Bay Company, the North West Company and the other smaller Canadian concerns placed on wolf pelts apparently remained relatively constant and virtually uniform: one wolf pelt equalling two Made Beaver.¹⁵³ By the late 1780s, the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance had established expectations of the value of their trade in wolf pelts, whether at English or Canadian posts.

¹⁵² See Murray G. Lawson, "The Beaver Hat and the North American Fur Trade," in Malvina Bolus, ed., *People and Pelts: Selected Papers of the Second North American Fur Trade Conference* (Winnipeg, 1972), 27-37, and, Hugh Grant, "Revenge of the Paris Hat," *The Beaver* 68, no. 6 (December 1988/January 1989), 37-44.

¹⁵³ For examples of Canadian values for wolves identical to the Hudson's Bay Company's, see William Tomison inland journal, in York Factory post journals, 4 June 1770, B.239/a/64, reel 1M158, HBCA, and, Umfreville, *The Present State*, 45. However, prices did vary from time to time and among traders. Cocking noted one Canadian inland trader taking wolves at one Made Beaver. Matthew Cocking inland journal (in York Factory post journal series), 29 May 1773, B.239/a/69, reel 1M158, HBCA.

Neutral Traders and Trading Posts

Relations between the Euroamerican traders and the Five allied peoples were generally quite peaceable during the first years of direct trade on the North Saskatchewan. The Piikani, Kainai and Gros Ventre were each singled out on occasion as being extremely co-operative and among the least troublesome of the Hudson's Bay Company's customers, even if not always industrious enough in the traders' eyes in the gathering of furs for the companies warehouses.¹⁵⁴ However, virtually all the posts on the Saskatchewan were fortified, with palisades surrounding the interior buildings. Vastly outnumbered among potentially hostile First Nations peoples, the Euroamerican traders took no chances with their personal safety and company property. They believed that, though these peoples were not openly hostile, they would take advantage of any opportunity to plunder. The Euroamericans became increasingly aware of their vulnerable position, especially in the summer months when their posts were lightly manned. Angus Shaw of the North West Company wrote that they were most at risk in the summer, "during the period that we are most exposed to the Depredations of the natives," the bulk of the servants and officers doing brigade duty to and from either York Factory or Grand Portage.¹⁵⁵ In 1788, Tomison was so concerned about the situation brought about by intertribal strife, low ammunition supplies and inexperienced servants that he abandoned Manchester House for the summer, leaving the inland men at Hudson

¹⁵⁴ See for example the following post journals in the HBCA: Manchester House, 9 and 10 April 1787 (Piikani and Kainai), B.121/a/1, reel 1M73; and, South Branch House, fos. 30Bd.-1d., Tomison to Bird, 25 October 1793 (Gros Ventre were "a peaceable People till now"), and, fos. 32-2d., Bird to Tomison, 8 November 1793, (Gros Ventre were "the most rational and inoffensive in this part of the Country"), B.205/a/8, reel 1M144.

¹⁵⁵ York Factory correspondence book, Shaw to Colen, Fort Augustus, 10 May 1797, fo. 27d., B.239/b/59, reel 1M256, HBCA.

House.¹⁵⁶ The following summer he left James Gaddy and seven men at Manchester House, twice the number usually left at the lower posts. Tomison stated that “my reason for leaving so many men, is that the Indians are much more daring than they used to be.”¹⁵⁷ In 1786, Tomison had complained that the various Canadian concerns dominated the river and that as they became more numerous the demands of his First Nations customers multiplied. However, the 200 Canadians who threatened Tomison’s trade on the Saskatchewan were a relatively puny and scattered force when compared to the numbers of now European-armed warriors who could be sent against them.¹⁵⁸

The traders, whether Hudson’s Bay Company, North West Company, independent, or later, American always tried to play the role of neutral peacemaker. This was for the most part not out of any sense of altruism or humanitarianism, but for the traders’ own self-preservation and enrichment. Intertribal strife hurt the trade and the volatility of such violent situations could endanger the traders’ lives. From the time of Henry Kelsey’s visit to the “Naywattame poets,” Euroamerican traders promoted harmony among the various Plains and woodland peoples.¹⁵⁹ Often the traders’ posts provided the neutral ground where truces or peace treaties could be arranged or confirmed between sometimes warring groups. For instance, in 1787 a party of Piikani arrived at Manchester House to arrange peace among the Kainai, Sarcee and Cree.¹⁶⁰ Five years later at the same post, Kainai arrived to see whether the Cree intended to maintain the

¹⁵⁶ Manchester House post journal, 2 May 1788, and, Tomison letter dated 13 May 1788, at Hudson House, fo. 61, B.121/a/2, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹⁵⁷ Manchester House post journal, 17 May 1789, B.121/a/3, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹⁵⁸ Hudson House post journal, 12 and 24 January 1786, B.87/a/8, reel 1M63, HBCA.

¹⁵⁹ Kelsey, *The Kelsey Papers* (1994), 3, 6 and 12 September 1691, pp. 9-11, and, Legardeur, “Memoir,” clxi.

¹⁶⁰ Manchester House post journal, 24 August 1787, B.121/a/2, reel 1M73, HBCA.

peace.¹⁶¹ In 1788, after Cree had attacked a party of Gros Ventre, Peter Pangman of the North West Company tried unsuccessfully to arrange a peace between them.¹⁶²

In an 1807 letter to John Peter Pruden at Acton House, the uppermost post on the North Saskatchewan River, in expectation of the arrival of Niitsitapi there, James Bird clearly summed up the fur traders' position:

Point out to them as forcibly as possible the necessity there is of their being on a friendly footing with the Southward [Cree] Indians, for to have a safe & easy Intercourse with us and above all that if they value our Friendship & assistance it will always be necessary for them whatever Quarrels may arise among the Indians; to consider us as a party unconcerned, Friends to all, sorry for their dissensions and at all times willing to do everything in our power to compose them.¹⁶³

In so many ways this exemplifies the narrow-minded, Pollyanna-like attitude of the Euroamericans. The fur trade, except by the introduction of alcohol and devastating diseases, was for the most part only a peripheral concern to the Plains peoples; their religious, social and political lives were largely unaffected by the trade and were of far more importance, despite whatever useful tools, comforts and ornaments the traders might offer to enhance or make easier their lives. Euroamericans, whose central concern was the fur trade, could not understand the First Nations person who did not devote himself to that activity, condemning individuals, bands or entire tribes for their "indolence," simply because their lives were focussed on areas other than the accumulation of material goods in vast quantities. Likewise, these same Euroamerican traders were in some sort of dreamland if they really expected to be viewed as unbiased

¹⁶¹ Manchester House post journal, 28 January 1792, B.121/a/7, reel 1M74, HBCA.

¹⁶² Manchester House post journal, 26 April, and 1, 3-5 May 1788, B.121/a/2, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹⁶³ Edmonton House post journal, Bird to Pruden letter dated 26 January 1807, at Edmonton House, in 26 January 1807 journal entry, B.60/a/6, reel 1M49, HBCA.

neutrals, when they were in the process of trading firearms to enemies of another First Nations people, or when they appeared to be favouring one people over another.

Intertribal Relations on the Saskatchewan

As described in detail in the previous chapter, Milloy, Doige, Russell and Binnema all posited a trade and military alliance between the Niitsitapi and the Cree-Assiniboine throughout most of the 18th century. I do not think that there exists sufficient evidence to sustain such a position for the period before the outbreak of the smallpox epidemic of 1781-1782 and the beginning of direct trade on the Saskatchewan between Euroamericans and Niitsitapi peoples. Records are too scanty and many are unclear. Milloy certainly argued that the Gros Ventre were never part of this trade and military alliance with the Cree and Assiniboine.¹⁶⁴ By the end of the 1780s, all concurred that the Gros Ventre were the enemies of the Cree and Assiniboine. However, there was disagreement among Milloy, Doige and Binnema as to the date of the termination of what Binnema termed "the Northern Coalition," as to the date of the breakdown of this supposed alliance between the Niitsitapai peoples and the Cree-Assiniboine. Milloy and Binnema date the final breakdown to 1806, while Doige placed its disintegration to the 1790s.¹⁶⁵ If such a

¹⁶⁴ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 5-20.

¹⁶⁵ Binnema clung to the idea of the existence of this northern coalition into the 19th century, even though he wrote of the 1782-1795 period: "For the Blackfoot [Niitsitapi] and Sarcee, friendships with Cree and Assiniboine bands deteriorated but did not dissolve before 1794, but it required remarkable forbearance and diplomacy to preserve any sense of common ground beyond that year. For the Atsina [Gros Ventre] the period witnessed the conclusive end to any friendly relations with the Cree and Assiniboine, and an increasing orientation towards the southern bands. The result was warfare in the Saskatchewan basin on a scale perhaps never before experienced." Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 242. "Perhaps" was a good choice of words here; it is really impossible to achieve any kind of an accurate understanding of intertribal relations over time on the Saskatchewan in the 18th century, because surviving records of the period prior to the 1780s are so scanty.

coalition ever indeed existed, there is little evidence of it in the 1780s and 1790s.

Whether or not this coalition ever actually existed in reality, there certainly was a logic for its existence. Before Euroamerican traders established posts in Niitsitapi territory, both the Cree-Assiniboine and the Niitsitapi would have benefited from such an arrangement, with the Cree-Assiniboine acting as middlemen. The Niitsitapi peoples got used European goods, including firearms; the Cree and Assiniboine got horses, and large quantities of wolf pelts which they re-traded to Euroamericans. Once fur trade posts were established within easy access of the Niitsitapi by the mid-1780s, they no longer needed middlemen.

Intertribal relations in the 1780s and early 1790s, despite the existence of a substantial documentary record, are still not always easy to decipher or define. The one constant, at least until the 1790s, seems to have been that the Shoshone were the enemies of everyone in the Saskatchewan. Yet during the winter of 1792-1793, the Piikani accepted Shoshone overtures to formalize a peace reached the previous summer. That winter a combined Kainai-Shoshone war party and another Piikani-Shoshone war party each attacked the Crow.¹⁶⁶ In 1795, probably in need of new alliances in the face of intensified Cree attacks, a large portion of the Gros Ventre was reported to have sought an alliance with the Shoshone.¹⁶⁷

The Sarcee apparently enjoyed amicable relations with both the Niitsitapi and the Cree in this period. As already noted, a combined Cree and Sarcee party trapped together

¹⁶⁶ Peter Fidler, "Journal of a Journey, 1792 & 3," 15 and 22 November, 12, 14, 16 and 30 December 1792, and 14 February and 2 March 1793, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA. In these entries Fidler also noted the Piikani theft of Shoshone horses, despite the peace, and the fact that the Piikani had likewise established peace with the Kootenay. Fidler confirmed that the Shoshone, Flathead and Kootenay were the traditional enemies of the Piikani.

¹⁶⁷ McGillivray, *The Journal*, 9 April 1795, p. 69.

and then traded at Hudson House in 1783.¹⁶⁸ Almost a decade later, another joint party was trading at Manchester House.¹⁶⁹ However, the 1780s were not uneventful for the Sarcee. Edward Umfreville reported that the Sarcee attacked “an encampment of Blood Indians, whom they were at peace with, and most of the men being absent.” He was not specific as to the date, but this was almost certainly the event noted by Tomison at Manchester House in July 1787, an attack by Sarcee and apparently Cree on a Kainai camp, one of the events that triggered the Piikani arriving at Manchester House in August 1787 to try to arrange peace among the Kainai, the Sarcee and the Cree.¹⁷⁰ Intertribal relationships are definitely unclear at this time, for in between these two events, Cree fled the area around Manchester House in fear of both the Kainai and the Sarcee.¹⁷¹ A year later, unknown factors caused internal strife among the Sarcee, resulting in several Sarcee deaths.¹⁷²

There seemed to be no troubles among the three Niitsitapi peoples. However, Peter Fidler did make the following surprising comment in 1793 about the Piikani and the Kainai: “Altho these 2 Tribes speak exactly the same language & appear outwardly very friendly - they in their Hearts hate one another.”¹⁷³ As noted earlier, Fidler also confirmed that the Niitsitapi were generally at odds with three peoples then located west of the

¹⁶⁸ Hudson House post journal, in Cumberland House post journal, 6 December 1783, B.49/a/14, reel 1M39, HBCA.

¹⁶⁹ Manchester House post journal, 2 May 1792, B.121/a/7, reel 1M74, HBCA.

¹⁷⁰ Umfreville, *The Present State*, 103, and, Manchester House post journal, 9 July and 24 August 1787, B.121/a/2, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹⁷¹ Manchester House post journal, 31 July 1787, B.121/a/2, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 13 April 1788.

¹⁷³ Peter Fidler, “Journal of a Journey, 1792 & 3,” 23 February 1793, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA.

Rockies, the Kootenay, Flathead and Shoshone. The Flathead were apparently the Niitsitapi's primary source of horses; the Niitsitapi raided west of the mountains and stole the horses. The Niitsitapi sometimes raided and sometimes traded horses from the Kootenay. As for relations with the Cree and Assiniboine, there is little or nothing to support a theory of an ongoing military alliance. There are times when the two groups were at peace with one another and times when they were not. Besides the 1787 incident of Cree-Kainai hostility noted immediately above, in January 1792 a party of Kainai arrived at Manchester House to await some Cree, to see whether the peace was to be maintained.¹⁷⁴ In 1786, Piikani killed a Cree and wounded another, causing Tomison to worry that it "is likely to turn out to a civil war."¹⁷⁵ It apparently did not. Fidler noted the arrival of a combined Sarcee and Cree party in the Bow River area in early 1793, with the Cree there to trade with the Piikani.¹⁷⁶ Later that year, Cree killed a Siksika at Buckingham House.¹⁷⁷ It is hard to draw any firm conclusions about Niitsitapi relations with the Cree prior to 1794. There is no real pattern, at least not one discernible in existing records. For most of this period they were probably at peace with each other and probably traded with each other, but there were times when this was not the case. There is no evidence of any joint military undertakings.

There is also no evidence of anything but ongoing amicable relations between the Gros Ventre and the Niitsitapi in this same period. However, there is ample evidence of rapidly deteriorating relations between the Gros Ventre and their eastern neighbours,

¹⁷⁴ Manchester House post journal, 28 January 1792, B.121/a/7, reel 1M74, HBCA.

¹⁷⁵ Hudson House post journal, 5 May 1786, B.87/a/8, reel 1M63, HBCA.

¹⁷⁶ Peter Fidler, "Journal of a Journey, 1792 & 3," 9 January 1793, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA.

¹⁷⁷ Buckingham House post journal, 12 October 1793, B.24/a/2, reel 1M18, HBCA.

the Cree and Assiniboiné. In the early and mid-1780s, Gros Ventre arrived to trade at Hudson House accompanied by both Assiniboiné and Cree.¹⁷⁸ By 1788 a new pattern of relations was being established. That summer there was extensive warfare between Cree and Gros Ventre. William Walker reported from the South Branch House. "The Southerd [Cree] and fall [Gros Ventre] Indians have been Killing each other, and since the whole Country is in a Stur [sic]."¹⁷⁹ The Cree had instigated the warfare with an attack on a party of Gros Ventre. The Cree apparently stole the Gros Ventre furs and traded them at a Canadian post.¹⁸⁰ Apparently most of the Gros Ventre stayed away from the Saskatchewan trading posts for almost two years, as a result of the warfare with the Cree in 1788.¹⁸¹

They may have wished that they had stayed away longer. According to Duncan McGillivray, the Gros Ventre and Cree had been enemies "for many years past," but, until 1793, there had only been low-consequence violence, with deaths on either side limited to very few.¹⁸² When James Bird arrived at South Branch House in the early autumn of 1793, he reported that this situation had changed, that the "Indians hereabouts

¹⁷⁸ Hudson House post journals, 26 October 1782, B.87/a/6, and, 1 May 1786, B.87/a/8, reel 1M63, HBCA.

¹⁷⁹ South Branch House post journal, 24 July and 11 September 1788, B.205/a/3, reel 1M143, HBCA. See also Manchester House post journal, Walker to Tomison letter, dated 12 September 1788 at South Branch House, fo. 56d., B.121/a/3, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹⁸⁰ Manchester House post journal, 26 April 1788, B.121/a/2, reel 1M73, HBCA.

¹⁸¹ Manchester House post journal, 12 May 1790, B.121/a/4, reel 1M74, HBCA. This entry reads: "Arrived a Great Tribe of Fall Indians with a Good many skins these Indians has been off from any of these Settlements these 2 Years through some Differences that happened between them and the Southward Indians." The traders' terminology was not usually anthropologically sound. Arriving groups of First Nations customers were often referred to as tribes or, more often in this period, as gangs.

¹⁸² McGillivray, *The Journal*, 12 March 1795, p. 62.

[Assiniboiné and Cree] are all afraid the fall [Gros Ventre] Indians will pay them a visit to revenge the death of their Countrymen.”¹⁸³ The previous summer 16 tents of Gros Ventre were encountered on the lower South Saskatchewan by a large force of Cree. According to Duncan McGillivray, the Cree, seeking to exact retribution for past injuries, decided on “exterminating entirely those unfortunate wretches.... they fell upon them like hungry Wolves and with remorseless fury butchered them all in cold blood except a few children whom they preserved for Slaves.”¹⁸⁴ According to Tomison, Assiniboiné were party to this attack on the Gros Ventre, in which, according to Tomison, they “killed 2 of their [Gros Ventre] old Men & 150 Women & Children afterwards fled into the Woods.”¹⁸⁵

Violence Erupts on the Saskatchewan

This level of violence and death was unprecedented in the Saskatchewan. It was to be the trigger for even more unprecedented behaviour. In the summer of 1791, Isaac Batt had been killed near Manchester House by “two villains.” When William Tomison heard the circumstances of his death, he thought of no recriminations or sanctions against the Kainai, in general, because the two Kainai “villains” were known to be untrustworthy individuals. Tomison blamed Batt for his foolhardiness in accompanying them; he also blamed James Gaddy for permitting Batt to do so.¹⁸⁶ Batt was the first Hudson’s Bay

¹⁸³ South Branch House post journal, Bird to Tomison letter, dated [?] October 1793 at South Branch House, fo. 30B, B.205/a/8, reel 1M144, HBCA.

¹⁸⁴ McGillivray, *The Journal*, 12 March 1795, p. 62.

¹⁸⁵ Buckingham House post journal, 22 October 1793, B.24/a/2, reel 1M18, HBCA.

¹⁸⁶ Manchester House post journal, 24 September and 3 October 1791, B.121/a/7, reel 1M74, HBCA. The tribal affiliation of the perpetrators was given in South Branch House post journal, 18 September 1792, B.205/a/6, reel 1M43, HBCA. Batt’s death must have hit the company hard. Despite its ongoing practice of sending men to live with

Company servant killed by any member of the Blackfoot alliance. He would soon be joined by others.

The peoples of the Blackfoot alliance got their first palpable taste of distant market forces in action in the late 1780s. The Comparative of Furs for the 1788-1789 outfit dropped the value of one prime wolf pelt from two to one Made Beaver; the purchasing power of the five tribes had in effect been cut in half, in what must have seemed to them to have been a completely arbitrary and unfathomable Hudson's Bay Company decision.¹⁸⁷ The lowered price did not actually take effect until the 1789-1790 outfit. Company officers on the Saskatchewan, who actually dealt first-hand with these peoples, not only expressed concern that this drastic devaluing of wolf pelts would hurt the Hudson's Bay Company's trade, but also revealed sympathy for their First Nations customers. In early 1790 at Manchester House, then the company's uppermost Saskatchewan post and the post most frequented by the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Sarcee and Gros Ventre, Thomas Stayner urged: "I presume if your Honors would take it into Consideration the great distance these Indians come & most Commonly thro' their Enemies Country their chief trade to, mostly consisting of Wolves."¹⁸⁸ On-site officers also expressed their concerns about the potential loss of trade to the North West Company

different Niitsitapi groups, James Gaddy was described in 1797 as the "only One that speaks the Blackfoot & Blood Indian Languages." Quoted in Alice M. Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, Edmonton House 1795-1800, Chesterfield House 1800-1802* (London, 1967), 10n.

¹⁸⁷ See the following account books in the HBCA: Churchill, 1788-1789, fo. 10, B.42/d/66, reel 1M454; Moose Factory, 1788-1789, fo. 8, B.135/d/58, reel 1M535; Severn, 1788-1789, fo. 17d., B.198/d/44, reel 1M587; and, York Factory, 1788-1789, fo. 45d., B.239/d/84, reel 1M673.

¹⁸⁸ Manchester House post journal, 15 March 1790, B.121/a/5, reel 1M74, HBCA.

and their other Canadian rivals, who had not then followed suit in lowering wolf prices.¹⁸⁹ Higher prices for wolf pelts at Canadian posts would almost certainly result in First Nations peoples taking not only their wolf skins there, but their other produce as well, such as foxes and provisions. For their part, the Niitsitapi and their allies were obviously not pleased, but they reacted with great reserve. Stayner noted only that they were “exceed^s hard to deal with. Nothing in short seemed to please them.”¹⁹⁰ However, at least two historians have speculated that one result of this Hudson’s Bay Company lowering of prices for wolves was the violence that soon erupted.¹⁹¹

The Gros Ventre were the most easterly located of the five allied tribes, and it was they who were experiencing the most intense and immediate pressure from the progressive expansion of the Cree and Assiniboiné westward onto the Plains, drawn there by the lure of horses and buffalo. The Gros Ventre were fewer in number and much less well-armed than their eastern neighbours, now enemies. The Gros Ventre arms shortage

¹⁸⁹ William Walker in Manchester House post journal, 16 March 1790, B.121/a/4, and Thomas Stayner in Manchester House post journal, 8 December 1789, B.121/a/5, reel 1M74, HBCA. Two journals of this season at Manchester House have survived, one kept by Walker and the other by Stayner.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Stayner’s Manchester House post journal, 8 December 1789, B.121/a/5, reel 1M74, HBCA.

¹⁹¹ Colin G. Calloway, “The Inter-tribal Balance of Power on the Great Plains, 1760-1850,” *Journal of American Studies* 16, no. 1 (April 1982), 36. Even if this Hudson’s Bay Company action provoked the violent Gros Ventre-Siksika reaction some four years later, Calloway had his facts wrong. He stated that the drop in prices of wolves occurred in the early 1790s, and he also seemed to assume that the Canadians immediately dropped their prices as well. Furthermore, he was unaware of Siksika involvement in the 1794 attack, claiming only Gros Ventre participation. Alice Johnson less stridently suggested this unprecedented 1793-1794 violence was not precipitated by any sudden Euroamerican actions. She argued that this hostility was the result of simmering resentment against Euroamericans and declining Gros Ventre fire-power with respect to their enemies, the Cree and Assiniboiné, whose principal trade article, the beaver pelt, had not declined in value. Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, xviin.

was undoubtedly the result of two factors: their trade in wolf pelts, recently devalued, and the comparatively small arms supply brought by the various trade concerns to posts frequented by this people. As already noted, at Buckingham House during the 1793-1794 season, the supply of firearms for trade was far short of the demand and the cause of much consternation for both various First Nations customers and the Hudson's Bay Company as well.¹⁹²

The frustrated Gros Ventre vented their anger not on the better armed and numerically superior Cree and Assiniboiné, but on the fur traders at the Manchester House/Pine Island site. In October 1793 a party of Gros Ventre, accompanied by some Siksika, was in to trade at the North West Company post. They attempted to loot that place, but after being warded off there successfully pillaged the Hudson's Bay Company post.¹⁹³ Tomison attributed the attack to the anger and frustration over the recent killing of so many Gros Ventre. He reported: "These have always been a peaceable People till now and what they have done I judge to be out of spite as they could not be revenged on the South^d [Cree] and stone [Assiniboiné] Indians for murdering so many of them last Summer."¹⁹⁴ Duncan McGillivray's first interpretation was that the incident was less a

¹⁹² Buckingham House post journal, 5-8 December 1793 and 19 January 1794, B.24/a/2, reel 1M18, HBCA.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 22 October 1793. In only one source are the Siksika identified as participants in this 1793 incident, which has usually been attributed solely to the Gros Ventre. Tomison reported, "I am very sorry to Inform you of the Great loss of Goods last fall by Manchester House being Robed by a Band of fall [Gros Ventre] & Blackfeet [Siksika] Indians & the men striped of everything they had." Cumberland House post journal, Tomison letter dated 27 January 1794 at Buckingham House, fo. 39, B.49/a/25a, reel 1M39, HBCA.

¹⁹⁴ Buckingham House post journal, 22 October 1793, B.24/a/2, reel 1M18, and, South Branch House post journal, Tomison to Bird letter dated 25 October 1793 at Buckingham House, fos. 30Bd.-31d., B.205/a/8, reel 1M144, HBCA.

response to intertribal strife than to animosity against traders whom he identified as “the French.” He wrote:

The Natives of this part of the Country are of late become much more troublesome than usual, not so much on acc^t of their own mutual quarrels, which are very frequent, as their bad intentions towards the French which they testify on every occasion: for, last fall a part of this very Band went to Pine Island to trade their Summer hunt, & Seeing the people unprepared after the fatigues of the Voyage entered the houses & began to pillage without mercy animating one another by insulting & despising the French; but their Cowardly disposition in doing is only to be equatted by their overbearing insolence in Security, for no Sooner were they apprized that M^r Finlay was arranging the Guns, than they evacuated the fort in the greatest confusion, carrying off However all the mens baggage, 2 Women & about 20 Horses _ They afterwards plundered the English Fort completely, destroying what they could not carry away, whilst the men Saved themselves with much difficulty by flight as the Savages were intent on the booty. _ The French by this time got armed & exchanged several Shots with the Indians from the Opposite Sides of the river _ Fortunately the former escaped with whole Skins but some of the latter received wounds of which they afterwards died.¹⁹⁵

In January 1794, that same party of Gros Ventre encountered McGillivray and two companions returning to Fort George from a nearby First Nations camp. The three were robbed of everything they had, but luckily managed to arrive safely back at the post. A party of over 25 armed men was then sent from the post to seek appropriate redress. However, Angus Shaw thought twice about confronting 150 armed and antagonistic Gros Ventre; discretion being the better part of valour, the men returned unblooded to Fort George.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ McGillivray to Simon McTavish, Grand Portage, 26 July 1794, fos. 171d.-2, North West Company Correspondence, F.3/1, reel 5M1, HBCA. Even though McGillivray was himself a clerk with the North West Company, it seems that he was here using the name “the French” to mean the North West Company. The Finlay whom he notes in this passage was probably James Finlay, a wintering partner in the North West Company. See Finlay biography in Wallace, ed., *Documents*, 441. It was reported that 24 pieces of goods were taken from Manchester House. Cumberland House post journal, 28 December 1793, B.49/a/25a, reel 1M39, HBCA.

¹⁹⁶ McGillivray to McTavish, Grand Portage, 26 July 1794, fos. 170d.-1d., North West Company Correspondence, F.3/1, reel 5M1, HBCA.

McGillivray later wrote that the “Gros Ventres being intimidated from attempting any speedy revenge upon the Crees, formed the design of attacking us, whom they considered as allies of their enemies.”¹⁹⁷ It was hard to sell neutrality, when the Euroamericans supplied more guns to the Cree than to the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre, and when wolf prices dropped, but beaver prices did not. Perhaps likewise frustrated by an arms shortage when compared with the Cree, whose principal trade article was beaver, and an inability to wreak direct vengeance, some Siksika may have also been prompted to join in this Gros Ventre retaliatory action because the Cree had so recently also killed a Siksika at Buckingham House.¹⁹⁸

For a variety of reasons, First Nations aggressiveness against Euroamericans peaked in 1793-1794. In late 1793, a large party of Siksika traded at Buckingham House. Tomison reported that they were “very ill behaved,” and also that they had “a great many new Guns.” He thought that this was evidence of their participation in the sacking of Manchester House.¹⁹⁹ At Fort George in January 1794, a group of Kainai and Siksika arrived to trade and one of them, for no apparent reason, fired upon the awaiting traders.²⁰⁰ Early the next month, Tomison at Buckingham House learned from men just returned from retrieving items from the abandoned Manchester House that about 150 Siksika and Gros Ventre had recently visited the North West Company’s still-operating Pine Island post/Fort de l’Isle. He wrote that they “brought 1200 Wolves which they traded & went away tolerably Peacible, & the next day returned & took 52 Horses 6 of

¹⁹⁷ McGillivray, *The Journal*, 12 March 1795, p. 63.

¹⁹⁸ Buckingham House post journal, 12 October 1793, B.24/a/2, reel 1M18, HBCA.

¹⁹⁹ South Branch House post journal, Tomison to Bird letter dated 2 January 1794 at Buckingham House, fos. 34d.-5, B.205/a/8, reel 1M144, HBCA.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 January 1794.

which they had just traded & had they not seen 50 Armed Men at the Canadian House its not known what lengths they would have gone to.”²⁰¹ McGillivray reported the event as a planned, abortive attempt to attack the post. Without identifying the First Nations peoples involved, he stated that they arrived “with intention to destroy the Fort, but Seeing such an attempt would be attended with much danger & difficulty, they contented themselves with carrying off about 60 horses from the gates of the Fort, threatening at the same time to return again in the Spring in greater Numbers to Scalp the people & plunder the goods, as a Sacrifice to appease the Spirits of their deceased relations.”²⁰² Only after Shaw had reinforced the post from Fort George were the officers and men willing to remain at Fort de l’Isle. They daily expected, but fortunately did not have to endure, further trouble from the Gros Ventre.

In the face of all these threatened and actual acts of violence, the North West Company planned to muster its complement of summer men at fewer posts in 1794. Angus Shaw had even proposed that at each rival site the two companies occupy just one fort during the summer for mutual protection, the post selection to be left to Tomison. By late January Shaw had decided to abandon South Branch House for the summer, and the Hudson’s Bay Company had agreed to do so as well. Tomison did not, however, agree to the joint occupation of posts on the Saskatchewan.²⁰³ At the last minute Shaw discovered that Tomison was inexplicably leaving men at South Branch House for the summer and

²⁰¹ Ibid., 5 February 1794.

²⁰² McGillivray to McTavish, Grand Portage, 26 July 1794, fo. 172, North West Company Correspondence, F.3/1, reel 5M1, HBCA.

²⁰³ See the following HBCA records: South Branch House post journal, Tomison to Bird letter dated 27 January 1794 at Buckingham House, fos. 34d.-5, B.205/a/8, reel 1M144; York Factory correspondence book, John Cornelius Van Driel to Joseph Colen, South Branch House, 26 May 1794, fos. 17-7d., B.239/b/55, reel 1M256; and, York Factory correspondence book, Angus Shaw to Colen, Fort Augustus, 10 May 1797, fo. 27, B.239/b/59, reel 1M256.

he was forced to do likewise. Tomison would soon rue the decision to occupy that post. He left five men there for the summer: Magnus Annel to have charge of it, along with James Gaddy, William Fea, Hugh Brough and John Cornelius Van Driel, the latter a one-time Canadian fur trader hired just the year before by the London Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company.²⁰⁴ Tomison explained the choice of Annel over the Committee's hand-picked man. "M^r Vandriel not having had sufficient experience, prevents me from putting him in Charge at so critical a time. __ and in this part of the Country."²⁰⁵

One month to the day after Tomison's departure downriver from South Branch House for York Factory, the South Saskatchewan post was destroyed and all but two of its summer inhabitants were killed by a party of 100 to 150 Gros Ventre and Siksika. Gaddy, who was away from the post on 24 June 1794, and Van Driel, who hid in a cellar during the attack, arrived at Cumberland House two weeks later. The journalist there reported that the two had arrived "from the South Branch House with the disagreeable News of its being taken (burnt to the Ground) by the fall [Gros Ventre] Indians. they likewise killed three of Your Honors Servants (the Names of which are Mag^s Annel. Will^m Fea. & Hugh Borough) which they cut up in the cruelest manner Immaginable. & after doing all the mischief they could they went to the Canadian House to serve it in the same manner but they being prepared & with the Assistance of several Southward [Cree]

²⁰⁴ Buckingham House post journal, 24 May 1794, B.24/a/2, reel 1M18, and, Governor and Committee to Colen, London, 30 May 1793, p. 200, London Correspondence Book Outwards - General Series, A.5/3, reel 27, HBCA. Van Driel had served as a clerk with the North West Company from at least 1788. For a brief biographical sketch, see Harry W. Duckworth, ed., *The English River Book: A North West Company Journal and Account Book of 1786* (Montreal, 1990), 171-2.

²⁰⁵ Buckingham House post journal, 24 May 1794, B.24/a/2, reel 1M18, HBCA. At the time, Magnus Annel was a steersman, earning £20 per annum, while Van Driel was listed as a trader, at £50 per annum. Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, 75n.

Indians gave them a brave repulse after killing & desperately Wounding a great many of them & the rest made the best of their escape.”²⁰⁶ In detailed accounts of the attack later written by Van Driel, he confirmed the presence of at least some Siksika with the Gros Ventre. He also reported that the attackers killed one woman and two children after the fall of the post, and then took another woman and three children prisoner. He attributed the successful North West Company defence of its post to more preparation, a larger complement of men and to a much better fortified establishment.²⁰⁷ After they repulsed the attack, Louis Chastelain, who had charge of the North West Company post for the summer, and his men abandoned their post and headed off downriver.

The people at South Branch House were casualties in what Virginia Cole Trenholm referred to as the Gros Ventre “war of survival in the Saskatchewan area.”²⁰⁸ They were being forcibly evicted from their home territory by well-armed and

²⁰⁶ Cumberland House post journal, 9 July 1794, B.49/a/26, reel 1M39, HBCA.

²⁰⁷ Van Driel’s accounts of the attack are in the following two pieces in the HBCA: fos. 163-6d., London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, 1787-1797, A.11/117, reel 189, and, Van Driel to John Fish, York Factory, 18 September 1794, fos. 195-5d., North West Company Correspondence, F.3/1, reel 5M1. Several other contemporary accounts also exist. See: “An Account of the Captures of Manchester and the South branch House by the Fall Indians, in the Fall of 1793 and Spring 1795,” unsigned report in Moose Factory post journal, fos. 57-8, B.135/a/82, reel 1M89, HBCA; Cumberland House post journal, Magnus Twatt to Malcolm Ross letter dated 5 September 1794, in 6 September 1794 journal entry, B.49/a/26, reel 1M39, HBCA; McGillivray, *The Journal*, 29 August 1794, pp. 13-7 and 12 March 1795, pp. 62-6; and, the least helpful of all, written more than 60 years after the event, John McDonald (of Garth), “Autobiographical Notes,” fo. 8d., MG19, A17, NAC. His “Autobiographical Notes” were published in Louis François Rodrigue Masson, ed., *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest; Récits de Voyages, Lettres, et Rapports Inédits Relatifs au Nord-Ouest Canadien*, vol. 2 (New York, 1960 [1890]), 1-59. McDonald was a North West Company clerk on the Saskatchewan at this time, but his memoirs are unreliable; he himself admitted that his memory of the described events had faded badly. See Carol M. Livermore and Norman Anick, “John McDonald,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IX, 1861 to 1879* (Toronto, 1976), 481-3.

²⁰⁸ Virginia Cole Trenholm, *The Arapahoes, Our People* (Norman, 1970), 27.

numerically superior Cree and Assiniboiné. Of course, the Gros Ventre did not see the Euroamerican traders as neutral third parties. At the same time that they were arming their enemies, these traders were devaluing the principal trade article of the Gros Ventre. It is important to note, at both Manchester House in 1793 and South Branch House in 1794, that when the Gros Ventre and their Siksika companions sacked the posts they destroyed the alcohol, apparently without drinking a drop.²⁰⁹ Not only the Euroamerican traders but their First Nations customers seemed to be well aware of the destruction caused by the distribution of alcohol.

The lone Niitsitapi winter count covering this period may also offer insight into these events. The Bull Plume Winter Count, a North Piikani winter count, has already been discussed above. The published version of the count offers nothing with respect to these matters. The three manuscript versions just might. In the published version, the year 1791 is denoted by “When log houses were first built.” The next year is described as “When there were many wolves.” The year 1784 had been designated as “When whitemen with short hair first came.”²¹⁰ One must remember that precision dating is not a hallmark of winter counts. It is not unusual for events confirmed in other sources to be off by one to three years in winter counts. This being said, there are more significant problems with the Bull Plume Winter Count. In all three of the manuscript versions, the year of many wolves preceded the year of the construction of the fur trade post.²¹¹ In one

²⁰⁹ South Branch House post journal, Tomison to Bird letter dated 25 October 1793 at Buckingham House, fo. 31, B.205/a/8, reel 1M144, and, Moose Factory post journal, “An Account of the Captures of Manchester and the South branch House by the Fall Indians, in the Fall of 1793 and Spring 1794,” fo. 57, B.135/a/82, reel 1M89, HBCA.

²¹⁰ Raczka, *Winter Count*, 27 and 29.

²¹¹ These three versions of the Bull Plume Winter Count are all held by the Glenbow Archives, in the Arthur Family Fonds: the first in M8188; the second in M156; and, the third in M4376.

version, “the First Bull Plume Count,” there is an interpretation of the pictographic symbol that differs entirely from that in the other versions. In the first count, the year is denoted as “When the wooden house was taken.” While interpreting such images falls far outside my area of expertise, this particular image appears to be a tree next to a ball of fire. If so, that would tend to support its interpretation as one of destruction, not construction. I do not know what steps were taken, or by whom exactly, to determine the final interpretation of this winter count. But one could legitimately speculate that there might indeed be a connection between the year when there many wolves and the year when a fur trade post was destroyed. Perhaps the Gros Ventre were distressed about what they received in trade for an abundance of wolf pelts and this in some way contributed to their attacking first Manchester House and then South Branch House. This is purely speculation, but it seems reasonable.

Tomison apparently accepted no responsibility for the destruction and deaths at South Branch House. He considered it a result of the company’s manpower shortage, certainly not his last-minute decision to retain the post for the summer, despite the universally perceived threat. The Hudson’s Bay Company’s losses in both the pillaging of Manchester House and the complete destruction of South Branch House were estimated at over 10,000 Made Beaver.²¹² The immediate results were many. Greater care was spent in substantially fortifying Saskatchewan posts, and those not so fortified

²¹² York Factory correspondence book, Colen to Stayner, York Factory, 15 September 1794, fo. 48d., B.239/b/55, reel 1M256, HBCA. The report contained in the Moose Factory post journal (fos. 57 and 57d., B.135/a/82, reel 1M89, HBCA) placed the losses at Manchester House at 3,000 Made Beaver, and at South Branch House at 4,000 Made Beaver. Duncan McGillivray estimated Hudson’s Bay Company losses at South Branch House on 24 June 1794 to be about 60-70 pieces, with total losses both there and at Manchester House being about 100 pieces. McGillivray, *The Journal*, 29 August 1794, pp. 15-6.

were left unoccupied in the summer.²¹³ The unfortunate Mr. Van Driel, perhaps understandably, soon became, according to one colleague, a “Hypochondriac,” and was sent back to England.²¹⁴ The Governor and Committee in London, though regretting the two incidents, brought the central concern of the company, trade and profit, to the fore. The Committee wrote to its officers in Rupert’s Land that the “circumstances at Manchester and South Branch Houses gave Us much pain tho’ We are happy that no worse consequences ensued_ let no means be lost in trying to Reconcile those Natives with our Servants.”²¹⁵

The Gros Ventre seem to have received all the blame for these two major incidents, despite the active participation on both occasions of at least some Siksika, and the other recent threatening actions taken by both Kainai and Siksika. After a two-and-a-half year absence the Gros Ventre returned to the Saskatchewan to trade, at Fort Augustus and Edmonton House. There the officers in charge, Angus Shaw, the Canadian, and George Sutherland, the Englishman, together impressed upon the leaders of the 400 Gros Ventre at the posts the companies’ extreme displeasure at the events of 1793 and 1794, and not only their ability now to thwart any such future attempts, but even to mete out retribution. However, they emphasized their desire to reestablish peaceful trading relations. Apparently the penitent Gros Ventre admitted that, according to

²¹³ Carlton House post journal, George Sutherland to James Bird letter dated 16 November 1795 at Cumberland House, fos. 20d.-1, and, Sutherland to Bird letter dated 9 February 1796 at Cumberland House, fo. 26, B.27/a/1, reel 1M18, HBCA.

²¹⁴ York Factory correspondence book, Thomas Stayner to George Sutherland, Churchill, 13 August 1795, fos. 26-7, B.239/b/56, reel 1M256, HBCA. Van Driel spent his last season in company service at Churchill, before returning to England. Duckworth, *The English River Book*, 172.

²¹⁵ London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, Governor and Committee to Colen and York Factory Council, London, 30 May 1795, fo. 172, item 12, A.11/117, reel 189, HBCA.

Sutherland, "they have been lately like wolves but promise to conduct themselves with propriety in future."²¹⁶ They traded 1,000 wolf pelts at Edmonton House and 500 at Fort Augustus. John McDonald of Garth concluded, after such poor returns, considering the extended time away from any trading posts, that the Gros Ventre were the "most useless & least valuable band of Indians in this quarter."²¹⁷ They had more on their minds than supplying furs to Euroamericans. Their national survival was hanging in the balance. Resuming trade on the Saskatchewan was undoubtedly part of their survival strategy. Reestablishing peaceful trade relations at the Saskatchewan posts again allowed them access to firearms and ammunition, as well as other European articles. With the return of the Gros Ventre, normal relations were once again achieved. The rival Saskatchewan river posts competed in relatively peaceful conditions over the next few years for the trade of all five of the allied tribes.

Westward Expansion

As Duncan McGillivray has described, by the summer of 1795 the country around Fort George was "entirely ruined" for such a distance that his First Nations customers "lose much time in coming to the House." The North West Company, therefore, advanced

²¹⁶ Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, Edmonton House post journal, 14-16 December 1796 and 3 January 1797, pp. 75-6 and 80-1. Apparently, there was some dispute between the two companies over the proper balance between chastising the Gros Ventre and renewing the trade. See York Factory correspondence book, Angus Shaw to Colen, Fort Augustus, 10 May 1797, fos. 26-8, and, John McDonald [of Garth] to Colen, Fort George, 24 May 1797, fos. 28d.-30d., B.239/b/59, reel 1M256, HBCA. For biographies of Shaw and Sutherland, see: Jennifer S.H. Brown, "George Sutherland," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto, 1979), 726-7, and, Gratien Allaire, "Angus Shaw," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VI, 1821 to 1835* (Toronto, 1987), 704-5.

²¹⁷ York Factory correspondence book, McDonald to Colen, Fort George, 24 May 1797, B.239/b/59, reel 1M256, HBCA.

farther up the North Saskatchewan River to the mouth of the Sturgeon River, where it built Fort Augustus. Its three-fold plan was to expand beyond the abilities of smaller rival traders to follow, to stretch Hudson's Bay Company resources to the limit when it followed, and to separate the various First Nations peoples then visiting Fort George; the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani and Gros Ventre were expected to continue to trade there, while the Cree, Assiniboiné and Sarcee were to utilize the upriver post.²¹⁸ The Hudson's Bay Company did follow and built Edmonton House to challenge the new Canadian post.

After their founding in 1795, Fort Augustus and Edmonton House became the district headquarters for their respective companies. Fort Augustus administered the North West Company's *Fort des Prairies* Department; Edmonton House was the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company's equivalent, the Saskatchewan District. As one Hudson's Bay Company officer put it, "the limits of this District are formed by the extent to which the Indians who trade occasionally remove their Tents in search of food or Furs."²¹⁹ This vast district soon stretched from the junction of the North and South Saskatchewan rivers to the Rockies, and from the Athabasca River to the upper reaches of the Missouri River and its northern tributaries.²²⁰

²¹⁸ McGillivray, *The Journal*, 11 May 1795, pp. 77-8.

²¹⁹ Edmonton House district report, James Bird, fo. 1, 1815, B.60/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA. *Fort des Prairies* had been the name long-given to the uppermost Canadian posts on the Saskatchewan River, near the Plains. It was used as early as the mid-1770s. See Alexander Henry (the Elder), *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories, Between the Years 1760 and 1776* (New York, 1976 [1809]), 314.

²²⁰ Governor Robert Semple to James Bird, Red River Settlement, 30 November 1815, p. 18,586, Selkirk Papers, MG19, E1, NAC. In 1815 the district's eastern boundaries were briefly expanded to include Cumberland House, which had earlier been part of this district, until about 1806, and in 1826 its northern boundaries were permanently extended by its absorption of the Lesser Slave Lake District. See the following HBCA records: York Factory, Minutes of Northern Council, 1826, items 6 and 37-41, fos. 86-106, B.239/k/1, reel 1M814, and, York Factory account books, 1805-1806, fos. 20 and 70, B.239/d/131, reel 1M677.

Edmonton House was just one of four trading posts built at that site in 1795.²²¹ Both the Hudson's Bay and North West companies apparently shared the same plan for their posts. In late 1796, George Sutherland, in charge on the Saskatchewan in Tomison's absence, and Angus Shaw told Siksika in at their posts that the "Slave Indians" were to trade at the Buckingham House-Fort George site. They were told that trade goods had been left for them at the downriver post. However, the Siksika were wary of going there, then fearing an Assiniboine attack.²²² Despite company desires, although some "Slave Indians" did trade at the downriver site through to the posts' closure in 1799, the Edmonton House-Fort Augustus site quickly became the principal trading destination of the five allied tribes of the Blackfoot alliance. Besides the peaceful reintegration of the Gros Ventre into the Saskatchewan trade network in late 1796, the first few years at this new location were fairly uneventful.²²³ Perhaps the most significant development was the introduction in the Saskatchewan by the Hudson's Bay Company of York boats, first used there in 1799, and over the objections of Tomison. These larger, sturdier craft eventually replaced canoes on the major fur trade routes in the Northwest.²²⁴

²²¹ Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, xxxii.

²²² Buckingham House post journal, Sutherland to Fidler, 12 December 1796 letter dated at Edmonton House, in 18 December 1796 journal entry, B.24/a/4, reel 1M18, HBCA.

²²³ The daily journals have survived for Edmonton House, from its founding in 1795 to 1800; the Buckingham House journals survive through to its closure in 1799. The Buckingham House journals are B.24/a/3-6, 1795-1796 to 1798-1799, reel 1M18, HBCA. The journals for Edmonton House for the first five years of its existence are B.60/a/1-5, 1795-1796 to 1799-1800, reels 1M48-9, HBCA. These five journals have been published in their entirety in Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*. Also published in this volume were two Chesterfield House post journals, B.34/a/2-3, 1800-1801 and 1801-1802, reel 1M20, HBCA.

²²⁴ Richard Glover, "York Boats," *The Beaver Outfit* 279 (March 1949), 19-23; John A. Alwin, "The Uncelebrated Boats of the Albany," *The Beaver Outfit* 305, no. 4 (Spring

In 1799, the North West Company, followed by the Hudson's Bay Company, expanded to the limit of navigation on the North Saskatchewan River. The Canadians built Rocky Mountain House, near the mouth of the Clearwater River, while the English built Acton House close by.²²⁵ See Figure Four. This new site immediately became the preferred trade centre for the Piikani; it was the post closest to their home territory. However, that was not the intention of either company. They built at Rocky Mountain House in the hopes of drawing in the trade of the Kootenay (*Ktunaxa*), who then resided west of the first chain of the Rockies, or as the Niitsitapi called it, "the Backbone-of-the-World."²²⁶ Peter Fidler had first encountered the Kootenay while travelling with the Piikani in 1792-1793. Fidler was apparently the first Euroamerican whom the Kootenay had ever seen.²²⁷ The Kootenay, who had almost certainly earlier been driven west across

1975), 47-53; and, Brown, "George Sutherland," 727.

²²⁵ The Niitsitapi referred to trading posts as "many houses." They specifically called the "many houses" at Rocky Mountain House-Acton House *kitsapuyosis*, or "above house," to distinguish this site from that of Edmonton House-Fort Augustus. Rocky Mountain House was also known to the Niitsitapi as *enuk-omukoyis*, or "little big house," a diminutive of the name for Edmonton House. See: John C. Ewers, "The Influence of the Fur Trade Upon the Indians of the Northern Plains," in Melvina Bolus, ed., *People and Pelts: Selected Papers of the Second North American Fur Trade Conference* (Winnipeg, 1972), 6; Adolf and Beverly Hungry Wolf, *Indian Tribes of the Northern Rockies* (Skookumchuck, 1991), 26; Hugh A. Dempsey, *Indian Names for Alberta Communities, Occasional Paper No. 4* (Calgary, 1969), 16; and, Eric J. and Patricia M. Holmgren, *Over 2000 Place Names of Alberta* (Saskatoon, 1976), 237.

²²⁶ James Willard Schultz, *Blackfeet Tales of Glacier National Park* (Boston, 1916), 105, and, W.P. Clark, *The Indian Sign Language* (Philadelphia, 1885), 424.

²²⁷ Peter Fidler, "Journal of a Journey, 1792 & 3," 31 December 1792, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA.

Figure Four. Map Showing the Locations of the Principal Fur Trade Posts in the Saskatchewan District/Fort des Prairies Department, 1795 to 1821.

the mountains by these very Piikani, had since established limited trade with them.²²⁸ Just as the Cree had once, at least periodically, acted as middlemen for the Niitsitapi, the Piikani did likewise for the Kootenay. But the Piikani did not trade firearms to any transmountain peoples. This Euroamerican-Niitsitapi relationship apparently caused considerable antipathy among the more westerly peoples for the Euroamerican traders, at least among the Kootenay.²²⁹

Three years after this first encounter, Duncan McGillivray noted the repeated failures of the Kootenay to break through to the Saskatchewan posts; they had been prevented from doing so by the Blackfoot alliance, at times with loss of life. These five peoples enjoyed the benefits of their middlemen role, and they did not want the balance of power in the region altered by the spread of firearms west of the Rockies.²³⁰ In 1798, two Kootenay did finally reach Edmonton House, in the company of a large party of Kainai and Piikani.²³¹ Ongoing Niitsitapi opposition to a full-scale trade developing between

²²⁸ There is ample evidence that the Kootenay once lived east of the Rockies, but were driven across the mountains by the Niitsitapi, led by the Piikani. This forced removal from their lands and the ongoing domination of the Kootenay by the Niitsitapi peoples undoubtedly led to the coining of the Kootenay's name for the Niitsitapi; it is *SanLa*, which literally means "Bad people." See: Alexander F. Chamberlain, "Kutenai and Blackfeet," File 1937, Alexander F. Chamberlain Papers, SINAA; Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, pp. 508 and 522; and, J.C. Yerbury, "Nineteenth Century Kootenay Settlement Patterns," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 4, no. 4 (1975), 23-35.

²²⁹ Ross Cox, a one-time Astorian and then North West Company clerk, wrote, "Previous to our arrival among them [the Kootenay] they entertained the most deadly hatred against white men, to whom they attributed all their misfortunes, owing to the assistance which their enemies received in arms and ammunition from the North-West Company's people to the eastward of the mountains." Ross Cox, *The Columbia River*, eds., Edgar I. Stewart and Jane R. Stewart (Norman, 1957 [1831]), 263.

²³⁰ McGillivray, *The Journal*, 28 February 1795, p. 56.

²³¹ Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, Edmonton House journal, 12-15 March 1798, pp. 112-3.

Euroamericans and the Kootenay at Edmonton House-Fort Augustus necessitated the construction of posts higher up. The Hudson's Bay and North West companies expended a great deal of time, manpower and money in the vain hope of establishing a Kootenay trade at Rocky Mountain House. Not until 1807, when David Thompson succeeded in crossing the Rockies from Rocky Mountain House, via the Howse Pass, and building on the Columbia watershed, did both the Canadians and English finally relinquish realistic hopes of having a lucrative Kootenay trade on the Saskatchewan. The North West Company made extraordinary efforts to establish this trade, but time and space do not permit even a cursory glance at these endeavours, all of which were based at Rocky Mountain House.²³²

As already noted, the Euroamerican traders were not always satisfied with what they perceived as a lack of industriousness on the part of local First Nations peoples. In early 1799, James Bird at Setting River House, a Hudson's Bay Company post below Edmonton House, wrote "that we are utterly disappointed in our hopes that building here near the beaver-ground would occasion the Indians hunting Beaver; save the Bungees [Saulteaux], all without exception are tenting in the plains, killing Buffalo for themselves

²³² A small sampling of the published work on this subject area includes: Hugh A. Dempsey, *A History of Rocky Mountain House*. In *Canadian Historic Sites Occasional Papers in History and Archaeology*, no. 6 (Ottawa, 1973), 113; David Smyth, *The Fur Trade Posts at Rocky Mountain House, Manuscript Report Series*, no. 197 (Ottawa, 1976), 3-11; Claude E. Schaeffer, *Le Blanc and La Gasse: Predecessors of David Thompson in the Columbian Plateau, Studies in Plains Anthropology and History*, no. 3 (Browning, 1966); Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]); John Nicks, "David Thompson," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII, 1851 to 1860* (Toronto, 1985), 878-84; Eric J. Holmgren, "Jacques-Raphaël Finlay," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VI, 1821 to 1835* (Toronto, 1987), 253-4; and, David Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea (Montreal & Kingston, 1994).

to eat & catching a few wolves; they have not even hitherto made any dried Provisions.”²³³

The North West Company sought to compensate for this lack of proper industriousness on the part of the local First Nations peoples by the enlistment of Iroquois (*Haudenosaunee*) from the St. Lawrence River region. The company had brought these Iroquois trappers to the West in limited numbers at least as early as 1794, and in somewhat larger numbers from 1798, but planned to bring out a considerable complement in 1801.²³⁴ Not wishing to alienate the local First Nations peoples upon whom they relied, the Canadians asked permission of the Piikani before the planned large influx. In November 1800, David Thompson and Duncan McGillivray travelled from Rocky Mountain House and met with the principal Piikani chief near the Bow River.

Thompson recorded:

We then spoke to him about introducing a Number of Iroquois & Seauteaux into the Country about the Mountains. We informed them that their Country was so very poor as to be utterly incapable of maintaining them for which reason they had applied to us to bring them up to the Mountains, which request we had not complied with as we did not know how they would be pleased with it. We also added that those Indians would behave quietly, would reside in the Woody Hills at the foot of the Mountain & serve as a Barrier between them & their Enemies.

²³³ Setting River post journal, 8 January 1799, B.197/a/1, reel 1M131, HBCA.

²³⁴ The best works on the Iroquois in the Northwest are: Trudy Nicks, “The Iroquois and the Fur Trade in Western Canada,” in *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto, 1980), 85-101; Jack A. Frisch, “Some Ethnological and Ethnohistorical Notes on the Iroquois in Alberta,” *Man in the Northeast* no. 12 (Fall 1976), 51-64, and, “Iroquois in the West,” in *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger, 544-6. *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 15 (Washington, 1978); John C. Ewers, “Iroquois Indians in the Far West,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 13, no. 2 (April 1963), 2-10; and, Theodore J. Karamanski, “The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of the Far West,” *The Beaver Outfit* 312, no. 4 (Spring 1982), 4-13.

Upon these Terms they gave us Permission to bring them up as soon as we pleased.²³⁵

Needless to say Thompson and McGillivray did not tell the whole truth, that the Iroquois, and Saulteaux, were being sent at the North West Company's instigation, that they were to trap and hunt ruthlessly to the near exhaustion of the fur supply and that their arrival in the West was being arranged in Montreal, or already had been, as the Piikani were being consulted.

In the fall of 1801, 300 Iroquois, under three-year contracts to the North West Company, arrived to trap and hunt in the far West, most in the headwaters of the upper Saskatchewan and Athabasca rivers.²³⁶ The majority of those who stayed at the expiration of their contracts, and there were many who chose to do so, eventually drifted farther north into the area both east and west of the Rockies, between the Athabasca and Peace rivers. The Iroquois were viewed as unwelcomed intruders by virtually all the First Nations peoples of the West and on numerous occasions these First Nations newcomers met violent deaths at the hands of the longtime residents.²³⁷ In the late 1820s, one Hudson's Bay Company officer, after the killing of Tête Jaune, perhaps the most famous of the Iroquois immigrants, summed up the general situation. William Connolly remarked, "The natives throughout this District have for a long While past looked upon the Iroquois as Robbers and despoilers of their lands, And it is only in Consideration for

²³⁵ David Thompson, "Thompson's Journey to the Red Deer [Bow] River," ed. Hugh A. Dempsey, *Alberta Historical Review* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1965), 22 November 1800, p. 10.

²³⁶ York Factory correspondence book, Tomison to John Ballenden, Cumberland House, 6 June 1802, pp. 33-6, B.239/b/67, reel 1M257, HBCA.

²³⁷ See: Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 311-7; Daniel Williams Harmon, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon*, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Toronto, 1957 [1820]), 13 October 1818, p. 193; and, Edmonton House post journal, 5 May 1813, B.60/a/11, reel 1M49, HBCA.

us that they have not long before this taken the only means in their power to rid themselves of their depredators.”²³⁸

The Hudson’s Bay Company outfit for Acton House was taken up from Edmonton House in a York boat and a canoe, in September 1799. James Bird led an overland party to the site. Bird had joined the company in 1792 and had charge of Edmonton House in 1799. In 1803, he succeeded Tomison as head of the Saskatchewan District.²³⁹ Bird’s party was joined on the way to the site by Piikani, some of whom had been on their way to Edmonton House, but all of whom instead travelled with Bird. He arrived at the future site of Acton House on 24 September and returned to Edmonton House on 6 October 1799. The principal customers at the Rocky Mountain House-Acton House site were Piikani. This site was occupied on and off for the next 75 years, and remained the trading post in British territory most frequented throughout its existence, with two brief exceptions which will be discussed below, by the Piikani, as well as by the Kainai, Siksika and Gros Ventre.²⁴⁰ An apparently rather uneventful season was passed at Rocky Mountain House-Acton House. Only the North West Company and Hudson’s Bay Company ever operated posts there, whereas at the Edmonton House-Fort Augustus location two other Canadian concerns had posts that season.

Acton House and Rocky Mountain House were retained for the 1800-1801 season. Duncan McGillivray had charge of the Canadian post, while James Bird may have positioned himself there. McGillivray and David Thompson undertook their fruitless

²³⁸ Quoted in David Smyth, “Tête Jaune,” *Alberta History* 23, no. 1 (Winter 1984), 7.

²³⁹ John E. Foster, “James Bird,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII, 1851 to 1860* (Toronto, 1985), 90-1.

²⁴⁰ Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, Edmonton House journal, 11 September to 4 October 1799, pp. 209-14. For histories of Rocky Mountain House, see Dempsey, *A History of Rocky Mountain House*, and, Smyth, *The Fur Trade*. John McDonald of Garth had charge of Rocky Mountain House that season; Acton House’s head is unknown.

exploration for a pass through the Rockies to the Columbia. While these two posts did attract some trade from the Niitsitapi, the real trading centre for the members of the Blackfoot alliance that season was at neither the Rocky Mountain House nor Edmonton sites, but at the confluence of the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers, where three rival Chesterfield houses competed. The North West Company apparently initiated the plan to establish a post there, and it was quickly followed by the Hudson's Bay Company and the New North West or XY Company. This latter company had been established in 1798 by people left out of the most recent North West Company partnership agreement. Until the 1804 merger of these two Canadian concerns, the New Company, the name by which it was most widely known in the Saskatchewan, was the most serious rival of the old North West and Hudson's Bay companies.²⁴¹ William Tomison was that year based at Cumberland House and had been instructed to try to establish a Hudson's Bay Company presence in the Athabasca region, the greatest beaver producing area in the Northwest and then still the exclusive preserve of the Canadians. He tried to convince James Bird that this move to the upper South Saskatchewan River "was only a scheme to lead your attention and the new Companies from" entering the Athabasca region, by diverting resources to the South Saskatchewan.²⁴²

²⁴¹ For more information on the XY Company, see general works already noted on the North West Company, as well as Russell Anthony Pendergast, "The XY Company, 1798-1804" (Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, University of Ottawa, 1957). Sir Alexander Mackenzie was the most famous partner in this new company. In fact, it is sometimes referred to as Alexander Mackenzie and Company.

²⁴² Tomison to Bird letter, quoted in Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, lxxviii. Tomison was upset that Peter Fidler had been sent to the South Saskatchewan instead of to the Athabasca. Tomison's stance is in some ways ironic. When Tomison had returned from a year's leave in 1798, there was delight in some Canadian quarters because, in the words of Duncan McGillivray, "all the old mans attention will be towards his dear Fort des Prairies [the Saskatchewan District] and of course they will relax in their exertions to the Northward from the York factory." McGillivray to McTavish, Frobisher and Company, Mackinac, 4 June 1799, p. 51, vol. 1, North West Company Correspondence,

As Binnema has pointed out, this was an unprecedented move on the traders' parts. The three posts built at the junction of the South Saskatchewan and Red Deer rivers were the first ever constructed within Niitsitapi territory. All previous posts which the Niitsitapi had visited had been built on the northern fringes of their territory. The posts at Chesterfield House required relationships with and reliance on the members of the Blackfoot alliance that had never previously existed.²⁴³ The North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company built their posts within a single stockade. The XY Company erected a separate fortified post close by. As Peter Fidler wrote, the fortifications were necessary "to repel any attack that they might make on us, as we are now just in the centre of the Slaves Indian country."²⁴⁴ Cree, and to a lesser extent Assiniboine, had been the mainstays at the other Saskatchewan posts. They had been fort hunters and messengers between posts. At Chesterfield House, Siksika and Gros Ventre filled these roles.²⁴⁵ While the risks may have been greater and the expenses certainly were - Fidler had 18 men under him - the rewards at the new posts were great; the Hudson's Bay Company's Chesterfield House had more than twice the returns of the Acton House and Edmonton House operations combined. See Table One for returns of trade for the years between 1799 and 1807 when either or both Acton House and Chesterfield House were open; Edmonton House was maintained without break into the 1880s.

MG19, B1, NAC.

²⁴³ Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 299-300.

²⁴⁴ As noted above, two Chesterfield House post journals have been published. Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, Chesterfield House journal, 6 October 1800, p. 270. Fidler's opposition was John Wills at the XY Company post and Pierre Belleau of the North West Company.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 and 30 November, 2 and 16 December 1800, pp. 277-8 and 280.

Table One. Returns of Trade in Made Beaver at Acton House, Edmonton House and Chesterfield House, 1799-1802 and 1804-1807.²⁴⁶

Outfit	Acton House	Edmonton House	Chesterfield House
1799-1800	2,289 $\frac{1}{3}$ MB	4,822 MB	not open
1800-1801	3,550 $\frac{2}{3}$ MB	2,087 MB	12,000 MB
1801-1802	1,367 $\frac{1}{2}$ MB	1,756 MB	7,495 MB
1804-1805	not open	1,925 $\frac{5}{6}$ MB	4,388 $\frac{5}{6}$ MB
1805-1806	1,254 $\frac{5}{6}$ MB	3,570 $\frac{2}{3}$ MB	not open
1806-1807	1,787 $\frac{11}{30}$ MB	5,085 MB	not open

It was a highly successful and rather quiet season at Chesterfield House. The Euroamericans witnessed different groups of Siksika, Kainai and Piikani either start for or return from war with the Shoshone. Siksika also killed two Gros Ventre close to the post. This personal act had potentially much wider ramifications for both peoples, but the action was counteracted when *Ak ko makki* (known to Euroamericans as “Old Swan,” “the Feathers” and also “Painted Feather”), one of the two most prominent Siksika leaders of this period, paid for his son’s crime by giving two horses to the Gros Ventre.²⁴⁷ All three companies abandoned their posts for the summer of 1801, apparently as they had planned to do from the outset of the season.

²⁴⁶ Figures taken from the following York Factory account books in the HBCA: B.239/d/120, 1799-1800, fo. 42d., reel 1M676; B.239/d/123, 1800-1801, fo. 28d., reel 1M676; B.239/d/124, 1801-1802, fo. 23d., reel 1M677; B.239/d/129, 1804-1805, fo. 22, reel 1M677; B.239/d/131, 1805-1806, fo. 23, reel 1M677; and, B.239/d/133, 1806-1807, fo. 22, reel 1M677.

²⁴⁷ Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, Chesterfield House journal, 17 February 1801, pp. 286 and 299n. The Gros Ventre were killed in February, but the compensatory gift was not made until late October 1801. See Binnema pieces for details of The Feathers/Old Swan and the other dominant Siksika leader, *O mok a pee*, who was known as Big Man or Gros Blanc. See his “Conflict or Cooperation,” “Old Swan,” and “The Common and Contested Ground.”

Although it was expected to return, the North West Company did not. In the fall of 1801, only the XY Company and the Hudson's Bay Company reopened their Chesterfield House posts. Tomison must have thought that his suspicions were vindicated about the North West Company's original purpose in establishing a post there.²⁴⁸ Once again the posts relied on Siksika hunters and messengers, almost certainly members of Old Swan's band. No Gros Ventre were engaged during the 1801-1802 season. In fact, the Gros Ventre caused a great deal of trouble that season. Fidler listed a series of Gros Ventre setbacks, which included a localized smallpox epidemic which had killed 100 of their young people, the August 1801 killing by Cree and Assiniboine of about 75 of their men, women and children, and the loss of large numbers of their horses in 1801-1802 through both a severe winter and Assiniboine thievery.²⁴⁹ He failed to mention another potential cause of Gros Ventre unrest. Wolf pelts had been devalued once again by the Hudson's Bay Company. For the 1801-1802 season wolf pelts dropped from a one-to-one ratio with beaver, to only being worth one-half Made Beaver.²⁵⁰ Matters were made worse when Siksika killed four Arapaho (*Inuna-ina*). The Arapaho are close relatives of the Gros Ventre and some were then visiting the Saskatchewan from their homeland on the southern Plains. Apparently Fidler intervened and further violence

²⁴⁸ Besides the obvious, the acquisition of furs, the North West Company's purpose at Chesterfield House may also have been to establish a base for future exploration. For a examination of this subject, see Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 301-3.

²⁴⁹ Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, 8 March 1802, pp. 316 and 317n.

²⁵⁰ The cut took effect for the 1801-1802 season and lasted until the 1804-1805 outfit, when the price of wolves rose again to one Made Beaver. See the following York Factory account books in the HBCA: B.239/d/124, 1801-1802, fo. 24, and, B.239/d/129, 1804-1805, fos. 5 and 22, reel 1M677.

was avoided when the Siksika gave valuable presents to the Arapaho.²⁵¹ Once again the Gros Ventre were the posts' principal customers, Fidler estimating that in early November "nearly the whole nation was here at one time."²⁵² Arapaho also traded at the posts, the first and only time that Arapaho are known ever to have traded in the Saskatchewan.

Relations deteriorated rapidly on the South Saskatchewan. In late February 1802, a party of 14 Iroquois and two Canadians was approaching the posts. Gros Ventre killed two of the Iroquois and a few days later killed ten more Iroquois and the two Canadians. The XY Company contingent took shelter in the Hudson's Bay Company post. The Euroamerican traders burned the XY Company post, just as they had burned the North West Company post at the beginning of the season, to eliminate potential shelter for troublesome or attacking First Nations peoples. The combined force of 37 men did not have to endure a Gros Ventre attack, but one was certainly feared. Fidler sent word to the Siksika, Piikani and Kainai to ask for protection against the Gros Ventre; he specifically

²⁵¹ See this Chesterfield House journal in Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, pp. 293-321. A second version of this Fidler journal for the 1801-1802 season exists in the Fort Chipewyan post journal, 1801-1803, fos. 1d.-27d., B.39/a/2, reel 1M21, HBCA. In many ways this unpublished copy is more detailed than the published version. Together they provide an incredibly detailed description of events at the post and in the region. Throughout the journal, Fidler exclusively referred to the Arapaho as the "Tattooed Indians." He was using the Niitsitapi name for them. The Arapaho tattooed their chests. See "Arapaho" file, pp. 2-3, Box 1, H.L. Scott Papers, 2932, SINA.

²⁵² Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, Chesterfield House journal, 4 November 1801, p. 299. A year earlier, Fidler had noted that the entire Gros Ventre nation consisted of 180 tents. However, in September 1805, François-Antoine Larocque, a North West Company explorer, met the Gros Ventre on the Yellowstone River and stated that they numbered "275 or 300 Lodges." Ibid., 12 November, p. 275, and, "François-Antoine Larocque's 'Yellowstone Journal'," in Wood and Thiessen, eds., *Early Fur Trade*, 9-11 September 1805, p. 191. This tremendous difference in the tent count demonstrates the unreliability of early population estimates, often made by individuals not fully familiar with the peoples whom they were enumerating.

asked them to be there at embarkation time, a particularly vulnerable time for the traders.²⁵³ However, Siksika brought word in mid-April that the Gros Ventre had all left for the Missouri River. They also said that the Gros Ventre were trying to enlist the aid of the Crow (*Absaroke*) to return to the Saskatchewan with the Arapaho, first to destroy Chesterfield House and then to attack the Cree and Assiniboine.²⁵⁴ The XY Company and Hudson's Bay Company parties abandoned Chesterfield House and headed downriver at the same time. At the mouth of the South Saskatchewan River, Fidler awaited and then joined the brigade from the North Saskatchewan. He recorded that that river's trade returns were the lowest ever, and also that "Acton House is deserted by all the Sides."²⁵⁵ The trade at the three North Saskatchewan posts was under 4,000 Made Beaver; the trade at Chesterfield House was 7,000 Made Beaver. The highly volatile situation caused the abandonment of the Chesterfield House site. However, inexplicably, the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company both returned there for the 1804-1805 season.²⁵⁶ Gros Ventre again visited the posts, but apparently soon after many headed for

²⁵³ Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, Chesterfield House journal, 21 February to 12 March 1802, pp. 311-8.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 April 1802, p. 321.

²⁵⁵ Chesterfield House post journal, in Fort Chipewyan journal, 28 May 1802, fo. 27, B.39/a/2, reel 1M21, HBCA.

²⁵⁶ A great deal of speculation has arisen over the date of the reestablishment of Chesterfield House. In his "Autobiographical Notes," McDonald wrote that he and John Hughes were at the post for the 1805-1806 season. His memory had failed him. Binnema ("The Common and Contested Ground," 300n.) detailed the conflicting and inconclusive evidence, coming down on the side of 1804-1805. He was correct. Further to the evidence cited by Binnema, accounting records in the HBCA positively identify the 1804-1805 season as the return to Chesterfield House. See York Factory account book, 1804-1805, fos. 22 and 86, B.239/d/129, reel 1M677, HBCA. This account book confirms that Joseph Howse was in charge there for the Hudson's Bay Company, with 19 men, the largest contingent at any Saskatchewan District post that outfit. McDonald and Hughes apparently had 20-25 men with them. McDonald, "Autobiographical Notes," in

the Missouri and even farther, to Spanish settlements.²⁵⁷ Despite good returns, the posts were abandoned after this one season (see Table One). Euroamericans did not return again to that site until 1822. James Bird's July 1805 hopes had been realized, when the North West Company chose not reoccupy Chesterfield House.²⁵⁸ Although there is no evidence that the posts were attacked that season, it is clear that Hidatsa (*Hiraáca*) from the Missouri visited Chesterfield House during the winter of 1804-1805, apparently on a war excursion against the Niitsitapi. The Hidatsa did have a battle with the Siksika close to Chesterfield House. In the spring, the Hidatsa killed at least two Canadians on the lower South Saskatchewan River, who were descending with McDonald's North West

Masson, ed., *Les Bourgeois*, vol. 2, 29-30. See also David J. Fairfield, "Chesterfield House and the Bow River Expedition" (M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Alberta, 1970), 30-1.

²⁵⁷ In September 1805, there were Gros Ventre on the Yellowstone River, who told François-Antoine Larocque that they had traded with McDonald. See "François-Antoine Larocque's 'Yellowstone Journal'," 9-11 September 1805, p. 191. For some reason few records have survived in the HBCA for the period from 1802 to 1806 on the Saskatchewan. Although no mention is made of such activity by McDonald, perhaps the Gros Ventre had done something untoward at Chesterfield House before they left, because in 1807 James Bird wrote: "A Band of about sixty of Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians arrived with a few wolves: These have been this two years just in the Neighbourhood of some Spanish Settlements, which are supposed to be Inland from the most northerly part of California; they have brought very little & the reason of it they say is the small hopes they entertained of being permitted to see the House." Edmonton House post journal, 8 May 1807, B.60/a/6, reel 1M49, HBCA.

²⁵⁸ York Factory correspondence book, Bird to John McNab, Oxford House, 19 July 1805, fos. 22d.-5, B.239/b/71, reel 1M257, HBCA. Bird here stated that he would not have had the men to oppose the Canadians at both Chesterfield House and Acton House, if they chose to occupy both sites.

Company brigade.²⁵⁹ This act undoubtedly sounded the death-knell for the posts at Chesterfield House.

Apart from the desperate actions of the Gros Ventre and the several accompanying Siksika in 1793 and 1794, relations between the Euroamerican traders and the member peoples of the Blackfoot alliance were largely friendly. It was a symbiotic relationship. This is not to say that each tribe, or band, behaved uniformly. Obviously, this was not the case. Binnema, in three different pieces, has demonstrated differing strategies within two large regional bands of the Siksika, from the mid-1790s until after 1810. So large were the bands led by Big Man and Old Swan, that in 1809 Alexander Henry apparently considered them to be virtually separate tribes.²⁶⁰ Members of Big Man's band were involved in the major 1793-1794 events.²⁶¹ However, after 1794, while Big Man may have chosen a more confrontational posture than Old Swan in relations with the Euroamericans, violence was not part of the equation. In fact, as Binnema himself pointed out, Big Man adopted Duncan McGillivray as his brother in April 1795, less than a year after members of his band had helped destroy South Branch House and killed its inhabitants.²⁶²

Besides the active cooperation already described at Chesterfield House, there are other examples of extraordinary sharing and cooperation. While at Chesterfield House,

²⁵⁹ Binnema analysed all of the existing documentation in "The Common and Contested Ground," 341-3. The original documentation is contained in: McDonald, "Autobiographical Notes," in Masson, ed., *Les Bourgeois*, vol. 2, 29-34; "Charles McKenzie's Narratives," in Wood and Thiessen, eds., *Early Fur Trade*, 233; and, York Factory post journal, 29 June 1805, B.239/a/111, reel 1M162, HBCA.

²⁶⁰ Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 377. As described by Binnema, Old Swan's band was often referred to as the Painted Feather band, and Big Man's as the Cold band.

²⁶¹ Binnema, "Conflict or Cooperation," "Old Swan," and "The Common and Contested Ground."

²⁶² Binnema, "Old Swan," 17, and, McGillivray, *The Journal*, 15 April 1795, p. 73.

Peter Fidler, one of Canada's renowned cartographers, was given a great deal of information about regions far south of anything explored to that date by any British or Canadians. He was provided with four maps by Siksika people, and, almost certainly at this same time, a fifth map by an unnamed Gros Ventre. One of these maps in particular, the 1801 Ac ko mok ki map, has been written about extensively, and reproduced frequently.²⁶³ This map was drawn by Old Swan. He provided Fidler with another map in 1802, as did two other Siksika, *Ak ko wee ak* and *Ki oo cus*. The Gros Ventre map covers the most extensive area, and includes notations of a Spanish settlement in northern California and a European settlement far down the Missouri River.²⁶⁴ This and the 1801 Ac ko mok ki map, besides covering an enormous geographical area, also contain the names and estimated populations of dozens of First Nations peoples. Fidler sent some of these maps to London in 1802, where the company provided copies to the Arrowsmith firm. Much of the information was in the revised map of North America published by Arrowsmith that very year, the map soon after used by Lewis and Clark.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ D.W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map," *The Beaver* Outfit 307, no. 4 (Spring 1977), 4-15; Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," Appendix III, 418-22; and, Cole Harris, ed., *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume I, From the Beginning to 1800* (Toronto, 1987), plate 59.

²⁶⁴ Judith Hudson Beattie, "Indian Maps in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives: A Comparison of Five Area Maps Recorded by Peter Fidler, 1801-1802," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-86), 166-75. It is not surprising that the Gros Ventre map should encompass the greatest area, for they seemed to have ventured the farthest afield from their home territory, probably the result of their Arapaho connection. As noted just above, in 1807 a party returned to Edmonton House from a trip to "Spanish Settlements" in "California." For more on this fascinating subject, see Paul M. Raczka, "Traditions of Northern Plains Raiders in New Mexico," in *The Changing Ways of Southwestern Indians: A Historic Perspective*, ed. Albert M. Schroeder (Glorieta, 1973), 47-53, and, "Canadian Raiders in the Southwest," *Canada West: The Pioneer Years* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1980), 26-30.

²⁶⁵ Beattie, "Indian Maps," 174, and, Barbara Belyea, "Mapping the Marias: The Interface of Native and Scientific Cartographies," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17, no. 3/4

Relations on the North Saskatchewan

Upon the abandonment of the post at Chesterfield House, the North West Company reopened Rocky Mountain House and the Hudson's Bay Company followed suit with Acton House. Both posts were maintained year-round until the summer of 1807. Both companies were still hoping to draw in the Kootenay to these posts, but the North West Company also used its upriver outpost as a base for further exploration to find a route across the Rockies to the Columbia River.

The greatest change in the Saskatchewan District came in 1806, in the relations between the five member nations of the Blackfoot alliance with the Cree and Assiniboine. Milloy and Binnema have pointed to this as a radical realignment of existing 18th-century trade and military relationships.²⁶⁶ Doige, who, as already noted, accepted the existence of a Niitsitapi-Cree alliance throughout much of the 18th century, did not see the events of 1806 as a turning point; he saw the breakdown of this supposed alliance in the 1780s, with the establishing of direct Niitsitapi-Euroamerican trade on the Saskatchewan. In fact, he argued that, by the mid-1790s, war between the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree-Assiniboine had become the norm.²⁶⁷ Dismissing for the moment a discussion of the issue of whether such a Niitsitapi-Cree alliance had ever existed, the evidence certainly supports Doige's position that it did not by the mid-1790s. In August 1803, Daniel Williams Harmon, a clerk in the North West Company, wrote from his post on the upper Assiniboine River that some Cree and Assiniboine "crossed the River to go and make Peace with their Enemies, the Rapid [Gros Ventre/*Atsina*/*A'aninin* or Hidatsa?] & Black Feet [Siksika] Indians, for both parties begin to weary of such a bloody War as has for

(Summer/Fall 1997), 165-84.

²⁶⁶ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, and, Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground."

²⁶⁷ Doige, "Warfare Patterns," especially 143 and 162.

such a length of time been kept up between them, and are therefore much inclined to patch up a Peace on almost any terms whatever.”²⁶⁸

Three years later, in 1806, in a somewhat confusing passage which seems to indicate that Cree-Assiniboine squabbling instigated warfare between the Siksika and the Cree-Assiniboine alliance, Harmon recorded an account of a major battle between the Cree and Siksika. At South Branch House he wrote:

Six Assiniboins have arrived, and inform us, that about eighty tents of Crees and Assiniboins, with about as many of the Black feet Indians, were on their way to wage war with the Rapid [Gros Ventre/*Atsina/A'aninin*, or Hidatsa?] Indians, their common enemy. But the two former tribes quarrelled, in their march, respecting a horse, which they both claimed, and which neither would relinquish. This circumstance occasioned a battle between them, which lasted during a day, in which twenty five of the Black feet Indians, and three of the Assiniboins, were killed.²⁶⁹

Although it is possible, maybe even probable, that this combined force was bent on attacking the Gros Ventre (*Atsina/A'aninin*), it might also be that this was directed at the Hidatsa. Perhaps some unrecorded rift had developed between the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre that would have caused such an aberration in normal Niitsitapi-Gros Ventre relations. Perhaps the Gros Ventre had done something at Chesterfield House during the 1804-1805 season that the Niitsitapi perceived as threatening to their continued access to Euroamerican goods. But it is also possible that this Harmon reference to the “Rapid Indians” was actually to the Hidatsa. As noted earlier, much to the confusion of later

²⁶⁸ Daniel Williams Harmon, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816*, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Toronto, 1957 [1820]), 18 August 1803, p. 69. The manuscript version of this journal is held by the Special Collections Department of the University of Iowa Libraries, at Iowa City. A photocopy of the original is held at the NAC, MG19, A15 (R7774-0-0-E). See also George Woodcock, “Daniel Williams Harmon,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VII, 1836 to 1850* (Toronto, 1988), 385-6.

²⁶⁹ Harmon, *Sixteen Years*, 8 August 1806, p. 100. The published version exactly reproduces the manuscript version of this entry. See “The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816,” 8 August 1806, pp. 124-5, University of Iowa Libraries.

writers, the *Atsina/A'aninin* and the Hidatsa shared many of the same exonyms. Fur traders referred to these two totally unrelated peoples by a plethora of identical names, including, but not restricted to: Gros Ventre, Fall Indians, Rapid Indians, Willow Indians, Minatarees and Big Bellies.²⁷⁰ Rather than a planned attack on the Gros Ventre (*Atsina/A'aninin*), one of the principal subjects of this thesis, it may instead have been a joint military operation against the Hidatsa. As noted above, the Hidatsa had quite recently travelled far from their own country on the Missouri River to attack the Niitsitapi on the South Saskatchewan River. This may have been the Niitsitapi's turn to be the aggressors.

The battle between the Cree-Assiniboine and the Siksika (and the Kainai) occurred in July 1806. James Bird received the news on his trip inland from York Factory. He was told that 28 "Blackfeet" and three Cree had been killed. He also reported that the Cree were "flying in all Quarters to conceal themselves in the Woods, and that the Blackfeet threaten indiscriminate Vengeance."²⁷¹ In a later account, Bird wrote that about 400 Siksika and Kainai were involved in the battle, versus the same number of Cree and Assiniboine, "in which twenty eight of the former and three of the latter are said to have fallen. The Southw^d [Cree] Ind^s were ultimately forced to a precipitate retreat with the loss of part of their Horses & baggage and dispersing in all quarters to conceal themselves in the woods, leaving their Enemies masters of the plains from South Branch to Acton House."²⁷² The Niitsitapi did not have to wait long to wreak

²⁷⁰ A fine summary of this naming problem is contained in Appendix II of Binnema, "The Common and Contested Ground," 403-17, as well as in Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 200-12.

²⁷¹ Edmonton House post journal, 25 August 1806, B.60/a/6, reel 1M49, HBCA.

²⁷² Ibid., Bird to John McNab letter dated at Edmonton House on 23 December 1806, in 31 December 1806 journal entry.

their promised vengeance. Upon his arrival at Edmonton House, Bird was informed that “fresh massacres” had taken place and that an attack on Acton House had been threatened. He wrote, “Four Tents of South^d [Cree] Indians who were returning from the Muddy River [Piikani] Indian Country quite ignorant of the late quarrel were on a sudden attacked about 100 miles from this, by two or three hundred Blackfeet [Siksika], two men made their escape, but the rest, men, women & Children were either butchered or taken Slaves.”²⁷³ There is no doubt that the level of violence between the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree-Assiniboine alliance increased after the summer of 1806. The number of casualties certainly did rise in this intertribal violence. Extant records do not necessarily prove any increase in the frequency of this violence, however. What Milloy and Binnema took to be a final breakdown of an existing alliance relationship may perhaps more accurately be interpreted as a scaling up of the level of violence and casualties between two groups of peoples who were already more often than not active enemies. Despite brief periods of peace between the Niitsitapi and the Cree-Assiniboine into the 1870s, the well-documented norm was open hostility and violence.²⁷⁴

Two days after he had arrived at Edmonton House, Bird sent off the outfit for Acton House by boat and canoe, but also sent men overland to see if all was indeed well there. It was. In early October he received news from Acton House that “Twenty Blackfeet [Siksika] men all well armed, had been there agreeable to the Information I had received, and Traded Ammunition &tc but offered no manner of Violence, tho’ they behaved in a less friendly & submissive manner than usual & Mr Pruden was under the necessity of Trading articles from them of little Value and paying them better than he

²⁷³ Ibid., 22 September 1806.

²⁷⁴ For a detailed, but somewhat flawed, chronology of ongoing Cree-Niitsitapi relations in the 19th century, see Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 83-118.

would have done under other circumstances.”²⁷⁵ During the 1806-1807 season, John Peter Pruden carried on a limited trade at Acton House, while watching David Thompson make preparations to cross the Rockies to the Columbia. The recent hostilities still played heavily on the traders’ minds, but by January 1807, according to Bird, neither the North West Company nor the Hudson’s Bay Company had “much reason to apprehend any hostile behaviour” from the Niitsitapi.²⁷⁶ That same month, Thompson recorded that he sent a man “to the Peagans, Blood & Blackfeet Indians to smoke the Pipe of Peace & endeavour to prevail on the two latter Tribes to go & trade at Fort Augustus.”²⁷⁷ This is the first, but certainly not the last, reference to a company wanting to make Rocky Mountain House in effect into a “Peigan post,” a post for the Piikani. The Kainai and Siksika resided farther north and east than the Piikani, and the companies probably did not want the extra costs to transport goods to Rocky Mountain House wasted in trading with peoples they thought should trade at the Edmonton location. It is not known how successful Thompson’s efforts were at this time. Whatever fears the traders then had of Niitsitapi hostility towards them were at last put to rest when a principal Siksika leader, “Aman,” arrived at Edmonton House in early April professing his people’s desire for peace and stating, according to Bird, “that having been long accustomed to be supplied with Brandy Tobacco & these articles are become objects of primary necessity to them, & nothing but absolute Danger can prevent their coming to procure them as usual.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Edmonton House post journal, 3 October 1806, B.60/a/6, reel 1M49, HBCA. Bird was referring to John Peter Pruden, a longtime Saskatchewan servant and officer of the Hudson’s Bay Company. W.H. Brooks, “John Peter Pruden,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IX, 1861 to 1870* (Toronto, 1976), 648-9.

²⁷⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 26 January 1807, B.60/a/6, reel 1M49, HBCA.

²⁷⁷ David Thompson Journals, 14 January 1807, Book 18, vol. 8, Provincial Archives of Ontario.

²⁷⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 7 April 1807, B.60/a/6, reel 1M49, HBCA.

Bird soon after received word from Pruden at Acton House “that all the Muddy River [Piikani] Indians have been at his House but that they have made very poor Hunts as his whole Trade amounts to no more than 1700 MB.”²⁷⁹ One month later David Thompson left Rocky Mountain House and succeeded in reaching the Columbia watershed, via the Howse Pass. By the end of the summer of 1807, both posts at Rocky Mountain House had been closed.

The Columbia Enterprise

This is another aspect of this thesis that has already been the subject of numerous books and articles. Time and space necessitate its being given short shrift here. By the 1790s, the Euroamericans on the upper North Saskatchewan River were hoping to tap the resources west of the Rockies. At first they hoped to entice the First Nations peoples who lived there to travel to their posts. When that failed, they themselves travelled across the Rockies.

As noted earlier, it was the Kootenay of all of these transmountain peoples who first drew the attention of the Euroamerican traders. In October 1799, before Acton House had even been completed, James Bird had given presents there to a Piikani leader, promising him even greater rewards if he could bring the Kootenay in to trade.²⁸⁰ It was not in the interests of the Piikani, nor of any other members of the Blackfoot alliance, to do so. If direct trade were established, not only would the Piikani lose the benefits of the middleman role which they were then enjoying, but they would lose control of the items

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 15 April 1807.

²⁸⁰ Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals*, Edmonton House journal, 4 October 1799, p. 212. Bird was not overly optimistic, for less than a month later he wrote in the same journal that it was “not very probable” that any Kootenay would visit Acton House. See 2 November 1799 entry, p. 219.

traded. They did not want to see a shift in the balance of power, by the acquisition of firearms by their neighbours/sometime enemies west of the Rockies. In the fall of 1800, Thompson went to meet a party of Kootenay who were on their way to Rocky Mountain House. While he was escorting the 33 people to his post, they were harassed along the way by Piikani, who stole most of their horses. The trade returns from this visit were paltry, but Thompson did arrange for future cooperation with the Kootenay.²⁸¹ In the face of ongoing Piikani opposition the best laid plans did not pan out. A few handfuls of Kootenay reached Rocky Mountain House over the years, but no real Kootenay trade ever developed east of the Rockies.

The North West Company had been laying the groundwork for Thompson's successful crossing of the Rockies for years, using Rocky Mountain House as a base camp. It was not only the trade of the far western First Nations peoples that the Canadians wanted, but a route to the Pacific as well. They wanted to shorten their supply route with a depot on the West Coast, besides using that base for the lucrative China trade. The Hudson's Bay Company had a tremendous advantage in being able to supply its western posts from Hudson Bay. Canadian concerns had to carry their goods from Montreal. The North West Company actively sought a Hudson Bay route after 1804, but negotiations with the Hudson's Bay Company got nowhere.²⁸²

²⁸¹ David Thompson, "Thompson's Journey to the Red Deer River," ed. Hugh A. Dempsey, *Alberta Historical Review* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1965), 1-8. See also Claude E. Schaeffer, "Le Blanc and La Gasse: Predecessors of David Thompson in the Columbian Plateau," in *Studies in Plains Anthropology and History* no. 3 (Browning, 1966).

²⁸² London Inward Correspondence - General, Duncan McGillivray and Thomas Forsyth (acting for the North West Company) to Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, London, 1 February 1805, fos. 68-9, A.10/1, reel 55, HBCA.

The Piikani were well aware of the North West Company's intentions and tried to thwart them.²⁸³ However, Thompson succeeded in reaching the Columbia River in the summer of 1807. Thompson explored and established posts over the next three years. The returns of trade each spring went east through the Howse Pass and down the North Saskatchewan, with the outfit returning in the fall by the same route. Thompson's first post west of the Rockies was Kootenay House, on the Columbia River below Lake Windermere, which was soon followed by others.²⁸⁴ While Thompson was supervising the construction of Kootenay House, Piikani visited the site. He wrote, "I had expected them long ago, & it must be their Policy to be highly displeased with us for being there, as we thus render all these Indians independent of them over whom from time almost immemorial they have held in dependence or as enemies, & destroyed them. They have it in their Power to be very troublesome to us, & even to cut us off."²⁸⁵ The undermanned Hudson's Bay Company could not respond effectively to this Canadian undertaking.

²⁸³ Thompson, *Narrative* (1968 [1916]), 375.

²⁸⁴ Thompson, *Columbia Journals and Narrative*.

²⁸⁵ Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, 27 August 1807, p. 62. A month later (25 September 1807, pp. 69 and 228), Kootenay told Thompson that they had been told by a party of Siksika, Piikani and Kainai that, in Thompson's words, "the Blackfeet [Siksika] had plundered Fort Augustus to equip themselves more ably for War." No such plundering or attack took place at Fort Augustus-Edmonton House. When James Bird arrived there in late September, he reported that all was well. Edmonton House post journal, 30 September 1807, B.60/a/7, reel 1M49, HBCA. However, this false report of the sacking of Fort Augustus-Edmonton House in 1807 has been accepted as true. J.B. Tyrrell, the original editor of Thompson's *Narrative*, had read Thompson's journals, now held by the Provincial Archives of Ontario. He undoubtedly had seen the journal entry quoted above and believed this false Niitsitapi report. In his edition of the *Narrative* (1968 [1916], pp. xc and 380n., Tyrrell flatly stated that the Niitsitapi had destroyed Fort Augustus in 1807. This false Niitsitapi report, "substantiated" by Tyrrell, has been widely accepted and repeated by many. For example, see Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto, 1992), 198 and 475.

Unable to compete west of the mountains, in 1809 James Bird did at least manage to muster a reconnaissance expedition, led by Joseph Howse.²⁸⁶

The next year Howse led a full-scale trading expedition, consisting of 14 Euroamericans and four Cree guides. Howse had got the jump on the North West Company, a head-start that would prove critical.²⁸⁷ In late October Bird received news from Howse that during the summer a large party of Piikani had attacked a party of Flathead, who were accompanied by Finan McDonald of the North West Company. The European-armed Flathead repulsed the attack; apparently 14 Piikani were killed. That defeat denotes the year in a Piikani winter count.²⁸⁸ Howse had made it across the mountains; Thompson had not. Howse reported that the Piikani had vowed to stop the trade west of the Rockies. Bird learned from visiting Piikani that they had done just that. The Piikani had not only stopped the North West Company canoes near the abandoned Rocky Mountain House, but they had apparently sent a party across the Rockies to intercept any Euroamericans who had already slipped past them.²⁸⁹ The Piikani intended to put an end to this disastrous arms trade.

²⁸⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 22 November 1808, B.60/a/8, reel 1M49, HBCA, and, H. Christopher Wolfart, "Joseph Howse," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII, 1851 to 1860* (Toronto, 1985), 411-4. Because of the Hudson's Bay Company's close connections with the Arrowsmith firm, the pass was named for Howse, and not for the first Euramericans who had traversed it. See Coolie Verner, "The Arrowsmith Firm and the Cartography of Canada," *The Canadian Cartographer* 8, no. 1 (June 1971), 1-7.

²⁸⁷ Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 20 June and 8-9 September 1810, pp. 451 and 470.

²⁸⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 31 October 1810, B.60/a/9, reel 1M49, HBCA, and, Raczka, *Winter Count*, 37. The year is marked there as "When we were driven in battle." For a biographical sketch of Finan McDonald, see Wallace, ed., *Documents*, 463.

²⁸⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 31 October 1810, B.60/a/9, reel 1M49, HBCA.

Partially to protect and support their men west of the mountains both the North West and Hudson's Bay companies had already decided to reopen their posts at Rocky Mountain House before news of this calamity reached them. When Alexander Henry arrived at the North West Company post on 5 October, he was startled to find it occupied by Thompson's Columbia brigade, but minus Thompson, who had been travelling on horseback. The canoe brigade, stopped from proceeding upriver by the Piikani, had been waiting at Rocky Mountain House since 24 September. Henry assumed that Thompson must be upriver from Rocky Mountain House waiting for his canoes, but kept from communicating with them by the ever-present Piikani. Henry managed to sneak the Columbia canoes off past the watchful Piikani, only to learn the next day that Thompson was actually downriver from Rocky Mountain House. Thompson, a normally courageous man, had apparently briefly lost his nerve and was frozen into inaction. Henry managed to locate him. He then filled the leadership void and quickly reassembled Thompson's scattered brigade. Thompson finally left with his men overland by a more northerly route to avoid the Piikani blockade. He led the North West Company party to the Athabasca Pass, which had been used years earlier by freemen.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Henry's journal is virtually the only source of information on this episode at Rocky Mountain House. Thompson's journal for this time is missing. This missing journal has since been the cause of considerable speculation about Thompson's courage and actions. See: Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 5 October to 7 November 1810, pp. 480-94; Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, xxi; Barbara Belyea, "The 'Columbian Enterprise' and A.S. Morton: A Historical Exemplum," *BC Studies* no. 86 (Summer 1990), 3-27; Glover introduction in Thompson, *Narrative* (1962 [1916]); Hugh A. Dempsey, "David Thompson Under Scrutiny," *Alberta Historical Review* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1964), 22-8; and, H.D. Smiley, "The Dalliance of David Thompson," *The Beaver Outfit* 303 (Winter 1972), 40-7.

The Piikani blockade persisted, but both companies managed to keep in touch with their men west of the mountains.²⁹¹ Howse had built a post in present-day Montana. In order to offer support and some measure of protection, both companies retained their posts at Rocky Mountain House during the summer of 1811 and throughout the next winter season.²⁹² In the spring of 1811, Piikani leaders told Bird at Edmonton House that they would not “molest M^r Howse on his return from the flat head Country; but declared that, if they again meet with a white Man going to supply their Enemies, they would not only plunder & kill him, but that they would make dry Meat of his body.”²⁹³ Bird left word at Edmonton House upon his departure for York Factory that Howse could himself decide whether to continue in the Columbia. Howse returned safely to that post in mid-July. Bird later reported that “it is no small Mortification to learn that he has thought it too Dangerous, till safer Road, than that by which he went, is examined.”²⁹⁴ The Hudson’s Bay Company would not venture in strength west of the Rockies until after the 1821 merger.

After the difficulties which he had experienced in 1810, Thompson sent a proposal to the North West Company that the Columbia in future be supplied by the Beaver and Athabasca rivers, and then via the Athabasca Pass. The partners rejected the plan as too costly. Instead, in 1811 they sent a second wintering partner, John McDonald

²⁹¹ Wolfart, “Joseph Howse,” 413; Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 26 January 1811, p. 595; and, Edmonton House post journal, 17 February and 25 March 1811, B.60/a/9, reel 1M49, HBCA.

²⁹² Edmonton House post journal, 10 May 1811, B.60/a/9, reel 1M49, HBCA.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13 May 1811.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 May and 30 July 1811, and, Wolfart, “Joseph Howse,” 413. Bird reported that the 36 packs of furs obtained by Howse represented a clear profit of 75 percent. Wolfart stated that the company’s costs were £576, while the returns were worth £1,500.

of Garth, to the Columbia to work with Thompson.²⁹⁵ In the early fall of 1811 McDonald led the Columbia brigade back up past Rocky Mountain House, ignoring the safer, though less direct, route via the Athabasca Pass.²⁹⁶ This decision almost resulted in disaster, for the Piikani in particular were determined to stop the spread of firearms to their transmountain enemies. The Niitsitapi and their allies could ill afford to be completely surrounded by well-armed First Nations enemies. In early November Bird heard of the misfortunes of some of McDonald's men. Bird wrote:

Two young Indian Men arrived from Acton House: These lads inform me that a party of Six Canadians, whom M^r M^cDonald had sent before him, on Horseback to make Canoes at the west side of the Portage in the Rocky Mountain, were there surprised by a Band of Muddy River [Piikani] Indians consisting of twenty four Men who stripped and plundered them of every Thing they had, and beat them severely with their Bows, but spared their Lives. M^r M^cDonald fortunately soon after met these Men, and saved them from the Miseries which their naked situation exposed them to. _ M^r M^cDonald and his party it appears, found, owing perhaps to their Numbers, no Enemy to interrupt them, and when the above lads left them, were ready to embark on the Cootahna [Kootenay] River, though, in all probability, the weather will have prevented his proceeding far by Water.²⁹⁷

The lesson twice learned, neither the North West Company nor the Hudson's Bay Company ever again used the Howse Pass as a transportation route. From 1812 the Athabasca Pass, out of reach of the Piikani, was the fur traders' gateway to and from the Columbia.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Wallace, ed., *Documents*, Minutes of July 1811 North West Company Council, Fort William, 265-6. Thompson had become a partner in the company in 1804.

²⁹⁶ McDonald told Bird in mid-August, near Cumberland House, of his intentions to take the Howse Pass route, "whatever may be the Consequence." Edmonton House post journal, 14 August 1811, B.60/a/10, reel 1M49, HBCA.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 November 1811.

²⁹⁸ David Smyth, "The Yellowhead Pass and the Fur Trade," *BC Studies* no. 64 (Winter 1984-85), 48-73.

Trade Continues on the North Saskatchewan

Despite their efforts to stop the trade west of the Rockies, a trade that had been based at Rocky Mountain House, the Piikani did not want to see that post closed once it and Acton House had reopened in 1810. The convenience and safety of the Rocky Mountain House site exceeded that of any other option then offered to the Piikani. Besides, if these posts were opened, the Piikani could combine trading at these posts with the patrolling of their northwestern frontier. Throughout much of the 1810-1811 season, Alexander Henry feared and prepared for a rumoured Gros Ventre attack at Rocky Mountain House. Such rumours were not infrequent. However, there may have been some substance to this one. Henry reported that the plan was known to the Piikani who intervened. The Piikani apparently told the Gros Ventre that if they attacked the posts at Rocky Mountain House they would in turn have to fight the Piikani. The Gros Ventre were primarily upset with the Euroamericans because in their perception they had recently been receiving ill-treatment at Fort Augustus and Edmonton House, where they were unable to obtain guns.²⁹⁹ The Piikani had missed the posts at Rocky Mountain House during their three-year abandonment. When Henry threatened to close Rocky Mountain House the Piikani promised to hunt beaver diligently. He reported that the Piikani "do not like the idea of going to any other Establishment below for their necessaries: the distance is too great for them, and they are always in dread of the treacherous behaviour of the Crees towards them."³⁰⁰ In the spring of 1812, Bird sent a servant, James Whiteway, to live with the

²⁹⁹ Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 532-5. In November 1811, when rumour of yet another attack on the posts at Rocky Mountain House reached Bird, this time a Piikani report of an imminent Kainai attack, he wrote that "indeed we of late been so pestered with these Threatenings of savage Vengeance that it is become impossible to attach much Belief to them." Edmonton House post journal, 15 November 1811, B.60/a/10, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³⁰⁰ Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 555.

Piikani, primarily to learn their language, but also to learn what he could of American activities.³⁰¹ However, in spite of Piikani desires and promises, both Rocky Mountain House and Acton House were closed in 1812. They were simply too expensive and, according to the companies, unnecessary. All of the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance were then expected to trade at Fort Augustus-Edmonton House.

In early 1811 the Gros Ventre complained to the Piikani that, in Henry's words, when they took wolf pelts to the Saskatchewan posts "they could get nothing for all their trouble in having killed them."³⁰² The Gros Ventre were reacting to yet another devaluation of their principal trade article. As noted earlier, until the late 1780s a wolf pelt had generally been valued at two Made Beaver. The Hudson's Bay Company furthered devalued wolf pelts to only one-half Made Beaver in 1801, but by the 1804-1805 outfit it was again one-to-one with beaver. In 1809, Alexander Henry had learned at the annual council of the North West Company at Fort William that there was no longer a market for wolves. He noted that in recent years the North West Company had traded few wolves, while the Hudson's Bay Company paid well for them. He attributed the closer Niitsitapi attachment to the English company to this difference in trading practices.³⁰³ However, that year Hudson's Bay Company officers were told not to trade wolves, and as few "small Furs as possible," because there was only demand in England for beaver and muskrat.³⁰⁴ Apparently when Bird implemented the new arrangement at Edmonton House, there was considerable unrest among the Niitsitapi. Henry wrote, "All this proceeds from the sudden change the HBC^o have made in their trade in this River,

³⁰¹ Edmonton House post journal, 19 May 1812, B.60/a/10, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³⁰² Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 532-3.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 14 September 1809, pp. 396-7.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 October 1809, p. 410.

and not taking wolves as usual, which has exasperated those Savage brutes to the last degree.”³⁰⁵

The Comparative of Furs was apparently not then changed. The Hudson’s Bay Company simply limited its trading of wolf pelts during the 1809-1810 season. The previous outfit in the Saskatchewan District the company had traded 8,018 wolf pelts; the next season they only took 4,794.³⁰⁶ In 1810, the company officially devalued wolves, cutting their price to about one-half Made Beaver. Only 2,083 wolf pelts were traded by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1810-1811 in the Saskatchewan.³⁰⁷ Matters continued to get worse for the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. In 1811-1812, wolves were valued at less than a quarter of a beaver pelt, but the Hudson’s Bay Company traded 3,786 that season in the Saskatchewan District. The next outfit, the value plummeted to about one-tenth that of beaver, and apparently only 385 wolf pelts were traded there.³⁰⁸ Perhaps the Gros Ventre and Niitsitapi did not even bother hunting them. In the 1813-1814 outfit, a wolf pelt was worth exactly one-eleventh of a beaver pelt. Only 402 were traded that

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 31 December 1809, p. 424. Unfortunately, the Edmonton House journal has not survived for the 1809-1810 season.

³⁰⁶ York Factory account books, 1808-1809, fo. 23, B.239/d/141, and, 1809-1810, fo. 23, B.239/d/144b, reel 1M678, HBCA.

³⁰⁷ For some reason, from 1810 in the account books of both York Factory and Edmonton House, the Comparative of Furs was not used. Instead, the value was given in shillings and pence. For the 1810-1811 outfit, beaver was listed at 20/6, while wolves were listed at 12/_. See Edmonton House account book, 1810-1811, fos. 10d.-11, B.60/d/2a, reel 1M467, and, York Factory account book, 1810-1811, fos. 32d.-4d., reel 1M679, HBCA.

³⁰⁸ Edmonton House account books, 1811-1812, fo. 14, B.60/d/3, and, 1812-1813, fo. 15d., B.60/d/4, reel 1M467; and, York Factory account books, 1811-1812, fo. 26d., B.239/d/156, and 1812-1813, fos. 30d. and 33d., B.239/d/159, reel 1M680, HBCA.

season in the Saskatchewan District by the Hudson's Bay Company.³⁰⁹ Two years later the price had risen somewhat, to about one-sixth the value of beaver, and 1,671 wolf pelts were traded by the company in the Saskatchewan.³¹⁰ In the fall of 1812, James Bird presented his analysis of, and fears about, the drastically altered situation in his district:

Wolves can not of course be, now, considered an Article of Trade, & this Circumstance will unavoidably create no trifling Discontent among the Indians of the plains (or, as they are generally called here, the Slave Tribes) who have been accustomed to supplies from us, whose Country affords nothing of value that they can bring as a substitute for Wolves, & who will regard us as Friends no longer than we are useful to them: Nor is this all, for if no profit can be made on Wolves, this River cannot afford so large an Establishment as it has at present and it has always been thought that Settlements in this River require Men sufficient to defend them, or that, otherwise, they would not remain long unplundered.³¹¹

Surprisingly, apart from the Henry references noted above, surviving records make no mention of any disturbances or visible signs of discontent attributable to the sudden decline in the value then assigned by the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company to this, the principal trade item of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and the Gros Ventre.

One year later when the Hudson's Bay Company's valuation for wolf pelts had slipped even lower, Bird wrote the following: "The NWC^o traders have desired the Indians to kill good Wolves, and I have in consequence told them that we will take a few also as I conclude that if Wolves are worth their taking they must also be of some little value to the Honorable Company."³¹² Bird probably had concluded incorrectly. Perhaps

³⁰⁹ Edmonton House account book, 1813-1814, fo. 19, B.60/d/5, reel 1M467, and, York Factory account book, 1813-1814, fos. 50d. and 53d., B.239/d/162, reel 1M680, HBCA.

³¹⁰ Edmonton House account book, 1815-1816, fo. 27, B.60/d/8, reel 1M467, and, York Factory account book, 1815-1816, fo. 21d., B.239/d/184, reel 1M682, HBCA.

³¹¹ Edmonton House post journal, 22 November 1812, B.60/a/11, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³¹² Edmonton House post journal, 8 October 1813, B.60/a/12, reel 1M49, HBCA.

the market for wolves in eastern North America, to which the North West Company's transportation route gave direct access, had improved. There is no indication that the English and European demand for wolves had increased. Despite Bird's declared intention, his wolf returns in the Saskatchewan District, as noted above, only rose to a meagre 402 in 1813-1814.

As will be discussed at some length in Chapter Six, the Hudson's Bay Company transportation route via Hudson Bay virtually precluded it from the market in eastern North America. To reach that market, furs would have to be shipped from Hudson Bay to England, and then transshipped either to New York or Montreal. Costs would be prohibitive. This applied doubly to buffalo robes, which took up comparatively enormous space in inland canoes and boats. Before the 1830s, the robe trade had really not developed to any extent, although its beginnings were evident. In the Saskatchewan, to maintain goodwill and something of a competitive position, Bird was under the necessity of trading at least some buffalo robes, but they were far from being highly prized. In reporting the trading of 160 robes from visiting Sarcee at Edmonton House in 1808, he offered this justification:

Perhaps it may not be improper to remark that we give nothing for Buffalo Hides but, Brandy, Tobacco & a little Ammunition, as we conceive them to be of too little value to pay for more expensive articles; and we are apprehensive, that without some such distinction they might in some measure prevent the killing of more valuable Skins; it must however be understood that we take no Hides from the Crees_ the only Indians of real Value.³¹³

On more than one occasion after 1810 Bird commented on the North West Company demand for buffalo robes, and dressed moose skins as well, and on its ready market for them.³¹⁴ The Canadians' willingness, even eagerness, to purchase buffalo robes gave it a

³¹³ Edmonton House post journal, 26 April 1808, B.60/a/7, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³¹⁴ Edmonton House post journals, 8 October 1811, B.60/a/10, and, 6 March 1816, B.60/a/15, reel 1M49, HBCA.

distinct advantage on the Saskatchewan. In 1815 Bird reported that on one visit nine Gros Ventre leaders arrived at Edmonton House, while twice that number went to his rival at Fort Augustus, “loaded principally with Buffalo Robes which are to him an advantageous article of Trade.”³¹⁵ A month later Bird was sending Gros Ventre to Fort Augustus. He wrote, “We are obliged to allow and even to persuade the Indians to take many Buffalo Robes to the NWC^{oys} House because our Stock of Tobacco is but small and because I know of no way in which they can be disposed of had I purchased them.”³¹⁶ As will be discussed in Chapter Six, there simply was no market for buffalo robes in Europe; indigenous sheepskins filled the same role at considerably less expense.

After Rocky Mountain House and Acton House were closed in 1812, the Niitsitapi traded for one season at competing posts above Edmonton House called Little White Earth House. However, as Bird noted, they were “unsurrounded with Stockades and of course quite unfit for Defence.”³¹⁷ Those posts were closed in the spring of 1813, and a new Fort Augustus and a new Edmonton House were then occupied, within the limits of the present-day City of Edmonton.³¹⁸ Again, the Niitsitapi were expected to trade at Edmonton House. Francis Heron, the Hudson’s Bay Company officer in charge

³¹⁵ Edmonton House post journal, 20 February 1815, B.60/a/13, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 21 March 1815. In 1820, 184 buffalo robes and 240 moose skins were shipped from York Factory destined to be transshipped to Quebec. York Factory account book, 1819-1820, fo. 123, B.239/d/211, reel 1M685, HBCA.

³¹⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 6 December 1812, B.60/a/11, reel 1M49, HBCA. In fact, on 8 December Bird sent word to the upriver outpost that if a large party of Gros Ventre approached, the Hudson’s Bay Company men should take refuge for mutual defence in the North West Company’s post.

³¹⁸ It was not unusual for posts to be moved, but to retain the same names. The posts built during the winter of 1812-1813 were actually the fourth Edmonton House and Fort Augustus posts which had been built since their founding in 1795. For more on the construction, location and occupation dates of these two posts, see: Smythe, “Thematic Study,” 212-5, and, Edmonton House post history search file, HBCA.

of the Saskatchewan District in 1818-1819, pointed out the poor economics of maintaining a separate post for the Niitsitapi. He said that Acton House had been abandoned "on Account of it being found that the Muddy River [Piikani] Indian trade could be much cheaper procured at this place/so long as the Muddies could be induced to come here than at that place, consequently it was a loosing post."³¹⁹ While Acton House and Rocky Mountain House were closed, the Piikani annually brought about 800 beaver skins to Edmonton House and Fort Augustus, split reasonably evenly between the two companies.³²⁰

Seeking ways to augment their returns and profits, the companies proposed various plans. During the 1813-1814 season the North West Company was talking of building a post two years later directly in Piikani territory, which was to be supplied from the Columbia. A post on the upper South Saskatchewan River was the planned Hudson's Bay Company response.³²¹ Neither post was actually built. In 1815, James Bird suggested an "Expidition" up the South Saskatchewan to build posts on its upper reaches and in the Rockies.³²² The Piikani were anxious to see such a plan realized. Bird reported: "They have long desired to have a Settlement made for them to trade at, in the upper part of the Bad [South Saskatchewan] River and they have promised that, if their wishes were complied with, they would exert themselves more in procuring Beaver than they have hitherto done and tent for this purpose on the most southern branch of the

³¹⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 9 October 1818, B.60/a/7, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³²⁰ Edmonton House district report, James Bird, 31 August 1815, fo. 4d., B.60/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA.

³²¹ Edmonton House post journal, 19 December 1813, B.60/a/12, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³²² Edmonton House district report, 31 August 1815, fo. 5d., B.60/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA.

Missouri.”³²³ Not the reestablishment of Rocky Mountain House, but the reestablishment of Chesterfield House or an even more southwesterly post was the preferred choice of the Piikani, and quite understandably so; a Bow or South Saskatchewan river post would be closer to, if not within, their home territory.

With no real clear purpose, Rocky Mountain House and Acton House may have been closed as part of a forced program of economic retrenchment. Certainly by 1812 both companies were shying away from their earlier proliferation of small outposts along the North Saskatchewan. During the 1814-1815 season the companies each occupied only two posts on the upper Saskatchewan, those at Edmonton and downstream at Paint River, or Fort Vermilion.³²⁴ Matters were made worse for the Euroamerican traders on the North Saskatchewan by the depletion of the beaver supply in the district, caused by years of competitive overexploitation. Bird feared for the viability of the Saskatchewan District. He wrote in 1813, “As to Furs, Beaver have long been gradually diminishing & are now almost exterminated and unless Wolves become of a little Value I know not how the trade of this River can be supported.”³²⁵ The Canadians were a little better off, not only because they for a time could afford to sustain a loss in the Saskatchewan; they could maintain their Saskatchewan posts for the provisions of the northern Plains which they gathered to support their profits from the lucrative Athabasca. The North West Company also had an advantage because in a limited way it had begun a trade in the bulky items of buffalo robes and moose skins, long before the former became the dominant trade item of the northern Plains.³²⁶

³²³ Ibid., fo. 4d.

³²⁴ Ibid., fo. 3.

³²⁵ Edmonton House post journal, 25 September 1813, B.60/a/12, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³²⁶ Edmonton House post journals: 8 October 1811, B.60/a/10; 20 February 1815, B.60/a/13; 6 March and 1 April 1816, B.60/a/15; and, 14 February 1819, B.60/a/17, reel

The closing of their favourite posts, at Rocky Mountain House, necessitating their travelling to the more distant and dangerous Edmonton site, the loss of their purchasing power, their continuing conflicts on their western flank with the now well-armed Flathead, on their southern boundary with the Crow and on their eastern borders with the Cree and Assiniboine all combined to make the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre peoples less friendly and cooperative. Military losses against the Flathead continued, amounting to 50 Kainai and Siksika dead in 1812-1813 alone, prompting a presumed effort to steal all the horses of the Euroamericans in the Saskatchewan, perhaps as revenge for arming their enemies or as a measure to prevent the transmountain trade from proceeding.³²⁷ The Piikani that same season killed “a free Canadian and two Iroquois” near the Rockies and vowed, according to Bird, “to kill every white Man they may find, west of the Rocky Mountain, or on his way thither.”³²⁸ In 1815, the death of a Siksika at the hands of the Cree near Edmonton House made the fort hunters there too afraid of Siksika retaliation even to leave the post.³²⁹ Ongoing Blackfoot-Assiniboine hostility caused the 1818 abandonment by both companies of their Dog Rump Creek houses, downstream from Edmonton.³³⁰ Frustrated by their deteriorating position the Niitsitapi took stern measures in the winter of 1818-1819, both to reassert their authority and to better their economic situation. They forbade the Edmonton House-Fort Augustus hunters from plying their trade. The Niitsitapi intended to supply meat to the posts and to

1M49, HBCA.

³²⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 28 April 1813, B.60/a/11, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³²⁸ Ibid., 5 May 1813.

³²⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 28 October 1815, B.60/a/15, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³³⁰ Edmonton House post journal, 25 September 1818, B.60/a/17, reel 1M49, HBCA.

set "their own price."³³¹ There was little the traders could do in the face of such determination. There were also few options available to the member peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. Apart from the Piikani, in whose southern territory at the headwaters of the Missouri beaver abounded, the other four peoples were faced with having little in their home country which was then in demand by the Euroamericans.

In these years of difficult relations with their First Nations customers in the Saskatchewan, inter-company relations remained remarkably peaceful, considering what was transpiring elsewhere in the Northwest. Lord Selkirk's Red River Colony provoked violent reactions from the Métis and the North West Company. The Hudson's Bay Company-sponsored settlement was seen as a threat to a way of life, to food supplies for the Nor'westers and as a roadblock on the route from Lake Superior to the far West and North. The first disconcerting incident on the Saskatchewan in this newly aroused rivalry occurred in December 1814, when Canadians obstructed English on the way from Fort Vermilion to another post at Green Lake.³³² Two years later, when difficulties in the Saskatchewan amounted to little more than verbal exchanges over one company hiring deserters from the other, violence erupted throughout the West. Governor Robert Semple and 21 colonists were killed at Seven Oaks, while John Clarke lost 16 Hudson's Bay Company men through starvation in the Athabasca.³³³ Although violence on a much reduced scale persisted throughout the Northwest, as did arrests of company officers on both trumped up and real charges, the Saskatchewan District remained calm. The two companies there signed annual agreements not to tamper with each other's employees, not to send liquor out from the posts and in general not to interfere with the other's

³³¹ Ibid., 21 January, 10 and 12 February 1819.

³³² Edmonton House post journal, 31 December 1814, B.60/a/13, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³³³ Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company," 48, and, Edmonton House post journal, 4 February to 15 March 1816, B.60/a/15, reel 1M49, HBCA.

activities.³³⁴ Elsewhere the companies exchanged gunshots or captives; on the Saskatchewan they exchanged letters complaining about violations of the terms of the agreements.³³⁵ Though still bitter trade rivals, they may have thought it wiser or even necessary to maintain peaceful relations between themselves on the Saskatchewan, in the face of growing unrest among the First Nations peoples of the district. The perceived danger from the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre may have been the determining factor in keeping the rival traders in the Saskatchewan District from resorting to the violence that elsewhere in the Northwest almost typified Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company relations of this period.

Following the death of Governor Semple, James Bird was appointed acting governor of the Hudson's Bay Company's operations in the Northwest. He was replaced in the Saskatchewan District in 1816-1817 by Hugh Carswell, and then by Francis Heron, who had charge there from 1817 to 1821. When Heron arrived at Edmonton House in early October 1818 he found, much to his surprise and incomprehension, that James Hughes, his North West Company counterpart, was planning to reopen Rocky Mountain House. Heron was forced to take steps to reestablish Acton House. Heron wrote:

I am now obliged to establish it in consequence of the NWC^o so doing, but I am well convinced at the same time/ and particularly on the present occasion/ that it is bad policy in both parties, as the Muddy River [Piikani] Indians for whom it is principally established are expected here in a few days with their Beaver trade, after which their trade will not be worth looking after until next fall, and then they may perhaps be induced to come to this place with their trade. Consequently the establishing a post for them at present will occasion an unnecessary waste of property, but as I have already said I am obliged to establish it, in consequence of the NWC^o doing so, in Case the Muddy River Indians might alter their

³³⁴ Edmonton House post journals: 4 October 1818, B.60/a/17; 6 May 1820, B.60/a/18; and, 12 October 1820, B.60/a/19, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³³⁵ Edmonton House post journal, 3 December 1820 to 7 February 1821, B.60/a/19, reel 1M49, HBCA.

determination of coming to this place on hearing that Acton House/ their favourite post is reestablished.³³⁶

On 10 October two Canadian canoes and two English boats set off to reopen the outposts, abandoned since 1812. However, the very next day the Piikani arrived at the district headquarters to trade, as Heron had expected; both companies immediately recalled their men and the posts at Rocky Mountain House remained closed for yet one more year.³³⁷ The planned return by the North West Company to Rocky Mountain House in 1818 seems as incomprehensible today as it did to Heron at the time.

However, in 1819 circumstances had changed and it was Heron who decided to reopen Acton House. In his annual report for 1819-1820 he laid out his reasons for this about-face:

On my departure from Edmonton House for York Factory with the returns of this District (May 17th 1819) I left M^r William Flett in charge of Edmonton House and the Outpost at Summer Berry [Pembina] River for the Summer, with a necessary establishment of Officers and men for these two Posts, And I also left M^r John Park with one interpreter and three men, to proceed to Old Acton House about the month of July to reestablish that Post, which now becomes a necessary measure for the securing of the Valuable Beaver trade which is annually to be procured from the Muddy River [Piikani] Indians, and of which the North West Company have lately made an attempt to deprive us by forming an establishment beyond the Rocky Mountains from the Columbia, within a few days walk of the Muddy River Indian Country for that purpose- But the reestablishing of Acton House will defeat their designs, as that is the Post of all others, at which those Indians as well as the Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians have the strongest inclination to trade,- But this post although it may be the means of saving the Muddy River Indian trade, will Considerably increase our expences and perhaps add but little to the amount of our returns.³³⁸

³³⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 9 October 1818, B.60/a/17, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³³⁷ Ibid., 4-13 October 1818.

³³⁸ Edmonton House district report, Francis Heron, 1818-1820, fo. 6, B.60/e/3, reel 1M777, HBCA. This piece contains two annual reports written by Francis Heron. The 1818-1819 district report is contained on fos. 1-5d., while that of 1819-1820 is on fos. 6-8.

In early July 1819, both posts at Rocky Mountain House were reestablished, principally, in the words of Flett, "for the Muddy River [Piikani] Indians."³³⁹ Flett had charge of Acton House for the winter of 1819-1820; he was opposed at Rocky Mountain House by John Rowand. A rather uneventful season was spent at the Rocky Mountain House posts. The beaver trade at the posts was the highest that it have ever been.³⁴⁰ This likely signalled a major change among the Piikani, a change which will be addressed at length through the remaining chapters. The most important and terrible occurrence in the Saskatchewan during the season was the outbreak of a measles epidemic. This epidemic originated in major cities in the eastern United States, and entered the British Northwest via two separate routes: Brandon House on the northern Plains and Fort William on Lake Superior.³⁴¹ Estimates put the death-rate among the Piikani, Kainai and Gros Ventre at up to one third of the total population.³⁴² Considering the tragic toll, it is quite surprising that this epidemic is noted in only one of the two Niitsitapi winter counts that cover this period.³⁴³

³³⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 2 July 1819, B.60/a/18, 1M49, HBCA.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 15 March 1820.

³⁴¹ F.J. Paul Hackett, "The 1819-20 Measles Epidemic: Its Origins, Diffusion and Mortality Effects upon the Indians of the Petit Nord." M.A. thesis, Department of Geography, University of Manitoba, 1991.

³⁴² Edmonton House post journal, 15 March 1820, B.60/a/18, reel 1M49, HBCA. Word of the outbreak first reached Edmonton House on 23 October. The journal after that date is full of entries concerning the extent and effects of the disease. For whatever reason, Heron did not give estimates of the death-rate among the Siksika and Sarcee, but it is safe to assume that it would have been comparable to the other three peoples. See also Decker, "We Should Never," 89-126, and, Sundstrom, "Smallpox Used Them Up."

³⁴³ It is included in the Bad Head Winter Count (Kainai), but not in the Bull Plume Winter Count (Piikani). Dempsey, *A Blackfoot Winter Count*, 7, and Raczaka, *Winter Count*.

In March 1820, Heron visited Acton House and reported “that the Muddy River [Piikani] Indians would feel much disgusted if that place Should be abandoned and if even threatened to go across the Rocky Mountains to a NW Establishment with their Beaver should Acton House not be kept up but on the other hand they promised should we keep up that establishment that they would induce the Cutney [Kootenay] Indians to come there with their trade.”³⁴⁴ Heron, therefore, decided to keep the post open that summer.³⁴⁵

An apparently quiet summer season was spent on the Saskatchewan in 1820, the one exception being the never-explained killing of a freeman by the Siksika.³⁴⁶ When Heron and his new Canadian equivalent, John McBean, arrived at their district headquarters in the early fall, the two companies once again signed their trade practices agreement. This was somewhat surprising, considering that the previous agreement had been cancelled in early May 1820 when Heron and Hughes had almost fought a duel and a full-scale battle had narrowly been avoided between the men at Fort Augustus and Edmonton House.³⁴⁷ The outfits were sent upriver in canoes for Rocky Mountain House and in boats for Acton House. Once again John Rowand was in charge there for the Canadians and William Flett for the English. Rowand was now a partner in the company and along with McBean was part of a North West Company Saskatchewan operation for 1820-1821 consisting of these two partners and about 90 men. The Hudson’s Bay Company contingent was considerably smaller, and even less than the normal

³⁴⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 15 March 1820, B.60/a/18, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³⁴⁵ Edmonton House post journal, 17 May 1820, B.60/a/19, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 May 1820.

³⁴⁷ Edmonton House post journals, 6 May 1820, B.60/a/18, and, 10-12 October 1820, B.60/a/19, reel 1M49, HBCA.

complement, about 56 people in all.³⁴⁸ Apart from the heated exchange of correspondence noted earlier, this rather undistinguished season was marred only by the killing near Edmonton House of a Siksika by a Cree or Assiniboine at the Hudson's Bay Company's hunters' tent, which was followed by the rapid, precautionary return of both companies' fort hunters to their posts.³⁴⁹

The two posts at Rocky Mountain House remained open through the summer of 1821. Word brought to Edmonton House from Carlton House in early July of the theft of all the Hudson's Bay Company's horses there by Siksika and Gros Ventre was all that broke the apparent monotony of the early summer.³⁵⁰ On 6 August 1821, however, the most important news ever to reach any post on the Saskatchewan, apart from the two disastrous epidemics of 1781-1782 and 1819-1820, was received at Edmonton House, blandly noted, and passed on up the river to Rocky Mountain House. The Edmonton House journal reads: "At 2 P.M. Mess^{rs} George Bird, and Hugh Monroe arrived here, with copies of Circular Letters, both from Gov^r Williams, and the Agents of the N.W^t Company, specifying, that an arrangement has taken place, between both the contending Parties, and requesting those, who are in charge of the different Posts in the Country, to give over all competition for the trade."³⁵¹ The Hudson's Bay Company and the North

³⁴⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 10 October 1820, B.60/a/19, reel 1M49, and, Edmonton House district report, Francis Heron, 1820-1821, fo. 1, B.60/e/4, reel 1M777, HBCA. For information on Rowand, see James Grierson MacGregor, *John Rowand: Czar of the Prairies* (Saskatoon, 1978), and Sylvia Van Kirk, "John Rowand," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII, 1851 to 1869* (Toronto, 1985), 779-81. The lives of McBean and Hughes are provided in brief in Wallace, ed., *Documents*, 458 and 461.

³⁴⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 15 November 1820, B.60/a/19, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³⁵⁰ Edmonton House post journal, 6 July 1821, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 6, 7 and 22 August 1821.

West Company had merged. Their rivalry on the Saskatchewan and throughout Ruperts Land was at an end.

Conclusions

The different corporate structures of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had clearly evident ramifications, such as the disruptive Canadian practice of the wide-scale distribution of alcohol and the importation of Iroquois trappers and hunters. The Hudson's Bay Company, despite its more stable financial base, was definitely the "weak sister" in its rivalry with the North West Company in the Saskatchewan District; the English company always followed the Canadians in the westward expansion to the Rockies. However, in the largely symbiotic relationship that existed between the Niitsitapi peoples and the Euroamerican traders, the long-established and intentionally fostered ties of friendship between the Piikani and the Hudson's Bay Company paid dividends, now most evident to the latter.

This symbiotic relationship with the members of the Blackfoot alliance was tested, stretched and temporarily broken in the early 1790s. These First Nations peoples got their first taste of distant market forces in action with the devaluation of their principal trade item: the wolf pelt. The cutting in half of their purchasing power, coupled with ever-increasing pressure and aggressiveness from the Cree and Assiniboine provoked violence in the Saskatchewan. The Gros Ventre apparently perceived that their very survival as a people was threatened. Assisted by some Siksika, they attacked two fur trade posts. Euroamerican protestations of neutrality did not wash. Unable to wreak vengeance on the Cree, in acts of desperation the Gros Ventre, and a few Siksika, attacked the arms suppliers of their enemies. By the early 1790s, Cree hostility against the Gros Ventre had become the norm. And from the early 1780s, there is no evidence of any Niitsitapi-Cree military alliance.

The Niitsitapi supported and benefited from direct trade with Euroamericans. Witness their various roles at Chesterfield House, the supplying of maps to the Hudson's Bay Company and their threat to the Gros Ventre in 1810-1811 that any attack on the fur trade posts at Rocky Mountain House would be countered by Niitsitapi warfare on the Gros Ventre. While the Niitsitapi derived considerable benefits from having Euroamerican trading posts near or in their territory (the later being the preferred choice), these peoples sought to control the trade; they clearly recognized the wider geopolitical implications of the spread of the trade. Their acquisition of firearms had allowed them to dominate the First Nations peoples immediately west of the Rockies. They did not want to see a shift in the balance of power that would inevitably follow expansion of direct Euroamerican trade into the Columbia watershed. Just as they would do on the upper Missouri in the 1830s, in the early 1810s the Niitsitapi made concerted efforts to prevent Euroamericans from crossing the Rockies. These efforts resulted in Euroamericans establishing transportation routes that swung wide around Niitsitapi territory.

In the 1810s, after wolf pelts had been so devalued that they were virtually worthless as a trade item, there was surprising restraint shown by the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. However, undoubtedly as a result of this drastic alteration in their economic power in the trade, there is evidence by the late 1810s of the Piikani changing their practices with respect to the killing of beaver. By the end of the decade, the intense and destructive rivalry of the North West and Hudson's Bay companies was leading to the potential ruin of both. The 1821 merger ended the Euroamerican rivalry that had existed since trade had been established with the Niitsitapi.

Chapter Four: Monopoly Rule and Piikani Transcendence, 1821 to 1831

The news of the merger that had reached Edmonton House-Fort Augustus on 6 August 1821 marked the end of almost 40 years of competition for the trade of the five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance (Piikani, Kainai, Siksika, Gros Ventre and Sarcee), each of whom had entered into regular and direct relations on the lower North Saskatchewan River with these two companies, and their smaller, short-lived opponents, in the early 1780s. The merger also signaled the beginning of a decade of monopoly for the newly reorganized Hudson's Bay Company in the Euroamerican trade with the Niitsitapi and their allies, a situation which would remain unchallenged until the founding of the American Fur Company's Fort Piegan on the Missouri River, in 1831. When the first of these peoples visited Edmonton House in the fall of 1821, they were described as being both "dejected" and "astonished" at the new arrangement.¹ However, the Piikani especially adapted to the changed circumstances, both of monopoly trade and of wolf pelts remaining virtually worthless; they quickly began to kill and trade beaver to ensure their survival among well-armed First Nations enemies.

The longstanding rivalry of the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company, turned violent and vindictive in recent years, had threatened the economic ruin of them both. By 1821 no clear, eventual winner was evident and the two companies were suffering, financially and otherwise. The Canadians' tremendous advantage in the fur-rich Athabasca had finally been effectively countered in 1818 by the English, when Colin Robertson entered that district with 26 officers, 160 men and 27 canoes.² Cutthroat competition throughout the Northwest had raised prices paid in the field for furs, depleted

¹ Edmonton House post journal, 10 and 28 November 1821, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA. The Siksika were the first to encounter the new situation at Edmonton House, followed by the Gros Ventre later that month.

² Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 230.

the fur resources themselves, caused a proliferation of economically unviable posts and decreased or eliminated profit margins. Potential financial disaster brought the rival factions to the negotiating table in London to resolve the situation. As one historian succinctly summed up:

The North West Company was suffering from the casual flexibility of structure which had once been its strength. Since it distributed its profits annually, in hard times it had no reserve fund, and its financial losses had a direct impact on the wintering partners. Although the Hudson's Bay Company did not show acute signs of distress, its overdraft stood at its maximum permitted level of £75,000. Neither side had enough confidence in its own strength to want a prolongation of the struggle. The Hudson's Bay Company was far from convinced that it was winning the day in Athabasca; the North West Company was doubtful whether it could survive its internal dissensions for many more months. A complex and often urgent set of pressures brought the agreement of 1821.³

The result was the merger of the two companies into a remodelled Hudson's Bay Company, combining some of the best aspects of both of its parent concerns. Drawing on the practices of the Canadians, the new company included its in-the-field officers in the profits, splitting a 40 percent share among 25 chief factors and 28 chief traders, while allowing these same officers an active say in the management of the operation, at annual, summer council meetings. London remained the headquarters of the company, and Hudson Bay, principally through the depot of York Factory, replaced the Canadians' St. Lawrence-Ottawa-Great Lakes route via Fort William as the supply route to the western interior. Rupert's Land was divided into two administrative departments, the Northern and the Southern. A relative newcomer, George Simpson,⁴ was chosen as Governor of the Northern Department, an area extending from Hudson Bay to the Pacific, and the Arctic to the American border.

³ Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company," 49.

⁴ John S. Galbraith, *The Little Emperor: Governor Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company* (Toronto, 1976), and, "Sir George Simpson," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII, 1851 to 1860* (Toronto, 1985), 812-9.

The Merger and the Saskatchewan District

The tasks of the new governor and the various district heads were: to streamline the fur trade operation; to overcome the personal animosities of longtime rivals, now new-found colleagues; to assuage Aboriginal reaction to this new monopoly situation; and, in general, to revitalize this once highly profitable enterprise. In no single district in the Northern Department was this problem more monumental, or more pressing, than in the Saskatchewan. At the time of the coalition the district was one of the most run-down in the western fur trade, showing a loss of some £5000 for the old Hudson's Bay Company in the final year before the merger.⁵

Although news of the merger reached the upper Saskatchewan in early August 1821, the brigades from Fort William and York Factory did not reach Edmonton House-Fort Augustus until mid-October, much later than usual. It was not until 19 October that John Rowand, the officer left in charge at Fort Augustus for the North West Company, learned that Chief Factor James Sutherland, a pre-merger Hudson's Bay Company officer and a man new to the Saskatchewan, was approaching with the brigade to take charge of the district. Virtually upon their arrival at Edmonton House, three canoes and a boat were sent upriver to the once-rival posts at Rocky Mountain House, the posts intended for the Piikani, in hopes of beating the winter freeze-up; none made it, necessitating the carrying of the winter outfit by land the rest of the way.⁶

⁵ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 July 1828, fo. 51d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/92, reel 3M44, HBCA.

⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 21, 22, 24 and 25 October, and, 4 and 6 November 1821, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA. The boat was frozen-in at the mouth of the Brazeau River, while the three canoes made it to within one day's journey of Rocky Mountain House and Acton House. Some of the goods in the boat were apparently left at the Brazeau over the winter. See this same journal, entries dated 29 January, 6 and 9 May 1822.

Sutherland arrived at Edmonton House-Fort Augustus on 23 October. Like his counterparts in districts throughout the Northern Department, he was faced with the immediate problem of a huge surplus of manpower and an unnecessary duplication of posts. He reported:

We have in this District 61 servants, belonging to the former H.B.C^y and 70 belonging to the late N.W.C^y, which make a total of 131 Engaged servants, including Officers, upon the present Concern, and are stationed at the different Posts of the District in the following manner. At this Place we have 43 Englishmen, and 17 Canadians; at the Mountain_House 11 Englishmen, and 27 Canadians; at Dog_Rump_Creek 4 Englishmen, and 21 Canadians; and at Pembina_River 3 Englishmen, and 5 Canadians.⁷

There were approximately 2,000 officers and men engaged by the new Hudson's Bay Company that same season throughout its territories, which stretched virtually uncontested from Labrador to the Pacific Ocean.⁸ With the rivalry at an end, only one post was now required where in many cases two posts already existed. At the district headquarters it was the former Hudson's Bay Company post, Edmonton House, which was retained, though Fort Augustus was partially and temporarily occupied for the winter of 1821-1822. Sutherland explained:

We principally for this winter, occupy our own Fort; being considered, as the most comfortable, and commodious residence of the two; nevertheless our number of men and families oblige us to occupy part of the N.W. Fort, for the safety of the Place, as well as for the scarcity of rooms, in our own Fort, to admit of putting up buildings, sufficient to give Lodgings to all our people. Besides these obstacles, the strife, and hatred, existing between the English and Canadian servants, from a long and series course of opposition, may render it absolutely necessary, to keep both parties, as far separate, as circumstances will admit; as we are not as yet aware, how they may intermix, tho' every exertion will be used to reconcile them to each other. Therefore the greatest part of our Canadian servants, which we

⁷ Ibid., 29 October 1821. Carlton House was open this season, as usual, but it was not then included in this enumeration of Edmonton House's domain.

⁸ Original Correspondence, 1825 Public Offices, Secretary of State, Lower Canada, fos. 265-94, vol. 205, Colonial Office 42, microfilm roll B-156, NAC.

could not lodge, in our own Fort, have at their own request, got permission, to reside for this winter, in their former habitations.⁹

Despite the absence of violence on the Saskatchewan in the recently-ended rivalry, feelings had run high, and not just among the servants. In 1815, John Rowand had offered to lay down his life in the struggle against the English.¹⁰ A year later, after the “massacre” at Seven Oaks, James “Jimmy Jock” Bird, the English Métis son of James Bird Sr., threatened mortal revenge against further Canadian transgressions.¹¹

Chief Trader John Rowand, who had served on the Saskatchewan since 1803 and who had become a partner in the North West Company in 1820, was put in charge of Rocky Mountain House in the fall of 1821.¹² The 38 officers and men stationed at Rocky Mountain House would have been two to three times the normal complement at either post. Though no documentary evidence survives to indicate which of Acton House or Rocky Mountain House was retained, archaeological research has definitely shown that the English company’s Acton House was occupied from 1821 into the 1830s, though the North West Company’s Rocky Mountain House may have been temporarily occupied in 1821-1822, and for the same reasons as was Fort Augustus.¹³ Despite its continued

⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 29 October 1821, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹⁰ Rowand to John Cameron, 31 December 1815, p. 8651, and, Rowand to Kenneth MacKenzie, 31 December 1815, p. 8657, Upper Fort des Prairies, Selkirk Papers, MG19, E1, NAC.

¹¹ Carlton House post journal, 16 October 1816, B.27/a/6, reel 1M19, HBCA. For a brief biography of “Jimmy Jock,” see David Smyth, “James Bird,” in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume XII, 1891 to 1900* (Toronto, 1990), 110-1.

¹² Edmonton House post journal, 29 October 1821, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹³ Donald N. Steer, Harvey J. Rogers and Gregory J. Lutick, “Archaeological Investigations at the Hudson’s Bay Company Rocky Mountain House, 1835-61,” *Manuscript Report Series*, no. 445, 2 vols. (Ottawa, 1979).

occupation the post lost its original name; Rocky Mountain House immediately replaced the name Acton House in all company records.

First Nations Peoples' Reactions and Post-merger Relations with the Company

At Rocky Mountain House, Edmonton House and throughout the West where the competition for furs had existed, Euroamerican traders were now faced with unhappy and often incredulous Aboriginal customers, whose previously enviable position of having rivals bid for their business had overnight come to an end. However, Sutherland at Edmonton House was aware of the potential efficacy of softening the transition period for people long used to a radically different state of affairs.

The Cree Indians, who came here on the 28th Instant went off, after having been liberally supplied, in all their necessaries, so as not to discourage them, from making good hunts; by dealing too hard with them, in their first transactions with the present concern; as their minds are not as yet, very favourably disposed, towards the changes which have taken place in the affairs, of this country. They cannot, or do not wish, to understand, how we became to have no opposition, this year, and are quite downcast at the event. In former times, they readily received, on demand, more than their necessaries, and gave them selves very little care, or trouble, to procure, wherewith to pay them, as they knew that, if they were not well treated at one House, they would be received, with open arms at the other. Consequently from long habit, they are now become indolent, and almost useless, so that time, with good management (which they do not want this year.) will be the only means, to rouse them, from their lethargy, in order to exert them selves in making good hunts, and for which they can only provide for them selves those articles, which are now necessary for their existence.¹⁴

As noted earlier, when the first Siksika arrived at Edmonton House in November, Sutherland described a similar reaction: "They are also very much dejected, seeing no opposition; so that they cannot expect any further competition, for their property."¹⁵ Later that month Sutherland wrote that a visiting group of Siksika and Gros Ventre "as well as

¹⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 30 October 1821, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10 November 1821.

others, are astonished at the changes, which have taken place, since last year.”¹⁶ These “downcast,” “dejected” and “astonished” reactions were undoubtedly expected by the company. However, what Sutherland could not understand was his customers’ failure to “understand” the changed circumstances so suddenly thrust upon them. The First Nations peoples of the Northwest were certainly used to changing patterns of trade and warfare among themselves, but not to the absolute disappearance of one party, or the melding of two into one. For 40 years, since first regular trade contact, at least two, if not more, Euroamerican concerns had been among them on the Saskatchewan. For most of this period the two principal White “tribes,” the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company, had been bitter rivals. Now they were one “people.” Of course, the new Hudson’s Bay Company’s Aboriginal customers would have been incredulous, whatever economic impact the merger on them might have been.

By the spring of 1822, the Cree of the Saskatchewan had still not adjusted to the merger to the satisfaction of the company; the Cree apparently chose not to devote themselves to fur gathering over the winter merely to pay off their accumulated personal debts, rather than to make future purchases.¹⁷ Earlier, word had reached Governor Simpson of both the almost universal displeasure in the Saskatchewan with the end of competition and of a likely drop in returns there as a result.¹⁸

Less enthusiastic hunting for trade purposes was not the only possible First Nations reaction to the merger. In the late winter of 1821-1822, news reached Edmonton House of a planned Gros Ventre attack:

¹⁶ Ibid., 28 November 1821.

¹⁷ Ibid., 17 April 1822.

¹⁸ Alexander Kennedy to Simpson, Cumberland House, 13 March 1822, fos. 19d.-20, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/116, reel 3M52, HBCA.

From some reports, which are put in circulation, that the Fall Indians (Gros Ventre) intend to attack the House, and seize all the property in the spring, induce us, to keep a regular watch, during some nights past, and which we intend, to continue, as we have seen very few of these Indians, since the Fall. Tho' this report may be groundless, and without foundation, yet we should be upon our guard, as we know, notwithstanding the liberal treatment, they receive, that their minds are not well disposed towards us, on account of the changes in the Country, having only one House, to which they now resort, for their supplies.¹⁹

The attack never materialized, but its threat, real or imagined, indicated the atmosphere in which the company operated that season on the Saskatchewan.

At the time of the merger, company manpower in the Saskatchewan District, including Carlton House, stood at 171 engaged servants and officers. That number had been lowered to just over 50 by 1825.²⁰ In this period Hudson's Bay Company estimates put the population of the five allied tribes at: Kainai, 300 to 400 tents, or about 2,100 to 2,800 people, and 1,200 to 1,600 warrior-aged males; Piikani, 550 to 600 tents, or about 3,850 to 4,200 people, and 2,200 to 2,400 warrior-aged males; Siksika, 500 to 600 tents, or about 3,500 to 4,200 people, and 2,000 warrior-aged males; Gros Ventre, 400 to 600 tents, or about 2,800 to 4,200 people, and 1,600 to 1,800 warrior-aged males; and, Sarcee, 90 tents, or about 630 people, and 180 warrior-aged males.²¹ The internal demographics

¹⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 8 March 1822, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA.

²⁰ Ibid, 29 October 1821; Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 1 September 1825, item 61, fos. 82-3, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/88, reel 3M43; and, Edmonton House district report, 1825, fo. 4d., B.60/e/8, reel 1M777, HBCA. The 1821 reference cited here actually gives a combined Hudson's Bay Company-North West Company total of 131 officers and men in the Saskatchewan District at the time of the merger, but this number did not include Carlton House, as Simpson's 1825 figure almost certainly did. Before the 1821 merger, Carlton House and its dependencies were often considered a separate district by the Hudson's Bay Company; after the merger that post was part of the Saskatchewan District, reporting to headquarters upriver at Edmonton House.

²¹ Bow River Expedition (Chesterfield House) district report, Francis Heron, 1 May 1823, fo. 2d., B.34/e/1, reel 1M776; Edmonton House district report, Colin Robertson, 1823, fo. 4, B.60/e/5, reel 1M777; and, Edmonton House district report, John Rowand, 1824, fo. 3, B.60/e/6, reel 1M777, HBCA. In order, these are references to the population estimates

of the figures for the first four peoples seem incredibly askew; one would not expect warrior-aged males to approach anywhere near the fifty percent mark of the total population. In 1809, Alexander Henry had given a slightly smaller Sarcee figure of 150 warriors, but added an overall population estimate of 90 tents.²² Using Heron's and McKenzie's estimate of seven people per tent, Henry's population estimate would have been 630 Sarcee men, women and children, but with a slightly higher proportion of warrior-aged males than that given by Robertson and Rowand. Henry's figures would seem to be a much more accurate representation of the internal sex and age demographics of the Sarcee than any of the above-noted 1820s figures for their four allies.

Despite the fact that approximately 15,000 First Nations people, and this just in the Blackfoot alliance, faced such a comparatively small Hudson's Bay Company contingent, the balance of bargaining power in the trade actually swung strongly to the company following the merger; there were no longer Euroamerican rivals who could be played off against each other. This swing in economic clout was true only because these First Nations peoples had effectively foresworn the use of force, in order to ensure ongoing access to trade goods. And now the Hudson's Bay Company was the sole practical source of supply.

Chief Factor Sutherland realized the delicacy of the altered situation, altered for all First Nations peoples throughout the district and Rupert's Land. He proposed a three-part plan: to attempt to reverse the "indolent" nature of his First Nations customers,

made by Francis Heron and Donald McKenzie after the Bow River Expedition of 1822-1823, and to Colin Robertson and John Rowand calculations, made at Edmonton House. Heron and McKenzie (fo. 2d., B.34/e/1) estimated seven individuals per tent. Interestingly, both Robertson (fo. 4, .60/e/5) and Rowand (fo. 3, B.60/e/6) estimated four warrior-aged males per tent for each of the Kainai, Piikani, Siksika and Gros Ventre, but only two warrior-aged males per tent for the Sarcee.

²² Coues, ed., *New Light*, vol. 2: 531-2.

supposedly formed during the period of ruinous competition; to be generous in his initial terms of trade²³; and to impress firmly upon his customers the shift in the balance of power. He accomplished this latter goal after word reached him in February 1822 that some Kainai had stolen Hudson's Bay Company horses upriver at Rocky Mountain House. Sutherland immediately told other Kainai visiting Edmonton House that, until all the horses had been returned, the Hudson's Bay Company would not trade with any of the Kainai people. Such a position would have been unthinkable before the merger, because either company taking such a stand would not only have lost an individual's, band's or tribe's entire trade to its rival, but it would also have run the risk of reprisals. In flexing his new monopolistic muscles, Sutherland observed that the Kainai "appear to be quite downcast at this treatment."²⁴ The stern response to this theft, and to a subsequent one at Rocky Mountain House, brought about the desired results. Between 23 February and 16 March all of the stolen horses were returned, but not by the culprits themselves. Sutherland wrote, "We have not as yet seen any of those who actually thieved them; as I suppose, they are rather afraid, or ashamed, to make their appearance at the House. Those who brought in the horses are some of the Heads or Principal men of the Blood_Indian_Tribe."²⁵ The company's point had been made. When one of the Kainai "thieves" visited Edmonton House after the horses had all been returned, Sutherland not only refused him entry to the fort, but would not accept his offered gift of a horse.²⁶ Throughout the 1820s company officers were able to exercise this newly-acquired power,

²³ Edmonton House post journal, 30 October 1821, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA.

²⁴ Ibid., 20 and 21 February 1822. See also entries dated 23 February, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10 and 16 March 1822.

²⁵ Ibid., 16 March 1822.

²⁶ Ibid., 19 March 1822.

though using less sweeping means, to recover horses stolen by members of the Blackfoot alliance, and by other First Nations peoples as well.²⁷ Then faced with no alternative, no other source of European goods and firearms, the company's First Nations customers either had to accept the then-present state of affairs or to resort to violence against the company. Surrounded by well-armed First Nations enemies, violence against the Hudson's Bay Company was certainly not seen as a viable option. The Niitsitapi and their allies could not take risk losing their only source of European armaments.

The absence of competition also permitted the Hudson's Bay Company in the summer of 1822 to order its officers to reduce by one-half the amount of alcohol given as presents to First Nations people visiting the company's posts.²⁸ Soon after, the company also reduced the credit that it advanced to its First Nations customers. John Rowand wrote, in 1825, that "the Indians who used to get from 50 to 100 Skins in Debts are now well Satisfied when we give them from 5 to 15 Skins."²⁹ While, at least in Rowand's opinion, by 1825 the Saskatchewan District's First Nations customers had adjusted well to the merger, this was not the judgement of other company officers, in 1823. In his summary report of the 1822-1823 Bow River Expedition (see below), Francis Heron assessed the impact of the 1821 merger. "The principal effects arising from this change of system in regard to trade since the coalition has been that of rendering the Natives

²⁷ Edmonton House post journals in HBCA: 26 October and 13 November 1823, B.60/a/22, 1M49; 17 and 21 October 1827, B.60/a/25, 1M50; and, 22 May 1828, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50.

²⁸ Item 97 of July 1822 council meeting, in Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council*, 24.

²⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 29 September 1825, B.60/a/23, reel 1M49 (this piece continues, from the 3 March 1826 entry, on reel 1M50), HBCA.

exceedingly turbulent and discontented; and consequently more difficult to deal with than formerly.”³⁰

Despite the general dissatisfaction of those most directly and negatively affected by the merger, there were no incidents of violence against either the company or its men in the district. From 15 to 18 May 1822 seven boats loaded with the returns of trade from Rocky Mountain House arrived at Edmonton House. Rowand came down in the last boat. He had left Nicolas Montour, “a Half-Breed or Native,” in charge of Rocky Mountain House for the summer, “with 2 Englishmen and 4 Canadians.”³¹ Rowand was left in charge of the district when Sutherland departed downriver for York Factory on 24 May, with the last part of the brigade of canoes and boats. The future of the company’s operations on the North Saskatchewan River was then precarious at best. The 1821-1822 outfit saw almost a £4,000 loss in the Saskatchewan.³² Plans had already been laid to explore the possibility of abandoning within the next year the trade along the entire North Saskatchewan River.

The Bow River Expedition

In July 1822, Simpson wrote to the Governor and Committee of the Hudson’s Bay Company in London deploring the exhausted condition of the North Saskatchewan River and reporting that he had recommended to the Northern Council that the posts on that

³⁰ Bow River Expedition report, Francis Heron, 1 May 1823, fo. 3, B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA.

³¹ Edmonton House post journal, 18 May 1822, B.60/a/20, reel 1M49, HBCA. There was talk at this time of replacing the lowly regarded Montour later in the season, but this apparently was not done. Rowand to Simpson, Carlton House, 9 September 1822, fos. 6-7d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/117, reel 3M52, HBCA.

³² Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 16 July 1822, fo. 5, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/85, reel 3M42, HBCA.

river all be abandoned, should the Bow River Expedition turn out as expected.³³ The idea of sending a major expedition to open up trade on the South Saskatchewan River, and on the northern tributaries of the Missouri River, was not a new one, nor was it originally Simpson's. As described in the previous chapter, the North West, Hudson's Bay and XY companies had all traded on the South Saskatchewan near the mouth of the Red Deer River, on and off from 1800 to 1805, at posts known as Chesterfield House. Trade returns had been high. In the three seasons that the Hudson's Bay Company maintained its post there (1800-1801, 1801-1802 and 1804-1805), Chesterfield House traded more than double the amount of furs and provisions than the company had managed to trade combined at both of its other "Blackfoot" posts, Edmonton House and Acton House. In those three seasons at Chesterfield House the Hudson's Bay Company alone, as already noted, traded 12,000 Made Beaver, 7,495 Made Beaver and 4,388 5/6 Made Beaver respectively (see Table One). Higher transportation costs, perceived increased danger, demand elsewhere in the district for its servants and its other resources, and the abandonment of the site by the North West Company, all prompted the Hudson's Bay Company likewise to retreat from this more southerly, and more vulnerable, location. However, since that time the beaver resources of that region, the home range of the Piikani, Siksika, Kainai and Gros Ventre, were considered to be enormous.

Also as noted in the previous chapter, in 1815, during an extended period when the posts at Rocky Mountain House remained closed, 1812-1819, the Piikani petitioned the Hudson's Bay Company not to return there but to build on the Bow or upper South Saskatchewan River, promising to "exert themselves more in procuring Beaver than they have hitherto done and tent for this purpose on the most southern branch of the

³³ Ibid., Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 31 July 1822, item 49, fos. 8-21.

Missouri.”³⁴ The drastically reduced demand, and price, for wolf pelts may have been the deciding factor in this Piikani solicitation and promise (see below). As this Bird report, as well as evidence that will be presented later in this thesis demonstrate, contrary to 20th-century assertions by Oscar Lewis, David J. Wishart, R. Grace Morgan and James Dempsey, the Niitsitapi did indeed want trading posts in their home territory.³⁵

In 1815, James Bird proposed a method of enlarging the Hudson’s Bay Company’s trade by a return not only to the upper South Saskatchewan River, but beyond. He wrote:

Then perhaps an enterprising mind might project an expedition up the South Branch and hope to make settlements near the Missouri and in the Rocky Mountains, but this is an Expedition that would require so large an outfit and the

³⁴ Edmonton House district report, James Bird, 31 August 1815, fo. 4d., B.60/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA.

³⁵ Lewis wrote in 1942, “Up to 1831, the Blackfoot [Niitsitapi] successfully prevented the establishment of trading posts in their territory in the United States.” He added, “Furthermore a glance at the map will show that without exception the Canadian trading posts were on the outskirts of Blackfoot territory, and therefore the traders never represented a threat in the eyes of the Blackfoot.” Wishart repeated these assertions, stating that the Niitsitapi “would not trade with the Americans,” and that the “British had managed to maintain tolerably good relations with the Blackfoot only by staying outside the Blackfoot hunting grounds and encouraging those Indians to travel to the posts on the Saskatchewan to trade.” Morgan supported these contentions. She incorrectly argued that the Blackfoot-speaking peoples “made concerted efforts” to prevent the construction of trading posts in their territory. James Dempsey followed in these many footsteps, writing that the Niitsitapi “prevented the establishment of any posts in their territory and only allowed a post to be built at Rocky Mountain House, which was on the edge of their northern domain.” See: Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact upon Blackfoot Culture, with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade* (Seattle: 1942), 24 and 27; David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840* (Lincoln, 1979), 45; R. Grace Morgan, “Beaver Ecology/Beaver Mythology” (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta, 1991), 16, 217 and 224; and, James Dempsey, “Effects on Aboriginal Cultures Due to Contact with Henry Kelsey,” in Henry Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, 133.

success of which would depend on so many circumstances that I do not feel myself qualified to give a decisive opinion on it.³⁶

His proposal won the qualified approval of at least some in the company, but no action was taken on it at that time.³⁷ Six years later, immediately following the merger, Bird more confidently put forward a more detailed version of his proposal to Nicholas Garry, President of the Council of the Northern Department, and one of two men sent out in 1821 to conciliate the officers and men in the field to the new post-merger situation. Bird's memorandum to Garry suggested using 60 engaged servants and 100 freemen. It also urged that, in advance of such an expedition, it should "be explained to the Peigans and their Consent obtained."³⁸ Prophetically, Bird then noted that to the best of his knowledge the headwaters of the Missouri were teeming with beaver, but that the South Saskatchewan River itself was destitute of that highly prized animal.

The time was ripe for such an expedition. The North Saskatchewan was at least temporarily played out. Piikani territory apparently abounded with beaver. And there was a huge manpower surplus on which to draw. A month after Bird wrote his memorandum to Garry, rumours of the proposed expedition were rampant within the company, and officers were volunteering their services.³⁹ By the early spring of 1822 plans for the "South Branch Expedition" were beginning to take shape.

³⁶ Edmonton House district report, James Bird, 31 August 1815, fo. 5d., B.60/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA.

³⁷ Thomas Thomas general letter, York Factory, 15 September 1815, p. 1431, Selkirk Papers, MG19, E1, NAC.

³⁸ Bird to Garry memorandum of 8 July 1821, quoted in David J. Fairfield, "Chesterfield House and the Bow River Expedition" (M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Alberta, 1970), 160. The original of this document is in E.11/2, reel 4M121, HBCA. See also J.G. Nelson, *The Last Refuge* (Montreal, 1973), 61-76.

³⁹ Francis Heron to Simpson, Norway House, 17 August 1821, fo. 6, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/116, reel 3M52, HBCA.

Simpson relied heavily on the advice and experience of Francis Heron, who had been in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's Saskatchewan District from 1817 to 1821. Heron envisaged a complement of 150 engaged servants and 150 freemen, nominally independent trappers who would follow the direction of the expedition's officers. Like Bird, Heron was sensitive to the possible reaction of the "Slave Tribes," the Piikani, Kainai, Siksika, Gros Ventre and Sarcee. He warned, "The only thing at which they are likely to take umbrage, is at seeing the Trappers employed killing Beaver on their lands."⁴⁰ He suggested placating these peoples by supplying them with beaver traps, thus allowing them to share in the wealth to be taken from their own lands. Heron recommended that at least three separate posts be built, one on a tributary of the Bow River, the Bull Pond River, exclusively for the trade of the Gros Ventre and the Piikani. He added, "These Indians have heretofore Traded either at Edmonton or Rocky Mountain houses on the North Branch, to which places as I have said before, they have always gone with reluctance from an apprehension of being either massacred or pillaged by their Enemies."⁴¹

Chief Trader Donald McKenzie was selected to lead the Bow River Expedition. He left York Factory with his brigade in mid-July 1822. He was met on the lower South Saskatchewan by John Rowand and a party from the North Saskatchewan.⁴² However, by the time that Rowand had been informed of the requirements of the expedition the majority of the freemen in the Edmonton House area had already dispersed for their

⁴⁰ Ibid., Heron to Simpson, Moose Lake, 14 March 1822, fos. 29d.-31d.

⁴¹ Ibid., fo. 32d.

⁴² For details of the Bow River Expedition, see the expedition's daily journal and its summary report, B.34/a/4, reel 1M20, and, B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA.

summer and fall hunts.⁴³ As for the freemen who frequented the Carlton House region of the district, and who had more fear of the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, they refused to go; they did not want to be separated from their families and they thought the venture “too dangerous to carry them up the Branch [South Saskatchewan River].”⁴⁴ Though initially planned to involve some 300 servants and freemen, McKenzie’s final party consisted of about 100 men, only a few of whom were not engaged company servants.⁴⁵ This may actually have been a blessing in disguise, for the Niitsitapi and their allies might have reacted violently to the intrusion of such a large number of uninvited trappers into their territory. Francis Heron described the flexible boundaries of the territory of the Niitsitapi and the Gros Ventre:

As I have already observed, that the Slave Indians [term encompassing the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Gros Ventre and Sarcee] are through necessity obliged to follow the movements of the Buffaloe, it will therefore be readily conceived that those tribes can have no fixed hunting grounds - There are however certain portions of the country considered by each tribe as their own Lands, and which they resort to when circumstances admit - The Blackfeet claim as their territories, the country lying between the North & South Branches of the Saskatchewan, next the Stone Indians [Assiniboine] The Blood Indians lay claim to the Country Westward of the Blackfeet, between the Bow & Fighting Rivers; and the Muddy River [Piikani], and Fall [Gros Ventre] Ind^s in general possess all that extensive country which lies between the Bow Rivers and the northern Barches [Branches?] of the Missouri.⁴⁶

⁴³ Rowand to Simpson, Carlton House, 9 September 1822, fos. 6-6d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/117, reel 3M52, HBCA.

⁴⁴ Carlton House post journal, 25 August 1822, B.27/a/12, 1M19, HBCA.

⁴⁵ Fairfield, “Chesterfield House,” 96. Heron actually wrote that “no trappers accompanied the expedition.” Despite this Heron assertion, there were some free trappers/hunters attached to the expedition, but these few apparently stuck close to the post and did not venture far. Jacques Berger, to name just one, was a freeman attached to this expedition. See below (in this and next two chapters) for much more on Berger. Certainly there were no large-scale trapping parties. Bow River Expedition report, fo. 3d., B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA.

⁴⁶ Bow River Expedition report, 1 May 1823, fo. 3, B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA. The Piikani and Gros Ventre did not jointly occupy a shared territory. Piikani territory was

Rather than disperse his force, McKenzie chose to erect only a single fortified post, just below the forks of the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers, close by the site of the Chesterfield House posts of 1800-1805 (see Figure Five). The site selection for this single post in Siksika territory caused some envy among the Piikani, Kainai and Gros Ventre.⁴⁷ Included in McKenzie's officer corps were chief traders Rowand and Heron, and the clerk, John Edward Harriott.

McKenzie personally led an exploring party from the post in mid-October. As the expedition journal described, before his departure he told an assembled group of some 400 "Chiefs and old men of the different Tribes" that the post had been built "not solely for Provisions, but Beaver," and that, if his mission proved successful, the next year another post would be erected at a location to be chosen by those First Nations leaders, somewhere on the Bow, Belly or Red Deer rivers.⁴⁸ And yet, his search for beaver was cut short by the opposition of some "800 Tents" of Gros Ventre. McKenzie had been posted earlier in his career with the North West Company west of the Rockies, and there had traded with First Nations peoples who were the perennial enemies of the Blackfoot alliance. The Gros Ventre did not believe, despite his protestations, that McKenzie was not then going to do so again.⁴⁹ Later that fall Heron led a party of more than 20 men to

located to the west of that of the Gros Ventre.

⁴⁷ Bow River Expedition journal, 14 October 1822, B.34/a/4, reel 1M20, HBCA.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15 October 1822.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 24 October 1822. In this entry the journalist stated that 800 tents of Gros Ventre stopped McKenzie's exploration. However, in the expedition's final report, which included population estimates, as noted above, for each of the Piikani, Siksika, Kainai and Gros Ventre, the total population for the Gros Ventre was listed at only 600 tents. This is a difference, using the Heron-McKenzie calculation of seven individuals per tent, of some 1,400 people. See Bow River Expedition report, 1 May 1823, Francis Heron, fo. 2d., B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA.

Figure Five. Map Showing the Locations of Fur Trade Posts in the Saskatchewan District, 1821 to 1831.

explore the upper Red Deer, Bow and Belly rivers, and in early winter Harriott took more than 30 men to explore the Sweet Grass Hills and towards the "Bears River," the Marias River, a tributary of the Missouri River, in American territory. In his unpublished memoirs, perhaps in general the most disappointing and uninformative document left by a major personality in the fur trade, Harriott himself later stated that his goal was "the junction of the Bears R with the Missouri where Fort Benton now stands," but that his "Blft guides," though taking him as far as an unnamed tributary of the Missouri, refused to lead him to the Marias River.⁵⁰ All three parties returned disappointed with the lack of evidence of substantial beaver populations. After Harriott's return on 8 January 1823, no further exploratory expeditions were sent out.

Life continued on the North Saskatchewan River as its future was being decided to the south. For the 1822-1823 season Chief Factor Colin Robertson was in charge of the Saskatchewan District at Edmonton House, while Chief Trader Joseph Felix LaRocque had charge of Rocky Mountain House; by October 1822 these were the only two posts maintained on the river above Carlton House.⁵¹ On 12 October the boat with the outfit for Rocky Mountain House left Edmonton House. Two days later LaRocque followed by land. About a month after his arrival there LaRocque wrote to Robertson, and according to the Edmonton House journalist, informed "him that the Piegans or Muddy River [Piikani] Indians were very unruly, and wanted a reinforcement of men - M^r Robertson immediately ordered 4 men to get ready to go off in 2 days."⁵² The additional

⁵⁰ John Edward Harriott, "Memoirs of life and adventure in the Hudson's Bay Company's territories, 1819-1825." Unpublished and unpaginated manuscript, ca. 1860, in the Coe Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁵¹ Edmonton House post journal, 11 October and 2 November 1822, B.60/a/21, reel 1M49, HBCA.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20 November 1822.

men were sent, but no incident worth noting apparently occurred at the upriver outpost. That January, Robertson visited Rocky Mountain House briefly, bringing back the information that LaRocque had already acquired 1,000 beaver pelts. Robertson repeated this journey in March 1823, this time in company with Governor George Simpson.⁵³ On 8 May, LaRocque arrived at Edmonton House with his returns of trade in three boats. He had left Ronald McDonald and four men upriver for the summer.

McDonald and his men were to have a very short stay at Rocky Mountain House. The Bow River Expedition had not worked out as planned. The Piikani, Kainai, Siksika and Gros Ventre visited the post near the mouth of the Red Deer River in numbers never before seen on the North Saskatchewan, some 6,000 at one particular time.⁵⁴ Deep within Niitsitapi territory, entire camps or bands could easily, quickly and safely visit this post. But they were more aggressive and threatening to the company on the South Saskatchewan than they had been on the North Saskatchewan. The expedition journal contains references to numerous instances of company men being fired on near the fort, and many other potentially violent incidents, though no member of the expedition was ever actually killed or wounded. Overall First Nations reaction to this company endeavour is difficult to judge. The building of the post is mentioned in at least one Kainai winter count, so it was certainly considered a significant event.⁵⁵ During its construction, many First Nations people lent their horses to the Hudson's Bay Company

⁵³ Ibid., 7 and 21 January, 10 and 17 March 1823.

⁵⁴ Bow River Expedition journal, 14 October 1822, B.34/a/4, reel 1M20, HBCA.

⁵⁵ Dempsey, *A Blackfoot Winter Count*, 7. This, as noted earlier, is the winter count of Bad Head, a minor chief of the Kainai. Dempsey pointed out that this particular "entry" in the winter count has been interpreted to identify the construction of either the Bow River Expedition post or an American post built this same season on the Yellowstone River. The Hudson's Bay Company post, deep within Niitsitapi territory, is by far the more likely candidate.

to haul building materials.⁵⁶ On top of this mixed reaction, and the high expense of maintaining so large a force of men for safety's sake, the rumoured wealth of beaver simply did not materialize. Heron summed up the expedition leader's feelings:

The country contrary to our sanguine expectations, is comparatively destitute of Beaver and the Buffaloe though numerous, owing to the scarcity of wood for constructing pounds, cannot be killed by the natives in such numbers, as to enable them to procure the necessary quantity of Provisions Besides the natives themselves are so hostilely disposed towards the Whites that the trade cannot afford to support the large establishments necessary to resist the attacks of those ferocious savages; who are at all times eager to commit depredations when the object is attainable.⁵⁷

Of course, like all other Hudson's Bay Company posts involved in the Plains trade, the expedition's post was heavily fortified, for the reasons expressed above by Heron. By the 1820s, just how much of this threat was real, pretended or illusory is difficult to tell. On 27 April 1823, the Bow River Expedition abandoned its single post and headed downriver for York Factory with its disappointing returns. In the end, this one-year experiment was judged to be a failure by the Hudson's Bay Company. Only a little over 1,000 large beaver pelts had been traded, after this enormous company effort and outlay.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Bow River Expedition journal, 8 October 1822, B.34/a/4, reel 1M20, HBCA.

⁵⁷ Bow River Expedition report, Heron, 1 May 1823, fo. 1d., B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA. Interestingly, in this summary report (fo. 3), Heron described in several lines the supposed cannibalism of these five allied tribes, asserting that the Gros Ventre were "the most addicted to that inhuman practice." I have not seen a single eye-witness account to back up Heron's statements. Although, in 1811, James Bird at Edmonton House reported that the Piikani had threatened "that they would make dry meat" of any Whites whom they found travelling west of the mountains to trade with their enemies. See Chapter Three of this thesis and Edmonton House post journal, 13 May 1811, B.60/a/9, reel 1M49, HBCA. It may be that the Niitsitapi and their allies fostered these notions in order to instill fear in their enemies and to persuade Euroamerican traders to adopt courses of action more favourable to them.

⁵⁸ For an itemized listing of the expedition's returns, see York Factory district fur returns, 1821-1842, fos. 35-6, B.239/h/1, reel 1M812, HBCA. The expedition's full beaver returns were: 1,055 common large; 237 common small; 1,777 pounds of large and small; and, 4 pounds of coat. The expedition apparently traded absolutely no buffalo robes.

Repercussions of the Failed Expedition: Belt Tightening and Reorganization

On 1 March 1823, McKenzie, Heron and Rowand all wrote separate letters to Governor Simpson, who was then at Edmonton House, concurring in their assessment of the past year's efforts as having been a failure and also in their judgement that the South Saskatchewan should be abandoned and that the North Saskatchewan posts ought to be retained.⁵⁹ Assuming the abandonment of the South Saskatchewan, Rowand, the officer most familiar with the district and its Aboriginal inhabitants, wrote to Simpson:

In that case it will be advisable to retain the Mountain House as well as to please the Piegans who are our principal beaver Hunters & who incessantly preach for that place_ The greater part of the Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians would also go there_ For the summer I should say that M^r Ranald M^cDonald with one or two Interpreters & 4 men would answer the purpose_ but for the winter the number must be increased in all twenty_ to give up the Mountain House intirely might either be the means of attracting too many Indians to Edmonton or give the sulks to the Piegans, who might perhaps keep away from any Forts during a couple of years if they only took it into their heads, Indeed a trick of this kind they have been known to serve us before now.⁶⁰

In another letter to Simpson of the same date, Rowand extolled the virtues of maintaining Rocky Mountain House. Not only was it the best post from which to send out freemen, perhaps with Piikani protection, but it was the post "which the Piegans always consider as their own fort exclusively."⁶¹ He also advised Simpson that the Piikani would gladly use beaver traps if the company would supply them. Simpson received Rowand's and the others' letters upon his return from Rocky Mountain House and initially concurred in Rowand's assessment of the future role of that post, if not in the personnel selection to staff it. Simpson wrote:

⁵⁹ For McKenzie, Heron and Rowand 1 March 1823 assessments of the expedition, see fos. 25-31d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/117, reel 3M52, HBCA.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Rowand to Simpson, Bow and Red Deer rivers, 1 March 1823, fos. 26d.-7.

⁶¹ Ibid., fos. 27d.-9d.

The Rocky Mountain House, being the favorite resort of the Piegans, who are our principal Fur Hunters, and the point from whence Freeman can be equipped to the best advantage, are good reasons for keeping it up, as a permanent establishment, and the complement of Summer men will be provided; but M^r Ranald M^cDonald does not appear either to myself or M^r Robertson, a fit person for such a charge, his health being in a bad state, of indolent habits, possessing no influence among the people, and a total stranger to the Indian Languages; M^r Small, is therefore considered more competent to the management of that post, assisted by M^r Fisher, which will enable us, to shake off Montour & Hughes, who are quite superfluous, have huge families, and heavy salaries.⁶²

Simpson wrote to LaRocque at the beginning of April to confirm the retention of Rocky Mountain House as a permanent establishment, principally for the trade of the Piikani. He also made his oft-repeated assertion that for the Saskatchewan to be made to pay it must get rid of its superannuated servants, employees with large families and the many other hangers-on.⁶³

One month later, Simpson did a complete about-face concerning the fate of Rocky Mountain House. It was to be included more drastically and directly in his economy measures. On 9 May, he wrote to John Peter Pruden at Carlton House, stating that Rocky Mountain House was to be closed for the summer.⁶⁴ The next day he passed an even stiffer sentence. "Under all circumstances it does not appear to me that the affairs of this Department are likely to suffer by the abandonment of the Rocky Mountain House, either in summer or winter, on the contrary much expence saved, as the increased Returns would not defray half the additional charges, and for those reasons it is withdrawn."⁶⁵ That same day two men were sent from Edmonton House, according to the post

⁶² Simpson to Rowand, Edmonton House, 22 March 1823, fos. 37-8, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/2, reel 3M3, HBCA.

⁶³ Ibid., Simpson to LaRocque, Edmonton House, 1 April 1823, fo. 39.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Simpson to Pruden, Edmonton House, 9 May 1823, fos. 41d.-2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Simpson to Donald Mckenzie, Edmonton House, 10 May 1823, fos. 43-3d.

journalist, "to the Mountain House to let M^r M^cDonald know that the Place is to be abandoned & to get a Batteau made to bring down the property."⁶⁶ At the previous meeting of the Council of the Northern Department, Simpson had been empowered to close any or all posts on the North Saskatchewan River.⁶⁷ He exercised his authority and closed Rocky Mountain House, over the strong objections of John Rowand. Simpson's decision was ratified at the July 1823 council at York Factory, as was his decision to establish a post on the Athabasca at the mouth of the McLeod River, for the Stoney [*Nakoda*] and Cree, who had previously traded at both Rocky Mountain House and Edmonton House.⁶⁸ The new post, at first under the jurisdiction of the Lesser Slave Lake District, but by 1825 part of the Saskatchewan District, was built in the fall of 1823 and named Fort Assiniboine.⁶⁹ Simpson was obviously hoping to make Edmonton House a trading centre exclusively for the three Blackfoot-speaking tribes and their allies, the Sarcee and the Gros Ventre.

In the two years following the closure of Rocky Mountain House, the longtime post for the Piikani, a great number of changes took place, both inside and outside the Saskatchewan District, which directly and positively contributed to the success of the fur trade there. Whatever the district's shortcomings in the early 1820s, after the failure of the Bow River Expedition Simpson realized that the North Saskatchewan would have to

⁶⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 10 and 18 May 1823, B.60/a/21, reel 1M49, HBCA. McDonald, his men and the boat arrived safely at Edmonton House on 18 May.

⁶⁷ Minutes of the Northern Council, 8 July 1822 meeting, item 55, fos. 11-8d., B.239/k/1, reel 1M814, HBCA.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 5 July 1823 meeting, items 64-5 and 67-8, fos. 25d.-38d., and, Simpson to William Connolly, Edmonton House, 8 May 1823, fos. 40-1, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/2, reel 3M3, HBCA.

⁶⁹ Richard Frances McCarty, "Fort Assiniboine, Alberta, 1823-1914: Fur Trade Post to Settled District" (M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Alberta, 1976).

be maintained, if only for the provisions which it annually supplied the company's transportation network.⁷⁰ Despite having ignored his advice concerning Rocky Mountain House, Simpson chose John Rowand to take charge of the district in the fall of 1823; Rowand would be in charge of the Saskatchewan District for the next 30 years. Together Rowand and Simpson turned the district around, changing it from the most economically depressed district at the time of the merger to the company's most profitable, in the late 1820s.

By the 1823-1824 season the company had reduced the total number of employees in North America to just over 1,300 and Simpson had decreased the number of Northern Department officers and men to 870.⁷¹ In the Saskatchewan Rowand continued the winnowing process, reaching a low at the end of the 1824-1825 season of just 53 engaged men, down from 171 at the merger.⁷² The population of both English and French Métis, and freemen was also greatly diminished in the district in the mid-1820s, as many left to settle at Red River or in the lower Columbia Valley.⁷³

Transportation re-organization instigated by Simpson brought new prominence to the Saskatchewan District, putting Edmonton House on the principal transcontinental route across British North America. Before 1825, the North West Company and then the Hudson's Bay Company had supplied the Columbia via Cumberland House,

⁷⁰ Simpson to Governor and Committee, Norway House, 23 June 1823, item 13, fos. 4-4d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/86, reel 3M42, HBCA. See also Arthur J. Ray, "The Northern Great Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade, 1774-1885," *Prairie Forum* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1984), 263-80.

⁷¹ Original Correspondence, 1825 Public Offices, Secretary of State, Lower Canada, fos. 322-34d., vol. 205, Colonial Office 42, microfilm roll B-156, NAC.

⁷² Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 1 September 1825, item 61, fos. 82-3, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/88, reel 3M43, and, Edmonton House district report, Rowand, 14 May 1825, fo. 4d., B.60/e/8, reel 1M777, HBCA.

⁷³ Edmonton House post journal, 11 March 1824, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

Île-à-la-Crosse, the Beaver River, Lac la Biche and the Athabasca River to the Athabasca Pass. After his 1824 trip to the Columbia, Simpson had decided to alter the supply and communication route. The Beaver River route was abandoned. Simpson ordered Rowand to build a road from Edmonton House on the North Saskatchewan to Fort Assiniboine on the Athabasca. The road was completed in the spring of 1825. Not only was this route faster and more reliable, but it allowed the combining of the Columbia, Lesser Slave Lake and Saskatchewan brigades, which decreased costs and increased security on the trip up and down the North Saskatchewan River. From 1825, virtually every traveller of note journeying across the northern half of the continent passed through Edmonton House, usually in conjunction with a Hudson's Bay Company brigade or at least with Hudson's Bay Company support of some kind. From that year to the abandonment of the transmountain brigade system in the early 1850s, the North Saskatchewan-Athabasca river route to the Athabasca and Yellowhead passes was the most frequented of any British North American transcontinental fur trade thoroughfare, surpassed only in length of use, but certainly not in importance, by the Peace River route to New Caledonia.⁷⁴ As a sign of its new strategic importance, by 1826 not only had the Saskatchewan District at first taken over two of the Lesser Slave Lake District's posts on this transcontinental route, Fort Assiniboine and Jasper House, but it had absorbed that entire district itself.⁷⁵

Piikani Reaction

Needless to say, the Piikani were not pleased with the abandonment of Rocky Mountain House in the spring of 1823. That fall some of them arrived to trade at Edmonton House,

⁷⁴ Smyth, "The Yellowhead Pass."

⁷⁵ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 20 August 1826, item 46, p. 42, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/12, reel 3M5, HBCA.

though the vast majority were then far to the south on the upper reaches of the Missouri. They were unequivocal in their reaction to the closure of their favourite post when they visited Rowand. He wrote:

They regret exceedingly that the Mountain House is abandoned, as the distance from their general hunting grounds, is too great to come this length, as well as being afraid to fall in with the Stone [Assiniboine] Indians, on their way hither; whereas at the Mountain, they laid quite secure from fear of their Enemies, as well as all other inconveniences, which they must experience coming to this place_ They also say, that we have a house for the Crees, a house for the Stone Indians, a house for the Blackfeet, Sussees [Sarcee], Blood & Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians, and none for those who give us the most Beaver, meaning themselves_ so that we must despise them;- therefore to banish their fear & then them, that we put more confidence in them, than in any of the other nations, three men are to start along with them to their Camp, in order to ascertain what quantity of Beaver they may have; to endeavour to bring them hither; to collect some information respecting that part of their Country, which is represented as abounding in many valuable fur bearing animals; and to learn what the Americans may be doing in that Quarter, from whom as the Peegans suppose, we may have cause to expect some opposition.⁷⁶

Rowand sent the three men with the Piikani, both to assess the reports of abundant beaver on the Missouri and on the eastern flank of the Rockies and to try to entice these valuable customers back to Edmonton House. After the disappointment of the Bow River Expedition, he was understandably dubious of such First Nations claims of untapped fur riches.⁷⁷ One of these three men was Hugh Monroe, who was also sent to learn the Blackfoot language. He eventually quit the fur trade and was adopted into the Piikani nation.⁷⁸ Rowand's concern about learning more of American activities on the Missouri

⁷⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 30 November 1823, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 27 November and 1 December 1823.

⁷⁸ Monroe's early life among the Piikani is described in detail in two books by James Willard Schultz, *Rising Wolf, the White Blackfoot: Hugh Monroe's Story of His First Year on the Plains* (London, 1920), and, *Red Crow's Brother; Hugh Monroe's Story of His Second Year on the Plains* (Boston, 1927). Monroe had entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and started his career in the Saskatchewan District in 1815. Edmonton House account book, 1815-1816, no. 43, fos. 28d.-30, B.60/d/8, reel 1M467, HBCA. See also Warren L. Hanna, "Hugh Monroe, the White Blackfoot," *The Piegan Storyteller*, 12, nos. 2-4 (April, July, October 1987).

River and west of the Rockies was a harbinger of more troubled times ahead for the company, when the American presence would become a very real threat to the lucrative trade of the Niitsitapi and the Gros Ventre. Earlier in the fall of 1823, many Kainai had arrived at Edmonton House with furs stolen from the Missouri Fur Company (see Chapter Five).⁷⁹

The assertion by the Piikani to Rowand that they were the most productive beaver suppliers of the district was not an exaggeration. By the 1820s, Piikani fur gathering habits had changed. In Alexander Henry's time at Rocky Mountain House (1810-1811), only one small band of Piikani, of only 30 to 40 tents, was reported to be beaver hunters.⁸⁰ By 1820, more Piikani were actively engaged in the beaver trade at Acton House and Rocky Mountain House.⁸¹ By the mid-1820s, trapping beaver had apparently become a widespread activity throughout much of that nation.

As noted in Chapter Three, the Niitsitapi peoples had a number of long-held cultural beliefs concerning the killing of beaver. There were taboos against killing beaver and rewards for not doing so. However, by the 1820s, political/military necessity would seem to have overcome many of the religious and environmental constraints which had kept the Piikani from killing beaver. The five allied tribes were then surrounded by well-armed First Nations peoples with whom they were often at war. National survival required maintaining one's position in this 19th-century arms race. The Piikani, of the five, were not only the most responsive to this need, but the most successful in the enforced transition to becoming beaver suppliers to Euroamerican traders. They also had

⁷⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 23 October 1823, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA. See also Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 August 1824, item 55, fos. 46d.-7d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/87, reel 3M43, HBCA.

⁸⁰ Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, p. 536.

⁸¹ Edmonton House post journal, 15 March 1820, B.60/a/18, reel 1M49, HBCA.

the best opportunity to make this successful and rewarding transition, for their territory abounded with beaver, on the upper reaches of the Missouri, and in the Rockies. Circumstances, created by both the introduction of the gun and the devaluation of the principal, traditional Niitsitapi trade item, the wolf pelt, were thus by the 1820s threatening the very survival of these three peoples and their two perennial allies. As described in some detail in the preceding chapter, the wolf pelt, the staple fur of the trade of the Niitsitapi peoples, and of the Gros Ventre, had gradually, and then suddenly, been reduced in value by the Hudson's Bay Company, almost to the point of worthlessness. And buffalo robes, though taken in trade, had not yet become a high-demand item. In the mid-1810s on the Saskatchewan, the Hudson's Bay Company took few robes in trade, while the North West Company norm was apparently under 1,000 per year.⁸² These five peoples were especially vulnerable after the catastrophic losses of the 1819-1820 measles epidemic, which reportedly killed one-third of the Piikani, the Kainai and the Gros Ventre, and undoubtedly took its toll as well on the Siksika and Sarcee.⁸³ This altered situation must first have caused a troubling dilemma, and then did definitely result in a significant disruption, at least temporarily, to the way of life of the Niitsitapi, especially the Piikani, who were forced to hold in abeyance many of their religious beliefs and other cultural values to guarantee self-preservation, through the large-scale killing of beaver.

To the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, their allies and their enemies, European firearms, and of course powder and ammunition, were among the most sought-after articles offered by Euroamerican traders. As described earlier in this thesis, guns had

⁸² Edmonton House district report, James Bird, 15 August 1815, fo. 5, B.60/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA. Bird wrote, "The Canadians procure the same kind of Furs in this District that we do with the addition of five, to nine, hundred Buffalo robes which they purchase for ½ lb Tobacco each and sell in Montreal for twenty five to thirty Shillings."

⁸³ Edmonton House post journal, 15 March 1820, B.60/a/18, reel 1M49, HBCA.

been introduced as trade items virtually as soon as the Hudson's Bay Company had established itself on the shores of Hudson Bay. The Euroamerican traders' original expectations for their use, however, did not coincide with the actual situation. In 1718, Henry Kelsey, the officer in charge at York Factory, lectured visiting First Nations people against making war on their neighbours, concluding "that we did not bring Powder Guns & other necessities to destroy mankind but to kill food for them & their family."⁸⁴

However, by the end of the century the Euroamericans on the northern Plains and in the woodlands were fully aware of the primary use of their traded guns once in Aboriginal hands. While travelling with the Piikani in the early 1790s, Peter Fidler wrote, "The Principal part of what Ammunition these Indians trade are for War - & as a principal article to barter with other Nations they are at peace with for Horses."⁸⁵ On the Plains, traditional weapons, such as the bow and arrow, were used in hunting for decades after the introduction of the gun; its almost exclusive purpose was for warfare.⁸⁶

Whatever *naïveté* might initially have existed among Euroamerican traders had long since vanished by the end of the 18th century. They knew the use to which their guns were put, and the importance which their First Nations customers placed on the acquisition of firearms. Fur trade posts became stop-off points on the way to war. In 1820 at Carlton House, the journalist recorded that "108 Crees arrived they are on a war excursion they brought about 40 Moose Skins to trade ammunition as they passed the

⁸⁴ York Factory post journal, 1 August 1718, B.239/a/4, reel 1M154, HBCA.

⁸⁵ Peter Fidler, "Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains, in 1792 & 3," 25 December 1792, E.3/2, reel 4M4, HBCA.

⁸⁶ For instance, Alexander Henry noted that the Mandan treated guns and ammunition as did the Piikani. European firearms were reserved for warfare, while traditional weapons were retained for the hunt. Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 1, 20 July 1806 entry, p. 222.

House.”⁸⁷ Seven years later, when the Edmonton House supply of trade guns had been exhausted by the beginning of November, Rowand described the lost trade to the company and the dejection of one of its potential Sarcee customers, who “produces his furs and wants a Gun for them which was the sole object of his labour.”⁸⁸

Except for Hugh Monroe, the men whom Rowand had sent with the Piikani in the fall of 1823 returned to Edmonton House in late April 1824, unsuccessful in their attempts to lure the Piikani back to the North Saskatchewan. Rowand reported, “Their principal objections to coming hither, were; the distance being so great and the plains so completely burnt that they could find no feeding for themselves or horses__ They had others, such as, that we had despised them, otherwise, their House at the Mountain, would not have been abandoned last Spring and if so, that they could do without us.”⁸⁹

Rowand’s men also reported that the Piikani were trading west of the Rockies at the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Flathead Post.⁹⁰ Because of the still-poor company findings about a plenitude of beaver in Piikani territory, Rowand decided against sending a large number of freemen there to hunt and trap, as he had once contemplated doing.⁹¹

Upon his return with the brigade in the early fall of 1824, Rowand not only heard of the successful beaver hunts of the Piikani on “the upper branches of the Missouri,” but also that they had no intention of bringing their furs to Edmonton House. On

⁸⁷ Carlton House post journal, 24 August 1820, B.27/a/10, reel 1M19, HBCA

⁸⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 2 November 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

⁸⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 21 April 1824, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

⁹⁰ Ibid. McKay, one the men sent to the Piikani, told Rowand that they were trading with Finan McDonald west of the Rockies. McDonald was posted that season at Flathead House. See Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council*, 53n. Rowand later reported that the Piikani had traded about 1,000 beaver pelts at Flathead Post. See Edmonton House district report, 1823-1824, fo. 2d., B.60/e/6, reel 1M777, HBCA.

⁹¹ Edmonton House post journal, 21 April 1824, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

6 November, Rowand sent the clerk, Henry Fisher, an interpreter and two men to the Piikani to attempt to bring them back to the North Saskatchewan. Fisher travelled across the Battle, Red Deer, Bow and Belly rivers, finally reaching the principal Piikani camp on the Marias River, on 6 December. The Piikani refused then to return to Edmonton House on several grounds: the distance being too great; the buffalo being too scarce for such a large number of them; and, the fear of encountering their enemies at that post. He received the same response at the two other Piikani camps which he soon after visited. However, the Piikani promised to accompany him to Edmonton House in the spring, if Fisher wintered with them. Perhaps his staying with them would be a sign of the company's professed commitment and esteem. Perhaps the Piikani thought that Fisher's accompanying them to Edmonton House would in some manner assure their safety. Perhaps his wintering with them and their accompanying him to Edmonton House would be mutual expressions of friendship. Or perhaps this Piikani request was part of a longer-term strategy designed eventually to gain them a post closer to their home territory. Fisher did spend the winter with them, and a large party of Piikani accompanied him to Edmonton House and traded 1,500 to 2,000 beaver with Rowand at the end of March 1825. Rowand reported on the visit, and on his subsequent actions and expectations:

The Peigans who are about 2400 men in number, are unquestionably the best Beaver hunters attached to this District seem to think themselves neglected, ever since our people have been withdrawn from the Rocky Mountain, and on that account did not visit Edmonton for some time past - the motives that led to such a step were, that the Peigans might be induced to come with their hunts to the latter place, therefore it was very justly considered as incurring unnecessary expences to keep up two Establishments, when one might answer every useful purpose_ Now they urge stronger than ever the necessity of having that place re-established, as a tract of Country which lies between their Lands and the Snake [Shoshone] and Flat Head Indians, which they are at times in the habit of frequenting, they represent to be abounding in Beaver_ that there is Beaver in that part of the country cannot be denied, as they have brought the best part of their hunts from thence, but that they exist in such numbers as represented may very much be doubted._ From my own intimate knowledge of the Plain Indians having had dealings with them for upwards of twenty years, I have found them frequently in the habit of exaggerating much in their reports, and making speculations to suit their own convenience, therefore I received this information with some caution,

but determined to prevail upon them to go thither this Summer so as to be enabled to send along with them under their protection, a party of the best Beaver hunters among our Freeman, and told the Peigans that I would altogether be guided in regard to the re-establishment of the Rocky Mountain House, by the hunts they might bring from thence and the report the Freeman would make of that Country; I therefore selected ten of our most active industrious and enterprising Freeman and recommended them to the particular care and protection of the Peigan chief who from his attachment to myself, and the whites in general, which he has evinced on several occasions, and from the influence I have the vanity to think I possess over him, will afford them every assistance and facility to obtain the object of their search, and shew them all the kindness and attention in his power. Having accordingly supplied both parties in some necessaries, they took their departure early in Spring well pleased and in high spirits, and barring disappointments from accidents which are neither to be foreseen nor prevented, I am confident they will do something before their return, which by the arrangements I have made with them, will not happen until Spring 1826_ and if their hunts and the report they may then make, should correspond to confirm the opinion they now have led us to entertain of that tract of country, I would in that case recommend indulging them with a Post at the Rocky Mountain, as I think by so doing the increase in the returns would sufficiently overbalance the additional expences incurred thereby to justify re-establishing it.⁹²

Intertribal Relations and the Company's Trade

As already noted, all Euroamerican traders sincerely wished to be perceived as neutrals, or even as peacemakers, in any disputes among their First Nations customers. This was for the most part not out of any sense of altruism or humanitarianism, but for the traders' self-preservation and enrichment. Intertribal strife not only hurt the trade, for it distracted or prevented First Nations peoples from concentrating efforts on fur and provision gathering, but the volatility of such violent confrontations could endanger the Euroamericans' own lives. As noted in Chapter Two, from at least the time of Henry

⁹² This long quotation and the earlier information concerning Rowand's and Fisher's Piikani-related activities are all taken from Rowand's Edmonton House district report, 14 May 1825, fos. 1d.-3d., B.60/e/8, reel 1M777, HBCA. The name of this Piikani chief is not given in the district report and, unfortunately, there is no surviving Edmonton House post journal for the 1825-1826 season. The identity of this friendly and accommodating Piikani leader remains unknown. It may very well have been Iron Shirt, with whom Rowand had previously entrusted men (see below).

Kelsey's inland journey from York Factory in the early 1690s, Euroamerican traders preached peace and harmony to all the Plains and woodland peoples.⁹³

Fur trade posts, besides serving as arsenals, often also provided the neutral ground where truces or long-lasting peace agreements could be negotiated between warring First Nations peoples. As already noted at length in Chapter Three, James Bird summed up the position generally held by all Euroamerican traders, whether British, Canadian or American. He wrote in 1807 that his First Nations customers should "consider us as a party unconcerned, Friends to all, sorry for their dissensions and at all times willing to do everything in our power to compose them."⁹⁴ Unfortunately for the fur trade companies, these First Nations peoples were not always so understanding as to consider them "a party unconcerned," especially when these companies were trading firearms to their enemies. However, despite the repeated protestations that peace was their ideal, these Euroamericans apparently had no qualms about profiting in the role of "arms dealers" to warring First Nations peoples, even when they well knew the use to which their arms would be put.

But not everything was as black and white as the Euroamericans might paint it in their ideal world order; intertribal peace did not always mean good times for the fur trade companies. As discussed in earlier chapters, peace to these First Nations was not merely the absence of war, but the establishment of ongoing, friendly relations. In 1830, during a period of prolonged peace between the Cree and the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, John Work, the officer in charge of Fort Colvile, complained that too much of a good thing was hurting the trade at the neighbouring Kootenay House:

⁹³ Journal entries of 6 and 12 September 1791, in Kelsey, *The Kelsey Papers* (1994), 10-1.

⁹⁴ Bird letter to John Peter Pruden, in the Edmonton House post journal, 26 January 1807 journal entry, B.60/a/6, reel 1M49, HBCA.

The decline in the trade of this post for the last two years may be chiefly attributed to the intercourse of the Natives with the Crees and Piegans from the East side of the Mountains So much of their time is occupied attending to meetings negotiating peace, bartering &^c that sufficient is not left to attend to their hunting in the proper season. Beaver are still numerous in their country.⁹⁵

Another effect of intertribal peace was that usually warring peoples would, during these respites, engage in trade among themselves in order to cement their alliances, often to the detriment of the interests of the fur trade companies. At Edmonton House in the spring of 1827, Rowand wrote of this intertribal commerce, which had been established for centuries, if not millennia, before the arrival of Europeans, as if it were some sort of illicit, underground economy. He was then short of provisions and he wanted to trade every ounce that he could from visiting Kainai, but he was unable to stop, as he put it, the “traffic” of these foodstuffs between the Kainai and the Cree.⁹⁶

Intertribal peace also saw First Nations peoples travel more freely and more frequently outside their usual territory, thanks to the removal of the threat to their safety. This, too, did not always bode well for the companies. At Edmonton House, Assiniboine and Cree visitors from the area around Carlton House were always viewed with suspicion. They were seen as potential thieves of company horses or as parties out to pillage the Niitsitapi or their allies. Likewise, any of the five allied tribes who visited the area near Carlton House was feared as a potential threat to the safety of the company and of its local customers. In March 1828, Rowand ordered the securing of Edmonton House’s horses because Assiniboine thieves “were in the vicinity owing in a great measure to the Peace made with the Blackfeet.”⁹⁷ At times company officers must have felt that they just could not win.

⁹⁵ Fort Colville district report, April 1830, fo. 6d., B.45/e/3, reel 1M777, HBCA.

⁹⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 2 April 1827, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

⁹⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 2 March 1828, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

Unusual measures were occasionally adopted to try to address the problem of perceived, or real, threats to company posts. At Carlton House the Niitsitapi and their allies were considered a definite threat when in the vicinity. Barring unusual circumstances, these same peoples were not viewed in like manner by the company's men on the upper North Saskatchewan, where the five tribes regularly came to trade. However, Carlton House supplied the Cree and the Assiniboine, enemies of the tribes of the Blackfoot alliance. In an effort to get into the good graces of these five peoples, during the 1824-1825 season the officer in charge at Carlton House, John Stuart, purchased nine captive Siksika women and children from the Cree; he planned to return them to their families. Stuart said that "it was the first experiment of the Kind I believe we tried in this quarter and no one can form an idea of what effect it may have."⁹⁸ Short- and long-term positive results were achieved by this purchasing of Siksika captives, or slaves, and the returning of them to their families. A month afterwards, Siksika "moderation" when encountering Carlton House men away from the post was attributed to Stuart's recent action.⁹⁹ Rowand, the district head, approved of Stuart's purchase of the Siksika captives.¹⁰⁰ Stuart apparently repeated this practice the next season.¹⁰¹ However, under the heading of "no good act shall go unpunished," another result of this Hudson's Bay Company action was that the Assiniboine apparently took more Niitsitapi

⁹⁸ Carlton House post journal, 7 November 1824, B.27/a/14, reel 1M19, HBCA. In this same entry, Stuart wrote that the Siksika and their allies "at present...equally exasperated against the whites in this quarter as they are against their enemies the Stone [Assiniboine] Indians and Crees_ and it was with a view of conciliating their minds and rendering them less hostile that these women and Children were purchased and sent back." See also other entries in this journal dated 26, 28 and 29 October 1824.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 20 December 1824.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5 January 1825.

¹⁰¹ Edmonton House post journal, 13 February 1827, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

women and children as prisoners, in the expectation, according to Stuart, of future company humanitarianism and largesse.¹⁰² In the long run, according to my reading of surviving Carlton House post journals, relations did seem to improve between the Hudson's Bay Company people at Carlton House and the Niitsitapi.¹⁰³ The one, rather large exception to this new civility between the company at Carlton House and the Niitsitapi occurred during the summer of 1827, when a Kainai band stole a large amount of goods from the understaffed post. Apparently, according to Rowand, the initial intent had been to destroy Carlton House. When the "Bull's Back Fat," the leader of the band and one of the most prominent, if not the most prominent, Kainai chiefs, was later in at Edmonton House, Rowand reprimanded him for the behaviour of his young men, whom, the chief claimed, he could not control the past summer.¹⁰⁴ See Chapter Five for more on this influential Kainai leader. The very next summer, however, the Bull's Back Fat was warmly greeted at Carlton House when he brought his band there, the first time, the post

¹⁰² Carlton House post journal, 10 May 1825, B.27/a/14, reel 1M19, HBCA. Stuart did not report increased raiding or warfare on the part of the Assiniboine, just a changed practice with respect to their captives. According to Stuart, as a direct result of his purchasing of Siksika slaves from the Cree the previous fall, the Assiniboine were keeping more women and children as prisoners, as opposed simply to killing them. This increase in captive taking was a definite change from the norm. In 1820, John Franklin described practices in warfare between the Niitsitapi and Cree; presumably these would be equally applicable to Niitsitapi-Assiniboine warfare. He wrote, "The prisoners of either sex are seldom spared, but slain on the spot with wanton cruelty." Franklin, *Narrative of a Journey*, 31 January to 5 February 1820 journal entry, p. 86.

¹⁰³ Carlton House journals have survived for the period covered by this chapter, 1821-1831, for the following seasons: 1820-1821, 1821-1822, 1822-1823, 1823-1824, 1824-1825, 1826-1827, 1827-1828, 1828-1829 and 1829-1830. See B.27/a/10-18, reel 1M19, HBCA.

¹⁰⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 15 and 21 October 1827, and 27 February 1828, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

journalist recorded, that "I have known of any of these Indians come on a Trade to Carlton."¹⁰⁵

Rowand's 1825 recommendation of "indulging" his "best Beaver hunters" with the reopening of Rocky Mountain House was a positive sign in Piikani-company relations. However, the 1820s were stressful times for the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance in their wider world. Almost continuous warfare existed with their First Nations neighbours on three flanks: the Cree and Assiniboine on the east; the Crow to the south; and, the Kootenay, Flathead, Shoshone and Nez Perce [*Ni Mii Pu*] in the west.¹⁰⁶ And while the association of the Piikani, Siksika, Kainai, Sarcee and Gros Ventre remained stable throughout this period, new alliances were being forged among their enemies. In 1823, the Cree made peace with the Kootenay and subsequently not only trapped in Kootenay territory but also went there to trade guns for horses.¹⁰⁷ The Cree also concluded an accord with the Crow.¹⁰⁸ In attempts to alleviate pressure on one side or another, usually in order to concentrate their offensive or defensive military efforts in the opposite direction, the tribes of the Blackfoot alliance also at least temporarily sought peace and friendly trade relations with their often-times adversaries. In 1825, they made peace with the Flathead, Nez Perce and Kootenay, and even traded their furs to the Kootenay in 1830-1831. In 1828, peace was arranged between the five allied tribes and

¹⁰⁵ Carlton House post journal, 17 August 1828, B.27/a/17, reel 1M19, HBCA. The amicable visit was facilitated by the recent peace reached between the Niitsitapi, and the Cree and Assiniboine.

¹⁰⁶ For a brief summary of the changing relations between the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance and their neighbours in this period, see Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 87-92.

¹⁰⁷ See Edmonton House post journals: 5 December 1823 and 20 April 1824, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49; 7 November 1826, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50; and, 1 October 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA. See also Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 8 January 1830, fos. 54-8, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/123, reel 3M53, HBCA.

¹⁰⁸ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 88-9.

the Cree and Assiniboine. This exceptional peace lasted almost without incident for four years. Not only were they not at war with each other at this time, but the Cree even traded guns to the Niitsitapi for horses, and, they went on joint military outings against then-mutual foes.¹⁰⁹ However, these unusual times of peace were fragile at best. And they were uneasy, because, despite the friendly intercourse, there remained, as one company officer put it, the “dread of each other,” born of a history of mistrust and violence.¹¹⁰ When these temporary and fragile periods of peace were not in effect, fatalities in intertribal conflicts, after the advent of the gun, could be high. In 1824, a particularly bad year, in separate battles with the Cree and Assiniboine, and with the Crow, two of the Niitsitapi peoples, the Kainai and the Siksika, suffered total losses of some 440 people, delivering them, as Rowand wrote, “a blow of which they are not likely to recover for some time to come.”¹¹¹

Open warfare, horse-raiding parties and acts of violence among the First Nations inhabitants of the Saskatchewan District were so commonplace that it would literally take

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 88-91; Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 8 January 1830, fos. 54-8, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/123, reel 3M53, and, Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 18 July 1831, item 59, fos. 31-3d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/98, reel 3M45, HBCA. It is unclear from the Brandon House reference noted below whether the Cree traded their guns specifically to the Siksika or to unspecified Niitsitapi; the entry simply reads to the “Blackfeet,” which at that post’s distance from the Blackfoot-speaking peoples could mean either Siksika or Niitsitapi. This particular Cree group, from the Moose Hills, apparently traded so many of their guns that Brandon House could not replenish their supply. See Brandon House post journal, 8 November 1829, B.22/a/23, reel 1M17, HBCA. An example of joint military activity occurred in 1831, when Cree from the Beaver Hills area accompanied Siksika on an expedition against the Crow. See Fort Pitt post journal, 14 April 1831, B.165/a/1, reel 1M119, HBCA.

¹¹⁰ Fort Pitt post journal, 6 and 9 June 1830, B.165/a/1, reel 1M119, HBCA. The post journalist was here referring to the “dread” that the Cree and the tribes of the Blackfoot alliance had for each other. Two years of peace could not then mask completely the norm of decades or more of hostilities.

¹¹¹ Edmonton House district report, 14 May 1825, fols 1-1d., B.60/e/8, 1M777, HBCA.

pages and pages merely to list them in point form for the ten years covered by this chapter. Upon his arrival at Edmonton House in early September 1826, Rowand wrote that the provision trade was lower than expected during his absence, which “arises principally from the prosecution of war which is in the present times appears to have become their summer vocation.”¹¹² A year earlier, when reporting on ongoing warfare between the Niitsitapi and the Cree, he stated, “The word with them is still war & war, a thing so Common now that it is not worth mentioning.”¹¹³ While the record of intertribal strife in the Saskatchewan is certainly worth “mentioning,” space requirements here preclude even an outline of a military chronology of the Niitsitapi and their allies for this period.

The Role of Freemen in Company Relations with the Niitsitapi

Rowand directed and relied on several freemen in the district, both to report on and to influence the activities of the Piikani. These freemen, virtually always ex-company servants and often also the English or French Métis offspring of fur trade marriages, were officially unattached to the company and did not in this period engage in any large-scale trade with the First Nations peoples of the Saskatchewan; they simply chose to hunt and trap individually or in small groups, and, like the members of the various tribes with whom they interacted, to trade their furs at local company posts. The earliest record, at least the earliest known to this author, of such freemen on the Saskatchewan was of two Canadians who brought in their furs to trade at Manchester House in 1789.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Edmonton House post journal, 4 September 1826, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹¹³ Edmonton House post journal, 9 October 1825, B.60/a/23, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹¹⁴ Manchester House post journal, 10 April 1789, B.121/a/3, reel 1M73, HBCA.

Gradually the number of men increased who chose the more independent life of the freeman to the much more restricted and regimented life of employment at a fur trade company post. Immediately following the 1821 merger, the ranks of freemen swelled enormously with the reduction in company manpower requirements brought about by the end of competition and the duplication of posts. Sometimes these Saskatchewan freemen were considered a nuisance or a bad influence on the company's First Nations customers, or even a destructive force on the district's resources.¹¹⁵ At other times freemen were recognized as a definite benefit to the company's Saskatchewan operations, for the furs that they themselves contributed, for the influence that some could wield among particular tribes and for the intelligence which they gathered in their travels. Many freemen were viewed as much better fur suppliers than any of the company's First Nations customers. After two freemen brought their furs to Edmonton House, the journalist recorded that "a trifling present would be much better bestowed here than to a number of Indians who collectively bring no more than one such individual _ encouragement must be given to freemen particularly in these parts if not they will become as Indians and become as Indolent and indifferent."¹¹⁶

By the mid-1820s, as noted earlier, many of the newly-created, post-merger Saskatchewan freemen chose to settle in Red River and on the lower Columbia. However, many others chose to stay in the district. Most of those who remained kept well clear of Niitsitapi territory; most lived on or north of the North Saskatchewan River. Of the few freemen who ventured to travel and live among the Niitsitapi, there were three

¹¹⁵ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 18 July 1831, item 59, fos. 32d.-3, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/98, reel 3M45, HBCA. Here Simpson was complaining of the destruction and disruption caused by "a large band of Freemen, say halfbreed families connected by intermarriages with the Indians in this neighbourhood [the Saskatchewan District]."

¹¹⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 30 December 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

who stood out: James “Jimmy Jock” Bird, the English Métis son of Chief Factor James Bird; Hugh Monroe, a Canadian who had left Hudson’s Bay Company service in the mid-1820s; and Jacques Berger, another Canadian and ex-Nor’wester, who had become a freeman in 1822. They all had established, or would establish, kinship ties with the Niitsitapi. Rowand used these three men, and several other freemen as well, in his attempts to maximize the beaver returns of the Piikani. The exact relationship that these men had with Rowand and with the Hudson’s Bay Company is not now always clear. In only one documented instance was any one of these men actually, directly paid while not under contract to the company. “Jimmy Jock” Bird received £20 in 1828-1829, “For Services rendered the C^y in the Plains.”¹¹⁷ Yet many of these freemen seemed to follow Rowand’s directions, if not orders, in determining where they hunted or trapped or with which tribes or bands they travelled and lived. In all likelihood, these “company” freemen derived such benefits as outright presents and favourable terms of trade on both their personal outfits and their returns.¹¹⁸

Jacques Berger and other freemen had played an integral part in the Bow River Expedition of 1822-1823, both as fur trappers and as provision suppliers. The following season Rowand started to use a limited number of these men in a different role, immediately among the Niitsitapi peoples, in particular the Piikani and the Siksika, with whom many of these freemen were already familiar or to whom they may already have been related by marriage. In the fall of 1823, Rowand sent three engaged servants,

¹¹⁷ Edmonton House account book, 1828-1829, fos. 4d.-5, B.60/d/27, reel 1M469, HBCA.

¹¹⁸ See Simpson to Governor, York Factory, 10 August 1832, item 67, fo. 43, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/99, reel 3M45, HBCA. Simpson here described the example of “Jimmy Jock” Bird, who received presents and “liberal payment for any skins he brought.” But Simpson would appear to have been incorrect when he stated that Bird was paid a “salary of £20” (my emphasis). This misunderstanding over compensation caused Bird’s sudden jump to the Americans in 1831. See Chapter Six.

including Hugh Monroe, then still apparently under contract to the company,¹¹⁹ and two freemen, Morrice Piccard and Louis Brunais, under the protection of the Piikani chief, Iron Shirt, to travel with the Piikani to the Missouri and the Rockies. According to the Edmonton House journal, these freemen were: to hunt beaver themselves; to report on the beaver resources of the country which they visited; and, “to learn what the Americans may be doing in that Quarter.”¹²⁰ In the spring of 1824, Rowand thought of getting some freemen to go with the Niitsitapi to work beaver, but, after the return of two of his engaged servants from the Piikani with discouraging reports of beaver populations, he decided against sending a large party of freemen there to hunt.¹²¹ Perhaps, inadvertently, he had managed to avoid alienating the Piikani by this decision not to send a large force of freemen to hunt on Piikani lands, a decision based solely on the likelihood of poor beaver returns. That autumn saw more freemen engaged in even more extensive reconnoitering of the territory of the Piikani, particularly, according to Rowand, the area “between their Lands and the Snake [Shoshone] and Flat Head Indians,” purported to abound with beaver. Rowand also told the Piikani, as cited earlier, that he “would altogether be guided in regard to the reestablishment of the Rocky Mountain House, by the hunts they might bring from thence, and the report the Freemen might make of that

¹¹⁹ In the fall of 1823, Rowand referred to Monroe as a company servant, but there is some contradictory evidence in the HBCA. Monroe is listed as a company servant in an 1822-1823 Edmonton House account book, but he does not appear in the list of servants in the 1823-1824 account book. See Edmonton House account books: 1822-1823, fos. 43d.-4, B.60/d/12, and, 1823-1824, fos. 2d.-5, B.60/d/15, reel 1M468, HBCA. See also Edmonton House post journal, 27 November and 1 December 1823, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹²⁰ Edmonton House post journal, 27, 28 and 30 November and 1 December 1823, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹²¹ Ibid., 9 and 21 April 1824.

country.”¹²² It was three of these freemen, including Bird and Monroe, whom Peter Skene Ogden encountered with a large party of Kainai and Piikani in June 1825, west of the height of land. In September 1825 Rowand reported that he still had “with the Piegans three Canadians and one Iroquois & one half Breed.”¹²³ Bird, Monroe and Morrice Piccard were three of these five men. Piccard, the Iroquois, returned to Edmonton House in mid-October 1825, having been with the Piikani since the previous March. He had already visited the as-yet-unopened Rocky Mountain House with a small party of Piikani, who were following closely behind him on the way to Edmonton House.¹²⁴

Niitsitapi Reaction to the Snake Country Expeditions (and to American Trappers)

Rivalry and conflicts among First Nations peoples were not all that disrupted the life of the five allied tribes in the 1820s. Uninvited Missouri River fur trappers out of St. Louis were quickly driven out of the Three Forks region of the upper Missouri River by the Kainai in 1822-1823 (see above and next chapter). Their compatriots, however, the mountain trappers, were not so easily eliminated. These “mountain men” entered the western and southern fringes of the country of the Niitsitapi and the Gros Ventre via the Platte River, a tributary of the Missouri. They were a constant irritant to the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance and the chief source of continued Niitsitapi anti-Americanism into the 1830s. The usual Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre response upon encountering these American “mountain men” was to kill them (see next chapter).

¹²² Edmonton House district report, 14 May 1825, fos. 2d. and 3, B.60/e/8, reel 1M777, HBCA.

¹²³ Edmonton House post journal, 19 September 1825, B.60/a/23, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 and 21 October 1825.

The Hudson's Bay Company's own activities west of the Rockies also provoked the ire of the Niitsitapi and their allies. In 1818, the North West Company had instituted its Snake Country expeditions west of the Rocky Mountains and south of the 49th parallel, in territory which that same year both Great Britain and the United States had declared to be open to joint occupation. In 1823, the Hudson's Bay Company had re-introduced these annual expeditions, with its first large-scale endeavour occurring in 1824 under Peter Skene Ogden.¹²⁵ Somewhat of a misnomer, the Snake Country expeditions, though generally commencing in the Snake River drainage basin, covered a vast area which included parts of present-day Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming. Ogden led six separate large-scale expeditions from 1824 to 1830; they were comprised both of company servants and free trappers. Governor Simpson spelled out in clear terms the purpose of this enterprise: "If properly managed no question exists that it would yield handsome profits as we have convincing proof that the country is a rich preserve of Beaver and which for political reasons we should endeavour to destroy as fast as possible."¹²⁶ A striking anomaly to normal company policy, the Snake Country expeditions were designed to reap huge short-term profits and to dissuade Americans from trapping extensively in the northern part of this disputed territory, the Oregon Territory, which most observers felt would eventually become the exclusive possession of

¹²⁵ Peter Skene Ogden, *Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Country Journals, 1824-25 and 1825-26*, ed. Edwin Ernest Rich (London, 1950); Ogden, *Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Country Journal, 1826-27*, ed. K.G. Davies (London, 1961); Ogden, *Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Country Journals, 1827-28 and 1828-29*, ed. Glyndwr Williams (London, 1971); and, John Work, *The Snake Country Expedition of 1830-1831: John Work's Field Journal*, ed. Francis D. Haines, Jr. (Norman, 1971). See also Gloria Griffen Cline, *Peter Skene Ogden and the Hudson's Bay Company* (Norman, 1974), and, Glyndwr Williams, "Peter Skene Ogden," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII, 1851 to 1860* (Toronto, 1985), 660-3.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Williams, "Ogden," 661.

the United States. This unprecedented and unique Hudson's Bay Company policy has aptly been called a "scorched stream policy."¹²⁷

The Snake River expeditions clearly demonstrated, at least in these undertakings, the hypocrisy of the company, and its apparent total lack of concern for the welfare of the First Nations peoples so directly affected by this narrow-minded, profit-driven policy. In trying to make the territory unattractive to Americans and to delay the inevitable transfer of it to the United States, the Hudson's Bay Company set out to deplete utterly its fur resources, the resources upon which the First Nations peoples of this vast region depended. As early as March 1825, one company officer reported on the success of this policy. "Since the Flatheads have become the general rendezvous for the Snake trappers, their lands have been generally ruined."¹²⁸ By 1830, the company had managed to "ruin" a tremendous area in the disputed territory west of the continental divide.¹²⁹ Apparently it was just fine for the Hudson's Bay Company to destroy these fur resources, but company officers thought that the First Nations peoples of the territory should be warned of the danger of allowing Americans to do likewise. In 1830, Chief Trader Francis Heron, then in charge of Fort Colville, wrote, "The Indians ought to be made to understand the impolicy of allowing American trappers to hunt on their lands."¹³⁰ It boggles the mind.

These Hudson's Bay Company trading and trapping expeditions conflicted with Niitsitapi interests in many ways: in the arming of their transmountain enemies; in the incursions of the free trappers onto lands that the Niitsitapi considered their own; and, in

¹²⁷ David E. Miller and David H. Miller, in introduction to Ogden, *Journals, 1827-28 and 1828-29*, xiv.

¹²⁸ Flathead Post district report, Alexander Ross, 10 March 1825, fo. 1, B.69/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA.

¹²⁹ Miller and Miller, in introduction to Ogden, *Journals, 1827-28 and 1828-29*, xxxv.

¹³⁰ Fort Colville post journal, 2 November 1830, B.45/a/1, reel 1M37, HBCA.

the depletion of the fur resources, especially beaver, which the Piikani in particular were putting to good use in the trade on the Saskatchewan. While the Snake River expeditions were virtually exclusively carried out west of the height of land of the Rockies, supposedly outside of Niitsitapi territory, more and more from the 1820s the Piikani and Kainai were to be found spending considerable time across the mountains. For decades the Niitsitapi had raided west of the Rockies, but now they hunted and trapped there, and even wintered there, in limited numbers.¹³¹

The initial Hudson's Bay Company Snake Country expedition was led by Finan McDonald, in 1823. That winter the expedition lost six men, killed by the Niitsitapi in present-day eastern Idaho.¹³² White trappers, whether American or British were *persona non grata* to the Niitsitapi. They were seen as intrusive destroyers of the Niitsitapi's natural resources. In June 1825, Ogden encountered about 150 Piikani and Kainai west of the Rockies, accompanied by "three Fort des Prairies Freeman," James "Jimmy Jock" Bird, Hugh Monroe and Morrice Piccard. Much to the relief of the expedition's men, these people met peacefully with Ogden's party, notwithstanding some minor pilfering, and they even traded some beaver pelts to Ogden. The Piikani and Kainai also expressed their intention to trade that year at Flathead House, not at Edmonton House, because they felt that the distance to that Saskatchewan post was too great and because they were then at war with the Assiniboine.¹³³ As the company's men at Carlton House were wary of meeting Niitsitapi people near their post, the men of the Snake Country expeditions were

¹³¹ Work, *The Snake Country*, 11n. Here Francis Haines noted that "Blackfoot" (presumably Niitsitapi, not Siksika) war parties frequently spent the winter in the middle Snake River Valley.

¹³² Ogden, *Journals, 1824-25 and 1825-26*, 40n. and 58n.

¹³³ Ibid., 28 June 1825 Ogden entry, p. 64, and, 28-29 June 1825 William Kittson journal entries, pp. 240-1. See also Ogden to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Snake Plains, 27 June 1825, pp. 14-7, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/119, reel 3M52, HBCA.

even in more fear of such encounters. This peaceful interaction of June 1825 was not the norm. In April of that year, William Kittson, Ogden's second-in-command, referred to the Niitsitapi as "the Enemy." A year later, Ogden wrote that for the members of the Snake Country expeditions Niitsitapi territory was "a country of danger."¹³⁴ John Work, who led the last Snake Country expedition, in 1830 to 1831, called the Niitsitapi "barbarians," after a Niitsitapi attack on a party of his men.¹³⁵ The journals of the Snake Country expeditions contain numerous references to Niitsitapi killing expedition men, attacking small hunting and trapping parties, and stealing the expeditions' horses.¹³⁶ In 1828, Ogden, in a state of frustration, wrote about "these villains," the Niitsitapi: "They certainly deserve to be punished and most severely, for the anxiety they cause us in this quarter, independent of the many murders and thefts they are guilty of."¹³⁷ However, meting out punishment was beyond Ogden's, and the company's, power. But at least in the Snake Country, the concept of neutrality was apparently inoperative, the result of the fear felt by, and of the acts of violence against, the men involved in the expeditions. In February 1831, Work's men assisted a group of Shoshone in retrieving horses which had been stolen from them by "a party of Blackfeet Indians." Later that year, an expedition

¹³⁴ Ogden, *Journals, 1824-25 and 1825-26*, 8 April 1825 Kittson entry, p. 226, and, 29 March 1826 Ogden entry, pp. 148-9.

¹³⁵ Work, *The Snake Country*, 25 September 1830 entry, p. 22.

¹³⁶ For example, see Ogden, *Journals, 1827-28 and 1828-29*, 24 May 1828 entry, 84-5, and, 93n., and 7 July 1828 entry, p. 92; Work, *The Snake Country*, 25 September 1830 entry, pp. 16n. and 20-3. See also Flathead Post post journal, 1 March 1825, B.69/a/1, reel 1M53, and, Fort Colville post journal, 29 April 1830, B.45/a/1, reel 1M37, HBCA.

¹³⁷ Ogden, *Journals, 1827-28 and 1828-29*, 20 May 1828 entry, p. 84.

man fired upon a "Blackfoot Indian," the only immediate provocation apparently being his presence near camp.¹³⁸

The Snake Country expeditions were anomalous to prevailing company policies and practices. The general Niitsitapi reaction to these expeditions was equally anomalous with respect to the Hudson's Bay Company, although this unusual aggressive and violent behaviour should have been completely understandable, in light of company activities west of the Rockies. What is less easy to comprehend is the apparent total acquiescence, and even complicity, of the most directly affected First Nations peoples in the blatant destruction of their fur resources by the Hudson's Bay Company. It might have been that these various peoples felt so hard-pressed by, and so weak in comparison to, their better-armed and numerically superior First Nations enemies on the northern Plains, that they were desperate for whatever benefits (firearms and other European goods) they could possibly get from this alliance situation with the Euroamericans who both trapped and traded in their territory.

A Post for the Piikani: Rocky Mountain House Reopened

While conflict seemed to be the order of the day between the company and the Niitsitapi in the Snake River country, on the Saskatchewan the basically symbiotic relationship remained intact. In order to cement this relationship, and to increase company profits, by March 1825 Simpson was re-thinking his earlier decision to abandon Rocky Mountain House. He wrote that it might "be considered expedient to establish the Rocky Mountain House for the accomodation [sic] of the Piegans."¹³⁹ Simpson, however, left the matter

¹³⁸ Work, *The Snake Country*, 15 February 1831 entry, pp. 76-7 and 10 May 1831 entry, p. 108.

¹³⁹ Simpson to Governor and Committee, Fort George, 10 March 1825, fo. 5, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/88, reel 3M43, HBCA.

entirely in Rowand's hands. The Governor had nothing but praise for Rowand, who, he said, brilliantly managed the most difficult district in the Northern Department and who was rapidly turning the Saskatchewan from one of the most expensive districts into one of the most productive.¹⁴⁰

Rowand arrived back at Edmonton House on 19 September 1825. He was set on reopening Rocky Mountain House and he was expectantly awaiting the Piikani beaver. He wrote, "We have still with the Piegans three Canadians and one Iroquois & one half Breed who sent word they would go to the mountain House where they expect to find us, the Report is that all the Piegans are to be in together some time in October and if true what is said we shall have no reason to Complain of their Hunt."¹⁴¹ Rowand had every reason to have high hopes, for Peter Skene Ogden had observed that summer that the Piikani had completely trapped out the beaver on two or three small rivers west of the Rockies.¹⁴² This was a complete reversal of existing practices, which had involved taking beaver, if taken at all, in limited numbers, so as not to exterminate this valuable animal. However, Rowand hoped only to have to maintain the outpost, which was to be personally re-established by him, until the large Piikani trading parties arrived there in the fall. He then intended to close it again, immediately. The Edmonton House journalist noted:

M Rowand find it important to see them himself, and if matters turn Out according to Expectation, as soon as the Trade will be Over with them, all will return & winter here, however if it is found any ways advantageous to pass the winter, then it Shall be done we are going prepared for it, In the Event of passing the winter there, — Rowand will Come down here & M Small will go up and take Charge of the Post for the winter. — Small & 12 men including the Int

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 1 September 1825, item 61, fos. 82-3.

¹⁴¹ Edmonton House post journal, 19 September 1825, B.60/a/23, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹⁴² Ogden, *Journals, 1824-25 and 1825-26*, 28 June 1825 entry, p. 64.

[interpreter] 4 women & 2 Children one of which is at the breast, will Constitute the Establishment.¹⁴³

A 40-piece outfit was sent up with eight men in a boat on 1 October, and a smaller number of pieces was transported on horseback. Rowand left for Rocky Mountain House on 9 October. In early November, word reached Edmonton House from Rowand that many Piikani had already been in, but that more were expected during the winter. The Edmonton House journal reads, "We are happy to learn of the fair prospects of that Post, it now appear Clearly that had there been no Post above; not one half of the Piegangs would have been here, the Dread of those Indians have of the Stone [Assiniboine] & Cries [Cree] Indians is great."¹⁴⁴ Rowand was also visited at Rocky Mountain House by several Stoney, who earlier at Edmonton House had expressed their desire to trade upriver.¹⁴⁵ In late November, Patrick Small went up to take charge of Rocky Mountain House and Rowand returned to the district headquarters.¹⁴⁶ Rowand soon after wrote, "I never saw Indians behave so well as the Piegangs."¹⁴⁷ In January, however, Small reported "that the Natives were very troublesome," but nothing noteworthy seems later to have

¹⁴³ Edmonton House post journal, 27 September 1825, B.60/a/23, reel 1M49, HBCA. See also entries dated 23 and 26 September 1825. Patrick Small was a highly regarded clerk in the district. See: Rowand assessment of him in Edmonton House district report, 1823-1824, fo. 4, B.60/e/6, reel 1M777, HBCA; Simpson assessment in his "Character Book," in Glyndwr Williams, ed., *Hudson's Bay Company Miscellany, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, 1975), 227; and, brief biographical sketch in Wallace, ed., *Documents*, 499.

¹⁴⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 7 November 1825, B.60/a/23, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 October and 7 November 1825.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 and 30 November 1825.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in John Stuart to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Carlton House, 16 February 1826, p. 68, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/119, reel 3M52, HBCA.

developed.¹⁴⁸ On 13 May, Small and all of his men arrived at Edmonton House with three boats full of the season's returns. Rocky Mountain House remained closed for the summer.

The 1825-1826 season on the Saskatchewan had been a very successful one. John Rowand was rewarded for his astute management with a promotion to the rank of chief factor in the summer of 1826. Simpson considered the Saskatchewan District second in value only to the Athabasca, east of the mountains, and this despite the recent failure of the provisions trade in the more southerly district. He especially appreciated that the Piikani trapped their furs, principally beaver, west of the Rockies and on the Missouri, in American territory, while the Saskatchewan was given a chance to recuperate from years of over-trapping. In the summer of 1826 Simpson once again left the decision whether or not to reopen Rocky Mountain House up to Rowand.¹⁴⁹

Upon his return to Edmonton House in early September and after assessing reports from the freeman, Jacques Berger,¹⁵⁰ who had travelled with the Piikani that summer, Rowand took measures to re-establish Rocky Mountain House, but not before waiting to see if this course of action could be avoided.¹⁵¹ The post was to be reopened "with an Outfit for the Piegans."¹⁵² On 20 September, Henry Fisher, the clerk who had

¹⁴⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 9 and 30 January 1826, B.60/a/23, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹⁴⁹ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 20 August 1826, item 46, pp. 42-4, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/12, reel 3M5, HBCA.

¹⁵⁰ For information about Berger's Piikani-related activities this season, see Edmonton House post journal, 7 and 8 September and 7 November 1826, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA. For a biography of Berger, see David Smyth, "Jacques Berger: Fur Trader," *The Beaver* 69, no. 3 (June/July 1989), 39-50.

¹⁵¹ Edmonton House post journal, especially entry dated 30 September 1826, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 14 September 1826.

charge of the district that summer in Rowand's absence, got "ready for an adventure to the Rocky Mountain house." On 3 October 1826, he left Edmonton House. Again that post's journal records:

M^r Fisher eleven men and four women besides an Indian took their departure with an Outfit of about 40 Pieces for the R.M. House carried up by horses it being by far more convenient than to proceed thither by water I send this Gentleman there for the purpose of trading with the Piegans and with some of the strong wood Crees and Assiniboins as well as a few half Breeds and Freeman who reside in the vacinity of the Mountain house_ some half Breeds and Crees equipped here go also up to make their hunts in that direction_ The Piegans gave out that if no Establishment was kept there none would come hither and being well acquainted with those Indians and their means of resource the above measures were adopted they of all the Plain Tribes [term encompassing Piikani, Kainai, Siksika, Gros Ventre and Sarcee] are the only Indians who exert themselves for Beaver therefore some little notice be shown them.¹⁵³

The previous season, Rowand had condemned the Siksika for the lack of furs and provisions which they brought to trade. He reported that "the Blackfeet Indians I must here say are now a worthless sett, not worth looking after." Later that same season he declared them to be the district's greatest horse thieves, quite a statement considering the record and the reputation of the Assiniboine at Edmonton House.¹⁵⁴

The 1826-1827 season was the first that an entire outfit of supplies and trade goods was carried overland to Rocky Mountain House, and not upriver by boat or canoe. Transportation of the outfit by horseback to Rocky Mountain House, two pieces per horse, became the norm over at least the next few years.¹⁵⁵ In 1821 Simpson had ordered wherever possible the replacement of canoes by boats, which were more durable and had

¹⁵³ Ibid., 3 October 1826.

¹⁵⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 2 November 1825 and 18 April 1826, B.60/a/23, reels 1M49-50, HBCA. In the 18 April journal entry, Rowand observed that "the Blackfoots [Siksika] Indians are now the greatest Thieves in this River & are always tormenting the Whites."

¹⁵⁵ Edmonton House post journals, 1826-1827 and 1827-1828, B.60/a/24-5, reel 1M50, and Rocky Mountain House post journals, 1828-1829, 1829-1830 and 1830-1831, B.184/a/1-3, reel 1M123, HBCA.

greater capacity. By the early 1820s, canoes were regularly used only in the more remote areas, where boats were impractical, or for company expresses, the intra-departmental mail service. Between Edmonton House and Rocky Mountain House, the North Saskatchewan River, as Rowand pointed out on more than one occasion, "becomes narrow and the Current much Stronger, with many Rapids, so that Boats cannot reach this latter place with more than Half Cargoe."¹⁵⁶ Despite the difficulty in reaching the upriver outpost by water, the exhausting drudgery of rowing loaded boats against the current had been the standard practice. The company men were delighted with the 1826 innovation and may have influenced its inauguration, even if they had to use their own horses to carry up the company's goods.¹⁵⁷ The engaged servants had other duties to perform with their own horses, but the company did give its men the opportunity to obtain them. On one occasion in 1823 at Edmonton House, it was noted in the journal that the "rest of the men at the Fort have got leave to trade horses for themselves, in order to perform the work they will be required to perform, each man having to hunt a certain quantity of meat & fish according to the number of his family."¹⁵⁸ The members of the Blackfoot alliance were the principal source of these horses. Rowand, who acquired a personal fortune in horses during his career, even sold some when necessary to his men for their use.¹⁵⁹ By

¹⁵⁶ Edmonton House district reports, 1823-1824, fo. 1, B.60/e/6, and, 20 July 1823, fo. 1, B.60/e/5, reel 1M777, HBCA.

¹⁵⁷ Just before Fisher left for his post, it was noted in the Edmonton House journal that the two men "who were sent for horses required for the Mountain house arrived this evening with thirty all in good condition the major part belong to the men who go with M^r Fisher each man takes up four pieces of the Company Property with his own horses which they prefer to working up their passage in Boats." See 30 September 1826 entry, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁵⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 17 November 1823, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹⁵⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 10 October 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50. Rowand had at least 200 horses when he died in 1854, something of an issue for the company. The herd

whichever means the outfit was taken up to Rocky Mountain House, the returns of trade were brought down in the spring in boats, in boats built at that outpost both for its own use and for the use of trading posts located farther downriver and elsewhere in the Northern Department.

Henry Fisher remained in charge at Rocky Mountain House for six straight winter seasons, from 1826 until 1832. At the time of the merger in 1821, he had been an apprentice clerk on the Saskatchewan in the service of the North West Company, with four years of service.¹⁶⁰ Before Fisher had departed with the outfit for Rocky Mountain House, Rowand sent Berger to the Piikani, to encourage them “to work well” and to tell them to take their beaver and other furs to Fisher’s post.¹⁶¹ Apparently, however, as late as the first week of November 1826 it was not certain that Rocky Mountain House would

had nominally been in his Métis wife’s name. The two had started this herd before the 1821 merger. Perhaps Rowand in part accumulated such a massive personal herd by keeping the horses which were often given to him by First Nations leaders who arrived at Edmonton House to trade. The apparent custom was to present Rowand with one or two horses, and possibly other gifts as well, such as beaver pelts, in return for which Rowand would present these leaders with gifts of equal or greater value. For example see Edmonton House post journal, 17 and 21 October 1828, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50, HBCA. After Rowand’s death, his son, John Jr., himself a company officer, and Governor Simpson agreed that one half of the horses would remain in the estate and that the other half would go to the company. See MacGregor, *John Rowand*, 172.

¹⁶⁰ See following HBCA records: York Factory servants lists, 1821, fos. 1d.-2, B.239/f/10, reel 1M785, and 1821-1822, no. 36, fos. 2d.-8, B.239/f/13, reel 1M786; and, North West Company Ledger, 1811-1821, p. 379, F.4/32, reel 5M7 (This massive ledger was microfilmed in two parts, odd-numbered pages on reel 5M7 and even-numbered pages on reel 5M8). For a brief biographical sketch of Fisher, see Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council*, 440-1. Fisher was apparently more fluent in Cree than in English, as was noted by more than one of his superiors. One wrote that he “does not speak or understand English well,” as his three surviving Rocky Mountain House journals attest. See also Glyndwr Williams, ed., *Hudson’s Bay Company Miscellany, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, 1975), 208, and, Rocky Mountain House post journals, 1828-1829, 1829-1830 and 1830-1831, B.184/a/1-3, reel 1M123, HBCA.

¹⁶¹ Edmonton House post journal, 8 September 1826, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

be maintained throughout the winter. It was the intelligence gathered by several other freemen that induced Rowand to keep the post open for the entire season. He wrote:

No news from young Bird and Geo: Ward who are with the Piegans, Brunais and Bérgerie are along the skirts of the Mountains and will not be in very soon the Piegans are far off and it will be late ere they come to the Fort every thing nevertheless wears a good aspect at that place for a profitable undertaking and I shall direct M^r Fisher to remain there for the winter and I have also some hopes that the half breeds and strong wood Indians [Stoney and Cree] will do something worth while whereas were they down here altogether they would idle the half their time in play and feasting....I requested M^r Fisher to seek the means of sending parolle for the Piegans to come in there as the Establishment was continued solely on account of them_ and also that the other plain Tribes should be directed to come hither conduct by M^r Munro and a man for the purpose of encouraging them to make provisions.¹⁶²

The Piikani were to be the beaver suppliers, and they were to take their furs to Rocky Mountain House; the Kainai, Siksika, Gros Ventre and Sarcee were to supply provisions to Edmonton House. In mid-November, Ward arrived at Edmonton House with news from Fisher, who had had his second visit from Hugh Monroe. The Edmonton House journal reads:

M^r F according to his instructions has employed M^r Munro to go in quest of the Piegans and endeavour to bring them in as soon as possible nothing but Americans is with every word those fellows utter and M^r Munro was directed how to act in regard to finding out the truth or falsehood of such stories which banter much with the feelings whether or no the Americans are established upon lands visited or convenient for the Piegans.¹⁶³

Since the time of the Bow River Expedition, and even before, the Saskatchewan traders had been hearing rumours of American advances which perhaps could challenge their southern trade. By the winter of 1826-1827, Rowand and Simpson perceived these

¹⁶² Ibid., 7 November 1826. George Ward had left the service of the Hudson's Bay Company in the spring of 1826 and he had since been living with the Piikani. See 17 November 1826 entry in this journal.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 17 November 1826.

mysterious developments as a very real threat. In early December 1826, Rowand received news from Monroe at Edmonton House of American activity. The journal entry reads:

M^r Munro and Gobin arrived this evening from the Mountain house they are sent by M^r Fisher for a supply of Ammunition Tob^o &c he has seen a Band of Piegans with whom he made a tolerable trade of furs but no provisions he writes that they all left that place well satisfied and disposed to redouble their exertions after beaver a flush of discontent generally breaks out from some one or other in a large party which was the case with two or three in this Band but of very short duration and soon forgotten it appears that the Americans are establishing themselves in a play calculated to attract and draw off the Piegans so as to afford them a favourable opportunity of bartering their furs, such might be contemplated by the Americans, but of its existence we doubt or the circumstances would be notorious the only Establishment we are aware of nearest to this place is the Yellow Stone River far enough were it not for hunting parties who frequently fall in with the Piegans which of course endangers our furs.¹⁶⁴

The Americans, as Rowand correctly surmised, were not as yet a danger to the company's Piikani trade, but they soon would be. Later in December, Rowand personally visited Rocky Mountain House to check on developments there.¹⁶⁵

Although Hugh Monroe was not officially re-engaged for the season, at least not according to fairly complete, surviving company records, he certainly seems to have acted much like a company servant during the winter of 1826-1827.¹⁶⁶ In mid-February 1827, Rowand received word that Fisher had sent Monroe and another man, Gobin, to accompany a Piikani band. Rowand wrote, "It appears by accounts received from M^r Fisher that all the Piegans have gone across the Mountains to work Beaver for the ensuing

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 7 December 1826.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 15 and 24 December 1826.

¹⁶⁶ Fisher, on Rowand's instructions, apparently directed Monroe's movements and activities throughout this season. Besides venturing out with individual groups of First Nations peoples, Monroe also ran errands between Rocky Mountain House and Edmonton House on at least two occasions. See Edmonton House post journal, 7, 11 and 29 December 1826 and 6 January and 5 April 1827, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA. Monroe's name does not appear on the district's list of servants for 1826-1827. Edmonton House account book, 1826-1827, fos. 16d.-9d., B.60/d/21, reel 1M468, HBCA.

year and with the determination of making good hunts.”¹⁶⁷ Fifty-two days after leaving Rocky Mountain House, Monroe and Gobin arrived at Edmonton House with the disappointing news that the theft by Assiniboine of a large number of horses of “the Plain Indians,” with whom the two were camping, would prevent the provision gathering of which Rowand was so badly in need.¹⁶⁸ The provisions were required both to feed the district headquarters and to supply the summer brigades. At the end of the winter season, on 8 May, the Edmonton House journal records that Rowand was “agreeably surprised by the arrival of M^r Fisher and his people from the Mountain House his brigade consisted of four Batteaus laden with the Returns of that place.” The Piikani had traded some 2,000 beaver pelts at Rocky Mountain House that season.¹⁶⁹ Not only did this indicate that the Piikani were pleased with the new post arrangements, but it also is a sign of changing Piikani practices with respect to the killing of beaver.

Permanent Establishment of Rocky Mountain House as a Wintering Post for the Piikani

Rowand left Fisher in charge at Edmonton House when he took the brigade down to York Factory. Returns were up £1,500 over the previous year. And they were the highest of any district in the company’s territories.¹⁷⁰ Simpson and Rowand did recognize that the Americans were likely soon “to become formidable rivals”¹⁷¹ in the Plains trade and that they would soon also likely start benefitting in that trade from furs taken in Hudson’s Bay

¹⁶⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 12 February 1827, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 28 March and 12 February 1827.

¹⁶⁹ Rowand to Simpson, Edmonton House, 15 January 1828, fos. 45d.-7d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/121, reel 3M53, HBCA.

¹⁷⁰ Simpson to Governor and Committee, Norway House, 21 June 1827, fo. 80, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/90, reel 3M44, HBCA.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 25 July 1827, fo. 24.

Company territory. To counteract any future American efforts and to maintain the goodwill of the Piikani, the trial winter openings of the previous two years were officially confirmed as having been successful and appropriate action was taken in July 1827.

Simpson wrote to London headquarters:

We have this season permanently established the Rocky Mountain House for the accomodation [sic] of the Piegans which will have the effect of drawing them during the winter from the Flat head lands and thereby keep them out of the way of the American Trappers, and our system of Trade will be so liberal that to compete with us on the west side of the Mountains the Americans must loose money as they cannot afford to sell their supplies taken that prodigious distance at any thing like the prices we can take.¹⁷²

Simpson went on to discuss “Jimmy Jock” Bird and Hugh Monroe, their attachment “to the roving life of plain Indians,” their “great influence with the Piegan Tribes” and how “by good management these thoughtless young men may be made exceedingly useful to us not only in the way of Trade but as means of offence or defence should the posture of affairs with America render it necessary hereafter to avail ourselves of the services of the plain Indian Tribes.”¹⁷³ This is the only reference that I found in the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, or anywhere else for that matter, even hinting at the possibility of the company exploiting its trade relationship with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance for any potential, future British military purposes. The uniqueness of this suggestion was undoubtedly the result of the utter implausibility of a British-Niitsitapi military alliance ever occurring in the fur trade era. These five peoples were far too independent, and their national interests were completely different from those of the British. The limited and tenuous trade relationship between these five peoples and the Hudson’s Bay Company precluded this thought from ever being anything other than pure fancy. There is not a

¹⁷² Ibid., item 32, fos. 23d.-6.

¹⁷³ Ibid., fos. 48-8d.

shred of evidence that the Niitsitapi and their allies ever desired or sought a military alliance with any Euroamericans to suit their own purposes or needs.

The Piikani and a Revitalized Saskatchewan District

Since the reopening of Rocky Mountain House in 1825, the Saskatchewan District's beaver returns, and its profits, had risen steadily, peaking in 1828-1829 at 9,382 fine beaver pelts and a profit of £20,000.¹⁷⁴ Though no records exist that break down the district's trade returns in this period by post or by tribe, there is no doubt that the single greatest factor in the reversal of the company's fortunes on the Saskatchewan was the Piikani trade, taken at Rocky Mountain House. The Hudson's Bay Company materially benefitted in two ways from this trade. As Governor Simpson noted in 1828, it "is not only the riches of the Hon'ble Company's Territory we are collecting, but those likewise of the United States, and of the unappropriated countries on the West side of the Mountains."¹⁷⁵ The previous year, the Governor and Committee had told Simpson, with respect to the Saskatchewan District, that "a liberal price ought to be given to the Indians who bring Furs from the American territory."¹⁷⁶ While the fur resources of the North Saskatchewan were being given a chance to recuperate after years of over-exploitation, the company was draining off the wealth of the upper Missouri and of the transmontane region south of the 49th parallel.

¹⁷⁴ York Factory district fur returns, 1821-1842, fos. 11-2, B.239/h/1, reel 1M812, and, Simpson to Governor and Committee, Norway House, 30 June 1829, item 34, fo. 19, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/96, reel 3M45, HBCA.

¹⁷⁵ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 July 1828, fo. 51d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/92, reel 3M44, HBCA.

¹⁷⁶ London Correspondence Book Outwards, Official, Governor and Committee to Simpson, London, 12 March 1827, item 22, fo. 120d./p. 226, A.6/21, reel 40, HBCA.

The Piikani were largely responsible for the greatest period of economic prosperity ever experienced by Euroamerican traders on the Saskatchewan. The Piikani had revitalized and reshaped the trade of the Hudson's Bay Company's Saskatchewan District. For decades almost solely a provisioning district, which supplied its wares to other, more lucrative districts, the Saskatchewan virtually overnight also became the richest beaver supplying district in the company's entire North American domains. Piikani entreaties and then trade were certainly virtually solely responsible for the successful reestablishment of Rocky Mountain House and for that post's boom years of the late 1820s. The Piikani beaver trade (and the regions from which it was derived) was considered so valuable that the Hudson's Bay Company excluded the Saskatchewan District from the conservation schemes which it implemented in the Northern Department in the mid-1820s and 1830s. Fearing the eventual extinction of the beaver, in 1826 the company introduced a beaver quota system, but it was not enforced in the Saskatchewan District, because the Piikani obtained so many of their furs outside Rupert's Land.¹⁷⁷ Besides, providing this special status to the Piikani encouraged their trading loyalty to the company in the face of encroaching American opposition in the fur trade. The bulk of the Piikani beaver were taken south of the 49th Parallel, in American territory, and in the disputed Oregon territory. The Hudson's Bay Company did not mind stripping those regions of their resources. Denuding the Oregon Territory and the upper Missouri River

¹⁷⁷ Arthur J. Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," *Journal of Historical Geography* 1, no. 1 (January 1975), 57. A good example of the lack of enforcement of the beaver quota system in the Saskatchewan District occurred in the 1828-1829 season. In the summer of 1828, the district's quota was officially set at 5,500, but the number of beaver pelts actually traded there during the 1828-1829 season was 9,382. See Minutes of the Northern Council, 2 July 1828 meeting, item 80, fos. 124-33, B.239/k/1, reel 1M814, and York Factory district fur returns, 1821-1842, fos. 11-2, B.239/h/1, reel 1M812, HBCA.

of its fur resources might also delay the inevitable: American fur trade posts in Niitsitapi territory, and American occupation and control of the Oregon Territory.

Rowand did try to have his other fur suppliers, First Nations peoples and freemen, leave the beaver to propagate and to get these people to concentrate on “the small fured [sic] animal only,” such as martens and muskrats.¹⁷⁸ The Piikani, and their four allies, were also exempted from the ban on taking beaver in the summer. In the spring of 1828, Rowand gave instructions for the company clerks left in charge of the upper Saskatchewan for the summer: “You are aware that we ought not encourage the Killing of Beaver during the current summer except from those tribes of the Plains and Piegans whom may Kill as many as they find inhabiting the southern parts of the Plains.”¹⁷⁹ Steel traps had been widely introduced in the 1790s; they killed beaver indiscriminate of their age or size. In 1822, Governor Simpson limited the use of beaver traps to “new Districts exposed to opposition and frontier establishments.”¹⁸⁰ In 1830, he expressed his continuing concern to Rowand that the beaver would soon become extinct. To avoid this he recommended paying higher prices for other furs.¹⁸¹ With the failure of these various beaver conservation schemes, sterner measures were taken by the Northern Council in June 1833. Simpson and the assembled chief factors and chief traders of the Northern Department ordered “that no Beaver Traps be issued from the Depot except for sale to the Piegan Indians.” The order, with the exemption, was repeated the following year.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 17 October 1826, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁷⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 19 May 1828, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁸⁰ Simpson quotation in Ray, “Some Conservation Schemes,” 55.

¹⁸¹ Simpson to Rowand, Red River Settlement, 18 December 1830, fos. 11d.-3, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/18, reel 3M7, HBCA.

¹⁸² Minutes of the Northern Council, 1-8 June 1833 meeting, items 91 and 92, fos. 15-27d., and, 1-9 July 1834 meeting, item 83, fos. 31-41d., B.239/k/2, reel 1M814, HBCA.

In the summer of 1827, the future of Rocky Mountain House seemed secure, as did its profitable trade with the Piikani. It had just been made a permanent wintering post. It was perhaps the single most profitable post in the most profitable district in the Hudson's Bay Company's North American territories. When Rowand returned to Edmonton House in early September, he was told of yet more American activity and of the rumoured jumping of Jacques Berger and Louis Brunais to the American cause.¹⁸³ On 22 September, Henry Fisher and 11 men, with an outfit of almost 60 pieces on 38 horses, started the trip to Rocky Mountain House.¹⁸⁴ Rowand visited Rocky Mountain House briefly in October, returning to Edmonton House before any Piikani had visited the outpost. Repeated news of Americans trading with the Piikani prompted Rowand to visit Rocky Mountain House again later that fall. The Edmonton House journalist noted, "News from the Mountain house is such that enduces M^r Rowand to take a second trip thither our Piegans have been and traded some of their furs with the Americans Berger one of our indebted freemen has absconded and joined them with all the goods and Traps advanced him by M^r Fisher."¹⁸⁵ The earlier-circulating rumours about Berger were, unfortunately for future Hudson's Bay Company prospects, confirmed. Of course the Piikani would welcome American traders, as opposed to trappers; the Piikani stood to gain tremendously from a renewed competition for their wares. A rather uneventful winter was then spent at both posts, while continued word of Americans trading with the

¹⁸³ Edmonton House post journal, 9 and 17 September 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 22 September 1827, and, Rowand to Simpson, Edmonton House, 15 January 1828, fos. 45d.-7d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/121, reel 3M53, HBCA. The trip from Edmonton House to Rocky Mountain House took 10 to 12 days for fully loaded horses and some three to four days for lightly laden animals.

¹⁸⁵ Edmonton House post journal, 29 November 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA. See also entries dated 17, 24 and 31 October, 30 November and 10 December 1827.

Piikani dampened company spirits. However, despite reports in early spring from Rocky Mountain House, according to the headquarters journal, that “every thing is not going on too well there_ the Indians are making poor hunts and the Piegans are trafficking their furs with the Americans,” the district’s beaver returns were actually slightly higher that winter than in the previous one.¹⁸⁶ In late April, the first two of Fisher’s boats arrived at Edmonton House. Fourteen packs of leather from these craft were quickly arranged and sent off to Fort Assiniboine, eventually to be carried that summer across the Yellowhead Pass to New Caledonia.¹⁸⁷ On 10 May, Fisher and the remaining two boats arrived from Rocky Mountain House. Another successful year had been completed. Simpson reported that summer that the Saskatchewan District had returns of £18,000 and that it showed a profit of £14,000.¹⁸⁸

During the summer of 1828, recurring reports reached Edmonton House of the killing of American trappers by the Niitsitapi; specifically identified were the Piikani and the Siksika.¹⁸⁹ These reports were well-founded; American trappers regularly paid with their lives for encroaching on Niitsitapi territory, or even for encountering any of them west of the Rockies. American traders, not trappers, were what the Niitsitapi wanted (see

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 3 March 1828, and, York Factory district fur returns, 1821-1842, fos. 11-2, B.239/h/1, reel 1M812, HBCA. The 1826-1827 district beaver returns were 5,934 pelts; the 1827-1828 season returned 6,116 beaver pelts.

¹⁸⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 26 April 1828, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA, and, Smyth, “The Yellowhead Pass.” The Yellowhead Pass was once also known as the Leather Pass. Leather was transported west across this pass by the Hudson’s Bay Company for trade at its posts in the New Caledonia District (central and northern present-day British Columbia) with First Nations customers. Large game animals were scarce in that district.

¹⁸⁸ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 July 1828, item 54, fos. 51-3, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/92, reel 3M44, HBCA.

¹⁸⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 15 June, 4 August and 8 October 1828, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50, HBCA.

Chapter Five for details). Late that summer prairie fires raged in the district, not only slowing the progress of the brigade upriver but presaging a winter of severe provision shortages, as the burnt Plains kept the buffalo far south of their usual northern range. At one point Edmonton House itself was threatened by the fires and that post's horses were actually burned by the blowing ashes.¹⁹⁰ Slowed by the dense, choking smoke, the brigade did not arrive at Edmonton House until 26 September; Rowand did not dispatch Fisher and his men to Rocky Mountain House until 4 October.

For the winter of 1828-1829 Fisher had 12 men who took the outfit up on 40 horses.¹⁹¹ On his way to the upriver outpost, Fisher received word that "Jimmy Jock" Bird was already waiting at Rocky Mountain House with 15 tents of Piikani and 10 tents of Gros Ventre. Fisher reached the post on 15 October and, by 19 October, had traded 1,000 beaver pelts, which he then despatched by boat to Edmonton House. Interestingly, Fisher's journal made no reference to this unusual action, but the Edmonton House journal did. It noted:

Late in the evening a Batteaux arrived from the Mountain house manned by Beauvay & P. Denomé M^r Fisher has sent down all the furs he has on hand and at same time his & Deceased Welshs family by all appearances the Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians are inclined to create disturbances, one of their Chiefs the Bears tooth who had been there would not smoke which is no proof or even sign of his friendship with the Whites the reason of M^r Fishers sending down the family &

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., especially entries dated 5, 17 and 25 September 1828, and, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, 13 January 1829, fos. 18d.-20d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/122, reel 3M53, HBCA.

¹⁹¹ Fisher's post journals for the next three winter seasons have survived, the first daily record of life at Rocky Mountain House since Alexander Henry's 1810-1811 journal. All three journals begin with Fisher's departure from Edmonton House and all describe in detail the overland route taken by the fall brigade, south from Edmonton House to the Battle River and then west across the Medicine River, and finally, a little over a mile or so from Rocky Mountain House, across the Clearwater River and then again across the North Saskatchewan. Rocky Mountain House post journals, 1828-1829, 1829-1830 and 1830-1831, B.184/a/1-3, reel 1M123, HBCA.

furs is in case any serious fray should take place with these blood thirsty Indians.¹⁹²

Ever since the violent episodes on the Saskatchewan in the mid-1790s, described at length in Chapter Three, the Gros Ventre had retained this feared notoriety. On 22 October, Bird left Rocky Mountain House for the Plains, apparently after having made some monetary arrangement with the company. Hugh Monroe arrived at the post that same day. Before the end of the month Fisher traded substantially more beaver skins, principally from incoming Piikani groups, but also from Cree and Stoney. He prepared a second boat for Edmonton House with his returns on 30 October, as he reported, "in case that it might be true what the Slave [Niitsitapi] Indians say that the Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians are to come and killed us."¹⁹³ The next day he sent 1,400 more beaver pelts to Edmonton House. When received there, it was noted in that post's journal that "the Blood [Kainai] Indians who are come this day, say that the Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians are fully determined if possible of plundering some of the Establishments in this District and then join a Party of their relations upon the Missourie or the Mandalles."¹⁹⁴ Whether these First Nations reports of the ill intentions of the Gros Ventre were well-founded or not probably cannot now be determined. This apparently unfounded rumour may have been started by the Niitsitapi themselves to promote company reliance on them and possibly in the hope of gaining better terms of trade. After the end of October, nothing further is noted of any real or perceived Gros Ventre threat. However, their rumoured plan to join their relations to the south was proved true. In early January 1830, Rowand reported that all the Gros Ventre, 400 tents of them, as well as 30 tents each of Kainai and

¹⁹² Edmonton House post journal, 23 October 1828, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁹³ Rocky Mountain House post journal, 30 October 1828, B.184/a/1, reel 1M123, HBCA.

¹⁹⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 3 November 1828, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50, HBCA.

Siksika and 20 tents of Piikani, had together left on a two- to three-year visit to the “flying Fall Indians,” the Arapaho, the closest relations of the Gros Ventre.¹⁹⁵ These Saskatchewan District First Nations peoples stayed away on the southern Plains for at least two to three years, likely returning to their homeland, between the Missouri and North Saskatchewan rivers, in the fall of 1832.¹⁹⁶

After this early scare the remainder of the season apparently passed relatively uneventfully. A small party of Gros Ventre visited Rocky Mountain House in February, without incident.¹⁹⁷ Rowand briefly visited Rocky Mountain House in early December and he was kept informed of “Jimmy Jock’s” comings and goings with the Piikani. Bird touched base at the post one more time, in late January 1829, before leaving with the Piikani who, Fisher reported, “were to cross the Mountains so as to be there early in the Spring to work Beaver.”¹⁹⁸ Despite some severe setbacks suffered by the Piikani that

¹⁹⁵ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 8 January, 1830, fos. 54-8, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/123, reel 3M53, HBCA. Rowand’s report confirms a Piikani oral tradition of Niitsitapi going to live with the Arapaho about this time. While most of the Gros Ventre and Niitsitapi returned to their own territory in 1832, many apparently remained with the Arapaho much longer, if not permanently. According to this Piikani oral history, recorded by Schaeffer, at least 10 tents of Kainai still resided with the Arapaho in 1851. File 167, Claude Everett Schaeffer Papers, M1100, Glenbow Archives.

¹⁹⁶ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 6 January 1831, fos. 94-5d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/125, reel 3M54, and, Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 18 July 1831, item 59, fo. 32, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/98, reel 3M45, HBCA. Rowand suggested a probable return date of late 1831, but the actual date was almost certainly the next year, at least for the largest part of those who travelled to the Arapaho. See Virginia Cole Trenholm, *The Arapahoes, Our People* (Norman, 1964), 88-90, and, “Colonel Henry Dodge Journal of Expedition to Rocky Mountains from Fort Leavenworth,” p. 25, *CIS US Serial Set*, H.exdoc. 181 (24-1), 289. The same Dodge report is also contained on pp. 130-46, *CIS US Serial Set*, Mil.aff. 654 (24-1), ASP021. See also Chapter Six of this thesis.

¹⁹⁷ Rocky Mountain House post journal, 22-24 January 1829, B.184/a/1, reel 1M123, HBCA.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 February 1829.

winter, among which were counted battle losses, including 200 horses to the Crow, and starvation owing to a scarcity of buffalo, when Fisher closed the post and set off downriver on 5 May, Rocky Mountain House and the Saskatchewan District had completed their most profitable season ever.¹⁹⁹ Simpson reported that the district's beaver returns were up well over 2,000 more than the previous season and that its 1828-1829 profits stood at £20,000.²⁰⁰ The Piikani were apparently killing and trading beaver in record numbers, probably, as will be argued in later in this thesis, to ensure their very survival. Surrounded by well-armed enemies, they had been forced by circumstances to trade beaver to acquire firearms. Although there are no precise records of just how much of the increased trade of the Saskatchewan District was the result of the Piikani beaver trade, Governor Simpson later reported that in the late 1820s the Piikani regularly traded 3,000 beaver pelts, and that some seasons the total was as high as 5,000.²⁰¹

Company Fortunes Show Signs of Decline

Prospects for another profitable season in the Saskatchewan District were good when Rowand returned to Edmonton House in the fall of 1829. The district's arrangements took shape that year as they would remain for a considerable period of time, except for a brief experiment from 1832 to 1834 on the Bow River, and the one-year closing of Fort Pitt in 1832-1833. In the fall of 1829 two new posts were established in the district. A

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 4-9 December 1828, 21, 24 and 31 January and 13 April 1829, and, Edmonton House post journal, 4 February 1829, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50, HBCA.

²⁰⁰ Simpson to Governor and Committee, Norway House, 30 June 1829, item 34, fos. 18-98, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/96, reel 3M45, HBCA.

²⁰¹ Governor Simpson's Report on the Northern Department, 1835, fos. 38d.-9, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/102, reel 3M46, HBCA.

small post was reopened at Lesser Slave Lake and a new post, Fort Pitt, was built near the Red Deer Hills, on the North Saskatchewan River, between Carlton House and Edmonton House. Fort Pitt soon became the best provisioning post in the district, supplied by Cree and Assiniboiné. During the 1829-1830 season and for the next several years, with the exceptions already noted, the following posts were maintained in the district: Lesser Slave Lake; Jasper House and Fort Assiniboiné, on the Athabasca River; and, Rocky Mountain House, Edmonton House, Fort Pitt and Carlton House on the North Saskatchewan River. The "two principal establishments" were the district headquarters, Edmonton House, and Carlton House.²⁰² Merely a wintering outpost in the organizational scheme, Rocky Mountain House remained one of the most profitable posts, if not the most profitable, in the company's entire North American operations.

No Edmonton House journal has survived for the 1829-1830 season and Henry Fisher's Rocky Mountain House post journal for the season is not very detailed nor very revealing in nature.²⁰³ Fisher and 11 men, with 22 horses each carrying two pieces, left Edmonton House on 6 October and arrived at Rocky Mountain House on 17 October. Five tents of Piikani were awaiting Fisher; more came in throughout the fall. Shortly after his arrival Fisher received word from some Piikani that "Jimmy Jock" Bird would be there in a few days, but when, or if, he turned up, Fisher did not specifically confirm; he just recorded the arrival of unnamed freemen some days later. Unlike the previous season, Fisher apparently sent no special word to Rowand of Bird's whereabouts, either

²⁰² Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 26 August 1830, item 44, fos. 37d.-8d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/97, and, Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 18 July 1831, item 59, fos. 31d.-3d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/98, reel 3M45, HBCA.

²⁰³ Rocky Mountain House post journal, 6 October 1829 to 11 April 1830, B.184/a/2, reel 1M123, HBCA. For some unexplained reason, Fisher's journal ends at 11 April, even though the trading season at the post continued to late April or early May.

in the fall or after his visit in early March.²⁰⁴ Fisher made no remarks about any particular arrangements with Bird or with any other freemen, or about any men travelling with the Piikani under company direction. In January 1830, Rowand reported a decline in trade at Rocky Mountain House. "The Piegans our best and principal Beaver hunters have given M^r Fisher this Fall at Rocky Mountain House not above half the number of Skins we got from them last year, the failure is not occasioned by beaver being scarce but by the Piegans being at War with the Flat Heads."²⁰⁵ Even though in just one visit 2,000 beaver were traded by the Piikani at Rocky Mountain House, returns there and throughout the district had dropped, and this in the midst of four years of peace between the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree and Assiniboine. Almost 2,000 fewer beaver were traded that season, but overall returns were down by only about £1500.²⁰⁶ However, Simpson still reported to London that the Saskatchewan remained "our most valuable District in the Northern Department."²⁰⁷ Remarkably, in this annual report to the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company he made no mention whatsoever of any potential American threat to the extremely lucrative trade of the Piikani.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 22-28 October 1829 and 7-9 March 1830.

²⁰⁵ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 8 January 1830, fos. 54-8, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/123, reel 3M53, HBCA.

²⁰⁶ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 26 August 1830, item 44, fos. 37d.-8d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/97, reel 3M45, and, York Factory district fur returns, 1821-1842, fos. 11-2, B.239/h/1, reel 1M812, HBCA.

²⁰⁷ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 26 August 1830, item 44, fos. 37d.-8d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/97, reel 3M45, HBCA.

On 18 September 1830, Rowand sent Fisher, 12 men and a 46-piece outfit overland to Rocky Mountain House.²⁰⁸ For a variety of reasons it was to be the most disappointing season in recent memory at the outpost. Fisher reached Rocky Mountain House safely at the end of the month. In early October he wrote in his journal, "I am very sorry to say that the Rocky Mountain house will make very poor returns this year."²⁰⁹ This glum forecast was prompted by the absence of any Piikani at the post as yet and by the record high levels of water in the summer, which had prevented traps from being set in many areas.²¹⁰ The Fort Pitt post journal stated that there was starvation among many First Nations peoples on the Plains during the winter season of 1830-1831, in particular noting the Siksika and Sarcee.²¹¹ Such conditions among the Niitsitapi and their allies would not be conducive to the trade. A Piikani winter count denoted this year as one of deep snow, perhaps the cause of the starvation, and thus, the poor trade returns.²¹²

On 23 October, "Jimmy Jock" Bird arrived at Rocky Mountain House with bad news. Fisher wrote, "James Bird arrived from the Piedgans says that the Piedgans are to go at the Americans with their Skins he says they Paid very chiep for thier supplies there."²¹³ Bird, still a freeman, once again appears to have been working under the direction of the company, but he may also have been trying to raise his stature by

²⁰⁸ Rocky Mountain House post journal, 18-30 September 1830, B.184/a/3, reel 1M123, HBCA. Again, unfortunately, the Edmonton House post journal has not survived for this season.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 6 October 1830. See also 5 October entry.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 23-25 October 1830.

²¹¹ Fort Pitt post journal, 20 December 1830, B.165/a/1, reel 1M119, HBCA.

²¹² Raczka, *Winter Count*, 42.

²¹³ Rocky Mountain House post journal, 23 October 1830, B.184/a/3, reel 1M123, HBCA.

emphasizing, falsely or not, the American threat to the Hudson's Bay Company's Piikani trade. The next day, Fisher wrote that he "Got Tobacco and amunition Pack up for James Bird to be off at the Piedgans tomorrow." The following day, he noted, "Bird and Michel Patnaude took their departure they have order to come home only when they have seen the Piedgans and to make them Kill Beaver til the later end of nex month." When Bird returned just before Christmas, not a single Piikani had yet visited Rocky Mountain House. Bird brought with him even more bad news. Fisher reported, "James Bird and Michel Patnaude arrived from the Piedgans they Given us very poor news saying that the Piedgans as been to the Coutonais [Kootenay] and Given them the whole of their Beaver skins for horses."²¹⁴ Fisher quickly sent off word of these developments to Rowand at Edmonton House. While the Piikani trading their beaver to the Kootenay was a setback for Rocky Mountain House, it probably was not for the Hudson's Bay Company; Simpson fully expected that these pelts would eventually end up being traded by the Kootenay to the company in the Columbia District.²¹⁵

Bird apparently remained at Rocky Mountain House until the middle of January 1830. When the Piikani failed to appear, Fisher sent him and two other men off "to see what the Piedgans are about they are to make them killed wolves and make Provision than bring them to the Fort."²¹⁶ Two small parties of Piikani arrived and traded very little, at the end of January; Bird returned three weeks later. Fisher recorded that "M'Donald, Jamy bird and La Grece Bryer arrived from the Piedgans Camp the left them at bellys River they are to be here with wolves and Provision to trade in ten or twelve days Im

²¹⁴ Ibid., 19 and 20 December 1830.

²¹⁵ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 18 July 1831, item 59, fos. 31d.-3d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/98, reel 3M45, HBCA.

²¹⁶ Rocky Mountain House post journal, 17 January 1831, B.184/a/3, reel 1M123, HBCA.

Sory to say no Beavers at all.”²¹⁷ Although Fisher does not mention it anywhere in his post journal, the reason for the short supply of beaver pelts from the Piikani was that they had not crossed the Rockies to trap beaver in 1830.²¹⁸ After the Piikani arrived and traded their meagre hunts, Fisher sent Bird and another man, Tournon, “to Passes the Summer along with them to make the Indians Kill Beaver they are to Go with them to the Place they Caled the Bellys River across the Rocky Mountain.”²¹⁹ Nothing further was heard of Bird or of any Piikani before Fisher closed Rocky Mountain House for the summer and departed downstream in early May.

In his annual report to the Governor and Committee of July 1831, Simpson described the downturn in the interrelated fortunes of the Piikani, Rocky Mountain House and the Saskatchewan District, which, he wrote, resulted in “a defalcation in the profits of about 30 Pcent.” The profits of the district had dropped to approximately £12,000, about what Simpson believed that they should be.²²⁰ He attributed the higher profits of the previous few years to “the more than ordinary success of the Plain Tribes [the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance] in their predatory excursions, and from the unusual number of musquash [muskrats] which were collected.” Simpson also noted that the fortunes of war had recently been against the Piikani, whom he called “our most valuable Customers.” He reported that on the way to trade at Rocky Mountain House in the fall of 1830, the Piikani had been attacked by the Crow, who killed 57 Piikani and who “took among other

²¹⁷ Ibid., 22 February 1831. See also entries dated 23-28 January.

²¹⁸ Fort Pitt post journal, 11 August 1830, B.165/a/1, reel 1M119, HBCA. No reason was given to explain the Piikani not crossing the mountains to kill beaver. It could have been related to the weather, or to any other number of political reasons.

²¹⁹ Rocky Mountain House post journal, 9 March 1831, B.184/a/3, reel 1M123, HBCA.

²²⁰ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 18 July 1831, item 59, fo. 31d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/98, reel 3M45, HBCA.

Spoil upwards of 2000 Beaver Skins.” Simpson’s report on the Saskatchewan seems to have been intended to lessen the expectations of his superiors in London concerning the district’s future prospects, while at the same time heaping praise on Rowand. Simpson assessed the situation:

The great drawback on this District is the large body of people required for the function of the Establishments, four of which, say Edmonton, Carlton, Fort Pitt and the Rocky Mountain House being frequently visited by some of the most formidable & turbulent Tribes in the Country, who altho’ not hostilely disposed towards us are ever on the alert for plunder, so that it is necessary to keep a number of hands over & above the voyaging complement solely for the purpose of guarding the Posts. This establishment of people we cannot venture to reduce, however the trade may turn out, nor can the general expences be brought lower than they now are, in fact the whole management of the District has for several years past been so excellent as to leave no room for improvement, nor is any other likely to surpass it in value to the Honble Company.²²¹

Simpson ended his summer 1831 report with a tremendous underestimation of the danger to the Hudson’s Bay Company trade of unconfirmed American undertakings.

From Indian report we learn that the Americans have it in view to establish next season a post at the head of the Yellow Stone river, which falls into the Missouri and is divided by a narrow strip or Height of Land from the head waters of the Bow River. If they do so it will injure the trade of the Saskatchewan greatly, but I do not think it probable, as from all we can learn there is no trade to be collected in that quarter equal to the Support of such a large & expensive Establishment as would be safe among the numerous & hostile Tribes by whom it would be surrounded.²²²

Simpson did not at all understand the intentions of his American rivals. The new American post was not to be located on the Yellowstone River, south of the Missouri. Rather, what Simpson feared and had earlier judged absolutely necessary to prevent, the establishment of an American trading post in “Blackfoot Country,”²²³ was about to take

²²¹ Ibid., fos. 32-2d.

²²² Ibid., fos.33-3d.

²²³ Simpson to John Warren Dease, Fort Vancouver, 17 February 1829, fos. 20d.-2, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/16, reel 3M6, HBCA.

place. Rather than on the Yellowstone, the new American post was about to be built on the Missouri River, near the mouth of the Marias River, in the heart of Piikani territory. The Saskatchewan District's virtual monopoly of the trade of the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance was about to come to an abrupt end.

Conclusions

The 1821 merger created the first monopoly situation that the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance had ever faced since direct trade had been established with Euroamericans. The First Nations peoples of the Saskatchewan District reacted with bewilderment and then quickly had to adjust to the substantially changed circumstances. Since there was no alternative supply of European goods, these peoples had to accept that for the moment at least the economic balance of power had shifted in favour of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Niitsitapi and their allies had obviously decided on a foreign policy which excluded violence against Euroamerican traders; to have done otherwise would have been incredibly short-sighted and could ultimately have eliminated their only then-current source of firearms and other European supplies.

The Hudson's Bay Company almost immediately entered into a period of retrenchment, of downsizing. After the failure of the Bow River Expedition to come even close to the company's expectations, the Hudson's Bay Company reduced its overhead on the North Saskatchewan River in a variety of ways. In 1823 it closed Rocky Mountain House. However, this would prove to be a short-lived measure.

The Piikani soon entered the trade in beaver apparently on an almost tribal-wide basis. At this time, apart from the far-from-lucrative provisions trade and a small trade in horses, the Niitsitapi had virtually nothing else that was then of value to Euroamericans. The political/military situation on the northern Plains necessitated that they somehow keep pace in an arms race with their neighbouring First Nations enemies. National

survival required that Niitsitapi religious and cultural beliefs be set aside, at least temporarily. The Piikani were the best positioned to act, because of the three Niitsitapi peoples they had by far the most plentiful beaver resources in their territory. The Piikani soon became the best beaver suppliers in the company's entire North American domains and, as Governor Simpson reported, "our most valuable Customers."²²⁴ The Piikani encouraged, and their beaver returns then demanded, the reestablishment of Rocky Mountain House. Into the 1830s, as a direct result of their lucrative beaver trade, the Piikani were granted a kind of "most favoured nation" status by the Hudson's Bay Company.

²²⁴ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 18 July 1831, item 59, fos. 32-2d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/98, reel 3M45, HBCA.

Chapter Five: A Quarter Century of Blind American Failure

For more than 20 years after the British and Canadians had established trade on the North Saskatchewan River with the Niitsitapi and their neighbours, the Missouri River, above the mouth of the Yellowstone, still remained unexplored by any Euroamericans. When Americans finally entered Niitsitapi country on the Upper Missouri, they did so as trappers and hunters, not as traders. The peoples of the Blackfoot alliance greeted the uninvited despoilers of their land with hostility. Rather than look for the cause of this violence in their own practices, which violated long-established protocols among First Nations peoples, Americans of this period, and subsequent American historians, laid the blame on never-documented British incitement of the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition

The Missouri River was part of the vast Louisiana Territory, an area then largely unknown to Euroamericans, and encompassing the western drainage basin of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. France ceded Louisiana to Spain in 1762, but reclaimed it by treaty in October 1800. President Thomas Jefferson and the fledgeling United States of America negotiated the outright purchase from Napoleonic France of the Territory, some 828,000 square miles, in the spring of 1803, at a cost of \$15,000,000.00. In one fell swoop, the acquisition of the middle of the continent, Jefferson had more than doubled the size of his country and, as Malone and Roeder wrote, “transformed the United States into a real imperial power.”¹

Before the actual transfer of the Louisiana Territory had taken place, President Jefferson obtained congressional funding for an overland expedition via the Missouri River to the mouth of the Columbia River. In 1792, it had been an American, Captain

¹ Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle, 1976), 25.

Robert Gray, who “rediscovered” the Columbia, some 17 years after a Spaniard, Bruno de Hezeta, had made the initial European “discovery” of its mouth. Gray named the river after his ship, the *Columbia Redivia*. Even before this date, American ships had been active in the maritime fur trade on the Pacific Coast, competing there with British and Russian interests. As James Gibson wrote, “By 1790 the Boston-Nootka Sound-Canton-Boston route, the ‘golden round,’ had been firmly delineated.”² Jefferson chose two men to lead the expedition: his private secretary, Captain Meriwether Lewis, and, at Lewis’ suggestion, Lieutenant William Clark. Among the most important of their many and varied duties on their way across the continent, Lewis and Clark were to evaluate the potential for the fur trade and to be alert for signs of any British/Canadian presence in the newly-acquired territory. Malone and Roeder observed, “Jefferson clearly aimed, finally, not only to thwart British influence in upper Louisiana, but also to beat the Canadian explorers into the Pacific Northwest, an area he was anxious to gain for the United States.”³

The co-captains, for Clark was addressed as captain by the men and was treated as co-leader by Lewis, made their preparations for their spring 1804 departure on the east bank of the Mississippi opposite the mouth of the Missouri, just above St. Louis. Upper Louisiana was not actually transferred to the United States until 10 March 1804. St. Louis had been the centre of the fur trade of the upper Mississippi and lower Missouri rivers under both Spanish and French colonial administrations, but the history of the fur

² James R. Gibson, “Bostonians and Muscovites on the Northwest Coast, 1788-1841,” in W. Peter Ward and Robert A.J. McDonald, eds., *British Columbia: Historical Readings* (Vancouver, 1981), 68. See also: James R. Gibson, “The Maritime Trade of the North Pacific Coast,” in Washburn, ed., *Handbook*, 375-90; and, Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver, 1977), 1-23.

³ Malone and Roeder, *Montana*, 26.

trade on the Missouri to this time, as one contemporary American put it, “would be a recital of the expeditions of vagrant hunters and traders who never ventured up the river beyond a few miles of” Council Bluffs.⁴ In mid-May 1804, Lewis and Clark, their 30 permanent party members and an auxiliary crew of 16 men set off up the Missouri in a fifty-foot keelboat and two smaller craft, called pirogues. They reached the Mandan Villages, 1,600 miles upriver, in late October and wintered there.⁵ In early April 1805 the keelboat was sent back down to St. Louis with the auxiliaries; Lewis and Clark and the main party resumed their upriver explorations in the two pirogues and six canoes, guided by the now-renowned Shoshone woman, Sacagewea, and her Canadian husband, Toussaint Charbonneau.⁶ Near the end of April they passed the mouth of the Yellowstone River and on 2 June they reached the mouth of the river that they eventually named “Maria’s River.” Though then in the heart of Piikani territory, the Expedition encountered no members of the Blackfoot-speaking tribes or their allies on its westward journey. It proceeded up the Missouri past the Great Falls to the Three Forks, which rivers they named the Jefferson, the Madison and the Gallatin. The party then crossed the continental divide on 12 August and finally, after descending the Clearwater, Snake and Columbia rivers, reached the mouth of the Columbia on 7 November 1805.

⁴ Thomas Biddle 1819 letter, cited in Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 41. This Wishart book provides a succinct synthesis of the history of the Rocky Mountain and Missouri River fur trade, to 1840. For other excellent general histories see: Swagerty, “Indian Trade”; Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West* (Lincoln, 1986); and, Paul Chrisler Phillips and J.W. Smur, *The American Fur Trade* (Norman, 1961).

⁵ The journals of the Expedition were published in eight volumes in 1904-1905, and re-issued in 1959. See Thwaites, ed., *Lewis and Clark*. The complete journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition have recently been re-edited and published in eleven volumes. See *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed., Gary E. Moulton (Lincoln, 1983-1997).

⁶ Although much has been written about this remarkable woman, a good, brief summary of her role in the Lewis and Clark Expedition may be found in James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln, 1988), especially pages 256-9.

No direct contact was made on the westward journey with the Niitsitapi, but these peoples almost certainly at least knew of the existence of Americans even before the Expedition had set off. A Piikani winter count, the Bull Plume Winter Count, marks the year 1801 with, "When we took the stars and stripes from the River Indians," and clearly shows a depiction of an American flag.⁷ The "River Indians," probably the Pend d'Oreille [*Stlqetkomschi*], a Plateau people residing west of the Rockies, may have obtained the flag from contact, direct or indirect, with Americans on the Pacific Coast.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition wintered at Fort Clatsop, a collection of small cabins which they hastily erected near the mouth of the Columbia River. In late March 1806 they started their return trip to the East. Near the continental divide Lewis and Clark split the Expedition in order to explore more territory on either side of the Missouri. In late July a small party led by Lewis was near the Marias River, investigating its potential as a navigable route into British territory. There Lewis and three of his men met a small group of Piikani on 26 July. Lewis told them "that I had come in search of them in order to prevail on them to be at peace with their neighbours particularly those on the West side of the mountains and to engage them to come and trade with me when the establishment is made at the entrance of this river."⁸ Obviously Lewis already recognized the potential importance of the confluence of the Marias and Missouri rivers for a future post for trade with the Niitsitapi. Unfortunately, after spending the night camped with the eight Piikani, Lewis' party was roused by Piikani attempts to steal their guns.⁹ During the

⁷ Racska, *Winter Count*, 33. Here Racska identified the "River Indians" as the Pend d'Oreille, from their name in Blackfoot, *Niituhta*, or River People.

⁸ Thwaites, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, vol. 5, Lewis journal, 26 July 1806, 222.

⁹ For a detailed description of this unfortunate incident, see *ibid.*, 26-27 July 1806, 219-27. See also: John C. Ewers, "Plains Indian Reactions to the Lewis and Clark Expedition," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 16, no. 1 (January 1966), 9-11; and, Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related*

ensuing struggle two Piikani were killed. Both sides hastily fled, Lewis and his men on Piikani horses. They miraculously met up with their river party from the Great Falls. Lewis and his men then proceeded downriver, joining Clark's party below the mouth of the Yellowstone in mid-August. The Expedition reached St. Louis on 23 September 1806. The incident near the Marias resulted in the only two deaths in combat with any First Nations peoples during the almost two and one half years of the Expedition's travels.

It was long held that this one fatal incident irrevocably, at least for the next quarter century, turned the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, and their allies, the Gros Ventre, against the Americans and that it was the determining event in establishing Niitsitapi animosity to any and all Americans with whom they came in contact. While certainly not a good omen, this single event did not solely portend the consequences later attributed to it. In fact, at least some Niitsitapi looked upon Lewis' action as fully justifiable self-defence.¹⁰

It would be interesting to know what word of the Expedition reached the traders on the upper North Saskatchewan River, but no journals have survived from either the

Documents, 1783-1854 (Urbana, 1978), vol. 1, 29 September 1806 Lewis letter, 342. Upon encountering this group Lewis suspected that they were "Minnetares of Fort de Prairie," or Gros Ventre (*A'aninin/Atsina*), and this they "apparently" claimed falsely to be. Probably difficulties in communication resulted in Lewis' misidentification. However, both Ewers in the above-noted work, on page 10, and David Thompson in his *Narrative* (1968 [1916], 375) correctly identified the First Nations people involved as Piikani. One of the Piikani present upon the occasion of this first meeting of Americans with any member of the Niitsitapi was later interviewed by George Bird Grinnell. Wolf Calf confirmed Piikani, not Gros Ventre, involvement with Lewis on the Marias. See Olid D. Wheeler, *The Trail of Lewis and Clark, 1804-1904* (New York, 1904), vol. 2, 311-3. In a brief history of the Gros Ventre and the fur trade, Schilz unwittingly accepted the incorrect Lewis identification and attributed this July 1806 incident to the Gros Ventre. See Thomas F. Schilz, "The Gros Ventres and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade, 1806-1835," *Annals of Wyoming* 56 (Fall 1984), 22.

¹⁰ Thwaites, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, vol. 5, 223-4n.; Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 711 and 713n.; and, Wheeler, *The Trail*, vol. 2, 312.

posts at Rocky Mountain House or those at Edmonton House for the duration of the Expedition.¹¹ David Thompson's Rocky Mountain House journal of October 1806 to May 1807 mentions no American-related activity of any kind. However, years later he made the somewhat dubious claim that the killing of the two Piikani men drew the entire Piikani tribe to the Missouri River to seek vengeance, thus allowing him to proceed unmolested from his post across the Howse Pass.¹² One would hardly think that this July 1806 incident would have kept all of the Piikani on the Missouri through the spring of 1807, and, indeed, Thompson's journal indicates regular contact with the Piikani people throughout the 1806-1807 season at Rocky Mountain House. The daily journals at Edmonton House are missing from the end of the 1799-1800 season to late September 1806. However, in December 1806 James Bird, the Hudson's Bay Company officer in charge at Edmonton House, wrote this somewhat puzzling passage, which undoubtedly refers to the Lewis and Clark Expedition, but which does not seem to jibe well with what is known from other sources about Lewis' fatal encounter with the Piikani. "A party of Americans were seen last Summer where the Missisoury enters the Rocky Mountains & 'tis reported by the Muddy or Missisoury River Indians [Piikani] that four of them set off with an intention to come here but that they Killed one & the rest returned."¹³

¹¹ For an analysis of Hudson's Bay Company awareness of and reaction to the Lewis and Clark Expedition, see David Smyth, "The 'Leviathan company of the North' Is Watching: The Hudson's Bay Company and the American Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, to 1831," in *Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium 2000 Proceedings, September 21-23, 2000* (Williston, 2001), 73-4.

¹² Thompson journal, 11 October 1806 to 10 May 1807, Book 18, vol. 8, David Thompson Papers, Provincial Archives of Ontario, and, Thompson, *Narrative*, (1968 [1916]), 375.

¹³ This passage is contained in a 23 December 1806 letter from Bird to John McNab, in the 31 December journal entry. Edmonton House post journal, fo. 6, B.60/a/6, reel 1M49, HBCA. John C. Jackson has recently interpreted this reference to mean that the man killed was Piikani. He then argued that this single reported Piikani death calls into question the

Following the Lewis and Clark Expedition and until the founding of Fort Piegan in 1831, at the confluence of the Marias and Missouri rivers, there were virtually two constants in American-Niitsitapi relations: the Americans encountered by the people of the Blackfoot alliance were trappers and hunters, not traders, and these Americans looked elsewhere, to purported British incitement, to explain the ongoing belligerence and hostility of the Niitsitapi and their allies. From the beginning, with the first large-scale American operations on the Upper Missouri, led by Manuel Lisa and his partners, the genesis could be seen of two distinct production systems that characterized American activity in the Rocky Mountains and on the Missouri to the 1830s. The overall strategy of the various American concerns was to establish trading posts on the lower river and to send large parties of trappers to the Rockies and to the headwaters of the Missouri.¹⁴ With the exception of the imported Iroquois (*Haudenosaunee*) hunters, brought in by the North West Company around the turn of the century, and the ongoing Snake Country expeditions west of the Rockies,¹⁵ both of which intrusive breaches of accepted practices

validity of the Piikani oral tradition that tells of two Piikani dead at the hands of Lewis and his three men (see Wheeler, *The Trail*, vol. 2, 311-3). However, I believe that this Edmonton House reference is to the four Americans and to the belief that one of them had been killed by the Piikani. It would then seem, assuming that Bird accurately reported the Piikani understanding of events, that the Piikani believed that Lewis and his three men were intending to visit the Saskatchewan River posts when this incident altered their plans. Lewis had no such plans and none of his men was killed in this unfortunate encounter with the eight Piikani. See John C. Jackson, *The Piikani Blackfeet: A Culture Under Siege* (Missoula, 2000), 56 and 221n.

¹⁴ The best analysis of the two fur production systems is Wishart's *The Fur Trade*.

¹⁵ As described in Chapter Four, the Snake Country expeditions were begun by the North West Company in 1818, and continued by the Hudson's Bay Company after the merger. Unique in the history of the British company, which normally had a long-term perspective when it came to maintaining the fur resource, these expeditions were designed to denude the Oregon Territory of most of its fur-bearing animals. The Hudson's Bay Company thought that this might delay the inevitable, the loss of the disputed territory to the United States, while resulting in tremendous returns to the company.

generated great local First Nations resentment, the overall strategy of both the Hudson's Bay and North West companies was to rely on an almost symbiotic trading relationship with the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, and with all of their First Nations customers.

In and near Niitsitapi country the late-arriving Americans broke with long-existing protocols of behaviour, virtually universal North American Aboriginal protocols and practices, which had existed before any Euroamericans had ever encountered the Niitsitapi. The Saskatchewan traders had wisely, and of necessity, adopted these First Nations conventions of foreign relations, and, by the time that the Americans arrived on the scene these conventions were long-established traditions of Niitsitapi-Euroamerican relations as well. At their peril, the Americans ignored, or remained oblivious to, the basic tenets of First Nations external relations, not to mention their basic disregard of common courtesy. They did little or nothing to foster friendship between themselves and the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, while at the same time they intentionally eliminated these First Nations peoples from the fur-gathering equation. American hunters and trappers, either on their own or affiliated with some company, trespassed without asking permission and took without offering compensation. The consequences should not have been surprising.

Manuel Lisa and Early American Trapping Efforts

Even before the Lewis and Clark Expedition had returned to its hero's reception at St. Louis, its discoveries of rich, new, untapped preserves of beaver and other fur-bearing animals in the Rockies and on the headwaters of the Missouri had enticed some to venture back upriver to try their luck. In August 1806 at the Mandan Villages, John Colter, with the blessing of Lewis and Clark, left the Expedition and joined a small party

of men who spent the next winter trapping on the Yellowstone River.¹⁶ When the Expedition did arrive back at St. Louis, others were quick to try to capitalize on the widely-publicized potentialities of the recently explored territory. The most ambitious and successful of these was Manuel Lisa, a Louisiana Spaniard based in St. Louis.¹⁷ Lisa organized and led a party of over 50 men, including George Drouillard, the Lewis and Clark Expedition's chief interpreter, in a keelboat up the Missouri. At the mouth of the Platte River, the point at which the Upper Missouri region was considered to start,¹⁸ Lisa met Colter returning from his year's trapping on the Yellowstone River. Colter signed on with Lisa. Likely on his and Drouillard's advice, Lisa decided to forego Niitsitapi territory and instead ventured up the Yellowstone to the Bighorn River, where he built a post named Fort Remon or Fort Raymond, but which was more generally referred to as Lisa's Fort or Fort Manuel (see Figure Six).¹⁹ Here Lisa traded with the Crow (*Absaroke*)

¹⁶ Thwaites, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, vol. 5, Clark journal, 15 August 1806, 341, and Burton Harris, *John Colter: His Years in the Rockies* (Lincoln, 1993), 35-8

¹⁷ For a more complete account of Lisa and of the early St. Louis fur trade, see Richard Edward Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa and the Opening of the Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman, 1963), and, William E. Foley and C. David Rice, *The First Chouteaus* (Urbana, 1983).

¹⁸ Ray H. Mattison, "The Indian Frontier on the Upper Missouri to 1865," *Nebraska History* 39 (September 1958), 241. Apparently even as early as 1811 there was a traditional ceremony or rite of passage that marked the westward crossing by the mouth of the Platte River. "The river Platte is regarded by the navigators of the Missouri as a point of as much importance, as the equinoctial line amongst mariners. All those who had not passed it before, were required to be shaved, unless they could compromise the matter by a treat. Much merriment was indulged on the occasion. From this we enter what is called the Upper Missouri. Indeed the change is perceptible and great". Henry Marie Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana* (Ann Arbor, 1966 [1817]), 11 May 1811 Brackenridge journal entry, 226, and, "Brackenridge's Journal Up the Missouri, 1811," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 6 (New York, 1966 [1815]), 77.

¹⁹ Malone and Roeder, *Montana*, 38; Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 42; and, R.G. Robertson, *Competitive Struggle: America's Western Fur Trading Posts, 1764-1865* (Boise, 1999), 211-4. Robertson here listed it under the name Fort Raymond.

Figure Six. Map Showing the Locations of American and Hudson's Bay Company Posts, 1807 to mid-1830s.

people, while his men trapped the many tributaries of the Yellowstone. It was on one such trapping outing, when Colter was travelling with some Crow and Flathead (*Séliš*), that an event occurred that further estranged the Blackfoot-speaking peoples from the Americans. Apparently about 1,500 members of the Blackfoot alliance attacked this party of Crow and Flathead, which itself numbered about 800.²⁰ Colter's vigorous defence of himself and of his companions only tended to confirm the Americans as enemies to the Niitsitapi. In the spring of 1808 Lisa left the Yellowstone and returned to St. Louis after an otherwise very successful season.

The Crow did not trade in the Saskatchewan District, but by January 1808 word of the new American post had reached Edmonton House from both Kainai and Gros Ventre visitors. There the journalist wrote:

These Indians inform us that a party of their young men who went on a War Expedition last Autumn discovered an American Settlement on the Banks of the Mississoury. The Americans they say received them in a very friendly manner, made them presents, and invited them to a general Meeting next Spring with all the Tribes they have hitherto warred with, in order to settle a Peace with them, and for the Purposes of Trade. They tell us that, the Americans promise to sell them a Gun for five Beavers & other Articles in proportion, that they value Buffalo robes &c., but add that, the Americans have no Spirits the Article first in their Esteem, and that they delight too much in War to deprive themselves of Enemies by making the Peace proposed.²¹

News of other American activity had also reached the Saskatchewan in a copy of a letter given to an unidentified tribe located south of the Kootenay people; the letter then passed through their hands to David Thompson and to James Bird. Dated 10 July 1807 at Fort Lewis, Yellow River, Columbia, and signed by a Lieutenant James Roseman and a

²⁰ Peter W. Dunwiddie, "The Nature of the Relationship between the Blackfoot Indians and the Men of the Fur Trade," *Annals of Wyoming History* 46 (1974), 126; Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 55-6; and, Harris, *John Colter*, 121-7. Harris here argued that the ongoing hostility between the Blackfoot alliance and Americans was directly attributable to this Colter event and not to the 1806 Lewis incident with the Piikani.

²¹ Edmonton House post journal, 22 January 1808, B.60/a/7, reel 1M49, HBCA.

Captain Zachary Perch, the letter claimed United States control over largely undefined areas, including the Pacific Coast to 50°N. latitude.²² Most likely these two officers were involved in some way in the maritime fur trade, but I have been unable to locate any further information about them.

The majority of Lisa's men decided to stay on the Yellowstone or in the mountains when Lisa departed for St. Louis in 1808.²³ Fort Manuel was retained, but trapping parties spread out over the distant countryside, including into Piikani territory at the Three Forks. They soon felt the wrath of Niitsitapi hostility. In the fall of 1808 different groups of Kainai, Sarcee and Gros Ventre arrived at the Saskatchewan trading posts both with news of having pillaged various small American "Settlements" that summer on the Missouri, and with their booty. In early October James Bird recorded the exploits of a band of Kainai just arrived at Edmonton House.

These People it appears from a variety of Accounts, & from Spoils now in their Possession, discovered in their Summer War excursions, on a southern branch of the Mississoury two small Settlements which they plundered of Goods to a considerable amount, besides about 300 Beaver skins. One of the men belonging to these Settlements was killed, & the rest (ten in number) after being stripped were permitted to escape - From some papers brought us by the Indians, the immediate Traders seem to have been Canadians; but from the situation of the Houses, & from the American Colors which were taken from them, it is concluded that they must have been subject to the United States.²⁴

A few days later Bird noted Sarcee participation in these events, when some of these people traded their captured prizes. At the end of the month he noted similar Gros Ventre depredations.

A few Fall [Gros Ventre] & several Muddy [Piikani] Indians arrived. The Fall Indians have likewise plundered a small American Settlement on the Mississoury, & as they confess themselves, killed two of the men that belonged to it. Amongst

²² Ibid., 10 November 1808.

²³ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 60-3.

²⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 2 October 1808, B.60/a/8, reel 1M49, HBCA.

other plunder, they have brought us a rifle Gun which, on account of its weight, they consider as of little Value.²⁵

The St. Louis Missouri Fur Company

Unbeknownst to Lisa, his men and his profits were suffering at the hands of the Blackfoot alliance. He was in St. Louis organizing the leading merchants and fur trading entrepreneurs of that city into the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company, which was more commonly known as the Missouri Fur Company. Among the partners were the Chouteaus, Pierre Menard and Andrew Henry. According to one contemporary, the “objectives of this company appear to have been to monopolize the trade among the lower tribes of the Missouri, who understand the art of trapping, and to send a large party to the headwaters of the Missouri capable of defending and trapping beaver themselves.”²⁶ Trading with the First Nations peoples on the lower reaches of the Missouri was good policy, as it tended to ensure that the transportation corridor to the upper reaches of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers would remain open; these First Nations peoples directly benefited from the American presence through trading.

In June 1809 Lisa led a force of over 150 men up the Missouri, reaching the Mandan Villages in September. There Lisa learned the disturbing news of the fate of his trappers who had plied their trade in Niitsitapi territory.²⁷ When last heard from, in October 1808, only one party of four trappers still remained near the Three Forks; it apparently then had more than 20 packs of beaver, which total was expected to reach 50 packs. It was decided that Henry and Menard would proceed overland and by boat, respectively, to reopen Fort Manuel and to prepare for a spring 1810 expedition to the

²⁵ Ibid., 12 and 31 October 1808.

²⁶ Thomas Biddle 1819 letter, quoted in Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 42.

²⁷ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 85-8.

Three Forks. Lisa returned to St. Louis to arrange for the next spring's outfit. By the fall of 1809 the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company had established posts: at Council Bluffs, for the Omaha (*UmaNahn*), Oto (*Chiwere*), Iowa (*Baxoje*) and Pawnee (*Chaiksichahiks*); at Cedar Island, for the Teton and Yankton Sioux; and, at the Arikara and Mandan-Hidatsa villages. It had also re-established Fort Manuel, for the Crow.²⁸ The company had not yet seriously breached the territory of the Blackfoot alliance, the ultimate goal of its endeavours, because therein lay the greatest reputed abundance of beaver.

In the late winter of 1809-1810 Pierre Menard, guided by John Colter, led a party of up to 80 men, including Andrew Henry and Reuben Lewis, from Fort Manuel to the Three Forks, arriving there on 3 April 1810.²⁹ They hastily erected a fort, Fort Henry or Three Forks, between the Jefferson and Madison rivers. In mid-April two groups of trappers set off from the post. Within ten miles of its starting point, on 12 April, one group was attacked by Gros Ventre, who were misidentified as the "Blackfeet"; they killed or captured five of the 18 men. Later that month a second outing ended with similar results, three dead, including George Drouillard, likely at the hands of the Kainai.³⁰ Menard was quick to realize that unless the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance could be placated, or "destroyed,"³¹ his post's present position was untenable. One

²⁸ Ibid., 90, and, Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 45.

²⁹ Thomas James, who accompanied this party, gave a figure of 32 men, but other sources suggest the probability of 60 to 80 men. Thomas James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans* (New York, 1966 [1846]), 45, and, Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 93n.

³⁰ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 94-6; Harris, *John Colter*, 144-51; and, typescript of 26 July 1810 article from the *Louisiana Gazette*, 26 July 1810 Folder, Box 1, Fur Trade Collection, 1686-1969, Missouri Historical Society (MHS).

³¹ In a letter to Pierre Chouteau, Menard suggested encouraging the Shoshone and Flathead to wage war on the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance and to take prisoners. Some of these captives would then be sent as emissaries of peace back to their people. Menard's letter of 21 April 1810 is reproduced in its original French, and in English, in Chittenden,

possible means which he suggested of establishing peaceful relations with these peoples would be to erect a trading post for the Blackfoot alliance on the Missouri, below the Great Falls. That was not actually done by any group of Americans until the establishment of Fort Piegan near the mouth of the Marias River in 1831, more than two tumultuous decades later. The First Nations peoples who committed these April 1810 depredations, though identified generally by the Americans as "Blackfeet," were, as noted above, actually Gros Ventre and Kainai. Parties of both of these peoples arrived at Rocky Mountain House during the 1810-1811 season with considerable materials from their encounters with the American trespassers.³² As John Ewers has pointed out, the American trappers of this early contact period were not "well enough acquainted with their opponents to identify them by tribe. To them the Indian raiders were all 'Blackfeet'," including the Gros Ventre, who were not even Blackfoot-speakers.³³

No outright offensive was ever launched on Menard's post. However, the Americans were prevented from venturing far from it. They were convinced that the members of the Blackfoot alliance had driven the game away from the vicinity of the post and that, according to one post occupant, "our enemies seemed bent upon starving us out."³⁴ Under such circumstances it is not surprising that many of the hunters and trappers decided to quit the area. Pierre Menard led many of these men back East, reaching St. Louis by mid-July 1810. Henry stayed with the remainder of the men at the Three Forks post until the fall, suffering, according to some reports, up to 20 or 30 deaths

The American Fur Trade, vol. 2, 878-83.

³² Alexander Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 545-6, and, Harris, *John Colter*, 145-6 and 149-50.

³³ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 51.

³⁴ James, *Three Years*, 81 and 86.

at the hands of the Niitsitapi and their allies, and surviving a pitched battle between 20 trappers and 200 members of the Blackfoot alliance.³⁵ That autumn Andrew Henry abandoned the post and took his men west across the continental divide to winter among the Shoshone and Flathead peoples on the north fork of the Snake River.

The year 1810 had been extremely disappointing, if not actually disastrous, for the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company. On top of the troubles in Niitsitapi country, the company was faced with several other setbacks. Menard reported that its caches on the Yellowstone had been looted by the Gros Ventre. The post at Cedar Island had burned to the ground, destroying \$10,000 to \$15,000 worth of furs. Furthermore, the effects of the Embargo Act had drastically reduced the price of beaver.³⁶ Lisa had been unable to arrange an outfit that year and so the upriver traders and trappers were left on their own for the 1810-1811 season, with no fresh supplies, provisions, trade goods, powder or lead. In the fall of 1810 the disheartened partners in St. Louis voted to send a relief expedition in the spring to aid their fellows still in the field: Andrew Henry and Reuben Lewis. Lisa, of course, was to lead the party upriver.

Two Expeditions Ascend the Missouri, 1811

While Lisa was trying to engage men and organize an outfit at St. Louis during the winter of 1810-1811, William Price Hunt, of John Jacob Astor's newly-created Pacific Fur Company, was there doing the same thing, though Hunt was more advanced in his preparations. He was to lead the overland expedition to the mouth of the Columbia River, there to link up with Astor's ocean-going contingent. Hunt's party was the first off the mark from St. Louis, leaving in mid-March 1811, while Lisa was delayed until early

³⁵ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 143, Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 46, and, Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 115.

³⁶ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 97.

April. His primary purposes were to rescue Henry and his men, if they needed rescuing, to re-supply Fort Mandan and to re-build the post at Cedar Island, as earlier promised to the Sioux. However, Lisa apparently still had not given up all hope of establishing peaceful relations with the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and their allies, and of growing wealthy from the rich fur resources of their territory. According to one of Lisa's travelling companions on this journey, "Mr. Lisa, also, privately entertained the hope of being able to make peace with the Blackfoot Indians, and to be permitted to remain quietly in the country, which offered the greatest advantages to the company."³⁷

Lisa's hopes were quickly extinguished. On 2 June he overtook Hunt. From that date the two parties ascended the Missouri together, a situation originally desired by Lisa for their mutual protection. Hunt's initial plan was to follow the Lewis and Clark route up the Missouri beyond the Great Falls. His mind was changed by the arguments of five experienced mountain trappers met and engaged on the way up the Missouri. They convinced Hunt that they knew of an easier route, striking west from the Arikara Villages. And more important, it was a much safer route, as it lay far south of Niitsitapi country. This latter point appears to have been the deciding factor.³⁸ When Lisa reached the

³⁷ Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 199.

³⁸ John Bradbury, "Bradbury's Travels in the Interior of America, 1809-1811," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 5 (New York, 1904 [1817]), Bradbury journal entries of 22 and 26-27 May 1811 and Ramsay Crooks narrative, 93, 98-100 and 228; and, Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 113-4. Bradbury's "Travels" have recently been re-issued. John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811* (Lincoln, 1986 [1817]). The avoidance of the territory of the Blackfoot alliance also figured prominently in the route selection of the eastward bound trip from Astoria in 1812. See Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 208-9, and, Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 53. One of Astor's sea-going party, Gabriel Franchère, reported upon the arrival on 18 January 1812 of the overland party at Astoria, at the mouth of the Columbia River, that Hunt "in order to avoid the Blackfeet (a dangerous and bloodthirsty tribe that kills all in its path)...took a southern route." Gabriel Franchère, *Journal of a Voyage on the North West Coast of North America during the Years 1811, 1812, 1813 and 1814*, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Toronto, 1969 [1854]), 109.

Mandan Villages he heard the encouraging news from Reuben Lewis that Henry was safe and on his way with valuable fur returns. Henry finally appeared, probably shortly after mid-July 1811, but recited to Lisa the disturbing story of the battle at the Three Forks the previous autumn between 200 members of the Blackfoot alliance and about 20 of his hunters, a battle in which only one trapper and some 20 First Nations people were purportedly killed.³⁹ This must finally have sounded the death knell to Lisa's lingering hopes for the exploitation of Niitsitapi territory. The St. Louis Missouri Fur Company immediately withdrew all of its men from the regions above the Mandan. That spring, Lisa quickly organized a new group of partners into a new company, the Missouri Fur Company, but after another difficult season upriver, it too retreated below the Mandan Villages. It would be another decade before any American organization dared again to venture near the territory of the five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance.

Meanwhile on the North Saskatchewan River the British and Canadian traders were well aware of the difficulties encountered by their prospective American rivals. In May 1811 Hudson's Bay Company officer James Bird learned at Edmonton House of the gruesome fate of Andrew Henry's captured men. Piikani people there had threatened to make "dry Meat" of the body of any Hudson's Bay Company or North West Company man whom they caught "going to supply their Enemies" west of the mountains. Bird wrote:

This threat they are sufficiently brutal to fulfill in its utmost extent, for, according to the concurring testimony of their own, and several other tribes, the Blood [Kainai] Indians, in course of Last summer, after Destroying three American Settlements on the Mississoury and killing most of the Men, horrid to relate,

³⁹ The exact date of Henry's arrival at the Mandan Villages is not known. Chittenden said only that it was sometime after mid-July. Oglesby stated that it was in September 1811, but the letter which he cited recounting this battle tale was published, according to Oglesby's own footnote, in the *Missouri Gazette*, on 8 August 1811, tending to support a July meeting of Henry and Lisa at the Mandan Villages. See Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 144, and, Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 115n.

roasted the Body of the principal American and eat it with the most savage Exultation.⁴⁰

Alexander Henry, Bird's North West Company rival, had obviously heard this same story at Rocky Mountain House, and firsthand from the Kainai. They reported the killing of an American company officer who had himself killed two Kainai when attacked. "This exasperated them, and I have reason to suppose they butchered him in a horrible manner and then ate him, partly raw and partly broiled."⁴¹ Whether true or not, and it is not too likely that it was, the traders on the Saskatchewan certainly believed this story of Kainai cannibalism.⁴²

From what James Bird later also learned, Hunt's decision to strike overland from the Arikara Villages to the West Coast proved fortuitous, though Hunt may not have realized it during his long ordeal. As described in detail in Chapter Three, by the fall of 1811 the Piikani had forced the North West Company to abandon the North Saskatchewan River and Howse Pass route to the Columbia. On hearing of the American overland expedition, they sought to halt it as well, undoubtedly for the same reasons. In December 1812 Bird reported, based on information received from a company servant who had been travelling with the Piikani, their continuing efforts to block Euroamerican transmontane travel and trade. Bird wrote:

⁴⁰ Edmonton House post journal, 13 May 1811, B.60/a/9, reel 1M49, HBCA.

⁴¹ Henry, *The Journal*, vol. 2, 545-6.

⁴² While cannibalism did exist in certain parts of North America north of Mesoamerica, notably among Iroquoian-speaking tribes in the Northeast, it was not a known practice of the peoples of the northern Plains. These two renditions of this particular incident, whether real, or concocted by the Kainai and their allies to instill fear and respect, are the only references to cannibalism among the Niitsitapi which I have encountered. For a thorough discussion of North American cannibalism, see Thomas S. Abler and Michael H. Logan, "The Florescence and Demise of Iroquoian Cannibalism: Human Sacrifice and Malinowski's Hypothesis," *Man in the Northeast* no. 35 (Spring 1988), 1-26.

James Whiteway acquired no Information of consequence by his Summer abode on the Missouri; the Indians resided there all the Summer in hopes of cutting off some Americans who they expected would ascend that River, but they saw none; and we have heard from the Columbia that the Americans, taught by frequent Disasters, left the Missouri & took their Route by Land to the Columbia, where about forty then had safely arrived.⁴³

Apart from the North West Company's buying out of the Astorians and some general news of the War of 1812, no American-related activity is again mentioned in any surviving upper Saskatchewan records until the early 1820s. The 1812-1813 return overland expedition from Astoria, led by Robert Stuart, intentionally steered well clear of Niitsitapi territory. He was convinced "by very urgent persuasions" to take a "tract, as less circuitous and more out of the walks of the Blackfoot Indians, who are very numerous and inimical to the whites."⁴⁴

Early and Ongoing Hostility of the Blackfoot Alliance to Americans

Lisa's and the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company's experiences and reactions in this first American fur "trade" encounter with the tribes of the Blackfoot alliance foretold and symbolized the overall state of affairs between Americans and these five peoples until the construction of Fort Piegan in 1831. Although the two distinct American production systems that characterized the Rocky Mountain and Upper Missouri fur trade era of the mid-1820s to the late 1830s had not yet clearly been developed and defined, their genesis was evident in the 1808-1811 plans and actions of Lisa and his partners. Their strategy, to establish trading posts on the lower river and to send large parties of trappers to the

⁴³ Edmonton House post journal, 6 December 1812, B.60/a/11, 1M49, HBCA.

⁴⁴ Robert Stuart, *On the Oregon Trail: Robert Stuart's Journey of Discovery*, ed., Kenneth A. Spaulding (Norman, 1953 [1935]), 7 September 1812 journal entry, p. 94. Stuart maintained a hearty respect for the dangers in travelling even on the southern fringes of Niitsitapi territory. See entries of 29 September and 1 October 1812, on pages 106-8.

headwaters of the Missouri,⁴⁵ resulted in a relatively successful business with their First Nations trading partners, but years of hostility with the aggrieved members of the Blackfoot alliance.

Many theories have been propounded to explain the ongoing hostile attitude of the Niitsitapi and their allies to Americans. The 1806 killing of the two Piikani was long held to be the decisive factor, but, while certainly not a cause of endearment, this incident was seen, as stated above, by at least some members of the alliance as understandable self-defence and not reason enough for any lasting antagonism against an entire people.⁴⁶ Colter's involvement in the 1808 battle of the allied Crow and Flathead against members of the Blackfoot alliance perhaps further exacerbated the situation, but would not have been sufficient to create such deep-seated enmity, as has been claimed.⁴⁷ Hiram Martin Chittenden argued that the over-riding source of this long-standing hostility was the strategic error made by Lisa in first building a trading post in the territory of the Crow, the perennial enemies of the Niitsitapi, when the principal object of his endeavours was ultimately to tap the resources of the Three Forks region, Piikani territory. According to Chittenden, this apparent alliance with and support of the Crow, as exemplified by Fort Manuel and the 1808 Colter incident, turned the Blackfoot alliance against any and all Americans.⁴⁸ Wishart argued that the Niitsitapi "would not trade with the Americans," and that the "British had managed to maintain tolerably good relations with the Blackfoot

⁴⁵ Thomas Biddle 1819 letter, quoted in Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 42.

⁴⁶ Thwaites, *Lewis and Clark*, vol. 5, 223-4n., and, Wheeler, *The Trail*, vol. 2, 312.

⁴⁷ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 711, and, Harris, *John Colter*, 127.

⁴⁸ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 119, and vol. 2, 711 and 713n.

only by staying outside the Blackfoot hunting grounds and encouraging those Indians to travel to the posts on the Saskatchewan to trade.⁴⁹

Chittenden's assertion is partially correct, in that intercourse with the Crow might have soured potential friendly relations with the five allied tribes. However, this merely influenced, it did not determine, American-Niitsitapi relations. The British and Canadians in this same period were actively involved in trade with the Assiniboine, Cree, Kootenay and Flathead, all then enemies of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples, and these traders did not suffer the wrath of the Blackfoot alliance, though it did oppose such trade with their foes. Wishart's statements, on the other hand, are way off the mark on this point. As he emphasized throughout his work, the first Americans in Niitsitapi territory, after Lewis and Clark, were there to trap and to hunt, not to trade. They did not present the Blackfoot alliance with a trade option. Henry's and Menard's fort at the Three Forks was meant as a base for company trappers; a trading post for the Niitsitapi farther downstream was an afterthought that was never put into effect.⁵⁰ As for the British and Canadians staying out of Niitsitapi territory, they quite profitably ran rival posts on the South Saskatchewan River near the heart of Niitsitapi country off and on from 1800 to 1805. In 1822-1823 the Hudson's Bay Company again established itself at the confluence of the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers, granted though, with a considerable increase in the perceived risk over its North Saskatchewan River locations. And when these traders confined themselves to posts on the North Saskatchewan, they were asked by the Piikani to return to a location more central to the life and territory of this people.⁵¹ Moreover, the most successful Piikani/Niitsitapi trading posts of all were

⁴⁹ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 45.

⁵⁰ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 95.

⁵¹ See Chapters Three and Four, and also, James Bird Edmonton House district report, 31 August 1815, fo. 4d., B.60/e/1, reel 1M777, HBCA.

Fort Piegan and its successor, Fort McKenzie, located right in the heart of Piikani country, near the mouth of the Marias River. The peoples of the Blackfoot alliance were not averse to fur trade posts in their territory; that is exactly what they wanted.

American Rationalizations

To explain this seemingly unrelenting Niitsitapi hostility, the Americans looked not at the possible shortcomings of their own practices, but sought comprehension and vindication in external influences. They blamed the British on the Saskatchewan for inciting the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance against them. From the earliest post-Lewis and Clark contact times to the 1820s, 1830s and beyond, a constant theme running through American explanations or justifications of their failures with these five peoples was the ever-present, but never once documented, British incitement to violence. By 1811, at least three of Lisa's colleagues or compatriots had charged or hinted at British involvement in the hostility of the Blackfoot alliance. Henry Marie Brackenridge, who accompanied Lisa's 1811 expedition to the Mandan Villages, stated that the 1806 Lewis and Clark incident was partly responsible for the Niitsitapi's "most deadly hatred to the Americans," but that "something may also be ascribed to the instigation of British traders."⁵² Thomas James, who was a member of Henry's and Menard's party to the Three Forks, met men of the North West Company just above the Mandan Villages. He wrote, "We suspected them of inciting the Blackfeet against us, and many of our company attributed our subsequent misfortunes to their hostility.... They traded regularly with the British traders and procured of them their arms and ammunition."⁵³ Reuben

⁵² Brackenridge, "Brackenridge's Journal," 28.

⁵³ James, *Three Years*, 26-7. James identified these rivals as "agents of the Hudson's Bay Company," but as his editor, Milo Milton Quaife, correctly pointed out (27n.), they were actually North West Company men.

Lewis concurred, writing from the Three Forks to his brother, Meriwether, "I am confident that the Blackfeet are urged on by the British traders in there Country."⁵⁴ This belief became quite widespread throughout the United States in the early 1800s, being picked up, as one historian put it, "on all levels of commerce and politics," including in the United States Senate and in the White House.⁵⁵ While certainly the two Canadian and British companies trading with the Blackfoot-speaking tribes benefited from this violence, both in maintaining a Saskatchewan River monopoly of the trade and, to a much lesser extent, through the sporadic acquisition of stolen/confiscated American furs through trade with members of the Blackfoot alliance, there still to this day has not been a shred of evidence unearthed by anyone to substantiate these 19th-century charges, at least not any evidence that I have seen.

Unfortunately, for the most part 20th-century American historians, though apparently finding nothing to support these self-serving accusations, have done little or nothing to refute them.⁵⁶ The North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company certainly traded the comparatively few captured furs, but failure by either one to have done so would surely have alienated their First Nations trading partners and sent these

⁵⁴ Reuben Lewis letter of 21 April 1810, quoted in Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 95. For a detailed analysis of this period, see Andrea G. Radke, "Reuben Lewis: Experiences on the Upper Missouri River, 1809-1813," in *Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium*, 32-43.

⁵⁵ Dunwiddie, "The Nature," 130-1.

⁵⁶ Chittenden and Dunwiddie left the whole matter hanging, while Wishart and Phillips, without citing a single source, both supported these 19th-century accusations. Wishart wrote, "The Americans, with some justification, accused the British of stoking this Blackfoot animosity." Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 45 and 46. See also: Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 150; Dunwiddie, "The Nature," 131; and, Phillips and Smurr, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 394. This very year, 2001, a new book on the Missouri River trade has emphatically reiterated this standard American position. Barbour wrote that Niitsitapi "enmity [to Americans] was unquestionably fueled by British traders." Barton Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Trade* (Norman, 2001), 25.

peoples scurrying to the rival company. The two companies were a far greater threat to each other in the trade with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance in the pre-merger period than were any American efforts. Despite the violence which erupted elsewhere in Rupert's Land before 1821 between these two rivals, none occurred on the upper Saskatchewan (see Chapter Three). Perhaps these Euroamerican traders realized their incredibly vulnerable position so close to Niitsitapi territory, and between the Cree and the Blackfoot alliance, who were generally actively warring enemies. In the face of bitter economic rivalry the English and Canadian companies on the Saskatchewan occasionally even operated their competing trading concerns within a single stockade, for mutual protection. In the absence of any evidence whatsoever, there is absolutely no reason to assume or accept the likelihood or probability that initial and ongoing Niitsitapi hostility to Americans was in any way the result of alleged (mythical?) British or Canadian incitement. This proposition may have originated from private companies trying to justify their failing practices to the Government of the United States, to ensure ongoing access to the fur riches. It may have been so widely and long accepted because around the Great Lakes, and farther east, such practices of encouraging First Nations hostility was often employed by one or other Euroamerican or European group against its rivals or enemies. So why not on the northern Plains too? As for the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre, their response may quite simply and understandably be taken as efforts to repel invaders or to dissuade trespassers. These uninvited Americans offered nothing, while despoiling Niitsitapi land and resources. Of course the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance reacted as they did against these interlopers.

Retreat and Regrouping

By the end of the second decade of the century neither the Missouri Fur Company, nor any of its St. Louis competitors, had progressed beyond the Mandan and Hidatsa villages,

below which they had retreated in 1812. Low beaver prices, the War of 1812, a decline in support in St. Louis for further risky Missouri River ventures and, finally, the depression of 1819-1820 all contributed to keeping the St. Louis-based fur trade no farther west in 1820 than it had been before Lisa's and his partners' bold efforts of 1807-1812. In 1818 the trade on the lower Missouri had revived sufficiently to allow Lisa to contemplate a return to the headwaters of the Missouri,⁵⁷ but his untimely death in 1820 and the staggering depression that hit St. Louis at this same time kept the Missouri Fur Company's operations confined to the river's lower and middle reaches.

The year 1821 saw a resurgence in demand for furs and a revitalization of the St. Louis fur trade. At that time there were three established firms in that centre engaged in the trade; Astor's American Fur Company had yet to get a toehold, but it was negotiating to do so. Besides the Missouri Fur Company, then headed by Joshua Pilcher, there were: the French Fur Company, owned and operated by Bartholomew Berthold and Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and, a new firm founded by William H. Ashley and longtime Missouri trader, Andrew Henry. Only two of these firms, however, were immediately determined to exploit the far reaches of the Missouri River country, the Missouri Fur Company and the Ashley-Henry concern.⁵⁸

Pilcher got the jump on his competitors. By the fall of 1821 the Missouri Fur Company was re-established on the Yellowstone River, near the mouth of the Bighorn River, with a force of about 150 men. Pilcher built Fort Benton there, named in honour of that staunch defender of the American fur traders and recently elected Missouri senator, Thomas Hart Benton. Pilcher was joined the next year by two colleagues, Robert

⁵⁷ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 147.

⁵⁸ The best single piece on this period of resurgence in the St. Louis fur trade and also on Ashley's career is Richard M. Clokey, *William H. Ashley: Enterprise and Politics in the Trans-Mississippi West* (Norman, 1980).

Jones and Michael Immell, who brought up another 180 men. Through a combination of trapping and trading in Crow territory Pilcher managed to send down some \$25,000 worth of furs to St. Louis in the fall of 1822. The Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre were well aware of this renewed American presence. As noted in Chapter Four, in October 1822, to ensure his safety, before leading an exploring party from the post just built at the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers, Chief Factor Donald McKenzie, the head of the Hudson's Bay Company's Bow River Expedition, had to assure the Niitsitapi that his intention was not "to assist their enemies and the Americans."⁵⁹ About this same time unconfirmed, and now obviously untrue, rumours reached Edmonton House from the Sarcee that the Piikani were trading with Americans.⁶⁰

Slower off the mark than the Missouri Fur Company, Ashley and Henry were more innovative in their approach to fur gathering. They advertised for men to trap on commission, rather than on a system of annual wages, though their new practice was modified in later years. They also planned not to engage in trade with any First Nations peoples. This was a drastic departure from earlier Missouri operations, which had all included trading on the lower Missouri, trading and trapping combined among the Crow, and trapping and hunting alone in the Three Forks and Rocky Mountain regions. In early April 1822, Henry led a large party of anywhere from 100 to 180 men upriver to the mouth of the Yellowstone River.⁶¹ There he built a post, Fort Henry. Ashley and a second group arrived at the fort on 1 October. They planned to use Fort Henry purely as a depot for fur storage, and also for self-defence, not as a trading post. Their furs would be

⁵⁹ Bow River Expedition (Chesterfield House) post journal, 15 October 1822, B.34/a/4, reel 1M20, HBCA.

⁶⁰ Edmonton House post journal, 25 and 26 November 1822, B.60/a/21, reel 1M49, HBCA.

⁶¹ Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 70n.

accumulated not by First Nations people coming in to trade, but by imported trappers, mostly Whites, strategically dispersed throughout the countryside, who would be met once or twice a year at prearranged sites.⁶² With Ashley's arrival, supplies for the fall and winter hunt were distributed. Henry sent trappers up both the Yellowstone River and the Missouri River, as high as the Musselshell River.⁶³ In mid-October Ashley set off for St. Louis in one of the two keelboats with the already-collected furs to arrange for the next spring's outfit.

In the late winter of 1822-1823 two different American companies were poised to re-enter the country of the Blackfoot alliance. Their British rival was aware of their presence from reports of these First Nations customers. In early March 1823, John Edward Harriott of the Bow River Expedition wrote to Governor Simpson about his 50-day trip from his post.

The Indian accounts at present all agree in one point, namely that no beaver can be found any where on this side of the Rocky Mountains except in one branch which empties into the Mississourie running through the Lands of the Crows__ and this itself they tell us is almost ruined by the Americans, who ascend the Mississourie in very large Crafts, To prove this they bring us traps belonging to these people.... The best Beaver they have they procure in this manner in caches and robbing the Americans.⁶⁴

Later that month a party of Siksika in at the post on the South Saskatchewan River reported that "they saw an American establishm' at the Forks of the R^d Deers River which Joins the Missouri from the South, and a great number of Crow Indian Tents surrounding

⁶² Ibid., 75n.

⁶³ Phillips and Smurr, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 397.

⁶⁴ Harriott to Simpson, Bow River, 1 March 1823, fo. 31, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/117, reel 3M52, HBCA.

them.”⁶⁵ They were describing Fort Henry at the mouth of the Yellowstone, a river known to the First Nations peoples of the region as the Elk or Red Deer River.⁶⁶

In the Bow River Expedition’s final report of 1 May 1823, Francis Heron correctly predicted the lack of any immediate American threat to the Hudson’s Bay Company’s trade with the five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, based both on one sound assessment and on one persistent, long-held misconception of the Saskatchewan traders.

Heron reported:

The Company need be under no apprehensions of the Americans encroaching upon their territories in this quarter, as the Countries bordering upon the lines, are too poor in furs, to induce them to undertake such an enterprize; but should they make the attempt their inveterate enemies the Slave Indians [term encompassing the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Gros Ventre and, sometimes, the Sarcee], will always thwart their views on that score.⁶⁷

Heron’s prediction that the “Slave Indians” would “thwart” any American efforts was prophetic, for within days of the writing of this report both American concerns were driven from the Upper Missouri by members of the Blackfoot alliance. Heron’s assertion that the lands of the alliance were “too poor in furs” to entice such a risky venture stands in stark contrast to the view predominantly held by Americans, one propagated by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. In 1806, Lewis wrote to President Jefferson: “That portion of the Continent watered by the Missouri and all it’s branches from the Cheyenne upwards is richer in beaver and Otter than any country on earth particularly that proportion of it’s subsidiary streams lying within the Rocky mountains.”⁶⁸ The American

⁶⁵ Bow River Expedition post journal, 19 March 1823, B.34/a/4, reel 1M20, HBCA.

⁶⁶ W.P. Clark, *The Indian Sign Language* (Philadelphia, 1885), 423.

⁶⁷ Bow River Expedition report, 1 May 1823, fos. 4-4d., B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA.

⁶⁸ Lewis to Jefferson, St. Louis, 23 September 1806, in Thwaites, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, vol. 7, 335. Clark expressed exactly the same beliefs as to the riches of the headwaters of the Missouri. See Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals*, vol. 8, 414.

assessment proved far more accurate, and this despite the longer-standing and more friendly relationship between the members of the Blackfoot alliance and the Saskatchewan traders.

While on the surface an enigma, the unravelling of this mystery is quite simple. Though limited in duration and extent, American contact with the territory of the five-tribe alliance was with its richest part (richest in furs, that is), the Three Forks region of the Missouri, the headwaters of that river at the Rockies. The men of the British and Canadian companies, even those of the Bow River Expedition, had travelled widely but had never seen the Three Forks. They were most familiar with the buffalo-rich, but beaver-poor, northern Plains area of Niitsitapi territory. To this time, the Three Forks and Rocky Mountain regions south of the 49th parallel, the prize sought after by the Americans since the passage of Lewis and Clark through this territory in 1805 and 1806, had remained terra incognita to the Hudson's Bay and North West companies. The Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre peoples may quite intentionally have kept the beaver riches of their most southern territory from the Hudson's Bay and North West companies. They were partners in trade, but the relationship was limited to that. The members of the Blackfoot alliance may have been quite satisfied with the extent of the relationship as it then existed; they may not have wanted pressure from these Euroamerican companies to exploit these beaver riches. Keeping the Saskatchewan traders in ignorance may have been viewed as the best policy. Not only would this "secrecy" keep unwanted incursions from happening, for example the possible influx of the imported Iroquois at the instigation of the Euroamericans, but it would eliminate the arising of conflict between the wants of these Euroamericans and the religious and cultural beliefs of the Niitsitapi

against the killing of beaver.⁶⁹ What the Saskatchewan traders did not know could not hurt or annoy the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance.

1823

In the spring of 1823 all hell broke loose among the Americans on the Upper Missouri. Early that season Jones and Immell led a large party of Missouri Fur Company trappers to the Three Forks region and Henry likewise took a small group of his people to the vicinity of the Great Falls to reinforce the contingent sent upriver in the fall. On 4 May, Henry's united party of 11 men was attacked by the Kainai. Four of his men were killed and about 200 traps were lost. The Americans identified their attackers as the "Blackfeet" or the "Blackfoot Indians," but they were in reality the Kainai, who later traded the American furs at Edmonton House.⁷⁰ Henry and the other survivors fled the upper river, taking refuge in Fort Henry until word arrived from Ashley from downriver. Shortly after this incident, in mid-May on the Jefferson River, the Jones-Immell party encountered 38 Piikani, who appeared amicable; one, Iron Shirt, even presented a letter that declared him to be a friend to the Whites. According to Pilcher's later account, which of course identified these First Nations people as Blackfeet, they spent the night encamped together and parted, apparently on good terms.⁷¹ However, while Jones and Immell were

⁶⁹ Morgan, "Beaver Ecology/Beaver Mythology," 34-5.

⁷⁰ Dale L. Morgan, ed., *The West of William H. Ashley* (Denver, 1964), 41-2 and 69-73. This wonderful collection of primary documents is the best single source of original material covering Ashley's entire career. For confirmation of the identity of these attackers as the Kainai, see Edmonton House post journal, 23 October 1823, B.60/a/22, 1M49, HBCA.

⁷¹ Iron Shirt's letter was dated "Mountain Post [Rocky Mountain House], 1823." He was given another letter by Jones and Immell attesting to his good reputation and his behaviour towards Americans. This letter was dated 19 May 1823, on the Jefferson River, 40 miles above the Three Forks. Pilcher's account of this meeting may be found in his testimony to the Committee of the Senate on Indian Affairs, p. 454, in "Proposition to Hold

travelling to Fort Benton, the Kainai assembled a force of some 300 to 400 men and attacked the trappers on the Yellowstone. Jones, Immell and five other men were killed, and \$15,000 to \$16,000 worth of furs were taken. According to the Piikani account of these events, recorded in the Edmonton House post journal, the Iron Shirt band of the Piikani parted peacefully from Jones and Immell, and it was a party of Kainai who later attacked these Americans. Pilcher testified before a Senate hearing that it was the same group of "Blackfoot Indians" who initially met Jones and Immell on friendly terms and then later attacked them. However, Pilcher was not present at either incident and the Piikani, led by Iron Shirt, who recounted the events at Edmonton House, had no reason to lie, at least not then to the Hudson's Bay Company.⁷² Besides, it was the Kainai, and not the Piikani, who came to Edmonton House throughout the 1823-1824 season with their American prizes. Later in the summer of 1823 some Siksika also killed four unidentified Americans who were ascending the Missouri River "in two Small Wooden Canoes."

Treaties with the Tribes Beyond the Mississippi for Preserving the Fur Trade, for Additional Agents," 18 March 1824, in *CIS US Serial Set*, Ind.aff. 202 (18-1), ASP08. The Jones-Immell letter was copied into the Edmonton House post journal, 28 November 1823, B.60/a/22, 1M49, HBCA. Part of Pilcher's testimony and the 23 October and 28 November 1823 Edmonton House journal entries are reproduced in Morgan, ed., *The West*, 41-2. This is almost certainly the Iron Shirt noted by Walter McClintock. See his *The Old North Trail, or Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians* (Lincoln, 1968 [1910]), 422-6 and 532, and, *Old Indian Trails* (Boston, 1992 [1923]), 212. Iron Shirt was one in the succession of keepers of the Bull Plume Winter Count. See Raczka, *Winter Count*, 13-6. Iron Shirt later met Maximilian, Prince of Wied, and his portrait was painted by Maximilian's companion, the artist Karl Bodmer. This portrait is reproduced in Raczka, *Winter Count*, 12, and in colour in William H. Goetzmann, intro., *Karl Bodmer's America* ([Japan], 1984), 246. Bodmer's original paintings are held by the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska.

⁷² Pilcher testimony, in "Proposition to Hold Treaties with the Tribes Beyond the Mississippi for Preserving the Fur Trade, for Additional Agents," 18 March 1824, p. 454, in *CIS US Serial Set*, Ind.aff. 202 (18-1), ASP08.

Other Siksika apparently then pillaged an abandoned American post on the Missouri, likely Fort Henry at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers.⁷³

Developments much farther down the Missouri River in late May and in early June 1823 added to the troubles of these two American operations. The Arikara forcibly stopped the upward passage of Ashley's two keelboats, attacking Ashley's party on 1 June, killing at least 12 men and wounding 11 in the first day's battle. Ashley was pinned down on an island near the Arikara Villages for over a month. Jedediah Smith carried word of this, "the worst disaster in fur trade history," to Henry at the mouth of the Yellowstone.⁷⁴ Fearing the elimination of their role as middlemen in a Plains trade that had existed before the coming of any Euroamericans to the region, the Arikara finally took action and shut down traffic on the Missouri. The peculiar practices of Ashley's and Henry's firm, strictly trapping the upper river with no involvement at all in trade with the First Nations peoples of its lower reaches, probably exacerbated long-standing Arikara anxieties and triggered this desperate measure.⁷⁵ The Arikara hostilities were quickly put down that August by the combined forces of the two fur trade concerns, including Henry and 50 of his men from Fort Henry, and a detachment of the United States Army, under Colonel Henry Leavenworth. But by the end of that summer both American "fur Trade companies" had abandoned the region above the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. The Missouri Fur Company retreated to the Lower Missouri River.

⁷³ Edmonton House post journal, 23 January 1824, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

⁷⁴ Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 98; Morgan, ed., *The West*; and, Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (Lincoln, 1964), 57 and 64-5.

⁷⁵ For a detailed analysis of the complex history of the Arikara which led to this 1823 incident, see Roger L. Nichols, "Backdrop for Disaster: Causes of the Arikara War of 1823," *South Dakota History* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984), 93-113, and, Charles E. Orser, "Understanding Arikara Trading Behaviour: A Cultural Case Study of the Ashley-Leavenworth Episode of 1823," in Thomas C. Buckley, ed., *Rendezvous: Selected Papers of the Fourth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1981* (St. Paul, 1984), 101-7.

Ashley and Henry gave up hope of exploiting the Missouri above the mouth of the Yellowstone. Henry returned to and then immediately abandoned Fort Henry, shifting his trapping efforts to the upper Yellowstone River and to the central Rockies, south of Niitsitapi country.⁷⁶

Word of these events first reached the Hudson's Bay Company at Carlton House, in mid-August 1823. Two freemen who had been travelling with the Niitsitapi and who had been present when "a war party of Slave Indians" that spring fell on "a large party of Americans and Crow Mountain Indians" provided an account of the attack "in the neighbourhood of Yellow Stone River," in which reportedly 16 Americans and 8 Crow people were killed. The two also gave details of the spoils, including 25 packs of beaver and 16 rifles.⁷⁷ This was likely the Kainai attack on the Jones and Immell party. Two months later at Edmonton House, parties of Kainai arrived to trade the taken furs, many of which were marked and identifiable as once having been the property of the Missouri Fur Company. In his post journal Chief Trader John Rowand addressed the predicament that he faced in trading these furs.

I must however add, that Strangers or persons unacquainted with the nature and disposition of these Indians, would not consider us justified in receiving and paying such property, as we suspect has been plundered_ But a contrary behaviour towards those we have now seen, would spread like lightning thro' the plains, and leave us the ensuing Spring, with only the number of these Beaver, now in our possession, which is not so far very considerable, as those Indians would sooner destroy or tear them into thousands of Pieces, rather than be at the trouble of carrying them hither without payment.⁷⁸

More news of Kainai and Siksika depredations reached the North Saskatchewan posts throughout the winter of 1823-1824. In mid-March a large party of Kainai was

⁷⁶ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 51-2; Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 101; and, Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 67-114.

⁷⁷ Carlton House post journal, 17 August 1823, B.27/a/13, reel 1M19, HBCA.

⁷⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 23 October 1823, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

again in at Edmonton House, trading considerable quantities of beaver pelts and buffalo robes, and displaying the "trophies" taken from the Americans, which included "Rifles, the first Volume of the Arabian Nights, Lewis & Clarke's travels in two Volumes."⁷⁹

Anxious to be more fully apprised of this new situation, the return of Americans to the Upper Missouri, Rowand had earlier that season sent three men with the Piikani to learn what they could of developments south of the 49th parallel. The three brought no word of any American activity with their return that spring.⁸⁰ There really was no news to be had of American activity on the Upper Missouri; before 1824 the Americans had abandoned their efforts there.

The Kainai and Arikara attacks of the spring of 1823 resulted in: a punitive military expedition against the Arikara, calls for an army post at the mouth of the Marias River, a congressional investigation into the state of affairs on the Missouri, and, something of an international incident between the United States and Great Britain.⁸¹ Once again accusations of British incitement were rampant in the United States, accusations which many thought were confirmed by the Hudson's Bay Company's willingness to trade the furs taken by the Kainai. United States Indian Agent Benjamin O'Fallon fanned the fires with his July 1823 charges, charges which were based completely on supposition.

I was in hopes, that the british Indⁿ. traders, had some bounds to their rapacity. I was in hopes, that during the late Indian war (1812-1815), in which, they were so instrumental in the indiscriminate massacre of our people, they were Completely satiated with our blood - but it appears not to have been the Case, like the greedy wolf, not satisfied with the flesh, they quarrel over the bones - They ravage our

⁷⁹ Ibid., 16 March and 23 January 1824.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 27 November to 1 December 1823 and 21 April 1824.

⁸¹ The best piece on these events is a collection of documents published in 1939. See Abraham P. Nasatir, ed., "The International Significance of the Jones and Immell Massacre and the Aricara Outbreak in 1823," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 30 (January 1939), 77-108.

fields, and are unwilling that we should glean them - Although bar'd by the Treaty of Ghent from participating in our Indian trade, They presume, and are not satisfied to do so - But becoming alarmed at the individual enterprise of our people, they are exciting the Indians against them, they furnish them with the instruments of Hell, and a passport to heaven - The instruments of death, and a passport to our bosoms.⁸²

Whether fervently, or merely conveniently, held, this persistently voiced opinion of British instigation clouded the real issues, the exclusion of certain First Nations peoples from the trade in furs, and the unwelcomed and invasive American trapping and hunting in the territory of other First Nations peoples. When Ashley and Henry had applied for their licence to operate on the Upper Missouri, Superintendent William Clark, newly appointed to his Indian Affairs post at St. Louis, approved their trading license, thus choosing, as one respected American historian has written, "to perpetuate the practice of overlooking legal distinctions between trading and trapping in the Indian country."⁸³ Legal niceties aside, large-scale trapping by Euroamericans, as practised in 1822-1823 in Niitsitapi country by the Missouri Fur Company and as planned by the Ashley-Henry firm, eliminated the First Nations component from what previously, at least among the British and Canadians, had been a Euroamerican-First Nations partnership, a significant change well understood by these First Nations participants in the fur trade. After the Leavenworth campaign against the Arikara in the summer of 1823, public support in the eastern United States for the First Nations position was voiced. Many laid the blame on Ashley's policy of trapping on First Nations lands. A New York newspaper editorialized:

General Ashley, with a party armed and equipped for war and not in the guise of mere traders, invades (that is the true expression) the territories of independent Indian nations, for so by making from time to time, treaties with, we acknowledge

⁸² Quoted in Morgan, ed., *The West*, 44-5. See also Nasatir, ed., "The International Significance," 91, and, Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 104.

⁸³ Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 81 and 85.

them to be, for the purpose of trapping beaver and taking generally other wild animals - No permission is asked of the Indians; on the contrary they are known to be opposed to, and alarmed at, the forcible intrusion of the whites upon their hunting grounds, and it was because they were known to be hostile that all the precautions of war were taken by gen. Ashley and his party against surprise in open hostility. The Indians were, therefore, authorized to repel the approaches of such a party - they did so - and in that contest, unfortunately very many of their country-men fell.⁸⁴

However, the questions put to two witnesses at an 1824 Senate inquiry into the fatal events of 1823 were obviously designed to point an accusing finger at the British traders for inciting their First Nations customers against potential American rivals. United States Indian Agent Richard Graham stated, "I have always found those Indians within our territories who visit British posts more unfriendly to us, and more difficult to control." Joshua Pilcher testified that "the disposition of such tribes of Indians as have intercourse with British traders, particularly the Blackfeet, has been uniformly hostile towards American citizens."⁸⁵ However, both men, in response to the question about the effects of Americans hunting and trapping on First Nations lands, responded that it had negative consequences on American-First Nations relations. Graham asserted:

I am decidedly of opinion that the hunting and trapping on Indian lands by American citizens produces the most unhappy effects upon the mind of the Indians. They look upon their game as we do upon our domestic animals, and hold them in the same estimation. It is their means of support: they have nothing else to depend upon for subsistence. It is not, therefore, unreasonable to suppose that they will not only steal from, but murder, those who are depriving them of their only means of subsistence.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Editorial of 9 October 1823 from the *New York American*, quoted in *ibid.*, 115.

⁸⁵ Graham answer to question 20 and Pilcher answer to question 21, pp. 452 and 456, in "Proposition to Hold Treaties with Tribes beyond the Mississippi for Preserving the Fur Trade, for Additional Agents," 18 March 1824, *CIS US Serial Set*, Ind.aff. 202 (18-1), ASP08.

⁸⁶ Answers to question 25, in *ibid.*, 453 and 456. Graham's testimony was published in full in Richard Graham, "Investigations as to Causes of Indian Hostilities West of the Missouri River, 1824," *Annals of Wyoming* 15, no. 3 (1943), 198-220.

Pilcher further added that “the practice must lead to bad consequences. But no Indians, that I have heard of, ever objected to traders, travellers, or others, killing what was necessary for their subsistence. That comes under the notion of hospitality.”⁸⁷ Despite their latter testimony, both Pilcher and Graham, along with Ashley and countless other Americans, continued to claim British instigation as the cause of hostilities and to propose a military post at the confluence of the Marias and Missouri rivers as the remedy.⁸⁸ No such post was built, at least not until the construction of Fort Buford, in 1866.

Governor Simpson reported to the Governor and Committee of the Hudson’s Bay Company, in London, on Rowand’s unexpected additions to his returns, acquired in bits and pieces throughout the winter of 1823-1824 from the Kainai.⁸⁹ The Committee quickly decided to return the furs or to reimburse the aggrieved American parties, whichever method the Americans should prefer. The Governor in London also wrote to the British Foreign Office, stating “that M^r Rowand erred in judgment in trading these skins and orders will be sent out by the first dispatch that no Furs whatever with American Fur Companys mark thereon or any others which our Officers have reason to suspect have been plundered by the Indians from their Traders, shall be bartered or in any way taken from the Indians in future.”⁹⁰ This was a policy more easily stated in London than carried out on the Saskatchewan in the face of uncomprehending First Nations customers. Why should a pelt captured from a Flathead person be acceptable in trade, but not one taken from a White trapper in Flathead country? Why should furs trapped

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 117-8, and, Morgan, ed., *The West*, 63-4.

⁸⁹ Nasatir, ed., “The International Significance,” 87.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 80-2.

without permission on Niitsitapi lands and then **confiscated** by the Niitsitapi themselves not be acceptable to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company?

One further upshot of the violent episodes of 1823 and of the Senate inquiry of 1824 was a concerted effort by the Government of the United States to find a peaceful solution to these continuing problems with the Missouri tribes. In 1825, the United States War Department sent General Henry Atkinson, Major Benjamin O'Fallon, and other commissioners, with a military escort of more than 475 men, to negotiate a series of peace agreements with these many and various First Nations peoples. The expedition left Fort Atkinson at Council Bluffs in mid-May and began its ascent of the Missouri River. It concluded treaties with several tribes on its upward journey.⁹¹ One of its principal goals was to establish peaceful relations with the Niitsitapi peoples, and the Gros Ventre. Atkinson's expedition reached the mouth of the Yellowstone River and Henry's abandoned post on 17 August, in hopes of meeting both the Niitsitapi and the Assiniboiné. Two days later they were fortuitously joined by William H. Ashley, who was returning via the Yellowstone from a successful winter's trapping in the central Rockies.⁹² Ashley informed Atkinson that the Blackfoot-speaking peoples were then apparently above the Great Falls of the Missouri. Virtually giving up all hope of encountering the Niitsitapi, Atkinson nonetheless led a party of 350 men 120 miles up the Missouri above the Yellowstone, in the hope of meeting and making a treaty with the Assiniboiné. Their efforts proved futile. They met no First Nations people and they soon returned to the confluence of the Yellowstone and the Missouri.

⁹¹ Atkinson's report of the expedition was printed as "Movements of the Expedition Which Lately Ascended the Missouri River," pp. 2-16, *CIS US Serial Set*, H.doc 117 (19-1), 136.

⁹² Harrison Clifford Dale, ed., *The Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith, 1822-1829* (Lincoln, 1991), 157-8.

Though never laying eyes on any Blackfoot-speaking peoples, Atkinson reported in great detail on them. Refreshingly, he did not lay any blame on the British for Niitsitapi hostility to Americans. In fact, he pointed out the difficulties and dangers which the British themselves often experienced with these peoples.

British traders sometimes go among them and trade, we understand, with safety; but, notwithstanding, they rob and kill those traders whenever they find them beyond the limits of their own country, or when they find them attempting to pass through on a visit to another tribe. The Blackfeet [Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre], also, we understand, depend on the chase alone for subsistence, live in leather lodges, and dress in skins and robes. They hold the best country for beaver East of the mountains, it being as yet but little trapped, either by themselves or the British traders.⁹³

The reference to British difficulties and losses is almost certainly to the Snake Country expeditions, which the Niitsitapi and their allies opposed. Atkinson's expedition returned safely to Council Bluffs on 19 September, its mission partially fulfilled. However, it would be another 30 years before the first American treaty with the Niitsitapi was signed.

Americans Searching for Explanations

Rather than looking for external forces to explain their violent rejection by the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, the American trappers and would-be traders might better have looked at their own practices. The answer seemed evident to the first United States Government Indian agents who encountered the situation firsthand from the 1820s onward; their appraisal of the situation still seems right on target. After Lewis and Clark, the first Americans to arrive, without invitation or announcement, encroached on the territory of the Niitsitapi primarily to trap furs themselves, thus despoiling the country of these First Nations peoples, while allowing no benefits whatsoever to accrue to them.

⁹³ "Movements of the Expedition Which Lately Ascended the Missouri River," p. 12, *CIS US Serial Set*, H.doc 117 (19-1), 136. Atkinson reported further on the British and the Niitsitapi in November 1825 in "Description of Indians Residing on the Missouri River, Anthropological and Geographical," pp. 656-7, *CIS US Serial Set*, Ind.aff. (19-1), 233.

Not surprisingly, the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and their allies did not take kindly to the depredation of their land and they took the means at their disposal to bring it to a halt. They needed no outside instigators to recognize their own self-interest and to act to protect it.

As early as 1811, Brackenridge recognized the possibility that Niitsitapi hostility was owing, at least in part, "perhaps to the jealousies of the Indians themselves, on seeing white hunters coming to establish themselves in their country and to destroy the beaver."⁹⁴ As noted above, Graham and Pilcher supported this view of an understandable First Nations animosity to trespassing Americans. For the next seven years after this Senate inquiry, as the mountain trapping/rendezvous system was developed, virtually the only exposure that the members of the Blackfoot alliance had to Americans was to interloping trappers, not to traders, for no fur trade post had yet been built for the these First Nations peoples on the Upper Missouri. In the early 1830s, other American Indian agents assessed this situation. In 1831, John Dougherty, the Upper Missouri Agent, remarked that of all the "tribes that inhabit the fur regions of the Rocky Mountains" the Blackfoot-speaking peoples were "considered the most hostile & formidable."⁹⁵ He went on to point out that, as far as he was aware, no American had ever asked permission to enter their territory and then to suggest that perhaps they would be more peacefully inclined if Americans should do so. "It may be that those Indians might become more reconciled to our hunters were we to ask for, and obtain their consent to hunt which I apprehend has never been done." In his report, Dougherty referred to those Americans

⁹⁴ Brackenridge, "Brackenridge's Journal," 28.

⁹⁵ Dougherty to Secretary of War, 19 November 1831, Camp Leavenworth, Letters Received from the Upper Missouri Agency, 1824-1835, Microfilm Roll 883, M234, BIA, USNA. Dougherty's report was published in full in John Dougherty, "A Description of the Fur Trade in 1831," ed. Richard E. Jensen, *Nebraska History* 56, no. 1 (Spring 1975), 108-20.

involved in the mountain fur business as “traders.”⁹⁶ However, Joshua Pilcher correctly identified them later that same year as “trappers.” Pilcher provided a sketch of “the Mountain business, which is distinct from the regular trade of the country, and which should be called by no other than its proper name_ that is the trapping business.” He said that it was the most valuable branch of the fur business, but that “it is distinct from the Indian trade.”⁹⁷

The next year agent John F.A. Sanford met members of the Blackfoot alliance on the Upper Missouri. He reported, “They told me that they were anxious to be friends with us but that as long as our people continued to trap on their lands, that they would kill them wherever they found them. That our traders had nothing to fear, that they would be well treated.”⁹⁸ He reiterated their feelings in 1833.

The Blackfeet [Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre] have killed 18 or 20 the last winter but who they are I cant say They kill them generally to the S.W. of their Country. but they are all Americans. This is not greater than usual. This does not surprise me at all_ as long as Whites are trapping in that Country it will be the case. The Blackfeet Chiefs have told me that I must never expect any thing else so long as the Whites were trapping in their Country. They said if “you will send Traders

⁹⁶ Dougherty, “A Description.”

⁹⁷ Pilcher to Secretary of War, 1 December 1831, St. Louis, pp. 4-5, Letters Received from the St. Louis Superintendency, 1829-1831, Microfilm Roll 749, M234, BIA, USNA. At this time Pilcher was retired from the fur trade and had just returned from a two-year tour through the West, including the Oregon Territory and parts of Rupert’s Land. He was actively seeking an appointment as an Indian agent. He wanted Dougherty’s job as the Upper Missouri Agent, but he settled for the position of Sac and Fox Agent, in May 1832. Seven years later he was the Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis. See John E. Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher: Fur Trader and Indian Agent* (Norman, 1968).

⁹⁸ Sanford to William Clark, 17 July 1832, St. Louis, pp. 3-4, Letters Received from the St. Louis Superintendency, 1832-1835, Microfilm Roll 750, M234, BIA, USNA. For a biography of this interesting government agent turned fur trader and millionaire businessman, see Janet Lecompte, “John F.A. Sanford,” in LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West* (Glendale, 1972) vol. 9, 351-9.

into our Country we will protect them & treat them;" But for your Trappers_ "Never."⁹⁹

For the American trappers and traders the message was slow to sink in. However, by 1833 the American Fur Company, which was then both successfully carrying on trade with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance at Fort McKenzie and operating large-scale trapping parties in the mountains, realized that continued trapping endangered its newly-acquired trade. William Astor advised:

I think it is worthy of consideration whether we had not better confine ourselves as soon as circumstances will permit, to trade with the Indians, & free Hunters, and give up hunting as part of our upper Missouri business_ The Indians are now too well aware of the value of furred animals in their country, to allow us to hunt them peaceably; and I apprehend a loss of our trade with the Blackfeet [Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre] will be a natural consequence of our coming into collision with them as we must do, if we persevere in the present system of trapping.¹⁰⁰

British and Canadian Practices

On the Saskatchewan the British and Canadian enterprises, through a combination of greater sensitivity to their First Nations customers, and pure happenstance on occasion, avoided the hostility directed at their American rivals on and near the upper reaches of the Missouri. As described in detail in earlier chapters, the North West and Hudson's Bay companies operated trading posts, not large-scale trapping parties on First Nations lands.

⁹⁹ Sanford to Clark, 26 July 1833, St. Louis, p. 3, Folder 13-5/F-29, Box 5, William Clark Papers, MHS. The famous western artist, George Catlin, who travelled upriver with Sanford in 1832 on the American Fur Company steamer *Yellow Stone*, retold what the agent, and undoubtedly fur traders as well, must have told him about differing Niitsitapi attitudes to and intentions for trappers and for traders. Catlin wrote in 1832 that "the Blackfeet" annually killed "some fifteen or twenty men." George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*, vol. 1 (New York, 1973 [1844]), 51-2, and, William R. Swagerty, "'Uncle Sam is a weak old fellow.' Northern Plains Indian Response to American Fur Company Activities, 1826-1854," in *Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium*, 99-100.

¹⁰⁰ William B. Astor to Pierre Chouteau Jr., 17 April 1833, New York, p. 1, Folder Chouteau-Papin Collection, 17 April 1833, Box 29, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

Though they often hoped for greater returns from these lands, their usual response to perceived underproduction was not to employ outside hunters but to send company men or affiliated freemen with particular bands to encourage enhanced fur-gathering efforts or to hunt and trap themselves under the protection of band leaders (see Chapters Three and Four). The North West Company did wander from this path with the introduction of large numbers of Iroquois hunters at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, but before the greatest influx, as noted in Chapter Three, David Thompson informed the Piikani of the plan and received permission to proceed. Despite the initial assent, however, the Iroquois interlopers often felt the anger of the original First Nations inhabitants of the northern Plains and Rockies. When the Hudson's Bay Company broke its normal practices with the Snake River expeditions of the 1820s and 1830s, members of these annual trapping parties often experienced the displeasure of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples with the loss of their property, or of their lives. While planning its Bow River Expedition of 1822-1823, the Hudson's Bay Company was aware, as one company officer predicted, that the Niitsitapi would likely "take umbrage...at seeing the Trappers employed killing Beaver on their lands."¹⁰¹ Luckily for the company the envisioned number of 300 in the expedition, including 150 free trappers, was reduced by circumstances to a total number of under 100, thus decreasing considerably the cause for any potential Niitsitapi annoyance (see Chapter Four).

Two American Production Systems Established

The twin catastrophes of 1823 which befell Ashley's and Henry's enterprise convinced the two partners to forsake the Upper Missouri and to re-direct their efforts to the central Rocky Mountains. After the Arikara campaign ended, Henry led one party of trappers

¹⁰¹ Francis Heron to Governor Simpson, Moose Lake, 14 March 1822, fo. 31d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/116, reel 3M52, HBCA.

and Jedediah Smith took another by separate overland routes from Fort Kiowa, downstream from the Arikara, near the mouth of the White River. Henry constructed a fort in Crow country, yet another Fort Henry, and he sent Smith west of the Rockies.¹⁰² In 1824, Smith returned from the Green River Valley through the Rockies via the South Pass, forgotten by Americans since Stuart's 1813 crossing.¹⁰³ This "re-discovery" of a pass capable of passage by wagons forged the last link in the transportation route that became the Oregon Trail. From 1824, the principal route used by trappers heading west of the Rockies was parallel to the Platte River, then via its north branch to the Sweetwater River and across the South Pass to the Green River watershed. This was also the main emigrant route of a later period.¹⁰⁴ Continuing troubles with First Nations peoples on the Upper Missouri, notably those of the Blackfoot alliance and the Arikara, prompted the development of this alternative to Lewis and Clark's Missouri River transcontinental route, an alternative which avoided the Arikara altogether and passed far south of the usual range of the Niitsitapi and the Gros Ventre. When Ashley and Henry followed the Platte River route to the mountains in the fall of 1824 and arranged for the first rendezvous of July 1825 at Henry's Fork, they revolutionized the fur business in the United States.¹⁰⁵ No fixed posts were required. Ashley, or his agents, would simply have to meet his trappers, and any free trappers, at an agreed-upon point in the mountains to

¹⁰² Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 132. For a quick guide to these various forts Henry, see Figure Six and also Robertson, *Competitive Struggle*, 125-35.

¹⁰³ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, and, John E. Sunder, *Bill Sublette, Mountain Man* (Norman, 1959).

¹⁰⁴ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 458-82.

¹⁰⁵ Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 136-53. On his return from the 1825 rendezvous, Ashley and his party were attacked by a group of "Black-feet," who only wounded one of Ashley's men, but managed to take all but two of the party's horses. See Morgan, ed., *The West*, 129-30.

exchange supplies and trade goods for furs. The annual rendezvous, and the mountain men whom it supported, became a fixture for the next fifteen years, and the stuff of legends to this day. It also resulted in the intentional systematic exclusion of most First Nations peoples from participation in the fur **trade** on their own lands. The Americans ravaged the lands of these peoples, providing no benefit to the First Nations inhabitants whatsoever. And then they wondered why they encountered animosity and violence from the members of the Blackfoot alliance. The wonder is that these American interlopers did not face the same intense and protracted response from many other First Nations peoples whose territory they had invaded and despoiled.

As Wishart has noted, Ashley's creation of the rendezvous system completed the two-fold development of the fur business in the trans-Mississippi West.

Two production systems emerged, each with a distinctive strategy. The Rocky Mountain Trapping System was based on beaver pelts, the Euro-American trapper, the rendezvous trade nexus, and the Platte overland supply route. The main product of the Upper Missouri Fur Trade, on the other hand, was bison robes, procured and processed by Native Americans, exchanged at the trading posts for manufactured products, and moved to St. Louis by water transportation. At St. Louis the production systems joined and the robes, skins and furs were fed into a trade network that was of national and international extent.¹⁰⁶

The beaver trade of the Blackfoot-speaking tribes had yet to be tapped from the Missouri, but it would soon add variety and value to that system's returns. For the next several years the main bodies of Rocky Mountain trappers avoided the territory of the Blackfoot alliance, until the central Rockies began to be played out. Those who did encounter members of the Blackfoot alliance usually paid with their lives.

Just as their firm had overcome its many difficulties and was about to become extremely profitable, Henry suddenly dissolved his partnership with Ashley.¹⁰⁷ Henry

¹⁰⁶ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 135.

retired, but Ashley stayed on to make his fortune, selling out in 1826 to three of his employees, Jedediah Smith, William Sublette and David Jackson. The firm of Smith, Jackson and Sublette was later widely known, as indeed was the Ashley-Henry concern, as the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, though this name was actually first used by the younger trappers who in turn bought out Smith, Jackson and Sublette, in August 1830.¹⁰⁸

While Ashley's trappers had successfully established a continuing presence in the Rockies, the St. Louis-based rival trading concerns were still limited to the Missouri well below the Yellowstone River. Pilcher had managed to send a small party of men to tag after Jedediah Smith's autumn 1823 expedition to the Crow, but by 1824 the Missouri Fur Company was in bankruptcy and its charter had expired.¹⁰⁹ Pilcher and new-found partners stayed in business at Council Bluffs, in the face of stiff competition, until 1827. Then, in a desperate move to regain financial solvency, Pilcher led an expedition up the Platte to the Rockies to challenge Smith, Jackson and Sublette. By 1828, this last effort a complete failure, Pilcher's career as an active fur trader was over.¹¹⁰ The demise of the Missouri Fur Company still left three other major fur trade companies in St. Louis: the firm of Berthold and Chouteau (the French Fur Company); the Columbia Fur Company (founded in 1822); and the newly-arrived Detroit concern, Stone, Bostwick and Company.

Astor Enters the Arena

John Jacob Astor's dream was to control the fur trade of the entire American West. The War of 1812 had forced him to relinquish his West Coast operations, but by 1821 his

¹⁰⁸ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 294.

¹⁰⁹ Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 55-9; Morgan, ed., *The West*, 85-6; and, Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 132.

¹¹⁰ Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 67-9.

American Fur Company and its subsidiaries dominated the trade east of the Mississippi. Astor's strategy in this period was quite evident: "expansion of trade territories and suppression of competition."¹¹¹ The American Fur Company's principal methods of eliminating its competition and expanding its territory were either to negotiate with, buy out and incorporate its rivals, or to drive its opponents out of business by underpricing them, at the cost of short-term losses. The American Fur Company had attempted unsuccessfully to enter the St. Louis trade in 1821. The following year Astor moved the headquarters of the company's recently-created Western Department to St. Louis, under the charge of Ramsay Crooks, his able lieutenant and one-fifth partner in the American Fur Company. That same year, 1822, the Western Department began supplying Berthold and Chouteau; the next year it absorbed Stone, Bostwick and Company.¹¹²

By 1823 the American Fur Company had its foothold in St. Louis and was faced only with the opposition of the Columbia Fur Company, and the French Fur Company, variously named at different times after its principal partners, Bernard Pratte, Bartholomew Berthold and Pierre Chouteau, Jr. Rather than fight a lengthy and costly battle with these long-time St. Louis traders, Astor and Crooks negotiated to bring them into the fold. In December 1826, the firm of Bernard Pratte and Company took over the management of the American Fur Company's Western Department, for a one-half share of the Department's profits.¹¹³ Astor and Crooks also gave up trying to drive the vigorous

¹¹¹ John D. Haeger, "Business Strategy and Practice in the Early Republic: John Jacob Astor and the American Fur Trade," *Western Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (May 1988), 198.

¹¹² Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 52, and, Phillips and Smurr, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 398-402. For a good history of the formation of the Western Department and its activities until Astor's retirement, see Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *John Jacob Astor: Business Man* (Cambridge, 1931), vol. 2, 734-90.

¹¹³ Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, vol. 2, 744-5; Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 52-3; Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 324-5 and 342n; and, Phillips and Smurr, *The American*

Columbia Fur Company out of business. After prolonged negotiations with Kenneth McKenzie, whom Crooks described as “the soul of his concern,”¹¹⁴ this firm became the Upper Missouri Outfit of the Western Department, in July 1827.

The Columbia Fur Company and the Upper Missouri Outfit

The Columbia Fur Company and its reincarnation, the Upper Missouri Outfit, were to have a profound impact on the Upper Missouri. The Columbia Fur Company was founded in 1822 in St. Louis as Tilton and Company. It was named after one of its American partners, J.P. Tilton, but it was best known as the Columbia Fur Company. The strength of this enterprise was the many ex-North West Company and ex-Hudson’s Bay Company men who had headed south to the Mississippi and Missouri rivers after the 1821 merger of those two great companies.¹¹⁵ The most important of these men was Kenneth McKenzie. He had joined the Canadian company in 1817, and, following the merger, was ranked as an apprentice clerk with the newly reorganized Hudson’s Bay Company.¹¹⁶ McKenzie was slated to be discharged from that then over-staffed company

Fur Trade, vol. 2, 401-6.

¹¹⁴ Erwin N. Thompson, *Fort Union Trading Post: Fur Trade Empire on the Upper Missouri* (Medora, North Dakota, 1986), 4, and, Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, vol. 2, 745-51.

¹¹⁵ Besides the more general histories of the fur trade already noted, for details on the early history of the Columbia Fur Company, see: Alvin C. Gluek, *Minnesota and the Manifest Destiny of the Canadian Northwest: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto, 1965), 31-9; Rhoda Gilman, Carolyn Gilman and Deborah M. Stultz, *The Red River Trails: Oxcart Routes between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement, 1820-1870* (St. Paul, 1979), 3-5; and, Donald Dean Parker, ed., *The Recollections of Philander Prescott: Frontiersman of the Old Northwest, 1819-1862* (Lincoln, 1966).

¹¹⁶ North West Company ledger, p. 697, F.4/32, reel 5M7, and, York Factory servants lists, fos. 1d.-2, B.239/f/10, reel 1M785, HBCA. For biographies of McKenzie, see: Ray H. Mattison, “Kenneth McKenzie,” in LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West* (Glendale, 1965), vol. 2, 217-24; Richard Edwards and M. Hopewell,

at the end of the 1821-1822 season, but, according to Governor George Simpson, he “deserted the Service” before the end of the outfit.¹¹⁷ McKenzie, William Laidlaw and Joseph Renville, all ex-North West or Hudson’s Bay company employees, ended up at St. Louis, via the headwaters of the Mississippi. They quickly found American partners. In 1822, the Columbia Fur Company was formed. It had very limited capital, but energetic and experienced leadership. Its principal post was located at Lake Traverse, in present-day Minnesota.¹¹⁸ The Hudson’s Bay Company kept its eye on these ex-employees.¹¹⁹

An internal Hudson’s Bay Company inquiry in 1823 into the circumstances surrounding the departure of McKenzie also provided the only information that is now known about his whereabouts and activities in the Northwest before moving to the United States. While with the North West Company, McKenzie had been posted on the Souris River, and he had made at least one trip to the Missouri, undoubtedly to trade at the

Edwards’s Great West and Her Commercial Metropolis, Embracing a General View of the West, and a Complete History of St. Louis (St. Louis, 1860), 100-1; and, Stella M. Drum, “Kenneth McKenzie,” in *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 12 (New York, 1933), 94-5.

¹¹⁷ York Factory servants lists, 1821-1822, no. 46, fos. 5d.-6, B.239/f/13, reel 1M786, HBCA. Simpson’s full assessment of McKenzie reads, “A young man of tolerable abilities but suspected of being addicted to Liquor, behaved dishonestly last Year and deserted the Service_ Gone to the States.” McKenzie’s “tolerable abilities” would come back to haunt his ex-employer. See also David Smyth, “The Struggle for the Piegan Trade: The Saskatchewan Versus the Missouri,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1984), 2-15.

¹¹⁸ Morgan stated that the company’s initial financing was under \$10,000.00. Morgan, ed., *The West*, 59. Joseph Renville had apparently built the post at Lake Traverse in the fall of 1821, before the formation of the Columbia Fur Company. Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 5 August 1822, item 9, fos. 24d.-6, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/85, reel 3M42, HBCA.

¹¹⁹ John Clark to Simpson, Fort Garry (Red River Settlement), 18 September 1822, fos. 7d.-8, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/118, reel 3M52, HBCA.

Mandan Villages.¹²⁰ At St. Louis, McKenzie applied for American citizenship and, when rumoured to be an agent of British fur trade interests, loudly protested his innocence of the allegations.¹²¹ His actions soon proved his words, as he became a ruthless opponent of the Hudson's Bay Company and strove constantly to cut into the trade of his former employer.

In 1823, the Columbia Fur Company put its partners' expertise to use. From its depot at Lake Traverse, it sent an overland party to the Mandan Villages to build a post. The company probably did not initially have the resources to establish itself along the length of the Missouri. Moreover, by using this overland supply route, an 11-day wagon trip replaced a 1,500-mile upriver ordeal from St. Louis.¹²² In 1827, following the arrangement with Astor's American Fur Company, McKenzie was made head of the Upper Missouri Outfit, whose territory extended from just above the mouth of the Big Sioux River west to the Rockies. McKenzie's Outfit retained much of its previous independence, relating, as one historian put it, to "Bernard Pratte and Company and the American Fur Company in the manner of an associate rather than as a subordinate."¹²³

¹²⁰ The Governor and Committee in London had asked Simpson to report on McKenzie's 1821 departure. They had heard that he had been fired. Simpson wrote three full pages on McKenzie, his less-than-stellar career and reputation with the North West Company and his quitting company service at Red River, before he was even aware that his contract was not to be renewed in 1822. Simpson referred to his "highly reprehensible" conduct. Governor and Committee to Simpson, London, 13 March 1823, item 65, fo. 76d., Simpson Correspondence, D.5/1, reel 3M54, and, Simpson to Governor and Committee, Norway House, 23 June 1823, item 65, fos. 28d.-9d., London Inward Correspondence from Governors, A.12/1, reel 195, HBCA. A copy of this 23 June Simpson letter can also be found on fos. 9-28, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/86, reel 3M42, HBCA.

¹²¹ Morgan, ed., *The West*, 84-6.

¹²² William H. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnepeek, Lake of the Woods, Etc., Performed in the Year 1823* (London, 1825), 453.

¹²³ Thompson, *Fort Union*, 4, and, Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, vol. 2, 749 and 762.

This organizational independence allowed the energies and initiatives of men like McKenzie and Chouteau to be expressed freely, but it also occasionally resulted in some wasted or duplicated efforts. This was the case in the early 1830s when both the Upper Missouri Outfit and the Western Department operated separate, competing trapping expeditions and supply trains in the Rockies.¹²⁴

Hudson's Bay Company Perceptions and Reactions

By 1827, the Columbia Fur Company was firmly established at the Mandan Villages, and perhaps even somewhat higher up the Missouri.¹²⁵ Downstream from the Mandan Villages it had run competing posts next to many of the American Fur Company's posts, before it was absorbed by Astor's giant firm.¹²⁶ No American traders had yet returned to Niitsitapi country, nor for that matter even to the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers. Despite these facts, in the mid-1820s John Rowand at Edmonton House lamented that from his Piikani customers, "nothing but Americans is with every word those fellows utter."¹²⁷ Peter Skene Ogden and his Snake Country expeditions of course regularly encountered in the Rockies, and beyond, the trappers who annually visited the

¹²⁴ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 148.

¹²⁵ There is some debate as to whether it was in 1825 or 1826 that James Kipp of the Columbia Fur Company built a post some 120 miles above the Mandan Villages, near the mouth of the White Earth River. This debate will be enjoined below. Interestingly, when the Columbia Fur Company established its Mandan post in 1822, it did so overland from its base of operations in present-day Minnesota, not reaching that destination travelling up the Missouri. McKenzie was personally familiar with this part of the country, because when he was with the North West Company, as Simpson later reported, he was posted on the Souris River and "sent on a Trading excursion to the Missouri," almost certainly to the Mandan Villages. See Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 1 August 1823, item 65, fo. 28d., London Correspondence Inward, A.12/1, reel 195, HBCA.

¹²⁶ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 326-7.

¹²⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 17 November 1826, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

American rendezvous. He complained vociferously about the desertion of his engaged servants, free trappers and Iroquois to the Americans and he noted the much higher prices which the Americans were willing to pay for furs. He also reported in 1825 a disturbing rumour which potentially threatened to cut severely into the Hudson's Bay Company's trade.

It was in the vicinity of the Marias River a fork of the Missouri from whence we returned, it was this River that Donald McKenzie Esq^r the year he wintered at Bow River sent a party to explore but which they did not reach and it is on the said River that the Americans have it in contemplation to make an establishment and if strong enough to cope with the War tribes of the Saskatchewan is the most suitable spot they could have selected and if carried into effect we shall soon loose our Flathead & Cootany trade if we loose nothing more we may deem ourselves lucky.¹²⁸

This must have been a reference to Ashley's earlier, but since abandoned, hope for a military and fur trade post at the mouth of the Marias River.

In the fall of 1826 at Edmonton House Rowand was well aware that many of the Cree and Assiniboine of the lower Saskatchewan had visited American posts on the Missouri and he had even heard stories from their kinsmen that the Americans had offered to help them "to exterminate our Piegans."¹²⁹ Conflicting rumours also persisted, but were rightly doubted by Rowand, that Americans were "establishing themselves in a play calculated to attract and draw off the Piegans." He sent Hugh Monroe to check their veracity.¹³⁰ These apparently contradictory rumours were probably both circulated to gain increased respect and better treatment/terms of trade for the Cree and Assiniboine and to

¹²⁸ Ogden to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Snake Plains, 27 June 1825, fos. 11-2, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/119, reel 3M52; Ogden to Simpson, Fort Nez Percé, 12 November 1825, p. 158, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/119, reel 3M53; and, Edmonton House post journal, 19 September and 19 October 1825, B.60/a/23, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹²⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 10 November 1826, B.60/a/24, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 17 November and 7 December 1826.

arouse fear in the Hudson's Bay Company, either fear of the loss of trade of the Piikani or fear of an alliance between the Cree and Assiniboine with the American newcomers. Rowand seemed not to have enough information to evaluate the situation accurately. He still believed that there was an American trading post on the Yellowstone River in Crow territory, but that had not been the case since 1824. He was unable to distinguish between traditional trading operations which would actually threaten the Hudson's Bay Company's trade with the Niitsitapi and their allies, and the large-scale trapping enterprises which, though injurious to the company's overall returns, especially in the Oregon Territory, were anathema to the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance and no real threat at all to the Hudson's Bay Company's virtual monopoly trade position with these five peoples. Rowand then just did not seem to know the true nature of the Ashley-initiated trapping enterprise and its possible ramifications on his trade.

Governor Simpson likewise failed to distinguish between American trappers and traders. In the summer of 1827, with the Saskatchewan District's returns and profits steadily rising, he predicted an imminent American challenge to the company's trade with the Niitsitapi and their allies.

Until these few years past the American Traders were in constant danger from them and Establishments were frequently cut off not entirely for the sake of plunder but because they had a rooted antipathy to the whole nation; the American Traders now however appear to have altered their system in regard to them and by conciliating treatment have overcome this hostile feeling in a great degree so that they are likely to become formidable rivals to us and from the facilities they have of communication with them their hunting grounds being chiefly within what is understood to be American boundaries, I fear they will soon notwithstanding all our exertions deprive us of a large proportion of their Furs.¹³¹

Simpson's prediction was accurate but on just what he based his evaluation of the "altered" American "system" is hard to comprehend. Unless he was prescient, he could

¹³¹ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 25 July 1827, item 32, fos. 24-4d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/90, reel 3M44, HBCA.

not have known of a brief aberration in normal Niitsitapi-American relations which occurred that summer some 1,500 miles from York Factory where he wrote his report. He definitely seemed to have a fixed, if unsubstantiated, concept about the nature of American activities.

Briefly Changed Relations

In the fall of 1827 Rowand learned that Jacques Berger and another indebted freeman, Louis Brunais, long attached to the Piikani and recently reporting on their movements to the Hudson's Bay Company, had "absconded and joined" the Americans.¹³² Berger apparently linked up with Robert Campbell who was leading a trapping party for Smith, Jackson and Sublette in Flathead country. Rowand learned from three visiting Siksika that Berger and Brunais were that summer with "a Party of American Trappers" and that the two had "used their endeavours to intice the Piegans" to do likewise, assuring them of more favourable terms of trade.¹³³ Though principally trapping operations, these large parties always carried at least a limited supply of trade goods with them, both to use as gifts and as items for trade should the proper circumstances arrive with First Nations people encountered along the way. Such fortuitous circumstances did materialize that summer. Berger's change of allegiance and a period of peace between the Flathead and the Blackfoot-speaking peoples coincided with, or perhaps led to, a Niitsitapi invitation to Campbell's party to trade. One participant in this anomalous event between American trappers and the Blackfoot-speaking peoples later asserted that 30 packs of beaver were

¹³² Edmonton House post journal, 29 November 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA, and, David Smyth, "Jacques Berger, Fur Trader," *The Beaver* 69, no. 3 (June/July 1989), 42-3.

¹³³ Edmonton House post journal, 17 September 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

traded, but a more likely estimate puts the ceiling at about three packs.¹³⁴ William H.

Ashley described this 20-day hiatus in the usual American relations with the Blackfoot-speaking peoples:

The Blackfoot [Niitsitapi, and probably Gros Ventre] Indians, who, it appears, are our most inveterate enemies, are the most numerous and formidable nation in the region of the Rocky Mountains. It is supposed their different bands, which, like the Sioux of the Missouri, are known by different names, can muster altogether from four to six thousand warriors: they inhabit the richest fur region within our limits. Their trade, (which for the last 15 or 20 years has been confined exclusively to British traders,) is supposed to be more valuable than half of that of all the other tribes in that country. These people had always, until a short time previous to committing the outrages herein mentioned, been considered enemies to our traders; but about that time some of them manifested a friendly disposition, invited a friendly intercourse and trade, and did actually dispose of a portion of their furs to Messrs. Smith, Jackson, and Sublette. This circumstance, I presume, alarmed the H.B. Company, as it was calculated to materially affect their interest. The conduct of these Indians again changed, and without any provocation on the part of the Americans, they commenced hostilities with redoubled exertions, and seemed determined to drive our people out of the country entirely. Our traders and hunters confined their operations to sections of country claimed by tribes friendly to them, and notwithstanding at the distance of several hundred miles from the district of country claimed by the Blackfoots, they were every where pursued by the warriors of this tribe, attacked, robbed, and destroyed, while the people of the H.B. Company were suffered to pass and repass unmolested. Knowing, as we do, that British traders are constantly among these Indians, supplying them (among other things) with arms and ammunition, and do receive of them all the furs which they plunder from our citizens - and knowing, too, from their own assertions, and conduct generally, that they are (otherwise) making violent exertions to monopolize the fur trade West of the Rocky Mountains, we are unavoidably led to the belief that the recent outrageous conduct of the Blackfoot Indians towards our citizens, may, in a great degree, be attributed to the location of those traders among them.¹³⁵

Interestingly enough this January 1829 Ashley charge of British provocation of Niitsitapi hostility was shortly thereafter challenged by another longtime trader then retired from active, direct involvement in the American trade. In 1830, Joshua Pilcher reported to the Secretary of War that while travelling in Rupert's Land he "saw nothing to justify the

¹³⁴ James P. Beckwourth and T.D. Bonner, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, Pioneer, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians* (London, 1892), 110-5; Morgan, ed., *The West*, 315n.; and, Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 290-1.

¹³⁵ Morgan, ed., *The West*, 187-8 and 315n.

opinion that [the Hudson's Bay Company] excited the Indians to kill and rob our citizens."¹³⁶

It is not now known what prompted this brief about-face by the Piikani. Perhaps they thought that the Americans would stop trapping on their lands if they initiated trading relations, and, when this gesture did not change the interlopers' ways, they resumed defence of their territory. Perhaps the Piikani merely used this incident as a bargaining chip in their relations with the Hudson's Bay Company which, they may have thought, was taking their trade for granted. The news of the trade with the Americans, which reached Edmonton House at the end of October,¹³⁷ was certainly the most unsettling occurrence on the North Saskatchewan for the company during the 1827-1828 season. In mid-January, Rowand reported that, like the Flathead, the Piikani, "the plain Indians who give us Beaver...have partly given way to the same delusion" by trading part of their hunt with the Americans. He stated that the Piikani "pride themselves much in their attachment to us," and he went on to note that some Piikani and Siksika had that summer even "visited a place built by the Americans near a large Lake [the Great Salt Lake] for the purpose of equipping their Trappers."¹³⁸ Some Kainai people may also have been involved in the summer 1827 trade with the Americans, for in February 1828 one Kainai man arrived at Edmonton House "in an American chief's Scarlet Coat of no inferior quality," and in other regalia which he had at some recent, but unspecified, time

¹³⁶ Quoted in Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 81-2.

¹³⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 31 October 1827, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹³⁸ Rowand to Simpson, Edmonton House, 15 January 1828, fos. 46-6d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/121, reel 3M53, HBCA. Apparently the Americans were quite upset when they learned of a Niitsitapi presence in the neighbourhood of the Great Salt Lake. See Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 293-4.

traded from some unidentified Americans.¹³⁹ Rowand and his colleagues were apparently unaware of the short duration of the peaceful trade between “their” First Nations customers and the Americans. In March 1828, word arrived from Rocky Mountain House that “the Indians are making poor hunts and the Piegans are trafficking their furs with the Americans.”¹⁴⁰ This “news” was out of date by some seven to eight months, and certainly did not reflect the then-current situation. The traders on the Saskatchewan may have been relieved to learn the following summer that the Piikani and Siksika were back killing American trappers, one of whom was rumoured to be Jacques Berger.¹⁴¹

An Overly Confident Hudson’s Bay Company

Despite the disturbing news that the Piikani had traded with the Americans, Simpson’s confidence was seemingly not shaken one iota. Without yet having heard of the renewed violence against the Americans, in July 1828 he reported to London on relations with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. We “have obtained an influence over them, which the American Traders have not yet been able to shake.”¹⁴² Oblivious to the distinction which

¹³⁹ Edmonton House post journal, 3 February 1828, B.60/a/25, 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 3 March 1828.

¹⁴¹ Edmonton House post journal, 15 June and 4 August 1828, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁴² Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 July 1828, item 54, fos. 52-2d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/92, reel 3M44, HBCA. Simpson went on to tell a dubious story, obviously having originated with the Niitsitapi, which he had swallowed hook, line and sinker. He wrote that the company’s influence “was particularly exemplified in the case of a band of Blackfeet that was encamped with some of general Ashley’s Trappers last summer at the Salt Lake in the Snake Country who had at the time 600 Beaver Skins in their possession, not one of which would they part with, notwithstanding the numberless tempting offers made them, but brought the parcel complete throughout a journey which occupied them several months to M^r Rowand at the Rocky Mountain House; and this of itself shews that kind and conciliating treatment can make an impression even on those turbulent lands.”

First Nations peoples of the region definitely made between traders and trappers, Simpson's and the company's smug sense of security and superiority would continue for a while longer, only to be suddenly dashed by a dose of reality.¹⁴³ However, during the 1828-1829 season the Hudson's Bay Company's predominance among the five peoples of the Blackfoot alliance remained unchallenged, as their hostility continued unabated against American trappers. In October 1828, word arrived at Edmonton House of a battle pitting the Piikani against the Crow and Shoshone, and also of the killing of some 18 more American trappers by the Blackfoot alliance.¹⁴⁴ January brought news of even more American deaths west of the Rockies at the hands "of our Plain Tribes."¹⁴⁵ The next month at Fort Vancouver, on the lower Columbia River, Governor Simpson predicted the imminent demise of the American operations west of the Rockies. He wrote:

The Americans as far as I am able to judge are on their last legs, and from M^r Pilchers Letter to you I should infer that they will withdraw from this side of the Mountains after the expiration of the current year. Their attention will then in all probability be directed to the Black feet Country into which they cannot venture without a large & well organized Expedition. To us it is highly important that they should not succeed in that enterprise as it would be cutting off the principal resource of our Establishment in the Saskatchewan and the most effectual way in which we can defeat their plans, is to withdraw our late deserters from them which would weaken them so much that without a fresh [way?] from the States they would not keep their ground among those Warlike Indians and after having passed Four Years to no purpose in the Snake Country [cost?] half their and ruined themselves, it is not probable that they would get another party at S^t Louis to follow them.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ At least one Hudson's Bay Company officer, John Work, could make the distinction between American trapping and trading operations. In 1830 he reported from west of the Rockies on the Americans' "present plan of making trapping their primary object and the trade with Indians a secondary consideration." Fort Colville district report, April 1830, fo. 13, B.45/e/3, reel 1M777, HBCA.

¹⁴⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 8 October 1828, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 2 January 1829.

¹⁴⁶ Simpson to Peter Warren Dease, Fort Vancouver, 17 February 1829, fos. 20d.-1, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/16, reel 3M6, HBCA.

Simpson probably underestimated American profits realized in these first years west of the height of land, but he did recognize that much of this transmontane area was being trapped and hunted out. However, his prediction about a massive American move into the country of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and their allies was about to come true. Later in 1829 Simpson reasserted his virtually complacent over-confidence in his company's relations with these five tribes. "They have a rooted aversion to the Americans which all the attentions of the latter cannot remove; and altho' I have reason to believe they give higher prices than we do, the prejudice of some of the Plains tribes is so strong against them, that they will travel hundreds of miles in order to visit their favourite traders."¹⁴⁷

Fort Union and Trappers in Niitsitapi Country

The year 1829 saw major developments in both the Missouri River fur trade and the Rocky Mountains trapping operations. For years there has been uncertainty over the founding date of Fort Union, the post at the mouth of the Yellowstone River which became the headquarters of the Upper Missouri Outfit, of the American Fur Company. The historian, Hiram Martin Chittenden, claimed that a "Fort Floyd" was built at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers in 1828, and that this post was then re-named Fort Union.¹⁴⁸ The official historian of Fort Union Trading Post National

¹⁴⁷ Simpson to Governor and Committee, Norway House, 30 June 1829, item 34, fos. 18-8d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/96, reel 3M45, HBCA.

¹⁴⁸ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 329-30, and vol. 2, 932-3. In this mammoth history, Chittenden cited letters written by Kenneth McKenzie that have since been lost. He asserted that these lost letters showed that McKenzie built the original Fort Union some 200 miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone, on the Missouri. That site was then abandoned, according to Chittenden, and the Upper Missouri Outfit then moved down river to Fort Floyd and renamed it Fort Union. The case of Chittenden's lost letters is examined in depth in Barton H. Barbour, "Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade, 1830-1865" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of New Mexico, 1993),

Historic Site re-sifted the Chittenden evidence, and that in several other sources regarding forts Union and Floyd, and he wrote “that this report will assume that Fort Union was founded in the fall of 1829.”¹⁴⁹ However, even more recent research which should have brought this debate to a conclusion has left the waters murky.

Though McKenzie intended to have built a post at the mouth of the Yellowstone by the fall of 1828, his reach did not apparently then extend that far westward. There is a new translation of Prince Maximilian zu Wied’s 1832-1834 journal which is still in manuscript form. It was produced for eventual publication under the auspices of the Center for Western Studies, Joslyn Art Museum, the owner of the original journal.¹⁵⁰ The newly-translated version of the journal affirms that Fort Floyd, built in 1828, was not located at the Yellowstone, but some 120 miles down the Missouri, near the mouth of the White Earth River. William J. Hunt, using this new translation of the original Maximilian journal, confirmed both the 1828 founding date and the 1829 closing date of Fort Floyd. However, relying on the long-lost letters cited by Chittenden, and apparently unaware of the convincing evidence in the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, which is cited immediately below in this thesis, Hunt also asserted an 1828 founding date for Fort

73-4. The revised thesis has just been published: *Fort Union and the Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman, 2001). Since present-day historians cannot examine the McKenzie letters cited by Chittenden, they must be doubly cautious, because he is known to have incorrectly dated another of McKenzie’s letters of the period, one where the original still exists. He asserted that a 7 June 1831 letter was dated 7 January 1831. See Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 343n., and, McKenzie to Agent of American Fur Company at St. Louis, 7 June 1831, Fort Tecumseh, p. 44, Folder Fort Tecumseh-Fort Pierre Letterbook, 1 November 1830 to 14 December 1832, Box 24, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

¹⁴⁹ Thompson, *Fort Union*, 10-2.

¹⁵⁰ Apparently, difficulties have arisen and the publication of Maximilian’s journals has been put on hold. However, a meticulous translation of the entire journal has been completed.

Union.¹⁵¹ Barton H. Barbour's doctoral thesis on Fort Union provided more evidence, minus any Hudson's Bay Company Archives references, much of the most convincing of which tended to confirm 1829 as the founding date of Fort Union. Inexplicably, although Barbour concluded in the body of his text in favour of an 1829 founding date for Fort Union,¹⁵² the title of his thesis implies an 1830 date.

Previously untapped Hudson's Bay Company Archives sources confirm Maximilian's assertions and definitely refute the 1828 Fort Union founding date hypothesis.¹⁵³ The Hudson's Bay Company in 1828 reopened Brandon House on the Assiniboine River, principally to thwart American incursions into its trade, in present-day southern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Chief Trader Francis Heron had charge of this Red River District post, and he made it one of his primary goals to learn all that he could of American activity on and near the Missouri. In late November 1828, Heron received word from one of his southern outposts. "The Americans they say have one post at the Mandan Village, which is the principal one that they have in those parts; one at the Muddy River about 150 Miles above Fort Mandan, on the banks of the Missouri; and one at Knife River, situated about 50 miles beyond the Turtle Mountain."¹⁵⁴ In his end-

¹⁵¹ William J. Hunt, Jr., "'At the Yellowstone...to Build a Fort': Fort Union Trading Post, 1828-1833," in *Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium Proceedings, September 13-15, 1990* (Williston, North Dakota, 1994), 7-23, especially 8-9. The Joslyn Art Museum was kind enough to provide me with the extracts from the newly-translated journal which were pertinent to this thesis.

¹⁵² Barbour, "Fort Union," 69-83, especially 83. In his recent book, which was largely based on his thesis, Barbour asserted that 1829 saw the start of construction on Fort Union, with its completion in 1830. See his *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman, 2001), 39-40.

¹⁵³ For a more detailed examination of this matter, see Smyth, "The 'Leviathan company'."

¹⁵⁴ Brandon House post journal, 29 November 1828, B.22/a/22, reel 1M17, HBCA.

of-season summary report Heron provided more details, but gave a different mileage figure for the uppermost Missouri post.

Having so often alluded to our American opponents, it may be proper to state more explicitly what we know or learned concerning them_ though not so near, as to enable us to ascertain their actual numbers, we are clear, as to their being in considerable force, very active, and divided into three establishments_ the principal of which is at the Mandan Villages; the next in magnitude is situated about two hundred and fifty Miles higher up the Missouri, from which they make frequent excursions to the Indians in the direction of Qu'appelle, and the third, the nearest to us is situated about fifty miles beyond the Turtle Mountain, through which the boundary line, is said to pass_ They were reported to be extremely liberal of their property last autumn, but whether from a scarcity of goods, or from retrenchment, it is said by the Indians, that they became more frugal towards Spring_ They too give Spirituous liquors (whiskey) to the Indians, though so far, not in large quantities_ Mr. Keneth McKenzie, formerly of the Northwest Company's service, is said to be their leader_ . A Steam boat laden with goods is reported to have remained all winter a short distance above the Mandan Villages, and that M^cKenzie with a strong party is to proceed with the Same, this spring to re,establish a fort on the Yellow Stone River.¹⁵⁵

Heron was describing Fort Floyd, near the mouth of the White Earth River, then, in the 1828-1829 season, the most westerly of the Upper Missouri Outfit's fur trade posts.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Brandon House district report, fos. 5d.-6, 6 May 1829, B.22/e/3, reel 1M776, HBCA. Heron had been misinformed about McKenzie's means of conveyance. There were no steamboats on the Upper Missouri that year, not until 1831. Heron's colleague at Fort Pelly, John Clarke, was much better informed about McKenzie's means of transportation. Clarke described the two 60-foot keelboats that had carried the outfit up the Missouri in 1828. See Fort Pelly post journal, 22 February 1829, B.159/a/10, reel 1M117, HBCA. For more on the history of steamboating on the upper Missouri River, see the following three samples from a very considerable literature: William E. Lass, *A History of Steamboating on the Upper Missouri River* (Lincoln, 1977); Michael M. Casler, *Steamboats of the Fort Union Fur Trade: An Illustrated Listing of Steamboats on the Upper Missouri River, 1831-1867* (Williston, 1999); and, Annalies Corbin, "A New Whistle on the Wind: Steamboats on the Missouri River," in *Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium 2000 Proceedings, September 21-23, 2000* (Williston, 2001), 113-9.

¹⁵⁶ In 1990, just before the first Fort Union fur trade symposium, I provided the staff at Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site copies of my notes from the above-noted HBCA records. I am quite certain that these confirm that the Upper Missouri Outfit had not reached the mouth of the Yellowstone River by the 1828-1829 season. However, William J. Hunt, using one of these same documents (I assume either the actual notes provided by me in 1990, or microfilm copies of the original HBCA piece, triggered by receipt of my notes),

Fort Floyd was almost certainly the post excavated in 1954, and since identified in the archaeological literature as Kipp's Post.¹⁵⁷

By the fall of 1829, Fort Floyd had been abandoned and Fort Union, its upriver successor, had been built. McKenzie had made it the headquarters of his Upper Missouri Outfit and he was in residence there that fall. Still outside of the territory of the Blackfoot alliance, he was then at least within easy listening distance of the promised

concluded that Heron's above-quoted report confirmed the construction of Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone in 1828. I interpreted the Turtle Mountain site to be an inland site, between the Missouri River and the international boundary. Hunt interpreted Heron's report to mean that Fort Floyd was at the Turtle Mountain site, which he claimed was the 19th-century American name for a prominent rise on the Missouri near the Knife River, and that Fort Union was the post noted by Heron as being "about two hundred and fifty Miles higher up the Missouri," from the Mandan Villages. Hunt cited only this one HBCA document, and cited it incorrectly, referring to Heron's Brandon House district report as the Brandon House post journal. Hunt, "Fort Floyd: An Enigmatic Nineteenth-Century Trading Post," *North Dakota History* 61, no. 3 (Summer 1994), 7-20. Although he was unsure of the exact dates, Charles Larpenteur, a longtime Missouri fur trader and resident of Fort Union, wrote: "About the year 1827 an outfit was made up and started for the mouth of the Yellowstone, Mr. McKenzie in charge. They did not reach that far the first year, but established a wintering post [1827-128 {dates inserted by original editor, Milo Milton Quaife}] at the mouth of White River, halfway between Forts Union and Berthold – say 150 miles below the Yellowstone.... The returns were found encouraging, and the following year [1829 {Quaife insertion}] he went on to the mouth of the Yellowstone." Larpenteur's chronology certainly supports the position that Fort Floyd was built in 1828, as a stop-gap measure, followed by the construction of Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone, in 1829. Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri*, intro. Paul L. Hedren (Lincoln, 1989 [1933]), 92.

¹⁵⁷ Alan R. Woolworth and W. Raymond Wood, "The Archeology of a Small Trading Post (Kipp's Post 32MN1) in the Garrison Reservoir, North Dakota," *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin No. 176* (Washington, 1960), 238-93, and, Alan R. Woolworth and W. Raymond Wood, "Excavations at Kipp's Post," *North Dakota History* 29 (1962), 236-52. Hunt suggested the possibility of Kipp's post and Fort Floyd being one and the same. See Hunt, "At the Yellowstone," 21n., and, "Fort Floyd." Robertson agreed that Fort Floyd and Kipp's Post were one and the same. Robertson, *Competitive Struggle*, 113.

land. Fort Union was on the north bank of the Missouri, about five miles by water above the mouth of the Yellowstone, and approximately 2,000 miles upriver from St. Louis.¹⁵⁸

While McKenzie was extending his reach up the Missouri, the firm of Smith, Jackson and Sublette had finally entered Niitsitapi country to trap. In November 1829, Sublette and Smith led a large expedition to the headwaters of the Missouri and Yellowstone. They conducted a successful fall hunt despite the threat of Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre attack, before travelling to their winter camp in the Wind River Valley.¹⁵⁹ One of the trappers in this party, Joseph Meek, later wrote of “the Blackfeet” (Niitsitapi, not Siksika, presumably): “The Blackfeet were the tribe most dreaded in the Rocky Mountains, and went by the name of ‘Bugs Boys,’ which rendered into good English, meant ‘the devil’s own’.”¹⁶⁰ The normally small, efficient trapping parties were considerably enlarged for security reasons when they entered the territory of the Blackfoot alliance. No apparent inordinate loss of life occurred with the move into this highly risky region. At Edmonton House, in January 1830, Rowand’s report of the known American losses seemed, if anything, lower than usual. “The poor American trappers pay dearly for their hunting Beaver we have a report of no less than Seven again this year having been Killed and massacred by the Fall Indians (Gros ventre) en route.”¹⁶¹

In the late winter of 1829-1830, Jedediah Smith led another large party of trappers back into Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre territory, this time to the vicinity of the Musselshell

¹⁵⁸ Thompson, *Fort Union*, 15 and 23n.

¹⁵⁹ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 139; Robert Newell, *Robert Newell’s Memoranda*, ed. Dorothy O. Johansen (Portland, 1959), 31; and, Frances Fuller Victor, *The River of the West. Life and Adventure in the Rocky Mountains and Oregon* (Hartford, 1870), 64.

¹⁶⁰ Victor, *The River of the West*, 61.

¹⁶¹ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 8 January 1830, fo. 57d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/123, reel 3M53, HBCA.

and Judith rivers. The trappers were again harassed by the people of the Blackfoot alliance, but nevertheless came away with a large number of pelts.¹⁶² Kenneth McKenzie may likewise have ventured briefly farther up the Missouri at about this time, though not as far as the country of the Niitsitapi, and to no now-known purpose; in January 1830 he may have been some 200 miles above Fort Union.¹⁶³ Perhaps he was attempting in person to establish relations with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance?

In July 1830 at the Wind River rendezvous, Smith, Jackson and Sublette decided to dissolve their partnership and to sell out to a younger group of trappers, who called their new concern the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. As has been discussed, the foreseeable imminent decline of the mountain trapping business, with the destruction of the fur resource, the greater dangers of operating in Niitsitapi territory, the sudden appearance in 1829 of a rival American Fur Company expedition to the mountains, and the lure of the southwestern trade all combined to prompt the three partners to get out when the getting-out was good.

Jacques Berger and the American Breakthrough

One man who chose not to stay with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was Jacques Berger, who had jumped from the influence of the Hudson's Bay Company to the Americans in 1827. He had had a lengthy but inauspicious career starting in 1804 on the North Saskatchewan, first with the North West Company and then briefly with the

¹⁶² Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 140, and, Victor, *The River of the West*, 85.

¹⁶³ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 933, and, Thompson, *Fort Union*, 12. This is a reference to the letters noted in an earlier footnote which Chittenden cited but which no longer apparently exist. Chittenden claimed that McKenzie was at the original Fort Union, some 200 miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone. If McKenzie was indeed that high up the Missouri, he may have been on some diplomatic mission to establish peaceful trade with the Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre.

Hudson's Bay Company.¹⁶⁴ He was well acquainted with the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance, was on good terms with them and could speak Blackfoot. Whether he left the July 1830 rendezvous and headed for Fort Union, or had previously quit the ranks of Smith, Jackson and Sublette's trappers, is not now known. At any rate, when McKenzie returned to Fort Union from St. Louis in the fall of 1830 Jacques Berger was there. McKenzie convinced Berger to undertake a mission to attempt to establish good relations with the Blackfoot alliance, in advance of his sending trading parties to them. McKenzie proposed doing what no other American had done before him, asking permission of the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance to enter their territory. Besides, virtually all previous American trading or trapping efforts had lacked personnel knowledgeable of, and known to, these peoples. Berger seemed to be the key which could safely unlock the long sought-after wealth observed and reported by Lewis and Clark, but virtually monopolized by British and Canadian traders. Berger was to lead a conciliatory party of four or five men into Niitsitapi territory. Despite the fact that Berger's small expedition was known by some as "the forlorn hope,"¹⁶⁵ McKenzie's far-sighted political efforts were soon tremendously rewarded.

There are no surviving contemporary accounts of this event, but the several later accounts, though varying in detail, all concur on the overall story.¹⁶⁶ The description

¹⁶⁴ Smyth, "Jacques Berger."

¹⁶⁵ Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, 93.

¹⁶⁶ Some of the many works that contain descriptions of Berger's trip are: *ibid.*, 93-7; James Stuart, "Adventure on the Upper Missouri," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, vol. 1 (Helena, 1876), 84-5; F.A. Chardon, *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834-1839*, ed. Annie Heloise Abel (Pierre, South Dakota, 1932), 401-3; Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 331-4; David Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, intro. David J. Wishart (New York, 1998 [1964]), 393-6; Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 56-9; Maximilian Alexander Philipp, Prince Wied-Neuwied, "Part II of Maximilian, Prince of Wied's Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832-1834," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 23 (Cleveland, 1906), 90-1; and, James Willard Schultz, *Signposts*

which follows, by James Willard Schultz, is one of the most vivid and reliable of this turning point in American-Niitsitapi and in American-Gros Ventre relations. Schultz, an adopted member of the Piikani, emphasized the role of the Bull's Back Fat, a Kainai leader, in the ultimate success of Berger's mission.¹⁶⁷ The Bull's Back Fat was undoubtedly more open to the American overture at this particular time because of a recent dressing-down by John Rowand, owing to the unruly conduct of some of his band members at Carlton House, on the North Saskatchewan.¹⁶⁸ He was considered the principal chief of his people by the Hudson's Bay Company, and he had long been courted by it. However, the English company soon labelled him a "vagabond" for his role in the loss of trade to the Missouri following the American Fur Company's successful

of Adventure: Glacier National Park as the Indians Know It (Boston, 1926), 23-7. Schultz placed the number in Berger's return party to Fort McKenzie at about 70 members of the Blackfoot alliance.

¹⁶⁷ Another version of this story was noted by Claude Schaeffer, apparently based on the writings of Nicolas Point. Point was a Jesuit missionary who met Berger in the 1840s. In Schaeffer's account, not the Bull's Back Fat, a Kainai leader, but Assapake, a Piikani leader, was instrumental in Berger's success. In this version, Berger and his four men met a Piikani war party led by "Assapake." The two leaders knew each other. They exchanged gifts and smoked the calumet. Some members of the Piikani party were dissatisfied with the gifts and they seized Berger's party's guns and equipment. "Assapake" intervened and restitution was made. Berger and his party then spent 20 days with "Assapake" at the camp of a Piikani leader named "Ouestematone." Berger finally set off on his return to Fort Union, accompanied by 92 men and 32 women. This account is not in the published Point journals. A similar version of the story of Berger's mission was recorded by Bradley, involving the Piikani, not the Kainai, and "Achsaht Ak-kee", or "Pretty Woman," the same man as in Point's rendition. See: Nicolas Point, *Wilderness Kingdom: Indian Life in the Rocky Mountains: 1840-1847*, trans. and intro. Joseph P. Donnelly (New York, 1967); James H. Bradley, "Affairs at Fort Benton, from 1831 to 1869," *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, vol. 3 (Boston, 1966 [1900]), 201-3; and, File 154, Claude Everett Schaeffer Papers, M1100, Glenbow Archives.

¹⁶⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 27 February 1828, B.60/a/25, reel 1M50, HBCA.

establishment in Niitsitapi territory.¹⁶⁹ The Bull's Back Fat, or Bull Back Fat, was the leader of the Followers of the Buffalo band of the Kainai and was considered by at least some Americans not just to be the leader of the Kainai, of his single tribe, but "the head chief of the Blackfoot nation [all three Niitsitapi peoples]."¹⁷⁰ About 50 years of age in 1833, he is specifically noted in American Fur Company correspondence as having survived the 1837-1838 smallpox epidemic. He died in 1842.¹⁷¹ Schultz described his role in Berger's expedition, but shed no light on how the Canadian had ended up at Fort Union:

Anyhow, there he was, the one man in all the Upper Missouri country who intimately knew the Blackfeet tribes and could speak their language. Mackenzie had little difficulty in inducing him to attempt to find some members of the Confederacy [the Blackfoot alliance] and bring them to Fort Union for a peace talk. Though it was known to be a very dangerous undertaking, five of the Company engagés volunteered to accompany Berger, and early in the fall of 1830 the little party struck out westward from the fort. They traveled day after day without seeing Indians of any tribe, until, at last, fresh signs of them were found in the valley of Badger Creek, a tributary of the Marias Fork of the Missouri, close up under the Rockies. That evening, as usual in making camp, Berger set up a long pole to which was attached a large American flag. This was discovered by a party of early morning hunters from a near-by mixed camp of Pikuni, Bloods, and Blackfeet. They had never before seen the Stars and Stripes, but they considered a flag a signal of the peaceful intentions of its carriers, and, riding in, were pleased to find that the leader of the little party of whites was their old North friend, Apikaiyi İtsimokan (Skunk Cap).

¹⁶⁹ Edmonton house post journals, 23 March 1827, B.60/a/24, and, 2 November 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁷⁰ Hugh A. Dempsey, "History and Identification of Blood Bands," in *Plains Indian Studies: A Collection of Essays in Honor of John C. Ewers and Waldo R. Wedel*, ed. Douglas H. Ubelaker and Herman J. Viola (Washington, 1982), 99, and, Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, vol. 1, 29. Catlin, who painted his portrait, gave the Bull's Back Fat's name in Blackfoot as "Stu-mick-o-sucks." Catlin's portrait of the Bull's Back Fat is reproduced in this same volume, facing p. 30. Maximilian and Bodmer also met the Bull's Back Fat. Bodmer's portrait of him is reproduced in Goetzmann, intro., *Karl Bodmer's America*, 261.

¹⁷¹ Dempsey, "Blood Bands," 99, and, James A. Hamilton to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., 25 February 1838, St. Louis, p. 3, Box 36, Chouteau Collection, MHS. In this letter Hamilton stated, "The Bull's back fat survives and is as warm a friend to the Company as heretofore."

Berger and his men accompanied the hunters to their camp, where they were well received, and after giving out the presents that he had for them, and after many talks, Berger induced a number of the chiefs and leading men of the camp to accompany him and his party to Fort Union. With their women, they were seventy-two in all, and Bull's Back Fat was the principal chief. None of the members of the Blackfeet tribes had ever been so far east as the mouth of the Yellowstone, and after passing the mouth of the Milk River, some of the warriors began to object to going farther. They did not believe that the whites had a trading-post at the mouth of the Yellowstone; they suspected that Berger was leading them to some remote point where they were to be ambushed by the Assiniboinés or other enemies. Although Bull's Back Fat did all that he could to allay their fears, they became more and more surly and suspicious, and at last, when near Fort Union, threatened to kill the whites and back-trail to Badger Creek. It is likely that they would have made good their threat, in spite of the remonstrances of Bull's Back Fat, had not Berger told them that if he failed to lead them into the whites' fort on the following day, they were welcome to kill him and his men. At about ten o'clock the next morning, the party rounded a large cottonwood grove, and lo! there was the fort plainly in sight. Their approach was discovered, the flag was run up, and cannons boomed them a salute. Dressed all in his best and with a sword at his side, Kenneth Mackenzie came out through the big gateway and greeted them, led them into the fort, and lavishly entertained them, loading them with valuable presents. A few days later, he had no difficulty in getting them to make a treaty of peace with him, whereby it was agreed that he should establish a trading-post in some favorable locality in their country.¹⁷²

No copy of this particular peace treaty has survived, but a copy exists of another which was apparently negotiated on 29 November 1831 at Fort Union. The parties involved were, according to the treaty document, not only "ambassadors" of "the powerful and distinguished nation of Blackfeet, Piegan, and Blood Indians" and of the American Fur Company, but also "the principal chief of all the Assiniboin nation, the Man that holds

¹⁷² Schultz, *Signposts*, 23-7. James Stuart's version, based on interviews conducted in the early 1870s, states that Berger and his three companions, two of whom were identified as Dacoteau and Morceau, were taken prisoner by a band of "Blackfeet" (possibly Niitsitapi, but less likely Siksika). According to this account, they were then escorted from Badger Creek to the Belly River, where they remained until late winter. They arrived back at Fort Union with 100 Niitsitapi in early April 1831. See Stuart, "Adventure on the Upper Missouri," 84-5. Judging by the McKenzie letter quoted below in the text, Stuart's version of events is highly questionable, especially concerning the Niitsitapi welcoming of the Berger party.

the Knife, attended by his chiefs of council."¹⁷³ For whatever reason, all of the Assiniboiné leaders are listed in the body of the document and as signatories, but not one of the Niitsitapi "ambassadors" is noted by name. Kenneth McKenzie signed "on behalf of the Piegans and Blackfeet."¹⁷⁴

In June 1831 McKenzie reported to St. Louis on Berger's trip and on its aftermath.

On my arrival at Fort Union last fall I fortunately found a Blackfoot interpreter, and by this means have been enabled to make those Indians acquainted with my views regarding them. I sent him with four or five men to their villages, where they were kindly received and well Treated, on their return to the fort, they were accompanied by some of the principal chiefs, they expressed great Satisfaction and pleasure at the idea of having a fort at their villages, which I promised and

¹⁷³ In the 1820s, the Hudson's Bay Company also considered "The Man Who Holds the Knife" to be the head chief of all of the Assiniboiné. See the following post records in the HBCA: Brandon House district report, 1822-1823, pp. 5-6, B.22/e/2, reel 1M776 (here his name is also given as "Men a hean"); Carlton House post journals, 1 September 1820, B.27/a/10, and, 8 and 10 December 1822, B.27/a/12, reel 1M19; Fort Ellice (Qu'Appelle) post journal, 27 April 1823, B.63/a/3, reel 1M51; and, Fort Pelly post journals, 16 February 1830, B.159/a/11, and, 11 November 1833, B.159/a/15, reel 1M117.

¹⁷⁴ Maximilian Alexander Philipp, Prince of Wied-Neuwied, "Part III of Maximilian, Prince of Wied's, Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832-1834," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 24 (Cleveland, 1906), 317. This 1831 treaty has also recently been reproduced in Vine Deloria, Jr. and Raymond J. DeMallie, eds., *Documents of American Indian Diplomacy: Indian Treaties, Agreements, and Conventions, 1775-1979*, vol. 2 (Norman, 1999), 1489-90. In the article noted above on Jacques Berger, I misinterpreted the now-apparent separate Niitsitapi trips to Fort Union in 1831. I stated in the Berger article that this surviving 1831 treaty was negotiated in early 1831, but not actually drawn up until November of that year. Then, in the absence of any Blackfoot alliance representatives, McKenzie signed on their behalf. A proper reading of the 29 November treaty clearly indicates that members of the Niitsitapi tribes were at Fort Union for a second visit in 1831, and that they then negotiated yet another treaty, this time including the Assiniboiné. Why McKenzie and Hamilton failed to identify a single Niitsitapi "ambassador," while listing several of the Assiniboiné leaders, must, however, remain a mystery. Perhaps the Niitsitapi had had to return to their own territory before the actual written document had been drawn up. Perhaps in discussion with McKenzie the Niitsitapi had agreed to make a peace with the Assiniboiné, but the Assiniboiné were not then present and did not arrive at Fort Union before the Niitsitapi returned home. See Smyth, "Jacques Berger," 45-6.

assured them they Should have this fall, and in order to Strengthen my promise I have sent a Clerk with four or five men to them, to trade what they may have_ It is impossible to say what may be the result of this enterprise, but I am very sanguine in my expectations. I hope and have no doubt, I Shall be well paid for our risk and trouble.¹⁷⁵

Berger was almost certainly one of the men sent back with the Bull's Back Fat that spring.

McKenzie also wrote in December 1831 about the progress of his peace and trade negotiations. "I have lately negotiated a treaty of peace between the Assiniboine and Blackfoot Indians, which I expect will be ratified. Exchange of Tobacco has been made and all requisite ceremonies observed. If firm and durable it will be of great importance to this district."¹⁷⁶ Unlike any of his American predecessors, McKenzie had adopted the long-established conventions and ceremonies of First Nations external relations, protocols and practices which the Saskatchewan traders had accepted decades earlier, to their considerable goodwill, security and profit. Schultz later wrote that the Niitsitapi had "no little respect and affection" for McKenzie, because of his just treatment of them. They called him *Kinûk-Suyiâp-wikwan*, meaning "Little Water-White-Man."¹⁷⁷

McKenzie was soon to be extremely "well paid" for his thoughtful and culturally sensitive initiative. The Hudson's Bay Company's virtual monopoly in the trade with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance was about to come to an abrupt end. An intensive

¹⁷⁵ McKenzie to Agent of American Fur Company at St. Louis, 7 June 1831, Fort Tecumseh, p. 44, Box 24, Chouteau Collection, MHS. Chittenden quoted from this letter, but his published version identified Berger by name. Chittenden also incorrectly gave the date of the letter as 7 **January** 1831. See Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 343n.

¹⁷⁶ McKenzie to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., letter, dated 11 December 1831 at Fort Union. Quoted in Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 343-4n. This letter has also apparently been lost.

¹⁷⁷ Schultz, *Signposts*, 110. The Niitsitapi, according to Schultz, had two separate names for the early Americans on the Upper Missouri River. They were "Water-White-Men" and "Big-Knives White-Men."

struggle was soon to be engaged for the returns and the profits of the trade of the Piikani, Kainai, Siksika and Gros Ventre peoples.

Conclusions

Since the Lewis and Clark Expedition had passed through Piikani country in the upper reaches of the Missouri River, Americans were aware of the riches in furs to be found in Niitsitapi territory. However, for virtually the entire 25 years after first contact, hostilities were the normal state of affairs when the member peoples of the Blackfoot alliance met American citizens. The root cause now seems so clear. Americans came uninvited into Niitsitapi territory, and as hunters and trappers, not as traders. They tried to take what was not theirs, and they offered nothing in return. Although this American activity falls under the general rubric of the fur trade, Joshua Pilcher astutely observed in 1831 that “the trapping business” was quite distinct from “the Indian trade.”¹⁷⁸

The Niitsitapi and their allies certainly could and did make the distinction. Needing no advice nor encouragement from British and Canadian traders in the Saskatchewan, the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance easily recognized their national interests, and acted accordingly to protect them. The vast majority of Americans during this period, whether inside or outside the fur trade-“trapping business,” blamed Niitsitapi and Gros Ventre violence on British incitement. They seemed oblivious to the fact that their own actions were solely responsible for the Niitsitapi’s violent reactions. Unfortunately, most American historians have since accepted that there was at least a kernel of truth in these charges of British incitement. I have seen not one shred of evidence to support this position. It was only after refugees from the Hudson’s Bay Company and North West Company joined the Missouri trade that the obvious solution to

¹⁷⁸ Pilcher to Secretary of War, 1 December 1831, St. Louis, pp. 4-5, Letters Received from the St. Louis Superintendency, 1829-1831, Microfilm Roll 749, M234, BIA, USNA.

the longstanding problem was finally realized. Kenneth McKenzie sent a diplomatic mission to the Niitsitapi asking permission to enter their country as trading partners. As will be seen, American traders were then warmly welcomed.

Chapter Six: The Successful American Challenge, 1831-1834 and Beyond

After the Americans asked permission to enter Niitsitapi territory as traders, they were warmly received. They were then finally able to benefit from two decisive natural advantages that they held over the Hudson's Bay Company on the Saskatchewan: a much more navigable river, the Missouri, and a better location, at the mouth of the Marias River, deep within Piikani territory. The American Fur Company not only broke the British monopoly in the Niitsitapi trade, but the Americans quickly and irrevocably took the bulk of that trade for themselves. However, the growing demand for buffalo robes and the ability of boats on the Missouri to transport large quantities of this bulky product, soon permitted the Piikani to abandon the beaver trade and to substitute the much more culturally appropriate robe trade in its stead. Another consequence of this intense company rivalry, which had accorded privileged status to the Piikani, was internal disruption and violence between the Kainai and Piikani.

The Strategic Importance of the Marias River

The annual cycle of the Niitsitapi peoples was divided into four seasons of unequal duration: one, the winter camp; two, the spring hunt and root-gathering season; three, the summer hunt and Sun Dance; and, four, the fall hunt and berry-collecting season.¹ The winter camp was the longest by far of these four annual periods, usually extending for about five months from late October or early November. Individual bands sought sheltered valleys which could offer wood for fuel, grass for their horses and game for their own consumption. While all three lasted a band would remain sedentary in its

¹ John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*, no. 159 of *Bulletin of the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington, 1988 [1955]), 123-9. Early observers did not all recognize the patterns in the seasonal rounds of the Plains peoples. One influential 19th-century American referred to the First Nations peoples of the Plains as the "erratic tribes." Gallatin, *A Synopsis of the Indian Tribes*, 120-34.

shelter from the harsh winter of the northern Plains. If fuel, forage or game became exhausted, then the camp would have to be moved.

While individual bands and tribes did not always winter in the same locations each year, there were valleys which are easily identifiable as the favourite and most regular choice of given groups. From at least the early 19th century and until the reservation period, the valley of the Marias River was the preferred wintering ground of the Piikani. James Willard Schultz, an adopted member of the Blackfoot tribe (the Piikani in Montana), wrote:

The Marias was a favourite stream with the Blackfeet for their winter encampments, for its wide and by no means deep valley was well timbered. In the shelter of the cottonwood groves their lodges were protected from the occasional north blizzards, there was an ample supply of fuel and fine grass for the horses. There were also great numbers of deer, elk, and mountain sheep in the valley and its breaks.²

Though in mid-century the Piikani also wintered on the Teton and Milk rivers, they apparently spent at least half of their winters on the Marias.³ The earliest White-documented Piikani winter encampment on the Marias was in 1813-1814, though these people had undoubtedly wintered there earlier than this. In February 1814 James Bird noted the report of some Kainai who had travelled 16 days to Edmonton House from their own winter camp on the Belly River. "They also informed us that the Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians and the Muddy River [Piikani] Indians are tenting on the Borders of the Bears or Maria's River which is of course such a great Distance from this that we can entertain no Hopes of their bringing any dry Provisions; it is doubtful if any great number of them visit the Houses this Spring."⁴

² James Willard Schultz, *My Life as an Indian* (Gansevoort, New York, 1996 [1907]), 37.

³ Ewers, *The Horse*, 125-6, and, Wissler, *Social Organization*, pt. 1, 45-50.

⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 25 February 1814, B.60/a/12, reel 1M49, HBCA.

From the beginning of the 19th century the Marias River was prominent in the plans and prospects of Euroamericans in their relations with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. It was on a tributary of the Marias that Meriwether Lewis had had his fateful encounter with the Piikani in July 1806, and, before the bloody incident of 27 July, he had promised to build a trading post for them at the mouth of the Marias.⁵ When the Hudson's Bay Company ventured up the South Saskatchewan River in 1822-1823 with its Bow River Expedition and built a post at the mouth of the Red Deer River, John Edward Harriott led a party south to "the Bears River," the Marias. Though the expedition journal states that Harriott travelled along the Marias' "banks for a considerable distance," he may not actually have reached that destination.⁶

In the developments which followed the Kainai attacks in May 1823 on Andrew Henry's trappers and then on the Jones-Immell party (see Chapter Five), the Marias River took centre stage. William H. Ashley suggested establishing a military post at the "mouth of Maria's river" both to quell or to eliminate any further such incidents and to break British influence over the Niitsitapi peoples.⁷ Testimony given at the investigation into the Jones-Immell massacre and into the Arikara hostilities of 1823 showed the favoured status of the Marias River in the Piikani's eyes. A survivor of the Jones-Immell massacre

⁵ Thwaites, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, vol. 5, Lewis journal, 26 July 1806, 220-2.

⁶ Bow River Expedition post journal, 8 January 1823, B.34/a/4, reel 1M20, HBCA. Two years afterwards, Peter Skene Ogden reported that "it was in the vicinity of the Marias River a fork of the Missouri from whence we returned, it was this River that Donald McKenzie Esq^r the year he wintered at Bow River sent a party to explore but which did not reach." In his unpublished memoirs Harriott stated that his goal was "the junction of the Bears R with the Missouri where Fort Benton now stands," but that his "Blft guides" refused to lead him to the Marias. Ogden to Simpson, Fort Nez Perces, 12 November 1825, p. 158, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/119, reel 3M52, HBCA, and, John Edward Harriott, "Memoirs of life and adventure in the Hudson's Bay Company's territories, 1819-1825." Unpublished and unpaginated manuscript, ca. 1860, in the Coe Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁷ Morgan, ed., *The West*, 63, and, Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 118.

wrote that the Piikani had “first invited us to come and establish at the mouth of the Maria River, as they said they had been informed was our intention.”⁸ Joshua Pilcher testified about the Piikani’s friendly meeting with the Jones-Immell party, before its disastrous encounter with the Kainai. “The Indians [Piikani] were invited to remain with the party for the night, and did so, making many professions of friendship, and appeared much gratified at the propositions to establish trading-houses in the country; and pointed out the mouth of the Maria’s River, 70 or 80 miles below the falls of Missouri, as the most desirable spot.”⁹ At least some in the Hudson’s Bay Company recognized the strategic importance of the Marias River to the Piikani-Niitsitapi trade. In 1825, Peter Skene Ogden warned Governor Simpson that “it is on the said River that the Americans have it in contemplation to make an establishment and if strong enough to cope with the War tribes of the Saskatchewan is the most suitable spot they could have selected.”¹⁰ Just to which Americans and to which plans Ogden was referring is now unclear, but his assessment of the potential significance of the mouth of the Marias River in the northern plains trade was prophetically accurate. Less than six years after Ogden’s assessment of its strategic importance, Jacques Berger was on a tributary of the Marias River and successfully encouraging representatives of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples to return with him to Fort Union. There Kenneth McKenzie promised to “establish a trading-post in

⁸ William Gordon letter of 15 June 1823, in Nasatir, ed., “The International Significance,” 100.

⁹ Nasatir, ed., “The International Significance,” 104, and, Richard Graham, “Investigations,” 208.

¹⁰ Ogden to Simpson, Fort Nez Percés, 12 November 1825, p. 158, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/119, reel 3M52, HBCA. As had been the case in 1813-1814, the Piikani’s principal camp during the winter of 1824-1825 was on the Marias River, a fact known by John Rowand and almost certainly also known by Ogden. Rowand’s Saskatchewan District Report, 14 May 1825, fo. 2, B.60/e/8, reel 1M777, HBCA.

some favorable locality in their country.”¹¹ In the fall of 1831 the post, long sought after by both the Niitsitapi and American traders, was built, and, not surprisingly, on the Missouri, at the mouth of the Marias River.

Fort Piegan

As noted at the end of the previous chapter, not only did McKenzie send “a Clerk with four or five men” back with the delegation from Niitsitapi territory in the spring of 1831, in advance of a larger complement to be sent to build the first American trading post there, but the Hudson’s Bay Company, from “Indian report,” knew of these plans to challenge its virtual monopoly situation in the trade of the Blackfoot alliance.

Unfortunately, neither the Edmonton House or Rocky Mountain House post journals nor any of the correspondence between Chief Factor John Rowand and Governor George Simpson have survived for this crucial 1831-1832 season; sources more removed from the centre must be relied upon to learn of the British company’s response to this unprecedented American threat. Also regrettable, but not so surprising, is the lack of a detailed, contemporary account of the American Fur Company’s actions in this pivotal year, the “best” record being a self-serving memoir by James Kipp, the founder of the new post, a memoir of dubious reliability written years after the events.¹²

James Kipp was born in Montreal, probably about 1788. He was with the Columbia Fur Company at or near the time of its founding, and in 1822 he built its first post in Mandan territory. In 1827, he became part of the Upper Missouri Outfit of the Western Department; Kenneth McKenzie was his boss. He may have been the man who supervised the construction of Fort Union for McKenzie in 1829. Two years later he

¹¹ Schultz, *Signposts*, 27.

¹² James H. Bradley, “Bradley Manuscript - Book F,” in *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, vol. 8 (Boston, 1966 [1917]), 244-50.

definitely did build two posts at McKenzie's behest, Fort Clark, at the Mandan Villages, in the spring of 1831, and Fort Piegan, that fall.¹³

Sometime in the summer of 1831 Kipp set off from Fort Union with "44 men and a 50 ton Keel boat laden with valuable cargo of Indian goods."¹⁴ He apparently wrote to McKenzie from the mouth of the Musselshell River on 16 September,¹⁵ and was probably at the Marias River by the end of that month. Rowand, the officer in charge of the Saskatchewan District, seems to have sent one of his clerks, Henry Fisher, to reconnoiter the situation on the Missouri. Fisher had had charge of Rocky Mountain House since 1826. He was well qualified both to assess the developments at the mouth of the Marias and to attempt to counteract the American move. Chittenden stated that Fisher came within a day's march of the site chosen for Fort Piegan and tried to woo the Piikani back to the North Saskatchewan. His efforts were apparently foiled by Berger, or one of the other men McKenzie had sent that spring, who was travelling with the group of Piikani encountered by Fisher.¹⁶ Kipp and his men requested that the gathered Piikani leave the site selected for Fort Piegan until he had had the opportunity to complete its construction.

¹³ Chardon, *Chardon's Journal*, 225-7, and, Larpenteur, *Forty Years*, 97n. Kipp remained active in the fur trade until his retirement in 1865. He was Prince Maximilian's Mandan interpreter during his North American tour and in 1847 he accompanied John Palliser to the Yellowstone. See also: Ray H. Mattison, "James Kipp," in Hafen, ed. *The Mountain Men*, vol. 2, 201-5; and, Erik L. Holland, "James Kipp: Upper Missouri Fur Trader," *North Dakota History* 47, no. 4 (Fall 1980), outside of back cover.

¹⁴ Bradley, "Book F," 244. Other estimates put Kipp's manpower as high as 75. For instance, see Stuart, "Adventure on the Upper Missouri," 85.

¹⁵ On 26 December 1831, William Laidlaw wrote to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., from Fort Tecumseh, passing on information which he had received in a letter from McKenzie dated 29 October 1831. McKenzie wrote that he had "no news from F^t Peagan, Kipp had got up safe, as far as the mouth of the Mussel shell River on the 16th Sept.; he had no doubt by this time has had news from him." Pages 83-4, Folder Fort Tecumseh-Fort Pierre Letterbook, Box 24, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

¹⁶ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 333-4.

They acceded to his wish. Meanwhile, Henry Fisher must have beaten a hasty retreat to Edmonton House to confirm Rowand's worst fears.

Fisher reached Edmonton House by early October, because on 8 October a special express from Rowand reached Fort Pitt and was forwarded that same day to Carlton House and then on to Governor Simpson at Red River.¹⁷ Rowand reported on the loss of the Piikani trade to the American Fur Company. He put forward the radical proposal that he remain inland the following summer to lead an expedition to the Piikani to try to regain their trade.¹⁸

To make matters worse, if that then seemed possible to Rowand, James "Jimmy Jock" Bird at this time announced his "defection" to the American cause. Bird wielded great influence among the Blackfoot-speaking peoples and had been used in recent years by Rowand to report on and to try to influence Niitsitapi actions. However, in a dispute with the Hudson's Bay Company over money, "Jimmy Jock" accepted an American offer to go to Fort Piegan. On 31 October Bird wrote from "Bears River" to Fisher, who was then back at Rocky Mountain House.

I take the pleasure. of. writing you these few. lines to let. you. To let. you. that I am well, I am. gone. to. Join the American Company. Its what I wished for. this long time to have revenge. on the Hudson's Bay Company, which I will have. you. thought Money was. two good. for my. and goods, and for you. being so bad. woman. and Children you was afraid [?] to give them any thing Good to eat, and

¹⁷ Fort Pitt post journal, 8 October 1831, B.165/a/2, reel 1M119, HBCA.

¹⁸ Neither Rowand's letter nor Simpson's response to it has survived. However, two other pieces of correspondence confirm Rowand's proposal and Simpson's agreement to it by at least early January 1832. See Donald McKenzie to James Hargrave, Red River, 20 December 1831, in James Hargrave, *The Hargrave Correspondence, 1821-1843*, ed., G.P. de T. Glazebrook (Toronto, 1938), 86-7, and, Governor and Committee to Simpson, London, 8 June 1832, fo. 130d., London Correspondence Book Outwards - Official Series, A.6/22, reel 40, HBCA.

myself, you cant. say. that I was ine debt. to you, for three Years. wages. I got no pay, and for my Horses. that I sold.¹⁹

Bird and, indeed, even Simpson, were of the opinion that Bird was to be paid for the services which he had been rendering the company, but he seems not to have received the agreed-upon financial compensation.²⁰ Simpson later reported:

In the mean time, however, it became known that the American Fur Company established their new Post at the forks of the Yellow Stone [Marias] and Missouri Rivers, and knowing the influence which "Jamey Jock" had over the Piegan, they sent couriers in quest of him through the Blackfeet Country, with pressing invitations to visit them, which he did, taking with him every Piegan over whom he had influence to the Camp of our opponents, with between 3 and 4000 Beaver.²¹

The construction of Fort Piegan was not just important to the competing trading companies; it was also a significant event in the lives of its First Nations customers and suppliers. The construction of this first American trading post for the Niitsitapi was designated the key event of 1831 in at least one Piikani and one Kainai winter count, and probably in one Siksika count as well. The Kainai count, the Bad Head Winter Count, described the year 1831 as "Kipp/otsitsitawpipi/etotoartay. Kipp/when he lived

¹⁹ Bird to Fisher, Bears River (Fort Piegan), 31 October 1831, fo. 2, Edmonton House inward correspondence, B.60/c/1, reel 1M270, HBCA.

²⁰ Simpson reported that Bird received an annual salary of £20, but such would not appear to have been the case. He did receive a gratuity in that amount "For Services rendered the C^y in the Plains" during the 1828-1829 season. However, the Saskatchewan District account books, complete for this period, make no mention of any other such payment. He apparently had a legitimate grievance against the company, even if Simpson was unaware of it. See the following HBCA references: Edmonton House account book, 1828-1829, fos. 4d.-5, B.60/d/27, reel 1M469; Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 August 1832, fo. 43, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/99, reel 3M45; and, Edmonton House inward correspondence, Bird to Rowand, Rocky Mountain House, 10 March 1831, fo. 1, B.60/c/1, reel 1M270.

²¹ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 August 1832, fo. 43d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/99, reel 3M45, HBCA.

there/where the rivers meet.”²² The Piikani count, the Bull Plume Winter Count, denotes the year “When the whites from the south and north met.”²³ The Siksika count, the Makoyatosew Winter Count, identifies the year with a picture which has been interpreted simply as “Grand loge.”²⁴ This almost certainly refers to the construction of Fort Piegan.

Kipp reported that he completed the construction of Fort Piegan in 73 days. “It consisted of a stockade enclosing a square of 110 feet within and upon the sides of which were three large buildings of logs, designed as quarters, stock houses and trading room. The gate was protected by an enclosure 25 feet square, the palisades standing 25 feet above the ground, the interior being commanded by loop holes for cannons and small arms from the main fort.”²⁵ Considering the reputation and past actions of the post’s expected First Nations visitors, at least with respect to most Americans, these defensive measures do not seem extreme in the least, and were similar to the fortified posts which had been built by English and Canadian concerns on the North and South Saskatchewan rivers since the 1780s. These features stood Kipp and his men in good stead. He wrote that he had to withstand an 11-day siege by some Kainai people, who, Kipp claimed, after ending this hostile action “confessed the part played in the matter by the agents of the Hudson’s Bay Company.”²⁶ This is a most dubious assertion.

²² Dempsey, *A Blackfoot Winter Count*, 9.

²³ Raczka, *Winter Count*, 43. This is almost definitely a reference to the construction of Fort Piegan, certainly the interpretation presented by Raczka, but it may be a more specific reference to an individual incident, which occurred in the summer of 1832, when Rowand and a Hudson’s Bay Company party encountered “Jimmy Jock” Bird and a party from Fort Piegan, along with several Piikani leaders. See below in this chapter.

²⁴ Makoyatosew Winter Count, in File 71.220/6738, Box 165, Jules Le Chevallier Papers, Archives of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

²⁵ Bradley, “Book F,” 245.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 248. Kipp’s claim about the Kainai siege of Fort Piegan was confirmed, or perhaps just repeated, by United States Indian Agent J.F.A. Sanford. See Sanford to William

Not only Kenneth McKenzie's trade initiatives but also his diplomatic maneuvers on the Missouri had repercussions in the Saskatchewan District. His successful efforts to negotiate peace, or at least to formalize arrangements already in the works, between the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance and the Assiniboiné, which culminated in the treaty signed at Fort Union on 29 November 1831, seem to have had far-reaching effects. Earlier that same month at Fort Pitt the officer in charge was surprised to learn of the mission of visiting Assiniboiné. "In the Evening arrived 9 men Stone [Assiniboiné] Indians from the Lower end of the Eagle hills they are come purposely to see the Blackfeet [Siksika] Indians & to make peace with them."²⁷ Their search on the Saskatchewan proved fruitless, but a formal peace treaty was agreed to by these same tribes later that month on the Missouri.

Rowand's problems on the North Saskatchewan were widely known throughout the Northern Department by December 1831. They were the season's most distressing news to the profit-sharing officers of the company.

What troubles us most at present is the news we have of Mr. Rowands Indians showing great defection of late- Indeed it was long an idea with me that the Americans were fastening on our frontier even from Upper Canada to the Pacific intending the forks of Missouri as a center to their chain across. Were this the case they must of necessity conciliate Slave tribes [term encompassing the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Gros Ventre and Sarcee] as they com(mand) their communication in these parts, & the Piegans were certainly at once the best & most valuable for their views- The Governor I am happy to find is entering into Mr. Rowands sentiments & it is hoped things will yet come round to what they were.²⁸

Clark, St. Louis, 17 July 1832, pp. 3-4, Letters Received from the St. Louis Superintendency, 1832-1835, Microfilm Roll 750, M234, RG75, BIA, USNA. Sanford here repeated the belief of Hudson's Bay Company incitement. This same basic story is also repeated in "James Kipp," File 513, George Bird Grinnell Papers, Southwest Museum.

²⁷ Fort Pitt post journal, 2 and 13 November 1831, B.165/a/2, reel 1M119, HBCA.

²⁸ Donald McKenzie to James Hargrave, Red River, 20 December 1831, in Hargrave, *The Hargrave Correspondence*, 87.

In early January 1831 Simpson notified London of his support for Rowand's proposal to attempt personally to win back the Piikani to the Hudson's Bay Company. In reply to Simpson's letter of 6 January the Governor and Committee expressed over-confident optimism in Rowand's upcoming expedition. "The intelligence it communicated is very satisfactory with the exception of the Peegan Tribe having taken their Hunts to the American Establishment; we trust however that M^r C. Factor Rowand will succeed in his Mission, and induce them to return to their allegiance to the Company."²⁹ Rowand visited Fisher at Rocky Mountain House at least once during the 1831-1832 season to assess more closely the deteriorating situation.³⁰ He apparently received Simpson's approval for his summer visit to the Piikani by special express in late January 1831, almost a month before "the General winter Express" passed upriver.³¹

The 1831-1832 season was pivotal in many ways. Though it was not then known by any of the key people involved, American, British or First Nations, the opening of Fort Piegan irrevocably altered the trading patterns of virtually the entire Piikani and Gros Ventre tribes, and those of a great part of the Siksika and Kainai peoples as well. Fort Piegan, which Kipp later asserted traded 6,450 pounds of beaver, valued at sale at

²⁹ Governor and Committee to Simpson, London, 8 June 1832, fo. 130d., London Correspondence Book Outwards - Official Series, A.6/22, reel 40, HBCA.

³⁰ Fort Pitt post journal, 21 November 1831, B.165/a/2, reel 1M119, HBCA.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 24 January, 17 and 20 February 1832. Simpson actually seems to have approved of Rowand's plan as early as the end of November 1831. He sent a special packet to Rowand which reached Fort Pelly on 8 December 1831, but which did not seem to have been forwarded to Carlton House until 7 January 1832. This would have been the same dispatch received at Fort Pitt on 24 January. Rowand's original express to Simpson had reached Fort Pelly on 4 November 1831. Fort Pelly post journal, 4 November and 8 December 1831 and 7 January 1832, B.159/a/13, reel 1M117, HBCA.

\$46,000,³² caused a drastic loss to the Saskatchewan District trade and signalled a period of rapid decline there. In the summer of 1832 Simpson reported on the Saskatchewan District. "This favourite Department was from the year 1824 until last year growing rapidly in value and importance, and, altho' it has within the past 12 months sustained a heavy and unexpected loss, it still maintains its elevated stand, being the most productive charge connected with the fur trade."³³ Fort Piegan, and its successors, also allowed a resurgence in the military power of the Blackfoot alliance, a presence which may have been waning in the 1820s from the almost constant onslaught by well-armed enemies on virtually all sides. The succession of posts at the Marias and Missouri rivers, with their insatiable demand for furs and buffalo robes, became the principal arsenal for the Niitsitapi and the Gros Ventre, supplying them with firearms in numbers never before available on the Saskatchewan. Their First Nations foes soon felt the impact of this renewed power.³⁴

As noted above, the 1831-1832 season also saw at least a temporary period of peace and friendship between the Assiniboine and the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, both on the Saskatchewan and on the Missouri. However, this unusual state of affairs was short-lived, a casualty of the end of the four years of peace between the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree, the Assiniboine's principal ally. Skirmishes and horse stealing involving the Sarcee and the Cree, and Cree horse stealing from the Piikani in the fall of

³² Bradley, "Book F," 246. Raczka estimated Kipp's returns at 19,350 beaver pelts. Raczka, *Winter Count*, 43.

³³ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 August 1832, fos. 42-2d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/99, reel 3M45, HBCA.

³⁴ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 93-5, and, David Edmunds, "Blackfoot Military Ascendancy on the Northern Plains," *Papers in Anthropology*, 10, no. 1 (Norman, University of Oklahoma Anthropology Club, Spring 1969), 1-22.

1831 presaged future developments.³⁵ However, in the winter of 1831-1832 friendly relations still existed between the Cree and the Siksika, with Cree and Blackfoot camping close to each other near Fort Pitt and the two tribes exchanging visits regularly through the late winter. Tensions developed between the two then friendly groups in February, perhaps triggered by a Sarcee and Cree dispute over horses. That month saw the Sarcee and Siksika gather in one large camp and the Cree do likewise. It was also reported that "the whole of the Stone [Assiniboine] Indians are all pitching down Country & they seem to fear the Blackfeet Indians."³⁶ The four year period of peace and friendship between the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree, and with it the brief respite between the Assiniboine and the Blackfoot alliance, came to a sudden end in March 1832 when Cree killed four Siksika attempting to steal horses. Though the Siksika tribe was slow to learn of this incident, word was sent immediately from Fort Pitt to Edmonton House. The threat of all out warfare on the Saskatchewan between the allied Cree and Assiniboine against the Niitsitapi and their allies prompted the closure of Fort Pitt for the summer and its continued abandonment during the 1832-1833 season.³⁷

On the Missouri, Fort Piegan was also abandoned for the summer, but not as a result of any perceived threat. Apparently no plans had been made to retain it for the summer. When Kipp was unable to find sufficient volunteers to remain while he took the season's returns down to Fort Union, he was forced to leave Fort Piegan unoccupied. He later reported, "The fort was left standing but was burned soon after by a party of

³⁵ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 88-91 and 94-6, and, Fort Pitt post journal, 4, 17-19 and 23 November 1831, B.165/a/2, reel 1M119, HBCA.

³⁶ Fort Pitt post journal, 14 February 1832, B.165/a/2, reel 1M119, HBCA. See also entries dated 1, 4 and 14 February and 12 March 1832.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26 and 29 March, and 13 and 25 April 1832.

Assiniboines.”³⁸ The Assiniboine had been trading with the American Fur Company at Fort Union since 1829, and apparently even with parties sent from that post north of the 49th Parallel.³⁹ They obviously wished to maintain their strategic advantage in the Euroamerican trade over their perennial enemies, the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. They burned Fort Piegan, the newly-established arsenal of their foes, as soon as the opportunity to do so presented itself without coming into open conflict with their own American trading partners.

Rowand’s “Piegan Expedition,” Rocky Mountain House and Piegan Post

When the last of the boats left downriver from Edmonton House in late May 1832, Rowand remained at his district headquarters making preparations “for a trip to the Piegans, who have lately gone to an American Fort established about the mouth of Medicine River, before the great Falls of the Missouri.”⁴⁰ Just as Jacques Berger’s earlier quest for the Niitsitapi was described by at least one of his contemporaries as the “forlorn hope,” Simpson used identical terminology when referring to Rowand’s trip as “this forlorn hope.”⁴¹ In early June “the Piegan Expedition” set off from Edmonton House.

An expedition under the immediate charge of M^r Chief Factor John Rowand, assisted by Mess^{rs} George McDougal and Henry Fisher with the compliment of

³⁸ Bradley, “Book F,” 250. In another publication, however, Bradley stated that Kipp had left three men behind at Fort Piegan for the summer. See Bradley, “Affairs at Fort Benton,” 204n. These men may actually have been left to live and travel with the Niitsitapi, and not to reside at or to guard the fort.

³⁹ John Peter Pruden to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Carlton House, February 1831, fo. 87d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/125, reel 3M54, HBCA.

⁴⁰ Edmonton House post journal, 26 May 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA.

⁴¹ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 10 August 1832, fo. 44d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/99, reel 3M45, HBCA.

fourteen men and a boy, for the purpose of ascertaining the cause of the Piegans having left off trading with us as usual, and in order to get them back to their old Station, from which, it is supposed, they have been drawn away by the persuasions of James Bird who has deserted the service; has been set on foot, and the men all well equipped with arms, and a suitable Outfit for trade.⁴²

No news was heard of the expedition until mid-August, and that, from a group of Sarcee visiting Edmonton House, was some 50 days old.⁴³

Even before Rowand's departure, the fate of Rocky Mountain House, the previously favourite trading location of the Piikani, had been sealed. At the annual council of the chief factors and chief traders with Simpson in July at York Factory, it was decided to abandon that suddenly unprofitable post. According to the minutes of that council meeting, in light of the "recent defection of the Piegan tribe rendering it unnecessary to maintain the Rocky Mountain House, which was originally established for their convenience," it was resolved to "abandon that Post, and to establish a new Post, to be called the Piegan Post, on the borders of the 49th Parallel of Latitude, with a view to attract that tribe, and to prevent other Indians who were in the habit of frequenting the Hon'ble Company's Posts in the Upper Part of the Saskatchewan from crossing the Line."⁴⁴ In London, the Governor and Committee reacted with the same unwarranted optimism to this confirmation of the departure of Rowand's expedition, an optimism born of years of unchallenged success in the Niitsitapi trade.

The account you give of the conduct of M^r Bird's son Jemmy Jack is to be lamented but it is probable that the Indians would soon have discovered that they were deceived in their expectations of trading more advantageously with the Americans. We think the Fur trade is under general obligations to M^r Rowand for the zeal and courage which he has displayed in going in search of the band of Indians; but we feel much anxiety for the safety of himself and his Party, and on the whole would have been better pleased if he had not engaged in an expedition

⁴² Edmonton House post journal, 4 and 5 June 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA.

⁴³ Ibid., 16 August 1832.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Northern Council, York Factory, 9-16 July 1832, fos. 2-12d., items 33 and 34, B.239/k/2, reel 1M814, HBCA.

attended with so much risk. As we have already observed we do not approve of exposing the lives of our Servants to so much risk for the sake of trade and in this case, if any accident happen to M^r Rowand himself very serious inconvenience and loss may be sustained, as it will not be easy to replace him in the difficult and important post at Edmonton.⁴⁵

Unfortunately for the Hudson's Bay Company, it was the Governor and Committee who were soon to realize that they had been "deceived in their expectations," a self-imposed deception from which they would soon be rapidly and rudely shaken.

On 20 August 1832 Rowand returned safely to Edmonton House. The post journal provides a lengthy summary of his trip into American territory to regain the lost Piikani trade. It also provides a questionable, highly self-serving account of Rowand's encounter with "Jimmy Jock" Bird, as well as a description of a battle between the Kootenay, and the Kainai and the Siksika.

This evening M^r Chief Factor Rowand & M^r George M^cDougall accompanied by seven men arrived from their tour to the Missisourie where they saw the Piegans headed by their chiefs. endeavours were made to get them back to their old station, and it is supposed they will do so_ though the Americans, whom they met near the sweet grass hills, will on the other hand try to stop them from coming in order to make as much as they can while in that quarter_ James Bird, as we understand, made an attempt to visit M^r Rowand at his Camp, but his manner of doing so with arms accompanied by several men and Indians singing, appearing to all present more like a show of contempt than that of respect, caused M^r Rowand to step out of his tent to ask the reason, but on his being perceived by James Bird, who could not foresee what was to happen, and knowing that that Gentleman had every right to be vexed with his shameful conduct in leaving his employers to join the Americans, made him wheel round his horse to leave his perilous situation as he thought, yet in the act his animal came in contact with a tree, the shock was so severe that Bird was thrown off and received by the fall a cut in the head, however the fright was so great he felt nothing, mounted his horse and left the field with the speed he could muster_ During this time M^r Rowand was surrounded by Indians who were endeavouring to appease his anger & stop him from shooting, which they supposed were his intentions_ Every precaution had been taken for the safety of the party, and we are happy to learn that during the whole route nothing

⁴⁵ Governor and Committee to Simpson, London, 1 March 1833, fo. 12, London Correspondence Book Outwards - Official Series, A.6/23, reel 40, HBCA. Though written in March 1833, London headquarters was still unaware of the outcome of Rowand's summer 1832 expedition. This March letter was written in response to Simpson's 10 August 1832 report, the last word received on the subject in London.

of any serious consequences had been met with. In course of summer they met with the Kootenais Chief who received them with good will. That Chief was at the head of thirty three men, and from these they exchanged some lean horses for good fat ones, giving Ammunition & Tobacco to boot. This small supply of ammunition given those Indians was the means of saving them from real danger. A few days after they were attacked by at least a thousand Blood & Blackfeet Indians, whose love of horses does not stop them from acting mischief towards friends or foes. They immediately began to pillage the Kootenais, who defended themselves with such bravery that after having seven of themselves wounded, made their enemies retreat with the loss of eight Killed and above twenty wounded, some of whom not expected to live, besides several of their horses missing. The Kootenais returned to their lands with great joy, having escaped from such a most dangerous situation.

We are also informed that M^r Rowand left M^r Henry Fisher with nine men to build a Fort on the head of the South Branch or Bow River for the use of the Piegan Tribe.⁴⁶

The Summer of 1832 on the Missouri

Within two weeks of Rowand's return to Edmonton House, reports from visiting Sarcee confirmed that the Hudson's Bay Company's new post on the Bow River would not be unopposed. The Edmonton House journal reads, "The Americans they say, have arrived in boats (the number unknown) and are building near the mouth of the Bear River."⁴⁷ The summer of 1832 had been far from uneventful for the American Fur Company, as well. Kipp, Bird, Berger, the rest of the company's men and several Niitsitapi (possibly including some Gros Ventre) had arrived at Fort Union sometime in April. McKenzie must have been thrilled at the returns from Fort Piegan, but also a little disappointed at the post's summer closure. Shortly after the arrival of the men and returns from the upriver post, McKenzie set off with the season's returns. On 27 April his party arrived at Fort Tecumseh, the company's post for the Sioux on the Missouri, south of the mouth of

⁴⁶ Edmonton House post journal, 20 August 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA. According to the 22 August entry in this journal, during the trip Rowand traded 600 beaver pelts from the Piikani. The encounter described here between Rowand's and "Jimmy Jock's" parties may be to what the earlier-noted Bull Plume Winter Count, a Piikani count, was referring in the meeting of "whites from the south and north." Raczka, *Winter Count*, 43.

⁴⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 2 September 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA.

the Cheyenne River. The post journalist there wrote, "Messrs. McKenzie, Kipp and Bird with 9 Blackfeet [Niitsitapi, and possibly Gros Ventre?] Indians arrived in a bateau from Ft. Union. McKensie brought down 111 packs of beaver skins."⁴⁸

"Jimmy Jock" Bird was considered quite a catch by the American firm. He had been paid \$500.00 for the remainder of the 1831-1832 season, after his "defection" from the Hudson's Bay Company. He was re-engaged, probably at Fort Union by McKenzie, for the full 1832-1833 season at a salary of \$1,200.00, then the standard clerk's pay in the American Fur Company.⁴⁹ Four days after their arrival at Fort Tecumseh, the journalist reported, "Mr. Bird and the Blackfoot Indians left here in the morning on a visit to the Sioux camp."⁵⁰ They returned to the fort on 4 May. The purpose of the visit by these representatives of the Blackfoot-speaking tribes to the Sioux is not explained in any existing records and is probably impossible to determine today.⁵¹ Perhaps they visited the Sioux to purchase ceremonial songs or objects.⁵²

⁴⁸ Doane Robinson, ed., "Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letterbooks," in vol. 9 of *South Dakota Historical Collections* (Pierre, 1918), 27 April 1832, p.155. The original of this document is held by the Missouri Historical Society.

⁴⁹ Fur Trade Ledgers, pp. 427 and 433, vol. T., and pp. 57-8 and 152, vol. V., MHS, and, William Clark to Lewis Cass, St. Louis, 16 January 1832, Letters Received from the St. Louis Superintendency, 1832-1835, Microfilm Roll 750, M234, RG75, BIA, USNA. This salary matched the high esteem in which the American Fur Company held "Jimmy Jock," and reflected its expectations of his influence over the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. In comparison, Berger, who had unlocked the door to this lucrative trade, was paid only \$800.00 per annum. See Larpenteur, *Forty Years*, 97, and, Fur Trade Ledgers, p. 427, vol. T., p. 152, vol. V., and p. 260, vol. W., MHS.

⁵⁰ Robinson, ed., "Fort Tecumseh," 1 May 1832, p. 155.

⁵¹ When I informed John Ewers of this 1832 visit, he could not then suggest an explanation. Ewers to Smyth, Arlington, Virginia, 18 February 1987.

⁵² Ceremonial objects, dances and even societies were often purchased from neighbouring First Nations peoples, often, far-distant neighbours. For instance, the Piikani acquired the Black Tail Dance from the Kootenay, and, the Tea Dance and the Kissing Dance from the

Kenneth McKenzie and his party waited at Fort Tecumseh for over a month before returning to Fort Union. And their return was in style. On 31 May the side-wheeler steamer, the *Yellow Stone*, arrived at Fort Tecumseh. McKenzie had convinced Pierre Chouteau Jr. of the potential benefits of steamers on the Missouri and he in turn had convinced company headquarters in New York. The result was the *Yellow Stone*, built during the winter of 1830-1831. At 130 feet in length, the boat drew six feet of water when fully loaded to its 75 ton capacity.⁵³ In the spring of 1831 the *Yellow Stone* had managed to reach only Fort Tecumseh. In 1832 its objective was again Fort Union. The steamer left Fort Tecumseh on 5 June. Among its passengers were: McKenzie; Pierre Chouteau Jr.; David Dawson Mitchell, who was to be sent to the Marias River; United States Indian Agent J.F.A. Sanford; George Catlin, the artist; and, presumably, Bird and the nine Niitsitapi. Exactly when the *Yellow Stone* reached Fort Union is not now known, but on 23 June it was back at Fort Tecumseh. The journal notes, "Sb Yellowstone arrived from Ft. Union. Sent down 600 packs robes on board."⁵⁴ Not only was the *Yellow Stone*, and its successors, a distinct improvement in the American Fur

Assiniboine. See interview with Peter Stubbs (Piikani), October 1970, part 3, AH.70.25.1, Ethnology Tapes, Acc. 78.43, Provincial Archives of Alberta, and, Summary of interview with Curly Bear (Piikani), 14 January 1911, p. 134, vol. 1, David C. Duvall Fonds, M4376, Glenbow Archives. From farther afield, the Niitsitapi Grass Dance Society apparently originated with the Pawnee (*Chahiksichahiks*), while songs of the Niitsitapi Buffalo Dance and Bull Society were probably acquired from the Arikara (*Sahnis*) and the Mandan (*Nú neta*). See James Murrie, "Notes on Blackfoot Songs," pp. 421-4, in vol. 2, David C. Duvall Fonds, M4376, Glenbow Archives. Four Siksika informants (One Gun, his wife, Scalplock and Mrs. Pretty Young Man) said that the Crazy Dog Society was purchased from First Nations peoples "way down in the eastern states." Interview of April 1965, AH.65.11, Ethnology Tapes, Acc. 78.43, Provincial Archives of Alberta. The Niitsitapi would travel incredible distances for religious and ceremonial objects and non-material culture.

⁵³ Lass, *A History of Steamboating*, 8-11; Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 337-40; and, Donald Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone* (New York, 1985).

⁵⁴ Robinson, ed., "Fort Tecumseh," 23 June 1832, pp. 156-7.

Company's transportation system, but it apparently elevated the company in its customers' eyes, as well. Newspaper reports after the *Yellow Stone's* return to St. Louis in late July described the reaction of First Nations people to this new phenomenon, though its long-term sway over Aboriginal trading practices was undoubtedly embellished for White America's consumption. The *New York American* reported:

This enterprize will no doubt greatly add to our trade and intercourse with the Indians, and subtract from that of the British trader. There is nothing, we are sure, that could have excited a greater degree of surprize among the wild inhabitants of the upper Missouri, than the appearance among them of a high pressure steamboat, moving majestically against the current, as if (so it would seem to them) impelled by some supernatural agency. Many of the Indians who had been in the habit of trading with the Hudson's Bay Company, declared that that company could no more compete with the Americans and concluded hereafter to bring all their skins to the latter; and said, that the British might turn out their dogs and burn their sledges, as they would be no longer useful while the Fire Boat walked upon the water. We are informed by Capt. B. that thousands of natives visited the boat, were very friendly, and invited him to several feasts prepared in honor of the occasion.⁵⁵

The successful voyage by steamboat to the mouth of the Yellowstone River was also widely noted in the European press.⁵⁶ At, or shortly after, the arrival of the *Yellow Stone* at Fort Union there were large numbers of Assiniboiné, Cree, Crow and Niitsitapi gathered at that post. Though generally all met on peaceable terms there, before the Cree departed they inexplicably killed a Niitsitapi chief.⁵⁷ Niitsitapi response to the killing is not now known. The generic designation "Blackfeet" was the only name used to describe these visitors to Fort Union, though many undoubtedly were Piikani and Kainai. These

⁵⁵ "First Steamboat to Fort Union," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1976), 1-2. The quotation is from the *New York American*, 31 July 1832. For a description of a Piikani reaction to the first encounter with a steamboat, see James Willard Schultz, *Why Gone Those Times? Blackfoot Tales*, ed., Eugene Lee Silliman (Norman, 1974), 115-25.

⁵⁶ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 339.

⁵⁷ Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, vol. 1, 14-65, but especially 22 and 38-9.

Niitsitapi people were probably there in such numbers awaiting the arrival of the outfit from below, and the subsequent departure of men and goods for the Marias.

McKenzie chose David Dawson Mitchell to reestablish the company's presence in Niitsitapi territory. Mitchell, a Virginian, had joined the Upper Missouri Outfit in 1828. By 1835, he would be a partner in that organization. He retired five years later. Twice he held the position of Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, seeing active military service both before and after his second appointment to that post.⁵⁸ An extremely able man, Mitchell was definitely a good choice for the still volatile company situation among the Blackfoot-speaking peoples.

In early July, Mitchell left by keelboat for the Marias, almost certainly escorted along the Missouri's banks by some of the Niitsitapi from Fort Union. However, several days later an unfortunate accident caused great trepidation within the company for its immediate prospects for the trade of the Blackfoot alliance. In mid-August, a company officer sent a report of the discouraging news to St. Louis:

On the 7th July the Keel boat for the Blk: feet inds, Mr. Mitchell with a Splendid Equipment, and 50 picked Men started for River Marias. 8 or 10 days after her departure from Fort Union, she was completely wrecked; the Cargo nearly all lost, one man (D. Bennoit) and a Blk: foot Indian drowned. Fortunately the "Flora" arrived about the same time they were apprised of the Melancholy tidings; all hands were immediately summoned to make up fresh Equipment for the Blk: feet, and the Flora left Fort Union for "Marias," on the 19th Ultio: The Untoward delay it is to be feared, will be very detrimental to the trade of the infant part [?], however, we must hope for the best; news will go ahead of the disaster, and Mr. Bird who departed with a party on horse-back, having Tobacco and ammunition, it is to be hoped, will do his utmost to content the Indians.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Paul E. Verdon, "David Dawson Mitchell: Virginian on the Wild Missouri," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1977), 2-15. Mitchell died at age 55, in 1861 at St. Louis.

⁵⁹ William Laidlaw to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., Fort Pierre, 14 August 1832, p. 130, Folder Fort Tecumseh-Fort Pierre Letterbook, Box 24, Chouteau Collection, MHS. Laidlaw was given the bad news by Catlin, who had just arrived from Fort Union. Bradley identified the drowned "Blk: foot Indian" as a Piikani. Bradley, "Affairs at Fort Benton," 205.

McKenzie was undoubtedly relieved to have a man of Bird's reputed influence to send ahead to dispel any Niitsitapi worries that the company would not soon be returning, despite the deadly mishap. "Jimmy Jock" and his party were obviously in Niitsitapi territory in time for their encounter with Rowand about the beginning of August. The *Flora*, on which the second outfit for Blackfoot alliance was carried upriver, was a large keelboat which had come up in the spring from St. Louis, following a few days behind the *Yellow Stone*.⁶⁰ By late August, according to the above-noted Sarcee reports at Edmonton House, Mitchell and his party were at the mouth of the Marias. Finding Fort Piegan totally destroyed, Mitchell chose a site for the new post about six miles above the mouth of the Marias on the north bank of the Missouri River. He named the new trading post which he built there Fort McKenzie.

News of the American Fur Company's difficulties reached the traders on the North Saskatchewan in October, buoying their sagging spirits. Siksika visitors informed Rowand at Edmonton House "that the Americans on their way up the Mississourie had lost a boat and two men were drowned_ besides the loss of the cargo_ They also say that the plain tribes had fired at the boats but no blood was shed, however it shows us that they are not so satisfied with the Americans this season as they were last."⁶¹ The tale of members of the Blackfoot alliance, "the plain tribes," firing on Mitchell's boat was probably fiction, made up by these First Nations visitors at Edmonton House to please the Hudson's Bay Company.

⁶⁰ Robinson, ed., "Fort Tecumseh," 10 and 11 June 1832, p. 156.

⁶¹ Edmonton House post journal, 17 October 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA.

Trading and Trapping

These were not the only troubles which beset the American Fur Company that year in its relations with the Blackfoot-speaking tribes and their allies. The company had not limited its involvement in the fur-collecting process simply to trading with First Nations peoples; it was also involved in the mountain trapping business, competing there with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. From 1827, the Upper Missouri Outfit under McKenzie had sent small parties to investigate activities and prospects in the mountains, while, from 1828, the Western Department under Pratte and Chouteau supplied larger scale expeditions led by Henry Vanderburgh. Between 1830 and 1832 these two parts of the American Fur Company, despite the Upper Missouri Outfit being in theory subordinate to or a branch of the Western Department, both “maintained large trapping brigades in the mountains and sent separate supply trains to the rendezvous.”⁶² After 1832, to avoid any further wasting of resources, the separate endeavours were combined. According to Wishart, “In the Rocky Mountains the American Fur Company’s operational strategy was straightforward: Henry Vanderburgh and Andrew Drips (the field captains) intended to learn the best trapping grounds by following the Rocky Mountain Fur Company brigades and to capture the trade of the free trappers by offering inflated prices for their furs.”⁶³ McKenzie and Chouteau at first implemented new outfitting procedures, using their Missouri River posts as the starting points for their supply trains. However, by 1834, the alternate transportation arrangements having proved less reliable, the American Fur Company followed the established Platte River route to the mountains.

In 1832, Lucien Fontenelle led one supply train west from the middle Missouri, while Etienne Provost took the other from Fort Union. They met on the Green River, but

⁶² Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 148; Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, vol. 2, 766-7; and, Dougherty, “A Description,” 116.

⁶³ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 149.

difficulties in transporting the outfit up the Missouri had so delayed their departures that they were unable to reach Vanderburgh and Drips before the break-up of the Pierre's Hole rendezvous.⁶⁴ Vanderburgh and Drips were there, but without adequate supplies of trade goods they could not compete with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and the other smaller concerns for the pelts of the gathered free trappers, the Flathead and the Nez Perce peoples.

The Pierre's Hole rendezvous ended unprofitably for the American Fur Company in mid-July 1832. However, it did not end uneventfully. Immediately following the break-up of the rendezvous, an indecisive battle was fought which was of little military consequence but of great symbolic significance. The Battle of Pierre's Hole was precipitated by an individual Iroquois' blood feud with the Niitsitapi. It involved the trappers, the Flathead and the Nez Perce on one side and members of the Blackfoot alliance on the other. Almost universally identified by Americans as Blackfoot proper (the Siksika), the bulk of the one side was almost certainly Gros Ventre, probably part of the large contingent which had left the Saskatchewan District in 1829 to visit their Arapaho kinfolk far to the south.⁶⁵ The Gros Ventre, undoubtedly accompanied by some of the Siksika, Kainai and Piikani who had journeyed south with them,⁶⁶ were returning to their own territory with their families. Even at this late date it was not unusual for Americans to fail to make a distinction among the three Blackfoot-speaking peoples and the allied Gros Ventre. In 1835 Colonel Henry Dodge encountered about 350 Gros

⁶⁴ Ibid., and, Fred R. Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous: A History of the Fur Trade Rendezvous, 1825-1840* (Provo, 1975), 75-6.

⁶⁵ Virginia Cole Trenholm, *The Arapahoes, Our People* (Norman, 1970), 88-90, and, "Colonel Henry Dodge Journal of Expedition to Rocky Mountains from Fort Leavenworth," p. 25, *CIS US Serial Set*, H.exdoc. 181 (24-1), 289.

⁶⁶ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 6 January 1831, fos. 94-5d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/125, reel 3M54, HBCA.

Ventre and 50 Niitsitapi living with the Arapaho and Cheyenne near Bent's Fort, on the Arkansas River. In his daily journal he did distinguish between the various visiting peoples, though he did improperly identify the "Gros-ventres" as "a band of the Blackfeet." However, in his summary letter of the expedition, Dodge referred only to meeting "some of the Blackfeet who reside with the Arepahas," and made no use of the name Gros Ventre, obviously including this tribe in his Blackfeet reference.⁶⁷ In 1832 it was another large party, principally consisting of Gros Ventre, who had first had hostile chance meetings with at least two different groups of trappers before the fateful and famous encounter of 18 July 1832 at Pierre's Hole.⁶⁸

Several first-hand accounts of the Battle of Pierre's Hole have survived, all varying somewhat in detail.⁶⁹ The large Gros Ventre party on its homeward migration to

⁶⁷ "Colonel Henry Dodge Journal," 25 and 34. Even the Spanish seem to have included the Gros Ventre under the general heading of Blackfeet, though they would have had far less opportunity to get to know any of the Niitsitapi or Gros Ventre peoples. However, at least one Spanish official did encounter "Patas negras," or Blackfeet (Niitsitapi and/or Gros Ventre), living with the Arapaho in the winter of 1833-1834. See Santiago Abreu to Ministerio de Guerra y Marina, 14 March 1834, MANM 14: 690, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, and, Thomas V. Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706-1875* (Lincoln, 1996), 234-5.

⁶⁸ On their return to the Missouri in the early summer of 1832 a large Gros Ventre party, travelling west of the first range of the Rockies, probably in an effort to avoid the Crow, pillaged, or attempted to do so, at least two different groups attached to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. See: Zenas Leonard, *The Adventures of Zenas Leonard*, ed. John C. Ewers (Norman, 1959), 35-40; Schilz, "The Gros Ventres," 24-5; and, William Sublette to Ashley, Lexington, Missouri, 21 September 1832, Folder 9-21-1832, Box 1, William L. Sublette Papers, MHS.

⁶⁹ For example, see: Sublette to Ashley, Lexington, Missouri, 21 September 1832, Folder 9-21-1832, Box 1, William L. Sublette Papers, MHS; Andrew Drips to John B. Sarpy, Pierre's Hole, 27 July 1832, Folder Chouteau-Papin Collection 27 July 1832, Box 28, Chouteau Collection, MHS; John B. Wyeth, "Wyeth's Oregon, or a Short History of a Long Journey, 1832," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 21 (Cleveland, 1905), 69-72; George Nidever, *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever, 1802-1883*, ed., William Henry Ellison (Berkeley, 1937), 26-30; Robert Campbell, *The*

the north inadvertently met a party of trappers led by Milton Sublette, who had the previous day left the Pierre's Hole rendezvous. The Gros Ventre, travelling with their families, and numbering perhaps 400, apparently had no hostile intentions. However, the treacherous killing of one of their leaders by an unidentified Flathead and by Antoine Godin, an Iroquois whose father had earlier been killed by the Niitsitapi, initiated a day-long battle.⁷⁰ The small band of trappers was quickly reinforced by some 500 other trappers, Flathead and Nez Perce from Pierre's Hole. A few died on each side; the inconclusive battle ended when the Gros Ventre withdrew under cover of darkness from their barricades in the woods. Inconsequential in military terms, the Battle of Pierre's Hole more than any other single event has come to symbolize the antipathy between the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance and the American "mountain men."⁷¹ At the time, and almost exclusively ever since, this event has not been seen as a blood feud, but rather as typifying "Blackfeet" hostility to Americans. It seems to embody the myth of the larger-than-life American "mountain man" versus the hostile environment, which environment included the "Blackfeet."

Rocky Mountain Letters of Robert Campbell, ed., Charles Eberstadt ([n.l.], 1955), 8-9; Victor, *The River of the West*, 112-8; Warren Angus Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains: A Diary of Wanderings on the Sources of the Rivers Missouri, Columbia, and Colorado, 1830-1835*, ed., LeRoy R. Hafen (Denver, 1983), 222-3; Leonard, *The Adventures*, 42-6; Nathaniel J. Wyeth, *The Correspondence and Journals of Captain Nathaniel J. Wyeth, 1831-6*, ed., Frederick G. Young (New York, 1973 [1899]), 159-60; and, Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 83-92 and 259-79.

⁷⁰ For a brief biography of Antoine Godin, see Aubrey L. Haines, "Antoine Godin," in Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men*, vol. 2, 175-8. Godin himself was killed in another act of blood revenge by "Jimmy Jock" Bird, at Fort Hall in May 1836.

⁷¹ Almost no history of the fur trade in the American West fails to deal with this incident. For a good summary and analysis, see Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 650-6, and Willard C. Hayden, "The Battle of Pierre's Hole," *Idaho Yesterdays* 16, no. 2 (1972), 2-11.

Vanderburgh's Death and Its Consequences

William Henry Vanderburgh was present at this battle. It was not his first hostile meeting with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance since leading trapping expeditions in the mountains for the American Fur Company. In the latter half of 1830, he apparently was attacked by, but successfully repulsed, a force of Niitsitapi warriors, according to company accounts losing only one man to 30 or 40 for the Niitsitapi.⁷² Though fortunate in these two skirmishes with members of the Blackfoot alliance, Vanderburgh, whose fur trade career had begun in 1818 at about 17 years of age with Manuel Lisa's Missouri Fur Company, was soon not to prove "third time lucky."⁷³ Shortly after the Battle of Pierre's Hole, Vanderburgh and Drips were re-supplied by Fontenelle. They then set off into Niitsitapi country, following in the tracks of a Rocky Mountain Fur Company brigade under the command of Thomas Fitzpatrick and Jim Bridger. Whether intentionally led into danger by his rivals or not, Vanderburgh was indeed in perilous territory for a trapper, the Three Forks region, Piikani territory. On 14 October, Vanderburgh took seven men of his party of 50 to explore the possibility of there being an Indian encampment nearby. According to one survivor's account, about 100 "Blackfoot" sprang from ambush on Vanderburgh and his men. According to the Niitsitapi, Vanderburgh and his party fired upon the approaching Kainai who were bringing letters to him.⁷⁴ The

⁷² Robinson, ed., "Fort Tecumseh," 28 December 1830, 144.

⁷³ Harvey L. Carter, "William H. Vanderburgh," in Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men*, vol. 7, 315-20, and, Paul C. Phillips, "William Henry Vanderburgh," *Mississippi Valley Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (December 1943), 377-94.

⁷⁴ Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 241-6. The Niitsitapi side of this incident was told to Joseph E. Brazeau, who in 1832 was in the employ of the American Fur Company. He was told the story years later while working for the Hudson's Bay Company. He in turn told the Niitsitapi version to the Earl of Southesk. See James Carnegie (Earl of Southesk), *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains* (Edinburgh, 1875), 160-2. Brazeau was employed by the American Fur Company among the Cheyenne and the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. He was an informant for George Catlin, with whom he travelled upriver on the

Kainai party was led by *Pe-toh-pee-kiss*, the Eagle Ribs.⁷⁵ Whatever the cause, likely fearful and over-anxious Americans in what they perceived to be enemy territory, the immediate result was the death of Vanderburgh and one of his men.⁷⁶

Vanderburgh's death prompted two levels of cautionary response within the American Fur Company. Lucien Fontenelle leaned toward merely the avoidance of Niitsitapi territory by the company's trapping expeditions. He argued that had Vanderburgh not gone "last fall to the infernal Blackfoot country I really believe that you might have sent in this season upwards of one hundred packs and would have saved the life of a good man."⁷⁷ William B. Astor, in New York, saw a more general, potential threat of continued trapping expeditions to the company's trading operations on the upper Missouri. He wrote:

The loss of M^r Vanderburgh I fear will have a bad effect on your mountain Expedition, and I think it is worthy of consideration whether we had not better confine ourselves as soon as circumstances will permit, to trade with the Indians, & free Hunters, and give up hunting as a part of our upper Missouri business_ The

Yellow Stone in 1832. Brazeau apparently lost favour with the Americans and moved northward, where he was employed by the Hudson's Bay Company from 1846 to 1868 in the Saskatchewan District, principally at Fort Assiniboine, Jasper House and Rocky Mountain House. See: Chardon, *Chardon's Journal*, 237-8n. and 273n.; "List of American Fur Company Men to Be Transported from St. Louis on Steamer 'Yellowstone'," 24 March 1832, no. 33, Folder Chouteau-Walsh Collection 24 March 1832, Box 27, Chouteau Collection, MHS; Joseph Brazeau search file, HBCA; and, Minutes of the Northern Council, Norway House, 24 June 1868, pp. 371-99, item 74, B.239/k/3, reel 1M814, HBCA.

⁷⁵ The Eagle Ribs had been painted by George Catlin at Fort Union earlier in 1832. See Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, vol. 1, 34 and facing 32.

⁷⁶ For more on the death of Vanderburgh, see: Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 2, 657-63; Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, eds., Robert A. Rees and Alan Sandy (Boston, 1977 [1837]), 64-5; and, "More Indian Warfare," *Doylestown Democrat* 16 April 1833. A photocopy of this Pennsylvania newspaper story is contained in Folder 16 April 1833, Box 1, Andrew Drips Papers, MHS.

⁷⁷ Fontenelle to William Laidlaw, Green River Rendezvous, 31 July 1833, p. 2, Folder Chouteau-Walsh Collection 31 July 1833, Box 30, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

Indians are now too well aware of the value of furred animals in their country, to allow us to hunt them peaceably; and I apprehend a loss of our trade with the Blackfeet will be a natural consequence of our coming into collision with them as we must do, if we persevere in the present system of trapping.⁷⁸

Both Astor's and Fontenelle's concerns about the dangers of trapping in the territory of the Blackfoot alliance were addressed during the 1833-1834 season. The American Fur Company retained its trapping expeditions in the mountains, but an arrangement reached with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company divided the trapping range. The American Fur Company took the Flathead, Snake River and Salt Lake regions, while the Rocky Mountain Fur Company got the areas about Green River, the upper Yellowstone and the dangerous headwaters of the Missouri.⁷⁹

Rival Posts: Fort McKenzie and Piegan Post, 1832 to 1833

While the Missouri's upper reaches may have been treacherous for the American Fur Company's trappers, this was not the case for its traders. Mitchell and his men successfully reestablished the company's presence in Piikani territory near the mouth of the Marias River in late August and September 1832, with the erection of Fort McKenzie, a well-fortified post of some 200 feet square, with log palisades and bastions.⁸⁰ This time, however, the American Fur Company's trading post for the Blackfoot alliance would not be unopposed in Niitsitapi territory, for while Mitchell was building his post on the Missouri, Henry Fisher was constructing the Hudson's Bay Company's Piegan Post on the Bow River. The American's Fort Piegan of the previous season had brought about at least the temporary demise of Rocky Mountain House. The English company

⁷⁸ Astor to Chouteau, New York, 17 April 1833, p. 1, Folder Chouteau-Papin Collection 17 April 1833, Box 29, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

⁷⁹ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 151.

⁸⁰ Bradley, "Affairs at Fort Benton," 205n.

was hoping that Piegan Post, the replacement for Rocky Mountain House, would be able to win back its lost trade, what with its more southerly location, closer to Piikani lands.

Fisher, the long-time clerk in charge at Rocky Mountain House, had been left by Rowand with nine men to start the building of the Bow River post. Rowand quickly re-supplied him, sending six men with 15 horses carrying 30 pieces of goods to Fisher in early September.⁸¹ Fisher was to build the post, but he was not to have charge of it. That assignment was to go to Chief Trader John Edward Harriott. He had joined the company as an apprentice in 1809 and had spent the bulk of his career on the Saskatchewan, including his participation in the 1822-1823 Bow River Expedition. From 1828 to 1832 he was stationed in the Columbia District, during which time he was appointed to the rank of chief trader. He returned to the east of the mountains in the spring of 1832, attending the annual council of the Northern Department that July at York Factory. In his "Character Book" of 1832, Governor Simpson made the following assessment of Harriott: "About 40 Years of Age. A finished Trader. Speaks Cree like a Native and is a great favourite with Indians: has much influence likewise with the people and is generally esteemed by his colleagues. Strong, active and fit for Severe duty. Mild tempered, well disposed, and bears an excellent private character. Came to the Country when quite a Boy so that he is deficient in regard to Education, but in every other respect he is a very effective Man."⁸²

On 20 September 1832, Harriott was back at Edmonton House with the inland Saskatchewan brigade. From this date, and for more than the next 20 years, he would be

⁸¹ Edmonton House post journal, 5 September 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA. Fortunately, the daily journals for Edmonton House have survived for the entire period, May 1832 to May 1834. See B.60/a/27 and 28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

⁸² Glyndwr Williams, ed., *Hudson's Bay Company Miscellany, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, 1975), 197, and, Lewis G. Thomas, "John Edward Harriott," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume LX, 1861 to 1870* (Toronto, 1976), 366-7.

John Rowand's right-hand man in the Saskatchewan District and would often have charge of it in Rowand's absence. Just before Harriott's arrival at Edmonton House word reached the district headquarters from Fisher "that all was safe, and that the Piegans had not as yet made their appearance at the Fort."⁸³ Immediately following Harriott's arrival, the outfit was made up "for Bow River or what is called the Piegan Post."⁸⁴ On 1 October, Harriott left for the Bow River. The journal noted: "After breakfast M^r C.T. Harriotte, accompanied by M^r Small with 16 Men besides families and 26 horses left this on their way to Piegan Post with the remainder of the Outfit of that Place." Patrick Small, a clerk with extensive service in both the Hudson's Bay and North West companies, apparently was originally intended to serve under Harriott at Piegan Post, but Harriott chose to keep Fisher there instead. Small and three men left the Bow River outpost on 13 October and three days later were back at Edmonton House, where Small remained for the rest of the season.

Harriott soon after summed up his situation as he was about to take head on the American operation on the upper Missouri.

On the 1st October I M^r Small and 16 Men started with the remainder of the Outfit; for this Post, and on the 10th reached it when I had the Pleasure of finding M^r Fisher, and party well, and far advanced with the Work of the Place, Say Fort Bastions, Indian House, Store and Dwelling House up M^r Fisher had heard from a Camp of about 40 Tents of Piegans who were at no great Distance and on their Way to this Establishm^t

M^r Fisher being the only Person in this District who is perfectly acquainted with the Piegans and having accompanied M^r Rowand in his excursion of last Summer is also acquainted with the Arrangements then made with them remains here, and M^r Small with four Men returned, immediately to Sanspariel [Edmonton

⁸³ Edmonton House post journal, 15 September 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA. Unless otherwise noted, details of the 1832-1833 season's activities are taken from this post journal.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 27 September 1832. Though uniformly called Piegan Post by the Hudson's Bay Company traders of the day, in the 20th century it also became known as Bow Fort; this is the name by which its records are listed in the HBCA.

House], leaving at this Place myself M^r Fisher Twenty two engaged Men and four free Half Breeds.⁸⁵

This number of men was about twice the normal complement stationed at Rocky Mountain House; it may have been seen as necessary, both in a defensive role and in the continuing work of completing the construction of the new post.⁸⁶

Rowand's and Harriott's high hopes for Piegan Post were soon dashed. In mid-October Harriott was faced with the gloomy reality of his situation. Harriott reported:

From the 15th to the 20 October this forty Tents of Piegans arrived and encamped close by the Fort, these are the only Indians who have not visited the American Fort this Season and altho they had not more than Eighty Beavers among them all, they were most liberally treated, a Piegan who arrived about the same Time from this Camp, about the Missourie, informed us that all the Indians in that Quarter had disposed of their Beaver to the Americans, but that they intended to visit us in Course of the Winter, the latter has however proved false, for with the exception of twelve Tents they are all encamped in the Vicinity of the American Fort.⁸⁷

In late October, Rowand set off to assess the situation in person. He returned from Piegan Post in mid-November with the outpost's paltry returns of "108 Beaver Skins the fruits of the late trade of that Post, though thirty odd Tents of Piegans, Blood Indians & Crees were at that Place."⁸⁸ Regular communication was maintained between

⁸⁵ Harriott to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Piegan Post, 6 January 1833, fo. 34, Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/4, reel 3M57, HBCA. Harriott here stated that Small left with four men, but the Edmonton House post journal entry of 16 October 1832 noted his arrival with only three men. For reasons now unknown, for a brief period in the early 1830s Edmonton House was referred to by its occupants as "Fort Sanspariel," the official journal of that post's 1832-1833 season even bearing this title.

⁸⁶ Each of these men is identified by name and the wages are listed in the Piegan Post account book for the 1832-1833 season, fos. 7d.-8, B.21/d/1, reel 1M433, HBCA.

⁸⁷ Harriott to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Piegan Post, 6 January 1833, fo. 34, Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/4, reel 3M57, HBCA.

⁸⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 25 October and 11 November 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA.

Rowand and Harriott, though with no good news to be heard from the outpost. On one trip from Edmonton House to the Bow River in mid-November, besides transporting "two Kegs of Spirits," a party also had charge of "a Packet for the west side of the Rocky Mountains."⁸⁹ The fall express from York Factory had arrived at Edmonton House on 26 October. Rowand, probably following Simpson's directions, apparently took advantage of the new outpost's southwesterly location to forward the company mail by a more direct southern pass through the Rockies to the Columbia watershed than by the usual Athabasca Pass route. This is the first such recorded crossing that far south, though through exactly which pass the express was carried is not now known, but it was probably via either the Simpson Pass or the White Man Pass.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ibid., 16 November 1832.

⁹⁰ David Smyth, "The Yellowhead Pass." The company express in 1832 was almost certainly carried across the Rockies over one or the other of the passes used in 1841 in two better-known crossings: the Simpson Pass, by Governor Simpson during his 1841-1842 journey around the world, and the White Man Pass, by James Sinclair and his emigrant party. See: Irene M. Spry, "Routes Through the Rockies," *The Beaver Outfit* 294 (Autumn 1963), 31-3; and, Irene M. Spry, "James Sinclair," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII, 1851 to 1860* (Toronto, 1985), 819. The 1832 route, or a variation thereof, was tried again in the summer of 1836, unsuccessfully. The express that year left Edmonton House in mid-May via an unspecified southern pass for the Columbia, where it was unfortunately lost in a canoe accident. A southern route for the express was again, this time successfully, used in the fall of 1840, an achievement which determined Simpson's route selection the following year. See the following HBCA records: Harriott to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 28 June 1836, fos. 192-2d., Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/4, reel 3M58; Rowand to Simpson, Edmonton House, 4 January 1841, fos. 13-3d., Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/6, reel 3M59; and, Rowand to Simpson, Edmonton House, 9 January 1841, fo. 19, Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/6, reel 3M59. These three (1832, 1836 and 1840) southern crossings of the Rockies with the company express are the only such occurrences of which I am aware before the termination of the transmountain express system by the Hudson's Bay Company in the mid-1850s, though news of Simpson's and Rowand's safe arrival at Fort Colville was carried across the Rockies by a southern route in the late summer of 1841 by a freeman who happened to be travelling to the Saskatchewan. See Archibald McDonald to Harriott, Fort Colville, 21 August 1841, Fort Colville Correspondence of Archibald McDonald, A, B, 20, C72M.1, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

In the fall of 1832 the intertribal warfare materialized that had been expected after the events of the previous spring. In early December two men returned to Edmonton House with news given to them by some Cree near Fort Pitt. The Kainai and Siksika had killed 18 Assiniboine, among them, according to reports, one who was named "the Chief that holds the Knife." He was the Assiniboine leader who had signed the peace treaty orchestrated by Kenneth McKenzie the previous fall with the Niitsitapi at Fort Union. He was then identified by McKenzie as "the principal chief of all the Assiniboin nation, the Man that holds the Knife."⁹¹ On 8 December, three days after this news was received, Harriott arrived with word of yet another engagement and a report on how these renewed hostilities were putting his American opposition on the Missouri in a precarious situation. The Edmonton House journal reads: "A battle had taken place betwext the Blackfeet [Siksika] and Assiniboines in which the latter have had ten men Killed and former four. Further the Americans were surrounded by a large Camp of Assiniboines who Keep those people from going out of their Fort. The Americans have, it is reported, offered eight Kegs of Rum to the Assiniboines for peace which was not accepted."⁹² This Assiniboine siege was likely of Fort Union, and not of Fort McKenzie, though the precise whereabouts of the siege is not confirmed in any records that I have seen. Any such sustained Assiniboine action near the Marias would surely have been quickly thwarted by the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, with tremendous loss of life to the Assiniboine.

⁹¹ Edmonton House post journal, 5 December 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA. The report of the demise of "the Chief that holds the Knife," was probably unfounded. In November 1833, "the Man that holds the knife a celebrated Stone Indian Chief" was alive and well at Fort Pelly. Though names of deceased leaders were often taken by others of their tribe, in this case, based on the particular wording of the existing documents, especially the 1833 Fort Pelly journal entry, it seems more likely that all of these references are to one and the same Assiniboine leader, with the 1832 reference being a false report of his death. Wied-Neuwied, "Part III," 317, and, Fort Pelly post journal, 11 November 1833, B.159/a/15, reel 1M117, HBCA.

⁹² Edmonton House post journal, 8 December 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA.

There seemed to be no apprehension of personal danger among the Saskatchewan traders as a result of deteriorating tribal relations. There was, however, almost certainly a growing malaise about their trade prospects in the face of both this renewed warfare and continuing American competition. Before Harriott returned to Piegan Post on 13 December he informed Rowand, according to the Edmonton House post journal, "that only four Piegans had visited his place since M^r Rowand left him, and that many Blood Indians were there on the score of trade which wishes had not been complied with so fully as it would have been here, however the Indians were sent away in a manner more satisfied than anticipated."⁹³

The situation remained relatively unchanged at Piegan Post and in the Saskatchewan District into January 1833. The Edmonton House journalist wrote: "All the news of that quarter still much the same as before, the Blood Indians are on their way hither, and the rest of the Plain tribes doing little or nothing, unless that of giving us much trouble."⁹⁴ Harriott reported in detail from Piegan Post:

There is at present upwards of five Hundred Tents of Blood Indians Blackfeet and Cercees [Sarcee], within sight of this Establishment, and many more Approaching, nor have we been able, notwithstanding our utmost Efforts, to prevail upon them to pitch towards the Saskatchewan, they are afraid of the Assiniboins, with whom the Blackfeet that are in that Quarter, had a battle not long ago, which was the cause of their moving up this Way, We however persist in refusing to Trade with them, in hopes of getting them to go to Sansparielle [Edmonton House], with what they now have to Trade, with the view of saving Transport which is an Object it being about 210 Miles from this to Sansparil and as yet no Snow on the Ground to admit of Sleds running.⁹⁵

The primary goal of the establishment of Piegan Post had been "to attract" the Piikani. However, the Council of the Northern Department had also declared a secondary

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 12 January 1833.

⁹⁵ Harriott to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Piegan Post, 6 January 1833, fo. 34d., Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/4, reel 3M57, HBCA.

purpose, "to prevent other Indians, who were in the habit of frequenting the Hon'ble Company's Posts in the Upper Part of the Saskatchewan, from crossing the Line."⁹⁶ Despite this other stated role for Piegan Post, Harriott and Rowand were seemingly reluctant to trade with any but the Piikani at the Bow River post. As can be seen from the above, they strove to have the other allied tribes, the Kainai, the Siksika and the Sarcee, trade on the North Saskatchewan, thus saving the company the high expense of transporting trade goods such a long distance overland to the Bow River and the returns of trade back to Edmonton House. They wanted their First Nations customers, all but the Piikani, and perhaps the Gros Ventre as well, to make the journey themselves to the district headquarters. This position may have been forced upon the two officers in the field, whatever the wishes of the council, by a possible inability to transport overland the potentially bulky returns of the Kainai, the Siksika and the Sarcee. Rowand and Harriott may have judged the district's supply of men and horses insufficient to cater to the wants of these three peoples. Their ability to handle the returns of trade of the Piikani at Piegan Post became a moot point; virtually no Piikani went there, and those who did traded almost nothing. In early January and again in early February the meagre returns of Piegan Post, both furs and provisions, were carried to Edmonton House by dog and horse sleds. The last party took 18 days to reach Edmonton House, owing to a lack of snow, and when just a day from its destination, according to journalist at Edmonton House, it "passed the Blood Indians who took the liberty of helping themselves to about a bale of provisions and had not the Chiefs interfered more would have been taken."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Minutes of the Northern Council, York Factory, 9-16 July 1832, fos. 2-12d., item 34, B.239/k/2, reel 1M814, HBCA.

⁹⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 5 and 6 January, and 2 February 1833, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA.

Rocky Mountain House Reopened and the Return of the Prodigal

Rocky Mountain House meanwhile had seemingly been all but forgotten, or written off.

In December two men had been sent from Edmonton House to trade the furs of the Stoney who were then residing near the abandoned outpost.⁹⁸ However, in mid-February Rowand received the surprising news that Rocky Mountain House was no longer unoccupied.

In the evening four men arrived from the Rocky Mountain house, to which place it seems M^r C.T. Harriott and party have taken their station from Bow River, it is however that Gentleman's intention to proceed to his first situation in the spring, in order to meet the Piegans, who it appears are on their way from the Missourie to trade with us. We are also informed that James Bird Jun^r is now at Breast river with another half breed and wishes much to return to this quarter.⁹⁹

Harriott's move was apparently made to accommodate three of the five "Slave Tribes," the Siksika, the Kainai and the Sarcee, who were later identified in the Edmonton House journal as "the principal cause of the change having taken place."¹⁰⁰ Harriott's refusal to trade with them at Piegan Post left them with the options, excluding Fort McKenzie, of travelling to Edmonton House or pressing for the reopening of Rocky Mountain House. When Harriott realized that the Piikani trade was just not going to materialize, he was faced with the virtual certainty of wasting his time on the Bow River in idle hopes or of returning to the North Saskatchewan outpost, where the Kainai, the Siksika and the Sarcee apparently promised to go to trade.

The news of "Jimmy Jock" Bird's desire to return to the company fold must have come as a shock to Rowand. On the surface it is inexplicable. Bird's parting from the Hudson's Bay Company had been acrimonious, to say the least. The American Fur

⁹⁸ Ibid., 7, 11 and 31 December 1832.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 16 February 1833.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 27 March 1833.

Company had sought him out, welcomed him warmly, paid him liberally and relied on his influence in time of crisis, after Mitchell's keelboat had sunk. Though not now provable beyond doubt, the reason for Bird's wish to return to the North Saskatchewan sphere was almost certainly a sudden fall from grace with his American employers, a fall brought about by pure bad luck for Bird. He had been travelling with the Kainai party that had encountered and killed William Henry Vanderburgh in October 1832, and had stripped him of his belongings. An extract of a letter by an unidentified author, published in a Pennsylvania newspaper in April 1833, confirmed Bird's presence with Vanderburgh's killers. "The Blackfeet showed the rifle and pistol of Mr. V. to Mr. Bird; and boasted of having killed a white chief, and one of his men.... Mr. Bird is an interpreter, and happened to be with the Indians at the time."¹⁰¹ Whether Vanderburgh's death was the result of a tragic misinterpretation of his situation, as later asserted by the Kainai, or of an intentional attack, as was almost universally believed by the American traders and trappers, Bird was there and did not, or could not, prevent the killing of one of his fellows in the American Fur Company. Perhaps because both the English and the Americans at that time held such an exaggerated estimation of Bird's influence among the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, Kenneth McKenzie and his colleagues may have suspected his complicity in Vanderburgh's death. In the American Fur Company's eyes Bird probably then appeared to be at worst a traitorous murderer, and at best a person who could not even ensure the safety of the company's men, let alone the enhancement of its trade and profits. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that in the late winter of 1832-1833 "Jimmy Jock" was expressing a desire to return to the Hudson's Bay Company. He was almost certainly fired by his American employers following Vanderburgh's death and

¹⁰¹ "More Indian Warfare," *Doylestown Democrat*, 16 April 1833, in Folder 16 April 1833, Box 1, Andrew Drips Papers, MHS.

must have been considered *persona non grata* throughout the American Fur Company's area of operations.

To most Niitsitapi, Bird's changed allegiances were probably a non-event. He, and men like him who had kinship ties to particular First Nations peoples, likely had only limited influence in First Nations decisions. Perhaps such ties could be a deciding factor in choosing to trade at one neighbouring post over another, but there is little or no evidence that kinship or friendship ties between First Nations peoples and Euroamerican traders (or their agents) could lead to First Nations peoples ignoring their own self-interest to travel unnecessarily long distances just for the sake of these ties, all other factors being equal.

Closing out the Season

The abandonment of Piegan Post and the reopening of Rocky Mountain House in early February 1833 eliminated the anticipated long overland journey in the spring with the Bow River returns, but it necessitated the sending of additional supplies and a blacksmith to the North Saskatchewan outpost. The blacksmith was needed "at the Rocky Mountain house for making nails &^c for building boats to bring down the returns of that quarter to this place."¹⁰² The returns of the last half of the winter season, however, were not to be great. In late March, Rowand received word from Harriott "that none of Slave Tribes have been at the House to trade."¹⁰³ A few days later Harriott arrived at Edmonton House to confer briefly with Rowand and confirmed "the news of that quarter as dull as ever, the Slave Tribes doing nothing either in provisions or fur hunting."¹⁰⁴ After his return to

¹⁰² Edmonton House post journal, 18 February 1833, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 27 March 1833.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 4 April 1833.

Rocky Mountain House on 6 April, nothing further was apparently heard from Harriott or from his post until 7 May, when he, Fisher and 12 men in four boats arrived back at Edmonton House with the Piegan Post and Rocky Mountain House returns. A fifth boat had been wrecked on the way down, and men were immediately sent back upriver to recover the salvaged property.¹⁰⁵ Men bringing down the outpost's horses were forced to leave them far from Edmonton House, for fear that nearby Plains Assiniboine would steal them.¹⁰⁶ On 14 May five boats departed Edmonton House for York Factory and six days later Rowand left with the remainder of the season's returns in seven more boats.

Harriott was left in charge of the district at Edmonton House for the summer. Rocky Mountain House had again been closed for the summer, as had been originally planned for Piegan Post.¹⁰⁷ The combined season's returns from the two outposts were pitiful. Only 645 large and 290 half beaver pelts had been traded, along with 187 prime and 163 common buffalo robes, and a variety of other furs as well.¹⁰⁸ Just before Rowand's departure with the brigade, Harriott summed up his season in a personal letter to a colleague:

I have nothing pleasing to communicate regarding the affairs of this District. the American opposition has rendered the before troublesome and independent Brutes we had to deal with now quite unmanageable. I was appointed to an advanced

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 8 and 14 May 1833.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 11, 12 and 14 May 1833. On 20 March 1833, the Edmonton House journalist had noted the arrival of a large party of Assiniboine from the Plains, along with some Cree, "about two hundred and forty men & boys, exclusive of the women and children." Though some Plains Assiniboine had in the past visited that post in small numbers, usually on horse-stealing outings, this was "the first instance within M^r Chief Factor Rowand's Knowledge of Assiniboines coming here to trade as they have this time with their families, although that Gentleman has been attached to this Post for nearly thirty years."

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the Northern Council, York Factory, 9-16 July 1832, fos. 2-12d., item 38, B.239/k/2, reel 1M814, HBCA.

¹⁰⁸ Piegan Post account book, 1832-1833, fo. 10d., B.21/d/1, reel 1M433, HBCA.

post on Bow River last fall but was under the necessity of retreating in Jan^y to the old Rocky mountain House where I passed the remainder of the season. I never passed such a troublesome winter before in the Indian country and what is most distressing nothing to Show for it.¹⁰⁹

David Dawson Mitchell had fared considerably better at Fort McKenzie, virtually monopolizing the Piikani trade. His exact returns are not now known. One 19th-century observer stated that "though the trade the following season was quite profitable, it did not reach the dimensions of the previous year."¹¹⁰ This decline in returns and profits may have been the direct result of the renewed hostilities between the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance with the Cree and Assiniboine. Warfare prevented concerted hunting and trapping efforts. Once again, however, the establishment of the American trading post near the Marias was considered the key event of the year by at least one keeper of a Kainai winter count. Mitchell and Fort McKenzie were described:

"*Otsitsitorkkanipi/omarxistowan/istoyemiw*. When he was camped there/Big Knife/ where he wintered."¹¹¹ Mitchell, a one-time soldier, was "Big Knife." The Hudson's Bay Company's Piegan Post got nary a mention in any Niitsitapi winter count. After spring break-up, Mitchell descended the Missouri with the returns of Fort McKenzie. This year, however, arrangements had been made to keep the trading post open. Mitchell left some 26 men there for the summer under E.L. Patton.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Harriott to John McLeod, Edmonton House, 13 May 1833, pp. 1-2, John McLeod Correspondence Inward, A, B, 40, M22.3, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

¹¹⁰ Bradley, "Affairs at Fort Benton," 206.

¹¹¹ Dempsey, *A Blackfoot Winter Count*, 9. "Big-Knives Whitemen," or simply "Big Knives," was the Niitsitapi name for Americans. Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 45, and, Schultz, *Signposts of Adventure*, 110.

¹¹² Wied-Neuwied, "Part II," 9 August 1833, pp. 86 and 93.

Natural American Advantages Finally Exploited

By the end of the 1832-1833 season the death knell had been tolled for the Hudson's Bay Company's Piikani trade, but it had as yet not been heard by either the British or American concerns. The Hudson's Bay Company would re-group during the summer of 1833 for a final assault on the American Fur Company's sudden monopoly of trade with the Piikani, but the futility of the effort and its final outcome had already been determined. Once the Americans had established their trading operation near the Marias, and had been welcomed by the Blackfoot alliance, they held two advantages which the English company could just not overcome. They enjoyed the insurmountable advantages of both a superior location, in the heart of Piikani territory, and a more navigable river, the Missouri, which permitted the use of larger craft, thus allowing them to bring in more trade goods, at lower cost, and to take out more and bulkier returns.

When limiting its posts to the upper North Saskatchewan River, the Hudson's Bay Company prior to the 1830s had heard pleas from its customers on the northern Plains for a post on the South Saskatchewan or Bow rivers, more central to their territory and not on its northern fringes, as were Edmonton House and Rocky Mountain House. The establishment of Fort Piegan, and then Fort McKenzie, right in the midst of the Piikani's homeland, changed the situation drastically. The South Saskatchewan and Bow rivers might still be acceptable locations for a post for the Kainai and the Siksika, but they were no longer competitive for the Piikani trade. The Piikani soon made their feelings known. In the fall of 1833, "Jimmy Jock" reported that they "think it's too far to go to the Bow River; this American fort is too handy for the Peagans to pass to go to Bow River."¹¹³

The Hudson's Bay Company's transportation system also lost out when compared to that of the Americans. On the Missouri River the keelboat was the principal means of

¹¹³ Bird to Harriott, Badger River, 23 October 1833, fo. 13d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54, HBCA.

upriver transportation until the advent of the steamboat in the early 1830s. And even after the steamer *Yellow Stone* had reached the mouth of the Yellowstone River in 1832, the keelboat was the vessel used from Fort Union to posts located farther upriver, until the successful ascent of steamboats to the Marias from 1859.¹¹⁴ Chittenden wrote that the keelboat “was a boat of no mean dimensions, averaging from sixty to seventy-five feet long, fifteen to eighteen feet beam, and three to four feet depth of hold.”¹¹⁵ It also had a substantial cargo box on its deck. Propelled by oar, pole, sail or cordelle, it lumbered along at only 12 to 18 miles per day on its upriver journeys. These boats were usually built in yards at Pittsburgh and Louisville, at a cost of \$2,000 to \$3,000 each. Manned by a crew of at least 20 or 30, the “maximum load that a keelboat could carry was **only** twenty-thirty tons of cargo.”¹¹⁶ In 1833, the keelboat carrying Mitchell from Fort Union arrived at Fort McKenzie on 9 August, after a 34-day voyage. Mitchell had been accompanied by two European visitors, the artist Karl Bodmer and his patron, Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied. The Prince’s entire trip of more than 3,000 miles from St. Louis, on both the steamer *Yellow Stone* to Fort Union and the keelboat to Fort McKenzie, had taken just four months.¹¹⁷ On the downward journey in the late spring, mackinaw boats were often used on the Missouri. Large, flat-bottomed craft, mackinaw

¹¹⁴ Lass, *A History of Steamboating*, 1-19.

¹¹⁵ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 32.

¹¹⁶ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 84. My added emphasis.

¹¹⁷ Wied-Neuwied, “Part II,” 9 August 1833, p. 89, and, Lass, *A History of Steamboating*, 1-2. Maximilian had left St. Louis on the *Yellow Stone* on 10 April 1833. For biographies of Prince Maximilian and of his artist companion, Karl Bodmer, and also to view beautiful reproductions of many of Bodmer’s paintings, see Goetzmann, intro., *Karl Bodmer’s America*. See also the Prince’s *People of the First Man: Life among the Plains Indians in Their Final Days of Glory*, eds., Davis Thomas and Karin Ronnefeldt (New York, 1976).

boats were built at the individual posts for the single, one-way trip at the end of the trading season.

Governor George Simpson and Chief Factor John Rowand would have been delighted to have had a river like the Missouri and vessels so limited that they could carry “only” 20 or 30 tons of cargo. The North Saskatchewan River was nowhere near as navigable a waterway as the Missouri; it allowed craft of considerably shallower draft than the Missouri. Besides, the North American destination of the Saskatchewan District’s returns, and the source of its outfits, was York Factory, on Hudson Bay, and over a route which involved many portages where both cargo and vessel had to be transported overland for short distances. The North West Company had relied on canoes for its inland transportation needs. The Hudson’s Bay Company introduced the York boat in the late 18th century, an innovation of superior capacity and durability which had largely replaced canoes on all but the most difficult routes by the 1820s.¹¹⁸ A York boat carried the first outfit up to Acton House in 1799. From that date they were virtually the only vessels used by the Hudson’s Bay Company in the Saskatchewan District to transport both its outfits and returns, until the introduction there of the Red River cart brigade system for the inward journey in the 1860s.

The York boat was a variation of an Orkney Island boat, developed at the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Albany post, on James Bay.¹¹⁹ After the 1821 merger, the new Hudson’s Bay Company attempted to standardize the dimensions of these boats. Built at individual posts throughout the Northern Department wherever suitable wood was

¹¹⁸ Eric W. Morse, *Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada/Then and Now* (Ottawa, 1971); Richard Glover, “York Boats,” *The Beaver*, Outfit 279 (March 1949), 19-23; and, A.A. McDonald, “H.B.C. Inland Transport,” in three parts in *The Beaver* 4, no. 1 (October 1923), 19-21; 4, no. 2 (November 1923), 52-3; and, 4, no. 3 (December 1923), 92-3.

¹¹⁹ John A. Alwin, “The Uncelebrated Boats of the Albany,” *The Beaver*, Outfit 305, no. 4 (Spring 1975), 47-53.

available, in the early 1820s the York boat came in a variety of dimensions. It was quickly decreed that each would have a keel length of no less than 24 feet. In 1824, the Council ordered that all the boats built in the Saskatchewan District should have a keel 27 feet long. By the 1850s, the Saskatchewan-built York boats had a keel length of 30 feet and were 42 feet long, nine feet wide and three feet deep.¹²⁰ An open boat built of local soft woods and with varying degrees of craftsmanship, a York boat had an average life expectancy of about three to four years.

The cargo of these boats was made up of “pieces,” packages of trade goods, furs or whatever, of various dimensions, but of approximately 90 pounds each in weight. Two of these pieces, totalling 180 pounds, were usually carried at a time by each crew member at each portage. It was the necessity of portaging these items that determined their weight, a determination made years before by the Canadian voyageurs. Though Governor Simpson estimated that a York boat could carry over 6,000 pounds of cargo, only once during the 1820s and early 1830s did the inward bound outfit for the Saskatchewan District exceed 5,000 pounds per boat, while the normal range was in the vicinity of 4,000 pounds.¹²¹ From 1828 to the mid-1830s the usual number of boats carrying the Saskatchewan outfit was eight or nine. On the upward journey in the 1820s and 1830s, the crew numbered anywhere from six to eight men, consisting of a steersman, perhaps a

¹²⁰ R. Harvey Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-31* (Toronto, 1940), York Factory, 10 July 1824, items 30 and 33, p. 78, and, Glover, “York Boats,” 22.

¹²¹ These figures were calculated from the data provided in the minutes of council of the Northern Department. The 1821 to 1831 minutes were published in Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council*; the original minutes from 1821 to 1870 are contained in B.239/k/1-3, reel 1M814, in the HBCA. From 1823 the Saskatchewan District’s outfit varied from 310 pieces carried in four boats, to 220 pieces in four boats in 1824, 240 pieces in six boats in 1825 and 292 pieces in six boats in 1826. From 1827 to 1830 its outfit rose to 360 pieces, carried in anywhere from six to nine boats. The outfit was drastically cut in 1831 and 1832, then totalling only about 250 pieces in each of these seasons and carried upriver in eight boats.

bowsman and the rest, middlemen or rowers. On the downstream journey during this same period, three or four was the norm, with anywhere from 12 to 16 boats departing with the returns from Edmonton House in the spring.¹²²

The largest outfit carried to the Saskatchewan by the 1830s was that of 1833: 550 pieces, or approximately 49,500 pounds, in ten boats.¹²³ This was the outfit for the entire district, which during the 1833-1834 season consisted of seven widely scattered posts: Carlton House, Fort Pitt and Edmonton House, on the North Saskatchewan River; Piegan Post, on the Bow River; Fort Assiniboine and Jasper House, on the Athabasca River; and Lesser Slave Lake. A single keelboat going to Fort McKenzie with a crew of 30 men could carry more than the largest outfit ever transported for the entire Saskatchewan District. And the York boats took at least twice the manpower to get it to their destination. The Hudson's Bay Company's transportation system on the North Saskatchewan could not possibly match either the capacity or the cost effectiveness of the American Fur Company's Missouri River system. This not only allowed the Missouri River traders to offer more trade goods at better rates to their First Nations customers, but it enabled them as well to purchase and transport downriver more and bulkier items, especially buffalo robes, which would soon outstrip beaver pelts in importance in the trade of the northern Plains.

¹²² The figures for the size of the crews and the number of boats were extracted from the surviving Edmonton House post journals in the HBCA for the 1820s and 1830s. See B.60/a/19-28, 1825-1829 and 1832-1834, reels 1M49-50.

¹²³ Minutes of Northern Council, Red River Settlement, July 1833, fo. 18, item 29, B.239/k/2, reel 1M814, HBCA.

The Last Hudson's Bay Company Hurrah

The Hudson's Bay Company could just not compete with the two overwhelming advantages of location and transportation enjoyed by the American Fur Company. In the spring of 1833, though distressed at the previous season's results, the Hudson's Bay Company had still not recognized the futility of its efforts to attempt to retrieve the Piikani trade; it was expectantly plotting its next moves.

The annual meeting of the available officers of the Northern Department took place at the Red River Settlement in the first week of June 1833. Simpson, Rowand and the other gathered chief factors and chief traders were determined to win back their lost trade. The previous year the company had re-engaged Hugh Monroe in support of this effort. He had been living with the Piikani since he left the company's employ in 1823.¹²⁴ Like Bird, Monroe was respected by the Niitsitapi peoples, had married into the Piikani tribe and purportedly had some influence among these peoples. He was hired as an interpreter, and, as the annual council meeting was being held, he and five other men from the North Saskatchewan were travelling with the Piikani, attempting to coax them back to the Hudson's Bay Company.¹²⁵

Despite the strong opinions voiced against Bird within the company at his departure to the Missouri in 1831, "Jimmy Jock" was welcomed back to the fold in 1833.

¹²⁴ Monroe was re-engaged in 1832 and remained in the company's employ until his second retirement in 1844. He was hired as an interpreter at a salary of £25 per annum, a rank and salary which he retained until leaving the service. Edmonton House account books, 1832 to 1845, B.60/d/41-78a, reels 1M470-3, HBCA. There are scattered references to Monroe throughout these district account books. See also HBCA search file on Monroe.

¹²⁵ Monroe had spent the 1832-1833 season at Piegan Post and Rocky Mountain House. He, Colin Fraser and four other men were apparently sent from the latter post before its spring closure, returning, unsuccessful in their mission, to Edmonton House on 24 July 1833. See the following HBCA records: Edmonton House post journal, 24 July 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, and, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 10 January 1834, fo. 61d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54.

The Hudson's Bay Company was willing to let bygones be bygones, as long as it stood to increase its profits. Such was the influence that he reputedly wielded among the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance that Governor Simpson personally signed him to a five year contract as a clerk and interpreter, at an annual salary of £100, four times that of Monroe.¹²⁶ However, the Hudson's Bay Company was soon to learn the same lesson that the American Fur Company had; no matter how respected Bird might be as a hunter, warrior or advisor, his ability to alter the actions, attitudes and decisions of his First Nations relatives and friends was limited, and it especially waned when he was known to be in the employ of a fur trade company and seen as a biased agent of Euroamerican traders. As discussed above, Bird undoubtedly had some influence among the Niitsitapi, but neither he nor anyone else could lead these peoples to ignore their own interests, simply to please him or to ingratiate themselves to one set of Euroamerican traders over another.

The Council of the Northern Department decided to reopen Piegan Post for the winter season and once again to abandon Rocky Mountain House. The council also decided to increase substantially the outfit sent to the Saskatchewan District for the 1833-1834 season, almost certainly to a large measure owing to the company's Piikani initiatives. Throughout the late 1820s, a 360-piece outfit was annually sent to that district, though it was severely cut back to only 250 pieces in 1831 and 1832, perhaps as a cost-reducing measure. In 1833, the outfit was more than doubled, to 550 pieces, a large portion of which was undoubtedly intended to be traded with the Piikani.¹²⁷ So anxious

¹²⁶ The contract was signed at Red River on 6 June 1833. See item 395, Servants' Contracts, A.32/21, reel 392, HBCA. This is the original contract, which was witnessed by Bird's father, James Bird Sr.

¹²⁷ Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council*, 180, 207, 237, 255 and 275, and, 1832 Minutes of Northern Council, fo. 5d., item 35 and 1833 Minutes of Northern Council, fo. 18, item 29, B.239/k/2, reel 1M814, HBCA.

were Simpson and the company to resume their aborted operation on the Bow River that a York boat with a crew of 12 men and loaded with supplies exclusively for Piegan Post was sent to Edmonton House weeks ahead of the regular Saskatchewan brigade. News of the Governor and Council's intentions reached Harriott there on 13 July, with the heavily manned boat arriving six days later.¹²⁸

During the summer of 1833 the Saskatchewan District was rampant with activity, most of which brought no cheer to Harriott nor to his large summer complement at Edmonton House,¹²⁹ who watched helplessly, it seemed, as events unfolded around them. In early July, a small party of Cree arrived at the post after trading guns for horses with some Kootenay near Piegan Post. They informed Harriott that "the Plain Tribes are keeping far to the southward to avoid a rencounter with the Crees and Assiniboins."¹³⁰ A few days later more disturbing news reached him. The Edmonton House journal reads:

At an Early hour in the morning two Crees came in from a war excursion some of them had their faces blacked in consequence of having killed three Peagans near the Chief Mountain and lost a friend_ They inform us that Colin Fraser & party are near the Bear River_ They are of opinion that the Black Bear (a Cree) and five of his friends have been murdered by the plain Tribes_ and likewise say that a large party of Crees have gone towards the Mandans to revenge themselves on that nation for an insult offered them last year_ Several war parties consisting of Peagans Blackfeet and Blood Indians have gone down the country to try and get a few Cree scalps.¹³¹

This widespread state of warfare did not bode well for the trade anywhere in the Saskatchewan, or, for that matter, on the Missouri. When the men who had been

¹²⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 13 and 19 July 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 31 May 1833. Harriott had an enormous number of people at Edmonton House that summer. Excluding the six men travelling with the Piikani and the 12 men who arrived by boat on 19 July, there were 18 men, 29 women and 71 children, a total of 118 mouths to feed.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 4 July 1833.

¹³¹ Ibid., 11 July 1833.

travelling with the Piikani since early spring returned, Harriott not only learned of their failure to lure back these longtime customers, but he was also informed of another battle involving the Piikani and yet another tribe. The Edmonton House journalist recorded:

In the afternoon we were rather surprised at the arrival of Colin Frazer, Munroe and four others from Breast River where they left the Piegans who were pitching towards the american post on Bear River where twenty men had been left for the purpose of trading_ A boat had just arrived there with goods which induced all the Indians to go over to our opponents_ A war part [sic] had come from the Flat Heads and report says they have been very fortunate in killing forty six individuals including two whites.¹³²

The ability to re-supply its outposts during the summer also gave a tremendous advantage to the American Fur Company. Not only was the Missouri River more navigable than the North Saskatchewan River, but it was open for navigation so much earlier and later each year, owing to its more southerly location. The boat, which Harriott on 24 July noted had arrived at Fort McKenzie, had likely reached there in June. The summer re-outfitting of Fort McKenzie became a regular practice, with the expected arrival date of the middle of June.¹³³ Even with an over-sized crew to hasten the York

¹³² Ibid., 24 July 1833. In the Thwaites edition of Maximilian's journal this battle is barely mentioned, hardly identifiable. The Thwaites edition was highly abridged; the new translation, to which I was generously granted access by the Center for Western Studies at the Joslyn Art Museum, is not. Maximilian described the May 1833 encounter of a war party of 500 Piikani with a considerably smaller Flathead party of 45, plus two unidentified Frenchmen. All but one of the Flathead were killed, while the Piikani apparently suffered only six fatalities. Wied-Neuwied, "Part II," 9 August 1833, p. 88, and, Maximilian Alexander Philipp, Prince of Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations in North America, 1832-1834: Diaries, Letters, and Related Manuscripts," translations of original German manuscripts in the Joslyn Art Museum. The detailed description of this battle is also in the journal entry for 9 August 1833.

¹³³ J.A.H. Hamilton to Joseph E. Brazeau, Fort Union, 12 January 1835, p. 61, "Fort Union Letterbook, 1833-1835," Folder Chouteau Collections Fort Union Letterbook, Box 31, Chouteau Collection ("Fort Union Letterbook"), MHS. The summer boat apparently stayed just long enough at Fort McKenzie to drop off the outfit and to pick up the early summer returns, before retracing its route downriver to Fort Union.

boat upriver, the summer outfit for Piegan Post did not reach Edmonton House until 19 July, and was not at the post on the Bow River until 10 August 1833.

In late July the open hostilities between the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree were brought to the doorstep of Edmonton House. A large party of about 260 Siksika were there trading when five Cree made their appearance. They were fired upon by a young Siksika, but nothing further then developed, thanks to the intervention of the company traders. Later that day one of these Cree “declared that it was the Cree inhabiting the lower part of the Country who always began war and that nothing could be more desirable to those of the upper Country of which he was one than a long continuance of peace.”¹³⁴ This may well have represented a recurring pattern, where immediate neighbours were less anxious/likely to precipitate violence, when retaliatory measures would be most strongly felt by them, whereas those one step or group removed were in less immediate danger of being on the receiving end of retaliation. As has been, and will be, demonstrated, the Hudson’s Bay Company traders were themselves most anxious and fearful when First Nations groups were near posts far removed from their home territory. However, in this particular case, not surprisingly, the assembled Siksika all concurred that the “generic” Cree were at fault and the sole cause of their present state of war. In late September, a small party of Cree at Edmonton House professed their peaceful intentions towards any Niitsitapi who might visit Fort Pitt when it was re-established, even though they, in obvious contradiction, openly told Rowand that they were then “in search of the Slave Indians in order to steal their horses and if in their power take the scalps of the owners.”¹³⁵ This was the state of First Nations external relations in the region at the reopening of Piegan Post in the summer of 1833,

¹³⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 28 and 29 July 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 20 September 1833.

declarations of peaceful intentions on all sides, but ongoing hostilities the reality of the situation.

On 31 July 1833 Harriott and 22 men, along with seven women and eight children, left for Piegan Post with “a small outfit for the Piegan trade.”¹³⁶ When they arrived there on 10 August Harriott recorded that they “found the Fort Standing but in a very bad State the Indians had burnt every bit of Plank about the place and otherwise injured the Buildings very much.”¹³⁷ The day after Harriott’s arrival at Bow River, the traders at Edmonton House learned of the failure of their two-man mission to attract the Kainai back to the North Saskatchewan. The two reported that “a quarrel took place [among the Kainai] which occasioned a division amongst them_ one party going to the Americans and the other pitching towards the mountains.”¹³⁸ Trading with the Hudson’s Bay Company at Edmonton House would not appear to have been a major consideration for either group. Harriott spent the remainder of August and the first half of September making repairs to his greatly damaged post. Apparently not a single First Nations person went there to trade until “Jimmy Jock” Bird arrived with four Piikani on 19 September. They remained the only such visitors to the post until after the arrival six days later of

¹³⁶ Ibid., 31 July 1833. The names of all of the men sent with Harriott are listed in this journal entry.

¹³⁷ Piegan Post/Bow Fort post journal, 31 July to 10 August entry, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA. This journal, for Piegan Post and then Rocky Mountain House, covers the period 31 July 1833 to 14 April 1834, at which date it abruptly and inexplicably ends. In late August 1833, four men from Piegan Post arrived at Edmonton House with Harriott’s report that he had “found the buildings much injured by the wind and the floors of almost all the houses burnt_ The Kootenais Indian by name Tobac is now living with the Crees at Rocky Mountain House which place is a heap of ruins.” Edmonton House post journal, 31 August 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹³⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 11 August 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA. The two men had left Edmonton House on this mission on 24 July.

Patrick Small, "accompanied by 18 men with 20 horses (each 2 p^s loads)."¹³⁹ Piegan Post's winter complement for the 1833-1834 season was now three times higher than the normal number at Rocky Mountain House; according to the outpost's account book, Harriott had stationed with him at Bow River, Small, Bird, 37 men, eight women, nine boys, eight girls and four widows and orphans.¹⁴⁰

Developments on the Missouri: Opposition to the American Fur Company

In the summer of 1833 on the Missouri the American Fur Company's Western Department and Upper Missouri Outfit were facing their first serious opposition, in the form of the recently formed partnership of William Sublette and Robert Campbell. Outfitted in New York during the winter of 1832-1833 and licensed to trade in April 1833, the two partners established posts in opposition to those of the American Fur Company all along the Missouri to the mouth of the Yellowstone, building Fort William there in the late summer of 1833, just three miles below Fort Union. Throughout the 1833-1834 season there was a price war on the Missouri. According to Wishart, the firm of Sublette and Campbell "generally went into direct 'storefront competition' with the American Fur Company posts and attempted to capture the trade of the local Indians by

¹³⁹ Ibid., 17 September 1833, and, Piegan Post journal, 19 and 25 September 1833, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA. Rowand reached Edmonton House on 5 September; the Saskatchewan brigade arrived the next day. Originally Henry Fisher was supposed to assist Harriott at Piegan Post, but Rowand's plan to reopen Fort Pitt that fall included Fisher in charge there. Small, therefore, took the outfit to Piegan Post and remained there for the season. Fisher, a longtime trader for the company among the Piikani was considered to be the only available officer qualified to look after the potentially difficult post of Fort Pitt. He apparently did so quite well. At the end of the profitable season at Fort Pitt Rowand praised Fisher. There "are very few traders equal to the Gentlⁿ who has charge of that post or who can manage a small outfit so well and have the same influence over his Indians and men." Edmonton House post journal, 9 April 1834, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁴⁰ Piegan Post account book, 1833-1834, fos. 1d.-2 and 14d.-5., B.21/d/2, reel 1M433, HBCA.

offering high prices for their furs and by dispensing alcohol freely. The American Fur Company generally responded by matching the high prices and by taking short-term losses in order to achieve long-term victory."¹⁴¹ Though the new concern apparently initially planned to oppose Fort McKenzie, Sublette and Campbell abandoned the idea of "sending to the Black feet this season."¹⁴² The effects of the increased competition were felt by the Hudson's Bay Company in the central and eastern Prairies. One British post manager complained, "Buffalo still far towards the Missouri this added to the high price given for Robes &c by the two Rival American Companies has prevented greatest part of the plain tribes coming in to HBC."¹⁴³

One day before Harriott reached Piegan Post on 10 August 1833 with his small summer outfit, Mitchell was back at Fort McKenzie with his extensive winter outfit, brought up by keelboat from Fort Union in only 34 days. As noted above, travelling with Mitchell were Maximilian, Prince of Wied-Neuwied, and his artist companion, Karl Bodmer, both of whom in different media have fortunately left a detailed record of this time and place. Maximilian confirmed the reports heard by the Hudson's Bay Company that the Piikani, Siksika, Kainai and Gros Ventre were almost all on the Missouri. Mitchell, Maximilian and company were greeted at Fort McKenzie by E.L. Patton, his men and hundreds of members of these four tribes.¹⁴⁴ The number of men posted there

¹⁴¹ Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 72.

¹⁴² Kenneth McKenzie to Mitchell, Fort Union, 21 January 1834, p. 26, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

¹⁴³ Fort Pelly post journal, 29 March 1834, B.159/a/15, reel 1M117, HBCA. See also entries in same journal of 11 November and 10 December 1833 and 17 February 1834.

¹⁴⁴ In the Thwaites edition of Maximilian's journal, these peoples are simply identified as "Blackfeet," but in the translated manuscript version the four tribes are identified by name. Wied-Neuwied, "Part II," 9 August 1833, p. 87, and, Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations," 9 August 1833, Joslyn Art Museum. Besides the references already cited above, in mid-September Rowand was told at Edmonton House that "the Blackfeet [Siksika] are all

that season then stood at about 79, but with the departure of Patton and 11 men on 12 August and the return to Fort Union of Maximilian, Bodmer and four others on 14 September, Mitchell was left with a little more than 60 men for the winter.¹⁴⁵

Mitchell did his utmost to secure the so recently established ties of the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance with the company. Jacques Berger, whom Maximilian called “the proper interpreter for the Blackfoot language,” ably assisted in this task by both serving as interpreter at the post and travelling to the camps of nearby bands to encourage them to visit Fort McKenzie. Mitchell quickly learned that some practices of the trade with his First Nations customers had to be maintained. Maximilian reported that Mitchell had once tried to do away with the greeting ceremonies and gift giving which were always associated with the arrival of First Nations leaders and their parties. When some potential customers threatened to leave if not shown the proper “points of honour,” Mitchell wisely, or out of simple necessity, chose to retain these well-established protocols of conducting foreign relations among First Nations groups on the northern Plains.¹⁴⁶ Relations between the post and the Kainai were almost destroyed on 12 August, however, when a Kainai man shot one of the company’s men with a pistol. The Kainai man

travelling towards the Missouri.” Edmonton House post journal, 11 September 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁴⁵ Wied-Neuwied, “Part II,” 9 and 12 August and 9 September 1833, pp. 93, 135-6 and 166-7. Maximilian described Patton as a “clerk of the Company, who had hitherto had the direction at Fort McKenzie, a man well known in the Rocky Mountains, and thoroughly acquainted with the business of the fur trade.” He was in charge of Fort Pierre during the 1833-1834 winter season. Chardon, *Chardon’s Journal*, 364. Maximilian had originally planned to spend the winter of 1833-1834 at Fort McKenzie or on the Plains nearby. However, apparently the monotonous meat diet offered at that post and the danger arising from intertribal war on the northern Plains dissuaded him from following either course of action, and prompted his early return downriver. See Robert Campbell, “The Private Journal of Robert Campbell,” ed. George R. Brooks, *The Bulletin, Missouri Historical Society* 20 (1963), 2 October 1833, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ Wied-Neuwied, “Part II,” 10 August 1833, pp. 126-7.

claimed that it was an accident, but some of Mitchell's men, and even the famed Piikani leader, Kootanae Appee, thought otherwise and advised Mitchell to take revenge for this and other Kainai offenses. He chose to treat the incident as an accident, but he did remove the Kainai individual from the fort with instructions never to return.¹⁴⁷ Though Mitchell's course of action may have been the most discreet, later professions by the culprit belied his assertion of innocence. Rowand reported in early November, "The Bulls Back Fat a Blood [Kainai] Indian chief the vagabond who first visited the Americans at the Yellow Stone and is now their support at Bears River paid M^r Harriott a visit accompanied by his son a villain who boasts of having shot an American lately in the very Fort where a Gentleman of the name of Mitchell has charge."¹⁴⁸

On 14 August "Jimmy Jock" arrived at Fort McKenzie from Fort Union, carrying letters from McKenzie for Mitchell. The American Fur Company was unaware of Bird's renewed employment with the Hudson's Bay Company, but Mitchell and Maximilian soon suspected him of being a "spy" for the English company. Initially friendly and helpful to Mitchell and Maximilian, though never trusted by either man, Bird left the vicinity of Fort McKenzie on or shortly after 29 August, following heated words with Mitchell. It was reported to him that Bird "had promised the several Indian chiefs to give them tobacco, if they would no longer dispose of their beaver skins here, but take them to the north, to the English Company."¹⁴⁹ Bird's efforts were to no avail. Two days after Mitchell received the report of Bird's attempt to lead the Piikani back to the Hudson's

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 12 August 1833, pp. 134-5.

¹⁴⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 2 November 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁴⁹ Wied-Neuwied, "Part II," 29 August 1833, p. 153. The original manuscript in the Joslyn Art Museum has considerably more references to Bird's stay at Fort McKenzie, and in much greater detail. "Jimmy Jock" is noted sparingly in the abridged, published journal, but in the original there are almost daily references to him from 14 to 29 August. Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations," Joslyn Art Museum.

Bay Company he heard the following re-assuring speech from the Piikani leader, Middle Bull:

He hoped that the Whites would renounce their bad opinion of them, and not believe that they took their skins and furs to the English: for it was evidently their (the Piekanns') own interest to be on good terms with the fort situated in their neighbourhood, the English settlements being at much too great a distance; that, if some of their people talked of carrying their beaver skins to the trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, it was merely to try to obtain goods on lower terms.¹⁵⁰

The occupants of Fort McKenzie and the small Piikani encampment of 18 to 20 tents (about 130 to 160 people) outside its walls were suddenly and violently awakened in the early morning of 28 August 1833 by an attack on the Piikani by about 500 Assiniboine and 100 Cree. Several women and children were killed almost immediately; the surviving men and families retreated within the fort's palisades. The attack was apparently led by The Man That Holds the Knife, the Assiniboine leader who had just three years earlier signed McKenzie's peace treaty with the Niitsitapi at Fort Union.¹⁵¹ The attack was clearly directed against the Piikani and not the Euroamerican occupants of the post, but the company men joined in the fusillade to repulse the unexpected assault. Word soon reached the post from Bird that another small Piikani camp was under attack a bit farther upriver. The Piikani numbers were bolstered by recruits who quickly arrived from a large, nearby encampment. Mitchell, some of his men and up to 600 Piikani warriors pursued and finally drove off the Assiniboine and Cree, who retreated from the

¹⁵⁰ Wied-Neuwied, "Part II," 31 August 1833, pp. 158-9. Maximilian considered Middle Bull, whose name in Blackfoot was *Tátsicki-Stomick*, to be the principal or highest ranking Piikani chief. A portrait of this leader is contained in Goetzmann, intro., *Karl Bodmer's America*, 245.

¹⁵¹ His leadership of this attack is confirmed in Fort Pelly post journal, 11 November 1833, B.159/a/15, reel 1M117, HBCA. Maximilian, however, stated that the attack was led by the Assiniboine chief "Minohänn (Le Goucher)," who later changed his name to "Tatógan (The Antelope)." Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations," 28 August 1833, Joslyn Art Museum.

area that night. According to Maximilian, the Piikani side suffered 10 dead and an unspecified number of wounded, while the Assiniboiné and Cree lost three men and had 20 wounded.¹⁵² Mitchell was afterwards worried that his lack of neutrality in this affair would be viewed with disfavour by his superiors, who might fear repercussions in their trade with the Assiniboiné and Cree at downstream posts. Apparently Mitchell's first inclination was to remain uninvolved in the battle, but he was prodded into action on the Piikani side by reproaches from some of the Piikani leaders at the post that day.¹⁵³ As discussed earlier, neutrality in any disputes among First Nations peoples had long been an established practice of Euroamerican traders, whether British, Canadian or American. However, McKenzie later wrote to Mitchell that "respecting the course you pursued when the fort was attacked, I look to the motives which prompted you they were noble & evinced the purest & strongest devotedness to my interest, what the eventual result may be time only can determine but it's more than probable had I been in your situation I should have done as you did."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Wied-Neuwied, "Part II," 28 August 1833, pp. 146-53, and, Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations," 28 August 1833, Joslyn Art Museum. News of this battle quickly spread throughout the northern Plains. Bird told Harriott at Piegan Post on 19 September. Rowand was aware of it by 30 September, upon receipt of letters from Harriott. By mid-November, "the Man that holds the knife," the self-declared leader of the attack, was rendering his personal account at Fort Pelly. Rowand later reported that the Assiniboiné had "killed 7 or 8 of the Peagan women, in which fray the Stone Indians report that one of their friends was killed, and another wounded." Rowand's casualty figures would appear to have been low for both sides. See the following HBCA records: Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 10 January 1834, fo. 63, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54; Edmonton House post journal, 30 September 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50; and, Fort Pelly post journal, 11 November 1833, B.159/a/15, reel 1M117.

¹⁵³ Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations," 28 August 1833, Joslyn Art Museum.

¹⁵⁴ McKenzie to Mitchell, Fort Union, 21 January 1834, p. 25, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS. There were, however, no negative repercussions for the American Fur Company. The Assiniboiné apparently admitted, whether sincerely or not, to McKenzie that "they were very wrong & are this year behaving with exemplary propriety." McKenzie to Mitchell, Fort

"Jimmy Jock" Bird arrived at Piegan Post on 19 September with news of all these events, but with only four Piikani companions. Harriott quickly outfitted him with six pieces of trading goods, "principally Tobacco, ammunition & Rum," and sent him off with Colin Fraser and two other men in a desperate effort to win back the wayward Piikani.¹⁵⁵ By mid-October Harriott's prospects began to deteriorate rapidly. The first bit of bad news arrived on 10 October. Harriott reported:

Eight Blkfeet [Siksika] arrived. The purpose of their visit is to know whether they will be allowed to trade at this post, and they were told to go to Edmonton for that we had nothing for them. These Indians inform us that the Peagans have killed an american Clerk, who with six men had started in quest of the Kootanais. the other five made their escape and returned to the missisourie. Two Blood Indians also arrived in the evening who inform us that two parties of that Tribe accompanied by a few Peagans are on their way here with a few Beaver Skins. The Blackfeet Blood Indians and some Peagans are now all encamped within about a days ride of this place and will as last year be continually about us nor will any thing we can say or do prevent them.¹⁵⁶

Union, 8 March 1834, p. 30, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

¹⁵⁵ Piegan Post journal, 23 September 1833, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, and, Edmonton House post journal, 30 September 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁵⁶ Piegan Post journal, 10 October 1833, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA. The American killed by the Piikani was a Mr. Doucette, likely Charles Doucette, who had left Fort McKenzie on 30 August 1833 on an expedition to the Kootenay. Maximilian reported, "It consisted of Doucette, Isidore Sandoval, with his wife, four engagés, and two Kutana [Kootenay] Indians, one of whom was Homach-Ksachkum, all mounted, and with nine pack-horses." The Prince also noted that the expedition was a complete failure, but he stated that the attack had been carried out by the Kainai, not the Piikani. Wied-Neuwied, "Part II," 30 August 1833, pp. 153-4, and, personal correspondence, Joseph Porter to author, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, 2 March 1990. In the original journal Maximilian noted that both Doucette and Sandoval were fluent in Blackfoot and that the latter's "Indian" wife was a Piikani woman. Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations," 30 August 1833, Joslyn Art Museum. Bodmer's portrait of "Hómach-Ksáchkum" is in Goetzmann, intro., *Karl Bodmer's America*, 258.

Once again all but the Piikani were to be treated as unwelcome customers at Piegan Post, although Harriott did record in his journal after this date the dispersal of alcohol and tobacco to the Kainai, Siksika and Sarcee, and a very limited trade with these other tribes.

On 11 October, Harriott noted a telling omen of things to come, though the signs of trouble between the Piikani and the Kainai had earlier been manifested at Fort McKenzie. He observed, "The party of Blood Indians arrived. but the Peagans encamped at some distance not being willing to meet the Blood Indians at the Fort at least the party that are now here there being some difference between them." Several days later he was dismayed by the surprise return of Fraser and the other two men who had accompanied Bird to the Piikani. "Jimmy Jock" had apparently sent these three back owing to the danger of the situation created by the Piikani having killed Doucette.¹⁵⁷ Bird's estimation of the potential danger proved correct. One week after Fraser's return, Bird had to write to Harriott reporting the deaths of the two Piikani and Ojibwe [*Anishinabe*] men with whom he was travelling. "I got both my men killed and the greatest part of the Company's property taken; all the Rum lost. I got off safe myself and all the horses of the Company except one the cart horse."¹⁵⁸ Bird had gone on ahead of his men, but when they did not catch up to him he back-tracked and found them both dead. He guessed that the Ojibwe had killed the Piikani, and then that a party of Piikani had encountered, pillaged and killed the Ojibwe. Bird also re-asserted his position, stated the previous June to Simpson at Red River, of the necessity of building a post at Chief Mountain, near the 49th Parallel, if the Hudson's Bay Company were to retain any hope of recouping the lost Piikani trade. Bird wrote:

¹⁵⁷ Piegan Post journal, 16 October 1833, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA.

¹⁵⁸ Bird to Harriott, Badger's River, 23 October 1833, fos. 13d.-4, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54, HBCA.

There are poor hopes of getting Peagans as yet, and they have nothing for one thing. all their call is for a fort at the Chief Mountain, if the H. H. Bay Company wants the Peagans much, they will have to build at the Chief Mountain the next Summer they think it's too far to go to the Bow River; this American fort is too handy for the Peagans to pass to go to Bow River, if the H.B. Company would build at the Chief Mountain, the next year we should get the greatest part of the Peagans they are afraid of the Bloods and of the Crees and they think the Journey too far to Bow River; their horses being very poor; they say that they don't like to go because they have no beaver.¹⁵⁹

Matters just kept going from bad to worse for Harriott. In mid-November some Sarcee visiting Piegan Post told him "that the Peagans are all beyond the mississourie. also the Fall [Gros Ventre] Indians."¹⁶⁰ Meanwhile Harriott's rum supply was rapidly being depleted by numerous Kainai, Siksika and Sarcee parties which brought in little to trade, but principally came to drink, "to smook a pipe and get the news."¹⁶¹ Harriott reported to Rowand that "the Blackfeet [Siksika] and all the Slave tribes are getting worse instead of better they hunt less and expect more."¹⁶² The members of the Blackfoot alliance were making the most of this period of intense Euroamerican competition for their trade.

Finally, in early December Harriott received some mixed, but largely encouraging, news. He wrote: "Three Peagan young men arrived and inform us that the old Head and a Band of Peagans are on their way here and that James Bird Jun with a large camp of that Tribe are approaching. Hostilities have commenced between them and the Crow Indians.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., fo. 13d. Bird had apparently been so convincing in his arguments in support of building a post at Chief Mountain that Governor Simpson may have initially planned to do so during the 1833-1834 season. London headquarters was certainly under the impression that this was to have been the case. Governor and Committee to Simpson, London, 5 March 1834, fo. 72d., London Correspondence Book Outwards - Official Series, A.6/23, reel 40, HBCA.

¹⁶⁰ Piegan Post journal, 17 November 1833, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 21 November 1833.

¹⁶² Edmonton House post journal, 2 November 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

and as the Blkfeet & Blood Indians have left that quarter they can no longer stand their ground.” Old Head’s band arrived but its trade was trifling compared with Harriott’s expectations/hopes.¹⁶³

The Unthinkable: Piikani Versus Kainai

The larger Piikani party with which Bird was travelling was just about to reach the post, when news of an event which would seal the fate of Piegan Post was received. Harriott reported:

The Blood Indⁿ went off early, and the Peagans were settled with and a party of Blood Indians arrived, and bring intelligence of a Battle having taken place between the Peagans & Blood Indians on Burnt River, in which three Peagan Camps were totally routed. The Peagans now here were quite pleased in the anticipation of having another Booze, but on hearing this news they lost no time but scampered off as quick as they could. This affair will of course put an end to any Peagans. were they ever so much inclined visiting this place for this season.¹⁶⁴

Piegan Post, despite its name, was actually located in Kainai territory, close to the informal and flexible boundary between Kainai and Piikani country.¹⁶⁵ The Piikani would

¹⁶³ Piegan Post journal, 5 December 1833, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA. Old Head’s band reached the post on 8 December and stayed to 11 December. The returns of this trade were: 21 beaver; 260 wolf pelts; 80 buffalo robes; 6 Red and 150 “Kitt” foxes; and 6 bear skins.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 17 December 1833.

¹⁶⁵ In 1823 Francis Heron reported to Governor Simpson from the Bow River Expedition post. He stated that among the five allied tribes there were no fixed territories when it came to buffalo hunting, but he added: “There are however certain portions of the country considered by each tribe as their Land, and which they resort to, when circumstances admit- The Blackfeet claim as their territories, the country lying between the North & South Branches of the Saskatchewan, next to the Stone [Assiniboine] Indians_ The Blood Indians lay claim to the Country Westward of the Blackfeet, between the Bow & Fighting Rivers; and the Muddy River [Piikani], and Fall [Gros Ventre] Ind^s in general possess all that extensive country which lies between the Bow River and the Northern Barches [Branches] of the Missouri.” Bow River Expedition report, 1 May 1823, fo. 3, B.34/e/1, reel 1M776, HBCA.

certainly not venture there to trade in such circumstances, not with Fort McKenzie at their doorstep.

In reporting on the horrendous situation in the Saskatchewan District in his annual January letter to the governor, chief factors and chief traders of the Northern Department, Rowand stated that “you are not perhaps all aware that the People [sic, Peigan/Piikani], Blood and Black feet Indians are all in the same tribe, who all speak the same language and always looked upon one another as friends and relations before this last warlike affair.”¹⁶⁶ This was the first and only known incident of open warfare among any of the three Blackfoot-speaking tribes; it was not only unprecedented, but virtually totally unexpected, at least by the Hudson’s Bay Company. In the summer of 1828 Hugh Monroe had informed Rowand “that great commotion exists amongst the Plain Tribes continually quarreling and stealing each others horses.”¹⁶⁷ Anywhere else this designation might have been of a generic, non-specific nature, but at Edmonton House and Rocky Mountain House in this period the term “Plain Tribes” was exclusively applied to the three Niitsitapi peoples, and to their allies, the Gros Ventre and the Sarcee. Nothing further was recorded of these or any other internal difficulties among the three or the five tribes until the early winter of 1832-1833. In December 1832, Harriott reported on the deteriorating conditions among the allied tribes. Rowand wrote: “M^r Harriott further says that the Indians are in a most dreadful state of malice amongst themselves and that War will soon break out throughout the Plain Tribes owing to the envious minds of their Chiefs.”¹⁶⁸ Undoubtedly this envy was in the minds of the Siksika and the Kainai, who

¹⁶⁶ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 10 January 1834, fo. 62d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54, HBCA.

¹⁶⁷ Edmonton House post journal, 4 August 1828, B.60/a/26, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁶⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 8 December 1832, B.60/a/27, reel 1M50, HBCA. Milloy provided a concise summary of the internal troubles of the Blackfoot alliance, internal Cree-Assiniboine dissensions and the violent interaction of these two generally opposed

saw a post, Piegan Post, built in Kainai territory, but at which they were not welcome to trade. The preferential treatment shown to the Piikani by the Hudson's Bay Company may very well have been the root cause of the sudden, unprecedented hostilities of 1833-1834.

The Blackfoot alliance was certainly not a monolith. At Fort McKenzie in the late summer of 1833 Maximilian noted that the Kootenay were then the enemies of the Siksika and the Kainai, but were at this time on friendly terms with the Piikani.¹⁶⁹ Despite Maximilian's earlier-noted assertion, it apparently was the Piikani, according to Hudson's Bay Company accounts, who had killed Doucette in 1833 and had prevented the American Fur Company from establishing direct trade with the Kootenay. The Piikani may still actually have been on friendly terms with the weaker Kootenay; they may just have wished to prevent the power imbalance to be altered by unlimited Kootenay access to American firearms. They may also have simply been defending their threatened middleman role. Maximilian also observed the growing divisiveness between the Kainai and the Piikani. Besides the Piikani reaction to the Kainai shooting of Doucette, the American Fur Company employee, there were earlier Kainai threats to kill a Piikani leader who had been singled out for special treatment by Mitchell, because, as Maximilian recorded, "he had never been to the north to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company."¹⁷⁰ The Kainai undoubtedly felt slighted in not receiving similar generous gifts.

groups in the early 1830s. However, he improperly cited this Harriott information as being from December 1833, not 1832, as was the case. Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 94-7.

¹⁶⁹ Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations," Joslyn Art Museum. This reference is not in a daily journal entry but in a "chapter" of the journal tentatively entitled, "A Few Words Regarding the Blackfoot Indians Piëkann, Kähna, and Siksekai, as well as the Grosventres des prairies, Flatheads, Snakes and Kutanäs."

¹⁷⁰ Wied-Neuwied, "Part II," 10 August 1833, p. 127.

Prince Maximilian noted matters reaching a head when on 31 August “some troops of Blood Indians had come near the fort, and the Piekanns fired at them with ball, which they answered, so that balls whistled over the fort.” Apparently no one was killed in this incident, but about two weeks earlier a Piikani was reported to have been murdered by some Kainai near Fort McKenzie.¹⁷¹ Kainai resentment against the favouritism shown to the Piikani by both the British and American companies was very real, just as was the preferential treatment itself. By 1833 the American Fur Company had come to realize what the Hudson’s Bay Company had known for years. Maximilian observed: “The proper Blackfeet (Siksekai) and the Blood Indians catch but few beavers, being chiefly engaged in war parties, and especially selling meat to the Hudson’s Bay Company. The Piekanns, on the other hand, catch the most beavers. Beaver traps (which are lent them) were distributed among them today, and many went away to hunt beavers.”¹⁷² Of course these companies would give special treatment to their best customers, though their other customers might not be expected to appreciate the situation. Besides reacting to a natural resentment to the preferential treatment accorded the Piikani, the Kainai may have also been trying in some way to sabotage this special trade relationship and somehow to substitute themselves for the Piikani in the Euroamerican traders’ eyes. Kainai territory, east of the Rockies and the foothills was not noted for its beaver resources. The absence of an abundance of beaver to trade, at a time when that was the most highly valued item to both British and American traders, undoubtedly precluded the Kainai from gaining this favoured status.

As noted above, in the late fall of 1833 Rowand was warned of the deteriorating conditions. He wrote: “M^r Harriott says the Blackfeet [Siksika] and all the Slave tribes

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 16 August 1833, p. 139 and 31 August 1833, p. 159.

¹⁷² Ibid., 1 September 1833, p. 162.

are getting worse instead of better they hunt less and expect more and are all jealous of the attention paid by us to the Piegans.”¹⁷³ Also as noted above, Bird had warned Harriott that fall that the Piikani “are afraid of the Bloods and the Crees.” The events which ensued proved that their fear was warranted, though the outbreak of warfare was apparently triggered by Piikani actions. Rowand later reported that the Piikani had killed two of the Kainai’s “greatest chiefs and wounded a third in one of their quarrels which so enraged the Blood Indians who immediately rushed upon the Peagans and destroyed a whole camp by killing the men and the women and children prisoners and proceeding to two other small camps, served them in the same manner.”¹⁷⁴ However, when he had first heard the news of the Kainai and Piikani warfare, Rowand was incredulous. “This I hardly believe it is not likely that friends and relations would at once wage so destructive a war_ The quarrel however will prevent the Piegans from visiting us.”¹⁷⁵ Neither Rowand nor any other fur trade officer on either side of the international border seems ever to have had the slightest inkling or comprehension of the role of the two rival companies in laying the groundwork for this fatal conflict and this massive disruption to the social fabric of the Niitsitapi peoples. As will be shown below, the violence and fear among the Piikani and the Kainai lasted for well over a year.

Surprisingly, not a single one of the seven Niitsitapi winter counts covering this period which were examined for this thesis even hint at the existence of this tragic internal conflict.¹⁷⁶ This apparent glaring anomaly in the Niitsitapi’s own historical

¹⁷³ Edmonton House post journal, 2 November 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁷⁴ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 10 January 1834, fo. 62d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54, HBCA.

¹⁷⁵ Edmonton House post journal, 22 December 1833, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁷⁶ I have examined seven distinct winter counts, plus variants, that cover the early 1830s: one Piikani, two Kainai and four Siksika. These are: Dempsey, *A Blackfoot Winter Count*

record may possibly be explained by Raymond D. Fogelson's work on "nonevents." He postulated that among some Aboriginal groups certain events are so traumatic that "they are denied," or erased from the group's collective memory.¹⁷⁷ This hypothesis would seem to explain the absence from these winter counts of this terrible and unique period of strife between the Piikani and the Kainai peoples. Another possible explanation could be that the Niitsitapi, in order to heal their wounds, agreed, tacitly or explicitly, not to speak of these events. After time, memories of these events would eventually fade or be erased. However, there is no surviving evidence to indicate what factors might have been at play to account for the absence in the winter counts of any mention of these unique and terrible events in the history of the Niitsitapi peoples.

Although well documented in the Euroamerican record of the period, as will soon be shown, and absent from contemporary Niitsitapi records, as demonstrated by the seven winter counts, these events were not completely eliminated from the memory of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples. In 1892, George Bird Grinnell published an account of this period of internal strife, as told to him by Niitsitapi informants. He wrote, "Once, about sixty or seventy years ago, the Bloods and the Piegans had a quarrel so serious that men

(Bad Head Winter Count - Kainai); Raczka, *Winter Count* (Bull Plume Winter Count - Piikani/North Peigan); Many Guns Winter Count (Siksika), File 300/35, Many Guns, in Hanks Papers, M8078, Glenbow Archives (originals of Hanks Papers are V-B-32M, in the CMC); Percy Creighton Winter Count (Kainai), Harry D. Biele Folder, Notes on Bloods, Box 13, Esther Schiff Goldfrank Papers, SINAA; Makoyatosew Winter Count (Siksika), 71.220/6738, Box 165, Jules Le Chevallier Papers, Archives of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Provincial Archives of Alberta; Houghton Running Rabbit Winter Count (Siksika), M4233, Glenbow Archives; and, Teddy Yellow Fly Winter Count (Siksika), M4423, Glenbow Archives. I see no reason to burden the reader at this time with what would be a considerably longer list, if all of the variants of these seven winter counts were to be cited here.

¹⁷⁷ Raymond D. Fogelson, "The History of Events and Nonevents," *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 2 (Spring 1989), 143. Fogelson's position was supported by Harkin. See Michael Harkin, "Emotion and Ethnohistory," paper delivered at the American Society for Ethnohistory Conference, Portland, Oregon, November 1996.

were killed on both sides and horses stolen; yet this was hardly a real war, for only part of each tribe was involved, and the trouble was not of long duration."¹⁷⁸ But even those who remembered the events or who knew the stories, seemed to play down the significance, duration and extent of this awful episode.

Return to Rocky Mountain House

Harriott quickly recognized the hopelessness of his situation and took decisive action. When Bird arrived at Piegan Post and confirmed the worst reports, Harriott immediately re-outfitted him and sent him back to an awaiting Piikani camp. Harriott subsequently reported on his low expectations for the success of this mission and of one further decision that he had made.

As M^r Chief Factor Rowand has acquainted you with the affairs of Peagan Post. I shall take the liberty of troubling you merely with some recent events that occurred since that Gentleman addressed you after the affray between the Peagans and Blood Indians (which by the by is not quite so bad as first reported with regard to the number killed altho' the consequence is the same) James Bird finding that it was impossible to prevail upon the Peagans to come to Bow River started immediately alone and the Indians with whom he resided promised to wait untill he should return with a supply of goods to trade the few furs they had say about 70 Beaver and some Wolves and Robes but as parties of Blood Indians were lurking along the mountains doing all the mischief they could to the Peagans it was not safe for him to start untill the 28th when supposing the coast to be clear he took his departure accompanied by Colin Fraser M^r Munro and 8 Men with an assortment of trading goods for the Peagan Camp which he expected to find at Badgers River about 300 Miles distant from Peagan Post. I have little hopes of his success but that nothing should be wanting on our part to enable him to fulfil his engagement I have risked the men and property with him and as there was nothing to gain by keeping up Peagan Post I determined on leaving it which we accordingly did on the 9th Ins^t and M^r Small with our whole establishment is now on his way to the Rocky Mountain House to await the Blood Indians whose trade we shall be able to secure not only at less expence but in larger quantities than we

¹⁷⁸ George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tails: The Story of a Prairie People* (Lincoln, 1962 [1892]), 208. In the 1890s, Red Crow, a Kainai, told of a period of unprecedented warfare (at an unspecified time and for an unspecified duration) between the Piikani and the Kainai. This 1890s reference was almost certainly to these 1830s events. See pages 99-100, vol. 1, R.N. Wilson Papers, M4421, Glenbow Archives.

could at Bow River exclusive of the risk and trouble of transporting it to the Saskatchewan.¹⁷⁹

In the same report Harriott also suggested the possibility of his travelling to Fort Vancouver late that winter and then proceeding to the Flathead country to trade with the Piikani there, west of the Rockies. No action was taken on this suggestion, though Rowand thought that trading with the Piikani at “the Flat head Post in Columbia” might be the ideal, temporary solution.¹⁸⁰ Likewise, Bird’s recommendation was rejected that the company establish a post at Chief Mountain, near the American border. Rowand had successfully argued against it. “I should be sorry to recommend as it is impossible it can ever pay half the expences the Company would be at, and few men at such a place, as matters stand now would be safe, and without water communication would never answer.”¹⁸¹ It was already thought to be too difficult and expensive to transport the outfit overland from Edmonton House to Piegan Post, without adding another 100 miles to the existing 200-mile, one-way trip. No consideration seems ever to have been given to outfitting Piegan Post via the more direct method of boats from the South Saskatchewan River. The apprehension, whether warranted or not, of the westward bound boats being pillaged by First Nations people was undoubtedly the over-riding factor in eliminating this option. In 1823, Rowand had pointed out the necessity of manning the boats with large crews between Carlton House and Edmonton House to avoid depredations by First

¹⁷⁹ Harriott to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 14 January 1834, fos. 32d.-3, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54, HBCA.

¹⁸⁰ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 10 January 1834, fo. 64d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/126, reel 3M54, HBCA.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, fos. 62-2d.

Nations groups.¹⁸² The South Saskatchewan River would have been an even riskier route, and without the presence of any nearby posts for assistance and refuge .

On 8 January 1834, Harriott abandoned Piegan Post for the second consecutive year. He wrote:

There being no advantage to be reaped by remaining at this place but on the reverse. Abundance of Trouble and Expenditure I have determined on leaving it and retreating to the old Rocky Mountain House to secure the Trade of the Blood Indians where we shall be able to bring them more to our own terms than at this place and in the evening every thing being ready we took our leave of Peagan Post which we left to the mercy of the Cercees [Sarcee]. who lost no time in taking possession.¹⁸³

Patrick Small led the men back to Rocky Mountain House, which he found on 20 January to be “in a very shattered condition.” Harriott and two men went directly to Edmonton House to inform Rowand. Upon Harriott’s arrival there on 13 January, Rowand noted, “M^r Harriott has been again obliged to abandon Bow River Post and M^r Small with All the men except 11 who are on their way here with 20 horses loaded with 5p^s each on sledges_ has gone to Rocky Mountain House_ the Peegan trade seems to be going to the devil heavy expenses incurred and no returns being made.”¹⁸⁴ The forced return to Rocky Mountain House was not good news to the Hudson’s Bay Company, but it was to the Stoney. In late October 1833, representatives of a band occupying the foothills between the North and South Saskatchewan rivers arrived at Edmonton House, according to the post journalist, “for a supply of ammunition and to learn if Rocky Mountain house is to

¹⁸² Edmonton House post journal, 25 July to 23 September 1823 entry, B.60/a/22, reel 1M49, HBCA.

¹⁸³ Piegan Post journal, 8 January 1834, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA.

¹⁸⁴ Edmonton House post journal, 13 January 1834, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

be established as last year.”¹⁸⁵ In mid-December there were still some Stoney camped near that post with furs to trade.¹⁸⁶

Harriott left Edmonton House on 24 January 1834 to meet “Jimmy Jock” near Piegan Post and to give him instructions from Rowand for the summer. In mid-February, Fraser, Monroe and three other men arrived at Rocky Mountain House, leaving Bird and five others to pass the summer among the Piikani. Bird’s returns were “a few trifling furs” and, as Rowand pessimistically/realistically noted, “Jamie Jock however is off again with a small outfit and 5 of the Company’s servants_ and if not sent to the other world will be back again in the fall.”¹⁸⁷

By the late winter of 1833-1834 Rowand’s frustration was showing. On one occasion in February, he wrote that he “traded with the Blackfeet [Siksika] who came yesterday and it is a trade indeed the d____d fellows are not worth one hundredth part of the trouble we take with them they talk much of the Americans and have the face to tell us they lose a great deal by coming_ those gentlemen feel quite offended if they do not get all they ask whether they have the means of paying or not.”¹⁸⁸ Later that same month he learned from visiting Sarcee of a battle recently fought between the Gros Ventre and the Crow, with the Gros Ventre purportedly being the decisive winners.¹⁸⁹

So deep was this rupture between the Kainai and the Piikani, that the Kainai, apparently, even sought a military alliance with the Cree against the Piikani. A

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 29 October 1833.

¹⁸⁶ Piegan Post journal, 18 December 1833, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 18 February 1834, and, Edmonton House post journal, 28 February 1834, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁸⁸ Edmonton House post journal, 12 February 1834, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 18 February 1834. According to this Sarcee report, the Gros Ventre lost only one to the Crow’s 24 dead in this encounter.

delegation of Kainai arrived at Edmonton House with a surprising proposal to deliver to the Cree. The Edmonton House journal reads: "About 3 P.M. arrived the Little Cree & Black Bear (a Cree) who resides with the Blood Indians and is accompanied by four [?] of that nation he is in search of the Crees to engage them to make war on the Piegans along with the Blood Indians_ in consequence of the Piegans having killed Ha pa six e man's [?] son."¹⁹⁰

Even though Rowand and his subordinates had no doubt in their minds about the sincerity of the Kainai, this overture to the Cree may have been a ruse. Four Niitsitapi winter counts note a "Wolf Peace" about this time, but there is no consistency in the interpretation of this term's meaning, and one cannot now be absolutely certain that the references are even to this February 1834 Kainai undertaking. One explanation of the reference in the Many Guns Winter Count (Siksika) to the "wolf peace," given as occurring in 1832, was to an untrusting peace between Cree and Siksika, where fear still existed and where they met with guns hidden under their blankets.¹⁹¹ However, three variant interpretations of the Many Guns Winter Count simply refer to "The Year of the Truce," and attribute it to 1833.¹⁹² There is no suggestion in these variants of mistrust, fear or deception. Another Siksika count, the Houghton Running Rabbit Winter Count, attributes the "peace with the wolf" to 1831, while the Teddy Yellow Fly Winter Count, also Siksika, gives a date of 1832 and has been interpreted as meaning "The Wolf Peace

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 19 February 1834.

¹⁹¹ See Hanks Papers, M8078, in Glenbow Archives: p. 2, File 35, Box 1, and, p. 58, File 301/13, Box 3.

¹⁹² The variants of the Many Guns Winter Count are in Files 65.68/2, 65.68/1 and 65.68/4, in the Provincial Archives of Alberta. Translations of these variants were by Dave Melting Tallow.

Treaty Year. A Treaty made with an enemy Tribe.”¹⁹³ The count which most convincingly, though not absolutely, owing to the Piikani reference within it, connects the “Wolf Peace” to this 1834 Kainai overture is a Kainai winter count, the Percy Creighton Winter Count. Though said to have occurred in 1832, the “Wolf Peace Making” was interpreted as “The Blood (and the Piegan and Sarcee) pretended to make peace with the Cree and fought with them instead.”¹⁹⁴ The “Wolf Peace” references in these winter counts perhaps raise more questions than they answer. Although almost certainly referring to the same event, to just which event and in which year is far from clear. The varying interpretations of the same counts challenge the certainty and reliability, in some cases, not so much of the original winter counts, but of the translations and interpretations of them, the only products that most researchers actually see. And if the Percy Creighton Winter Count has been interpreted correctly and does indeed refer to this 1834 Kainai mission to the Cree, then it definitely calls into question the surety of Euroamerican analysis and understanding of seemingly clear-cut First Nations purposes and actions. If the interpretation is accurate, then the Hudson’s Bay Company traders at Edmonton House did not have a clue what the Kainai were up to.

Whatever the motivation behind this Kainai delegation to the Cree, whether genuine or deceitful, the extraordinary military alliance never materialized. In March 1834, Rowand reported that the Siksika, Kainai and Sarcee “seem quite enraged at the Beaver Hill Crees who destroyed a camp of 26 lodges of Blood Indians they discovered at Red Deers river_ killing 40 men women and children and taking 100 horses.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Houghton Running Rabbit Winter Count, M4233, and, Teddy Yellow Fly Fonds, M4423, Glenbow Archives.

¹⁹⁴ “Notes on Bloods,” Harry D. Biele Folder, Box 13, Esther Schiff Goldfrank Papers, SINAA

¹⁹⁵ Edmonton House post journal, 17 March 1834, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA. For another account of this incident, see Piegan post journal, 5 March 1834, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16,

Relations between the five tribes of the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree-Assiniboine returned to their 19th-century norm with this attack. Relations among the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, however, did not normalize so quickly. As late as September 1834, there were no signs that the state of at least limited war between the Kainai and Piikani was about to end. James Kipp then reported from Fort McKenzie, where he was in charge for the 1834-1835 season, on these continued hostilities and on his trade prospects.

Were the Peigans to hunt more industriously as they ought to do I might yet make something, but their sole aim at present is War which will continue a long time. The blood Indians proposed making peace but the peigans refused; and since that the blood Indians have stolen the peigan horses which will no doubt occasion a war of some time's duration as the Peigans are now fully determined to renew hostilities against them.¹⁹⁶

That same month, according to Rowand, fear of encountering Kainai kept a small party of Piikani, "who have kept staunch to us ever since the Americans have been upon their Lands," away from Rocky Mountain House, until escorted into the post by Bird, Small and several company men.¹⁹⁷ There apparently is no existing record of just how and when hostilities ended between these two usually closely-knit peoples, but it was probably within a few months of this visit to Rocky Mountain House.

The remainder of the 1833-1834 season brought no good news to the traders on the North Saskatchewan. In late March it was learned from one of Bird's men that "Jimmy Jock" had fallen in with a Kainai camp on his way to the Piikani. Harriott

HBCA. And for more detail on internal Cree divisions at this time, see Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 94-7.

¹⁹⁶ Kipp to McKenzie, Fort McKenzie, 5 September 1834, pp. 2-3, Folder Chouteau-Papin Collection 5 September 1834, Box 33, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

¹⁹⁷ Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 7 January 1835, fo. 45, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/127, reel 3M54, HBCA.

reported: "M^r Bird had some difficulty in getting past they stole part of his Horses but the Chief went and got them back. for which of course he was well paid."¹⁹⁸ Two weeks later Harriott's and Rowand's last hopes for any returns from the Piikani in the near future were dashed. On 14 April, Bird's men arrived back at Rocky Mountain House with the news that Harriott reported that they had "had the misfortune to lose all their Horses and property previous to reaching the Peagan camp. they however proceeded and overtook the Peagans across the Missouri."¹⁹⁹ Rowand stated that Bird "with difficulty has preserved his own life and the lives of those with him he sent the five men he had with him back for more supplies with instructions for them to meet him at the three forks across the mountains at a place called Jeffersons River_ Had James Bird not told the blood Indians that he was going to make peace between them and the Piegans by order of M^r Harriott he would scarcely have escaped."²⁰⁰ Apparently, "Jimmy Jock" was re-supplied that summer, but once again his efforts were thwarted. Kipp reported on his continued misfortune. "Bird passed the summer with the Peigans: he however got very few Beaver from the Indians who have been in the habit of trading here. All he got were Twenty five Lodges who have been always trading at the north. The blood Indians stole all his horses which obliged him to cash his Goods: The Gros Ventres found his cche and took the contents."²⁰¹ So much, one might suggest, for the personal influence of an outsider, at least one employed by a fur trade company and seen to be acting in its

¹⁹⁸ Piegan Post journal, 28 March 1834, B.21/a/1, reel 1M16, HBCA.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 14 April 1834.

²⁰⁰ Edmonton House post journal, 24 April 1834, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA.

²⁰¹ Kipp to McKenzie, Fort McKenzie, 5 September 1834, p. 3, Folder Chouteau-Papin Collection 5 September 1834, Box 33, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

interests, affecting the overall behaviour and trading practices of First Nations peoples, no matter how well that individual might be positioned or connected, even by marriage.

Harriott arrived at Edmonton House from Rocky Mountain House on 24 April in a boat with part of the season's returns; Small brought the rest there in three boats on 3 May. Rowand summed up the season: "The returns from that quarter and the Peagan post are the worst that have ever been made."²⁰² Harriott had only managed to collect 87 "Large Beaver" from the Piikani, 131 from the Siksika, Kainai and Sarcee, and another 125 from the Stoney and freemen. His prime buffalo robe count stood at only 377 from all sources.²⁰³ On 20 May Rowand departed for York Factory with the season's incredibly disappointing returns.

In late July, after having been fully apprized of the situation by Rowand, Simpson reported on the gloomy situation in the Saskatchewan District, somehow managing to end with "confident hopes" for its future prospects.

Saskatchewan, which was long the favourite District in the Northern Department, I am concerned to say still continues to decline in point of returns, while its expences, on the other hand, are gradually increasing; the profits are therefore going down rapidly, and, when the accounts are made up, I am apprehensive that we shall find a deficiency of fully £2000 on those of last year. This is owing to the proximity of the American trading posts and trapping parties to the hunting grounds of the plains tribes, who used to visit us from the Southward, say the Piegan, Blood, Blackfeet, and Circee, tribes, who have of late been drawn to the banks of the Missouri by the high opposition prices offered in that quarter, which have rendered all the personal influence of their old traders on the Saskatchewan of little avail; and notwithstanding all Jemmy Jock's exertions to bring the Piegans back to us, our trade with that tribe did not exceed 500 Beaver, and taking the expences incurred in collecting them into account, at a cost exceeding double their value in the London market, while the danger to which lives & property were exposed, in watching this losing trade, by the occupation of the Piegan post, in the midst of the plains, was very great. We have therefore determined on abandoning that post, and on re-establishing the Rocky Mountain House this season, which will enable us to curtail the expences of the District, by the reduction of the

²⁰² Edmonton House post journal, 24 April 1834, B.60/a/28, reel 1M50, HBCA. The horses from Rocky Mountain House, 32 of the company's and 49 of the men's, were brought down by Monroe and two men; they reached Edmonton House on 3 May.

²⁰³ Piegan Post account book, 1833-1834, fo. 18, B.21/d/2, reel 1M433, HBCA.

complement of people, and I entertain confident hopes that the result of the current outfit will shew an amendment on that of the past.²⁰⁴

The Situation on the Missouri: The Tide Permanently Turned

On the Missouri during this eventful 1833-1834 season the American Fur Company appears to have been unaware of the effects its presence was having on the Hudson's Bay Company's trade. In January 1834, Kenneth McKenzie wrote from Fort Union to Mitchell. "Your beaver trade has certainly fallen very short of my expectations but I will give you the credit of getting every skin that could be obtained." He went on to say, "We can only regret that the Leviathan company of the North have means so extensive & goods so cheap but they will not drive me from my purpose, industry & perseverance will overcome many obstacles, and if your Indians are faithful another season may be more profitable than the present."²⁰⁵ McKenzie, who became known in parts of the United States by the appellations "King of the Missouri" and "Emperor of the West,"²⁰⁶ did not then realize that he had already won, that he had beaten the Hudson's Bay Company, "the Leviathan company of the North," in the struggle for the Piikani trade, and the trade of much of the Siksika, Kainai and Sarcee, as well. McKenzie did not understand that the reason for the decline in returns for the 1833-1834 season had nothing to do with the resources of the northern opposition. The real reason for the decline in trade was the warfare among his First Nations customers, warfare which Euroamerican traders had long known prevented concerted hunting and trapping efforts. From the spring of 1833 to the spring of 1834 there was periodic warfare between at least some

²⁰⁴ Simpson to Governor and Committee, York Factory, 21 July 1834, fos. 17d.-8, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/100, reel 3M46, HBCA.

²⁰⁵ McKenzie to Mitchell, Fort Union, 21 January 1834, p. 25, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

²⁰⁶ Chardon, *Chardon's Journal*, 220n.

members of the Blackfoot alliance and the Flathead, the Crow and the Cree and the Assiniboine. However, the hostilities most disruptive to the trade were those between the Kainai and the Piikani. By the end of the 1833-1834 season, the outcome of the struggle for the Piikani trade had been emphatically determined, even if McKenzie was unaware of it.

McKenzie spared no effort in solidifying his position among the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance. Faced with opposition in the north and the possibility of expansion upriver by Sublette and Campbell, he informed Mitchell, "I am desirous you should re-engage M. Berjer & all the men who can talk sufficient Black foot to do us to continue at the Fort."²⁰⁷ McKenzie, with Mitchell's assistance, also managed to overcome Alexander Culbertson's apparent initial reticence, and convinced that relatively inexperienced company clerk to remain at Fort McKenzie to take charge there after Mitchell's return in the spring to Fort Union, and then Mitchell's retirement from company service.²⁰⁸ Culbertson was left with 20 men for the summer at Fort McKenzie.²⁰⁹ McKenzie could not have chosen a better man for the position, as time would soon tell. After a brief military career, by 1830 Culbertson was involved in the Minnesota fur trade. In 1833 he was engaged by the Upper Missouri Outfit and stationed at Fort McKenzie. In 1835 he had charge of that post for the winter season and in 1840 he succeeded McKenzie at Fort Union. He later returned to Piikani country, his success there undoubtedly aided by his marriage in August 1833, according to the custom of the

²⁰⁷ McKenzie to Mitchell, Fort Union, 21 January 1834, p. 27, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 27-8, and also in this same piece, McKenzie to Alexander Culbertson, Fort Union, 21 January 1834, pp. 22-3, and, McKenzie to Mitchell, Fort Union, 8 March 1834, p. 30.

²⁰⁹ Jack Holterman, *King of the High Missouri: The Saga of the Culbertsons* (Helena, 1987), 45.

country, to a Piikani woman, whose name is not now known. In the early 1840s, certainly after the death of his first wife (date unknown), he married another Niitsitapi woman, Natawista, of the Kainai.²¹⁰ He remained a key figure in the trade with the Blackfoot-speaking peoples until the mid-1850s.

In March 1834 McKenzie sent his final instructions for the season to Mitchell, concerning both the summer arrangements and the possibility of establishing trade with the Kootenay. McKenzie wrote:

I wish you to leave as strong a force as possible to protect the property during the Summer & impress on M^r C. [Culbertson] the importance of the adage "An ounce of precaution is worth a pound of cure"....

My present views regarding your posts are that it is best to remain tranquil & not strive to push the trade farther West until mutual confidence is established between A.F.C. & Indians. Cootanaha [Kootenay] trade will not pay risk & expence attending it. I prefer sedulously to court the good opinion of Indians around you for any seriously disastrous occurrence arising from too much risk or too little caution may destroy in a moment what I have been years building up.²¹¹

The obvious opposition of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples to the company's establishing trade with the Kootenay, as evidenced by the killing of Doucette, prompted McKenzie's "ounce of precaution" in this matter, though just one year later Jacques

²¹⁰ Ibid., especially 57-65; Lesley Wischmann, *Frontier Diplomats: The Life and Times of Alexander Culbertson and Natoyist-Siksima* (Spokane, 2000); Myrtle Clifford, "Three Women of Frontier Montana" (M.A. dissertation, Department of History, State University of Montana, 1932), pt. 3; Wied-Neuwied, "Explorations," 27 August 1833, Joslyn Art Museum; and, Alexander Culbertson, "Alexander Culbertson's Journey to the Bow River," ed. Hugh A. Dempsey, *Alberta Historical Review* 19, no. 4 (Autumn 1971), 8-20. The marriage to the unnamed Piikani woman in 1833 is not noted in the published Maximilian journal. In the unpublished manuscript journal, Maximilian stated that Culbertson's "Indian" bride was a "Piegan" woman, a relative (daughter?) of "White Buffalo." Maximilian's journal confirms that Culbertson had two Niitsitapi wives in succession, a fact that is not widely known. For a biography of his second wife, see Hugh A. Dempsey, "Natawista," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume XII, 1891 to 1900* (Toronto, 1991), 778-9.

²¹¹ McKenzie to Mitchell, Fort Union, 8 March 1834, p. 30, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

Berger was given the go-ahead to try to initiate trade with this transmountain people.²¹² Mitchell was back at Fort Union with the season's returns on 16 April 1834. Upon his arrival, McKenzie reported that "Indians gone off well satisfied from Fort McK. at least so I hear."²¹³ Culbertson remained in charge there until Kipp's arrival at the Marias with the winter outfit on 10 August 1834. By early September Kipp's and Culbertson's combined returns totalled only "seven packs of Beaver," half the number of the previous summer. Kipp complained of the altered conditions since he had first built Fort Piegan in 1831. He reported that the Piikani "are ten times as numerous as the first year they visited us and are as equally troublesome as they are expensive._ I was compelled to cloth fourteen chiefs independant of the Liquor, Tobacco & Ammunition with which I presented them."²¹⁴

Alcohol remained a staple in the fur trade on both sides of the international boundary, despite protestations by both major companies of their aversion to its use and despite federal government legislation in the United States outlawing it from the trade. McKenzie wrote:

After 20 years experience in the Indian trade I can safely declare that an entire prohibition of liquor if rigidly enforced would be an almost incalculable relief to the trader, but you well know that the Indians of this district from their proximity to the trading establishments of the H.B.C. have always been accustomed to the use of liquor, & it is by no means extraordinary that they should seek to be supplied therewith when making their trade on this side of the lines.²¹⁵

²¹² Smyth, "Jacques Berger," 47-8.

²¹³ McKenzie to Samuel Tulloch, Fort Union, 22 April 1834, p. 47, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

²¹⁴ Kipp to McKenzie, Fort McKenzie, 5 September 1834, p. 1, Folder Chouteau-Papin Collection 5 September 1834, Box 33, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

²¹⁵ McKenzie to Chouteau, Fort Union, 20 March 1834, p. 43, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

To maintain or to increase one's share of the trade was the primary goal of all of these company men, of whatever nationality. By the 1830s liquor was such an ingrained part of the trade of the northern Plains, either as a trade item itself or as a gift distributed during First Nations visits to the posts, that in areas where competition existed a trader dared not be without alcohol. As one put it, "Liquor we must have or we might as well give up."²¹⁶

In 1833-1834 the American Fur Company on the upper Missouri was faced not only with competition from the Hudson's Bay Company, but from the firm of Sublette and Campbell, as well. In July 1832, Congress had passed an act absolutely prohibiting the taking of liquor into Indian territory. Inspectors were stationed at strategic locations to examine companies' outfits and to confiscate contraband liquor. To sidestep the letter of the law, and with the full knowledge of his superiors, McKenzie shipped a still to Fort Union in 1833, there to make, rather than to import, his alcohol for the trade. When rivals made this information known to the government, the American Fur Company came perilously close to losing its licence to trade. The still was dismantled and shipped downriver. McKenzie was to a great degree made the scapegoat of the affair.²¹⁷

However, alcohol was not eliminated from the trade. Liquor continued to make it upriver, either hidden from inspectors' eyes or listed as being for internal company consumption. Yet the government restrictions did have some effect and caused alterations in company policies. In May 1835, Culbertson, again in charge of Fort McKenzie, was told to make the most of a difficult situation, because, as one colleague at Fort Union informed him, "Liquor cannot be obtained on any terms without open war with the President & his army and risking forcible expulsion from the country. I send you

²¹⁶ Unnamed American fur trader quoted in Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 355.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 355-62.

two Barrels of Alcohol and six of Wine make the most of it and do not sell a single drop of it to the men, we have long since ceased to do it here.”²¹⁸

The firm of Sublette and Campbell was a thorn in McKenzie’s side for only one season. When Campbell proposed terms of a potential sale of his company to McKenzie during the winter of 1833-1834, McKenzie refused to consider them; he was confident that his policy “of paying four times the usual price for furs” would soon drive his competitors out of business.²¹⁹ His superiors chose another tack. They bought out Sublette and Campbell, with the reciprocal conditions that Sublette and Campbell cease their Missouri trade for one year and that the American Fur Company withdraw from the mountain trade for a like period. This was no great loss to the latter firm. The American Fur Company, according to Astor’s biographer, “had not profited by the mountain trade, having always been late at the annual rendezvous, and the trade in the mountains had been continued largely to maintain the Company’s prestige among the Indians and free trappers.”²²⁰

The End of One Era and the Beginning of Another

The year 1834 marked the end of an era and the beginning of another, in many ways. The retirement of John Jacob Astor marked and foretold incredible changes in the hierarchy and make-up of the fur trade in the United States. He had been contemplating this move

²¹⁸ Daniel Lamont to Culbertson, Fort Union, 5 May 1835, p. 77, “Fort Union Letterbook,” MHS. See also, Barbour, *Fort Union*, 157-75.

²¹⁹ Porter, *John Jacob Astor* vol. 2, 769-70. See also: Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, vol. 1, 350-5; Wishart, *The Fur Trade*, 71-2; and, Campbell, “The Private Journal,” 12 November 1833, p. 19.

²²⁰ Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, vol. 2, 769.

for quite awhile and had made his decision by 1833.²²¹ He had predicted both the change to mass-produced clothing and the switch to silk hats from beaver-felt hats, spelling the end of the heyday for the fur trade. As one historian has put it, "When Astor sold the American Fur Company in 1834, then, he was reacting to market changes as well as restricting his business commitments with advancing age."²²² Pratte, Chouteau and Company bought the Western Department of the American Fur Company, and a group headed by Ramsay Crooks bought its Northern Department. Pratte and Chouteau, now the sole owners, continued to run the Western Department as they had done under their agreements with Astor. As well, their operation on the Missouri continued to be known as the American Fur Company, and this operation remained secure. It would be years before they would again be seriously challenged on the Missouri.

Relations among the Niitsitapi peoples eventually returned to normal, but those with the Hudson's Bay Company had been changed forever. Even the Bow River site, once so sought after by the Piikani, was a weak second to the American Fur Company's site at the Marias and Missouri. Together with a more navigable river which permitted larger, more efficient boats, and thus better pricing, the Americans permanently took all of the Gros Ventre trade, the vast bulk of the Piikani's and much of the Kainai and Siksika trade as well. The monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance had been shattered. With its January 1834 return to Rocky Mountain House, it remained in its self-confinement on the North Saskatchewan River until 1874, when the arrival of the North-West Mounted Police in present-day southern Alberta convinced the company that it could safely and profitably venture south again. Interested in reviving conveniently located competition, in the 1830s the Piikani

²²¹ Ibid., 770.

²²² Haeger, "Business Strategy and Practice," 201.

repeatedly exhorted the company to return to the Bow River.²²³ Simpson refused to accede to their wishes. He knew that by remaining on the North Saskatchewan River his company was in effect forfeiting the Piikani trade to the Americans, but he and his leading officers in the Saskatchewan District all believed that a return to the environs of Piegan Post would be both too dangerous and too expensive. In 1839, he reported to London, "We have therefore, altho very reluctantly, come to the determination of making no further effort to recover that once valuable branch of Trade."²²⁴

Because the overall trade of the 1833-1834 season had been so poor, as a result of intertribal strife on several fronts, McKenzie was not immediately aware that he had broken the hold of the Hudson's Bay Company, or, as he referred to it, "the Leviathan company of the North."²²⁵ Forts Piegan and McKenzie caused an immediate and severe economic decline for the Saskatchewan District. They probably also accounted for a resurgence of Niitsitapi military power; they became in turn both trading post and arsenal to the Piikani, Kainai, Siksika and Gros Ventre, supplying firearms in numbers never attainable from the Hudson's Bay Company posts in the Saskatchewan.²²⁶

Ironically, some of those American advantages which allowed the American Fur Company so quickly and easily to take over the coveted Piikani beaver trade were instrumental in its almost total demise. Buffalo robes were increasingly in demand in the East, and the American Fur Company's transportation network, which linked the upper

²²³ Simpson to Governor and Committee, Lachine, 29 April 1839, fo. 30d., Simpson Correspondence, D.4/106, reel 3M46, HBCA.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ McKenzie to Mitchell, Fort Union, 21 January 1834, p. 25, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

²²⁶ Edmunds, "Blackfoot Military Ascendancy," 1-22, and, Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 93-5.

Missouri by keelboat and steamer to St. Louis, could handle all the robes that these northern Plains peoples could produce. By the late 1830s, buffalo robes, not beaver pelts, were king on the Missouri. In fact, from 1833 on the Missouri the American Fur Company's "Standard of Value," against which all country produce and trade goods were measured, was the buffalo robe, just as the beaver pelt had been the Hudson's Bay Company's and the North West Company's standard for decades in their "Comparatives of Furs."²²⁷ And this new "Standard" was established before the drastic decline in value of beaver in the late 1830s, when the Europeans' two-and-a-half-century love affair with beaver-felt hats was finally and abruptly ended both by cheaper soft felt hats and by silk hats.²²⁸

However, long before the end of the decade and the drop in beaver's value, both the American Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had witnessed the end of the Piikani beaver trade. In 1835, Daniel Lamont wrote from Fort Union, "As the Beaver Trade for the last three years has been regularly declining notwithstanding every facility & encouragement we have given the Peigans, it appears to me that our sheet anchor will be the Robe Trade."²²⁹ Governor George Simpson was also well aware of the declining returns from the Piikani beaver trade; he attributed the drastic decrease to high American prices for furs which permitted the Piikani "to obtain all the supplies they require for less than one third of the quantity they usually brought to market, so that now, instead of

²²⁷ Journal entries of 2 and 19 June 1862, in Lewis Henry Morgan, *The Indian Journals, 1859-62*, ed. Leslie A. White (Ann Arbor, 1959), 157 and 179.

²²⁸ Murray G. Lawson, "The Beaver Hat and the North American Fur Trade," in Malvina Bolus, ed., *People and Pelts: Selected Papers of the Second North American Fur Trade Conference* (Winnipeg, 1972), 36, and, Hugh Grant, "Revenge of the Paris Hat," *The Beaver* 68, no. 6 (December 1988/January 1989), 44.

²²⁹ Lamont to Culbertson, Fort Union, 5 May 1835, p. 77, "Fort Union Letterbook," MHS.

occupying their time in hunting and trading as formerly, they amuse themselves in gambling, and are occupied in war & horse thieving excursions.”²³⁰ Obviously the demand was still there for beaver pelts. The supply/resource was too. In September 1834, James Kipp reported from Fort McKenzie:

The Peigans have now finished their Beaver Trade and instead of being better as I had reason to believe from reports, it would prove, in reality, it is much less than what was procured by them last year. It is really discouraging and not only so for they are ten times as numerous as the first year they visited us and are equally troublesome as they are expensive. _ I was compelled to cloth fourteen chiefs independant of the Liquor, Tobacco & Ammunition with which I presented them and all I received during the whole Trade was seven packs of Beaver just half the quantity last year they procured. This decrease of Beaver is not in consequence of the scarcity but it is because the Indians do not hunt nor will they while we continue to treat them on the same principle as we have been in the habit of observing towards these Indians. They have been in the habit of received entirely too much for nothing.²³¹

Once again the Euroamericans misunderstood the motivations of this First Nations people. A recently developed response conceived out of necessity to ensure national survival, beaver hunting and trapping to acquire firearms and ammunition, and other trade goods as well, was virtually abandoned by the Piikani as soon as the opportunity presented itself. The buffalo hunt, more in keeping with the daily needs and the proclivities of the Piikani, Kainai, Siksika and Gros Ventre could now, as always, not only meet a wide variety of internal requirements, but also provide a lucrative trade item as well, the buffalo robe. The robe trade permitted these peoples, particularly the Piikani, to abandon the short-lived practice of killing beaver, which was so evidently offensive to

²³⁰ Governor Simpson's Report on the Northern Department, 1835, fos. 38d.-9, Simpson Correspondence, D.4/102, reel 3M46, HBCA. Simpson here reported that the Piikani regularly used to trade 3,000 beaver pelts, and that some seasons the total was as high as 5,000. He did not refer to Rocky Mountain House by its proper name; he called it "the Piegan House."

²³¹ Kipp to McKenzie, Fort McKenzie, 5 September 1834, pp. 1-2, Box 33, Chouteau Collection, MHS.

their religious beliefs and other cultural sensibilities, and to return to a more harmonious condition of coinciding beliefs and practices, a harmony which they had consciously relinquished, not to accumulate wealth, but to guarantee self-preservation.

Just as the renewal of traditional practices remained steady for the Piikani, and the Kainai, Siksika and Gros Ventre, so too did their altered relationships with the competing fur trade companies. About a decade after the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1837, Rowand reported from Edmonton House that “the Small Pox and Americans have taken away nearly the whole of the plain Indians.”²³² American domination of the Niitsitapi trade persisted. Lieutenant William F. Butler confirmed this. He reported, since the closure of Piegan Post, “nearly some forty years ago,” that “there can be little doubt that the greater portion of robes, buffalo leather, &c., traded by the Blackfeet [Niitsitapi] finds its way down the waters of the Missouri.”²³³ After the Americans established trading posts at the confluence of the Marias and Missouri rivers, except for one visit by a small party in the summer of 1848, the Gros Ventre never again returned to the Saskatchewan District to trade.²³⁴ The Kainai, Siksika and even some Piikani did bring limited trade to Rocky Mountain House and Edmonton House, but so few Piikani traded on the North

²³² Rowand to Simpson, Edmonton House, [?] January 1846, fos. 15a-15b, Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/16, reel 3M71, HBCA.

²³³ Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 377.

²³⁴ Rowand to Simpson, Edmonton House, 6 November 1848, fos. 222a-b, and, Rowand to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 30 December 1848, fos. 548-8d., Simpson Inward Correspondence, D.5/23, reels 3M83-4, HBCA. The Gros Ventre apparently made that trip strictly to get alcohol. Rowand reported that they traded 100 horses for rum.

Saskatchewan River that the officer in charge of the Saskatchewan District referred to them in 1870 as the “American Indians.”²³⁵

²³⁵ York Factory inward correspondence, William J. Christie to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Edmonton House, 6 January 1870, fo. 13, B.239/c/19, reel 1M404, HBCA.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Long-held, oft-repeated stereotypes and misconceptions are hard moulds to break. Quite recently, Robert Martin presented a sliding “Tribal Scale of Aggression” for North American First Nations peoples. The Niitsitapi were judged the most aggressive. After a brief recitation of purportedly inexplicable incidents of Niitsitapi violence, Martin concluded, “You can see how a tribe like the Blackfeet [the three Niitsitapi peoples] might contribute to the bad rap of the Native Americans.”¹ The “bad rap” should perhaps be Martin’s, not the Niitsitapi’s.

While the Martin case may be an extreme example of the misunderstandings rampant in the historiography of the Niitsitapi peoples, it is not all that unrepresentative of the general state of affairs. I have tried in this thesis to counteract prevalent misrepresentations and to set straight many errors of fact. I have examined aspects of the history of the Piikani, Siksika and Kainai that I believe were either misunderstood or not thoroughly addressed in the literature. I have tried to interpret these aspects of the history of the Niitsitapi trade to bring an understanding that may previously have been lacking.

It matters that there have been so many gross distortions of the history of these three peoples. There was no Niitsitapi trade at York Factory; neither they nor their allies traded there, despite countless assertions to the contrary. The Niitsitapi did not travel from the northern Plains of present-day Alberta and Montana to trade on the shores of Hudson Bay. In contrast to the position so widely expounded, the reactions of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples to encroaching Americans was not irrational, barbaric or inexplicable, nor were they provoked, except by the actions of the American interlopers themselves. There is no evidence to support the contention of British incitement. How is it possible to have intelligent and productive debates over the meaning and significance of

¹ Robert Martin, “Head Scalpers or Good Samaritans.” Online. Available: <http://militaryhistory.abou...a112699.htm?iam=dpile&terms=%2BBlackfeet>. 2 June 2001.

aspects of the history of the Niitsitapi, when there is no accurate, agreed-upon framework of facts or events on which to base interpretive arguments?

At the same time that I was establishing this missing framework, I also argued my own particular thesis. Three groups of Euroamerican newcomers (Canadian, British and American) encountered the Niitsitapi; they employed distinct tactics and strategies to exploit the wealth of the territory of the Blackfoot-speaking peoples. They each fared differently. The Niitsitapi rationally assessed the potential benefits, opportunities, disadvantages and dangers presented in each set of circumstances, and then showed remarkable flexibility in the actions which they took to ensure their survival and prosperity.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the three Niitsitapi peoples, and their Sarcee and Gros Ventre allies, clearly fell under the generic Archithinue label. They were all definitely Archithinue. However, the term Archithinue was applied to far more First Nations peoples than just these five. All members of the Blackfoot alliance were Archithinue, but not all Archithinue were members of the Blackfoot alliance. It is often highly debatable to which First Nations peoples a fur trader might have been referring in a particular case when he used this term. This uncertainty has caused a considerable variety of 20th-century interpretations and identifications for the 18th century: of individual First Nations peoples; of relationships that might have existed among First Nations peoples; and of relationships between First Nations peoples and Euroamericans.

Analysis of the Archithinue dominated the second chapter of this thesis. From this reexamination it is clear that no Archithinue trade ever existed at York Factory. This confirms Dale Russell's well-argued position, but conflicts with the assertions of many others. A handful of Archithinue individuals did visit Hudson Bay, but no trade ever developed at York Factory with these various residents of the western interior. I believe that this point is conclusively proved.

Clarifying the relationships of the members of the Blackfoot alliance with the Cree and the Assiniboine offers less certainty. David Mandelbaum's hypothesis of ongoing Niitsitapi-Cree hostility throughout the 18th century has been thoroughly attacked, and utterly demolished, by such scholars as Ray, Milloy, Russell, Binnema and Doige. However, I have challenged the substituted portrayal of intertribal relations. Whatever the proffered termination date of this supposed trade and military alliance, I do not think that there is enough evidence to substantiate the unqualified assertion that the alliance ever positively did exist. Russell wrote, "There is nothing to suggest chronic hostility between the Cree and Assiniboine on the one hand, and the Blackfoot Nation [the Niitsitapi] on the other."² I believe that the near-opposite is just as true, that there is insufficient evidence to support conclusively the existence of a "chronic" trade alliance or, especially, of an ongoing, unbroken military alliance of the Niitsitapi with the Cree-Assiniboine. Russell noted that in the surviving journals of the Hudson's Bay Company's inland travellers from the 1750s to the 1770s there was no evidence that the peaceful meetings of Cree with Archithinue were anything other than spontaneous. There were no prearrangements, at least none evident to these Euroamerican observers. Besides, the Archithinue and Cree often did not meet at all on the Saskatchewan River in the spring to trade.³ Regarding the trade relationship between the Niitsitapi and the Cree, there is an undeniable logic to the argument that they were trading partners. Each benefited from the relationship, at least before the Niitsitapi could trade directly at the source, with Euroamericans. Whether this permanent, peaceful relationship actually existed throughout the 18th century is another matter. The logic of an arrangement does not

² Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree*, 199.

³ *Ibid.*, 105.

mean that such a situation ever existed. Logic does not necessarily equate to concrete reality.

There is definitely ample evidence in surviving records of peaceful Archithinue-Cree interaction, and even evidence of some joint Niitsitapi-Cree military undertakings. It appears that in the 18th century the Shoshone were an enemy common to virtually every First Nations people in the Saskatchewan, certainly to the members of the Blackfoot alliance and to the Cree, as well. However, having an enemy in common does not necessarily make allies of those with the shared foe. In fact, Milloy himself provided evidence of one example of this three-sided warfare. He noted that in 1833 the Cree and the Niitsitapi were each the enemy of the Mandan, but that the Cree and Niitsitapi were at this same time at war with one another.⁴

The proponents of the hypothesis of the existence of the Cree-Niitsitapi military alliance seem selectively to pick out and identify the Niitsitapi in the Archithinue references in the documentary record. As described in Chapter Two, there were many instances noted of Archithinue being the enemies of the Cree, and of the Cree fearing Archithinue. Also noted in that chapter, the adherents of the hypothesis of a military alliance discounted these as possible references to the Niitsitapi. They interpreted them as references to the Shoshone, or, if geography eliminated the Shoshone option, then to the Gros Ventre or Sarcee. There is an element of circular reasoning to their examination of the evidence. The hypothesis is that Cree and Niitsitapi were allied. The Niitsitapi are Archithinue. The Cree are at war with unspecified Archithinue. These Archithinue cannot be the Niitsitapi, because the Niitsitapi are allies of the Cree, as the evidence clearly demonstrates. The documentary record of this time and place is so fragmentary

⁴ Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 65.

that I believe that it is impossible to be certain that such a military alliance ever existed. It may well have, but it would be safer to qualify any such assertion.

Brian Hayden wrote that just as friendship relations had to be reinforced among hunter-gatherer groups, so too did enmity.⁵ He argued that such groups needed to participate fairly frequently in low-casualty hostilities in order to be prepared for warfare on a larger scale, should conditions necessitate. This position would appear to demand that neighbours be either perpetual friends or perpetual foes. Such reliable and predictable scenarios did not materialize in the Saskatchewan; in fact, no such unbroken, consistent reinforcement was evident. While there were extended periods when peoples were either allied with or at odds with particular neighbours, these were inevitably interspersed with brief reversals of the established, normal relationships. Peter Fidler even noted joint Shoshone-Niitsitapi military actions in the early 1790s. From the 1780s, when the documentary record becomes considerably more complete, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to identify consistency in Niitsitapi-Cree relations. Warfare and friendship were intermixed, although in a given period one was probably the more prevalent condition. Throughout the 19th century there is absolutely no doubt that enmity and warfare were the norm between Niitsitapi and Cree, interspersed with brief respites of friendship, trade and peace. Hayden's theory of consistency of relationships does not hold up with the Niitsitapi and their neighbours. Although the search for pattern upon which to develop an explanation or theory is understandable, I do not think that the now-discarded theory/pattern of Mandelbaum is so easily replaced by one that asserts its opposite; the currently, widely accepted theory of ongoing, unbroken Cree-Niitsitapi alliance in the 18th century cannot unequivocally replace the disproved one of permanent

⁵ Hayden, *Archaeology*, 176-7.

Niitsitapi-Cree hostility.⁶ While such a military alliance may have existed, I do not believe that there is sufficient evidence to prove the hypothesis. There is just as much evidence disputing this patterned relationship, evidence suggesting that periods of friendship and cooperation were intermingled with periods of hostility.

Euroamerican traders of whatever stripe did not comprehend the tremendous cultural gaps that existed between themselves and First Nations peoples in the theory and practice of external relations. Euroamerican traders loudly and often declared their neutrality. Concepts of neutrality and isolationism appear to have been totally alien to the Niitsitapi and their First Nations neighbours. In daily life, there was the normal physical isolation from one's neighbours, but this was the result of geography, of populations scattered across a vast area. In this First Nations world you were either friend or foe. In the Euroamerican/European world you did not have to be friends to conduct business. Neutrality, during disputes between First Nations peoples, and in the supplying of firearms to them, was the watchword for the Euroamerican traders.

Radically different concepts of peace were displayed in these world views. To Euroamericans, peace could merely mean the absence of hostilities or of the tension caused by the expectation of their imminent outbreak. To the Niitsitapi and the surrounding First Nations peoples, peace was also, and essentially, the establishment and regular maintenance of friendship. The "peace pipe" of Hollywood movies should more appropriately be called, as it was by many fur traders, "the pipe of friendship" or the "friendly pipe."⁷ Without intertribal bonds of kinship and friendship, intertribal peace

⁶ Two examples of the wide-spread acceptance of this revisionist theory of friendly 18th-century Niitsitapi interaction with the Cree-Assiniboine may be found in: Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto, 1987), 27 and 56, and, Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 196.

⁷ For example, see Charles Mackenzie, "The Missouri Indians," in Masson, ed., *Les Bourgeois*, vol. 1, p. 346, and, York Factory post journal, 26 June 1717, B.239/a/3, reel

would not have been possible. Peace was relationship centred, not agreement centred.⁸ If peace existed, then friendly intercourse necessarily ensued, in many manifestations, such as those shown throughout this thesis: gift-giving, visiting, trading and adoption. In the words of Napoleon Chagnon, the options were “raid and trade.”⁹ There was no third option, other than trying to avoid being raided. A people did not always raid or trade consistently with the same neighbours, but raid/warfare or trade/friendship were the basics of external relations. Neutrality, the absence of meaningful, personal relationships, was not part of First Nations foreign affairs on the northern Plains. First Nations peoples did not simply partake in a cold, impersonal series of economic exchanges, either among themselves or with Euroamericans. Long-established protocols and ceremonies made trade a part of meaningful social and very personal interrelationships. A simple economic exchange, devoid of other meanings and entanglements, may have been what most Euroamerican companies sought, but it was not what they got.

Trade certainly provided definite material, economic, political and military benefits. But as James Dempsey wrote, trade “was a step in establishing and perpetuating social and political relations with individuals and groups.”¹⁰ Friendship could be an end in itself, and trade was often the means to attain or maintain that very personal relationship. Friendship entailed reciprocal obligations. A friend was supposed to respond to another friend’s needs, provided that in the exchange reasonably equitable benefits accrued to each. Friends interacted and traded with each other. One’s friends

1M154, HBCA. See also many other references in Chapter Two.

⁸ Richard T. Price and Cynthia Dunnigan, *Toward an Understanding of Aboriginal Peacemaking* (Victoria, 1995), 2-3.

⁹ Chagnon, “California Shell Money,” 11.

¹⁰ Dempsey, “Effects on Aboriginal Cultures,” 132.

did not supply arms to one's enemies. In establishing trade relations with First Nations peoples, Euroamericans were unknowingly accepting social and personal responsibilities. Trading guns to the enemies of a First Nations people was not the act of a friend. Professing an incomprehensible neutrality did not always suffice. Witness the events of the early 1790s on the Saskatchewan.

Establishing friendship, even kinship, resulted in many rewards, besides the obvious one of the friendship itself. Euroamericans certainly recognized the benefits and they sought to establish such relationships to augment the profits of their companies. The concerted efforts of the Hudson's Bay Company among the Piikani in the late 18th century achieved an attachment or personal bond, and then returns of trade to the company from the Piikani that was out of proportion to its trade elsewhere at the time. Interestingly, despite the pervasive attitude throughout the Hudson's Bay Company hierarchy during this period, James Isham was apparently disappointed that in the mid-1700s Anthony Henday had not accepted the offer of marriage to the daughter of an Archithinue leader, because Isham believed that the marriage would have considerably brightened the company's trade prospects.¹¹

Fictive and actual kinship relations did not necessarily override other interests at play in external relations, but they were positive, mitigating factors. Personal relationships established between individuals belonging to different First Nations groups could not guarantee that peace would last, in the face of such realities as revenge for past grievances or horse raiding for either the personal accumulation of wealth and status or for the needs of the First Nations group. Kinship relationships offered no absolute guarantees. In the early 1830s, as described in Chapter Six, "Jimmy Jock" Bird could not use his reputed influence with his Niitsitapi kin, because he was apparently seen by them

¹¹ Isham comment in Henday journal (in York Factory post journal series), fo. 41d., B.239/a/40, reel 1M156, HBCA.

for what he was at the time, an agent of Euroamerican fur trade companies, with the companies' interests foremost in his mind. And on top of that, after his return to the Hudson's Bay Company he represented the trade option that was so obviously of less benefit and convenience of the two then open to the Niitsitapi, especially to the Piikani. This all being said, extratribal kinship relations did play a significant role in external relations on the northern Plains. However, despite assertions by some that they superceded the established relations existing within individual tribes/peoples/nations, that was patently not the case. One need look no further than the history of warfare in the Northwest. The Piikani-Kainai strife of the early 1830s was an unprecedented aberration, and that was between two distinct First Nations peoples. Warfare with those external to one's tribe was commonplace; intratribal warfare was the incredibly rare exception to the rule. If extratribal kinship was a deciding factor, then why are there virtually an infinite number of examples of intertribal warfare, but hardly any of intratribal hostilities?

For millennia the peoples of the northern Plains had interacted and developed the mechanisms of social intercourse. Interlocking trade networks crossed the continent. Trade practices and customs had evolved along with these First Nations networks. These customs, practices and ceremonies had tremendous cultural, often religious, significance.¹² As described by Paul Thistle, and as detailed throughout this thesis, the most successful Euroamerican traders and trading companies adapted to and adopted the established First Nations norms.¹³ Even if the Saskatchewan traders did not comprehend the meaning of the rituals and ceremonies, they for the most part accepted the necessity of at least paying lip-service to them, of accepting the First Nations way of conducting the trade, no matter how much it might sometimes bristle.

¹² Harrod, *Renewing the World*, especially p.160.

¹³ Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations*.

The North West Company, the Hudson's Bay Company and the smaller concerns on the Saskatchewan did adapt themselves. They not only accepted First Nations protocols and practices, but they employed local First Nations individuals as post hunters, bought food from local First Nations groups and accepted advice on such matters as the location of posts. They were rewarded with largely symbiotic, consensual and friendly relations with the peoples of the Blackfoot alliance, apart from the notable exception of the violence of 1793 and 1794. There were, however, significant differences in company practices, which were largely attributable to their corporate make-up. Until the 1810s, the Hudson's Bay Company was staffed in the field by salaried servants and officers. They worked for a company with a royal charter, solid investment capital and a longstanding hierarchical structure. In sharp contrast, the North West Company was in reality a series of short-lived partnerships, with changing membership. Its principal officers in the field, its wintering partners, shared in the company profits, which were divvied up with an eye only on the immediate future. They were understandably more aggressive than their English counterparts and far less concerned with the long-term consequences of their actions on either their First Nations customers or the fur resource. This shortsightedness led to several disruptive North West Company practices, which included: a much freer use of alcohol in the trade, the importation of large numbers of Iroquois hunters and trappers to increase fur returns, and the Snake Country expeditions, large-scale company-operated trapping expeditions west of the Rockies. These last two undertakings violated the rules of the game as understood by local First Nations peoples, and to which the Hudson's Bay and North West companies had both previously adhered. As described in this thesis, there were negative consequences to these abrogations of accepted and acceptable external relations.

Euroamerican "traders" from the United States appear generally to have been oblivious to established protocols of First Nations' foreign affairs. American visitors to

the territory of the Blackfoot alliance totally ignored not only these practices and protocols, but basic common courtesy, and common sense. As a result, they were greeted with 25 years of virtually unbroken hostility and death. Most Americans were seen by the Niitsitapi and the Gros Ventre as what they were, uninvited interlopers and despoilers; they came primarily, if not exclusively, as trappers and hunters, not as traders. It was not British incitement, but American ignorance and apparent unwillingness to adapt that caused this long-standing animosity.

Despite the complete absence of apparently even one iota of evidence, American claims of British incitement have persisted from the period of the violence in the early 19th century, through the writings of scholars in the 20th century, and even into the 21st. The Niitsitapi and their allies needed no British-Canadian insights or involvement to recognize what was in their self-interest and then to take appropriate and necessary actions. Not only is there no evidence of purported British incitement, but just the contrary. Despite the intense competition in the Saskatchewan prior to 1821, the rival Euroamerican/White fur traders there were well aware that they shared a racial/ethnic solidarity. This understood racial superiority and perceived Anglo-Saxon sameness precluded the incitement by one group of fur traders of violence of any kind by First Nations peoples against any other Euroamericans, no matter how intense the business and personal rivalry might be. Violence once instigated could too easily come home to roost. There is no reason to assume that this same racial solidarity was not at play in the Saskatchewan when the Euroamerican rivals were Americans on the Missouri. The two competing Euroamerican groups were just not that far apart, and the same First Nations peoples, who had no real vested interest with either, visited their posts on each river.

It was not until refugees from the merger of the Hudson's Bay and North West companies joined ranks with American concerns on the Missouri that the American mind-set was altered. However, even then it took considerable time and the altered view was

not universally understood or shared. Kenneth McKenzie and his colleagues easily and safely established an American presence in the heart of Piikani territory, as soon as common courtesy and established protocols were observed by the newcomers. American traders were warmly welcomed into Niitsitapi country, just as the Niitsitapi had urged and welcomed British and Canadian establishments within their territory. Despite assertions to the contrary by several authors, all evidence indicates that the Niitsitapi did indeed want fur trade posts within their territory; they did not prefer post locations on the northern fringes of their country, on the North Saskatchewan River. And as soon as Americans had established a trading presence among the Niitsitapi, the natural, geographical advantages of their better location, on the Marias River deep within Piikani territory, and the much more navigable Missouri River gave them trade advantages to which the Hudson's Bay Company simply could not remotely adequately respond. The American fur traders then quickly and convincingly took the bulk of the Niitsitapi trade for themselves.

Niitsitapi beliefs that were recorded in the early 20th century were apparently concretely displayed and witnessed in action by early fur traders, such as Peter Fidler. For decades, Euroamericans, totally ignorant of the religious and cultural factors that shaped Niitsitapi behaviour with respect to the beaver, were frustrated by the failure of these peoples to bring in more of this, the Euroamericans' most prized trade item. There is little doubt that the service which the beaver provided in promoting a reliable water supply was recognized and valued by the First Nations peoples of the northern Plains. Among the Niitsitapi, taboos against killing beaver and rewards for protecting them probably to some extent originated from quite practical observations and concerns. However, rather than abandoning these beliefs as soon as the horse had given them greater range and mobility, the Niitsitapi retained these beliefs and, for the most part, acted in concert with them whenever possible. It was only after the wolf pelt had been

devalued by the companies to such an extent that it became a virtually worthless trade item, that the Piikani, in whose territory the greatest beaver supply was located, temporarily held their beliefs in abeyance and energetically took beaver, apparently on a nearly tribal-wide basis. National survival demanded such action. However, as Howard Harrod argued, Niitsitapi beliefs could be and were often renewed through rituals, ceremonies and practices.¹⁴ Though he did not specifically address the matter of beaver hunting, the history of the Piikani's trade in beaver strongly supports his position. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, the Piikani, in keeping with their long-held and still-held beliefs, stopped killing beaver and happily substituted buffalo robes as their primary item of trade.

There is a great deal of similarity between the practical, environmentally-determined origins of these Niitsitapi beliefs concerning the beaver and those parts of the Kashrut, Jewish dietary laws, which concern the eating of pork. The origins of these laws against eating pork probably originated in legitimate health concerns.¹⁵ The environmental/health reasons for not eating pork no longer exist, but pork is still not eaten by people of the Jewish faith. Likewise, even though the acquisition of the horse may have eliminated the environmental reasons for safeguarding the beaver, the Niitsitapi did not kill beaver in any numbers. But when forced to do so among increasingly well-armed neighbours and enemies, as soon as national survival could be assured by other means, the Piikani renewed their beliefs by the very practical demonstration of once again refraining from the killing of beaver. The trading of buffalo robes presented the Niitsitapi with an attractive alternative that did not conflict with their religious and cultural beliefs.

¹⁴ Harrod, *Renewing the World*.

¹⁵ "Kashrut: Jewish Dietary Laws." Online. Two separate pieces with identical titles, available at: <http://www.jewfaq.org/kashrut.htm>. and www.whit.org/shofar/html/kosher.html. 9 April 2001.

The robe trade, not itself without certain internal social impacts, was an almost perfect fit that allowed the Niitsitapi peoples to survive and to flourish.

My focus on the Niitsitapi, my striving to be thorough and meticulous in my research and my rigorous analysis of the material uncovered has resulted in this thesis contradicting and reinterpreting much of the work of my predecessors in the field. So much of the history of the Niitsitapi and of the Niitsitapi trade has been distorted by inadequate research and less-than-rigorous analysis. While my own interpretations of the Niitsitapi trade may themselves be challenged, I trust that I have helped to establish a basic framework of “facts” and events, to which future scholars can add and upon which future hypotheses may solidly be based. Like all of their First Nations neighbours, the Niitsitapi were rational beings, with particular sets of world views and cultural beliefs which influenced their attitudes and actions. They were neither illogical nor barbaric. The more that we know of their history, and of the history of their interactions with Euroamericans, the more that we can appreciate and debate this wonderful complexity.

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