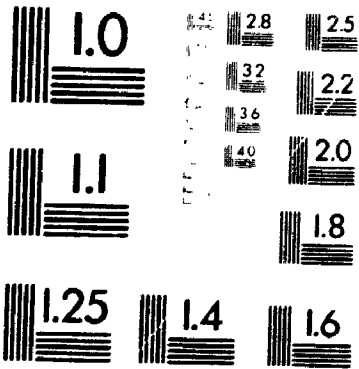


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DAILY LIFE ON WESTERN HUDSON BAY 1714 TO 1870:
A SOCIAL HISTORY OF YORK FACTORY AND CHURCHILL

by

MICHAEL B. PAYNE, B.A., M.A.

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

Department of History

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

April 26, 1989

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of two fur trade communities: York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort/Fort Churchill. It covers the period from 1714 to 1870, or from the Hudson's Bay Company's reoccupation of York after the Treaty of Utrecht to the annexation of company territories by Canada.

Up until the 1770's York and Churchill were in many respects very similar communities. Both were bayside factories responsible for trade with large hinterlands, and both ranked among the most significant fur trade sites in North America. After the Hudson's Bay Company's establishment of inland posts in 1774 the fortunes of these two posts increasingly diverged. Churchill became a small outpost subordinate to York by the early 19th century, whereas York became the chief depot and administrative centre for the fur trade. What follows then is a study of some of the similarities and differences between these post communities.

A community is less a place than a population, and the primary focus of this study is the men who took up service with the Hudson's Bay Company and who were stationed at York and Churchill. In order to provide a better understanding of the lives and experiences of Hudson's Bay Company employees of all ranks, this dissertation begins with a analysis of the social structure and set of social relations which prevailed at York and Churchill. It then examines work and work relations and patterns of recreation and leisure at these posts. The growing impact of non-trade social institutions in the 19th century is outlined through an analysis of the development of a system of schooling and

apprenticeship and by a consideration of the role of religion and missionaries in post life. The occupational hazards of company service and general standards of health at these posts are studied in order to estimate the costs and potential benefits entailed in taking up a career in the fur trade. The final chapters examine the basic elements of material life in any community: the clothing, accommodation, and diet of post residents.

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I would like to thank the Hudson's Bay Company for permission to consult and to use quotations from their corporate archives, and Shirlee Smith and her staff at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives for their help over the years. I would also like to thank the staff at the National Archives of Canada where much of the research for this dissertation was carried out.

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Finally I would like to thank my family, Deborah and Christopher, without whom the pleasure of finally finishing would be meaningless. They have borne most of the costs of this enterprise, and I appreciate their support and forbearance much more than a few words on an opening page can ever convey.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 1973 L.G. Thomas, surveying the development of fur trade historiography up to that time, outlined several aspects which he felt had been neglected. Two of them were the "history of individual posts" and the "day to day life of the fur trader".¹ Great as the changes in fur trade historiography have been in the last sixteen years, these two subjects still deserve closer attention than they have so far received. This dissertation is intended to address both of these historiographical gaps by examining the comparative history of two of the Hudson's Bay Company's oldest and most important post communities, York Factory and Churchill,² and the everyday life of the company employees stationed at these posts.

In his discussion of the state of fur trade historiography, two features of Professor Thomas's remarks stand out. The first is the fact that almost all of the works he regarded as the most significant and influential contributions to fur trade scholarship had been originally published prior to 1940. The second is the fact that there was little disagreement in these works about the nature and main features of the fur trade in Western Canada.³ The historiographical tradition he described is perhaps best exemplified by H.A. Innis's, The Fur Trade in Canada, and A.S. Morton's A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71. These and other works

¹ L.G. Thomas, "Historiography of the Fur Trade Era," in Richard Allen (ed.), A Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains, (Regina: Canadian Plains Study Centre, 1973), p. 83.

² Although generally known as Churchill or Fort Churchill, between 1717 and 1783 this post was officially named Prince of Wales's Fort.

³ Thomas, "Historiography," pp. 77-83.

by historians like J.B. Tyrrell, W.S. Wallace, and L.J. Burpee emphasized the fur trade as a motive for exploration, as part of a protracted struggle for control of the continent by rival imperial interests, and as economic or business history.⁴ Innis's formulation of "staples" theory in fact cast the fur trade as part of a grand paradigm explaining much of Canada's subsequent social, economic, and political development. Considerable attention was paid in this school of fur trade studies to the lives and activities of a handful of key explorers and traders who mapped the interior of North America and who shaped their respective companies' trading practices. But as Adrian Tanner has remarked of a more recent work, Indians were generally "well offstage left", and less distinguished company officers and the great bulk of fur trade employees were "offstage right".⁵

Since the early 1970's a number of historians have made a concerted effort to bring the primary producers of furs, native people, back on to centre stage.⁶ In Canada a growing interest in native and ethnohistory has

⁴ Some of the most significant of these works include Harold A Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930); A. S. Morton, The History of the Canadian West to 1870-71 (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1939); Joseph Burr Tyrrell (ed.), Documents Relating to the Early History of Hudson Bay (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1931); William Stewart Wallace, Documents Relating to the North West Company (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934), and Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de La Vérendrye, Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Vérendrye and his sons (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1927). In general most of the best traditional fur trade history has appeared in the publications of the Champlain and Hudson's Bay Record Societies.

⁵ Adrian Tanner, "The End of Fur Trade History," Queen's Quarterly, 80, 1 (Spring 1983): 189.

⁶ Some of the better examples of this approach include Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay 1800-1870 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983); Arthur J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1680-1870 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) and Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman,

meant considerable interest in the fur trade and fur trade records. In much of North America the first contacts between natives and Europeans took place either directly or indirectly through the fur trade, but until recently it was rare for historians to make such effort to understand the fur trade from a native point of view. Reading fur trade records from this new perspective, however, has called into question much of what Canadian historians thought they knew about white-native relations and the conduct of the fur trade. It can no longer be casually assumed that native groups quickly became dependent on trade goods, and many of the customs and practices of the trade turn out on closer examination to have been initiated by natives and not by fur trade companies or their employees. So thoroughgoing have been the changes to our sense of how the fur trade operated that a recently published history of Western Canada now argues that the fur trade in Western Canada should be understood as two distinct if interconnected trades, one native and the other European.⁷

Although there have been some attempts to bring fur trade company employees onto the centre stage as well,⁸ they have been perhaps less

"Give Us Good Measure": An Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

⁷ Gerald Friesen, A History of Western Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

⁸ The earliest of these was probably Grace Lee Nute, The Voyageurs (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1955). More recently one might mention Philip Goldring, Papers on the Labour System of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1900: Volume I, Manuscript Report Series no. 382, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979); Philip Goldring, Papers on the Labour System of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1900: Volume II, Manuscript Report Series no. 412, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1980); Philip Goldring, Papers on the Labour System of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1900: Volume III, Microfiche Report Series no. 289, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1982), and John Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC 1780-1821" in Carol Judd and Arthur J. Ray (eds.), Old Trails and New

successful in changing historians' perceptions of the nature and significance of the fur trade than the work of native historians. There is, however, an important revisionist trend in fur trade historiography which some have called the "new" fur trade studies.⁹ The most influential proponents of this new historiographical school are probably Jennifer Brown, Sylvia Van Kirk, Frits Pannekoek, and John Foster. All of these authors have set out self-consciously to write fur trade "social" history, and all are interested in the study of the fur trade as a "socio-cultural complex" rather than simply as a business. In one way or another their major works all emphasize the degree to which the fur trade produced "an indigenous society in early Western Canada" that was neither European nor Indian but which was strong and coherent enough to survive for over two centuries.¹⁰ Jennifer Brown, for example, has described the fur trade as a "semi-autonomous" or "partial social sphere" which overlapped both European and Indian parent societies. Van Kirk and Brown in particular have presented a

Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference
(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp.102-26.

⁹ See the introduction to Judd and Ray, Old Trails and New Directions, pp.3-4.

¹⁰ See Sylvia Van Kirk, "Fur Trade Social History: Some Recent Trends," in Judd and Ray, Old Trails, pp.160-73. Van Kirk bases her analysis of the main features of fur trade social history on four doctoral dissertations which appeared between 1972 and 1976. While other works have appeared dealing with the social history of the fur trade since 1976 these theses remain the most influential works in the field and have attracted the most attention among other scholars both for the issues they raise and the directions they suggest for further research. The theses in question are Jennifer Brown, "Company Men and Native Families." (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1976); Sylvia Van Kirk, "The Role of Women in the Fur Trade Society of the Canadian West 1700-1850." (PhD thesis, University of London, 1975); John Foster, "The Country-Born in the Red River Settlement, 1820-70." (PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 1973); and Frits Pannekoek, "The Churches and the Social Structure in the Red River Area, 1811-1870." (PhD thesis, Queen's University, 1973).

strong case to suggest that in the areas of marriage and family patterns distinctive "customs of the country" had developed at fur trade posts at least as early as the late 18th century.¹¹ As in the case of ethnohistorians, most of those seeking to study fur trade society have adopted a different perspective from traditional fur trade historiography, which usually emphasized metropolitan concerns. Not only is the fur trade seen less and less through the eyes of company directors and managers in London or Montreal, but Van Kirk and Brown have tried to understand the trade from the point of view of native and "mixed-blood" or Métis women and children. In general a shift in emphasis from metropolis to hinterland has also meant a shift in emphasis from European to native and from company employees to their wives and families.

Few would argue that these changes in historiographical perspective have not significantly improved our understanding of the fur trade. Some commentators, however, have sounded a note of caution. Adrian Tanner, for example, has argued that it is premature "to talk about anything so ambitious as fur trade society". He suggests that the boundaries of that society remain ill-defined, and that much more work needs to be done to determine its variant forms.¹² As Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz have argued, a local or regional approach to the study of fur trade history is one way of addressing this problem.¹³

¹¹ Jennifer S.H. Brown, Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), p.xvii and p.52, and Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980), p.4.

¹² Tanner, "The End of Fur Trade History," pp. 180-81.

¹³ See Francis and Morantz, Partners in Furs, p.167.

Tanner also suggests that perhaps the most important change occasioned by this renewed interest in fur trade subjects and fur trade records has been the erosion of fur trade studies as a special sub-category of scholarship.¹⁴ Ethnohistorians use fur trade materials to write native history just as social historians find fur trade records a wonderful resource for writing women's history or labour history.

This dissertation is intended to follow suit. Although it is about two fur trade communities, York Factory and Fort Churchill, it is as much local and social history as fur trade history. It is not addressed simply to fur trade historians but to social historians interested in subjects like social and work relations, or the social functions of sport and recreation, and to historians working in the fields of medical, educational and material history as well. What it shares with most recent writing on fur trade topics is a hinterland perspective, though one which takes account of where and when metropolitan influences shaped behaviour in these communities. It attempts to bring the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company who garrisoned these posts between 1714 and 1870 onto centre stage, and not just senior officers but tradesmen, labourers, and junior officers as well.

Alan Rodgers has argued that local historians ought to discuss communities of people, not locations; but in this case significant portions of the community remain largely unrecorded. As a result his suggestion that historians should normally begin with a description of the size and composition of the communities they study can be only imperfectly attempted

¹⁴ Tanner, "The End of Fur Trade History," p. 178.

here.¹⁵ As Sylvia Van Kirk has pointed out the fur trade was not "totally male",¹⁶ but the experiences and contributions of the native wives and children of company employees were rarely reported in post records. Their role in the internal structure of the posts - in the allocation of authority and status, in the organization of work and leisure, in providing medical treatment and other matters addressed in this study - is unclear and may have been less central than in the domestic and marital concerns studied by others.¹⁷

Despite their numbers, wives and children may be seen as distinct from permanent company employees in several respects apart from simply age, sex or ethnicity. Company employees shared many similar experiences of work, and their social relations were largely predicated upon their rank and occupation within the company's service. The influence of rank and status also spilled over into other aspects of their lives, ranging from what they ate to how they chose to spend their leisure. Permanent company employees were a distinct group in the fur trade, with their own unique functions and place within the Hudson's Bay Company's service, and their characteristics, problems, interests and behaviour are neither more nor less important than those of other groups whose lives were also shaped by the fur trade.

The two communities studied here were both complex in structure and distinctive in form, and this diversity of fur trade life is one of the major themes of the following pages. Another theme is the dynamics of

¹⁵ Alan Rodgers, Approaches to Local History (London: Longmans, 1977), pp. 6-7 and 10.

¹⁶ Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, p.3.

¹⁷ Notably in ibid., and Brown, Strangers in Blood.

cultural adaptation. It is generally recognized that in any type of cross-cultural trade both traders and their hosts will be affected to some degree by contact with each other.¹⁸ In the case of the fur trade, however, one half of the equation has often been ignored. The profound changes in native cultures caused by contact with Europeans are common preoccupations of native and ethnohistorians, but less attention has been paid to how that contact changed the traders. It is important to try to understand how service in the fur trade changed company employees in order to trace exactly how and in what areas of culture and behaviour the fur trade operated as a "semi-autonomous" social sphere.

At the same time it is no less important to recognize that in taking up a career in the Hudson's Bay Company's service, employees did not necessarily abandon all their inherited social values and attitudes or way of life. In many respects what is most interesting about the communities studied here is the persistence of a social structure and set of social relations that fur traders brought with them from outside the North-West. Pre-industrial styles of work and work relations continued to shape fur trade labour into the 19th century, and everyday life at York and Churchill can only be understood through careful comparative study with life in employees' home communities.

There have been almost as many attempts made to define social history as there have been historians who have adopted the term to describe their work. Most would now agree that a simple definition like G.M. Trevelyan's

¹⁸ For an interesting discussion of the various forms taken by such trade and some of the implications of cross-cultural trade for traders and their hosts see Philip Curtin, Cross-Cultural Trade in World History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

"history ... with the politics left out" can no longer suffice,¹⁹ but beyond that agreement is hard to find. Eric Hobsbawm, in a much quoted essay, has argued that social history ought to aspire to being a history of society, though he conceded he had no work in mind at the time which met his ideal.²⁰ Instead he offered a broad listing of subjects in which he felt interesting social historical research was likely. This sort of inclusive rather than exclusive approach makes considerable sense, especially in the case of Canada where interest in social history is still relatively new. Nevertheless there are some common themes which run through most social historians' research. As E.P. Thompson has argued social history is in a sense a kind of historical reclamation project aimed at individuals and groups whose experiences, beliefs, and agency also helped to shape history along with kings and queens, prime ministers and business magnates.²¹ If nothing else this process helps us to understand better "the kind of life lived by ordinary people of the past",²² and to recognize in some small fashion the importance of their lives in making history. What follows here is an attempt to reclaim and reconstruct the kind of life lived by Hudson's Bay Company employees at York Factory and Churchill in the 18th and 19th centuries.

¹⁹ G.M. Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History (London: Longmans, Green and Co. for the Readers Union, 1958), Vol.1, p. xi.

²⁰ E.J. Hobsbawm, "From Social History to the History of Society," in Felix Gilbert and Stephen R. Graubard (eds.), Historical Studies Today (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), p. 14.

²¹ See for example, E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 13.

²² Peter Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 1.

Fernand Braudel has noted that many of the subjects discussed in subsequent chapters "are usually kept separate from each other" and are left to "develop in the margin of traditional history". Yet a refusal to take the study of "demography, food, costume, lodging" and allied matters seriously can only interfere with our ability to understand "the context in which pre-industrial economies operated" and to grasp the structures which defined everyday life in the past. As Braudel has argued "the ways people eat, dress, or lodge, are never a matter of indifference",²³ and consequently they should never be treated as matters of no import by social historians.

It was the search for a sea-passage to Asia which first brought Europeans to Hudson Bay in the early 17th century, but these explorers were more interested in finding a way out of the bay than in either the native inhabitants of the area or potential trade. Western Hudson Bay was initially explored by an English expedition led by Sir Thomas Button in 1612, and a Danish expedition under Jens Munk in 1619.²⁴ Both parties wintered on Hudson Bay: the former near the mouth of the Nelson River and the latter at the mouth of the Churchill River. These first European experiences of life on Hudson Bay did little to suggest that the region was conducive to

²³ Fernand Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century: Volume I. The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 27-29.

²⁴ Jens Munk's journal of his experiences at Churchill was published in Danish in 1624. Translations of his journal may be found in C.C.A. Gosch (ed.), Danish Arctic Expeditions 1605-1620: Book II - Expedition of Captain Jens Munk, 1619-1620 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1897), Vol. XCVII and W.A. Kenyon (ed.), The Journal of Jens Munk 1619-1620 (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1980).

settlement: only three of Munk's 84 men survived to return to Denmark.²⁵ Ironically, however, these wintering sites would eventually become the two most important fur trade sites on western Hudson Bay: York Factory and Churchill.

York was founded in 1682 as one of the first ventures of the newly formed Hudson's Bay Company.²⁶ After changing hands several times in Anglo-French wars,²⁷ it was reoccupied in 1714. The company's governor on Hudson Bay, James Knight, was then faced with the problem of re-establishing the fur trade on a sound and regular basis on western Hudson Bay. At the time the Hudson's Bay Company was content to have its employees remain at its posts on the shores of the bay and let the Indians transport their furs down to these posts on a seasonal basis. York Factory's location on a peninsula of land between the mouths of the Hayes and Nelson Rivers quickly made it the most important post in the company's trading system. These rivers, particularly the Hayes, could be used to transport furs down to the bay from an enormous hinterland. In the early 18th century York Factory's hinterland stretched inland from Hudson Bay across much of what is now the Prairie Provinces and northward to the Athabasca area. Occasionally Indians from

²⁵ There is a theory that trichinosis as well as scurvy attacked Munk's party, and perhaps Button's men as well. See Delbert Young, "Was there an Unsuspected Killer Aboard 'The Unicorn'," The Beaver, 304, 3 (Winter 1973): 9-15.

²⁶ The best general account of the early years of the company may be found in E.E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870: Volume I: 1670-1763 (London: The Hudson's Bay Company Record Society, 1958) especially chapter VII, pp. 61-83. This period is also treated in Tyrrell, Early History of Hudson Bay, pp. 1-34.

²⁷ The events of the period from 1682 to 1713 are the subject of numerous studies. Perhaps the best brief account of who built what and where, who then captured it, and when it changed hands again can be found in ibid., pp. 10-31.

the remote interior ventured down to York Factory, but for the most part the trade at York was dominated by the Cree, and to a lesser extent by the Assiniboine Indians, who lived between York Factory and Lake Winnipeg. The Cree and their Assiniboine allies took advantage of their location to establish themselves as middlemen in the trade. They guarded their position carefully and used their access to supplies of guns and powder to expand their territory north and westwards.²⁸ The trade system that developed between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Cree in the early and mid-18th century produced a large and generally profitable trade at York Factory.²⁹

Knight, however, saw an opportunity to expand the company's trade by establishing a post to the north of York. He hoped this would enable the company to trade with the Chipewyan Indians and Inuit, neither of whom could be induced in any numbers to risk encountering the hostile and better-armed Cree at York Factory. Soon after his arrival at York, Knight began the

²⁸ The best account of the role of the Cree and Assiniboine in the fur trade of the western interior may be found in Arthur Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade, especially pp. 3-23 and 51-70. A second valuable discussion of this aspect of the fur trade appears in John S. Milloy, The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1780 to 1870 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), especially pp.5-20.

²⁹ Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman indicate that after York Factory was reoccupied the trade there grew quickly from about 4,000 made beaver - the basic unit of value in the fur trade equivalent to the value of one prime whole beaver pelt - to more than 40,000 made beaver circa 1730. Thereafter trade declined somewhat but up until the late 1760's it remained at 28,000 made beaver or above. By the 1720's the trade at York Factory was larger than at any other post and by the 1730's it was two to three times greater than the trade at York's nearest rival; initially Fort Albany and later Prince of Wales's Fort. See Ray and Freeman, "Give Us Good Measure", p. 34 figure 4. According to their calculations over the same period from about 1730 to 1770 the "overplus", or the excess of furs acquired by company officers who set the actual terms of trade above the official company standard, at York Factory was once again normally double or more than double the overplus at any other post. Ibid., pp. 145-48, figures 21, 22, 23, and 24.

lengthy process of sending men out to contact the Chipewyan or "Northern" Indians to try to secure a truce between them and the Cree, at least in the vicinity of company posts. With the aid of the Chipewyan woman, Thanadelthur, such a truce was eventually arranged, and in 1717 Knight built Prince of Wales's Fort at the mouth of the Churchill River.³⁰ Like York Factory, Prince of Wales's Fort maintained a trade with a large hinterland stretching inland along the Churchill River and northwards to the Barren Grounds of what are now the Northwest Territories. Unlike York Factory however the trade at Prince of Wales's Fort was dominated not by the Cree and their allies, but by the Chipewyan Indians, and in particular certain Chipewyan who acted as middlemen for their fellows.³¹ The Inuit of the Hudson Bay coast were not included in Knight's peace-making scheme, and for some considerable time the Chipewyan and Cree remained hostile towards the Inuit. As a result, despite the hopes of Knight and subsequent factors at Prince of Wales's Fort, the Inuit rarely visited in the 18th century,

³⁰ Knight's peace-making efforts are detailed in James F. Kenny (ed.), The Founding of Churchill: Being the Journal of Captain James Knight, Governor-in-Chief in Hudson Bay, from the 14th of July to the 13th of September, 1717 (Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1932), pp. 52-63. The role of Thanadelthur in these negotiations is described in Sylvia Van Kirk, "Thanadelthur," The Beaver, 304,4 (Spring 1974): 41-45.

³¹ The best known of these "trading" Chipewyan was Samuel Hearne's friend and guide Mattonabee. Hearne in his travels had occasion to come into contact with Chipewyans who did not choose to travel to Prince of Wales's Fort to trade, and who preferred to leave this dangerous way of life to others. He stated that most Chipewyan men had made the journey to Prince of Wales's Fort at least once in their lives, but their experiences on the way there cured them of any desire to repeat the trek across hundreds of miles of inhospitable terrain. Despite his status as a company officer he was forced to concede that among the Chipewyan "those who have the least intercourse with the Factories, are by far the happiest". Samuel Hearne, A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), p. 52.

although a small trade was maintained by sloop captains sailing north along the coast from Prince of Wales's Fort.

By the 1730's the Hudson's Bay Company's trading system on western Hudson Bay was established on a fairly firm footing. The system was essentially a passive one, described by Joseph Robson, an employee of the company and later one of its most vocal critics, as an eighty-year-long sleep "at the edge of a frozen sea".³² Company employees rarely ventured far from their bayside posts, and the collection of furs and their transport down to these posts from the interior was left in the hands of Indian middlemen. This unenterprising approach to trade worked reasonably well until the late 1740's when Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de la Vérendrye, expanded the Montreal-based fur trade to the lower Saskatchewan River.³³ Even so Canadian traders had less effect on overall trade at York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort than their presence astride the water routes down to the Bay might have suggested. Their high transport costs limited the range of trade goods they could supply and forced them to concentrate on light but valuable furs such as marten and some beaver. As a result the Indians of the interior continued to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company often for heavier trade goods like guns, kettles and the like which were shipped more cheaply through Hudson Bay. The Hudson's Bay Company did react to Canadian competition in the 1750's by sending individual employees inland with the Indians, like Anthony Henday in 1754-55, to encourage the

³² Joseph Robson, An Account of Six years Residence in Hudson's Bay from 1733 to 1738, and 1744 to 1747 (New York: S.R. Publishers, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1985), p. 8.

³³ La Vérendrye, Journals and Letters, pp. 447 and 454.

Indians to bypass Canadian posts; but it specifically rejected any plan to construct inland posts.

It was not until after the fall of New France in 1759-60 and the transfer of Quebec to Britain in 1763 that the company's trading system on Hudson Bay was forced to undergo radical change. After rising somewhat during the confused period between the outbreak of the Seven Year's War and the effective re-establishment of a Montreal-based fur trade in the interior in the late 1760's, fur returns at York Factory dropped sharply from 24,000 made beaver a year or more in 1765-70 to 10,000 made beaver in 1775.³⁴ At Prince of Wales's Fort the decline was not so dramatic, but even there fur returns in 1775 and 1776 had dropped to 7375 1/8 made beaver and 8254 7/8 made beaver respectively from an earlier average of between 12,000 and 13,000 made beaver, a decline of about one third of the total trade.³⁵ One Hudson's Bay Company officer, Andrew Graham, succinctly stated the problem: "Such is the Influence of the Pedlars".³⁶

The response of the Hudson's Bay Company was to abandon its old policy of waiting for Indian middlemen to bring furs down to the bay and instead it instituted a policy of building inland posts. The first of these posts was Cumberland House built in 1774 near the North Saskatchewan River on Pine Island Lake. Thereafter the Hudson's Bay Company attempted to match the traders from Montreal post for post throughout the interior until the union

³⁴ See Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade, p. 52, figure 16.

³⁵ Michael Payne, Prince of Wales's Fort: A Social History 1717-1762 Manuscript Report Series no. 371, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979), p. 127.

³⁶ HBCA:A.11/15, fo.21, Andrew Graham to London committee, Annual letter from Churchill 1775.

of the North-West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 brought this period of competition to a close.

The policy of building inland posts had a dramatic effect on the Hudson's Bay Company's operations. The company was forced to expand its work force vastly and to hire men with new skills as canoe men and later boatmen, and it had to reorganize the way it transacted business. The difficulties the company faced in adjusting to the move inland,³⁷ and the impact of this change on Cree, Assiniboine, and Chipewyan middlemen³⁸ have been discussed elsewhere. What is less frequently discussed is the impact this new policy had on the old bayside posts.

Soon after the move inland bayside posts lost much of their significance as trading centres, retaining only responsibility for a much diminished local trade with the native peoples of their immediate area.³⁹ This happened more quickly at York than at Prince of Wales's Fort, where Chipewyan middlemen continued to come down to trade into the 1780's despite the presence of other posts on the borders of their territory. It was the destruction of Prince of Wales's Fort by a French naval expedition under the Comte de La Perouse in 1782 which effectively ended the pattern of Chipewyan trade there.

³⁷ Richard Glover, "The Difficulties of the Hudson's Bay Company's Penetration of the West," Canadian Historical Review, 29, 3 (September 1948): 240-254.

³⁸ Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade, pp. 125-58.

³⁹ In company parlance the Indians living in the vicinity of bayside posts were called "Homeguard" Indians. At York and Churchill most were Swampy Cree, but the term was on occasion applied to Chipewyan and other Indian groups.

From the 1760's on the bayside posts which prospered and continued to play a major role in the Hudson's Bay Company's trading system were those which acted as supply depots for inland posts. Although never as important a trade centre as York Factory, Prince of Wales's Fort had played a significant role in Hudson's Bay Company operations. A large stone fortress had been begun there in 1731, and for over forty years work continued on its walls costing the Hudson's Bay Company as much as £40,000.⁴⁰ When La Perouse showed that the fort was indefensible and the Chipewyan trade declined, the rationale for a large post at Churchill collapsed. The company rebuilt a more modest post there in 1783 named Fort Churchill, but it never regained its former size or importance. During the 1790's an attempt was made to establish a chain of inland posts subordinate to Churchill without much success. By the early 1800's the London committee of the Hudson's Bay Company had doubts as to the value of maintaining Churchill as a factory with subsidiary posts separate from York Factory.⁴¹ The Churchill River was not found to be an effective route to the Athabasca. In 1814 when the company reorganized its system of posts and departments under Andrew Wedderburn Colville's "Retrenching System" Churchill was made subordinate to York.⁴²

By contrast as the numbers of inland posts expanded and their distance from Hudson Bay increased, York Factory assumed greater and greater importance, particularly after the introduction of boats on the inland

⁴⁰ Payne, Prince of Wales' Fort, p. 99.

⁴¹ E.E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870: Volume II: 1783-1870 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), p. 278.

⁴² Ibid., p. 315.

transport network in place of canoes. York boats allowed the company to ship larger and bulkier cargoes inland, which in turn made it possible to concentrate warehouse and distribution responsibilities at a few bayside posts.⁴³ For the North-West this came increasingly to be York Factory. In addition after much experimentation it was discovered that the Hayes River provided better access to the interior than the Churchill, Nelson, Albany or any other competing waterway, further emphasizing York Factory's centrality to company operations - no longer due to the volume of trade carried on there but by virtue of its warehouse, transshipment, and administrative responsibilities.⁴⁴

The union of the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies in 1821 in no way diminished York Factory's significance. A major reason for the North West Company's willingness to merge with the Hudson's Bay Company was the high cost of shipping goods and furs by canoe to and from its posts in the North-West via Fort William and Montreal. With the union of the companies the North West Company's depot at Fort William was superseded by York Factory, which then took over responsibility as the main depot for the now unified trade. The result was a burst of construction at York including

⁴³ The transportation system of the Hudson's Bay company including the substitution of York boats for canoes is described in great detail in John Alwin, "Mode, Pattern and Pulse: Hudson's Bay Company Transport, 1670-1821," (PhD thesis, University of Manitoba, 1978).

⁴⁴ York Factory's growing importance in the late 18th and early 19th centuries can also be seen in the construction of a "new" York Factory upstream from "old" York beginning in 1788. From about 1798 on it was discovered that storage facilities at the new factory were inadequate to cope with the volume of trade goods, provisions, and furs passing through York, especially with the growth of the Red River Settlement after 1811. During the period the number of buildings at York were greatly expanded as new storehouses, shops, cookrooms, residences and so on were built. See Bruce Donaldson, York Factory: A Land-Use History, Manuscript Report Series no. 444, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1981), pp. 17-42.

the building of the "Depot" warehouse along with artisan's shops, new fur warehouses, residences, and a powder magazine in the period between 1830 and 1838.⁴⁵ The "Depot" warehouse was the largest single building constructed by the Hudson's Bay Company in North America up until the 20th century, and it remains perhaps the most graphic reminder of York's central role in the fur trade.⁴⁶ Between 1821 and 1857 virtually all the Hudson's Bay Company's imports and exports passed through York Factory and this warehouse.

In 1858 the Company began to ship goods through St. Paul, making use of the American railway system which had reached Minnesota by that time. From that point on York Factory's transport responsibilities declined year by year until 1873, when the last full "outfit" was shipped to York. The following year all the surplus goods at the factory were shipped to Red River.⁴⁷ Paralleling this decline in warehouse and transshipment responsibilities, York Factory lost most of its administrative duties and its manufacturing functions. Increasingly after 1860 the paper work of the fur trade, indents for goods, accounts and the like, was transferred from York to Red River along with the manufacture of trade goods like kettles, pots, and traps.⁴⁸ Throughout the 1870's and 1880's the complement of men at York declined until it too had joined Churchill as little more than an outpost.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 43-57.

⁴⁶ Bruce Donaldson, The York Factory "Depot" Warehouse: A Structural and Use History, 1830-1861 Microfiche Report Series no.5, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1982), pp. 26-27.

⁴⁷ Donaldson, York Factory: Land-Use, p. 77.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 71-5 and p. 77.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

The stages in the development of York Factory and Churchill may be divided into the following periods. Between 1714 (1717 in the case of Churchill) and 1774 both York and Prince of Wales's Fort operated as bayside factories. Each was responsible for trade with a large hinterland, and at both posts most of this trade was conducted with native middlemen. Between 1774 and 1821 both York and Churchill suffered some loss of status as trade centres. At York, however, this was partially balanced by increased administrative responsibilities and a growing importance as the company's main warehouse and transshipment site. Unlike York, which supplied a chain of inland posts, Churchill never really succeeded in establishing a network of inland posts, and by the early 18th century it had become an outpost of York. After 1821 Churchill remained a sub-post in the York Factory district. York, on the other hand, became the chief administrative, manufacturing and distribution centre for the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department up to the 1860's. In the final decade of this study York began to decline as more and more of its functions were transferred to Red River, but it was not until the 1880's that this process was complete.

The Hudson's Bay Company Archives provide a remarkable collection of materials for studying the history of individual posts. The most important of these sources are included in what the Hudson's Bay Company Archives designate as their "B" series records. These are post records of all sorts and begin with the designations of B.239 for York Factory records, and B.42 for Prince of Wales's Fort and Churchill records. This series contains a variety of different sorts of materials which are designated by a letter following the initial series and post designation. For example B.239/a/182 represents the post journal for York Factory for 1851-52. The most

significant of these are post journals (indicated by an "a"), country correspondence or those letters sent between posts ("b"), inward correspondence from London ("c"), account books of all sorts ("d"), district reports ("e"), lists of servants ("f"), servants' accounts ("g"), minutes of the Northern Council - the governing council of the Hudson's Bay Company in the North-West after 1821 ("k"), district statements ("l"), miscellaneous papers ("z") which include materials like reports to the London committee on various aspects of the operations of posts, passenger lists for company supply vessels, and so on, and finally post inventories ("aa"). The Hudson's Bay Archives also contain a good deal of information on specific posts in other sorts of records, primarily the "A" series records kept at the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company, which include outward and inward correspondence, personnel records, and miscellaneous reports and correspondence, and the "D" series of governors' papers and correspondence.

Although collected as business records post journals and other materials are also well suited to the study of social history. At both York and Churchill similar documentation was collected in a systematic manner over lengthy and continuous periods of time. This makes the comparative study of separate communities simpler and more practical. It also allows for a more coherent analysis of social change and social stasis within individual posts. There are of course some difficulties. Personnel records were collected in different ways and contain different information before and after 1821. Many journal entries are laconic in the extreme, consisting only of some variation on "Men employed as yesterday". Finally and perhaps most significantly company records generally contain information on post residents more or less in inverse proportion to their numbers. The senior

officers who kept the records reveal much more about themselves than about junior officers, who in turn usually figure more prominently than tradesmen or labourers. Similarly native people appear most often in account books and trade ledgers, and the information recorded about them is only infrequently related to the subjects studied in subsequent chapters. Whenever possible their role in post life will be examined, but in order to study their relationship with company employees of all ranks a very different dissertation would be necessary, using different sources and describing different phenomena.

The main focus of this study then is the group of permanent company employees who served at York Factory and Churchill between 1714 and 1870. The specific topics covered in subsequent chapters include social structure and social relations, work, leisure and recreation, non-trade social institutions, accident, disease and medical treatment, and standard of living. These subjects do not exhaust all possible lines of scholarly enquiry in examining post communities, but taken together they provide a detailed analysis of some of the most important aspects of everyday life in Hudson's Bay Company service. They also allow comparative study between posts and some consideration of differing paths of social development within the two communities.

Chapter II - Social Structure and Social Relations

In North America the term colony is usually treated as synonymous with the largely agricultural settlements established by European powers along the Atlantic seaboard and in the St. Lawrence River valley in the 17th and 18th centuries. What is sometimes overlooked is the fact that colonization could take a variety of forms. K.G. Davies has argued that although early European expansion in North America was a "confused affair" marked by considerable experimentation and frequent failure two enduring forms of colony emerged which he terms "regimes of settlement" and "regimes of trading posts".¹ The two were never mutually exclusive, and trade without settlement was as unlikely as successful settlement without a secure basis in trade - a cash crop or commodity that would cover the costs of colony formation. Indeed in many cases trading posts acted as the precursors of large-scale agricultural settlement, but there was nothing inevitable about the process.

The distinction between regimes of settlement and regimes of trading posts, given formal recognition in French colonial administration in the terms "comptoir" and "colonie",² is found mainly in the motives behind the establishment of any given expatriate European community and the on-going economic basis of the settlement. As Davies points out some Europeans sought "to exploit the new lands in a wholly or mainly commercial way ... in

¹ K.G. Davies, The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), pp. 86-87.

² Ibid., p. 87.

order to obtain supplies of fish, fur, pepper or dyewood", while others "looked to the colonies for land on which well-peopled estates could be erected as nearly as possible like manorial or seigniorial properties at home".³ Although apparently contradictory aims, in the 17th century many colonial promoters managed to combine both an interest in trade with an expectation that their lands might become well-peopled.

The actions of the London committee of the Hudson's Bay Company in the 1670's and 1680's reveal a similar confusion of purpose. The charter granted to the company in 1670 has been described as "the charter of a colony, Rupert's Land, as much as the charter of a trading company", and it empowered the company to establish virtually any form of settlement it saw fit: "Castles Fortifications Fortes Garrisons Colonies or Plantacions Townes or Villages".⁴ Few of these options were actually taken up, and it should be remembered that they were not a charter obligation despite the claims of later company critics like Arthur Dobbs. The company did not have to establish plantations or a regime of settlement, but there is evidence that such a course of action was contemplated for a time. As Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk both note, in the mid-1680's the company experimented with a policy of allowing its officers to take their wives with them to Hudson and James bays,⁵ and had this policy been allowed to continue it is possible that the company might have established a very different form of community

³ *Ibid.*, p. 86. Philip Curtin has noted another possible distinction. What he calls "trading post empires" or "fortified trade diasporas" generally sought only to control the trade of a region and not to administer territory. Curtin, Cross-Cultural Trade, p. 35.

⁴ Rich, Hudson's Bay Company: Volume I, p. 55.

⁵ Brown, Strangers in Blood, pp.9-11 and Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, p.173.

from those it eventually settled upon. There is no reason to believe that, if European men could survive and even prosper in the admittedly bleak surroundings of Hudson Bay, European wives and children could not have secured a subsistence there as well. "Company familism", as Jennifer Brown describes this policy of settling men with their wives and children, failed not because of its impossibility but for other reasons.⁶ While the wife of Henry Sergeant, the governor at Fort Albany, and her friend Mrs. Maurice were both wounded during De Troyes's attack on Forts Albany and Charles in 1686, this is only a partial explanation of the London committee's rejection of "company familism". As Davies points out a regime of trading posts was considerably cheaper, in the short run at least, than attempts to settle a large permanent population in colonial territories.⁷ This was particularly true at bayside trading posts which, it was clear even by the 1680's, would never be entirely self-supporting in terms of food. The larger the population at these posts the more acute the need for imported provisions and for the purchases of food from the local Homeguard population. It is highly likely that, if the London committee had pursued a policy of allowing its employees to emigrate with their families, the Hudson's Bay Company would have failed as a viable commercial enterprise.⁸ Rich, Brown and other historians have traced the shift away from an interest in encouraging settlement to an interest in maximizing trade to changes in the composition of the governing committee of the Hudson's Bay Company. By about 1679 the

⁶ See Brown, Strangers in Blood, p. 10-11.

⁷ Davies, North Atlantic, p. 87.

⁸ This happened with the Virginia and Plymouth Companies and the Company of a Hundred Associates, though in these cases their trading territories had far better settlement potential than Hudson Bay.

original courtier-investors in the company had largely been replaced by a group of London financiers led by Sir James Hayes.⁹ These new stockholders helped the company chart a prudent and ultimately profitable course in which the demands of trade took precedence over improbable colonization schemes.

It should also be remembered that the company's regime of trading posts was not an aberration, though as a colonial strategy in North America it was less common than regimes of settlement. K.G. Davies has described this policy as essentially a Dutch-style of colonization, and argues that it suited the primarily commercial motives of the Dutch who were content to plant "small lightly defended [factories] ... garrisoned by a few soldiers and worked by a few traders, sited wherever profitable trade was expected".¹⁰ The British also founded similar colonies, though their colonial style was more eclectic ranging from slave colonies, refuges for religious exiles, to more conventional settlement and trading post colonies.¹¹

In West Africa another chartered trading company, the Royal African Company, founded at much the same time as the Hudson's Bay Company in 1672, adopted a very similar approach to trade and colonial development as the London committee. Indeed the types of coastal trading enclaves founded by the Royal African Company seem to bear a close resemblance to the forts and factories of the Hudson's Bay Company in everything from size to personnel

⁹ Rich, Hudson's Bay Company: Volume I, pp. 86-88, and Brown, Strangers in Blood, p. 9.

¹⁰ Davies, North Atlantic, p. 44 and pp. 58-59.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 59.

and government.¹² One interesting difference between the two companies, however, was a matter of terminology. The Royal African Company normally designated its main settlements forts, and used factory to describe unfortified, often temporary outposts.¹³ The Hudson's Bay Company on the other hand usually followed the opposite pattern until the later 18th century, when it began to call new outposts "houses", leaving factory and fort for major trade and administrative centres.

According to Davies "certain styles of European establishment suited certain geographical and physical environments ... and not others". North America generally suited settlement colonies, but Dutch-style trading posts suited marginal areas with limited agricultural potential. They also suited the interests of merchants, and where commercial motives remained paramount trading post colonies proved a durable and adaptable form of colonization.¹⁴

¹² See K.G. Davies, The Royal African Company (London: Longman's Green and Company, 1957), pp. 240-64. These two trading companies apparently shared some important stockholders and committee members, and the influence of one company's experiences on the other might prove a profitable line of research. See, Rich, Hudson's Bay Company: Volume I, p. 25 and K.G. Davies, Royal African Company, pp. 63-74.

¹³ Ibid., p. 246.

¹⁴ Davies, North Atlantic, p. 66. Gerald Sider in his study of the development of Newfoundland society likens the situation of fishermen to native fur trappers, but outpost settlements also had much in common with fur trade post communities. See Gerald Sider, Culture and Class in Anthropology and History: a Newfoundland illustration (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 12-38, esp pp. 30-33. Stephen Innes also argues that in New England colonial communities were more varied in type and form than most assume. He suggests that New England consisted of three distinct settlement zones each with its own characteristic types of community. The community he studied, Springfield, was highly commercialized and bore little resemblance either to older urban areas like Boston or Salem or to towns where subsistence agriculture predominated like Dedham or Andover. Throughout most of the 17th century it remained essentially a small company town dominated by the Pyncheon family; indeed it began as a fur trade post. According to Innes this helped to ensure that Springfield, and probably other communities like it, was first of all an economic community

In rejecting "company familism" and opting instead for another model of colonial community, more economic than social in basis, the London committee and Hudson's Bay Company were following a recognizable pattern of colonial development.

By the time the company reassumed control of York Factory in 1714 and established its new post at Prince of Wales's Fort in 1717 the main features of its settlement policy had been set down for nearly three decades. Still the anticipated form of these communities was only imperfectly reflected in actual social practices at trading posts, revealing an interesting tension between metropolis and hinterland. The London committee could shape but never entirely control the types of community which developed under its aegis.

Bayside posts were expected to be permanently occupied sites but with an impermanent population. Company servants were hired to work for a specific number of years - usually five for European servants on their first contract - and on the completion of their contracts they were either to return home or sign on for a further tour of duty. They were expected then to be sojourners rather than life-long emigrants. Unlike the indentured servant who so often became a colonist elsewhere in North America, the Hudson's Bay Company did not allow its servants to remain in company territories after their contracts had been served, at least prior to 1812 and the establishment of the Red River Settlement. Indeed although their contracts and terms of work were very similar in some respects company servants were not hired as indentured servants. Instead company service was

and only later a social community. See Stephen Innes, Labour in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. xv-xxi.

closer to engagement as a soldier or sailor. The London committee reflecting this expected its men to conform to a quasi-military style of government and discipline.¹⁵ The men were to be ordered by rank according to a type of hierarchy by occupation. A broad social distinction was drawn between "officers" or "gentlemen" as they were sometimes termed and "servants" or "the men". Of course within these two general groups there were considerable variations in power, prestige, pay, and perquisites. Jennifer Brown has described the policy of the London committee in the 18th century as "military monasticism" - military in that company employees were organized into a social system of ranks and subjected to a near military form of discipline, and monastic in that the London committee assumed they would be celibate and chaste during their time in the North-West.¹⁶ Not only did the company effectively prevent wives and children from accompanying employees to Hudson Bay until well into the 19th century, but the London committee also strictly enjoined its men not to intermarry with native groups or even to engage in any sexual contact with native women. Parts of this policy were relatively easy to enforce: there is only one recorded instance when a European woman managed to secure passage to Hudson Bay in the period up to 1812. The woman in question, Isabel Gunn, followed her lover to Albany in 1806, but without official approval. She managed to disguise herself as a labourer, and her fellow servants protected her secret

¹⁵ As Rich points out, however, the company's disciplinary measures were less draconian than those in force in the Navy or Army or even an elite public school. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company: Volume I, pp. 607-8.

¹⁶ Brown, Strangers in Blood, p. 11.

until she gave birth to a child in 1807.¹⁷ Otherwise no European women were allowed into company territories until Lord Selkirk established the Red River colony in 1812. Even then the Red River Settlers were deemed to be separate from other company operations, and it was not until the 1820's that a handful of company officers actually lived in the North-West with wives who were neither native nor mixed-blood.¹⁸

The prevention of sexual contact between company employees and native women and a prohibition against intermarriage were less simple to maintain. Indeed both proved impossible to enforce, though at least officially they remained breaches of company regulations until the early 19th century.

Jennifer Brown compares this policy with mores in the British army, and argues that the Hudson's Bay Company went further than the military in trying to control the sexual conduct of its employees. Up until the 20th century the British army expected its members, especially junior officers, to defer marriage, but it did not demand chastity as well.¹⁹ The company's policy of demanding, if not always securing, chastity and celibacy among its employees is credited, however, by Brown and Van Kirk with forming much of the basis for the later development of a distinctive "fur trade society".

¹⁷ Her story is recounted in greater detail in Malvina Bolus, "The Son of I. Gunn," *The Beaver*, 302, 3 (Winter 1971): 23-26.

¹⁸ The term mixed-blood is, of course, a scientific fallacy, and is used in this thesis with some reservation to describe the offspring of European fathers and native mothers. Alternative terms like Métis are preferable in some respects, but Métis is generally used in Canada to describe a specific group of people most of whom had a French and native ancestry. Half-breed is simply pejorative in modern usage and will only be used in direct quotations. The minefield of ethnic labelling in the fur trade is explored with sensitivity by Jennifer Brown in "Linguistic Solitudes and Changing Social Categories," in Judd and Ray, *Old Trails and New Directions*, pp. 147-59.

¹⁹ Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, p. 12.

Intermarriage between native women and European men was common throughout the New World, and in Latin America "mestizo" groups form the largest identifiable population groupings. Similarly in Canada there are enormous numbers of people with some native ancestry. It has been estimated, for example, that about "forty percent of French Canadians could find at least one Amerindian in their family trees".²⁰ The extent of this intermarriage between European and native peoples has usually been seriously underestimated or glossed over in the conventional historiography of New France, Acadia and the British colonies.²¹ The absence of European women in fur trade territories made it impossible to deny the existence of mixed marriages or sexual liaisons. If children were born or marriages contracted the wife and mother could only have been native or mixed-blood in ancestry up until the 1820s, and she was unlikely to have been anything else up until the 1880s. That children were born and "marriages" contracted in the fur trade territories could not be denied, and there was a slow adjustment of official company practices and regulations concerning marriage and domestic obligations to take account of actual fur trade conditions.

The London committee's original desire to prohibit all sexual contact and intermarriage between its employees and native women has often been treated as at best hopeless naivety and at worst outright idiocy,²² but the

²⁰ Olive Patricia Dickason, "From 'One Nation' in the Northeast to 'New Nation' in the Northwest: A Look at the emergence of the Métis," in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown (eds.), The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), p. 19.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 20-24.

²² The most recent articulation of such views may be found in Peter C. Newman, Company of Adventurers: Volume I (Markham: Viking Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 202-04.

policy may not have been so quixotic as it appears at first glance. Elsewhere in North America and in Europe apprentices and indentured and household servants were usually prohibited from marrying except in exceptional circumstances or with the permission of their masters. In other North American colonies indentured servants faced stiff penalties for marriage without their master's consent and sexual improprieties were equally harshly punished.²³ The London committee's position on such matters merely reflected a contemporary view that masters had the right to control the personal as well as the work lives of their employees.²⁴

The company may well have felt quite justified in its actions especially when trade, post security, and the very survival of employees depended upon the "goodwill and co-operation" of native groups.²⁵ Moreover as Peter Laslett and other social historians have shown early marriage was not common in pre-industrial Britain in any segment of society.²⁶ The much remarked-upon cases of child marriage in royal families and the aristocracy were both few in number and more in the nature of a betrothal than a binding contract. Consummation of such marriages awaited adulthood. Not only did

²³ Davies, North Atlantic, p. 106.

²⁴ Ibid. Davies suggests that the status of a "servant" in colonial North America was roughly comparable to that of an apprentice in Britain but with fewer prospects of actually learning a trade and less hope of redress if ill-treated. In early colonial history unfree labour and unequal contractual relations were the norm, and few thought it improper for masters to interfere in what would now be considered the private concerns of their employees. See, ibid., p. 99.

²⁵ Brown, Strangers in Blood, p. 12.

²⁶ Indeed given shorter life expectations marriage actually occupied less of an individual's life cycle than is the case today. A man marrying at the age of 28 or 30 in 18th century Britain had probably lived about half his life already. See Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost: Further Explored (London: Methuen, 1963), pp. 81-80.

late marriages act as an effective means of limiting family size, but it allowed both partners to work for a number of years in order to acquire some savings and a small stock of necessary property before embarking upon raising a family. Moreover sexual maturity occurred considerably later than is the case today - perhaps as much as three to four years later.²⁷ Company employees hired in their late teens may well have only just reached puberty. The fact that in 1806 a young woman, Isabel Gunn, could masquerade as a labourer suggests much the same thing. A tradition of late marriage was particularly strong in the Orkneys, at least based on 19th century evidence which indicated the average age of Orkneymen at marriage was slightly over 30 years, appreciably higher than the general British average.²⁸ If company employees did not expect to marry until their late twenties or early thirties they could easily serve out a five year contract, and perhaps an extension of this contract before reaching an age when establishing a family was considered normal. What complicated matters was the fact that many found company service very attractive and chose not to remain just sojourners. As even some critics of the company noted - with incredulity - many employees having served in the North-West had no desire to return home and others after going back to Britain quickly developed an urge to reenter

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.84.

²⁸ See Christopher Smout, "Aspects of Sexual Behaviour in Nineteenth-Century Scotland," in Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen, and Richard M. Smith (eds.) Bastardy and its Comparative History: Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and marital nonconformism in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica and Japan (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), p. 203. Articles in this work also indicate, however, that the prevalence of illegitimacy and practices like bundling meant popular custom countenanced behaviour that religious and legal authorities frowned upon.

company service.²⁹ By the mid-18th century then there was a significant cadre, albeit one whose size has never been determined with precision, of long-service employees who planned to spend the bulk of their working careers on the shores of Hudson Bay. These long-service employees were a valuable part of company operations, and their right to marry and raise families was less easy to deny than in the case of temporary sojourners.

The London committee may also have assumed that native groups would not be eager to see their women marry company employees or to countenance sexual contacts. As Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk have shown, however, this assumption was at least partially false. Close ties between traders and native groups could be cemented by intermarriage, and for native women there were appreciable material benefits in the form of assured access to blankets, pots, needles, and other trade goods to be gained from establishing stable relationships with company employees. There were powerful and compelling reasons beyond mere biology why both company employees and their native trading partners would seek to circumvent any policy prohibiting intermarriage and sexual contact in the fur trade. It is worthy of note that the London committee soon modified its views on such matters. By the early 18th century the committee merely contented itself with encouraging its officers to "hinder as much as possible" such cross-

²⁹ In the 19th century the median length of service for company employees as a whole was more than six years, and at York the average was even higher. See Payne, "York Factory", p.43. No equivalent figures are obtainable for the 18th century as personnel records did not include years of service. Still critics and defenders of the company both agreed in published remarks that many, perhaps most, company employees "imbibe[d] a love of the country" and reengaged in large numbers at the ends of their contracts. See for example Edward Umfreville, The Present State of Hudson Bay, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954), pp.62-63, and James Isham, Isham's Observations and Notes, (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1948), pp.220-21.

cultural liaisons and shortly thereafter it admitted to Richard Norton, the officer in charge of Prince of Wales's Fort, that it had no power to compel him to remain celibate.³⁰ The company did, however, argue that it had no responsibility for maintaining wives or families at its posts, and throughout most of the 18th century a kind of compromise was reached. The company continued formally to prohibit marriage, but it took no action against employees who transgressed this regulation. Some individual officers like Joseph Isbister or James Duffield attempted to enforce the letter of these and other company regulations, but most company officers pursued a more tolerant course. It was customary for post governors to keep a wife, or sometimes more than one wife, and junior officers might take a woman to their rooms in the post "at proper times", though in the latter case these women were expected to leave the post at night. Tradesmen and labourers were expected to remain celibate and chaste while actually resident at the main post, but they could keep a woman while working away from the post at hunting, fishing, or wood-cutting camps.³¹

Unfortunately this policy makes it difficult to describe the size and composition of 18th century post communities. It is known that some, perhaps many, company employees formed stable long-term relationships generally termed "country Marriages" with native women and after about 1770 with mixed-blood women.³² As early as the 1740's James Isham commented on the existence of children born to company employees and native women and

³⁰ See Brown, Strangers in Blood, p. 13 and Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties", p.39.

³¹ See Graham, Observations, p. 248.

³² See Brown, Strangers in Blood, pp. 51-80.

described them as "pretty Numerous".³³ However most company officers were less than forthcoming in post records about their domestic lives, since there remained an official prohibition in force against them maintaining wives and families at company posts. As a result information about how many company employees married, their family sizes, and the overall size of post communities is scanty.

It is known that the size of the community at company posts was appreciably larger than company employees alone, and although full-time company employees stationed at York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort, later Churchill, are the primary focus of this dissertation it needs to be remembered that they were not the entire population of these posts. Jennifer Brown has estimated, admittedly on the basis of a rather small sample, that prior to 1821 Hudson Bay Company men who married native or mixed-blood women according to the custom of the country had an average of about 3.8 children each. After 1821 family sizes increased sharply, perhaps reflecting more permanent relationships, earlier marriage, or greater acceptance of the very fact of intermarriage. Of all the families sampled in the period between 1821 and 1850 the average number of children produced was 7.3.³⁴

Even at the lower pre-1821 rate of just under four children per couple, and assuming no more than one man in four formed a lasting relationship with a woman in the North-West the actual size of most post communities must have

³³ Isham, Observations, p.79.

³⁴ Brown, Strangers in Blood, Table 3, p. 154.

been at least double the normal complement of men.³⁵ After 1821 larger families and in some cases a higher rate of marriage would have meant a community perhaps three or more times the size the official complement of men. In addition most bayside posts had an associated population of Indians, often called the Homeguard. At York most of these Homeguard were nominally Cree,³⁶ but at Prince of Wales's Fort and Churchill there were also Chipewyan and Inuit families described as Homeguard as well.³⁷ Some historians now suspect that by the late 18th century a large proportion, perhaps most, of the Homeguard were "in fact widows, former wives, or descendants of earlier traders", and not simply a branch of the local native

³⁵ Philip Goldring has estimated that about 25% to 33% of all company employees at any one time were married and had dependents living with them at their posts after 1821. See Philip Goldring, "Employment Relations in the Fur Trade, 1821-1892", Unpublished paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, June 1981, p. 10. Scanty evidence makes any equivalent estimate for the pre-1821 period highly speculative. There is one interesting piece of evidence from Churchill which gives some insight into the size of the community there. In 1856 James Hackland noted that the post was crowded with people that winter. Despite only being allowed six men on regular staff, some 70 rations were being served out on a weekly basis to women and children alone. See HBCA:B.42/a/188, fo.67, 6 December 1856. That same year the Reverend William Mason visited Churchill and baptized many of the posts's residents. The families of James Dunning, William Oman and William Gibeault provided 24 converts in all. HBCA:B.42/a/188, fo.35, 6 April 1856.

³⁶ A preliminary study of the Homeguard at York has been completed. See Victor P. Lytwyn, York Factory Native Ethnohistory: A Literature Review and an Assessment of Source Materials, Microfiche Report Series no. 162, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1984).

³⁷ In the 18th century few Inuit made more than fleeting visits to Prince of Wales's Fort unless taken there as translators. Their reluctance to establish more frequent contact is largely explained by the fact that Churchill could only be reached after travelling through territory controlled by the Chipewyan. As Hearne makes plain, the Inuit and Chipewyan remained hostile to each other into the late 18th century. After about 1800 some Inuit came to live in the Churchill area, and a few, most notably a man named Oulibuck, served as regular company employees.

population.³⁸ The widows, orphans, invalids, and others mentioned in post journals as living at or about bayside posts made a significant addition to the population of post communities from at least the early 18th century onwards. As early as 1717 Henry Kelsey remarked that he had thirteen Indians living at York and relying on post food rations.³⁹ These Indians were not simply the objects of charity; they hunted and trapped for the post, helped with other work, and produced needed supplies like snowshoes and clothing. Indeed they fulfilled many of the same functions as the families of company employees in later years.⁴⁰ In fact the thirteen Indians described by Kelsey may have included some of the first Indian women taken as country wives in the North-West and some of the first mixed-blood children.

Over the rest of the 18th century the numbers of Homeguard and post dependents found at York and Churchill varied considerably. Few probably lived at the post year round, and their numbers always went up in winter, especially if game was scarce, and in spring at the time of the goose hunt. Although various individuals and families wintered over near Prince of Wales's Fort from the 1720's onwards,⁴¹ post records seem to suggest fewer native people lingered near Churchill than York after finishing their trade, probably because of the harsh conditions at Churchill. Certainly its exposed

³⁸ See for example, Brown, Strangers in Blood, p. 68.

³⁹ HBCA:3.239/a/4, fo.9d, 8 December 1717. At this time York had a regular complement of about 20 men.

⁴⁰ See Jennifer Brown, "A Colony of Very Useful Hands," The Beaver, 307,4 (Spring 1977): 39-45.

⁴¹ See for example HBCA:B.42/a/2, fo.45, 8 June 1722; B.42/a/4, fo.30, 22 June 1724; B.42/a/5, fo.7, 8 October 1724, and B.42/a/9, fo.25, 28 April 1729.

location inhibited camping there.⁴² Near the end of the century Samuel Hearne estimated the Homeguard population around Churchill at about 32 people, though this number had been halved by smallpox and starvation from the 69 Homeguard at Churchill in 1782.⁴³ Even so 32 Homeguard if present all at once at the post would have equalled the size of the permanent work force stationed there in 1783-84.⁴⁴ Forty years later the Churchill District Report suggested a somewhat larger Homeguard population, including 10 Cree hunters and their families and 20 Chipewyan hunters and their families. The report noted, however, that the Cree spent their winters about 150 miles inland south of the Churchill River, and thus only the Chipewyan were frequent visitors to the post.⁴⁵

At York the Homeguard were more numerous or at least more closely tied to the post.⁴⁶ Throughout the 18th century there were usually a number of Indians living at York Factory from at least the fall to the spring, since some effort was made to get them to leave the post over the summer when game was plentiful and conditions less harsh. Over the winter the number of

⁴² For example William Sinclair in the mid-19 century remarked that few Indians remained more than a few days at Churchill with the result that "several months passes without seeing a single Indian". HBCA:D.5/16, fo.17, William Sinclair to George Simpson, 1 January 1846.

⁴³ HBCA:B.42/b/26, fo.4d, Samuel Hearne to William Falconer, 23 December 1783.

⁴⁴ See HBCA:A.30/3, fos.20d-23, Churchill Factory Servants List 1784.

⁴⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/149, pp. 53-56.

⁴⁶ In notes drawn up for George Simpson's appearances before the 1857 Parliamentary Enquiry the total number of native people frequenting York Factory was estimated as 300 persons and Churchill 400. Many of Churchill's Indians, however, were only irregular visitors to the post. See HBCA:E.18/8, fo.41.

native people residing at York usually increased so that it was not uncommon for post journals to report 60 or more, indeed on occasion up to 130 Indians, as living at the post.⁴⁷ By the mid-19th century there was a more or less permanent native settlement around York Factory. Philip Goldring quotes Letitia Hargrave to the effect that at York the native people themselves drew a distinction between "tent" and "Fort" Indians.⁴⁸ Many "widows and orphans" were housed on the periphery of York Factory at Four Mile Gully, and most senior officers made some effort to see them fed and housed.⁴⁹ In 1863 James Clare even drew up a formal list of provisions to be dispensed on a regular basis to post hunters and their families along with the invalids, widows, and orphans living near York Factory. Most received a few pounds of flour and oatmeal along with a little pork or beef and one or two geese per week from post supplies.⁵⁰ According to Bruce Donaldson by the mid-19th century York Factory was home to at least four or five extended native families who had established a small cluster of cabins at Four Mile Gully, Ten Shilling Creek and other nearby locations.⁵¹ Donaldson offers no estimate of the total size of this now virtually permanent native population at York, but Clare's provision list suggests

⁴⁷ See for examples HBCA:B.239/a/34, fo.29d, 11 April 1751; B.239/a/53, fo.35, 5 May 1765, and B.239/a/68, fo.28, 7 March 1773.

⁴⁸ Letitia Hargrave, The Letters of Letitia Hargrave, Margaret Arnett Macleod (ed.), (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1947), p. 251, Letitia Hargrave to Florence Mactavish, 24 August 1850, quoted in Goldring, Papers: Volume II, p. 37. Although this distinction is not discussed in other ethnographic literature it suggests a division in the ranks of the Homeguard between those who lived at York and those who merely traded there.

⁴⁹ Payne, York Factory, p. 171.

⁵⁰ See HBCA:B.239/z/28, fo.34, 3 November 1863.

⁵¹ Donaldson, Land Use, pp. 63-64.

about 13 "paupers" were living at York in 1663, along with at least two families requiring some support. The deer and partridge hunters and others employed in temporary labour for the company and their families must have at least doubled this population, and it seems likely that any estimate of the population of York Factory in the mid-18th century should include no less than 50 to 60 native people, in addition to regular company employees and their families.

Thus at both York Factory and Churchill the all-male enclave envisaged by the London committee in the late 17th century developed into something quite different. Fur trade posts may also have been planned originally as economic communities, but they developed into social communities as well. Still among the full-time company employees who formed the core of these post settlements a shared experience of service with the Hudson's Bay Company was the most significant tie. John Nicks has suggested that many employees from the Orkneys had relatives who also served with the Hudson's Bay Company, but post employee records do not suggest large numbers of men served at the same post at the same time as their fathers or brothers. Indeed as Nicks notes the most common pattern was for brothers to work for the company but sequentially and not at the same time.⁵² Similarly although the company tended to concentrate its recruitment in a few areas, especially the Orkneys in the period before 1821, the numbers of men recruited made up no more than a tiny proportion of the population of any Orkney parish with the possible exception of Orphir and Birsay in the late 18th century.⁵³ From the late 18th century on employee records normally included a home

⁵² Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC", p. 115.

⁵³ Ibid., Tables 1 and 2, pp. 106-07.

parish and few posts housed more than a handful of men from the same parish.⁵⁴ These men, if from the Orkneys or other small communities, may have known each other prior to joining the Hudson's Bay Company, but suggestions of closer connections remain a matter of speculation.⁵⁵

In North America, however, they formed communities in which social as well as economic ties proliferated. A common employer may have brought them all to the shores of Hudson Bay, but once there other common ties can be found. Shared work and way of life alone would have made posts a web of social relationships. In addition the growth of family and other domestic ties expanded the community to include wives and children. At Churchill family ties became particularly complex in the later 19th century. William Oman and James Dunning, two long-time employees at Churchill, became in effect the dual paterfamilias of the community. Their sons worked for the company and their daughters either married, lived with, or had children by a large proportion of the men who served at Churchill.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The most common single parish designation at York Factory and Churchill after 1821 was "native", though as this included the entire territory of Rupert's Land it implied no great likelihood of familiarity. In 1794 by way of example there were 8 men out of 28 at Fort Churchill who gave Stromness as their home parish, an unusually high proportion of any posts's complement to come from one parish. At the time the population of Stromness, however, was between about 2,100 and 2,200 persons, so the Stromness men at Churchill constituted less than 0.4% of the parish population. They were also all of different ages and occupations, including harpooners, bricklayers, and labourers, further undermining any belief that they would have been closely connected before taking up company service. Three did, however, share the same last name, Linklater. See HBCA:A.30/6, fos.42d-46, Fort Churchill Servant List.

⁵⁵ See for example Frits Pannekoek, "'Corruption' at Moose", *The Beaver*, 308, 4 (Spring 1979):9.

⁵⁶ Jane Dunning for example first "married" a Chipewyan hunter in 1840, but the relationship foundered, and in 1847 she was reported to have been married to Finlay Munroe, the post cooper. Anne Oman had a child by Thomas Canada, a prisoner sent to Churchill from Red River in 1859, and soon after

Similarly the Homeguard Indians who settled around posts like York Factory also formed part of these post communities. With or without family ties to company employees, they worked directly or indirectly for the company as boat or canoe men, hunters, fishermen, or producing snowshoes, clothing or other supplies for the post.⁵⁷ Native people participated in most post festivities like Christmas balls and the New Year's Day celebrations,⁵⁸ and when they died they were often buried at the post.

married William Gibeault. Nancy Dunning married Adam Colin and Maria Oman George McPherson. Thus throughout most of the 1850's and 1860's out of 8 or 9 permanent employees at Churchill at least 3 or 4 were usually related by marriage. See HBCA:B.42/a/173, fo.2, 11 June 1840; B.42/a/195, fo.2d, 12 November 1847; B.42/a/186, fo.18d, 31 January 1852; B.42/a/188, fo.35, 6 April 1856; B.42/a/189a, fo.70, 26 and 27 February 1859; B.42/a/190, fo.40, 26 February 1863, and B.42/a/191, fo.44d, 21 November 1865. A fuller study of marital and familial ties at Churchill in the later 19th century might well reveal even more connections. At times the post seems to an outside observer to have resembled a large extended family with the officer in charge the odd man out.

⁵⁷ The study of native labour in the fur trade is certainly worthy of closer study. At York Factory in the 19th century separate account books were kept detailing the casual labour provided by the Homeguard. These account books reveal that native people participated, at least on occasion, in virtually every aspect of post labour. See for example HBCA:B.239/d/798, York Factory Indian Services Outfit 1850. It is sometimes assumed that native people only supplied provisions and furs especially in the period prior to 1774, but this is not so. As early as 1724 Richard Norton reported hiring an Indian man and his family to make snowshoes and boots for Prince of Wales's Fort, and other Indians in the early 18th century helped with the construction of Prince of Wales's Fort, cleared paths around York Factory, and built deer hedges. Most were paid at a rate of one made beaver's worth of goods per day, a made beaver being the value of one prime beaver skin. See for example, HBCA:B.42/a/5, fo.7, 6 October 1724; B.42/a/22, fo.28, 8 June 1741, B.239/a/34, fo.35, 24 May 1751; B.239/a/36, fo.8d, 6 October 1752, and B.239/a/60, fo.46d, 17 July 1769. In the later 18th century Andrew Graham estimated that an Indian hunter needed about 70 made beaver worth of goods a year. If true casual labour at a post was probably quite attractive as an alternative to hunting and trapping as it could, in theory, supply a year's supply of trade goods with but 70 days' labour. See Graham, Observations, p.283.

⁵⁸ See Chapter IV, "Leisure", p. 220.

surely as good a symbol of belonging to a community as any.⁵⁹ By the mid-18th century then post communities were composed of company employees, women, children, and a significant population of native people - some related to employees by birth or country marriage, while others perhaps were simply attracted to the economic opportunities provided by the presence of a fur trade post in their territory.

Unfortunately while it is known that the communities established at York Factory and Churchill included wives and children and Homeguard Indians as well as regular company employees,⁶⁰ most post records concentrate on the officers and men of the Hudson's Bay Company. It is possible to trace with some precision, however, the number of year-round employees stationed at bayside posts, their primary occupations, and their salaries and origins.

As previously mentioned the Hudson's Bay Company divided its employees into two basic categories, "officers" and "men", but for the purposes of analysis the latter category of employee needs to be sub-divided and defined more closely. In addition to make comparisons more comprehensible employee records will be divided into three periods: 1724-1774, 1775-1821, and 1821-1870. The dividing lines between these periods correspond to major

⁵⁹ Listing all the native burials at York or Churchill would be a difficult exercise. Two examples may stand for the many. Both indicate that some Indians went out of their way to request burial at posts and with at least some of the outward forms of European burial practice. See HBCA:B.239/a/60, fo.35, 16 May 1769, and B.239/a/62, fo.9, 8 October 1769.

⁶⁰ Most posts also had seasonal visitors, especially in the period after 1774, who in a sense formed part of the community as well. Canoe and boatmen, inland officers, ships' crews, missionaries and others all stayed at bayside posts for varying lengths of time. Seasonal visitors were most common at York, but they were also found at Churchill in smaller numbers particularly in the period between about 1760 and 1815. Some of these visitors have left letters, journals and other writings which flesh out post records, but in most cases their impact on bayside posts was ephemeral.

structural changes in the company's conduct of the fur trade - the establishment of inland trading posts in 1774 and the coalition of the Hudson's Bay and North-West Companies in 1821.

During the first period under consideration here, 1724-1774, significant differences in the size and composition of the work forces at York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort had already appeared. Up to the 1730's both posts had very similar complements of men, but in 1731 construction of a stone fort meant an immediate doubling of the size of the work force at Prince of Wales's Fort. As the London committee noted "it was necessary to send over four and twenty men, consisting of Tradesmen: and other Labouring Hands" to begin work on the new fort.⁶¹ Although the number of men stationed at York Factory grew more or less steadily, it was not until the 1760's that York Factory caught up to and passed Prince of Wales's Fort. Thus despite its much smaller trade returns Prince of Wales's Fort was actually a larger post in terms of its garrison size through much of the early 18th century.

Both posts housed slightly over 20 men in the 1720's, but after 1731 Prince of Wales's Fort's complement of men ballooned to over 50. The number of men allocated to York Factory remained below 30 until the later 1740's at which point the size of York Factory's work force began to increase rapidly. By 1759 it had reached 50 men, and had passed Prince of Wales's Fort. By 1774-75 York Factory had 60 full-time employees, a growth rate of about 10

⁶¹ Quoted in Orysia Luchak, Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th Century: an Analysis of Trade, Construction, and Sloop Voyages Northward, Manuscript Report Series no. 243, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979), p.41.

TABLE 1: York Factory Personnel, 1724-1870

Year	1724-25	1729-30	1734-35	1739-40	1744-45	1749-50	1754-55	1759-60	1764-65	1769-70	1774-75	Average Percentage
Officers	4	4	4	2	3	5	6	6	4	4	7	4.5
Tradesmen	4	7	5	7	11	10	13	7	9	10	11	9.3
Apprentices	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	24.4
Sailors	1	0	1	1	2	5	6	16	16	11	6	3.8
Skilled labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.9
Labourers	7	10	15	14	9	14	15	15	15	21	31	0.0
Servants	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	15.8
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.7
Total	23	22	24	25	28	36	39	50	56	54	60	38.0
												100.0

Year	1784	1790	1794	1799	1801-03	1812	1818-19	Average Percentage
Officers	5	4	10	8	4	4	5	5.4
Tradesmen	2	8	12	12	15	2	2	9.4
Apprentices	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0.4
Sailors	1	2	5	3	2	0	0	1.9
Skilled labour	1	5	4	2	4	0	0	2.9
Labourers	4	4	11	13	9	11	5	10.7
Servants	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0.4
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.4
Total	16	30	58	40	34	27	14	31.6
								100.0

Source: York Factory Archives

TABLE 1 (Cont'd): Work Factory Personnel, 1724-1870

Year	1824-25	1829-30	1834-35	1839-40	1844-45	1849-50	1854-55	1859-60	1864-65	1869-70	Average Percentage
Officers	10	5	6	7	6	8	7	8	8	7	7.2
Treadmen	16	15	9	13	10	9	9	11	10	12	11.4
Apprentices	1	0	2	2	5	8	5	4	3	1	3.1
Sailors	1	1	5	5	8	6	2	2	5	7	6.5
Skilled labour	5	2	3	1	0	3	2	4	1	3	4.2
Labourers	30	14	20	11	11	12	22	20	35	41	25.5
Servants	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Total	63	37	45	38	40	51	47	49	63	40	49.4
											100.0

Source: See footnote 62

TABLE 2: Prince of Wales's Fort / Churchill Personnel, 1724 - 1870

Year	1724-25	1729-30	1734-35	1749-50	1754-55	1759-60	1764-65	1769-70	1774	Average Percentage
Officers	5	4	3	5	4	3	3	5	6	4.2
Treasuremen	3	5	10	8	9	5	4	7	11	6.9
Apprentices	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2
Sailors	8	1	1	5	8	5	4	21	9	6.9
Skilled Labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.2
Labourers	6	9	79	30	22	29	79	24	20	23.6
Servants	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	0.9
Ukroon	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0.4
Total	23	20	53	50	44	44	46	60	50	49.3

Year	1779	1784	1789	1794	1804	1812	1818-19	Average Percentage
Officers	5	4	5	4	2	10	3	4.7
Treasuremen	10	7	8	8	5	8	0	6.6
Apprentices	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Sailors	14	5	9	8	1	0	0	5.3
Skilled Labour	3	1	2	2	1	2	1	1.7
Labourers	13	14	11	6	5	19	4	11.7
Servants	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.4
Ukroon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Total	46	32	36	28	14	49	8	30.4

Source: See footnote 6.

TABLE 2 (Cont'd): Prince of Wales's Fort / Churchill Personnel, 1721 - 1870

Year	1821-25	1826-30	1831-35	1836-40	1841-45	1846-50	1851-55	1856-60	1861-65	1866-70	Average	Percentage
Officers	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.3	14.9
Tradesmen	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1.5	17.2
Apprentices	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0.6	6.9
Sailors	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.5	5.7
Skilled Labour	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0.4	4.6
Labourers	6	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4.3	48.4
Servants	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0
Unknown	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	1.1
Total	11	5	13	6	6	9	7	8	9	9	6.7	100.0

Year codes: see footnote 62

employees a decade from 1749-50 on.⁶² The size of the work force at Prince of Wales's Fort levelled off in the 1750's and early 1760's at an average of about 45 men. In the late 1760's a renewed burst of construction that resulted in the official completion of the fort in 1771, and attempts to expand whaling operations from Churchill meant an appreciable jump in the size of the work force there to 60 men in 1769-70.⁶³ The abandonment of the black whale fishery in 1772 meant a sharp drop in the need for sailors at Prince of Wales's Fort, and by 1774 the complement of men stationed there had returned to a more normal level for the period of 50 men.⁶⁴

Personnel records between 1774 and 1821 are somewhat confused by changes in the company's record-keeping systems. There are a number of sharp fluctuations in the sizes of the complements of men stationed at York

⁶² See Tables 1 and 2. The sources for these and subsequent Tables in this chapter are as follows: HBCA:A.16/9, A.16/10, A.16/11, Prince of Wales's Fort Officers' and Servants' Accounts, 1724-25 to 1769-70; A.16/30, A.16/31, A.16/32, York Factory Officers' and Servants' Accounts, 1724-25 to 1774-75; A.30/1, A.30/3, A.30/4, Prince of Wales's and Fort Churchill Servant Lists, 1774 to 1789; B.239/f/1, York Factory Servant List, 1784; A.30/6, York Factory and Fort Churchill Servant List 1794; A.30/9, York Factory Servant List, 1799; B.42/f/2, Churchill Servants, 1804; B.239/f/9, York Factory Servants, 1802-03; A.30/11, York Factory and Churchill Servants 1812; A.30/16, York Factory and Churchill Servants 1818-19; B.239/g/4, Northern Department Accounts, 1824-25; B.239/g/9, Northern Department Accounts, 1829-30; B.239/g/14, Northern Department Accounts, 1834-35; B.239/g/19, Northern Department Accounts, 1839-40; B.239/g/24, Northern Department Accounts, 1844-45; B.239/g/29, Northern Department Accounts, 1849-50; B.239/g/34, Northern Department Accounts, 1854-55; B.239/g/39, Northern Department Accounts, 1859-60; B.239/g/42, Northern Department Accounts, 1864-65; and B.239/g/46, Northern Department Accounts, 1869-70.

⁶³ See George Ingram, Prince of Wales's Fort: A Structural History, Manuscript Report no. 297, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979), pp. 30-31. A brief account of the company's abortive attempts to develop a black whale fishery out of Churchill may be found in Luchak, Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th Century, pp. 99-100. A fuller account may be found in Garron Frances Wells, "The Development of Trade along the North West Coast of Hudson Bay, 1717-1790", M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1982.

⁶⁴ See Table 2, p. 47.

Factory and particularly Churchill which are difficult to explain except by suggesting that on occasion records included the names of men at the main posts and at subordinate inland posts as well.⁶⁵ The size of the work force at York and Prince of Wales's Fort may have declined slightly from pre-1774 levels in the later 1770's, but it was the capture and destruction of these posts by La Perouse in 1782 which most affected manpower levels. When the company reoccupied the posts it was with appreciably reduced garrisons. This was especially true of York Factory which had only 18 men in 1784 as opposed to 32 at Churchill.⁶⁶ Still York Factory once again began to grow rapidly in size when it became clear that it was the most logical site for a central warehouse and depot for inland posts. In 1794 York had grown to 58 employees, though six of these men were in fact intended for inland duties but had been unable to proceed inland in the fall.⁶⁷ The stresses of competition with the North-West Company, and the demand for labour in the interior encouraged the company to commit as much of its manpower as possible inland in the later 1790's and early 1800's. At York the size of the work force declined from 40 men in 1799 to 34 men in 1802-03, and again from 27 men in 1812 to only 14 men in 1818-19 just prior to the amalgamation

⁶⁵ As in the case, for example, of Churchill in 1812. The number of men listed in the Churchill personnel records as traders and writers that year suggest some of these individuals must have been stationed at sub-posts. Moreover the man normally in command at Churchill in 1812, William Auld, is not listed as stationed there at all - though as superintendent of the "Northern Factories" his responsibilities were greater than Churchill alone. See HBCA:A.30/11, fos.43d-48, Churchill Servants List 1812.

⁶⁶ See Tables 1 and 2, pp.46 and 47. It was also at this point that the post at Churchill became known formally as Fort Churchill. Prince of Wales's Fort was destroyed, and the new post was given a name which had always been used to describe the location.

⁶⁷ See HBCA:B.239/f/1, fo.87d, York Factory List of Servants 1794.

of the Hudson's Bay and North-West Companies. At Churchill a similar process took place with the exception of the apparently anomalous period around 1812. In 1804 there were 14 men stationed at Churchill and in 1818-19 only 8 men, which makes a stated figure of 48 for 1812 seem difficult to explain except in terms of some sort of difference in how personnel records were kept. Overall the rather unsettled pattern of manpower levels at these bayside posts reflects the turmoil and upheaval in company operations during this period.⁶⁶

After 1821 a more discernible pattern of manpower levels may be traced at York Factory and Churchill. The coalition of the Hudson's Bay and North-West Companies meant a temporary increase in post population more noticeable at York Factory than Churchill. In the newly reorganized company York Factory would serve as the main depot and transshipment point for goods entering and furs leaving the North-West. Churchill on the other hand had been relegated to the status of an outpost by 1821, and would remain so. As a result while York Factory's complement of men in 1824-25 was 53, Churchill's was a mere eleven. George Simpson's attempts to prune what he saw as the bloated size of the new Hudson's Bay Company's work force were noticeable at both York and Churchill which by 1829-30 had been cut to 37 and 5 men respectively. Although in 1834-35 Churchill had a garrison of 13 men, throughout the rest of the period covered by this study personnel levels varied very little. Between 7 and 9 men were stationed in every year sampled at Churchill from 1838-40 to 1868-70. The numbers of men stationed at York varied more widely. In general, numbers increased there through the 1840's and reached 51 men in 1849-50. In the 1850's the level of manpower

⁶⁶ See Tables 1 and 2, pp. 46-47.

at York changed little, but by 1864-64 it had grown to 63 men, the largest number of employees at either post in any of the years sampled, and a level of manpower similar to York Factory in the late 1760's and early 1770's before the establishment of inland posts. The use of alternate routes to move goods and furs into and out of the interior in the later 1860's which led to York Factory's decline as a fur trade centre shows up in manpower levels for 1869-70 which declined sharply to 40 men.⁸⁸

While something of the history of these posts may be traced in overall manpower levels, more detailed examination of the actual composition of this work force offers some insight into the social structure of these posts. For the purposes of analysis company employees have been divided into seven general occupational categories: officers, tradesmen, apprentices, sailors, skilled labour, labourers, and personal servants. Each of these categories of employee had its own history and development in company service, and will be described more fully in the following paragraphs. For the purposes of clarity when an employee was given two occupation titles, it has been assumed that the first job listed was the employee's primary occupation.

Officers formed the managerial and professional élite of the fur trade. After 1821 it is easy to define who officers were and who they were not. Personnel records for the Northern Department list commissioned officers, chief traders and chief factors who were paid not salaries but a share of corporate profits, separately from all other employees. Throughout almost the entire period between 1821 and 1870 York Factory was commanded by a commissioned officer, often with the assistance of another commissioned officer who acted as the accountant or chief record-keeper for the Northern

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Department. Probably only at Red River was a similar concentration of commissioned officers to be found. Churchill on the other hand was a relatively minor command and although Colin Robertson, a Chief Factor, was listed as commanding Churchill in the early 1820's, and Charles Griffin, a Chief Trader, was stationed there in the 1860's it was generally put in the charge of officers of less exalted rank.⁷⁰ Other company officers, whom Philip Goldring has described as the "salaried gentlemen",⁷¹ were given a second separate listing in departmental accounts. Their titles included clerk, apprentice clerk, postmaster, apprentice postmaster, surgeon and sloopmaster.⁷² Prior to 1821 it is more difficult to define exactly who was an officer, in part because social distinctions were less rigidly observed. Throughout most of the 18th century there were normally three or four individuals stationed at York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort whose status as officers of the company was clear. Each post had a "governor" or "chief", and frequently a "deputy governor" to assist in managing the post. In addition both posts usually had a surgeon and at least one sloopmaster as part of their complement of men. Employee records, however, also include a number of other occupational titles which probably accorded their bearers

⁷⁰ Robertson's career was in clear decline by the time he was given command of Churchill and Charles Griffin was only posted there after an undistinguished career in the Mackenzie district.

⁷¹ Goldring, Papers: Volume 1, p.23.

⁷² Post-1821 apprentice clerks and postmasters have been included in the category of officers, and not apprentices for the purposes of this study. Most fulfilled clerical duties at York and were in effect simply junior, poorly paid, and largely powerless officers. Postmasters were not responsible for the mail. They were officers deemed capable of taking charge of a small outpost or running a saleshop at a larger post. In rank postmasters were subordinate to clerks, though many were experienced and in some respects highly regarded employees.

the status of officers. Writers and assistant writers appear to have fulfilled essentially the same functions as clerks in later years, as did traders, assistant traders, post accountants and assistant accountants. Because their functions were primarily administrative or professional, and because many of the men who held these positions would later serve in occupations with a clear officer status, the men listed as teachers, and book or store-keepers have also been included in the pre-1821 category of officers.

The category of tradesman contains most of the familiar trades encountered in 18th and 19th century Britain: cooper, blacksmith, tinsmith, tailor, netmaker, mason, bricklayer, carpenter, joiner, sawyer, armourer, and shipwright. Post personnel records also include a number of occupations that in the fur trade had some record-keeping or administrative function but which were not positions accorded the status of officer like butler, steward, storeman and store porter which have been included in the category of tradesmen. In addition there are a number of occupations rarely encountered in personnel records like gunstock maker, file cutter, hatter, farrier, distiller, and gunner which seem appropriate to include among the ranks of tradesmen.

Prior to 1821 apprentices include all employees so designated. During this period some apprentices, indeed probably most, were expected eventually to serve as writers or officers as was the case with David Thompson, or Charles Price Isham.⁷³ This was not always true, however, and other apprentices like John Butler Junior and Andrew Aiken at Prince of Wales's

⁷³ See HBCA:B.239/f/1, York Factory Servants 1790, and A.16/32, York Factory Servants 1769-70. Both Isham and Thompson would go on to have distinguished careers in the fur trade.

Fort served seven year apprenticeships only to become labourers.⁷⁴ After 1821, apprenticeships other than apprentice officers, were used to train the sons of company employees to fill jobs as tradesmen.⁷⁵

The category of skilled labour has been used to describe a number of occupations which began to appear in personnel records after 1774. In many cases these job titles were given to senior labourers so as to justify slightly elevated wages and as recognition for supervisory or other duties they performed over and above simple manual labour. Others recognize what might be termed "country skills": not trades in the normal sense but skilled and valuable labour in a fur trade context. The occupations included in this category of employee are bow and steersmen, fisherman, hunter, interpreter, cattlekeeper, cook, and pateroon - the man in charge of the wood-cutting camp.

The category of sailors includes all those listed as sailors, sloopers, and mariners along with whalers, harpooners, mates, and masters of small vessels like shallops who were generally paid less than mates on sloops. Labourers includes all those designated as labourers, and after 1821 the men listed as mid- or middlemen.⁷⁶ The latter could serve in summer on brigade duty, but unlike steer or bowsman theirs was not a particularly skilled occupation requiring only an ability to pull an oar or tracking line. They

⁷⁴ See HBCA:A.16/9, Prince of Wales's Fort Servants 1724-25 to 1734-35, and A.16/10, Prince of Wales's Fort Servants 1754-55.

⁷⁵ Apprenticeships will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent chapter. See Chapter V, "Education and Religion", pp. 287-89.

⁷⁶ The term middleman needs explanation. It refers to where the individual sat in a canoe or York boat, and does not imply any role as an intermediary in trade.

were paid the same basic wages as labourers and appear to have been treated as interchangeable with labourers for most post work.

The final category of employee to be considered here is personal servants. In the latter half of the 18th century the company allowed certain officers, normally only the sloopmaster and post governor, £8 to £10 per annum with which to hire a servant. As servants were not always listed in personnel records, some officers may simply have pocketed the money. Other officers seem to have used the money to employ a family member or friend's child while teaching them the skills needed to serve later as a company officer. In 1759-60, for example, James Isham listed Charles Price, presumably Charles Price Isham in fact, as his servant, and later George Charles served as William Jefferson's servant at Churchill before becoming a writer there.⁷⁷

Comparing the composition of the work forces at York Factory and Churchill over time, some interesting parallels and contrasts emerge. Between 1724 and 1774 the two posts' average complement of men was quite similar, though Prince of Wales's Fort was slightly larger. At both posts personal servants made up only a tiny proportion of the work force, and the category of employee termed "skilled labour" here was almost entirely absent.⁷⁸ Although their numbers fluctuated considerably over the period in question, peaking in the 1760's when the company was trying to establish a

⁷⁷ See HBCA:A.16/32, York Factory Servants 1759-60, and A.30/4 and A.30/6, Fort Churchill Servants 1789 and 1794. Similarly in 1784 Thomas Prince, the sloopmaster at Churchill, hired John McKinie as his servant. Five years earlier another John McKinie, perhaps the father, also served at Churchill as a mason. See HBCA:A.30/1 and A.30/3, Prince of Wales's Fort Servants 1779 and Fort Churchill Servants 1784.

⁷⁸ Only in 1774 did a fisherman and a pateroon of the woods appear at Prince of Wales's Fort. See HBCA:A.30/1, Prince of Wales's Fort Servants 1774.

whale fishery, sailors also formed a remarkably similar proportion of the work force at both posts. There were a few more apprentices at York than at Prince of Wales's Fort, but their numbers were not great at either post. The major differences between York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort during this period in terms of the composition of their respective work forces was a significantly higher proportion of labourers at Prince of Wales's Fort, and a corresponding preponderance of officers and tradesmen at York Factory. This in turn reflects the differing labour needs at the two posts. The larger volume of trade passing through York Factory meant added record-keeping and administrative responsibilities for officers, and a greater need for tradesmen to produce trade goods and supplies. At Prince of Wales's Fort, however, the greatest demand for labour was created by construction of a stone fort there. This provided some work for tradesmen, especially masons, but much of the construction work required only unskilled labour and Prince of Wales's Fort's work force reflects this. At Prince of Wales's Fort over half the men were labourers and if combined with sailors over 70% of the work force was engaged in essentially manual labour.⁷⁹ Only about one in six employees was hired to work as a tradesman, and about one in ten worked as an officer. At York Factory, however, about one employee in eight was an officer, and one in four worked as tradesman. Still sailors and labourers together did form well over half the work force, and if one were

⁷⁹ This is less surprising when one looks at the actual work performed at fur trade posts. As Chapter III will suggest, the actual work of a fur trade post was taken up in large measure by cutting wood, constructing and maintaining post buildings, and feeding post residents.

looking for a typical company employee at either post that person would have been a manual labourer.⁸⁰

Between 1774 and 1821 the average size of the work force at York Factory was slightly larger than at Prince of Wales's Fort/Fort Churchill - even more so if one discounts the apparently anomalous personnel data from 1812 at Churchill. At both York and Churchill the numbers of labourers and the proportion of the total work force they represented were down appreciably. Sailors continued to form a significant proportion of the available labour at Churchill - over one-sixth - but at York Factory their numbers were down. This reflects an on-going white whale fishery at Churchill,⁸¹ and the continued use of sloops for trading along the coast north of Churchill up to the 1790's.⁸² At both posts officers and tradesmen had become increasingly important as a component of the overall work force. At York Factory just under half of all employees were either officers or tradesmen, while at Churchill officers and tradesmen were almost as numerous as labourers. It is worth noting, however, that one pattern from the previous period was maintained. Tradesmen remained more common at York and labourers at Churchill. The numbers of skilled labourers at both posts, while not high, underlines the growing importance of canoe and later boat brigade work during this period. Most of the men hired as bow and steersmen wintered inland, however, and thus their considerable impact on company

⁸⁰ See Tables 1 and 2, pp.46 and 47.

⁸¹ As previously mentioned the black whale fishery was abandoned in 1771, but this did not stop a continued hunt centred at Churchill of beluga whales.

⁸² See Luchak, Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th century, pp. 124-25.

labour demand is not directly reflected in employee records for bayside posts.⁶³

Most of these patterns remained true in the 1821 to 1870 period. The small size of the work force at Churchill, which averaged just less than nine men in any given year, meant small changes in the number of employees in any category could have a large effect in terms of their overall proportion in the work force. Nevertheless labourers continued to represent just under half of all employees at Churchill, and officers and tradesmen about one-sixth each. As in each previous sample there were proportionally fewer labourers in the work force at York than at Churchill, and appreciably more officers and tradesmen. Nearly one in four employees at York was a tradesman and about one in six was an officer still.⁶⁴ Looking at company personnel records from 1724 to 1870 it is startling how little the occupational composition of the work force at these posts changed in terms of proportions. While the numbers of employees varied widely the occupational profile of both posts did not.

The job titles of the men stationed at these posts are only one aspect of social structure, and in order to illustrate the relative levels of pay and prestige within occupational groups a more detailed examination of the records from 1754-55, 1794, and 1844-45 will follow.

The first and most obvious observation which can be made based on wage and salary levels in 1754-55 is that the company chose to reward its senior officers handsomely in comparison with all other employees. The base salaries of James Isham and Ferdinand Jacobs were £80 and £70 per annum

⁶³ See Tables 1 and 2, pp.48 and 47.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

TABLE 3: WAGES AND SALARIES, 1754-55
 YORK FACTORY:

Wages in Pounds	Officers	Tradesmen	Apprentices	Sailors	Skilled Labour	Labourers	Servants
100+	1						
90-99	1						
80-89							
70-79							
60-69							
50-59							
40-49		1					
30-39	2	5					
20-29	2	1		3		1	
15-19		2		2		7	
10-14		1		1		5	
5-9							
under 5			2				

Note: Two officers received substantial earnings from furs shipped on their own accounts. Their actual salaries were 80 pounds and 40 pounds for the Chief at York and the Master of Blankenburgh House respectively. Blankenburgh House was an outpost located near the mouth of the Nelson River.

PRINCE OF WALES'S FORT:

Wages in Pounds	Officers	Tradesmen	Apprentices	Sailors	Skilled Labour	Labourers	Servants
100+	1						
90-99							
80-89							
70-79							
60-69							
50-59							
40-49	1	1					
30-39	2	4		3			
20-29		1		5			
15-19		1					
10-14		1					
5-9						7	1
under 5						15	

Note: Ferdinand Jacobs, the Chief at Prince of Wales's Fort more than doubled his former salary of 70 pounds with over 14 pounds worth of furs shipped on his own account.

Source: MBCHB.16/10 and R.16/31

respectively, but they were able to increase their salaries substantially with the money they received from the sale of their private trappings. These furs were acquired as gifts from visiting Indians, through actual trapping, or illicit trade. Andrew Graham described in detail the elaborate system of private trade that had developed at bayside posts by the 1760's, which resulted in still further profits for senior officers, but that is not what is meant here.⁶⁵ Up to 1770 the company allowed officers in charge of posts to ship home furs on their own account as an inducement for conscientious service.⁶⁶ They were allowed half the value of these furs when sold in London markets. Andrew Graham estimated that personal trappings usually added about £30 to £40 a year to a senior officer's salary, but in this case the privilege was worth much more.⁶⁷ Two other officers also enjoyed additions to their basic salaries. John Bean, the sloopmaster at Prince of Wales's Fort, received a small share from the profits gained on trade with the Inuit during the annual sloop voyage.⁶⁸ Samuel Skinsker did

⁶⁵ Graham, Observations, pp. 282-85.

⁶⁶ The policy was begun in 1700, and was intended originally to counter the French threat to company operations. See Rich, Hudson's Bay Company: Volume I, p. 374.

⁶⁷ Graham, Observations, p. 282. Private trade with ships' captains may have added a further £100 or more to these officers' emoluments. Between 1755 and 1764 there were almost yearly comments in either the London committee's letter to Jacobs or his reply about the number of furs he claimed as private trappings. See HBCA:A.5/1, fo.10d, London committee to Ferdinand Jacobs, 27 May 1755; fo.15d, London committee to Jacobs, 12 May 1758; fo.48, London committee to Jacobs, 25 May 1762, and fo.57d, London committee to Jacobs, 23 May 1764. This exchange over private trappings suggests that company factors were far from powerless in any confrontation with their employers.

⁶⁸ Returns from these voyages were never very high, however, and the shares gained from this trade had a minimal effect on most participants' salaries. See Luchak, Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th Century, Appendix II, Table 5, pp. 175-84.

rather better from his post as master at Flamborough House, a sub-post maintained at Flamborough Head on the Nelson River in the 1750's. Although in effect still part of the York Factory establishment, officers in charge of Flamborough House were also accorded the privilege of private trappings, and Skinsher more than doubled his base salary of £40 with £59/14/10 worth of furs.

The other officers at these two posts earned even less. The two surgeons were both paid £36 a year. At York Factory the sloopmaster was paid but £30, appreciably less than John Bean. This may reflect either less experience as a ship's master or the greater dangers faced in sailing northwards from Churchill rather than along the coast near York Factory. Richard Squire, the accountant at Prince of Wales's Fort, was also paid £30 per annum, while Andrew Graham who had the same title at York received but £15 as did Humphrey Marten, who was listed as an assistant writer.⁸⁸ Thus there was a rather sharp tenfold difference between junior and senior officers' remuneration, and in fact even sloopmasters and surgeons could expect to earn only about one-third of the income enjoyed by officers in charge of posts. Although the Hudson's Bay Company has been generally criticized by most historians for failing to unleash the creative powers of Manmon among its senior officers by giving them a stake in the size of the trade they acquired, personnel records do not entirely support this view.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Graham and Marten, of course, went on to rather distinguished careers with the Hudson's Bay Company. In fact both men would serve as chiefs at York Factory in time.

⁸⁹ The argument that the North West Company gained more daring and vigorous traders than the Hudson's Bay Company due to the latter's failure to base salaries on performance dates back at least to Innis, and is sometimes offered as at least a partial explanation of the HBC's lacklustre response to competition in the later 18th century. See Innis, *Fur Trade*, p.

Even prior to its reorganization of factors' salaries in 1770, the London committee offered direct financial benefits to those officers whose experience and competence, and perhaps advantageous connections, saw them rise to the top levels of company service. Being placed in charge of a post meant an enormous increase in wealth, and it is not surprising that there was always a certain amount of jealousy and ill-feeling between officers whose financial well-being was so closely tied to their promotion prospects. This also gave senior officers considerable power over any junior officer planning a career in company service, but equally it subjected them to the need to keep the London committee content. Officers commanded posts at the pleasure of the London committee and could be recalled any year. Their continued tenure in command and the benefits that accrued from that command were thus indirectly but nonetheless closely tied to trade returns.⁹¹

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about officer's salaries in this period, however, was the fact that aside from senior officers they were not obviously superior to all other ranks in company service. At both York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in 1754-55 the second highest listed wage was given to a tradesman. At Prince of Wales's Fort, a shipwright named Guilford Long was paid £40 per annum, the same basic amount as the

155. For a more recent version of this argument see Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, p. 58.

⁹¹ The careers of senior company officers prior to 1821 have not been studied as closely as those of commissioned officers in the post-1821 period, especially as a collective group. Were someone to attempt such a study however, it is likely that the officers who exhibited superior managerial administrative, and trading skills would also prove to be those who enjoyed the longest tenures as officers in charge of posts. Men like Moses Norton, Ferdinand Jacobs, James Isham, Samuel Hearne, and Joseph Colen were all competent and effective businessmen though they may have had other failings.

sloopmaster John Bean received. This was also an appreciably higher wage than either the post surgeon or the post accountant received. Indeed his fellow shipwright, William Matthews, at £36 per annum, was paid as much as the surgeon and also more than the accountant.

At York, Richard Ford, a carpenter was paid £45 a year. Although Samuel Skrimsher was able to earn more money due to his personal trappings, his regular salary as master of a subpost was only £40 a year. Ford was also paid three times the salaries of Andrew Graham and Humphrey Marten, and appreciably more than the sloopmaster and surgeon as well. Indeed, as at Prince of Wales's Fort, the surgeon at York was only paid as much as another shipwright, John Reeves, who at £36 a year had the fourth highest salary in the post.

At both posts the largest single group of tradesmen earned between £20 and £28 per annum. The trades represented in this group included cooper, bricklayer, sawyer, armourer, farrier, smith, and mason. Not all the men listed in these trades were so well paid, however. Arthur Wildridge, listed as a mason and labourer at Prince of Wales's Fort, was paid only £10 a year, as was William Millar, a sawyer at York Factory. Anthony Henday, listed as a netmaker and labourer at York, was also paid only £10 a year,⁹² and the three tailors at York and Prince of Wales's Fort were the worst paid tradesmen of all earning £6, £7, and £8 respectively. Indeed this pattern

⁹² Henday, or Hendry as he was sometimes called, achieved fame as an inland traveller and as the reputed first white man to see the Rocky Mountains. His journals have been published in L.J. Burpee (ed.), The Journals of Anthony Hendry, 1754-55 York Factory to the Blackfeet Country (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1973).

of highly paid shipwrights and poorly paid tailors remained common, so long as the company hired men in these occupations.⁹³

What is most interesting about tradesmen's wages was first of all the range of their remuneration. It was not uncommon for experienced tradesmen in some occupations to earn more than surgeons, sloop captains, and other officers, and indeed most tradesmen were paid more than apprentice writers or clerks and other inexperienced officers. By the same token, however, the bottom ranks of tradesmen - about one third of their number - were likely to be paid less than most sailors and some labourers.

Sailors tended to be slightly better paid at Prince of Wales's Fort than at York Factory. Ordinary sailors were usually paid £15 per annum at Prince of Wales's Fort though one, John Paterson, received £24. This wage suggests that he fulfilled some specialized function on the sloop since it was similar to the mate's wage of £25 and the harpooner's wage of £22. In addition sailors at Churchill received a small share from the returns or trade during their voyages, and harpooners received bounties for the whales they killed.⁹⁴ At York no sailor earned more than £16 a year in 1754-55,

⁹³ See Tables 3, 4 and 5, pp. 59, 75 and 81.

⁹⁴ William Auld described the method of whaling in use at Churchill c. 1811. Whale boats with white painted bottoms were employed in hopes that the "silly fish...[would] mistake the boat for a companion". The boat crew consisted of "any two of the worst hands in the factory and the Harpooner who also acts as Steersman" until a whale was sighted. The harpooner then stationed himself at the bow of the boat and directed his replacement at the helm with hand signals. No conversation or noise was supposedly allowed for fear of frightening the whale off. In theory the whalers then sailed up along side of the unsuspecting whale and killed it. The dead whale was then towed to a mooring buoy and the hunt continued. According to Auld it took about 9.5 beluga whales to produce 1 ton of oil and an expert harpooner in Auld's estimation might be able to kill 80-90 whales a year. It was his opinion, however, that the white whale fishery at Churchill "can never be a very great object". HBCA:B.42/a/136a, fos.11-11d, William Auld Memorandum Book.

and one, Peter Vincent, earned only £8. Most, however, earned between £10 and £15 per annum.

Labourers followed almost exactly the opposite pattern at York and Prince of Wales's Fort to sailors. At York one labourer, John Hughes, earned £20 a year, a wage equivalent to that paid to many tradesmen. The majority of York Factory labourers, however, were paid £10 a year, though two earned £8 and three earned only £6. At Prince of Wales's Fort three labourers, Henry Mowat, James Irving, and James Craigie Junior, earned £14 a year. Each was probably an experienced employee and fulfilled some sort of supervisory function in construction or camp work. Four other labourers were paid £10 a year, but by far the largest number of labourers, 15 in all, earned less than £10. Of these men, 12 earned only £6 a year apparently reflecting a large demand for unskilled and inexperienced manual labour at Prince of Wales's Fort during construction.

There were three other employees at York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in 1754-55. The two apprentices at York were given room, board, and clothing in return for their labour, and a single £10 payment upon the completion of their articles. Each of these boys then earned just under £1.5 a year, although they had to serve a full seven years to collect this money. Apprentices were always the lowest paid company employees, but apprenticeships in later years were eagerly sought. They allowed boys to learn a trade, and in the 18th century were often used as a way of training future officers. Assuming one's conduct was acceptable and work reasonably competent apprenticeship was often used as a way to enter company service at a junior rank but with good prospects for one's future employment. Apprentices had a chance of acquiring seven years experience in the fur

trade by an age when many company employees were only being hired for the first time.⁹⁵ The other employee, Richard Richardson, was stationed at Prince of Wales's Fort. He was paid £10 a year to act as John Bean's personal servant. The duties of these personal servants were never set out in post records, and some may well have worked more like a labourer or a sailor than a domestic servant. While little is known about the actual work of these men, they were paid much more than apprentices and considerably more than many labourers.⁹⁶

The salary and wage structures of these posts underline the observation that the work force at York Factory in the early and mid-18th century was more highly skilled and thus better paid on average than at Prince of Wales's. Just over one third of the work force at Prince of Wales's Fort earned under £10 a year, whereas at York Factory the proportion was about one quarter.⁹⁷ Even more interesting, however, was the distribution of wages among occupational groups. If wages and salaries may be seen as a rough index of social status in post communities, then it is by no means clear that status and occupation were inextricably linked at this time in company service. Although officers in charge of posts managed to secure much higher remuneration for their labour than all other employees, as a whole officers were not automatically better paid than skilled and

⁹⁵ See Chapter V, "Education and Religion", pp. 267-69.

⁹⁶ The data for employees' occupations and wages in 1754-55 found in Table 3 was abstracted from HBCA:A.6/10, Prince of Wales's Fort Servants Accounts 1754-55, and A.16/31, York Factory Servants Accounts 1754-55.

⁹⁷ At Prince of Wales's Fort 16 of 44 men earned less than £10, and at York 10 of 39 employees. In addition two of these individuals at York were apprentices who would, if they remained in company service, soon earn much more than £10 per annum. *Ibid.*

experienced tradesmen, or even in some cases sloop's mates, harpooners, or even in one instance a labourer. Similarly tradesmen ranked among both the best paid company employees and the worst. To some extent this reflects the different values placed on the labour of different trades, and in all likelihood the wages and availability of certain trades in the British labour market. Consistently in the 18th century tailors ranked among the lowest paid quartile of company employees. Sawyers were also found among this category as well though not quite so consistently. This may well reflect the rather low status and pay of most "ready-made" tailors in Britain,⁹⁸ and the fact that sawyers did essentially the same work at the lumber and wood-cutting camps as men listed only as labourers.⁹⁹ When sawyers were paid more than labourers it probably reflects their experience or perhaps some supervisory role in the camps. Some sawyers may also have worked as rough carpenters, but without the expertise of the men listed as joiners and carpenters. By contrast shipwrights have long been recognized by social historians as forming part of what Eric Hobsbawm has called the "labour aristocracy".¹⁰⁰ The elite of the working class, such men enjoyed high wages and regular work, and in order to recruit shipwrights in the 18th

⁹⁸ The work of tailors is discussed in greater detail in Chapter VII, "Standard of Living: Clothing and Accommodation", pp. 356-57. The poor tailor is, of course, a staple character in folk literature, though in Britain care must be taken to distinguish between tailors producing cheap ready-to-wear clothing for working people and "bespoke" tailors catering to the aristocracy who were among the best paid tradesmen in Britain. See for example, John Burnett, A History of the Cost of Living (London: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 145-6 and p. 173.

⁹⁹ See Chapter III, "Work", p. 154.

¹⁰⁰ See Eric Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), pp. 286-89, and Burnett, Cost of Living, pp. 253-54.

century the Hudson's Bay Company apparently had to pay wages roughly equivalent to and in some cases exceeding those earned by surgeons and sloopmasters. Similarly, although sailors' and labourers' wages tended to be concentrated in a narrower range of income, their status and responsibilities varied considerably as well.

The income and wage structure of posts like York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in the early to mid-18th century reveals a strongly hierarchical community, but one without rigid social distinctions. Whatever their formal occupational title, employees were paid according to their experience, responsibilities, and the demand for their labour. Officers were not automatically paid more than labourers or other skilled employees, and the possession of a specific work skill did not by itself ensure one's inclusion in the ranks of the best paid employees.

The relative openness of the social structure of these posts at this time may also be illustrated in other ways. Each post was formally governed by a post council composed of the officer in charge, the ship's captain when present, and such other persons as the London committee appointed to the council in its annual letter to the post. These councils heard serious disciplinary cases, drafted replies to the London committee's annual letters, and in general seem to have been intended to function as the local legislative and judicial arms of company government, and perhaps to act as a limit on the powers of officers in charge of posts. In practice these councils did not contradict or overturn the actions of senior officers though ship's captains did wield some influence.¹⁰¹ Toothless as these

¹⁰¹ Closer study of ship's captains and their role and influence in the conduct of the fur trade might prove very interesting. They were central to any clandestine trade, yet the London committee had to rely on them for much

councils were, membership on them was a clear mark of status at least in the formal hierarchy of post society. Post councils usually included the chief, his deputy, the surgeon, and sometimes the sloopmaster or a writer, in addition to the ship's captain, but not all officers were automatically appointed. Moreover up until the 1740's and 50's the councils at York and Prince of Wales's Fort might well include tradesmen. For example Augustine Frost, a bricklayer, was appointed to the council at York in 1748, and continued to serve on the council until he left York in 1759.¹⁰² Frost was

of its up-to-date information on the trade. Captains acted as intermediaries between the London committee and its distant work force. According to some captains could make or break officers and even some ordinary employee's careers, and post records include a variety of complaints about captains written by the officers in charge of posts. The latter, however, had to be careful since a ship which failed to land or whose cargo was seriously short in any number of key supplies would seriously disrupt trade and even endanger the lives of post residents. Captains had enormous potential power, but how they used it and to what ends aside from self-enrichment is largely unknown. Captain Richards was eventually removed as a company captain in 1801 after being caught smuggling furs. Years earlier Samuel Hearne had complained about Richards and other captains in a letter to Humphrey Marten. Hearne noted that "those that sail in the Ships do not want to put a stop to Smuggling, but to the contrary they are the only aiders and abettors for were their no Receivers there would be no thieves...". Hearne's letter was copied as part of Churchill's post correspondence and was eventually read by the London committee. They responded by rebuking Hearne and requesting that if he had proof of his accusations that he send it to London and if not that he refrain from using innuendo to blacken reputations. See HBCA:B.42/b/28, fo.4d, Samuel Hearne to Humphrey Marten, undated, and A.5/2, fo.130d, London committee to Samuel Hearne, 11 May 1785.

¹⁰² Intriguingly Frost was by no means the best paid tradesman at York, but he may have been the most powerful. See HBCA:A.6/7, fo.137, Annual Letter to York Factory, 5 May 1748, A.6/9, fo.110d, Annual Letter to York Factory 17 May 1759, and annual letters in between. Augustine Frost figured prominently in the difficulties experienced by James Duffield at Moose Factory in the early 1740's. Frost had close personal and family ties with the Homeguard Cree at Moose, and Duffield considered him the ring-leader of a disgruntled faction of "corrupted" men who wished to see Moose "an Indian factory". Duffield's heavy handed attempts at "reform" of the customs and morals of the post led directly to the much discussed "Henly House Massacre" in which a number of company employees at an outpost were killed by the Homeguard in 1752. Frost's power at Moose and later at York Factory was

not unique though he did serve as a member of the council at York for some years after the practice of appointing non-officers to the council at Prince of Wales's Fort had been dropped.

Parallelling this willingness to include non-officers on the councils of bayside posts was a certain openness in the formal ranks of company employees. Up until the late 18th century an appreciable number of prominent company officers began their careers not as writers or even apprentices but as tradesmen or ordinary labourers. Charles Price Isham, Peter Fidler, James Knight, Henry Kelsey, Thomas McClish, Richard Norton, and William Tomison are all examples.¹⁰³ In addition the formal dividing line between officers and the men was sometimes blurred. As late as 1797 the London committee wrote to Thomas Stayner at Churchill to remind him that writers were to be included in the officer's mess both as an incentive to encourage hard work and faithful service and to "maintain a proper distinction between them and the Common Men".¹⁰⁴

based on his close ties with the Homeguard and his understanding of their concerns and interests. See Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, pp. 43-44 and Pannekoek, "Corruption at Moose".

¹⁰³ This phenomenon is discussed at some length in Brown, Strangers in Blood, pp. 29-30. Barring a full-scale study of 18th century company officers and their career patterns it is difficult to know how common the practice of promotion from the ranks was. Most assume it was more likely in the 18th than the 19th century, though some social mobility remained possible after 1821. See Payne, York Factory, pp. 32-33. What appears to be different is the fact that in the 18th century tradesmen and labourers were not barred by reason of their original status from assuming the top posts in company service as post governors or factors. In the 19th century this sort of mobility was less likely. Men promoted from the ranks were more likely to be found in the bottom levels of the officer cadre, and men like William Anderson who began his career as a labourer in 1833 and left company service as "chief trader" in 1864 were a rarity. See *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ HBCA:A.6/18, fo.46, Annual Letter to Churchill, 31 May 1797.

This urge to maintain a "proper distinction" between officers and non-officers appears to have grown much stronger in the later 18th and early 19th centuries. Certainly admission to the officers' mess became a carefully guarded right, which at the same time could provide a less than subtle reminder of one's rank and status in the post hierarchy. John MacLeod, an apprentice clerk with Miles Macdonell's advance party of Red River Settlers, complained that they were greeted at York Factory in a "Cold & haughty" manner and that he was then sent off to dine, not with his fellow officers, but with the cooks on scraps from the factor's table.¹⁰⁵ In 1824 one Neil McDonald was inadvertently admitted to the officers' mess at York Factory. A member of John Franklin's arctic exploration party, he was in fact merely a steersman and had no "right" to this indulgence. Before Franklin and his men left York John George McTavish took care to inform his fellow officers inland that McDonald was not to be "ushered" to any officers' tables.¹⁰⁶ It was also at about this same time that the governing Northern Council of the fur trade passed a resolution which specifically excluded guides and interpreters from dining in the officers' mess at York

¹⁰⁵ See Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM): MG1 D5, John MacLeod Diary, pp. 1-2. Disputes over precedence in seating also took place on occasion at company posts, and table manners and conversation were taken quite seriously at York Factory. Robert Wilson, an officer promoted from the ranks, was made the butt of jokes in the mess at York precisely because he was ignorant of the social conventions surrounding dining. See Hargrave, Letters, pp. 86-87, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 1 December 1840, and Chapter VIII, "Standard of Living: Diet", p. 466.

¹⁰⁶ HBCA:B.239/b/86b, p. 12, J.G. McTavish to James Leith, 1 September 1824.

Factory; a legislative pronouncement which was without point unless guides and interpreters had previously been allowed to do so.¹⁰⁷

Before leaving the subject of salaries and wages in the 18th century it is worth considering how the incomes of company employees compared with men employed in similar occupations in Britain at the time. The period up to about 1750-60 is generally considered to have been a favourable one for most working people in Britain with wages usually rising faster than prices. Even so, few would argue that many working people were able to secure any significant income over and above their costs of food, clothing, housing and other necessities. As John Burnett and others have noted, any advantages gained from higher wages or lower prices were turned to increased consumption in all but a tiny number of privileged households.¹⁰⁸ The fact that the Hudson's Bay Company provided food, housing and some clothing for its employees means that it is difficult to make direct comparisons between

¹⁰⁷ HBCA:B.239/k/1, fo.17d, Minutes of Council 1822, item 104. This is an interesting item and it suggests that some observers like Carol Judd, who seems to include guides and interpreters among the lower ranks of officers after 1821, overestimate their formal status. See Carol Judd, "Native Labour and social stratification in the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department, 1770-1870," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 17, 4 (1980): 306.

¹⁰⁸ See Burnett, Cost of Living, pp. 128-39 and p. 187. According to Gregory King well over one half of all households and about half the total population of England and Wales in 1688 "decreased the wealth of the country" because they could not earn enough in a year to support themselves, and had to rely in whole or in part on charity to make up the shortfall. Although conditions may have improved marginally by the mid-18th century the basic social arithmetic of "ancien regime" Europe remained largely unchanged. The world was divided into a privileged minority and an "inferior" majority which was condemned to "lives of deprivation and dependence". See Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost: England Before the Industrial Age (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1971), p. 23; Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (London: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 28-31, and Robert and Elborg Forster (eds.), European Society in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 238-40.

wages in the fur trade and Great Britain. As will be argued in Chapters VII and VIII the food and housing provided to company employees compared favourably with British nutritional and housing standards, and company employees were able to acquire the clothing and clothing materials they required without undue financial strain.¹⁰⁹ For this reason in the Hudson's Bay Company's service even labourers' earnings were probably equivalent to those of skilled artisans in Britain. Some direct comparisons, however, can be made. As late as the 1790's farm labourers in the Orkneys were paid between £2/10/0 and £3 per annum with board or about half the wages of company labourers in their first years of service. At the same time skilled tradesmen in Stromness might gross £20 to £30 a year from which they would have had to find money for food, clothing, shelter, and tools. Tradesmen in company service had none of these expenses, and wages just as high or higher.¹¹⁰ It is also worth noting that while a farm labourer's wages were fixed at about £3 per annum, a company labourer's wages increased with experience and even more quickly if some useful skill like hunting, fishing, or steering a canoe or York boat was acquired. Most recent fur trade

¹⁰⁹ According to John Burnett few families in Britain had any economic margin, and most household budgets collected by social reformers actually did not cover all costs. Poor relief, borrowing, or perhaps unreported or clandestine earnings made up these periodic shortfalls in income. Better-off families, including perhaps some well-to-do artisans, could sometimes set aside some money in case of emergency or illness, but few could endure any lengthy illness or period of unemployment. The standard of living in most households was "precarious" still even at the end of the 19th century. See Burnett, Cost of Living, p. 187.

¹¹⁰ See John Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC 1780-1821" in Old Trails and New Directions, pp. 117-19.

historians concur with John Nicks' observation that "there is little doubt ... financial inducements were present for both labourers and tradesmen".¹¹¹

Even more significant was the fact that company employees could save some portion of their income, and did so in surprising numbers.¹¹² John Nicks has calculated that in the late 18th century a typical personal savings rate of about £45 or more from eight years of service would be enough to rent land, purchase animals, and set up in the Orkneys as a small farmer.¹¹³ Tradesmen, who could set aside money faster than labourers, might return home and purchase a business or set themselves up in trade with even less investment of time working overseas.

By 1794 there is some evidence that the Hudson's Bay Company was following a slightly more systematic approach to employee salaries and wages. The incomes of officers and tradesmen did continue to vary appreciably, but the wages paid to labourers and skilled labour, and to a lesser extent sailors as well, varied little. Of the 27 men listed as labourers at York Factory and Churchill, 22 were paid £8 per annum, 2 received £8 per annum, and three received £10 per annum.¹¹⁴ The two cooks at Churchill both earned £14 a year, and the two cooks at York £10. The difference in cook's wages may well have stemmed from the fact that the

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹¹² John Nicks found that among Orkneymen who served more than one year and less than twelve - in other words employees who planned to return home to the Orkneys, but who were satisfactory employees - a majority managed to save more than 70 percent of their total earnings. *Ibid.*, p. 121, especially Table 13.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 127. One could then fail as a farmer of course, but that is a separate matter.

¹¹⁴ See HBCA.A.30/6, fos.36d-48, Servants' Accounts 1794.

TABLE 4: WAGES AND SALARIES, 1794

YORK FACTORY:

Wages in Pounds	Officers	Tradesmen	Apprentices	Sailors	Skilled Labour	Surors
100+						
90-99	1					
80-89						
70-79	1					
60-69						
50-59						
40-49	1					
30-39	1	1				
20-29	2	6		1		
15-19	3	1		3		
10-14	1	3		1	4	
5-9		6				14
under 5						

Note: No wages were listed for the one apprentice, and while Joseph Tolent's salary was listed at 80 pounds, he was allowed 10 pounds probably for a servant and he also received a bounty based on York's trade.

PRINCE OF WALES'S FORT:

Wages in Pounds	Officers	Tradesmen	Apprentices	Sailors	Skilled Labour	Labourers
100+						
90-99						
80-89	1					
70-79						
60-69						
50-59	1					
40-49						
30-39	1	1				
20-29	1	2				
15-19	1	3		5		
10-14		1				1
5-9		1				5
under 5						

Note: Thomas Steyner, the officer in charge of Churchill, had a base salary of 70 pounds and an allowance of 10 pounds; once again perhaps for a servant.

Source: MBFRSA.30/6

cooks at Churchill had 11 and 15 years of experience respectively, as opposed to seven and eight years experience for the cooks at York Factory. The other two men included in the ranks of skilled labour were a bowsman and the pateroon of the woods at York. Both men earned £12 a year. John Wood, the bowsman had nine years of experience in the fur trade, and only Tom Manson, the pateroon, did not fit the pattern of placing long-service employees in these occupational categories. Manson had only joined company service in 1792, but his age of 35 suggests he was hired for his previous experience directing and managing labour in the Orkneys.¹¹⁵ In each case these men earned wages equal to or slightly higher than the best paid labourers.

Of the 13 sailors stationed at York and Churchill, five earned £18 a year. The best paid sailor, William Smith at York Factory, was paid £20. He had eight years experience with the company, and probably worked as the mate on the post shallop. The next most common wages for sailors were £15 and £10 per annum with three men each. The higher wage was paid to men with 11, 13, and 26 years service, while the lower wage was paid to men with 3, 7 and 11 years service respectively.¹¹⁶

While officers' salaries varied considerably, there is some evidence of greater system in their salary structures too. Joseph Colen, the "resident" at York was paid a base salary of £80 a year along with £10 for a servant.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ See entries for Hugh Gray, Robert Pearson, Peter Sinclair and Henry Smith at Churchill, and Thomas Clouston and John Inkster at York. *Ibid.*

Colen was also paid a bounty on the furs shipped from York Factory.¹¹⁷ Colen's total income then must have easily exceeded £100 a year, and probably approximated the earnings of earlier factors like Ishan and Jacobs in the 1750's. Churchill's declining importance as a trade centre was reflected in the fact that its officer in charge, Thomas Stayner, had a base salary of £70, the same salary as Colen's deputy at York, Robert Longmoor. Stayner was not paid a bounty on Churchill's trade, but as the officer in charge of a post he did receive £10 with which to hire a servant. At both posts the surgeons were paid £40 a year, and four of the six men listed as writers were paid £15 a year. The two writers whose salaries were listed as £12 and £20 respectively, however, were not obviously either less or more experienced, and it would appear a certain amount of flexibility, or perhaps arbitrariness, was still found in officers' wages.

While no labourer earned more than an officer, writers earning £15 a year were paid only slightly more than the cooks at Churchill and less than many sailors and most tradesmen. At both York and Churchill there was a tradesman who earned £36 a year. Nichol Garson, at Churchill, was a carpenter and had served the company for 16 years. By contrast James Sinclair, the shipwright at York, had only taken up employment in the fur trade in 1793. At 35 years old, however, he was clearly an experienced tradesman like Garson. At Churchill only two officers, Stayner and the surgeon William Auld earned more than Garson, and at York only Colen, Longmoor and the surgeon Thomas Thomas earned more than Sinclair.

¹¹⁷ Alice M. Johnson, ed., Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence: Edmonton House 1795-1800 Chesterfield House 1800-1802 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1967), p.xiv.

At Churchill, however, there was a rather sharp drop to the next best paid tradesman, John Budge, a sawyer, and James Robertson, a cooper, both of whom were paid £20 a year. The remaining tradesmen all earned between £12 and £16 a year - roughly the same amount as a writer or a sailor - with the single exception of one tailor, James Wilson, who earned only £8 a year.

At York Factory the largest single group of tradesmen, six in all, earned £25 a year: more than the salaries of half of the post's officers, and appreciably more than the earnings of sailors, skilled labour, and labourers. Not all tradesmen, however, were so fortunate. The next largest group, five in all and including three sawyers, one tailor and one distiller, earned but £8 a year, only slightly more than the usual wage for labourers. Indeed one sawyer, John Inkster Senior, was paid only £6 a year - the same wage as a labourer.¹¹⁸

The wage and salary structure of these posts still exhibited a rather steep gradient from senior officers to ordinary labourers. At both posts about half or more of the residents earned £14 or less,¹¹⁹ while at York only three men earned more than £40, and at Churchill just two. Although Joseph Colen's full salary including bounties was not listed, he earned at least 15 times and Thomas Stayner 13 times the wages of a labourer. In some respects, however, this represented a relative narrowing of income distribution from the earlier 18th century. Certainly command of a bayside

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* The low average wages for sawyers suggests once again that theirs was not a highly regarded skill in the fur trade. Their status was closer to labourers than coopers or blacksmiths. Ironically sawyers' work was crucial to post operations and one of the most significant demands on available labour. See Chapter III, "Work", pp. 150-51.

¹¹⁹ At York 36 of the 57 men whose wages were listed earned under £14 a year, while at Churchill the number was 14 out of 28 men.

factory was not always as lucrative as before, reflecting the fact that the primary focus of the fur trade had moved inland. This was especially true at Churchill which could no longer be considered one of the most important commands in the Hudson's Bay Company service. York's warehouse and transshipment responsibilities still left Colen considerable power, but he too was officially subordinate to the "inland" governor William Tomison.

In the post-1821 period many of these tendencies were further elaborated. This was particularly true of the tendency to rationalize and formalize wage and salary structures - a process which seems to have paralleled a more rigidly hierarchical social structure. With greater attention to maintaining "proper distinctions" between officers and men came a more stratified wage and salary structure. The confused and even quixotic lack of system seen in the mid-18th century reflected a community in which status and rank were not necessarily synonymous, but after 1821 rank, status and wages were more closely linked.

The Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 employed nearly 2,000 people, paid under a variety of schemes: there were differing employment practices in Lower Canada and the Orkneys, and even in Rupert's Land there were different customs between the London- and Montreal-based fur trades. George Simpson and the London committee moved quickly to remove the most obvious inconsistencies, and by the mid-1820's separate Canadian and European contract terms had largely been eliminated.¹²⁰ What emerged was a clearly hierarchical system of remuneration based on occupational ranks. Officers

¹²⁰ Goldring, Papers: Volume II, pp. 47-49. Some distinctions did remain, however. As late as the 1830's Lower Canadian recruits were offered higher initial wages than Scottish employees with the clear understanding that they would pay more for any goods they purchased from company stores. Ibid., p. 48 and p. 120.

with very few exceptions whatever their age or experience were paid more than other employees. Tradesmen were the next best paid category, and once again with few exceptions were paid more than any other servants. Sailors were paid more than labourers, and labourers in turn were paid more than apprentices. At the end of their articles most of the latter would become tradesmen and leap-frog past labourers and sailors to the upper reaches of servants' wages. In 1844-45 there were seven officers at York Factory and Churchill. James Hargrave, a chief factor and commissioned officer, was not paid a salary as such, but was given two shares of the commissioned officers' fund which in turn was based on final returns from the outfit of 1844-45.¹²¹ Although it usually took three years for the final returns from an outfit to be determined, Hargrave would eventually earn £658 for his labours in 1844-45. Although a reasonably good year, it was not exceptional, and between 1840 and 1860 a single commissioned officer's share averaged just over £346 a year.¹²² Promotion to the rank of commissioned officer carried enormous benefit, and as in the early 18th century the top ranks of the company's service enjoyed significantly higher incomes than even their fellow officers. Indeed despite some evidence that wage and salary distinctions had declined after about 1774, after 1821 privilege was once again on the increase in the Hudson's Bay Company's service. Not only did James Hargrave earn six and one half times the income of a senior clerk,

¹²¹ See Public Archives of British Columbia: A-B-15-1, "Statement showing the annual gain by the fur trade partners from 1821-1871: And from 1872-1882, with some remarks anent both. 1884", by Roderick MacFarlane, unpaginated. Information supplied by Philip Goldring to author.

¹²² Goldring, Papers: Volume II, p. 40. Chief Factors averaged then just under £700 a year in income.

TABLE 5: WAGES, SALARIES AND SHARES, 1844-45

YORK FACTORY:

Wages in Pounds	Officers	Tradesmen	Apprentices	Sailors	Skilled Labour	Labourers	Unlisted
650	1						
100	1						
90-99							
80-89							
70-79							
60-69	1						
50-59	2						
40-49	1	6					
30-39		5					
25-29		1					
20-24				3			
15-19							
10-14							11
under 10			4				

Note: A commissioned officer's share in 1844-45 was 524 pounds. A chief factor like James Hargrave received twice this amount, though it might take three years to be paid in full.

CHURCHILL:

Wages in Pounds	Officers	Tradesmen	Apprentices	Sailors	Skilled Labour	Labourers	Unlisted
100	1						
90-99							
80-89							
70-79							
60-69							
50-59							
40-49							
30-39							
25-29		2					
20-24							
15-19							1
10-14							3
under 10							

Note: James Dunning had no listed occupation, in other years however he appeared as either as a harpooner, interpreter, or steersman.

Source: HBCRB.234/g/24

he was paid only slightly less than the total wages of all 34 servants stationed at York in 1844-45.¹²³

At York salaried officers' incomes ranged from £30 a year to £100 for the surgeon/clerk William Gillespie. The officer in charge at Churchill, Robert Harding, was also an experienced clerk and like Gillespie earned £100 per annum. Junior or apprentice clerks and postmasters were the lowest paid officers at York and Churchill in the post-1821 period. Their salaries varied somewhat over time, but by the 1840's payment for most officers had been systematized. In 1848 for example it was set down that apprentice postmasters, "the lowest rank for a gentleman" and a category of employee rarely seen at York Factory,¹²⁴ would be paid £20 a year for five years. At £20 per annum an apprentice postmaster would earn the same wages as most sloopers, and more than labourers working on their first contracts. On the other hand they would earn less than even inexperienced tradesmen.¹²⁵ After five years they were to be paid as postmasters who over a three year contract earned £30, then £40, and then £50 a year. If promoted no further a postmaster would continue to earn £50 a year. If promoted to the ranks of the clerks, the former postmaster would earn £75 a year. By contrast

¹²³ Hargrave received £658, the other five officers together earned £270, and the 34 servants £680. See HBCA:B.239/g/24, Northern Department Accounts 1844-45.

¹²⁴ Thomas Swanston, an apprentice postmaster, served at York Factory in 1855, but no other apprentice postmaster was listed in the five yearly samples taken at York between 1824 and 1870. See HBCA:B.239/g/34, Northern Department Accounts, 1854-55.

¹²⁵ In later years both apprentice postmasters and postmasters earned even higher wages. By 1865 a postmaster could earn as much as £75 per annum. See Goldring, Papers: Volume II, pp. 240-41. Apprentice postmasters were the single significant exception to the rule that officers were normally paid more than all other employees.

apprentice clerks usually began their careers at £20 a year, with increments to £25, £30, £40 and £50. After five years an apprentice clerk was eligible to become a clerk, a full three years sooner than their fellows who had joined the company as apprentice postmasters, and with about £65 more in gross earnings during their apprenticeships. Clerks earned between about £60 and £100, and there was some flexibility in their rates of pay. Sloopmasters and surgeon/clerks were hired directly at clerk's wages as were a few older experienced men, but most company officers spent at least five years as apprentices of one sort or another.¹²⁶ The normal upper limit for salaried officers was the £100 a year earned by senior clerks after ten or more years of service. It was from the ranks of these men that commissioned officers were selected, but only after serving at least 12 years in the fur trade and on occasion many more.

Aside from apprentice postmasters, most other salaried officers earned considerably more than even experienced tradesmen. In 1844-45 for example, at York Factory and Churchill there were 12 tradesmen, ten of whom earned between £25 and £30 a year. One man listed as an assistant carpenter at York earned £20, and Edward Smith, a blacksmith with 15 years experience, earned £35.¹²⁷ Thus an apprentice clerk in his second or third year of service was paid as much or more than most tradesmen, while a postmaster was

¹²⁶ Sloopmasters and surgeons were rare in company service except at York where there were often one man in each occupation. Ebseard Whiffen, a surgeon, earned £123/11/3 in 1834-35, but generally surgeons at York earned £100 or less a year, and sloopmasters between £60 and £75 a year.

¹²⁷ Four men were paid £25 a year, and five £30 a year. The final tradesman was paid £28.

in this happy situation from the first year of his contract.¹²⁸ It was no longer possible, as was the case even in the late 18th century, for a tradesman or labourer to earn more than any but the most junior of officers.

Most tradesmen at York and Churchill earned either £25 or £30 a year depending upon their length of service, work experience, and trade skills. This narrowing of the range of tradesmen's wages was partially the result of the disappearance of the worst paid 18th century tradesmen, tailors and sawyers, from company service. The need for tailors was obviated by the growing use of ready-made clothing, the policy of not supplying employee clothing except in a handful of circumstances, the end of the tradition of clothing Indian trading captains, and the fact that the wives of employees could perform some of the tasks formerly assigned to tailors.¹²⁹ The work formerly done by sawyers was taken over by men with different occupational titles in the 19th century.¹³⁰ As Philip Goldring has indicated tradesmen's wages were regulated according to a more or less standard scale from 1824 on. Although there were periodic problems and readjustments were made in tradesmen's wage rates, the tendency to try to rationalize the wage and

¹²⁸ It could hardly be otherwise since the rank of postmaster was sometimes used to promote capable and experienced tradesmen and labourers to officer status. See for example, Goldring, Papers: Volume II, pp. 238-39.

¹²⁹ See Chapter VII, "Standard of Living: Clothing and Accommodation", p. 356. In 1856-57, for example, the women at York sewed 18 biscuit bags, 120 corn bags and 50 flour bags, along with 70 boat oil cloths, 5 tent cloths, 10 leather boat covers, and 10 "sheeting" oil cloths. In addition they also repaired an unspecified number of buffalo robes. See HBCA:B 239/d/919, York Factory Tradesmen's Winter Work, 1856-57.

¹³⁰ James Hargrave indicated in his memorandum on factory operations written for his replacement, Nicol Finlayson, in 1839 that the lumber party sent off to cut plank and boards was usually managed by Tom Spence. Spence up to 1839 had been listed in personnel records as a sailor, suggesting that the old occupations of pateron of the woods and sawyer had not disappeared, but had been taken over by others. See Payne, York Factory, p. 357.

salary structures in company service was clearly apparent in the case of boatbuilders, blacksmiths, coopers, carpenters and other "mechanics".¹³¹

An even more striking degree of uniformity may be found in the wages paid to sloop crews and labourers at York Factory and Churchill. Of the eight men listed as sloopers at York in 1844-45, seven earned £20 a year and one earned £21. The latter had ten years of service with the company, about twice that of any other post sailor. Among labourers wages ranged from £16 to £20 a year. Out of 15 men listed as labourers at York Factory and Churchill three earned £16 a year and ten earned £17 a year. One man, George Davidson, earned a basic wage of £16 a year, but also received a gratuity of £3. Gratuities in company parlance were not tips, but payments for extra or unusually demanding duties. Davidson probably served as a mess-waiter or servant for York Factory's officers, tasks which normally were rewarded with a £3 gratuity.¹³² The only other anomalous labourer's wage at either York Factory or Churchill was that paid to William Onan at Churchill. Onan had 24 years of experience and provided a variety of significant services. Along with another long time employee, James Dunning, he acted as a translator when needed, and he also appears to have helped with post stores. As a result his wages were higher than normal for a labourer at £20 per annum.

Wage and salary scales limited the power of senior company officers to advance the wages of experienced and capable employees. Junior officers' careers could still be advanced or blighted by the opinions of their superiors, but patronage had little role in relations between officers and

¹³¹ Goldring, *Papers: Volume II*, pp. 208-11.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 328.

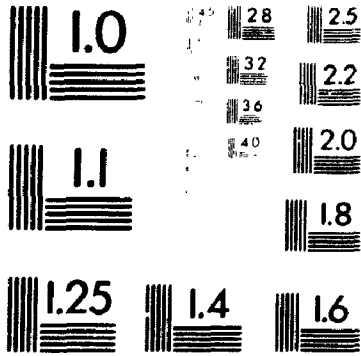
men. Incompetent or unruly men might be sent home or fail to have their contracts renewed, but it was no longer easy for senior officers to reward favoured tradesmen and labourers with higher wages and more responsible positions. The increasing social distance in the 19th century between officers and men noted by Brown, Van Kirk, Judd, and Goldring was mirrored by the fact that patronage really only operated within the elite of the company's service.¹³³

The steep income gradient of post communities may be illustrated by the fact that in 1844-45 at York Factory James Hargrave, the lone commissioned officer, earned £858. The average annual income among salaried officers was £54, while the wages of tradesmen and labourers averaged only £20, or but 3% of Hargrave's earnings. At a smaller outpost like Churchill, however, such income distinctions were not so acute. Robert Harding, the one officer stationed there in 1844-45, earned £100 a year, or less than five times the average salary of the men stationed at Churchill.¹³⁴ It is hard to imagine that this did not have a significant effect on social relations in these

¹³³ Lack of social contact and the unlikelihood that officers could affect the career paths or pay of company servants such as fine or sending unsatisfactory servants home undermines attempts to invoke Peter Laslett's model of the pre-industrial household as a means of understanding post social structure and social relations. Laslett's households involve considerable social interaction and face-to-face contact between master and servant that 19th century fur trade posts like York, and probably Churchill as well, never provided. If a pre-industrial household works at all as a model in the fur trade it is as a way of understanding the officers' mess. See Sylvia Van Kirk, "Fur Trade Social History: Some Recent Trends", in Judd and Ray (eds.), Old Trails and New Directions, pp. 161-62.

¹³⁴ The seven tradesmen and labourers at Churchill earned £151 in total, or an average of slightly more than £21/10 each. Among the men wages ranged from £17 to £30 a year. At York, on the other hand, the range was from £8 to £35 a year. If the frontier had a levelling tendency in the fur trade, it was to be found not in major trade or administrative centres, but in outposts.

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respective posts, and may partially explain what was apparently a more docile and less unruly work force at Churchill than at York in the period after 1821.¹³⁵

There is no reason to believe that company salaries and wages were not still quite attractive in the 19th century. Although the company supplied its men with less clothing and tried to curb other customary non-financial benefits in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, room and board and some equipment continued to be provided at company expense.¹³⁶ Distance did not completely insulate company service from the price of labour in other markets, particularly Britain, and from the late 18th century on the company had to revise its wage rates upwards from time to time.¹³⁷ There were periods when the company's demand for labour clearly outstripped supply, and as we shall see during such times employees often extracted wage and other concessions from their employers. As was the case in Britain wages and salaries in the fur trade showed a general upward trend between about 1800 and 1870, but they did not always rise faster than prices. In the 1850's in particular the company had considerable difficulty in attracting good new recruits in Northern Scotland because wages were deemed to be too low.¹³⁸ Nevertheless even at times when the wages offered by the Hudson's Bay Company appear to have been least attractive, company employees of all ranks managed to save high proportions of their incomes. In Britain it is

¹³⁵ See Chapter III, "Work", pp. 193-94. By contrast Prince of Wales's Fort was probably more turbulent than York in the early 18th century.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹³⁷ The best available surveys of wage rate changes may be found in Goldring, *Papers: Volume II* and Goldring, *Papers: Volume III*.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-18.

generally conceded that income rarely exceeded expenditure for most working people throughout the 19th century, and that for working people the prospect of acquiring any significant quantity of capital was remote at best.¹³⁹

By contrast company employees, who wished to do so, could and did save considerable sums of money. Philip Goldring has estimated that in the mid-19th century a frugal bachelor in company service could live on slightly more than £5 a year, since he had his housing and basic food requirements supplied.¹⁴⁰ If correct, even apprentices could save money. Fur trade records contain some anecdotal evidence to support the view that substantial savings were quite possible even for labourers. For example Letitia Hargrave reported that her family's cook, Robert Garson, had saved £300 over 27 years of service. As his wages varied between £17 and £20 per annum during this period he had managed to save an average of about 50 to 60% of his income. What appears to have concerned Letitia Hargrave most, however, was the fact that Garson's savings were greater than those of her brother, Dugald Mactavish, despite the fact that Dugald was an officer.¹⁴¹ This accords well with John Nicks' calculation that in the early 19th century

¹³⁹ As historians interested in the question of standards of living in the Industrial Revolution shift their focus from wage rates to consumption levels it is becoming increasingly clear that substandard food, clothing, and shelter were the norm in Britain. Higher wages were often simply absorbed by attempts to purchase better quality goods. The miserable level of household furnishings and paucity of personal property noted by various social reformers and Parliamentary committees investigating the living conditions of the working class reflect the fact that in most working class households income rarely exceeded basic living costs. See for example, Burnett, Cost of Living, pp. 247-81 or Arthur J. Taylor (ed.), The Standard of Living in Britain in the Industrial Revolution (London: Methuen, 1975).

¹⁴⁰ Goldring, Papers: Volume II, p. 211.

¹⁴¹ Hargrave, Letters, p. 130, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 2 December 1842.

Orkneymen saved at a rate of better than 70% of their gross earnings. He found that labourers could save £60 or more in eight years or less, while tradesmen could put aside this amount of money in as little as four years.¹⁴² Philip Goldring has estimated that for Lewismen from the Hebrides a labourer's salary of £17 a year was equivalent to the total earnings of a crofter who also hired on as a part-time fisherman - in a good year. He found that Lewismen in the company service in the 1830's and 40's could save £5 to £10 a year, "perhaps more than the gross earnings of their counterparts who stayed at Home".¹⁴³

There were important factors that could limit both the appeal of company wages and the amounts employees were able to save. Many employees from Britain had to remit at least a portion of their salaries to support families they left behind or to pay off debts. Men with family obligations in Rupert's Land generally had to spend a much higher proportion of their incomes at company salesshops than single Orkney or Lewismen. Among British recruits the economic incentive to join the Hudson's Bay Company's service was clearly strongest for unmarried men with little property and limited work experience and skills.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC", pp. 121-22.

¹⁴³ Philip Goldring, "Lewis and the Hudson's Bay Company in the Nineteenth Century", *Scottish Studies*, 24 (1980): 32.

¹⁴⁴ While labourers might save as much as they could have earned in Lewis or Shetland or the Orkneys, the same was not necessarily true for tradesmen, or sailors or for that matter. Company wages for tradesmen were not obviously superior in all cases, and sailors had a variety of alternate forms of employment including whaling. As an economic strategy temporary emigration to Hudson Bay almost certainly had greater potential benefits for the unskilled and unmarried Briton than for those with families and marketable skills.

Officers' salaries in the 19th century, at least for those with the rank of clerk, sloopmaster, or surgeon and commissioned officers, were also generally attractive in large measure because they included room and board. Clerks in Britain were not always highly paid as many of Charles Dickens's novels reveal. It was by no means unheard of for junior clerks in the mid-19th century to earn about £20 to £25 a year, and senior clerks with ten or more years of experience to earn less than £60 a year.¹⁴⁵ Yet even so a senior clerk in the Hudson's Bay Company's service earning £100 per annum would probably only barely qualify for membership in the middle class in Britain in the mid-19th century.¹⁴⁶ While company clerks ate well and were generally housed adequately their actual incomes would not have gone too far in Britain at a time when a maid might cost £10 to £20 a year with room and board and a good grammar or day school for one's children would cost perhaps £12 to £25 a year per child.¹⁴⁷ A senior clerk's salary probably exceeded the real earnings of most fellow clerks in Britain,¹⁴⁸ but it represented only a respectable, not really a comfortable, level of earnings.

Commissioned officers' earnings on the other hand not only made them the wealthiest residents of the North-West but also would have placed them

¹⁴⁵ Burnett, Cost of Living, p. 234.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁴⁷ According to the Taunton Report on Education of 1864 a second grade school which would prepare the sons of business and professional men, farmers, and large shopkeepers for careers in commerce or the professions, but not for university, cost about six to twelve guineas a year for a day student and £25 to £40 for boarders. Better quality schools preparing students for university entrance cost up to £120 a year. See Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 301.

¹⁴⁸ A salary of £100 with room and board was probably worth not less than £150 a year.

in about the top 5% of household incomes in Britain. As late as 1909 only about three percent of the population of England and Wales were members of households where the annual income exceeded £700. Hargrave's income of £658 in 1844-45 was roughly similar to that earned by headmasters of the best boarding schools, university principals, and somewhat less than doctors with good practices.¹⁴⁹ His income was comfortably middle-class, but by no means unusual for a successful men of business in a British context.

Letitia Hargrave once remarked that some company officers were legendary for their wealth, particularly the miserly John Charles who was reported to be worth £30,000 in 1842,¹⁵⁰ but most commissioned officers were much less wealthy. The Hargrave's could afford pianos, Axminster carpets, and fashionable lighting in their home at York. Even so they worried about the expense of sending their son, Joseph James, to Scotland to be educated.¹⁵¹

Overall most of the men who took up careers in the Hudson's Bay Company probably earned appreciably more than they would have in similar jobs in Britain. The advantage, however, was most marked for labourers despite the

¹⁴⁹ See Burnett, *Cost of Living*, p. 233. It was, however, much less than the earnings of owners of modest-sized manufacturing plants or barristers, let alone the gentry. Burnett estimates that in Britain by the mid-19th century a "gentleman" required an income of at least £1000 a year, and preferably much more than that. *Ibid.*, p. 224. Hargrave's income, of course, was clear of housing and food expenses, and was probably worth about £1000 a year.

¹⁵⁰ Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 118, Letitia Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish Senior, 8 September 1842.

¹⁵¹ See Chapter VII, "Standard of Living: Clothing and Accommodation", pp. 395-96 and Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 174, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 14 September 1843. Letitia Hargrave frequently discussed not only the changing fortunes of commissioned officers, but her family's expenses in her letters. She was appalled by the improvidence of the wives and daughters of some of her husbands' associates, and for her part frequently complained about the high cost of postage.

fact that they were at the bottom of the company's wage hierarchy. By contrast commissioned officers were on the one hand highly paid in comparison with other fur trade employees, but their incomes were not exceptionally high in comparison with middle class earnings in Britain. If clerks were at best marginally middle class in earnings from a metropolitan point of view, commissioned officers were only comfortably so. Indeed it needs to be remembered that despite being imposing figures in the North-West, commissioned officers and before 1821 governors of posts were in the final analysis simply well-paid employees. Although often paid in whole or in part from trade profits senior officers were not usually owners or directors of the company, and profit-sharing may well be seen as little more than a disguised salary system.¹⁵²

The origins of company servants have attracted considerable attention over the years from a variety of scholars.¹⁵³ Most of this interest has been prompted by a desire to understand the dynamics of the labour system of the fur trade better, and to investigate changes in the degree of racism and ethnic stereotyping in the career patterns and prospects of native and mixed blood employees. Some effort has also been made to test the accuracy of George Simpson's observations on the ethnic characteristics of employee

¹⁵² See Goldring, Papers: Volume III, pp. 40-41. See also Judd, "Native Labour", p. 313. The fact that officers were also employees leads Judd to conclude that traditional class analysis is inappropriate in a fur trade context and that sociological models of social stratification by income fit better. Over nearly two centuries of activity only three company officers managed to move from the status of employee to membership on the London committee - the real elite of the company: James Knight in the early 18th century and Duncan Finlayson and Donald Smith in the later 19th century. See Payne, York Factory, p. 246, fn. 48.

¹⁵³ Notably Philip Goldring, Papers, Volumes I - III, John Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC", and Carol Judd, "A Mixt Band of Many Nations", and "Native Labour".

groups and his view that diversified recruitment encouraged a more docile and less fractious work force.

The Hudson's Bay Company began hiring Orkneymen for service in the North-West as early as 1701, but it was not until 1727 that Orkneymen became the preferred source of post labour. Personnel records prior to the 1780's did not include information on employee's home parishes, but John Nicks and others have characterized the normal ethnic profile of the work force at bayside posts up to about 1774 as being almost exclusively English officers, largely English with some Orkney tradesmen, while most other occupations were almost exclusively filled by Orkneymen.¹⁵⁴ Although the company hired a handful of men in Scotland, Lower Canada, Rupert's Land, and England after 1774, Orkneymen continued to dominate company service both as a proportion of the total work force and in absolute numbers. In 1800, for example 390 of the 498 men employed by the Hudson's Bay Company in the North West - just under 80% of the whole - came from the Orkneys.¹⁵⁵

Thereafter the company tried to expand the geographical base for recruitment and although the Orkneys would remain the largest single source of labour in the company's service overall up to 1821 their numbers declined in both absolute and proportional terms. While English recruitment remained roughly steady the numbers of other Scots, Canadian, and locally recruited employees grew appreciably. The union of the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies intensified this process. Philip Goldring has calculated that nearly 80% of the new company's work force in what was known as the Northern Department in the 1820's came from the Canadas or Rupert's Land. Vigorous

¹⁵⁴ Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC", p. 102.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

TABLE 6: CARROLL OFFICERS, INCLUDING COMMISSIONED OFFICERS, BY PLACE OF ORIGIN

Year	1805	1814	1812	1818	1824	1829	1834	1839	1844	1849	1854	1859	1864	1869	1874	1879	1884	1889	1894	1899	Total Percentage		
Orkney			1	4	2		1				1	1	1								11	29.7	
Shetland																						0	0.0
Hebrides																						0	0.0
Mainland Scotland	1	1	1	1	2																	6	15.2
England	4	3	4				1	1	1													16	40.2
Other Britain																						0	0.0
Canada																						0	0.0
Rupert's Land																				1		1	2.7
Other European																						0	0.0
Unknown																				1	1	3	8.1
TOTAL	5	4	20	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	37	99.9	

Source: See footnote 62

TABLE 7: CHURCHILL THRESHMEN BY PLACE OF ORIGIN

Year	1833	1841	1844	1847	1849	1854	1859	1864	1869	1874	1879	1884	1889	1894	1899	1904	1909	1914	1919	1924	1929	1934	1939	1944	1949	1954	1959	1964	1969	1974	1979	Total Percentage			
Orkney	5	6	5	7																													28	63.6	
Shetland																																		2	4.5
Hebrides																																		2	4.5
Mainland Scotland																																		1	2.3
England																																		5	11.4
Other Britain																																		0	0.0
Canada																																		1	2.3
Paper's Land																																		5	11.4
Other European																																		0	0.0
Unknown																																		0	0.0
TOTAL	8	8	5	8	0	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	41	100.0		

Source: See footnote 12

TABLE 8: OTHER DUMMILL SEAMEN BY PLACE OF ORIGIN

Year	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	Total Percentage		
	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874			
	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874	1874			
Orkney	15	15	6	27	4	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	60	56.7	
Shetland																					6	4.3
Hebrides																					6	4.3
Mainland Scotland			1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	3.5	
England	1																			3	2.1	
Other Britain																				0	0.0	
Canada																				0	0.0	
Rupert's Land																				33	23.4	
Other European																				0	0.0	
Unknown	7	1																		8	5.7	
TOTAL	23	16	7	31	5	7	3	6	6	5	6	5	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	141	100.0	

Source: See footnotes to Table 7.

TABLE 9: YORK FACTORY OFFICERS, INCLUDING COMMISSIONED OFFICERS, BY PLACE OF ORIGIN

Year	1794	1812	1818	1824	1829	1834	1839	1844	1849	1854	1859	1864	1869	1874	1879	1884	1889	Total Percentage
Orkney	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	28.4
Shetland																		1.0
Hebrides																		0.0
Mainland Scotland	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	17.6
England	6	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	34.3
Other Britain																		2.0
Canada																		5.0
Rupert's Land																		4.9
Other European																		10.0
Unknown	1																	0.0
TOTAL	10	8	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	102

Source: See footnote 12

TABLE 10: YORK FACTORY INVESTMENT BY PLACE OF ORIGIN

Year	1794	1799	1803	1808	1812	1817	1821	1826	1831	1836	1841	1846	1851	1856	1861	1866	1871	1876	1881	1886	1891	1896	1901	1906	1911	1916	1921	Total Percentage		
Orkney	17	11	11	6	1	7	3	2	2	7	9	4	4	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	52.7	
Shetland											1																		3.0	
Hebrides																													1.2	
Mainland Scotland	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	2	1		2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17	10.3	
England																													7	4.2
Other Britain																													0	0.0
Canada											9	9	5	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	28	17.0
Rupert's Land																													18	10.9
Other European																													1	0.6
Unknown																													0	0.0
TOTAL	17	12	13	7	2	16	15	9	9	13	20	9	9	11	11	20	12	12	12	12	12	11	11	10	10	12	12	165	99.9	

See notes to table 9.

TABLE 11: OTHER YORK FACTORY SEWINGS BY PLACE OF ORIGIN

Year	1844	1874	1812 / 13	1816	1824 / 25	1829 / 30	1834 / 35	1839 / 40	1844 / 45	1849 / 50	1854 / 55	1859 / 60	1864 / 65	1869 / 70	Total Percentage	
Orkney	17	19	11	16	3	21	9	17	11	15	8	7	16	10	202	53.2
Shetland										4	4	4	6	4	22	5.6
Hebrides								4	4	3	3	5	9	1	37	9.7
Mainland Scotland				3	2	1				2	3	1	1	1	14	3.7
England		1	2			1			1	1		2	1	1	13	3.4
Other Britain					1	1									2	0.5
Canada					1	1	6	3	3	1			1		22	5.8
Rupert's Land				1	1	3	4	3	5	8	7	10	6	4	57	15.0
Other European					1							1			2	0.5
Unknown					1								4		9	2.4
TOTAL	31	20	17	16	8	37	17	36	24	34	31	30	46	21	380	100.0

Source: See footnote 12

pruning of the work force in the 1820's reduced overall numbers, but not the dominance of Canadien and to a lesser extent Métis or mixed blood employees. In 1830, for example, over 40% of the entire work force came originally from the Canadas, and a further 25% or so of the work force was classified as "native" to Rupert's land. By contrast although Orkneymen continued to dominate Scottish recruiting, overall Scottish employees made up just over 30% of all permanent employees.¹⁵⁶

In subsequent years Orkney provided fewer and fewer of all Scottish recruits. More and more the company looked to Lewis and Shetland and the northern highlands for new employees instead of Orkney. Briefly in the late 1830's and early 1840's Scots would once again provide the largest single source of permanent employees. Still as recruitment in Lower Canada declined from about 1830 on,¹⁵⁷ most of the new growth in the company's work force was provided by men listed as "native" in personnel records. Philip Goldring has determined that by 1850 "natives" had passed Scots as the largest single source of permanent employees at just about 42% of all company servants. By 1860 this had risen to about 60% of the total work force and never fell below 50% in the years up to 1880.¹⁵⁸

Not only did the work forces at York Factory and Churchill differ from this general pattern in certain important respects, they also differed from each other more and more as the 19th century progressed.

¹⁵⁶ Goldring, Papers: Volume I, pp. 62-67. "Native" recruits were mostly of mixed blood or Métis origin, and the term "native" appears to have been used in the sense of native to Rupert's Land or the North-West.

¹⁵⁷ See Judd, "Mixed Bands", Table 1, p. 133.

¹⁵⁸ Goldring, Papers: Volume I, p. 64.

Prior to 1821 both York Factory and Churchill followed the patterns described by John Nicks fairly closely, although there were more Orkney officers especially at Churchill and officers from mainland Scotland than perhaps most would expect. Based on the years sampled, out of the 50 officers at the two posts for whom parishes were listed 28 came from England, 13 from Orkney, and 9 from mainland Scotland. Although there were a handful of English and Scottish tradesmen stationed at these posts - 15 of 72 in total or about 20% of all tradesmen - the remainder were Orkneymen. A similar pattern also prevailed with the remaining servant population. Of the other 161 men for whom home parishes were listed 143 came from the Orkneys: almost 90% of the remaining employees. Only 18 men were listed as coming from parishes in England or mainland Scotland or as "native" employees.¹⁵⁹

According to John Nicks' calculations Orkneymen were declining in both absolute and proportional numbers in company service after 1800, but at York and Churchill they continued to dominate the permanent work forces up to 1821. Both posts were in effect expatriate Orkney communities. At Churchill in 1804, for example, the officer in charge, William Auld, came from Edinburgh, and the pataroon, John Forbes, came from Caithness, while the other 12 men all came from Orkney.¹⁶⁰ Bayside posts prior to 1821 were by no means "mixt bands of many nations", and indeed with the exception of a handful of locally engaged servants all the men stationed at York Factory and Churchill prior to 1821 were British: either Englishmen, Scotsmen, or Orkneymen.

¹⁵⁹ See Tables 6 - 11, pp.94-99.

¹⁶⁰ See HBCA:B.42/f/2, Churchill Servants List 1804.

Somewhat surprisingly, Orkneymen continued to dominate the work force at York Factory after 1821, even providing the largest single pool of officers: 22 of the 72 officers sampled gave a home parish in the Orkneys. By contrast there were 18 Englishmen, 14 Scots, and 11 "natives" listed as officers at York.¹⁶¹ Among tradesmen and other servants Orkneymen overall formed the largest single source of labour, but their dominance was never total. In some categories of labour in fact, Orkneymen were rare. Apprentices, for example, were almost exclusively recruited in Rupert's Land from among the sons of company employees.¹⁶² Lower Canada provided most of the tradesmen employed at York in the later 1820's and early 1830's, and thereafter "native" tradesmen, many former apprentices, rivalled Orkneymen in overall numbers. Nevertheless Orkneymen constituted 45 of the 114 tradesmen sampled at York after 1821, or just under 40% of the total. The 28 Lower Canadian tradesmen represented about 25% of the total, and Rupert's Landers about 15%.¹⁶³ Among the remaining servants stationed at York 126 of 288 were Orkneymen, just under 45% of the total, with Rupert's Landers forming the next largest pool of labour at 55 of 288 men or just under 20% of the total. Together Shetlanders and Lewismen slightly outnumbered these "native" employees, and no other group provided even 10% of the total.¹⁶⁴

In the years sampled between 1794 and 1870, 646 men were listed as permanent employees of the Hudson's Bay Company stationed at York Factory. Out of this total 318 or just under 50% gave a parish in the Orkneys as

¹⁶¹ See Table 9, p.97 and Payne, York Factory, p. 48, Table 2.

¹⁶² See Chapter V, "Education and Religion", p. 268.

¹⁶³ See Table 10, p.98.

¹⁶⁴ See Table 11, p.99.

TABLE 12: CHURCHILL EMPLOYEES ALL RANKS, 1769-1870

	Number	Percentage
Orkney	119	53.6
Shetland	8	3.6
Hebrides	8	3.6
Mainland Scotland	12	5.4
England	24	10.8
Other Britain	0	0.0
Canada	1	0.5
Rupert's Land	39	17.5
Other European	0	0.0
Unknown	11	5.0
TOTAL	222	100.0

Source: See footnote 62

TABLE 13: YORK FACTORY EMPLOYEES ALL RANKS, 1794-1870

	Number	Percentage
Orkney	318	49.1
Shetland	28	4.3
Hebrides	39	6.0
Mainland Scotland	49	7.6
England	55	8.5
Other Britain	4	0.6
Canada	55	8.5
Rupert's Land	85	13.1
Other European	3	0.5
Unknown	11	1.7
TOTAL	647	100.0

Source: See footnote 62

their home. Rupert's Land the next most common source of employees provided just 85 men or about 13% of the total, and no other area provided even 10% of the remaining employees. While York Factory was no longer in effect just an expatriate Orkney community, it was to an astonishing degree a British community. Britain, including Ireland, provided fully 493 of 646 men sampled, or more than 75% of permanent employees stationed at York. Even during the 1820's and 1830's when Lower Canadians dominated company service, and after 1840 when employees were recruited for the most part in Rupert's Land itself, York Factory remained primarily a British enclave.¹⁸⁵

At Churchill a roughly parallel situation prevailed but with some significant differences. Overall 222 men were listed as stationed at Churchill in the years sampled between 1789 and 1870. Orkneymen constituted 119 or over 53% of this total. The next largest source of labour was Rupert's Land with but 39 men, and just over 17% of the total. Englishmen, primarily due to their numbers as officers and tradesmen in the pre-1821 period, just exceeded 10% of the sample. As at York, British employees in total constituted more than 75% of all employees at Churchill, and Scots most of that number.¹⁸⁶

In some respects, however, overall population figures for Churchill are less revealing than at York. Because of the steep decline in the size of the post work force at Churchill after about 1800, a large proportion of

¹⁸⁵ In fact it was in many respects more a Scottish than a British enclave. Orkney, Shetland, Lewis, and Mainland Scotland together provided 434 men out of a total sample of 646, over two thirds of the whole. See Table 13, p.103.

¹⁸⁶ In total they made up 171 of 222 men sampled, or 77% of the whole. Orkney, Shetland, Lewis, and mainland Scotland together constituted just over 66% of all Churchill employees. See Table 12, p.103.

total post sample comes from the pre-1821 period. Out of a total sample of 222 men, 135 of these employees worked at Churchill prior to 1821, about 60% of the total sample. Between 1789 and 1821 about 70% of all employees sampled at Churchill were Orkneymen, which rather skewed the overall totals for the post. In a similar fashion aside from one officer, Robert Harding, who served at Churchill from 1826 to 1845, all the other Englishmen stationed at Churchill worked there prior to 1821. After 1821, there were far more men listed as "native" employees stationed at Churchill than any other home parish. A total of 87 men were listed as stationed at Churchill in the years sampled after 1821, and of this number 37 were listed as "native" employees, slightly more than 42% of the total sample between 1824 and 1870. Only 22 men during this same period gave a parish in the Orkneys as their home. Lewis, Shetland and mainland Scotland provided another 21 men, meaning that Scots in total only just exceeded Rupert's Landers as a proportion of the total work force stationed at Churchill between 1824 and 1870. In this respect at least Churchill was much more representative of the ethnic structure of company service as a whole after 1840 than York Factory.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ See Tables 6 to 8 and Table 12, pp.94-96 and p.103. There is another possible implication arising from this difference in employee backgrounds between York Factory and Churchill. Many sociologists believe that by definition a society must be at least largely self-perpetuating in terms of population. If one accepts this view it would imply that if a "fur trade society" can be said to exist it was to be found in outposts like Churchill and not in a major centre like York. For a brief, albeit somewhat dated, review of sociological definitions of "society" see David L. Sills (ed.), International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 14, (New York: Macmillan and the Free Press, 1968), entries for "Societies, Small" and "Society", pp. 572-585.

Several observations come to mind regarding the ethnic origins of the company employees stationed at York Factory and Churchill. As a policy dispersed recruitment took root only after 1800 and then primarily in the years after 1821. As a business strategy it did perhaps offer the company certain economies. Recruitment could be pursued most vigorously in areas where labour costs were perceived to be most advantageous, and if one source of men proved inadequate any shortfall could probably be made up by hiring in another market. Dispersed recruitment, however, was not the same thing as dispersed deployment, and at least some of the advantages claimed for the policy by proponents like George Simpson were almost certainly wishful thinking. As early as 1823 Simpson recorded his opinion that while Canadian employees were volatile they were in the main hardy and easily managed. Orkneymen were slow and less hardy, not to mention obstinate and secretive. Still he saw them as desirable employees in their way, and even the Irish and Scots, whom Simpson viewed as independent and inclined to form cabals, were worth recruiting in small numbers. The reason for this according to Simpson was that a balance of employees from different areas encouraged competition between the groups and made them individually easier to control. In short cabals and combinations, as any labour unrest tended to be termed, would be limited by ethnic cleavages in the work force.¹⁰⁰

As Chapter III, "Work", will argue, the notion that the Hudson's Bay Company's employees were docile needs to be rethought, but even if true the reason can scarcely have been dispersed recruitment unless it was also tied to a policy of dispersed deployment. Employee records from York and

¹⁰⁰ This much quoted passage in Simpson's official reports may be found in HBCA:D.4/86, fo.14-14d, Official Report 1823. It is also cited at length in Judd, "Mixt Bands", p. 131.

Churchill suggest that rather than being "mixt bands" of many nations, post communities were surprisingly homogeneous with fewer ethnic differences even between officers and men than has sometimes been assumed.¹⁶⁹ If this pattern was general there can be little doubt that Simpson's attempts to manage and control the company's work force by taking advantage of the antipathy and distrust that could arise between men from different backgrounds was illusory. Antipathies did exist of course. Robert Clouston remarked that when travelling with a canoe brigade at every encampment the part "divided itself by mutual consent, ... the Iroquois had a fire; the French Canadians had a fire" and Clouston, as an officer, had a third fire to himself.¹⁷⁰ William Walker requested in 1790 that he be recalled to England if "any Person from the Orkney Isles should be placed over me".¹⁷¹ While Walker's sentiments were perhaps extreme, they were by no means completely anomalous. Orkneymen has a reputation for clannishness, and as most Lewismen were Gaelic speaking they too tended to band together.¹⁷² The tendency for Orkneymen, Lewismen, Shetlanders, even Norwegians and Canadians to be stationed at a limited number of posts meant however that there was little advantage to the company and its officers to be wrung from such ethnic hostilities as occurred. Indeed on the handful of occasions when

¹⁶⁹ See Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC", p. 102, and Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties", p. 11. A slightly different view that recognizes the company's tendency to promote officers from within - at least prior to 1821 - and which notes the number of Orkney officers who rose to senior ranks may be found in Brown, Strangers in Blood, pp. 30-31.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Goldring, Papers: Volume II, p. 37.

¹⁷¹ HBCA:A.11/117, fo.52, William Walker to London committee, 25 July 1790.

¹⁷² See Goldring, "Lewis and the Hudson's Bay Company, pp. 28-9 and 36-7.

violence actually broke out between groups, as in 1811 when a group of Irishmen with Miles Macdonnell's Red River Settlement party brutally assaulted some Orkneymen at York Factory, the company's interests were clearly damaged.¹⁷³ If a policy of dispersed recruitment had any effect in making company servants more docile and easily managed it was probably because recruiting efforts focussed on areas where the social values of pre-industrial or "ancien regime" society remained strong. The belief that "firm distinctions between persons made some superior, most inferior", and that the "various gradations" of society were authoritatively established" was rarely challenged at either York Factory or Churchill.¹⁷⁴ Indeed York Factory has been described as a place where

everybody found reason to be grateful for superiority over someone else. In the little chapel at York the Chief Factor's household sat alone in a corner to be secluded & apart from the vulgar, while the Mess or unmarried officers and clerks also sat in a little group, & the men wd not share the forms [pews] with the Indians, the Fort Indians won't sit beside the tent ones & so forth.¹⁷⁵

One of the complaints sometimes raised about English servants was that they were more prone to protest their living and work conditions than Orkneymen, and that they were less prepared to accept the inequalities of post society.¹⁷⁶ The ideal of fur trade social relations was a deferential work force and paternalistic officers. However, since reality conflicted

¹⁷³ See PAC:MG19 E1, Lord Selkirk Papers, volume I, p. 260 and pp. 267-8.

¹⁷⁴ Laslett, The World We Have Lost, p. 23.

¹⁷⁵ Goldring, Papers: Volume II, p. 37.

¹⁷⁶ A typical comment along these lines maybe found in HBCA:B.239/a/89, fo.35, 18 July 1789. Carol Judd also cites similar opinions about English servants in the nineteenth century. See Judd, "Mixt Bands", p. 135.

with the ideal on occasion more direct means of social control than a belief that some men were born to command and others to obey was necessary.

The officers in charge of posts like York Factory and Churchill, while by no means a law unto themselves, were the key figures in any system of discipline - or in the absence of any system. Although senior officers prior to 1821 were subject to recall and only held their positions at the pleasure of the London committee, they could wield tremendous power in their posts. Miles Macdonnell aptly summarized the potential power of senior officers as well as their many responsibilities in a letter to William Auld:

You now compose in your person so many characters & functions civil, secular & clerical that you will be a match for the Devil himself - there can be no such thing as getting to the unguarded side of you - you only want military to make you invincible - 177

In fact the officers in charge of York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort, prior to 1782 at least, had some military powers. They commanded posts that were also fortifications of limited strength and even after 1782 they were expected to defend their posts and company property. After 1821, commissioned officers' tenure was slightly more secure. Although the clerks placed in charge of Churchill could be replaced, commissioned officers could not be stripped of their status. Of course they could be transferred to undesirable stations,¹⁷⁸ and otherwise encouraged into taking early retirement. Their powers as officers in charge of posts, however, had

¹⁷⁷ HBCA:B.239/b/83, fos.5d-6, Miles Macdonnell to William Auld, 4 December 1812.

¹⁷⁸ Colin Robertson for example was sent to Churchill apparently as a less than subtle comment on the value George Simpson placed on his services. See Glyndwr Williams (ed.), Hudson's Bay Miscellany 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1975), pp.169-70.

changed little from the 18th century. In particular they continued to be responsible for maintaining order and discipline in their posts.

Because senior officers had to impose punishments of varying sorts for varying breaches of post discipline, many cultivated a kind of social distance even from fellow officers. Dr. Helmcken, a visitor to York Factory in the 1840's, remarked that James Hargrave had been "very familiar and affable" while travelling out to York on the supply ship, but that "no sooner did he set foot ashore than he became dignified cold and distant". Helmcken likened Hargrave to a naval admiral who could be "pleasant and urbane ashore, but the moment his foot touches the deck, he is the admiral - discipline prevails, and he may or may not be a tyrant".¹⁷⁹ While Helmcken graciously allowed that Hargrave was no tyrant, others certainly resented their senior officers, and accusations of tyrannical behaviour occasionally crop up in company records.

The problem of social distance was a difficult one. Junior officers were encouraged from the beginning of their careers to avoid familiarity with the men since tradesmen and labourers "soon lose respect for an officer who forgets his position".¹⁸⁰ Nor was such advice just some peculiar social shibboleth. For example, Joseph Colen reported that one of his writers, Thomas Wiegand, preferred the company of "common labourers" with whom he regularly became intoxicated. As a result of this behaviour Wiegand had become "the butt and ridicule to men and natives".¹⁸¹ William Auld in a

¹⁷⁹ John Sebastien Helmcken, The Reminiscences of Dr. John Helmcken (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975), p. 95.

¹⁸⁰ George Simpson McTavish, Behind the Palisades: An Autobiography (Sidney, British Columbia: Gray's Publishing, 1963), p. 30.

¹⁸¹ HBCA:B.239/a/90, fos.38d-39, 28 April 1790.

letter of advice to John Charles, a young inexperienced officer, outlined the problem as he saw it.

You no doubt will keep a strict account of such Goods as are sold to the Men and remember that in your situation solicitations for indulgence are more likely to be made than if you had been in riper years but you ought to know that generosity is not only improper but highly criminal. It is of no moment whether the people be dissatisfied at you, indeed I would rather hear that you were disliked by them, if their approbation be the price of your dishonour, shun it as you would Pestilence. Keep yourself as much as possible from their society, in which, it is unlikely you can reap much benefit.¹⁸²

While it may have been of no moment to men like Auld what their employees thought of them, the kind of social distance regularly recommended as desirable to company officers must have been difficult to sustain. Auld himself complained a year later that he had become a "solitary hermit" at Churchill having no other officers to mess with at the post.¹⁸³ While this problem was more obvious at an outpost like Churchill in the 19th century, where it was not common to station more than one officer at a time, even at York officers could feel isolated. This was probably most true for senior officers who were not part of the boisterous life of Bachelors' Hall. Chief Trader James Clare commented to James Hargrave that he was "getting sadly weary of North West life principally I fancy from the solitary life to which it condemns me". Clare complained that he "never [got] half an hours

¹⁸² HBCA:B.42/b/46, p. 24, William Auld to John Charles, 6 February 1803.

¹⁸³ HBCA:B.42/b/47, p.14, William Auld to John Hodgson, 10 March 1804. Personnel records for Churchill in 1804 list Magnus Rendall as a shallop master. Auld either did not consider Rendall a fellow officer, or Rendall had been sent out to the camps at the time Auld wrote.

conversation which ranges above the common place", and that as a result his only diversions were "work and books".¹⁸⁴

While junior officers were only expected to discipline labourers and tradesmen, and in many cases not even them,¹⁸⁵ senior officers, especially those commanding large posts, had to discipline fellow officers. After 1821 at Churchill only one or two officers at most were normally resident at the post at any one time and the question of one officer disciplining another rarely arose. At York after 1821 there were certainly enough officers stationed for such problems to arise, but available records contain few references to disputes between officers. Letitia Hargrave did remark that R.M. Ballantyne, an apprentice clerk, was threatened by her brother William Mactavish and the surgeon, Dr. Gillespie with the indignity of a public thrashing as a result of his "conceited or stylish" behaviour.¹⁸⁶ Apprentice clerks and postmasters almost certainly were kept in line by older officers with an occasional cuff or kick, but company records mention few other more formal punishments for officers. Some were fined, including commissioned officers in a handful of cases, by the Northern Department

¹⁸⁴ HBCA:E.21/1, James and Joseph Hargrave Correspondence, fo.139, James Clare to James Hargrave, 1 August 1860. Hargrave, himself, probably avoided the worst of this isolation by having not only a family at York, but a trusted friend and brother-in-law, William Mactavish, stationed there for many years, and a wide circle of friends and correspondents throughout the Northern and Southern Departments. Clare, for his part, continued on in company service until his death in 1866.

¹⁸⁵ At York in the 19th century most of the apprentice clerks and postmasters worked almost exclusively in the saleshop or accountant's office. They had little contact with the men and no reason to have to discipline either tradesmen or labourers.

¹⁸⁶ Ballantyne, of course, would become a renowned author in time, but in 1843 he was only 18 years old, scarcely more than a boy to experienced officers. See Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 162, Letitia Hargrave to Florence Mactavish, 10 September 1843.

Council, but while this sanction was available it does not seem to have been invoked often in the case of officers.¹⁸⁷ Officers who misbehaved or who annoyed their superiors were more likely to find themselves released from company service or saddled with severely circumscribed promotion prospects. After 1821 then, the social control of company officers at York Factory and Churchill seems to have operated more by indirect means than through actual physical punishments or fines.¹⁸⁸

In the 18th century, relations among the officers at both York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort were often poisoned by serious disputes. These disputes frequently pitted the officer in charge of the post and sometimes his deputy against the surgeon or sloopmaster, though other officers on occasion joined one party or the other. Surgeons and sloopmasters were probably more likely to present discipline problems to their superiors than other officers for several reasons. Their work made them relatively independent, and both surgeons and sloopmasters had greater opportunity to engage in activities like private trade than most other employees. Surgeons for example could see Indians privately under the guise of treating them as

¹⁸⁷ In 1826, Chief Trader John Spencer was fined £20 for an unnecessary expenditure of 20 bags of pemmican, but most commissioned officers only received a stern rebuke from George Simpson if detected wasting food. James Hargrave, for example, was merely warned in no uncertain terms to stop indenting for mustard, fish sauce, and pickles. Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 159 fn, George Simpson to James Hargrave, 3 March 1843.

¹⁸⁸ For example in 1858 a rather bizarre case occurred at York Factory. The surgeon, Mr. Robert McLeod, was accused of "clandestine intrusion" into the Reverend William Mason's family, and of "unmeasured and abusive language". This was clearly ungentlemanly conduct, and McLeod resigned. He was allowed, however, the face-saving option of claiming to resign for health reasons. Ironically no one could replace McLeod as surgeon at York immediately and he continued to serve for another year - without incident. See HBCA:B.239/b/105, fo.91d, James Hargrave to Sir George Simpson, 26 May 1858, and fo.123d, James Clare to W.G. Smith, September 1858. See also HBCA:B.239/b/107, fo 39d, James Clare to Thomas Fraser, 17 September 1858.

patients, and medical supplies were in some demand as trade goods.¹⁰⁰ Sloopmasters could engage in private trade both when away from the post on voyages and even while ostensibly anchored in harbour so long as they were out of sight of the main post. Sloopmasters also could deal directly with ships' captains while loading and unloading the annual supply ship, and could easily secure stocks of brandy and other trade goods while disposing of any furs they had collected. Moreover surgeons and sloopmasters were often sojourners rather than career company employees. They had little to fear in being sent home before their contracts were up, and little need to maintain the good will and patronage of their commanding officer. As Thomas Bird noted concerning the surgeon at Prince of Wales's Fort in 1731, John Hume was "a Young Man that Acts more like one that Prefers his own will & Pleasure here more than Yr. Honours Service, or Interest".¹⁰⁰ For his part, Hume was reported to have stated that he would "obey No Command, ... [for] a Compy. Govn. is no Governer".¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ According to Andrew Graham Indian shamans found a few European medicines valuable if only as props in their healing rituals. Company officers used to supply them with some "medicines" - including cheap printed pictures which were supposed to act as talismans. See Graham, Observations, pp.320-21. Surgeons, of course, could trade medicines on their own account and some were caught doing just that. See for examples, HBCA:B.42/a/11, fo.26, 19 June 1731, and B.42/a/55, fos.45d-46, 3 August 1761.

¹⁰⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/11, fos.25d-26, 17 June 1731.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., fo.23d, 29 May 1731. Surgeons had some important weapons in any battles with their superiors, especially if their superior suffered from ill-health. Humphrey Marten at York in 1786 became embroiled in a series of disputes with his surgeon, Alfred Robinson. Unfortunately at the time Marten was also suffering terribly from gout and other ailments. The two men exchanged insults and fought on a number of occasions, and Marten wrote somewhat forlornly that for a man facing death as he thought he was it was hard to find the Surgeon no friend but rather a constant critic. Robinson apparently "frequently upbraided" Marten for being "peevish" and "Tyrannical" not to mention a "Lyar", "Scoundrel", and "Old Brute". HBCA:B.239/a/86, fos.20-20d, 3 and 4 February, 1786. Marten's ill health

Most disputes between senior and other officers in the 18th century revolved around the company's attempts to control moral behaviour and private trade. A number of company officers in the 18th century were reputed to be heavy drinkers, but little action was taken in most instances. In 1749 for example, when the surgeon at Prince of Wales's Fort got drunk and abused Ferdinand Jacobs and "desturbed the whole house", Joseph Isbister, admittedly by his own report, claimed only to have pointed out the "ill Consequences of bad exampls".¹⁸² Moses Norton, in 1772, requested a new surgeon:

as we have Laboured under a very great In Conveniency for Some time past when Sickness has Happend ... I am Sorry to Say that our present Surgeon is a very Improper Person for the Charge he has in Trust, ... most Constantly Rendering himself Incapable of his Duty, Commonly at times when his Assistance is mostly wanted, thro ye Affects of Liquor, for 8 or 10 days together ...¹⁸³

Despite the surgeon's unseemly behaviour, however, Norton sought only to have him replaced the following year. Tradesmen and labourers who behaved in a similar fashion could expect more than a reprimand, and were usually sent home as soon as possible.

Sexual misconduct also caused considerable conflict within the officers' mess. Most post governors appear to have turned a blind eye to the personal lives of their men, especially in the case of fellow officers, but a handful of senior officers set out to "reform" the morals of their

forced him to give up any attempt to discipline Robinson, who not only kept a woman in his rooms but arranged for mess meals to be delivered to her. As for his treatment of Marten's frequent "agonies" he offered only one bottle of Stomach Tincture and another of Cinnamon Water. HBCA:B.239/a/88, fo.30d, 19 April 1786.

¹⁸² HBCA:B.42/a/32, fo.19d, 26 January 1749.

¹⁸³ HBCA:A.11/14, fo.170d, Moses Norton to London committee 1772.

posts. One of the most notorious of these "reforming" factors was Joseph Isbister. While stationed at Prince of Wales's Fort in the early 1750's, he soon provoked open hostility with most of his mess. His problems began with a series of relatively trivial disputes with the sloopmaster, James Walker, who was supported by the surgeon, Mr. Bass, and a clerk, Timothy Sutton.

According to Isbister's reports the initial problem was his attempt to curtail private trading. He suspected that Walker was a ring leader in trading brandy for furs among the men, and noted that Walker took care to anchor his sloop out of sight from the fort especially at ship-time.¹⁸⁴ Isbister also suspected Bass and Sutton of private trade, especially since they took to leaving the post without permission.¹⁸⁵ Actually private trade was probably not their only motive, and they were on several occasions suspected of trying to waylay Indian women visiting the post in order to "gratify their brutal appetits".¹⁸⁶ If Isbister had a sense of humour, however, he might have been amused when Bass and Sutton set off to intercept what they thought was a woman. Instead "it happined to be a wolfe which when they drew nigh persu:d them & drove them back with as great

¹⁸⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/36, fo.4d, 19 August 1750. If Walker was trading brandy he had purchased from the ship's captain he was not alone. John Bean, the sloopmaster at Prince of Wales's Fort in 1756, was named as a supplier of illicit brandy along with Mr. Richard Squire, the post accountant and deputy. See HBCA:B.42/a/48, fo.18d, 2 January 1758. Bean was also accused of selling a Robert Otterton 10 gallons of brandy for £3/10/0 and it was noted that he had £25 in payments made to him from servant accounts at Prince of Wales's Fort. The inference was that this money could only have been payments for supplies of brandy. HBCA:B.42/a/46, fos.47d-48d, 23 August 1753.

¹⁸⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/36, fos.8d-9, 12 September 1750.

¹⁸⁶ See for examples, HBCA:B.42/a/36, fo.16d, 7 October 1750; fo.20d, 22 November 1750, and HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo.27, 6 February 1752.

precipitation as they Set out with".¹⁹⁷ For their part Bass, Walker and Sutton accused Isbister of wanting to keep any compliant Indian for his own sexual satisfaction.¹⁹⁸

In 1751 Isbister attempted to have Bass and Sutton sent home to Britain, but the ship's surgeon refused to stay on Hudson Bay so Bass could not be replaced.¹⁹⁹ After the ship left with Sutton, Bass and Walker began to cause trouble again. Bass and Walker fought with Ferdinand Jacobs, Isbister's deputy,²⁰⁰ and were uncooperative and disruptive. Walker explained his enmity by remarking that Isbister did not give his officers "presents" of furs and he did not allow them to keep women at the post.²⁰¹ On another occasion Walker commented that he would rather earn £30 a year at York than £40 at Prince of Wales's Fort, as James Isham at York gave his men furs and other rewards and was not particularly puritanical about their personal lives.²⁰² In the end the London committee resolved the troubles at Prince of Wales's Fort by bringing Bass and Isbister home, along with a

¹⁹⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/36, fo.41, 11 March 1751.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, fo.20, 22 November 1750.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, fos.66 and 67, 3 and 7 August 1751.

²⁰⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo.27d, 8 February 1752, and fos.48d-49, 17 June 1752. Walker had to be threatened with being placed in irons in order to break up one brawl. Such a course of action would have been unique at York or Churchill where officers were not physically punished - at least in the form of being whipped or clapped in irons as tradesmen and labourers were on occasion. The reason for this seems to have been solely a matter of social status.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, fos.25d-26, 1 February 1752.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, fos.27d-28, 8 February 1752.

number of servants Isbister described as "Sots & Mutinous persons, & useless men".²⁰³

Similar problems also arose at York Factory. In 1761-62 Humphrey Marten had considerable difficulty with a surgeon named James Bloxham. Like many other surgeons he was disinclined to obey orders, and disruptive socially. On one occasion he even tried to get Marten to fight a duel with pistols.²⁰⁴ Marten accused Bloxham of being a drunkard, and suspected that either private trade or sexual misconduct lay behind his anti-social behaviour. Marten, who was only the acting chief at York after Isham's death, may not have handled the situation with diplomacy or skill. One journal entry, however, suggests that Bloxham's behaviour went far beyond acceptable standards of the day. According to Marten he once found Bloxham apparently committing an act of bestiality with one of the post dogs, though Bloxham tried to pretend he had a woman hidden in the room.²⁰⁵ If untrue, the story gives some idea of the power senior officers had to blacken the reputations of their subordinates; if true, it suggests why relations between Marten and Bloxham remained uneasy for the rest of the year.

Many of the tensions between officers over sexual matters were based on the inherent unfairness of the custom in the mid-18th century of commanding officers keeping a "wife" and sometimes more than one in the post, when they

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, fo.57, 5 August 1752.

²⁰⁴ See HBCA:B.239/a/49, fos.7-7d, 10 October 1761. See also *ibid.*, fos.16-16d, 3 December 1761 and fos.21-22, 7-16 January 1762.

²⁰⁵ HBCA:B239/a/49, fos.9-10d, 21 October 1761. Bloxham later claimed that he had been using the dog as a subject for an experiment in techniques of examining fallopian tubes. He also claimed that Marten had burst into his room just as he was about to urinate which explained his open breeches and waistcoat.

restricted other officers to occasional liaisons and only allowed tradesmen and labourers to have contact with women while out at the work camps.²⁰⁶ Ferdinand Jacobs when he arrived to take over York Factory described the Men's House at the factory as a "Brothel House", and set about trying to reform the morals of his officers and men.²⁰⁷ His actions provoked protests from the men - one of the few occasions when sexual conduct actually provoked open disputes between officers and men, as opposed to between one officer and another.²⁰⁸ Fellow officers, however, tended to be more openly resentful, especially when their superiors' actions seemed hypocritical or tyrannical. James Bloxham's replacement at York, Paul Caldwell, crudely but very graphically described the problem. He compared Ferdinand Jacobs' attempts to reform the moral behaviour of his employees to the actions of "Snarling Currs [who] could neither F--k themselves nor Let Other Dogs F--k".²⁰⁹ Although almost certainly untrue - Jacobs had several children - the fact that factors could keep "bedfellows" in the post and fellow officers

²⁰⁶ Graham, Observations, p. 248. See also Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties", pp. 41-2.

²⁰⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/50, fo.5, 22 September 1762.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., fos.5-5d, 22,23, and 24 September 1762. See also ibid., fo.7, 4 October 1762. Several men responded to Jacobs' edicts by claiming to be ill, and in one case threatening suicide. As a protest it was not very effective. Earlier in 1762, Humphrey Marten had also attempted to stop one of the men from keeping a woman at York. The man in question, a Thomas Inkester, stated that the woman was his wife, and if he could not have her stay at the post he would not stay either. When Marten was adamant and argued that "neither he nor any of the Men should be permitted to keep one, as it was repugnant to Your Honours orders", Inkester and his brother left the post. They were "Natives of the Country" and simply returned to their relatives. Thereafter when they visited the post they were simply treated as Homeguard Indians. See HBCA:B.239/a/49, fos.20-20d, 2 and 3 January 1762, and fo.38d, 27 April 1762.

²⁰⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/51, fo.32d, 4 May 1764.

could not, if the factor chose to make an issue of it, clearly caused resentment and ill-feeling.

Similar sexual misconduct was rarely noted among the men prior to 1821, and even less often punished. Commanding officers may well have chosen not to enquire too deeply into the personal lives of their tradesmen and labourers, at least at York and Prince of Wales's Fort, but even so the contrast with officers is striking. For the most part the commanding officers at York and Prince of Wales's Fort seem to have paid little or no attention to the personal lives of the men unless forced to do so. When Ferdinand Jacobs sought to remove all the women from the Men's House at York, and several men refused to work, he casually let it be known that one of the protestors, a John Hughes, was rumoured to have an incestuous relationship with his daughter. On the other hand he made no attempt to punish Hughes for his behaviour.²¹⁰ James Isham was forced to punish Peter Vincent in 1754 after George Dorrell complained that Vincent had attempted an act of sodomy. As punishment Isham had Vincent beaten. The form of Vincent's beating, however, seems significant. Every man in the post was to give him "a Slap on the back side with a Barrell stave", suggesting that the "crime" was viewed less as an assault on Dorrell than as an affront to the community.²¹¹ A week later the same punishment was ordered for Peter Isbister, who, it turned out, had seduced Vincent "to that wicked and sinful

²¹⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/50, fo.5, 22 September 1762.

²¹¹ HBCA:B.239/a/39, fo.13d, 23 December 1754. In other cases when the whole community was called upon to participate in a beating it was usually to punish theft - not from the company but from fellow servants. In the previously mentioned case of James Bloxham, Humphrey Marten described Bloxham's apparent sexual act with a dog as not just an offence against God, but "an offence against all Men." HBCA:B.239/a/49, fo.9d, 21 October 1761.

act of Sodomy", and who, by his own confession, had been "twice in the young mans bed, and offer'd severall times". His crime was obviously considered to be somewhat more serious: he was ordered to receive two blows from every man in the post.²¹² The odd sequel to the story, however, did not emerge until the following July. Vincent again complained that Isbister had tried to talk him into committing sodomy, and Isham had Isbister "Lashed up, and Every Man 3 Strokes with a good Young Willow". Isham also then ordered Vincent and Isbister "Seperated ... from being in the same Cabbin". In other words despite having admitted their homosexual activities with each other in December, the two men had been left to share a sleeping compartment for the next seven months. Even allowing for a certain naivete on the part of Isham it is hard to believe that, if sodomy was seen as "abominable", "wicked", and "sinful", two men known to have engaged in the practice would have been left to room together.²¹³ Vincent and Isbister were eventually sent back to Britain.

Punishing employees by publicly beating them or exposing them to ridicule or humiliation was reserved for tradesmen and labourers, and usually only for relatively major breaches of discipline. Minor transgressions like refusing an order or using "saucy" language were normally dealt with directly and on the spot with a blow or a kick. It is interesting however that while some officers had the reputation of being

²¹² *Ibid.*, fo.14, 30 December 1754. There were 39 men stationed at York at the time, so presumably he was to receive 76 blows with a barrel stave.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, fo.34d, 16 July 1755.

overly quick with their fists,²¹⁴ the men they struck were not entirely at their mercy. Not only did some fight back, but when officers overstepped the bounds of an acceptable level of violence or punished unfairly they were sometimes called to account. Few matters were so likely to result in confrontations between officers and men as the use of physical force to discipline company employees. Some, of course, fought back, but even among those who did not immediately retaliate many found ways of protesting their punishment. Moses Norton was shocked and distressed to receive a lawyer's letter sent to him at Churchill in 1764 at the instigation of a man he had struck over one year earlier.²¹⁵ Nothing came of the letter in the end, but it indicated the depth of the resentment physical punishments could produce. Most responded more directly and on the spur of the moment. In 1819 when a steersman was struck for no good reason by an officer in charge of one of the York Factory brigades, the steersman simply refused to proceed inland with that officer. When the officer escalated the violence by striking the steersman again across the back with his sabre - presumably with the flat side of the blade or the story might have had a different ending - the steersman's refusal to travel inland with that brigade was ensured. The journal entry reporting these events clearly implies that the officer in

²¹⁴ Richard Squire at Prince of Wales's Fort was known to have been rather prone to violent solutions to disciplinary problems. Among other things he was reported to have been fond of threatening to make "Spread Agles" of the men under his command. See HBCA:B.42/a/42, fo.48, 29 August 1754. Of course, he was by no means unique in this behaviour, and any attempt to list incidents in which company servants were hit, kicked, and otherwise chastised would be a long and extremely tedious exercise.

²¹⁵ HBCA:A.11/14, fo.4d, Annual Letter from Prince of Wales's Fort 1764.

question, a Mr. Dears, had far exceeded his authority and that the steersman was within his rights to refuse to serve any longer under Mr. Dears.²¹⁶

For the most part, however, victims seem to have acquiesced in their punishments. Unless officers were chosen simply for their size and strength, their subordinates would have had to accept the notion that not only did life ordain that some would command and most others obey, but that if commands were not obeyed a cuff or a kick would follow.

More draconian physical punishments were occasionally invoked for company servants accused of theft, illicit trade, or drunkenness. Assault and more violent crimes were comparatively rare, but were dealt with much like theft and illicit trade. For example, in 1719 at York Henry Veal and John Burry were "Stript to their wast" and given 11 and 24 lashes with a "Catt of Nine tales" respectively for their parts in a drunken "Imbroile".²¹⁷ In later years culprits were tied to the post beaver press to receive their lashes. The most common crime for which a public flogging was imposed was theft, though in 1758 George Luitit was given 24 lashes at York "for using the Sacred name of the Almighty, in a most profane manner".²¹⁸ Post journals do not include very frequent references to flogging, and it is quite conceivable that as a punishment it was much rarer in the fur trade than in 18th century society generally. Certainly company employees were not subject to the sort of brutal discipline common at the

²¹⁶ HBCA:B.239/a/126, fos.27-27d, 22 May 1819.

²¹⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/5, fo.66, 24 and 28 December 1719.

²¹⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/46, 11 December 1758. In general little attention seems to have been paid to profane language or ignoring prayers. In 1772, however, four men who missed prayers at York were put out on the "Leads" or roof for two hours as punishment. HBCA:B.239/a/66, fos.42d-43, 19 April 1772.

time in either the army or the navy. The last references to public floggings at York Factory and Churchill occur in 1797 and 1798 respectively. In both cases the man involved was accused of theft and in both cases all the other men in the post participated in beating the thief.²¹⁹ This tendency to make floggings not only public but collective underlines once again the degree to which many crimes were seen less as individual moral lapses than as crimes against the whole community.

There was no particular coherence, however, to the punishments handed out to company servants. Illicit trade might be punished by a public whipping, but it was at least as likely to be punished by a fine or simple seizure of the furs in question.²²⁰ While some men might be whipped or placed in irons for theft or fighting, others were simply reprimanded, or in the case of a cook caught stealing food simply removed from office.²²¹ A complete list of the punishments imposed at York and Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th century would include whipping, house or rather bedplace arrest, handcuffs and leg irons, confiscation of property including illegally acquired furs and brandy, fines, short rations, and being sent home on the next ship. The capriciousness of a system of punishment, in which one man

²¹⁹ See HBCA:B.239/a/100, fos.16d-17, 27 March 1797, and B.42/a/124, fo.22d, 12 August 1798.

²²⁰ For two examples of quite different responses to private trade see: HBCA:B.239/a/10, fos.26d-27, 14 July 1728 and B.42/a/27, fo.1d, 19 August 1744. Some officers claimed that trying to prevent illicit trade was a hopeless task anyway. In 1750 for example Joseph Isbister, a reforming factor, claimed that at Prince of Wales's Fort some furs inevitably fell into the hands of the men and since there were so many "Cliffs & holes in the Rocks" in which to hide these furs that no factor could hope to defeat private trade. HBCA:A.11/13, fo.116, Annual letter from Prince of Wales's Fort 1750.

²²¹ HBCA:B.42/a/126, fos.4d-5, 21 April 1802.

could be reprimanded for behaviour and another publicly flogged for the same behaviour must have led to some resentment. Certainly by the later 18th century the London committee suspected that this was so, and attempts were made to substitute a slightly more coherent system of punishments.

In 1792 the London committee established the principle that fines would be employed to punish "neglect of duty or other gross misconduct", and public floggings and other such physical punishments were generally abandoned. The committee felt fines were better suited to maintaining "a proper subordination" of servants to officers, and junior officers to their commanders.²²² Fines were to be imposed by post councils - and later the Northern Department Council - but were subject to review by the London committee.²²³ The key to the successful implementation of a disciplinary system based on fines according to the London committee was to ensure that any fine imposed was decided upon with "that calm equanimity without which the administration of Justice must degenerate into tyranny".²²⁴

Although occasionally invoked after 1790, it also became less and less common to send employees home early for disciplinary reasons. Increasingly if men were dismissed from company service before their contracts were completed it was because the employee in question refused to do any further work.²²⁵ As far as the London committee was concerned sending men home

²²² HBCA.A.11/117, fo.160, London committee to William Tomison and council, 25 May 1792.

²²³ HBCA:B.239/b/78, fo.30d, Annual letter to York Factory, 28 May 1800. On rare occasions fines were reviewed and found to be excessive. See for example, B.239/b/78, fo.36, Annual Letter to York Factory, 20 May 1801.

²²⁴ HBCA:A.6/18, p. 84, London committee to Messrs. Auld and Thomas, 30 May 1812.

²²⁵ See Chapter III, "Work", pp. 173-74.

early was less a punishment than a direct loss to the company in the form of wage advances, transport costs, and lost work. As a result company officers were enjoined not to send their disciplinary problems home on "trifling grounds" any more.²²⁶

After 1821 company officers were encouraged to deal with minor disciplinary infractions without recourse to blows. James Hargrave wrote at length to William McKay, the master of one of York's outposts at Trout Lake, after hearing of McKay's coming to blows with a servant. Hargrave stated that the London committee had "repeatedly issued instructions" that its officers were not to kick or punch subordinates. Hargrave went on to remark that assaulting one's subordinates was "scarcely necessary to enforce discipline" especially when "neglect of duty or mutinous refusal of it is already provided with exemplary and most proper punishment by fine agreeably to the terms of the contract which the offending servant has signed".²²⁷ Hargrave's comments were a trifle hypocritical. According to Letitia Hargrave officers at York, including her husband and brother, remained quite "ready ... with their hands". Tradesmen and labourers who for one reason or another annoyed senior officers were still likely to be struck for their

²²⁶ HBCA:A.6/18, pp. 253-54, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 4 January 1815.

²²⁷ HBCA:B.239/b/96, fo.33, James Hargrave to William McKay, 4 March 1845. Thirty years earlier Thomas Thomas had criticized the behaviour of an officer accused of striking his subordinates. Thomas remarked that such behaviour "implies a Degree of Passion ... during which an Officer may I think degrade himself". The problem then was not so much striking a servant, but the loss of control and dignity such behaviour reflected. See HBCA:B.239/b/85, fo.35d, Thomas Thomas to James Sutherland, 24 March 1815.

impudence in 1840 as in 1740, but the practice was at least formally discouraged.²²⁸

While other physical penalties including short rations, were occasionally invoked, fines were the formal punishment of choice after 1821.²²⁹ Fines of £2 and £3 were fairly common, and represented a significant sanction at a time when labourers might earn only £15 to £22 a year. They were particularly effective with men who were trying to save money so as to leave company service. In later years, however, officers like Joseph Wilson noted that fines were not very effective in the case of men who spent their entire wages in post sale shops as soon as possible. According to Wilson the sort of man who saved most of his wages was not likely to need correction.²³⁰ Nevertheless fines continued to be the most common disciplinary sanction, in all but the most serious disciplinary cases from about 1790 to 1870.

Between 1714 and 1870 there were a handful of instances at York Factory and Churchill when serious physical assaults occurred - some of which resulted in deaths. Somewhat surprisingly in most of these cases little or

²²⁸ Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 132, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 2 December 1842. Letitia Hargrave offered an interesting twist on this phenomenon in another letter. She reported that Richard Grant, an officer, was incensed at John Beith the tinsmith's suggestion that the company habitually swindled Indians. When Grant challenged Beith to fight, Beith refused. Lest Beith's actions be justified on the grounds that he could not fight an officer, Grant threw off his jacket and announced that "there lay coat and commission". Beith, rather sensibly, continued to refuse combat. *Ibid.*, p. 94, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 20 February 1840.

²²⁹ A few instances of people being placed in irons or "exposed" on post roofs can be found in York Factory and Churchill journals after 1821, but they were extremely rare. See Payne, *York Factory*, pp. 35-36.

²³⁰ HBCA:A.11/118, fos.505-06d, J.W. Wilson to Thomas Fraser, 23 September 1865.

nothing was done to punish the assailant other than to send him home. John Watson, an armourer at Prince of Wales's Fort who attempted to stab Joseph Isbister with a sharpened file in 1748, was handcuffed and confined to his room for just six days. He was then released without further punishment.²³¹ He was not sent home until 1750, after several further though less dramatic confrontations with Isbister.²³² Samuel Skrimsher, the master at Flamborough House, was killed in a fight with an Indian in 1755. No further action was taken in the case, at least partially because Skrimsher was considered to have behaved in a very imprudent manner in drinking and fighting with an Indian.²³³ Later James Isham had a rather cryptic verse put on Skrimsher's grave marker:

Vehement after pleasures
I seek for treasures Below
Which Caused my asshes
Here to lye in oblivio'.²³⁴

Other violent incidents at York and Churchill had equally inconclusive consequences. In 1796, for example, a North West Company employee, Joseph

²³¹ HBCA:B.42/a/32, fos.8-8d, 2 October 1748; fo.9, 8 October 1748, and B.42/a/34, fo.5d, 5 September 1749.

²³² HBCA.A.11/13, fo.115, Annual Letter from Prince of Wales's Fort 1750.

²³³ HBCA:B.239/a/39, fo.28d, 23 May 1755.

²³⁴ The exact sense of the verse is unclear, but the implication appears to be that Skrimsher was judged to be largely responsible for his own demise. *Ibid.*, fo.36, 6 August 1755. Officers were occasionally assaulted by Indians - and vice versa - though such actions were relatively rare at York and Churchill. In 1771, for example, an Assiniboine Indian tried to stab Ferdinand Jacobs with a knife. Jacobs disarmed his assailant and simply "Turned him quietly Out the Factory". While the journal entry may exaggerate the mildness of Jacobs' response, company officers were generally disinclined to punish Indians. As Letitia Hargrave put it "the Indians have their own laws and we dont interfere". See HBCA:B.239/a/65, fo.41d, 27 June 1771, and Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 176, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 14 September 1843.

Le Rocher, arrived at York Factory and asked to enter Hudson's Bay Company service. Joseph Colen was suspicious of Le Rocher's motives, and he was only hired conditionally. This caution proved well-founded when three days after his arrival at York Le Rocher attempted to kill an Indian camping at York. A few weeks later he tried to kill yet another Indian, at which point Colen had Le Rocher handcuffed and placed under guard.²³⁵

After his arrest it came out that Le Rocher had travelled to York, not to take up employment with the Hudson's Bay Company, but to exact revenge for the death of a NWC trader, Robert Thompson. Colen had refused to arrest the Indians suspected of killing Thompson; that would have been an "act of imprudence" akin to declaring "open hostilities against the Indians".²³⁶ According to Le Rocher's fellow servants, he admitted to them that he had been promised that all his debts to the North West Company would be cancelled if he killed the men accused of killing Thompson.²³⁷ If Colen could not take any action against the Indians who may have killed Thompson, this was not the case with Le Rocher. His assaults on two Indians were witnessed, and he had confessed to being, in effect, a hired killer. Even so, Colen did nothing more than to send Le Rocher back to the North West Company in exchange for two men who had previously deserted from York Factory.

In 1857 at York Factory, a Norwegian recruit named Lars Gulbransen, also known as "Jack Brown", assaulted the night watchmen at York. He also threatened with a knife three officers who came to the watchman's aid. For

²³⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/99, fo.16d, 19 June 1796 and fo.19, 7 July 1796.

²³⁶ Ibid., fos.8d-9, 22 February 1796.

²³⁷ Ibid., fo.19d, 7 July 1796.

a time at least he was kept in irons at York,²³⁸ but he was not sent home. It was an unfortunate decision, since that winter he killed Andreas Johanneson in a fight. Gulbransen was then sent off to the jail at Norway House to await trial.²³⁹ Before any trial was held, however, the Northern Council felt itself unwilling to proceed against Gulbransen in the North-West. He was quietly sent back to York to be transported to England. According to George Simpson he would be tried in England, but company records do not report any further proceedings against him.²⁴⁰

Senior officers had few compunctions about punishing tradesmen or labourers, but they were loathe to discipline fellow officers in any formal fashion. Moreover if faced with misdemeanors more serious than refusing an order, misappropriation of post supplies, or drunkenness, company officers really had no coherent disciplinary response. Fines were the most popular punishment in most disciplinary cases after 1790, but they were hardly an

²³⁸ HBCA:B.239/b/105, fo.43d, James Hargrave to William Smith, 12 September 1857.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, fos.77-77d, James Hargrave to Sir George Simpson, 27 February 1858. A jail and court house had been built at Norway House in 1854, with the idea that the Recorder of Rupert's Land would hold a circuit court there in June or July every year to try civil and criminal cases. See HBCA:B.239/k/3, pp. 94-95, Minutes of Council 1854. A jail had also been built at York in 1841 to house Ataswapoh, an Indian from Saskatchewan sent to York to serve a year's imprisonment for manslaughter. His story is recounted in greater detail in Payne, *York Factory*, pp. 39-40. Post journals contain no references to this jail being used after 1842. In the 1850's several Indians were sent to York Factory district to serve two year sentences. They were in effect deported to Severn and Churchill. One of the men sent to Churchill robbed the post and escaped to live among the local Indians briefly in 1855. Otherwise they lived and worked as normal company labourers, and several continued in company service at Severn and Churchill after their sentences had expired. See the Churchill post journals for 1854-55, HBCA:B.42/a/187 and 188, for an account of the Churchill prisoners.

²⁴⁰ PAC:MG19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, Miscellaneous Papers, p. 627. Extract from a dispatch from Sir George Simpson to James Clare, 21 June 1858.

appropriate response to manslaughter or even serious thefts. It is probably fortunate that serious crimes, especially violent ones, were relatively rare at York Factory and Churchill. When the warehouse was broken into at York in 1857, James Hargrave claimed that in his lengthy experience there no equivalent crime had ever been previously committed.²⁴¹ Sir George Simpson made a similar comment about violent crimes that same year. In notes drawn up for his appearance before a Parliamentary committee Simpson remarked that the number of "grave" offenses in the North-West was very small. Since 1821, he claimed, there had been only 19 instances in which a loss of life had occurred and which involved company employees as either victims or perpetrators. In eleven cases some punishment was inflicted, though Simpson did not specify the form it took. In one case a trial was held in which the prisoner was acquitted, and one case was declared justifiable homicide. In three cases the accused fled and died or disappeared before being brought to justice, and in the final three cases no action was taken at all due to lack of evidence.²⁴²

To conclude then, post communities were basically pre-industrial in their social structure. They were organized around a system of ranks that in turn were based on occupations, and there appears to have been little overt questioning of a social system which made the few superior to the many. Both officers and men expected that the former would command and the latter obey,

²⁴¹ HBCA:B.239/b/105, fo.67d, James Hargrave to William Smith, 1 December 1857.

²⁴² HBCA:E.18/8, fos.52-54. If Simpson, Hargrave and others are correct the residents of the North-West were remarkably law-abiding long before there was any effective police force, judicial system, or jails. Certainly evidence from York Factory and Churchill would tend to support an argument that the Canadian frontier was not particularly violent or lawless long before the NWMP were established.

albeit sometimes grudgingly. Although the line between officers and men was never completely impassable, occupational and wage hierarchies were more fluid and confused in the 18th than the 19th centuries. After 1821 the company increasingly rationalized its wage and command systems, and social mobility declined. Although there appears to have been some narrowing of wage and salary differentials between the early and late 18th centuries this trend did not continue. After 1821 commissioned officers in particular regained the rather steep income advantage over all other employees, including fellow officers, enjoyed by post governors in the period up to 1774, and wage and salary scales became increasingly stratified.

There were significant differences in the composition of the work forces at York and Churchill. The most obvious was the size of the work force stationed at these sites, which in turn reflects changes in the demand for labour and the place of the posts in the company's trading system. But there are other distinctions to be drawn as well, including the larger proportion of the work force at York which was composed of officers and tradesmen. Even at a time when more men were stationed at Prince of Wales's Fort than York Factory, York's greater administrative and manufacturing responsibilities required a somewhat more highly skilled and paid work force.

Both posts were essentially expatriate Orkney communities up to about 1821, and even after 1821 both remained largely garrisoned at all ranks by British recruits. At Churchill, however, Orkneymen became rarer and rarer as the 19th century progressed, and a much higher proportion of the work force as a whole was composed of men recruited in Rupert's Land. In a sense York Factory remained a colonial community, closely tied to Britain by bonds

of trade, family connection, and regular, if infrequent, communication. Ironically Churchill, as an isolated and marginal post in the company's trading system after 1821, was in many respects more autonomous and less colonial. It was also in some respects less obviously hierarchical in structure since few officers were stationed there and they were often relatively junior in rank and experience. As subsequent chapters will indicate they probably had even less direct control over work and personal lives than either officers at York Factory or officers at Prince of Wales's Fort and Churchill prior to 1821.

Indeed while the company attempted to impose some sort of system of social control on its employees by encouraging a set of social values based on deference and instituting a set of disciplinary sanctions for various crimes and misdemeanors, power in post communities was not simply exercised from the top down, as the following chapter on "Work" will argue. Still if social control was applied in an unsystematic and confused, even capricious, fashion in the early years of bayside settlement, by the 1790's a more coherent and generally effective range of disciplinary sanctions for minor offenses based on fines had been instituted. Company officers had less success dealing with more serious crime than pilferage or violent crimes like attempted murder or manslaughter, but fortunately for them such occurrences were quite rare: at least at York and Churchill. It was not fear of retributive justice that kept company employees from committing serious crimes against either their employer or their fellow employees. Instead it was perhaps some of the "rituals of mutuality", as E.P. Thompson

calls them,²⁴³ explored in the following two chapters on "Work" and "Leisure" that really provided a sense of community at bayside posts.

²⁴³ See Thompson, English Working Class, p. 456.

Chapter III - Work and Work Relations

The desire to understand the lives of working people in the past better lies at the heart of social history, and no part of human existence is more fundamental than work. As Robert Malcolmson has pointed out "getting a living ... is the foundation on which social life is built".¹ This chapter will examine how employees of the Hudson's Bay Company at York Factory and Churchill got a living and some of the implications of their work experiences and behaviour.

In his pioneering study of Canadian labour history, Clare Pentland identifies two distinct types of skilled labour as central to the fur trade: the trader and the canoeman.² Although canoemen played a lesser role in the operations of the Hudson's Bay Company than in the Montreal-based fur trade, the place of the canoeman or voyageur is usually given over to the men who worked with the York boat brigades. Indeed many fur trade historians have seen the rivalry between the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies primarily in terms of a competition between two systems of transport and communication: one based on York boats and the other on canoes.³

The trader and the Canadian voyageur are easily the most familiar and recognizable symbols of labour in the fur trade. As Graeme Wynn has

¹ Robert W. Malcolmson, Life and Labour in England 1700-1780 (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p. 22.

² H. Clare Pentland, Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860 (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981), p. 28.

³ This is a major theme in the works of historians like Harold Innis, Richard Glover and A.S. Morton. In a recent article C.S. MacKinnon has stated flatly that Canadian history, and by implication fur trade history as well, "is largely the history of transportation". See C.S. MacKinnon, "Some Logistics of Portage La Loche (Methy)," Prairie Forum, 5, 1 (Spring 1980): 51.

suggested they constitute one of the four archetypes of working men in late 18th and early 19th century Canada along with the farmer, the fisherman, and the lumberman.⁴ However, the process of getting a living in the Hudson's Bay Company's service involved all of the above occupations at times - farmer, fisherman, lumberman, trader, voyageur, and boatman as well as blacksmith, tinsmith, carpenter, boatbuilder, hunter, cook and accountant. In fact neither trading activities nor brigade work formed more than a tiny proportion of the overall work of a fur trade post like York Factory or Churchill. They are an archetype badly in need of revision, and not only at bayside posts but at inland posts as well.⁵

Simple arithmetic indicates that even in the Montreal-based fur trade with its extraordinarily long supply and communications routes voyageurs spent more time out of their canoes than in them. The shipping season was limited by the constraints of break-up and freeze-up of inland waterways. This meant the voyaging season at the outside lasted only from about April to September or six months. In practice the season was much shorter. The North West Company, for example, divided its canoe routes into two distinct sections: Montreal to Grand Portage or after 1803 Fort William, and from

⁴ Graeme Wynn, "On the Margins of Empire, 1760-1840," in Craig Brown (ed.), The Illustrated History of Canada (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1987), pp.229-30.

⁵ See for example A.S. Morton's description of the annual work routine at Fort Edmonton c. 1821. Morton, The Canadian West, pp.698-703. The memoirs of fur traders as diverse as David Thompson, R.M. Ballantyne, and Alexander Henry all indicate that life at an inland post involved more food and fuel collection than shooting rapids or parleying with chiefs. See David Thompson, Travels in Western North America 1784-1812, Victor G. Hopwood (ed.), (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), pp.100-03 and 141-46; Robert Michael Ballantyne, Hudson Bay or Everyday Life in the Wilds of North America (London: Thomas Nelson, 1902), pp.77-87, and Alexander Henry, Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776 (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1969), pp.55-58.

there inland to interior posts. The canoeen employed on the first leg of this journey typically completed their round trip in about three months⁶, and for nine months of the year most lived on farms in Lower Canada. Similarly the men employed at inland posts made the down river run to Grand Portage or Fort William in about one month. The return journey against the current took longer but was usually completed in about two months.⁷ In the case of canoes coming from the Nor'Westers' most distant posts in the Athabasca region a round trip to Fort William and back could not be completed in three months so their route took them only as far as Rainy Lake.⁸ Thus even inland employees spent about three-quarters of their time garrisoning posts.

In the Hudson's Bay Company's service transport duties represented an even smaller part of the overall labour of permanent employees. Up until 1774 when the company began to establish inland posts few company men ventured more than a short distance inland in search of wood or game. In fact it was not until the destruction of York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort by La Perouse in 1782 and the smallpox epidemic of 1781-82 disrupted trade patterns that many groups of Indians from the interior stopped transporting their own furs down to the bay. Over the next half century responsibility for moving goods and furs between inland posts and bayside factories was assumed by members of the company's permanent work force.

⁶ Ross, Beyond the River and the Bay, pp. 55-6.

⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

Beginning in 1831, however, this task was increasingly taken over by native and mixed-blood tripmen hired on a seasonal basis to man the boat brigades.⁹

Work on boat and canoe brigades was only one of many work responsibilities for permanent company employees. It was also more a duty of employees stationed at inland posts than of the men living at bayside posts like York Factory and Churchill. In 1794, for example, personnel records for these posts list only one man out of a complement of 58 men at York and 28 men at Churchill as employed in any of the usual occupations associated with brigade work - bowsman, steersman, or middleman.¹⁰ By 1812 this number had increased, but only to six men out of 78 stationed at these posts.¹¹

If anything trade occupied even less of company employees' time and labour. The volume of furs traded at York Factory peaked in 1730, and at Prince of Wales's Fort in the late 1730's.¹² The post journals for York Factory in 1729-30 and Prince of Wales's Fort for 1738-39 reveal that the officers in charge of these posts were actually involved in trading for furs on 45 and 11 days respectively.¹³ The larger number of trade contacts at

⁹ This is not to say the Hudson's Bay Company's demand for labour remained static, but ever lengthening supply routes did not affect the size of the permanent work force so much as seasonal employees after 1831. The growth and composition of this temporary work force is examined in Goldring, Papers: Volume 1, pp. 98-107.

¹⁰ See HBCA:A.30/6, fos.36d-42 and fos. 42d-46, Lists of Servants at York Factory and Churchill 1794.

¹¹ HBCA:A.30/11, fos.23d-26 and 43d-48, Lists of Servants at York Factory and Churchill 1812.

¹² Ray and Freeman, "Give Us Good Measure", pp. 190-191.

¹³ See HBCA:B.239/a/12, York Factory Post Journal 1729-30, and B.42/a/19, Prince of Wales's Fort Post Journal 1738-39.

York reflects the much greater volume of furs traded there, and some differences in trading patterns. At both posts in the early 18th century most trade occurred in early summer, usually in the month of June, when large groups of Indians arrived from their territories in the interior. At York, however, small groups of Homeguard Cree living near the post visited throughout the year to take debt - an advance on furs to be trapped - and to trade such furs as had been collected. Moreover most trade contacts involved only the officer in charge of the post and sometimes his deputy, in addition to a few hands to fetch trade goods and store furs.

Although a significant trade in provisions also developed at these posts, once again the frequency of trade contacts was not particularly high. At both posts in the years mentioned above, company officers traded for provisions on 21 occasions over the course of the year.¹⁴

If anything the actual business of trade occupied less and less of company officers' time at bayside posts after the establishment of inland trading posts. By the 19th century Churchill had become an outpost of York responsible only for a small local trade which was handled by a single clerk, and at York local trade after 1811 was assigned to a junior officer.¹⁵ This freed more senior officers to deal with the growing administrative and record-keeping responsibilities of the post.

Trade in furs was the sole commercial justification for building and

¹⁴ Provisions were received somewhat more frequently. During the spring and fall goose hunts geese were delivered to the post almost daily, but the selling of accounts was left to the end of the hunts.

¹⁵ Donaldson, Land Use, pp. 27-9.

maintaining permanently garrisoned posts, ¹⁶ but post records make it clear trade represented only a minuscule proportion of the work of posts like York Factory and Churchill. Indeed neither trade nor transport figured as prominently in the work of a fur trade post as most assume. They were crucial to the operations of fur trade companies but most employees, especially those working for the Hudson's Bay Company at bayside posts, were required to spend the bulk of their careers in the fur trade at quite different tasks.

The overwhelming attention paid to trade and transport in studies of fur trade labour reflects a certain bias in fur trade historiography towards business and economic history. As a business the fur trade existed to acquire furs in exchange for other goods, and the main logistical problem facing fur trade companies was how to get trade goods in to one market at company posts, and furs out to another market in London or Montreal. From the point of view of the men actually employed in the trade other considerations were often more pressing. Like many businesses the fur trade was a way of life as well as a commercial enterprise, and getting a living in the fur trade involved subsistence first of all. It was only after company employees had provided for their food, clothing and shelter requirements that the work of trade, transport, and other activities in

¹⁶ The company did try on occasion to establish trade in other commodities like whale oil, timber, isinglass, castoreum, Labrador tea and precious metals. These efforts were never very successful and represented only a tiny fraction of the company's business. Some of these schemes have been described in Douglas Leechman, "Commodityes besides Furrs," *The Beaver*, 304, 4 (Spring 1974): 46-52.

support of trade like record-keeping and the manufacture of trade goods could be contemplated.¹⁷

The problem of point of view in assessing the nature and importance of work in the fur trade was graphically, if somewhat hyperbolically, put by William Auld in 1811. Auld suggested that the London committee was apt to see the work of its overseas boatmen as "synonymous [sic]" with "the sprucely-dressed wherry-man with his plush breeches & his silver badge" or the bargeman negotiating his passage under London bridge. In reality Auld noted the men in his charge had to wade through freezing water tracking their boats inland and faced numerous "shallow horrors of rocky chasms".¹⁸ In similar fashion work at posts like York Factory and Churchill appeared very different to the tradesmen and labourers stationed at these posts than to the senior officers who commanded them. There was little romance in their labours, which for the most part were routine and mundane; they spent a far greater proportion of their working time cutting firewood than shooting rapids and taking inventory than "higgling and haggling" with Indian trading captains.

¹⁷ Gerald Sider in his study of outport life in Newfoundland suggests that a distinction needs to be drawn between a fisherman's work as a commodity producer and the work he is required to perform in order to subsist. The two types of labour are obviously connected since the one is pointless without the other, but as a commodity producer a fisherman must sell the product of his labour, in his subsistence activities he consumes the product of his labour. See Sider, Culture and Class pp. 179-80. The fur trade paid the bills and provided the reason for Europeans to settle on Hudson Bay, but it did not absorb more than a minuscule proportion of the labour of a company post. Like Sider's fishermen company employees ate or burned most of the product of their labour.

¹⁸ HBCA:A.11/118, fo.23, William Auld to London committee, 29 September 1811.

The basic nature of work at company posts remained essentially pre-industrial and changed very little over the period between 1713 and 1870. Work was primarily manual and relied on human muscle and simple tools, though dogs, oxen, and sometimes horses were used for haulage duties. Steam powered machinery was never important in the fur trade, and the Hudson's Bay Company had little success in introducing sophisticated new technologies into its operations. A steam mill sent to Moose Factory in the 1830's as part of a scheme to cut lumber was never put to use¹⁹, and a steam boat sent to York in 1869 proved incapable of towing York boats inland against the current of the Hayes River.²⁰ The company did employ steam boats with greater success on the Red and North Saskatchewan Rivers from the 1860's on, but such steam-powered vessels were more significant as harbingers of future changes in the post 1870 period than as an important part of company operations prior to 1870. The style and pace of work in the fur trade changed far less over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries than in company employees' home communities. One friend of James Hargrave described York Factory in 1844 as a "heavy, lumbering, lazy" place quite out of touch with the "velocified" world of mid-19th century Britain.²¹ In point of fact there is no reason to assume company employees were lazy, but they were not subject to the type of time and work discipline imposed by industrial capitalism - though as we shall see some officers would have liked to impose more regular work hours and tighter control over their subordinates' labour.

Hours of work at bayside posts varied according to the season. The

¹⁹ Morton, Canadian West, p. 643.

²⁰ Donaldson, Land-Use, p. 76-7.

²¹ HBCA:B.239/c/3, fo.329, Robert Gill to James Hargrave, 1 February 1844.

winter work season stretched from about mid-October to the end of March. Work hours during this period were apparently established by custom and therefore they were not often outlined. At York in the mid-19th century it was indicated that breakfast was usually served at 6:30 a.m. and work began at 7:15 a.m. The men were allowed an hour for lunch between 12:00 and 1:00 p.m., and work ended at 5:15 p.m.²² Such hours were only approximate, however, and James Hargrave indicated that hours varied slightly by month over the winter period.²³ The reason for this was that the work day was effectively governed by the hours of daylight. Thus the work day began "as early as daylight will permit" and ended when "the day light fails".²⁴ At both York and Churchill in the depths of winter it is unlikely work could begin as early as 7:15 a.m. or be continued as late as 5:15 p.m. Andrew Graham described the normal winter work day at Prince of Wales's Fort in the mid 19th century as lasting only between 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. with an hour off for a mid-day meal.²⁵ At York the work day may have been slightly longer due to its more southerly location, but was probably similar. Thus in winter the normal work day for company employees probably varied between

²² See HBCA:B.239/a/154, fo.15, 3 November 1840.

²³ Payne, York Factory, Appendix B - "Memorandum Regarding the Affairs of York Factory, Winter Session 1839-40", p. 358.

"In the beginning of this month [November], the hours of labor which during the two previous ones had been gradually diminished as the days shortened, are now arranged on a new plan. Duty begins at daylight the people having already Breakfasted and continues till dark with only one interval of an hour from Noon until 1 p.m. for Dinner. A scale or table of the work hours throughout each month in the year has been drawn up founded upon what has for many years been the customary hours of this Factory ...".

²⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/149, fo.122, 2 November 1835.

²⁵ Graham, Observations, p. 244.

as many as nine hours at the maximum and as few as four or five hours at the minimum.

Hours of work during the summer season from about April to October were longer. According to Andrew Graham the work day in summer was set at 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the mid 18th century. As the men began work before breakfast there were two meal breaks each of about one hour during the day. These ten hour work days, however, could be extended when work was pressing. It was occasionally reported that at least some post residents were required to begin their labours as early as 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. and that they were not excused from work until "Six, Seven or Eight at Night".²⁶

In general, however, the busiest period and the longest working hours were during "ship-time". At bayside factories for about two weeks of the year in late August or early September virtually all other work activities stopped in order to enable the unloading and reloading of the annual supply ship. The work could be frenzied, and the normal work day and work week were ignored if necessary in order to complete this essential task.²⁷ The men could be asked to work day and night and on Sundays and other normal days off duty, and they did so apparently without overt complaints. Of course, when extra efforts were requested company officers sometimes felt obliged to offer extra rations of alcohol as an inducement to work longer

²⁶ See for example, HBCA.A.11/15, fo.17d, Annual Letter from Prince of Wales's Fort 1775; B.42/a/90, fo.27, 24 June 1775; b.239/a/49, fo.51, 28 July 1762; and B.239/a/126, fo.32, 10 July 1819.

²⁷ HBCA:A.11/118, fo.142, James Hargrave to Archibald Barclay, 28 September 1847.

hours, and on occasion alternative days of rest were granted to make up for work on Sundays.²⁸

These hours of work were intended to govern the employment of tradesmen and labourers. Officers' workdays were somewhat different. In the 18th century the formal duties of officers, especially clerks, surgeons, and sloopmasters, were far from onerous. Record-keeping and other administrative duties were relatively simple and occupied little time.²⁹ As a result officers were apparently allowed considerable latitude in setting their own hours of work. This may well have continued into the 19th century at outposts like Churchill, where the business of running the post was probably not a full-time occupation.³⁰ At York, however, especially after 1821 the growing complexity of the fur trade saddled officers stationed there with considerable administrative responsibilities, in particular the voluminous accounts and business records demanded by the governors of the company. As noted elsewhere in this study officers at York were eventually granted an extra day off work to compensate for their long hours at their desks and additional clerks were posted there to help cope with the flood of records generated by the trade. Still officers' work hours were probably more regular at York and less dominated by seasonal fluctuations in work load. In the early 19th century it was reported that they worked about

²⁸ See for example *ibid*; B.239/a/49, fo.51, 28 July 1762, and B.42/a/90, fo.27, 24 June 1775.

²⁹ Thompson, *Narrative*, p. 56.

³⁰ Officers stationed there admitted no one overworked himself at Churchill, and on one occasion remarked that their avid pursuit of hunting at least lowered the costs of imported provisions at Churchill and provided the company with some return "during the 6 or 7 months there is nothing to do to employ us". See HBCA:B.42/a/132, fo.7, 29 November 1806.

eight hours a day on average,³¹ but some were later described as tied to their desks from 8:30 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. or later in winter.³² Indeed William Mactavish's job as accountant at York was reported to have forced him to work up to 18 hours a day; but this may have had more to do with Mactavish's personality than the formal requirements of the job.³³

It is difficult to determine the length of the normal work week. There is some evidence to suggest that tradesmen and labourers were given Sundays and a half day on Saturday as holidays as early as 1749. Saturdays were almost certainly treated as at least half-holidays by the early 19th century, and many may have received the entire day off. Officers were given Wednesdays as holidays as well at York from the 1840's on.³⁴ The official work week for tradesmen and labourers then would have been about 50 hours in winter and 55 to 60 hours in summer. Officers' hours are less easy to determine, but excepting the overly zealous like William Mactavish, they probably averaged closer to 40 to 45 hours a week at York in the 19th century. Hours of work at Churchill in the 19th century are even more

³¹ PAC:MG19 A21, reel C73, Hargrave Family Papers, George Barnston to James Hargrave, 14 November 1824.

³² See R.M. Ballantyne, Hudson Bay, p. 99 and HBCA:B.239/z/26, fos.143-44. They presumably were allowed about two hours for meals during the period like tradesmen and labourers. R.M. Ballantyne indicated that he worked from about 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., then again from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and after dinner until about 8 p.m. - about 8-9 hours a day, 4 days a week.

³³ Hargrave, Letters, pp. 148-49, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 9 September 1843.

³⁴ The work week at company posts is described in greater detail in Chapter IV, "Leisure", pp. 205-07.

difficult to determine but were almost certainly less than at York during the same period.³⁵

As some labour historians have pointed out coherent information on hours of work in the period before about 1900 is difficult to obtain.³⁶ Conditions varied considerably from country to country and between different groups of workers. Nevertheless viewed from the vantage point of most working people in the 18th and 19th centuries in Britain, Canada, or the United States hours of work in the fur trade, at least for Hudson's Bay Company employees, were moderate. One might compare the 40 hour week of a clerk at York Factory with conditions described by writers like Charles Dickens in Victorian Britain for example. Bob Cratchit might have been quite willing to emigrate had he been aware of his fellow clerks' work hours at York or Churchill. It was not until the 1880's and 1890's that a 55 hour work week became standard in manufacturing industries in the United States³⁷, and a similar work week remained common in Britain into the early 20th century.³⁸

There is little evidence to suggest that either the company or its officers were much influenced by the growing school of "enlightened"

³⁵ Officers at Churchill regularly lamented a lack of diligence in the work force there, and implied most only worked a few hours a day. See Chapter IV, "Leisure", p. 210.

³⁶ See for example Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, pp. 51-2. Subsequent research has indicated more the variety of conditions than any trend, aside from the general feeling that hours of work increased under the impact of the Industrial Revolution, and only began to decline again with the growth of effective labour organizations in the mid-19th century.

³⁷ Herbert G. Gutman, Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 270.

³⁸ Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, pp. 52-3.

management in the later 19th century which noted that shorter work hours did not necessarily entail loss of production and sometimes encouraged greater productivity among employees.³⁹ Both the company and its senior officers were, in general, believers in the "Protestant" work ethic, and placed great importance on the virtues of hard work, punctuality, private property, and the sanctity of contractual obligations.⁴⁰ As a result the prevalence of an earlier "pre-industrial" work ethic in the fur trade was a source of some tension in relations between officers and men. The stricter time-work discipline of industrial capitalism was often viewed as an important goal at company posts, but environmental constraints and the nature of work at these settlements made the imposition of strict working hours difficult. During the winter, in particular, work had to follow what E.P. Thompson has called "nature's time" - the rhythm of work dictated by seasonal changes in daylight hours, and climate - and not "clock" time.⁴¹ Outdoor work, which dominated fur trade labour, could only be contemplated when light and weather conditions were favourable. At the hunting, fishing, and wood-cutting camps working hours based on clock-time were impossible to enforce. Within posts themselves, however, work could be more closely regulated and some efforts were made to try to impose a tighter discipline in terms of hours of work. From the early 18th century on the company supplied bells to its major posts which were used to ring employees out to work and in to

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 355-62.

⁴⁰ To cite some of the main elements of this ethic as defined in Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society*, p. 5.

⁴¹ E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work- Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," in M.W. Flinn and T.C. Smout (eds.), *Essays in Social History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 39-44.

meals. This practice was based on naval work discipline and was intended to keep "inferior officers, tradesmen and all others" regular in their duties.⁴² In the 19th century, in particular, some observers placed great importance on this imposition of regular work hours. George Simpson Mactavish commented at length on their value at York Factory in the 1880's.

Surrounded by miles of swamps, neighbours a couple of hundred miles distant, communication with the outside world limited to four regular packets, ... the living conditions were only made tolerable by the efficient moral discipline of the officers in charge. With idleness or laxity of government, men would have soon lost the grip on themselves, and become as uninspiring as the native. Therefore, after years of experience, the routine was carried on with proverbial clock-like accuracy, and to the best advantage of health, work, exercise and pastime. Regular hours of work were as essential in the wilds as in business city marts and factories ...⁴³

Mactavish's comments reveal more than a belief that somehow a casual approach to work was a symptom of "going native"⁴⁴. Many officers, though not all, held a different attitude towards work and work discipline than the men they commanded. Bells and a clock-like organization of work time were part of an ideal of business efficiency and an ethic of work to which most company employees did not subscribe.

Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has termed this interest in regular and sustained labour a form of "bourgeois ethnocentrism" that has caused a

⁴² Graham, Observations, p. 244.

⁴³ Mactavish, Behind the Palisades, p. 51.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that some other officers also feared "going native". William Mactavish, for example, remarked in 1834 that he was glad to have been posted to York instead of inland, despite the long hours he worked there. At an inland post he feared he might have taken on "any customs or manners" and become a "perfect indian". See PAC:MG13 A21, reel c83, p 243, William Mactavish to Dugald Mactavish Senior, 27 August 1834.

"sentence of life at hard labour" to be passed on those who adopt it,⁴⁵ but company labourers and tradesmen were under no such sentence. Just as the constraints of daylight and climate ensured hours of work were as much a product of natural as of clock-time, and the nature and location of work at company posts gave employees themselves considerable control over their own labour.

The persistence of pre-industrial work habits like alternating periods of intensive labour with periods of near idleness and reduced output in the fur trade may well be one of the best evidences of the substantial autonomy enjoyed by fur trade employees in the conduct of their work.⁴⁶ As E.P. Thompson has noted "whenever men [and women] were in control of their own working lives "the pace of work was spasmodic. He points out that such work habits still prevail among a lucky few whose work is not governed by others, and for this reason he suggests it is the "natural" rhythm of work.⁴⁷

This natural rhythm of work was very much a feature of fur trade labour and was a product of a series of inter-related factors. The winter work season was sometimes called the indoor season as opposed to the outdoor season of summer, but this was a partial misnomer. The bulk of the work at bayside posts was outdoor work year round, and therefore was subject to the vagaries of climate. Company officers were not always enthralled by the

⁴⁵ Marshall Sahlins, Stone Age Economics (New York: Aldine, 1972), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁶ Although writing about very different workers the notion of what is meant by "worker's control" is explored with considerable insight in David Montgomery, Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), esp. pp. 9-27.

⁴⁷ E.P. Thompson, "Time-Work Discipline", p. 50.

prospect, but they had little choice but to give the men time off when weather conditions were unfavourable. Joseph Isbister the chief at Prince of Wales's Fort in 1749 complained that "it was Contrary to My inclination to let them [the men] have so many Holidays", but he, like other factors, could only assign indoor work in bad weather to the men actually resident at the post.⁴⁸ Picking oakum, cleaning rooms and workshops, and other such activities were used to put the men to some employment when weather conditions were too harsh for outdoor work, but these activities could not have taken up more than a small portion of the available labour of the post.

During the winter months a large proportion of the work force at both York Factory and Churchill were assigned to work at the wood cutting, hunting, and fishing camps. Indeed cutting lumber and firewood was almost certainly the single most common occupation of company employees other than officers and some tradesmen. This was the case in the 18th century and remained so through the 19th century. As Tim Ball has noted, company employees at bayside posts in the eighteenth century "spent most of their time searching for, cutting, hauling, and processing wood for a wide variety of uses, but primarily to offset, in some small way, the harshness of [the] environment".⁴⁹ The problem of securing adequate supplies of lumber and firewood probably occupied more and more time as the 18th and 19th centuries progressed because of the lengthy period needed for trees to grow in the Hudson Bay Lowland area. Most of the useful wood for building and burning

⁴⁸ See HBCA:B.42/a/32, fo.34d, 13 June 1749. As another officer remarked poor weather forced his men to be "almost Idle sorely against our Wills" - though he may have been invoking a royal "our". HBCA:B.238/a/754, fo.3, 4 September 1777.

⁴⁹ Tim Ball, "Timber!: An Adventurer's Life on the Bay was an Endless Search for Wood," The Beaver, 67, 2 (April/May 1987): 46.

had been cut down in the immediate vicinity of bayside posts within a few years of settlement. Wooder's camps had to be set up farther afield in order to supply the enormous quantities of firewood and lumber needed to build and heat these posts.⁵⁰ In the 1880's Chief Factor Joseph Fortescue noted that at York Factory a combination of fire and two centuries of wood cutting had cleared the banks of the Nelson River of wood for 8 miles on either side as much as 140 miles inland.⁵¹

As wooder's camps were moved farther and farther away from the main post settlement it became almost impossible to monitor what the men assigned to firewood and lumber parties did. Occasionally chief factors paid surprise visits to these camps, and almost always found the actual quantity of wood cut was less than what they felt was appropriate.⁵² William Anderson's unexpected arrival at the wood cutters' house near Churchill in 1852 found all the men still in bed at 8:00 a.m., and Anderson remarked "I

⁵⁰ James Isham estimated that a post like York Factory or Churchill in the 1740's required two piles of wood 20 feet high and 160 yards in circumference just for heating post residences every year. Isham, *Observations*, p. 171. Others offered smaller estimates like "2 Large Piles Each 43 Yards Round". HBCA:B.42/a/53, fo.28d, 1 March 1760. Joseph Isbister on one occasion indicated that it took 9 months and most of his men to secure enough firewood for the winter. HBCA:B.42/a/32, fo.14, 17 November 1748.

⁵¹ Arthur Ray, "York Factory: The Crises of Transition, 1870-1880," *The Beaver*, 313, 2 (Autumn 1982): 26. Fortescue also claimed hauling wood this distance alone took the work of 40 to 60 men and women for two months. *Ibid.*, p. 27. In 1764 Ferdinand Jacobs estimated that there was no suitable wood for building within 40 miles of York. HBCA:B.239/a/90, fo.3d, 21 September 1764. Twenty-five years later Joseph Colen indicated that wood for lumber could only be found about 50 miles away (a rate of retreat of about $\frac{1}{4}$ a mile a year), and that even firewood had to be cut 15 miles off, and then only poplar could be found. HBCA:B.239/a/90, fos.145-14d, 2 December 1789. At Churchill as early as 1739 the wood-cutting camps had to be set up 30 miles north of the factory at the Knife River in order to find a sufficient supply of wood. HBCA:B.42/a/19, fo.17, 22 January 1739.

⁵² See for example, HBCA:B.42/a/42, fo.3, 15 September 1753; B.239/a/50, fo.11d, 8 November 1762, and B.42/a/166, fo.15d, 10 December 1836.

have every reason to believe that it is always the case".⁵³ In fairness, however, it should be noted that the following year his unannounced visit found the men working diligently: the surprise on this occasion was his own.⁵⁴

Most officers made few serious efforts actually to check on their men out at these camps and contented themselves with the odd sarcastic remark in their journals to the effect that supplies of wood were indicative of the men having "taken it easy as usual".⁵⁵ On occasion the appointment of a new supervisor of wood-cutting operations resulted in much greater production,⁵⁶ but such increases in productive efficiency were normally temporary. Officers sometimes tried to threaten or cajole more effort out of the men, and a few convinced susceptible employees to admit a lack of diligence in the completion of their duties.⁵⁷ Some even lent a hand with hauling wood back to the factory in order to ensure the job was done to their satisfaction, though such a "hands on" approach to management was rare,⁵⁸ and the wooders could easily claim with no chance of contradiction that they were unable to do any work for days at a time because the weather was inclement.⁵⁹

⁵³ HBCA:B.42/a/186, fo.60, 22 October 1852.

⁵⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/187, fo.21d, 27 October 1853.

⁵⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/188, fo.22, 29 December 1855.

⁵⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/34, fo.15, 1 December 1749.

⁵⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/181, fo.18d, 24 and 25 January 1845.

⁵⁸ See for examples HBCA:B.42/a/6, fo.14d, 10 January 1728; HBCA:B.239/a/50, fo.15, 9 December 1762 and B.42/a/189a, fo.64d, 18 December 1858.

⁵⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/87, fo.18d, 20 January 1787.

The work carried out at the wooders' camps was not normally supervised by an officer but by a tradesman or an experienced labourer. In the 18th century, the person in charge of these camps was sometimes given the title of "pateroon of the woods". They were usually experienced hands and were paid slightly higher wages than regular labourers. The isolation of these camps and the fact that commanding officers had no real means of questioning the distance wood had to be moved, the availability and location of suitable stands of timber, or of weather and work conditions at the camps meant the wooders enjoyed substantial control over their own work: subject only to the supervision of a fellow company servant. Pateroons and sawyers in charge of these work parties did have important responsibilities, however, since their work was clearly vital to their fellow company servants' existence. They may well have countenanced sleeping in, periodic drunkenness, occasional fights, and even tormenting of unpopular individuals but they were unlikely to support someone who did not do his share of the work. Joseph Isbister, for example, remarked that one man, James Holly, felt forced to return to the factory in 1751 because his fellow labourers threw snow balls at him and treated him badly. As Isbister went on to note, the reason for Holly's unpopularity was that he was "remarkably idle".⁶⁰ Firewood and lumber may have been cut, collected and transported more slowly and in less quantity than senior officers would have liked, but sufficient quantities were always found and nobody froze at either York or Churchill because supplies of wood ran out.⁶¹

⁶⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo.17d, 28 November 1751.

⁶¹ Some sawyers and pateroons were either incompetent or irresponsible enough, however, to cause shortages of firewood. In 1788, for example, Henry Garrock, allowed his men to fritter away so much time the normal two

A similar pattern prevailed with post hunters and fishermen. Although usually stationed closer to the post than the wood cutting camps the men sent out to hunt partridges and other game during the winter and to fish were left in large measure to supervise themselves. It was all but impossible for senior officers residing in the main post to judge how diligently hunters pursued their assigned work. It was very common for senior officers to suspect that their hunters were taking advantage of this fact, but there was little they could do about it. Hunting success was dependent upon skill, experience, and a large measure of chance, which left those who wished to do so with a convenient excuse for poor returns. Hunters regularly complained that game was scarce, and in fact populations of ptarmigan, the main object of winter hunting, varied considerably. Still many officers were suspicious when, as often happened, one group of hunters shot just a handful of birds while others produced hundreds. For example in 1788, Charles Isham brought 430 partridges, as ptarmigan were generally called, in to York Factory in a space of twelve days. This was double the quantity of birds all the other hunters had delivered in a whole month, despite there being up to nine other hunters afield at any one time.⁶² As Humphrey Marten remarked when two hunters returned to York with but twelve partridges they were "either unfortunate or lazy, which later I take to be the case, for the Indians I have that way do very well".⁶³ Officers

year supply of firewood was seriously depleted before he was relieved of his duties. HBCA:B.239/a/88, fos.30-30d, 15 March 1788.

⁶² HBCA:B.239/a/88, fos.21-21d, 26 January 1788.

⁶³ HBCA:B.239/a/173, fo.31, 24 February 1776. It is interesting to note the reversal of stereotypes in Marten's comment. In this instance he clearly viewed his Indian hunters as more diligent and dutiful than Orkneymen.

sometimes received more direct confirmation of their suspicions. Ferdinand Jacobs in 1765, for example, accused one of his hunters of not bringing all the partridges he and his tent mates had killed in to York Factory. The hunter in question, William Flat, somewhat amazingly admitted that he had left 40 birds behind while bringing in only 20, a policy which Jacobs noted allowed Flat and his fellows to "Trifle their time away".⁶⁴

In addition to being able to control their work hours hunters stationed at distant camps could also adapt whatever hunting techniques they desired. Most preferred to hunt ptarmigan with guns and bird shot, whereas their officers liked to encourage trapping partridges in nets. The use of nets was cheaper and could produce large catches of partridges, but many hunters "abominate[d] the nets".⁶⁵ The reason for their resistance to trapping ptarmigan this way may have been based both on its lack of sport and the method used to dispatch the birds. According to Samuel Hearne large nets eight to twelve feet square were stretched on a wooden frame and set up over a pile of snow and gravel. The net and frame were supported by props to which lines were attached. The hunters then drove ptarmigan towards the pile of snow and gravel. The gravel acted as a lure for the birds since they needed small stones to grind their food in their gizzards. When a number of birds were on the pile of gravel the props for the frame and net were pulled away and the birds trapped. The hunters then could run to the net and kill all the trapped ptarmigans "by biting them at the back of the head".⁶⁶ It is easy to see why netting partridges appealed more to cost-

⁶⁴ HBCA.B.239/a/53, fo.26d, 10 March 1765.

⁶⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/73, fo.31, 24 February 1776.

⁶⁶ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp. 265-66.

conscious chief factors than to the men actually employed in hunting for the post.

To some extent senior officers tried to compensate for their inability to monitor and direct the work of men stationed away from the post by selecting those whom they sent out. Hunting was considered a relatively attractive form of employment and many preferred it to other potential duties. In general work in the camps was viewed as a "comfortable berth". In addition to escaping close supervision and scrutiny of one's work, log tents were seen as preferable accommodation in winter to the cold and smoky residences at the main post, and the men stationed at the camps were probably able to secure a larger proportion of fresh provisions in their diet than those who remained in the post. Indeed to some degree the purpose of sending men out from the post to work was to reduce their reliance on imported provisions. Even in periods of scarcity post hunters and fishermen could support themselves in part with the game they shot and the fish they caught. The presence of families at these camps was an additional attraction to work there, especially in the 18th century before the company officially tolerated fur trade marriages. Sympathetic and humane senior officers like James Isham at York offered no objection to the presence of women at hunting and wood-cutting camps, although some remained opposed to their men living with women in the post itself.⁶⁷

As a result work at hunting and wood-cutting camps was seen as a privilege which some officers reserved for their most trustworthy

⁶⁷ See Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, pp.41-45.

employees.⁶⁸ This meant that at both York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in the later 18th century hunting came to be primarily a responsibility of junior officers. As David Thompson noted the best shots in the post were almost always clerks or other officers,⁶⁹ and they had at the time the freedom from other work responsibilities to allow them to leave the post for weeks at a time. In the 19th century, especially after 1821, officers' formal duties became more time consuming, but they continued to do the bulk of the hunting by company employees at York.⁷⁰ At Churchill after 1821 there was rarely more than one officer stationed there, and hunting did not become a prerogative of officers. Instead the men were stationed most of the year in camps and were expected to support themselves and their families as much as possible through hunting and fishing. Some officers at Churchill were sure that hunting occupied so much time that instead of being pursued alongside other work responsibilities it had largely replaced them.⁷¹

Work at fishing camps followed a slightly different pattern. The men sent out to provide fish for the post, like hunters and wood-cutters, were able to set their own hours of work, and were allowed to supervise their own labours, but fishing was not viewed as a particularly attractive occupation. Officers did sometimes angle for fish as a recreational activity, but most

⁶⁸ Or so Ferdinand Jacobs implied. See HBCA:B.239/a/53, fo.27, 12 March 1765.

⁶⁹ Thompson, Travels in North America, p. 74.

⁷⁰ As discussed elsewhere in this study, Indians supplied most of the food procured for posts like York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort (though not Churchill after about 1821) through hunting. See Chapter VIII, "Standard of Living: Diet", p. 435.

⁷¹ See for example, HBCA:B.42/a/177, fo.10d, 8 and 9 September 1842, and B.42/a/181, fo.19d, 14 and 15 February 1845.

of the fish consumed at York and Churchill were caught using nets. Fishing was primarily an activity of the winter months and nets were set below the ice of lakes and rivers. Andrew Graham has provided a lengthy description of the basic techniques used by company fishermen:

A net is provided six to twelve fathoms long, with a line somewhat longer affixed to each end; and the spot where it is to be set being determined upon, holes are cut in the ice about a fathom distance from each other and more or less in number as the extent of the net requires. One of the end lines is then fastened to a curved stick, which being thrust under the ice at the first aperture reaches to the next; and the operation is repeated until the line is conveyed to its desired distance. The net is then pulled under. Those for this duty have no corks at the top, that they might not touch the ice and freeze to it. A long pole is fixed to each end, and being stuck into the earth under water in a perpendicular position, at once keeps the net steady and expanded. ... In order to search this net the aperture at each end being opened, and the poles cast loose, the extreme end of one line is veered away by a person whilst his companion at the other end hauls the net from under the ice.⁷²

After removing any fish caught in the net it was then simply pulled back under the water and secured with poles as before. This was cold and difficult work, and by no means sport fishing. As James Isham observed "before [the fish were] well lay'd upon the Ground, are froze as stiff as stockfish".⁷³ The other major fishing technique employed at company posts was similar. Fishermen set lines and hooks instead of nets under the ice.⁷⁴

Like hunting and wood-cutting fishing was vital to the existence of company employees, and frozen and dried fish were one of the most important sources of country provisions at bayside posts. At York Factory the discovery of secure and productive sources of fish in the 1820's may well

⁷² Graham, Observations, p. 294.

⁷³ Isham, Observations, p. 168.

⁷⁴ Graham, Observations, p. 295.

have been the single most important factor in finally bringing scurvy under control there.⁷⁵ As with wood-cutting operations fishing was supervised by an experienced servant who was paid slightly higher wages than other labourers, and given the title of post fisherman. These men usually directed the labours of one or two other men at least, and had considerable responsibility. The failure of post fisheries to provide an adequate supply of fish to feed fellow employees and post dogs could have serious consequences. However demanding the work was, at York in the 19th century in particular, fishing supplied enormous quantities of food to the post.

Overall work in the camps constituted a large proportion of the total labour of a bayside post. James Hargrave's instructions to Nichol Finlayson on post operations for the year 1839-40 indicate that even at York Factory in the 19th century, where a high proportion of the work force was engaged in the manufacturing of trade goods, record-keeping and other administrative functions, hunting, fishing, and wood-cutting occupied considerable time. At the end of August or the beginning of September two parties of men were sent out to help the Indians with the goose hunt, and another party of men was sent out to the fishing camps. The goose-hunting party remained out for about a month and the fishermen, usually at least three men, were kept at their labours until the end of January. Hauling the fish home also occupied two other men and most of the post dogs for much of January. Six to eight men were sent out to cut firewood between October and the end of March. The timber party also consisted of about six hands who worked at their camp cutting and hauling logs, boards, and planks from October to March. In addition other men were sent out to cut hay and hunt partridges and

⁷⁵ See Chapter VI, "Accident and Disease", p. 331.

sometimes caribou or "deer" for unspecified periods of time. There were 39 men stationed at York in 1839-40, of whom about half - 17 to 19 men worked almost exclusively at the camps for at least six months of the year. In addition at any one time between September and March about five or six other men were employed at duties which required them to be absent from the post for days at a time cutting hay, hauling fish, or hunting. At York then something like about 25 to 30 percent of the total work of the post was carried out at various work camps far from the main post settlement.⁷⁶

York's labour requirements in this regard do not seem to have been high for a bayside post. In the mid-18th century when the normal complement of men at York Factory and Churchill ranged between about 35 and 50 persons,⁷⁷ it was not uncommon for officers to remark that during the winter work season the actual number of men resident at the post was only about one quarter to one fifth of that number.⁷⁸ In 1811 William Auld even suggested that York be all but abandoned during the winter months, aside from one or two hands, as a means of saving firewood.⁷⁹ At Churchill in the 19th century the men were even more likely to be working away from the main post, and not just in winter; in the summer months they were also often engaged in

⁷⁶ PAC:MG19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, reel C81, James Hargrave letterbook #15, 26 July 1839 - 18 May 1840, "Memorandum Regarding the Affairs of York Factory, Winter Session 1839-40", unpaginated.

⁷⁷ See, Graham, *Observations*, p. 243 and 251, and Chapter II, "Social Structure", Tables 1 and 2, p. 46 and 47.

⁷⁸ See for examples, HBCA:B.239/a/46, fos.18-18d, 24 January 1759; B.239/a/48, fo.15d, 12 January 1761; B.239/a/73, fo.28, 30 January 1776; B.239/a/74, fo.6d, 14 October 1776, and B.239/b/35, fo.2, Andrew Graham to Ferdinand Jacobs, 9 January 1775. In this letter Andrew Graham gives specific figures. Out of 53 men at Prince of Wales's Fort 15 were to winter at the post, and 38 were dispatched to the hunting and wooder's camps.

⁷⁹ HBCA:B.42/a/136a, fo.7, William Auld's Memorandum Book 1811.

whaling and other duties outside the post. Thus at both York Factory and Churchill much of the work of the men hired in the capacities of labourer, fisherman, sawyer, sloop, sailor, and even many officers was carried out far from the supervision of senior officers, and was directed at subsistence not trade.

The men working within the walls of bayside posts were perhaps formally subject to more closely regulated work hours and could be supervised more closely, if commanding officers desired, but they too enjoyed substantial control over their own labour. During the winter season the men left at the main post were drawn primarily from the ranks of officers, tradesmen, and men employed in what, for want of a better term, might be termed service occupations - cooks, bakers, stewards and cattlekeepers. The independence and control these employees were able to exert over their own labour was dependent in large measure on the skill and technical knowledge they brought to their work. As the American labour leader, Big Bill Haywood once remarked, "the manager's brains are under the workmen's cap",⁸⁰ and this was very much the case at fur trade posts, especially for officers like the post surgeons and sloop captains and for tradesmen and apprentices.

Officers in charge of bayside posts generally allowed fellow officers considerable latitude in the performance of their duties. In the 18th century and at outposts like Churchill in the 19th century the formal work responsibilities of many officers were not onerous. Post surgeons, for example, were only needed when someone was actually ill or injured, and it was assumed they had considerable free time. At York, where surgeons continued to be stationed into the 19th century, it became policy to hire

⁸⁰ Quoted in Montgomery, Worker's Control, p. 9.

surgeons in the dual capacity of surgeon and clerk in order to make fuller use of their time.⁸¹ Sloop masters could be expected to work at their primary occupation only during the relatively short season of open water on Hudson Bay so some, like James Hackland, were given additional responsibilities. Hackland was sent to run Churchill during the winter season for several years in the mid-1850's.⁸²

Both of these positions were effectively part time jobs in the fur trade, but the Hudson's Bay Company had no alternative but to fill them with full-time employees. Similarly the work of clerks could not always be stretched to fill an entire year, and they were often put to work hunting or doing other chores about the post. The partial exception to this rule was the position of company officers at York after 1821. These officers were forced to work more regular hours and under closer supervision by commissioned officers due to the large volume of paperwork for which they were responsible. Nevertheless as James Hargrave noted officers were accorded the privilege of "taking a turn on snowshoes" or going "for a walk" whenever they felt inclined.⁸³

Obviously not all officers were equally diligent in the performance of their duties, and post records contain a number of complaints about incompetent or irresponsible clerks, surgeons, and sloop masters. It was:

⁸¹ See Chapter VI, "Accident and Disease", p. 345.

⁸² See, for example, HBCA:B.239/g/34. Officers and Servants Accounts Northern Department 1854-55.

⁸³ PAC:MG 19 D23, "Unfinished Journal of a Clerk [James Hargrave]", p. 10, 1 March 1829. Extra officers were sent to help out with the summer rush of accounts, furs and trade goods at York after about 1830, and for officers there the departure of the supply ship meant a considerable relief from work duties.

generally assumed, however, that as members of the elite of post society they could be left alone to complete their duties with a minimal amount of interference and supervision.⁸⁴

The tradesmen and other servants working within the post could be more closely monitored than their fellows stationed at work camps, but they too managed to exert considerable control over their labour. Like surgeons and sloop captains their relative independence was at least partially a product of their skills and experience. Experienced and reliable tradesmen were always in short supply, and senior officers frequently noted, as Joseph Colen did in 1790, that the need to find and train such men was a constant problem. Referring to his sawyers he wrote:

Having Men to learn to use the Pit Saw, almost every year is a great hinderance to our buildings - as well as a great loss in Timber - for so soon as thy become useful as Sawyers [they] are taken inland and I have the same trouble the next year to learn others - ⁸⁵

In addition most officers were trained in business skills and had at best only a rough idea of how a blacksmith forged axes or a cooper put barrels

⁸⁴ Some company officers did try to question the competence and performance of some of their subordinate officers though often the only result was strained relations and discord in the post. As previously mentioned surgeons and sloop masters were particularly likely to resent criticism from senior officers, who it must be admitted lacked the specialized training and skills of surgeons and ship's captains. Joseph Isbister, for example, became embroiled in a series of disputes with his fellow officers which began when he interfered with the sloop master James Walker's handling of his crew and repairs to the post boats. Walker was incensed by Isbister's actions and indicated that Isbister had neither the knowledge nor the judgement to comment on such matters. Although Isbister had the power to discipline Walker and eventually forced Walker to apologize, Isbister soon found his sloop captain, surgeon and some clerks ranged against him in what he called a "faction". Isbister's "reforming" zeal and contentious personality made his tenure at Prince of Wales's Fort one of the most troubled periods in that post's history. See, Payne, Prince of Wales's Fort, pp.19-23.

⁸⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/91, fo.5d-6, 11 October 1790.

together. Thomas Stayner, the officer in charge of Churchill in 1797, had considerable difficulty with a joiner named Charles Seymour. Seymour was fined on at least two occasions for refusing duty which he apparently did not consider part of his job. When asked, for example, to grind hatchets he boasted "all the Devils in Hell" could not make him do it. He was fined £3 for his comments but he did not sharpen the hatchets.⁸⁶ Some months later he was given a mahogany chair to repair by Stayner. In the course of putting the chair back together he split every joint in it and broke its back in two and then announced it was "stronger than ever it was before". Stayner was convinced Seymour had purposely broken the chair in revenge, but he had no way of knowing this for certain and Seymour was not punished for his actions.⁸⁷

Company officers frequently suspected some employees of taking advantage of work and weather conditions for their own purposes, but they found it difficult to act on these suspicions. They could, as Joseph Isbister and Ferdinand Jacobs at Prince of Wales's Fort did, stand beside a workman to make sure work was done, but this was not an entirely sensible policy.⁸⁸ Joseph Colen adopted much the same technique during the building of the new factory at York in the late 1780's and early 1790's. He commented that he stayed at the new factory site to prevent the men there from taking advantage of the situation, but it meant that he had "to attend the driving of almost every nail, [and] the laying of every Brick".⁸⁹ It was

⁸⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/123, fo.6d, 9 December 1796.

⁸⁷ Ibid., fo.9d, 3 April 1797.

⁸⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo.8d, 1 October 1751.

⁸⁹ HBCA:B.42/b/35, fo.3, Joseph Colen to Thomas Stayner, 7 January 1793.

not a particularly productive use of his time, but he felt he had no option given that at least one of the post carpenters, Charles Kitson, had stated point blank that it was "against his Religion to work on a Monday".⁸⁰

The celebration of St. Monday, an extra day of rest and relaxation, claimed by many tradesmen in 18th and 19th century Britain⁸¹, was rarely invoked so directly at company posts, but a certain amount of unsanctioned time off during working hours for drinking and socializing was a part of fur trade labour. Ferdinand Jacobs complained in 1764 that his smith, James Smith and Smith's friend William Brown, "dont work above 6 hours in ye day & when they get Brandy I Cant get them Even to work that Little time".⁸² Joseph Isbister at Prince of Wales's Fort described similar behaviour. On a surprise inspection of workshops around the post he noticed several men missing from their work. He eventually found them "loitering their time away" in the hay house.⁸³ Indeed according to Isbister and other senior officers some of the men bullied their fellows into evading their duties.⁸⁴ According to Ferdinand Jacobs this sort of behaviour had become something of a custom at York in the 1760's.

Since I have been here I have Corrected three of the Men, the first George Chambers for getting Drunk & Neglecting his Duty; the Second Robert Alders for going to the Indians Tents & Employing them without my Knowledge, the Third John Robertson for Endeavouring with Some Others to Oblige the Servants that Came

⁸⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/92, fo.27d, 25 April 1792.

⁸¹ See Eric Partridge, The Penguin Dictionary of Historical Slang (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 792.

⁸² HBCA:B.239/a/51, fo.23, 5 March 1764.

⁸³ HBCA:B.42/a/38, fos.40-40d, 28 April 1752.

⁸⁴ See for examples HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo.38, 13 April 1752, and B.239/a/96, fo.18d-19, 17 March 1794.

Over this Year to Pay Each One Quart of Brandy for working Yesterday at the Press (their Footing as these Old, Knowing Ones Calls it, & for Every Little Job these Fellows has with the consent of Mr. Marten made the Poor Men Pay Each a Quart of Brandy Or be Tyed up by the Heels, which I am informed has been done in his [Marten's] Presence, And that the Number of Quarts... amounts to Nigh 20 Each Man...⁹⁵

Paying one's footing was apparently a relatively common practice among 18th century working men. It was in effect an initiation fee, or rather a series of small fines of money or alcohol, levied against new hands the first time they completed any unfamiliar task. Thus a new recruit might be required to pay his footing the first time he cut timber, shot a partridge, or entered the Men's House.⁹⁶ It is interesting to note that while Ferdinand Jacobs tried to curb the custom another officer, Humphrey Marten, tolerated, perhaps even encouraged, it.

Eighteenth and early 19th century post journals were more likely to report drinking and socializing during the work hours than those after 1821 - at least at York. At Churchill alcohol was hard to obtain once it ceased to be used as a trade item, but the tradition of guiltlessly incorporating socializing into work activities appears to have remained strong. Certainly company officers at both York and Churchill continued to suspect such behaviour on the part of some of their subordinates.

The control exercised over their own labours by company servants was not simply manifested in the appropriation of unsanctioned time off work or the persistence of employees' own work place customs and traditions. Tradesmen, for example, had a large say in the organization and operation of their work shops. They trained apprentices, established schedules for when

⁹⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/50, fos.7-7d, 5 October 1762.

⁹⁶ See Partridge, Historical Slang, p. 338.

and how they produced required goods, and directed the labour of assistants. They were consulted on the ordering of supplies and were at least partially responsible for inventories of necessary materials.⁹⁷ According to William Auld the carpenters and sawyers at York and Churchill were used to appropriating the best lumber to use in chests ordered by the men. In addition post blacksmiths took iron and steel from their shop supplies to make locks, hinges and other hardware for these chests. According to Auld these chests were made during regular work hours, but the men were never charged for them by the company.⁹⁸ To Auld such activities were akin to theft, but company servants almost certainly saw them as a customary right sanctioned by long tradition.

Company tradesmen were usually allowed to proceed with their work without much supervision or even close scrutiny of their productivity. Joseph Colen experimented at York with having some employees provide weekly reports on their output - he felt it might act as a spur to encourage competition between different parties of wood cutters⁹⁹ - but in general most work at company posts was measured on a seasonal or even yearly basis. Indeed the nature of most of the work at company posts made it difficult to measure output any other way. Most of the goods produced at York and Churchill required several subsidiary operations but only one or two persons to complete these tasks. For example manufacture of a barrel required the production and curing of staves, assembly of staves and hoops and so on.

⁹⁷ This meant on occasion complaints that supplies were wasted or left to accumulate unused. See HBCA:B.239/a/50, fo.34d, 27 May 1763.

⁹⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/136a, fo.8, William Auld Memorandum Book 1811.

⁹⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/87, fo.13, 23 November 1766.

Each stage required time and in any given week or month the post coopers might have completed no barrels, casks, or any other container.

This caused few problems with experienced and reliable tradesmen, but incompetent or irresponsible employees could cause serious problems since the consequences of their inability or inattention took so long to emerge. Joseph Colen, for example, had considerable difficulty with one of his shipwrights named Robert Farrer. Farrer may have had some skill and knowledge of working on large craft but when ordered to build a York boat he was at a loss as to how to proceed. After six weeks of work Colen noted that Farrer and his assistant were not making much progress but they were left alone to muddle through.¹⁰⁰ The boat was finally completed and found to be useless - in July of the following year.¹⁰¹ Farrer was sent home that September and before leaving confessed to Colen that he was not really trained as a boatbuilder. It was the company's hiring agent in the Orkneys who made this claim on his behalf. Many of the problems with incompetent tradesmen at York and Churchill had their origins with these agents who, as Philip Goldring has observed, were interested in finding "suitable or nearly suitable men".¹⁰²

Tradesmen were allowed a certain latitude in how they completed assigned work. Thomas Marcus, a carpenter at Churchill, decided on his own initiative to build a larger York boat than was considered usual. Unfortunately his innovation was not well regarded, and the larger boat was

¹⁰⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/90, fo.11d, 13 November 1769.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., fo.58, 20 July 1790.

¹⁰² Goldring, Papers: Volume III, p. 4. Their notions of what constituted near suitability could well have been at odds with those of officers in the field.

deemed inappropriate and unserviceable. William Auld and the council at Churchill proposed to fine Marcus for the extra costs and difficulty his action had caused. Marcus agreed to the fine but indicated that he felt it should amount to no more than three days' wages and provisions. When the council set the fine at £5, Marcus refused to do any more work.¹⁰³

In general company servants, especially tradesmen and skilled labourers, were protective of their rights and their dignity as working men. Although relatively rare, some were willing to defend themselves and their prerogatives with physical force when challenged. In 1776, Humphrey Marten ordered Christopher Blaydes, a shipwright at York, to make some paddles. Blaydes seems to have felt manufacturing paddles was not a fit task for a shipwright. Marten, suspecting resistance to his order, went to Blaydes' workshop and found him absent. He sought Blaydes out and demanded to see the three paddles Blaydes claimed to have completed. On returning to the woodshop Blaydes could produce no finished paddles, but he pointed to a pile of wood in which he said they could be found. According to Marten he then began to swear and abused Marten "In the grossest terms", whereupon Marten struck him with a stick. Undeterred by this Blaydes returned the blows and grabbing Marten tried to wrestle him to the ground. The fight was soon broken up "but not all that my Selfe [Marten] or Officers could do could make him make one Paddle".¹⁰⁴ Ferdinand Jacobs found himself involved in a similar imbroglio with a mason at Prince of Wales's Fort in 1759.

...this Morning I went to the Building where the Mason & Others had laid three Stones which I found was not Set as they Should be, two of them I turned off the wall, the Other I Showed to Our Mason

¹⁰³ HBCA:B.42/c/1, fos.3-3d, 25 June 1811.

¹⁰⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/73, fos.60d-61, 30 July 1776.

where his Error was, and Could not help Reprimanding him to which he gave me very Provoking Answers, I Said to him if there was a Stick upon the wall I Should Bate him, he Immediately took up a Six foot Rule Expressing at the Same time many wicked Imprecations that he would Knock me Down if I touch'd him, upon which I took up a Rouler & made to hit him on his Shoulder when he at the Same time Struck full at me with the Rule wch. Blow I Guarded of with my Left Arm, after which we Closed, Mr. Norton Came upon the wall & Laid hold of him when we all three Fell on the Gravel at which time we Quited Each Other, I told him I would Put him in Irons, he Came off the wall wery willingly to be put in Irons Expecting thereby to Live an Idle Life, to Prevent which and that the Build:g may not be retarded I Ordered him to his work again ...¹⁰⁵

Company servants were less likely to strike officers in the 19th than 18th century, and there is some evidence to suggest that officers were at least formally discouraged from striking the men after about 1800.¹⁰⁶ But if their responses were less physical 19th century tradesmen were no less quick to take offense. In 1858, for example, there was some discontent at York when shortages of country provisions forced James Hargrave to reduce food rations. In order to quell the protest Hargrave tried to make an example of John Moar, an assistant boatbuilder and reputed ringleader of the grumblers. Hargrave rebuked Moar "for the carelessness and indifference with which he performed his duty to the Company, in comparison with the eagerness with which he urged his claims to better Rations, better cookery and other matters that he considered his Rights". If Hargrave expected Moar to be chastened by this tongue-lashing he was greatly mistaken. Moar replied that as Hargrave "had injured his character as a Tradesmen he would work no longer for the Company". Hargrave then offered to transfer Moar to

¹⁰⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/52, fo.35, 15 June 1776.

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter II, "Social Structure", pp. 126-27.

Churchill, but Moar remained adamant and stated "he would not go unless sent as a prisoner".¹⁰⁷

The sorts of issues which could spark protests remained very similar from the 18th to the 19th centuries, but the forms these protests took and the justifications offered for such behaviour exhibit an interesting evolution. Up until about the 1790's protests were likely to be personal, were often spontaneous, and tended to be aimed at defense of traditional rights or customs. Occasionally the rights and privileges one group of servants defended conflicted with another's sense of fairness, but by and large most company servants, and many officers as well, were united in their sense of what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices "based on a set of well established social norms and obligations ... within the community".¹⁰⁸

One area where different groups of servants' notions of fairness conflicted was responsibility for taking night watches. At both York and Prince of Wales's Fort post gates were locked and a watch set every night during the summer months and on occasion in winter too. Generally the night was divided into three three hour sections between 8:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. and the duty was rotated. Some tradesmen tried to evade watch duty on the grounds that it was not a proper employment for them, and some commanding officers agreed. Other company servants were inclined to see such a policy

¹⁰⁷ HBCA:B.239/b/105, fo.91, James Hargrave to Sir George Simpson, 26 May 1858.

¹⁰⁸ E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, 50 (February 1971): 79.

as favouritism, and pressed to have the tradesmen included in this duty; as one man stated "he would be a Slave to none of them [tradesmen]".¹⁰⁸

Most conflicts, however, pitted senior officers against the men or their fellow officers. In the early 18th century many such conflicts tended to revolve around disputes over letting unhappy servants return home, the quality and quantity of provisions, and work conditions and responsibilities. Another significant cause of trouble was overly violent or unwarranted punishment meted out by officers. In most cases these disputes were essentially personal, and collective actions to protest grievances were relatively rare. The tactics employed to pressure the company and its officers were by no means ineffective, but they were generally direct and spontaneous expressions of irritation or outrage.

The costs of sending employees out to company posts in terms of their transport salary advances, and maintenance were considerable, and the Hudson's Bay Company felt these costs could only be recouped over a number of years of service. As a result the company and its officers were loathe to allow men to return home before their contracts were up. Some employees, however, found service at bayside posts to be intolerable for a variety of reasons, and agitated to be allowed to return home early. Some managed to be sent home as a disciplinary measure while others found their own idiosyncratic means of being sent home. Hugh Wilson, for example, not only refused to perform his work duties but he took to his bed for days on end refusing even to get up "to ease nature".¹¹⁰ His presence in the Men's House became so unbearable to his fellows that his bed was moved first into the

¹⁰⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/70, fo.29, 16 April 1773.

¹¹⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/89, fo.21, 2 March 1789.

"guard Room" and then outside into a tent.¹¹¹ He was sent home on the next supply ship. Most did not have to go so far as Wilson, however, and a simple but categorical refusal to work usually had the desired result. Nevertheless some chose to back their demands with other measures. A common tactic at company posts was writing a formal letter of protest either to the officer in charge of the post or the London committee itself. In 1752, John Dunk, an employee at Prince of Wales's Fort, whose request to return home early had been ignored went one step further, and threatened to write to "ye Duck of Newcastle's office" in protest. If forced to remain he vowed to do no work and suggested he could only be detained if placed "in Irons".¹¹² Like others who chose to make an issue of it he was allowed to return home on the next ship.

One of the customary rights claimed by company employees was an adequate and varied supply of provisions. Company servants were willing to accept long stretches of short rations when supplies of food were tight, but they did object to what they considered unnecessary economy campaigns, over reliance on a single source of food, or the distribution of sub-standard or spoiled provisions. Complaints over food were one occasion when the men were liable to act collectively, and their preferred method of protest was the traditional food riot. Several such riots occurred at Prince of Wales's Fort in the early 18th century. Joseph Isbister reported in 1752 that he had ordered fresh partridges served to the men so that they could "make pies or dress them as usual". The men considered the partridges they were given

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, fo.33d, 15 June 1789 and fo.36, 29 June 1789.

¹¹² At the time the Duke of Newcastle was Secretary of State for Foreign Policy and a leading figure in the British government. HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo.56d, 2 August 1752.

inedible, and they decided to throw them away "in ye dirt & gravel" of the factory yard.¹¹³ A few years later a similar protest erupted over the serving of salt "salmon" - actually arctic char - too frequently. According to Ferdinand Jacobs the men registered their protest by throwing the fish at each other.¹¹⁴ In 1760 some men tried to spark a riot over improperly baked bread and meat pies. When they received little support they threatened to beat the cook, who had blamed them for the problem. According to the cook the men were continually opening the oven to check on their pies and other food, which lowered the temperature in the oven, and ensured nothing was cooked properly.¹¹⁵ Spontaneous outbursts were unlikely to produce lasting effects, but they did serve as a safety valve and in order to avoid trouble most company officers made some effort to ensure food was varied and served in large enough quantities to satisfy the men. In addition the company itself made periodic efforts to answer complaints about the food it exported to its posts, and especially in later 18th and 19th centuries it tried to introduce new more nutritious foods to supplement supplies of country provisions.¹¹⁶

Working conditions could also spark protests. Company employees quite rightly held that they were under no obligation to run unnecessary risks for the company. The company itself recognized this fact and during the various wars of the 18th century established a system of cash benefits for any men

¹¹³ HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo.43-43d, 17 May 1752. One man, James Flat, was caned for his part in the food riot, but only because he had thrown his mess-mates food away without their consent. *Ibid.*, fo.44d.

¹¹⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/50, fo.9c, 28 October 1757.

¹¹⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/53, fo.36d-37, 5 May 1760.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter VIII, "Standard of Living: Diet", p. 463.

injured in defence of its posts, and payments to the estates of any men who might be killed. A sum of £30 was to be paid to any man who lost an arm or a leg in an engagement and an equal sum was promised to the families of any man who lost his life. Other injuries would be compensated at the discretion of the London committee.¹¹⁷ Of course, when Churchill and York were actually attacked in 1782, these proposed payments had no effect, and both posts were surrendered without battle. In general company employees showed little desire to train or serve in a military capacity.

Instructed Our men at all Convenient times in the Use of Fire Arms & Exerxcis'd them in the Milletary way, as far as Our Knowledge in those affairs Extended, but do not Pretend to be any Great Proficients, However they are most of them able to Load fire & hit a Mark at a Tollerable distance.¹¹⁸

Hired as carpenters, blacksmiths, or labourers company servants generally did not consider military duties part of their responsibilities, and they were quite willing to protest any other work duties they considered unsafe. In 1750, for example, the crew of the sloop Churchill wrote a formal letter of complaint to Joseph Isbister, protesting an order from the London committee that they remain anchored in the Churchill River until late September so that the sloop would be available for duty after the departure of the supply ship. They argued that this was not customary and that it placed their lives at risk due to strong tides and increasing volumes of ice in the river mouth. They demanded that they be allowed to berth the sloop at its normal winter harbour, Sloop's Cove, and leave the ship to take up

¹¹⁷ See for example A.6/7, fos.39-39d, Annual Letter to York Factory, 10 May 1744.

¹¹⁸ HBCA:A.11/13, fo.92d, Annual Letter from Prince of Wales's Fort 1746.

their winter duties. Isbister concurred.¹¹⁹ Similarly in 1767 the seaman aboard the sloop Success collectively refused to sail north to trade with the Inuit until major repairs were completed on the sloop, making it seaworthy again.¹²⁰

Some company servants were also quick to refuse work they did not consider appropriate or to protest working conditions. For example in 1767 a party of men sent out to clear willows from around York Factory returned home at 8:00 a.m. When asked why they had abandoned work they offered the excuse that it was snowing. When it was pointed out others continued to work outdoors despite the snow, one John Irvine remarked that "if Other men have a mind to go to Hell that was no reason they should".¹²¹ Indeed almost any excuse might be invoked to refuse work individuals hoped to evade. Ferdinand Jacobs at Prince of Wales's Fort reported that two of his masons tried to justify their absence from work with the rather implausible excuse that the stones they had been given to work on were "too flinty". Jacobs saw this as merely an excuse for spending the day drinking.¹²²

Others attempted to justify their actions on a slightly different basis. Instead of invoking work conditions they objected to the type of work ordered. Joseph Colen complained that his steward, James Smith, refused to do any duty other than his official responsibilities in serving out the men's provisions, despite the fact that this work "would not take up

¹¹⁹ HBCA:B.42/a/36, fo 11, 25 September 1750.

¹²⁰ HBCA:A.11/14, fo.51, Annual Letter from Prince of Wales's Fort 1767

¹²¹ HBCA:B.239/a/57, fo.7d, 17 October 1767.

¹²² HBCA:B.42/a/46, fo.34d, 21 May 1756.

three hours in a week to an active man".¹²³ Similarly James Dunning at Churchill adamantly refused to collect firewood on the grounds that it was not a legitimate part of his work responsibilities as master of the post shallop. What was slightly different about James Dunning's action in comparison with earlier incidents of a similar nature was that he did not defend his actions on the grounds of custom or tradition. In a portent of disputes to come, he argued that he had agreed to no such duty when he signed his contract and that he was only liable to perform the duties of the position for which he was hired.¹²⁴

Most such confrontations were essentially personal, but company employees could act in concert to protest high handed and violent treatment by officers. In 1798, for example, at York a man sweeping out the officers' quarters spoke insolently to some officers who pushed him outdoors where he fell and cut his cheek. The incident happened at Christmas time, and the man in question was intoxicated, but his fellow servants objected to what they saw as one of their fellows "being ill used by the Officers". The post tradesmen and labourers immediately assembled in the factory court yard and announced that they would not sweep the officers' quarters in future. The officer in charge of York, John Ballenden, met with the men and tried to argue that their conduct was improper, but the men were not mollified. Finally three days after the original incident the officers involved publicly, albeit far from graciously, apologized to the men. As Ballenden wrote.

¹²³ HBCA:B.239/a/95, fo.22, 12 March 1793.

¹²⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/122, fo.11, 19 April 1796.

Messrs House Ward and Fielding condemed much against my inclination to inform the Men that they were sorry for what happened to William Cooper last Sunday evening - the insulting Language from him provoked them, and hoped he would never be guilty of the like in future or any of them ...¹²⁵

Intriguingly these events did not appear in the recopied post journal for the year which suggests senior officers occasionally edited out of the post records information which did not reflect well on their handling of disciplinary matters.¹²⁶

In the 19th century disputes over matters like provisions, discipline, and work conditions did not disappear, but they seem to have become less frequent. Beginning in the 1780's when grievances occurred they were increasingly likely to involve salary and work responsibilities. The question of whether or not company employees had the right to leave company service before their contracts were up also continued to be a source of friction. The methods employed by company servants to protest what they considered unfair or unreasonable treatment changed somewhat as well. Formal letters of protest, spontaneous riots, and the simple refusal to work were not entirely abandoned, but in the late 18th and 19th centuries company servants developed new tactics to press for redress of their grievances. Many of these tactics required considerable organization and forethought and they were more and more likely to require collective rather than individual action. Similarly after about 1780 company servants were less likely to justify their actions on the grounds of traditional or customary rights and

¹²⁵ See HBCA:B.239/a/101, fo.66d, 30 December 1798; fo.67, 1 January 1799, and fo.67d, 2 January 1799.

¹²⁶ See HBCA:B.239/a/103, fo.19, 30 December 1798.

were increasingly prone to invoke company statutes and regulations or their contractual rights in defence of their demands.

The earliest surviving employee contracts with the Hudson's Bay Company date back to 1780.¹²⁷ Prior to the 1780's servants apparently made some sort of agreement with ships' captains or company officers regarding their wages, occupations, and terms of service, but it is impossible to know whether or not a formal contract was signed or if the employee in question merely came to some sort of oral agreement. From at least 1780 on, however, standardized printed contracts were the usual form of agreement between the company and its employees. These contracts were on the surface rather one-sided documents, which detailed the employee's obligations to the company but left unstated the company's reciprocal obligations to its employees, except for salary. The fact, however, that company employees signed on as "servants" may have had some significance. In England the laws governing master-servant relationships accorded some rights to servants and implied some obligations on the part of masters.¹²⁸

In many respects however, the law governing the contracts signed by company employees was moot. There is no evidence in company records from York or Churchill that anyone was actually taken to court over breach of

¹²⁷ See HBCA A.32/1, Servants' Contracts 1780-82.

¹²⁸ The laws governing master-servant relations up until the mid-19th century in England were essentially Elizabethan consolidations of earlier laws dating from the 14th century. They provided some protection from dismissal without cause and generally attempted to fix wage rates and hours of work. In general these latter provisions worked against servants' interests, but they did serve on occasion to define minimum standards as well as maximums. See D.N. Pritt, Employees, Workers and Trade Unions (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), pp. 9-16. Scottish law may well have differed from English law in these matters at this time, or at least Scottish employees may have believed a master-servant relationship accorded them rights which were not set out in the standard company contract.

contract nor that any employees sued the company for failure to live up to its obligations. Nevertheless it became increasingly common in late 18th and 19th centuries for the company's senior officers and its servants to appeal to contractual rights and obligations in disputes, and less and less common for disgruntled employees to seek redress of grievances based on customary practices or moral notions of what was fair. The case of Donald Smith is indicative of this change. Assigned to brigade work he returned to York from the interior, claiming to have been sent back "as unfit for the trials & fatigue of the journey". When it was suggested that he should be sent home to Britain, however, he demurred. Instead he proposed to work at what he could and indicated that if forced to return to Britain he would demand his full wages for the entire period of his contract.¹²⁹ It was later discovered that he had deserted his brigade, which enabled James Hargrave to turn the tables on him. Hargrave noted that it was Smith who had breached his contract and not the company. In the end Smith was sent back to Britain.

Perhaps the most dramatic dispute over contracts at York in the 19th century occurred in 1858. During the 1850's the company had begun an experiment with hiring Norwegian employees. Through an error in translation of the company's standard employee contract, Norwegian recruits were led to believe that they only had to give one year's notice in order to resign from company service. This provision was not part of the English contract and the company and its officers expected that, unless an employee was unfit or was dismissed from service, employees would serve out the entire period for which they had contracted. This was, of course, not always the case and some

¹²⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/150, fo.4d, 10 July 1838.

individuals were always able to force the company to release them from their contracts early. The company, however, was not disposed to make this a contractual right, and when a number of Norwegians applied to return home early their request was refused. In July of 1858 the Norwegians at York refused to do any further duty in order to force the company to let them depart. James Clare, the officer in charge of York at the time, stopped their wages, but feared that the strike would spread to other discontented employees once they realized " ... our total inability effectually to punish such open mutiny".¹³⁰ Unfortunately the post journal for 1858 is missing from company records, and it is not entirely clear which Norwegian servants were involved in this protest and what exactly happened to them. Still some Norwegians were dismissed in 1858, and others were allowed to return to Norway early when it was discovered that their claims concerning the Norwegian version of their contract were in fact accurate.¹³¹ When the supply ship arrived at York Factory in August 1858, James Clare immediately went aboard with a translator to explain the problem to incoming Norwegian recruits. He offered them free passage home and termination of their contracts if they were unwilling to serve under the provisions of the English contract. Sixteen of thirty-four recruits immediately decided to return home when Clare refused to increase their wages to the same level as those of new recruits from the Orkneys. Eleven of the eighteen remaining Norwegians then resigned when they discovered the company would not provide them with free blankets, tea and sugar as they claimed they had been

¹³⁰ HBCA:B.239/b/105, fo.103, James Clare to Sir George Simpson, 16 August 1858.

¹³¹ Goldring, Papers: Vol. III, p. 272.

promised by recruiting agents.¹³² The following year recruitment efforts in Norway were abandoned.

The problem over the wording of the Norwegian contract indicates something of the importance both the company and its employees had come to place on the formal provisions of contracts. Company regulations and circulars which set out standards and quantities of provisions and other details of post life were also used to buttress employee grievances. In 1863 Robert Mowat refused further duty until his rations of flour were increased from six to seven pounds a week. According to William Simpson, the officer in charge at Churchill, it had been customary there to supply single men with six pounds of flour,¹³³ but Mowat appears to have based his claim for more flour on a standard of rations the company had published in a printed circular and had sent out to its recruiting agents.¹³⁴ James Clare suggested similar protests had occurred at York that same year.¹³⁵

Parallelling the increasing invocation of contract rights in disputes between officers and men at company posts was an increasing tendency to make wages an issue. In the early 18th century company employees at York and

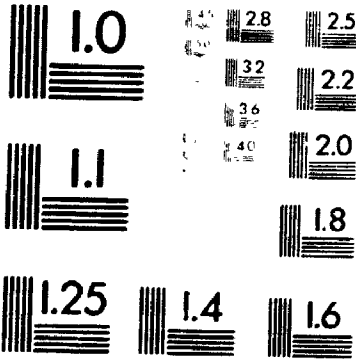
¹³² HBCA:B.239/b/105, fos.111-111d, James Clare to Sir George Simpson, 27 August 1858.

¹³³ HBCA:B.42/b/161, fo.66, William Simpson to James Clare, 3 January 1863

¹³⁴ See PAC:MG19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, C83, p. 635, Printed Circular - Thomas Fraser to Hudson's Bay Company Agents, 22 November 1858. The company appears to have intended this ration list as an illustration of the advantages of their service and not as a definitive statement of food allowances. In earlier years employees had always accepted the fact that on occasion short rations would be their lot, and it may be that Mowat was just using flour rations as a convenient excuse to evade work or to be sent home before his contract was up.

¹³⁵ HBCA:A.11/118, fo.437d, James Clare to Thomas Fraser, 13 September 1863.

3



MICRO

Prince of Wales's Fort made no apparent effort to pressure the company or its officers to raise wages. Some may have grumbled, but when protests arose they were not about pay. Wage rates were apparently set as much by custom as by market forces, and were seemingly based on traditional notions of a "fair day's pay for a fair day's work". New conditions in the fur trade, however, began to break down this informal consensus on wage rates and beginning in 1776 the men assigned to inland duty began to demand higher wages for their services. They refused to travel inland from York unless they were paid an extra gratuity of forty shillings each.¹³⁶ The company was not inclined to accede to these demands, and its bayside factors resented being put in a position where they found themselves pressured on one hand to advance wages and on the other to maintain customary wage rates. As Humphrey Marten complained in 1779:

my Selfe very farr from well Indeed the anxiety that now attends a Chief at York Fort, (who must either disobey your Honrs. orders or drop the Inland settlements as your old Servants will not go inland, unless their demands are complied with) is so great that, sleep, health and peace of mind, are to me no more; consequently Life is a heavy burthen ...¹³⁷

The capture of York and Churchill by the French in 1782 temporarily interrupted these problems, but soon after the resettlement of these posts in 1783 the issue resurfaced. In 1785 it was again reported that company servants whose contracts had expired were pressing for higher wages, and that they were becoming increasingly "Insolent [and] bold in their language".¹³⁸ It is difficult to tell from personnel records from this

¹³⁶ HBCA:B.239/a/73, fo.57, 13 July 1776.

¹³⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/76, fo.57d-58, 21 July 1785.

¹³⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/84, fo.37d, 15 July 1785.

period whether or not company servants were able to extract higher wages for in the period up to 1780 there had been considerable variations in the wages offered to different categories of employees. Still company officers certainly felt trapped between their employees' and their employer's demands. Some may well have given in to demands for increased wages. The company, however, informed its factors that they were not to give in to "extravagant Demands", and that they should refuse to rehire anyone "who objects to go where he is ordered". Dissatisfied servants were simply to be sent home.¹³⁹

Such instructions led only to an escalation of tensions. Opposition to company wage rates was largely centred on the skilled canoeemen, the bow and steersmen who piloted canoes along the Hayes River to inland posts. In 1789 they worked out another tactic to increase the pressure of their demands. They began to try to orchestrate the time of their contract renewals so that they could threaten to resign en masse, and some implied that if sent to Britain they would immediately sign on with Canadian companies and return to the North-West in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company. Joseph Colen, then chief at York, saw this as a dangerous and disturbing trend. Lamenting the older tradition of work relations he suggested these steer and bowsmen showed "no gratitude for past favours" which were in their eyes "Chimeras ... their own Interest in the only God they worship".¹⁴⁰ In point of fact, however, the balance of power had not really shifted, and in the end most agreed to return inland at the wages the company offered.

¹³⁹ HBCA:A.6/14, fos.38-38d, Annual Letter to York Factory, 16 May 1788.

¹⁴⁰ HBCA.A.11/117, fos.31-31d, Joseph Colen to London committee, 7 September, 1789.

Troubles abated somewhat the following year and according to William Tomison, the company's inland chief, the main complaint was lack of provisions not wages. Nevertheless he noted that an interesting new method of protest was being used. According to Tomison individuals in Kirkwall were actively trying to discourage potential new recruits from the Orkneys from signing on with the company with tales of horrors and hardships of company service.¹⁴¹ If true this new tactic was potentially highly effective. Interference with the company's recruitment would clearly strengthen the bargaining position of old servants.

The following year, 1792, was again difficult and disputatious. The men whose contracts were up for renewal made some effort to demand higher wages and advances collectively, but their sense of solidarity was at best weak. Threatened with being sent home, many capitulated and signed contracts on the company's terms, while others apparently gave up and chose to return to Britain.¹⁴² According to Joseph Colen, however, some of the instigators of the protest had sworn an oath to support each other in their demands, an indication that more concerted collective action was likely in future.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ HBCA:A.11/117, fo.56d, William Tomison to London committee, 31 August 1790. Tomison implied a connection between the disgruntled canoemen and attempts to interfere with recruitment in the Orkneys, but to do so may well overstate the organizational powers of company servants. There were good reasons why some individuals in the Orkneys would try to discourage local labour from joining company service that had nothing to do with wage rates for canoemen.

¹⁴² HBCA:B.239/b/51, fos.20d-21, Joseph Colen to William Jefferson, 25 July 1791.

¹⁴³ HBCA:B.239/a/91, fo.31d, 23 July 1791.

In 1792 brigade men were also presented with a new issue. The company, faced with increasing problems in moving goods inland from York, proposed to use the Nelson River as an alternative to the smaller Hayes River. Led by one James Linklater the company's canoe men refused to take their canoes up the Nelson. Linklater was threatened with contractual penalties, but remained adamant telling the council at York that he would by "damn'd if he did go". Linklater was then struck from the company's list of servants and put on half rations until he could be shipped home. Once again this forceful action broke down the collective solidarity of the canoe men, and the rest consented to take canoes inland on the Nelson River.¹⁴⁴

The following year the London committee showed some willingness to bend. In its letter to the council at York it conceded that able hands could be promoted to steersmen and paid higher wages, but it also reaffirmed its position that refractory servants should be fined and sent home. Company officers were also enjoined to take great care to ensure steersmen's contracts "not all [expire] at the same time".¹⁴⁵ The committee also suggested rather slyly that anyone planning to leave company service be reminded that on arrival in Britain they stood a good chance of being pressed into service in the Royal Navy.¹⁴⁶ Company records do not provide convincing evidence of the effectiveness of this threat in muting employee discontent, but it seems likely that war with Revolutionary and Napoleonic

¹⁴⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/92, fo.41, 26 July 1792 and fos. 42-43, 27 July 1792. The experiment with using the Nelson River proved to be a failure and the canoe men's concern that it was too difficult and dangerous to navigate was shown to be accurate.

¹⁴⁵ HBCA:A.6/15, fo.63, Annual Letter to York Factory, 30 May 1793.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, fo.65d.

France acted as a considerable deterrent to wider labour problems at company posts at this time.

In addition company canoemen faced a new threat to their livelihood and a new source of potential conflict and dispute with their employers in 1793: technological change. The failure of the experiment with using canoes on the Nelson River in 1792 encouraged the company to try another tack in its attempts to improve its system of transport and communication with inland posts. Joseph Colen proposed to use boats, not canoes, to move goods inland. In 1793 he arranged to send goods by boat at least as far as Rock or Gordon House about 175 kilometres inland from York. Boats promised to offer the company substantial savings in manpower and threatened to undermine the position and skills of steers, bowsmen and canoebuilders. In 1793 the company's canoemen tried to intimidate some of the men at York who were expected to conduct boats inland. One man was threatened with "rough usage" for suggesting boats could easily be used in the interior.¹⁴⁷ When Colen was finally ready to send his boat brigade inland, the men assigned to this duty tried to object on the grounds that it would subject them to "the displeasure and ill will of their fellow servants &c inland".¹⁴⁸ Colen overrode these objections by arguing that any who refused this duty, for whatever reason, would be treated as refractory servants and would be subject to disciplinary action. In the end the boats were taken inland.

The following year a resolution of sorts was finally achieved. Joseph Colen travelled inland to Gordon House with the York boats to ensure no problems occurred, and it was convincingly shown that boats as well as

¹⁴⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/95, fos.30Bd-31B, 29 July 1793.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, fo.33d, 15 June 1793.

canoes could be employed on inland routes.¹⁴⁹ Thereafter boats were introduced on more and more stretches of the company's transport routes, until by the early 19th century they had almost completely replaced the canoe as the company's basic mode of transport. Nevertheless the company did offer their employees some wage concessions. In the annual letter for 1794 the London committee outlined a system of trip bonuses for boat and canoe brigade work. The route inland from York to Buckingham House, then the company's most distant post on the North Saskatchewan River near the present Alberta/Saskatchewan border, was divided into four sections: York Factory to Hill River, Hill River to Deep Water Lake, Deep Water Lake to Cumberland House, and finally Cumberland House to Buckingham House. Bonuses of 20 shillings were to be paid to brigade pilots, 15 shillings to bow and steersmen and 10 shillings to middlemen for the completion of each section of this route except for the section between Hill River and Deep Water Lake which was deemed so difficult bonuses were doubled.¹⁵⁰ In addition bowmen were offered higher basic wages of £14 per annum, and Joseph Colen promised that in future all bow and steersmen would be paid full wages for the job even if not formally rated on company books in those positions.¹⁵¹ According to Colen these new wage arrangements were greeted with some enthusiasm, and at least temporarily labour disputes abated at York. Canoemen had not been able to prevent the introduction of York boats, but they did secure some wage concessions at last, as well as some recognition of the specialized work skills of bow and steersmen.

¹⁴⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/96, fo.27, 4 June 1794.

¹⁵⁰ HBCA:B.239/b/78, fos.2-2d, Annual Letter to York Factory 29 May 1794.

¹⁵¹ HBCA:B.239/a/96, fos.37d-38d, 27 June 1794.

Very similar problems arose when attempts were made to establish a chain of inland posts supplied from Churchill in the later 1790's. Overt signs of trouble at Churchill appeared in 1796 when Thomas Stayner tried to organize an exploration party to search for a route to the Athabasca region. Eight of the men assigned to this duty absolutely refused to travel inland though most had several years left to run on their contracts. All were fined, and some were sent back to Britain, but the exploration party was stopped.¹⁵² Three years later in 1799 Thomas Stayner complained at length of the development of a "combination" of disgruntled employees.

The able hands had entered into a combination, not to go up [inland], because they said their Contracts would expire on the arrival of the Ship and that it would be impossible for them to get down to the Factory in time to secure their passage home and others not thinking their wages adequate to the fatigue they underwent, could not go Inland again without an advance. ... of the former I gave them my word they should be down at ship time, as to the latter their demands being unjustifiable, we did not conceive ourselves authorized in advancing their wages, much persuasion was made us[e] of, to bring them to a sense of their duty, but without effect, the Council therefore came to a determination to mulct each man in proportion to his wages. ... The major part of this refractory set went home p. Ship, those who staid behind, finding themselves losers by their disobedience, have ever since conducted themselves with the greatest propriety.¹⁵³

If Stayner thought the problem had been nipped in the bud, however, he was mistaken. In 1800 all the men at Churchill's inland posts whose contracts were due to expire applied to leave company service. Stayner assumed they did not really intend to return to Britain, but hoped instead

¹⁵² HBCA:B.42/a/122, fos 14d-15, 30 June 3 July 1796, and fo.16, 25 August 1796.

¹⁵³ HBCA:B.42/b/41, fos.3d-4, Thomas Stayner to Mr. Thomas, 20 January 1799.

to extract higher wages in return for staying on. He vowed to resist such tactics, and unlike Joseph Colen argued that such problems would be easier to control if the company simply fixed wage rates according to job title.¹⁵⁴ In fact Stayner and his fellow officers were caught in a difficult position. The London committee had made it very clear that they objected to the practice of sending employees home before their contracts were up for anything short of a "flagrant breach of Duty". Officers were warned that if they used this disciplinary measure for capricious personal reasons or with insufficient cause, they were liable to be charged "5 Guineas" to pay for the passage of company servants sent home early. In addition the committee suggested it might find senior officers responsible for any unwarranted increase in wages they promised.¹⁵⁵ Officers were reluctant to give up this power, however, and their employees continued to assume they could negotiate higher wages with their commanding officers. As a result in 1799 the committee once again reiterated its policy that no wages could be increased without direct authorization from London and demanded that all employees make their wishes known one year before their contracts were due to expire. Only those who intended to leave company service were to be allowed to travel with the inland brigades down to bayside factories and all those who intended to continue in company service were to remain inland. It was hoped

¹⁵⁴ HBCA:B.42/b/42, pp.26-27, Thomas Stayner to John Ballenden, 18 March 1800. Which was in large measure what the company tried to do after about 1830.

¹⁵⁵ See for example HBCA:B.239/b/78, fos.13d-14, Annual Letter to York Factory, 31 May 1797.

that this policy would preclude men arriving at York and Churchill expecting to "extort" higher wages in return for signing new contracts.¹⁵⁶

At Churchill labour unrest soon abated when it became clear officers like Thomas Stayner had little option but to refuse requests for higher wages. In 1802 two carpenters at Churchill did refuse to serve inland, but the only result was that they were sent home as their services were no longer needed.¹⁵⁷ Similarly in 1811 a number of men "combined together" to try to get higher wages, but when threatened with fines and informed they could either resign contracts or go home the "combination" collapsed.¹⁵⁸ This was the last half-hearted attempt at Churchill to use collective action to improve wages or working conditions. Throughout the rest of the 19th century company employees at Churchill were relatively quiescent. A few engaged in personal protests of one sort or another like the sailor at Churchill in 1804 who "threatened to post the character of [the] Factory on the doors of the Churches in Orkney" over a dispute concerning his behaviour.¹⁵⁹ Even such individual manifestations of conflict and grievance became more and more rare after 1800, or at least less and less likely to be reported. Why this should be so must remain a matter of speculation. The small size of the community there might have inhibited the development of a sense of social distance between officers and men. Also after 1821 most officers at Churchill were relatively junior, and may have been unwilling to try to control too closely the lives and activities of their

¹⁵⁶ HBCA:B.239/b/78, fo.25-26, Annual Letter to York Factory, 31 May 1799.

¹⁵⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/126, fo.8, 17 August 1802.

¹⁵⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/136b, fo.7, 6,7 and 8 July 1811.

¹⁵⁹ HBCA:B.42/f/2, fo.9, Churchill List of Servants 1804.

subordinates. For most a posting to Churchill meant a way station to more responsible commands or an indication that their careers in the fur trade were in decline. In either case there would have been little incentive to risk upsetting the tranquil operation of the post.

Among company servants a posting to Churchill was often a sign that they were considered too inefficient, dull, or lackadaisical to be left at posts where the demands of business were more pressing. A rather casual approach to work could be tolerated at Churchill more easily than at York. In addition at Churchill the men were able to establish with their families a community largely of their own creation based on life in the wood cutting, hunting and fishing camps. At Churchill community revolved around family and friends and neither the officers stationed at the main post nor the distant management of the company impinged very deeply on the yearly round of subsistence at these camps.

At York, however, both individuals and groups continued on occasion to raise grievances and to protest wages and work conditions. In 1805, for example, John McNab and the council at York complained that former company servants in the Orkneys and their friends and relations still in company employ at York were attempting to interfere with the recruitment of new employees.¹⁶⁰ Similarly in 1845, Orkneymen, led by tradesmen, protested the discontinuance of their ration of alcohol by informing James Hargrave that as Presbyterians they would no longer attend "English Prayers" on Sunday. The subject of this protest was less startling than their tactics, which only the most optimistic or simple-minded could have imagined would have had much effect. For his part Hargrave simply noted "as I know not how far we

¹⁶⁰ HBCA:B.239/b/78, fo.52d, Annual Letter from York Factory, 31 May 1805.

would be legally justified in compelling men to act as Christians I have taken no public notice".¹⁶¹ In the end Hargrave reported two or three men resigned over the issue, but he noted they would be soon replaced by others just as useful and perhaps "more docile".¹⁶²

More typical both in terms of tactics and the cause of grievance were James Clare's problems in 1863 at York. A number of men wished to retire early and threatened to refuse all duty if not allowed to do so. Throughout the year Clare had faced protests from the men at York who had formed "combinations refusing to work if their demands were not complied with". The source of their discontent according to Clare was the company's failure to live up to promises made to them by recruiting agents and infringement of company's own circulars setting out work and living conditions. As Clare noted, the men at York in 1863, as they had for nearly a century, "seem to be understanding the power they have in their hands when acting in a body".¹⁶³

Clare's problems in 1863 encapsulate most of the major differences between labour unrest in early 18th century and disputes in the period after about 1780. Employees' grievances were increasingly justified by reference to contracts and other such formal written statements of company regulations and obligations: not customary or traditional rights. More and more protests were collective rather than individual, and in the 19th century they were

¹⁶¹ HBCA:D.5/13, fo.371, James Hargrave to Sir George Simpson, 1 April 1845.

¹⁶² HBCA:D.5/15, fo.501d, James Hargrave to Sir George Simpson, 1 December 1845.

¹⁶³ HBCA:A.11/118, fo.437d, James Clare to Thomas Fraser, 13 September 1863.

also less spontaneous and direct and more a product of planning and co-ordination. Yet in this case as in most fur trade protests success was limited. In the end Clare, like virtually every other company officer faced with disgruntled subordinates, responded simply by "gradually weeding out and getting rid of the more troublesome characters".¹⁸⁴

In general company employees secured few advantages from their struggles with the company and its officers. Wage rates did slowly move upwards in the period after 1790, but there is no compelling evidence to suggest threats of work stoppages or attempts to interfere with recruitment of new employees were the primary causes of this phenomenon. Higher wages in the company's recruitment areas and more alternatives to company service provided a more direct impetus to the company to raise its wage rates and to improve living conditions in its posts than any action by discontented servants. Individual employees who wished to return home to Britain before their contracts had expired were usually successful in securing their ends, but largely because it was less bother to let them depart than to make an issue of their discontent. The company was prepared to let determined individuals leave its service early, but it remained adamant that this not be a contractual right. Nevertheless events at both York Factory and Churchill provide clear evidence that company servants were not particularly docile, and they had a strong sense of their rights and of the company's obligation to provide reasonable food and housing. They were also

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*. Changes in recruitment areas in the late 1850's and 1860's may have further encouraged a trend to refer not to custom or tradition but to contracts and circulars. Men hired on the Scottish mainland and to a lesser extent Shetland and Lewis may not have had much knowledge of the customs of company service. In the event of a dispute they may have relied on their contracts in the absence of any other defence.

protective of their dignity as working men and resented unwarranted intrusions into their working lives. They sought to control their hours and pace of work and were prepared to resist changes in work conditions or responsibilities which they suspected were not in their favour.

The set of labour relations developed at Hudson's Bay Company posts like York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in the early 18th century followed fairly closely the pattern of "personal" labour relations described by Clare Pentland. As Pentland pointed out, shortages of skilled labour "forced the employer to cling to a particular employee", but equally the scarcity of alternative employment made employees cling to their employers. The result was a relationship of mutual dependence marked by a certain sharing of power and system of rights and obligations, less economic or legal than moral, that governed employees' responsibilities to their employers and vice versa.¹⁶⁵

At the Hudson's Bay Company's bayside posts cracks in this system of personal labour relations were already apparent by the late 1780's and early 1790's. Both the company and its employees were increasingly prone to rely on contracts rather than custom to define their respective obligations and wage rates rather than non-financial issues increasingly provided the focus of labour-management disputes. In the early 18th century, company factors often complained of facing "factions", "cabals" or "combinations" in their posts, but these "factions" were not evidence of any incipient class consciousness. Most consisted of a few friends - often fellow officers in point of fact - united in some sense of grievance against their commanding

¹⁶⁵ Pentland, Labour and Capital, pp. 24-6.

officers. They arose most often in the 18th century during the tenures of "reforming governors" like Joseph Isbister at Prince of Wales's Fort and James Duffield at Moose Factory, who tended to see immoral or illegitimate behaviour in what others saw as customary rights.¹⁶⁶ Lines of cleavage on issues like provisions, the right to marry and maintain families at company posts, and the like tended to be more vertical than horizontal, pitting Orkneymen against Englishmen or one group of officers against another.¹⁶⁷ For example when protests arose at York Factory over short rations in 1790, English employees demanded that their share of available provisions be greater than that offered to Orkneymen.¹⁶⁸

Disputes over wages and contract terms were more likely to produce a sense of common cause, though as the canoeemen in the 1780's and 1790's had found collective action was hard to sustain. While company servants were far from powerless in their dealings with officers and the company, the balance of power was not usually in their favour. Throughout the later 18th and 19th centuries the former mutual dependence of men on company and vice versa eroded more on one side than the other. Company servants were more and more dependent on their employer than the company was on its employees. Even so there is little justification for the view that labour relations in

¹⁶⁶ Duffield's problems at Moose for example have been described in some detail in Pannekoek, "Corruption at Moose", pp. 4-11.

¹⁶⁷ Company servants' unwillingness to see themselves as workers in opposition to owners, and tendency to organize their protests as Orkneymen, or old hands, or tradesmen in opposition to Englishmen, new recruits, or labourers reflects the kind of behaviour described by E.P. Thompson in "Eighteenth Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" Social History, 3, 2 (May 1978): 133-65.

¹⁶⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/90, fos.27-28, 14 March 1790.

the fur trade were based on the "semi-feudal exploitation" of company servants.¹⁶⁹ Company servants were always able to withdraw their services if rates of pay and conditions of work were to become too unattractive, if not immediately, then at least at the completion of their contracts. This was true both for employees recruited in Britain or the Canadas and "native" employees, although there were some differences in how these groups could withdraw their labour. The former could either retire from company service and go home, or after 1812 move to Red River. Native employees could also retire to Red River, or return to their families. Some became free traders in opposition to the HBC or chose to take up seasonal employment in the fur trade. The important point is that while there may not have been many alternatives to company service, there rarely were none.

Fluctuations in the intensity and number of labour protests at posts like York Factory and Churchill also suggest a work force with a sharp appreciation of when conditions favoured their causes. The main periods of labour unrest at York and Churchill encountered in this study were the 1750's at Prince of Wales's Fort, which may largely be attributed to the actions of Joseph Isbister; the 1780's and 1790's at York and the early 1790's at Churchill, when the expansion of inland trading posts meant increased demand for labour at a time of decreased supply; and the late 1850's and early 1860's when recruitment problems once again meant demand for labour exceeded supply.¹⁷⁰ Growing demand for labour and a need to

¹⁶⁹ Stanley Ryerson, Unequal Union: Roots of Crisis in the Canadas, 1815-1873 (Toronto: Progress Books, 1973), p. 383.

¹⁷⁰ These fluctuations in the Hudson's Bay Company's ability to match its labour needs with willing and able recruits are examined in Glover, "Difficulties of the Hudson's Bay Company", pp.240-54, and Goldring, PAPERS: Volumes I, II, and III.

acquire skilled canoe and boatmen in 1780's and 1790's provided an opportunity to press for better food, wages, and work conditions, as did circumstances seventy years later. By contrast the company's work force in the 1820's and early 1830's was more docile despite the enormous changes engendered by the union of the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies in 1821. The primary reason for this would appear to be that in the 1820's the company was trying to reduce the size of its work force and thus the supply of labour significantly out-stripped demand.

The bulk of the labour of company servants and much of the labour of its officers was directed at subsistence, not at trade, transport or the production of trade goods. The largest single component of work at posts like York Factory and Churchill throughout the period surveyed in this study was getting a living in its simplest forms: the provision of food, fuel, and shelter for company employees and their dependents. The relatively simple technologies employed in the pursuit of these objects ensured that labour in the fur trade was seasonal, task-oriented, and essentially pre-industrial in character. Neither company officers nor the ownership of the company as represented by the London committee were able, even when willing to do so, to monitor or direct the work of their subordinates very closely. It is a tribute to the responsibility and skill of the men hired as tradesmen and labourers that with little outside direction or compulsion necessary work was almost invariably completed, ensuring the survival of fellow post residents. A certain amount of socializing and evasion of work was incorporated into the work day, but when circumstances required most company employees were prepared to work long and hard and uncomplainingly. As James

Hargrave remarked "the government of our servants is, in a great measure, one of opinion rather than force".¹⁷¹

By the 19th century work and work relations at York and Churchill were increasingly anachronistic especially when compared with working conditions in Britain. In this instance though anachronistic labour practices may have suited company employees as much as the company itself. Tradesmen and labourers at York and Churchill continued to exercise considerable control over their own labour including their hours and pace of work well into the 19th century. By contrast in Britain working people were being subjected to an increasingly rigid time/work discipline, and many were seeing their cherished work place traditions and illusions of independence eroded by industrial capitalism. As John Rule has argued simplistic notions of a pre industrial "golden age" do not stand close scrutiny; there was exploitation and poverty before the Industrial Revolution. Nevertheless when early 19th century artisans "looked back it was usually to...recent memories of better days".¹⁷² These folk memories helped to shape the response of working people to the new conditions of labour in the 19th century, and encouraged many to believe that economic "progress" meant fewer rights and greater obligations whatever the trend line of average wages. Company servants at York and Churchill had reason to prefer the "backwardness" of work and work relations in the fur trade.

¹⁷¹ HBCA:D.5/15, fo.50ld, James Hargrave to Sir George Simpson, 1 December 1845.

¹⁷² John Rule, "The property of skill in the period of manufacture", in Patrick Joyce (ed.), The Historical Meanings of Work (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.114.

Chapter IV - Leisure and Recreation

The role of leisure and recreational activities in the lives of Hudson's Bay Company employees has never attracted much attention.¹ This oversight is not limited to fur trade historiography alone however. Canadian historians in general have been slow to take up the study of recreation and leisure. Many undoubtedly share the view of A.R.M. Lower, who has been quoted to the effect that sports and games are not "matters to be taken seriously".² For others the study of such activities is seen as at best "a minor tributary to the mainstream of history".³ As Peter Bailey has pointed out though, social historians have come increasingly to recognise that "leisure time and its activities are ... a significant element of social

¹ The terms "Leisure", "recreation", "sport", and "game" are familiar and common words in everyday usage. Among scholars interested in such matters, however, they are used in rather specific fashion and need to be defined for the purposes of this chapter. Most scholarly definitions of the term "leisure" according to Stanley Parker in The Sociology of Leisure, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), involve either a time definition, a normative definition, or some combination of both. The simplest definitions of leisure treat it as "residual" time or that portion of the day which is not taken up with work, sleep and other necessary activities and social duties. By such a definition leisure has always been part of the human experience though the quantity of leisure or "surplus" time available to individuals and groups in different epochs and for different societies varies a great deal. Definitions of leisure become more complex when they include a normative component which describes what leisure ought to be. In this chapter "leisure" is used to describe time off from work and other social and physiological obligations which is also used for purposes of relaxation, diversion, voluntary participation in community life, and personal development. Recreation is used to describe leisure activities, and sports and games are two varieties of recreations.

² Quoted in S.F. Wise, "Sport and Class Values in Old Ontario and Quebec," in W.H. Heick and Roger Graham (eds.), His Own Man: Essays in Honour of Reginald Marsden Lower (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), p. 94.

³ Peter Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 1.

experience, whose history is of particular importance in the broader exercise of reconstructing the kind of life lived by the ordinary people of the past".⁴

In North America popular mythology accords little role to leisure in the lives of the first European settlers in the New World.⁵ Even among sports historians there is a tendency to discount the importance of leisure in colonial North America. As a recently published text-book puts it, "the exacting demands of existence in colonial America (A.D. 1492-1775) left little time for pleasure-seeking. The need to survive put a high premium on labor for all".⁶ In Canada similar views also prevail. Peter Lindsay in an article for The Canadian Encyclopedia remarked that "in the pioneer settlements of the Europeans, play was relatively unimportant compared with the serious work of survival", though he does go on to describe a handful of recreational activities which did occur.⁷

Histories of sport and recreation in Canada reflect this view. Most concentrate almost exclusively on the later 19th and 20th centuries.⁸ Fur

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The study of popular culture in New France represents a partial exception to this observation. There is a long tradition of scholarly study of sports and recreations in New France which is well represented in recent works like Jean Paul Massicotte and Claude Lessard (eds.), Histoire du Sport de l'Antiquité au XIX Siècle (Sillery, P.Q.: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1984), esp. pp. 181-297.

⁶ Reynold Edgar Carlson et al, Recreation and Leisure: the Changing Scene (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1979) p. 35.

⁷ Peter Lindsay, "Sports History", The Canadian Encyclopedia Vol. III, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1985), p. 1744.

⁸ General narrative histories which include material on 18th and 19th century Canada include Nancy Howell and Maxwell L. Howell, Sports and Games in Canadian Life 1700 to the Present (London and Toronto: Macmillan, 1982); Harry Roxborough, One Hundred - Not Out: The History of Nineteenth Century

trade records suggest, however, that the struggle for survival in 18th and early 19th century Canada was not all consuming and left considerable time for Hudson's Bay Company employees at posts like York Factory and Churchill to participate in a vibrant and active recreational life. The sports, games and other pastimes of Merrie Olde England, or in this case Merrie Auld Scotland too,⁹ are often treated as one bit of cultural baggage pioneer settlers did leave behind, but the experience of fur trade employees suggests otherwise. Leisure and leisure activities may well have been more common and more significant in frontier life than is usually acknowledged.

Canadian Sport (Toronto: Ryerson, 1966); Peter Leslie Lindsay, "A History of Sport in Canada 1807-1867." (PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 1969); and Allan Elton Cox, "A History of Sports in Canada, 1869-1900." (PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 1969). These studies concern themselves primarily with attributing sports and games to the cultural tradition of one ethnic group or the other in the Canadian mosaic, or with describing where sports and games were first played, and something of the way in which they were played. Such general narrative histories have been criticized for their failure to connect sports with social change and social variables like class. See for example, Alan Metcalfe, "Some Background Influences on Nineteenth Century Canadian Sport and Physical Education," Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education, 2, 1 (May 1974): 62. Alan Metcalfe's own work, the previously mentioned article by S.F. Wise, and several theses, notably Ian F. Jobling, "Sport in Nineteenth Century Canada: the Effects of Technological Changes on its Development." (PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 1970), and Morris Kenneth Mott, "Manly Sports and Manitobans: Settlement Days to World War One." (PhD thesis, Queen's University, 1980) all suggest that sports history may be placed in a broader context of social history in Canada.

⁹ As noted in Chapter II, "Social Structure", the garrisons at York and Churchill were drawn overwhelmingly from Scotland and especially from Orkney. It is well known that a number of sports and pastimes are particularly associated with Scotland, including golf and curling. Unfortunately neither of these sports were reported as fur trade activities. There was a Scottish and Orcadian flavour to some leisure activities at bayside posts: fiddle music, reels, a New Year's football match and so on, but overall the traditions seem more British than specifically Scottish. Of course Scots did play many of the same sports and games as Englishmen and Canadiens for that matter. For a discussion of Scottish sports and games see: Robert Scott Fittis, Games and Pastimes of Scotland (East Ardsley: E.P. Publishing, 1975) and Gerald Redmond, Canada's Sporting Scots (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982).

Even the first Europeans to winter on the western shore of Hudson's Bay took time off from the problems of securing food, clothing and shelter to play games and enjoy holidays. Jens Munk who wintered at Churchill in 1619-1620 reported that over the Christmas season his men not only attended mass and "played games to amuse themselves, and whoever could think up the most amusing game was the most popular".¹⁰

Little else is known about the recreational habits of the first fur trade residents of the North-West until 1714.¹¹ Shortly thereafter, however, records from both York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort indicate that in addition to Christmas a number of other holidays were kept. Coronation Day, Guy Fawkes Day and St. George's Day were all kept as holidays at York Factory at least as early as 1717-18.¹² Other holidays were soon added, including Easter and the King's Birthday,¹³ and Christmas holiday season was extended to New Year's at Prince of Wales's Fort by

¹⁰ Munk, The Journal of Jens Munk, p. 25.

¹¹ Although his account of events over the winter of 1682-83 is fanciful, Nicholas Jérémie reported that French traders captured John Bridgar and his party of Hudson's Bay Company men by attacking them on the feast of Epiphany on January 6, the traditional end of the Christmas holiday season. According to Jérémie's account Bridgar and party were all too intoxicated to make any defense. Although this version of events does not agree with other accounts, it is intriguing. The fact that Jérémie thought such a "ruse de guerre" was plausible indicates that a tradition of heavy drinking and holiday celebration was part of fur trade life from the beginning. See Nicholas Jérémie, Twenty Years of York Factory, 1694-1714, translated by R. Douglas and J.N. Wallace, (Ottawa: Thorburn and Abbott, 1926), pp. 24-25. A more balanced account of events may be found in Morton, Canadian West, pp. 88-91.

¹² HBCA:B.239/a/5. fo. 8d, 20 October 1717; fo. 9, 5 November 1717, and fo. 19d, 23 April 1718.

¹³ See for examples HBCA:B.42/a/4, fo.23, 5 April 1724, and fo.27, 28 May 1724.

1727.¹⁴ Post records do not always make it clear what days were celebrated as holidays and practices may well have varied considerably from post to post and at the whim of officers in charge, but by about the mid 18th century it was customary to mark Coronation Day, Guy Fawkes Day, St. George's Day, Easter, and the Christmas period between December 24 and January 1.¹⁵ On occasion other days were also treated as holidays including the monarch's birthday and on a handful of occasions notable events at these forts.¹⁶ The holidays celebrated at fur trade posts did change over time. Guy Fawkes Day, for example, was apparently dropped as a holiday in the 1790's, but at about the same time St. Andrew's Day seems to have been adopted as a holiday, so overall there was little change from about 1750 to 1870 in the number of holidays enjoyed by company employees. In total these customary holidays amounted from 10 to 14 days out of the year. Some were only treated as half-holidays, like Guy Fawkes, St. George's and St. Andrew's Days, though since these days were usually celebrated with numerous

¹⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/7, fo.9d, 1 January 1727.

¹⁵ Post journals do report some work occurring between Christmas Eve and New Year's on occasion such as shovelling snow, collecting firewood, or hunting. Depending on the year and the day of the week upon which Christmas and New Year's fell the holiday period might vary between about 5 and 10 days though the work engaged in probably did not require a full day's labour nor would it have required the entire work force of the post.

¹⁶ The burial of Captain Anthony Beale was marked with a seven gun salute and toasts to the King and company in 1731, HBCA:B.42/a/11, fo.19, 14 April 1731; and a house warming for the new stone fort was held in 1740, B.42/a/21, fo.17d, 27 September 1740, for example. It was never common, however, for such local holidays to be held.

alcoholic toasts in effect the holidays probably extended into the following work day.¹⁷

In addition company employees at bayside posts were normally given Sundays as a day of rest, whether or not religious services were held. In later years missionaries often complained that Sundays were not treated as a day of rest in the fur trade, but their comments appear to have been directed at canoe and boat brigades which travelled on Sundays not at practices at most posts. Between Sundays and other customary holidays something like 60 to 65 days - about one-sixth of the year - were holidays for company employees from the early 18th century onwards.

There is some evidence to suggest that as early as 1749 Saturdays were treated as half-holidays as well, though how widespread this custom was cannot be determined.¹⁸ Periodic references to a Saturday half-holiday continue into the 19th century, though at Churchill on one occasion it was noted that the holiday was not granted due to pressure of work.¹⁹ A Saturday half-holiday was probably treated more as a privilege than a right: a privilege which may not have always been granted and which depended to some extent on the views of the officers in charge of the posts. Nevertheless it may well have subtracted the equivalent of about 20 or more holiday days a year from the work of employees of all ranks. If so holidays then would have constituted between one fifth and one quarter of the entire year.

¹⁷ See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/44, fo.11d, 11 November 1757. "The Extraordinary Loyalty of this little Garrison Yesterday occasioned little done the Day".

¹⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/32, fo.34d, 13 June 1749.

¹⁹ HBCA:B.42/a/186, fo.81, 30 April 1853.

Even this may underestimate the customary holidays of at least some fur trade employees. A journal kept at York Factory in 1829 by James Hargrave describes Saturdays as full holidays,²⁰ and a missionary at York in the 1850's reported that officers were given Wednesdays as holidays as well.²¹ It is not clear if a four or five day work week was general or if it was the practice year round, but by the mid-19th century some of York Factory's residents may well have enjoyed sanctioned holidays amounting to one-third of the year or more.²²

In all likelihood for most of the period covered by this study holidays for company employees at York Factory and Churchill constituted more than one-sixth of the year and less than a third. However even if one chooses to accept only the lower figure it is clear fur trade employees enjoyed considerable leisure - much more than has usually been assumed to be the case. In fairness, it should be noted that in pre-industrial Britain "about one day in three was a holiday of some kind" according to most estimates.²³ Eighteenth century company employees probably enjoyed fewer holidays than most working men in their home communities. By the late 18th and early 19th

²⁰ PAC:MG19 D23, "Unfinished Journal of a Clerk [James Hargrave]", p. 10, 1 March 1829.

²¹ PAC:MG19 B2, CMS, reel A94, William Mason Journal 1855, 14 November 1855. R.M. Ballantyne also described Wednesdays and Saturdays as holidays for officers - time which he suggests was spent primarily in hunting. He points out, however, that unlike company servants officers worked until eight in the evening even in the winter, Ballantyne, Hudson Bay, p. 99.

²² These additional holidays seem to have been limited to officers. In June 1842 at York tradesmen requested an additional day off work, but James Hargrave rejected the request as unreasonable. Leisure time was at least in part, a function of rank. See Hargrave, Letters, p. 132, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 2 December 1842.

²³ Parker, Leisure, p. 24, and Michael Marrus (ed.), The Emergence of Leisure (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 5.

centuries though, this situation had probably been reversed. The extensive calendar of religious feast days and other holidays of traditional British society had been "considerably pruned, both by employers and the church" until in the 1830's in England only Sundays and eight statutory half holidays remained.²⁴ In Britain a Saturday half-holiday was only gradually re-introduced from about 1850 on, and as late as the 1870's many categories of workers still had not secured a five and a half day work week.²⁵

Officially sanctioned holidays made up only part of the leisure time of fur trade employees. The normal work day at company posts left both officers and men with time at their disposal especially during the winter season when hours of work were shortened to reflect diminished daylight hours at northern posts. In addition work was seasonal and task-oriented meaning that typically work patterns in the fur trade consisted of periods of intensive effort followed by often lengthy periods during which work responsibilities were considerably reduced.²⁶ For example the period between the sailing of the annual supply ship and the beginning of winter work at York Factory was described in one journal as a "leisure season" during which little duty was done and York's residents "had [their] time entirely at [their] own disposal".²⁷ The tendency to over man posts to cope with seasonal increases in work also increased leisure during less busy

²⁴ Peter Cecil Bailey, "Rational Recreation: The Social Control of Leisure and Popular Culture in Victorian England, 1830-1885." (PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1975), p. 14.

²⁵ Tony Mason, Association Football and English Society 1883-1915 (Brighton:Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 2-3.

²⁶ See Chapter III, "Work", pp. 142-49.

²⁷ PAC:MG19 D23, "Unfinished Journal of a Clerk", p.6, 10 October 1828.

periods of the year. As James Hargrave reported to George Simpson in 1841 the increased complement of officers assigned to the "Counting House" at York meant the clerks and accountant at York were able to enjoy "a more regular system of exercise....a system so beneficial and indeed so necessary to those who are confined to Desks through the days and long evenings of winter on this Coast. ²⁰ Labourers doing outdoor work - the largest category of employees at both York Factory and Churchill - were subject to a certain amount of enforced idleness as well due to weather conditions. Chief Factors sometimes ordered indoor work cleaning or picking oakum on cold or rainy days, but often the men were simply excused from work. Journal entries like the following suggest that in such circumstances company employees found their own ways of passing time during poor weather: "excessive cold for this time of year; no working out of doors, and most of the men too much Enibriated to do much within".²⁰

Company employees also managed to appropriate for themselves considerable amounts of unsanctioned time off, and as mentioned earlier there was little effective control much of the time over how diligently employees set about their work. For the most part, except for occasional surprise inspection tours, company employees were left alone to determine how and when they completed their duties.

²⁰ HBCA:D.5/6, fos. 57-57d, James Hargrave to George Simpson, 20 February 1841. The officers charged with keeping the voluminous accounts of York Factory worked longer days in winter than tradesmen or labourers. Their normal winter work day was described as stretching from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. See PAC:MG 19 D23, "Unfinished Journal of a Clerk", p. 10, 1 March 1829. Extra holidays for officers may have been a partial compensation for their extended hours of evening work.

²⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/86, fo.45d, 8 July 1786.

At York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort there were a sufficient number of officers and senior tradesmen for work to be periodically scrutinized, but at Churchill after 1821 even by fur trade standards the pace of work was notoriously dilatory. With only a single officer present there, and at that usually not year round, labourers at Churchill exercised almost total control over their own work. As a result even officers admitted at Churchill "we ... do not overwork ourselves, we take it easily".³⁰ Typically at Churchill when work was assigned, the men did it as quickly as possible with little regard to the quality of the work "and then to the house or tent for a spell ... if a half days work is done it is thought good work".³¹

It is impossible to quantify such unsanctioned leisure time but it is probable that it amounted to a substantial portion of the year, especially for the tradesmen and labourers doing outdoor work away from the post at camps. It is also clear that leisure was an extremely important feature of life at bayside posts from the early 18th century onwards. The notion that "the exacting demands of existence" in frontier settlements "left little time for pleasure seeking" needs to be reconsidered, at least in the case of fur trade communities. Instead what needs to be studied in greater detail is how Hudson's Bay Company employees spent their leisure time.

³⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/185, fo.13, 21 April 1848.

³¹ HBCA:B.42/a/188, fo.20, 30 December 1856. Marginal comments from three later readers were added to this observation concurring with this view of Churchill life. According to one "Twas ever thus". This leisurely approach to work at Churchill became almost proverbial in company circles. In 1857 James Hackland, then in charge of the post, discovered his wood cutters had purposely built their piles of firewood one third smaller than normal - a technique he dubbed "Churchill cutting". HBCA:B.42/a/183a, fo.21d, 19 December 1857.

The minor holidays in the fur trade calendar, Guy Fawkes Day, St. George's Day, Coronation Day, the King's Birthday, and later St. Andrew's Day, were all celebrated in much the same fashion. Usually the post was made festive looking by flying colours and the men were given extra alcohol rations with which to drink a series of toasts in the afternoon or evening. On St. George's Day it was customary to hold a target shooting competition for a small prize, which served the dual purpose of sport and improving marksmanship.³² Target shooting apparently died out as a custom in the late 18th century, however, although it was reported at Churchill in 1848.³³ A comment in the York Factory journal for 1797 suggests that the desire to conserve powder led to this change.³⁴ A bonfire and fireworks enlivened Guy Fawkes Day up until about the same time. Unfortunately a rather spectacular accident involving Joseph Colen's nephew Thomas Colen, who was "dreadfully mutilated" when fireworks he was carrying in his pockets exploded, put an end to the bonfire and fireworks display at York thereafter.³⁵

However the rounds of toasts to his or her majesty, the governors of the Company, and other beneficiaries of the officers' and men's good will were retained.³⁶ They often became in the 18th century the occasion for post balls, at least at York Factory where numbers made an evening dance

³² Or at least so Samuel Hearne reported. See HBCA:B.42/a/110, fo. 20d, 23 April 1788.

³³ HBCA:B.42/a/185, fo.13, 22 April 1848.

³⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/100, fo.18d, 24 April 1797.

³⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/99, fo.3d, 5 November 1795.

³⁶ At least up until the 1840's when the Hudson's Bay Company began actively to reduce consumption of alcohol at posts like York Factory by reducing its shipments of spirits to the post.

possible. An interesting feature of these celebrations was the fact that the native people living at both York and Churchill were sometimes included in the festivities. They were present on Coronation Day celebrations at Prince of Wales's Fort in 1741. The celebrations in 1741 were unusually elaborate because Captain Middleton and the crews of the ships Furnace and Discovery were wintering at Churchill that year. The day began by marching both sailors and company men from the new fort to Sloop's Cove where a twenty-eight gun salute was fired and toasts were drunk - although the officers' port wine froze in their glasses as soon as it was poured from the bottle. Everyone then marched back to the fort with drums beating and colours flying; the men did some military drill, fired several musket volleys and more toasts were drunk. In the evening company employees, ships' crews, and Indians all shared a punch made with thirty gallons of brandy, "and the evening concluded with all possible demonstrations of joy, to the great pleasure and satisfaction of the natives".³⁷ This occasion differs more in degree than kind from other holiday celebrations reported at bayside posts.

Most of the minor holidays in the fur trade calendar have little to do with either events at the post or the cycle of work in the fur trade. On the contrary most of the holiday celebrations reported in post journals may be associated with nationalist sentiments like St. George's and St. Andrew's Days, loyalty to the Crown like Coronation Day or the King's Birthday or support for institutions like the Established Church in the case of Guy

³⁷ John Barrow (ed.), The Geography of Hudson's Bay: Being the Remarks of Captain W. Coats, in many voyages to the locality, between the years 1727 and 1751 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1852), appendix "Extracts from the log of Captain Middleton", pp. 110-11.

Fawkes Day. Celebration of these days reaffirmed the Britishness of these post communities and not the distinctiveness of fur trade life.

The one apparent exception to this general observation was the tradition that slowly developed of celebrating ship time at York Factory. As already noted the period after the departure of the annual supply ship came in the nineteenth century to be treated as something of a leisure period at York, and while the ship was at York a certain amount of celebratory activity took place despite long working days. The ship's captain and officers were entertained ashore and this hospitality was reciprocated on board the ships, particularly on the eve of departure.³⁸ Ashore the ship's departure came to be celebrated with a ball, which the missionary J.P. Gardiner rather sourly complained often lasted until 3 o'clock in the morning and which was "productive of much evil" in his eyes.³⁹ On rare occasions a dance or other celebration was held as a result of the completion of a major construction project or to mark the visit of an important fur trade figure like a London governor of the company or George Simpson.⁴⁰

It was the Christmas season, however, which was the main holiday period in the fur trade and which was celebrated with the most elaborate festivities. The holiday period generally lasted from December 24 until January 1, a time when hours of daylight at posts like York Factory and

³⁸ See for example: PAC:MG19 D23, "Unfinished Journal of a Clerk", p.6, 20 September 1828.

³⁹ For accounts of ship-time balls see, PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1859-60, 30 September 1859, Gardiner Journal 1860-61, 20 September 1860; and J.P. Gardiner Journal 1861-62, 14 September 1861.

⁴⁰ As, for example, in 1824 when Simpson's departure for the Columbia district was celebrated - probably with considerable relief - by the residents of York Factory. HBCA:B.239/a/132, fo.30, 14 August 1824.

Churchill were least advantageous for outdoor work, and cold weather and winter storms were likely. The gradual abandonment of much pretense of labour during the Christmas season may well have been a case of making a virtue of necessity. Since little work was likely to be accomplished one might as well make it an outright holiday time.

At both Prince of Wales's Fort and York Factory in the 18th centuries holiday celebrations consisted primarily of feasting and drinking. Extra rations of food and drink were distributed among the men "to keep ye Same in Mirth", as one journal entry put it.⁴¹ In the early years food supplies were sometimes stretched a little thin at Christmas; little feasting could be done in 1725 at Prince of Wales's Fort when post hunters brought in only 30 partridges with which to celebrate the season.⁴² When food supplies were more plentiful, however, an attempt was made to approximate the sort of Christmas dinner traditional in Britain. As early as 1717 at York Factory each mess of 4 men was given 28 pounds of flour, 12 quarts of pease, 4 quarts of oatmeal, 2 quarts of rice, 2 pounds of raisins, 1 pound of currants, 2 pieces of beef, one goose, eight partridges, eight rabbits, 4 salt tongues, and 8 pounds of fresh venison for their meals during Christmas week.⁴³ Roast goose and Christmas pudding were as much a tradition in the

⁴¹ HBCA:B.42/a/15, fo.17, 25 December 1734.

⁴² HBCA:B.42/a/6, fo.13d, 23 December 1725.

⁴³ HBCA:B.239/a/5, fo.11d, 23 December 1717. This list of Christmas rations was by no means unusual and often supplies of food were even more lavish. In later years butter, sugar, molasses, tea and other "luxuries" were commonly dispensed. See for examples, HBCA:B.239/a/130, fo.24d, 25 December 1821; B.239/a/141, p.34, 24 December 1829; and HBCA:B.239/a/154, fo.24, 24 December 1840. Extra rations of an equivalent nature were also dispensed on New Year's Day. For a discussion of normal ration quantities see Chapter VIII, "Standard of Living: Diet", pp. 454-57.

fur trade as in Britain. Along with extra food rations, rum and other alcoholic beverages were supplied to the men in addition to their normal beer rations with which to celebrate the season.

Feasting and toasts were essentially communal activities, as were most of the other activities associated with this holiday period. As early as 1754, for example, it was reported that the men "Saluted" the chief and officers of the post first thing on Christmas morning before church services were held, and that such a salute was customary at company posts.⁴⁴ Gift-giving was not often reported, but on two occasions when it was described the activity had a strongly paternalistic flavour. In 1751 Joseph Isbister at Prince of Wales's Fort mentioned that he had distributed his old clothes among the men,⁴⁵ and in 1747 the men at York Factory were given religious books sent out by the London committee.⁴⁶

Christmas celebrations also had a sporting component in the 18th century at York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort. As early as 1734 football was played at Prince of Wales's Fort on New Year's Day - quite possibly the first game of football ever played in Canada.⁴⁷ Perhaps because of its larger complement of men football was reported as a regular part of the holiday celebrations at Prince of Wales's Fort much earlier than at York Factory, where the first reference to a football game at Christmas time does

⁴⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/39, fo.13d, 25 December 1754. Saluting the fort and its prominent residents also seems to have become customary on New Year's Day as well. See HBCA:B.239/a/66, fo.20, 1 January 1772.

⁴⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo. 21, 27 December 1751.

⁴⁶ HBCA:B.239/a/30, fo.13, 25 December 1747.

⁴⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/14, fo.17d, 1 January 1734.

not occur until 1776.⁴⁹ Similarly references to football games at Churchill cease in the late 18th century, presumably because the declining size of the post precluded an adequate turnout for the game. By contrast football continued to be played at York Factory until well into the 19th century.⁴⁹ Indeed according to John McDougall it was the "national game" of the North-West and was still being played regularly at Norway House and Rossville Mission into the 1860's.⁵⁰ The games were often spirited affairs and the competitive element of the game may well have been enhanced by the practice of giving a prize of a keg of rum to the victorious side.⁵¹ It is interesting to note that post journals describe these football games as involving all the hands including officers.⁵² It seems a reasonable inference to suppose that the football games at Prince of Wales's Fort and York Factory would have resembled the game played at Kirkwall in the Orkneys, also on New Year's Day. The following account of this game from Daniel Gorrie's Summers and Winters in The Orkneys gives a good idea of the form the fur trade game probably took.

Regularly as the day [New Year's] recurs there is a gathering of the populace intent on preserving one curious and time-honoured custom from extinction. The game - which should have ended with the era of cockfighting - is virtually a trial of strength, of pushing and wrestling power between "up the street" and "down the street", the

⁴⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/74, fo.13d, 30 December 1776.

⁴⁹ References to football at York Factory continue into the 1840's, thereafter these games are no longer mentioned, though it should be noted post journals no longer exist for York after 1852. See Payne, York Factory, p. 82.

⁵⁰ John McDougall, Forest, Lake and Prairie, pp. 83-4.

⁵¹ HBCA:B.235/c/1, Winnipeg Correspondence Inward, fo. 3, George Barnston to James Hargrave, 1 February 1823.

⁵² See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/141, fo.34, 25 December 1829.

grand object of the belligerents being to propel the ball to one or the other end of town. Broad Street, where the struggle commences under the shadow of St. Magnus [Cathedral], becomes the centre of attraction about noon-tide. Sailors and porters arrive in formidable force from the purlieus of the harbour, tradesmen gather in groups, and even hoary-headed men, feeling the old glow of combative blood in their veins, hasten to the scene of anticipated contest. At one o'clock a signal pistol-shot is fired, the ball is tossed into the air from the steps of the old cross, and around it, soon as it bumps on the ground, there immediately gathers from all sides a dense and surging crowd. The wrestling and struggling mass sways hither and thither, sometimes revolving like a maelstrom, and at others stationary in a grim deadlock. At intervals, the ball, as if flying for dear life, makes a spasmodic bound from the crowd; but a sudden headlong rush encloses it again, and so the struggle continues as before. For onlookers it is exciting to observe the fierce red-hot faces of the combatants, while the only appearance of good-humour displayed is a grim smile flickering fitfully across an upturned visage.... Heavy knock-down blows, both foul and fair, are freely given and received. The struggle seldom lasts much longer than an hour, and when the seamen and porters win the day, they place the ball, as a trophy of conquest, on the top-mast of the largest ship in the harbour. ⁵³

In general up until the late 19th century football was a folk game played with only minimal local rules, and it was remarkable as much for the violence of the play as for any sporting element.⁵⁴ Games were sometimes used to protest field enclosures and other such activities of local landowners.⁵⁵ The violence of these games and their connections with social protest suggests that the New Year's Day football games at York and Prince of Wales's Forts may well have served as a useful safety-valve for social tensions at these posts. Officers who participated in these games must have

⁵³ Daniel Gorrie, Summers and Winters in The Orkneys (London:1868), p. 82-4, quoted in Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals, pp. 78-9 fn.

⁵⁴ A French observer of the famous Derby football game in 1829 remarked that "if Englishmen called this playing, it would be impossible to say what they would call fighting". See Bailey, Leisure and Class, p.8.

⁵⁵ Thompson, "Moral Economy", p.116.

been subject to fair and foul knock-down blows, but in a context which implied no threat to the established hierarchy of post society.

It is also significant that it became customary to play football on New Year's Day: the same day as the game was traditionally played at Kirkwall. Outdoor sports were not ideally suited to mid-winter at York or Churchill, but this communal football game must have served as a nostalgic reminder of Britain like roast goose and Christmas pudding. Like so many other Christmas practices in the fur trade, it underlined the ties that not only bound post communities together but also emphasized the Britishness of these colonial communities.

Christmas at York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort was celebrated in much the same way up until the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Thereafter practices at the two posts began to diverge sharply. At York Factory Christmas celebrations became progressively more and more elaborate whereas at Churchill holiday celebrations became much simpler and in some respects more private and less communal. By the early 1840's Christmas at Churchill had become very quiet indeed. The men and their families stationed at Churchill often did not bother to come into the post at all at Christmas, preferring to stay out at the hunting and wood-cutting camps.⁵⁶ Indeed there was little reason to do so. The only people left at Churchill over the winter usually were the officer in charge of the post and one man, William Oman, and his family. There was little alcohol at the post - it was no longer an item of trade - and the men could normally only secure a small supply for themselves in the fall when the supply sloop arrived from York Factory. According to the officers stationed at Churchill the men sometimes

⁵⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/175, fo.16, 25 December 1841.

saved a little rum for Christmas, but they were as likely to drink it as soon as they got their hands on it as save it for holidays.⁵⁷ A ball was held at Churchill in 1851, but this was exceptional.⁵⁸ For someone used to holiday celebrations at York or the larger posts it can hardly have seemed like a holiday at all. As one journal entry put it: "this is new years day and the dullest that I never ever seen".⁵⁹

By contrast Christmas celebrations at York Factory in the 19th century put a great deal of emphasis on community participation and became more and more elaborate. The holiday season was marked by unusual indulgence, and often over-indulgence, in food, drink, and merry-making. It was an occasion for football, hunting excursions, dances, pranks, horse-play, over-eating, and heavy drinking. According to R.M. Ballantyne, who included a lengthy and lively account of holiday celebrations at York in his Hudson Bay: Everyday Life in the Wilds of North America, Christmas Day began in Bachelor's Hall with pillow fights, locking people in rooms, and other such boyish amusements.⁶⁰ But games and pranks and tramps in the woods, like the religious services which were always held, were only preliminaries for the real order of business of the day: Christmas dinner and the ball which followed it. New Year's Eve and New Year's Day were also occasions for a feast and a ball. As in the 18th century extra food rations were distributed to the men, with a roast goose and the ingredients for a

⁵⁷ See HBCA:B.42/a/181, fo.16d, 20 and 21 December 1844; B:42/a/185, fos. 4-4d, 21 December 1847, and fo.5, 25 December 1847; and B.42/a/189a, fo.66, 1 January 1859.

⁵⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/186, fo.15d, 25 December 1851.

⁵⁹ HBCA:B.42/a/185, fo.5d, 1 January 1848.

⁶⁰ Ballantyne, Hudson Bay, pp. 100-101.

Christmas pudding always prominent in the list. Officers enjoyed even more lavish fare with roast goose and beef, partridges, salt pork, and port and Madeira wine for toasts.⁶¹

After Christmas dinner it was customary for a dance to be held, attended by most of the community: officers and men, their families, and the local Homeguard Indians. Music was provided by drummers and fiddlers and on one notable occasion George Gladman's "beloved organ".⁶² Before the dancing began company men lined up to be each kissed in turn by the Indian women present, a tradition the women apparently set great store by.⁶³ Scottish reels were the only dances common to most parties and were kept up almost without respite for the entire evening.⁶⁴ In later years other dances were also included, some of which appear to have had a local character: the York Factory Breakdown, the Hudson Bay Jig, and the Polar Bear Walk Around.⁶⁵ According to Ballantyne around midnight cold venison with bread, butter, sugar and a large kettle of tea were served before the celebrants returned home.⁶⁶ Other observers suggest celebrations continued on well into the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁶² Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 110, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs Dugald MacTavish, 14 May 1842. Interestingly Ballantyne mentions that during his stay at York the drummer and fiddler were both Cree and that the latter used a fiddle of his own construction. Ballantyne, *Hudson Bay*, p. 104.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 104-5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105. The choice of dance does seem significant. Not only are reels archetypal Scottish dances, but they are are a kind of communal folk dance requiring a minimum of four dancers.

⁶⁵ These dances are mentioned as part of the holiday festivities at York in the 1880's. See *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 13 April 1883, p. 5, quoted in Michael Cross (ed.), *The Workmen in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 60.

⁶⁶ Ballantyne, *Hudson Bay*, p. 105.

early morning, and it was not until 4:00 a.m. that the last revellers staggered off to bed.⁸⁷

The festivities on New Year's Day were very similar, though during the day they consisted largely of a long round of visiting about the post.

Early in the morning the clerks visit the gentlemen in charge, & each gets a tumbler full of "Old man's milk" a punch made of equal parts of Brandy & milk with spices &c - the gentleman in Charge then meets all the servants in the Carpenter's shop & gives two glasses of Brandy or wine to each the servants go out & the Indians are then received first the men then the women & these also get two glasses of spirits - the servants then visit the clerks & each house in the Fort & the Clerks visit each of the men & this visiting goes on till 4 o'clock in the after noon & sometimes till late in the evening, each giving the other grog.⁸⁸

These toasts and visits about the post clearly helped to reinforce a sense of community at York Factory and, like many of the holiday celebrations, were more than just diversions.

However, not everyone found all of these Christmas festivities entirely enjoyable. Letitia Hargrave, for example, described one of her infrequent visits to a post ball as "a humbling affair". She viewed the Indian women with their smoky smelling blankets and tendency to nurse their babies publicly as "obnoxious" and she reported that she was "glad to come home".⁸⁹ One suspects that most of those at the ball in question were equally glad of her departure. The Reverend J.P. Gardiner, while the resident missionary at York, was also distressed by the way Christmas was celebrated at York. He was particularly concerned that what ought to have been a Christian holiday

⁸⁷ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1861-62, 1 January 1862.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Hargrave, *Letters*, pp. 94-95, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 20 February 1841.

was marked by so much drinking and open sexuality. In 1858 he tried to prevent his servant from attending the New Year's Ball, but she defied him and went anyway. When he refused to have her back as a servant she simply moved across the river to the Indian encampment, where he was certain she supported herself as a "common prostitute".⁷⁰ He also worried that the suggestible were tempted from the path of virtue at these holiday celebrations and described the case of one man whose "weak" intellect was taken advantage of by officers and men. Apparently they convinced him to drink a tumbler of brandy and whiskey and made him very drunk. The man in question spent the following day with Gardiner in tears and full of remorse and would not go home until the next ball was over for fear that his fellows would "drag him to the dance" again.⁷¹

In fact Gardiner may have had some reason for his opposition to the form of holiday celebrations at York. Alcohol consumption was heavy at York during the holiday season, and there were periodic attempts to limit or discourage excessive drinking there. The question of alcohol consumption at company posts is discussed elsewhere in this study,⁷² but it is worth noting that despite missionary, company, and individual officers' attempts to discourage excessive drinking Christmas celebrations retained a bacchanalian character. Gardiner himself compiled a list of the alcohol consumed between

⁷⁰ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1858-59, 31 December 1858, and 29 January 1859.

⁷¹ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1860-61, 31 December 1860.

⁷² See Chapter VI, "Accident and Disease", pp. 337-38.

Christmas and New Year's at York Factory by about fifty men stationed there in 1861-62.⁷³

Sold to Officers and Servants	Brandy	16 ³ / ₈ galls.	
"	Wiskey[sic]	17	"
"	Port Wine	5 ³ / ₈	"
"	Run	33 ⁷ / ₈	"
Regales for Servants	Run	10 ¹ / ₄	"
For the Company's Ball	Run	3	"
"	Shrub	1	"
"	Port Wine	1	"
"	Brandy	1	"
"	Whiskey	1	"
Given for Visiting New Year's	Shrub	4 ¹ / ₂	"
Day	Brandy	2 ¹ / ₂	"
"	Port Wine	3	"
		<hr/>	
		104 ⁷ / ₈	"

Gardiner also reported that between eight and ten gallons of alcoholic drinks were distributed to the local Homeguard, at a time when at least officially no alcohol was to be given to natives in trade or as gifts, and company employees' purchases of liquor were to be limited to a maximum of two gallons of spirits and four gallons of wine in any given year.⁷⁴

Holiday celebrations formed only one part of the leisure and recreation habits of fur traders. While many of the recreational activities engaged in as part of the holiday celebrations paralleled activities throughout the rest of the year, they do not completely represent the rich variety of ways that fur traders found to divert and entertain themselves.

Aside from football competitive sports were not often reported in post records, but it would be unusual if foot, canoe, and boat races as well as simple contests of strength and skill like arm-wrestling or shooting at

⁷³ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1861-62, 1 January 1862.

⁷⁴ See HBCA:B.239/k/2, fo.120, Minutes of Council 1841, resolve #94, and fo.156d, Standing Rules and Regulations 1844, resolve #59.

targets did not occur fairly frequently. A target-shooting competition was customary on St. George's Day and most of the men participated, though in 1719 at York Factory the post carpenter refused to join the competition as he "cannot be persuaded to fire a Gun".⁷⁵ This comment is interesting, however, since it suggests that despite the communal nature of most holiday celebrations a degree of independence and personal choice was allowed to post residents in their participation in such activities. The only spontaneous occurrence of target shooting reported in post records occurred in 1756 at Prince of Wales's Fort. The crew of the post sloop diverted themselves one morning with some target practice with the ship's swivel guns, creating some anxiety at the post. Armed men were sent off to determine the cause of the gunfire, and this form of sporting activity was not reported again.⁷⁶ At York Factory races were included in the Christmas celebrations in 1776, but once again they were not mentioned subsequently.⁷⁷ Nor were canoe or boat races mentioned with much frequency, though in 1825 a race was held between Governor Simpson's canoe and a Montreal canoe at York Factory. Simpson's picked crew narrowly won.⁷⁸ According to George Simpson McTavish carriages pulled by dogs were raced on the river ice at York

⁷⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/5, fo.47d, 23 April 1719.

⁷⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/46, fos.39d-40, 29 June 1756.

⁷⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/74, fo.13d, 30 December 1776.

⁷⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/133, fo.27d, 9 August 1825. In 1840 "a small gig or pleasure boat" was built at York for the use of officers, especially after ship time when they had time for such "relaxation". HBCA:B.239/a/152, fos.25-25d, 31 March 1840.

Factory in the 1880's at Christmas time, but it is not clear whether this was a long-standing tradition or a recent sporting innovation.⁷⁹

The rarity of references to canoe and boat races at both York Factory and Churchill conflicts somewhat with the widely held view that such competitions were frequent occurrences in the fur trade. A number of histories suggest that the pride and competitive nature of voyageurs made epic canoe races a feature of fur trade life.⁸⁰ The evidence for this view appears to depend primarily on a description in the journal of Duncan M'Gillivray of a race between the Athabasca and Saskatchewan River brigades. M'Gillivray reported that the Athapaskan brigade challenged his men's skill and stamina as canoemen. The challenge being taken up, both brigades raced for 48 hours along Lake Winnipeg until mutual exhaustion caused both groups to abandon the contest.⁸¹ At one point when the canoes were under sail a steersman in one canoe fell both asleep and overboard, but passing canoes in the heat of the contest ignored his pleas for help. Fortunately his own canoe returned in time to save him from drowning. What is not clear from this account is whether or not such races were common, or if this was simply an isolated, though extremely colourful, occurrence. It may be that canoe racing was more common among North-West Company employees than Hudson's Bay

⁷⁹ George Simpson McTavish, Behind the Palisades, p. 69.

⁸⁰ The suggestion appears most notably in both Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, The North West Company (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 43-4, and Ronald S. Lappage, "The Physical Feats of the Voyageur," The Canadian Journal of History of Sport, XV,1 (May 1984):34.

⁸¹ Duncan M'Gillivray, The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1784-5, Arthur S. Morton (ed.), (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 11-12. It is also worthy of note that according to the journal entry in question the race was at least partially conducted under sail. It was not exactly the two days of "continuous paddling" described in Campbell, The North West Company, pp.43-44.

Company men. At any rate such spirited races were not reported at either York Factory or Churchill during the period covered by this study, and they do not seem to have played much role in the sporting traditions of fur traders stationed at bayside posts.⁸²

The other sport which popular and academic historians associate with the fur trade is boxing. It has been suggested that York Factory as the chief meeting place of canoe and boat brigades was host to a yearly, albeit unofficial, heavy-weight championship of the North-West.⁸³ Paulet Paul, a Red River tripman, was the central figure in a number of epic battles between brigade champions, and in the 1850's was reported to have broken the collar bone of a huge English sailor from the York Factory supply ship with a single blow.⁸⁴ For the most part, however, the residents of bayside posts appear to have been only spectators at such "boxing" matches. Boxing seems to have been adopted as a sporting tradition only by canoe and boat brigadesmen, and to have had little appeal for permanent company employees. The latter certainly fought with each other on a fairly regular basis, however. The journal entry at Churchill for 21 December 1847 describes the form of most such fights. The weather was too bad for the packet men to leave for York Factory. They decided to drink the small stock of rum they

⁸² Some confirmation of this view can be found in the journal of J.B. Nevins. He reported that while travelling with a York boat brigade his crew of Canadian tripmen tried to engage a crew of Indian tripmen in a boat race. They soon passed the latter who declined to put up any resistance and the anticipated race fell flat. See J.B. Nevins, M.D., A Narrative of Two Voyages to Hudson's Bay with Traditions of the North American Indians (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1847), pp. 83-84.

⁸³ See Mott, "Manly Sports", pp. 43-44, and John E. Foster, "Paulet Paul: Metis or 'House Indian' Folk Hero?" Manitoba History, 9 (Spring 1985):3.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

had set aside for their Christmas celebrations "and in the end, as usual had a Battle, no less than four out of the six were stupid to it [sic]".⁸⁵ Such fights can scarcely be described as "boxing" and really ought not to be dignified as sport.

At bayside posts active physical recreations were more common than competitive sports and in large measure they obviated the need to develop a tradition of sporting activity. Physical recreations took many forms at both York Factory and Churchill, and included some somewhat surprising activities. Skating, for example, was reported as early as 1777 at Prince of Wales's Fort.⁸⁶ The reference to skating on this occasion as in a subsequent instance at York Factory in 1826 occurred because the men in question fell and broke collar bones.⁸⁷ James Clare in a letter to William Lane in 1847 suggests that while skating enjoyed a certain popularity, it was a risky recreation due to ice conditions at places like York Factory.

As to skating here it is but very poor for we only had a week or so of it in the fall of the year & that was far from being good as the Ice was by no means so smooth as the polished surface of a mirr[or] so that I enjoyed but little of it.⁸⁸

It was small wonder accidents occurred, especially as boot skates were not developed until the 1860's, and fur trade skaters would have had to make do

⁸⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/185, fos.4d-5, 21 December 1847.

⁸⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/94, fo.21, 23 February 1777.

⁸⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/135, fo.7, 28 December 1826.

⁸⁸ PAC:MG 19 A40, reel M.829, William Lane Correspondence, James Clare to William Lane, 15 February 1847

with skate blades that were attached with foot and ankle straps and screws driven into shoe or boot heels.⁸⁹

In the 1770's and 1780's officers in charge of York Factory occasionally pressed horses normally used for draught purposes into service for horseback riding. Humphrey Marten in particular was fond of riding as a form of exercise and claimed it was of great benefit to his health.⁹⁰ He was less convinced of the enjoyment felt by his transport:

I took much exercise on Horseback in the fall, and do so still. As the frost set in before we had any snow, I had a fine opportunity of riding to the Forked-Tree, Four mile gulley, Sallisburry hammock and almost to the Burnt Tent, but the old broken winded Horse did not like the Sport half so well as I did and frequently fell on his knees probably to pray for Snow to hinder such long Journeys.⁹¹

Some years later Marten himself had cause to doubt the healthful effects of riding. In 1785 a horse he was riding fell on him and badly injured his right leg.⁹² Four months later he was still complaining of a lame right ankle.⁹³ At York Factory oxen replaced horses for draught work about 1825, making further riding excursions impossible even if officers there wished to emulate Marten.⁹⁴

Swimming, however, required nothing more than reasonably warm weather and a suitable body of water. Not surprisingly it appears to have been a

⁸⁹ Lindsay, "History of Sport", pp. 49-50. Skating really only became popular elsewhere in Canada after prepared ice surfaces were introduced in the 1850's, and boot skates became available in the 1860's. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

⁹⁰ HBCA:B.239/b/37, fo.11d, Humphrey Marten to Severn, Albany and Moose Forts, 21 February 1777.

⁹¹ HBCA:B.42/a/94, fo.14, Humphrey Marten to Samuel Hearne, 4 January 1777.

⁹² HBCA:B.239/a/84, fo.25, 19 April 1785.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, fo.43, 21 August 1785.

⁹⁴ Donaldson, Land Use, p.193.

relatively common pastime at company posts, though Churchill's northerly location and the extreme cold of the water there acted as a strong discouragement to bathing. William Jefferson, the Chief Factor at Fort Churchill in 1792 did report taking a morning dip there, but he also mentioned that as a result he became "extremely ill".⁹⁵ Otherwise the residents of Churchill appear to have avoided swimming as a voluntary activity. At York Factory, however, swimming was more frequently mentioned. Hot weather allowed the men and their families to engage in swimming which also served the additional purpose of allowing them to wash and bathe themselves.⁹⁶ Unfortunately swimming in the river at York Factory could be quite dangerous, and at least four bathers drowned there over the course of the 18th century.

In 1750, Captain Newton, the chief at York Factory, drowned while swimming.

...this After Noone we had the misfortune to loose our worthy Master in the following manner the water being Clear and Smooth he [Newton] had a mind to Treat his Selfe with a Swim accordinly Goes in wone of our Little Boats to ye Long Boat Laying of in ye Stream to which he fasend ye Small Boat to ondressd him Selfe put a pr. of Linnen Draws on lyed a handkercheif round his head, Junt overboard & Swoom very Lively for Sum minutes with the Tide till about wone Hundred and fifty Yards be Low the Factory and with in Sixty or Seventy foot of Shore when to our Grate Surprise we had ye onfortunate aspect to See him go Down at wonce with out Eny hisatation or Sines of Distress and Immeadetly aperd a gain Calling for healp. ...Went to his assistance but pore Gentel Man Never apering the Second time Renderd our Indcavers on Servesable it is thought the kramp was ye Cause of his misfortune.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/117, fo.23d, 27 July 1792.

⁹⁶ See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/47, fo.32, 10 July 1760.

⁹⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/33, fos.36-36d, 28 June 1750.

Four years later one Elezr. Norton drowned in similar fashion after swimming out to a boat anchored 200 yards off-shore. Richard Satchfield in this instance actually reached Norton, but Norton's drowning struggles forced Satchfield to let him go and Norton disappeared beneath the water.⁹⁸ No further swimming accidents occurred until 1799, when two young girls drowned in the river. One was a daughter of George Sutherland, Joseph Colen's deputy, and the other a daughter of a prominent Indian. A body was found an hour later "and every means was used as prescribed by the Human Society for restoring to Life - but without the least Symptom of Effect."⁹⁹

While riding, skating and swimming had their devotees they were not the main physical recreation of fur traders. Indeed they are significant primarily as indications of the variety of recreational activities Hudson's Bay Company employees enjoyed. The most important active physical recreations at company posts were hunting, fishing, trapping and allied activities like canoeing and snowshoeing.

These activities present, however, some problems of definition and classification. All were work as well as leisure activities. It is important therefore to distinguish between voluntary hunting and fishing that carried out at posts as part of an individual's normal work responsibilities.

⁹⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/37, fo.26, 16 June 1754.

⁹⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/101, fo.98, 25 July 1799. The idea that someone could be revived after an hour in the water seems farfetched, but eight years earlier an Indian boy was reported to have been saved by Mr. Thomas, the surgeon, at York after about three quarters of an hour under water using "the directions recommended by the Humane Society". This story seems unlikely, but was apparently believed at the time. See HBCA:B.239/a/91, fo.30d, 18 July 1791.

In the case of fishing the distinction between fishing as work and fishing as sport at both York Factory and Churchill seems to have been based largely on technique. The bulk of the fish consumed as food were caught by company servants who set nets and lines in the lakes and rivers about the posts. In winter, the main fishing season, nets were set by hand underneath lake or river ice - a cold and scarcely sporting activity - though one which could in good years produce enormous quantities of fish. Fishing does not seem to have been as popular a recreation as hunting, perhaps because company employees ate so many fish as rations they had little desire to acquire more for sport. There are very few references to angling at Churchill despite the fact that arctic char, now highly regarded as a game fish, were common there in the 18th century. However some individuals like Moses Norton did have fishing tackle,¹⁰⁰ and it may have been a more common activity than a few scattered references would suggest.

At York Factory references to fishing for recreation and pleasure are more common. Some company officers like Ferdinand Jacobs, Matthew Cocking, and Humphrey Marten appear to have been quite fond of fishing, primarily angling for trout at Ten Shilling Creek. Their fishing parties usually consisted of themselves and one or two other officers - often the surgeon who had few direct duties much of the time - and four or more men to row or paddle them around to the best fishing locations.¹⁰¹ For the most part recreational fishing was a preserve of company officers - especially chief factors and traders and their favoured friends - who alone could take time

¹⁰⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/53, fo.13, 1 November 1759.

¹⁰¹ See for examples; HBCA:B.239/a/55, fo.34, 27 May 1767; fo.34d, 29 May 1767; fo.35, 1 June 1767; B.239/a/80, fo.11d, 10 October 1781; B.239/a/84, fo.38d, 24 July 1785.

off on work days without risk of censure and who could arrange the necessary boats and crews to transport themselves to the best fishing sites like Ten Shilling Creek. It was also officers like William Mactavish, who could afford expensive fishing equipment like the "good strong Hickory fishing Rod 18 feet long in four pieces to screw together, with Reel, Line & two spare top pieced also a fly Book and a good assortment of flies" he ordered through his father in Scotland in 1842.¹⁰² With such equipment William Mactavish could emulate the sort of sport fishing to which gentleman followers of Izaak Walton aspired. George Simpson McTavish, however, noted that the fish around York Factory did not always respond as they should. At some point during his tour of duty at York in the 1880's he was honoured by an invitation to fish with Chief Factor Joseph Fortescue.

Mr. Fortescue had a beautiful imported rod, with fancy tackle, and a book of fly hooks that would have delighted an entomologist. I [McTavish] was very much afraid that I would have very little chance of catching anything against such a handicap, as my outfit consisted of a small sapling cut from the woods, a stout piece of cord, a large unadorned hook, and for bait a piece of salt pork.¹⁰³

With his crude equipment McTavish quickly landed three or four trout, at which point Fortescue attempted to teach him how to fish properly. On his first cast with Fortescue's rod he got a bite and Fortescue then took over to show him how to play the fish. McTavish returned happily to his own gear while Fortescue struggled to land the trout in sporting fashion.

When the time came for us to head for home, I had caught nineteen, and Mr. Fortescue one, showing that the trout, thank goodness, had not yet become civilized. They wanted no gaudy attraction to stimulate their appetites. They were after the substance of a chunk

¹⁰² PAC:MG19 A21, reel C83, Hargrave Family Papers, p. 287, William Mactavish to Dugald Mactavish Senior, 31 August 1842.

¹⁰³ McTavish, Behind the Palisades, p. 95.

of salt pork, and despised such small allurements as a colored figment of imagination in the shape of an imported fly.¹⁰⁴

Hunting like fishing was both a work activity and a recreation. By and large it was the officers at company posts who engaged in hunting as a leisure activity and company servants who hunted as part of their work duties. At both York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th century the formal work responsibilities of clerks and officers like surgeons and sloop captains were not particularly demanding. David Thompson, for example, complained that during his stay at Churchill he was liable to lose his skill as a clerk for want of writing practice. Indeed he confessed that Samuel Hearne, the governor of the post, had only employed him for a few days a year copying out Hearne's manuscript and recopying an invoice.¹⁰⁵ After his transfer to York Factory in the post of clerk and accountant he further confessed that the work entailed in these positions could be completed in a few days and the rest of the year was spent hunting.¹⁰⁶ A great deal of the officers' hunting therefore falls into the category of make work, but make-work which did have considerable value. An entry in the Churchill post journal of 1806 calculated that it cost £3/17/0 for powder and shot to kill 1800 partridges, but that this quantity of game replaced £37/9/2 of imported rations such as salt beef, flour, raisins and suet. Of course this calculation does not take account of the wages paid to the officers employed hunting partridges, but as the journal entry points out with more honesty than modesty, providing food to the post was one of "the

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, *Travels in Western North America*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 56.

great & important services we/the Officers annually perform in the winter months when otherwise we might be dosing over the Stove for during 6 or 7 months there is nothing to do to employ us".¹⁰⁷ Increasing administrative and record-keeping responsibilities at York Factory after 1821 meant officers there had to spend much longer hours at their desks and hunting came to be treated more and more as a recreational respite from work.

Recreational hunting was primarily an activity of officers and more a 19th than an 18th century phenomenon. The main objects of these hunts were caribou and ptarmigan, while polar bears and other large game were also sometimes hunted. Not all forms of hunting were seen as equally enjoyable or sporting however. Chief Trader William Sinclair, while stationed at Churchill in 1846, went out to see how the local Inuit hunted seals. He reported that seal hunting was "too labourious to make amusement of it, its no fun to be crawling in cold ice Water for an hour at a stretch."¹⁰⁸ Similarly George Barnston questioned the sport involved in hunting beaver:

I seized an Ice chisel struck it into the ice but paused - and thought what am I about to do? to assist in depriving an animal of life known to be surpassed only by man in foresight and sagacity, and fit to serve him as an example in pursuing the path of peaceful industry and social innocence - This Consideration stopt my arm and damped my eagerness for the pursuit of the prey - As became a Fur Trader however, I assisted the Indians a little, and at the end of the 2nd Day they killed two Beaver.¹⁰⁹

Geese were killed in huge numbers at both York and Churchill, but usually by native hunters. Goose hunting required considerable skill and patience not to mention a high degree of stoicism to sit unmoving in a blind

¹⁰⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/132, fo.7, 29 November 1806.

¹⁰⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/183, fo.50, 3 May 1846.

¹⁰⁹ HBCA:B.239/c/1, fo.113, George Barnston to James Hargrave, 22 June 1823.

on a frozen or nearly frozen marsh. The goose hunt was, however, the one type of hunting at company posts in which a form of competition grew up. As early as the mid-18th century it had become customary to distribute "Goose Brandy" among the Homeguard hunters.¹¹⁰ By the early 19th century in addition to this celebratory brandy given to mark the end of the hunt a bottle of rum was given to the hunter who brought in the first goose of the season.¹¹¹ In the 1840's the present of a bottle of rum was discontinued and other rewards such as sugar, molasses, tobacco, and a scarlet feather were substituted.¹¹²

Unlike hunting and fishing, trapping for furs was neither a recreation nor a part of company service. It was engaged in by all ranks from the earliest establishment of trading posts. The most common method of trapping was the use of setting guns, though deadfall and other sorts of traps were also employed. On one notable occasion foxes became so common at Prince of Wales's Fort that they entered the courtyard of the post. Moses Norton caught three with fishing tackle and bait which he suspended out of his window.¹¹³ Private trapping could help to supplement an employee's wages with the money received from selling furs to the post warehouse but it also led to private trade. Individuals trading on their own account, as we have seen, were always a problem at company posts. The London committee took a

¹¹⁰ See for example; HBCA:B.239/a/46, fo.33d, 2 June 1759.

¹¹¹ HBCA:B.42/a/155, fo.34, 10 May 1828.

¹¹² See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/155, fo.40, 28 April 1842, and B.42/a/177, fo.25d, 13 May 1843. The Reverend J.P. Gardiner revealed, however, that the bottle of rum was not entirely supplanted, or else had been reintroduced by the 1860's. See PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, A87, Gardiner Journal 1860-61, 6 May 1861.

¹¹³ HBCA:B.42/a/53, fo.13, 1 November 1759.

variety of measures to try to limit illicit trade, and finally, in 1825 decreed that all furs in the possession of officers and servants were to be exchanged at no more than the Indian standard of trade.¹¹⁴ In 1841 the company went one stage further and required employees to pay the equivalent of the highest prices paid for prime furs at the London fur auctions for any furs which officers and servants acquired or kept for their own personal use.¹¹⁵ These actions by the company made trapping less attractive as a means of supplementing income without entirely discouraging the practice. George Simpson McTavish reported as late as the 1880's that junior clerks still found the few extra pounds they could earn by trapping most welcome.¹¹⁶ Letitia Hargrave reported that her brother William Mactavish and the surgeon at York, William Gillespie, pursued the trapping of foxes with considerable vigour and a measure of inter-personal rivalry. Gillespie traded his furs for "all he can get", but Mactavish gave them to the company warehouses requesting only that their value be given to poor Indians.¹¹⁷

Snowshoeing and canoeing appear to have been less recreational pastimes of their own than necessary adjuncts to activities like hunting, fishing and trapping. R.M. Ballantyne does describe with some eloquence the pleasures of "rambles" on snowshoes and excursions in canoes and boats, and they

¹¹⁴ HBCA:B.239/k/1, fo.71d, Minutes of Council 1825.

¹¹⁵ See E.M. Oliver, The Canadian North-West: Its Early Development and Legislative Records, Vol. II, (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1915), p. 827; Minutes of Council 1841, resolve #71.

¹¹⁶ McTavish, Behind the Palisades, p. 60.

¹¹⁷ Letitia Hargrave, Letters, p. 180, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 30 March 1844.

should not be overlooked as part of the recreational attractions of fur trade life.¹¹⁸

Hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreations seem to have been primarily pastimes of company officers. While tradesmen and labourers engaged in the same or similar activities it was usually as part of their work duties. It is interesting, however, if not entirely surprising, that fur trade recreations often paralleled work, and that they are distinguishable only by the degree to which they were voluntary activities engaged in during leisure hours.

Although hunting and fishing were viewed as recreations in Britain, they can scarcely be construed as cultural importations to the North-West. The active outdoor recreations of company employees were drawn almost exclusively from local resources and materials. In contrast the more sedentary pastimes of officers and men were, in most cases, part of the cultural baggage they brought with them from Britain.

Games appear to have figured much more prominently than sports in the leisure patterns of company employees. Gambling games like dice and wagers were not often reported, still it is unlikely, given their prevalence in British society of the 18th and 19th centuries, that games of chance did not have their devotees.¹¹⁹ At York at least two individuals attempted

¹¹⁸ Ballantyne, *Hudson Bay*, pp. 94-7 and pp. 108-12.

¹¹⁹ An account of a dice game with stakes of alcohol is described in HBCA:B.42/a/44, fo.15, 23 December 1754. According to one account the name Ten Shilling Creek was derived from a wager of that amount which was decided there. See HBCA:B.239/a/121, fos.4-4d, 12 October 1814. Still it seems surprising that gambling was not mentioned more often in post records. Perhaps the legendary frugality of Orkneymen discouraged such games. If so, fur traders clearly differed from other "frontier" workers in North America in later years for whom gambling was a favorite pastime.

unsuccessfully to raise money on their personal property by organizing raffles. In one instance a watch was raffled, but some of the participants did not pay up and James Hargrave refused to pursue the defaulters.¹²⁰ In the second case Hargrave refused to allow a retiring officer to raffle his gun. Letitia Hargrave's account of the event suggests that what particularly offended sensibilities was that an officer, David Hume Ross, would seek to make a little money by such an expedient especially as he was the nephew of Baron Hume.¹²¹

Card games like whist were popular at least among the Hargrave family,¹²² and James Hargrave also enjoyed playing chess. Donald Ross of Norway House was impressed enough by Hargrave's chess skills to request lessons from him.¹²³ Checkers or draughts were commonly played at fur trade posts and were one of the few European games taken up by Indians.¹²⁴ Indeed several commentators noted that some Indians became so proficient at checkers that few, if any, Europeans could beat them at the game.¹²⁵ The most unusual game of draughts reported in fur trade literature involved

¹²⁰ HBCA:B.239/b/92, fo.44d, James Hargrave to Edward Smith, 18 May 1836.

¹²¹ PAC:MG19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, Reel C84, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 1 April 1848.

¹²² James and Letitia Hargrave were both described as regular whist players by Dr. Helmcken. See Helmcken, Reminiscences, p. 85. William Mactavish was also "a great whist player", Hargrave, Letters, p. 90, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 1 December 1840.

¹²³ Hargrave, Correspondence, p. 252, Donald Ross to James Hargrave, 30 December 1836.

¹²⁴ Robert Stewart Culin, Games of the North American Indians (New York: AMS Press, 1973), p. 32.

¹²⁵ Daniel Williams Harmon, Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: the Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon 1800-1816, W. Kaye Lamb (ed.), (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), p. 226 and Graham, Observations, p. 168.

David Thompson during his stay at Cumberland House. There were two checker boards at the post, and with little else to do Thompson played the game constantly until he became quite expert. One day while playing the game by himself the devil came and sat down opposite Thompson. According to Thompson this apparition had two horns on his forehead, black curling hair over his head and body and the appearance of a Spaniard. They played several games, each of which was won by Thompson until at length the devil simply disappeared. Thompson reported that he was unable to decide if it was a dream or reality, but that as a result he made a vow never to play another game of skill or chance.¹²⁶ Although chess and whist may have been played primarily by company officers, other card and board games seem to have been popular among the men. As one author put it at fur trade posts "every apartment possesses its well-thumbed pack of cards, its rude cribbage board, and sets of dominoes".¹²⁷

The most common sedentary pastimes at company posts were the convivial and often connected activities of drinking and conversation. It is all too easy to forget in concentrating on the deaths, accidents, fights and social disruption caused by immoderate drinking that most of the alcohol consumption at company posts was social and convivial.¹²⁸ Nevertheless

¹²⁶ Thompson, *Travels*, p. 90. It is intriguing to speculate on the future course of Canadian history had the devil defeated Thompson. Perhaps Thompson would have become as addicted to card playing, gambling and dancing as he reports the other residents of Cumberland House were. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹²⁷ H.M. Robinson, *The Great Fur Land or Sketches of Life in the Hudson's Bay Territory* (Toronto: Coles Publishing, 1972), First published 1879, p. 102.

¹²⁸ For example J.P. Gardiner noted that James Hargrave usually sent missionaries off to visit other posts with a supply of brandy so that the missionary and the officer in charge of the outpost might "spend our evenings together comfortably". Gardiner refused the gift due to his

drunkenness was common enough at company posts to provoke attempts to discourage excessive drinking. As early as 1727 the London committee wrote to Richard Norton at Prince of Wales's Fort outlining its concern that drunkenness was too prevalent at posts, and encouraging officers in charge to limit alcohol consumption and to punish those caught trading illegally in rum or brandy as well as those who drank to excess.¹²⁹ Little came of such admonitions; and punishments for drunkenness or for trading in alcohol were relatively rare considering how common both offenses were. It was not really until after the union of the Hudson's Bay and North-West Companies in 1821 that any concerted effort was made to reduce alcohol consumption at company posts. Company regulations were altered to control the sale of alcohol to both Indians and company employees of all ranks, and officers and missionaries tried to encourage voluntary temperance with mixed success. Attempts to regulate and reduce alcohol consumption at posts like York Factory and Churchill are discussed elsewhere in this study, but they are of some relevance to the subject of recreation and leisure in the fur trade. As Peter Bailey and other social historians have noted efforts were made by a variety of groups to "civilize" popular recreations in 19th century Britain.¹³⁰ This urge to control the darker side of popular recreation grew

temperance principles and one suspects evening were not spent comfortably with someone who announced his purpose was not "to sit & drink Evenings" but only "to proclaim the gospel of Xt". See PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1861 62, 19 March 1862.

¹²⁹ HBCA:A.6/5, fo.8, London committee to Richard Norton, 27 May 1727.

¹³⁰ See Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, p. 3. It is interesting to note that in the 18th and early 19th century popular recreations were often viewed with great tolerance by ruling elites who suspected "intervals of licence" had a "stabilising effect" on society. *Ibid.* A similar case is made in Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreation in English Society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge at the University Press, 1973). Hugh Cunningham in *Leisure in*

in strength from the early 19th century onwards and involved both proscription of what were deemed undesirable activities and the substitution of more acceptable "rational" recreational alternatives.

The campaign against excessive drinking in the fur trade depended in large measure upon proscription, but attempts to encourage and develop alternative leisure activities were also made. The Reverend J.P. Gardiner was particularly eager to direct the conversational and debating instincts of York's residents in moral and worthwhile directions. He attempted to set up bible study and discussion groups and "conversational" classes in which weighty matters like whether or not "the conduct of a man [ought] to be influenced by public opinion" were debated.¹³¹ Unfortunately as he later noted the men at York Factory were "willing to talk on any subject - science, politics - anything rather than practical Christianity".¹³²

Paralleling this impulse to turn the simple pleasures of conversation and debate to "worthwhile" ends was the successful attempt to establish a subscription library at York Factory. Reading had always been one of the most popular recreational activities at fur trade posts and collections of books, magazines, and newspapers could be found at company posts almost from the moment of their establishment. In 1924 when the Hudson's Bay Company

the Industrial Revolution c.1780- c.1880 (London: Croom Helm, 1980) traces the origins of the urge to civilize and control popular recreations back into the 18th century, but argues that many still agreed with the proposition that popular recreations should be defended. Ibid., pp. 44-48.

¹³¹ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1860-61, 15 November 1860.

¹³² Ibid., J.P. Gardiner Journal 1861-62, 14 October 1861.

collected up books stored at York and Moose Factories a copy of the Epistles of Pliny the Younger published in Latin and dated 1678 was found.¹³³

Book collections at company posts took two forms throughout the 18th century. Individuals acquired private libraries of varying sizes, and the company itself sent out small numbers of books which were kept at posts. The largest reported private library in the 18th century was Joseph Colen's collection at York Factory, which in the 1790's comprised 1400 volumes.¹³⁴ Other collections were more modest, still company records from the late 18th century include several book orders similar to the following:

Mr. William Moore - the works of Josephus and the new Edition of Harris's Voyages
 Peter Fidler - Heath's Royal Navigation or Astronomer Accuratia
 David Thompson - Robertson's Elements of Navigation, the last Edition in two Volumes.¹³⁵

References to the reading of other works can occasionally be found, such as Ferdinand Jacob's mention of reading Robson's Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay in 1754.¹³⁶ James Isham also read and commented on works by Arthur Dobbs, Theodore Drage and especially Henry Ellis.¹³⁷ Isham was distinctly critical of Robson and declared in a letter to Jacobs "Good Lord deliver Us from such falsity, Especially about York Fort &c."¹³⁸ Other works on the fur trade were also read by individuals at company posts.

¹³³ C.E. L'Ami, "Priceless Books from Old Fur Trade Libraries," The Beaver, 266, 3 (December 1935): p. 27.

¹³⁴ Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals, p. xviii.

¹³⁵ HBCA:A.11/117, fo.149-49d, Joseph Colen to London Committee, 26 September 1791.

¹³⁶ HBCA:B.42/b/1a, fo.3d, Ferdinand Jacob to James Isham, 22 January 1754

¹³⁷ Isham, Observations, pp. 197-238.

¹³⁸ HBCA:B.239/b/11, fo.7, James Isham to Ferdinand Jacobs, 15 April 1754

Joseph Colen apparently took a manuscript copy of Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson Bay back to York Factory with him from the company's library in London.¹³⁹ Colen also claimed that Edward Umfreville's Present State of Hudson Bay was widely read by the men at York Factory and under its influence they "bid defiance [sic] to all order" in the belief, fostered by Umfreville's book, that the company had no legal right to stop their wages or regulate their conduct.¹⁴⁰

While reading seems to have been primarily an activity of company officers, Colen's comment suggests that it was not exclusively so. Peter Fidler, for example, began his career with the company as a labourer and was also a reader and book buyer of note. For the most part however, the books purchased and read by individuals in the 18th century were primarily technical treatises or serious literature.¹⁴¹ Light or frivolous reading was not much reported in surviving records though, as Humphrey Marten wrote, this did not mean reading was not seen as an important and pleasurable recreational activity. In 1786 Marten's eyesight began to deteriorate, he was unable to read for more than short periods of time, "a great misfortune to one so fond of reading".¹⁴²

¹³⁹ When Colen's action was discovered the London committee sent a sharp note to York Factory requesting the return of Graham's manuscript by the next ship. Fortunately the manuscript was not lost. HBCA:B.239/b/78, fo.16d, Annual Letter to York Factory, 31 May 1797.

¹⁴⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/92, fo.16d, 24 January 1792.

¹⁴¹ Peter Fidler purchased Ann Radcliffe's gothic masterpiece, The Mysteries of Udolpho in 1795, and David Thompson acquired Milton's Paradise Lost c. 1792. See Johnson, Saskatchewan Journals, p. xcvi.

¹⁴² HBCA:B.239/a/86, fo.41d, 17 June 1786.

The other source of books at company posts in the 18th century was books sent out by the London committee for use at its posts. For the most part these consisted of Bibles, Books of Common Prayer and collections of sermons.¹⁴³ Religious tracts were also occasionally sent out for distribution free of charge among the men.¹⁴⁴ Practical works like nautical almanacs and the like were also shipped out for use at company posts when deemed necessary.¹⁴⁵ In general the company saw providing books to its posts in the 18th century primarily as a means of influencing "the morals and behaviour of our Servants ... with a view to promote religion and Virtue".¹⁴⁶ This was not exclusively the case though, and other reading materials were shipped to bayside posts less from any practical or moral consideration than for the pleasure they afforded. At least as early as 1780 packets of newspapers were sent out to posts like York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort, which allowed residents of these posts to remain

¹⁴³ See for examples, HBCA:A.6/8, fo.15d, Annual Letter to York Factory, 16 May 1749; fo.18, Annual Letter to Prince of Wales's Fort, 16 May 1749; fo.69, Annual Letter to York Factory, 16 May 1751; fo. 115d, Annual Letter to York Factory, 24 May 1753. The latter entry is interesting in that it proposes Books of Common Prayer be offered for sale at a price of 2 shillings and 8 pence each to the men. In most other cases these Bibles and other books were intended solely for factory use and were made part of the post inventories.

¹⁴⁴ See for examples, HBCA:A.6/13, fo.104, Annual Letter to York Factory, 19 May 1784; fo.159d, Annual Letter to York Factory 24 May 1786, similar instructions were also included in letters to Churchill sent in the same years, *ibid.*, fos.107 and 162d.

¹⁴⁵ See HBCA:A.24/18, fo.34d, Prince of Wales's Fort Miscellany, 1778.

¹⁴⁶ HBCA:A.6/13, fo.104, Annual Letter to York Factory, 19 May 1784.

tolerably, if somewhat belatedly, informed about events outside fur trade territories.¹⁴⁷

In the 19th century information about the reading habits of company employees is more easily obtained. Individuals continued to build personal book collections for their own private use and to share with friends. These collections were normally acquired piecemeal through orders placed with the Secretary of the London committee of the Hudson's Bay Company or through personal agents in London, Edinburgh or other major centres. Occasionally an individual simply purchased a large collection outright, though for obvious reasons this expedient was only open to wealthier company employees.¹⁴⁸ Most, however, had to content themselves with a yearly book order. Officers like James Hargrave regularly ordered large shipments of books and magazines and spent considerable sums in the process. In 1841 for example his book order consisted of "Rose's Translation of Orlanda Furiosa, Percy's Relics of Antient English Poetry, Washington Irving's Astoria, Cowper's Translation of the Illiad & Odyssey, The Subaltern, Bracebridge Hall, Arabian History, Translations of Euripedes, Herodotus and Levy [sic]".¹⁴⁹ In other years his imports were somewhat more modest, consisting only of files of magazines

¹⁴⁷ HBCA:B.239/b/40, fo.9d, Samuel Hearne to Humphrey Marten, 30 January 1780.

¹⁴⁸ William Lane at Norway House in 1847 purchased in effect his own library in this fashion. See PAC:MG19 A40, reel M.829, William Lane Correspondence, James Clare to William Lane, 15 February 1847.

¹⁴⁹ Margaret Arnett MacLeod, "Introduction" to Letitia Hargrave, Letters, p. lxiii.

like "Chalmer's Journal" and "Tait's Magazine" and a few books.¹⁵⁰
Nevertheless even while still a clerk he made regular book orders.¹⁵¹

Hargrave probably purchased more reading material than most but neither his tastes nor his urge to collect books were unique. The extensive correspondence between James Hargrave and his friends stationed at other posts around the North West frequently contain descriptions of the books each read and opinions about their quality and interest. Donald Ross at Norway House in particular enjoyed discussing his reading with Hargrave though his tastes by his own admission were not as elevated as Hargrave's. Ross was an avid reader of Walter Scott and other popular novelists as well as a devotee of magazines like Hood's Comic Annual, the Penny Magazine and similar publications. Ross described his tastes as "decidedly for light reading" which in his mind proclaimed no "great depth of intellect or soundness of understanding on my part but I cannot help it my belief is that a man should regulate his reading much in the same manner as he does his other appetites and propensities - by enjoying that which affords him the greatest share of satisfaction, providing that its tendency is not to injure himself or any one else".¹⁵² It would seem Ross also had found time to acquaint himself with Benthamite Utilitarianism.

Book purchases were not simply confined to company officers. Tradesmen and labourers also read and some apparently owned books of their own.

¹⁵⁰ HBCA:E.21/1, James and Joseph Hargrave Correspondence, order placed with George Copland, 7 March 1835.

¹⁵¹ PAC:MG19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, reel C73, William Smith to James Hargrave, 1 June 1831, p. 329; HBCA:B.239/c/2, fo. 12, John Clowes to James Hargrave, 1 June 1829.

¹⁵² Hargrave, Correspondence, Donald Ross to James Hargrave, 28 December 1833, pp. 129-30

William Drever a carpenter at York Factory placed the following book order with William Smith the Secretary of the London committee in 1834.

- 1 Copy Housepainter & Colourman's Guide
- JP.F. Fingay
- 1 Do The Varnishers Guide
- 1 Do The Cabinet Makers Do By G.A. Siddons
- 1 Do The Builders Practical Doj By John Nicholson
- 1 Do The Millwrights Do Esq. Civil Engineer
- 1 Do The Young Man's Book of Knowledge
- 1 Do The Cottagers of Glenburniel
- 1 Do The Cottagers on the Cliff
- 1 Do the Sequel to Ditto 153

Drever's book order suggests an unusual interest in improving his skills as a tradesman, but not all of his purchases were technical treatises. Like Ross and other fur trade readers he was interested in lighter reading material as well. Other tradesmen and labourers also owned books though unlike officers their reading habits are less likely to be recorded. It is interesting to note, however, that in 1859 the missionary J.P. Gardiner mentioned that one in four new recruits at York Factory arrived there already in possession of a Bible.¹⁵⁴ It is likely that Bibles and other reading matter, like cards, cribbage boards and dominoes, were part of the normal furnishings of the Men's House at company posts.

At Churchill in the 19th century there are relatively few references to book collecting or reading by employees of any ranks. In 1808 John Charles did receive a packet of books containing "Barclay's Dictionary, Parks Travels, [and] Joyner's Scientific Dialogues" as a gift from a friend in

¹⁵³ HBCA:B.239/b/92, fo.9d, James Hargrave to William Smith, 9 September 1834

¹⁵⁴ PAC:MG17 B2, reel A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1859-60, 27 September 1859.

Britain.¹⁵⁵ There may well have been others at Churchill who spent some of their leisure time reading, but many of the men stationed at Churchill were probably illiterate. On at least one occasion when the officer in charge there was absent post records had to be kept by Nancy Dunning, the only person left at the post who could read and write.¹⁵⁶

The company itself continued to send out books and other reading materials to its posts. In 1816 the London committee decided to set aside £30 per annum to purchase books "for the instruction & amusement of the Officers & Servants of the Company".¹⁵⁷ The fact that these books were to be selected both for practical and entertainment purposes represents something of a shift in company policy. Up until this time post book collections were intended almost exclusively to serve moral and instructional ends. However, these books were not intended for use at bayside factories and posts like York Factory or Churchill. Most were to be sent to Red River, where they came to be part of the Red River Library, and inventories of books in this library compiled in 1819 and 1821 indicate that the library was intended primarily to serve as a store of reference materials. Dictionaries, scientific and agricultural treatises, histories, and serious literature dominate these lists of library holdings, though a few popular novels and other lighter fare were also included.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ HBCA:A.6/17, fo.121d, London committee to John Charles, 21 May 1808.

¹⁵⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/189a, fo.11d, 3 October 1857. She had kept the post journal since 4 August.

¹⁵⁷ HBCA:A.6/19, fo.10, London committee to Robert Semple, 8 May 1816.

¹⁵⁸ These inventories may be found in, PAC.MG19 A21, reel C83, Hargrave Family Papers, pp. 386-7 and p. 388-91. The 1822 inventory lists over 100 items including books,, maps, collections of magazines, government documents and manuals. Of this number about 25 items were novels, plays, poems and

Libraries were developed at a number of other company posts but on a different basis. The Red River Library was provided at company expense; other fur trade libraries were established by subscription. The first subscription library in company territories was established at Fort Vancouver c.1833-4. By 1836 it was well established and operating as one of its members put it "full blast".¹⁵⁹ The library was stored at Fort Vancouver but subscribers were solicited throughout the Columbia district and library members stationed at outposts could send for the books they wanted and return them when convenient. They also met once a year to place a library order, which was sent via York Factory to London where the company's secretary placed the order with book dealers. The following year the materials chosen were shipped to Fort Vancouver by the annual supply ship to York then inland using the company's boat and canoe brigades.

The idea proved popular and spread to other districts. A subscription library was established in the Mackenzie District in the 1840's. This library which was housed at Fort Simpson cost subscribers £1 to join and its yearly fees were also £1. As a result it is likely that only officers and better paid tradesmen could afford to join.¹⁶⁰ In 1852, David Anderson, the first bishop of Rupert's Land, commented favourably on this sort of library scheme while visiting Moose Factory.

If libraries of some extent could be established at some central posts, and the books circulated through the surrounding district, the good effect produced might be very great. It might be the means

literary essays. Most of the rest of the collection was composed of technical or reference works.

¹⁵⁹ Michael Payne and Gregory Thomas, "Literacy, Literature and Libraries in the Fur Trade." *The Beaver*, 313,4 (Spring 1983): 47.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

of self-improvement to young men cut off from all the advantages of society, and beguile the solitude of these retired posts.¹⁶¹

His comments paralleled those of the London committee in 1816 in that they suggest a two-fold purpose in reading - self improvement and recreation. They also reflect the growing belief in Britain that libraries provided a healthy and uplifting recreational alternative for the lower classes.¹⁶²

A library was established at Moose Factory in the 1850's, and another subscription library was begun at York in 1856. At York an initial meeting of interested parties was held on 18 February 1856 and enough money was raised to purchase about 200 volumes. Instigation for the scheme came from the officers of the post and William Mason the missionary stationed there. From the start, however, Mason hoped the proposed library would benefit the whole community.¹⁶³

When the library formally opened on 1 November 1856 "for the benefit of all classes" Mason remarked that he "was pleased to see so many of the servants enter their names as annual subscribers of 5s/ & some 10 s ".¹⁶⁴ The idea of differential subscription rates appears to have been an innovation at York Factory and almost certainly helped to ensure that the library did not simply become the preserve of post officers.

The first collection consisted of 133 volumes and a number of

¹⁶¹ David Anderson, The Net in the Bay (East Ardsley: S.R. Publishers: Ltd., Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967), p. 112.

¹⁶² Bailey, "Rational Recreation", p. 160.

¹⁶³ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A94, William Mason Journal 1855-56, 18 February 1856.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., William Mason Journal 1856, 1 November 1856.

publications of the Religious Tract Society,¹⁶⁵ however it quickly grew into a large and popular institution. George Simpson McTavish described the library and its operations in the late 1880's in his autobiography Behind the Palisades. Although his description of the library falls outside the period covered by this study it is probable that the library had not changed significantly except in size from the 1860's.

York Factory was fortunate in having a goodly collection of books, amounting to nineteen hundred volumes when I left in 1889. ... The duty of librarian fell to the apprentice clerk for more reasons than one, the chief however being, that the ten shilling fee otherwise to be paid from his first year's salary of twenty pounds, was allowed for his services, and meant much to him. The higher officers paid one pound, the clerks ten shillings and the mechanics and labourers five shillings annually, the same rate applying ... to post managers and men in the district and adjoining ones. The books covered many fields of knowledge, selection being made from catalogues received from London by the ship, at an annual meeting, held prior to the departure of the Winter packet which carried the next year's order to England via Winnipeg. The men had a representative but dependence was placed almost entirely on the officers, who tried to get the best, and most for the available funds.¹⁶⁶

The available funds were used first of all to bring collections of popular magazines and periodicals like Punch or Chamber's Journal up to date and to add to series of popular 19th century writers. Adventure stories were purchased for the men, but officers took care to ensure that "no trash" was acquired. They felt that they "could not afford to get worthless books".¹⁶⁷

The library was opened on Saturday nights, officially for one hour after the ringing of the post bell signalled the end of the work day, but in practice until everyone had searched the shelves for his week's selection of reading material. McTavish mentions that the library was in disarray when

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., William Mason Journal 1856, 28 October 1856.

¹⁶⁶ McTavish, Behind the Palisades, p. 60.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

he took responsibility for it, previous librarians having neglected to keep good records of its holdings or the locations of books loaned out. It is clear however, that it was not just a large collection of books, but an organized library for which books and periodicals were systematically collected.¹⁶⁶

The exact composition of the collection at York Factory cannot be ascertained. No catalogue of the library survives and the collection itself dissipated over the years.¹⁶⁹ Many of the volumes from post subscription libraries found their way to the Hudson's Bay House library for which a catalogue was created in 1932. This catalogue suggests that like the Red River Library, post subscription libraries contained a lot of technical and reference works. However, they also included many works on history, natural history, travel, exploration and biography, and unlike the Red River Library the bulk of these collections was literary. Shakespearean plays, poetry by Burns, Byron, Longfellow, and Tennyson and novels by Scott, Dickens, Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton, Tackery, Trollope, and Stevenson all were represented.¹⁷⁰ Indeed reading tastes in the fur trade appear to have been quite conventional and post libraries probably differed very little from collections found in public and subscription libraries elsewhere in the English speaking world. To some extent this probably reflects the control exerted over post libraries by company officers and missionaries who as

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60-1.

¹⁶⁹ A good number of the books from the York Factory Library however, have been identified and gathered back together by Ms. Judith Beattie of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives where they now repose as part of the Archives library.

¹⁷⁰ See Ralph Parsons, *Catalogue of the Fur Trade Library* (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay House, 1932).

George Simpson McTavish reveals exercised a disproportionate influence over the selection of library materials. For them reading was valuable not only as a means of self-improvement and moral education, but as a more "civilized" recreational alternative to other potential pastimes like excessive drinking.

At Churchill no equivalent institution to the York Factory Library developed. Newspapers and other reading materials did find their way there,¹⁷¹ but Churchill was much too small and isolated a post for a subscription library. Of course, residents of Churchill could belong to the York Factory Library, but whether any availed themselves of this opportunity is unknown. The difference in recreational resources between a major fur trade centre like York Factory and an outpost like Churchill is starkly revealed in examining reading habits at both posts. The library at York was just one recreational resource denied to company employees whose careers took them to outposts.

While many fur traders spent part of their leisure hours reading, some went one stage further and tried their hands at writing themselves. Company officers maintained an extensive correspondence both with the Governor and committee in London, each other, and friends in Britain or Canada. Letters from home were read and reread and were described as "a great treat" though a pleasure mixed "with some painful feelings". They emphasized the loneliness and isolation of fur trade life at the same time as they provided welcome news of events in the outside world.¹⁷² Nor were officers alone in

¹⁷¹ See for example, HBCA:B..239/c/3, fo.103, Robert Harding to John Charles, 8 April 1838.

¹⁷² This point is made with some literary flourish in PAC:MG19 D23, "Unfinished Journal of a Clerk", p. 5, 16 August 1828.

their interest in correspondence with the outside world. Many tradesmen and labourers, especially those from the Orkneys were literate, and in 1765 when the supply ship for Prince of Wales's Fort failed to stop at Stornoway a number of the men stationed there petitioned to be sent home unsuccessfully - in protest at having to spend two years without news from family or friends.¹⁷³

A handful of individuals had even more ambitious literary aims and a surprising number of fur trade figures wrote books which were published either at the time or in later years. Fur trade authors who resided at York Factory and Churchill include David Thompson, Samuel Hearne, James Isham, Andrew Graham, Edward Umfreville, Joseph Robson, Henry Kelsey, and Anthony Henday. Most of their works fall into the categories of travel and exploration literature, natural history, and accounts of fur trade life, but some fur trade authors struck out in unusual literary directions. Kelsey's account of his travels for example is partially written in verse and another resident of York, Dr. William Smellie, also published verse. Smellie, who served as the post surgeon at York from 1845 to 1849, confessed in the preface to The Sea, Sketches of a Voyage to Hudson's Bay; and Other Poems that during his stay at York he spent many hours "in dalliance with the Muse".¹⁷⁴ Modern readers may well wonder how profitable this dalliance was,¹⁷⁵ but it is interesting that he sought to turn his experience in the

¹⁷³ HBCA:A.11/14, fo.22, Annual Letter from Prince of Wales's Fort 1765.

¹⁷⁴ The Scald [William Smellie], The Sea; Sketches of a Voyage to Hudson's Bay; And Other Poems (London: Hope & Co., 1855), p. vii.

¹⁷⁵ For example:

And now the breeze was falling fast away,
And daylight past advancing to decay;
In the smooth waters of the sea

fur trade into inspiration for literature. Robert Michael Ballantyne, who was stationed at York for a time in the 1840's, enjoyed much greater success as an author. His career in the fur trade was mostly undistinguished, but he drew on it as an author to produce three very successful boy's adventure novels: Ungava, The Young Fur Traders, and Hudson Bay.

Occasionally other individuals at York Factory and Churchill also "dallied with the muse". William Todd, a surgeon at York in the 1820's, has been credited with writing a satirical lampoon of the idiosyncracies of John Franklin and the other members of his first polar expedition.¹⁷⁶ Nor was music neglected at company posts. While there were no individuals who distinguished themselves in quite the same fashion as York and Churchill's authors did, fiddles, drums, guitars, pianos, organs and other instruments all found their way out to bayside posts. Dancing was an important part of many holiday celebrations, and singing was part of the work routine on canoe and boat brigades. Slightly more uncommon were those who sought to express themselves through painting or drawing, but they were not unheard of. At

The white beluga sported merrily

A mongrel crew they were as e'er pulled o'er
 In boat of six from any stranger shore -
 Canadians, Metifs, Crees, Hebridean Gaels,
 And wandering natives of Orcadian dales.
 In Indian garb those motley settlers wear,
 Gaudy yet homely, makes a stranger stare;
 The garnished mocassin of Tawdry show,
 The scarlet sash, and moose or grey capot,
 With ornamental work for various needs,
 Tinsel of quills, and party coloured beads.
 Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁷⁶ See Margaret Arnett MacLeod and Richard Glover, "Franklin's First Expedition As Seen By The Fur Traders," The Polar Record, 15, 98 (1971): 669-682. James Hargrave also tried his hand at journal writing. See PAC:MG19 D23, "Unfinished Journal of a Clerk", which has been attributed to Hargrave.

York Factory, for example, an unknown artist painted a series of lively scenes of fur trade life on shelving in the depot building.¹⁷⁷ Samuel Hearne produced a number of illustrations for his book as did James Isham. George Barnston commissioned James Hargrave to acquire a set of drawings from an unnamed artist at Red River probably Peter Rindisbacher.¹⁷⁸ Hargrave himself decorated his residence at York with engravings, and the officers' winter mess boasted a large portrait of Admiral Lord Nelson on one wall and a scene of the Battle of Trafalgar on the other.¹⁷⁹

Individual fur traders also maintained a number of other cultural interests. At Churchill in the 18th century it became popular to visit the ruins of Prince of Wales's Fort as a kind of sight seeing tour.¹⁸⁰ Others collected "curiosities",¹⁸¹ and in 1756 something of an archaeological dig was organized at Prince of Wales's Fort. A variety of items ranging from tools to "Iron Caps" were found near the factory gates: a cache of artifacts left behind by the Munk expedition.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ See Gary Adams, "Art and Archaeology at York Factory," *The Beaver*, 313,1 (Summer 1982): 38-42.

¹⁷⁸ PAC:MG19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, reel C73, George Barnston to James Hargrave, 14 November 1824, pp. 44-5.

¹⁷⁹ Hargrave, *Letters*, p. xlii; Ballantyne, *Hudson Bay*, p. 102; and Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 236, Letitia Hargrave to Florence Mactavish, 8 September 1848. Joseph Colen also collected prints. See HBCA:A.5/4, fo.51d, London committee to John Ballenden, 31 May 1799.

¹⁸⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/186, fo.55, 15 September 1852; B.42/a/188, fo.35d, 7 April 1856 and B.42/a/191, fo.30, 28 June 1865.

¹⁸¹ Although Humphrey Marten suspected that one such collector, Alfred Robinson, did so as a cover for private trade. HBCA:B.239/a/86, fo.4d 5, 10 October 1785.

¹⁸² HBCA:B.42/a/46, fo.33-33d, 14 May 1756.

Collecting specimens and artifacts for museums and scientific societies like the Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh and later the Smithsonian Institute in Washington was a common activity. As early as 1762 the London committee requested that samples of plants be sent from Churchill and York Factory,¹⁶³ and by the early 1770's plants, stuffed birds and animals, even a few live specimens had been shipped back to Britain.¹⁶⁴ In the 19th century specimen collecting became even more popular, and almost every type of natural history specimen which could be collected and shipped back to Britain, Canada or the United States was.¹⁶⁵ In fact a number of fur trade employees stationed at York and Churchill like Thomas Hutchins, Andrew Graham, and Samuel Hearne made significant contributions to 18th century natural history, particularly to Thomas Pennant's Arctic Zoology and John Latham's A General Synopsis of Birds. Fur traders also had a great and occasionally scholarly interest in meteorology. Often this interest was represented by nothing more experimentally rigorous than setting barrels out in winter to see how fast they froze and burst, or freezing mercury in a bullet mould so as to shoot it through a board.¹⁶⁶ More serious studies were conducted, however. Detailed meteorological records were kept at both York and Churchill, and in 1835 considerable efforts were made to determine the depth of permafrost at York, its temperature, and the composition of the

¹⁶³ HBCA:A.5/1, fos.48-48d, London committee to Ferdinand Jacobs, 25 May 1762, and London committee to Moses Norton, 25 May 1762.

¹⁶⁴ Moses Norton for example attempted to send two live elks to Britain in 1767. HBCA:A.5/1, fo.88d, London committee to Moses Norton, 25 May 1768.

¹⁶⁵ Specimen collecting is discussed in some detail in Gregory Thomas, "The Smithsonian and the Hudson's Bay Company," Prairie Forum, 10, 2(Fall 1985): 283-305.

¹⁶⁶ Ballantyne, Hudson Bay, p. 89.

frozen soil.¹⁸⁷ Thomas Hutchins, who served as a surgeon at York in the early 1770's, made scientific observations on the causes and treatment of wind burn and frost-bite.¹⁸⁸ Indeed some years later Hutchins was awarded the Royal Society's Copley Medal for experiments he had done while at Albany on the effects of cold on mercury.¹⁸⁹

Residents of York and Churchill maintained a lively interest in scientific matters, which the company and other organizations like the Royal Society tried to foster. Individuals were sent elaborate advice and equipment to help them with specimen preparations.¹⁹⁰ Other equipment like mathematical instruments, telescopes, maps and globes was also supplied to posts.¹⁹¹ Referring to a collection of globes and maps sent to him in 1791, Joseph Colen remarked that they would "amuse my leisure moments" which as a result he hoped "to turn to advantage".¹⁹²

In 1801, the pioneering British sports historian Joseph Strutt argued that "in order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular

¹⁸⁷ See HBCA:B.239/a/149, fo.10d, 22 October 1835, and fos.12 12d, 2 November 1835.

¹⁸⁸ PAC:MG19 A47, Thomas Hutchins Papers, fos.2 5, "Observations on the Effects of Cold & Their Remedies".

¹⁸⁹ Glyndwr Williams, "Thomas Hutchins", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol.IV, p. 377. Hutchins was one of two Hudson's Bay Company employees to receive the Copley Medal in the 18th century. Christopher Middleton, a ship's captain, was also awarded this medal in 1742.

¹⁹⁰ See for examples, HBCA:A.64/33, Miscellaneous Note Book, fos.2 2d, "Instruction for skinning and Stuffing Birds"; and B.42/c/1, fos.7 8d, Spencer T. Baird, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to Officers in Charge of Fort Churchill, 8 October 1860.

¹⁹¹ HBCA:B.239/aa/1, p. 39 and p. 45, York Factory Inventory 1821.

¹⁹² HBCA:A.11/117, fo.114, Joseph Colen to London committee, 24 September 1791.

people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the Sports and Pastimes most generally prevalent among them".¹⁹³ The study of recreation and leisure in the fur trade reveals several largely unsuspected aspects of life in the Hudson's Bay Company's service. To begin with company employees enjoyed considerable leisure time, and the traditions of popular recreation in Britain remained lively and active in the New World. Neither environmental constraints nor the need to secure food, clothing, and shelter so dominated their lives that sports, games and other pastimes played little part in post life. On the contrary company men enjoyed a wide variety of leisure activities which not only provided pleasure in and of themselves but which served several useful social functions as well. Holiday celebrations in particular underlined the ties that bound post communities together, and at York Factory emphasized the British roots of most residents. It is significant that in the 19th century holiday celebrations at York became increasingly elaborate, whereas at Churchill holiday observances were more private and simple. Churchill was a community based largely on an extended kinship network whereas at York the larger complement of men and more sophisticated social structure required greater affirmation of social ties.

Another feature of leisure patterns at York was the development of a subscription library there. Churchill on the other hand was too small and too isolated a settlement to support such a facility, and readers there had to rely exclusively on private book purchases and borrowed reading material from York. At both York and Churchill some company employees pursued

¹⁹³ Joseph Strutt, The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England; Including the Rural and Domestic Recreations, May Games, Mummers, Shows, Processions, Pageants, and Pompous Spectacles, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time (London: William Reeves, 1830), first published 1801, p. xvii.

interests in natural history and specimen collecting, but such amateur intellectual pastimes were more common at York largely because of the much larger complement of officers stationed there, especially in the period after 1821. Indeed rank and status seem to have made a greater difference in employee's leisure and recreational activities at York than at Churchill in the later 19th century.

As in many other features of fur trade life there was little to distinguish York Factory from Prince of Wales's Fort in terms of the sports, games, and other pastimes of their residents up until the late 18th century. Thereafter the leisure patterns and activities of company employees stationed at York and Churchill differed more and more. In one respect, however, experiences at both posts were very similar and paralleled changes social historians have noted in Britain during the same period. The darker side of popular culture and entertainment was under attack from those who sought to civilize and control leisure and recreation activities on both sides of the Atlantic. The shift from "the Roaring Boys to the Boy's Brigade" noted by some British historians was also encouraged at posts like York Factory and Churchill.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (London, 1955), p. 13, quoted in Bailey, "Rational Recreation", p. 360.

Chapter V - The Growth of Non-Trade Institutions at Fur Trade Posts: Education and Religion

In the 18th century education and religion were not totally ignored at fur trade posts like York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort, but they were pursued in a haphazard manner. It was not until the late 18th and early 19th centuries that formal attempts were made to begin a system of schooling at some of the larger fur trade posts or that organizations like the Church Missionary Society began to make their presence felt in company territories. It is a measure of the increasing complexity and sophistication of community life at York Factory that schools and a church were established there. Churchill on the other hand had become too small, too insular, and too marginal in the company's trading system for such non-essential institutions. There is probably no other aspect of post life in which the contrasts between York and Churchill are so striking.

There have been many studies of the history of education in the North-West, though most only begin with the first attempts to establish a formal system of schooling for children in skills like reading and writing.¹ Education is however not necessarily synonymous with schooling. Indian children were educated before mission schools were established,² and so too

¹ Some of the best of these are: Keith Wilson, "The Development of Education in Manitoba." (PhD thesis, Michigan State University, 1967); Robert Walter Gustafson, "The Education of Canada's Indian Peoples: An Experience in Colonialism." (MEd thesis, University of Manitoba, 1978); J.W. Chalmers, "Education and the Honourable Company," Alberta Historical Review, 13, 3 (Summer 1965): 25-28, and Thomas Bredin, "The Red River Academy," The Beaver, 305.3 (Winter 1974): 10-17, and "The Reverend David Jones: Missionary at Red River 1823-38," The Beaver, 312, 2 (Autumn 1981): 47-52.

² D. Bruce Sealey, Education of the Manitoba Metis: An Historical Sketch (Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Education, Native Education Branch, 1977-78) p. 2.

were the children of Hudson's Bay Company men and native women. Children simply learned language and practical social and survival skills without recourse to spelling books or readers. Company employees also were encouraged to learn Indian languages and practical skills like how to hunt, fish and trap, but there is no evidence that any kind of formal instruction was offered at posts in such matters. Still individual officers did produce vocabularies and phrase books in Indian languages which may have been put to use in the training of apprentice officers, and as early as 1710 Henry Kelsey produced a dictionary which the company apparently had printed for use at York Factory.³ James Isham included vocabularies and sample conversations for the use of persons "Residing in North America" in his Observations on Hudson Bay produced in 1743.⁴

In general the company and its officers in the field appear to have relied on the very effective but informal pedagogical technique of learning by doing. The presence of individuals listed as apprentices in personnel records at both York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort from the 1720's onwards indicates that the company did train some employees itself to suit its needs, but the numbers of apprentices were never high. For the most part the company seems to have preferred to hire men who had already acquired skills as clerks or tradesmen before sending them to Hudson Bay.⁵

³ Douglas McKay, The Honourable Company: A History of the Hudson's Bay Company (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), pp. 64-5.

⁴ Isham, Observations, pp. 5-64. In 1845, the London committee sent 6 copies of a Cree grammar written by a former officer, Joseph Howse, to York Factory "for the use of the Apprentice Clerks...to whom a knowledge of that language may be an object of importance." HBCA:A.6/26, fo.170, London committee to James Hargrave, 14 June 1845.

⁵ See Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC", pp.112-13.

Some company employees over the course of their careers earned new job titles and higher wages after they had acquired experience and skills that warranted promotion from the ranks of labourers to cook or steward or fisherman, but there is no evidence that such promotions were the result of any systematic training program.

A laissez-faire approach to education and job training prevailed in company service up until the late 18th century. The establishment of inland posts increased the company's demand for labour at a time when recruiting in Britain was becoming more difficult. The company's need for skilled labour was acute,⁶ and more men in all occupations were needed. Shifting employees from bayside posts into the interior was a partial solution to the problem, but one which made it more difficult to maintain the remaining trade of those posts. It was clear that the company could not maintain its factories on the bay, expand its posts on the Saskatchewan, and compete in the Athabasca without a much larger work force.⁷

The problem of securing a large and suitably skilled work force was compounded by the rival demands for manpower of the American and French wars. The only men the company could hire in the Orkneys by the 1790's were those too short to be accepted by the navy, and according to David Thompson the declining size and vigour of new recruits was obvious. In 1796 the Indian wife of James Spence is reported to have remarked to her husband after seeing the arrival of new company recruits at York: "James, have you not always told me that the people in your country are as numerous as the

⁶ Richard Glover, "Difficulties of the Hudson's Bay Company", p. 244.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 246-252.

leaves on the trees? How can you speak such a falsehood? If there were any more, would these dwarfs have come here?"⁸

The company responded by broadening its recruiting efforts to include Canadiens, Highland Scots, Irishmen and others. It also came to the belated realization that the children of company employees in the North West also offered a large and hitherto almost totally untapped reserve of potential employees. At the same time company employees themselves were increasingly eager to find work for their children with the Hudson's Bay Company. Previously it has been assumed that children born to Indian women and company employees, of all ranks would eventually return to their mothers' families and take up an Indian way of life. Many fathers however had grave misgivings about their children taking up a way of life which they viewed as primitive, heathen and dangerous.⁹

Parallelling changes noted by historians of the family in 18th century Britain, fur trade fathers, beginning with officers and then extending down through the ranks, were prepared to make larger financial and emotional investments in their children.¹⁰ Some established annuities to support their families after they left company service or upon their deaths, but annuities alone could not ensure the futures of children. Increasingly fur trade fathers tried to find husbands for their daughters among the ranks of other company employees and to place their sons in careers either with the

⁸ The navy demanded that men be 5'5" or taller. Company recruiting apparently was limited to those who did not achieve this height. David Thompson, Travels in Western North America 1784-1812, Victor Hopwood (ed.) (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), p. 134.

⁹ Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, p. 97.

¹⁰ Brown, Strangers in Blood, p. 155.

company or outside company territories with British or Canadian firms. Education in the shape of some sort of more formal schooling came to be seen as a means of securing both of these objectives.

by the mid-18th century a handful of company officers had managed to send their sons to Britain to be educated. For example Charles Isham, the son of James Isham, was sent to England in 1763 on the proceeds of his father's estate, and in 1766 he joined the company's service as an apprentice. Seven years later he was made a labourer and it was not until 1789 that he was finally promoted to the ranks of company officer. Isham's case, however, illustrates some of the problems faced by fur trade fathers in the 18th century in finding careers for their mixed-blood sons. Only senior officers could afford to send a son to Britain or Canada to be educated, and they had no assurance that their children would find a career with the Hudson's Bay Company afterwards. Moreover despite the prominence of his father, Charles Isham had to work 23 years before he was promoted to the status of an officer. Although a small number of mixed-blood sons of company employees were hired to serve at York and Prince of Wales's Fort,¹¹ in general the company made little effort to recruit or to train these boys up until the 1790's.

Not even wealthy and well-connected officers could send their daughters back to Britain to be educated. Occasionally officers and servants requested permission to send daughters home, but the London committee normally turned down all such requests as it felt girls "required special

¹¹ For example Thomas and Robert Inksetter or Inkster who served briefly at York in the early 1760's.

care which the ships' captains could not possibly provide".¹² Andrew Graham was allowed to bring his daughter with him when he retired from company service in 1775, but it was only because he was travelling with her that the company relaxed its usual prohibition against letting daughters leave the North-West. Earlier requests by Graham for a passage for his daughter had always been refused.¹³ As a result mixed-blood girls, no matter how prominent their fathers, were usually brought up to be "indistinguishable from the Indians" even down to their names in many cases.¹⁴ The differing experiences of the children of Ferdinand Jacobs illustrate the different treatment of sons and daughters even among the highest ranking officers. Jacob's son, Samuel, was sent home to England to be educated but his daughter, Thucatch, was "brought up among the Home Guard ... and eventually she became the wife of 'one of York[']s best Indian home Guards'".¹⁵

In the 1790's then the coincidence of interests between the company which needed employees and company men who were eager to find careers for their sons in company service and non-Indian spouses for their daughters made the question of education at company posts more pressing. The first indication that the Hudson's Bay Company was willing to assume some responsibility for the education of its employees' children came in 1794. That year the London committee had primers and spelling books sent out to its bayside posts for the use of the children there. York Factory was sent

¹² Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, p. 96.

¹³ HBCA:A.6/12, fo.45d, London committee to Joseph Richards, 4 May 1775.

¹⁴ Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, p. 96.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

100 primers and Churchill 50 because of its smaller size.¹⁶ The committee expressed the hope that "much good will be the result of your care and attention to their [the children's] improvement". Actual teaching was left as the responsibility of parents however,¹⁷ and the company limited its efforts simply to providing teaching materials. How these primers were used is not recorded in post records, but Moose Factory journals mention that children were "at their Books" in the late 1790's and the same may also have been true at York and Churchill.¹⁸

Sending out spelling books was a far cry from a system of schooling and represented only a modest step forward from the "ad hoc" arrangements of an earlier period, but it was not the company's only educational reform at the time. From at least the 1720's on the company had employed apprentices at York and Churchill. Most of those listed as apprentices in personnel records prior to 1800 were actually apprentice clerks though a few became labourers on the completion of their apprenticeships. In the period before 1800 apprenticeship at company posts was not apparently directed at either training tradesmen or offering employment to the sons of company employees.¹⁹

The first identifiable mixed-blood apprentices at York Factory were George Ross, John Inkester and Joseph Cook, whose appointments were

¹⁶ HBCA:A.6/15, fo.11d, London committee to Churchill, 29 May 1794, and B.239/4/78, fo.5, London committee to York Factory, 29 May 1794.

¹⁷ Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, p. 103.

¹⁸ Jennifer Brown, "A Colony of Very Useful Hands", p. 39.

¹⁹ See Chapter II, "Social Structure", Tables 1 and 2, pp. 46 and 47.

confirmed by the London committee in 1801.²⁰ Between 1821 and 1870 some 26 apprentices, not counting apprentice clerks or postmasters, served at York Factory. All but two of them were designated in company personnel records as "native" or born in the North-West. Well over 90% of these apprentices at York therefore were the children of company employees.²¹ At Churchill there were five apprentices over the same period, all of them native.²² Among these five there were two apprentice coopers and two apprentice interpreters. Normally at Churchill the only tradesmen in the 19th century were coopers and blacksmiths, so no other trades could have been taught there. Norman Marten, who was first listed as an apprentice interpreter in 1864, appeared simply as a labourer in 1869, suggesting either that he abandoned his apprenticeship or that in some cases signing on as an apprentice was simply a way of getting onto the company's books.²³ At York Factory apprenticeships took a much more varied form. There were apprentice boatbuilders, tinsmiths, blacksmiths, coopers, joiners, carpenters, store porters, sailors and even an apprentice labourer, though it is hard to know what skills the latter was taught. The greater variety of work carried on at York and the larger component of tradesmen there ensured that York could act as a centre for training new employees in a variety of skills. Philip Goldring has surveyed the numbers of apprentices in the entire Northern Department at ten year intervals between 1830 and 1870. In 1840 two of the eight apprentices in the Northern Department were stationed at York. In

²⁰ HBCA:B.239/b/78, fo.36, Annual Letter to York Factory, 20 May 1801.

²¹ Payne, York Factory, pp.334-352.

²² See HBCA:B.239/g/1 to B.239/g/6.

²³ See HBCA:B.239/g/42 and B.239/g/46.

1850, eight of twenty apprentices were stationed at York and in 1860 four of twelve thus during the years of York's greatest influence between one quarter and two fifths of all apprentices were trained there.²⁴

Apprenticeships only partially satisfied the company's need for skilled employees and the desire of company servants to find careers for their sons in the fur trade. While a training system of a sort, it was not the formal system of schooling many desired, nor did it offer any solution to the problem of educating and placing daughters. Moreover apprentices never made up more than a tiny fraction of the company's total work force. In 1850, for example, there were 26 apprentices in the entire Northern Department out of a total work force of 492 men or about 5% of the total.²⁵ The same year apprentices represented about 13% of all "native" employees. This suggests that apprentices were a valuable means of training and recruiting the children of company employees but never the main means of doing so.²⁶

In 1806 the London committee proposed the creation of a formal system of schooling at its bayside posts and described the benefits it thought such a school system would bestow on both the company and the children so educated:

we have thought it would be advisable, to instruct the Children belonging to our Servants in the Principles of Religion & teach them from their Youth, reading, writing, & Arithmetic also accounts which we

²⁴ See Goldring, Papers: Volume I, p. 81 and Payne, York Factory, pp. 339-348. In using Goldring's figures apprentice postmasters were not included as they were considered gentlemen, not servants, albeit gentlemen of "the lowest grade".

²⁵ Goldring, Papers: Volume I, p. 71 and p. 81. This was the highest proportion of the total work force for the years Goldring surveyed. In other years they made up about 2.5-3% of the total.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

should hope would attach them to our service & in a few Years become a small Colony of very useful hands.²⁷

The committee went on to suggest that while it might be difficult to secure the services of clergymen to act as teachers and to provide religious instruction, "there would be less difficulty in sending out persons merely to serve as Schoolmasters".²⁸ The response from York Factory was very favorable to the idea:

This benevolent proposition of your Honors ought to excite grateful sensations in the hearts of your servants and doubly excite them in the promotion of your concerns ... [the] Schoolmaster ought to be steady & if of advanced age his success might be greater, [for] the sending of Children to the Factory will depend upon the compliance of the Parents.²⁹

In general the idea of schools was well received at the bayside posts and the following year the London committee remarked in its annual letters to Churchill, York Factory, Severn and other posts that it was pleased the idea of educating children had "been received with Gratitude" at those posts. But the committee had difficulty in deciding how exactly to set these schools up. It included with its annual letters a lengthy outline of how it wished the schools to be operated, but it also requested that officers at their factories comment on these proposals. In the interim the committee sent out school books and suggested that post surgeons "who must have much leisure time, will cheerfully engage in this useful Service". Anticipating the claims that surgeons had no training as schoolmasters the committee argued that teaching children did not require "any very particular

²⁷ HBCA:A.6/17, fo.80d, London committee to York Factory, 31 May 1806.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ HBCA:B.239/b/79, fos.50d-51, York Factory to London committee, 31 May 1806.

Studies or Qualifications ... while his pupils are learning with a little attention he will always find himself sufficiently prepared for their progressive improvement".³⁰ Although the committee did not feel teaching required any special skills they did promise some small extra payment for the person who took on the job.

The committee's "School Instructions" are interesting not only for the light they shed on ideas about education in the early 19th century, but also for the strongly paternalistic role the committee envisioned for itself and the governing councils of its posts. The benefits the company hoped would accrue from the scheme are also equally plain. It proposed that schools would be established at the "Chief Factories" only, but that children from those factories and inland posts could attend. Instruction was to be in reading, writing, arithmetic and the principles of religion. Children would be admitted "without distinction" at the age of five years, and schooling would last for seven years or until they were employed as apprentices or in some other capacity with the company. Children of company employees, so long as their fathers remained in the service, children of employees who had died in the North-West, and children of chiefs of trading tribes all could be admitted, but they had to be christened. Parents were responsible for clothing their children properly and decently; their accounts would be charged for any clothing supplied by the company. The council at the factory was responsible for admitting children to the school and the schoolmaster was to have a place on the council. Children could be refused for health or behaviour reasons, and they could be dismissed for the same

³⁰ HBCA:A.6/17, fo.112d, London committee to Churchill, 31 May 1807. Similar comments were included in letters sent to York, Severn, Moose, Albany and other posts.

reasons. An early start to instruction was felt to be most important, but older children could be admitted to the school at the discretion of the factory council. The committee also wanted a detailed school register to be kept and sent to them. Regulations for these schools were to be as follows.

Fixed Hours for Attendance in Order to encourage a habit of Regularity. The Hours will be settled according to the Season & the occupations at the Factory.

The school should meet twice a day with an intermedial time of relaxation rather than too long attendance which is irksome to Children.

When out of School the Children should be employed as their ages will allow in useful habits ...

A short prayer previous to the Business of the day.

On Sundays the Children will attend Divine Service perform'd as usual, they will likewise attend the Readings on that day suited to their Capacities.

It is particularly recommended that Children should not be taught to Read out of the Bible or new Testament, these Books not to be given them till they can read currently & understand them.

The Children's Writing Books are to be sent home annually that the Committee may judge of their progress.³¹

The response from York Factory to the committee's proposal was both lengthy and equally revealing of company employees' educational expectations for their children. Their concern that post schools address the problem of educating daughters as well as sons was clear, as was the idea that schooling ought to limit the influence of the childrens' mothers.

³¹ HBCA:A.6/17, fos.119-120d, "School Instructions". The committee's concern that the hours of instruction not be too irksome and its opposition to the notion of teaching reading from the Bible seem relatively progressive for the early 19th century. The use of schooling to inculcate habits of punctuality is also an interesting comment on committee members' views of the purpose of education.

Acculturation to non-native values was seen as an integral part of any school system in the North-West, at least by fur trade fathers.

In the first instance it is the anxious desire of every parent that the happiness resulting from Education & Religion should be imparted without distinction to the Children of both sexes & that the female youth in particular should experience that delicacy & attention to their persons their peculiar situation requires - Native women as attendants on these young persons seems improper - their society would keep alive the Indian language & with it, its native superstition which ought to be obliterated from the mind with all possible care It is therefore humbly suggested that a female from England of suitable abilities and good moral character accompanying the schoolmaster would obviate the necessity of employing such attendants & the cleanliness of the Children & domestic Economy of the seminary under the superintendence of a respectable Matron, would, we have no doubt be equal to the wishes of your Honors & promise to the undertaking, that success, which could not be expected from a more limited regulation - The expenses necessarily incurred in forwarding this benevolent design, would, as far as your Honors thought proper be cheerfully sustain'd by those whose children received the benefit of the institution - The residence of the Children & their instructors would be most convenient at a short distance from the Factory, where firewood & country provisions, could with little difficulty be procured on the spot - Many places of this kind are to be found in the Vicinity of York & such retired situations would not only estrange the Children from their Indian acquaintance, but present other advantages friendly to the progress of Education morality and good order ...³²

That fall a school was established at York Factory, though not under the supervision of the surgeon and not exactly in the form envisioned by either the council at York or the London committee. Journal entries indicate the school was opened on October 1807 and operated intermittently over the winter and spring.³³ The schoolmaster was a Mr. Garrock, who probably deserves the title of the first school teacher in the Canadian West. Personnel records for the period are so sketchy that it is not clear whether he was hired as a schoolmaster or just took on the job. Post

³² HBCA:B.239/b/79, fos.53d-54, York Factory to London committee, 28 September 1807.

³³ See HBCA:B.239/a/114, fo.2d, 14 October 1807 and fo.6d, 7-13 March 1808

records describe him as a "diligent" teacher, but he was also described as "attentive to the Guns & traps brings in a fox at times ... and grows a good partridge hunter."³⁴ Such journal entries suggest teaching was not his sole or even primary function, and he soon handed over his teaching responsibilities to a new man, Mr. Geddes.

In 1808 the company sent out men who were later listed as schoolmasters in personnel records to York Factory, Albany, and Eastmain. They appear to have been hired on five year contracts, and were paid £30 per annum. There was also a schoolmaster listed on the books for Moose Factory though he had probably entered company service in 1797 in some other capacity.³⁵ No schoolmaster appears to have been sent to Churchill. Nor do post journals for Churchill mention the existence of a school. Correspondence books for the period are equally mute on the subject, and the council at Churchill apparently did not reply to the London committee's school proposals in 1807. Why this should have been so is a matter of speculation. In 1807 Churchill was not as important a post as York, but it was still roughly similar in size. Perhaps the residents of Churchill simply had no interest in the establishment of a school there or it was felt York was close enough for children from Churchill to be sent there if necessary.

In the fall of 1808, Mr. Geddes re opened the school at York. Initially he had only four full-time students: Catherine Sinclair, John and Mary Bunn, and Harriet Ballandine. Joseph Cook was described as only an occasional student.³⁶ In June 1809 three more of William Hemmings Cook's

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See HBCA:A.30/11, List of Servants 1812.

³⁶ HBCA:B.239/a/115, fo.2, 9 September 1808.

sons were enrolled, Jerry, Charles, and Richard.³⁷ By August the school was reported to have grown to a student population of eleven.³⁸ Geddes, like Garrock, does not seem to have worked exclusively as a teacher, and he too was occasionally reported to be off hunting. In his absence, however, the school was not closed, and either the surgeon, Mr. Bunn or James Dibble acted as schoolmaster.³⁹

In 1809 the London Committee was informed that "the School Establishment is proceeding under the happiest presages of Success" and samples of the students' work were sent to London as proof of their progress.⁴⁰ Hard as it may be to imagine the governors of the Hudson's Bay Company studying student note books at their meetings, they had requested that examples of student work be sent to them in their school proposal of 1807, and York complied. A small house was even built to accommodate students, and the old Beer Shed was converted for use as a "Winter School Room".⁴¹ Yet in spite of all this activity and interest, references to the operation of the school at York cease soon thereafter.

York's schoolmaster, Mr. Geddes, was still listed as employed in that capacity up to 1813 in personnel records, but whether or not the school was still in operation cannot be determined. By 1813, the schoolmasters at Albany and Eastmain had been given new titles as sloopmaster and district

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.17d, 2 June 1809.

³⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/116, fo.23d, 28 August 1809.

³⁹ See for examples, HBCA:B.239/a/115, fo.5, 30 September 1808 and B.239/a/116, fo.9, 3 January 1810.

⁴⁰ HBCA:B.239/b/79, fo.59d, York Factory to London committee, 14 September 1809.

⁴¹ HBCA:B.239/a/116, fo.1d, 18 September 1809 and fo.3, 3 October 1809.

master respectively, neither of which would have left them much time or opportunity to keep up their teaching.⁴² It would seem that the company, having hired these men for five years as an experiment, dropped the idea and either found new occupations for their schoolmasters or let them leave company service without replacement. These first schools were probably dropped as part of Andrew Wedderburn Colville's austerity measures introduced in 1811 to help the company compete more effectively with the Nor'Westers in the interior, though surviving company records never actually say so. The establishment of the Red River Settlement in 1812 also made it possible to contemplate establishing a major residential school in the interior to which children could be sent from across the company's domains. The London committee had in fact toyed with such an idea in 1809,⁴³ and in 1820 when the Reverend John West was sent to Red River as the company's chaplain one of his responsibilities was to be the establishment of a school there.⁴⁴

Between 1810 and 1820 there is no mention of schooling in post records for York Factory, and John West on his arrival there in 1820 remarked upon the number of "children running about, growing up in ignorance and idleness" - a comment which suggests that no schooling was provided at York at the time.⁴⁵ West proposed that another school be established upon a regularly

⁴² See HBCA:A.30/12, List of Servants 1813.

⁴³ HBCA:B.239/b/78, fo.73, London committee to York Factory, 20 May 1809.

⁴⁴ John West, The Substance of a Journal During a Residence at the Red River Colony (East Ardsley, Yorkshire: E.R. Publishers, 1968), first published 1824, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

organized system⁴⁶ and he convinced one of the York Factory Indians to send a son inland with him to be educated. The boy was baptized and given the name John Hope; along with a second Indian boy from Norway House named Henry Budd, he became one of the first pupils at the school that West proceeded to open at Red River. That school, later named the Red River Academy, received a number of Indian and mixed-blood students from York Factory over the years including the children of William Todd, an officer at York.⁴⁷ Still a school at Red River was not an entirely practical solution to the problem of educating the children of York Factory, and for the most part it remained true that only officers could afford to send their children to Red River or back to Britain for schooling.⁴⁸

The idea of establishing a school at York Factory to serve the needs of post residents was not completely abandoned. In 1834 the post journal mentions the existence of an evening school for tradesmen, labourers and children.⁴⁹ The journal entry for 21 October 1840 describes the operation of this school, its students, and the company's contribution to its success:

An Evening School conducted by William Anderson the Store Porter was this day opened for the instruction of the young apprentices under contracts to the company at this place which is also attended by all the children of the Tradesmen, and by such of the servants as are desirous of improving their education. - The hours of attendance are from 6 to 9 O'Clock - candles, likewise Paper,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, A77, Memoranda relating to the Settlement at Red River, p. 72, and Bredin, "Red River Academy", p. 11.

⁴⁸ The practice of sending sons home to Britain to be educated never entirely died out, even after schooling was available in the North-West. The Hargraves, for example, sent their son Joseph James to Scotland. See Hargrave, *Letters*, pp. 144-5, 293-4 and 299-300. See also Brown, "Ultimate Respectability", parts one and two.

⁴⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/148, fo.22d, 10 November 1834.

Pens and Books for the apprentices, are supplied them gratuitously, and it is hoped that the instruction thus afforded them will not only be of use to them individually but tend to render them more efficient servants to their employers when they come to years of maturity.⁵⁰

The evening school was generally run from late October to the end of March or April - the same period as the factory operated on shortened winter hours. At the end of the year students were examined on their progress in reading, writing, and arithmetic and on occasion prizes were distributed "among those who had shown the greatest and most rapid proficiency".⁵¹ The company limited its support of this school to candles and writing materials, although it did allow an extra payment of £5 per annum to the storekeeper for running the school.⁵²

The presence of resident missionaries at York after 1854 meant the expansion of the school's operations. William Mason, the first of the Church Missionary Society's ministers to be stationed at York, was eager to lend a hand with the school.⁵³ At his instigation Indian men and women were

⁵⁰ HBCA:B.239/s/154, fos.12d-13, 21 October 1834.

⁵¹ See for examples, HBCA:B.239/a/161, fo.30, 25 March 1845 and B.239/a/154, fo.40, 23 March 1841.

⁵² PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, A87, J.P. Gardiner, Journal 1858-59, 25 October 1858.

⁵³ The Church Missionary Society was one of the two major Anglican missionary organizations along with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospels in Foreign Parts active in the North-West in the 19th century. The CMS was founded in 1799 and had a more Evangelical membership than the older Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Both organizations had roughly parallel aims, but the CMS seems to have been slightly more active in missionary work with Indian groups, while the SPG was more likely to provide ministers for European and mixed-blood congregations. See Eugene Stock, The History of the Church Missionary Society Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 3 vols.

included in the school, and Mrs. Mason began an infant school.⁵⁴ Missionaries also encouraged continuing the school into the summer months so that Indians and their children could attend.⁵⁵ Both Mason and his successor J.P. Gardiner were primarily interested in teaching Indians, for as Mason remarked "A Mission without a School & School Master is incomplete".⁵⁶ They helped with the post school - Gardiner for example taught English in 1858 because the storekeeper was Norwegian⁵⁷ - but they did not entirely supplant the night school for tradesmen and apprentices. Their mission school was in effect a second educational institution at York.

By contrast Churchill records contain only passing references to the existence of a school there in 1857-58. The school is described as a Sabbath school, and there is no indication that it operated either before or after 1857-58.⁵⁸ The last mention of the school at Churchill occurred when one of the post dogs bit William Oman Junior on his way to school in retaliation for a kick the unfortunate dog had received from another of Churchill's students.⁵⁹

While it is possible that schools were operated at Churchill without any other mention, the contrast with York Factory is stark. At York Factory

⁵⁴ PAC:MG17, CMS, A94, William Mason Journal 1855, 2 July 1855, and William Mason to Secretary of CMS, 24 May 1856.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1860-16, 11 June 1861 and 19 July 1861.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, A94, William Mason Journal 1855, 10 July 1855.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1858-59, 25 October 1858.

⁵⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/189a, fo.13d, 19 October 1857; fo.28d, 24 February 1858; and fo.56d, 10 October 1858.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, fo.56d, 10 October 1858.

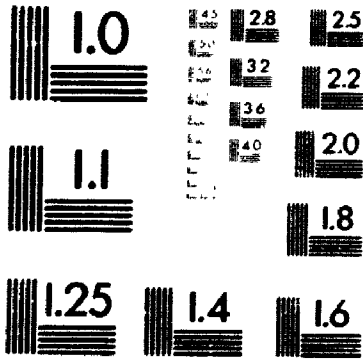
any proposal to institute a formal system of education was eagerly taken up and the residents of York managed to establish and maintain a school with only minimal support from the company twenty years before a missionary was stationed there. Churchill on the other hand seems not to have responded to the London committee's proposal in 1807 and no school was established there. While some children from Churchill did become apprentices, it was never a major centre for training apprentices itself in the period up to 1870. Nor did the sort of night school for tradesmen, apprentices, and children created at York develop at Churchill.

A similar pattern may be seen in the area of religion. As early as 1680 the Hudson's Bay Company instructed its officers "to have public prayers and reading of the Scriptures or some other religious Books wheresoever you shall be resident, at least on the Lord's days."⁶⁰ Throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries similar exhortations were delivered to officers in charge of posts which suggests practice fell short of the committee's ideal in many instances. In the 18th century there were officers at York and Churchill who took their responsibilities for providing some sort of religious observance very seriously. In the early 1750's for example, James Isham regularly reported the sermons he had read to the men in post journals and the readings for the day. Apparently Isham possessed a number of published collections of sermons from which he chose some suitable message for York's residents.⁶¹ By contrast other officers were less

⁶⁰ Quoted in Morton, *Canadian West*, p. 81.

⁶¹ See HBCA:B.239/a/34-36, York Factory Post Journals 1750-52. The collections of sermons Isham used included seven volumes of Tillotson's *Sermons*, two volumes of Boyle's *Collection of Sermons* and Bishop Burnet's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*.

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conventional in their religious views and practices. David Thompson reported that while Samuel Hearne had sermons read to the men at Prince of Wales's Fort on Sundays, Hearne himself was a deist and follower of Voltaire.⁶² Hearne for his part had described his superior at Prince of Wales's Fort, Moses Norton, as a man who lived "in open defiance of every law, human and divine".⁶³

In fact conditions at company posts in the 18th and early 19th centuries did not always allow for regular services, or for the keeping of Sundays as a day of rest. At York Factory in the 1750's and 1760's it was occasionally reported that trading Indians were angered by Isham's attempts to avoid trading on Sundays. Significantly their desires took precedence and Isham either had to mollify their anger by giving them drink and "burgoe", a porridge-like dish made by boiling oatmeal, bread and prunes together, or by consenting to trade.⁶⁴ Similarly work at the post was on occasion so pressing that Sunday had to be turned into a regular work day. When Hearne returned to Churchill in 1783 to re establish a post there, the men worked on Sundays for more than a month until construction was far enough advanced to allow a more normal work week.⁶⁵ By contrast when York Factory was flooded in 1788 a few men refused to work as ordered on Sunday,

⁶² Thompson, *Travels in Western North America*, pp.65-6.

⁶³ Hearne, *A Journey to the Northern Ocean*, p. 39.

⁶⁴ See HBCA:B.239/a/34, fo.34, 19 May 1751; B.239/a/35, fo.36, 14 June 1752; and B.239/a/37, fo.26d, 23 June 1754. On one occasion in 1763 Sunday services had to be postponed because the Indians camped at York were drunk. B.239/a/50, fo.39, 26 June 1763.

⁶⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/103, fo.6, 19 December 1783. Thomas Stayner also reported substituting a week day holiday when pressures of work required Sunday labour. See HBCA:B.42/a/118, fo.20, 29 June 1793.

though Joseph Colen remarked that "they were not so tenacious of their Conscience in ... working for themselves".⁶⁶

Nevertheless, despite the complaints of missionaries in later years that services were not always held on Sundays, they do seem to have been kept as holidays at bayside posts. At York and Churchill journal entries for Sundays rarely report any work being conducted, though often men from the hunting and firewood camps travelled back to their tents on Sunday. Many company employees, perhaps most, saw Sundays as a day off work to be enjoyed as they saw fit: hunting, fishing, or even going for a walk.⁶⁷ As a result religious observances were not necessarily seen as an important part of this day of rest. As Joseph Isbister remarked in 1750 he had prayers read "but loth are our people to Come to hear.(it is easier to get them to work then to pr vers...)"⁶⁸

The London committee did send out religious books and tracts to be distributed among its employees in the North-West,⁶⁹ along with Bibles and prayer books which at York Factory and Churchill were kept as part of post inventories.⁷⁰ Nevertheless between 1713 and 1818 no effort was made to establish clergymen in company territories to minister to either employees

⁶⁶ HBCA:B.239/a/88, fo.43, 11 May 1788

⁶⁷ See for example.HBCA:B.42/a/103, fo.19d, 7 March 1784, or B.42/a/110, fo.22d, 11 May 1788.

⁶⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/36, fo.17, 28 October 1750.

⁶⁹ See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/30, fo.13, 25 December 1747; B.239/a/87, fo.3, 3 September 1786; and A.11/15, fo.110, Samuel Hearne to London Committee, 12 September 1784.

⁷⁰ See for example, HBCA:A.6/8, fo.15d, London committee to York Factory, 16 May 1749, and fo.18, London committee to Prince of Wales's Fort, 16 May 1749.

or Indians, and in general religious observance at company posts depended almost entirely on the whims of the officer in charge. The appointment of John West as chaplain to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1820 was part then of a major shift in company policy towards missionary activity in their territories. Like the Roman Catholic missionaries who settled at Red River in 1818, West was expected to minister not only to the white and mixed blood population at Red River and the posts he visited but also to native groups as well.⁷¹ After a century and a half of trading activity the Hudson's Bay Company was at last prepared to encourage missionary activity and to support the presence of ministers in the North-West.

West visited York Factory every year between 1820 and 1823 when he left the North-West and he also visited Churchill in 1823. During his visits he celebrated several marriages, baptized some children, and gave company officers and men a chance to reveal their Christian zeal. On his visit to York Factory in 1821 he helped Nicholas Garry, a member of the London committee and later Deputy Governor of the company, establish an Auxiliary Bible Society.⁷² This Auxiliary Bible Society raised £130 in aid of the British and Foreign Bible Society, £50 of which came from Garry and the rest from company officers.⁷³ By the following year £260/0/6 had been remitted

⁷¹ West, Substance of a Journal, p. 2. It is interesting to note that the company made little effort to encourage the development of a single "Established" church in its territories. From the start Anglican and Roman Catholic missionaries were allowed, and soon afterwards Methodist missions were also supported.

⁷² Garry was at York Factory to help coordinate the union of the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies.

⁷³ Morton, Canadian West, p. 631, and West, Substance of a Journal, p. 66.

to London presumably to help pay for shipping religious materials to the North-West by the British and Foreign Bible Society.⁷⁴

Between 1823 and 1854, York was visited virtually every year by missionaries of one persuasion or the other, but without much impact on post life. Marriages were solemnized according to Christian ritual, but most had already been contracted by the fur trade practice of country marriage. Children were baptized and some evangelical work among the York Factory Homeguards was done, but religious observance remained erratic. The same was even more true at Churchill, which by the 19th century was no longer visited by supply ships from Britain and therefore could not be easily visited by missionaries on their way in or out of the North-West. In 1841 the post journal for Churchill noted that:

In accordance with instructions received p. schooner. Prayers were read to day and to which the few men & others attended for the first time. these instructions would have been attended to ere this but we had not a sufficiency of Prayer books till the return of our Indians by whom Mr. Hargrave kindly forwarded two.⁷⁵

Even so the pattern of life at Churchill made holding religious services difficult. For much of the year virtually the entire complement of men and their families at Churchill lived outside the post at hunting and wood cutting camps. Prayer books were supplied to them and they were encouraged to spend Sundays "in a proper way", but the officer in charge at Churchill had no way of knowing what his men did on most Sundays - or any other day

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89. Despite this initial flurry of interest no further references to an Auxiliary Bible Society at York were noted by this researcher. It seems to have been largely dependent on the exertions of West and Garry, though West makes no mention of the society on his next visit to York.

⁷⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/175, fo.9d, 5 September 1841.

for that matter.⁷⁶ John West's earlier comments on the Minutes of Council for 1823, which had urged regular Sunday services and which West dismissed as likely to be observed "only when convenient", were almost certainly accurate in the case of posts like Churchill.⁷⁷

Indeed at Churchill the attitude of the officers in charge towards religion mattered relatively little since they spent most of the summer at York, and their winters living almost alone in the post. In 1864 one journal entry reads "no one to come to prayer all of[f] with there Guns: we have much need of a parson among us".⁷⁸ Occasionally missionaries from York visited Churchill in the 1850's and 60's much as missionaries had passed through York between 1820 and 1854. Reverend Gardiner did try to establish a mission at Churchill in 1862-63 in an attempt to convert the Inuit who visited Churchill but with no success. Within a year he left Churchill in order to return to Britain suffering from "a great deal of Nervous Depression".⁷⁹ It was not until the 1880's that a mission was finally established at Churchill under the care of John Lofthouse.⁸⁰

By contrast efforts to establish a mission at York Factory, after some initial difficulties with finding a suitable minister, were more successful. In 1850 Bishop David Anderson of Rupert's Land wrote the board of the

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, fo.14d, 21 November 1841.

⁷⁷ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, A77, "Extracts from the Minutes of Council Held at York Factory July 5/1823", pp. 67-70.

⁷⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/190, fo.83, 22 May 1864.

⁷⁹ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, A87, Affidavit of Henry Beddome Surgeon at York Factory, 11 September 1863.

⁸⁰ See Martha McCarthy, Fort Churchill: A Land Use History, Microfiche Report Series no.219, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1985), p.212-213.

Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts with the idea that a minister be sent to York Factory.⁶¹ Anderson's decision to approach the SPG suggests that at least initially his object was a church at York for company employees and their families and that missionary work among the Homeguard was at best a secondary object. Pressing his case again the following year, he pointed out that York Factory was "an important Factory with many Clerks and servants of the Hudson's Bay Company without the means of grace among them".⁶² To strengthen his case Anderson also included a petition from some Indians at York Factory requesting a minister. Anderson noted "It does seem hard that all the Clergymen, coming to the Country land at York, see the Indians there, & pass on to their destinations".⁶³

For all his advocacy no one could be found in Britain to serve at York, so Anderson next proposed that a student from St. John's School in Red River be appointed to the post. Anderson suggested a Mr. Robert McDonald, who was about to be ordained as a deacon and who could speak some Cree and use syllabics. He was also willing to accept a smaller stipend than British ministers.⁶⁴ In a private letter Anderson felt compelled to point out that McDonald was "Country born", that his mother was mixed-blood while his

⁶¹ The Anglican Bishopric of Rupert's Land was established in 1849, and the Reverend David Anderson was appointed its first bishop. The cathedral, St. John's Cathedral, was built at Red River. The early history of this diocese is covered in the Reverend T.C.B. Boon, The Anglican Church from the Bay to the Rockies: a History of the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land and its Diocese from 1820 to 1950 (Toronto: Ryerson, 1962).

⁶² PAC:MG17 B1, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts Papers [SPG], North West Mission, David [Anderson Bishop of] Rupert's Land to the Reverend Mr. Hawkins Secretary SPG, 4 August 1851, p. 627.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ PAC:MG17 B1 SPG, N.W. Mission, David Rupert's Land to Mr. Hawkins, 22 November 1852, p. 632.

father was European, a fact which in the end ruined his chances to take up this mission at York.⁶⁵ While acceptable to the SPG, McDonald was not considered suitable by company officials. According to the official history of the SPG "it was deemed advisable to send a clergyman of greater experience, and as such a one could not be obtained until 1854. ... the mission was undertaken by the C.M.S."⁶⁶ The CMS found a minister for York Factory in James Evan's former assistant at Norway House, the Reverend Mr. William Mason, who had recently left the Methodist Church and been ordained as an Anglican minister.

A parsonage and a church were built at York Factory between 1854 and 1856. The Church itself was consecrated by Bishop Anderson on 16 September 1856 and was named the Church of St. John of York.⁶⁷ The mission at York was not, however, an unqualified success. The church was so cold it could only be used from late spring to early autumn. When the weather became too

⁶⁵ PAC:MG17 B1, SPG, N.W. Mission, David Rupert's Land to Mr. Hawkins, 24 November 1852, p. 635.

⁶⁶ Society for the Propagation for the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Classified Digest of the Records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts 1701-1892 (London: SPG, 1898), sixth edition, p. 179. McDonald eventually became the Archdeacon of Mackenzie River, and had a most distinguished career as a clergyman. Among his other accomplishments: he translated the Bible and the Book of Common prayer into Tukulit. See Eugene Stock, The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Men and Its Work (London: CMS, 1899), vol. II, p. 325.

⁶⁷ The order of service that day has survived.

Hymn 157	W. Mason
A Prayer	The Bishop
Psalm CXXVII &	
(I Peter II 1-10)	W. Mason
The Foundation laid by James Hargrave Esq. C[hief] F[actor]	
Hymn 476	W. Mason
A Prayer and the Blessing	The Bishop

old York residents simply took their prayer books home and services had to be transferred to an old mess room.⁸⁸ Wherever services were held, Mason and his successors J.P. Gardiner and W.W. Kirkby agreed attendance was not high. Many of the men were either Roman Catholics or Presbyterians, or simply uninterested. Mason noted that his services were attended fairly regularly by the officers but by few of the servants.⁸⁹ Kirkby remarked that in 1870 out of 53 people resident at York only about 10 attended services.⁹⁰ Gardiner in particular found it galling that his attempts to limit alcohol consumption and licentious behaviour at Christmas were mostly futile. Similarly his attempts to promote Bible study and conversational classes had little success, and one man informed Gardiner in no uncertain terms that Gardiner would not be seeing him in church but that he was "just as good as many who do go".⁹¹

Missionary work among the Homeguard was slightly more successful, though a far cry from the hopes of men like Gardiner. While at York William Mason arranged for the shipment of a printing press and with the aid of his wife Sophia, a daughter of Chief Factor Thomas Thomas, managed to produce a number of religious texts in syllabics.⁹² Mason and Gardiner in particular tried to provide some education and religious instruction to York's Indians

⁸⁸ PAC:MG17 B2, A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1860-61, 23 September 1860.

⁸⁹ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, A94, William Mason Journal 1855, 22 July 1855.

⁹⁰ PAM:MG1, D16, Roderick Macfarlane Papers, W.W. Kirkby to Roderick Macfarlane, 28 November 1870.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1859-60, 6 October 1859.

⁹² See T.C.B. Boon, Use of Catechisms and Syllabics by the Early Missionaries of Rupert's Land 1820-1880 (Toronto: Church Historical Society, 1960), off-print no. 21, unpaginated; PAC:MG17, B2, CMS, A94, William Mason to Secretary CMS, 1 December 1857.

and claimed some success in securing willing students. In addition a tradition developed at York of holding two or three services every Sunday. The morning and evening services were held in English while the afternoon service was in Cree.⁹³ Of course, the numbers of Homeguards actually converted to Christianity and the nature of their actual beliefs remains a mystery.⁹⁴

In the end what probably matters most about the missionaries' presence at York Factory is not any impact they had on post life. By and large when they attempted to influence behaviour or undercut fur trade traditions like the balls and drinking at Christmas they had little effect. Nor did the simple presence of a missionary suddenly make company employees devout and regular churchgoers. Many continued to see Sunday simply as a day of rest as they had since the 18th century.

What is most significant about the establishment of a church and schools at York Factory, and the failure to establish such institutions at

⁹³ *Ibid.*, A87, J.P. Gardiner Journal 1860-61, 14 October 1860. At Churchill when services were held William Oman and James Dunning acted as translators for any Cree or Chipewyan present. Oman and Dunning were key figures in company operations at Churchill despite being only servants. Oman could speak Cree and Dunning Chipewyan, while most of their ostensible superiors could speak neither. See HBCA:B.42/a/177, fo.5, 17 July 1842.

⁹⁴ As Jennifer Brown and other scholars have shown religious belief among the Indians of the Hudson's Bay area is a complicated matter and not easily summarized. Missionaries almost certainly were overly optimistic in their assessments of their impact and traditional native beliefs were not soon abandoned even among those who were viewed as Christian Indians. See for example J.S.H. Brown, "The Track to Heaven: the Hudson Bay Cree Religions Movement of 1843," in William Cowan (ed.), *Papers of the 13th Algonquin Conference* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982). Robert Harding spoke for many company officers when he noted that after months of supposed great interest in Christianity the Chipewyan visiting Churchill still maintained "their old superstitions". To Harding this was proof that conversion efforts were "lost time" and that any change Christianity had produced among the Chipewyan was "for the worse". HBCA:B.42/a/181, fo.24d, 4 May 1845.

Churchill in the degree to which life in the fur trade and the amenities offered to company employees differed based on place of residence. In the 18th century both York Factory and Churchill were quite similar and at both posts non trade social institutions existed in a kind of embryonic form. Changes in the size and function of these posts within the company's trade system meant that in the years after about 1780 community life at these two posts diverged sharply. At York Factory the community developed a system of schooling largely through its own efforts, and the presence of missionaries exposed employees and their families to a new set of social and moral influences. Churchill on the other hand was, if anything, more insular and isolated as a community in 1870 than it had been in 1780.

Chapter VI - Accident, Disease and Medical Treatment

Few historians have studied the significance of disease and disease treatment in the North-West despite the fact that, as Arthur Ray has observed, Hudson's Bay Company records represent a surprisingly good source of information for medical history.¹ S.E.D. Shortt has remarked that while medical historians in Canada have paid some attention to healing practices among native peoples, for the most part they have been interested in the medical issues and advances of the late 19th and 20th centuries.² As a result very little is known about the health of fur trade company employees or how they dealt with accidental injuries or occurrences of disease.

Employees of the Hudson's Bay Company stationed at York and Churchill actually held widely divergent opinions on the risks entailed in their choice of occupation. Samuel Hearne at Prince of Wales's Fort remarked in a letter to Humphrey Marten that both his men and he were "as usual all in good health", and that Churchill was "the healthiest part in the known world". Indeed Hearne claimed many thought that they "never [grew] any older" while stationed there.³ Other company employees were less convinced that they had found the Fountain of Youth on the shores of Hudson Bay. These subjective perceptions of the health risks of a career in the fur trade varied considerably from post to post and over time. Some men

¹ Arthur J. Ray, "The Diffusion of Disease in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," The Geographical Review, 68, 2 (April 1978): 142 fn.

² See S.E.D. Shortt, "Antiquarians and Amateurs: Reflections on the Writing of Medical History in Canada", in S.E.D. Shortt, (ed.), Medicine in Canadian Society: Historical Perspectives (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981), pp. 1-17.

³ HBCA:B.42/a/94, fo.24, Samuel Hearne to Humphrey Marten, 20 March 1777.

considered York Factory an unhealthy posting: "unfavourable to the constitution of its inhabitants."⁴

Dr. William Ewart has made an estimate of the mortality rate at York Factory for the period between 1714 and 1801. According to his calculations some 64 company employees stationed at York died there during this period: an annual mortality rate of about 15 persons per 1000.⁵ The bulk of company employees were relatively young men ranging in age from their late teens to their forties so a relatively low mortality rate was to be expected. Still as Dr. Ewart points out the mortality rate at York was comparable to, indeed if anything lower than, mortality rates in other colonial communities like 18th century Massachusetts for which figures are available.⁶ Moreover the mortality rate at York was somewhat lower than estimated rates for 18th and early 19th century England.⁷

If York had a reputation in the early 19th century as an unhealthy posting it was almost certainly based on a comparison with conditions at other fur trade posts rather than on a comparison with either Britain or other colonial communities. Overall mortality figures at York simply do not support an argument that the fur trade was a hazardous occupation.

⁴ See for example, Hargrave, *Correspondence*, p. 63, Charles Ross to James Hargrave, 3 February 1831, and p. 252, John Bell to James Hargrave, 30 January 1837.

⁵ William B. Ewart, MD, "Causes of Mortality in a Sub-Arctic Settlement (York Factory Man.), 1714-1848," *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 129 (September 15, 1983): 572.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 573.

⁷ See D.V. Glass, "Population and Population Movements in England and Wales, 1700 to 1850", in D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley (eds.), *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985), p. 241.

According to Dr. Ewart's figures most deaths at York Factory in the 18th century were accidental. Of the 64 company employees who died at York between 1714 and 1801, 11 died from infectious diseases, nine from scurvy, and one from gout. In 12 cases the cause of death was unknown, unreported or could not be determined. Drowning on the other hand was the cause of death in 25 cases. Alcoholism was the primary cause of death in only two cases, while suicide, murder, old age, and accident accounted for the final four deaths at York.⁶ Thus for the 52 deaths for which causes could be determined almost 50% were the result of drowning. By contrast infectious diseases and scurvy caused about 40% of all deaths of company employees, although infectious diseases were a significant cause of death among the native population of York Factory and area.⁶ Rather surprisingly alcoholism, suicide and violence were not significant causes of death at York in the 18th century based on Dr. Ewart's figures.

A similar pattern also prevailed at York Factory in the 19th century and at Prince of Wales's Fort and Fort Churchill in the 18th and 19th centuries. With the possible exception of an outbreak of typhus among new company recruits at York in 1863, infectious diseases and dietary ailments

⁶ Ewart, "Causes of Mortality", p. 572.

⁶ The only smallpox epidemic to reach York occurred in 1781-82, but other diseases like measles, scarlet fever, influenza and typhus also exacted a toll of the native population of the area. See *ibid.*, pp. 572-3, especially Figure 3 "Causes of Death at York Factory, for European and Indian Populations Combined, Between 1801 and 1800". In the 19th century boat and canoe brigades acted as a major means of diffusing infectious diseases making transport centres like York, Norway House, and Red River focal points for outbreaks of disease. At York most victims of these epidemics were native people and the families of company servants. Company employees themselves were less likely to be infected and only in rare instances died. For a study of the diffusion of diseases in the North-West in the mid-19th century see Ray, "Diffusion of Diseases", p. 142-158.

were less likely to cause death among company employees in the 19th than in the 18th century. If anything general standards of health improved at both posts for company employees after about 1800.

Accidents were the most important risk to fur traders' lives and health, though it is important to distinguish between simple mischance and occupational and environmental hazards. The former category of accidents may be passed over quickly. Post records report a number of freakish accidents at both York and Churchill. For example, in 1794, the cook at York was injured when the clapper of the post bell fell off and struck him.¹⁰ Similarly in 1751 a piece of the wall of Prince of Wales's Fort fell and nearly struck Joseph Isbister.¹¹ Such accidents were relatively rare, though on a handful of occasions they produced serious injuries and even deaths. William Auld, for example, had to return to Britain for treatment of injuries he sustained when he fell through a hatch in a warehouse at Churchill in 1804¹², and Oliver Leney died at York in somewhat mysterious circumstances after he fell and hit his head while out collecting water in 1754.¹³ Richard Chirgwen was crushed to death in 1767 at Prince of Wales's Fort when a sloop he was helping to repair slid off its blocks.¹⁴ Although work-related, such accidents were not really part of any sort of pattern of occupational risk. Still many jobs at both York Factory and Churchill were

¹⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/98, fo.12, 2 January 1794.

¹¹ HBCA:B.42/a/38, fo.3, 29 August 1751.

¹² HBCA:B.42/b/47, p. 22, William Auld to J. McNab, 5 July 1804.

¹³ HBCA:B.42/a/37, fo.35d, 7 September 1754.

¹⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/70, fo.3d-4, 21 September 1767.

hazardous to some degree, and company employees were subject to a range of environmental risks.

Perhaps no form of accident was more feared than the threat of fire. Letitia Hargrave even suggested that her husband James was liable to kill himself with worry over the threat of fire at York.¹⁵ Prince of Wales's Fort was constructed primarily from stone, but wood was the basic construction material used in other posts and the threat of fire was very real. Over the years several company posts burned to the ground, including the first post built at Churchill in 1888.¹⁶ A number of fires broke out at both York and Churchill in the 18th and 19th centuries, but none caused more than minor property damage, and all were contained without major mishap. In large measure this can be attributed to the precautions taken by company officers to limit the dangers of fire. Buildings were normally constructed at some distance from one another to hinder the spread of fire, and gunpowder was stored in specially constructed magazines located some distance away from the main post buildings. Similarly other flammable materials like oil were stored in separate warehouses, and cook rooms and tradesmen's shops where fires had to be kept lit on a regular basis were also separated from the main dwelling houses and warehouses.

Many of the fires which did occur were caused by poorly constructed chimneys,¹⁷ and the substitution of metal stoves for open fireplaces in dwelling and cook rooms in the early 19th century probably helped to

¹⁵ Hargrave, Letters, P. 143, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 10 April 1843.

¹⁶ Morton, Canadian West, p. 106.

¹⁷ See for examples, HBCA:B.239/a/78, fo.23, 8 March 1780 and B.239/a/120, fo.8, 12 December 1812.

alleviate the problem. Attempts were made to ensure that chimneys and stove pipes were swept out on a regular basis, and company officers instituted periodic campaigns to ensure lamps and fires were never left to burn untended. In 1778, for example, Walter Briggs was severely reprimanded and forced to apologize to the entire assembled company of men at York for falling asleep with his lamp still burning. Humphrey Marten, the officer in charge of York at the time, ordered that in future all fires and lights were to be extinguished by the post watch, and that no one was to carry fire of any sort from one place to another in the factory except in a special "kettle" to prevent the inadvertent setting of fires.¹⁰ Needless to say such precautions were not always followed. In 1814 for example, a party of settlers bound for Red River forgot to put out their fire and burned their residence at Churchill to the ground.¹⁰

In order to ensure that preventable fires were kept to a minimum James Hargrave at York Factory established a codified set of fire regulations in 1844. These regulations made the post blacksmith responsible for examining all stove pipes once a month. Covered fire shovels were to be used to transport coals from one location to another, and workshop fireplaces and stoves were to be shut down during mealtimes and carefully extinguished with water or snow every evening. Workshops were also to be swept out at least once a week on Saturdays, and shavings and other flammable materials were to be stored well away from stoves. In addition candles were always to be kept

¹⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/78, fo.11d-12, 9 October 1778.

¹⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/140, fo.22d, 8 March 1814.

inside lanterns, and no smoking was allowed in store rooms, the retail shop or ration room.²⁰

Although most fires were caused by human agency, fires caused by lightning strikes were not unknown, and weather conditions at both York Factory and Churchill represented a source of some risk to company employees. Whereas fires produced no deaths and few injuries, the same was not true for other environmental hazards. The violent storms and cold wet weather that characterize climatic conditions on the shores of Hudson Bay were directly or indirectly implicated in a number of serious accidents which befell company employees. In 1802 lightning struck the mainmast of the Beaver brig on a voyage between Severn and York Factory. It shattered the mast and threw the captain and crew to the deck. Fortunately they recovered in time to put out the ensuing fire or all would have perished.²¹ Violent storms also played havoc with shipping at Churchill; on one occasion heavy seas actually drove an overturned boat and its crew ashore when it upset in the mouth of the Churchill River.²² Unfortunately not all accidents had such happy results, and drowning was the single most commonly reported cause of death at York and Churchill in the 18th and 19th centuries. In one accident alone fourteen French soldiers drowned at York in 1782 when several boats ferrying them to shore overturned in the Hayes River.²³

²⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/181, fo.11-11d, 9 November 1844.

²¹ HBCA:B.239/a/106, fo.40, 9 August 1802.

²² HBCA:B.42/a/36, fo.14, 8 October 1750.

²³ HBCA:E.2/12, p. 632. Humphrey Marten suggested the number of drownings may have been as high as 27 men. *Ibid.*, p. 638. These soldiers were members of La Perouse's raiding expedition, and not company employees.

At York a few drownings occurred as a result of swimming accidents, but most took place while loading and unloading the annual supply ship.²⁴ Other occupations like rafting firewood and travelling in canoes and boats on the lakes and rivers around York also constituted a certain risk.²⁵ At York drowning accidents became less common in the 18th century, but they remained among the most significant causes of accidental death.²⁶ At Churchill fewer drownings occurred, perhaps because company employees spent less time there out on the water. The harbour at Churchill allowed the annual supply ship to anchor closer to shore, and by the 18th century Churchill's supply ship had been dropped and the post was supplied from York Factory. In addition, unlike York, Churchill never developed into a major transshipment point for inland posts, so company employees there did not have to do much voyaging on nearby rivers. Whaling operations at Churchill, however, did produce a few boat accidents. In 1668, for example, John Groat was drowned when he fell out of a whale boat.²⁷

Flooding was a serious problem at York, and several near-fatal accidents occurred. Spring floods, following the breakup of the Hayes River, were almost a yearly occurrence, and in 1766 led to moving the

²⁴ Typical of such accidents was "a melancholy affair" in 1770 in which 5 men drowned - 2 from the factory, 2 from the supply ship, and one from the Churchill sloop - when their "Imprudent Conduct" sank their boat while returning to the Factory. HBCA:B.239/a/62, fo.55d, 4 September 1770.

²⁵ See for example HBCA:B.239/a/27, fo.21, 7 July 1746, and B.239/a/148, fos.9d-10, 25 August 1634.

²⁶ After 1800 post journals record only 4 drowning accidents involving company employees. See HBCA:B.239/a/115, fo.28, 12 August 1809; B.239/a/128, fo.25, 27 July 1821; B.239/a/157, fo.53d, 16 August 1843; and B.239/a/173, fo.8d, 15 October 1849.

²⁷ HBCA:B.42/b/62, fo.7d, C.J. Griffen to J.W. Wilson, 31 July 1668.

factory to its present site. Damage was usually limited to property, but in 1813 a work party was forced to spend the night on the roof of their dwelling after a flash flood inundated their camp. Although no one was drowned or injured, the incident underlined the need to be prepared for any eventuality and the speed with which dangerous conditions could arise.²⁸

This need to be alert and prepared for danger was particularly acute in cold and wet weather. Climatic conditions at York and Churchill presented company employees with very real dangers. Death by freezing or exposure was probably the most common form of accidental death at Churchill, and second only to drowning at York. It was also a significant cause of injury to company employees. Carelessness, inexperience, or bad judgement played an important role in many of these accidents, most of which were probably avoidable. In 1724, for example, William Manning, a sailor stationed at Prince of Wales's Fort froze to death when he lost his way back to the post after obstinately refusing to travel with his three companions.²⁹ A remarkably similar accident befell an inexperienced junior clerk named Mr. Costello in 1814. He left his companions while returning to York Factory from Churchill, claiming to know an alternate route along a nearby gravel ridge. When his companions camped that night they expected him to appear after walking along a parallel course all day, but he had disappeared,

²⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/120, fo.21d, 8 May 1813. Although flooding was less prevalent at Churchill, similar accidents could arise there too. In December 1806, the wooder's camp flooded one evening. Fortunately it occurred early in the evening and the men were able to climb trees. Finally at noon the following day the water had frozen solidly enough that they were able to climb down and walk back to Churchill "half undressed" and extremely cold since the temperature was 28° F below zero. See B.42/b/50, fos.8-8d, William Auld to Mr Thomas, 11 March 1807.

²⁹ HBCA:B.42/a/5, fo.11d, 30 November 1724.

probably to die of exposure.³⁰ An error of judgement led to one of the most harrowing tales of misadventure at York Factory. In January 1772 three men, James Thomas, John Farrant, and James Ross, left York to hunt partridges on the north shore of the Nelson River. Apparently Ross allowed his less experienced companions to convince him to cross the river closer to its mouth than was prudent. They found themselves on a large ice floe that was carried out into Hudson Bay. For five days they were carried in and out of the mouth of the Nelson River without being able to reach shore. Finally on the sixth day they tried to reach shore by jumping across ice floes, but John Farrant fell into the water and the attempt was abandoned. Thoroughly wet, Farrant died that evening. In the meantime Thomas had badly frozen his hands and face and he too succumbed to exhaustion and exposure the following day. Ross finally got ashore eight days after they had initially tried to cross the Nelson River, but missed the path back to the factory. He was forced to camp out overnight without a fire one last time, before he finally managed to stumble into the factory on January 15, 1772. His feet and hands were badly frozen but he survived with only the loss of his fingers and toes - and presumably also some horrifying memories.³¹ An indication of the impact of these men's experience had on fellow company employees is the fact that their story was repeated almost verbatim in Edward Umfreville's, Present State of Hudson Bay. According to Umfreville Ross returned to the Orkneys on an annuity of £20 per annum from the company, and a subscription from his fellows at all the company's posts. Umfreville also noted that

³⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/141, fos.3d-5d, 18 October 1814.

³¹ Thomas, Farrant, and Ross's story is recounted in two places in the post journal. See, HBCA:B.239/a/66, fos.23-25 and 63-64d, 6-15 January 1772.

Ross was ungrateful enough not to thank anyone who contributed to this subscription before he left York for home.³²

Although any fatal accident was an unhappy occurrence, some were particularly poignant. In 1834 a Christmas ball at York had a particularly tragic outcome. A young Indian who was employed as a hunter and dog-team driver was found frozen to death just outside the post palisades. The youth, named Nepinawasis, suffered from epilepsy and it was assumed that he had left the ball and gone outside "on some necessary occasion". While outside he had been overcome by an epileptic seizure in a spot where no one noticed him. Alcohol may have contributed to his untimely death since it was reported that he had been drinking though he was "far from being helplessly intoxicated".³³

The majority of accidents involving the cold were less serious, and company men affected a certain indifference to the pain and discomfort of frozen body parts. Andrew Graham, who had frozen his feet badly in his first years at York Factory through carelessness in not repairing his socks³⁴, later had little sympathy for another new recruit who froze his face at the wooder's tent. Graham and Thomas Hutchins, the surgeon, decided the poor man was more afraid than hurt, and Graham noted that although his face was "a little Blistered and tumefied [swollen]" such injuries were common "and disregarded in Hudson's Bay".³⁵ Company servants survived and even took pride in startling hardships. In January 1789, for example,

³² Umfreville, The Present State of Hudson Bay, pp. 11-12.

³³ HBCA:B.239/a/148, fo.29, 28 December 1834.

³⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/37, fos.14-14d, 7 February 1754.

³⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/88, fos.14-14d, 2 and 3 December 1771.

Thomas Spence returned to Churchill after being lost in the woods for eight days in the midst of storms and bad weather. He managed to survive "without fire, Sleep, or any kind of subsistence except Snow thawed in his hands with a little Oat meal and a few Raisins, intermixed".³⁶ John Duncan at Prince of Wales's Fort fell into a patch of open water in March 1780. After nearly drowning, he managed to get back on the ice, soaked from head to foot and without his hat and mittens. He still managed to walk eight miles back to the post, where he had to be cut out of his frozen clothing.³⁷ Such stories help to explain a rather contemptuous attitude to those who worried about a slightly frozen face. It also led to the rather foolhardy behaviour of individuals like the sawyer at York who had to have a finger amputated after working at the pitsaw without gloves on in -28 degree Fahrenheit weather "to demonstrate to his comrades how hardy he was".³⁸

Obviously the harsh and changeable climate at both York and Churchill was dangerous, but most company employees recognized this danger and took precautions to minimize risks. Experienced and sensible men travelled with proper clothing, materials for setting fires and whenever possible in company. They recognized the warning signs of frostbite³⁹ and knew that, if they were lost near a post or camp, search parties would be sent out and the post bell would be rung to lead them home.

³⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/112, fo.12d, 19 January 1789.

³⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/100, fo.15, 21 March 1780.

³⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/154, fo.21, 11 December 1840.

³⁹ R.M. Ballantyne, The Young Fur Traders: A Tale of the Far North (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1901), p. 218.

Post surgeons developed considerable experience in the treatment of cases of frostbite, though their methods would not have met with the approval of modern doctors. Thomas Hutchins, the surgeon at York between 1766 and 1773, has left a description of how he treated the cases he encountered. Hutchins, who treated the unfortunate James Ross among others, used snow followed by cold water to slowly warm the frozen area, and then rubbed it with flannel. No knowledgeable doctor would now recommend putting snow on or rubbing a case of frostbite, but most of Hutchin's patients suffered no further harm.⁴⁰ If blisters appeared, Hutchins treated them with camphorated ointment. He did find, however, that this course of treatment did not work with severe cases of frostbite. Although he proposed no alternative, he suggested medical experts of the day were wrong to assume such treatments had much effect.⁴¹ Then as now, serious cases of frostbite almost always required amputation, and amputation may well have been the most common form of surgical treatment at York and Churchill. Many company employees were marked by their service in the North-West with the loss of fingers and toes, but most seem to have accepted this as one of the hazards of their chosen profession. Indeed virtually the only complaint about amputation recorded in post records was from one man at York in 1738, who feared that the loss of part of his ear would make him the object of scorn when he returned to Britain, where cropped ears were still sometimes used as

⁴⁰ The conventional wisdom today is that frozen body parts should be warmed as quickly as possible in warm, but not hot water, and never rubbed as this can damage the skin. See for example William A.R. Thomson M.D., Black's Medical Dictionary (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1979), 32nd ed., pp. 36C-61.

⁴¹ PAC:MG19 A47, Thomas Hutchins Papers, fos.4-5.

a punishment for theft.⁴² As Andrew Graham remarked "setting aside unavoidable accidents it is a person's own neglect if he is hurt by the weather; for please to observe, we think nothing to have our face, point of our nose, under the chin, points of our fingers, and laps of our ears froze a little, which only exchanges the old skin for a new one, and in some complexions will leave a mark for ever".⁴³

There were other occupational hazards at York Factory and Churchill. During the building of Prince of Wales's Fort construction accidents were fairly common. The process of laying rather large blocks of stone into place on the walls produced several near-fatal accidents,⁴⁴ but it was quarrying the rock for the walls that was most dangerous. Most company servants refused to set gunpowder charges to blast out the rock. For a time Richard Norton, the officer in charge of Prince of Wales's Fort, was forced to risk his own life:

I blow'd up 4 large Rocks at Eskemay [Eskimo] Point, ye Last of wch had Like to have been fatall to me, in Setting Fire to ye Serpent ye Rock blew up before I Could Gett far enough from it, ye Blast Knocked me Down where I Lay Some moments Stund, & recd 2 Slight wounds in my thighs by a Peice of ye Rock yt Flew between my Legs - ⁴⁵

It was somewhat unusual for an officer to take on such a task, and Norton eventually prevailed upon two subordinates to quarry rocks. One of the men, Robert Gawdie had a charge blow up in his face, so he abandoned the task to

⁴² HBCA:B.239/a/21, fo.17, 27 December 1738.

⁴³ Graham, *Observations*, p. 300.

⁴⁴ In 1762, for example, a guy rope snapped while putting a large stone in place causing the entire lifting apparatus to collapse on Magnus Scart and Malcolm Jock, Fortunately they received only glancing blows though they were "very Nigh being Crush'd to Death". HBCA:B.42/a/56, fo.47d, 6 August 1762.

⁴⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/14, fos.34d-35, 8 May 1734.

his associate Thomas Smith.⁴⁶ Smith, for his part, proved more courageous or perhaps more foolhardy, though as the following letter indicates he used his daring to acquire certain material benefits.

Thomas Smith ... ha[s] been twice grievously wounded in [blowing up rocks], which has struck such a terror upon all our men that none will undertake to perform the same except the aforesaid Thomas Smith who has executed it for two years past and has had ten gallons brandy yearly for his encouragement therein. His time being out next year he is willing to continue longer in your honours' service and execute the said office in blowing up rocks as well as other duties provided your honours will please to raise his salary £5 per annum.⁴⁷

Hunting also entailed some hazard. One of the more persistent myths of the fur trade is that trade guns were unreliable and of inferior quality. Some archaeologists interested in the subject of trade muskets have disputed this view.⁴⁸ York Factory and Churchill records indicate that most injuries from burst muskets cannot easily be attributed to the poor quality of the weapon. In only one case at York Factory was a burst gun declared to have been flawed and badly brazed.⁴⁹ It was not the breeches of muskets which exploded, as would have been the case had the problem been in the manufacture of the gun, but the muzzles. The most common injury of this sort was to the thumb, forefinger or inside of the hand of the hunter indicating that the portion of the barrel which exploded was near the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, fo.48d, 18 July 1734.

⁴⁷ HBCA:A.11/13, fo.31d, Annual Letter from Prince of Wales's Fort 1736.

⁴⁸ See for example, T.M. Hamilton, Firearms on the Frontier: Guns at Fort Michilimackinac, 1715-1781, Reports in Mackinac History and Archeology No. 5, Mackinac Island State Park Commission, 1976, p. 6.

⁴⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/73, fo.6, 14 September 1775.

muzzle.⁵⁰ In one instance it was admitted that the victim was injured as a result of his own error in overloading his gun⁵¹, and as T.M. Hamilton points out most muzzle explosions were probably caused by the accidental plugging of the barrel with mud or snow while hunting.⁵²

There were also a number of accidents involving "setting" guns. This hunting technique required that a loaded gun be set up and aimed at a spot where a piece of bait was left. The bait in turn was attached to the trigger of the gun by a line, so that when an animal pulled at the bait it shot itself. These traps were simple and reasonably effective, though at Prince of Wales's Fort it was observed that foxes or wolves, if only wounded at a setting gun, would no longer take the bait. Instead they waited until another animal was killed in the trap and then ate the carcass.⁵³ These guns could be dangerous to those who set them. There were several accidents at both York and Churchill with these guns when hunters inadvertently set the guns off by stumbling over the trigger line themselves. On one particularly unlucky occasion a wounded partridge accidentally got tangled in the line just as a pursuing hunter stood opposite the muzzle of the gun.⁵⁴ In 1831 Alexis Valois, a labourer at York Factory, was killed when a setting gun he

⁵⁰ The wounds suffered by Mr. Prince at Churchill in 1785 were typical. The forefinger of his left hand was blown off, his thumb was broken, and the palm of his hand badly damaged. HBCA:B.42/a/104, fo.23, 28 May 1785.

⁵¹ HBCA:B.239/a/66, fo.47d, 24 May 1772.

⁵² Hamilton, FIREARMS, p. 6.

⁵³ HBCA:A.11/13, fo.65, Annual Letter from Prince of Wales's Fort, 8 August 1743. Instead it was proposed that these animals be poisoned.

⁵⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/70, fos. 13d-14, 11 December 1787.

was loading accidentally discharged⁸⁵, but this was the only occasion when wounds from a setting gun proved fatal at either York or Churchill.

Hunters found many ways to injure themselves, ranging from exploding powder horns to cleaning or moving loaded guns and even falling out of trees.⁸⁶ Considering the amount of time company employees spent hunting, however, it is surprising to find only three fatal accidents reported. In addition to the unfortunate Alexis Valois, a steward at Prince of Wales's Fort accidentally shot and killed himself in 1744, and a labourer named George Louttit was killed at York when he put an old gun barrel which was still loaded into the blacksmith's forge to rework the metal.⁸⁷

Like hunting, work in the lumber and firewood camps at both posts had its attendant dangers. Most accidents took the form of bruises and cuts, some of the latter relatively serious.⁸⁸ Piles of wood occasionally collapsed and sleds carrying loads of wood sometimes overturned. In a handful of instances the unfortunate victims of these accidents broke an arm or a leg. These broken limbs were treated effectively, despite the fact that up until the development of antiseptics in the mid-1860's the infection

⁸⁵ HBCA:B.239/b/89b, p. 16, Alexander Christie to George Simpson, 10 February 1831.

⁸⁶ See for example: HBCA:B.239/a/155, fo.15, 1 December 1841; B.239/a/24, fo.18, 4 March 1743; B.239/a/21, fo.7, 18 September 1738, and B.42/a/3, fo.10, 4 December 1722.

⁸⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/27, fo.1, 17 August 1744, and B.239/b/104b, fo.3, William Mactavish to Archibald Barclay, 6 September 1852.

⁸⁸ For example a joiner at Prince of Wales's Fort lost two toes in 1744 when his axe slipped and struck his foot. See HBCA:B.42/a/25, fo.39, 21 July 1744. Squaring timbers with adzes and axes was particularly dangerous in winter. Apparently these tools were liable to glance off frozen wood, and cut legs and feet. See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/23, fo.15d, 7 December 1741.

usual in compound fractures frequently resulted in death or amputation.⁵⁹ Perhaps the fractures involved were only simple fractures and therefore less likely to result in complications. Indeed the only death at either post indirectly caused by an accident at the wooder's camps, aside from drownings, occurred in 1801. William Bakie, at York Factory, cut his leg badly with a hatchet and then contracted scurvy - the combination of which proved fatal.⁶⁰

Other occupations produced accidents on occasion. In 1780, Montcrief Tate was wounded when a wad from one of York's cannons struck him when the cannon was fired to salute the departure of the supply ship.⁶¹ Tate lingered on for nearly a year with terrible injuries until he finally died in July 1781. His death was described as a "great satisfaction [to] every one in the Fort, as he was in a most deplorable condition and extremely offensive to all as came near him".⁶² But most accidents were less macabre, and less serious.

Although accidental death was the major cause of mortality among company employees stationed at Churchill and York Factory, there is little evidence that company men themselves viewed theirs as a hazardous life. By and large they appear to have been well aware of the environmental and occupational risks they faced, and to have taken sensible precautions to minimize these risks wherever possible.

⁵⁹ F.F. Cartwright, A Social History of Medicine (London: Longman, 1977), pp. 144-5.

⁶⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/105, fo.36d, 31 March 1801.

⁶¹ HBCA:B.239/a/79, fos.2-2d, 17 September 1780.

⁶² HBCA:B.239/a/79, fo.44d-45, 17 July 1771.

Differences in the kind and severity of accidents between York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th century appear to have been minor - although drowning incidents were more common at York. In the 19th century York's larger population meant more accidents occurred there, but on a per capita basis it is not clear that York's residents suffered from a greater risk of death or injury than men stationed at Churchill. Thus York's reputation among company employees as an unhealthy posting must have rested more on the risk of contracting disease than on the accidents that happened there.

The causes of accidents are relatively easy to ascertain and the diagnosis and treatment of cuts and frostbite are simple to understand in comparison with available records on disease at York and Churchill. Fur trade journals were often vague about identifying diseases, and symptoms were only imperfectly recorded. Dr. Ewart was unable to determine the cause of death in about one-fifth of the cases between 1714 and 1801 that he examined. It is therefore impossible to provide a complete description of the incidence of disease at either York Factory or Churchill, but the general outlines of disease and disease treatment at these posts may be ascertained.

A few company employees appear to have died simply of old age, like Michael Hunt the armourer at York Factory in 1785, who was found dead in his bed one morning.⁶³ In this and in other similar cases when someone was found dead in their beds the immediate cause of death was often assumed to be some sort of fit. In 1758, Alexander Chetham, a cook at York, completed his day's work around 5 p.m. and planned to drink "a Mugg" with a friend

⁶³ HBCA:B.239/a/99, fo.1d, 22 September 1785.

over a pipe of tobacco. His friend, Thomas Ford, came to find him when he did not appear as planned, and saw him, apparently asleep on his bed, fully clothed except for one shoe. Ford took his drink and left Chetham, but Chetham did not appear for work the following day. When his room was entered he was found dead. It was assumed he had suffered some sort of "Sudden fitt".⁶⁴ Ironically Ford was also found dead in his bed three months later, although in his case James Isham noted that he had complained previously of a cold and sore throat.⁶⁵

Company employees were also subject to a range of familiar ailments. Various individuals suffered from complaints like rheumatism, scrofula, epilepsy, and gout. This last ailment in particular affected a number of company officers, perhaps occasioned in part by their diet and drinking habits. Successive attacks of gout seriously undermined the health of James Isham and Humphrey Marten and contributed to Isham's death in 1761.⁶⁶ Similarly in 1806, another officer at York, Mr. Sutherland, died after an attack of gout⁶⁷, and several other individuals suffered badly from the disease though with less serious consequences.

In the 18th century a number of diseases were common at bayside posts. During the winter months something known as the "Country Distemper" was prevalent. According to Andrew Graham and Edward Unfreville the disease was marked by sharp chest pains and difficulty in breathing. Both thought the

⁶⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/47, fos.5d-6, 19 September 1759.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, fo.14, 28 December 1759.

⁶⁶ Isham, *Observations*, Appendix C, p. 324.

⁶⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/113, fos.6d-7, 15-21 December 1806.

cause was breathing exceedingly cold air.⁶⁹ Probably pneumonia or pleurisy, country distemper was more incapacitating than dangerous and neither Unfreville nor post journals at either York or Churchill reported any deaths from it.⁶⁹ According to Graham when it occurred it was usually treated with drinks of hot sage or Labrador tea "with some ginger and a fourth part brandy". This drink usually produced sweating and then sleep "leaving only a slight pain or soreness behind, which is removed by oily balsamic emulsions".⁷⁰ Somewhat surprisingly this once common ailment disappeared from post records in the late 18th century, nor was it replaced with increased reports of pneumonia or pleurisy. It may be that improvements in clothing and housing made the disease less prevalent, or that the gradual warming of the climate around Hudson Bay in the late 18th and 19th centuries subjected company employees to less severe and extended periods of cold weather.⁷¹

Another common 18th century ailment was the "bloody flux" or dysentery.⁷² If left untreated dysentery can be a serious disease. One man

⁶⁹ Graham, Observations, p. 289, and Unfreville, Present State, p. 19.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Graham, Observations, p. 289.

⁷¹ See Tim Ball, "The Hudson's Bay Company Journals as a Source of Information for the Reconstruction of Climate", in Thomas C. Buckley (ed.) Rendezvous: Selected Papers of the Fourth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1981 (St. Paul: North American Fur Trade Conference, 1984), p. 44.

⁷² Ross Mitchell suggests "bloody Flux" may have been cholera, at least in some instances, though there is no reason to suppose cholera reached York Factory or Churchill in the 18th century. See Mitchell, Medicine in Manitoba: the Story of Its Beginnings (Winnipeg: Stovel Advocate Press, [1954]), p. 44.

died of it at Prince of Wales's Fort in 1747,⁷³ but his was an exceptional case. At both posts dysentery was more unpleasant and incapacitating than dangerous. Unlike country distemper, however, dysentery and diarrhoea continued to be relatively common ailments into the 18th century. A case book kept by William Snellie, the surgeon at York, in 1846-47 reveals that 20 of the 136 patients he saw were suffering from dysentery or diarrhoea.⁷⁴

Company men learned to limit snowblindness by wearing "Black crepe [crepe] before [their] eyes when travelling"⁷⁵, and eye irritation from living in smoke-filled rooms and log tents was apparently common. According to James Isham the smoky rooms at York and Churchill made life there "dismal" for anyone suffering from illness or injury and delayed the recovery of patients.⁷⁶ In 1811 William Hemmings Cook resorted to classical allusion to describe life at smoke-filled log tents. He described York's surgeon as living in "a habitation Proserpine [Persephone] herself could not exist in". According to Cook the surgeon complained that "he was almost blind with smoke but as he saw that I was out myself & braved the smoke like another Pluto I expected he would do the same & make a virtue of necessity".⁷⁷ The substitution of stoves for fireplaces at about this time undoubtedly made life at York and Churchill more comfortable at both posts and work camps. Complaints about smoky rooms disappear from post records in the early 18th century.

⁷³ HBCA:B.42/a/31, fo.11d, 19 November 1747.

⁷⁴ See HBCA:B.239/a/166, York Factory Medical Journal 1846-47.

⁷⁵ Graham, *Observations*, p. 299.

⁷⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/24, fo.20d, 21 January 1743.

⁷⁷ HBCA:B.42/b/55, fo.1d, W.H. Cook to William Auld, 8 January 1811.

Venereal disease was a much more serious problem, and part of the London committee's oft-expressed concern over sexual contacts between its employees and native people was a result of a fear of the spread of syphilis. Their primary concern seems to have been the risk of company men contracting venereal disease from native women. Ferdinand Jacobs, for example, was quite specific in reporting that the sloop master at Prince of Wales's Fort caught "the Clap or Pox" from an Indian woman who had come to Churchill from York with the winter correspondence packet in 1781.⁷⁸ Post records, however, indicate that venereal disease could just as easily spread from company employees to the Homeguard population, and in fact several men were reported to have arrived on Hudson Bay already infected.⁷⁹

Medical historians have long debated the origin of syphilis, without agreement. Although less accepted now, many believed that syphilis was endemic among native peoples in the New World prior to Columbus's voyage of 1492, and that sailors from Columbus's ships brought the disease back to Europe with them. Others have argued that syphilis was present among European, African and Asian populations centuries before Columbus's voyage, but that it was not recognized as a separate disease. According to this argument many of those who were termed lepers in medieval Europe were in fact syphilitic. Still other medical historians argue that the first recorded outbreak of syphilis in Naples in 1495 was in fact the arrival of a new disease, but that any connection with the New World was purely circumstantial. The latter theory, which is increasingly seen as the most

⁷⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/55, fos.37-37d, 31 May 1781.

⁷⁹ See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/14, fo.8d, 17 October 1731, and B.239/a/53, fo.8, 4 October 1784.

probable, argues that either changes in the environment, personal hygiene and other social factors or a mutation in the spirochete, Treponema pallidum, which causes syphilis resulted in a new sexually-transmitted disease.⁶⁰

Although James Isham made no mention of venereal disease, subsequent fur trade authors suggest that by the later 18th century venereal disease, probably syphilis, was well established in the native populations of the North-West. According to Andrew Graham, Edward Umfreville, and later Alexander Mackenzie venereal disease was common among Indians, but they had discovered herbal remedies for the ailment and their symptoms were less acute than among Europeans.⁶¹ The latter observation, though by no means proof of a pre-Columbian origin, suggests long acquaintance with syphilis. Graham, for example, clearly blames the introduction of syphilis into the North-West on Canadian and European fur traders.⁶²

Among employees at York and Churchill unambiguous references to venereal disease date from the 1730's, though it would be surprising if cases of the "Pox" were previously unknown at these posts.⁶³ An inventory

⁶⁰ There is an enormous body of literature on venereal diseases, and it is one of the staple subjects for medical historians. A useful and balanced survey of speculation surrounding the causes and origins of syphilis may be found in William J. Brown et al, Syphilis and Other Venereal Diseases (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 1-10.

⁶¹ Graham, Observations, p. 143; Umfreville, Present State, p. 19, and Sir Alexander Mackenzie, The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, W. Kaye Lamb (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 134.

⁶² Graham, Observations, pp. 143-4.

⁶³ See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/14, fo.8d, 17 October 1731. E.E. Rich mentions references to the pox in company records as early as the 1680's though not at York or Churchill. See E.E. Rich, "The Fur Traders: Their Diet and Drugs," The Beaver, 307, 1 (Summer 1976): 49.

of surgeon's supplies from Fort Albany in 1730, for example, includes guaiac or guaiacum wood from the West Indies, which was sometimes used in the 16th century to treat syphilis,⁶⁴ although no longer highly regarded in this role.⁶⁵ The normal method of treating venereal disease both in Europe and company posts was with mercury, which unlike guaiacum is generally conceded to have had some value. It was usually administered in one of four ways: orally, by rubbing so that the metal was absorbed through the skin, by the use of salves or plasters which left the mercury in continuous contact with the skin, or by fumigation. All four processes were designed to cause extreme salivation, which in theory carried away venereal "poisons". It was often felt that the production of three pints of saliva a day was a good sign, and mercury was often prescribed in dangerous quantities to produce the desired degree of salivation.⁶⁶ The connection between treatment by salivation and syphilis suggests that one Jasper Graham at York was a syphilis victim as early as 1720, but it is impossible to be sure he suffered from venereal disease.⁶⁷

Despite great concern about the disease, however, it was rarely reported as a cause of death at either York Factory or Prince of Wales's Fort. Robert Tomlins, a cooper at York died in 1731 after undergoing "26 Days" of salivation for the "Pox", which might lead one to speculate that it was his treatment as much as the disease which was the cause of death.⁶⁸ Of

⁶⁴ HBCA:B.3/2/2, fos.4-4d, Fort Albany Miscellany.

⁶⁵ Brown et al, *Syphilis*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/5, fo.75, 3 June 1720.

⁶⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/14, fo.8d, 17 October 1731.

course some of the instances of sudden death by "fitt" may have been caused by aneurysm of the aorta, a common symptom of tertiary syphilis. Similarly a few of the individuals declared insane may have been exhibiting signs of syphilis-induced psychosis, though this must remain a matter of speculation.

In general, though a significant medical problem, especially in the period between about 1760 and 1800 when reported cases at York and Churchill were most common, syphilis attracted more concern and attention from members of the London committee and company officers than would seem to have been warranted by the actual incidence of the disease. After 1800 clear references to cases of venereal disease at York and Churchill almost entirely disappear, though in 1846 it was suggested that some new recruits had arrived at York showing signs of prior venereal infection. It was further suggested that if recruits were given a proper medical inspection prior to embarkation such individuals might be screened out in future.⁸⁹ A few men were treated with mercury in the 19th century, such as the hatter at York in 1830 and one of William Smellie's patients in 1847, but such references were rare.⁹⁰

In terms of mortality the most serious disease at bayside posts in the 18th century was not an infectious disease but scurvy, a disease caused by dietary deficiency. Along with pellagra, beriberi, and rickets it forms one of a group of diseases known as avitaminoses, all caused by a lack of

⁸⁹ HBCA:A.5/15, p. 66, Archibald Barclay to J. Clouston, 14 October 1846.

⁹⁰ See HBCA:B.239/a/141, p. 64, 19 June 1830, and HBCA:B.239/a/166, York Factory Medical Journal 1846-47, January 1847. Treating a hatter with mercury is not without irony given the origin of the phrase "mad as a hatter".

essential vitamins. Scurvy is caused by a lack of sufficient vitamin C in the diet.

Although probably one of the oldest afflictions known to humanity, scurvy is most closely associated with the long overseas voyages of the early European explorers and with the early colonial settlements of the New World. Although Vitamin C was not isolated until 1928, as early as 1564 the Dutch scientist Ronseus recognized that oranges could be used to treat the ailment, and Jacques Cartier had been introduced to the antiscorbutic properties of spruce bark and sap by Indians in 1536.⁶¹ Thus it could be treated long before anyone understood why the treatments worked.

Scurvy was a particularly serious problem among the crews of the first European explorers to winter on Hudson Bay. Jens Munk, for example, lost 81 men out of his entire party of 64 to scurvy when he wintered at Churchill in 1619-20.⁶² Subsequent Hudson's Bay Company post settlements never experienced an equivalent mortality from scurvy, but it was a significant problem at bayside posts until the early 19th century.

Outbreaks of scurvy were less common at Prince of Wales's Fort than at York Factory, though not unknown. In 1726, for example, six men contracted scurvy at Churchill when lack of malt prevented the brewing of spruce beer, the main antiscorbutic in use at company posts.⁶³ The worst outbreak of scurvy at Churchill occurred in 1741-42 when Captain Middleton was forced to

⁶¹ The earliest empirical observation on the treatment of scurvy by dietary means are described in Erwin H. Ackerknecht, MD, History and Geography of the Most Important Diseases (New York: Hafner Publishing, 1965) pp. 145-47.

⁶² See "Jens Eriksen Munk", The Canadian Encyclopedia, vol.2, p. 1177.

⁶³ HBCA:B.42/a/6, fo.24d, 2 May 1726.

winter there with his ships, the Burnaca and Discovery. The addition of two ship's crews severely taxed supplies of country provisions, a problem exacerbated by an unusually cold and difficult winter which limited the success of post hunters. Although company men avoided scurvy, eleven of Middleton's sailors died from it, and relations between the two groups were severely strained.⁹⁴ On the surface of things this might suggest James Isham, then commander at Churchill, and his men did not do all they could to help Middleton's party. Experiences at York, however, undermine this point of view. As we shall see, at York, serious outbreaks of scurvy almost always followed the unexpected wintering of more than a handful of extra persons.⁹⁵ Despite the experience of Captain Middleton and his men, Churchill was regarded as quite free from scurvy, at least in comparison with other bayside posts. Samuel Hearne boasted that during his ten years as chief there no one suffered "the least symptom of the scurvy". In the following paragraph he contradicts this overbold assertion by admitting that two men had died from scurvy during his years there, but nevertheless scurvy figures much less prominently in Churchill records than at York.⁹⁶

At York scurvy was the primary cause of death for nine company employees between 1714 and 1801.⁹⁷ Other deaths attributed to scurvy

⁹⁴ Isham, Observations, "Introduction", p. lvii.

⁹⁵ This view is also given some confirmation by events at Churchill in 1834. The Prince Rupert struck a rock near Churchill and her crew were forced to winter there. By early spring Churchill was being described as a "complete Hospital" with most of the ill suffering from scurvy. See HBCA:B.42/a/162, fo.9, 15 April 1834, and fo.13, 28 April 1834.

⁹⁶ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 294. Glover points out that this contradiction is an indication that Hearne's manuscript was never completely edited and revised before publication.

⁹⁷ Ewart, "Causes of Mortality", p. 572.

followed the arrival of groups of winterers at York. In both 1745 and 1811 serious outbreaks of scurvy occurred when first the crews of the Dobbs Galley and California were forced to winter at York, and then among Miles Macdonnell's advance party of Red River Settlers. In the former case four sailors died,⁹⁹ and in the latter one settler.⁹⁹ In these two cases company men largely avoided scurvy themselves, but the disease also struck York Factory's resident population. Joseph Colen has left a vivid account of the ravages of scurvy at York during the winter of 1788-89, when supplies of country provisions ran short.

It is impossible to express my anxiety having so many disabled Men around me, others daily falling bad and no fresh provisions to be got so much distress us, that I know not what to do - God I hope will send speedy relief. -

The Scurvy rages, with violence and some Men are so Bad it is difficulty they are removed from their beds - Scarcely one person at this place but is tainted with this disorder - and It is almost impossible to describe the malady that rages amongst us which is attended with a kind of putrifaction the Teeth loosen Gums swell, A quantity of loose dark flesh is cut off daily from the afflicted before they can take any kind of Subsistence The Patients Legs swell which are much discoloured they are disabled and contracted in their Limbs as to render them objects of Comisseration - Their breath is so offensive as to be utmost unbearable; and a lowness of spirits attends the whole afflicted.¹⁰⁰

Although occasional references to scurvy can be found in post records as late as the 1840's,¹⁰¹ it was primarily a problem in the period before 1821. The decreased number and violence of scurvy outbreaks in the 19th

⁹⁹ Isham, Observations, "Introduction", p. lxxvii.

⁹⁹ Mitchell, Medicine in Manitoba, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/89, fos.25-25d, 22 April 1789.

¹⁰¹ See for example, HBCA:A.11/118, fo.67, James Hargrave to Archibald Barclay, 6 September 1848, and fo.177d, James Hargrave to Archibald Barclay, 6 September 1849. At Churchill the last serious outbreak of scurvy occurred in 1834. See HBCA:B.42/a/162, fo.13, 28 April 1834.

century are attributable to improvements in supplies of country provisions, the effective use of antiscorbutics, and campaigns to improve health standards at company posts.

As some medical historians have pointed out, in the middle of the 18th century attitudes towards disease and treatment began to change in Europe. Disease had long been viewed rather fatalistically as an inevitable feature of life. Individuals were given treatments for their ailments, some of which had real value, but little attention was paid to the notion of preventing disease. The only preventive measure in common use before the 18th century was quarantine. Eighteenth-century medical practitioners increasingly employed an empirical approach to disease and treatment, and focussed a great deal of their attention on environmental causes of illness.¹⁰² These "environmentalist" doctors emphasized the importance of cleanliness, ventilation and clean air, and to a lesser extent the virtues of good diet and exercise. Their theories of disease causation were flawed since they did not yet recognize that bacteria and viruses were the ultimate cause of most of the diseases they were trying to prevent, but their environmental approach to disease control paid important dividends. As James C. Riley points out their "attack on those locations in the habitat from which disease seemed to spring constituted ... an attack not against disease itself but against common disease carriers".¹⁰³

Approaches to the problem of scurvy at company posts roughly parallel this new "environmentalist" theory of medicine and its increasing emphasis

¹⁰² James C. Riley, The Eighteenth Century Campaign to Avoid Disease (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. x-xii.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 138.

on prevention as well as treatment. In the early 18th century the causes of scurvy were at least partially understood at company posts. An entry in the ship's log of HMS Furnace in 1741 indicates that at Churchill scurvy patients were treated with "Decoctions of Spruce" and fed "fresh Meat & Broth for their Common Diet".¹⁰⁴ Simple empirical observation had shown company men that there was a connection between an over-reliance in winter on salt provisions and the appearance of scurvy. As fresh provisions were not always available various antiscorbutics were put to use to treat the ill. The main antiscorbutic at use at company posts in the 18th century was spruce beer. A recipe for spruce beer as brewed at bayside posts c.1746-47 reads as follows:

To brew this Beer, the Kettle being near full of Water, cram the Kettle with small Pine; from one Experiment you will judge the Quantity of Pine that will bear a Proportion to your Water, let the Tops of the Pine be boiled in the Water until the Pine turns yellow, and the Bark peels, or the Sprigs strip off readily on being pulled; then take off your Kettle, and the Pine out of the Water, and to about two Gallons of Liquor put a quarter of a Pint of Molasses; hang your Kettle on, giving the Liquor another Boil until a Scum arises; then take the Liquor off, put it into a Cask in which you have before put cold Water. the Quantity of about two Gallons, if it is a twelve Gallon Cask; when your Cask is full, then take a Gun with a small Quantity of Powder, and no Wad; fire into the Bung-hole, it will set the Liquor a working; in about twenty-four Hours stop the Cask down, and the Liquor will be ready to drink.¹⁰⁵

This recipe was seen as perhaps overcomplicated, and as a shortcut some simply boiled the malt, molasses and spruce all together in one operation.

This technique was criticized as a "lasses Custome and Hurtfull to mens

¹⁰⁴ PAC:MG18 D4, Dobbs Collection, vol 4, Journal of HMS Furnace, 17 January 1741.

¹⁰⁵ Clerk of the California [Charles Swaine], An Account of a Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage, Vol. 1, (East Ardsley: S.R. Publishers, 1988), reprint ed., p. 170.

Constitutions". It was held to be responsible for several cases of gravel at Prince of Wales's Fort in the late 1740's.¹⁰⁶

A variety of other antiscorbutics were tried. At York Factory "Red Cabbage in vinegared Pickle" and "Essence of Malt" were used in the later 18th century, on the grounds that the Navy and East India Company had found them "the best remedy for the Sea and Land Scurvy ever Discovered".¹⁰⁷ The London committee carefully advised its officers at York to ensure that the malt they sent was not just used to make beer as this had little value in scurvy prevention. Instead the malt was to be drunk mixed with boiling water, and then only by those who were already suffering from scurvy.¹⁰⁸ Other antiscorbutics were also tried, like lemon crystals and sauerkraut, along with locally available items like cranberries. Samuel Hearne listed gooseberries, heathberries, currants, juniper berries, strawberries, and several other berries in addition to cranberries, as locally available fruits at Churchill which company employees collected and consumed.¹⁰⁹ At York, however, cranberries were the most popular and most often collected berries.¹¹⁰ Some company men also had considerable faith in the medicinal properties of alcohol. According to Miles Macdonnell one employee tried to avoid the scurvy outbreak of 1811-12 by drinking a hogshead of English

¹⁰⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/32, fo.12, 28 October 1748. Gravel is an ailment somewhat similar to kidney stones but less acute in which visible crystals form in an individual's urine.

¹⁰⁷ HBCA:A.6/14, fo.134, Annual Letter to York Factory, May 1791.

¹⁰⁸ See for example, HBCA:B.238/b/78, fos.2d-3, Annual Letter to York Factory, 29 May 1794.

¹⁰⁹ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp. 289-92.

¹¹⁰ HBCA:B..238/a/86, fos.4-4d. 3 October 1783.

porter along with port wine, lemon salts, essence of salt, and cranberries, perhaps in the belief that a variety of remedies was better than reliance on a single cure.¹¹¹ On occasion the post surgeon at York ordered that wine and grog be served to the men, not so much as antiscorbutics but as a way to cheer "drooping spirits".¹¹²

In most instances antiscorbutics were used to treat those who were already ill and not as a means of preventing outbreaks of scurvy in the first place. As the same antiscorbutics were used at all the company's bayside posts in the 18th century, it was not their use alone which led to a lower incidence of scurvy at some posts than at others. By the late 18th century this seems to have been understood by post surgeons, senior officers and the London committee, and attempts were made to institute policies at company posts which would help to prevent scurvy from occurring in the first place. Samuel Hearne's comments on scurvy and on the general healthfulness of life at Churchill are instructive. It was his view that "the pureness of the air" and the "wholesomeness of the diet" were responsible for the low incidence of disease there. As for scurvy, he claimed to have kept it at bay "by proper attention to cleanliness, and keeping the people at seasonable exercise".¹¹³ The strong "environmentalist" flavour to his remarks is readily apparent.

At York a campaign based on exercise, activity and cleanliness along with better diet and the continued use of antiscorbutics was begun in the

¹¹¹ PAC:MG18 E1, Lord Selkirk Papers, vol. II. p. 372.

¹¹² HBCA:B..239/a/82, fo.31, 28 May 1782, and B.239/a/87, fo.20, 17 April 1785.

¹¹³ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 294.

1780's in an attempt to rid the post of scurvy. Indolence and inactivity were increasingly invoked as at least predisposing causes of scurvy. One employee, Robert Wilson, was accused of rejoicing in his affliction "as it exempts him from any work".¹¹⁴ Robert Hudson, a clerk at York who died from scurvy in 1780 was declared to be ill "entirely thro his inactivity". What made his case even more unusual, was that he was an officer "the first and only instance" Joseph Colen had seen of an officer contracting scurvy.¹¹⁵ While we now recognize that the superior diet of company officers was the reason why scurvy was primarily an affliction of company labourers and tradesmen, it is interesting to note that company officials were inclined to make it a moral rather than class issue.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries considerable attention was also paid to improving the cleanliness of York Factory and the personal hygiene of its residents. Initially Colen saw the problem primarily in personal terms:

Six in the Sick list; part of whom very bad with the Scurvy but so indolent that notwithstanding their health in a great measure depends on keeping themselves clean, they cannot be prevailed on, even to wash their hands and face oftener than once a week, and some of them not as frequent, and I am credibly informed, here are many men at this place, that have not done this office unless compelled to it for many Months together, and that is, as often as they wash their Linen, but to prevent this trouble, they have got into the habit of wearing flannel shirts, which they wear from the beginning of October, till the warmth of the sun the May following obliges them to lay such filthy apparel aside.¹¹⁶

To counteract this Joseph Colen and the surgeon proposed to wake "conspicuous" offenders at "five O'Clock in the morning, in order that they

¹¹⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/85, fo.18, 13 February 1783.

¹¹⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/80, fo.21, 1 February 1780.

¹¹⁶ HBCA:B.239/a/85, fo.18d-19, 18 February 1783.

may clean themselves by the time the rest of the men go to their work."¹¹⁷

The London committee supported this plan and added additional coercive weight to the surgeon's idea. The committee wrote the following year:

We observe that your Men, according to your Report, keep themselves exceedingly filthy, it is therefore very easy to account for the Scurvy, making such progress amongst the Men - a trifling Fine ought to be imposed on those, who do not clean themselves, at least once a Week on Sundays - .¹¹⁸

The men were reluctant to use their leisure time for this purpose, however, and they managed to force Colen to let them clean themselves and their clothing during work hours.¹¹⁹

At such the same time some attention was also paid to improving the cleanliness of the post and the men's houses and apartments. Cleaning the men's rooms was increasingly mentioned as a way of occupying their time when weather conditions precluded outdoor work.¹²⁰ Although not aimed specifically at scurvy, cleaning and sometimes fumigating rooms was seen as a means of preventing "the encroachments of Disease" in general.¹²¹ Later in the 1830's this practice had become so regular at York that James Hargrave reported bedding was aired and houses cleaned and washed out every week as part of the normal round of work.¹²²

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, fo.18d, 19 February 1783.

¹¹⁸ HBCA:A.6/15, fo.108d, Annual Letter to York Factory, 29 May 1784.

¹¹⁹ HBCA:B..239/a/95, fo.19, 18 February 1783.

¹²⁰ One of the first mentions of this practice at York occurred in 1786. Up until then the men were usually assigned to pick oakum or some other task in bad weather. See HBCA:B..239/a/86, fo.42d, 24 June 1786.

¹²¹ HBCA:B.239/a/118, fo.1d, 9 October 1811.

¹²² HBCA:B.239/a/148, fo.35, 4 January 1835.

Efforts were also made to improve the general post environment. The construction and repair of drainage ditches around the post was a regular feature of work at York, and may well have had some value as a public health measure. There is no clear evidence, however, that site drainage was intended as a means of improving health; it was undertaken to improve the quality of post gardens and limit damage to building foundations. Of greater interest were attempts to improve sanitation at the post and better dispose of human wastes. Although there is no reason to assume privies and latrines were not in use from the foundation of York and Prince of Wales's Fort, they do not often show up on 18th century post plans and may have been a relatively late innovation.¹²³ In 1771, Andrew Graham revealed the men at York were in the habit of emptying their chamber pots and throwing rubbish out of the windows of the men's house, with the result that post gardens were unusable and the walls of the factory were badly stained.¹²⁴ Soon after the post journal reports the construction of "necessaries", "conveniences", and other structures "for the goddess Cloacina" about the factory. Initially these euphemistically described toilet facilities were built for officers like Humphrey Marten and the post surgeon,¹²⁵ but soon after these refinements were extended to other employees.¹²⁶ In 1787,

¹²³ Plans of Prince of Wales's Fort made c.1743 do not indicate a latrine, though one is shown on a 1782 plan. See Luchak, Prince of Wales's Fort, p. 51 and p. 119. A similar pattern prevails at York Factory. Indeed structural histories of both posts contain no information on privy or latrine construction up to c.1782. See George Ingram, York Factory: A Structural History, and George Ingram, Prince of Wales's Fort: A Structural History, Manuscript Report Series no. 287, (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979).

¹²⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/66, fo.17d, 16 December 1771.

¹²⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/71, fo.14d, 2 January 1775 and fo.27, 22 May 1775.

¹²⁶ HBCA:B.239/a/73, fo.17, 10 November 1775 and fo.18, 17 November 1775.

Joseph Colen proudly noted that the new Men's House was built "replete with conveniences",¹²⁷ and thereafter post journals refer on occasion to construction of replacement privies at both York and Churchill. The belief that the health of company employees was closely connected to standards of sanitation and cleanliness remained strong, and in 1825 the London committee reacted to a report that hygienic conditions at York were again in decline. The committee laid the blame for the situation on the "inattention of those in charge of the Factory" and ordered "that the Surgeon be consulted and proper regulations to ensure cleanliness both the persons of the Men and their house be framed and enforced".¹²⁸ It was further suggested that these regulations might parallel those adopted by the Royal Navy, which at the turn of the century had promulgated a sanitary code for ships and ships' crews based on the issuance of soap and installation of bathing facilities, and on regular draining, and fumigating, and improved ventilation of ship's quarters.¹²⁹

The Royal Navy at the same time took steps to try to improve the quality of the diet of its sailors, a reform also adopted by the Hudson's Bay Company in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Although the diet at York Factory and Churchill compared favourably in many respects with British diets of the same period the fact that scurvy was a problem indicates that diets were not ideal. Although post surgeons, senior officers, and the London committee were inclined to place much of the blame for scurvy on

¹²⁷ HBCA:B.238/a/88, fos.15-16, 1 December 1787.

¹²⁸ HBCA:A.6/21, fo.35, London committee to George Simpson, 11 March 1825.

¹²⁹ Richard L. Blanco, Wellington's Surgeon General: Sir James McGrigor (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 22.

individual employee's personal habits and on other environmental causes, the role of diet was not overlooked. Beginning in the late 18th century efforts were made to supply posts with new foodstuffs like Dutch cheese, rice, and other products deemed to be more nutritious or more easily preserved than earlier imports.¹³⁰ Company officers had complained periodically about the quality of food supplies sent from Britain throughout the 18th century, but in the 1790's the London committee appears to have begun taking these complaints more seriously. Some long-standing grievances were acted upon as in the case of Irish beef, long disliked at company posts, which the London committee agreed to stop shipping in 1792.¹³¹ Officers at York conceded that food supplies from Britain were more bountiful and of better quality than had been the case for some time.¹³²

Although old company hands were sometimes inclined to resist aspects of this campaign against scurvy, such as the regulations to encourage cleanliness and some dietary reforms,¹³³ in general the policies of improving diet, cleanliness, encouraging activity and exercise, along with the use of a variety of antiscorbutics had favourable results.

¹³⁰ See for examples, HBCA:B.239/b/78, fos.16d-17, Annual Letter to York Factory, 31 May 1787, and *ibid*, fo.68, Annual Letter to York Factory, 20 May 1808.

¹³¹ HBCA:A.6/15, fo.26, Annual Letter to York Factory, 25 May 1782.

¹³² HBCA:A.11/117, fo.117, Annual Letter from York Factory, 28 September 1781.

¹³³ See for example HBCA:B.239/a/118, fos.11d-12, 30 April 1812. In this instance a number of old hands refused the table beer they were served at mealtimes as an antiscorbutic. While the value of table beer in the prevention of scurvy may be debated this does not seem to have been the basis of their concern. It is more likely that they preferred beer with a higher alcoholic content such as imported porter. W.H. Cook, the officer in charge of York, implied that his men had resisted "the adoption of every regulation" put in place to try to improve their health.

Since the means of treating and of preventing scurvy did not differ in any significant fashion between York and Churchill, the reasons for the differences in the number and severity of outbreaks between these two posts must be found elsewhere. The monotonous regularity with which scurvy followed the over-wintering of more than a few extra persons at bayside posts - even in the 18th century when fairly effective means of preventing and treating scurvy were already in place - underlines the fragile balance that existed at company posts between the size of their resident population and the ability of the environment to support this population. Fresh country provisions were the key to scurvy prevention despite the use of antiscorbutics. The larger the complement of men at a bayside post the greater the risk that the failure of one or more of the usual sources of country provisions would result in an outbreak of scurvy. Although for a time in the mid-18th century the complement of men at Prince of Wales's Fort was greater than at York,¹³⁴ in general the situation was reversed, and the risk of scurvy was therefore somewhat higher at York than at Churchill. This connection between the size of the post population and the risk of scurvy seems to have been understood, at least implicitly, by Samuel Hearne. He remarked that his success in avoiding scurvy at Churchill had been achieved "though my complement at times amounted in number to fifty-three".¹³⁵

In addition to its somewhat smaller population Churchill may also have been blessed with more ample supplies of country provisions. Hearne, as mentioned previously, lists a wide variety of berries available there which

¹³⁴ See Graham, *Observations*, p. 248 and p. 251.

¹³⁵ Hearne, *A Journey to the Northern Ocean*, p. 294.

were collected and eaten by post residents. In addition, residents of Churchill in the 18th century had some success in exploiting the fish resources of the area, in addition to the geese, ducks, ptarmigan, caribou and other birds and mammals hunted as food at other bayside posts. Supplies of arctic char and caplin (or Kepling as Hearne called them) may well have provided a small nutritional advantage to Churchill's residents, which the indifferent returns from 18th century fishing at York did not.¹³⁶ Supplies of fresh food of all types at Churchill were simply more abundant than at York. At least this was the view of some residents of York Factory in the 1790's. Edward Jarvis, the former governor of Albany, was posted to York in 1798 to report on trade there. Soon after his arrival supplies of country provisions became strained, and so did Jarvis's nerves. He announced that "the dread of experiencing want so much haunts his mind" that he could not sleep, and after hearing food supplies were usually more plentiful at Churchill he left York for its neighbouring post.¹³⁷ Scurvy was not really brought under control at York until the 1820's, when new lake and then later river fisheries were developed to provide the post with a reliable source of fresh and frozen fish throughout the winter and spring months. Although a few mild cases of scurvy did appear at York after 1821 it was no longer a serious medical problem. As a friend of James Hargrave remarked in a letter:

I rejoice that the meridian of YF agrees with you so well as to furnish no ground of complaint. That place was once famous for the Scurvy, but now I believe it is quite unknown to you - owing

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 253-4.

¹³⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/100, fo.6d, 28 November 1798.

no doubt to wiser precautions than in the days of the Gothamites.¹³⁸

Ironically soon after Charles Ross wrote these lines to James Hargrave a new medical problem arose to disturb the smooth operation of York Factory. The new illness was named "York Factory Disease", but it has never been clearly identified. Unlike scurvy it affected company officers, not tradesmen or labourers. It first appeared in the spring of 1834 and did not entirely disappear until 1837. Although only one death was directly attributed to it¹³⁹, in 1836 James Hargrave, Dr. Todd and other officers at York were evacuated to Norway House to prevent further mortality.¹⁴⁰ The disease was usually described as a form of "dyspepsia", or "colic", and as early as 1835 speculation as to its causes focussed on the work conditions of officers at York.¹⁴¹ Although environmental and climatic conditions at York were mentioned as possible causes, the feeling seems to have been that the long hours some officers spent doing accounts were to blame for this dyspepsia.

The company arranged for an enquiry into the causes and possible cure of the York Factory Disease c.1836-37. An examination was made of the cooking utensils in use at York, but no evidence was found to support the notion that copper or some other "mineral poison" was to blame. The

¹³⁸ Hargrave, Correspondence, p. 83, Charles Ross to James Hargrave, 3 February 1831. Ross was, of course, referring to the nursery rhyme "Three Wise Men of Gotham" whose actions in setting to sea in a bowl were not wise but incredibly foolish.

¹³⁹ HBCA:B.239/b/92, fo.45d, James Hargrave to John Charles, 28 May 1836.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., fos.60d-61, John Charles to Captain Graves, 27 September 1836.

¹⁴¹ See Hargrave, Correspondence, p. 206, Francis Butcher to James Hargrave, 28 December 1835. See also, ibid., pp. 252-53, John Bell to James Hargrave 30 January 1837.

drinking water was also examined and found to be "pure and wholesome". Instead the inquiry found the "predisposing" cause was the "Close Confinement of the Gentlemen in the Office, or in Rooms the Temperature of which Average 70° to 80°". In addition to working in overheated rooms, the inquiry suggested officers' work hours in winter were too long, stretching from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. or later. It was argued that these two factors combined to produce "a languid State of the System, with loss of Tone in the Stomach". The "immediate" cause of the ailment was described as "the imperfect Manner, in which Food is prepared". Otherwise palatable and nutritious food was apparently all too often rendered neither palatable nor nutritious by the way it was cooked at York "deranging the digestive functions" of post officers. Although no specific remedy for the latter problem was proposed, it was suggested offices and rooms be kept at lower temperatures, and that officers be allowed, as had been the case formerly, additional leisure time to hunt.¹⁴²

These proposals were acted upon, and officers were allowed additional days off work and time during the day to hunt if they wished. As no further mention was made in post records of the "York Factory Disease" these reforms apparently worked. As noted earlier however, digestive problems were endemic at York, and it may well be that this mysterious ailment was nothing more than a more acute form of what was a common problem in the fur trade.

Until the 1780's infectious diseases only occasionally reached epidemic proportions at Churchill and York Factory. Dr. Ewart attributed just 11 deaths of company employees at York in the 18th century to infectious diseases including syphilis. Nor do post records support La Verendrye's

¹⁴² HBCA:B.239/z/26, fos.143-144.

claim that an outbreak of smallpox the Lake of the Woods and Winnipeg River areas in 1737 had spread from the Hudson's Bay Company's posts on the bay.¹⁴³ There was an outbreak of measles among the York Factory Homeguard in 1751,¹⁴⁴ but the first great epidemic to affect York and Churchill did not occur until 1781-82.

This smallpox epidemic is reasonably well-documented and company records from inland posts give historians a fairly clear idea of its extent and of the horrifying toll of lives it took among native peoples. The disease spread northwards from the Missouri River area across the plains and parklands region of Western Canada, finally reaching Indian groups who traded at York and Churchill in 1782. No Indians suffering from smallpox actually reached Prince of Wales's Fort, but Samuel Hearne later estimated that among the Chipewyan men who travelled down to Churchill to trade mortality may have been as high as 90 percent.¹⁴⁵ The result was a blow to Churchill's trade from which it never entirely recovered. At York post records indicate six inland Indians died there from smallpox after coming down to trade. Company officers took steps to keep affected inland Indians away from the local Homeguard population - apparently with complete success. Although the mortality rate among Cree bands living in the lower North

¹⁴³ La Verendrye, Journals and Letters, pp. 258-59 and p. 282.

¹⁴⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/34, fo.38d, 13 June 1751. The extent of this epidemic and the mortality it caused are unknown.

¹⁴⁵ Hearne, A Journey to the Northern Ocean, pp. 115-16 fn.

Saskatchewan River area was high, the epidemic had little direct affect on either native or European communities at York.¹⁴⁶

Epidemics were somewhat more common after 1800 than before, and as in the 18th century they were felt more strongly by the native population and to a lesser extent the families of company employees than by employees themselves. As fewer and fewer Indians travelled any great distance to either York or Churchill to trade, the annual supply ship and boat brigades became the main source of infection. Because Churchill was rarely visited by either boat brigades or a supply ship after the late 18th century, the community there was almost entirely untouched by outbreaks of serious infectious disease. In addition the small complement of men there and low population density of Indians in the area made it all but impossible for infectious diseases to take hold. In 1813 a ship with a party of Red River colonists did arrive at Churchill with many of the colonists seriously ill with typhus. The whole party was landed and then put into immediate quarantine which prevented any further spread of the disease. In total seven of the colonists had died aboard ship¹⁴⁷, and several more died ashore.¹⁴⁸ Still residents of Churchill felt themselves to be under little risk from epidemic disease in the 18th century. When smallpox again swept the plains Indian tribes in 1837-38, the Hudson's Bay Company shipped vaccine to its posts. Robert Harding, the officer in charge of Churchill at

¹⁴⁶ See Michael Payne, "Smallpox at York Factory: Epidemic Disease, Burial Practice, and the York Factory Cemetery", in Payne, York Factory: A Social History, pp. 434-38.

¹⁴⁷ Mitchell, Medicine in Manitoba, p. 26.

¹⁴⁸ See *ibid.* and HBCA:B.42/a/138, fo.8, fo.8d and fo.9, August 1813. The total death toll was between 10 and 12 persons.

the time, received this vaccine but questioned the value of using it in such a remote location. He was given a somewhat sharp order to begin vaccinating local Indians as soon as possible, since some Chipewyan Indians who hunted near plains Indian bands might contract the disease.¹⁴⁹ Harding finally complied. Between the summer of 1838 and spring of 1839 he vaccinated a number of Churchill residents and some Cree and Chipewyan Indians. Many of them, and all of the Inuit at Churchill, refused the operation.¹⁵⁰

At York outbreaks of infectious disease were more common. In 1819-20 whooping cough spread among the Homeguard.¹⁵¹ In 1835, influenza killed eight Indians at York after being brought there by boat brigades. Further influenza outbreaks occurred in 1843, 1845, and 1850, though only in 1845 was the means of transmission of the disease clearly attributable to the boat brigades.¹⁵² These later occurrences of influenza produced fewer deaths than in 1835, but the 1845 epidemic in particular caused serious disruption of business and life at York.¹⁵³ In 1843 there was also a minor outbreak of typhus and "brain fever" at York among company servants.¹⁵⁴ Donald Mackenzie, a sailor, was reported to have died from brain fever.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ HBCA:B.239/b/83, fo.13, John Charles to Robert Harding, 30 March 1838.

¹⁵⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/169, fo.4d, 8 July 1838; fo.5d, 18 July 1838; fo.6d, 27 July 1838; fo.21d, 10 April 1839, and fo.22d, 18 April 1839.

¹⁵¹ HBCA:B.239/e/2, fo.2, York Factory District Report 1820.

¹⁵² Ray, "Diffusion of Disease", pp. 142-50.

¹⁵³ HBCA:B.239/b/97a, fo.13d, James Hargrave to George Simpson, 10 August 1845.

¹⁵⁴ HBCA:B.239/b/94, fo.89d, James Hargrave to Archibald Barclay, 20 September 1843.

¹⁵⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/157, fo.47, 18 July 1843.

The greatest mortality occurred in 1846 when the boat brigade brought measles to York. Company servants, boatmen, and the local Homeguard were all soon infected with the disease. The only deaths which occurred were among the Homeguard. Thirty-one Indians died in the immediate vicinity of York, and James Hargrave suspected many more perished unknown to him.¹⁵⁶ In 1856 a heavy but unquantified mortality was reported among the Homeguard at York after a serious outbreak of Erysipelas or St. Anthony's Fire.¹⁵⁷

A vaccination campaign was also mounted at York in 1838, though as in the case of Churchill smallpox was not reported anywhere near York. Scarlet fever killed two children at York in 1864,¹⁵⁸ but only an outbreak of typhus in 1863 caused serious mortality among company employees. That year the annual supply ship arrived at York with an outbreak of typhus aboard. Once again the long ocean voyage protected post residents. The disease had already manifested itself, and those suffering from typhus were immediately put into quarantine. Only 27 of the company's 73 recruits could be sent inland, and the rest were kept at York in separate quarters.¹⁵⁹ Between September and December six of these men died from the disease before it finally ran its course and the quarantine was lifted.¹⁶⁰ In general the number and variety of outbreaks of infectious disease at York Factory were

¹⁵⁶ HBCA:A.11/118, fos.106-106d, James Hargrave to Archibald Barclay, 6 August 1846.

¹⁵⁷ The disease was not ergotism, however, which was also sometimes called St. Anthony's Fire, but a type of streptococcal infection. HBCA:B.239/b/105, fos.10d-11, James Hargrave to William Smith, 1 December 1856.

¹⁵⁸ HBCA:A.11/118, fo: 478d, W. Wilson to Thomas Fraser, 19 November 1864.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, fos.435-35d, James Clare to Thomas Fraser, 13 September 1863.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fos.446d-47, James Clare to Thomas Fraser, 1 December 1863.

clearly connected to its role as a transshipment point for the Hudson's Bay Company. Like Norway House and Red River, it was a focal point for many epidemic diseases which more remote posts escaped.¹⁶¹

It has sometimes been suggested that fur trade life placed serious strains on the mental health of company employees and that depression, alcoholism, suicide, and sometimes murder and assault followed from the isolation and rigours of life at bayside posts.¹⁶² Alcohol consumption at company posts may not have been as high as is usually assumed. Nor were company employees' drinking habits unusual for the period. Careful examination of records at York and Churchill do not support the notion that "brandy-death" was common at all. A number of accidental deaths at both York and Churchill were caused, at least in part, by imprudent drinking; but the total mortality was not particularly high. The death of Matthew Staines at Prince of Wales's Fort was typical of most such incidents. He and a group of fellow hunters became lost in the woods after drinking too much brandy and Staines froze to death.¹⁶³ While a handful of similar cases can be found in post records, Dr. Ewart found few cases of death at York that could be directly attributed to alcoholism: over a period of some 87 years only two deaths - a minuscule mortality rate considering fur traders' reputations as heavy drinkers.¹⁶⁴ A similar pattern prevailed at Prince of Wales's Fort. John Devenport, a carpenter there, was found dead in his bed,

¹⁶¹ Ray, "Diffusion of Disease", p.156.

¹⁶² See for example, Parnekoek, "Corruption at Moose", p. 5, and Newman, Company of Adventurers, pp. 162-3.

¹⁶³ HBCA:B.42/a/25, fo.20d, 21 March 1744.

¹⁶⁴ The incidents in question may be found in HBCA:B.239/a/37, fo.18, 21 February 1754, and HBCA:B.239/a/173, fos.27-27d, 25 January 1776.

apparently having suffocated in his own vomit after drinking brandy to excess, but this may well be the only such case at Churchill. In the 19th century Churchill residents were forced to lead an almost completely temperate life whether they wanted to or not since almost no alcohol was shipped to the post.

Although alcohol was more a social than a medical problem at York and Churchill, there was some connection between heavy alcohol consumption and violent behaviour in some individuals. James Watson's apparent attempt to murder Joseph Isbister in 1748, and his reputation as an "unsociable" and "Untractable Lunatick" were attributed to his drinking.¹⁶⁵ In other instances, like William Stout who had to be chained to his bed and shipped home in 1754 after threatening to blow up the magazine,¹⁶⁶ or Samuel Walker, the post accountant, who attempted to cut his own throat in 1725,¹⁶⁷ violent behaviour is more plausibly attributed to mental instability or depression.

In the 19th century Churchill's increased isolation and the smaller complement of men there may have caused some increase in depression. Robert Miles, who was placed in charge of the post for a brief period in 1857-58, by his own admission suffered from depression there; many of his journal entries are distinctly odd and suggest some degree of paranoia.¹⁶⁸ However, it may not have been Churchill's location and society alone which was to blame for Miles's problems. Prior to his arrival at York on his way to

¹⁶⁵ HBCA:A.11/13, fo.15, Annual Letter from Churchill 1750.

¹⁶⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/42, fo.40d, 2 July 1754.

¹⁶⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/8, fo.5, 13 September 1725.

¹⁶⁸ See HBCA:B.42/a/188a. He admits his depressed mental state in fo.54d, 23 September 1858.

Churchill James Hargrave had been warned by James Anderson that while stationed at Fort Simpson Miles had been unwell and "deranged at intervals".¹⁶⁹ The Reverend Gardiner also complained of depression during his stay at Churchill, and in 1803 William Auld feared that Peter Gowdie, the post blacksmith, planned to commit suicide. Auld suspected that Gowdie's "solitary occupation" was to blame and decided to send him out to tent with the wooders as a cure. Whether this common sense treatment worked or not is not reported, but no further references to Gowdie's insomnia or depression occur.¹⁷⁰

At York occasional cases of depression and mental imbalance were reported. Some cases were almost amusing. In 1771 for example, James Hutchins laboured for a time under the illusion that fairies were stealing brandy out of the post warehouse and that he ought to shoot them to prevent these thefts. It was felt Hutchins' hallucinations might have been caused by drink, but no alcohol was found in his cabin or chest and his work during the day was normal.¹⁷¹ In 1787 Matthew Barron exhibited slightly more worrisome symptoms running naked around the post in mid-February. He was locked in his room until he recovered somewhat, but soon showed signs of mental imbalance again. As in most other such cases he was simply sent home to Britain as soon as possible.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ PAC:MG19 A21, Hargrave Papers, reel C78, p. 8372, James Anderson to James Hargrave, 27 July 1857.

¹⁷⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/128, fo.3d, December 1803.

¹⁷¹ HBCA:B.239/a/65, fo.17d, 9 January 1771.

¹⁷² HBCA:B.239/a/87, fo.21d, 18 February 1787; fo.45d, 27 July 1787, and fo.52d, 3 September 1787.

Depression also struck several York residents with varying degrees of seriousness. William Mactavish, for example, admitted that his work as post accountant was responsible for causing "a fit of the Blue Devils of about 6 weeks duration".¹⁷³ Nor was this condition a new one. His sister, Letitia Hargrave, had reported some years earlier that he suffered depression regularly after the departure of the supply ship, and that he was sometimes unable to eat properly until early November.¹⁷⁴ Depression could take a more serious turn. In 1850, David Harvey accidentally shot and killed the son of a fellow servant. Overcome with remorse he waited until left alone, and then slipped away to the water hole in the river where he drowned himself.¹⁷⁵ His was one of two successful suicides at York, though at least two other men tried unsuccessfully to kill themselves.¹⁷⁶ In 1726 James Robertson tried to kill himself by the somewhat unlikely means of purposely placing his hand in a trap and awaiting death by exposure. To gain courage for this desperate plan he drank a half pint of brandy, but the effects of the brandy wore off before he had frozen to death. At that point he came to his senses, with some difficulty extracted himself from the trap and walked back to the factory. In the end his hand had to be amputated, but he survived.¹⁷⁷ In 1753, the surgeon threatened to shoot himself and actually did fire a shot in his room, but out of the window. Apparently he was more

¹⁷³ PAM:MG1 D20, Donald Ross Collection, file 121, William Mactavish to Donald Ross, 23 May 1851, postscript dated 4 June 1851.

¹⁷⁴ Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 179, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 29 November 1843.

¹⁷⁵ HBCA:B.238/a/173, fo.35d, 25 March 1850.

¹⁷⁶ Ewart, "Causes of Mortality", p. 572.

¹⁷⁷ HBCA:B.238/a/8, fo.67, 3 January 1726 and fo. 68d, 17 January 1726.

desirous of alarming his fellow officers than of actually doing himself any serious injury.¹⁷⁹

At both York and Churchill forcible restraint was the most common means used for dealing with mental illness, particularly when affected individuals appeared to be violent. One case at York, however, indicated the limitations of such an approach. In 1798 Donald Mackay or McKay was assigned to York, in the somewhat vague capacity of "Gentleman at Large". John Ballenden, the officer in charge of York Factory at the time, soon found Mackay a difficult and rather menacing guest. He made a series of unreasonable and disturbing demands which made Ballenden suspect that he was "deranged in his mind".¹⁸⁰ Mackay absented himself from the officers' mess and then complained that some of the wine sent to him with his meals was poisoned.¹⁸⁰ His behaviour became increasingly violent and threatening throughout the spring and summer of 1799. He fired a gun out of the windows of his room on several occasions, and warned factory residents that he would not permit anyone to approach his quarters.¹⁸¹ He also dropped threatening and abusive notes directed at Ballenden into the factory courtyard. One of these read in part:

Mark read and Digest this
You toad poked faced Vagabond
Your Cote is daded with Cheat,
& your face may be served the same.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/138, fo.28d, 8 April 1753.

¹⁷⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/101, fo.80, 19 November 1798.

¹⁸⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/103, fo.28d, 10 February 1799.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, fo.44d, 28 May 1799, fo.45d, 30 May 1799 and fo.47d, 30 May 1799.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, fos.43d-44, 28 May 1799.

He later threatened to burn the building he was quartered in and "peraded before his door with his broad Sword threatening he would run the first man thro' that made his appearance". With considerable understatement this last journal entry concluded "He at present Disturbs the whole Factory".¹⁶³ Finally his reign of terror at York ended when he was put aboard the supply ship on 15 September 1799.¹⁶⁴

It is easy to understand why no one at York was eager to tackle Mackay in the later stages of his stay at York, when his mental problems had taken a decidedly violent turn. What is less clear is why nothing was done earlier. Physical restraint had been used in other cases under less provocation, and one can only assume that Mackay's position as an officer precluded the use of forcible restraint. He was even allowed to return to company service in 1806-7, and once again his behaviour was equally odd. William Auld summarized his feelings about Mackay after a stay at Churchill:

"[I] think he may possibly be fit to live alone on the top of the highest hill in Scotland unirritated except by Ossians Ghosts whence we pray he may never be brought by an order signed in Fenchurch Street [the London offices of the Hudson's Bay Company].¹⁶⁵

It has been suggested that environmental conditions at York drove McKay "dangerously close to nervous breakdown and suicide".¹⁶⁶ In fact he threatened violence to others not himself, and his aberrant behaviour began

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, fo.98d, 4 August 1799.

¹⁶⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/104, fo.1, 15 September 1799.

¹⁶⁵ HBCA:B.42/b/51, fo.11d, William Auld to Messrs. Hodgson, Thomas, and Gladman, 10 August 1806.

¹⁶⁶ John C. Jackson, "Donald Mackay", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. VI 1821-1835, pp. 463-4.

soon after his arrival at York. At both York and Churchill most company employees coped with isolation, loneliness, and the environment surprisingly well. Rates of suicide and attempted suicide were low - a handful of cases at most over a century and a half. Similarly depression, nervous breakdown, and more violent forms of mental instability, as in the cases of Mackay and Watson, were relatively rare given the number of men stationed at these posts and the length of time they were occupied. Although direct comparisons are impossible, it is worth noting that the suicide rate in Canada in 1982 was 12 to 15 persons per year for every 100,000 people or a mortality rate of about 0.00015.¹⁸⁷ Assuming that the average number of men stationed at York and Churchill was about 60 persons a year, over the 158 years covered by this study two suicides constitute a mortality rate of about 0.0002 - a figure almost identical to modern Canadian rates.¹⁸⁸

The medicine practiced at York Factory and Churchill is worthy of some attention as is the role of post surgeons in community life. The Hudson's Bay Company provided surgeons at its major bayside posts throughout most of the 18th century. Between about 1800 and 1820 personnel records do not always list someone hired specifically as a surgeon at York or Churchill, though some officers stationed at these posts during this period had medical training. William Auld at Churchill, for example, began his career as a surgeon, and Thomas Bunn, at York, although listed as a writer in personnel

¹⁸⁷ See "Suicide", The Canadian Encyclopedia, pp. 1770-71.

¹⁸⁸ It is, of course, possible that the numbers of suicides at York and Churchill were higher. Some deaths attributed to accidents may have been purposeful, and some instances of suicide missed in reading post journals. The numbers of suicides, however, even if five times higher would still be only one in a thousand: scant evidence that company employees suffered serious harm from the isolation of their posts.

records also served as post surgeon. After the reorganization of the fur trade in the 1820's a surgeon was again stationed at York - one of three locations where the company provided doctors along with Red River and the Columbia district. There was no surgeon at Churchill, though if anyone became seriously ill there it was possible for the surgeon to visit from York or for the affected individual to be transported to York for attention. Of course, neither of these courses of action would be much help in an emergency, and it is perhaps just as well that the community at Churchill was as healthy as it was.

Surgeons occupied a somewhat ambiguous position in the post community. They were accorded the status of officers and gentlemen, and were usually paid higher wages than any other employee aside from the officer in charge of the post and sometimes his deputy. Most, however, served only a few years and as a group, with a few notable exceptions, rarely chose to make a career in the fur trade. By and large they were well-paid sojourners, and probably did not wield as much influence in post society as their wages would suggest. In the 18th century they were often seen by the officers in charge of York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort as malcontents, and many were suspected of private trade and other breaches of regulations.¹⁰⁰

The medical skills of surgeons were highly variable. Some like Thomas Hutchins and William Todd appear to have been skilled and diligent surgeons,

¹⁰⁰ There appears to have been some justification for this view. Surgeons could meet with Indians privately under the guise of treating them and a substantial trade in medicines grew up with Indian shamans. See, for example, HBCA:B.42/a/55, fos.45d-48, 3 August 1761. Other surgeons were accused of leading factions among officers and men in opposition to factors. Joseph Isbister, James Isham, Ferdinand Jacobs, and Humphrey Marten all had trouble with their surgeons. See for examples, HBCA:B.239/a/49, fos.9-10d, 21 October 1761; B.239/a/51, fo.32d, 4 May 1764; B.239/a/86, fo.30d, 19 April 1766, and Chapter II, "Social Structure", pp. 112-19.

while others took a rather cavalier approach to their responsibilities. The job was not generally viewed as a full-time occupation, and in the 18th century surgeons were hired in the dual capacity of clerk and surgeon. Dr. William Snellic, a surgeon at York, was dismissed from company service in 1848 when it became apparent his abilities in both functions were limited. Nor was it clear whether it was his professional skills as a doctor or his lack of aptitude for a clerk's responsibilities which was more to blame for the low regard with which he came to be viewed at York.¹⁰⁰

Why the London committee felt it necessary to station surgeons at York in the 18th century is something of a mystery. In 1807 the committee suggested surgeons might take on the task of running post schools as they "must have much leisure time",¹⁰¹ and most posts operated perfectly well without a resident surgeon. It may be that York's reputation as a relatively unhealthy posting or its status as the administrative centre of the fur trade in the North-West was the motivation behind this policy. According to Arthur Ray's research, a stronger case could have been made for the need to locate a surgeon at Norway House than at York.¹⁰²

At posts like Churchill in the period from 1821 to 1870, where no surgeon was stationed, medical treatment became the responsibility of the officer in charge of the post. A modest collection of medicines were stored at the post, and in the case of the vaccination campaign of 1838 careful instructions were sent to Robert Harding along with the vaccine to try to

¹⁰⁰ Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 244 fn, Sir George Simpson to James Hargrave, 20 June 1848.

¹⁰¹ HBCA:B.239/b/78, fo.62, Annual Letter to York Factory 31 May 1807.

¹⁰² Ray, "Diffusion of Disease", p. 158.

ensure that his men, their families and Indians visiting the post were treated effectively.¹⁸³ Lists of drugs, ointments, plasters, and other remedies also appear to have been drawn up for the use of company officers at posts where no surgeon was stationed.¹⁸⁴ Despite this, R.M. Ballantyne described medicine at such posts as relying almost exclusively on bleeding, castor oil, epsom salts and emetics as "the foundations and the copestones" of all disease treatment. As a result he noted that "if a man gets ill, he goes on till he gets better; and if he doesn't get better, he dies".¹⁸⁵

It is also probable that residents of Churchill employed some of their own folk remedies to their ailments including some herbal remedies adapted from native medicinal practices. The most common of these was wishacapucca or Labrador tea. The leaves of this plant were apparently often used to treat sores and skin problems and to make tea.¹⁸⁶ James Ishem claimed to have used this tea to cure a nervous disorder and to have supplied it to a friend in Britain to cure "giddiness" and "fainting fitts".¹⁸⁷ Hearne, however, was sceptical of its value; its frequent use by his men had not shown it to have "the least medical quality".¹⁸⁸ Use of wishacapucca tea continued into the 19th century. In 1848 James Hargrave secured a supply of

¹⁸³ HBCA:B.239/b/93, fo.18d, James Hargrave to Robert Harding, 21 July 1838.

¹⁸⁴ See for example, HBCA:A.67/1, fos.90-93d.

¹⁸⁵ Ballantyne, The Young Fur Traders, pp. 54-55.

¹⁸⁶ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 283.

¹⁸⁷ Ishem, Observations, p. 217.

¹⁸⁸ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 283.

wishacapucca for Bishop Provencher.¹⁹⁹ In addition spruce was used to make spruce beer, and Andrew Graham suggested that the buds of the balsam fir were also used on occasion for "inward disorders".²⁰⁰ The London committee in 1738 and 1762 requested that surgeons seek out specimens of local plants that might have some medical value and ship them to London, but nothing came of these schemes - perhaps because none of the plants collected proved to have much value.²⁰¹

William Smellie was not highly regarded as a doctor at York, but his case records from 1846-47 provide some insight into the sorts of accidents and ailments post surgeons faced. Over the course of 13 months Smellie saw some 136 patients, a rather leisurely patient rate of about ten a month. Although some required several visits or treatments the majority were only seen once. Accidental injuries, which made up a little over one-fifth of his cases, were rarely serious and required little treatment. Ten of these injuries were sustained by boatmen, Indians and others just visiting York.²⁰² Five were axe or adze cuts, and some were serious enough to require stitches. In one case Smellie had to amputate a toe. Most, accidental injuries were strains or simple cuts and bruises. Indeed the most complicated surgical procedure Smellie was called upon to perform was setting a broken finger and a broken wrist for two Norway House Indians.

¹⁹⁹ HBCA:B.239/b/96, fo.42, James Hargrave to the Right Reverend The Bishop of the Northwest, 1 September 1848.

²⁰⁰ Graham, Observations, p. 128.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 129 and pp. 129-30 fn.

²⁰² Overall about one-third of Smellie's patients were visitors to the post - 48 of 136 patients. In addition about 15 of his patients were wives, children and Homeguard Cree from York Factory.

TABLE 14: Dr. ...'s Medical Journal, 1945-47

	Gastric Pain/ Digestive Complaints	Blurred/ Dysentery	Head/ Internal Pain #	Accidental Injury	Other	Total Cases
August 1945	2	1	2	0	1	15
September 1945	5	2	2	1	3	13
October 1945	2	2	0	3	2	9
November 1945	1	5	0	3	2	11
December 1945	0	0	2	2	0	4
January 1947	0	1	0	0	3	4
February 1947	0	1	1	0	0	2
March 1947	0	0	1	2	3	6
April 1947	0	0	0	0	1	1
May 1947	2	1	2	2	4	11
June 1947	4	1	5	2	9	31
July 1947	2	0	5	5	6	18
August 1947	5	0	0	0	6	11
Total	20	20	20	30	45	135

* Includes coughs and colds

Note: The June 1947 figures include 18 visitors to York Factory.

Sources: HSDR:8-239/a/155.

Diarrhoea and dysentery were usually treated with rhubarb powder, calomel, chalk, or jalap. Gastric pain, and other digestive complaints were also treated in much the same fashion with purgatives of varying strength. Along with coughs, colds, and other internal pains these rather prosaic ailments made up nearly half of Sællie's patients and nearly 80% of those patients suffering from disease of any sort. The other ailments Sællie was called upon to deal with were by and large equally mundane. He treated some headaches, a couple of hangovers, inflamed eyes, and a few cases of rheumatism. He may have encountered a case of jaundice and one of equine encephalomyelitis, but it unclear if he recognized them as such or if the treatments he prescribed were of much value. In fact if Ballantyne was correct that at posts where no surgeons were present medicine relied almost exclusively on bleeding, castor oil, epsom salts and emetics, Sællie's records suggest that it was little different even where surgeons were stationed. He simply replaced castor oil and epsom salts with rhubarb, jalap, calomel and ipecacuanha powder.

At York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th century the presence of surgeons made more sophisticated medical treatments possible, but the value of some of the treatment offered was problematic. Based on an analysis of the drugs, ointments, plasters and other materials in use at bayside posts in the early 18th century, Dr. S. Jarcho suggests most were valueless and some like lead plasters were positively dangerous.²⁰³ On the other hand, as "environmentalist" notions of disease became more popular, senior officers and surgeons at York and Churchill began to pay more

²⁰³ S.J. [Dr. S. Jarcho], "Drugs Used at Hudson Bay in 1730," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 47, 7 (July 1971): 838-42.

attention to disease prevention rather than simply treating illness when it appeared. The campaign to limit scurvy at York, with its emphasis on exercise, activity, improved hygiene and diet, represented a new direction in medical care in the fur trade. Although only fresh food and antiscorbutics could have had any direct effect on scurvy, exercise and cleanliness undoubtedly improved general standards of health at company posts, and it is interesting to note that essentially the same treatments were invoked to deal with the "York Factory Disease" when it appeared in the mid-1830's. In the case of infectious diseases some efforts were also made in the area of prevention to complement treatment of affected individuals. The vaccination campaign of 1838 against smallpox, and the use of quarantine to isolate cases of typhus at York and Churchill were sensible and effective responses to these problems. Further the inspection of new recruits at York or in Britain may well have contributed to the apparent decline in cases of syphilis at company posts in the 19th century.

Standards of health appear to have been reasonably high at company posts, and the sorts of accidental injury and the ailments encountered there were usually not beyond the capacity of even indifferently trained surgeons and untrained officers to treat. It is difficult to construct a case for arguing that company employees suffered much risk in taking up careers in the fur trade; if Hearne's notion that Hudson Bay was the "healthiest part in the known world" was an exaggeration it was not a wild one. Compared with conditions in their home communities company employees could expect to live healthy and reasonably secure lives.

There were some significant differences in the incidence of and mortality from diseases between York Factory and Churchill. Scurvy was a

much greater problem at York, either because of less plentiful local food resources and a failure to exploit fish fully as a source of winter provisions or simply because of York's larger work force after about 1774. In addition York's status as the company's main warehouse and administrative centre made it one of the focal points for the diffusion of infectious diseases in the North-West in the 18th century. In general Prince of Wales's Fort and Churchill were healthier postings than York Factory, despite the fact that after about 1800 any medicine practised at Churchill was of the "do-it-yourself" variety.

Chapter VII - Standard of Living and Material Culture: Clothing and Accommodation

The study of standards of living in the past is one of the most difficult and contentious subjects in all of social and economic history. It raises such complex and apparently intractable problems of method and interpretation that many prefer to concentrate on less politically loaded topics and ones for which firmer and less challengeable answers can be found.¹ Nevertheless it is hard to imagine any attempt to reconstruct the lives of ordinary people in the past without examining so fundamental a group of questions as the quality and quantity of the food they ate, the clothing they wore, and the homes they lived in. Indeed as E.P. Thompson has argued it is only when historians interested in standards of living pass beyond "the somewhat unreal pursuit of the wage-rates of hypothetical average workers" and direct their attention to articles of consumption which can more easily be measured and compared that any way out of the problems of method and interpretation can be envisaged.² Nevertheless an approach based on consumption rather than wages is fraught with difficulties. Overall levels of production of certain goods may rise in a society at the same time as the share of these goods enjoyed by certain categories of individuals declines due to inequalities in distribution. There is also an important

¹ As Arthur J. Taylor has noted the study of standard of living in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries almost inevitably leads to "a judgment on capitalism, about the social consequences of the operation of a free-market economy" despite the fact that the subject is "diffuse [and] many-sided" and not liable to produce simple answers. See Taylor, The Standard of Living in Britain, p. vii.

² Thompson, Making of the Working Class, p. 347.

cultural dimension in any assessment of standard of living. For example from a nutritional point of view white wheaten bread may be inferior to wholewheat, rye, or barley bread, but the consumption of white loaves was seen as a mark of status in the 18th and 19th centuries - perhaps even up to the present day in many households. A diet based largely on potatoes may well have been a nutritional advance from one based largely on bread, but it was perceived as dietary degradation by the people whose cherished symbol of status - white bread - had been lost.³

In order to arrive at useful measures of standard of living it is important to try to arrive at per capita levels of consumption for various goods as well as to factor into any assessment of relative standard of living cultural preferences. It is equally important to try to avoid judging the standard of living at Hudson's Bay Company posts from a modern perspective. Viewed from the late 20th century, conditions in the fur trade were far from attractive, and many authors have written eloquently about the privations endured by fur trade employees. Their accommodations were often cold, damp, and smoky, and they had little privacy and few comforts in their cramped and spartan quarters. Their clothing was frequently makeshift or purchased from stocks of cheap ready-made clothes supplied by the ships' captains. Yet for all that it is hyperbolic to suggest they were forced "to exist near the limits of human endurance" as one popular historian would have it.⁴ Such views are based on a misleading comparison

³ Ibid., pp. 347-48. The same point has been made in many other works notably J.C. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, The Englishman's Food: A History of Five Centuries of English Diet (London: Jonathan Cape, 1957) and by R.N. Salaman, The History and Social Influence of the Potato (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949).

⁴ Newman, Company of Adventurers, p. 8.

between modern and 18th and 19th century living conditions. What seems unendurable in 1968 may well have been relative luxury in 1766. In assessing living conditions in the fur trade the proper comparisons are with conditions in employees' home communities. Indeed these are the comparisons company servants themselves made, and by and large the evidence suggests most such comparisons favoured conditions at company posts.

Examination of the material culture of the fur trade also offers an interesting case study in the dynamics of cultural change and adaptation. It is equally important to detail aspects of material culture which did not change. As John Mannion has suggested, material culture in expatriate communities is part inheritance, part imitation, and part innovation.⁶ Hudson's Bay Company posts are no exception to this observation.

During the "summer" season Hudson's Bay Company employees were reported to have worn "common European dress".⁶ Company servants had several sources of supply for this clothing. The company itself sent out clothing materials and ready-made shirts, stockings, handkerchiefs, hats, and shoes both for use as trade goods and for sale to its own employees.⁷ In addition company employees, especially British and Orkney servants,

⁶ John J. Mannion, Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 171.

⁶ Graham, Observations, p. 298. Graham also suggested most men only purchased a few "trifles"- mainly shirts and waistcoats- as many of their remaining clothing needs were provided for by the company. Ibid., p.248.

⁷ These clothing items appear in the earliest surviving invoice books from York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort dated 1732. Oddly enough these lists of goods do not mention breeches, trousers, coats or waistcoats which must have been purchased from other sources. See HBCA:A.24/17, fo.3, Prince of Wales's Fort Invoice Book 1732; A.24/23, fos.2d-3, York Factory Invoice Book 1732, and subsequent volumes.

undoubtedly brought supplies of clothing out with them in their chests when first hired, and may well have been resupplied periodically by family or friends.⁹ The main source of European dress, however, was apparently the captains of the annual supply ships, who sold the men inexpensive ready-made clothing from their stores of seaman's "slops". The British navy had introduced the "slop chest" as early as 1623, and the practice of keeping a store of ready-made clothing aboard ships was soon extended to merchant vessels as well.¹⁰ This clothing was supplied by specialized clothing contractors who were among the first large scale manufacturers of ready-to-wear clothing. There was no particular uniform for sailors in the 18th century, and seamen's clothing came in various colours and materials. Typically, however, sailors' dress consisted of buckled shoes, cotton or woolen stockings, check or striped trousers made from canvas or linen, which protected underclothing from dirt, tar and paint, cotton or linen shirts, waistcoats or vests, and single-breasted jackets. Most also wore a kerchief around their necks and one of a number of different styles of hat or cap, including the knitted Monmouth cap and the tarred canvas or tarpaulin hat which gave sailors the nickname Jack Tar.¹⁰ To modern eyes men dressed in

⁹ In the 18th century sailing instructions to captains and annual letters to posts regularly commented on the need to discourage private trade by preventing company servants from receiving shipments and packages of goods from home. Whether or not this prohibition extended to clothing is unknown. By the 18th century packages for company employees were an accepted part of all ship's cargoes.

¹⁰ Peter F. Copeland, Working Dress in Colonial and Revolutionary America (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. 8.

¹⁰ Descriptions of sailors' dress may be found in ibid., pp. 5-12 and Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Occupational Costume in England from the Eleventh Century to 1914 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1967), pp. 58-62.

18th century sailors' garb would have presented a startling and garish sight. Each item of clothing was often a different colour: red, blue, grey, or brown, and a different pattern as well: stripes, checks and solid colours.

Post invoices suggest the clothing sent out by the company for sale at its posts was very similar to "seamen's slops". Shirts were described as speckled, striped, or solid colours and stockings were usually either red or blue. Since the company almost certainly purchased its supplies of shirts, stockings, shoes and handkerchiefs from the same suppliers of ready-made clothing as the ships captains, the appearance of company servants probably changed very little however their clothing needs were supplied. According to David Thompson, company men in the 1780's usually wore tight blue jackets - presumably over cotton or linen shirts - and leather trousers.¹¹ Thompson's mention of the prevalence of blue jackets in the wardrobes of company servants offers indirect confirmation of the continued importation of seamen's slops. Blue jackets had been introduced as a kind of uniform for naval officers in 1748 and by the 1770's had largely replaced other colours like red and grey among ordinary seamen as well.¹² The fact, however, that he noted company servants had adopted leather as the preferred material for their trousers suggests that by the later 18th century indigenous clothing materials may have been used in place of imported cloth, at least for some clothing items in the men's summer wardrobes, and underlines the point that not all of this clothing was necessarily produced by British suppliers.

¹¹ Thompson, *Narrative*, p. 40.

¹² Copeland, *Working Dress*, p. 7.

Tailors were part of the regular complement of men at bayside factories from the early 18th century onwards. Much of their work was taken up with producing coats to be given as presents to trading captains, and the manufacture of specialized winter clothing. Nevertheless some may have had time to produce trousers, shirts, and other clothing for sale to fellow employees. Other servants were also likely to have made and repaired clothing for themselves. In the 18th century skill with a needle and thread was of necessity not limited only to tailors and women. Soldiers, sailors and many other men expected to repair their own clothes much of the time, and examples can be found in British museums of waistcoats, trousers, and other clothing decorated by their owners with appliqué and embroidery.¹³ Company servants were able to purchase materials for clothing in the form of thread, cloth, duffel, or blanketing from company stores for their own use, or to give to Indian women to turn into clothing for them. By the later 18th century much of this work was probably done by the wives of company men, but as late as 1791 Joseph Colen complained that the post sloopers had stolen the mainsail of their ship to make trousers for themselves.¹⁴

Eighteenth century British and colonial dress characteristically revealed the wearer's occupation. One's work was often reflected directly

¹³ Cunningham and Lucas, Occupational Costume, p. 58.

¹⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/92, fos.3-3d, 5 October 1791. In using sail cloth to make themselves trousers these men were not exactly the "desperate" creatures described by Peter Newman in Company of Adventurers, p. xix. Few today would choose such a clothing material, but old sails had a long history of use in sailor's clothing. Canvas trousers were worn to keep stockings, breeches and other undergarments dry and protected from tar, oil, paint and other such potential hazards to clothing. See Cunningham and Lucas, Occupational Costume, p. 58.

in one's dress,¹⁵ though whether or not this was the case at fur trade posts is impossible to determine. It is tempting to speculate that the specialized hats, aprons, and other working garb worn by tradesmen in Britain and in the American colonies also found their way to Hudson Bay, but there is no direct evidence of this. Still blacksmiths, tinmiths, carpenters, masons, and cooks employed at company posts almost certainly would have worn cloth or leather aprons to protect their clothing. They may also well have preferred to wear breeches, as trousers at the time were considered fit only for unskilled labouring men and sailors.¹⁶

Company officers in the 18th century did not have to rely on either imported ready-made clothing or clothes made for them by native women. Some clothing was certainly obtained this way,¹⁷ but officers could order tailor-made clothing from Britain or use the services of post tailors. A painted panel found at York Factory shows a man and woman, almost certainly an officer and his wife, taking tea. The picture has not been dated exactly, but it probably was painted by a resident of York in either the late 18th or early 19th century. The man in the painting is shown wearing a wig, a shirt with either a cravat or a ruffed collar and cuffs, and a long

¹⁵ Copeland, Working Dress, p. xiv.

¹⁶ Many company tradesmen may have brought these visible symbols of their trades, like the long apron with a triangular bib adopted by coopers, with them in their chests along with other tools of their trade. Post workshops were furnished with necessary equipment and some tools, but tradesmen probably supplied at least a basic set of their own tools.

¹⁷ For example Ferdinand Jacobs reported in 1755 that his sloop master, John Bean, had beaten two Indian women for not making him some deer hide socks as he had requested. Fortunately for white-native relations at Prince of Wales's Fort most such transactions had less dramatic consequences. See HBCA:B.42/a/46, fos.3d-4, 29 September 1755.

coat.¹⁸ Along with breeches and stockings and perhaps an embroidered waistcoat or vest such garb was common dress for British men of business of the time. The one post officer who might have presented a different appearance was the surgeon. As a surgeon he was entitled to wear a distinctive wig, and most physicians and surgeons in the 18th century wore black coats and breeches.¹⁹

Company officers did not often discuss their clothing, but one incident suggests some at least had a sense of sartorial occasion. According to David Thompson, William Tomison, the company's inland governor in the 1790's, kept a special scarlet vest to wear during his stays at York Factory. When finally after years of intermittent use it began to fade he attempted to have it cleaned. The result was disastrous. Lye was used and most of the colour in the vest was bleached out. Unwilling to appear in a spotted red and white vest Tomison was forced to purchase a new blue one to wear while resident at York. Tomison was also critical of Thompson's appearance. He declared Thompson's jacket too ragged for either further wear or mending and ordered a new one made by the tailor at York for Thompson's use.²⁰

In the 19th century summer dress changed somewhat with the whims of fashion. The tight clothing Thompson described apparently gave way to clothes cut to a "full roomy size".²¹ Trousers replaced breeches in normal

¹⁸ See Gary Adams, "Art and Archaeology at York Factory", p.40.

¹⁹ Copeland, Occupational Dress, p. 152.

²⁰ Thompson, Narrative, pp. 51-2.

²¹ HBCA:B.239/b/93, fo.64d, James Hargrave to Sir George Simpson, 5 September 1840.

wear for men of all classes in the fur trade as well as in Britain. Similarly the brightly coloured clothing which had been worn by the well-to-do as well as the poor went out of fashion for the former. As woolen cloth replaced silk and satin in fashionable male dress, cut rather than colour became the main determinant of status.²² Company officers like James Hargrave, who usually purchased their formal business clothing from tailors in Britain, outfitted themselves with the conventional uniform of businessmen - frock coat, waistcoat, trousers and cravats - in subdued shades. As Hargrave's clothing and toiletry order from 1828 indicates, this clothing could absorb a significant portion of a clerk's salary. At the time Hargrave earned £100 per annum and spent just over £7 on clothing, tooth powder, and soap sent out from Britain.²³ Considering that Hargrave would have also had to provide himself with shirts, underclothing, socks and shoes, it is likely that he spent at least 10% of his annual salary on clothing alone. As a senior clerk his salary was about double that of junior clerks and up to five times that of apprentice clerks. If they too

²² C. Willett Cunnington and Phyllis Cunnington, Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), revised ed., pp. 19-20.

²³ His order read as follows:

	£	s	d
A Second Cloth Frock Coat	3	0	0
A Waistcoat and a Pair of Trousers	2	6	0
A Fur seal Cap		18	0
1 Box of Vegetable [sic]Tooth Powder		2	6
2 Lambs Wool Cravatts		4	0
1 Dozen Cakes sented [sic]soap		12	0
Porterage		1	0
	£7	3	6

had to outfit themselves with tailor-made coats, waistcoats and trousers - even if of inferior quality - clothing probably constituted the largest single expense in their budgets.²⁴ Tradesmen and labourers continued to outfit themselves at least in part with the ready-made clothing they purchased at post saleshops. Considerable care had to be taken in the selection of these clothing items, because company servants had strong preferences and were not satisfied with strictly utilitarian clothing. James Clare complained in 1858 that a selection of embroidered flannel shirts sent to York were likely to prove unsalable. According to Clare they were too inferior in quality and the embroidery patterns were too tasteless for company officers to purchase them, but they were not showy enough for the men.²⁵ The men who worked on the boat brigades, in particular, acquired a reputation for ostentatious dressing, but other employees were also reportedly eager to purchase what they considered finery. George Simpson saw to it that the company indulged their urge for small luxuries in their clothing and remarked that many employees felt cheated and aggrieved if they could not spend freely in the saleshops of posts like York and were compelled by lack of desirable merchandise to save their wages.²⁶

Simpson's comments on employees' willingness to spend freely on clothing are not entirely confirmed, however, by actual post accounts. These contain a reasonably detailed record of employee's purchases from post

²⁴ In middle-class British households at about the same time, expenditures on clothing were estimated at about one-seventh of family income. See John Burnett, A History of the Cost of Living (London: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 243.

²⁵ HBCA:B.239/b/105, fo.127d, James Clare to W.G. Smith, 9 September 1858.

²⁶ HBCA:B.239/c/2, fo.37, George Simpson to Alexander Christie, 18 December 1830.

stores. In the early 18th century most men spent very little of their wages on clothing or clothing materials purchased from post stores. At York Factory in 1732-33 for example company employees bought on a per capita basis approximately 0.25 of a blanket, 0.2 yards of blue duffel, 3.75 yards of flannel, 0.5 pairs of shoes, and smaller quantities of stockings, shirts, and broad cloth.²⁷ At Prince of Wales's Fort in 1739-40 similar per capita purchases of clothing were recorded. There the men on average bought about 0.5 blankets, 2 yards of flannel, $\frac{1}{2}$ dozen buttons, 3 needles, 0.2 pairs of shoes, and small quantities of red baize and white cloth. On average they spent £3/5/9 at the post sale shop, but £2/7/0 of this total was spent on tobacco, brandy, sugar, clay pipes, and soap. Thus the average spending on clothing or clothing materials at Prince of Wales's Fort was 18 shillings, a little less than one pound per annum. Of course individual spending varied a great deal. One man, William Allen, spent only 5 shillings on three quarts of brandy and two pounds of leaf tobacco. Thomas Kingston on the other hand spent £7/10/0, though only 15 shillings of this was spent on cloth, blankets, twine and needles.²⁸ At the time wages for labourers ranged from £4 to £16 per annum with an average salary of about £7. Tradesmen earned between £14 and £30 per annum and averaged about £22.²⁹ Thus while 18 shillings a year for clothing represented nearly one quarter of the earnings of newly recruited labourers - who in all likelihood were those whose purchases from post stores were smallest - it was only about

²⁷ HBCA:B.239/d/22, York Factory Accounts 1732-33.

²⁸ HBCA:B.42/d/20, Prince of Wales's Fort Accounts 1739-40.

²⁹ Prince of Wales's Fort Servants Accounts for 1739-40 are missing, this average salary for labourers and tradesmen is derived from York Factory accounts. See, HBCA:A.16/31, York Factory Servants Accounts 1739-40.

one-eighth of an average labourer's wages, and less than a twentieth of an average tradesman's wages. Still at the time much of the men's clothing was probably purchased from the ship's captains, and clothing may well have taken up a larger proportion of company servant's budgets than these figures indicate.

Post records from the later 18th century reveal that company employees were slightly more likely to purchase clothing or clothing materials from company supplies, but the amounts purchased remained relatively low. At both York Factory and Churchill in 1779-80 ready-made clothing and clothing materials made up only about half of all goods purchased by employees from the company. At Churchill employees purchased approximately 1.2 blankets, 1.3 pairs of stockings, 3 buttons, 0.15 yards of baize, 0.8 yards of cloth, 0.56 yards of flannel and 0.44 yards of duffel per capita. York Factory residents purchased very similar quantities and types of goods. On a per capita basis they bought approximately 0.86 blankets, 0.43 shirts, 0.22 pairs of stockings, 0.2 yards of baize, 1.1 yards of cloth, 0.6 yards of flannel, 0.2 yards of duffel, and 5 buttons. The major differences in purchases between the two posts were that very few shoes were sold at York, and no shirts were purchased at Churchill.³⁰ On average at both posts most men still spent just over £1 per annum on clothing. Given that average salaries had risen appreciably - labourers at Prince of Wales's Fort averaged £10 per annum³¹ - it would appear clothing costs had remained steady or even declined somewhat as a proportion of salaries.

³⁰ HBCA:B.42/d/59, Prince of Wales's Fort Accounts 1779-80, and B.239/d/70, York Factory Accounts 1779-80.

³¹ See HBCA:A.30/1, Prince of Wales's Fort Servants 1779-80.

Because the 19th century accounts are so voluminous, and because individuals travelled more between posts it is more difficult to abstract individual clothing purchases for post residents in the 19th century, especially at York Factory. There Simpson's finery may well have been more popular. At Churchill, however, the earlier patterns of the 18th century seem to have persisted. The eight men stationed there in 1840-41 spent an average of about £1/16/9 each on goods from the post shop of which about 10 shillings was spent on shot, powder, brandy, tobacco, and other such goods. Thus company employees, at Churchill anyhow, still spent only a little more than £1 per annum on clothing and clothing materials. Once again as salaries had increased - the lowest wage at Churchill in 1840-41 was £18 per annum - so if anything clothing costs consumed less of company employee's income than ever before.³²

Company employees may have used other sources of clothing besides post sale shops; their actual purchases there of ready-to-wear clothing and materials were probably only sufficient to supply about one set of clothes every two years at best.³³ However, Joseph Colen's observation that the men at York Factory in the 1790's were prone to wearing the same shirt for months on end until it became so filthy and tattered it had to be discarded

³² See HBCA:B.42/d/158 and 159, Churchill Accounts 1840-41.

³³ How employees clothed their families is unclear from these account books. As an example both James Dunning and William Oman maintained families at Churchill in 1840-41, but neither purchased clothing or material from the post in any quantity. Dunning limited his purchases of such items to 5 mooseskins, ½ yard of green stroud, and a roll of gartering. Oman purchased even less - only 4 Mooseskins. In general purchases of more than about 4 yards of material and one blanket a year were extremely rare in the account books surveyed. It may be that most clothing material was bought and paid for with wives' earnings from trapping or temporary labour at the post. Further research on this matter may well indicate that marriage to a company employee by no means ensured a steady supply of clothing material.

may in fact reflect a rather common attitude towards clothing at company posts.³⁴ If so, many company men may well have been content to leave the purchase of lavish clothing to tripmen, and save their wages for other purposes or spend them on small luxuries like brandy, tobacco, and sugar. According to Letitia Hargrave some tripmen were prepared to spend the equivalent of an entire year's wages on a Scottish-style bonnet decorated with silver and ostrich feathers.³⁵

Without being able to determine how much clothing company employees acquired from home or ship's captains it is impossible to say how their clothing compared in quality or quantity with that worn by working people in Britain or elsewhere in North America at the time. British studies indicate, however, that aside from better paid artisans whose work was fairly regular, clothing for most working people in Britain in the 18th and through much of the 19th century was usually obtained only with some difficulty. Despite the efforts of social reformers who concocted ideal household budgets which carefully allocated every halfpenny to some useful end, the reality of life for most was a constant struggle to pay for food, drink, fuel, and rent. While clothing was normally the fifth largest component of most reported budgets, 5 to 10% was probably more common in poorer households.³⁶ Generally working people made do with second-hand or home-made and much repaired clothing. Many bought their clothing on credit,

³⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/95, fos.18d-19, 18 February 1793.

³⁵ Hargrave, Letters, p. 96, Letitia Hargrave to Florence Mactavish, 4 September 1841.

³⁶ According to John Burnett typically only about 5 to 10 percent of earnings were spent on clothing in poorer households. Burnett, Cost of Living, p. 279. Intriguingly this is very similar to the proportion of salary company servants spent on clothing and material at post sale shops.

though this caused the clothes to be much more expensive in the end, because they could never manage to save the full cost of a coat or shoes or dress at one time. For most clothing could only be replaced infrequently, and few could afford to dress themselves and their families with enough clothing to allow regular changes and cleaning. As incomes rose proportionate spending on clothing increased, and in North America where wages for working people were generally higher than in Britain it is believed that they purchased more and better quality clothing.³⁷

The summer clothing of officers and men at posts like York Factory and Churchill almost certainly differed very little from the clothing worn by men working at similar occupations in Britain or in other colonial communities in North America. Overall there may have been greater reliance placed on ready-made clothing in the fur trade than in employees' home societies, especially in the 18th century when inexpensive mass-produced clothing was rare outside of sailor's slops and similar clothing produced for labourers. The most important distinction, since food, drink, fuel and rent were provided by the company, was that instead of having to set aside pennies a week in order to purchase a coat or shoes any reasonably provident company servant could buy whatever he needed more or less whenever he needed it. That they did not purchase more clothing and may have been content to wear whatever they owned until it was in rags and filthy, was a product less of dire economic necessity than of cultural choice.

Summer clothing in the fur trade was one aspect of material culture where innovation and cultural borrowing from native peoples had little effect. The major exception to this rule was the development of specialized

³⁷ Copeland, Working Dress, p. xii.

footwear used by the men who worked on the boat brigades. When travelling against the current tripmen frequently had to haul boats inland, and the company furnished them with what were known as tracking shoes. Heavy moccasin-like shoes made from buffalo or ox hide, they protected employees' feet and clothing while wading through rocky waters.³⁰

The winter dress of company employees was in many respects much more interesting and involved a much higher degree of cultural adaptation and change. In recognition of this fur trade authors devoted much more space in their works to describing winter dress than summer clothing which in the main was neither picturesque nor unfamiliar to their readers. James Isham noted ironically that company employees in winter came to resemble the very animals whose pelts they were employed to collect. As he remarked, when dressed for outdoor work in winter fur traders appeared "more like Beasts than men, with the hairy Cloathing we wear".³⁰ According to Andrew Graham by the mid-18th century company employees had adopted something close to a standardized winter costume. Before the weather became too cold company men wore a loose outer coat he called a banian or banyan made from moose hide trimmed with fur. In the depths of winter greater protection was needed, and a beaver toggy was worn instead. The toggy was a long fur coat which

³⁰ HBCA:B.239/b/107, fo.141d, James Clare to William Mactavish, 14 August 1862. Most tracking shoes were made by native people for sale to the company. At York they were usually produced by the Homeguard who lived around the post and perhaps by the wives of company servants as well. According to Isaac Cowie this was one of the main work responsibilities of post women. See Isaac Cowie, Company of Adventurers (Toronto: William Briggs, 1913), p. 213. These shoes were produced in large quantities. In 1800 for example 850 pairs were made at York alone. HBCA:B.239/a/105, fo.10d, 10 November 1800. In later years at Churchill Inuit boots were also produced for use by company employees. See HBCA:B.239/b/83, fo.68d, James Hargrave to Robert Harding, 10 December 1840.

³⁰ Isham, Observations, p. 117.

was tied under the chin and was usually made from beaver skins.⁴⁰ For added warmth and protection from damp the fur side of the skins was turned inward. Under the toggy men wore a cloth waistcoat with sleeves and deer or elk-hide breeches. Both were lined with flannel. Legs were protected by worsted or yarn stockings with Indian-style cloth leggings over them. These reached from the ankle to the groin and were tied beneath the knees with string or garters. The men wore three pairs of duffel or blanketting socks on their feet. These socks reached at least half-way up the calf, and over them the men wore shoes, "the same as the natives ... to exclude cold and snow when travelling". In milder weather a cap with only a band of otter skin around it was worn. In extreme cold or drifting snow a lined cap was worn, with a broader band of otter skin and a large flap which came down over the shoulders to prevent snow going down the neck. The men also covered their faces with a chin-cloth of fur, duffel, flannel or blanketting, which when tied around the face left only eyes, nose, and mouth exposed. Finally for their hands the men wore leather mittens in mild weather, or in extreme cold lined beaver mittens with the fur outside so that it could be used to press against the face when necessary. These mittens were fastened together, a practice Graham indicated was borrowed from native peoples.⁴¹ This winter wear judiciously blended native and

⁴⁰ The word toggy, toggey, or tockey as it sometimes appears, is assumed to be derived from the Cree word "niskotake" for coat. The coat itself was clearly an adaptation of the beaver cloaks worn by Indians and which produced the valuable "coat" beaver so much in demand by hat makers. See Avis et al., Dictionary of Canadianisms, p. 789.

⁴¹ Graham, Observations, pp. 287-98.

imported materials to take advantage of the best qualities of each.⁴² Aside from materials, however, it represented a direct imitation of native clothing style, and a clear example of cultural adaptation by company employees. It also offered considerable practical advantages over the cold-weather clothing worn in Britain at the time. It protected company men not only from the cold but also from the wind and snow which were in some respects more dangerous. The bulk of the instances of serious frost-bite suffered by company employees occurred when their clothing became wet or as a result of wind chill, and not simply as a result of frigid temperatures.

The increased size of the company's work force and declining supplies of beaver led to the abandonment of the beaver toggy as a normal part of winter clothing in the 1780's. According to David Thompson leather coats became more common in the later 18th century,⁴³ and in the early 19th century company men experimented with the use of buffalo robes for winter clothing.⁴⁴ It was not until the union of the Hudson's Bay and North West companies in 1821 that the blanket coat or capote came into common usage among Hudson's Bay Company employees. Although it is now inextricably associated with the Hudson's Bay Company, the blanket coat or capote had a long history prior to its adoption by company men. The basic design of the capote, a long hooded greatcoat, was essentially native, but it was adopted

⁴² As Eric Ross has pointed out skin and leather clothing usually becomes hard and uncomfortable to wear after having been wet, and native people too appreciated the advantages of cloth for inner garments. Leather and fur were better suited for outer wear. Ross, Beyond the River and the Bay, pp. 86-87.

⁴³ Thompson, Narrative, p. 36.

⁴⁴ See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/120, fo.4, 20 October 1812.

by French fur traders early in the 17th century.⁴⁵ After the conquest of Quebec English-speaking fur traders from Montreal began to use this highly serviceable garment, and eventually through them it was introduced to Hudson's Bay Company employees. The fact that similar coats are still sold in large numbers is a testament to the functional practicality of these coats. Warm and durable, the capote was relatively easily made and when properly cut left very little waste from a blanket.⁴⁶

The introduction of the capote also marked an important change in the way in which company servants were clothed. Summer dress had always been an employee's own responsibility, and although the company imported clothing and clothing materials for their use individuals were expected to purchase their own clothing out of their wages. The only exception to this general rule was the company's provision of tracking shoes free of charge to its boatmen. Some specialized clothing may also have been provided, like the protective aprons worn by most tradesmen. Post records are generally mute on such matters, though Joseph Colen did indicate in 1785 that the men working on cleaning and digging drainage ditches at York were issued smocks and trousers to protect their own clothes while engaged in this rather dirty task, and that similar clothing was issued to boatmen.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Pierre Esprit Radisson, Voyages, p. 110.

⁴⁶ The pattern for a late 19th century version of this coat may be found in Dorothy Burnham, Cut My Cote, (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1973) p. 21.

⁴⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/97, fo.20d, 24 April 1785. Andrew Graham makes a similar suggestion indicating that during his time on the bay protective leather clothing, like coats, was issued at company expense. Graham, Observations, p.248.

The winter dress of company employees was treated somewhat differently. Although company men were expected to provide their own stockings, socks, waistcoats and breeches, they were issued most of the necessary outer wear. Throughout the 18th and into the early 19th centuries beaver toggies, leather coats, hats, mittens and snowshoes were provided by the company. This was a substantial saving to company servants, who might have been hard pressed to purchase a coat made from five to eight prime beaver pelts for themselves.⁴⁸ After 1821 though, the less expensive capote became an important sales item at posts, and ready-to-wear blanket coats were imported in large quantity from Britain. At about the same time the company began to make it harder and harder for employees to dress themselves in furs. In 1825 the company decreed that any furs trapped by officers or men had to be traded to the company at the same standard of trade as Indian producers received.⁴⁹ In 1841 the company went even further and made it policy that company employees wishing to procure furs for their own use would have to pay an equivalent price to that secured for prime furs of the same type at London auctions.⁵⁰ Such actions were important features of the campaign to undermine customary rights in the fur trade and to substitute a system of remuneration for work based on wages alone for the older complicated system of remuneration based on both wages and non-financial or indirectly

⁴⁸ Avis, Dictionary of Canadianisms, entry for "Beaver Coat", p. 41.

⁴⁹ HBCA:B.239/k/1, fo.71d, Resolve #88, Minutes of Council 1825.

⁵⁰ Resolve #71, Minutes of Council 1841. See Oliver, The Canadian North-West, Vol. II, p. 827.

financial benefits discussed elsewhere in this study.⁵¹ Somewhat surprisingly post records do not indicate any great resentment over these changes, despite the fact that the erosion of the old tradition of supplying beaver or leather toggies, mittens, caps and on occasion other clothing meant an additional expense for company servants. Perhaps the upheaval caused by the union of the two fur trade companies and the influx of former North West and XY Company men who had been used to purchasing their own winter clothing made the change easier.

Officers did continue to purchase furs from post stores - otter and muskrat appear to have been the most popular purchases⁵² - perhaps to make caps and mittens. Senior officers like James Hargrave were able to purchase furs in considerable quantities to give as gifts or for their own or family members' use. Letitia Hargrave described herself as "well skinned" during the winter of 1842-43. She had been given "nearly 60 ermine skins, a white fox muff [and] a new lynx boa". The most valuable of her furs, however, was a marten tippet of which one of the three skins was a "prodigy". The fur in question had first been spotted in the possession of an Indian who was going to make it into a medicine bag. One Mr. Sinclair, a company officer, made the Indian give it up, and James Hargrave in his turn "could not let it pass, so he bought it". He then instructed Robert Wilson to choose two other marten skins as close in quality to the prodigy as possible to make up

⁵¹ The right to keep personal trappings or to purchase furs, ostensibly for personal use, could be used to supplement official wages. Upon retirement company servants could take their personal property home and sell the furs they brought back with them. Nineteenth century company policy made such speculation more difficult.

⁵² See for example, HBCA:B.239/z/28, fo.127, Furs Sold to Employees Outfit 1836.

a good sized tippet.⁵³ Later in the same letter detailing her recent fur acquisitions Letitia Hargrave explained why ownership of furs at posts like York Factory was beyond the means of all but officers and why only commissioned officers could afford to see their wives "well-skinned". She noted all employees had "to surrender every skin they get & I believe they get about the value of a lb. of tobacco in return, unless for the very fine kinds, wch if I am rightly informed bring 5/- Otters (Land ones) sold last year for £1/13 at the house in London & here anyone who needs a cap will have to pay that & 20 per cent additional".⁵⁴

Thus over the course of a century Isham's beasts in hairy clothing had been transformed. There is considerable irony in the fact that the very items posts were established to collect had become so valuable and expensive that furs could only be used in the regular winter wardrobe of a handful of senior company employees and their spouses. Cultural anthropologists interested in the study of diet, like Claude Lévi-Strauss and his disciples, have tried to draw a distinction between nature and culture especially in the area of food preparation.⁵⁵ According to their basic theoretical premise the distinction is made between "that which is found in a natural

⁵³ Hargrave, Letters, p. 129, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 2 December 1842.

⁵⁴ Ibid. In other words it would now require trapping seven otters in order to keep one pelt. It is also interesting to note Letitia Hargrave's reported stock of fur clothing went up shortly after the company's new policy was announced. Perhaps Hargrave and others took advantage of a final opportunity to purchase furs at the old rate.

⁵⁵ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969). A useful summary of the "structuralist" approach to the anthropology of diet may be found in Stephen Mennell, All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 8-13.

[or near natural] state and that which is transformed or elaborated by human effort".⁵⁶ Although a very different aspect of material life it could be argued that fur trade clothing patterns reflected a movement away from the natural towards the culturally elaborated. There is something very natural seeming about wearing the skins of your prey or at least the prey of your trading partners, but by the 19th century fur traders had more or less abandoned fur in their clothing. Not only was more and more of their clothing imported tailor-made or ready-to-wear items but it was increasingly made from cotton or woolen cloth even when made by wives or the men themselves. There is something almost incongruous about fur traders dressing themselves in cloth made from the produce of domestic animals or crops, but such was the case.

In general cultural adaptation in fur trade clothing followed a functional pattern. European clothing styles and materials conferred neither clear advantages nor disadvantages over native clothing in the warmer months and therefore there was little impetus to change. As William McNeill has argued, cultural changes as a result of contact between two distinct communities normally occur only when "the safe and familiar" which most people prefer, no longer functions well.⁵⁷ There was, however, clear value in adapting native dress during the winter months since its design and many of its materials were better suited to the extreme climatic conditions faced by anyone resident on the shores of Hudson Bay. Similarly native peoples saw distinct advantages in incorporating European clothing materials

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ William H. McNeill, The Great Frontier: Freedom and Hierarchy in Modern Times (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1903), p. 9-10.

into their dress as well, with the result that wool and cotton replaced leather and fur in the manufacture of many clothing items. Thus native people quickly adopted blanketting as a material for making winter coats which Europeans in turn adapted for their use. In many respects the process was almost circular with one group's imitation being adopted by the other. Letitia Hargrave's description of her indoor winter clothing offers an intriguing glimpse of the end result of this process. Outwardly she presented a fairly conventional appearance for the period wearing stockings and a merino gown, though she did admit to wearing a man's flannel jacket as well. What was less conventional was her footwear and the clothing she wore under her gown and stockings. While the gown itself was lined with bath coating - a form of thick woolen baize cloth⁵⁸ - she also wore long drawers reaching down to her feet made from bath coating, duffel socks and moccasins. She also mentioned that she wore cloth leggings on occasion like the native and mixed blood women at York.⁵⁹

In later years she did try to teach some of the other women at York how to knit so that they could make their own stockings, but she suggested few were likely to abandon leggings and duffel socks entirely.⁶⁰ The one form of clothing imitation Letitia Hargrave was not prepared to encourage, however, was in the area of baby clothing. She admitted that she dressed her son in "frocks" or baby dresses covered in puffs and buttons and "made

⁵⁸ See Cunnington and Cunnington, Handbook of English Costume, p. 418.

⁵⁹ Hargrave, Letters, pp. 89-90, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 1 December 1840.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 165, Letitia Hargrave to Mary Mactavish, 12 September 1843.

as intricate as possible to hinder Madame Daunais [the wife of the post carpenter] from making little Jean Battiste's on the same model".⁶¹

The housing provided for company employees and their families at York Factory and Churchill followed a roughly similar pattern. Most adaptations in inherited notions of housing design and furnishings were prompted by functional considerations and were arrived at either by a process of trial and error or by adapting native techniques to the needs of company employees. Most posts consisted of one central permanently garrisoned site surrounded by a number of satellite encampments usually used for one specific purpose - hunting, fishing, or firewood-cutting - and occupied on a temporary basis as needed. Very different kinds of accommodation were offered at the camps from those provided at the main post settlement. Most company employees would have had considerable experience living in both sorts of housing, often alternating their residences between post and camp several times within the course of a single year.

Company employees constructed and used a variety of temporary shelters when travelling or living away from the main post. Travellers and post hunters often made use of tents and even more temporary shelters like lean-tos and snow houses when occasion warranted. R.M. Ballantyne, for example, described a kind of snow house built within a copse of trees which was used by hunters at York Factory while camping out over night.⁶² Tents made from skins, leather, canvas, or "Russian duck" a kind of heavy linen cloth, were in common use at posts like York Factory and Churchill and appear frequently in post inventories and other records. According to James Isham, however,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 14 May 1842.

⁶² Ballantyne, *The Young Fur Traders*, pp. 219-23.

whatever the material they were made from these tents did not provide particularly comfortable housing especially in cold or wet weather. He suggested company employees only used tents at a pinch and avoided sleeping out in them whenever possible. His description of the effects of sleeping in a tent in winter leaves no doubt as to the cause of this reluctance:

itt's unknown what hardship's, men must Endure in these parts, to see Isceles of Ice & frozt, hanging over mens heads as they Lye in bed, -from the mouth to the top of the tent will hang Ice in a Great Quantity, in one nights time, occation'd by their breath, and their Blanketts are so thick of frozt itt takes them one hou: Every morning to thaw and Dry such.⁶³

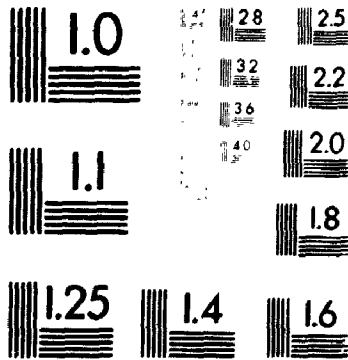
The tents Isham described and those used by most company employees were almost certainly a direct borrowing from the basic native teepee or wigwan, indeed many were undoubtedly acquired from Indians themselves. In later years canvas and Russian duck tents were sometimes used, and may have been constructed on a somewhat different pattern.⁶⁴ These tents, however, were never used as more than a temporary expedient, unlike the log tent which was the basic form of housing used at post encampments throughout the 18th and into the 19th century.

Descriptions of log tents indicate that they were all built to a similar pattern. A long pole was suspended between two trees or two upright posts, and then logs were laid up against this pole on either side sloping outwards. The ends of the tent were likewise formed from logs laid up against the side walls, and a small doorway was usually cut in the south

⁶³ Isham, Observations, p. 90.

⁶⁴ It may be that they were designed, not along the conical lines of Indian tents, but with the more dome or house-like appearance of army camp tents. David Thompson described the canvas tents in use in the 1780's as shaped "like a soldier's bell tent with the top cut off to let the smoke out". See Thompson, Narrative, p. 28.

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side of the structure. Moss was pushed into the spaces between the logs and the whole structure was covered with a layer of mud which in winter froze into a hard and reasonably weather-tight casing. Overall the log tent looked very much like a steeply pitched roof or the "eves of a house" as one writer put it.⁶⁵ A log tent fourteen feet long would have been about seven feet wide and nine feet high and could accommodate up to fourteen people. In the middle of the building a chimney hole was left and beneath it a hearth was built. Around the hearth large squared logs were laid which acted as seats and protected against the spread of fire. In the area around the hearth pine or spruce boughs were scattered to raise bedding up off the ground about a foot, and the men slept around the hearth with their feet pointed inward and their heads towards the outside walls.⁶⁶

The origins of these log tents is the subject of some debate. Many assumed at the time that they were built in imitation of native dwellings. James Isham stated bluntly the Indians of his acquaintance "never built any", though they built brush and bark lodges.⁶⁷ Still the log tent does seem to bear some resemblance to the "wickiup"; the wood or brush shelter built by Cree and other Algonquian-speaking tribes, even if the resemblance is not exact. The Jesuit Relations also mention Indians building with

⁶⁵ Clerk of the California [Charles Swaine], Account of a Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage (East Ardsley: S.R. Publishers, 1988) volume I, p. 136.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 135-7.

⁶⁷ Isham, Observations, p. 214 fn. Modern historians are also somewhat confused on this issue, including the current author who was once convinced of the native ancestry of these dwellings. See Payne, Prince of Wales's Fort, p. 60.

"saplings bent together" and covered with mud, grass or other materials,⁶⁸ but such parallels may be simply fortuitous. They are, however, more plausible than the suggestion made by others that log cabin building techniques drew on "Neolithic building forms that had survived in Europe into the early Middle Ages and could still be seen in out-of-the-way places as late as the seventeenth century".⁶⁹ As Alan Gowans has pointed out such notions are a trifle far-fetched. Instead he suggests that similarities in construction techniques and building appearances between native and European log housing are a result of "similar conditions of life provok[ing] similar architectural response: facing raw nature without adequate tools or time, men will everywhere and at all times produce the same sort of shelter".⁷⁰ It is, however, interesting to note that the log tent relied on vertical timbering, not the horizontal log construction so familiar to us all as the archetypical log cabin. Vertical timbering was never common elsewhere in North America, and according to John Rempel it had not been used in Britain since about the eleventh century.⁷¹ If fur traders were calling on folk memory in building these log tents the memory was a very distant one.

Whatever their inspiration log tents proved to be an efficient and adaptable form of housing. Company employees generally found them warmer and less smoky than either Indian tents or dwelling houses at the main post.

⁶⁸ See Alan Gowans, Building Canada: An Architectural History of Canadian Life (Toronto:Oxford University Press, 1966), plate no. 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷¹ John Rempel, Building with Wood and other Aspects of Nineteenth-Century building in Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 11.

For a variety of reasons, including practicality and comfort, many company employees saw work in the camps as more attractive than remaining year-round in the main post, and at one point in the early 19th century William Auld proposed York Factory be abandoned during the winter months by all but a skeleton staff. He suggested the rest of the men could then find shelter in winter houses like log tents in the woods thus affecting a considerable saving in firewood and adding considerably to the comfort and well-being of the men.⁷² William Hennings Cook, then the officer in charge at York, in fact took up this suggestion, and left York in the charge of his steward for three months between 29 September 1810 and 1 January 1811.⁷³ According to Cook the reason why he and his fellow officers preferred life in the camps to the main post was because the firewood then available at York - mostly green poplar - was "totally destitute of every property congenial to the idea of a comfortable fireside".⁷⁴ In fairness, however, it should be noted he then complained the following year that he had been forced to live "like another Pluto" in the underworld since wet poplar burned with no less smoke or greater warmth at the log tents than in post fireplaces.⁷⁵

In the later 18th and 19th centuries log tents seem to have been superseded by more permanent structures at sites which fishermen and hunters regularly used. As early as 1787 William Jefferson at Churchill mentioned that he had had a small dwelling house built for the post whalers at the aptly named Musketo Point. He had this proper house built to ensure that

⁷² HBCA:B.42/a/136a, fo.7, William Auld Memorandum Book 1811.

⁷³ HBCA:B.239/a/117, fo.3, 29 September 1810.

⁷⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/117, fos.2d-3, 26 September 1810.

⁷⁵ HBCA:B.42/b/55, fo.1d, William Cook to William Auld, 8 January 1811.

the whalers got a good night's sleep untroubled by "Musketoes and Sand flies" so that they could pursue their labours "with the alacrity requisite" for the task.⁷⁶ Log tents probably remained in use longer at lumber and firewood camps which were moved almost every year, but even there more permanent housing was introduced eventually. At Churchill in 1838, for example, the wooders requested and received a stove to use in the house they had built for themselves.⁷⁷ Similarly in 1842 they enlarged their house so that the wooder's families could lodge with them in greater comfort and with more space.⁷⁸ A map of York Factory and area drawn in 1812 and 1813 shows a similar proliferation of more or less permanent cabins built in the vicinity of the post.⁷⁹ Most probably resembled the small square log cabin photographed by Robert Bell in 1879-80 in the woods around York Factory.⁸⁰ The log tent then roughly approximates the shanty or first dwelling built by many settlers elsewhere in Canada. As time went by most of these shanties were replaced with larger and more commodious dwellings,⁸¹ and this seems to have been the case at the camps set up around fur trade posts. When a location came to be used for hunting, fishing or wood-cutting on a fairly regular basis cabins would be substituted for log tents and other less permanent forms of shelter.

⁷⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/110, fos.6d-7, 11 October 1787.

⁷⁷ HBCA:B.42/a/167, fo.19, 9 January 1838.

⁷⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/177, fo.15d, 28 November 1842.

⁷⁹ See HBCA:G.1/3, Chart of entrance to Nelson River 1812, and G.1/163, Chart of entrance to Nelson River, 1813. See also HBCA:B.42/b/57, frontispiece, Map of York Factory and environs.

⁸⁰ See PAC:Photograph Collection, C77949, Robert Bell Collection.

⁸¹ The process is well-described in Remple, Building with Wood, p. 21-23.

Within the main post settlement the housing provided for company employees was much more varied. Not only did company men learn to adapt European building techniques through a long process of trial and error to the physical and climatic constraints of the Hudson Bay Lowland region, the kind of housing provided was directly connected to occupational rank and in the 19th century marital status as well. The earliest posts built on Hudson Bay were little more than hovels. According to James Knight, when he took over from the French at York Factory in 1714, the building he inherited resembled a "Cow house". He complained that it was so dark inside it that he could not see his hand at any time of the day without the aid of a candle. The fort was "so Black & Dark, Cold & Whett, withal nothing to make it better but heaping up Earth abt it to make it Warm".⁸²

The following spring Knight began work on a new fort. Knight's reconstructed York Factory consisted of a large square building surrounded by a palisade wall with four corner bastions or flankers. Knight had had previous experience in post construction during his years spent at Fort Albany, and the fort he built at York Factory was roughly similar in basic design to other bayside posts built in the early 18th century. One flanker was used as a powder magazine, another as the trade room, and the two remaining flankers were used to house the men. Both were two stories high and contained a series of small berths or cabins to which the men were assigned. Although no description of the internal structures of these flankers survives it is probable that they resembled the men's house built later at Prince of Wales's Fort. There each story of the residence consisted of a large central room with a fireplace and small separate

⁸² Quoted in A.S. Morton, Canadian West. p. 130.

bedplaces arranged around the outer walls. These "cabins" were generally shared by two men except for tradesmen, clerks, and other officers who were assigned larger corner rooms of their own. The main central building Knight had built was about 36 feet or 12 meters square and 24 feet or 8 meters high. It consisted of three stories when completed: the top floor was used as warehouse space - high above potential flood waters. The officer in charge of York had an apartment which, in all likelihood, included a bedchamber and mess room shared with other officers on the second floor. The first floor was originally used as living quarters for the men before their flankers were completed. Its use in later years is unknown.⁸³

Two major problems soon appeared. Knight had dug a trench or moat around his palisades which had the effect of speeding erosion at the site. The walls of both the flankers and palisades needed repair with monotonous regularity. Company employees also chose to plaster the exterior of the logs used to build the fort, which discouraged draughts but encouraged rot. By the late 1730's York was rotting and sagging away, and plans were put in place to rebuild the post in 1742.⁸⁴

The new York Factory was constructed on a somewhat different plan. Once again the post was based on four corner bastions, but instead of a central warehouse/residence building a series of sheds were built between the bastions so that their outer walls formed a continuous curtain wall around the post, and the central courtyard was left empty except for a powder magazine. Accommodation for post residents remained very similar,

⁸³ A fuller description of Knight's fort may be found in Ingram, *York Factory*, pp. 9-15.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.

however. The men were housed in one bastion, while a second bastion was divided between the governor of York Factory and his fellow officers. Tradesmen and labourers shared 28 small cabins or bedplaces on two floors. These cabins were really only intended for sleeping; eating and socializing took place in the common mess room around which the bedplaces were arranged.⁶⁵ Officers' quarters were similar though less cramped. They too shared a large central mess or guard room with a fireplace on one floor of a bastion, and slept in small bedplaces which opened into the main mess room. Unlike many of the men, however, they did not have to share a bed cabin. The officer in charge of York lived on the floor above his fellow officers. His apartments were better finished than other housing at York with wainscotting on the walls and plastered ceilings and consisted of two or perhaps three rooms: a bed chamber, a study or parlour, and a mess room.⁶⁶ At Churchill, James Knight built a very similar fort in 1717 to the one he had had constructed at York Factory. In 1730 the company decided to build a stone fortress there, and in 1731 work began on the new Prince of Wales's Fort. The new fort was not officially occupied until 1740 and for nine years company employees were housed at both sites. During this period suitable accommodation was often hard to find and in one memorable experiment in 1735 Richard Norton, the officer in charge of Prince of Wales's Fort, had a shed built around a bake oven and the door to the oven removed in order to use it as lodgings for some of his men.⁶⁷ Most housing

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20. It is interesting to note that the walls of these bedplaces were finished with boards, perhaps to cut down on draughts and to make them slightly more comfortable.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

⁶⁷ See HBCA:B.42/a/115, fo.11, 23 September 1735 and fo.24d, 1 March 1736.

was more conventional however. There were two main buildings in the courtyard of the new stone fort. On one side of the courtyard there was a low one story building divided into tradesmen's workshops and a cookroom. On the other side of the courtyard a larger two story structure was built. According to Joseph Robson this building was 101.5 feet long, 33 feet wide and 17 feet high.⁶⁶ The building was further subdivided into three sections: a men's house, a warehouse, and the governor of the fort's residence. Approximately half the building was given over to the Men's House: about 3000 square feet or 280 square meters of living space. As the complement of men at Prince of Wales's Fort ranged from about 40 to 60 men in the mid-18th century,⁶⁷ this would have meant each person would have had between about 50 and 75 square feet, or 5 and 7 square metres, of living space. Given that this space was not allocated equally and that post officers and senior tradesmen were given individual bedplaces, conditions must have been rather crowded for ordinary labourers and no one could have enjoyed much privacy. Indeed conditions would have been worse were it not for the fact that at any one time nearly half the work force of the post was probably living away from the main post at the work camps.

Much of the remaining space in this building was taken up with a two story warehouse, but the south-east corner was separated off as a residence for the governor of the post. As at York Factory the governor's residence consisted of several rooms, and probably amounted to about 1000 square feet or 90 square meters of living space. The governor's rooms at Prince of Wales's Fort were also somewhat more carefully finished with "wainscotting"

⁶⁶ Robson, Six Years Residence, p. 71.

⁶⁷ See Chapter II, "Social Structure", Table 2, p. 47.

and "lyning" on the walls.⁹⁰ Stone was really not an ideal medium for construction on the shores of Hudson Bay, but this dwelling house survived reasonably well. Unlike wooden posts which had to be rebuilt every 30 to 40 years due to rot, slumping foundations, and warping wood,⁹¹ it remained basically sound up until the fort was destroyed in 1782 by the krench.

When York and Churchill were resettled in 1783 the company sent out prefabricated buildings to serve as residences for officers and men. The house at York was approximately 40 feet by 25 feet, or 12 metres by 8 metres, and two stories in height.⁹² In its initial form it included rooms given over as trading rooms and warehouse space, but in 1788 it was rearranged to be only a dwelling house. Tradesmen and labourers were allocated about half the first and second floor: about 1000 square feet or 90 square metres of space.⁹³ Although the complement of men at York was rather lower than in the mid-18th century the men still received only the equivalent of about 75 square feet or 7 square metres of space per person.⁹⁴ Officers were slightly better housed. Their guard room and cabins occupied about half of the ground floor: about 500 square feet or 45 square metres. This space was shared by 4 or 5 men and only one of the cabins was designed to house two people - presumably apprentice clerks. Once again the officer

⁹⁰ See HBCA:B.42/a/21, fo.21, 17 November 1740, and fo.25, 22 December 1740.

⁹¹ See Ingram, York Factory, p. 1 and Donaldson, Land-Use, p. 38.

⁹² Ingram, York Factory, p. 33.

⁹³ See HBCA:G.1/110, A Ground Plan of York Factory as taken in January 1786 by Joseph Colen.

⁹⁴ See HBCA:B.239/f/1, York Factory Servants List 1784. In 1784, 13 labourers and tradesmen and 5 officers were stationed at York.

in charge of the factory received a suite of rooms - in this case a bed chamber and two dining or sitting rooms though one was used on occasion as a trading room in winter. These rooms took up slightly less than half the upper story of the building.

The equivalent house at Churchill remained in use into the 19th century, but flooding at York in 1788 forced a move to a higher factory site. During construction the old factory was kept in use, but by 1792 it had been largely abandoned.⁹⁵ Accommodations at the new factory site were very similar to those built before 1782. Once again the main post buildings consisted of four corner bastions connected by sheds and warehouses whose outer walls formed a continuous curtain wall between the bastions. Similarly the tradesmen and labourers were housed in one bastion, and officers in another. With York's complement of men once again increasing the men's flanker was designed to provide 66 bedplaces on the old pattern of small one and two person cabins arranged around a central common mess area.⁹⁶ In the officers' bastion the first floor was given over to a guard room and bedplaces for clerks, surgeons, and sloop masters, while the officer in charge of York lived on the second floor. His rooms were spacious enough that Joseph Colen was able to keep his personal library of 1400 volumes and a barrel organ in them.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/92, fo.26d, 23 April 1792.

⁹⁶ See HBCA:B.239/a/92, fo.26, 21 April 1792.

⁹⁷ He also had an "Electrifying Mac[hi]ne" in his rooms which was used for medical treatments. The machine was first mentioned by Humphrey Marten in 1786 who claimed it had cured several men, including Mr. Falconer who was going blind. HBCA:B.239/a/86, fo.61, 27 August 1786. A list of Colen's personal property left at York may be found in HBCA:A.5/4, fo.51d, London committee to John Ballenden, 31 May 1799.

This basic housing pattern remained unchanged at bayside posts until the early 1820's, when barracks-like men's houses were partially replaced by smaller dwelling houses. This new approach to housing company employees was reflected by two new men's residences constructed at York Factory in 1823. Each was designed to provide accommodation for eight men at most.⁹⁸ As new buildings were constructed and old buildings replaced, smaller special purpose dwellings became more common. Separate quarters were offered to married and unmarried officers, and senior officers and their families were housed in separate single family dwellings. Married tradesmen and labourers were not allowed to live with their families within the post, and families appear to have been housed in the growing Indian encampments established near York at Fishing Island, French Creek and Ten Shilling Creek.⁹⁹

Large "Men's Houses" did not entirely go out of fashion. In 1852 at York a large residence about 50 feet by 25 feet, or 15 metres by 8 metres, was built which was designed to house up to 40 men.¹⁰⁰ Smaller dwelling houses, like those built in 1823, were also in use, and it is not clear exactly who was lodged where. It is unlikely though that the large Men's House was ever filled to capacity given that the total number of tradesmen and labourers at York in the 1850's and 1860's was usually only slightly more than 40 men.¹⁰¹ At Churchill a similar large Men's House was built in 1814 to replace the building brought out in 1783, which had burned. The new

⁹⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/132, fo.7d, 1 November 1823.

⁹⁹ See Donaldson, *Land-Use*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* If all 40 men were resident there at any one time, each would have had only about 30 square feet of space - if anything less space than 18th century residences.

¹⁰¹ See Chapter II, "Social Structure", Table 1, p. 48.

men's house was a one story structure 83 feet long by 22 feet wide or about 25 metres by 7 metres.¹⁰² The men stationed at Churchill and their families gradually sub-divided the interior of this building into a rabbit warren of private apartments,¹⁰³ and a similar process may have taken place with York's Men's House.

In general company employees were given more living space and greater privacy in the 19th century than in the 18th century. Accommodation was also more rigidly stratified. In the 18th century tradesmen and labourers lived together in barracks-like flankers with the only real distinction being that tradesmen usually were given a single bedplace or "cabin" while labourers shared a bed. Similarly junior officers shared one floor of the officers' bastion, while the officer in charge of the post lived above them in an apartment.¹⁰⁴ In the 19th century large communal Men's Houses were partially superseded by smaller shared dwellings, and at Churchill, where a Men's House remained in use, its interior was extensively sub-divided to allow for greater separation between individual residents and in particular to accommodate any families living at the post. At York Factory it became normal to house married and unmarried officers separately, and senior officers were given their own separate residences. Married tradesmen and labourers at York were apparently forced to keep their families on the

¹⁰² See McCarthy, Churchill Land Use, p. 45.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 105. Given that only about 7 or 8 men were stationed at Churchill in an average year in the 19th century each would have received about 250 square feet of space.

¹⁰⁴ The use of the term "apartment" to describe their rooms may well be significant. The term derives from the same roots as apart, and implies a physical and social separation within a larger residence for someone's living quarters.

periphery of the post settlement, which in turn encouraged further distinctions between those who lived primarily in post housing and those who did not.¹⁰⁵

Company employees also made significant adaptations in the design and building techniques used in post housing. Whereas 18th century post buildings usually had become unusable within 30 to 40 years of their construction, 19th century buildings had a much longer lifespan. Several reasons have been offered for this improvement in building quality ranging from the use of heavy timber foundations which were less subject to frost heave than stone or brick foundations and the use of frame buildings covered with weatherboard instead of logs.¹⁰⁶ Housing, like other buildings at the main fort site, however was always constructed according to relatively

¹⁰⁵ The construction of individual family cabins at York has received some study. Archaeologists working at the site between 1978 and 1980 examined several cabins and found all probably dated from the late 19th or early 20th centuries. See Gary Adams and Marg Burnip, York Factory Archeology: Interim Report 1978-80 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1981) Microfiche Report no. 27. Examination of known settlement sites across the Hayes River at Ten Shilling or French Creek might reveal earlier habitations. The settlement of families in separate cabins on the periphery of the post has been noted at other company posts. See Carol Judd, "Housing the Homeguard at Moose Factory 1730-1982", Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 3, 1 [1983]: 23-38. The development of "private" family dwellings at posts echoes similar changes in British housing patterns in the later 19th century. Previously enclosed courts and alleys meant shared space and facilities - much like the Men's House at Churchill, but a combination of social and economic pressures led to the break-down of these self-contained urban communities. The new ideal was single-family housing with as little communal space as possible, and the ambiguities of public and private space inherent in court and alley housing removed. Outside was public, inside was private. See M.J. Daunton, House and Home in the Victorian City (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp.12-13. Such housing encouraged greater social distance between individuals and families, and it is interesting to note that it began to appear at company posts at a time when social stratification within post communities was on the rise.

¹⁰⁶ Building techniques and adaptations are explored in much greater detail in Donaldson, Land-Use, and "Depot" Warehouse, and Ingram, York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort.

conventional European or British notions of barracks or house design. At the camps company employees could build practical and simple dwellings to suit themselves, and the log tent they either developed themselves or adapted from native log and brush housing was usually seen as superior in terms of warmth and practicality to post residences. At York Factory in particular efforts were made to ensure the main post buildings presented a neat and attractive, even imposing, appearance. The surrounding countryside at York lacked charm, but Letitia Hargrave described the factory itself as a "great swell" with its main buildings painted a pale yellow with white trim.¹⁰⁷

Describing the size and layout of rooms, however, is only one aspect of housing. In order to form an accurate impression of the quality of fur trade accommodations and a sense of what it was like to live in a fur trade post it is important to consider room furnishings. No description of the interior furnishings or appearance of a log tent survives aside from the suggestion that the floor was covered with tree boughs and that large squared logs, which could be used as seats, surrounded the hearth.¹⁰⁸ It seems fair to suggest that log tents would have been furnished with blankets and bedding, tools like axes and guns, some cooking utensils, and a few personal belongings like clothes.

¹⁰⁷ Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 62, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, September 1840. Dugald Mactavish made much the same comment in another letter. He described York as "the finest ... in the Country and were the grounds not so swampy [it] would be altogether a very pleasure place [palace?]" PAC:MG19 A21, reel C83, p. 120, Hargrave Family Papers, Dugald Mactavish to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish Senior, 8 July 1839.

¹⁰⁸ Clerk of the California, *An Account of a Voyage*, pp. 135-7.

The interiors of 18th century men's houses are somewhat better known from surviving plans of posts, but their furnishings remain largely undescribed. The men's bed places may have contained feather mattresses,¹⁰⁹ bedding and a few personal possessions probably stored in a wooden trunk or chest.¹¹⁰ The most prominent feature of the men's guard or mess room was a large central fireplace used for heating, but not cooking as food was normally prepared in a separate cook house. The main furnishings were probably benches and tables put together by post carpenters and joiners.¹¹¹

The mess room may also have included cupboards for storing beer and alcohol rations.¹¹² Officers' quarters were basically similar but slightly less cramped. They usually dined with the factor, and their guard room was probably used more for socializing than as a mess room. Officers in charge of posts aspired to somewhat more gracious living conditions. As previously mentioned the interior fittings of their rooms were completed with greater care and furnishings were much less spartan. Joseph Colen, for example, in addition to his library and barrel organ had a clock, a looking glass, two barometers, 21 prints, and various pieces of table and glassware in his

¹⁰⁹ See for example, HBCA:B.239/b/78, fo.32, Annual Letter to York Factory, 28 May 1800.

¹¹⁰ Many of these chests were probably the chests William Auld complained about. See HBCA:B.42/a/136a, fo.8, William Auld Memorandum Book 1811.

¹¹¹ Eighteenth century records contain few references to the manufacture of furniture for post use, but in later years some references can be found to making tables and benches. See for example HBCA:B.239/a/128, fo.14, 2 April 1821 and fo.14d, 8 April 1821.

¹¹² See HBCA:G.1/110, Ground Plan of York Factory 1786-87, Plan for new dwelling.

rooms at York.¹¹³ Moses Norton's rooms at Churchill were furnished in similar fashion. "He imported books, pictures, and an organ from England, and even kept a pet parrot".¹¹⁴ According to Samuel Hearne, Norton's rooms were "not only convenient but elegant" except for one quirk of his character. They were regularly crowded with "favourite Indians : at night he [Norton] locked the doors, and put the keys under his pillow; so that in the morning his dining room was generally, for the want of necessary conveniences, worse than a hog-stye".¹¹⁵ As Lawrence Wright has argued hygiene is one area of life in which there is "no clear Wellsian outline of progress",¹¹⁶ and sanitation does not seem to have been a priority in 18th century fur trade housing. As later campaigns to improve the cleanliness and hygienic habits of company employees indicate, Norton's behaviour was not entirely unusual, though it clearly shocked Hearne.¹¹⁷

It is possible to describe the interiors of 18th century post housing in greater detail, in particular "Bachelors' Hall", the residence built for unmarried officers at York Factory in 1831.¹¹⁸ R.M. Ballantyne's account of the interior layout and furnishings of Bachelors' Hall may also be taken as

¹¹³ He also owned 3 goats, 13 sow pigs, and 6 breeding sows kept at the factory, presumably for his table. HBCA:A.5/4, fo.51d, London committee to John Ballenden, 31 May 1799.

¹¹⁴ Sylvia Van Kirk, "Moses Norton", in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol. IV - 1771-1800, p. 584.

¹¹⁵ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 39.

¹¹⁶ Wright, Clean and Decent, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter VI, "Accident and Disease", pp. 325-27. Hearne on the other hand prided himself on maintaining a high level of cleanliness in his posts. Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 294.

¹¹⁸ Donaldson, Land-Use, p. 53.

a fair description of conditions in the various Men's Houses built at York except that the bed places of tradesmen and labourers were probably smaller, and the personal property in the rooms would have reflected different occupations. Ballantyne's Bachelors' Hall was a one story wooden building with a large central hall or common room off which sleeping "apartments" opened. It was originally painted white inside, but years of smoke had discoloured the paint to a dirty yellow. There was no carpet, but the floor was plank, and a single iron stove heated the building. The common room had two deal tables and five unbroken chairs. The remaining furnishings of the room consisted of guns, fishing rods, a few books, pipes, and piles of tobacco - neatly encompassing the most common recreations of junior officers. The bedrooms were small, low rooms with no furniture other than beds, chests which also served as seats, and in some rooms tables which doubled as desks. Most were filled with the tools of the occupants' trade - inkstands and account books, surgical equipment or the like, and personal property like clothing, guns and snowshoes. Although Ballantyne described the building as without "ornament or luxury" he did find the overall effect "rather snug than otherwise".¹¹⁹ Similar housing at Fort Vancouver has been described as "Unpretending but not Indecent", which seems an equally fair assessment of conditions at York in the 19th century.¹²⁰

Senior officers, however, strove for a greater degree of refinement and luxury in their housing. At York two individual houses were set aside for senior officers and their families. One had been built originally for the

¹¹⁹ Ballantyne, Hudson Bay, pp. 92-3.

¹²⁰ John A. Hussey, "'Unpretending' but not 'Indecent': Living Quarters at Mid-19th Century HBC Posts", The Beaver, 305, 4 (Spring 1975): 12.

use of George Simpson when visiting York, but in 1834 James Hargrave converted it for his own use. A second house was allocated for the use of the second in command at York who was usually also employed as the accountant for the Northern Department.¹²¹

The Hargrave residence was a square single-story house which included two bedrooms, two sitting or drawing rooms, a large dining room which also served as the officers' winter mess, a kitchen, and servant's quarters.¹²² In 1842, following the birth of James and Letitia's first child, a nursery was added.¹²³ Most of the rooms were painted green, a colour James Hargrave considered "good for the sight", but the Hargrave's bedroom was painted pale blue with indigo wainscotting.¹²⁴ The furniture in their bedroom was painted green, black and yellow and consisted of two wardrobes, two chests of drawers, book cases, mirrors, towel screen, night table and bed.¹²⁵ The main sitting room included a Kidderminster carpet, a Viennese mahogany piano, a sofa, table and mirror.¹²⁶ The dining room, which as the winter mess room also served a public purpose, was furnished with an eye to making an impression of elegance. The table was mahogany, though the chairs were "home made", and the walls were decorated with several prints framed in birds'-eye maple. On festive occasions the room was lit by a special Argand

¹²¹ Donaldson, Land-Use, p. 54

¹²² Hargrave, Letters, p. xlii.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 122, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 8 September 1842.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 74, Letitia Hargrave to Mary Mactavish, 1 September 1840.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 88, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs Dugald Mactavish, 1 December 1840.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. lxii.

lamp.¹²⁷ The Hargraves also purchased silver cutlery, but James was unwilling to pay for sterling and indicated that silver plate was sufficient for York Factory. He did promise, however, that when they returned from "out of the world" he would buy Letitia proper sterling silver.¹²⁸

Despite the sense that sterling silver would be wasted on society at York Factory, the Hargrave's residence was furnished and decorated with a view to creating an atmosphere of refinement which was noticeably lacking in Ballantyne's description of Bachelors' Hall. There a kind of rough practicality prevailed. The overall picture of the Hargrave's residence is one of "solid comfort and cosy clutter" - features historians of housing associate with middle-class Victorian British houses.¹²⁹ It also suggests that a sharp distinction was still drawn between the housing provided for officers in charge of posts, or after 1821 commissioned officers, and all other ranks. Indeed housing standards for junior officers in terms of space and furnishings were closer to those of the men than of their superiors. As was the case with salaries, promotion to the top rungs of company service meant a steep improvement in the quality of one's housing.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. lxii, and Ballantyne, *Hudson Bay*, pp. 101-2. The Argand lamp, invented in 1783, was an important innovation in oil lamps and an alternative to candles as a source of artificial light. According to some it revolutionized evenings by allowing card playing, reading, writing, sewing, and social activities to be carried on in some comfort and without excessive eye strain for the first time. See for example, Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Viking-Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 138-9. The Hargraves also owned candle and Sinumbra lamps - the latter were reputed to cast no distracting shadows.

¹²⁸ Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 17, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 5 May 1840.

¹²⁹ See for example, John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1985* (London: Methuen, 1986), revised edition, p. 112.

Unfortunately almost no information has survived about housing at Churchill in the 19th century, aside from a few descriptions of the physical dimensions and interior layouts of post dwellings. As at York officers in charge of Churchill were allocated a separate private dwelling considerably larger and more spacious than the accommodation provided for the men.¹³⁰ However, neither the furnishings of the Men's House nor of the officer's house are much discussed in post records. Because the officer in charge at Churchill was usually only a clerk or sloop master, most probably could not afford to furnish their home with the variety and clutter of the Hargrave's residence. Some may well have occasionally indulged an urge for fine furnishings, but the experience of Robert Harding, the officer in charge of Churchill from 1826 to 1845, suggests expensive ornaments were out of place there. On his retirement from company service he gave a large piece of cut crystal to Letitia Hargrave and confessed that he had brought it out to Churchill as a tobacco box but had never bothered to use it.¹³¹

To modern eyes the most obvious features of the housing provided to company employees, with the exception of senior officers, were its lack of privacy and its cramped conditions. Neither of these, however, were a cause of complaint at either York Factory or Churchill according to surviving records. Instead insects and cold were the most common grievances raised concerning housing. The enormous number of biting insects at both York and Churchill led John Newton, the chief factor at York in 1749, to remark that

¹³⁰ These houses are described in McCarthy, Churchill Land-Use, p. 46 and p. 114.

¹³¹ Hargrave, Letters, p. 198, Letitia Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish Senior, 1 September 1845.

he preferred "the Cold of a whole Winter" to a month of "Moschettos".¹³² According to James Knight company employees sometimes were driven to lighting fires in the middle of summer to try to smoke the mosquitoes and flies out of their dwellings.¹³³ Apparently in the 18th century "Musketo Fans" made from buffalo hair attached to a short wooden handle were manufactured in some quantity by Indians from the interior and sold to company employees who used them to whisk biting insects off their faces.¹³⁴ None of these expedients offered more than temporary relief, and according to Ballantyne mosquitoes and flies "kept up a perpetual hum day and night" in Bachelors' Hall.¹³⁵ In the 1840's, however, a partial solution to the problem was finally found when "mosquito frames or blinds were introduced as summer window attachments at York."¹³⁶

Despite John Newton's comment cold was by far the most frequent complaint about housing conditions at York Factory and Churchill which is hardly surprising given the extreme weather conditions in the Hudson Bay Lowlands region, and the sort of building and heating technology available to company employees. Minimum insulation standards for modern homes in the coldest areas of Canada would require softwood log walls of over 40 centimeters or about 17 inches thickness, and even greater insulation for

¹³² HBCA:B.239/a/32, fo.36, 13 July 1749.

¹³³ Kenney, The Founding of Churchill, pp. 122-23.

¹³⁴ Clerk of the California, An Account of a Voyage, vol. II, p. 62.

¹³⁵ Ballantyne, Hudson Bay, p. 92.

¹³⁶ See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/173, fo.9d, 19 October 1849. Letitia Hargrave also mentioned the use of "green gauze mosquito curtains" and indicated they were of some effect. Hargrave, Letters, p. 82, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, September 1840.

floors and ceilings.¹³⁷ According to Joseph Robson the walls of the bastions at York Factory were only about half this thickness: eight or nine inches.¹³⁸ Stone is even less effective as an insulating material than softwood logs, and although the exterior walls of the dwelling house at Prince of Wales's Fort were about two feet thick they too provided inadequate insulation.¹³⁹ As a result enormous quantities of firewood were consumed at both York and Churchill, especially as most was burned in an inefficient fashion. In the early 18th century post dwellings were heated by fireplaces or brick stoves,¹⁴⁰ and two iron stoves were sent to York Factory in 1723.¹⁴¹ By the later 18th century stoves seem to have gone somewhat out of favour at bayside posts though one was put in to replace a fireplace and chimney in the Men's House at Churchill in 1793,¹⁴² and Miles Macdonell seems to have had a stove to heat his cabin at the Red River settlers' encampment in 1811 near York.¹⁴³ Thus in 1814 when the London committee sent iron stoves out to York and Churchill they were treated as a significant innovation, and important savings in firewood consumption were

¹³⁷ Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Canadian Wood-Frame House Construction (Ottawa: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1970, Metric edition), pp. 238-39, Tables 41 and 42.

¹³⁸ Robson, Six Years Residence, p. 30.

¹³⁹ See Isham, Observations, p. 172. Assuming stone has about the same insulation value as brick, ideally stone walls should have been about six times thicker than wood.

¹⁴⁰ See for example, HBCA:B.42/a/13, fo.3d, 22 August 1722; PAC:MG18 D4, vol. 4, H.M.S. Furnace Journal, 2 January 1741, and Isham, Observations, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ HBCA:A.6/4, fo.72d, Annual Letter to York Factory, 17 May 1723.

¹⁴² HBCA:B.42/a/116, fo.16d, 15 May 1793.

¹⁴³ HBCA:B.239/b/82, fos.4d-5, W.H. Cook to Miles Macdonell, 3 November 1811, and fo.6, Miles Macdonell to W.H. Cook, 6 November 1811.

expected from their use.¹⁴⁴ Thereafter iron stoves, usually manufactured by the Carron company, became the normal method of heating post residences. Although more efficient at this task than fireplaces they still consumed enormous quantities of firewood. In the 1840's George Simpson, after visiting Russia, tried to encourage use of Russian-style brick stoves at York which he thought would provide further savings in fuel consumption. Simpson even arranged for an employee of the Russian-American Fur Company to travel from Sitka to York Factory to advise on the construction of these new stoves. James Hargrave, however, would have nothing to do with brick stoves, and would "not let them be built in any of the gentlemen's houses". Hargrave's reluctance to explore the possible advantages of Russian brick stoves was never explained, but Letitia Hargrave did comment that he "hate[d] the mention of economy in fuel".¹⁴⁵ Of course any mention of economy in firewood was usually connected to cutting the complement of men at York which might explain Hargrave's dislike of the subject.

Nevertheless a combination of the increased use of stoves, the construction of smaller, more easily heated buildings, and some advances in construction techniques,¹⁴⁶ made post buildings warmer in the mid-19th century than ever before. The suggestion that the York Factory disease was partially caused by officers working in a room heated to 70 or 80 degrees

¹⁴⁴ HBCA:A.6/18, p. 196, London committee to Thomas Thomas, April 1814.

¹⁴⁵ Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 147, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 1 April 1843, and p. 147 fn., George Simpson to James Hargrave, 1 December 1842.

¹⁴⁶ For example post journals suggest double windows and doors were introduced in the 1830's and 40's. See, HBCA:B.239/a/152, fo.8d, 7 October 1839, and B.239/a/155, fo.9d, 25 October 1841.

Fahrenheit was a major change from earlier comments on post conditions,¹⁴⁷ though complaints about the cold did not entirely vanish. The Reverend William Mason, for example, remarked that in the York Factory parsonage he had had a cup of tea freeze solid before he had finished drinking it,¹⁴⁸ but such occurrences were less often remarked upon in the later 18th century.

Most earlier comments on the extreme cold at York and Churchill were fairly conventional. Officers were prone to remark that their ink had frozen, and beer, liquor and food were periodically described as freezing solid despite being kept within dwelling houses. Occasionally, however, a more unusual comment offers a graphic reminder that the cold could be a serious hardship. In 1748, for example, in the midst of a particularly cold snap, three men at York Factory froze their feet while asleep in their beds and James Isham "almost" froze his arm.¹⁴⁹ At Prince of Wales's Fort snow was an additional problem. Because of its exposed location on Eskimo Point snow tended to drift into the fort and collect there. Buildings had to be specially reinforced with posts to cope with the weight of snow on roof tops, and in years of heavy snowfall the men had to dig their way out of second story windows and move about through the courtyard in tunnels dug

¹⁴⁷ See HBCA:B.239/z/26, fos.143-144, "Notes of Enquiries and Examinations made at York Factory for the Purpose of Ascertaining the Probable [sic] Cause of the Colic prevalent there during the Winters 33/4, 34/5, 35/6". This sense that over-heated air could have ill effects seems connected to improved heating which made hot rooms possible. In 1839, for example, an ailing Indian woman was sent off to the Indian tents to recover after being lodged in the Men's house. It was felt the latter was contributing to her ill-health due to its "warm confined air and noise". HBCA:B.239/a/151, fos. 26d-27, 10 February 1839.

¹⁴⁸ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A94, William Mason Journal 1855-56, 2 July 1856.

¹⁴⁹ HBCA:B.239/a/30, fo.15d, 21 January 1748.

through fourteen or more feet of snow.¹⁵⁰ The banks of snow which formed around the walls of dwelling houses, however, did provide some insulation, and were an alternative to covering buildings with turf, as was tried on occasion to conserve heat.¹⁵¹ According to David Thompson another expedient was to encourage the development of a thick coat of frost on interior walls, and then wet it to form a layer of insulating ice about four inches thick.¹⁵² Humphrey Marten writing to Samuel Hearne in 1784 described the dwelling house he had brought out from England as "litterally ... a House of Ice". According to Marten the mortar used to build its walls had frozen before drying so that ice alone kept it from collapse that winter.¹⁵³ David Thompson indicated that during the day post residents kept moving indoors, and in very cold weather wore their beaver toggies or coats as they walked about their guard-room. He also offered a partial explanation of this practice by noting that at both York and Churchill fires were only lit in the dwelling houses in the mornings and evenings to conserve fuel.¹⁵⁴ At Prince of Wales's Fort it was even reported one winter that no fire was lit upstairs in the Men's House for 14 days.¹⁵⁵ As no deaths from frost-bite were recorded it would appear the men were either out at the camps or

¹⁵⁰ The worst problems with snow occurred in 1738-40 and 1760-61. See HBCA:B.42/a/20, fo.16d, 2 March 1740, and B.42/a/55, fo.22, 29 January 1760.

¹⁵¹ See Ingram, York Factory, p. 9, and HBCA:B.42/a/14, fo.7d, 17 September 1733.

¹⁵² Thompson, Narrative, p. 10.

¹⁵³ HBCA:B.42/b/26, fos.9-9d, Humphrey Marten to Samuel Hearne, 6 January 1784.

¹⁵⁴ Thompson, Narrative, pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/30, fo.12, 4 February 1747.

huddled around the first floor fire, still the search for warmth led company employees to adopt some odd measures. James Ishan described the heating methods employed at Churchill during his years there. The dwelling houses were "Close shutt 18 hour's Every Day, in winter" with 3 inch thick wooden shutters placed over every window.

four Large fires are made in Large Brick stoves (Build for that purpose) Every Day, which as soon as the wood is Burn't Downe to a coal, the top of the chimley is close stop't with a Iron Cover, this Keeps the heat within the housses, tho' at the same time the smoak makes our heads to ac'h, and Very offensive and unholosome, - Notwithstanding of which in 4 or 5 hour's after the fire is out and the chimly still close stop't, the inside of the wall of our houses are 6 or 8 inches thick of Ice, which is Every Day cutt away with Hatchetts, - three or 4 times of a Day we make Iron shott of 24 lb. weight hott in the fire, and hang up at the window's of our apartments.¹⁵⁶

Such descriptions emphasize the struggle company employees faced in adapting to the severe environmental conditions encountered on the shores of Hudson Bay. Modern research indicates that in the 18th century they were under the added constraint of trying to survive during a long period of unusually cold and adverse weather conditions: the "Little Ice Age" of 1500 to about 1765.¹⁵⁷ Not only did building and heating techniques improve in the 19th century, but average winter temperatures and other weather conditions may have also moderated. Still there can be little doubt the European building styles and techniques introduced by company employees were not particularly well adapted to the conditions found at York and Churchill, and the appeal of life in the hunting, fishing, and wood-cutting camps was

¹⁵⁶ Ishan, *Observations*, pp. 172-73. A very similar description of post heating methods from about the same period may be found in PAC:MG18 D4, vol.4, *HMS Furnace Journal*, 2 January 1741.

¹⁵⁷ Ball, "Reconstruction of climate", p. 44.

based in part on the superiority of the log tent as a form of winter housing.

Even there, however, company men were not free from cold, smoke and other discomforts. It is important to remember as well that inadequate as post housing was in many respects, native technology was not always superior in this area. If James Isham and other fur trade writers are to be believed wintering in a skin tent was no warmer or more comfortable than the Men's House at Prince of Wales's Fort at its worst. In fact in later years at Churchill special houses were built to provide temporary accommodation for visiting Indians who, it was felt, could not be expected to tent out in such a bleak and inhospitable location.¹⁵⁸

There can be little doubt that the comforts of most post accommodation were few. Aside from senior officers quarters and some public rooms like the officers' mess at York Factory furnishings were few and chosen with an eye to practicality not display. Spartan interiors went along with generally cramped, smoky, and all too often frigid quarters. Nevertheless, while to modern eyes the men's houses at York and Churchill seem to represent all but intolerable living conditions, company employees themselves do not seem to have taken this view. When company employees compared their housing at York and Churchill with housing in their former homes, it was by no means clear that their standard of living had declined. Indeed in some respects many may have found their accommodations superior to what they had formerly known.

There is an important structural bias in most perceptions of the sort of housing in which people in the past lived. The homes of the wealthy are

¹⁵⁸ McCarthy, Churchill: Land Use, p. 115.

far more likely to be preserved than those of more modest wealth or the poor. Moreover larger well-built homes survive long after the incompetently or shoddily constructed have disappeared. It is also sometimes forgotten that the large surviving dwellings found in the older quarters of European and even North American cities like Montreal and Quebec, were not always single family dwellings. They often housed servants and lodgers, and if owned by tradesmen, apprentices as well. In addition many provided workshop and retail store space. As Witold Rybczynski points out notions of privacy and domesticity intruded only slowly into the homes of the well-to-do in northern Europe from about the later 17th or early 18th century onwards.¹⁵⁹ A sense of the home as a private not a public place began first in aristocratic and then spread to bourgeois European households. This in turn was reflected in a growing tendency to separate servants from family and children from adults, each in their own bedrooms and areas of the home.¹⁶⁰ Rybczynski's argument may well be correct, but it had little significance for ordinary working people in the 18th and early 19th centuries for whom privacy, even if desired, was unattainable.

There is now a large and ever-growing body of literature detailing the history of housing in Britain.¹⁶¹ Although important regional differences

¹⁵⁹ Witold Rybczynski, Home: A Short History of an Idea (Markham: Viking-Penguin Books, 1987), p. 77.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 51-76.

¹⁶¹ Some of the more useful of these include Burnett, Social History of Housing; Dauntton, House and Home; Stanley Chapman (ed.), The History of Working-Class Housing: A Symposium (Newton Abbot:David & Charles,1971); David Rubinstein, Victorian Homes (Newton Abbot:David & Charles,1974); Enid Gauldie, Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing 1780-1918 (London: George Allen & Unwin,1974); and M.A. Simpson and T.H. Lloyd (eds.), Middle Class Housing in Britain (Newton Abbot:David & Charles,1977).

have been noted, housing in Scotland for example was notoriously bad,¹⁶² some general conclusions have been reached by virtually every writer on the subject from the 19th century on. Although there was always a group of better-off tradesmen, Hobsbawn's labour aristocrats, the bulk of the working people in Britain in the 18th and through most of the 19th centuries lived in housing marked by "not enough space, not enough warmth, not enough light, not enough furniture".¹⁶³ Indeed one could go on to include poor ventilation, inadequate plumbing, crumbling walls, leaking roofs, and no kitchen in this list of common housing problems. In rural areas cottages were often badly overcrowded, especially where the taking in of lodgers had become common. Figures from a survey taken in 1851 indicate about 40 percent of English cottages had only one bedroom, and 55 percent two. Single bedroom cottages housed an average of 4 persons, and two bedroom cottages 5 persons. Average room sizes suggest this left a space in these bedrooms of about 156 cubic feet for each resident - 6 feet by 6 feet by 6 feet - about the same space allocated to company employees for their sleeping cabins.¹⁶⁴ Indeed social reformers easily found a myriad of examples of homes where this average would have seemed relative luxury. In urban areas housing was really no better, especially in the first half of the 19th century when urban population growth was highest. Demand for housing grew far faster than supply, with the result that rents rose rapidly, the quality of housing generally deteriorated, and many homes were sub-divided into flats or rented out as rooms. "Back to back" housing,

¹⁶² Gauldie, Cruel Habitations, p. 24.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁶⁴ Burnett, A Social History of Housing, p. 43

which would later be roundly condemned by sanitary reformers, began in the 18th century as one of the better forms of working-class housing - much superior to cellar dwellings, lodging houses and tenement houses.¹⁶⁵ Even so the typical "back to back" house consisted of two or three rooms built on a lot 10 to 15 feet wide and about the same depth. Most provided families with only about 200 to 500 square feet of living space at best.¹⁶⁶ Census figures between 1801 and 1841 for England indicate the average number of persons living in each inhabited house ranged from 5.4 to 5.6.¹⁶⁷ Thus even in the case of better-quality working class housing like back to backs living space averaged about 40 square feet to perhaps 100 square feet or 4 square metres to 10 square metres per person, and many endured far greater crowding in cellars and tenements. Despite living in a barracks-like environment company employees shared much the same - indeed if anything slightly more - living space per capita.

Company servants recruited in Scotland had endured housing conditions that were probably worse. In rural areas many houses consisted only of four stone walls, and tenants were expected to supply their own doors, roof timbers, and turf roofing,¹⁶⁸ and Scottish cities contained some of the worst slum housing in late 18th and 19th century Britain.¹⁶⁹ Most company

¹⁶⁵ The horrors of these latter forms of housing are described in detail in *ibid.*, pp. 58-69.

¹⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 70-77, and Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations*, pp. 93-95.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁶⁸ Rural Scottish housing is described in some detail in *ibid.*, p. 51-53.

¹⁶⁹ Housing in Glasgow for example is discussed in John Brett, "Working-Class Housing in Glasgow, 1851-1914" in Chapman (ed.), *Working-Class Housing*, pp. 57-86.

recruits, however, came from the Orkney Islands. The traditional Orcadian home has been described:

[most houses] were long and low in proportion, built of drystone with a roof of thatch supported on a frame of imported timber or driftwood ... The house was divided into a "but" and a "ben" end by a free-standing fire "back", against which a peat fire perpetually burned filling the whole house with acrid smoke. There was a chimney, or more accurately a hole in the roof framed by rough boards, called a lun, which drew out some of the smoke, but the general effect was to fill the house with smoke without either warming or drying it effectively. Roofs were not waterproof, and in heavy rain a mixture of cold water and soot dripped down the necks and into the food of the unwary.¹⁷⁰

These cold, damp, draughty and small houses were often shared with farm animals, and usually had no windows and very little furniture except for box beds. These beds did, however, help to retain some heat for sleeping residents, and provided the only modicum of privacy available.¹⁷¹ Lest this description of the meager comforts of an Orkney house be considered exaggerated, it should be noted that very similar housing was described as typical on other Scottish islands like Lewis and the Shetlands.¹⁷²

If company employees from Britain left no complaints about the crowded conditions and lack of space and privacy they endured in company service it may well have been because they did not see conditions in the Men's Houses at York or Prince of Wales's Fort as in any way unusual. Scottish employees, for example, probably saw company housing as essentially similar to the "bothy" system used by farmers to put up farm labourers. Large communal dormitories with bunk beds built around a central common space, the

¹⁷⁰ Patrick Bailey, *Orkney* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1971), p. 105.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² James R. Nicholson, *Traditional Life in Shetland* (London: Robert Hale, 1978), pp. 71-78, and John Mercer, *Hebridean Islands: Colonsay, Gigha, Jura* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1974), pp. 192-5.

bothy aroused great indignation among social reformers like William Cobbett. Apparently though, the people who actually lived in them often enjoyed the community life they encouraged, and the same may well have been true for post Men's Houses.¹⁷³ Indeed communal housing was quite common in most areas of Britain, and itinerant tradesmen, farm labourers, soldiers, sailors, even many school children would have lived for significant portions of their lives in housing roughly comparable - and in many cases much inferior to that offered in fur trade posts. It was a culture in which many still valued sociability more than privacy.

Nor would the lack of creature comforts in the Men's Houses of York and Churchill have seemed intolerable. The spartan furnishings described by R.M. Ballantyne and post records: benches and tables, a few chairs, chests, feather mattresses, and a few items of clothing, somewhat astonishingly compare favourably with descriptions of house interiors in Britain in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Most historians agree that it was not until the later Victorian period that more than a handful of working families could aspire to owning more than their beds and some bedding, a table and a few chairs.¹⁷⁴ Even Parliamentary reports from the mid-19th century describe conditions among the poorest residents of Britain that seem more neolithic than anything - piles of straw for bedding, rocks for chairs, and perhaps a container for water.¹⁷⁵ The Hudson's Bay Company did not recruit its employees from the poorest strata of British society, but even better-

¹⁷³ "Bothy" life is described in some detail in Gauldie, Cruel Habitations, pp. 66-68.

¹⁷⁴ Burnett, Cost of Living, pp. 280-81, Burnett, Social History of Housing, pp. 173-4, and Gauldie, Cruel Habitations, p. 57 and p. 98.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

off working people could rarely afford much furniture after paying for rent, food, drink, and fuel. Furniture usually ranked below clothing in household budgets, and amounted to at most a minuscule proportion of working-class expenditure. In 1881 the British Association for the Advancement of Science calculated that furniture constituted just over 1% of working class expenditures - less than was spent on either tea or fruit - yet at the time it is usually felt working class household furnishings were much improved.¹⁷⁶ If the cosy clutter of the Hargrave's residence reflected middle-class Victorian interiors, the spartan interior of the Men's House and Bachelors' Hall at company posts equally reflected British working-class interiors.

Witold Rybczynski has explored the impact of the notion of comfort on housing through the centuries. As he remarks, in European cultures at least, for centuries comfort was unknown and therefore unmissed.¹⁷⁷ In Britain the idea of comfort in housing began to take hold first in aristocratic circles in the 18th century.¹⁷⁸ This new ideal of physical ease was best reflected in furniture and house design, but it had important limits. Chairs could be upholstered and rooms made more human in scale, without necessarily overcoming problems of heating, plumbing, or ventilation. Moreover, these new ideas did not extend much beyond the homes of an aristocratic and upper middle class elite. Working people may well have hoped for comfort in their homes, but it was by all accounts all but impossible to achieve. The intensity of the cold at York and Churchill was

¹⁷⁶ Burnett, Cost of Living, pp. 258-59.

¹⁷⁷ Rybczynski, Home, p. 31.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 101-21.

clearly a shock to many - though something old hands took pride in learning to tolerate¹⁷⁰ but cold, damp, and draughty houses were a normal part of working class existence in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In general company housing at York and Churchill compared quite favourably with British housing of the same period. Sleeping cabins provided more privacy than box or canopy beds, and company employees probably had slightly more living space than British working people. They did not have to share their homes with domestic animals or give up any of their limited living space for kitchens or workshops. Moreover the fact that a large proportion of the post work force was absent for much of the year meant crowding in post dwellings was less than per capita figures for living space would suggest. Post housing offered few comforts, but few were expected. The simple furnishings found in Bachelors' Hall or the Men's House were serviceable and as much or more than most working families in Britain could expect to own. Cold and insects were annoyances differing more in degree than kind from the discomforts of life in Britain, and ones for which fur trade housing by the mid-19th century had found some solutions.

There were, however, at least two groups of company employees for whom service in the North-West probably meant a decline in standard of living in terms of housing. The men recruited in Lower Canada in the late 18th and early 19th centuries left communities where housing standards were quite high, both in terms of living space and material comfort. Recent research indicates that in the period between 1761 and 1800, rural housing in the Montreal and Trois Rivieres regions where the old "voyageur" parishes were

¹⁷⁰ See for example, Graham, *Observations*, p. 300.

to be found, averaged about 57 and 67 square metres or about 600 to 700 square feet of space for wooden houses, and somewhat more for stone houses.¹⁸⁰ In Montreal houses were larger on average, but there house space was often shared with workshops and businesses, not to mention lodgers and, for the well-to-do, servants. Still even allowing for the large size of Quebecois families such homes by the standards of the time were both spacious and quite advanced. One need only compare Quebecois farm housing with its multiple bedrooms, sitting room and large kitchen, with British rural cottages of the same period which rarely amounted to more than two or three small rooms or the minimalist one up and one down back to back houses which dominated large sections of British cities. As Peter Moogk has pointed out, however, the often graceful and well-designed housing of 18th century New France was the product of more than a century of experimentation and adaptation¹⁸¹, and one should perhaps not judge company builders too harshly for requiring much the same period of time to adjust their building techniques to suit conditions on Hudson Bay.

The other group of company employees whose housing at York and Churchill did not always compare well were officers, especially senior officers. Housing in fur trade posts was allocated on a rather steep curve of privilege. Junior officers' quarters were only slightly less crowded than those of company servants, and Bachelors' Hall was much closer in appearance and comforts to the Men's House than to the houses and apartments

¹⁸⁰ See R. Cole Harris (ed.), Historical Atlas of Canada: From the Beginning to 1800 Volume 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), plates 55 and 56.

¹⁸¹ See Peter N. Moogk, Building a House in New France: An Account of the Perplexities of Client and Craftsman in Early Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 119-21.

supplied to officers in charge of posts. In Britain and elsewhere in North America, however, young unmarried men working as clerks or beginning their careers in the professions expected to live for a number of years either at home or in lodgings. For financial reasons middle-class men usually put off marriage until their late twenties or early thirties¹⁸² and rarely rented more than minimal accommodations until the need to provide a family home required greater cash outlays. Unfortunately most historians of housing have little to say about this segment of the population; while it is not unlikely that many young British clerks lived in rooms roughly comparable to Ballantyne's Bachelors' Hall, this remains conjecture.

Closer comparisons are possible, however, with the housing supplied to senior officers. Their houses and apartments were clearly much more spacious and better furnished than other post housing, and some officers like Joseph Colen and later the Hargraves aspired to the kind of elegance and comfort in their domestic surrounding Rybczynski has described. Still based on their salaries they might have aspired to more. An officer in charge of a company post in the 18th century usually earned about £100 per annum, though sometimes in a first command the amount could be considerably less. They were, however, usually able to supplement this salary with bounties on trade or personal trappings which were often rather large. Most then earned between about £100 and £200 a year - an income which would have made them comfortably middle-class in Britain, and at least in a provincial town enabled them to rent a large home with servants' quarters, three or

¹⁸² To service this market British landlords developed the "genteel lodging house" which was a feature of middle class neighbourhoods from at least the late 18th century on. See for example, Robert Newton, "Exeter, 1770-1870", in Simpson and Lloyd(eds.), Middle Class Housing, p. 25.

more bedrooms, dining room, parlour, kitchen and large yard.¹⁶³ By the 19th century commissioned officers may have been even better paid in comparative terms. Between 1840 and 1860 the average annual value of chief trader's share of company profits was nearly £350, and chief factors received twice this amount.¹⁶⁴ An income in this range in Britain would support hiring at least one servant, and at £700 a year up to three or four servants, along with a large house and other luxuries like extended holidays or perhaps a coach and horses.¹⁶⁵ The Hargraves' home seems rather modest by comparison. It would seem that in many respects, despite the hierarchical nature of post society, labourers in company service improved their comparative standard of living vis-a-vis people working at similar jobs in Britain more than tradesmen and much more than officers.

¹⁶³ Eighteenth century middle-class salaries and living standards are described in Burnett, Cost of Living, pp. 170-78.

¹⁶⁴ Goldring, Papers: Volume II, p. 40.

¹⁶⁵ See for example the household budgets included in Burnett, Cost of Living, pp. 238-42. In effect a commissioned officer's salary was much larger since they paid for neither housing nor food for themselves or their families. A chief factor's salary during the period mentioned may well have been equivalent to £1000 a year or more. As late as 1909 this would still have placed them in the top two or three percent of British household incomes. Ibid., p. 233. See also Simpson and Lloyd, Middle Class Housing.

Chapter VIII - Standard of Living and Material Culture: Diet

Like accommodation and clothing the diets of Hudson's Bay Company employees stationed at York Factory and Churchill were a product of practical considerations and strongly held cultural preferences. Food is a physiological necessity, but what human beings can eat and what they actually do eat are often totally different matters. As a result what one society views as a delicacy another views with revulsion, and not all potential sources of food will be exploited equally. Culturally defined tastes often shape the dietary regimens of a community as much as practicality.

The diets of company employees at bayside posts reveal some of the complexity of this interaction between what people can eat and what they chose to eat, because as expatriates company men were forced to adapt their former eating habits and preferences in some significant ways. Nevertheless a kind of culinary conservatism asserted itself; company employees went to considerable lengths to keep their food as familiar as possible, even to the point of pursuing clearly uneconomic subsistence strategies and persistently misnaming several foodstuffs so as to make them appear less exotic.

Company employees were recruited for the most part from communities where the basic dietary regime was founded on agriculture and not hunting or food gathering. In their home communities in Britain or colonial North America company men were used to a diet based in varying proportions on cereal grains, fruits and vegetables, milk and milk products, and meat from domesticated animals, though vestiges of a hunting and food gathering economy, like fishing for example, still remained. On the shores of Hudson

Bay they met a native population which supported itself by hunting game birds and mammals, fishing, and to a lesser extent on collecting naturally occurring edible plants and berries. As a result of contact native groups like the Cree and Chipewyan did incorporate some European foodstuffs into their diets. Flour, in particular, came to be valued as a dietary supplement especially when other sources of food were scarce. At York and Churchill, however, most native groups treated European foods more as novelties or occasional culinary diversions than as significant additions to their diets. For example burgoe or burgoo, a stew made from oatmeal, bread, prunes and sometimes molasses, was served at York Factory in the 18th century as a kind of celebratory dish to Indians coming in to trade,¹ but away from the post European foods were probably almost never consumed, at least prior to the 19th century.

Company employees, by contrast, settled over time into a hybrid dietary regime based in part on agriculture and animal husbandry and in part on hunting and food gathering. Although some previously unknown or little known foodstuffs were incorporated into their diets, company employees remained extremely conservative in their food preferences. When new food items were used they were usually prepared so as to resemble the dishes eaten in home societies. Samuel Hearne suggested that it had "almost become a proverb in the Northern settlements, that whoever wishes to know what is good [to eat], must live with the Indians",² but in point of fact most company servants only borrowed the raw materials of native cuisine and only

¹ See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/34, fo.34, 19 May 1751; HBCA:B.239/a/35, fo.36, 14 June 1752; HBCA:B.239/a/37, fo.26d, 23 June 1754, and B.239/a/54, fo.36d, 1 June 1766.

² Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 205.

a few of those at that. Very few native cooking methods or recipes found their way into post cuisine. In general both the company and its employees went to great lengths to ensure that the food consumed at posts like York Factory and Churchill was as traditional and familiar as possible.

The food supplied to company employees at York Factory and Churchill was roughly divided into two categories: imported and country provisions. Imported provisions, as their name implied, were shipped to company posts from Britain on the annual supply ship. Their importance in the diet of company employees varied from post to post and over time. Food from Britain was probably more significant in the diets of those employed at posts served by supply ships than at interior posts or outposts. Thus in the 18th century imported provisions played a similar role in the diets of the men stationed at York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort. By the 19th century, however, they seem to have figured less prominently in the foods consumed at Churchill than at York. They did not entirely disappear from tables there; George Simpson McTavish reveals that as late as the 1860's some imported foods still found their way to Churchill.³ Imported provisions were

³ See McTavish, Behind the Palisades, p. 57-59. He mentions eating preserved potatoes and vegetables, and Danish butter among other imported foods while stationed at Churchill. In the early 19th century the use of imported foods varied widely at Churchill. In 1800-01 and again in 1821-22 post records report almost no consumption of imported food except for a little salt pork and bacon and 7 pounds of flour per man per week. In 1827-28 this flour, along with biscuit and oatmeal was estimated as comprising one third of all the food consumed at Churchill and in 1828-29 half of the food eaten there. At York, however, flour was never calculated as a ration; it was simply customary to receive a pound of it a day. If one ignores flour, as was the case at York, in calculating reliance on imported foods, even in 1827-28 and 1828-29 the diet at Churchill was largely based on country provisions. See HBCA:B.42/a/125, fos.4-4d, 23 November 1800; B.42/e/3, fo.2 Churchill District Report 1821-22; B.42/e/5, fo.1d, Churchill District Report 1827-28, and B.42/e/6, fo.1d, Churchill District Report 1828-29.

sometimes seen as an unnecessary luxury, and during campaigns to lower company costs consumption of imported foods was often discouraged as an economy measure. Under Andrew Wedderburn Colville's retrenching scheme of 1811, for example, the creation of an agricultural colony at Red River was closely linked to plans to cut back on the export of food to company posts,⁴ and George Simpson's reorganization of the fur trade after 1821 also included plans for encouraging greater food self-sufficiency. Indeed Simpson has acquired a certain notoriety for the care he exhibited in combing post indents for unnecessary food supplies. Simpson even wrote to James Hargrave taking him to task for requesting fish sauce, pickles, and mustard "on public account", when Simpson claimed he did not allow himself the luxury of such frivolous condiments.⁵

Despite reorganization schemes, Simpson's scrutiny, and appeals to lower expenses, imported provisions made up a large proportion of the food consumed at bayside posts in the 18th century, and at York in the 19th century they still formed between about one third and one half of all provisions consumed.⁶ They were intended to be used as emergency food supplies when other sources of country provisions failed, and as a supplement to make country provisions into the kind of dishes that company employees found familiar and palatable. In addition imported foods also supplied company employees with a few dietary luxuries. For example

⁴ Morton, Canadian West, p. 532.

⁵ Hargrave, Letters, p. 159 fn., George Simpson to James Hargrave, 23 March 1843.

⁶ See Table 18, p.441. This estimate does not include flour some of which came from Red River. One pound of flour, however, would have provided about 1,600 calories of food energy - between about 25 and 50 percent of the total calories in most daily rations.

throughout the 18th century the company shipped small quantities of tea, coffee, spices, and even candies to its posts. In 1782 at Prince of Wales's Fort these included 12 lb. of coffee, 12 lb. of chocolate, 12 lb. of caraway comfits, 112 lb. of refined sugar, 12 lb. of brown candy, 12 lb. of white candy, 1 lb. of cinnamon, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of mace, 1 lb. of cloves, 1 lb. of nutmeg, 8 lb. of ginger, 20 lb. of pepper, 10 lb. of pimento, 12 lb. of Spanish juice [licorice], 10 lb. of saffras, 7 lb. of Bohea tea and 7 lb. of green tea.⁷

Most of these supplies were probably destined for the officers' mess, but tea and sugar were also supplied to ordinary company servants and were available for purchase in the post sale shop.

Country provisions came in various forms and in their entirety formed the bulk of the food consumed at company posts. Most were the product of hunting and fishing by company employees themselves or were acquired through trade with the local native population. In addition most posts, including York Factory and Churchill, had gardens from which it was hoped at least a modest supply of fresh vegetables could be procured, and domestic animals were also kept for both transport and haulage duties and as a source of meat. A small inter-post trade in food developed, especially in the period after 1821, and some efforts were made to gather food from the plants growing wild around posts like York Factory and Churchill.

This latter potential supply of food does not seem to have been exploited with much vigour, although it might have made a significant addition to post food supplies. Spruce was collected to make spruce beer,

⁷ HBCA:A.24/18, fo.70d. The chocolate was probably intended for drinking.

and "wishakapucka" or Labrador tea was made into a tea substitute.⁹ Both were used more for their medicinal qualities than as a regular part of fur trade diet, however. Only a few of the possible edible plants found near York or Churchill were collected as food. This oversight was not simply a matter of a lack of knowledge regarding what plants could be eaten. Samuel Hearne, for example, listed over ten edible berries found in the vicinity of Churchill, but few were either collected or consumed in any quantity. Hearne indicated that gooseberries, cranberries and dewwaterberries [*rubus chamaemorus*] were the most commonly eaten berries at Churchill.⁹ At York gooseberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries, and black currants all grew locally¹⁰, and were pressed into service on occasion as antiscorbutics. It was really only cranberries, however, which were reported to have been collected in any quantity for the tables at York. Like gooseberries at Churchill they were usually turned into tarts, which Dr. Helmcken described as measuring "two feet long and 8 inches or so broad".¹¹ Cranberries were also packed in sugar or water and shipped to Britain as gifts - one of the few instances along with buffalo tongues of food crossing the Atlantic back

⁹ See Chapter VI- "Accident, Disease, and Medical Treatment, pp. 311 and 347.

⁹ Hearne, Journey to Northern Ocean, pp. 289-93. Significant quantities of berries could be collected if post residents chose to do so. In 1853 the women at Churchill collected 28 gallons of berries in 2 days. HBCA:B.42/a/187, fo.18, 19-21 September 1853.

¹⁰ Unfreville, Present State, p. 14

¹¹ Dr. John Sebastien Helmcken, The Reminiscences of Dr. John Sebastien Helmcken, Dorothy Blakey Smith (ed.), (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975), p. 87.

from Ruperts' Land to Britain.¹² Hearne also mentioned collecting dandelions at Churchill to make salads,¹³ but no one else reported this practice and it may have been simply a personal idiosyncrasy. Certainly Hearne was rather more adventurous in his eating habits than most company employees. He also mentions eating and finding palatable boiled moss.¹⁴ He went on to say that those who tried it usually grew fond of it, but most other fur trade authors disagreed. Tripe de roche, as boiled lichen was usually called, was more commonly viewed by northern travellers as a food of last resort to be eaten only when no other food was available. Opinion varied, but many found it only slightly preferable to starvation.¹⁵

Company employees also exchanged provisions between posts. In most cases the quantities were small, and the food was sent either as a curiosity or a present to fellow officers. At York, for example, officers were sent arctic char, trout and buffalo tongues along with carp tongues and jackfish bosses from Oxford House and muskox from Churchill.¹⁶ Severn regularly supplied York Factory with salt geese in the mid-19th century, and flour was

¹² See Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 289; Thomas M'Keavor, A Voyage to Hudson's Bay, p. 70; and HBCA:B.239/c/1, fo.62d, George Simpson to John George McTavish, 20 December 1821.

¹³ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 294.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 211

¹⁵ See for example, Concise Dictionary of Canadianisms, p. 287, entry for "tripe de roche". Alexander Henry, for example, described it as having a bitter and disagreeable taste though he was happy enough to eat it on one occasion in 1788. According to Henry his travelling companions at the time were so starved that had he not found tripe de roche they planned to kill and eat a woman in their party. Alexander Henry, Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1964), pp. 214-5.

¹⁶ See Payne, York Factory, p. 198.

shipped there from Red River.¹⁷ Potatoes, which were grown with some success at Oxford House, were packed in kegs and sent down to York with the boat brigades. On occasion the quantities shipped were significant. In 1838, for example, the boats from Oxford House carried 80 bushels of potatoes and 6 bushels of turnips,¹⁸ but overall these food supplies did not constitute more than a tiny proportion of the food consumed at York Factory. Food shipments from other posts to Churchill were rare, and only locally produced country provisions were usually available there.

The remaining country provisions illustrate the hybrid dietary regimen at Hudson's Bay Company posts clearly. On one hand considerable efforts were made to grow food crops even at bayside posts and to raise domestic animals, but ultimately most country provisions were the product of hunting and fishing. Looking after the post livestock occupied the labours of at least one man throughout most of the year and several more hands to cut and collect fodder in the fall.¹⁹ Similarly gardening occupied one man for much of the summer, and in fall several men had to be assigned to collect the vegetables which actually grew. The output from these efforts was, with rare exceptions, disappointing, and can scarcely have justified the cost of the labour expended.

¹⁷ See for examples, HBCA:B.239/b/93, fo.84, James Hargrave to John Cronartie, 19 April 1845, and B.239/b/97a, fo.8d, James Hargrave to Donald Ross, 23 July 1845.

¹⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/150, fo.17, 12 September 1838. Most shipments were smaller however.

¹⁹ The job of looking after livestock usually fell to a post labourer, but on occasion personnel records list someone as employed as an ostler or later as post cattle keeper. See for example HBCA:A.30/1, List of Servants Prince of Wales's Fort 1778, entry for John Johnston; and HBCA:B.239/g/39, Northern Department Servant's Accounts 1859-60, entry for James Marwick.

The company tried to cultivate gardens at its posts from the 17th century on, but before 1774 only the gardens at James Bay posts had much success.²⁰ At both York and Churchill conditions were not favourable to gardening in terms of either soil or climatic conditions. Year after year post gardens there produced negligible or disappointing returns. In the early 18th century at Prince of Wales's Fort the vegetables collected rarely amounted to more than a few bushels of turnips and some potatoes the size of hen's eggs. In the 1780's, however, attempts were made to improve the soil in the post gardens by hauling in new soil and adding "mould".²¹ The improved soil or perhaps gradually improving weather conditions meant slightly better crops. Thereafter in a good year the gardens at Churchill might produce "50 bushels of turnips, a middling quantity of Yorkshire cabbages, Colworts, Lettuces, Spinage, Radishes, Onions and a few green pease".²² In 1803 the gardens produced a record 6 3/4 tons of turnip and 600 to 700 cabbages.²³ Good crops could mean a bushel or more of turnips and about 20 cabbages per man, and led William Jefferson, the chief at Churchill in 1789 to exclaim: "Under God I attribute the healthfulness of Your Honours Servants here to the produce of our garden".²⁴

²⁰ See Umfreville, Present State, p. 14.

²¹ HBCA:B.42/a/106, fo.32, 30 May 1786, and B.42/a/108, fo.4, 22 September 1786. A similar soil enrichment program was attempted in 1793. HBCA:B.42/a/119, fo.4d, 30 September 1793 and fo.5, 9 October 1793. The garden in question was 170 feet long and 60 feet wide. HBCA:B.42/a/104, fo.4d, 25 October 1784.

²² HBCA:B.42/a/116, fo.3, 12 October 1790.

²³ HBCA:B.42/a/129, fo.1d, September 1803.

²⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/114, fo.4d, 30 September 1789.

Welcome as these fresh vegetables were, Jefferson's comments were a trifle exaggerated. Over the course of a year neither 20 cabbages nor a bushel of turnips would make much difference to one's health, and poor crops were at least as common as good ones. Indeed just three years before the record crop of 1803 the Churchill post journal complained that fewer potatoes were dug than planted,²⁵ and shortly before Jefferson attributed the good health of his men to turnips and cabbages, the post journal noted one year's crops amounted to no more than "a few boilings for Chiefs table and some to give the other Men".²⁶ In the 1820's and 1830's post journals and district reports for Churchill regularly reported the destruction of almost the entire garden crop by grubs, and gardening was less often reported in post journals thereafter.²⁷ It was not entirely abandoned, however, and periodic references to turnip crops recur into the 1850's especially when some sort of problem occurred. In 1840, for example, post dogs ate much of the crop, and in 1852 the turnips had to be harvested with pick axes because the ground had frozen solid all around them.²⁸ Still after 1821 the small population of Churchill meant even modest crops could produce a significant amount of food on a per capita basis. In 1840 for

²⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/125, fo.1d, 19 September 1800.

²⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/112, fo.5, 9 October 1788.

²⁷ See for example, HBCA:B.42/a/149, p. 49, Report of Old Churchill District; HBCA:B.42/e/5, fo.1, Churchill District Report 1827-28, and HBCA:B.42/a/159, fo.12, 5 October 1831.

²⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/173, fo.11, 5 October 1840, and HBCA:B.42/a/186, fo.56d, 27 September 1852.

example, only eight men were stationed at Churchill and over 50 bushels of turnips were reported to have been collected.²⁹

Gardening at York Factory followed much the same pattern. The gardens there were not very productive throughout most of the 18th century up to the 1780's. Reported crop sizes varied widely from year to year. In 1760, 31 bushels of turnips were grown, but a year later only 4 bushels were collected.³⁰ Occasionally the gardens produced significant quantities of other vegetables - for example 160 dozen carrots in 1755, though this was an unusually large crop³¹ - and periodic attempts were made to try to improve output. In 1754 cabbage plants were started indoors in boxes in the hope that they would mature before fall frosts.³² It was a rare year, however, when the gardens would have produced even a bushel of turnips and carrots and a few salad greens or beans per person at York. Indeed much of the produce of these gardens probably was eaten in the officers' mess. In 1724, for example, it was considered worthy of note that the gardens had produced enough vegetables to serve with the men's meals two or three times a week for most of the winter.³³ In the later 18th and early 19th centuries post gardens received somewhat more attention. They were fertilized with manure and lime, and to improve drainage they were trenched and built up on beds of

²⁹ HBCA:B.42/a/173, fo.11, 5 October 1840.

³⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/48, fo.6d, 8 October 1760, and B.239/a/49, fo.6, 28 September 1761.

³¹ HBCA:B.239/a/41, fo.7, 10 October 1755.

³² HBCA:B.239/a/37, fo.18d, 25 March 1754. The fall harvest however did not report any great improvement in cabbage production; indeed cabbages were not mentioned at all. See HBCA:B.239/a/39, fo.4, 24 September 1754.

³³ HBCA:B.239/a/8, fo.43, 12 October 1724.

willow.³⁴ Soil was brought down to the factory to improve the gardens, and in 1815 William Hennings Cook indicated that the post garden was made up of "Night Soil - Grey Mould & rotten Tobacco".³⁵ As at Churchill experiments were made with growing seedlings indoors in boxes, and hot beds and greenhouses were tried as well. The company shipped various types of seed to York including some which from their names, like "Early Yellow" turnip and "Early York" cabbage, appear to have been chosen to suit the short growing season on Hudson Bay.³⁶ Yet despite all of these efforts actual crops rarely amounted to much, and officers at York also concocted a long list of explanations ranging from blight and bad seed to caterpillars and grubs to explain disappointing crops.³⁷ The most productive year at York was probably 1838, when 135 bushels of turnips were grown - about three bushels a man. There were so many turnips that year that many wound up being fed to the post pigs and cows.³⁸ In more normal years, however, turnip production usually averaged about 30 bushels, or less than one bushelful per man stationed at York.

³⁴ See HBCA:B.239/a/126, fo.5, Standing Orders for York Factory #5; B.239/a/106, fo.3, 29 September 1801; Hargrave, Letters, p. 78, Letitia Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish Senior, 2 September 1840, and McTavish, Behind the Palisades, pp. 25-6.

³⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/101, fo.88d, 27 May 1799, and B.239/e/1, fo.5, York Factory District Report 1815.

³⁶ See HBCA:B.239/a/126, fo.26d, 15 May 1819; Hargrave, Letters, p. 107, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 14 May 1842; Helmcken, Reminiscences, p. 97. According to Dr. Helmcken despite the use of a greenhouse the vegetables he saw at York were about the size of marbles. A list of the seed stocked at York may be found in HBCA:B.239/aa/14, pp. 21-22, York Factory Inventory 1833.

³⁷ Payne, York Factory, p. 185.

³⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/151, fo.4d, 26 September 1838 and fo.28d, 19 February 1839.

It has been argued that gardening fulfilled an important function in supplying food to company employees less in terms of quantity than in terms of providing a timely supply of fresh vitamin-rich foods. D.W. Moodie contends that the produce from post gardens, particularly salad greens, offered some protection from scurvy in summer when other sources of fresh food were scant.³⁹ Post records do report planting spinach, lettuce, kale, parsley and radishes, but no references are made to harvesting them. Presumably they were cropped throughout the summer and may indeed have proved a timely addition to post diet. Moodie's argument is in some senses irrefutable. Scurvy was not common in summer and the reason may have been gardening. Still without knowing how much lettuce, kale, and parsley were collected it is impossible to judge how much any individual company employee consumed. Moreover, according to Letitia Hargrave lettuce and spinach were boiled "bodily" before eating,⁴⁰ and if true their contribution to good nutrition would have been considerably diminished. Recommended daily allowances of vitamin C would require the regular consumption of about two cups or 300 grams of cooked turnip which would soon have depleted all but the most successful year's crops at York Factory and Prince of Wales's

³⁹ D.W. Moodie, "Gardening on the Bay The First Century", The Beaver, 309, 1 (Summer 1978): 54-59.

⁴⁰ Hargrave, Letters, p. 61, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, September 1840, and pp. 107-8, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish 14 May 1842. Boiled cabbage contains less than half the vitamin C of raw cabbage and although turnips are considered a reasonably good source of vitamin C, they contain no vitamin A and only small quantities of thiamin and riboflavin. They are not a wonder vegetable; even as a source of Vitamin C they are outstripped by many other vegetables. See Buss and Robertson, Manual of Nutrition, pp. 104-5.

Fort.⁴¹ Scurvy was most common in early spring at the end of a long winter, before large supplies of geese and venison were collected during spring hunts. These were probably more timely as sources of Vitamin C than salad greens. Between September 1802 and July 1805 monthly totals of country provisions collected were kept at Churchill. According to these records it was January to April when supplies of fresh food from hunting and fishing were most scarce, and not the summer months when fish and venison in particular were available in quantity.⁴² Thus produce from post gardens was perhaps less timely an addition to diet than has been suspected up to now. As overall quantities of vegetables produced were never great the efforts put into gardening at posts like York Factory and Churchill were from a practical point of view largely irrational.⁴³

Attempts to raise domestic animals at these posts were only slightly more successful. Hogs and hens had accompanied Charles Bayly and his men to Fort Charles in 1670,⁴⁴ and in the years following virtually every other variety of farm animal was tried at bayside posts: goats, sheep, cows, horses, and even geese and turkeys.⁴⁵ Unfortunately few survived long, both

⁴¹ See Jean A.T. Pennington and Helen Nichols Church, Food Values of Portions Commonly Used (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 14th edition, p. xv and p. 160.

⁴² See Table 16, p.436.

⁴³ This was not the case at all fur trade posts however. As Table 15, p.432, shows York and Churchill were two of the posts where gardening was least successful, though a partial exception needs to be made for Churchill after 1821. There the small population made even modest crops more significant when shared on a per capita basis.

⁴⁴ Nute, Caesars of the Wilderness, p. 138.

⁴⁵ Apparently geese thrived at York, but turkeys grew somnolent in the cold and had to be moved indoors. Hargrave, Letters, p. 135, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 2 December 1842.

because most of these animals were more valuable as food than as stock to post residents - the exceptions were draught horses and oxen - and because it was almost impossible to keep animals properly at bayside posts. In the 18th century they were even turned loose to forage for themselves around the post during the summer months, with the result that some became wild and uncontrollable.⁴⁶ The real problem however, was the long winter at York and Churchill. Not only did the animals require large quantities of fodder, but they had to be kept shut up in sties and byres for at least eight months of the year. When two cows died over the winter of 1865-66 at Churchill the officer in charge, C.J. Griffin, was moved to write, "the climate here is very trying for animals, fancy an animal being shut up in a dark, closed, confined stable for eight months in a year, never stirring out of its Stall!"⁴⁷ The result was that the health of these animals was often poor and many died from disease or misadventure. Even some company officers doubted the utility of keeping domestic animals at their posts. At York after the men refused to eat some pork on the grounds of its poor quality and taste, it was noted that the pigs had been fed for several weeks before slaughter on pease but even so they still produced "very indifferent pork". On the whole it was felt raising pigs was "expensive and unprofitable ... at a place where potatoes or any kind of grain can not be raised".⁴⁸ A similar observation was made about keeping cattle at Churchill. Because fodder was

⁴⁶ In 1755 for example the bull at Prince of Wales's Fort nearly killed his keeper and attempted to gore anyone who came near him. He was quickly turned into a number of dinners. HBCA:B.42/a/46, fo.6, 12 October 1755.

⁴⁷ HBCA:R.42/b/61, fo.80d, C.J. Griffen to J.W. Wilson, 20 June 1866.

⁴⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/152, fo.10, 12 November 1839.

expensive to collect and often of poor quality, most cows lost weight after arrival at Churchill and their meat was "lean and tasteless".⁴⁹

The combination of poor health, accidents, and a tendency to kill livestock as soon as possible before the quality and quantity of their meat declined meant that post herds were never self-sustaining. Calves and piglets were born, but few were left alive long. In 1813, after the York Factory journal announced two more cows had been butchered for meat, someone on the London committee added the comment "folly" to the margin⁵⁰, but the folly persisted. Dead cows and pigs meant a few hundred pounds of fresh meat - alive they were at best a nuisance. The quantities of meat produced were often reasonably large - between 1000 and 2000 pounds of fresh pork or beef in a year.⁵¹ At a rate of approximately two pounds of meat per man per day post livestock could provide between about 500 and 1000 food rations a year. At York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th century figures for beef and pork production are rare.⁵² At Churchill the small

⁴⁹ HBCA:B.42/a/126, fo.8d, 19 August 1802. Joseph Colen made a similar point in 1786. He argued that keeping livestock at York was a waste of time - although he kept animals himself there - because the food they produced was insignificant in comparison with the costs of their maintenance. He noted that at York up to six men had to spend virtually the entire summer at Hay Island producing the winter fodder post livestock required. HBCA:B.239/a/87, fo.4d, 12 September 1786.

⁵⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/120, fo.18, 9 April 1813.

⁵¹ See for examples, HBCA:B.239/a/79, fos.8-9d, 30 October - 13 November 1780; B.239/a/112, fo.4, 28 October - 3 November 1805; B.42/a/128, fos.1d-4d, September 1802 - July 1803; B.42/a/129, fos.1-8d, August 1803 - July 1804, and B.42/a/130, fos.2-12d, September 1804-1805.

⁵² One of the few times when actual quantities of meat produced at York Factory in the 18th century were listed occurred in 1778. A bull and a cow provided 864 pounds of beef, and a number of boars, sows and piglets produced an additional 920 pounds of pork. At the time there were 25 men stationed at York, meaning the livestock produced about 70 pounds of meat a man - about 35 days rations. HBCA:B.239/a/74, fo.8, 1 November and 4

population in the 19th century meant a ton of meat could feed the post for a month or more, but as Table 16 indicates the quantities of beef and pork collected at Churchill were dwarfed by returns of venison, geese, and ptarmigan. More specific figures are available for York Factory in the mid-19th century. There fresh and salt pork and beef together provided the men's daily food rations on average of about 60 days of the year.⁵³ Unfortunately ration lists did not distinguish between imported salt beef and pork and fresh beef and pork, so it is impossible to tell the proportion provided by each source. Assuming, however, that salt provisions made up at least one third of this amount,- fresh pork and beef from post livestock probably made up no more than about 10% of food supplies at York in the 19th century, and less than this at York and Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th century. No doubt this amount of food could have been made up at less expense than keeping livestock at company posts entailed. Unlike vegetables, however, the food provided by post livestock could be timely. The animals were usually butchered in late October or early November, when alternative supplies of country provisions were sometimes scarce. This rationale for keeping livestock, however, was weakened by the increased use of ice as a means of preserving food. At Churchill references to the collection of ice for use in storing meat appear as early as 1795.⁵⁴ Similarly at York an ice house was built in 1805-6, primarily to store venison without having to preserve it with salt.⁵⁵ Thus by the early 19th century large quantities of

November 1876.

⁵³ See Table 16, p.443.

⁵⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/121a, fo.17, 29 May 1795.

⁵⁵ Donaldson, Land Use, p. 189.

TABLE 15: Land under cultivation and Live Stock on hand - in districts of the Northern Department, 1 June 1866

Districts	Acres of Land under cultivation	Bulls	Cows	Oxen	Calves	Heifers	Stewers	Horses	Hares	Calts	Pigs	Sheep	Lambo	Stallions	Mules	Dogs
Alibonza	18	3	10	5	6			22	41	32				23		52
Mademoiselle's River	31	4	7	7	6		1	9	1							212
English River	23	3	12	12	9	9		12	6	2						170
Quiberland	9	3	10	8	5	1		407	164	29	63			30	7	90
Saskatchewan	68	28	67	144	51	11	6	214	79	38				4		111
Saan River	31	6	36	102	17	13	6	76	32	33	38	19	14	3	5	189
Red River		14	26	55	104	77	1	2	1		73			1		46
La C. la Pluie		3	12	14	9	5										76
Norway House		3	4	7	10	6										46
Island Lake			4	4	5											11
Sewern		1	1	1	1											25
Trout Lake		1														19
Churchill		1														48
York Factory		1	4	8	1	3										
TOTAL	190	71	168	678	424	128	8	742	324	134	134	19	14	61	12	1,087

Source: HEDR:R.1302/23, p. 446.

meat could be kept frozen over the summer into the fall at both York Factory and Churchill.⁵⁶ This may help to explain the sharp drop in numbers of domestic animals kept at bayside posts in the later 19th century. As Table 15 indicates, by 1866 there was only one bull housed at Churchill and 17 head of cattle including oxen at York.

Ecologists and cultural anthropologists have attempted to explain food preferences in both humans and animals by use of models of optimal foraging. According to the theory human beings do a sort of rough cost-benefit analysis to decide whether or not it is worth hunting or collecting a given food. In particular it is suggested "hunters or collectors will pursue or harvest only those species which maximize the rate of calorie return for the time they spend foraging".⁵⁷ In agricultural societies the cost benefit analysis becomes more complicated, but few societies persist in trying to grow inappropriate and unproductive crops or to raise domestic animals which are unable to reproduce themselves. As Marvin Harris argues "there generally are good and sufficient practical reasons for why people do what they do, and food is no exception".⁵⁸

⁵⁶ At York Factory enormous blocks of ice three feet by three feet by two feet were cut to use in the ice house. See for example, HBCA:B.239/a/159, fo.27, 7 March 1844. The quantities of food stored in the York Factory ice house were significant. In 1830 in March at the end of the winter it still contained 3700 lb. of venison and 2000 partridges. Similarly in 1835 a spring inventory revealed that the ice house held 1912 lb. of venison, 1112 lb. of beef and veal, and 1485 whitefish. See HBCA:B.239/a/141, pp.44-45, 20 March 1830, and HBCA:B.239/a/148, fos.42d-43, 21 March 1835.

⁵⁷ Marvin Harris, Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1985), p. 165.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

In this case, however, the "good and sufficient reasons", if they exist, do not seem to have been practical ones. Although livestock-rearing and gardening were quite productive at some inland posts, at York Factory and Churchill in the main they were not.⁵⁹ The suggestion that gardening and post livestock were valuable more for when they provided food than for the raw quantities they produced is difficult to refute absolutely, and may have some merit especially at 18th century bayside posts. The bulk of the food produced by gardens and post pigs and cattle was consumed in the fall between shiptime and Christmas. Yet in the early fall berries and venison were usually available and in November and December fish and partridges began to figure more prominently in employees' diets. Turnips and pork were in reality supplements or alternatives to other available food sources at York and Churchill, and almost certainly could have been dispensed with from the point of view of subsistence alone.

The question then arises of why company employees, the London committee, and parsimonious managers like George Simpson - who objected to the expense of fish sauce - continued to place great importance on the need to maintain domestic animals and gardens at York and Churchill. Initially gardens and livestock were probably seen as an essential part of any scheme to establish "plantations" in company territories, and as a kind of experiment to see how company employees could be maintained on the shores of

⁵⁹ See Table 15, p.432. The company's own figures indicate clearly the failure to establish a secure agricultural base for its posts in the Hudson Bay lowland region. Churchill, Severn, and Trout Lake were the least productive "districts", with Island Lake and York close behind. All of these districts were in fact single posts and were designated districts for some accounting purposes. For most administrative purposes they were all considered part of the York Factory district. It is also interesting to note that even in the remote Mackenzie and Athabasca areas the company managed to maintain much larger stocks of cattle and to cultivate some land.

Hudson Bay. The notion that weather conditions at bayside posts ought to be like conditions at similar latitudes in Europe took some time to shake, but nevertheless by the mid-18th century company employees, if not always company critics like Arthur Dobbs,⁸⁰ knew there was a considerable difference between the climate at Churchill and the Orkneys although they were located on much the same lines of latitude. After fifty years of experimentation with gardens which produced meager crops and livestock which could only be maintained by regular importation of fresh stock, the persistence of such activities at bayside posts cannot be explained by either the false assumptions of the original company governors or simple inertia. The good and sufficient reasons for the persistence of gardening and livestock-rearing in the face of years of disappointing returns and only infrequent success were probably more psychological than practical. What turnips and other garden crops did provide along with beef and pork, more than any purely nutritional benefit, was familiar foods with which to prepare the stews, meat pies, roasts and other dishes company employees apparently preferred. Letitia Hargrave also suggested another possible appeal of gardening. She tried to grow flowers in window boxes at York, though she succeeded only in raising a crop of chickweed. She claimed, however, that it at least "flowered & looked green & that itself was something".⁸¹ Post gardens and post livestock could in all likelihood have been dispensed with from a purely practical point of view, and the food they provided could probably have been supplied from other less expensive

⁸⁰ Morton, Canadian West, p. 212.

⁸¹ Hargrave, Letters, pp. 183-4, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 30 March 1844.

TABLE 16: Average returns of Country Provisions by Month - Churchill 1802-1805

	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	Average Yearly Return
Birds, small	10.3								2.1		11.7	162.0	175.3
Ducks	16.0	3.0							12.0	5.0	63.4	401.0	540.3
Geese	53.0	9.0							1,497.7	149.7	2.0	53.0	1,764.4
Poultry	3.7	340.3	513.3	565.7	291.3	629.0	704.0	251.0		0.7	133.3	362.0	3,399.0
Wet-sour green lbs.	1,522.3	1,757.3	30.0	422.7			22.7	78.0		3,844.7	100.0		8,209.0
Wet-sour-dried lbs.	215.3	42.0								71.3			438.6
Hares		0.3	0.3	1.3		0.3		0.3			0.3		2.8
Tongues (dew)		0.7	14.3					0.7		2.0	0.7		38.4
Fat (dew) lbs.								2.7	2.0		40.0		41.7
Fish lbs.	28.0	647.3	30.0	101.3						69.3	164.0	590.0	1,472.6
Pork-fresh lbs.		476.7	32.5										1,009.8
Beef-fresh lbs.		476.7	42.7										889.4

Note: The August figures are based on only one year's returns, 1803, all other averages are based on three years' returns.

Source: HCH:R-C:18, Aug. 11-16; B. 47/a/129, for. 1-9d; B. 47/a/130, for. 2-12d.

Table 17: Country Provisions Collected at York

	1897-98	1898-99	1899-00	1900-01	1901-02	1902-03	1903-04	1904-05	1905-06	1906-07	1907-08	1908-09	1909-10	1910-11	1911-12	Average Amount
Meat	34.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.5
Trout	40.0	498.0	0.0	380.0	258.0	0.0	380.0	205.0	430.0	6211.0	430.0	330.0	0.0	0.0	38.0	263.6
Lake Whitefish	535.0	6722.0	0.0	7630.0	9480.0	10480.0	7630.0	1183.0	6211.0	2941.0	4302.0	2941.0	0.0	0.0	7781.0	6076.6
River Whitefish	11994.0	8605.0	11419.0	14647.0	7524.0	11419.0	14647.0	15981.0	23472.0	19287.0	15799.0	19287.0	15799.0	0.0	24414.0	15020.5
Jack	0.0	36.0	0.0	0.0	357.0	0.0	0.0	371.0	87.0	28.0	569.0	28.0	569.0	0.0	0.0	152.1
Fish of Sorts	2715.0	5276.0	3203.0	2112.0	1680.0	2725.0	2112.0	535.0	2512.0	4689.0	3675.0	4689.0	3675.0	1813.0	1813.0	2812.3
Fresh Mutton lbs.	7725.0	7403.0	5793.0	6042.0	1782.0	2936.0	6042.0	6566.0	6534.0	5037.0	4301.0	5037.0	4301.0	4172.0	4172.0	5288.3
Dried Mutton lbs.	125.0	174.0	58.0	60.0	42.0	23.0	60.0	99.0	40.0	0.0	71.0	80.0	71.0	20.0	20.0	72.0
Deer Heads	15.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3
Deer Tongues	35.0	35.0	6.0	20.0	6.0	8.0	20.0	43.0	0.0	0.0	18.0	9.0	18.0	12.0	12.0	20.1
Ducks	4293.0	3943.0	6377.0	2100.0	4657.0	2301.0	2100.0	2056.0	2979.0	2820.0	4635.0	2820.0	4635.0	1774.0	1774.0	3487.3
Geese	4274.0	3378.0	2300.0	421.0	1124.0	1243.0	421.0	499.0	2230.0	1826.0	1815.0	1826.0	1815.0	2736.0	2736.0	2722.3
Plovers	3359.0	3122.0	5059.0	2134.0	1117.0	3068.0	2134.0	4311.0	3361.0	2793.0	919.0	2793.0	919.0	4116.0	4116.0	3082.6
Partridges	4663.0	446.0	9952.0	7072.0	6778.0	4468.0	7072.0	9951.0	7382.0	1626.0	1010.0	1626.0	1010.0	4078.0	4078.0	4874.2
Rabbits	816.0	108.0	17.0	0.0	140.0	279.0	0.0	451.0	116.0	5.0	249.0	249.0	249.0	113.0	113.0	227.5
Beaver	0.0	1.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9
Porcupines	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
White Whales	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.0	26.0	33.0	26.0	33.0	43.0	43.0	10.7
Cranberries gal.	307.0	0.0	0.0	137.5	0.0	0.0	137.5	0.0	67.0	0.0	80.0	0.0	80.0	128.3	128.3	65.4

Source: HBCR:B.279/v/148, fo.55d; B.239/v/152, tes.31-31d, B.239/v/154, fo.53d; B.239/v/155, fo.44d; B.239/v/157, fo.39; B.239/v/159, fo.39; B.239/v/161, fo.40; B.239/v/168, fo.37; B.239/v/171, fo.43; B.239/v/173, fo.47d; B.239/v/176, fo.41.

sources. That they provided any food was however something, for as research has shown taste preferences in food are largely learned, and turnip and beef would have seemed all the more palatable for being familiar.⁶²

The major sources of country provisions at bayside posts were hunting and fishing carried out not for sport but for provisioning by both company employees and the local native population. A large proportion of this food was supplied to posts like York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort by native hunters and fishermen - one of the strongest arguments of those who would prefer to see the fur trade as a partnership between natives and Europeans. In effect the food supplied by native people made it possible for the company to maintain year-round garrisons at its posts and far outweighed any quantities of food supplied by the Hudson's Bay Company to its trading partners.⁶³ Still company employees and their families always contributed to their own subsistence, and at Churchill by the 19th century they had largely taken over responsibility for hunting and fishing for themselves.⁶⁴

Throughout the 18th century at both posts and into the 19th century at York the Homeguard provided most of the venison and almost all of the ducks, plover, and geese consumed by company employees. By contrast company

⁶² See Stephen Mennell, All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 1-2. Mennell cites the example of coffee, the taste of which most people find repugnant at first, but which after hundreds of cups an equal number find highly attractive as a flavour. Human beings apparently have trouble recognizing and perceiving new or unfamiliar flavours, leading some researchers to suggest what we experience is not really taste "but a sort of pre-taste". *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁶³ See for example, Francis and Morantz, Partners in Furs, p. 169-70.

⁶⁴ Intriguingly the wives of company employees appear to have done much of the actual work of fishing. "Mother Oman says that Oman & Grey did nothing but eat the fish that the wives killed, and I believe it, as I have got very few fish since the men went up." HBCA:B.42/a/169a, fo.78d, 7 May 1659.

employees did participate in hunting caribou and geese, were largely responsible for supplying their posts with fish, and completely dominated partridge hunting. This appears to have been as much by default as by design; partridges were hunted in winter when the Homeguard were usually living some distance inland and were thus unavailable for hunting on a regular basis.

There were important differences in kinds and quantities of country provisions procurable by hunting and fishing at different posts. At a number of interior posts the diet relied almost exclusively on fish. Service at these so-called fish posts was considered something of a hardship due to the monotony of the diet, but in fact a fish diet was probably healthier than one which relied heavily on salt meat and geese or even fresh venison and game birds.⁶⁵ Neither Churchill nor York Factory were fish posts, but at the latter in particular fish featured prominently in the diet. By the mid-19th century in an average year over 24,000 fish of varying kinds were caught for use at York Factory.⁶⁶ Many of these fish were used to feed post dogs and for other purposes, but even so nearly one-fifth of the food rations served at York consisted of fish.⁶⁷ At Churchill fish were an important part of the summer diet, but available records suggest less

⁶⁵ A description of the range of fish posts may be found in Goldring, Papers: Volume II, p. 219. Most were found in northern districts like Cumberland, English River, Mackenzie and Athabasca. An indication of the healthful quality of the diet at these posts was their reputation for producing large families. Fertility rates appear to have been high at posts like Fort Chipewyan where the diet relied heavily on whitefish. Van Kirk, Tender Ties, pp. 86-7.

⁶⁶ See Table 17, p.437.

⁶⁷ See Table 18, p.443.

reliance was placed on fish there than at York.⁶⁸ In the 18th century, however, at Prince of Wales's Fort fish may have been eaten in greater quantities. Whitefish and arctic char, which company employees persisted in calling salmon, were often reported as being caught and eaten. Indeed char were so common that they were salted and dried in quantity for later use, and were served often enough that the men rioted in 1757 over being given salt salmon too frequently.⁶⁹ Most of the fish consumed at York and Churchill was supplied by company employees, but fish was also sometimes an item of trade with local native groups.

Although not fish posts neither York nor Churchill were exactly meat posts either. The main source of red meat at these posts was caribou, which company employees usually called deer. Both woodland and barren ground caribou were hunted, though the former were probably more common at York and the latter at Churchill. The numbers of caribou inhabiting the Hudson Bay Lowland region in the 18th century were enormous: David Thompson estimated that during one two-day period 3,500,000 migrated by York Factory.⁷⁰ Samuel Hearne, however, was of the opinion that the numbers of caribou travelling along the Hudson Bay coast were already in decline by the 1770's, though their numbers remained high farther inland.⁷¹ Most of the caribou killed were procured either by snaring them in deer hedges or by killing them as they crossed rivers during their migrations. Swimming caribou apparently were unable to make any resistance and could be killed using spears, arrows,

⁶⁸ See Tables 16 and 17, pp.436-37.

⁶⁹ Payne, Prince of Wales's Fort, pp. 47-49 and p. 56.

⁷⁰ Thompson, Travels, p. 118.

⁷¹ Hearne, Journey to the Northern Ocean, p. 127.

knives, even sharpened sticks in addition to guns. Indians in particular were adept at this method of hunting, but company employees also tried to intercept migrating herds with varying success.⁷² Deer hedges were used in wooded areas and were probably more common at York than Churchill. Brush and small trees were cut and set up in a line one or two miles in length. Small gaps were left in the fence about every 15 yards, and snares set in the gaps. The unlucky caribou stumbled into these gaps and were trapped. Some were strangled or died when the tree the snare was attached to fell on them, but others managed to drag themselves and the snare and its attachments off with them. Company employees regularly checked the hedges, and easily tracked any escaping caribou. Killing the caribou, however, was sometimes a little more difficult, and David Thompson mentioned that even animals trapped in a hedge could deliver dangerous kicks with their forefeet.⁷³ Changes in migration patterns and range like those suggested by Hearne's comments, or increasing wariness on the part of the caribou themselves - John Ballenden suspected that they smelled the ropes and lashings of the snares and wood used in the hedges⁷⁴ - meant declining returns from the hedges at York in the early 19th century. Indeed the failure of the hedges to provide a regular supply of venison was a major cause of the strained relations which developed between Miles Macdonnell and his advance party of Red River Settlers and company officers like William

⁷² Thompson, *Travels*, p. 118, and Graham, *Observations*, p. 15.

⁷³ Detailed descriptions of deer hedges and their operations may be found in Isham, *Observations*, pp. 152-3, and Thompson, *Narrative*, pp. 86-87.

⁷⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/106, fo.25d, 30 April 1802.

Hemmings Cook and William Auld.⁷⁵ As a result caribou were also hunted with guns in winter between their migrations and by the mid-19th century, if not sooner, they were providing York with an average of about 2.5 tons of fresh and frozen meat a year.⁷⁶ Records from Churchill suggest even more venison was collected there - over four tons per annum⁷⁷ - and given the smaller population at Churchill this translated into about 600 pounds of meat per man per year. At York ration lists suggest less reliance on fresh venison, which was served an average of about 11 days a year. This may reflect the large size of fresh venison rations. The company's stated ration was four pounds of venison per man per day, but some fur traders implied company servants would eat six to eight pounds of fresh venison a day whenever they could get it.⁷⁸ The large quantities of fresh venison consumed on a daily basis would restrict the number of days upon which it could be served, but even so company provision records apparently underrecord venison

⁷⁵ Macdonnell and his men were encouraged to build a camp up the Nelson River to be near the deer hedges; had they produced more venison neither scurvy nor open hostility between Irish and Scots employees might have broken out. In addition Macdonnell might not have felt so hard done by in his dealings with company officers, and they might have viewed Macdonnell and his men as less of a burden.

⁷⁶ See Table 17, p.437.

⁷⁷ See Table 16, p.436.

⁷⁸ See for example, PAC:MG 19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, reel C83, p. 635, Printed Circular from Thomas Fraser to Company Agents, 22 November 1858, and HBCA:B.42/b/57, fo.6d, William Auld to Miles Macdonnell, 3 November 1811. David Thompson also mentioned company employees eating up to 8 pounds of venison a day. See Ross, Beyond the River, p. 77. Four pounds of venison might provide between about 3,200 and 4,500 calories of food energy a day depending upon the cut of the meat. At an average value of about 176 calories for every 90 grams of cooked caribou, eight pounds of venison would mean a staggering food intake of 7,000 calories a day. See Pennington and Church, Food Values, p. 108, and Health Services and Promotion Branch and Health Protection Branch, Nutrient Value of Some Common Foods (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1978), p.13.

Table 28: Daily Food Rations Served at Vert

	1970-11	1971-12	1972-01	1973-02	1974-03	1975-04	1976-05	1977-06	1978-07	1979-08	1980-09	1981-10	1982-11	1983-12	Average no. of days
Oatmeal	27.0	25.0	28.5	20.0	30.0	11.0	22.5	26.5	21.5	23.5					23.5
Peas	16.0	19.0	9.5	17.0	29.0	10.0	0.0	2.5	1.5	11.6					11.6
Biscuit	0.0	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4					0.4
Rice	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1					0.1
Corneal	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.0	20.0	25.0	21.0	8.3					8.3
Barley	0.0	0.0	0.0	..0	9.0	35.0	42.5	31.0	17.0	14.9					14.9
Pork-salt and fresh	32.0	36.0	54.0	61.0	54.0	39.0	52.0	52.0	53.0	48.0					48.0
Beef-salt and fresh	27.0	15.0	28.0	17.0	5.0	7.0	10.0	0.0	1.0	12.2					12.2
Lake Whitefish	44.0	54.0	56.5	63.0	4.0	46.0	16.0	28.0	47.0	39.7					39.7
River Whitefish	23.5	26.0	21.0	25.5	30.5	49.0	43.0	37.0	41.0	32.9					32.9
Ducks-fresh	0.0	0.0	8.5	2.0	0.5	3.0	0.5	3.0	0.0	1.9					1.9
Geese-salt	3.5	0.0	1.0	9.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5					1.5
Geese-fresh	6.0	2.0	0.0	7.5	10.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	3.0	3.7					3.7
Meat-salt	63.0	59.0	56.0	58.0	60.0	46.0	53.0	53.5	52.0	35.5					35.5
Meat-fresh	15.0	12.0	4.0	11.0	12.0	12.0	11.5	12.5	8.0	10.9					10.9
Dried meat	47.0	25.0	24.0	4.0	7.0	14.0	4.0	10.5	4.0	15.5					15.5
Pheasant	24.0	48.0	36.0	36.0	68.0	42.0	72.5	76.0	63.0	51.6					51.6
Plover	9.0	4.0	5.5	0.0	9.0	4.0	7.0	5.0	12.0	6.2					6.2
Partridges	28.0	40.0	29.5	34.0	36.0	33.0	8.5	2.5	20.0	26.4					26.4
Rabbit	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1					0.1

Source: HRD1: B.239/a/148, fo. 55d; B.239/a/152, fo. 31-31d; B.239/a/154, fo. 53d; B.239/a/155, fo. 44d; B.239/a/157, fo. 39; B.239/a/159, fo. 37; B.239/a/161, fo. 40; B.239/a/168, fo. 37; B.239/a/171, fo. 43; B.239/a/173, fo. 47d; B.239/a/176, fo. 41.

consumption. In 1844-45 there were 40 men stationed at York and fresh venison was reported to have been served on 12 days. At four pounds of venison a man this would account for only 1920 pounds of the 6568 pounds of fresh venison collected that year.⁷⁹ Some of the excess venison may have been turned into dried meat or pemmican which made up an average of about 67 days rations a year at York in the mid-19th century. Another possible explanation of this apparent anomaly is the impact of employee's families on post food requirements. It has been estimated that about one-quarter to one third of all company employees had dependents, and according to company practice in the 19th century wives were granted one-half a man's ration and dependent children one quarter ration.⁸⁰ Families may well have doubled the size of the ration list at posts like York, which also received many visitors who also had to be fed. It is quite conceivable that during the summer months of 1844-45 daily rations may have totalled 100 or more at York, in which case three tons of venison might have only fed the post for about 12 days.⁸¹

Although the company did not so designate its posts, York and Churchill were less meat or fish posts than game bird posts. Ducks and plover were shot by the thousand at York but because of the large numbers of each supplied as a single food ration: ideally two to three ducks and six plover

⁷⁹ See Tables 17 and 18, pp.437 and 443.

⁸⁰ Goldring, Papers: Volume III, p. 285.

⁸¹ The enormous quantities of food consumed at a post like York further underline the marginal nature of the food supplied by post livestock and gardens. At 100 rations a day 1000 pounds of beef would feed the post community for at most five days, and 30 bushels of turnips would provide about 10 quarts of vegetable per person. Under optimal conditions and without wastage this would only provide the recommended intake of vitamin C for adults for about 20 days.

- thousands were required to feed a post like York even for a few days. Assuming York required about 100 food rations a day in summer in the mid-19th century a yearly average production of plover of just over 3,000 birds would feed the post for just five days - a figure very close to the average derived from post records of just over six days.⁶² Salt and fresh ducks, however, were only listed as providing about three to five days rations a year or about 700 to 1000 ducks. Since average yearly production was more than three and one half times this quantity it would appear either thousands of ducks were wasted, or many were consumed as a supplement to other rations without being recorded.

According to Samuel Hearne plover became less numerous as one travelled north, and during his time at Churchill they were treated as a luxury food and not as an addition "to the general stock of provisions".⁶³ They may well have been synonymous with the listing for "small birds" in Churchill provision records.⁶⁴ Ducks were harvested in somewhat greater numbers at Churchill than plover, but they too were rarely mentioned as a regular ration item. According to Samuel Hearne most of the ducks available at Churchill were not highly esteemed as food except for mallards and pintail ducks in early summer and teal in the fall.⁶⁵ He described the other local ducks as rank or fishy in taste, which may explain in part why they were not shot and eaten in greater numbers.

⁶² See Tables 17 and 18, pp.437 and 443.

⁶³ Hearne, Northern Ocean, p. 275.

⁶⁴ See Table 16, p.436.

⁶⁵ Hearne, Northern Ocean, p. 287-88.

At both York and Churchill the most important game birds were partridges and geese, especially in the 18th century. Partridges, actually rock and willow ptarmigan, provided virtually the only supply of fresh provisions in the depths of winter, and they were killed in enormous quantities. In 1719-20 for example, the twenty-four men at Prince of Wales's Fort killed and ate 6237 partridges over the course of the winter, or about 260 partridges each.⁶⁶ Not every year was so productive, of course, but ptarmigan appear to have been particularly common at Churchill. Both Samuel Hearne and William Auld reported using them to feed the post hogs on occasion.⁶⁷ Over the winter of 1805-6 post hunters had provided the equivalent of about 314 partridges for each man on Churchill's staff by the end of December, and Auld indicated that plucked, cleaned and dressed these birds averaged about one and one half pounds each.⁶⁸ At York partridge hunting varied wildly in its success. In 1842 over 6,700 were either trapped or shot whereas in 1793 only 140 were killed.⁶⁹ Interestingly later that year one of the few fatalities from scurvy at York occurred.⁷⁰ By the mid-19th century in an average year just under 5,000 partridges were

⁶⁶ HBCA:B.42/a/1, fo.75, 16 April 1720.

⁶⁷ Hearne, Northern Ocean, p. 267 and HBCA:B.42/a/131, fo.14d, 24 March 1806.

⁶⁸ HBCA:B.42/a/131, fo.12d, 25-31 December 1805. As a result the hunting tents were abandoned for it was expected no one could eat any more partridges. See also B.42/a/132, fo.6d, 29 November 1806. Ptarmigan provide about 104 calories for every 90 grams of weight. A daily ration consisting of three to four partridges of about 1.5 pounds each would have provided between about 3000 and 4000 calories of food energy. Health Services, Nutrient Value, p.13.

⁶⁹ Payne, York Factory, p. 205.

⁷⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/95, fo.42, 22 July 1793.

collected at York and they were served out as rations about 28.5 days a year on average.⁹¹ Although this represented a significant proportion of the years' diet it was probably a decline from earlier years. The total number of partridges killed remained similar to 18th century levels, but the increased size of the York Factory community meant they provided fewer day's rations. In addition the use of ice houses and successful lake and river fisheries had decreased the absolute reliance company employees had formerly placed on partridges as a source of fresh or at least unsalted and undried food during the winter months. This increased variety in winter diet was undoubtedly a healthy innovation. As William Jefferson remarked company employees knew by experience that partridges "alone were not for any length of time sufficient to support the human frame".⁹² Of course no single food is, and human beings have both a physiological and cultural need for some variety in their diets. It was therefore not surprising that company employees looked forward to the spring break-up of lakes and rivers and the arrival soon after of huge flocks of geese.

If partridges were of enormous importance to the diet at York and Churchill because they were often the only source of fresh provisions in winter, geese signalled the end of a steady diet of salt and dried provisions enlivened only by partridges and, in the 19th century, some frozen foods. The spring goose hunt was usually more productive than the fall hunt, and between the two it was not uncommon to kill several thousand geese at both York Factory and Prince of Wales's Fort. In later years at

⁹¹ See Tables 17 and 18, pp. 437 and 443.

⁹² HBCA:B.42/a/114, fo.17d, 12 April 1790.

Churchill the goose hunt apparently produced fewer birds,⁹³ but a smaller post population meant fewer were needed to supply an equal number of food rations. Some geese were eaten fresh especially in spring, and at least as early as 1790 some geese from the fall hunt were kept frozen for eating later in the winter.⁹⁴ The largest quantity of geese, however, were salted for later use. According to one recipe dating from 1769 to preserve geese it was necessary to pluck and clean them then take

pickle strong enough to swim an egg in, and put a little coarse Sugar & a little salt petre poundd into the Pickle, and let them [the split geese] lay about 4 hours, and then hang them up in the Tent 'till they were dried, and they have kept all winter extremely good, ... and are so fresh they want no manner of watering.⁹⁵

Most geese, however, were probably not prepared so carefully, and were simply left in pickle until well and truly salted. They were then revived like other salt provisions by watering - essentially leaching the excess salt out of the flesh. At both York and Churchill this was usually done by cutting a hole in the ice on the nearby river and suspending a net filled with salt geese or other provisions down into the stream under the ice. After a day or two the ice hole was reopened and "freshened" provisions removed.

A normal food ration consisted of one whole goose if fresh, and between

⁹³ See Table 16, p.436. Samuel Hearne suggested that at Prince of Wales's Fort a spring hunt of five or six thousand geese and a fall hunt of seven to eight hundred were considered good but not exceptional. At York hunts fluctuated more. Most of the geese killed were snow geese though other goose species were also hunted. Hearne, Northern Ocean, pp. 281-87.

⁹⁴ HBCA:B.42/a/114, fo.18d, 11 April 1790.

⁹⁵ HBCA:B.239/b/30, fo.7d, John Fowler to Ferdinand Jacobs, April 1789.

one-half and one goose per man if salted.⁹⁶ Although Hearne suggested some geese may have weighed as much as twelve pounds, most of the geese killed at Churchill and York Factory would have been considerably smaller. Goose, however, is quite a rich meat, and snow geese provide about 140 calories for every 90 grams of flesh or about 700 calories a pound.⁹⁷ Geese may have figured more prominently in the diets of the men stationed at York Factory and Churchill in the 18th century than in the 19th century, but even so post records from York indicate that salt geese were on average the single most common food ration served there in the mid-19th century. Along with fresh geese they made up almost one-sixth of all daily rations at York.⁹⁸ Unlike partridges, they were usually hunted by Homeguard Indians hired on a seasonal basis to hunt for the post, although company employees sometimes assisted in the hunts. The reasons for this appear to have been first of all the greater skill of native hunters - Hearne estimated his fellow Europeans might kill thirty geese for every hundred killed by Indian hunters⁹⁹ - and the nature of the task. Goose hunting was not just a skilled but also an arduous occupation, which required great patience and

⁹⁶ The customary size of a salt goose ration in the 18th century appears to have been 3/4 of a goose per man, although Andrew Graham mentions 1/2 a goose. Journal references to this lower figure may be found as well. See for example, Graham, Observations, p. 296, or HBCA:B.42/a/60, fo.21d, 7 January 1764. Later in the 19th century the ration was often described as one full salt goose per man. See for example PAC:MG 19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, reel C83, P. 635, Printed Circular, 22 November 1858.

⁹⁷ Health Services, Nutrient Value, p. 13.

⁹⁸ See Table 17, p.437.

⁹⁹ Hearne, Northern Ocean, p. 263. There were some exceptions to this general rule though. In 1792 at York nearly one half of the 1500 geese killed in the spring hunt were attributed to Messrs. Sutherland and Thomas. HBCA:B.239/b/52, fos.13-13d, Joseph Colen to John Ballenden. 11 June 1792.

fortitude. Edward Umfreville described the conduct of the goose hunt at York Factory in the 18th century.

As a great part of the Factory provisions consists of geese killed by the Indians, the English supply them with powder and shot for this purpose allowing them the value of a beaver skin for every ten geese they kill; accordingly, after the Indian has got this supply, he sets off from his tent early in the morning into the marshes, where he sets himself down, with a degree of patience difficult to be imitated, and being sheltered by a few willows, waits for the geese. They shoot them flying, and are so very dexterous at this sport, that a good hunter will kill, in times of plenty, fifty or sixty in a day. Few Europeans are able to endure cold, fatigue, hunger, or adversity in any shape, with an equal degree of magnanimity and composure to that which is familiar to the natives of this country. After being out a whole day on a hunt, exposed to the bleakest winds and most penetrating cold, and that without the least thing to satisfy the calls of nature, an Indian comes home, warms himself at the fire, smokes a few pipes of tobacco, and then retires to rest, as calm as if in the midst of plenty ...¹⁰⁰

Other types of country provisions were occasionally collected for consumption at posts but most played little role in overall diet. Rabbits and hares were sometimes trapped or snared, but not in any quantity according to surviving records. A handful of references can be found to collecting bird eggs, hunting polar bears, and other unusual foods,¹⁰¹ but although these might have been exploited with greater vigour company employees appear to have been content with concentrating on geese, partridges, fish and caribou to the exclusion of almost all other possible foods. Company officers sometimes appropriated rare but appetizing foods

¹⁰⁰ Umfreville, Present State, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰¹ In 1826 for example, there was a brief flurry of interest in polar bears as a source of food at Churchill. One was killed and eaten and declared to be quite appetizing. A second bear was shot three days later, which turned out to be much less appealing as food. It was eventually fed to the post dogs. See HBCA:B.42/a/153, fo.14, 2 November 1826 and fo.14d, 5 November 1826

for their mess, like the cod fish found near Churchill in 1768,¹⁰² but they too relied on the same dietary staples as the men for the most part. Only in times of great want were most company men willing to experiment with new food resources. In 1788, for example, Joseph Colen noted that the men at York were willing to eat suckers and found them quite acceptable when flooding made other sources of fresh provisions all but impossible to procure.¹⁰³ Suckers were treated as "fish of sorts" and used as dog food in more normal circumstances. During the winter of 1797 when other provisions ran short company men at York ate "wolves wolverines Foxes Martins [and] Musk Rats". This occurrence was considered sufficiently unusual that it was reported in the post journal.¹⁰⁴ It was not ignorance of the food potential of these and other animals, however, which kept company men from pursuing them as food. Samuel Hearne described porcupines, skunks, wolves, white foxes, bears, muskrats, hares, squirrels, seals and other creatures all as both edible and even "good eating".¹⁰⁵ The reason was in all likelihood a combination of dietary and taste preferences, and the employment of a rough sort of "optimal foraging" pattern in the hunting and food-gathering component of post diet. Although post hunters probably killed whatever game they met, they did concentrate their efforts on hunting large mammals and the most prolific birds. They also varied their hunting patterns over the course of the year seeking geese in spring and fall, ptarmigan in winter,

¹⁰² HBCA:B.42/a/74, fo.3, 8 September 1768. This was also probably the fate of the beaver, trout, and porcupines occasionally collected as provisions.

¹⁰³ HBCA:B.239/a/88, fo.58, 25 July 1788.

¹⁰⁴ HBCA:B.239/a/100, fo.15, 16 February 1797.

¹⁰⁵ Hearne, Northern Ocean, pp. 232-51.

and caribou during their migration seasons. This adherence to "optimal foraging" was also prompted by the heavy reliance company employees placed on the local native population as suppliers of food. At York and Churchill the Homeguard tended to trade their food surpluses to the company, so what the company received was what was most available at any given time. Unlike native groups though, company employees had access to imported foods and a variety of preserved foods. This meant they did not have to exploit all possible food resources with equal vigour. Salt beef and pork, flour and pease offered a kind of dietary safety net that allowed company men to indulge their taste preferences for arctic char and whitefish and to treat suckers and other "fish of sorts" as food fit only for dogs.

This in turn suggests that jokes to the effect that the initials HBC stood for Hungry Belly Company or George Simpson McTavish's jocular description of hunger as "Hudson's Bay sauce" are in some important respects misleading.¹⁰⁸ Many company employees at York Factory and Churchill experienced periods of real dearth, but for the most part between imported and country provisions food rations were surprisingly large.

The exact mechanics of how company employees were fed is never clearly spelled out in post records for either Churchill or York Factory. Food supplies were usually under the care of a post steward. At larger posts this was an important job for which extra pay was normally allowed. An incompetent or dishonest steward could cause serious problems either by failing to keep proper track of stores or by serving out excessive rations. William Deans, the steward at York in 1786-87, was finally dismissed for

¹⁰⁸ McTavish, Behind the Palisades, p. 50 and p. 58, and Dictionary of Canadianisms, p. 330, "H.B.C. jocular".

wasting provisions and for being too generous. He apparently did not always use the oldest food first, and a cask of pease had to be fed to the post pigs in 1786 when it was discovered to be rotten. Its condition was explained by the fact that it had been stored in the warehouse since 1783.¹⁰⁷ Although Deane's oversight was far from unique - casks and barrels of food were often discovered to have gone bad after sitting for years in the warehouse - he compounded his sin by trying to court favour with his fellow servants by serving extra large portions of food.¹⁰⁸ Other stewards were accused of the opposite crime by their fellow servants - providing short rations - and a certain amount of grumbling about the quantity and quality of food provided was endemic. Some of these problems appear to have occurred as a result of the way post food supplies were distributed. Once a week the steward, or at smaller posts like Churchill in the 19th century the clerk or a trusted servant, handed out the rations to the men. Officers were fed separately, but tradesmen and labourers were divided into four man messes. Each mess was then responsible for its own food, and it was not unheard of for messmates to try to steal from each other.¹⁰⁹ In 1751 this led to complaints at Prince of Wales's Fort that the men were being cheated of their proper food rations. When Joseph Isbister investigated the complaint his steward remarked that it was the men's own

¹⁰⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/87, fo.10, 21 October 1783.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., fo.25, 19 March 1787.

¹⁰⁹ In 1785, York was home to a particularly greedy and unpleasant fellow named Gilbert Duncan. He became so obese he could not do his work and was finally struck from duty and sent home. Before this occurred, however, it was noted he stole food from his mess mates and whenever possible "gorged" himself on the fattest and choicest pieces of meat. HBCA:B.239/a/86, fo.12d, 29 November 1785, and fo.14, 10 December 1785.

fault and not short rations from him that was to blame. He told Isbister "that they are so disagreeable amongst themselves that they Cannot eat 4 men together but Cut a peice of meat in 4 parts and dressed which when its boild in Such Small peices, will Shrink Verry much but if dresd whole, not to be Complained of".¹¹⁰

This complaint, however, offers some insight into how company employees prepared and cooked their meals. Officers did not cook their own meals and the men listed in post records as cooks provided this service for the officer's mess. Cooks may have aided company servants with the preparation and cooking of their meals, but this was not their main function.¹¹¹ Each mess then was responsible for its own food, and from the weekly rations served out to them prepared their own meals. This pattern may have been modified somewhat when married servants became more common and rations may have been distributed to families in some cases. A weekly distribution of rations may also have been modified slightly to take into account spoilage of food. Dried or salt provisions could be kept from one week's end to another, as could most foods in winter, but during warmer weather fresh meat and fish or even frozen provisions would have had to be eaten within a day or two of being served out.

In the 18th century daily rations often included two or more types of food, but by the 19th century post accounts expressed food rations in

¹¹⁰ HBCA:B.42/a/36, fos.37d-38, 17 February 1751. Imported pork and beef from Britain often had a high fat content, and if cut into smaller portions may well have rendered down more than if left whole. In 1786 Joseph Colen complained that a 5 1/2 lb. piece of pork sent to York weighed only 1 3/4 lb. after boiling, but that 3 lb of fat were collected from the pot it had cooked in. HBCA:B.239/a/86, fo.19, 26 January 1786.

¹¹¹ See for example, HBCA:B.42/a/53, fo.37, 4 May 1760.

quantities of single foods. This does not mean company employees ate oatmeal one day and nothing but ducks the next. They were given what was in effect a basket of raw materials from which they could put together their meals as they saw fit. Company records contain numerous lists of rations but two examples will suffice. In both cases the ration lists indicate an ideal, and short rations caused by dearth or misappropriation by post stewards meant that on occasion these standards were not met. In addition conditions varied from post to post and not all foods were available at all posts. Andrew Graham suggested that the following daily food rations were customary for each four-man mess by the later 18th century.

Pork salt from England	4 lb. wt., peas 1 quart
Beef salt from England	4 lb. wt., plums 2 lb, flour 2 lb, suet 2 lb., peas 1 quart
Bacon from England	3 lb., peas 1 quart
Cheese Chesire	2 lb. wt., Butter $\frac{1}{2}$ lb., Oatmeal 1 quart.
Geese fresh	4 no.
Geese salt	2 no., pease 1 quart
Deers flesh either fresh or salt	14 lb.
Ptarmigan	12 no. Oatmeal 1 quart
Deers tongues	10 no. Oatmeal 1 quart
Beaver's flesh (rich food)	12 lb. wt.
Fish	12 lb. wt., Butter $\frac{1}{2}$ lb.
Fish salt	14 lb. wt., Vinegar and Oil each $\frac{1}{2}$ pint.
Hares small	6 no., Oatmeal 1 quart.
Ducks	8 no., Oatmeal 1 quart.
Flour for bread for one week	24 lb. wt. ¹¹²

Some of these foods, like hares and beaver, were rarely consumed at York or Churchill though they may have been more common at other posts. Graham's list suggests how many meals were prepared. Salt beef and pork, for example, were probably boiled into a stew with pease, though the pease and oatmeal may also have been used to make porridge and gruels. Salt beef also

¹¹² Graham, Observations, p. 296.

seems to have been eaten with plum pudding, and fresh fish may have been either fried or served with butter. Salt fish on the other hand was given an oil and vinegar dressing. It is also clear that most meals were accompanied by bread - about one pounds' worth per man per day. This bread, however, was not eaten fresh as today. It appears to have been baked about once a week and then stored for later eating. On the sloop voyages undertaken from Prince of Wales's Fort in the 18th century all the bread for the entire voyage of four to five weeks was baked before departure.¹¹³

Graham's list also allows us to estimate the approximate nutritional value of some customary daily food rations. Food allowances consisted of between about 14 and 16 ounces or about 400 to 450 grams of flour per person per day. This quantity of flour would provide up to about 1600 calories of food energy a day along with some vitamins and minerals though no vitamin C. A cup of dried peas, assuming they were roughly similar to modern split peas, would provide a little over 200 calories of food energy along with some vitamin A and C. A similar quantity of oatmeal would provide about the same number of calories. On a day when the food consisted of bacon the total calorie intake for company employees would have been between about 1800 and 2100 from bacon, 200 calories from pease, and 1600 calories from flour: a grand total of between 3600 and 3900 calories. The bacon and pease would also have provided some vitamin C though nothing like what is now considered advisable. In the case of fresh fish, assuming Graham's figures refer to whitefish, 3 pounds of whitefish would provide over 2100 and

¹¹³ See Payne, Prince of Wales's Fort, pp. 54-55. Bread made at company posts must have been quite different from modern breads as well, since little or no milk could have gone into the dough. Most bread would have resembled unleavened bannock bread or salt-risen bread.

perhaps as much as 2900 calories of food energy along with some vitamin A, B and C. The butter served with this fish - 2 ounces or just under 60 grams - would offer well over 400 calories of energy though little else besides perhaps some vitamin A. Fish days then offered company employees well over 4000 calories. Indeed most food rations on Graham's list offered similar food intake. It seems fair to assert then that barring short rations, company servants received about an average of at least 4000 calories of food a day.¹¹⁴ According to modern nutritional standards most food rations were probably too high in fats and somewhat deficient in vitamins and minerals. Average caloric consumption was also higher by about 1000 calories or more than recommended levels for adult males today. The types of work done in the fur trade, however, probably meant food consumption was about right especially for those doing manual labour outdoors in winter.¹¹⁵

In the 19th century food rations were, if anything, somewhat more lavish. A list of customary rations quantities prepared in 1858 indicated that each company employee received one pound of flour usually in the form of bread every day. In addition a days' rations would be composed of one of the following quantities of food:

2 lbs. of Scotch Barley
 2 lbs. of Oatmeal
 1 quart of Pease
 2 lbs. fresh or salt beef
 1½ lbs. of Salt pork

¹¹⁴ Food values indicated here are based on values listed in Pennington and Church, Food Values; Buss and Robertson, Manual of Nutrition, and Health Services, Nutrient Value.

¹¹⁵ Pennington and Church suggest an adult male between the ages of 23 and 50 weighing 70 kilograms needs about 2700 calories of food per day. A normal dietary range then would be between 2300 and 3100 calories with those employed in manual labour or engaged in strenuous exercise requiring a somewhat higher food intake.

2 lbs. of pemmican
 2 lbs. of dried meat [probably venison at York and Churchill]
 1 Salt or Fresh goose
 2 or 3 salt or fresh ducks
 6 salt or fresh plover
 2 or 3 fresh lake whitefish, 3-5 lbs. each.
 8 fresh river whitefish
 4 lbs. fresh venison
 4 rabbits
 4 partridges

In addition company employees were allowed 2 pounds of tallow each month and 2 gallons of molasses. The tallow may have been intended for making candles with, although fat was used for cooking.¹¹⁶ The circular listing these food rations was never official and may have been somewhat optimistic, but it agreed fairly closely with other lists of food rations found elsewhere in company records.¹¹⁷ Once again a pound of flour, if eaten in its entirety, would have offered about 1600 calories of energy. A goose with three to four pounds of meat would offer over 2000 calories and perhaps as much as 3000 calories, depending on the species and how it was cooked. Four pounds of fresh venison would offer about 3500 calories on average, but the actual amount would depend upon the cut. Cleaned and dressed 2 or 3 lake whitefish probably provided at least four to six pounds of meat which in turn would provide about 4000 calories of energy. Even the barley and oatmeal would have provided over 3000 calories of food a day, if employees ate nothing else. A typical daily food allowance for company servants in the 19th century, barring short rations which were not often reported, might

¹¹⁶ PAC:MG19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, reel C83, p. 635, Printed Circular of Private Instructions from Thomas Fraser to Company Agents, 22 November 1858.

¹¹⁷ See Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 115, Letitia Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish Senior, 27 May 1842, HBCA:B.239/a/154, fo.45, 21 April 1841; and HBCA:B.239/c/3, fo.98, Thomas Spence to James Hargrave, 2 March 1835.

well have amounted to an average of 5000 to 6000 calories a day.¹¹⁰ Based on the number of times each foodstuff was supplied as rations at York between 1840 and 1851,¹¹⁰ company employees could be supplied with the following per capita quantities of food each year:

365 lb. of flour
 47 lb. of oatmeal
 30 lb. of barley
 11.5 quarts of pease
 61 lb. of salt pork
 24.5 lb. of salt or fresh beef
 79-119 Lake whitefish
 263 River whitefish
 6-10 Ducks
 58 Geese
 37 Plover
 43.5 lb. of fresh venison
 31 lb. of dried meat
 103 lb. of pemmican
 106 Partridges¹²⁰

In addition this impressive quantity of food was supplemented with unrecorded quantities of cornmeal, rice, biscuit, cranberries, rabbits and other foods rarely listed as rations served but available from post food supplies.

It should also be noted that these food rations appear to have applied to company servants and their families only. Officers were fed separately and on a somewhat less restrictive basis. According to Andrew Graham officers' messes in the 18th century seldom sat down to less than three

¹¹⁰ See Health Services, Nutrient Value, pp.11-13 for the nutritional values of a variety of game fish, birds, and animals. A half food ration for wives would then have provided a reasonably comfortable food intake of about 2500 to 3000 calories a day. Even a child's ration would have amounted to 1250 to 1500 calories. Moreover most families could supplement their diets with fishing or hunting on their own behalf if they wished.

¹¹⁰ See Table 17, p.437.

¹²⁰ Quantities have been rounded off to the nearest half.

dishes and on occasion many more.¹²¹ This pattern continued in the 19th century. Dr. Helncken described dining at York, and to his surprise receiving a whole duck to eat after a course of whitefish. While he was still deciding how to eat this duck, his neighbour was already starting on his second. Helncken then reported that he was told in winter the post officers regularly ate two to three geese each.¹²² Letitia Hargrave indicated that officers' wives ate similar meals. She described one meal shared with three other women as consisting of "a roast of venison at the top [of the table] 3 geese at the foot, 4 ducks on one side 6 plover on the other, a large Red River ham (whole leg) & potatoes & mashed turnips or boiled lettuce".¹²³ According to Letitia Hargrave "good swallows" were common at York among officers and their families.¹²⁴ Some officers may have voluntarily limited the quantity and variety of food served in their mess, as William Jefferson did at Churchill in 1792, to prevent grumbling among the men;¹²⁵ but in general officers and their families were limited only by availability and the size of their appetites in their food consumption.

It is not surprising then to discover that obesity was a more common dietary problem than starvation at company posts. Several company officers acquired a certain notoriety for their large size: James Hargrave by 1845

¹²¹ Graham, Observations, p. 297.

¹²² Helncken, Reminiscences, p. 97.

¹²³ Hargrave, Letters, p. 61, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, September 1840.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 100, Letitia Hargrave to Mary Mactavish, 9 September 1841.

¹²⁵ HBCA:B.42/a/117, fo.13d, 31 March 1792. Joseph Colen adopted a similar policy at York. See B.42/b/30, fo.4d, Joseph Colen to William Jefferson.

weighed 224 pounds.¹²⁶ It is also interesting to note that gout was a common complaint among senior officers in the 18th century: a disease associated not with malnutrition or dietary deficiency but an overly rich diet. Churchill had a reputation in the later 18th century for enjoying larger and more reliable stocks of country provisions than York,¹²⁷ and this may well have been true on a per capita basis if not always in absolute terms. Still both posts did experience some periods of genuine want, especially in the early 18th century. In 1717, for example, food was shifted into the warehouse space above Henry Kelsey's rooms at York to prevent its theft "itt being hungry times and no Game Stirring".¹²⁸ Some company employees tried to face dearth with the same stoicism as Nathaniel Bishop in 1722, who wrote "the four Men ye went out Yesterdy, came home brought nothing but a hungrey Appetite, wch Sometimes happens to us hear when wee have not Sufficient to Satisfie it."¹²⁹ Most employees though were less tolerant of short rations, but they did accept the notion that ration quantities had to be limited on occasion. Protests over spoiled or inedible food were reasonably common, and most senior officers attempted to avoid such confrontations whenever possible. Officers would usually take complaints about food seriously and act upon them if justified. Ferdinand Jacobs at York in 1769, for example, found the pieces of salt beef sent out from England to be small so he doubled the daily mess allowance. While he

¹²⁶ See Hargrave, *Letters*, p. 197 fn., John Ballenden to James Hargrave, 2 May 1845.

¹²⁷ HBCA:B.239/a/100, fo.6d, 28 November 1796.

¹²⁸ HBCA:B.239/a/5, fo.10, 22 November 1717.

¹²⁹ HBCA:B.42/a/3, fo.7, 23 September 1722.

warned him men not to complain without cause, he also promised that "they Should have their Bellys Full of Sweet & good Provisions".¹³⁰ Officers' willingness to listen to complaints about substandard food, and to complain themselves to the London committee about short weight on flour, rancid butter, rotten cheese and the like was prompted by a canny assessment of the consequences of not feeding their men as much as possible. Many officers probably exceeded normal daily rations when they thought it feasible. William Auld indicated that he was willing to allow the men in his command 8 pounds of venison a day if they wanted it and supplies would allow it.¹³¹ This was less altruism than common sense for as William Jefferson remarked "when provisions are short, Anarchy takes place of Subordination".¹³² In truth, short provisions never actually produced anarchy, but they could severely strain relations and company officers found keeping bellies full made their jobs much easier.

In general company servants managed to make a full belly a customary right and one customary right which could not be assailed. Indeed on some occasions when post records reported the institution of short rations, the phrase was actually being used to describe the substitution of one sort of food for another. In 1813, for example, supplies of flour and oatmeal ran short at both York and Churchill. To conserve supplies short rations of 3 pounds of flour and 3 pounds of oatmeal were instituted. To prevent dissatisfaction extra rations of other sorts were offered, either an added partridge, one pound of fresh venison, or a pound of fish. Moreover it was

¹³⁰ HBCA:B.239/a/62, fos.13-13d, 11 November 1769.

¹³¹ HBCA:B.42/b/57, William Auld to Miles Macdonnell, 3 November 1811.

¹³² HBCA:B.42/a/110, fo.23d, 21 May 1788.

noted that if flour and oatmeal supplies dropped too low, biscuit could be pressed into service.¹³³

Company servants could not ensure that the food they were served was always as Letitia Hargrave put it "exactly 1st chop", but no one could at a time when food preservation techniques were still limited to salting, drying, smoking, and freezing for the most part.¹³⁴ A certain amount of food spoilage was inevitable and company records certainly contain numerous references to sub-standard and spoiled food. What they also make clear though is that this food was rarely eaten, and if served to the men complaints were inevitable. Nor could officers ensure that the daily diet was not monotonous. A strategy of "optimal foraging" implies using the most readily available food resources, and fur traders did this in large measure. Just as there were fish and meat posts each individual post seems to have venison months, and fish months, and goose months, and partridge months. Over the course of a year residents of York and Churchill enjoyed considerable food variety, but day in/day out the food varied little. Post journals contain periodic complaints to this effect, and food riots occurred

¹³³ HBCA:B.239/b/84, fo.51d, William Auld to William Hemmings Cook, 5 November 1813. This letter may offer a partial explanation of the use of biscuit at company posts. It was regularly shipped from Britain, but almost never reported as served as food. Some may have been used on sloop voyages or while travelling, but most probably got used as a food reserve or to feed Indians - a kind of ration of last resort.

¹³⁴ Hargrave, Letters, p. 259, Letitia Hargrave to James Hargrave, 12 August 1851. It is interesting to note that the company was quick to introduce new food innovations into its service. Growing trade in food stuffs in the late 18th and 19th centuries led to the provision of Dutch cheese and Danish butter at company posts. Similarly advances in food preservation led to the commercial sale of "preserved" or "dessicated" vegetables in the mid-19th century. As early as 1845 the company began shipping "Edward's Preserved Potatoes" to its posts, and soon after added dried vegetables. See, Payne, York Factory, p. 210.

on several occasions in the 18th century. These riots were usually caused not by lack of food, but by either substandard rations or the sheer monotony of eating geese or arctic char day after day.

The monotony of the diet was probably exacerbated by the way food was prepared at most posts. The two most famous fur trade dishes, boiled corn or pease with lard and "robbiboo" or pemmican soup, were not much eaten at company posts like York and Churchill. They were really the mainstays of voyageur and tripmen's diets.¹³⁵ Instead venison, pork and beef were usually cooked as stews or in pies, often with gravy thickened with flour, oatmeal, or barley or roasted. Oatmeal and pease could be eaten as a porridge or gruel. A favourite Hudson's Bay Company dish in the 18th century was grout which was made from oatmeal "boiled to a thickness, sweetened with Molassus".¹³⁶ Fish could be cooked in a variety of ways - in the 18th century it seems to have been dressed with oil and vinegar or cooked with butter. Ducks, plover, and geese could also be roasted and George Simpson McTavish described how they could be cooked over an open fire. Birds were cleaned and split and a sharpened stick inserted through their breasts to hold them open. Then they were stuck on a longer stick which when planted into the ground held them over the fire. Although this method of cooking

¹³⁵ Robbiboo was usually eaten on canoe and boat routes above Fort William. Pemmican was mixed with flour and water and then boiled to make a thick soup or broth. Voyageurs working for the North-West Company between Montreal and Fort William were nicknamed "mangeurs de lard" or pork eaters because of the amount of boiled corn and pease they ate. Each man was given about one quart of pease or dried corn, which was then put into a communal kettle. After boiling to the point of disintegration, two or three pounds of pork bacon, or fat were cut into small pieces and added to the pot. The result was a pudding-like stew high in calories and according to many surprisingly palatable. See Nute, The Voyageurs, pp. 51-52.

¹³⁶ Clerk of the California, An Account of a Voyage, vol. 1, p. 122.

was fairly basic, company employees appear to have borrowed it from Cree cuisine. McTavish called the geese cooked this way as "poonasjed", a term clearly derived from the Cree word "poonask" or "ponask" used to describe cooking split fish or birds over an open fire.¹³⁷ Such cross-cultural borrowing in cooking techniques was relatively rare however, and in general fur trade meals aspired to little more than a show of plenty. The meals served in officers' messes differed more in degree than kind from the meals eaten by the men - more dishes and more food, but not usually different foods or ones prepared differently. In part this was caused by the relative lack of sophistication and expertise of post cooks. Most cooks were company servants for whom a relatively comfortable and undemanding line of work was sought as a reward for long service. As Letitia Hargrave remarked of the man promoted to the rank of officer's cook at York in 1843, his repertoire of dishes upon taking on the job was limited to boiled potatoes and cod.¹³⁸ What was cooked for officers then varied little from what the men cooked for themselves. Most of this was what might be called "plain cooking", and company employees of all ranks probably wanted no more. Letitia Hargrave, for example, on one occasion revealed that what she yearned for at York was not paté de fois gras or lobster bisque but Scottish scones and cakes.¹³⁹ In Britain, French cooking and food service became fashionable in some circles

¹³⁷ McTavish, Behind the Palisades, p. 39. See also Dictionary of Canadianisms, p. 573.

¹³⁸ Hargrave, Letters, p. 159, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 10 September 1843.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 108, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 14 May 1842.

after the end of the Napoleonic Wars¹⁴⁰, but they were never able to supplant an older British culinary tradition of "solid abundance" entirely. Creatures of fashion might aspire to meals of several courses and delicate sauces or unusual meats and vegetables, but most members of the gentry and middle-classes were suspicious of "fancy French dishes" and service. They liked roasts and chops and meat pies in quantity and all served at the same time. As one account of a London merchant's dinner party put it "There was no impertinent and miserable attempts at foreign cooking ... not a single dish appeared upon the table under false pretenses".¹⁴¹ Popular cookbooks of the period reveal similar tendencies. "Foreign" or "continental" dishes were usually included, but they rarely made up more than a tiny proportion of the recipes printed suggesting professional and domestic cooks were still mostly influenced by "plain cookery".¹⁴² That post cooks were not capable of more than simple boiling, roasting, frying, and stewing was probably not seen as any great hardship. Indeed fur traders of all ranks affected a certain indifference to fancy cooking and many liked to see their hardiness reflected in their diet. As John Charles at York remarked to John Todd:

An Old Campaigner ... will not decline the Provisions You have to give,

¹⁴⁰ See for example, Burnett, Plenty and Want, pp. 57-62. French chefs had been gaining prominence from the 18th century on, but a strong anti-Gallic mood in the late 18th and early 19th century rather delayed the impact of French cooking styles on British haute cuisine.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁴² Ibid. This taste for simple meals seems connected in the Victorian period to a sense that plain living and unadorned dining was morally superior to elaborate and costly meals. See C. Anne Wilson, Food and Drink in Britain: From the Stone Age to Recent Times (London: Constable, 1973), p. 421. A similar suggestion is made in Mennell, All Manners of Food, pp. 212-13.

and I am Sure by this Time You are fully Convinced nothing in the Shape of Food will Poison Fur Traders.¹⁴³

In general then the diet of all ranks at York and Churchill was marked by fairly bland but familiar cooking techniques. Officers' diets can be differentiated from those of the men only in terms of who cooked for them and the quantities and variety of food available at any given meal. Some officers did try to encourage a more refined atmosphere in their mess by being sticklers for manners and by encouraging a careful hierarchy of seating positions around the mess table,¹⁴⁴ but company servants probably had their own dining customs as well.

The relative infrequency with which dietary deficiency diseases struck company employees at York and Churchill, and the lack of evidence to support any notion of an unusually high mortality rate at these posts suggests a generally adequate diet. Shortages did occur - during one particularly bad

¹⁴³ HBCA:B.239/b/92, fos.72-72d, J. Charles to J. Todd, 27 January 1837.

¹⁴⁴ Letitia Hargrave's letters contain considerable information on dining customs at York in the 19th century. She revealed that Robert Wilson, a postmaster promoted from the ranks, was forced to endure regular teasing at the mess table for his ignorance of the conventions of conversation and manners of so-called "polite society", as well as noting the careful attempts of visiting officers from the interior to follow the lead of the more sophisticated and *au courant*. See Hargrave, *Letters*, pp. 86-87, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish Senior, 1 December 1840, and p. 77, Letitia Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish Senior, 2 September 1840. In the mess at York the officer in charge sat at the head of the table, and his second at the foot. Other officers were then ranged around the mahogany more or less in order of precedence. At Churchill a dispute over seating precedence took a somewhat farcical turn in 1791. The sloop captain being new to the post inadvertently sat in Robert Longmoor's spot. Longmoor, the deputy at Churchill, commented loudly on strangers not understanding the ways of the post, and Charles Duncan learned his place. He continued to harbour some resentment of Longmoor though, and refused to sign the annual letter from the post under Longmoor's name. He also composed a lengthy and somewhat uncharitable letter explaining his pique with Longmoor for the edification of the London committee. HBCA:A.11/15, fos.184-85, Captain Charles Duncan to London committee, 10 September 1791.

winter Joseph Colen was moved to write - "It's distressing to the feeling Mind to hear the Crys of Children for food"¹⁴⁵ but ordinarily food was reasonably plentiful. Some employees seem to have harbored real fears of starvation which affected their judgement and behaviour, but such cases were exceptional.¹⁴⁶ Rations at posts like York Factory and Churchill were normally more than adequate, and according to some observers even excessive. Andrew Graham, for example, suggested that in his experience his men rarely ate their full allowance of flour, and some saved the excess to send home to their families in the Orkneys while others gave it away to the Homeguard.¹⁴⁷ Modern nutritionists might well question the calorie intake of employees - assuming they ate all they were allocated as food - and overall the diet at posts like York and Churchill was probably rather high in fats, carbohydrates, and provided an excess of protein. It may also have been deficient in calcium, unless company men ate the bones of the fish they consumed, as milk must have been in short supply and by the 19th century cheese was rarely reported as a food ration.¹⁴⁸ The most common criticism

¹⁴⁵ HBCA:B.239/a/100, fos.14-14d, 8 February 1797.

¹⁴⁶ Edward Jarvis, for example, fled York for Churchill in 1796 just prior to Joseph Colen's comment on children crying out for food. Jarvis apparently had been told supplies of food were generally more secure at Churchill than York. Given the lower incidence of scurvy at Churchill, this may well have been true. HBCA:B.239/a/100, fo.6d, 28 November 1796.

¹⁴⁷ Graham, Observations, pp. 296-97.

¹⁴⁸ This absence of milk and milk products from the diet at York and Churchill may not have been noticed much by post residents themselves. Milk had almost totally vanished from the diets of agricultural labourers in Southern England and urban working families by the 18th century, though butter was consumed in small quantities. In 1862 it was estimated many English working class families consumed less than 8 ounces of milk per person per week - at Bethnal Green the figure was a mere 1.6 ounces. See Eric Hobsbawm, "The British Standard of Living, 1790-1850", in Taylor, The Standard of Living in Britain, p. 79.

of fur trade diet, however, was the presumed lack of Vitamin C due to an inability to secure adequate supplies of fresh vegetables. This view reflects the modern belief in the value of a balanced and varied diet, but vegetables are not a necessary part of any diet. Historically many cultures have subsisted without succumbing to deficiency diseases on all-meat or nearly all-meat diets. Game birds and animals, fish and some domesticated animals provided the largest proportion of fur trade rations - over 80% of the daily food rations served at York Factory in the mid-19th century ¹⁴⁹ and about 60 to 70 percent of daily caloric intake based on normal daily ration sizes.¹⁵⁰ Still fur trade diet was hybrid in nature - about two thirds country provisions and one-third imported foods, and approximately the same proportion of food produced by hunting and food-gathering methods and by agricultural and livestock rearing activities respectively. It was also a hybrid dietary regime in a cultural sense: not only did native groups provide much of the food consumed at posts like York Factory and Churchill, but some of these foodstuffs were new and previously unfamiliar food items.¹⁵¹ Counterbalancing this was the tendency to prepare and serve these new foods in traditional forms, and indeed to rename them to make them seem less unusual and alien.

¹⁴⁹ See Table 17, p.437.

¹⁵⁰ One pound of flour would provide up to about 1600 calories - the meat or fish portion of the daily food ration usually offered at least twice this number of calories.

¹⁵¹ This in turn raises some questions of perception not really answered by available records. By the 18th century in Britain game birds and animals had become very much luxury food items, available for the most part only to gamekeepers and their aristocratic employers. Before the appeal wore off due to constant exposure, dining on roast venison must have seemed quite adventurous and luxurious to new British recruits.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the diet at York Factory and Churchill, however, was the quantity of food made available to company employees. Hunting and food gathering produced large amounts of food in most years, but it was necessary to manage these food supplies well as country provisions were not equally available throughout the year. Short rations were less common in the 19th century than the 18th century, not because overall levels of food collected changed so much as available food resources were exploited more effectively and food was preserved with less wastage. Drying, salting, and smoking of food was supplemented by extensive use of freezing, and ice houses meant geese and venison collected in early summer could be kept well into the fall and winter when other sources of country provisions could run short. In addition ice fishing at York after 1821 provided a large and reasonably secure source of fresh and frozen food during the winter months, enabling company men to avoid excessive reliance on salt provisions and capricious supplies of ptarmigan.

To understand, however, how well-fed company employees were it is necessary to compare the kind and quantity of food they ate, not against modern dietary prescriptions, but the sort of food consumed by working and middle class households in Britain and elsewhere in North America. Company employees recruited in Rupert's Land may have experienced some dietary changes in moving from one post community to another: there was, for example, a significant change to be found in moving from a fish to a meat post. Also the large quantities of ducks, geese and ptarmigan eaten at York and Churchill in addition to venison, pork, beef, and fish may have meant that diet there was more varied than at many interior posts. However the

company's ration system meant quantities of food served probably varied very little from post to post.

Employees recruited in Quebec tended to come from the so-called voyageur parishes found along the St. Lawrence river between Montreal and Trois Rivieres with perhaps the largest single group coming from the Sorel area. The other significant source of employees, especially tradesmen, was the town of Montreal. It is generally assumed that residents of New France and later Quebec ate better than their Old World contemporaries, but most works rely on essentially impressionistic arguments.¹⁵² They were, however, subject to periodic crop failures, and residents of towns like Montreal probably subsisted on bread, dried peas and beans, and butcher's meat by the later 18th century.¹⁵³ One estimate of grain consumption in the earlier 18th century suggested that in New France adults consumed about 12 minots of wheat a year. Although the minot was a volume measure, a minot of wheat has been estimated at about 65 pounds which, if true, implies an annual consumption of about 780 pounds or over 350 kilograms of wheat.¹⁵⁴ At such a rate of consumption it is hard to believe they had room for any other food, though it does make company rations of one pound of flour a day

¹⁵² See for example, Dale Miquelon, New France 1701-1744 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), pp. 223-24. Social historians in Quebec have gathered a lot more information on commodity production than consumption in the 18th and 19th centuries. See for example, Fernand Ouellet, Economic and Social History of Quebec 1760-1850 (Toronto: Macmillan for Carleton University Press, 1980).

¹⁵³ Game was probably no longer available to supplement supplies of beef and pork.

¹⁵⁴ A. Jean E. Lunr, "Economic Development in New France, 1713-1760", (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 1942) cited in Miquelon, New France 1701-1744, p. 323. The estimate of the weight of a minot of wheat comes from The Dictionary of Canadianisms, p. 478.

seen less excessive and unusual, and like company flour rations this wheat may not have been consumed in its entirety. More recent research suggests that the area around Sorel, from whence many company servants were recruited, was one of the first parts of Quebec in the early 19th century to shift away from wheat production to an economy based on subsistence agriculture.¹⁵⁵ Indeed fur trade companies generally recruited their employees in exactly those areas of Quebec where economic constraints and a lower standard of living made seasonal labour and medium-term migration of three to five years to seek work attractive propositions. In the absence of good data on consumption rates any comparison between the diet at York Factory and Churchill and Quebec can only be speculative. Nevertheless it is hard to believe Lower Canadian recruits saw any decline in their levels of food consumption on taking up company service, and they may well have enjoyed more meat and fish - certainly more game - than they would have consumed at home. They may also have been less subject to the consequences of poor harvests and fluctuations in the prices of food since it was supplied to them and in most cases food was not something they had to pay for themselves.¹⁵⁶ Certainly available evidence does not suggest they would have eaten large quantities of fresh fruit or vegetables, especially the men recruited from Montreal, and at company posts as at home in Lower Canada their diet would have been composed largely of grain and grain products, peas and beans, and meat and fish.

¹⁵⁵ See Allan Greer, "Fur Trade Labour and Lower Canadian Agrarian Structures", *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers/Communications Historiques* (1981), pp. 187-214, and Fernand Ouellet, *La Bas Canada 1791-1840: Changements Structureux et Crise* (Ottawa: Editions de L'Université d'Ottawa, 1976), pp. 492-7.

¹⁵⁶ Sugar, tea, and alcohol were the partial exceptions to this rule.

A closer comparison is possible with British diets of the 18th and 19th centuries. In the 18th century in England, at least, wages generally rose slowly, but in the first half of the century prices appear to have remained more or less stable and even declined in many instances. The early 18th century then was generally a favourable period for working people. After 1760 prices began to rise steadily and it is unlikely that most working people managed to increase their wages to keep pace.¹⁵⁷ Eighteenth century English scholars were fond of a kind of political economy that attempted to calculate which segments of society added to national wealth, and which ones reduced it. Most attempts at this sort of social cost-benefit analysis beginning with Gregory King in 1688 and continuing throughout the 18th century, found half or more of the English population could not live on what they earned, and had to be supported in whole or in part by schemes like Poor Relief. The diets of those on Poor Relief - largely agricultural labourers and their families - are easily categorized. In the south of England they ate bread and more bread - varied only by small quantities of tea, cheese, meat, and a few vegetables they grew for themselves.¹⁵⁸ In the North of England conditions were slightly better and the diet somewhat healthier. Milk and milk products like cheese and butter were less expensive and more available, and potatoes varied the near total reliance on bread. Still even in the north, agricultural labourers ate few vegetables

¹⁵⁷ Burnett, Cost of Living, p. 131-33.

¹⁵⁸ A typical household budget for a man, his wife, and five children allowed for the purchase of one pound of cheese, and two ounces each of tea, sugar, and butter per week to share among the entire family. Burnett, Cost of Living, p. 167.

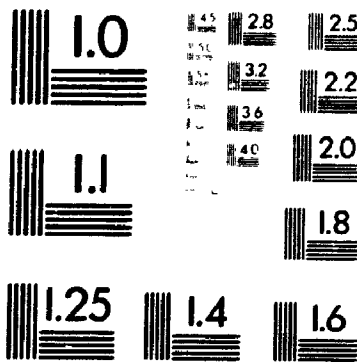
aside from potatoes and very little meat.¹⁵⁹ The urban workers in better paid trades ate more meat although it was often undesirable cuts like shins and trotters or organ meats like tripe. Most working people, however, made do with bread, meat perhaps once a week, potatoes and small quantities of milk, tea, sugar and butter.¹⁶⁰ Three things stand out about these descriptions of typical 18th century English diets - the huge dependence on bread, the absence of a significant consumption of vegetables other than potatoes, and the fact that meat and fish did not really figure very prominently in the food eaten by working people. By contrast middle-class and aristocratic households were highly carnivorous, and most meals consisted of fish, beef, mutton, poultry or pork cooked in various ways and often served together. What they did not include much of were either bread or vegetable dishes - indeed fruit may well have been consumed in greater quantities than vegetables.¹⁶¹ If the meals of the well-to-do were unimaginative and those of working people and the poor monotonous and even bleak, England still was the wealthiest society in Europe - perhaps the world - in the 18th century.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168. See also Drummond and Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food*, pp. 207-08.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 186. According to Eric Hobsbawm in later years butter became almost a substitute for meat and a Giffen good. Demand was quite inelastic due to the amount of bread eaten, and in times of want many bought butter in preference to most other foods. Hobsbawm, "Standard of Living 1790-1850", pp. 79-80.

¹⁶¹ See Drummond and Wilbraham, *The Englishman's Food*, pp. 210-18. Interestingly Stephen Mennell, in his study of British and French cooking methods, has noted a kind of traditional disdain on the part of English cook book author for vegetable dishes. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries soggy boiled vegetables were actually recommended by many cook book authors as preferable to crisp *al dente* vegetables. Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, p. 100 and p. 213.

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Company employees recruited in Scotland - in the 18th century almost exclusively from the Orkneys - were not in a better situation at home, indeed if anything their diets may have been even less sustaining than those of English working people. Ferdinand Jacobs in the 1750's dismissed complaints about the food at Prince of Wales's Fort with the comment that his Orcadian men had "Seldom, if Ever, Eat[en] Any thing better than Pease or Barley Bread with Salt Sellocks [cod or coal-fish fry] & Kale".¹⁸² He described Andrew Shewrie, a labourer at Prince of Wales's Fort and ringleader of the protest, as someone "that Never Eat a bit of wheate Bread till he Came into Your Hons. Service".¹⁸³ Agricultural techniques and crop yields improved somewhat in the Orkneys after the late 18th century, but contemporaneous observers offer a fairly bleak picture of Orcadian agriculture prior to about 1790. Oats and barley were the main crops grown in a very primitive system of two crop rotation. Equipment was equally primitive and one visitor described the ploughs in use on Orkney crofts as resembling those "described by Virgil in his first Georgic".¹⁸⁴ Wooden harrows and Roman style ploughs served only to "comb" and "scratch" the surface of the soil, and as a result crop yields were very low.¹⁸⁵ In England it had been estimated cereal grains produced an average of about 10 to 11 grains for every seed sown in the latter half of the 18th century, but in the Orkneys the return was more like three to four grains. As a result

¹⁸² HBCA:B.42/a/50, fo.10, 29 October 1757. Kale is a variety of cabbage.

¹⁸³ Ibid., fos.9d-10, 28 October 1757.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Glover, Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1775-82 (London:Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1952) Second Series 1779-82, p. xiv.

¹⁸⁵ Patrick Bailey, Orkney, (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971), p. 104.

about one-third of all crops had to be held back as seed.¹⁶⁶ Ferdinand Jacobs was probably fairly accurate in describing his Orcadian servants as having been used to a diet of pease, barley bread, kale, and a few salt fish. These dietary staples would have been supplemented with some milk and pork and mutton on occasion. What is clear is that most Orkney labourers and probably many tradesmen as well would not have had the opportunity to eat the variety and quantity of food considered no more than customary at company posts in the 18th century.

The 19th century British obsession with social statistics and social reform means that a great deal is known about food consumption patterns of the period especially in England. There is still considerable debate as to whether standards of living, including diet, were on the whole improving or regressing in the period from about 1790 to 1850,¹⁶⁷ but whether the trend line was up or down it is known beyond debate that most working people in Britain subsisted on a limited, monotonous, and in many respects inadequate diet through most of the century - and well into the 20th century for that matter.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Glover, Cumberland House, p. xiv, and Fernand Braudel, Capitalism and Material Life (London: Fontana, 1974), p. 81.

¹⁶⁷ Many of the most notable works in this "standard of living debate" are reprinted in Taylor, The Standard of Living In Britain.

¹⁶⁸ Indeed some would argue modern diets are inadequate in many respects, though the range of available foods has increased immeasurably. Monotony is not now forced upon us, and if we continue to eat the same foods prepared the same ways day after day it is now largely a matter of choice. It has been estimated that a majority of English labourers - and by extension their families as well - were still chronically under nourished in terms of calories and protein requirements, not to mention vitamins and other essential nutrients, in 1914. See Burnett, Plenty and Want, p. 135.

In the first half of the 19th century the great dietary dividing line in most areas of Britain lay between better paid artisans for whom work was regular and year round - Hobsbawn's labour aristocrats - and the rest of the working class. Those above this line could afford to purchase meat, poultry, and fish on a regular basis. As in the 18th century the well-to do were highly carnivorous, and comparatively speaking relied little on the great food staples of the rest of society - bread and potatoes. The less well-off could hope for little more than a sense of feeling full produced by the consumption of large quantities of bread and flour and other cereal grain products like oatmeal. If they ate vegetables it was almost always potatoes, and few saw much meat, cheese, poultry or fish.

A few household food budgets collected by social reformers in 19th century England will illustrate the difference in dietary regimen between well-paid artisans, skilled and semi-skilled labourers, and the really poor. A well paid London compositor in 1810 was reported to have purchased 20 lb. of bread and flour, 14 lb. of meat, 2 lb. of butter, 1 lb. of cheese, 2 lb. of sugar, as well as unspecified quantities of beer, milk, tea, and vegetables and some condiments like salt, pepper, and vinegar for himself, his wife and two children on a weekly basis. Interestingly the largest single expenditure in this budget was not rent but meat. By comparison a Lancashire cotton spinner earning above average wages, but with a wife and five children, purchased 1½ lb. of butter, 1½ oz. of tea, 4 quarts of oatmeal, 1½ lb. of bacon, 40 lb. of potatoes, 7 quarts of milk, 1½ lb. of sugar, and 1 lb. of meat for Sunday, along with small quantities of salt,

pepper and mustard, on a weekly basis. This family made further savings by baking its own bread in unspecified quantities.¹⁶⁹

The increasing reliance on bread and potatoes and other "filler" foods is obvious, but the trend became even more acute with ordinary labourers. Many agricultural labourers, for example, were unable to purchase any butcher's meat at all, and made do with bread and potatoes, along with small quantities of cheese, butter, tea and sugar.¹⁷⁰ Those who fell into parish relief, suffered extended periods of unemployment, or worked intermittently in distressed trades might well have to give up the tea, sugar, cheese and butter. In a survey done in Manchester in 1841 a direct correlation between income and relative expenditure on bread as opposed to meat was found. As household income rose both proportionally and in absolute terms the amount spent on meat went up. As income dropped proportional expenditure on bread rose sharply until in the poorest households it made up nearly one third of all purchases.¹⁷¹ Economic historians find it easier to agree that after about mid-century general standards of living in Britain began to improve somewhat especially during the so-called "Golden Age" of Victorian Britain, 1850-1873. Even so most working people in England saw only a marginal improvement in a diet that has been characterized as "at best stodgy and monotonous, at worst hopelessly deficient in quantity and nutriment".¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ These two household budgets may be found in Burnett, Cost of Living, pp. 260-61.

¹⁷⁰ The diet of agricultural labourers and their families is discussed at length in Burnett, Plenty and Want, pp. 14-28.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 50.

Company employees recruited in the Orkneys had experienced a similar dietary regimen. Although agricultural techniques and productivity began to improve in the Orkneys in the late 18th century - enough grain was produced that in most years the islands were net exporters of grain - in the 19th century most Orcadians still relied on oatmeal porridge, barley bread, cabbages, kale, and some root vegetables like turnip and potato as their main foods. Small farmers could keep a few household animals like a pig and some chickens or geese to provide meat, and fish were available especially in coastal communities.¹⁷³ Meat was perhaps more available to Shetland Islanders than to Orkneymen, but even so fish were probably more common as food than lamb or mutton. The oatmeal and barley eaten by Orcadians were less prominent perhaps in the diets of Shetlanders, who in turn probably consumed more potatoes.¹⁷⁴ The other Scottish islands where the company occasionally turned for labour were the Hebrides and Lewis in particular. There too historians note the typical Lewisman subsisted on oatmeal, potatoes, and fish.¹⁷⁵ The general adequacy of these diets is the subject of some difference of opinion. It was estimated in 1811 that an inhabitant of the Hebrides consumed at best only about half the food eaten by the average Englishman, while the diet of the typical Orkneyman was described as "monotonous rather than inadequate".¹⁷⁶ Such opinions are impressionistic, but fit well with what is known about British food consumption in the 19th

¹⁷³ Bailey, Orkney, pp. 104-07.

¹⁷⁴ See Nicholson, Traditional Life in Shetland, pp. 78-83. One crofter described his daily round of meals in 1804 as coalfish for breakfast, coalfish and cabbage for lunch, and coalfish for supper.

¹⁷⁵ See Mercer, Hebridean Islands, p. 195.

¹⁷⁶ See ibid., and Bailey Orkney, p. 106-7.

century generally. For the well-to-do food was relatively speaking cheap and plentiful, and most opted for a diet based in large measure upon the consumption of meat, poultry and fish. Better paid artisans and perhaps some skilled factory workers could also aspire to eating meat regularly, though unlike middle-class households they still had to rely on bread as a staple. Most labouring people whether they lived in town or in the countryside rarely ate meat except for some bacon added to their potatoes, and sometimes a small quantity for Sunday dinner. Most of their food consisted of wheat bread, and in some areas oatmeal or barley bread and potatoes.

Vegetables, aside from potatoes, did not figure prominently in British diets of any social class, and the failure of post gardens at York and Churchill to produce regular crops may not have disturbed company employees so much as subsequent historians. Most employees were probably not used to eating root or leaf vegetables regularly, and what they had been used to eating, aside from potatoes, had usually been prepared so as to minimize any nutritional value the vegetables might originally have offered.¹⁷⁷

The diet at posts like York Factory and Churchill was far from ideal in many respects: food rations contained too much fat and too many calories and they were wasteful of protein among other things. Company employees were however more at risk from the hazards of dietary excess than deficiency. Certainly the basic dietary regimen most were used to in their home

¹⁷⁷ Available research on British dietary preferences indicates that vegetables were not highly regarded as food nor considered particularly essential for good health. This makes the extraordinary efforts put into trying to garden at company posts into an even more inexplicable light, if the purpose of the exercise is to be understood solely in practical terms. See Mennell, All Manners of Food, p. 303.

communities was changed substantially in Rupert's Land. Working men, who were lucky to get a pound of meat a day in Britain, felt hard done by when offered short rations of 2 pounds of pemmican, 2½ pounds of pork, 1 goose, and 2 large and 3 small whitefish a week.¹⁷⁸ As Stephen Mennell points out in both France and Britain the middle classes sought to emulate "the carnivorous tastes of the warrior class [aristocracy], first quantitatively, later qualitatively".¹⁷⁹

Of course by the 19th century aristocratic palates were satiated with sheer volume of meat consumed, and elaborate food preparation and presentation took the place of simple plenty in elite dining. In Britain, however, the middle classes never really gave up "plain cooking", and the meals described by Letitia Hargrave could as easily have been served in a prosperous middle-class household in Britain in the 1840's as at York Factory. It was company servants, and labourers in particular, whose diets were most changed by emigration. Both tradesmen and labourers at York and Churchill consumed meat, poultry, and fish at rates rather similar to comfortable, albeit not really wealthy, middle-class English households. Even their allowance of 1 pound of flour or bread per person per day was closer to middle-class dietary habits than those of working people who frequently ate more bread if they could afford it. An ordinary labourer at York or Churchill consumed more meat, indeed more of almost every thing, than the best paid "labour aristocrats" in Britain, and interestingly were given the same food rations as tradesmen in company service. As in the case

¹⁷⁸ See HBCA:B.233/c/3, fo.98, Thomas Spence to James Hargrave, 2 March 1835.

¹⁷⁹ Mennell, All Manners of Food, p. 303.

of clothing and accommodation, it was the bottom ranks in Hudson's Bay Company service which improved their comparative standard of living most noticeably, despite the steep gradient of privilege the company sanctioned.

It is also interesting to note the hybrid dietary regime adopted at company posts. Although company employees largely came from communities where a diet based on agriculture and livestock rearing prevailed, they adapted easily to a diet based in large measure upon hunting and food gathering. Imported provisions made up about one third of all food consumed and provided a kind of safety net which ensured company employees did not run the same risk of starvation a diet based solely on county provisions would have entailed. Imported provisions also allowed company employees to be much more choosy about what they would eat. Of all the food resources available in the Hudson's Bay Lowlands region they chose to concentrate their hunting and food gathering efforts on a relatively narrow range of game animals, fish, and plants which seemed both familiar and attractive to them as food. Even the food supplied by native hunters reflected European perceptions of what was "good to eat", as Marvin Harris puts it. In turn this strong streak of dietary conservatism meant new foods were accorded old names and were prepared as much as possible to resemble dishes eaten in Britain. In this case cultural tastes appear to have taken precedence over practicality or a crude functionalism, perhaps because a plentiful standard of living made such dietary conservatism possible.

Chapter IX - Conclusion

Harold Perkin has described English society on the eve of the Industrial Revolution as "a hierarchical society in which men took their places in an accepted order of precedence, a pyramid stretching down from a tiny minority of the rich and powerful through ever larger layers of lesser wealth and power to the great mass of the poor and powerless".¹ With some minor tinkering this description of pre-industrial society could be made to fit most Western European societies in the 18th and early 19th centuries and many colonial communities in North America as well. At fur trade posts Perkin's social pyramid was somewhat truncated for there was no equivalent of the English nobility and gentry present, nor was there a large mass of the truly poor and powerless. As we have seen, even the worst-paid Hudson's Bay Company employees enjoyed some small margin of financial security, because they were paid year round and the company provided them with room and board.

In a sense permanent company employees in the period covered by this study fall into what Perkin calls "the middle ranks" of pre-industrial society. They were all men who were forced by their social position to earn their living but they were also, in the main, men who managed to earn at least as much as they spent in a year. This was not the case for many labouring men or their families in England. The pioneer social statisticians, Gregory King and Patrick Colquhoun, estimated that between the late 17th and early 19th centuries fully one-half to one-third of the

¹ Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, p. 17.

English population were forced to rely in whole or in part on poor relief.² Labourers in the Hudson's Bay Company's service probably gained a greater comparative advantage over men doing equivalent work in Britain than any other category of company employee by virtue of the fact that they could expect to be fed regularly and clothed and housed, if not always in comfort, at least adequately.

Yet even if company employees were all in some respects members of the middling ranks of a pre-industrial society, they shared with their fellows in Britain a social structure composed of a series of "graduated statuses" which formed "part of the given, unquestioned environment into which men were born".³ This society of ranks or orders governed virtually every aspect of fur trade life from clothing and diet to choice of recreations. It is perhaps less surprising that this sort of pre-industrial social structure and set of social relations was transplanted on the shores of Hudson Bay than that it persisted so long there. Long after British society was convulsed by the Industrial Revolution, the style and substance of work and work relations in the company's service remained pre-industrial. In fact in many respects closer attention was paid to an individual's rank and status in the fur trade after 1821 than before. Wage and salary scales for different types of labour became more and more rigid, and there is some evidence to suggest that social mobility within the company's service declined. At York in particular there was a growing emphasis on where one

² Although most of the figures for poverty in 18th century Britain are at best informed estimates, the proportion of the population requiring some form of charitable relief probably declined somewhat after 1688. Many feel, however, that poverty was on the rise again in the early 19th century. See *ibid.*, pp 19-22.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

stood in the post hierarchy after 1821, which was reflected in seating arrangements in the chapel and officers' mess and which appears to have prompted Letitia Hargraves's description of York as "by far the most respectable place in the territory".

The strength and persistence of pre-industrial social forms and values may be partially explained by the mercantile capitalist nature of the fur trade and of the Hudson's Bay Company. It was not accidental that in fur trade parlance the term factory referred not to an industrial or manufacturing complex but to a central trading post and residence of a "factor". In addition the company generally recruited its personnel in areas where industrialization and the new social attitudes industrialization encouraged were weak.

Of course company posts like York and Churchill were not completely isolated from the forces of social change outside the North-West. Although rarely visited by outsiders in the 18th century company territories were never completely closed; moreover, in the period after 1821 an increasing number of missionaries, explorers, scientists and other non fur trade visitors all had some impact on post life. In addition company personnel were largely, though not exclusively, recruited from outside the North-West. At Churchill a much higher proportion of the total work force was native to the North-West, but both York and Churchill were essentially enclaves of expatriate Britons, and more particularly expatriate Orkneymen, in the period up to 1870. That the communities these men established reflected on going British cultural influences is rooted in this basic demographic fact. In virtually every aspect of post life examined in this study the importance

of employees' ties to their home communities outside the North-West may be easily discerned.

What prevented posts like York and Churchill from being simply fragments of "pre-industrial" or "old order" Britain was in part the company's policy after about 1800 of dispersed recruitment. Although more company employees at York and Churchill came from British backgrounds than was the case in the company's service as a whole, a portion of the garrisons of these posts from the late 18th century on came from Lower Canada, and the North West itself. There were even a few individuals who claimed a French, Irish, or Norwegian background. While not exactly the "mongrel crew" Dr. William Snellie described in his poem "Landing at York",⁴ the residents of York and Churchill carried with them a variety of cultural baggage.

Of much greater importance, however, was the influence of contact with the native population of the North-West. In most cross-cultural trading situations, including the fur trade, the most profound changes are usually wrought in the lives of the host population. Nevertheless even if they set out to preserve their original culture unchanged, traders can hardly fail to be changed by contact with their hosts. Intermarriage between company employees and native or mixed blood women, in particular, was an important formative influence on post communities. Not only were women and children a part of post populations from at least the mid 18th century on, they participated in most aspects of fur trade life. This fact was given some recognition in 1802 when the wives of the men at York were described as to

⁴ The Scald [Dr. William Snellie], The Sea, p. 93.

all intents and purposes company employees as well.⁵ While the London committee did not explicitly disagree with this comment, wives were not formally accepted as company employees either. In general the presence of women and children at York and Churchill is most apparent when discussing schooling and apprenticeship and some social activities like the Christmas balls. Otherwise their contributions to post life are obscured by the reporting biases of company records.

Although historians have generally paid greater attention to the consequences of white-native contact for native groups, Hudson's Bay Company employees developed a distinctive way of life with both native and European roots. In 1823, the missionary, the Reverend David Jones, commented at length on this feature of fur trade life:

I have often been astonished at the amazing degeneracy which they [company employees] have shown by falling by degrees into the habits of the Indian. The Trader found the Indians with fishing nets peculiar to themselves both in structure and in mode of setting - this he has adopted:- he found the Indian in his small Birch-rind canoe - he gets into it and performs voyages of hundreds of miles in it:- he found the Indian preparing his food in a way peculiar to himself that of making it into Pemican - this is now the food of the labouring class throughout the country - in short the European follows the same track that the Indians did - lives by the Chase - travels in Winter in the Indian Carioles drawn by Indian Dogs - adopts the Indian dress with many other things that may be enumerated.⁶

Jones's view that using canoes or dressing in skins was a sign of degeneracy may be dismissed as ethnocentric and racist, but the essence of his comments is sound. While his observations are by no means a complete catalogue of cultural borrowing by fur trade company employees, they

⁵ HBCA:B.239/b/79, fo.41, Annual letter from York Factory, September 1802.

⁶ PAC:MG17 B2, CMS, reel A77, David Jones Journal, 6 November 1823, p. 91.

underline how much the fur trade was a hybrid way of life. Some of the clearest and most striking examples of cultural exchange and imitation may be found in the realm of material culture. Certainly at both York and Churchill company employees were quick to adopt native techniques of hunting, fishing, and travel and to incorporate native clothing styles and foodstuffs where these methods and materials conferred direct and discernible advantages. It was not degeneracy but a practical recognition that native people had much to teach company employees about survival in a new environment that fostered this kind of cultural exchange.

It is also in the area of material culture that some of the best evidence for a type of shared fur trade experience may be found. At York and Churchill the kind of clothing worn by company employees, their housing arrangements, and basic dietary regimen were all quite similar. For example, although fur traders sometimes drew a distinction between "meat" and "fish" posts, at both York and Churchill the diet was rich in calories, largely carnivorous, and dependent on a mixture of locally collected game and imported flour and preserved foods.

Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz have commented that "the term 'fur trade' is a bit of a misnomer" since it suggests "a monolithic enterprise, uniform at all times in all parts of the country".⁷ They contend, on the contrary, that there were several different fur trades which varied both over time and from region to region. This study suggests that a similar caution ought to prevail when talking about "fur trade society". Although York and Churchill were similar communities in many respects, there were significant differences between these two neighbouring posts as well. The

⁷ Francis and Morantz, Partners in Furs, p. 167.

resemblances between the posts were perhaps strongest in the period up to about 1774, when both York and Prince of Wales's Fort shared a roughly comparable role in the Hudson's Bay Company's trading system. During this period work and leisure patterns and most other aspects of everyday life at York and Churchill were quite similar. Yet even in this early period differences in the composition of the work forces at these posts may be detected. These differences were largely based on the different labour requirements at York and Prince of Wales's Fort. At York there were generally more officers and tradesmen in the garrison, reflecting the larger volume of trade there and the demand for more locally produced trade goods. At Churchill construction of the stone fortress meant ordinary labourers made up more than half the total work force. Of course other distinctions may also be discerned, but the differences between these posts are perhaps less striking than their similarities in this early period. Still the experiences of company employees always varied to some extent based upon where they were posted.

From the later 18th century on these two fur trade communities followed increasingly divergent paths of development. Perhaps the most obvious difference was a simple matter of size. York Factory remained one of the largest of company posts because of its role as an administrative centre and its warehouse and manufacturing responsibilities. Churchill on the other hand became a simple outpost - subordinate to York and responsible only for a small local trade and white whale fishery. Between 1821 and 1870 this meant that the average complement of men at York was more than five times the size of the complement of men stationed at Churchill.

This difference in size had significant effects on most aspects of life in the two communities. At York the social structure was much more complex than at Churchill and subtle nuances of rank and status were more carefully observed. The sort of attention paid to who might hunt on a Wednesday and where one sat in the officers's mess was difficult to sustain at Churchill, where it was rare for more than one officer to reside at any one time. In general company service was highly hierarchical in structure and distinctions between officers and men and even between different officers and different categories of servant were defined more sharply in the 19th than in the 18th century. At Churchill, however, one does not find the enormous gap between the salary of commissioned officers and other employees as was the case at York, and even among tradesmen and labourers the range of wages was apparently less striking than at York.

Similarly the different sizes of the communities had clear effects on the nature of community life. York's larger size ensured a greater variety of both work and leisure possibilities than at Churchill. The latter was too small and too insular a community to support a school or a library or a church in the period up to 1870, but at York all of these institutions took root. At York a larger population also made it possible to develop and maintain holiday traditions like football games and regular balls. At Churchill, on the other hand, by the mid-19th century the men and their families often did not even bother to come in from their hunting and wood-cutting camps to celebrate Christmas at the main post. At York conscious efforts were made to include the whole post community in many recreational activities and traditions like saluting the officer in charge and visiting about the post on New Year's Day. The deliberate preservation of such

traditions suggests a desire to reinforce some sense of community. At Churchill, where most of the men and their families lived and worked together in the camps and where in fact many of the men were related by their marriage to the daughters of James Dunning and William Oman, less artifice was needed. In a sense Churchill's small size and isolated situation in the 19th century may actually have fostered stronger community ties than those that prevailed at York.

The more closely one looks at post records the less convincing many widely-held perceptions of life in the fur trade become. At York and Churchill, for example, the most common occupation was probably cutting wood; it was certainly not trading furs or paddling canoes. Nor were the tradesmen and labourers who made up the bulk of company employees a powerless and docile work force. Most had a strong sense of their "rights" as established by custom and practice or by contract - even if in this latter case their beliefs were probably mistaken from a purely legal point of view. They were certainly prepared to protest ill-usage and to agitate for better food and working conditions and better wages when opportunity presented itself. They were not, however, prepared to question the basic structure of company service, which generally paralleled their experiences of the wider world. The notion that a few would command and the rest obey - most of the time - and that society ought to be based on a hierarchy of ranks was rarely challenged openly at either York or Churchill.

At work company employees exercised considerable control over their own labour. The nature of the work at a fur trade post meant that most men worked under their own direction or the supervision of a fellow labourer or tradesman. Officers were allowed considerable latitude in setting their own

hours and days of work, not to mention the pace of their labours, but they were not unique. Tradesmen and labourers could also shape the pace of work and to a lesser extent their hours of work as well. In particular men hired for their specialized skills and those who worked outside the main post at the camps were subject to little direct supervision by senior officers. Indeed although ostensibly governed by a variety of rules and regulations, company employees were not subject to arbitrary disciplinary measures. Physical and financial punishments were sometimes imposed, but they were not particularly common and by the standards of the time they were not particularly harsh.

In general company employees enjoyed considerable time off work. Holidays alone accounted for at least one-sixth of the year for employees of all ranks and perhaps as much as a third of the year or more for some favoured groups like officers. The residents of York and Churchill used their leisure time to pursue a surprising variety of recreations. These recreations included sports like football and games like chess, checkers and whist, along with hunting, fishing, trapping, and other active outdoor pursuits. There was a more intellectual side to fur trade leisure as well. Both York and Churchill produced writers and students of natural history, and many fur traders were avid readers.

Of course not all of the recreational customs of the fur trade were so refined. Perhaps the most common pastimes of company employees at York and Churchill were socializing and drinking. Both of these activities intruded into what were supposed to be working hours, and excessive drinking was a serious social problem at these posts. Much has been made over the years of the heavy-drinking traditions of the fur trade, but care should be taken not

to over-emphasize this aspect of post life. The drinking habits of Hudson's Bay Company employees were by no means unusual for a period in which drunkenness was common and carried no apparent social stigma. Overall consumption levels of alcohol at York and Churchill were probably not all that much higher than average consumption rates in industrialized countries today, but in common with their fellow drinkers in Britain and in colonial North America fur traders were binge drinkers who consumed considerable quantities of alcohol when they drank. The presence of a number of lurid accounts of the effects of excessive drinking in post journals and correspondence obscures the fact that such occurrences were comparatively rare.

Similarly the records of York and Churchill do not provide much evidence to suggest that violence, suicide, or mental instability were common in the fur trade. On the contrary these records suggest a generally healthy population and men who coped well with the isolation and strain of their chosen work. Nor do available records suggest that company employees were forced to endure undue privations. Their clothing was a sensible blending of European and native styles and materials, and their accommodations, while spartan and often crowded, were in all likelihood equivalent and in many cases superior to British housing standards. Their diets may have been somewhat monotonous and bore little resemblance to the sort of balanced diet now recommended by nutritionists, but their food was probably not inadequate. Scurvy was less common than is generally supposed, and as company employees gained greater experience in supplying themselves with country provisions the incidence of scurvy clearly declined. Company employees ate appreciably more meat, fish, and fowl than working people in

Britain, and much less bread. Although vegetables were not a significant component of the diet at bayside posts, it should be noted that few vegetables were eaten by working people in Britain either aside from potatoes. In fact daily food rations at York and Churchill exceeded suggested modern caloric allowances, and if consumed in full obesity was a more likely result than either scurvy or starvation.

Many dissertations conclude with the hope that further research will be done in the field, and it may be noted that literally hundreds of other posts remain to be studied and many aspects of everyday life in the fur trade have not been touched upon here. For nearly a decade and a half fur trade social history has been limited with few exceptions to studies of recruitment and promotion patterns within individual companies' services, marital practices and family structures, and white-native relations. While all important subjects, they do not exhaust every possible line of enquiry for social historians. If the fur trade is to be understood in social and cultural, as well as in economic terms, it is vital that social and work relations be studied as intensively as trade or white-native relations. Any scrutiny of these phenomena will be most fruitful if it includes careful analysis at the individual post level, as well as at aggregate levels. Moreover social and work relations, like recreation and leisure customs, education and health care, and standard of living, need to be studied in comparative terms: not only between different fur trade companies or different regions, but also between different types of post, different categories of employee, and between the North-West and employees' home communities.

This study represents but one small part of an on-going process in social history, which, by trying to reconstruct and understand the lives of ordinary people in the past, seeks to recognize both the agency and the importance of the experiences of these people. Since this study then is as much a beginning as a conclusion, I would like to end with an observation about the purposes of historical research, especially research on the rank and file of history, written by Richard Gough, the 17th century student of the parish of Myddle:

I doubt not but some persons will thinke that many things that I have written are alltogether uselesse; but I doe believe that there is nothing herein mentioned which may not by chance att one time or other happen to bee needful to some person or other.⁸

⁸ Richard Gough, The History of Myddle, David Hey (ed.), (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p.78.

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