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THE PLAINS CREE: A PRELIMINARY TRADE AND
MILITARY CHRONOLOGY 1670 - 1870

by

John Sheridan Milloy, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of History

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

September 15, 1972

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of Graduate Studies acceptance of the thesis
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and Military Chronology 1670-1870"
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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the migration of one branch of the Cree in the three centuries before 1870, their adoption of Plains life and their military and commercial relations with their neighbours. While more or less continuously a part of the Hudson's Bay Company trading system from the late seventeenth century, this branch of the Cree were more vitally engaged in trade alliances with other tribes: first with the Blackfoot, then with the Mandan villages and subsequently in attempts to establish new trade alliances with tribes farther west. Military and commercial relations generally combined to form a series of coherent patterns. Four phases are distinguished: wars of migration and territory, characterized by a Cree-Blackfoot alliance and lasting until the later years of the eighteenth century; the period of the Mandan alliance, characterized by a common enmity to the Sioux and by Cree dependence on the Mandan traders, especially for horses; the Horse Wars of 1810-50, when Cree attempts to find a substitute for the Mandan trade were combined with a search for western allies against the Blackfoot; and finally the Buffalo Wars of 1850-70, a struggle for the diminishing territory where Plains life based on buffalo hunting was still possible. In the course of these conflicts and bargains with their neighbours, the Plains Cree forged and retained a tribal identity, a culture and a social organization, all well-adapted to Plains life and none of them, in about 1870, dependent upon or undermined by relations with white traders.

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Table of Synonyms

The names given to plains tribes differ not only within a specific source and between sources, but they also change over the period of the fur trade. The following table lists the names with the most common appearing on the left and the synonyms, arranged in time sequence, following on the right.

1. Plains Cree - Nehethawá (and variations of that spelling), Cristineaux and Knisteneaux, Southerd, Southern, and Cris.
2. Assiniboine - numerous variations of spelling sometimes with the addition of "poet", Stoney (also used to refer to Wood or Mountain Assiniboine).
3. Blackfoot "confederacy" - Archithi[or "e"]nie - whether this title is meant to apply to the whole confederacy or just the Blackfoot tribe proper is not clear, Slave Indians, Plains Tribes.
4. Blackfoot (the tribe itself) - Siksika, Blackfoot proper.
5. Piegan - a member tribe of the confederacy sometimes referred to as Muddy River Indians.
6. Blood - a member tribe of the confederacy constantly referred to by that title.
7. Sarcee - this tribe is a sub-division of the Beaver (woodland) Indians. The Sarcee joined the confederacy in the second half of the eighteenth century, - Circer, Sussee and Sacree.

8. Gros Ventre, a sometime ally of the confederacy -
Naywattame Poets, Atsina (the anthropological designation), Gros Ventre des Prairies, Big Belly, Fall, and Rapid Indians.
9. Sioux - Naudawisses (and variations of spelling), Dakotah.
10. Crow - Gens des Corbeaus, Crow, Rocky Mountain Crow.
11. Snake - Gens du Serpent, Shoshoni.
12. Cheyenne - Schaines.
13. Minnetaree - Gros Ventres, Big Belly - (the confusion between these and the Atsina is minimized by the totally different life-styles of these two tribes which makes identification quite simple).
14. Arapaho - Tattooed.
15. Mandan - this is quite a standard title.
16. Arikaras - many variations of spelling, Rees.
17. Kootenay - Cooteney, Koutenai, Cuttencha.
18. Ojibwa - Chippawa, Ojibway (many variant spellings).
19. Saulteaux - Saulteurs.
20. Bungees - a term used to describe Indians who entered western Canada in the van of the fur trade.
21. Plains Indians - Gens du Large.

Introduction

The Indian is a man, for he is born amid weeping, he grows up amongst tears or dreams; and he occasionally grows old when excessive privation has not broken down, before its time, a constitution endowed by nature with all that is necessary to ensure longevity.

Bishop Taché, 1868.

The current fashion for things Indian, both on a popular and on a political level, has spurred a new interest in Indian history. In Canada and the United States the growth of Indian activism, the continuing politics of the minorities, and the struggles of ethnic groups against assimilation have added urgency to the study of the nature of the non-white, non-Anglo Saxons and their role in North American history. The recognition of the mosaic nature of Canada has lent support and importance to the investigation of diverse groups and activities not ordinarily included as part of the more traditional approaches of national political development and French-English relations in the search for the characteristics of the Canadian identity. Further, the emergence of the Third World as a discernable political entity whose members have a common colonial experience has given a more immediate purpose to the study of native history through "colonial parallels."¹

This new emphasis upon Indians calls upon the historian to enter upon a relatively new field of endeavour in which "The Indian is the center, no matter how many people displace him or how deeply he is driven into the remote areas of the land..."² Yet, whether the historian enters this field on

the basis of a particular interest in the subject itself, or under the aegis of the idea of limited identities, there is nothing which necessitates a change in his professional behaviour. The questions that the historian must ask about Indians are really no different from those that have been asked about Canadians, or about Canada as a subject of historical analysis.

The idea that that the Indian is somehow different from other historical subjects, that this uniqueness puts him and his past beyond the historian's ability to produce meaningful generalizations using well-known methodologies, is a misconception that should be quickly dispelled if it still exists to any degree. Diamond Jenness, Canada's best known anthropologist, placed the Indians' past firmly within the province of the historical discipline. "Their inner culture, their social customs, political organizations, religious ideas and art, were all products of a long evolution in which psychological and historical factors played the major role."³

Certainly the mystery that has surrounded the Indian and the nature of his social and political development has been caused by the fact that they have customarily been the exclusive preserve of the anthropologist who has produced, by the application of his own specialized, non-historic methodologies, conclusions couched in the particular terminology of his discipline. It is ironic that it was an anthropologist, Oscar Lewis, who concluded when surveying works focussing on the plains tribes, that "The failure of anthropologists to deal successfully with these problems [culture change] can be

attributed in part to their systematic neglect of documentary evidence."⁴

The anthropologist more often than not concentrated upon what the historian would call the new factor, or in exceptional cases the dynamic. Thus much attention has been paid to the effect of the horse, the gun, and the coming of the white man and his ways. Effects were often measured through models of culture traits from which change and time sequence were then inferred, or cultures were simply studied in one time sequence which avoided the problems of change over time and resulted in a structural analysis stressing the inter-relationships of institutions, rather than the evolution of institutions and the development of those relationships. Although a sketch of a tribe's history may be given as an introduction the anthropologist rarely feels the need to include that material in his subsequent analysis.

In relation to the Indians of eastern Canada, especially the Iroquois, Indian history is certainly not a new endeavour. In western Canada, though, the Indian has remained either as a sub-section of the history of the fur trade or the subject of an anthropological study of the type mentioned above. Neither of these constitute Indian history: valuable though their contributions are, the fur trade historians have not focussed on Indians and the anthropologists have not focussed on changes in time.

This thesis is intended to lay some of the preliminary groundwork without which more sophisticated historical method-

ologies cannot operate. That groundwork is the reconstruction of a basic military and trade chronology of the Plains Cree; the sifting of available historical documents to isolate events and the use of interpretation primarily, although not exclusively, as a tool to place these events in their proper time relationships, and to provide some basic, though purely tentative, explanations of the trade and military patterns as they emerge. There is no particular reason for beginning with the Cree rather than with some other tribe. It is true that Cree history combines a wood and a plains period, so that the process and timing of their migration throws light on life in both environments and suggests causes for the adoption of the plains; but the same can be said of the Sarcee, the Assiniboine, the Ojibwa, the Saulteaux, and perhaps even the Blackfoot. Yet some one tribe must be chosen to start with. The tribe defines the widest limit of Indian social and political organization; their life was tribal, it was as tribesmen that they met, traded with, fought with, and made alliances with other men, red or white; and in its basic outline their history must be tribal, too.

The time span to be covered, 1670 - 1870, would seem to be an integrated chronological sequence. It begins with contact, itself a major event the impact of which on social and political forms is yet to be discovered for the Cree and other plains tribes; it ends with the disappearance of the buffalo from Cree lands, an event marking the beginning of a basic change in the Cree life-style and of a period in which

very new problems were placed before the Cree nation. Within this long period of time there are at least three distinct eras, each defined by a paramount motive for war - the wars of migration and territory, the wars for horses, and the buffalo wars. Intimately related to each of these is a particular trade pattern, combining the Cree, Europeans, and other plains tribes, supported by a parallel military pattern. Thus trade and military events will be given priority throughout. Social factors, such as the basic forms of social organization, the Cree systems of social welfare, prestige, social investment, and demographic information, will be introduced only insofar as they contribute to the understanding of the particular nature of the military and trade patterns of each of these three eras. So too, deterministic factors such as the horse and the gun will be discussed only to judge their effect on forms and motives of warfare and trade, without considering their wider social and technological implications.

Admittedly, then, this chronology cannot pretend to be inclusive of all significant types of deterministic factors or events. Cree-white relations and the role of the Metis, two of the most crucial topics in the history of the plains people, have received little attention so as to allow a steady focus on the progression of military and trade events, and with the belief that these areas will be approached with greater ease and benefit after the chronology has been completed. This thesis is primarily concerned with the sequence

of events rather than with a search for an all-pervading dynamic.

Trade and military patterns have been chosen over all others on the strength of the idea that they are the most basic, that they are formed by events which are key to any future study of a more social or cultural nature. The similarity of plains cultures, and possibly of greater importance, the differences between tribes, is directly related both to the tribe's unique historical development and to the transmission of traits along the lines of military and trade alliances. It will be seen, for example, that the designation of the pre-trade geographic position of the Blackfoot can be best determined by a similarity in language and material culture with tribes with whom they had an early trade and possibly even a military alliance. The Cree themselves through their long association with the Assiniboine take on many of the classic plains traits yet their continued association with tribes who arrive late on the plains preserve for them clear traces of their previous woodland existence. As the routes that these traits travelled were those of war and military alliances, primary attention must be directed to relocating these routes, to determining the time and circumstances of their usage.

It is the mix of conformity to, and deviance from, a seemingly basic plains model that betrays the influence of more purely historical factors, that first suggests the need for an historical investigation, and demands that the first

step be the chronology. Only through the isolation of the unique event sequence of the Plains Cree can a beginning be made toward a real interpretive history of that tribe or of any other tribe, woodland or plains.

Chapter 1 - The Canadian Plains in the Pre-Trade Era

1. The Indian as an Historian

The identity of the Indian tribes who inhabited the plains in the pre-trade part of the 1600's and the range of their tribal territories is a matter of some uncertainty. It was only in the last decade of that century that a white man, Henry Kelsey, wandered over some part of these territories and kept a journal of his travels. The Kelsey journal, written partly in quaint doggerel, defies the geographer's attempt to follow the explorer's trail with real accuracy. The information the journal provides concerning the Indian tribes is almost equally baffling. In addition, "the impact of the new culture on the Indians had proceeded westward ahead of the actual physical presence of the white men,"¹ disturbing the deployment of the pre-trade Indian population, so that Kelsey's notes cannot be expected to throw any light on the plains population prior to this event. If this is true of Kelsey's journal, it is even more true of those of LaVerendrye and Jacques Repentigny Legardeur de Saint Pierre. All three of these journals, but especially the first two, often form the basis for sketches of the early trade in the Canadian west. But in an effort to reconstruct the position of tribes prior to the trade, they are of little use.

Without a large collection of white eye-witness accounts, and with the inherent difficulties of the only three early ones extant, there are but three other general sources of

primary evidence available. These, of course, are Indian tradition,* physical remains which are the natural province of archaeologists and physical anthropologists, and linguistic evidence. Due to their particular technical nature, the historian cannot approach the last two directly. This and the relative scarcity of physical evidence, plus the fact that the historian is accustomed to the type of evidence of which oral tradition is a part, means that much of the basis for the reconstruction of plains Indian history in the seventeenth century is the evidence provided by Indian tradition. This fact demands that some comment on the reliability of this source should be made.

Edwin T. Denig, writing in 1854, after 21 years of experience with the plains Indians, remarked significantly that

A great difficulty is experienced at the commencement of the history of any of these tribes [Cree, Assiniboine, Sioux, Arikaras, and Crow] in endeavoring to trace their origin to a remote period. From a people where no written data exists, and whose only method of preserving their national history is oral tradition, very little of ancient date can be extracted aspiring to the dignity of truth. Their traditions handed down through several generations, diversified and embellished by the fancies of the narrators, become confused and fabulous. Farther back than the year 1760 [73 years before Denig entered the west] all appears obscure or at least their statements of events said to have happened before that time differ so materially as to be unworthy of note.²

*The journals of La Verendrye and Saint Pierre both lack (probably because of their authors' intense interest in geography and exploration) collections of Indian historical traditions. Kelsey's journal is equally barren. On the other hand, journals such as those of David Thompson, Alexander Henry and Warren Ferris, which were kept in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, contain much valuable evidence on the pre-trade history of the Canadian west.

The opinion of a man who made an effort to delve into the history of the tribes with whom he traded seems to demand a measure of respect from any individual attempting to follow in his footsteps. It appears that he received what he considered creditable information relative to the span of time which included his informant's life-time and that of the informant's father.

While David Thompson received remarkably precise information from the eye-witness accounts of his informants Chief Sheshapaskiet³ and Saukamappee,⁴ he also accepted with confidence information dating back to the subject's great-grandfather.⁵ Alexander Henry was somewhat more restrictive with the tradition of the Cree, who he said "will often find much difficulty in tracing out who was his Grand Father."⁶

A consensus of the views of these three traders would suggest that the limit of reliability should be placed at the informant's grandfather. Yet others who have endeavoured to uncover the early history of the Indians have displayed much more faith in the reliability of the Indian as an historian.

Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, both a Cree Chief and an anthropologist, placed unbounded confidence in the oral tradition of his people and in particular of Chief Masqua and the band of the Piapot Reserve in Saskatchewan. The evidence Long Lance gathered from these informants in 1922 relates the path of the Cree westward migration beginning in 1632 and their subsequent plains history, a period covering 290 years.⁷ He was careful to point out that

These facts were unravelled painstakingly in the presence of the entire band, each member of which knows this history in lesser detail from his own forebears. The old plains Indian is painfully exact in what he says in a formal manner, and, when in doubt, he goes to laborious length to ascertain the truth from his brethren, or else he leaves the thing unsaid. The council pow-wows, in which the facts set forth herein were gathered, stretched over a period of two days; for every detail had to be verified by parallel accounts from the chiefs contemporaries.⁸

Accepting the fact that Long Lance's Indian background could have given him an advantage over Denig in obtaining what appears to be considerable cooperation from his informants, there is still evident, in the comments of these two researchers, a more basic cause for the difference in the results of their investigations. This is their opinion of the reliability of the Indian as an historian. Denig insists that the traditions were "diversified and embellished by the fancies of the narrators."⁹ In Long Lance's view the plains Indians were "painfully exact"¹⁰ and even went to the trouble to check their facts with other potential narrators.

In the face of this difference of opinion between two men who had first-hand experience with collecting traditions, and because of the historical importance of these traditions, it is necessary to see if there was anything in the nature of plains Indian society or in the nature of the events likely to be preserved which would tend to guarantee accuracy and govern the determination of longevity.

It is obvious that the basic process of oral tradition existed in plains Indian society. As Long Lance has stated, tradition was handed down from father to son. John McLean

began an important Blackfoot recollection which he recorded with the phrase, "Some of the aged Indians have stated that they remember when they were children hearing the old warriors tell...."¹¹ Even more crucial than this is Long Lance's assertion that consultations on the subject of the tribe's history took place between members of the band. David Thompson's journal provides evidence that this existed in his time. He wrote in reference to the Piegans that "in their idle time sometimes this [their original location] is the subject of their conversation."¹²

There was, though, a much more elaborate social mechanism in plains Indian society which can be related to the process of the preservation of oral tradition. This mechanism was the acquisition of status through individual action in warfare,* it was of central importance in plains social organization. "War exploits were the chief concern of the young men and constituted the stock topic among their elders."¹³

A young man was awarded his rank in the band by his deeds in battle and rose in standing according to the relative merit of each deed, and the merit of his total war record. This record was recounted, and hence the warrior's rank was reinforced during important social functions. The warrior had to retell his deeds with accuracy, for in this competitive system his war party comrades were his witnesses and, if he lied, his undoers.

David Mandelbaum in his work The Plains Cree presents an
*A full description of this will be given in a later chapter.

unedited war record which he received orally in 1935 from Fine-day. An analysis of these records which relate to the 1860's discloses a constant pattern. In each of the eight war exploits a detailed account is given of the leader, the number of warriors taking part, the enemy, the distance to the battle, the location where the enemy was found, the particular events that then occurred, the exact booty taken, the number of casualties on each side, and the trip home.* 14

After one particularly successful war trip Fine-day related his exploits and then the band's reaction. "The chiefs said that only one other man had gone back after an all day fight ...The big chiefs had done much that was worth a great deal, but none of them had done what I had done." 15

From the foregoing evidence certain characteristics of Indian oral tradition are quite clear. Indian eye-witness informants would provide, as a social necessity, remarkably detailed and precise recollections which supply a wealth of information for the reconstruction of war and migratory patterns. In order to govern social ranking the band and tribal elders were forced to record these recollections on the basis of some selective system so that individual actions could be compared to deeds that had taken place in the past. Naturally, the collective mind of the band elders acting as a repository

*If this structure is compared to Saukamappee's famous relation (told to David Thompson) of Blackfoot-Snake battles in the first half of the eighteenth century and to Faro's recollection (told to Warren Ferris) of Blackfoot-Flathead battles of the same period, it will be found to fit almost exactly.

had limitations for the amount of tradition that could be preserved but there is no reason to suggest that old information was simply discarded for the retention of relatively new information. It is more probable that the process of preservation was much more selective and based on the nature of the deed rather than the age of tradition, so that very old recollections would have been preserved along with relatively new accounts. The fact that different elders would by necessity, or choice, preserve different parts of the general war tradition and the fact that one band's collection would be different from the next band's would result in a situation, if members from different bands were consulted or the elders of a band were consulted separately, in which the traditions of that people appeared to be "diversified and embellished by the different narrators."¹⁶

H.A. Dempsey in his introduction to Bad Head's winter count indicated that he found this process of preservation and division of the tradition among band members.

The winter counts of the Blackfoot Indians, like those of other plains tribes, were simple but effective methods of reckoning time. One outstanding event was recorded for each year and, if nothing occurred which effected the whole tribe a local or personal incident was recorded. Thus winter counts kept by different men varied in some years but were identical, in recording epidemics, treaties and other significant events.¹⁷

Significant events, events which can be seen to have had a particularly sharp psychological impact on the band or tribe, tended to inject themselves into the above noted process of collection and preservation of information. These traditions differed from the individual war records in that

they were band-wide experiences but that does not mean that they were preserved with less accuracy and detail. The same people, after all, were preserving both types of tradition. The subject matter of their band-wide traditions makes them especially valuable for the Indian historian.

Epidemics, treaties, general war, great victories and defeats, the acquisition of new tools such as the horse and gun are all events which by their nature left a clear psychological imprint. A Flathead, Faro, described for Warren Ferris the series of defeats suffered by his tribe at the hands of the Blackfoot who, unlike them, were armed with guns "...the Great Spirit has forsaken us; he has furnished our enemies with his thunder to destroy us."¹⁸ The anguish of those times had obviously burned itself into the tribe's memory. The recollection of epidemics displays the same sort of psychological imprinting. "Our hearts were low and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people..."¹⁹

Possibly the most stunning evidence in this area deals with the acquisition of the gun. The Cree preserved this tradition for 150 years before it was written down and still it has the ring of authenticity.

...one of them fired the first gun that had been given to them by the white men, he throws it down and ran for his life. He thought that the gun was dangerous from behind as it was from the front, and it was sometime before the Indians learned to hold onto the piece, after it had been discharged. They thought it was to be fired and then thrown down as quickly as possible.²⁰

Not only were these gun traditions preserved over a long period but in some cases they are of unerring precision.

Saukamappee, one of the armed Cree who aided the Blackfoot in their battles against the Snakes, told David Thompson in 1787 that he returned to the Piegan camp a short time after the battle (1732) and married a chief's daughter, giving his gun as the bride price.²¹ Weasel Tail, a Blackfoot informant, told J.C. Ewers in 1941 how his nation received their first gun. "Later [after the battle] one of the Cree young men married a Blackfoot girl and gave one of the new weapons to his father-in-law."²²

To be fair to Denig, it should not be inferred from the above that the Indians are the paragons of historical virtue. Certainly some traditions became smudged and confused in their transmission just as in white written history the real meaning of the original document is occasionally embellished in its transfer to the printed page or a contrary piece of evidence or tradition is ignored because it is felt that it would not be acceptable to the audience. Charges that the Indians at times told the white man what they thought he wanted to hear are probably true,* so also it is evident that some white men heard only what they wanted to hear. Yet, even with these qualifications all the marks of the historical process, or rather the archival function, are in evidence: the collection and preservation of records which are of

*David Thompson disclosed that "I have always found it very difficult to learn their real opinion on what may be termed religious subjects. Asking them questions on this head, is to no purpose, they will give the answer best adopted to avoid other questions and please the enquirer."²³ It is significant that he presented no such cautionary note as a preface to the historical traditions he recorded.

importance to the society.

It seems certain, then, that Indian oral tradition is a reliable source for the reconstruction of Indian history. There is demonstrated reason for having confidence in its accuracy whether it is eye-witness evidence or tradition of great age. Certainly it is only wise to scrutinize it as rigorously as written evidence. The tests of logic and verification by comparison with other traditions, archaeological and anthropological findings can be applied. There does seem to be a sufficient amount of tradition that has been tested and judged reliable to present an outline of the deployment of tribes on the plains in the pre-trade era.

2. Deployment of Tribes on the Plains in the Pre-Trade Era

The discovery of the location of the Blackfoot nation* is the key to a full and convincing picture of the deployment of the tribes on the Canadian plains in the pre-trade era. This task has been left virtually untouched by many who have had the occasion to deal with this area either directly or indirectly through their interests in an associated topic, such as the fur trade. Diamond Jenness in his notes on the Blackfoot ignores the pre-trade period, submitting instead the generalization that "in the middle of the eighteenth century...the Blackfoot...territory stretched from the Rocky mountains well into Saskatchewan."²⁴ E. Palmer Patterson in his book, The Canadian Indian a History Since 1500, begins his account after trade with Europeans, or their middlemen, had affected the pattern of plains settlement. Even H.R. Schoolcraft, whose massive six-volume work is so full of detail, makes only a most general comment on the retreat of the Shoshone in the face of the invading and musket-wielding "Indians of the Saskatchewan."²⁵ Some authors have been more precise. A.S. Morton does attempt to provide an Indian background to his history of the fur trade. Those of his conclusions which are pertinent will be mentioned in the following pages. Oscar Lewis in his work, The Effects of

*The term "Blackfoot" is used here to designate the Blood and Piegan tribes as well as the Blackfoot proper. The Sarcee, an Athapaskan tribe, joined the confederacy only in the second half of the eighteenth century.

White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade, consulted some of the historical evidence and many of the prevailing theories on this point. He came to a rather general conclusion.

In any case, since the tradition of the Blackfeet, Assiniboine, and Cree all agree that the Blackfoot were the most westerly group, it seems certain that the Blackfoot were on the Plains west of the South Saskatchewan by 1690 and most probably a good deal earlier.²⁶

It is important to attempt a clearer estimation of the Blackfoot range than this so that a later discussion on migration in the trade era can be made equally precise.

As Lewis has suggested, there is little doubt that the Blackfoot were the most westerly of the Algonkian-speaking group. In the migration story of Chief Masqua, the Cree, whose ~~ancestors~~^{*} would roam the western prairies, resided in the vicinity of Montreal* at the time of "the first white man's ship landing on the eastern shores."²⁸ The Blackfoot, according to Long Lance's informant, were then situated around the mouth of the Red River. Although there is no corroboration for this far south-eastern location of the Cree, Chief Masqua's specific designation of the Blackfoot territory does receive some direct support from at least one other source. G.E. Hyde suggests that the Red River area at that time

and the lands lying immediately west of Lake Winnipeg were held by the Algonkin and Siouan tribes, most of

*It is possible that this is a garbled recollection of Cree trading trips to Montreal in the 1670's. "In 1670 Saulteurs, Missisaugas, and Crees were among the Indians going to the French settlement."²⁷

descendants.

whom were partly sedentary, dwelling in earth lodges, making pottery,* planting corn and other crops. Among these people we may include the three Blackfoot Tribes.²⁹

Evidence for the existence of semi-agricultural communities along the length of the Red River is not rare and it is even possible to make a tentative identification of the various Algonkin and Siouan tribes that probably lived in the area.

In 1797 David Thompson interviewed Manoah, a Frenchman living as a native with the Mandans, and was told that in the time of the Mandan's great-grandfathers, they had "formerly possessed all the streams of the Red River, and the head of the Mississippi."³⁰ They had many villages and

cultivated the ground as now, they lived many years this way how many they do not know, at length the Indians of the Woods armed with guns which killed and frightened them...obliged [them] to quit their villages, and remove from place to place until they came to the Missouri River...³¹

Besides the possibility that the Blackfoot nation lived in this area, it seems probable that the Algonkian language group was represented by the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Atsina. John Bradbury, touring the Missouri River in the years 1809, 1810, and 1811, learned that the Arapaho "had been driven by the Sioux from their former place of residence, near the Red River of Lake Winnipic."³² J.R. Swanton, an anthropologist, confirms Bradbury's account and supplements it. "According to tradition, the Arapaho were once sedentary and seem to

*Archaeological investigations have discovered in this area the evidence of a pottery making culture which has been dated as 1350-1750. For a full discussion see W.M. Hlady's article South Eastern Manitoba Resurveyed in Ten Thousand Years of Archaeology in Manitoba, Manitoba Archaeological Society, 1970.

have lived in the Red River Valley."³³ J. Powell, another anthropologist, notes that the Arapaho, who lived in South Dakota in the nineteenth century, had, at a much earlier date, "become separated from their kindred in the north and had forced their way through hostile tribes across the Missouri."³⁴

The Arapaho's kindred would have been the Atsina. J. Swanton described them as a branch of the Arapaho.³⁵ Unfortunately, there are few primary source references to this tribe. They alienated themselves from the Canadian and English traders through various acts of violence and spent much of their time in the late 1700's and in the 1800's living with the Arapaho south of the Missouri. W.M. Hlady takes the position that the Atsina, also known as the Fall, Rapid or Gros Ventre Indians, "lived in the Red River Valley probably as far north as the present day international boundary. They were once a sedentary agricultural people."³⁶

The Cheyenne, who like the Arapaho finally found a home as a plains tribe in South Dakota, also inhabited the Red River valley. Father de Smet, the Jesuit missionary, reviewing their history up to 1845 noted that the Cheyenne "by the close of the century [seventeenth] were living in the region about Lake Winnipeg."³⁷ The evidence of the fur traders Alexander Henry and David Thompson confirms the tradition that de Smet had summarized and adds illuminating detail. A. Henry writing in 1800 placed the Cheyenne villages on the Schain River, a tributary of the Red River, and noted that

they were not abandoned until "about Sixty years ago [1740]."³⁸ David Thompson's informant "Chief Sheshapaskiet a Chippaway,"³⁹ described the Cheyenne as cultivators and traders of "Corn and other Vegetables."⁴⁰

Unfortunately, although Hyde suggests that "we may include the three Blackfoot tribes"⁴¹ among those who were living a semi-agricultural existence in the vicinity of the Red River and on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg, there is no concrete evidence to allow this.* David Thompson when he inquired into the origins of the Blackfoot nation received no hint of early relations with any of the foregoing Algonkin tribes. There is no recollection of earth lodges or of corn or vegetable cultivation. What he did learn from the Pie-gans was that "They have no tradition that they ever made use of canoes..."⁴² But neither the lack of canoes nor the use of pottery⁺ which Matthew Cocking observed at a Blackfoot camp in 1772 and described as being "of their own Manufacturing,"⁴⁴ is really suggestive of a previously settled existence.

*This should not be taken as proof that Chief Masqua's tradition is wrong. The Atsina Indians, sometime in the late 1700's allied themselves with the Blackfoot, and were protected by the confederacy against the Cree and Assiniboine. The Cree, and Masqua, probably assumed that they were the fourth member of the confederacy so that their placement of the Blackfoot in the Red River area is quite understandable.

+As late as 1947 Double Victory Calf Robe, an aged Blood Indian woman, demonstrated for J.C. Ewers how pottery was made.⁴³ That the method is so simple, forming a pot shape from pottery dough and hardening it with boiling water, and the fact that the method of making it was preserved down to modern times suggests that it was a craft of a nomadic people and that the lack of Blackfoot pottery after 1772 was due to the introduction of European kettles and was not caused by the abandonment of a settled community that had been conducive to the making and use of pottery.

Thompson did learn that "their old men [Piegan] always point to the North East* as the place they came from, and their progress has always been to the south west."⁴⁷ The Eagle Hills was the most easterly location that the Piegans can remember as a home territory.⁴⁸ As they were the frontier tribe of the confederacy, it is probable that when they were in that area the Blood and Blackfoot were living somewhat further to the north-east. Taking Thompson's Piegan informants at their word and drawing a line north-eastward from the Eagle Hills, places the limit of the Blackfoot plains territory along that line at the Saskatchewan River, just east of the junction of the north and south branches. This track, although it is approximate, should be taken as the path of the Blackfoot south-western movement in the pre-trade period of the seventeenth century. Yet it is not definite that the Eagle Hills was the most westerly point of Blackfoot territory in this period. Additional pieces of evidence must be taken into consideration in order to estimate the western limit of the Blackfoot range.

*Alexander Mackenzie contradicts the evidence Thompson collected. Mackenzie wrote, "The Picaneais, Blackfeet, and Blood-Indians, are a distinct people...and I have reason to think, are travelling North-West."⁴⁵ Mackenzie's view was an optical illusion caused by the spread of the fur trade. All the plains Indians moved north-west, with the exception of the Sarcee, as the Hudson's Bay Company and Canadian traders extended their posts along the North Branch of the Saskatchewan. Had he looked more carefully he would have seen the Piegan spearheading a move south-west of the South Branch of the Saskatchewan which took them to the sources of the Missouri. Mackenzie's thesis has found its way into one secondary source. E. Palmer Patterson II, wrote that the "Blackfeet were migrating north and west from the vicinity of south eastern Saskatchewan..."⁴⁶ As there is no evidence

John McLean in his book The Indian, Their Manners and Customs, written in 1889, related a tradition which if taken literally would place the Blackfoot, at one time in their history, on the western side of the Rocky Mountains.

Some of the aged Indians have stated that they remember when they were children hearing the old warriors tell how they came across the Rocky Mountains and were accustomed to engage in battle with flint-headed arrows... From their traditions it appears that the great ancestors of the Blackfoot nation dwelt on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains that his children crossed the mountains and dwelt for a time on the Pacific coast, where they mingled with other tribes and finally returned to the country in which they now live.⁴⁹

The Blackfoot tradition of mingling with other tribes becomes significant when placed beside the following piece of technical linguistic evidence which suggests that Blackfoot

methods of inflexion and formal pronominal affixes resemble those of the Ojibwa, Cree, and most eastern dialects; but etymologically, it [Blackfoot language] seems to differ considerably more from all other Algonkian forms than these vary from each other.⁵⁰

The meaning of this can be demonstrated rather plainly even to the eye of one not initiated into the mysteries of the science of philology. In his journal Alexander Henry compiled a comparative vocabulary of the Ojibwa, Cree and Blackfoot languages. An extract from it is revealing:

<u>English</u>	<u>Ogebois</u>	<u>Knistineaux</u>	<u>Slave</u>
God	Ki jai Manitou	Kei jai Manitou	Nah too ye Espoots
heart	ho tai	ho tai ho	hogs kitchip
beaver	ah mic	ah misk	Kichs tah kie ⁵¹

One conclusion can be immediately drawn from this. The Blackfoot separated from the eastern Algonkin tribes at an of the Blackfoot ever having lived in south-eastern Saskatchewan in the 1600's this interpretation is difficult to accept.

early date and remained isolated from the conformative influences of the main branch of the Algonkian language. Over this considerable span of time the Blackfoot developed a vocabulary that on the surface appears as a tongue totally foreign to the parent linguistic group.

So it was seen by some early observers. Alexander Mckenzie, for one, noted that they "speak a language of their own"⁵² and in emphasizing his point stated "nor have I heard of any Indians with whose language that which they speak has any affinity."⁵³ Father P. de Smet was somewhat more observant than Mackenzie on this point. He discovered that the

Kootinai language is altogether different from the language of the above mentioned tribes [Flatheads and Nez Perces]. It resembles rather the language of the Blackfeet.⁵⁴

This observation, taken together with the recollection quoted by McLean, the deviant nature of the Blackfoot language, and some samples of Blackfoot material culture such as sinew-backed bows, quilted leather armour, four-pole tent structure, and moccasin types, all of which are denoted as influences flowing from such western tribes as the Kootenay and Shoshone, have led some to locate the Blackfoot in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.⁵⁵ To dispute the verity of the early influence of western tribes on the Blackfoot language and culture, especially when it is based on physical evidence would be folly. Yet to suggest that this evidence is enough to place the Blackfoot in the foothills of the Rockies is a logically false position unless it can be proven

that the foothills marked the limit of the eastern penetration of the western tribes and hence their meeting place with the Blackfoot.

The evidence available indicates that the western border of the Blackfoot territory was the junction of the Bow and South Saskatchewan Rivers. David Thompson, commenting on the territory of the Blackfoot in the 1790's which included the Bow River and extended to the mountains, noted that these lands

were formerly in full possession of the Kootanoes, northward; the next the Saliesh [Flatheads] and their allies and most southern, the Snake [Shoshone] Indians and their tribes, now driven across the mountains.⁵⁶

Thompson's deployment of tribes produces a pattern of occupancy which in a southward order reads the Kootenay, Salish, and then the Snakes. The particular eastern limit of this range which has been suggested as the junction of the Bow and South Saskatchewan Rivers is so designated on the strength of this and of the following evidence.

David Thompson's informant Saukamappee, a Cree who lived with the Blackfoot from his early manhood, informed him that when the Blackfoot finally drove the Snake Indians out of western Canada (a process in which Saukamappee took part) "they [the Snakes] had suffered dreadfully as well as us and had left all this fine country of the Bow River to us."⁵⁷ The Snake Indians on their part told Lewis and Clark in 1805, that

Within their own recollection they formerly lived in the plains but they had been driven into the mountains

by...the roving Indians of the Sacatchawain, and are now obliged to visit occasionally and by stealth the country of their ancestors.⁵⁸

A.S. Morton, in his work on the fur trade, confirms this tradition and adds strength to the choice of the junction as the borderline between the territories of the Blackfoot, Snake, Kootenay, and Salish. In his description of the Snake-Blackfoot battles in the early fur trade period he suggests that the Snakes, as the first possessors of horses on the Canadian plains, "were victoriously forcing their way into the valley of the South Saskatchewan..."⁵⁹

Thompson's evidence, the Snake's claim to ancestral lands in western Canada, their identification of the Blackfoot as Saskatchewan River Indians, and the similar designation by A.S. Morton, added to Saukamappee's description of the Bow River country as the spoils of war, seem to indicate that the determination of the junction of the Bow and South Saskatchewan Rivers as the western limit of the Blackfoot nation in the pre-trade era is a good one. There is one other factor which tends to confirm this site. It is due south-west of the Eagle Hills, on the line remembered by the Piegans as the direction of their advance.

The Kootenay are the sole members of the Kootenayan language group.* "In dress, customs, and religion they resembled the plains tribes..."⁶⁰ A.S. Morton confirms the

*See the map "Aboriginal Population" which gives a division of Canadian tribes by their linguistic affiliation in the fifth edition of the Indians of Canada by Diamond Jenness.

tradition of their eastern location though for some unexplained reason he places the Kootenay in Montana.⁶¹ J.R. Swanton's view is both more precise and somewhat closer to Thompson's deployment. He stated that "The Kutenai family lived east of the Rocky Mountains, extending at least as far as McLeod, Alberta,"⁶² (only about 90 miles from the junction). Alexander Henry placed the Kootenay even further north, "Along the Banks of the Clearwater River, and near the foot of the Mountains..."⁶³ Unfortunately there is no evidence that this location pre-dates the Blackfoot western drive when the Kootenay were displaced from their original homeland.

The Salish, Flathead in this case, are members of the Interior Salish language group. They too preserve a tradition, which in 1831 was related to Warren Ferris an American fur trader, of having had at least hunting territories north of the Jefferson River, one of the sources of the Missouri.⁶⁴

The north-western curl of the South Saskatchewan after its junction with the Bow River would place that part of the river in the territory of the Snake, Kootenay and Salish tribes. This junction as the western border of the Blackfoot nation places their home territory approximately 130 miles due east of the Rocky Mountains. As there is no tradition of warfare between these tribes until the early trade period, it seems definite that through inter-tribe visits, which would include Blackfoot trips into the foothills (and possibly even to the western side of the Rockies as McLean's tradition suggests), that the Blackfoot language and material culture

were influenced by their western neighbours in this area.

The core in this range of the Blackfoot nomad nation in the pre-trade era extended in a south-westerly direction from just east of the junction of the Bow and South Branch of the Saskatchewan River. There is no evidence to show the width, measured in a south-easterly or a north-westerly direction from this central core, of their territory. It is clear that the Canadian west from the Red River to the Rockies was shared by the Blackfoot with nomads like themselves on their west and Algonkin semi-agriculturalists on their south-eastern flank. It seems clear from this pattern that the Cree, the Sarcee and the Assiniboine,* who were all later to play a prominent role in plains Indian history, had not yet reached the Canadian plains.

*Only Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance suggests that the Assiniboine "came north into what is now Saskatchewan shortly after the year 1600".⁸⁵ Evidence which will be discussed in the next chapter will show this to be incorrect. It should be noted that Long Lance's position on the Assiniboine is not part of Chief Masqua's tradition.

Chapter II - The Wars of Migration and Territory

1. The Early Location of the Cree and Their Expansion Into the North-Western Woodlands

The Cree preserve the tradition that in their early history they were members of "the same tribe as the Ojibwas..."¹ The cause of the separation is unknown to them. Edwin Denig recorded the same recollection and speculated that

the division was very ancient and arose from some family feud so frequent in their primitive mode of government. It may have been they were induced by the superior hunting advantages in the northern direction.²

Whether or not Denig's hunting theory is correct, the Cree in the first half of the seventeenth century were north of the Ojibwa, who with the Nipissing and Sauteaux controlled the northern shore of Lake Superior.

David Mandelbaum, on the strength of R.G. Thwaite's comments on the Jesuit Relations of 1656-58, designates the following four territories as the home country of the Cree: the Lake Nipigon region, the country west of James Bay, the area between Lake Nipigon and Moose River, and the shores of the Eastman River.³ He was quite emphatic that

Although it is hardly to be expected that the early priests and traders could have known the lands beyond Hudson Bay or even about Lake Winnipeg, yet there is not the slightest evidence that the Cree had a westward extension.⁴

There is little doubt that his designation of these four eastern areas as Cree territory is correct, but his strong position on the western extension can be shown to be false on the basis of evidence discovered since the completion of

his work.

What escaped the ears of the early priests and traders has been unearthed by modern-day researchers. W.M. Hlady, an archaeologist, reviewing and updating the work of a colleague, R.S. MacNeish* concluded that

Cree penetration into Manitoba was reasonably early in the area between the present international boundary and the Nelson River in the woodlands. If we considered pottery remains, the time may be as long as nine to fourteen hundred years.⁵

He noted further that these villages were constructed on the north bank of the Winnipeg River near or at Lake Winnipeg,⁺⁶ probably near the site later chosen by the traders for Fort Alexander.

D. Mandelbaum wrote that Cree seasonal travels in this pre-trade period "were strictly in a north and south direction."⁸ It is quite possible then that Cree from the Winnipeg River area were familiar with the Hayes or even the Nelson River route to Hudson's Bay in the pre-trade period. Certainly by 1682[#] they had discovered this route. Mandel-

*R.S. MacNeish described his archaeological findings in his work, "An Introduction to the Archaeology of Southeast Manitoba (Ottawa, 1958), National Museum of Canada Bulletin 157.

+H.Y. Hind recorded a Cree tradition which held "that at a remote period they drove the Ojibways from the lower Winnipeg to the country bordering on the Lake of the Woods and since that time have maintained their footing in the conquered territory."⁷

#W.H. Hlady suggests that possible evidence of this exists as early as 1670. He points to a passage in Thomas Gorst's journal of a trip to Fort Nelson in that year. "There were ye remains of some of ye Native Wigwams and Sweating houses..."⁹ From the mention of sweating houses "I am inclined to believe that the Indians responsible were Cree...but our information on the Chipewyan is so poor that it is unwise to come to a definite conclusion!"¹⁰ Unfortunately for this piece of

baum himself provides confirmation of this in his summary of Cree activity between 1670 and 1760.

By 1682 they travel to York Factory and Fort Nelson in large numbers from their lands which are fifteen to twenty days journey inland.

It is in the area of the Winnipeg River that this western division of the Cree met the tribe that would become the most constant ally of the Plains Cree. This was the Assiniboine tribe of the Siouan language group.

The title, Assiniboine, is most commonly translated "the people who cook with hot stones"¹² from their habit of placing heated stones in a water-filled container. They called themselves Dakota, Our People, the Indian term for the whole Sioux nation.

Originally the Assiniboine were part of the "Wazi-Kute gens of the Yanktoni"¹³ a division of the Sioux. There is little doubt that their split from this group was violent. The Sioux called the Assiniboine "Hohi, rebels."¹⁴ Albert Jenks in his work, The Wild Rice Gatherers of the Upper Lakes, adds not only another name and translation to the list but also some clue to their early history.

The Assinpoualaks (Assiniboin or 'Warriors of the rocks') are a Siouan tribe which perhaps in the sixteenth century after quarrelling with their kinsmen, the Dakota, sought refuge among the assin or rocks of the Lake of the Woods.¹⁵

W.J. McGee, on the strength of Jesuit writings, places the circumstantial evidence sweating was so widespread that no conclusion whatsoever should be drawn from Gorst's passage. See Map 20 showing distribution of the sweating custom and sweat-house construction in Harold Driver, Indians of North America (Chicago, 1969).

Assiniboine at the Lake of the Woods which he points out was formerly called "L. [ac] Assinepoualacs."¹⁶ There are many confirmations of this Assiniboine move to the Lake of the Woods area. David Bushnell summarized the Assiniboine migration and pointed out one of its most significant results.

It is quite evident the Assiniboin, about the first years of the seventeenth century, moved northward from the densely forested region surrounding the headwaters of Mississippi...to the vicinity of the Lake of the Woods and beyond, where they soon became allied with the Cree. They continued to move northward and westward and by the close of the century were living in the region about Lake Winnipeg.¹⁷

It is quite evident from this, then, that the Cree-Assiniboine alliance ante-dated the plains existence of both of these two tribes.*

With the Cree, the Assiniboine may have known of the Nelson and Hayes River route to the Bay shores, and certainly with the Cree they appeared at Fort Nelson and York shortly after the founding of these posts.

The Cree nation of the pre-trade era covered the territory from the Eastmain River west to the Winnipeg River. The Cree living in Mandelbaum's four eastern areas were, through their connection with the Nippising, in contact with the western flow of European goods as early as 1640. H.A. Innis summed up their position in the French trade

*E.P. Patterson displayed a not uncommon position on this point "They [Cree] pushed out gradually into the Prairies, where they formed an alliance with their Assiniboine neighbours..."¹⁸ David Mandelbaum though points to the 1650's as an early date for the obvious functioning of this alliance.¹⁹

system in words which could be applied to any eastern tribe who did not control the prime middleman position.

...the Crees in the neighbourhood of Hudson Bay, living farthest distance from the French possessed beaver in the greatest abundance [especially castor gras], valued European commodities most highly, secured the least favorable rate of exchange.²⁰

In trade for their furs the Cree received a restricted supply of dull knives, soiled cloth, torn nets, and kettles worn thin by use - all the discarded European articles of the tribes closer to the French. It is very unlikely that the Cree acquired any firearms through this system.

In 1668 the Hudson's Bay Company built Charles Fort on Rupert River. By 1679 two more posts had been added, one each on the Moose and Albany Rivers. In 1682 Fort Nelson and Hayes Fort (later changed to York Factory) were constructed at the mouths of the Nelson and Hayes Rivers respectively.

For the Cree, the establishment of these posts on the doorstep of their home territory and the alliance forged with the Company* brought a dramatic change in their fur trade fortunes. They became the Company's chief consumers and merchandizers of European goods and armed with muskets they began a two-pronged western migration that brought them through the northern woodlands to the Rocky Mountains and led to the birth of a new nation on the plains - the Nehiyawuk (the Exact-Speaking People) - the Plains Cree.

The establishment of the posts at the mouth of the

*In the fashion of early white-Indian relations, Prince Attash, a Cree, was taken to England in 1674 to see Prince Rupert.²¹

Hayes and Nelson rivers and subsequently at the mouth of the Churchill (1688) gave the Cree three supply bases for their woodland move into the vast hinterland of the northwest. Exhibiting typical middlemen behaviour the Cree took control of the rivers and blocked access to the ports on the Bay shores to all except their allies the Assiniboine. Yet unlike many eastern middlemen the Cree insisted on occupying and exploiting the fur resources of the northern area themselves.

Alexander Mackenzie described both their method and motive. The Cree, he noted

destroyed or drove back the [Beaver and Chipecywan] natives, whom they held in great contempt on many accounts, but particularly for their ignorance in hunting the beaver as well as preparing, stretching and drying the skins of those animals.²²

Andrew Graham, an Hudson's Bay Company employee, commented on the process of their migration and added revealing detail

At the time the English first settled in Hudson's Bay different tribes of this nation [Cree] inhabited the country from the sea-coast up to the Lakes; but...in order to search for furs to barter, or because food grew scarce by the large number of animals destroyed for their furs and skin one or more of these reasons has caused them gradually to retire further inland.²³

It is obvious that a dual engine powered the Cree woodland drive: the isolation of the European source from intercourse with other tribes and the expansion of their hunting territories in answer to the problem of recurring scarcities. As the Cree armed with muskets could not be opposed by the inland tribes, they could determine, with reference to the state of the resource, the rate of their expansion.

The northern tribes directly affected by this process of expansion were the Chipewyan and Beaver Indians. Both presented a type of threat to the Cree monopoly position; the Chipewyan because their eastern range reached to Hudson's Bay²⁴ and the Beaver because, although situated much further west, they used canoes.²⁵ But neither of these tribes had guns and, therefore, presented no serious military threat to the Cree.

The general northern line of march west was along the English River (named the Missinipi by the Cree) to a pivotal point at Isle a la Crosse. The briefest glance at a map reveals the strategic value of this point. The Cree could travel northward through the Methye Portage system down the Athabaska River to Lake Athabaska and then south-west down the Peace River to the mountains, or up the Athabaska River to Lesser Slave Lake or further up that river to the mountains. The Beaver River enters Isle a la Crosse in the south and therefore travelling up the river in a south-westerly direction the Cree come to a point a short distance north of the North Branch of the Saskatchewan. They made good use of this system of waterways, pushing the Beaver Indians north to Lake Athabaska and the Peace River and west to Lesser Slave Lake.²⁶

Alexander Mackenzie described a spring reunion at Isle a la Crosse which he suggested was a typical, almost yearly event.

From there [Beaver River] they returned in the spring

to their friends whom they had left, and at the same time met with others who had penetrated with the same designs [hunting and war] into the Athabaska country...²⁷

There they held a spring festival and made "the necessary preparations for the annual journey to Churchill"²⁸ to trade their furs, to replenish their supply of European goods.

The Cree who used the English river route to the west were not alone in driving back the Beaver Indians and exploiting the resource of that area. Mackenzie, in 1793, referring to Lesser Slave Lake discloses that

It is well known to the Knistineaux, who are among the inhabitants of the plains on the banks of the Saskatchewan river; for formerly, when they used to come to make war in this country [against the Slave Indians, a division of the Beaver], they came in their canoes to that lake and left them there, from thence there is a beaten path all the way to the Fork or east branch of this [Smoky] river, which was their war road.²⁹

These Cree would have come west on the Saskatchewan river, north down the Beaver River to Isle a la Crosse and from there to Lesser Slave Lake. There seems to be no entirely clear evidence to confirm the Plains Cree tradition cited by Mackenzie. P. Turnor at Fort Chipewyan in 1791 wrote that "all the other Southern Indians are going to War upon the Indians to Westward of Slave Lake..."³⁰ "Southern Indians" is a name often applied to the Saskatchewan Cree in early trade journals so it is possible he was referring to Cree from the plains area.

Cree expansion in this northern area was remarkably rapid. When a truce was established in 1760 with the Beaver Indians they had already reached the Lesser Slave Lake area.³¹

Whether or not the Cree who used the Saskatchewan as a western route had penetrated to this point at an earlier date is unknown.

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the dominant position of these northern Cree was being undermined. In 1820, the change was shockingly obvious. Captain John Franklin, passing through their country* in that year, drew attention to this.

They were formerly a powerful and numerous nation which ranged over a very extensive country, and were most successful in their predatory excursions against their neighbors, particularly the northern Indians... but they have long ceased to be held in any fear, and are now, perhaps, the most harmless and inoffensive of the whole Indian race.³²

Franklin's companion, the learned Dr. J. Richardson, agreed with his evaluation.

Their character has sunk among the neighboring nations. They are no longer the warriors who drove before them the inhabitants of the Saskatchewan and Missinipi.³³

What had befallen these northern Cree is probably best explained by the classical interpretation⁺ of the effects of Indian-white intercourse on the Indian and his civilization. The Cree in the northern woodland after an initial period of rapid expansion began a long and tragic decline.

Key in this process was the gradual destruction of the

*Franklin's remarks were based on his knowledge of the Cree around Cumberland House. Naturally the process of decline and the growth of dependence were occurring at different rates in different parts of Cree territory. His remarks, and the ones which follow do though represent the culmination of the change no matter at what rate or area in which it occurred.

+Of course the best Canadian example of this interpretation is A.G. Baily's The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian

resource base of Indian society. The wealth of the Indian was the fur-bearing animal. This was the only aspect of his environment that the technology of his society was able to convert into European wealth. The introduction of new technology, the gun and more especially the metal trap, made his exploitation of that resource much more efficient. His desire to own European articles and the demands of the fur trade system increased the volume of his exploitation. The two combined, increased efficiency and increased volume, rapidly bankrupted the Indian's society.

As early as 1842 H.R. Schoolcraft had, through his studies of many Indian tribes, isolated this process.

To gain these indulgences [European goods] he yielded readily to the inducements of commerce...rapidly destroying, with firearms and steel traps, the races of the forest his only means of subsistence. The overstimulated chase at first aroused new energies, but left him in a few years his immense territories, which were valueless to him without the deer and beaver.³⁴

The Indian became poor and in extreme cases he died of starvation. To the hardships of poverty was added the tragedy of dependence.

The decrease in animals only emphasized the importance of efficient hunting tools. The Indian became increasingly dependent on these tools. The slumping resource and growing dependence was a vicious and tragic circle that caused Indian wood society to spiral downwards. Richardson pointed out this dependence and noted that there were psychological

Cultures 1504-1700, University of Toronto Press, 1969, originally published in 1937.

side-effects.

Their existance at present hangs upon the supplies of ammunition and clothing they receive from the traders, and they deeply feel their dependent situation.³⁵

Franklin, too, commented on this.

Having laid the bow and arrow aside, and the use of snares, except for rabbits and partridges, they depend entirely on the Europeans for the means of gaining their subsistence, as they require guns, and a constant supply of powder and shot...³⁶

It was not only white observers who saw this dependence; some Indians expressed their views on the subject. David Thompson related that

The old Indians, when speaking of their ancestors wonder how they could live as the Beaver was wiser and the Bear stronger, than them, and confess, that if they were deprived of the Gun, they could not live by the Bow and Arrow, and must soon perish.³⁷

Only six years after the Franklin Expedition had travelled through the country of the northern Cree, the Hudson's Bay Company took steps which dramatically conceded the above assessments. The Council of the Company's Northern Department passed a resolution in 1826, resolving "that the Indians be liberally supplied with the requisite necessities, particularly with the article of ammunition whether they have the money to pay for it or not."³⁸

This dependency and the decline in the resource base were the core of the problem, yet around them were clustered other factors which made the situation worse.

Liquor which these Cree had been able to receive with their abundant hunts and used in celebrations now, as their hunts declined, became more difficult to acquire. Their

continued demand and their inability to purchase sufficient amounts caused further debasement. Richardson stated that

Their character has been still more debased by the passion for spiritous liquors, so assiduously fostered among them. To obtain the noxious beverage they descend to the most humiliating entreaties, and assume an abjectness of behavior which does not seem natural to them.³⁹

It is difficult to say to what extent liquor can be blamed for the social dislocation that became evident in woods society. Certainly there was a drift away from many old customs. Again it was Richardson's keen eye that discerned this.

The manners and customs of the Cree have...undergone a change at least equal to that which has taken place in their moral character; and, although we heard of many practices peculiar to them, yet they appeared to be as nearly much honoured in the breach as the observance.⁴⁰

Intercourse with Europeans even affected their dress. They considered it a display of poverty to be dressed entirely in their own clothing. Their declining wealth was frivolously spent on liquor and fancy ornaments. Governor Simpson's description of the Indian dandy colorfully illustrates this.

It was not unusual in those days to see an Indian walking about in Half Boots, with a Silk Parasol in his hand and a Watch in his Fob while the nakedness of his family was barely covered with Leather.⁴¹

All these factors, but especially the decline of the fur resource, worked to drain the vitality from these northern Cree. Alexander Mackenzie suggested that this process began around 1790,⁴² it was evident to Franklin, Richardson and

Simpson in the 1820's, and it got progressively worse as time passed.

The fortunes of the Cree who had chosen to use the Saskatchewan River as their route to the west, and the territory south of the Saskatchewan as their hinterland were, by 1790, vastly different and would continue along a different course for the remainder of the trade era.

2. The Cree-Blackfoot Drive West, A Military Chronology, 1682-1813

For a considerable length of time it has been a popular notion that as the Cree with their European weapons moved into the plains they drove all before them, causing a westward displacement of the resident plains tribes. This process accounted for the placement of tribes when the fur companies built their posts on the Saskatchewan and the unceasing enmity between the Cree and the Blackfoot nation. E.P. Patterson utilized this view in his recent work on the Canadian Indian.

The acquisition of the gun in the early 1680's had been an important factor in setting the Crees in motion westward, which in turn had resulted in their pressure on the Blackfoot. Thus a kind of domino effect was created when the Blackfoot in their turn applied pressure on the Kutenais and Shoshones.⁴³

To a greater or lesser extent many others have subscribed to this concept. Paul Kane was probably the earliest. He wrote, in 1848, "This tribe [Cree] has been from time immemorial at war with the Blackfeet, whom they at one time conquered and held in subjection..."⁴⁴ Even W.M. Hlady, whose careful archaeological writings are such an aid in reconstructing early living patterns, took the position that "The Crees had been driving the Blackfoot westward and south westward when they had guns, while the Blackfoot were armed with bows and arrows."⁴⁵ As a measure of how popular and standardized this interpretation has become one has only to refer to F.W. Hodge's Handbook of the Indians of Canada. There it is written that

The united tribes [Cree and Assiniboine] attacked and drove south-westward the Sikiska and allied tribes who formerly dwelt along the Saskatchewan.⁴⁶

There is very little that can be said about this interpretation except that a fuller appreciation of the evidence shows that it is wrong. It will be shown in the following pages that, for example, an early Blackfoot-Cree alliance was maintained after both tribes had firearms and both had equal access to fur posts.

The Cree's initial contact with, and involvement in, the military patterns of the western plains was through this alliance with the Blackfoot against the Snakes and their allies, the Kootenay and Salish. If these Cree did have any enemies at this time among the various resident plains tribes these were the Gros Ventre (Atsina) Indians in the prairie region east of the South Branch of the Saskatchewan River.

Prior to the arrival of the Cree on the Saskatchewan and before the Snakes received horses from the south, the period of peace and friendly intercourse between the Snakes and Blackfoot came to an end. This breakdown in relations began with a comparatively minor incident but it grew into an irreconcilable hatred. Weasel Tail related these events to J.C. Ewers.

Long ago the Snakes and Blackfeet were friendly. But one time a group of Snake and Blackfoot boys were playing a kind of football game, and a Snake boy was hurt. His father became angry and clubbed to death the Blackfoot boy he accused of injuring his son. This started the fighting between these tribes.⁴⁷

After this murder the Snakes and Blackfoot met with the

Bow River between them. Scabby Robe, challenged by a Snake to single combat, defeated him and took his scalp as a trophy. "From that time on there was continuous warfare between the Snakes and Blackfeet."⁴⁸ The general result of these early campaigns was that the Blackfoot were driven down the South Branch to the Eagle Hills some time before 1723.⁴⁹

It is obvious that the commencement of Blackfoot-Snake hostilities had nothing to do with the spread of European weapons nor with the intrusion of the Saskatchewan Cree as middlemen. When the Blackfoot finally drove the Snakes, their Kootenay and Salish allies, south-west and out of the Canadian plains it was not a domino effect caused by Cree pressure but rather the invasion and re-taking of the more south-westerly part of the Blackfoot's traditional homeland. This, as it will be shown, was done with Cree aid; there was no "pressure on the Blackfoot."⁵⁰

Sometime between 1682, when the Cree using York Factory as a base began their move southward to the Saskatchewan, and 1723 when Saukamappee, a Cree, went to the aid of the Blackfoot nation,⁵¹ the Cree and Blackfoot met for the first time. Again Weasel Tail related to J.C. Ewers the tradition of this very friendly meeting.

The Blackfeet began to acquire guns before they got horses. Before they had any guns the bow and arrow was their principal weapon. They were then friendly with the Crees. One time a party of Blackfeet were in the woods north of the Saskatchewan. They heard a frightening noise and began to run away. Some Crees, who had made the noise by shooting a gun, motioned to the

Blackfeet and told them to come to them. The Crees then showed the Blackfeet how to load a gun from the muzzle and to fire it by pulling the trigger.⁵²

It seems then that the initial Blackfoot-Cree meeting resulted in the Blackfoot learning how to use a gun rather than in having the gun used on them. There is no evidence that this state of affairs changed until the end of the eighteenth century.

On the basis of this evidence it seems definite that the period of early Blackfoot-Cree contact, the period between 1682 and 1723, was a period of friendly accord. Taking this as a constant, it is possible to look at Henry Kelsey's journal and to come to some tentative conclusions about the identity of the tribes he mentions and the nature of the Cree move southward.

On June 17, 1690, Kelsey began his famous, though rather muddled, inland journal

In sixteen hundred and ninety'th year
I set forth as plainly may appear
And for my masters interest I did soon
Sett from ye house ye twealth of June.⁵³

Travelling inland, with an Assiniboine Chief,⁵⁴ for approximately six hundred miles he reached the Saskatchewan, probably at the Pas,⁵⁵ in July.

And for my masters I speaking for ym all
This neck of land I deerings point did call.⁵⁶

In September Kelsey, still in the Deerings Point area, conducted a peace conference between the Assiniboine, the

Natives [Naywattame poets] of that place wch, knows
No use of Better than wooden Bows
According to ye use & custom of this place⁵⁷

and the Home Indians (Saskatchewan Cree). He had little success for as soon as he had turned his back

Some of the home Indians came upon their track
And for old grudges & their minds to fill
Came up with them Six tents of wch, they killed.⁵⁸

Kelsey spent the winter of 1690-91 in that area and then in July he began a long inland trip. He and his Assiniboine guides proceeded westward along the Saskatchewan by canoe to a point probably the site of Cumberland House,⁵⁹ where he set out on foot, southwestward in search of the Naywattame Poets. On July 30 he came upon the Eagle Birch Indians. This group he had met before, possibly during the previous winter, they

were very glad yt I was returned according to my promise for if I should be wanting they should be greatly afraid yt ye Nayhaythaways [Cree Indians] would murder ym.⁶⁰

These Indians had interesting information for Kelsey.

Their newes wch was yt ye Nayhaythaways had lost 3 of their women wch ye Naywattame poets had killed ye last spring & withall they appointed where they themselves would meet us but as for ye Naywattame poets they were fled so far yet they thought I should not see them.⁶¹

Kelsey continued his journey and on August 24, 1691, he met the Mountain Poets.⁶² Finally, in September 1691, Kelsey came up with the Naywattame poets. On the 12th of that month, he held a conference with the chief. After some ceremonial preliminaries Kelsey began his speech. He

told him yt he should not mind wt had passed formerly as concerning ye nayhaythaways killing six tents of his Countrymen & for ye future we English will seek for to prevent it going further for if so be they did so any more ye Governr, says he will not trade with ym [Cree and Assiniboine].⁶³

Kelsey then presented gifts to the Naywattame Chief who in turn made his reply.

he seemed very well pleased & told me he had forgott wt had past although they had kill'd most of his kindred & relations & likewise told me...he would meet me at Deerings point ye next spring & go with me to ye factory...⁶⁴

Kelsey then turned back towards Deering Point. He later received news that the Cree had again attacked them and had killed two.⁶⁵

The question of import, then, is who were these Naywattame Poets, Mountain Poets, and Eagle Birch Indians? Given that Cree-Blackfoot relations from 1682 to 1723 were friendly, and there seems to be evidence that they were, certain clues are presented which aid in the interpretations of Kelsey's journal entries.

The first, of course, is that the Naywattame Poets, who Kelsey pictures as the enemy of the Cree, were not the Blackfoot. From this it can be concluded that, as the home territory of the Blackfoot at that time was roughly the South Branch of the Saskatchewan, Kelsey's plains wanderings, after he left the Cumberland House site, did not extend that far south-west.* Secondly, it has been shown (see Chapter I) that the Kootenay, Snakes and Salish, all of whom could be associated with the Rocky Mountains, were to the south and west of the Blackfoot nation. It seems quite definite, then, that the Mountain Poets are not any of those three

*D. Mackay's map of Kelsey's journal placed his farthest point of travel west as a point due south-east of the source of the Carrot River.⁶⁶

tribes. On the same basis they would not have been the Eagle Birch Indians either. It seems certain that Kelsey's travels were confined to the eastern plains and that he did not meet any of the tribes of the Blackfoot confederacy or their enemies further to the west.

The Mountain Poets, if their name can be taken to associate them with actually living in or near mountains in 1690, could have been stationed in the Porcupine Hills, Touchwood Hills,* or the Turtle Mountains. As the Naywattame Poets had, in 1691, fled and were beyond the Mountain Poets they could have been situated in the Qu'appelle River area in a south-westerly direction, towards the Carrot River in a north-westerly direction, or around Last Mountain Lake in a westerly direction from the Touchwood Hills. If the Mountain Poets were in the Turtle Mountains the Naywattame Poets could have been in the area between the Souris and Qu'appelle Rivers.

The name Eagle Birch does not provide the same suggestive clue, except that they were possibly living on the edge of the plains in a wooded area. Of course, these locations are so numerous that nothing can be drawn from it.

It was shown in Chapter I that the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Atsina and Mandan could all be placed in south-eastern Manitoba, or at least along the Red River, prior to the fur trade period. The Cheyenne maintained their Shain River position

*E.E. Rich suggests that when Kelsey was with the Mountain Poets he was "approaching the Touchwood Hills."⁶⁷ which are just west of the north branch of the Assiniboine.

until at least 1740 and the Mandan were probably south, if not south-east moving up the Missouri in the mid-1600's. This leaves the Atsina and Arapaho as likely candidates to fill the role of Naywattame Poets. It should be remembered that the pre-trade position of the Atsina has been settled as "the Red River Valley probably as far north as the present day international boundary."⁶⁸

The Atsina Tribe, also known as the Fall, Rapid or Gros Ventre Indians, played a significant part in plains Indian history, especially in the 1790's. The names Fall and Rapid are significant as the tribe was given those titles by traders who found them living on the rapids of the Saskatchewan.⁶⁹ In the early trade period they migrated north-westward from the Red River to the Saskatchewan. As no mention is made of them by Saukamappee in his relation of the Blackfoot-Snake battles of the 1720's and 1730, it could be assumed that they were still south-east of the Saskatchewan at that time.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence available with which to trace the path of the Gros Ventre's north-westward migration. LaVerendrye makes no mention of this tribe. He preserved no tradition that would explain why they left their early Red River location to move west onto the Canadian plains. Legardeur de Saint Pierre gives a picture of the plains in 1751 which is much like Kelsey's. He indicates that the Cree and the Assiniboine were at war with "the Hyactejlini, the Brochets, and the Gros Ventres."⁷⁰ Although this may tend to strengthen the identification of the Nay-

wattame Poets as Gros Ventre, he gives no information as to the location of these tribes. References in journals of much later date (1790 - 1810) place the Gros Ventre as far east as the western limit of the Assiniboine River⁷¹ and the western end of the Qu'appelle River.⁷²

If it is acceptable to identify the Naywattame Poets as the Gros Ventre* this makes the mystery of the Eagle Birch Indians and the Mountain Poets rather easier to solve. E.E. Rich states that these two groups are Assiniboine. He calls the Eagle Birch Indians the "Assiniboine of the Woods"⁷⁴ and the Mountain Poets the "Assiniboine of the Hills."⁷⁵

On the basis of logic alone Rich's designation is very attractive. It should be recalled that the Eagle Birch Indians told Kelsey that they were very happy he had returned because they feared that the "Nayhaythaways would murder ym."⁷⁶ The Mountain Poets likewise feared the Cree. But the Naywattame Poets were opposed by both the Cree and the Assiniboine. It seems certain then that the Mountain Poets and Eagle Birch Indians were not Cree. Since they showed no fear of the Assiniboine they were not part of the Gros Ventre nation. They therefore had to be two bands of the Assiniboine tribe.

It would seem, from the foregoing discussion, at least reasonable to identify the Naywattame Poets as Gros Ventre

*Both E.E. Rich and D. Mackay identify the Naywattame Poets as the Gros Ventre though they present no analysis to confirm this designation. Other historians have been more reserved. W.L. Morton calls them "an unidentifiable tribe"⁷³ and H.A. Innis follows suit.

and the Mountain Poets and Eagle Birch Indians as Assiniboine bands. This, of course, means that the Cree-Assiniboine alliance was an alliance between the Cree and some bands of the Assiniboine and that the Cree were actively opposed to other bands among whom can be numbered the Mountain Poets and the Eagle Birch Indians.

Having identified Kelsey's mysterious Indians, it is now possible to outline the Cree's initial moves towards the west along the Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Cree, Kelsey's "Home Indians,"⁷⁷ had between 1682 and 1690 established as their home territory, the area between the shores of the Bay and Deerings Point (the Pas) with the Assiniboine to the south, west, and east of that location. Since 1680 the Cree had been actively engaged in tapping the fur resources of that area and as the resource diminished they had been withdrawing inland down the Hayes River.⁷⁸ In this they were duplicating the pattern of the Cree who were moving westward along the Nelson and English Rivers. By 1690 it seems that they were just beginning to expand their hunting territory south of the Saskatchewan. Their expansion could have been causing the Mountain Poets and Eagle Birch Indians to be pushed out of their lands, an experience similar to that being undergone by the Chipeywan and Beaver Indians in the north.

The Saskatchewan Cree, of course, also controlled access to the Bay shore posts by the Hayes River. During Kelsey's time on the plains only some bands of Assiniboine

were allowed to travel north.⁷⁹ These favoured Assiniboine, probably concerned with maintaining their privilege of passage on the Hayes, were forced to stand aside and ignore the deprivations of the Cree on the Mountain Poets and the Eagle Birch Indians and they actively joined the Cree against the Naywattame Poets.

It is difficult to surmise why the Cree were opposed to these two Assiniboine bands, unless the territorial expansion theory is correct. There is no evidence of Cree-Assiniboine hostility prior to 1690 and it is unknown how long after 1692 the Cree continued to oppose the Mountain Poets and Eagle Birch Indians. It is quite possible that it was a short and passing squabble.

After Henry Kelsey returned to York Fort in 1692, the Cree continued their migration south, and south-westward. The state of warfare between the Cree-Assiniboine and the Gros Ventre-Naywattame continued. Cree relations with the Blackfoot which definitely ante-date 1723 remained friendly.

The year, 1723, is a significant date in the history of the Cree on the plains. In that year David Thompson's informant, Saukamappee, was a boy of 16 living with his family and their Cree band some distance to the east or north of the Blackfoot nation.

The Snake^{*}-Blackfoot war was still in progress. The

*G. Hyde makes a tentative identification of the Snakes whom the Blackfoot were battling in 1730. "They were evidently the Lamki Shoshones of later times, called Tukuarika or Mountain Sheep Eaters."⁸⁰

Blackfoot, with the Piegans suffering the brunt of the Snake advance, had retreated north-east and were then to the east of the Eagle Hills.⁸¹ In the winter of 1722, the Piegans sent out a call for help to all the tribes of the Blackfoot nation. Two of these messengers from the Piegans came to the camp of Saukamappee's father. Twenty Cree volunteered to go with the Piegan to aid the Blackfoot.*⁸²

We came to the Peeaganes and their allies. They were camped in the Plains on the left bank of the River (the north side) and were a great many. We feasted, a great war tent was made, and a few days passed in speeches... A war chief was elected by the chiefs, and we got ready to march. Our spies had been out and had seen a large camp of the Snake Indians on the Plains of the Eagle Hill, and we had to cross the River in canoes, and on rafts, which are securely secured for our retreat. When we had crossed and numbered our men, we were about 350 warriors. They had their scouts out, and came to meet us. Both parties made a great show of their numbers, and I thought that they were more numerous than ourselves.⁸³

The ensuing battle resulted in a draw, the weary contestants leaving the field without a decision; a few were wounded but none scalped.

The Snakes had fought with arrows "headed with a sharp, smooth, black stone which broke when it struck anything."⁸⁴ There were no firearms involved in the fight. The Cree guns "were left at home for those who stayed behind to hunt."⁸⁵ Nor were there horses in either the Blackfoot or Snake contingents.

Saukamappee, his father, and fellow volunteers returned

*Saukamappee's war record will be given in some length as it will be important in later discussions of war techniques, the acquisition of horses, and because it is a reliable account of the events it pertains to.

home. He grew up, became a skilled hunter, and married.

We had passed a winter together,* when Messengers came from our allies to claim assistance...By this time the affairs of both parties had much changed; we had more guns and iron headed arrows than before; but our enemies the Snake Indians and their allies [Salish and Kootenay] had Misstutim (Big Dogs, that is Horses) on which they rode, swift as the Deer, on which they dashed at the Peeagans, and with their stone Pakamoggan [tomahawks] knocked them on the head, and thus they lost several of their best men. This news we did not well comprehend and it alarmed us, for we had no idea of Horses and could not make out what they were. Only three of us went and I should not have gone, had not my wives relations frequently intimated, that her father's medicine bag would be honored by the scalp of a Snake Indian.⁸⁶

The Cree again set out to join the Piegan. The account does not give the location of the Blackfoot camp nor of the ensuing battle. It is important to note that between the first battle in 1723 and this one in the year 1732 the Snakes had acquired horses. They probably also adopted the military tactics of the large cavalry unit which became the mark of many plains battles. This combined the element of surprise with the rapid, headlong rush at the enemy. It was sudden, swift, and deadly.

After their arrival at the Blackfoot camp, the War Chief surveyed his warriors and

found between us and the Stone Indians we had ten guns and each of us about thirty balls, and powder for the war, and we were considered the strength of the battle.⁸⁷

The combined force of Blackfoot, Cree and Assiniboine began their march and found that "the enemy was near in a large war party, but had no Horses with them, for at that

*This passage of time is usually counted as nine years, which would make Saukamappee 25 in the year 1732.

time they had very few of them."⁸⁸

These enemies quickly joined battle. As in 1723, parallel lines were formed and the warriors hid behind large, thick shields. But this time the outcome was much different.

our shots caused consternation and dismay along their whole line. The battle had begun about Noon, and the sun was not yet half down, when we perceived some of them had crawled away from their shields, and were taking to flight.⁸⁹

The Snakes had been routed. Great celebrations followed, honours were heaped upon the Cree and Assiniboine marksmen whose "guns had gained the victory."⁹⁰

Saukamappee, who returned to live with the Blackfoot shortly after this battle, told Thompson that

The terror of that battle and our guns has prevented any more general battles, and our wars have since been carried by ambuscade and surprize of small camps, in which we have greatly the advantage, from the Guns, arrow shods of iron, long knives, flat bayonets and axes from the Traders.⁹¹

From 1732 to 1751 there is a break in the chronology of the Cree-Blackfoot alliance and their joint campaigns against the Snake and their allies. The journal of La Verendrye's sons who travelled south-west of the Missouri River in 1742 with the Gens des Cheveaux Indians does though throw some light on Snake activity along the Missouri.

After marching a number of days with the Gens des Cheveaux they came to the Indians' main camp and found that the people

were in a state of great desolation. There was nothing but weeping and howling, all their villages

having been destroyed by the Gens du Serpent [Snake Indians] and only a few of their tribe having escaped.⁹²

These mounted Snakes carried on their warfare from spring to fall. In 1741, it was claimed they had destroyed seventeen villages, killing old men and women, making slaves of the young women and trading them to the tribes of the sea coast for horses and Spanish goods.⁹³

The La Verendrye brothers then travelled on and joined a camp of Bow Indians* who were on friendly terms with the Gens des Cheveaux.⁹⁴ Every day that they were with these Indians

Messages urging them [other bands] to meet us have been sent out in all directions. Every day you hear the war song chanted; this is not without purpose: we are going to march to the great mountains which are near the sea, to seek the Snakes there.⁹⁵

On New Year's day, 1743, the combined force of Bow and Gens des Cheveaux Indians came "in sight of the mountains. The number of warriors exceeded two thousand..."⁹⁶

The successful raids that the Snakes had been making in the years previous to this had resulted in their situation becoming increasingly desperate. The immediate effect was that the various Missouri River tribes joined the list of plains tribes actively engaged against them. Not only had these actions increased the size of the forces attacking them but they, possibly without knowing it, had cut themselves off from the Mandan trading villages through which they could

*No attempt will be made here to identify the Bow or Gens des Cheveaux Indians. Their identity, at this point, is much less important than establishing their opposition to the Snakes.

have received a supply of firearms in exchange for their horses. Had they been able to find their way into that trading system, they could have strengthened their position against the Cree and Blackfoot.

The Snakes' contact with the Spanish was of little help to them in their dilemma. For "the Spanish refuse to let them have firearms under pretense that these weapons will only induce them to kill each other."⁹⁷ They became isolated aided only by their equally weak allies the Kootenay and the Salish. When Lewis and Clark visited the Snakes in 1805 Cameahwait, a chief, expressed the frustration and rage of his nation.

But this should not be, if we had guns, instead of hiding ourselves in the mountains and living like bears on roots and berries, we would then go down and live in the buffalo country in spite of our enemies, whom we never fear when we meet on equal terms.⁹⁸

In 1750, Legardeur de Saint Pierre noted that the Cree and Assiniboine were carrying on a successful series of campaigns against the "Hyactjlini, the Brochets and the Gros Ventres."⁹⁹ Like Henry Kelsey he tried to make peace among these nations. During the winter (1750 - 1751) he gathered these tribes together and they swore to live like brothers. His success though was short lived for in November, 1751, he learned that some Assiniboine, who had been camping with the Hyactjlini, "seeing that they were much more numerous than the others, slaughtered them, and no mention made of a single person saved except a few women and children they carried off as prisoners."¹⁰⁰

It is impossible to determine who the Hyactjlini and Brochet (Jackfish?) Indians were or even to be sure that the Gros Ventre are the Fall or Rapid Indians. From evidence of a later date though it would seem doubtful that these Indians were of the Blackfoot nation. Of course, it is possible that these three Indian groups were all bands of the Gros Ventre nation.

Anthony Hendey visited the far western plains just three years after Legardeur de Saint Pierre. In 1754, he found no evidence of Cree-Assiniboine hostilities against the Gros Ventre. His journal, though, does give some hints as to the condition of the Blackfoot-Cree alliance and the progress of their south-western advance against the Snake and their allies.

Travelling up the Saskatchewan by canoe and then across the plains using a horse he had purchased from the Assiniboine as a pack animal, he reached a large encampment of Assiniboine Indians near the site of Battleford, Saskatchewan on September 5, 1754.¹⁰¹ He continued on across the plains until he came to the junction of the Red Deer River and the South Branch of the Saskatchewan where he met the Archithinue (Blackfoot) Indians.¹⁰²

Hendey's mission, the purpose of which had been to convince these Indians to come down to York Factory, failed. They told him they didn't own or know how to use canoes. The trading which was carried on while Hendey was in their village certainly indicates that they were receiving their

supplies through the Cree and Assiniboine.¹⁰³

It is also evident from Hendey's journal that the Blackfoot had, by 1754, pushed back the Snake, Kootenay and Salish to the south-western side of the junction of the Red Deer River and South Branch of the Saskatchewan. Although no mention is made of battles, or even of the Snakes, the cordial trading relations between the Cree-Assiniboine and Blackfoot are a reliable indication that their military alliance was still operative.

Between Hendey's visit in 1754, and the journey of Matthew Cocking in 1772, there is no direct white evidence relating to the Blackfoot-Cree warfare against the Snakes. There is though a remarkable Indian tradition that discloses some of the military events during this period.

Faro, a Flathead, related his recollection of the fate of his tribe in his boyhood* to Warren Ferris, the American trader.

A great many snows past when I was a child our people were in a continual fear of the Blackfeet, who were already in possession of firearms of which we knew nothing, save by their murderous effects. During our excursions for buffalo, we were frequently attacked by them, and many of our bravest warriors fell victims to the thunder and lightning they wielded which we conjectured had been given to them by the Great Spirit to punish us for our sins.¹⁰⁴

Battle followed battle with the Flatheads suffering serious losses in each engagement.

*This tradition was related in 1831. As no age is given for Faro by Ferris, it could be assumed that he was between middle age and old age, or 50 to 80. This would place these events between 1755 and 1781.

They never came in reach of our arrows, but remained at such a distance that they could deal death to us without endangering themselves...Goaded by thirst for revenge, we often rushed forth upon our enemies, but they receded like the rainbow in proportion as we advanced, and ever remained at the same distance, whence they destroyed us by their deadly bolts, while we were utterly powerless to oppose them.¹⁰⁵

The Flathead soon realized that there was little they could do against the Blackfoot. They assembled in council and Big Foot, the head chief of the nation, addressed them.

He set forth the necessity of leaving our country. 'My heart tells me,' said he, 'that the Great Spirit has forsaken us; he has furnished our enemies with his thunder to destroy us, yet something whispers to me, that we may fly to the mountains and avoid a fate, which if we remain here is inevitable.'¹⁰⁶

The tribe listened to the voice whispering to Big Foot and began their retreat, leaving behind the plains and withdrawing into the protection of the mountains.

The extent of Cree involvement in these battles with the Flathead is unknown. Their alliance with the Blackfoot remained firm through this period so it is quite possible that some were actively engaged.

On August 24, 1772, Matthew Cocking, travelling to the west with the same purpose in mind as had Anthony Hendey, reached the South Branch of the Saskatchewan just south of its junction with the North Branch. His hunters, Assiniboine or Cree,

saw several Horses up the branch on the other side. They are all in general afraid, supposing the horses to belong to the Snake Indians* with whom they are always at variance.¹⁰⁸

*It is impossible here not to include Burpee's humorous comment on this passage "These could hardly be the true Snakes

This reaction to the sighting of a strange horse was repeated a number of times during Cocking's trip. It is obvious that the Cree and Assiniboine had at least maintained their opposition to the Snakes.

By November 4, 1772, Cocking had not yet contacted the Blackfoot (Archithinue) nation and he had lost hope of finding them. This was "a great disappointment to my companions who used to trade"¹⁰⁹ with them. He noted further in his description of the Blackfoot that they met the Cree-Assiniboine each March to carry on a trade.¹¹⁰ The Cree-Blackfoot relations obviously continued friendly with yearly meetings and the possibility of the Cree and/or Assiniboine accompanying them on their war trips. It is hard to imagine the young Cree warriors devoting themselves exclusively to trade without their wives "relations frequently [intimating] that her father's medicine bag would be honored by the scalp of a Snake Indian."¹¹¹

Cocking had no more success in convincing the Blackfoot to come in to trade than had Hendey. They gave him almost the same reason, the long and arduous journey and their lack of canoes. As they were parting he was told that "their

or Shoshones whose usual habitat was the Yellow-stone country. Alexander Henry, the younger, refers to Snake Indians in the Red River country, and Dr. Cowes suggests these may have been Sioux. Possibly Cocking's Snakes may also respond to the same identification, though somewhat out of Sioux territory."¹⁰⁷ Of course what is of importance is not who these Indians were, but that the hunters thought they were Snakes and feared them. There seems to be little doubt in the face of the evidence already presented that they were Snakes.

Countrymen are going to war with the Snake Indians."¹¹²

The exact location of the Snakes at this point is difficult to determine. Alexander Henry (elder) was, in 1776, on the plains south of the junction of the two Branches of the Saskatchewan. In an Assiniboine camp he met a woman who was a slave. He was told that she had been captured "far to the westward of the mountains."¹¹³ This, of course, is not definite proof that the Snakes and their allies had withdrawn from the plains.

Saukamappee gives much more information on this point. According to his account the Blackfoot, around the year 1780, were advancing southward in the vicinity of the Red Deer River. They attacked a Snake camp but to their amazement they met little resistance. The inhabitants of the camp were all dying. Two days later the smallpox broke out in the Blackfoot camp.¹¹⁴

War was no longer thought of, and we had enough to do to hunt and make provisions for our families, for in our sickness we had consumed all our dried provisions ...Our hearts were low and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people. To hunt for our families was our sole occupation and kill Beavers, Wolves and Foxes to trade our necessaries; and we thought of War no more, and perhaps would have made peace with them [Snakes] for they had suffered dreadfully as well as us and had left all this fine country of the Bow River to us.¹¹⁵

This epidemic swept the plains from west to east in the years 1780 - 1782. The Blackfoot advance had taken them back to their original homeland - the Bow River country.

The shock of the epidemic, the massive loss of life which drained the energies from the tribes, caused a lull in

the war. This lasted until the year 1785 when

five of our tents pitched away to the valleys of the Rocky Mountains, up a branch of this River [the Bow] to hunt the Big Horn Deer.¹¹⁶

While hunting they were ambushed and killed by a party of Snake Indians.¹¹⁷ Immediately the Blackfoot began to prepare for war.

Early in September of 1787

a party of about two hundred and fifty Warrior's under the command of Kootana Appe went off to war on the Snake Indians; they proceeded southward near the east foot of the Mountains and found no natives.¹¹⁸

It is possible, of course, that this expedition had just missed the wandering Snakes who were still on the Plains. But it seems definite that between 1787 and 1805 the Snake withdrawal was completed. In the latter year Lewis and Clark noted in the journal of their expedition that "Within their [Snake's] own recollection they formerly lived in the plains, but they have withdrawn into the mountains..."¹¹⁹

The Salish, as shown previously, probably retreated into the mountains sometime in the 1760's. It is more difficult to pin down a date for the Kootenay retreat. Duncan McGillivray, a North West Company trader at Fort George (North branch of the Saskatchewan), disclosed, in 1795, that

The Coutonies have already made several attempts to visit us, but they have been always obstructed by their enemies and forced to relinquish their design with loss...this year however it is reported that they intend obtaining a safe passage hither by bribing their enemies with Bands of Horses. Whether this method will succeed we cannot judge, but it is shrewdly suspected that a party will be formed to intercept as usual their progress to this quarter.¹²⁰

By 1807 the Kootenay definitely had withdrawn from the Canadian plains. In that year David Thompson crossed the mountains to find them.

In their westward drive the Blackfoot, their Cree and Assiniboine allies had taken more than eighty years to reach the Rockies. At the end of the period the plains had been cleared of the Snake, Kootenay and Salish tribes. During the same era, New France, and hence the French fur trade, had fallen. The North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company had entered the west and leap-frogged each other in the construction of posts along the length of the Saskatchewan.

As the history of the westward drive is largely the story of the superiority of arms of one group of antagonists over the other it does not seem that it would be fully told until the drive was stopped, and a new military pattern begun. This new pattern was established, the balance of power levelled, by 1813.

The expansion of the Canadian and British traders along the Saskatchewan was matched, though on a smaller scale, in the early nineteenth century, by the arrival of American fur traders at the western end of the Missouri. The Blackfoot quickly realized the danger of Americans crossing the mountains and entering into trade with the Snake and Salish. They effectively blockaded the sources of the Missouri and adopted the policy of indiscriminately killing Americans on sight.¹²¹ They employed the same policy on the Saskatchewan¹²² although they implemented it with more reserve, never going

further than threats. For them to kill a white man in that area was to threaten their own supply of firearms.

In 1807, Thompson broke the Saskatchewan blockade, crossed the mountains and began the first direct trade with the Kootenay at Kootenay house. The Kootenay were quick to take advantage of this event and the subsequent arrival of other traders. Before the traders had established contact with them, the Kootenay had nurtured a burning hatred against the whites for supplying their enemies with firearms that had been used to drive them from their fathers' lands. Yet, when the traders came

They appeared to be perfectly aware that the beaver was the only object that induced us [Ross Cox of the North West Company] to visit their country; and they accordingly exerted themselves to procure it, not, as some of them candidly declared for our interest, but for the purpose of obtaining firearms, spears &c to enable them to meet their old enemies the Black-feet on more equal terms.¹²³

Thompson suggested that there was an additional factor connected with their acquisition of firearms, which supplemented the new strength of the Kootenay.

All those who could procure Guns soon became good shots ...the Peegan Indians...are not good shots they are accustomed to fire at the Bison on horseback, within a few feet of the animal, it gives them no practice at long shots at small marks. On the contrary, the Indians on the west side of the Mountains are accustomed to fire at the Small Antelope at a distance of one hundred and twenty yards, which is a great advantage in battle, where everyone marks out his man.¹²⁴

When the Piegans realized that Thompson had slipped through their blockade they crossed the mountains, found the post, laid siege to it for three weeks, and then departed.

Their Civil Chief was incensed by these events. He

harangued them, and gave his advice to form a strong war party under Kootonai Appie the War Chief and directly to crush the white Men and the Natives on the west side of the Mountains before they became well armed. They have always been our slaves (Prisoners) and now they will pretend to equal us; no, we must not suffer this, we must at once crush them. We know them to be desperate Men, and we must destroy them before they become to powerful for us.¹²⁵

The Piegan Civil Chief had a full understanding of the dangers. They had whipped the Kootenay into submission and driven them across the mountains. Now the Kootenay were turning around to face them, desperate for revenge and armed with the same weapon the Blackfoot had used to defeat them for so many years. He knew it was only a matter of time before the Kootenay struck back. The Blackfoot had to crush them before they were ready.

Between 1807 and 1812 the Kootenay received a regular supply of arms, although the Piegans continued in their attempts to enforce their blockade at least through to 1811.¹²⁶ Blackfoot annoyance with the white traders for supplying their enemies grew with their inability to stop the westward flow of guns and it reached a high point in 1812.

James Bird (a Hudson's Bay Company trader) noted in the Edmonton post journal of that year that

The Muddy River Indians [Piegans] sent, lately, Young Men to his House [Acton House, an Hudson's Bay Company close to the Rockies]...to inform them that the Blood Indians were determined in attacking both Houses [Acton and the North West Company post in the area] on Account of a Defeat they had lately received from an Enemy, who was assisted by White Men...¹²⁷

This turned out to be a desperate threat. The Blood Indians

restricted their actions to stealing the traders' horses, possibly feeling they had a right to these as they normally would have been able to steal them with ease from the unarmed Kootenay. Regardless of these Blackfoot actions, the arming of the Kootenay continued.

Finally, after years of defeats, the Kootenay began to enjoy the fruits of victory. Probably the choicest of these was their ability to recross the mountains to hunt the buffalo in the land that had once been theirs.¹²⁸ In 1812, the Piegans sued for peace but the negotiations broke down and the warfare continued.¹²⁹

On December 24, 1813, R. Cox reported a significant event in the history of the Flathead people. A large band of their warriors

had recently returned from the buffalo country, and had revenged their defeat of the preceding year by a signal victory of their enemies the Blackfeet, several of whose warriors, with their women, they had taken prisoners.¹³⁰

The victory surely gave them hope that they could recross the mountains each summer and hunt the buffalo in relative safety, procuring a supply of dried meat for the winter.

Like their Kootenay neighbours the Flatheads had been overjoyed at the opportunity of purchasing arms from the traders who arrived on their side of the mountains. Cox described the turn in Flathead fortunes which followed.

From this moment affairs took a decided change in their favor, and [in] the subsequent contests the numbers of killed, wounded, and prisoners were more equal.¹³¹

The Blackfoot, on the other hand, were furious and they dec-

lared

to our people [North West Company employees] at Forts des Prairies [Saskatchewan River posts] that all white men who might happen to fall into their hands, to the westward of the mountains, would be treated by them as enemies, in consequence of their furnishing the Flat-heads with weapons, which were used with such deadly effect against their nation.¹³²

Perhaps the crowning touch in the re-emergence of Salish and Kootenay power was the rebirth, in 1813, of their former alliance.* They agreed

that neither party shall make peace with the Blackfoot until the latter shall permit them to hunt without molestation on the buffalo plains.¹³³

They also began to make joint trips to the buffalo grounds in an attempt to increase the security of their hunting parties.¹³⁴

The Snakes, too, began to receive arms. They did not at this point join the Salish-Kootenay alliance. They added the Nez Perce to their long list of adversaries and began to look for a peace settlement with the Blackfoot.¹³⁵

The arming of the Kootenay, Salish, and Snakes, and the formation of the Salish-Kootenay alliance did not stop the Blackfoot from continuing to conduct their raids across the mountains for scalps and horses. Nor did it allow the three mountain tribes to re-occupy the plains. But it did ensure that the Blackfoot could no longer raid without fear of serious loss and that the Snake, Salish, and Kootenay

could at least hunt on the plains with some hope of defending

*The role the Cree played in the rebuilding of Flathead military strength will be discussed in a subsequent section.

their hunting parties.

The new strength of these tribes, the formation and continued functioning of their alliance, plays an important part in Blackfoot-Cree relations and general plains Indian history throughout the rest of the trade period.

3. Characteristics of the Cree-Blackfoot Trade System In The 18th Century

It is difficult to assess the amount of actual front-line participation of the Cree in the Blackfoot drive to the mountains. Even in Saukamappee's account of the battles of 1723 and 1732, the number of Cree warriors, although crucial, was small. There is little reason to believe though that this habit of sending aid to the Blackfoot ceased. It is much more plausible that Cree warriors had continued to march with Blackfoot columns as they sought out and attacked Snake, Salish, and Kootenay encampments.

Yet, at the same time there can be little doubt that the major and most important role played by the Cree in those military events was in supplying the Blackfoot with firearms. If there was one thing that Saukamappee and Comeahwait, the Snake chief, could agree upon, it was that the introduction of the gun and iron-headed shock weapons tipped the scale in favor of the Canadian plains tribes who had established contact with the British traders.

If it is considered for a moment that the Cree and their Assiniboine ally were supplying European weapons to the Missouri River Indians, through the Mandan villages, as well as to the Blackfoot nation, it can be well understood how the Cree could be described in an account of those times as "the moving spirits of all these continents".¹³⁶

To suggest that the Cree in their favoured trade position simply blocked other tribes from gaining access to the

posts is to suggest that the Cree did not know how to maximize the benefits of their geographic position. Throughout the 18th century, in the plains area, the Cree manifested the behaviour of traders in every sense. They practised sharp bargaining with their European sources and set a very profitable tariff on the goods they brought to their Indian trading partners.

Even though the British, and the French, were their indispensable suppliers this did not tie the Cree to a particular British or French trade policy. The pleadings of La Verendrye, Legardeur de Saint Pierre, and Kelsey for a peace that would benefit the trade fell on uncooperative and independent ears. The Cree themselves, for their own political reasons, decided who would receive goods from the Europeans and who would not.

Thus Cree trade and military policies went hand-in-hand. From the 1690's all through the 18th century the Naywattame-Gros Ventre were excluded by the Cree, who hunted and attacked them at every opportunity. When the Blackfoot-Cree military alliance began to break down, the Cree were quick to turn to the aid of their former enemy, the Flat-head.¹³⁷

For some reason the Cree chose to enter into a military and trade relationship with the Blackfoot. When the decision was taken and by whom, and exactly when the trading began is not definitely known.

Saukamappee's account suggests that the military alliance pre-dates the trade system, or at least that it pre-dates

the inclusion of the gun as a commodity in that system. As late as the second battle, in 1732, the Blackfoot still had no firearms.¹³⁸ Even after that engagement the Blackfoot remember receiving guns as marriage gifts not as articles of trade.¹³⁹ Weasel Tail states quite definitely that "The Blackfoot began to acquire guns before they got horses."¹⁴⁰ This dates the beginning of the Cree-Blackfoot trade in guns at least to a point between the year 1732 and 1754 when Hendey visited the Blackfoot and found that they and the Assiniboine had horses.¹⁴¹

The Blackfoot received their horses by stealing* them from the Snakes,+ the Kootenay, and the Salish, who in turn acquired them from the south in the area of the Spanish settlements.¹⁴³ The desire for horses added heat to the Blackfoot campaigns against their enemies and made the gap between them all the wider.

Anthony Hendey was the first white man to see the Blackfoot-Cree trading process first hand. On May 15, 1755, he began to trade with the Blackfoot and

the Indians [Cree and Assiniboine] purchased great numbers of Wolves, Beaver and Foxes...which proves what the Woman formerly told me concerning the Natives getting part of their Furs from the Archithinue Indians.¹⁴⁴

This was the core of that trade system. The Cree visited

*In the tradition of Weasel Tail, the Blackfoot stole the first horses they ever owned.¹⁴²

+The earliest date of Snake acquisition is a matter of some controversy. See E.G. Roe, From Dogs to Horses Among the Western Indian Tribes, Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Third Series, May 1939, and J.C. Ewers, The Horse in Blackfoot Culture, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 159, reprinted 1969, for a discussion of this point.

the Blackfoot in the spring and supplemented their own winter hunts taken along the Saskatchewan River with the furs that the Blackfoot had collected. The Cree then turned east and began the long journey to York Fort.

They arrived there determined to make the best trade possible. Far from being obsequious the returning Cree, possibly realizing the Company's dependence on their trade, demanded fair dealing. In a typical pre-trading speech the Captain of the Indians exhorted the traders to

Tell your servants to fill the measure, and not to put their thumbs within the brim...Let us trade good black tobacco, moist and hard twisted; let us see it before it is opened...Let the young men have more than measure of tobacco, cheap kettles, thick, and high.¹⁴⁵

If the goods were not of high quality they complained. They returned guns that had exploded in their hands. They demanded "light guns, small in the hand, and well shaped, with locks that will not freeze in the winter."¹⁴⁶

William Tomison finally turned their complaints and demands back to the Company.

I am sorry to inform your honours that there is great complaints from all quarters against the guns, many Indians has lost part of their hands and other have lost the whole hand.¹⁴⁷

It is not known if Tomison asked the Company to fill another Cree request. They desired bright "red gun cases."¹⁴⁸

On completion of their trade at the Bay, the Cree returned to the Saskatchewan to spend the winter hunting before once again visiting the Blackfoot. This rhythm of trade which the Cree lived by was duplicated by the Hudson's

Bay Company when it had built its inland posts.

Matthew Cocking designated March as the month of the Cree-Blackfoot trade mart and suggested that the area just south-west of the junction of the North and South Branches of the Saskatchewan was the location of this annual event.¹⁴⁹

On November 4, 1772, Cocking remarked that the Cree and Assiniboine received "Horses and Buffalo skin garments, for winter apparel also wolf skins and other furs"¹⁵⁰ from the Blackfoot. He did not, though, enumerate the goods the Blackfoot acquired in exchange.

Andrew Graham, a Hudson's Bay Company employee, provided in his memoirs of service, a valuable picture of Cree trading activities. According to his account a Blackfoot (Archithinue) made his way to York Factory in 1766.

I asked him if there were any beaver and wolves etc. in his country. He said there were plenty and that our traders [Cree] came amongst them and bought up their furs.¹⁵¹

Graham learned that the list of trade goods included in addition to guns, hatchets, kettles, and knives.¹⁵² Powder and shot should be added to this list as well as "arrow shods of iron, long knives, [and] bayonets..."¹⁵³

Of much greater significance was Graham's discovery of the prices charged the Blackfoot by the Cree for those articles. From his remarks on this and the Company's standard at that time the following comparative price chart has been drawn up:

<u>Company price for Cree</u>	<u>Article</u>	<u>Cree price for Blackfoot</u>
14 Beaver	1 Gun	50 Beaver
1 Beaver	1 Hatchet	6 Beaver
8 Beaver	1 Large Kettle	20 Beaver
1/3 Beaver	1 Knife	4 Beaver 154

The Blackfoot hunter was allowed to substitute wolves in the same amount as beaver to purchase these articles from the Cree.

The high price for guns is understandable. The Blackfoot were a captive market and they derived direct economic benefit from their use. Guns made their attacks on the Snakes successful and the horses they took as booty could in turn be traded to the Cree and Assiniboine.

There is only one indication in the early sources of the price of horses in the Cree-Blackfoot trading system. Hendey, in 1754, purchased a horse from a member of an Assiniboine band to the south-west of Battleford, Saskatchewan, for a gun.¹⁵⁵ Using the Cree tariff of 1766 this would make a horse purchased in that area worth about 50 beaver. This, of course, can only be accepted as the roughest of estimates.

The state of warfare on the western plains seems to have dictated both the type of article and the amount of these articles by type traded. Obviously a heavy emphasis was laid on European tools of war; guns, knives and arrow heads. As these were the goods for which the demand was highest, and consequently so was the price,* other articles, though of lower price, played a minor role in the trade system.

*Note that in the tariff of 1766 guns were nearly 4 times the

This explains why, in 1772, the Blackfoot were still making and using their own pottery to "dress their victuals"¹⁵⁶ Among the Assiniboines living in the same area as the Blackfoot, and who like them were probably being serviced by Cree traders, Alexander Henry (the elder) found the same situation. They too were poor in kettles. "Our supper was made on the tongues of the wild ox, or buffalo, boiled in my kettle which was the only one in the camp",¹⁵⁷ of two hundred tents.

The Cree were not destined to remain forever the provisioners of the Blackfoot. By 1776, the Canadian traders had reached the Forks of the Saskatchewan River.¹⁵⁸ Between 1774 and 1799 the Hudson's Bay Company had posts stretching from the mouth of the Saskatchewan to the source of the North Branch in the Rocky Mountains. The Canadian traders had a post at almost every Hudson's Bay Company location.

The Cree-Blackfoot trade system did not automatically cease in 1776. The predominantly eastern location of early Saskatchewan posts, the irregular visits of the Canadians, the uncertainty of their supplies and even the short supplies of the Hudson's Bay Company when it reached the Saskatchewan, probably allowed the Cree, for a while at least, to act as a supplementary source.* These shortages, plus Cree involvement in beaver trapping which other western tribes passed up in favour of exclusive concentration on the buffalo hunt,

Company's price, hatchets 6 times, knives 12 times but kettles, and large ones too, were only 2.5 times the Company's price.

*This Cree role is obvious in the Mandan trade system after Mandan contact with white traders had been established so that it is not improbable that the same process existed on the Saskatchewan.

gave the Cree added buying power which allowed them to continue in their former role. For many years they continued to trade guns for horses with the Assiniboine¹⁵⁹ and probably with the Blackfoot too, while their relations remained friendly.

Over a long period then, the Cree-Blackfoot trade system acted as the vital basis of their military alliance. Even the yearly schedule which brought fresh supplies to the Saskatchewan plains every spring, coincided with the prosecution of campaigns during the summer months.

Often it has been remarked that the Cree middlemen prevented others from reaching the British posts. Though this may be true in the case of the Naywattame it is an irrelevant concept in the case of the Blackfoot. Anthony Hendey's comment that the Cree, though they had

promised the Chief Factor at York Fort to talk to them strongly on that Subject [to convince the Blackfoot to come to trade at the Bay], they never opened their mouths.¹⁶⁰

should not be interpreted, as Hendey did, as the reluctance of the middleman to give up his position. Rather, it is indicative of the understanding between the Cree and Blackfoot. The latter were neither able to go east nor did they wish to. After all, they were not in desperate need of kettles. What they needed and received from their Cree allies was arms - the extra margin of force which enabled them to drive back their Snake, Kootenay, and Salish enemies.

Throughout the period of their alliance with the Blackfoot the Cree organized and maintained their economic system.

They hunted, prepared and bought skins with which they acquired goods to trade at a profit with Indians who did not have direct contact with the European supplier.

Their system was doubly beneficial, for they could realize their profit at either end of the trade chain. The profit on European goods sold to the Blackfoot could be utilized at the fur posts for the purchase of luxury items such as extra kettles, liquor, decorative items such as buttons and lace, or more guns and iron weapons. Or, if they wished, they could transport a supply of weapons to the Blackfoot and purchase the one item they could not receive in the European fur trade - the horse.

Horses, though, had no economic benefit within the trade system (unless traded further east at higher prices) until the traders came in numbers to build their posts along the prairie's rim. Only then did the provision trade become a profitable venture for the ex-middlemen Cree, and only then was the horse a common economic asset for trading, buffalo hunting, and the transportation of dried meat.

Although the pattern of Cree trade to the Blackfoot is evident, the question of how consciously the Cree organized and prosecuted it still arises. The annual regularity of the process, the existence of a pre-designated location for trading, all point to a consciously organized system. The Cree tariff, and the relationship between military goals and the type of goods most traded further indicate that the system was purposefully designed.

Yet who designed the system and who prosecuted it? Certainly there is no implication intended in the foregoing pages that the term Cree signified a coordinated national undertaking.

Saukamappee's tradition again gives some hint to the discovery of the trading Cree. It should be remembered that in answer to the Piegan call in 1723 some Cree took up their arms and some stayed behind to hunt. Like their participation in war, Cree participation in carrying goods to the Blackfoot would have been an individual decision. As some competed more vigorously than others for leadership in war and displayed more talent and liking for it, so in trade some individuals would have been more ambitious or better qualified than others.

Band organization was loose and informal. Harold Driver confirms this in his description of the government and social controls of the Algonkian-speaking forest dwellers, of whom the Cree were a part until much later than many observers of the Plains Cree demonstrate. He wrote

In the forest...each family occupied its own trapping and hunting territory in the winter and subsisted to a greater extent on the beaver and other small animals ...Such families congregated during the short summer season at lakes and streams...161

At these summer meetings, the festivals were held, war parties were organized and sent off, and the trading trip was undertaken. The aspiring trade leader had to struggle to form a group from the gathering, working against other would-be leaders. Edward Umfreville drew a picture of them

on their way to the posts which shows their methods and energy.

During the voyage, each leader canvasses, with all manner of art and diligence, for people to join his gang, influencing some by presents, and others by promises, for the more canoes he has under his command, the greater he appears at the Factory.¹⁶²

The role of individual enterprise in prosecuting the trade was crucial. At the post he would bargain with the traders trying to make a better deal for his followers.

If the summer meetings could launch war parties they could also discuss and make decisions on matters of trade. La Verendrye noted that the

Forks [some place on the Saskatchewan River]...is the rendezvous every spring of the Cree of the Mountains, Prairies, and Rivers to deliberate as to what they shall do - go and trade with the French or with the English.¹⁶³

In military undertakings "mutual resentment against their enemies forms their union for perpetrating their revenge."¹⁶⁴ In trade matters the summer council had at least one unifying goal - a larger return for their furs. In 1766, J. Carver met Indians from the Lake Winnipeg region who had come east to Grand Portage, Lake Superior

in search of traders from Michillimackinac with a design if Possible to get Some of them to go into their Country and Winter with them, the reason they give for their coming here after traders is that they Say at Hudson's bay they are forced to give much more for their goods than for those they purchase of traders from Michillimackinac or Montreal.¹⁶⁵

The tariff of 1766 was probably another one of these summer decisions. The Blackfoot chief who told Graham about it was referring to prices charged by Cree "traders".¹⁶⁶

This suggests that it was a system both commonly known and applied by the various individual Cree traders.

If decisions were made on a band basis, and implemented by volunteering individuals, why, for example, were all Cree opposed to the Naywattame-Gros Ventre and all Cree allied to the Blackfoot? Does this not imply a tribal decision?

An actual in-council tribal decision on these matters is very unlikely in this period of Cree history. If they existed at all, tribal meetings "owing to the distances between their hunting grounds and the difficulty in securing enough fish and game to support a large, if transient population"¹⁶⁷ were very rare. Yet the existence of common tribal behaviour and of individual decisions, for two reasons at least, is not a contradiction.

The fact that band members were free to roam from band to band would tend to spread customs, cultural forms, and band decisions by the same process, throughout the tribe. How else can it be explained that the Cree living from the Eastmain River to the eastern shores of Lake Winnipeg in the pre-trade period could be identified by their common language and culture as being members of the same nation?

The custom of sending messengers from band to band to recruit membership for a band organized military campaign further demonstrates how a band decision could become the pattern for tribal behaviour without a joint meeting of all the bands. Therefore alliance with the Blackfoot and opposition to the Naywattame-Gros Ventre were undoubtedly

decisions made by bands most involved with these questions and decisions which were not contravened by other members of the nation.

It seems reasonable to conclude then that the decision to trade with the Blackfoot and such parts of the trade system as the tariff were band decisions. Also that part of the system such as the scheduling was determined by the conditions of weather and methods of transportation. Of course, it was the individual who prosecuted the trade under the general decisions of the band.

Tribal organization, with reference to decision making, changed over the fur trade era. The change did not begin until the Cree adopted the plains as a home territory, and began to develop the new cultural forms, military and trade patterns that this adoption implied. The formation of a new and distinct Cree nation of the plains was a slow process and it was not completed until at least the end of the eighteenth century if not later. The chronology of this gradual switch from forest to plains and some tentative conclusions as to the reason for this move is the subject of the next section.

4. The Cree-- Gradual Adoption of the Plains

The common conception of the Cree has been that they are divided into two large groups, the Woodland Cree and the Plains Cree.¹⁶⁸ This is a perfectly adequate anthropological description but for the purpose of historical analysis it hides more than it discloses. If the historical perspective is restored to it, the following breakdown for the two classic categories is the result.

1. Woodland Cree → Woodland Cree, also called Swampy Cree or Muskegon
2. Woodland Cree → Saskatchewan River Cree → Plains Cree

To begin a discussion of the Plains Cree at the third stage of this historical breakdown is to ignore a large part of the Plains Cree chronology and to run the risk of omitting from an analysis factors, evident in the first two stages, which affect Cree behaviour in the last stage. The problem of dating these phases is not one of time alone but also one of definition.

A.S. Morton presented the most general of solutions to this problem of dating when he wrote

At an early date Crees wandered onto the prairies and adopted the very different manner of living which characterized the buffalo country.¹⁶⁹

Though this is far from a complete answer, Morton has set out the two factors, time and the adoption of plains life-style, which must be assessed together to arrive at an

estimated date for the appearance of the classic concept of the Cree as a Plains nation.

What, though, is meant by the "different manner of living"¹⁷⁰ which characterized the buffalo country?" Anthropological sources, almost without exception, provide a structural model of a given Indian nation, be it woodland or plains. The drawback in this, of course, is that these are not working models, they concentrate on form rather than process. Even the form described is limited in time to the period of the anthropologist's observations. The perspective of change over time is largely ignored and as such these models are descriptive rather than explanatory.

Certainly the plains life-style changed significantly over the term of its existence. The introduction of the horse, gun, and the arrival of the European traders in the plains area all induced adjustments in the manner of living. With this in mind it is obviously without value to take an abstract model of plains Cree society and to compare the historical evidence to it in an attempt to date when the Saskatchewan Cree began to conform to this model.

If this method, although theoretically the best, has too many practical difficulties to be utilized, then another method would seem to grow in value. This would be to note the behavioural and cultural indicators of the Saskatchewan River Cree as disclosed by available historical evidence and to show by additional pieces of historical evidence that these had changed to what are commonly accepted as

plains traits. This method will not produce a model of the Saskatchewan River Cree nor of the Plains Cree but as the goal is to isolate, date, and to explain the switch from forest to plain this is not a drawback.

The term Saskatchewan River Cree is employed here, and has been used in previous sections, to designate those Cree who were using the Saskatchewan River as their route west rather than the Nelson-Churchill-English routes to the west. There is no reason to believe that the choice of one route over the other, initially at least, caused the birth of new social or political forms. Those new forms which did appear between 1682 and the point when the Saskatchewan Cree began a separate development would have been common to both groups and probably are traceable to shared new experiences of which European articles would be paramount in any analysis of cause.

One of the most characteristic traits of the Saskatchewan River Cree was their energy and deep involvement in the fur trade. They were in effect extensions of the fur-gathering apparatus of the Hudson's Bay Company and the French traders. In their trade relationship with the Blackfoot nation, they were an Indian version of the *coureur de bois*. A heavy emphasis must be placed on the canoe in the fulfillment of this role. It allowed relatively quick, long distance transportation and hence made possible the far western penetration of these Cree from their base at York Fort.

As traders these Saskatchewan Cree placed highest value,

as did the European traders, on the beaver. It was the prime fur of all the available furs and hence it could be expected that these Cree exerted their main energy in collecting it.

It would seem misleading to suggest that these Cree had a home territory. Certainly they had trapping areas which were territory that they had laid claim to. Yet their desire for European goods was like a long cord, which connected them to the posts on the Bay and pulled them back each spring.

In the previous discussion of Kelsey's journal it was seen that the Cree, spreading up the Hayes River, had made contact with the plains west of Lake Winnipeg by 1690. The buffalo hunt, one of the most colorful traits of the plains Indian, was witnessed by Kelsey in 1691. His Cree and Assiniboine hunters

when they see a great parcel of them they surround them with men wch done they gather themselves into a smaller Compass Keeping ye Beast still in ye middle & so shooting ym till they breakout at some place or other & so gett away from ym. 171

At the very least, this indicates that the Cree were using the plains as a food resource area. The rest of Kelsey's journal, though, clearly establishes these Cree as woods Indians. They used the plains as a hinterland, there is no evidence that they used it as a homeland.

Saukamappee's tradition is equally inconclusive on this point. In 1723 when he, his father, and other Cree warriors went to aid the Blackfoot, his band was living somewhere to the east or north of the Blackfoot. Whether the band was

situated north of the Saskatchewan in the woods or south of it on the plains is not stated. Even if the band was living to the south on the plains, a location which might imply a beginning of plains occupation, other factors must be taken into consideration.

First, the Cree travelled to the Blackfoot camp by canoe.¹⁷² They therefore still maintained at least one key trait of the Saskatchewan River Cree - the ability to get back to York Fort. This in itself of course, does not disqualify them as the core of the coming Cree nation.

Yet there is still a second factor. The Piegan messengers by tradition came in the winter (1722). Living along the Saskatchewan in the winter and trapping that area before trading with the Blackfoot and returning to York Fort in the spring was (as shown in Chapter II, Section 3) part of the yearly trade cycle which can be identified as a Saskatchewan Cree operation.

Though neither of these two factors proves that Saukamappee's band was not occupying the plains permanently, they are suggestive of enough doubt that in the absence of concrete data to the contrary it seems safer not to choose the date 1723, nor even 1732, as the beginning of the Plains Cree.

La Verendrye was the first European to state that there were Cree on the plains. He noted in 1739 that the building of Fort Dauphin (Lake Winnipegosis near the mouth of the Red Deer River) had been requested by the Cree of the Prairies

and the Canoe Assiniboine.¹⁷³ Unfortunately there is no supportive evidence for this claim, and he gives no description of these Cree. It is, therefore, almost impossible to draw any conclusions from his statement.

At least one writer, E.P. Patterson, would seem to accept La Verendrye's statement at face value. He wrote, "By the 1730's some of the Cree were permanently out on the Prairies."¹⁷⁴ If this is to be taken as true, then one of the following must be accepted as a companion statement. These Cree had voluntarily cut themselves off from the English or had had the Hayes route north closed to them. They became plains dwellers because of the building of Fort Dauphin, an idea which directly contradicts La Verendrye's evidence. They had their European articles brought to them by the Cree who remained in the fur system. Some new factor attracted them to the plains which was judged more desirable than the yearly trip to the fur post. There is no direct evidence that supports any of these four statements.

Certainly it is true that by the 1730's the Cree had established contact with the plains, but this was shown to have occurred at least as early as 1690. What new factor appeared between 1690 and 1730 to keep some Cree "permanently out on the Prairies"?¹⁷⁵

Patterson could hardly argue that the Cree at that date were abandoning canoes in favour of horses, for he states in the same paragraph that the "Crees probably first acquired horses in the 1770's, the more westerly bands

getting them before those to the east."¹⁷⁶ Yet the appearance of the horse on the Canadian plains, and Cree access to them at an earlier date than Patterson suggests, may have been the new factor which began the switch from forest to plain.

It was noted in the tradition that Saukamappee had related to David Thompson that although the Blackfoot had seen horses by 1732 they did not own any themselves.¹⁷⁷ When Hendey visited the Blackfoot he found them well mounted. But of greater significance, he noted that the Assiniboine in that area had horses and had maintained their ability to go to York Fort. On May 17, 1775, he recorded the following observation in his journal.

Ten tents of Eagle Indians joined the Architinue Indians. Five Canoes of them are going to the Fort with me. They are a tribe of the Assinipoet Nation [Eagle Birch Indians?]; and like them use Horses for carrying the baggage and not to ride on.¹⁷⁸

A number of interesting patterns emerge from this. One, of course, is the initial custom of using the horse as a pack animal rather than as a mount. But of more significance for the present discussion is the fact that by 1754 the Blackfoot had acquired enough horses to be trading them to the Assiniboine. Some of these Assiniboine, if for no other reason than the necessity of tending the horses would remain permanently south of the Saskatchewan, while others of the same band would return to York Factory for supplies.

Matthew Cocking's journal adds certainty to the existence of this Assiniboine pattern. On September 19, 1772, he

smoked with the Assinipoet strangers: I advised them to be diligent in trapping furs, and to go with me to the Company's Forts, most of them being strangers; but they seemed unwilling, saying, they were unacquainted with the method of building Canoes and paddling: However they would send their furs by their friends who yearly visit the forts.¹⁷⁹

To this must be added his statement that his Indian traveling companions "used to trade Horses"¹⁸⁰ with the Blackfoot. Alexander Henry just two years later (1776) "saw for the first time, one of those herds of horses which the Osinipoilles possess in number."¹⁸¹ On the same trip he saw the Assiniboine hunt buffalo using a wooden pound¹⁸² rather than the surro^und on foot that Kelsey had described.

While it is evident that some Assiniboine were trading for horses and thereby taking up permanent residence on the plains, others were taking their furs back to the Bay shores as the Assiniboine had told Cocking. Samuel Hearne traveling from York Fort to the Saskatchewan River in 1774 "met four Canoes of Assiney Poets going to the Fort with Trade",¹⁸³ and William Tomison, another Hudson's Bay trader, saw "27 Canoes of Assinnie Poets"¹⁸⁴ on the Saskatchewan in 1777.

It has been established, through the evidence provided by Cocking, that Cree and Assiniboine were trading horses from the Blackfoot by 1770. As Blackfoot-Cree trading relations pre-date 1772, stretching back at least to 1722, and as the Blackfoot had acquired horses and began trading them prior to 1754, it is highly probable that the Cree acquired horses sometime between 1732 and 1754. This means that the Cree would have begun to adopt the plains in the fashion

shown for the Assiniboine sometime during the same period.

La Verendrye's evidence, therefore, is somewhat more reliable. Yet, it still contains one impediment to full creditability. If the reason that the Cree and Assiniboine adopted the plains was because they could combine the best of both worlds, that is the ownership of horses and a regular supply of goods from York Factory, they why is there no mention of horses in La Verendrye's report? True, there is no description of these Cree, but can it not be safely assumed that if these so-called "Cree of the Prairies"¹⁸⁵ had had horses this would have been mentioned?

In summary then, it would seem reasonable to suggest the following as conclusions. Cree adoption of the plains began prior to the construction of the Hudson's Bay Company posts on the Saskatchewan River. Acquisition of horses by the band and the maintenance by that band, or by an associated group, of the means to reach the Bay posts was the pattern of adoption practised by the Cree as well as the Assiniboine. La Verendrye's date of 1739 and Patterson's of the 1730's are difficult, if not impossible to confirm.

Certainly these Saskatchewan Cree by 1770 would have been displaying at least two traits of the Plains Indians. Yet, they had to undergo two more interrelated changes before they became the classic Plains Cree. Both of these latter changes are related to posts being built on the banks of the Saskatchewan and other plains rivers. This event accelerated previous changes by downgrading the importance

of the canoe, caused new ones, and, because of the increase in the number of trade journals, made this process of change more evident.

W. McGillivray in his Sketches of the Fur Trade (1809) presented what is a typical fur trader's assessment of the Indians.

With respect to the Fur Trade, whatever peculiarities each tribe of Indians may have, ...they are divided by the North West Company into two classes; those who have furs and those who have none, or, the Indians of the mountaineous & woody regions and those of the Plains.¹⁸⁶

He then expanded his description of both groups. Of the Plains tribes he wrote that

The principle aid given by these Indians to the Fur Trader is to kill Buffalo and Deer, and prepare the flesh and tallow for the Company's servants who without this provision, which could not be obtained in any other part of the Country, would be compelled to abandon the most lucrative part of the trade.¹⁸⁷

After the year 1774 (this year will be taken as a general date for the Saskatchewan invasion by the European traders) the fur trade placed a new demand upon the Indian and his environment. Whereas previously the traders wanted only the valuable fur, especially beaver, they now needed a constant supply of nourishing, portable food to support their increasingly far-flung operations. The best buffalo herds of the prairies were soon recognized as a rich resource. The hunting of buffalo to supply dried meat and fat to the posts became a viable economic alternative to the collection of prime furs. Without these provisions the fur traders

would have had to abandon their inland operations.

The question posed here, then, is when did the Cree, in the area of these new posts, turn from beaver hunting to the production of provisions? Secondly, were they forced into producing provisions, forced out onto the plains, because the beaver resources in their area disappeared? Answering these questions would seem to promise an outline of the final stages of the switch from forest to plain.

Initially the building of inland posts on the eastern section of the Saskatchewan did not markedly change the previous situation with respect to the Indians who visited the traders. Mitchell Oman, a Hudson's Bay Company trader, explained that it was only when posts had been built "350 miles above Cumberland House"¹⁸⁸ that the traders were finally freed "from being wholly among the Nahathaways and allowed the Indians of the Plains to trade with us."¹⁸⁹ Of course, the Assiniboine still came to the eastern Saskatchewan posts and they did so instead of going to York Factory.¹⁹⁰

As early as 1781, there is an indication that some Indians were becoming increasingly interested in applying their efforts solely to hunting buffalo. Throughout the following twenty years they occasionally employed a technique to raise the benefits of that occupation. Robert Longmore drew the Company's attention to this.

The Ground is all Burnt & no Buffalo, the Natives burnt it, as they was nigh here in the Fall, and far from the Beaver Country, on purpose that they might get a great price for provisions.¹⁹¹

This trick probably worked well. With each new post the demand for provisions increased accordingly. In 1786, William Tomison estimated that "there is in this River [Saskatchewan] near 200 Canadians, which is more than there is of Southern [Plains Cree] Indians."¹⁹² Yet, the Saskatchewan River Cree who were using canoes to go east and many of the few Cree who owned horses and were living on the plains seem to have remained in the beaver trade. Robert Longmore told Tomison that "I had all the Southern [Indians] that had no furs last year, away at Beaver Hunting."¹⁹³

In the 1790's the Cree change from forest to plain, from beaver to buffalo, was completed. The Blackfoot, who prior to 1774 had hunted beaver, wolves and foxes to buy firearms from the Cree trader, were the first to devote themselves almost exclusively to buffalo. By 1793 Tomison characterized them as "of all the different Tribes these are the most indolent in procuring furs."¹⁹⁴ Many bands of the Assiniboine also began to bring "nothing but buffalo skins"¹⁹⁵ to the posts. The Cree began to exhibit similar behaviour. On December 11, 1794, the Grand Souteau, a Cree Chief, arrived at Fort George (near Manchester House on the North Branch, approximately forty miles above Battleford). Duncan McGillivray learned that "His nation amuse themselves driving Buffalo into a Pound."¹⁹⁶ In the spring of 1795, he noted that the "Crees are quite pitiful this spring having amused themselves during the Winter with smoking and feasting along with the Piegans."¹⁹⁷

There is the possibility of course that this change in the hunting habits of the Cree was caused by a rapidly disappearing beaver resource rather than the enjoyment of the good life that McGillivray has pictured. He, himself, wrote in 1795 that

The Country around Fort George is now entirely ruined. The Natives have already killed all the Beaver to such a distance that they lose much time in coming to the House, during the Hunting Season.¹⁹⁸

James Bird (a Hudson's Bay Company employee) reported in 1797 to William Tomison on the state of the beaver resource on the South Branch of the Saskatchewan. He commented that "a great part of the Indians are already in the plains & declare they have not been able to find Beaver."¹⁹⁹

In view of this situation both the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian traders moved their posts further west along the North Branch. In 1795, the Canadians built Fort Augustus and the Hudson's Bay Company built Edmonton House, close to it. D. McGillivray described this area "as a rich and plentiful Country abounding with all kinds of animals especially Beavers & Otters."²⁰⁰

The general strategy was not only to get close to richer beaver resources but to divide the Indians.

The lower Fort [Fort George] will only therefore serve in future for the Gens du Large, whilst the Crees, Assiniboine, and Circes, being the Principal Beaver Hunters will resort to [the area of Forts Augustus and Edmonton] the Forks.²⁰¹

If the Cree could be moved upstream and into contact with an ample supply of beaver possibly they would stop spending

their winters smoking, feasting, and pounding buffalo with the Blackfoot.

The traders had already taken other measures in an attempt to counteract the drift away from beaver hunting. Indians who arrived at a post with nothing but provisions were "coldly received"²⁰² and "treated with less liberality"²⁰³ than Indians who brought in beaver. But the competition between the British and Canadian traders would have blunted the effectiveness of this tactic. The traders were well aware that an Indian badly treated one day might go to the competition with valuable furs the next.

Within three years of the opening of Forts Edmonton and Augustus the traders realized that their attempt to lure the Cree and other Indians back into beaver hunting and to hold other Cree in that system had failed. James Bird reported this to his superior William Tomison.

I am sorry to inform you that we are utterly disappointed in our hopes that building here near the beaver ground would occasion the Indians hunting Beaver... all without exception are tenting in the plains killing Buffalo for themselves to eat.²⁰⁴

The beaver were still abundant but the Cree had chosen to opt out of the peltry trade and to adopt the plains, to become fully involved in hunting the buffalo.

To the Canadians this may not have been much of a surprise. They seem to have foreseen this drift away from beaver hunting and had taken steps as early as 1794 to compensate for it. In the face of the defection of their "Principal Beaver Hunters"²⁰⁵ and as a move to make themselves

more competitive, the Canadians induced Indians from Lake Superior and Rainy Lake, Indians who were "then Industrious"²⁰⁶ to come to the Saskatchewan and hunt Beaver. William Tomison recorded in his journal in 1795 that "seven Michilimaccana Indians arrived in a canoe...these with many others came to the Red River last autumn with the New Company of adventurers."²⁰⁷ In the same year they were trading as far west as Edmonton.²⁰⁸ James Bird's report indicating the failure of the plan to lure the Indians back to beaver hunting had one bright spot, the Bungees were still hunting beaver in that area.²⁰⁹ They along with the Swampy Ground Assiniboine and a small group of Strongwood Cree were all that were left of the Saskatchewan River beaver hunters.

Except for this small group of Strongwood Cree, the once energetic Saskatchewan River Cree, who for over a hundred years travelled the great distances between York Fort and the plains, had become, in the view of one trader,

a useless sett of lazy indolent fellows a mear nuisance to us...they are generally to be found in large Camps, Winter and Summer, where they remain Idle throughout the year. Buffalo is the only object they have in view.²¹⁰

This long and gradual progress to the plains life style had begun sometime prior to the building of the Saskatchewan posts with the horse playing a key role. The increase in traders along the Saskatchewan and the consequent demand for provisions made the hunting of buffalo and production of provisions a viable economic undertaking. The 1790's would seem to have been the central time for this adoption.

One point cannot be stressed enough. When the Cree changed their emphasis to buffalo hunting there was still an adequate beaver resource to allow them to continue the profitable trading of prime furs. The Cree therefore had alternatives and they made a choice between one type of hunting and another. They were not pushed out onto the plains "with the exhaustion of woodland food and fur supply"²¹¹ as Oscar Lewis suggests.

With an adequate beaver resource, and the fact that the resource was, after 1774, increasingly close to the supplies of European goods thereby turning the horse into a useable transport method within the fur system, why did the Saskatchewan Cree voluntarily opt out of beaver hunting? The reason probably has nothing to do with trade policies or European supplies. Duncan McGillivray seems to put his finger on it in 1794 when he described the Plains Indians.

The Inhabitants of the Plains are so advantageously situated that they could live very happily independent of our assistance. They are surrounded with innumerable herds of various kinds of animals, whose flesh affords them excellent nourishment and whose skins defend them from the inclemency of the weather, and they have invented so many methods for the destruction of animals, that they stand in no need of ammunition to provide a sufficiency for these purposes.²¹²

The pleasure of living in large groups in the winter and summer, the year-round social activities of the band and tribe, and the vast buffalo herds to support this life cannot be discounted as an important cause of the Cree adoption of the plains environment.

There are undoubtedly other allied causes. One, of

course, was that when the Blackfoot gained direct access to European supplies the Cree trading system fell apart. A good part of the profit in hunting beaver disappeared. The result of this occurrence and of other factors must be considered to trace the chronology and causes of the break-up of the Cree-Blackfoot military alliance.

5. Breakdown of the Cree-Blackfoot Alliance

The period between 1790 and 1810 is one of considerable complexity in the history of the Plains Cree. It was a time of political instability on the western plains - the adjustment period between an old era and a new one. From a military point of view the old era had been marked by the imbalance caused by supplies of guns which reached only some of the western Indians. In this new era the sources of European weapons became accessible to all tribes. For the Cree, who were becoming permanent residents of the plains, this period of adjustment saw the disappearance of their trading system. Their supply of European articles had always been secure and continued so, but now as a plains tribe they had to give serious consideration to acquiring a supply of horses. The most important change for them and for the pattern of trade and military activity in the nineteenth century was the failure of their alliance with the Blackfoot.

The Cree-Blackfoot alliance seems to have been one of unbroken peace* until the first rupture, and this only temporary, occurred in 1787. In June of that year the Cree for an unknown reason, attacked the "Blood Indians and killed some women and children..."²¹⁴ As the news of this massacre

*Sometime after 1750 the Blackfoot-Cree alliance was joined by the Sarcee tribe, a division of the Athapaskan linguistic group. Edward Umfreville noted that "They retain a close alliance with the Nehethawas, rather to profit by their protection, than for any mutual esteem, subsisting between them."²¹³ For a detailed study of these Indians see Diamond Jenness' work The Sarcee Indians of Alberta, National Museum of Canada Bulletin No. 90, Anthropological Series No. 23, Ottawa, 1921.

spread "all the Cree Indians fled for the woods for fear of the Blood Indians..."²¹⁵ What began to look like the beginning of an all-out war between the Cree and Blood Indians was peacefully settled by the intervention of the Piegans.

On August 24, 1787, a small group of Piegans arrived at Manchester House. W. Tomison, master at that House, learned that "their chief business is to make it up between the blood Indians and Crees...to be at peace and all to come to the Houses as before."²¹⁶ This was an astute diplomatic move by these Indians. Manchester House, was, at that time, the post farthest west on the North Branch. If the war continued, the Piegans realized as did the traders that "it [the war] will do a great deal of harm to this House [Manchester] as the Blood Indians and Muddy River Indians [Piegans] will be afraid to come in..."²¹⁷ The Cree in 1787 obviously still had the power to close off the supply of European goods to the Blackfoot.

These Piegans left the post on their peace mission, taking tobacco as an aid to their discussions.²¹⁸ Unfortunately there is no report on the success of their conciliatory efforts in the autumn of 1787. It is only in 1792 that any direct comment is made on Blood-Cree relations. In that year, and again at Manchester House, "one tent of blood Indians...has staid to await the arrival of some Nehethewea Indians to know wheter they intend to keep peace with them or not."²¹⁹

The path of Cree-Blackfoot relations ran smoothly until

the early years of the 1790's. In those years warfare on the plains became wide-spread, even sweeping up the traders in its course. The seeds of this disruption seem to have been contained in the Cree-Gros Ventre (Fall) hostility.

The western military campaigns of the Cree in the seventeenth and in the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century had been directed, as shown previously, against the Snake, Kootenay, Salish, and the Gros Ventre-Naywattame, or Fall Indians. The latter Indians, located on the South Branch, had themselves been involved in the efforts to clear the plains of the Snakes and their allies. William Tomison, in the autumn of 1782, reported the return of a war party of Fall Indians from an expedition against the Snakes.²²⁰ As late as 1801, "One hundred Fall Indians set off to War against the Snake Indians"²²¹ from Chesterfield House on the South Branch of the Saskatchewan. There is no evidence though that these Gros Ventre expeditions, although directed against enemies of the Cree and Assiniboine, were then or earlier assisted by the latter two tribes. On the contrary, their relations seem to have been always violent. The Cree and Assiniboine were at war with the Gros Ventre in 1751. The next available piece of evidence again discloses a state of war. In the spring of 1788 the Cree "fell upon them [Gros Ventres] shot one of their leading men and robbed them of their furs."²²² By July 1788, this incident, and probably others that went unreported, caused a season of general war. "The Southerd [Cree] and fall Indians have been killing each other and

since the whole country is in a stir...the times here is really precarious...²²³

Between 1788 and 1793, Cree and Assiniboine attacks on the Gros Ventre continued and seemed to have grown in intensity. Certainly their campaigns met with a high degree of success. Over this period events were building to a significant climax.

In 1789, John Tanner, a white man who since boyhood had been living with the Ojibwa, purchased a horse from a Cree-Assiniboine war party. These raiders had just returned to the Assiniboine River after a seven-month absence and they brought 180 horses stolen from the Gros Ventre. Of almost equal consequence for these warriors was that they "had fallen [on] and destroyed one village, and taken one hundred and fifty scalps besides prisoners."²²⁴ Though all Cree war parties against the Gros Ventre were undoubtedly not that successful, they "have been involved in frequent quarrels"²²⁵ over this period. In 1793, the Cree struck again and they struck hard.

In the spring of 1793, a band of Gros Ventre were camped on the bank of the South Branch of the Saskatchewan. There they were discovered by a combined force of South Branch and Swan River Cree and some Assiniboine warriors.²²⁶ These Indians

immediately resolved to revenge all their former injuries, by exterminating entirely these unfortunate wretches...they fell upon them like hungry Wolves and with remorseless fury butchered them all in cold blood except for a few children they preserved for Slaves.²²⁷

It was subsequently reported at Buckingham House that two old men had been killed along with 150 women and children.²²⁸ This horrible massacre filled the Gros Ventre with terror and they fled.²²⁹ The Cree, likewise fearing an equally stunning reprisal, kept on their guard.²³⁰ They waited all summer, while the Gros Ventre planned their next move. When it finally came, it was in a most unexpected form.

In the second week in October, 1793, a Gros Ventre warrior arrived at Manchester House. He came for tobacco for a party of Gros Ventre led by L'Homme a Calumet²³¹ who would be in to trade in a few days.²³² On October 22, a Company employee reached Buckingham House with surprising news. William Tomison entered the report in his post journal.

At noon Robert Linklatter arrived and brought the disagreeable News of Manchester House being Robbed of everything belonging to the Company & the Men stripped of everything they possessed, by a body of Fall Indians who came to the House on pretence to trade...they began on the Canadians first [Pine Island Fort] & took a number of Horses & stripped many of their Men. Suppose they were 40 in Number.²³³

Duncan McGillivray claimed that this attack on Pine Island Fort was largely unsuccessful, with only some men losing their personal baggage. He further stated that the Indians' small victory "was bought by the blood of four Savages who afterwards died of the wounds they received on this occasion."²³⁴

The differences in the reports are secondary to the fact that the Gros Ventre had made a radical move. Attacking both suppliers of European goods must have seemed sheer

madness to all the other Indians. Their decision to do so is a good measure of their desperation.

It is reasonable to assume that if they had been able to revenge themselves directly on the Cree for the spring massacre they would have done so. Edward Umfreville in 1790 made a revealing comment on the Gros Ventre. He noted that they "seem not yet to be initiated into the manner of hunting beavers...for they bring us nothing but wolves."²³⁵ This, taken together with the facts that the Cree undoubtedly excluded them from their trade system and that their territory along the South Branch was poor in beaver,²³⁶ would have made their stock of firearms small. Compared to the well-armed beaver-hunting Cree then, they were too weak a force to try conclusions directly. The traders, whom on Duncan McGillivray's evidence the Gros Ventre believed to be "the allies of their enemies",²³⁷ were safer to attack. Whether the Gros Ventre blamed the traders or not, an attack on them was a short cut to acquiring firearms and so to placing themselves on an equal footing with the Cree.

The Gros Ventre, having plundered the traders once, attacked them again, this time on the South Branch of the Saskatchewan River. On June 24, 1794, two hundred Gros Ventre warriors under the direction of their "War Chief L'Homme de Callumet"²³⁸ attacked the Hudson's Bay Post named South Branch House.²³⁹ After a short fight they captured the post and having pillaged it they burnt it to the ground.²⁴⁰ Magnus Twatt, assigned to the command of Cumberland House

for that year, reported the more tragic details.

They likewise killed three of Your Honors Servants the Names of which are Mag. Annel [the trader in charge] William Fea & Hugh Brough [two other men, James Gaddy and W. Van Driel, escaped] which they cut up in the cruelest manner Imaginable.²⁴¹

They then turned their attention to the North West Company post "which stood only a couple of hundred Rods from the others."²⁴² The traders there, headed by Louis Chastellain, exhibited "spirited behavior in their own defense ...and compelled the enemy to relinquish their enterprize."²⁴³ It is important to note that they received "the assistance of several Southward Indians."²⁴⁴

After the attack on South Branch House the Cree took up the offensive against the Gros Ventre. In the fall of 1794, a war party was formed, possibly under the direction of The Gauche, a well known chief of that area,²⁴⁵ to go against "the Blackfoot."²⁴⁶ On January 7, 1795, James Bird discovered that Cree from the Swan River district were assembling to launch a campaign against the Gros Ventre.²⁴⁷ During the winter of 1794-95, though, the Cree and Blackfoot must have reached a new accord; for that spring it was disclosed that they had been hunting buffalo together.²⁴⁸

The Blackfoot had not remained entirely aloof from these battles between the Cree, the traders, and the Gros Ventre. They had an interest in good relations with the Cree and the traders, but they had an established association with the Gros Ventre. The foundation on which Blackfoot-Gros Ventre relations rested is not evident until the early 1800's, when it becomes

clear that the Gros Ventre, who had maintained earlier ties with the Arapaho, were a vital link between the Blackfoot and the Arapaho-Cheyenne horse market south of the Missouri. In a description of the Gros Ventre Indians written in those times (early 1790's), the Blackfoot position becomes clear

The Fall Indians...wander much with the Blackfoot; their language being unlike that of both the Sioux and the Ojibways. These last, and the Cree, are more friendly with the Blackfoot than they are with the Fall Indians.²⁴⁹

Maintaining friendly relations with both the Gros Ventre and Cree would prove an increasingly difficult task for the Blackfoot. On February 5, 1794, a band of Blackfoot and Fall Indians, together numbering 150 warriors, arrived at Buckingham House.

They traded & went away Tolerably Peacible & the next day returned & took 52 horses 6 of which they had just traded & had they not seen 50 Armed Men at the Canadian House it is not known what length they would have gone to.²⁵⁰

If the turmoil of 1793-94 demonstrates anything, besides the Gros Ventre's desperate need of weapons, it is that the Blackfoot were wavering between an exclusive alliance with the Gros Ventre or with the Cree. It shows also that the Cree were determined to oppose the Gros Ventre, even at the possible cost of their Blackfoot alliance, and were dedicated to the protection of their source of strength.

After the summer of 1794 the Gros Ventre were reported to have withdrawn towards the south-west.²⁵¹ The Blackfoot covered their retreat with the diplomatic explanation that the guilty Gros Ventre, who were only a part of that nation,

had formed an alliance with the Snakes.²⁵² The truth of the matter was that they went to visit their closest Algonkian-speaking relatives, the Arapaho south of the Missouri.²⁵³

Cree campaigns during the years 1795 to 1800 were directed exclusively against the Snake, Kootenay, and Salish. Then in the fall of 1800 a large band of Blackfoot "near killed 3 Southard Indians...but luckily they made their escape after the above Indians had got intoxicated..."²⁵⁴

With these preliminaries barely under way, the Gros Ventre returned. Again they were in a desperate mood and in what was becoming typical Gros Ventre behaviour they turned to take out their frustrations on the traders. A Kas Kin, a leading Gros Ventre chief, and a band of warriors approached Chesterfield House (Hudson's Bay Company post which replaced South Branch House) on March 8, 1802. Peter Fidler, the trader in charge, summarized the discussion that followed.

The small pox being among them last summer [they seem to have caught this from the Arapaho] ...and also the Assiniboine and Cree Indians falling upon them in two separate places;* and the very severe winter which several got froze to death besides nearly all the horses dying consequence of those that remained after the Stone Indians swept away with much above 100: all the above causes probably have sharpened and caused their former vindictive dispositions and have been the reason of their killing the Irroquis.+ ²⁵⁸

Fidler was able to head off trouble and to assure the Gros Ventre that the Company was not "sending for the Blackfoot

*One war party was made up of Cree from Swan River.²⁵⁵ The other was a mixed group of South Branch Cree and Assiniboine.²⁵⁶ Both met with success.

+David Thompson gives a full description of this altercation.²⁵⁷

and other nations of Indians to form a party against them."²⁵⁹ He subsequently learned though that the Gros Ventre had returned to the Missouri to recruit a war party from among the Arapaho for the purpose of attacking the Company, the Cree, and the Assiniboine.

The warfare which the Cree had initiated in the spring of 1793 by their massacre of the Gros Ventre came to a temporary halt in 1803. A party of Cree and Assiniboine, in the summer of that year, crossed the Battle River

to go and make Peace with their Enemies the Rapid & Black Feet Indians for both parties begin to be weary of such a bloody War as has for such a length of time been kept up between them.²⁶⁰

They were successful at least in making peace with the Black-foot.²⁶¹

This peace lasted until the summer of 1806. Then, James Bird noted that

a fatal Quarrel has taken place between the Blackfeet & Southern Indians...a battle had been fought between them in which 28 of the former, and three of the latter had fallen...the Southern Indians are flying in all Quarters...How far the effects of this Quarrel may extend is impossible to foresee...²⁶²

The battle was followed by the ambush and killing of four tents of Cree Indians returning from a visit to the Pie-gans.²⁶³ The result of these troubles was the ending of the Cree-Blackfoot alliance. The connection which had been worn thin by the turmoil of the 1790's finally snapped in 1806.

Although the immediate cause of the battles of 1806 is not known, the outcome of the only recorded Cree-Blackfoot joint campaign against the Gros Ventre discloses one of the

underlying currents that caused the final disruption.

D.W. Harmon recorded the story in his journal.

Six Assiniboines arrived and inform us that about Eighty Lodges of Crees and Assiniboins with about as many Blackfoot were on their way to wage war on the Rapid Indians but the...tribes fell out on the way respecting a horse which they both claimed, and which neither could relinquish and fought a battle amongst themselves.²⁶⁴

A number of factors, among which the Cree-Assiniboine supply of horses was significant, caused the final rupture.

The Cree over the period were coming out onto the plains in increasingly large numbers and were hungry for horses. Their abandonment of beaver trapping in the mid-1790's reduced their wealth and consequently their ability to purchase them. Alexander Henry observed this when he wrote of the Plains Cree

Indolence and gluttony seems to be their sole object. In the winter season they take the Bow and Arrow, Firearms are scarce among them...If they can procure a gun they instantly give it to the Assiniboines in exchange for a horse.²⁶⁵

Their campaigns against the Gros Ventre were undoubtedly designed in part to supplement their poor stock of horses. As early as 1801 the Arapaho, conducted by the Gros Ventre, visited the South Branch area.²⁶⁶ By 1807 a connection had been made between the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Blackfoot through which the latter began to receive horses.²⁶⁷ Had the Cree made peace with the Gros Ventre they too could have entered the Arapaho-Cheyenne horse market. By continuing their campaigns they forced the Blackfoot to side with the Gros Ventre and their southern supply of horses.

Throughout the seventeenth century the Cree had been a valuable source of weapons for the Blackfoot. Even as late as 1787 the Piegans had been careful to keep peace between their nation and the Cree so that the flow of European goods could continue. The Blackfoot alliance with the Gros Ventre was not in those years an important economic asset for the Blackfoot. They could afford to avert their eyes from Cree deprivations. The opening of Edmonton House in 1795 and Rocky Mountain House in 1799,²⁶⁸ changed this situation. The Blackfoot then had direct and secure access to European goods within their own territory.

As the economic importance of the Cree alliance declined and the benefits of a Gros Ventre alliance increased, the matter became quite simple for the Blackfoot. They no longer needed the Cree for firearms and they had acquired a secure supply of horses through the Gros Ventre; the Cree were therefore dispensable. The alliance was ended by the Blackfoot in the battles of 1806. Cree policy had been short-sighted, as their insistent hostility to the Gros Ventre undoubtedly pushed the Blackfoot into a decision; but the shift in trading patterns left no room for doubt about what that decision would be.

The problem set for the Cree by the breakdown of the Blackfoot alliance was more than military. They did, of course, launch war parties directly against their new enemy. They also tried to isolate the Blackfoot from white traders. In 1808 they attempted the same tactics of blockade that

the Blackfoot were already using against the Kootenay, Flathead, and Snakes. Alexander Henry on his way up the Saskatchewan was informed that the

Crees...had assembled at the Battle River and had determined to prevent us from passing upwards to keep the Slave Indians from receiving any supplies from us in arms and ammunition.²⁶⁹

This move was no more successful for the Cree than it was for the Blackfoot when they employed it, and it appears not to have been repeated. Apart from the fact that the Cree could hardly afford to increase the number of their enemies by opposing the traders, a blockade could do nothing about what was probably a more serious logistical problem. The Cree had lost their source of horses in going to war with the Gros Ventre and Blackfoot. They could not expect to prosper, either in the war or in life on the plains, without finding a new source. Sometime between 1806 and 1810 they made contact with the Flathead and began to supply them with guns and ammunition,²⁷⁰ probably in exchange for horses. In the new military pattern which the Cree had to form, a central consideration would be the acquisition of a reliable supply of horses; the only possible solution was a military alliance with a horse-trading tribe against the Blackfoot.

Chapter III - The Cree and the Mandan Traders

1. Military Patterns on the South Eastern Plains 1730 - 1805

The spotlight of historical attention has habitually shone on the activities of the tribes of the western plains when it has not been focussed with determined exclusiveness on the course of the British, French and Canadian traders. The area of the south-eastern plains has been portrayed consistently as the challenging homeland of the Selkirk settlers, the graveyard of Governor Semple cut down in the great pemmican war, the base camp of both the colorful Metis buffalo hunters and the eager missionaries dreaming of rich harvests in savage souls, the battleground of the nation's one successful rebellion, and the birth place of white Manitoba. On the part of fur trade historians this preoccupation is understandable. Yet even D. Mandelbaum almost totally ignores this area of Cree activity. In the shadows of the fur trade and of the struggling prairie settlement, very significant events occurred in the course of Indian history and in particular Cree history.

The Mandan trading center and Cree participation in it are probably the most important events in the history of the Plains Cree in this south-eastern area. This center must represent the high point in plains economic organization. It was a native system which began prior to the fur trade and adapted well to the introduction of European goods. Both the Cree and Assiniboine had an important role in its functioning.

It has previously been established that the western division of the Woodland Cree nation, prior to the trade era, inhabited the banks of the Winnipeg River. There, sometime in the seventeenth century, they made welcome the Assiniboine exiles from the Sioux nation. These tribes jointly entered the Hudson's Bay trade system and became familiar with the territory west of Lake Winnipeg by 1690. This northern and western involvement did not immediately cause them to relinquish their traditional homeland nor their involvement in the inter-tribal politics of that area. The Cree-Assiniboine maintained a stake in this eastern area well into the eighteenth century and in their extension south-westward they were the prime powers on the south-eastern Canadian plains throughout the trade era.

David Mandelbaum in his summary of the first fifty years of Indian-white contact (1640 - 1690) in the Lake Superior region, described the Cree as a "powerful tribe feared by their enemies, the Dakota, against who they waged a fierce warfare with their Assiniboine and Algonkin-speaking allies."¹ But in accordance with his north-eastern placement of the whole Cree nation, he designates the Cree warriors as coming from the north of Lake Superior. The participation, though, of the Assiniboine, who had moved to the Winnipeg River area, would suggest that the western Cree may have also engaged in these hostilities against the Sioux.

H.A. Innis places the Algonkin-Assiniboine warfare against the Sioux firmly within the context of the fur trade.²

The impression that Sioux-Algonquin hostilities were limited to that cause alone and were therefore based solely on strategy directed towards acquiring the exclusive benefits of European trade should not be allowed to stand. Albert Jenks in his work, The Wild Rice Gatherers of the Upper Lakes, relates the cause of early Algonkin-Sioux battles. He notes that it is clear "from Indian tradition and the evidence seems trustworthy"³ that the Ojibwa were driven into the Great Lakes region by the expansion of the Iroquois.

In all this western movement south of Lake Superior the Ojibwa were ~~surrounded~~ by the fierce...Dakota, who claimed the southern and western sides of the Lake. Every foot of ground was valiantly contested until at last the invaders halted near La Pointe, where they were compelled to seek safety on La Pointe island. There they built a village and cultivated extensive gardens of pumpkins and maize. They also occasionally hunted along the headwaters of the St. Croix River.⁴

The events of this tradition, which Jenks dates as having occurred as early as 1492,⁵ demonstrates that the military pattern exhibited in the trade wars of the 1600's had an early, pre-trade basis. The participation of the Assiniboine in these hostilities can be accounted for by their predisposition to oppose the Sioux as a result of their violent separation in the first years of the seventeenth century. As for the western Cree, they had a tradition of hostility to the Sioux as part of their cultural baggage before their westward movement began.

Direct evidence for the military and trade activities of these western Cree appears relatively late. Although there are many references to the Cree to the north of Lake

surrounded.

Superior and along the shores of Hudson's Bay,⁶ references to the Winnipeg River Cree are not made until 1730. Pierre Gaultier, Sieur de la Verendrye, reported to Beauharnois on October 10, 1730, the content of a conversation he had held with Poko and Petit Jour, two Cree chiefs from Lake Nipigon.⁷ They informed him that they had been to the westward and reached "a great river [Winnipeg-Rainy River waterway] which flows straight towards the setting sun."⁸

Poko and Petit Jour provided La Verendrye with a description of the tribes of that area. The right bank of that water system (the northern side as one travels west) is

held by the Cree, and is the country of the moose and marten, while the beaver is so plentiful that the savages place little value on it and only collect the large skins which they send to the English.⁹

The southern side of this waterway is inhabited by the "Assiniboin and the Sioux, the country is rich in metals, and the buffalo are abundant."¹⁰

As La Verendrye moved west and established his system of fur posts, these statements were confirmed and he acquired more detailed first-hand information on the country west of Rainy Lake. In 1749, the year before his death, he summarized this knowledge in a short memorandum.¹¹ In it he disclosed the deployment of the Cree and Assiniboine tribes. The territory around the Lake of the Woods was held by the Cree and their Monsoni allies. At the mouth of the Winnipeg River where he had built Fort Maurepas lived the Cree of the Boisfort. To the north-west of that post, in the area of Cedar

Lake and Lake Winnipegosis, were the Cree of the Lakes and Little Rivers, and the Cree of the Prairies and the Canoe Assiniboine. The Assiniboine were also on the banks of the Assiniboine River.¹² Although it is not mentioned in this memorandum of 1749, he did give evidence in earlier reports of the Cree living around the mouth of the Red River and on the Assiniboine at least as far west as the Forks.¹³ In conversations with visiting chiefs, both Cree and Assiniboine, he recorded important information relative to existing military patterns. He found that

the Sioux and Saulteurs have from time immemorial waged war against the Monsoni, the Christinau or Cree, and the Assiniboin, which is gradually destroying these tribes.¹⁴

The Cree and Monsoni would congregate on the shore of the Lake of the Woods. Then by canoe they would travel southward up the St. Pierre River (Warroad River which enters the lake from the south-west) and

place their canoes above a fork in the river by which the enemy was accustomed to pass in order to come to them, and so as to put their lands and their families in safety, and then go to the prairies where the Assiniboin would give them rendezvous...They told me that their campaign would last two months and that the number of warriors might amount to eleven or twelve hundred men when the Assiniboin had joined them.*¹⁵

This pattern of alliances and warfare had been exhibited farther to the east.

*Over one hundred years later H.Y. Hind commented on the nature of war roads and listed some of them. He noted that the "selection of certain tracts of country for the 'Warpath' is probably determined by the facilities presented for communication and concealment combined...2. War-path River from the south-west corner of the Lake of the Woods to Roseau River, thence to the prairies..."¹⁶ His designation is remarkably similar to La Verendrye's.

It was a pattern too firmly established for La Verendrye to change. His mission to discover the western sea depended on the Cree. Fort Charles, built in 1733 as the first French fort in Cree territory, was not the Indians only source of European goods. The Cree of Lake Winnipeg and Red River were undoubtedly already using these well-known routes north to the English traders at Hudson's Bay, and the Assiniboine in the Assiniboine River area employed Lake Manitoba for the same purpose.¹⁷ The Cree, with an alternate northern source of trade goods and their total control of La Verendrye's intended westward route, forced him into their mold. A.S. Morton's picture of the romantic, battle scarred, trader-explorer standing in council with the Cree asserting "his ascendancy over his dusky subjects"¹⁸ smoothing the way for his expansion west, and "preventing them from raiding tribes Friendly to the French...",¹⁹ seems to have no foundation in reality. E.E. Rich came much closer to revealing the situation than Morton. He noted that La Verendrye's "dependence on them grew to such an extent that in 1734 he sanctioned their adoption of his eldest son, to go on the war path with them against the Sioux."²⁰ Morton himself states that La Verendrye could not convince the Cree to stop their warfare on the Sioux of the plains.²¹ There may be some suggestion that these Sioux of the Plains were not in contact with the French posts to the east by Lake Superior and were therefore an acceptable enemy for the Cree within the parameters of French trade strategy. H.A. Innis, though,

wrote that the Sioux, whom the Cree were battling in the 1730's were those who traded with the French to the south-east.²²

The continued campaigns of the Cree in those early years of the 1730's and La Verendrye's support of these raiding parties led to personal tragedy for him. In June, 1736, the Sioux struck back against the French-Cree-Assiniboine alliance. They ambushed a party of twenty-one Frenchmen led by La Verendrye's eldest son Jean-Baptiste* and massacred them all.²³ Like true allies the Cree immediately came to La Verendrye's aid.

On the twenty sixth [June] four canoes and twelve men arrived Cree and Assiniboin from the neighbourhood of Lake Winnipeg, the two tribes having assembled at fort Maurepas to beg me earnestly to let them know if I intended to go and avenge the Blood of the French, and particularly that of my son...²⁴

These Cree and Assiniboine left Fort Maurepas and travelled to the Red River some distance above its junction with the Assiniboine "which was the usual rendezvous⁺ for Assiniboin, Cree, Monsoni...in order to reach the Sioux."²⁶ When all the warriors had congregated at the meeting place their number reached eight hundred. This, of course, was not the only retaliatory attack that was launched. La Colle, a Monsoni chief, told La Verendrye that he had organized a party of three hundred warriors, Cree, Assiniboine, Monsoni, *Jean-Baptiste was the son who had gone on the war-path with the Cree in the campaign previously mentioned.

+This is not the same war-path outlined previously by La Verendrye. It does, though, resemble the war road described by Hind as "3. War-path River from Lake Winnipeg...to the prairies south of Manitobah Lake - the old war path of the Swampy Crees, the Assiniboine and Sioux..."²⁵

and Saulteurs.²⁷

Little is known about the success of these war parties. In 1738 La Verendrye met a Cree war chief on the Assiniboine River and learned that he had destroyed ten enemy tents but that that "was not enough to satisfy us."²⁸ The fact that La Colle had recruited Saulteur warriors would suggest that the Saulteur-Sioux alliance had broken down. Possibly it was the horror of the Sioux success in their attack on the French party or the dread of large Cree-Assiniboine revenge campaigns that caused their rupture. Whatever the specific reason, two of La Verendrye's men reported in 1736 that "a great number of Saulteur have sought refuge with them through fear of the Sioux."²⁹

Throughout the second half of the 1730's La Colle and his Cree-Assiniboine warriors kept up the pressure on the Sioux in the eastern part of the Winnipeg-Rainy River waterway. In the autumn of 1742 La Colle, whose territory was around Rainy Lake, gathered together

two hundred men, the majority of whom were Cree and Assiniboin, that they had attacked the Sioux of the Prairies, that seventy warriors of that tribe were killed...that the band of La Colle had lost only six men, and that there were many wounded, as they had fought during four days.³⁰

They probably travelled from "Rainy River to Red Lake River, then across the prairies in the Valley of Red Lake River to Miniwaken or Devils Lake, in Dakotoh Territory."³¹

All three of these war roads, the Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, and Lake Winnipeg routes, not only took the Cree-

Assiniboine warriors down against their Sioux enemies but also into the area of the Mandan villages. In separate entries for 1733 La Verendrye noted, in reference to the Mandans, that the "Cree and Assiniboin have constantly made war upon them and have captured several children from them"³² and then that the "Cree and Assiniboin have made peace with that tribe."³³ When he visited the Mandans in 1738 they were living on the Missouri west of the bend, probably near the junction of the Missouri and Knife Rivers. This, of course, is west of the territory due south of the Winnipeg-Rainy River waterway. The Mandan move from that area to the Missouri, where La Verendrye found them, is of great importance in the evolution of Cree-Mandan relations.

Unfortunately La Verendrye made no comment on the possible origins nor the migratory path of the Mandan nation. In 1797 David Thompson's informant Manoah told him that the Mandan had once

possessed all the streams of the Red River, and the head of the Mississippi, where the Wild Rice, and the Deer were plenty, but then the Bison and the Horse were not known to them: On all those streams they had Villages and cultivated the ground as now...³⁴

Manoah continued his recitation of the tradition, telling how the Mandan came to abandon that territory.

at length the Indians of the Woods armed with guns which killed and frightened them, and iron weapons, frequently attacked them and against these they had no defense; but were obliged to quit their Villages, and remove from place to place, until they came to the Missouri River, where our fathers made Villages, and the Indians of the Woods no longer attacked us...³⁵

Manoah's tradition indicates that the migration westward

could not have taken place until after 1640 when the "Indians of the Woods" would have received firearms and iron-headed weapons. Thompson states that these marauding "Indians of the Woods" were "Chippaways."³⁶ A.S. Morton translates this as "Saulteurs"³⁷ the allies of the Sioux.

In 1804 Lewis and Clark, travelling up the Missouri, came to a site just north of the junction of the Missouri and Cannonball Rivers. They discovered

on a point of a hill ninety feet above the plain, are the remains of an old village which is high, strong, and has been fortified; this our chief [Arikara] tells us is the remains of one of the Mandan villages.³⁸

They continued on their journey up the Missouri and at a point some seventy-two miles from the previous site

are the remains of a village covering six or eight acres, formerly occupied by the Mandans, who, says our Ricara chief, once lived in a number of villages on each side of the river, till the Sioux forced them forty miles higher; whence after a few years residence they moved to their present position [Fort Clark just east of the junction of the Missouri and Knife Rivers and in the general area where La Verendrye found them].

Although this evidence is highly credible, the date assigned to it by Lewis and Clark is definitely incorrect. They suggest that the final removal took place around the year 1760.⁴⁰ From the location of the Mandan villages when La Verendrye visited them it seems definite that their migration fell into the period between 1640 and 1738.

It is difficult to surmise whether or not the Cree and Assiniboine took part in driving out the Mandans. It is true that La Verendrye stated in 1733 that the "Cree and Assiniboin have constantly made war upon them"⁴¹ but there

is no direct evidence from preserved tradition, either Mandan or Arikara, that any Indians other than the Saulteur and Sioux were participants in the Mandan expulsion. To have had one village site after another destroyed would have been a powerful and therefore memorable experience. It is doubtful that if the Cree had been a party to causing such a series of calamities that the Mandans would have forgotten. Their most persistent enemies, as the Arikara chief pointed out, were the Sioux.

It is probable then that the Mandans, having lost their settlements around the source of the Mississippi, and Red River after 1640, retreated westward to the Missouri near the mouth of the Cannonball River. There they built new towns and were again expelled by the Sioux. This process of building and retreating in the face of Sioux aggression was repeated a number of times until by 1738 they had established themselves at the location where La Verendrye found them.

One question of central interest here is what caused the Mandan to come to a rest and to remain in that general location until 1837? Could the peace which La Verendrye reported had been made between the Mandan, Cree, and Assiniboine in 1733 be part of the answer?

In that same year, 1733, La Verendrye, having heard of mineral deposits five days journey from Lake of the Woods, asked some Indians to bring him some specimens. They replied that "they could not come before winter as they were leaving

in the spring to go to the Ouachipouennes [Mandans] in order to buy corn from them."⁴² Although there is no direct evidence of it, it is probable that these corn buying voyages were a yearly occurrence. In 1735 La Jemeraye, La Verendrye's nephew, reported that

The Assiniboin added that they were going to start with their families and go to the Ouachipouennes and would leave their families with them while they went to make war in another quarter.⁴³

The only recorded enemy of both the Assiniboine and Mandan in this period was the Saulteur-Sioux alliance. The trading relations, and the cooperation between the two tribes would date the beginning of the Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan alliance at the year 1735, or more exactly, 1733, when peace was established between those nations.

Cree and Assiniboine warriors, especially as they were armed with guns, would have added significantly to the Mandan's ability to withstand Sioux aggressions. The contact of the Cree and Assiniboine with a source of firearms, the common Sioux enemy, and the Mandan's production of corn were the three legs of the tripod upon which the Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan alliance rested.

The importance of corn in the formation of this accord should not be underestimated. Saukamappee's band had to leave hunters at home to ensure that the warriors' families would not starve in their absence. The Cree and Assiniboine in the south-east could billet their dependents with the Mandans, who had adequate food resources. Corn was also an

ideal portable food supply for winter hunting expeditions and was therefore, as pemmican would be in later years, an important supportive element in the prosecution of the trade.

It is possible that the formation of this alliance allowed the Mandan nation to come to a final resting place. Another factor intervened which also must be counted as an aid to the Mandan, allowing them to begin another settlement with some hope of permanence. Alexander Henry tracing the course of the Mandan migration stated that the

Mandans proceeded with an intention of setting themselves somewhere about the confluence of the little Missouri River or upon the upper part of the Riviere La Sourie* on their arrival at this place the Big Bellies [Minnetaree] barred the road and put a stop to their progress to the Westward.⁴⁴

La Verendrye made no mention of the Minnetaree nation when he visited the Mandan. His sons, travelling south-west of the Mandan villages, did meet the Gens de Corbeaux (Crow) Indians who had split from the Minnetaree before the end of the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ The Minnetaree then would have been, by 1738, close to the Mandans⁺ and could have acted as Henry suggests.

The formation of the Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan alliance did not cause the Sioux to abandon their campaigns. The alliance had to be more than a threat based on the consolidation of power, it had to be an active military organization.

*It is possible that Cree-Assiniboine campaigns against the Mandans prior to 1733 was directed at keeping the Mandans out of that area which was Assiniboine territory. There of course is no evidence to support this suggestion.

+A more detailed treatment of Mandan-Minnetaree relations will be given in the following section on Cree-Mandan trade relations.

The Sioux were relentless, their raiders extended their war trips up into the Assiniboine River area as well as to the Mandan village sites on the Missouri. In 1738 La Verendrye on his way to visit the Mandan villages was told by some Assiniboine that the "Sioux often visit in that direction and I had need of an escort."⁴⁶

The Mandans and Assiniboine kept in constant contact in this period. They informed the Mandans of La Verendrye's intention to visit them, and when La Verendrye met a Mandan chief he noted that the "chief spoke to me in Assiniboine."⁴⁷

Unfortunately when La Verendrye withdrew from the area of the south-eastern plains the course of Mandan, Assiniboine, and Cree relations receded into obscurity. When the next source of evidence becomes available some changes are evident in this area. John Tanner arrived at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in the late 1780's. There he "found great numbers of Ojibbeways and Ottawaws encamped."⁴⁸ These Indians, many of whom were from as far east as Lake Huron, were using the Assiniboine River as a resource area. On their voyages to this territory they became involved, as Tanner did, in the existing military patterns. After Tanner's first year in the west and just as his band was preparing to return to Lake Huron the

Assiniboins and Crees, and all the Indians of this part of the country, with whom the Mandans had made peace, were invited by the Mandans to come to their country and join in a war against the people called by the Ojibbeways A-gutel-a ninne [Minnetarees] who live two days distant from the Mandans.⁴⁹

Tanner's notation of a peace settlement between the Cree-Assiniboine, Mandan, and other unnamed Indians certainly suggests that the course of their relations since the last visit of La Verendrye's men (1742) had not been completely tranquil. The hostilities between the Mandan and Minnetaree indicate that their relationship may also have had periods of instability.

The Sioux and Mandan, during at least a part of the period between 1738 and 1789, seem to have attempted an alliance. At a Minnetaree village in 1806 Alexander Henry found a pile of human bones, the remains he was told, of a Sioux raiding party in 1790. The Sioux had attempted to isolate the Minnetaree by making a peace with the Mandans. This they accomplished but their seige of the Minnetaree villages had been a failure.⁵⁰ How long this Mandan-Sioux peace lasted is not known.

The only positive reference made in existing evidence to relations between the Cree, Assiniboine, and the Sioux in this dark period prior to 1789 is the tradition of a great Sioux victory near Lake Winnipeg. Both Alexander Henry⁵¹ and John McDonnell, another trader, present a recollection which has its roots in the origin of the name Riviere aux Morts. McDonnell wrote that

Three leagues from the lake, the River aux morts enters the Red River on the north side. Here a large camp of Assiniboils, Cree and Sauteux were massacred by the Sioux or Naudawesis, the most powerful nation in all the interior country. Ever since this slaughter, the river has been called with propriety, Riviere aux morts.⁵²

It was David Thompson's understanding that Cree-Assiniboine-Sioux warfare had been continuous. In a recapitulation of events from the Assiniboine-Sioux division until the year 1812 he refers to this unceasing enmity and the success of the Assiniboine who

with the Nahathaways, who accompanied them to war were powerful, and with their allies, made their brethren the Sioux Nation feel the weight of their resentment for several years, until the smallpox of 1782 came, which involved them all in one calamity, and very much reduced the numbers of all parties.⁵³

Though the epidemic may have lessened the tempo of warfare it did not stop it, nor did it cause any change in the structure of military alliances. Thompson himself relates that in 1794 the Sioux near the Turtle Mountains destroyed fifteen tents of Assiniboine.⁵⁴

Whether or not the Cree, Assiniboine, and Sioux fought continually between 1742 and 1789 or reached some temporary settlements is a matter of conjecture. It is definite, though, that a state of warfare existed between them in 1793. In that year John McDonnell reported the return of a successful Assiniboine war party which had set out to find the Sioux south of the Missouri.⁵⁵

The year 1794 is a mysterious date in the historical calendar of the Indians of this area. John Sutherland, a Hudson's Bay Company trader, entered the following two observations in the Fort Ellice journal.

March 20, 1794...the reason that they [Assiniboine] give [for not hunting] is their enemies the Shues and Mandans killed 60 or 70 of them last summer and killed one and wounded another this spring.

April 6, 1794...the Indians [Assiniboine] are noted for stealing and therefore I am not surprized at the Soos and Mandan Indians destroying so many of them as they look upon them as a set of inferior beings.⁵⁶

The wording of these entries is unclear enough to cause a degree of uncertainty as to his intended meaning. Does Sutherland mean that a Sioux-Mandan accord existed in this period? If so, could the settlement made between them in 1790 have been the start of a four-year alliance? On the other hand, should these entries be taken to merely indicate continued Assiniboine-Sioux warfare and only a temporary rupture with the Mandans? No further reference is made to warfare in the available sources until 1797 and in that year "The Mandales, Cristineaux and Assiniboils have combined together and engaged in war with the Panies [Pawnees or Arikara]...and fought a Battle this summer."⁵⁷ This may reinforce the idea that the evidence of 1794 is indicative of only temporary discord between the Mandan and their usually friendly Assiniboine ally.

By 1800 the pattern of Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan cooperation in military campaigns first noted in 1733 is again clearly discernable. In March of that year messengers circulated among the Cree and Assiniboine camps bringing the news that the Sioux were prowling in the area of the Mandan villages.⁵⁸ War parties were subsequently dispatched and that autumn they returned with the joyous news that they had "fought a great battle with some Sioux's & got the advantage of them, they sang and danced ye whole night."⁵⁹ Not all the news that summer though was cause for celebration.

That spring a joint force of Cree, Assiniboine, Ojibwa, and Mandan warriors, marched on the Minnetaree villages.⁶⁰ The Minnetaree chose the Assiniboine as their target for revenge, forcing them to retreat from the Turtle Mountains.⁶¹

The military alliance of the Cree, Assiniboine, and Mandan nations was by 1800 once again fully functional. The Cree and Assiniboine continued to attack their traditional enemies the Sioux and to come to the aid of the Mandan against enemies, be they Minnetaree or Pawnee-Arikara, who were primarily Mandan adversaries. Almost as quickly as this relationship showed signs of stability it began to falter. Even the Cree-Assiniboine-Saulteaux alliance was beset with discord. Alexander Henry met, in the fall of 1801, "fiity five men, [Saulteaux] bearing arms...not an Assiniboine or a Cree has been here during the summer, the former are doubtful of the behavior of the Saulteur towards them."⁶²

In a series of cryptic entries in the Brandon House journal beginning on December 20, 1801, the course of a Mandan-Assiniboine crisis is summarized. On December 20, 1801, the Mandans killed 11 Assiniboine, "the heads were brought in and eat by the dogs with several other parts of their bodies."⁶³ The next spring the Assiniboine were reported to be flying northward to escape Mandan war parties.⁶⁴ Finally, on November 28, 1803 "3 Indians [Assiniboine] came in they have just returned from the Mandales."⁶⁵ Peace seems to have been restored. Nowhere in this evidence is any cause suggested for these hostilities nor is the position of

the Cree given.

The Assiniboine-Saulteaux discord was patched up by 1804. Alexander Henry noted that in the summer of 1804 they formed two war parties, the second composed of three hundred warriors, and directed their steps towards Sioux country.⁶⁶ The following year, 1805, another party of three hundred, including a contingent of Cree warriors, set out to battle the Sioux. The Mandan and Minnetaree finally united, and under the leadership of the False Horn Chief "went to war towards the Sioux country."⁶⁷

This period of accord and unified opposition to the Sioux is an ideal place to come to a halt and to look back at the course of Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan relations. One preliminary observation can be made immediately. This alliance was quite different from the Cree alliance with the Blackfoot: its first goal was not the conquest of territory but the preservation of the Mandan settlement against various aggressors, primarily the Sioux but also the Minnetaree and Pawnee-Arikara. From the viewpoint of a common Sioux enemy cooperative military undertakings would seem to have been equally beneficial to all these partners. Yet certainly it was the Cree and Assiniboine warriors who bolstered the military strength of the Mandan, who protected the Mandan settlements and prevented their destruction and another dispersal of the Mandan people. The Cree-Assiniboine alliance had operated against the Sioux irrespective of the state of their relationship with the Mandan but the ancient quarrel

had acquired a new purpose on the plains.

It was assumed that the initial peace settlement in 1733 had been based on common military interests, the destruction of the Sioux, on Cree-Assiniboine ownership of firearms and on Mandan production of corn. If the Mandan were a weak military partner, and needed Cree-Assiniboine protection it can only be assumed that increased emphasis must be placed on other factors to ^{know} ~~why~~ why, in the eyes of the Cree and Assiniboine, they were a desirable ally. The production of corn, taken to represent a trading relationship, is certainly that factor. In a subtle and much more complex degree than in Cree-Blackfoot relations, Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan relations are a mix of military and trade interests. It is only by looking at this side of the alliance that some sense can be made of the central position of the Mandan and also of the brittle state of the Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan alliance between 1794 and 1805.

2. Cree Participation in the Mandan Trade System

There can be little doubt that the manufactures of European civilization penetrated the plains prior to the actual physical presence of the white traders. The Blackfoot acquired firearms and iron tools at least twenty years before their first meeting with a white man. The Mandans suffered the effects of Sioux-Saulteaux acquisition of European weapons as early as 1640 and were themselves trading for European goods before La Verendrye reached their villages.

By the time white traders finally caught up with the spread of their articles they were apt to find a functioning trade system interwoven with military alliances, much as Cocking discovered existing between the Cree and Blackfoot. The Cree-Blackfoot trade organization, as effective as it was in promoting specific military goals, was unsophisticated compared to the Mandan trade system.

When La Verendrye visited the Mandan villages he entered the grand mart of the plains. The trade tentacles which stretched out fan-like from these villages reached westward to the Pacific coast, to the Spanish settlements in the south, to the shores of Hudson's Bay in the north and at least as far east as the Lake of the Woods. In geographic area alone the scope of the Mandan trade empire rivalled that of the Hudson's Bay Company. When it is considered that the British, French, and Canadian merchants themselves traded through this system it can be suggested in all seriousness that for a time

the European outlets were a sub-system within the Mandan trade organization. Like the Hudson's Bay Company, the Mandan trade empire, although it had to be buttressed by local garrison alliances, managed to transcend many political divisions for the sake of trade.

In La Verendrye's journals and reports covering the years 1733 to 1787 some light is thrown on part of the structure of the Mandan trade system. In those years the Mandan became connected, probably for the first time, with a source of European goods, and incidentally a source which was controlled by the Cree-Assiniboine alliance. From the Assiniboine the Mandan received knives, axes, fire steels, and other iron tools, paying for them with their own agricultural produce, mainly corn and beans.⁶⁸ La Verendrye, on the basis of a conversation with an Assiniboine, concluded that "the Assiniboin were the only ones who brought them"⁶⁹ European goods. During these initial years of the trade the Cree played an active part only in the affairs of the military alliance. La Verendrye's trip to the villages and the separate visits of his men and sons discloses, even at this early date, a well developed system.

The Assiniboine who escorted La Verendrye to the villages in 1738 travelled slowly with a definite purpose in mind. The scouts who preceded the column kept a sharp lookout for the Sioux and for buffalo. When a herd of these animals crossed their path

they raised a cry which is soon returned by the vanguard, and all the most active men in the columns join the vanguard to hem in the cattle, of which they secure a number, and each takes what flesh he wants.⁷⁰

These hunts were conducted en route to supplement the supply of fat and meat that the Assiniboine would trade to the Mandan "to eat with the grain [corn] of which they always eat much, having seldom either meat or fat."⁷¹ Even La Verendrye purchased fat at the Assiniboine encampment before they set out.⁷²

Arriving at the villages the Frenchmen and Assiniboine were greeted by the chief who presented them with a very appropriate "gift of Indian corn in the ear, and of their Tobacco in rolls."⁷³ After these cordial preliminaries were completed, the Assiniboine and Mandan conducted their business. The Mandans displayed their stores of corn, beans, tobacco, painted feathers, painted buffalo robes, deer skins, dressed buckskin, garters, decorative head bands and girdles. On their part the Assiniboine offered buffalo meat and fat, kettles, axes, muskets, powder, ball, knives and awls.⁷⁴ Unfortunately there is no information provided on the rates of exchange. La Verendrye does note, though, that the Mandans "are cunning traders, cheating the Assiniboins of all they may possess."⁷⁵

The dressed and decorated skins, both buffalo and deer, were acquired by the Mandans through trade. Each summer, usually in the month of June,

there arrived at the great fort on the bank of the river of the Mandan, several savage tribes which use horses and carry on trade with them; that they bring dressed skins trimmed and ornamented with plummage and porcupine quills, painted in various colours, also white buffalo-skins, and that the Mandan give them in exchange grain and beans.⁷⁶

In the spring of 1739 two hundred tents of these Indians

arrived at the villages. They were from different allied tribes, one of which "came from the setting of the sun, where there are white men living in towns and in forts made of bricks and white stone."⁷⁷

In 1741 La Verendrye's sons, Francois and Louis-Joseph, returned from a trip to the Mandan villages where they had hoped to meet the Gens de Chevaux and travel west with them. Failing to make this juncture, they returned north and brought with them two horses "... and four little tubes [beads] which he says are of porcelain an article much used among the people of the Sea..."⁸¹

The Mandan did conduct Francois and Louis-Joseph southward in 1742 and then turned them over to the protection of the Beaux Hommes. Finally after much wandering, they met the Gens des Chevaux. These Indians told them of the ravages of their enemy the Gens du Serpent (Snake Indians) who captured young women "and traded them at the sea coast for horses and merchandize."⁸² In a summary comment on their journey they noted that "All the tribes of that country have a large number of horses, asses, and mules."⁸³

J.C. Ewers, who has made a special study of the horse

*D. Mandelbaum makes the statement (and provides no footnote) that "De La Verendrye, in 1738, mentioned that he had seen horses among the Cree".⁷⁸ L.J. Burpee an editor of La Verendrye's papers states that this reference to 1741 "is the first mention of the explorers actually seeing horses in the west."⁷⁹ J.C. Ewers commenting on this purchase concluded that this "seems to have marked the beginning of the trade in horses from the nomadic tribes southwest of the Missouri."⁸⁰ Mandelbaum's position is quite incorrect. A reading of La Verendrye's journals and reports only corroborates the statements of Burpee and Ewers.

trade on the plains, suggests that the plains tribes who visited the Mandan villages included the Crows, Cheyenne, Arapahoes, Commanches, Kiowa-Apaches, and Kiowa.⁸⁴ From among these tribes, excluding the Cheyenne and Arapaho, may be found the identification of the Gens des Cheveaux, Bow, Beaux Homme, and of the other Indians who met La Verendrye's sons.

The evidence pertaining to the years 1733 to 1742 discloses certain interesting characteristics of the Mandan trade system. Below is a summary of that trade.

<u>Assiniboine</u>	<u>Mandan</u>	<u>Western Plains Tribes</u>
meat, fat, and European goods	↔ agricultural products, hides, and handicrafts ↔	hides, handicrafts and horses

The naturalness of these relationships is strikingly evident. The trade, excluding European articles, is an exchange of products typical of the divergent life styles - an exchange of the products of the garden for the products of the hunt. This strongly suggests that the trading center, or at least these types of relationships, existed for many years before the introduction of European goods.

Familiar "European" economic behaviour is displayed by their production of a surplus* for trade to supplement

E.E. Rich argues in his article, Trade Habits and Economic Motivation Among the Indians of North America, (CJEPS, 1960) that "in trade with Indians the price mechanism did not work"⁸⁵ due in part to the fact that the Indians did not have the European sense of property nor did they practice stock-piling. That the manipulation of price did not induce larger hunts may be quite true but the reasons Rich puts forward are questionable. In fact they would indicate a completely uninformed position probably based initially on an overdrawn concept of Indian communalism. The very system

indigenous products of the home country with products available from other territories. The labour of one supplemented the labour of the other. The inclusion of craft items in the collection of goods offered for sale reveals that the needs being served had reached a higher level than the mere physical desire for variety in the daily diet.

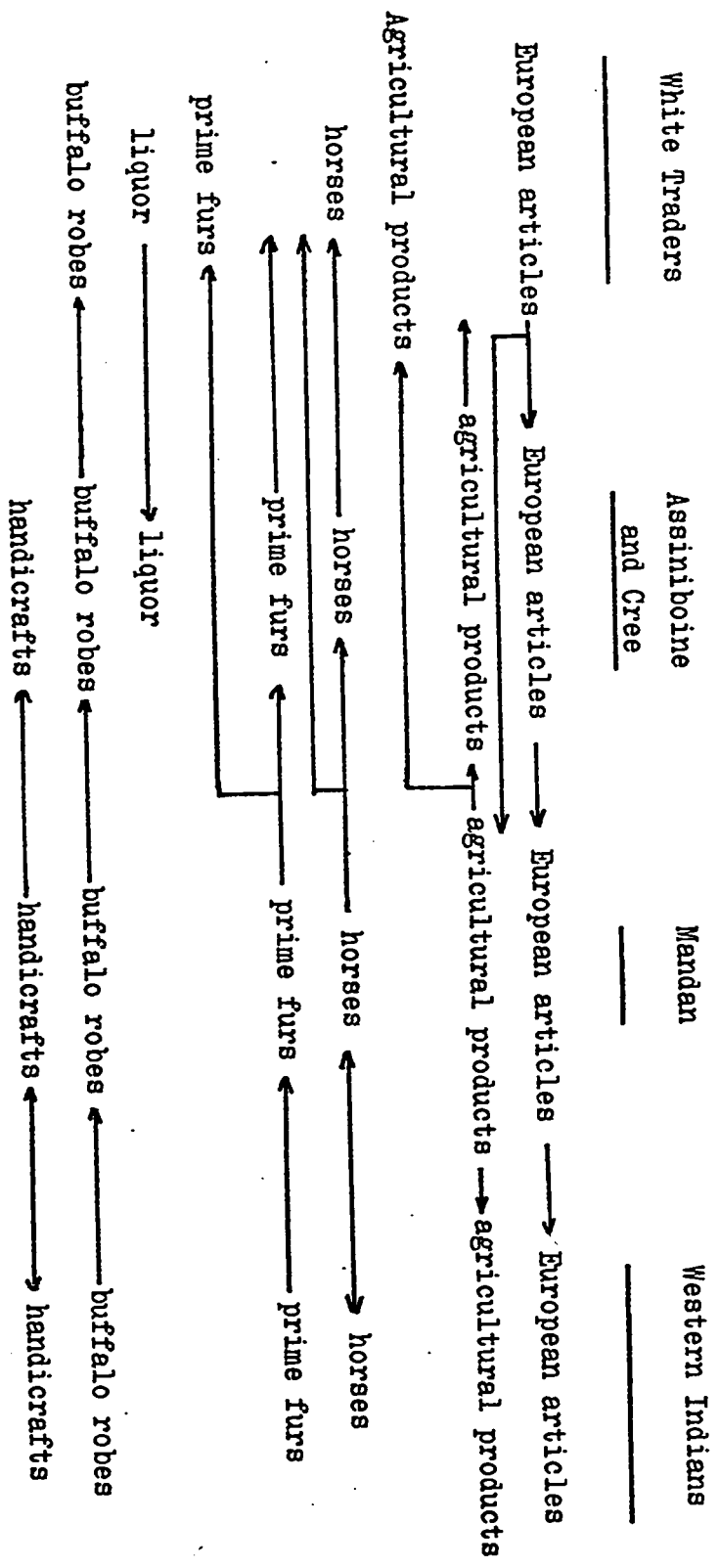
It is also evident that the Mandan's agricultural products were the common coinage of the trade system; that the Mandan played the central and determining role in the trade. Prior to 1741 there is no evidence of horses being traded to Indians to the east of the villages and there is no evidence at all in these early years of the trade that the Mandan traded European goods westward. La Verendrye notes that in the conduct of their trade with the Assiniboine the Mandan made the best deals. He even suggests that the Assiniboine were cheated. His opinion though is undoubtedly based on a French scale of prices, which would have reserved valuable items such as firearms for the acquisition of prime furs. It seems proper to suggest, in view of the evidence, that the Mandan system operated at least partially on an Indian schedule of prices, structured by Indian demands which were not identical to those of the white traders. The of middlemen that he discusses, especially when that position was held by an agricultural people, denotes stockpiling - demanded that the Indian planned their trade with an eye to surplusses. Property in the sense of personal ownership, even rules guarding the rights of owners and customs regulating methods of alienation definitely existed. The concept of profit through trade between Indians themselves and with white men was well understood and applied.

Assiniboine considered the agricultural produce of the Mandan gardens as very valuable commodities.⁸⁶

What appears as a Mandan reluctance to trade European goods to the western Indians may simply reflect the fact that the volume of these goods was not yet adequate to fill any but their own needs. It is difficult to decide if the same can be suggested as an explanation for the lack of horse trading between the Mandan and Assiniboine. Perhaps the Assiniboine, like the Saskatchewan Cree, depending on their canoes to maintain their connection with the British and French traders, had not yet begun to demand horses in trade.

During the second half of the eighteenth century important, though not necessarily basic, structural changes occurred in this trade system. The type of agricultural products traded remained the same as those which had been exchanged throughout the system in the 1730's. The selection of European goods became more varied as the competition between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian companies escalated. To the limited list of La Verendrye's time were added such items as wampum shell and hair pipes, hawk bells, small saws, iron lances, and brass rings.⁸⁷ The embargo on English goods was lifted in the second half of the eighteenth century and these, in conjunction with agricultural products, became the Mandan's standard medium of exchange to the western tribes. For a summary of goods traded through the Mandan system in the years 1790-1837, see the chart on the following page.

MANDAN TRADE SYSTEM 1790 - 1810



By 1805 the Mandan were investing most of their agricultural production in the trade, holding in reserve only enough to provide a cushion against such emergencies as a Sioux siege. Buffalo meat was substituted for corn and beans as the staple of their diet.⁸⁸ Increased ownership of horses had led them into buffalo hunting so that as their consumption of buffalo increased their demand for Assiniboine supplies of meat and fat declined. Buffalo robes, which were a by-product of their utilization of this food supply, found their way to the British and Canadian posts.⁸⁹

Liquor was not used by the Mandan either for relaxation or trade, though it can be safely assumed that it was offered to them by the white traders.⁹⁰ Handicrafts, of course, remained an item of trade. Trade in these articles, and in agricultural products, demonstrates the basic stability of the design of the system geared as it was to trade in general rather than to the fur trade in particular.*

Prime furs were traded along with these other commodities, but they were handled no differently from other items. The French traveller M. Perrin Du Lac noted that "The Mandannes...partake very little of the fur trade. They only carry it on by means of other nations, they bring their furs to sell to the Whites."⁹² With reference to a suggestion

*Eagle feathers were one item that would fall into this general category as they were used as decorative items, especially for sacred pipes. They were very highly prized by the Indians. The tail feathers of two calumet eagles carried an exchange value of a good horse or a gun.⁹¹

that they become more involved in hunting and trading beaver like the Indians of the north, they told C. McKenzie, a fur trader, "We are no slaves. Our fathers were not slaves."⁹³ The Mandan were determined to remain, like the white man, traders.

Throughout the eighteenth century the Cree and Assiniboine were regular suppliers of European goods to the Mandan villages. In the 1790's the conditions relative to trade with Europeans which had existed during this century changed. Both the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian companies built posts along the Assiniboine and Red Rivers. This would seem to have accelerated a pattern of plains adoption similar to that which was taking place on the northern plains at the same time.* The building of posts in Cree, Assiniboine, and Ojibwa territory decreased the importance of the canoe as the necessity for the long trip to the Bay or to Lake Superior disappeared. Though the profitability of hunting buffalo for trade fell through in the Mandan villages it was given new life in Cree territory by the demands of the traders.

*The resume of plains adoption in this south-eastern area cannot be definite or as detailed as the previous analysis of this process on the northern plains. This is so by necessity as the sources in this area do not give up a wealth of detail on necessary points. It would be dangerous to suggest that the process of adoption was the same for these Cree as for the Saskatchewan Cree. Though many factors are similar, there are important differences which would immediately call such a suggestion into dispute. It is not known, for example, how soon after 1741 the Cree-Assiniboine began to acquire horses and whether or not this led to a specialized group of traders who serviced their relatives and the Mandan, nor is the effect of the Mandan villages on the process or rate of adoption known.

With the necessity for the long trading trip gone and the demand for provisions ensured, the Cree and Assiniboine would have become more interested in switching onto the plains and increasingly interested in the ownership of horses. As early as 1789 John Tanner described a Cree-Assiniboine war party which had travelled from the south-eastern plains to the South Branch of the Saskatchewan on a successful horse-stealing raid on the Fall Indians.⁹⁴

The Cree of the south-eastern plains would seem to have been in an ideal position to purchase horses. The coming of white traders did not eliminate them, nor the role of the Assiniboine as suppliers of European goods to the Mandan,⁹⁵ though it did cause a re-alignment of their relationship in the trade system. Unlike their northern and western relatives, who were barred from the horse-trading system of that area by their opposition to the Fall Indians, the south-eastern Cree were allied with the Mandan who, with their Minnetaree ally, controlled the major horse mart of the eastern plains. Other factors, however, intervened to undermine the position of the Cree and Assiniboine, to limit their ability to purchase horses, and finally to bring about the collapse of their trade alliance with the Mandan. There is abundant evidence about the conduct of the trade in the Mandan villages; and the terms of that trade were controlled by the Mandan, not by the Cree and Assiniboine.

Evidence pertaining to the years 1804 through 1806, discloses the yearly bustle of activity at the Mandan and

Minnetaree villages. In those years the Lewis and Clark expedition visited the villages, as did many Hudson's Bay Company and Canadian traders. A few of these visitors left behind lively and informative records of what passed before their eyes.

The Mandan Fair was the center of trade activity. All winter the women made ready for the part they would play. Touring the villages Alexander Henry viewed the energetic preparations for this event. In each village "The women all very busy employed taking up their hidden treasures and making preparations for the approaching Fair."⁹⁶ When the various tribes had assembled the trading began in earnest. Henry enthusiastically proclaimed that

It represented a perfect Country Fair. Everyone was anxious to dispose of her property to advantage and for this purpose they carry their load from Tent to Tent before they can dispose of the whole.⁹⁷

It was a colourful and exciting time. The brightly painted teepees of the plains tribes stood out sharply from the somber wood and mud-covered Mandan houses clustered along the Missouri. Drifting from among these silent structures were the sharp, chanting rhythms of dancers and singers, the yelping of battling hordes of dogs, the excited cries of the children, and the babbling gossip of the old women. When the Cree and Assiniboine visited the villages in 1804 the celebrations continued for two full days.⁹⁸ The young warriors undoubtedly disdained these frivolities, devoting their time to strutting about in their feathered and beaded

majesty or to performing feats of horsemanship with their best buffalo runners and incidentally winning the admiring glances of the young women.

After the initial greetings and the cordial gift exchanges that were the traditional preliminaries, loud voices could be heard as the plains messengers

riding both within and without the Camp at full speed haranguing with great vehemence ordering their own people to receive their friends [the Mandan] well, to take them into their Tents secure their property from Theft give them plenty to eat, and in the end to exchange with them their own commodities for those of their relations upon equal terms and not to cheat or wrong anybody of their Property.⁹⁹

In spite of their cordiality and friendliness the Mandan must have been amused by the last lines of the message to the plains people. The dancing, singing and fine words were really only a thin veneer covering the hard-nosed rates of exchange set unilaterally by the Mandan-Minnetaree and applied to all who came to trade. The plains tribes were a captive client and the Mandan were not about to let the good fellowship of the Fair sway them from full realization of their potential profits. Their trade tyranny is nowhere more strikingly displayed than in their trade in European articles and horses.

The Mandan-Minnetaree appreciated the value of European goods and the desire for them on the part of their western trading partners. A prominent Minnetaree chief, Le Borgne,*

*Alexander Henry met this chief and has left an interesting description of him. "This man is the great chief of the Big Bellies [Minnetaree] and indeed it may be said with the greatest propriety, that he is the principal man in the five

though bewildered by white behaviour, clearly saw the benefits of it.

White men love beaver and they are continually in search of beaver for its skin. What use they make of the skin I do not know, but they give us good things in return - They exchange it for guns, ammunition etc. Our fathers were not acquainted with white men - we live better than our fathers lived.¹⁰¹

These Indian traders were not about to see these advantages slip through their fingers. Not being beaver hunters themselves their livelihood depended on keeping the western tribes isolated from sources of European goods. With this as a basic policy they prevented white traders from going westward beyond the villages. La Roque, a Canadian who planned to explore up the Missouri, had the Mandan position fully explained to him. They asserted that

if the white people would extend their dealings to the Rocky Mountains the Mandans would thereby become great sufferers as they not only would lose all the benefits which they had hitherto derived from their intercourse with these distant tribes but in measure as these tribes obtained arms they would become independent and insolent in the extreme.¹⁰²

The main Mandan fear was not that the western tribes were armed but that they would acquire a source of arms independent of Mandan control. The Mandan themselves were quite willing to trade arms to these Indians. For the sake of profit and security, they wished to keep it that way.

Villages whatever he says is law, and upon many occasions he has displayed his own personal bravery in civil quarrels and disturbances among his own Tribe, and the Mandanes in everyone of which he has always had the advantage and succeeded in adopting his own plans, but not without sometimes the death of his own adversary and which no individual dare revenge."¹⁰⁰

In 1805 C. McKenzie witnessed a trading session between the Crow Mountain Indians and the Mandan-Minnetaree. He was amazed at "the great quantity of merchandize which the Missouri Indians have accumulated by their intercourse with Indians [Cree-Assiniboine] that visit them from the vicinity of commercial establishments."¹⁰³ While smoking the pipe of friendship the Crows were offered

a present consisting of two hundred guns, with one hundred rounds of ammunition for each, a hundred bush-ells of Indian corn, a quantity of mercantile articles such as kettles, axes, clothes &c &c. The Corbeaux in return brought two hundred and fifty horses, large parcels of buffalo robes, leather leggins, shirts &c &c.¹⁰⁴

Though on the surface this may appear to be an equitable exchange it was far from that. The Mandan-Minnetaree were in complete control of the business conducted.

Alexander Henry who had been so enthusiastic about the Fair concluded, after viewing a similar trading session, that the Crow were kept "in subjection."¹⁰⁵ The core of his complaint was that the Mandan-Minnetaree set

their own price for their horses and every other [article] they bring nor will they allow a stranger to give the real value of their commodities, the price once fixed by these scoundrels, they will permit you to give no more than they offer themselves. By this means they generally get into their hands the total of whatever is brought into their Villages, and then sell out again to strangers for double what it cost them.¹⁰⁶

Their control over prices seemed unbreakable. The plains tribes could only submit, and the white traders were in no position to force a change in the trading rules of the villages. The Mandans held the whites in no great es-

teem. When introduced by C. McKenzie to Chaboillez and Henry, the supervisors of the Canadian traders in that area, the Mandan chiefs told him that

the Great Chiefs in the Spanish Settlements were clothed in dresses that dazzled the eyes of the Indians, that they were surrounded with armed men who had many slaves in attendance, and that they made many presents to the Mandanes. Your Chiefs...are white like the Chiefs of the Spanards, but they are not Great Chiefs, nor do they look like Chiefs.¹⁰⁷

Even the semi-military company of Lewis and Clark was viewed with disdain. One Minnetaree chief expressed the opinion that "Had I these white warriors in the upper plains...my young men on horseback would do for them as they would do for so many whites...for there are only two sensible men among them, the Worker of Iron and the Maker of Guns."¹⁰⁸

Henry had noted that what the Mandan-Minnetaree received from one tribe of plains Indians they doubled in price before trading to other western tribes or to the Cree and Assiniboine. They applied the same mark-up to European goods received from the north-east. For one hundred made beaver Henry purchased "a tolerable good horse...and paid what I thought a good price for him."¹⁰⁹ He subsequently disclosed that the valuation of those goods would be doubled before they were traded west - making them worth two hundred made beaver.¹¹⁰

In their dealings with the Indians, Lewis and Clark experienced this process of doubling before sale. They discovered, when bargaining with the Snake Indians for horses, that "An elegant horse may be purchased of the natives

for a few beads or other paltry trinkets which in the United States would not cost more than one or two dollars."¹¹¹ These Snakes were at the western end of the Mandan trade empire. They traded their horses at what J.C. Ewers called the "Shoshoni rendezvous."¹¹² This trade mart was attended by the Snakes, Flatheads, Nez Perces, Utes, and the Crow Indians. The successful military campaigns of the Blackfoot-Cree alliance and the Missouri Indians had driven them from the plains and by 1805 allowed the Crow to make peace with the now nonaggressive Snakes and to open a trade in horses with them. From the Crow Indians came

The only articles of metal which the Shoshonees possess* [and which] are a few bad knives, some brass kettles, some bracelets or arm bands of iron and brass, a few buttons worn as ornaments in their hair, one or two spears about a foot in length, and some heads of arrows made of iron and brass.¹¹⁴

According to Ewers, the Crow, when they arrived at the Mandan-Minnetaree villages with these horses, demanded a "mark up of 100 per cent."¹¹⁵ Using the price that Lewis and Clark paid the Snakes as an approximate base price for the Shoshone rendezvous, this Crow demand would mean a price of between two and four dollars for each horse sold to the Mandan. The resale price the Mandan affixed to horses from the Crow would have been between six and eight dollars, depending on the quality of each animal. In the Mandan villages Lewis and Clark purchased three horses "the whole of which

*This statement is not accurate. The Snake Indians told Lewis and Clark that from their relations, who lived to the south-west near the Spanish, they traded "horses, mules, cloth, metal, beads and the shells here worn as ornaments, and which are those of a species of pearl oysters."¹¹³

[the European articles traded for the horses] did not in the United States cost more than twenty dollars",¹¹⁶ or 6.6 dollars per horse. It should be noted also that the horse they purchased from the Snake Indians was "elegant"¹¹⁷ while the ones from the Mandan were only "very good."¹¹⁸

The evidence of Lewis and Clark and the results of Ewers' research can be summarized in the following chart detailing the cost of one horse as it moved eastward through the trade system.

Snakes → Crow → Mandan → Lewis and Clark
 \$1-\$2 \$2-\$4 \$6-\$8

When Henry purchased one horse at the villages for 100 made beaver he paid the following basket of European goods.

1 new gun, 400 Balls and powder, 1 Chiefs scarlet Coat, 1 copper kettle, 1 hand axe, 1 iron lance, 1 broad bead belt, 2 wampum hair pipes, 2 wampum shell pipes, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb Blue beads, 1 doz. brass rings, 1 doz. hawk bells, $\frac{1}{2}$ doz. flints, $\frac{1}{2}$ doz. worms, $\frac{1}{2}$ doz. awls, 2 large knives, 1 small saw, 1 hornful White powder.*¹²⁰

Applying the same doubling system outlined above and keeping the goods at the Red River valuation, this basket, traded from east to west through the system produces the following results relative to the price of one horse and the number of horses obtainable for the total value of the basket.

Snakes ← Crow ← Mandan ← Red River
 25 MB 50 MB 100 MB price of 1 horse
 4=100 MB 2=100 MB 1=100 MB number of horses

*In 1809 Henry purchased a horse from a Blackfoot Indian. The price paid is interesting in that it shows the profitability of the Mandan price and it raises questions about the value to the plains Indians of liquor. He paid "A Gallon Keg of Blackfoot Rum 2 Fthm new Twist Tobacco 20 Balls and Powder, One Awl, One Scalper, 1 Falcher [?], 1 worm 1 p.c. Glass, 1 Steel, 1 Flint."¹¹⁹

If the Mandan could buy one horse for 50 made beaver then by an upward adjustment of the value of the basket to 200 made beaver they could purchase four times as many horses with the same goods as could the Cree. Even if the Cree revalued the basket upwards this could only have caused a similar revaluation in the villages and could not affect the ratio of purchasing power that had been set up by the west to east system of doubling.

It is difficult to believe that this situation could have existed when the Cree-Assiniboine were the exclusive source of European goods. The disadvantageous position of the Cree-Assiniboine was most likely caused by their adoption of the plains and the effects of the arrival of white traders. The presence of traders in the villages may have caused a rise in the price of horses in an effort by the Mandan to increase their source of European goods through means other than beaver hunting. As early as 1795 the Canadian traders were supplied with all their horses from the villages.¹²¹ In 1806 Henry paid 100 made beaver for a horse while James Sutherland reported paying only 45 made beaver in 1796.¹²² It is even possible that the Mandan became selective about the type of European goods to be traded for horses. In 1804 one Hudson's Bay Company trader travelled to the villages with "tobacco, beads, and other merchandise to trade for furs, and a few guns to be traded for horses."¹²³

Yet the price rise is only an indication of a much more serious realignment in the trade system. Fur trade prices

were based on the white traders' consideration of overhead including inventory, transportation, salaries and expected profits in European or Canadian markets. Prior to 1821, the year of the amalgamation of the rival companies, these prices were also determined in part by the state of competition. The Cree and Assiniboine acquired their European goods from these white traders at rates determined in that manner. There was nothing crippling in this situation while the Cree and Assiniboine were the exclusive suppliers to the Mandan. Yet when the Mandan made direct contact with the white traders the Cree-Assiniboine became caught between two pricing systems. The ability of the Cree and Assiniboine to acquire European goods, and therefore the amount of goods they could turn to the purchase of horses, remained tied to the European price structure. The pricing of horses, of course, was determined by the Mandan not by the white traders. The one hundred per cent increase in horse prices (45 MB to 100 MB) was not matched by a commensurate increase in the price of beaver. The market price of beaver between 1784 and 1805 rose only fifty per cent,¹²⁴ a negligible increase* which was probably not reflected in over-the-counter prices in the west. Just to remain competitive in the villages the Cree and Assiniboine had to adhere to the prices for European goods determined by white traders. The result was that as horse prices rose and the number of beaver skins traded declined¹²⁵ the

*This amounts to an average increase of only about 2.4% per year. A margin which was probably put towards increased overhead costs incurred by the expansion of the European inland trade organization.

Cree and Assiniboine found it difficult to keep their heads above water.

In response to this situation they developed two courses of action. Both were implemented between 1795 and 1806; neither of them brought satisfactory long term results. John McKay the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Brandon House in 1805 recorded in his journal that

the Mandans and Big Bellies has 132 new Guns, all from Red River, no wonder these Indians is always in want of that article, as fast as they take them in Debt they give them away to the Mandals or Big Bellies they get nothing in return but Indian Corn and Buffalo Robes this is a great means why they often slip their Debts.¹²⁶

Trading corn and buffalo robes for guns was a short-sighted arrangement. Corn was used by the Cree-Assiniboine as a supplement to their diet and as a safeguard against seasons when they could find no buffalo.¹²⁷ In 1804 two hundred lodges of Assiniboine "passed the winter at the Forks of the Little Missouri sent daily to the village to barter for corn."¹²⁸ A good part of the corn purchased was consumed by them rather than being used in trade. Buffalo robes too, although they could be traded to the British and Canadian traders, returned small profits. Innis noted that in a list of eleven furs; arranged in descending order of value, buffalo robes appear at the bottom.¹²⁹

John McKay's suggestion that the Cree-Assiniboine got nothing for their guns but corn and buffalo robes is incorrect. In 1806 Henry, for example, notes that Old Crane and his band on their way home from the villages were "all provided with horses and loaded with corn."¹³⁰ But the resale

value of these horses once they were in the hands of the Cree and the Assiniboine plummeted downward. As early as 1795 traders on the Red and Assiniboine Rivers remarked that horses purchased in the Mandan villages were "very expensive."¹³¹ Only in 1818 was some more specific indication given of that price relative to horse prices on the south-eastern plains. Peter Fidler noted that "Horses traded there [Mandan villages] were very dear, near double the prices we give for them in this Quarter."¹³² This margin of difference probably fluctuated between 1795 and 1817 so that the Cree-Assiniboine loss during some years may have been less than fifty per cent but it would still seem to have been a loss. Horses, then, along with corn and buffalo robes were not highly profitable items for them in their dealings with white traders. For a period at least the Cree and Assiniboine could trade these items to the Saulteaux. In the autumn of 1801 the Assiniboine and Saulteaux camped together "singing, Dancing, Smoking and selling Medicine for horses."¹³³ But by 1805 the Cree and Assiniboine had placed the Saulteaux in direct contact with the Mandan.¹³⁴ In the following year the Saulteaux planned to visit the villages and purchase horses on their own.¹³⁵

According to McKay's outline of the process the Cree and Assiniboine, having taken guns for the Mandan trade on credit and being unable to make up their debt through the sale of items subsequently purchased from the Mandan, would "often slip their Debts."¹³⁶ This technique short-circuited

both the Mandan and European trade systems. They in effect acquired European articles at no cost except their reputation and turned a profit irrespective of the rate of exchange charged by the Mandan. During this period of competition between the fur companies they could for a while escape retribution. Their behaviour though was that of thieves and the white traders would not allow themselves to be plundered for long. A short journal entry by John Linklater, a British trader, outlined the fate of an Indian who employed this technique. "I got a horse for my Debt from a Cree as I could get no other mode of payment."¹³⁷ The profit of stealing was taken from him.

In another move the Cree and Assiniboine tried to turn back the clock. On two occasions, once in 1804 and again in 1806, they decided to block "any Communication, between their traders & the Missouri Indians, as they wish to Engross that trade themselves."¹³⁸ During these two years the traders were forced to carry their guns fully charged for they knew if they were caught on the track to the Mandan villages the Cree and their Assiniboine allies "would certainly deprive us of our horses...and even pillage us of our property and perhaps murder us all, as they disapprove of our taking Arms and Ammunition to the Missouri."¹³⁹ British and Canadian traders continued, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, to visit the Mandan-Minnetaree villages. Fidler's journal of 1818 contains an interesting entry on this point. "2 Canadians came from the Forks and brought me a Letter

from Mr. Sutherland who says that he & the Colony are going to send a party of Men to the Mandan villages on purpose to trade Horses for the Colonists."¹⁴⁰ In a subsequent note for November 30, 1818, it is clear that the Colonists were receiving horses from the villages.

The technique of blockade was directed towards regaining their position as the sole source of European goods for the Mandan and the former benefits of that position. It was doomed to failure by the very contradictions inherent in its conception. The white traders were expected to allow themselves to be cut off from the Mandan and at the same time to carry on a peaceful trade with their would-be oppressors.

The Cree-Assiniboine policies of non-payment of debt and blockade bear the marks of frustration. Their favoured position in a system they helped to build and defend had disappeared. The twin pressures of the Mandan system of doubling and the stable fur pricing system reshaped the Cree-Assiniboine role to that of a client from one of partnership with the Mandan. They were unable to discover a workable policy that would redress the system of pricing in their favour. They could, if they wished, remain within the native trade system on the terms set by the Mandan. After all they were still a source of European goods and remained a useful ally against the Sioux.

Yet the Cree and Assiniboine were impatient with their lot. Especially galling was the fact that the high price

for horses cut into their ability to satisfy what must have been a growing demand for horses.* As late as 1804 Alexander Henry met a war party of 300 warriors only half of whom were mounted, the remainder being forced to walk and to fight on foot.¹⁴¹ This situation was undoubtedly causing internal pressure, some of which was channelled into the Cree-Fall Indian disputes in the northern and western plains but a residue of which made itself felt in this south-eastern area. In 1796 "a number of Crees and Assinipoils, set out for the Mandals to steal horses."¹⁴²

The periods of instability apparent in the Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan alliance between 1794 and 1805 (see the previous section for the military chronology of those years) were based on the attempts by the Cree and Assiniboine to rebuild a profitable position for themselves in the trade system, and on the shocks of horse thefts by the Cree and Assiniboine warriors. By 1806 these thefts had become so common, by the Assiniboine at least, that the Mandan's "invariable rule now is to put the horses every night in the same lodge with the family."¹⁴³ This trend toward stealing Mandan horses was the beginning of the end for the Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan trade and military alliances.

*This is based on the assumption that the process of plains adoption in the south-eastern plains area, as in the northern area, increased the importance of horse ownership and therefore increased the demand for horses.

3. Breakdown of the Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan Alliance, 1806-1837

The Cree and Assiniboine raiders who had begun to prey upon the horse herds of their Mandan ally were attacking a force which had changed significantly since the 1730's. By the early 1800's the Mandan were no longer the weak partners of the military alliance. They had developed into a strong and aggressive military force. The villages themselves were the core of their strength. David Thompson, when he visited the Mandan, discovered a design underlying the jumble of lodges that composed a village. Sitting on a buffalo robe in one of these lodges he drew the plan of an English town on the sandy floor. His Mandan hosts studied it in silence then, shaking their heads, they stated that "In these straight streets we see no advantage the inhabitants have over their enemies."¹⁴⁴ Thompson was forced to concede that "Their manner of building and disposition of the houses, is probably the best, for they build for security, not for convenience."¹⁴⁵

Beginning with this solid base the Mandan strengthened their defensive position by maintaining a constant reserve of provisions in the event an attacking force confined them to their village, cutting them off from the buffalo herds.¹⁴⁶ They also took measures to guarantee adequate fire power. "Arms and Ammunition...are very essential articles for their defense, and accordingly every individual has a stock of Ball and Powder laid up in case of any sudden emergencies."¹⁴⁷

Mandan involvement in buffalo hunting, an activity which

brought discipline and coordination to a mounted force, and the constant flow of guns from the north-east gave the Mandan a new confidence and allowed them to become an effective offensive force. They even organized campaigns against the Sioux.¹⁴⁸ Peace with the Minnetaree, Crow, and with the Cheyenne in 1806,¹⁴⁹ released the Mandans from reliance on the Cree-Assiniboine as the sole source of military aid.

Against the background of this military strength the Mandan council was convened on November 17, 1804 to consider the nation's relations with the Cree and Assiniboine and to determine what should be their policy towards these troublesome allies.¹⁵⁰ Their deliberations were long and involved and it was not until the following day that Black Cat, one of the leading participants, informed Lewis and Clark, who were making preparations to winter in the village, of the result of the meeting.

...the council decided that they would not resent the recent insults from the Assiniboins and Knistinaux, until they had seen whether we had deceived them or not in our promises of furnishing them with arms and ammunition...¹⁵¹

In answer to this, Lewis and Clark advised them "to continue at peace that supplies of every kind would no doubt arrive for them, but that time was necessary to organize the trade."¹⁵² The overriding consideration in the council had obviously been the imperative need to keep open the lines of supply. Cree and Assiniboine transgressions would have to be ignored until the promises of the white explorers were fully realized. Only with the acquisition of a reliable alternate

source of European goods could the Mandan afford to end their association with the Cree and Assiniboine.

Lewis and Clark's promise was based on the assumption that their flag of exploration would be quickly followed by the flag of trade. In this they were correct. In 1807, Manuel Lisa, co-founder of the Missouri Fur Company, made contact with the Mandan and built Lisa's Fort at the junction of the Big Knife and Missouri Rivers.¹⁵³ This post was maintained until 1812. Other traders such as Ramsay Crooks, later president of the American Fur Company, and his partner R. McLellan worked this area of the Missouri between 1807 and 1817.¹⁵⁴

These early years of the American trade on the Missouri were not without their serious problems. J. Bradbury, an American travelling up the Missouri in 1809, found the Sioux "had been waiting for us eleven days with a decided intention of opposing our progress."¹⁵⁵ In the subsequent council the Sioux chief recited the litany of excuses for a blockade, claiming "they were at war with the Ricaras, Mandans and Minnaterrees and that it would be an injury to them if these nations were furnished with arms and ammunition."¹⁵⁶ Two years later W. Brakenbridge, another American traveller and in Lisa's company, had the same experience.¹⁵⁷

These blockades, meeting with uneven success, continued over the next ten years. By the 1820's the Arikaras had begun to employ them. Then, in 1823, they made a fatal mistake; they killed thirteen traders attached to W.H. Ashley's fur

brigade. After two campaigns of retaliation, the first led by General H. Leavenworth and the second by Colonel H. Atkinson, the Arikaras were pacified and the Missouri opened for safe passage.¹⁵⁸ The construction of western posts then progressed unopposed. James Kipp built a post for the Columbia Fur Company adjacent to the Mandan villages. In 1828 the American Fur Company bypassed the villages, constructing Fort Union at the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. Three years later that Company built Fort Clark, the most famous of the Mandan posts.¹⁵⁹

These military events, and the appearance of a secure flow of goods from the south-east were bound to cause a re-alignment of plains military patterns, but in 1804 the existing pattern, insofar as the Cree, Mandan, and Assiniboine were concerned, was based on a flow of European goods from the north-east. There can be little doubt that, as the Mandan gained confidence in this south-eastern route, and as Cree-Assiniboine depredations continued, the Mandan were freed from their reluctance to strike back against the horse thieves.

Even though Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan relations were increasingly fragile the Cree and Assiniboine continued to undertake massive, though not always successful, campaigns against the common enemy, the Sioux. In 1806, after a series of small and inconclusive engagements, Cree, Assiniboine and Ojibwa warriors congregated at the Turtle Mountains. John Tanner arrived with a group of four hundred. "We were surprised when we found already on the ground one thousand Assiniboins,

Crees and Ojibeways."¹⁶⁰

This large party began its journey but was plagued by dissension. Tanner explained that

On this occasion, men were assembled from a vast extent of country of dissimilar feelings and dialects and of the whole fourteen hundred, not one would acknowledge any authority superior to his own will. It is true that ordinarily they yield a certain degree of obedience to the chief...but the obedience...continues no longer than the will of the chief corresponds entirely with the inclination of those he leads.¹⁶¹

Individually and in groups warriors dropped out. Murders and horse stealing caused further division until within two days march of the Sioux villages "four hundred were all that remained."¹⁶² These also turned and went home.

The year 1806 began darkly for the Mandan. In June C. McKenzie reached the villages and noted that

The face of the Mississourie country looked beautiful, but the natives appeared more gloomy than usual, owing, we understood to the recent loss of some of their young men killed on a war expedition, as well as to the absence of a party who had gone to revenge that loss, and to the hooping cough which was then raging throughout the country.¹⁶³

Unfortunately McKenzie does not identify who this enemy was. In July, though, their situation improved markedly. The Sioux and Cheyenne arrived at the Mandan-Minnetaree villages and peace was made.

While these four tribes were camped together a great commotion broke out.

After waiting in suspense for sometime, we [Alexander Henry] were informed that the uproar proceeded from the arrival of Twelve Asineboines [led by Old Crane] a party of these people having arrived at the Village just after we had left it, now taking the advantage of the Big Bellies and Mandans, being more numerous

than the Schines and Sioux had followed our tracks to the camp. The Schines upon being informed of their coming were fully determined to kill them as those people are most inveterate enemies to each others. But as they came upon our road and in a manner under the protection of our party. The latter [Mandan and Minnetarees] were resolved instantly to defend and protect them.¹⁶⁴

The Mandan decision of 1804 seems to have remained operative to this point. The arrival of Old Crane's party caused the peace to become somewhat unsettled, although no actual fighting took place.

It is possible that this Sioux-Mandan accord had been initiated by the latter, for during the summer they and the Minnetaree went to war against the Arikara. The peace could have been a ploy to isolate that nation. Exactly how long this pattern lasted is not known. In 1809 the Sioux chief, who spoke to J. Bradbury, named the Mandan as one of his enemies and subsequent to that council Bradbury met a Mandan-Minnetaree-Arikara war party bound for Sioux territory.¹⁶⁵

Little evidence exists concerning the state of military affairs on the south-eastern plains between the years 1807 and 1817. It is known that the Sioux kept up their attempts to blockade the Missouri. In the summer of 1809 A. Henry discovered that a powerful force of Assiniboines "had assembled upon the banks of the Missouri to go to War when all their Firearms were collected and counted the total was 1100 Guns."¹⁶⁶ He was confident that he "did not exaggerate when I estimate them at the above number."¹⁶⁷ These warriors could have been headed for the Minnetaree villages for in

the following year "within Cry of the [Brandon] House"¹⁶⁸ the Assiniboine were caught unprepared by a party of Minnetarees. Miraculously they escaped without one casualty.

Throughout this period to 1817 there is no mention of Cree military activity. It is probable that they maintained their yearly rhythms of forays against the Sioux. By 1817 a state of war existed between them and the Mandan. In that year the Cree, upon sighting a band of sixty Mandan warriors, disbanded a buffalo hunt and fled to the safety of Brandon House.¹⁶⁹ Between 1817 and 1821 the Cree, for the first time in their plains history, began to take military and political action independent of, and at times opposed to, the positions adopted by their Assiniboine ally.

On November 9, 1817 a jubilant Assiniboine war party returned to Brandon House after a raid on the Mandan. They proclaimed they were "going there again to War in about a Month & to steal horses."¹⁷⁰ But the Cree under the leadership of "The Little Sonneau...speak of going there soon on purpose to renew Terms of Friendship between both tribes which has long existed between them."¹⁷¹ On December 15 Peter Fidler, who was then the Master of Brandon House, learned from men he had sent to the villages, that

A few days before Our People reached their villages an Embassy of Sioux had departed for their own lands they had been to renew their former alliance* and our party understood that both tribes have agreed to make

*It is difficult to say exactly when this alliance began. From the evidence discussed previously, it would seem that it would have fallen between the years 1811 and 1817, unless it is the settlement of 1806 that is being referred to.

war in Company in the spring against the Stone Indians who trade in the Assiniboine River.¹⁷²

The Assiniboine displayed a typical reaction; they attempted to blockade the track to the Missouri.¹⁷³

Even in the face of this Mandan-Sioux alliance and the Assiniboine blockade, the Cree persisted in pursuing their policy of peace. On January 27, 1818, the Cree told Fidler that they "are all going to visit the Mandanes in a friendly manner very soon."¹⁷⁴ They passed part of that winter in the Mandan villages and negotiated an amicable settlement. It is hard to believe that they did not discuss the Sioux-Mandan plans for the spring. In March they returned to Brandon House accompanied by a Mandan brave.¹⁷⁵

The next two months passed quietly. Then, on May 1, twelve Mandan warriors appeared at the Canadian post on the Qu'Appelle River and announced that "a great body of them is coming to war when the new Grass is about 2 Inches long."¹⁷⁶ As this news spread among the camps, the Assiniboine retreated to the north side of the Assiniboine River.¹⁷⁷ The Cree remained unperturbed. If the threatened war party did come the Assiniboine managed to avoid it, for no battle has been recorded.

During this summer of 1818 three Assiniboine warriors, fell in with the Little Sonneau's band and treacherously murdered the Mandan, who had returned to live with the Cree after the Mandan peace settlement. It is possible that this was an action deliberately designed to disrupt the Mandan-

Cree alliance and to force the Cree into active support of the Assiniboine against marauding Sioux-Mandan war parties. The Cree, however, took the risk of travelling to the Mandan villages, unprepared for war, to return the dead men's hair and "to trade Horses."¹⁷⁸ Therein lay the basis of Cree determination. They seem to have realized that the Assiniboine policy only cut them off from the horse mart and brought about the powerful combination of Sioux and Mandan forces that could easily lead to a successful invasion of their territory.

Cree determination was matched by the astuteness of Mandan diplomacy. In their alliance with the Cree on one hand and the Sioux on the other, they were successfully juggling two opposites. Their Sioux alliance added to the security of the Missouri as the south-eastern source of goods and their accord with the Cree assured access to the British and Canadians and visits from Cree traders. Even if the Sioux attacked the Cree, as they did in the spring of 1819,¹⁷⁹ the Mandan had managed to neutralize the Cree and isolate the Assiniboine. With Sioux aid they could deal severely with the Assiniboine.

In 1819 the Assiniboine seem to have recovered from the shock of the Sioux-Mandan alliance and their abandonment by the Cree. On the 4th of June "60 Tents of Stone Indians, are going to war against the Mandans."¹⁸⁰ Two months later twenty more Assiniboine warriors set out for the villages and the Cree organized a raid against the Sioux in retali-

ation for their spring defeat.¹⁸¹ Neither their campaign against the Sioux nor the Assiniboine attacks on the Mandan prevented the Cree from once again going to trade with the Mandan.¹⁸² By 1820 it begins to look as if this new military and trade pattern, which excluded the Assiniboine, was becoming settled. Yet within three years it had disintegrated.

The common Cree-Assiniboine antipathy to the Sioux nation undoubtedly saved the Cree-Assiniboine alliance which, since 1817, seemed to have been drifting towards a violent rupture. Sioux territory by this period had expanded to include all the area between the Mississippi and the Missouri.¹⁸³ To the north of that east-west line was the collective territory of their historic enemies, The Cree, Assiniboine, and Ojibwa. If the Cree wished to keep open their trade with the Mandan they would have to contend militarily with the implacable Sioux. Although the Assiniboine were no longer an asset in Cree relations with the Mandan, Assiniboine military aid was invaluable in Cree hostilities with the Sioux. The price of Assiniboine aid would logically have been Cree compliance with the Assiniboine position on the Mandan.

In these early years of the 1820's the pace of warfare quickened and the Cree and Assiniboine moved closer together until their alliance was reborn in its old form. In 1820 the Cree participated in the first recorded joint campaign

with the Assiniboine since before 1817. The two old allies and the Ojibwa congregated at "Portage les Prairies" and struck out for Sioux country.¹⁸⁴ That winter "4 or 5 Indians [no tribe given] in the vicinity of Red River had been killed by the Mandans,"¹⁸⁵ causing another war party to assemble at Portage des Prairies in the spring of 1821.¹⁸⁶ The Mandan struck again in the winter of 1822 but were repulsed by the Assiniboine.¹⁸⁷ This may have been the decisive blow. In the afternoon of March 8, 1823

Two Crees arrive [at Fort Ellice] from Brandon House quarter. One of them called the Eagle. They inform us that all the Crees are assembling...to go to war. The Mandales have already made their appearance at the Mountain and killed one Stone Indian.¹⁸⁸

This one campaign not only snapped the temporary Sioux-Mandan-Cree accord but the Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan alliance, after years of questionable solidarity, was finally and totally broken by it. James Kipp of the Columbia Fur Company built a post adjacent to the villages and in that same year the federal troops attacked the Arikara. Nothing demonstrates more clearly the end of this old alliance, and the Mandan abandonment of the north-eastern trade route, than Mandan actions in 1831 and 1832.* On September 25, 1831, they attacked and killed two Hudson's Bay Company freemen within a mile of Brandon House. A month later they reappeared, ambushed a work party, and drove them back into the security of the post.¹⁸⁹ The following autumn, 1832, a group of Company

*There is an unfortunate gap in the sources between 1823 and 1831.

employees were

attacked by a party of Mandans, they had seen the enemy in the evening but were doubtful whether [they were] Mandans or Stone Indians and did not in consequence take necessary precautions. Yet when attacked in the night under every disadvantage they showed both courage and address, defended themselves & Coy. property successfully...¹⁹⁰

On their part the Cree and Assiniboine continued these joint horse stealing excursions and war parties. They were completely cut off from every source of horses. Then in the spring of 1831 La Quatre, the principal Cree chief in the Assiniboine River area, told the Master of Fort Pelly that during the previous winter a

Crow Indian Chief had sent pressing messages to them to come and meet them at a certain place holding out all offers of friendship that he would conduct them back out of all danger with a strong party of his young men and would also supply them with horses at a very moderate price.*¹⁹¹

The Cree seemed completely surprised by this crucial development. Their hunts were abandoned and the winter spent in councils. "Their attention taken up with the idea of visiting the Crows where they expect to return with plenty of horses."¹⁹² As in their peace with the Mandan in 1817, the Cree were once again drawn by the possibility of establishing direct contact with a supply of horses. Yet there was some hesitancy, some question as to the motives of the Crow. The Hudson's Bay Company was sure that the

*Since the building of Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone in 1828 the Cree were liberated from the Mandan's exclusive control over the westward flow of European goods. This invitation could represent the new independence of the Crow and an attempt to increase the size of their horse market. It does not indicate the beginning of hostilities between the Crow and the Mandan.

invitation was an attempt by American traders to attain control of Cree hunts. The Cree doubted this but they did intend to visit those traders "with a view of learning how the Indians are treated with the Americans."¹⁹³

On June 10, 1831, the Cree with some Saulteaux left the Fort Pelly area to visit the Crow.¹⁹⁴ The question of Crow motivation had still not been settled and as they travelled their doubts must have grown for "being apprehensive of intrigues they did not go far."¹⁹⁵ The Cree probably felt that the Crow invitation could have been intended as bait to draw them into a Crow-Mandan trap, and that when they least expected it they would be massacred by their would-be trading partners. These Cree fears may have been well-founded, for on the banks of the Missouri they were attacked by the Mandan. The fighting was desperate and finally the Mandan were forced to abandon "Their Horses, Guns and even their dress and only escaped by their dexterity in Swimming across the Missouri River."¹⁹⁶

This defeat was only one of the disasters which befell the Mandan in the 1830's and led to their destruction in 1837. By 1833 the Mandan could count among the ranks of their enemies the Blackfoot, Assiniboine, Sioux, Pawnees, Arikaras, Cheyennes, Cree, and Arapaho.¹⁹⁷ Only the Minnetaree and Crow remained faithful to them. The Crow, who were reputed to have a stock of between 9000 and 10,000 horses, continued to trade their animals to them¹⁹⁸ and to

exchange visits with their Minnetaree relatives.¹⁹⁹ But now the Mandan had no one with whom to trade these horses. The western extension of American posts beyond the Mandan villages had released the plains tribes from Mandan control and must be seen as one of the causes of the military pattern just noted.

Although conditions seemed ripe for a new Cree-Assiniboine-Mandan alliance it did not come about and there is no evidence that overtures were made in that direction by either side. The Cree and Assiniboine, though judged poor in horses,²⁰⁰ maintained their military pressure on the Mandan. According to Maximillian, Prince of Wied, they were "very daring and often approach the villages...either singly or in small parties, and sometimes surprise individuals and shoot them."²⁰¹ The American trader F.A. Chardon witnessed the departure of 300 Cree and Assiniboine warriors bound for the Mandan villages.²⁰² Two years later he witnessed the death of the Mandan nation.

In 1837 the dreaded small pox came among the Mandan villages. By August only 23 warriors were left alive with some women and old men.²⁰³ The Mandan tried to recruit their strength by inviting the Arikaras, who had been moving up the Missouri in the face of Sioux pressure, to join them in the nearly empty villages. This arrangement proved unworkable and in June 1838 "the few remaining Mandans that were living with the Rees all started up to remain with the Minnetaree, as they cannot agree with the Rees, as the latter

are continually stealing their Women."204 So after more than one hundred years of settled and prosperous occupation of these villages, the remaining Mandan were exiles once again. The abandoned villages did not long outlive their builders. Before daylight on Wednesday the 7th of January 1839, F.A. Chardon, standing on the wall of Fort Clark

beheld the Mandan Village all in flames. The lodges being all made of dry Wood, and all on fire at the same time, Made a splendid sight, the Night being dark - this Must be an end to What was once called the Mandan Village.205

Chapter IV - The Horse Wars 1810 - 1850

1. Some Aspects of Plains Cree Social and Political Organization

The years from 1810 to 1850 represent a distinct era in the history of the Plains Cree. It is the long middle period placed between two eras of significant change. By 1810 the Cree's commanding role in the European fur trade had been circumscribed, and their native trade systems undermined, by the extension of the sources of European goods into the home territory of every tribe associated with the Canadian plains. The wars of territory and migration, which had characterized the military and trade history of this first period, and were to a large extent prosecuted on the basis of a power imbalance, were ended as the balance of power was levelled. Familiar military patterns, the Blackfoot-Cree alliance, had broken down, and the Cree-Mandan alliance was tottering toward a final collapse. The Cree, prior to 1810, had completed their adoption of the plains, though they continued to receive woodland recruits all through this period, giving up fur-hunting and the use of the canoe for buffalo-hunting and the use of horses. This in turn had lent a new emphasis to the importance of the horse trade over the fur trade, a contributing cause to the failure of both the Blackfoot and Mandan alliances.

This middle period ends approximately in 1850. The era 1850-1870 is, somewhat like the first of these three periods, a time of crises. The buffalo herds, the very basis of plains subsistence, began a rapid decline. This tragic phenomenon brought a new focus to plains warfare and highlights a new

trend in Cree economic behaviour. It also induced the intensification of Cree awareness of territory, their nation, their relationship with the white man and the effects of the fur trade.

What then is the nature of this middle period? Certainly it contains all the romance, the colour, and the peculiar cultural traits which are the hallmarks of the popular depiction of the plains Indian and his society. But this artistic conception should not be allowed to obscure the conscious and rational attempts by the Cree and other plains tribes to construct new military and trade patterns to replace those, which, because of changed circumstances, had failed. The end of territorial wars and wars to protect favoured fur trade positions did not cause a deterioration of the substantive motives for military patterns. War remained a communal undertaking based on strategy which encompassed more than merely a quest for individual status. For the Cree this period encompasses the development of their particular version of plains society. The size, structure, and motive forces of that society, and the deterministic qualities of certain culture traits form an important prologue to a discussion of the military and trade chronology of this period.

Cree Population and Band Breakdown 1810 - 1850

The size of Indian population in any period prior to enumeration under the treaty system is indefinite. This, of course, does not downgrade the utility or the importance of the approximate estimates that have been recorded by early travellers and traders. The problem they faced in arriving

at a rough census was well expressed by Alexander Henry in his cautionary preface to an estimate of the Cree, "...to find the exact number it would be a difficult task as they are dispersed over such a vast extent and frequently intermix with other nations".¹ It was not until the reserve period that the Plains Indians could be separated, made to stand still, and be counted. Early accounts are hampered by this Indian mobility and the limited view of the enumerator. This in turn led to vagueness and wild variation in the estimates. H.R. Schoolcraft provides three estimates which illustrate this point.

1736	Cristineaux ^a	Ounepegan Lake	...60
1764	Christineaux ^b	"	...3000
1812	Killisteneaux ^c	"	...500 ²

To this problem of Indian mobility must be added the indefinite effects of the epidemics of smallpox on the demographic profile of the Plains Indians. The first of these calamities was noted by La Verendrye in 1737 when "the Win-³nipeg Cree...at fort Maurepas had all died of smallpox". There is no doubt that "all" was intended to represent a substantial proportion but a proportion of what total is not known. The impact, both psychological and demographic, is much clearer for the second, and most infamous of the plagues.

In the years 1780 to 1782 as death swept down upon them the Indians were stunned with incredulity; how could the pox move from person to person? "We had no belief that one man

could give it to another, any more than a wounded man could

Estimates by: a) M. Chauvignerie b) Cpt. T. Hutchins
c) An Army Officer.

give his wound to another."⁴ They abandoned their hunts, fled from their dying relations and friends and even threw away furs "to the good Spirrit, that they might live".⁵ Nor was it uncommon for

The father of a family, whom the infection had not reached, to call them around him to represent the cruel sufferings and horrid fate of their relatives, from the influence of some evil spirit who was preparing to extirpate their race; and to incite them to baffle death, with all its horrors, by their own poniards.⁶

The landscape presented a desolate picture, "the Indians lying Dead about the Barren Ground like rotten sheep, their Tents left standing & Wild beast Devouring them".⁷ The traders could only stand aside and watch. William Tomison reported his sincere distress to the Company's owners. "I do assure your Honors it cuts me to the Heart to see the Miser-⁸able condition they are in & not being able to help them."

The passing of the plague left the Indians in a stupor. It was only with difficulty that many survivors could be coaxed back into the normal pattern of life.⁹ Those who survived believed, according to many white witnesses, that

the Great Master of Life had delivered them over to the Evil Spirit for their wicked courses; and for many years afterward those who escaped the deadly contagion, strictly conformed themselves to their own code of moral laws.¹⁰

From the estimates of the death toll it appears that the Evil Spirit had chastized them very severely indeed. Edward Um-¹¹preville held that not more than one in fifty survived and A. Henry believed that two-thirds of the Cree nation succumbed.¹²

The Cree were much more fortunate in the one epidemic that

fell in the period 1810 - 1850. By then the traders were no longer helpless, vaccine had been distributed to every Hudson's Bay Company post. In 1837 the smallpox returned. It first appeared on the Canadian plains among "a band of half crees half assiniboin called the young dogs as they speak both languages but neither correctly".¹³ William Todd, Master of Fort Pelly, was forewarned of its approach from the Missouri and worked hard to vaccinate all the Cree of that area. He even taught the Indians how to administer the serum and reported that one man "Vaccinated his own family and about 20 of his connexions."¹⁴ Although there are no post journal references to programs of vaccination in other areas of the plains, J. Rae, the Arctic explorer, stated that "A gentleman at the Saskatchewan vaccinated all the Cree Indians that came in; and there was scarcely a single case occurred among the tribe."¹⁵ In this manner the plague was confined and affected the Blackfoot but "principally the Assiniboine,"¹⁶ and of course the Mandan who having violently rejected the British traders, cut themselves off from the life-saving serum. The Cree seemed to have escaped with few losses.

The evidence seems conclusive that the population of western Indians declined significantly in the years 1780 - 1782, that estimates of Cree population after this period would represent only a fraction of the Cree who had migrated westward after 1680, and that Cree population between 1810 and 1850 should not show a large variation due to the plague of 1837.

Probably the most reliable early estimate of Indian population is found in W. McGillivray's short work entitled a Sketch of the Fur Trade in Canada, 1809. His total count for the plains was 30,000 individuals. This aggregate he subsequently broke down by tribe, though his categories of enumeration are varied and inconsistent. The estimates are provided either by number of tents, number of families or number of individuals. The arithmetic logic of his figures discloses a constant relationship between these three categories: 1 Tent = 1.4 Families = 14 Individuals. Using these ratios his figures can be converted and his census recast to read

Tribe	Figures as Given	Conversion to Families	Conversion to Individuals
Ojibwa	24 F	24	336*
Cree	250 T	350	4900*
Assiniboine	230 T	322	4508
Sarcee	60 F	84 60	816
Blackfoot	700 T - 1000 F	1000	19600
Fall	200 T	280	<u>3920</u> ¹⁸
Total			33,080

Alexander Henry's 1810 accounting concludes with a total of 28,000,¹⁹ a figure remarkably close to McGillivray's. In 1857 Sir George Simpson, Inland Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, told a Select Committee of the British Parliament that the total plains population had declined to 25,000.²⁰ These totals taken together would indicate a net loss of 3000

*It is probably just an interesting coincidence, but combining McGillivray's estimate with Henry's estimate of Cree deaths in 1780 results in a pre-plague population of approximately 15,000 which in turn is Colonel H. Bouquet's estimate of Cree population in 1764.¹⁷

to 5000 Indians over the period 1810 - 1850. Though it is impossible to make a judgement on the reliability of these estimates they do show an expected downward trend due to small pox, venereal disease, scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough, and warfare.

McGillivray's figure of 4900 for the Cree is given support by Henry who estimates their number at 4200.²¹ The question that arises here is did Cree population follow the general downward trend exhibited by the total plains population? David Mandelbaum chose the figure 12,500 as the Cree total for 1860,²² clearly suggesting an upward trend and implying by that that the force of natural increase was more than adequate to compensate for death through disease and warfare. In doing this he ignores Hind's estimate of 1857 of 2000 Cree.²³ Diamond Jenness uses Hind's estimate, though he quotes it incorrectly, and concludes that "between 1835 and 1858 diseases and wars reduced their number from 4000 to barely 1000."²⁴ Intermediate estimates from 1829 through to 1860 would tend to lend credence to Mandelbaum's position.

General P. Porter, Secretary of War in the American government of 1829, reported that Cree population was 3000.²⁵ G. Catlin, the artist, noted in 1832 that "I have said before that they [Cree] are about 3000 in number - by that I mean but a small part of that extensive tribe, who are in the habit of visiting American Fur Company Establishments."²⁶ Prince Maximillian's estimate of the whole Cree tribe in 1833 was 7440²⁷ an increase of 2540 over McGillivray's. A War Depart-

ment report of 1836 lists the Cree at 3000.²⁸ Unfortunately the next estimate, except for Hind's, does not appear until 1860 when Palliser placed Cree population at 11,500²⁹ a figure only 1000 short of Mandelbaum's estimate. These figures indicate an overall increase for the Cree of 5600. Given that the Cree almost totally escaped the epidemic of 1837 Mandelbaum's upward trend is quite credible. Blackfoot losses in 1837 alone are able to account for the 3000-5000 decrease in total plains population.*

One demographic fact is made quite clear by this collection of estimates: the Cree for most of this period numbered less than one-half of the strength of the Blackfoot. Maximilian noted that in 1833 the Blackfoot could field 5000-6000 warriors while the most the Cree could muster was 1600 to 2400.³² Other factors to be discussed later intervened which made this numerical superiority much less imposing than it appears.

The Plains Cree were grouped into a number of bands which were, after the family, the basic social and political unit of the tribe. Diamond Jenness states, without corroboration, that the Cree had twelve bands each with its own chief.³³ David Mandelbaum, who is without exception the leading anthropological expert on the Plains Cree, discovered eight bands divided into two geographical headings. Both these positions should be accepted as correct. Mandelbaum

*Maximilian's Blackfoot estimate in 1833 was 18,000 - 20,000,³⁰ Palliser's in 1860 was 14,300.³¹

stated that Cree bands "were loose and shifting units",³⁴ meaning that the Cree were free to move from one band to another. "The prestige and power of the leading chief was also an important factor in the cohesiveness of a band."³⁵ The band as an institution was stable but membership, specific territory, leadership and the number of bands would have fluctuated over time. Warfare, disease, or the death of a prominent leader could all cause the band count to be altered.

Unfortunately this fluidity means that given band breakdowns can only relate to a specific time period. There is no complete band count for the period 1810 - 1850. Yet it is still useful to consider Mandelbaum's outline, which refers to the period 1860 - 1880, to isolate one factor that can be taken as a constant and is therefore applicable to the period under discussion.

According to Mandelbaum's informants, the Cree were grouped under two regional headings: the Downstream People and the Upstream People. The Calling River People (Qu'Appelle valley), the Rabbit Skin People (area between the Assiniboine and Qu'Appelle Rivers), and the Touchwood Hills People (area between Touchwood Hills and Long Lake) were the bands of the Downstream People. The Upstream People included the bands of the River People (area between North Saskatchewan and Battle Rivers), the Beaver Hills People (west of the River People extending south to the Battle River), the House People (in the Fort Carlton area) and the Parkland People (situated just east of the former band).³⁶

From the above outline it is immediately obvious that terms Upstream and Downstream are somewhat misleading. What is actually meant is the people of the north-western plains and of the south-eastern plains. This regional pattern was initially set in the early trade period by the Upstream People's (Saskatchewan Cree's) use of the Saskatchewan-Hayes River route to the Bay posts and the Downstream People's use of the Assiniboine-Red River-Lake Winnipeg waterway. It was subsequently reinforced by involvement in the particular trade and military patterns which dominated the area. There is no evidence though that these regional divisions were sharp enough to cause the growth of two separate Cree nations on the plains. Participation of Downstream People in the military pattern of the north-western plains is evident in 1789, 1793, 1795, and 1802.*

Edwin Denig, whose fur trade career was centred in the south-eastern plains,⁺ furnished a partial Cree band count which supports the idea of a constant regional division. What is of immediate interest is Denig's concept that the whole Cree nation was represented by the Downstream People. He fails to acknowledge the existence of the Upstream People, in fact he goes so far as to state that they (the whole Cree nation) could not sustain their position near the numerous tribes northward, but were compelled to place, by their removal, several hundred miles of uninhabited territory between

*These incidents were noted in Chapter II Section 5, The Breakdown of the Cree-Blackfoot alliance.

+Although Denig did not write his account of the Cree until 1854 he had spent the previous 21 years on the Missouri so that his outline would probably reflect the conditions of the period 1810-1850.

themselves and other more warlike nations.³⁷ Denig's suggestion of a south-eastern retreat does not bear the scrutiny of primary evidence but it does emphasize the permanency of the regional division.

The Cree of the south-eastern plains were, according to Denig's notes, divided into the following bands.

- 1) Chocab, or band of Eyes Open, 100 lodges, residing in the Qu'Appelle area.
- 2) Pay si e kan, or Striped, 40-50 lodges, near the Tinder Mountain.
- 3) Pis cha haw a chis, or Magpies, 30-40 lodges, near the Tinder Mountain.
- 4) Kee as Koo sis or Small Gulls, 30-40 families, near the Qu'Appelle River.
- 5) The Painted Lodge, He Who Shoots the Bear with Arrows, The Little Eagle, and The Standing Bear, four small bands named after their leaders, about 130-140 lodges.
- 6) Ma tai tai ki ok or Plusiers des Aigles, 300 lodges, led by Le Sonnant, near the Woody Mountains.
- 7) Band of She mare Kaw or La Lance, 350 lodges, near the Cypress and Prickly Pear Mountains.
- 8) Several small portions of the nation led by Red Fox, Iron Child, Muskegan etc., to the west of the Wood Mountains.³⁸

As the Cree were totally nomadic, at the beginning of this period at least, the territorial limits of the bands were not specified "for the wealth of the country consists of

buffaloes and wolves which exist in plenty everywhere among them".³⁹

Although it is unfortunate that more definite population figures cannot be given and that a full band outline is not available for the Cree in the period 1810-1850, factors have emerged which are probably of greater importance. First, if Mandelbaum's trend is accepted, the Cree nation was growing in the face of disease and warfare while other plains nations were losing ground. Secondly, a regional division in the Cree nation was founded by geography and the early European trade system and was nurtured by the military patterns prior to 1810. Thirdly, the band count was not constant nor was band membership stable and the quality of leadership was a prime determinant in the cohesiveness and longevity of a band.⁴⁰

The basic suppleness of this band system should be noted. The system of complete transferability of membership gave the Cree social structure the elasticity to absorb the external blows of great losses through war and disease. Internal social pressures too were given vent by the ability of a disaffected member to join another band, and for the aspiring warrior to fulfil his leadership ambition without having to disrupt the existing political structure, by forming a new band. Although there are no traces of democracy in evidence, the freedom of movement of the band members did in its effect enforce a code of acceptable behaviour on the leadership.

Prestige, Investment, and Welfare

Leadership, the social and political organization of the

Cree band and tribe, discloses the generative forces at work behind the military and trade patterns that have been discussed and the ones yet to be considered. Prestige, with its component factors of military valor, wealth and liberality, was the single most important determinant governing social status and political ranking. These factors were intimately linked and enforced customary behaviour upon Cree males, channelling their lives into prescribed patterns of action. By following those patterns the individual placed himself in competition with his peers to acquire increases in status until the ultimate level was reached - chief. Yet the very aspect of competition which gave status ensured the operation of an effective system of social welfare through the redistribution of wealth.

The path to the position of chief was clearly marked and is therefore not difficult to reconstruct. The Cree young man, unless a chief's son, began his social life without status or position, for unlike other plains people the Plains Cree had no age-grade societies. Participation in a raiding party would probably be the first status giving function for the young Cree. If he displayed bravery he might be given, after one raid as a chief's son or after a number of raids if his family were of no great consequence, the title "Worthy Young Man."⁴¹ The next step was to be invited to join the Warrior Society of which there was but one in each band. This society was led by the Warrior Chief* chosen by the

*The Warrior Chief should not be confused with the War Chief.

warriors with his authority "confined to those activities performed by the Warriors as a group."⁴³ The society was charged with guarding the line of march when the band travelled, policing the buffalo hunt, and controlling the warriors when engaged in a military campaign.⁴⁴ The last and paramount step was from member of the Warrior Society, or Warrior Chief, to Chief. The Chief's position was often hereditary but if a Chief's son was considered incompetent "some man of high prestige was acknowledged as successor."⁴⁵

A man's war record was the heart of his status and the cause of his particular rise from one level to the next. Mandelbaum's informants assured him that a man "who had not distinguished himself on the warpath could not be chief."⁴⁶ Even ranking among chiefs was determined by their war exploits. When a number of chiefs met in council the status accorded each "did not depend on the size of his following but hinged largely on his war record."⁴⁷ This record was composed of the history of the individual's participation in military campaigns or raids in which each of his deeds was given a particular value on a predetermined scale.

The criterion in ranking war exploits was the degree of danger to which the man was exposed while accomplishing the feat. Thus a man who shot an enemy while he himself was under fire outranked one who had killed an enemy from ambush. Similarly one who had killed his man with a club had more to his credit than one who had picked off his opponent with a rifle.⁴⁸

Mandelbaum explains that "The Warrior Chief was distinct from the Chief proper, although a Warrior Chief often became Band Chief. Since the societies had no function in warfare, the Warrior Chief was not also a war chief. But he was always one of the boldest and ablest of the fighting men."⁴²

The killing of an old man with grey hair was one of the highest deeds, for the old men usually remained inside the teepee so that a warrior would have to penetrate the cordon of people protecting him. Paul Kane revealed that this accomplishment had a specific social consequence. In the tent of Chief Broken Arm he noted that

Amongst our visitors was the son-in-law of the Chief and, according to Indian custom he took his seat with his back towards his father and mother-in-law never addressing them but through the medium of a third party. This rule is never broken through until the son-in-law proves himself worthy of personally speaking to him by having killed an enemy with white hairs. ⁴⁹

The concept that the more danger the warrior exposed himself to the higher would be the merit of his deed was carried through to its logical end, "the highest deed of all was to make peace with a hostile tribe. It required great courage to approach the enemy unarmed, for hostile peoples usually shot the Cree at sight." ⁵⁰ Broken Arm, Kane's host in 1847, was not only "among the foremost and most renowned of their warriors" ⁵¹ but was also

a remarkable exception to the generality of Indians, they call him the 'peacemaker', and twice within the last two or three years he pushed his way alone into the Blackfoot country, and walked into the enemy's camp unarmed, with the peace pipe in his hand, exhorting them to peace, and offering them the alternative of killing him. ⁵²

La Lance, who Denig designated as the head of all the Cree chiefs, had a splendid war record but he also "distinguished himself in making several peaces with some bands of the Black-foot nation..." ⁵³

Immediately on his return from an expedition the war-

rior began to take advantage of his deeds. The band members gathered together and the warriors would

recount the history of the expedition, particularly, relating the manner in which they fell upon their enemies, the number of men they killed, and of slaves, horses ec. they have taken.⁵⁴

Fine-day, Mandelbaum's prime informant, related that when he returned after one outing "I told the whole story. The chiefs said that no other man had gone back after an all day fight."⁵⁵ He was subsequently chosen to lead the Warrior Society.

Throughout his life the warrior was given the opportunity to reinforce his status by recounting his war record. These occasions included the Sun Dance, Give Away Dance, Dakota Dance,* and other public functions such as burial of the dead.⁵⁶ If a man were foolish enough to falsify his deeds "he could be challenged by anyone who had been on war parties with him."⁵⁷ This fact plus the helpfulness of corroboration guaranteed accurate reporting. Fine-day, in relating the deed that won him the title, Worthy Young Man, stressed that "two Worthy Young Men who had been on the trip had seen me do all these things and thats why I became one of them."⁵⁸

Though an outstanding war record was a pre-requisite for advancement, wealth and liberality were also of great importance. Open-handedness was a consideration in ranking a chief among his peers. "A chief had to give freely of his possessions to needy tribesmen, and usually set the pace on the

*For a complete description of social functions which included opportunities for coup-counting, see Mandelbaum's chapter on ceremonialism, pp. 205-283.

occasions for ceremonial gift giving."⁵⁹ It was incumbent upon the chief to be an energetic hunter as well as an intrepid warrior. One chief, Teimmskos, derived most of his prestige from his ability as a pound maker. "In winter, people from distant places would seek his encampment to enjoy the abundance of meat secured under his guidance."⁶⁰ Ceremonial communal feasts were "commonly made by the chiefs."⁶¹ Even in his function as arbiter of disputes "gift giving was a socially accepted method of mollifying an aggrieved person."⁶²

Liberality was an expected and important mark of the chief's behaviour. So also was it a device for increasing social status in conjunction with the individual's war record. For example, the elevation from Worthy Young Man to the Warrior Society was often delayed by the fact that "membership in the society entailed considerable expense; Worthy Young Men did not usually become Warriors until they acquired a number of ...material possessions."⁶³ Like the chiefs, the Warriors and Worthy Young Men were expected to display customary behaviour. They

maintained prestige by demonstrating their dissociation from sentiments held by common people. They had to part with their material possessions freely and willingly; they were expected to be above sexual jealousy they took it upon themselves to prepare corpses for burial...When a Worthy Young Man died in battle the usual manifestations of mourning were foregone because he willingly courted both.⁶⁴

As in the case of war deeds appropriate social mechanisms existed which presented the opportunity of deriving status through gift giving. Some of these like the Give Away Dance

or the Sitting Up Until Morning ceremony were elaborate occasions, others were informal. During the progress of a dog feast, for example, "a Warrior would occasionally demonstrate his disdain of material possessions by having a new robe passed around on which the others wiped their greasy hands."⁶⁵

Clearly related to individual gift giving was the practice of social investment which not only brought status but also worked as part of a Cree social welfare system. The individual would, having acquired a quantity of goods, distribute them among his friends, relatives and "the aged chiefs, and most respectable, men of the tribe."⁶⁶ The recipient could in turn use these goods in gift giving to raise his own status. But when the original owner needed a large amount of food for a feast, or required additional wealth to purchase a medicine bundle or a public position, such as the Pipestem Carrier, he had only to call in his investment. If a man failed to fulfil his obligation to aid the donor "his relatives...teased and mocked him until he settled his debt."⁶⁷ In this manner wealth was distributed throughout the band, raising the level of each families' status and ownership of material possessions yet still guaranteeing benefit for the individual who had originally acquired it.

Allied to this was a well-developed system of social welfare which extended to all members of the band. A chief, of course, was expected to display concern for the material welfare of his followers. "At ceremonies chiefs were expected

to contribute a larger share of the feast than the other tribesmen." ⁶⁸ After a hunt when the meat was brought back into the camp "the chiefs wife dropped the choice parts in front of the tipis of the poor." ⁶⁹ As a wealthy man, the chief attached to his household orphans or the sons of poor families.

They were treated as members of the family, provided with clothes and food and were able to use the chief's horses. From the chief they received informal training in hunting and warfare. These workers...were to be found in the tipis of most men of high rank. ⁷⁰

Some chiefs were especially adroit at providing for the band.

E. Denig described Cho cab, Eyes Open, as a

chief of note...not so much as a warrior but as a prudent financier.... His duty as a leader, therefore, is to look out for the welfare of his people, to see they amass property, live comfortably and hunt with order, also to go at their head when they visit the fort to trade and endeavor to secure their goods, advantage by making the best bargain he can for them. ⁷¹

The chief did not bear the burden of his office alone. He was supported by his relations who in turn "benefited by the prestige derived from kinship with a respected chief." ⁷² Band members who were able also supported the prestige and the office of the chief. The Chief's Crier, and Caller, were two officials, usually older men who could no longer take part in campaigns, who announced the chief's decisions, his deeds, and called men to council. Though chosen by the chief many gifts of food and fine clothing were given to the incumbents by the band's leading men so that they "might not endanger the dignity of his position by being poorly clad." ⁷³

The Warrior Society also employed old men past the age

of active participation in the competitive status process. These men functioned as criers and servers of food in the lodge.⁷⁴ But the Society was also involved in the welfare of the poor of the band. Mandelbaum learned that "Old people or widows who were in need would kill a dog and bring it to the society lodge. The Warriors feasted on the dog meat and then gave the donor whatever was requested."⁷⁵

Customs relative to property further display the Cree mix of individualism and social support. Food that was collectively procured, such as buffalo through the use of a pound, was collectively distributed. But food which was obtained by the individual need not be. Of course there was no division of tribal hunting territory either on an individual or a band basis. Material wealth, such as guns, horses, hides, tents, and dogs, was individually owned although use was allowed to all members of the extended family.⁷⁶ Yet the distinctions of wealth could have been blurred to some extent by the practices of investment and welfare that tended to distribute wealth through the band.

The quest for individual status through participation in military campaigns and by demonstrating liberality through gift giving and disdain of material possessions, clearly displays the intense competitiveness of Cree social and political life, and makes a mockery of traditional concepts of the exclusive communality of Indian, hence Cree, society. John McDougall, the well-known western missionary, set forth a general condemnation that not only indicates how little he

appreciated the real nature of Indian social customs but also illustrates the difficulties that many observers have experienced in preventing their European values from colouring their analysis of Indian life. He wrote that "Tribal communism has always been hurtful to individuality, and without this no race of man can progress."⁷⁷ His use of the term progress and the certain implication that its definition was simulation of white social and technological development is enough to betray the bias of his position. His basic assumption, that individualism and tribal communism (a term he unfortunately does not define) could not reach full flower in the same pot, is not only logically suspect but incorrect in the face of evidence presented on individual efforts to acquire higher social ranking, the type of class division* that that might imply, and the co-existence of a Cree social welfare system, which would seem to constitute the real extent of Cree tribal communism. As welfare was largely a project of the individual, or the society with wealth, tribal communism should be seen as a function of the individual status quest as well as a trait displaying not unexpected feelings of compassion and social conscience for the aged and less fortunate. Even the oldest enduring Canadian plains society, the Blackfoot, is

*There have been many discussions on social class and the openness of plains society yet even Harold Driver, a skeptic in this area, concluded "I am willing to concede that most Plains tribes in the nineteenth century, did have a tendency toward class structure, but the exact number of classes and the amount of mobility from one to another is vague or unknown."⁷⁸

portrayed by Oscar Lewis as progressively individualistic and materialistic. He stated without equivocation that the "prestige derived from the counting of these coups and from ceremonial recitation of war deeds, though present, was in later years over-shadowed by the prestige of wealth."⁷⁹ Although there is no evidence that the Cree system changed its prime stress from war deeds to the simple acquisition of property, it has been demonstrated that individual action and initiative was the formula for progression through the various levels of social rank.

Certainly it should not be assumed from this that individual freedom was boundless to the degree that no order existed in Cree society, that the Plains Cree really was a wild, free spirit. The rule of law, or if preferred the rule of custom, is everywhere evident in the structure of coup ranking, in standardized conduct expected from members of the Warrior society and even in the Cree religious system, wherein the Kieche Manito and Metchee Manito denoted a division between good and evil. On the more practical level, the sole decision-making authority of the chief and policing powers of the Warrior Society display the existence of executive authority and organized power of implementation of political decisions. The mocking and teasing of debtors is significant of social pressures brought to bear on individuals to conform to social customs.

Though the band was the stage upon which the status competition was enacted, it was outside the band and tribal set-

ting that the individual acquired the raw material of prestige: material goods and military honours. Naturally bravery could only be displayed in warfare, be it in organized campaigns or in the more informal raiding parties. Material goods on the other hand could be acquired under the aegis of trade, hunting and both types of military adventure. Reflecting on the status system, it is obvious that it could not function without an inflow of material goods and military deeds; it could not function without trade and war. Cree band and tribal relations with other tribes then should be expected to bear directly upon these internal domestic needs. Cree external relations in the period before 1810 were discovered to have been participation in consciously constituted trade patterns and supportive military alliances. These patterns and alliances were therefore a rational approach to the problem of the acquisition of property that could be converted into status. In this respect the Saskatchewan Cree traders, the traders to the Mandan villages, and the participants in raids and organized campaigns against the Fall, Snake and Sioux tribes were in essence agents of a single societal demand working within an external tribal system, which induced the inflow of convertible material. The question of course that arises is did the nature of goods obtained through external systems (military and trade patterns) of acquisition cause a change in the basic nature of those systems?

The Horse and Gun, Agents of What Changes?

The impact of the horse and gun as new causal factors in the cultural formation of plains tribes is a matter of some controversy among anthropologists. Their conclusions, some of which will be noted, are nearly as varied as the methodologies they applied. Bernard Mishkin, in his study of rank and warfare among plains Indians, focussed on the Kiowa and referred to the horse as the agent of an "industrial Revolution"⁸⁰ on the plains. Diamond Jenness, though his methodology cannot be compared to Mishkin's, did arrive at a remarkably similar conclusion suggesting that "their [Indians] lives had been revolutionized by the horse."⁸¹ Clark Wissler in a much more moderate vein, conducted his investigation through a reconstruction of culture trait complexes and concluded that "from a qualitative point of view the culture of the Plains would have been much the same without the horse."⁸² M. Smith employed an approach similar to Wissler's, concentrated on warfare, and decided that

With due consideration to their cultural importance (horse and gun) there is however, no conclusive evidence that they revolutionized war procedures. Apparently their effect was not radically to change the existing war complexes, but to accelerate the momentum of warfare.⁸³

Oscar Lewis, who prided himself on what he considered an historical method, took dead aim on Smith's position. "In view of the non-historical approach, it is not surprising that no evidence of vital changes was found."⁸⁴ Lewis

disclosed that from his research on the Blackfoot the following generalization could be formulated and applied to all Canadian plains tribes. This was that

there have been no changes in any aspects of aboriginal culture greater than those which have occurred in warfare. These changes were brought about by the introduction of the horse, gun and fur trade on the Northern Plains.⁸⁵

These cross currents of conclusion, methodologies, and subject tribes would seem to do no more than create a whirlpool of confusion. Yet the stress laid on warfare by Lewis and Smith, together with their opposing positions, to say nothing of the divergence in their methodologies, does provide a framework for managing a discussion of the effects wrought by the horse and gun on one of the external systems of acquisition - military patterns.

Smith's opinion boils down to more of the same; war procedures and complexes do not change, only the incidence of war increases. This does not imply any criticism of war and trade patterns as presented in earlier chapters nor does it suggest that there should be significant changes in the period 1810 to 1850. Lewis not only concluded that significant changes occurred in warfare but also that some of the more significant social and political changes were delayed, that old patterns continued until at least 1810 and were then completely changed by 1850.⁸⁶

As it is Lewis and those who support his conclusions who have postulated important changes in warfare and Indian political organization due to the introduction of the horse

and gun, it is important to display their reasoning more fully. Lewis began by suggesting that the lesson to be learned from the Thompson-Saukamappee record of Snake-Cree-Blackfoot battles in the early eighteenth century was that

Before the horse and gun a simple difference in numbers might well decide the outcome of the battle. Large war parties were therefore essential. This necessitated band co-operation and made war a tribal affair...With the introduction of the horse and gun all this changed. As we have seen [in Saukamappee's account] the few Cree and Assiniboine were now considered 'the strength of the battle'. It is this new importance of equipment as over against men that distinguished the 'primitive' Blackfoot warfare from that of a later period.⁸⁷

Though Jenness did not stress Thompson's evidence he did note, in reference to horses, that they "converted primitive parties of foot-hunters, isolated, timid, and circumscribed in their movements, into organized bands of daring warriors..."⁸⁸

Yet these changes were not related exclusively to battlefield strategy. The emergence of smaller, more deadly war parties had, according to Lewis, the effect of reducing the importance of the war chief, who disappeared entirely by the mid-nineteenth century and of causing the introduction of the temporary war leader.⁸⁹ This decline of central and permanent leadership in war represented the abandonment of war as a tribal undertaking. A direct result of this was that

Far from acting as a unifying factor, the introduction of the horse and gun represented a disruptive one. Later warfare carried on by small raiding parties became essentially a means of personal aggrandisement in which tribal interests gave way to those of the individual.⁹⁰

This view that the horse and gun put an end to tribal

war and gave rise to individual status raids as the sole military form is not found only in Lewis. Mishkin characterized it as the game theory of warfare.

The exaggerated interest of warriors in the performance of war deeds in order to acquire rank and the standardized character of these deeds, have led some interpreters of Plains culture to see warfare as a game in which players manoeuver for social recognition. According to this widely accepted view, the pattern of Plains warfare is an elaborately developed activity separated from the normal current of Plains life.⁹¹

Lewis' comments together with the game theory indicate a total decentralization of the tribe,^{*} and the disappearance of the large organized campaign directed toward tribal trade or military goals. This would suggest that in the period 1810 to 1850 an almost senseless situation persisted in which "War and confusion reigned everywhere while the buffalo diminished apace."⁹² The co-ordinated patterns of war and trade which had existed prior to 1810 could neither be reconstructed nor replaced with new ones. The individual and the impromptu status raid had replaced the tribal powers of organizing and implementing long term policies. All this of course is laid at the doorstep of the horse and gun.

Saukamappee's tradition, the foundation of Lewis' position, discloses an additional and important factor which Lewis overlooked and which bears directly on the effects of the horse and gun. Saukamappee informed Thompson that he would not have taken part in the second Blackfoot-Cree-

^{*}Lewis is correct in his idea of decentralization of the Blackfoot confederacy between 1810 and 1850. This event and its causes will be discussed in the next section.

Snake battle had it not been that "my wife's relations frequently intimated, that her father's medicine bag would be honored by the scalp of a Snake Indian."⁹³ At the conclusion of the battle the War Chief told the Cree and Assiniboine warriors "That if anyone had the right to the scalp of an enemy as a war trophy it ought to be us, who with our guns had gained the victory."⁹⁴ This evidence quite clearly demonstrates that the individual status quest existed at least within the organized tribal campaign prior to the introduction of the horse and gun. It is quite possible then that individual status quests, and even the small raiding party, were not created by the horse and gun, although these two factors may have embellished and brought to maturity those cultural traits.

By Lewis' own admission and the evidence from primary sources displayed in previous chapters, the two forms of warfare were co-existent in Blackfoot society until at least 1810. Having received both horses and guns by the mid-eighteenth century, it would seem that a new factor is needed to explain the total Blackfoot change, suggested by Lewis, from tribal war to individual adventure and the appearance of the accompanying political ramifications after 1810.

If the dissolution of Blackfoot tribal war is accepted as an historical occurrence then certainly the new factor, acting in association with the horse and gun, was the end of territorial war. By 1810 the Blackfoot had pushed the Snake,

Salish and Kootenay off the Canadian plains. The tribal cohesiveness that the implementation of that policy demanded was ended with the successful completion of the task. If Blackfoot tribal war ended it did so primarily because there was no longer a need for it, rather than because new equipment (the horse and gun) produced changes in Blackfoot society which made tribal war impossible.

Without entering upon a critical analysis of the process described by Lewis it is important to see how much of it can be applied to the Plains Cree. To what extent did the Plains Cree, especially after the era of territorial wars, maintain the ability to formulate and execute tribal policy directed towards coordinated trade and military goals?

The chronologies of Cree-Blackfoot and Cree-Mandan relations have made it quite evident that on the adoption of the plains the horse became an important factor in Cree trade and political life. The role of the gun as a weapon and trade item was also shown to have been significant. Mandelbaum, viewing all material objects utilized by the Cree, designated the horse as "the standard of prestige value by means of which the status criteria of wealth, valor and liberality could be realized."⁹⁵ There can be no doubt that the desire to acquire horses became a primary focus of the small raiding party which was designed specifically to function as an individual status quest mechanism. Fine-day's war record is simply a listing of successive status raids in which in each case horse-stealing and brave deeds were the main

components and an increase in status the main derivative. Throughout the period 1810 to 1850 there is abundant primary evidence that the launching of small war parties was a regular event in the Cree year. But there is no evidence that this caused an abandonment of tribal war.

Large scale campaigns organized by the Cree and directed towards tribal interests continued throughout the period. D.W. Harmon devoted a number of pages in his journal to describing the organization of a Cree campaign in 1816. He noted how they had prepared all winter, collecting "bows, arrows, guns and ammunition."⁹⁶ Then as the spring approached the chiefs

send men with presents of tobacco, to the whole tribe... inviting them to meet at a specified place early in the spring, in general council. The war pipe is then lighted up, and those who are willing to become soldiers in the campaign, smoke the pipe. None are compelled to enlist but, to excite in the young men a martial spirit and to stimulate them to become his followers the war chief makes a long harangue, in which he relates the injuries, that they have received from their enemies.⁹⁷

In 1848 Paul Kane witnessed Kee-a kee-ka-sa-coo-way, head chief of all the Crees, "travelling through all their camps to induce them to take up the tomahawk and follow him on a war expedition."⁹⁸ Mandelbaum was informed by Fine-day that large campaigns were discontinued when he was a boy which was about 1860.⁹⁹ John Macoun, a western historian who experienced those times, commented that

War parties and horse stealing parties were altogether different, and any traveller could tell the one from another at a glance. When a war party is organized the braves are mounted on their best horses, they are daubed all over with paint and depart with much ceremony.

It is not so with horse stealers.¹⁰⁰

Edwin Denig adds to this mounting collection of evidence his observation that "There have been times when numerous assemblies took place including most of the nation, particularly when large war expeditions were about to be formed."¹⁰¹

This evidence of the persistence of large scale campaigns indicates that the Cree military system did not become simply a status game played by aggressive individuals, that though this might have been the motivation of warriors in both the small and large war parties it should not be suggested as the sole cause of war. Tribal interests, be they traditional positions of opposition to given tribes, collective revenge sorties, or the prosecution of campaigns under military alliances supporting trade systems, did not disappear. If anything the era of the horse and gun brought consolidation not decentralization to the Cree nation.

Diamond Jenness in a passage comparing woods Indian social organization with that of the plains Indians noted that "Amalgamation was most frequent on the prairies, where driving the buffalo herds into pounds required the cooperation of many people."¹⁰² Denig ignored the influence of the buffalo hunt, emphasizing the role of the horse and gun instead. "These [Cree] like other nations, by the introduction of the horse and firearms, were enabled to hunt and locate in large bodies capable of defense and subsistence."¹⁰³

The process which Lewis has described for the Blackfoot does not apply to the Plains Cree. The introduction of the

horse and gun, the changes that they caused in war procedures did not bring about, at least in Cree society, the loosening of political bonds to the extent that individual action completely supplanted tribal and band undertakings. The Cree seemed to have maintained a balanced military pattern which included, without serious contradiction, both types of campaign. The power of the tribe to organize militarily to support tribal trade goals remained. Certainly the horse changed infantry into cavalry and pitched battles into swift and deadly charges by large mounted units, but tribal motives for war persisted.

For the Cree, then, the period 1810 to 1850 was one of cultural, and possibly even numerical, expansion. Through their contacts with other plains tribes they acquired many of the standard characteristics of the plains Indian. Yet they developed a strain of plains culture which was peculiar to themselves and reflected their historic experience. In the preface to his description of the Plains Cree, Denig noted that "The nation now about to be considered, ...impose upon us a somewhat lengthy description from the fact that in many things they do not resemble the others."¹⁰⁴ Part of this difference was based on the lingering cultural memories of their woodland origin. David I. Bushnell in his work, Burials of the Algonquian, Siouan and Caddean Tribes West of the Mississippi, found that the Cree, although they had abandoned the woodlands, maintained the burial practices exhibited by their woods-dwelling relatives the Ojibwa.¹⁰⁵

The horse and buffalo, the two most important animals in plains life and ceremonial objects in some plains societies, did not become special objects in the religion or the ceremonialism of the Plains Cree. The dog though, both a woods and plains companion, was an important ceremonial object, functioning as an accessory to rather than an object of ritualism."¹⁰⁶

Perhaps one of the most interesting and significant examples of Cree cultural variance based on their historic eastern experience is found in Cree art forms, specifically beadwork patterns. The classic plains pattern consisted of "a few rectangular and triangular designs for the composition of complex figures."¹⁰⁷ But the Cree invariably "work in curvilinear lines"¹⁰⁸ or more precisely in elaborate floral designs which M. Barbeau considered as having been derived from "rococco figures and ornaments of Francis I period as transported to Canada."¹⁰⁹ As both a personal and tribal expression of heritage the floral motif is an appropriate emblem to signify the unique experience of the Plains Cree, the influence of that experience, and the function of unique events in Cree history. As a tribal expression it should tell the researcher that only through the reconstruction of the unique chronology of the Cree past as opposed to the more traditional forms of analysis based on the supposedly inescapable influences of the environment and prominent material objects, will the basis be laid for the production of satisfactory explanations of Cree history.

2. The Military Chronology 1810 - 1850

The horse, and the need of the plains Indian to acquire an adequate and secure supply of them, was seen to be central in the explanation of the breakdown of both the Cree-Mandan and the Cree-Blackfoot alliances. In the case of both these political upheavals circumstances worked against the Cree. The choice by the Blackfoot of a Gros Ventre alliance which secured access to a horse market, and the particular pricing system in the Mandan trade empire, together with the appearance of a south-eastern supply of European goods, cut the Cree and their Assiniboine ally off from contact with any supply of horses.

The manner in which the Cree and Assiniboine reacted to this development on the north-western plains was identical to their behaviour towards their former ally, the Mandan. The Assiniboine, as they had in the south-east, led the way. In 1807, the year after the Blackfoot-Cree alliance came to a violent end, James Bird, master at Edmonton House, reviewed the situation among the tribes on the Canadian plains laying particular stress on the behaviour of the Assiniboine.

These Stone Indians are the most useless and the most troublesome Tribe that inhabit these parts, they kill no Furs, and Horse Stealing is their trade, their Depredations never cease but are extended to all the Tribes of Natives as well as the Traders from Red River to this place. 110

The Cree followed closely the example of the Assiniboine. By 1810 the raids, both in frequency and in success, had reached a climax. In that year the Hudson's Bay Company re-

ported losing 650 horses in the Fort Edmonton area alone.¹¹¹ To this would have to be added the Blackfoot and North West Company losses in order to arrive at some kind of estimate of the great magnitude of this concerted program of stealing.

The Hudson's Bay Company, though stung by their losses, remained passive. The same cannot be said for all Canadian traders nor the Blackfoot. In March, 1810, Alexander Henry decided to make an attempt to get back his horses. He called together the Blackfoot and held a council offering them "four Kegs of Indian Rum, and one roll of Tobacco if they would go for them in a peaceable manner but they did not relish the proposal."¹¹² Though it is not surprising that his scheme was rejected, Henry subsequently learned that

they had a plan of their own which had been in agitation for sometime past of being fully revenged upon the Horse Thieves, for their daily thefts that as soon as the Snow was gone off the ground, and all their young returned from War the Indians below would feel the weight of their anger.¹¹³

In preparation for this event the Blackfoot "had some time ago sent Tobacco about to invite all the other different Tribes of the Slave Indians to assemble upon the Red Deer River."¹¹⁴

The slowness of the Blackfoot to take serious large-scale action against the Cree and Assiniboine horse thieves until 1810 had been caused by the fact that since 1806 they had been forced to fight a two-front war. That very spring Old Painted Feather led a victorious campaign against the Flathead, returning with "a good many scalps and about 200

horses."¹¹⁵ Much of their attention during the period 1806-1810 had been directed towards trying to enforce a blockade against the Snake, Kootenay, and Salish, and failing that in making a last ditch attempt to eradicate those tribes before they became sufficiently well armed to pose an offensive threat.

Now that the Blackfoot turned to throw their full weight against the Cree and Assiniboine, the Cree shifted their opposition to the Blackfoot into high gear. In April, 1810, Cree messengers circulated among the allies' camps designating the Eagle Hills as the general rendezvous for a summer war campaign.¹¹⁶ Though this was both an expected and traditional move the Cree had already taken decisive action which represented a significant break with the past. Somehow the Cree managed to penetrate Blackfoot territory and began to "take supplies of Arms and Ammunition"¹¹⁷ to the Flathead adding to the effectiveness of Flathead campaigns. In 1810 an armed body of Flathead killed sixteen Piegans causing the Blackfoot to tell the traders they would be on guard against Cree traders in the future,¹¹⁸ and adding another motive, besides the punishment of horse thieves, to the Blackfoot campaign of 1810. This Cree-Flathead contact was tentative and precarious for it could only be maintained through Blackfoot territory, but it does represent the first effort by the Cree to reconstruct a new trade and military system through which they could receive horses.

There was yet another variable to be added to this

emerging military pattern on the north-western plains. It was introduced not by the Cree but through the actions of the Blackfoot and their ally the Fall Indians.

Blackfoot attempts to keep the Indians on the west side of the Rockies, isolated from the traders, and now the Cree, led directly to this new factor, the opening of a third front. In 1810 the Blood and Fall Indians fell upon Manuel Lisa's establishment at the junction of the Yellowstone and Big Horn Rivers in Crow country. They murdered the Americans and brought away "a considerable booty consisting of Goods of various kinds."¹¹⁹ The Crow were infuriated by this attack upon their traders. The following year they met the Fall Indians on the battlefield.

During the heat of the Battle the Crow Mountain Indians called out to them, that in future, they would save them the trouble of coming to war upon them. That the ensuing Summer they would in Company with the Americans go to war upon them and find them out upon the Banks of the Saskatchewan.¹²⁰

This announcement sent shock waves of panic through the Fall tribe. They realized that there was no safety in retreat for the Crow were numerous and aggressive and that the Cree and Assiniboine would celebrate their return by attacking them. The Fall leaders, as they had some fifteen years earlier in the face of a similar situation, decided on a dramatic course. They planned to

come into our Forts [North West Company] under a pretence of Trade, and taking us unawares and unprepared to defend ourselves. To murder and plunder us of our Property, which having done they would find themselves in a state to defend themselves against their enemies.¹²¹

Fortunately for the traders and the Blackfoot, the Fall Indians confided in the Piegan who were horrified. The Piegan warned that an attack on the traders would drive them away forever leaving everyone, except their enemies, without the means of defence. The Fall may have remained unconvinced by this logic for the Piegans finally told them that if "they [the Fall] fought with us [the traders] they must fight with them also."¹²² This put an end to the Fall threat to the Blackfoot source of arms, but it also weakened the Fall-Blackfoot alliance. It was clear that the Fall Indians were not a strong military ally. Within five years the Blood Indians displayed open hostility to the Fall Indians, preventing them from coming to the Saskatchewan posts to trade for arms.¹²³

By 1811 this new, three-sided military pattern, though as yet largely uncoordinated, was clearly evident. In that year the Crow fulfilled their promise made to the Fall Indians by marching north in search of them.¹²⁴ The Cree also launched an attack in that year and when they withdrew Cry Bear, a famous Blackfoot warrior, lay among the dead.¹²⁵ Even the Flathead met with success in a battle with the Blackfoot in 1812.¹²⁶

Though this new pattern had appeared and was functioning with a great degree of military success, the Cree were not deriving substantial trade benefits from it. The flow of horses from the Flathead, if that is what the Cree were receiving in trade for their guns and ammunition, must have been limited and uncertain owing to Blackfoot control of the

trade route. There was no contact between the Cree and the horse-rich Crow except through the Mandan villages. Their common antipathy to the Blackfoot had not yet drawn them into any kind of an alliance. In the face of continued Blackfoot hostilities, the Cree could do little else but continue their campaigns against the Blackfoot and their horse herds. Blow for inconsequential blow the Blackfoot-Cree warfare continued until 1815 when a shift in Cree fortunes became evident.

Early in the summer of 1815 a band of Assiniboine warriors fell upon twenty tents of Sarcee and Blood Indians, killing four men and one woman.¹²⁷ This was followed in November by an ambush and the destruction of eight tents of Blood Indians by a combined force of Cree and Assiniboine.¹²⁸ In October the Cree withdrew to the junction of the South and North Branches of the Saskatchewan and prepared to defend themselves against an expected large scale Blackfoot reprisal which never materialized.¹²⁹ The winter passed quietly and in the spring the Cree, possibly taking heart from the fact that in the previous year they had struck at will without retaliation, formed a large war party and set off for Blackfoot country.¹³⁰ James Bird, then resident at Carlton House, recorded the success of this venture. "The Southward Indians after destroying last summer a great number of Women and children of the blood Indians fled to this place to conceal themselves, and they pass the winter in this neighbourhood."¹³¹

Within two years the Cree, with the aid of their Assini-

boine ally, had gained the upper hand. The traders seemed to realize this and feared that, "if the Southward [Cree] and Stone Indians stand their ground, that no white Men will be permitted to go higher up this River next fall than this place [Carlton House]." ¹³² Though a blockade may have increased their advantage, the Cree did not adopt that policy. The events of the summer of 1818 may have made them regret that omission. In two separate battles the Cree lost three warriors and had twenty-three wounded while fourteen Assiniboine lost their lives compared with minor Blackfoot casualties. ¹³³ That winter the Assiniboine Chief, The One That Holds the Knife, toured the Cree and Assiniboine encampments rallying martial spirits and recruiting warriors for a campaign in the summer of 1819. ¹³⁴ Then, in the first week of March, without warning or explanation:

the Stone [then near Carlton House] received the Slave Indians tobacco, smoked for the purpose of making a Peace with the above Tribe and also put one piece of their Tobacco in a fine painted Bladder to be sent to the Slave Indians by the first opportunity for them to smoke which signifies making Peace. ¹³⁵

On the 19th of April a contingent of Cree and Assiniboine peace-makers from Carlton House approached Edmonton House, "a few blackfeet arrived and peace was made." ¹³⁶

Why, after thirteen years of continual hostilities (1806 - 1819) had the Blackfoot suddenly sued for peace? It is true that throughout this period they had not only suffered repeated blows of the Cree and Assiniboine but had been compelled to fend off the attacks of the Crow, Flathead, Snake

and Kootenay. This move for peace may represent an attempt by the Blackfoot to relieve themselves of some of the pressures of this three-front war. There is some evidence that the Blackfoot both wanted and badly needed a breathing spell to recruit their strength.

There is no doubt that these years of war had drained Blackfoot resources. James Bird, noted after the summer of warfare in 1816, that "They [the plains Indians] appear to be doing very little in the fur way and our men can scarcely get sufficient Meat for their present subsistence."¹³⁷ With the summers spent in war and the winters passed in council and general war preparations trading, and therefore the acquisition of valuable European war materials, declined. The first step the Blackfoot took towards recruitment was to order the traders to recall their buffalo hunters from Blackfoot lands. The traders realized that "the motive that Blackfoot have in view for driving away our hunters is, that by in so doing, we must apply to them for Buffalo meat, for which they can make their own price."¹³⁸ If this ploy was successful they could rebuild their fire-power at an even faster rate than normal. The second step towards recruitment was the Blackfoot-Cree-Assiniboine peace.

For the Blackfoot the peace of 1819 came not a moment too soon. Bad Head in his winter count for 1819-1820 recorded simply "Saskina/pastsimisin" (coughing epidemic).¹³⁹ The traders at Edmonton preserved the tragic details. "It appears from the reports of the Muddy River [Piegan] Indians

the Fall Indians and the Blood Indians that the Meazles have carried of one third of their Countrymen."¹⁴⁰

The Cree, perhaps fearing infection, stayed clear of Blackfoot camps. Yet it is obvious that something was stirring in Cree councils. In June, 1820, "a large camp of 200 Tents assembled to prepare for war but they did not go!"¹⁴¹ Some Cree did join a successful Assiniboine war party against the Fall Indians in July.¹⁴² Then on August, 17, 1820

15 Crees arrived [at Carlton House] they went away some time ago to steal horses from the Slave Indians they fell in with 10 Tents of Blackfeet Indians but being unable to get their Horses away they fired on the Tents in the night time and (say) they Killed five.¹⁴³

Again it was horses that appeared to be causing the strain in this new Blackfoot-Cree accord. There is no evidence of any horse-trading between these two tribes during the term of peace. The Cree and Assiniboine battle against the Fall Indians would seem to indicate that the Cree-Blackfoot agreement excluded a Cree reconciliation with the Fall Indians and therefore did not include Cree entrance into the Fall-Arapaho horse market.

The troubles of the summer and autumn of 1820 were the preliminaries for the final failure of this new Cree-Blackfoot accord. Between August 6 and August 24, 1821, five hundred Cree and Assiniboine warriors "fought a Battle on the South Branch River with the Slave Indians and ...they killed 25 of them and on their side 7 Crees and 8 Stone Indians were killed."¹⁴⁴ The Blackfoot, in the spring of 1822, countered

with an unexpected move. They invited the Cree to join a joint campaign against the tribes on the west side of the mountains. The Cree, undoubtedly fired by the thought of acquiring many horses as booty, agreed to go.¹⁴⁵ But on February 26, 1823, some Sarcee arrived at Edmonton House, "they inform us that 2 Crees Indians have been killed by some of the Plains or Slave tribe who are supposed to be Blackfoot - and which very likely will be the cause of war being declared between these 2 Tribes."¹⁴⁶

The Assiniboine, who had not been sent the invitation, spent their summer of 1822 in warfare. Donald MacKenzie, then leading the Hudson's Bay Company's Bow River Expedition, received a Blackfoot delegation on November 3, 1822. He was told that the Crow Indians had destroyed five Piegan families on the Belly River and that a

War party of the Stone Inds. came on the Tents of them also while the men were Hunting and massacred the whole, the party Hunting heard their firing and immediately proceeded to their Tents and found all their Families Butchered, they instantly pursued them and Killed from Eighteen to Nineteen of them, open war being now declared by all the Slave tribes against the Stone Indians.¹⁴⁷

The Assiniboine were quick to mend their ways. In the spring of 1823 they made peace with the Blackfoot¹⁴⁸ proper and on March 30, 1824 the Fall Indians reported that the Assiniboine "were negotiating about a treaty of peace with the plains tribes at that time and which has been concluded between both parties with the usual ceremonies of smoking."¹⁴⁹ In the autumn of 1823 the Cree after a series of skirmishes with the Blackfoot tried to follow the Assiniboine lead but

"after a number of fruitless Speeches on both sides, they parted no better friends than they met."¹⁵⁰ Another Cree attempt to make peace with the Blackfoot in April, 1824, ended in failure.¹⁵¹

Throughout the duration of the Cree-Assiniboine-Blackfoot peace the Blackfoot had been continually under attack from the Crow. It was not until the winter of 1824 that the Blackfoot could celebrate a decisive victory over them.¹⁵² With the Cree-Blackfoot peace ended, the Blackfoot took matters firmly in hand. In the summer of 1825 a large company of Blackfoot warriors attacked the Beaver Hills Cree and destroyed "16 tents of them."¹⁵³ Then in October they they took another step which undoubtedly strengthened their efforts against the Cree. Representatives of the Blood, Piegan, Fall, and Blackfoot proper crossed the mountains and made peace with the Flatheads, Nez Perces and Kootenay.¹⁵⁴ By December they had returned and sent off a contingent in an unsuccessful search for the Cree.¹⁵⁵ All during the summer of 1826 battles raged between these two adversaries. Then, in September, the Blackfoot scored a significant victory. Chief Factor Rowand of Edmonton House reported on a

Battle between our Blackfoot and their allies the Fall Indians, Blood Indians and Surcees with the Crees of the lower country?..on the South Branch River and ten Crees with seven Blackfeet remained upon the field the Crees deserting their Lodges exposed them to the ransack of their enemies who pillaged and carried off everything that could be obtained about eighty Leather Tents became a sacrifice to their fury.¹⁵⁶

Though their forces were in disarray the Cree had not

lost their ability to launch a diplomatic counter offensive. In the month following their loss to the Blackfoot, they disclosed that they had made a "treaty with the Crow Indians...and that they had visited the American traders and were well received by them."¹⁵⁷ It was also announced that they had arranged to meet the Kootenay in council during the summer of 1827.¹⁵⁸ By these moves the Cree not only placed themselves in direct contact with two suppliers of horses but they began to weld together an alliance that could carry on a coordinated campaign against the Blackfoot. It was a determined effort to check the Blackfoot's ability to consolidate their forces on one or two of the three fronts by gaining the neutrality of their third adversary through a peace treaty.

These diplomatic moves began to pay immediate dividends. Early in February the Blackfoot retreated northward to Edmonton House. A few weeks previously

they were attacked by a Party of Crow Mountain Indians when they received a very unpleasant bon jour that put an end to fifteen Blackfoot amongst whom there were three or four men of distinction in particular [name not given] who lost his life in the Battle and they say the Crow Indians followed them to no very great distance from this Establishment our poor Indians lost upward of one hundred and sixty five horses in this affray.¹⁵⁹

In the month that followed the Fall Indians "were again attacked by the Stone Indians"¹⁶⁰ and news reached Edmonton that "fourteen Piegan of those gone to hunt beaver across the Mountains were Killed by a War Party of Crow Mountain Indians."¹⁶¹ The success of Cree diplomacy and the ensuing

campaigns can best be appreciated by a comment on the state of the Blackfoot Confederacy by Chief Factor John Rowand, "on every side these poor devils are beset with enemies." 162

Rowand in considering the particular case of the Blood, determined that

it appears that these Indians imagine the source of their welfare and tranquility arises in immediately revenging attacks made upon them without considering of measures that would enable them to execute such objects effectually - their frequent failure in attempts of this kind only aggravates the cause, and is adding fuel to the fire they would extinguish. 163

Had he been in their place he would "adopt some domestic plan to furnish themselves with horses and to establish a peace with their neighbours the Stone Indians which would aggrandize their forces to check the enmity of the Crow Mountain Indians." 164

There is no proof that Rowand's thoughts reached the Blood Council, but on March 25, 1827

The Bulls back fat [a Blood Chief] invited the few Crees now here to smoke a pipe with him and his companions as a token of peace which he solicits on behalf of himself and his country men and has left Tobacco and a little weed and a piece of Buffalo back fat tied together and to be sent to the Stone Indians and Crees of Carlton. 165

A few days later the Blood announced their determination "to carry on war with the Crow Mountain Indians." 166

It was not only a desire to be revenged upon the Crow that drove the Blood to approach the Cree and Assiniboine with a view to peace. An important second motive was that their stock of horses had been drastically reduced. Rowand noted that "to deprive these people of their horses is to take

from them their only riches which so many recent plunders have completely effect[ed]."¹⁶⁷ By 1827 the Blood were "indifferent wheter they sell their horses at extravagant prices or not the number amongst them having so much diminished which enhances their sale nearly 80 Per cent."¹⁶⁸ The fact that the Blackfoot had that winter retreated to Edmonton House before the advancing Crow could have meant that the route to the southern horse market was blocked. The only course left to them was to reopen that route by force. The Blood hoped that the Cree and Assiniboine would help them.

The Blood overture of peace to the Cree and Assiniboine did not represent the wishes of the whole Confederacy. Just two weeks after that event a band of Blackfoot warriors left Edmonton House on an unsuccessful war expedition against the Cree.¹⁶⁹ Yet, on July 20, 1827 "...early in the morning four Beaver hill Crees arrive and are come for the purpose of making peace with the Slave Tribes."¹⁷⁰ Unfortunately what the outcome of this visit was, whether or not these Cree peacemakers ever met with any of the tribes of the Confederacy is not known. Only the Cree readiness to discuss peace is evident. The available sources reveal nothing of Cree movements from that point until April 7, 1828. On that day the Cree peacemakers once again arrived at Edmonton and met the Blackfoot, Blood and Sarcee under the leadership of The Feather, and "the conciliatory Pipe went round to the satisfaction of everyone."¹⁷¹ An important part of the settlement

was the Cree promise "not to steal their horses & have in consideration given them three."¹⁷² Three horses was a small gift but if it represented Blackfoot willingness to trade their horses to the Cree they were probably well pleased. Finally on August 3, 1828 the Cree made peace with the Blood who had originally taken the first step towards a reconciliation.¹⁷³

When the news of these treaties reached Carlton House, Chief Factor Pruden recorded in the post journal the mixed reactions of the Cree. Some were highly pleased but there was "another party of Crees which still remain doubtful whether they will consent to Peace and these are the strongest Party."¹⁷⁴ The seeds of disruption seem to have been laid at the very outset of this peace.

Unlike the Cree, the Assiniboine made no reply at all to Bull back fat's proposal of March 25, 1827. In the autumn of 1827 they attacked an encampment of Blackfoot and Piegan families "and the latter were all destroyed excepting one man and nine women who were out gathering Plains Turnips and escaped the carnage."¹⁷⁵ Shortly after that victory they discovered another Blackfoot camp but "upon the eve of fighting Peace was made very gratifying to both Parties and they parted friends."¹⁷⁶ Before their departure, however, the Assiniboine agreed to attend a further meeting that spring near Edmonton House so that a more formal and inclusive peace could be made. Early in April, "forty eight Stone Indians arrived at the Black-foot camp and made peace with them and...half of them returned

with some Blackfoot for the Stone Indian Camp."¹⁷⁷ Throughout the summer and fall these exchanges of hospitality continued.

Though the Blackfoot had managed to end the warfare on their eastern flank, they failed to complete the second part of the Blood strategy - enlisting Cree and Assiniboine aid against the Crow. It is difficult to believe that the Cree would have abandoned such a horse-rich ally. Trouble caused by a shortage of horses in the confederacy (at least among the Blood) was beginning to become serious. H. Munro, a Hudson's Bay Company employee noted in August 1828 that "a great commotion exists amongst the Plains tribes continually quarrelling and stealing each others horses."¹⁷⁸ Peace with the Cree and Assiniboine could not solve their problem and the Crow showed no signs of abandoning their offensive posture. If anything, they increased the tempo of their attacks. In February, 1828, the Crow ambushed a Fall encampment and killed twenty-five of their warriors.¹⁷⁹ They followed this with a successful attack on the Blood and Blackfoot.¹⁸⁰ On October 8, 1828, a report reached Edmonton that "the Piegans have had a battle with the Crow Indians as well as the Snakes and that eighteen Americans have been killed."¹⁸¹ Even an attempt to ease their position by making peace with the Snake who had an adequate supply of horses failed when the peace party led by Crow Big Foot was ambushed and totally annihilated.¹⁸² The Crow continued to hinder Blackfoot attempts to reach the west

side of the Rockies. On January 21, 1829, H. Fisher was informed by James Bird that "the Crows Indians are Playing the duce with our poor Piegans they been Killing nine of them and stole 200 Horses from them."¹⁸³ This series of Blackfoot defeats was brightened by only one success; they surprised and killed seven Crow near the Missouri.¹⁸⁴

Since their settlement in 1828 Cree-Blackfoot relations had remained placid. Then in August, 1830, Louis Le Blanc, a Company trader, learned that a battle had "taken place between the Lower country Crees & the Blackfeet somewhere about the Eagle Creek [possibly the small river that drains the Eagle Hills]."¹⁸⁵ These "Lower country Crees" were either those around Carlton House who on hearing the news of the Blood-Cree accord of 1828 could not make up their minds whether to agree to it or not, or Cree from as far east as the Assiniboine River. With reference to this latter group D. MacKenzie recorded in the Fort Pelly journal on September 4, 1830, that "It appears they have had a dust with the Blackfeets where 13 of the latter was Killed and two of the former and some of their Horses taken."¹⁸⁶

Both the Cree around Edmonton and the Blackfoot were alarmed and surprised by the news of this battle. The Cree formed large camps for their defence but they undertook no preparations for a campaign against the Blackfoot.¹⁸⁷ The winter of 1830-31 went by without incident. When the spring came to the plains the Blackfoot-Cree peace appeared even stronger. Patrick Small then in charge of Fort Pitt recorded the

arrival of "eight Blackfoot & their families...they have been tented with the Crees the whole winter."¹⁸⁸ Joint council meetings may also have been conducted for Small was informed by the Cree that "a great many of the Beaver hill Crees are going to join the Blackfeet for the purpose of going to war with them on the Crow mountain Indians."¹⁸⁹ Though it would seem that the Cree had finally been drawn into an attack on their Crow ally, the scheme was destroyed by a series of disputes over horses between the Beaver Hills Cree and the Sarcees which continued throughout the summer and fall of 1831.¹⁹⁰ By the spring of 1832 the Cree had turned on the Blackfoot proper "and Killed four young men...owing to these Blackfeet having stole their horses."¹⁹¹ Many of the Cree headed south where in September they were found camping with the Crow Indians.¹⁹² In October a large Cree war party marched north in search of the Blackfoot.¹⁹³ This Cree-Crow reunion would seem to have guaranteed that the Blackfoot would find no peace along their southern flank, however, another development won for them a secure and valuable military power base. This development was the radical change in the temper of Blackfoot-American relations.

Since the appearance of American traders on the Missouri in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Blackfoot had waged a relentless campaign against them. Their first major success was the destruction of Manuel Lisa's post in 1810. A Blood Indian massacre of nineteen traders in 1823 became a minor international incident. American newspapers

charged that "they [the Blood] were incited to these barbarous acts by the Traders of the Hudson's Bay Company."¹⁹⁴ There is no proof that the Honourable Company was the guiding force behind Blackfoot aggression on the Missouri, nevertheless it is certain that whatever disabilities the Americans had to suffer under were viewed as beneficial to Company interests.

Company interests, in this instance, demanded that the Americans be excluded from the beaver-rich Snake Country on the west side of the mountains which the Company in turn worked by an annual trapping expedition and by encouraging the Piegans to cross the mountains in search of furs. In an effort to strengthen their hold over the Snake Country the Company supported James Bird, Jimmy Jock, and Hugh Munro who like courier de bois lived with the various Piegan bands and, according to George Simpson, by

their bravery and activity have obtained great influence with the Piegan tribes, this influence Mr. Rowand turns to profitable account and by good management these thoughtless young men may be exceedingly useful to us not only in the way of Trade but as a means of offence or defence should the posture of affairs with America render it necessary hereafter to avail ourselves of the Services of the plainsIndian tribes.¹⁹⁵

Those Americans who managed to elude the Blackfoot blockers and reached the Snake Country found that they could not compete effectively against the British traders who brought low priced goods in by sea. The Americans long and unsecured supply line stretched back to St. Louis and inflated the cost of their trading goods. With these factors working for them,

the Company was, by 1827, almost the sole beneficiary of that resource area, a position they enjoyed until 1831.

Quite unexpectedly in the spring of 1831, Blood and Blackfoot warriors crossed the Rockies and attacked the Company's Snake Country Expedition.¹⁹⁶ Subsequently the Piegan sent messengers to K. Mackenzie of the American Fur Company. The resultant meeting saw the signing of a treaty and a promise by Mackenzie to establish a post near their lands in the following year.*¹⁹⁷

The suddenness of these events is somewhat deceiving for they were actually the product of a process that had begun sometime earlier. By 1830 the supply of beaver both in the Snake Country and around the sources of the Missouri had all but disappeared owing to the severity of British-American competition and Blackfoot trapping. The Americans, unable to compete on the west side of the mountains, withdrew eastward, consolidated their position on the Missouri, and raised the price paid for buffalo robes. In the case of buffalo robes the Americans had an advantage over the Hudson's Bay Company as their transport route, the Missouri, gave direct access to both the resource area and their supply base, St. Louis, and it allowed bulk shipping by steamboat. Added to these benefits was a ready home market for that commodity. In 1832 the American Fur Company on the Missouri traded 25,000 beaver skins and 40,000 to 50,000 buffalo robes.¹⁹⁸ It was

*This post, initially called Fort Piegan, was rechristened Fort MacKenzie and was located near the junction of the Marias and Missouri Rivers.

estimated that between 1833 and 1843 they traded 70,000 robes each year while the Hudson's Bay Company received 10,000 robes annually.* 199

This new price for buffalo, the noticeable lack of beaver, and possibly the fact that the Americans were now firmly established in the role of friendly traders rather than trader-trappers bent on an invasion of the Blackfoot homeland, undoubtedly brought about the reversal of the traditional Blackfoot opinions of the Americans. The effect of this on the Hudson's Bay Company's control of the resources of the area, and of the Blackfoot was dramatic. Simpson, who had been so confident in 1827 of Rowand's ability to influence the Blackfoot, now reported that they "have of late been drawn to the lands of the Missouri by the high opposition prices offered in that quarter."²⁰¹ The Company's Saskatchewan district, where the Blackfoot had once traded without exception, showed a loss of £2,000 in the season 1833-34.²⁰² In the same year Simpson ordered that Rocky Mountain House, the post maintained especially for the Piegan, be closed.²⁰³ Middle Bull, a chief of the Piegan, reflected this new situation in a speech to the trader in charge of Fort Mackenzie in 1833.

*This estimate for the Hudson's Bay Company is not very exact. Between 1832 and 1843 their return in buffalo was

1832	1008	1838	2920
1833	1642	1839	7096
1834	2557	1840	4234
1835	3004	1841	6414
1836	4626	1842	11787
1837	1554	1843	14526 ²⁰⁰

He hoped that the Whites would renounce their bad opinion of them, and not believe that they took their skins and furs to the English for it was evidently their (the Piegan's) own interest to be on good terms with the fort situated in their neighbourhood, the English settlements being at too great a distance; that if some of their people talked of carrying their beaver skins to the trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company it was merely to obtain goods on lower terms.²⁰⁴

For the plains tribes the upward revaluation of buffalo robes improved their ability to supply themselves with European goods. They were placed in a new relationship with the traders, supplying a valued fur as well as provisions. The increased inward flow of European goods, especially firearms, had an immediate military consequence. For the Blackfoot the Missouri, once only a land of Crow war parties and wandering American trappers, was now, with the construction of American posts, a military arsenal. They quickly took advantage of this fact and the military events which followed show the consequent rise of a new Blackfoot power.

John Work, the Hudson's Bay Company trader, and a band of Flathead were attacked by a war party of 300 Blackfoot. "Nearly the whole of whom were armed with guns and well supplied with ammunition as they were enabled to keep up a brisk and continued fire upon us for upwards of five hours."²⁰⁵ Work also discovered that the Blackfoot were assembling in great numbers around Fort Piegan, supplying themselves with firearms and making plans for a massive campaign against the Flathead to be undertaken that spring.²⁰⁶ With the completion of their preparations the Blackfoot struck a combined Flathead-Nez Perce camp on May 19, 1821. Three days later Warren Ferris

arrived at the battlefield and recorded the events that had taken place.

They lost twelve men killed, and several severely if not mortally wounded besides upward of a thousand head of horses which were taken by the Blackfoot. The attack lasted two days, and was so obstinate at the commencement, that six or eight of the Flathead tents were cut up by their enemies and several of the latter killed in camp. There were about a thousand of the enemy; who came for the purpose of annihilating the Flatheads, root and branch. Previous to the commencement of the fray they told the Flatheads that McKenzie had supplied them with guns by the hundred,* and ammunition proportionate, and they now came with the intention of fighting, until 'they should get their stomachs full'.²⁰⁸

Three months after this Flathead-Blackfoot battle the Blackfoot, again 1,000 strong, fell upon a small party of Kootenay who miraculously escaped with but few casualties.²⁰⁹

The Blackfoot supplemented the real military power they derived from their new connection with the Americans with a deliberate propaganda campaign. They prefaced their spring on the Flathead-Nez Perce by revealing to them the fact that Mackenzie had supplied them with their guns. In 1835 they delivered a pictograph to the Flathead. A Flathead chief interpreted its interesting contents for Warren Ferris.

Flatt-heads, take notice that peace, amity and commerce have at length been established in good faith, between the whites and our tribe; that for our benefit they have erected a fort at the three forks of the Missouri supplied with everything necessary that our comfort and safety require; that we have assembled in great numbers at the fort where a brisk trade has been opened, and

*This represents a significant increase in the number of guns acquired by the Blackfoot in one year. In previous years the number of guns entering the plains through posts in the Saskatchewan district had been much lower. For the years 1825 to 1831 inclusive the number of guns traded per year was 60, 90, 70, 120, 290, 250, and 60.²⁰⁷ It should be remembered that these went to the Cree and Assiniboine as well as the Blackfoot.

that we shall henceforth remain on the headwaters of the Missouri. You will please observe that we scalped thirty of you last spring, and that we intend to serve the rest of you in the same manner. If, therefore, you consult your own interests and safety, you will not venture on our hunting grounds, but keep out of our vicinity.²¹⁰

The events of 1831 to 1835 clearly demonstrate the commanding position that the Blackfoot were able to build from their new and profitable supply base on the Missouri. The Cree and Assiniboine, however, also benefited from the higher prices for buffalo robes for by 1832 they began to take their hunts to the American Fur Company's Fort Union at the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri.²¹¹ In the fall of 1833 they struck hard at the root of the new Blackfoot strength. Prince Maximilian, then visiting Fort McKenzie, preserved in his journal the events of the early morning of August 28.

When we entered the court-yard of the fort, all our people were in motion, and some were firing from the roofs. On ascending it, we saw the whole prairie covered with Indians on foot and on horseback, who were firing at the fort, and on the hills were several detached bodies. About eighteen or twenty Blackfoot tents, pitched near the fort, the inmates of which had been singing and drinking the whole night, and had fallen into a deep sleep towards morning, had been surprised by 600 Assiniboins and Crees.²¹²

One month later The Man that Holds the Knife, the Assiniboine chief who had led the Cree-Assiniboine warriors on that morning, reported to W. Todd at Fort Pelly that "he had been at war against the Blackfeet during Summer and had a severe Battle with them at the American Establishment...the Blackfoot saved themselves by getting into the Fort."²¹³

On the northern plains the political situation had be-

come chaotic since the breakdown of the Blackfoot-Cree peace in the spring of 1832. Yet the root cause of this was not so much the renewed Cree-Blackfoot hostilities, although that was part of it, as it was the serious disagreements which had become manifest within the Blackfoot confederacy. Since H. Munro's report in 1828 of fighting and horse stealing among the confederate tribes,²¹⁴ the instability of the confederacy had grown. Actions of the Husons's Bay Company directed at winning back the Piegan and their beaver hunts, for the Piegan were still able to find beaver, contributed to this instability. In August, 1832, Chief Factor Rowand made a special trip southward in an effort to induce the Piegan to return to the Company's fold.²¹⁵ W. Hariotte, a Company trader, warned Rowand in November, 1833, that "the Blackfeet and all the Slave Tribes are getting worse instead of better they hunt less and expect more [undoubtedly a result of American prices] and are all jealous of the attention paid by us to the Piegans."²¹⁶ In December he forecast that "War will soon breakout throughout the Plain [Blackfoot] Tribes owing to the envious minds of their Chiefs."²¹⁷ Nine days later, on December 17, Hariotte's assessment was proven correct as "a party of Blood Indians arrived [at the Bow River post] and bring intelligence of a battle having taken place between the Piegan & Blood Indians...in which the Piegan camps were totally routed."²¹⁸ Additional information received at Edmonton House disclosed that the Blood "had destroyed 3 camps of the latter [Piegan] and made slaves of their women

and children."²¹⁹

The Cree were far from being unconcerned spectators to these events. Yet with the confederacy drifting towards a break up, the Cree exhibited an unusual degree of disorganization leading to an inability to capitalize on this opportunity. There was an obvious difference in the position of the Cree around Edmonton and those living near Carlton House. The latter, obviously in an aggressive mood, opened the summer of 1833 by launching a successful campaign with the aid of the Assiniboine against the Blood.²²⁰ This was followed by the vicious murder of five Piegan young men who had been invited to visit a Cree camp headed by Purapisk-at-tun,²²¹ and a separate unsuccessful attack on the Piegan.²²²

The Cree of Fort Edmonton seemed determined to recapture the peace which had been lost in 1832. On July 16, 1833, Black Bear, a Cree chief

arrived [at Edmonton House] from the Blood Indian camp near the mouth of the Red Deer River where he was treated with every kindness and was assured that nothing could be more congruent to their [Blood's] feelings than having a peace established between the two nations - for which purpose they requested him to bring his tribe to their Camp but on his way he [met] with some of the war party who had killed the Piegans and so found all his hopes of effecting a peace were blasted.²²³

In disgust and anger Black Bear returned to the Blood camp. An attempt by Old Squirrel, another Edmonton area peacemaker, to reach a settlement with the Piegan clearly highlights the retrograde effect of this element of dualism of Cree policy. At the beginning of the Cree-Piegan meeting held at Fort Edmonton on the 29th of July

Old Squirrel got up and in the Piegan language declared that it was the Crees inhabiting the lower part of the country who always began war and that nothing could be more desirable to those of the Upper Country of which he was one than a long continuance of peace.²²⁴

A Blackfoot chief who was present and was chosen to speak for the Piegan rose and replied that

the Indians of the Peigan, Blackfoot, Sarcees and Blood Indian tribes were always desirous to treat a Cree well but that they were such ungrateful dogs that kindness instead of making them better made them only made them worse they were constantly making peace and at the same time doing everything in their power to break it.²²⁵

At the end of this imperious and insulting address the Cree, realizing the hopelessness of their aims, left.

This harsh rebuff and the news of the Blood-Piegan battle in December, 1833, put even the Edmonton Cree in an aggressive frame of mind. John Rowand observed, in his journal entry of January 18, 1834, that these Cree

do not speak as if they were much inclined to make peace with the Slave Indians they want first to get horses and then there may be something done in that way but then in their turn the Slave Tribes will be hard to deal with as they think more of their horses than they do of their wives and children though this does not say much in their favor and will not always hold good yet it is not less true.²²⁶

Once again it was horses and the Cree need to find a supplier that formed the basis of their policy.

In the midst of this Black Bear, who had remained with the Blood since the disheartening failure of his peace mission, returned on February 19, 1834, to Edmonton "in search of the Crees to engage them to make war on the Piegans with the Blood Indians."²²⁷ Unfortunately Black Bear's work and

this Cree opportunity to drive a wedge deeply into the confederacy were lost by the action of the lower country Cree. Just two weeks after Black Bear had passed Edmonton for the Cree camps "The 4 Blood Indians who accompanied The Little Cree [Black Bear]...arrived with very long faces. A war party of Stone & Beaver Hill Cree Indians amounting to about 100 attacked a Camp amounting to 30 Tents of Blood Indians on the Banks of the Red Deer River."²²⁸ Chief Factor Pruden at Carlton House learned that the war party "had killed a good many and brought off 96 Horses and 6 Women."²²⁹ These Cree returned to Fort Pitt and spent the rest of the spring celebrating their supposed victory.²³⁰ By the autumn the Blood recovered from the shock of their loss and met the Cree in an indecisive battle.²³¹

With all hope of peace shattered the policy of the Beaver Hill and Carlton Crees became the policy for the whole tribe. The Man That Holds the Knife headed the extensive preparations in the south-east which were completed in the spring of 1835. W. Todd witnessed these events and recorded the contents of a conversation he had with that respected leader who

now proceeds to Join the Crees and Assiniboines of the Saskatchewan When the Whole are assembled to go to War on the Blackfoot every year we hear of War among the Indians but have never seen Such Preparations as they are now Making he will I think be at the head of not less than between 3 & 4000 men.²³²

Even the Cree in the Edmonton area made ready.²³³ It was they who opened the campaign when their war party "about 300

in number had a battle with 22 Circies Indians Killed 10 of them of the Cree party 3 were killed & 10 wounded."²³⁴

What happened to the combined Cree-Assiniboine war party, whether it met with victory, was distracted from its original intent, or was even defeated is not known. The sources are either lost or those consulted are mute on this point. When evidence again becomes available it relates to the summer and fall of 1836. At the end of June seventeen mounted Blood appeared at Carlton House. The trader, more familiar with the Cree tongue, had considerable difficulty communicating with them "all that I could understand from them was that they had made Peace with the Crees and Assiniboine some where opposite to Fort Pitt."²³⁵ Within a short space of time the trader received "11 Cree young men carrying the Tobacco for Peace from the Slave Indians to the Crees that reside to the Southward of this Place."²³⁶ Again the sources fall silent until April 15, 1837, when a report was circulated among the Cree of Carlton House that "55 Stone Indians...had a skirmish with the Slave Indians."²³⁷ The trader in charge of Carlton House concluded that "this Affair will create War again among the Plains Tribes."²³⁸

Though this last Assiniboine victory undoubtedly stirred within the Blackfoot a desire for revenge, the satisfaction of that urge had to be postponed, for in that year the small pox fell upon them. The contagion was particularly vicious in its attack on the Blackfoot and Assiniboine. One anonymous observer was profoundly affected by the suffering and death

around him and was moved to write an eloquent and touching description of the passage of Apixosin - the small pox.

Language, however forcible, can convey but a faint idea of the scene of desolation which the country now presents. In whatever direction you turn, nothing but sad wrecks of mortality meet the eye; lodges standing on every hill, but not a streak of smoke rising from them. Not a sound can be heard to break the awful stillness, save the ominous croak of ravens, and the mournful howl of wolves fattening on the human carcasses that lie strewn around. It seems as if the very genius of desolation had stalked through the prairies, and wreaked his vengeance on everything bearing the shape of humanity.²³⁹

The silence of which he spoke continued throughout 1838; time was needed to reassemble the scattered bands, to mourn, and to recruit their supplies. Once recovered the Blackfoot, in the spring of 1839, struck a weak blow at both the Assiniboine and Cree.²⁴⁰

In the south along the Missouri, the situation, with reference to the Cree-Crow alliance, had once again changed. In the summer of 1838 the Assiniboine, led by The Man That Holds the Knife, attacked the Minnetaree, the historic ally of the Crow, but were beaten back by the villagers with the loss of 64 warriors.²⁴¹ The Cree, somewhat less aggressive, or realizing the folly of attacking a village, confined themselves to ambushing small parties of Crow hunters or traders.²⁴² The root of these Cree-Crow hostilities was, according to Denig, the Assiniboine insistence on sending out horse-raiders against the large Crow herds. The result of these battles and ambushes was that the Crow not only lost horses but were cut off from the supply of corn they were accustomed

to receive from their Minnetaree relatives. In 1844 the Crow, having nothing to gain from continued warfare, for it had become obvious that the Cree-Assiniboine could not be cleared from their route to the villages, sued for peace and were accepted.²⁴³ B. Mishkin contends that the settlement was negotiated by the Assiniboine and that the Crow were granted permission to hunt in Assiniboine territory and safe passage to the Minnetaree villages in exchange for a yearly payment of horses.²⁴⁴ In that same year a peace was made between the Assiniboine and Minnetaree. Both these settlements were seen by Denig as having been laid on solid foundations. "Both this peace and the one with the Crows will be likely to continue as there appears to be no advantage in any party to break them."²⁴⁵

Blackfoot fortunes in this southern area had declined since their initial supremacy in the 1830's. In 1840 a Blackfoot war party of eight hundred ambushed sixty Flathead and, although greatly superior in numbers, when the adversaries withdrew from the field eighty Blackfoot lay dead, amongst them was but one Flathead warrior.²⁴⁶ The Crow scored a signal victory over them in 1841 killing Walking Crow, a respected Blood chief.²⁴⁷ The year 1845 brought fresh disasters; Father de Smet described it as a "memorable epoch in the sad annals of the Blackfoot nation."²⁴⁸ He then disclosed the basis of his assessment.

In two skirmishes with the Flat Heads...they lost 21 warriors. The Crees have carried off a great number

of their horses, and twenty seven scalps. The Crows have struck them a mortal blow - fifty families, the entire band of Little Robe, were lately massacred, and 160 women and children have been led into captivity.²⁴⁹

Turning to the Cree, de Smet who probably received his information from H ariotte, noted that "in the preceding year [1844] they carried off more than 600 [Blackfoot] horses."²⁵⁰

Reacting to this successful aggression on all three fronts the Blackfoot once again turned to isolate the Cree-Assiniboine. In 1846 they made peace with the Flathead but when they approached the Crow with the same purpose in mind they were rejected.²⁵¹ This Blackfoot-Flathead peace continued unbroken until 1848 when a dispute over horses disrupted it.²⁵²

In 1848* the Cree witnessed an invasion of their territory by a combined force of Piegan, Blackfoot proper, Blood, Sarcee, and even some Fall Indians. They marched as far east as Carlton House, fell upon a Cree encampment, and withdrew with a significant victory.²⁵³ There is no record that the Cree countered this blow until 1850 when a Cree war party attacked the Blackfoot near Sweetgrass Hills killing among others Eagle Calf, a famous Blackfoot warrior.²⁵⁴

By 1850 there was no significant change in the design or functioning of the military pattern which had begun in 1810. There is still in evidence that loose alliance of tribes, Cree-Assiniboine, Crow, and Flathead, which surrounded the Blackfoot on three fronts and was bound together as much by

*Again the sources are silent on Blackfoot and Cree war plans and military activity in 1847.

a common antipathy to the confederacy based on individual historic reasons, as by any formal agreements. Only the Cree-Assiniboine-Crow alliance seems to have grown stronger and more formal after 1844 as it was then based not only on common opposition to the Blackfoot but on mutually beneficial trade terms. The Cree throughout the period manifested a strong resolve and, except for a brief span in the 1830's, a single-mindedness of purpose and method. Yet there was an important change taking place, the introduction of a new factor, a new motive for war to be added to the search to acquire horses and a horse-trading partner. This new element was the growing scarcity of buffalo. Father de Smet was one of the first to record this development and to forecast its effects in terms of future military activity. He wrote, in the fall of 1846,

The plains where the buffalo graze are becoming more and more a desert, and at every season's hunt the different Indian tribes find themselves closer together. It is probable that the plains of the Yellowstone and Missouri and as far as the forks of the Saskatchewan ...will be within the next dozen years the last retreat of the buffalo. The Crees, Assiniboins, the Snakes, the Bannocks, the Crows, the Blackfeet, the Aricaras and the Sioux are drawing near to these plains each year; whenever they meet, it is war to the death. These meetings must naturally become more frequent, and it is to be feared that the last of the buffalo may be disputed in a last fight between the unfortunate remnants of these unhappy tribes.²⁵⁵

The days of the buffalo wars were upon the plains Indian; the final military epoch of the Plains Cree had begun.

Chapter V - The Buffalo Wars 1850 - 1870

My Grandfather, we are glad to see you, and happy that you are not come in a shameful manner, for you have brought plenty of your young men with you. Be not angry with us; we are obliged to destroy you to make ourselves live.

Address of welcome to buffalo entering the pound.

During the winter of 1871 the Reverend John McDougall, missionary to the Cree, met and spoke to an old Cree man travelling through the snows toward the Hand Hills.

Where are you going was my next question? Travelling for life replied the old man. Where will you find it? I again asked and back came the answer, Look yonder my grandchild; do you see a blue range of hills far away...There is life said the old man. There are my people, there are buffalo; these are life to me.¹

His people, his band, and the buffalo were life to this Cree and indeed to all plains tribesmen. The band supported the individual, applauding his deeds as a young warrior and hunter, providing a forum for his participation in social rites, and easing the poverty and burdens of his old age. The animals associated with these plains people, the dog, the horse, and the buffalo, occupied "the same relation to Prairie Indians that domesticated animals and the productions of the farm and forest bear to civilized races."² Though the horse was an important tool for war and hunting, it was the buffalo upon which plains society existed. It provided skins for shelter and clothing, bones and sinews for tools, and food - meat to be roasted, boiled, or dried for pemmican, "the provision of Providence for aboriginal man and the pioneer of every class"³ F.G. Roe in his special study of the buffalo aptly concluded,

"If any animal was ever designed by the hand of nature for the express purpose of supplying at one stroke nearly all the wants of an entire race, surely the buffalo was intended for the Indian."⁴

Yet over and above the provision of subsistence and materials for tools, the great herds allowed the maintenance of an Indian life-style largely untainted by European influences. D. Thompson optimistically portrayed the land of the buffalo as

an immense track of country which the Supreme Being, the Lord of the whole Earth, has given to the Deer, and other wild animals, and to the Red Man forever, here, as his fathers of many centuries past have done, he may roam, free as the wind, but this wandering life, and the poverty of the country, prevents the labors of the Missionary to teach the sacred truths of Christianity.⁵

J. McDougall certainly agreed with at least the last part of this assessment, writing "You cannot really civilize a hunter or a fisherman until you wean him from these modes of making a livelihood."⁶ Likewise Bishop Taché admitted in 1868 that although some plains Indians had been converted "nearly all of them, Christian or Infidel, retain their original social customs."⁷ While the buffalo were numerous, and the herds everywhere in evidence, plains life was secure and bountiful but as the herds diminished life became hard, and finally the type of wandering existence the Plains Cree had enjoyed for so many generations became impossible.

This tragic, though not unexpected development was the result of a combination of factors all of which can be traced

back to the fur trade.* Edwin Denig believed with good reason that the "tendency of every fur trade is towards extinction of the game and diminishing the value of the country for hunting."⁹ Though the Hudson's Bay Company tried to design and enforce a program of fur conservation it did so only with limited success and only with reference to stationary woodland animals such as the beaver, otter, and muskrat. The

buffalo, wolves, foxes and other migratory quadrupeds could not be thus protected. Neither do we see any way of preventing their ultimate extinction except in the abandonment of the trade entirely, and reducing the natives to their primitive state of arms and ammunition.¹⁰

This failure to conserve large woodland animals caused additional pressure to be placed on the plains herds. H.Y. Hind noted that by 1860 many wood Indians had abandoned their former habitat and "now keep horses and enjoy the advantage of making the prairie and forest tributary to their wants."¹¹

The decline in the size of the herds was accelerated when the American traders raised the price of buffalo robes thereby making the buffalo a source of fur profit as well as food. The Hudson's Bay Company in an effort to counteract this competition also adjusted prices and their buffalo robe return figures indicate the resultant increase in the rate of exploitation.

*Only J. McDougall, in accordance with his religious view of the world, saw the workings of external forces as the basic cause. The independence of the plains Indian, based as it was on the buffalo herds, limited the progress of conversion and "therefore in the fullness of time the Great Father in the interests of his children, wiped them [the buffalo] from the face of the earth."⁸

Selected Hudson's Bay Company Buffalo Return Figures 1821-1860

1821	200	1839	7,000
1823	1,500	1842	12,500
1829	2,000	1849	7,500
1831	1,000	1852	12,500
1834	3,500	1856	15,500
1836	5,000	1860	3,500

These figures, of course, do not represent the total yearly volume of robes, traded for the Missouri traders received by far the largest share of the hunts.*

It is made abundantly clear by the evidence of traders, missionaries, and travellers that in the period 1850 to 1870 the buffalo, due to the above noted factors, was disappearing. Yet there is an important element in this process which, for a fuller understanding of Plains Cree political and military positions in this period, must be made equally clear. The growing scarcity of buffalo was a regional phenomenon, that is, it was occurring at unequal rates in different parts of the plains, drawing the tribes into closer proximity, forcing them to encroach upon the hunting grounds of others in pursuit of the buffalo, or, in the view of the old Cree man, in pursuit of life.

As early as 1846 Father de Smet observed that "at every seasons hunt the different Indian tribes find themselves closer together."¹⁴ The Cree and Assiniboine were approaching Blackfoot territory from the east which de Smet had forecast would be "the last retreat of the buffalo."¹⁵ By 1862

*Oscar Lewis estimated that the American Fur Company received 70,000 robes annually between 1830-1843, and at Fort Benton, [Blackfoot country] alone traded 20,000 robes a year between 1843 and 1870.¹³

the buffalo was gone from the Red River country;¹⁶ each year the Metis hunter had had to travel farther west to find them.¹⁷ The westward extension of Hudson's Bay Company posts from the Red River highlights the wave of scarcity moving from east to west. In 1830 Brandon House had been succeeded by Fort Ellice, built at the western end of the Qu'Appelle River, as the main pemmican gathering post. By 1852 it was realized that Fort Ellice itself was too far east and two western outposts had to be built on the plains to bring the Company closer to the herds.¹⁸ G.M. Dawson, the Assistant Director of the Geological Survey of Canada, writing with reference to the second half of the 1870's, noted the fulfillment of de Smet's prophecy. He disclosed that the last buffalo "are congregated in a limited area near the foot of the Rocky Mountains in the British territories [Blackfoot country] and [are] surrounded by a cordon of hungry savages."¹⁹

Throughout the period occasional pockets of herds were discovered which broke the general pattern of east to west scarcity. In 18~~6~~⁵7 J. Palliser found many buffalo around the elbow of the South Branch of the Saskatchewan which he "accounted for by its being the neutral ground of the Crees, Assiniboine and Blackfeet none of these tribes are in the habit of resorting to its neighborhood except in war parties."²⁰ Yet the general pattern prevailed and for the Cree and their Assiniboine ally it meant that their country, more quickly than that of the Blackfoot, no longer "trembled to their tread and roar."²¹

With buffalo as with horses, therefore, the Cree suffered a scarcity while their Blackfoot adversaries enjoyed the benefits of their geographic position. Unfortunately for the Cree this problem could not be solved by a mixture of military and trade policies, for in truth not one tribesman, though his existence depended upon them, could claim ownership of a single buffalo. Though warfare, more particularly the invasion of Blackfoot territory, would seem to have been the sole course open to the Cree, ideas for a solution which certainly included war, were somewhat more varied.

One of the most significant changes in Cree politics in this period 1850 to 1870 was a new attitude toward the white man, the Metis, and the fur trade in general. Since initial contact with the white man in the late seventeenth century the Cree had displayed pride in their Indianness and an independence in their political and military behaviour. It should not be assumed for a moment that Cree inclusion in the white trade system or the obvious technological superiority of some white tools placed the white man on a higher level in the eyes of the Cree or of any other plains tribe. Alexander Henry cautioned his fellow traders never "to be so vain as to believe an Indian in his heart has really any esteem for him, or suppose him his equal in wisdom or sense."²² Though Henry's assessment may seem somewhat cynical, the missionary John West observed similarly that "In their fancied superior knowledge they are often heard to remark when conversing with the European, "You are almost as clever as an Indian."²³ As a

general rule the Indian saw himself as the norm and the more a white man differed from the Indian, or from the trader who had been forced by the conditions of the west to adopt many Indian habits, the more ridiculous he appeared. Hence the scientific members of the Fleming Expedition browsing among the flora and fauna were the source of much amusement. The pinnacle of hilarity was reached when it was discovered that Fleming himself was collecting buffalo skulls, bones without marrow. This was "too much for even Indian gravity, and off he [the guide] would go into fits of laughing at the folly of white men."²⁴

This confidence in their intellectual superiority was matched by a stubborn independence in political affairs. The Cree did not become unthinking pawns in the white man's race for trade and empire. Time and time again the western Cree made it clear that they would consult their own interests first. Such had been the case in their alliance with La Verendrye, in the middlemen role of the Saskatchewan Cree traders, and in the Cree-Mandan alliance against the Sioux. Possibly the most striking example of this fact was their answer to the efforts of Canadian traders to draw them into the dispute between the two contending fur companies over the Selkirk settlement. James Bird reported that some young Cree and Assiniboine warriors had been tempted by the thoughts of easy plunder but that the Chief's advice had prevailed.

You had better not interfere in the quarrels of the white people. You cannot know what party will ultimately pre-

vail - Should you assist the weaker - You will not fail to be long punished for such interference by the conquerors, whereas tho' the party you assist should prevail, the Services You may have rendered it will soon be forgotten so that you may injure but cannot permanently benefit yourselves.²⁵

Despite Cree ethnocentricity and political independence their relations with the whites had been characterized by friendliness and cooperation. Their interests had been, with only minor exceptions, synonymous with those of the traders, and their differences were never serious enough to provoke extended or violent hostilities. In the period 1850 to 1870, though, the depletion of the buffalo herds brought the interests of the Cree and the traders into direct opposition and a new phase in Cree-white relations, marked by hostility though not by violence on the part of the Cree, began. The Cree now saw the traders and the trade system in a new light and they were displeased by their effects on Cree hunting grounds. This displeasure was initially directed against the Metis whose encroachments upon Cree territory were viewed "with feelings of jealousy and enmity."²⁶ Small groups of Metis were attacked and in an effort to frustrate organized Metis hunts the Cree "set fire to the prairie about the time the brulés set out for the hunt, and by this means drove the game beyond their reach."²⁷

The Cree, from sole concentration upon the threat posed by the Metis trespassers, expanded their opposition to all who were not themselves Cree or allied to them. Preliminary statements against the white traders had the strong flavour

of a calculated trade policy but within a short period they began to take on the unsettling tone of desperation. By 1857 the Ojibwa, who were closely associated with the Cree, had enunciated the traditional fears of a native population in the face of white advance - dispossession. "The white man comes, looks at their [Indians'] flowers, their trees, and their rivers; others soon follow, and they [the Indian] have nowhere a home."²⁸ In 1859 H.Y. Hind was invited to an important Cree council convened by Mis-tich-oos (Short-stick) in the Qu'Appelle River area.

All the speakers objected strongly to the half breeds hunting buffalo during the winter in the Plains country. They had no objection to trade with them or with the white people, but they insisted that all strangers should purchase dried meat or pemmican, and not hunt for themselves.²⁹

To what appears to be purely a desire to secure the remaining trade to themselves the council added "strong objections against the Hudson's Bay Company encroaching upon the prairies [obviously a reference to the Fort Ellice outposts] and driving away the buffalo."³⁰ Some of the chiefs took this conclusion to its logical end and, as Hind commented, "although they acknowledged the value of firearms, they thought they were better off in olden times when they had only bows and spears and wild animals were numerous."³¹ This council had decided that the white man and his tools were to blame for the decrease in the size of the herds and the gradual disappearance of buffalo from their lands. This was a radical departure from the previous partnership of interests. The traders were in effect

placed in the same category with anyone who threatened them, a category which already included the Metis and the Blackfoot. In a separate council it was decided that "they would not permit either white man or half-breeds to hunt in their country or travel through it, except for the purpose of trading for their dried meat, pemmican, skins, and robes."³²

This council decision was not rigorously enforced. The Cree limited their actions to threats and lectures such as was delivered to Viscount Milton and Dr. Cheadle when they were found hunting buffalo on the plains by a Cree chief in 1862.

In your land you are, I know, great chiefs. You have abundance of blankets, tea and salt, tobacco and rum. You have splendid guns, and powder, and shot as much as you can desire. But there is one thing that you lack - you have no buffalo, and you come here to seek them. I am a great chief also. But the Great Spirit has not dealt with us alike. You he has endowed with various riches, while to me he has given the buffalo alone. Why should you visit this country to destroy the only good thing I possess, simply for your own pleasure?³³

As well as being portrayed by the Cree as the prime cause of the decrease in the size of the herds, the Hudson's Bay Company was charged with the responsibility for the subsequent Cree invasion of Blackfoot territory in search of buffalo and for the deaths of Cree warriors slain in the battles which were the natural result of this trespass. Some Cree felt that their charity to the white man was a virtue they could no longer afford. Pee-wa-Kay-win-in, a Cree, told Isaac Cowie, a Company trader, that

...in order to feed the few white people in the world, whom the Indians vastly exceeded in numbers, the allied

tribes, Crow, Shoshone, and others, and their relations to the white man were that of a people who were the victims of the white man's greed and ambition, and who were being driven to the westward by the white man's arms.

They received the concept of the white man and were certainly incredulous, for they did not understand the political and military realities of the situation. The council's proclamation of exclusive hunting rights, the passionate orations of the type delivered to Hilton and Canada, and other expressions of frustration and anger did not obscure from the Crow the fact that they could not afford to break their trade relationship with the white man. It is noteworthy that in the speeches quoted above the Crow stressed their interest in continuing the trade. Certainly their demand for exclusive hunting privileges represented a real desire and a concern for the resource but they would not have fought for that principle while the Blackfoot were still a force to be reckoned with. They realized that if they were to hunt buffalo at all it would become increasingly necessary for them to visit Blackfoot territory and this they could do only as an armed force. Though they undoubtedly liked the white man less, and seemed to comprehend the destructive force of the fur trade, they needed European weapons as much, if not more, than ever. The fact that they did not attempt to put a violent end to the trade in an effort to preserve the buffalo indicates not only a wise respect of white power and their own need of white weapons but possibly even that they knew their wealth was spent, that the process of destruction was too far advanced

halted, and that the only sensible course of action was to squeeze what benefits they could out of the remaining buffalo before the whole trade system collapsed. Though this final statement might seem to be an exaggeration of the degree of Cree understanding of the buffalo, and hence trade crisis, there is evidence that at least some Cree were making adjustments geared to providing an alternate means of subsistence, or at least a supplement to buffalo, which in itself suggests a clear understanding of the trend of events on the plains.

This adjustment was the beginning of Plains Cree agriculture. In 1857 H.Y. Hind met a Metis, John Spence, who was then growing corn in the Assiniboine River area, and "One of his neighbors, a Cree Indian had cultivated it for four years and had not met with any failure."³⁵ Edwin Denig, whose writings relate to the years prior to 1855, provided evidence of a much more substantial, and in its details significant, agricultural development. He noted that the Pis cha Kaw a chis, or Magpies, band of the Cree

count 30 or 40 lodges, are stationed at Tinder Mountain, live in log cabins covered with earth, till the soil to some extent and raise considerable quantities of maize and potatoes, hunt buffalo in the winter season and get their supplies from the English posts of the interior.³⁶

Three aspects of this description are worthy of further note. The building of mud-covered, log huts is not only reminiscent of the Mandan-Minnetaree villages but also denotes permanence, a serious intent on the part of the inhabitants to maintain their agricultural endeavours. The fact that Denig lists them as a band means that the villagers had organized themselves

from scattered groups of individuals like John Spence's neighbour, or that their involvement in agriculture had been a band decision. Either way it does suggest an additional degree of purpose and permanence. Possibly of greatest significance is the fact that there is no evidence that this was not an independent Cree development, no evidence that it was induced by missionaries. Only one minister, a Mr. Pratt (Church of England), who J. Palliser described as a pure Cree, made positive reference to Cree agriculture and in so doing he signified his ignorance of the existence of the Magpie village but possibly furnished the motive for it. He told Palliser in 1857 that "the Crees are beginning to apprehend scarcity of buffalo, and many are most anxious to try agriculture."³⁷ The fact that the Magpie villagers farmed in the summer and hunted buffalo in the winter would indicate an attempt to supplement an increasingly scarce supply of meat.

Though this agricultural village displays the adaptability of the Plains Cree, it is equally evident that it involved only a minority. The remainder of the nation continued to place their hopes in the more traditional policy of war. And so the battles continued uninterrupted by the scarcity of buffalo which along with the need to acquire horses, and revenge became a motive for war. The pattern of the loose three-sided alliance failed and the Blackfoot confederacy continued to show signs of instability.

At the beginning of this final military era it is important to note the boundary between the Cree and Blackfoot nations.

Taking the elbow of the South Branch of the Saskatchewan as neutral ground the Cree commanded the Canadian plains east of a line drawn from the junction of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers to the elbow and east of a second line drawn from Edmonton (also a neutral area) to the elbow. This placed most of the Battle River and the North Branch of the Saskatchewan under Cree control. In their quest for the buffalo the Cree were forced to violate their borders and to attempt to extend this territory westward. Efforts to expand their territory were begun by the Cree and were centered for most of the period, on the northwestern plains, the country of the North Saskatchewan.

In the northwestern section of Cree territory the summer of 1854* resembled so many of the summers that had preceded it, since the last Cree-Blackfoot peace had ended in 1836. "War parties of both sides [Cree and Blackfoot] kept the war path after scalps horses and women, and many a fierce engagement resulted."³⁸ During the winter the Cree kept their forces in the field, ranging far to the west of Edmonton in the northern part of Piegan territory.³⁹ After a quiet summer (1855) the Piegan responded to these attacks not with a war party but by sending peace makers to Edmonton. In September "a compact was agreed upon between them and the Crees, when each went through the usual ceremony of smoking the Calumet."⁴⁰ In the month that followed disturbing news of successful Cree horse-stealing raids against the Piegan reached Edmonton.⁴¹ These

*Unfortunately there is no evidence available for the years 1850-1854.

raids, unlike those of previous years, did not indicate the prosecution of a separate policy on the part of the Cree of the lower country. They too were disturbed by this threat to the peace and in the spring of 1856

The Indian Chieftain Paw pas kies from Fort Pitt accompanied by Camenacoos left here [Edmonton] this evening with a long string of Tobacco presents on a embassy to the Blackfoot Nation whom they expect to meet at the Rocky Mountain House and conciliate by the above tokens.⁴²

This attempt at conciliation must have been successful in expanding the peace to include all the tribes of the confederacy; at any rate, there are no reports of Cree-Blackfoot battles until 1857.

In the spring of 1857 a band of Cree and Blackfoot were camped together near the elbow of the South Branch of the Saskatchewan. A Cree horse-stealing party of twenty-five young men silently entered the encampment and made off with a large number of Blackfoot horses. The Blackfoot pursued them and "At sunset they fell upon the young Crees, surrounded them in the coulee in which the men encamped, and killed 17 of them on the spot with balls and arrows and by rolling large stones on them."⁴³ In June the Cree struck the Sarcee in the Edmonton area and in September a party of Blood Indians reported that the Cree and Assiniboine had "stole all the mountain Piegan horses."⁴⁴ The Piegans themselves disclosed that they had slain thirty Cree and that the Cree in general were constantly stealing their horses.⁴⁵ Yet in the same month, September, "Some Crees came from Mas Kie pe toon's [Broken Arm's] Camps they tell different stories about the peace"⁴⁶

and these Cree subsequently "left for their camp with tobacco from the Blackfoot, Blood Indians and Circies"⁴⁷ indicating that at least those three members of the confederacy favoured a reconciliation. On October 27, Broken Arm and the Little Chief made a triumphal visit to Edmonton accompanied by "the usual ceremony giving Horses and firing salutes."⁴⁸ The ensuing peace lasted, undisturbed, until 1860.

Along the Missouri a new element was added to the military pattern which relieved the Blackfoot of much of the discomfort of Crow-Assiniboine attacks and allowed them to apply more force in the north against the Cree. From as early as the first half of the seventeenth century the Sioux had been expanding westward and throughout the eighteenth century they plagued the Cree, Assiniboine, Mandan, and Minnetaree on the south-eastern plains. By the 1840's a state of war existed between them and the Metis who pursued their hunts along the Red River.⁴⁹ In March 1863 the Minnesota Sioux, having spread terror among the American settlers, came to Fort Garry one thousand strong and caused "the greatest terror and excitement."⁵⁰ As foreboding as their appearance and reputation made them, they remained peaceful, settling down in the Portage la Prairie region. Further to the southwest an American trader, Henry Boller, observed that in the late 1850's the country around the Yellowstone had been completely overrun by strong war parties of Sioux bound against the Crow and Assiniboine..."⁵¹ Charles Larpenteur, another American, noted in 1863 the Sioux had advanced to the Milk River in Blackfoot

country.⁵² With the Crow and Assiniboine distracted by the Sioux, the Cree could not expect unreserved aid from their two allies. Throughout the period there is a noticeable absence of Crow thrusts against the Blackfoot.

The agreement which had been reached at Edmonton in the late fall of 1857 was shattered in October, 1860, by the unrevenged Cree murder of a Blackfoot Chief.⁵³ For the Blackfoot this event, though in itself a bitter occurrence, was only the final spark which ignited a growing discontent. Chief Factor Christie, in charge of the Saskatchewan district, reported that

the Blackfeet have been unbearable for the last 3 Years or more, always getting worse & worse destroying our crops, stealing our Horses & doing everything they could to annoy us, in order to provoke a quarrel so as to Kill us. They now [March 1861] threaten openly to Kill whites, Half-breeds or Crees where-ever they find them and to burn Edmonton Fort.⁵⁴

The source of their annoyance, unless it was the growing scarcity of buffalo, is unknown. The Cree by their actions did nothing to calm Blackfoot anger. With the peace broken, the lower country Cree dispatched a war party which fell upon a Blackfoot camp, stole their horses and killed eighteen.⁵⁵ In the spring of 1862, in full view of Fort Edmonton, they repeated their success.⁵⁶ During the summer and fall of 1862 hostilities continued unabated.

Throughout 1862 Broken Arm, the Cree peace maker, worked diligently to change Cree policy, to prepare the way for a new and stable peace with the Blackfoot. By December 7, 1862, he was ready to meet the Blackfoot. In the company of Chief

Sweet Grass and fifty Cree escorts, Broken Arm arrived that day at Edmonton and "brought a Letter from Lower Crees (Ft. Pitt and Carlton) all asking for peace to be made with Blackfoot and wished to see the Blackfoot here."⁵⁷ Chief Factor Christie "agreed to send Tobacco and a messenger to see the Blackfeet to ascertain their feelings on the matter."⁵⁸ He also demanded that the Cree first give up their arms, a request the Cree complied with on the conditions that "the Blackfeet will make peace and do the same."⁵⁹ The Cree had not long to wait; on December 9 a mixed party of Blood, Blackfoot, Piegans, and Sarcee answered the Cree summons.⁶⁰ Christie continued as mid-wife of the peace. After the speeches "and promises to keep the peace"⁶¹ he

delivered a paper to each Chief confirming the Peace made, signed with the name of all the Chiefs present - Tobacco exchanged & sent to Slave Indian camp and Cree Camps, all parties saluted each other with a Kiss, shook hands and the Crees went off quietly at once - long may it last.⁶²

The extent of Company involvement in Broken Arm's efforts before the Edmonton meeting is not clear. In the spring of 1862 Christie had reported on conditions at Edmonton and concluded "It will always be a trouble at this Fort in keeping peace between them as the Crees want payment to keep the peace."⁶³ The Cree realized that peace was in the Company's interest as it would allow unhampered access to the Blackfoot and the Cree were quite willing to make a profit on their military strength in that area. There is, however, no direct evidence of a Company-Cree agreement of this nature and the very idea

of one may be overshadowed by Broken Arm's reputation as a lover of peace for its own sake.

The Assiniboine were not represented at these negotiations. For some unrecorded reason Broken Arm seems to have ignored them and the Blackfoot excluded them from the peace. On February 18, 1863, two Assiniboine warriors reported that two men of their tribe had lately been killed by some of the Blackfoot who had been present at the Edmonton settlement.⁶⁴ Piegan attendance at those talks concealed but did not cure the continuing instability of the confederacy. In the last years of the 1850's the Piegan made peace with the Flathead and allowed them to hunt on their lands. These two new allies beat off a combined Cree-Assiniboine attack deep in Blackfoot territory in 1860.⁶⁵ Within a year (winter of 1861-62) the value of this Flathead alliance increased as the Piegan engaged in a full scale war with the Fall Indians.⁶⁶ This war and one attack in particular heightened the dissension within the confederacy. The Piegan, in the winter of 1863, attacked a Blood-Fall encampment and destroyed four tents of Fall Indians including a chief.⁶⁷ By the spring of that year the Piegan and Blackfoot were no longer on speaking terms. Christie noted in the Edmonton journal "Pieigans waiting patiently across the River, wont come to trouble us until the Blackfoot are off as they dont like them."⁶⁸

The Cree, meanwhile, made good use of what proved to be but a short peace, and the Blackfoot concentration on their internal problems. In the autumn of 1863 it was disclosed

that the Cree had once again made contact with the Kootenay and begun to trade for horses. Broken Arm's son was one of the Cree who took part in this adventure.⁶⁹ The control over Cree policy that Broken Arm had displayed at Edmonton in December 1862 passed to the more militant lower country Cree. Their first move was a successful attack on the Sarcee in November 1863.⁷⁰ On January 2, 1864, a band of Blackfoot and Sarcee came in to Edmonton and traded quickly as "they were in a hurry to be off as they expect an attack to be made on their Camp by the Crees."⁷¹ This was followed by a Cree-Blackfoot battle late in February or early in March.⁷² Then on April 5, 1864

When Slave Indians were nearly finished trading [at Edmonton] Some Crees from Fort Pitt arrived Cumenacosse and the little pine at their head they rushed on a few who were still remaining about the fort fired several Shots, wounded one blood Indian...of course blackfeet returned the compliment as best they could, however the blackfeet ran for it and left their horses in front of the Fort the crees took advantage of the opportunity and took about a dozen of horses.⁷³

Throughout the summer this warfare continued without a pause. Then in the autumn of 1864 Broken Arm made another move for peace. On this occasion however, there was a basic difference in his behaviour. He "determined to go with a party to the Blackfoot camp to arrange if possible, a temporary peace which might last over the winter months and thus give the Cree an opportunity to make robes and provisions for trade."⁷⁴ Roughly translated Broken Arm wanted a truce during which the Cree could recruit their military strength. In this he was successful but on February 18, 1865, a freeman

reported at Edmonton House "that a Cree has been Killed in the Blackfoot Camp. So much for their Peace."⁷⁵ By April the Cree were fully prepared and sent off a war party with the Assiniboine, engaged the Blackfoot in a pitched battle, and withdrew with a victory.⁷⁶

There was little that the Blackfoot could do in the face of this resolute Cree campaign, for that same spring they had been attacked by a much more deadly enemy - scarlet fever.

On March 24, 1865

L'Hereux arrived [at Edmonton] from the Blackfoot Camp brings 2 Blackfeet with him & a note from Rev. Pere La Combe informing of great mortality among the Pagans, Bloods & Blackfeet, from scarlet fever more than 1100 persons, men women & children had died among the Blackfeet.⁷⁷

Within four days of that report Mr. Hardisty, in command of Rocky Mountain House, sent to Edmonton an unsettling assessment of the situation in his area. The Indians were then

...very hard to deal with & threatening the whites very much, blame us for the sickness, and threaten to Kill whites, an outbreak very much apprehended, Indians desperate, assistance in men and arms requested.⁷⁸

Fortunately for the Company the Blackfoot turned their rage on the Americans in the south, killing eleven miners on the Missouri, and upon the Cree or Assiniboine. In June (1865) a Blackfoot war party of eighty men "fell in with a camp of Crees or stones not certain which and killed twenty nine of them principally women and children."⁷⁹ Once again after a series of defeats and an epidemic the Blackfoot returned to the offensive.

The see-saw nature of the warfare in this northern area

between 1850 and 1865 made it obvious that, except for the brief contact with the Kootenay, the Cree had wrung little benefit from their military activities. They had made no progress westward and although they occasionally had driven the Blackfoot away from Edmonton the Blackfoot stubbornly, and to the amazement of the traders,⁸⁰ continued to come in. It is true that Cree war parties had raided as far west as Rocky Mountain House but these were temporary incursions from which they soon returned. Even Broken Arm's peace treaties had not been productive of positive benefits. Unlike the Cree-Assiniboine-Crow treaty of 1844 they did not seem to contain any agreement on points of trade or hunting rights. The Piegan-Flathead peace and the Sioux attacks on the Crow and Assiniboine destroyed the power of the three-sided alliance of 1810-1850. The result was a stalemate. Realizing this, the Cree turned southward.⁸¹

It was towards the southern plains, bounded on the east by the line stretching from the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers to the elbow of the South Branch, that the Cree directed their attention. Yet it was not solely the bands of the North Saskatchewan who participated in this push. The Cree from the south-eastern plains, the Swan River and Qu'Appelle River bands, had been following the westward retreat of the buffalo and forced an entry into Blackfoot territory south of the South Branch. This southern area had been relatively peaceful between 1850 and 1865. It had been, of course, the setting of the Fall-Piegan war, but it was free of Crow

war parties and there is little evidence of Cree-Assiniboine attacks on members of the confederacy. In the last years of this era it became the stage for violent incidents and of the final climactic battle between the Cree and the Blackfoot.

Sometime between 1865 and 1868 the Cree from the Qu'Appelle area crossed into Blackfoot territory and advanced towards the Cypress Hills.* It would be misleading to call this an invasion, for it was more of a heavily armed migration. The cavalcade was composed of women, children, old women, warriors and all their possessions. Nor was it solely a Cree advance for it included "the allied Crees and Saulteaux, the semi-Stoney and Cree 'Young Dogs' of Qu'Appelle and Touchwood Hills a few English and French Metis...also some Assiniboines from Wood Mountain and a few from the North Saskatchewan."⁸² In 1869 Isaac Cowie visited one of their camps "consisting of three hundred and fifty large leather lodges, containing a mixed population of probably two thousand five hundred or three thousand people, of whom about five hundred were men and lads capable of waging war."⁸³ Although it would seem to be folly to have brought so many defenseless dependents into enemy territory it must be remembered that these allies had come to find buffalo they were not simply warriors, raiders in search of plunder and glory.

The westward progress of the Cree and their buffalo hungry allies did not go unnoticed or unopposed. In the summer of 1868 an advance guard of sixty Cree warriors visited the put them 150 miles west of the traditional Cree-Blackfoot border.

Cypress Hills. On the way back to their camp, some twenty miles to the east they "were attacked and all killed by the Blackfoot."⁸⁴ Cree casualties continued to mount at an alarming rate.* In the spring of 1869 this Cree thrust for buffalo claimed its most famous victim. On April 23, 1869, "Two young fellows arrived [at Edmonton] from the Blackfoot camp & report Old Misticpictoos [Broken Arm] Killed by the Blackfoot his two sons & Grandson also about the same time."⁸⁶ The Reverend John McDougall who had grown particularly fond of Broken Arm sought out and recorded the circumstances and details of his death.

It turned out that the Crees and Blackfeet were in proximity having been forced there by the movements of the buffalo, and the Blackfeet made proposals of peace which Maskepetoon answered favorably, and himself and his son with a small party set out to arrange and ratify the compact. As he approached the camp of the Blackfeet, the latter came out to meet him with loud acclaim, and seemed very friendly, and the whole crowd of both sides sat down to quietly converse, and, as far as Maskepetoon was concerned, to smoke the pipe of peace. But while this function was going on, at a signal given by one of the Blackfeet, the massacre of the old chief and his people began, and very soon all were killed by this consummate treachery.⁸⁷

Unfortunately McDougall omits from his account the location of this tragic Cree-Blackfoot meeting. It is known from the June 29th Edmonton journal entry that contingents of North Saskatchewan Cree and Assiniboine with their families had penetrated Blackfoot territory as far to the south as the Red Deer River.⁸⁸

*Isaac Cowie estimated that between 1867 and 1874 "seven hundred braves were killed in battle, by murder and by sudden death of our acquaintance at Fort Qu'Appelle."⁸⁵

Naturally the Cree were enraged by the murder of Broken Arm and his band of peace makers. "Already while the spring was yet young, Maskepetoon's murder was being revenged and many scalps were taken."⁸⁹ In the spring that followed (1870) the Cree cunningly laid an ambush for the Blackfoot who were approaching Edmonton to trade. The trap was sprung and "the most brutal massacre took place."⁹⁰ The few Blackfoot who survived fled back to their camp where they organized

...a large party of warriors, several hundreds in number came in to have their turn at revenge...and when the war party came out in full force at the river they were climbing the steep banks before the fort gates with the best packs of furs to serve as shields when the bullets came. Come the bullets did, fast and furious, but as the guns were inferior and the distance considerable no one was hurt. And now that the Blackfeet took none by surprize and the fort was shut, they turned their attention to the carts...⁹¹

The campaign of revenge for Broken Arm's murder and the battles over the buffalo created a state of war all along the Cree-Blackfoot border.

Writing in 1911 J. McDougall reviewed the situation on the Canadian plains in that spring of 1870. "With the rebellion at headquarters [Riel rebellion], which was the base of supplies, tribal war around us and the fearful scourge of smallpox in sight truly the whole Saskatchewan was in a bad state."⁹² Bad Head recorded that the smallpox appeared among his people, the Blood, in the winter of 1869-70.⁹³ According to Many Wounds, D. Jenness' Sarcee informant, "In the late summer of this year (1870) when the berries had begun to ripen and we had encamped near the Blackfoot just north of

the Red Deer River, smallpox broke out among us."⁹⁴ On September 27 the plague reached Edmonton when "Freemen came in from the Plains today with people sick with the small pox."⁹⁵ Sometime during the summer the Cree entered a deserted Blackfoot camp and plundered it even though it contained bodies scarred by small pox. When they rode off the disease went with them.⁹⁶ From these warriors it spread to the Cree east of Edmonton and soon appeared among the Qu'Appelle and Touchwood Hills Cree. Only the Swan River and Red River districts escaped contamination.⁹⁷

J. McDougall estimated "that fully half of the native tribes perished during the season of 1870..."⁹⁸ Major W.F. Butler, in his report to A.G. Archibald, the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, stated that the Cree suffered more heavily than the Blood or Blackfoot. He received this impression from Father Lacombe who was of the opinion that "neither the Blood nor Blackfoot Indians had in proportion to their numbers, as many casualties as the Crees, whose losses may be safely stated at from 600 to 800 persons."⁹⁹ Isaac Cowie made no estimate of Cree deaths but he did reveal that he had saved an indeterminate number by vaccination.¹⁰⁰ Though the death toll was high, the epidemic had been like flash of lightning, striking suddenly with deadly force and disappearing just as quickly.

By the fall of 1870 the Cree were strong enough to turn their thoughts to war. In October the Cree and their Assiniboine ally dispatched a war party of between six and eight

hundred warriors led by Big Bear, Piapot,* Little Mountain, and Little Pine.*¹⁰¹ They hoped for a great victory, and end to the effectiveness of the Blackfoot. Mountain Horse, a Cree interviewed after this campaign, told of a war council during which one chief rose and addressed the assembled warriors. "My children...Advance and capture the Blackfoot nation, women and children. The small pox killed most of their fighters so we wont be opposed by any great number."¹⁰² With this exhortation supporting their martial ardor they marched westward until they found the Blood camp of Bull Back Fat and Button Chief at the junction of the Oldman and St. Mary's River, a short distance from Fort Whoop-up.¹⁰³ Having deployed their forces, the Cree commanders ordered a full attack. At first the Cree warriors, with surprise giving them an edge, met with success, but soon the Blood forces were augmented by many South Piegan under the leadership of Big Leg, Black Eagle, and Heavy Shield. These Piegan were "armed with repeating rifles, needle guns and revolvers... while the Cree and Assiniboines had only old muskets, Hudson Bay fukes, and bows and arrows to depend on."¹⁰⁴ One young Blood warrior captured one of these old Cree muskets. "It had seven balls in it and when I fired it kicked so hard that it almost killed me. I feel that I had a more narrow escape by shooting that gun than I had with the Indians."¹⁰⁵ Greatly outclassed by Blood-Piegan fire power and surprised

*Piapot was a chief of the Cree from the south-east while Little Pine was from the North Saskatchewan. This of course suggests that it was a nation-wide undertaking.

the Piegan reinforcements the Cree saw their attack turn into a rout. Jerry Potts, who fought with the Blood-Piegan forces, remembered that "You could fire with your eyes shut and would be sure to kill a Cree."¹⁰⁶ They were driven across the river and took refuge in a small wood. Some sought safety in a coulee but they were soon surrounded, and put to death after a valiant though hopeless resistance. The Blood and Piegan then withdrew mercifully allowing the remaining Cree and Assiniboine to return homeward. Dr. G. Kennedy conducted a study of the battle and concluded "It is difficult to estimate the loss of the Crees, on account of so many being killed in the River, and their bodies swept away by the current, but it is certain that it is between two and three hundred. About forty Blackfeet were killed and fifty wounded."¹⁰⁷

Throughout the winter of 1870-71 the Cree camps were filled with the mournful cries of women and children without husbands and fathers, and of old men whose sons had been slain but could not be buried. Weary and demoralized the Cree decided on peace; in the spring they sent tobacco to the Blackfoot.¹⁰⁸ The summer was "a season of almost absolute rest from tribal war."¹⁰⁹ In the autumn the peace makers met at the Red Deer River and concluded a formal treaty.¹¹⁰ Except for occasional incidents of horse stealing this agreement continued unbroken.

Major Butler, at the Touchwood Hills in Cree territory surveyed the west in that year and wrote

There is not a sound in the air or on the earth; on

every side lie spread the relics of a great fight waged by man against the brute creation; all is silent and deserted - the Indian and buffalo gone the settler not yet come.¹¹¹

His obituary for the buffalo was premature, for on the western plains, in Blackfoot country, the buffalo still roamed and continued to do so throughout the 1870's. On Cree lands, however, the buffalo had disappeared, the land was silent, no longer resounding to the hooves of the great herds. Cree policy in the period 1850-1870, their attempt to expand their borders westward, had failed. On the plains of the North Saskatchewan, around Edmonton, the Blackfoot confederacy, even with dissension in its ranks, had been resolute, exchanging raid for raid with little effect on the border. The peace settlements did little more than stall the Cree advance, allowing time for recruitment, but not solving the problem of growing scarcity. The Cree, along the southern border, made some progress into Blackfoot country, being able to hunt in large armed companies. Unfortunately their inaccurate assessment of Blackfoot losses in the epidemic of 1869-70 caused them to gamble this progress on a massive thrust designed to cripple their enemy in one stroke. They lost that gamble on the banks of the Oldman River and with it they lost any hope of extending their territories and capturing a part of the remaining herds. The initiative was then firmly in the hands of the Blackfoot. Fortunately for the Cree, the Blackfoot, after the settlement of 1871, "do not, now, in the absence of valuable game try to maintain their former extensive

boundaries."¹¹² They allowed the Cree to wander into their territory to hunt the remaining buffalo.¹¹³ On the sufferance of the Blackfoot, the Cree were once again able to find and hunt the buffalo. Life, for a time at least, could continue as it had been for so many generations of Plains Cree.

Conclusion

By 1870 one hundred years of plains history stretched behind the Cree and before that was another one hundred years since first contact with the white man. If these two centuries disclose anything about the Cree it is that they became a progressively better organized and an independent nation, maintaining its integrity in the face of both white influence and Indian rivals. Certainly after contact the Cree changed; he became a musket-carrying, provision provider for the fur companies, he moved from the woodland to the plains. This change in environments caused him to abandon the canoe in favour of the horse, the bark-covered lodge for the leather tent, and the family beaver hunt in favour of the cooperative buffalo hunt. Yet these changes did not destroy the core of the Cree nation; the ability and desire to make and execute decisions with reference to their interests was not, and could not be, destroyed by new European tools or by environment-induced changes in material culture. Circumstance, too, aided in this preservation. While the Cree were solely a woodland people most prone to the classic process of dependence the white man was too weak to impose his political and economic desires, and when the white trader became more numerous and his trade system had enveloped the whole country from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific shores the Cree had already escaped to the freedom of the plains. Yet before they made the transition from woodland to plains the Cree, through their invasion of the northwestern woodlands and the profitable

trade system of the Saskatchewan Cree wrung every possible benefit from their early association with the traders.

The Cree, both in their woodland phase after contact and in their plains existence, continued their participation in economic and political alliances which had begun prior to contact and made up the military and trade patterns which controlled the inland flow of European goods. Initially, the Cree in the south-eastern and north-western plains occupied, with their Assiniboine ally, the powerful middleman position. The coming of the white man and the intrusion of his goods into native trade systems could not obliterate those patterns. The Mandan trade empire admirably displays the resilience of native value systems within which eagle feathers were as highly valued as guns - as trade items at least. There can be little doubt that firearms allowed great military victories by the armed over the unarmed. But in the case of the Black-foot-Cree alliance against the Snake, Salish, and Kootenay and the Mandan-Cree alliance against the Sioux these new weapons were used in traditional patterns rather than creating new ones. When the distribution of firearms became universal their effects were limited simply to determining the length of casualty lists. The new military power that the gun traditionally represents was used by the Cree to support their trade alliances rather than to score military victories for their own sake. Cree tribal war, which became a marked trait in their plains life continued throughout their history.

It must be remembered that the Plains Cree lived in an

Indian world which supported white visitors on its rim, and that this world demanded that he maintain his institutions, that as he was independent he would have to take care of himself. Cree leaders, by necessity, displayed a well developed ability to analyse current economic and military problems and to mobilize their forces, be they military or economic, to solve these problems in a manner they hoped would be beneficial to their people. In this framework the European trader became an important, though not always the determining, variable within the plains political spectrum. The horse wars most precisely demonstrate this, for the motive for war, the underlying purpose of military and trade patterns between 1810 and 1850, was a commodity not controlled, nor even highly valued, by the white trader. Likewise, Cree participation in the most sophisticated Indian trade system, the Mandan empire, was not directed towards improving their position in the fur trade but towards acquiring horses. Truly the Plains Cree lived for themselves, and not as white organized appendages of an alien trade system.

By 1870 the Plains Cree had experienced a succession of military and trade crises; the breakdown of their Blackfoot and Mandan alliances being the most notable. Each time the Cree had reorganized their system of alliances, wedding themselves to the Crow and burying their ancient dispute with their Flathead and Kootenay adversaries; they had formed new combinations to recapture lost military and trade advantages. They developed a very respectable diplomatic tradition and in

their long warfare with the Blackfoot a fine military record. Their flexible band system and the status system with its stress on generosity and valour produced an inner strength which allowed for the absorption of the shocks of epidemics and great defeats and guaranteed the much needed martial spirit.

After 1870, however, the Cree faced a crisis for which they had no experience. The buffalo had left their lands and even though the Blackfoot, after the peace of 1871, allowed them to trespass and hunt among the remaining herds it was only a matter of time before the buffalo disappeared altogether from the plains, before the end of plains life was in full view, before the system of reserves divided them from their wanderings. When the end finally came, as it did in 1879, it was heralded not by the deafening silence that Major Butler had written of in 1870 but by a tragic cry which went up and echoed across the plains.

My Father, have pity on me!

I have nothing to eat,

I am dying of thirst -

Everything is gone!¹

Turning to face the east the Cree could see the emptiness of their lands, the great herds now ran only in their memories; all that was real was the approaching white man and the strange confinement of the reserve.

If there is a tragedy in Plains Cree history, it is not a growing dependence on the very white influences that were

causing his society to crumble; it is that his society, or at least his ability to organize on economic and military lines, remained remarkably unchanged, outliving the herds upon which the society physically existed. What was led into the bondage of the reserves was not the ruin of a political and social system, but a healthy organism which had taken root and grown strong on the plains. In a sense, however, the fate of the Plains Cree nation followed that of the buffalo not to death but into a white man's pound.

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