

Mapping the Liberal Impulse: The Primacy of Cartography
in the Hudson's Bay Company's Imperial Project, 1749-
1857

by

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Abstract

This research project presents three case studies that illustrate the nature of the Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC) imperial project and how it was guided by liberal impulses and a desire to attain geographic knowledge. There is a specific focus on how spaces were mapped, conceptualized, and rationalized from native, to fur trade, and finally as settler space. Through an emphasis on the early surveying projects of the interior of Rupert's Land (1749-1805), the establishment of the Red River Settlement (1804-1820), and the 1857 British Parliamentary Inquiry of the HBC, this thesis argues that the desire to seek geographical knowledge was born from an enlightenment yearning to advance scientific understanding of geography through cartography, but was ultimately advanced by the HBC as a means to make the spaces of their imperium into ones that were ordered, secure, rational, and ultimately governable. Map-making projects both defined and ultimately brought to an end the HBC's imperium in Rupert's Land.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vi
1 Chapter : Introduction	1
2 Chapter : Map-making in the Middle Ground: The HBC and the Quest for Geographic Knowledge, 1749-1805	17
3 Chapter : HBC Retrenchment, the Founding of Red River, and the Mapping of Settler Space, 1804-1820.....	51
4 Chapter : Cartography, Geographical Sciences and the 1857 Parliamentary Inquiry into the Hudson's Bay Company	85
5 Chapter : Conclusion.....	116
Bibliography	119

List of Figures

Figure 1: <i>New Map of North America</i> . J. Robinson, 1744.....	22
Figure 2: <i>A Map Exhibiting all the New Discoveries of the Interior Parts of North America</i> . Aaron Arrowsmith, 1796.....	29
Figure 3: <i>Chart of Lakes and Rivers in North America</i> . Philip Turnor, 1792.....	34
Figure 4: <i>A Map of the Upper Missouri River Drawn by Ackomokki, a Blackfoot Chief</i> . Peter Fidler, 1802.....	40
Figure 5: <i>Map of the District of Assiniboia</i> . Anonymous, 1811.....	68
Figure 6: <i>Plan of the Settlement on Red River as it was June 1816</i> . Aaron Arrowsmith, 1816.....	71
Figure 7: <i>A Map Showing the Lands at Red River Conveyed by Indian Chiefs to the Earl of Selkirk</i> . Peter Fidler, 1817.....	72
Figure 8: <i>A Sketch a la Savage of the Manetoba District</i> . Peter Fidler, 1820.....	73

Chapter One: Introduction

Victory in the Seven Years War (1756-1763) gave Britain an expansive empire at a moment of immense developments in science and politics. Just as Britain found itself in possession of a vast imperium its scientists were making advancements in navigation, astronomy, exploration, and cartography. According to Stephen J. Hornsby in *Surveyors of Empire*, the resulting quest for geographic knowledge that manifested itself in the implementation of mapping projects from the South Pacific to Bengal led to new ways of conceptualizing spaces of empire.¹ Hornsby's study of the surveying projects of the eastern coast of North America in the years immediately preceding the Seven Years War is reflective of the spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities that, among other things, places surveyors and the world they strove to re-order at the forefront of the historical geography of British imperial projects.

Working within the history of political thought, Jennifer Pitts' *Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* explains how liberalism became increasingly a fundamental component of how empire was conceptualized and governed.² Despite the initial resistance to imperial expansion based on the Universalist's rationalization of all peoples, liberalism, particularly its utilitarian variety, began to articulate justifications for settler colonialism and the subjugation of indigenous peoples.

¹ Stephen J. Hornsby, *Surveyors of Empire: Samuel Holland, J. F. W. Des Barres, and the Making of the Atlantic Neptune* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2011), 4

² This thesis refers to liberalism and its variant utilitarianism as the philosophical belief advanced by late-Enlightenment thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill that government should be for the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Among other things, liberalism and utilitarianism concentrated on bringing about improvement through creating rational ordered spaces that would create the ideal environment for good governance, capitalism, and individual freedom.

Alongside the development of a liberal governing ideology, the rationalization of space through cartography was a fundamental component of Britain's justification of its empire. As a result, it can be argued that the British imperial project that emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was rooted in a quest for scientific knowledge and rationalization of spaces through liberal ideology, maps, and mapmaking.

Being directly influenced by both historical geography and the history of political thought, this thesis is essentially a retelling of the history of the Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC) imperial project in Rupert's Land from the implementation of surveying schemes that concentrated on the territory's interior during the late eighteenth century to the end of the Company's charter in 1859. More specifically this study concentrates on maps and map-making with a focus on three pivotal moments: the quest for geographic knowledge in the eighteenth century and the resulting mapping projects in Rupert' Land; the establishment of the Red River Colony (1811-1821) and the reconceptualization of significant parts of the territory into settler space; and, finally, the 1857 British parliamentary inquiry into the future of Rupert's Land that effectively brought to an end the HBC's imperial project. Turning away from traditional accounts of the exploration and opening up of the west by merchant adventurers and visionary governors such as David Thompson and George Simpson, attention will instead be placed on how the spaces of the fur trade were known and represented by those tasked with relaying this knowledge to their corporate masters in London. In this respect, maps and their makers become the central actors in this process. The maps studied reflect the worldviews of the surveyors, cartographers, and corporate officials operating both in Rupert's Land and London. How these views shifted over time as the British imperial

project as a whole become more defined were just as important to the development of Rupert's Land and the spread of the fur trade as the daily machinations of the trader and the volume of goods traded.

As we shall see, the HBC's quest for geographic knowledge was rooted in the wider British imperial project of the era that became increasingly defined by liberalism and guided by a scientific cartographic gaze.³ By retelling the story of the HBC's struggle for mastery of Rupert's Land with the map and the mapmaker as primary agents, the thesis demonstrates how Rupert's Land's geopolitical identity underwent some identifiable change over time. It was first conceptualized on the map as a barren hinterland in the late eighteenth century, then arduously rationalized by company officials and surveyors into governable space, and, finally, remade cartographically as settler space by the mid-nineteenth century. The historical development of the HBC's imperial project was thus bound up with the extent to which geographic knowledge was received and understood.

Historians and geographers have long recognized the significance of maps. Numerous studies of cartographic convention have been written with a particular emphasis placed on the evolution of map-making techniques. The map's historical significance was measured based on how well it reflected geographic realists and were used primarily as objective visual depictions of historical change. However, recent scholarship had problematized this and historians and geographers have recognized how

³ Theodore Binnema's recently-published *Enlightened Zeal: The HBC and Scientific Networks, 1670-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), argues that the HBC increasingly embraced the quest for scientific knowledge as a way of bolstering its reputation and securing its legitimacy. While this thesis touches on similar themes, Binnema's study is too recent for incorporation into my thesis.

maps are in fact cultural texts that were part of, rather than merely reflections of historical events in general and imperial projects in particular.⁴

The HBC's imperial project has been the subject of recent historical scholarship influenced by the theoretical frameworks advanced by the spatial turn. Daniel W. Clayton in *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* concentrates on the local encounters between European explorers and colonizers on Vancouver Island with indigenous peoples in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, spaces where the HBC was later tasked with exploring and colonizing. The main emphasis of this study is on agency and the construction of meaning by both sides in the colonial contact zone. Significant attention is placed on the methods of representation used by the early explorers and later by the HBC to rationalize the space of Vancouver Island into one that was part of the British imperium. In this sense the ledger book and the map become primary agents in the imperial fashioning of Vancouver Island.⁵ The cadastral mapping of the space marked its official inscription as an imperial space, making it a fundamental component of British sovereignty in the area. Described by Clayton as "imperial reterritorialization," it was a process that was made all the more crucial with the intense rivalry with Spanish, Russian and American interests that characterized the nineteenth century mapping projects. Although Vancouver Island falls beyond the scope of my thesis (as it was not part of Rupert's Land), Clayton's emphasis on the methods of

⁴ John Brian Harley, "New England Cartography and the Native Americans," in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, Paul Laxton ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2001), 171-172. Harley's work has often been attributed as foundational to the spatial turn in the humanities. After his death in 1991 Paul Laxton compiled his most well-known works into the collection *The New Nature of Maps*. The multi-volume (volumes 4-6 forthcoming) *History of Cartography* project established by the University of Wisconsin and under the current editorship of geographer Matthew Edney was co-founded by Harley and continues as a legacy project in his honour.

⁵ Daniel W. Clayton, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), xv-xvi

representation, conceptualization, and rationalization of space through cartography provide a theoretical framework and methodology for my study of the HBC's mapping projects in Rupert's Land and their wider imperial connotations.

The linguistic and spatial turns in the humanities have led to a fundamental rethinking of the role of space and place in historiography and of the nature of maps and map-making. Historical and cultural geographers such as Denis Wood, Brian Harley, and Matthew Edney have mostly rejected traditional empiricist and positivist interpretations of maps and map-making. Instead they "deconstruct the map", revealing that far from being transparent and objective, maps are instead objects of material culture that reflected contemporary cultural trends and political ideologies and which were often used as sources of juridical power. It is argued that maps are historically significant since they often reflected imagined places as much as spatial realities. Essentially maps were expressions of anticipation of political power, of making space into "territory". As a result, for these scholars maps must be regarded historically as political and cultural technologies. In this sense maps both represented and helped drive the process of imperial expansion.

In *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre, the preeminent theorist on the critical theory of space and place described the true complexity of the new nature of maps. Essentially Lefebvre argues that space is a social construct. States and other agencies wielding power aim to control spaces. Before spaces can be governed they must be rationalized, structured, and planned. Cartography was thus employed by the state to gain knowledge over the territories in its possession.⁶ Thus the map is the visual embodiment

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 85.

of the projection of power over space. A particular concern of his was the problematization of the relationship between map and territory and the assertion that the map comes before the territory. Lefebvre asks: “how many maps, in the descriptive and geographical sense, might be needed to deal...with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents?” He answers by arguing that a map cannot be read through conventional means, instead maps must be placed in their proper context because what they represent are subject to change. For Lefebvre, the spaces on the map are produced, not merely reflected.⁷ In the archive the map is no longer an objective source of knowledge for the historian, but instead are reflections of the subjectivities in which they were produced and used.

In *The Power of Maps*, Denis Wood argues that early-modern subjectivities for map-making were associated with the rise of capitalism, the state, and empire. Despite what the linguistic turn and the writings of Lefebvre did to challenge the traditional account of the uses of maps, Wood argues that there remains a large cohort of historians of cartography that deny that the map is socially constructed. Those scholars situate cartography into a history of progress, from crude error-filled beginnings to more sophisticated and accurate representations of space-as-it-really-is. In direct contrast, Wood argues that maps have historically represented the accumulation of the thought process and labour of the past.⁸ They are subjective as they were produced to represent existing power structures. Cartographers were influenced either directly or indirectly to produce maps that represented imagined geographies and spatial power structures. To illustrate this point he turns to the example of the cartography of early colonial New

⁷ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 84-85.

⁸ Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 45-6

England. He argues that English cartographers often left blank spaces on the map but Native Americans did not do this when producing maps for the colonizers. This according to Wood represents the inherent power structures of colonialism. The blank space represents territory to be filled in not left alone, demonstrating not a quest for the objective truth, but a desire to control more space.

In “New England Cartography,” Harley shifted his attention away from imagining colonial places through cartography and he outlines how maps were central to the displacement of indigenous peoples and the legitimatization of colonial rule. John Smith’s 1616 map was used as the founding document of New England. This name was chosen both to exert sovereignty in the face of competition from the French and Spanish and to seek domestic backers for the colonial project. Harley writes that Native place-names were collected by Smith but were subsequently replaced with English ones. With this action it was determined that the land was to be English not Native.⁹ This map set a precedent of eradicating indigenous place names in cartography. British colonial expansion was given its ideological underpinning in John Locke’s assertion that ‘unimproved land’ is ripe for the taking by colonists who were expected to bring order to the perceived dark and empty wilderness. Maps of New England were the visual embodiments of this ideology, giving psychological support to the notion of there being limitless land for the taking. The absence of indigenous place names gave the illusion that the land was uninhabited, serving in part to quell fears of indigenous attack and to convince settlers to move inland. In this sense maps became primary tools in the exercise of juridical power over the indigenous and the colonists. In addition to this it is clear that

⁹ John Brian Harley, “New England Cartography and the Native Americans,” 180.

maps were fundamental to the establishment of charters and land grants to the extent that they could not be drafted if no maps had been available.¹⁰ Finally, there was what Harley describes as a growing “map consciousness” among New England colonial leaders. He points to the example of the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony ruling in 1641 that every new settlement had to have its boundaries surveyed and recorded in an official plan. As a result, the authority of maps was added to the authority of legal treatises, histories, and the Bible in justifying the appropriation of indigenous land for resettlement.¹¹

Geographer Matthew Edney in *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India*, further develops Harley’s deduction of maps. He argues that the standardization of space through new mapping methods developed in the eighteenth century such as triangulation expanded imperial power. In the context of the Enlightenment the perceived irrational world with its myriad of places was on paper turned into an ordered collection of spaces through cartography. Edney argues that the knowledge that the surveying of India generated was more of the inherent power relations between the East India Company and the conquered peoples than of the topography.¹² Whatever the intentions of the surveyors and the cartographers their practice was governed by the existing power structures that make up the dynamics of imperial conquest and rule. Most importantly Edney argues is that it was the British belief that they were creating the perfect map of the subcontinent that enabled them to rule it.¹³ Essentially Edney, like Harley argues that the map created India as an object of rule. As

¹⁰ Ibid., 192.

¹¹ Harley, “New England Cartography and the Native Americans,” 187-88

¹² Matthew Edney *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 17-18.

¹³ Ibid., 24-25.

in New England, the illusion of a rational space made it governable. Furthermore, employing cartography as an objective science helped the British distinguish themselves from the conquered as they equated map-making with progress and civilization in contrast to the ‘despotic and mystic’ Orient. As a result, maps and map-making were some of the foundations that the East India Company state was built upon.¹⁴ Therefore maps in the colonial context are demonstrated to be sources of power-knowledge.

What the writings of these geographers demonstrate is that maps and map-making must be regarded as central actors in the formation of discourses of imagined geographies and the politics of controlling space. Cultural geographers have argued that space has to be first visualized and ordered before it can be governed. Spaces are constructed socially and cartography is the primary means of production. The linguistic turn brought about a new thinking of the nature of maps, re-conceptualizing them as objects of material culture. The spatial turn brought studies of space and place to the forefront of many disciplines in the humanities. In the context of the historiography of colonialism maps have increasingly been regarded as reflections of power structures and imagined geographies. The struggle for empire occurred on the ground in the form of military conquest and the resettlement of territory. It was justified through charters and statute, debated and conceptualized through philosophy. But most importantly historians must understand that empire was visualized and planned through cartography. Maps are historically significant since they represent the struggle for empire on paper, not as objective and transparent reflections of spatial realities but as subjective agents in imagining and implementing imperial expansion.

¹⁴ Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, 34.

Historians have generally regarded the introduction of European cartographical practice into Rupert's Land as part of the evolution of company rule in general, and a reflection of the increase in HBC power in particular, with the end result being the advancement of 'scientific knowledge' of the vast geography.¹⁵ What kinds of histories might be possible, however, if we were to think more explicitly about maps-as-technologies of rule? This is what this thesis asks. HBC mapping during this period was not merely a reflection of the 'discoveries' of merchant adventurer explores. Instead, it was endemic of the systematic process of the supplementing, subverting, and finally silencing of indigenous voices and geographical knowledge that is characteristic of the process of transforming indigenous space into European envisioned, administered, and later settled space.

The most extensive study of HBC cartography is Richard Ruggles's *A Country So Interesting: The HBC and Two Centuries of Mapping*. While being an invaluable source for a research project of this nature, Ruggles's study is essentially a history of cartography as a science, rather than a cultural history of mapping informed by the spatial turn. Therefore, my work is instead more widely influenced by recent studies on Rupert's Land cartography such as Barbara Belyea's *Dark Storm Moving West*. Her work has given agency to the surveyor and the map produced. Particular emphasis is placed on Peter Fidler the chief HBC surveyor during its period of expansion (1780-1820) and how he portrayed the native spaces he encountered through cartography. Belyea argues that his maps were unique in how they blended indigenous and European cartographic conventions.

¹⁵ Richard I. Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting: The HBC and Two Centuries of Mapping* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001) is a good example of this interpretation of HBC mapping projects.

When studying maps in the context of exploring and ‘discovering’ native space by Europeans, the real question, as Barbara Belyea argues, is not of a cartographic accuracy following universal standards in measurement, but “of communication from one set of culture-specific measurements to another.”¹⁶ This communication is in the form of a process of translating spatial knowledge. More specifically with Europeans being the receivers of spatial knowledge, the translation of indigenous cartography was characterized by an attempt to reconcile it with equivalent cartographic conventions. In this sense, the most ‘accurate’ and useful maps were those that successfully negotiated the two cartographic conventions: the indigenous emphasis on practicality and way finding with the Euro-American drive to provide scientific representations of the topography.

In her study, Belyea emphasizes the agency demonstrated by indigenous peoples in the map-making project. Fidler was tasked with receiving and translating their geographic knowledge through cartography, which was in turn often misunderstood by cartographers such as Aaron Arrowsmith and explorers such as Lewis and Clark.¹⁷ Belyea concentrates on how Fidler operated within a local, indigenous mapping culture. In contrast, this thesis expands the study of the rationalizing of space through cartography by emphasizing the extent to which a European worldview was being imposed on the landscape, a process that was driven by developments in London within the context of the immense changes in the nature of Britain’s imperial project in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries. As a result, the process in which Fidler received geographic

¹⁶ Barbara Belyea, “Amerindian Maps: The Explorer as Translator,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 18 (1992), 270.

¹⁷ Barbara Belyea, *Dark Storm Moving West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 73.

knowledge from indigenous peoples and then conveyed it to his superiors is situated in this thesis as an element of a wider historical process of rationalizing and re-ordering space through cartography that was a main characteristic of the imperial project. Consequently, Fidler's role in the map-making project moves beyond that of negotiating and rationalizing native space to include the HBC's struggle to transform Rupert's Land into a governable space in the midst of conflict with corporate rivals in the early nineteenth century.

The founding of the Red River Colony in 1811 marked a significant turning point in the HBC imperial project. The colony's founder Lord Selkirk had convinced the Company's Board of Governors that the introduction of settlement schemes into Rupert's Land would introduce a sense of permanency to the Company's presence, which in the process marked Rupert's Land's transition to governable space. With the introduction of settler colonialism, the role of surveyors such as Peter Fidler became even more prominent. New geographic knowledge was sought, as attention shifted to where was best to establish settlements. Still being primarily concerned with preserving the fur trade, the introduction and mapping of settler space led to the emergence of a new conception of the geography of Rupert's Land that culminated in the 1857 British parliamentary inquiry into the HBC and the final transition of Rupert's Land from fur trade space to settler space.

The historiography of the British Empire often describes the mid-nineteenth century as a period in which fundamental changes took place regarding how the British envisioned and governed the empire. The ascendancy of liberalism in British political culture led to new practices of political economy and increased interest in a civilizing

mission of moral and scientific improvement. The trading monopolies like the HBC and the East India Company were increasingly regarded as antiquated and corrupt. The British Empire underwent a period of reform as utilitarian and free trade liberals embraced advances in science and economics to bring about improvement to both the empire's subjects and territory. It was in this context that the HBC's imperium in Rupert's Land was brought under scrutiny by the British parliament.

Despite its implications for the future of the HBC and the wider history of Canada, the 1857 Parliamentary Inquiry into the HBC has received scant attention by historians. Doug Owrām in *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West* portrays the inquiry not as a pivotal moment in the history of Rupert's Land, but as a sideshow in what was essentially a Canadian-based expansionist movement.¹⁸ Owrām does concentrate on the quest for geographic knowledge and Upper Canada's conceptualization of Rupert's Land as settler space, such as Palliser's Triangle and the perception of a "fertile belt". Writing before the spatial turn began exercising such an influence on histories of colonialism and empire, Owrām emphasized the role of geographical knowledge making and representation as essential to the national politics of "expansion." Most importantly, Owrām demonstrated that Palliser's exploration of and reporting on Rupert's Land helped re-conceptualize it into settler space with his emphasis on agricultural suitability. However, little attention is paid to how the transformation of Rupert's Land from fur trade to settler space was part of a wider British imperial project.¹⁹ By concentrating on the 1857 parliamentary inquiry into the HBC and its

¹⁸ Doug Owrām, *Promise of Eden*, 67-8.

¹⁹ Owrām did address this gap in his study of a later period in Canadian colonial history, *Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada, 1880-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) but he did not revise *Promise of Eden* when it was re-printed in 1992.

Charter, this thesis expands Owsram's study by emphasizing how maps and map-making were at the forefront of the debate over the future of Rupert's Land by the parliamentarians at Westminster. How the maps were produced and consumed directly influenced their view of the geography and ultimately led to Rupert's Land's rationalization as settler space.

This research project will present three case studies that illustrate the nature of the HBC's imperial project and how it was guided by both liberal impulses and a desire to attain geographic knowledge with particular attention paid to how spaces were mapped, conceptualized, and rationalized from indigenous, to fur trade, and finally as settler space. This desire to seek geographical knowledge was born out of the Enlightenment yearning to advance scientific understanding of geography through cartography, but was ultimately advanced by the HBC as a means to make the spaces of their imperium into ones that were ordered, secure, rational, and ultimately governable. Map-making projects both defined and ultimately brought to an end the HBC's imperium in Rupert's Land.

Chapter Two, entitled "Map-making in the Middle Ground: The HBC and the Quest for Geographic "Knowledge" 1749-1805" concentrates on how the British imperial project that emerged in the late eighteenth century was guided by a desire to receive geographic knowledge of the hitherto 'unknown' spaces under imperial control. While initially reluctant to allow the study of the interior of Rupert's Land for fear that it would endanger their monopoly, the HBC increasingly used mapping projects to justify their presence in the region. However, success ultimately relied on the work of surveyors such as Peter Fidler rather than cartographers such as Aaron Arrowsmith as it was the surveyor on the ground rather than the mapmaker in the drafting room who was tasked with

translating geographic knowledge received from indigenous sources. The end result was an intricate system of hybrid mapping that reflected both the HBC's and the wider cartographical community's desire to discover new territory, and the imposition of their worldview on the landscape.

Chapter Three, "HBC Retrenchment, the Founding of Red River, and the Mapping of Settler Space, 1804-1820" is a study of the HBC's efforts to impose order on the landscape, a process that redefined their imperial project to include settlement schemes. While the late eighteenth century witnessed the HBC employing surveyors to map out the interior of Rupert's Land in order to better understand the spaces of their imperium, the early nineteenth century saw the HBC's preoccupation with making Rupert' Land into a governable space. Of primary concern was the expansion of the trading operations of the North West Company (NWC) who essentially possessed greater knowledge of Rupert's Land. The HBC's mapping projects remained primarily concerned with surveying the interior but a significant component of the plan advanced by Lord Selkirk to rationalize Rupert's Land into governable space relied on the introduction of settlement schemes along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. New questions surrounding the topography's suitability for settlement entered the discourse and surveyors such as Peter Fidler began to conceive of the landscape as being a settler space. The imposition of order and the introduction of settlement to the landscape were informed by the ascendant tenets of liberal ideology that at this point was beginning to define the essence of the British imperial project. Lord Selkirk was a liberal imperialist who believed that colonization would ensure Company control over Rupert's Land. How these spaces were reconceptualised to fit this new liberal vision is the main emphasis of this case study.

Chapter Four, “Cartography, Geographical Sciences and the 1857 Parliamentary Inquiry into the Hudson’s Bay Company” is primarily a case study of the proceedings of the 1857 British Parliamentary Select Committee that was tasked with examining the HBC’s operations and the extent to which it reconceptualised Rupert’s Land into a settler space. As with the founding of the Red River Colony in 1811, the British imperial project was increasingly defined by liberalism. In the age of free trade, the HBC was increasingly seen as antiquated, and was despite Red River, generally regarded to be hostile to colonization, and subject to criticism of both its business practises and treatment of indigenous peoples. The Inquiry occurred at the same time that the East India Company’s monopoly and its gross mismanagement of the Indian subcontinent and its perceived hostility to liberal ideals of benevolent rule and free trade contributed to a climate of mistrust aimed at trading companies. However, as my study of the Inquiry demonstrates, what ultimately proved fatal to the HBC’s cause was the perception that Rupert’s Land was suitable for settlement. Witnesses testified that in Rupert’s Land vast swaths of fertile land could be found and echoing past concerns suggested that the HBC was either ignorant of this or attempting to hide the ‘truth’ out of fear it would endanger their monopoly. A significant proportion of the Inquiry’s proceedings were spent on discussing these themes and ultimately Rupert’s Land was reconceptualised as a settler space in the minds of the Committee, consequently marking the end of the HBC’s monopoly and Rupert’s Land’s conforming to the new liberal British imperial project.

Chapter Two: Map-making in the Middle Ground: The HBC and the Quest for Geographic Knowledge, 1749-1805

The late eighteenth century marked a rapid expansion of the British Empire. This was most vividly represented not through the establishment of settler colonies but in the quest for geographic “knowledge” of the territories of the British imperium, and Rupert’s Land was no exception. The exploits of the explorers who voyaged across oceans and continents along with the maps they produced are historically well known. But, in what context were late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century maps of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s (hereafter HBC) imperium in Rupert’s Land produced? How was geographic knowledge produced by surveyor-explorers and cartographers steeped in (mis)translation? Finally, to what extent did maps of fur trade spaces represent a British imperial culture that was characterized by imagined geographies of geographic speculation and landscapes of anticipation?

Maps are essentially cultural texts. In the case of the mapping of “native spaces” by the HBC, they represent the culture of the fur trade, the wider quest for geographic knowledge, and the gradual evolution of how the Company imagined and rationalized their imperium in Rupert’s Land. More specifically, HBC surveyor-explorer Peter Fidler was both a reflection and an expression of a “middle ground” that characterized the early fur trade. In their wider political context, while being presentations of the fur trade in which they were produced, Fidler’s maps were misread and misused by cartographers operating within a culture that valued the rationalization of imperial spaces and was guided by notions of imagined geographies in a quest for geographic knowledge.

This chapter begins by outlining the context in which HBC cartography was produced and consumed through a discussion of the public culture of maps in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It continues by arguing that the work of cartographers such as Aaron Arrowsmith, while striving for scientific accuracy, was ultimately a reflection of anticipation and rationalization. The chapter then concentrates on HBC mapping projects that occurred within the context of the middle ground and the desire to gain knowledge of native spaces that were crucial to counter the Company's competitors. It concludes with a discussion about how indigenous voices were silenced through the cartography they helped produce as the middle ground was mapped and then subverted in the quest for geographic knowledge in the context of imperial expansion.

In "New England Cartography and the Native Americans," historical geographer Brian Harley ponders the extent to which indigenous people helped guide the map-making process. He argues that the maps produced in the early colonial period were based on spatial knowledge that was mostly conveyed to the settlers by Natives. However, this sharing of geographical knowledge was not represented on the map. For cultural historians, maps are regarded as classic forms of power-knowledge and are a fundamental component of the colonial discourses that have displaced Native North Americans.¹ Indigenous peoples have been largely excluded from the maps produced by any colonial society or enterprise despite the fact that they played a significant role in the production of the first maps of the North American colonies made by English settlers. In order to fully understand this, historians must accept the existence of an indigenous cartographical convention within settler-colonial cultures, and to attempt to 'reconstruct'

¹ J. B. Harley, "New England Cartography and the Native Americans," in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, J. B. Harley, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 170.

indigenous contributions to the maps of North America that Europeans produced in their distinct style. Harley provides numerous examples of well-known maps of colonial North America being essentially depictions of indigenous spatial knowledge by European cartographers, even though many, such as John Foster's *Map of New England* (1677) were in fact mistranslations of indigenous spatial knowledge. Therefore, maps produced in colonial contact zones have an "inter-textual character," that represents mostly failed attempts at reconciling two fundamentally distinct mapping practices and cultures.²

Approaching indigenous-settler relations from a different historiographical perspective, Richard White calls our attention to the cultures and geographies of exchange. Misunderstanding characterized these relationships, but through creativity a new set of meanings and practices emerged that existed between the two cultures.³ According to White, this produced a middle ground, which he defines as the "place in between; between cultures, empires, and in between peoples and the non-state world of villages."⁴ The cartographical conventions and maps that were produced by settler cultures and fur trade enterprises in the Red River district can also be understood as the direct embodiment of this middle ground. As this chapter argues, these cartographic encounters were characterized by an exchange of ideas, a blending of conventions, and mutual dependency. Surveyor-explorers both received and translated Native maps and were often immersed in mapping cultures they initially did not understand. Maps produced by settler societies were often complete misinterpretations of Native space and spatial knowledge, but they were nonetheless the by-product of exchanges with local

² Harley, "New England Cartography," 175.

³ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), X.

⁴ Ibid.

indigenous and Metis peoples. Indeed, how these maps were produced and how those outside this state of affairs read them, is a microcosm of the changing state of native-new-comer relations in this era of imperial expansion.

The minimal level of knowledge held by Europeans of the spaces under HBC administration was dependent almost exclusively on that shared by indigenous peoples. With the lack of available accurate maps, charts, and surveys, fur traders had to rely on indigenous cartography to navigate this vast space and fill in the blanks on their maps. Before the mapping projects undertaken by David Thompson, Philip Turnor, Samuel Hearne, and Peter Fidler, depictions of Rupert's Land in European cartography was for the most part relegated to the coastlines of Hudson's Bay and the spaces that encompassed the search for the fabled Northwest Passage. Any knowledge of the land held by the European merchant explorers was until this point learned from indigenous traders, forming part of the state of mutual dependency that characterized the early fur trade. Maps had essentially negotiated indigenous cultural landscapes encountered by Europeans, and then became tools for the introduction of hegemonic power.

Although not initially involved in settler-colonial schemes, the HBC's mapping projects demonstrate both how maps and map-making drove the process of imperial expansion, and how surveyor-explorers attempted to translate indigenous spatial knowledge and cartographical convention. At the time of the HBC's Charter in 1670, Rupert's Land was essentially *terra incognita* to Europeans. In the century that followed, only a few hundred fur traders lived along the vast coast of Hudson Bay and fewer still travelled into the interior of the Company's vast imperium. HBC surveyor-explorers could gain geographic information that they perceived to be accurate only by finding

European equivalents for the indigenous maps. As a result, they were receivers of knowledge and occupied a middle ground between indigenous and European mapping cultures as they speculated on what the maps meant to them. However, as Barbara Belyea argues in *Dark Storm Moving West*, most explorers were completely ignorant about the characteristics of the Native spaces they encountered, and attempted to structure knowledge from indigenous sources into their own ways of cataloguing data rather than in the native ways of seeing and experiencing.⁵

In the eighteenth century, very little geographic information was relayed to Britain due to the lack of inland expeditions and the HBC's governors' refusal to share geographic information for fear their competitors could use it against them. Nevertheless this lack of geographic information being conveyed to Britain created an atmosphere of suspicion and only fuelled the desire to acquire geographic knowledge. Discussions surrounding the geography of Rupert's Land became characterized by speculation and anticipation. An example of the extent of European knowledge of Rupert's Land is the 1744 *New Map of North America* (Figure 1).⁶ This map was published in HBC critic Arthur Dobb's 1744 book *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay in the North-West Part of America*.⁷ This map and the book in which it appeared provide an

⁵ Barbara Belyea, *Dark Storm Moving West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 47-49.

⁶ Joseph La France. *A New Map of North America from the Latitude of 40 to 68 Degrees. Including the late discoveries made on board the Furnace Bomb Ketch in 1742. And the Western rivers lakes falling into Nelson River in Hudson's Bay, as described by Joseph la France a French Canadese Indian, who travelled thro those countries and lakes for 3 years from 1739 to 1742* (London: J. Robinson), [map], scale not given, in the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, JCB Map Collection. Reference # D744D632a.

⁷ The full title being, *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay in the North- West Part of America: Containing a Description of their Soil and their Methods of Commerce, &c. Shewing the Benefit to be made by settling Colonies, and opening a Trade in These parts; whereby the French will be deprived in great Measure of their Trafick in Furs, and the Communication between Canada and Mississippi be cut oz. The whole intended to shew the great Possibility of a North- West Passage, so long desired; and which (if discovered) would be of highest Advantage to these Kingdoms.*

important insight into the public culture of HBC cartography and the context in which eighteenth century surveyor-explorers of Rupert's Land operated.

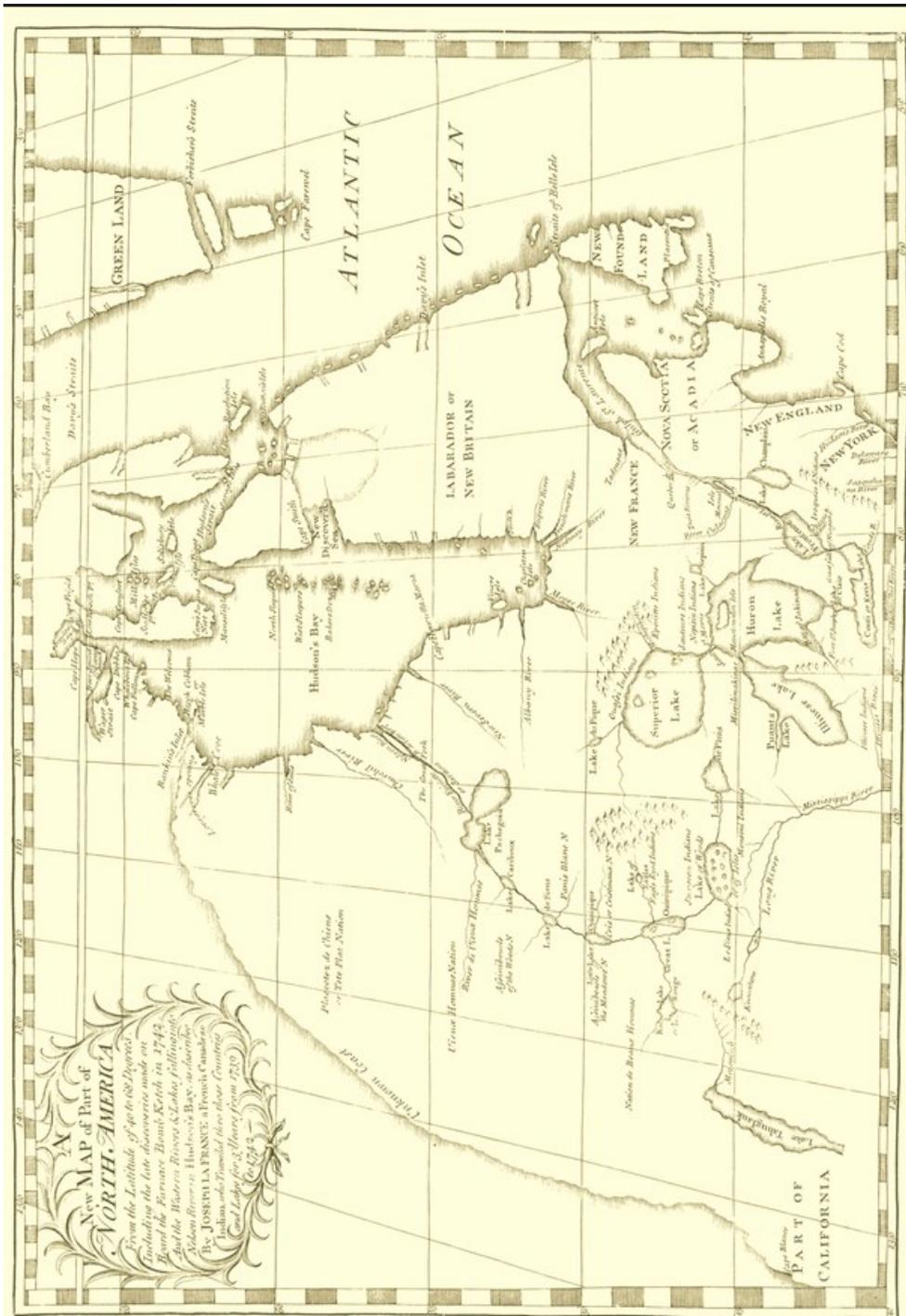


Figure 1: New Map of North America. J. Robinson, 1744.

Source: The John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

The *New Map of North America* and Dobbs' *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay* provided one of first public comprehensive geographic descriptions of Rupert's Land. While considered representations of geographic realities they actually represented Rupert's Land as a landscape of anticipation. The map with its vast swaths of blank space reflected both a dearth of knowledge and a desire to acquire it. The network of south flowing rivers and large lakes depicted on the map were more reflections of what contemporaries assumed ought to be there rather than geographic realities observed and documented for the map's cartographers. These anticipations can be understood when we put the map back into the context in which it was made and circulated. By the mid-eighteenth century, the HBC was the subject of increasing criticism. Joseph Robson in his celebrated *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay* described the Company as being "asleep at the edge of a frozen sea."⁸ While content to remain at the shore and have Natives travel to the posts to conduct trade, the Company was either unwilling or unable to venture inland to counter the expansion of French trading operations. As a result little exploration of the interior of Rupert's Land was undertaken making the Company the subject of public attack by Robson, Dobbs and others who argued that the HBC was squandering opportunities to spread colonization and expand geographic knowledge.⁹ There had been no major European expedition inland from the bay since 1690 and most geographic knowledge received by the HBC came from local indigenous peoples with whom they traded.

⁸ His remarks were for the most part accurate, as the Company was content with remaining at its bay side posts receiving furs from the Natives. Joseph Robson, *An Account of six years residence in Hudson's Bay, from 1773-1736, and 1744 to 1747* (London, 1752), 6.

⁹ D.W. Moodie, "Science and Reality: Arthur Dobbs and the Eighteenth Century Representation of Rupert's Land," *Journal of Historical Geography* 2 (1976), 294.

The HBC's culture of secrecy and its lack of geographical knowledge created an environment of speculation and hostility. Dobbs and his supporters accused the Company of doing little to discover the location of the Northwest Passage (that he was convinced existed) and hiding the true extent of the area's suitability for agriculture and colonization.¹⁰ In his book Dobbs imagined Rupert's Land to be both the location of the Northwest Passage and containing a vast expanse of fertile land.¹¹ Any view to the contrary was the product of deception by the HBC who Dobbs argued sought to protect their monopoly since "to deter others from trading there, or making settlement, conceal all the advantages to be made in that country."¹² This imagined geography contained an abundance of lakes and rivers with large expanses of forests. There was both little to no mention of the indigenous peoples or the presence of grassland. The region was in effect described as the perfect settler space, with fertile soil, and a small indigenous population. His book and the map published in it had omitted their presence because it did not suit the imagined geography he anticipated. It was a view shared by others, notably Henry Ellis who, in his book *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay* (1748), criticized the HBC's failure to introduce permanent white agricultural settlement to Rupert's Land, insisting "[t]he Country is much warmer and fruitful within land."¹³ Since the HBC did not share its geographic knowledge with the public, discourses surrounding the geography of Rupert's Land became shaped by the Company's opponents, and were rooted in speculation and

¹⁰ Moodie, "Science and Reality," 297.

¹¹ Arthur Dobbs, *An account of the countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay in the north-west part of America* (London 1744), 46-7.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ Henry Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay by the Dobbs Galley and California, in the years 1746 and 1747 for discovering a North-West Passage* (London 1748), 152, 170. Quoted in D.W. Moodie, 301.

imagination. It was in this context that the British House of Commons called an inquiry into the Company's affairs in 1749.

The 1749 Inquiry into the State of the HBC was directly influenced by the culture of speculation advanced by Company critics such as Dobbs and merchants and politicians advocating for free trade and colonial expansion. The majority of witnesses, most of whom were former HBC employees, were critical of the Company's actions in Rupert's Land. Echoing Robson's "asleep next to a frozen sea" comments, the witnesses criticized what they regarded was the Company's lack of enthusiasm for exploration and colonization. The HBC for their part did little to mitigate their unpopularity, refusing to send witnesses to testify at the committee. Rather than being contemptuous of Parliament, they were afraid of compromising their monopoly by sharing information with committee members.¹⁴ The Company, however, contributed to the public debate by publishing a pamphlet outlining their position on Rupert's Land and distributing it to the Committee for their deliberations.¹⁵

The concise pamphlet summarized the Company's exploration projects and repudiated any prospect of establishing settlement schemes. The Company argued that they successfully kept the French from trading into Hudson's Bay at considerable corporate expense and they had in fact sent out several expeditions in search of the Northwest Passage and made a point of enquiring of its whereabouts with the Native traders, to no avail.¹⁶ The Company presented their own imagined geography to directly repudiate speculation made by witnesses such as former employees Richard White and

¹⁴ Moodie, "Science and Reality," 303.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁶ Governor and Committee of the Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay, *The Case of the Hudson's Bay Company* (London: Hudson's Bay Company, 1749).

John Hayter regarding suitability for agriculture.¹⁷ In contrast to Dobbs' imagined geography the Company argued that Rupert's Land was completely unsuitable for agriculture and colonization. There was "snow for three parts of the year," permafrost, and chilling nights in the middle of summer were commonplace. Furthermore, the "country is so infertile...that a great part of provisions have to be imported from England." Local indigenous peoples were depicted as a starving and miserable people. There was no Eden or *terra nullius*; Rupert's Land was depicted as a *terra horribilis*, its only value being to extract as much profit as possible from the fur trade.

Despite the HBC's efforts, the Select Committee resolved that the region inland from the bay was suited for settlement, but, much to the pleasure of the Company, they also decided that the Company was allowed to continue its policies. The vision of a vast expanse of settlement in Rupert's Land was present, but the resolve to carry it out was not. Any expansion of trading activities or settlement schemes could only be carried out at public expense, and with all resources directed to the American colonies there was little appetite for the sorts of schemes advocated by Dobbs.¹⁸ Most pertinent for our concerns is that this episode indicates that there was a desire for geographic knowledge and that imagined geographies played crucial roles in colonial political culture. Opposition to the Company gradually dissipated throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century as the company lifted its policy of secrecy and became actively engaged in surveying and

¹⁷ At the inquiry, Richard White testified that Rupert's Land could be settled and "improved" and in the southern parts agriculture could be undertaken. John Hayter claimed that he observed large tracts of land that could be easily cultivated. *United Kingdom, Report from the Committee Appointed to Enquire into the State and Conditions of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay and of the Trade Carried on There* (London, 1749), 219, 222. Quoted in Moodie, "Science and Reality," 303.

¹⁸ D. W. Moodie, "Science and Reality," 305.

exploring the interior of Rupert's Land. Nevertheless, the territory that encompassed the HBC's imperium remained the subject of outside speculation and curiosity.

The late eighteenth century was characterized by increased interest in exploring the interior of the North American continent. With the newly independent United States looking increasingly to the west for future expansion, the HBC also expressed a desire to "discover" the true extent of their interior possessions in Rupert's Land. This was the period when the famed explorer-cartographers such as Samuel Hearne, David Thompson, and Alexander Mackenzie, William Clark, and Meriwether Lewis ventured deep into the interior of North America. While their exploits are well documented in the historiography, there is little emphasis in the literature on how this spatial knowledge was mapped and conveyed to a wider reading public.¹⁹ In this respect, the key historical actor was Aaron Arrowsmith the Elder.

Arrowsmith was a significant figure in the history of British Empire map-making, specifically with regards to the history of HBC cartography. His atlases of the British Isles and his maps that depicted the expansion of empire in Australasia and North America earned him a reputation for authority and accuracy.²⁰ His nephew John Arrowsmith carried on his work, updating a series of maps of North America until 1821. Unlike his maps of Britain, Arrowsmith never participated in surveying in North America. Instead, the majority of the material compiled for his cartographical projects

¹⁹ Notable examples include, E. E. Rich *History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, vol. 1-3 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960), and Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America, to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1789 and 1793*, reprint (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1903).

²⁰ Aaron Arrowsmith the Elder was regarded as the premier cartographer of the British Empire. Many of his productions were based on original surveys, and thus he became the primary disseminator of geographic discoveries. In addition to his *Map of North America*, other maps based on original surveys include his 1807 map of Scotland based on the Military Survey of Scotland of 1745-55, and his 1822 *Atlas of Southern India*.

dealing with North America came from surveying reports, journals, and charts sent to him by the explorer-surveyors. Arrowsmith was thus both a translator and compiler of locally-produced geographical knowledge. He accumulated all these different parts and assembled them in (mostly) cartographic wholes.

Consider, for example, Arrowsmith's map, "[E]xhibiting all the new discoveries of the interior parts of North America," first published in 1796. It was essentially a synthesis of the topographical knowledge possessed at the time by Europeans.²¹ (Figure 2) Revised in 1802, Lewis and Clark even used the map as a guide for their expedition. What they learned in the field was later incorporated into later versions of Arrowsmith's maps. Indeed the map was revised several times by his son Aaron the Younger and nephew John Arrowsmith up to 1850, and it remained throughout the nineteenth century as the primary comprehensive cartographical representation of North America. While being an important reflection of how European geographic knowledge expanded over a 50-year period, the history of how the Arrowsmith maps were consumed and the process of how the geographic 'knowledge' was received on the ground demonstrates the map's significance as a cultural text rather than merely a scientific representation of the expansion of empire.

²¹ Aaron Arrowsmith, *A map exhibiting all the new discoveries in the interior parts of North America inscribed by permission to the honorable Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay in testimony of their liberal communications to their most obedient and very humble servant.* (London: Charles Street, SoHo, January 1st, 1795) additions to 1796, Library and Archives Canada Reference # H2/1000/179, NMC24668.



Figure 2: A Map Exhibiting all the New Discoveries of the Interior Parts of North America. Aaron Arrowsmith, 1796.

Source: Library and Archives Canada

The Arrowsmith family's work was not restricted to cartography.²² In addition to atlases and maps, Arrowsmith the Younger also published a textbook for the Eton school in 1831 that outlined the geographic history of the world. His description of British North America, particularly the North West Territories (Rupert's Land) offer a clear insight into how the space was conceived and presented in imperial discourse: "British America contains about 2,776,600 square miles, or more than all of Europe, and its population is estimated at 2,500,000 souls." How much of that population was made up of indigenous peoples is not mentioned. British America, for all its expanse and thin population, is described as a place firmly under imperial control, "divided into eight great provinces or governments...under the management of a Governor General [and his lieutenant governors]; he resides in Quebec, the metropolis of the whole country."²³ Considerable attention is directed to the jurisdictions of British North America that reside outside the formally administered provinces, referring to Rupert's Land as part of "new Britain." Demonstrating that he read the ethnographic studies sent to him by the HBC, but placed little importance on them, Arrowsmith described the vast area as being inhabited by a number of "Indian tribes, varying in number from 500 to 5,000 souls as the Esquimeaux [sic], Chippewa, and Copper Indians, and many others whose names it is unnecessary to mention."²⁴ A direct reflection of the limited indigenous presence on colonial maps, Arrowsmith regarded them as insignificant side notes. Furthermore, he also played the

²² Aaron Arrowsmith the Elder's nephew John produced the celebrated *London Atlas*, which contained the most detailed maps that existed at the time. His son Aaron the Younger produced numerous maps of North America and Australia, in addition to his *Atlas of Ancient Geography*, and *Atlas of Modern geography* that were widely used in British schools. Coolie Verner, "The Arrowsmith Firm and the Cartography of Canada" *The Canadian Cartographer* 8 (1971), 4.

²³ Aaron Arrowsmith, *A Compendium of Ancient and Modern Geography, for the use of Eton School*, (London: E. Williams, 1831), 809.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 811.

role of the ethnographer, explaining that “[t]hese savage tribes are all Pagans, who nevertheless have some notion of a Supreme Being and a future existence: they live chiefly by hunting and war, and find a ready market for the produce of the chase, at the posts established by the Hudson’s Bay and North West Companies.”²⁵ In this statement Arrowsmith could have been implying that the indigenous peoples of the Northwest had little purpose to their lives before the arrival of the fur trade. With his long description of the various forts and trading posts established by the two companies while being silent about indigenous settlements and place names, Arrowsmith was describing a space that was conceived and governed by Europeans. The indigenous peoples who inhabited the area were “insignificant” and lived their lives for the purposes of the fur trade. If this was how Europe regarded the spaces of the fur trade, what about the views of the surveyors on the ground?

In 1778, York House Postmaster Philip Turnor was officially appointed by the London Committee as a surveyor and was directed to scope out the area along the Saskatchewan and Churchill rivers. As previously mentioned, it was the Company’s desire to extend down into this area in order to block the advance of the Canadian fur trade companies. Turnor, being the first European to map this area, was in effect claiming the land for the HBC. With the area in question largely mapped by 1785, the Company felt confident to establish forts along the rivers. The rapid expansion of the HBC’s imperium in Rupert’s Land commenced with the 1789 plan to send Turnor as head of an expedition to survey the Athabasca region to the edge of the Rocky Mountains. In this endeavour, Turnor chose Peter Fidler as his assistant and tasked him with the drafting of

²⁵ Arrowsmith, *A Compendium*, 812.

maps and charts. Fidler compiled a series of detailed sketches and spent the winter of 1791-92 living among the local Chipewyans near Slave Lake.

Fidler's journal of his expedition provides a detailed account of his exploits and offers an important insight into how a surveyor operating within the middle ground of the fur trade conceived of his surroundings. These sorts of accounts may have helped form the discourses of colonialism with regards to indigenous peoples. In September 1791, for example, he embarked on his winter journey to live with the Chipewyans and "acquire their language." Fidler displayed both his enthusiasm for the opportunity to survey and learn their language and the paternalistic nature of the fur trade under which he operated. He remarked that the main reason for wintering with them was because "[t]hese Indians have got pretty large Credits from Mr. [Malcolm] Ross [an officer of the HBC] and he wished a person to accompany them, to secure his Debt and not one of the rest of our people will winter with them."²⁶ For Fidler, this was primarily a surveying expedition and his journals contain several astrological observations that he calculated using a small sextant supplied to him by the HBC, in addition to the National Almanac that he carried with him. However, his observations were not accurate because he lacked a watch to make the necessary observations for lines of longitude.²⁷ As a result, his observations were based on both guesswork and what information he could learn from his guides.

Despite being immersed in Chipewyan culture, Fidler's journals contain many of the common perceptions held by Europeans towards indigenous peoples. Echoing the description provided by Arrowsmith, Fidler recounts how he met 'Sothern Indians' who

²⁶ Peter Fidler, "A Journal of a Journey with the Chipawyans or the Northern Indians to the Slave Lake, & to the East & West of the Slave River in 1791 & 2," in *Canadian Exploration Literature: An Anthology*, Germaine Warkentin ed. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007), 221. Hereafter cited as Fidler, *Journal*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

were returning from a war with the Cree, and had with them “the scalps of 2 men” that he was told were acquired after a violent encounter on their way to conduct a trade at Slave Lake House.²⁸ Fidler described a people who were severely destitute, as they “had suffered great hardships for want of food during the greatest part of the time they were in this expedition.” He was under the impression that “[a]s to all the Indians they all in general from their earliest infancy used to go without [food] 2 or 3 times a week; as when they have anything they can never rest till all is consumed, it is always with them feast or famine.”²⁹ The remainder of his journal of his expedition contains more observations of the poverty and the savagery of the indigenous peoples he encountered. In perhaps the most revealing observation of the nature of the native-newcomer relationship under the fur trade, Fidler remarked that “[i]t is an invariable custom with all Indians...that the more a European does of work with them the worse he is respected by them...[but whereas he refuses to do work] they will be very kind to him and will give him a larger allowance of provisions than had he listened to every request of theirs.”³⁰ Fidler and other surveyors were clearly operating within a space governed by customs and characterizations that were often quite alien. How fur traders negotiated these differences in cultural conventions had been well documented in the historiography of the fur trade. However, little has been written on how surveyor-explorers received spatial knowledge and produced maps that relied on the negotiated middle ground that characterized the fur trade.³¹

²⁸ Fidler, *Journal*, 222.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

³¹ A major exception being the work of Barbara Belyea, notably *Dark Storm Moving West*, which places considerable emphasis on Native agency and how fur traders and cartographers negotiated the indigenous cultural landscape while trying to rationalize it through European cartographical conventions.

The primary piece of cartography that was drafted from the observations during this expedition was Philip Turnor's 1792 map entitled *Chart of Lakes and Rivers in North America* (Figure 3). The subtitle explained that the shaded areas on the map were "from actual surveys," the non-shaded areas "from Canadian and Indian information." Here is a direct acknowledgment that the success of Company map-making projects during this period depended largely on the spatial knowledge shared by indigenous people. This knowledge was conveyed to British audiences in a way that was familiar to them. Following European cartographic convention, its scale and longitude and latitude lines portray a sense of order and mastery of the geography. The unknown is also portrayed on the map as a blank space. What could not be accurately measured and depicted was not put on the map. Maps like this constitute the bulk of what was produced during this era of scientific geography. Nevertheless, Turnor's and Arrowsmith's cartographies, however popular and influential, were not the only cartographies produced in this era.

The map-making process from 1780-1821 was characterized by trial and error as surveyors and explorers struggled to understand an environment that was shaped by a culture that seemed to them both remote and primitive. Map-making by the HBC was more than a drive to discover new land and scientifically represent it in elaborate maps in the Mercator projection. Historians of cartography have recognized that there was disconnect between Europeans and indigenous cartographic convention that had to be negotiated by explorers and surveyors. However, failing to recognize maps as being cultural texts leads them to the assumption that indigenous mapping was inaccurate, which the European cartographers had to fix through the introduction of Western

cartographical convention through a painstaking process of mapping the vast interior of Rupert's Land.

Richard Ruggles argues this early process of map-making was characterized by decentralization and improvisation. Company personnel on the ground would commission and distribute maps amongst themselves, while occasionally forwarding the ones they deemed important to London.³² However, by the 1780s the near exhaustion of the beaver supply along the Hudson's Bay coast and the encroachment of Montreal-based traders into the southern regions of Rupert's Land forced the HBC into a more aggressive business model. The London Committee envisioned a line of forts and trading posts that would extend from Hudson's Bay into the Athabasca region and the Great Lakes in order to secure the fur supply and block the Canadian traders. Before this scheme could be implemented the land between the Bay and the Great Lakes had to be explored, mapped, and surveyed on an unprecedented scale. The Company quickly established the interior posts of Cumberland, Gloucester, and Wappis Cogamy Houses in the midst of Blackfoot territory. By the late 1780s the committee expressed their desire to established posts further inland on the Saskatchewan River. It was at this point that the position of Company surveyor was introduced.

Previously surveying and mapping was unofficially delegated to Company personnel who ventured out into field and who possessed basic cartographical skills. Way finding was almost exclusively entrusted to indigenous scouts. Ruggles describes this arrangement as being essentially unchanged throughout the previous century.³³ In the

³² Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting: The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991), 18.

³³ Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting*, 3.

late eighteenth century, maps and map-making were essential to Company operations as the business strategy shifted to having traders venture into indigenous territory partly in order to undertake surveying projects.

Peter Fidler's mapping career, which lasted from 1789 to 1820, is significant in the history of HBC cartography not only because of the unparalleled breadth and scope of his work, but also due to the extent to which he incorporated indigenous spatial knowledge and cartographical technique into his drafts. Most notably, Fidler would routinely ask for descriptions and sketches by local native populations and transcribe them into his own journals. From 1800 to 1801, for example, Fidler surveyed the South Saskatchewan River and transcribed nine maps based almost exclusively on information received from the Blackfoot. The maps covered an immense distance from the Upper Missouri and Red Deer rivers to the Rocky Mountains. Maps are texts and therefore the information Fidler received from his indigenous sources affected the composition of the maps he produced. However, regarding these indigenous maps, Fidler strove to reproduce them without adding in western cartographic practice.³⁴

The Blackfoot maps (Figure 4) constitute some of the most important examples of early indigenous cartography and illustrate the cultural power relations inherent in the map-making process. An analysis of these maps collected by Peter Fidler and the extent they were influenced by indigenous practices must go beyond an empirical and positivist study. To fully understand the historical significance of HBC maps and map-making historians must use the critical theory approach that was outlined by Brian Harley and others to explain the cultural connotations and the hegemonic power of this cartography

³⁴ Judith Hudson Beattie, "Indian Maps in the HBC Archives: A Comparison of Five Area Maps Recorded by Peter Fidler, 1801-1802," *Archivia* 21 (1985), 167.

in the context of the expansion of the HBC fur trade. Despite the lack of critical analysis, Ruggles' study remains the primary scholarly work on HBC maps, however in *Dark Storm Moving West*, Barbara Belyea provides a critical analysis of early HBC mapping with a particular emphasis on the significance of Peter Fidler's work and his usage of indigenous spatial knowledge. She argues that many historians, such as Ruggles, regard indigenous maps to be primitive. Belyea insists that this is a decontextualized understanding of those maps, and insists that examples like the Blackfoot maps represent an indigenous worldview that was incompatible to the forms of scientific accuracy then dominant in western convention.³⁵ As reflected in Figure 4, there is no northern projection or scale, and no attempt to show all physical features.³⁶ Instead, indigenous mapping concentrated on way finding which in the context of the fur trade was of more use to the Company than overly detailed maps with scales and coordinates. Indigenous mapping practice significantly influenced the way fur traders and explorers perceived geographical features and guided their routes of 'discovery'.³⁷ In this context they were just as accurate and spatially grounded as any map a European could produce. How Company cartographers and fur traders consumed these maps and negotiated the two worldviews, represents the inherent power structures and cultural connotations of the fur trade.

The Native maps transcribed by Fidler constitute some of the most important examples of early indigenous cartography and illustrate the cultural power relations inherent in the map-making process. Four of these maps were based on two maps of the

³⁵ Barbara Belyea, *Dark Storm Moving West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 53.

³⁶ Beattie, "Indian Maps in the HBC Archives," 173.

³⁷ Ibid.

Siksika Territory surrounding the newly established Chesterfield House drawn by the Blackfoot Chief Ackomokki in 1801 and 1802 (Figure 4). This map depicted an area that remained mostly unexplored by Europeans, being the first piece of cartography available until the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804-5.³⁸ Additionally, in 1802 the Blackfoot Akkeweek made two similar sketches of the Bow and Oldman River basins, and Fidler also transcribed a map of the region encompassing the North Saskatchewan and Yellowstone River by the Blackfoot Chief Kioocus. Ruggles notes that elements of these maps were integrated with western cartographical practices in the final map Fidler produced for the HBC.³⁹ Furthermore, in 1802 Fidler made a copy of a sketch made by a local indigenous person, Chachaypaywayti, which Ruggles describes as “an excellent example of native mapping,” in the cartographic style of ‘beads on a stick’ consisting of simple lines and circles to denote lakes and rivers. Its value was in “providing directions and the locations of lakes.”⁴⁰ But maps are much more than mere tools for direction produced by individuals, they are also products of societies. According to Theodore Binnema, the similar conventions found in the maps in addition to how Ackomokki’s map depicts areas he had never personally observed suggest that these maps represent the collective knowledge of the Blackfoot and a shared cartographic practice that predated the arrival of European explorers.⁴¹

³⁸ Lori Padolsky Nordland, “The Concept of “Secondary Provenance:” Re-Interpreting Ackomokki’s Map as Evolving Text,” *Archivia* 58 (2004), 149.

³⁹ Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting*, 64.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴¹ Theodore Binnema, “How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan’s Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World,” in *From Rupert’s Land to Canada*, Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens and R.C. Macleod, eds. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 210.

Figure 4: *A Map of the Upper Missouri River drawn by Ackomokki, a Blackfoot Chief. Peter Fidler, 1802.*⁴²

Source: Belyea, *Dark Storm*, 64.

Ackomokki's map of the Siksika Territory is arguably the most historically significant of all the Native maps collected by Fidler. In addition to being a clear example of the types of symbolism used in the native cartographical convention, it also depicts the largest number of named rivers, mountains and peaks along with the travel times between them, and statistics pertaining to 32 indigenous bands. Furthermore, the map contains all the information necessary for one to navigate the plains. Instead of being overwhelmed with intricate detail of topography, the map presents the information in a form that is easily committed to memory as it only provides detail that is directly related to travel.⁴³ The European cartographic convention of the era was obsessed with inventories of great detail, and thus produced maps that were nearly impossible to commit to memory or share orally. There is no doubt, as historians have emphasized, that in addition to demonstrating the extent to which fur traders had relied on indigenous peoples for way-finding, Ackomokki's map was an important tool in Fidler's surveying efforts and represents a significant contribution to geographic knowledge. For our interests, though, even more significant is how the map was interpreted (or misinterpreted) by fur traders, cartographers, and Company executives, and what all this reveals about the power structures of the fur trade and imperial expansion.

In July 1802, Fidler sent Ackomokki's map to the London Committee and he attached a detailed letter where he described the map's features and described both the

⁴² Peter Fidler, *A Map of the Upper Missouri River drawn by Ackomokki, a Blackfoot Chief* [map], 1802, in Belyea, *Dark Storm*, 64.

⁴³ Binnema, "How Does a Map mean?", 213.

physical and ethnographic features of the Rocky Mountain headwaters of the Missouri and South Saskatchewan Rivers. In his letter, Fidler made no attempt to mitigate the influence of indigenous voices in producing the map: “[e]nclosed is a map of my journey from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains [1792-3], showing the rivers and other remarkable places to the Miss su ry [sic] river, which is taken solely from Indian information.” Having felt the need to explain why he resorted to relying on indigenous knowledge despite their perceived lack of cartographical skills, Fidler wrote that “[t]his Indian map conveys much information where European documents fail; and on some occasions are of much use, especially as they show [where]...rivers and other remarkable places are, although they are utterly unacquainted with any proportion in drawing them.”⁴⁴ He continued by rationalizing the map to suit European cartographical conventions by explaining the elevation above sea level and degrees of latitude, information that Arrowsmith had found essential to his map-making project.

The letter also provides a detailed discussion of topography and ethnography, information that was crucial to a trading company seeking to expand its domain. Fidler provided topographical descriptions, explaining that the bases of the mountains that the Natives named “Woods Edge” were a thick forest, but in the rest of the territory “not a single tree is to be found” with the natives having to resort to burning animal dung for fuel.⁴⁵ He describes the mountains as a “stupendous and steep wall across the greater part of the North American continent, “which prevents the buffalo from crossing it.” Describing indigenous peoples and animals interchangeably while being conscious of the fact that he is producing maps for a fur trading enterprise, Fidler also provides

⁴⁴ Peter Fidler, “Letter,” quoted in D.W. and Barry Kaye, “The Ackomokki Map,” *The Beaver* 307 (spring 1977), 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

considerable detail about indigenous hunting and gathering practices and the suitability of buffalo and mountain sheep for food.⁴⁶ He describes some tribes as being “very inoffensive and unwarlike,” with their division into “thirteen gangs” being beneficial to HBC schemes since it would presumably prevent Native alliances that might threaten the Company. Spatial knowledge is conveyed both in a manner that would interest the geographer, fur trader and company executive. Ackomokki’s map thus became an important tool in expanding the HBC’s imperium throughout the interior of Rupert’s Land.

Upon receiving the map and Fidler’s attached letter in October the London Committee quickly realized its significance. The map was forwarded to the Royal Society and to Aaron Arrowsmith who later incorporated it into his map of North America:

Some maps and papers sent in by Fidler in 1802 arrived in London on 23rd October...By 17 December [Alexander] Lean [HBC Secretary] was writing to Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, and the Alexander Dalrymple, Hydrographer to the Admiralty, saying that Fidler's maps and papers were deposited with Mr. Arrowsmith, and that it would be highly satisfactory to the Company if these should be of sufficient importance to attract their notice. In the letter to Mr. Banks, Lean said, "Mr. Arrowsmith considers them as important in ascertaining, with some degree of certainty, the sources of the Missouri [sic], they also convey much curious [i]nformation respecting the face of many Countries hitherto unknown to European."⁴⁷

This correspondence demonstrates both the Company’s intention to quickly map out their territory in order to further continental expansion, and a desire to exert influence in the Royal Society. The cartography of the Canadian Northwest in the early nineteenth

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Saskatchewan Correspondence,” quoted in D.W. and Barry Kaye, “The Ackomokki Map,” *The Beaver* 307 (spring 1977), 10-11.

century was thus produced to further the ambition of a business enterprise steeped in imperialism. In this sense the map did indeed precede the territory. While produced mainly for consumption by Company governance and personnel, HBC cartography in general, and the Ackomokki map in particular, played a significant role in the expansion of empire in the northwest of North America. The process, while steady, was fraught with error, demonstrating the perils of attempting to supplant the knowledge of one culture over another that characterized the map-making process.

Aaron Arrowsmith's incorporation of Ackomokki's map into his widely circulated updated 1804 edition of his *Map of North America* is both an example of cultural appropriation of spatial knowledge and the misunderstandings that characterized the fur trade and native-newcomer relations. Maps were the main historical agents of the expansion of the HBC imperium in Rupert's Land and its eventual settlement by Europeans. Arrowsmith received the knowledge conveyed in the Ackomokki map as a tool to aid him in filling in the blanks on maps of the Northwestern interior. Not having access to the other Native maps collected by Fidler, Arrowsmith failed to understand that the map was a cultural text that represented the sharing of knowledge in the middle ground between Native and European fur trader. He assumed that the map was to scale in the Mercator projection. Essentially, in trying to understand what the map portrayed, Arrowsmith had failed to consider how the map conveyed knowledge.⁴⁸ Arrowsmith, however, was not necessarily placed in the position to interpret how the map represented knowledge because being completely isolated from the Blackfoot world placed him outside the middle ground. Cartographers, governors, and imperial officials relied almost

⁴⁸ Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean?" 208.

exclusively on what was conveyed to them from those one the ground. As a result, the imperial project carried out by the HBC in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was partly characterized by misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

Peter Fidler, for his part, was likely aware of the misunderstanding that would result when a cartographer such as Arrowsmith in London received a map produced by an “alien” culture of an area never before represented in maps produced by Europeans. In his letter he did attempt to describe the map in terms relating to European mapping conventions. However, this served only to increase the level of confusion because Fidler had done exactly what Arrowsmith did: attempt to understand what the map represented before learning how it conveyed knowledge. As Theodore Binnema writes, had Fidler attempted to interpret Ackomokki’s map before he sent it to London, he would have been much more successful than Arrowsmith because he had more tools at his disposal.⁴⁹ Fidler’s immersion in Blackfoot culture and his cartographic endeavour being undertaken within the context of the middle ground of the fur trade had made this map more comprehensible to him. Essentially, by only sending Ackomokki’s map to London instead of all five Blackfoot maps he had collected, Fidler had inadvertently caused a communications failure. Arrowsmith was unaware of the cultural context in which the maps were produced, and his adherence to western mapping convention was ultimately incompatible with the middle ground approach practiced by Fidler. Nevertheless the Ackomokki map was well received and incorporated into Arrowsmith’s updated map of North America in 1802.

⁴⁹ Binnema, “How Does a Map Mean?” 208

The extent to which the Ackomokki map of 1802 was incorporated into Arrowsmith's updated map of the same year has recently become a subject of debate amongst historians of cartography.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Arrowsmith was the chief cartographer of the HBC, and Peter Fidler's position as chief explorer-surveyor ensured that there was a considerable exchange of knowledge between the two that spanned the entirety of Fidler's mapping career (1795-1820). Fidler, unlike Arrowsmith and his companions strove to find a middle ground between native and western cartographic conventions while operating in the context of the expansion of the fur trade.

As previously demonstrated, frontier mapping was characterized by the trial and error that stemmed from the guesswork and interpretations (and misinterpretation) of unknown geography. The most vivid representations of frontier mapping by the HBC are the Arrowsmith maps of North America produced and updated between 1796 and 1814. These maps represent the expansion of cartographical knowledge by the HBC as it engaged in inland expansion, and were the primary maps of the area that were consumed by government officials, explorers, and the general public. More importantly than what knowledge they depicted was how Company officials used these maps as sources of power. The HBC strove to map as much of Rupert's Land as possible, not just to spread scientific knowledge of geography that was previously unknown to Europeans, but also to rationalize it to conform to the intricacies of the fur trade and to legitimize their claims as a trading monopoly. Despite having been used by the Company to vaunt the extent of their imperium and to imagine the extension of trading networks on every river, the

⁵⁰ Belyea, *Dark Storm*, 44-48.

Arrowsmith maps, and others produced strictly according to European cartographic convention, were proved useless as tools of practical on the ground governance.

In his copy of Ackomokki's map, Fidler employed the use of symbols of cultural hegemony that were common in cartography. On the map are the usual symbols that depicted topographical features central to the fur trade such as lakes, rivers, and locations of portages. The most powerful representation of juridical power, however, was the depiction of Chesterfield House, the nearest trading post to the Siksika Territory. This is the only structure displayed on the map. It is uniquely depicted as a square house with a triangular roof and flag, and its placement in the centre reinforces both its assumed significance and power. The indigenous groups are represented on the map both alphabetically and numerically.⁵¹ The absence of any symbolism to depict indigenous tribes is a direct representation of the cultural hegemony of Europeans over the indigenous peoples in general, and the centrality of the fur trader in the economic and social life of the indigenous in particular. This is an example of the state of social order being depicted within the text of maps. Brian Harley argues that the spaces and symbols on maps, in addition to being a description of topography, are also a depiction of the social structure of a particular place and of the cultural power structure that drive the politics of place making.⁵² While being a valuable source of knowledge about the indigenous tribes that inhabit the territory, the lack of symbols in representing them on this map demonstrate that they are effectively subordinate to the HBC post, being mere footnotes on a map read by Company personnel who were primarily concerned with the

⁵¹ Nordland, "Secondary Provenance," 152.

⁵² J. B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, J. B. Harley, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 6.

topography. Furthermore, Lori Padolsky Nordland writes that by ignoring the individuality of certain indigenous groups and omitting the existence of other tribes on the map, Fidler reinforced the perception held by fur traders that indigenous peoples were a homogenous entity. In this regard, the map is essentially about Chesterfield House and the surrounding topography, rather than the human geography.⁵³ Ultimately, this map demonstrates HBC cartography was primarily driven by a desire to depict topography that was useful to the fur trade, and to visualize the extension of the Company's imperium by denoting the location of trading posts, with its indigenous subjects listed in the margins. Ackomokki's map is thus an important textual source that reveals the nature of the power structures of the fur trade in the region.

Essentially Fidler's maps were a hybrid between the two cartographical styles. For example, when mapping lakes he provided specific shapes rather than the symbols used in indigenous mapping or the irregular speculative lines often found in European cartography. The small maps included in his journals are unique to this period, as they do not necessarily provide a visual description of what he wrote down; instead they often act as substitutes to text. While employing Western notions of scientific accuracy in his official maps, Fidler's journal sketches often have no orientation, and are more in tune with indigenous cartographical convention. Included in his journals are reproductions or originals of maps sketched out by indigenous and Canadian traders belonging to the North West Company. Furthermore, in his surveying notes he often used indigenous signs and symbols.⁵⁴

⁵³ Nordland, "Secondary Provenance," 152.

⁵⁴ Belyea, *Dark Storm*, 81.

Maps produced according to European cartographical convention were forwarded to the London committee and consumed by geographers at the Royal Society as accurate descriptions of the Company's vast possessions. These maps, however, with their lines of longitude and latitude, detailed descriptions of topographical features, and wide scales, were often not suitable for the types of journeys undertaken by the fur trader. Fur traders and surveyors such as Peter Fidler created a cartographical middle ground between the western search for scientific accuracy and indigenous people's concern with distance and way finding. For Peter Fidler, indigenous cartography was important (if supplementary) material in the wider HBC map-making and surveying project. Thus while the three main trade routes between York Factory and Lake Winnipeg had been extensively surveyed and mapped by 1809. Fidler still included in his portfolio a map of the same routes produced by a local indigenous person named Chaypaywatis. This map was used not to contrast the different approaches to cartography, but to supplement the HBC's work.⁵⁵

The HBC's mapping of Native space represents the intricacies of Native-newcomer relations, and the desire to obtain geographic knowledge to bolster their position against their rivals. The process of acquiring this knowledge demonstrates how mapping projects were fundamental components of imperial expansion that was characterized by a culture that valued imagined geographies and promoted landscapes of anticipation. The improvisation and misinterpretations that characterized these projects undertaken primarily by Peter Fidler were an expression of the middle ground that historians such as Richard White argues had characterized the fur trade and the wider state of settler relations with indigenous peoples. The subsequent unraveling of the

⁵⁵ Belyea, *Dark Storm*, 57.

middle ground was both represented and driven by a desire to rationalize the land according to European cartographic conventions. The process of supplementation, and later appropriation of indigenous geographic knowledge nevertheless represents the establishment of the cultural hegemony that characterized fur trade and wider imperial culture during this period. Fidler's mapping practice was useful in the process of exploration, but ultimately these native voices were subverted and then silenced in the mapping that proceeded Fidler's.

Chapter Three: HBC Retrenchment, the Founding of Red River, and the Mapping of Settler Space, 1804-1820

This chapter explores the essence of the Hudson's Bay Company's (hereafter HBC) project of reasserting its sovereignty in Rupert's Land between 1804 and 1821, one that the historiography refers to as "retrenchment" but which historical contemporaries dubbed "the new system."¹ More specifically, this chapter considers how retrenchment was influenced by imperial discourses of liberalism and expressed through practices of cartography. It begins with an emphasis on the Selkirk-Colville plan for retrenchment against the North West Company (NWC) that led to the establishment of the Red River Colony in 1811. This imperial project was ultimately guided by the then-emerging ideology of liberalism, which during this period was beginning to be used to advocate for British imperial expansion through colonization. Furthermore, the chapter concentrates on how HBC retrenchment and the establishment of the Red River Colony was, in addition to the urgent need to reform Company administration, ultimately driven by changing conceptualizations of fur trade spaces and guided by a desire to rationalize it. The effect was to make Rupert's Land 'governable', a process that culminated in the merger of the HBC with the NWC in 1821, and the preservation of the Company's monopoly.

While later territorial endeavours, such as the administration of New Caledonia and British Columbia, were largely forced upon the company through extraneous

¹ This is a term used by historians such as E. E. Rich and Harold Innis to describe the implementation of reforms both in Company governance and the management of the fur trade during this period that saw an increase in tensions between the HBC and its Nor'Wester opponents. Contemporaries referred to it as "the retrenching system" or "new system." This chapter will refer to "retrenchment" as anything that relates to the implementation of reform by the HBC, particularly the settlement scheme at Red River that was implemented by Lord Selkirk and Andrew Colville in 1811.

circumstances that originated in London and in Washington D.C, the HBC's experiment in settler colonial projects in the Red River District were largely of its own volition.² The exploits of several hundred, mostly Scottish colonists, especially their clashes with local Métis populations and with the rival North West Company have been extensively documented in the historiography.³ Building upon but also away from this focus in the literature, here I argue that the conceptualization and implementation of the Red River Colony is ultimately a story about cartographical imperialism, control of space, and the imposition of company sovereignty within a conflict ridden contact zone. To do so, this chapter offers an analysis of cartography, surveying, and spatial discourse that appeared in correspondence and Company minutes, with a focus on the extent to which the main actors in this process of colonization were concerned with questions of geography. In doing so, this chapter suggests that cartography helped drive this shift in HBC policy.

The early nineteenth century witnessed a shift in the spatial conception of Rupert's Land away from a fur trade space dominated by indigenous peoples towards a space that was governable. The HBC was being overrun by the free traders of the North West Company, and mapping practices were changed to reflect this situation. The London Committee of the HBC and the Chief Factors shifted their attention away from conceptualizing native space in favour of ordering the spaces to reflect their corporate ambitions, most notably competing with the NWC. Company officials were no longer

² For a detailed, albeit rather dated history of the HBC's imperial politics, see John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957). For a detailed spatial history of the HBC in British Columbia, see Stephen Royle, *Company, Crown, and Colony: The Hudson's Bay Company and Territorial Endeavour in Western Canada* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2011).

³ For example, the work of J. M. Bumsted, notably *The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770-1815* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1982), and *Lord Selkirk: A Life* (E. Lansing, MI: Michigan State Press, 2009). Also George Bryce's *The Romantic Settlement of Lord Selkirk's Colonists* (Toronto: Musson Book Company, 1909).

primarily concerned with finding ways of navigating indigenous spaces, and exploring new territory. Instead they focused their efforts on countering the spread of NWC traders into the lands under their imperium. The Company that for 120 years was content with having a presence on Hudson's Bay and occasionally sending out scouting parties to find new inland routes needed to come up with new ways of governing fur trade geographies and exerting their power over an increasingly contested landscape.

These issues along with a perilous economic situation in a Europe in the grip of the Napoleonic Wars led to a radical departure from the Company's traditional practices and conservative tendencies.⁴ While the East India Company apparently stumbled into its colonial possessions in India, the HBC's territorial endeavour and settler colonial practices were entirely of its own volition, crafted as part of a plan to counter their competitors and solidify their control over the spaces under their imperium. It was in the context of competition, therefore, that the HBC experimented with settler colonialism and the transformation of Red River from a fur trade space into a settler space. Furthermore, these experiments emerged at a very important moment for British imperialism, as liberal reformers began exerting tremendous influence in both policy formation and cultural sensibilities in British settler colonies.⁵ We observe the influence of these reformers and of liberalism through this chapter's analysis of the mapping practices of HBC surveyors and cartographers, how the maps were received in London, and how they were used to conceptualize and to govern the spaces of settler colonialism in Rupert's Land.

⁴ Scott Stephen, "The Fork in the Road: Red River, Retrenchment and the Struggle for the Future of the Hudson's Bay Company," *Manitoba History* 71 (Winter, 2013), 39.

⁵ Daniel Samson, *The Spirit of Industry and Improvement: Liberal Government and Rural-Industrial Society, Nova Scotia, 1790-1862* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2008), 250-1.

While the systematic process of transforming Rupert's Land into a rational space for the purposes of securing the Company's interests was not on the same scale as the extensive surveying of Rupert's Land that later occurred after the rebellions of the 1870s, in some ways it was just as significant. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, prior to this era both European traders venturing into the interior and their corporate masters who attempted to administer Rupert's Land regarded it as a vast expanse of unknown territory. Surveyors and cartographers mapping it had to work within a cultural middle ground and like the traders had to negotiate these spaces with local indigenous peoples. From the early nineteenth century and up to the merger of the HBC and the NWC in 1821, a vast expanse of the territory was reorganized into administrative zones and settler spaces. This project was essential if the Company was to retain its title to the land and exercise its rights granted to it in 1670. Rationalizing the land according to European scientific conventions was thought necessary if the fur trade was to be maintained and the HBC to remain a trading monopoly. While the historiography concentrates on this episode being the part of the foundation of the Métis nation and of the opening of the west as a future territorial part of a future Canada, it should also be considered an example of the wider imperial project then being carried out by British trading companies and other imperial interests. When viewed from that perspective, the HBC's policy of retrenchment and the founding of Red River was also a product of a growth of domestic imperial fervor in Britain and the ascendancy of liberalism. Ultimately, Red River was founded on, and guided by, emergent liberal notions of utilitarianism and capitalism, along with the desire to legitimize company rule through the rationalization and ordering of space through cartography and surveying which characterized this period of British imperial expansion.

By the early nineteenth century, events in Rupert's Land demonstrated that enterprising individual fur traders based out of Montreal and with more detailed geographic knowledge of the region were better able to engage in the trade than a cumbersome conservative trading monopoly. The HBC could point to their legal right and sovereignty granted to them in the Charter of 1670, but the reality in Rupert's Land was that whoever could better negotiate and rationalize the land, its peoples, and its natural resources were the ones that would profit from its exploitation. Despite the efforts of Peter Fidler described in Chapter Two, it was clear by 1804 that the North West Company exercised a position of immense strength against the fledging monopoly. Some estimates claimed that the NWC (newly merged with their rivals the XY Company) were claiming up to three-quarters of the fur trade profits during this period.⁶ With their merger, the NWC's leaders began to concoct further expansionary schemes, even envisioning trading beyond the Rocky Mountains, and drawing up ambitious plans in 1804 to penetrate the Columbia River. In contrast, the HBC did not share the same vision or enterprising fervour as the NWC. Understaffed and short of capital, the Company was content to hold on to the possessions it had, while occasionally sending out surveyors and explorers to confirm the extent of inland penetration by NWC traders (Nor'Westers). While company men like Peter Fidler and William Auld were frustrated by their weakened position against their corporate rivals, often concocting schemes to remedy the situation, the official position of the London committee was to ensure maximum profit but with the absolute avoidance of conflict.

The great and first object of our concern is an increase [in] trade to counterbalance the very enormous and increasing expense of it...It is

⁶ Stephen, "The Fork in the Road," 39.

not in the intention or the interest of the Company to create contentions even with the Natives or the [Nor'Westers], which may produce the most serious and mischievous consequences.⁷

HBC personnel were often ill informed of both events and geography, and the Company's governors often failed to incentivize their employees on a scale similar to other trading companies. The Company's governors were notoriously unwilling to give orders to engage the NWC, for fear of triggering violent confrontations that the HBC could not afford to fight and London would not be able to provide assistance due to the war in Europe.

The entire situation on the ground was thus one of confusion and mismanagement. The factors had little knowledge of the land they theoretically governed, there was no adequate system of accounting, and instructions sent by the London Committee were often confusing, or impractical.⁸ While Peter Fidler had reached the Athabasca in 1802, there was little that he or any other HBC employee could do to dislodge the NWC from it. Furthermore, many Native traders became reluctant to venture into the contested territory out of fear of being caught in the midst of violence between the two companies. Observing the situation, Fidler told the London Committee that it was the determination of the NWC traders to drive away the Company through the use of force and that there was little that anyone working for the HBC could do about it.⁹ Furthermore, former NWC trader turned HBC official Colin Robertson similarly concluded that only armed force

⁷ Quoted in E.E. Rich, *The History of the HBC, 1670-1870* II (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), 256-257.

⁸ E. E. Rich, "Introduction," in *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book, September 1817 to September 1822*, E. E. Rich ed. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1939), xxii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

would dislodge the Nor'Westers from Rupert's Land.¹⁰ In 1804-5 it was increasingly apparent that without a new strategy and intervention, the HBC would continue to be pushed out of the territory over which it possessed a legal trading monopoly. To address this situation, the London Committee was presented with several different plans to order these contested spaces into ones that would be stable and profitable for the Company.

Before discussing how retrenchment and colonization were implemented by the HBC and the extent to which it was rooted in a liberal empire project and driven by cartography, it is important to understand the context of which the plan was formulated. Sovereignty, while rooted in law, cannot be exercised without a command of the geography. With Napoleon's implementation of the Continental Blockade against Britain, the HBC's perilous financial situation became dire, forcing the London Committee into action. In 1808 they asked the Board of Trade for financial relief, stating that the Company had three years of stock of goods and had not sold a fur export since 1806.¹¹ Chief Factor William Auld, who along with Peter Fidler had been attempting to make sense of the geography surrounding Cumberland House and Athabasca while repelling the advances of the NWC, suggested that the Committee sanction the use of military force to dislodge the Nor'Westers. However, both the British government and the London Committee, conscious of the experiences of the East India Company, were resistant to sanctioning the use of military personnel as it would both tie up overstretched military

¹⁰ Rich, "Introduction", xxv. Colin Robertson is most noted for having led an expedition to the Athabasca to regain HBC control from the NWC in 1814. He fell out of agreement with Robert Semple, the governor of the Red River Colony but returned to HBC service as a Chief Factor after the 1821 merger of the NWC and the HBC. However he found himself in disagreement with Governor George Simpson and was never able to exert the influence in company affairs that he sought.

¹¹ Rich, "Introduction," xxi.

forces that were currently engaged against Napoleons armies, and was not financially viable for the struggling company.¹² What then were the Company's options?

The London Committee was presented with two suggestions for dealing with the crisis. First was that of the committee member George Wollaston who proposed a radical solution: withdraw temporarily from the fur trade altogether. The status quo of attempting to compete with the NWC while hoping the market for beaver would improve was untenable, he argued. Instead, Wollaston proposed that the Company focus its attention on securing its geographically advantageous route through Hudson's Bay by bolstering exploration and surveying and taking advantage of the ambiguous language in the Royal Charter and focus on trading in timber, a commodity in high demand as Europe was in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars. This proposal suited the Company's immediate interests and many on the Committee were receptive to it when Wollaston presented his "Observations" on the state of the fur trade in April 1809.¹³ The Committee became resigned to Wollaston's proposal as they resolved to not comply with the factors' requests for more personnel in order to step up efforts against the NWC. The Committee explained that instead of sending in more traders, it was their intention to retain only those who were absolutely necessary.¹⁴ Furthermore the Company asked the Treasury for a loan and seriously contemplated moving to fill the void in the timber trade that was created by the closing of the Baltic to British trade. This sense of defeatism was not, however, shared by

¹² The East India Company (EIC) had undergone a tremendous restricting in its mandate following the end of the Seven Years War. With victory against the French in the 1757 Battle of Plassey the company found itself in control of the majority of Bengal and surrounding states as the French presence in India was erased the Ottoman Empire began to collapse. Despite this victory the EIC found itself in a financially unsustainable position. The majority of its revenue became diverted towards the costs of governing and corruption and the company faced insolvency in the early 1770s. The British Parliament attempted to pass reforms (notably the India Act of 1784) and had to bail out the Company on several occasions between 1770 and 1810.

¹³ E. E. Rich, "Introduction", xxix.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxx.

all of those who had held a vested interest in the Company's fortunes. Colin Robertson, Andrew Colville, and Lord Selkirk presented their own radical visions to the Committee and proposed long-term solutions, rather than short-term improvisations to the Company's financial problems.¹⁵ Their proposals centred on an ambitious spatial and social reordering of Rupert's Land as a territory rather than merely responding to external circumstances.

Colin Robertson travelled to London in 1808 via Cumberland House to present his counter proposal to the London Committee, one that focused on re-doubling the Company's efforts in the Athabasca. He argued that what little profit was left out of the trade in beaver pelts could be found in the region. This area had been in the Company's sights ever since the NWC pushed into it a decade earlier. Peter Fidler was active in the area and his surveying of it confirmed that the region was rich in beaver. The Committee was aware of the Athabasca's riches but had done little to dislodge the NWC from it. In stark contrast to the more defeatist stance advocated by Wollaston, Robertson proposed the entire force of the HBC be directed to the region. He essentially called for the "Canadianization" of the Company's operations, replacing the Orkneymen who made up the background of the Company's employees, with experienced "Canadian" traders.¹⁶ The company's organization, he argued, must be unified and a new establishment created for the Athabasca, with all other posts concentrating their efforts in supporting it. While receptive to Robertson's vision, due to severe financial restraints the Committee was more inclined to support Wollaston's temporary withdrawal proposal, albeit reluctantly.

¹⁵ Andrew Colville was the prominent member of the London Committee and brother-in-law of the Earl of Selkirk. Having sought out to rationalize the HBC he became receptive of Selkirk's plan for retrenchment.

¹⁶ A contemporary term that referred to employing French Canadian and Metis traders and their methods, Rich, *Robertson's Letters*, xxxvi.

It was in the midst of this debate that Andrew Colville, supported by Lord Selkirk, proposed a radical shakeup of the Company's operations, and spatial conceptions.

Colville was elected to the Committee amidst the debate over the Company's future and with the help of Lord Selkirk brought forward his ambitious plans. The Selkirk-Colville Plan had two major components, both essentially focused on strengthening the Company's command of the vast geography of Rupert's Land. It called for a complete structural reorganization of governance, dividing Rupert's Land into several districts. A rigid system of financial accounting was proposed for the posts, and most significantly, the plan called for the establishment of an agricultural colony within the newly-created Red River District.¹⁷ This colony would initially be made up of mostly retired Company employees and would serve to alleviate the burden of having to send expensive imports of food into Rupert's Land.¹⁸ The organization of Rupert's Land into a corporate space and the introduction of settlement, would, it was hoped by Colville and Selkirk, justify the Company's existence to London and also strengthen it locally against the NWC. In order to implement this ambitious series of reforms, a clear command of the geography was essential. Imperial power and justification rested on a control of the geography, and it was in this sense that the work of surveyors and cartographers like Peter Fidler became essential to this new imperial project being advocated for the HBC.

The plan was well received by the Committee, which quickly decided to reject Robertson's proposition and delay the implementation of Wollaston's plan for withdrawal from the fur trade. The Company effectively shook off its conservatism and boldly embraced its role as an imperial enterprise. According to E. E. Rich, this plan was

¹⁷ Stephen, "Red River," 45.

¹⁸ Rich, *Robertson's Letters*, xxxii.

accepted because of the strength of Colville's personality and the financial backing of Lord Selkirk, along with an eagerness to reject the defeatist tendencies of the Wollaston plan. Implementation of the Colville-Selkirk plan would not be without its risks. It was clear to Selkirk that the Red River colony would be placed in a region beyond the practical jurisdiction of British law, and would antagonize the Nor'Westers to the point where violence could erupt.¹⁹ Retrenchment, however, did not demonstrate a detailed understanding of the fur trade, or of Company governance. Rather it was a vision, rooted in ascendant liberal ideals of what the Company should be.²⁰ If successful, his plan would make the HBC into a powerful imperial entity tasked with controlling the fur trade in the North American Northwest and establishing permanent, white settlement beyond the frontier. It was an ambitious plan born out the increased imperial fervour witnessed during the Napoleonic Wars. With the establishment of the colony at Red River and the renewed effort to explore and survey, the HBC essentially became a liberal enterprise whose imperial project was guided by cartography and notions of space.

These debates within the company occurred at the same time as other debates in the British public sphere about the nature of the British imperial project. Of acute importance was the ascendancy of liberalism. Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and Adam Smith's notion of free markets were deeply influential and served to remake Britain and its empire. The later writings of the utilitarians James Mill and his son J.S. Mill dominated the political discussion in the early nineteenth century. While drawing most often on the example of the United States, Australia, and India, Bentham and the Mills had taken up the herculean task of determining how to justify a sense of legitimacy in

¹⁹ J. M. Bumsted, *Lord Selkirk: A Life* (East Lansing MI: Michigan State University Press, 2009), 189.

²⁰ Rich, *Robertson's Letters*, xxxiii.

ruling foreign peoples, and in the case of the HBC, providing models of how to govern their imperial spaces.

Selkirk, Colville, and other HBC reformers were not ignorant of the discourses of imperialism that were prevalent during this period. In addition to the spread of revolutionary ideas, the Napoleon Wars also led to the expansion of the British military and fiscal state. Market capitalism became firmly entrenched, a development that seemingly challenged the pretence of the old mercantile trading monopolies such as the HBC. While the HBC was engaged in debate on how to strengthen its position and justify its existence, the East India Company and the British Government found itself with a similar situation in India. Visions of reform in India according to liberal ideals had been prevalent in imperial political discourse since the late 1780s, and became ascendant in the early nineteenth century. The rhetoric initially revolved around ideas of classical liberalism as colonial officials were concerned with maximizing trade and profit and rooting out the inhibiting corruption they believed was endemic in the subcontinent.²¹ In the early nineteenth century liberal ideology had gained a dominating influence in Britain, and its utilitarian strand was the most significant with regards to India.

With this emphasis on liberal notions of improvement came a renewed emphasis on colonization. While the HBC debated the merits of introducing settlement schemes to Rupert's Land, full-scale colonization projects were under way in British North America. Land was being divided up into townships and farms and industrial capitalism was being imposed, especially in Nova Scotia. Guiding this process was an emphasis on bringing about the improvement of the landscape, a sentiment held by missionaries, middle-class

²¹ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 64.

merchants, politicians, and industrial capitalists among others. It was believed that with an improved, rationalized landscape came profitable capitalist enterprise and an ordered and healthy populace. Where in Britain, and to a lesser extent in Nova Scotia, such improvement schemes led to enclosure, it was nevertheless argued by utilitarians that despite the initial hardships faced by the rural poor, they would ultimately be the beneficiaries of an improved landscape. This rhetoric of improvement became a central element of the liberal civilizing mission that guided many British imperial projects in the Atlantic world.²²

By the 1810s, seizing on the idea that British rule should bring some sort of improvement to its colonial subjects, free traders and utilitarians created a new ideology of imperial governance shaped by the ideals of liberalism that justified the subjugation and exploitation of foreign peoples. The period where Selkirk was carrying out retrenchment and the establishment of the Red River Colony was the height of utilitarian and reformist fervour. There was a flurry of publications that dealt with the nature of British imperialism, most notably James Mill's *A History of British India* (1818) that called for a policy that was guided by the principles of reforming both imperial administration to make it less corrupt and more efficient (and by extension profitable). It was argued that a benevolent East India Company guided by the pursuit of financial profit, and rational administration, would bring order to the chaos of the subcontinent and in turn bring civilization to its subjects.²³ Despotism was justified in the ruling of foreign peoples where in the case of the East India Company (and it was implied in every non-

²² Daniel Samson, *The Spirit of Industry and Improvement*, 151-2.

²³ James Mill, *The History of British India* (1818, reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 226, 236-7. F. Rosen, "Eric Stokes, British Utilitarianism, and India," in *J.S. Mill's Encounter with India*, eds. Martin I. Moir, Douglas M. Peers, and Lynne Zastoupl (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 64-70.

settler colony) that despotic rule was necessary to keep its “uncivilized” peoples in line while preserving British interests. Having the state take over the affairs of the trading companies would have no benefit as it would drain Britain’s treasury and introduce “unbound corruption into the British government.”²⁴ The solution was to have the trading companies maintain their mercantile despotism but to encourage reform and root out corruption. When Mill described a continent without law and order, inhabited by a people who were at lower stages of civilization, and lamented the state of corruption and mismanagement by the East India Company, he could very well have been discussing the state of affairs in Rupert’s Land.

Lord Selkirk was both a liberal and an imperialist. His work *Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland: With a View of Emigration* demonstrated his adherence to the principles of utilitarianism that John Mill had advocated. Selkirk was primarily concerned with what he believed were the detrimental effects on small tenure farmers by the process of enclosure that was occurring in the Highlands.²⁵ “Proprietary interests” were being pursued by landlords and estate owners and as a result the “feudal system...where every farm was occupied by as many people as the produce could subsist,” was being replaced by the “natural result of private interest,” being maximum efficiency and thus a population surplus.²⁶ Quoting Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, Selkirk was adamant in his belief that the increase in agricultural productivity was

²⁴ Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 125.

²⁵ The implementation of enclosure in the Scottish Highlands meant that large estates that sought to introduce sheep herding had gradually bought out small landholders who concentrated on subsistence farming.

²⁶ Thomas Douglas Selkirk, *Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland: With a View of Emigration*, (Edinburgh: R. Taylor & Co., 1805), 24-25.

detrimental to the cottagers and small farmers.²⁷ Selkirk argued that the dispossessed Highland farmers had few options, find work in the growing industrial sectors of the lowlands and the North of England, or emigrate. While many of his contemporaries argued that emigration would harm the country, Selkirk believed that it would directly strengthen the Empire's position by bolstering the colonies. "Some persons have insinuated that the colonies are altogether of little use...But it is better than the overflowing of our own population, or having them move to a country with which we are unconnected [such as the United States]. It is besides of no small importance that our own colonies should be peopled by men who are consonant to our own government."²⁸ For Selkirk, Highland emigrants would be the perfect candidates for bolstering a colony's strength and spatial control since they possessed "old established principles of loyalty" and a militaristic character. Finally, they would form a string barrier against American encroachments in into British America.²⁹ Emigrants from the Highlands were conceived as being the perfect pioneer settler, an advance guard of colonialism. In this sense suffering people would be helped and the empire preserved. Selkirk had the utilitarian plan, and with the case of the HBC's struggle against the Nor'Westers, was presented a laboratory for colonial projects.

In his writing and his conception of the Red River Colony, Selkirk possessed an enthusiasm for these liberal visions of improvement and justified the HBC's imperium by claiming it was guided by benevolence. His book, *A Sketch of the British Fur Trade in North America, with Observations Relative to the North-West Company of Montreal*,

²⁷ Ibid., 36.

²⁸ Selkirk, *State of the Highlands*, 159.

²⁹ Ibid., 162.

published in 1816, is like John Mill's *History of British India*, an expression of the liberalism that permeated imperial discourse. He strongly criticized the North West Company's handling of the fur trade, arguing that their mismanagement threatened to deplete fur stocks and was greatly harmful to indigenous peoples. In a similar fashion to Edmund Burke's denunciation of the corruption of the East India Company and its governor Warren Hastings in the 1780s, Selkirk's *Observations* are a damning indictment of the corruption and abuses of the North West Company and a manifesto for the sorts of improvements the benevolent rulers of the HBC would implement once they regained control of Rupert's Land. In contrast, Selkirk wrote that the HBC's "men of liberal mind...have uniformly expressed the strongest desire to preserve moral and religious habits among their people; nor have their efforts for this purpose been without effect."³⁰ He argued that the preservation of the HBC monopoly would ensure peace, profit, moral leadership, and protection of indigenous peoples. "Every impartial person acquainted with the Indian trade is ready to acknowledge that, with respect to sobriety, orderly behaviour, and steady adherence to their moral duties, the servants of the HBC are much superior to any other class employed in the same business."³¹ Selkirk claimed that it was the moral duty of every liberal imperialist to help preserve the trading rights of the Honourable Company. However, appeals to morality and law could only go so far. The recent history of the HBC's endeavour to preserve its imperium demonstrated that to be successful the Company needed a firm spatial grounding, which for the most part it did not have before the implementation of retrenchment.

³⁰ Selkirk, *A Sketch of the British Fur Trade in North America, with Observations Relative to the North-West Company of Montreal* (London: James Ridgway, 1816), 82.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

The grand ideals of ardent imperialists, while important, form only one aspect of the British imperial project at Red River. The success of these projects depended on a mastery over the spaces of imperialism. While the historiography provides detailed accounts of the military struggles that resulted from the introduction and assertion of British imperial control in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, less emphasis is placed on how these spaces were conquered on paper. The legal and military history of the Red River settlement and HBC retrenchment has been well documented, but what about the surveyor and settler? How did the maps drive the process of the conceptualization and ordering of space by the HBC and the Selkirk colonization scheme? Peter Fidler, a veteran of HBC spatial ordering projects, as both a surveyor and Company official, became a central figure in the process of rationalizing the space into one of settlement.

In 1811, the London Committee officially granted Lord Selkirk a large parcel of land in the Winnipeg District of Rupert's Land for the purposes of establishing an agricultural colony. Selkirk immediately set out to recruit the first settlers, and placed an advertisement in the *Inverness Journal* that called for "young, active, stout men" for employment in the Company with the purposes for settlement "in part of their territories, which enjoys a good climate, and favourable soil and situation."³² While he was quick to make known Red River's perceived suitability for settlement on paper, Selkirk was aware of the perilous situation on the ground. The proposed location of his colony was at the centre of increased rivalry by the NWC and the HBC, with the latter in a continued state

³² Bumsted, *Lord Selkirk*, 193.

of withdrawal since 1808. Writing to William Auld, the chief at York Factory who was tasked with establishing the colony, Selkirk lamented that:

There is reason to believe not only that a systematic plan was formed [by the NWC] for driving [the HBC] traders out of all the valuable beaver countries, but the hopes were entertained of reducing the Honourable Company to so low an ebb, as in time, to induce them to make over their chartered rights to their commercial rivals.³³

The exact boundaries of the District of Assiniboia were somewhat ambiguous, as it was admitted that sufficient mapping had not been carried out. Nevertheless, Lord Selkirk and his staff made every attempt was made to represent it as ordered as rational: “[t]he Territory forming part of the land of the Company and bounded by an imaginary line (that is to say) beginning on the Western shore of Lake Winnipeg, at a point of 52 degrees and 30 minutes north...due south where the parallel of 52 degrees intersects the western branch of the Red River...”³⁴ Recognizing that the description was arbitrary, it was proclaimed that “the tract...is to be more particularly described and distinguished, and the boundary marked out in the map or plan annexed to these presents, in which plan the lands hereby intended to be granted are coloured red.”³⁵ The accompanying *Map of the District of Assiniboia, 1811* (Figure 5) displays considerable uncertainty in where to place the boundary, which according to the attached memorandum, was a result of confusion over whether the Red River intersected with latitude 52 as claimed in the grant.³⁶ Nevertheless, the map was deemed as a sufficient representation of the District,

³³ W. Auld, letter dated October 3, 1811 at York Factory, in Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Selkirk Papers Volume 1, Microfilm Reel C-1, 65, reference # R9790-0-8-E.

³⁴ “Grant of the District of Assiniboia by the HBC to Lord Selkirk,” in *The Canadian North-West: Its early Development and Legislative Records 1*, E. H. Oliver ed. (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1914), 155

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Anonymous, Map of the District of Assiniboia, 1811, extracted from Register "A", memorandum [signed by] witness Alex Mundell, Edwd. Robarts, Alex. Lean, Sury, Selkirk. [Map], scale not given, 1811, Library and Archives Canada, Reference # H3/701/1811(1914).

and Governor Miles MacDonell carried it to Assiniboia to help him establish the colony. This map, although acknowledged as flawed, was used along with the grant as both a display of and a legal claim for sovereignty.

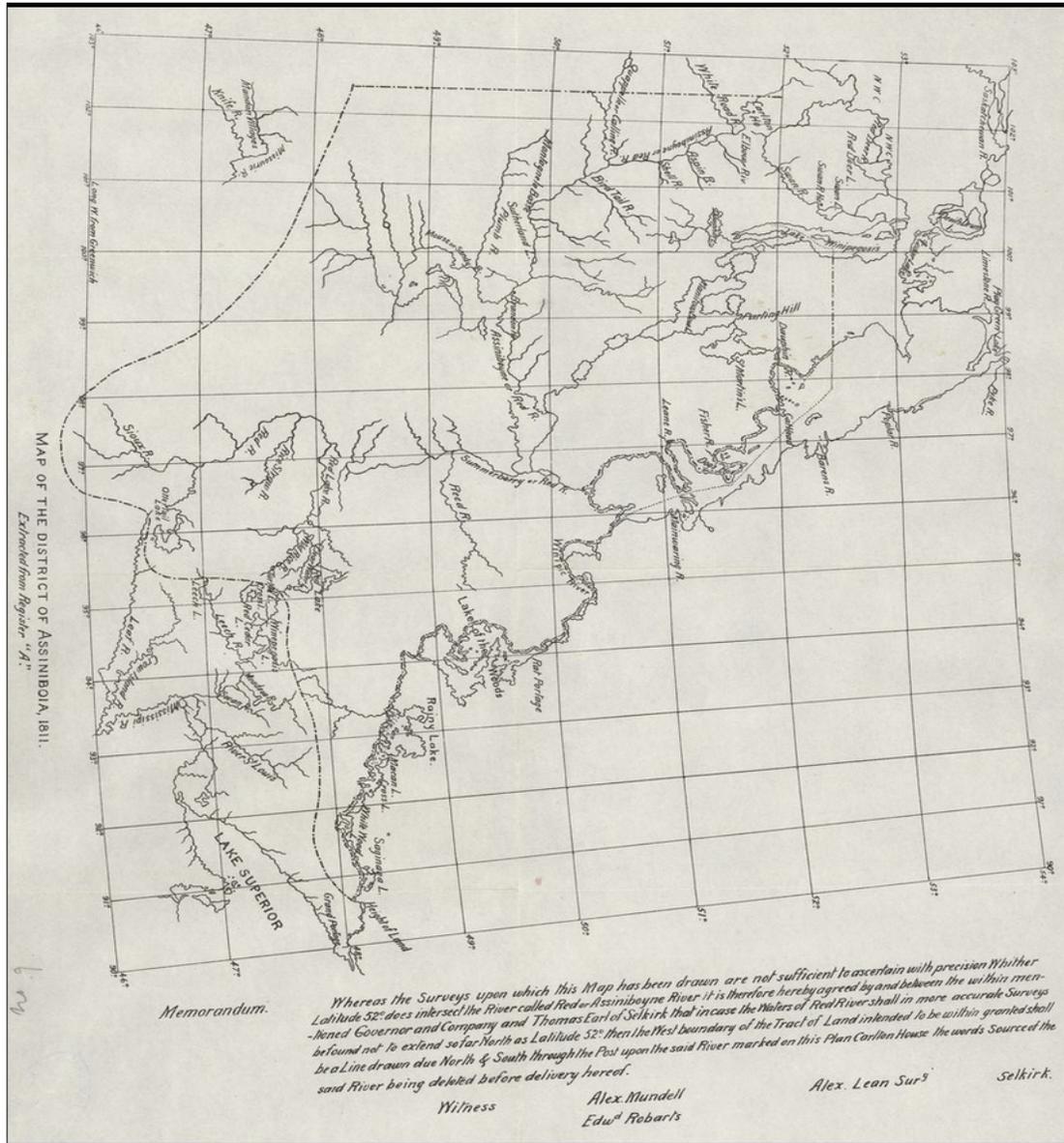


Figure 5: Map of the District of Assiniboia. Anonymous, 1811.
Source: Library and Archives Canada

The establishment of the District of Assiniboia in 1812 divided Rupert's Land into two spaces, fur trade and settler. Peter Fidler made this clear with the introduction of a cadastral property survey in 1812. In addition to a desire to accurately map rivers and lakes for the purposes of the fur trade, these new mapping projects would also place significant emphasis on settler spaces such as land grants. While the fur trader was content to operate in a world defined by a hybrid mapping practice that combined indigenous and European cartographic conventions, the introduction of the principle of private property into the geography brought a renewed emphasis on map-making based on scientific accuracy through triangulation and other scientific methods. For the first time, Rupert's Land would be subject to the quest to both rationalize and standardize space on a scale that mirrored those that occurred in other settler colonies. The cadastral survey of the Selkirk Land grants represent what Patrick Joyce refers to as "the standardization of abstraction." Where previous mapping projects were content to leave out topographic features that were not useful to the fur trader, or unknown to the surveyor, the introduction of "standardized scale served to homogenize the space."³⁷ As a result, a standardized map based on cadastral surveying made the space into one that was easily governable with authority based on property law. With the introduction of cadastral surveying, Fidler helped introduce a new form of governance to Red River, effectively inscribing it as a settler space. Nevertheless, if the Selkirk colonization scheme were to succeed, a mastery of space on the map was essential.

Peter Fidler was the chief surveyor of the Red River Colony, and his work, more than any other cartographer, directly contributed to the legitimacy of the HBC's project

³⁷ Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), 36-7.

of retrenchment and colonization. In 1812, Fidler was appointed the head of Brandon House, the HBC's primary inland trading post. In addition to aiding one of the first groups of settlers in their journey from York House to the colony established at the junction of the Red and Assiniboia rivers, he also travelled from Brandon House to Fort Douglas at Red River to advise Governor MacDonell and to survey and blaze property lots.

Fidler and Aaron Arrowsmith also drafted maps that were attached to land deeds, the most notable of them being his 1816 map of the Red River District. Among other places, this map was attached to an affidavit to a court case against the North West Company (Figure 6). This map, and others like it, was important for Red River settlers' and their struggles with the Nor'Westers. Attached to land deeds, cadastral maps such as Figure 6 demonstrate how maps were important sources of juridical power, served to rationalize and order space on paper, and in turn affected how settlers saw and knew this territory as "theirs."³⁸ Indeed, *The Plan of the Settlement on Red River as it was June 1816*, produced by Aaron Arrowsmith and based on an earlier map of Fidler's, was used at the court trial held in Montreal of that same year over the events surrounding the destruction of the Red River Settlement by a group of Nor'Westers.³⁹ With its neat lines and rectangles of property, the map (re)presented the colony as being a permanent fixture on the land with its carefully laid out lots depicting the legal property held by the settlers. The map also informed the reader of its accuracy, pointing out that the surveys which

³⁸ Aaron Arrowsmith. *Plan of the Settlement on Red River as it was June 1816* [map]. Scale not given. In: Andrew Amos, *Report of Trials in the Courts of Canada, Relative to the Destruction of the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement on the Red River with Observations* (London: J. Murray, 1820). In Andrew Amos. *Report of Trials in the Courts of Canada, Relative to the Destruction of the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement on the Red River, with observations* (London: J. Murray, 1820).

³⁹ John Warkentin and Richard I. Ruggles, *Historical Atlas of Manitoba: A Selection of Facsimile Maps, Plans, and Sketches from 1612 to 1969* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Historical Society, 1970), 188.

underlay its making were done by “chain and compass.” The rivers, trees, and plains are clearly represented and it is annotated with further topographic detail. Here the map presented a rationalized space that contained an ordered colony. While being anything but at the time, this map represented a vision of what had existed, and what could exist once justice was served.

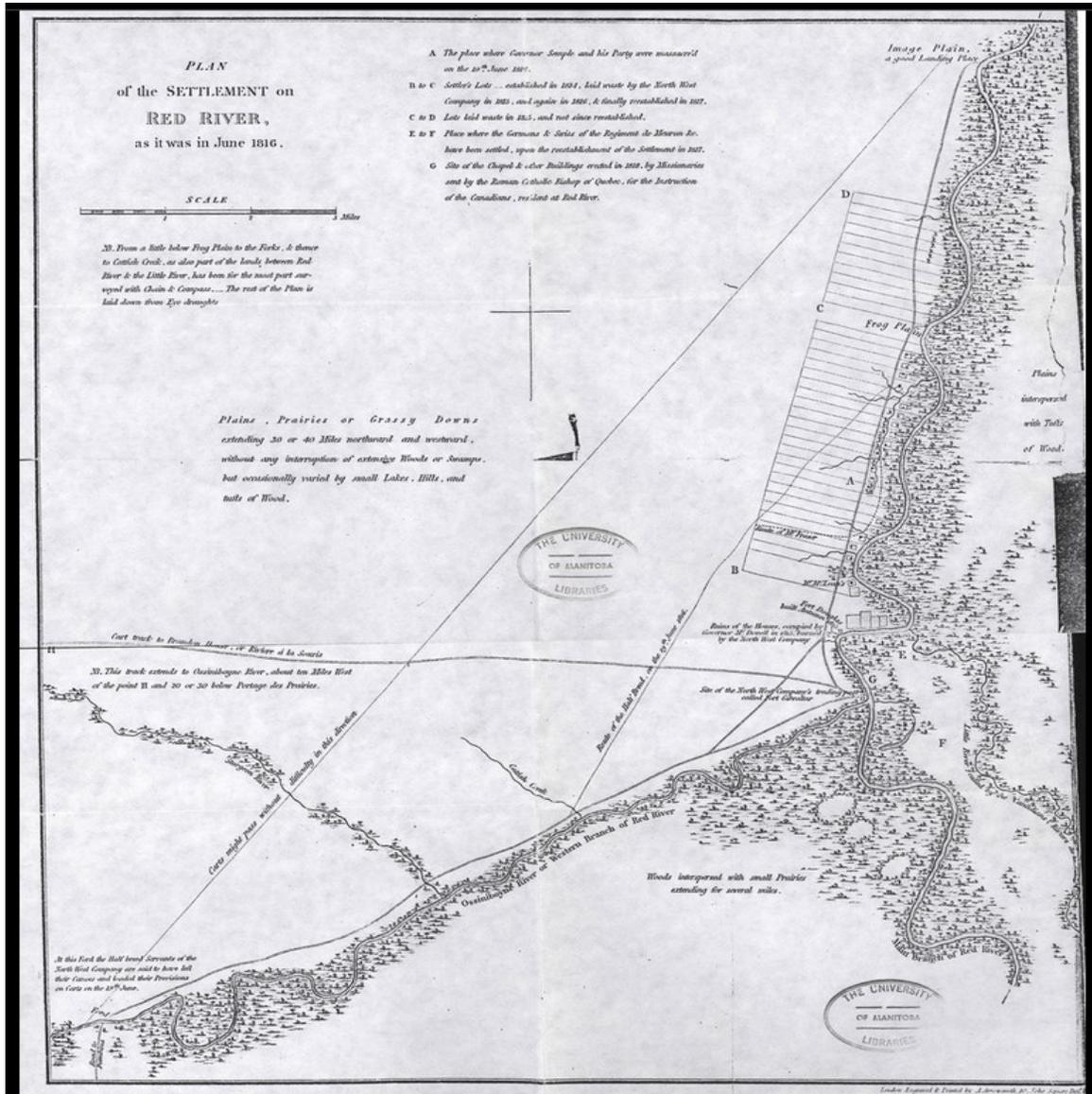


Figure 6: Plan of the Settlement on Red River as it was June 1816. Aaron Arrowsmith 1816.

Source: Amos, Andrew. Report of Trials in the Courts of Canada, Relative to the Destruction of the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement on the Red River, with observations. London: J. Murray, 1820.

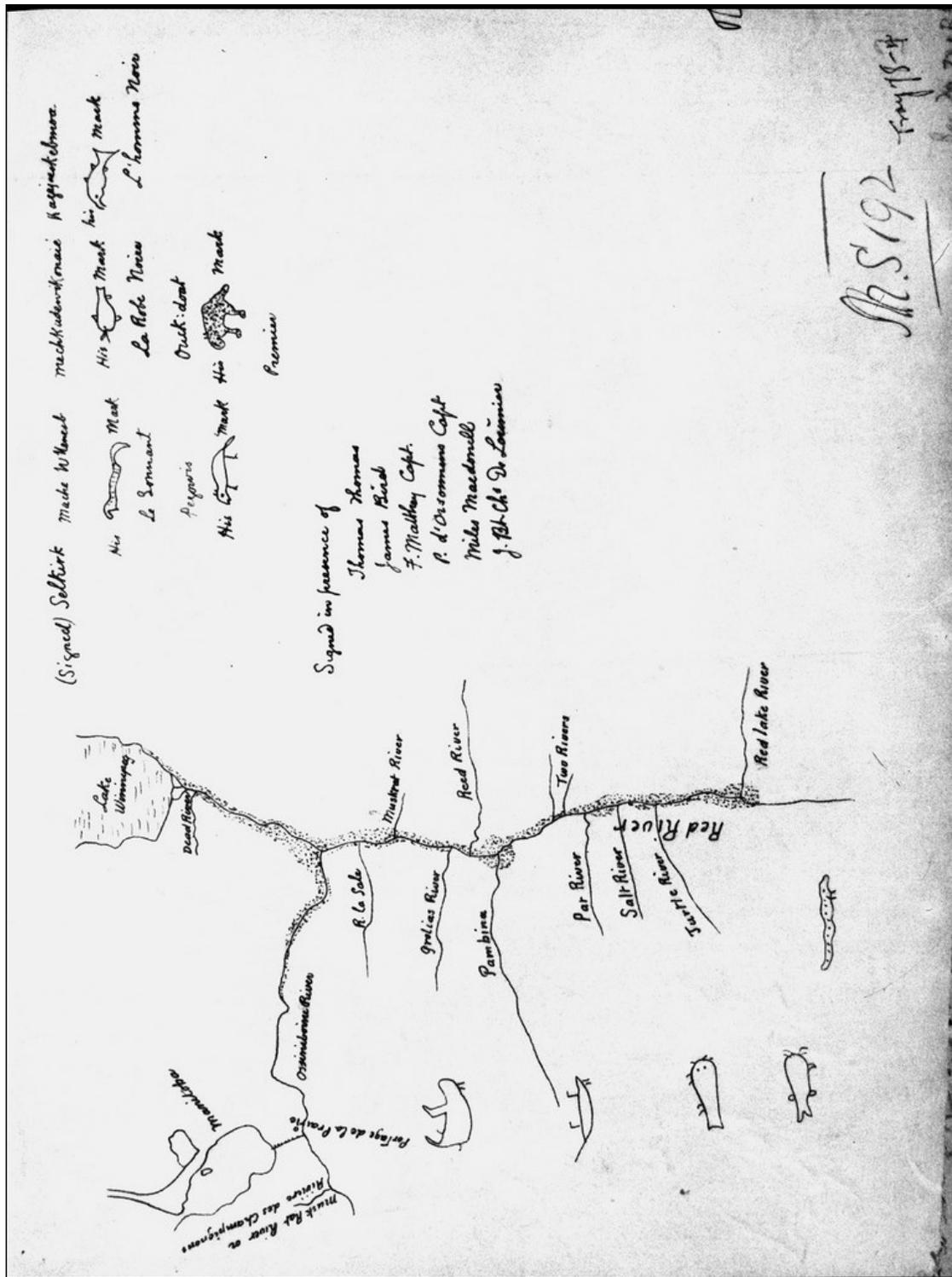


Figure 7: A Map Showing the Lands at Red River Conveyed by Indian Chiefs to the Earl of Selkirk. Peter Fidler, 1817.

Source: Warkentin John, and Richard I. Ruggles. *Historical Atlas of Manitoba: A Selection of Facsimile Maps, Plans, and Sketches from 1612 to 1969*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Historical Society, 1970. 168.

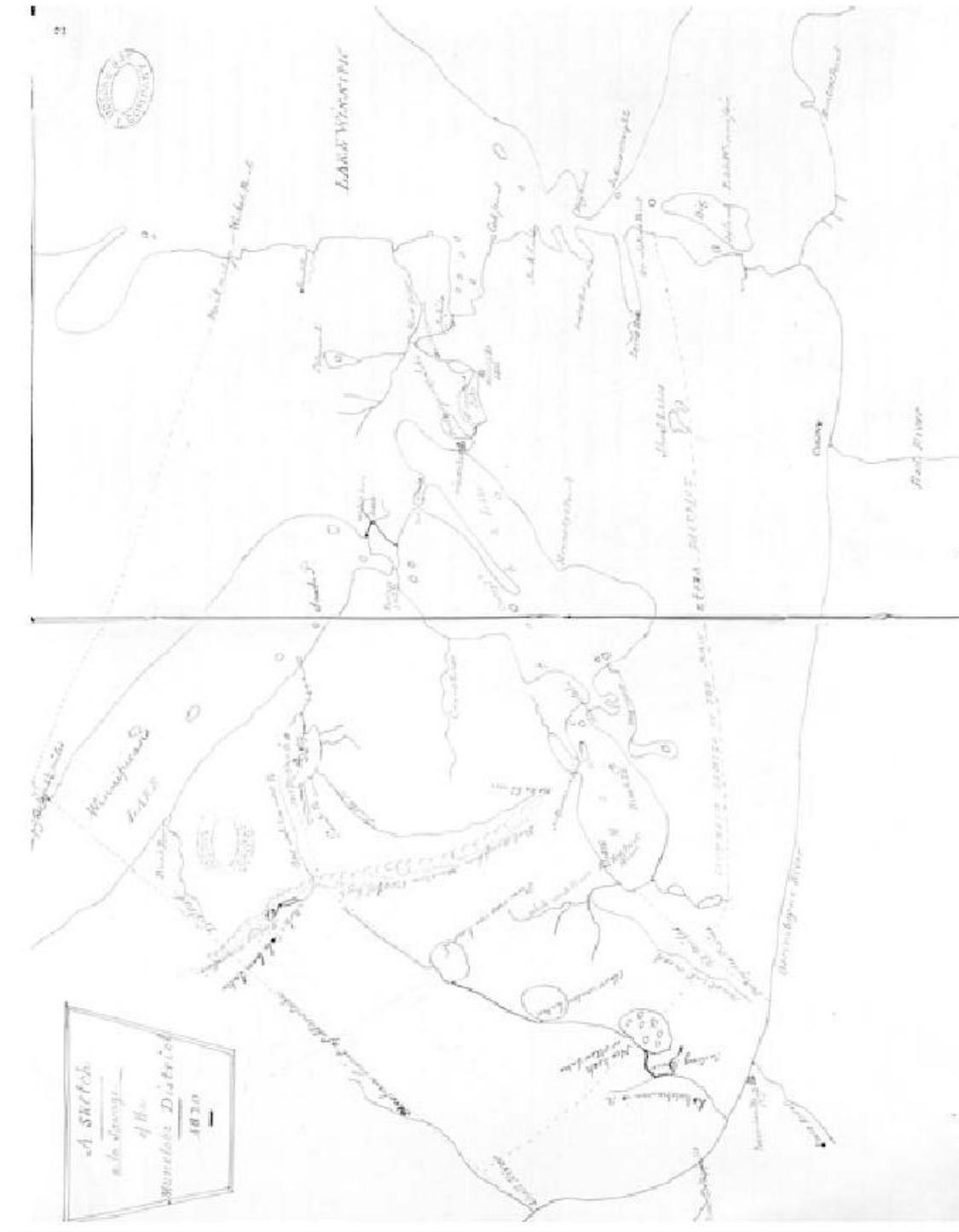


Figure 8: *A Sketch a la Savage of the Manitoba District.* Peter Fidler, 1820.
 Source: Belyea, *Dark Storm*. 85.

While dealing with the violent resistance of the Nor'Westers, Selkirk took steps to secure more territory for the Red River Settlement and was careful to have it documented through maps. Much of the land that encompassed the District of Assiniboia was at this point still under the territorial control of the Cree and more-limitedly the Ojibwa.⁴⁰ On 18 July 1817, Selkirk negotiated a treaty with local Anishinabe Cree and Ojibwa leaders to cede land along the Red River leading from the colony to the foot of Lake Winnipeg.⁴¹ The transferred land was two miles wide along the Red and Assiniboia Rivers with zones of six-mile radius around HBC posts such as Fort Douglas and the forks at the mouth of Red Lake and Red River.⁴² The map of the treaty entitled *A Map Showing the Lands at Red River Conveyed by Indian Chiefs to the Earl of Selkirk* (Figure 7) was surveyed and drawn by Peter Fidler to inscribe this new spatial ordering on a landscape that was in the midst of a violent struggle for supremacy.⁴³ For those not aware of the situation on the ground, this map hid the tensions between the Cree and Ojibwa, with the latter using the

⁴⁰ In *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, Laura Peers writes that the indigenous leaders did not form a united voice in the treaty process. Peers argues that Red River had been a site of contention well before the arrival of Selkirk's settlers. The Ojibwa arrived at Red River 20-30 years prior after being displaced from areas around the Great Lakes. By the time of Selkirk's colonization scheme the Ojibwa bands were in an uneasy alliance with the local Cree. (The Ojibwa were originally invited by the Cree to settle at Red River after a devastating Small Pox epidemic in the 1780s). However, Peers writes that the treaty negotiations brought about tensions as many Cree band leaders disputed the Ojibwa's right to engage in the land negotiations, and by extension draw maps of the territory, as it would mean an acceptance of the Ojibwa right to the land. According to Peers it is not quite clear what the exact details of the dispute between the Ojibwa and the Cree was but at one point some Cree leaders threatened to expel the Ojibwa from Red River entirely. Peguis, exerting his influence among the Cree bands persuaded his fellow leaders to allow the Ojibwa to be a part of the treaty process.

Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 91-93.

⁴¹ Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 93.

⁴² Warkentin and Ruggles, *Manitoba Historical Atlas*, 168.

⁴³ Peter Fidler, *A Map Showing Lands at Red River Conveyed by Indian Chiefs to the Earl of Selkirk 1817* (facsimile) [1:1,393,920], in Warkentin and Ruggles, *Manitoba Historical Atlas*, 168.

map and the resulting treaty as a confirmation of their land claims and some sort of protection from their Cree adversaries.⁴⁴

The map is striking since it represents the indigenous-European hybrid style previously employed by Fidler rather than the more cadastral types produced by him during this period. First and foremost, this map is intended to be a legal document representing the land transfer. Selkirk along with several witnesses and the Governor of the Red River Colony have affixed their signatures to the map. Furthermore, local band leaders Peguis (Ojibwa), the Premier (Cree), and Black Coat (Cree) signed with their doodems that were then annotated with written text by Fidler.⁴⁵ There are no graticules and very little topographic detail other than the location of the lakes and rivers. The names of the different Cree and Ojibwa bands are provided along with the doodem used by Anishinabe leaders to affix their names and represent their respective claims to the landscape. The *Manitoba Historical Atlas* suggests that Fidler, following his previous practice, may have copied the map from one drawn by these band leaders.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, this map is a vivid example of the power of cartography in legitimizing, and not just representing, the imposition of imperial power on the landscape since once it reached London it became an official treaty document.

As part of the implementation of retrenchment, in 1819 the London Committee decreed that Rupert's Land was to be divided into trading districts administered by a

⁴⁴ Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 92-93.

⁴⁵ The use of doodems in treaties was already a well-established practice of Anishinabe peoples. A doodem is a pictogram representation of their clan identities. The various doodem on the *Map Showing the Lands at Red River Conveyed by Indian Chiefs to the Earl of Selkirk* reflect how Red River was a place of importance to many Cree and Ojibwa clans, and that there was no one 'representative' of indigenous peoples in this highly contested space. For more on the significance of doodem in the treaty-making process in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries see Heidi Bohaker, "Reading Anishinabe Identities: Meaning and Metaphor in Nindodem Pictographs," *Ethnohistory* 57 (2010): 11-33.

⁴⁶ Warkentin and Ruggles, *Manitoba Historical Atlas*, 168.

Chief Factor based at a main trading fort. The shape and extent of the districts were envisioned on the official maps produced in London, and instructions were sent to Rupert's Land for the Chief Factors to conform to this new spatial ordering. London sent them blank ruled Mercator projections and copies of Arrowsmith's *Map Exhibiting all the New Discoveries* along with instructions to carry out the proper sketch of the topography that was required to put the new trading districts in place.⁴⁷ However, no Chief Factor managed to fully carry out these orders. They had minimal familiarity with European cartographical practices, and had relied on indigenous sources of information. Maps such as Arrowsmith's were useless to them and many traders had little idea about how use the Mercator projection graticules, let alone add their own "discoveries" to Arrowsmith's map.⁴⁸ To the Company's surprise, some of the traders had, like Peter Fidler earlier, instead produced maps that were more in line with the indigenous convention or a hybrid between the two.⁴⁹ Fidler himself drew his district plan according to the indigenous approach that he had used continuously throughout his career and named it "*A Sketch a la Savage of the Manetoba District*" (Figure 8).⁵⁰ Despite an unwillingness to conform to London's standards of rationalizing space, geographic knowledge was still conveyed to Company administrators, and officials on the ground, especially surveyors like Peter Fidler, were important agents in the process of ordering space. Even more important than the maps in producing geographic knowledge were the District Reports that were commissioned as part of retrenchment.

⁴⁷ Richard I. Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting: The HBC and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991), 64.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁸ Barbara Belyea, *Dark Storm Moving West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 87.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Peter Fidler, *A Sketch a la Savage of the Manetoba District*, [map], in Belyea, *Dark Storm*, 85.

During the period of retrenchment and the increased conflict with the Nor'Westers, the HBC increasingly relied on the District Reports for vital information of the situation on the ground. A product of the reorganization of Company governance, these reports and the importance attached to them demonstrate a renewed emphasis on acquiring information of the geography under (or envisioned to be) Company control. Along with *Sketch a la Savage* (Figure 8), Fidler's *Manetoba District Report* (1820) was the last work he submitted to London before his death. While not dealing directly with Red River, the *Report* demonstrates the nature of HBC discourse on spatial ordering and geographic knowledge in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The report demonstrates how surveyors, in addition to measuring the landscape for mapping purposes, were also considered to be naturalists, demographers, climatologists and whatever else the Company desired. The surveyor, as a mapmaker, demographer, or naturalist was the main agents in the process of inscribing meaning on the landscape and producing geographic knowledge.

Fidler's *General Report of the Manetoba District for 1820*, was like every district report, written for the London Committee and the newly established North Council of Rupert's Land. The report begins with a scientific description of the boundaries of the district using the lakes and rivers as reference points and thus is presented in language that is familiar to the fur trader's conception of space.

The length of the District is 163 Miles from East to West and 157 Miles from North to South comprehending 25, 690 Square miles and 16,442,240 acres which is only at the rate of 1 single Native inhabitant of all ages and sexes for every 25 miles square which is a slender population. There are few navigable rivers...⁵¹

⁵¹ Peter Fidler, *General Report of the Manetoba District for 1820*, 2.

With this description of few rivers and even fewer native people, Fidler had in effect made the District into a land of scarce potential for resource extraction. But the fact that he made an elaborate report of a district that would have been dismissed as relatively useless to a fur trading enterprise demonstrates the new zeal possessed by HBC administrators to obtain information about all the spaces under their control, rather than just the ones that were beneficial to the fur trade. Furthermore considerable attention is placed on climatology, suggesting that the Manitoba District was being conceived as being more than a fur trade space. The topography is described as being relatively flat, with the western parts being dry with small woods. The southern parts of the district however, are described as being more temperate with an abundance of maple “from which the Natives annually make a considerable amount of sugar which, along with birch bark, is traded in significant quantity with Company posts. Fidler also describes the soil as “not near so good as at the Red River, [since it has] so much salt.” Nevertheless, the soil is sufficient to sustain wild rice and “medicinal roots.” The waterways have little fish, but there are considerable amounts of shellfish.⁵² Finally, with regards to the climate and vegetation, Fidler observed that the district is “rather colder in winter than the Assiniboia (Red River),” with frost lasting from early November to late April.⁵³

Evoking comparisons to geographies more familiar to his readers, and thus further rationalizing the space, Fidler remarked, “July as in England is found the hottest month and January the most severe.”⁵⁴ He concluded his description of the physical geography of the Manitoba District by arguing that there are a few advantages to be had regarding

⁵² Fidler, *Manetoba Report*, 4-5

⁵³ Fidler, *Manetoba Report*, 9-10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 12. Fidler also evokes comparisons to England when he described the birds that could be found in the District. He observed that there is also the “Jay and Magpie exactly the same size and plumage as in England.” Fidler, *Manetoba Report*, 15.

the fur trade since both the beaver and the marten have been exhausted by the Nor'Westers. According to Fidler there was very little opportunity for cultivation, and with this conclusion he ensured that there would be few attempts at introducing either a major fur trade presence or the expansion of settler agriculture schemes.⁵⁵ The Manitoba District was portrayed, at first glance, as a rather sterile geographic space, not much use to the fur trader.

In addition to general observations on topography and climate, Fidler also provided a detailed description of the human geography of the Manitoba District. Fidler's career with the HBC in general, and at Red River in particular, has been characterized by a preoccupation with countering the activities of the North West Company. As a result, his report also concentrated on the human geography of the Manitoba District, with a particular emphasis on the extent of the Nor'Wester's activities in the region. In 1815 the HBC had established three small trading posts in the district, with the NWC mostly confined to the southern portion of Lake Winnipeg and around Fort Dauphin.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Fidler remarked that there were few attempts at cultivation with the soil being mostly insufficient. The extent of the NWC presence and trade is extensively documented. This section reads more like a military reconnaissance than a surveying report as detail is provided on where the permanent spots are, the routes they take, and the volume of traded goods. The extent of the liquor trade is documented and the names of the Nor'Wester leadership are also provided.

Reflecting both HBC discourse and a liberal concern for well-being, Fidler remarked that the NWC often traded spirits to the natives (especially rum) and advanced

⁵⁵ Ibid., 17-18.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 19.

little credit to them. However, he sensed an opening, writing that “[n]otwithstanding the inferiority of the Canadian [NWC] goods in comparison of ours, still the Indians have a habit of going to their house, but are daily becoming more independent and will in a few years openly dispense of their furs to those who will pay them best.”⁵⁷ Fidler also provided a highly detailed account of the indigenous peoples living and trading in the District along with a table describing the numbers of “men, women, and children.”⁵⁸ Several pages are taken up with elaborate description of the “customs and habits” of the indigenous groups, down to how they use eating utensils. Fidler’s report, while providing important insight into the social and economic parameters of the fur trade, also reveal how space was conceived and how geographic and demographic knowledge was gathered and presented to Company administrators. It reveals both a geographic curiosity, and a desire to rationalize the spaces that were nominally under Company control.

District reports such as the one compiled by Fidler in 1820 became important sources of geographic knowledge when the Company engaged in its next phase of consolidating their power in Rupert’s Land. The disturbances surrounding retrenchment and colonization, including the Pemmican War, had caused alarm in the Colonial Office. The fear that continuing conflict would overwhelm the HBC, threaten the Red River Colony and destroy the viability of the fur trade forced the British government to step in. In 1821 a statute was passed by Parliament that forced the merger of the two rival companies. In their spatial analysis of the competing fur trade networks of the HBC and the NWC, Donald Freeman and Francis Dungey argue that Rupert’s Land was rationalized through a “spatial duopoly” of competing networks between the two

⁵⁷ Fidler, *Manetoba Report*, 28-29.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

Companies. The number of forts increased as conflict intensified during the period of Retrenchment. After the merger of 1821 a process of “rationalization of the spatial pattern of post locations was undertaken.”⁵⁹ Retrenchment had succeeded and the Company sought out to re-organize space according to monopolistic economic conditions. Redundant forts were closed and new trading networks established as the HBC sought to consolidate its newfound control of the fur trade.⁶⁰ With the original purpose of the Red River Colony fulfilled, its position was nevertheless strengthened when discharged traders were resettled there after their posts were closed and downsized. HBC monopoly and the Red River Colony became permanently entrenched in the landscape.

The newly reinvigorated HBC implemented a series of administrative reforms, the most significant being the division of Rupert’s Land into two administrative zones, the Northern Department based at York Factory and encompassing Red River and Southern Department based at Moose Factory. In order to ensure efficient, and informed administration, a governor and council, answerable to the central committee in London, headed each Department.⁶¹ George Simpson arrived in Rupert’s Land shortly after the merger to take charge of the Northern Council and thus oversee the process of consolidation and colonization. With both Peter Fidler and Lord Selkirk dead, Simpson was tasked with carrying forward their work. Of primary concern was preventing intrusion from any enterprising free traders from both the Canadas and the United States, in addition to establishing the long-term viability of the Red River colony. Simpson was

⁵⁹ Donald B. Freeman and Francis Dungey, “A Spatial Duopoly: Competition in the Western Canadian Fur Trade, 1770-1835,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 7 (1981), 260.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁶¹ *Minutes of Council, Northern Department of Rupert’s Land, 1821-31*, R. Harvey Fleming, ed. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1940), xi.

also determined to gain a clear understanding of the region under his control. In contrast to previous Company administrators who struggled to govern a territory that they little understood, Simpson made a point of travelling throughout the northern department and studying exploration journals, survey reports, and maps of the spaces of the territory.⁶² Simpson remained cautious towards the Red River colony, as he was fearful that its expansion would endanger the fur trade.⁶³ The Company was content to maintain the colony as a place to resettle retired and discharged traders and their families. Further agricultural expansion was discouraged as it would encroach into trading areas, and a larger population was to be avoided since the Company did not have the resources to police it, and was fearful of growing agitation by the settlers for free trade.⁶⁴ With the death of Selkirk and the consolidation of Company control, any grandiose plans for the expansion of settlement disappeared. Simpson made it his mission to entrench the HBC's monopoly and expand the domain of the company to the Pacific.

The HBC imperial project of retrenchment and colonization, while a product of liberal and corporate reform, relied on the rationalization of space for its success. The bold ideas of the liberal reformers such as Selkirk were partially successful in their desire to reform the operations of a conservative trading monopoly. The HBC emerged from retrenchment with its monopoly preserved and its imperial control on Rupert's Land entrenched. In an age of imperial expansion and the ascendancy of liberalism, the Company successfully reformed itself into a viable commercial enterprise and gained the backing of influential imperial liberals such as Lord Selkirk.

⁶² Ibid., xxiii.

⁶³ This was an issue that became a major problem for the HBC in later years, a subject that I address in detail in Chapter 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid., xxvii, 315.

The consolidation of the HBC's monopoly was a part of a wider British imperial project of justification through liberalism and rationalization through cartography. Liberal imperialists such as John Mill and Lord Selkirk justified British imperialism with utilitarian notions and the promotion of colonization schemes. Surveyor-cartographers such as Peter Fidler rationalized the land into governable space that was safe for the implementation of the liberal projects and corporate consolidation. Imperial rule could be justified through legal and political theories, but wars of expansion and settlement schemes were reliant just as much on geographic information and depictions of rationalized ordered spaces on maps. Retrenchment and the colonization scheme undertaken by the HBC against its NWC rivals demonstrates that spaces were first presented as rational, ordered, and governed on the map before any plan could be undertaken on the ground. When we recognize the centrality of cartography to the events and colonization efforts at Red River, a surveyor such as Peter Fidler was as influential a historical actor as Lord Selkirk.

Retrenchment was ultimately successful as it served to strengthen the HBC's imperium. More specifically, while the introduction of settlement and the mapping of settler space created a sense of permanency to the HBC's position, it had the opposite long term effect. The introduction of discourses of settlement led to the emergence of the expansionist agitation for opening up Rupert's Land to full agricultural colonization and with it a direct threat to the fur trade and the HBC's imperium.

Chapter Four: Cartography, Geographical Sciences, and the 1857 Parliamentary Inquiry into the Hudson's Bay Company

This chapter explores how cartography and related geographic sciences contributed to the “official” inscription of Rupert’s Land’s Saskatchewan and Red River districts as settler spaces in formation. While this relationship began earlier in the nineteenth century, as shown in Chapter Three, at mid-century debates over and reliance upon geographic knowledge assumed even greater cultural and political currency. To explore this intensification, this chapter offers a re-investigation of the 1857 Select Committee on the Hudson’s Bay Company (hereafter referred to as “the Inquiry”). In contrast to other scholarly studies of this inquiry, here more attention is accorded to what the “experts” brought to testify and who provided much of the facts from which the Committee made its recommendation and from which contemporaries came to know this region. As we shall see, the debate over the future uses of Rupert’s Land centred on the testimony of explorers, climatologists, geologists and cartographers. It was their opinions and visions, especially those expressed through cartography that led to the official inscription of Rupert’s Land as a future place of settlement by the *Report of the Select Committee into the Hudson’s Bay Company*.

The Inquiry took place in the aftermath of a period of fundamental change in the British Empire.¹ Once content to have trading companies administer vast expanses of imperial possessions, and to extract wealth from various natural resources, the British

¹ For discussion of the return towards an emphasis on settler colonialism in the mid-19th century see James Belich’s *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For a study of liberalism and imperialism see Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: the Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). For a study of the changing nature of moral reform in urban settings see Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003).

government was increasingly apprehensive of this imperial outsourcing. It also was increasingly concerned with establishing more permanent white settlements throughout its empire, especially in Australia, South Africa, and British North America. The rapid expansion of Britain's economy led to explosive demand for raw materials such as ore and timber, while demand for traditional products such as beaver furs declined. It is thus hardly accidental that in Britain and in older-settled areas of British North America (especially in Upper Canada) that serious have been raised about renewing the HBC charter in Rupert's Land. As A.A. den Otter wrote in his study of the Inquiry's view towards indigenous peoples, "witness and questioners alike believed that...the powerful combination of science, technology, and capitalism, flourishing under increasingly free political and economic institutions, had created the great and wealthy British Empire."²

In the Canadas, early industrial expansion in the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence coupled with significant population growth had led to increased agitation by business and political leaders for expansion of settlement into the hinterlands of the Ottawa Valley and northeastern Ontario. This demand for new land to settle and exploit led to a flurry of geographic studies. The Hudson's Bay Company (hereafter "HBC") had for centuries been exploring and mapping their vast territory inscribing it as a fur trade hinterland. However, in the context of this vigorous expansionist fervour, mapmakers endeavoured to find new land appropriate for settlement. In this sense, the history of the opening of the Canadian West was driven by the visions of mapmakers and by what they inscribed on the landscape. The HBC in all its power and prestige could not stop what became inevitable once it appeared on the map. To what extent, then, did the anticipatory

² A. A. den Otter, *Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert's Land* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012), 144-45.

gaze of expansionist mapmakers play a role in the 1857 inquiry? How did maps and mapmaking shape the committee's decision on the future of the HBC's operations in Rupert's Land, and what were the wider implications for the politics of place making with regards to Canada West and its relationship to Rupert's Land? The answer to these questions points to both continuity and differences from the earlier decades of the nineteenth century when cartography and liberalism first began to affect HBC policy and practices in Rupert's Land.

The near hegemonic influence of liberal ideology by the mid-nineteenth century essentially marked the end of the era of London's enthusiasm for global despotic trading monopolies. Utilitarianism, the expansion of government bureaucracy, and the dominance of capitalism and free trade meant that the mercantilist despotism of monopolistic enterprises could either not adapt to changing circumstances, or was no longer required by an increasingly assertive government to manage its imperial affairs.³ While the East India Company (hereafter "EIC") was in its last days after the disastrous culmination of spectacular corruption, cost overruns, and ethnic violence, the HBC was a comparatively benign enterprise whose imperium over the vast portions of the northwest of the continent was since the merger of 1821 comparatively stable and peaceful. Despite the clear distinctions between the two trading companies, the perils of monopoly were plainly on the minds of British parliamentarians. While other monopolies fell over questions of economic cost, political mismanagement, and botched civilizing missions, the HBC's imperium was brought to an end almost exclusively due to questions of spatial knowledge, vision, and usage. The East India Company was proclaimed to be morally

³ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 47, 55.

bankrupt and subsequently dissolved by Parliament in 1857 due largely to events on the ground. The HBC's imperium was brought to an end on the map once it was no longer shown to fit into the spatial conception of the territory it governed.

By 1857, expansionist sentiment with regards to Rupert's Land was no longer relegated primarily to explorers, enemies of the HBC of various shades, and a few enterprising individuals in the Crown Lands Department and Geological Survey.⁴ The call to expand the domain of the Canadas into the fur trade hinterland of Rupert's Land was taken up by the popular press, and manifested itself in the political culture of Canada West. The Company's Charter was up for renewal in 1859 and in response, the British Parliament appointed a Select Committee to determine the appropriate course of action. Colonial Secretary Henry Labouchere, who possessed mixed views towards the Company, chaired the 1857 Parliamentary Select Committee into the Hudson's Bay Company. It also included a wide range of characters from Edward Ellice, a long-time employee and supporter of the Company, to William Gladstone a fervent free trader and opponent of all monopolistic enterprises including both the EIC and HBC. It had become clear to the British Parliament that, in the Province of Canada, a decisive shift in public opinion against the HBC had occurred, but official opinion regarding the matter in London had remained up until this point ambivalent and often ill informed. The 1857 Parliamentary Inquiry thus became a clash of visions and ideologies regarding the future of the HBC

⁴ More specifically Doug Owrham writes that by 1850 the HBC had been "exposed to severe criticism from several sources, including, residents of the Red River settlement. In its relations with the Indians, the European inhabitants, and the British Empire the company had been portrayed as tyrannical in its rule and opposed to progress." Most importantly Owrham argues that the question was raised regarding whether or not the HBC was the natural result of the geography and climate of the region, or as the Aborigines Protection Society argued, had "retarded the progress of civilization and religion." Owrham, *Promise of Eden* 35-6.

and land use west of the Great Lakes. Yet these debates, we shall see, revolved around changing spatial perceptions driven largely by cartography and the geographic sciences.

Despite its implications for the future of the HBC and the wider history of Canada, the few historical studies of the Inquiry and its ramifications are for the most part incomplete. J. S. Galbraith in *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor* (1957) portrays the Inquiry as a clash of personalities between enemies and supporters of the Company competed to influence an ambivalent British government. Doug Owsam in his influential study of the Canadian expansionist movement, *Promise of Eden* (1978), gives passing mention to the Inquiry, portraying it as a sideshow in what was essentially for him a Canadian-based expansionist movement which the British government had no choice but to support. A more recent and detailed study of the Inquiry appears in A. A. den Otter's *Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert's Land*. Concentrating almost exclusively on how expansionists viewed the indigenous populations of Rupert's Land, den Otter argues that there was an intricate civilizing mission that drove expansionist sentiment. Mid-nineteenth century imperialists regarded indigenous peoples as a part of nature, and thus the only effective way to "civilize" them was to expand civilization into the fur trade hinterland. In contrast to earlier scholars, for den Otter the Inquiry is historically significant because it laid the groundwork for future policies regarding indigenous peoples and was a direct indication of the future state of native-newcomer relations.⁵ While den Otter's study is an important refinement of earlier scholarship, it shares the same disinterest with respect to how the committee was primarily concerned by questions of geography, not population. Even

⁵ den Otter, *Civilizing the Wilderness*, 194-195.

Owram, whose interest in geographical imaginations such as the reaction to Palliser's Triangle, is at the crux of his own arguments about how and why expansionists from Upper Canada "saw" the West as a rich field for agricultural settlement, pays little attention to how this Inquiry and its Report used maps as primary pieces of evidence and became influenced by a cartographical gaze.⁶

The map preceded the territory with regards to the transformation Rupert's Land into a settler space. Until this point in time, cartographical depictions of this territory, with the important exception of the Red River District, had dealt primarily with the intricacies of the river systems and the locations of forts and trading posts. Knowledge of the land was based on what was essentially beneficial to the fur trader. These maps depicting the fur trader's gaze were now read differently, with the eye to the establishment of agricultural settlements.⁷ 1857 marks a pivotal moment in the history of Rupert's Land since it was at the Inquiry that the land was thoroughly rather than selectively re-imagined as settler space. It became a territory that was no longer a fur trade hinterland but instead an extension of the settler frontier. On paper, the several thousand settlers at Red River were no longer in the perceived hopeless situation of being

⁶ Cartography does play an important role in Owram's study of the Canadian expansionist movement, especially with regards to the reception to Palliser's Triangle. He writes that the contribution made by Palliser was his division of the North West (Rupert's Land) into identifiable sub-regions with descriptions of the climatology and resources of areas such as the Assiniboine and Red River regions. His work was a "significant contribution to knowledge" since it refuted old generalizations of the region's unsuitability for settlement. Furthermore it was an outline based on the potential of the region rather than its 'actual' characteristics. "Palliser's Triangle", and the "fertile belt" were definitions that were understood only when attention was concentrated on questions of agricultural suitability and the prospect of settlement. Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 67-8.

⁷ The theme of the discursive power of maps is demonstrated in J.B. Harley. *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001), especially the essays "Maps, Knowledge, and Power," and "Deconstructing the Map." Along with Matthew Edney (*Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997)), it is revealed that maps are primary tools of justifying, not just representing, territorial power and agents of forming discourses of imagined geographies. This is also discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, especially pages 7-9.

stuck beyond the frontier; they were now regarded in Britain and Canada as vanguards of civilization, as true pioneers.

One of the first witnesses to be examined at the Inquiry was Sir George Simpson, the long-time Governor of the HBC. The testimony by this star witness demonstrates the centrality of questions regarding space at the Inquiry. Likely having expected to discuss legal arguments and to present an economic case for the renewal of the HBC Charter, Simpson was confronted by Committee members' questions that concentrated almost exclusively on questions of climate and settlement. Simpson spent many years living and travelling throughout the company's vast domain and his exploits were sensationally depicted in a two-volume work in *An Overland Journey Round the World: During the Years 1841 and 1842* published in 1847 and appearing under his authorial name. With this in mind, Henry Laboucher, Colonial Secretary and committee chairman, opened the proceeding with a direct question to George Simpson: "Will you...give to the committee an account of your impressions of the character and territory of the [HBC] in point of soil and climate, particularly with reference to its adaptation for the purposes of cultivation and colonization?"⁸ Simpson was well aware of the threat to the company's position posed by questions of climate and land use. His answer was a direct reiteration of the company's official position for decades: "I don't think that any part of it is suitable for settlement, the crops are very uncertain." By this point, anyone with a vague knowledge of land usage in the territory was aware of the presence of a relatively large farming community at Red River, in addition to the small self-sustaining areas of cultivation near the company's myriad of forts. To the company's supporters on the committee, Simpson

⁸ Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on the HBC; Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, 1857, 46. Hereafter cited as *Report*.

was speaking the truth, or at least demonstrating a rational opinion on the impracticality of settlement schemes. For those who wished to see much greater colonization, however, Simpson was either covering up the truth in order to protect the company's interests, or not sharing in their optimism regarding the spirit of industry and improvement that existed at Red River.

According to Donald Worster, in the mid-nineteenth century there was widespread "anti-Arcadian sentiment" coupled with an understanding that agricultural settlement would improve the hospitability of the climate.⁹ This was a powerful proposition that was brought up frequently during the Committee's proceedings. Henry Laboucher, for example, confronted Simpson with this very notion when he said, "[i]n the account which you have given of the climate...of the banks of the Saskatchewan [River], you have made no allowance for the influences upon climate which are produced by settlement." Speaking from personal experience Simpson displayed no faith in this proposition and declared, "...I am not aware that settlement does produce any material influence upon climate; I have not known it to do so in Canada; I have been in the Canadas for many years, and I do not find the climate improved."¹⁰ Amongst his detractors, the prospect of settlement improving the climate in Canada remained a possibility, as it was widely believed that levels of settlement in Canada were not yet sufficient. Committee member Gordon even went as far to ask Simpson if he was aware that Europe was "once as frozen as Rupert's Land?"¹¹ A rudimentary knowledge of climatology was clearly prevalent in the minds of many Committee members, making it a

⁹ Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas, 2nd Edition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29-30.

¹⁰ *Report*, 47.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 51.

significant factor in influencing discourses of imagined geographies regarding Rupert's Land as an anticipated settler space.

Notions of imaginary landscapes were often as powerful as scientific discussions of topography and climatology. Simpson's past writings which presented his climatological observations and musings on future land use came back to haunt him during his testimony. Both Laboucher and Gordon cited his bestselling work *Journey Round the World* during the hearing. Quoting a passage of Simpson's book that described the area between Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods, Laboucher pointed out that Simpson's imaginary landscape was one very similar to that of the expansionists. "[Quoting Simpson] From Fort Frances downward, a stretch nearly 100 miles, it is not interrupted by a single impediment...nor are the banks less favourable to agriculture than the water themselves to navigation, resembling...the Thames near Richmond [England]." Most damaging for Simpson's position was the reference to his imagined landscape as in fact an ideal field for colonization: "Is it not too much for the eye of philanthropy to discern through the vista of futurity this noble stream, connecting the fertile shores of two spacious lakes, with crowded steamboats on its bosom and populous town on its banks?" Simpson attributed all this to the type of sensationalism that is often used to sell books. He conceded, though, that his visions may well be true with regards to the landscape, but insisted the climate was just not favourable to bring it to fruition.¹² Simpson provided even more retractions of his climatological observations when he insisted that his own writings on the fertility of the soil at Red River were an exaggeration, and in reality could

¹² *Report*, 48.

only be applied to small areas along the riverbanks.¹³ Simpson learned that the visionary language of a travel writer was a powerful weapon in the formation of discourses of imaginary landscapes, and the irony that his own writing would be turned against him was no doubt lost on him.

Simpson did not have the final word on the matter. Other witnesses ranging from company employees and soldiers, to geologists, explorers and government officials helped contribute the formation of official opinion regarding both the current and future state of Rupert's Land. While Sir George Simpson's testimony was a defence of the status quo, most other witnesses advanced their own personal agendas that were either indifferent or blatantly at odds with those of the HBC. What linked the diverse opinions held by those who testified was an emphasis on climate and topography in general, and suitability for settlement in particular. Free trade advocates, utilitarian liberals, and legal officials all concentrated their attention towards that central question. For example, when asked whether any land under HBC control was suitable for settlement, Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Lefroy of the Royal Artillery explained that, while it was possible, the process of bringing settlement to fruition would be slow and arduous. While Red River had been adapted for the purposes of agriculture, it in no way compared to other parts of British North America.¹⁴ Nevertheless he believed that the territory between Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods was "not much more unfavourable than many parts of Lower Canada." Furthermore, he described the Saskatchewan district, especially the parts adjacent to Fort Cumberland, as having land that was well suited for settlement with the

¹³ *Report*, 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

only serious impediment being the frequent harsh winters.¹⁵ Referring to public opinion in the Canadas, Lefroy remarked that there are strong impressions that sections of Rupert's Land were suitable for settlement. He was not, however, able to discern the level of agitation for action that existed at the time.¹⁶ Lefroy's testimony was at times ambivalent and committee members wanted more direct answers. The examination that followed delved further into questions of climate and topography and placed maps at the centre of the discussion.

As Lefroy's interrogation progressed the Committee turned to the specifics of the topography and geology of Red River. Lefroy explained that the HBC had in fact favoured cultivation at Red River in order to keep the settlers away from the Buffalo hunt, and he refuted the perception that buffalo grazing land, of which there was plenty, was suitable for agriculture.¹⁷ Laboucher was not convinced of this proposition since geological reports and cartography of the area noted the presence of limestone, which was assumed by many experts and lay people to indicate agricultural potential. Furthermore, the presence of woodland was assumed by many (including the committee) to be a measure of soil fertility; "people explore a country for agricultural capability namely from the wood upon it." When Lefroy questioned that assumption, he was told that it had been the case in both the Canadas and the United States.¹⁸ Again, using both comparisons and historical precedent, Lefroy, like Simpson, was asked if he would dispute the "fact" that settlement had improved Europe's climate.

¹⁵ *Report*, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

Discussion then turned toward a deeper cartographical analysis. Laboucher assumed the southern portion of Lake Winnipeg was suitable for settlement because of its similar longitude to Western Europe. Here the representational power of maps was on full display. Assumptions were made based on the scientific rationalization of spaces that both examiner and witness had never observed in person. The map's denotation of both tree and limestone, along with displaying lines of latitude similar to those in Europe, fuelled the assumption that the land was suitable for agriculture, and thus an ideal place of future white settlement.¹⁹

Former Company employee John Rae provided further testimony regarding the Saskatchewan District's suitability for settlement, and devoted particular attention to the areas around the Red and Rainy Rivers. He informed the Committee that although he had never been to the Saskatchewan District he did hear from others that it was suitable for cultivation except for the temporary problems of transportation, communication, and direct competition from the United States.²⁰ Basing his assumptions on what he had discerned from others, he claimed that both the Saskatchewan and Red Rivers were quite capable of settlement "as soon as the country grows up to it same as it does in the States."²¹ If Minnesota could be settled then there was no reason why the Saskatchewan District and Red River could not. The only mitigating factor was the lack of adequate transportation routes and the presence of "warlike" indigenous peoples. He explained that once American settlements reached the border the next logical step would be to open up the HBC territory to settlement. For Rae, it was not a question of if the land could sustain

¹⁹ Owrarn, *Promise of Eden*, 63-64.

²⁰ *Report*, 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

settlement, but when it could be made a reality. The territory in question was already settler space in his mind. The committee appeared to agree with this assessment of settlement being gradual rather than immediate. Turning to questions of the practicalities of arranging this, Rae was asked if the nature of the fur trade required a monopoly, and if it could be arranged to have the HBC give non-fur bearing land over to settlement. Indeed, once settler space was envisioned, the discussion quickly turned to how best to order it.

Visions of Rupert's Land as a settler space were not relegated to the readings of maps, it was also the product of on the ground observations, particularly those that fuelled the vehement opposition towards the HBC as expressed by Alexander Isbister. Isbister was one of the first prominent critics of the HBC, going back to his extensive correspondence with the former Colonial Secretary Earl Grey. He wrote letters and circulated petitions on behalf of the Red River settlers. Isbister was also a prominent liberal, founding the Aborigines Protection Society that lobbied the British government on behalf of the indigenous peoples who Isbister argued were being subjugated to the tyranny of HBC monopoly, having their potential squandered by the restriction against free trade. His testimony embodied the nature of anti-HBC sentiment, combining both the free trade and utilitarian strands of liberalism that was sweeping the British Empire and defining its civilizing mission.²² Most significant, however, was that these concerns were anchored, supported, and driven by discourses of spatial management and cartographical reasoning. In his testimony at the Inquiry, the HBC was depicted as an oppressive force that was only interested in profits. He described it as being as a direct "obstruction of the colonizing spirit of [the] settlers who are in the territory." He continued by criticizing

²² Owrn, *Promise of Eden*, 34.

how the company enforced its strict monopoly over the fur trade, stifling both entrepreneurial spirit, and denying the settlers basic rights.²³

Committee members demonstrated a keen interest in Isbister's opinion regarding the potential to expand settlement in the territory. He told the Inquiry that he envisioned an area of settlement that would encompass the chain of rivers between Lake Winnipeg and Lake Superior. He believed that the land in question would be settled rather quickly if the HBC's monopoly was abolished. However, Isbister was more cautious regarding questions of law and order. Asked whether he thought that the Canadian government could immediately take up the task of governing Rupert's Land, Isbister insisted that the Canadas must be able to demonstrate a capability to do so before the land could be opened up.²⁴ Furthermore, he deemed the proposed compromise with the HBC of opening up non-fur lands to settlement to be insufficient. While land is a strong inducement for settlers, the liberalization of the fur trade, he argued, would attract scores of settlers and other enterprising individuals to Rupert's Land.²⁵ Once again, the region was depicted as settler space just waiting to be freed from the monopolistic tyranny of HBC rule.

The full impact of Isbister's arguments against the HBC was not confined to legal writings and anti-monopoly rhetoric. Instead, in 1857 his geological and cartographical writings were just beginning to make an impact. Most notably, Isbister had written a geological account of Rupert's Land along with a coloured map that was published in the 1856 edition of the *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society*. In addition to this he had published a detailed geographical survey of the country west of Mackenzie River in the

²³ *Report*, 121.

²⁴ *Report*, 124.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, as well as several papers on similar subjects to the British Association of the Advancement of Science.²⁶ Isbister provided the map in question to the committee as evidence, and noted that there was an abundance of animals and vegetation similar to that found in Russia. This depiction of territory similar to Russia's provided ample "evidence," he said, that the land could be cultivated and settled. The power of cartography was on full display in Isbister's maps and writings. Legal arguments, petitions, accusation of abuse against both settlers and indigenous peoples, and anti-monopoly rhetoric would do little to challenge the HBC imperium if the maps and geological surveys did not depict a territory suitable for cultivation.

Sir John Richardson, a notable explorer, was called in as a witness to describe his travels and observations of Rupert's Land and presented claims that were more nuanced than Isbister's. He was a part of the 1819 and 1825 expeditions led by Sir John Franklin. However, the committee members were already familiar with his travels; they were more interested in his opinions regarding the presence of land suitable for settlement. Where public and official interest in his travels was once based on tales of adventure, particularly the search for the Northwest Passage, Richardson now found himself confronted with the intricacies of the politics of place making. In this endeavour he described to the committee a land where cereals can grow in large quantities up to the "latitude 56 degrees." Asked if there was land that was suitable for subsistence farming, Richardson remarked that a considerable population could live off the land as far north as the Peace River, but that any agricultural community would not be allowed to prosper due to the lack of roads and communication, an implicit reference to the anti-development

²⁶ Ibid., 353.

tendencies of the HBC.²⁷ He was also adamant in his belief that farming could only be possible along the prairie river banks, as the limestone “is not fertile [and] contains a lot of magnesia, which is generally thought to be very injurious to agriculture.”²⁸ Despite there being land suitable for settlement, Richardson expressed his support for the status quo. In response to a question by company supporter Edward Ellice, Richardson argued that abolishing the HBC monopoly would lead to the same sort of chaos that occurred in the early 1820s.²⁹ Settlement should be gradual, and only occur when the Canadian frontier had advanced into Red River. If not, he believed that there would be immense problems regarding law and order that would particularly put at risk the welfare of the indigenous people. This testimony reveals that although Richardson’s maps and writings were not commissioned for the purposes of advancing the settlement frontier, they nevertheless had become a crucial part of the discourses of imagined settler spaces.

The second session of the Inquiry was held on 19 May 1857 and opened with the testimony of Colonel John F. Crofton who directly refuted many of the ambivalent observations made by Sir John Richardson. With regards to Red River he was of the belief that its climate was similar to that of Upper Canada’s, perhaps even *less* severe. He explained that from his experience “[t]he thermometer sinks to 47 below zero occasionally at Red River, as it does at Quebec, but the open season is somewhat longer at Red River...even [longer] than Upper Canada[‘s].”³⁰ As evidence for his sensational claims, he presented to the Committee a full report of the colony’s products and climate. He described winters that last from mid-November to early April (relatively similar to

²⁷ *Report*, 150-151.

²⁸ *Report*, 151.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

Canada's), farmers who grow oats, wheat, and a variety of vegetables, and fertile soil laced with limestone. Pointing to the available map, he pointed out that limestone, and thus fertile land, extended from Red River across the prairies to the edge of the Rocky Mountains.³¹ In summing up his testimony he boldly told the Committee that Rupert's Land was "quite fit for agriculture," and that it could "maintain a colony of millions."³² It was all laid out on the map place before the committee, the rivers with its alluvial soils, the extensive range of prairie land ready for the plough and enriched with an abundance of limestone. For Crofton, the only question in his mind was when would the settlers be allowed to arrive?

In the testimony of Justice William Draper, legal arguments and commercial considerations were outweighed in influence by cartography and discussions of geology. Draper, Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas of Upper Canada, was sent to London by the Canadian government to both observe and testify at the Inquiry. It was reported in the *Toronto Globe* that Draper was instructed by the Governor General to do everything in his power to express the interest and claims of Canada. The Governor General was quoted as instructing Draper to "consider it part of your duty to watch over those interests by connecting any erroneous impressions, and by bringing forward any legal claims which this province may possess on account of its territorial position." Furthermore he was not authorized to negotiate any plan of settlement without first consulting the Governor general. Draper was also instructed to concentrate his attention on expressing the importance of securing the North-West territory against the "sudden and unauthorized influx of immigration from the United States," since it was feared that

³¹ *Report*, 171.

³² *Ibid.*

the continued “vacancy” of the territory and absence of a marked boundary would lead to possible annexation by the Americans.³³ For all intents and purposes he was the official voice of the Province of Canada.³⁴

Although he admitted to the Inquiry that he had never been west of Lake Superior, he affirmed the Canadian government’s official position regarding HBC territory. He argued that the land belonged to the Canadas and it was the government’s desire to expand into it at the opportune moment.³⁵ Draper went as far as to argue against the legal right of the HBC to govern Rupert’s Land. Their legal right to the Hudson’s Bay drainage basin was declared to be ill-founded since “until the very modern period, as is quite inconsistent with the claims advanced by the Company for nearly a century and a half.”³⁶ He argued that the HBC’s monopoly over the fur trade in the region did not give it the legal right to govern the land. In this sense the government of Canada was aligning itself with the claims of Company enemies such as Alexander Isbister. Draper was instructed to ascertain the Committee’s official position regarding the matter, especially with questions of land boundaries and the legal rights of settlers.

Draper also used legal arguments to advance the vision of Rupert’s Land as settler space. He proposed that Canada should at least have a “free right to explore and survey” in order to “ascertain the capabilities of the country.”³⁷ This right was currently held by the HBC and Draper insisted that the HBC was not interested in carrying out proper surveying and mapping of the land in order to determine its suitability for colonization.

³³ “Hudson’s Bay Territory: the Draper Instructions,” *The Globe*, March 7, 1857.

³⁴ Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden*, 41, 56.

³⁵ *Report*, 211.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 212.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

In doing so, it was implied that the HBC was covering up the territory's true potential. Transferring this right to the Province of Canada would place the power of ordering space in the hands of an experienced settler colony, transforming the fur trade hinterland into a settler frontier. Draper even presented a scheme to colonize Rupert's Land in proposing that roads be constructed with free land granted to settlers on either side; and that townships be established and incorporated into the province of Canada West. This was hardly accidental; identical colonization projects were underway in both Upper and Lower Canada.³⁸ There was some territorial modesty in this ambitious scheme, as Draper told the committee that Canada would "never dream of pushing beyond the Rocky Mountains."³⁹ However, he was pragmatic with regards to communication. Maps had consistently depicted a vast swath of land between Lake Huron and Lake Superior that was for the most part devoid of cultivatable land. The consensus was that Canada could not govern any part of Rupert's Land, including Red River, if communication was not opened first. Once this was addressed he saw no reason why Red River could not be governed as part of the Canadas.⁴⁰ Draper's testimony thus presented the Committee with a direct question; should it allow Rupert's Land to remain the exclusive domain of an antiquated fur monopoly in an age of settler expansion and free trade, or allow its transformation into a Canadian settler frontier? In their decision-making process, geography, not necessarily questions of legal rights, were the paramount pieces of evidence and persuasion.

³⁸ John C. Walsh. "Upper Canada and the Mapping of Settler Space (unpublished paper presented to the 2011 Canadian Historical Association General Meeting), 4, 7.

³⁹ *Report*, 212.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

As Doug Owram demonstrates, public and official opinion in Canada had by this point shifted decisively in favour of expansionism. The Canadian government was asking for official permission to undertake surveying for the purposes of ascertaining suitability for settlement. Asked to confirm that position, Draper assured the Committee that the Canadian government would enthusiastically take up the expense of surveying and settling the country.⁴¹ It was an extremely controversial matter in British North America with both sides making sensational claims. An official, scientific survey, it was believed, would bring a sense of rationalism to the matter. In fact, the granting of permission to undertake surveying by a settler colony confirms that the land was now regarded as an anticipated settler space.

Justice Draper had no personal knowledge of Rupert's Land and Red River. He admitted that, like the majority of his colleagues, his information was gathered from cartographical sources along with various travel writings and geological reports produced by those on both sides of the debate. Before travelling across the North Atlantic, Draper had been briefed on the matter by Alfred R. Roche, an employee of the Crown Lands Department, and ardent expansionist whose writings would play a significant role in bringing official opinion in support of the expansionist campaign.⁴² Referring to the map placed before the Committee, Draper explained where he thought the line of settlement should be placed. As all assembled looked at the map, Draper pointed out that he believed the "most valuable land for settlement would be found to lie in parallel of latitude south of Norway House," but, he reaffirmed the fact that he had "no personal knowledge" regarding the matter. What followed were more discussions over latitude, and the

⁴¹ *Report*, 215.

⁴² Owram, *Promise of Eden*, 41.

locations of rivers and forts. Draper, having nothing more to offer, relied almost exclusively on the maps held before him, repeatedly pointing to lines of latitude and longitude to rationalize this fur trade territory as one that was suitable for white, agricultural (re)settlement.⁴³

The knowledge discerned from maps once again proved indispensable when the discussion turned towards questions regarding the extent of American encroachment into Rupert's Land and the means of expanding the settlement frontier west of Lake Huron. The notion that these maps made possible to imagine a future as much as they depicted present topographical realities was clearly demonstrated by Draper's testimony. Commenting, for example, on the map not showing any firm border between Rupert's Land and the United States, Draper warned, "[it is] an undefined line; there is nothing to prevent people from crossing it; nothing to point it out; nothing to defend it."⁴⁴ Draper was not alone in emphasizing the ambiguity and uncertainty that appeared on the map and thus on the land itself.

Draper also made extensive use of the example of colonization in Upper Canada as "proof" for what kind of transformation would be possible in Rupert's Land once its fur trade past gave way to a modern agricultural and proto-industrial future. With regards to the expansion of the settlement frontier, Draper informed the Committee that townships were being laid out along the Ottawa River towards Lake Nipissing. According to him, this expansion of settler space was made possible once the North West Company ended the trade operations in the area.⁴⁵ The government had invested heavily

⁴³ *Report*, 217.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 223-224.

in this expansion of the frontier and undertook an extensive survey for the “purposes of ascertaining the best mode of improving [the Ottawa River].” Draper was adamant in explaining to the Committee that the development of the Ottawa River demonstrated the extent to which a country that was once “barren, unoccupied, and unsettled, and which interposed great obstacles to navigation,” was now in the process of becoming settled. Furthermore, the means of transportation were being improved with all difficulties of river transportation having been mitigated once settlement was firmly established.⁴⁶ Draper also cited the Welland and Sault Ste. Marie Canals as examples of how transportation was being improved. With these transportation links one could travel by boat from Montreal to Lake Nipissing and Lake Superior, “a vessel of very considerable burthen loaded at Montreal could discharge her cargo at Montreal.”⁴⁷ Once settlement was sufficiently built up a rail-link could be established, allowing all year transportation from Red River to Montreal. The Province of Canada had an ambitious plan for Rupert’s Land that was rationalized through cartography. All that was required was that the HBC relinquish what Draper and other critics perceived as the Company’s regressive control of the land.

It was assumed that since the HBC’s interests would undoubtedly be threatened by the arrival of settlers, it would be up to London to step in and force the Company’s hand. Draper suggested a compromise between the status quo and the complete abolition of the monopoly. Canada would take over whatever were decided to be the HBC’s fertile lands and populate it with settlers, which would in turn open up new markets for not only for Montreal and Toronto merchants, but also locally for HBC traders. Furthermore the

⁴² *Report*, 224.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

frontier would be secured against American encroachment. With the opening of the land for settlement all but assumed to be inevitable, the question in Canada was whether or not to allow the HBC to maintain its trade monopoly. This compromise solution of having a fur trade monopoly coexist with a settler colony was at the time being debated in Canada. The colonial parliament was holding its own inquiry into this matter, where in addition to deciding the fate of the fur monopoly, questions were being asked as to whether all means necessary were expended with regards to studying the land for settlement and agricultural potential. Draper explained that the provincial assembly believed they have more detailed evidence that supports the expansionist's position.⁴⁸ However, when pressed on the matter, Draper insisted that he held no more than "mere newspaper knowledge on the subject."⁴⁹

The Inquiry was adjourned until 04 June and immediately called in Draper to provide further testimony regarding recent developments in Canada. He provided the Committee with a sensational piece of evidence to advance his case, the famous isotherm map of Rupert's Land.⁵⁰ The map was prepared by the Crown Lands Office in Toronto and depicted the climatological situations of various posts, but most significantly the map clearly showed the lines of isothermal temperature. During this period, isothermal maps became important tools of persuasion by advocates of settlement (boosters), especially in the American west. The geographer Alexander von Humboldt's writings on climate

⁴⁸ *Report*, 230.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Later published in *The Globe* this map became important evidence used by the expansionists to advance their claims.

A good example of the employment of isothermal maps as evidence to support the booster cause was in American mid-west, which during this period was being subjected to a massive influx of settlers. Settlements that were located within an ideal isothermal range such as Chicago and St. Louis became subject to massive land speculation and explosive population growth during the mid-nineteenth century. See William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, particularly Ch. 1, "Dreaming the Metropolis."

suggested that the ideal range of settlement was contained within a narrow isotherm band that followed a mean annual temperature of 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Regions in North American that generally followed this isotherm line were presented as being the perfect place for settlement and civilization.⁵¹ Were Red River and the North West Territory within this ideal isotherm?

As it was a relatively new science, Draper explained it as best he could. “[The map is designed] to show the lines of isothermal temperatures, to show the geological structure, and to show besides that, by references to different authorities, the assumed climate...as has been represented by people who have visited the country...so that [to present] what is supposed to be the truth...”⁵² Based on temperature alone, the map clearly demonstrated that the climate was suitable for settlement in vast swaths of Rupert’s Land. There was yet any public reaction because according to Draper the map was currently undergoing revisions with regards to the area around Lake Huron and Lake Superior and would not be published for some time. Furthermore the fact that a Justice, with no training or experience in cartography or the geographic sciences, spent most of his testimony peering over maps and employing them as evidence, along with discussing climate and topography, demonstrated the power of maps and map-making.

Alfred Roche, an employee of the Crown Lands Office, was tasked to present the Committee with reporting on the state of public opinion in Canada with regards to the HBC and its imperium. He explained that he possessed an adverse opinion since he was both an expansionist and anti-monopolist. To illustrate the prevalence of expansionist rhetoric in Canada he described how Mr. Vankoughnet stated at a public meeting in

⁵¹ William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 38.

⁵² *Report*, 231.

September 1856 that the boundary of Canada is the Pacific Ocean, and that “no charter could give a body of men control over half a continent, and that he would not rest until the [HBC] Charter was abolished.” Although deviating from official opinion, this was far from being an extreme view. Roche believed that it was a widely held opinion by both the press and “public men of all degrees.”⁵³ Although government officials desired the territory to be attached to Canada, Roche conceded there was ambivalence towards whether they were prepared to govern it. He also described how the Commissioner of Crown Lands stated that public attention has been attracted to the Saskatchewan Country, and as a result action should be taken to ensure its development.⁵⁴ Also the Commissioner was of the opinion that all available land in the western peninsula of Canada West had been taken up by settlers, and thus the prairies of the Red River, Saskatchewan, and Assiniboia would provide “great inducement” for settlers. The expansion of settlement into the Ottawa-Huron Tract was already a direct result of the land in the western peninsula being exhausted, but Roche argued that the fertile prairie land in the Saskatchewan and Red River areas would be more attractive to pioneers than the heavily forested and often rocky land of the Ottawa Valley. He elaborated further, describing public opinion that was generally hostile to the HBC. Roche explained that it was widely believed that the Company opposed settlement and resource development, and public opinion and many in the government “look upon [the HBC] as a foreign body monopolizing an immense territory, keeping it in a state of nature, when it has many resources which might be developed.” While Upper Canada was struggling to settle every

⁵³ *Report*, 248.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

acre of fertile land, the HBC was regarded as squandering and mismanaging theirs. To this end they wanted to see the HBC abolished completely.⁵⁵

Roche's testimony was supported and further elaborated upon by Richard King. A polymath, King served as both a surgeon and naturalist in the 1833-36 Arctic expeditions led by Sir John Ross, and was thus considered an expert on the climate of the country. He described Rupert's Land as being a "very large country" and handed the Committee a copy of Arthur Arrowsmith's well-regarded maps of the region. Referring to it as one of Arrowsmith's best and most detailed, he pointed to a clearly-marked "square piece of country which is always looked upon as a very fertile valley." The land in question was bounded on the south by Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River and by Lake Athabasca in the north, and it encompassed an area of several hundred square miles. King described the area as being similar to how "Livingstone described the interior of Africa...This large portion which I describe as within this I looked upon as the most fertile portion which I saw. On the map you will see the country is entirely surrounded by water." The banks of the rivers possess fertile timber rich soil, with forests compared to those of Kensington Park. This country, according to King, "[c]ertainly has the highest qualities for qualification [for settlement] if properly opened up."⁵⁶ With the map as his guide, and a vast public knowledge of British exploration from which to draw simplified comparisons, King presented an image of a vast fertile land surrounded by waterways that was just waiting to receive settlers.

The last significant witness to be called in to testify was committee member Edward Ellice. As a member of the HBC Board of Governors, Ellice represented the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁵⁶ *Report*, 313-314.

Company's interests in Parliament. Ellice stressed caution and essentially refuted the image of a rosy future envisioned by the expansionists. He described how when he first joined the HBC in 1803 the state of the interior of Rupert's Land was "very bad."⁵⁷ Stressing the perils of free trade in the fur sector, he explained how competition between the HBC and the North West Company was conducted with "great extravagance, with frequent collisions between Indians and whites, and everything got worse until 1811" when Lord Selkirk was granted his deed to establish a colony at Red River.⁵⁸ Asked by Chairman Laboucher if he agreed with the proposal that the HBC cede to Canada land of no value to the fur trade for the purposes of expanding the settler frontier, Ellice exclaimed that he, along with the Company, was receptive to the idea. He believed that there would be no difficulty and that the HBC Board of Governors would agree to it as long as Canada bore the expense of governing and policing it, and upholding the fur trade monopoly.⁵⁹

Ultimately the HBC realized that expansionist rhetoric was too strong, and the cartographical and climatological arguments against their position were too influential to prevent the expansion of the settlement frontier. Since Rupert's Land was increasingly regarded as a settler space in the hearts and minds of Canadians, the best the Company could hope for was to arrive at an arrangement with the British and Canadian governments to confine those settler spaces to areas where there is no abundance of fur. However, Ellice was adamant in his belief that no matter how strong the desire, Canada was not ready to govern the territory. He stressed that it was in the HBC's interests to

⁵⁷ *Report*, 323.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 330.

preserve Britain's territorial possessions until the time came to hand it over to the colonial government.⁶⁰ He depicted the Company as a steward of Crown Land, holding it in trust for the future use of the Canadian people. When asked if "civilization and cultivation be established in Red River and the adjacent country" Ellice attempted to dispel the perception that the HBC had previously opposed and obstructed any attempts to expand settlement. He described the Red River colony as being a failed experiment due to its isolation, and declared that the HBC would only support further schemes if they could prove to be profitable. The HBC would not interfere if Britain or Canada would pay the expense of establishing further settlements, but he believed that "no circumstances at present connected with Red River which would give me the least idea that a prosperous colony could exist there without great assistance."⁶¹ Ellice and the HBC were depicted as being realists immune to all the romantic expansionist sentiment prevalent in the Canadas.

While the idea of expanding the settlement frontier was supported and anticipated by cartography, it did not reflect how the HBC perceived the situation to be on the ground. Asked if the climate at Red River was similar to that of Minnesota, Ellice exclaimed that northern Minnesota was hardly an ideal country for settlement. Attempting to refute the claims of the isotherm map presented by Justice Draper, he elaborated this point describing how,

...even the Minnesota territory is not very hospitable...and the most northern settlement in Minnesota [near Red River] is five degrees to the south of it...[a]long the banks of the river, there is a quantity of good soil, which is to an extent productive. Then [when Red River] is 1,000 feet above the level of the sea; it is in the latitude of 50 degrees,

⁶⁰ *Report*, 330.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 331.

Quebec is in 46°50'. It is three or four degrees further north than Quebec...when you come to the latitude 50 degrees and 1,000 feet above the level of the sea, the climate is not very favourable, so it has been found by the settlers at the Red River [colony].⁶²

Furthermore, he reminded the committee that Red River had been on the verge of starvation at least twice in its history. Restating the point made many times at the inquiry, Laboucher asked Ellice if it could be assumed that “a fur company has interests in direct opposition to the colonization of the country?” Ellice replied that nothing should be assumed, but it is his opinion that a fur company cannot and should not be involved in colonization schemes, with the Selkirk Settlement being a temporary exception which ultimately proved to be a major drain on company resources in the long term.⁶³ In effect, it was determined that if the Committee decided to open the land up for settlement, they should not expect the HBC to tolerate, not manage the process.

After forty days of testimony and debate, the Select Committee on the Hudson’s Bay Company tabled its ruling. For all the rhetoric of Company abuses, free trade, legal rights to land, mistreatment of indigenous peoples, and questionable company governance that witnesses had brought forward, it was questions of geography that ultimately influenced the Committee’s decision to end the HBC imperium. In the report to Parliament, it was recommended that the 1838 renewal of the HBC’s Charter be allowed to expire in 1859, and the territory opened to settlement. The Committee’s report expressed support for allowing the Canadian government to annex Rupert’s Land for the purposes of settlement and recognized that Red River and the Saskatchewan District were the most desirable and suitable for this purpose. Further discussion of the Canadian

⁶² *Report*, 331.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 341.

government's readiness to govern the territory had to occur before an Act of Parliament could be passed regarding the matter. In order to preserve the fur trade and the HBC's financial future, it was argued that the trade monopoly be maintained for the time being. A compromise was reached that represented the expansionist desire to expand the settlement frontier and the HBC's desire to maintain its fur monopoly. The territory's perceived suitability for settlement meant that the Company's legal rights to the land were withdrawn. It was agreed that due to its very nature a fur monopoly could not take up the task of expanding the settlement frontier.

In the history of imperial expansion, maps are often anticipatory, representing a territory yet-to-come as much as a territory already there. For British colonialisms in this era, maps envisioned future conquests, rationalized the hinterland into settler space, and helped shape expansionist discourse. We saw all of these elements reveal themselves in the context of the 1857 Parliamentary Inquiry. While questions of the HBC's legitimacy and debates over the merits of free trade were frequently brought up during the proceedings, the most powerful pieces of evidence against the Company's position were not necessarily legal documents petitions, or financial records. Instead maps and climatological observations were the most significant factors in shaping the Committee's position. Fighting the claims of HBC officials that drew upon anecdotal evidence, cartography, cartographical reasoning, and climate science legitimized and re-presented Rupert's Land as settler space. Whether topographical or isothermal, these maps provided ample evidence to support the expansionists' claims. Supporters of the status quo had to argue against the power of maps and in the process discovered that the HBC's imperium was perceived to be denying this reality. In the context of colonial politics, the process of

settler expansion begins once territory is considered to be a frontier and it is anticipated as such on the map. The Canadian government was determined to annex Rupert's Land; it was up to London to decide when, not if this would occur.

The debate over the future of Rupert's Land as a settler space centred almost exclusively on the testimony of explorers, climatologists, geologists and cartographers at the Inquiry, and their work was instrumental in shaping the opinions of government officials such as Justice Draper. While den Otter is certainly correct with respect to how the Inquiry reveals much about contemporary thought regarding indigenous and Métis peoples, even those discussions were framed by debates over geography. And because of this, maps and those who spoke with maps, including men like Judge Draper who were not scientific experts, were influential voices. The quest for geographic knowledge and the mapping projects that were tied to it had left the hands of the HBC once its centuries old monopoly was abolished and Rupert's Land absorbed into the newly formed Dominion of Canada in 1870. The Company that had both fostered and inhibited the quest for geographic knowledge had effectively been mapped Rupert's Land.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The dissolution of the HBC's monopoly in 1859 and the absorption of Rupert's Land into the newly created Dominion of Canada in 1870 marked another chapter in the long process of reconceptualising the region into settler space. The violence witnessed at Red River after its founding had served as a prelude to the conflict that ensued once Rupert's Land was fully opened to white settlement. The Red River Rebellions that began in 1869 demonstrate that the colonization process, while often easily envisioned on paper, becomes much more difficult to implement when a large swath of the population on the ground does not share the same spatial ambitions. For the imperialists in London and the expansionists in central Canada, Rupert's Land may have seemed as a vast fertile land ready to receive millions of settlers. The Métis people were not consulted in this process and their conception of their land was entirely incompatible with what the imperial visionaries displayed through cartography. The Métis and their leader Louis Riel understood the power of maps in reconceptualising space; after all the rebellion essentially began with the arrival of surveyors with the purposes of introducing cadastral mapping. As the Métis understood, it was the surveyor who was the main agent in the process of conceptualizing space, with their arrival it became clear that the land was being colonized to conform to visions of Red River as a settler space.

The Red River rebellions were not just the beginning of the end for the Métis conception of Red River and the start of the Canadian settlement of the West. As this thesis demonstrated, the events of the late 1860s were instead a culmination of a century-long process of the colonization of Rupert's Land on paper. From the late 1780s, HBC surveyor-explorers first negotiated the native spaces of the interior of Rupert's Land, then

rationalized them into fur trade space, transformed it into a governable space, and finally re-envisioned it as a settler space.

It is important to understand that maps are essentially cultural texts. In the context of the HBC's mapping of space in the late eighteenth century, they represent both the culture of the fur trade, and the wider quest for geographic knowledge. More specifically, as Chapter Two demonstrated, the maps produced by HBC explorer-surveyor Peter Fidler with their combination of European and indigenous cartographical conventions are a reflection of the hybrid nature of fur trade culture. In their wider political context, Fidler's maps were misread and misused by cartographers such as Aaron Arrowsmith who operated within a culture that valued the rationalization of imperial spaces and was guided by western notions of territory and imagined geographies.

While initially reluctant to embrace the quest for geographic knowledge that was an important component of the British imperial project, the HBC in the early nineteenth century turned its attention to gaining geographic knowledge to remake Rupert's Land into a rational, governable space. As Chapter Three demonstrated the primary purpose of Lord Selkirk and Andrew Colville's "retrenchment" was to remake Rupert's Land into a governable space. In the wake of intense competition from the North West Company, trading districts were established, new committees of governance were formed, and more personnel was recruited with the ultimate aim of making the region into a space of law and order and, in turn, profitable. Most importantly, a new conceptualization of space was introduced to the Red River District in the form of settlement. This imperial project was ultimately guided by the emergent ideology of liberalism and driven by changing conceptualizations of fur trade spaces and guided by a desire to rationalize it. With the

establishment of the Red River Colony and the HBC's eventual victory over the Nor'Westers, Rupert's Land was ultimately made 'governable'.

Retrenchment culminated in the 1821 merger of the HBC and the North West Company and a sense of peace and security was established. However, by the 1850s the HBC was confronted by a new threat to its imperium: domestic expansionism from the Province of Canada and the conceptualization of space that came with it. Although the HBC had for centuries been exploring and mapping their vast territory in order to conform to the quest for geographic knowledge. However, in the context of the emerging expansionist fervour, both in British North America and in Britain, mapmakers endeavoured to find new land appropriate for settlement. The quest for geographic knowledge had become characterized by finding territory suitable for agriculture and settlement. The HBC that up until this point seemed to be secure as an imperial agent, could not stop what became inevitable once it appeared on the map.

As Chapter Four demonstrated, expansionist fervour and liberal agitation for free trade combined to create a growing climate of hostility towards the HBC. The British government responded by calling a parliamentary inquiry into the affairs of the HBC. With significant attention directed towards the geography of Rupert's Land, particularly its suitability for settlement, the 1857 Inquiry served to officially reconceptualise Rupert's Land as a settler space. The quest for geographic knowledge and the mapping projects of the HBC had culminated in the dismantling of its monopoly and imperium. The arrival of the surveyors at Red River in 1869 to map out this territory to conform to the new spatial conception of it being a settler space under the governance of the Dominion of Canada

marked the end point of century-long process of rationalizing space through cartography and the use of maps as both a rhetorical and a political technology.

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