HOME FROM THE HILL

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A History of the Metis in Western Canada

Don McLean

Gabriel Dumont Institute

2nd printing 1988

Cover Design: Dianne Olmstead
Typesetting: Publication Associates (Regina) Ltd.
Production: LM Publication Services, Regina
Printed and bound in Canada by Gagne Printing

Cover photo: Children of Louis Riel — Jean and Marie Angelique.
Public Archives of Canada, no. PA 139072

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

McLean, Donald George
Home from the Hill
2nd Edition

Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-920915-24-8

1. Metis — Canada, Western — History.* I. Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research. I. Title.

FC109.M34 1988 971.2'00497 C87-098128-5
E99.M69M34 1988

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people involved in the production of a book such as this. Often, those who work the hardest at the most tedious tasks required of such a project are not recognized, or rewarded appropriately. Such a person is Janette Heath. With her quiet charm and her gentle disposition, she provided us with inspiration. She typed, and at times caught spelling errors for me, but these tasks, when added up, fail to approximate her overall contribution to the book. If the book has a spirit, the spirit is that of Janette. Gale Racette, who learned so fast, must be recognized for her unusual ability and proficiency as a secretary. Lynn Hirshman must accept my thanks for her meticulous editing that kept me on my toes and, hopefully, eradicated all errors and omissions from this work. And finally, I'd like to thank Mavis Bear and Barbara Kozak for filling in and helping out when other secretarial assistance was required.

PROLOGUE

CHEYENNE GENESIS

In the beginning there was nothing, and Maheo, the All Spirit, lived in the void. He looked around him, but there was nothing to see. He listened, but there was nothing to hear. There was only Maheo, alone in nothingness.

Because of the greatness of his Power, Maheo was not lonesome. His being was a Universe. But as he moved through the endless time of nothingness, it seemed to Maheo that his Power should be put to use. What good is Power, Maheo asked himself, if it is not used to make a world and people to live in it?

With his Power, Maheo created a great water, like a lake, but salty. Out of this salty water, Maheo knew, he could bring all life that ever was to be. The lake itself was life, if Maheo so commanded it. In the darkness of nothingness, Maheo could feel the coolness of the water and taste on his lips the tang of the salt.

"There should be water beings," Maheo told his Power. And so it was. First the fish, swimming in the deep water, and then the mussels and snails and crawfish, lying on the sand and mud Maheo had formed so his lake should have a bottom.

Let us also create something that lives on the water, Maheo thought to his Power.

And so it was. For now there were snow geese and mallards and teal and coots and terns and loons living and swimming about on the water's surface. Maheo could hear the splashing of their feet and the flapping of their wings in the darkness.

I should like to see the things that have been created, Maheo decided.

And, again, so it was. Light began to grow and spread, first white and bleached in the east, then golden and strong till it filled the middle of the sky and extended all around the horizon. Maheo watched the light, and he saw the birds and fishes, and the shellfish lying on the bottom of the lake as the light showed them to him.

How beautiful it all is, Maheo thought in his heart.

Then the snow goose paddled over to where she thought Maheo was, in the space above the lake. "I do not know where You are, but I know You must be everywhere. Listen to me, Maheo. This is good water that You have made, on which we live. But birds are not like fish. Sometimes we get tired of swimming. Sometimes we would like to get out of the water."

"Then fly," said Maheo, and he waved his arms, and all the water birds flew, skittering along the surface of the lake until they had speed enough to rise in the air. The skies were darkened with them.

"How beautiful their wings are in the light," Maheo said to his Power, as the birds wheeled and turned, and became living patterns against the sky.

The loon was the first to drop back to the surface of the lake. "Maheo," he said, looking around, for he knew that Maheo was all about him, "You have made us sky and light to fly in, and You have made us water to swim in. It sounds ungrateful to want something else, yet still we do. When we are tired of swimming and tired of flying, we should like a dry solid place where we could walk and rest. Give us a place to build our nests, please, Maheo."

"So be it," answered Maheo, 'but to make such a place I must have your help, all of you. By myself, I have made four things: the water, the light, the sky air, and the peoples of the water. Now I must have help if I am to create more, for my Power will only let me make four things by myself."

"Tell us how we can help You," said all the water peoples. "We are ready to do what You say."

Maheo stretched out his hand and beckoned. "Let the biggest and the swiftest try to find land first," he said, and the snow goose came to him.

"I am ready to try," the snow goose said, and she drove herself along the water until the white wake behind her grew and grew to a sharp white point that drove her up into the air as the feathers drive an arrow. She flew high into the sky, until she was only a dark spot against the clearness of the light. Then the goose turned, and down she plunged, faster than any arrow, and dived into the water. She pierced the surface with her beak as if it were the point of a spear.

The snow goose was gone a long time. Maheo counted to four, four hundred times before she rose to the surface of the water and lay there floating, her beak half open as she gasped for air.

"What have you brought us?" Maheo asked her, and the snow goose sighed sadly, and answered, "Nothing. I brought nothing back."

Then the loon tried, and after him, the mallard. Each in turn rose until he was a speck against the light, and turned and dived with the speed of a flashing arrow into the water. And each in turn rose wearily, and wearily answered, "Nothing," when Maheo asked him what he had brought.

At last there came the little coot, paddling across the surface of the water very quietly, dipping his head sometimes to catch a tiny fish, and shaking the water beads from his scalp lock whenever he rose.

"Maheo," the little coot said softly, "when I put my head beneath the water, it seems to me that I see something there, far below. Perhaps I can swim down to it — I don't know. I can't fly or dive like my sisters and brothers. All I can do is swim, but I will swim down the best I know how, and go as deep as I can. May I try, please, Maheo?"

"Little brother," said Maheo, "no man can do more than his best, and I have asked for the help of all the water peoples. Certainly you shall try. Perhaps swimming will be better than diving, after all. Try, little brother, and see what you can do."

"Hah-ho!" the little coot said. "Thank you, Maheo," and he put his head under the water and swam down and down and down and down, until he was out of sight.

The coot was gone a long, long, long, long time. Then Maheo and the other birds could see a little dark spot beneath the water's surface, slowly rising toward them. It seemed as if they would never see the coot himself, but at last the spot began to have a shape. Still it rose and rose, and at last Maheo and the water peoples could surely see who it was. The little coot was swimming up from the bottom of the salty lake.

When the coot reached the surface, he stretched his closed beak upward into the light, but he did not open it.

"Give me what you have brought," Maheo said, and the coot let his beak fall open, so a little ball of mud could fall from his tongue into Maheo's hand, for when Maheo wanted to, he could become like a man.

"Go, little brother," Maheo said. "Thank you, and may what you have brought always protect you."

And so it was and so it is, for the coot's flesh still tastes of mud, and neither man nor animal will eat a coot unless there is nothing else to eat.

Maheo rolled the ball of mud between the palms of his hands, and it began to grow larger, until there was almost too much mud for Maheo to hold. He looked around for a place to put the mud, but there was nothing but water or air anywhere around him.

"Come and help me again, water peoples," Maheo called. "I must put this mud somewhere. One of you must let me place it on his back."

All the fish and all the other water creatures came swimming to Maheo, and he tried to find the right one to carry the mud. The mussels and snails and crawfish were too small, although they all had solid backs, and they lived too deep in the water for the mud to rest on them. The fish were too narrow, and their back fins stuck up through the mud and cut it to pieces. Finally only one water person was left.

"Grandmother Turtle," Maheo asked, "do you think that you can help me?"

"I'm very old and very slow, but I will try," the turtle answered. She swam over to Maheo, and he piled the mud on her rounded back, until he had made a hill. Under Maheo's hands the hill grew and spread and flattened out, until the Grandmother Turtle was hidden from sight.

"So be it," Maheo said once again. "Let the earth be known as our Grandmother, and let the Grandmother who carries the earth be the only being who is at home beneath the water, or within the earth, or above the ground; the only one who can go anywhere by swimming or by walking as she chooses."

And so it was, and so it is. Grandmother Turtle and all her descendants must walk very slowly, for they carry the whole weight of the whole world and all its peoples on their backs.

Now there was earth as well as water, but the earth was barren. And Maheo said to his Power, "Our Grandmother Earth is like a woman; she should be fruitful. Let her begin to bear life. Help me, my Power."

When Maheo said that, trees and grass sprang up to become the Grandmother's hair. The flowers became her bright ornaments, and the fruits and the seeds were the gifts that the earth offered back to Maheo. The birds came to rest on her hands when they were tired, and the fish came close to her sides. Maheo looked at the Earth Woman and he thought she was very beautiful; the most beautiful thing he had made so far.

She should not be alone, Maheo thought. Let me give her something of myself, so she will know that I am near her and that I love her.

Maheo reached into his right side, and pulled out a rib bone. He breathed on the bone, and laid it softly on the bosom of the Earth Woman. The bone moved and stirred, stood upright and walked. The first man had come to be.

"He is alone with the Grandmother Earth as I once was alone with the void," said Maheo. "It is not good for anyone to be alone." So Maheo fashioned a human woman from his left rib, and set her with the man. Then there were two persons on the Grandmother Earth, her children and Maheo's. They were happy together, and Maheo was happy as he watched them.

After a year, in the springtime, the first child was born. As the years passed, there were other children. They went their ways, and founded many tribes.

From time to time, after that, Maheo realized that his people walking on the earth had certain needs. At those times, Maheo, with the help of his Power, created animals to feed and care for the people. He gave them deer for clothing and food, porcupines to make their ornaments, the swift antelopes on the open plains, and the prairie dogs that burrowed in the earth.

At last Maheo thought to his Power, Why, one animal can take the place of all the others put together, and then he made the buffalo.

Maheo is still with us. He is everywhere, watching all his people, and all the creation he has made. Maheo is all good and all life; he is the creator, the guardian, and the teacher. We are all here because of Maheo.[1]

The stories of creation told by other tribesmen of the Great Central Plains were similar to this one, of the Cheyenne. The Plains Indians (unlike the tribesmen of Israel) did not place humans near the top of their hierarchy of values. For them, humans did not have dominion over all other plants and animals. At the top of the Plains Indians' hierarchy of values were the earth, the timeless mountains and the sky, and of course, God, the creator of all things.

Despite some significant differences between the Plains Indians' stories of creation and the Judeo-Christian Book of Genesis, the similarities are astounding. These similarities may be due to the fact that humans

everywhere shared a common history and a common way of life that differentiated us from all other species during the first millennia of our existence. This common heritage was the "hunting and gathering" mode of existence by which humankind first sustained life on earth. This way of life demanded a co-operative social order. The human response was the creation of tribal societies, and it is this social innovation that led to the development of a highly intelligent species which, in a god-like manner, created its own destiny. As the famous anthropologist, Richard E. Leakey, put it:

> Not until relatively recently, between 20,000 and 10,000 years ago, did [hunting-and-gathering] begin to be replaced by systematic food production in the form of pastoralism or agriculture. . . . Given the importance of hunting-and-gathering through the many thousands of generations of our forebears, it may well be that this way of life is an indelible part of what makes us human.[2]

Hunting and gathering was replaced as the dominant economic order when humans domesticated plants and animals and settled in sedentary communities. This innovation began what is known as *the neolithic age.*[3] Although the neolithic age had dawned in many parts of North and Central America prior to European contact, the Plains Indians were still living as hunters and gatherers in a tribal society when first contact was made with Europeans.

CHAPTER 1

SCIENTIFIC THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF NATIVE NORTH AMERICANS

There are two contradictory theories about the origins of North American Natives. The established theory suggests that North America was first populated by people from Asia, who crossed the Bering Strait on a land bridge that existed up until some 12,000 years ago. This has been the dominant theory among anthropologists and historians until very recently. In 1981, however, this theory was seriously challenged by Jeffrey Goodman, who argues in his book ***American Genesis*** that humans first originated in North America, and populated Europe and Asia by travelling across the Bering land bridge.

Perhaps the clearest statement of the former theory comes from Alvin Josephy Jr., who wrote:

> There is little doubt among scientists where the earliest known inhabitants of the New World came from and how they entered the Americas. Since no remains have ever been found in the Western Hemisphere of a pre-Homo Sapiens type of man, it is now generally accepted that humans did not evolve in North or South America as they did in the old world but that the first of them came into present day Alaska from Northeastern Asia at least 12,000 to 15,000 years ago, and possibly long before that . . . Some experts have speculated that the earliest migrants could have reached North America during the Sangamon Interglacial period before the Wisconsin glaciation. That would have been 75,000 years ago. But most scientists, while not ruling out the possibility of such an early entry into the Western Hemisphere, are more conservative and provide estimates that range from 12,000 to 35,000 years ago or slightly earlier.[1]

Jeffrey Goodman does not argue with Josephy's Bering Strait theory. Indeed, anthropologists agree that a land bridge existed across the Bering

Strait, linking North America to Siberia until some 10,000 – 12,000 years ago, when it sank into the Bering Sea. But Goodman insists that the bridge was used by Americans who populated regions of Europe and Asia.

Goodman claims that skeletal remains and artifacts found in America are older than their Asian or European counterparts. Here is the essence of Goodman's thesis:

> Up until now, archaeologists and anthropologists firmly believed that: (1) several million years ago, *Homo habilis,* the first clear ancestor on man's lineage, appeared in Africa; (2) approximately one million years ago, *Homo erectus*, a more advanced form appeared in Asia, Africa, and Europe; (3) about 180,000 years ago, "near men" called Neanderthals dominated Europe; and finally, (4) fully modern man, our direct ancestors, appeared in Europe 35,000 years ago, spreading into Africa and Asia and eventually reaching North America 12,000 years ago. Since, according to this scenario, there were no fully modern men anywhere in the world 70,000 years ago, these new American discoveries, mostly from North America, point to the astonishing thesis that men like ourselves, subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens,* made their world debut in the Americas, instead of in Europe. The proverbial Garden of Eden may have been in North America in southern California, and from this Garden the first fully modern men may have ventured forth bearing cultural and technological gifts to the rest of the world.
>
> New information has come from far below the earth's surface, from depths of fifteen to sixty feet, much deeper than the few feet usually dug by archaeologists in the Americas. Steam shovels working on housing sites, steep rain-etched gulleys, and exploratory shafts have penetrated a thick earthen veil to offer a glimpse of these ancient times. Buried under the virtually unexplored geological strata of the American continents may be a message for all of mankind: a saga of our true origins — the saga of who man is and where he has come from.
>
> Ironically, ten years ago the famed Dr. Louis Leakey stood alone when he suggested that there was an ancient prehistoric bounty to be found in the Americas. The theory that modern man first appeared in the Americas is quite a new theory, a turn-about in archaeological thinking. Until recently, it has been an accepted fact that successive waves of nomadic Asian

hunters unwittingly wandered across the now submerged Bering Land Bridge — the land corridor which connected Asia to Alaska in glacial times — to populate a new continent and become the first American Indians. But now it seems more likely that if the first modern men did cross the Bering Bridge to settle in a new continent, they traveled from the Americas to Europe and Asia. A startling pattern has emerged: many innovative types of artifacts such as advanced spear point styles, specialized bone tools, grinding tools, and the bow and arrow appear to have been used by New World craftsmen in North America many thousands of years before Old World craftsmen in Europe, Asia, and Africa used them. The sequence of artifact dates indicates that the Paleo-Indians radiated out from their southern California base and traveled in three different directions: north to the Old World, east to the Atlantic states, and south to the southern tip of South America.

The American Indians may have even been responsible for the sudden appearance of cave-dwelling Cro-Magnon man in Europe, one of the most celebrated moments in mankind's history. For decades, archaeologists have known that rather suddenly, 35,000 years ago, the crude Neanderthals were replaced throughout Europe by fully modern Cro-Magnon man. A culturally sleeping Europe was awakened overnight. Some scholars have even described this changeover as a sudden "invasion." Where our direct ancestors, Cro-Magnon man, came from and where our distant cousins, the Neanderthals, went has remained a mystery. The American Indians may provide the answer.

American Indians, who migrated to Europe, may have been the Cro-Magnons. We now know that tools unique to Cro-Magnon men who lived in Spain, first appeared in the American Southwest. From a site in Lewisville, Texas, a spear point which is exactly like unique spear points used in Spain 20,000 years ago dated to (was found to be) more than 38,000 years in age. From five different California sites, scientists have found five different fully modern skulls, resembling Indian and generalized Indian/European skulls, all bearing dates older than the oldest of the European Cro-Magnon sites. One skull from Sunnyvale, California, near San Francisco, dated to 70,000 years ago, a date twice as old as the oldest fully modern skull from Europe. The fact that American Indians now predate modern man's appearance in Europe by at least 35,000 years

may explain why these first Europeans, called Cro-Magnons, appeared with an already highly developed and sophisticated art style, which included painting, sculpture, and carvings. Skulls dating from 7,000 to 20,000 years ago found in Japan and in Chinese caves which bear a marked resemblance to Indian skulls may well be the remains of Indian settlers, who also took their skills to Asia as well as to Europe.

Going one step further, we can even consider the possibility that many of man's greatest cultural and technological achievements, which include the manufacturing of pottery, plant and animal domestication, mathematical concepts, calendrics, astronomy, and sophisticated medical knowledge first appeared in the New World instead of the Old World.

The notion that the American Indians may have been the very earliest true men does not surprise the Indians; their legends have said so all along. The Hopi Indians of northern Arizona teach that "three worlds" existed prior to the one in which we now live. During the first of these three worlds, the Hopi say, their ancestors were highly advanced, they had domesticated corn and animals. They say that this first world was eventually destroyed by fire, the second world was destroyed by ice, and the third world by water. To the Hopi, these worlds existed in the San Francisco mountains, the mountains outside of Flagstaff, Arizona. These worlds at least make geologic sense. The destruction of the Hopi's third world by water may correspond to the inner-mountain basin damming and flooding that took place approximately 25,000 years ago in the Flagstaff mountains. The destruction of the second world by ice could represent the glacial activity that took place in the peaks approximately l00,000 years ago. And the destruction of the first world by fire could represent the volcanic activity that took place in the mountains approximately 250,000 years ago. A recent archaeological discovery in the area gives added support to Hopi myth.

At this dig I have discovered the oldest known geometrically engraved stone in the world, an engraving two to three times as old as similar engravings made by Cro-Magnon man. While engravings of reindeer and bison catch the eye, geometric engravings usually have a much greater significance. Abstract engravings have been found to correlate with phases of the moon or movements of the planets, or to be records of sacred (esoteric) religious information.

> Thus, as with the story of creation and the flood in the Bible, the basic elements and sequence of Hopi legend could be correct. If so, archaeologists must wonder what previously unconsidered monumental events took place in the Americas so long ago, events which led to modern man's first appearance.[2]

The question of the origins of the American Natives is, and shall remain, a complex one that has not yet achieved a high degree of consensus. Clearly, however, there was a wide diversity of races, cultures and civilizations in the Americas prior to the Columbus voyage of 1492. The skin coloration of the various peoples ranged from dark brown to a very light yellowish brown. There were marked physical differences as well. Some groups of Indians were extremely tall, and some very short. Some were "round-headed," some "long-headed." Some had coarse features, some delicate features. Some had the slant-eyed features of the Mongolian race; some did not.

It seems certain that some Indians are of Asiatic origin, but it is possible that others are not. The wide variety of Native languages in use offers another puzzle that has yet to be solved. The differences between some Native languages may have resulted from divergence, as members of the original linguistic family separated and developed independent languages down through the ages. It is certain, however, that America was peopled by more than one language, or racial, grouping.

Sea voyages to the Pacific Islands of Polynesia were possible in pre-Columbian times. This theory was proven dramatically when the Norwegian anthropologist, Thor Heyerdahl, sailed his raft, the "Kon-Tiki," from South America to an island in Polynesia in 1947, using the technology that existed in America in pre-Columbian times. However, no other convincing evidence exists to indicate that there may have been transoceanic migrations between the Americas and other major land masses. There is no evidence of contact between Americans and Europeans prior to the time of the Vikings' first sea voyages to America during the 9th century A.D. If Goodman was correct, such contact may have occurred in prehistoric times on European, not American, soil. It is virtually certain, however, that contact between Europeans and Americans did not take place on American soil before the Viking expeditions of the 9th century.

William C. Macleod, whose epic work, ***The American Indian Frontier,*** launched in 1928, has perhaps put forward the most extensively researched document dealing with the question of Native American origins. Macleod wrote:

> The American Indian type varies from tribe to tribe, and between family groups within the tribe. There is as much difference between the Sioux of the plains of the United States and the Salish of the Oregon coast as between the Thibetans and the Filipinos. Some of this variation probably developed in the Americas, but there is little doubt today that different Mongolian types came into America at different times.

The Origin of the Indian Languages; Eskimo Related to Turkish

How did these Mongolians enter the Americas? This is a question which only in very recent years has been approaching a solution aided by the study of the relationships of the American languages. The French scientist Sauvageot, in a very scholarly monograph published in 1924, gave what appears to most students unequivocal proof of the Old World affinities of the Eskimo language.

In Europe and Asia is a group of languages and dialects all closely related, called the Uralian — or Ural-Altaic — stock, spoken only by peoples of Mongoloid racial origin — in contrast, for example, with the Indo-European stock of languages spoken chiefly by the Caucasian peoples. This Uralian stock includes the languages of Finland, Turkey, Esthonia, Hungary, Thibet, Mongolia, and of the Manchus and the Siberian Tungus. Sauvageot has shown that Eskimo is a language of this stock — in other words, that Eskimo is related to Hungarian and Finnish in the sense that Greek is related to Latin, or English to Russian.

Curiously enough, the languages of the Japanese, Koreans, and of the tribes of northeastern Siberia (the Paleo-Siberians or Old Siberians) are not members of the Uralian stock. The Eskimo language, however, contains words borrowed from these non-related languages.

Standing on the American side of the Bering Strait, on a clear day, one may see the coast of Asia. Often the strait is frozen over. As we have already noted, the Eskimo, some few centuries ago, were a powerful group in Siberia as well as in America. There is conclusive evidence that the Amerian Eskimo are an immigrant off-shoot of the Asiatic Eskimo, entering America by the Bering Strait route and across the islands in the Bering Sea; while at the same or some other time, the Aleuts — whose language is apparently related to theirs — possibly passed along the islands of the Aleutian chain which border the Bering Sea on the south and serve as stepping-stones between Europe and Asia.

Navajo Related to Chinese

The immigrant Eskimo-speaking people from Siberia undoubtedly found peoples already inhabiting Arctic America. Some of these they probably killed off; some they undoubtedly assimilated. These earlier groups had come, perhaps, from Asia also as part of a pre-Eskimo immigration that came by the Bering Sea routes.

It was no doubt by way of the Bering Sea, at some date long before the Eskimo intrusion, that the original Athabascan-speaking group entered America. The Athabascan languages today include those spoken by the Indians in the interior of Alaska, the greater part of the Rocky Mountain plateau of Canada, and by the more familiar Apache and Navajo of the southwest of the United States.

It is the contention of the distinguished American scientist Sapir that Athabascan Indians used the peculiar system of "tone," which, to our ears, makes Chinese so much of a sing-song, and by means of which the same words in different tones have widely different meanings.

Australians and Polynesians in America

It is on the authority of the distinguished French scholar Rivet, supported by Dixon and others in America, that a group of

languages including Yuman, spoken notably in upper and lower California, but also in Nicaragua and in Texas and northwestern Mexico — a group known as the Hokan stock — is identified as related closely to the languages of the Malays, Polynesians, and Melanesians — the Melano-Polynesian stock. On the same authority the languages of the Indians of Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia — known as the Tson stock — are related closely to those of the Australian blackfellows.

But how could Australians and Polynesians get into the Americas? These Australians, although nearly as dark as negroes, are not of a negro type. Save for the darkness of skin, with their bushy beards and wavy hair they suggest the Ainu. For a variety of reasons it has long been my opinion that the Ainu are northern and the Australian are southern representatives of a race of Australoid type once dominant over the whole of the Mongolian regions of Eastern Asia at a time when negroid peoples inhabited Malaysia, Polynesia, and Australia.

Recent scientific study would indicate that this Australoid type not only preceded the Mongolians in Asia but also in the Americas. Very possibly, it, too, came in over the Bering Sea route.[3]

Although anthropologists, historians, and linguists cannot agree with certainty upon the probable origins of North American Natives, there is a common recognition that North America contained a wide diversity of cultures and languages prior to European contact. (See Appendix A for the principal language groupings that existed in North and Central America prior to European contact.)

The great range of languages in pre-Columbian America reflected the rich diversity of cultures and peoples on the continent. Although some American societies had achieved complex levels of civilization long before the Vikings set foot on the continent's eastern coast, the myth of the American "Savage" has been perpetuated by historians whose bias favoured the European colonizers. Thus, the European colonization of America was seen as legitimate since the "White Man" was bringing with him a "civilizing" influence, and of course the Christian religion. Some of the Natives were still living as hunters and gatherers, particularly on the Great Central Plains where the abundance of buffalo made further innovation unnecessary. But these tribesmen were in fact as modern in biological terms as the White explorers who "discovered" them. They

happened to be sustaining themselves by an ancient method.[4]

Many, if not most, of the people of the new world had entered or gone beyond the neolithic at the time of first European contact. In fact there were agriculturalists living in the fertile St. Lawrence valley, and the fisheries of the West Coast from what is now Alaska to Oregon were immensely productive. The pre-Columbian population of North America north of Mexico has been estimated at about three million people – far more than could have been sustained by a hunting-and-gathering economy. Fifteen million people or more lived in South America.[5]

In the highlands of Peru, Colombia, and Yucatan, and throughout the valley regions of Mexico, the population was dense. Industry and agriculture flourished in these regions and substantial cities existed prior to the conquest of the Spaniards. Throughout the Americas there was no "free land." All the lands were being used to their maximum potential, given the technology of the time.[6] Macleod wrote:

> Naturally enough, the Indians thoroughly and painstakingly exploited their natural resources. Every bit of land which Indian methods made available was cultivated, where agriculture was understood and hunting was no haphazard pleasure-jaunting, *but a careful and laborious systematic exploitation of the wild animals and wild vegetable products of each region.* (emphasis in the original)[7]

Even in the most "backward" regions of the North American continent – Labrador and the Great Plains – hunters lived a semi-nomadic life, utilizing permanent village sites. Although hunters, and sometimes their families, might have to be away from their villages for months at a time, they lived for at least part of the year in their permanent villages. On the hunt, they lived in tipis or other temporary shelters, but every group had permanent bark, earth, or plank houses. In the St. Lawrence Valley the agricultural Indians lived in much larger, permanent villages, as did the people of the West Coast.

In fact, there is evidence that North American agriculturalists, (people entering the neolithic age) lived some three thousand years ago in communities that ranged in size from 3,000 to 10,000 people. These urban sites still exist, and are being studied by anthropologists in the Missouri River Valley in what is now Alabama, USA.[8]

Although land was held in common through loosely defined tribal territories throughout most of North America, private ownership of land

also existed. Indeed, private ownership of land was common among the large agricultural tribes of the East Coast of North America from the St. Lawrence to the Chesapeake Bay.[9] With private ownership came the advent of social classes and slavery, many years prior to European contact. This occurred – as was the case in Europe – with the dawning of the neolithic age.

The Neolithic in America

In the Americas the neolithic did not occur until about 3,500 B.C.[10] At the time of first contact with Europeans, domesticated American species of plants included maize (corn), amaranth, quinona, beans of many varieties, peanuts, potatoes, tomatoes and pineapples. Anthropologists were no less incredulous than others when they discovered that the same patterns of development occurred in America as in Africa, Asia, and Europe. "The transition from hunting-and-gathering nomadism to sedentary village life took place independently of significant diffusionary influences emanating from any Old World centre of agriculture."[11] In fact, it is likely that the neolithic would have occurred independently much earlier in the Americas but for the general absence of animals that could be easily domesticated after the horse became extinct about 9,200 B.C.[12]

The only New World animal that was of marginal use as a beast of burden was the llama. Indeed, it was the Incas and Aztecs of Peru and Central America who, using the llama as a beast of burden, first built canals to irrigate domestic crops. Cities developed in this region that rivaled the cities of the Middle-East, long before Europeans set foot on the shores of the Americas.

As was the case in the Middle-East, population density increased during the neolithic in Central America, and large units of stratified (class-based) society came into existence between 3,500 B.C. and 2,000 B.C., culminating in states containing millions of inhabitants. Empires were ruled from capital cities whose populations ranged between 80,000 and 150,000 people, living amid temples, palaces, markets, plazas and gigantic pyramids.[13] Thus, by 2,000 B.C. full fledged nation-states had developed in America complete with a ruling aristocracy supported by a state apparatus, and a large class of citizens. As was the case with the ancient

empires of Greece and Rome, these American nations utilized slaves as their major labour source.[14]

The use of slaves was not confined to central America. Indeed, those tribal societies of Indians along the St. Lawrence River who were still living the semi-nomadic life of early agriculturalists utilized forms of slave labour. These societies, in the process of transition into the neolithic, showed signs of early class divisions. Macleod wrote:

> It is not surprising to find that not only among the great states of Incas and Aztecs, but also among the primitive agriculturalists . . . of North America, there were social classes and even slavery.
>
> Among virtually all the tribes existed an aristocracy. Civil chiefship or governmental prerogative was hereditary, passing down in the noble families. Economic privileges, such as the right to share in the commoners' production, made the aristocracy a group enjoying relative wealth as well as social privilege. There was also the bourgeois group, those families not born to the purple, but yet industrious enough or lucky enough to have acquired wealth — more wealth sometimes, than even the aristocrats, whom they tended to displace.
>
> There were the ordinary, poor commoners, governed by their aristocrats, exploited by their bourgeoisie.
>
> And finally there were the slaves. In the greater part of North, Central, and South America, captives of war were held frequently as slaves for life, their children becoming freemen. Slavery was hereditary on the northwest coast of North America, and there an active intertribal trade in slaves existed.[15]

As can be seen, societies in the Americas developed classes and a state structure in an almost identical pattern to that of European and Mid-Eastern societies.

Europeans as "Discoverers" of America

When Christopher Columbus "discovered" America on his audacious trip westward in 1492 he was engaged in a much larger venture than the simple testing of an hypothesis that India could be reached by sailing

westward. Although Columbus truly believed that he could reach the riches of India more quickly by sailing westward around the world instead of taking the known Eastern route around the Cape of Good Hope, he was not simply working on his own to prove an abstract theory. European merchants were desperately seeking new and lucrative trading arrangements. European heads of state were engaged in often bloody competition with each other for both new territories and new trade routes. When Columbus "discovered" America (he at first thought it was India, and named American Natives "Indians") he set into motion a profitable process for European merchants and rulers, a colonizing process that was to last hundreds of years and eventually spell disaster for the people of the Americas.

Upon his return to Spain from the New World, Columbus reported to his monarch, Queen Isabella, that the Natives of the Island of San Salvador "were so tractable, so peaceable . . . that I swear to your majesties there is not in the world a better nation. They love their neighbours as themselves, and their discourse is ever sweet and gentle, and accompanied with a smile."[16]

The meeting between the Spaniards and the natives of San Salvador spelled the end of the latter people's idyllic way of life (if indeed it had been an idyllic life). European monarchs were soon engaged in a dispute over control of the New World colonies. Portugal, which had initiated the race for colonies across the Southern Atlantic route, claimed possession of the new territories on religious grounds. The Portuguese monarch claimed the new territories on the grounds that they fell within the scope of a papal bull of 1455, wherein the Pope authorized Portugal "to reduce to servitude all infidel peoples."[17]

In 1493 a series of papal bulls mediated the dispute between Spain and Portugal over American territories, so that the conquest of South America went forward expeditiously. The Spanish and Portuguese conquest was marked with great cruelty and total disregard for the "infidels" whose lands were taken and whose peoples were being enslaved through the use of a forced labour system.

Macleod wrote of this episode:

> Isabella and her successors shared the theories of the rights of conquest held in common by all the sovereigns and jurists of Europe in her day. The conquered, whether subdued by violence or merely the threat of violence, had no rights save

> such as the conqueror might choose to concede to them. Theoretically, however, Spain entered the New World not to conquer, but to pacify. The Pope had granted most of the Americas to the Spanish Crown; therefore all that was required was to inform the Indians of that fact and require their allegiance. If any were "rebellious" and disturbed the peace, Spanish arms would pacify that region.[18]

Although all governmental authority in the colonies was derived from the Spanish Crown, private armies were used to "pacify" and plunder the enormous wealth of the Incas and Aztecs of America. The Spanish system of enslavement soon killed off the Indians in many parts of South and Central America. African slaves were then imported to work the plantations. This created a lucrative slave trade in which the English excelled. They were so successful in trading black slaves, taken from Africa and sold in the New World, that the slave trade eventually provided much of the capital required to launch England into the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century.[19]

When the Spanish and Portuguese plundered the wealth of the New World, they did not do so from the vantage point of a unified nation-state. The entire Iberian Peninsula was divided into three kingdoms: Castile, of which Isabella was Queen; Aragon, of which Ferdinand was King; and Portugal. The marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand did not totally unify the two feudal kingdoms of Spain. Isabella forbade any but Castilians to hold office in the administration of the American colonies. This policy "was scarcely at all relaxed during the sixteenth century."[20] Thus, Spain's conquest of the New World was, in economic terms, Castile's conquest of the New world.

While Spain and Portugal remained as internally divided feudal kingdoms, other European regions were fast becoming unified nations through a process of internal wars among the aristocracy, wars that tended to centralize political power under one sovereign. And while the all-powerful monarchs of France initially took the lead in the exploration of the North American continent, the English were busy defeating remnants of tribal and feudal societies in their own homeland, and unifying the nation.

Of even greater significance, the English merchant class and the new industrial capitalists (whose empires had been financed by the slave trade) had become strong enough to challenge the old doctrine of the divine right of kings. By 1651, the Stuart kings' reign had resulted in bloody

revolution, as Oliver Cromwell entrenched the new middle class of merchants and industrialists as the new masters of the nation. Their power over the nation was institutionalized through a new and revolutionary political institution when the King's divine right to rule was superseded by parliamentary democracy. This unleashed the creative power of a new and dynamic class of people onto the stage of history. It did not take long for England's new class of rulers to challenge the power of France, their closest competitor in the race for colonies. The Canadian historian, Guy Fregault, wrote of the difference between England and France in the eighteenth century:

> After having lived for two centuries under an absolute monarchy and survived a certain number of political crises, England, in the course of her evolution, had reached a new formula for royal power, a formula better adapted to the development of her social structure and for this reason subtler, more effective, and more harmoniously tuned to her collective life than was the case with the French monarch. In France the mechanism of the monarchy needed to be readjusted, simplified, and cleaned, so that its gears might mesh with those of the new force, the bourgeoisie . . . England, on the other hand, was ruled by an aristocracy of trade and finance in conjunction with the aristocracy of birth to which it was linked by business interests and family ties.[21]

The Fur Trade in Canada

Although the Spanish Crown retained colonies in South and Central America until the 19th century, much of its power was eclipsed during the 17th century by England, whose rulers had learned to make serious political accommodations with the rising class of merchants and manufacturers who were so vital to the colonization process.

The Spanish had little to do with exploration or colonization in the northern half of the North American continent; nevertheless, some historians argue that Canada derived its name, not from the French or the English, but from the Spanish. When Spanish adventurers first saw the mouth of the St. Lawrence River and the adjoining miles of snow-covered wilderness, they named the harsh-looking country "aca nada,"

meaning "Here is nothing."[22] The Spanish adventurers were wrong. Here was an immense fortune in furs for future colonizers.

While Spain began to drop behind France and England in the competition for North American colonies, Holland — a small nation with a powerful middle class — moved rapidly into the forefront of the competition. In fact, Holland's middle class developed a system of colonization that soon proved remarkably successful. This system gave to the Dutch merchants involved in colonization the powers of a sovereign nation. This was achieved through the creation of the *chartered company,* or the *joint stock company.*

Macleod described the most famous of the Dutch chartered companies:

> The climax of this novel transition of trading companies into colonizing companies came with the organization of the Dutch East India Company in 1602. This company was granted not merely a monopoly of trade with the Far East, but also the right to maintain an army and navy and to wage war, to make peace, to make treaties with foreign nations in its own name, to conquer or otherwise acquire foreign territories, to rule these territories in its own name, and to mint a coinage for its use in these territories. It had a capital of six and one-half million florins in shares of two thousand florins each. In 1652 it colonized the Cape of Good Hope. By 1669 it was ruling over the Cape, over Java and the rest of what are still the Dutch East Indies and over Ceylon; it possessed 150 trading ships and forty war vessels, had an army of ten thousand company soldiers, and in that year it paid its usual dividend of forty per cent . . . The Dutch expansion of privileges awarded by the State to trading companies was soon followed by England, France, and Sweden, and later, by Russia.[23]

The chartered company, with all of the attributes of a sovereign nation, was ideally suited to solve the problems of colonization. The chartered company literally became the government of a colony, controlling its own army, and creating its own laws to better facilitate its profits from trade and commerce with the colony.

England moved quickly to establish its own chartered companies for the colonization of America. These English companies, like their Dutch counterparts, united the power of the state to the trading ventures of its merchants. The development of the English chartered company was the result of careful strategy for the colonization of America.

In 1584, Queen Elizabeth of England rewarded a scholar who she referred to as "The Younger Hakluyt" with political favours for his ***Discourse on Western Planning,*** which was to become the model used by England for the colonization of America.[24] In the *Discourse,* the Younger Hakluyt was spelling out in clear terms the economic basis for the system of colonization that became known as mercantilism.

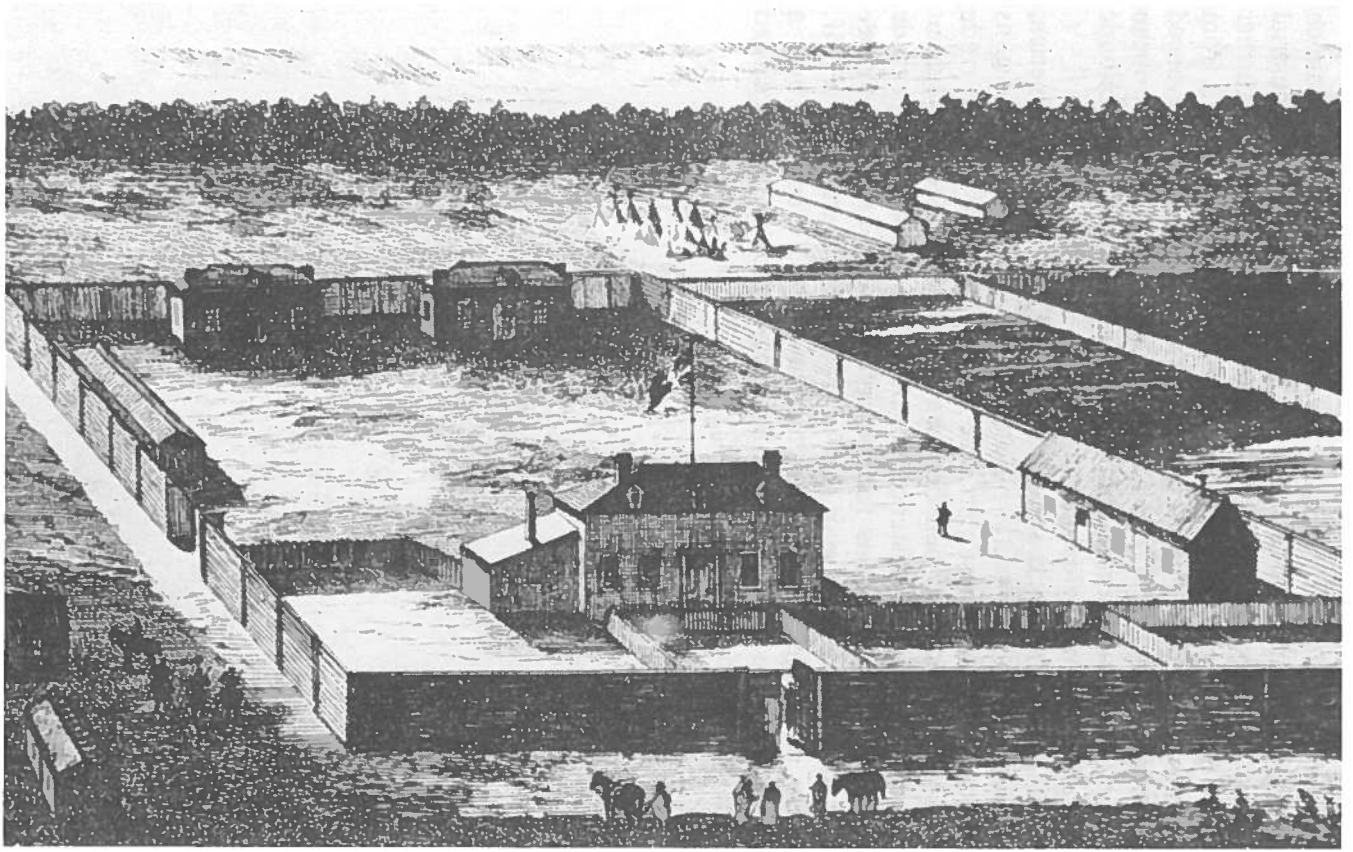
This system of the controlled underdevelopment of a colony was used by both England and France in North America during the fur trading epoch. Both France and England had much the same plans for the colonization of the territory that is now Canada. These territories were to remain dependent on the European colonizing country for all of their required manufactured goods. In this way, the colony would provide capital for European industrial expansion. At the same time, the colony would provide an almost limitless captive market for European goods. In essence, this was the economic rationale for the European colonization process that went on around the world throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Historically, this process is referred to as mercantilism, which functioned precisely as planned by the English court theorists of the sixteenth century.

While the English middle class was planning its exploitation of the American Colonies, the nascent French middle class remained under the absolute power of the monarch. Early French fur trading companies in America were not successful for a number of reasons, but primarily because the French monarchy refused to share state power with its merchant class in a new and dynamic manner, as did the English. Although France did not organize its exploitation of colonies as efficiently as the English merchants, it did attempt to practice the same policies of mercantilism:

> The institutional development of New France was an indication of the relation between the fur trade and the mercantile policy. The fur trade provided an ample supply of raw material for the manufacture of highly profitable luxury goods. A colony engaged in the fur trade was not in a position to develop industries to compete with manufacturers of the mother country. Its weakness necessitated reliance upon the military support of the mother country. Finally the insatiable demands of the Indians for goods stimulated European manufacturers.[25]

The capital generated from this lucrative trade was to be used to launch the European country involved into a capital-intensive industrial revolution. This new industrial technology in turn provided a further growth in national capital. The wealth that was ruthlessly drawn from the colonies provided for a militarily stronger, more industrially advanced European state. Thus, the further advances in technology in the European mother country ensured a continuing downward spiral, in both economic and social terms, for the colonies.

Although the Indian tribes sometimes resisted this process in America, the genuine demand for metal objects such as knives, axes and guns ensured that, for the most part, the Indians initially saw the trade relationship as a mutually beneficial one. In New France, throughout its century and a half of existence as a colony of France, the fur trade provided the economic basis for the colony. Although New France survived as a colony because of the fur trade for a century and a half, it was the more aggressive English merchants who eventually built a durable, world wide empire based, in large part, upon the profits earned from the North American fur trade.



Fort Pelly, 1877.

photo credit: Saskatchewan Archives Board.

CHAPTER 2

VOYAGERS AND INDIAN MAIDENS: THE FUR TRADE CREATES A NEW PEOPLE

As the seventeenth century began, European powers, torn with conflict and religious upheaval at home, fought each other for American colonies across the Atlantic. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Spain and Portugal had fallen behind in the competition to colonize America, as the English sea dogs scored victory after victory on the high seas. The English, favourably situated on the North Atlantic trade route to America, initially concentrated on exploiting the abundant fisheries and timber resources of North America's East Coast, while seeking a North West passage around the unknown land mass in hopes of finding a more direct route to the riches of the Orient. At the same time, the English and the Dutch began to settle in the continent's fertile eastern seaboard regions from Virginia in the south to New England.

Jamestown, in Virginia, was established in 1607. The English Puritans — a Protestant sect who were escaping religious persecution at home — settled in New England in 1620. The Dutch established an important settlement at the mouth of the Hudson River (present-day New York). Neither the English nor the Dutch, however, attempted settlements north of New England.

France, on the other hand, keeping pace with England in the race for colonies, explored the St. Lawrence region, and was quickly drawn into the fur trade along the St. Lawrence River Valley. Quebec was founded in 1608, but it was not a settlement so much as it was a military garrison. By 1642 Quebec was still small, with only about 100 inhabitants. By 1662, after serious efforts to organize French emigration to the colony, there were only about 3000 people in New France. Quebec was still little more than a precarious military garrison, foolishly locked into a war with the powerful Iroquois confederation. Samuel de Champlain, Quebec's

founder, had sided with the Iroquois' enemies, the Hurons, before he became aware of the power of the Iroquois. Unlike the New England settlers, who had migrated in families, the colony of New France consisted almost entirely of males involved as soldiers or fur traders. Thus, while the English to the south were intent upon the transformation of the colonies through agricultural and industrial pursuits, the French colony to the north remained a wilderness, producing only furs for export to Europe.

Although political alliances with various Indian bands were important considerations that determined the success or failure of the first European colonies in America, there were important geographical features that contributed to their differing approaches to colonization as well. The Allegheny Mountains tended to restrain the English from penetrating rapidly westward from the coastal areas of New England. But the French settlements of the St. Lawrence Valley were located on a mighty river with connecting waterways to the rich fur-bearing regions in the heart of the continent. These circumstances tied the economy of New France to the extraction of the fur staple just as they pushed the English colonies into the more sedentary pursuits of agriculture and eventual industrialization.

The different methods of colonization used by the French and the British were historically significant because they accounted for the vastly different attitudes assumed by the two colonizers towards the Indians of America. Since the English colonies were only peripherally engaged in the fur trade, they did not depend upon Indian labour. In fact, agriculture was, as an economic system, inimical to the traditional tribal way of life of the Natives. Nomadic tribes of Indians and huge herds of wild animals were incompatible with domestic crops, fences and private property. Over the years, the settlers of the Thirteen Colonies developed an ideology described as "intolerent, puritanical, self-righteous and increasingly abhorrent of the 'heathen.'"[1]

In New France, on the other hand, the Indians, as the only suppliers of the fur staple, were vital to the colony's development. It should be no surprise, therefore, that the French colony along the St. Lawrence developed attitudes ranging from benign acceptance of the Indians to a paternalistic concern for their material and spiritual welfare. Canadian historian W.L. Morton wrote, describing the importance of the fur trade to the French colony:

> The coureur du bois [runners of the woods] of the records was usually an unlicensed trader; that is a full trader, one who defied authority in trading and who perhaps took, or threatened to take, his furs to Albany [in British held territory]. When he did come down to Montreal, wild, exuberent, perhaps defiant, he drank and rioted, spending his profits on women and finery.
>
> Often for good reason he did not return to his parish to rejoin his family and make confession, but remained in the woods, living the life of the Indians and mingling his blood with theirs to begin the race of the Metis ["mixed bloods"]. As such, he was a threat to New France and a danger to its morals. What wonder the devout governors fumed at him, and the ecclesiastics censured him . . . But to prosper, New France had to contain this brood of her wild and lawless children: chide as she might, she dare not disown them. And the expansion of the fur trade alone could hold them, for it gave them the occupation and the life they loved.[2]

Small wonder that French missionaries converted the Indians to Catholicism with a zeal unmatched by any other European colonizer in America – the colony depended upon friendly Natives, willing to trade in furs, for its very existence.

> To begin with, they were important to French imperial power in the fur trade. The mission centres in Huron villages served to cement the French alliance with the chief tribe of the Great Lakes country and strengthened the trading partnership that brought the French on the St. Lawrence so many western furs.[3]

The Jesuits were successful in Christianizing the Hurons, and in ensuring that they would remain loyal trading partners with the French. The Jesuits also expended much energy in an attempt to Christianize the Iroquois, but in this they failed, and this powerful Indian alliance all but destroyed Quebec. For years the colony existed under a virtual state of siege by the Iroquois confederacy, who had aligned themselves with those English and Dutch companies that traded in furs along the Hudson River.

In 1661, Louis XIV of France, an absolute monarch in the feudal tradition, sought to apply more rigidly the doctrines of mercantilism to his colony of New France. Under the direction of Colbert, his colonial Minister of Finance, company rule was modified in the colony to bring it more in line with the desires of the French state. After 1663 all colonial

officials were appointed by the Crown of France. By 1667, troops were brought over from France, ending the threat of imminent destruction by the Iroquois. But the rigid control imposed upon the colony through its governing appointees soon caused friction with local entrepreneurs who wanted to trade in furs.

By 1670, with the French Crown controlling all aspects of the colony's social and economic life, New France was still almost totally dependent on the fur trade. However, some limited settlement had taken place. But the *habitants* of New France were not independent farmers as were the English to the south. The seigneurial system of New France was merely the importation of European feudalism into the New World. Although feudalism had been destroyed in England by the capitalist revolutions of the seventeenth century, it was still the dominant order in France. Thus, society in New France was staunchly Catholic and rigidly hierarchical. In fact, the *habitants* were little more than serfs in the colony, while their masters, the *Seigneurs,* lived a life of relative affluence as a homespun landed aristocracy on the frontier. As a result of this type of social organization, agriculture did not prosper, and New France, throughout its century and a half of existence, survived only because of the fur trade.[4]

The Iroquois, ever aggressive and innovative, competed with the French in the fur trade. The Iroquois competed not just as trappers of fur, but as entrepreneurs — middle men — who did a brisk trade taking furs acquired from other Indians to the Dutch and English merchants along the Hudson River. As a result of Iroquois competition, the French pushed westward into the Mississippi Valley as a means of confining English fur trading activities to a small area near the east coast. By 1671 the French had established fur trading posts at Sault Ste. Marie, Michilimackinac, and Green Bay in the Great Lakes region, and claimed the interior of the continent as the possession of Imperial France.

However, local Quebec traders were not allowed a significant share in the profits created by French expansion in the fur trade. Throughout the late 1650's, two Quebec adventurers, Pierre Radisson and Medart Grosseilliers, had explored the James Bay and Hudson Bay regions, discovering rich fur trading possibilities. In 1661 they were refused a licence to trade, however, unless they agreed to pay one half of all their profits to the colonial governor, the Comte de Frontenac. Rather than agree to this the two independent and strong-willed *Canadiens* turned in anger to the English for a trading relationship. This important action

marked the beginning of the downfall of the French fur trading empire in North America. As a result of Radisson's and Grosseillier's efforts, Charles II of England entered into the fur trade in the Hudson Bay region.

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) was chartered to extract the wealth of these regions and bring it home to England. Charles II granted a charter to his cousin, Prince Rupert, and seventeen other noblemen and merchants. The charter presumed to grant them control over much of the northern and western regions of the North American continent. This was a vast, ill-defined region already inhabited by hundreds of thousands of Native people with ancient but fully developed social systems in tune with the harsh yet bountiful country. The HBC was granted absolute control over all the regions watered by streams flowing into Hudson Bay.[5]

Under the terms of the charter this territory, which was re-named "Rupert's Land," was to be governed by the directors of the HBC, who were given the power of heads of state. Charles II granted them the power to "establish laws and impose penalties for the infraction of the laws, to erect forts, to maintain ships of war, and to make war or peace with the Natives."[6]

Equipped with these grandiose political powers, the HBC set up a system of fur trading posts (forts) that ringed James Bay and Hudson Bay. The fur trading forts of Eastmain (built in 1718), Rupert House (1678), Moose Factory (1672) and Albany (1678) were established around James Bay, while York Factory and Fort Nelson (built in 1684), Fort Severn (1685), and Fort Churchill (1717) were established on the Western shores of Hudson Bay. Unlike the French, who had learned to respect the Indians upon whom they depended for furs, the English aristocrats who controlled the HBC initially treated the Natives with scorn. Puritanical attitudes among the Company's directors resulted in attempts to prevent social or sexual contact between company employees and the Indian people who traded with them.[7]

Political and social control of the colony of Rupert's Land was deemed to have been achieved through the granting of the charter. This was of course absurd, for real political control of the Natives was ultimately achieved only through economic or military conquest later ratified by treaties. In fact, the charter meant little to the Native people trading in furs with the HBC in the regions of James Bay and Hudson Bay. What was important was their access to items of the new technology – metal items such as knives, axes and cooking utensils. Guns and ammunition

soon made life easier for people who made their living by hunting.

For the Indians, the fur trading process seemed at first to present a mutually beneficial relationship. Furs were abundant and could be traded for labour-saving devices that really did enhance their lives. One can easily imagine how metal knives and axes would ease the tasks of skinning animals, cutting firewood, and carrying out the innumerable daily tasks that required sharp instruments. Prior to the appearance of the European traders with their metal cooking utensils, water could be boiled only by using rocks that had been heated in an open fire. Guns and ammunition gave their bearers power over traditional enemies, and were highly sought-after items.

The trade relationship that developed did, however, have negative effects that were not immediately apparent to the Natives. The trade relationships that developed between the Indian hunters and the HBC traders were profoundly changing the lives of the former group. For the first time in their history they were involved in trapping animals to be exchanged as commodities in an international market. Prior to this, Indian economic activity had revolved around the hunting of animals that were only to be used as food and clothing for themselves and their relatives. This kind of activity had demanded a social order based upon egalitarian co-operation and communal distribution based upon kinship patterns. The fur trade changed all this, though not immediately. But the acquisition of furs for use as objects of exchange in an international marketplace very quickly reduced the degree of independence previously enjoyed by the Natives.

The more the Indians came to depend upon the fur trade as a means of supplying the tools to fulfill their daily needs, the more dependent they became upon the HBC and the European market. As old skills, such as the making of stone arrowheads and the use of the bow and arrow, fell into disuse, the Natives became almost entirely dependent upon the HBC as the only source from which the goods of the new technology could be acquired. Within a matter of decades, then, many northern Indians had become dependent upon the fur trade for their livelihood.

This fitted the long-term plans of the HBC, whose mercantile policies were based upon such dependency. Since the northern Indians had no agricultural experience to fall back on, the HBC was able to obtain much greater control over them than the French had been able to achieve over the Indians along the St. Lawrence. The tribes along the St. Lawrence could fall back upon their crops for survival if the hunt for furs failed.

Not so with the northern Indians, who, having no agricultural skill, depended upon the hunt for virtually all of their sustenance. Canada's most prestigious economic historian, Harold Innis, wrote of this contrast:

> During the century of occupation of Hudson's Bay the English had built and elaborated an organization remarkably adapted to control of the trade in that area. As contrasted with the trade in the St. Lawrence, in which control was impossible, effective control of the trade by a centralized body in England was the dominant characteristic.[8]

There is an ongoing debate among Canadian historians as to whether or not the HBC ever did manage to obtain political and economic control over the Natives of Rupert's Land. There is no question that it was the company's objective to do so, however. Gustavus Myers, quoting from the Report from the Select Committee on the HBC in 1857, described the attempts of the company to control the Indians of Rupert's Land by using starvation as a means of achieving such control. He wrote,

> Absolutely controlling supplies of every description, the HBC refused to give even the bare necessities of life to settlers and Indians if its interests demanded that they be denied them . . . If an Indian sold furs to settlers, the Company seized the furs and impounded them, and imprisoned the Indian. The Company also refused supplies and provisions to Indians who did not comply with the most minute of its numerous regulations; in such cases, the consequence was starvation.[9]

The Company's attempts to control the population of Rupert's Land were carried out in a sustained and systematic way so as to assure the colony's continued dependence on the Company for all the required manufactured goods. At times this policy led to starvation among Indians such as the Nascapi of Labrador whose social system had come to depend upon the fur trade. Theirs was a classic case of a people whose assimilation was too rapid, and whose ancient skills were abandoned as they became commodity producers for the Company. When the fur-bearing animals of their tribal territory became extinct through over-trapping they had no way of supporting themselves since they could no longer obtain ammunition for their guns from the HBC. Since the company had rigorously prevented the growth of any activity other than the fur trade, the Nascapi died of starvation when the furs were depleted.[10] This was indeed a form of economic genocide: the end result of a process that

just a short time earlier seemed so beneficial to the Indian hunters of the North.

In other regions of the North where the HBC influence was not as strong, the fur trade continued to enhance the lives of the Natives. So long as they retained their ancient skills and maintained control over their own hunting-and-gathering economy, they could use the fur trade to their own advantage. In such cases the Indians had the upper hand with the company, being greater in numbers and in potential military strength. Famine struck those tribes who maintained their economic and cultural independence only rarely, when natural disaster or disease decimated the game upon which they lived. At such times they too were at the mercy of the HBC.

During normal years, however, the HBC was indebted to these Natives for much of its food supply. Supplies from England often arrived in a rancid condition. Some crops were grown locally by the HBC for use as a food supply for its employees, but these sources were insufficient at times, and the Company became dependent on the Natives for much of its food supply. Canadian historians Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray have long argued that the Natives remained largely independent of the HBC despite its attempts to create an economic dependency on its trade goods. In a book edited by Judd and Ray, Toby Morantz documented the Company's dependence upon a tribe of Indians who lived along the coast of James Bay:

> The volume of food contributed by the coasters to the [HBC] posts, on an almost daily basis, far exceeded whatever sustenance they received in dire times. For instance in 1757 . . . twenty coasters during the period from February to June received help from the company in the form of 573 quarts of oatmeal. In the same year, eighty company men at Eastmain consumed 976 salt geese, 190 pounds of dried caribou meat and at least 100 fish, all supplied by the Indians.[11]

It was not the weakness of Indian culture that led to dependence on the HBC. On the contrary, it was the Europeans in Rupert's Land who depended upon the local culture for survival. Generosity was an integral part of the tribal culture just as the drive for the acquisition of wealth through exploitation was an integral part of European culture during its age of mercantilism. In the end, however, the introduction of the metal technology and the trade relationship itself replaced Native skills in many

regions, placing the Natives under the control of the Company.

A few years after the coasters had so generously assisted the company with supplies, things had changed drastically for them. In 1769, William Falconer, an HBC employee, wrote of the coasters: "They, being so much used to the gun ect (sic) that the use of bows and arrows is so little practiced by the low-country Natives, that they could not subsist by it alone." [12]

The northern Indians, a pre-agricultural people subsisting on game animals that were at times scarce, may well have come to depend almost totally on the fur trade for survival. But this was a regional, not a universal phenomenon. Like the Iroquois to the south, the Plains Indians of the West retained their independence from the fur trading companies because of a strong indigenous economic system based upon the hunting of buffalo.

With millions of buffalo on the prairie, the Plains Indians remained independent until after the Company's charter had passed into history. Harold Innis recorded the extent to which the fur trading companies were dependent on the Indians (and later the Metis) for *pemmican* as the staple food that made the fur trade in the interior of the continent possible. "They alone supply all the food on which the company's servants subsist: without which they could be compelled to abandon three fourths of the country, and all the valuable part of the trade." [13] Pemmican was prepared with smoked buffalo meat, often mixed with wild berries. Pemmican did not spoil and it was so nutritious that people could live on it for months, with no other food supplement. Pemmican was such an important food staple in Rupert's Land that battles were to be fought over it.

The Halfbreed People: A Workforce for the Hudson's Bay Company

Initially the fur trade of the north was carried out between two distinct races and cultures that had little in common with each other. But the fur trade soon pushed the Indians and the British into both social and sexual contact. At the beginning of the fur trade in Rupert's Land, HBC employees were forbidden close personal contact with their Indian hosts.

The directors' regulations in the Company's Governor's Orders For the Mens' Behaviour, dated September 26, 1714, stated:

1. All persons to attend prayers.
2. To live lovingly with one another, not to swear or quarrell but to live peaceably without drunkenness or profaneness.
3. No man to meddle, trade or affront any Indians, nor to concern themselves with women . . . Men going contrary [to this order] to be punished before Indians.[14]

Rule number 3 is an example of old world morality that simply did not fit, and could not be transplanted into the culture of the new world. Laws, rules and mores of Europe were foreign conventions that did not address the day-to-day realities of Rupert's Land. In fact, they often contradicted the dynamics at work in the local political economy. As well, rule number 3 contradicted the life-force that has always drawn men and women together.

It was not sentiment, however, that eventually overcame the HBC's rules against interracial sex. It was the human need for sexual contact. And, almost as important in the colony of Rupert's Land, it was the economic value of the Indian women whose traditional skills made them invaluable as a work force for the company.[15]

Anthropologist Jennifer Brown argued that the fur trade simply could not have been carried out successfully without the specialized labour of Indian women. Furthermore, Brown pointed out, marriage was a traditional means by which political alliances were made between Indian bands. By Indian standards, the gift of a chieftain's daughter to a trader demanded reciprocity in the form of a trade alliance. The senior officers of the Hudson Bay and James Bay posts were therefore faced with social pressure from Indian bands to enjoy the sexual services of their women. If an officer refused the women, the Indian man who made the offer was stung by the insult, and trade would suffer as a result.[16]

By the Christian standards of the HBC men, this kind of bargaining was judged immoral. However, this was not the case among the Indians of the North. Indeed, it would be considered immoral and selfish if the woman were not offered in friendship. Such customs were not seen as moral questions by the Indians. These customs were based upon strict, complex rules, and European men who mistook such customs as licence for promiscuity could pay dearly for such an infraction of Native law.

It was often expedient for the chief factor of a post to take an Indian

bride since he would then be subject to fewer offers, and could then live according to his Christian standards without offending his Indian trading partners.[17] Such marriages created social and family ties between the HBC and the Indian bands trading with it.

Despite Christian ethics, many officers could not resist the temptation of the favours of a number of Indian women. Since it was the officer class that was granted this privilege, the British class system was infused into the new Halfbreed people from their very beginnings, as the fathers' attitudes and religion were passed on to the offspring. However, although the male was traditionally dominant in the Indian marriage relationship, women did have considerable economic power because of their monopoly of many of the skills necessary for survival in Native society. The material culture of the people was, in fact, passed on by the women.

When a HBC officer married a Cree woman, the Cree ceremony was used. This ceremony was not as elaborate as that of the Europeans, but it was just as binding. When a young man wished to marry he applied for consent from the girl's father or protector, making a gift of trading articles. The suitor then placed a gift of cloth or clothing at the door of the woman's tent. If she accepted the gift, they were married. If the gift was rejected, so was the suitor.

The northern Indians did not take marriage lightly. Women and men who were married were very rarely promiscuous, and were expected to remain loyal for life. The custom of wife-lending did not violate the social code of honour. Only the refusal of such a cherished gift violated the husband's honour. William Falconer wrote of the Northern Cree marriages, "both man and wife perform their duty and are more chaste to each other than the more civilized nations who are instructed with Christianity."[18]

Metissage (the marriage of European men and Indian women) was useful to the HBC because it cemented trade relationships; more, it was invaluable to the company because it provided a highly specialized labour force of Native women trained in the skills that made life possible in the North. Because traditional Indian society utilized a social division of labour based upon gender, women had a monopoly of many of the skills that were vital to human survival. They made all the clothing worn by the people prior to European contact, and they made pemmican, the food staple that ensured survival during the bleak winter months when hunting became more hazardous.

Women carried out many tasks for the HBC, whose posts they shared

with their European husbands and their own kinfolk. The officers at York, on the western shore of Hudson Bay, listed for the London Committee the tasks that the Indian women performed for the company:

> They clean and put into a state of preservation all beaver and Otter skins brought in by the Indians undried and in bad condition. They prepare line for snowshoes and knit them also without which your Honour's servants could not give sufficient opposition to the Canadian traders. They make leather shoes for the men . . . and are useful in a variety of other instances.[19]

As well, Indian women repaired canoes and did most of the heavy work such as the skinning of animals and the carrying of heavy loads during treks inland. Despite lingering reluctance on behalf of the Company's directors, metissage became a profitable and common practice among the officer class in Rupert's Land. Subordinates were eventually allowed to marry as well, since their wives' skills were so useful to the Company. As for the men themselves, the marriages that took place made life comfortable in a harsh land many miles from their native homeland.

As these liaisons increased over the years, the population of Halfbreed people grew rapidly in and near the HBC forts of the Bay regions, producing a new people — a people who combined the technical skills of their European fathers with those of their Indian mothers. Such people were, it seemed, made to order as servants and middlemen for the Company. Gifted with their mothers' language and culture, tutored in the technical knowledge of their fathers, they were the ideal workforce for Rupert's Land.

European Events Shape American History

While the HBC was quietly pursuing the profitable fur trade in the Bay regions for the first hundred years of its existence, France and England were moving toward an all-out military confrontation as a means of settling the competition for colonies around the world. In 1756 the Seven Years War began between England and France. Although the British stormed and captured fortress Quebec in 1759, the battle did not decide the fate of Canada. This was in fact only a minor battle in a much wider theatre of war. It was events occurring in Europe that determined

the fate of America. Guy Fregault wrote that the war between England and France for the possession of colonies was in fact a world war:

> It was a war affecting the four continents. As it developed it revealed the extreme complexity of international relations. Isolation . . . became an illusion. The bonds of interest between states . . . form a sort of chain whose links are so firmly joined that no one state can be shaken without all the others immediately feeling the shock to a greater or lesser degree. Atrocities perpetuated in the course of hostilities seemed to suggest that the world was once more plunged into the dark ages. Never in truth . . . were so many armies assembled at one time in one theatre of war, never did armies fight so bitterly, ravage countries with such fury or display such lack of humanity as they pillaged their unfortunate inhabitants. In America the war was no less cruel then in Europe. It was perhaps even more cruel.[20]

The Indians of the St. Lawrence region and those Indians involved with the Thirteen Colonies were drawn into the war between England and France. This was a war often fought without quarter or compassion. French and Indian victors often massacred defeated British garrisons. Similarly, the once powerful Huron nation was all but wiped out by the Iroquois, who acted as allies of the British during the long struggle between the European powers in America. The Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763, marked the end of the Seven Years War.

The Treaty of Paris handed several important French colonies to England. It gave Canada to England, as well as vast areas of the continent that now belong to the United States. The French colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique were also handed over to England. Canada was retained by King George III of England not only because of the profitability of the fur trade, but also because it would provide for military bases should the Thirteen Colonies carry out a revolution against the mother country.

The Treaty of Paris also represented a victory for the HBC, since it put an end to the French fur trading empire along the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes-Mississippi route, and allowed the HBC virtually unlimited opportunity for expansion. The treaty guaranteed the continuation of the mercantile policies of colonization that had proven to be so profitable for the Company. The HBC was free to ensure the continued underdevelopment of Rupert's Land, to deny agricultural settlement, and to concentrate on the extraction of one extremely profitable staple commodity — fur.

A Canadian Company Emerges

After the Treaty of Paris, economic challenges from within the Canadian colony soon lent some urgency to the HBC's efforts to expand. The HBC had become comfortable and complacent with its monopoly guaranteed by the charter of 1670. But a small yet unruly and aggressive middle class had developed in Canada over the previous 100 years, and by the 1760s Montreal merchants of Scottish ancestry were eagerly seeking investment opportunities in the fur trade. They seized upon the route vacated by the French after 1763, and were soon trekking westward to the fur-bearing regions of the shield and beyond, following the route that had been taken by earlier French explorers.

Although the HBC had not carried the fur trade beyond the Bay regions of the North, it had sent Henry Kelsey inland on an exploration expedition as far as the Canadian prairies in 1690. But the French had been far more venturesome. Their explorers had travelled as far west as the foothills of the Rockies by 1743. By 1751 they had set up a trading post on the present site of Calgary, Alberta.[21] After the defeat of the French in 1763, Canadian traders quickly pushed westward along known paths and riverways. The HBC charter was simply disregarded by these traders. This Canadian company moved with an aggression that had been absent from the complacent English company sitting on the shores of Hudson Bay. The French Canadian voyageurs in the service of the Canadian company pushed rapidly south into the Mississippi and Ohio valleys, and westward to the Rocky Mountains.

In 1783 the Treaty of Versailles ceded the lands south of the Great Lakes to the new American republic, which had swept the British from the American colonies through the revolution of 1775. As the fur trade of the Mississippi and Ohio regions went into American hands, Canadian merchants concentrated on westward expansion into Rupert's Land. The Jay Treaty of 1796 ended any remaining hope of the Canadian merchants trading south of the Great Lakes. American agricultural settlement was moving rapidly westward, effectively displacing the fur trade in the United States as the dominant activity on its frontier.

However, the Jay Treaty guaranteed the continuation of mercantilism in the Canadian colony by securing American neutrality in the war between England and France in return for England's support for American financial credit. With the danger of American invasion reduced,

settlement in Canada would be contained, and the fur trade would remain the dominant economic activity in the remaining British possessions.

With the assurance that the fur trade in Canada would remain profitable, the Canadian push westward was dramatic. By 1778, Peter Pond crossed the Northwest to the Athabasca River, reaching waters that ran north to the Arctic Ocean. Soon after, fur traders were working the rich Athabasca country. By 1793 Alexander Mackenzie had penetrated the dangerous waterways of the three Canadian mountain barriers, and reached the Pacific Ocean.

These explorers were not simply "discovering" new territories for adventure's sake. Alexander Mackenzie was one of the most aggressive and most dynamic of the Canadian fur traders. Born in Scotland in 1764, he was related to wealthy merchants of the fur trade in America. He emigrated with his father to New York in 1774. In 1779, at the age of 15, he entered the fur trade with the firm of Finlay, Gregory and Company. By 1778 this firm, along with several other small Canadian companies, had merged with the Canadian North West Company (NWCo.), of which Mackenzie soon became a chief shareholder. When Mackenzie pushed through to the West coast in 1793 he was not simply exploring new territory; he was engaged in expanding his company's range of business.

The NWCo. represented substantial Canadian capital by 1793. This company had already undergone a sometimes bloody process of competition and merger. The competition between the NWCo. and its chief competitor, the XY Company, had continued in a particularly violent form until 1804. The merger of the NWCo. and the XY Company in 1804 concentrated remaining Canadian capital into one powerful organization, the NWCo. This merger created an effective regional monopoly in those portions of the continent not under HBC or American control. The regional monopoly created by this merger gave the Canadian company control over wages paid to its employees,[22] and over the prices paid to Indians for the furs trapped within its region of domination. As well, the NWCo. developed a sophisticated international marketing system, rivaling that of the HBC.

> Furs from the Columbia district were sent direct to Canton [China]. Tea and Chinese products were taken to England on the return voyage. Difficulties with the East India Company in carrying on direct trade with China led to the arrangement in

1815 by which the furs were dispatched through a Boston house. Trade was carried on through American hands from 1816 to 1820.[23]

The NWCo. had an impressive continental transportation infrastructure, complete with a small fleet of commercial ships on the Great Lakes. By 1790 it had two vessels on Lake Superior, one of twelve tons, and one of 15 tons. By 1793 it had two vessels of 40 tons each that plied Lakes Erie, Michigan and Huron. By 1803 two larger ships were added. Canoes were manufactured at Three Rivers, and at Michilimackinac on the Great Lakes. Locks were built at Sault Ste. Marie for canoe passages around the rapids.

These canoes were large craft capable of carrying surprisingly heavy loads. Each canoe was crewed by eight men. Canoes usually travelled to the interior and back in brigades of three or more. Following is a tabulation of the goods carried in a single canoe outbound from Montreal to the remote interior of the continent:

Cargo Tabulated in an Outbound Canoe, Montreal

16 bales containing	Each	Total
1 pc. stroud and other dry goods	100	1600
12 kegs rum, each 8 gals	80	960
2 kegs wine, each 8 gals	80	160
4 kegs pork and beef	70	280
2 kegs grease, l/3 tallow, 2/3 lard	70	140
1 keg butter		70
3 cases iron work	100	300
1 case guns		90
6 kegs powder	80	480
4 bags shot and ball	85	340
4 bags flour	100	400
4 rolls Brazil tobacco	90	360
4 bales tobacco	90	360
63 packages		5540
9 men	140	1260
9 bags	30	270
1 keg rum		80
6 bags bread or pease	100	600
4 kegs beef or pork	70	280
1 travelling case		80
Kettles, poles, paddles, oil cloth, gum, bark etc.		140
		8250 lbs.

Harold Innis reported that great distances were covered in a surprisingly short period of time by these craft. He wrote, "With a canoe 35 feet long, 4½ feet broad, 30 inches deep, carrying 8 men and a clerk, it took 26 days from Montreal to Michilimackinac."[24] With 9 men working a 10 hour day, this represents 2340 man-hours, one way, from Montreal to Michilimackinac. Consider that this was approximately 1/10 of the way to Athabasca and other districts of the West. The man-hours required, therefore, for a one-way journey to the West amounted to about 23,400. Clearly, this was a remarkably labour intensive business.

The Metis People: A Workforce for the North West Company

The NWCo. had a much cheaper source of labour than did the HBC, which had to import its initial labour force from Great Britain. The NWCo. obtained the vast majority of its servants from Quebec. The Quebec *habitants* eagerly competed for jobs as voyageurs for the NWCo. These men, like their HBC counterparts, were usually indentured by the company for a five- to seven-year period. Wages were usually paid in kind, instead of in cash. The NWCo. paid such low wages that the voyageurs often returned to Montreal in debt to the company after a rough and dangerous trip to the far West.[25]

The Catholic Church involved itself in providing a stable workforce for the NWCo. The local *cure* provided certificates vouching for the character of young men who would not be likely to strike or cause the company problems. As a result, there were no strikes, and few serious labour difficulties despite the long work days (up to 18 hours at the paddle) and despite wages that often did not equal the cost of their upkeep.[26] Those who did cause trouble were simply discharged. No compensation was paid if an employee was injured or killed. Nevertheless, there was never a shortage of young men eager to accept the adventurous life of a voyageur for the NWCo.

The Quebecois voyageurs made marital and sexual alliances with Indian women along their trade route for all the same personal and trade-related reasons as their HBC counterparts. But there were significant differences between the Indian women's liaisons with NWCo. men and those with men of the HBC.

The tight rules of the HBC prohibited promiscuity between the laboring class of employees and Native women. The HBC servants practiced monogamy, raising their children in strict Protestant tradition. But many of the servants were forced by the HBC to leave their wives and families behind when their term with the Company was finished in Rupert's Land. The Company simply did not pay enough to allow employees to bring their "country wives" and families back to Great Britain.

The men of the NWCo., on the other hand, were natives of Canada. As a result, they formed stable life-long relationships with their Native wives. Lacking the discipline of the HBC men, however, they sometimes were involved in the trafficking of Indian women. At times, Indian women were given by the NWCo. officers to employees instead of a salary. Employees often placed an explicit economic value on women and sexual privileges. Many voyageurs worked for the NWCo. in a state of perpetual bondage, on the condition that they be permitted to have the women of their choice.[27] Some men kept a woman at every stop over along the trade route.[28]

So *Les Metis* came into being as children of the fur trade, through passion and love, through economic expediency, and at times through the shameful exploitation of women as rewards for hard labour and as objects of trade. The children of all such unions, like their Halfbreed counterparts in the HBC, were in a good position to act as middlemen and labourers in the fur trade. Bilingual and bicultural, they were at home with the lifestyle of their mothers, and could often read and write at least at levels acceptable on the frontier. Furthermore, their fathers' company connections set them up as preferred candidates for tasks such as interpreters, canoemen, fur packers and manual labourers around the company forts.

Indian women played a more romantic role in the history of the NWCo. than in that of the HBC. It was the Indian woman who provided the lure that led many young Quebecois away from the dull life of a *habitant* in a stifling feudal system to the adventure of the waterways, the woods and the prairies. The adventure and romance of the fur trade must have compared most favourably to the routine existence of a serf in a hierarchical society, where there was little hope for adventure or the acquisition of wealth. Perhaps the present day Metis speak more than an ounce of truth when they claim to be descended from the bravest and best of *les Canadiens,* and the fairest of the Indian maidens.

Both the HBC and the NWCo. were satisfied with the growth of the

mixed-blood population. It was cheaper for both companies to have a local work force familiar with the daily affairs of the fur trade from childhood onward than it was to import and train foreigners. The HBC, despite its initial attitudes towards Native women, recognized the value of its mixed blood children. The policy of utilizing the Halfbreed offspring was spelled out by an officer of the Company, who recommended to the London Committee that "it would be most useful to cultivate a small colony of very Useful Hands who would ultimately replace European-born servants." [29]

This policy of creating a small colony of "very Useful Hands" was so successful that at the time of the first census (1870) taken in Red River (the fur trading capital of the West), the mixed-blood population greatly outnumbered the people solely of European descent. Of the total population of 11,963, only 1,565 were European. There were 558 Indians, 5,757 were French-speaking Metis, while there were 4,083 English-speaking Halfbreeds.* [30]

The Metis people came into existence, then, not by random chance or pure propinquity, but in response to specific historical forces. They came into being in response to the requirements of the world-wide system of mercantilism known as colonialism. The Metis emerged as a brand new cultural, social and historical entity as a direct result of the actions of the imperial powers of Europe engaged in the extraction of the fur staple in North America. These circumstances created tolerant attitudes on the part of the colonizers toward Natives engaged in the fur trade. This tolerent attitude remained throughout the fur-trading epoch, and extended to the mixed-bloods that the fur trade had created. Indeed, it was the mixed-bloods who were to provide the very foundation upon which European super-profits were to be earned in the fur trade.

Competition Leads to War in Rupert's Land

When the NWCo. began its rapid penetration of the Canadian interior, the conservative directors of the HBC had no choice but to follow suit.

*"Halfbreed" is now seen as a pejorative term by Native people. It was used here simply to indicate that this was the name given to the English-speaking mixed-bloods associated with the HBC. This group will be referred to as the English Metis throughout the remainder of this book.

Until such time as the upstart colonial company could be dealt with either legally or militarily, the HBC was forced to compete. This competition sent the two companies into a panic of westward expansion, leap-frogging over one another in an effort to secure trade in all the profitable regions of the country.

This created major internal changes for the HBC. Rapid westward expansion into the continent's interior required a greatly expanded labour force. The hundreds of thousands of man-hours required to take canoes on the return journey from Hudson's Bay to Athabasca and other remote regions of the Northwest sent costs spiraling upward. The HBC's expanded trade route entered the West from Hudson's Bay via the Churchill and Nelson Rivers and Lake Winnipeg. It then split into two directions. One route went west via the Saskatchewan River to Fort Edmonton, then north to Athabasca and eventually to the Arctic Ocean via the Mackenzie River. The southern branch of the trade route followed from Lake Winnipeg via lakes and rivers to the Red River settlement at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers (at the present location of Winnipeg, Manitoba).

The NWCo.'s trade route began in Montreal, using the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes waterways. It then went westward across the shield, using the Dog River and Dog Lake system, the Sturgeon River, the Rainy River and Rainy Lake, the Lake of the Woods and the Winnipeg River waterways to Red River, where the NWCo. trade route intersected that of the HBC. From Red River westward and northward, the NWCo. and the HBC set up forts across from one another in nearly all regions in order to compete for the fur trade. This competition drove up the prices that had to be paid to Indians for their furs. As well, it led to higher wage demands by the companies' rapidly expanding labour force; thus, the competition quickly reduced profits for both companies. This competition wiped out HBC profits entirely for a number of years. The Company failed to pay dividends to its shareholders between 1809 and 1814.[31]

Red River soon became a strategic location in the struggle between the two companies for the control of the fur trade in North America. Located at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, political control of Red River offered potential control over the entire transportation infrastructure of both companies. By 1809, the NWCo. had established Fort Gibraltar near the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, while the HBC established nearby Fort Garry in 1822. The NWCo. established Fort Douglas, just to the south of Fort Garry in 1823. Red River was clearly seen by both companies as the critical location for the control of the fur trade in the West. Just as important

as its geographical location was the fact that Red River was also the centre where all the pemmican for their winter operations could be obtained by both companies.

The HBC had helped to establish a community of Metis buffalo hunters at White Horse Plains, located a few kilometers south of the Red River settlement. The village of Grantown was established here so that Metis buffalo hunters could supply the company with pemmican. Significantly, the buffalo hunters were situated between the Red River settlement and the dangerous Sioux nation to the south, and acted as a protective buffer for the settlement. These highly skilled and highly disciplined Metis horsemen were buffalo hunters of French-Indian origin under the command of a Scots Metis named Cuthbert Grant. Over the years, these Metis had been involved in minor skirmishes with Sioux war parties in which some Metis were killed. In the main, however, the presence of such a large body of well-armed and well-mounted buffalo hunters was sufficient to keep the Sioux away from the fur-trading regions north of the 49th parallel.

But trouble came to Red River from other sources. As competition sharpened, the two companies soon resorted to armed attacks on each other. In 1806, a NWCo. officer attempted to block the HBC's Albany route by attacking HBC posts at Bad Lake and Red Lake in Minnesota, and Big Falls, near Lake Winnipeg. In 1808, J. D. Campbell of the NWCo. attacked the HBC post at Reindeer Lake.[32] There were numerous instances of the assassination of HBC workers who were caught away from their forts. Tension mounted across the West as both companies agitated among their employees, goading them into more aggressive action.

In particular, the NWCo. officials appealed to the nationalist sentiments of their employees. As competition took a more violent turn, the role of the paramilitary buffalo hunters under the command of Cuthbert Grant became critical. Not only did they control the vital supply of pemmican upon which Red River and the entire fur trade in the west depended, they also constituted the only substantial military force in the western portion of British North America. Although Cuthbert Grant's loyalty lay with the NWCo., the French Metis under his command tended to seek peaceful solutions to their problems, having no history, to this point, of military aggression. As was the case with their Cree mothers, the Metis had not yet acquired a concept of private property. Nor did the Metis have a fully developed sense of nationalism. Although they were a cohesive group, proud of both their Indian and French cultures, they still had not developed a nationalist ideological framework sufficient to launch them on the road to nationhood through armed conflict.

Cuthbert Grant was different from his Metis followers, however. Grant did have a concept of private property. He was the son of a Highland Scottish aristocrat who had earned a fortune in the Canadian fur trade with the NWCo. His mother was a Cree Indian and undoubtedly had influenced his world view, but Cuthbert Grant had been sent to Scotland, where he was educated in the tradition of the British upper classes. When he returned to Rupert's Land, a skilled swordsman with a militaristic demeanor, he was set up as a feudal landlord in Grantown, where he took charge of the Metis buffalo hunters.

Grant's best friend during the peaceful time after his return from Scotland was John McKay, an officer in charge of the opposing HBC operations near Grantown. Indeed, a love affair developed between Grant and John's sister Betsy McKay; these two remained lovers for years, despite the war of the corporations that raged around them and which involved them both, on opposing sides.

It was Grant's British upper-class background, however, that enabled the officers of the NWCo. to co-opt him into their military struggle against the HBC. As the leader of the Metis buffalo hunters, Grant was the key to military victory, since he could bring to the NWCo. the loyalty of the most powerful military force on the Canadian frontier. Just as the forces that were eventually used in a military showdown by the NWCo. had roots in both Canada and the Highlands of Scotland, so too did the unfortunate pawns of the HBC, men who, through no fault of their own, were to die in a bloody conflict between competing fur-trading companies in Rupert's Land.

The inhabitants of the wild and beautiful Scottish Highlands, like the Indians of America, had entered the 18th century not as members of a feudal or capitalist society, but as clansmen still living a tribal way of life. Proud and warlike, but disunited through traditional clan warfare, they were defeated in battle by the English and Scottish states in 1746. They were brutally oppressed. By the beginning of the 19th century, starvation and forced emigration had all but emptied their glens and mountains. Their own aristocracy had callously contributed to this process after their defeat by the English.

From this pool of destitute people the HBC had drawn the majority of its labour force for many years. Now the Earl of Selkirk had further plans for the survivors of this mid-eighteenth century holocaust. He recruited several hundred Highlanders and sent them to Prince Edward Island in 1803, where, he hoped, they would serve as a new peasantry to be utilized by a transplanted English landed aristocracy. At the same time, Selkirk had gained financial control of the HBC.

The HBC was in a severe financial crisis because of the loss of European

markets as a result of the Napoleonic wars, and because of the cost of the trade war in Rupert's Land. In 1811, Selkirk set up a 116,000-square-mile region for settlement by the Highlanders. This grant of land, defined as the District of Assiniboia, included Red River and the country stretching south as far as the Mississippi basin in what is now the United States.

This settlement was initially opposed by nearly all local elements of both companies in the West. The NWCo. had its own rules and regulations forbidding settlement other than that required to fill its own agricultural needs. The Selkirk settlement was also opposed by the HBC "winterers," managers who worked on a profit-sharing basis.

Miles Macdonell, a Canadian of Scottish descent, led the first contingent of Selkirk settlers into this tinderbox of intrigue and tension in 1812. They consisted of several families, 23 people in total. At an ostentatious public ceremony, Macdonell took possession of the District of Assiniboia in the Earl of Selkirk's name. The settlement was established at the vital forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, under the guns of the NWCo.'s Fort Gibraltar. Margaret Macleod and W. L. Morton wrote of this folly:

> Thus at the very key to the rivers, along the provisions route from Qu'Appelle, Selkirk's colony was taking shape. In its labourers and settlers was a force which might, if Selkirk's purpose was antagonistic to the interests of the NWCo., stop the movement of pemmican from the upper Assiniboine to Base de La Riviere. And every new band of settlers would increase the threat.[34]

It was soon clear to the officers of the NWCo. that Selkirk's purposes were antagonistic. The colony was clearly designed to stress the HBC's possession of the land at the forks of the river, which possession could cut off the NWCo.'s flow of supplies and pemmican. Such control by the HBC would make the fur trade impossible in the West for the NWCo. Macleod and Morton wrote: "Here was the key to the rivers, to the pemmican trade and, in a measure, to the northwest fur trade."[35]

As Red River grew in numbers with the influx of additional Scottish settlers, the officers of the NWCo. stepped up their agitation among the French-speaking Metis, insisting that the settlement must be destroyed before it destroyed the fur trade and, consequently, the Metis way of life. Still, the French Metis were slow to take up arms against the settlers. They did, however, carry out limited raids in which some crops were burned. None of the settlers was killed.

Then Miles Macdonell played into the hands of his cousin, Alexander Macdonell, who, as an officer of the NWCo., was attempting to incite the powerful Metis of White Horse Plains to take up arms and kill the settlers. Miles Macdonell attempted to enforce a law that would have prevented the Metis from hunting buffalo in their traditional way. This act infuriated the Metis since it struck at the very basis of their existence. In the meantime, Cuthbert Grant had aligned himself with the NWCo. in its war against the HBC and the doomed settlers.

> He was to help bind the *bois brules* [literally "burnt wood" the name given the dark-skinned French Metis] to the cause of the NWCo., and with their help to remove from the life-line of Upper Red River the menace of the colony at the Forks . . . By doing so he was also able to identify with the new Metis nation, and he stands at the beginning of their history as Louis Riel stands at the end. But at the same time Grant was to make of himself and the *bois brules* the dupes and tools of the 'Nor'Westers.'[36]

Just as Miles Macdonell's actions fostered war among his followers, so too did Grant act as an agent for his company, bringing about the mobilization of the Metis. Although the French Metis as a group were not interested in taking up arms for the NWCo., the company, as of February, 1815, "thought it could count on the moral support and active aid – if not of the Metis nation as such – at least of many of its members."[37] Thus, because of the constant agitation by NWCo. officers, some of whom were blood relatives of the settlers who were to be killed, the scene was set for the only Metis "atrocity" in the history of the Metis nation.

Late in the afternoon of June 19, 1816, these events came to a head at a place called Seven Oaks, now a part of the residential section of Winnipeg. The HBC's new governor, Robert Semple, a haughty man who despised the *bois-brules,* led twenty settlers out from Fort Douglas to intercept a party of Metis believed to be transporting pemmican contrary to a regulation imposed by the impetuous Miles Macdonell in 1814.

The hastily armed settlers, many of whom were armed with weapons that were incapable of being fired, walked out behind their governor to meet a large mounted party of Metis. On the other side waited Cuthbert Grant with well over a hundred armed men dressed in war paint, ready

for action. As the HBC party approached, some Metis slipped from their horses and crawled into the shrubbery on both sides of the trail, leaving a few mounted men to stand and parley with the approaching force.

Semple deployed his men in a straight line across the trail as he approached Cuthbert Grant and his visible horsemen. Here they faced each other silently for a moment. In the silence, emphasized by a warm summer breeze and the setting sun, an Indian moved toward the settlers. Semple curtly ordered him back. Angry words were exchanged between Semple and Grant. Then a shot rang out as a settler fired at the Indian, who had continued to edge forward, disregarding warnings to turn back. Immediately a second shot rang out. It was fired by Grant and it struck Semple in the thigh. The Highlanders fired one volley at the visible line of Metis horsemen, who dived behind their horses and escaped unscathed.

The Metis who had been concealed along the trail opened up with a brisk fire from both sides. The Metis men, who seconds ago were astride their horses were now concealed behind them. Volley after volley of gunfire came from Grant and his men. At the same time, some of the concealed Metis came in from behind the settlers, completely surrounding them. They were now doomed. Some, like John Maclean and an HBC official named Rogers, fixed bayonets and charged savagely at Grant. They were cut down by a sharp volley. A few men broke and ran. They were ridden down and speared. Governor Semple was dispatched with a shot in the chest.[38] Most of the settlers were killed in the first few seconds of battle, falling where they had stood, in a straight line across the trail.

When Alexander Macdonell of the NWCo. heard the news of the slaughter, he immediately called his followers together and shouted, "Good news. Twenty-two of the enemy have been killed."[39] This trade war had pitted friend against friend, relative against relative, and inflamed the spirit of a future Metis nation. From this battle came the Metis anthem, sung by the minstrel Pierre Falcon, who did not participate in the battle but had watched from a distance. Like many other national anthems, it was a song of hatred. "The song was born on June 19, 1816. On that day, too, the nation was born in the minds of the Metis people, if not yet in political fact."[40]

This battle, however, represented only a temporary victory for Cuthbert Grant and the NWCo. The incident had long range effects not foreseen by any of the participants. Indeed, the carnage moved the owners of the warring companies into seeking an end to the conflict. Alexander

Mackenzie, who owned shares in both companies, had not wanted either the competition or the war. In fact, prior to the battle of Seven Oaks he had worked tirelessly among the powerful politicians in England in an effort to have the state intervene and force a merger of the two companies.

In 1821 his efforts paid off for the shareholders of both companies when British state intervention succeeded in forcing a merger. This state intervention was in fact brought on by the bloodshed at Seven Oaks. Alexander Mackenzie did not live to reap the benefits of the merger, however; he died in 1820.

Lord Selkirk's health had collapsed shortly after the battle of Seven Oaks, and he died at his villa in the south of France at the age of 49. The war had cost the HBC "about forty thousand in addition to Selkirk's own losses; [£100,000] — the rival's costs were even greater."[41]

CHAPTER 3

THE FUR TRADE AND THE BIRTH OF THE METIS NATION

The amalgamation of 1821 was achieved through the intervention of the British state. It ended the rancorous and costly fur-trade war, making possible a brief era of super-profits for the newly structured HBC. By 1820 the market for furs seemed limitless. The wealthy classes of Europe were setting the style, using furs as ostentatious symbols of wealth, and thereby creating an ever-increasing demand. North America was the source of most of the furs reaching this market. Although some Russian and Scandinavian furs entered this lucrative market, their impact on prices was negligible. The monopoly power given to the HBC by the merger of 1821 enabled the Company to control market prices by manipulating and controlling the supply of furs reaching it.

There were substantial short-term benefits as well. The new, centrally controlled Hudson's Bay Company monopoly could now exploit its labour force and the Indian fur producers to the maximum since there was no remaining competition. In a one-industry colony, owned and operated by one giant monopoly, Natives of the colony were left with no options. They had to function either as employees or as commodity producers for the Hudson's Bay Company. With little bargaining power, the Natives were almost totally dependent on the Company, both as an employer and as a provider of goods which could not be obtained elsewhere.

The NWCo. had, through Cuthbert Grant, obtained the loyalty of the French Metis. Now that the two companies were one, it was possible for the HBC to win the loyalty of the French Metis workforce for a few more profitable decades. During these decades the French Metis would play a major role in the newly structured company.

There was no guarantee that the Indians of the North would remain docile under HBC rule, however. Although the northern Indians were still to be the major suppliers of fur for the company, they had not fared

well during the first century of the fur trade. The fur trade had, in one way or another, reduced their ability to maintain their traditional tribal culture which had served them so well during the past millenia.[1] At the same time, a new disaster was about to strike the Indians of North America.

During the last half of the 19th century a new and dreadful pestilence struck the Indians of the North, changing the people and their ancient society forever. This mysterious and terrifying presence seemed to accompany the European fur traders in an uncanny way. It had no visible embodiment. It spread silently on lethal wings from lodge to lodge, village to village, and from tribe to tribe. The disease ravaged the mind and the body, and left the scattered survivors often wandering like madmen among the corpses of all those they had known and loved. Smallpox was a plague of shattering consequence.[2] It killed men, women and children with a relentless and recurring fury that did not abate until it ran its course. The gods seemed as helpless as the people. Even Kichemanito, the god with the good humor and the kind spirit who had always held respect for people, as for all living things, seemed to have abandoned them.

Throughout the last half of the 19th century, smallpox epidemics recurred, dramatically reducing the Indian population across the West and nearly destroying the ancient cultures. The survivors were driven into the hands of the new priests and medicine men, who taught a new doctrine of life — the doctrine of a god who cared for individuals and offered salvation on an individual rather than a tribal basis. The Europeans did not die of the dread disease. And the Metis survived the epidemics to a much greater extent than did the Indians.[3] Was this because their one, all-powerful god was greater than the Great Manito?

The introduction of Christianity was a mixed blessing at best. A God who judged individuals did not reinforce the goals of tribal society; so, despite the best of intentions, Christianity hastened the ultimate social breakdown that the plague had initiated.

As Indian power waned, Metis power ascended to its brief but golden zenith. During the years from the turn of the century to 1870, the Metis blended the best of the fading culture of their Indian mothers with the dynamism of the diverse cultures of their European fathers. Always, however, Metis culture was tied to the fur trade and the buffalo hunt. Metis culture did not grow in a free environment; the omnipresent HBC struggled incessantly to harness the young energy, to control the people

and to shape the destiny of the emerging Metis nation.

As Harold Innis suggested, the merger of 1821 seemed to make this desired control possible for the HBC. He wrote:

> Seldom has there existed an instance in which monopoly control was exercised over a wide area through such a long period in history . . . as from 1821 to 1869. And seldom has it been the fortune of an institution to be linked throughout its history to the life of one man as is the case of Governor Sir George Simpson. The activities of the Hudson's Bay Company in the period 1821 to 1869 deserve an important place in the history of monopolies.[4]

Simpson was so closely linked to the life and policy of the HBC in Rupert's Land that his personal correspondence takes on unusual significance. In a letter to a friend written one year after the merger took place, Simpson described his Company's post-merger policy towards those Indians dealing with it:

> Their immediate wants have been fully supplied, but of course the scenes of extravagance are at an end, and it will be a work of time to reconcile them to the new order of things . . . I have made it my study to examine the nature and character of Indians and however repugnant it may be to our feelings, I am convinced they must be ruled with a rod of iron to bring and keep them in a proper state of subordination, and the most certain way to effect this is by letting them feel their dependence upon us.[5]

Simpson was taking full advantage of the chaotic conditions of the Indians. The Metis, however, were well organized and functioned from a position of strength. Simpson anticipated a prolonged struggle with them.

Despite the numerical and military superiority of the Metis, the merger of 1821 placed the HBC into a position of immense economic power in Rupert's Land. The Company, however, did not have a military force or a strong constabulary. What the Company needed was a local governing body that could effectively co-opt and control the Native inhabitants without the use of military force.

There were some groups of people that the HBC could not exercise power over. The Company's power did not extend to the Plains Indians who lived more or less independently of the HBC as buffalo hunters.

Indeed, the HBC's coercive power did not really extend to those Metis who lived primarily as buffalo hunters.

Simpson was acutely aware of the Company's inability to exercise power over the Metis buffalo hunters. He recognized that their degree of economic independence meant that they could some day push for political independence from the HBC, and this might mean a military confrontation that would endanger the Company's existence in Rupert's Land. In 1824, Simpson wrote, describing his fear of the growing Metis independence: "It is necessary to watch them and manage them with great care, otherwise they may become the most formidable enemy to which the settlement is exposed."[6]

The Company implemented a process of social manipulation between 1821 and 1848 as a means of controlling the inhabitants of Rupert's Land. This machiavellian process included the creation of the illusion that local groups of people, such as the Metis, were participating in the governing of the colony. But this was only an illusion. After the merger of 1821 the HBC began the systematic exploitation of the colony's inhabitants which was to increase to a level that would make some form of active political dissent inevitable. After 1821, wages paid to employees were substantially reduced.[7] The Indian trappers received less for their furs.[8] About half the trading forts and trading routes were abandoned, since they were no longer required on a competitive basis. Over half of the former employees in Rupert's Land were laid off, creating massive unemployment,[9] despite the fact that the company's volume of business, along with its profits, was increasing dramatically.

The unemployment created by the merger was, in turn, creating political problems that were potentially explosive. Although the Company was still under the thumb of the London Committee (made up of the largest share holders), considerable power had been vested in George Simpson so that he could set up a local puppet government, which he, in turn, could dominate as the colonial governor.

When large numbers of servants were discharged from the newly amalgamated HBC after 1821, Simpson recognized that the company would have to set up a coercive state apparatus in order to exercise social control over this surplus population that could no longer be used by the Company as a labour force in the fur trade. Since the HBC was systematically preventing the growth of agricultural or industrial alternatives to the fur trade in the colony, this surplus population had to be rigidly controlled. From the Company's perspective, failure to do

so would be to invite political and economic chaos.

The Simpson correspondence of 1822 contains the following directive. In essence, it lays out the rationale for the creation of a coercive state apparatus at Red River as a means of ensuring social stability:

> It comes to be a serious consideration how these people are to be disposed of. It is both dangerous and expensive to support a numerous population of this description in an uneducated and savage condition, and it would be impolitic and inexpedient to encourage and allow them to collect together in different parts of the country, where they could not be under proper superintendence. The establishment of clergymen and schools at the Red River Settlement, where means of religious instruction and education will be afforded them, and where they will be under a regular police and government, by the establishment of Magistrates, under the Act passed last session of Parliament points out the proper mode of disposing of this numerous class of persons.[10]

This "numerous class of persons" included not only the ex-employees of the old HBC, but also the French-speaking Metis who had worked for the NWCo. Most of these former employees were simply abandoned to their fate when the amalgamated company closed the trading routes and forts they had manned prior to the merger. Most of the displaced French-speaking Metis joined Cuthbert Grant's buffalo hunters at White Horse Plains, and others set up new hunting groups.

Although the French Metis continued to live at or near Red River during the sedentary portion of the annual hunting cycle, they soon took on the same semi-nomadic characteristics of the Plains Indians who had hunted buffalo for centuries. The Metis, however, employed European technology that greatly improved upon the old Indian method of hunting. Indeed, Cuthbert Grant's community at White Horse Plains (now called Pembina) had become the home of the most proficient buffalo hunters of the Plains. These were the hunters who supplied the Red River settlement and the HBC with pemmican. As well, they traded buffalo hides to the HBC, which was doing a brisk trade in hides through its West Coast ports.

So long as the Metis buffalo hunters contained their trading activities within the framework of the HBC's needs, they would continue to be considered a friendly and vital component of the colony. But if they began trading freely with American merchants the HBC would be virtually

powerless to enforce its laws against such activity, since the Company had no army or police force that could match the power of Grant's para-military community of hunters. Red River was to serve as the centre from which such a force might arise and be put to use by the Company.

Many of the English-speaking Metis who had served in the northern posts prior to amalgamation were deemed to be more loyal to the HBC than their French-Catholic counterparts who had worked for the NWCo. These English-speaking Metis were Protestants, after all, and many were offspring of the British officer class of the HBC.

Some of the children of officers had acquired responsible jobs as clerks with the company. Certainly, their religion and language made them more compatible with the interests of the new monopoly than was the case with the French Metis. By moving hundreds of these English-speaking Metis to Red River from the northern regions, the HBC was stationing a force at this vital location that might form the basis of a Company militia should that become necessary.

But Red River was to serve another equally important function for the HBC. According to the Company's new plans, Red River would be the centre for its more streamlined, more tightly controlled labour force. The old system of indentured labour had worked well enough during the previous century and a half when men had to be transported across the North Atlantic to the New World. The Company had taken men from the impoverished clans in the Highlands of Scotland, from the lowlands and from the Orkney Islands to the north, paid them a mere subsistence wage, and signed them on for a seven year contract. They were then shipped home again, always forced through poverty to leave their native wives and families behind them.

After 1821, however, this system was outdated. With a large pool of unemployed labour to draw from at Red River, there was no longer any point in employing a permanent workforce who had to be kept year round irrespective of the fact that many tasks in the fur trade were seasonal. It would be much more profitable for the HBC to contract out much of its work to the Metis, and to employ seasonal labourers who could be laid off during the quiet season. This would mean a savings of hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling for the Company. Innis explains:

> The number of servants employed by the contending companies was triple the number required in quiet times, and, more especially, when the business came to be managed buy

> one firm . . . The influx of families [to Red River] from the fur trade, in 1822, and the following summer, exceeded in number those who represented the original colonists brought in by his Lordship [Lord Selkirk]. The large personnel of both companies incidental to competitive conditions was reduced and arrangements made for settling those who had been discharged at Red River.[11]

But, while the HBC was making careful plans to create a community of loyal citizens at Red River, its continued reliance on the French Metis as suppliers of buffalo represented a major weakness. The company was unwittingly contributing to the historical process of Metis nation-building by helping to set the French Metis up as independent commodity producers of pemmican and buffalo hides. However, Simpson had little choice in this matter, because the HBC had come to depend upon the Metis to supply the vital pemmican to both the settlement and the outlying fur trading posts in Rupert's Land.

The importation of the English-speaking Metis to Red River was aimed at striking a balance of power at Red River. And this population was clearly designed to act as a pool of surplus labour that would be used to end the Company's reliance upon the more expensive indentured labour system. Red River was to be used, then, both as the centre of state power for the HBC, and as a geographical vantage point where a large pool of surplus labour would be available for use at the Company's pleasure.

The people brought in from the discontinued posts across Rupert's Land were to serve yet another valuable purpose for the HBC. They were given twenty-five acres of land per family so that they could produce food for their own needs and for the Company.[12] This would, if it worked, end the company's reliance on the French Metis buffalo hunters, whose loyalty to the HBC was questionable at best.

While the Company's plans to provide a surplus labour pool at Red River worked more efficiently than the HBC executive originally anticipated, the plans for a limited agricultural settlement failed and, to the end of its days in the North West, the Company remained dependent upon the Metis for its basic food supply. In 1823, the HBC attempted to import cattle from the USA in sufficient quantitities to enable the surviving Selkirk settlers to provide beef for the Company, thus reducing its dependency on pemmican. This did not work, however. For a time the cattle industry did thrive, but during the first major drought the industry failed. In fact, from 1813 to 1868 — a 55 year period —

there were no less than 30 serious crop failures in the Red River settlement caused by early frost, locusts, drought and other "unspecified" events, as listed here:

Table 1
A List of Partial and Complete Crop Failures in the Red River Settlement

Year of Failure	Frost	Locusts	Drought	Other or Unspecified
1813			X	X
1817	X			X
1818		X		
1819		X		
1820		X		
1821		X		
1822				X
1823				X
1825				X
1826	X			
1832				X
1836	X			
1837	X		X	
1840			X	
1844				X
1846				X
1847	X			
1848		X	X	
1850				X
1855	X			
1856	X			
1857	X	X		
1861				X
1862				X
1863			X	
1864		X	X	
1865		X		
1866	X	X		X
1867		X		
1868	X			

X = Cause of crop failure.[13]

Aside from the natural disasters, there were other reasons why the agricultural component of the settlement failed. The HBC did not want agriculture to grow in the colony beyond a very limited level. The Company wanted just enough produce to satisfy its own needs, but could not allow agriculture to grow beyond those limits to a point where it might become a flourishing industry on its own. In the end, the HBC could ill afford its dangerous flirtation with agricultural production.

The Company took steps to ensure that agriculture remained limited, according to the dictates of its own requirements. Commercial farming had to give way to simple subsistence farming for both the Selkirk settlers and the English Metis who were brought in from the discontinued posts.[14] For these people, employment in the fur trade was the only way to acquire luxury items — anything beyond that which could be produced on their small farms. The HBC now had almost complete control over the inhabitants of Red River.

Through the Company's policy of the creation of subsistence-level farming and part-time employment at Red River, the English-speaking Metis became a more or less passive workforce for the HBC from 1821 to 1869. Unlike the French Metis, these people did have a place in the colonial economy of Rupert's Land, even though that place was at the bottom of the Company's class structure. Still, they had, all in all, a decent enough life. There was little money, but the tight sense of community lent some meaning and pride to their lives.

There were Protestant churches that served as centres of worship under the guidance of the Reverend Mr. West. The English Metis farms stretched back in long, narrow strips from the Red River in much the same manner as the Habitants of Quebec had arranged their landholdings along the St. Lawrence River a century before. This plan was of course borrowed from the French Metis, some of whom farmed small plots of land as neighbors of their English-speaking Metis cousins.

The English-speaking Metis tended towards the stern Calvinistic outlook of their Scottish fathers, but this austere world view was softened to some extent by the gregariouness of their Cree mothers. They were, in the main, a peaceful and loving people during the years between 1821 and 1849 when hardship was at a minimum.

During the winter months the men were often absent from their farms in the Red River settlement, earning a small salary as employees of the HBC. In the spring they were home again for the plowing and planting that had to be done. During the hot summer months there was hay to

put up in preparation for winter. In the fall, small crops were harvested and the winter's firewood was split and stacked. But life was not all work and stern reality. Wild Scottish jigs and reels were played on homemade fiddles during the many parties and wedding celebrations, while moccasined feet kept time to the music. Bannock was baked, feasts were held, and card parties moved from home to home throughout the winter months.

Life was less secure for the French Metis who had been laid off after the merger than for their English-speaking cousins who remained with the HBC. There was no place for them in the legal economy of Rupert's Land, except as suppliers of the food staple, pemmican. They could not farm commercially, for there were no markets. They could not continue as voyageurs for the HBC, for they had been laid off. Furthermore, the HBC government did not trust them as much as it trusted the English-speaking Metis. And the "massacre" of Seven Oaks was still remembered by the Scottish survivors in the colony.

Strangely, however, the eviction of the French Metis from the domestic tranquility of Red River worked to their advantage. Since the Company's agricultural efforts had failed to ensure a stable food supply for the colony and the Company, the HBC became almost totally dependent upon the French Metis as suppliers of pemmican. The fact that they had become the most efficient buffalo hunters on the Plains gave them not only a degree of independence from, but also considerable power over, the HBC executive who were the legal rulers of Rupert's Land. George Simpson had to bargain with the Metis for pemmican. He could not dictate prices to them.

The HBC had only two potential means of controlling these independent Metis. The Company's governor could apply to the British state for a military force to come in and conquer them, or he could attempt to co-opt the Metis by setting up a colonial administration that utilized token Metis leaders to his own advantage. If the latter alternative were used, important leaders such as Cuthbert Grant would obtain some power in the colonial government. But this patronage would tie Grant and his followers to the Company's coattails.[15] Freighting contracts were given to Cuthbert Grant so as to obtain his economic as well as his political loyalty to the HBC. It was hoped that with Grant's loyalty would go the loyalty of the entire French Metis constituency.

Half Scottish aristocrat, half Indian warrior, ex-mercenary for the NWCo., Grant was still the unquestioned leader of the Metis settlement

at White Horse Plains. He was still the commander of a group who, demonstrably, could be used as a deadly military force. Simpson was unquestionably as astute politically as he was cunning in the business world of his day. He therefore recognized the need to co-opt Cuthbert Grant if he wished peacefully to win the loyalty of the Metis buffalo hunters. This was his paramount task if the HBC was to continue to prosper in Rupert's Land.

Simpson moved quickly to exonerate Grant from any blame in the killing of the twenty-two settlers at Seven Oaks in 1816. In 1822 Simpson took steps to manipulate the law in Grant's favor, so as to clear him of any responsibility in the deaths of the settlers.[16] Simpson wrote of Grant:

> Grant showed me a letter from Mr. Wm. McGillivray recommending his going down to Canada to get clear of the Bills of indictment which he is determined on doing in the Spring . . . McGillivray acknowledges that he has from 4 to 5 thousand pounds in his hands but Grant has pretty good information that it should be 13 or 14 thousand pounds. He suspects that they are inclined to impose such a fine on him; his object seems to be to deposit his money in safe hands and re-enter the Service [of the HBC] but if not admitted I suspect he will be inclined to form an opposition and if he does he will be a very dangerous man as he has many followers and great control over the [Metis] and Indians, he gave me a full statement of the unfortunate affair ["massacre" of Seven Oaks] from which it would appear that he did little more than defend himself . . . He is a manly, spirited fellow and I should hope that the Committee will not object to his being again admitted into the Service.[17]

Simpson was successful on all counts. Grant was exonerated of all blame for the death of the settlers. He did return to the service of the HBC as a contractor for the Company. And he did bring with him, if not the loyalty of his followers, then at least their tolerance. Grant's decision to join the HBC literally enabled the Company to survive. The HBC could not legally have controlled the Metis of Pembina without Grant's consent. For one thing, Pembina was located just across the American border in what is now North Dakota. Thus, the Metis community there came under US law, not HBC rule. From such a vantage point, Grant could have carried on free trade in furs and

buffalo with impunity. Small wonder Simpson chose to forget that Grant's cavalry had killed twenty-two of his own countrymen. Simpson desperately needed Grant. He unabashedly sang Grant's praises to his friends and business cronies. Simpson wrote of Grant: "He appears a very steady good tempered well behaved man possessing strong natural parts and some education . . . He seems to have been entirely made a party tool of in the late unfortunate business [the "massacre" of Seven Oaks]." [18]

Simpson did not stop at mere moral support; he quickly moved Grant into a position of prominence, making him the new Company policeman for the plains. Grant was to be used by the HBC to prevent the Metis from engaging in illicit free trade with merchants in the USA.

Although Simpson was quick (almost indecently quick) to forgive Grant for his part in the killing of the settlers, his good will did not extend to the ordinary French Metis hunters. For nearly a century and a half these people had proven themselves to be tough and willing workers in the fur trade. Now that they threatened to become a problem for the company, they were suddenly seen as being an unworthy lot. In 1824 Simpson wrote to the HBC governor and Committee in London:

> The [Metis] population is by far the most extended about the Settlement and appear to require great good management otherwise they will become in my opinion dangerous to its peace; hitherto they lived almost entirely by the chase and . . . have been enabled to indulge in their rage for dress, extravagance, and dissipation . . . Their notion of pride and independence are such that they will not enter the service; moreover they are not the Class that would be desirable on any terms as they are indolent and unsteady, merely fit for voyaging. Under those circumstances it is necessary to watch and manage them with great care, otherwise they may become the most formidable enemy to which the settlement is exposed. Cuthbert Grant, (who is a clerk in our service) is warmly attached to this race of people and has much influence over them which he seems desirous to use in furtherance of your views. [19]

Simpson's efforts to co-opt Grant paid off, and peace was obtained for a number of years, although the unsanctioned free trade slowly gained momentum despite Grant's efforts to stop it. In 1828, Simpson gave Grant a rather grandiose title. He was set up as the company's "Warden of the