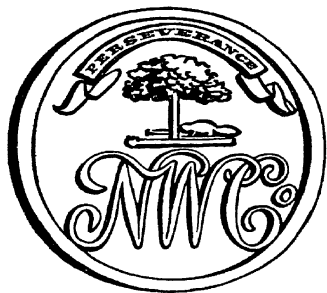


THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

*By Marjorie Wilkins Campbell*

THE SOIL IS NOT ENOUGH  
THE SASKATCHEWAN  
ONTARIO  
THE NOR'WESTERS  
THE NORTH WEST COMPANY



THE  
NORTH WEST  
COMPANY

*Marjorie Wilkins Campbell*

ST MARTIN'S PRESS : NEW YORK  
1957

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By MARJORIE WILKINS CAMPBELL

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To ANGUS CAMPBELL, M.D.

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6.00

So in the Libyan fable it is told  
That once an eagle, stricken with a dart,  
Said, when he saw the fashion of the shaft,  
“With our own feathers, not by others’ hands,  
Are we now smitten.”

*Aeschylus*

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MARJORIE WILKINS CAMPBELL

Toronto, 1957

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*Principal people in the book*

SIMON McTAVISH and his three nephews:

WILLIAM MCGILLIVRAY

DUNCAN MCGILLIVRAY

SIMON MCGILLIVRAY

JOHN GEORGE McTAVISH, cousin to Simon McTavish

JOHN McDONALD of Garth, nephew-in-law to Simon McTavish

DAVID THOMPSON, brother-in-law to McDonald

RODERICK MCKENZIE, brother-in-law to Mrs. Simon McTavish

ANGUS SHAW, nephew-in-law to Simon McTavish

SIMON FRASER, cousin to Simon McTavish

JOHN FRASER of McTavish, Fraser & Co., London, cousin to  
Simon McTavish

SIMON MCGILLIVRAY, grand-nephew to Simon McTavish

JOSEPH MCGILLIVRAY, grand-nephew to Simon McTavish

ALEXANDER FRASER, "distant cousin" to Simon McTavish

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE (Knight), cousin to Roderick McKenzie

CHARLES CHABOILLEZ, brother-in-law to Simon McTavish

JUDGE REID, nephew-in-law to Simon McTavish

JOHN DUNCAN CAMPBELL, son-in-law to John McDonald of  
Garth

JOSEPH FROBISHER, Simon McTavish's Montreal partner

JAMES McTAVISH, "relative" to Simon McTavish

DONALD McTAVISH, cousin to Simon McTavish

## THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

ALEXANDER HENRY, trader of Montreal

PETER PANGMAN, partner, North West Company

PETER POND, partner, North West Company

ARCHIBALD NORMAN McLEOD, partner, North West Company

WILLIAM McINTOSH, partner, North West Company

ALEXANDER McKAY, partner, North West Company

DR. JOHN McLoughlin, married to Alex. McKay's widow

JAMES, JOHN AND ANDREW McGILL, merchants of Montreal

ISAAC TODD, merchant of Montreal

THOMAS DOUGLAS, LORD SELKIRK, of the Hudson's Bay Company

COLIN ROBERTSON, a former Nor'Wester

MILES MACDONELL, Selkirk's lieutenant

JOHN CLARKE, of the Hudson's Bay Company

GEORGE SIMPSON, clerk in Hudson's Bay Company

NICHOLAS GARRY, member of committee of Hudson's Bay  
Company.

THE NORTH WEST COMPANY



## Prologue

The North West Company never was a company in the modern sense. It had no charter. It was, rather, a series of co-partnerships between small groups of men who were promoters, merchants or fur-trader-explorers, or all three together or in turn. Some were French Canadian, others came to Montreal during the unsettled years of the American War of Independence. Most were Highland Scots, still harbouring the splendid loyalties and bitter enmities of their native glens; proud, sensitive, sometimes ruthless men driven by a restless urge to see what lay around the next bend in the river, figuratively as well as literally.

When the first North West Company co-partnership was formed in Montreal in 1779 the fur trade was North America's major industry and the only business of any account in the British colony of Quebec; the continent beyond Lake Winnipeg, other than two narrow thrusts toward the Missouri River and the lower end of Lake Athabasca, remained an uncharted wilderness, its extent unknown though by no means unimagined. By the early years of the nineteenth century the North West Company had discovered and explored the third of the continent which in fact became the northwest. Its partners had established Montreal and, it was charged by its opponents, practically ruled all of what is today Canada with the exception

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of the Maritime Provinces. Because of its enormous expansion, manufacturers in England, the United States and the West Indies had already put down strong financial roots. Through its chief shareholders, the firm of McTavish, Frobisher—later McTavish, McGillivrays and Company—and the London firm of McTavish, Fraser and Company, it had organized and channelled the numerous and varied operations of the fur trade from as far off as today's Oregon and British Columbia to the markets of Europe, with maritime ventures to China and even into Hudson Bay. In the words of W. Stewart Wallace, whose efforts have done much to retrieve their story from oblivion, the men of the North West Company "conquered half a continent, and they built up a commercial empire, the like of which North America at least has never seen".

Five men stand head high above their fellows in this enterprising company: Simon McTavish, the prime promoter, who, with his nephew William McGillivray controlled the concern almost from the beginning, Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson and Simon Fraser. Their story ranks with Greek tragedy. In the end they brought about their own doom at the hands of the competitors they had goaded into active opposition, the Hudson's Bay Company.

In the sense that most great events stem from comparatively small and obscure causes, a fashion in men's hats led to the formation of the North West Company—and the eventual discovery of the vast northwest. Indeed, the cause in this case should be narrowed to include only gentlemen's hats. And at that it all started by chance.

The first Basque fishermen who sailed into the gulfs and bays of the Lower St. Lawrence to dry their cod catch, naturally did a little trading on the side with the natives who greeted them at the shoreline. Not that the natives had much worth bartering for more than an old knife or a thin red blanket, or so the early fishermen thought at the time. For want of something of apparently greater value, they traded the beaver robes

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worn by many an Indian as his sole garment, six or eight skins stitched together with sinews, the fur side polished to a rich sheen from contact with the wearer's body which also rubbed off the coarse guard hairs characteristic of beaver. The fishermen called the Indians' robes *castor gras*, greasy beaver. On the long, cold return journey across the North Atlantic with their dried cod catch, they discovered that a beaver robe made a wonderfully warm sleeping-blanket; accustomed to the smells of fishing-vessels at sea for months at a time and not being overly fastidious, the stench of the beaver skins bothered them not at all. They felt they had made a good bargain with the natives whom they had left naked on the shores of North America. They were sure of it when first one and then other European felt-makers offered to buy their robes.

Never had the European felt-makers seen fur like this. Each fine beaver hair had minute barbs, ideal for making high-grade fur felt. To the craftsmen skilled in the "art and mystery" of felt-making it was a miracle. Now they could turn out felt such as they had never been able to produce from Muscovy beaver or native furs. At once fashion in fur-felt hats boomed. Gentlemen clamoured for more and more of the huge, handsome, expensive hats in colours to rival an August garden. Soon there were not enough *castor gras* robes brought back to Europe from America to keep up with the demand, and the fishermen were trading plain beaver, with the coarse guard hairs and without the fine polish of greasy native bodies. At last, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a valuable item of trade had been established between the Old World and the New, one not too bulky to be transported in the small ships of the day. By the time of the Restoration in England a gentleman of fashion paid as high as four guineas for his hat, or as much as a skilled workman earned in six months.

Some of the pelts came from the English colonies, but already the French, too, had developed a considerable trade in furs from their towns along the St. Lawrence—Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal. During the early sixteen-sixties Médard Chouart,

known as *Sieur des Groseilliers*, and *Pierre Esprit Radisson* who as a boy had been carried off by an Indian band and brought up as a native, had paddled by birch-bark canoe up the Ottawa River and across Georgian Bay into Lake Superior. Wintering to the south and west and north of the great lake, they not only traded more fine furs than any man in the French colony had ever seen, but they came to realize that the potential wealth in beaver and other furs in the interior was almost unlimited. They also pieced together scraps of information gleaned from the native chiefs whom they met, and thought of reaching what they called the heart of the continent by an easier route than the Ottawa River and one less threatened by attack from hostile natives: they would travel by ship through the bay discovered by Henry Hudson.

It was a magnificent idea, but one not relished by the authorities of New France who resented the wealth and possible fame which might accrue to the two intrepid trader-explorers. Their request to the French colonial governor for ships and financial backing for the proposed trip into Hudson Bay was answered with an unprecedented levy in taxes and a demand for a large share of the returns on the pretext that the two had traded without licence from the official trading authority. Disappointed, but still certain of the soundness of their idea, *Groseilliers* and *Radisson* turned to Boston for ships. There, though the far-sighted Yankees provided a ship, its captain chanced to be more familiar with the warm run to Barbadoes than the cold trip to Hudson Bay; ice-floes in the Straits forced him back. As a last resort the indomitable pair sailed for England and the court of Charles II.

They found a London eager to welcome Charles and the fine fashions of France after the austerities of Cromwell's regime. Whitehall's Long Gallery bloomed like a garden of gorgeous chrysanthemums, each bloom a gentleman's magnificently plumed hat. So did the mansions south of the Strand, and the new and popular coffee-houses. But though Charles received the two French colonials, and though he was excited by their

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stories of their travels to the interior of North America and their prospects of great wealth, war with the Dutch had tied up most of his fleet. It was some time before he could spare a ship, and even then it was a mere cockleshell, augmented a few months later by another almost as unfit for crossing the North Atlantic and bucking its way into the forbidding and all but unknown Hudson Bay.

Fortunately, Groseilliers and Radisson sailed one on each ship, for Radisson's vessel ran into a terrific storm and had to limp back to port. Groseilliers with better luck reached the lower end of the bay in 1668, returning the following year to London with pelts finer than the grandest of his and Radisson's hopes. In 1670 Charles chartered the Hudson's Bay Company, a group of speculators headed by his cousin, Prince Rupert, who in return for a promise to explore received a monopoly to such lands as they might discover and exploit by way of Hudson Straits; after the custom of the time, inhabitants and animals alike were included in the prodigal grant.

While the Hudson's Bay Company was making its early ventures into the bay, individual Frenchmen along the St. Lawrence were carrying the cross and *fleur de lis* and a taste for brandy and European trade goods ever farther inland. The *pays d'en haut*, the northwest, had become boom country. Because of its harvest of pelts, ships plying the Atlantic between England and Western Europe carried pay loads both ways.

By the time Wolfe and Montcalm met on the farmer's field which history knows as the Plains of Abraham, there were two routes to the northwest, routes destined to meet as surely as the blades of a pair of scissors. But not for several decades. So far the Hudson's Bay Company had done little exploring other than sending two of its servants, Henry Kelsey and Anthony Henday, inland from Fort Churchill with a couple of Indian bands and with instructions to persuade the native trappers to carry their furs to Hudson Bay. It was different on the St. Lawrence.

From Montreal, La Vérendrye and his gallant sons and other

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French trader-explorers had built a string of log forts from Michilimackinac, between Lakes Huron and Michigan, through the Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods country to the Red River, the Missouri and up the Saskatchewan almost as far as the forks. Already they had developed a well organized, well disciplined trade, travelling by Indian birch-bark canoe and Indian snowshoe, living on fish and game augmented by native corn and maple sugar traded at Michilimackinac, wild rice from the Lake of the Woods country, and dried buffalo meat from the plains west of the Red River. Following ancient aboriginal routes, the lakes and linking streams through woods abounding in the birch and cedar and pine which provided the materials for their canoes, they had established a steadily increasing source of income for New France. La Vérendrye's young son Louis-Joseph was about to explore the great Saskatchewan River to its source as a tribute to his king, when the Seven Years' War ended both the French fur trade and French exploration to the northwest.

After a brief hiatus, the British picked up the trade abandoned by the French. Alexander Henry, earliest of the New England merchants to accept the government's invitation to come to Montreal, led the vanguard. In common with the steadily increasing trickle of new traders—from the New England colonies and from England—he quickly succumbed to the challenging, exciting, dangerous lure of the fabulous northwest. Soon he, too, became part of the legend of the *pays d'en haut*. For to Montrealers, French or English by ancestry, the northwest was both the land of potential big business and the stuff of dreams. In the northwest a man might make his fortune; he might also discover the mythical Northwest Passage. Somewhere beyond Lake Winnipeg, beyond the shining mountains described by the natives, lay the Western Sea, *la mer de l'ouest*. It was like the French to mock at their own dreams of the Northwest Passage. Long ago La Salle had been one of the leaders in the search and his seigniorship had been called Lachine, probably by

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the men who set out with him. And it was Lachine from which the fur brigade set out for the northwest.

As the French had done, the new Canadians caught something of the restless, beckoning spirit of the streams that were always coming from or going somewhere. And though they never suspected it—how could they imagine the extent of the continent northwestward?—geography had already destined the role the two races were to play in the making not only of what was to become Canada, but the northwestern United States as well. From Montreal in a great arc, the linking streams and lakes of the Canadian Shield provided a natural highway and at the same time the habitat of myriad fur-bearing animals. The going would not be easy and competition would develop inevitably, but reduced to the simplest terms all the fur-trader-explorers had to do was to follow those waterways, selecting the most likely of the aboriginal routes over which tribe after tribe of natives for various considerations would, or at least could, guide them.

The first trader from Montreal to reach the Lake Winnipeg country after the conquest was François le Blanc, a former French servant, now master of his own canoes and a cargo of trade goods valued at £2,400, obtained on credit from the Montreal merchants, Isaac Todd and James McGill. "Franceways" was followed by James Finlay and Thomas Corry, whose trips were so profitable that each was able to establish himself in business from the returns of no more than two ventures to the interior. The rush to the northwest was on. Soon half a dozen Montreal interests invaded the Lower Saskatchewan, among them two Yorkshire brothers, Joseph and Thomas Frobisher; the two McGill brothers, James and John; Henry himself, and a Yankee trader, Peter Pond. Pond, a former supply agent with General Amherst, had had considerable fur-trading experience on the Mississippi and was outfitted, in part at least, by Simon McTavish, a young merchant, formerly of Albany, now engaged in forwarding rum on the Great Lakes, with headquarters at Montreal.

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From time to time the Montrealers in the northwest met servants of the Hudson's Bay Company armed with printed leaflets threatening severe penalties against any man who dared trespass the monopolied though as yet unexplored territory of the English concern. They ignored the threats, confident that they had inherited not only the trade formerly carried on by New France but the right to the rewards of their enterprise. It mattered little to them that the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company taunted them as being pedlars while the English persuaded the natives to carry their pelts to them; one of the Montrealers, Peter Pangman, even tried to get the Hudson's Bay people to ship his pelts to London by way of Hudson Bay. By 1774 they had built so many rough log trading-posts in the vicinity of Lake Winnipeg that the chartered company was forced to abandon its traditional policy of waiting on the bay. That year it sent Samuel Hearne, recently returned from his epochal trip to the Coppermine and the Arctic, to build Cumberland House on the Lower Saskatchewan.

By that time, too, the Montreal traders were feeling the effects of competition among themselves. Cumberland House was not yet completed as the Hudson's Bay Company's first inland post when Henry observed:

"Four different interests were struggling for the trade of the Saskatchiwaine, but, fortunately they had this year agreed to join their stock, and when the season was over, to divide the skins and meat. This arrangement was beneficial to the merchants, but not so directly to the Indians, who, having no other place to resort to nearer than Hudson Bay or Cumberland House, paid greater prices than if a competition subsisted."

Henry's comment was a clear indication of a trend already developing among the Montreal traders. Though he omitted to mention the names of the four interests concerned, they probably included the Frobishers, the McGills, Pond, and himself—all strong, enterprising men. Despite the constant struggle to obtain sufficient food supplies, the Frobishers and Henry, acting on information gleaned from native trappers and chiefs,

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were already planning to push northwestward from the Lower Saskatchewan to the Upper Churchill. Almost starving to death—Joseph Frobisher lived part of the winter by chewing pelts, and there were rumours of cannibalism—the three lengthened the trade route from Montreal to Isle à la Crosse Lake. The following year the same men attempted to cross Methye Portage to the watershed of the Arctic, and Lake Athabasca, but found the hazards of early ice in the rivers and shortage of food even worse than they had anticipated. Though they had to turn back, they had already successfully intercepted the rich supply of pelts which for almost a hundred years had been carried by natives of the area all the way down the Churchill River to Hudson Bay.

Spurred by the effects of increasing competition among the Montrealers themselves and by native accounts of the rich pelts to be traded in the Athabasca country, Pond shared the determination of Henry and the Frobishers to reach Lake Athabasca. His chance came in 1778 when toward the end of the season this same little group of men had a surplus of trade goods. It was a tribute to his resourcefulness that they elected Pond to set out with four small canoes and those surplus goods on the trip on which the Frobishers had failed.

Pond, though he could scarcely read or write, knew how to live off the country through which he travelled. With a meagre supply of wild rice and dried buffalo meat, and pausing only when absolutely necessary to fish, he reached the long lovely Methye Portage before winter froze the highway streams. With his little group of French-Canadian voyageurs, certainly not more than sixteen, he wintered on the Elk River some forty miles south of Lake Athabasca in the log shacks he and his men hurriedly built. Peter Pond was not only the first white man to cross Methye Portage, but he was the first white man to take trade goods to the Chipewyan Indians. His reward was great. The Chipewyans brought him thousands of the finest, darkest, silkiest beaver skins he had ever seen; even more important, they introduced him, and through him the fur trade, to pemmican,

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dried buffalo meat, pounded to a powder and packed in convenient hide bags, which made it light and convenient for stowing in canoes. In the spring of 1779 Pond paddled and portaged his way back to his colleagues on the Lower Saskatchewan, living on pemmican and thus saving considerable time formerly spent in fishing. Even by loading his four canoes to the gunwales with prime beaver, he had left as many furs behind, cached in his log shack, where he would return for them the following spring.

The Montreal traders had, of course, only been able to push on as far as Lake Athabasca, rolling back the map of the continent as they went, by using the routes and facilities bequeathed them by the French, who earlier had adopted and adapted them from the natives. And already the new Montrealers had further adapted the system developed by the French.

When Michilimackinac on Lake Huron had been the outpost of the fur trade, French-Canadian canoemen known as voyageurs had readily made the round trip up the Ottawa River and down the French with trade goods and returned with the furs in a single season between spring thaw and winter freeze-up. As the northwest routes extended, it became necessary to develop a new depot on the west shore of Lake Superior, Grand Portage, which also soon came to serve the southwest, or Mississippi, trade as well. Now a second set of canoemen was required for the trip northwest from Grand Portage, almost doubling the cost of transport. Now, too, each small partnership in Montreal required a trader or wintering partner to take charge of trading in the interior, as well as an executive in Montreal capable of managing the local business and arranging the ever increasing long credits. Already it took from three to four years from the time manufactured goods were ordered in England or rum from the West Indies, shipped to Montreal, carried to the native trappers in the interior, and the bartered pelts transported back to Montreal by the canoemen, and from there shipped to the market in London.

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The several small partnerships in Montreal—and each year more were organized in the growing town on the St. Lawrence—steadily, and often painfully, learned to meet the challenges of competition. There were increased distances involved, and the nice problem of stowing a canoe with a minimum of essential provisions and a maximum of trade goods. Most, though not all, found enough capital to maintain warehouses and clerks in Montreal, to pay their clerks and canoemen in the interior, and to feed them and find canoes. All this was in addition to having to finance purchase of trade goods and the essential expenses of shipping the furs to England and preparing them for sale. Among several others sailing for London with their furs in the autumn of 1776, Simon McTavish alone had to arrange shipping for pelts valued at £15,000. Like his colleagues and competitors he was more able to cope with trade matters than with the problems forced upon them all by the events of the time. Not least of these was a colonial government still more concerned with the ties of the Old World than the challenges of the New.

The extension of the Province of Quebec to the Ohio River by the Quebec Act of 1774 had been one of the causes of the break between the English colonies and the mother country. When Congress troops marched on Montreal the next year—occupying the town for an entire winter—the British authorities at once dumped the town's supply of powder into the St. Lawrence to prevent it getting into rebel hands. The following year, though both Quebec and Montreal were freed of rebel troops, they took another precautionary step; while the Americans were composing their Declaration of Independence, the British authorities prohibited private shipping on the Great Lakes. Both steps imposed great hardships on the fur-traders. There was little danger, they protested, of supplies of any kind falling into rebel hands. A far greater threat to the existence of the town was the economic handicap which must result from their being unable to forward heavy supplies by bateau to Michilimackinac and Grand Portage. For not only were the traders

faced with the heavy costs of sending these supplies by canoe up the Ottawa, but they were also short of powder and trade goods, because most merchandise had been sledded down to Albany during the winter of occupation. Surely the governor must realize that this was no time to hamstring their operations since Montreal that year had benefited by upwards of £30,000 in trade which had formerly gone through Albany. Affairs in the Province of Quebec, complained one merchant, were "overwhelmed with every kind of confusion, particularly in commercial matters, justice being administered by a compound of English and French laws and tinctured with the absurdities of both". The assembly which they had been promised, and through which they might expect a sympathetic hearing, now seemed more remote than ever.

The traders and merchants—even now they were predominantly Scots—found themselves closer to the French than to the unsympathetic British military and civil authorities. Several had already married daughters of the French merchants and minor *noblesse* who had stayed on in Montreal to continue an important role in the fur trade, and all employed French clerks and voyageurs. Yet, though most were no more loyal to England than their cousins to the south, and certainly no more inclined to support restrictions such as the Stamp Act, their very frustrations reminded them of their dependence on England for the manufactured goods essential to the Indian trade, as well as on London, their chief market.

PART ONE

*Simon McTavish*



## CHAPTER I

# *The Business of the Colony*

Few people came to Montreal in winter. As soon as the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers froze the town's only highways were closed, usually from early December until April. Perhaps a hardy adventurer might buck the deep drifts on the trail from Three Rivers, on snowshoes or by cariole, and occasionally officials brought despatches or news from Quebec. During the unsettled years of the American War of Independence even Albany merchants avoided the long trip north to Montreal in winter. As the outpost of civilization at the edge of the forest that stretched no man knew how far to the northwest, for four months of the year the town might never have existed.

Most winters, Montrealers took their isolation for granted. They were used to snow drifts which blocked several of the sixteen gates and half hid the twenty-foot crenelated stone walls surrounding the town; they knew the lovely sight of church spires glistening like inverted icicles against the great expanse of endless white, while smoke rose in blue-grey plumes above every tin-covered roof on the streets of snug stone houses and log cottages. Sometimes on still moonlit nights frost split the St. Lawrence ice with a sound like the report from a musket, and then even the snow-blanketed mountain—in summer close and protecting—became remote and aloof.

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Of necessity the town's nine thousand inhabitants made their own social life right through to spring thaw, as they depended on their resources for everything else. By four o'clock most business was over in the shops and warehouses along St. Paul Street. Lights twinkled out across the snow from several taverns and from the stone houses on fashionable Notre Dame. As soon as darkness had settled, lanterns appeared. The jingle of sleigh bells proclaimed some local festivity, a ball at the Château de Ramezay, private dinners or card parties, family gatherings, church socials or a concert. At Christmas and New Year's French and English, military and merchant, fur-trader's wife and wife of clerk or voyageur in billowing skirts and furs or in shawls and homespun, bowed and curtsied as they wished one another good health and good fortune for the coming year. Only toward the beginning of March did men and women alike turn toward the snow-covered mountain, seeking a sign that spring was coming, the first faint greying of that shining whiteness. In March everyone talked about the spring thaw, and the lottery. For as long as the oldest French inhabitant remembered there had always been a lottery on the day when the ice would go out of the St. Lawrence.

In 1779, even on New Year's Day, the festivities were less gay than usual. And with good reason. Last year licences for the fur-trading ventures to the southwest and the northwest had been issued late. This year, it was rumoured, the governor at Quebec would issue no licences at all on the ground that only by such restrictions could he ensure that no goods would reach the rebels. Faced with possible disaster, several merchants prepared a petition, had it signed by the majority of their associates and made the long trip to Quebec. With the fur trade bringing the colony an annual revenue of not less than £200,000, surely the governor must realize that the merchant-traders needed every gun and every gallon of rum for legitimate business. But though they had doubts about the granting of their petition, all during January and February those remaining in Montreal worked as usual in their cold

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warehouses. Determined to be prepared they sorted and baled trade goods for the coming season, carefully checking every item against well-thumbed lists, for each venture must depend solely on supplies transported to the interior by canoe. In other warehouses, equally cold, piles of pelts were baled ready for shipment to the fur sales in London. Toward the end of March visits were made to the little farms along the rivers for canoe-building materials and to see about engaging voyageurs.

Already goods sledded the nine miles from the town's west gate were piled high at Lachine. The days lengthened and the ice broke free. James Bannerman wrote to his partner Simon McTavish at Detroit, "I assure you that it is doubtful when passes for the Upper Country will be granted or if they will be granted". Still there was no word from the governor. When at last he finally bowed to the merchants' petition, the season was too late for canoes to reach their destination before freeze-up. No trade goods would reach the many posts in the interior for the winter of 1779-80.

Outwardly, during the summer, Montreal looked much the same as usual after the merchandise had been returned from Lachine to the warehouses in Montreal. Along the north shoreline of the St. Lawrence, below the town, Indian canoes lay beached like a vast length of unevenly-worked blanket stitching. A couple of tall ships rode at anchor off shore, discharging their cargoes of kegs and bales into a succession of small boats or onto the bowed shoulders of wading men. Strings of noisy ox-carts lurched up the climbing, rutted streets to the warehouses, piled high with cases of guns, kegs of ball and shot, bales of strouds and calico, kettles and knives and beads; all, with the exception of the beads which came from Italy, were manufactured in England. And when August slipped into the warm, glowing days of September, the most exciting sound in the town's entire year flashed along every street and into every home: "The first canoes have arrived!"

The first canoes from the Indian country had reached Lachine.

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The first trader was back, safe after more than seventeen months' complete absence of news. Soon there would be others. Soon the nine-mile rutted trail by-passing the rapids shrieked with the noise of more ungreased wooden wheels, each ox-cart now piled high with packs of strong-smelling pelts.

Suddenly the town burst into life. Voyageurs swarmed every narrow street like boys just out of school, excited to be home again, bursting with yarns and boastings, drinking too much rum, intoxicated by the sight of white girls. The little stores could not supply them with all the new knives and gay shirts and presents they craved while they had silver in their pouches.

Was this to be the last year these voyageurs would swagger through the streets of Montreal with money for grog or to buy a few acres on which to start homes of their own? Were all the men who had built up the expanding fur trade, French and English alike, to go bankrupt? Was Montreal's history, over a century long now, finished? Were the shuttle movements of ship and canoe on which the town depended, and of which it was the very core, at an end?

Desperately the merchants had sent off the previous year's pelts before the ships sailed down the St. Lawrence; they had stored the new season's trade in their warehouses. Some, well aware that next year's returns were already doubtful, had paid their men depressed wages. And now, while the maples on the mountain burst into flame and St. Helen's Island in the St. Lawrence looked like a glowing gem, they turned to their own grim situation. Simon McTavish's partner, James Bannerman, gave up in disgust and returned to the Old Country, where several others were inclined to follow him. But most had no intention of quitting. Most determined to carry on, meeting the enormous risks as best they could. Their only way out lay in petitioning the governor from a strong, united front. They had discussed it for months. Now several of the small partnerships decided to take definite steps. They would join together in a single group, the North West Company.

Not all of the small partnerships in Montreal were in favour

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of coalition, nor believed that it would influence the governor. But those who did join the little group significantly included the partners in the pool which Alexander Henry had mentioned as being on the Lower Saskatchewan in 1775. The co-partnership provided for sixteen shares, two each held by local firms: Todd & McGill, Ben. & Jos. Frobisher, McGill & Paterson, McTavish & Co., Holmes & Grant, Wadden & Co., McBeath & Co.; and one share each held by Ross & Co. and Oakes & Co.

The first three partnerships included men already so closely associated as to be almost one. They had been in business in Montreal for several years and though each was comparatively young, all were able and respected men. The last five were smaller concerns, George McBeath having as his partner the American trader, Peter Pond. Simon McTavish, whose new partner was Patrick Small, grand-nephew of a governor of Guernsey, was already marked by his business associates as a man who would get somewhere.

Son of John McTavish of Fraser's Highlanders, Simon had been born in Stratherrick, Scotland, in 1750. He sailed for the New World at thirteen, and was apprenticed in New York, probably to the fur trade. At twenty, his seven years of apprenticeship over, he set himself up in business in a small way at Albany, and was soon partner with Bannerman, forwarding rum on the Great Lakes. From the day he arrived at Montreal in the summer of 1774, he was part of the town. By the time the North West Company was formed, five years later, he was a mature young man, tall and with the lean good looks of his proud Highland ancestors; he had already admitted to a love of good wine, good oysters and pretty girls and that he was "always like a fish out of water when not in love". His grasp of New World business and Montreal's position as hub of the shuttle movements westward to the interior and eastward to the markets of London and Western Europe had taken him on more than one voyage across the Atlantic to buy merchandise and to arrange credit. When he had returned to London in 1776 with the pelts worth £15,000, he had also visited the fam-

ily and birthplace he had dreamed of ever since he left Scotland at thirteen. His sister was now Ann McTavish McGillivray, with young sons who soon would need an education and an opportunity to find careers for themselves, no easy accomplishment in Scotland at the time. Simon even then determined to bring many of his relatives to the New World where opportunities seemed boundless.

But meantime, as well as travelling to the old land, he must go each year to Michilimackinac or the new inland depot on Lake Superior. Though he had not been beyond Grand Portage himself, he had made it his business to get a good working knowledge of the geography and trade conditions of both the nearer southwest or Mississippi trade and that of the northwest where he had earlier supplied Peter Pond.

In common with his colleagues, McTavish had little capital to put into the new concern. Though his investment was made up largely of trade goods and canoes, he was from the beginning potentially as important a member as any in the new group, the first joint-stock company in Canada and probably on the continent.

By the first of the new year the partners of the new North West Company had the satisfaction of knowing that their co-partnership had brought Montreal's depressed conditions to the attention of the authorities. During 1780 the little walled town received one of her rare wintertime visitors, Charles Grant, a prosperous and respected merchant of Quebec, appointed by Governor Sir Frederick Haldimand to make a complete report on the fur trade.

Never in Montreal's already long record for warm hospitality did a visitor receive more enthusiastic entertainment. Among his hosts were Charles Chaboillez, born in the interior near Michilimackinac, and whose seven daughters were to provide wives for at least two prominent North West Company partners; by that time, too, Alexander Henry and James McGill were about to marry pretty daughters of their *Canadien* associates, and everywhere Grant found the pleasant mingling of French and English

tongues. Along with good dinners and card parties and suppers he received the utmost co-operation in preparation of his report. The merchants showed him figures to prove that the town did in fact annually contribute over £200,000 in new business to the colony's economy. They provided shrewd comments on the political dangers involved in curtailing the fur trade; if denied the European goods on which they had learned to rely, the natives might well consider the British beaten by the Americans or even by the Spanish still on the Lower Mississippi. In either case Britain would lose not only the business involved, but the entire territory to the westward. Finally Charles Grant was given every opportunity to study the situation of the merchants themselves, as well as the inevitable plight of the people in and about the town who were dependent on the industry.

Prior to the government's embargo on private shipping on the Great Lakes, the merchants had shipped rum by bateau from Niagara or Detroit to Michilimackinac and Grand Portage. Now this heavy cargo, along with other heavy merchandise, must be carried by canoe up the Ottawa River. They had soon discovered, the Montreal merchants told the commissioner, that the government's ships gave no priority to trade goods; often valuable cargoes were left on docks, to be spoiled or pillaged, and with no hope of recompense. Inevitably, if cargoes must be shipped by the Ottawa, only by issuing licences on time could the business be maintained and increased. Indeed the business could actually provide employment for every man in the colony. Already upwards of two hundred canoes were needed each spring to carry goods westward from Lachine; each canoe by the time it reached Grand Portage having cost the merchants concerned £750, much of it for wages to canoemen and warehousemen and for canoes and provisions. And each year more territory was being discovered, thereby not only extending the potential fur-trade country, but bringing more business to Montreal.

Grant returned to Quebec, a long, cold journey after the warmth and comforts of the snug stone houses in Montreal, with

a bulky report for the governor. Haldimand, himself long a resident of the colony, studied the report closely, pausing now and again to remark pointedly on the enormous quantities of rum and other trade goods employed, perhaps extravagantly, by the merchant-fur-traders; he must continue to consider the advice of military men in charge of the colony's defence, and their determination to guard against the possibility of goods falling into rebel hands. But in the end the objective of the first North West Company was achieved. In the spring of 1780 licences were issued, and on time.

All Montreal, it seemed, moved to Lachine on the day when the first canoes set out for the northwest. Spring was in the air and the first willow buds not yet opened as the voyageurs arrived. They came swaggering, smoking their short pipes, each dressed in his best shirt and cap, a gaily coloured *ceinture flèche* a-swing above his "carraboo" breeches. Their cheery French, laced with a few expressive Indian and English phrases, was the language of the trade. One or two canoemen had signed on as far away as Quebec, a few at Three Rivers or Sorel. Most came from the small farms along the rivers near Montreal, and in the early years of the English fur trade some at least would be back in time to help with the harvest. Each carried his brightly painted paddle, the badge of office of a pork-eater, a gift from a father who had spent the best years of his life in the adventurous life of a voyageur or, perhaps, fashioned by himself during long winter evenings while his thoughts lingered over the girl on the next farm.

They were the *mangeurs du lard*—the pork-eaters who lived on dried corn and fat pork on the trip between Montreal and Grand Portage. They were gay, tough, skilled and indispensable to the fur trade, as they well knew. One, past seventy, boasted what each of these short, stocky, sentimental men in his heart believed:

"I could carry, paddle, walk and sing with any man I ever saw. I have been twenty-four years a canoeman, and forty-one

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in service; no portage was ever too long for me. Fifty songs could I sing. I have saved the lives of ten voyageurs. Have had twelve wives and six running dogs. I spent all my money on pleasure. Were I young again, I should spend my life the same way over. There is no life so happy as a voyageur's life!"

Yet a voyageur had little enough money to spend—on pleasure or on a small strip farm beside one of the rivers he loved. If he became a steersman he might get 300 livres a year—a livre was roughly a shilling following the English conquest—or 350 livres as a guide. To this would be added a blanket, a shirt and a pair of trousers, a little tobacco, the daily ration of a pound of dried corn and fat pork, and a tot of rum when the bourgeois saw fit. A man who could sing could count on an extra livre or so.

Year after year it happened the same way. The gentlemen arrived at Lachine by calash or on horseback, accompanied by Montreal friends who would see them off. Before embarking they enjoyed an enormous farewell luncheon of sturgeon, venison, bear steaks, probably some good nippy cheese and invariably a generous quantity of the finest Madeira. While they feasted their French clerks saw to the final lading of the craft, though often a bourgeois left his meal to see how things were going where the new thirty-six-foot long, six-foot wide canoes bobbed at the waterside.

"Careful with that keg . . . watch that bung or you'll break the seal. . . . Do you not yet know how to stow a bow pack?" The bourgeois' authoritative voice was always the dominant sound at Lachine.

Gradually, one after another, the canoes were loaded until not a sign of their strong, white, cedar floor boards could be seen. Into each, apart from the cargo, went provisions for ten men—several hundred pounds of dried corn and salt pork. Each man was allowed forty pounds of personal luggage, which included his blanket; and there were materials for repairing the canoe (watape for sewing the patches together, and pine-gum for waterproofing the seams). In all, the load was four thousand

pounds. Finally, at the prow fluttered the bourgeois' flag. For the first time in the spring of 1780 it was that of the North West Company whose N.W.Co. was soon to become familiar wherever pelts were traded between Indian and white men.

On shore wives and children, sweethearts and parents, the merchants and clerks who would carry on the business in Montreal during the summer months called out farewells, "*Bon voyage!*", "God bless you!" And then always for a brief moment every voice hushed. Here and there a young voyageur, already steady in his place in the canoe, caught the eyes of a dark-haired girl in the crowd; a young husband smiled an intimate message to his wife, marking a moment he would always remember when he smelled Balm of Gilead buds in spring. In their places just behind the middle seats agents and bourgeois pressed their tall beaver hats more firmly on their heads against the strong breeze. Steersmen and bowmen half kneeled, half stood in their places, tense, waiting. And then the order rang out. Slowly, proudly each bright paddle rose, flashed in the sun, and dug deep in the rushing icy water. Steadily each canoe moved off from the landing-place. Arms rose and fell, rhythmically. The low craft shot forward. Soon the brigade, part of hundreds of canoes which left each summer, was out in the stream, each craft keeping its position in perfect formation. Space blurred familiar faces on shore. The last farewells died on the wind.

But the canoes were not quite on their way yet. Less than half an hour's paddling and they would pause for a final, eventful ceremony. The voyageurs would seek the blessing of their patron, Ste. Anne, at the shrine commemorated by Thomas Moore in the "Canadian Boat Song":

"Faintly as tolls the evening chime,  
Our voices keep tune and our oars keep time.  
Soon as the woods on the shore grow dim,  
We'll sing at Ste. Anne's our parting hymn . . ."

Peter Pond on his first trip to the northwest described the rough little church at the end of Montreal Island: "This Church

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is Dedicated to St. Ann who Protects all Voigers. Heare is a small Box with a Hole in the top for ye Reception of a Little Money for the Hole [holy] father or to say a small Mass for those Who Put a small Sum in the Box. Scars a Voiger but stops hear and Puts in his mite and By that Meanes they Suppose they are Protected . . .”

Often the voyageurs had to break thin ice at the river's edge in the morning during the first few days of the canoes' trip up the Ottawa, even though mid-day's sun might force them to shed their shirts. But no matter how cold, when rapids forced a stop or when the brigade paused for breakfast or nooning or supper the bowman sprang into the stream at the river's edge to steady the craft, followed by the steersman and the middlemen. Only then did the gentlemen disembark, riding pick-a-back on the shoulders of their sturdy voyageurs. The disembarking process occurred often, for there were thirty-six portages or *décharges* between Lachine and Georgian Bay. At a portage the voyageurs carried both canoe and cargo; when they could shoot the rapids or track and carry only the cargo they made what they called a *décharge*.

Theirs were long days, starting at dawn when the men woke from their blankets on the ground to the guide's cry of "Lève! Lève!" and ending with only enough daylight to build their supper fires to cook the great kettle of corn-meal and pork. Other than breakfast and nooning, rests occurred only when the bourgeois called a *pipe*. Then paddles were shipped and sacs opened and the comfortable fragrance of tobacco smoke called for a brief yarn or a little gossip. Each day's trip was measured by the number of *pipes* smoked. And always after each *pipe* there was a song—"À la Claire Fontaine", perhaps, or "La Belle Lisette", or the rollicking

"En roulant ma boule roulant,  
En roulant ma boule,  
En roulant ma boule roulant,  
En roulant ma boule . . ."

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Past the Long Sault Rapids on the Ottawa they paddled, doffing their caps where young Dollard and his seventeen comrades had lost their lives saving Montreal from the Iroquois. At the Rideau and Chaudière Rapids days were spent carrying cargo and craft round the stretches of white water. More time was often lost on wind-swept Lake Nipissing before they sped down the French River to Georgian Bay's great open sea. Here every superstitious voyageur paused to toss overboard a trinket or a bit of tobacco to appease the wind, *La Vieille*, the old woman.

But often the old woman was in no mood to be appeased. After raging squalls had drenched men and cargo, blankets and lengths of bright calico must be spread to dry on bushes, while each bourgeois looked westward with restless eyes. To make up the time lost drying the goods, the men had to paddle faster and for longer hours. That was when a tot of rum added miles, and good humour, to the long day's travel.

Some canoes would go to Lake Michigan and the Ohio and Mississippi River country where the bulk of the pelts was still traded, travelling by way of Michilimackinac. The north-west canoes pressed on for Grand Portage. But always before rounding the last point there was a pause. Short of Point Chapeau the brigade stopped long enough for each voyageur to shave and put on his best shirt, while the bourgeois opened cassettes stowed under their seats for their best tall beaver hats. Then with another song and a great burst of rhythmic force, the brigade swept up to the landing-stage. From the shore there burst a heart-quickenning *feu de joie*, followed by the barking of dogs; then cries of welcome and the pleasant sight of Chippewa girls in their graceful buckskin tunics.

At the stockaded cluster of log warehouses and dwellings at the mouth of the Pigeon River, the co-partners sent off their canoes. Some were trading to the south, some to the northwest; but most were risking ventures in both directions. During the first summer in which the North West Company operated, the major part of the business was to the southwest. Those who

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were most heavily concerned with the northwest trade must often have questioned the wisdom of risking so much of their hard-found capital in that still uncertain territory.

For the first few days when canoes from Montreal met news-starved winterers, everyone gossiped and drank and feasted. During those few days, as every experienced fur-trader knew, it was almost impossible for northmen to shoulder kegs and bales. Only after a *boisson* would they resume their usual good-tempered, dawn-to-dusk labour. It was much the same with the wintering partners themselves; they, too, needed a brief holiday and the opportunity to talk and listen. It was then that the Montrealers told about the difficulties involved in securing trade goods and credits, and the problems behind obtaining licences. And gradually in the exchange of ideas and experiences the Montrealers pieced together details of the trade in the *pays d'en haut*, the new tribes contacted, the new country explored and the prices paid for pelts. In the summer of 1780, one item of news topped all other accounts of trade and all other gossip: the superb quality of beaver traded by Peter Pond in the Athabasca country. The beaver from that country was superior to that from the Mississippi, and these pelts came from virgin country.

But Pond's trip to the Athabasca territory by no means added up to immediate success for the partners concerned with the northwest trade. Not all the fur-traders in Montreal had joined the co-partnership, and competition continued to cost everyone dearly. As each outfit reached Grand Portage, scraps—often very small scraps—of information became available to those who would assess the entire northwest trade. Since not all winterers came down to the depot each year, months and even years must pass before more than hearsay could be collected concerning some phases of the trade. Out of the mass of gossip and reliable reports a few facts finally told the story of the first years of the co-partnership.

William Bruce, an independent Montreal trader, had given the natives in his territory too much rum—or not enough—and

had had his post plundered and several of his men killed. He had endangered not only his own life, but that of every other white man in the interior. A dreadful scourge of small-pox had killed several bands of natives, driving survivors in panic to the deep woods and away from their traditional trapping-grounds, thus diminishing trapping for several years. Peter Pangman, after a single season in the northwest, had broken away from the co-partnership and was living in a tent and trading outside the North West Company's stockade. Wadden, too, broke away. Peter Pond, following his second successful trip to Athabasca, was stopped short of a third season by early ice on the river, and had to winter near Lac La Ronge in opposition to Wadden. Probably Pond was desperately short of supplies, and Wadden may have suffered much the same hardships. During the winter differences developed between the two, were patched up, and flared again. One night Wadden was shot and killed while Pond, according to one of Wadden's clerks, was visiting in his cabin.

That first co-partnership did not long survive its many difficulties. Pangman's break and Wadden's death, the charge of murder against Pond all proved too great a strain. But for several of the men concerned, the adventure both economically and in promoting discovery was a heady challenge. The Frobishers had taken an actual part in extending the territory northwestward, as Pond had done. Simon McTavish realized that the new country was remote from the handicaps imposed by the current war in the English colonies and possible threat from rebel troops. He was encouraged by the way his new partner, Patrick Small, had settled into a winterer's life near Isle à la Crosse. There a young Indian wife had brought him the entire trade of her tribe. Neither the Frobishers nor McTavish could forget those pelts brought down by Pond, deeper, silkier, richer, darker than any ever seen before. And Pond, both at Grand Portage and in Montreal during his trial, talked of streams far beyond the Athabasca country. To add a fillip to the situation, the French fleet under La Perouse had sailed into Hudson Bay.

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While La Perouse sacked Fort Prince of Wales and burned York Factory, the Montrealers shipped to London, by way of the St. Lawrence, the pelts which the Hudson's Bay Company traditionally had sent home through Hudson Straits.

## CHAPTER II

# *Gentleman's Agreement*

During the long deliberations of the Treaty of Versailles, the merchants of Montreal waited uneasily. The treaty inevitably must affect every one of the four or five million white inhabitants of the Atlantic seaboard and the St. Lawrence Valley; for them it might mean another crisis. To avoid even a day's delay, they had a messenger in New York to meet each ship, and to bring the news to Montreal by the best horses and the fastest boat on Lake Champlain.

For the merchants concerned with the northwest trade, the terms of the Treaty signed in 1783 could scarcely have been worse. Almost as disturbing was the implied slur on their loyalty to England.

Most men in Montreal and Quebec knew that England must grant the English colonies the independence for which they had fought. The Canadians were willing to accept the United States of America as a fact. But where was the justice in extending the former colonies across the Alleghenies, westward all the way to the Mississippi River? Need the mother country have gone so far to secure the friendship of former subjects as to discard the clause in the Quebec Act which had extended Canada's boundary to the Ohio? What of the western posts essential to the

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fur trade: Niagara, Detroit and Michilimackinac? If the boundary between British territory and that of the new republic was indeed to stretch westward from Lake Superior by way of Pigeon River to the Lake of the Woods and the Mississippi River, even Grand Portage would be on American soil.

The boundary clause of the Treaty of Versailles hung like a dark cloud over the bright autumn days of 1783 when the canoes arrived at Lachine. It robbed the ox-carts' shrieking wheels of their music and restrained the excitement that perennially marked the sailing of the fur ships for London. Colonials accustomed to lack of interest from the mother country could accept it far more readily than the probable loss of their inland bases. That autumn the merchants in Quebec and Three Rivers as well as in Montreal set about drafting an appeal against the boundary clause of the treaty; and as they did so, they discovered major differences in their own outlook.

Broadly their opinions fell into two groups. One group, that headed generally by James and John McGill, believed that the boundary line to be drawn through Pigeon River would make little actual difference to the fur trade. Settlers, this little group argued, would not soon go as far west as the Mississippi River; the Americans therefore would have no reason to restrict Montreal traders.

The Frobisher brothers, along with Alexander Henry and Simon McTavish, strongly disagreed. They were convinced that the future of the trade lay not in the southwest but in the real northwest beyond Lake Superior, perhaps even far beyond the Lake Athabasca country. A boundary cutting through these two vast areas must inevitably complicate trade.

Because most of the men of the fur trade were close friends the boundary question was never long absent from social gatherings. And yet, as the usual festivities of Christmas and New Year drew the little town closer in on itself, it all seemed remote and impersonal. Snowbound within the high walls of Montreal, the men relaxed for a time their intense concentration on appeals to parliament. It was difficult to remember constantly that a

treaty negotiated on the other side of the world could so completely ignore the interests of the Indians and those of the fur-traders themselves. Briefly, during the holidays, more immediate interests pushed the entire unhappy situation temporarily out of mind.

That winter Joseph Frobisher celebrated the birth of his son, Benjamin, inviting his friends to his house to drink a toast to the future bourgeois. Alexander Henry, through with long years of gruelling travel by canoe and snowshoe, was now settling down to life as a prosperous merchant. Even Simon McTavish, still a bachelor at thirty-three, was living up to his earlier avowed liking for good wine, good oysters and pretty girls, though the excellent suppers in his apartment were usually stag affairs.

For McTavish the winter of 1783-4 was one of the happiest he had known, despite the treaty and little real hope that the merchants' appeal would improve the situation. Late in the summer his nineteen-year-old nephew William McGillivray, had reached Montreal. The hardships current in the Highlands made it impossible for a man in his brother-in-law's position to provide his sons with an education. McTavish had paid for William's schooling, as he was now doing for William's younger brother, Duncan, and would do for his sister Ann's baby, Simon. And this young Highlander, the first of several whom McTavish would establish in business, lived up to his every hope. Not only was his nephew a good companion at the stag suppers in the apartment above the warehouse: more than once during the winter McTavish found himself standing back during a ball at the château or a dance at the Frobishers' or the Henrys'; proud as any father he watched the young man pay court to the town's leading matrons, some of them little older than himself. Handsome, well turned out, William from the first had won the interest of any unattached girl in the town. Most important, he showed a shrewd, comprehending interest in the business of the fur trade.

But though Montreal's social life went on superficially much

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as usual, an idea was evolving which was to change the entire future of the colony. At first it was little more than a suggestion, and no one could say when the idea actually crystallized; perhaps it was at a casual gathering of men interested in the original North West Company, before a blazing hearth fire and with a good supply of choice Madeira at hand. Yet, when the idea became fact, to the little group of men accustomed to battling weather and geography as well as natives and each other and the government, it was completely reasonable. McTavish and the Frobishers believed in the northwest as the main fur-trade territory and had extensive investments there. On the other hand, the McGills and Isaac Todd were certain that the destiny of the fur trade still lay in the southwest. Why not, then, divide the territory, the entire known and yet to be discovered *pays d'en haut*?

More Madeira probably heightened the idea when it was first raised. Doubtless those present toasted it and one another's future, warm and cosy in the comfortable living-room belonging to one of their coterie. It was a splendid idea, they agreed; and, as casually as though they were dealing a pack of cards, they cut up the entire fur-trade territory among themselves. But each man was sober enough to know what he was doing. A few days after the great evening when the idea originated, the little group of friends met for a keen, business-like discussion of details.

The first North West Company agreement had served its purpose, but it had been at best an emergency move and, in a sense, a trial kite. While it had brought the immediate problems of the industry to the attention of the governor, it had overlooked one major handicap, the enormous cost to each partnership of sending cargoes to both the southwest and the northwest. That handicap removed, the next step was to transfer the investments held in the Mississippi country by the Frobishers and McTavish and their proposed partners, and to close out the McGill interests in the northwest. In January of 1784 a new North West

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Company agreement was drafted, again with provision for sixteen shares. This time the partners were B. & J. Frobisher and Simon McTavish, who would each hold three shares; George McBeath, Robert Grant, Nicholas Montour and Patrick Small were allotted two shares each, while Peter Pond and William Holmes would each be offered a single share.

The agreement made McTavish the largest single shareholder in the proposed agreement which could not, of course, become effective until the winterers in each partnership ratified its terms at Grand Portage the following summer. McTavish knew he could count on Small, and the Frobishers had every reason to believe that Montour, their winterer, would go along with the plan. Holmes, too, had proven himself adept in overcoming competition in the highly competitive northwest with a shrewd blend of diplomacy and force; more than once he had sent out a group of his men well armed with rum and tobacco to native bands traditionally devoted to the Hudson's Bay Company, meeting the protests of the opposition's servants with a politely phrased apology and an invitation to share a cup of grog, a scarce commodity in the English trading-posts. The designers of the new North West Company were less certain of Peter Pond. Pond, though he was short of capital, would probably demand more than the single share allotted him. He might not agree with the view that his lack of capital and his implication in the death of Wadden offset his important discoveries of territory and the development of pemmican as a food staple. But in the final summing up of capital and other assets, the little group in Montreal considered the offer fair enough.

As spring approached, the usual piles of trade goods were assembled at Lachine, while small mountains of kegged rum were kept under guard until the canoes should be sent off. By 1784, the majority of canoes belonged to men interested in the northwest trade or those whose future business would lie in the Mississippi territory. But there were also several independent traders, men who had turned down offers to join with the new concern or others who, for various reasons, had been given no

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opportunity to join. Already competition was keen, and trade goods represented hard-found capital.

That spring William McGillivray was engaged as the North West Company's first English clerk, a break in the tradition that clerks should all be French; McTavish had already started his nephew in the business. When the ice went out of the Ottawa, uncle and nephew took their places aboard the proprietor's *canot du maître*, well stocked with good food, and even with fur robes against the chill of early mornings.

Young William McGillivray caught his first glimpse of Grand Portage as the brigade of canoes swept round Point au Chapeau. Though he had heard endless accounts of the inland depot on the trip—from the voyageurs, over evening camp fires, and from his uncle while the canoemen paddled—he was amazed at the size and activity of the stockaded post in the afternoon shadow of brooding Mount Maude. Men sent ahead in light canoes had already opened company stores and houses. A straggle of Indian teepees dotted the shoreline beyond the few log buildings belonging to independent traders.

From the bastion the usual *feu de joie* had crackled across the water followed by greetings from the group of white men on the shore. While their voyageurs held the canoe steady the passengers stepped carefully to the rough timber landing. McTavish shook hands warmly with one after another, the combination of friendliness and implied authority which his nephew had noted in Montreal now more marked in the group of whom so few were dressed as gentlemen. Beyond the motley crowd of white men, in breeches and coats as well as in buckskins and moccasins, and the *engagés* and natives, the post looked even more imposing. McGillivray had a quick view of the main buildings: the high-pitched roof at the centre was obviously the great hall; the tin-roofed stone structure would be the magazine; the smaller buildings, also tin-roofed as a precaution against fire, the stores and living-quarters. Several attractive Chippewa girls, standing to one side with quiet dignity and

less quiet eyes, momentarily diverted his gaze from the trail leading beyond the post and up round Mount Maude. It was the way to the northwest which he would soon be following, leaving civilization behind him for two years, perhaps three.

But his uncle was introducing him to the gentlemen, winterers from the nearer districts who had been the first to arrive. Even as they talked, McTavish led the way toward the main gate. Behind them they left the distracting confusion of clerks shouting orders, voyageurs cursing as they shouldered packs, and the quiet voices of those Chippewa girls talking in their strange, melodious tongue.

McGillivray had immediately sensed the mood of tense excitement at the depot, the feeling of ordered muddle which was part of the brief, annual summer rendezvous. Though the season was still early, trade goods were being sorted for the various districts, incoming pelts examined and checked. In the little counting-house each newly arrived northman was paid his wages. He scarcely paused long enough to check the amount against his expenses before hurrying off for the treat of rum due each man by tradition, and for the first bread and butter he had tasted since leaving Grand Portage the previous summer. The routine of the post was going on as usual, even though final details of the new North West Company agreement must await the arrival of the winterer from the farthest district, Peter Pond.

A stir of excitement greeted the eventual sight of the Athabaskan brigade trudging down the trail, for already Pond was famous for his discoveries and notorious for the rumours associated with Etienne Wadden's murder.

The first white man to have crossed the Height of Land to the arctic watershed, he who had developed the strategic two-thousand-mile supply line of caches of pemmican, listened to plans for the new company with great interest till he heard details of the proposed share allotment. One share for him? Did they think he would accept only one share? As the Frobishers and McTavish had surmised, Pond could not be per-

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suaded that in the formation of the new company capital counted for more than experience and initiative and the discovery of fresh territory. Spurning the offer, and pausing at Grand Portage only long enough to attend to essential business, he went on down to Montreal. Now an American citizen, having been born in Connecticut, Pond hoped that in Washington he would find the degree of appreciation lacking in his former partners. He would take to Washington the sketch map of the northwest on which he had worked laboriously during several winters, the first map ever made of the northwest.

At Grand Portage the meeting of the new company was called without Pond. Already, arrangements had been completed with the McGills and Isaac Todd and the other former partners for the disposal of their goods and equipment in the northwest. Only the final formalities remained, the acceptance of three shares each by the Frobishers and Simon McTavish, two by Small and Montour and McBeath, and a single share by Holmes. The share offered Pond remained open. The new North West Company became a fact at Grand Portage in the summer of 1784.

It was a momentous occasion for the partners concerned. To celebrate they issued a general invitation to a ball, to be preceded by a dinner for the gentlemen at the post, their former partners and the independent traders with whom they were on friendly terms.

Before the festivities the usual precautions were taken; watches were posted along the gallery to guard against fire, one of the constant hazards in the settlement built entirely of wood. In the early evening the various gentlemen and their young clerks gathered in the great hall, each dressed for the event in his best fawn or grey coat and breeches and bright-hued silk vest. After a pleasant interval of drinking they sat down to a great spread of beef, salt pork, hams, venison and fish, Indian corn, bread and butter and cheese, tea, wine and spirits. A couple of hours later, while they were drinking their final toasts

to the "Mother of all the Saints" and to the fur trade, the piper tuned up for the dance while the fiddler plucked at his strings. Soon the great hall was cleared of tables and the chairs moved to one end for the gentlemen. Candles, already placed in the massive candelabra, were lit to complete the festive atmosphere.

Though "the people" had been gathering outside for some time, they filed into the hall slowly and a little shyly at first, awed by the presence of the gentlemen and the bright lights from so many candles. But gradually the large room filled. Older Indians and squaws slip-slapped to places along the walls where they squatted on the floor amid sleeping black-haired papooses propped up in cradles. And then, having at last overcome their diffidence, pork-eaters and northmen poured in, the former in clean shirts and bright hand-woven sashes, the latter in new buckskin shirts and leggings and breechcloths. Indian chiefs sported the red or blue coats provided by the traders as marks of honour, and their tawdry medals. Braves had daubed their chests and faces, and every Chippewa girl wore her finest beaded white tunic, for tonight she would dance with the white men.

The piper and the fiddler struck up the first tune. Each pork-eater and northman pranced to the centre of the crowded room with his graceful partner, there to await the customary signal for the ball to open.

Each year it was the same at balls at the depot. The senior gentleman, probably Simon McTavish this time since the North West Company was host, rose to lead the opening reel. With a gallant bow to the prettiest girl present, a chief's daughter, the proprietor nodded to the fiddler as he led her to the front of the room. The fiddler nodded to the piper. Soon everyone who could, danced reels and squares till the floor was filled with prancing feet.

It was a memorable initiation for young William McGillivray, and not only into the agreeable ways of Indian girls. From the first day at Grand Portage with his uncle, he had begun to realize that only by firmness, well interlarded with sometimes stern justice and an occasional regale, could this motley *mélange*

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of French and half-breed *engagés* be managed. More than once during the ball when a pork-eater coveted a girl squired by a northman, or vice versa, a bourgeois curtly ordered both men out of the room before they could get into a serious fight. Usually both men returned to go on with the dance. Only occasionally was it necessary to lock one or both in the little jail, the *pot au beurre*. Late in the evening everyone paused for refreshment—great platters of cold venison, pork and fish, great piles of bread, and gallons of scalding tea. When all the food had disappeared, the celebration continued, Scots and English and French men dancing with Chippewa girls, or slipping away for a more intimate rendezvous, till dawn brightened the lead-coloured waters of Lake Superior.

At last the morning came when McTavish and his nephew walked together to the west gate. McGillivray was to spend his first winter inland as a clerk at the Red River, and McTavish would return to Montreal and the many details of developing his partnership within the North West Company. After a few final words, uncle and nephew shook hands. While McTavish followed them with his eyes along the trail he himself would never take, McGillivray trudged off with his bourgeois and their voyageurs. The trail led past the camp where the pork-eaters slept under their upturned canoes; across the little creek that separated pork-eaters from northmen to minimize their fighting, and then past the straggling, weathered tents of the northmen themselves.

The Height of Land between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods country runs close to the west shore of Lake Superior. Rising in many places to a thousand feet, it gives the area its magnificent scenery and raises the formidable obstacle to canoe travel noted by Jacques de Noyen, the first white man to visit the area, in the early seventeenth century. At this ancient aboriginal cross-roads the Indians had carried their smaller craft and packs up the long portage. With larger craft and heavier

loads, the Nor'Westers shouldered their packs and took to canoes above the falls of the Pigeon River.

For a month during the hottest days of summer, a stream of men trudged the nine-mile track in another of the trade's essential shuttles. Both pork-eaters and northmen carried eight ninety-pound packs according to contract, with a Spanish dollar for each extra pack. Looking like apes, their arms swinging free as they bent under two, and sometimes three, packs held by tump lines across their foreheads, they shuttled up and down; shouldering trade goods up, pelts down, cursing, singing, challenging one another to see who could carry the heaviest loads for the longest distances without a stop.

Over the years the voyageurs had developed regular resting places known as *poses*. Sixteen *poses* marked the grand portage, varying in length from six to eight hundred yards. Even with these pauses, in Alexander Henry's words, the transportation of goods for each brigade was a "work of seven days of severe and dangerous exertion".

A few days and some fifty miles beyond Grand Portage the northwest route crossed the *Hauteur de Terre*. This Height of Land was more than a few acres of scrub trees and rock where all the streams behind the westbound canoes flowed to the Great Lakes and all those ahead to the vague, remote north. For the streams flowing into Lake Superior flowed homeward for each white man. No matter how he had longed for adventure, at the Height of Land he felt a swift, overwhelming panic, part homesickness and part apprehension.

Perhaps it was because the Height of Land was more than geography—it was a Rubicon. A ceremony marked each man's first crossing, as it is marked at the equator. From boyhood each voyageur had heard of this ceremony until it became a legend. Back on his father's farm along the St. Lawrence, or more likely in his mother's warm kitchen, old hands had pictured their own moments of excitement and panic during this unforgettable moment of their first trip to the interior. In a

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sense they were prepared for it. Young McGillivray had had no such background.

Even before the canoes left Lachine the voyageurs as well as the bourgeois had made a point of preparing Mr. McTavish's nephew for the ordeal. They had hoped he would be able to measure up to the initiation. "Some men . . ." they commenced to tell him of this man or that—but always they broke off before they divulged the frailties of his predecessors. By the time his own fateful day arrived, William McGillivray was steadying himself for an ordeal equal to that of a young Indian facing the rites of manhood.

The east-flowing streams had dwindled. Canoes and packs and kegs had been carried to the first west-flowing water when the brigade paused at the far edge of the rocky little plateau, covered with sparse clumps of bush. The stream where they would refloat the canoes was little more than a creek of fast water, riffled as much by wind as by current, and here and there shaded by a few scrub cedar.

McGillivray had become accustomed to the noise of a fur-brigade party; the continual profane banter and singing of voyageurs at the carrying-places, and the quieter talk of clerks and bourgeois. The sudden, dramatic silence was in itself a shock. About him stood the men of the entire brigade, doing nothing in broad daylight. As if it had all been rehearsed many times, the guide who had made the most trips to the northwest, a man not over thirty, stepped forward, unsheathing his hunting-knife from his belt. A few paces from the tyro, and beside a clump of cedar, he paused to examine the blade of the knife. Not satisfied, he sharpened the blade slowly and carefully, testing it on the hairs of his weathered wrist. McGillivray watched the steel cut through one of the stiff hairs as though it were butter. Still with the air of detachment, the guide, now very much master of ceremonies, looked about him at the scrub cedar, selected and cut off a bough with a single slash of the knife. Only then did he address the initiate, McGillivray, or-

dering him to a low spot beside the stream. In a voice that rang out across the little plateau he commanded: "Kneel!"

McGillivray had doffed his cap. Now he dropped to his knees. Suddenly his head and shoulders were drenched with cold water, dipped from the stream with the cedar bough. The guide commanded him to repeat the ancient two-fold promise. Keeping his voice as firm as he could, McGillivray swore in French never to permit a new-comer to pass the Height of Land without a similar ceremony—and never to kiss a voyageur's wife without her permission.

Someone fired a shot into the air as he scrambled to his feet. Every man present shook his hand, thumped him on the back, cried out congratulations and called for a drink to toast the newly initiated northman.

The toast was the real reason for the ceremony, some said. But even then William McGillivray sensed that there was much more to it. Already he realized that only a few hundred men made the long, dangerous trip each year. He felt something of the deep emotion behind each northman's proud boast: "Je suis un homme du nord!"

Now he, too, was a northman.

The ceremony was the last break in the gruelling routine of the trip. Up at dawn, as a clerk he was required to see that his voyageurs had their canoes safely stowed. No time must be lost at the breakfast stop, about eight, nor at nooning. Now and again the bourgeois called for a *pipe* and a brief rest, and unless they were delayed by wind or storm the day ended in time merely to make a fire and cook their supper before falling asleep, on a dry rock if they could find one, before dark. By Basswood and Cross Lake to the Rainy River, "the most beautiful river in the north", the voyageurs claimed, down the Lake of the Woods they paddled or portaged the small north canoes; through Devil's Gap where flowed all the watershed of the area into the wild Winnipeg River. Year after year voyageurs drowned in the boiling cataracts of this *Rivière Blanche*, even on reaches considered safe for canoes, and where William's

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brother, Duncan, a few years later was to describe an incident all too common on the stretch where seven portages could be seen:

"One of the canoes imprudently advanced too near the Fall to load. After the goods were debarked, the upper end through some negligence was suddenly carried out by the current with the steersman suspended after it, and the foreman attempting to retain his end, was also carried away . . . They were hurled down through three successive cascades, the canoe several times overwhelmed with water and threatened every moment with being dashed to pieces on the rocks. After arriving at the dreadful whirlpool it remained a considerable time under water. At length the current drove it to shore, with the men still hanging on. Tho' they at first seemed insensible, after a little assistance they recovered and before night renewed their labours as if nothing had happened to them."

The great highlight of Lake Winnipeg was a race between the regularly laden canoes and those going to Lake Athabasca. To be able to reach their destination before freeze-up the Athabaskan brigades set out laden a quarter lighter than the other craft, and with crews specially chosen to stand the rigours of the annual four-thousand-mile round trip from Lake Athabasca to Grand Portage and back.

Year after year as the fur trade increased the size of each brigade, the race on Lake Winnipeg became more and more an event to be talked of throughout each ensuing winter, as well as for years to come. Perhaps a little drunk from an extra ration of rum after the heart-breaking passage of the Winnipeg River, the Athabaskan crews boasted that they could out-paddle any crew on Lake Winnipeg. Also a little drunk, the others took up the challenge.

Sometimes as many as a hundred canoes raced, each brigade keeping formation. A good voyageur paddled forty strokes to the minute, and could maintain that pace from dawn to dusk with brief stops for breakfast and nooning and an occasional *pipe*. Forty strokes to the minute was considered a good, safe

pace by the proprietors. But the men liked speed. They needed a change of excitement after risking their lives, and the company's cargo, on white water. Across wide, shallow, choppy Lake Winnipeg the Athabascans hurled their challenges. The others increased speed. Forty-five strokes to the minute. Fifty strokes. When one of the heavier laden canoes slackened, the Athabascans taunted:

"Do you want to stop, eh, old men! Old like a tortoise!"

On one occasion a steersman fell asleep from exhaustion and toppled out of his canoe. In the icy water and with his heavy clothes pulling him down he called to two competing crews to save him *pour l'amour de Dieu* and the Blessed Virgin. But neither slackened speed for a moment. Had the man's own crew not turned back for him, he would surely have drowned.

The rival northmen were like wrestlers with their reputations at stake. Fifty strokes to the minute increased to fifty-five. No time now for smokes. No time for songs. Guides, caught up in the tension, hacked off hunks of pemmican for the straining voyageurs who chewed as they paddled till they verged on exhaustion. And as exhaustion neared, judgment waned. Now they paddled sixty strokes to the minute; now sixty-five. The record for a Lake Winnipeg canoe race between Athabaskan and Saskatchewan River brigades was forty hours of continuous paddling, and then a bourgeois ordered the crews to stop. Though there was little rancour after the canoes were finally beached on the low shore, a considerable distance separated each camp site as a precaution. The bourgeois traditionally opened a keg of rum. Then after a hot supper of boiled pemmican and wild rice, every man slept for hours, as inert as the hard ground on which he lay.

William McGillivray, bound for the Red River, would see his first great canoe race the following year. As the voyageurs were straining their way down Lake Winnipeg, he was about to spend his first winter inland in close proximity to several independent Montreal and Detroit traders and a Hudson's Bay Company post. The aspens were already turning yellow and the

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nights chill when he reached the territory at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers; a territory equally important as a depot for pemmican from the prairies as for pelts.

Meanwhile back in Montreal after the trip to Grand Portage, McTavish and the Frobishers used their now strengthened position to offset such possible effects as the new boundary might have on their northwest investments. In October, 1784, another carefully considered petition was sent to Governor Haldimand at Quebec, signed on behalf of the North West Company by Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher.

The petition led off with a reminder of the potential advantages to the colony of the newly organized company, and the assurance that its partners and *engagés* would defend the unexplored boundary between Canada and the United States if such defence should ever prove necessary. But the Nor'Westers were not limiting themselves to verbal support. Already they were investigating the possible effects on Grand Portage if it should be found to be on American soil; they had sent Edward Umfreville with six canoemen to look for an alternate route to the Pigeon River portage, one entirely on the British side of the border. So far none had been found, but they were continuing the search. Meanwhile they craved government support:

"The Inland Navigation from Montreal, by which the North West business is carried on, is perhaps the most extensive of any in the known world, but is only practicable for Canoes on account of the great number of Carrying places. To give Your Excellency some Idea of which, there are upwards of ninety from Montreal to Lake du Bois, and many of them long ones."

The petition to Governor Haldimand pointed out that the business now required two groups of men, each five hundred strong, and two types of canoe, the four-ton craft paddled and carried between Lachine and Grand Portage, and canoes half that size which were used between Lake Superior and every "post in the interior Country to the extent of 1,000 to 2,000

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miles and upwards. These canoes must be despatched as soon as the ice was out of the rivers in order to get goods, and men, to the remote posts before the danger of freeze-up; the northmen must leave Grand Portage by the first of August at the latest. To manage this wide-flung business the partners of the North West Company had an investment in goods alone of upwards of £50,000 original cost, in Furs to be sent to Montreal by the return of their Canoes, and in goods in the Interior country . . .”

The partners of the North West Company, therefore, begged His Excellency to grant them his “Favour and Protection to obtain for them an Exclusive Right to the trade of the North West” for ten years. In return they would carry on exploration at their own expense, and keep the governor posted on their discoveries. The Nor’Westers also requested a repeal of the embargo on private shipping on the Great Lakes now, surely, no longer necessary since the war was over and because the government boats “are generally so much employed in transporting stores and provisions for Government as to occasion the merchants effects to remain a very long time on the communication subject to waste, damage and pilfering”. By this time they had abandoned hope of changing the boundary clause in the Treaty of Versailles.

Again Haldimand was in a dilemma. Along with the multiplicity of routine duties connected with governing the colony, he was harassed with the endless problems of finding food and homes for the increasing numbers of homeless fugitives from the former New England colonies seeking sanctuary in Canada. He had no time to recommend or even to consider carefully the granting of a ten-year monopoly of the fur trade to the partners of the North West Company. As for repealing the embargo on shipping on the Great Lakes, there was still the risk that shipping freed of governmental controls might “open a door to illicit American trade by way of Oswego to Albany”. As a compromise, Haldimand granted the North West Company permission to build a 34-foot boat for use on Lake Superior. The company found, after the vessel was completed at a cost of

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£1,843, that they could not get her up the falls on the St. Mary's River. Building the vessel and sending word of the handicap of the falls on the St. Mary's River to Quebec took several months; by that time Haldimand felt he might permit the vessel to sail on Lake Huron. Within a couple of years the North West Company had its own boats on each of the Great Lakes except Michigan.

Meanwhile Peter Pond had visited Congress and presented his sketch map, indicating the extent of his explorations. He found Congress completely occupied with its own immediate post-war problems and so satiated with Mississippi territory received through the Treaty of Versailles that it had no interest in remote Athabasca. Unable to interest Washington, Pond had no choice but to return to Montreal. There he had long talks with his friend, Alexander Henry, who shrewdly agreed with Pond's claim that "There are many national advantages which may result from discovering and surveying these remote unknown parts of America". Pond's explorations and his account of the recent gossip in Washington were recorded by Henry in a letter to his friend, William Edgar, in Detroit:

"My scheme for the North Coast of America I think will soon take place, as I am told they are fitting Albany Sloops for Chinna. They may as well send them to Cook's River, where I am persuaded they will receive more profits than from all the upper posts . . ." The words were Henry's but the ideas obviously were those of Peter Pond.

Along with his account of Captain Cook's discoveries of the Pacific coast, Pond had brought back to Montreal a rumour that the Empress of Russia was about to make some settlement regarding Kamchatka. The interest in the Pacific coast had challenged Pond's enquiring mind: might there not be a passage between the far northwest, somewhere beyond Lake Athabasca perhaps, and the mouth of the river discovered by Captain Cook? Surely that river could not be far from the Athabasca territory.

Whatever Pond's hopes had been for Congress' support of his

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exploration, he found himself thrown back upon that single North West Company share as his last hope. It was the only deal he could make. For above everything else, the illiterate, practical fur-trader wanted to get back to the Athabasca country. The company would finance his return and as a partner, even one with a single share, he would have scope for his explorations.

From their very first year of operations, the partners of the new North West Company realized that without the government's support their hoped-for monopoly was considerably less than fact.

Among the canoes setting out for the northwest in the spring of 1784, Simon McTavish and his nephew had seen several belonging to the partnership of John Gregory and Normand McLeod, who did business in both Montreal and Detroit. William McGillivray had been specially interested in this independent partnership which was also breaking from tradition and had that season engaged as clerks two young Highland Scots cousins, Alexander Mackenzie and Roderick McKenzie. McGillivray spent his second winter in the interior, trading in competition with the latter at Lac des Serpents, near Isle à la Crosse. Later McKenzie recorded the meeting of the two young men, each in his early twenties:

"On my arrival here I fixed on a place for winter . . . In the interval W. McGillivray appeared well determined for opposition. His order, he said, was to place himself alongside of me, but he observed that he did not approve of the situation I had selected, and he was informed of a much better one not far distant, and suggested that it would be for our mutual good if I would accompany him to this place, which I without hesitation agreed to do, and in a few hours we reached our proposed destination, in the vicinity of a small river which promised a plentiful fishery."

That winter gave McGillivray many opportunities for piecing together the activities of the firm of Gregory, McLeod and

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Company. Peter Pangman and John Ross, omitted from the North West Company agreement of 1784, had joined this smaller outfit which already had several trading-posts throughout the northwest in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company as well as the Nor'Westers. Pangman himself was at Gregory, McLeod's Fort des Prairies; Alexander Mackenzie was on the Churchill River as a bourgeois in opposition to McTavish's partner, Patrick Small, and John Ross was in the Athabasca country near Pond, back again in the North West Company. But the Gregory, McLeod people, though aggressive, were ill equipped to compete with their much stronger opponents. In 1785 they had in the northwest only eight canoe-loads of goods, containing some eight thousand gallons of rum, and ninety men. That year the Nor'Westers had sent inland twenty-five canoes manned by two hundred and sixty experienced men, with sixty thousand gallons of rum, their trade goods worth four times that of the smaller outfit. The resulting competition was bad for each of the companies as well as for the independent traders, and only the natives profited by the several-sided struggle. Worst hit was the Hudson's Bay Company whose servants, nicknamed "potties" or small measures by the Nor'Westers, suffered countless handicaps because their employers provided them with no rum at all for trade with the natives. The combined rum of the two Montreal firms and the independent traders forced William Tomison to accuse Pangman of being "a saucy Insolent man", and to send a letter on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company to the "governor of Canada . . . hoping Your Excellency will make such regulations as will preserve posterity and not be destroyed by fiery double distilled Rum from Canada".

Throughout the northwest the three companies provided the natives with all the advantages of competitive prices, to their own disadvantage. Alexander Mackenzie at Isle à la Crosse found Patrick Small a formidable competitor. Before the winter was over, he sent instructions to his cousin Roderick at Lac des Serpents, advising him generally "Should opponents come alongside you, you must do as they do", and specifically to keep on

the watch for "Mr. McGillivray's interpreter, as he is a very keen, insinuating fellow".

By that time William McGillivray himself had acquired considerable practical knowledge of the fur trade from Small, as well as finding much in common with his uncle's partner. With an Indian wife and two little half-breed girls, Charlotte and Nancy, Small had achieved a semblance of civilized home life in the interior. That autumn, at Lac des Serpents, the young clerk followed his bourgeois' example, and when his Indian girl bore his first son, named the child Simon for his uncle; later, he was to name his second son Joseph for Mr. Frobisher.

McGillivray, like Roderick McKenzie, expected to spend his third summer (1787) inland, on a branch of the fur trade as essential as the actual bartering of pelts. His instructions, received by letter the previous year from Grand Portage, were to proceed to the buffalo prairies south of the Upper Churchill River to trade pemmican. But first, he was to take out his winter's trade, meeting Small at Isle à la Crosse, from where Small would take the canoes east. Roderick McKenzie had likewise been instructed to meet his cousin-bourgeois at Isle à la Crosse, and in his journal wrote an account of his trip with McGillivray:

"In the spring after the trade was over, my neighbour and I, after comparing notes, agreed to travel in company to our respective headquarters, where our canoes arrived side by side, the crews singing in concert. Notwithstanding the surprise the chorus caused, we were both well received at the waterside by our respective employers. McGillivray and I lived on friendly terms ever after."

Small left for Grand Portage with the North West Company canoes, followed not long after by Alexander Mackenzie, each bourgeois leaving his clerk with instructions for the more remote competitors, Pond and John Ross, due down from the Athabasca country. But in contrast with the amicable relations between

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McGillivray and Roderick McKenzie, tragedy had again struck in Pond's territory; Ross had been killed during the winter in a scuffle with some of Pond's men.

The two young rival clerks pieced together the accounts brought down by the opposing brigades, aware that two men of more divergent character than Pond and Ross could scarcely have met in the wide, lonely spaces of the northwest. Though there had been a series of disagreements, and the fatal scuffle had occurred over some fish nets, Pond must above all have resented the presence of an opponent in the rich territory he had discovered. The situation was so serious that McGillivray and McKenzie persuaded others in their respective outfits to go to the prairies for pemmican; they must take word of Ross' death to Grand Portage, hoping to arrive before their employers had left the depot. Each was aware of the possible effect of this second murder with which Pond's name was connected, not only on the North West Company but on the entire northwest fur trade.

The great inland depot was still teeming with activity when they reached sight of Lake Superior. To the two young men coming down the portage trail from the wilderness, the cluster of buildings owned by the various fur-trading concerns looked like a metropolis. But McGillivray had little thought for noticing improvements made during his three-year absence by his uncle's concern or by their competitors. He went at once to McTavish with word of Ross' death, while Roderick McKenzie took the news to his employers.

At first the word of Ross' murder roused all the bitterness inherent in sharp competition. Gregory and McLeod accused the Nor'Westers of many acts of violence, each countered by similar charges against the "potties". But after the first recriminations were over each side faced the fact that continued opposition, much of it admittedly undisciplined, must eventually endanger the entire fur trade. And though Pond was associated with the stronger group, the firm of Gregory, McLeod was no match for the better financed, better manned and better

equipped North West Company. As Alexander Mackenzie admitted:

"We now found that, independent of the natural difficulties of the undertaking, we should have to encounter every other which they, who were already in possession of the trade of the country, could throw in our way, and which their circumstances enabled them to do."

The obvious course was coalition. A coalition would not only present a more nearly united front on behalf of the northwest fur trade when the causes leading to Ross' death were investigated at Quebec, but it would tend to achieve another much needed end, curtailment of the costs of competition.

By the summer of 1787, Simon McTavish had acquired a fourth share in the North West Company, having bought one of McBeath's shares. Now senior partner in the concern, he invited the gentlemen of Gregory, McLeod and Company to a meeting with the gentlemen of the North West Company then at the depot. McTavish could meet his colleagues and prospective colleagues with many advantages. Not only was he the largest shareholder, a man with more than ten years of experience as a merchant-trader and a promoter of outstanding success, but he was already noted for his commanding presence and shrewd and polished persuasiveness.

McTavish doubtless had discussed the stand to be taken by the North West Company with the partners present, and probably including the nephew whom he already was coaching for partnership. He could face the men around the table in the great hall with no sign of anxiety over the outcome of the inevitable trials against Pond or his men. They were to be offered a practical business agreement, and one based on the best terms McTavish could win from them. On that basis he suggested that the partners of Gregory, McLeod and Company should join the North West Company, assuming a quarter interest in the profit and losses of the enlarged concern. The smaller group accepted the offer, and agreed that the stock in

## GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT

the newly organized concern should be increased from sixteen to twenty shares.

Under the newly negotiated arrangement, McTavish held four shares. Three were set aside for Joseph Frobisher, whose brother Benjamin had died earlier in the summer. There would be two shares each for Patrick Small, Nicholas Montour and Robert Grant, with one share each for McBeath, Pond, Holmes and each of the surviving partners of the former Gregory, McLeod and Company: John Gregory, Normand McLeod, Peter Pangman and Alexander Mackenzie. The new agreement was to last for five years, until 1792.

In the space of eight years, Simon McTavish had risen to senior partnership of the North West Company which, but for the Hudson's Bay Company, now enjoyed a virtual monopoly of the known northwest.

### CHAPTER III

## *McTavish, Frobisher and Company*

Simon McTavish had written a letter to Joseph Frobisher in April, 1787, following the death of Benjamin, in which he had "put my thoughts on paper on purpose to give you an opportunity of weighing all the circumstances". Almost immediately he had had to leave for Grand Portage to look after his north-west interests. That business, together with all the details of union with the firm of Gregory, McLeod, had kept him thoroughly occupied for months. Back in Montreal in the autumn, he returned to the business proposed in his letter.

"Ever since the death of my worthy friend, your brother, I have been considering in what manner our business in the N.W. can be best managed, so as to keep up our present influence and interest in that country: for we may be well assured, the late unfortunate event will encourage those who wish to support Gregory in a Perseverance of the present opposition which I am afraid may be done with success in the end unless we take the most effectual steps to prevent it."

John Ross' tragic death, and the subsequent union had ended "the present opposition", but McTavish's suggestions were still valid. Since Joseph Frobisher was now alone, it would be impossible for him to attend personally to the business in Montreal as well as at Grand Portage. McTavish was in much

the same position. He could not manage the outfits and other Montreal detail and "go every year to the Portage, which is unavoidable for any person largely interested in that country". And since they together held "near one-half of the concern . . . I see no means so likely to support our consequences in that country as to join our Fortunes and names in a general co-partnership".

There were many factors in favour of such a step. By the "near one-half of the concern" McTavish referred to the seven North West Company shares held by himself and Frobisher to which, in the interests of control, they could add the two shares each owned by their winterers, Montour and Small—in all eleven of the entire twenty shares. Since McTavish was about to close out the balance of his Michilimackinac interests, those facilities could be used in a joint concern; these together with the combined credits of their respective English supply houses would put them in a position to carry on the proposed business on an extensive scale. As for his own affairs, McTavish had written, "they are so easily seen into that I can at any time join".

Frobisher had immediately approved of McTavish's suggestion, but though he had spent considerable time during the summer months trying to devise means of accepting it, he was embarrassingly short of capital. During the war he and his brother had speculated heavily in liquor, only to find prices slumped at the end of hostilities and themselves the loser by some £15,000 Halifax currency. He had, however, his shares in the North West Company and these, together with his well established offices and warehouses in Montreal, proved to be adequate security against obligations. To McTavish's great satisfaction, on November 19, 1787, his lawyer, Dummer Powell, drew up an agreement. A notice of the dissolution of the partnership of B. & J. Frobisher duly appeared in the *Montreal Gazette*, and Joseph Frobisher wrote to his friend John Blackwood, then at Quebec: "We admitted our friend Mr. James Hallowell to a certain share in the business by which

## THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

the House now becomes McTavish, Frobisher & Co. to take effect the first of January next". The business was to be conducted from Frobisher's counting-house, vaults and warehouses in Montreal.

McTavish, Frobisher's main capital—the total was some £25,000—was the partners' share in the North West Company which it dominated from the beginning, as Dummer Powell noted under the heading: "profits—N.W. Co.—Amt for 1787

|                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| B. & J. Frobisher:  | 6/16th—9251. 3. 2  |
| Sim. McTavish       | 5/16th—7709. 5. 11 |
| Jno Blackwood       | 3/16th—4625. 11. 7 |
| Geo. McBeath & Pond | 2/16th—3083. 11. 4 |

These were modest fortunes at a time when in Montreal beef sold at the equivalent of from 3 to 8 cents a pound; butter from 12 to 18 cents, and maple sugar, 4 cents a pound; potatoes were 40 cents a bushel; firewood cost \$2 a cord, and one could travel from Montreal to Quebec by calèche for \$15, plus provisions since there were few inns along the route.

The advantages of the union were soon apparent. Credit, always a major concern in the Canadian fur trade, became dangerously extended with each new territory discovered, because of the three or four years' advance necessary on most trade goods. Not only were McTavish and Frobisher now in a position to outfit their canoes for the following spring, but they could consolidate their northwest business. That year the firm bought Alexander Henry's remaining northwest interests, and leased the fur-trading rights of Rivière Tremblant and Portage de l'Isle. The leases were to bring the second of McTavish's close relatives into the North West Company; his cousin, Simon Fraser, was placed in charge of trade at both Rivière Tremblant and Portage de l'Isle.

The formation of the firm of McTavish, Frobisher coincided with an important year in Montreal's progress. Early during the fall of 1787, the town entertained its first royal visitor,

Prince William Henry, with fireworks on the Champs de Mars, presentation of the leading citizens and a great, glittering ball at the Château de Ramezay. Already the town was spreading beyond its walls, due to the great influx of United Empire Loyalists who had chosen to settle in business in Montreal rather than in villages or on farms along the St. Lawrence River or at Niagara. John Jacob Astor had recently leased a warehouse where he stored the pelts he bought from the Nor'Westers and various independent traders for resale in New York. And just about the time Simon McTavish and Joseph Frobisher dusted their signatures on their new agreement, nineteen French, Scottish and English citizens met to form one of the most exclusive social organizations the world has known, and one which was to exert considerable influence on the future of the entire colony. They called it the Beaver Club, and limited membership to gentlemen who had actually wintered in the Indian country.

No great changes had been possible for the North West Company during or following the summer in which the two rival groups had united at Grand Portage. Most of the outfits had already been sent off or were about to leave when William McGillivray and Roderick McKenzie brought down word of John Ross' death. That winter Patrick Small continued in the Churchill country, Pond was still at Athabasca, and Montour on the Saskatchewan. Peter Pangman, again a North West Company partner, and an experienced winterer, had set off at once for the Upper Saskatchewan Fort des Prairies. Alexander Mackenzie, only twenty-three, also now a North West Company partner, had taken the long trip to Lake Athabasca to winter with Pond. The latter had already announced his intention to devote his entire time to exploration and was to go down to Montreal the following year to give evidence in Ross' murder.

Setting out so late in the summer, and perhaps because he was in territory new to him, Mackenzie was not able to get all his canoes through to Athabasca before freeze-up. As a result the

territory was short of trade goods during the winter, even though some packs were hauled by sled from Lac la Loche, where his canoes had been stopped by ice. Fewer trade goods meant that less pemmican could be traded, and they must all depend on fishing more than ever for provisions. But Pond handled his men with great skill, persuading them to go out *en déroutine* to get pelts from the Indians in their camps, sending men north to winter at Great Slave Lake and southwest up the Peace River. As second in command young Mackenzie visited one sub-post after another until he was thoroughly familiar with the entire vast territory. When he was not trading and traveling by sled or snowshoe, he spent many an evening with Pond in the latter's snug log shack, listening to the veteran's endless talk about the rivers he hoped to explore.

Pond had dug and planted a small garden near his main post above Lake Athabasca. It was typical of his constant concern for food, of his development of caches of dried meat along the long route, and of his constant interest in prairie Indians far to the south who would trade pemmican for the trade goods, tobacco and rum he had brought laboriously all the way from Montreal. Without food there would be no pelts—and there was no food other than the meat or fish they could barter. Fish was often scarce and in any case fishing took hours of every day that could more profitably be spent on the fur trade.

By that time Pond was an old man in the fur trade. At forty-seven he was weary from the long, arduous journeys he had been making ever since he had left his Connecticut home thirty years before. He knew all the hardships—thousands of miles by canoe and portage in summer, plagued by heat, black-flies and mosquitoes; long, bitterly cold winter trips by snowshoe and dog team; close contact with unwashed Indians and, too often, hunger. He was handicapped by his lack of formal education and the preference of most of his fellow-partners for trade rather than exploration. Yet every new bend in every new river was a delight and a challenge to him. Because of his ceaseless questioning each newly met band of Indians added

to his knowledge of the country ahead, its animal and plant life. Always he was studying land and water contours. From first-hand experience he knew most of the known waterways north of the Mississippi and west of Montreal, and he longed to map them all.

Often Pond's hands were clumsy from cold as he worked at his rough maps by candlelight or the light of the fire. Many a time he had to thaw his frozen ink. As young Alexander Mackenzie watched and listened he realized that no one had a better grasp of the geography of the northwest than this man who had traded knives from the *gens du coteau rouge*, hoping to find through these copper Indians a way to the Northwest Passage, if not the Passage itself; who had talked with other natives coming from the mountains by way of the Peace River; who was fanatically convinced that only a few leagues separated Lake Athabasca from the Pacific Ocean and Captain Cook's River. But Pond's beliefs amused Patrick Small, his neighbour at Isle à la Crosse, so much that Small wrote McTavish about them, by the winter express: "I am quite surprised at the wild ideas Mr. Pond has of matters which Mr. Mackenzie told me were incomprehensibly extravagant. He is preparing a fine map to lay before the Empress of Russia . . ."

The extravagant ideas which had amused Small fired Mackenzie's imagination. By the same express—letters and despatches were carried by dog-sled and snowshoe once during every winter between the entire string of posts—Alexander wrote to his cousin Roderick about "some of my distant intentions, I beg you will not reveal them to any person, as it might be prejudicial to me, though I may never have it in my power to put them in execution . . ."

Like Roderick, Alexander had been undecided about remaining in the interior for another year. Whatever his plans at the time, he accompanied Pond east to Grand Portage when spring loosened the frozen streams, while Roderick went down with his bourgeois, Small.

## THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

As usual Simon McTavish had travelled from Montreal to Grand Portage in the spring following his agreement with Joseph Frobisher to preside at the annual meeting. But he was not relying only on his position as senior partner to maintain his growing control of the company. He already knew the relative position of each northwest post from Pond's rough sketch map. He had complete statements of the business of each department and his own estimate of each partner and clerk who faced him around the great meeting table. This summer, for the first time, the business of the North West Company could be conducted as he felt an expanding business should be conducted. And to McTavish few phases of fur-trade management were more important than meeting the various winterers over an evening glass of rum or Madeira before one of the great blazing fires in the mess hall. Many of his most shrewd appraisals of men and situations were based on those seemingly casual conversations. That summer at Grand Portage he found each man eager to discuss a common topic, the activities of the Hudson's Bay Company, a new development in the hitherto one-sided northwest trade.

The Hudson's Bay Company were building boats—they called them York boats—great, clumsy craft that brought howls of laughter from the skilled Canadian voyageurs when they saw them on the Saskatchewan River. York boats, the winterers said, were like the awkward Orkneymen who manned them; they had no grace, no soul such as a canoe had. The English were also imitating Pond's use of pemmican. They were building more inland posts, again copying the Nor'Westers. In the great hall at Grand Portage McTavish and his fellow-partners and clerks shared many a hearty laugh as they discussed the English. Not for a moment did they doubt their ability to meet the English competition, on the Saskatchewan or on the Churchill. And if the Hudson's Bay Company should attempt to invade the Athabasca Territory, well out of its chartered domains, the Nor'Westers knew how to win pelts: a little rum, perhaps a few inches of tobacco, an hour or two spent haranguing

the natives about the convenience of trading at Lake Athabasca instead of hauling their pelts all the way to Hudson Bay; it was all very simple and practical. The Chipewyans would surely fall for such wooing.

When the meetings ended, Alexander Mackenzie had been posted to the Athabasca to replace Pond during the latter's absence in the east. Though he was the youngest partner, he was placed in charge of the richest department of all, financed by the North West Company and guided by Pond's carefully collected information. Mackenzie also had his own dreams, and if he was to make those dreams come true, he would need a reliable, competent clerk. This time he asked that his cousin return with him as his clerk. But after six years in the interior Roderick had his heart set on a holiday, and at first he declined. It was then, and as a last resource, that Alexander told his cousin confidentially of his plan to undertake a trip of exploration the following spring. Roderick could not find it in his heart to discourage so ambitious an undertaking and agreed to return to the far northwest for a seventh season.

Fired with his plans, perhaps warmed by his cousin's generous co-operation, Alexander Mackenzie made the return trip to Pond's old post in a record fifty-two days. That winter he would live in Pond's house, while Roderick carried out the company's plans to build a new post on Lake Athabasca, Fort Chipewyan.

Fort Chipewyan was designed to have political importance as well as to be the depot for the ever-increasing Athabasca department. Not only would it impress the natives, but it would show the Hudson's Bay Company that the Nor'Westers were determined to hold the territory discovered by their partner, Pond.

So far the Hudson's Bay people had stayed clear of the Athabasca territory. That winter Mackenzie received a visit from Philip Turnor with instructions from his employers, the Hudson's Bay Company, to attempt to locate the boundary on behalf of the British government. Though the Nor'Westers had

received a request from London for co-operation in the project, the mere presence of an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company in Athabasca might be the thin edge of a wedge. But Turnor assured Mackenzie that his mission had nothing to do with trade, and certainly everyone stood to benefit from locating Lake Athabasca in relation to the 49th parallel. Reassured and eager to know the actual position of the new Fort Chipewyan, Mackenzie offered Turnor every facility along with the hospitality of the post.

Meantime Roderick McKenzie was getting on with plans for Fort Chipewyan, and devoting considerable care to the choice of a suitable site. After weighing the advantages of several, he "pitched upon a contiguous projection which advanced upon a league into the lake, the base of which appeared in the shape of a person sitting with arms extended, the palms forming, as it were, a point". It was a beautiful setting and would provide excellent fishing.

Alexander Mackenzie, the young bourgeois, proved during his first winter in charge of the Athabasca District that his fellow-partners had made no mistake in appointing him to take over from Pond. He, too, could manage the details of the fur trade of this ever-increasing territory, keeping an eye on the major project at the site of Fort Chipewyan. During the late fall he realized that Roderick, whose men were felling and squaring timbers for the new post, must have lost track of the time; by his reports Roderick was several days out. To bring him up to date, Alexander sent a perpetual calendar down north, along with a pair of warm mitts; the mitts, he hoped, would prove useful during the busy fishing season. But Roderick had discovered that a man had no use for mitts while hauling fish from under the early ice on Lake Athabasca. Alexander had instructed him to put by sufficient fish to feed his men for the winter—thereby curtailing the expense of costly trade goods for pemmican—and to do so Roderick had six nets in the lake, emptying them three times a day. Along with acknowledgment of the calendar and the mitts, Alexander received a note indi-

cating some of the hardships entailed in substituting fish for pemmican: "The fingers and wrists, while occupied in managing the nets and disentangling the fish from the meshes, must be kept constantly immersed to prevent their freezing."

But Alexander had more on his mind than managing the department and supervising his cousin's construction of the future "Emporium of the North". While he pressed and packed the winter's pelts as spring approached, his spare moments were all devoted to the plan he had confided to Roderick. As he wrote up the reports which he would send east by the canoes only stern self-discipline kept his thoughts from turning in the opposite direction. This summer Alexander would not himself head the brigade carrying the North West Company's furs east to Grand Portage. He was delegating that responsibility to his cousin who would meet William McGillivray at Isle à la Crosse. While the two young clerks were following the long route to the depot, the equally young Alexander Mackenzie prepared to set off in search of Pond's long-sought Northwest Passage.

"June, 1789—Wednesday, 3., We embarked at nine o'clock in the morning, at Fort Chipewyan, on the South side of the Lake of the Hills (Athabasca), in latitude 58.40 North and longitude 110.30 . . . The Crew consisted of four Canadians, two of whom were attended by their wives, and a German; we were also accompanied by an Indian, who had acquired the title of English Chief, and his two wives, in a small canoe. These men were engaged to serve in the twofold capacity of interpreters and hunters. This Indian was one of the followers of the chief who conducted Mr. Hearne to the Copper-Mine river."

Setting out with Mackenzie was North West Company clerk Le Roux, who would go as far as Great Slave Lake to trade with the natives there. On his first trip as an explorer Mackenzie took only such provisions and clothing as he thought would be absolutely necessary, together with arms and ammunition for defence and hunting. He also carried presents to woo the natives

he might meet to friendliness or as guides where necessary.

As he already knew, probably from Pond and from enquiries of natives, the Slave River flows in two directions—into Lake Athabasca at spring floods, and out of the lake during the rest of the year. Mackenzie made a note of the phenomenon in his journal. Twenty-two days later he crossed Great Slave Lake, still so choked with ice in late June as to cause him considerable trouble in finding the outflow to the north. The weather was bitterly cold; the only time the party saw moon or stars was during a brief eclipse of the moon. At last, however, he was on a great strong-flowing stream. Was he actually on the last lap of the legendary Northwest Passage? As Pond would have done, he cached several bags of pemmican for the return journey.

The great river flowed west, northwest, the first large stream he had travelled that did not flow east. Its current moved swift and strong. Another large stream came in from the west, the Liard. Next, Mackenzie passed the outflow of the North Nahanni. Soon, surely, the main stream would swing west. But now the Rockies were on his left flank, snow covered and shining during the hot July mid-day sun. He was travelling north and not west as he had expected. Eventually the last beaver meadows petered out, beyond where the Great Bear River flowed in from the east; he saw no further promise of a rich harvest in pelts. Passing through the great ramparts, he had thought the frail canoe would be dashed to pieces. Now it seemed a mere chip on the ever-widening river, surely the largest river in the world. The few Indian tribes encountered gave way to sparse tribes of Eskimos. And always, day after day, Mackenzie fought an unspoken, growing conviction that this way would never lead to the warm Pacific. Five weeks after leaving Fort Chipewyan, he beached his canoe on a low shore in a great, wide estuary. He had reached tide-water.

He was over four thousand miles from Montreal: "Athabasca is 2750 miles to the north west of Montreal. The distance from (Athabasca) to the North Sea . . . by the lake and Mackenzie's

River is 1540 miles". Great cakes of ice dotted the bitterly cold water. Though the young explorer stayed awake through the first night, the sun did not set.

Mackenzie took care not to discuss his innermost apprehensions with his voyageurs, trusted and experienced men though they were. He knew, even before they begged him to return, that they had no joy in his discovery. Winter might come any day and catch them without food. They were terrified when they paddled the canoe close to what they thought to be a strange little island, only to find it was actually a whale which almost swamped their canoe before they could get away. More than once, after the first excitement of reaching the estuary, he had to bolster his men's morale and doubtless his own with a regale of the pitifully small supply of rum. By sheer will power he persuaded them to stay for ten days, during which he made observations and studied the estuary and its islands. But not even a further regale could keep them there another day after the night when spring tide swamped their tents and blankets. Bitterly heartsick, Mackenzie gave the order to return. He had not found a way to the Pacific. All he had discovered was what he called "The River of Disappointment".

The trip homeward quickly became gruelling. Now no hopes of great discoveries lightened the hardships, no prospect of new, rich fur-trading territory. The men had to track mile after weary mile against the current, their arms in harness while they hauled the canoe along rough stretches of slippery, rocky shore. Almost all the way to Chipewyan the going was back-breaking and slow; more than once the trip was delayed when a man was overcome with exhaustion. For Mackenzie himself each mile as he sat hunched in the canoe or trudged along the shore reminded him that there was no northwest passage by land north of Lake Athabasca. The upper part of the Mackenzie basin would yield more pelts for the fur trade; that seemed all there was to be said for the cruelly disappointing trek.

Roderick, back with the supplies from Grand Portage, welcomed him at Fort Chipewyan with affection and relief. He

noted the trip in his journal after the manner of practical men whose hard hands do not readily take up the pen or quill: "He performed his perilous undertaking to the Arctic Ocean, without experiencing any material accident, in about one hundred days".

The cousins spent that winter together at Fort Chipewyan. But for Alexander, tense with reaction and fatigue, even the comparative comfort of the new depot fell flat, and his only relief from the excitement of exploration lay in throwing himself into the details of the fur trade. Only the winter express with news of the various posts broke the routine, and when it arrived he had to force himself to be interested in Angus Shaw's account of further monotonous detail. Shaw, who had recently opened the post farthest west, at Lac Original, complained that his digestion suffered from a continuous diet of fish, and that he was having trouble keeping his men from mutiny. One he had had to fine for "grog drinking" and two others he was sending to Montreal "in irons for theft". But it was always that way with a new post, as Mackenzie well knew. Pangman was having similar difficulties far up the Saskatchewan. The details which would have interested him any other year were no match for the depression which lingered after the exertions of his trip to the Arctic.

When spring arrived Alexander Mackenzie was reminded that exploration and trade often conflicted. On his way down to Grand Portage he received a letter from Simon McTavish, and sent its contents back to Roderick, who again remained inland, in charge of Fort Chipewyan for the summer:

"We found a very severe letter here from Mr. McTavish, respecting the Athabasca packs of last year which were received in bad order partly owing, he says, to St. Germain and partly to us having left them without a proper person to conduct them, and desires that precautions should be taken against such a recurrence."

Only by such painstaking management had the company's business increased from an annual return of £30,000 sterling in 1787 to £53,000 in the space of six years. Perhaps his dis-

covery of this new river would prove to be more of a liability than an asset, for even if the Upper Mackenzie Basin did yield valuable pelts, the returns might be offset by increased cost of transportation, already over-extended.

Three days after his arrival at Grand Portage Alexander wrote Roderick by the Athabasca canoes: "My expedition was hardly spoken of, but that is what I expected".

The partners at Grand Portage had heard many accounts of new rivers. Only the discovery of potentially valuable fur-producing territory, or a practical trade highway to the Pacific would excite their interest. At the depot Mackenzie found every man as much concerned over a new company agreement about to be drafted as in a nine-hundred-mile river that flowed to the Arctic Ocean. They were at least as much interested in another item of news brought by him from Fort Chipewyan.

Philip Turnor had located the position of Fort Chipewyan. The North West Company's new depot was not only far to the north of the 49th parallel of latitude and the unexplored boundary between the United States and British territory, but it was also located at 115' west longitude. It was not, as both Pond and Mackenzie had hoped, within a few leagues of the Pacific Ocean. The information had shown Mackenzie, and most of his fellow-partners, that finding a way to the Pacific was a far greater challenge than he or Pond had anticipated. It was a greater disappointment than Pond could bear. Worn out with his exertions before he was fifty, there was now no chance that he would fulfil what had become the goal of his lifetime; he would never reach the Pacific. Though the murder charges against him and his men had been dropped, due both to uncertainty over jurisdiction and lack of evidence, all his hopes were dead. Nothing remained for him in the northwest. A disillusioned, broken man, he sold his share in the North West Company to William McGillivray for £800 and left the fur trade forever.

The North West Company never had a charter. Every few

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years its partners, varying from time to time, drew up a new agreement, sometimes at Montreal, sometimes at Grand Portage. Since some winterers did not come out to Grand Portage every year, and would not have the opportunity to consider terms and vote on them in less than two years, the agreement due for acceptance in 1790 had been discussed during the previous summer. One of McTavish's first announcements to the partners and winterers gathered round the table that summer was official notice of the formation of the firm of McTavish, Frobisher. With quiet jubilation, he heard them agree—they even made it the very first clause of the new agreement—that “McTavish, Frobisher & Coy shall do all the business of this concern at Montreal and import the goods necessary for the supplies, charging 5% at the bottom of the invoice . . .” The partners agreed to allow McTavish, Frobisher interest at 5% on all imports, 4% to cover running expenses, chiefly wages and provisions, and 6% for all advances other than imports.

In the new North West Company agreement the number of shares was increased to twenty, of which McTavish, Frobisher held six, making it the dominant partner. Two shares each were now held by Nicholas Montour, Robert Grant, Patrick Small, John Gregory, Peter Pangman and Alexander Mackenzie. McTavish's nephew, a shareholder since his purchase of Pond's share, and Daniel Sutherland, a close friend of McTavish, held the remaining two shares. Each man bound himself to the terms of the contract under penalty of £5,000 for each share held.

At the end of the meeting they had agreed that McTavish, Frobisher should store and prepare all North West Company pelts for market, ship and sell them in London or elsewhere. McTavish, Frobisher would handle all the company's accounts, and act as bankers for such surplus funds as the shareholders might acquire, paying interest at the rate of 5%. Since the business had increased so greatly that it would be necessary for Simon McTavish to go more often to London, John Gregory and Daniel Sutherland were appointed to act as agents of

McTavish, Frobisher, conducting the business at Grand Portage. Neither was a partner in the firm of McTavish, Frobisher at the time.

One of the last items of business at Grand Portage that summer was of urgent importance to each winterer: a schedule of furloughs, in order of seniority. Alexander Mackenzie, as a tribute to his great discovery, along with receiving a share bonus, was elected to go out the following summer, the earliest possible furlough. In the meantime, he must again make the long trip to Lake Athabasca.

Often, on the way to Fort Chipewyan, at the post during the winter, and on his way out the following spring Mackenzie thought of his holiday. Preparing for it, he asked his cousin to find him a few souvenirs since it would be "unbecoming a Nor'Wester to appear below so unprovided in that line. Keep for me one of the small musk buffalo horns in its natural state. I think the skin of the buffalo will look curious. Try and procure a fawn robe or two".

He thought he wanted to go to England, and decided to discuss the trip with Simon McTavish. But when he reached Grand Portage McTavish had already left for Montreal with his old friend Patrick Small, now about to retire. It was another disappointment for Mackenzie, duly recorded in a letter to Roderick: "I am very sorry, because I am afraid I shall not be able to see the former in Canada. He left me a very kind note expressing a desire that I should make Mr. Frobisher's my home while in Montreal".

McTavish had indeed sailed for England when Mackenzie reached Montreal. By that time the explorer had finally made up his mind to go to England also. Discussing his plans with Joseph Frobisher and John Gregory, in charge of the firm during McTavish's absence, he told them of his wish to improve his education and see about better instruments. "The request being so laudable," Gregory wrote McTavish in London, "we did not hesitate upon it but upon these conditions that he be out in the spring, time enough to sett out with me" for Grand Portage.

In London McTavish found himself harassed; in addition to business he had his own personal affairs and those of his colleagues. The details of buying trade goods, selling pelts and arranging credits were enough to occupy his full time. But he must also see that his nephew Duncan was getting a well-rounded education, so that he would be fitted for the firm in Canada, and there were endless commissions from his partner. Frobisher had asked him to escort his son Ben to England and to place the boy in a good boarding-school; he wanted copies of the *Courrier de Londres* sent out regularly, and the latest work on the French Revolution, in French. And surely, wrote Frobisher, McTavish could give him first-hand news of the war "at this critical juncture . . ."; Mackenzie had brought over a small trunkful of patterns for strouds which must be made up for the northwest trade. Each packet brought letters from Frobisher which must be answered, along with complaints that Hallowell and Gregory were not showing him the deference warranted by his experience and position. Equally disturbing to McTavish were Frobisher's letters about the North West Company's first shipment of furs to Canton. This venture had been backed by Henry and John Jacob Astor, and news received in New York from Canton suggested that prices in the Far East were currently low. More than once McTavish would have been desperate had not prices remained comparatively good in London in spite of the French Revolution.

To handle all the details demanding his attention and to free himself to direct the policies of the concerns which he headed, McTavish realized that he must have competent help in London. At the time his cousin John Fraser, who was familiar with the needs of the Canadian trade and had good connections in London, was temporarily out of business. Soon the Montreal promoter headed yet another company, McTavish, Fraser of London. Relieved of local detail and with formal connections in London, he felt himself in a position to look into another side of the trade which had been causing him some concern: the long overland haul by way of the Ottawa River, increased

by each new extension of territory, was placing the North West Company at a grave disadvantage with the Hudson's Bay Company's shorter route.

By this time McTavish knew his way about London, and had several influential friends. He was able to arrange for an interview with England's Prime Minister, William Pitt.

McTavish well knew that the Hudson's Bay Company's 1670 charter provided not only a monopoly of the territory drained by rivers flowing into Hudson Bay, but exclusive use of the Bay itself. He requested that the Prime Minister cancel these rights. To support his request he pointed out that the Hudson's Bay Company was not living up to its original undertaking to conduct extensive explorations, such as the North West Company was doing without any special privilege whatever, indeed with considerable handicap since they were denied use of Hudson Bay.

Pitt talked about the powerful little coterie who were the committee in charge of the English company's affairs, and was obviously far more familiar with the problems of the English concern than those of the Montrealers. As for the charter of the Hudson's Bay Company, that, he told the colonial promoter, could be cancelled only by an Act of Parliament.

McTavish had no time to linger in London lobbying an Act of Parliament. But he would make one more attempt. He made another call, this time at the London headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company itself, with an offer on behalf of the North West Company to lease transit rights through the Bay.

Following its trouncing in Hudson Bay by the French Admiral La Perouse, the chartered firm's dividends had dwindled, but they were now somewhat improved. McTavish's offer was firmly rejected. The only course left was to do what he could to increase the efficiency of the present route.

Back in Montreal he found that the North West Company was having to pay an ever-increasing cost for its success. John McGill, now in the lumber business, was casting envious eyes on their trade currently "gaining nearly £3000 p. share". Alex-

ander Henry, as well as the China venture with Astor, was backing a little free trade in the Nipigon territory. The westward settlement which McTavish had anticipated in the United States following the war had forced various southwest traders to look to the northwest. Two of them, George Leith and John Richardson of Detroit, had already sent trial ventures beyond Grand Portage.

It was the sort of situation on which McTavish thrived. To meet the challenges, the North West Company soon had a small fleet of boats on the Great Lakes, including two of twelve and fifteen tons on Lake Superior; the 45-ton sloop *Beaver* and the 40-ton *Athabasca* ferried supplies between Detroit and Mackinac and Sault Ste. Marie. Though the Ottawa River was still the shortest and best route for the fur canoes, the Great Lakes had long since proved to be a faster and more economical route for shipping heavy trade goods, especially since the Nor'Westers had improved the Niagara portage road. Beyond Lake Superior plans for developing Lac la Pluie post as a depot for the Athabasca trade were put into effect. Fort Chipewyan became an advanced depot for the Mackenzie River country and such territory as might be discovered towards the Rocky Mountains; it also came to be known as the Athens of the north because of the little library of books collected there by Roderick McKenzie and the partners and clerks. Joseph Frobisher had become increasingly interested in his work as a member of the Legislative Council at Quebec and McTavish missed his constant and close support. But there was compensation in the hope that Frobisher might use his influence in the matter of a canal to be dug between Montreal and Lachine; and young William McGillivray was becoming just such an able and congenial assistant as his uncle might have wished.

Now a partner in the North West Company and soon to join the firm of McTavish, Frobisher, McGillivray kept his uncle well informed by letter concerning the inland trade. To McTavish's great delight, his nephew represented the affairs of the Nor'Westers in the interior in a manner that must inevitably

MCTAVISH, FROBISHER AND COMPANY

come to the attention of the Hudson's Bay Company committee. Recalling his rebuff in London, McTavish glowed with pride as he read the copy of a letter written by McGillivray to William Tomison and delivered to the latter's Hudson's Bay Company post on the Saskatchewan River.

Tomison's truculent behaviour had often irritated various Nor'Westers in the interior, and it was time someone should deal with him in appropriate terms. On every count William's handling of the matter was pleasing to McTavish, and one paragraph seemed to even many scores:

"I am no stranger to the opinion you have always entertained of all those who had traded in the country by way of Canada but it is well your surmises are not facts . . . I don't think the high sounding title your employers have obtained by their charter gives them the right to look down on other people by themselves or their servants. Were it such a desirable thing to become one of them and all at once honorable, it would require no great interest to buy enough shares even to entitle a man to vote in the deliberations of the committee . . .

Your most obedient servant,  
W. McGillivray.

P.S. I would not have answered your letter myself, but I do not think it of consequence enough to merit any consideration from the gentlemen of the Company at the Great Carrying Place."

## Overland to the Pacific

By the early seventeen-nineties, the fur trade was rapidly building a new Montreal. Already there was considerable talk of tearing down its high, crenelated wall. The several gates, once a source of reassurance when they could be locked against predatory Indian bands, now handicapped expansion of old and new places of business and restricted the movement of carts and calèches to the suburbs spreading toward the mountain and to east and west of the old port. Some of the new houses were being built by United Empire Loyalists. Most, and certainly the most lavish, belonged to the fur-traders who were retiring in comparative affluence on their profits made in the interior.

Several retired fur-traders had bought seigniories in the surrounding country, equipping them with furniture and silver brought in by the ships coming into the port for furs. Among these was Peter Pangman, who had made the prairies and the Upper Saskatchewan his chief sphere and who in 1790 had pushed farther west than any white man; he had marked the feat by cutting his initials and the year into a great pine within sight of the Rockies and near the location of one of the important North West Company posts soon to be built, Rocky Mountain House. Pangman's seigniory, Lachenaie, had belonged to the LeGardeur family. There at Mascouche Pangman assumed the title of seignior for himself and his family, and settled to the life of a gentleman of means.

There were others, less famed—Normand McLeod and the fiery William Holmes, among them. Joseph Frobisher's winterer, Nicholas Montour, bought the seigniorie of La Pointe du Lac, where he built a new house in what he called the "Middle Ages style". Montour was later to represent the county of St. Maurice in the Legislative Assembly.

McTavish's winterer, Patrick Small, had retired to England to join his fur-trade fortune with that of his uncle, General Small, but his present partner, Joseph Frobisher, had no thought of leaving the town beside the St. Lawrence. Using part of the dowry from his wife, Charlotte Joubert, and his own growing fortune, Frobisher was enlarging Beaver Hall, partly to be able to entertain other members of the Legislative Assembly who might visit Montreal.

Beaver Hall was already noted for its generous hospitality. Completed, the huge log house measured eighty feet long by thirty-six wide, and was covered by sawn board. It stood in the centre of some forty arpents of land on Coteau St. Louis, with a row of Lombardy poplars and the mountain for a backdrop, and a splendid view of the town and river below. Behind the house the orchard was already yielding barrels of the fine Guy and Bourassa apples which the stocky Yorkshireman delighted in giving to his friends. A great sweeping driveway brought carriages and calèches from the town itself, crossing St. Martin's Creek before climbing Beaver Hall Hill.

Among the affluent fur merchants who were changing the town with their places of business and houses, Simon McTavish was probably the wealthiest. Ever keen to further the fortunes of his clansmen, McTavish not only had the satisfaction of knowing that his cousin, Simon Fraser, was now a partner in the North West Company, his nephew William McGillivray about to join the firm of McTavish, Frobisher, but that another nephew Duncan McGillivray had just arrived to enter the fur trade.

For several years he had rented a house at 2327 St. Jean Baptiste Street for use during his brief stays in Montreal. It

had been new when he first occupied it, a stone house built in the pleasant prevailing English style, with stables and out-buildings which included an ice-house of generous proportions and a small garden. There Duncan McGillivray spent his first winter in the colony before embarking on further education as an apprentice in the North West Company.

Duncan was one of many young men from the Highlands of Scotland to enjoy a winter in Montreal's still isolated but increasingly gay society. After from five to seven years' apprenticeship he, like other successful clerks, could expect a partnership, probably as a winterer. Indeed, to protect the prospects of clerks, a clause in the latest agreement stipulated that shares could not be disposed of except by consent of a majority of the partners, and then only to experienced clerks in the concern. McTavish's young nephew, following his brother William, had every reason to anticipate a successful career; but first he must learn the trade along with all the other clerks, receiving each year £100 and his clothes and provisions. Started on the ladder the young man must make his own way, for McTavish himself was about to embark on his most romantic adventure.

The richest man in Montreal was now forty-three. Though he had had little time to consider marriage, he was at last planning a real home of his own, an idea prompted by the sudden realization that his old friend Charles Jean Baptiste Chaboillez had a very lovely daughter.

Marie Marguerite Chaboillez was, in the words of a visitor to Montreal "one of the most beautiful women I have ever met". Though she was not yet eighteen, McTavish would be following the precedent set by many of his colleagues who had married young French girls. During the winter of 1792-3 he spent considerable money on improving the house on St. Jean Baptiste Street, including £300 for furniture. He bought a new batch of music, a long list of earthenware and crockery, and household linen. New carpet was laid all over the house. When he found a vintage that pleased him, McTavish laid in quantities of fine wine, particularly the Madeira he enjoyed. And on October 1,

1793, his marriage contract with Marie Marguerite Chaboillez, "a young lady with a plum", passed before notary De Lisle. Because the bride was still a minor, one of a large family of two sons and seven daughters, and because her father was absent from Montreal, doubtless on his extensive fur-trade interests, Marie Marguerite's mother signed the marriage contract. The ceremony was performed by the minister of the new Scotch Presbyterian church which most Nor'Westers supported, but McTavish in common with friends who had also married French girls, maintained a pew in the French church for his young wife.

Soon after his marriage he bought the house on St. Jean Baptiste Street for £1,650, and in no time the house was as famous for its hospitality as was Beaver Hall. Every visitor, winterer or proprietor of the North West Company, townspeople and guests in Montreal, remarked on young Mrs. McTavish's charm and beauty. They were a striking couple when they appeared at the town's first theatre, the "Marquis" as McTavish was often called, in his long coat with fur tippet and muff and his wife in costly furs. They were entertained in the new houses recently built by some of the hundreds of United Empire Loyalists who had settled in the town as well as by fur-trade friends. They went to suppers and balls and dinners where everyone in that brief era spoke French and English.

That winter McTavish's name was suggested for the Legislative Council by both Governor Lord Grenville and Lieutenant-Governor Sir Alured Clarke. But he had to forgo the honour and responsibility. The expanding business needed his attention in London and by the recent agreement McGillivray was to replace him at the meetings at Grand Portage. Before leaving for England in the spring of 1794 he arranged that a new kinsman, Marie Marguerite's young brother Charles Chaboillez, should join the North West Company as a clerk. And then he took his wife on her first trip to England.

John Fraser had so much business demanding McTavish's attention as soon as they arrived that the Montreal promoter

could scarcely enjoy a brief holiday without interruptions. "I did not intend troubling you so soon again much less interrupting your happiness," wrote Fraser while Simon and Marie Marguerite were holidaying at Brighton. But after a few busy weeks McTavish was able to leave many of the details to Fraser while he went about plans for realizing another dream. That year he made a point of paying his respects to the chief of Clan McTavish in Scotland, accompanied by his lovely young wife. The chieftain made a note of the occasion:

"A kinsman of mine who has lately made his appearance in England with an immense Fortune, acquired in the wilds of North America, has put upon me to take out Arms—To entitle me, however, to supporters, to which as Chief I certainly have Right, it will be necessary to trace myself up to the Root."

As a result of the timely suggestion, and as a kinsman, Simon McTavish won permission to use the armorial bearings of the chief of Clan Tavish for himself and his family. But the visit was to bring much greater rewards. Simon took a fond liking to the chief's young son, a bonnie lad and his cousin surely, since every Scot is kinsman to the chief of his clan. Before leaving, he suggested that when the boy John George was old enough, he should start him in the North West Company.

While Simon McTavish was in the old country William McGillivray, accompanied by his brother Duncan, went up to Grand Portage to conduct the season's business. Already there were rumours at Montreal that Alexander Mackenzie had completed another great trip of discovery. The winter express had brought letters, but no real account of the event could be known until Mackenzie himself reached Grand Portage. It was a momentous occasion for young Duncan to arrive for his first visit to the inland depot with Alexander Mackenzie coming down the portage trail bringing the story of his second and greatest discovery.

Mackenzie had returned to Fort Chipewyan after his visit

to England, equipped with further training and improved instruments and a stubborn determination to find a way to the Pacific Ocean. Again the North West Company would finance his explorations, and again his cousin Roderick, though still longing to quit the fur-trade country, would remain at Chipewyan in charge of the department during his absence.

This time Mackenzie planned to winter far up the Peace River to be able to start as soon as the ice went out in the spring. He now felt certain that the Peace must provide a route to the Pacific, for the natives assured him that it flowed from far back in the mountains to the southwest. The trade arranged for the season, he left Roderick at Fort Chipewyan. Paddling up the Peace to its confluence with the Smoky, he chose a site for his camp in the valley and on the bank of the larger stream. As he and Peter Pond had done earlier, his first act was to get in touch with the natives who would barter pelts. Then he must spend long, precious autumn hours smoking with them and bickering over credits, winning their confidence before he could ask them about the streams that came from the mountains and beyond. Only after these essential preliminaries could he and his men set about building their winter shelters from trees which were already felled and squared into logs. The nights were bitterly cold in the thousand-foot-deep valley and the first stars bright at 4:30 in the afternoon when, on December 23, he finally moved into his own small log house surrounded by those of his men, each seventeen by twelve feet, and all surrounded by a log stockade.

Inevitably in the endless details of planning trade in his district that stretched from Great Slave Lake to Lake Athabasca and as far up the Peace as any white man had travelled, some items were overlooked. In January he had to send down to Fort Chipewyan requesting Roderick to send up a book from the remote depot's small library:

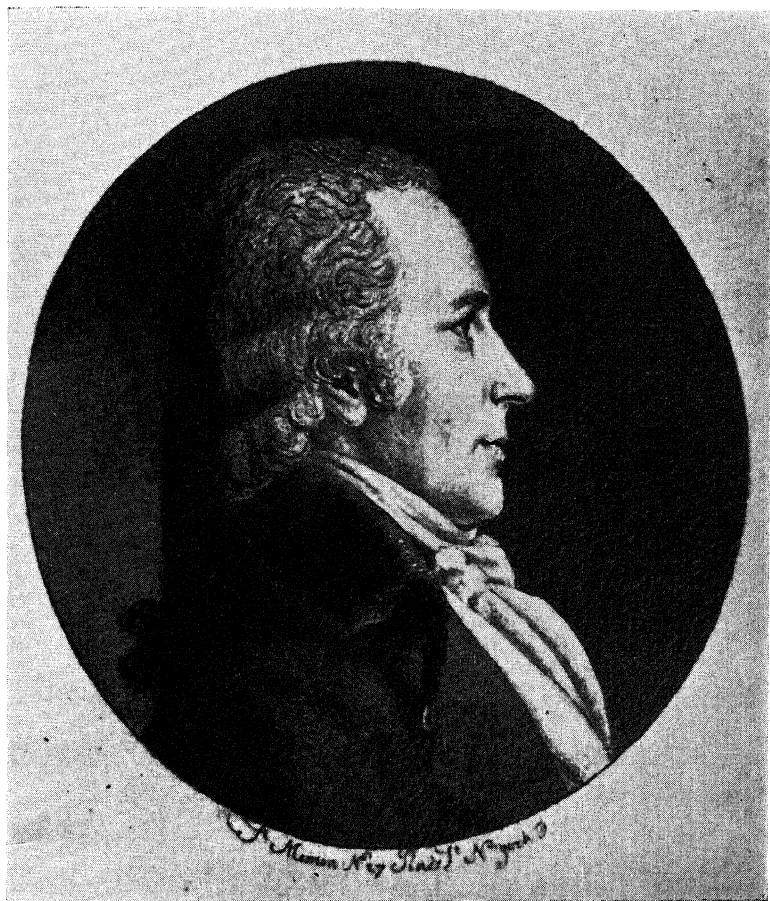
"I forgot . . . Atkinson's epitome of Navigation . . . and send me the sextant with all the quicksilver you have, as I have lost mine."

Deep in the valley of the Peace, where the great river banks seem like mountains themselves, he planned the trip he would commence in the spring. The Smoky, he knew, was the smaller stream. But where did the Peace come from? Where, too, could he find guides to take him through the deep mountain passes and among Indian tribes rumoured to be hostile and strongly armed? Would he ever get together a crew of men physically fit for the rigours of the trip, disciplined enough to follow him, willing to go? "I have great trouble to procure young men to accompany me in my expedition; none of them like it," he wrote to Roderick. But he was determined to make the attempt: "Should I be successful, I shall retire with great advantage; if not, I cannot be worse off than I am at present . . ."

Alexander, isolated in the little log shack at the meeting of the Peace and the Smoky Rivers in the winter of 1792-3, spent considerable time writing his cousin, perhaps thinking on paper, perhaps to give himself moral support; it was sheer folly, he commented, for a man to remain in such country and under such primitive conditions when he might enjoy life among civilized people, as he, surely, ought to be able to do.

During the winter and throughout the coming summer he would see no white men other than his own clerks and voyageurs. Like them, he relieved some of the monotony in the company of his Indian wife, who bore him a son, Andrew, eventually to become a clerk in the North West Company. He found many tasks among the natives: a young Indian suffered blood poisoning, and Mackenzie bled him, thereby saving his life; he amputated the gangrenous finger of another, and meditated over many a bloody fight, usually the result of the everlasting gambling to which the natives about the post were addicted. Doubtless to relieve the monotony and to get his thoughts away from plans for the projected trip, he wrote out an account of the popular native game known as *Platter*:

"The instruments of it consist of a platter or dish, made of wood or bark, and six round or square but flat pieces of metal, wood or stone, whose sides or surfaces are of different colours.



SIMON McTAVISH

From the portrait by St. Mémin  
Courtesy Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington



## OVERLAND TO THE PACIFIC

These are put into the dish, and after being for some time shaken together, are thrown into the air, and received again into the dish with considerable dexterity; when, by the number that are turned up of the same mark or colour, the game is regulated. If there should be equal numbers, the throw is not reckoned; if two or four, the platter changes hands."

Beaver and other pelts were very plentiful and by spring, through trade and by sending his men to native camps *en déroutine*, he had enough to load six canoes. These he pressed, ready to send down to Roderick who would take them on to Grand Portage. Carefully he wrote up all details of his department's business—the credits given to various tribes, the stocks on hand, the prospects for the next year's trade. If his expedition ended in disaster and he himself failed to return, the company's business would go on. And finally he wrote his own personal letters. To Roderick he sent a special note:

"Remember me kindly to those of our friends I do not write to, and plead my cause. I send you a couple of guineas, the rest I take with me to traffic with the Russians . . . may all happiness attend you! Adieu!

dear Roderick,  
Yours unchangeably,  
Alex Mackenzie."

He had already built his canoe for the trip—twenty-five feet long with a four-foot-nine-inch beam, the lightest craft that could carry ten men with their food and arms, as well as presents for Indian trade and Mackenzie's instruments—in all three thousand pounds. Before the craft was put into the water at seven in the morning of Thursday, May 9, 1793, his crew dropped to their knees in prayer for a safe return, and the two assistants left in charge of the post "shed tears on the reflection of those dangers which we might encounter on our expedition".

The magnificent Peace was flooding its deep, winding, coulée-cut valley that morning. But the canoe was so heavily

laden with essentials that Mackenzie's concern was for its seams rather than for the beauty of his highway. Even on the first day he had to stop while his men gummed a break, employing the time to shoot a deer for supper, and thus saving the precious wild rice and pemmican for use when no game was to be had. Often there was ice on quiet back stretches of the river when they set out in the morning, and because the season was so early floating ice made many stretches hazardous.

This trip, instead of being carried downstream as had happened on the Arctic trip, his men must pull against the current. Along the way, as at the confluence with Pine River, his experienced fur-trader's eye noted a good site for a future post, one in rich buffalo country; the Pine River site eventually became a Peace River Rocky Mountain House. As they penetrated deeper into the mountains, his men often had to track, sometimes hauling the canoe from the top of high cliffs far above the narrow, deep white water. Where possible they clung to the shoreline, but a single false step or the breaking of the rope might at any moment send the loaded canoe to instant destruction. And all the time they must be on the alert for great boulders rolling down from above, or treacherous stones loosened by their own feet.

But eventually he reached the forks of the river. So far he had merely followed the stream, perilous as that had been. Now he must decide which fork to take: the broad, inviting Finlay or the tortuous rapids of the Parsnip? His men urged him to follow the former, as did his own sense. But an old Indian had told him of a great river to be reached by way of the Parsnip. Had he picked up the passage to that stream by the Pack River he would have come to a carrying-place over to today's Fraser. Missing the Pack River, he passed into a small lake where he met a band of hostile Indians. With the experience of an old Nor'Wester Mackenzie brought out a few trade goods and a little rum, and won a much-needed guide.

As they reached the higher mountains, the nights became bitterly cold. The passes deepened and grew more rugged and

tortuous. Even inured to hardship as they were, carrying packs and the canoe often exhausted his men. Convinced that this route would never take them to the Pacific, they begged him to return, as his crew to the River of Disappointment had done. Mackenzie himself grew apprehensive and one day to steady his courage wrote out an account of the trip so far, sealed it in an empty rum keg and sent it off downstream. That day, as he usually did when the going seemed hopeless, he shared with his man "a kettle of wild rice, sweetened with (maple) sugar, along with the usual regale of rum".

When they reached the height of land, the Great Divide, he lost no opportunity to assure his men that they were now actually on the way to the Pacific. Now the streams flowed west; surely that must convince them that their trip must soon be crowned by success. Following stream after stream, they came at last to today's Fraser, which Mackenzie thought must be the Columbia. But never had he or his men attempted to travel so terrifying a river. The stream was so fast and dangerous that endless portages slowed them almost to a standstill. "The labour and fatigue beggars description", he recorded in his journal.

In spite of the hardships that each day threatened to end the expedition, Mackenzie followed the Fraser for over four hundred miles before turning back. He learned from natives that the river soon followed a southerly course. Still believing that he was on the Columbia, he calculated the distance from his present position to where he believed the Columbia reached the Pacific, and realized that he could not possibly travel so far and return in a season. Mackenzie was further handicapped through serious damage to his canoe, but a stop to build another would take more time than he could spare. His entire supply of bullets, on which the party depended for food and defence, had been lost at one of the rapids, and all he had was a small supply fashioned from shot.

Mackenzie, adding up all the handicaps, still determined to go on if at all possible. It was then that he met another of the many bands of natives roaming the valleys of the interior. From them,

he learned that the ocean due west was not really far distant. That day he made another of the succession of appalling decisions that were part of the trip, and cached the canoe. Striking west by a barely defined aboriginal trail, after seventeen days of exhausting travel through ever more lush undergrowth, he reached tide-water. He was perhaps two hundred and fifty miles from where he had left the canoe. Surely this time he was at the Pacific. But even then he was not within sight of open water. Borrowing a dug-out from friendly natives, he pushed on, only to be threatened by three dug-out canoes of hostile natives, who closed in on his single craft, brandishing their spears. It seemed as though they must all be murdered within sight of their long-sought goal. But once again Mackenzie's carefully hoarded trinkets came to his rescue. Though the hostile natives never became friendly, they ceased to threaten. Appeased by his gifts they told Mackenzie through his interpreter of white men from a great ship who had fired on their people and attacked them with swords. The explorer assured them that he had no such hostile intentions.

He was, he felt certain, not very far now from open water, since Captain John Mears, who had visited the Pacific Coast in 1790 had placed Nootka as far east as 126° W. longitude. He did not realize then how far north of Nootka he was. On July 21 he camped on a sloping rock lapped by Pacific water, though not actually in sight of the open ocean. Next morning he mixed a little vermilion in melted grease, and with it inscribed a brief memorial of his visit on the face of the rock. The words he wrote were: "Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three".

He was the first white man to cross the continent north of Spanish California, the first from Montreal. And he had no means of knowing that Captain George Vancouver was at that time exploring the many inlets of the same coast; nor that it was Vancouver's sailing master of the *Chatham* who but a month before had been near the very rock on which he took

his first, long, hungry look at the Pacific Ocean; that one of Vancouver's men had fired on the natives and so was responsible for their hostility.

There should have been a great burst of musket fire by way of celebration; Mackenzie could not afford the powder. There should have been a gargantuan feast, for there was plenty of food here; Mackenzie's men refused to prolong their stay. They could not forget the trip they had just made and must now retrace in fear and in weariness. They were terrified of the hostile natives along the way, fearful that they would be trapped in the mountain passes without food, to freeze to death during the winter.

Mackenzie took a long, last look at the goal of a thousand explorers before him. The Pacific Ocean could be reached overland. He had proven it. But the way he had come was no fur-trader's route. Canoes could never transport pelts over those formidable rapids, nor voyageurs carry packs through those tortuous defiles. He had discovered a passage to the Pacific, but it was another river of disappointment. Another man would find a more practical way, for he was convinced that there must be one. Without even seeing the Russians, though he had pushed a wedge between their territory and that held by the Spaniards far to the south, he turned his eyes away from the great goal.

The little party struggled back up the rough mountain streams, by the deep, barely passable defiles to the Great Divide. Glad to be even that far, they welcomed the east-flowing streams that would carry them to the little post at the confluence of the Peace River and the Smoky. From there the going was easy. On September 24, 134 days after leaving in the spring, Mackenzie and his men reached Fort Chipewyan again. Mackenzie noted the occasion in his *Voyages*:

"Here my voyages of discovery terminate. Their toils and their dangers, their solitudes and sufferings, have not been exaggerated . . . On the contrary, in many instances language has failed me in the attempt to describe them . . ."

The very fact of again resuming the life of a trader reminded

him that this trip too had been a commercial failure. Though to his men merely to be safely out of the forbidding mountains was cause for thanksgiving, Mackenzie was only partially pleased with the results of almost twenty thousand miles of travel, the approximate distance covered on his Arctic and Pacific trips. His satisfaction in being the first white man to reach the Pacific overland from Canada was spoiled by the knowledge that once again, to the fur trade, his discoveries were a costly failure. And he was physically exhausted. During the winter, while Roderick was temporarily away at one of the department's outposts, Alexander wrote him:

"What a pretty situation I am in this winter, starving and alone, without the power of doing myself or anybody else good! The boy at Lac La Loche, or even my own servant, is equal to the performance of winter occupation, and the profits, I am afraid will be so small during the war, that it will not be worth any man's while to remain in it."

Yet he did attempt to copy his journal, as he had promised himself and Roderick he would do. But that, too, proved to be a depressing experience. Whenever he sat down to his desk at Fort Chipewyan he was unable to concentrate. His thoughts rambled. Often he found himself walking the floor or looking out on the endless expanse of wind-blown snow. At times, forcing himself to recall the events of his two trips, every interruption became a welcome excuse for avoiding the task of putting them on paper; it was a relief to have to examine stores in the garret, to confer with men making canoes or pressing pelts. Seldom throughout the long winter was his mind at ease, and not often could he bend it to his will. If only he could look forward to Roderick's congenial companionship on the trip to Grand Portage in the spring the winter might be bearable. But even that comfort was denied him. Again Roderick was obliged to remain inland. Mackenzie went down without his cousin, expecting to meet McTavish at the depot.

He longed for the relief of a good talk with "the premier", as he had come to call the senior partner, but that, too, was

denied him. Out of touch with events due to his long trip, he learned at Grand Portage that McTavish was still in England and that William McGillivray was to preside at the annual meeting.

Mackenzie probably experienced difficulty in the actual telling of his accomplishment to his partners. He had reached the Pacific, but what words could convey the hardships of the trip? How could he make them understand the utter impossibility of the route for heavily laden canoes? Yet he was given a hearing which surprised him. Agents and partners congratulated him. They asked endless questions around the meeting table, over breakfast and at dinner and before evening fires in the great hall. He was rewarded by a further share in the company, and reminded that he had accomplished what the competitor Hudson's Bay Company had contracted, but had not bothered to do. Each man took pride in the fact that a partner of the North West Company had been the first to cross the continent from Canada, though each also knew that the trip, like that to the Arctic, had cost the company upwards of £1,500; and to the fur trade it had little economic value.

When the meetings at Grand Portage were concluded, William McGillivray and his young brother Duncan headed westward in light canoes. Mackenzie continued his way eastward. This time he travelled by way of the Great Lakes instead of the familiar Ottawa River route. At Niagara-on-the-Lake he paused long enough to call on John Graves Simcoe, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada; he felt the need to share his ideas and plans with some man in authority. Simcoe listened, and later passed on many of Mackenzie's comments in a lengthy report to the Committee of the Privy Council for Trade and Foreign Plantations in London.

Alexander Mackenzie, in Simcoe's opinion, was a man as intelligent as he was adventurous, and many of his suggestions were sound. The two great competing fur-trade concerns, the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies, should unite, and

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the trade of the northwest be shipped through Hudson Bay, using the incomparable Canadian voyageurs with their canoes and sleds in the interior. Mackenzie had also recommended that depots be developed on the Pacific coast, perhaps at the mouth of the great river recently discovered by Captain Cook. He thought a fleet of ships to carry on the trade by way of the Horn was essential if the fur trade was to continue to expand, with Canadians doing the actual bartering for, as the Russians had discovered, sailors were not fitted for such a specialized occupation. Mackenzie's final suggestion proved the extent to which he, and many of his fellow Nor'Westers, were interested in more than merely local trade: The East India Company, with a monopoly of the Chinese trade, would also find these depots useful, and "the diminution of the quantity of Silver sent to China in consequence of the increase of the fur trade would be a national advantage . . . The Hudson's Bay route may be of importance to Great Britain as a maritime Power, and possibly, in case of necessity, might be of consequence to the safety of Upper Canada."

Mackenzie's plan for combining the matchless skill and experience of the North West Company's personnel with the short route controlled by the Hudson's Bay Company, though forwarded to London by Simcoe, was apparently shelved. Having made his report to the lieutenant-governor, he had no energy to follow it through. But, bone weary as he was from the arduous life of a fur-trader-explorer, he took time in Montreal to pass on many of his ideas to Joseph Frobisher, and an account of the meeting at Grand Portage, as stormy as any he had known. He even found the energy to persuade Frobisher that the time had come for a new North West Company agreement, and to take the lead in drafting it. That accomplished, he sailed for England for a holiday.

The North West Company had already embarked on the maritime policy suggested by Mackenzie in his interview with Governor Simcoe. Two years previously McTavish, Frobisher

had entered into a partnership with Alexander Henry, and probably including Astor. By this agreement two vessels, the *Washington* and the *America*, were chartered to ship North West pelts to China by way of the Horn. Through the facilities of McTavish, Fraser of London a return cargo—yard goods, tea and semi-porcelain—had been purchased in Canton, and insured at £5,000. Not only had the North West Company reached the Pacific overland through Mackenzie's explorations, but it was now also making its way to the fabled western sea by water.

For a time the venture had caused its backers considerable concern. Even while Mackenzie was planning and actually undertaking his trip across the mountains, backers of the North West Company had waited anxiously for word of their investment. Would the ships survive possible attacks from the French; the fearful storms rounding the Horn; unforeseen hazards at sea or in the Far East? Just as he was about to sail from Portsmouth for Canada, McTavish was handed a letter from John Fraser suggesting another hazard, further possible loss of capital: "The coffee houses are in a hubbub, rumour has it that the Ireland fleets have been separated in a gale . . . the losses to our property will surely be fearful, perhaps as much as twenty thousand pounds . . ."

Arrived at Montreal, McTavish found near panic wherever he met men even remotely interested in the venture. James Hallowell, a partner of McTavish, Frobisher since 1791 and currently representing the firm in the United States, wrote that still no news from China had reached New York. John Blackwood of Quebec, who was later to join the partnership and who had invested money in the China venture, demanded of Frobisher by letter: "When may we look to an account of the Adventure to Canton?", to which appeal Frobisher could only reply that he feared they would all lose heavily.

But the cargo had arrived safely, and the good news roused interest in further ventures to the Far East. Letters between McTavish and his partners and other interested investors took on a happier tone. Not only did John Jacob Astor buy the

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return cargo of goods from Canton, but he and Henry negotiated the purchase of a large consignment of North West Company pelts shipped to London; pelts at the time still could not be exported directly to New York, but must go to London and be re-shipped. Henry, now joined in business by his nephew Alexander Henry the Younger, wrote McTavish that he and Astor would be glad to enter into any promising deal, "as him and me had been considerably connected in the fur & China Trade this several years".

Plans for the second venture to the Pacific by sea were much more ambitious than the original undertaking. The partners decided to look into the possibility of procuring goods from Bombay, by way of Canton, to the extent of some \$50,000. An eight-hundred-ton vessel was now chartered in New York, with a consignment of forty thousand beaver. The over-all cost of the venture, as estimated by Hallowell, was to be £279,894.

McTavish was behind each of the increasingly ambitious deals, working against the slow transportation and communication of the time, and handicapped by his ever-increasing travels. Now in London, he conferred with Fraser. Now in Montreal, he wrote endless letters to Hallowell, and went as often as he could to New York himself. Not all of his colleagues grasped the scope of the increasing business. Several who seldom left Montreal, save for trips to the interior or to Quebec, had little knowledge of the complicated details of the over-all business. They had no real understanding of McTavish's need for credits to keep their numerous deals moving. From London he had continually to write the Montreal house to send him all available bills. Over-cautious, his Montreal colleagues frequently let him down, till in desperation he wrote them:

"Really sires, I am quite confounded at such inconsiderate conduct on your part and was not everything at stake, I should not be sorry to see you suffer for your obstinacy . . ." Surely they must realize his need for all the bills they could supply, and without delay. It was unreasonable of them to doubt his ability to arrange credits in England. Were they not aware that his

many years of experience in London and his numerous well-established connections gave him a better understanding of the needs of the business abroad than they could ever have in Montreal?

McTavish was finding Frobisher, for whom he still retained the warmest affection, increasingly difficult. When he wrote the older man for details of the year's business, Frobisher was likely to reply with an account of some irrelevant matter—he would curse the day he joined with them if Hallowell and Gregory failed to defer adequately to him as "Principle of the House"—but no reference to the pressing current business.

McTavish had worries beyond those caused by his desperately needed credits and Frobisher's increasing years. The great extension of the business, overland and by sea to the Pacific, made control increasingly difficult. In 1794 a new problem was disclosed to him in a letter from Angus Shaw, a close friend who was soon to marry his niece, Ann McGillivray's daughter. Shaw was already a wintering partner, and wrote McTavish from Grand Portage.

There were numerous problems connected with the interior trade which required McTavish's personal attention, Shaw maintained. The winterers needed closer leadership. Some were disgruntled, as shown by a fairly wide disagreement over disposal of the share in the North West Company available since William McGillivray had become a partner of McTavish, McGillivray; several young and deserving winterers felt entitled to that share. "One more visit from you here would in my opinion be of great service to the concern in general," suggested Shaw. "For my part, I ardently wish it may happen . . ."

McTavish was in London when he received Shaw's letter. War in Europe was steadily complicating the profitable sale of pelts; loss of shipping was forcing insurance rates dangerously high both on the Atlantic and the Pacific. Word had just reached London of terrible war losses on the continent, the campaign had at last opened, and the French were said to have been beaten by the Austrians before Metz. How could he

possibly drop all the complicated reins he was holding in England, and return not only to Montreal but inland to Grand Portage? Yet there were personal as well as business reasons for making the trip. Marie Marguerite was homesick and worried over her sister Adelaide's serious illness in Montreal; William McGillivray had written suggesting that his aunt return to Canada if she wanted to see her sister again.

However, there was no advantage in returning to Canada until spring, in time to set off by canoe for the interior; and Adelaide's condition was not desperate. During the winter, McTavish lost no opportunity to collect every scrap of information he could get by letter about the situation referred to by Shaw. From that letter, and from talks he had had with Alexander Mackenzie recently arrived from Montreal, together with letters from other partners, McTavish realized that this was no minor disgruntlement.

The agreement of 1790 was to have come into effect in 1792, and to last until 1799. In 1791, too, there had been rumours of a new northwest opposition. Apprehensive that the Mississippi trade would be taken over by the Americans, Todd, McGill & Co. and the Henrys and the new firm of Forsyth, Richardson & Co. were not only casting envious eyes on the growing northwest trade, but McGill approached Joseph Frobisher with a suggestion that the North West Company increase its shares and take in these three firms. At the time Frobisher had told McGill that little could be done until after the 1792 meeting, but that the proposition would then receive consideration.

From the letters between the would-be North West Company partners and the principals in London and Montreal no one could doubt the interest in northwest trade. At one stage of the correspondence the name of the Henrys was omitted from probable new partnership, causing Alexander Henry the Elder to write immediately to McTavish; if any partnership was to be added to the North West Company, he certainly felt entitled to be included. William Grant, of Grant, Campion & Co. also made it clear that his firm wanted a part in the northwest

business. The pressure mounted throughout the winter of 1791-2. Frobisher wrote McTavish that unless steps were taken to include the aspiring partnerships, a formidable opposition would develop; it would be wise for McTavish, Frobisher to take them in and thereby secure the considerable profits from managing the increased North West trade. John Fraser, in London, agreed with Frobisher, and warned McTavish against "losing the laddle full for the lickings" since the latter believed that the North West Company could withstand any opposition the smaller firms might offer. In the end, the shares in the North West Company were increased to forty-six at the 1792 meeting, when a new agreement replaced the one negotiated in 1790.

Now McTavish, Frobisher—its partners then were McTavish, Frobisher, William McGillivray, newly appointed, and John Gregory—held twenty of the forty-six shares; Alexander Mackenzie held six, and the mooted opposition of the firms of Todd, McGill & Co., and Forsyth, Richardson & Co., had been scotched with two shares for each; two shares each also went to Montour, Sutherland and Shaw. The remaining ten were held singly, and among those holding them were the firms of Grant, Campion & Co., Robert and Cuthbert Grant, and Roderick McKenzie. The two other Grants—David and Peter—were omitted, and at once set up in opposition, outfitted by London and Montreal firms, and it was rumoured, with the connivance of Daniel Sutherland.

And then came the meeting at Grand Portage in 1794.

In London during the the following winter McTavish read first one account and then another of the differences that had troubled the meeting. The new small partnerships feared a slump in furs due to the war, and demanded that the North West Company retrench; but their real concern, Hallowell wrote McTavish, was their anxiety lest McTavish, Frobisher cut into their interests, especially in the still considerable Michilimackinac trade. Some winterers had resented the appointment of William McGillivray, newer in the trade than

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several others and less experienced, to the dominant firm of McTavish, Frobisher.

These were all matters that probably could be settled. The real cause of the disagreements at Grand Portage that summer of 1794 was the discontent of winterers. Unfamiliar with the hardships formerly endured by the men who had pioneered the northwest trade, they compared their life in the interior with the affluence now enjoyed by retired partners in Montreal and elsewhere. They wanted a larger share of the profits. Many complained that the trade goods received in the interior were inferior to those issued by the Hudson's Bay Company; the natives refused to trade for some of the strouds and guns, even with a bonus of rum. And many felt that McTavish was too inaccessible; when they wanted to discuss their problems with him, he was often in London instead of being at the rendezvous.

Some of the more disgruntled at Grand Portage had sought out Alexander Mackenzie with their grievances; Mackenzie, fresh from his heroic trip to the Pacific, would understand the hard lot of a winterer.

They had found the explorer sympathetic. During his brief stay in Montreal following his visit to Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe, Mackenzie had not only presented their case to Frobisher, but had suggested that extra shares be found for others who felt they had been slighted. He had recommended that Venant St. Germain, who was especially disgruntled, be given two shares in the Company. Extra shares should also be held for other winterers and clerks. In general Frobisher had agreed with Mackenzie's ideas including the suggestion that McTavish, Frobisher should assume half the risk in providing these new shares. The shrewd Frobisher in recommending these changes to McTavish pointed out that shares granted to clerks would at least eliminate their salaries. His letter to McTavish had been followed by the draft of a new North West Company agreement which reflected both Mackenzie's help and his views.

The only hope McTavish might have had of avoiding the long, inconvenient trip from London to Grand Portage would

have been to appoint his nephew to preside in his place. But William's partnership in McTavish, Frobisher was one of the causes of dissent; moreover, he would be entirely out of touch with events since the meeting of 1794. After chairing that meeting, William had set out with his brother Duncan for Isle à la Crosse. When he might have been of major service to the concern in Montreal, he was wintering with his Indian wife and his little half-breed sons. Since McGillivray would not reach Grand Portage prior to the opening of the meeting, and could receive no advance warning of the problems involved, McTavish and his wife sailed for Canada in the spring. Barely pausing long enough in Montreal to settle Marie Marguerite and his baby son and heir, William, in the house on St. Jean Baptiste Street, he took a calèche for Lachine and embarked on the familiar trip up the Ottawa.

Again McTavish was able to bring all his experience and finesse to bear. Near him around the large table sat his nephew William, back from the trip which he had probably taken for personal reasons, though McTavish himself had often forgone personal interests in favour of those of the concern. There was Angus Shaw, soon to marry Ann McGillivray's daughter; Simon Fraser, his cousin and a newly elected partner; young Duncan would soon be looking to partnership, together with several other clansmen who were already clerks. And then there were the wintering partners with whom he had worked for years, and some who were strangers; all were men on whom the fur trade depended. This summer McTavish sensed a new cleavage of interests between the winterers and the agents. It had happened before, but not with such bitterness. At no matter what mental and emotional cost to himself, and inevitably at some material sacrifice to McTavish, Frobisher, he must weld together the greatly divergent outlooks of the *pays d'en haut* and Montreal.

Again the winterers made clear their support of the firm of McTavish, Frobisher at the outset of the meeting; they approved the continuation of McTavish, Frobisher as sole agents of the North West Company. Nine partners were admitted, and some

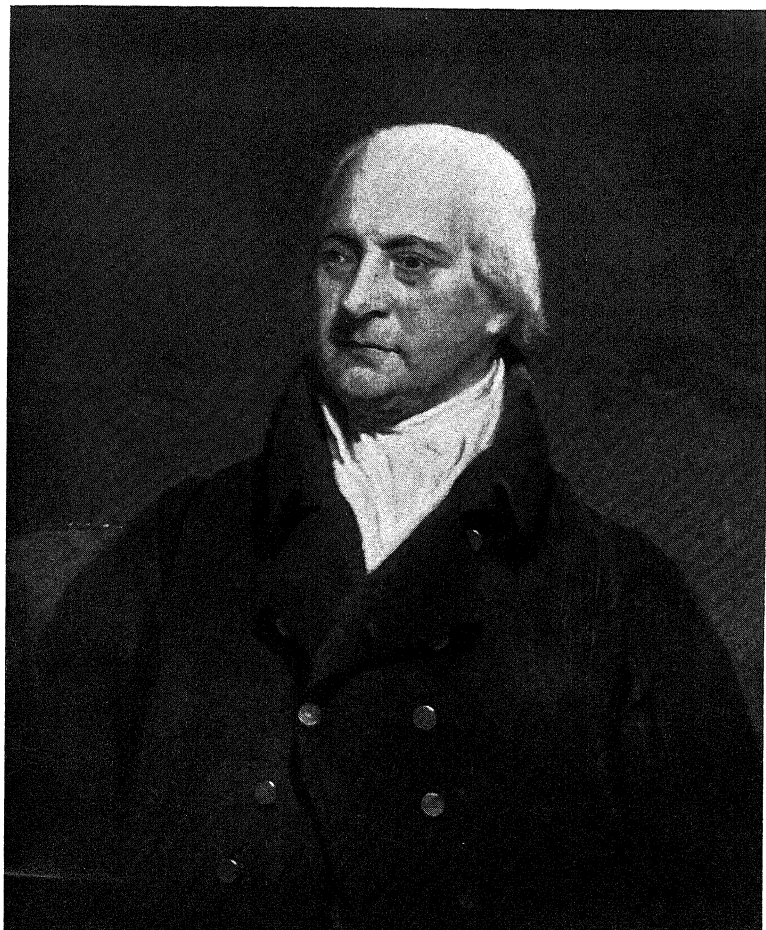
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of the most troublesome elements disappeared: the house of Grant, Campion had been dissolved during the winter, and the North West Company took over its trade in the Timiskaming area; Venant St. Germain announced his retirement, probably for romantic reasons, as he was married within a few months; Daniel Sutherland, suspected of disloyalty to the firm, was not re-elected; the Henrys were negotiating sale of their shares, acquired three years before, to Hallowell. Toward the end of the sessions, the wintering partners voted a share in the concern to the agents in appreciation of their efforts.

The meeting at Grand Portage in 1795 was almost a complete success. The clerks who had become partners were encouraged, and winterers with an extra share were satisfied. But the firms who three or four years before had begged for shares in the North West Company, the houses of Todd, McGill and Forsyth, Richardson, turned down the shares offered them. After a couple of years' trial they probably felt that they would have little chance of being heard against the strong, dominant partnership of McTavish, Frobisher, sole agent for the North West Company; they may have resented the increasing strength of the other larger partnerships, and they balked at the clause in the agreement requiring a penalty of £5,000 for each share held for competition against the North West Company.

Once more the concern fell short of consolidating the entire Montreal trade with that of the interior from Nipigon to the Mackenzie River and beyond. McTavish had not been able to eliminate entirely all Canadian opposition. And, as he knew from information gleaned in London and confirmed by winterers, another cloud loomed dark on their horizon; the Hudson's Bay Company was at last improving the quality of both its personnel and trade goods in the interior.

The struggle for supremacy of the fur trade was about to become more than a struggle between rival Canadian firms.



SIMON McTAVISH

From the portrait by J. Hoppner  
Courtesy Public Archives of Canada



## CHAPTER V

# Era of Expansion

Duncan McGillivray's sphere in the northwest differed from that of his brother. William had spent most of his time in the Upper Churchill River country where, like the Athabasca and Mackenzie Districts, the Hudson's Bay Company had so far built no trading-posts. Duncan was to work mostly in the Saskatchewan River Basin in close competition with the English.

"Crossed the portage Mr Shaw Mr McDonald, my Brother and myself", he had written in his journal following the stormy meeting at Grand Portage in the summer of 1794.

After parting with William at Cumberland House, Duncan travelled up the Saskatchewan with Angus Shaw, his bourgeois. His fellow-clerk was John McDonald of Garth, so called after his birthplace at Garthbeg, Scotland, though to the voyageurs he was *Le Bras Croché* on account of a withered arm.

Ever since the pedlars from Montreal had forced them to send Samuel Hearne to build Cumberland House in 1774, the Hudson's Bay Company had made some effort to match the leap-frog tactics of the Canadians on the Saskatchewan. Within a couple of decades rival posts marked the most strategic sites at every in-flowing stream—at the forks of the South Branch and the North Saskatchewan, at the Battle River, the Sturgeon and, finally, the Clearwater where Peter Pangman had opened the

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first trade with the Blackfoot in sight of the Rockies. Famous among these North West Company posts were Pine Island, Fort George, Fort Augustus and Rocky Mountain House, opposed in turn by the Hudson's Bay Company's Manchester, Buckingham, Edmonton and Acton Houses. When McGillivray arrived on the Saskatchewan each company had a post at Cumberland Lake, where the Nor'Westers provisioned their posts and the brigades for Athabasca territory and beyond.

The Saskatchewan differed from the Upper Churchill and Athabasca country in other ways than in the growing competition with the English. The north branch of the Y-shaped Saskatchewan that drains the Rocky Mountains into Lake Winnipeg flowed between the prairies and the wooded country stretching northwards. To the south roamed great herds of buffalo. To the south, too, roamed tribes of well-fed Sioux and Blackfoot and Stoney Indians who already had horses.

"The inhabitants of the Plains," Duncan noted, "are so advantageously situated that they could live happily independent of our assistance. They are surrounded with innumerable herds of various kinds of animals, whose flesh affords them excellent nourishment and whose Skins defend them from the inclemency of the weather, and they have invented so many methods for the destruction of Animals, that they stand in no need of ammunition to provide a sufficiency for these purposes. It is then our luxuries that attract them to the Fort and make us so necessary to their happiness. The love of Rum is their first inducement to industry; they undergo every hardship and fatigue to procure a Skinful of this delicious beverage, and when a Nation becomes addicted to drinking, it affords a strong presumption that they will soon become excellent hunters."

Duncan had not travelled far up the Saskatchewan before he had his first experience with some of the disadvantages of supplying natives with liquor. At The Pas the brigade came upon eight tents of Saulteurs in the midst of a drinking orgy; already two natives had been stabbed, one dying immediately and the other being mortally wounded. The traders' need of

pemmican provided the natives with a little more rum, and Shaw took care to camp several miles upstream; even at that distance the clerks took turns watching to see that no Indian tried to pilfer the packs, "a trade at which they are very dextrous especially when drunk", Duncan observed.

At both posts at Cumberland House, Shaw found everyone in a state of great excitement. A distraught servant of the Hudson's Bay Company had recently arrived with the dreadful news that a band of *Gros Ventres* had attacked the English company's post on the South Branch; several white men had been butchered, the entire supplies pillaged, and he alone had escaped. Fearful of further attacks, William Tomison was awaiting Shaw's arrival so that the two brigades could travel upstream together in strength.

Always the rough country at the edge of the lowest prairie steppe made travel dangerous. McGillivray, who kept a careful record of his trip for his uncle's information, noted that this part of the river was dreaded by the entire brigade of voyageurs. So strong was the current from spring floods that the men could make no headway with the heavily loaded canoes, but must put themselves into harness and haul the craft. Because their slow progress made them a target for easy attack, the laborious trip was further slowed by the necessity for keeping constant guard. It was one of the worst stretches of the entire river and might have been dreaded even more but for the fact that every man knew that just beyond lay *La Montée*.

*La Montée* had received its name from the corral of horses maintained by the North West Company at the edge of the prairies. Here bourgeois and clerks hunted buffalo while the voyageurs continued upstream with the canoes.

That buffalo hunt was a highlight of every trip up the Saskatchewan, and as eagerly anticipated as the previous stretch was dreaded. Mounted on well trained, swift horses the gentlemen of the brigade not only enjoyed a few hours of excellent sport and a welcome relief from the monotony of canoe travel, but provided the entire brigade with fresh meat. By ten on

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the morning of their first day's hunt, Shaw and his clerks had shot two fat young bulls, dressed the carcasses and had the choicest cuts broiling over hot willow embers for their breakfast beside a stream of clear water. After living on fish, wild rice and pemmican since leaving Grand Portage, Duncan McGillivray made an eloquent entry in his journal: "We feasted like Aldermen on the Fat of the land". When the hunters were completely satisfied, they called in the guides and voyageurs to finish the feast.

At last the brigade safely reached its destination, Fort George. All the way from Sault Ste. Marie McGillivray had travelled through country occupied by various branches of the Algonkian Indians whose common tongue enabled white men to pass from one group—known as *Earchiinnue*, or stranger people—to the next, right up to the Rockies. Fort George was in the midst of the *Gros Ventres* or Big Bellies, so named for the sign language gesture by which they were known, and the Blackfoot. Bands from both tribes were waiting to trade when the Nor'Westers arrived.

But first the canoes were unloaded and the trade goods stored, essential precautions where natives were strong and addicted to stealing. After the men had been allotted their log houses and the natives were temporarily satisfied with rum and trinkets, Angus Shaw gave the customary home-coming dance to which he invited William Tomison from the Hudson's Bay Company post across a gully. Like all home-coming dances, it was overcrowded, hot and noisy: "all were merry—our men as alert as if they had already rested for a month; but we were very much crowded, 72 men, 37 women and 65 children, and the room being 22/23 feet, made it disagreeably warm".

Shaw's invitation to Tomison was not unusual. Frequently at the more remote posts, white men of rival companies shared their rare festivities though they returned to all the sharp practices of competition the next day. Shaw even invited Tomison to breakfast shortly after their arrival to discuss the credits which each company had given the various tribes. But it was not

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easy to achieve even a semblance of neighbourliness with Tomison, perhaps because of the hard, cheerless life which the man had lived for so many years. Often relations were strained to such an extent that simple civilities were impossible, as on the occasion during a dry season when Tomison denied a North West Company servant access to the well shared by the two posts. On that occasion Shaw sent McDonald over to reason with Tomison about the well in the gully.

*Le Bras Croché* had often boasted that the McDonalds as lords of the isles at the time of the flood had had their own boat on Loch Lomond, thus the survival of the strongest men and the fairest women rendered them superior to all the clans of Scotland. Arguing with Tomison, a big man, was much to McDonald's liking. He assured the Englishman that rain would probably fall soon to relieve the water shortage, but that if he did not comply one or the other of them would most certainly pay a visit to the bottom of the well. The argument so amazed Tomison that the Nor'Westers got their share of the water, and had no further trouble over that well.

McDonald and McGillivray quickly learned the significance of a *poste des prairies*. The posts to the north in the Mackenzie, Athabasca and Churchill River Departments provided the bulk of the finest pelts, but little game other than fish. Hence they depended on the prairie posts for provisions, almost entirely pemmican. For this, as for shelter and clothing and companionship, the white men depended on Indian women. The ears of the young clerks soon became attuned to the rhythmic beat of Indian women pounding pemmican.

It started when the natives had completed one of their great buffalo hunts. At once the women went to work. It was they who hauled the great carcasses clear of the bloody, grotesque piles of animals which had been crowded into pounds and killed. They peeled off the massive hides and cut the meat into the thin strips which they dried in the sun or over willow embers. And then, on spread-out, dressed buffalo hides or in a hollow log they commenced the endless lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub, that went on

day after day, sometimes for weeks, and often to the accompaniment of weird chanting. The sound could be heard far across the prairie. Even to a young man brought up in civilization it became a symbol of home, for there were few bourgeois or clerks without a mud-chinked log shack where lived a tawny-skinned native woman and several of the half-breed children who made up the ever-growing Métis population.

But the reason for the sound was primarily economic. Trading ninety-pound hide bags of pemmican, finished with fat from the tasty *dépouilles* along the buffalo spine and flavoured with wild saskatoon berries, made up the other half of the fur-trade economy for the North West Company. At Fort George it was as much a part of daily life as travelling *en déroutine* in winter to persuade Indian bands to trap pelts in exchange for rum—or returning to the welcoming plume of blue smoke rising from a cabin half-buried in snow. Only one phase of the life irked young McGillivray, and he found that phase disgusting:

“Men, Women and Children, promiscuously mingle together and join in one diabolical clamour of singing, crying, fighting & c and to such excess do they indulge their love of drinking that all regard to decency or decorum is forgotten,—They expose themselves in the most indecent positions, leaving uncovered those parts which nature requires to be concealed, a circumstance which they carefully avoid in their sober moments, and the intercourse between the sexes, at any time but little restrained, is now indulged with the greatest freedom . . .”

But only when a tribe became addicted to rum would its women pound pemmican and its young men hunt the fresh meat which the traders froze in their huge *glacières*. It was rum that persuaded them to supply the dog-sleds that hauled pemmican all the way to Isle à la Crosse and even to Fort Chipewyan. For a gallon of Blackfoot milk and a few trinkets, a white trader could buy a “common” horse; a couple of gallons purchased one of the fine stallions which the Nor’Westers themselves used for hunting; and more than one clerk attained an attractive bride by providing her father with the essential ingre-

dient for a *boisson*. On the Upper Saskatchewan, knowing just how much he could dilute a gallon of rum with river water was one of the two prime qualifications for a fur-trader, since new tribes, unfamiliar with alcohol, could be satisfied with a much weaker, less expensive mixture than could confirmed drinkers. The other most useful qualification was courage, as Duncan discovered when a dozen young braves arrived at Fort George with demands for tobacco for a score of Black-foot and Blood chiefs camped on the river bank. The young men were soon followed by their respective bands, some thirty of whose men went over to the Hudson's Bay Company post, while seventy or eighty paraded across the rough prairie to Fort George. One of these bands, Duncan suspected, had stolen some trade goods from him the previous year, and he determined to know who were the culprits. When the natives were gathered in the Indian hall, he demanded the names of the offenders. All denied any knowledge of the theft. Suddenly the young clerk lost his temper: "Being transported with rage at seeing no likelihood of receiving any atonement for the Injury I had Suffered, I sprung upon their greatest chief the Gros Blanc & offered him an indignity which he will always remember with anger and resentment".

McGillivray was prepared to defend himself, but there was no need. By his courage he had won the respect of Gros Blanc and his braves, together with a promise that the chief's tribe would hunt for the post. Later Gros Blanc welcomed McGillivray as a blood brother.

Inevitably the cost of bringing trade goods so far inland was the virtual extermination of one beaver meadow after another. McGillivray himself shamelessly recalled one of his own early trapping experiences: "We found a Beaver lodge built on the side of a small dam . . . we resolved to work it, and began by cutting a passage in the dam in order to evacuate the water, and destroyed in a few hours the fabric which their ingenuity had been constructing for many years. We killed the whole of this family—4 old Beaver and as many young ones . . ."

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In an attempt to offset the costs of competition, the Canadian traders introduced steel traps. These not only hastened the destruction of excellent beaver meadows, but they were heavy and costly to transport by canoe. Castoreum, hitherto traded solely as a valuable commodity used for making perfume, had long been used by the natives as bait. Now the fur-traders borrowed yet another native custom, with such success that the use of castoreum as bait became common practice. This substance secreted in the groin of the beaver, when smeared on even a primitive Indian trap, attracted beaver as surely as dogs are attracted to a bitch in heat.

It was during McGillivray's early years on the Saskatchewan that David and Peter Grant, rejected in the North West Company agreement of 1795, first appeared as independent traders. They did not last long. Peter Grant had poor success in the valleys of the South Saskatchewan and Qu'Appelle Rivers and the following year was forced to seek employment with the North West Company. Shaw, on the Upper Saskatchewan, instructed his clerks to prevent the natives from trading with this small concern, by paying higher prices than David Grant could pay; and if that failed, to threaten the natives with reprisals for trading with him. Shaw further undermined Grant's business by offering his clerks and voyageurs higher wages than their engagement had specified. As a result Duncan was able to write his uncle McTavish about their progress in stamping out the competition: "From the precautions which have been taken to oppose him this year with success, it is hoped he will have reason to repent his rashness in having undertaken an opposition against the North West Company upon such a slender foundation". Grant did not attempt again to compete with the powerful co-partnership. He died soon after his return to Montreal, a ruined man, even while the Nor'Westers were leap-frogging their way farther up the Saskatchewan.

Fort George by that time had become obsolete as a trading-post of consequence, and Angus Shaw had already built Fort Augustus farther upstream at the mouth of the Sturgeon River,

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soon to be followed by William Tomison who built Fort Edmonton "within musket shots". But while Fort Augustus was to remain a useful pemmican supply depot, the Nor'Westers were looking still farther upstream toward the beckoning Rockies; already plans were made and in 1799 John McDonald was to cut the timbers for Rocky Mountain House. The North West Company was about to test its long cherished hope of finding a practical canoe route to the Pacific.

And each spring, as the leap-frog tactic carried them farther west, great brigades of canoes floated pelts downstream. Steadily the Saskatchewan became a great highway, beloved of bourgeois and clerk alike. It was *Le Bras Croché* who recorded the excitement of the annual trip to Grand Portage for them all:

"In May we made all due preparation in putting canoes in order—making batteaux, making Pemmican, and packing Furs—and by the 15th were all ready to embark for our rendez-vous at Grand Portage, all afloat upon the Grand Saskatchewan then at high water from the melting of Snows from the Rocky Mountains & all its tributary streams. It was a Grand Sight to see such a Grand River, the innumerable herds of Buffloes & Deers & many grizle Bears On its Banks feeding and crossing in such numbers that we often got our canoes amongst them & shot hundreds without need . . . We took on board as much as would feed us while it kept fresh and good, generally until we got to Lac Winnipeg, i.e we took while we got the Buffloes enough to last us when we could get none . . .

"We got all safe to Cumberland Depot, deposited the Pemican for the Northern Department . . . This is the usual way of supply: care was taken if possible to procure a sufficient quantum to enable all the Brigades to proceed without loss of time & all encouragement given the Indians to supply us as want of Provisions would prevent progress & stop the Trade."

From time to time along the Saskatchewan the Nor'Westers had met a quiet, dark-eyed, stocky Welsh servant of the Hudson's Bay Company, with his black hair cut in a bang across

his forehead. David Thompson had been at various prairie posts for several years. They had seen him in the marshy muskrat country of the Lower Saskatchewan, and at Cumberland House where he was being trained as a surveyor under Philip Turnor. Not only had Thompson located his own company's Cumberland House, making it one of the few points on the continent whose position on the earth was then accurately known—Fort Chipewyan was another—but because of his findings the Nor'Westers could also locate their own nearby fort. Eventually they heard that "Mr Surveyor Thompson" was at Reindeer Lake in opposition to Alexander Fraser.

That winter David Thompson's agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company expired after nearly fourteen years' service. Thompson had been a fatherless boy of thirteen at the Grey Coat School in Westminster when the Hudson's Bay Company engaged him as an apprentice. His schooling at the Institute "designed to educate poor children in piety and virtue"—and while he was still under thirteen—had included the reading of such books as *Mechanics: A Treatise in Algebra; Epitome of Navigation*, and *A Survey of the Tides*. After a couple of years' training on Hudson Bay under Samuel Hearne and Humphrey Marten, young Thompson had been sent inland to trade, meeting the Frobishers. Even then he was dreaming of becoming an explorer, a not unreasonable hope since by one of the terms of its charter the Hudson's Bay Company had agreed to explore the territory covered by its monopoly. But though he kept careful meteorological records wherever he travelled, though he studied under Turnor and became a competent surveyor and noted native customs and plant and animal life, Thompson remained merely a trader. Even when he won permission to explore a route between the Churchill River and the east end of Lake Athabasca—a route which would save his company considerable time and effort—he received no encouragement and had to build his own canoe and find his own provisions for the trip.

Though Thompson did discover the route through Reindeer

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and Wollaston Lakes, one of the most difficult trips of his fourteen years of travel by canoe and snowshoe and of great value to his superiors on Hudson Bay, he received only grudging approval, and no reward whatever. But on Reindeer Lake he met Alexander Fraser, another "second cousin" to Simon McTavish.

Fraser and Thompson liked each other. During the winter the Nor'Wester often visited Thompson's log trading-post on the remote lake, and invited him to return the visits. It was not easy to get the Welshman to talk about himself or his own experiences, but slowly Fraser drew out the story of the boy who had been brought up at the Grey Coat School, filling in several of the gaps from his own observations of Thompson's career in the interior.

Thompson had travelled well over nine thousand miles of inland waterways, and surveyed some three thousand. He was also a competent fur-trader and a responsible servant. Yet though he was twenty-eight and his agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company was due for renewal, his salary would only be £60 and he had no hope of bettering himself. His was a gloomy future compared with Fraser's prospects as a partner of the North West Company, and Fraser said so. During the winter, the Montrealer told his friend much about the achievements of the Canadian concern and of its plans for further development. Eventually he suggested that Thompson join the North West Company, and on a momentous day in the spring of 1797, the Welshman made another entry in the series of neat journals he kept throughout his lifetime: "this day left the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and entered that of the Merchants of Canada. May God Almighty prosper me."

At Grand Portage, almost a metropolis to the man who had spent so many years in the interior, David Thompson received a royal welcome.

When the War of Independence ended with the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, Great Britain had agreed to a boundary between the two countries to be formed by the Pigeon River west

from Lake Superior, then along the 49th parallel to the headwaters of the Mississippi River; only later did anyone discover that the Mississippi did not reach as far north as the 49th parallel. At the time it was said that "Scarcely an American settler had carried his axe across the Ohio". But now settlers were pressing westward. The Americans were demanding surrender of the British garrisons at Detroit and Michilimackinac. Grand Portage must be moved, though according to the Jay Treaty of 1794 "The cession (of fur-trade posts) is not to be considered as interrupting the usual course of Communications and Commerce between the Two Countries and the Indian Nations" which should at all times be free to His Majesty's subjects and to the citizens of the United States. There was to be no duty on goods merely carried over a portage on either side of the border, so long as the goods were immediately re-embarked for other places.

Thompson arrived at Grand Portage just a year after the Jay Treaty required cession of the ports on American soil. Though the fur-traders from Montreal were still using the Grand Portage trail, the Americans imposed one obstruction after another to secure revenue from the tide of riches passing through the corner of their territory west of Lake Superior. Rumours hinted that they would soon impose heavy taxes. An actual order required that rum be shipped in large kegs, an impossible condition since only small kegs could be carried on a voyageur's back. And southwest traders, ousted by the westward movement of settlers, were turning to the northwest, causing not only occasional traffic jams but frequent disagreement on the already congested bottle-neck of the entire fur trade.

David Thompson could not have arrived at Grand Portage at a more propitious moment. As well as locating the position of their new depot, the Nor'Westers must know where the boundary actually ran and whether or not some of their western posts were on American soil. Thompson was immediately engaged as a clerk whose current duties would be exploring and surveying.

Before the last brigade had left Grand Portage, the former

Hudson's Bay Company surveyor headed west on a great circle trip. By canoe, on foot, on horseback and by snowshoe he travelled four thousand miles during the next year, keeping records all the way. From Lake Winnipeg he followed the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, locating all North West Company forts in the area. From the Assiniboine he cut down to the Mandan country on the Missouri, which he called the Mississippi, thus opening new areas for the Montrealers to trade. Then he cut back eastward to the headwaters of the Mississippi, along the south shore of Lake Superior, and up to Sault Ste. Marie. Completely circling Lake Superior, he was back at Grand Portage the following summer—and the partners had the exact position of every post in the area and its relationship to the international boundary. His instruments had been a ten-inch radius sextant, a telescope, drawing instruments and a couple of thermometers.

While the partners discussed plans and sites for their new depot, they got to know "Mr. Astronomer Thompson" better. Though his stern upbringing had taught him never to drink and he was the only man among the seemingly godless company at the fort who said his prayers regularly, everyone liked him. He was a fine story-teller, too. Dr. J. J. Bigsby, chief of the American party on the International Boundary Commission, recalled that Thompson could "create a wilderness and people it with warring savages, or climb the Rocky Mountains with you in a snow storm so clearly that you could shut your eyes and hear the crack of a rifle or feel snow flakes on your cheek".

But the North West Company was primarily a commercial concern. Though Thompson had proven himself a magnificent explorer and surveyor, the partners knew that he was also an experienced fur-trader. Would he not like to trade and explore at the same time?

Thompson spent his second winter as a North West Company clerk in the Athabasca country, trading more pelts than he had ever taken for the Hudson's Bay Company, while at the same time increasing his knowledge of the vast northwest. When spring came he pressed and packed his fine pelts with a feeling

of great pride of achievement. And on his way east to Grand Portage he made a brief, unscheduled pause at Isle à la Crosse.

By that time Patrick Small's half-breed daughters were growing up. Charlotte was fourteen, the usual age for Indian and half-breed girls to marry. In the customary ceremony *au façon du nord* David Thompson married her, though certainly he omitted one customary portion of such ceremonies, the present of a keg of rum to the bride's father. Small had already left the country and his native wife, and Thompson staunchly refused to give liquor to natives if he could help it. It was to be an enduring union, and the Welshman noted his wedding day in his current carefully kept journal: "This day married Charlotte Small". The wedding trip was the routine journey to the depot with the furs.

At Grand Portage Thompson received the finest wedding present he could imagine—an abundance of drawing-paper for making maps. The Nor'Westers had had the paper and a set of drawing instruments sent up especially for him from Montreal. Within the space of a couple of weeks, most of it spent in the usual duties of a clerk at the depot, Thompson and his bride left to retrace their trip westward as far as Cumberland House. There they continued upstream with the Saskatchewan brigade. At last Thompson was to work as fur-trader and explorer, with the added fillip of equipment and time for map-making. At last, too, the Nor'Westers headed by McTavish would take another step toward their great goal—a practical overland route to the Pacific. Thompson, they hoped, would discover a pass through the Rockies by way of the Upper Saskatchewan.

The Jay Treaty, signed in 1794 and to come into effect two years later, had been partially implemented by the North West Company when Thompson made his year-long circle trip. But the treaty had other facets than noting the boundary and deciding whether trading-posts were on British or American soil. One of these in a few years was to cause considerable difficulty to

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the Nor'Westers, though at the time it received only minor attention.

Since the revolt of the English colonies, the British government had stopped the direct export of furs from Canada to the States; pelts bought at Montreal must be shipped to London or the continent, and then reshipped to New York. The clause in Jay's Treaty which "opened a direct commercial intercourse between Canada and the United States" had been designed to facilitate the marketing of pelts, still Canada's only export commodity. Though the clause was not hailed by transatlantic shipping interests, both Montreal and New York liked it. John Jacob Astor, who had come a long way from the days when he carried trading-goods to the natives in a pack on his back, remarked when he heard of it: "Now I will make my fortune in the fur trade". Astor soon afterwards sailed for England, and in London contracted with Simon McTavish for a large consignment of North West Company furs, to be exported direct from Montreal to New York. Back in America, he found other advantages in the Jay Treaty. Hitherto he had had to buy in Montreal furs trapped and traded in the vicinity of Detroit and Michilimackinac with that long, roundabout, costly shipment to London and then back to New York. Now he could procure them from the former British posts and ship direct to New York, thereby denying the Canadian trade its profits from handling the business in Montreal. The North West Company, still interested in the area about Detroit and Michilimackinac even after pulling out of the remoter Mississippi territory, soon discovered also that Astor would do his own buying and not necessarily in Montreal. But inevitably, though it worked primarily to John Jacob Astor's advantage, the Jay Treaty resulted in a closer link between Montreal and New York. This was demonstrated in the relationship between McTavish, Frobisher and Astor, when the two firms realized the potential advantages in acting as purchasing agents for one another.

While McTavish was negotiating the sale of pelts to Astor in London, the North West Company was seeking—at times

almost desperately—an all-British route to replace that by Grand Portage.

As early as the year following the Treaty of Versailles, the Nor'Westers had engaged Edward Umfreville to search for a canoe route linking Lake Superior with Lake Winnipeg, on Canadian soil. Umfreville had failed in his difficult search westward from Lake Nipigon, but the search had gone on summer after summer; until a route was found no plans for a new depot could be made; not even the site of the new depot could be chosen. By 1798 the search had become one of the most pressing items of the summer's business.

That summer Roderick McKenzie chanced to meet a band of Indians at the Height of Land, and from them learned of a water communication paralleling the old route only a short distance to the north, and linking Lake Superior with Lac la Pluie. McKenzie persuaded the natives to guide him to an entrance to the waterway, and followed it to where the Kaministiquia River flows into Lake Superior.

He had rediscovered the old French route. It was more difficult than that by way of Grand Portage and the Pigeon River, but it was passable for canoes of the size they had been using, and it was all on British soil. As at Grand Portage, a lengthy carry was necessary to overcome the Height of Land above Lake Superior; the North West Company, if it used the old French canoe trail, must portage round the magnificent Kakabeka Falls on the Kaministiquia River some twenty miles west of Lake Superior. Kakabeka Falls, McKenzie felt, were "little inferior in splendor to the Falls of Niagara".

The route followed the Kaministiquia River generally to the Height of Land, and then by Dog Lake eventually to link up with the Grand Portage route so that the Rainy Lake forwarding depot for Athabasca could still be used. A flat at the mouth of the Kaministiquia River was chosen as a suitable site for the new headquarters, and both it and the route rediscovered by McKenzie were approved by Simon McTavish in a letter from Montreal, dated June 22, 1799:

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"Your observations on the proposed road by Lake *Du Chien* convince me, beyond a doubt, that it would be more advantageous and easy for us than the Grand Portage, and if our applications for a grant to the Company succeeds, which I hope it will, I think no time should be lost in moving our place of rendez-vous."

The partners of the North West Company also approved the site, and at once a corps of clerks set to work on a major stock-taking, while plans were drawn for a larger depot, more in keeping with the company's increased size and importance. The new post would have all the facilities of the old one, but the great hall would be larger; there would be better accommodation for the partners and agents and clerks, as well as for the men. New stores would hold the vast variety of goods kept at the post for each summer's trading from drugs and food to clothing, arms and "laced coats for Indian chiefs". The supplies alone at Grand Portage were valued at nearly £7,000.

The new depot was only one of many steps planned by the North West Company to offset the handicaps imposed by Jay's Treaty. For several years a winter express had carried despatches and news between the various posts. The first regularly scheduled express had been put in operation the previous season. By dog team and snowshoe messengers leaving Fort Chipewyan on October 1, 1798, and picking up mail from the various posts all down the line, had arrived at Sault Ste. Marie on May 17 of the following spring, in two hundred and twenty-nine days. New vessels on the Great Lakes and improved conditions at the carrying-places speeded transport as well as cutting costs. Because the British government was about to send out Lieutenant George Landmann of the Royal Engineers to build fortifications and wharves at St. Joseph to replace the former installations at Michilimackinac—now commonly known as Mackinac—the North West Company chose St. Joseph as the site of a new canoe-building depot. And to overcome the bottle-neck portage round the rapids on the St. Mary's River,

it constructed in 1799 the first lock on the Great Lakes. It was a small stone lock just large enough to take canoes and bateaux up and down the drop between Lakes Superior and Huron, but it eliminated the former slow routine of unloading and carrying craft and cargoes. Oxen hauled the small vessels through the waterway, and in time a sizeable village developed beside the lock.

With an ever-increasing tonnage of goods required for the northwest, major economies were developed in the east, since few changes in the mode of transport were possible west of Lake Superior. For such goods as might go by Lake Erie, the Niagara portage road to the west of the river was greatly improved. But the major transport economy was effected by way of the town of York on Lake Ontario. Simon McTavish himself went to York to look over the situation when the North West Company voted £12,000 "toward making Yonge Street a better road". Assured of a solid road on Yonge Street, goods could be sent from Lachine to York by boat in summer, hauled by oxen north to Lake Simcoe in winter, and after a short carry reshipped from the Nottawasaga River or, later, from Penetanguishene the following summer. At Montreal the Legislative Council was pressed to build a canal linking Montreal with Lachine.

Nor was the expansion to be limited to the British Territories and the northwest. Faced with handicaps resulting from Napoleon's war in Europe—depressed and unsettled markets and attacks on shipping by French privateers—the mercantile empire headed by McTavish turned to new and, it was hoped, safer markets. It would now operate its own merchantmen trading to China by way of the Horn.

Ever since the first shipment of northwestern furs to China in 1792, the North West Company had suffered from restrictions imposed by the East India Company. After a series of ventures—some in co-operation with Alexander Henry's firm and with Astor—McTavish, Frobisher chartered its own vessel to carry North West Company pelts to Canton, meantime making plans for opening a branch in New York.

The move proved difficult and complicated. While several consignments got through safely, insurance rates were high on account of war and storms. To enable McTavish, Frobisher to keep track of the details of each cargo in New York or Montreal, and McTavish, Fraser to finance it from London, as many as six copies of each consigning document and its attendant instructions were necessary. The slow process of eighteenth-century communications resulted in some omissions. Such inaccuracies had a way of compounding errors to the confusion and frustration of records, and especially of James Hallowell wrestling in Montreal with the firm's accounts.

But the main burden had continued to fall on McTavish until he was relieved of part of it by Alexander Mackenzie. Following his overland trip to the Pacific and the agreement of 1795, Mackenzie had relinquished his interests in the North West Company to become a partner of McTavish, Frobisher, holding six of the twenty shares. He had already suggested the development of depots on the Pacific coast of America, and despite an unsuccessful attempt to persuade the government to unite all the great chartered companies, was well equipped to handle the maritime interests of the firm in New York. In that capacity, with his detailed grasp of the fur trade and his newly acquired fame as an explorer, he was able to free McTavish for the growing problems of negotiation and policy-making.

For the major venture of 1798, Mackenzie acquired the *Northern Liberties*—340 tons, several other vessels and the sloop *Nancy* which he purchased for "17,500 dollars at 6 and 12 months credit", as he wrote McTavish after several months spent in Boston, Baltimore and Philadelphia examining every available ship. While having the *Nancy* "coppered" in Philadelphia, Mackenzie wrote to John Fraser in London for a copy of Arrowsmith's charts of "the Northwest America" as a guide in the projected venture. Fraser, on receipt of the request and its covering letter explaining the recent maritime purchases, strongly advised continued use of chartered American vessels; they would, he warned, run foul of the monopolied

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East India Company if they attempted trading in China with British capital. But despite Fraser's warning, work on the *Nancy* continued. Mackenzie was not deterred even by French attacks, of which he wrote to McTavish: "A few days since we had the unpleasant intelligence that the *Ariadene* was taken and carried to Bourdeaux. They have captured and carried into Porto Rico the *New Jersey* from Canton to Philadelphia with as rich a cargo as the *Ariadene* which is a sufficient pretense for the French to take American property".

To better handle the hazardous Canton venture, James Hallowell himself sailed aboard the *Northern Liberties* on the year-long voyage to China in April of 1798, and despite rumours of French privateers off Batavia, arrived safely with the northwest pelts at Canton in October. The outgoing cargo was insured for \$35,000, and the return cargo for \$80,000. Encouraged by his trip the Nor'Westers continued sending large consignments of top-grade furs to China, a move which brought further protests from John Fraser in London.

It might seem very advisable to the partners of McTavish, Frobisher in Montreal or New York to offer the finest northwest pelts for sale in China, complained Fraser, but the decision was proving disastrous in London. Admitting the wartime hazards of shipping pelts to England from Montreal, it was poor business to send only inferior furs to London. Did they suppose second quality pelts could compete with prime Hudson's Bay Company furs in the currently unsettled market? Surely they must realize that to hold its own at the auction sales in London, the North West Company must continue to offer only the highest quality pelts. McTavish, Frobisher must juggle the demands of the Far East with those of Europe and somehow retain both.

While he headed the expansion of North West Company interests half-way round the world, McTavish was also promoting his own family's fortunes. In Scotland Lachlan McTavish had died in 1796 in sorely straitened circumstances and McTavish had immediately replied to a plea from the family's lawyer:

"A few days ago I received your favor . . . giving the unwelcome account of my poor friend Dunardary, and the embarrass'd situation of his affairs and Family; Which I regret very much. He was not deceived in reckoning on my friendly disposition toward him, and it was my intention to have helped him."

McTavish gave the late chief's wife generous financial assistance, at the same time offering "to cheerfully take charge of the second boy (John George) whenever he is qualified to come into the Compting House, & wish a proper attention be paid to his education—until he is 16—& if the expence will be inconvenient for the Family I will pay it". The young son of the chief of Clan Tavish was soon after taken into the firm as a clerk.

That year McTavish purchased the estate of Dunardary to keep it in the family, at the time admitting to a friend that it was a sort of hobby-horse with him though he realized that for a merchant to purchase such a place would seem like laying out money to a disadvantage. But he never occupied Dunardary; the details of the purchase were handled by John Fraser on his behalf, and the land leased to its old tenant. Perhaps because he wanted the security of landed property for his own son and heir, born the year the late chief died, McTavish also bought the seigniory of Terrebonne near Montreal for £25,000 sterling. He never occupied it, either. The steadily mounting problems of the concerns he headed complicated no doubt by the strong clannish desire to further the interests of his kin, left him no time for the life of a country gentleman.

When his old friend Frobisher retired in 1796 McTavish determined to replace him with William McGillivray. This decision was probably the cause of a sudden coolness between Alexander Mackenzie and himself, for Mackenzie doubtless resented the concentration of McTavish clansmen as well as the slight to his own fortunes and accomplishments. Moreover, not only was William to move up in the dominant partnership, but Duncan was also to be brought into McTavish, Frobisher. And there were numerous other signs of family nepotism.

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Marie Marguerite's brother, Charles Chaboillez, was now a partner in the North West Company, as was Alexander Fraser, McTavish's relative who had brought David Thompson into the concern, and still another cousin, Simon Fraser. A second Simon Fraser, also a relative, had recently been engaged as a clerk; born at Bennington, Vermont, he was already showing the flair for exploration which would bring further fame to the men gathered in by McTavish.

Alexander Mackenzie was by no means the only man in Montreal to resent the clannishness of McTavish. The enormous expansion of the concerns headed by Simon had long since roused the antagonism of individuals as well as small firms not in the North West Company, among them that of Forsyth, Richardson. But though relations between McTavish and Alexander swiftly reached breaking-point, Roderick McKenzie, serving his last year in charge of the Athabasca department—and soon to marry one of Mrs. McTavish's sisters—remained a staunch friend. In a letter to him, Simon McTavish clearly indicated his awareness of the challenges they must meet during the last year of the eighteenth century:

"The threatened opposition have, this year, made a serious attack to us, and I fear that a coalition of interests between the parties opposed to us may render them more formidable, but I still hope the additional resources which the Company will draw from the new discoveries in your department, and by pushing the business by *Fon du Lac*, will compensate us for some years to come for any thing the new adventurers to the North-West may clip from our wings. The sales are this year good, and I have great hopes they will continue to be so . . . Peace cannot be far distant; when it comes our expenses will be considerably diminished, and if in a few years the Houses in opposition to us get tired of their undertaking, the business may be as good as at any time heretofore . . ."

## CHAPTER VI

# *Alexander Mackenzie Opposes*

In the summer of 1799 William McGillivray and Alexander Mackenzie, agents of McTavish, Frobisher, met the wintering partners as usual at Grand Portage. Details of the meeting are not known, because no minutes appear to have survived. But before the winterers crossed the portage westward again and the agents returned in their great canoes to Montreal, Alexander Mackenzie had quit the North West Company.

"Feeling himself uncomfortable," noted Roderick, "he could not think of renewing his engagements and was determined to withdraw from the concern.

"This brought on a serious discussion, and it was resolved unanimously by the wintering partners that Mr. Mackenzie having their sole confidence, they could not dispense with his services, therefore that every means should be adopted to retain him, but unfortunately, the best endeavours of his friends were of no avail . . ."

Why had Alexander Mackenzie suddenly determined to withdraw from the company to which his explorations had contributed so much? According to his cousin the break was due to "an unfortunate misunderstanding between Mr. Mackenzie and Mr. McGillivray so that they cannot well act together" as agents of McTavish, Frobisher. But what had caused the misunderstanding? Why could not Mackenzie and McGillivray

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act together? Less than two years earlier the two had joined in entertaining Lieutenant George T. Landmann, Corps of Engineers, at the Beaver Club when Landmann was on his way to St. Joseph. Landmann had joyously recalled the occasion:

"We dined at four o'clock, and after taking a satisfactory quantity of wine, perhaps a bottle each, the married men . . . retired, leaving about a dozen to drink their health. We now began in earnest and in true highland style, and by four o'clock in the morning the whole of us had reached such a degree of perfection that we could all give the war whoop as well as Mackenzie and McGillivray, we could all sing admirably, we could all drink like fishes, and we all thought we could dance on the table without disturbing a single decanter, glass or plate by which it was profusely covered . . ."

Following the Beaver Club dinner, McGillivray and Alexander Mackenzie had invited Landmann to travel with them to St. Joseph. "All the preparations for this stupendous journey being completed", Landmann had made the trip to Lachine by calèche in "the moderate space of three hours & without broken bones or sore injuries". And before the canoes left, he had again been entertained by Mackenzie and McGillivray at a special Beaver Club farewell dinner, another of the glorious Bacchanals by which the Nor'Westers offset some of the toils of their arduous lives. That day McGillivray and Mackenzie had shared the boisterous "*dioche* and *dorichs*". They had not even noticed when young Landmann, who was only eighteen, crept into an empty fireplace to watch the proceedings, but had gone on to drink one after another of the traditional Beaver Club toasts. At the end of the dinner, Mackenzie and McGillivray, president and vice-president for the day, alone of the company remained upright in their chairs—but not for long. The last thing Landmann recalled of that meal at Lachine was Mackenzie proposing a toast to their fallen comrades—all under the table—as he pushed a bottle toward McGillivray and slid from his chair to join them, followed by McGillivray himself.

The break was probably due to diverging views on policy and

the obstacle of the clan McTavish rather than to a rupture in the friendship between the two men. Perhaps Alexander continued to protest that the company was neglecting its clerks in the interior. Shortly after he and McGillivray had entertained Landmann, he had written Roderick about the "formation of a concern against the North West Co., by Messers Forsyth, Richardson & Co. and others". A namesake nephew was a wintering partner with this firm whose partners now frankly called themselves the New North West Company. Ever since the break between Forsyth, Richardson and the North West Company in 1795, this partnership had enjoyed the explorer's interest and had even occasionally received the benefit of his shrewd and experienced advice. There were, however, other reasons for the break.

Joseph Frobisher's retirement had left a gap in the firm of McTavish, Frobisher. Frobisher might have been replaced by John Gregory, Mackenzie himself or by McGillivray. McTavish's sponsorship of his nephew doubtless irked the explorer. As well, McTavish, much as he desired transit rights through Hudson Bay, must have mistrusted Mackenzie's plan to unite the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies since such a union might actually result in moving the base of the entire fur trade from Montreal to Hudson Bay.

Mackenzie would know of McTavish's opposition to his plan, and everyone in Montreal was aware of McTavish's intense loyalty to his own clansmen. Perhaps before the canoes left for Grand Portage that spring of 1799, it was an open secret that the senior partner insisted that his nephew replace Frobisher, a decision tied in with McTavish's need for greater control of the firm on account of that threatened opposition which had "this year made a serious attack to us". In the autumn word of Mackenzie's resignation had hardly reached Montreal when McTavish commenced negotiations to form a new company, "... the period of duration . . . under which Alexander Mackenzie was admitted to co-partner" having expired, and the various former partners now being free to make

such arrangements as they could or felt would be practicable. On December 2, the necessary details were completed, without Mackenzie.

In the new firm, still known as McTavish, Frobisher, and to last until 1806, Simon McTavish held four shares, John Gregory and William McGillivray each two, while single shares were owned by Duncan McGillivray and William Hallowell. With seven of the ten shares in the dominant partnership within the North West Company held by himself and his nephews, McTavish enjoyed a greater control than ever before.

Under the new agreement he would handle the concern's finances and correspondence, Gregory the "outfits Packing and Shipping Concerns", Hallowell the book-keeping, and the two McGillivrays would act as agents to the North West Company. Since McTavish planned to live in London as soon as such a move could be made without prejudicing the firm's affairs, William McGillivray was eventually to replace him at Montreal. A special clause covered such interests as Alexander Mackenzie might still hold in the old concern, and Roderick was invited to partnership in his place, to act as agent in the event of William McGillivray's assumption of McTavish's Montreal duties. Roderick McKenzie accepted the offer, but with reluctance on account of his close friendship with his cousin.

By that time Alexander had already left New York, from where he sailed for England. In London he went at once to see John Fraser, and for months every ship carried letters of excited comment and conjecture about his dramatic move.

"Mackenzie's abrupt departure from Mont<sup>l</sup> proceeds, I believe," Fraser wrote McTavish, "entirely from a fit of ill-humour, without any fix'd plan or knowing himself what he would be at." Alexander had taken not only his own account of his troubles to Fraser, but also a batch of documents and letters covering his relations with McTavish himself, McTavish, Frobisher, and the North West Company. After a careful study of them, Fraser had advised him to think twice before taking legal action against "people possess'd of his whole property . . . who

might set him at defiance for many years", reminding him that after the repeated notice he had given McTavish he could not be surprised that his resignation was finally accepted despite a last-minute change of mind. Fraser felt that McTavish had proposed a fair settlement to Mackenzie, but he went on to warn that Mackenzie ". . . has got an intire ascendant over your young Men, & if driven to desperation he may take steps ruinous to you. He has told myself Your Nt. West business will be completely ruin'd; to others he has thrown out most violent threats of revenge, and I have some hints too extravagant to mention". Yet, John Fraser added in fairness, Mackenzie had "been very modest on the score of money matters". Fraser was sure he had no intention of "interfering with you but by his influence with our people".

It may be that McTavish's own attitude had had something to do with Mackenzie's retirement. Doubtless the efforts and triumphs of the past thirty years—McTavish was now nearly fifty—were showing their effects, causing him to be irritable at times and less inclined than formerly to be diplomatic. Probably Mackenzie himself, though sixteen years McTavish's junior, was suffering from his years of arduous travel and the hardships that went with life as a fur-trader in the interior. John Fraser's feeling was borne out by others. Young John George McTavish was to recall a few years later that when Simon McTavish blocked Mackenzie's wish to have his name put in the firm and to take precedency over William McGillivray, Mackenzie had become quarrelsome and left the firm. And at the time Alexander Henry had commented in one of his long letters to Askin in Detroit that "the old N. West Company is all in the hands of McTavish. Frobisher and McKensy is out, the latter went off in a pet, the cause as far as I can learn was who should be first—McTavish or McK—and as there could not be two Caesars in Rome one must remove".

The year after Mackenzie had been dropped from McTavish, Frobisher, the partnership of Forsyth, Richardson—which already

had excellent connections in London and was one of Montreal's most respected firms—was joined by John Ogilvy of the also well established Montreal firm of Parker, Gerrard and Ogilvy, and John Mure of Quebec. While none of these had been formidable as individual firms, they made a strong combination. The New North West Company had built its own depot at Grand Portage, though much smaller than that of the North West Company, and its packs marked XY were frequently seen at portages far into the northwest.

Simon McTavish set about meeting this latest competition with all his old drive. Orders went out to each department to undersell the XY Company where necessary, allotments of rum and tobacco were increased, and special attention paid to winning the Indian trade through *boissons*. There were to be more gifts of hats and the bright red and blue, lace- and braid-trimmed coats beloved of the native chiefs. But McTavish did not stop at these obvious measures. In face of the organized competition from Montreal combined with that of the Hudson's Bay Company, he and his associates continued with renewed energy to seek for a practical trade route overland to the Pacific. This might help to offset the English concern's monopoly of Hudson Bay.

Duncan McTavish, backed by his prestige as a partner of McTavish, Frobisher, headed the operation, with David Thompson as clerk. The two wintered at the newly built Rocky Mountain House on the Upper Saskatchewan where McGillivray, in Thompson's words, "prepared to cross the mountains". McGillivray had taken to the Saskatchewan a copy of Captain Vancouver's recently published *Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean*, and this, he hoped, would help him in his plans.

The Rockies could be seen from Rocky Mountain House, where McGillivray and Thompson arrived on October 5, 1800. Long after the sun had set each day beyond the sharply serrated main ridges, it glowed through a great gap in the mountains—the gap through which, according to the local natives, flowed

the North Saskatchewan River. Would the Saskatchewan provide a trade route to Vancouver's Columbia River, McGillivray and Thompson asked one another. How far was it passable beyond Rocky Mountain House?

At once they commenced to probe the various probable passes. McGillivray made a great traverse northwestward from Rocky Mountain House across the Height of Land separating the watershed of the North Saskatchewan from that of the Athabasca River, while Thompson cut southward from the tributary Clearwater River to the Bow. Meeting a band of Kootenay Indians from the interior of the mountains on their way to trade with the Nor'Westers, Thompson accompanied them back to the post. After a series of feasts, long speeches and gifts calculated to win their friendship and trade, McGillivray sent two of his men home with the Kootenays when the tribe returned to its mountain valley hunting-grounds, scouts who were probably the first white men to reach the headwaters of the Saskatchewan. Then he and Thompson set out on horseback on November 17 to visit the Piegan Indians down along the Bow River. This was a combined trade mission and exploratory trip up the Bow whose valley might provide a pass across the formidable barrier to the Pacific. So greatly did McGillivray enjoy the meals of mountain sheep shot on that trip that he had one of the hides dressed so as to be able to take it east as a souvenir.

Following the Bow River trip, the coldest months of the winter were spent at the post, bartering with the natives and copying pertinent passages from Vancouver's journal. Supplies had also to be prepared for the trip across the mountains. Unfortunately, McGillivray's plans to set out early in the spring were frustrated by a long and painful attack of rheumatic fever. But while he was convalescing he sent Thompson out on two more reconnaissance trips: one by horse up the tributary Clearwater and the other by canoe up the Saskatchewan. Both men hoped the latter would take Thompson right to the sources of the great river but spring floods forced him back. Nevertheless, though the actual attempt to cross the Height of Land was not made

that spring, considerable information had been gleaned toward discovering a way to the Columbia River—and the Pacific Ocean.

While his nephew was at Rocky Mountain House, Simon McTavish went himself to the summer meeting at Grand Portage. After five years' absence there was endless business to demand his attention at the depot, much though he would have preferred to avoid the fatigues of the trip—and to remain even briefly in Montreal with Marguerite and their three young children. He had just returned from New York, a trip forced on him by Mackenzie's sudden break. There he had been required to look to business that ranged from chartering vessels to discussing with Levi Solomon the purchase of tobacco at "6 cents per hundred for Richmond and 5 cents for Georgia at 60 and 90 days", and deciding whether it were wiser in view of the perennial shortage of credit to save half a cent by paying cash for the commodity so essential to Indian trade. Perhaps he might have avoided the trip entirely had not William McGillivray just been married to Magdeleine McDonald, sister to John of Garth and "a charming woman", according to Alexander Mackenzie who had once crossed from England on the same ship with her. McGillivray could not take his bride on a wedding trip to Grand Portage as David Thompson had done with his half-breed wife.

But it was good policy for McTavish to meet again with the winterers and clerks at the old rendezvous. The six clerks who were promoted to partnership were encouraged to stiffen their competition against the New North West people, and all—clerks and partners—wanted to see about better personnel conditions in the interior. That summer discussions before the fires in the great hall, as well as formally around the meeting table, turned often to a situation rapidly becoming so serious as to merit a clause in the minutes of the summer's proceedings: certain partners and clerks, it was regretted, were "guilty of drunkenness . . . hereby rendered incapable of performing the duties they owe to the concern". To prevent this "*greatest of*

*Evils*”—the phrase was underlined in the neatly quilled minutes—“from gaining ground and, if possible to *root it out altogether*”—again underlined—they passed a resolution whereby any partner who could be proved guilty of drunkenness while serving in the Indian territory would be expelled from the concern, and any clerk or interpreter would forfeit a year’s wages. The clause was implemented for the first time the following year when Jean Baptiste Cadot forfeited his entire interest in the company after being formally charged and found guilty of drunkenness.

Probably McTavish’s most important business at the 1801 meeting at Grand Portage was plans for a renewed North West Company agreement, due for discussion the following summer.

To preside over the new agreement, and the last meeting held at Grand Portage, in 1802 he made his last trip up Lake Superior. Present were all the partners of McTavish, Frobisher: McTavish himself, William McGillivray, John Gregory, William Hallowell and Duncan McGillivray. The latter had come to the meeting from Rocky Mountain House, leaving the preliminary explorations for the link between the Saskatchewan and Columbia Rivers.

It was never possible for all winterers to leave their posts to go to the depot; but that summer half of the possible twenty-eight were present, the others being represented by attorneys chosen from among those who could attend. They came from the new posts up the Mackenzie and from the Missouri country, as well as from the older-established posts. All were alert to the growing competition, as they indicated clearly in the first clause of this latest of documents by which the North West Company was held together. Partners of McTavish, Frobisher, who knew the financial position of the concern, and winterers who had coped with actual trading competition in the interior feelingly supported the minute to provide “a more solid permanent system for the Government and Regulation of the various rights and interests of the Parties concerned . . . so as to render all attempts . . . by others to injure them in their said trade and commerce

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fruitless and ineffectual, and above all to preserve and secure . . . the many benefits and advantages which, by their united labors and exertions . . . they have become entitled to reap . . .”

The agreement designed to tighten control of the business for the next twenty years would come into effect the following summer, 1803, at the first meeting to be held at new Fort Kaministiquia.

McTavish, Frobisher, with its five partners present, was elected to continue to handle the company's business at Montreal and elsewhere, sending two agents to the depot for meetings with partners of the North West Company. Shares were to be increased so that six more would be available for clerks due for advancement. Almost as important to young men who had spent three or more years in the interior, a new schedule provided for furloughs in order of seniority of service. However, this clause had a necessary rider. The routine of the interior trade depended absolutely on each man being in his department, and a winterer not returning after furlough as agreed would forfeit his interest in the concern—usually everything he owned in the world—should his fellow-partners so vote at the meeting following his breach of contract. And, obviously with Alexander Mackenzie in mind, all agreed to continue the penalty clause of £5,000 for each share held in the North West Company for any man “jointly or individually” entering into any opposition with the company.

At his last meeting at the inland depot, Simon McTavish presided over measures other than those relating to internal discipline. Always the company must expand either its territory or its prestige; its own activities had made any marking time impossible. Hitherto the Nor'Westers had traded only in the northwest and to the north of Lake Superior. Now they were to reach out in another direction. At the 1802 meeting they decided to purchase the stock of the King's Domains or Tadoussac Posts—the rich monopoly in the Saguenay River country formerly held by the kings of France—leasing the monopoly for twenty years at £1,025 annually. The nearby

private seigniory of *Mille Vaches* was also leased for the same period at £300 a year. Angus Shaw was appointed to take charge of the new territory, with residence at Quebec. The concentrated presence of so many partners of McTavish, Frobisher, with so large a group of winterers, consolidated control of the concern, improved internal discipline and extended North West Company territory. It had also paved the way for coping with a new threat to the entire Indian trade from the Saguenay River to the Rockies and from the Missouri to the Mackenzie River Basin, the return to Canada of Alexander Mackenzie, knight.

In London after his break with the North West Company, Mackenzie had resumed the writing of his journals for publication. Again he realized, as he had found at Fort Chipewyan, that it was a work "that requires much more time than I was aware of". But London was the centre of numerous travellers of the day, many of whom knew that while they could cope with geography and weather and even hostile human beings, they could not bend their wills to writing. As a result several men were making a living as ghost writers, among them William Combe, author of *The Tours of Dr. Syntax*. Combe, though he had been able to achieve a variety of literary styles to suit various clients, had been unable to remain out of debtor's prison. And there he wrote Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal, on the River St. Lawrence, through the continent of North America, to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans; in the years 1789 and 1793, with a preliminary account of the rise, progress and present state of the fur trade in that country*.

The book was an immediate success. Three subsequent editions followed within a couple of years, one in England and two in the United States, and only an occasional critic commented on the amazing elegance of the intrepid explorer's style. The *Voyages* also brought Mackenzie wealth, though as he wrote Roderick "an author must advance at least two thousand pounds before you receive a shilling for the work".

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Mackenzie himself immediately became famous, in England and in Scotland as well as on the continent. Sir Thomas Lawrence painted his portrait as a handsome young man with eyes set wide apart, a sensitive mouth and a stubborn chin. Mackenzie had met the Duke of Kent, Queen Victoria's father, on various occasions when the royal visitor had been entertained by the fur barons in Montreal, at the Beaver Club and elsewhere, and the two men had kept in touch by letter. In London, the Duke introduced the explorer to society. For a season Mackenzie enjoyed a life as much unlike that he had known at Fort Chipewyan or even at Grand Portage as he could imagine—or John Fraser, either, who like Henry in Montreal kept eye and ear on the activities of fur-traders in London. In 1802, King George III, to whom the *Voyages* were dedicated, knighted "His Majesty's Most Faithful Subject and Devoted Servant".

The book was soon in Canada for anyone to read. In his long preface Sir Alexander—in Combe's polished phrases—commented on the delay between the trips and publication: "It has been asserted that a misunderstanding between a person of high office and myself, was the cause of this procrastination. It has also been propogated that it was occasioned by that precaution which the policy of commerce will sometimes suggest; but they are both equally devoid of foundation. The one is an idle tale; and there could be no solid reason for concealing the circumstances of discoveries whose arrangements and prosecution were so honourable to my associates and myself, at whose expense they were undertaken". Mackenzie went on to explain to his readers that the delay was due to the very nature of his occupation and his diffidence at appearing as an author, "being much better calculated to perform the voyages, arduous as they might be, than to write an account of them".

In an epilogue Mackenzie summed up his views of the northwest fur trade as well as recording views advanced by various of his former colleagues. The fur trade from its very nature could not be carried on by individuals; a very large

capital, or credit, or both, was necessary, and "consequently an association of men of wealth to direct, and men of enterprise to act, in one common interest, must be formed on such principles, as that in due time the latter may succeed the former, in continual and progressive succession".

He repeated the proposal for "the juncture of such an association with the Hudson's Bay Company", the one firm having the right to trade by charter, "the other a right by prior possession, and being the successor to the subjects of France, who were exclusively possessed of all the then known parts of this country, before Canada was ceded to Great Britain, except the coast of Hudson's Bay, and having themselves been the discoverers of a vast extent of country since added to His Majesty's territories, even to the Hyperborean and the Pacific Oceans".

If the Hudson's Bay Company declined such an undertaking, surely, argued Mackenzie in his epilogue, the government should require it to give up a right it refused to exercise, though "on a just indemnification". There were adventurers willing to undertake the risks, even to trading on the Columbia River, men who should not be denied the right to navigation "of the bay by Nelson's River" provided they did not interfere with the monopolied company. Finally, he argued, by extending the fur trade "from latitude 48. North to the pole, except that portion which the Russians have in the Pacific . . . with the fishing in both seas and the markets of the four quarters of the globe" Great Britain could recoup the expenses of her entire North American exploration.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie returned to Montreal, and at once the partners of the XY Company claimed his support. Soon he became their active head, in competition with his former associates. And Montreal quickly took sides. The Reverend John Strachan, familiar with fur-trade gossip and soon to marry Andrew McGill's young widow, wrote about it to a friend abroad: "You have no doubt seen Mackenzie's voyages across the continent . . . the praise he acquired tho' not diminished

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should be extended to some of his mercantile associates, particularly to a Mr. McTavish, the first merchant in the two Provinces, were it generally known that he was the original projector, & pushed it forward, . . . Mackenzie & he have quarreled about their mercantile enterprises . . . Montreal, the chief trading town of the two Canadas is torn with factions . . . Mr. McKinzie (now Sir Alexander) having joined the new company . . . the dryness that formerly subsisted between the companies is much increased . . . this becomes very disagreeable to the neutral part of the town, who dare not mix the two Companies in the same Party."

Social relations were doubtless strained at Beaver Club dinners and friendships and family connections disrupted, even among Mackenzie's own kin. His cousin turned down an invitation to associate himself with the new concern: "It was impossible for me to join in any hostile measures against the North West Concern, happening to be a regular partner in them under agreement . . ." Roderick McKenzie was also about to marry Marie Louise Rachel Chaboillez, Simon McTavish's young sister-in-law.

Inevitably gossip concerning the break spread far and wide. Old Alexander Henry had a pithy comment for his friend Askin: "The one party is a new raised corps without discipline, the other old veterans. I can't find one man of experience, that has the least knowledge of the north, concerned".

Henry was right about the *engagés*, but both John Forsyth and his cousin John Richardson had considerable experience in the fur trade, and both were respected in Montreal and well connected with supply firms in London and Albany. Two of Forsyth's brothers were merchants along the Great Lakes route, one at Kingston and the other at Niagara. With Parker, Gerard and Ogilvy, they had considerable backing. Headed by the newly knighted Mackenzie, they were a formidable opposition, with capital almost equal to that of the old North West Company. On his way east following his winter at Rocky Mountain House, Duncan McGillivray who had taken careful

stock of their progress, noted that "the opposition still continues. They have augmented their outfit of last year by about 4 Canoes—during the last season the sacrifices they have made to procure Men are incredible . . . they throw away their means with a profusion that astonishes the Men themselves . . . (Alexander Mackenzie) is now their Chief Agent, and his duty is to spoil the Prospects—to take the bread from the Mouth of those who have sacrificed their time to aggrandise him and make his Fortune . . ."

The progress made by the XY people heightened the Nor'-Westers feeling of affront. Duncan took a good look at their new ship, the *Perseverance* being built at Point aux Pins, "where we also are building a vessel"; both boats were for use on Lake Superior. Every report reaching the depot indicated that the competition was being stepped up right across the territory claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company under its monopoly and that discovered in the Athabasca country and beyond by partners of the North West Company. There were XY posts at Rainy Lake and Bas de la Rivière Winnipic and on the Red River; Fort Souris on the Assiniboine was about to be occupied; three log trading-posts were under construction in the deep valley of the Qu'Appelle; *engagés* of the firm headed by Mackenzie were trading pemmican and pelts far up the Saskatchewan, as well as pemmican among the hostile Blackfoot up the South Branch, and beaver far to the north. At many strategic sites all three major rivals had posts. The competition had forced the Nor'Westers to place their strongest winterers where the struggle was keenest.

Among these strongest winterers was Alexander Henry the Younger, recently elected to partnership, and bourgeois at Pembina on the Red River. Bred to the harsh life of a fur-trader and reared on first-hand accounts of his uncle's pioneer struggles, Henry instinctively matched the tactics of his Montreal competitors—and with gusto. At the Red River where pemmican was the major item of barter, he passed up no opportunity—fair practice or otherwise—to get pelts as well. With the

combined traits of genuine courage and bravado, he frequently achieved his ends without resorting to physical force, as when he heard that the XY people had paid the powerful chief Grosse Gueule to kill him. Well aware of the Indians' admiration for bravery, Henry went at once to Grosse Gueule's camp and demanded that he barter all the pelts in his teepee. The chief protested that he had promised to trade with the XY people, but he gave the Nor'Wester the furs. Later in the season Henry resorted to similar tactics on the Upper Tongue River. On that occasion when he met a band of natives returning to their camp from trapping beaver he actually fought with the women for possession of their furs. "It was the most disagreeable *déroutine* I ever made . . .", but he got the pelts, and frankly admitted in his report to the partners the following summer that he knew that the XY people had already paid the natives in goods for them.

Up the Saskatchewan where both pelts and pemmican made up the valuable trade, the strife between the Montreal firms approached a state of civil war. John McDonald of Garth at Fort de l'Isle found himself wintering with "Mr. de Rocheblave for the new Company, a gentleman of family, on one side and the Hudson Bay Fort on the other; I was thus placed between two fires". Yet in the strange combination of friendships and sharp competition familiar to the trade in the remote interior, gentlemen in charge of the three posts and their men often met socially in between their keenly fought business deals. One day McDonald and his clerk, James King, a great bully whom the Nor'Westers had pried from the XY people for higher wages, were taking tea at the Hudson's Bay Company house with Mr. Hallett. In the course of casual conversation, probably laced with considerable boasting, McDonald informed Hallett that a band of natives had sent messengers with word that they had many valuable pelts to trade; King was leaving next day *en déroutine* to visit the band some two days' journey distant. McDonald also casually mentioned that de Rocheblave's clerk, La Mothe, was also going by dog-sled to the same band.

"Better take care, King," warned Hallett half jokingly, half seriously, "La Mothe will shoot you if he gets a chance."

King laughed at the mere thought of being shot by the XY clerk. A strong man and powerfully built, he could take care of himself. "To be shot by that La Mothe would be a great joke," he retorted.

The two clerks with their interpreters set out together from Fort de l'Isle, like any group of young men on a business trip. They slept together for warmth in one of the leather tents during the bitterly cold nights. On the way as they mushed over the miles of shrub-dotted, snow-crust ed prairie behind their carioles, they agreed that at the Indian camp each would spend the night there with the bands to whom his company had given credits in goods, and in the morning gather the pelts due them.

Early the next morning as arranged, King started to load his sled, only to discover that certain packs were missing; these, the natives said, were already bartered. Suspecting La Mothe of taking them, King trudged over to the teepee where the other white clerk had slept. There was La Mothe even then roping a great pile of packs on his sled. King at once accused him of bartering furs due the North West Company. La Mothe shrugged off the accusation, and went on securing the packs. Over the piles of frozen pelts with the Indians and their women and children looking stolidly on, and all the sled dogs yelping excitedly, the two white men broke into a heated argument.

"Would you give them up if you were me?" demanded La Mothe.

King admitted that he wouldn't.

"Then you don't get these!"

As King reached for one of the packs, La Mothe warned him. There was a pistol shot, and the Nor'Wester lay dead on the snow in front of the buffalo hide teepee.

Shocked into grief by his own impulsive violence, La Mothe laid King's body on one of the sleds and hauled it all the way back to Fort de l'Isle. There McDonald buried his clerk "with military honors". Later he was to record that La Mothe "came

down to Montreal and was allowed to live. He was of a respectable family".

In Montreal John Richardson, on behalf of the XY Company, made a formal protest to the governor-general following La Mothe's trial and acquittal. The XY Company was, he claimed, "viewed by the other with jealousy and rancour improper in Subjects of the same Empire, pursuing a legal and open trade"; its *engagés* were threatened with every obstacle the North West Company could devise to turn the natives against them and to prevent them getting furs. Richardson recommended strongly that some authority be constituted to regulate the Indian fur trade before the entire business was ruined. The North West Company, whose partners could retaliate by matching every XY Company charge of violence, countered with the reminder that they had actually discovered much of the territory now being trespassed by the firm which in 1803 formally became Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company. They would welcome proper authority for the fur trade, but would meantime continue to order their men to defend themselves and the company's property.

La Mothe's acquittal for the murder of King was due largely to uncertainty of jurisdiction of the courts. Had the crime been committed in territory considered to be part of Upper Canada? asked the judges. Or, being on the watershed of the Saskatchewan River, was it legally part of what the Hudson's Bay Company called Rupert's Land?

For some time the government, as well as men in charge of both Montreal companies, had been disturbed over the increasing strife in the interior. The Nor'Westers wanted protection in the territory they considered theirs by right of discovery. The XY people insisted on their right to trade wherever they could find furs. Following La Mothe's trial, the Imperial Government finally acted. That year it passed the Canada Jurisdiction Act by which criminal offences committed in the Indian territories could be tried in Lower Canada. Provision was made for Justices of the Peace to serve in the Indian country, and in 1803

five were named: William and Duncan McGillivray, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Roderick McKenzie and John Ogilvy. One of the first to face trial was Duncan McGillivray himself, though the incident occurred in territory not technically regarded as native.

The younger McGillivray was quick, courageous and passionately loyal to his own concern. Coming on a tent pitched on the shore between Grand Portage and the site of the new Fort Kaministiquia, and belonging to a free-trader named Rosseau, McGillivray told Rosseau's clerk to clear off. The Nor'Westers would permit no strangers undermining the discipline and morale of their men by selling them gewgaws for their Indian women, trinkets which the men could buy at the company's stores—and at the company's prices; and furthermore, independent traders who might encourage the men to trade *pacquettons* on their own account were a nuisance. The clerk refused to leave. Again McGillivray warned him. When the warning had no effect, he whipped out his hunting-knife and slashed the free-trader's tent to ribbons. Threatening redress when his employer heard of the attack, Rosseau's clerk quickly loaded his canoes and paddled east across Lake Superior.

Later in Montreal Rosseau charged the junior partner of McTavish, Frobisher, and the court fined McGillivray £1,500 and costs on the grounds that "cutting down a man's tent would hurt and prejudice him in the minds of *engagés* . . . and that such a public insult would do him damage." The fine, probably paid by McTavish, Frobisher, was less than Rosseau would have made had his venture been successful, and McGillivray doubtless felt that it was justified.

Steadily and swiftly the strife mounted, all the way from the Great Lakes to the Athabasca where, by the summer of 1803, the natives had become so accustomed to the price-cutting of the white rivals that none of the firms made real profits. For twenty-eight canoe-loads of trade goods portaged north from Lake Winnipeg that year the North West Company got only a hundred and eighty-two packs of furs; the XY people, whose

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investment was much smaller, took east but thirty-one packs, and the Hudson's Bay Company, making its initial sortie, had "6 small bundles" for their efforts, and were discouraged from returning to the Athabasca territory for several years.

The Nor'Westers were more than holding their own, however. Their answer to the boast of Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company to do business "in various ways in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, as well as in Montreal, Quebec and Michilimackinac" was the opening of Fort Kaministiquia in 1803.

The new inland depot at the mouth of the stream whose name in Chippewa means "river of difficult entrance" provided considerable prestige compared with the XY Company's modest buildings across the river and below the creek on the south side known as the Little Forks.

Fort Kaministiquia—on the old French route rediscovered by the North West Company—was situated on a low rise of land forty miles north of Grand Portage, on Canadian soil, facing a magnificent view of the imposing ramparts of Mount McKay and with Lake Superior reaching to the eastern horizon. Though as many as a thousand men had worked on its great hall, houses, stores, sheds and wharves at a cost of upwards of £50,000, the depot was not yet completed for the first meeting in 1803. But already a few cattle grazed on the lush flats upstream, and on the rise of ground immediately above the post—where La Vérendrye had camped half a century before—small fields were being tilled for seeding to coarse grains and potatoes. Already, too, a path was tramped out by hundreds of northmen, who together shouldered quantities of packs and kegs beyond the dreams of the French explorer. At that first meeting at Fort Kaministiquia two men who were to play important roles in the North West Company were admitted to partnership, David Thompson and John Duncan Campbell. Campbell later married Elizabeth, daughter of John McDonald and his wife Nancy, and grand-daughter to McTavish's former partner, Patrick Small, and so became related to Thompson by marriage.

McTavish meantime was leading the struggle with more than prestige and improved transportation and business methods. One item above all others would influence the natives to trap pelts and trade pemmican—rum. Between the years 1793 and 1798 the average annual quantity traded by the North West Company had been 9,600 gallons of high wines and rum; in 1803 it had almost doubled: that year over 16,000 gallons were carried across the height of land above Fort Kaministiquia. With only some 5,000 gallons the XY Company was completely out-traded in spirits. But the combined consumption of alcohol—well over 20,000 gallons at the height of the struggle—was regarded as an emergency move by all concerned. Diluted with as much as five parts of water, the hundred thousand gallons of "Blackfoot Milk" was considered necessary to meet the competition to secure pelts, even though it must inevitably debauch the entire Indian trade. Only a small quantity was set aside for the men, for regales or New Year's celebrations or, as George Nelson recalled happily during his clerkship at the Red River, for a festive eggnog made in the spring from sturgeon roes; "stirred smartly while putting in the rum . . ." it was as good as any eggnog made from hens' eggs.

Despite the excessive use of rum, McTavish had not been confusing effects with causes. Even while he was dealing with the handicaps imposed by the conditions of his more than continent-wide business, he was laying plans for overcoming one of the main causes. Quietly and thoroughly as he directed the struggle with the XY and Hudson's Bay Company in the north-west itself, he worked on a daring plan for a showdown with the latter. As early as 1802 John Fraser in London had been consulted, and had approved the brilliantly conceived plan.

While Sir Alexander Mackenzie was putting the finishing touches to his company—its penalty for competition from any of its shareholder-partners was twice that provided for by the Nor'Westers, or £10,000—and while McGillivray was seeing to the opening of Fort Kaministiquia, McTavish was mulling over a long letter from Fraser, the letter approving his plan.

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Fraser had written McTavish one of his generous packets of news and gossip concerning business in London and on the continent. Included in the mass of fact and opinion was a paragraph about a current venture which had recently come to Fraser's ears: "The romantic scheme of a nobleman (Lord Selkirk) . . . I have just learned by mere accident, that he has engaged above 600 people; he has chartered two ships to carry them out: goes with them himself to remain two years, and make his settlement somewhere about Lake Huron, where he has obtained a great tract of land . . . he is a young man about 27 or 8 with a clear estate of £15000 P An<sup>m</sup> & a good deal of money. What kind of neighbors they may prove to you, I know not . . ."

McTavish had already met young Selkirk, at the Beaver Club and elsewhere in Montreal. But there were many men undertaking adventures in the New World. He was more interested in another topic mentioned at length in Fraser's letter: "Your complete union must ultimately baffle the attempts of your adversaries, & your success (which is really extraordinary under such circumstances) will enable you to combat them with advantage . . ." The real nugget in the letter from London had to do with a Captain Richards and the adventure concerning which McTavish had consulted Fraser: "I am really glad that you have determined on making an attempt; I still think it a speculation on which your company ought not to hesitate in risking some thousands . . ."

This venture was indeed to be backed by many thousands of pounds of the firm's money. If it succeeded—and McTavish was taking his customary precautions to ensure its success—it would not only result in great relief to the North West Company's increasingly costly transport system, but it would also bring considerable personal satisfaction to McTavish himself. For he had not forgotten that rebuff from the Hudson's Bay Company some fifteen years before. He also knew the details of Alexander Mackenzie's earlier attempts to lease or otherwise acquire—for the North West Company—transit rights through

Hudson Bay, and the refusal of the British government to open that northern waterway to the Montrealers.

Since letters to London and replies took months, McTavish over a year before had asked Fraser to look about for a competent, reliable sea captain. Fraser had engaged a Captain Richards, formerly with the Hudson's Bay Company and familiar with Hudson Straits and Bay. That settled, McTavish had chartered the *Eddystone*, over 350 tons, had her heavily armed, and manned by forty experienced Orkneymen. He had then taken into his confidence—the project obviously required secrecy—his kinsman, the younger brother of the chief of Clan Tavish. At last, in the early summer of 1803, the *Eddystone* under Captain Richards and with John George McTavish in charge of the mission, sailed from Montreal for Hudson Bay.

While the *Eddystone* was on its way, another of McTavish's relatives, Angus Shaw, was preparing to leave his King's Posts' headquarters at Quebec. Accompanied by a second strong party, Shaw followed the route of the French explorer Joliette overland to James Bay. The two groups of Nor'Westers met on Charlton Island, a little to the north of the mouth of the Rupert River. There Shaw and young McTavish built Fort St. Andrews, first nailing to a tree a plaque bearing the inscription: "This island of Charlton taken possession of by Angus Shaw, Esqr. 1st day of September 1803 for the benefit of the N. West Company in the presence of Captain Richards and the following gentlemen being British subjects—Captain Sarmon, Mr. McTavish, Mr. McDougal, Mr. Folster." Shaw and John George McTavish, using Charlton Island as a base, then built two more small posts, one on Hayes Island at the mouth of the Moose River and one on the mainland at the mouth of the East Main River.

Even before he could receive word of the success of his *coup*, Simon McTavish sent Duncan McGillivray to London to negotiate with the Hudson's Bay Company for transit rights through the bay. It was a mission he would gladly have undertaken himself, but in the spring of 1804 his health was poor. A cold

which at first had seemed a minor ailment, failed to clear up normally. The results of his strenuous physical trips doubtless were taking their toll; the tension and frustrations of the recent struggle with Mackenzie and other former colleagues had taxed his nervous system more than he realized. By May his condition was so serious that the entire fur trade was concerned and John Richardson mentioned in a letter to Samuel Black wintering for the XY Company in the Athabasca territory that: "Mr. McTavish continues very unwell and is not yet out of danger".

During the previous summer, while the *Eddystone* was on its mission to Hudson Bay, McTavish had begun to fulfil yet another dream. To replace the house on St. Jean Baptiste Street he was building a mansion, larger and much more magnificent than Joseph Frobisher's Beaver Hall. It was on the plateau below Mount Royal and adjoining the fine stretch of land on which his friend James McGill had recently erected his fine house. Even though he hoped eventually to retire to London to live, here would be a suitable home for his beautiful young wife and their four children: eight-year-old William; Mary Pasky, seven; Anne, five, and the baby, Simon, born the previous year.

From the site of his mansion—between today's Peel and McTavish Streets—the fields below spread toward the growing town with a magnificent view of ships on the St. Lawrence River and the distant mountains beyond. During the previous summer workmen had already erected the walls and roofed the building, and when spring came McTavish moved to a stone cottage on the property so as to be able to supervise the work personally. It was later described by an old resident of Montreal: ". . . with two semi-circular towers at each end . . . a frontage of 126 feet. The roof of the main building . . . constructed on the old-fashioned *high* principle, draining from the ridge pole to all four sides. Those of the two towers were conical in shape, all being covered in tin. The main building was three storeys high, the *res-de-chaussée*, or ground floor being some twelve feet in height, the intention being . . . to have it

occupied by the kitchen, servants' rooms, etc . . . the same as we see in many of the houses built in France . . . the material was dressed limestone".

McTavish's chill developed into "an inflammation". He was seriously ill when William McGillivray left Lachine for the second meeting at Fort Kaministiquia. At the new depot, with Roderick McKenzie acting as agent in Duncan's place, the partners of the North West Company were discussing "the necessity of adopting . . . every measure that can tend to retrench expenses . . ." when, on July 6, 1804, Simon McTavish died at Montreal. He was fifty-four.

They buried him on his estate behind the still unfinished mansion, and afterwards luncheon was served on tables set up under the trees for the many mourners who walked or drove up from the town. Then, with his executors, his widow—she was not yet twenty-eight—heard the terms of her husband's will.

Seldom has a more generous or patriarchal will been drawn. Dated just four days before his death, McTavish seems to have forgotten none among his relatives, god-children, intimate friends and servants in Scotland, England or Canada. There was even £1,000 left for "assisting such of my poor relatives in Scotland as I may have neglected to provide for", and a legacy of £1,000 for the surviving children of one William Kay, "as I am doubtful whether I was justly entitled to the amount of the judgment rendered in my favour by the Court of Appeals in this province". The bequests to friends and servants ranged from several thousand down to a few pounds. There was a thousand pounds for each of the orders of nuns at the Hôtel Dieu and the Grey Nuns Hospital, and two hundred to his physician, Dr. George Selby. McTavish left to his father-in-law an annuity of £150, and release from such funds as the elder Chaboillez might have borrowed from him.

For "Margaret"—in his will he anglicized his wife's name—McTavish willed £1,200 a year, together with the use of the house on St. Jean Baptiste Street, with all the household furniture and plate, a pair of horses, a four-wheel carriage and a

calash, and all the trinkets, clothes and wearing apparel he owned in the province. To his son and heir William, and William's male heirs in turn forever, would go the mansion now being built together with Dunardary in Scotland, and should William die before coming of age, McTavish willed that the estates should go in turn to his younger son or his nephews or other male relatives; but none not blessed with his surname could inherit Dunardary without legally assuming the name of McTavish. The infant Simon was to have £20,000, and each of McTavish's daughters—and any child or children his wife might yet bear him—were willed the sum of £10,000 each plus a cash settlement at the time of marriage.

But McTavish had not made his magnanimous will without thought of the business he had developed over the years, and its perennial need of capital. None of the legacies over a hundred guineas was to be paid out of his estate until seven years after his death unless "sufficient money for that purpose shall have been realized therefrom without loss or inconvenience to the concern or concerns in which I am now a partner".

Simon McTavish was dead and it was too soon to measure the loss. Montreal had known him as a young man of modest prospects and untried capacity. It was burying him in middle age full of riches and power. And these things it had shared in beyond anything his Last Will and Testament could convey. The young man who had loved good wine, good oysters and pretty girls—The Marquis—had found in the small French town a joyous partner in his sense of style, of being equal to great events. For a short lifetime he had made it into a tiny metropolis, a status it would never quite lose.

In the far northwest, on the China coast and in London, great affairs would continue to move in the patterns he had ordained. His vision had always outreached that of his partners but so had his grasp of events and firmness of purpose; and so had his control of men. Now the news of his death would spread through the wide fur lands he had never seen. As it travelled

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up the waterways the gay and fearless men would fall silent, knowing they would not see his like again.

He had had one weakness which all knew and many resented: his determination to advance the members of his family. They stood round his grave and spread across the unfolding map of the west. Time would show how well his judgment marched with his loyalty. Into the last agreement of McTavish, Frobisher he had written the clause which named William McGillivray as his successor. The mantle of Simon McTavish had fallen on the nephew he had trained to wear it. Only time would tell whether it would be worn with the elegance and authority which had built and held an empire.



PART TWO

*William McGillivray*



## CHAPTER VII

# *McTavish, McGillivrays and Company*

Simon McTavish's death opened the way to the goal of his lifetime, a union between the Montreal fur-traders. But before William McGillivray could bring about the broader coalition of the North West and XY Companies he must see to all the personal details associated with the loss of his uncle's warm, proud presence.

On his return from Fort Kaministiquia he had little time for Magdeleine and their baby daughter, Ann; or for his children by his Indian wife—his daughter living at nearby Berthier, possibly with her mother, and his sons William and Joseph just entering the North West Company as clerks. For many months his uncle's affairs and his uncle's widow demanded practically his full time and attention.

Marie Marguerite McTavish had had little opportunity to appreciate her husband's great work and responsibilities. In the ten years of their marriage he had been almost continually travelling, without her except for the single trip to England—directing the affairs of the North West Company and of McTavish, Frobisher, and McTavish, Fraser and minor associations in New York and elsewhere. His roles as promoter and chief director of the interlocking concerns, coupled with the slow transportation and complicated by the hazards of war had left little time for family life.

Perhaps the widow of the richest man in the country resented the fact that her husband had named trustees to supervise the education of their four children; doubtless she resented the implication that at the time of his death he still regarded her as the minor he had married. She had had little responsibility to prepare her to cope with the experienced business men who were McTavish's executors: five Canadians, John Fraser in London and his brother-in-law Hugh Fraser of Scotland.

William McGillivray sent a copy of his uncle's will to Duncan, still in England, and called together his other fellow-executors in Montreal—Joseph Frobisher, Isaac Todd and Judge James Reid, who had married a third Chaboillez daughter. When the immediate details of funeral expenses and an income for Marie Marguerite and her children had been arranged, there was the question of the mansion. Should work on it be continued? Would Mrs. McTavish be able to manage so large a place alone? Could the estate stand the cost of completing it? They decided to finish only essential work at the time; the land was leased, and the house itself never completed. Roderick McKenzie bought the seigniory of Terrebonne.

Simon McGillivray, McTavish's youngest nephew, who had not entered the active fur trade because of lameness, was about to become a partner of McTavish, Fraser in London. He agreed to act as tutor to his uncle's heir, eight-year-old William, and as sub-tutor to the three younger children, all of whom, according to the will, must be educated in England. The clause requiring that her children be educated abroad probably caused Marie Marguerite McTavish as much anguish as any aspect of her loneliness—and McGillivray as much difficulty. No sooner were the children in England, than she wanted them back in Canada, perhaps because she was lonely in England and needed the comfort of her own relatives during her early widowhood; more than once at her insistence the executors met to discuss the question of bringing the children back to Canada. But there was the will. In the end they were forced to become firm: if Mrs. McTavish wished to reside in Canada, she could do

so, of course; but her children, and specially her husband's heir, must continue to reside in England for "his education and to avoid the inconvenience, expense and danger of another voyage". Eventually, Marie Marguerite married a British army officer, William Smith Plenderleath, and remained in England.

In the meantime, William McGillivray spent considerable time striving to find solutions to her many personal problems as well as managing the vast concern built by his uncle and whose leadership he must assume. His first official duty on behalf of the North West Company was to summon together the partners. On November 5, 1804, he presided at the meeting in Montreal which formally united the rival concerns.

Everyone in Montreal, and many men elsewhere, watched this latest meeting of the North West Company with interest. What would become of the concern now that Simon McTavish was dead? Could McGillivray hold it together—or would it break up into a straggle of competing partnerships?

From the first half hour in the impressive meeting-room it was clear that a new era was about to commence for the company, and not entirely because another man, the forty-year-old McGillivray, sat in the chair at the head of the table. A feeling of controlled excitement prevailed in the great counting-room through which each man passed on his way to the meeting; it was clearly felt, though the clerks sat as usual at their high desks, though the scratch of quills on fine paper was unchanged; the precise placement of leather-bound account books still lined the walls and quiet, competent head clerks moved about as they had done in Mr. McTavish's time. In the board-room itself, the great fires blazed on the hearth against the November chill; familiar portraits brightened the walls; even the muted sounds from the street were the same. But now into the room filed men who in recent years had been bitter competitors of the old North West Company: the distinguished Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the cousins John Richardson and John Forsyth, and former partners of the North West Company who had joined the opposition. When William McGillivray called the meeting

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to order there were present his brother and the other partners of McTavish, Frobisher: John Gregory, William Hallowell and Roderick McKenzie, who between them held power of attorney from the twenty-five wintering partners. Mackenzie headed the men of the former XY Company, who included John Ogilvy and John Mure and attorneys of Phyn, Inglis and Company of London, and their six winterers. Increasing the shares in the new company to a convenient one hundred, it was agreed that the partners of the former old North West Company would hold a seventy-five per cent interest in the new, united concern, and those of the group headed by Mackenzie, twenty-five per cent.

The North West Company had always done business under three major handicaps: its temporary agreements, the increasingly long hauls from Montreal, and the dispersal of capital at the end of each year's business. The 1804 agreement was to run for eighteen years, partly to offset the handicaps of short agreements. As formerly, no provision was made for building up reserves of working capital, and for the moment the long haul must remain an unsolved, but by no means overlooked, problem.

Actually, as the partners of the united concern considered their assets, there appeared to be little cause for concern, even over these handicaps. Lumped together, the holdings of the two groups were impressive: the many posts in the interior, often two at the same site, as well as those remaining on Hudson Bay; the forts and buildings on Lakes Superior, Huron and Erie and the several vessels, among them the *Nancy*; Fort Kaminstiquia itself; all the property in Montreal and Lachine and the King's Posts in Quebec, and the services of correspondents at Niagara, Kingston and Sandwich.

But though they would now have practically a monopoly of Montreal mercantile interests in the fur trade, experience prompted a clause by which "no trade or business shall be undertaken or carried on by the joint concern but what is properly understood to be the FUR TRADE or necessarily

depending thereon without the express consent or acquiescence of the Representatives or Agents of the New Company, except the Fisheries carried on at the different posts below Quebec, now leased by the said Old Company". No separate trade whatever would be tolerated, except in the "old southwest", and doubtless after considerable politely phrased but heated discussion, it was resolved, surely under pressure of the majority interests, that Sir Alexander Mackenzie be "excluded from any interference in the trade", or management of the business.

The minority concern—and union was not accomplished without other clashes of temperament or interest—won a point when it was finally agreed that the "said New Company shall sustain no part of the Expenses which have been occasioned by the late adventure made by the said Old Company to the Hudson Bay Territory by Sea". But while the minority group refused to assume liability for any lawsuits which the Hudson's Bay Company might bring against partners of the old North West Company for trespass, they agreed to bear their full share of such costs as might occur should permission be obtained to use the bay. As formerly, the firm of McTavish, Frobisher would manage the majority of the North West Company business, a quarter only of the outfitting going to the supply house of Forsyth, Richardson. The winterers not present—and few could possibly be absent from their duties in the interior during the winter months—would have an opportunity at the next annual meeting at Fort Kaministiquia to approve the new agreement, or to retire from the concern.

Four days after signing the new North West Company agreement, Sir Alexander Mackenzie met the partners of his firm to discuss details of managing their one-quarter interest. Mackenzie's group was practically a continuation of the former XY Company, and capitalized at £30,000. Its most important effect on the new company was the men it brought into the concern. Mackenzie himself was about to be appointed member of the Legislative Assembly for Huntingdon. Thomas Thain, a competent accountant, and John Ogilvy, with Henry McKenzie,

younger brother of Roderick, as alternative, would represent the Mackenzie interests at Fort Kaministiquia. And, through Phyn, Inglis and Company of London, the new concern received the support of Edward "Bear" Ellice, soon to be known as the first commoner in England. Ellice came from a family notable in international financial circles with experience in colonial trade, and was himself a man of great wealth.

The stage was set for the annual meeting of the North West Company at Fort Kaministiquia in the summer of 1805.

William McGillivray went up the Ottawa River to the depot in his private canoe, the only man in the entire organization entitled to such a privilege. By the time his canoe swept across Thunder Bay, men sent up earlier had prepared for the momentous gathering. Special foods and liquors had been laid in for the occasion, and the depot was almost completed.

Inevitably the union of men who had so recently been bitter competitors was not achieved without difficulty. After tribute had been paid to the late Simon McTavish, his nephew was forced to face at once the stubborn determination of the former competitors to secure every possible right and privilege to which they felt entitled. Backed by Duncan and Roderick McKenzie, the elder McGillivray from the first found his every move challenged by the agents of Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company, John Ogilvy and Thomas Thain. One point was to be solved only through arbitration. At the Montreal meeting McGillivray had insisted that the old concern retain three shares to provide for clerks already promised the privileges of wintering partners. When these shares were not immediately filled at the contentious meeting at Fort Kaministiquia and when McGillivray claimed that the profits of the shares, until they were allotted, belonged to the three-quarter interests held by the "old" concern, Ogilvy and Thain demanded that the profits go to the whole, the minority to receive a quarter. If profits of shares allotted to winterers could be reserved for the majority interests, protested Ogilvy and Thain, not only might essential posts in the interior become vacant but winterers of Sir Alexander Mackenzie and

Company could be excluded entirely. While the bitterly contested problem was postponed for legal settlement, the meeting agreed that the spirit of the new agreement must be honoured. No winterer could be replaced without consent of the majority of the concern; and no winterer's share should be considered vacant unless the winterer in question had died, forfeited his share through misbehaviour, or had legally retired.

McGillivray found several winterers of the "old" concern voting with Ogilvy and Thain that profits from the three unfilled shares go to the whole; it was his first rift as chief executive with the men with whom he himself had worked as a winterer. But gradually he was able to bring agreement into the meeting.

Already in effect were the regulations passed the previous year, while McTavish was dying; they covered the size and content of each northwest canoe, and limited winterers to only "one Man (or servant) over and above the number that are in his loaded canoes". Now further restrictions were accepted by the winterers, perhaps because each man realized that an inevitable surplus of experienced men existed; but also because each hoped for increased returns from his share as a winterer. One restriction, all knew, was certain to result in protests from their clerks and *engagés*, but it must go through—the "practice of suffering men to bring out *pacquettons* . . . in the company's canoes". Voyageurs had always smuggled a few furs in their luggage, selling them in Montreal or to free-traders who might hang around the depot; every winterer expected the *engagés* to take out a few souvenirs, and even to make a little on the side. But the privilege had been abused. Now it was agreed that any man caught with more than two buffalo robes or two dressed skins, or one of each, would be fined "50 livres N.W. Currency", and any employee caught trafficking with "petty traders or Montreal men" would forfeit his wages. There was little doubt that most voyageurs would accept the terms when their next contract was arranged, for there would be a surplus of men in all ranks. All above the rank of voyageur would

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share the restrictions on recently improved living conditions in the interior. For several years tea, coffee and chocolate had been included in the packs going to the interior, despite high freight charges. Now these luxuries were to be cut to half—six pounds of tea and four of coffee and chocolate for each winterer, half that amount for clerks—for the entire year. Voyageurs, of course, had no such privileges.

By this time, too, many voyageurs and other servants had grown old in the fur trade; old for that hard trade at forty or fifty. Many were existing in log shacks near the depot. The winterers felt something should be done for these "objects of charity" and that it was up to the agents, or directors as they were now to be known, to make provision for them. Again a minor rift occurred between agents and winterers when the former suggested that the latter contribute to the fur trade's earliest pension scheme. But eventually the fund was set up by the agents, "not exceeding One hundred pounds per Annum . . . no individual to receive more than Ten pounds currency in One Year".

Still dealing with problems in the interior, agents and winterers turned to the delicate question shared by all—the number of women and children in the country.

This "heavy burden on the company" the partners of the North West Company discussed at length. Each of them had or had had an Indian or half-breed wife *au façon du Nord* from the McGillivrays down to the newest winterer. Each knew how useful an Indian woman could be to cook, carry, make fires or set up teepees on the trail; to gather gum and watape for mending canoes; to make snowshoes, moccasins and all leather garments; to gather berries, dry and pound meat and pack pemmican—and to supply their only feminine companionship while in the interior. They admitted—Scots and the few French and English partners present—that though a native woman could provide most of her keep, she and her children, when multiplied by the many posts across the country, became a considerable financial burden to the concern. Aware that at

least one man in the gathering had two Indian wives and families at two different posts, all agreed that steps must be taken to check "so great an Evil, at least if nothing could be done to suppress it entirely".

More or less typical was Alexander Henry the Younger, who referred to his Indian consort as "Her Ladyship, My Squaw". She had come to his cabin following a New Year's revel. Henry, according to his journal, had tried to get rid of her, even going off buffalo-hunting in the hope that she would leave in his absence. But the girl refused to go. Henry eventually accepted the inevitable, since "the Devil himself couldn't have got rid of her", and when he was made a bourgeois, "Her Ladyship, My Squaw" became a first lady of the vast interior. It was different with many of the less affluent clerks. Among them, a recently apprenticed New Englander, Daniel Harmon, was one of the few who for some years refused to have anything to do with native girls, though he, too, eventually succumbed, and "after sober reflection agreed to accept a girl of fourteen . . . a nice, quiet chief's daughter with an amiable disposition . . ."

For the record, the partners at Fort Kaministiquia, agents and winterers alike, agreed that "no Man whatsoever, either partner or clerk, or Engage, belonging to the Concern shall henceforth take, or suffer to be taken, under any pretense whatsoever, any woman or maid from any of the tribes of Indians . . . to live with him within the Company's Houses or Forts & to be maintained at the expence of the Concern". With fine Highland stoicism they enacted a penalty of a hundred pounds, Halifax currency, for every breach, the sum to be forfeited to the company.

The embargo looked fine on the minute book. Both it and the next clause doubtless called for a bumper by way of celebration. For the penalty was to be enforced only under limited conditions: ". . . it is understood that taken the Daughter of a white Man after the fashion of the Country, should be considered no violation of this resolve". By now there were

numerous half-breed girls in the interior; with them to choose from the North West Company would receive little revenue from men unable to resist the charms of full-blooded Indian girls.

Such restrictions had to do chiefly with the personal lives of winterers. The meeting at Fort Kaministiquia following union was to include one item of far broader import to agents and winterers alike. When the minutes were finally quilled onto fine paper, this was recorded as the first item: "... to consider the present State of the Negotiation with the Hudson's Bay Company, for obtaining a transit for their property thro' Hudson Bay to the North West or interior Country: And also to decide on the proper Measures to be adopted for bringing the said Negotiation to a favourable conclusion . . ."

The partners of the North West Company formally agreed that the English company be approached with an offer to lease transportation rights through Hudson Bay for a sum not to exceed two thousand pounds a year, and for a period to be arranged mutually. As a special lever, the agents were authorized to offer to withdraw from Charlton Island and the Eastmain and Moose Rivers, the posts built by Shaw and John George McTavish the previous year. All they wanted was the right to use the bay; they would in no way interfere with the posts or bayside trade carried on by the Hudson's Bay Company; and they would expect a guarantee from the latter not to interfere in any way with their trade. It was an offer which, in the event, the English company was not prepared to accept.

In 1806 the firm of McTavish, Frobisher was reorganized, dropping the name of Frobisher, to become McTavish, McGillivrays and Company. By this time many of the older merchants had retired, Joseph Frobisher among them, though between the old Nor'Wester and the young McGillivrays and their associates relationships continued as cordial as ever. Indeed, in a little *Diary of My Dinners*, kept by Frobisher between 1806 and 1810, the names of the McGillivray brothers and their friends and families occur frequently; now Frobisher

is dining with Mr. and Mrs. William McGillivray, to celebrate their wedding anniversary or Ann's birthday, or they are visiting him; the closest ties are apparent between them. And there were many other guests: Roderick McKenzie and his wife, Sir Alexander, and such notable visitors as General Sir Isaac Brock, the Hallowells and Henrys, and John Jacob Astor and his daughter Magdalen; the latter young lady, it was noted, was due to receive some £25,000 from her father on her marriage, which eventually was to an American.

Partners in the firm now were the two McGillivrays, Roderick McKenzie, Angus Shaw, and the two Hallowells—William and James, Junior. From the first the new concern was associated with various other Montreal houses in the Michilimackinac Company, which had been formed as a means of protection against American interference following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The Michilimackinac Company operated on American territory, and had its headquarters in Montreal. Among its partners were the firms of Forsyth, Richardson, the McGills, and Parker, Gerrard and Ogilvy. Already opposition by the Americans against Canadian traders on United States territory had greatly increased; boats laden with goods or pelts and sailing by way of the Great Lakes were more than once seized at Detroit or Niagara. Astor and his daughter continued to be entertained in Montreal. Though men like the McGillivrays were doubtless aware that Astor was already organizing his American Fur Company, they were also deeply concerned over the surplus of experienced fur-traders and saw in Astor's venture employment and even a possible bright future for former associates. Several winterers, however, took another view of the situation. Following the formation of the Michilimackinac Company, a small group held a private meeting at the depot. The boundary settled between the Montrealers and Astor to define the trade areas between the Michilimackinac Company and the Nor'Westers might be all very well, but they should have been consulted. To prevent further possibility of becoming no more than "McGillivray's Geese", the group of winterers

demanding that one of their number attend at Michilimackinac to represent them and they reserved the right to reject any agreement affecting their interests until such an appointee was recognized by the agents.

Yet despite the divergent interests of Montrealers and winterers, McGillivray handled the trade with an experienced understanding of its many facets. Within a couple of years the new regulations over which he had presided had begun to show results and Sir Alexander was able to note happily: "I understand that the result of the returns from all quarters is estimated at from £130,000 to £140,000, which must leave a handsome profit upon the outfit for the year . . ." The company was planning its extensions across the Rockies, it had come to a workable agreement on the sphere of the Michilimackinac Company, and in July, 1807, the winterers held another meeting at Fort Kaministiquia without the presence of the agents. At that meeting they proposed a move which was a distinct compliment to McGillivray and a token of their support. They resolved formally that "the name of this place should be changed & that of Fort William substituted in its stead . . ." The agents agreed, and on the minutes recorded their wish that the name of Kaministiquia be accordingly "discontinued & abolished forever".

The great depot, now Fort William, was at last completed, with Kenneth McKenzie, apparently a relative of Roderick McKenzie, in charge. Travellers arriving for the first time marvelled at its size and equipment, several writing glowing accounts of "the wilderness depot".

"The buildings at Fort William," noted Ross Cox, an Irish employee of the American Fur Company, "consists of a large house, in which the dining hall is situated, and in which the gentleman in charge resides; the council house; a range of snug buildings for the accommodation of the people from the interior; a large counting house; the doctor's residence (occupied by the first doctor west of the Great Lakes); extensive stores for the merchandise and furs; a forge; various workshops,

with apartments for the mechanics, a number of whom are always stationed there. There is also a prison for refractory voyageurs (the *pot au beurre*). The whole is surrounded by wooden fortifications, flanked by bastions, and is sufficiently strong to withstand any attack from the natives. Outside the fort is a shipyard, in which the company's vessels on the lake are built and repaired. The kitchen garden is well stocked, and there are extensive fields of Indian corn and potatoes. There are also several head of cattle, with sheep, hogs, poultry, & c., and a few horses for domestic use.

"The country about the fort is low, with a rich, moist soil. The air is damp, owing to frequent rains, and the constant exhalation from Lake Superior."

Cox described the great hall as "a noble apartment, and sufficiently capacious to entertain two hundred. A finely executed bust of the late Simon McTavish is placed in it (on one of the great mantels over the fire place at each end of the room), with portraits of various proprietors." The portraits included a full-length likeness of Lord Nelson, presented by William McGillivray who, with Sir Alexander Mackenzie, had been a member of the committee responsible for placing the statue of Nelson in Montreal's Notre Dame Street, and a painting of the Battle of Trafalgar. (In order to get the paintings safely up to Fort William by canoe and sailing-ship, the canvases had been removed, rolled and sealed in a water-resistant container.) On one wall a space was left for the map which the company some day expected to have of its discoveries and possessions in the interior; it was to be drawn a few years later by David Thompson.

Fort William was the nerve centre as well as the supply depot for the entire northwest. From it goods were sent to the advance depot at Lac la Pluie, where as Daniel Harmon noted: "the goods are set apart for the different posts . . . and to this place, the greater number of persons who have charge (of the Athabasca and Fort Vermilion posts) come every fall to receive their merchandise". For each canoe of five men from

Fort William, Harmon recorded the ration for the trip: "Two bags of corn  $1\frac{1}{2}$  bushel each and 15 lbs. of grease to Lac La Pluie; two bags of wild rice  $1\frac{1}{2}$  bushels each and 10 lbs. of grease to Bas de la Rivière Winnipic; four bags of pemmican of 90 lbs. each to Cumberland House, and two bags of pemmican 90 lbs. each to serve until we come among the buffalo generally near the Montee or at the farthest the elbow of the Saskatchewan. This shows the vast quantity of provisions we require yearly to carry on the trade in the N.W. The brigades which proceed N.W. of Cumberland House require three additional bags of pemmican per canoe and some a fourth". All of this must be requisitioned from Fort William.

At the depot plans were made for John Rowand, clerk and son of a Quebec doctor, to build the first North West Company house at Fort Edmonton. Here plans were developed by Duncan McGillivray for exploration across the Rockies by David Thompson and another partner, Simon Fraser. Here, too, the partners, directors, and winterers talked long and knowingly about the quantity of liquor still being sent up to the northwest. The liquor consumption was down from the twenty thousand gallons a year at the height of the struggle between the two companies, to an average of 10,700 gallons. But the government was questioning even that amount, and further economies might have to be enforced. The quantity could be cut, it was agreed, "should the *Saints in Parliament*—in their mistaken notions of philanthropy—persist in the Intention of abolishing that Article wholly in the Trade. It is the general opinion that even one Half of the above quantity or 5000 gallons if restricted to that small quantity, might still serve the trade was it found adviseable to make any offer of that kind to Parliament, in order to prevent its total prohibition".

William McGillivray might have felt that he could now enjoy his place as head of the greatest concern in the country. He had a charming wife and daughter, and he had been greatly warmed by the tribute of men who had shared the life of a winterer with him, in the naming of the depot Fort William.

But throughout the following winter he worried greatly about his brother's health.

By the spring of 1808 Duncan was seriously ill, probably from a recurrence of the rheumatic fever which earlier had prevented him from attempting an actual trip across the Rockies. Early in March, William wrote Judge Reid that Duncan seemed to be losing ground; he hoped the warm spring would help, though cold weather would keep the roads in better condition. A week later he wrote Judge Reid again, announcing the birth of his second daughter, and adding "Poor Duncan still continues in the same listless state." Duncan died in April, and William buried him in the family vault on Mount Royal where the two nephews had erected a handsome monument to Simon McTavish. His death was another real blow to William who, like McTavish, was intensely devoted to his family and had depended greatly on Duncan's support in the new responsibilities of handling the North West Company and McTavish, McGillivrays. Archibald Norman McLeod became a partner of McTavish, McGillivrays, filling the vacancy created by Duncan McGillivray's death, and thereby making available another precious winterer's share.

Again, William McGillivray had no time for personal grief. Shortly after Duncan's death he went to Fort William for the summer meeting, the trip each way taking a good month, and on his return to Montreal assumed the social as well as business leadership which he had shared with his brother.

Montreal was growing rapidly along with North West Company interests. That year, 1808, its citizens thronged the waterfront to see the first steamboat on the St. Lawrence, the *Accommodation* built by brewer John Molson, leave on her maiden voyage to Quebec. That year, too, the town acquired its first water-works. And in September the Beaver Club, lapsed since McTavish's death, resumed meetings. The first was a dinner in honour of Captain Alexander Patterson of the *Eweretta*, and a notable party of guests.

It had been a Beaver Club custom to elect to honorary

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membership captains of the vessels which carried the fur-traders' pelts to England, returning with trade goods, and Captain Patterson was now elected to honorary membership. Present also at the dinner were John Jacob Astor (by this time rated as being worth some £200,000, and about to launch the American Fur Company, capitalized at a million dollars) and Sir John Johnson, head of the Indian department. Since one of the rules of the Beaver Club required every member in town to attend unless his health prevented, McGillivray was present.

Joseph Frobisher, charter member and in his sixty-ninth year, presided, with William McKay as "cork". Vice-president for the day was Alexander Henry the Elder, still recalling that he had been presented to Marie Antoinette and to Sir Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society. James McGill was there, and Roderick McKenzie, each wearing his gold Beaver Club medal with the inscription "Fortitude in Distress" on a black ribbon instead of the usual blue, out of respect for the memory of both Simon McTavish and Duncan McGillivray. Thirty-two sat down to the famous fare which included roast beaver, pemmican, sturgeon and wild rice, and a large and impressive list of liquors and wine. They drank the five toasts obligatory at all Beaver Club dinners, and always in the same order: To the mother of all the Saints; the King; the fur trade in all its branches; voyageurs, wives and children; and, finally, absent members.

With all the others McGillivray smoked the calumet, the pipe passed round the entire table, Indian fashion. With them he sang the loved voyageur songs, "A la claire fontaine", "En roulant ma boule", "Malbrouck", and many another. And when morning would soon come, they all did the *Grand voyage*; every gentleman present found a make-believe paddle, a walking-stick or poker or sword, and then seated on the carpet in two rows, with many a Highland hoot or Indian whoop and many a nostalgic song, they all paddled an imaginary *canot du maître*.

For William McGillivray it had been good to forget his

worries and losses for an evening. But Duncan's death continued to leave a great gap, one which meant more even than the ties of deep brotherly affection. Duncan had been carrying on the negotiations with the Hudson's Bay Company, agreed on at Fort William, and the English company had just refused the offer of the North West Company, firmly and with finality.

William McGillivray was in no mood to accept a rebuff. Like his uncle before him, he had other cards and he was ready to play them. If the Nor'Westers could get transit through Hudson Bay by no other means, he would see about buying a control in the English company.

He had consulted Edward Ellice and Sir Alexander Mackenzie about his plan, and both were thoroughly in accord. Both realized, too, that the scheme would require considerable diplomacy to ensure its success. The stock must be bought up quietly, and by men of excellent reputation, for the governor and committee of the Hudson's Bay Company would never sell to the North West Company knowingly, no matter how hard pressed they might be. Sir Alexander was fortuitously about to retire to England to live. William McGillivray asked him to see about buying some £30,000 worth of Hudson's Bay Company stock, and Mackenzie in London approached Lord Selkirk, an acquaintance of some standing, to negotiate the purchase. He and McGillivray had entertained Selkirk at the Beaver Club some years before, and Selkirk had admitted that Mackenzie's *Voyages* had greatly inspired his current interest in North American settlement. The explorer and the young nobleman met to discuss the purchase, probably at the Canada Club, the "association of merchants and others connected with British North America", whose members lunched and dined from time to time at the Freemasons' Tavern in Great Queen Street, Holborn. The step toward acquiring control of the Hudson's Bay Company, McGillivray felt, was well on its way to being launched.

At that time he was about to become a member of the Legislative Council. He was also spending considerable time over

the affairs of men in the concern, especially those for whom there was no employment following union, or who were dissatisfied with such employment as was available for them. Though several had already been engaged by Astor others, still with the North West Company, were disgruntled because of slow promotion, among them the clerk Colin Robertson. Following differences with John McDonald of Garth, Robertson resigned in 1809. There was nothing McGillivray could do for him since the concern had voted to accept his resignation. He was, however, presented with sincere regrets, cordial wishes for his future and a warm testimonial prior to sailing for England.

Meantime, McGillivray's private life was saddened by the death of his first son in March, 1810, soon after the child's birth. A few months later his wife, probably to recover from the heart-breaking loss of her baby, sailed for Scotland for a visit with her relatives. She never returned to Canada. Before the canoes had returned from Fort William in the autumn Magdeleine also was dead, though weeks must pass before her husband received word of his bereavement. In the space of six years, McGillivray had lost his uncle, his brother, his son and his wife. Alexander Mackenzie had retired to the Old Country where he married his beautiful cousin Geddes, and Roderick had become a dormant partner. Desperately in need of comfort, William persuaded his sister to come from Scotland to live with him in Montreal and look after his two little girls. His younger brother Simon also left London and McTavish, Fraser to join the firm of McTavish, McGillivrays.

As well as the comfort of one of his own kin, he needed the assistance of the able, experienced business man, Simon. A new venture about to be organized would require his presence in New York from time to time.

Ever since 1788 the North West Company had had some association with John Jacob Astor, then a young German immigrant recently arrived in the New World. Now head of the great American Fur Company backed by the State of New York, and with avowed intention of carrying American trade

right to the Pacific under the guise of the newly formed Pacific Fur Company, Astor had become powerful in the mercantile life of the two young countries. Though Astor continued to visit Montreal, and was received with the usual hospitality by Roderick McKenzie, Frobisher, McGillivray and other leading fur merchants, his business deals inevitably strained the association. So long as he had bought pelts from the various Mackinac traders, American or Canadian—prior to 1810 he had purchased furs from various traders—Astor had not provided serious opposition to the Montrealers. In 1810 he started purchasing on his own account, and it was an open secret that he had vowed to absorb the Michilimackinac Company.

Astor had already sent several vessels by way of the Horn to the Pacific coast with the intention of trading in the territory about the mouth of the Columbia, imposing another threat to North West Company interests. With the hope of recouping this business for Montreal and possibly with the hope of preventing international incidents, McGillivray arranged formation of yet another company. After a series of meetings with Astor in Montreal and New York, he joined with the proprietor of the American and Pacific Fur Companies to organize a new Michilimackinac firm, to be known as the South West Company.

Shares in the new concern were to be held by Astor and by McTavish, McGillivrays and Forsyth, Richardson, the Montreal firms stipulating that the North West Company could purchase a third of their interest. The lucrative supply business was to be handled one-half through New York, the other through Montreal; certain goods could be obtained to better advantage in each country, and by importing through New York that half of the goods—Astor's share—would be free of duty. The agreement was signed by McGillivray and Astor at New York on January 11, 1811. Two months later the American government announced its Non-Intercourse Act, prohibiting importation of goods from either France or England. Not even Astor's personal influence with the president of the United States

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prevailed when, later in the summer, a cargo from England reached St. Joseph's; despite the dependence of the natives on manufactured goods and the possible loss to the South West Company the goods were held up at the border.

Meantime, and before the cargo from England had arrived at St. Joseph's, McGillivray was at Fort William with the offer to the North West Company of a third interest in the new concern. He found considerable hostility to the entire South West Company. Some winterers were alarmed over the probable effects of the Non-Intercourse Act. Others had not become reconciled to the 1806 delineation of territory between the North West and South West Companies, to be continued in the new agreement negotiated by McGillivray with Astor. Three former XY winterers, James Leith, John Wills and John Haldane sharply criticized both agreements with Astor. Others protested the clause stating that "... the North West Company shall ... deliver up to this Concern (the Southwest Company) all and every Post of Trade or Trading house, which they at present occupy within the Territories or Limits of the United States of America and shall not hold any separate Interest or Trade with any other person or persons other than the present Concern in the Indian Country within the Territories of the United States of America, nor furnish any person or person with Goods ..."

This, charged the critical winterers, was going too far. The "southwest" was, after all, at the very door of Fort William; much of its trade and many of its posts had been developed by the Nor'Westers. Pierre de Rocheblave joined in the protest. For a time it looked as though a serious rift must develop, not only between these three and the agents, but between the entire group of winterers and the representatives of McTavish, McGillivrays. William McGillivray found himself having to call up every resource of tact to prevent an open break. He achieved harmony in the end only by diverting their attention to one clause on which all were certain to agree "... that the Limits within which the Trade of this Concern (the South West

Company) shall be carried on has no application whatsoever to any country beyond the Ridge of the Rocky Mountains, nor the River Mississipie nor to the North West Coast in the Pacific Ocean . . .”

But a majority of the Nor'Westers had realized that the South West Company offered dividends if it could be adequately managed. Warmed by McGillivray's reference to the Pacific trade, they eventually voted in favour of accepting the offer of a third interest; and in the end they were joined by the dissidents when McGillivray suggested the name of Pierre de Rocheblave as manager of the new concern. McGillivray could have used no more persuasive argument than reminding them of the far west, for by 1811 the North West Company had at last extended its fur-trade empire right to the mouth of the Columbia River.

## CHAPTER VIII

# *The Pacific Slope and the War of 1812*

In 1803 the United States, already a lusty, rapidly growing republic, had turned its attention to the Pacific. That year the American government sent Captain Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to discover an overland route across the continent. The two young men also received instructions from President Jefferson to study the natives and their customs in the territory they crossed, and to make careful notes of natural resources and geography. Eventually Lewis and Clark reached the Columbia River whose mouth had been discovered by another American, Captain Robert Gray of Boston, some twelve years earlier.

During the early nineteenth century news travelled at the pace of canoes and horses and men on foot. But the Nor'Westers managed to keep in touch with events which might in any way affect the fur trade. They knew that Lewis and Clark had reached the Pacific as soon as did the American government, and possibly earlier. As the privately owned company which had backed Alexander Mackenzie's trip ten years before, they were intensely concerned with the purpose behind the American expedition. Above all, they wanted to know whether the Americans would lay claim to the rich fur trade of the Upper Missouri River and the territory west of the Rockies.

As early as 1800 Duncan McGillivray had made plans to cross the Rockies. Despite crippling bouts of rheumatic fever, he had investigated several of the probable passes from the Saskatchewan River, and had sent David Thompson and Alexander Henry the Younger on further such explorations. He and his associates had carefully studied the available information collected by other explorers, with special attention to Captain Vancouver's accounts of the Pacific coast to the north of the Columbia. As soon as union with the XY was completed, the North West Company renewed the assault on the mountain barrier with determination and all the capital they could spare.

The plan—a great, two-pronged drive led by the ablest men among the company's explorer-traders—was finally worked out at Fort William during the first year of McGillivray's régime. David Thompson, backed by John McDonald of Garth at Rocky Mountain House, was chosen to seek a route by way of the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan. Simon Fraser, a partner of several years' standing and familiar with the territory beyond Lake Athabasca, would explore the Rockies from Peace River. He was to work his way over the Great Divide, and develop the vast fur-trade territory at the headwaters of the Peace, soon to be known from its rugged terrain as New Caledonia.

Fraser had spent his boyhood at Bennington, Vermont, where his father, a cousin of Simon McTavish, had joined the loyalist forces. After Captain Fraser was captured by the rebels and died in jail at Albany, his young widow had taken their eight children to the Glengarry settlement in Upper Canada. Young Simon was educated in Montreal by his uncle Fraser, a judge of the Court of Common Pleas. At sixteen he was articled to McTavish, Frobisher, from where he entered the North West Company as a clerk.

Before the meeting of 1805 at Fort William ended, Fraser had led his expedition westwards by way of the Peace. He was accompanied by a party of thirty experienced, hardy men.

By late autumn he had reached the Upper Peace River. But

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reaching the Upper Peace did not mean that he could at once embark on plans for crossing the mountains. First the fur trade must be set up. During the winter Fraser detailed fourteen men to build a post at Rocky Mountain Portage. Others were sent up the Pack River, to build the stockaded, log fort which he named in honour of Archibald Norman McLeod; Fort McLeod was the first trading-post in what later became British Columbia. The following summer Fraser opened a third small depot on Stuart Lake, naming the lake for his friend and lieutenant, John Stuart, and the post Fort St. James. And while exploring the Nechako River, he built a fourth outpost, Fort George. The four trading-posts, all stoutly built log houses surrounded by picket stockades, became the nucleus for the North West Company district of New Caledonia.

For nearly two years Fraser traded while exploring the Upper Peace and its tributaries and the territory to the west. The beaver were even better than the best in the Mackenzie Valley, blacker and silkier and more plentiful, as were also marten and fisher. The only handicap was the vast distance from Montreal.

Fraser often wished during his first season in New Caledonia that trading information from the natives about the territory across the mountains was as easy as trading pelts. More than once he suspected that they were telling him yarns calculated to please him rather than actual facts concerning mountain passes, the rivers they travelled in the interior, the tribes they in turn traded with. Above all he wished to learn whether or not there were streams accessible from the Peace which would reach the fabled River of the West, the Columbia. During his two years he rechecked the points mentioned by Mackenzie in his *Voyages*, and with wry humour accused his fellow-explorer of missing the outflow of the Pack River to the Parsnip while enjoying a nap. Taking advantage of Mackenzie's experience, he traded dried salmon with the natives and gradually adapted his food supply from pemmican to salmon. He hoped also to find game available across the mountains. The arrival of Jules

Quesnel late in the summer of 1807 with trade goods from Fort William assured a start on the trip of discovery the following spring.

Spring was late that year in the mountains. Not until May 22 was Fraser finally able to set out from Fort George. He had with him John Stuart and Jules Quesnel as aides, a crew of nineteen men, and two Indian guides. They had four canoes.

"Having made every necessary preparation for a long voyage," he noted in his journal, "we embarked at 5 o'clock a.m."

Fraser believed he was on the Columbia, for the stream in front of Fort George was some three hundred yards wide, its current swift and strong. The going was good. The party swept along until they stopped at eleven for breakfast. Before putting their canoes back into the stream, Fraser cached a supply of dried salmon for the return trip.

Probably he never would have stuck out the trip to reach the Pacific but for those first few days of comparatively easy travel. The rest of the trip was perhaps more arduous and fraught with continual danger than any trip of discovery ever undertaken. But though the natives had warned him that the river was all but impassable, Fraser had dedicated himself to reaching the Pacific Ocean; that spirit was to carry him on when everything else failed.

Like all explorers, he depended heavily on the natives, following aboriginal waterways and paths through the Pacific slope forests of ever larger trees and denser undergrowth. From the first he found the natives less dependent on white men, and therefore less willing to provide information and food, than were the Indians east of the Rockies. Those who had arms were often hostile. Only when describing the hazards of the river he hoped to travel, did Fraser find them reliable. Where natives had told him of "whirlpools that would swallow up canoes . . ." Fraser found a boiling rapid "about 1½ mile long and the rocks on both sides of the River contract themselves in some places to either 30 or 40 yards of one another . . ."

Every mile of the way, every day, his life and those of his

men depended on quick thinking and cool, disciplined action: "It is so wild that I cannot find words to describe our situation at times. We have to pass where no human being should venture, yet in those places there is a regular footpath impressed or rather indented upon the very rocks by frequent travelling. Besides this, the steps which are formed like a ladder or the shrouds of a ship, by poles hanging to one another and crossed at certain distances with twigs, the whole suspended from the top to the foot of immense precipices and fastened at both extremities to stones and trees, furnish a safe and convenient passage to the Natives; but we, who had not the advantage of their education and experience, were often in imminent danger when obliged to follow their example."

No matter how dangerous the going, Fraser, like every other northwest trader-explorer, kept his terse, often hurriedly written journal: ". . . it being absolutely impossible to carry the canoes by land, all hands without hesitation embarked as it were a *corps perdu* upon the mercy of this awful tide . . . Skimming along as fast as lightning the crews, cool and determined, followed each other in awful silence, and when we arrived at the end, we stood gazing at each other in silent congratulation at our narrow escape from total destruction . . ." On one such passage, they were not as fortunate. One of the men, La Chappelle, had his light canoe swept from under him in a rapid: "I lost my recollection, which however I soon recovered and was surprised to find myself on a smooth, easy current with one half of the canoe in my arms".

Inevitably Fraser's well disciplined men felt they had reached the limits of their endurance. As had happened to Mackenzie, Fraser had to face a group of mutinous, nearly spent voyageurs. Bone weary himself, as a last resort he challenged their common sense: What chance had they without him? How could any white man survive in these inhospitable, unfamiliar mountains without experienced leadership? Did they not realize that alone each would perish; that together they had every hope of overcoming the worst hazards and fatigues? When he had finally

given them proof of the leadership and the moral comfort they so greatly needed, he asked each to take an oath: "I solemnly swear before Almighty God to perish rather than forsake any of our crew in distress during the present voyage". Not a man refused.

As had also happened with Mackenzie, Fraser's senses heralded their nearness to salt water. The air was softer, the rainfall heavier, the vegetation more lush and impenetrable. As he and his little party dropped closer to sea-level the natives appeared better fed. They lived in great, well constructed longhouses, and resented more fiercely the arrival of the white men than had any of the previous tribes. When he finally talked with them through an interpreter they told Fraser that already other white men had visited their shores by sailing-ships.

Fraser longed to press on beyond the inlet of the sea where he saw tides that rose and fell. Again like Mackenzie, he, too, longed to savour the great moment, the goal of so many explorers before him. But his men shared none of his longing. Surrounded by well armed, hostile natives, they demanded that he return at once. So another Nor'Wester recorded his brief glimpse of the Pacific: on July 2 "we came in sight of a gulf or bay of the sea . . . seeing nothing but dangers and difficulties in our way, we therefore relinquished our designs and turned our thoughts toward home . . . Here I must again acknowledge my great disappointment in not seeing the *main* Ocean, having gone so near it as to be almost within view . . . The latitude is 49' nearly, while that of the entrance of the Columbia is 46' 20. This river therefore is not the Columbia!"

Simon Fraser had reached the Gulf of Georgia, not actually the Pacific Ocean. Nor had he found a practical trade route across the mountains for the North West Company. He had explored the magnificent, terrible Fraser River, and now he must return by it, his troubled thoughts wondering which of his fellow-partners would eventually discover the Columbia, and whether or not even that river would be navigable. Five weeks later he was back at Fort George, where he spent the winter

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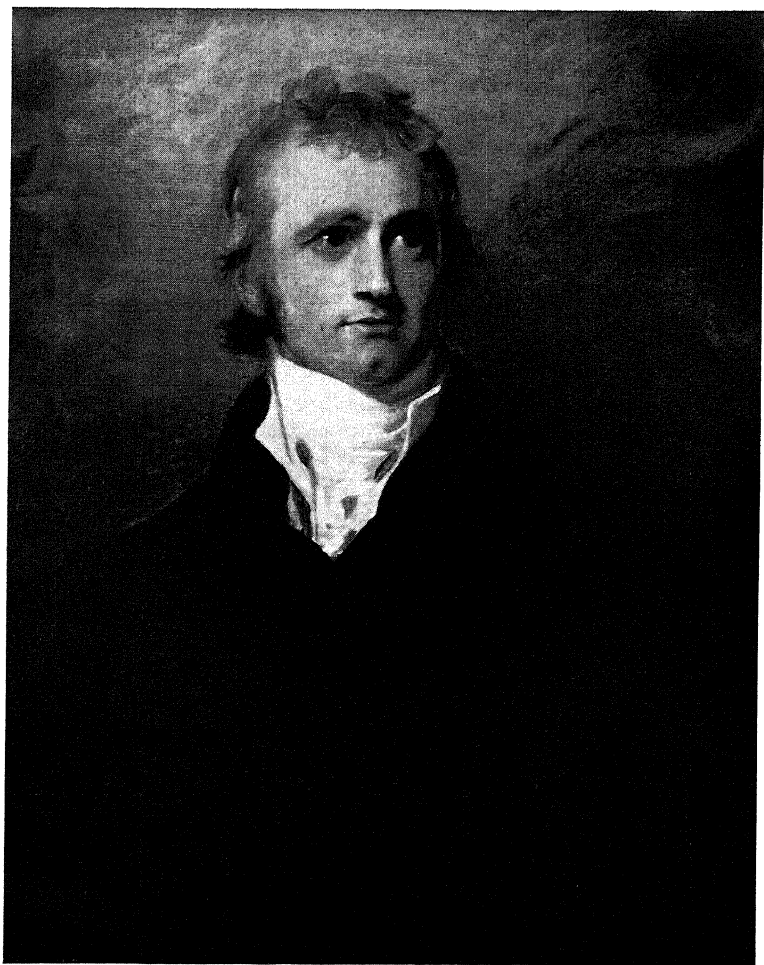
as a bourgeois in charge of a fur-trade department, and not as a great explorer. That winter he put New Caledonia on a firm foundation for Daniel Harmon, his fellow-native of Bennington, Vermont, to take over and develop into one of the most productive fur-bearing districts of the entire North West Company.

Fraser went east to Fort William in the summer of 1809 with news of the discovery by a Nor'Wester of a second river that flowed to the Pacific.

Meanwhile Sir Alexander Mackenzie in London was pursuing explorations of another nature for the company. Use of whatever practical route his fellow-explorers might discover across the Rockies would be possible only with some form of control of the fur trade. Sir Alexander had approached Lord Selkirk about purchasing stock in the Hudson's Bay Company. He was also negotiating a resolve made at the last meeting at Fort William that he purchase for the North West Company "Hudsons Bay Stock to the Amount of Fifteen thousand Pound Sterling, with a view of establishing an influence in the Committee of the said Company . . ."

Now he applied to the British Board of Trade for a charter whereby the Nor'Westers could extend their trade to the Far East. Together with Simon McGillivray and Edward Ellice, he had already approached the East India Company about acquiring trading privileges in Asia and had run into much the same stone wall as had faced the North West Company when seeking transit rights through Hudson Bay.

As eloquently as he was able, Sir Alexander described for the gentlemen of the Board of Trade the enormous handicap of his company operating under private enterprise as against the privileges enjoyed by the monopolied East India and South Sea Companies. But he also stressed the advantages to Great Britain of supporting his appeal for a charter. The Nor'Westers proposed to extend their string of trading-posts right across the continent, from the British-held Atlantic colonies to the mouth



SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE  
From the portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence  
Courtesy National Gallery of Canada



of the Columbia River where "... a Commercial Colony might be planted, from whence trade could be carried on and extended, not only with the interior, but along the Coast and its adjacent Islands . . ." Such a string of posts would offset the ambitions of Astor and his American and Pacific Fur Companies; it would serve to forestall such claims as the Americans might make to the Upper Missouri country, even then being trapped by the Nor'Westers and, manned by a small naval force, a post at the mouth of the Columbia would doubtless hold the territory against any possible attack by the Spanish during the current war. But only with access to the markets of the Far East could the North West Company adequately finance its projected trans-continent project. To this end, and on behalf of the North West Company, Sir Alexander Mackenzie petitioned the British government to intercede with the East India Company to share, on a reasonable rental, its monopoly of the trade to the Far East.

The British Board of Trade, as usual at the time, was occupied with many problems. It dallied indefinitely over the explorer's petition. After waiting for three years, Sir Alexander again appealed to the government for a charter for the North West Company, this time supported by the London firms of McTavish, Fraser and Inglis, Ellice. Accompanying the request was a note to the effect that Astor had offered the Nor'Westers a third interest in the American Fur Company; the offer had been refused since an acceptance must inevitably further American interests and recognize American sovereignty in territory largely discovered by British subjects, the Nor'Westers themselves.

While the negotiations were going on in London, David Thompson was actually forging the last link in the firm's string of trading-posts reaching right across the continent. It was a small family group that had reached Rocky Mountain House far up the Saskatchewan in 1806 on the fourth attempt to cross the Rockies. For probably the first time since they

parted as girls, the half-breed sisters who were wives to Thompson and John McDonald of Garth would spend a winter together. While the two bourgeois organized the season's trade their clerk Jaco, James Finlay's half-breed son, was sent to open a path to the source of the Saskatchewan, and to build canoes and a supply depot across the Divide. By the time spring arrived every possible provision for the expedition to the Columbia was completed.

And yet Thompson's departure, which ought to have been an exciting, joyous occasion, was clouded by a personal difference with his brother-in-law. All along Thompson had made no secret of his aversion to using liquor in the fur trade. At last, he hoped, he could prove his conviction that a man could trade furs without liquor. McDonald strongly disagreed. Officially in charge of the expedition, he insisted that rum was essential.

"I was obliged," Thompson recorded in his journal for 1807, "to take two kegs of alcohol, overruled by my partners (Messrs Don<sup>d</sup> McTavish and Jo McDonald Gart) for I had made it a law to myself, that no alcohol should pass the Mountains in my company, and thus be clear of the sad sight of drunkenness, and its many evils: but these gentlemen insisted upon alcohol being the most profitable article that could be taken to the indian trade. In this I knew they had miscalculated; accordingly when we came to the defiles of the Mountains I placed the two Kegs of Alcohol on a vicious horse; and by noon the Kegs were empty, and in pieces, the Horse rubbing his load against the Rocks to get rid of it; I wrote my partners what I had done; and that I would do the same to every Keg of Alcohol and for the next six years I had charge of the furr trade on the west side of the Mountains, no further attempt was made to introduce spirituous liquors."

Thompson set out with his wife and three small children, the youngest only fifteen months old and in a cradle on her mother's back. He had several pack-horses laden with trade goods, and three hundred pounds of pemmican. But like Mackenzie and Fraser, he had to feel his way in spite of the

explorations already made. Though Rocky Mountain House was his immediate base, his main source of supply was Fort William a couple of thousand miles away; and every ounce of trade goods must be expended to the best advantage. He hoped the river across the mountains to which he was headed was indeed the Columbia, but that he must find out.

Even on the east slopes of the Rockies, Thompson had trouble with the Indians. The Piegans, who had had fire-arms for many years, were determined to deny such an advantage to the Kootenays in the valley just beyond the Great Divide. They might actually have prevented him from his attempt, had not the main tribe of the Piegans been away on a war-party: "the murder of two peagan Indians by Captain Lewis of the United States, drew the Peagans to the Missouri to revenge their deaths; and this gave me an opportunity to cross the Mountains by the defiles of the Saskatchewan River, which led to the headwaters of the Columbia River".

Thompson's little party was also delayed on the north bank of the Saskatchewan, at the lovely mountain valley called Kootenay Plain: "Here among their stupendous and solitary wilds covered with eternal Snow, and Mountain connected with Mountain by immense glaciers, the collection of Ages and on which the Beams of the Sun makes hardly an impression when aided by the most favorable weather, I stayed fourteen days more, impatiently waiting for the melting of the Snows of the Height of Land."

At last Thompson with Charlotte and their three small children and Thompson's men reached the Great Divide. Below them to the east lay the great valley of the Saskatchewan; all about them were the white and shining, bitterly cold ice-fields, and to the west the little Blaeberry Creek which, he hoped, would lead eventually to the Pacific. It was there that Thompson prayed that God would grant that he should discover the great river he sought and return in safety. Pressing on, a few days later he reached the Columbia River, and there "we builded Log Houses, and strongly stockaded it on three sides,

the other side resting on the steep bank of the river; the Logs of the House, and the Stockades, Bastions & c were of a peculiar kind of a heavy resinous Fir, of a rough black bark. It was clean grown to about twenty feet, when it threw off a head of long, rude branches . . . the Stockades were all ball proof, as well as the Logs of the Houses." Thompson had built his post of lodge-pole pine.

From the first he was worried about shortage of food. Though by autumn, he knew, there would be plenty of red deer, antelope and mountain sheep, game was terribly scarce during the summer months. They had to eat several of the horses, finding "the meat of the tame horse better than that of the wild horse, the fat was not so oily . . ." Salmon, worn to the bone from the long struggle upstream to spawn, provided poor variety. Occasionally Thompson saw mountain goats, but they "were difficult to hunt from their feeding grounds on the highest parts of the Hills, and the natives relate that they are wicked, kicking down stones on them".

As well as short rations, Thompson had to endure a three weeks' siege from the Kootenay under their famous chief, Kootenae Appee. The Indians tried to starve him into retiring back across the mountains: "they thought to make us suffer from want of water, as the bank we were on was 20 feet high and very steep, but at night, by a strong cord we quietly and gently let down two brass kettles each holding four gallons, and drew them up full; which was enough for us . . ."

Later in the season when the siege let up, he built a raft and floated all his goods south up the Columbia to its source at Lake Windermere, and there, deep in the beautiful Windermere Valley he gradually developed Kootenay House on a noble site looking north down the river, and with its back to Windermere Lake. When it was finally completed, the main house, including a mess-hall and living-quarters, was sixty feet long, built of logs neatly hewn "in the French Canadian manner". Inside the high stockade of sharply pointed lodge-pole pine, his

men erected stores and their own snug houses. The main gate opened onto the river.

For three years Kootenay House was Thompson's headquarters. From it he travelled back and forth across the mountains by the headwaters of the Saskatchewan, and explored the streams along the way and far down into the valleys to the south of the source of the Columbia.

The Columbia actually starts in a chain of long lakes, and flows north in a great bend round the Selkirk Range—then known as Nelson's Mountains—swinging south and west again in a wide arc to the Pacific. Leaving his family at the post, Thompson carried his canoe across the narrow flats to a stream flowing south, the Kootenay; he called the tiny height of land McGillivray's Portage. During his first year he built trading-posts down the Kootenay River into the Flathead and Pend d'Oreille Lake country of modern Idaho. The following year he picked up his family (Charlotte was then many months pregnant) and back-tracked up the Columbia River to Boat Encampment and once more crossed the Great Divide by the perilous, cold, incomparably toilsome headwaters of the Saskatchewan. Dependent on the pemmican they could carry, they were again desperately short of food when game was scarce and before they reached the canoes and pemmican which Thompson had prudently cached. At last paddling swiftly downstream, they soon reached the little post of Boggy Hall on the North Saskatchewan, where Charlotte and her children were to stay while Thompson went east to Rainy Lake Post for supplies and with his pelts. On August 25, she gave birth to their second son and fourth child.

Thompson stayed at Rainy Lake Post only a couple of days, perhaps because of concern for Charlotte, but probably because an entire summer season was scarcely long enough to travel from Kootenay House to Rainy Lake Post and back. Travelling against the first snow-storms in the high passes, he was back on the Columbia on October 31. He had travelled close to five thousand miles on the round trip.

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Again he spent a busy winter trading and observing the position of each territory he visited along the Columbia and its tributaries. Next summer he took his furs out only as far as Fort Augustus on the Saskatchewan, returning in time to start further explorations of the Columbia itself. On his return trip, he met another party at the Kootenay Plain, a group of Hudson's Bay Company men led by Joseph Howse.

The governor of the Hudson's Bay Company in London had heard of Thompson's trips across the mountains and had written to John McNab, in charge at York Factory, for information about the English company's former employee. McNab knew little more than his employers, and he had neither means nor trained personnel to send inland from Hudson Bay to see what progress Thompson had made. The best he could do was to send Joseph Howse, a willing clerk. Howse had failed in his first attempt to reach the Great Divide. On the second attempt, with more trade goods and better provisions, he finally reached the Columbia, and travelled up the river to the Windermere Lakes and down to the Flathead country. Lacking Thompson's skill as an Indian trader and his indomitable devotion to duty, Howse and his companions found the hostility of the Piegans and Flatheads more than they could endure. After this single sortie, the Hudson's Bay Company abandoned the Pacific slope to the Nor'Westers.

Thompson meanwhile was building a new log outpost on Pend d'Oreille Lake, Kullyspel House. Then he built Saleesh House, and sent Jaco Finlay with several other men to cut logs for Spokane House, the first little post on the Spokane River. That summer his clerk McMillan brought in the trade goods, while Thompson explored and searched for birch bark, difficult to secure in the interior because the climate produced bark too thin for making canoes.

Thompson had often wondered if there might not be a practical trade route eastward from the Lower Columbia by way of Pend d'Oreille Lake. But though he and Finlay spent several months seeking such a route, they found none. He had explored

another large tract of country, but he still had to take out the forty-six packs of pelts he had traded in the Flathead country by the old, difficult North Saskatchewan route, longer with every southward exploration he made. On the 16th of May "with much suffering and hard labor" he got his pelts as far as the Kootenay River, and from there followed the now familiar road down the Columbia, across the Rockies and down the Saskatchewan to Lake Winnipeg, and finally to Rainy Lake House.

On his return trip the Piegans forced him to turn north from the North Saskatchewan. Crossing the Height of Land to the Athabasca River he explored a new route over the Great Divide by way of the Athabasca. Thompson considered this a better route than by the Saskatchewan but his partners at Fort William, when they heard of it, advised him to continue by the old route; from their chairs around the meeting-table it seemed safer, shorter and less arduous.

Thompson finally felt himself in a position to make his long and carefully projected survey of the entire Columbia. He had explored the upper river and many of its tributaries. Now from the rich Kootenay River country, he made his way to Kettle Falls, noting the many details so important to the success of this final leg of his great trip: the climate; vegetation; abundance or shortage of food along the way; the terrible unseen falls in the rivers, and the natives: ". . . the Men were of common size with tolerable good features, straight, well limbed for activity, their eyes of a mild cast, black and inclined to a deep hazel; their hair long, lightly black, and not coarse, the Women had no beauty to spare, and wanted the agile step of those that dwell in tents". Kettle Falls—Thompson gave it its native name, Ilthkoyape—was more than the site of the best Chinook salmon fisheries in the interior, it was a milestone in Thompson's explorations. Here he put his canoe into the stream for the trip whereby he would complete his survey of the entire Columbia River.

"The River before us (was) wholly unknown to us, and all

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the information only a day's journey of Rapids direct before us; by observation I found the Latitude of these, the Ilthkoyape Falls to be 48' .38' .7" N Longitude 117' .48' .49" west, and the variation 20 degrees East . . . The names of my men were Michael Bourdeaux, Pierre Pariel, Joseph Cote, Michel Boulard, Francois Gregoire; with Charles and Ignace, two good Iroquois Indians, and two Simpoil natives for interpreters . . . After praying the Almighty to protect and prosper us on our voyage to the Ocean, early on the third of July we embarked . . ."

Thompson carefully recorded the object of his trip: "We set off on a voyage down the Columbia River to explore this river in order to open out a passage for the interior trade with the Pacific Ocean." Twelve days later, after passing the wonders of Grand Coulee, the inflow of the Snake River, where he tacked up half a sheet of paper claiming the territory for Great Britain and the Nor'Westers, the Dalles, Mount Hood and the Willamette River, ". . . near noon we arrived at Tongue Point, which at right angles stretches its steep rocky shore across the River for a full half mile, and brought us to a full view of the Pacific Ocean; which to me was a great pleasure, but my Men seemed disappointed; they had been accustomed to the boundless horizon of the great Lakes of Canada, and their high rolling waves; from the Ocean they expected a more boundless view, a something beyond the power of their senses which they could not describe; and my informing them, that directly opposite to us, at the distance of five thousand miles was the Empire of Japan added nothing to their Ideas, but a Map would".

Thompson, partner of the North West Company, had reached the Pacific at the mouth of the Columbia River, overland from Canada. But he was not the first there. The Pacific Fur Company's ship *Tonquin*, sailing by way of the Horn, had reached the spot on April 11, 1811. Thompson arrived on July 15, three months later, to find "the fur trading post of Mr. J. J. Astor of the City of New York; which was four low log huts, the far famed Fort Astoria of the United States; the place was in charge of Messrs McDougall and Stuart who had been clerks

of the North West Company; and by whom we were politely received". One of Astor's men, Gabriel Franchère, described the arrival of the Nor'Westers: "Toward midday we saw a large canoe with a flag displayed at her stern, rounding the point we call Tongue Point. The flag she bore was British, and her crew was composed of eight Canadian boatmen or voyageurs. A well-dressed man, who appeared to be the commander, was the first to leap ashore".

For Thompson his arrival at the Pacific was the zenith of his career as a geographer. It was, in a way, his journey's end. "I have fully completed the survey of this part of North America from sea to sea, and by almost innumerable astronomical Observations have determined the positions of the Mountains, Lakes and Rivers, and other remarkable places on the northern part of this Country . . ."

He so accurately surveyed the Columbia River that many parts of his survey are still in use. He had completed the North West Company route to the Pacific, over three thousand miles from Montreal. He had solved the riddle of the Northwest Passage which challenged every fur-trader-explorer when Simon McTavish launched the fully organized company but a quarter-century before. Next year Thompson left the Pacific slope, never to return. At Fort William his partners welcomed him as befitted the discoverer of the first navigable Northwest Passage across the continent; they cared for his wife and their children, the fifth born at Fort Augustus the year before. The occasion was recorded in the minutes of the company for the annual meeting of 1812:

"A resolve entered into that Mr. David Thompson now going down on Rotation shall be allowed his full Share for three years after the outfit and one Hund<sup>d</sup> Pounds besides—that he is to finish his charts, maps &c and deliver them to the Agents in that time, after which he is to be considered as a retired Partner, and enjoy the Profits of One Hundredth for Seven Years—the Hund<sup>d</sup> p. p annum is meant for compensation for making use of his

own Instruments & c & c., and for furnishing him with implements for drawing, writing, &c."

Thompson had arrived to find his partners deeply concerned with the outbreak of the War of 1812.

For several years there had been rumours of war. Britain had retaliated to Napoleon's 1806 decree blockading the entire British coast by declaring all traffic with France contraband, and all vessels in any way connected with France liable to seizure. This threat had forced the United States to decree her Non-Intercourse Act prohibiting all commerce with either belligerent until the "obnoxious decree" was removed.

The international situation worsened when Britain proclaimed her "Right of Search". Having trouble manning her ships, she had determined to catch all deserters who might have sought sanctuary on foreign ships, and when the U.S.S. *Chesapeake* resisted in June, 1807, H.M.S. *Leopard* forced submission by a broadside. An offer of reparation failed to appease the righteous indignation of the Americans, whose antagonism had been fanned by publication of the letters of John Henry, a close friend of the McGillivrays and other Nor'Westers. Now they were more determined than ever to bring the provinces of British North America under the protection of Congress.

On June 18, 1812, President James Madison declared a state of war between "the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the dependencies thereof and the United States of America and their dependencies". Right at the beginning the action swung to the fur-trade strongholds at the strategic Straits of Mackinac.

John Jacob Astor had been riding by horseback to Washington, hoping that open hostilities could be prevented, when he heard that his country had actually declared war on the British. Astor had known full well that such a war would not only cut off his supply of trade goods from Europe, but might also swing the natives from trapping to the excitement of the war-path. Now his shrewd, grasping instinct alerted him to

the probable fate of his large investment in much wanted Indian trade goods at St. Joseph's on the British side of the border. This cargo of English manufactured goods had been imported by his Montreal colleagues for the South West Company by way of Quebec to beat the Non-Intercourse Act. There was, too, his year's trade in pelts stored at Mackinac; with Mackinac under the British, his Canadian partners would find some means of safeguarding the furs. Astor lost no time in sending word of the declaration of war, not to the Americans at Mackinac, but to his Canadian agent, Toussaint Pothier at St. Joseph's. On July 17, Captain Roberts, in command of the little British fort, led a quickly assembled army of Indians and fur-traders—among them Pothier—across the straits. Mackinac was captured without firing a shot; as Astor had intended, its American commander did not know that a state of war existed. Nor had the British authorities time to send up word. The Honourable John Richardson, partner in the South West Company, got word to General Brock on June 26, and only on July 7 did official word from Washington reach Governor-General Sir John Prevost. The South West Company trade goods were still at St. Joseph's but Astor's furs were saved. He later got them down to Montreal and since he was about to arrange a much needed loan of some \$6,000,000 to the American government, he managed to smuggle shipments over the border by way of Plattsburg on and off throughout the duration of the war.

The fall of Fort Mackinac secured Upper Canada and won for the British the continued support of the Indians. They were further impressed by the fact that the North West Company immediately turned over to the government its large store of provisions at Ste. Maries. But from the first many of the company's men and posts were in the front line. Detroit was captured, then abandoned by the British, and reoccupied by the Americans; Niagara was under fire; the company's stables and stores at Ste. Maries were burned to the ground when the Americans retaliated for the capture of Mackinac. A hastily mobilized corps of voyageurs under command of William Mc-

Gillivray volunteered for whatever service might arise; and later in the war, a North West Company partner, William McKay, was to lead part of this group to recapture Fort Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi. Meantime the partners at Fort William were making plans to protect their people and to safeguard the company's property.

Word of the declaration of war reached Fort William on July 18, just eleven days after official notice was received by the governor-general, and a good two weeks before it could possibly have arrived so far inland had Astor not placed his private gain ahead of his country's good.

Even before David Thompson was acclaimed for his magnificent Columbia River exploration, the first item was being quilled into the minutes of the 1812 meeting: "Mr Donald McTavish is appointed to set out immediately & proceed in the Columbia Business by sailing from England for the South West Coast as soon as possible & conduct that Business in conformity with the Resolve of the Company . . ." At the same time Alexander Henry the Younger left for the northwest with instructions to John Stuart, then at Fort Chipewyan, to accompany John George McTavish to the Columbia with news of the outbreak of hostilities. The two cousins of Simon McTavish would, if plans turned out successfully, meet at the mouth of the Columbia River; one having travelled overland, the other crossing the Atlantic to England, and from there sailing for the Pacific coast.

The urgent details of communication attended to, the partners turned at once to the equally pressing business of getting their pelts safely down to Montreal: "On Account of the Declaration of war by the Americans it was determined to send as many men as could be spared, without detriment to the business, to *Lac la Pluie* to help getting the packs out in as much haste as possible, and Mr. McLellan volunteered to go and conduct the same—at the same time to use his influence to send out as many Indians as could be induced, to accompany us for the safeguard of the Company's Furs to the French River. And that Mr James Grant

should go to Fond du Lac on the same business; that Mr. Shaw and the Gentlemen going to Montreal, and as many as could be spared, should set out in the *Invincible* with a supply of arms ammunitions & Provisions for St. Maries—then to act as circumstances require”.

Pelts valued at some £200,000 were loaded into forty-seven *canots du maître*. Guarded by one hundred and thirty-five armed Nor'Westers, they were sent off to Montreal. On the stretch between Sault Ste. Marie and the French River the brigade hugged the shore. With every voyageur paddling at top speed behind the island, it evaded attack from the American armed vessels *Tigress* and *Scorpion*, then patrolling Lake Huron.

Since Fort Niagara was no longer safe as a supply line, the Nor'Westers took advantage of the town of York on Lake Ontario, and the Yonge Street road they had improved north to Lake Simcoe. In the hope of shortening the long portage between Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay, the Nottawasaga route, William McGillivray personally explored an old Indian trail from farther up Lake Simcoe to Matchedash Bay on Georgian Bay and eventually the company used Penetanguishene as an alternate base. In August of 1814, the *Nancy* which had transported the bulk of the company's goods between Georgian Bay and Ste. Maries was sunk by the Americans at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River. That year, following the American victory at Put-In Bay on Lake Erie, the North West Company again appealed to the British government for permission to use Hudson Bay. This time the Hudson's Bay Company was persuaded to agree, but only on condition that the Nor'Westers pay compensation for the advantage of the shorter route, estimated by the English company at £10,000 a year. Rather than pay so prohibitive a price, the Montrealers continued to risk continued use of the Ottawa River and got through without serious incident.

And while the war was occupying Canadians and Americans in the east, the North West Company was waging it from

another front thousands of miles away on the Lower Columbia River. While Alexander Henry the Younger was on his way from Fort William to meet Stuart and John George McTavish, Donald McTavish was travelling eastward, accompanied by John McDonald of Garth. At Montreal, they loaded the great cargo of pelts aboard the *Isaac Todd*, which "mounted ten guns, and had a letter of Marque", and under convoy by the British navy's fall fleet numbering "forty sails", set off for England.

It was February before McTavish and McDonald could dispose of the pelts in England and make final arrangements to sail for the Columbia River with a crew of voyageurs to man the company's canoes on the west coast. The bill of lading for the goods they would take ended with the words "and so God send the good ship to her desired port in safety. Amen." But the good ship was not to leave Portsmouth without delay.

Accompanied by Simon McGillivray, Edward Ellice had gone down to Portsmouth to see the *Isaac Todd* sail. With Donald McTavish and John McDonald they were dining at the main hotel in the town when a messenger handed McTavish a note. The voyageurs, on shore leave and a little drunk, had been picked up by a press gang and were already aboard a naval recruit ship. McTavish hurried off to intercede. He soon found how desperately the navy needed men; despite his assurances that they were Canadians belonging to the *Isaac Todd* and bound for the Columbia River, he could not get his men freed. Yet without the voyageurs, the entire trip might be useless. In desperation the little group of Nor'Westers turned to "Bear" Ellice for help; Ellice, brother-in-law to Lord Grey, went round to call on the port Admiral, Lord Grey's brother, and soon the frightened voyageurs were back aboard their own ship.

As a precaution against the hazards of war and storm, McTavish and McDonald sailed aboard separate ships as far as Rio de Janeiro. McTavish was on the *Isaac Todd*, accompanied by Jane Barnes, a barmaid he had picked up at Portsmouth who expected to be the first white woman on the Pacific coast. McDonald sailed from Portsmouth to Rio aboard the *Phoebe*

and at Rio changed to the *Racoon*, Captain Black; McTavish continued aboard the *Isaac Todd*. Some time after the ships rounded the Horn they got separated. The *Isaac Todd* had to put into San Francisco for the winter, but on November 30, 1813, nine months after leaving London, John McDonald of Garth aboard the *Racoon* arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River. He found Fort Astoria already in possession of the North West Company.

Ever since David Thompson had arrived to trade in the territory east of the Lower Columbia and the Astorians had built their first little post at the mouth of the river, the Nor'Westers and the Pacific Fur Company had been competing for pelts. They had built a series of posts inland: at the Willamette River, at Spokane, on the Okanagan and Kootenay Rivers. There were repetitions of the strife which had existed earlier east of the mountains between the Nor'Westers and the XY and the Hudson's Bay Companies—some of it bitter, but most merely spirited incidents such as that recalled by Ross Cox: "Mr. Pillet fought a duel with Mr. Montour of the North-West, with pocket pistols, at six paces; both hits; one in the collar of the coat and the other in the leg of the trousers. Two of their men acted as seconds, and the tailor speedily healed their wounds".

John George McTavish, accompanied by John Stuart and Alexander Henry had taken news of the outbreak of war to Fort Spokane, and then went on down to Fort Astoria to notify the Americans of the imminent arrival of the *Isaac Todd*. Hoping to receive supplies themselves from New York by ship, Astor's men had held out for a few months but eventually the Nor'Westers were able to persuade them that there was not a chance of an American ship passing the British navy blockade. Their arguments were strengthened by further North West parties coming overland from Fort William. When Angus Bethune, a nephew of Angus Shaw, arrived from Fort William with word that the *Isaac Todd* had actually left England along with the *Phoebe* and the *Racoon*, McTavish started to negotiate

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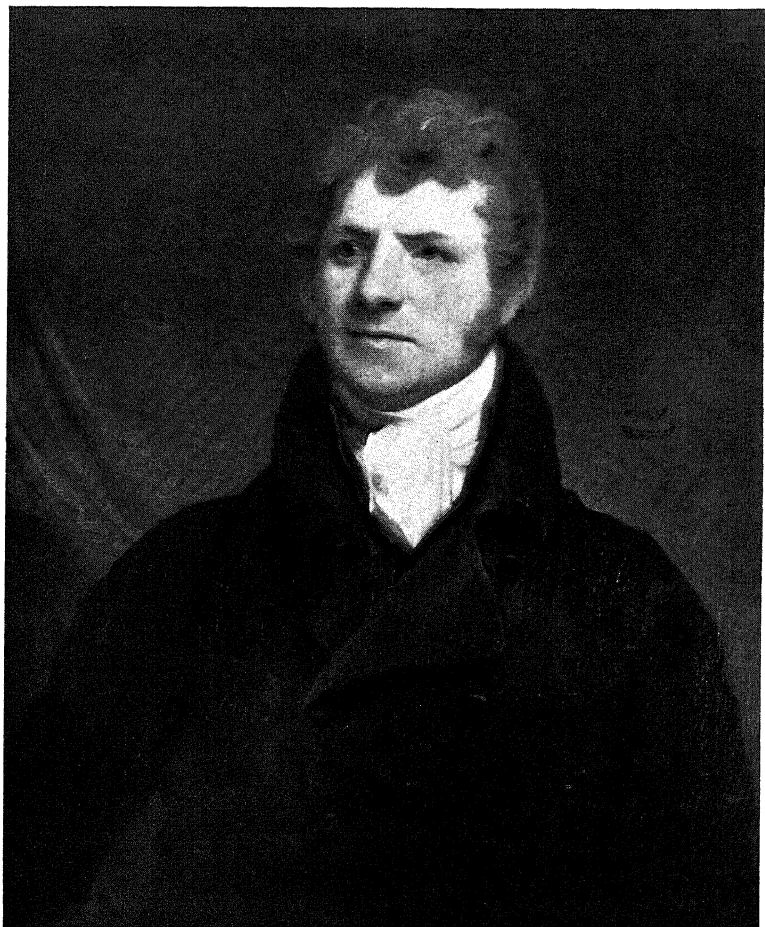
with the employees of the Pacific Fur Company to buy the entire establishment. This was to include fort, guns, food, and both the pelts on hand and those bartered but not yet arrived from the interior. He even tried to prolong the transaction, hoping that the ships would arrive and thereby save his company the purchase price. Since the *Isaac Todd* had not arrived by July 1, 1814, Duncan McDougall, in charge of the Pacific Fur Company, sold the entire establishment of Astoria to the North West Company, to be paid for in currency in three instalments before the end of the year. It was a transaction which was to cost the Nor'Westers dearly when Astor finally achieved his revenge.

Arriving aboard the *Raccoon* John McDonald found old friends among both former Pacific Fur Company employees and his own partners. McDonald was confident that there never had been any question of prize money involved: "The force was sent to fulfil a duty to the North-West Company; it was no government measure. They were . . . under my directions as a Partner of that Company, and acted accordingly."

McDougall boarded the *Raccoon* to discuss the fate of the former Pacific Fur Company men and their possessions with McDonald and Captain Black. "We settled with Mr. McDougall that we should land next day at about six miles from Astoria," recalled John McDonald of Garth, "and take possession in George's name . . . we found the North West gentlemen and the Astorians ready to receive us. To our utter disappointment, we found only a few stores and barracks surrounded by a few imperfect stockades with two or three swivels mounted near the gate. The place was not fit to resist anything but savages . . . Captain Black took a bottle of wine, or perhaps something stronger, broke it against the flag staff, hoisted the Union Jack, and called it 'Fort George'".

And so the entire Pacific slope between San Francisco and Alaska came into the trade empire of the North West Company.

With the war's end imminent the partners and agents meeting



WILLIAM MCGILLIVRAY

From the portrait by Sir Martin Archer Shee  
Courtesy Public Archives of Canada



at Fort William in July of 1814 plunged immediately into discussion of the Columbia River events: ". . . no material objections was made to the terms on which the purchase of the Pacific Fur Company had been made, except as to the payments, the near period at which they are fixed being considered highly advantageous to the Concern—as the time it would take to realize the Property in order to meet such payments did not seem to have been considered, and the manner in which the bills are drawn throwing a loss of at least £3000 on the Concern owing to the rate of Exchange between Canada & England. The Advantages derived from the Arrangement were deemed considerable, by means of it the Posts were supplied for the Winter which from the non arrival of the Vessels expected could not have done otherways—and it greatly facilitated the getting out of the Country of the American Fur Company . . ."

Several former employees of the Pacific or American Fur Company joined the Nor'Westers, among them Duncan McDougall who had signed the agreement of sale. McDougall, no doubt due to his position as head of the old Astor concern, and perhaps because he was a former Nor'Wester, was made a partner in the North West Company, receiving a one-hundredth share. Ross Cox, who kept a vivid diary of the events, took employment with the North West Company as a clerk, along with Donald McKenzie, Roderick's younger brother. At the meeting, also, several clerks were elected to partnership, among them Alexander Stewart, Duncan Cameron, John Stuart, George Keith and John George McTavish. With the Columbia territory to be developed the concern would need these experienced partners.

There were other minor items of business: Roderick, now the Honourable Roderick McKenzie, wished to retire, and his interests were bought in for £10,000. Following a special meeting, the winterers requested that general accounts be properly signed. McTavish, McGillivrays contributed three and a half shares for the promotion of clerks. William McGillivray announced a new agreement of the firm of McTavish, McGilliv-

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rays, and that the partners now were himself and his brother Simon, Archibald Norman McLeod, Thomas Thain, John George McTavish and Henry McKenzie, the Hallowells having been dropped. A resolve recorded in the minutes referred to another problem, steadily mounting in intensity in the interior: Hudson's Bay Company employees henceforth would "*on no account* be engaged by the N W Co", and because of "strong H B opposition" the Red River posts, Fort Dauphin and the Churchill District were to be strengthened.

In the mass of highly satisfactory business conducted at Fort William in the summer of 1814—and this included a note of jubilation over the end of the war—the highlight was a social occasion as well as a celebration. At last David Thompson's huge map of "The North West Territory of the Province of Canada" was hung on the wall in the mess hall. It bore the inscription:

This map made for the North West Company in 1813 and 1814 and delivered to The Honorable William McGillivray the Agent Embraces the region lying between 45 and 60 degrees North Latitude and 84 and 124 degrees West Longitude comprising the Surveys and Discoveries of 20 years namely the Discovery and Survey of the Oregon Territory to the Pacific Ocean the Survey of the Athabasca Lake, Slave River and Lake from which flows Mackenzies River to the Arctic Sea by Mr. Philip Turner the route of Sir Alexander Mackenzie in 1792 down part of Frasers River together with the Survey of this River to the Pacific Ocean by the late John Stewart of the North West Company

by David Thompson Astronomer and Surveyor.

The great dream for which Simon McTavish and many another had worked so long had at last come true. Now the partners of the North West Company could look up at Thompson's map and see the extent of their dominion. Beyond the limits of the map to the northwest flowed the river discovered by Sir Alexander Mackenzie, not included on the map because

Thompson had not himself travelled it. Flowing into the Mackenzie from the west, the partners knew, was the recently discovered Liard River where old Alexander Henry's younger son, a third Alexander Henry, had recently been murdered by natives at Fort Nelson. Nor had Thompson thought it necessary to depict the Great Lakes territory, other than Superior; this country, like the well-mapped, familiar French River-Lake Nipissing-Ottawa River route to Montreal was already well known, as were the Districts of Nipigon, Timiskaming and the Saguenay River. But apart from these two areas off the extreme northwest and southeast corners of the map, everything they had accomplished, their discoveries and their posts, was spread out before them.

Now they could clearly visualize the course of the Columbia, with Fort George (the former Fort Astoria) at its mouth. Fort George, like Fort Nelson, was a melancholy reminder of the cost paid for their progress by men who had been their colleagues and intimates: two partners, Donald McTavish and Alexander Henry the Younger, had drowned off Fort George when their boat capsized the previous spring. The partners could see clearly the many rivers discovered and surveyed by Thompson as he headed their enormous expansion across the Rockies: the Kootenay, the Spokane, the Willamette, the Lewis, and a note "Lewis and Clarke's canoes". There were the many lakes, the posts which could be seen at a glance and in relationship to one another: Saleesh, Spokane, Kullyspel, and Fort George itself; even marked on the map were the fabulous Mounts Olympus and "Rainer"—Thompson's spelling. They could place the range of mountains named for Lord Nelson (today's Selkirk Range); the Fraser and Athabasca and Peace and Saskatchewan Rivers; the Churchill and, far to the south the rivers of the plains, the Assiniboine, the Qu'Appelle, the Red, the Missouri and the Upper Mississippi. They could see the position of each great district or department: New Caledonia, where Daniel Harmon was trading such fine pelts; the Athabasca, where William McGillivray's half-breed son, Simon, was

climbing the ladder to partnership with Sir Alexander's half-breed son as his clerk; coming nearer to Fort William, there was Rainy Lake Post (Lac la Pluie) and the Lake of the Woods and the terrible Winnipeg River, with its stretches of white water, flowing into Lake Winnipeg.

Studying David Thompson's map in the great hall at Fort William that summer, William McGillivray and his partners saw graphically the advantage of the Hudson Bay route over the St. Lawrence River; the advantage so often stressed in London by Simon McTavish and Sir Alexander Mackenzie. But not all the aspects of their trade became evident at a first look at the map. It took time and study to assess the significance of post sites and watersheds and highway streams never before seen on paper. Individually and in groups they looked at and discussed the map when they met in the bright morning light for breakfast; they mulled it over as they went about their duties throughout the day, in the great hall, the counting-house or in the acrid smelling fur warehouses; and they talked over their Madeira or rum late in the evening when the cool winds off Lake Superior prompted them to draw up their comfortable chairs before the fire. They looked at the map now when deciding where to place men to the best advantage. Even winterers who travelled thousands of miles each year saw more clearly the distances between familiar posts and districts. And gradually as they looked at the map, each man's eyes turned more and more to the area south of Lake Winnipeg.

Lake Winnipeg, they now saw clearly, was the nerve centre of the continent's canoe transportation system. From Lake Winnipeg a man could travel by canoe to almost any part of North America, with never more than a day's carry. And Lake Winnipeg was more than the nerve centre of the linking waterways of the continent. It was also the vital pemmican provision centre on the long route between Montreal and the great fur-trading districts of the remote northwest; for the Qu'Appelle and Assiniboine Rivers flowed through the buffalo country and into the Red, which in turn flowed into Lake Winnipeg.

Looking at that first map of the known northwest in 1814 the Nor'Westers faced an intolerable situation: Thomas Douglas, Lord Selkirk, had obtained from the Hudson's Bay Company a grant of land astride the Red River, and in this vital area he was attempting to settle a group of dispossessed Highland Scots.

To any man familiar with the northwest at the time, it was little short of inhuman to settle white men and women where only one white woman so far had ventured. As had already happened on the Mississippi, settlers would quickly drive away the buffalo on which they as well as the fur-traders, the Métis and the Indians, must depend for survival. Selkirk's venture must be uprooted before more unfortunate Highlanders perished from the inhospitable climate and the enmity of Métis who themselves feared dispossession at the hands of Selkirk's settlers. It must be crushed, if necessary, before it wrecked the fur trade which was still the life-blood of the two provinces of Canada as well as of the North West Company.

## CHAPTER IX

# Red River Settlement

Thomas Douglas, fifth Earl of Selkirk, was born at Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland, in 1771, and educated for the law. As the youngest of seven sons, he succeeded to the family titles after the death of each of his brothers and then his father, all probably from tuberculosis. He was a handsome, popular man of twenty-eight, much better educated for his position than most of his peers.

As a student at Edinburgh young Thomas Douglas had been deeply concerned over the hardships of the many severely oppressed people in the Highlands of Scotland, and after graduation visited France to study the revolution. Back in Scotland and England, he strongly protested the "Highland Clearances", the dispersal of thousands of crofters to provide large sheep-runs for wealthy landowners. After reading Mackenzie's *Voyages Selkirk* in 1802 proposed to the Home Secretary a settlement of crofters along the Red River:

"At the Western extremity of Canada upon the Waters which fall into Lake Winnipeck &, uniting in the great River of Port Nelson, discharge themselves into Hudson's Bay is a country which the Indian traders represent as fertile, & of a Climate far more temperate than the shores of the Atlantic under the same parallel . . . Here, therefore, the Colonists may with a moderate

exertion of industry be certain of a comfortable subsistence & they may raise some valuable objects of exportation . . .”

The government rejected the scheme as being utterly impractical, as it had rejected an earlier plan of Selkirk's for Irish emigration to America. Undaunted, Selkirk organized his first actual colonization scheme the following year, settling eight hundred people on Prince Edward Island. The fact that he was not on hand personally to supervise their difficulties with shelter, food and land distribution, at the time seemed merely unfortunate for all concerned, and not part of a pattern; he did turn up eventually, and later the same year toured the United States and Canada where he visited Montreal and enjoyed the hospitality of the Beaver Club. On his return to Scotland he published a pamphlet, *Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland, with a View to Causes and Probable Consequences of Emigration*. This was followed by *A Sketch of the British Fur Trade in 1806*, based on information gleaned from Sir Alexander Mackenzie and other members of the Beaver Club. Yet another treatise came in 1807, *Observations of a Proposal for Forming a Society for the Civilization and Improvement of the North American Indians Within the British Boundary*.

While he was writing his pamphlets, Selkirk planned two more emigration schemes, this time in Upper Canada, where he acquired grants of land at Moulton on Lake Erie and Baldoon on Lake St. Clair. Here, as with the Prince Edward Island scheme, Selkirk's philanthropic dreams lacked a practical foundation. The land in both areas was low and marshy and required considerable costly drainage before it could be farmed; many of the immigrants left as soon as they could find means of getting away. Still Selkirk continued to think and write about his distressed countrymen, but without any real knowledge of the conditions they would find in the territory where he planned to settle them. Nor did he enquire whether the two great fur-trading concerns, the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies,

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would welcome the Red River settlement scheme which again occupied his attention.

In 1807 Lord Selkirk married Jean Wedderburn, heiress to a considerable fortune in Hudson's Bay Company stock. Perhaps it was his marriage which prompted him to acquire a further interest in the company on his own behalf, or it may have been through his role as agent for Sir Alexander Mackenzie's purchases on behalf of the North West Company; Sir Alexander charged that Selkirk kept for himself stock which he had agreed to buy for the Nor'Westers. Probably he acted on advice—or through a plea—from his wife's brother, Andrew Wedderburn Colvile, recently elected to the committee of the Hudson's Bay Company. By 1808 the English concern's dividends, which for years had averaged 8%, were down to 4%. In 1809 no dividends were paid, nor were any to be paid for the next five years, and soon stock which had been steady at £250 had dropped to £50.

Sir Alexander, in London with Edward Ellice and Simon McGillivray, and haunting Whitehall with the petition for a North West Company charter, managed at the same time to keep an ear alert to the current Hudson's Bay Company situation. Lady Selkirk's brother, they soon came to realize, was a shrewd young man with an almost fanatical determination to reverse his firm's steadily worsening fortunes. Colvile no doubt was behind the refusal to accede to the Nor'Westers' current plea for transit rights through Hudson Bay. In his denial he was apparently acting on advice from Colin Robertson, the former North West Company clerk then seeking employment with the Hudson's Bay Company.

At the Canada Club and through the various London coffee-houses and financial circles, Sir Alexander, Ellice and McGillivray pieced together many of the changes proposed by their competitors as a means of restoring dividends and building *esprit de corps* among Hudson's Bay employees. Some of the innovations were clearly the result of suggestions from Robertson: to encourage its servants to compete more energetically

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with the Nor'Westers, the Hudson's Bay Company would now give them a small share in the concern's profits, though with reduced salaries; servants were now ordered to resort to force if they felt themselves attacked; Orkneymen, traditionally engaged for North America, were to be replaced by men "from the Western Isles and Coast of Scotland, where the people are of a more spirited race than in Orkney". And from now on the Hudson's Bay Company would expect its servants to live off the country, growing root vegetables, Indian corn and grains about the posts.

To the three Nor'Westers who had just been denied, for a fourth time, transit rights through Hudson Bay, this last proposed innovation of their competitors was an obvious and serious threat. Agriculture inevitably would lead to farm labourers. It meant the germ of settlement, the very antithesis of the fur trade. That in itself was a step which must be challenged. But there was the added rumour in the coffee-houses that Selkirk was consulting lawyers about the legality of the Hudson's Bay Company charter and whether the company had the right to make land grants. The rumour sent the three Nor'Westers, all now small shareholders in the Hudson's Bay Company, in a fighting mood to the next meeting of the shareholders.

Selkirk by this time held some £4,000 of the company's total stock, estimated at £103,000. The Nor'Westers together had even less, but at least they were entitled to attend meetings and make protests. They did both. They protested strongly and bitterly when Selkirk was voted a grant of land astride the Red River, some 116,000 square miles. This great block, which later was to become part of North Dakota, Minnesota, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, included the sites of several important North West Company pemmican-trading posts: *Espérance* and *Dauphin* on the *Qu'Appelle* River; *La Souris*; *Gibraltar* at the confluence of the Red and *Assiniboine* Rivers; *Pembina* near the 49th parallel and *Bas de la Rivière Winnipeg*.

It was only a small meeting of the company. Less than a quarter of the voting power was present, including the three

Nor'Westers. Yet they protested in vain. That small group held the authority to grant not only the huge tract of land, but with it control over the lives of thousands of people—white, Métis and Indian—living in the area or dependent on it.

From that day the friendship between Sir Alexander and Lord Selkirk ceased. Not only were the Nor'Westers barred from use of Hudson Bay, but for a few shillings, the token fee paid by him for the grant of land, Selkirk proposed a colony that was a direct threat to the enterprise built up by the North West Company over the years. No less involved were the thousands of people dependent on the fur trade, and the supply houses in England and the West Indies also dependent on the trade which currently averaged some £250,000 a year. There was, too, another objection to the scheme. A settlement implied men, women and children, and the Red River with its extreme climate was no place for emigrants unaccustomed to the nomadic life forced on inhabitants of the northwest by its remoteness from markets for agricultural products.

The three Nor'Westers in London soon had ample proof of Selkirk's determination to carry out his plan. Within six months Selkirk had increased his original stock in the Hudson's Bay Company by five times. He had also engaged as his agent at the settlement Miles Macdonell, a cousin to Alexander Macdonell, the Nor'Wester in charge of the Red River Department. Further, the Hudson's Bay Company was by now seriously considering the employment of Colin Robertson. The North West Company partners launched their campaign of defence right in Scotland where Selkirk obviously expected to interest the emigrants who would be used to enhance his family's already great fortune.

Letters began to appear in the *Inverness Journal* signed "A Highlander". The Highlander was Simon McGillivray, who like Sir Alexander and practically every other Nor'Wester had blood ties with people in the Highlands. McGillivray wrote with all the clannishness of his late uncle, Simon McTavish, and of facts known to every Nor'Wester.

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To reach the Red River, the emigrants "must first traverse the inhospitable regions in the vicinity of Hudsons Bay and perform a voyage of 200 Miles of Inland navigation—stemming strong currents and dangerous rapids & carrying their boats and cargoes over numerous portages. This voyage I do not think they can perform in the present season for the frost will be approaching before they can reach York Fort, where I fancy they must pass the winter, and if so, Mr. Editor, it is my firm belief that many of them will perish before the Spring from excessive cold and from want of food . . . In addition, when they reach the Red River, they will be surrounded by warlike natives who will consider them as intruders come to spoil their hunting ground, to drive away the wild animals and to destroy the Indians as the white men have done in Canada and the United States . . . even if the emigrants escape the scalping knife, they will be subject to constant alarm and terror. Their habitations, their Crops, their Cattle will be destroyed and they will find it impossible to exist in the Country . . ."

Several men who had signed on as an advance party of labourers changed their mind on reading "A Highlander's" letters. Others who had sold their entire meagre possessions to buy passage refused to board the ship sent to take them from Stornoway to America. In an age when many ships were inadequately equipped and incompetently manned, the *Edward and Anne* was so overcrowded that the local customs officer, an uncle by marriage to Sir Alexander Mackenzie, refused to pass it; under the Dundas Act which limited the number of passengers on ships of varying tonnages, he boarded the vessel, and freed those men who had been forcibly embarked. After many delays the *Edward and Anne* sailed on July 26, 1811, later than any ship had ever sailed for Hudson Bay. It was still badly overcrowded because Miles Macdonell had persuaded many of the men that they must live up to their contracts with Selkirk.

Selkirk had hoped that the party of a hundred and five men would reach Hudson Bay in time to travel to the Red River the same autumn and prepare shelter for the emigrants he would

send out the following year. The ship barely arrived before freeze-up. As Simon McGillivray had warned, they were forced to winter at York Factory. No shelter was ready for them there, and practically no provisions. Many died of starvation, exposure and scurvy. Toward spring the survivors mutinied. By the time the Hayes River was open for navigation, Miles Macdonell had twenty-two "effectives" out of one hundred and five men.

At that momentous meeting at Fort William in the summer of 1812, the partners of the North West Company had had a third notable item for discussion along with David Thompson's exploration of the entire Columbia River and the outbreak of war. Simon McGillivray, who at the time could know nothing of President Madison's declaration, had written them a long account of the events concerning Selkirk's grant and the steps taken to offset its success:

"By the Inverness newspapers . . . you will see that I have given His Lordship some annoyance through the medium of the press and I have reason to hope that the 'Highlander's Letters' will in a great measure prevent him from getting servants or emigrants from the Highlands of Scotland . . . The committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, is at present a mere machine in the hands of Lord Selkirk, who appears to be so much wedded to his schemes of colonization in the interior of North America, that it will be some time, and I fear cause much expense to us, as well as to himself, before he is driven to abandon the project, yet *he must be driven to abandon it*, for his success would strike at the very existence of the trade".

McGillivray advised his partners to immediately "dispatch an Express to the Interior with notice to prepare your people for a year of Trial. If possible your posts should be strengthened with men and extra supplies of goods, and measures should be taken for a vigorous opposition of the Hudson's Bay Company in all their departments even where you have never gone before.

"We forbear to suggest the particular details of this opposition, as you will be better able to judge of them than we are, but the

opposition ought to be general and followed up at almost any expence in order to spoil their returns for a year or two".

Nor'Wester Alexander Macdonell got his first glimpse of Selkirk's immigrants when Miles brought them up the Red River in August of 1812, eleven months after the *Edward and Anne* had sailed from Scotland. Never had be seen a more hapless lot. Surely these poorly clad, half-starved men could be no menace to the North West Company. Alexander invited his cousin Miles to dine at the North West Company's Fort Gibraltar, together with Benjamin Frobisher on his way to Lake Athabasca, and another winterer, John Wills. As a civil gesture he also invited the head of the nearby Hudson's Bay Company post, though the meal was hardly commenced before he realized that there was little love lost between the two; the obviously mutual hostility was heightened when Miles invited all present to a "ceremony and seizin' of the land" to be held the following day.

The three Nor'Westers accepted the invitation, no doubt to find out what Selkirk's agent meant by his reference to seizing the land, though Alexander refused to permit his clerks to attend. And there on the bank of the Red River they watched Miles fire one of the small cannon he had hauled inland from Hudson Bay, and raise his colours. They listened to the terms of Selkirk's grant from the Hudson's Bay Company read in English and then in French. This was followed by the proclamation appointing Miles Macdonell governor of "Assiniboia", a term presumably referring to the territory on which their own posts were located. The situation seemed utterly fantastic, but in view of the hapless condition of the little party of labourers, there seemed little need to protest.

During the next few weeks Miles trudged up and down the river, looking for a site for his proposed post, already named Fort Douglas in honour of Selkirk. The post was still little more than a name when the next group of immigrants arrived in October, hungry and weary after the gruelling trip from Hudson

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Bay. There was no shelter ready, not even for the woman, Mrs. McLean, who had given birth to a baby along the way. Because Miles had no warehouse, either, Alexander offered to store the new-comers' small supply of seed grain, ammunition and liquor. At that, he did more for them than the Hudson's Bay Company people who made no attempt to disguise their resentment over Miles' official proclamation, and who were doubtless embarrassed because they could relieve the new-comers' food shortage with nothing more than a few bags of potatoes.

From the first the winter promised to be a tragic one for the settlers, not one of whom had experience in farming. Soon they were grubbing with hoes for wild roots—other than a single plough, hoes were their sole implements—and trying to hook catfish in the river. Had not Alexander sold Miles pemmican from Fort Gibraltar's well-stocked stores and made no protest when Miles employed one of the North West Company *engagés*, Lajimonière, to hunt buffalo, they must all have starved to death. But even Lajimonière, whose wife was the first white woman in the Red River territory, could not hunt for so many, and Miles moved his settlers upriver to the vicinity of the Nor'Westers' Pembina, so as to be closer to the buffalo herds. That winter neither Fort Douglas nor the cluster of rude teepees known as Fort Daer threatened the North West Company, nor was there much evidence that Lord Selkirk at this rate would be able to settle in ten years the thousand families required as one of the terms of his grant. Even with the war still an unknown factor, the Nor'Westers were far less disturbed by that implied threat to their supply of provisions, than by actual accounts of immigrant mothers selling their shawls to Hudson's Bay Company servants for oatmeal to feed their children.

In the spring Miles herded his immigrants back to the still unfinished Fort Douglas and set about sowing his first crop. The Nor'Westers found it difficult to hide their amusement when he tried to cultivate the tough prairie soil with hoes after the only plough proved inadequate. They would again have had to feed the poor victims had not Peter Fidler brought down a

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cart-load of pemmican from Fort Brandon, along with a few head of cattle to augment Miles' herd, locally known as Adam and Eve.

The Nor'Westers had no objection to Fidler supplying the colonists with food from the Hudson's Bay Company stores; indeed they expected him to do so. It was a different matter entirely when Fidler commenced surveying land along the river into lots for the new-comers—and without a word of consultation with the Nor'Westers, or of reassurance to the Métis who for at least three generations had looked on the Red River as home. Though Lord Selkirk had obtained expert legal advice and the Hudson's Bay Company had the right to grant him the land on both sides of the Red River, Fidler's survey sowed the seeds of resentment and fear which were to spur the Métis to two revolts within the next fifty years. The mood of apprehension was not lessened by the arrival of a third party of colonists in the fall of 1813; nor by the fact that Miles still failed to provide food or shelter for them. Again he led the unfortunate people to Fort Daer, now a tiny cluster of huts and a further reminder to the Métis of settlement despite Miles' inadequate efforts to hunt buffalo without horses or trained hunters.

Meantime, with the war into its second year, Fort Gibraltar became even more important as a supply centre for the North West Company. As had been customary since Peter Pond's time, the bourgeois engaged Métis to hunt buffalo and Indian women to pound tons of pemmican, until the great warehouses were filled to the rafters with ninety-pound packs for the brigades on their way west, or east to Fort William. Wild rice was brought down from the Lake of the Woods country, and in spring the sap of the local maple trees would be boiled to make syrup and sugar. As usual at Fort Gibraltar, the Nor'Westers held their New Year's festivities, the noisy, boisterous *boisson*, with pipers and fiddlers beloved of every bourgeois and clerk and their Métis relatives. During the winter they might almost have forgotten the immigrants at Fort Daer but for casual scraps of gossip: the bull, Adam, had fallen through the river

ice and was drowned; dogs had attacked the small herd of sheep; this man or woman had died, or another child had been born.

Alexander Macdonell was only mildly surprised early in the new year of 1814 when a messenger from his cousin appeared at Fort Gibraltar with an official-looking document signed "Miles Macdonell, governor of Assiniboia". At the first reading the North West Company bourgeois could scarcely believe his eyes; surely this was a crude, practical joke. He reread Miles' document:

"Whereas the welfare of the families at present forming the settlement on the Red River . . . with those on their way to it, passing the winter at York or Churchill Forts in Hudson's Bay, as also those who are expected to arrive next autumn, renders it a necessary and indispensable part of my duty to provide for their support. In the yet uncultivated state of this country, the ordinary resources derived from the Buffaloe, and other wild animals hunted within the territory, are not deemed more than adequate for the requisite supply; wherefore it is hereby ordered that no person trading in furs or provisions within the territory, for the honourable the Hudson's Bay company, the North-West Company, or any individual, or unconnected trader or persons whatever, shall take out any provisions, either flesh, grain or vegetables, procured or raised within the said territory, by water or land carriage, for one twelvemonth from the date hereof; save and except what may be judged necessary for the trading parties at this present time within the territory, to carry them to their respective destinations, and also may on due application to me, obtain license for the same. The provisions procur'd and raised as above shall be taken for the use of the colony; and that no loss may accrue to the parties concerned, they will be paid for by British bills at the customary rates."

Miles had provided penalties with his embargo, too, and in view of the war now being waged went so far as to call on the Nor'Westers for the "cooperation of every good Subject of His Majesty".

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This was no joke. It was rather, decided Alexander Macdonell, a declaration of civil war and bitter ingratitude after his neighbourliness to Miles. How could British bills at the customary rates provide an organized supply of pemmican for the Nor'-Westers' brigades in wartime? Did Miles actually believe that the North West Company would apply to him for licence to export their own provisions, prudently laid in as an essential part of their trade organization; or that trading-parties destined for other departments would be "within the territory" at this time of year? Could he think of no better means of supplying the colonists than by confiscating his competitors' provisions?

To the bourgeois in charge of Fort Gibraltar, his cousin Miles' proclamation was another Stamp Act, legal but unconscionable. The Selkirk Settlement was basically a means of ousting the Montreal concern to the advantage of the Hudson's Bay Company, as William McGillivray had shrewdly observed in a recent letter to Miles, of which Alexander had a copy: "How you can hold out that the view of Lord Selkirk and of course his agents are merely agricultural is to us unaccountable, when we are told that the engagements of all his people oblige them to be drafted into the service of the Hudson's Bay Company whenever that concern stands in need of them for the purpose of the Fur Trade . . ."

Until he could get in touch with his fellow-partners at Fort William for advice, Alexander decided to ignore the proclamation, and to carry on his business as usual.

Miles soon made such a course impossible.

As usual, Métis *engagés* of the North West Company brought sled-loads of pemmican from outlying hunt camps to the main storehouse at Fort Gibraltar regularly throughout the winter. Shortly after issuing his proclamation Miles sent Spencer, one of the immigrants whom he had appointed his sheriff, to the Turtle River Plains camp. Spencer not only ordered a party of Métis to stop loading their sleds with pemmican, but to replace the bags on the scaffolds. This first seizure of the food on which the natives of the Red River must depend inevitably roused the

Métis' already smouldering antagonism. But Miles did not stop there. He issued orders that a cargo of pemmican being rafted down the Assiniboine to Fort Gibraltar be confiscated; in an attempt to prevent its seizure the voyageurs in charge cached it on the river bank and set off across the prairie; they knew Spencer would find it, but he must face considerable discomfiture before doing so. A raid on La Souris headed by Spencer was supported by a Hudson's Bay trader named Howse. Four hundred bags of pemmican were seized that time, part of it stored at Fort Brandon across the river and the balance sent downstream to Fort Douglas. Miles took the precaution of guarding the shipment with an escort of colonists as the boats passed Fort Gibraltar.

By this time Miles was boasting that he had force enough "to crush all the Nor'Westers on this river, should they be so hardy as to resist my authority", adding that while he doubted that the bourgeois could prevail on their men to act against the settlers, he was determined that his authority "should not be trampled on". A battery of guns which he had erected in front of Fort Douglas stopped two North West Company canoes coming upstream from Fort William. From them Macdonell commandeered a consignment of arms though he freed the men.

Alexander had retaliated by having Howse arrested for the plunder of Fort La Souris and was planning further action when the spring brigade from Fort William arrived at Lake Winnipeg. The Métis were eager to drive the colonists out by force, and might have done so had not John McDonald of Garth also reached Lake Winnipeg on his way east from the Columbia. Out of touch with the serious significance of recent events on the Red River, he counselled against "coming to extremities" which might lead to bloody civil war, and patched up the mounting differences. After obtaining a grudging truce he continued on to Fort William. The peace was broken when a fourth party of colonists arrived a few days later: 31 men, 3 women and 17 girls from Kildonan. For their support Miles confiscated another hundred bags of pemmican en route to Fort Gibraltar.

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At Fort William the partners grudgingly backed the action of John McDonald of Garth in arranging a compromise with Selkirk's agent, though several maintained that it reflected little credit on the North West Company. But all insisted there must be an end to such interference with the affairs of the company. At a special meeting of agents and winterers, "a full determination was taken to defend the Property at all Hazards". The North West Company clerks and others who had submitted to the seizure of pemmican were censured, and every man instructed to resist any further attempt to confiscate the company's goods. Apparently, Miles Macdonell and the "Heads of the Hudson Bay Interests" supposed the war had cut off all North West Company support from Canada; that by depriving the company of provisions collected in the interior its people would be starved and the business totally stopped, a misconception that must be corrected at once. Alexander Macdonell and Duncan Cameron returned to Lake Winnipeg with news of the war's end and the feeling that there was now peace all over the world except at the Red River. But they had the official support of their colleagues. "We will do our best to defend our rights," vowed Alexander. ". . . Nothing but the complete downfall of the Colony will satisfy some, by fair or foul means—a most desirable object if it can be accomplished. So here is at them with all my heart and energy".

In October 1814 the bourgeois at Fort Gibraltar, Bas de la Rivière Winnipic and Fort Dauphin received notices from Miles Macdonell to quit their posts within six months, on the pretext that the land belonged to Lord Selkirk. Though they had attempted to ignore the Proclamation, this latest attack could not be ignored. Not only was it a threat to the life-line of the North West Company, but it was also a challenge from which the Métis could not easily be restrained.

Overnight the men and women living in the Red River Valley divided into two camps. Bostonnais Pangman and Cuthbert Grant, sons of North West Company partners and Indian

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mothers, undertook to organize their people's defence. Soon many of Selkirk's people joined with the Nor'Westers. A majority of the original labourers, by now completely disgruntled with the whole immigration project, sought employment with the Canadians as soon as their time with Selkirk was up. One small party of colonists, already friendly with the Nor'Westers, hauled a couple of Miles' cannon from Fort Douglas to Fort Gibraltar. By spring Duncan Cameron was ready. Using a warrant signed by Archibald Norman McLeod under the Canada Jurisdiction Act, he arrested Spencer, the so-called sheriff, and then the "governor" himself, and sent both to Canada.

But Cameron had a more subtle and generous means of dispensing with the presence of many of the immigrants. Numbers who had survived the horrors of a winter at Hudson Bay, the laborious trip inland and the hardships of the settlement coupled with the criminal ineptness of Selkirk's agent, longed to leave the Red River forever and as soon as possible. Cameron's offer, on behalf of the North West Company, to transport all who wished to leave for Canada in the company's canoes came as a blessed salvation. There were many among them more than willing to agree with the bourgeois that "Lord Selkirk . . . and Miles Macdonell are the greatest enemies you ever had"; they needed no reminder of the truth of Simon McGillivray's warning in the *Inverness Journal*. When the North West Company brigades left Lake Winnipeg for the east that summer, each included special canoes carrying families and individuals fleeing from Selkirk's unhappy settlement. All were to receive free transportation to Canada and on their arrival each man was assured land which he could till and within reasonable contact with other settlements; many settled near Bradford at the lower end of Lake Simcoe along what came to be known as the "Scotch Line".

Faced with the rising hostility of the now more or less organized Métis, the remainder of Selkirk's colonists fled by boat down to Lake Winnipeg. Leaderless, they gathered their small belongings together and formed a pitiful little community, while

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at the Red River many of their tiny crops and shacks fell to the inevitable plundering of the Métis, rejoicing that at last the colony was dispersed. Fort Douglas was burned to the ground along with the colonists' grist-mill. Little of the settlement remained.

But it was a short reprieve for both Métis and Nor'Westers. Shortly after Miles Macdonell was taken prisoner to Canada, Colin Robertson appeared on the Red River. Lord Selkirk was in Montreal, he announced, and he himself headed a brigade of Hudson's Bay Company canoes on the way to Lake Athabasca, having travelled by way of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers. As Selkirk's agent, he was already gathering together the dispersed colonists, and would resettle them at the site of Fort Douglas. After sending on his brigade Robertson went about rebuilding Fort Douglas with all the swagger with which his former colleagues had been familiar.

Robertson's motto as a clerk in the North West Company had been "When you are among wolves, howl!" Now he more than lived up to it. In an effort to undermine the loyalty of the Métis to the Nor'Westers, he completely reversed the Hudson's Bay Company's usual cautious policy and paid exorbitant prices for provisions. With great abandon he handed out presents of blankets and other trade goods. For a time he even won over Bostonnais Pangman as a hunter. Then, on October 15, he attempted to arrest Cameron while the bourgeois was taking a stroll near Fort Gibraltar; the arrest was, he said, in retaliation for one recently made by Alexander Macdonell. Cameron coolly told him to be careful about making false arrests, and Robertson retired to his own post.

Again peace lasted but briefly. A couple of weeks later a further party of eighty immigrants arrived from Hudson's Bay in charge of Robert Semple. Semple had scarcely landed on the river bank when he announced that he held a commission from the Hudson's Bay Company as governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land. Both the announcement and the officious manner in

which Semple made it obviously roused Robertson's hostility, to the delight of the Nor'Westers at Fort Gibraltar. Nor did Semple show more tact in his attitude toward the Métis and Indians, treating them as though they were scarcely good enough to serve him and the colony. To the Nor'Westers his presence as governor-in-chief of the Hudson's Bay Company's Rupert's Land left no doubt of the connection between Selkirk's colonizing project and the fur trade ambitions of the English concern.

As usual during the winter, Cameron left Fort Gibraltar on various trips to outlying North West Company posts. On his return in March he was busy writing up despatches to catch the express for Fort William when a commotion at the fort gate attracted his attention. Before he had time to arm himself, a gang of Robertson's men rushed into his room and grabbed him. Robertson himself followed. To Cameron's indignant protests against such crude trespass, Robertson retorted that the North West Company bourgeois had promised free passage to Montreal for one of Robertson's men, and that that was pretext enough for his arrest. Robertson's real reason for the arrest soon became apparent; while his armed gang held the bourgeois, he not only read the letter Cameron had been writing—it was an appeal to James Grant at Fond du Lac for help against Selkirk's "machinations"—but went on to ransack the room for further letters. When he had made free with North West Company papers, he ordered his men to seize the entire Fort Gibraltar. With Cameron still under close guard, he used the information contained in the letters as a further pretext, this time waylaying the express in force; breaking open seals, he read the various despatches. A letter from Alexander Macdonell addressed to Cameron, roused his fury: "a storm is gathering in the north ready to burst on the rascals who deserve it", Alexander had written from Fort Brandon. "Little do they know the situation. Last year was but a joke. The new nation under their leaders are coming forward to clear their native soil of intruders and assassins".

The seizure of Fort Gibraltar and the bourgeois' arrest would

have been signal enough to rouse the "new nation" referred to in Alexander Macdonell's letter to Cameron. Not yet content, Robertson's men went on to capture Pembina, thereby providing Cuthbert Grant with his signal to alert the Métis scattered throughout the Red River Valley. But Selkirk's agents had not yet ended their provocation. Relations were obviously increasingly strained between the blustering Robertson and the arrogant, weak Semple. The former made his preparations to leave for England by way of Hudson Bay and to take Cameron with him, a prisoner; Semple was to remain in charge. Ever since Robertson's capture of Fort Gibraltar they had disagreed over holding both the Nor'Westers' post and their own. As he climbed into the boat on the Red River Robertson hurled a blast of advice at Semple: that he should tear down the great North West Company post at the strategic confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. With Robertson's words ringing in his ears, Cameron had his last glimpse of the fort from the river; delayed at Fort York and still a prisoner, it was to be seventeen months before he reached England and made his way back to Canada where he sued Selkirk and won damages of £3,000 for false arrest.

On the very day Robertson left, Semple ordered Fort Gibraltar demolished. The stockades were rafted down to Fort Douglas and the timbers that could not easily be moved burnt to the ground. The sight of the great fort in flames was too much for the Métis; soon the fire which had been smouldering in every one of them also burst into flame. To each the destruction of the North West Company post was a warning of what might happen to his own small home. Like a prairie fire news of the destruction of Fort Gibraltar raced from post to post, and from camp to camp wherever Métis and Indians gathered to hunt buffalo. The ancient war spirit of their Indian mothers, augmented by many a strain of fighting French and Highland Scots paternity, urged them to defend their very existence; and the Nor'Westers were no longer in any mood to enforce restraint.

In May, Cuthbert Grant with a party of Métis waylaid a

brigade of Hudson's Bay Company boats at a portage on the Assiniboine; the pemmican would replace some of that seized earlier by Miles, and would be needed if they must go on the offensive against Selkirk's Settlement. Further provisions were seized at Brandon House, and the English post plundered. Reinforced by parties from outlying posts, Grant in June headed the assembled Métis toward a meeting with a party of bourgeois and voyageurs due to arrive at Lake Winnipeg from Fort William.

"Possibly and most probably their appearance may suffice," A. N. McLeod had written Grant, "but in any case they shall be well and fully recompensed for their trouble." The partners had held many serious consultations, and he would arrive with reinforcements, including at least two partners, Dr. John McLoughlin and Robert Henry, and perhaps a party of Indians from Rainy Lake: "We shall be guarded and prudent, we shall commit no extravagances but we must not suffer ourselves to be imposed upon . . ."

A few friendly Indians tried to warn Semple of the danger now facing the colonists; but the "governor" of Rupert's Land was too arrogant to listen to natives.

Late on the day of June 19, 1816, Grant was within sight of the rubble of Fort Gibraltar. He might continue to follow the river bank, but in doing so would run the risk of fire from the cannon at Fort Douglas. Instead, he led his men—some of them Indians in war paint—on a line across the prairie, avoiding the angle between the rivers to regain the Red River below Fort Douglas. As he headed his men toward a point known as Seven Oaks he saw a group of some thirty men emerge from the fort gate, headed by Robert Semple. Now on the alert, he watched their movements carefully. Semple hesitated and sent back a messenger for reinforcements and a cannon, though without waiting for either he came right on, joined by several colonists. Young Cuthbert Grant (he was only nineteen at the time) at once ordered his men to deploy; one detachment to ride on toward the river while he himself led the other group so as to

reach the river behind Semple. He was still riding toward the river when one of his men, a *Canadien* named Boucher, broke from the column, and in patois demanded to know what it was that Semple wanted.

"What do *you* want?" demanded the "governor", and the two broke into heated argument.

The tempers of the Métis and Indians were trigger tense, and Grant had already had considerable difficulty restraining them from attack.

"We want our fort," snapped Boucher.

"Go to your fort, then!" retorted Semple, to which the *Canadien* answered angrily: "Why did you destroy our fort, you damned rascal?"

Probably stung out of his senses by the insult from one whom he considered his inferior, Robert Semple grabbed Boucher's gun. It was the opening act of battle. Even as Boucher slid from his horse to retrieve his gun, the Métis opened fire. One of Semple's men fell. Then Semple himself was hit. Shots spurted from behind horses quickly used as barricades, from the oaks themselves and from nearby bushes. Grant tried to save the wounded Semple but an Indian shot and killed him. In the confused minutes that followed the desperate Métis killed twenty of the colonists. Only one of their own number died. As dusk fell on the prairies and the rivers Grant took several prisoners. Riding over to occupy Fort Douglas, he warned that if further shooting occurred no one would be spared. With great care he had every item in the post listed, signing each list, "Cuthbert Grant, clerk of the North West Company, acting for the North West Company".

Daniel Harmon, collecting details of the affray months later, claimed that two shots were fired from Semple's straggling little party before Boucher denounced the English governor. Indeed, every man present at the little site marked by the seven oaks had his own version of what had happened.

Three days later Archibald Norman McLeod, agent for McTavish, McGillivrays and partner of the North West Com-

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pany, reached Lake Winnipeg and hurried upstream to Fort Douglas. The "battle" of Seven Oaks had temporarily relieved the Nor'Westers of any fear of "being imposed upon". Once more the unhappy remnants of the colony had taken off down the Red River, and McLeod had already interviewed them on his way from Lake Winnipeg, commandeering such papers as he considered of value.

No doubt to impress the Métis, who as much as the Indians loved a show of arms, he ordered a small salute to be fired. Then he formally took possession of Fort Douglas as at least partial recompense for Fort Gibraltar. His final official act was to call together the Métis whose action had defended their homes as well as the company's property, rewarding those whose deeds seemed most outstanding in the light of the circumstances.

And down on Lake Winnipeg voyageurs paddled the Nor'Westers' heavily laden canoes toward Grand Rapids and the Saskatchewan River, in the belief that at last their supply lines were safe.

## CHAPTER X

# *"The Ancient North West Spirit"*

During the fall of 1815 the partners of McTavish, McGillivrays were considering ways and means of holding their Athabasca trade when Lord Selkirk arrived in Montreal with his wife and family. Selkirk did not receive quite the cordial welcome which he had enjoyed twelve years before. Here and there places of business were closed to him, and he might have felt considerable embarrassment socially but for his wife's great charm and tact. When he came to engage lawyers to handle his own interests as well as those of the Hudson's Bay Company, the town's leading legal counsel had all already been retained by the Nor'Westers.

Selkirk had come to Montreal—by way of New York and not by Hudson Bay as his unhappy immigrants had had to travel—with full powers to negotiate a union between the English concern and the North West Company. Recalling the occasion on which his own overtures had received scant courtesy in London, William McGillivray took his time in receiving him. When he did meet the Earl with his lawyer, Samuel Gale, the head of the Montreal firm quickly and shrewdly sized up the offer. This time it was he who did the refusing.

Selkirk proposed that the Hudson's Bay Company concede to the Nor'Westers the right to trade in Athabasca and in "Canada

to the south of the height of land"—rights which they already enjoyed—along with transit through Hudson Bay. The offer was made on conditions that the Canadian firm recognize the rights conferred by the charter: "We will give upon a pepper corn rent the use of as many posts as may be necessary . . . and a lease to a depot at Port Nelson, with right of transit to Lake Winipic . . ."

To keep the door open, McGillivray countered by suggesting a basis on which the two firms could unite, the English firm to have a third of the profits and losses, with every prospect of "a handsome future dividend and of much present comfort", the North West Company to assume a two-thirds interest. Considering the charter on one hand, and on the other the great discoveries of the Nor'Westers, their existing business and facilities in Montreal for managing the fur trade, he considered it a fair division. Selkirk spurned the offer. Realizing that Selkirk lacked even a semblance of appreciation of the extent of discoveries and trade achieved by the North West Company, McGillivray in turn announced that he had no intention of risking "a substance in pursuit of a shadow".

It had not taken him long to realize that Selkirk was interested only in protecting the charter; he had no real desire for union. Before leaving London the Earl had actually petitioned the Colonial Secretary for a military force to guard his Red River Settlement. Lord Bathurst, though he had regarded the project at the Red River as "wild and unpromising" had referred the petition to the governor-general of Canada, Sir Gordon Drummond. Drummond naturally consulted McGillivray, the member of the Legislative Assembly most closely in touch with northwest affairs, assuring the Colonial Secretary that McGillivray and his colleagues were "persons of the utmost integrity and respectability".

Neither the governor-general of Canada nor McGillivray saw any need for a military force to guard the immigrants. Indeed, Drummond had already stated that "if the lives and property of the Earl of Selkirk's settlers are or may be hereafter endangered

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that danger will arise principally from the conduct of Mr. Miles Macdonell . . .”; Macdonell had assumed powers not vested in “any agent private or public or any individual or of any chartered body”.

To Selkirk’s charge of intrigue by “a certain company”, McGillivray retorted: “I cannot but express the feelings of indignation to which this calumny gives rise . . . Under the guise and cloak of colonization he is aiming at and maturing an exterminating blow” at the fur trade. Selkirk’s accusation that the Nor’Westers were instigating strife in the Indian country was answered with the statement that on more than one occasion his company had provided provisions for “the innocent people who had been enticed from their homes by golden but delusive promises, and had saved them from starvation . . . I therefore declare that I am an utter stranger to any instigation or any determination of the Indian nations to make an attack upon the settlement in question; but I will not take upon me to say that serious quarrels may not happen between the settlers and the natives, whose hunting grounds have been taken possession of . . . the arrogance and violent conduct of Lord Selkirk’s agents . . . cannot well fail to produce such a result”.

Selkirk’s real reason for visiting Montreal soon became apparent. During the winter he published yet another pamphlet: *Sketch of the British Fur Trade in North America with Observations Relative to the North West Company of Montreal*. The Nor’Westers met his blast by appointing Henry McKenzie, Roderick’s younger brother, to take charge of their public relations. Soon a series of letters appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* under the pseudonym of “Mercator”, the writer being the able and well informed Edward Ellice. “Mercator” questioned the legality of the Hudson’s Bay Company charter and of Selkirk’s obnoxious Red River grant. He pointed out the position of the Nor’Westers as successors to the French fur-trader-explorers; while the North West Company was exploring the continent right to the Arctic and Pacific Oceans, the English firm, whose charter required it to explore, had sat stolidly on the

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Bay. "Mercator's" letters soon drew answering comment, some of it so bitter that one loyal North West Company supporter threatened to horsewhip Selkirk's brother-in-law John Halkett, believed to be the author of some of the more insulting tirades.

In spite of bitter opposition in Montreal, Selkirk persisted in his demands for an armed force for the Red River. The governor eventually agreed to a personal bodyguard of fifteen men from the Swiss de Meuron regiment of mercenaries, inactive since the war, the men to be maintained at Selkirk's expense. Drummond felt, however, that it was his duty to explain this concession to the "gentlemen of the North-West Company at Montreal with the view of removing any alarm which the measure might excite". When word reached him that the de Meurons were being disbanded, he told Selkirk that he would not be able to provide even the bodyguard.

McGillivray heard rumours of Selkirk's next step, though at the time details doubtless were kept as secret as possible. Taking the law into his own hands, Selkirk recruited a hundred of the disbanded mercenaries. Promising them land on the Red River, he issued them uniforms and engaged over a hundred voyageurs to act as a transport corps. At the same time he sent an order to the States for a "furnace for heating cannon balls". The furnace, together with artillery and provisions, was to be shipped to him at Sault Ste. Marie, where he would collect the large consignment on his way to the Red River.

Before leaving Montreal, McGillivray on April 28, 1816, wrote McTavish: "We have been kept in hot water here all the winter engaging men, and making preparations for the contest of the ensuing winter. Lord Selkirk as far as his means go, or rather those of the Hudson's Bay Company, will endeavour to spoil the trade & perhaps really thinks he will succeed in driving us out of what is called the Hudsons Bay territories. We are perfectly satisfied that he has *no right*, that neither the Government nor the laws of the country will support him in this, therefore the only advantage he has over us, is perhaps that his

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Goods are easier procured by the way of Hudson Bay, but then his men go up light, from home. In short I have no apprehension of the result, and as good or bad examples are often taken from the agents, perhaps it is right on this occasion to step forward and show that they are in earnest. It is settled therefore that McLeod is to winter at Athabasca and I must resume my old situation at headquarters. I trust that the spirit of restraint will be general among us. There is dishonor in being fooled by this pidling Lord & it will be the more disgraceful as we cannot fail but by our own faults, in which case luxury must for some years be lost sight of. You see by this that the east side of the mountains does not present you a *bed of roses*”.

All the way up the familiar route—the one which Selkirk also would travel—McGillivray in the spring had rumours enough to occupy his attention. After the winter's efforts to unravel the meaning behind Selkirk's strange actions, it was a relief at last to see the magnificent promontories of Thunder Bay. Soon, in the strong disciplined rhythm of the depot's routine, the disquiet of the trip left him. Already many winterers had arrived. As usual the great wealth of pelts poured in day after day on the shoulders of sturdy northmen. The flow of pelts from the northwest was particularly heartening this summer of 1816; it would compensate for the inevitable loss of trade from the southwest due to the incredible hostility of his long-time colleague, Astor.

Just the year before he and Astor had signed an agreement to continue the South West Company until 1820. It was all he and his colleagues had been able to salvage from the struggle for the border negotiated by the British at the Treaty of Ghent. His brother Simon and Edward Ellice had been in London almost continuously since the war's end striving to save the victories won by the fur-traders at Mackinac and Niagara as well as at Astoria, only to realize that once again the British government gave little weight to the claims of its colonial subjects. Even the Nor'Westers' urgent petition for a neutral Indian territory to the south of the Great Lakes had been ignored. And now Astor

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had had his revenge for the loss of Astoria. At his pressing instigation Congress had passed legislation limiting licences for the Indian trade on American soil to American citizens. Astor, backed by the United States government, had double-crossed the Nor'Westers. From now on, though William McGillivray would make the best terms possible with Astor for disposal of the Montrealers' half-interest in the South West Company, their fortunes must lie entirely in the northwest.

That summer at Fort William, McGillivray recalled a letter he had written to Duncan Cameron at the Red River when the close connection between Selkirk's Settlement and the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade became apparent: "The H.B. Company, you see intend to oppose seriously. I hope the ancient North-West spirit will rouse with indignation."

Before the partners could consider steps to meet the thrust from their long-time associate Astor, Cameron arrived with word of the swift tragic little battle at Seven Oaks.

Word flashed through the entire depot. In French and English and native *patois* it echoed throughout camps of northmen and pork-eaters, the Indian tent villages along the shore and on every street within the stockade. Most fervently of all it was discussed again and again in the great hall where the bust of Simon McTavish was a reminder of how recent was the continent-wide trade achieved by their own effort and enterprise. The news that a hundred and thirty of Selkirk's colonists had accepted the Nor'Westers' offer of sanctuary in Canada, and were already on their way east strengthened the feeling of satisfaction.

In the bitter struggle for survival when even the great monopolied companies depended on wits and force to compensate for slow communication and transport, the privately owned Nor'Westers had suddenly won a reprieve. Semple's rash act relieved them of the probable necessity of taking the offensive against the colony thrust across their life-line by Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company. Coming on the heels of Astor's retaliatory *coup*, word of the disbandment of the settlement of immi-

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grants was glorious news. A cry of relief rang through Fort William like a chant:

“Our life-line is free!”

Now they could plan for the coming season's trade without the nagging fear of starvation. A surge of new life flowed through the entire concern. Never were consignments of goods sent off with greater hope and enthusiasm. During the long summer days, moccasins and European leather boots trod deep paths in the grass and bracken along the portage trail. At night bourgeois and clerks danced in the great hall, singing tender Scottish ballads and naughty French songs to the sensuous slip-slap of moccasined feet and the haunting cadence of bagpipe and fiddle; now and again a Chippewa girl's throaty murmur blended with a man's exulting laughter in one of the cabins or from under the canoes beached along the riverside. Fort William had never seemed more secure.

In the great hall by day the partners planned the next season's trade or, for the more remote departments, that for several years to come; already, they knew, consignments had left the Rainy Lake post for the Athabasca territory and beyond. The future for the North West Company appeared brighter than at any moment in its brief, perennial struggle, but for one discordant note.

Every canoe brigade and every sailing-boat reaching Fort William from Sault Ste. Marie brought rumours of Selkirk's expedition to the Red River. Knowing as he did that the settlement was dispersed, and that the majority of the colonists were on their way east in the company's canoes, William McGillivray must often have wondered what “the Bible peer” hoped to achieve for all his effort and expense—unless he should be so mad as to think of using those de Meuron mercenaries for more than agricultural pursuits. But the Nor'Westers had had to defend themselves against so many obstacles that they had learned from experience to be always on the alert. They were hemmed in, he wrote his friend John Johnson of the Indian Depart-

ment that summer, "... by a set of unprincipled Agents of Government on one side and by a speculating Nobleman on the other—Equally as it appears bent on the same subject—to exclude Canada and Canadians from this too famous trade . . . I really wish I were decently out of it, although I shall never submit to be kicked out of it by any Lord or commoner in the King's Dominions . . ."

Steadily the rumours persisted. Selkirk had had himself appointed a Justice of the Peace. Accompanied by his physician, Dr. John Allen, he had reached Sault Ste. Marie, and there he had received word of the dispersal of his colony following the battle at Seven Oaks. Dr. Allen had broken the news to Selkirk, apparently fearful that his lordship's health was not equal to such a blow. But Selkirk, after a brief period of prostration, had rallied and determined to go at once to Fort William, demanding that the two Justices of the Peace at Sault Ste. Marie, John Askin and Charles Ermatinger, accompany him. Both had refused. In a fury of indignation, Selkirk had then determined to go on his own, accompanied by his corps of a hundred uniformed and, if the rumours were true, armed mercenaries.

At Fort William the Nor'Westers began to ask one another what Selkirk was planning. The boat-loads of arms and the furnace for heating cannon balls which had recently reached Sault Ste. Marie from Detroit seemed a strange aid to colonization. But one thing irked them beyond every rumour, the fact that Selkirk was free to use both the Ottawa River route and Hudson Bay.

On August 12, 1816, they saw his great armada enter the mouth of the Kaministiquia River, though according to rumour he had planned to go to the Red River by way of Fond du Lac.

After witnessing Selkirk's strange flashes of fanatical enthusiasm, interspersed with bouts of depression, in Montreal the previous winter, and in view of the Nor'Westers' victory at the Red River, William McGillivray did not expect a courtesy call from the leader of the armed expedition camped across the

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river and above the very gate of Fort William. He was, however, certain that there would be some communication.

Barely settling camp, Selkirk demanded the liberation of several men arrested by the Nor'Westers at the Red River, to which McGillivray at once agreed. After questioning the men Selkirk the following day sent two of his armed, uniformed mercenaries to the gate of Fort William with a warrant for his, William McGillivray's, arrest for treason and conspiracy and as an accessory to murder.

McGillivray could hardly believe that Selkirk was in earnest. But he must go over to see what was behind this incredible situation. Two of his colleagues, Kenneth McKenzie and Dr. John McLoughlin, offered to accompany him, and even to put up bail if such were demanded. The head of the North West Company finished a letter he had been writing when the de Meurons arrived, and the three Nor'Westers got into a canoe and were paddled up the river.

“What right have you to assume the powers of a governor of Canada?” McGillivray demanded of Selkirk.

Without the courtesy of an explanation, Selkirk ordered his men to arrest McKenzie and Dr. McLoughlin as well as McGillivray. He refused to grant them bail, claiming that the charges against the three were too serious to allow bail. In view of Selkirk's military strength, McGillivray and his colleagues submitted with what dignity they could muster; McGillivray doubtless recalling bitterly his comment to McTavish that there was dishonour in being fooled by this “pidling” lord. They were, they all realized, in the hands of a man at least temporarily deranged.

As soon as he had secured the three Nor'Westers Selkirk sent a strong detachment to Fort William with further warrants. The remaining partners were gathered at the fort gate, vigorously protesting the warrants, when Selkirk's Captain d'Orsonnens called up a boat-load of reinforcements. Before the gate could be closed, Selkirk had captured not only sixteen partners of the North West Company but the great civilian trading-post itself.

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Among the partners were McLeod who was to have wintered at Athabasca, and John George McTavish, his fellow-bourgeois, just arrived from the Columbia.

Threatening to "cut up by the root one of the most abominable combinations that was ever suffered to exist in the British Dominions", Selkirk ordered his men to lock up every record in the post. But before the task was completed he was near collapse from fatigue and excitement, and his doctor advised him to retire to the camp across the river to cool off. Warning the Nor'Westers not to touch any of their possessions secured by his locks until he returned in the morning, Selkirk reluctantly submitted.

The Nor'Westers lost no time in ignoring the warning, and wasted little in denouncing their obviously deranged attacker. Alone in the post for a few hours, they had more important things to do.

It was a night which each would remember as long as he lived. Everything about the post, on the surface, looked as usual; the great hall, their bedrooms in which none would attempt to sleep, the great flickering fires. Even the sounds outside were much the same as they had been summer after summer. From the doorway opening onto the wide piazza, the cool, moist air had its familiar, caressing quality; the night wind pitched off the high promontory of Mount McKay to ruffle the waters of Lake Superior offshore. Here and there mists veiled the brooding promontories, as happened frequently. Only the actions of the partners themselves were strange and incredible.

Among the sixteen were at least two members of the Legislative Council of the provinces of Canada. There were men who played leading roles in the colony's financial and social life, men familiar with the economic and political affairs of Montreal and New York and London, as well as less well known winterers. Tonight all were prisoners in their own great stockaded depot. A thousand miles from Montreal, there was no hope of adequate help arriving within a couple of months, even though a messenger had escaped down the Kaministiquia

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and across Lake Superior. With an army across the river and under command of a dictator periodically bereft of his senses, only one course was open: to burn such of their records as they could before Selkirk confiscated them to whatever ends his warped mind might suggest.

They could not hope to destroy all the records in the post, and there was always the hope that Selkirk might spare some which they would need in the future when they regained control. Quickly they consulted, and quickly they made decisions. Great batches of such papers as Selkirk might use to their disadvantage were piled on the fireplaces in the mess hall. Others were carried to the kitchen stoves by the armful. A few small arms were loaded and cached in the hayloft, a barrel of gunpowder carried out of the rear gate into the swamp, and hidden; under cover of darkness skilled voyageurs silently paddled a canoe-load of arms up the river, passing under the very shadow of Selkirk's camp. When morning came only the blackened ashes of paper on the hearths and in the kitchen stoves, and a patch of trampled grass in the swamp, indicated the precautions they had taken.

After a restless night Selkirk was nervous and irritable when he arrived at the post. The discovery that the partners of the North West Company had destroyed some of their own papers threw him into a frenzy of excitement. He at once ordered his men to seize the entire post and to make a complete search. The finding of some thirty bales of pelts belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company (probably those confiscated a few months earlier by Alexander Macdonell) brought bitter accusations. The list of names of Métis whom the Nor'Westers were rewarding for their loyalty at the Red River became criminal evidence. Thumbing through private correspondence, as Miles Macdonell had done at Fort Gibraltar, he grabbed a memo referring to Lajimonière, the former Nor'Wester whom he had engaged as a courier; Lajimonière, according to the memo, would probably pass through Fond du Lac and should be waylaid. It was further fuel for Selkirk's blazing anger.

The papers which excited him could have been destroyed

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by the partners had they considered them dangerously incriminating; but now Selkirk had all that remained tied up by his servants. After several hours, again close to exhaustion and beyond reason, he ordered all Nor'Westers to abandon Fort William. The company's servants were sent to camp across the river, and the partners placed under close custody.

On August 19, Lord Selkirk forced the Honourable William McGillivray and all the other partners at Fort William except Daniel McKenzie into canoes, to be sent east under guard. To the Nor'Westers the scene was a nightmare comparable only to the hours when they burned the records of an era. While a man lauded for his philanthropic ideals commanded the dockside, supported by a mercenary army, they must leave Fort William to whatever fate his unsound mind might devise. Even the post's employees must be abandoned. But futile as all protests had been, William McGillivray spoke out in sharp and bitter indignation when he saw that one of the canoes into which several North West partners and voyageurs were being forced was dangerously overloaded. With many more at the water-side, surely Lord Selkirk would consent to the use of another so that the lives of the voyageurs as well as of the partners under custody would not be endangered on the treacherous waters of Lake Superior. Selkirk refused the request. A few days later, off the north shore the brigade ran into a storm and the overcrowded canoe was swamped; nine Nor'Westers were drowned, including Kenneth McKenzie. The other partner who had accompanied William McGillivray on his initial call on Selkirk, Dr. McLoughlin, was swept up on shore, and revived only after hours of resuscitation. The list of casualties from this bitter war was steadily mounting.

Though McGillivray knew that he would be released as soon as he reached York or Montreal—if he survived that long—he had much to occupy his bitter thoughts as he sat hunched in the canoe, paddled along Lake Superior, each day farther from the depot named in his honour. Fortunately, goods for most of the departments had already been sent off; only a few

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nearer posts would seriously lack supplies. His great concern was for the season's packs. Pelts valued at £100,000, prime furs, were in the warehouses when Selkirk arrived, ready to be shipped east. Not only would the concern lack that capital for the coming year, but it must also get along without returns from the South West Company. Combined with the costly handicap of the Hudson's Bay invasion of Athabasca, they were in for a grim winter, one which would require every resource of the ancient northwest spirit.

From Montreal the capture of Fort William seemed an incredible nightmare. Even those who had suffered the indignity of arrest on their own premises by an army of mercenaries, could scarcely believe that Selkirk had so completely lost his reason. Equally as incredible were the letters sent by the Earl to Montreal. To Sir John Coape Sherbrooke, Drummond's successor as governor-general, he had written that he was sending to Upper Canada "a Cargo of Criminals of a larger caliber than usually came before the court of York", and "I do not pretend to deny that I was glad to have it so framed as to keep a part of the capital of the North West Company in a state of inaction till the question between us be decided, so as to limit in some degree their resources for carrying on a system of lawless violence against me." To his wife he had admitted "my wretchedly ill-advised conduct".

Selkirk, McGillivray soon heard, was wintering at Fort William; obviously his health was not up to the strain of further travel so late in the season. But the head of the North West Company cared little for Selkirk's health. His chief concern was to retrieve the £100,000 worth of pelts on which the immediate prosperity of Canada as well as those in the actual employ of the Montreal concern must depend. Though the season was already late he managed to get together a brigade of vessels and canoes above Sault Ste. Marie, hoping to bring the cargo east. A terrific equinoctial gale swamped many of the craft on Lake Superior and the expedition was broken up, causing Lady

Selkirk to write to her husband from Montreal that the great armada had disappeared and that "one after another of the partners return to Montreal looking very foolish while all the world are laughing at them".

Lady Selkirk had misjudged the calibre of the men behind the North West Company. McGillivray had yet another resource. He requested Dr. Mitchell, Justice of the Peace at Drummond's Island, to issue a warrant for Lord Selkirk's arrest. Though the season was now desperately late, Constable Smith set out with it by canoe, arriving at Fort William in November.

The warrant threw Selkirk into another paroxysm of rage. He had been expecting despatches from Montreal and his servant had mistaken Constable Smith for the messenger. Selkirk was already excited by news of the murder of a one-time Hudson's Bay Company employee, just received; Owen Keveny had been killed by one of Selkirk's former de Meuron men now in the employ of the North West Company. Lacking the restraint of McGillivray a few months previous, Selkirk charged that the warrant was "a trick, and the pretended constable an imposter", and decided to ignore it.

In Montreal news soon spread that Lord Selkirk had resisted the execution of the warrant. Throughout the colony the press made much of the whole Fort William outrage. "There must be something rotten in the cause which has so many enemies," charged Attorney-General John Beverley Robinson of Upper Canada, while the Reverend Dr. John Strachan in the *Montreal Gazette* referred to "the unscrupulous land-grabber". William McGillivray's dignified conduct under the difficult circumstances was contrasted time and again with Selkirk's hysterical assumption of the role of dictator.

By the end of the year parliament in London was sufficiently roused by conditions in British North America to share the concern of men in the Legislative Assemblies of Canada over the mounting strife in the Indian countries. A commission of two was appointed to look into the entire situation: W. B. Coltman, a diplomatic, fair-minded member of the Legislative Assembly

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for Lower Canada, and John Fletcher, a former police magistrate in Quebec. On January 1, 1817, Coltman advised the Colonial Office that “the North West Company may be driven to call in the aid of the Indians . . .”, and requested special instructions. Six weeks later, Lord Bathurst suggested that the governor-general “if possible, should warn Lord Selkirk of the danger to which he will expose himself, if he should persist in resisting the execution of the laws . . .”, and advised that the governor-general “without delay on the receipt of this instruction take care that an indictment be preferred against his Lordship for the rescue of himself . . . and upon a true bill being found against him you will take the necessary and usual measures in such cases for arresting his Lordship and bringing him before the Court . . . Surrounded as Lord Selkirk appears to be with a Military Force which has once already been employed to defeat the execution of legal process, it is almost impossible to hope that he will submit quietly . . .”

Parliament considered a special act to cover jurisdiction of territory beyond the Canadas and the United States because of the danger which might “result to the commercial and political interests of Great Britain from the opening which the conduct of Lord Selkirk appears calculated to give to the admission of foreign influence over the Indian Nations”. Even Lady Selkirk spending the winter in Montreal was deeply worried over her husband’s behaviour. “He is,” she wrote a friend, “so very sanguine, every difficulty seems to vanish before him.” To Selkirk she wrote a note of warning: “For Heaven’s sake be less sanguine. You really frighten me.”

Gradually, as the winter passed, William McGillivray in Montreal received scraps of news about Selkirk’s actions: Selkirk had sent a force under Captain d’Orsonnens to Rainy Lake, capturing that well provisioned post to provide for his own men. The force had gone on to take Fort Douglas, occupied by the Nor’Westers since the destruction of Fort Gibraltar, scaling the walls and forcing submission with a couple of cannon. Miles

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Macdonell had plundered Bas de la Rivière Winnipic, the greatest of the Nor'Westers' inland provision depots.

But only by getting back to Fort William himself could McGillivray fully assess the magnitude of Selkirk's depredations.

Leaving his daughters in his sister's care, he set out from Lachine by the earliest canoe.

Not only was the company faced with unknown confusion and loss of revenue through Selkirk's capture of Fort William and the inland posts, but its partners had just received further bad news. Taking advantage of Selkirk's attack and the Nor'Westers' consequent shortage of capital, Astor had forced the sale of their South West Company interests, probably at a considerable loss to the Montrealers who could no longer trade on American soil; it was a foregone conclusion that he would shortly strike at the former Astoria. The need to return Fort William to a normal footing was desperate.

Arriving at the Kaministiquia River, he retook Fort William without incident. Selkirk had left on May 1 for the Red River. At once McGillivray commenced the intricate piecing together of events at the depot since his enforced departure the previous August.

McGillivray quickly verified one of the worst rumours of Selkirk's complete disregard for the lives and livelihood of North West Company people. Refusing to permit the remaining two brigades to leave the post for the interior on the pretext that he would need the supplies for his own men, he had seized the provisions provided for them for the winter. They were without even arms and ammunition for hunting, and could do no trading.

Selkirk had proposed that three North West Company clerks retained at the depot agree to arbitration. The clerks had retorted that they had no authority to arbitrate for the concern. He had then turned to Daniel McKenzie, already held prisoner for weeks. Keeping him drunk and under arrest, Selkirk had finally coerced the Nor'Wester into selling a large consignment of food, purchased at Michilimackinac in the summer of 1816,

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for £1,200 and signing an agreement submitting all disputes between the two companies to a committee to be appointed by the Lords Chief Justices of the King's Bench and Common Pleas at Westminster. McKenzie was also forced to agree to payment by Selkirk for the pelts at Fort William, worth some £100,000, through rentals on Selkirk's Kirkcudbrightshire estate at the rate of £3,000 a year.

McGillivray and his partners threw out the iniquitous agreement and turned to more pressing business. As they had expected, the confusion resulting from destruction of the depot's records seriously dislocated business at every turn. Supplies were short even at Fort William, because Selkirk had confiscated them all to feed his army. Elsewhere reserve stocks carefully built up over years had been wantonly depleted. Though Rainy Lake post and Bas de la Rivière Winnipeg were soon reoccupied, food and trade goods could not possibly be replaced in a single season, and months must pass before the effects of the capture of Fort William on the more remote departments, particularly Athabasca, could be assessed. And in the meantime, Selkirk was himself on the Red River.

Archibald Norman McLeod and Alexander Macdonell had been on hand to welcome Commissioner Coltman at the Red River. Coltman was an old friend and casually accepted the Nor'Westers' invitation to dine on the day of his arrival, ignoring Lord Selkirk's protest that the acceptance of the invitation indicated favouritism. He handed McLeod and Selkirk copies of the Prince Regent's Proclamation. To Selkirk's claim that he had given inventories for all goods taken and, when convenient, had paid for them, McLeod retorted that Cuthbert Grant also had provided inventories before taking over Fort Douglas. And, McLeod reminded Selkirk, the agreement with Daniel McKenzie doped by his lordship's liquor would not restock Fort William, Rainy Lake post, or Bas de la Rivière Winnipeg, any more than Miles Macdonell's pemmican embargo had fed the Métis and voyageurs earlier.

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Commissioner Coltman, familiar with the economic factors of the fur trade as Canada's major industry, treated the struggle as a private trade war, doubtless hoping thereby to prevent a repetition of the parliamentary moves which had led to the rebellion of the English colonies less than fifty years before. From his camp situated halfway between the North West and Hudson's Bay Company posts on the Red River, he ordered that both parties restore all goods and posts to the status existing before the outbreak of hostilities in conformity with the Prince Regent's Proclamation. Cuthbert Grant, charged by Selkirk in connection with the battle at Seven Oaks, was arrested, Coltman later taking him in his own canoe back to Montreal. Selkirk himself was arrested on warrant, with bail set at £6,000, and Dr. Allen, charged with complicity, given bail at £3,000; both were to appear later before the courts of Upper Canada.

But Coltman's decisions did not complete the dispersal of the colony. As Selkirk's health improved greatly with the dry Red River air, he turned eagerly to the role of proud benefactor, despite commenting that it might be "the most prudent course to allow these people to seek asylum within the American lines". Though many of the de Meurons, after grasping the situation, decided to return to Canada, a few remained. With them and the remnants of the colony, Selkirk set about laying out a town-site, choosing locations for church, school, grist-mill and even bridges. He imitated North West bourgeois by accepting an honorary chieftainship from one of the native bands. Yet never did he show the slightest feeling for the men and women born in the territory.

Selkirk's attitude throughout his entire stay at the Red River was that his was the only right course. Filled with false optimism, no doubt the result of his improved lung condition, he assumed that root crops and seeds sown in the valley would mature exactly as though they had been planted on his estates in Scotland. When he finally left the settlement, he was convinced that all would be well. That night frost killed the root

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crops, and was followed by a hurricane which destroyed the grain. Once more the settlement was forced back on pemmican.

His feverish and unstable optimism had its limits, however. Perhaps acting on Commissioner Coltman's tactful reminder of the “inevitable comparison between his lordship's case and that of Mr. McGillivray”, and probably certain that warrants would await him at Fort William, he returned to Canada by the safer and more comfortable route through the United States.

In Montreal and York wagers ran high that Lord Selkirk would never return to face the many charges against him. But other than in the gloomily confessed “great mistake” Selkirk seemed to have no doubts about the righteousness of his own cause.

The first warrants were served on him on his arrival on Canadian soil at Sandwich. Others followed at York and Montreal. At each place Selkirk found little sympathy for either his conduct or his colony. Much as responsible people in both Upper and Lower Canada and at the Colonial Office in London wanted an end to hostilities in the Indian countries, the northwest fur trade was part of the colony's life. Two colonial judges “could not consistently with their consciences sit on judgment upon these matters”; they were Judge Reid, who had married the McGillivrays' sister, and Judge Ogden whose son was a winterer with the North West Company. Attorney-General John Beverley Robinson at York earlier had been retained by the Nor'Westers as legal counsel. Lord Selkirk even ran into difficulties in obtaining competent stenographers; most were already employed by the Nor'Westers, and the only one available demanded five guineas a day. Uncertainty over jurisdiction of the charges resulted in cases being moved between courts at York and Montreal. After months of delay the courts finally decided that offences committed in the Indian countries belonged to Upper Canada, and therefore could not be tried in Montreal.

Commissioner Coltman spent considerable time taking affidavits in both Upper and Lower Canada. It was March, 1818,

before the first case came up for trial, and then many hundreds of pages of evidence were taken. In general they fell into three main groups: the Colonial Office proceedings against Lord Selkirk; proceedings against the North West Company, preferred chiefly by Lord Selkirk; and charges laid by the North West Company against officials of Selkirk's Red River Colony, notably Miles Macdonell and Colin Robertson. So complicated were the various charges and counter-charges that the *Montreal Courant* prepared a handy list for its readers: twenty-nine cases against the Hudson's Bay Company and Lord Selkirk, and no less than a hundred and fifty against the Nor'Westers. Lord Selkirk had raked up every act which could be considered aggression, and which might be used to embarrass the Montreal firm.

Throughout the trials there appeared to be a strong under-current of belief that while Lord Selkirk's grant was legal, it was unconscionable and potentially dangerous to the life of the colony. In the end only one charge against the Nor'Westers resulted in conviction: Charles de Reinhard, the former de Meuron, was sentenced to be hanged for the murder of Owen Keveny. A charge of murder against Archibald McLellan, the winterer under whom de Reinhard and Owen Keveny had served, was, after many delays, finally thrown out. Cuthbert Grant and Bostonnais Pangman, arrested in connection with the "battle" of Seven Oaks, were admitted to bail but permitted to leave for the northwest before being tried. Proof of the general intention to avoid further inciting public opinion was indicated by the fact that Lord Selkirk's bail of £6,000 was finally settled for £50 and that of Dr. Allen—set at £3,000—for £25.

Lord Selkirk by the fall of 1818 had already suffered several lung haemorrhages, and had been advised by his physician to leave Canada. In November he sailed for England by way of New York, though Lady Selkirk remained in Montreal for the rest of the winter. Even Dr. Allen felt his patient's "opinion of the Attorney-General rather too severe" and that the Crown officers had done "their poor best". A couple of months after Selkirk's departure, he was fined £500 for resisting arrest by

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Constable Smith at Fort William; and a suit by Daniel McKenzie for false imprisonment at Fort William brought a further penalty of £1,500. Even in England the Earl, now desperately ill, was followed by reminders of his acts as accounts of the trials were reprinted in the London press.

While William and Simon McGillivray, Ellice and Thomas Thain were defending the very existence of the North West Company against Selkirk's charges during 1818, the ancient northwest spirit was being magnificently upheld west of the Rockies.

The trade of the Pacific slope, like that in the Nipigon and Timiskaming departments and the King's Domains down the Saguenay, had suffered from Lord Selkirk's attacks merely through the general confusion to the trade. There was also a resulting lack of capital, and the added frustration of receiving news six months after events in the east had actually occurred.

George Keith, in charge following the drowning of Donald McTavish and Alexander Henry the Younger, had opened the Willamette and Cowlitz Valleys to trade. Since the war, ships arrived practically every year, calling on their way to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands and China. One of them brought a spice of gossip in the news that McTavish's barmaid, Jane Barnes, after a series of casual alliances, had finally been married to Captain Robson. Keith, posted to Athabasca, was followed by Donald McKenzie, who generally reorganized and improved the entire Columbia Department.

McKenzie's knowledge of native psychology was notably valuable. During the first few years the express canoe which formed so essential a part of the company's tight trade schedule east of the Rockies, proved a tragic failure in the mountains. One express canoe after another was plundered by the more numerous, better organized tribes along the way. Carefully studying their customs, McKenzie learned that the natives had a strong, superstitious awe for the written word. His communication problems were at an end. Soon the express was function-

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ing satisfactorily, and relays of natives were guarding with their lives the miraculous sheets of paper which bore messages.

Under McKenzie, John George McTavish had built up Spokane House into a well fortified, well stocked inland depot. Ross Cox, after exciting encounters with desert life and rattlesnakes on the way from the Snake River, had explored the country around Fort Kamloops. Alexander Ross established Fort Okanagan, and then Fort Walla Walla in the Nez Percé country. Traders penetrated the deep, tortuous Snake River valleys which, though remote and comparatively inaccessible because of the great volume of the river's flow, proved rich in valuable pelts. But the final and typically North West Company innovation was the communication between Fort George, the former Astoria on the Lower Columbia and Fort McLeod far to the north in the Arctic watershed of the Peace River. After Ross had established Spokane and Cox had built up Kamloops, McKenzie organized a combination pack-horse-canoe route linking Fort Okanagan and Fort McLeod by way of Kamloops and the Fraser River.

By that time Daniel Harmon and John Stuart had developed New Caledonia into an economically valuable department whose potential was limited only by its remoteness. With the inauguration of the pack-horse-canoe route, goods exported from New York by ship were brought direct from Fort George to Fort McLeod. A new day was dawning for the departments in the mountain valleys. Now Harmon, who had lived for over ten years in New Caledonia with his half-breed wife and their children, began to feel comparatively close to civilization. He would still send his sons east for schooling, like other winterers, and teach his daughters and the "mother of my children" to write in English while they talked in French in their log house home. He would continue to maintain a store of dried salmon—at one time he had as many as 25,000 dried salmon in his storehouse—and competently manage his trade with the natives. He would still enjoy the solace of reading, since he had found that a fur-trader's business seldom occupied more than a fifth

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of his time. Harmon reflected that it was a man's own fault if he did not improve his “understandings, for there are few posts which are not tolerably well supplied with books . . . If I were deprived of these silent companions, many a gloomy hour would pass over me . . .” But now at least once a year, he could count on that direct communication from Fort George, with the great increase in supplies which it made possible.

It was by the pack-horse-canoe express that Harmon received word that once again the American flag fluttered over the fort at the mouth of the Columbia.

As far back as 1815, the American government had informed Great Britain that it intended to reoccupy Astoria, the move prompted by Astor's revenge for the Nor'Westers' purchase of the post during the war. Simon McGillivray had protested to Lord Bathurst in London and to the governor-general of Canada time and again during the following years; his protests, however, had failed to prevent the American ship *Ontario* from sailing for the Pacific with news that the British government had agreed to return Astoria to its pre-war status. But McGillivray's efforts had not been entirely fruitless. While the Americans held sovereignty over Astoria, the North West Company won the right to occupy the post for a ten-year period from October 20, 1818. The far-flung trade link between Montreal and the Lower Columbia was still intact; Astor would make no attempt to enter the Pacific coast fur trade for at least a decade.

Yet while trade could now be improved on the Pacific, a state of war was developing in the nearer Athabasca territory.

When Colin Robertson arrived at the Red River in 1815 with the brigade of Hudson's Bay Company canoes destined for the Athabasca country, the Nor'Westers were already bitterly indignant that he should have access to the St. Lawrence while they were denied use of Hudson Bay. They soon had enough information to charge that “that fickle traitor, Robertson” had actually persuaded the English concern to spend some £6,000 on a concerted invasion of the territory discovered by Pond.

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Deciding to remain on the Red River to re-establish the colony, Robertson had turned over command of the expedition to John Clarke, a former employee of the Pacific Fur Company. But Clarke lacked both experience and provisions. Robertson had glowingly persuaded his new employers that posts could be established throughout the Nor'Westers' Athabasca territory, and Clarke hoped to carry out instructions to build a post on Lake Athabasca (it was to be known as Fort Wedderburn) and trading-posts at Great Slave Lake, and up the Peace and Athabasca Rivers. He soon learned that the Nor'Westers had not forgotten Miles Macdonell's pemmican embargo.

That season William McIntosh was winterer in charge at Fort Chipewyan. McIntosh, in view of the state of near civil war now existing, warned the natives not to hunt for Clarke; if they did, he would give them no ammunition and no rum. Clarke, miscalculating the difficulties of securing food in the Athabasca country, was soon in serious trouble. Almost immediately on his arrival he had commenced building more posts than he could supply. With pitifully little pemmican and spread out in small groups hundreds of miles apart in completely strange country, his men were soon desperate. All were on short rations, though none as hard hit as the little party up the Peace River at the site of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vermilion.

When Clarke realized how close to starvation were the sixteen in this group, he ordered them down to Lake Athabasca where the fishing seldom failed. But though they set out by canoe, the river soon froze and they had to continue through the rough country on foot. Exhausted, hopeless, bitterly cold and starving, one by one nine men dropped by the way. Only three reached Fort Wedderburn. Before the winter was over they, like most of Clarke's surviving men, were depending on food provided by the Nor'Wester McIntosh—at a price; each man promised not to serve the English concern in the territory for three years. Even Clarke, who at first swore he would survive on rose hips rather than accept food from the Nor'Westers, in the end lived off Fort Chipewyan's prudently stocked stores.

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Following the affray at Seven Oaks, Archibald Norman McLeod took charge of Athabasca, well backed by men and trade goods to meet the Hudson's Bay Company opposition. Again Clarke was short of provisions. Again he had to turn to the Nor'Westers for food, and when the debt reached considerable proportions, McLeod seized Fort Wedderburn as security and with it Clarke when he became too troublesome. In reply to Clarke's protests, McLeod showed him a letter from William McGillivray giving a full account of Lord Selkirk's invasion of Fort William; if the Hudson's Bay people wished violence, the Nor'Westers would lose no opportunity to defend both their people and their property. Later in the season word reached Fort Chipewyan that the English concern had sent out a gang of Norwegians to build an inland depot at Norway Point on Lake Winnipeg. At once McLeod sent Clarke north to Great Slave Lake for the rest of the winter. Up there he would be unable to manage the affairs of the Hudson's Bay Company, and McLeod was taking no chance on a repetition of Selkirk's capture of Fort William.

Following their reoccupation of Fort William in 1817, the Nor'Westers postponed all hope of profits in Athabasca. Their first consideration now was to defend their holdings and to ensure better returns for the future. John George McTavish was transferred from the Columbia to take charge at Fort Chipewyan, supported by Angus Shaw and William McGillivray's son, Simon. On their way to Athabasca after the meeting at Fort William, McTavish and Shaw heard that the Hudson's Bay Company had sent out a new governor for the territory it called Rupert's Land, and on arriving at Fort Chipewyan they found the truculent Colin Robertson already at Fort Wedderburn.

Robertson had brought in—by way of the St. Lawrence-Ottawa River route and not by Hudson Bay—twenty-two canoes of trade goods and over a hundred men. His first move had been to reduce Clarke to a deputy position, his next to brag of all he had done to improve the Hudson's Bay Company: he had taught

the English how to handle canoes and how to load them as the Nor'Westers did. He had advised that vegetables and coarse grains be grown about the posts, and suggested that an inland depot be built at Grand Rapids at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River. It would be a sort of Fort William, closer to the general communication lines than the newly erected Norway House.

Robertson's presence at nearby Fort Wedderburn, on the little island across from Fort Chipewyan, irritated McTavish. It was a season of "galling trials", he wrote Shaw at Isle à la Crosse. Not only had Robertson as many men as the Nor'Westers, but many of them were bullies eager for a fight. Robertson had openly claimed to the natives that the English had as much right to the Athabasca trade as had the Montrealers. McTavish's chief trouble that winter was keeping his own men under control. Every one of them, like McTavish himself, regarded the territory as a Canadian possession, and only by the firmest discipline did he prevent a bloody scrap when Robertson in the presence of a band of natives threatened to burn Fort Chipewyan to the ground.

Early in October McTavish had to send Simon McGillivray to break up a fight between one of his men and one of Robertson's servants outside Fort Wedderburn. Young McGillivray was quickly joined by Robertson, who protested that this was no time for a fight; one of his men had been accidentally killed, and the funeral was about to be held. While he was protesting, Robertson's pistol went off; he later claimed that he had accidentally dropped the weapon. But young McGillivray, like McLeod the year before, took no chances. Though Colin Robertson was a big man and laid about wildly with his now empty pistol, Simon ordered Samuel Black to arrest him. Robertson was soon pushed into a North West canoe, and not one of his own people went to his assistance. From the canoe, soon on its way to Fort Chipewyan, he shouted that he would capture the Nor'Westers "as we took them at Fort William with the sun shining in their face".

McTavish lodged Robertson in a tiny shack of a jail out

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beside Fort Chipewyan's privy, answering his protests with a reminder of his threat to burn the fort.

During the winter McTavish permitted Robertson every courtesy short of freedom, and such food and liquor as Fort Wedderburn could provide. This privilege was used by Robertson to communicate with his own post by code messages tucked into a rum keg, returned from time to time for refilling. At Fort Vermilion, Clarke retaliated for Robertson's capture by waylaying William McIntosh. From Fort Chipewyan to the surrounding trade posts—Isle à la Crosse, up the Peace and the Athabasca, at Great Slave Lake—the presence of the Hudson's Bay people, though they achieved no great trade, served to inform the natives that the Montrealers no longer commanded a monopoly of the territory.

In the spring McTavish took Robertson east, under guard, with the North West canoes. At Isle à la Crosse he permitted him to spend the night at the Hudson's Bay post. As the brigade neared Cumberland House later, McTavish repeated the offer: "If you are inclined you can go and see your friends under the same understanding we had at Isle olo Crosse." As he probably anticipated, Robertson broke his parole. The North West Company brigade went on without him, McTavish doubtless hoping that he would never again see Robertson.

After the custom of years, the Nor'Westers' brigades came down the Saskatchewan, one after another, a few days or a few weeks apart: from the Pacific, the Upper Saskatchewan, the Churchill and the territories beyond Lake Athabasca. As usual, the partners and some of the senior clerks left their canoes above Grand Rapids, the three-mile stretch of white water where the Saskatchewan flows into Lake Winnipeg, strolling along the portage trail while the canoes shot the rapids. When the water was high canoes could shoot the rapids without unloading.

A week or so after Robertson's escape, on June 18, John

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Duncan Campbell, in charge of the Churchill River department, strolled the portage trail with Benjamin Frobisher.

This was always one of the most pleasant hours of the entire fur-trade year. Brigades met, and men exchanged gossip. They chatted about personal affairs and the company's trade, and about the belated scraps of world news which between them they had been able to glean. With summer in the air and the winter's trade over, every man was in a genial mood. The wide expanse of Lake Winnipeg beckoned; beyond lay Rainy Lake post and Fort William, and word of home. Aspens and Balm of Gilead were already in their first fresh green. But for black flies and mosquitoes the world was quiet and beautiful and utterly peaceful.

It was in such a mood that the two Nor'Westers were surprised by a whoop from the bushes beside the portage trail. Suddenly both were seized by a gang of husky bullies. As they instinctively resisted, each had his arms brutally pinioned behind his back. Ben Frobisher, straining to aid a couple of his men also being manhandled, was struck on the head with the butt of a Hudson's Bay Company gun.

Completely overwhelmed, the two North West Company partners were rushed along the moccasin-tramped trail. No heed was paid to their demands to see warrants for their seizure. As they and their captors neared Lake Winnipeg, John Clarke appeared. With him was another man, whom he introduced to the prisoners as "William Williams, Governor of Rupertsland". To the Nor'Westers' repeated demand to see the warrants, Williams and Clarke merely pointed to a barge moored at the foot of the rapids; on it a couple of cannon were mounted and trained on the portage. Nearby were the tents of a detachment of the disbanded de Meurons whom Lord Selkirk had engaged as settlers for his Red River colony; they were again in uniform and armed as troops.

Because Benjamin Frobisher was obviously suffering greatly from his head wound, Campbell repeated his demand to see the warrants for their arrest, in accordance with the Prince Regent's

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Proclamation. To this Williams retorted: “I care not a curse for the Prince Regent’s Proclamation; Lord Bathurst and Sir John Sherbrooke by whom it was framed are d— rascals. I act upon the charter of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and as governor and magistrate in these territories, I have sufficient authority and will do as I think proper.”

Williams went on to denounce Lord Bathurst as being bribed by North West gold. He declared that he would act independently of “the rascally Government of Canada . . . and make use of the colonists and every other power to drive out of the country every d— Northwester it contains, or perish in the attempt.”

Campbell and Frobisher were hustled off to a temporary jail on a tiny island in the river, no concern whatever being shown for Frobisher’s head wound which continued to cause him increasing suffering. Five days later another boat brought McTavish and Shaw to the little jail. To their protests, they had heard only a repetition of Williams’ insolent retort to Campbell and Frobisher. Shaw, who had produced a copy of the Prince Regent’s Proclamation, was told he could leave if he wished; but the permission was retracted when Shaw assured Williams that if he did he would “return in the space of forty days, and spread carnage and bloodshed about the country”.

The little island soon became too small for all the North West Company prisoners. Each partner’s cassette was opened; letters and other papers were confiscated, some being read in the presence of Selkirk’s mercenaries as a token of legality. While Williams was pawing through his company’s records, William McIntosh who was suffering from dysentery begged and was granted permission to retire; on each of several such occasions he worked on the beach building a small raft. McIntosh finally made his escape, the only Nor’Wester to do so from the island jail, leaving a note in a book on the beach that he was going to commit suicide. Later the de Meurons, searching frantically for him in every bush, found another note: McIntosh had drowned himself “having tied a stone about my neck to

keep me at the bottom". Since much of Lake Winnipeg is not more than two feet deep for a mile out from shore, there could be little doubt that McIntosh, ill as he was, was already on his way to Fort William.

Several other Nor'Westers evaded capture after being advised by a Métis of Williams' ambush, among them Alexander Macdonell, John Stewart and Simon McGillivray who took the longer portage by way of Lake Winnipegosis. McTavish and Shaw, together with Campbell and Frobisher, were sent under guard to Hudson Bay.

Already crazed by his head wound, Frobisher made several desperate attempts and finally escaped late in the fall. As this son of one of the first white men to reach the northwest wandered in the bush, his mind became increasingly affected by his grievous wound. The strain of the rough travel, with no shelter at night, the increasingly cold weather, and lack of food gradually slowed down his progress. For weeks he struggled on, hoping eventually to reach a North West Company post. He died near Cedar Lake only a few days short of his destination, and a Métis living in the vicinity erected a cairn to his memory at the site where his body was found. It bore the inscription: "To the memory of Benjamin Frobisher who perished on this spot 22 November, 1819, in escaping from York Factory where he had been most unjustly detained by servants of the Hudson's Bay Company."

Simon McGillivray, after eluding William Williams' armed bullies at Grand Rapids, took word of the ambush and an account of Frobisher's severe wounding to Fort William.

By the summer of 1819, Selkirk's attacks had seriously disrupted both the North West Company and McTavish, McGillivrays. Simon found his father, now in his late fifties, suffering from the effects of the strain and in ill health. Desperately short of working capital as a result of Astor's *coup* as well as Selkirk's confiscation of an entire year's trade, the expenses of the resultant litigation and the invasion of the Athabasca

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country, McTavish, McGillivrays was hard pressed to meet its obligations to the wintering partners of the North West Company. With the agreement of 1804 due for renewal in 1822, the senior McGillivray must face his associates without the support of four members of the firm—McTavish and Shaw, on their way to England in a Hudson's Bay Company ship, and Frobisher and Campbell he knew not where on Hudson Bay.

McGillivray was further handicapped because both John Forsyth and John Richardson, hitherto strong supporters, were now deeply involved in a new venture, the establishment of Canada's first bank, the Bank of Montreal. Neither was at Fort William to back him; and he needed support.

By the very character of men drawn to the North West Company, each was a strong individualist. Inevitably each young man, his entire capital and livelihood invested in the company, began to question the management, some covertly, some openly. Before their queries came generally into the open McGillivray sensed their antagonism. But he had to show them, for their own good as well as that of the concern, that survival depended on staying together. Somehow, he must persuade each man present to continue his support of the company when the new agreement came up for ratification.

They had all been under strain, some for years. In each department, Selkirk's attack had resulted in shortages of supplies; sometimes there had been grim and bitter physical attack. Inevitably, tempers flared at the meeting: had McGillivray and the other agents done all they could to win transit rights through Hudson Bay from the English company? Did they not realize that the Hudson's Bay Company was also in great financial difficulties?

McGillivray was able to persuade many of the winterers to promise their power of attorney, in case they could not personally come down to Fort William for the crucial meeting three years hence. Others left without fully appreciating the extent to which both McGillivrays, as well as Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Edward Ellice, had striven to break through the

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icy wall in London. Several had no insight into the stubborn refusals of the English company to share their monopoly of the bay. They could not know that in December of that very year Edward Ellice was to go to the Hudson's Bay Company—it was the fifth attempt made by the Canadian firm—to beg Selkirk to sell his shares if the simple right to use Hudson Bay could be acquired in no other way, a request which Selkirk, rapidly declining in health, refused to consider.

One question dominated all others at Fort William during that summer of 1819: who best could handle the Athabasca? Who, indeed, could replace the kidnapped McTavish? Or Angus Shaw, Ben Frobisher, or John Duncan Campbell? Surveying their map, and considering every possible man, George Keith was finally chosen. Keith was not as strong a man as the situation demanded, but he had had considerable experience in the Columbia. Simon McGillivray could be relied on to defend the company's reputation, and Samuel Black, though inclined to be a bully was probably the very man needed in the current struggle; they would be Keith's lieutenants.

Compared with the previous winter, the trade in the widely separated posts fanning out from Lake Athabasca during 1819-20 was quiet. Colin Robertson, back again, wisely wintered at the new Hudson's Bay Company post up the Peace River. At Fort Chipewyan, on many a long evening the valuable library collected by Roderick McKenzie afforded welcome diversion from the tension of the mounting struggle.

In the spring, when the brigade was almost ready to leave, a messenger arrived from Commissioner Coltman with warrants for the arrest of four North West Company servants and Samuel Black, charged with false arrest of Colin Robertson the previous year. The servants were taken back to Montreal; Black escaped with little difficulty.

George Keith, tense because of the unknown difficulties that might lie ahead of him on the trip, was eager to get off with his cargo of furs. But that spring there was yet another problem:

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Captain John Franklin had arrived from England on a great projected trip of exploration, and requested both the Montreal and the English firm for supplies and men to act as guides. Pausing only long enough to contribute both, Keith finally left Fort Chipewyan.

That summer he wasted no time enjoying the famous scenic beauties at Methye Portage, nor down the long chain of lakes which make up the Upper Churchill River. At all costs, Keith determined to reach Grand Rapids well ahead of Robertson.

At Grand Rapids he found a large group of partners already arrived. McTavish was back from England, freed of the charges laid against him by the Hudson's Bay Company's John Clarke almost a year before. Accompanied by Campbell, who had been taken to Canada and also freed, and by two other partners, James Leith and Henry McKenzie, McTavish had left Fort William in May and travelled by light canoe so as to be back at Grand Rapids to meet Keith before Robertson arrived. Simon McGillivray, Junior, soon joined the party. Any other year they would all have hurried on to Rainy Lake post or Fort William. This year, in spite of ever-present black flies and mosquitoes, each welcomed the opportunity to relax the customarily tight schedule. Peter Warren Deace arrived over the portage trail, and at once agreed to delay. So did McLeod and Cuthbert Grant. In all, eight partners were eventually assembled at Grand Rapids, with six clerks, and over fifty other *engagés*. They were all waiting for Colin Robertson to come down the portage trail.

When Robertson finally appeared, Henry McKenzie, in charge of the *engagés*, was ready for him. With a great whoop, his men rushed at Robertson. Ignoring his protests, they took his gun and pinioned his arms behind him, just as the English had done the year before. The louder he complained, the more roughly they handled him. Robertson came close to losing his life when he charged that the warrant for his arrest had been executed by "the murderers of the Red River".

The insult to the Métis at the Red River was more than

Cuthbert Grant could bear. "Don't insult the halfbreeds," he warned, whipping out his revolver, "or I'll shoot you!"

The Nor'Westers laughed at Robertson's protests; Frobisher had been a popular and competent fur-trader. With grim satisfaction they hustled him off to the tiny island where the Nor'Westers had suffered under Clarke and Williams the previous year. Their only disappointment was in not being able to arrest William Williams too. Williams, well aware that the Nor'Westers would never permit him to pass Grand Rapids without avenging the attack of the previous year, had gone to Hudson Bay by the Minago route.

It was a triumphant moment for the Nor'Westers at Grand Rapids; partners and clerks of the North West Company, as well as their *engagés*, jubilantly watched the canoe bearing Robertson grow small on the expanse of Lake Winnipeg. At last, surely, the trade would really be free. McTavish, during his enforced trip to London, had learned that the Hudson's Bay Company had stretched to the limit its credit with the Bank of England. Also, Lord Selkirk was now desperately ill. Indeed, so grave was the plight of the English company, and so certain were its directors that the Nor'Westers would avenge the insults perpetrated by William Williams that they had sent out George Simpson to replace him as governor; McTavish had crossed the Atlantic on the same ship.

But the northwest fur trade had already lost too much time this season at Grand Rapids. A quick command rang out. Soon bourgeois and voyageurs were attending to their various camp-breaking duties at the mile-wide mouth of the great Saskatchewan. In time-honoured manner, steersmen and bowmen floated canoes and steadied them while the gentlemen were carried to their seats. The brigade lined up. The bourgeois gave the order, and paddles dipped strong and deep into the murky waters of Lake Winnipeg.

On the way they met and passed other brigades en route to New Caledonia and the Columbia; in one of them sat Daniel

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Harmon. Across the windswept water the Nor'Westers hailed one another; the voyageurs in their quick, eager French, the bourgeois sometimes in French, sometimes in English. The news was of brigades on their way, of the season's trade, of who had been at Fort William or were going on rotation down to Montreal. When the Athabaskan bourgeois' canoe came abreast, Daniel Harmon called out across the water news that caused even the voyageurs to break for a moment the steady rhythm of their paddling: "Lord Selkirk is dead!" Almost in the same breath came another shocking announcement: "Sir Alexander Mackenzie is dead!"

Within months of each other, the two men whose lives had become inextricably a part of the fur trade had died, Selkirk in the South of France, and Mackenzie near his home in Scotland.

## CHAPTER XI

# Not By Others' Hands

In the spring of 1820 William McGillivray paused only briefly in Montreal on his way from London. As had happened so often before, he had virtually no time for home life, for Ann's daughter or his half-breed daughter at Berthier. He could merely be thankful that "I left my little girls in Montreal perfectly well" and turn his attention to the endless problems that challenged him.

How often had he planned the affairs of the North West Company as he sat hunched in his great canoe on the way to Fort William? How many hours—or days and weeks—had he wrestled with the problems of holding together this vast, tenuous trade empire that linked Montreal with the Pacific, and Canada with Great Britain as well as with New York and the West Indies and China? Young, new voyageurs had paddled and portaged and sung their way up the Ottawa River and finally grown too old to paddle a *canot du maître*, yet he was still making the trip long after he would have given half his fortune (if he had any fortune after Selkirk's assaults!) to turn over the reins to a younger man. Yet now more than ever, every Nor'Wester was needed, himself most of all.

During the winter he had written John George McTavish from London:

"... in the state of feeling at present general in the N West, the best means of safety for a man's property, is in his own resolution & capacity to defend it. This it has long been attempted to impress upon the minds of some of our friends, who thought that Government should do *every* thing. You have been long enough here to learn how difficult it is to get them to do *any* thing—after all the memorials, representations & labours of this winter, the only thing obtained is this *notice* or *order* to the Hudson's Bay Compy to respect the Prince Regents Proclamation of 1817..."

Hopeless of ever convincing parliament that the plight of Canadians in the northwest was desperate, from London McGillivray had sent the Nor'Westers urgent instructions as early as February: "... Some very decided step on our part will be required to counteract the violence with which we are threatened—at all events every man should be at his post, & the sooner you take your departure the better..."

To his great satisfaction he learned on reaching the depot that McTavish and Campbell had already left for Grand Rapids with sixty men and a warrant for Robertson's arrest. Much less satisfactory was the behaviour of Dr. John McLoughlin, the partner then in charge at Fort William.

Though McGillivray himself, as well as other Nor'Westers had appeared before committees of parliament, the government had always favoured the Hudson's Bay Company at the expense of the colonial fur-traders. Now when it issued an official communique to each of the competitor companies, the copy to the North West Company had not been delivered direct to McGillivray who had been in London most of the winter, or even to McTavish. Instead it had been entrusted to George Simpson, the provisional governor of Rupert's Land, and Simpson on his way to Athabasca to head the Hudson's Bay Company opposition, had called at Fort William with the document, the now too familiar Prince Regent's Proclamation. Dr. McLoughlin had not only accepted the copy of the proclamation but had received Simpson.

McGillivray had already suspected Dr. McLoughlin of attempts to undermine the agent's control. Entertaining George Simpson, the cocky little representative of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort William, was surely no indication of loyalty to the concern. Obviously the doctor was no longer the man to leave in charge of the depot, and in a position to influence any disgruntled winterer who might harbour feelings antagonistic to the régime.

While McTavish and Campbell were waiting for Robertson at Grand Rapids, McGillivray carried on the routine affairs of the depot. But this summer, as never before while he received reports and directed the details of each department, he weighed the qualities of each clerk and winterer. Who could be trusted to further the company's interests? Who might undermine the essential unity of directorate and personnel? When he was finally convinced that a small group of winterers were holding private meetings under the leadership of Dr. McLoughlin and Angus Bethune, he sent a special messenger by light canoe to recall McTavish as soon as possible from Grand Rapids. McTavish would replace Dr. McLoughlin at Fort William.

"The doctor," he wrote McTavish on July 15, 1820, "... feels very sore at being removed from this place ... [he] tried every means to defeat the plan, and he and those whom he got to join him, make themselves ridiculous ... all the particulars regarding the transaction at this place ... [are] ... *set on paper*, at least. The Doctor and Mr. Bethune go down on Rotation, and are to be appointed *deputies* to negotiate a new agreement. On this however two words are to be said before we quit the ground. The wintering Partners here must not consider themselves entirely the N.W. Co." And in a postscript to the letter to his cousin McGillivray advised: "You should write to your friends in the Interior in any way you like, to send you Powers of Attorney next year to act for them. We are likely not to be unanimous in making a new agreement."

It was a summer at Fort William when McGillivray must often recall the words he had written to McTavish while Selkirk

was still in Montreal: ". . . we cannot fail but by our own faults". Never had he listened to such heated arguments in the great hall, and this year there was a new note. It had never been easy to mould together the opinions of these men who could go off into the unmapped wilderness and control headstrong natives, who could explore unknown country and carry on valuable trade, dependent almost entirely on their own good sense and initiative. They had never submitted easily to the discipline of the organization, utterly essential at the depot and down through the winterers and clerks to the *engagés* in the interior. Now the group of winterers led by Dr. McLoughlin charged that the agents had failed them in not obtaining rights to Hudson Bay. More than once McGillivray lost his temper, even as he strove to make allowances for the tensions of the past few years, the shortages of provisions and trade goods, the apprehensions concerning each man's personal future. Pilloried as was McTavish, McGillivrays by the events of these recent years, he could not even give the winterers a comprehensive statement of the firm's finances.

When he left for Montreal at the meeting's end, his body ached with worry and frustration. Not even the appearance of Colin Robertson, being taken east following his capture by McTavish at Grand Rapids, eased the feeling of impending doom. Yet one thing he knew out of all his experience and every intuition: if they remained united, those intrepid younger winterers and the experienced Montreal agents, they were still an unbeatable combination.

At Fort Chipewyan in the fall of 1820 Simon McGillivray and George Keith quickly appraised the new man in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Wedderburn. Williams having avoided the Nor'Westers and still free to act as governor, George Simpson had been posted to Athabasca. A single act had damned Simpson in the eyes of the already outraged Nor'Westers, and word of the act had sped by moccasin telegraph through the land of muskeg and lobster and jack pine.

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Simpson had camped on Cedar Lake, the expansion of the Lower Saskatchewan, near the cairn erected to the memory of Benjamin Frobisher. He read the inscription: "To the memory of Benjamin Frobisher who perished on this spot 22nd. Novr, 1819, in escaping from York Factory, where he had been most unjustly detained by servants of the Hudson's Bay Coy". The board bearing the inscription was missing when he left the site.

A few days later McGillivray in his graceful canoe and with his disciplined brigade had caught up with Simpson below Cumberland House. Pausing beside Simpson's canoes, "old, crazy and patched, built originally of bad materials without symmetry and neither adopted [*sic*] for stowing nor expedition . . ." he passed on the news of Lord Selkirk's death, which he had heard before leaving Fort William. Simpson disdained to believe the report, and McGillivray had ordered his voyageurs to push on, quickly leaving the hostile employee of the English firm far behind.

Now nothing Simpson did could escape reaching the ears of the Nor'Westers at Fort Chipewyan. They kept track of his actions at Beaver Lake and Isle à la Crosse, on the Methye Portage, and right up to Lake Athabasca. They knew where Simpson had succeeded in winning natives to hunt for him by "giving them a dram", where he had failed. They took a bitter delight in learning that he could not succeed in invading New Caledonia because of his shortage of provisions and shot. His new post at St. Mary's was not completed. Simpson lacked bark and canoes. Nor was he able to meet the quota of provisions promised Captain Franklin by both fur-trading companies for Franklin's expedition to the Arctic; the shortage was made up from North West Company stores.

The day following Simpson's arrival at Fort Wedderburn, September 21, 1820, McGillivray sent over a month-old Montreal newspaper containing an item correcting a statement that Lord Selkirk had died at Gau in the south of France; the

place should have been Pau. With the paper, McGillivray sent a note:

"To Gentn. in charge of Fort Wedderburne—Gentn.—As we are led to understand that you misbelieve us concerning Lord Selkirk's death; you have only to peruse this Newspaper and you will find that there has been no fabrication on our part in it. S.McG.Jr.—N.B. Please send back the paper after perusal."

When McGillivray got the paper back, Simpson had included a note:

"To the Gentn. in charge of Fort Chipewyan—Gentn.—If the report of Lord Selkirk's death is founded on truth, we in common with all who knew his Lordships worth regret the event most sincerely; but the pains which the N.W. Coy. have taken to circulate it, confirms our belief that the Editor of the *Montreal Herald* has been imposed upon designedly."

From that beginning at Lake Athabasca McGillivray and Keith determined to permit Simpson no peaceful occupation of Wedderburn. They lost no opportunity to put his company, his men and himself in a bad light with the natives: John Clarke, who had been so important during the previous season, was now in disgrace and his career all but finished; the English company's traps were made of such poor quality iron that they would bend; their axes would chip or crack when the bitter cold of the northern winter set in. To meet Simpson's instructions to his clerks to "impress on the minds of the Indians, that the Company are rich, strong and powerful, and strictly honorable, and that our Opponents are the reverse", McGillivray and Keith merely pointed to the North West Company houses, well built, well supplied with pemmican and trade goods. They even invited some of Simpson's clerks to a good meal or a tot of rum at Chipewyan, partly to impress the men and sometimes because they liked individuals or were sorry for them. But when Simpson charged his men that "every exertion must be used to Trade the Debts of the N.W. Coy", meaning that they should take by force pelts paid for in advance by the Nor'Westers, McGillivray and Keith changed their tactics.

During Robertson's régime the Nor'Westers had erected a blockhouse on Potato Island, only twelve yards from the main gate of Fort Wedderburn and Wedderburn's main access to the lake; from the rear windows of the blockhouse they could look right into the yard of the rival post. Aware that their very nearness greatly annoyed Simpson, McGillivray and Keith now increased the guard; the blockhouse was never without a man who from time to time made himself conspicuous at one of the rear windows. At the same time, Keith dropped a casual remark that before the winter was over, he would have Simpson locked up in the privy at Chipewyan, as Robertson had been the previous year; the remark, as Keith had intended, soon reached Simpson's ears. McGillivray's Irish servant, Kelly, amused himself by bragging about the great strength of his master's company within hearing of Simpson's servants. In the shortening days of late autumn, the long evenings were livened for the Nor'Westers by endless inventive horse-play at the expense of the English. By day they lost no opportunity to warn the Hudson's Bay people to stay clear of their property.

A line had already been drawn between the two properties, running from the side of the Nor'Westers' blockhouse nearest Fort Wedderburn. Glancing from his window one day McGillivray saw one of Simpson's men trudging close by with a load of wood on his shoulder. The bourgeois sent his clerk out to protest, and the clerk not only upbraided the man, but knocked him down, gave him a good trouncing, took his cap as a trophy and sent him home without his faggots. Soon Simpson's clerk was knocking at McGillivray's door; his master demanded his servant's cap, the wood and an explanation. McGillivray replied that he did not wish to enter into explanations, but that the clerk could pick up the firewood if he wished. The man had just had time to reach Wedderburn when the sound of a shot echoed across the lake.

McGillivray rushed out to see who had fired the gun. In view of Simpson's threats against any man who failed to respect the "Honourable Hudson's Bay Company"—which the

Nor'Westers certainly had not taken docilely—none of them felt safe. The shot, Simpson explained, had been fired by his clerk, merely to empty his gun. The explanation so closely resembled Robertson's excuse of the previous year that McGillivray determined to take measures to prevent a repetition.

In an attempt to limit the Nor'Westers' view of Wedderburn, Simpson had already built a line of pickets from his gate to the water-front. Next morning, on October 23, McGillivray gave instructions to extend the Nor'Westers' blockhouse so as to be able to maintain a watch on Simpson's movements, no doubt further to annoy Simpson. He was overseeing the digging of a trench when Simpson rushed out of Wedderburn, charging that the trench was being dug two feet within the English company's property. McGillivray told his men to carry on, and Simpson, apparently convinced that nothing he could say would daunt the bourgeois, retreated into his own post.

It was then that one of his men, Amable Grignon, a former Montreal constable, returned to Wedderburn after a week's absence. McGillivray casually noted the man's arrival. He was still overseeing work on the blockhouse when Simpson reappeared at the Wedderburn gate accompanied by Grignon and several other men in arms. "Mr. McGillivray," called Simpson, "I should be glad to have some further explanation with you on the subject of this boundary line."

McGillivray walked over to reply. He had scarcely reached the gate of Wedderburn when Grignon collared him, shouting, "I arrest you in the King's name!" The Nor'Wester resisted, but Grignon and Simpson had several of their bullies armed and ready. Another bourgeois of the North West Company had been forcibly captured by employees of the Hudson's Bay Company.

McGillivray protested to Simpson that he was being assaulted as his father had been at Fort William. Simpson retorted that the "officer had acted on his own responsibility and alone could be responsible for the consequences", though he later admitted that he knew the warrant was worthless and the arrest illegal.

George Keith was quickly told of the bourgeois' arrest, and

at once demanded his release and an explanation. Simpson refused both; he was not responsible, he said, for the constable's act. Keith then wrote a formal letter of protest against the "outrageous seizure of Mr. Simon McGillivray", to which Simpson replied that he had communicated the contents of Keith's letter to the constable—who could not read the letter himself—and that the constable was satisfied of the legality of the arrest; as for himself, Simpson would on no account consent to Mr. McGillivray's release.

Simon McGillivray then demanded bail. Simpson retorted that the constable "was doubtful how far he would be justified in accepting bail for his appearance; but at all events he could not think of taking the personal security of any gentleman connected with the N.W. Coy". And then Simpson offered that if McGillivray would "lodge to the same amount as A.N. McLeod exacted of Mr. Clarke, say 30 pieces Goods or 30 Packs of Beaver in my hands as an indemnity", he had no objections to offering himself as security. McGillivray refused that offer.

While Simpson permitted his prisoner to write to Keith, all letters were opened. When McGillivray's half-breed wife called to see him, Simpson ordered his own women to search her; with a squaw in his post pregnant with his child, George Simpson could easily find native women to do his bidding. He consented to McGillivray's wife and their children living with him at Fort Wedderburn, so long as McGillivray promised to make no attempt to escape, for he had already recognized the value of native women: ". . . since connubial alliances are the best security we can have of the goodwill of the Natives, I have therefore recommended the Gentlemen to form connections with the principal Families immediately upon their arrival, which is no difficult matter as the offer of their Wives & daughters is the first token of their Friendship & hospitality".

But it was a bad time for McGillivray. Simpson taunted his children with being as dark as his (Simpson's) negro cook. He tried on numerous occasions to get McGillivray to talk of fur-

trade affairs for, as McGillivray well knew, it was his intention to ferret out every trade secret the Nor'Westers possessed. Simpson, short of food, short of trade goods and rum, was already imitating the Canadian's trade methods which he had formerly condemned. In a letter to his superiors in London he advised paying three-quarters of the men's wages in spirits. At the same time he commented on his great satisfaction in having McGillivray a prisoner, legal or otherwise, within his stockades since he would have been "a troublesome thorn in our sides during the winter".

The struggle on Lake Athabasca during the following weeks had its comic side. Simpson, determined to best the Nor'Westers at any cost, built a counter bastion, high enough to spy out every move within Chipewyan. Night after night, at each post guards were mounted. Not a move passed unnoticed, the coming and going of natives and servants tending fish-nets or chopping the thickening ice for water, visits between the various log houses within the two stockades. McGillivray was kept under guard by Simpson in Wedderburn's main house, but the man entrusted with the task proved to be not overly loyal to his master, and the Nor'Wester learned of Simpson's plan to send him off to a more remote post. He made no comment on the news, but gradually complained more and more of poor health; Simpson would not likely risk sending an ailing McGillivray on a winter journey which would jeopardize his life. Or would he? From his frustrated position he contrived a code by which he could communicate with Keith; perhaps Simpson would stop at nothing to rid Athabasca of William McGillivray's son. In December, the code probably saved his life after Simon's little son heard talk that his father was going to be killed.

It was a bitterly cold night on Lake Athabasca. McGillivray's wife kept the fire burning in their guarded quarters. Across the snow, the lights would be bright at Fort Chipewyan, they knew, and smoke curling from the chimneys. They were surprised though, and dismayed, to hear through the thin partitions that

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Simpson's people were also up and about; sounds of dancing and singing in the main hall indicated that Simpson's people were on the alert and warmed by a little rum. The sounds were ominous to McGillivray sitting by the fire while his wife sat stitching moccasins. But McGillivray waited and listened with what calm he could manage till the hour set for his break for freedom.

Next morning a couple of servants from Chipewyan went to the lake for water. Seeing one of Simpson's men at the same task in front of Chipewyan, they called across the ice. Had Mr. McGillivray enjoyed the dance at Fort Wedderburn? That he had, assured the English servant. To which the Nor'Westers called back jubilantly: "He danced with us, too!"

McGillivray had escaped, clad in shirt and trousers and shoes. To Simpson's accusations that she had helped her husband to escape, his squaw said he had climbed up the chimney. Her explanation sent Simpson out in search of footsteps, in vain. Simpson then interrogated the servant who had looked after McGillivray. Despite endless questions "in English, French, Italian and Spanish", the man insisted that he knew nothing of Mr. McGillivray's means of escape. The Nor'Wester himself merely stated that he had escaped "in his wife's gown".

Steadily as the weather became colder the civil war flared into increased bitterness at Lake Athabasca. McGillivray's brother Joseph came up from Fort Vermilion to see about Simon's release, but returned after discovering that Simon was already free and following consultations at Chipewyan; he had to cope with Hudson's Bay Company competition on the Peace River. Throughout January, February and March of 1821, while winter provided the best trapping conditions, the Montrealers upheld their trade in the finest of the ancient northwest tradition. Travelling hundreds of miles by snowshoe and dog team, they did a good season's barter and saw to it that Simpson fared a poor second.

They had better men, better provisioned and better led. Heartened by the knowledge that they were defending territory

which they themselves had explored and exploited and which was beyond the monopoly of the English firm, they could out-trade any usurper. But the fortunes of the North West Company ultimately lay not with William McGillivray's sons, fighting gallantly and with great spirit, nor with their fellow-winterers spread across the northwest and the Pacific slope. Though winterers and agents alike had won their great success by their own efforts and not by others' hands, their very initiative had built a trade empire so vast that it was vulnerable. Indeed the very vastness of the territory over which they traded inevitably placed the decision elsewhere. While Simon McGillivray was planning his escape from George Simpson, the last stages of the struggle were being waged on the other side of the world, in London.

Dr. John McLoughlin and Angus Bethune, in Montreal on furlough during the autumn of 1820, had met the agents. But McGillivray could promise them little more than had been possible at the summer meeting at Fort William. While he too was planning to sail for London, by another ship, they boarded the *Albion* at New York, and on board met Colin Robertson. The two Nor'Westers avoided the ex-Nor'Wester as much as possible, but inevitably the three came face to face. On the last day at sea Dr. McLoughlin and Bethune were putting down their names for a subscription for the crew when Robertson appeared. Dr. McLoughlin had already written his name, and Bethune paused to permit Robertson to sign next. The man who had engineered the Hudson's Bay Company attacks on his fellow-Montrealers drew himself up and turned to a clerical passenger near by. "Come, Abby," he said, "put down your name. I don't like to sign between two North Westers."

In London the two dissident winterers, even with their power of attorney from eighteen wintering partners, received further snubs, both from Montrealers at the Canada Club and from Londoners.

By that time William McGillivray was also in London, where

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he joined his brother Simon and Edward Ellice. Ellice, a year before, had found the Hudson's Bay Company suddenly receptive to another of the many overtures he had made during the past decade. The English company, he knew, faced financial difficulties comparable to those of the North West Company, in spite of recently declaring a couple of 4% dividends. It was heavily in debt to the Bank of England; it owed some £30,000 for trade goods and a similar sum to its servants in wages; in all, Ellice had estimated the English firm's indebtedness to be as high as £100,000. He had been further encouraged by the fact that Lord Selkirk, shortly before his death, had agreed not "to put an absolute negative on the sale of my Hudson's Bay stock, if the transaction can be arranged on such terms as my friends who are on the spot consider advantageous, and as not compromising my character in any way". It was then that Andrew Colville, Lady Selkirk's brother and head of the Hudson's Bay Company, had become civil to Ellice and Simon McGillivray.

At first the civility had seemed sincere. But it had soon been replaced by a strange coolness, and the negotiations were postponed. What, asked the Montrealers of one another, could be behind this sudden change of attitude?

It was then they heard that Dr. McLoughlin and Bethune were also in London. Slowly and painfully, after learning of the presence in London of the winterers elected to see about a new agreement, McGillivray and Ellice pieced together an explanation.

Almost two years before—shortly after the first seriously strained meeting at Fort William in 1819—the representatives of the dissident winterers had written to Selkirk's lawyer in Montreal. Discovery of the communication was in itself shocking. Nothing could have dealt William McGillivray a worse blow than the gist of that letter: the winterers had inquired on what terms the Hudson's Bay Company would supply them in place of McTavish, McGillivrays.

Their overture explained Colville's sudden change of attitude,

his coolness, and why he later turned to the agents for negotiations. The worst that could happen to the North West Company had occurred. The Nor'Westers had split their own ranks, and Colville was playing one group against the other. They had laid themselves open through their rift, and he was making full use of his advantage.

In less than two years the North West Company agreement must come up for renewal. Desperately depleted by the struggle imposed by Selkirk and by Astor's double-cross, the financial resources of McTavish, McGillivray—and the North West Company—needed a period of strong, cohesive support. But again, due to the very vastness of the empire they had developed, there was now not sufficient time to communicate with each winterer at his remote post and to win his power of attorney. Without ever having had the support of parliament their only hope lay in seeing that Colville made terms with the agents and not with the winterers; a not impossible objective, since the shrewd Colville must know that if he negotiated union with the winterers, McTavish, McGillivrays with their powerful backing in Montreal would at once organize another company.

On March 26, 1821, William and Simon McGillivray and Edward Ellice signed an agreement of union with the Hudson's Bay Company. It was entitled "An Agreement Between the Governor & Company of the Hudson's Bay Company and Certain Partners of the North West Company".

Two months after signing the agreement of union in London, William McGillivray was again back in Montreal, and on May 28 gave a dinner in honour of Nicholas Garry. Garry had volunteered to go to Canada to handle the details of union on behalf of the English company. As the only unmarried man on the committee of the Hudson's Bay Company he had volunteered to take the arduous and presumably dangerous journey, completely unaware that married partners of the North West Company had not only been travelling to the interior for years, but had discovered many of the routes over which they travelled.

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McGillivray entertained Nicholas Garry with the traditional Montreal hospitality. Along with his brother Simon and Archibald Norman McLeod and John Richardson, he called to welcome Garry on his arrival from New York. To a dinner, at which his sister and his pretty teen-age daughters were present, he invited several leading partners of the North West and McTavish, McGillivrays Companies, along with their wives. During the next two weeks the representative of the Hudson's Bay Company dined several times with either William or Simon McGillivray, and evening after evening was entertained by other leading Montrealers. One day William McGillivray took him to Lachine to get some idea of canoes and their lading. When Garry marvelled at the lightness and fragility of the bark craft, McGillivray was able to assure him that during his entire association with the North West Company, one-half of one per cent would cover losses of cargoes from wrecked canoes.

Finally, Nicholas Garry left Lachine with the two McGillivrays, for Fort William.

It was a magnificent 36-foot canoe that took the party and their servants up the Ottawa River. On board was a tent for the gentlemen's meals, thirty by fifteen feet, with an oilcloth carpet and boxes and cassettes for table and chairs. Each had a comfortable bed and his own sleeping-tent. At night the great fire over which the pork-eaters boiled their cracked corn provided a friendly glow, and served to protect the gentlemen a little from the agonies of mosquitoes. But from the first it was evident that Nicholas Garry, at home though he might be in the committee room in London, would not easily take to the life of a bourgeois. William McGillivray had made up his mind to treat Garry as a fellow-partner in the company which would result from union, but he found it difficult to like the man. The difficulty increased when, after they met up with another brigade late one day, a boy in his teens came to the big tent and asked for Mr. McGillivray.

"Monsieur, vous êtes mon père," he said after a few words of polite greeting.

"Comment, Coquin!" exclaimed William McGillivray.

McGillivray's look of amazement when the boy said his name was Simon caused Garry so much laughter "that I thought we should never have ceased". The brothers, doubtless aware that Garry himself was a bastard, listened to the comment that young Simon was a "a nice Canadian boy, moitié noir et moitié blanc", and set about discovering whose son he really was; possibly he was a child of Duncan, though more probably of one of William's sons, Simon, or Joseph. They could not do so now, but at the first opportunity they would make further enquiries.

Meantime the brigade pushed on next morning, William hunched in his canoe with a beaver robe over his knees, for the mornings were cool for passengers who could not keep warm by paddling. God, how tired he was of travel!—the long ocean crossing in sailing-ships, the long trips by canoe which once had been so exciting and so satisfying. This time, on his last trip to the depot, there were moments when he envied Alexander Mackenzie, and even Selkirk, at rest in their graves.

He and Simon and Ellice had made absolutely the best terms possible due to the split in the company's ranks. But for him the trip was the end of an era. For nearly forty years he had been travelling up and down the Ottawa, first to Grand Portage and then to Fort William. He was greatly relieved that his brother Simon, lame though he was, had agreed to make the necessary trip with Garry beyond Fort William; Simon was only thirty-eight. William himself would see to the heavy business of union at the depot, and then return to Montreal.

The great canoe swept up to the dockside at Fort William just eighteen days after leaving Lachine. Never did so great a *feu de joie* echo across the great water of Thunder Bay. Never, it seemed to William McGillivray, had the Métis shouted as they did this time, nor had his own people cheered so lustily. John George McTavish was there with his heart-warming welcome, McLeod and Pierre de la Rocheblave and many another familiar face.

They gave Nicholas Garry the best accommodation the depot

could provide, with suitable quarters for his servant, Raven. The day after their arrival, William McGillivray invited him to the ceremony in the great hall where, as their great white father, William presented gifts to the native chiefs.

The chiefs, many of them known to the elder McGillivray since boyhood, ceremoniously laid before him twenty superlative beaver skins. Then the leading chief vowed that as long as stood Mount McKay (the great promontory in front of the post and on which was the lake which John McDonald of Garth had called Loch Lomond) so long would he and his people remain true to their great father; that though rumour, the Black-bird, whispered of a change to take place, he would ever trust McGillivray. In reply the Nor'Wester assured the chiefs, and through them all their people, that union would make no difference in the white man's dealings with the Indians. To mark the occasion he gave each chief a red coat trimmed with blue and gold braid with a round hat and a shirt; then he sat quietly waiting while the chiefs then and there and with complete dignity changed into the resplendent attire. Finally, after a further gift of rum and tobacco, the peace pipe was smoked, and the natives departed. Next day they performed their ceremonious war-dance. By that time all the winterers who could leave their posts had arrived, and the major business of the meeting could be commenced.

On July 10, the winterers filed into the great hall to hear the details of the agreement signed by William and Simon McGillivray and Edward Ellice in London "on behalf of themselves and the North West Company of Montreal". Gone was the laughter and camaraderie which had so often brightened their days in the noble room; gone, for these few days, even the memories of gay reels and the lilt of bagpipe and fiddle. From the far ends of the country these men who might have met to accept a new North West Company agreement, had come together instead to face the unforeseen facts of their individual futures. Most of them were tall, strongly built Highlanders, proud, sensitive men who had had to make their own terms with

the demanding, lonely and harsh conditions of the fur trade. Though handicapped by lack of news of what had happened, they would listen attentively to the agents, and then they would make their comments.

The trade under the union, they heard, would be carried on in the name of the Hudson's Bay Company. The two parties to the agreement would find equal shares of capital, and would divide the profits and losses equally. (This was not as good as the offer made earlier to the English company by which the Canadian concern offered to share on a two-thirds-one-third basis.) A joint board would be set up for consulting and advising on the management of the fur trade, comprised of two members of each of the former companies and the governor or deputy governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

There was, too, the Deed Poll, another long document by which some partners of the North West Company, but by no means all, would be commissioned chief factors and chief traders in the new Hudson's Bay Company. The stock—"clear gains"—of the united companies was to be divided into one hundred shares, twenty to go to the governor and company, twenty to the "parties of the second part", the North West Company; forty to chief factors and chief traders, and the remaining twenty shares to be divided into five shares each for representatives of Lord Selkirk and Simon McGillivray and Edward Ellice as compensation, with the final shares "one moiety to the said Gov. & Co., and the other moiety to the said winterers of the second part".

The winterers in the great hall at Fort William listened to the reading of the long, involved document which joined the two great factions, and to the long and equally involved Deed Poll. Now and again a man cleared his throat, or hitched his legs more comfortably in his chair. But for an hour or so—it seemed like an eternity—the only other sounds were the familiar voice reading on and on and the crackle of fine parchment paper as a page was turned.

Continuance of the name of the Hudson's Bay Company was

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acceptable. Indeed, while the wintering partners of the North West Company would have preferred to keep their famous name, the monopoly associated with that of the English firm meant much from a shrewd business angle. Management from London and under a committee with the balance of power in favour of the old English company was less acceptable. Here and there a voice with a rich Scottish cadence broke out in protest. Others joined in. Why should the Hudson's Bay people hold the balance of authority? What could the English company bring to the union comparable with their discoveries? In cold fact, the Hudson's Bay Company could contribute only its name and charter, a counting-house organization and right to use Hudson Bay, which justly should be open to all. On the other hand they, the Nor'Westers, brought to the union not only the knowledge which had made the fur trade the great success that it was, but the entire territory beyond the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly. Theirs were the Athabasca and Mackenzie and Peace River basins, the entire Pacific slope from Mackenzie's rock to below the Columbia and inland as far as the Upper Missouri, all spread before them on David Thompson's magnificent map; and theirs Nipigon and Timiskaming and the King's Posts on the Saguenay. As for the relative financial positions of the two companies—were not both on the verge of bankruptcy?

But each winterer's own future was locked in the terms of the Deed Poll, if indeed he was to have any future at all in the fur trade of the northwest.

The significance of the terms of the Deed Poll dawned on each man only after long, shocked minutes of consideration. A reserve fund was to be built up from the profits of ten shares—in the current business and not in the old London company. Those who might be offered employment could accept the arbitrary conditions, or seek other employment. But if they did join the new company, they would not be partners. Under the terms of amalgamation they would merely be chief factors and chief traders; indeed, they would be little more than servants.

"Amalgamation," cried the wintering partners of the North West Company bitterly, "this is not amalgamation. This is submersion. We are drowned men!"

They recalled how union with the XY Company had necessitated dropping many good men, for the simple reason that fewer were needed where duplication was eliminated. The same thing would happen now. Over them all hung one grave, vital question: Who would be dropped, who have to seek strange occupation outside the only field for which he was fitted by experience and inclination? What of the clerks, the young men who had apprenticed themselves with the expectation of becoming partners? What of men who must serve at posts which had long been the scenes of bitter rivalry with the old Hudson's Bay Company?

Slowly, and much too late, the Nor'Westers began to comprehend the price they were paying for their strong individualism. Had they remained united, they might have won much better terms, if not complete victory. A few realized how shrewdly Andrew Colville had exploited the split in their ranks, the extent to which he had taken advantage of their separate negotiations.

Now Fort William, the great depot, would give way to York Factory on the cold, bleak shore of Hudson Bay where no Nor'Wester had ever been, except as a prisoner of the old Hudson's Bay Company. Montreal's harbour would no longer pulse with Canada's life-blood of ships coming and going on fur-trade business. Montreal, so far as the fur trade was concerned, would sink to the rank of a mere department.

Occasionally during the swift-moving weeks at Fort William, agents and winterers met without the chilling presence of Nicholas Garry. When the strain became more than William could bear, Simon presided. Simon McGillivray, though not known to them personally as was William, was liked by the winterers. Even Colin Robertson had said of him ". . . there is a sort of Highland pride and frankness about the little fellow that I don't dislike. He has no blarney about him." With his

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brother worn out by the long struggle, Simon spared no effort to ease the strain of the last days at Fort William. He explained the details of union again and again to those who could not believe that this had actually happened. He discussed plans for the future of the various posts and even made a few promises about placement. As a souvenir of the last days together, he and William gave presents to many of their loyal friends, "a handsome dagger to one, a pair of pistols to another". To Samuel Black, who had been responsible for the capture of Colin Robertson in 1818 at Athabasca, they presented a ring bearing the inscription "To the most worthy of the North-westers".

On July 15, James Leith, the first Nor'Wester to join the new Hudson's Bay Company, left for the Athabasca territory. The last meeting at Fort William was nearing its end. The last summer rendezvous was almost over.

On July 21 Simon McGillivray and Nicholas Garry set out for the trip to York Factory by way of Lake Winnipeg; en route they would present commissions to winterers and former Hudson's Bay Company servants and inspect the various posts. William, though not well enough to make the trip himself, courteously went as far as the Mountain Portage near Kakabeka Falls to see them off. William sensed that his brother would have no pleasant trip. Garry was already showing strong evidence of his thinly veiled feeling of superiority which had marked the trip from Lachine to Fort William. "Left Fort William and never in my Life have I left a place with less regret", he noted in his diary.

Garry complained of his northern canoe not being as good as that used by Simon McGillivray. He did not approve of his voyageurs, failing to understand their unwillingness to comply with his orders to out-paddle McGillivray. Though neither they nor Simon could know that Garry referred to the latter in his diary as "one of our bloodthirsty enemies", they could sense the hostile attitude of this outlander who insisted on leaving at the break of dawn each morning to avoid meeting the agent. They

did not have to read words written by Garry in his diary to feel the attitude behind his "being anxious on many accounts not to arrive at the Red River colony with Mr. McGillivray . . . I felt much relief in being without my *Compagne de Voyage*".

Back at the depot while his brother was on his way to Hudson Bay, William McGillivray took time to write to a few of his most intimate friends.

"I have been at this place since the 1st inst: settling a most important Business," he wrote to the Reverend John Strachan on July 26. ". . . the carrying into effect of the various Deeds and Covenants entered into on the part of the North West Company in London with the Hudson Bay Company. These arrangements are happily completed, and I part with my *old troops*—to meet with them no more in discussions on the Indian trade . . . I have been an agent or Director, since 1794, and Chief Superintendent since 1799, the management has not been easy, for we had many storms to weather from without, and some *derangement in the Household*. But thank God! the whole is closed with honour—and the trade will be productive if well managed, after the Country shall have been restored to order, which it will require a couple of years to effect. Thus the fur trade is forever lost to Canada! The treaty of Ghent destroyed the Southern trade; still the capital and exertion of a few individuals supported the Northern trade, under many disadvantages, against a Chartered Company, who brought their goods to the Indian country at less than one half the Expence that ours cost us. But it would have been worse than folly to have continued the contest further. We have made no submission. We met and negotiated on equal terms.

"A Board of Directors sits in London, composed of two members of the Hudson's Bay Committee, two members of our side (the capitalists)—with the Governor & Deputy Governor. This Board must regulate the trade, and until the country is got into proper order—it is probable I must assume a charge of it—which for some little time will occasion my absence from Canada . . .

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"My own fortunes have been singular as connected with the N W Fur Trade—I was the first English clerk engaged in the service of the N.W. Co. on its first Establishment in 1784, and I have put my Hand and Seal to the Instrument which closes its *career* and *name* in 1821—

"The loss of this trade to Montreal & the immediate district in its vicinity, will be severely felt among a certain class of the People—the yearly disbursements in cash from the office in Montreal to the people employed in various ways, as well as for provisions and stores, was not less than £40,000 pr annum—a large sum taken out of circulation . . .

"My brother Simon left this for York Fort in Hudson's Bay on the 21st. He is to inspect the Depots and Inventories of Property belonging to the H.B. Co., (to form part of the Stock)—and this duty performed, he will make the best of his (way) to Montreal—I think by way of Timiskamingue.

"I beg my respectful regards to Mrs. Strachan, and am my dear ever yours most faithfully

W. McGillivray."

Finally, the last winterers had left, the management of the business was completed. Through the summer weeks, William McGillivray had watched those proud Highlanders who had made the North West Company great, file out for the last time, never to return to Fort William. When each had gone, and the North West Company had passed into history, McGillivray took his last look about the great depot named in his honour, indeed built by him. He was actually a ruined man, in spite of the seemingly happy terms of union, for McTavish, McGillivrays was on the verge of bankruptcy. And more than his own hopes and fortunes were ruined. The remaining papers of the North West Company, the records of an era, would be shipped to London. Canada's first major industry had been stricken desperately if not mortally.

Broken in health, weary and dispirited, William McGillivray settled down in the high-prowed canoe that would take him

home to Montreal. As each familiar landmark vanished from his sight, he remembered scene after scene in his long association with the North West Company: Simon McTavish shaking sand on the wet ink of his signature at the bottom of the first North West Company agreement, at Grand Portage, in 1784; Alexander Mackenzie, with the look in his wide-set eyes of a man who has faced great odds and won, stalking up and down before the mess-room fire as he recounted the struggles of his trip to the Pacific; Simon Fraser describing the unbelievable hazards of the river which was to bear his name; the satisfaction on the face of each man when the XY and North West Companies toasted union at the first meeting at Fort William; David Thompson proudly presenting to him, William McGillivray, the first great map of the northwest.

Were they to be remembered only as names on that map? Would nothing else remain of the vast empire they had explored—and lost, not by others' hands, he now knew, but by their own very qualities which had won it?

## EPILOGUE

### *Pro Pelle Cutem*

It might have been one of the classical tragedies. Washington Irving, who knew many a Nor'Wester personally, wrote a few years later in *Astoria*: "The feudal state of Fort William is at an end; its council chamber is silent and deserted; its banquet hall no longer echoes to the burst of loyalty, or the 'auld warld' ditty: the lords of the lakes and forests have passed away."

But not only had the régime ended. With it collapsed the fortunes of most of the men who had made it great. William McGillivray died in London in 1825, his daughters soon to become practically destitute. Sir Alexander Mackenzie was gone. Within a decade, all four of Simon McTavish's children—his two sons and two daughters—had died. Simon McGillivray, Senior, had sacrificed his entire fortune in an attempt to satisfy the creditors of McTavish, McGillivrays. Simon Fraser was living in modest retirement near Cornwall, and David Thompson was to die in poverty as Peter Pond already had done. In Montreal even the name of the North West Company was quickly effaced by that of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Some of the leading Nor'Westers joined the new Hudson's Bay Company. Dr. John McLoughlin, as chief trader, was to become famous as the "Father of Oregon". John George McTavish took charge at York Factory, where he hung the paintings

of Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar as a nostalgic reminder of Fort William days. Young John Rowand, who had become a partner of the Montreal firm just prior to its close, rose to head the enormous department surrounding Fort Edmonton.

These former Nor'Westers, along with their fellow-partners who joined the new concern, went to York Factory for the first meeting following union. It was a meeting that taxed to the limit the social and diplomatic resources of both George Simpson and Simon McGillivray. More than once each had to call up every wile he possessed to soften the hostility between former rivals; many a Nor'Wester found he could not sing the old songs in a strange land. The hardest part of all, perhaps, came after the formalities were completed, and the new trade commenced.

The ink on the signatures of the agreement of union was scarcely dry when the new company began to vindicate many of the North West Company customs which the old Hudson's Bay Company had vilified. Even on the way to Hudson Bay, Nicholas Garry denounced Lord Selkirk's settlement in his diary. Though by 1821 "over £100,000" had been spent on the project, men and women completely unfit for emigration but lured by a prospectus advertising "an Elysium, houses ready for their reception" continued to arrive at the Red River to find neither shelter nor provisions. George Simpson, later Sir George, swore before a committee of parliament that the northwest was unsuited for agriculture, and time proved that the Hudson Bay route, though economical for the fur trade, would never compete with the St. Lawrence as a settlement route. Rum was dropped as a trade commodity. With an effective monopoly the natives had to trap or starve for want of ammunition; besides, it had become an unnecessary expense. In the fifty years following union, and before the company finally relinquished its monopoly, independent traders continued to be crushed ruthlessly.

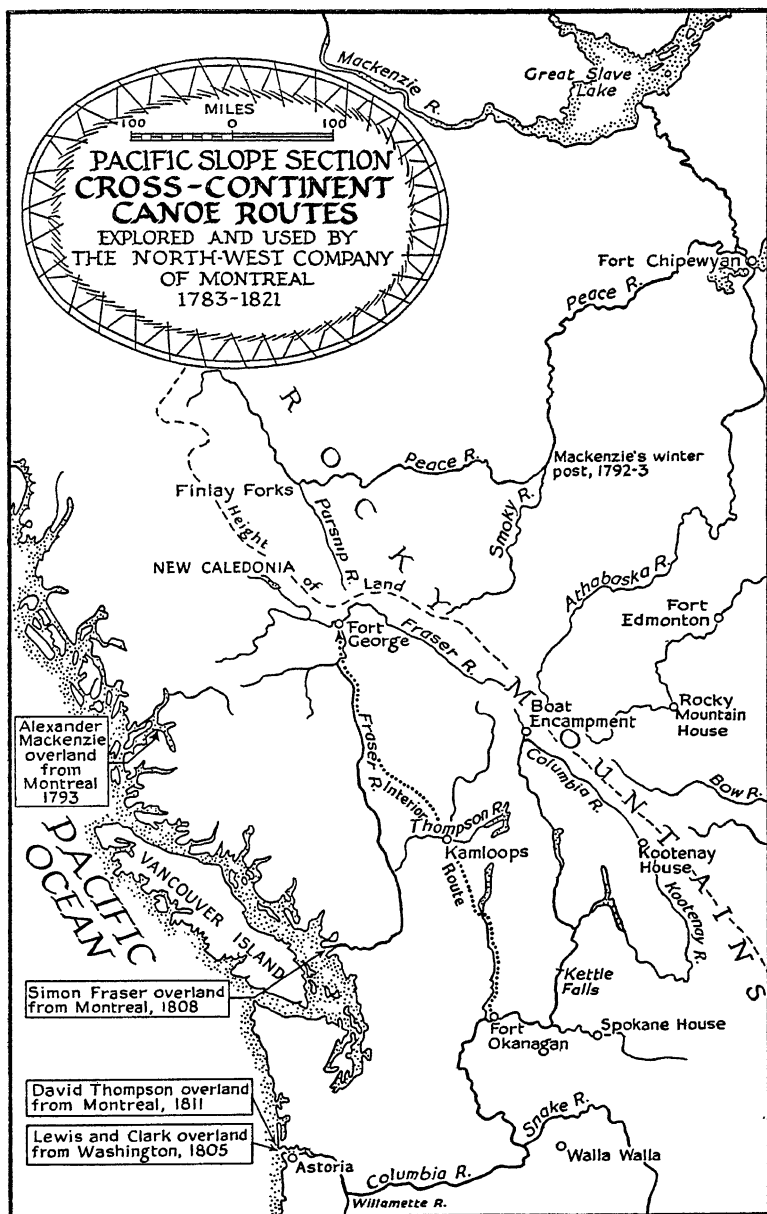
For sixty years—until the Canadian Pacific Railway pushed westwards—the link between Montreal and the northwest was

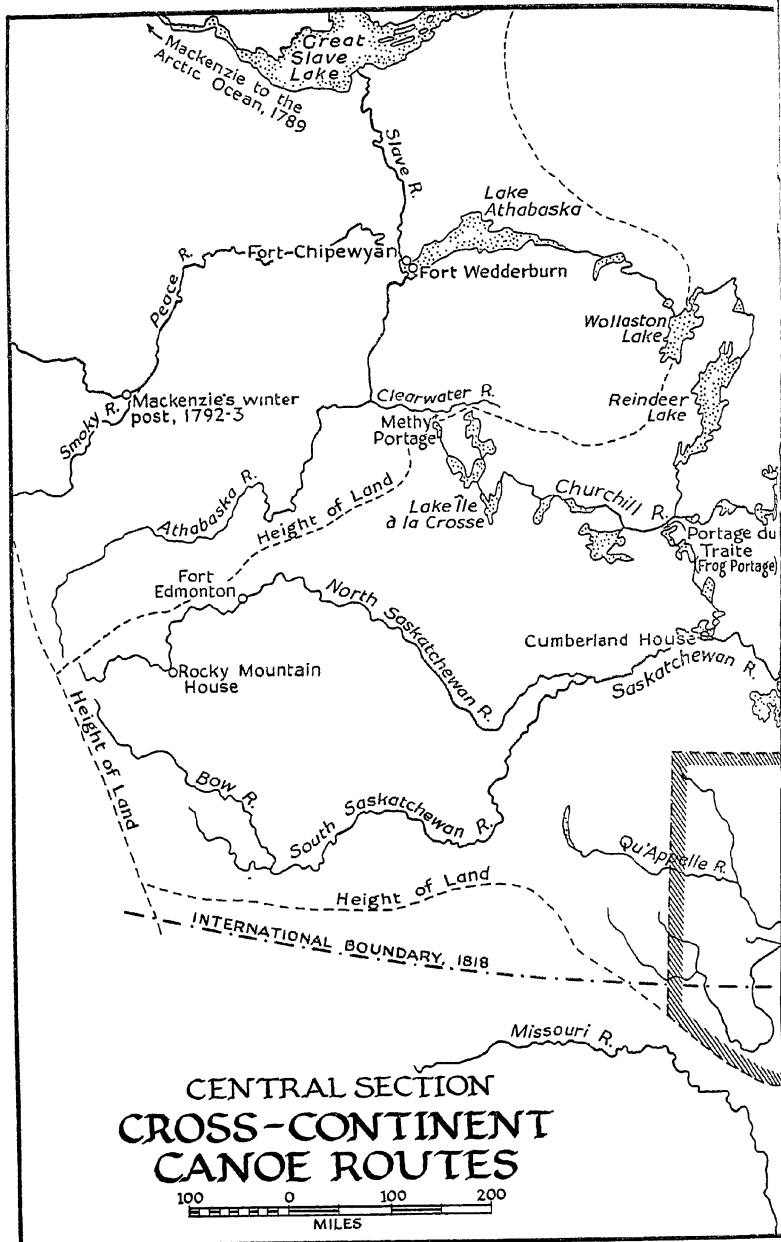
## THE NORTH WEST COMPANY

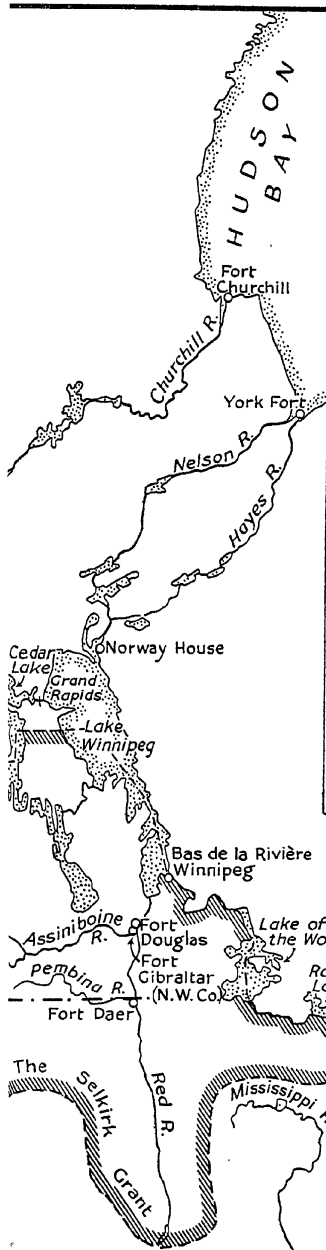
all but severed. Only the moccasins of voyageurs carrying an occasional express canoe prevented the portages from becoming entirely overgrown. Yet with something like poetic justice the second trans-Canada highway, when it became a reality in 1885, closely followed the old canoe route, to end the hiatus and return Fort William as well as Montreal to their strategic supremacy.

During most of that time the new Hudson's Bay Company ruled a trade empire stretching from Labrador to the Pacific. Through Hudson Bay poured the wealth of pelts from New Caledonia and the vast Mackenzie Basin. From the Columbia Department and the former North West Company connections with the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands and China, a maritime trade expanded to link up with California and Russia. And over every post between the Atlantic and the Pacific fluttered the blue company flag with its white H.B.C., translated by the irreverent, and sometimes affectionately, as "Here Before Christ". In the rugged interior the motto dating from the time of Charles II, *Pro pelle cutem*, came to stand for a justice almost biblically interpreted as "a skin for a skin". The new Hudson's Bay Company had become one of the greatest concerns the world has seen.

What did it matter then, that McTavish, McGillivrays became insolvent, that the firm was not even declared bankrupt? Against a mass of figures in red stood the monumental assets won by the Nor'Westers. Perhaps, had they remained united and Montreal continued as the main entrepôt for the British Northwest, Oregon might have become a part of Canada. But there need be no speculation concerning their real achievement. They had transformed the mythical Western Sea into an actual map of a third of the North American continent. The overland northwest passage had become a magnificent fact.

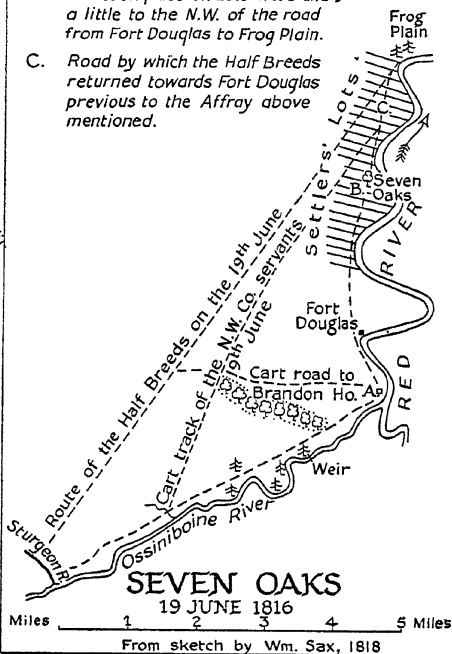


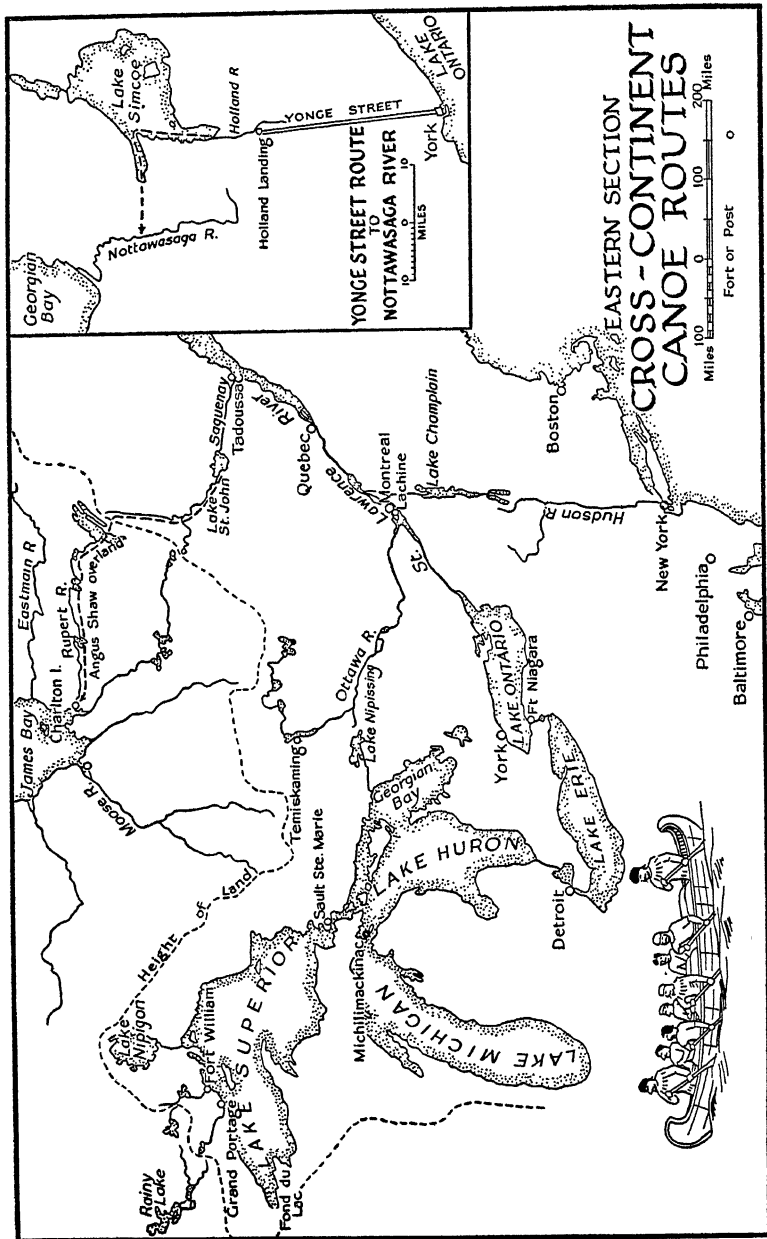




Remarks from depositions on behalf  
of the Half Breeds

- A. Site of Fort Gibraltar, destroyed post of the North West Company
- B. Spot where the Affray of 19<sup>th</sup> June 1816 took place on Lots No. 8 and 9 a little to the N.W. of the road from Fort Douglas to Frog Plain.
- C. Road by which the Half Breeds returned towards Fort Douglas previous to the Affray above mentioned.





## Notes on Authorities

Since this may be the first book published which attempts to tell the over-all story of the North West Company, some comment on sources is indicated. There is, too, an element of mystery to be considered.

One very obvious query tops all comment: why has this phase of North American history so long been neglected? There are, of course, several explanations. By far the most important is the fact that prior to the nineteen-thirties no one even partially appreciated all that the Nor'Westers had achieved. During that decade three scholars converged on the subject: In 1930 Harold Innis published *The Fur Trade in Canada* as part of his economic history of the country and containing splendid reconstructions of certain missing North West Company documents. This was followed, in 1934, by the Champlain Society volume entitled *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, with an introduction by W. Stewart Wallace; for me that thirty-six page introduction presented the story of the North West Company in a bold profile that was both a blueprint and the soaring steel of a magnificent skyscraper.

Shortly after publication of the *Documents*, Arthur S. Morton completed *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*. This enormous mass of material considers the Nor'Westers from the viewpoint of their contemporaries—and competitors—the Hudson's Bay Company. The only earlier work attempting to be

definitive was *The North West Company* by Gordon Charles Davidson, which appeared in 1918 as one of the University of California Publications in History, and was necessarily limited by the material available at the time.

There were numerous works covering single phases of the activities of the Montreal fur concern, notably Sir Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages*—though the original in the Public Archives of Canada makes more colourful reading than does the version ghost-written by William Combe; several diaries, and the papers collected by Roderick McKenzie and published by his son-in-law, L. R. Masson, as well as the mass of material, some of it biased, known as the Selkirk Papers. Scores, perhaps hundreds, of other diaries and journals also were available, but only with W. Stewart Wallace's Introduction did the relationship of each to the whole become apparent.

Much of Dr. Wallace's work became possible when the Hudson's Bay Company, which had inherited considerable North West Company material at union, nearly a hundred years later called in expert archivists, organized its rich storehouse of records and made the whole available to students of North American history.

There is a popular misconception that the Hudson's Bay Company suppressed all reference to its former competitors following union. The fact of the matter probably is that Sir George Simpson who, had he been born thirty years earlier would likely have been a Nor'Wester himself, had enough to do developing the new concern; for him the present and the immediate future agreeably outshone the Nor'Westers' glowing past. Besides, Canada was at the threshold of a new economy, and the rise of the lumber industry, as well as of agriculture, contributed to the oblivion of the recently powerful fur magnates. But the Hudson's Bay Company was by no means without blame. William McGillivray and his partners were forced to destroy valuable papers when Lord Selkirk invaded Fort William, though the papers confiscated by Selkirk himself and others later captured by Williams at Grand Rapids were either returned

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to Canada or committed to the Hudson's Bay Company vaults in London. Following union, as one after another of the families which had been prominent in Montreal faced severely straitened circumstances, they moved to smaller towns where living would be less expensive; with them, no doubt, went many bundles of letters, diaries or journals; others were dispersed, some even at auction, following the bankruptcy of McTavish, McGillivrays. One batch of these was collected by the first Lord Strathcona and lodged in the Public Record Office in Edinburgh; in 1937 these papers were examined and microfilmed—one of the first microfilming operations—by Burt Brown Barker of the University of Oregon; they are now in the possession of the Hudson's Bay Company. Part of Peter Pond's diary was destroyed as waste paper, the remainder finally being edited by Harold Innis. Within the past decade one missing North West Company document turned up when Elaine Allan Mitchell, acting on a suggestion from Dr. Wallace, located a copy of the agreement of 1795 in Scotland. Others may yet be found.

The present work has evolved from considerable travel and research. The travel has included visits to the actual sites of all major North West Company posts and many minor sites from the Saguenay to the Peace River and Oregon. Unfortunately no historic North West Company fur-trade post today exists in Canada, except a reconstruction of David Thompson's Fort Kootenay, at present in bad repair; the only first-class reconstruction is at Grand Portage, Minnesota, forty miles southwest of Fort William. Research has been undertaken wherever material was known to exist.

To achieve a panoramic picture of this far-flung scene—the only approach possible in a single, comparatively short volume—great simplification has been necessary, with omission of detail obvious to any reader familiar with one or more of the many phases which would warrant a book in itself. For clarity, modern names have been used where various historical names occur; quotes have been edited—mainly to bring punctuation in line with modern usage—but always with a view to retaining the

meaning or sense intended by the original writer; and since there were so many Scots in both concerns, the Nor'Westers are generally referred to as Canadians, *Canadiens* or Montrealers and the Hudson's Bay Company people as "English". Because of repeated references to the Nor'Westers as "cut-throats and bullies" by contemporary writers, and because the other side of the story has been told countless times, considerable effort has been made throughout the text to present their viewpoint and to correct the origins of this libel.

There is heart-break for anyone who would tell the story of the North West Company at the present time, and a possible further explanation for the lack of previous works. The heart-break is due to the many gaps in the record. The dearth of first-hand accounts of the break between Simon McTavish and Alexander Mackenzie presents a serious obstacle. The missing agreements are difficult to bridge. More distressing is the lack of personal letters and diaries; the complete blank to the seeker after details of human relationships, warmly intimate or coldly hostile. The marriages of both McTavish and his nephew-heir lasted but ten years, the former ending with his own death, the latter with the death of his wife. Lack of distinguishing personal characteristics of each of the men who literally laid the foundations for the present Canada, as well as opening the American Northwest, make vivid pictures almost impossible.

Of the numerous sources considered those found specially useful in writing *The North West Company* fall into four categories. Some of the agreements by which the company operated are still missing. Since those known to exist are all in print, together with reference to the originals, they are most easily accessible in this form, though in the South West Company agreement the clause indicating the western extent of trade limits is given as the Missouri in the work on Astor, and as the "River Mississippi" in the *Documents*. The available relevant agreements are: McTavish, Frobisher, 1787; North West Company, 1790; McTavish, Frobisher, 1799; North West Company, 1802; XY Company, 1803; North West Company, 1804; Sir A. Mac-

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kenzie & Co., 1804; McTavish, McGillivrays, 1811; McTavish, McGillivrays, 1814; Governor & Co. of Hudson's Bay and William and Simon McGillivray and Edward Ellice, 1820—all in *Documents Relating to the North West Company*. The North West Company agreement of 1795 is reprinted in the *Canadian Historical Review*, 1955; that of the South West Company, 1811 appears in both the *Documents* and in *John Jacob Astor*, Porter.

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A wealth of material appears in various periodicals including *The Beaver*, organ of the Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg; *Canadian Historical Review*; *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*; *Washington Historical Quarterly*; *Minnesota History* and *North Dakota Quarterly*.

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MACKENZIE

FRASER R

FRASER R

THOMPSON

Columbia R

From map by  
A. Arrowsmith 1819

From a map published in London, 1817

From a map  
published in  
London, 1817

between Latitudes 40 and 70 NORTH; and Longitudes 80 and 150 WEST

*THE PRINCIPAL TRADING STATIONS*

NORTH WEST COMPANY

