

The University of Manitoba

THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE FUR TRADE OF  
THE LITTLE NORTH AND ITS EXPANSION INTO THE  
EAST WINNIPEG COUNTRY TO 1821

by

Victor P. Lytwyn

A Thesis Submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies in  
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for the Degree of Master of Arts

Department of Geography

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the historical geography of the fur trade of the Little North and its expansion into the East Winnipeg Country to 1821. It focuses on the physical and human factors that shaped the expansion of European fur trade settlements from the shores of Lake Superior and Hudson and James Bays to the country east of Lake Winnipeg. In so doing, it provides new insights into the trade that was carried into the region by Hudson's Bay Company and St. Lawrence-based traders. Fur trade posts and transport routes have been located in this poorly known region and, in addition, this study details the individual and institutional factors that dictated the development of the fur trade in the region.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank Dr. D.W. Moodie for supervising my thesis. His patience, encouragement, and direction in all aspects of this study proved invaluable. I would also like to thank Dr. B. Kaye for his helpful suggestions and comments. Sincere thanks are also extended to Mrs. S. Smith, Hudson's Bay Company Archivist, for granting permission to consult and quote from the Company's Archives. Thanks are also due to Mrs. B. Drebert for typing this thesis. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Joanne, for her patience and support.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study undertakes an historical geography of the expansion of the European fur trade into the East Winnipeg Country to 1821. Defined as the lands draining westward into Lake Winnipeg, the East Winnipeg Country could be reached by traders penetrating northwestward from the shores of Lake Superior and by those travelling south and westward from the shores of Hudson and James Bay. The country intervening between Hudson Bay and Lake Superior on the one hand and Lake Winnipeg on the other hand came to be known by the fur traders as the Little North. The East Winnipeg Country comprised the western most section of the Little North and, like the latter, lay almost entirely within the rocky uplands of the Canadian Shield.

To the north and west of Lake Winnipeg lay the vast fur bearing lands of the Great North. The fur trade of this region was connected to the Great Lakes and Hudson Bay by trunk lines that flanked, but did not penetrate into, the Little North. As a result, the fur trade of the Little North and that of the Great North largely developed independently of one another. The Little North was thus bypassed by the main thrusts of the European trade directed into the Great North from York Factory on Hudson Bay and Grand Portage on Lake Superior. The beginning of fur trade settlement in the East Winnipeg Country in 1792 marked the closing

of the fur trade frontier in the Little North. This was begun at a time when fur trade settlements had been extended throughout most of the Great North. For the Hudson's Bay Company, settlement in the Great North by this time had reached the upper waters of the Saskatchewan River system. That of the Montreal traders, in contrast, had expanded into the fur rich Athabasca Country far to the north and west. Thus, the fur trade of the East Winnipeg Country lagged behind that of surrounding regions and, in this sense, remained peripheral to major developments in the fur trade as a whole.

When the fur trade of the East Winnipeg Country was undertaken in earnest in the 1790's, it was penetrated and settled from existing bases on all flanks. Following a flurry of some two decades of intense competition among the trading concerns, the resource base of the region was drastically depleted. Expansion into new areas was not possible and, in the face of such diminished fur returns, most of the settlements were abandoned. With the exception of a desultory trade conducted from a few posts in the region following 1821, the East Winnipeg Country lapsed into economic obscurity and remains essentially in this condition today.

Despite the fact that the East Winnipeg Country proved to be a valuable fur resource region in its own right, and contributed significantly to both the Hudson Bay and Montreal trade prior to 1821, it has been almost completely ignored in the literature of the fur trade.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.E. Rich, the eminent historian of the Hudson's Bay Company, entirely neglected the fur trade of the East Winnipeg Country in his published works, while A.S. Morton, the historian who provides perhaps the best locational detail and geographical background to the study of the fur trade wrote only that: "Lake Winnipeg was not of special interest to the fur traders save as a water-way along which, with an anxious eye for its treacherous storms, they moved to their wintering ground."



This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature from the perspectives of regional historical geography. Although avowedly regional in its objectives, the context of the study is a broader one in both its spatial and temporal dimensions. It also seeks to explain those aspects of the expansion of the fur trade from Lake Superior and Hudson Bay that culminated in European exploration and settlement of the East Winnipeg Country, and that influenced its subsequent development. Like the fur trade of East Winnipeg, the extra-regional circumstances that led to its development are also little known and poorly understood, and form a major part of this study.

In view of these gaps, a virtual tabula rasa was confronted in the initial endeavour to establish even the most elementary of fur trade patterns in the region. The routes of pioneer traders, the locations of settlements and the emergence of transport routes had all to be redrawn in the face of fragmentary documentation. This problem of reconstructing the geography of the region and its connections with the rest of the Little North was further complicated by an initially obscure and frequently changing toponymy that in most instances had not been studied and made comprehensible by previous scholarship. Thus, fundamental to this study was the analysis of place names, a task that required

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(A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71, p. 438). This historical void has not been without its consequences. A.I. Hallowell, for instance, relied on this shallow historical depiction of the fur trade in East Winnipeg in his study of the cultural development of the Indians of that region. He stated that: "the presence of a few isolated trading posts [in the country east of Lake Winnipeg] did not change the major cultural pattern of their lives [the Berens River Saulteaux]." (Culture and Experience, p. 112). This study, however, shows that the European influence in the region was considerably greater than that of a few isolated trading posts as hitherto thought.

detailed investigation of topographic maps and semantic evidence and, most important, careful scrutiny of the limited number of historical maps that have survived. As a result, maps, both historical and those constructed from other sources, became the building blocks around which the study has been based. They afford the keys, not only to reconstructing the major patterns that emerged, but also to an understanding of the geosophy or geographical ideas of the men who created them.

More so than many economic activities, the patterns imposed by the fur trade were shaped as much by the landscapes that the fur traders encountered as by their economic aspirations. No explanation of the nature of the East Winnipeg trade, of its anomalous development both spatially and temporally and, indeed, of the virtual failure of scholars to recognize its existence, is possible without a careful investigation of its physical geography. Not only were details of the physical geography basic to identifying patterns on the land, but the physical character of both the region and its spacious surrounds serves to explain much of why these fur trade patterns evolved as they did. Thus, in addition to toponomic and cartographic evidence, that of a purely physical nature was fundamental to the study and is elaborated in some detail.

Although influenced greatly by the physical geography, the expansion of the fur trade into the East Winnipeg Country, was motivated by the largely economic concerns of the individuals, partnerships and companies engaged in the Northwestern fur trade. Avenues of exploration, the location of settlements and the nature of the regional trade were all shaped in part by larger forces within the fur trade as a whole and by decision-making at the management level. But in their details within

the East Winnipeg Country, they were largely the result of the efforts of individual men on the ground, efforts that were occasionally heroic and always expended on the terms that the environment had to offer. It is to this complex mix of factors and influences that this study is addressed in its endeavour to describe and understand the historical geography of the fur trade of the Little North and its expansion into the East Winnipeg Country prior to 1821.

In employing the regional method, the study adopts a time honoured approach in geography. Although currently out of favour in some branches of the discipline, it remains the central organizing approach in historical geographical research, and can readily be applied to both the Little North and the East Winnipeg Country as distinctive economic and physical entities. Although the central task of the study is to provide an historical geography of a particular fur trade region, such an approach can yield insights that bear, not only upon the individual region, but upon the larger milieu of which it was a part. This study thus endeavours to provide an understanding of an overlooked theatre of the fur trade and, hopefully, further insight into the overall workings of the trade.

The surviving documents of the Hudson's Bay Company's inland traders who operated in the Little North and East Winnipeg Country prior to 1821 comprise the bulk of the written records relating to the region.<sup>2</sup> As a result, this study would not have been possible without the permis-

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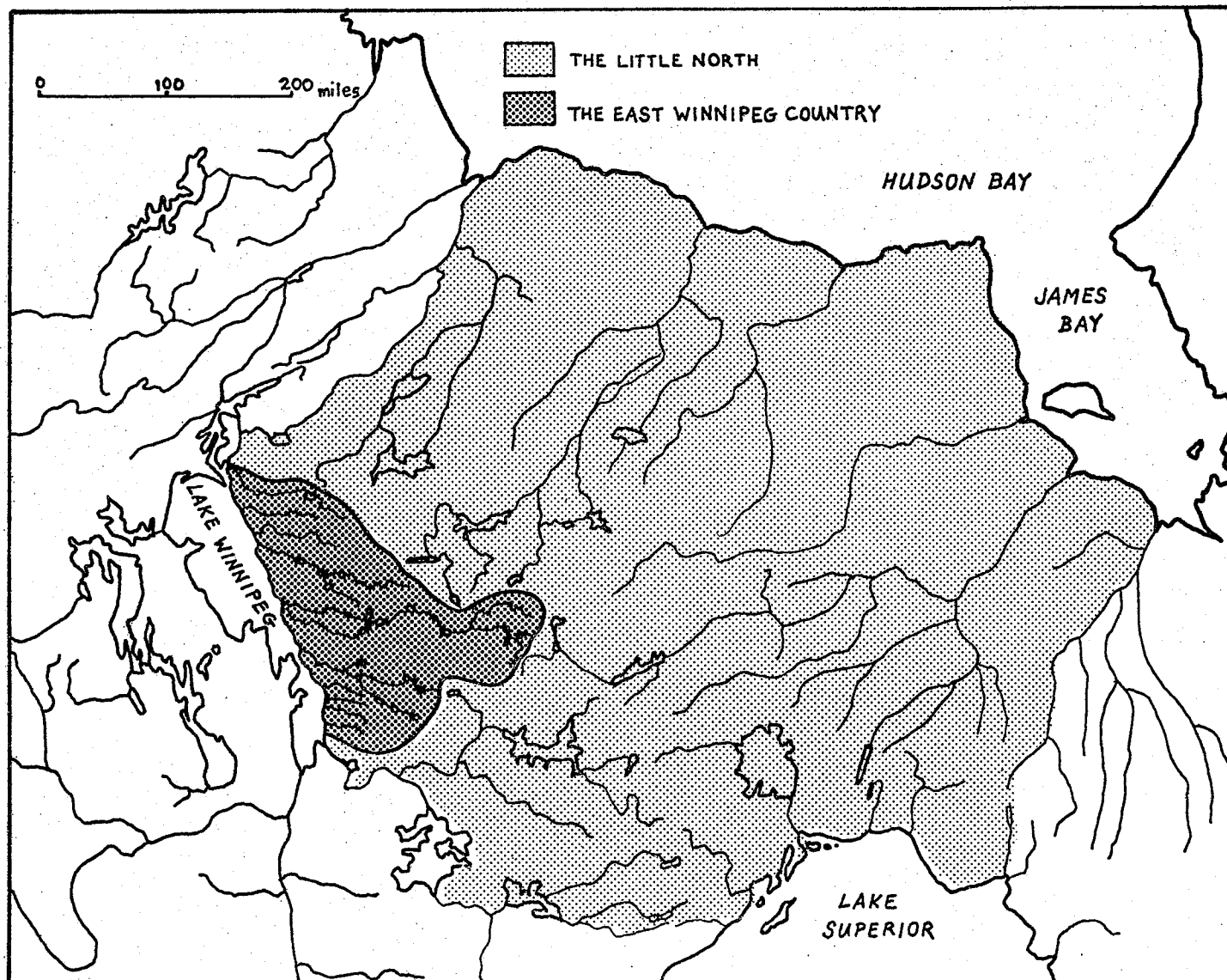
<sup>2</sup> Quotations from the Company's documents form an integral part of this study and have been referenced as Hudson's Bay Company Archival material by their index numbers at the end of each footnote. For example: "John Davis, Osnaburgh House Journal, 1815-16", B.155/a/28, fo. 1.

sion of the Company to conduct research into these documents. Although the documents primarily reflect the activities of the Hudson's Bay Company, the detailed and exhaustive nature of some of the observations that they contain shed light on many aspects of the history and geography of the Little North and, in particular, of the East Winnipeg Country. Primary research into the activities of the St. Lawrence traders in the region was not possible to the same degree because of the relative paucity of documentary information relating to their trade.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A number of documents in the Masson Collection, several reports of the Provincial Archives of Quebec, and some documents relating to the North West Company preserved in the Hudson's Bay Company's Archives were most useful for the background on the St. Lawrence fur traders. In addition, W.S. Wallace's, Documents Relating to the North West Company, proved to be invaluable in this respect.

Figure 1: The Little North and the East Winnipeg Country



## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND TO THE FUR TRADE OF EAST WINNIPEG AND THE LITTLE NORTH

#### 1. Early Approaches from Lake Superior and Hudson Bay

Apart from a few English fur trading forts on the coast of Hudson and James Bays, the fur trade in the Canadian Northwest was pioneered in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by French traders using the Great Lakes waterway to the continental interior. This route led to the Northwest through Lake Superior and proceeded up the rivers flowing into its northern and western shores. Paddling through Lake Superior, these traders were separated from the coast of James Bay by a relatively narrow isthmus of land less than three hundred miles wide. This isthmus is dominated by Hudson Bay drainage which extends to within less than twenty-five miles of Lake Superior at some points along its northern shore. Thus, to the north, the French could penetrate with relative ease into the vast drainage basin of Hudson Bay from their bases on Lake Superior. Although from the outset they engaged in a trade to the north, their main efforts in expanding beyond Lake Superior were directed toward the west, and away from the relatively confined English trading hinterland lying immediately to the south of James Bay. Their objective in the west was the "Little Sea", or Lake Winnipeg. This was achieved by ascending the rivers flowing into the western end of Lake Superior

and crossing the height of land that lay some seventy miles to the west. From there, they descended the westward flowing rivers that led to the southern end of Lake Winnipeg.

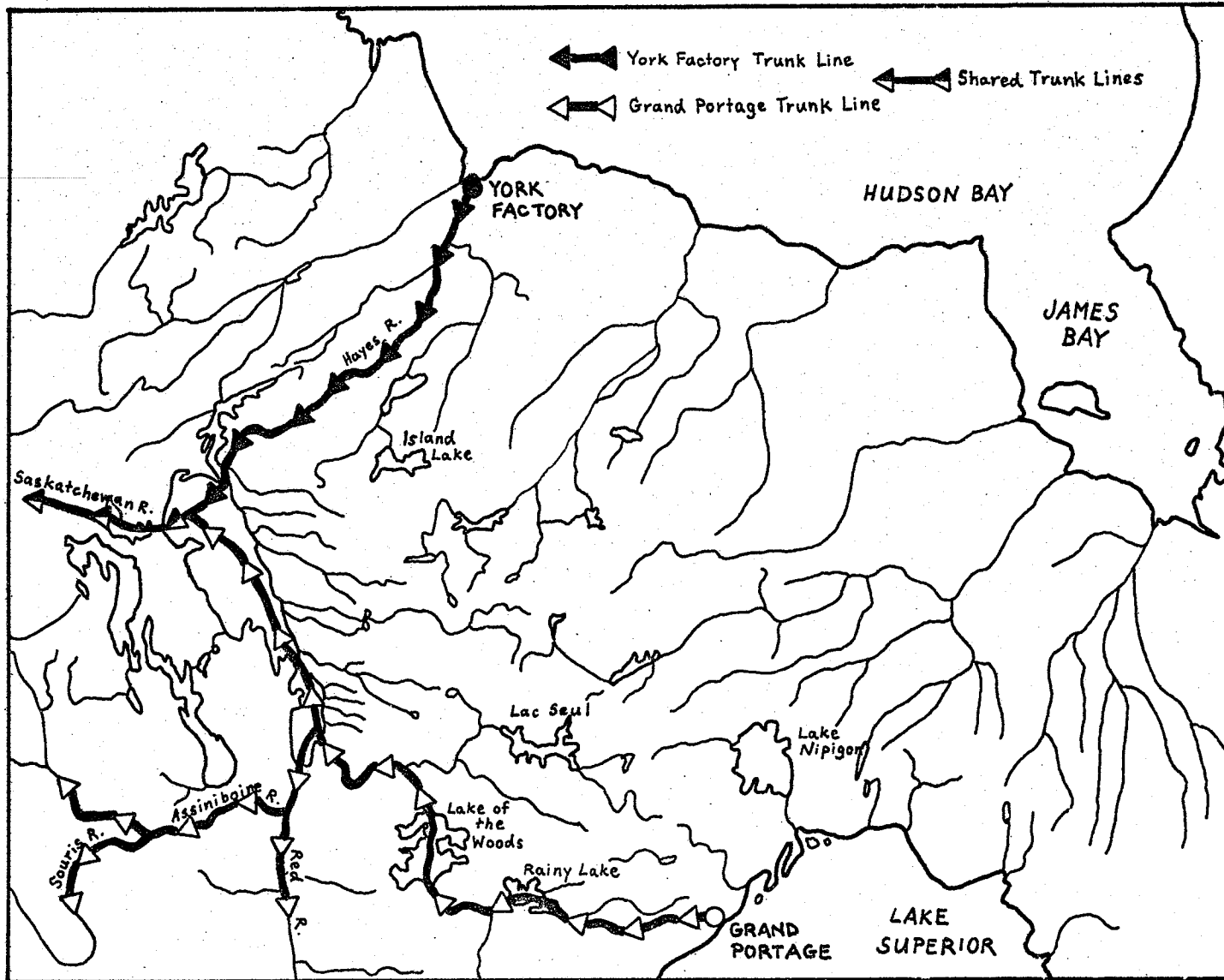
The southern inflow of Lake Winnipeg subsequently became the nodal point for trading activities projected toward the interior plains and parkland regions through the valleys of the Red, Assiniboine, Swan, Qu'Appelle, Souris, and even the Missouri. Other French traders paddled northward through Lake Winnipeg and ventured into the southern margins of the vast northwestern boreal forest region by the valley of the Saskatchewan River.

Following the demise of the French, this large inland body of water came to be the strategic centre and staging point for developing much of the fur trade of the Northwest. For the Hudson's Bay Company, this expansion was achieved by travelling up the Nelson-Hayes water route to the northern end of Lake Winnipeg and, for the pedlars from the St. Lawrence, the earlier French connections from the Lakehead were maintained and expanded (Fig. 2).

## 2. Expansion into the Little North and East Winnipeg

The country lying to the east of Lake Winnipeg, and between Lake Superior and Hudson Bay, afforded not only the transport connections to much of the great land mass of the Canadian Northwest which, to the west of Lake Winnipeg, broadens out and engulfs a region of hundreds of thousands of square miles, but it also became a fur region of great value in its own right. Following the resurrection of the northwest fur trade by pedlars from the St. Lawrence after 1763, this relatively confined but fur rich region immediately became a zone of intense competition

Figure 2: Fur Trade Trunk Lines to the Great North





between them and the traders of the Hudson's Bay Company.

To the early French traders who initially explored the lands to the north and west of Lake Superior, this region became known as Le Petit Nord, or the Little North. Although its exact boundaries were never precisely defined, the appellation was used to distinguish this region from Le Grand Nord, or the Great North, which lay roughly to the north and west of Lake Winnipeg. The Little North was flanked on the southwest by the fur trade trunk lines that linked the Lakehead with Lake Winnipeg. It was bound on the northwest by the main transport line to Lake Winnipeg from Hudson Bay (Fig. 2). The penetration of the Little North, however, was directed from settlements other than those commanding these main avenues of ingress into the Northwest, and the trade of the region was thus largely conducted for its own sake and not as a prelude to further advances into the Great North.

To tap the fur resources of the Little North, Hudson's Bay Company traders expanded inland from Albany Fort on James Bay and, to a lesser degree, from Severn House and York Factory on Hudson Bay. The St. Lawrence traders initially entered the region from Lake Nipigon and, after crossing into Hudson Bay drainage, were thereupon confined to the same riverine connections used by the Hudson's Bay Company's traders. As fur trade competition in the Little North increased, traders from both Albany and Nipigon expanded westward into the upper reaches of the different river systems draining into Hudson Bay. The headwater regions of the two major rivers, the Albany and the Severn, experienced especially active fur trading development and settlement in the 1790's and early 1800's. Competition along the headwaters of these two rivers stimulated further expansion of the trade over the height of land that

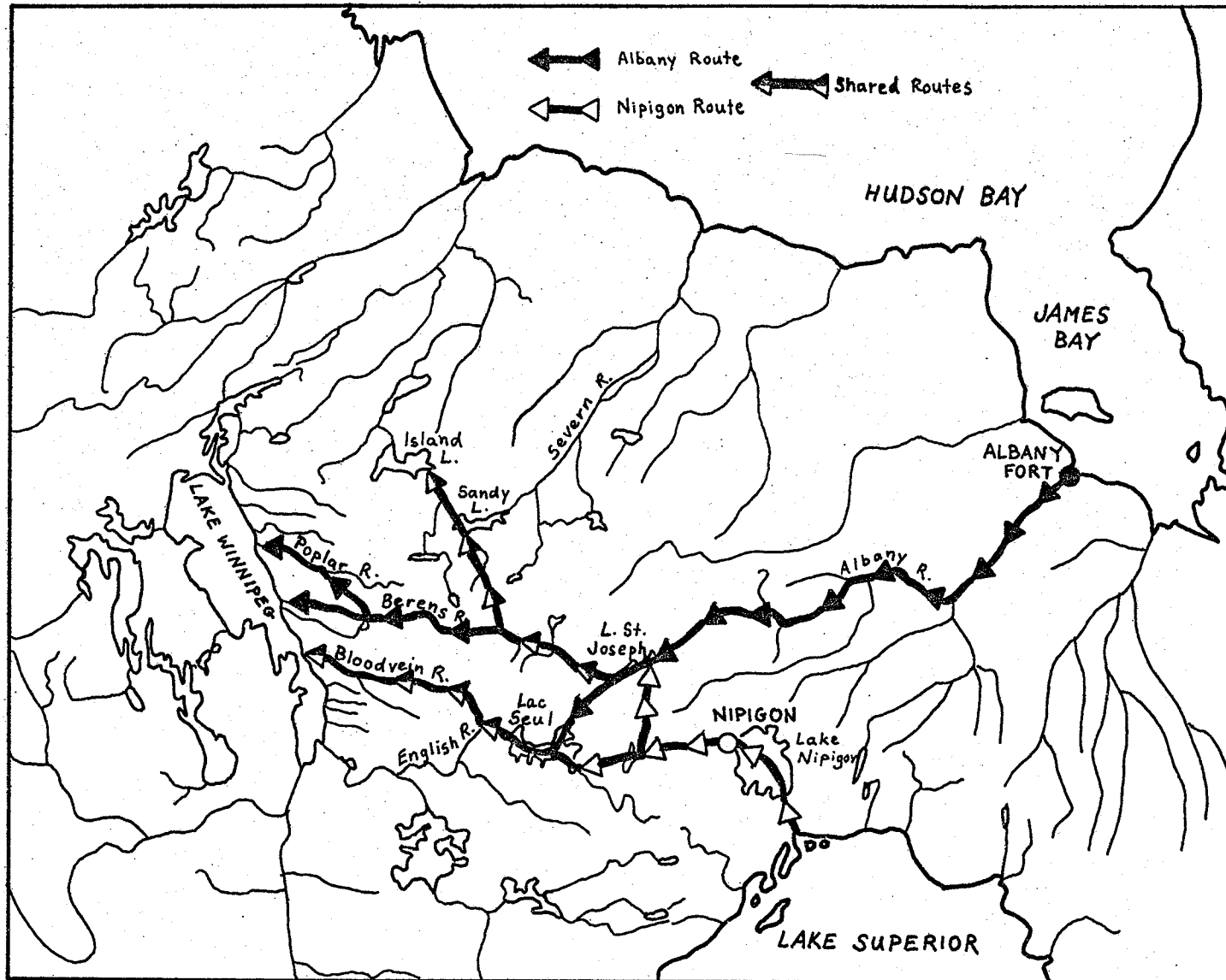
led into the westward flowing rivers of the East Winnipeg Country (Fig. 3).

The headwater region where this connection was made lay at the core of the Little North. It comprised a complicated and confusing landscape for the first Europeans who found themselves in this little known part of the continent. Intense glaciation had scoured and scraped this height of land, leaving behind an irregular, rocky surface through which rivers twisted and lakes seemed to be in every depression. Many rivers find their sources along this divide, whose varied slopes seemed to cast them to virtually all points of the compass. But drainage basins nowhere were clearly defined, and the heights of land separating tributary streams could easily be confused with those separating entirely different river systems.

It is not surprising that the early traders who sought out the fur resources of this headwater region were frequently disoriented and confused. As a result, they were often unable to reckon their positions relative to major water bodies such as Hudson Bay, Lake Superior, or Lake Winnipeg with any degree of certainty. This being the case, fur trade officials at the forts on Hudson and James Bays, as well as those along the shore of Lake Superior, had for long only a crude awareness of the geographical situation of many of their inland traders in the Little North.

The Nipigon and Albany men who pioneered the fur trade in East Winnipeg from the St. Lawrence and Hudson Bay, respectively were compelled by competition to continually expand their trading operations in this region. This process eventually brought them into competition with traders representing their own companies. The latter came from Grand

Figure 3: Albany and Nipigon Routes to East Winnipeg



Portage and York Factory and were largely unaware of the extent of the earlier advances into East Winnipeg by their own people from Nipigon and Albany (Fig. 4). Thus, when these later traders began to tap the furs of the region from the east coast of Lake Winnipeg, James Sutherland in command of the Hudson's Bay Company men from York Factory could write that:

Perhaps there is no extensive district in this part of America, so little known as the tract of country to the East of Lake Winipic.<sup>1</sup>

Sutherland was only vaguely aware of the extensive activities of his Albany counterparts in the same region and, although there is no direct evidence, it is apparent that the Montreal traders encountered the same problems of overlap in developing the fur trade of East Winnipeg.

There was little improvement in the knowledge of East Winnipeg's regional geography for many years after the union of the North West Company with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821. In 1878, sixty-three years after James Sutherland's statement, Robert Bell reporting for the Geological Survey of Canada, offered a similar appraisal of the region.

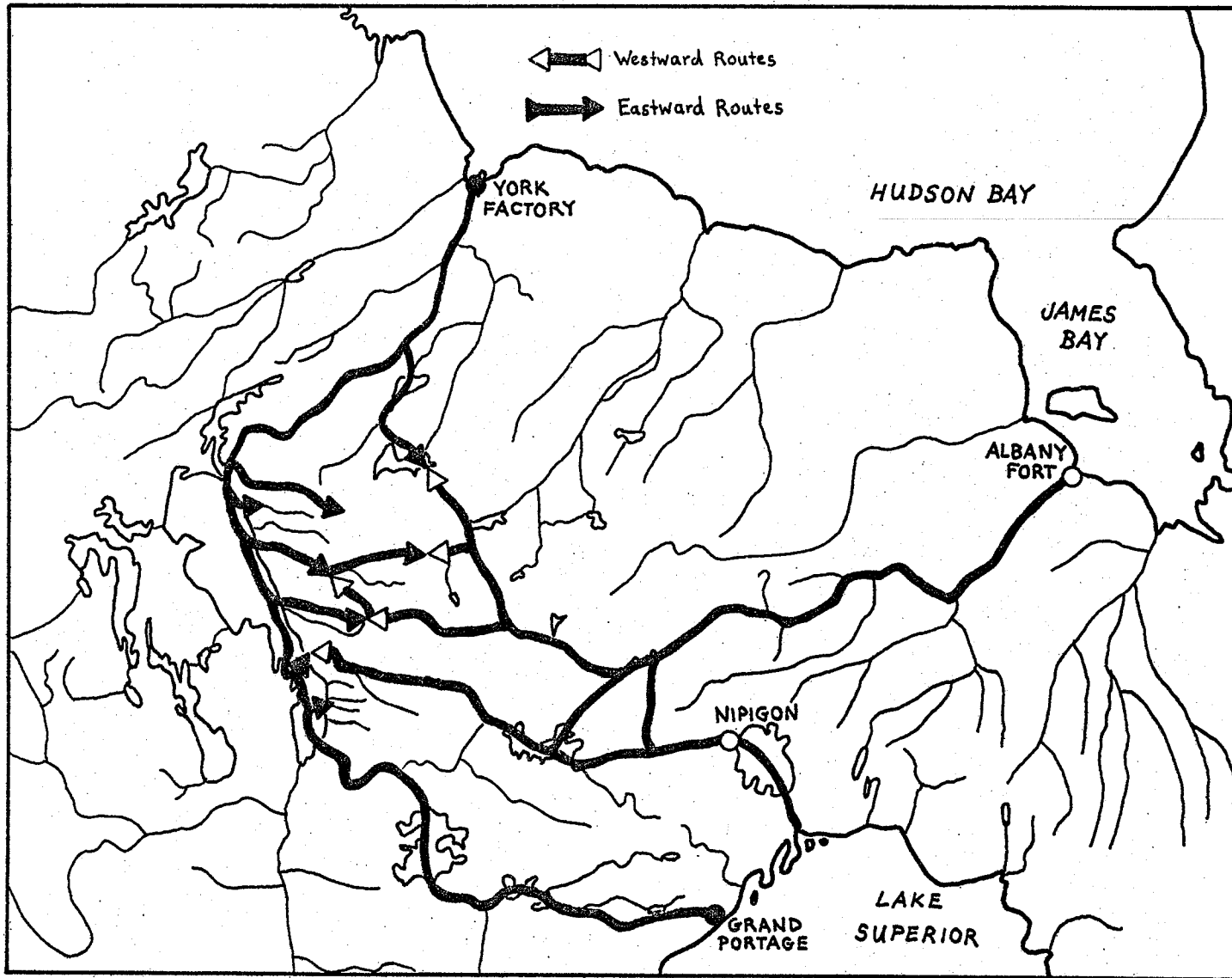
. . . the country east of Lake Winnipeg, from one extremity to the other, as far as it has been explored is reported to consist of rocks and swamps. It is however, very imperfectly known, the explorations hitherto made being of very limited extent compared with the whole area.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James Sutherland, "Reports on the Eastern Coast of Lake Winnipeg", 1815, B.16/e/1, fo. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bell, Report of the Geological Survey of Canada, 1878, p. 23 cc.

Figure 4: Westward and Eastward Penetration of the East Winnipeg Country



The country that had become intimately known to a handful of fur traders who had lived in East Winnipeg prior to 1821 persisted as a vaguely known region to the Hudson's Bay Company and, until the early part of this century, it remained a veritable terra incognita to the rest of the world.

In the twentieth century, with the advent of extensive geological and topographical surveys, depiction of the East Winnipeg region experienced marked changes from the vague and inaccurate forms which had taken shape on the eighteenth and nineteenth century maps. In the process, the East Winnipeg Country was rediscovered with twentieth century technology and acquired an essentially new toponymy. Today, only vestigial remnants of the fur traders' occupation remain. A few main rivers and lakes have retained the names that were given them by these early traders, and a few surveyors, in unexpectedly happening upon the foundations of some of their buildings, were tempted to speculate that the history of the region, like that of its complex terrain, was a mystery that had yet to be solved. For example, in 1924 E.L. Bruce wrote:

That the English [River] was used to a much greater extent than the literature of the early traders would indicate, is shown, however, by the well cut-out portages that have the appearance of long use. Just west of the inlet to Tide Lake [one of the sites of a number of posts operated by many different traders and commonly known as Escabitchewan], one of the men of Mr. Dobie's party discovered the remains of an old establishment of some size.<sup>3</sup>

W.D. Harding made similar remarks while surveying the Cat Lake region

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<sup>3</sup> E.L. Bruce, "Geology of the Upper Part of the English River Valley", Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Ontario Department of Mines, vol. XXXIII, part IV, 1924, p. 1.

in 1936:

Besides being on the canoe route to James bay by way of Lake St. Joseph and the Albany river, Birch Lake also gives access to the route to Hudson bay by way of the English and Berens rivers, Lake Winnipeg, and the Nelson river. Its location suggests that it may have been travelled by the early Canadian explorers, but no mention of it was found in the records examined.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. The Landscape of the Little North

In attempting to unravel the history of the East Winnipeg Country, one can profitably begin by examining the physical geography of the region and of the land that led to it. From bases, either on James Bay or Lake Nipigon, European explorers penetrated inland and westward along the rivers of the Little North. Travel was facilitated by the many rivers and lakes of the Shield Country that comprised the bulk of the Little North, and the canoe became the indispensable vehicle of the fur trade. Along with the canoe came the Indian, both as canoe builder and river pilot and, under the exhortations of the European fur traders, Indian guides pointed the way to the untapped fur regions of the interior. Often there were no simple or clear-cut routes to these regions, but the value of furs encouraged the traders to endure the hardships of crossing from river to river, lake to lake, and of passing from one drainage basin into the next. Against the strong economic motivations that pushed these men further into the interior, the physical landscape of the Little North loomed irrepressibly as a rugged, rocky ridge in

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<sup>4</sup> W.D. Harding, "Geology of the Birch-Springpole Lakes Area", Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Ontario Department of Mines, vol. XLV, part IV, 1936, p. 1.

some places, an impassable swamp in other places, as a dry river bed at times, and almost always as an environment in which the ominous hiss of a rapid or waterfall could be heard from the river's next bend. The search for furs, although fuelled by the forces of economics, was largely dependent upon the fortitude of these individual traders, whose efforts were shaped by the myriad forms of physical geography.

To reach the East Winnipeg Country, all fur traders had to travel a considerable distance through the Little North. Two basic approaches evolved: the Nipigon route, which provided the means of access for St. Lawrence-based fur trading individuals, partnerships, and companies, and the Albany route, upon which the Hudson's Bay Company's traders travelled to reach East Winnipeg. The two trading approaches enmeshed into one at Lake St. Joseph, near the headwaters of the Albany River and, from there westward toward Lake Winnipeg, all fur traders shared a common river network (Fig. 3).

### 3.1 Inland from Albany Fort

The Hudson's Bay Company established the majority of its inland trading posts in the Little North from Albany Fort at the mouth of the Albany River on James Bay. The country immediately inland from the fort is an extensive swampy plain that slopes very slightly towards James Bay. These poorly drained lowlands are part of the Hudson Bay lowlands<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 5), which occupy much of the western coast of Hudson and James Bays. They extend inland for a distance of one hundred miles at York Factory

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<sup>5</sup> J.S. Rowe, Forest Regions of Canada, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Canada, Bulletin 123, 1959, p. 15.



and two hundred and fifty miles at Albany Fort. To the southwest of Albany Fort, this expansive lowland broadens out to come within one hundred and twenty-five miles of Lake Superior's northern shore.

The Albany River flows peacefully through this two hundred and fifty mile stretch of lowlands before emptying its waters into James Bay. The river meanders through the lowlands in long sweeping curves that posed no barrier to inland trading developments from the fort.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Bell observed in 1886 that:

In size, the Albany is comparable with the Ottawa, and at high water it might be navigated by powerful river steamers from the mouth to Martin's Falls, where the first portage occurs, a distance of 250 miles.<sup>7</sup>

The river is so straight and calm in places that Bell was prompted to further remark:

In two stretches, known as the Long Openings, the river is so straight that, sitting in a canoe and looking from one end of them, the sky and water appear to meet on the horizon.<sup>8</sup>

The land on either side of the river consists almost entirely of muskeg and bog. Numerous small, circular lakes and patches of muskeg

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<sup>6</sup> There was one obstacle to navigation on the Albany River that was especially bothersome during periods of low water. Situated about twelve miles upriver from the fort are the Great Falls which could be easily by-passed by boats using a small parallel channel during high water. In the fall season, however, water levels usually decreased and rendered the passage through this alternate channel impossible. During these times, canoes were required to by-pass the falls along the main channel of the river.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Bell, Geological Survey of Canada, Annual Report, 1886, p. 31 G.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 32 G.

pock-mark the lowlands and, in some places, the multitude of lakes has given rise to the term small-pox, or pothole muskeg. Drainage is extremely poor, making overland travel almost impossible during the summer months. During that season the lowlands have been characterized as "a soggy sphagnum-covered expanse dotted by occasional clumps of sedges or nigger-heads, or a few patches of stunted black spruce".<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the poor drainage, the long and severely cold winters combined to stunt tree growth and give the region a strongly subarctic, almost barren ground appearance. The sparse vegetation cover and severe climate limited the numbers and species of other forms of life in the lowlands. It afforded a very poor habitat for the fur bearers upon which the Hudson's Bay Company depended. The lowlands therefore provided an unattractive environment for Indians intent upon procuring furs to trade for European goods. The Indians who inhabited the lowlands did so seasonally and lived in small, widely-scattered, nomadic hunting groups.

The Hudson's Bay Company forts on the Bayside were thus largely dependent upon the forested interior that lay beyond the range of the lowlands for the bulk of their annual supply of furs. In a way, the lowlands posed a vast economic wasteland that divided Albany on the shore of James Bay from the resources of the fur forest that began some two hundred and fifty miles inland.

Beyond the Hudson Bay lowlands lay the forested uplands of the Canadian Shield. The boundary between the lowlands and the shield is

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<sup>9</sup> D.B. Coombs, "The Physiographic Subdivisions of the Hudson Bay Lowlands South of 60 Degrees North", Geographical Bulletin, No. 6, 1954, p. 6.

not sharply defined in most places, but along the Albany River the line of contact is plainly marked at Martin's Fall. This fall is actually a series of rapids that comprised the first difficult portage for the Hudson's Bay Company's inland traders on their journey up the Albany River. Although these rapids signified the beginning of the shield, the country on either side of the river at Martin's Fall is a transition zone between the extremely flat lowlands to the east and the more rugged uplands to the west.

The course of the Albany River beyond Martin's Fall changes markedly from the gentle, sweeping curves of the lowlands. The river bends sharply in places as it seeks to conform to the rocky terrain of the uplands. It runs rapidly through narrows and falls over hard ridges of bedrock. In many other places, the river broadens out to form lakes of varying sizes and shapes. The Albany River flows primarily in a westward direction from Martins Fall and through the northern margins of the Central Plateau Section of the Canadian Shield<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 5). Between Martin's Fall and Lake St. Joseph, which is situated some two hundred miles upriver, the land on either side of the Albany is generally level, and is interrupted only occasionally by gentle, drumlinized undulations and rounded hills of gneiss. Proceeding westward the effects of glaciation can be seen with increasing frequency as eskers and drumlins rise above the generally level landscape of the uplands.

Drainage in the Central Plateau Section is much better developed than in the lowlands and this factor promotes a substantially greater tree growth. Extensive areas of bog and muskeg also occur in this

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<sup>10</sup> J.S. Rowe, Forest Regions of Canada, p. 16.

region, and frequent forest fires have reduced large areas to barren rockland. Compared to the Hudson Bay Lowlands, however, this region is capable of supporting a greater number and variety of plant and animal species. It is a significantly richer area in furs and other faunal resources, and therefore able to support a much denser Indian population. The larger number of Indians in this region augured well for the Hudson's Bay Company's trade, but at the same time reminded the early English traders of their vulnerability. Thus, when John Best established Osnaburgh House for the Hudson's Bay Company in 1786, he remarked: "we are so few men at this place for so large gangs of Indians".<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, gaining a foothold in this plateau section of the shield was of primary importance for the Hudson's Bay Company in its initial phase of the pursuit of the fur resources of the interior.

The Albany River reaches the western boundary of the Central Plateau Section at Lake St. Joseph. The Albany men in their ascent of the river to this point found themselves unopposed by other traders. Lake St. Joseph, however, lay on the Canadian route from Lake Nipigon, and from there westward the Albany expansion meshed with that of the Nipigon traders.

### 3.2 Inland from Lake Nipigon

While the Hudson's Bay Company maintained control of Hudson Bay and the straits leading to the Atlantic Ocean, other companies or

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<sup>11</sup> John Best, "A Journal of a Journey from Gloster House to Mis-kee, ha, ga, my Lake as also the principal occurrences at Osnaburgh House on the Said Lake commencing the 15th June 1786 and ending\_\_\_\_\_". B.155/a/1, fo. 8.

individuals were forced to use the much longer and more arduous Great Lakes routeway to the interior. At the western end of Lake Superior, Kaministikwia, and later Grand Portage, became the main entrepôts for the fur trade of the Great North. In contrast, the Nipigon River, which empties into the northern shore of Lake Superior became the portal from which the trade of the Little North was controlled.

Unlike the Hudson's Bay Company's traders at Albany Fort, who were confronted with two hundred and fifty miles of desolate lowlands, these French, and later other Canadian traders were immediately faced with the difficulties of travelling through the Canadian Shield. The coastlands along the northern shore of Lake Superior near the outlet of the Nipigon River are rugged and striking. Steep, rocky cliffs and massive forested hills abut the lake and pose a formidable exterior to those seeking to enter the Nipigon Country. Nipigon Bay is sheltered from Lake Superior by a chain of islands and, from within the calm waters of the bay, steep, rocky islands rise with grandeur. A massive sentinel of rock known to the early fur traders as the Pierre Rouge<sup>12</sup> appears to silently guard the mouth of the Nipigon River. Proceeding upriver, the Nipigon flows initially through a rough country featuring forested, hummocky terrain with frequent rock outcrops, and high, rocky river banks. The menacing facade of the northern shore of Lake Superior, however, gradually gives way in the interior to a relatively gentle topography of rolling hills and generally low relief.

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<sup>12</sup> This topographic feature is presently named Red Rock Hill which is virtually the equivalent of this early French term found in Duncan Cameron's, "The Nipigon Country, 1804", in L.R. Masson (ed.), Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, vol. II, 1960, p. 240.

Lake Nipigon lies approximately thirty miles north of Lake Superior. It is a relatively large lake, containing numerous bays and islands, while the surrounding shorelands are rock-strewn and thickly forested. The Canadian traders paddled northwestward through the lake for some forty-five miles before reaching Wabinoosh Bay, the most widely used point of departure for the fur brigades venturing into the Little North. From there, the fur traders ascended the rivers to the height of land that separates Lake Superior drainage from that of Hudson Bay. Canoe routes through this region followed complex paths afforded by its innumerable lakes and rivers. Duncan Cameron, one of the principal traders in the Nipigon region remarked:

The two thirds of this country are nothing but rivers and lakes, some fifty leagues long; properly speaking, the whole country is nothing but water and islands; I have never travelled as yet above three leagues by land without finding either a river or a lake on my way.<sup>13</sup>

The Nipigon traders quickly crossed over the height of land and made their way to the headwaters of the English and Albany Rivers. This area of the shield is a transition zone between the Great Lakes forest to the south and the truly boreal forest to the north (fig. 5). In general the topography is level but there is considerable local relief. In describing a traverse by airplane northward from Lac Seul on the English River to Lake St. Joseph in 1927, J.W. Greig offered these observations concerning the nature of the region:

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<sup>13</sup> Duncan Cameron, "The Nipigon Country, 1804", in L.R. Masson (ed.), Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, vol. II, 1960, p. 240.

Travelling northward from Lac Seul over this area, one sees a level plain stretching out beneath. The monotony is broken here and there by lakes, by the different shades of green of the forest, and by occasional bare brule patches, but never by hills . . . If one travels back over the same country by canoe it will be seen that, although the country is essentially level, the lake shores, especially where lakes are numerous, are usually rocky and that back from the lakes rounded rock hills are frequent. The country is also well wooded, so that it presents a pleasing and far from monotonous aspect.<sup>14</sup>

Traders from Nipigon first sustained contact with the Albany men on Lake St. Joseph. By the time that Osnaburgh House was built in 1786, the Nipigon traders had cut a well-worn path<sup>15</sup> to the lake and had penetrated to the headwaters of the Albany. The Hudson's Bay traders quickly followed their rivals and the ensuing struggle for furs pushed traders from both sides over the height of land and into the East Winnipeg Country.

### 3.3 From Lake St. Joseph to the East Winnipeg Country

West of Lake St. Joseph the Albany River takes its rise in the rugged Interior Upland Section of the shield<sup>16</sup> (Fig. 5), as do the Attawapiskat, Winisk, Severn, Gods, Hayes, and numerous tributary streams of these main rivers flowing directly into Hudson and James Bays. Most of the rivers flowing westward into Lake Winnipeg also take

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<sup>14</sup> J.W. Greig, "Woman and Narrow Lakes Area, District of Kenora", Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Ontario Department of Mines, vol. XXXVI, part III, 1927, p. 90.

<sup>15</sup> The name "Pedlarpath Bay" is still used today as the name of the bay by which the Nipigon traders entered Lake St. Joseph.

<sup>16</sup> This term has been substituted for Rowe's, Northern Coniferous Section, and is more descriptive of the topographical nature of the region.

their sources in this upland or headwater region. The headwater area comprises a maze of lakes and rivers flowing in every direction. Water is in every depression, while rocky knolls and ridges rise in many other places to expose the Precambrian granites and gneisses of the bed-rock. River basins are ill-defined in this confusing terrain, and crossing from one basin into the next was often much more easily accomplished than navigating the twisting, turning length of a single river. J.W. Greig made the following observations concerning the drainage pattern:

. . . the numbers of lakes increases until the waters form a labyrinth of channels running aimlessly over the land, and it becomes difficult to determine to which lakes the various channels belong.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the Interior Upland Section, climate and drainage conditions allow for better tree growth. The major limiting factor is the availability of adequate soil cover due to the scouring action of glaciation. Frequent fires have also acted to restrain the development of forests. Black spruce predominates, especially on the thin soils of the uplands and poorly drained lowlands. "In river valleys, around some of the lakes and on south-facing slopes, where more favourable conditions of soil and local climate allow, white spruce, balsam fir, aspen and balsam poplar form mixed stands of good growth."<sup>18</sup> These favourable areas for tree growth with their stands of riparian poplar were

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<sup>17</sup> J.W. Greig, "Woman and Narrow Lakes Area, District of Kenora", Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Ontario Department of Mines, vol. XXXVI, part III, 1927, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> J.S. Rowe, Forest Regions of Canada, p. 26.



prime habitat for the beaver and other fur bearers. The search for these rich fur areas led the traders deeper into the interior uplands and brought them into the East Winnipeg Country.

The East Winnipeg Country lies almost entirely within the confines of the Interior Upland Section, save for a thirty mile stretch of lowlands bordering Lake Winnipeg (Fig. 5). The latter represents the former shorelands of glacial Lake Agassiz. When the fur traders from Nipigon and Albany eventually gained the shores of Lake Winnipeg, they had reached the western limit of the Little North and thereby finally established a tie with the main route of the fur trade into the Great North.

Geographically, the East Winnipeg Country has been defined as the eastern drainage basin of Lake Winnipeg. From its northern boundary at the Nelson River to the Winnipeg River at its southern extremity it is drained by principally westward flowing rivers. The western boundary of the region is the long eastern coastline of Lake Winnipeg, while the eastern boundary follows the irregular outline of the sources of the region's river systems. The eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg extends for some two hundred and twenty-five miles and is oriented slightly to the northwest. The eastern extent of the drainage basin varies, but it reaches its greatest distance at the headwaters of the Berens River which takes its rise about two hundred miles east of Lake Winnipeg. The height of land which encloses the East Winnipeg Basin separates it from the Nelson, Hayes, Severn, Albany, and Winnipeg-English River Basins.

The East Winnipeg Country is dissected by numerous rivers and their tributary streams and lakes. The major river systems from north to south are the Poplar, Berens, and Bloodvein Rivers. The Poplar

River enters Lake Winnipeg at the fifty-third parallel, approximately three-quarters of the way up the coast of the lake. It begins its course roughly one hundred and thirty miles to the east of Lake Winnipeg and descends from the height of land that separates it from the headwaters of the Severn River, which flows northeastward into Hudson Bay. The Berens River discharges into Lake Winnipeg at about the middle of its length. Its headwaters are separated from the Albany River which flows eastward into James Bay. The Bloodvein River flows into Lake Winnipeg about one-third of the way up its coast, and emanates from an area about one hundred miles to the southeast. The headwaters of the Bloodvein River are there divided from a tributary system of the English River. Prior to 1821, these rivers were first pioneered from their sources, and later, their mouths. Penetration of the region from the headwaters was, in many respects, easier for it comprised downstream access and did not require the arduous portage over the line of rapids occasioned by the contact between the interior uplands and the Lake Winnipeg lowlands.

The entire East Winnipeg Country experiences a cold, continental climate that is characterized by long, cold winters and short, warm summers. Precipitation is generally low, averaging nineteen inches per year, and much of that falls during the spring and summer months. The surfacial material in East Winnipeg is composed of Precambrian bedrock overlain by glacial till, organic deposits, and lacustrine clays. The topography of the region varies considerably from rolling to hilly in the strongly bedrock-controlled eastern margins, to fairly flat in the west, where bedrock formations are overlain by thick layers of glacial, lacustrine, and organic deposits. The relief ranges from more than

900 feet in the eastern headwater area to about the level of Lake Winnipeg at 713 feet in the west.

Boreal forest covers the entire region. Black spruce is the predominant species, particularly on poorly drained peats. The large bogs that are found throughout the East Winnipeg Country are characterized by semi-open tracts of stunted black spruce and tamarack, interspersed occasionally with aspen and sedge fens. Wild rice (*Zizania palustris*) reaches its northwest limit in this region and occurs on localized sites where suitable conditions exist, such as in some shallow lakes and along stretches of the Berens River. The wildlife species in the region prior to the advent of the fur trade appear to have been diverse and numerous. Fur bearers and game animals existed in sufficient abundance during the early years of the fur trade to support an Indian population typical or slightly in excess of most areas of the Canadian Shield. Subsistence for the Indians in this region was enhanced by the availability of wild rice and the waterfowl and fisheries of Lake Winnipeg.

Once the European fur traders had expanded to the limits of the East Winnipeg Country, there were no frontiers left to be discovered, and there were no new regions to exploit when the fur resource showed signs of depletion. Consequently, the East Winnipeg Country became a region of intensive trading activity which lasted only until many of the fur bearers, and especially the beaver, were drastically reduced and could no longer be profitably exploited to the same degree. The fur trade did not die out in the region following 1821, but was very much a pale reflection of that which had been conducted during the period of competitive trade.

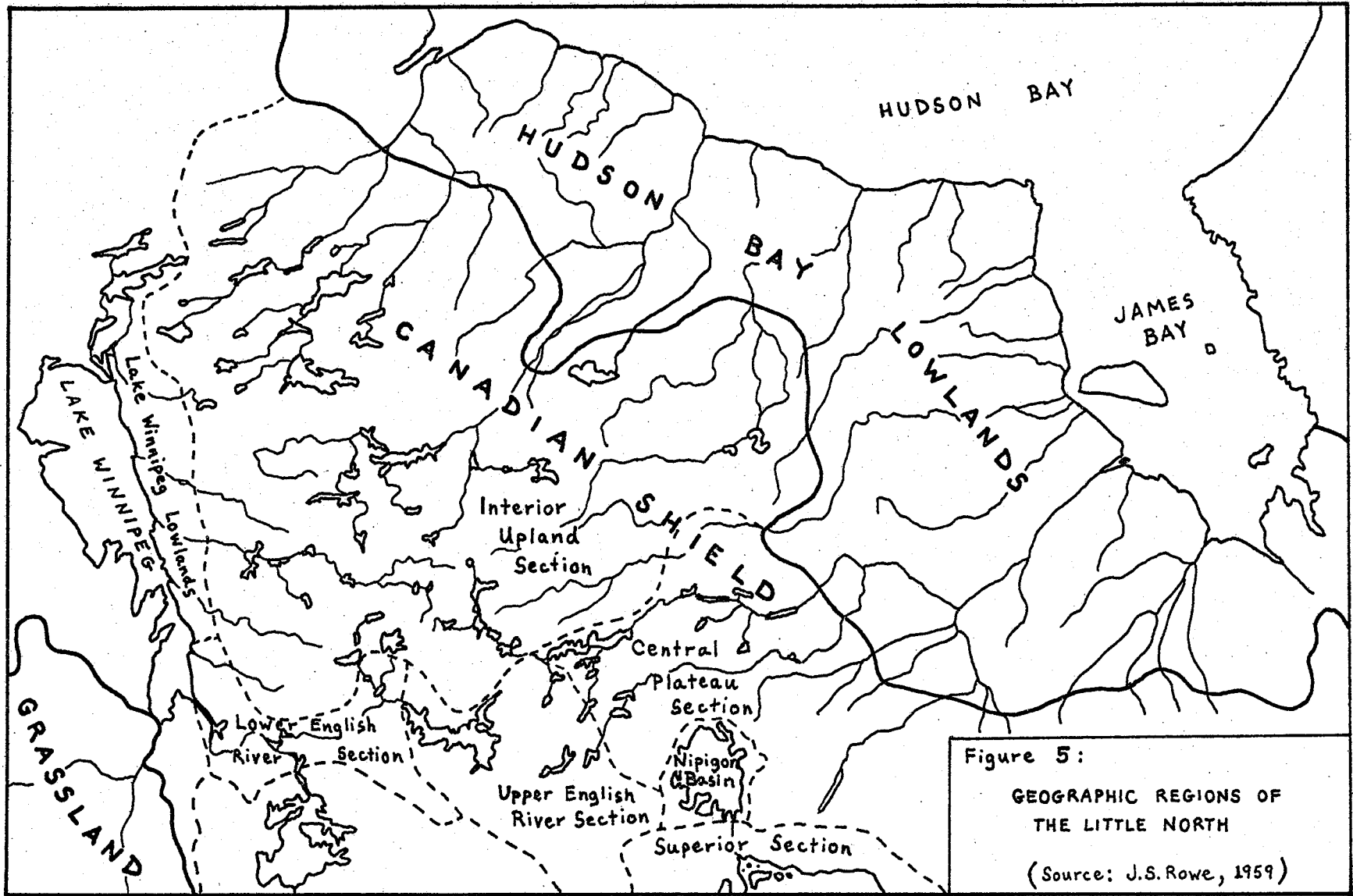


Figure 5:  
 GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS OF  
 THE LITTLE NORTH  
 (Source: J.S. Rowe, 1959)

## CHAPTER III

### THE EARLY FUR TRADE OF THE LITTLE NORTH TO 1784

#### 1. The Beginnings of the Trade During the French Régime, 1662-1763

The French were the first to explore the Little North, and if A.S. Morton's<sup>1</sup> interpretations are correct, the earliest explorations were conducted by Médard Chouart des Groseilliers and Pierre Esprit Radisson. In the summer of 1662 these two men set out by canoe from Sault Ste. Marie and made their way along the northern shore of Lake Superior. According to Morton, at Michipicoton Bay they turned their crafts northward and proceeded up the Michipicoton River. They had only to paddle thirty miles before they reached the height of land separating the rivers flowing southward into Lake Superior from those flowing northward into James Bay. After successfully negotiating that portage, the two Frenchmen appear to have descended the Missinaibi River to its confluence with the Moose River, and then followed the latter to its outlet at the bottom of James Bay. The explorers skirted the eastern coastlands, perhaps reaching as far east as Rupert Bay, and then turned around and paddled up the western coast until they reached the mouth of Albany River. They ascended the Albany and eventually made their way

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<sup>1</sup> A.S. Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71, 1973, p. 44. There is a vagueness about the travels of Radisson and Groseilliers at this time, but Morton's interpretation is accepted here.

over the drainage divide into Lake Nipigon and finally back into Lake Superior (Fig. 6).

Groseilliers and Radisson were impressed with the abundant, high quality fur resources of the Little North, but were unsuccessful in persuading the French authorities to finance a full scale fur trading venture. They subsequently took their plans to England and, by 1668, had convinced a group of English entrepreneurs to establish a fur trading post at the bottom of James Bay. This voyage used the northern sea route instead of the long Great Lakes waterway, and the expedition sailed into Hudson Bay in the summer of 1668. They made their way south into James Bay, and at the mouth of Rupert's River they built Charles Fort, probably at a location that the pair had visited in 1661. The venture proved to be very successful and the proprietors were granted a charter by King Charles II of England the following year which gave the newly formed Hudson's Bay Company the exclusive rights to,

. . . all the seas, straits, bays, rivers, lakes, and creeks within Hudson Strait, with all the lands, lakes, rivers and the like not now occupied by the subjects of any other Christian Prince, with the sole commerce to the said places, and all mines and minerals and royal and other fishing, same to be held as of the manor of East Greenwich, on the rent of two elks and two black beaver yearly.<sup>2</sup>

The French interest in the country north and west of Lake Superior was rekindled after the granting of the Hudson's Bay Company charter. France was determined to drive the English out of the Bay, and this resulted in a long period of warfare for control of the Bay and the straits that connected it with the Atlantic Ocean. Apart from the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

French conflicts with the English on the Bay itself, there was a gradual movement of French fur traders through the Great Lakes toward Lake Superior and the Little North. In 1677, two *coureurs-des-bois*, or wood runners, arrived at Charles Fort from a French post that was located on Lake Mistassini. A year later, another Frenchman, Jolliet by name, was reported to have visited Charles Fort. In the summer of 1684, a trading post was established by Du Lhut on the northeast side of Lake Nipigon, at the mouth of the Ombabika River (Fig. 6). This post, alternately called Fort La Maune or Fort La Tourette, was strategically situated to tap the fur trade of the Albany River Valley that fed the Hudson's Bay Company's Albany Fort which had been built in 1679 at the mouth of the Albany River. In 1685, a small outpost (Fort des Francais, or Fort Frougris) was built by Du Lhut's brother, La Tourette, at the junction of the Albany and Kenogami Rivers. This post occupied a strategic river junction, and was built to further impede the Indians travelling to Albany Fort with furs from their winter hunting grounds. Farther west, a trading post was built at the outflow of Rainy Lake by De Noyon in 1688. These seventeenth century encroachments of French traders into the Little North, however, were of minor consequence. Warfare and international interests directed the focus of France's attentions elsewhere, and left the fur trade in the hands of a small number of traders who operated from bases on the Great Lakes.

No further French exploration or expansion of settlement appears to have taken place in the Little North until 1717, when Zachare Roubette de la Noue erected a temporary hut on Rainy Lake, near the site of de Noyon's wintering place in 1688-89. This expansion was organized from Lake Superior as part of a renewed French fur trading effort that

came to be known as Les Postes du Nord. It included forts at Kaminitikwia, and at the mouth of the Nipigon River, with an outpost at Michipicoton. These French forts and temporary winter outposts posed a serious threat to the supply of furs that was annually drawn to the Hudson's Bay Company's forts on the Bay. Albany Fort was particularly hurt by these intrusions since its trading hinterland was closest to the French advance. The French fort at Nipigon River was primarily effective in impeding the flow of furs destined for Albany Fort. Coureurs-des-bois from that fort penetrated northward and screened out many of the furs that had previously gone to Albany Fort. As early as 1716, an officer at Albany Fort referred to the French as "the treacherous next door neighbour we have to deal with"<sup>3</sup>, and indicated that they were settled only seven days travel upriver from the fort.

Under the aggressive leadership of La Vérendrye, the Postes du Nord expanded farther north and west of Lake Superior. Most of the expansion was directed toward the lands beyond the Little North, and French forts were built in the Great North along the valleys of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and, to the northwest, along the valley of the Saskatchewan River.

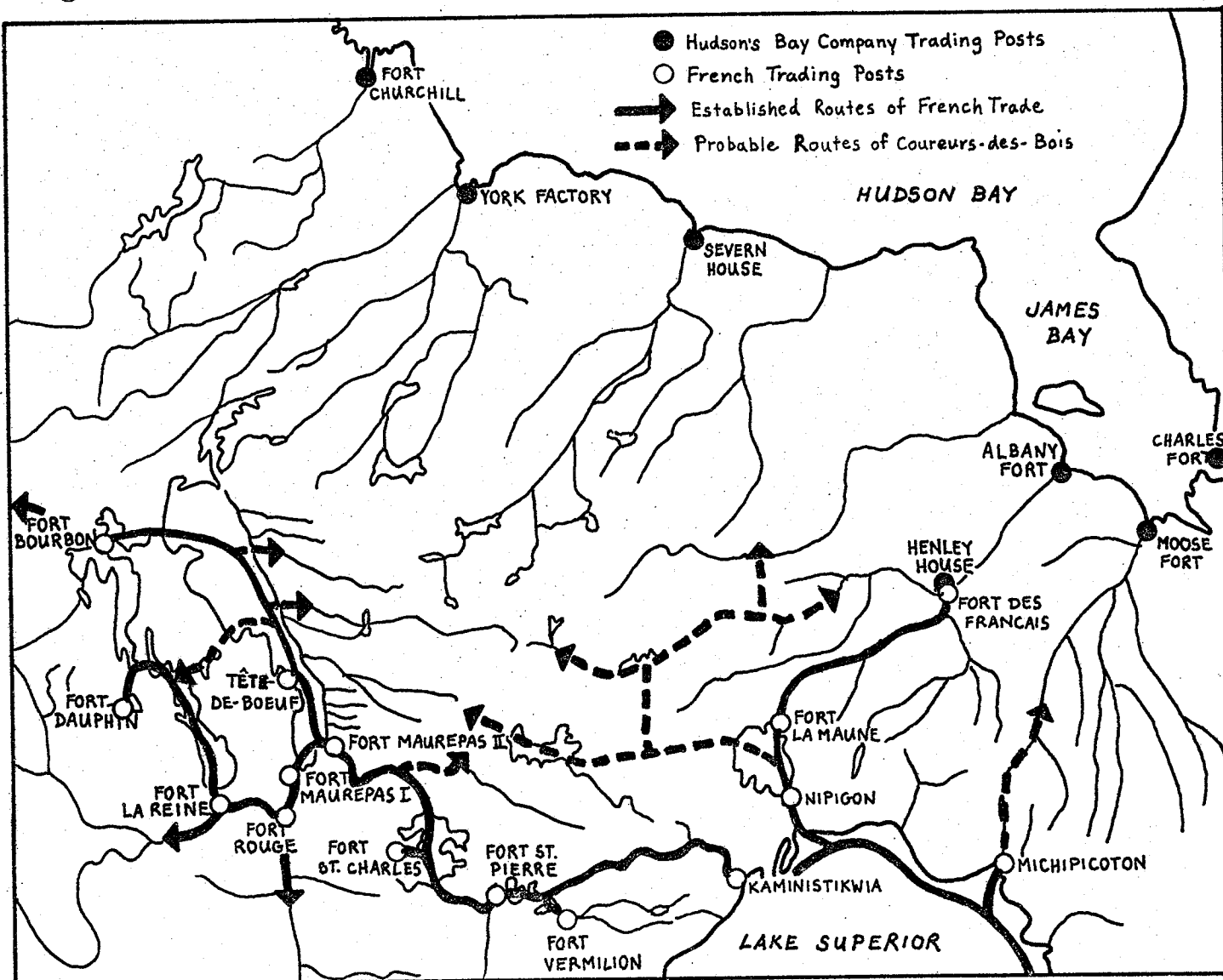
The major Postes du Nord that were established during the first half of the eighteenth century bespeak only in part of the history of the fur trade during this period. The other part concerns the actions of the coureurs-des-bois. These hardy individuals carried the trade into a much wider area than that encompassed by the main posts. In all probability, they traversed much of the Little North during the French

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<sup>3</sup> K.G. Davies (ed.), Letters from Hudson Bay, 1703-40, 1965, p. 48.



Figure 6: Trading Posts and Routes During the French Régime



régime, but little is known of them or their wanderings, for they were largely illiterate, and left few traces of their existence. They appear in the early Hudson's Bay Company's journals simply as the wood runners. E.E. Rich has described them as,

. . . living with Indians, often accompanied on their travels by a full-blooded squaw, competitive and individualistic, in strong contrast with the regimentation of the English traders.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 6 contains a partial reconstruction of what was undoubtedly a wider ranging trade conducted by these coureurs-des-bois. The information on the coureurs-des-bois has been derived from the physical evidence of their presence described by later Hudson's Bay Company traders and Montreal pedlars in the region.

The Postes du Nord were ceded to the British in 1763 as a result of the defeat of France in the Seven Years War. Independent fur traders of French or French Canadian origin continued to trade along the shores of Lake Superior after 1763, but they were gradually absorbed by the new entrepreneurs of the fur trade, the predominantly British pedlars from Montreal.

## 2. Hudson's Bay Company Early Advances into the Little North, 1743-75

The encroachments of the French fur traders had caused a general decline in the fur returns of the Hudson's Bay Company and, in 1743, the Company attempted to counter the French by building a settlement inland from Albany Fort. Situated one hundred and fifty miles upstream from the fort at the confluence of the Kenogami River, Henley House was

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<sup>4</sup> E.E. Rich, The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857, 1967, p. 94.

located within the resource poor Hudson Bay lowlands. This was an entirely new departure from the Company's established practice of tide-water trading, and the decision to embark upon this venture was accompanied by considerable doubt as to its efficacy and, indeed, its practicability. Despite these concerns and the difficulties envisioned, Henley House was nevertheless built in 1743. It was not intended to serve as an inland trading post, but to induce the upland Indians to bring their furs down to Albany and, at the same time, to keep a watch on the French traders. From the outset, Henley House was plagued by troubles, both internal and external. It proved difficult to supply and staff and was ransacked by Indians in 1755. In 1759, the newly resettled house was destroyed by a combined force of French and Indians.

Henley House remained unoccupied until 1766, when the Company decided to reopen it as a check upon the encroachments of the newly arrived Canadian pedlars from the St. Lawrence. The house was still intended to induce the Indians to take their furs down to Albany, a function that was clearly outlined in this 1769 correspondence:

. . . . When the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Committee, ordered Henley to be re-established, it was not with the intent to make it a place of Trade, but as a place, where the Natives on being distressed, in their Passage to and from Albany Fort, both in summer, and winter, might resort to, and receive such helps, as their necessitys require.<sup>5</sup>

The officer in charge of Henley House, Thomas Powell, was perplexed by these orders since he believed that the Company was losing a great deal by not allowing Indians to trade at the house. Many Indians in-

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<sup>5</sup> Humphrey Marten, "Letter from Albany Fort to Thomas Powell, Henley House, Sept. 12, 1769", B.3/b/7, fos. 2 and 2d.

formed Powell that they would take their furs to the pedlars if he did not trade with them. The Chief Factor at Albany Fort, Humphrey Marten, held steadfastly to a contrary view and wrote that:

. . . Your long narrative of Indians not chusing to come to trade at this place [Albany] . . . let me tell you that the Indians will come to this place, except when the following accidents happen, viz., sickness, lameness, a small quantity of goods, or such summer trash [summer furs], that it is not worth taking from them or Lastly if not Inticed by the master to trade at Henley or suffered so to do Privately with the men. . . .<sup>6</sup>

The general tone of Marten's words downplayed the effects of the Canadians upon Albany's returns, and put some of the blame on the men at Henley House. By 1770, however, Marten had reversed his position and urged all of his men:

. . . not to be too sparing in a few presents to Uplanders [Indians from Albany's interior]. If we sow not how shall we reape . . . So many Pedlars up Country settling themselves in Every corner must distress us much, he therefore that can counteract those Encroaching Rascals will do himself Honours, and his Master acceptable service.<sup>7</sup>

During the early 1770's, reports of the pedlars among Albany's upland Indians steadily increased. They were reported to be building posts amidst the Indians' winter hunting grounds and giving their leaders large presents to discourage them from going to Albany Fort. Similar activities were reported from York and Severn, but the greatest

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<sup>6</sup> Humphrey Marten, "Letter from Albany Fort to Thomas Powell, Henley House, Dec. 28, 1769", B.3/b/7, fo. 11d.

<sup>7</sup> Humphrey Marten, "Letter from Albany Fort to Thomas Powell, Henley House, March 10, 1770", B.3/b/7, fo. 21d.

impact was felt at Albany. Marten became so distressed that in 1772, he wrote:

. . . Poor Albany how art thou fallen, the trade at Present, not 5000 [made beaver] the Pedlars ruin us, may the Devil confound them.<sup>8</sup>

In 1775, Henley House was elevated to the status of trading post and, with this change in policy, the era of inland trading from Albany began.

Although Albany had made the first move inland by establishing Henley House, the task of exploring the forested uplands of the Little North was initiated from Severn House. In 1767, Andrew Graham, the Chief Factor of Severn, sent William Tomison to winter among Severn's upland Indians. Tomison ascended the Severn River to the height of land and then crossed over into the East Winnipeg Country to leave the first recorded impressions of this region and of the Canadian trade that was developing in its vicinity.<sup>9</sup> His most probable route to Lake Winnipeg, or the great lake, was down the Poplar River, a route that was used by later inland travellers from Severn (Fig. 9). After nearly three months of travelling Tomison arrived at Lake Winnipeg:

. . . arrived at the great Lake on Sep<sup>t</sup> 3<sup>d</sup> where I found many Indians waiting the arrival of the English and french pedlars, they informed me that there were two Houses at Misquagamaw river within 1/2 days padle across the Lake, and that they were gone down with furs to Montreal; one House is commanded by an Englishman and 8 servants who mans two Large canoes, the other house by a frenchman and 16 servants who mans 4

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<sup>8</sup> Humphrey Marten, "Letter from Albany Fort dated June 19, 1772", B.3/b/9, fo. 36.

<sup>9</sup> "Observations of a Journey inland to the great Lake performed by William Tomison, Steward att Severn House Mr. Andrew Graham Master from June 16th 1767 to June 30th 1768." B.198/a/10.

Large canoes and to the westward were 3 houses more all commanded by frenchman, they take all kinds of furs, the natives were cloathed in french cloth, blankets, printed callicoes and other stuffs . . .<sup>10</sup>

Although there appeared to be no houses settled on Lake Winnipeg, the Indians were well supplied with goods from these trading rendezvous at some of the river mouths on its east coast. A month later Tomison met a French trader and his entourage of ten Frenchmen and fourteen Indians in six large canoes on their way to "Basquea" (Paskoyac or The Pas), confirming the presence of Canadians "acrose the lake". This trader, whose name was Saswe, was described as follows by Tomison:

His dress was a ruffled shirt, a Blanket Jacket, a pair of long trowsers without stockings or shoes his own hair with a hatt bound about with green binding, a poor looking small man about 50 years of age, he seemed to have a great command over the men, he lay in the middle of the canoe with his wife and son.<sup>11</sup>

Tomison also learned from one of Saswe's men that he was employed and outfitted by a French merchant from Montreal.

Tomison was the first Hudson's Bay Company servant to travel through the East Winnipeg Country and, although his journal is not detailed, he did provide the first observations of Canadian trading activities in the region. From these, it is apparent that the Indians were well accustomed by that time to taking their furs to the nearby Canadian traders.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., fos. 1 and 1d. The Misquagamaw River referred to here is most likely the Saskatchewan River.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., fo. 2d.

. . . whenever they collect a few furs they went to misqugamaw river and traded them with the English, and am certain what furs goes down to Albany Fort and Severn House is collected from different Indians, and were it not for Brazile tobacco very few would come, they told me that they had no occasion to go down when they could get goods so nigh at hand.<sup>12</sup>

Tomison also observed that there was plenty of wild rice to be had in this region, which was yet another encouragement for the Company to move into the East Winnipeg Country and establish inland trading houses.

Tomison returned to Severn in the summer of 1768 and spent the next winter preparing another inland expedition which commenced in the summer of 1769. This second journey took him past the East Winnipeg Country to the Lake Dauphin area. Tomison observed much the same as he had two years previously, commenting that the Canadian traders were well established in the Dauphin region and profiting at the Company's expense. He returned by way of York Fort and later became one of the Company's leading traders along the Saskatchewan River.

At Severn House no further plans were made toward establishing inland trading connections with the upland, or Bungee Indians.<sup>13</sup> Surprisingly, Severn did not follow up Tomison's explorations while York and Albany actively expanded their inland settlements. Despite reports as early as 1771 that Canadian pedlars were "lying at the head of the Severn River"<sup>14</sup>, the men at Severn, whether by apathy or design<sup>15</sup>,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., fo. 3.

<sup>13</sup> A term used by traders from Severn House to describe the Northern Ojibwa.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Atkinson, "Severn House Journal, 1771-72", B.198/a/15, fo. 35d.

<sup>15</sup> The reason most often cited for Severn's slowness to establish

remained at their house on the Bay. The trade at Severn declined and, by 1772, mainly the "low country natives"<sup>16</sup>, or those who inhabited the Hudson Bay Lowlands, were trading at the house. In 1774, several Indians reported that there were "two large canoes with eleven pedlars, lying on this side [east side] of Frenchman's Lake [Lake Winnipeg], where they were wintered and got several of our debtors to trade with them."<sup>17</sup> As York and Albany men were sent inland in future years the officers in charge of Severn expressed a desire to do likewise especially in view of reports such as the above. Severn House remained, however, curiously understaffed and, for much of the time before 1821, seems to have been neglected by the Hudson's Bay Company.

### 3. The Pedlars from Canada, 1763-1779

Since 1763, a new breed of fur traders had been making their way up the Great Lakes routeway organized as largely British-financed fur trading ventures from Montreal. These pedlars, or Canadians, as they were alternatively called by the clerks of the Hudson's Bay Company, continued trading for furs in the French tradition, employing French Canadian voyageurs and coureurs-des-bois, and wintering inland among the Indians.

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inland trading posts was the neglect upon the Company's part to officially sanction such a move. Another reason hinted at in various Severn journals indicated that the men at that house were unwilling to perform such duties.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Graham, "Severn House Journal, 1772-73", B.198/a/17, fo. 15d.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Graham, "Severn House Journal, 1773-74", B.198/a/18, fo. 28d.





In 1767, several Canadian traders reached Lake Winnipeg and, at the same time, others penetrated into the region beyond Lake Nipigon. According to a letter by Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher in 1784, the first Canadian adventurer travelled northwest of Lake Superior in the year 1765.<sup>18</sup> This unnamed trader set off from Michilimackinac and got as far as Lake La Pluye (Rainy Lake), at which point his canoes were plundered by Indians. This same trader made a second attempt the following year but met with the same fate, again on Rainy Lake. In 1767, Canadian traders finally pushed past Rainy Lake without incident and managed to reach Lake Ouinipique (Lake Winnipeg).

In the same year a total of thirty-two canoes had "Gone by Lake Superior to ye North West", carrying goods valued at £12,598 (Table 1). From these fur trade invoices it is evident that the financiers were mainly British entrepreneurs, while the actual trade for furs was conducted almost entirely by French Canadians. The places of wintering suggest that the fur trade had not yet expanded beyond the Manitoba Lakes, and was focused mainly on the northern, western, and southern shores of Lake Superior.

Similar records of Canadian activity for other years have not survived and what information that is available is of little use.

W.K. Lamb observed that:

No two accounts of the activities of the first British traders to enter the country west of Lake Superior agree in detail. Many of the traders were illiterate; few of them were associated in partner-

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<sup>18</sup> "Letter to Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher to General Haldimand, Dated October 4, 1784"; in W.S. Wallace (ed.), Documents Relating to the North West Company, 1967, pp. 70-71.

Table 1: An account of the Number of Canoes gone out Wintering from the Post of Michilimackinac, Including the Names of Traders and those that are Bail for them. Also the Value of their goods and where they are bound.

1767 July	TRADERS NAMES	NAMES OF THOSE WHO	No. OF	PLACES OF WINTERING	VALUE OF		
	THAT GO IN THE CANOES	ENTER INTO SECURITY FOR THE GOOD BEHAVIOUR OF THOSE GOING OUT			CANOES	MERCHANDISE	£
				Gone by Lake Superior to ye North West			
7	Blondeau.....	Spicemaker, Blondeau..	2	Fort La Reine & Fort Dauphin	700	..	..
	Le Blancell...	Alexander Baxter.....	6	Fort Daphne & La Pierce	2400	..	..
	Campion.....	Groesbeeke.....	1	Lac de Plieu & La Dubois	400	..	..
	Marcaut.....	Guillard.....	2	Nippigon & La Carpe	511	10	..
	Menard.....	Forest Oakes.....	3	" "	1106	..	7
9	Barselon.....	Benjamin Frobisher....	2	Petit Ouinipique	506	17	..
	Bertrand.....	Deriviere.....	2	Fals Avoine	600	..	..
11	Baby.....	Chenville.....	1	Michipicoton	500	..	..
12	Thos: Curray..	Isaac Todd.....	2	Camnistugouia	1000	..	..
14	Chabouillet...	Groissbeek.....	1	Lance	600	..	..
16	Louis Amblen..	De Riviere.....	1	De Riviere Serpent	175	..	..
	Chabouillet...	McGill.....	2	La Pointe	700	..	..
24	St. Germain...	Alexander Henry.....	1	Lance	400	..	..
Aug.							
10	Cadot.....	Alexander Henry.....	2	St. Mary's	1200	..	..
18	Bartie.....	Alexander Baxter.....	2	Du Fond du Lac	800	..	..
21	Chinn.....	Alexander Henry.....	2	La Poine	1000	..	..

Source: C.E. Lart (transcript), "Notes and Documents: Fur-Trade Returns, 1767",  
The Canadian Historical Review. vol. III, No. 4, December, 1922.

ships that required them to keep written records. As a result, information is fragmentary and often conflicting.<sup>19</sup>

From Hudson's Bay Company observations, however, it is apparent that Canadian traders were well established in the trading hinterlands of the coastal forts by the early 1770's. During this time, the Indian reports from the upland areas of the Little North indicated that the Canadians had already settled near the headwaters of the Severn and Albany Rivers. It is difficult to assess the veracity of these claims but they nonetheless point to an increasing involvement of Canadians trading in the Little North.

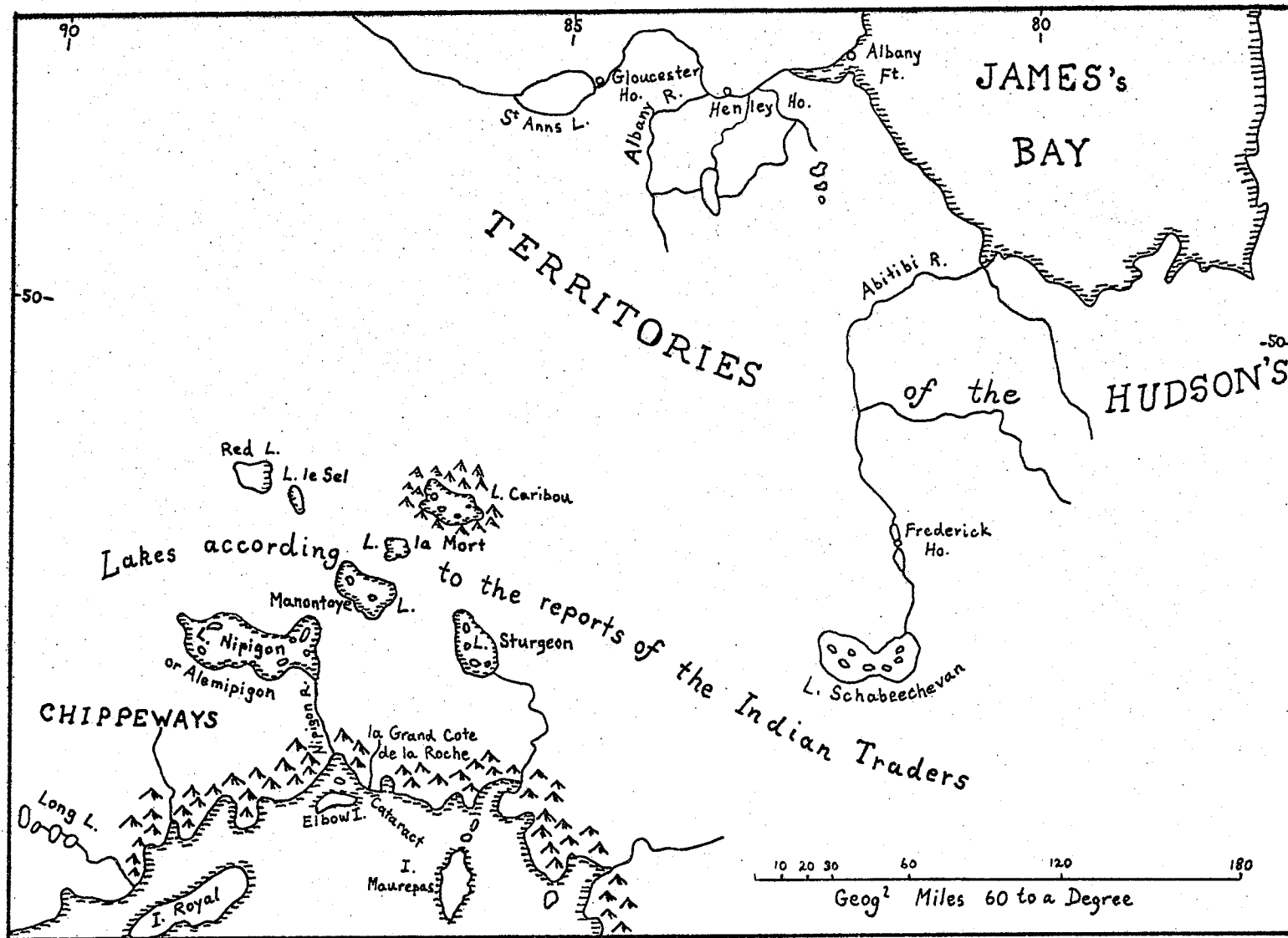
One of the earliest surviving written accounts of the Canadian fur trade in the Little North is John Long's Voyages and Travels<sup>20</sup>, which is in part an account of his two-year sojourn in the Lake Nipigon Country from 1777 to 1779. The book also contains information concerning the fur trade in general and is a valuable source for early geographical descriptions and toponymy. Most notably, it contains a sketch map, presumably drawn by Long, of the "Western Countries of Canada in 1791" (Fig. 7). Even a quick glance at the map will reveal its obvious inaccuracies, but a careful investigation of it, using Long's written descriptions, modern topographic maps, and a background in the literature of the fur trade, enables one to relate the speculative and exaggerated features of the sketch map to their actual locations on the

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<sup>19</sup> W.K. Lamb (ed.), The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, 1970, p. 70.

<sup>20</sup> M.M. Quaife (ed.), John Long's Voyages and Travels in the Years 1768-1788, 1922. (Hereinafter referred to as Long's Voyages and Travels.)

Figure 7; A Section of John Long's Sketch of the "Western Countries of Canada, 1791"



ground. Once the details of this fundamental problem have been solved, Long's observations can be made to yield valuable insights into the early Canadian trade.

In the historical introduction to Long's narrative, M.M. Quaife wrote:

. . . our author was sent into the Lake Superior district, being assigned to the forbidding region around Lake Nipigon and extending indefinitely northward and westward.<sup>21</sup>

Quaife's interpretation of the Lake Nipigon region as forbidding may have been derived from the journal of Duncan Cameron, which had been published in L.R. Masson's Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest, in 1889. In it, Cameron related the desperate story of Monsieur Clause, whom he described as the first (Canadian) trader to pass Lake Nipigon. Clause was said to have journeyed there in 1767, and that:

He and his men were almost starved to death and reduced to eat several packs of beaver to preserve their lives . . . This was a poor encouragement to others; however, some years after, other traders came to Lac la Savanne, Nid de Corbeau and Lac du Pichou, where several men were starved to death at different times. In Lac la Savanne, no less than four out of eight starved in one year. This gave the country such a bad name that men could not be had at any price to bring in goods.<sup>22</sup>

John Long was sent into the Nipigon Country in the fall of 1777 as an employee of an unnamed concern, although it is likely that his employer was Ezekiel Solomon. He described Lake Nipigon and the inhabi-

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Duncan Cameron, "The Nipigon Country, 1804", in L.R. Masson (ed.), Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, Vol. II, 1960, pp. 242-43.

tants of that country as follows:

Lake Alemipigon, or Nipigon, is about 100 miles in length, and supplies the savages with great quantities of fish. The land affords abundance of wild roots, and the animals are very numerous. The Indians who hunt here are in number about 300, and are remarkably wild and superstitious.<sup>23</sup>

The accounts of his journey into the interior beyond are, in general, not very detailed<sup>24</sup>, but, from his directions, a rough sketch of his travels can be drawn (Fig. 8).

The first place mentioned on his journey inland from Lake Nipigon was Lac Eturgeon, or present Sturgeon Lake. He described it as thirty miles wide in some parts and containing a number of small islands. Long passed through Sturgeon Lake on his way to his wintering place which was to be Lac la Mort, or Dead Lake. He reached that lake on the twenty-fifth of September, 1777, almost two months after his departure

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<sup>23</sup> Long's Voyages and Travels, p. 66. His estimate of 300 Indians is relatively high. In 1784, James Sutherland of the Hudson's Bay Company observed only thirty hunting Indians belonging to Lake Nipigon. "Gloucester House Journal", 1784-85, B.78/a/11, fo. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Long explained this lack of geographical detail in the following manner: "As the description of this country, hitherto so little explored, is a principal part of what I intend in this publication, I have described it either from my own knowledge or the most authentic information I was able to procure from the savages . . . It is necessary to observe that though the Indians are very expert in delineating countries upon bark with wood-coal mixed with bear's grease, and which even the women do with great precision, the length of a day's march is very uncertain and consequently cannot afford any geographical information. This remark, I trust, will be found to want no further proof than the consideration that their drafts consist principally of lakes and rivers, as they seldom travel much by land; and when their track overland is described it is perhaps only a short portage which they cross in order to again pursue their journey on their favourite element. But as few persons will probably read this account with a view of going into this country, the description I have been able to give will be sufficient for the generality of my readers." Long, op. cit., pp. 107-108.

from Lake Nipigon. Lac la Mort was observed to be:

. . . situated to the northeast of Lake Alemipigon. This lake is about sixty miles in circumference, the land low and swampy, and the water very unpleasant to the palate.<sup>25</sup>

Long could not have been an accurate surveyor or cartographer, since Sturgeon Lake lies due west of Lake Nipigon, and it is unlikely that he would have proceeded from there to a lake lying on the northeast side of Lake Nipigon (Fig. 8). The probable location of Lac la Mort is present Savant Lake, situated about fifteen miles northeast of Sturgeon Lake. Savant Lake is roughly sixty miles in circumference, and the surrounding land, in general, is low lying and swampy.<sup>26</sup> The Indians who frequented Lac la Mort were described as Chippewas, an alternate name for the Ojibwa.

In January the provisions at Lac la Mort ran short and Long and an Indian couple set out for Lake Manontoye, where Mr. Shaw, a brother trader was wintering. Their journey took them through Sturgeon Lake and, as they drew near to Lake Manontoye, Long learned that Shaw had been captured by "Hudson Bay savages". Long assisted in the rescue of Shaw and was then provided with wild rice and dried meat, and with two of Shaw's men to assist him on his journey back to Lac la Mort. Long described Lake Manontoye as somewhat smaller than Lac Eturgeon, and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Further evidence to this effect can be found in a later section of Long's observations in which he describes a journey from Lac la Mort to Lake Manontoye. Lake Manontoye is definitely present Lake Minnitaki which is situated to the west of Sturgeon Lake. In travelling to Lake Manontoye, Long first passed through Sturgeon Lake which verifies the location of Lac la Mort as somewhere to the northeast of Sturgeon Lake.

observed that:

It abounds with excellent fish and wild fowl, and oats, rice, and cranberries grow spontaneously in the swamps. There are very few islands in it.<sup>27</sup>

A few days after his return to Lac la Mort, Long described the arrival of a band of Indians, some from the Red Lake or Misqui Sakiegan, and some from the Weed Lake or Lake Shabeechevan.<sup>28</sup> Long was also given some measures of distance and direction to the principal lakes in the area:

From Red Lake to Lake le Sel, or Salt Lake [Lac Seul] by the Indian accounts, there are fourteen short portages, and twenty two creeks . . . From this lake [Lac Seul] to Lake Caribou, or Reindeer Lake, is eight days' march across five creeks and three portages.<sup>29</sup>

The last mentioned lake is undoubtedly present Caribou Lake, situated about twenty miles northwest of Lake Nipigon.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 89. There are a number of islands in Minnitaki Lake, but depending upon where Shaw's house was situated, there may have been few in sight. Long's visit took place in the winter and this might have also had a bearing on his ability to accurately discern the number of islands in the lake.

<sup>28</sup> Red Lake is most probably the present lake of the same name, situated to the northwest of Lac Seul. Weed Lake is later confirmed to be present Tide Lake, where a number of trading posts commonly named Escabitchewan were built.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-05.

<sup>30</sup> Long described this lake as follows: ". . . about thirty miles long, with several small islands, resembling the Mille Isles in the River St. Lawrence above Montreal. The water is deep and clear, and the bottom hard . . . It is surrounded by a chain of high mountains. . . Some years ago a French trader settled here, but of late it has been deserted." (p. 105). Caribou Lake appears on Long's sketch map to the northeast of of Lake Nipigon, and is depicted as a lake surrounded by



Continuing his geographical description of the area, Long observed:

From Lake Schabeechevan [Tide Lake] to Lake Arbitibis are three small lakes, eight creeks, and five portages.<sup>31</sup>

Lake Arbitibis probably referred to present Lake of the Woods. Long described this lake as being:

. . . very large, and the surrounding land rocky and mountainous. At the northern extremity of this lake is a large fall of water, which flows from a river whose current is rapid for about twenty miles. On this river there are also dangerous rapids; the land upon its banks is low, and the beach sandy.<sup>32</sup>

Long probably confused the principal directions of this lake. The large fall at the 'northern extremity' corresponds more correctly to the Long Sault Rapids at the southern inflow of the Rainy River. The Rainy River which flows into the Lake of the Woods does indeed contain a number of rapids, and has low, sandy banks. This is a crucial observation, since the Winnipeg River which flows from the northern extremity of the lake is surrounded by the typical hard rock environment of the Canadian Shield.

From Lake Arbitibis, Long mentioned a small lake called Crow's Nest Lake, or Cark Cark Sakiegan, and thirty miles down the river was

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mountains. Present Caribou Lake is situated to the northwest of Lake Nipigon, but is bordered by hills and cliffs which reach 250 feet at some places, and would certainly have given an early traveller the appearance of being in a lake surrounded by mountains.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>32</sup> Loc. cit.

Neeshshemaince Sakiegan, or the Lake of the Two Sisters, so called from the "meeting of two currents, which form one grand discharge into the lake"<sup>33</sup>. These observations match up with the previous interpretation of Lake Arbitibis as present Lake of the Woods. The location of the Lake of the Two Sisters corresponds to present Tetu Lake at the junction of the Winnipeg and English Rivers.

During the trading season, Long identified another trader, James Clark, five of whose men starved at Lake Savan. The location of this lake was given in George Sutherland's journal of 1777-78, as present Pashkokogan Lake. Sutherland, a Hudson's Bay Company servant, remarked that "James Clark wintered at Pashcocoggan Lake in 1777, where 4 of his men died of hunger."<sup>34</sup> In the spring, Long also learned that Monsieur Jacques Santeron had a trading house at Lake Shabeechevan (Escabitchewan) and intended to desert the service of his employers and sell his furs to the Hudson's Bay Company. Long was determined to stop Santeron, but an Indian Chief explained that it would be to little avail since Santeron would have already gotten as far as the North River (Albany River), leading to Hudson Bay. However, the fate of Jacques Santeron is uncertain since the Hudson's Bay Company journals make no mention of him.

Long departed from Lac la Mort in the early summer of 1778 with a rich winter trade of 140 packs. He arrived at Portage Plain, adjoining Lake Nipigon, on the second of July, and finally arrived at Pays Plat

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> George Sutherland, "A Journal of the most remarkable Transactions and Occurrences Inland with Pedlars, 1779-80", B.211/a/1, fo. 19.

(west of the Nipigon River) on the tenth of August. There he met other traders, remarking that some of them had wintered remote from him and had gone by way of the Grand Portage. On the fifteenth of August, Long was ready to leave for his second trading season in the Nipigon Country.

His destination that year was Lake Schabeechevan, where the deserter Jacques Santeron had wintered the previous year. Since he did not mention Sturgeon Lake or Lake Manontoye in his journal, one can assume that his route to Lake Schabeechevan was not by the Lac Seul-English River route. The alternative route would have been via the Wabigoon River system. It appears that Long left the English river track just before entering Sturgeon Lake, and then travelled through a series of lakes and rivers until he reached Skunk's Lake (Wabigoon Lake). From there, he travelled to Lake Schabeechevan which he described as:

. . . about 180 miles in circumference and full of small islands. It abounds with fish, and the swamps are full of wild rice and cranberries. It is about six days' march from Lac la Mort . . . At the extremity of this lake is a fall of water which runs from a river of the same name, and has a direct communication with the waters leading from Fort Albany.<sup>35</sup>

All of these observations correspond correctly with the geographical characteristics of present Tide Lake, except for an overestimation of its circumference.

During the winter, Long was informed that Joseph La Forme, a fellow trader who was settled at Lac Seul, was killed by an Indian. He

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<sup>35</sup> Long's Voyages and Travels, p. 110.

also mentioned a house under the management of a Mr. Fulton on Skunk's Head Lake, or Shekarkistergoan (Shikag Lake), located between Lake Nipigon and Minnitaki Lake. In February of 1779, Long was visited by a trader claiming to have come from Fort Albany. He was "dressed in a smoaked-leather shirt", and was described by Long as a respectable and civil man. The only man to visit this part of the country from Albany was George Sutherland. The date of this meeting, however, does not correspond with that of Sutherland's journey from Albany Fort to Lake Winnipeg in the 1777-78 season. Furthermore, Sutherland did not mention this meeting with Long in his journal so that the veracity of Long's account in this instance is questionable. He may have learned of Sutherland at a later date and decided to include a meeting with him in his book to provide additional interest to his story. In any case, it is unlikely that such a meeting took place.

Long's return in the spring followed the Skunk's River and, if the interpretation of Skunk's Lake as present Wabigoon Lake is correct, then the Skunk's River would correctly correspond to the Wabigoon River. Lac le Nid au Corbeau<sup>36</sup> was the next place name mentioned, and is a further indication that he followed the same route as he had taken in the fall.

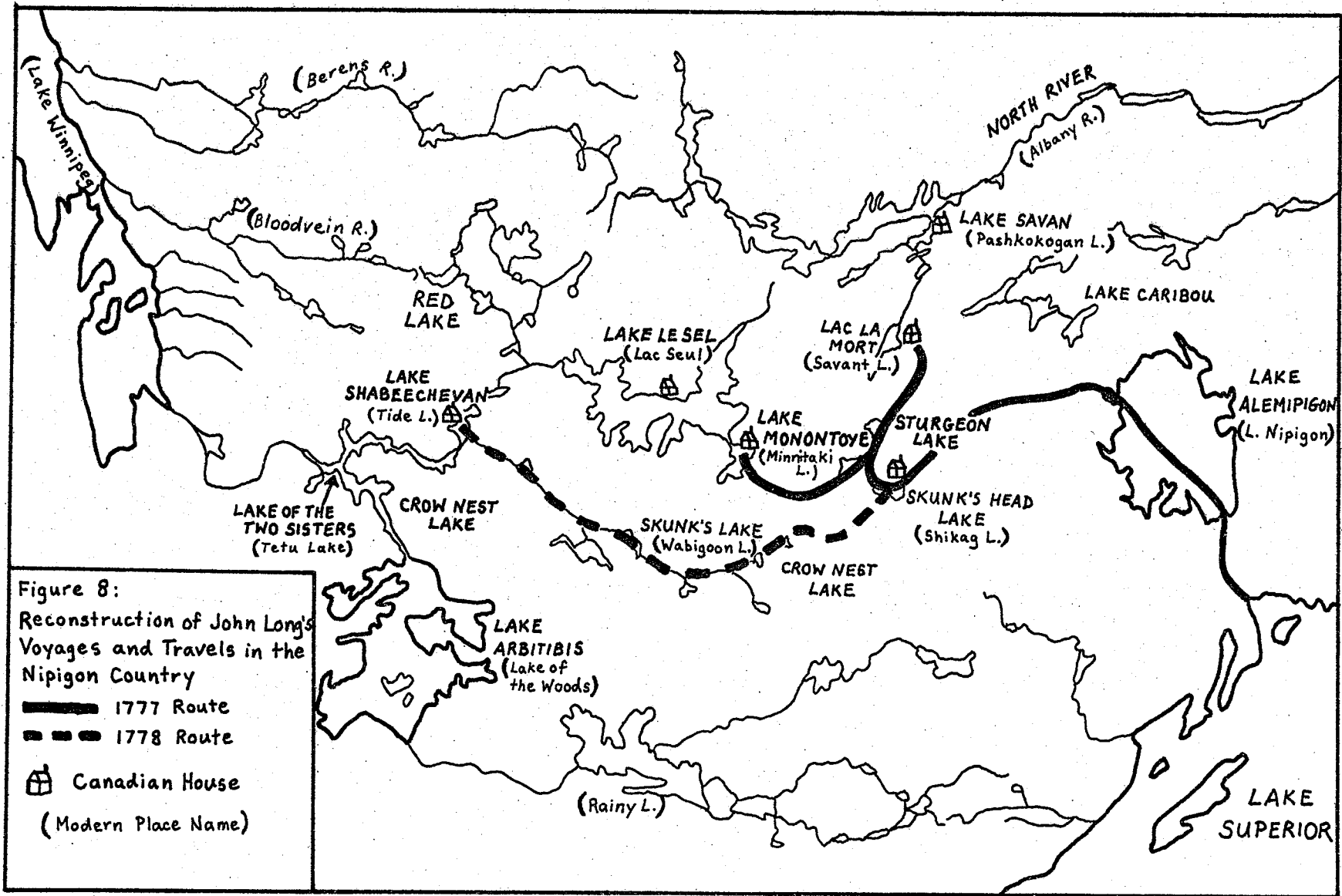
This marked the end of Long's observations on the Nipigon Country. Despite its inaccuracies and probable exaggerations, his memoirs provide a vital and singular insight into the geography of the early Canadian trade in the Little North (Fig. 8). From his comments and the map, it is evident that the Montreal trade was largely confined to the southern

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<sup>36</sup> Lac le Nid au Corbeau, or Crow's Nest Lake, cannot be identified but was located between Wabigoon and Sturgeon Lakes.

margins of the Little North and was concentrated in the English River region which came to be known as the Monontagué to the North West Company. It is also apparent that the trade was conducted by a number of well established traders of different concerns. Although Long's experience was restricted to the English River-Nipigon axis, and he resided in the region for only two years, he was able to comment on the activities and locations of the Canadians around him in the Little North. Virtually all of these traders approached the region through Lake Nipigon, and the main focus of the trade appears to have been directed to the west and northwest of that lake. The point of departure for this trade was through Wabinosh Bay at the northwest extremity of Lake Nipigon and, from there, the traders diverged along different "paths" for their respective winter stations.

Figure 8 is a reconstruction of Long's travels and observations. From the trading posts and routeways shown on the map, it is evident that the trading ventures of these men had taken them deep into areas that had for years supplied furs to the Hudson's Bay Company through Severn House and, more especially, Albany Fort. Their inroads were such that the Company could no longer be sure of a regular or adequate supply of furs from their upland Indians of the forested interior. Whereas the Canadian traders saw the Little North as a valuable fur domain into which further expansion was possible, and from which greater profit could be derived, the Hudson's Bay Company men at this time knew it only as a vaguely defined hinterland. It was also a region which for a century had yielded its wealth each spring to the Bayside forts employing the old system of tidewater trading, a system which the English were loathe to give up.



#### 4. Early Inland Explorations from Albany Fort, 1776-1780

By 1776, declining fur returns and numerous reports of Canadian traders inland that were injuring the Company's trade, made it essential for Albany Fort to supplement its tidewater trade. The times also seemed auspicious, for the Company hoped to take advantage of the American War of Independence which made vulnerable the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes routeway. In the summer of 1776, Thomas Hutchins, the Chief Factor of Albany, sent Edward Jarvis inland to survey the situation. Jarvis returned later that year having been as far as Lake Superior. He had gone by the South Branch (Kenogami River), and had visited two French Canadian trading posts at Meshipicoot (Michipicoton) (Fig. 9). On the basis of Jarvis' observations, the Albany council determined that the Lake Superior region could be better exploited from Moose Fort because of easier access through the Moose River basin. As a result, future inland initiatives from Albany were to be directed along the main branch of the Albany River.

In the spring of 1777, Hutchins sent John Kipling and David Sanderson, with an Indian woman as a guide, to proceed inland and establish a trading settlement on the Albany River beyond Henley House. The expedition was faced with many hardships, being the first attempt by the Company to navigate beyond Henley with fully laden boats. They managed to haul their heavy boats past the first set of rapids and, with further difficulty, proceeded until they reached Upashewa Lake, which was roughly one hundred and twenty-five miles upriver from Henley (Fig. 9). There they built a temporary post on the south shore of the lake at about the middle of its length, and named it Gloucester House in honour of the brother of George III, King of England. It was an

important occasion for it signified Albany's first step out of the lowlands and into the fur forest of the shield. In so doing, Kipling and Sanderson had managed to navigate beyond the line of contact at Martin's Fall and had established a foothold, however precarious it might have been, in the Central Plateau Section of the Canadian Shield.

Several months after Gloucester House had been established, Hutchins sent George Sutherland with an Indian named Captain Caupermertissnewinnekee "to explore the country above Gloucester House and endeavour to bring down Indians to trade next year"<sup>37</sup>. Earlier that year, Sutherland had made an excursion north of the fort to the River Equane (Ekwan River) which had prepared him somewhat for the rigours of inland travel. The objectives of his expedition beyond Gloucester House were simply to proceed as far inland as possible, and to induce any Indians that he might find to return with him the following year to trade their furs at Albany.

Sutherland set out on June 20, 1777 and, after passing Gloucester House came to Lake Memenescua sacaheggan (Miminiska Lake) where he met an Englishman who, upon further investigation, was found to be a servant of a Mr. Bartie who had a post about ninety miles to the southwest on Pashkokogan Lake. Sutherland was also told that there were no other trading houses between Lake Memenescua and Lake Superior, and that Lake St. Anns (Lake Nipigon) was about one hundred and fifty miles to the southward.

After travelling an estimated seven hundred miles, Sutherland was informed by Indians that "there was formerly a great many Indians in

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Hutchins, "Albany Fort Journal, 1777-78", B.3/a/71, fo. 23d.



Albany River but destroyed being always at ware with one another."<sup>38</sup>

This situation, added to the influence of the pedlars' generous presents of brandy and other European goods, had serious repercussions for the Albany trade. In October, Sutherland met with Isaac Batt, a deserter from the Company's service, and at that time in the employ of a French pedlar. Batt was described as intent upon dissuading the Indians from going to the Company's settlements.

Sutherland finally reached Lake Winnipeg on November 23, 1777 (Fig. 9). An Indian there informed him of some of the directions and distances to the Company's bayside settlements. The accuracy of his observations indicated a wide geographic knowledge and implied a high degree of mobility.

. . . upon enquiry he told me that at hard paddling in the summer could get to Cumberland House in 5 days to York Fort in 13 days to Severn in 12 days and to Albany in 21 days and that Cumberland House bore about WNW, York Fort NEE, Severn ENE, and Albany E southerly, and the Indians that are always going down them rivers can give one a very near idea of both distances and bearings.<sup>39</sup>

During his stay with the Indians in the East Winnipeg Country, Sutherland did not meet with any Canadian traders. He did learn, however, that two Canadian houses had been built that fall about one hundred and twenty miles to the southward. Sutherland's camp was situated on a lake called Pashe pick a haggan, which was probably somewhere along the Berens River. The Canadians were said to be at a lake called

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., fo. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., fo. 20d.

Nashe pick a haggan, and the distance of one hundred and twenty miles to the southward would likely place them in the vicinity of the inflow of the Winnipeg River. This would have been a logical place for Canadian settlements since it was located on the main transport route to the Great North. The Indians who camped along the east coast of Lake Winnipeg were in the habit of going to the river mouths to trade with the Canadians who passed through the lake in the fall on their way to their winter trading posts, and on their return in the spring to the Grand Portage. This practice was much the same as Tomison had witnessed ten years earlier.

The trip to Albany by canoe was an extremely demanding journey of over eight hundred miles, and few Indians could be convinced to accompany Sutherland to the Bayside when European goods could be had at their own doorstep. Although Sutherland arrived back at Albany Fort in the summer of 1778 with five canoes of upland Indians well laden with furs, his mission was largely a failure, since the majority of the Indians had refused to come to Albany and instead traded their furs with the Canadians along the coast of Lake Winnipeg.

During the summer of 1779, the French trader Germain Maugenest, his assistant Thomas Coates, seven Canadians, and three Indian guides arrived at Albany Fort. Hutchins was informed that Maugenest had deserted his trading post on Sturgeon Lake and had brought his men and furs to Albany with the prospects of engaging in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. He had left the service of his employer, Ezekiel Solomon, complaining of ill usage, and expressed a desire to help the Company regain control of the fur trade in Albany's hinterland.

Hutchins was wary of the Frenchman's motives and refused to engage him

or his men. Instead he directed Maugenest to take his proposals to London while his men were ordered to return to Sturgeon Lake and await Maugenest's return next season.

To take advantage of this unexpected opportunity, Hutchins ordered George Sutherland to accompany Coates and the rest of Maugenest's men on their return to Sturgeon Lake, "to find out the Track and observe their manner of Travelling". George Sutherland's experience in travelling inland and living among the Indians had obviously established him as Albany's most qualified servant to evaluate the chances of establishing inland trading settlements. Hutchins informed Sutherland that he was to travel with the Canadians but, upon his arrival at Sturgeon Lake, was to winter with an Indian family that had earlier promised this favour to Hutchins. It was an ideal opportunity for Hutchins to obtain intelligence concerning the Canadian trading activities, and also to check the validity of Maugenest's story.

Sutherland's journal of occurrences<sup>40</sup> at Sturgeon Lake during that season provides one of the most provocative and detailed accounts of the beginnings of Albany's fur trade inland. It is of interest not only for the light it sheds on the early Canadian fur trade in the Little North, but also for its gripping account of human suffering and endurance in the harsh environment of the Canadian Shield. It reveals Sutherland as an unswervingly loyal employee, and also as a sensitive, intelligent man given to commenting upon a diversity of topics ranging from French Canadian table manners to Indian legends.

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<sup>40</sup> George Sutherland, "A Journal of the most remarkable Transactions and Occurrences Inland with Pedlars from 26th July 1779 to 31st May 1780", B.211/a/1.

Sutherland's first impressions of his French Canadian competitors was not flattering.

. . . it takes no less than 4 french men to track this canoe and I am shour two of our men would be able to do it this convinces me of the truth of the common fraze that one English are always able for two french.

. . . never did I see such a parcel of lazey fellows as these french men are, and they are fit to eat the divel and smoak his mother, for they must stop and smoak and eat at every miles end.<sup>41</sup>

As the journey progressed, he became less critical of them and began to understand their expertise in handling canoes and travelling through the country.

. . . if the french was lazy in tracking I find them very clever in the falls they understand the management of canoes in falls very well and carry very heavy loads.<sup>42</sup>

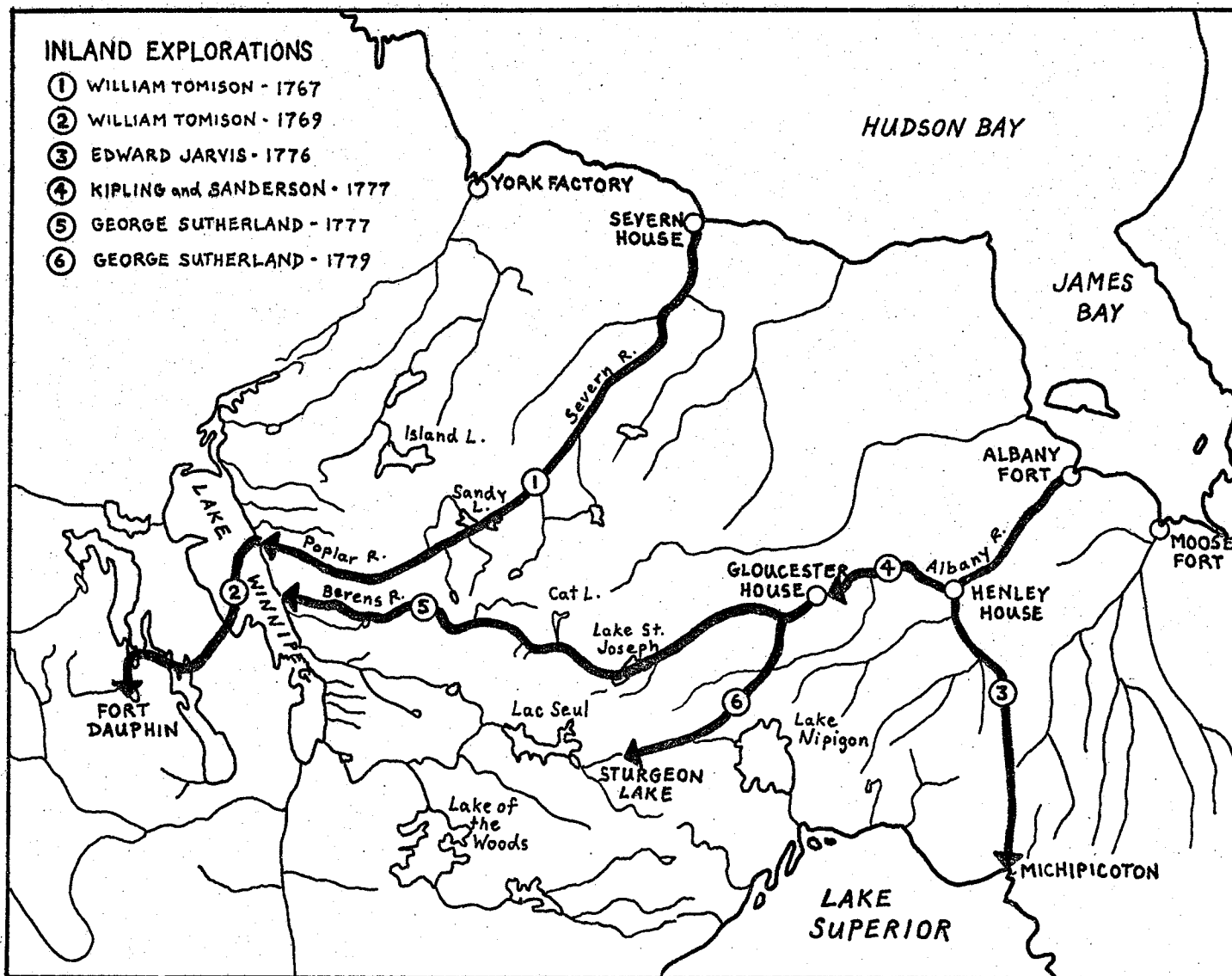
Shortly after passing Gloucester House, they came to Eabemit Lake (Eabemet Lake) and Sutherland noted that a French trader had wintered there about seventeen or eighteen years ago (c. 1761). At that point, the party departed from the Albany River track that Sutherland had followed to Lake Winnipeg in 1777 and turned southwest toward Sturgeon Lake (Fig. 9). On September 10, they reached the Wapinonick saca hegan, or the White Earth Lake (White Clay Lake), and Sutherland was informed that they were now on the Okeke River (Ogoki River) which was said to fall into the Albany River a long way above Henley House. He was also told that there was a "french house" settled a little below

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., fo. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Loc. cit.

Figure 9: Early Hudson's Bay Company Explorations in the Little North.



the White Lake (or Whitewater Lake). Farther upriver, at a waterfall, Sutherland remarked that they were near the pedlars' road leading to the house at Pashkokogan Lake where Bartie had previously wintered. This reference places them at the foot of present Kenoji Lake. On September 14, they entered a lake called Wabakama sacaheggan (Wabakami Lake) and from there turned southwest on present Flindt River. Sutherland described the area of the central plateau through which he was travelling at this time as follows:

. . . the country for most part nothing but barron high rocky ground with a few burnd woods river broad and very little currant a man would be puzzled to find Earth enough to sew a quart of pease in twenty miles distance. I have travelled upwards of a thousand miles in the country before now but never did I see anything like this.<sup>43</sup>

This desolate upland terrain of little soil, barren rocks and of burnt trees continued unabated and, as they neared the large lake called nameu saca heggan, or Sturgeon Lake, Sutherland began to feel uneasy about his winter prospects. His suspicions were confirmed when the Indian with whom he was to pass the winter refused to take him in because:

. . . he had a large family and his country was very poor and the Indians always starved here abouts he likewise said that all the Indians here about would not be able to maintain one man among them all winter ho, lo, where the divel have I got to now . . .<sup>44</sup>

Sutherland had no choice other than to winter with Coates and his

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., fo. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., fo. 13.

men. He soon learned that there were other pedlars building at the opposite end of the lake. The house that Maugenest's men had begun to build had been burned to the ground by these men when they learned that Maugenest had deserted to the Hudson's Bay Company. The man in charge of these pedlars was James Clark and, in general, he treated Sutherland hospitably. During one of Sutherland's conversations with Clark, however, he was made aware of Clark's lack of respect for the Hudson's Bay Company's charter:

. . . it is not in your Company's pour to hinder us because this part of the country belonged to Canada since Canada was Canada.<sup>45</sup>

Clark continued the conversation, adding that he was only an employee of other people and that it was his employers' wish to "get within one hundred miles of Hudson's Bay which I make no doubt but what we will in a few years." He further noted that, "we would not only get more furr's but of a better kind we sadly want our packs composed of your Hudsons Bay guinea martins."<sup>46</sup>

In his conversations with the pedlars, Sutherland was able to ascertain the relative numbers and locations of the other Canadian traders in the region. There were two canoes at Oker Lake (Red Lake), two at Eagle Lake (probably the Eagle Lake northeast of Lake of the Woods), two below the White Lake (Whitewater Lake), two at Animapeg, or what the Hudson's Bay Company called St. Anns (Lake Nipigon), two at the Pike (Pic), two at the Tikameg Lake (a lake between Lake Nipigon

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., fo. 19d.

<sup>46</sup> Loc. cit.

and Henley House), two at Mishipicottow (Michipicoton), one at the Dog Lake (seventy miles south of Sturgeon Lake), two houses at a lake called Lake Lapluie (Rainy Lake), one house at a lake called Lake debois (Lake of the Woods), one house at a lake called Pashcocoggan (Pashkokogan Lake), and the house on Sturgeon Lake where Clark and his eight men were settled (Fig. 10). The Albany officers had feared that there was an increasing number of Canadian traders settled among their upland Indians, but now George Sutherland had solid supporting evidence:

. . . here are no less than 17 houses that they have got to the Eastward of Lake Winnipeg and to the northward of Lake Superior just about Albany River it is no wonder that the trade is fallen of late at Albany and who can raise it one may strive till Eternity, give them presents and indulge them as much as he chuses and never be a bit better for it . . . the pedlars are in every hole and corner where there are any Indians to be found . . . besides as far as I can learn the pedlars give away more to the Indians then what we doo when we give them the most.<sup>47</sup>

Sutherland observed that the Indians of the Sturgeon Lake area were quite content to stay near their winter hunting grounds and trade with the Canadians. An Indian Chief confided, "we know very well that your cloth is better then that the french are but then when my coat is wore out the french will give me another if I am not able to buy one and that is more then you would doo if you was in my country."<sup>48</sup>

After questioning Clark about the economic organization of the Canadian fur trade, Sutherland learned that most of the trade was carried on by companies or partnerships and, that the "country to the

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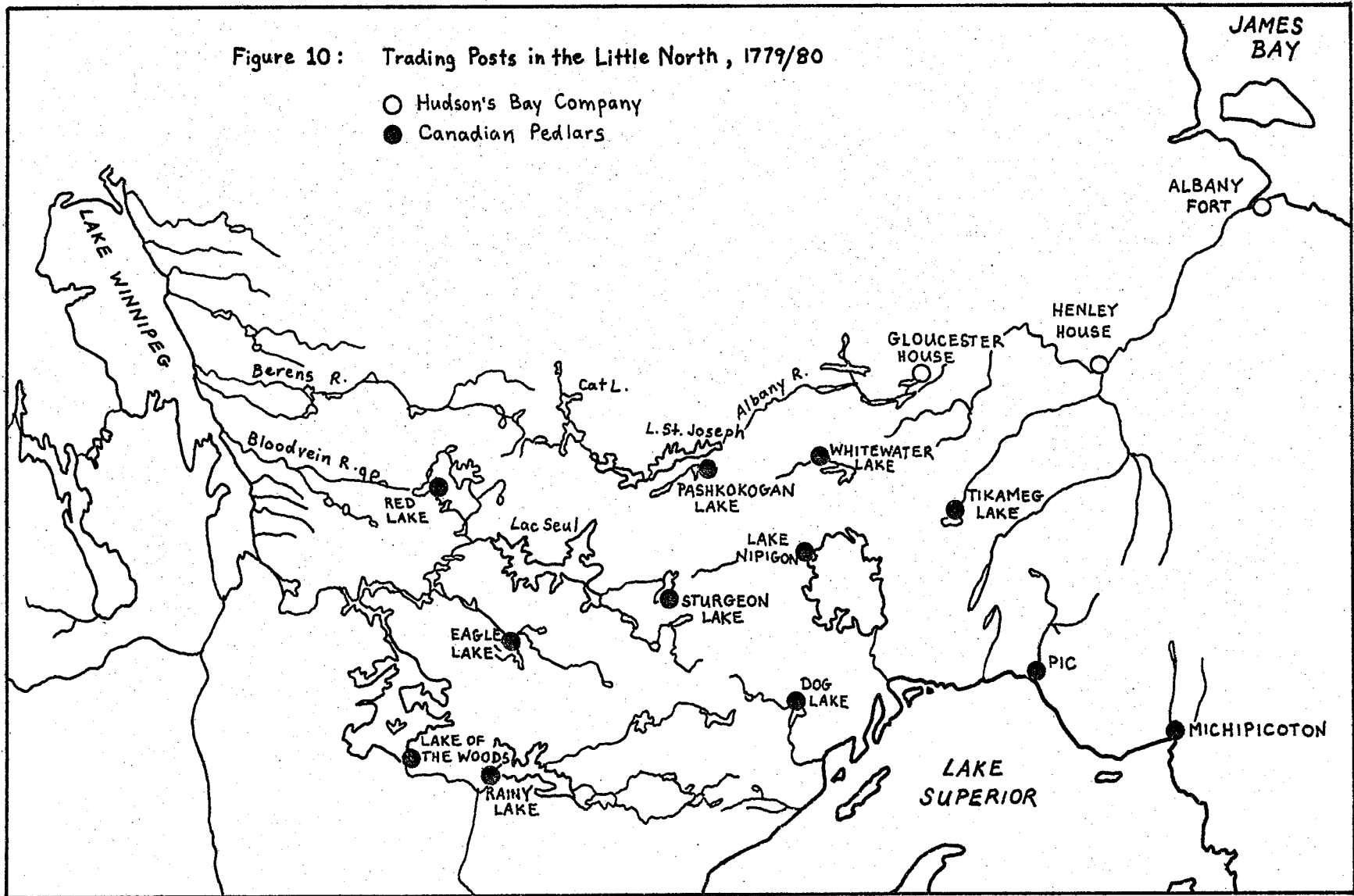
<sup>46</sup> Ibid., fo. 16d.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., fo. 23d.



Figure 10: Trading Posts in the Little North, 1779/80

- Hudson's Bay Company
- Canadian Pedlars



northward of Lake Superior is poisoned with them for it is impossible for a man to travel 150 miles any course without finding a pedlars house."<sup>49</sup> Their route to the Little North was through Lake Nipigon and, from there, they followed different "roads" to their respective houses. Ezekiel Solomon, whom Sutherland debased as an "illiterate Jew", was described as the man in charge of the fur trade in the Little North. Clark himself was one of Solomon's employees, as had been the deserter Maugenest. Shaw (Alexander Shaw), who was wintering that year at Oker Lake, was termed "Solomon's serjent". The register of engagées at Montreal for the Northwest fur trade in 1779<sup>50</sup> and the early 1780's verify Clark's statements. Ezekiel Solomon was the leading employer during these years and, although he operated posts elsewhere, the bulk of his engagées were sent to winter in the Postes du Nipigon.

Having had the opportunity to view Clark's trading goods, Sutherland assessed the Hudson's Bay Company's wares as being as good or better. During the trading season, he was also able to calculate the Canadian standard of trade in terms of the Company's made beaver standard. This is shown below, along with the Hudson's Bay Company's standard at Albany Fort for the same season.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., fo. 25d.

<sup>50</sup> "Répertoire des Engagements pour L'Ouest Conservés dans les Archives Judiciaires de Montréal, 1778-1788", Rapport de L'Archiviste de la Province de Quebec pour 1946-47, pp. 299-370. The following is an excerpt from a biographical sketch of Solomon: "Ezekiel Solomons, a Jewish trader who was captured by the Indians at Michilimackinac in 1763, and was afterwards taken by the Ottawa Indians to Montreal and ransomed, and many of whose half-breed descendants settled, first at Drummond Island, in Lake Huron, and afterwards at Penetanguishine, Upper Canada. Ezekiel Solomons was, according to his grandson, a native of Berlin, Germany." W.S. Wallace (ed.), The Macmillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography, 4th edition, 1978, p. 785.

Canadian Standard		Hudson's Bay Company Standard	
1 otter	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>	1 otter	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>
1 cat (lynx)	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>	1 cat	= 2 MB <sup>r</sup>
2 marten	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>	2 marten	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>
2 mink	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>	4 mink	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>
1 wolverine	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>	1 wolverine	= 2 MB <sup>r</sup>
1 wejack (fisher)	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>	1 wejack	= 1 MB <sup>r</sup>

The only main difference in the two standards of trade involved the value of cat, or lynx, pelts. Beaver, marten, otter, and lynx pelts were the main species in the trade of the Little North at this time, making up about ninety percent of the total. Since the Indians could get more for their lynx pelts from the Hudson's Bay Company, the Canadians encouraged their Indians to trade lynx for otter pelts with the Hudson's Bay Company's Indians, and thereby profited from the higher market value for otter pelts. They had also realized that they could profit by maintaining a flexible standard of trade and thereby take advantage of the more rigid standards of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Hudson's Bay Company's standards reflected many years of trading with Indians at a relatively fixed standard which became increasingly more difficult to change.

Although Ezekiel Solomon controlled much of the Canadian fur trade in the Little North, there were also a number of independent traders who competed with the Solomon concerns. Sutherland noted that competition between Canadian traders drove up the price of furs considerably as each trader lowered his standard and gave out more presents of liquor and tobacco than usual. Sutherland marvelled at their ability to sell goods cheaper than the Hudson's Bay Company, even though the Canadians had to travel more than 1,500 miles to their inland posts.

Sutherland wrote:

if one of the Company's servants was to come here and trade and give away at this rate he would look very foolish when he went to make his accounts up.<sup>51</sup>

Sutherland also learned details of the wages of the Canadian traders. Clerks, such as Clark, were paid between two and three thousand livres per annum, and sometimes they had a fifth share of the adventures over which they presided. The clerks were also provided with every necessary, and had no occasion to spend any part of their wages while in the country. The common men's wages ranged from 1,000 to 1,500 livres, and while at first this appeared extravagant to Sutherland, he learned later that the men sometimes spent their whole year's wages or more on items such as food, liquor, and clothing during the winter trading season. This situation had provoked some of the men to abandon the service of their employers and live among the Indians. Sutherland remarked upon this practice as follows:

. . . I am creditably informed numbers of poor wretches lost after this manner in the great north and become greater rascals in a short time than the worst savages, . . . teaching the savages the vices of white people.<sup>52</sup>

Sutherland quickly realized that Maugenest had exaggerated his ability to control the fur trade of the Little North for the Hudson's Bay Company. The fact of the matter, according to Clark, was that Maugenest was in debt to Solomon for 30,000 livres and had simply deserted to

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., fo. 28d.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., fo. 30.

avoid payment.

In the light of what he had learned, Sutherland concluded that the Hudson's Bay Company's chances of settling the Little North were dismal.

it is impossible even if the Company had twenty settlements in this part of the country the pedlars would have their share of the trade.<sup>53</sup>

The major restraining factor was the lack of suitable men at Albany to conduct the trade. Maugenest had suggested that the Company send out three clerks, but Sutherland warned that the tasks of Canadian clerks differed from those of the Hudson's Bay Company's trading masters. The former were not required to write journals or accounts, but they had to be proficient in communicating and trading with Indians. Sutherland claimed that there was no one at the Albany establishment capable of performing these duties. In an amusing analogy, Sutherland remarked that it would be better to send out forty good fat hogs than men and goods because surely the men would perish, but the hogs could be used for next year's pork indent. Another major difficulty, according to Sutherland, was that the language spoken by the Sturgeon Lake Indians was different from that of the James Bay or Albany Fort Indians. This suggests that, by 1779, the Ojibwa had penetrated at least as far as the Sturgeon Lake area, and were easily distinguished linguistically from the Cree residing in the James Bay Lowlands and on the margins of the shield uplands.

Sutherland also believed that Albany's inland plans would be

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<sup>53</sup> Loc. cit.

rendered futile by the lack of suitable canoes to convey men and goods through the rugged upland shield country. The route from Albany Fort to Sturgeon Lake was a long and difficult one, with numerous rapids and falls over which they would be forced to portage. The proposed inland settlements would require large canoes of the type used by the Canadians and procured from the Indians at Michilimackinac. The Indians of the Sturgeon Lake area were unable to make large canoes because the region lacked suitable building materials. Even if large canoes might become available to the Company, Sutherland doubted that the men at Albany could be able to use them: ". . . such men as these are incapable of working large canoes as I am to be Bishop in the Church of Rome."<sup>54</sup> In addition, the Albany men lacked the necessary wilderness skills of hunting and fishing, which were essential for surviving in the Little North. He contrasted the situation in the Little North with that at Cumberland House, where the Indians assisted in the canoes and also supplied the York men with provisions throughout the year. At Sturgeon Lake, the Indians did not help in transporting the canoes, and they certainly did not provide the traders with sufficient provisions.

While Clark and his men passed the winter at one end of the lake, Sutherland, Coates and the rest of his men wintered at the other end. Both parties suffered from hunger, and some of the Indians around them died of starvation that winter. Slowly, Sutherland himself weakened as his hunger and the cold increased. Over the course of the winter, he and his party were obliged to eat their shoes, mittens, and even their snowshoe strings. During the month of March, Sutherland became

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., fo. 32.

extremely ill and, by April, realized that he could not move because of a sharp pain in his left side. He feared that he would die at Sturgeon Lake, but was saved from that fate by several Indian women who carried him to Gloucester House in their canoes after the spring break-up.

Sutherland concluded his journal by emphasizing the poor prospects of inland trading posts in the Sturgeon Lake area and, indeed, the rest of the Little North. Maugenest was revealed as a traitor to his Canadian employer, Solomon, and Sutherland accused him of concealing the truth in order to get a safe passage aboard the Company's ship to Europe. Coates, who was supposed to have remained at Sturgeon Lake positively refused, and set off for the Canadas with two of the men. Three of Maugenest's men died during the winter and the rest engaged with James Clark. As for Sutherland, he would not return to Sturgeon Lake, "not for the King of England place for the rest of my life".<sup>55</sup>

##### 5. Ezekiel Solomon: Master Pedlar of the Little North, 1780-1784

While George Sutherland was experiencing his bleak winter of 1779-80 at Sturgeon Lake, Germain Maugenest was meeting with the Hudson's Bay Company in London. Despite Sutherland's negative assessment of Albany's ability to establish and maintain inland trading posts, Maugenest was able to convince the Company to support his plans which embraced many specific proposals from first-hand experience about how the inland trade should be conducted. These suggestions, ranged from the adoption of certain trading articles, such as pointed, or striped, blankets and copper kettles with lids, to the manner of packing goods into canoes and

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., fo. 43.

boats in order to conserve space and prevent spoilage. Perhaps most importantly, he advocated the use of shallow, flat-bottomed batteaux for inland service. This suggestion was designed to solve the age-old problem at Albany of procuring large canoes, and although Maugenest appears to have had no experience with craft of this nature, his views coincided with the Company's approach to inland navigation from the Bottom of the Bay. With the confidence of his new employers, the Canadian Maugenest returned to the Bay in the summer of 1780 as Albany's first inland factor.

Upon his arrival at Albany, Maugenest learned of the unfortunate occurrences at Sturgeon Lake the previous winter in which his men had either perished or deserted. He also learned that his orders to procure ten large canoes had not been carried out and that his trading post had been destroyed. Thus, his plans for trading inland from Albany immediately suffered a setback, and Maugenest was forced to spend the winter of 1780-81 at Albany Fort. Fortunately, he had brought a batteau with him from London, and orders were given to the men at Henley and Gloucester to construct similar craft for the inland venture. Maugenest was also given the pick of the Albany men to assist him on his journey inland in the spring. The question of where to establish his inland trading post appeared to trouble Maugenest. Earlier, he had informed Hutchins that the Sturgeon Lake area was a plentiful country, but Sutherland's experience had proven that statement to be quite an exaggeration. Kipling at Gloucester had also reported that the Sturgeon Lake area, "from what I can hear from the natives it is a barren country of provisions."<sup>56</sup> By March, Maugenest had made up his mind not to return to

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<sup>56</sup> John Kipling, "Letter to Thomas Hutchins, Nov. 4, 1780", B.3/b/18, fo. 7.



Sturgeon Lake, and requested that Indian guides be obtained at Gloucester to direct him to "Paskoggan, St. Anns or the Carp Lake".<sup>57</sup>

News of Maugenest's intended journey spread rapidly beyond Gloucester House and, shortly before he set off from Albany, Indians brought word that, "Ezekiel Solomon (who is master of all the Trading Houses in this part of the Country) is at Packokagan."<sup>58</sup> By June, the Indians reported threatening news from Solomon:

Solomon Moses [Ezekiel Solomon] has made an establishment at Pashcocoggan and waits for Mr. Maugenest's arrival to take the trading goods away in lieu of a debt due to him from Mr. Maugenest.<sup>59</sup>

Solomon obviously knew the geography of the Little North, since his trading post at Pashkokogan Lake was right in the track that any inland movement along the Albany River beyond Gloucester would have to follow. This master pedlar of the Little North, however, very likely had larger designs in mind at this time than personal vengeance when he settled at Pashkokogan. He must have been concerned about the possible impact of Albany's proposed inland posts upon his previously secure trade with the Indians of the region. His personal appearance at Pashkokogan reflected this concern and, at the same time, demonstrated his determination to keep the Albany men pinned down along the margins of the Hudson Bay lowlands.

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas Hutchins, "Letter to John Kipling, March 5, 1781", B.3/b/18, fo. 18d.

<sup>58</sup> John Kipling, "Gloucester House Journal, 1780-81", B.78/a/6, fo. 17.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Hutchins, "Albany Fort Journal, 1780-81", B.3/a/78, fo. 26.

Despite Solomon's threats, the inland expedition proceeded in the spring with Maugenest at the helm of the new batteaux and in charge of the twelve men chosen from Albany. From the outset, the expedition was plagued with dissension. George Sutherland's misfortunes at Sturgeon Lake had instilled a fear of living inland among the Albany men and they refused to assist Maugenest unless they were given eight months provisions at the outset of the journey. Three of the men refused to go beyond Henley House, while there were signs that the predominantly Orkney servants had little respect for their French inland factor. The journey was slow and hazardous and one batteau was damaged and the entire load lost on the way to Gloucester House. When the party finally reached Gloucester, a distressed Maugenest proclaimed, "I can't go inland with them for they don't understand this work at all."<sup>60</sup> Maugenest also concluded that he would be unable to take the batteaux any farther. He wrote to Hutchins, explaining:

I am partly convinced from self experience as well as by the information of every Indian who knows the Country that Batteaux or any wooden craft will never get to Lake Pishkocoggan the River being nothing but rocks & shoals for about half the way to a lake called Me, men, esca [Miminiska Lake].<sup>61</sup>

Maugenest spent the winter of 1781-82 at Gloucester House. He obviously knew that Solomon was lying in wait for him at Pashkokogan and had no desire to push further inland. Moreover, there was little prospect for trade in that direction for, as the Indians who visited

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<sup>60</sup> Germain Maugenest, "Letter to Thomas Hutchins, July 21, 1781", B.3/b/18, fo. 41d.

<sup>61</sup> Germain Maugenest, "Letter to Thomas Hutchins, May 5, 1781", B.3/b/19, fo. 34.

Gloucester informed Kipling:

. . . Mr. Solomon the Jew is expected this fall with a great many men inland that he left 4 men with goods at one of his Houses inland and that they and Mr. Solomon himself gives 2 Beaver for every Beaver skin in order to break Mr. Maugenest Trade as he has heard of his coming inland.<sup>62</sup>

The following spring Hutchins directed Maugenest to make every effort to reach Pashkokogan Lake. From Indian information, Hutchins had learned that Solomon had "carried above 40 packs of furs from thence last year".<sup>63</sup> Hutchins' orders were not heeded, however, and Maugenest again wintered at Gloucester.

In 1783, Hutchins was replaced by Edward Jarvis who pursued a more aggressive inland policy. Jarvis immediately recalled Maugenest and dispatched him to Moose Fort, where he remained until his service with the Company ended.<sup>64</sup> Maugenest's reluctance to extend Albany's inland trade beyond Gloucester had infuriated the newly appointed Albany Chief, especially as numerous reports from Indians living in the uplands beyond Gloucester indicated that the Canadians, mainly under Solomon's direction, were pushing farther west and that their numbers had increased so rapidly that the Indians ". . . says that they have so many Traders among them they know not which to pleas them or us."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> John Kipling, "Gloucester House Journal, 1781-82", B.78/a/7, fo. 5d.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Hutchins, "Letter to Germain Maugenest, March 26, 1782", B.3/b/19, fo. 27.

<sup>64</sup> Maugenest remained at Moose for a number of years and became an active inland trader in that region.

<sup>65</sup> John Kipling, "Gloucester House Journal, 1782-83", B.78/a/7, fo. 21d.

Jarvis' first move was to establish a permanent boat brigade between Albany and Martin's Fall. He appointed David Sanderson "patroon of the inland craft", to undertake this task. Sanderson was described as "ye fittest man to conduct the craft up ye falls, as he is more experienced and faithfuller than many".<sup>66</sup> In 1784, Sanderson built a log tent at Martin's Fall, which was the beginning of a permanent settlement at that spot. Jarvis reasoned that an effective supply link was the first step in "extending and enlarging the Company's trade".<sup>67</sup> Once this had been done, he envisioned a chain of settlements through the "Indian Country" which would extend the Company's influence and increase the trade for Albany.

Jarvis' inland plans were delayed, however, by a fire which levelled Henley House during the winter of 1783-84. Four years had passed since George Sutherland's journey to Sturgeon Lake, and still the men at Albany had failed to proceed beyond Gloucester. The following spring, however, Jarvis appointed James Sutherland the assistant trader at Gloucester, to conduct explorations into the interior uplands. Of special interest to Jarvis was the Lake Nipigon area, and his orders to Sutherland reflect this concern:

. . . explain the country from Gloster to Lake St. Ann or called Animepick or sometimes Almepegan . . . the above Lake has been long an object recommended to our attention by the Honourable Company, and by what we can learn has a direct communication with Lake Superior is much resorted to by Indians who are

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<sup>66</sup> John Kipling, "Letter to Edward Jarvis", B.3/b/20, fo. 11d.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Letter to John Kipling", B.78/a/9, fo. 10.

out of the immediate Track of Gloster.<sup>68</sup>

The country beyond Gloucester was still virtually unknown to the Albany men. Despite George Sutherland's earlier inland experiences and Maugenest's residence at Gloucester, Jarvis had acquired little knowledge of its geography. Kipling's experience at the forefront of Albany's inland operations at Gloucester, however, had enabled him to gain a better understanding of the interior, and he wrote to Jarvis advising:

. . . I shall send James Sutherland inland as Early in summer as I can, to Explore the country, but I am of opinion that our main object should be to survey the road between Gloustr and Piskoggogan Lake as that is the rout of all the Indians . . . The making a settlement on St. Anns according to indian report is not practicable from Gloustr.<sup>69</sup>

Kipling's advice was heeded, and James Sutherland set off from Gloucester on May 20, 1784, accompanied by Thomas Richards and two Indians. As they proceeded up the Albany River toward Pashkokogan Lake, Sutherland remarked that the remains of an old French House stood at the "river which leads to Eabemit Lake".<sup>70</sup> After nine days' travel by canoe, they reached "Piskocoggan Lake" (Fig. 11). Sutherland soon located the Canadian trading post on the lake, but found it deserted

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<sup>68</sup> John Kipling, "Gloucester House Journal, 1783-84", B.78/a/9, fo.10.

<sup>69</sup> John Kipling, "Letter to Edward Jarvis", B.78/a/9, fo. 13.

<sup>70</sup> James Sutherland, "Gloucester House Journal, 1784", B.78/a/11, fo. 3d. This house would have been situated at the junction with present Eabamet River. It is impossible to determine whether this house was of French or Canadian origin.

except for one man who had been left to pass the summer. The rest of the men had left two days previously for Lake Superior with their trade of fifteen bundles of furs. Sutherland described the Canadian house as a "Hogstie". The man who had been left in charge could speak no English and Sutherland no French, so that they had to communicate using the Indian language.

From the Canadian, Sutherland learned that there was another house settled on Crow Nest Lake (Springpole Lake)<sup>71</sup> which was estimated to be about five days' travel beyond Pashkokogan. Two canoes with seven men had wintered on that lake and had procured roughly 2,000 made beaver in furs. The only other trading establishment that the Canadian disclosed was on Lake Nipigon, which usually procured 1,200 to 1,600 made beaver. Sutherland also learned that Ezekiel Solomon was very ill, apparently poisoned by Indians, and residing at Michillimackinac. With Solomon out of the picture, Sutherland remarked that the remaining traders were "men of no circumstance"<sup>72</sup>.

While he was surveying Pashkokogan Lake, Sutherland met an independent trader, or, "a man for himself".<sup>73</sup> This man had been in the country for fifteen years and was observed to be as "frightened of an Englishman as he is of Lucifer"<sup>74</sup>. Sutherland seized this opportunity to procure a map of the "road" to Lake Nipigon, which the experienced

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<sup>71</sup> Identified as present Springpole Lake by interpreting the "Osnaburgh District Report Map, 1816", B.155/e/4.

<sup>72</sup> James Sutherland, "Gloucester House Journal, 1784", B.78/a/11, fo. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>74</sup> Loc. cit.

trader prepared obediently. Lake Nipigon was to be the destination for Sutherland's next journey of exploration.

After returning to Gloucester, the same exploring party turned their course southward toward Lake Nipigon. The Albany men referred to this lake as Lake St. Anns, the Canadians called it Anipegon or Atimipigon, and the Indians knew it as Annimepeggy. Sutherland and his companions reached the lake within a week but it was described as a "very difficult road" and impracticable to navigate from Gloucester with the batteaux (Fig. 11). On their way, they passed the remains of an old "French House"<sup>75</sup> on the shore of "Motchicat Lake" (Mojikit Lake). Paddling along the Ogoki River, Sutherland remarked: ". . . such a fine River I never saw . . . I cannot learn where it leads to without it goes to the Manatie Country."<sup>76</sup> An Indian at Gloucester had told Kipling earlier that the Manatie Country had, "a great number of Indians which go by the name of jeppoys".<sup>77</sup> This Indian also spoke of the bountiful Indian corn<sup>78</sup> that grew in this region, and of the numerous moose that could be found there. The Manatie Indians were said to be very fond of the Company's goods, and their country had no trading post in it. When Sutherland returned to Gloucester, plans had already been made by

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<sup>75</sup> From this description it is impossible to determine whether this post was of French or Canadian origin.

<sup>76</sup> James Sutherland, "Gloucester House Journal, 1784", B.78/a/11, fo. 10d.

<sup>77</sup> John Kipling, "Gloucester House Journal, 1783-84", B.78/a/9, fo. 23d. The word jeppoys likely derives from Ojibwa, indicating that the Indians of the Manatie Country differed from the Cree of the Gloucester area.

<sup>78</sup> Indian corn was often used by the early traders as a synonym for wild rice, which is definitely the case here.

Kipling for an exploration of the "Manatie Country" the following spring. This country which had been so glowingly portrayed by the Indian at Gloucester was later revealed to be the Monontagué, or Upper English River region. The Indian had obviously exaggerated parts of his story, for Canadian posts had already been established in the region. He perhaps did so because he realized that a greater number of competing posts in the Monontagué Country would increase the value of his furs.

Sutherland's inland explorations had given Albany a better picture of the interior country. Pashkokogan Lake had proved to be accessible from Gloucester, and trading prospects there appeared to be good. Access to Lake Nipigon was difficult but Kipling and Sutherland both regarded that lake as a strategic place to counter the Canadian fur trade, for it was the place from which all the pedlars entered the Little North. Kipling wrote:

. . . if your Honors had a House on that lake and 10  
Bold resolute men at it, they would stop any of the  
Traders from coming in to this part of the Country  
for the future.<sup>79</sup>

The plan to blockade the Canadian traders at Lake Nipigon, however, was not approved by the Company for it ran counter to their policy of non-aggression toward the Canadians. The Company's main interest was therefore directed back toward the country along Albany River's upland valley where Pashkokogan Lake lay, and beyond which lay the intriguing Manatie Country.

The Monontagué, however, was a country with which the Canadians

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<sup>79</sup> John Kipling, "Gloucester House Journal, 1783-84", B.78/a/10, fo. 4.



were intimately familiar and which had been their undisturbed domain since the first independent traders had arrived shortly after 1763. Subsequently, the trade of the region had been virtually monopolized by Ezekiel Solomon who, as the Company well knew, had easily blunted their previous attempt to expand beyond Gloucester.

The advent of Ezekiel Solomon to the fur trade of the Little North had begun the centralization of the Montreal fur trade in the region. His consolidation of the trade of the Little North was thus a significant departure from the earlier practices of the British-based fur trade of the St. Lawrence which, from the outset, was developed by a miscellany of small partnerships and enterprising individuals. From bases at Michilimackinac and Lake Nipigon, Solomon was able to develop a trading system that eventually extended northward to the headwaters of the Severn River and westward to the watershed of Lake Winnipeg. Despite the paucity of information, and the fact that a handful of independent traders continued to operate in the region, it is apparent that he was able to develop a network of posts which, by 1784, controlled most of the fur trade of the Little North.

Like the French before him, Solomon was forced to travel the long route from Montreal and Michilimackinac to the wintering grounds in the Little North. His trade, however, was borne on the shoulders of experienced French Canadian voyageurs and was commanded by clerks such as Shaw, Clark, and Maugenest, all of whom were well-versed in the arts of managing voyageurs and of trading with the Indians. In developing this trade, Solomon displayed an aggressive nature that often gained him advantages. His successes earned him the respect but not the sympathies

of his competitors at Michilimackinac.<sup>80</sup>

When, through illness, Solomon was unable to continue the trade of the Postes du Nipigon, there were other forces consolidating on the St. Lawrence that were quick to exploit the vacuum that his departure occasioned. First formed in 1779, the partnership known as the North West Company, was in the process of re-organizing and expanding in 1784 and, in that year, opened its first posts in the region that Solomon had dominated only the year before. This issued in a new phase in the exploitation of the fur resources of the region, but it was one which in many respects was a continuation of the centralized trade that Solomon had so expeditiously and effectively created.

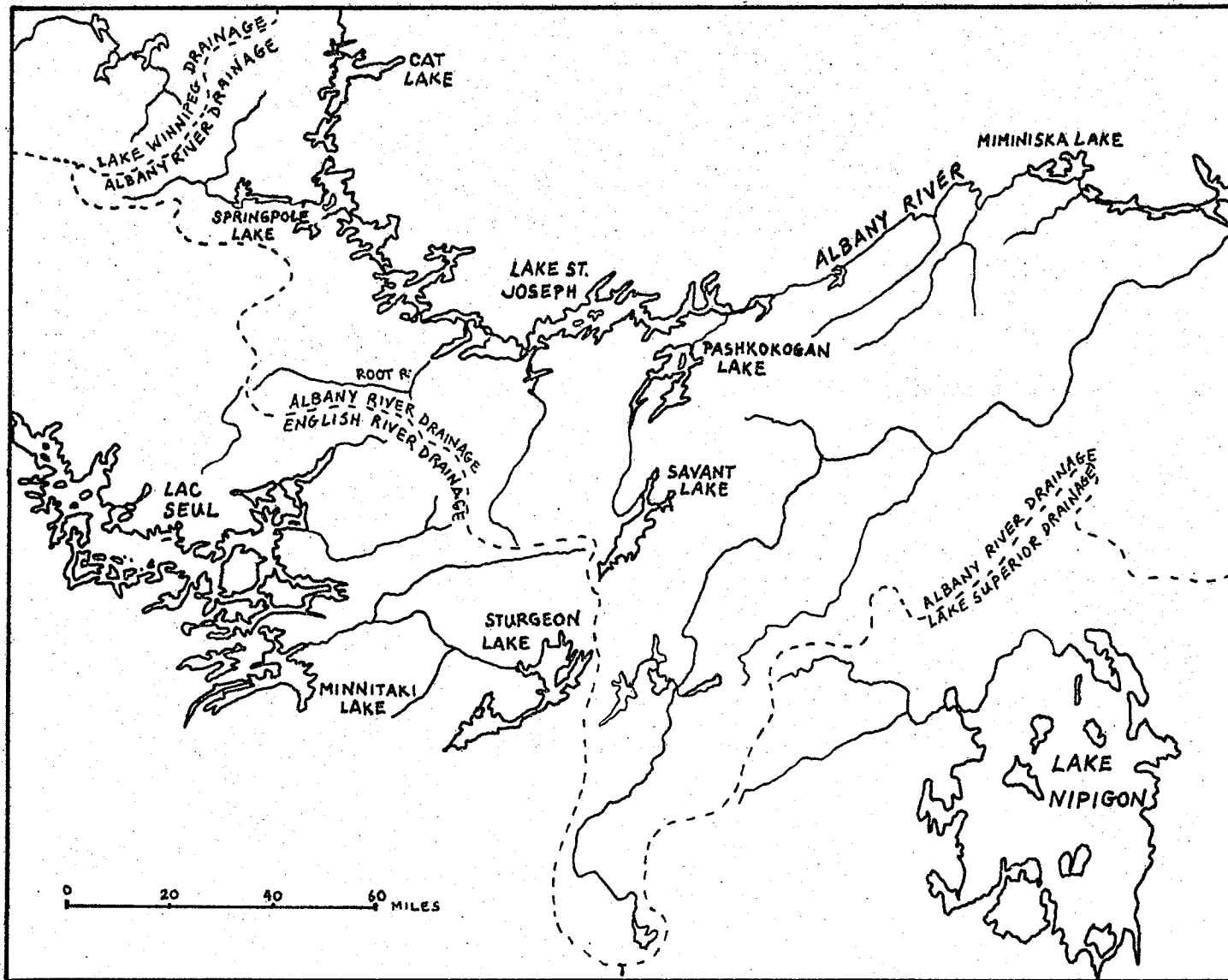
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<sup>80</sup> Some insight into these aspects of Solomon's character can be gleaned from the following excerpt of a letter written by James Bannerman from Michilimackinac, dated July 26, 1776 to William Edgar, a merchant in Detroit.

Never had poor Devil more trouble than I have had with the Jews and their Contract, I had sold the most of the provisions to Capt Depeyster at a very low rate, and am now obliged to buy dear to replace the Quantity sold. Nobody expected Solomon up, and indeed by justice I was not obliged to furnish him any as he was not here himself nor any person for him to receive the Corn and Flour the time agreed on, but two or three Scoundrels on the Jury tird the others out, and I was obliged to give him half the Quantity promised in his first Agreement, I never will for the future be concerned in Contracts of any kind--

in W.S. Wallace (ed.), Documents Relating to the North West Company, 1967, p. 55.

Figure 11: From Lake Nipigon to the Head of Albany River Drainage.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE NORTH WEST COMPANY AND HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY STRUGGLE FOR FURS IN THE LITTLE NORTH, 1784-1791

#### 1. The Beginning of North West Company Trade in the Little North

The demise of Solomon's trading monopoly in the Little North opened the door for North West Company expansion into the region. The reports of his departure also created a stir among the English at Albany. From Gloucester, Kipling learned that many of the Canadian traders had withdrawn from the country above that place, and that only three trading posts were settled above it in 1784, compared with seven in 1777. The news of the withdrawal, however, was soon replaced with reports of new Canadian traders in the Little North. During the summer of 1784, Kipling discovered that six Englishmen were travelling across the country in a large canoe. These newcomers were said to have come through Lake Superior and Nipigon and, after wintering in the fire country<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> The fire country was never a clearly defined area, but the early journals of the Hudson's Bay Company indicate that it referred to the Monontagué region. Kipling wrote in 1785 that, "most of ye Indians in ye fire country having gone to war." [B.3/b/22, fo. 46d]. These Indians were the same ones who were supposed to guide James Sutherland to their Manatie Country. Kipling wrote in the Gloucester House Journal that these Indians had, "joined a war party against the Pot Indians". [B.78/a/12, fo. 19]. The term fire country may have arisen from the increasing frequency of fires that the Company traders experienced on their inland explorations toward the English River basin.

were proceeding towards the Company's maritime settlements. The "chief man", Kipling was informed, possessed a quadrant and was often seen observing the sun. Kipling rightly judged him to be "Mr. Edward Umfravil" (Umfreville) who had been in the service of the Company at York Fort and Severn House and who had lately engaged in the service of the newly organized North West Company.

Umfreville had been sent to Lake Nipigon to explore a canoe route to Lake Winnipeg. The route traditionally taken by the Canadians from Grand Portage had been determined to be in American territory by the 1783 Treaty of Paris, so Umfreville's task was to establish the viability of an alternate route from Lake Nipigon to the continental interior. Although Canadian fur traders for many years had been travelling through the Nipigon Country, it appears that Solomon's control over the trade in the Little North prior to 1784 had been such as to prevent other organizations, including the North West Company, from establishing a foothold in this region. As a result, they had only limited knowledge of the country in question.

Umfreville's journal<sup>2</sup> provides the first written descriptions of the Little North from the perspective of the North West Company. Significantly, he did not observe other Canadian traders in the region at this time. Although his party travelled through the Little North in the summer months when most traders would have been at Grand Portage, Pays Plat, or Michilimackinac, the lack of comment concerning other traders appears to verify the general withdrawal from the region following Solomon's retirement from the fur trade. Shortly thereafter, the North

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<sup>2</sup> R. Douglas (ed.), Nipigon to Winnipeg, A Canoe Voyage Through Western Ontario by Edward Umfreville in 1784, Ottawa, 1929.

West Company created its Nipigon Department, which came to virtually monopolize the Montreal trade in the Little North in the years immediately following Umfreville's journey.

Umfreville's expedition departed from Lake Nipigon where he secured an Indian guide who had remembered seeing him at Severn House. This bespeaks of the remarkable mobility of Indians during the early period, since the distance from Severn House to Lake Nipigon was well over 500 miles by canoe. Once the party had crossed over the height of land, Umfreville observed that they had reached the Rivière de Monataggé (English River). He also recalled that John Long had wintered in this part of the country in 1777-78, and Lac Monataggé (Lake Minnitaki) was described as the location of Shaw's former post. When they reached Lac Seul, their Indian guide informed them that:

. . . all the Indians who trade at Albany Fort, pass by here, that it is no more than three days paddling to Henley house and five to Albany Fort and that Mr. Lyons made 36 packs at his settlement.<sup>3</sup>

Although Umfreville's recommendations on the Nipigon route were favourable, the North West Company eventually opted for the old Kaminitikwia (Fort William) route which was closer to the existing canoe route

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41. There are a number of inaccuracies and inconsistencies in this statement. The estimation of time required to travel to Henley and Albany is extremely low. Evidence from later Hudson's Bay Company journals indicate that the average time to travel from Lac Seul to Albany was actually five times greater than this estimate. It is also unusual that the guide failed to mention Gloucester House which was situated much closer than Henley, and had been in operation for eight years. The reference to Mr. Lyons' settlement is unclear as the location, duration, and affiliation of this trading post were not explained in Umfreville's narrative. It appears that the post was situated somewhere on Lac Seul, and that Douglas (the editor) supposed the trader to be Benjamin Lyons, a merchant who resided in Mackinac in 1778 (p. 9).

from Grand Portage. However, his expedition was a success in the sense that the North West Company learned of the potential of the Little North, and shortly thereafter established a regular trade in the region which lasted until 1821.

2. The Albany Batteaux Track Meets the Pedlar's Path at Lake St. Joseph, 1784-1787

James Sutherland's intended visit to the "Monotaggy", or Manatie Country, in the summer of 1784 was frustrated by the news of the Indians of that country going to war against the "Pot Indians".<sup>4</sup> Jarvis, however, still made plans to settle a trading house beyond Gloucester the following year. John Best was chosen to lead the expedition and was ordered to "erect a settlement at or as near to Pascocoggan Lake as possible"<sup>5</sup>. He was to engage in friendly trade with the Indians and live upon peaceable terms with the Canadians should any be found nearby. By his own "good conduct" and "ye superior quality" of his goods, Best was expected to establish a "greater influence with ye natives".<sup>6</sup>

The men at Albany were extremely reluctant to join Best on this mission. Perhaps the spectre of George Sutherland still haunted them, and Jarvis was finally forced to post an official notice ordering the men not to decline going inland.<sup>7</sup> Eight men were picked to assist Best

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<sup>4</sup> John Kipling, "Gloucester House Journal, 1784-85", B.78/a/12, fo. 19. The term Pot was commonly used to denote members of the Assiniboine tribe.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Letter to John Best, July 20, 1785", B.3/b/22, fo. 48d.

<sup>6</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Albany Fort Journal, 1784-85", B.3/a/87, fo. 3.

and the party departed from Albany in the summer of 1785. They reached Gloucester on August 20, 1785, and then paddled upriver roughly eighty miles until they reached Memenusca Lake (present Miminiska Lake) on September 11. At this point Best found it impossible to proceed farther with the batteaux (an obstacle that Maugenest had earlier outlined) and decided to remain there during the winter. The news of Best's failure to reach Pashkokogan caused Jarvis to write the following in his journal:

I expect in a few years that your honors will find it to your advantage, to branch out again to the rice rivers, and fire country and if your honors were to engage Canadians at the grand Portage perhaps they might be employed to advantage and at less expense, beyond Pascocoggan under your old officers, than your orkney servants who the further they go the more they dislike the service.<sup>8</sup>

Jarvis' remarks recall George Sutherland's conclusions in 1780. Canadians were observed to be better suited to inland travelling and living than were the predominantly Orkney servants of the Company. His reference to the rice rivers and the fire country reveals something of his geographical knowledge of the country into which he hoped to extend the Albany trade. The origin of the term, rice rivers, is unclear but it is likely that it derives from George Sutherland's observations on the east side of Lake Winnipeg in 1777-78. Sutherland was the first man from Albany to mention wild rice:

. . . in this lake there grow a kind of Indian corn or more properly wild rice it grows in the water the grains resemble oats but somewhat longer and smaller

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., fo. 10.



and of greenish cullor . . . there are many Rivers  
and Lakes that contain this Grain.<sup>9</sup>

Since Sutherland's journey, there was also some mention of wild rice in the Gloucester, Henley, and Albany journals. Kipling had been informed in 1784 that the Monontagué region abounded in Indian corn, which was almost certainly a reference to rice, and Best had traded wild rice from Indians during the winter of 1785-86 at Miminiska Lake. The rice rivers, like the fire country, was therefore most likely intended as a general term to identify the land lying beyond Gloucester of which the Company knew little in detail.

News of the Hudson's Bay Company's intentions to settle at Pashkogan saw the Canadian abandon their house there and build one farther west at Crow Nest Lake (Springpole Lake, see Fig. 11). In 1786, Best was informed that Canadians had established another trading post even farther away. The leader of this group was said to be Mr. Shaw and the location of the post was vaguely reported as, ". . . about 200 miles above the Crow nest Lake where he interrupts all the Indians who come down country."<sup>10</sup> Other Indians informed Kipling that, "James Clarke had a house on Skunk head Lake (near Sturgeon Lake)" [present Shikag Lake].<sup>11</sup> These reports clearly indicate that a revitalized Canadian trading

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<sup>9</sup> George Sutherland, "A Journal Kept by George Sutherland Containing the most particular occurrences that happened during his Tenting with the Indians commencing June the 20th 1777 and ending June the 27th 1778", B.3/a/73, fo. 15.

<sup>10</sup> John Kipling, "Gloucester House Journal, 1785-86", B.78/a/13, fo. 24d. This may have been a post of Cat Lake or somewhere near the headwaters of the Severn River, as reports from Severn House seem to collaborate.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., fo. 22.

effort was taking place and signal the beginnings of North West Company trade in this region.

During the summer of 1786, James Sutherland was finally guided by a party of Indians toward the "Manatauggy Country" (see Fig. 12). Once they had crossed the height of land and reached "Lake Saul" (Lac Seul), however, his Indian companions refused to go farther, but said that the Monontagué Country was located along the Swistimetwa River (English River). Sutherland's explorations through Lac Seul took him to the western end of the lake, where he reported a narrow, westward flowing river which was said to join the "Winepegg River running into Hudsons Bay to the Northward of Port Nelson Rivers."<sup>12</sup> Sutherland was the first man from Albany to explore this route, a route which would ultimately lead the Albany traders to the southern inflow of Lake Winnipeg.

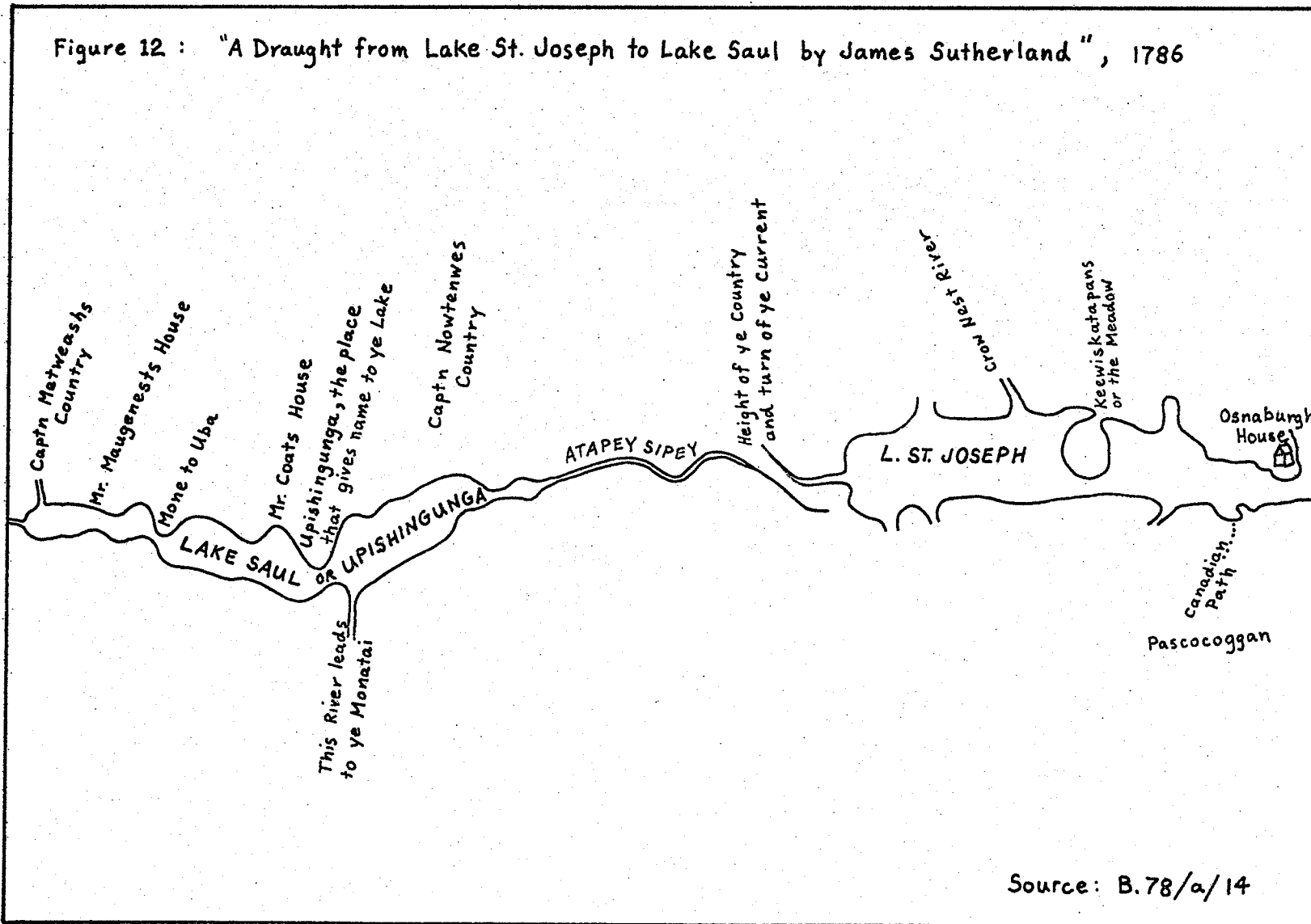
In July Sutherland was afforded further proof of Lac Seul's strategic transport position and its links with Lake Winnipeg. He observed twenty-seven large canoes manned by Montreal traders, probably all Nor' Westers, passing through Lac Seul from "Basquea or the Country about Cumberland House".<sup>13</sup> The Indians residing near the lake informed Sutherland that more than one hundred canoes had already passed through it during the summer. Although the Indians probably exaggerated the volume of traffic, the number of Canadians traversing the region convinced Sutherland that the Company's expansion beyond the confines of the Albany River basin must be into the Lac Seul and Monontagué regions.

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<sup>12</sup> James Sutherland, "A Journal from Gloucester Inland, 1786", B.78/a/15, fo. 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 5d. These remarks suggest that the Nipigon route was heavily used at this time by the North West Company to conduct their traders to the Great North, a situation which has not been noted by previous scholarship.

Figure 12 : "A Draught from Lake St. Joseph to Lake Saul by James Sutherland", 1786



Source: B.78/a/14

Sutherland believed, however, that he was not suitable for the task of expanding Albany's trade, and made some penetrating comments on the kind of men needed to conduct this trade.

. . . I am sorry that roving about with Indians does not agree with my Constitution being always sickly with living on their course filthy diet. It requires a man stout, and healthy who had been brought up in a labourous way, such a person who could without reluctance adopt the Indian manners and customs might do great good by going inland, as the Indians are very fond of an Englishman among them, and would gather to him in the spring to come down with him, but the contrary would be the effect of a man not pleasing the Indians, for should he laugh at their superstitious ways, or advise them to a contrary application of their medicines they would be highly affronted with him, and might be a means of endangering his safety, he must be grave when they are grave, laugh when they laugh, and do as they do, if he wants to please Indians.<sup>14</sup>

The North West Company had several advantages in developing the trade for furs in the Little North. Although the Nor'Westers did not establish themselves in the region until 1785, it is apparent that the men who had managed Solomon's little trading empire, such as Alexander Shaw and James Clark, readily engaged in their service. Besides the advantage of acquiring seasoned officers familiar with the geography of the Little North, the North West Company benefited additionally by employing large numbers of French Canadians possessed of the qualities that Sutherland had described as indispensable to the trade. In contrast, the predominantly Orkney servants from Albany were reluctant to travel inland and knew little of Indian ways. Thus, at the outset, the Nor'Westers' combination of experience and ability gave them a decisive

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., fo. 7.

edge over the Hudson's Bay Company in the struggle for the fur resources of the Little North.

Jarvis, fully aware of the disadvantages under which he laboured, felt that it was nonetheless imperative to explore the interior beyond Gloucester and establish trading posts alongside the Canadians. He believed that living nearer the Canadians would to some extent offset their skills in wilderness trading and living, and improve the morale of his Albany men. Best's expedition to Pashkokogan Lake, which had stalled at Miminiska Lake, was enabled to continue in the spring of 1786. Best had requested during the winter that small batteaux be built to move his men and goods up this twisting, rugged course of the Albany River and, in response to this request, two small batteaux had been sent upriver from Albany as soon as the river had broken.

The journey was a long and uncertain one since Best was unable to procure an Indian guide. Relying totally on directions from James Sutherland, Best and his party proceeded upriver for a hundred miles and, after nearly a month, they finally reached their destination. Sutherland had advised Best to build his house on Miskigogamy Lake (Lake St. Joseph) which was located a little below Pashkokogan. In contrast to Pashkokogan, the former lay on the main Albany track and was believed to be superior for fishing. Best decided to build his house on the north shore of the lake, opposite to the "Canadian path", or the route which the Canadians used to travel through Lake St. Joseph from Pashkokogan to Crow Nest Lake (see Fig. 11). Best was a skilled carpenter, and his trading post was quickly and efficiently built imitating the Canadian style. Best remarked:

. . . we have got a good house built over our heads now it is 40 feet by 22 with 4 angles of a new construction that answers the same end as flankers, and much easier built.<sup>15</sup>

The house was originally called Miscacoggamy House, but soon after its construction the name was permanently changed to Osnaburgh House. It was not, however, the first house on the lake for Best found the remains of two small Canadian posts there, evidence again that the Hudson's Bay Company would have to redouble its efforts if ever they were to steal a march on the pedlars.

Osnaburgh House was situated close to the Interior Upland Section of the shield and Best immediately noted a significantly larger Indian population there.<sup>16</sup> It was also strategically located near the headwaters of the Albany River, and at the junction of the Canadian canoe route from Nipigon to the Albany River. During the fall, several Canadian canoes were seen entering the lake and paddling upriver. Best was able to learn that one Canadian post had been settled on Cat Lake by "John Tupa" and nine men.<sup>17</sup>

Best was given the authority to trade goods at a flexible rate at Osnaburgh. This meant that he could counter the Canadian competition and lower his prices accordingly. The Indians quickly realized the advantage of having that kind of competition for their furs. Edward Clouston, the assistant trader at Osnaburgh, commented upon the Indians'

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<sup>15</sup> John Best, "Letter from Osnaburgh House to Albany Fort, Jan. 22, 1787", B.3/b/24, fo. 17.

<sup>16</sup> John Best, "Osnaburgh House Journal, 1786-87", B.155/a/1, fo. 8.

<sup>17</sup> This was a North West Company post, since Tupa was one of their clerks in the Nipigon Department at this time.

practice of trading at both Osnaburgh and the Canadian posts in the following manner:

. . . the Indians are sensible of the superiority of our goods to the Canadians but they find by experience that by trading part of their Furs and part with the Canadians they make more then if they were to trade all with one.<sup>18</sup>

The trade during the first year was promising, comprising 1,391 made beaver, of which more than half was beaver pelts.<sup>19</sup> Best soon discovered, however, that he had to give as much away in presents to the Indians as he traded for furs. The major item of expense was brandy, which the Indians regularly demanded before the actual trading could begin. Brandy was also given to Indians in exchange for guiding services and for country provisions such as venison and wild rice. Once the Indians were persuaded to trade their furs, they usually preferred to obtain goods of a more practical nature such as blankets and guns.

In the spring several Canadian traders passed through Lake St. Joseph with their winter furs and Tupa stopped briefly at Osnaburgh on his return to Lake Superior. Best estimated the Nor'Wester's trade to be roughly equal to his own, but was surprised to find that Tupa's goods were of a very fine quality. Later, Best also learned that Canadian rum was much preferred by the Indians over the Company's brandy. Thus by 1786, it appears that the increasingly powerful North West Company had demonstrated to the Indians that they could provide trade goods com-

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<sup>18</sup> Edward Clouston, "Letter from Osnaburgh House to Albany Fort, June 11, 1787", B.3/b/24, fo. 40.

<sup>19</sup> Albany Fort Account Book, 1786-87, B.3/d/96.

parable in quality to those of the Hudson's Bay Company, and had eliminated the only advantage that the latter had held in competing for the Indians' furs. No longer would the Albany men be expected to draw the Indians to them by the "superior quality" of their goods. They would have to match the Nor'Westers paddle stroke by paddle stroke in order to remain successful in the fur trade.

### 3. Rival Trading Posts at Cat Lake and Red Lake, 1788-1791

The establishment of Osnaburgh House greatly increased contact between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadians. It also spurred the Canadian traders to expand farther westward and northward to be free of the Hudson's Bay Company now following in their wake. In so doing, they moved deeper into the trading hinterland of Severn House and, to some extent, York Factory. As early as 1777 the Severn House journals identified Canadian traders at Cat Lake:

They [Indians] inform me [Matthew Cocking] that two canoes of Canadian Pedlars wintered at the Cat Lake and which is only three days paddle from here [Severn House].<sup>20</sup>

Although Cat Lake lay at the headwaters of the Albany River, it provided easy access to the Severn basin. Based upon Indian information received at Severn, it is evident that at least one Canadian post was operating on Cat Lake from 1777 onward. In the trading season of 1787-88 John Tupa was once again settled on Cat Lake, and Robert Goodwin, who had taken over from Best as Master of Osnaburgh that season, regarded the

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew Cocking, "Severn House Journal, 1777-78", B.198/a/22, fo. 38.



Cat Lake area as the next logical move inland for the Company. He wrote to Albany informing Jarvis of his desire to send two batteaux to Cat Lake in the fall.

During the summer of 1788, Goodwin took an unusual step for the Company by engaging David Michael, an experienced "Canadian" at Osnaburgh. Michael was actually an American, who had worked in the fur trade of the Little North for a number of years under "John Clarke" (most probably James Clark). Jarvis was pleased with Goodwin's actions and wrote to the Company in London:

. . . [Michael] appears very fit for the Company's service being to all appearances well acquainted with the country in every direction and capable of bearing the greatest hardships.<sup>21</sup>

Hiring Canadians had been much talked about at Albany, but ever since Maugeness's removal in 1784, the trade had been conducted entirely by British personnel. Jarvis hoped that engaging experienced Canadians would better enable him to keep up with the Nor'Westers who were rapidly expanding to the west and north.

The first step beyond Osnaburgh for the Hudson's Bay Company was to Cat Lake at the headwaters of the Albany River. John Best was chosen to lead the expedition and the party set off from Osnaburgh on August 6, 1788. Before they could leave, however, two Indians had to be engaged to guide them, since no one at Osnaburgh knew how to find Cat Lake.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Letter from Albany Fort", B.3/b/25, fo. 57d.

<sup>22</sup> The fact that no one knew the way to Cat Lake is not surprising. The first surveyor to travel through this region, Thomas Fawcett, reported similar difficulties on his journey from Osnaburgh to Cat Lake in 1885: ". . . I reached the place where the route to Cat Lake turns

The party proceeded upriver in one batteaux and two canoes and, after nine days filled with difficult portages, they reached Cat Lake. Once in the lake, Best requested his guides to conduct him to the Nor'Westers' post, beside which he intended to build his own house. However, the post was abandoned and it seems that news of the Albany expedition to Cat Lake deflected the elusive Nor'Westers from the area. Best and his men were thus unopposed that winter.

At Osnaburgh, meanwhile, four more Canadians offered to engage in the Company's service. One of them, Simon Beaugrand, had been Tupa's assistant at Cat Lake the previous two seasons. All four men were contracted at ten pounds per year and the usual bounties for inland service. Shortly thereafter Goodwin dispatched them to join Best at Cat Lake as replacements for the British servants. Goodwin obviously felt that the Canadians would be best employed at the frontier post where Best and his men were unfamiliar with the surroundings. Although Jarvis approved of Goodwin's hiring of the Canadians, he vehemently opposed his decision to man the Cat Lake post solely with Canadians.

Best's first impressions of the Cat Lake area were highly favourable and he wrote to Goodwin:

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off. In order to find the way I had to engage a guide at Osnaburgh, and also retain my former guide, as I could not get one who understood, and none of my men except the Indian guide could speak, the Indian language. I had been informed several times previous to this that the route to Cat Lake was a difficult one to find, and that the Indians themselves often missed the way after they had been over the route several times. This I found to be the case, as the guide had to stop and study sometimes before he would advance, and would occasionally change his course. The route is made up of a succession of lakes joined by narrow channels, assuming the form of a river only at these places and for but a short distance at a time. The lakes are full of islands and their extent could not be determined without making a survey of their shores." Report of Thomas Fawcett, D.L.S., Sessional Papers (No. 8), 1866, p. 36.

. . . sir now is the time for a push if we had plenty of goods & big canoes, I think we could drive every Trader out of the country at least those that comes in to this part of it.<sup>23</sup>

Best's enthusiasm, however, was dampened during the winter when he found that Cat Lake was a poor place for country provisions. Despite the privations and hardships of that first season at Cat Lake, the post was able to procure a substantial trade in furs, and especially in beaver pelts.<sup>24</sup> The Indians who inhabited the hinterland of the post exhibited much the same behaviour as those trading at Osnaburgh, demanding large presents of brandy and trading their furs for goods such as blankets, guns, hatchets, and files.

Jarvis was pleased with the returns from Cat Lake but felt that it would be unnecessary to retain a post there:

. . . I do not think it is necessary to continue the station at Cat Lake as the Canadians have deserted it, especially as you [Goodwin] say the indians will either come to you [Osnaburgh] or go to Severn.<sup>25</sup>

Jarvis changed his views, however, when he was informed that the Canadians planned to return there in the fall, and Best was ordered to return to Cat Lake to oppose the Canadians.

Goodwin had informed Jarvis that Cat Lake was closer to Severn than Albany, so Jarvis also ordered Richard Perkins, "an intelligent

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<sup>23</sup> John Best, "Letter from Cat Lake to Osnaburgh House", B.155/a/3, fo. 8.

<sup>24</sup> The total trade at Cat Lake for 1788-89 was 1,115 MB, of which 730 MB was derived from beaver pelts.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Letter from Albany Fort to Osnaburgh House, June 1, 1789", B.3/b/26, fo. 68.

man", to "proceed to Cat Lake and from thence to Severn with Indians, or David Michael if no Indians can be procured."<sup>26</sup> Goodwin engaged two Indian guides for Perkins who successfully reached Severn House that summer and made a sketch of his route (Fig. 13).<sup>27</sup> Perkins' survey of the country between Cat Lake and Severn House provided the Company with much needed geographical information. Even though Cat Lake was shown to be closer to Severn than Albany, the Company did not embark upon plans for settlements inland from Severn. Because of the inland trading infrastructure that had already been developed, Albany was better poised to expand into the Severn hinterland to check the Canadian traders there.

Plans were also formulated to extend Albany's chain of inland settlements to the Lac Seul area and beyond. Goodwin initially recommended that Best be sent to the:

. . . Fire Country by way of Upissinguga [Lac Seul] and Mr. Beaugrand with the Canadians to the Trout Lake [present Trout Lake near Red Lake].<sup>28</sup>

Jarvis approved these plans but he stressed that the Canadians were not to be trusted by themselves:

. . . your proposal you make at the same time of sending Mr. Beaugrand & Canadians alone to Trout Lake is totally inadmissable as I repeat it they must be mixt.<sup>29</sup>

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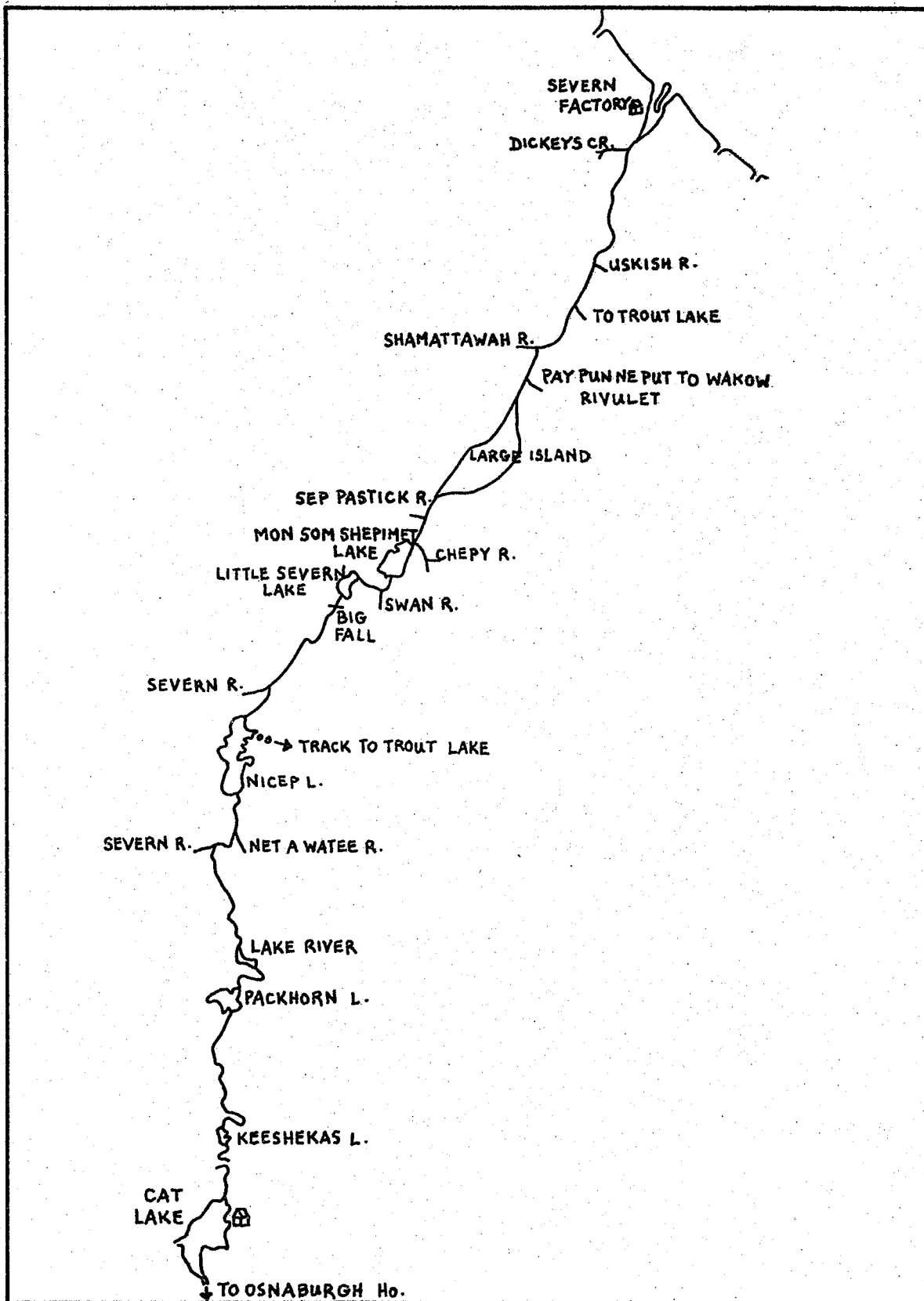
<sup>26</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Letter from Albany Fort to Osnaburgh House, Dec. 1, 1788", B.3/b/26, fo. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Fidler redrafted Perkins' sketch in 1815.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Goodwin, "Letter from Osnaburgh House to Albany Fort, Sept. 16, 1788", B.3/b/26, fo. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Letter from Albany Fort to Osnaburgh House, Dec. 1, 1788", B.3/b/26, fo. 24.

Figure 13: A Journey from Cat Lake to Severn Factory by Richard Perkins, 1789. Redraughted by Peter Fidler, 1815.



The Trout Lake spoken of in this correspondence was known only from Indian reports, and Jarvis had received information that it was 500 miles from Osnaburgh.<sup>30</sup> John Best had also heard of this lake and wrote:

. . . if there is to be a house on Trout Lake there should be 7 or 8 men to stay at it they are very bad indians that way they often times kill the pedlars at that lake.<sup>31</sup>

Jarvis became so intrigued with Trout Lake that he wanted Best to build a settlement there next season, reasoning that:

. . . As experience convinces us that the only way to prevent the Canadians from hurting the Hon<sup>ble</sup> Company's trade, is to seat ourselves in or near their posts . . .<sup>32</sup>

However, Best was prevented from going to Trout Lake because he was needed at Cat Lake to oppose the Canadians during the 1789-90 season, but the vaguely known Trout Lake area persisted as a target for Albany's inland expansion.

What little was known by the Hudson's Bay Company of the Little North at this time can be seen in Figure 14, a map most likely drawn by Edward Jarvis in 1789 or 1790. In particular, Cat Lake, at the frontier of Albany's inland trade, is shown to be much too close to Lake Winnipeg,

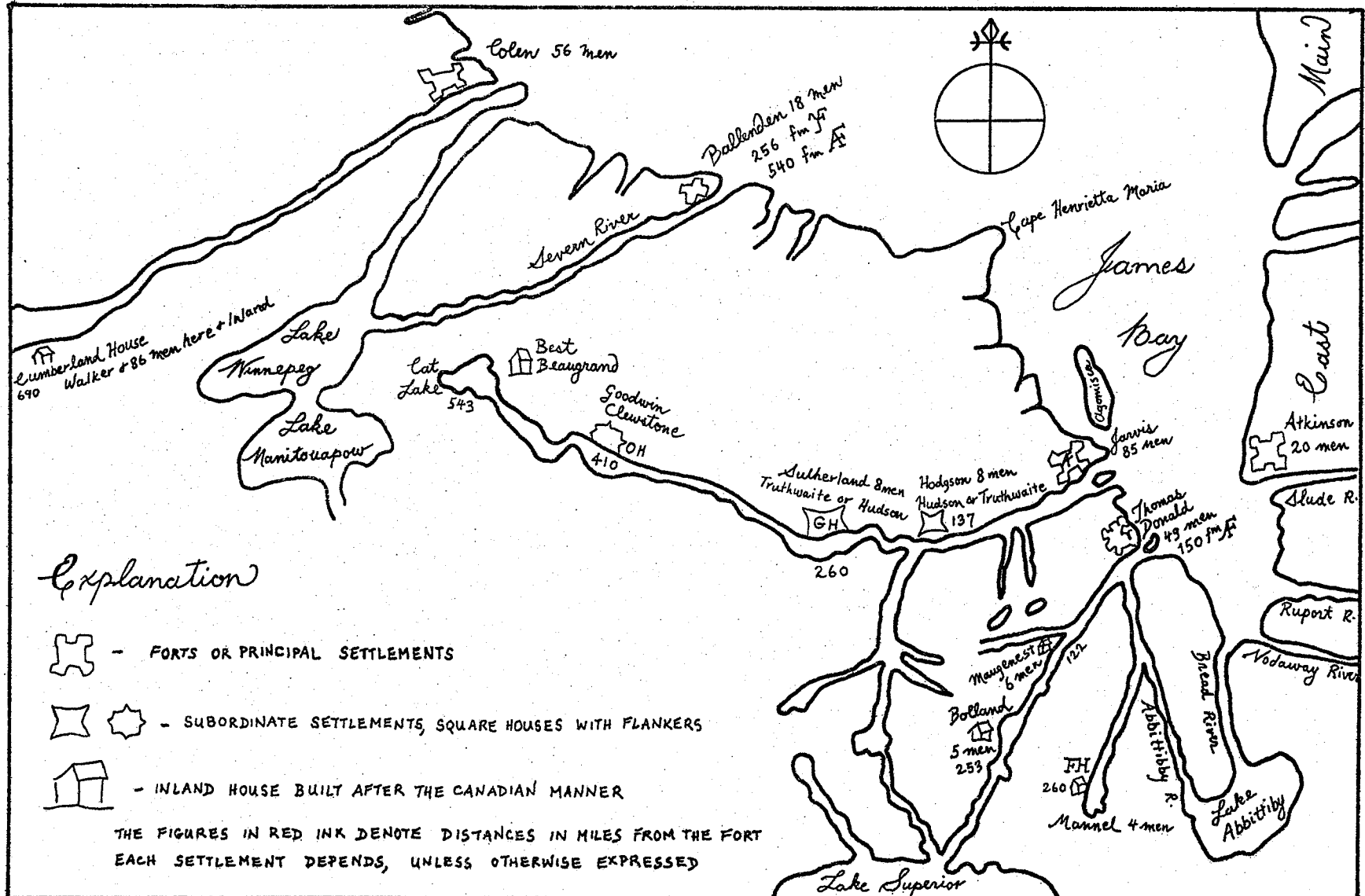
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<sup>30</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Letter from Albany Fort to Osnaburgh House, July 20, 1788", B.3/b/25, fo. 57d.

<sup>31</sup> John Best, "Letter from Cat Lake to Albany Fort, Feb. 4, 1789", B.3/b/26, fo. 49d.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Letter from Albany Fort to Osnaburgh House, June 1, 1789", B.3/b/26, fo. 68.

Figure 14: Hudson's Bay Company Settlements, c.1790.



Source: Clements Library, University of Michigan.

while the Trout Lake region which lies south of Cat Lake is not depicted at all. To the south and west of the Albany River the map is blank, omitting even the connection between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg.

During the 1789-90 season Best was opposed by an experienced trader named Chavaudrille. The latter came to Cat Lake with ten men and two large canoes and built his house thirty yards from the Hudson's Bay Company's house. Chavaudrille was described as a middle-aged man who had been trading for twenty-eight years, mainly in the "Missipy Country". He was most likely a clerk, as he was able to inform Goodwin of the relative numbers and wintering places of other Nor'Westers in the Little North. Tupa, who had previously traded at Cat Lake, had taken two large canoes of men and goods to a post on Lake Saul or Upishungo Lake (Lac Seul), Cameron with two canoes went to red paint lake (Red Lake), Maukay (Donald McKay) was at a house on Lake St. Anns (Lake Nipigon), and another Maukay (John McKay) was trading at Sturgeon Lake (see Fig. 16). Chavaudrille's experience and superior numbers made the trade for furs very difficult for Best. The Cat Lake post was the first Albany establishment to experience competition at such close quarters, and during the winter several confrontations between the opposing traders bordered on violence. The Indians of Cat Lake revelled in this situation and increasingly demanded large presents of liquor before they would trade their furs to either company. Best wrote:

Chavoderi gave the Capt<sup>n</sup> that went to him 4 gallons of Brandy and I gave the other 5 gallons--he shall not out strip me if I can help it.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John Best, "Cat Lake Journal, 1789-90", B.30/a/2, fo. 9d.



By 1790, the Albany traders were ready to extend their system of trading posts beyond the Albany River basin and into the Lac Seul region which had riverine connections with Trout Lake and Lake Winnipeg. James Sutherland, the man who had made the first explorations of Lac Seul in 1786, was placed in charge of fourteen men and given two boats and a small canoe to establish the post. Sutherland's party was escorted by Goodwin, Best and six other men as far as the Canadian path in Lake St. Joseph, and from there they followed Sutherland's previous route to Lac Seul. When they reached the long portage over the height of land, the Albany men set to work constructing a rollered track for the batteaux containing 436 logs over a distance of 810 yards<sup>34</sup>, a technique that was to greatly facilitate penetration inland from Albany by batteaux. Upon entering Lac Seul, Sutherland found it was necessary to engage two Indian guides to pilot them through the large lake which was filled with many islands and deceptive bays. After two days of paddling through the lake, they reached the North West Company's post and found Tupa in charge. Sutherland had initially intended to build his house beside Tupa's but after viewing that particular place he decided to proceed farther inland to Red Lake, where Tupa's commander, Duncan Cameron, had his house. Tupa graciously provided one of his men, Jean Baptiste Rou-

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<sup>34</sup> This portage was traversed by Thomas Fawcett in his survey of the region in 1885. He offered the following interesting remarks about the history of the portage: "Root or Route River is said by some to derive its name from the rooty portage which connects it with Lake St. Joseph, and by others on account of its being part of the old canoe route from Fort Albany on James' Bay to Lac Seul, and points west. It was formerly a stream of some importance, when used for purposes of navigation, but for a number of years has not been travelled except occasionally by Indians in passing between the two large lakes." Thomas Fawcett, D.L.S., Sessional Papers, No. 8, 1886, p. 34.

cinte, to guide Sutherland to Red Lake, and within five days they reached their destination (Fig. 15):

. . . entered Lake Roug, (or Red Lake) hitherto improperly called by us Red Paint Lake; Went ashore and had breakfast at Mr. Cameron's House which is situated at the foot of the Lake . . . went a few miles further up the Lake to build . . . Red Lake is according to my computation 250 miles from Osnaburgh. Mr. Tupa's House about half way.<sup>35</sup>

Cameron was regarded by the Albany men as the principal trader in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company, and Sutherland recorded his entrance to Red Lake in the following words:

. . . he was dres't fit to appear at Court his men likewise very Genteel, had a large beautiful flag, I was ashamed to hoist mine being an old dirty thing which is the shame to the service.<sup>36</sup>

Sutherland invited Cameron to dinner and the next day Cameron returned the favour. Sutherland was treated royally and was in this way clearly made aware of the abundant resources of his North West Company opponent. He observed:

. . . to my great surprise found entertainment suitable for any gentleman, boiled Beef, Pork, Beaver, Portugal splet peas made into fine soup, fat Cake, Chocolate, and very good wine; his table cover'd with clean linen with every thing suitable there to as he carries a large kanteen and two chests with his cloathes,

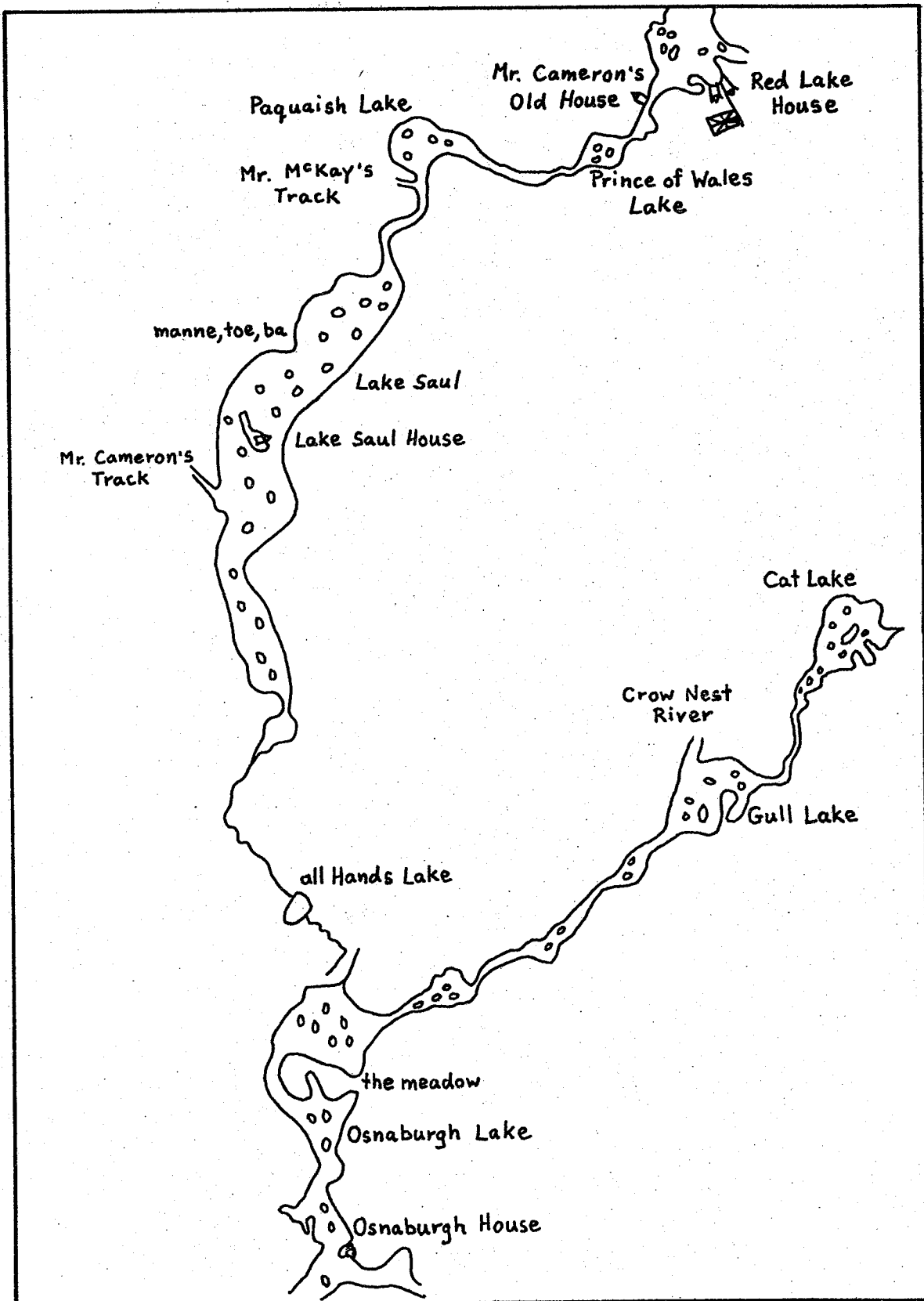
In contrast Sutherland shamefully admitted:

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<sup>35</sup> James Sutherland, "Red Lake Journal, 1790-91", B.177/a/1, fo. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., fo. 10. Duncan Cameron first traded in the Nipigon Country in 1785.

Figure 15: A Draught Between Osnaburgh and Red Lake by John Best, 1792.



Source: Red Lake Journal, B.177/a/2, fo. 1d.

. . . when I invite him to dine with me I have not so much as a knife and a fork for him and my self and but one plate.<sup>37</sup>

Cameron decided to abandon his house and build another about one hundred yards above Sutherland's. Despite an intensely competitive trading season the two men developed a strong friendship. Cameron was well respected by the Red Lake Indians and also had the advantage of a large supply of goods from the Lac Seul post, which acted as a depot for the inland posts. His men proved to be much more adept at trading and working than Sutherland's and the latter complained that:

. . . I never saw such unacquainted hands in this country as I have got . . . I am afraid to trust them out of Doors for fear of losing themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Cameron himself was well acquainted with the necessary skills of wilderness survival and, during the winter, he generously assisted Sutherland by making several pairs of snowshoes, an art that neither Sutherland nor any of his men understood. His trading experience had also given him a better understanding of Indian customs and preferences. He placed great emphasis on his outward appearance and, beside the elegant flag, he possessed a large brass blunderbuss which was fired ceremoniously whenever Indians approached his house. He was also generous in giving large presents of rum and tobacco to the Indians. Sutherland found that the Nor'Wester's stock of these two articles, as Best had noted previously at Cat Lake, was superior to the Hudson's Bay Company's brandy and tobacco.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., fo. 10d.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., fo. 17.

. . . his Rum is of the best Jameca Spirits and is much preferred by the Indians to our English Brandy . . . My tobacco is also very bad Mr. Cameron has very good Brazil tobacco as also a very good kind manufactured in London called Spencer's Twist which the Indians in this part of the country are very fond of.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the many advantages possessed by Cameron and his men, Sutherland was able to procure a substantial trade. His returns also indicated that the region was relatively rich in beaver.<sup>40</sup> Sutherland had proven at last that batteaux could be transported over the height of land and that Albany men, regardless of their inexperience, could profitably compete with the Nor'Westers.

While Sutherland pioneered the trade for the Hudson's Bay Company at Red Lake, Best once again wintered at Cat Lake. Although the post had been settled for two years, he was forced to hire two independent Canadian traders to guide him there. By the time they reached Cat Lake, the Nor'Westers, under the leadership of Jean-Baptiste Turcot (also spelled Turko, Turcott, and Tiercot), had already begun trading with the Indians. Beside arriving at Cat Lake late in the season, Best suffered the embarrassment of realizing that, once he had unloaded the boats, he had no person capable of taking the extra men back to Osnaburgh. His only recourse was to engage one of Turcot's men, who agreed to act as their guide.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., fos. 15d and 22. The Hudson's Bay Company responded to this situation in part by supplying Albany Fort with Spencer's Twist tobacco beginning in the 1797 trading season (from Albany Account Books).

<sup>40</sup> Sutherland remarked that most of the trade comprised "prime beaver skins", and the Albany accounts indicate that the returns from Red Lake amounted to 2,445 made beaver, of which sixty-three percent was attributed to beaver pelts.

By this time the hiring of Canadians was no longer viewed with suspicion by the Albany traders and, indeed was considered highly desirable if not necessary at this juncture if they were to keep pace with the Nor'Westers in the Little North. The Company officially supported the engagement of experienced Canadians in their service, and the Albany officers, in contrast to those at the other coastal forts, were actively encouraged to do so.<sup>41</sup> In the summer of 1791, three North West Company clerks deserted to the Albany service: the McKay brothers, John and Donald, and Jean-Baptiste Turcot. Goodwin rated Turcot as, "the most proper person I have seen yet for trade", and reported that, "it would be a shame to permit him to come back for the Canadian merchants [Nor'Westers] by these vigorous measures I hope to root the Canadian Traders out of ye Country."<sup>42</sup>

By 1791, the fur trade in the Little North had expanded westward from Nipigon and Albany to the height of land that marked the extent of East Winnipeg's drainage. Both the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies had settled trading posts at two points on the eastern side of the divide--at Red Lake in the English/Winnipeg River drainage basin and at Cat Lake in the Albany River basin--and both companies were thus poised to penetrate the East Winnipeg Country from the headwater region. For the Albany men these advances had been made possible by using flat-bottomed batteaux, and for the Nor'Westers from Nipigon, large canoes

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<sup>41</sup> This Company policy was maintained at Albany until at least 1800. In 1794 the following was written in the Albany Fort Correspondence: "the Honourable Committee have once again given liberty to their officers to engage Canadians in their service who are free so to do." B.3/b/31, fo. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Goodwin, "Osnaburgh House Journal, 1790-91", B.155/a/5, fo. 21d.

had facilitated the movement of men, supplies, and trade goods through the complex topography leading to the head of East Winnipeg drainage.

The two-pronged advances of both companies toward East Winnipeg can be seen clearly in Figure 16. This western frontier of the trade in the Little North comprised a region in which furs, and especially beaver, were abundant (Fig. 16). In addition, further expansion westward to Lake Winnipeg and beyond was expected to be easily accomplished with the support of larger quantities of rice and, eventually, with pemmican supplied from the prairies, or "meadows".

The Albany inland trade was patterned in many respects after that carried inland by the men from Nipigon and, indeed, its success appears to have been predicated upon adaptations of this nature. The Hudson's Bay Company posts were constructed in the "Canadian manner", being structures that could be quickly and easily built in the wilderness of the shield. Albany's inland officers also generally followed the flexible standard of trade set by their counterparts from Nipigon. Additionally, the policy of hiring experienced Canadian voyageurs and clerks greatly enabled the Albany expansion to keep pace with the Nor'Westers. Engaging these men instantly provided the Albany inland movement with valuable experience that many of the Company's servants lacked.

Figure 17 reveals the state of geographical knowledge possessed by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1791. The map was likely drawn by John Hodgson and, although its inaccuracies are obvious, it definitely indicates that the Company was aware by that time of the Canadian routes from Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg. This map also provides the first details on the Nipigon "tracks" to the Monontagué and to Lake St. Joseph, and these are shown merging with the Albany routes. This

information related to lands that lay beyond the Company's frontier, although communicated by Indians or Nor'Westers, is indicative of a significant expansion of the Company's geographical knowledge in this direction. Toward Lake Winnipeg, however, the map loses its orientation and the resulting depiction bespeaks of a poor knowledge of the unsettled East Winnipeg Country that lay beyond the two trading frontiers at Red and Cat Lakes.



Figure 16: The Hudson's Bay Company Fur Trade in the Little North, 1791, Showing Albany and Nipigon Fur Trade Posts and Routes.

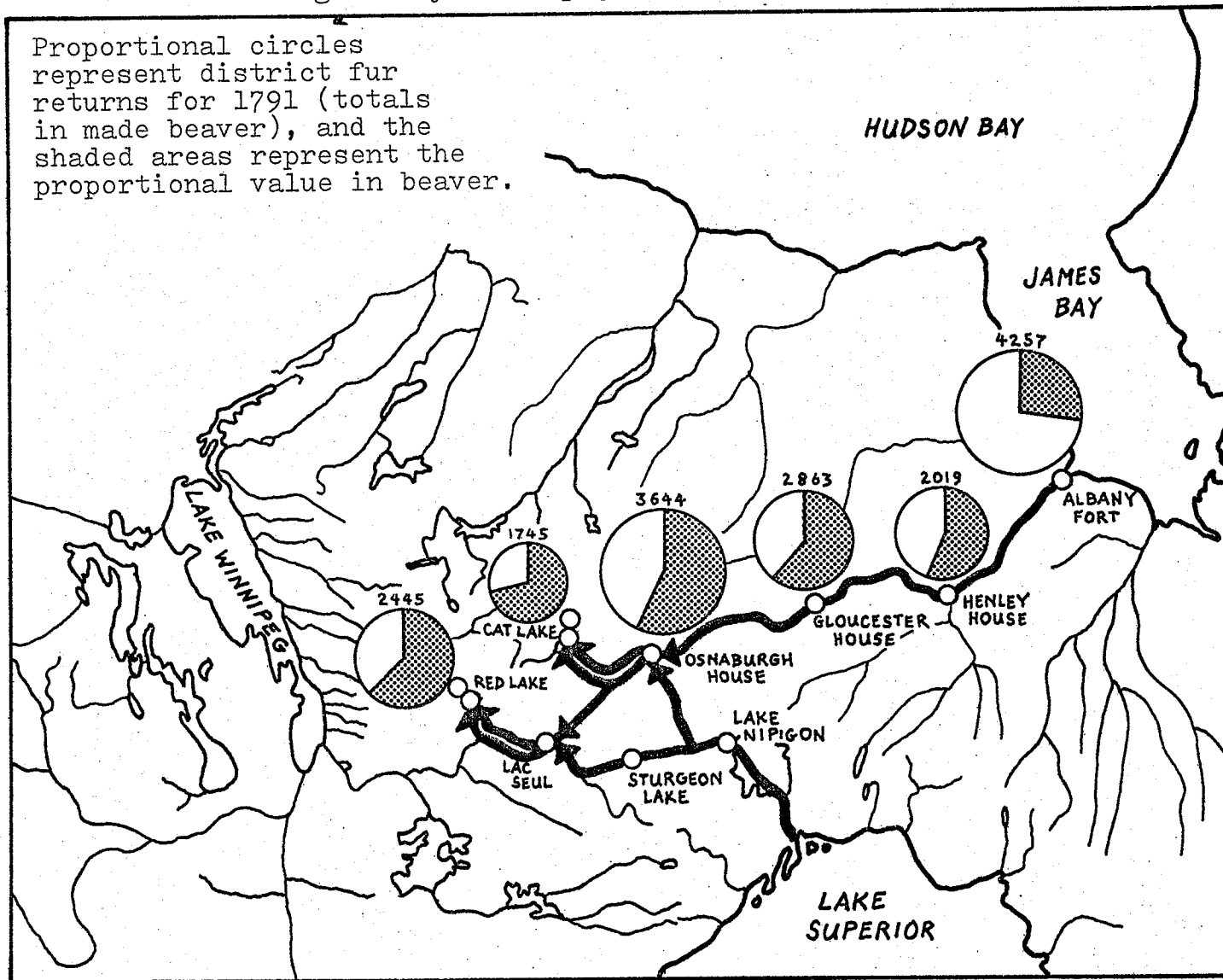
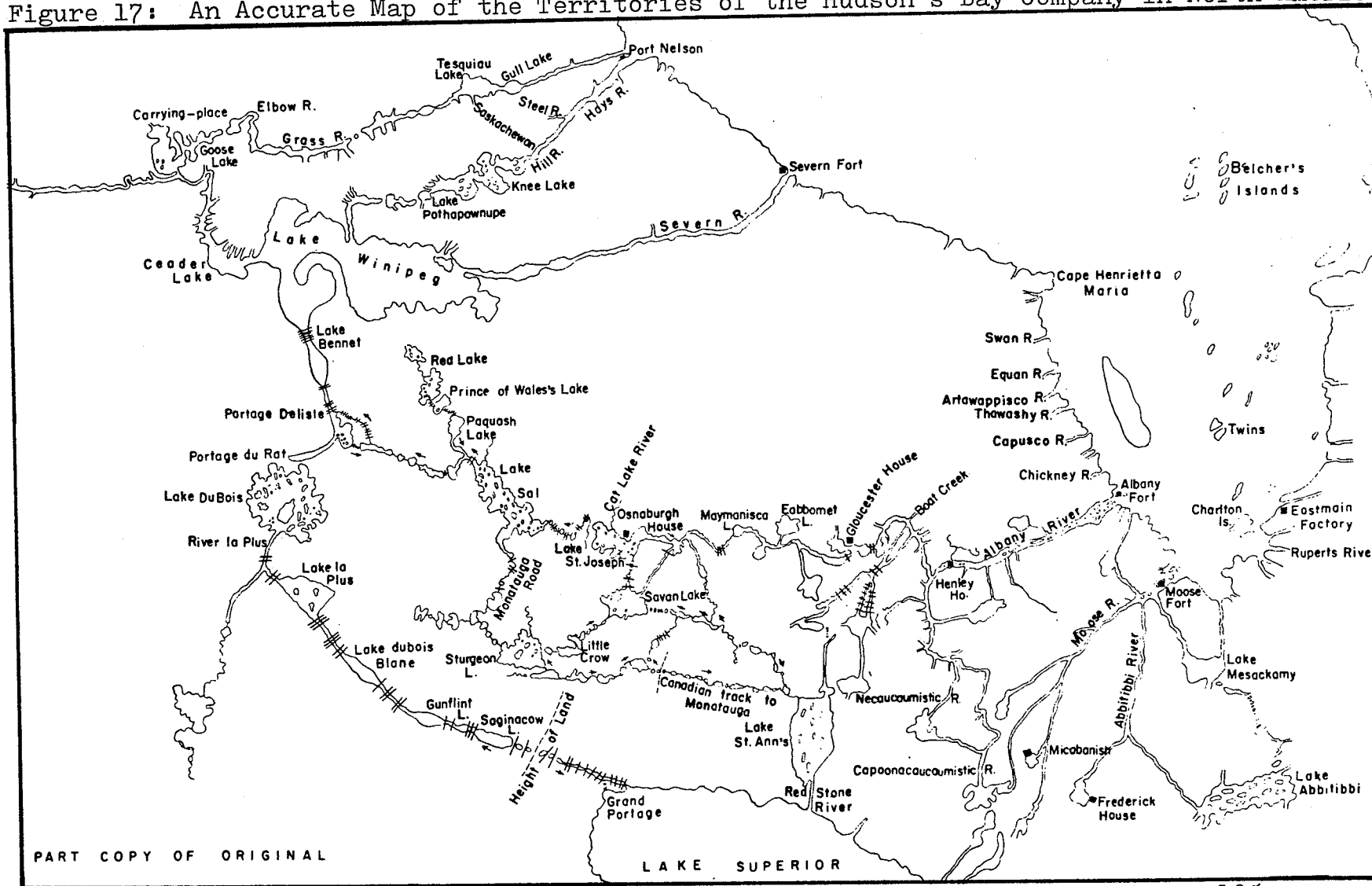


Figure 17: An Accurate Map of the Territories of the Hudson's Bay Company in North America



Source: R.I. Ruggles and J. Warkentin, Historical Atlas of Manitoba. 1971, p. 105.

## CHAPTER V

### COMPETITION IN THE EAST WINNIPEG COUNTRY

1791-1810

#### 1. Expansion on Two Fronts: Penetration into the East Winnipeg and Severn Countries, 1791-1796

In 1791, both companies sent trading outfits to Red Lake: Cameron, the Nor'Wester, arrived with two large and one small canoe, while Best for the Hudson's Bay Company reached the lake with two batteaux. The relationship between the two opposing traders was not nearly as amicable as that shared by Cameron and Sutherland the previous year. The desertion of Cameron's three clerks to the Hudson's Bay Company may have prompted a much more antagonistic demeanour on his part, and the winter of 1791-92 at Red Lake was marked by threats and intimidating behaviour from both camps. During one such incident, Best remarked ". . . Mr. Cameron and me was almost gone to war about the [Indians'] debts."<sup>1</sup> The intense competition at Red Lake was a harbinger of the kind of relationship that would develop between the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company in the ensuing years throughout most of the Northwest.

At the end of the season Cameron left some men behind to build a trading post to the west of Red Lake and over the height of land leading

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<sup>1</sup> John Best, "Red Lake Journal, 1791-92", B.177/a/2, fo. 12d.

into the East Winnipeg Country. Again the Nor'Westers had taken the initiative and, with what seemed to be almost unerring instinct, expanded in a manner that would cut off the Hudson's Bay Company's trade and gain them a tactical advantage in the close-quartered competition that had recently emerged. Best remarked that this new post "will cut of most of the red Lake trade"<sup>2</sup>, and recommended that they too build a house in that country.

The Nor'Westers returned to Cat Lake in 1791, but the Albany men were prevented from doing so because, even after three years of settlement, none of the available men could follow the route. The following summer Osnaburgh House was visited by four canoes of "strange Indians from Lake Winipic".<sup>3</sup> These Indians traded some furs with the Albany men, but their main reason for travelling to Osnaburgh was to encourage them to build a trading post in their country. Goodwin wrote: "They very much wanted me to send men with Goods to his Lake plenty of water and ye road being good."<sup>4</sup> Goodwin recommended, as Best had done at Red Lake, that the Company send men and goods to establish a post in the East Winnipeg Country.

Although expansion into the East Winnipeg Country appeared imminent on two fronts, it occurred only from the Red Lake quarter. Beyond Cat Lake, the expansion of trade was deflected northward to the Severn headwaters instead of westward to East Winnipeg. This was occasioned

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., fo. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Goodwin, "Osnaburgh House Journal, 1791-92", B.155/a/6, fo. 23d.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., fo. 23d.

by the vigorous efforts of Jean-Baptiste Turcot who, after a year of trading on Lac Seul, had left Albany's service. He returned in the fall of 1792 in the employ of the North West Company to trade in the Cat Lake region. On his way to Cat Lake, he outfitted a post for Crow Nest Lake (Springpole Lake) (see Fig. 11) which was managed by his assistant, Pomainville. After a year's absence from Cat Lake, Goodwin realized that it was essential to send men to oppose Turcot or risk losing the entire trade of that region. Edward Clouston was chosen to lead the Albany men, but the success of the mission rested completely with David Michael, the only man at Osnaburgh who knew the way to Cat Lake. Clouston marvelled at Michael's abilities and wrote that he was, "the most expert man for knowing the road thro' Lake etc. I ever saw."<sup>5</sup> The trade at Cat Lake appears to have been successful for both parties<sup>6</sup>, but Turcot was not satisfied with part of the trade and made plans to establish a post beyond Cat Lake on the Severn headwaters. In the summer of 1793, he dispatched some men with a large canoe of goods for Sand Lake (Sandy Lake). This move was designed not only to impede the flow of Indians to Albany's Cat Lake post, but also to capture some of Severn's trade.

At Red Lake, Best returned late in the summer of 1792 to find that Cameron's men had succeeded in building a post in the East Winnipeg Country at Bad Lake (probably present Larus Lake) near the headwaters of the Bloodvein River. Best also managed to send some of his men to Bad

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Clouston, "Cat Lake Journal, 1792-93", B.30/a/4, fo. 2d.

<sup>6</sup> Over 65 percent of Albany's Cat Lake returns were made up of beaver pelts, "Albany Account Book, 1792-93", B.3/d/103.

Lake in small canoes led by Beaugrand, the former Nor'Wester, and built beside Cameron's men. These two small outposts on the Bloodvein launched the period of competitive fur trade in East Winnipeg.

To the southwest of Red Lake, the trade of the lower English River and westward along the Winnipeg River to the inflow of Lake Winnipeg, was still the preserve of the Canadian traders. However, James Sutherland built a post "in the Canadian manner" for the Hudson's Bay Company in the fall of 1792 at Escabitchewan, or Lake Burdigno (Tide Lake).<sup>7</sup> He soon discovered the dominance of Canadian traders in this region and remarked that: ". . . no less than seven Houses within one hundred miles around me and some not so far."<sup>8</sup> The majority of these Canadians were undoubtedly Nor'Westers, supplied from the Grand Portage, who comprised the southern wing of that Company's trade in the Little North.

The Nor'Westers from Nipigon channelled their efforts into expanding their trade on the Red Lake and Cat Lake frontiers. Turcot was in charge of the latter and proceeded in 1793 to move beyond Cat Lake and settled on Sandy Lake at the head of Severn drainage. The Albany outfit for Cat Lake that season was pitifully small, being made up of Clouston and three men. Clouston remarked: ". . . I am sorry it is not in my

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<sup>7</sup> Sutherland discovered the remains of an old building nearby which Donald McKay described as having been built more than sixty years previously by a trader named Burdino, or Burdigno. McKay recalled seeing Burdigno at Grand Portage before the latter died in 1780, a very aged man. Sutherland was very much interested in these ruins and commented, "The corners of the House by which its dimensions may be known is still standing, but on the slightest touch moulders into dust, I carried a piece of one log home and tied it to the ledge of my House as a rare piece of antiquity in this wild country where history is unpreserved." (B.64/a/1, fo. 12).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., fo. 16d.

power to follow them as there is neither men nor provisions."<sup>9</sup> During the winter he sent a small trading party under David Michael toward Sandy Lake, but he too was unable to reach this destination: "The road is so bad they cannot haul provisions and trading goods sufficient to make anything."<sup>10</sup> As a result, Clouston's trade that season dropped considerably, or to only 840 made beaver.

In addition to Turcot, who had blockaded the Indian hunters from the north, Clouston was informed that several Canadian traders had settled on Lake Winnipeg and were drawing the Indians westward to that quarter. These traders were largely Nor'Westers from the Grand Portage who had begun to establish posts along the east coast of Lake Winnipeg. An Indian from Lake Winnipeg said that there were no less than four traders on the lake. He also informed Clouston that his country was only "five days march with their small canoes".<sup>11</sup> Clouston petitioned for an opportunity to "send a large canoe and goods for a trial"<sup>12</sup>, but sufficient men, goods, and canoes were unavailable for this task.

In the Red Lake quarter, the Nor'Westers from Nipigon were also expanding into new territory and, at the same time, reducing the fur returns of Albany's Red Lake House. Cameron had established a second post on the Bloodvein River at its mouth and, together with the Bad Lake post, the Nor'Westers were able to prevent many Indians from visiting Best at Red Lake. Albany's lack of large canoes prevented Best from

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Clouston, "Cat Lake Journal, 1793-94", B.30/a/5, fo. 1d.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., fo. 8d.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., fo. 19d.

<sup>12</sup> Loc. cit.

outfitting an outpost for Bad Lake in the 1793-94 season and his trade fell considerably. During the winter he wrote: ". . . what trade is got now it most be done by strength."<sup>13</sup>

James Sutherland meanwhile continued to pioneer the Albany trade along the English River. He proceeded past Lake Burdigno in the fall of 1793 and reached Portage de l'Isle where he built his house. Sutherland found this part of the country to be quite inhospitable and remarked: ". . . the country so rocky and hilly, and would appear as if God never meant his name to be mentioned here."<sup>14</sup> During the winter, Sutherland was opposed by a rather ruthless<sup>15</sup> Nor'Wester named La Tour (or La Tower), and from him learned that another Nor'Wester, "La Sear", was situated "betwixt me and the Wennipeg how is it possible then for me to get trade."<sup>16</sup> This man was undoubtedly Toussaint Lesieur, who in 1792 had built a store house at Bas de la Rivière Winipic (Bottom of the River Winnipeg) just above the site of what later became Fort Alexander.

In addition to Sutherland's post at Lake Burdigno, the Albany inland movement pressed forward dramatically on two other fronts. Trading posts were established that year on the Assiniboine River and Rainy Lake. Beside being of value for their furs, these two regions were important for their supply of pemmican and large birch bark canoes,

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<sup>13</sup> John Best, "Red Lake Journal, 1793-94", B.177/a/4, fo. 11.

<sup>14</sup> James Sutherland, "Portage de L'Isle Journal, 1793-94", B.161/a/1, fo. 3d.

<sup>15</sup> Sutherland provided many examples in his journal of La Tour's inhumane and brutal behaviour toward his own men.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., fo. 9d.



respectively. The latter was especially important in the development of Albany's East Winnipeg trade.

In 1794, the veteran Albany trader, explorer, and commander of the inland boat brigades, David Sanderson, was appointed master of Cat Lake House. His appearance on this frontier of the Albany trade issued in a period of expansion and vigorous competition against the Nor'Westers. Along with Sanderson came his native born family, whose wilderness skills and abilities to communicate with the Indians, made the Albany outfit comparable in experience to any that the Nor'Westers could muster.

Sanderson immediately perceived the need to expand beyond Cat Lake and settle beside the Canadian traders above him in the Severn. He wrote to James Sutherland at Osnaburgh explaining that:

The Canadians all went up with Turko in the summer he is put up at great lake [McDowell Lake] and Allan M Farling at Eagle Lake [probably on Berens River] is stopt all the Indians to come down there is poor prospect of trade hir this year as there has not a Indian been hir from Winipick nor, I dont expect to see any from that part as they must pass threth great lake.<sup>17</sup>

He also indicated that it was impossible to follow them since he lacked suitable canoes to move his men and goods through the headwater region.

At Red Lake, Best realized that it was essential to build alongside the Nor'Westers on the lower reaches of the Bloodvein River. In the summer of 1794, he left the command of Red Lake House under his

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<sup>17</sup> David Sanderson, "Cat Lake Journal, 1794-95", B.30/a/6, fo. 11. In a letter to Albany Fort, Sanderson explained further that the "great Lake", or "Messusackassigan", was about half way to "Sand Lake". Feb. 1, 1794, B.3/b/31, fo. 18.

assistant, Magnus Birsay, and set off: ". . . with two Big Canoes and one Indian canoe for our guide to the Weanipeck Lake."<sup>18</sup> Hitherto, the use of canoes by the Albany men had been confined to the small canoes of the Indians residing along the Albany and English Rivers. These canoes had been only supplemental to the batteaux employed to transport men and goods along the main transport lines of Albany's hinterland. Large canoes, similar to those used by the Nor'Westers, became available to the Albany men shortly after the settlement of the trading post at "Lake la Pluis" (Rainy Lake). The first large canoes to reach Osnaburgh appear to have been delivered in the summer of 1794 and were likely used in the "Blood River Expedition". These canoes lacked sufficient paddles, a relatively simple wilderness task that none of the Company's men at Osnaburgh was capable of performing. The deployment of the canoes was delayed until Goodwin: ". . . paid Canadians for 6 paddles for large Canoes as very few of our men know how to make them."<sup>19</sup> Expansion into the East Winnipeg and Severn drainage basins depended upon canoes to navigate the small, and at times shoal, river channels of the headwater region. This could not be done with batteaux and required cargo capacities larger than those of small Indian canoes if a successful trade was to be conducted alongside the Nor'Westers.

The journey beyond Red Lake proved to be as difficult as envisioned and Best and his men were faced with many hardships in descending the

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<sup>18</sup> John Best, "A Journal of Wind Weather and Transactions at the Weanipeck and on the Journey to that Place from red Lake, 1794-95", B.254/a/1, fo. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Goodwin, "Osnaburgh House Journal, 1793-94", B.155/a/9d, fo. 20.

river. They reached Bad Lake after ten days and twenty-seven portages. From there it took them two weeks and fifty portages to reach Lake Winnipeg (Fig. 18).

At the mouth of the river, Best found the North West Company post and two clerks, "Latoor and Shivelee", awaiting his arrival. They had orders to follow Best and oppose him wherever he built his house. Best had initially planned to cross Lake Winnipeg, but the Indians at the mouth of the river persuaded him to build there. The Nor'Westers, perceiving the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg to be poor for provisions, removed to the west side of the lake and built at Weijack River (Fisher River).<sup>20</sup> Provisioning the Blood River House was indeed difficult and the Albany men survived on a sparse diet of venison, fish, and wild rice supplied by the local Indians.

The Nor'Westers at Fisher River on the west coast of Lake Winnipeg were supplied from Cameron's main post at Red Lake. At this time it is apparent that the North West Company had not yet made a complete distinction between their Lac Ouinipique and Nipigon Departments. According to Cameron writing in 1804:

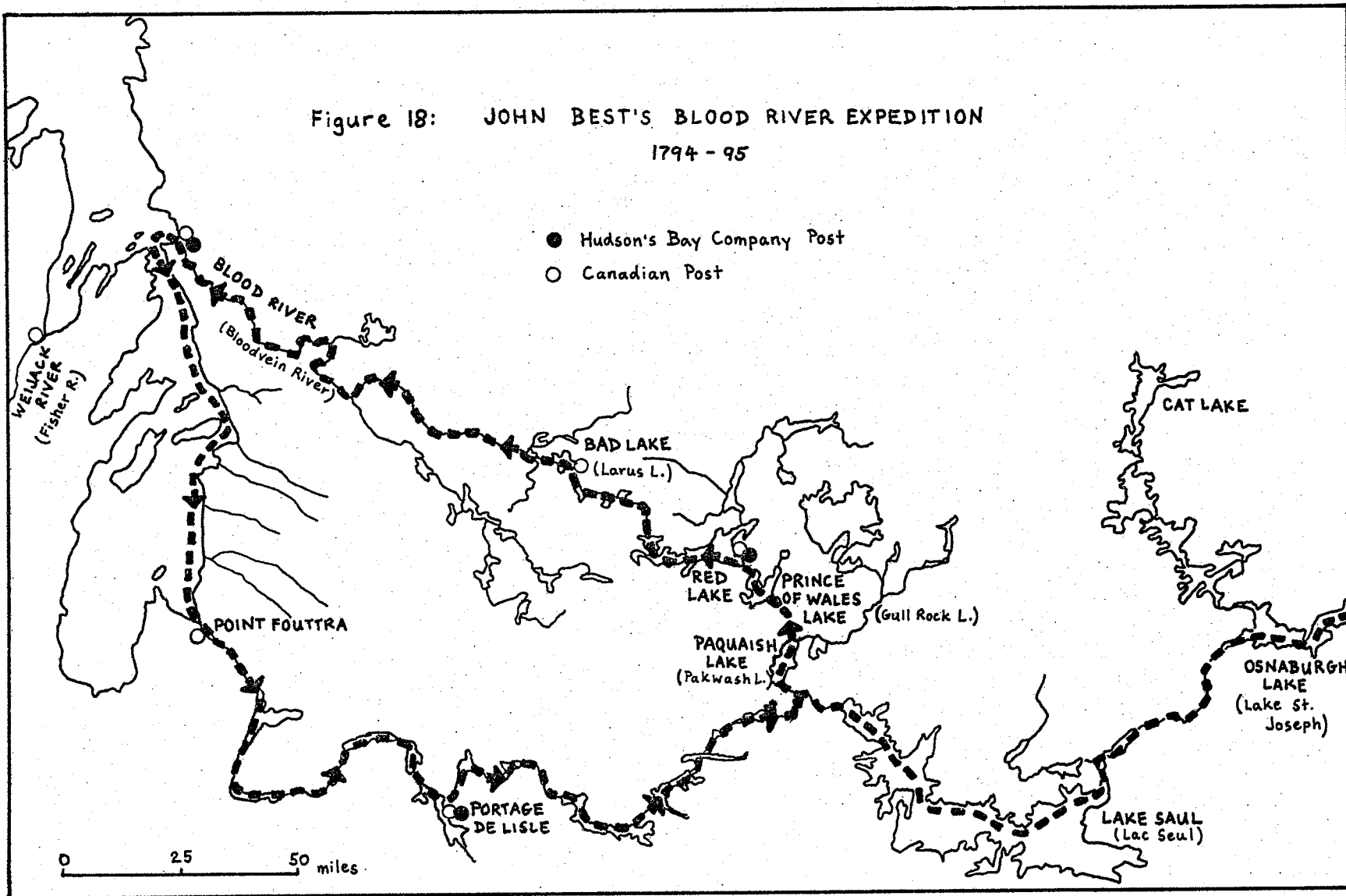
When I first came as clerk in this country, in 1785, the whole Nipigon only produced 56 packs, although there was then no opposition either from Hudson's Bay or any where else, and although one third of what now forms the Lake Ouinipique Department was then belonging to the Nipigon.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The fisher was alternately called the wejack or brown polecat in G. Williams (ed.), Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91, 1969, p. 12. The Ojibwa translation of fisher was hojick according to Alexander Henry's "Journal", in E. Coues (ed.), New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814, vol. II, 1965, p. 535.

<sup>21</sup> Duncan Cameron, "The Nipigon Country, 1804", in L.R. Masson (ed.), Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, vol. II, 1960, p. 243.

Figure 18: JOHN BEST'S BLOOD RIVER EXPEDITION  
1794 - 95



After the breakthrough from Red Lake to Lake Winnipeg, however, it was soon realized that posts along the coast of Lake Winnipeg could be much easier supplied from their depot at Bas-de-la-Rivière Winipic. Best too realized that this connection was superior to the Bloodvein River route and planned to make his return trip via the Winnipeg River. This was not a simple task, as the Albany men were unacquainted with the tempestuous waters of the lake and were relatively unskilled in handling the large canoes. Their return by Lake Winnipeg was made possible only by engaging one of La Tour's men, who guided them to "point fouttra" at the outlet of the Winnipeg River. From there, Best found an Indian who guided them upriver to Red Lake.

The Blood River expedition was the forerunner of trading activity by both companies in the southern margins of the East Winnipeg Country. This trade, although initially directed westward from Red Lake, was, in the years following, to be supplied and managed from Pointe au Foutre at Bas-de-la-Rivière Winipic.

During the summer of 1795, plans had been formulated to extend the Albany trade to the north of Cat Lake. In the spring David Sanderson had sent his son Jack (John) and an Indian named Fidler to explore the "road" to the Severn headwaters. Jack Sanderson succeeded in his journey and was sent down to Osnaburgh to inform James Sutherland of his findings.

He says the road in general is not very bad, only some long carrying places; that Severn River is divided into 3 branches Great Lake on the middle branch, the farthest is the main River, and here Allan McFarlen is building a House which Jack saw and is in the direct road of all the Severn Indians. The Beaver is in great plenty here . . . the House McFarlen is building [probably on Sandy Lake] is

within 4 days Journey of the Winnepeg great Lake where Mr. Fraser has wintered [possibly at the mouth of the Poplar River] who from the best information has made 100 packs of furs this year . . . It is therefore evident that without Albany be enabled to launch out a settlement in this profitable part of the country that the Canadians will carry away all the trade, and in the end entirely ruin Severn as they will never be able to creep inland from that settlement.<sup>22</sup>

During the summer two large canoes were procured at Osnaburgh for the expedition beyond Cat Lake. Two of Sanderson's sons, Tom and Jack, who were experienced in travelling through the shield country, were sent to pilot the canoes to Cat Lake. The expedition to the Severn headwaters was therefore ready to depart in the fall of 1795. Sanderson's journey has been traced in detail (Fig. 19) to determine his whereabouts and the locations of his competitors in this vaguely known region. Figure 20 is a sketch map drawn by Andrew Flett who accompanied Sanderson to the Severn headwaters. The time required to travel from Osnaburgh to Sandy Lake was given by Duncan Cameron as twenty-three days. The map was drawn without a scale or directions. It was much more akin to an Indian map than a European map, and did not add much geographic knowledge to what little was already known about the region.

In addition to McFarlane at Sandy Lake and Turcot at MacDowell Lake, two other clerks were sent by Cameron to the country above Cat Lake. They were "Solomon junior" (probably a mixed-blood son of Ezekiel Solomon) who settled at Fly Lake (Whiteloon Lake) and "Mesieur"

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<sup>22</sup> James Sutherland, "Journal of the Winds, Weather, and Transactions at Osnaburgh House, 1794-95", B.155/a/10, fo. 34d. The Fraser mentioned here is most likely Simon Fraser who had operated a post at Rivière des Trembles [Poplar] at the time. W.S. Wallace (ed.), Documents Relating to the North West Company, 1968, p. 445.

Figure 19:  
 DAVID SANDERSON'S EXPEDITION  
 TO FLY LAKE  
 1795-96

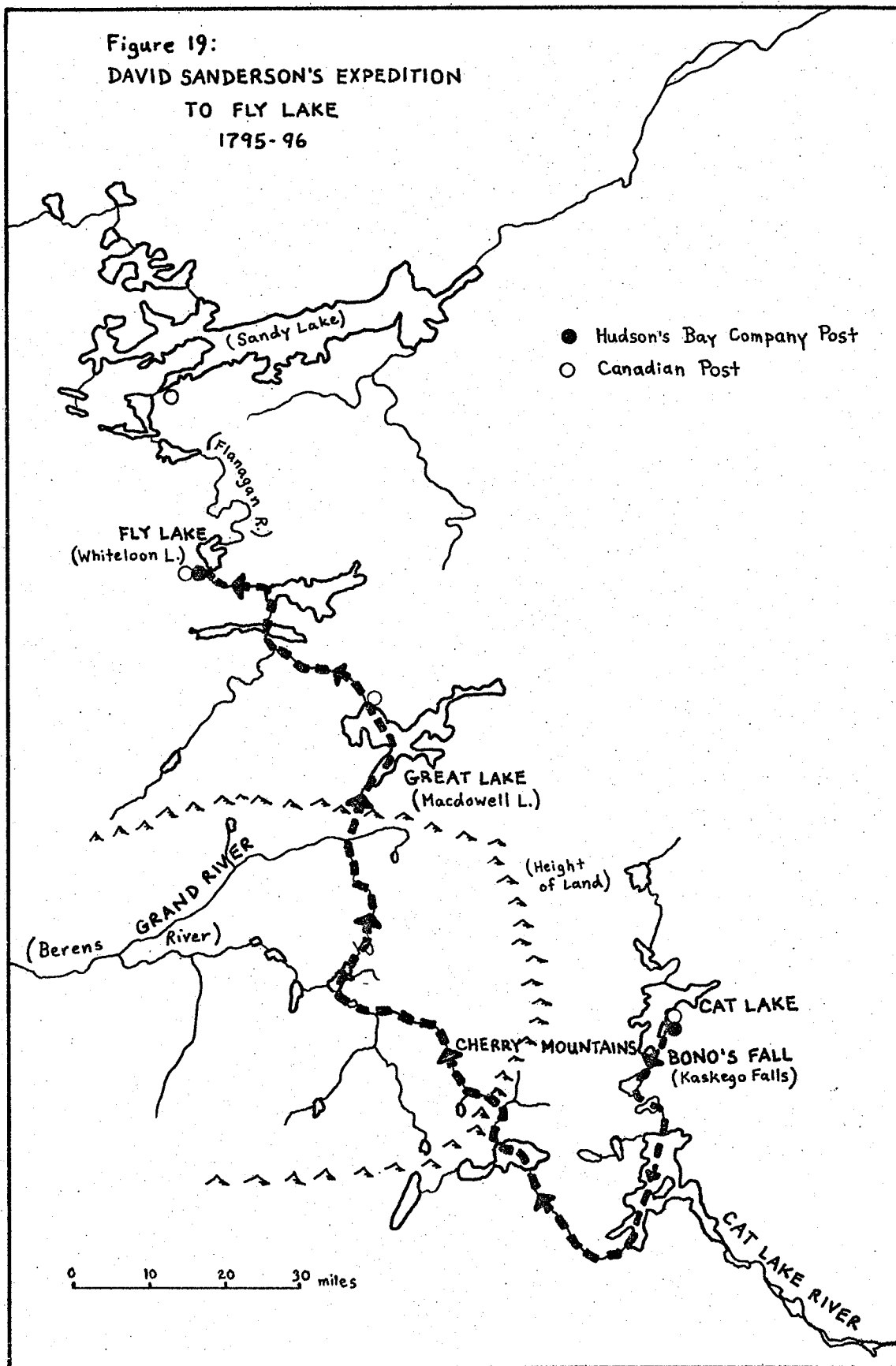
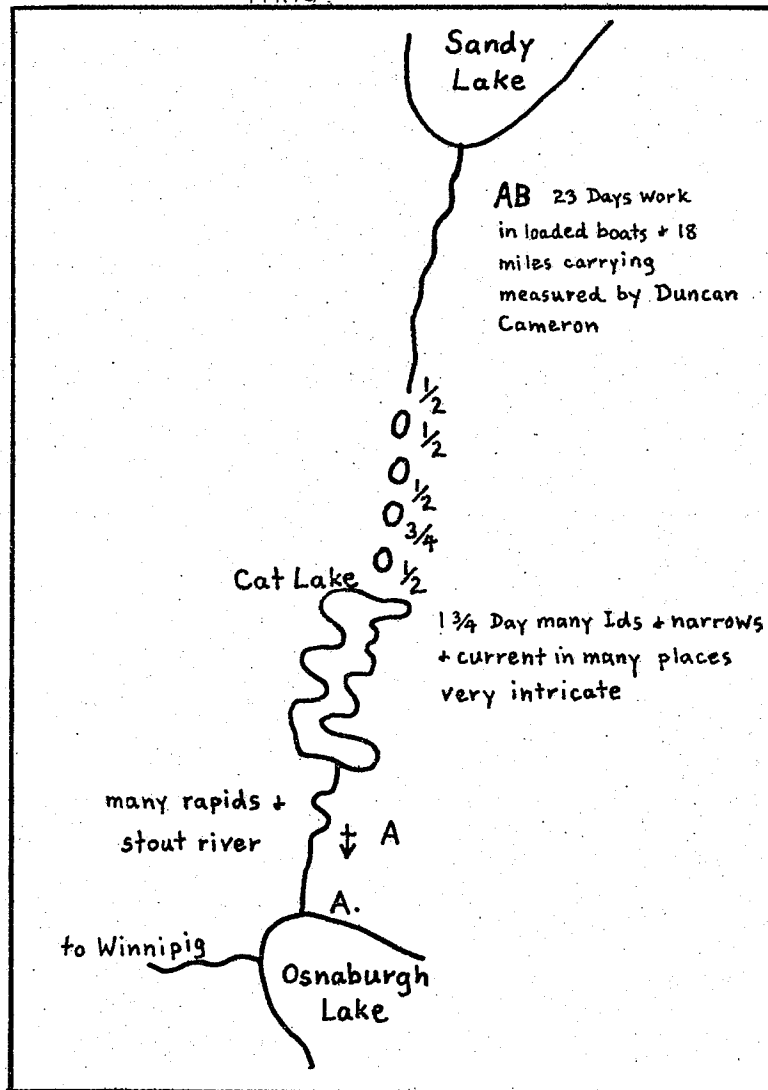


Figure 20: A Map of Osnaburgh to Sandy Lake by Andrew Flett. Re-draughted by Peter Fidler, 1809.



Source: Peter Fidler's Notebook, B. 5/4,  
fo. 18d.

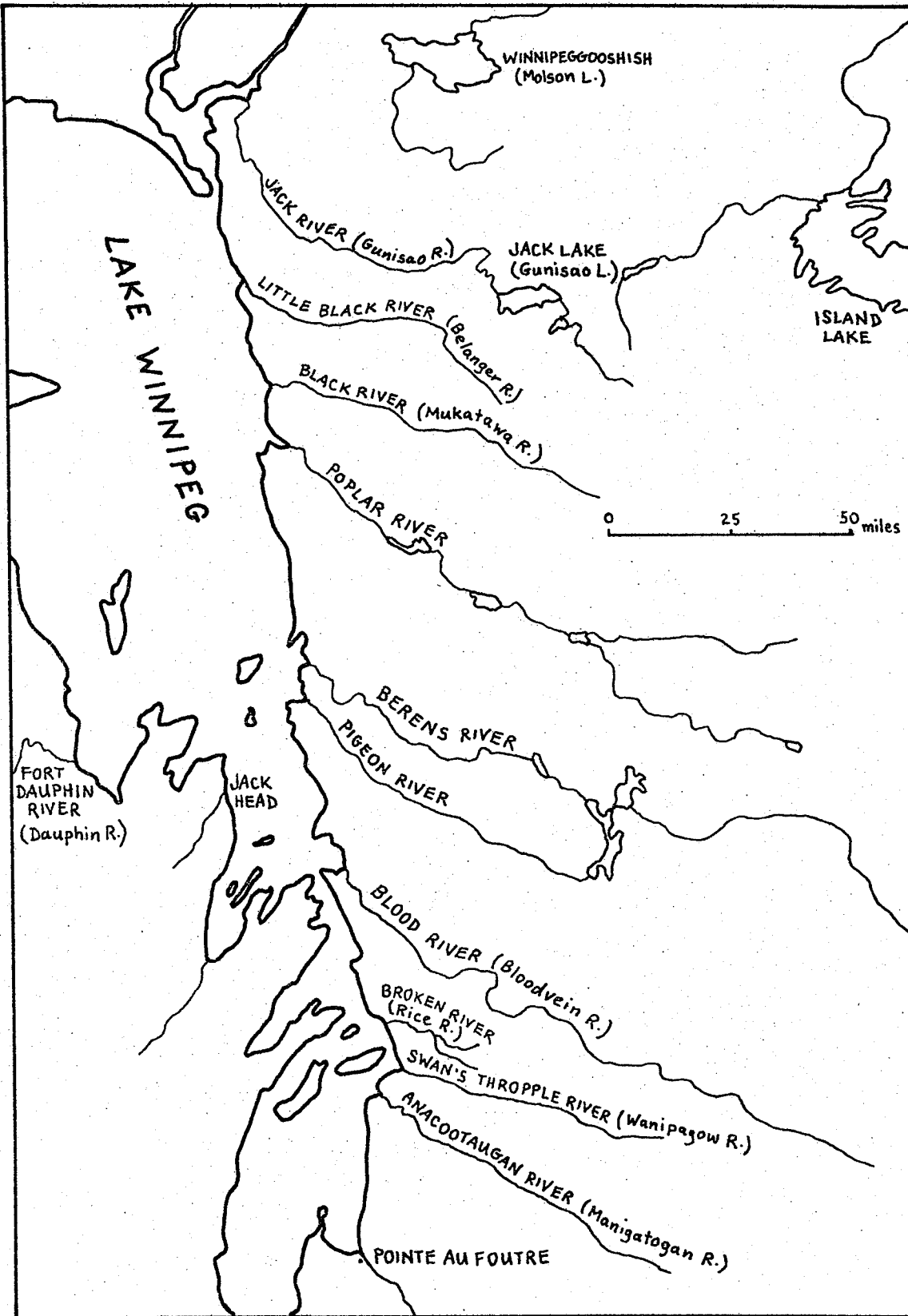


whose post was vaguely reported to be at the head of the Severn River. Sanderson thus faced considerable odds as his own outfit consisted of only nine men.

Sanderson built his house beside Solomon junior on Whiteloon Lake and, despite being surrounded by Nor'Westers on all sides, was able to procure a substantial trade of forty-eight bundles of furs (over 3,000 made beaver). This area, moreover, proved to be rich in beaver as nearly eighty percent of the returns were made up of beaver pelts. Sanderson was able to keep his expenses to a minimum and found that, by employing the Nor'Westers' tactics of sending men to the Indians' camps to trade, the returns could be considerably increased. On his return to Os naburgh in the spring, four Canadians deserted to his side, thus bolstering the ranks of experienced men on this front and adding another large canoe to the service.

At the southern end of Lake Winnipeg during the 1795-96 season, Edward Clouston built for Albany at Pointe au Foutre, opposite the North West Company post under the command of "Guet". Meanwhile, Best intended to resettle his Blood River House, but when he found that it had been destroyed by the Nor'Westers, he proceeded to the west coast of Lake Winnipeg to build beside his competitors. He reached Jack Head (Fig. 21) and left Beau grand with a few men to build a post there. Best pressed northward through the lake until he reached the mouth of Fort Dauphin River (Dauphin River) and built his house there naming it Suspense. He learned that Cameron, La Tour, and two independent traders "Reieume" and "La Violet" were located upriver at the Partridge Crop (along Fairford River). Best was once again fiercely opposed by Cameron.

Figure 21: Lake Winnipeg's Eastern Coast



Mr. Cameron is constantly at variance with me concerning trade, that it is almost impossible to get ye furrs without fighting for it.<sup>23</sup>

By 1796 Albany's inland trade had spread to a wide area of the Little North and had in fact extended beyond it to the Interlake region and to the southeastern margins of the prairie (Fig. 22). The Albany men had even ventured into two of the North West Company's strongholds: the Nipigon and Rainy Lake Countries. Competition was vigorous in all districts but it appears that the Nor'Westers generally held an advantage in manpower and fur returns. The East Winnipeg Country had been settled on its southern margins by both companies and along the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg. Much of East Winnipeg, however, remained unexploited, although traders from both companies were active along the adjacent Albany and Severn headwaters.

Figure 22 shows the returns of the Hudson's Bay Company trade in the Little North in 1796. Proportional circles have been drawn to represent the total trade in made beaver for each district, and these circles have been divided to show the relative value of beaver pelts each district was producing. The map reveals the large area over which Albany's trade was conducted. It also shows that beaver pelts comprised roughly fifty percent or more of the value of fur returns from all districts, except Albany Fort and, that as in the preceding hundred years of tidewater trading, it remained the most important pelt in this period of European inland settlement and competition in the Little North. The map also shows that it was along the expanding frontier of the fur trade

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<sup>23</sup> John Best, "River Dauphin Journal, 1795-96", B.51/a/1, fo. 17d.

Figure 22: The Hudson's Bay Company Fur Trade in the Little North, 1796.

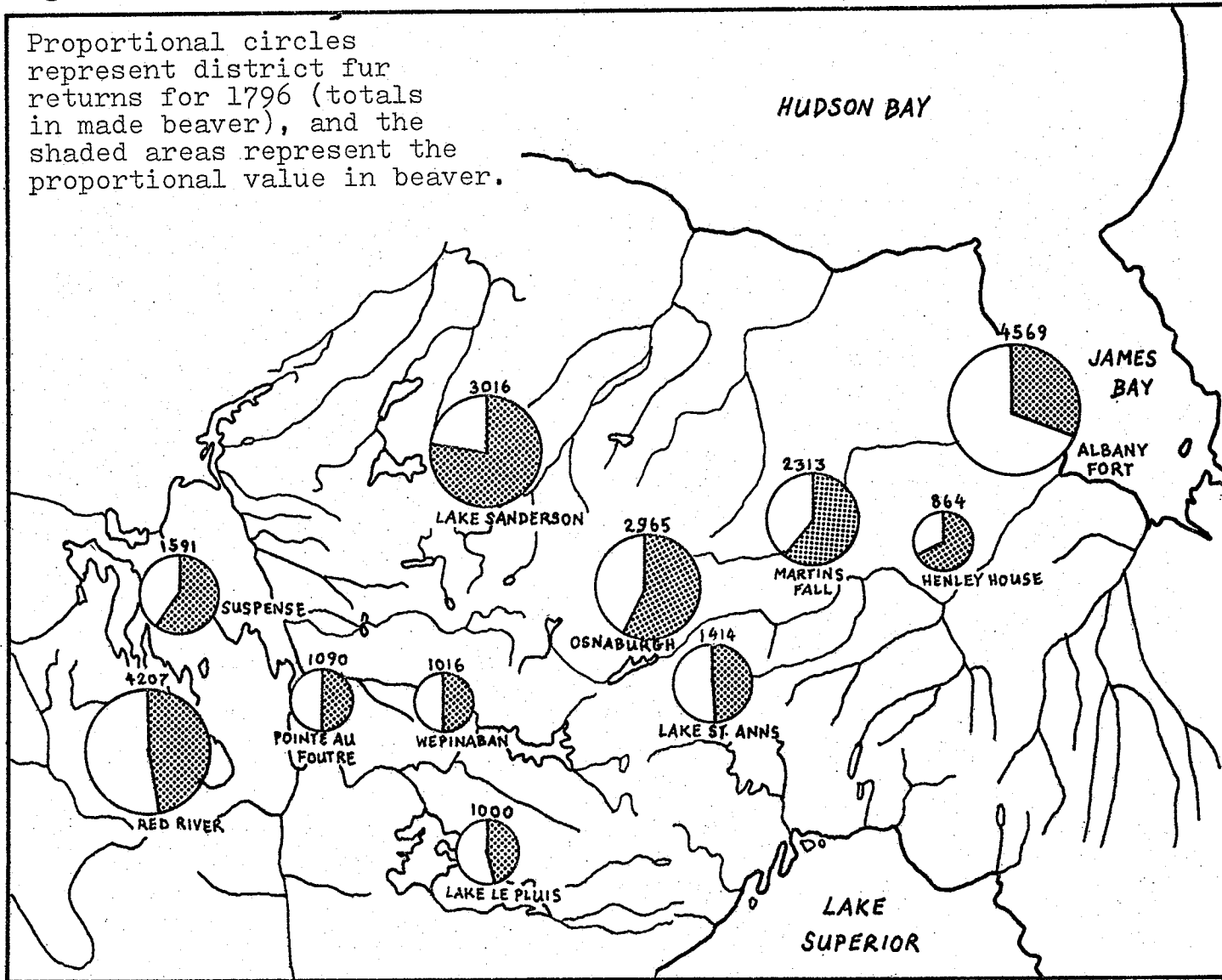
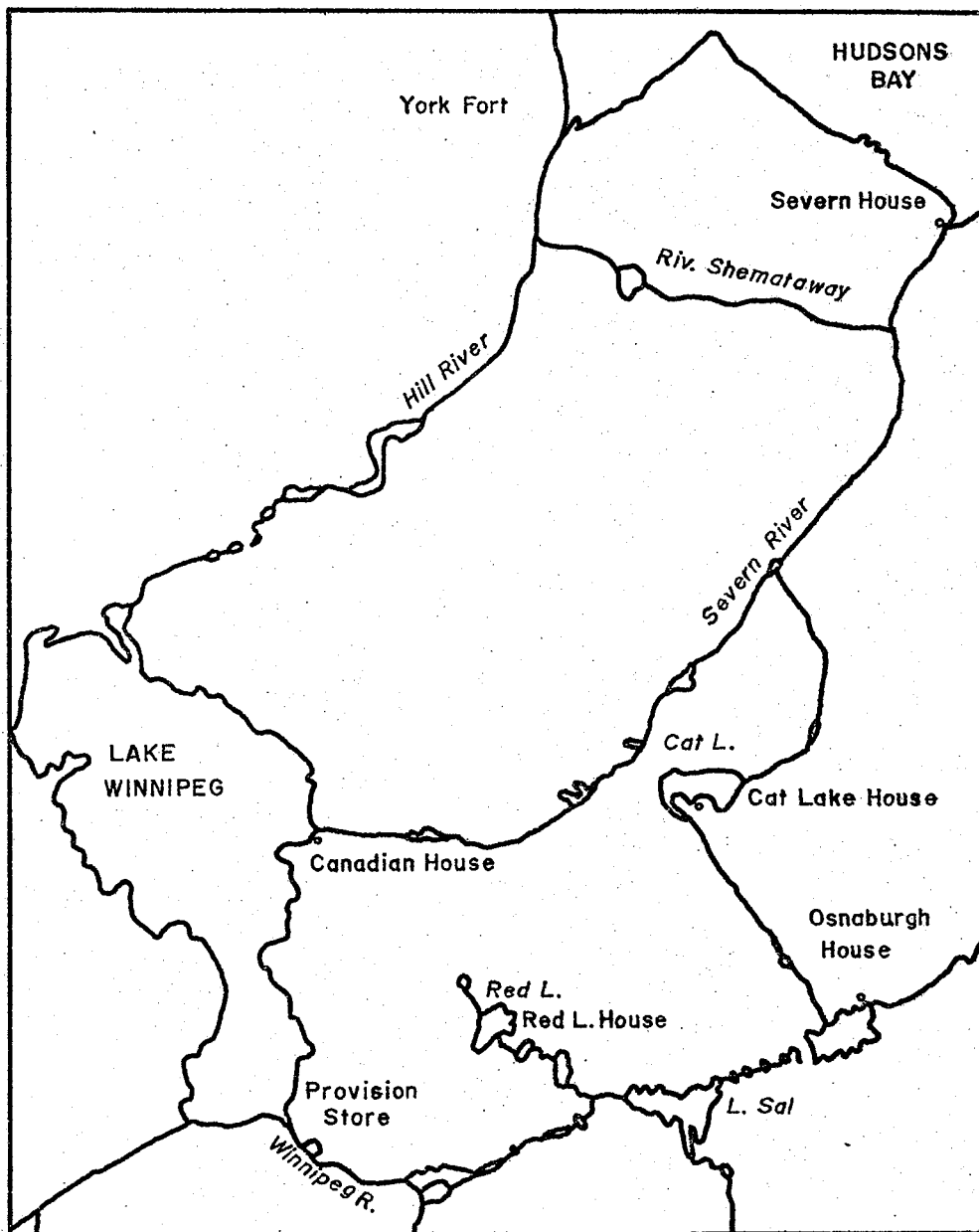


Figure 23: Detail of the East Winnipeg Country from A. Arrowsmith's Map of America, 1796.



in the Little North that the beaver was the most plentiful. The Lake Sanderson district at the Severn headwaters procured the greatest returns of beaver and this, in part, accounts for the deflection of trade into this region and the Hudson's Bay Company's failure to settle the East Winnipeg Country from the vantage of Cat Lake at that time.

The state of the Company's geographical knowledge in 1796 can be seen in Aaron Arrowsmith's, Map of America, which was published that year and was prepared from information in the Hudson's Bay Company's possession. Figure 23 is the section of Arrowsmith's map showing the area surrounding the East Winnipeg Country. The southern and northern connections to Lake Winnipeg have been drawn quite accurately but the lake itself and the country to the east of it have been distorted, reflecting the vague knowledge of this area imparted to Arrowsmith by the Hudson's Bay Company. A Canadian house is depicted on an East Winnipeg River, likely the Berens, and this river is shown to connect with the Severn River flowing to Hudson Bay. This false connection was shown on most maps of North America and can be dated from William Tomison's journey from Severn to Lake Winnipeg in 1767. The Lake Sanderson District, which was located at the Severn headwaters, and the area westward to Lake Winnipeg therefore remained almost as poorly known in 1796 as it had been prior to Tomison's journey.

## 2. The Ascendency of the North West Company in East Winnipeg, 1796-1800

Duncan Cameron removed from his Partridge Crop House in the Inter-lake region in 1796 and journeyed to Whiteloon on the Severn to oppose David Sanderson. Cameron's decision may have been influenced by Sanderson's success the previous year, but more likely it was in response to

Sanderson's hiring of several Canadians in the summer, including the clerk McFarlane. Cameron wrote the following in a letter to the Albany Chief.

. . . I am very much surprised that Mr. Sanderson would have such assurance as to debauch our servants in the mean manner he did; by giving those rogues provisions, canoe, and several other encouragements to induce them to depart, and leave our property on the beach.<sup>24</sup>

Sanderson reported the incident in a much different light:

. . . arrived at Great Lake and found 2 Canadians that had run away from Mr. Solomon they offered to assist us to Cat Lake for victuals which I agreed . . . arrived at Cat Lake and found all well, also three Canadians that had run away from their masters, they want to engage in this service.<sup>25</sup>

On the journey to Whiteloon Lake in the fall of 1796, Sanderson dispatched the former Nor'Wester, McFarlane, to build a post at Eagle Lake (possibly Eagle Lake on the Berens River). This was the first time the Albany men were able to steal a step on the Nor'Westers, although it should be noted that this was accomplished only by using the former North West Company clerk, McFarlane. Cameron discovered the location of McFarlane's post during the winter and quickly outfitted a post to oppose him there.

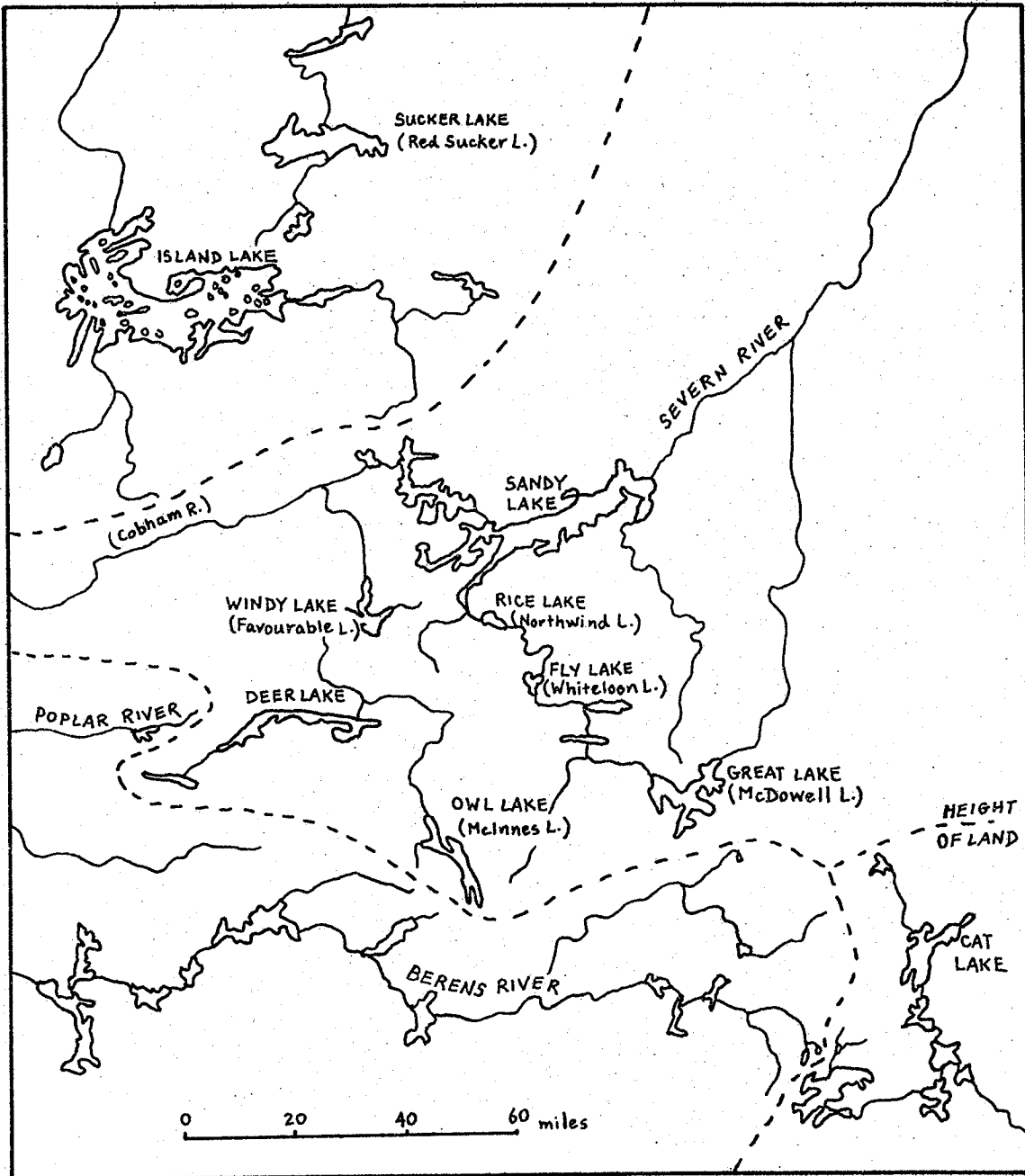
That season, 1796-97, Sanderson and Cameron were both surprised to learn that two large canoes of Canadians had settled a post on Deer

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<sup>24</sup> Duncan Cameron, "Letter to Albany Fort, Sept. 7, 1796", B.3/b/34, fo. 10.

<sup>25</sup> David Sanderson, "A Journal of Wind, Weather and Transactions at Fly and Catt Lakes, 1795-96", B.71/a/1, fos. 12d and 13.

Figure 24: The Severn Headwaters and Adjacent Country.





Lake, which was about forty miles to the west of Whiteloon Lake near the height of land separating the East Winnipeg and Severn basins (Fig. 24). These men were traders from the Grand Portage and had reached Deer Lake by ascending the Poplar River from the east coast of Lake Winnipeg. This was the first attempt by the Lac Quinipique Nor'Westers to go beyond lakeshore trading. It was also the deepest eastward thrust by the Nor'Westers from this vantage, for it took them beyond East Winnipeg drainage and into the Severn headwaters that had already been settled by their comrades from Nipigon. This overlap of trade between the two wings of the North West Company lasted only one season and was never repeated.

The relationship between the two veterans, Sanderson and Cameron, at Whiteloon Lake during the winter was filled with violent overtones. Sanderson wrote:

. . . I have good reason to write against Mr. Cameron when he and his men took by force from the Indians the furs that was intend'd to pay my debts which he prides himself in his numbers & says he always had more than the Hudson's Bay Company and ever will in a country where there is no civil or Military Law.<sup>26</sup>

In the Pointe au Foutre district that season, Clouston built a post along the east coast of Lake Winnipeg at the mouth of the Manigotogan River (see Fig. 21). He was opposed there by Nor'Westers and also learned that they had another post one hundred miles northward at Pigeon River. While Clouston wintered at his house, which he named Post Doubtful, he was informed that York Factory men had built a post at the

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<sup>25</sup> David Sanderson, "Letter to Albany Fort, Aug. 17, 1797", B.3/b/34, fo. 56.

northern end of the lake at Jack fish River (Gunisao River). During the winter, the Albany and York traders tried to reach each other but did not succeed in doing so for neither party could secure a guide to take them along the uncharted eastern coast of the lake.

Henry Hallett was the man in charge of the York post at the mouth of the Gunisao River. This was the first year that the York men had succeeded in establishing a post on Lake Winnipeg, and Hallett was vigorously opposed by the Nor'Westers. When he learned of Clouston's post to the southward he dispatched two men:

. . . to gain further information as it certainly would be much easier to settle a post there from York Fort then from the above place [Albany] as they have such a great Distance to convey their goods before they can reach this quarter.<sup>27</sup>

Although the York men could not reach Manigatogan River, Hallett's observations were the first to grasp the significance of the jurisdictional overlap that was beginning to develop between York and Albany in the East Winnipeg Country.

The men of the North West Company's Nipigon Department returned to the Severn headwaters in the 1797-98 season with redoubled efforts to cripple the Albany trade. Allan McFarlane had been persuaded by Cameron to return to the North West Company, and Cameron outfitted posts for Deer Lake, Sandy Lake, the White fishing Place (possibly White Claw Lake) and the Carp River (exact location uncertain). Sanderson was able to counter this only by sending men to Deer Lake. Sanderson complained:

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Hallett, "Colens Cat Jack River America Journal, 1796-97", B.154/a/1, fo. 17.

I now see plainly if a larger quantity of goods and likewise more men is not allowed for this quarter it will be impossible to cope with Mr. Cameron any longer.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, along the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg during the 1797-98 season, Thomas Vincent<sup>29</sup> took over the command of the house at Pointe au Foutre, but no outposts were built on the lake that year. The Albany men, however, did push beyond Lake Winnipeg and on to Lake Manitoba region and settled a house at Manitobar (The Narrows). The York post at Jack River was resettled but suffered from a vigorous competition by the Nor'Wester William McKay, who had been placed in charge of the Lac Ouinipique Department.

At this time Severn House, headed by an energetic master, Thomas Thomas, finally made plans to build inland posts at its headwaters and replace the Albany men there. Thomas had learned from Indians that "Mr. D. Saunders" of Albany had a post at "Wappistaquiaw" which was only six days journey upriver from Severn. James Swain was appointed to make this journey inland in the summer of 1798. Swain reached Sandy Lake but his Indian guide could not be persuaded to take him farther. He wrote:

. . . I then beg'd him to accompany me to the Place where David Saunders wintered but he said he would not . . . he told me it was two Days work to David Saunder's House that there was no carrying places but still current mostly all the way, that it was unnecessary to go farther as there were many Indians about this Lake . . .<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> David Sanderson, "Fly Lake Journal, 1797-98", B.71/a/3, fo. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Clouston had been ordered to take over the charge of Osnaburgh House from John Best who had apparently gone mad during the winter.

<sup>30</sup> James Swain, "A Journal during a Journey Inland from Severn House Hudson's Bay, 1798", B.198/a/51, fo. 6.

Although Swain's report of the Severn headwater region was promising, Thomas appears to have had insufficient resources to follow up on Swain's explorations and it would be several years before inland settlements would be established from Severn.

Sanderson and his Albany men returned to the Severn headwaters for the 1798-99 season with an increased outfit and four large canoes. Sanderson proceeded to Sandy Lake where he built his house, while he dispatched John Linklater with six men to build an outpost to the west. It is difficult to determine exactly where Linklater and his men travelled, but his journal provides some clues as to his whereabouts (Fig. 25). They were headed north of Deer Lake on the Severn River when Linklater made the following remarks:

. . . passed 3 carrying places not the longest but the worst ever I seed the river between ye falls is exeptionally dangerous.<sup>31</sup>

He then travelled westward on the Cobham River, possibly settling at Hudwin Lake, and received some interesting information bearing upon the earliest Albany explorations in East Winnipeg.

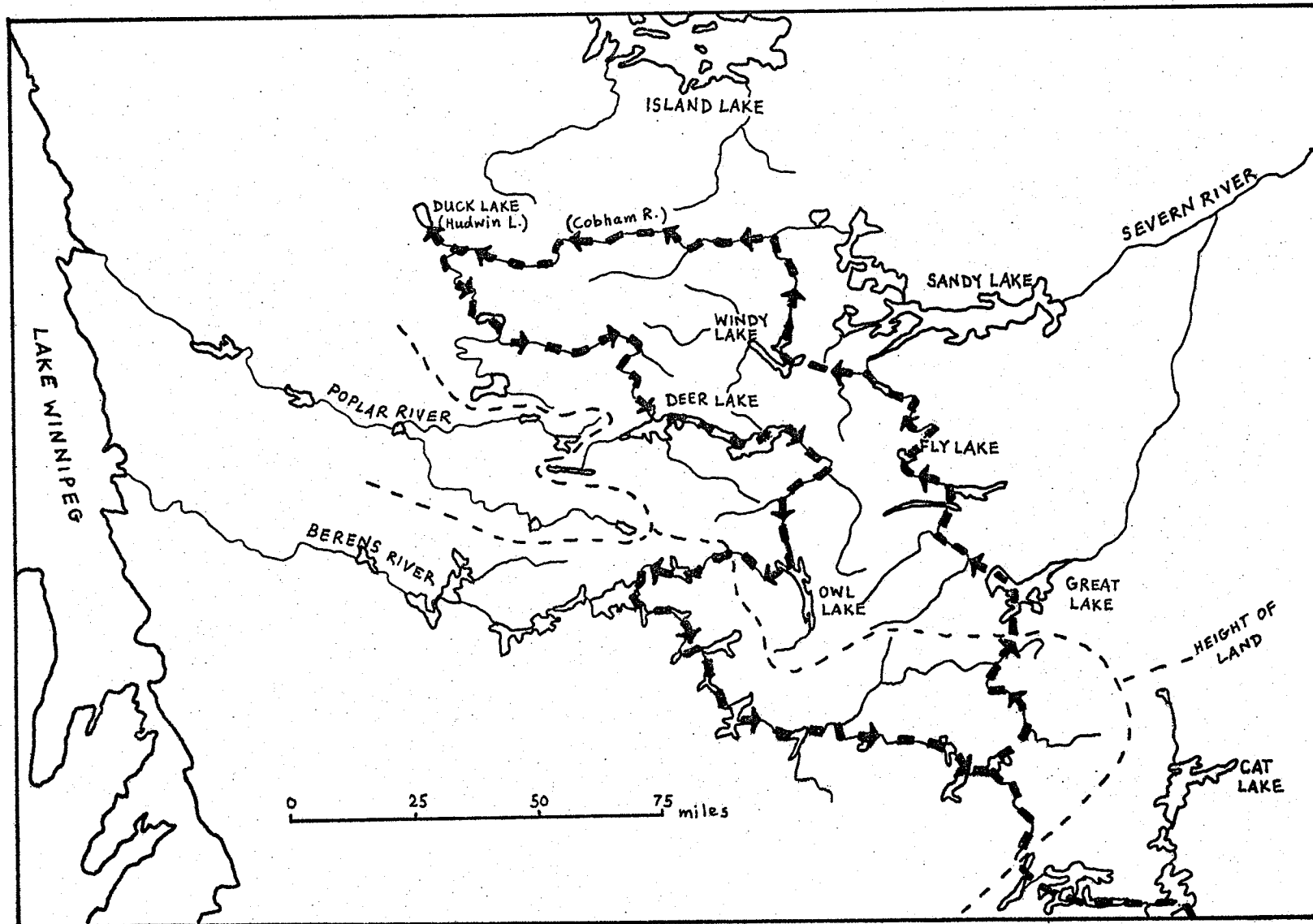
. . . the Inds which arrived this Day informs me that Mr. George Sutherland wintered in this part of ye country when he accompanied Cappematiswinekee from Albany.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John Linklater, "Journal of Occurrences from Fly Lake, to Duck Lake, 1798-99", B.54/a/a, fo. 3d. In 1886, A.P. Low conducted a geological survey of the Severn River, north of Deer Lake, and wrote: "In this distance there are five chutes, which together give forty-nine feet fall; or sixteen, ten, six, five, and twelve feet." in, "Preliminary Report on An Exploration of Country between Lake Winnipeg and Hudson Bay", Geological Survey of Canada, Part F., vol. II, 1886, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> John Linklater, "Journal of Occurrences from Fly Lake to Duck Lake, 1798-99", B.54/a/1, fo. 4d.

Figure 25: John Linklater's Journey to Duck Lake, 1798/99.



During the winter, Linklater explored the country to the north and even visited Island Lake, which was called by the Indians Upawaca. After an unopposed and successful trade, the party journeyed back to Osnaburgh. Linklater explored a different route on the way back (see Fig. 25) and this led him into the Berens River. Undoubtedly, he learned of this route from the Indians and it would not be unreasonable to assume that this information was conveyed to him in the context of Sutherland's pioneer exploration of the East Winnipeg Country in 1777. Linklater was impressed with both the route and the prospects for trade. The region was accessible by batteaux and had yet to be exploited by the Nor'Westers. He wrote that:

. . . I am much surprised that from Mr. George Sutherlands remarks no person from Albany has visited this part of the Country before now, as either batteause or canoes can penetrate with as much ease and safety as any part of ye country I have travelled through.<sup>33</sup>

Sanderson, who had returned from a fiercely competitive trade with Cameron at Sandy Lake, expressed great interest in this route and planned to settle a trial post there with batteaux next fall. While this thrust was being planned the Albany and York traders on Lake Winnipeg remained pinned down to their posts at both ends of the lake by vigorous competition from the Nor'Westers.

The season of 1799-1800 was salient to developing Albany's East Winnipeg trade. Sanderson requested a batteau for his outfit and Linklater was given orders to take it to Deer Lake using the Berens River route. Linklater successfully reached Deer Lake, but during the winter

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., fo. 20d.

this enterprising trader met an unfortunate death, being stabbed by a drunken Indian.

Meanwhile, Sanderson was having increasing difficulty with the trade at Sandy Lake. Not only was he ruthlessly opposed by Cameron, but he had a difficult time convincing the Albany men to accompany him with the canoes on the long and difficult journey to the Severn headwaters. Cameron and Sanderson were continually sending their men to the Indians' tents to trade furs, and Cameron, with his superior manpower and goods was the uncontested winner in these circumstances.

At Pointe au Foutre, Vincent outfitted a post for Anacootaugan River (Manigatogan River) (see Fig. 21), but this offered only a paltry competition to the Nor'Westers who had a number of posts about the lake. Vincent wrote:

The prospects of Trade at this place I am sorrty to say are the worst I ever saw owing to their being so many settlements around us.<sup>34</sup>

He also complained that the Nor'Westers' large canoes in this part of the country gave them an advantage over the Albany batteaux, which were used exclusively in this district. Farther north the York Factory men abandoned their house at the mouth of Gunisao River, leaving the entire east coast of Lake Winnipeg north of the Manigatogan to the North West Company.

By 1800 the North West Company had come to dominate the fur trade in East Winnipeg. Unlike the Albany men who faced a long and difficult journey by batteaux from James Bay, the Nor'Westers in their large

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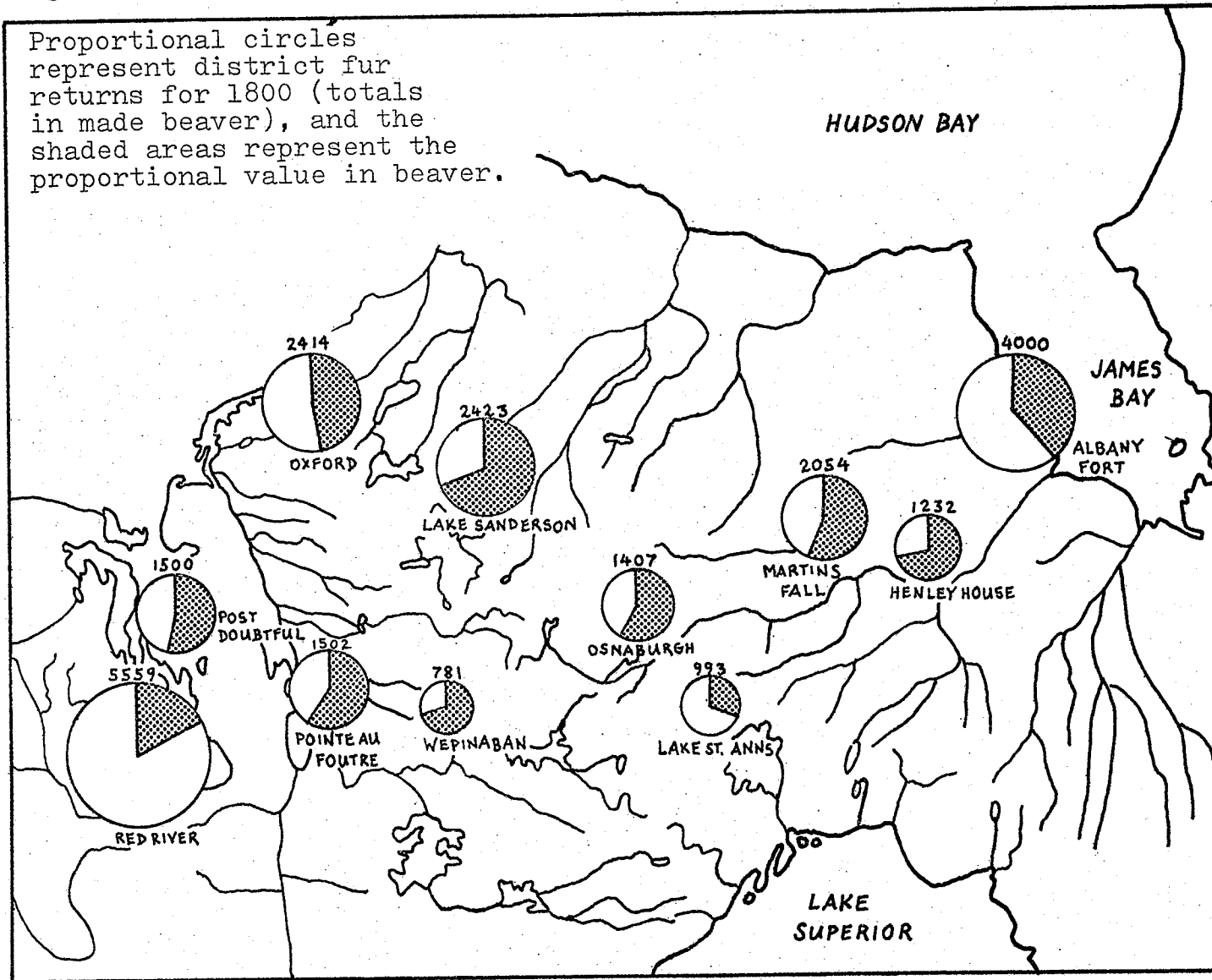
<sup>34</sup> Thomas Vincent, "River Oinepeauga House Journal, 1799-1800", B.4/a/3, fo. 14d.

canoes were efficiently supplied from their forward depot at Pointe au Foutre. Their outfits were substantially larger than those from Albany, and the Lac Quinipique Nor'Westers were able to exploit a significantly greater area of the East Winnipeg Country. A few attempts had been made by men from York Factory to settle the northern margins of East Winnipeg but so far these ventures had met with little success against the powerful opposition from the Nor'Westers. The eastern headwater region had yet to be exploited to any degree by either Company. It appears that the Nipigon Nor'Westers were restricted by departmental agreement to the country east of Lake Winnipeg drainage but had managed to prevent the Albany men from venturing full force into East Winnipeg by sending large trading parties along the Severn and Albany headwaters. The Berens River route to East Winnipeg, which had been first explored by George Sutherland in 1777, had recently been re-discovered by the Albany men and this avenue appeared to hold the brightest promise for the fur traders from Albany.

Although the Hudson's Bay Company faced an increasingly stronger opposition from the Nor'Westers, the trade in furs from the Little North actually peaked during the period 1796 to 1800. The North West Company most likely experienced a similar and larger peak in their returns from the Little North. Figure 26 reveals the state of the Hudson's Bay Company trade in the Little North in 1800. It can be seen that a large portion of Albany's trade was being produced in the Red River District which was just beyond the boundaries of the Little North. This district however was poor in beaver, while the districts within the Little North, including York's Oxford House, still maintained a relatively healthy proportion of beaver in their returns. The trade in and around East



Figure 26: The Hudson's Bay Company Fur Trade in the Little North, 1800.



Winnipeg provided a substantial quantity of furs and still maintained a high proportion of beaver.

### 3. The Berens River Fur Trade, 1800-1805

In the summer of 1800, David Sanderson set off for what was to be his last season of trading on the Severn headwaters. The newly discovered Berens River route to East Winnipeg had been proven by Linklater to be easily navigable by batteaux. Sanderson sent William Thomas and six men with a batteau to winter on the Berens, and they built their house on Sandy Narrows Lake (Stout Lake)<sup>35</sup> (Fig. 27). Sanderson returned to Sandy Lake with the rest of the outfit. He outfitted a post for Island Lake, while Cameron countered by opposing the Albany men there and by settling additional outposts at Succar Lake (Red Sucker Lake) and Owl Lake (McInnes Lake) (see Fig. 24).

The number of Nor'Westers in the Lac Ouinipique Department appears to have gradually increased<sup>36</sup> and, in the summer of 1800, McKay returned with eleven large canoes. That season, a small outfit from the "Little Company" (X.Y. Company) also tried to establish a post on Lake Winnipeg but was unsuccessful and went instead to the Red River. McKay had be-

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<sup>35</sup> The location of Sandy Narrows Lake is difficult to determine since that name has since been replaced. The best clue as to its location is found in the earliest survey of the Berens headwaters. A.W. Pouton, an Indian Reserve Surveyor for the Department of Indian Affairs, surveyed a reserve on "Pek-ange-Kum Lake" in 1888. He made a written sketch of the river from Family Lake to its headwaters in which the names of the successive lakes were given. They were given as Family, Fishing Eagle, Rocky Island, Sandy Narrows, Moose, Pekangikum, Goose, Fairy, and Upper Goose Lakes. From this rough sketch the location of Sandy Narrows Lake has been determined to be present Stout Lake.

<sup>36</sup> By 1802, the Lac Ouinipique Department comprised 80 men. See Table 2.

Table 2: North West Company Labour Force Totals  
for the Lac Ouinipique Department.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Number of Men</u>	<u>Additional Information</u>
1799 <sup>a</sup>	n.a.	1 Partner, 7 Clerks
1802 <sup>b</sup>	80	2 Partners, 13 Clerks and Interpreters, 7 Posts
1805 <sup>c</sup>	84	4 Clerks
1812 <sup>d</sup>	31	
1813	32	
1814	21	
1815	14	
1816	9	
1817	4	
1818	18	
1819	34	
1820	31	
1821	30	

SOURCES:

- a) "Arrangements of the Proprietors, Clerks, Interpreters etc. of the North West Company, 1799", Public Archives of Canada, MG.19, C.1, vol. 32.
- b) G.C. Davidson, The North West Company, 1967, Appendix I.
- c) "Transcript, List of North West Company Men at Various Stations, 1805", Public Archives of Canada, MG.19, C.1, vol. 55.
- d) "Register of North West Company Servants by Department, 1811-21", Hudson's Bay Company Archives, F.4/32.

come much bolder in his competition with the Albany men on Lake Winnipeg.

Vincent wrote:

. . . Mr. McKay has sent word to all the Indians hereabouts that if any one lands at my house he will either shoot or hang him.<sup>37</sup>

Vincent managed to build one post on Lake Winnipeg at the mouth of Broken River (Rice River) (Fig. 21) but this appears to have had little effect upon the virtual monopoly of the Nor'Westers.

Although Sanderson's journal for the 1801-02 season has not survived, it is evident from the Albany account books and the later journals that he completely abandoned the Severn headwaters and left the trade of that quarter entirely to Cameron and his Nor'Westers from Nipigon. Instead, he devoted his energies to developing the Berens River trade, a move that took him beyond the jurisdiction of Cameron's Nipigon Department and which enabled him to tap the virgin country lying between Cameron and McKay of the Lac Ouinipique Department farther to the west.

In the Lac Ouinipique Department, the Nor'Westers continued to harrass Albany's small outfit. Vincent found it necessary to abandon the Pointe au Foutre House and journeyed with a batteau up the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg until he reached Swan thropple River (Wanipagow River)<sup>38</sup> (see Fig. 21). From there he proceeded only a short distance

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Vincent, "Pointe au Foutre Journal, 1800-1801", B.4/a/4, fo. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Swan thropple River was marked on Arrowsmith's 1819 map as Swain's Throttle River. It was located between Broken River (Rice River) to the north and Mainwarins River (Manigatogan River) to the south. See Figure 34.

up the river but found it too dangerous to ascend with the batteau. He thus wintered near the mouth of the river on Turtle Lake (Clangula Lake). An outpost was also re-settled at the mouth of Rice River. To the north, men from York had returned and settled a post on Jack Lake (Gunisao Lake) (see Figure 21). William Sinclair, the master of that post, observed that the Nor'Westers under McKay had firm control of the trade in that area as well.

. . . the number of Canadian Houses that is all around this settlements it is surprising that a skin is got at it at all they are encroaching every year nearer to us.<sup>39</sup>

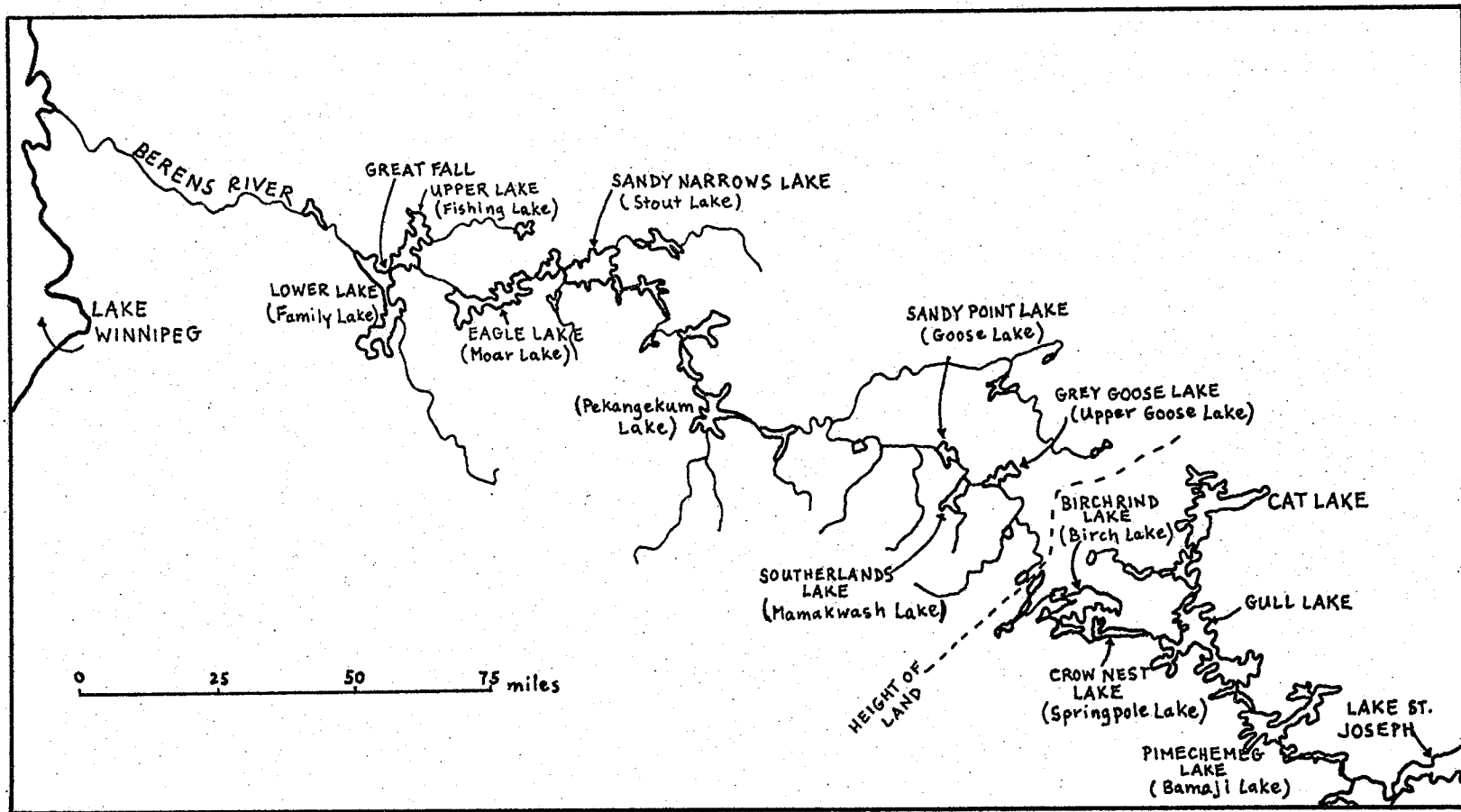
After the 1801-02 season Albany pulled out of the trade along the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg to concentrate their attack upon the East Winnipeg Country from the eastern headwaters. A small outfit headed by Vincent resettled Red Lake and an outpost was built on Bad Lake (Larus Lake) at the headwaters of the Bloodvein River. He was opposed at both places by "Adhemar", a clerk of the North West Company. Vincent learned that the Nor'Westers also had a post at the mouth of the Bloodvein River as did the X.Y. Company.

The Berens River cut through the middle of the East Winnipeg Country and, from posts established along its length, David Sanderson hoped to draw some of the trade away from the Nor'Westers established on Lake Winnipeg and from Cameron's Nipigon men who perforce remained to the east of the divide. Although by no means a sluggish river, the Berens was navigable by batteaux, and this factor freed the Albany men

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<sup>39</sup> William Sinclair, "Jack Lake House Journal, 1801-02", B.239/b/69, fo. 13d.

Figure 27: The East Winnipeg Country From Lake St. Joseph Westward to the Mouth of Berens River.



from relying upon large canoes that could only be obtained with difficulty from the Rainy Lake area and from North West Company deserters.

During the 1802-03 season, posts were settled at Sandy Narrows (Stout Lake) and at the Great Fall (between Fishing and Family Lakes). Sanderson was also obliged to outfit a trading post for Owl (McInnes) Lake which was just to the north of the Berens on the Severn system. This post was commanded by Sanderson's eldest son John, who was a young man of twenty-four, and was built mainly to "please the Indians"<sup>40</sup> of that quarter. Sanderson himself presided over the Great Fall House which he had established the previous year, and made a substantial trade of 39 bundles of furs (roughly 2,800 made beaver). Although there was no direct competition at Great Fall, it would seem that the Nor'Westers had settled a house at the mouth of the river. Sanderson quickly perceived this and sent his son David junior immediately, "toward ye winnipeck to look out for Indians".<sup>41</sup> During the winter the Nor'Westers sent men to the Indians' tents in the vicinity of Great Fall and Sanderson countered by employing his men in the same manner.

The Albany withdrawal from Severn's headwaters left the trade of that sector open to Cameron and his Nor'Westers. The men at Severn were ill-prepared to oppose them, but the York men readied themselves for this task. William Sinclair at Oxford House wrote to York Fort informing the chief of his intention of exploring a route to Island Lake. Toward this end he requested information about the Island Lake Country

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<sup>40</sup> David Sanderson, "Great Fall Journal, 1802-03", B.18/a/1, fo. 1d.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., fo. 1d.

and suggested that William Tomison would be able to report on this subject. This request is most revealing, for it demonstrates the lack of communication between York and Albany, but more importantly it suggests that the exact whereabouts of Sanderson and his men was unknown to the men in charge of Albany as well.

In 1803-04, Vincent and his Albany men continued to oppose the Nor'-Westers and X.Y. Company men along the southeastern fringes of the East Winnipeg Country. The Red and Bad Lake posts were occupied once more by Vincent and by Adhemar for the North West Company. An X.Y. post was also built on Cedar or Cutt Lake (Wabaskong Lake).<sup>42</sup> Although there is no clear evidence indicating that the X.Y. traders had yet penetrated northward to the Berens River, the Nor'-Westers were established along the entire eastern coast of the lake. They were quickly and efficiently supplied from their storehouse at Pointe au Foudre. In contrast, Sanderson and his men hauled their batteaux and supplies along the inhospitable and unyielding terrain of the interior uplands. The 1803-04 outfit, for example, required twenty-four days to travel from Osnaburgh to Sandy Narrows, and during the trip one man drowned. Despite these difficulties Sanderson had gained control of the entire upper reaches of the Berens westward to Great Fall. His son, John, was sent once again to trade on the Severn system to the north, wintering on Windy Lake (Favourable Lake) in opposition to Cameron's men under Munro who still held sway in that area. The York men at Oxford House settled an outpost at Island Lake, but the numerous Nor'-Westers easily frustrated their trade.

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<sup>42</sup> This lake has been located using information from the "Osnaburgh District Report Map, 1816", B.155/e/4.



Peter Whitford who was in charge wrote:

. . . hopes were frustrated by the Canadians who arrived with three canoes & 20 men in October last & in winter six more men came from Mr. Munro at the Windy Lake these men were dispersed all over the Lake in such a manner as to intercept the Indians which they did effectually.<sup>43</sup>

At Great Fall House, Sanderson found it necessary to send men toward Lake Winnipeg to stop his competitors from monopolizing the trade there. He wrote:

. . . the settlements of Canadians is so many that the Indians informs me that these Canadians trade the beaver with them where they kill them.<sup>44</sup>

An outfit headed by Jasper Corrigan was dispatched to the northwest destined for Rice Lake (Harrop Lake) but their batteau would only go as far as Lower Rice Lake (probably Wrong Lake) on the Poplar River system (see Fig. 38).

The next season 1804-05 Sanderson reacted quickly by bringing in a large canoe in addition to his two batteaux in order to effectively prosecute the trade on the Poplar River. James Slater was placed in charge of the Rice Lake (Harrop Lake) post, but the opposition on the lower reaches of the Poplar was severe that year. In addition to the numerous Canadians who were sent from their downstream posts to winter with the Indians, Slater had to contend with Indians from "Montreale", or Iroquois, who for the first time were sent into the East Winnipeg

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Whitford, "Letter from Oxford House to York Factory, June 11, 1804", B.239/b/69, fo. 59.

<sup>44</sup> David Sanderson, "Great Fall Journal, 1803-04", B.18/a/2, fo. 5.

Country.

Meanwhile, at Great Fall, Sanderson was visited, first by X.Y. traders, and then by some Nor'Westers who ascended the river from Lake Winnipeg. The X.Y. outfit comprised two large canoes under the charge of Alexander Campbell. He told Sanderson that he was going to build his post at the bottom of the fall. A week later, an advance party of seven Nor'Westers headed by a Mr. McDonald arrived at the bottom of the fall. McDonald built his post at the Little Grand Rapid (Night Owl Rapids) and shortly thereafter Campbell of the X.Y. Company invited Sanderson to unite with him against the Nor'Westers. This offer, however, was refused by Sanderson and the three concerns spent the entire winter in vigorous opposition. The Canadians built "6 Houses which is placed all round the Lake below the fall and they have stoped all the Ind<sup>s</sup> on that quarter."<sup>45</sup> Sanderson was restricted to the land above the fall and wrote: "our Boats are so weighty that we could not go over the fall."<sup>46</sup> In February, the Albany men went overland past the fall and built beside the Nor'Westers' house at the "Little Fall". The Nor'Westers had seventeen men at their post and easily outmaneuvered the five men sent from Great Fall House. McDonald's men quickly showed themselves to be ruthless traders whom Sanderson described as, "a set of the greatest villens that ever came from Canada".<sup>47</sup>

As the Nor'Westers were pressing in the Lac Quinipique Department, Cameron and his Nipigon men continued to corner much of the trade in the

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<sup>45</sup> David Sanderson, "Great Fall Journal, 1804-05", B.18/a/3, fo.5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., fo. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., fo. 8.

Severn headwaters. York sent an outfit to Island Lake and John Sanderson for Albany settled at McInnes Lake, but these efforts appear to have had little effect upon Cameron's dominance, whose trading activities are described in his incomplete but nonetheless valuable journal kept during the 1804-05 trading season.<sup>48</sup>

Cameron's route has been interpreted and mapped in Figure 28.

Cameron himself was destined to trade against John Sanderson at McInnes Lake:

. . . in the hope of taking a few packs from them, in order to help me to keep up the usual average returns from this Department, which would be impossible were I to confine myself within the usual limits, as beaver is getting scarce.<sup>49</sup>

These remarks indicate that Cameron was actually crossing into the Lac Quinipique Department to oppose the Albany men. He also felt that he was justified in so doing since the beaver were becoming scarce in the Upper Severn and there were no other Nor'Westers in the vicinity to oppose John Sanderson's trade.

When he arrived at McInnes Lake, Cameron found that the Albany men had already been there a month. This disadvantage was further amplified by Sanderson's intimate connections with the Indians and his penchant for being liberal with his supply of liquor. Cameron wrote:

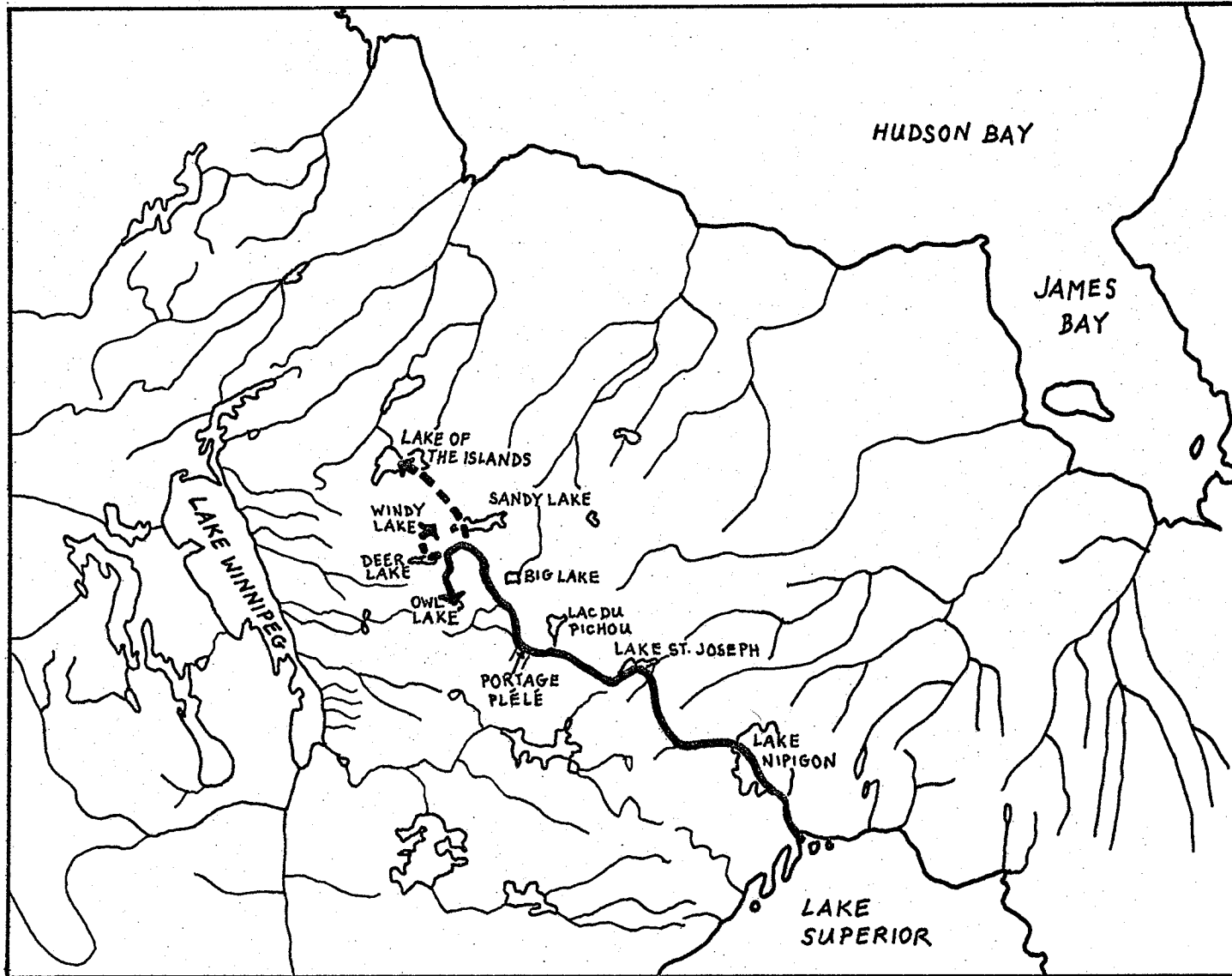
There are now eight Indians here, all drunk and very troublesome to my neighbour, who, I believe, is as

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<sup>48</sup> Duncan Cameron, "The Nipigon Country, 1804", in L.R. Masson (ed.), Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, Vol. II, 1960, p. 243.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

Figure 28: Duncan Cameron's Route to the Severn Headwaters, 1804.



drunk as themselves; they are very civil to me, and so they may, for I am giving them plenty to drink.<sup>50</sup>

The trade had reached a point where the Indians expected liquor at all times, whether or not they brought skins to trade.

Cameron's experience of twenty years in the fur trade made him an astute observer of the effects of the trade upon the environment, and the returns of his Nipigon Department at this time.

. . . The Indians have lost all industry and are becoming careless about hunting and paying their credits, as they very well know that when one will refuse, another more extravagant will readily give . . . I am sorry to say that, even if there were no opposition at all in the country to spoil the trade, it is now getting so barren and poor that in a dozen years hence, the returns from it will be so trifling that, even if one company had the whole, on the cheapest terms, it will be little enough to pay the expenses of carrying on the business, for the hunt is declining very fast, and we are obliged every year to make new discoveries and settle new posts. Even with all that, we cannot keep the former average of returns, although the consummation of goods is increasing every year, and I believe that our discoveries are now about at an end, and that the trade cannot be extended much further than it is at present.<sup>51</sup>

Cameron's statement that the geographical limits to the trade would soon be reached and his prophecy that the trade would dwindle to nothing in twelve years would begin to ring true shortly after 1805. Virtually every fur region within the Little North had been tapped by 1805, and the pressure of sustained and generally increasing fur trapping had clearly reduced the fur resource of much of the region.

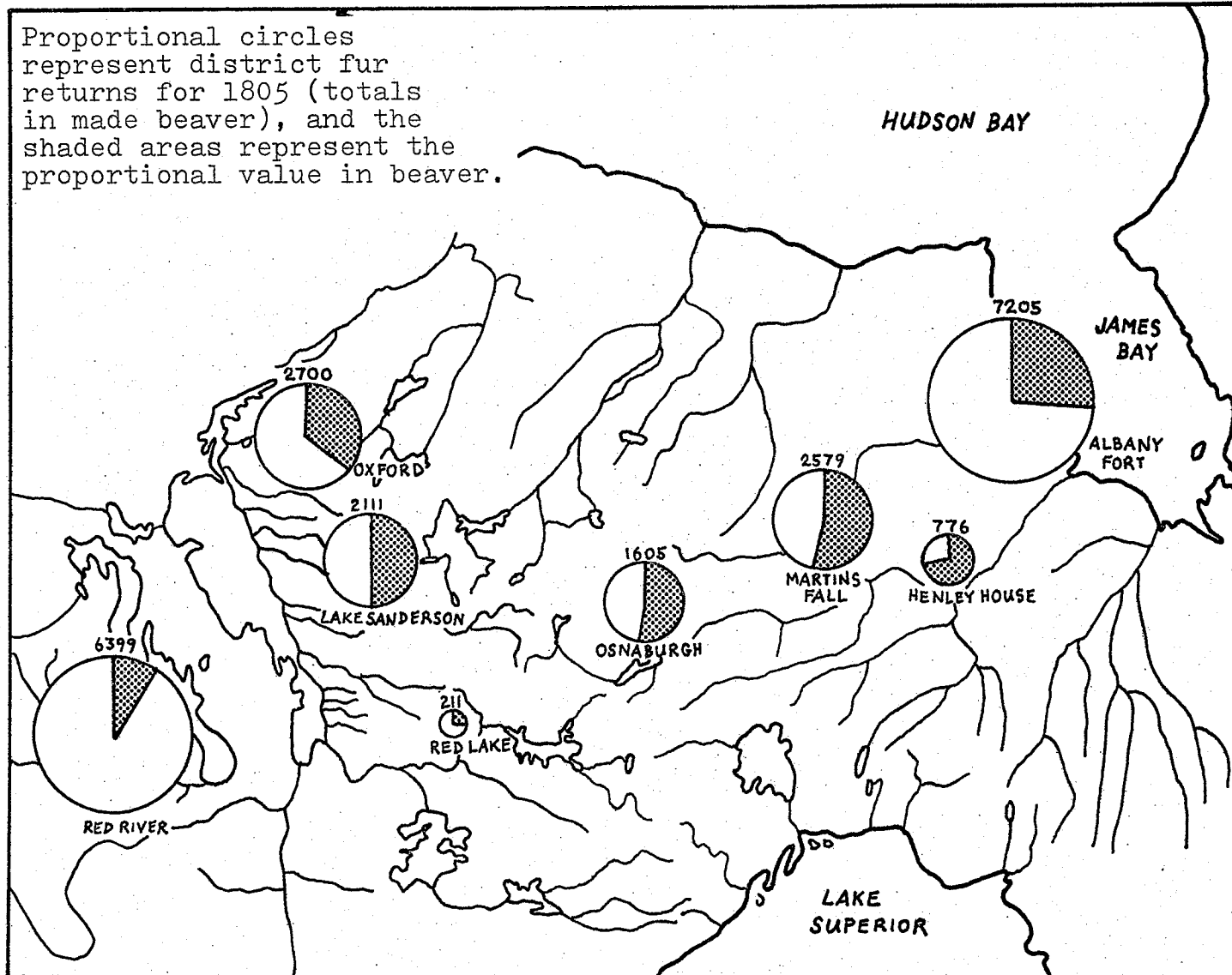
Figure 29 shows the state of the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade in

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

Figure 29: The Hudson's Bay Company Fur Trade in the Little North, 1805.



the Little North in 1805. It can readily be seen that the proportional value of beaver in the returns of the Company's districts had decreased markedly. This was especially true in the regions where competition was severe such as Red River. In East Winnipeg the returns also reflected a general decline in the annual harvest of beaver pelts. The competition for furs had peaked in 1804 with the Hudson's Bay, North West, and X.Y. Companies vigorously opposing one another for a share of the fur resources of the Little North. In 1805 the X.Y. Company united with the North West Company to usher in a period in which the two remaining companies bitterly opposed each other in a struggle for the dwindling fur bearers of the region.

#### 4. The Twilight of Competitive Trade in the East Winnipeg Country, 1805-1810

David Sanderson, the fifty-three year old Albany veteran, was made master of Osnaburgh House in 1805. Before he retired from the Berens River Country, however, he had sent a message to York Factory by Thomas McNab junior, a mixed-blood son of the York Chief. In it he tersely noted some of the same problems that Cameron had written about from his perspective on the Severn at the same time.

. . . I am sorry to inform you of the Trade of this quarter is much shortened by reason of many oppositions from Canadians which is the confusion of the Indians as we vie with each other who can throw away the most of our employers property on them before any return can be made.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> David Sanderson, "Letter from Great Fall to York Factory, May 22, 1805", B.239/b/73, fo. 6.

Albany's East Winnipeg trade for the 1805-06 season was commanded by William Thomas. He was a relatively inexperienced trader, but his outfit included two of Sanderson's mixed-blood sons, David junior and James. In contrast to his predecessor, and for reasons that are not clear, Thomas opted to carry the East Winnipeg trade entirely with batteaux, which proved to be a costly mistake. He was unable to reach Great Fall, finding the river too shoal to take the batteaux any farther than Eagle Lake (see Fig. 27). There he built his house and shortly after learned that the Nor'Westers had houses on the Poplar River and on the Berens below the Big Fall. He wrote:

. . . they are going to rice Lake [on the Poplar River] in the middle of the Indian hunting ground the Indians wish us to go there but is impossible to go with Boats . . . the Canadians have a great advantage over us with their canoes as they can go in any part of the Country and that we cannot with Boats.<sup>53</sup>

Since the trade west of Great Fall was lost to the Nor'Westers, Thomas decided to outfit two outposts to the north and east. James Slater was placed in charge of the Deer Lake post on the Severn and John Crear was sent to Sandy Point Lake (Goose Lake) on the Berens headwaters (see Fig. 27). The fur trade from these posts, however, was trifling and indeed the whole country appeared to have been exhausted of furs.

. . . an Indian family arrived brought 30 B<sup>r</sup> they inform me they have been starving all the winter and could not find any B<sup>r</sup> this part of the country being entirely hunted up.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> William Thomas, "Lake Sanderson Journal, 1805-06", B.57/a/1, fos. 2 and 5d.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., fo. 9.



The Albany men continued to pay dearly for furs to keep the Indians away from the Nor'Westers, and presents of liquor became the only means to conduct trade.

To the south, at Red Lake and the headwaters of the Bloodvein, William Corrigan for Albany was opposed by a large and unruly outfit of Nor'Westers. The main trading post for both companies was established on Bad Lake; Corrigan with five men and a large canoe, and John Haldane, formerly a wintering partner of the X.Y. Company, with seventeen men and two large and two small canoes. During the winter, the Nor'Westers armed themselves and forced their way into the Albany posts at Red Lake and Bad Lake, robbing the latter of their furs. Haldane, confident of his superiority, told Corrigan plainly: ". . . he had come for furs and furs he would have if they should come from Hell."<sup>55</sup> The reasons for these acts of aggression are not clear, but it is evident that the decline of furs from the region had, in part, prompted Haldane and his men to rob the Albany posts. In addition, the union of the X.Y. and North West Companies had created a surplus of men in the district.<sup>56</sup> These men easily outnumbered the Hudson's Bay Company men and were likely emboldened by their superior strength.

For the 1806-07 season on the Berens River, Thomas wisely ordered two canoes for his outfit and was able to reach Big Fall. On his way he had left Slater to winter on Grey Goose Lake (Upper Goose Lake) at the headwaters of the Berens. At Big Fall, Thomas decided to press on

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<sup>55</sup> William Corrigan, "Journal of Occurrences at Red and Bad Lakes, 1805/06", B.244/a/1, fo. 7d.

<sup>56</sup> Corrigan noted that there were upwards of 50 men at the Lac Seul depot in the spring of 1806.

to Rice Lake (Harrop Lake) on the Poplar River and left Crear and five men to winter at the falls. Taking the two canoes, Thomas reached Rice Lake in six days:

. . . found the Ind<sup>s</sup> making Rice gave them a treat of Brandy and traded about 80 gls of Rice these Ind<sup>s</sup> wish me to winter in Brandy Lake about two days journey from this place.<sup>57</sup>

He reached Brandy Lake (Wrong Lake) but decided to winter at Thunder Lake (Weaver Lake) beside the Nor'Westers (see Fig. 38). He also dispatched a canoe to build beside the North West Company post at the mouth of Poplar River. Despite these vigorous measures, the fur returns were dismal. Thomas wrote: ". . . furs of every kind are very scarce in this quarter."<sup>58</sup>

At Big Fall, the fight for the few remaining furs reached its zenith. In October, the Nor'Wester McDonald and five men forced their way into the Albany house occupied by Crear and William Ploughman. McDonald demanded their furs and when Ploughman resisted McDonald drew his cutlass and stabbed the former in the arm. The Nor'Westers then ransacked the post, taking furs, provisions, and a canoe. The vulnerable Albany men were victimized a second time in January by the Nor'Westers who forced their way into the post and took more furs and provisions. After this second incident, the Albany men refused to stay at Big Fall, fearing for their lives, and joined Thomas at Thunder Lake.

Beside the armed conflict with the Nor'Westers, Thomas received a reprimand from the newly resettled York post at Jack Lake (Gunisao Lake).

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<sup>57</sup> William Thomas, "Lake Sanderson Journal, 1806-07", B.217/a/1, fo. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., fo. 5.

Thomas Swain, the master of that post, sent a letter by an Indian messenger to Thomas accusing him of encroaching on York's trading lands.

Thomas sent a bitter reply to Swain in which he wrote:

. . . I conceive myself not in the least accountable to you for any part of my conduct any further remonstrance from you will not be attended to.<sup>59</sup>

This clash between Thomas and Swain touched off a debate between the Chiefs of York and Albany as to the propriety of who should conduct the trade in East Winnipeg. The Albany Chief, Hodgson, was finally convinced that the York men could exploit the region more profitably and gave orders to Thomas to withdraw if the York Traders came into that area. Thomas agreed but quickly added that:

. . . from the knowledge I have of this part of the country together with my poor success here this year makes me think it will scarcely be of any advantage establishing a Post within the vicinity of this place as the Beaver are very scarce and the Indians are all meaning to go to different places to hunt next year.<sup>60</sup>

An outfit from York was nevertheless prepared in 1807 under the direction of Alexander Kennedy. McNab, the York Chief, ordered him to build a post at the place where the Albany men had wintered and added:

. . . a slight Geographic glance, point out the Superior ease of its supplies from York, & as the chief at Albany justly observes, our general attention should be regulated by these circumstances.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., fo. 8d.

<sup>60</sup> William Thomas, "Letter from Poplar River to York Factory, April 4, 1807", B.239/b/76, fo. 33d.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas McNab, "Letter from York Factory to Albany Fort, Jan. 25, 1808", B.239/b/75, p. 7.

George Spence, an Albany man who had served with the Great Fall outfit, made a rough sketch of the Poplar River route from Great Fall House to Lake Winnipeg (Fig. 30). Although it revealed very little about the regional geography of East Winnipeg, it did point out that Lake Winnipeg could be reached in eleven days while the trip from Osnaburgh to Great Fall generally required more than double that time.

Kennedy ascended the Poplar River in the fall of 1807 and built his post at Drunken Lake (Wrong Lake) which was called Brandy Lake by the Albany men. He was opposed there by Duncan Cameron who had been transferred to the Lac Ouinipique Department that year. Furs of any kind were scarce and, despite Cameron's experience, both posts made a poor trade. Kennedy remarked that, "between us we had only seven wretched Indians".<sup>62</sup>

Cameron had been transferred to the Lac Ouinipique Department in 1807, replacing William McKay who had retired from the service of the North West Company.<sup>63</sup> The trade of the Lake Winnipeg region was in a severe state of decline and Cameron moved quickly to reorganize the department. After trading on the Poplar River during the winter, Cameron returned to Fort William and, at a meeting of the Proprietors of the North West Company held on July 24, 1808, the following resolutions were passed:

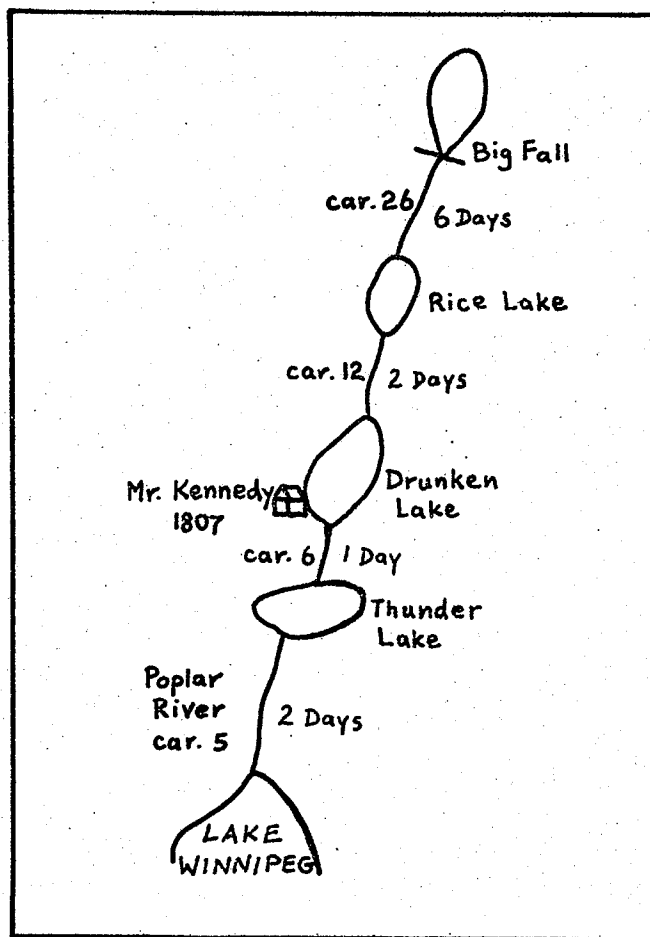
. . . a Statement of the Trade and number of Establishments in the Lac Ouinipique & Upper Red River Departments were laid before the meeting--It appeared

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<sup>62</sup> Alexander Kennedy, "Letter from Oxford House to York Factory, June 13, 1808", B.239/b/75, p. 28.

<sup>63</sup> W.S. Wallace (ed.), Documents Relating to the North West Company, 1968, p. 256.

Figure 30: A Map of Lake Winnipeg to Big Fall by George Spence. Redrafted by Peter Fidler, 1809.



Source: Peter Fidler's Notebook,  
E.3/4, fo. 18d.

that in the winter of 1807/08, there had been Ten Canoes, and as many Posts and Masters in Lac Ouiniquie Department--That five of these Posts only produced 32½ Packs in all--it was therefore determined that these five Posts should be given up, & the remaining five only established--Say Skabitchiwine, Bas de la Riviere, Riviere Cassé, Riviere au Tourte, & Les Dalles, and that Mr. Cameron should make his Arrangements accordingly.<sup>64</sup>

This reorganization left only two posts to be settled on the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg, Rivière Cassé, or Broken River (Rice River), and Rivière au Tourte, or Pigeon River (probably refers to Berens River).

The York traders failed to return to Poplar River in 1808. The Chief at York wrote:

. . . scarcity of men causes us now to relinquish a post occupied last year near Sandy Narrow, where Mr. Thomas wintered from Albany.<sup>65</sup>

Thomas had maintained his major post at Sandy Narrows during the winter of 1807-08 and had outfitted a post at Great Fall under Slater. He returned to Sandy Narrows late in the summer of 1808 and once again dispatched Slater and eight men to the Great Fall. Slater was persuaded by Indians to build at the "Little Ripple" below the Great Fall and shortly thereafter a party of Nor'Westers arrived to build beside him. Alexander Campbell, the former X.Y. Company clerk, headed this outfit which included ten men in a large canoe. The North West Company also had a post at the mouth of "Pigeon River" (probably Berens River) and at Bad Lake on the Bloodvein headwaters which drew a large number of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas McNab, "Letter from York Factory to Albany Fort, Jan. 11, 1809", B.239/b/77, fo. 4.

Indians away from the Albany post. Campbell continually sent his men to the Indian's camps and, although the Nor'Westers offered no violence against Slater or his men, they warned "the Indians from coming in to us [Hudson's Bay Company post] threatening to kill them if they do not hunt for them."<sup>66</sup> Campbell proved to be an irresponsible trader and Cameron, who would not tolerate that kind of behaviour, sent out two clerks, McDonald and Nelson, in the winter to take over the charge of his post. Campbell was relieved of his command and, "he is never to be employed in their service any more."<sup>67</sup> McDonald remained at the Little Ripple for the rest of the winter to oppose Slater but the country was in such an exhausted state that neither concern was able to procure much of a trade. The Indians all complained that the beaver had disappeared from the region and Slater left his post in the spring with only five packs of furs. He wrote: "they [Indians] join in the same cry with the rest that they can find no Beaver."<sup>68</sup>

David Sanderson returned to lead Albany's Berens River trade during the 1809-10 season,<sup>69</sup> while Thomas took over at Osnaburgh. The York traders once more declined to settle in East Winnipeg, a region over

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<sup>66</sup> James Slater, "Letter from the Little Ripple to Sandy Narrows, Nov. 20, 1808", B.193/a/2, fo. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., fo. 17d.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., fo. 15d.

<sup>69</sup> Sanderson's eldest son, John, had accidentally drowned in the spring. Thomas reported that John Sanderson had met his unfortunate fate because he had been drunk while on his way to trade at an Indian camp. The Albany men were all warned against drinking, but Thomas wrote: "I have every reason to believe this is a custom among our people and at this time has been the means of their Honors losing a good servant and a mother and 4 small children a good father and husband." Sandy Narrows Journal, B.193/a/2, fo. 20.

which they had so adamantly demanded jurisdiction only a few years previously. Sanderson wintered at Sandy Narrows, while an outpost was settled at Grey Goose Lake under James Loutitt and Slater returned to the Great Fall. None of these posts experienced direct opposition from the Nor'Westers, who appear to have largely withdrawn from East Winnipeg. Cameron, in his final year as the commander of the Lac Ouinipique Department, had taken only five canoes with him in the fall of 1809.<sup>70</sup> Despite the lack of competition, the Albany posts made an unsuccessful trade that season. Slater at Great Fall wrote:

. . . as for Beaver skins I have seen none only cats & a few martins & they all make a great complaint theres no Beaver which I suppose to be true or else they would have killed some.<sup>71</sup>

During the winter Sanderson received an official order to clear out all men and goods from his district. The Albany men had been ordered by Company officials in London to henceforth remain within the confines of Albany River drainage.

By 1810 the fur trade in the East Winnipeg Country and throughout much of the Little North had declined sharply. Large areas had been over-trapped and many reports indicated that the beaver had disappeared completely from areas which had once been rich in that animal. Figure 31 shows the returns of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Little North in 1810. The most notable aspect of this map compared with the previous maps of fur returns is the decline in beaver from the area around Lake

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<sup>70</sup> W.S. Wallace (ed.), Documents Relating to the North West Company, 1968, p. 265.

<sup>71</sup> James Slater, "Letter from Great Fall to Sandy Narrows, April 9, 1810", B.193/a/3, fo. 8.



Winnipeg. Figure 32 provides a more graphic display of this phenomenon, concentrating on East Winnipeg and comparing a peak fur return season, 1798-99, with a low fur return season, 1806-07.

The North West Company had already begun its withdrawal from East Winnipeg in 1808, but the Hudson's Bay Company made plans in 1810 for new settlements in the region to be directed from York Factory. Thus, just as the Nor'Westers had generally been the first to exploit fur bearing regions, they were also in this instance quicker to respond to the resource depletion occasioned by competitive trading. In part this reflected a more intense pressure to realize annual profits but, relative to the men from Hudson's Bay, it was also evidence of a more efficient and accurate communication of knowledge among the bourgeois of the North West Company at their annual meetings in Fort William.

Figure 31: The Hudson's Bay Company Fur Trade in the Little North, 1810.

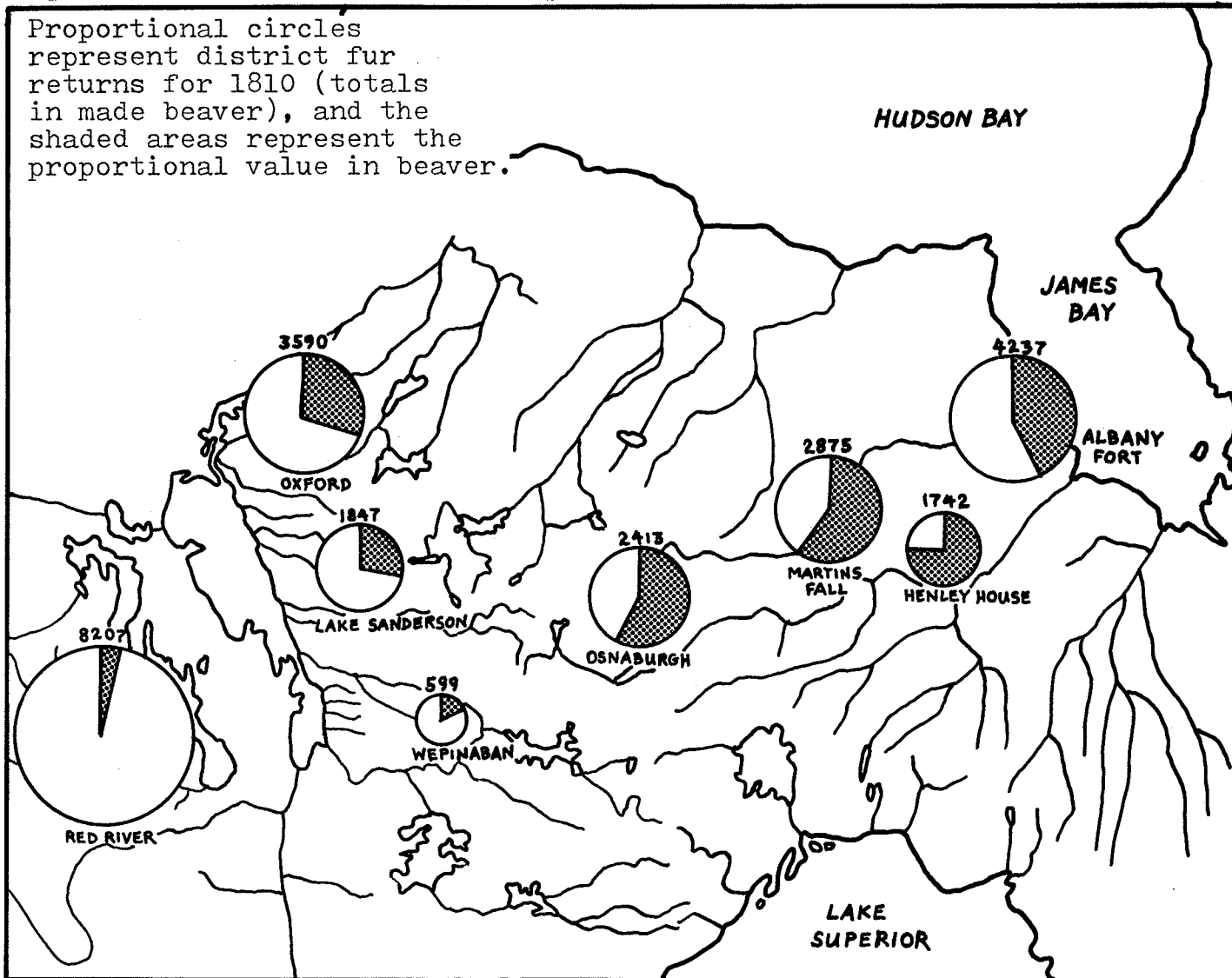
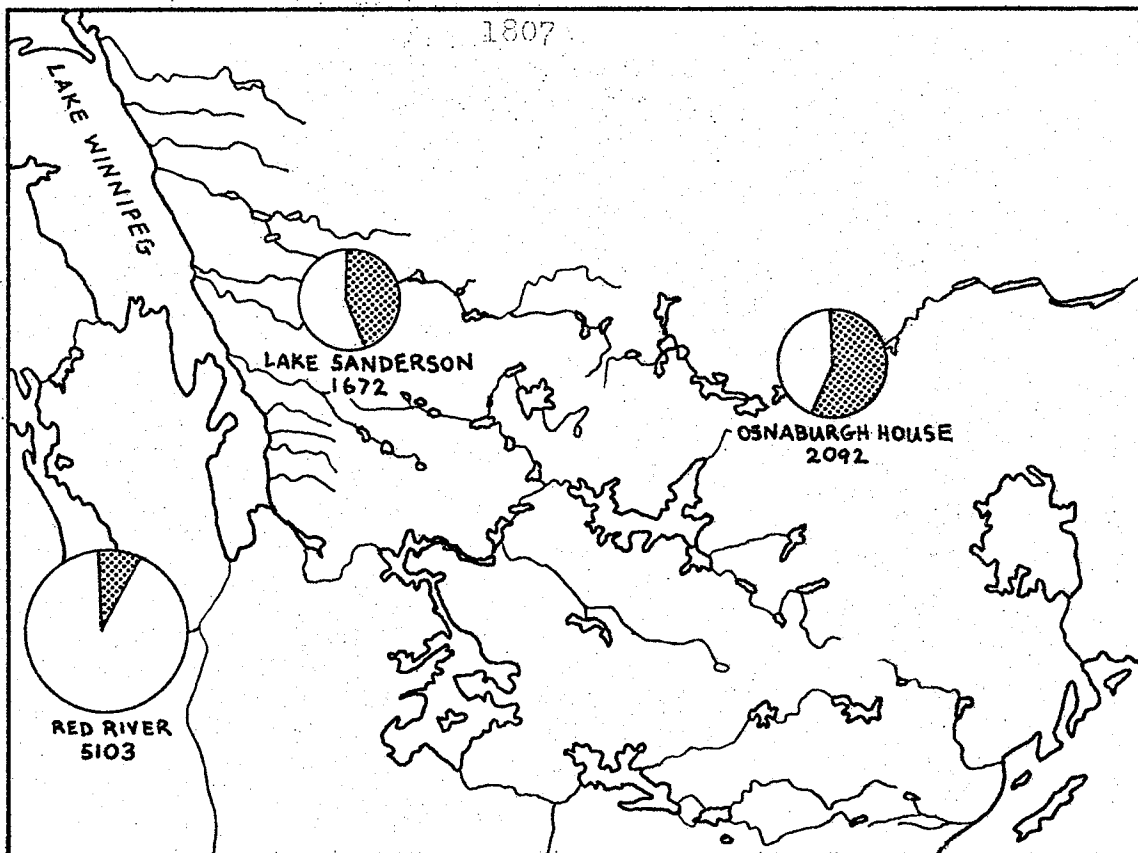
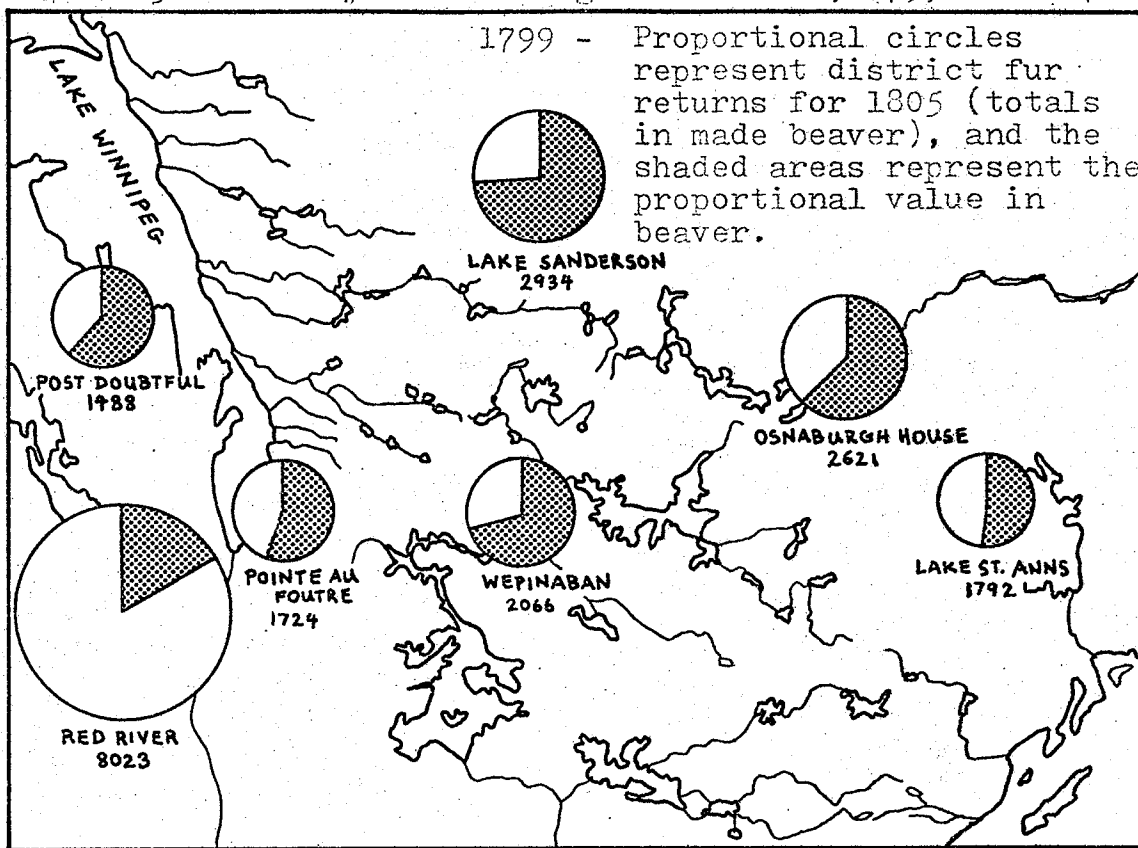


Figure 32: Albany's Declining Fur Returns, 1799 to 1807.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE YORK FACTORY FUR TRADE IN EAST WINNIPEG, 1810-1821

#### 1. Hudson's Bay Company Reorganization and the East Winnipeg Trade, 1810-1814

In the summer of 1810 the Hudson's Bay Company completed a fundamental reorganization of its trade in Ruperts Land. The basic feature of this restructuring of the Company's trade was the division of Ruperts Land into two relatively autonomous administrative units, or departments. The Northern Department comprised all lands to the west of and including Lake Winnipeg drainage, while the Southern Department was made up of the lands lying to the east of the Lake Winnipeg basin. The East Winnipeg Country thus became part of the Northern Department which had its headquarters at York Factory and, in a single stroke, the London Committee had severed the connections that had fostered the development of the fur trade in the region from Albany.

The trade inland from York was also reorganized that year and a new district within the Northern Department, called the Winnipeg Factory District was formed to administer the trade of the East Winnipeg Country and adjacent areas. The Winnipeg Factory District comprised that part of Lake Winnipeg drainage which was bounded by Oxford House on the north, to Cumberland House on the west, and to the headwaters of the Red

River on the south. The London Committee, however, were uncertain where the eastern boundary of the Winnipeg Factory should be placed and left that decision to be made mutually by the officers in charge of the Winnipeg and Albany Factories. Although the London Committee recommended that the eastern boundary should extend to the height of land separating Lake Winnipeg drainage from the Albany basin, they were aware that such an arrangement might warrant modification in the light of developments in the headwater region up until that time. This prompted the Governor of the Company to write:

. . . You [Auld] will have to arrange with Mr. Thomas the limits of the Posts of the Factories of Winnipeg and Albany as you may mutually consider most proper, but from the information at present before us, we are inclined to think that Lake Sal [Lac Seul] ought to remain attached to Albany, though the waters which flow from it fall into Lake Winipeg which in general is to be considered as the criterion of belonging to the Factory of that name.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these concerns, a mutually agreed upon eastern boundary did not emerge in the years immediately following the reorganization, and the trading arrangements in the headwater region were instead pursued in an ad hoc, year-by-year fashion.

During the 1810-11 season, the Winnipeg Factory was administered in the northeast from Oxford House, from which four outposts were established: Island Lake, Cross River, Black River (Mukutawa River), and Winnipegishish (Molson Lake). The Nor'Westers settled at Island Lake, but the other posts were unopposed during the 1810-11 trading season. The state of the fur trade in this region, however, was far from encour-

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<sup>1</sup> "Letter from the Governor and Committee to William Auld, Hudson's Bay House, London, May 31, 1810", A.16/18, p. 1.

aging. Beaver were drastically depleted and William Sinclair at Oxford wrote:

. . . they [Indians] make a heavy complaint that there is no Beaver to be found any where which I truly believe to be the case . . . few of these animals is in this quarter of the country when first this House Oxford was settled the Beaver was mid-dling numerous & every year since they have been upon the decline and at present there is no sign of animals.<sup>2</sup>

The only area that showed any signs of a profitable trade was that surrounding the Black River (Mukutawa River) post on the east coast of Lake Winnipeg. Sinclair remarked that the trade at Mukutawa River was, "mostly Beaver skins in general the furs from that Quarter is good".<sup>3</sup>

Despite the reorganization, Albany continued to outfit traders for the East Winnipeg Country. David Sanderson was placed in charge of ten men in two batteaux to winter on the Berens River. The main post was at Sandy Narrows and, although no post journal has survived, it is probable that James Slater re-occupied the house at Big Fall with a small party of men. The Albany men returned to Osnaburgh on June 19, 1811, and despite the withdrawal of the Nor'Westers from East Winnipeg, the returns in this sector were also poor.<sup>4</sup> Sanderson, who had pioneered the Berens River trade, left the service of the Hudson's Bay Company after the close of the 1810-11 trading season. He returned to his Orkney home in Kirkwall and rejoined his family which he had visited

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<sup>2</sup> William Sinclair, "A Journal of Occurrences at Winnipeg Factory, 1810-11", B.156/a/4, fo. 4d.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., fo. 5d.

<sup>4</sup> Only 22 bundles of furs were procured that year of which few were made up of beaver pelts.

but briefly during his forty-one years service in the Little North. He left his native born family behind to continue living and trading in the lands that he had explored and settled for Albany.

In the summer of 1811, the Company amended their plans of the previous year by splitting the Winnipeg Factory District into two parts consisting of the East and West Winnipeg Factories. The East Winnipeg Factory District was to be bounded by the height of land separating Lake Winnipeg drainage from that of Severn and Albany. William Hillier, a former military officer with no experience in the fur trade, was appointed Chief of East Winnipeg and was to be in command of a group of Irish labourers, who for the first time were being recruited for the Company's service. From perusing the Company's London Correspondence it is apparent that Hillier was chosen for this task because of his skills as a disciplinarian rather than his expertise in the fur trade.

. . . We [the London Committee] have intentionally put under his [Hillier's] command a set of completely new men in order that the habits of subordination which he undertakes to establish among them may not be deranged by any communication with men accustomed to a more relaxed state of discipline.<sup>5</sup>

It was hoped that development of Irish labourers under strict discipline would be more effective than using Orkneymen to counter the bullying tactics of the Nor'Westers that had become common throughout much of the Northwest.

Hillier was expected to establish: "the chief Post of his Factory near the mouth of Winipeg River & to push his post up the river toward

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<sup>5</sup> "Letter from the Governor and Committee to William Auld and Thomas Thomas, Hudson's Bay House, London, May 31, 1811", A.6/18, p. 27.

Lake Sal and Lake le Pluie, as far as circumstances enable."<sup>6</sup> These three places were the main forwarding or inland depots for the fur brigades of the North West Company. It is apparent that were Hillier able to establish himself beside these three depots, then the Hudson's Bay Company would have been strategically situated to sever the Nor'Westers' vital supply lines should any aggression develop. The strategic nature of this plan was such that East Winnipeg was given the highest priority by the London Committee: "the chief effort to be made this season must be in the Winepeg & Nipegon Country."<sup>7</sup> Orders were given to both departments urging them to send experienced and trustworthy servants to the East Winnipeg Factory, and to:

. . . transfer to the East Winnipeg Factory all the Canadians now in the Company's service, or at least as many of them as are within easy reach.<sup>8</sup>

These grand plans for a strategic offensive in East Winnipeg, however, were postponed as the late arrival of Hillier and his Irishmen at York Factory precluded any inland movement for the 1811-12 season. Their first winter was spent instead on Hudson Bay at the "Nelson Encampment", on the north side of the Nelson River opposite Seal Island. The subdivision of the Winnipeg Factory District into eastern and western units was cancelled. Winnipeg Factory thus retained the administration of both the eastern and western sections of Lake Winnipeg. William Sinclair at Oxford, however, increased the trade in East Winnipeg by

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 28.



settling posts at Jack, Black, and Poplar Rivers. The Poplar River post was managed by Donald Sutherland and was the southernmost penetration of East Winnipeg by the York traders since Alexander Kennedy's winter at Drunken Lake (Wrong Lake) on the Poplar in 1807-08.

During the winter of 1811-12, one of Hillier's appointed assistant traders, John Slitt, refused to accept the position. He had written to Thomas Thomas, the Governor of the Southern Department:

. . . alledging as the Reasons for his Refusal, the smallness of his fixed salary, and the entire certainty he has (from his knowledge of the country), of the impossibility of any profits being made, as those posts have, for some years past produced very few good furs.<sup>9</sup>

Auld, the Northern Governor, responded with the following words:

. . . this is an additional confirmation of what I have long heard, that the E<sup>t</sup> Winnipeg Country has been exhausted by the Canadian traders.<sup>10</sup>

The London Committee was not so easily discouraged and ordered Peter Fidler to make a survey of the country between Lake Winnipeg and the heads of the Severn and Albany Rivers. Fidler, however, was unable to undertake the survey and spent the next season at Brandon House.

At Albany, news of Hillier's situation came late. Thomas had sent word to his inland settlements to contact "David Sandison junior" and "Hugh Linklater". These two men were recommended by Thomas for the East Winnipeg Factory. He wrote that:

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Thomas, "Letter from Moose Factory to York Factory, March 28, 1812", B.3/b/48a, fo. 26.

<sup>10</sup> William Auld, "Letter from York Factory to Moose Factory, June 10, 1812", B.3/b/48a, fo. 42.

. . . they are natives of the country and have been many years in the service, are expert in steering Boats or Canoes, able Interpreters and (the latter in particular) can act as Guides in most parts of the Winipeg Country.<sup>11</sup>

Both Sanderson and Linklater had left the service the previous year and efforts were made from Osnaburgh to find them for this task. They had still not been found when the news of the postponement reached Albany in the winter. The Albany traders, however, continued to tap the furs of East Winnipeg from their Sandy Narrows post, but the outfit that year was reduced to only five men. James Slater led the Sandy Narrows party and returned in the spring with seventeen packs of furs. Although small in comparison to earlier years, it was remarked to be a very good return at Osnaburgh in 1812.

Hillier embarked from the Nelson Encampment in the spring of 1812 for East Winnipeg but decided against building a post at the mouth of the Winnipeg River. Instead he settled beside the newly arrived settlers at Red River and explained his actions as follows:

. . . for want of Traders it was impossible to push any outposts, and the Country in the vicinity of Point a Foutre being entirely destitute of furs.<sup>12</sup>

The one-year delay in plans had caused the Company's earlier order to supply East Winnipeg with experienced servants and Canadians to go largely unheeded. At Osnaburgh, Sanderson and Linklater were finally engaged to assist in the establishment of the Factory. These two men,

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Thomas, "Letter from Albany Fort to William Hillier, Chief East Winipeg Factory, June 28, 1812", B.3/b/48a, fo. 37d.

<sup>12</sup> William Hillier, "Letter from Pabina River to York Factory, Dec. 4, 1812", B.239/b/83, fo. 1.

however, were the only ones sent from the Southern Department, and it appears likely that they did not reach Pointe au Foudre before Hillier's decision to abolish his plans for a settlement.

In the ensuing confusion, the three posts which had been established the previous year on the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg were abandoned. Hillier had taken the men and goods with him to the Red River and had even sent the Department's most experienced trader in East Winnipeg, Donald Sutherland, to winter at Turtle River, an upstream tributary of the Red River. In what would be one of their last thrusts into the region, the Nor'Westers seized this opportunity to re-establish themselves in East Winnipeg and built a post at the mouth of "Pigeon River" (likely Berens River). Sinclair was much distressed at these events and wrote to Hillier that:

. . . I understood that Mr. Sutherland was to winter at some place along the East side of the Winipeg. Clouston Dickson informs me that the Canadians is settled the Pigeon River, in this case I am much afraid that they will cut off the Black River Indians.<sup>13</sup>

The Albany Chief, Thomas Vincent, had anticipated the Winnipeg Factory to be built and had issued the following orders to his inland men at Osnaburgh:

. . . a new Factory at the E<sup>+</sup> end of Lake Winnipeg is to be established this summer, within the limits of which Sandy Narrows house will be included, should therefore any Master arrive there with intention to settle that post. Mr. Slater & his men, must return to you, after delivering his goods to the master of

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<sup>13</sup> William Sinclair, "West Winnipeg Factory Journal, 1812-13", B.154/a/5, fo. 20.

that District.<sup>14</sup>

When the news of Hillier's decision to abandon the plans for East Winnipeg reached Osnaburgh, Slater was given four men and a large canoe to resettle the Sandy Narrows house. Perhaps because of the Nor'Wester competition from the mouth of Berens River, Slater's returns declined. He returned in the spring with sixteen packs but these were made up of inferior skins.

. . . I [William Thomas] am sorry to add the returns from this post [Sandy Narrows] are not so good as last year, being greatly difficient in Whole Beaver skins and Otters.<sup>15</sup>

Hillier's refusal to settle the East Winnipeg Country had totally disrupted the Company's plans for trade in the region and he was quickly replaced by the experienced trader James Sutherland.<sup>16</sup> Like Hillier, however, Sutherland too was opposed to building a headquarters post, or factory, in the East Winnipeg Country. He wrote that:

From the want of Traders and the exhausted state of the country about E. Winipic the two establishments of E & West Winipic have been united.<sup>17</sup>

Rather, Sutherland elected to conduct the united trade of the district

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Vincent, "Letter from Albany Fort to Osnaburgh House, June 7, 1812", B.3/b/48b, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> William Thomas, "Osnaburgh House Journal, 1812-13", B.155/a/25, fos. 9d and 10.

<sup>16</sup> Not to be confused with James Sutherland of Albany who had died at Brandon House in 1797.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from James Sutherland, in Selkirk Papers, vol. III, p. 834.

from Cumberland House.

The London Committee was frustrated by these events but still wanted to know more about the East Winnipeg Country since contemporary maps were all too vague on the region. Peter Fidler had made a detailed and accurate survey of Lake Winnipeg's eastern coast in 1809 (Fig. 33) but the land to the east was still unknown, which is clearly evident in the Arrowsmith maps of the time (Fig. 34). The Committee also sensed that their officers at York knew little of the region. They also appear to have judged the region to be more amenable to fur production than did their officers in the country and wrote to the Chief at York Factory advising that:

. . . It is highly necessary that this country should be effectually occupied from Osnaburg, Severn, or the posts on Lake Winipic. The most advantageous mode of placing them cannot be judged without these surveys, and no time should be lost in carrying them into effect.<sup>18</sup>

A similar request was written to Albany for geographical information about East Winnipeg:

A sketch such as every Indian is capable of drawing, however rude and inaccurate, would always be better than no information at all.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, at Osnaburgh, the Sandy Narrows outfit was again readied for the 1813-14 season. David Sanderson junior, who had returned with Linklater from the aborted East Winnipeg venture, was employed in

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<sup>18</sup> "Letter from the Governor and Committee to Thomas Thomas, Hudson's Bay House, London, April 9, 1814", A.6/18, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup> "Letter from the Governor and Committee to Thomas Vincent, Hudson's Bay House, London, March 19, 1815", A.6/18, p. 271.

Figure 33: The East Coast of Lake Winnipeg.

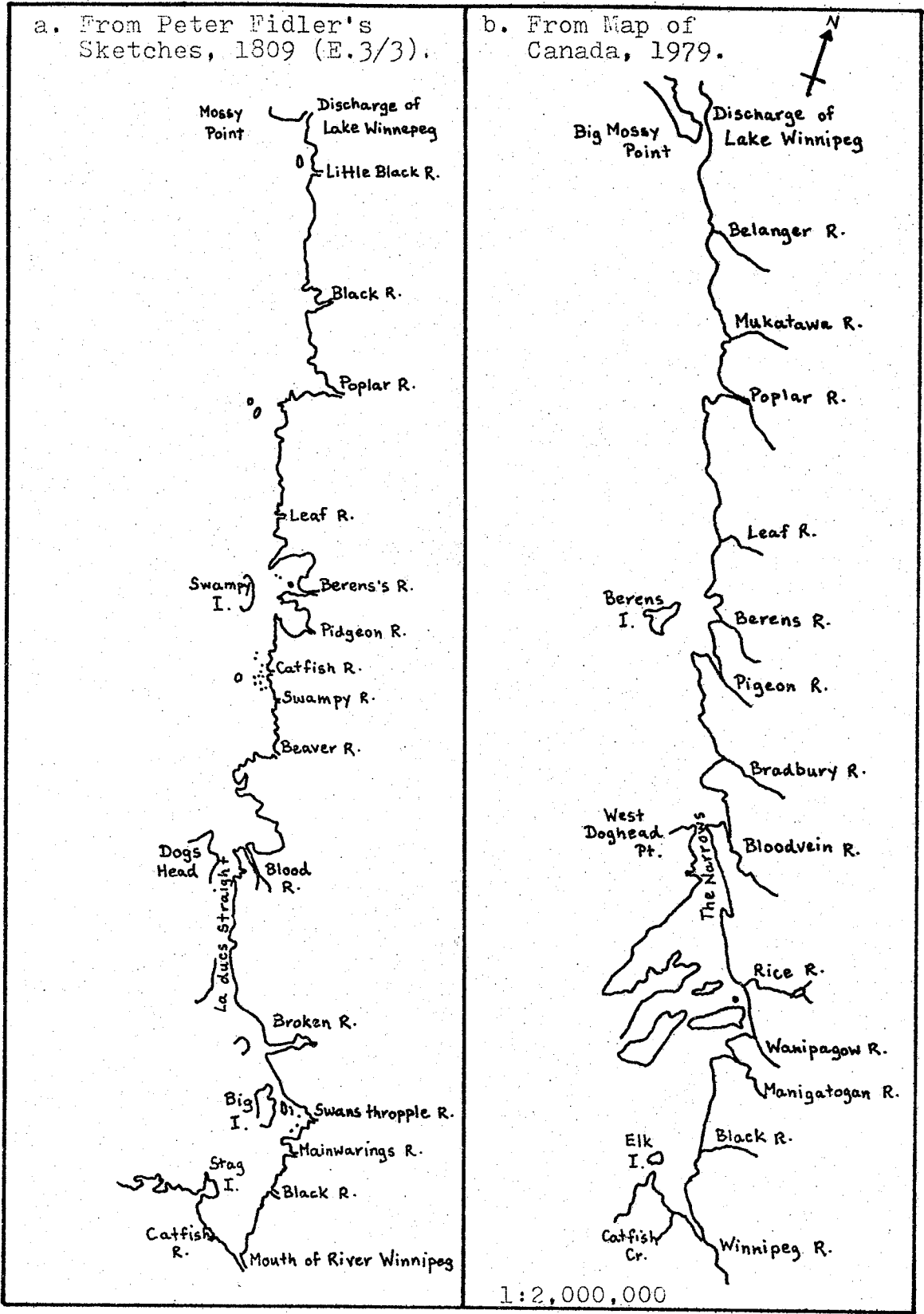
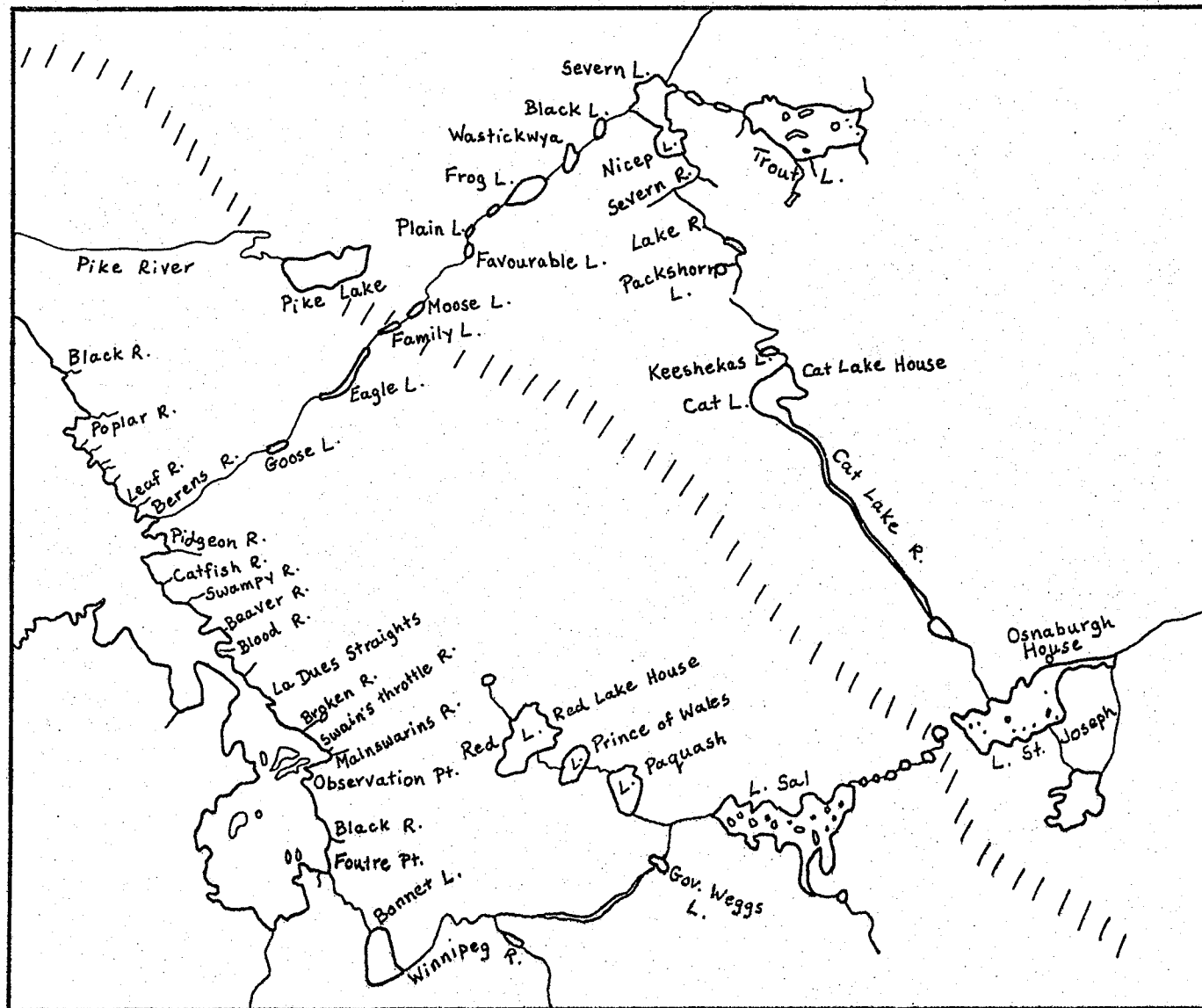


Figure 34: A Section of A. Arrowsmith's Map of America, 1795, additions to 1811, 1818-19.



this outfit. His services were urgently required for the Sandy Narrows canoe was in need of repair and Sanderson was one of the few men in Albany's service who had the skills to perform such a task. The consignment of men for the Sandy Narrows post was small, being five men in all, and the returns once again declined from the previous year.

Four years after the major reorganization of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1810, resettlement of the East Winnipeg Country had largely failed to materialize. Indeed, the whole region had been abandoned save for a few Albany outposts along its eastern watershed and the intermittent presence of York outposts along the northern section of Lake Winnipeg's eastern coast. The Nor'Westers, following their withdrawal from East Winnipeg in 1808, confined their activities to the southern inflow of the lake at Pointe au Foudre. From there, on at least one occasion, a trade had been carried to the mouth of the Berens River to exploit the vacuum occasioned by the confusion of the reorganization and the decisions of men like Hillier who were skeptical of the profitability of settling in East Winnipeg. Beaver and other valuable furs were reported to be scarce in the region and further settlements appeared unwarranted. The London Committee, in contrast, was determined to effect a wider settlement of the East Winnipeg Country, alleging the reports of a poor resource potential to be partly attributable to inadequate knowledge of the region.

## 2. York Factory Traders on the Berens River, 1814-1821

In 1814 the newly appointed Governor of the Northern Department, Thomas Thomas, began to reorganize the fur trade in East Winnipeg. That summer he started construction of a storehouse at the outflow of Lake



Winnipeg. This new establishment was to be called Norway House in recognition of the Norwegian labourers who were recruited to build it. Norway House was to serve as a forward depot for the Northern Department's fur brigades in much the same manner as Pointe au Foudre functioned for the Nor'Westers at the Lake's inflow. Thomas also made arrangements with James Sutherland to settle a post on the east coast of Lake Winnipeg at the mouth of the Berens River. The man placed in charge of this post was Dr. George Holdsworth who had formerly acted as surgeon at York Factory and at the Red River Settlement. Upon hearing that Holdsworth had offered his services for the East Winnipeg post, Thomas remarked:

I am glad that he has been employed in the Fur Trade, he bears a very good character, as a young man of superior abilities the zeal and assiduity which I know he possesses may render him (with a little experience) a very able trader.<sup>20</sup>

Although Holdsworth was described to have settled a house at the mouth of Pigeon River, the location of the post was actually on the Berens. Donald Sutherland, who traded in the region a few years later, noted that the, "old house built by Doctor Goldsworth", was near the mouth of the Berens River, "at the first fall from Lake Winnipeg".<sup>21</sup> The terms Berens and Pigeon Rivers appear to have been used interchangeably among the Indians as well as the traders of East Winnipeg. Brother Frederick Leach who ministered to the Indians of East Winnipeg in the

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Thomas, "Letter from York Factory to James Sutherland, Jack River, March 24, 1815", B.239/b/85, fo. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Sutherland, "Berens River Journal, 1818-19", B.16/a/2, p. 30. These comments place Holdsworth's post at or near present Sturgeon Falls (see Fig. 39).

early years of the twentieth century also noted this place name tradition and wrote:

There is one fact I have never been able to find out. Why do the Indians here in their Saulteaux language call Berens River, Pigeon River?<sup>22</sup>

This "confusion" appears to have arisen from the fact that the two rivers issue from the same lake.

Holdsworth's trade at Berens River, although unopposed, was not encouraging. The returns were meagre and the York men found it very difficult to procure sufficient country provisions. In mid-winter, James Sutherland wrote:

. . . his prospects are not flattering their fishing has failed, and their whole stock was barely sufficient to keep them till spring with half allowance also very little hopes of his procuring many furs, as previous to his arrival at Pidgeon River, [Berens River] most part of the Indians had given in hopes of our people arriving and had gone to the Canadians at Winnipeg River.<sup>23</sup>

The Nor'Westers occupied only the storehouse at Pointe au Foudre that year but it appears that even their presence there was sufficient to draw the few Indians of East Winnipeg away from the Berens River post. Holdsworth did not return to the fur trade after the 1814-15 season, but returned to England on the Company ship in the spring.

The Albany men had re-occupied Sandy Narrows that season with Slater in charge of a small consignment of men and goods. A large canoe

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<sup>22</sup> Brother Frederick Leach, 59 Years with Indians and Settlers on Lake Winnipeg, 1976, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> James Sutherland, "Letter from Jack River to York Factory, Feb. 28, 1815", B.239/b/85, fo. 27d.

was used to transport the outfit of five men which included two Sandersons, David and James. The fur returns from this region, however, also continued to be poor.

Beginning in 1815, the Company requested that the various inland trading districts prepare annual reports. These were designed to supply the Company with information on all relevant aspects of the trade ranging from population estimates of the natives to character reports on the Company's servants. James Sutherland, the Chief of the East Winnipeg District prepared two reports in 1815: one dealing with the "Jack River Country" and the other being a "Report on the Eastern Coast of Lake Winnipeg". Sutherland had little personal experience in the East Winnipeg Country. His reports were based mainly on the " cursory observations of our traders", and Indians accounts which were, "in many things are deficient and erroneous."<sup>24</sup>

Sutherland was aware that the Albany traders had formerly known the entire East Winnipeg Country, but none of their knowledge had been imparted to the men at York. He was informed that Albany traders had in the past reached Lake Winnipeg by way of the Winnipeg River at its southern extremity. He also learned that they had occupied trading posts toward the height of land separating Lake Winnipeg from Albany drainage, but was unable to determine if, "they had navigated these rivers [rivers flowing into Lake Winnipeg], or that they have explored the intermediate country."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> James Sutherland, "Reports on the Eastern Coast of Lake Winnipeg, 1815", B.16/e/1, fo. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Loc. cit.

The eastern coastline of Lake Winnipeg had been accurately surveyed by Peter Fidler in 1809 (Fig. 33), but inland toward the height of land, the region was uncharted. In his District Reports, Sutherland supplied the Company with what little information he could gather concerning the nature of the country and the courses of the principal rivers draining the intervening territory. At the northern end of the lake, Jack River (Gunisao River) emptied its water into Playgreen Lake just above the outlet of Lake Winnipeg. Sutherland estimated the Gunisao to rise from an area five days' journey to the east, or a distance of sixty to seventy miles. At its source lay Jack Lake (Gunisao Lake) which was described as a "deep rocky Lake about 22 miles long and 7 wide it runs North & South along the Hight of land."<sup>26</sup> Farther south, the Poplar River was said to rise about seventy miles east of Lake Winnipeg at Thunder Lake (Weaver Lake). Eastward from that lake the river continued under the name of Drunken River which rose from Drunken Lake (Wrong Lake) some fifty miles away. To the south of the Poplar lay the Berens River. Sutherland dismissed the notion that the Berens had a direct communication with the Severn River. All previous maps, including Arrowsmith's, had portrayed this connection which dated from Tomison's journey from Severn House to Lake Winnipeg in 1767. Sutherland remarked that the Pigeon River, which entered Lake Winnipeg twenty miles south of the Berens, was the principal river, and the Berens, "may with more propriety be called a branch of the Pigeon River".<sup>27</sup> Both of these rivers issued from the Big Fall Lake (Family and Fishing Lakes), which he esti-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., fo. 1d.

<sup>27</sup> Loc. cit.

mated to be seventy miles east of Lake Winnipeg. Even though Sutherland insisted on characterizing the Pigeon as the main river, the Indians informed him that the Berens was more easily navigated to the Big Fall. East of the Big Fall Lake, Sutherland was unsure of the course or length of the "Pigeon River". He did learn, however, that the Albany traders operated a post called Sandy Narrows near the headwaters of the "Pigeon", and was informed that:

The navigation of this river beyond the Big Fall Lake, is tolerably good only four falls occurring. Loaded Canoes will go in five days from the Big Fall to Sandy Narrows.<sup>28</sup>

South of the Pigeon, the Blood River (Bloodvein River) was described as a westward flowing river which fell into Lake Winnipeg near the Dogs Head (Doghead Point). This information in itself could have been easily derived from Arrowsmith's map, but Sutherland provided additional details concerning its uncharted upper reaches. He remarked that the Bloodvein was not navigable for boats but that canoes could be conducted upriver. In describing the course of the river, Sutherland imagined what the journey would have been like:

. . . In proceeding up the river after a voyage of four days we are now at a small lake called the Bad Lake, where the traders from Albany some years since had a Post. Beyond the Bad Lake, another small lake is met with, canoes may be conducted from these waters over the height of land to the rivers falling into the Red Lake.<sup>29</sup>

Sutherland differentiated two parts of the East Winnipeg District:

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<sup>28</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., fo. 1d.

the Jack River Country and the East Winnipeg Country. The lands of the Jack River Country to the north were greatly impoverished "in animals both for food and raiments for the Natives". In addition, "the productions of this district for trade have failed greatly of late years Beaver is nearly annihilated, Musquash is not plentiful."<sup>30</sup> The only advantages of this area arose from its close proximity to York Factory, but that was of little significance in light of its poor resources.

To the south of Jack River, the East Winnipeg Country, although imperfectly known, was recommended as a more fruitful place to conduct a trade for furs. Sutherland explained that formerly this country, "abounded in Beaver, but the great demand for their skins joined to a disease which carried off great numbers, had nearly extirpated the race."<sup>31</sup> Despite the reduced numbers of beaver and other fur bearers, the East Winnipeg Country was still considered to be worth exploiting. Sutherland wrote that:

The productions of this district which are most valuable for Trade are its furs these altho' not very numerous are of much finer quality than those further westward.<sup>32</sup>

Details of the 1815-16 season are not available in the form of post journals or district reports, but from the account books it is evident that only one small outpost was settled in the entire East Winnipeg Country. The outfit was listed as "Pidgeon River", but it was likely

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<sup>30</sup> James Sutherland, "Jack River District Report, 1815", B.154/3/1, fo. 3d.

<sup>31</sup> James Sutherland, "Reports on the Eastern Coast of Lake Winnipeg, 1815", B.16/e/1, fo. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., fo. 4.

located near the mouth of the Berens River. The officer in charge of this post was Donald Sutherland who in previous years had operated posts on the Gunisao, Mukutawa, and Poplar Rivers.

The Albany men had pulled completely out of the East Winnipeg Country by 1815 after fifteen years of continuous trading on the Berens River. James Slater wintered that season instead at Red Lake with four men, including David and Thomas Sanderson, and a large canoe. The Sandersons were in great demand because of their unique wilderness skills. John Davis at Osnaburgh wrote to Slater reminding him:

. . . do not forget to send David or Thomas Saunderson before the ice brakes as I depend on one of them to build canoes . . . <sup>33</sup>

There was little change in the fur trade of East Winnipeg for the 1816-17 season. Donald Sutherland once again wintered on the Berens River and, although no details of his trade can be given, it is evident from later journals that he built his post that year at the Great, or Big Fall. Slater and his Albany men wintered again at Red Lake on the margins of the East Winnipeg Country. This outfit was made up without the services of David Sanderson junior who had deserted to live among the Indians. Davis explained this situation as follows:

. . . David Sanderson who says that he will not come in the service I asked him for what reason he says because he is not used well, and is allways starving and will only do the same when he goes like an Indian . . . <sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John Davis, "Osnaburgh House Journal, 1815-16", B.155/a/28, fo. 20.

<sup>34</sup> John Davis, "Osnaburgh House Journal, 1816-17", B.155/a/29, fo. 5.

With David Sanderson junior gone<sup>35</sup>, the Albany officers depended upon his brothers for services such as guiding and building canoes. Slater kept Thomas Sanderson at Red Lake during the winter to fix their canoe, but this caused Davis at Osnaburgh to remark, "if he is not here in time to build canoes for the ensuing summer, business will be at a stand."<sup>36</sup> At Red Lake Slater was opposed by Mr. Harris, a Nor'Wester, who arrived with two canoes and seven men. Beside the competition from the Nor'Westers, Slater's trade was also affected by York's Big Fall House. Slater wrote:

. . . I am also informed by the King Fishers Indians that Mr. George [Donald] Sutherland is at Big Fall with two canoes from York.<sup>37</sup>

Donald Sutherland had spent the 1816-17 season at Big Fall post on the Berens River. It was built at the upper end of the Lower Lake (Family Lake) beside the remains of an old Albany trading house. During the summer of 1817, Sutherland and several men stayed at the house to finish its construction and to plant a garden. Potatoes, cabbages, turnips, and barley were sown in the hopes of supplementing the stock of fish, wild rice, waterfowl, and venison that could be procured from the surrounding area. The house was completed during the summer and a fence was erected to enclose the gardens which spread over one and one quarter acres.

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<sup>35</sup> David Sanderson's name appears among the Indians who visited York's Big Fall House in the winter of 1816-17.

<sup>36</sup> James Slater, "Red Lake Journal, 1816-17", B.177/a/9, fo. 9d.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., fo. 17.



The Big Fall House was supplied from Norway House by canoe. The journey was a difficult one, comprising many portages along the lower reaches of the Berens. Sutherland was determined to find an easier route to Lake Winnipeg and left Big Fall in the late summer with an Indian guide to explore a route via the Poplar River. This route had been previously used by the Albany men but Sutherland appears to have been unaware of this fact. The Poplar route proved to be even more difficult and dangerous than the Berens. On several occasions, the canoe was battered against rocks in the numerous rapids along the way and Sutherland exclaimed, "we were very near drowned."<sup>38</sup> Altogether, the trip took seven days and required forty-one portages. On their return from Norway House with the goods for the coming season, Sutherland opted to use the Berens River route to the Big Fall. The outfit was packed into two canoes, and seven men including Sutherland and the Indian guide made the trip. The journey through Lake Winnipeg was hazardous as storms and high winds buffeted their small crafts. It took thirteen days to reach Berens River, and then seven more days to ascend the river to the house.

Sutherland and his men faced no opposition that year and had a rather successful trade amounting to twenty-seven packs of furs representing a total value of £1,852. The reorganization in 1810 had done away with the old system of made beaver accounting and since then the fur returns had been simply translated into their value in pounds sterling. However, the made beaver standard was retained for the actual trade with the Indians, and by multiplying the made beaver

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Sutherland, "Great Rapid Berens River Journal, 1817-18", B.16/a/1, p. 6.

standard for each fur type by the total quantity procured, the total returns in made beaver can be calculated. This has been done in Table 3 for the 1819-20 and 1820-21 Berens River fur returns for which a detailed breakdown exists. Since no detailed accounts of the trade prior to 1819 can be found for Berens River, a total made beaver figure for earlier years can only be determined by calculating an average pound sterling to made beaver ratio. Using this method, the total returns of the 1817-18 season have been calculated to be roughly 3,000 made beaver (Table 4).

With no competition to contend with, the Big Fall House could draw Indians to trade furs from a large area. Figure 35 shows the approximate extent of Big Fall's trading hinterland in 1817-18, and has been drawn according to locational evidence found in the daily remarks of the post journal. The trade, although lacking in beaver, was substantial enough in other furs such as marten, lynx, and muskrat (see Table 5) to warrant plans for an expansion of several outposts the next season. Toward this end, James Sutherland, the District Chief, ordered Donald Sutherland to procure several large canoes.

. . . if you could get Mantros [a Canadian Freeman] to build a large canoe or two it would be a great service at lest you ought to get 2 or 3 half size canoes made fore the use of your District the trade in that quarter must be extended and crafts of that size will be most convenient fore that purpose.<sup>39</sup>

The Albany traders remained outside of East Winnipeg that season as Slater and his men returned to the Red Lake House. The Nor'Westers opposed him there and also sent some men to winter at Bad Lake on the Bloodvein River. Slater was unable to send an outfit alongside them

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

Table 3: Conversion of Berens River Fur Returns to  
the Made Beaver Standard.  
(Using Albany's 1809 Standard)

<u>Species</u>	<u>Fur Returns</u>			
	1919-20		1820-21	
	Quantity	(MB)	Quantity	(MB)
Bears, black prime	15	(45)	43	(129)
Bears, common and cub	1	(2)	3	(6)
Bears, brown prime	1	(2)	3	(6)
Beaver, whole	79	(79)	209	(209)
Beaver, half	59	(49)	101	(55)
Castorium (lbs.)	-	-	7	(4)
Fishers	18	(18)	20	(20)
Foxes, cross	15	(30)	9	(18)
Foxes, grey	18	(18)	12	(12)
Foxes, red	10	(10)	31	(31)
Lynx	510	(510)	795	(795)
Martens, prime	1,136	(578)	695	(347)
Martens, common	12	(4)	5	(2)
Minks	54	(14)	48	(16)
Muskrats	2,608	(435)	4,514	(752)
Otters, prime	84	(168)	232	(464)
Otters, common and cub	37	(37)	43	(43)
Rabbits	630	(52)	720	(60)
Wolverines	1	(1)	5	(5)
Total Value of Returns in Made Beaver		(2,052)		(2,974)
Total Value of Returns in Pounds Sterling		1,316		1,815
Conversion Ratio		1.56		1.64
Average Conversion Ratio				1.60

Table 4: Berens River Fur Returns 1816-21

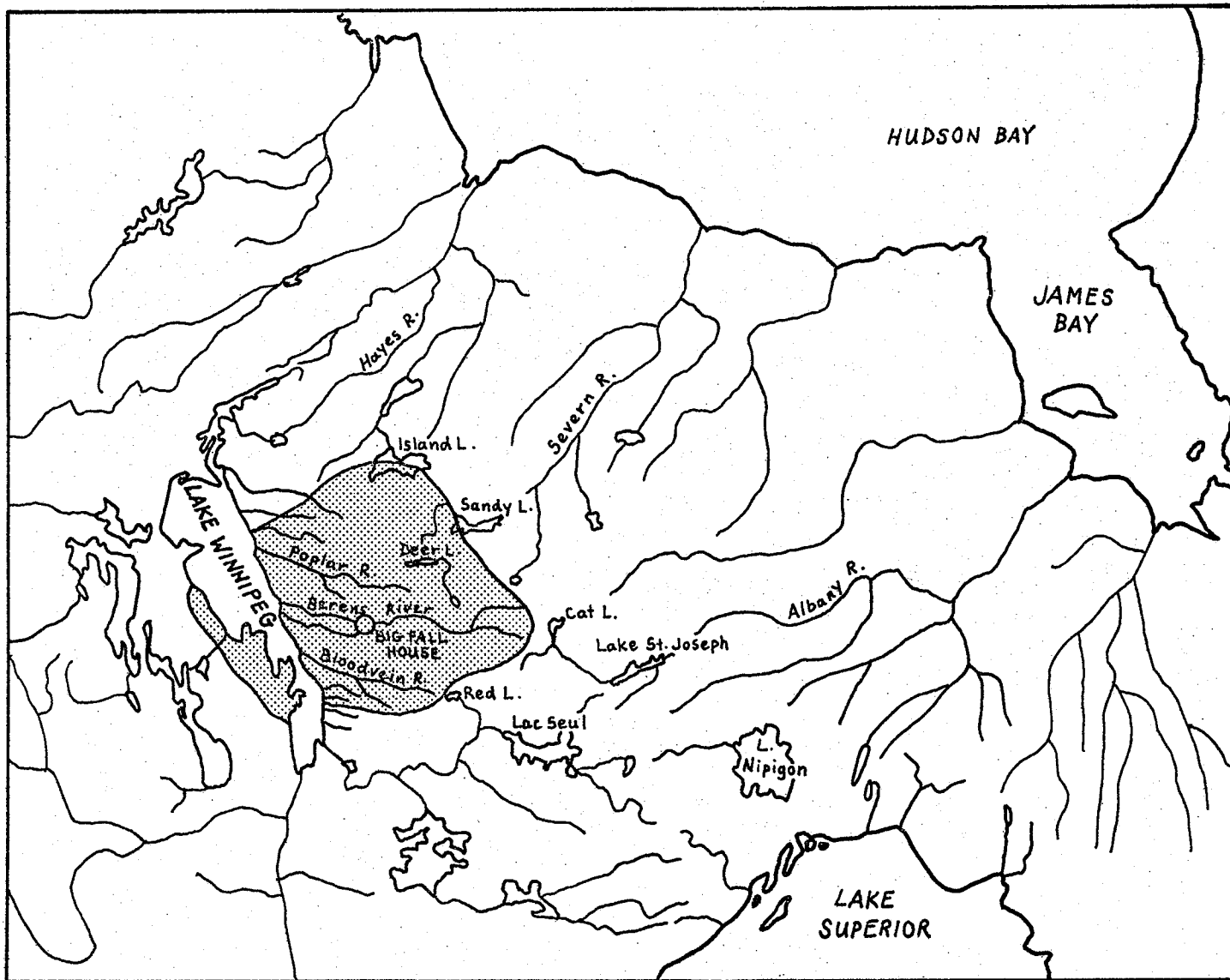
<u>SEASON</u>	<u>VALUE OF RETURNS IN POUNDS STERLING</u>	<u>VALUE OF RETURNS IN MADE BEAVER<sup>a</sup></u>
1816-17	1,454	2,326
1817-18	1,853	2,965
1818-19	1,837	2,939
1819-20	1,316	2,106
1820-21	1,815	2,904

a) Values of Returns in Made Beaver have been calculated by multiplying the value of Returns in Pounds Sterling by a factor of 1.60. This conversion factor has been obtained from the detailed breakdown of fur returns in Table 3.

Table 5: Changing Composition of Fur Returns from East Winnipeg

<u>Species of furs or other produce.</u>	<u>Albany Returns</u>					<u>York Returns</u>	
	1796-97	98-99	99-1800	1805-06	08-09	19-20	20-21
Badgers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bears	9	7	6	14	17	17	49
Beaver, whole	932	1,776	1,324	891	648	79	209
"  , half	794	608	608	304	304	59	101
"  , coat (lbs)	144	110	73	14	1	-	1
"  , castorium	23	21	30	-	37	-	7
Fishers	3	8	8	11	10	18	20
Foxes, cross	1	2	1	2	5	33	21
"  , red	1	1	-	2	1	10	31
Lynx, prime	124	154	104	35	129	510	795
"  , common	25	24	20	10	51	-	-
Martens, prime	204	157	291	806	602	1,136	695
"  , common	110	73	97	181	66	12	5
Minks	55	29	15	58	91	54	48
Moose parchment	25	45	54	-	58	-	-
Muskrats	55	27	39	72	558	2,608	4,514
Otters, prime	38	43	65	85	89	84	232
"  , common	99	88	20	44	90	37	43
Rabbits	-	-	-	-	-	630	720
Wolverines	17	13	13	5	6	1	5
Wolves	2	3	3	-	-	-	-

Figure 35: Big Fall House Trading Hinterland, 1817/18.



because "none of us knows the road to Bad Lake".<sup>40</sup> In addition to the Nor'Westers, Slater had to contend with the York traders at Big Fall who gave debt to some of the Red Lake Indians. During the winter, the York trader at Rainy Lake, McPherson, requested that James Sanderson be sent down from the outpost at Escabeechewan. This petition was refused, however, as the master of that post explained, "as I have non that understands the Ind<sup>s</sup> I cannot do it."<sup>41</sup>

In the fall of 1818, Sutherland was informed by a "bungee Indian" (Ojibwa), that his step-father "John Crebassae" was heading upriver to settle beside the York post. This report proved to be true as the next day Crebassae, a North West Company clerk, arrived with two large canoes and seven men, a number of women, and several dogs. Crebasse built a small house about 600 yards above Sutherland's house, and Sutherland countered this move by building a small house above Crebassae. The competition for furs was intense, and during the winter several arguments and fights broke open between the men of the two companies. Sutherland managed to gain the upper hand, however, and the Nor'Westers struggled through most of the winter on the brink of starvation. In the Spring Sutherland remarked that, "I actually think that they have not made two packs at this place, including Moose and Deer Skins."<sup>42</sup>

Sutherland's returns were hurt more by the other Nor'Westers' posts at Jack Head and Bad Lake. This influx of traders into the East Winnipeg caused Sutherland's expenses to increase markedly. The North

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<sup>40</sup> James Slater, "Red Lake District Journal, 1817-18", B.177/a/10, fo. 8d.

<sup>41</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>42</sup> Donald Sutherland, "Berens River Journal, 1818-19", B.16/a/2, p. 28.

West Company post at Jack Head was managed by a "Mr. Nelson" and many Indians were attracted to that post because of the "medicine" that Nelson offered to trade. It appears likely that the Nor'Westers attempted to introduce some type of herbal medicine at this time which possibly had some ameliorating effect on the European diseases<sup>43</sup> which had taken a heavy toll of Indians throughout the Northwest. Sutherland wrote on May 2, 1819:

Andrew Bakie and the other men arrived from Hook Nose and party with a few furs. This party is due to the Canadians heavy debts fore medicins or ruts from the other side of Lake Winipig this cursed medicins is more hurt to us than all the Canadians that is hear to oppose us.<sup>44</sup>

At the close of the 1818-19 season, Sutherland prepared a Berens River District Report and also provided the Company with a sketch map of the East Winnipeg Country (Fig. 36). Details of this sketch map were quickly drafted onto Arrowsmith's 1822 Map of America (Fig. 37) to finally fill in an area that had been all but empty or falsely represented on previous maps. Figures 38 and 39 depict Sutherland's sketches of the Berens and Poplar Rivers and compare them with their modern equivalents to reveal Sutherland's perception and toponymy of this region.

In his district report, Sutherland described the general features of East Winnipeg's landscape as follows:

. . . the whole country is mountainous rocks following one another--betwext thos mountains is small

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<sup>43</sup> A.J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade, p. 106. A major epidemic of measles and whooping cough swept through the Western Interior in 1819.

<sup>44</sup> Donald Sutherland, op. cit., p. 26.



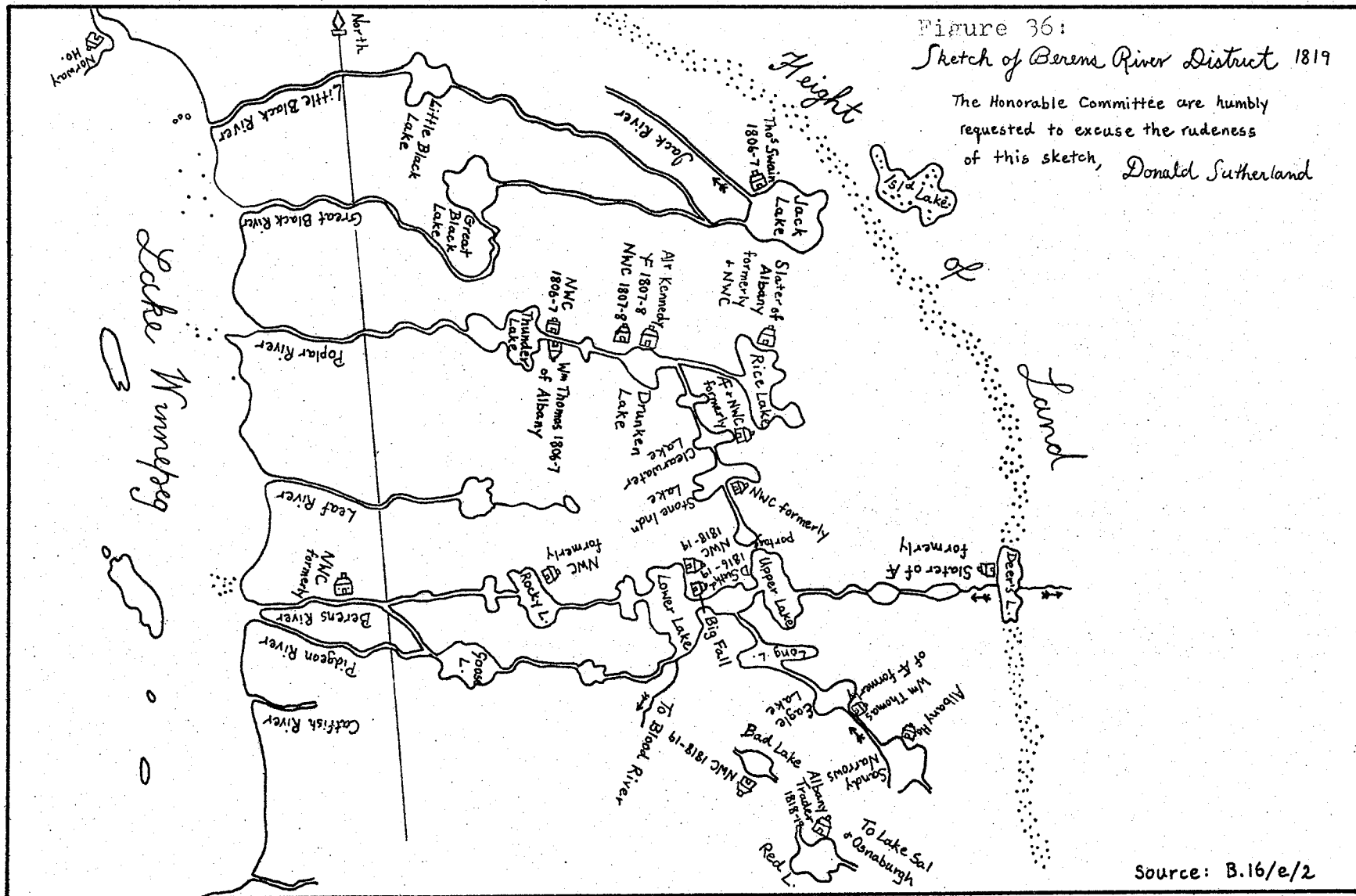


Figure 37: A Section of A. Arrowsmith's Map of America, 1822.

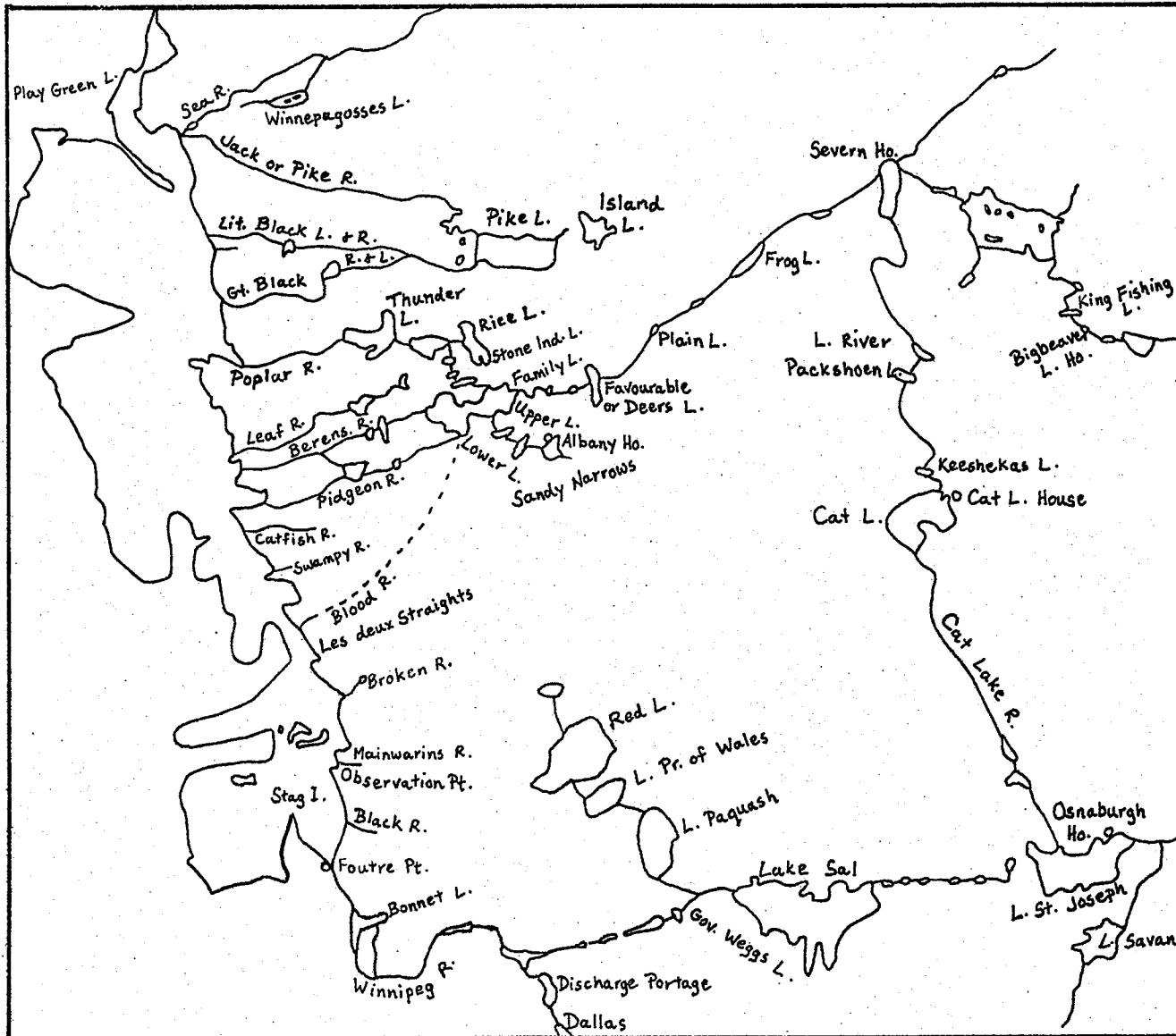


Figure 38: Detail of the Poplar and Berens Rivers.

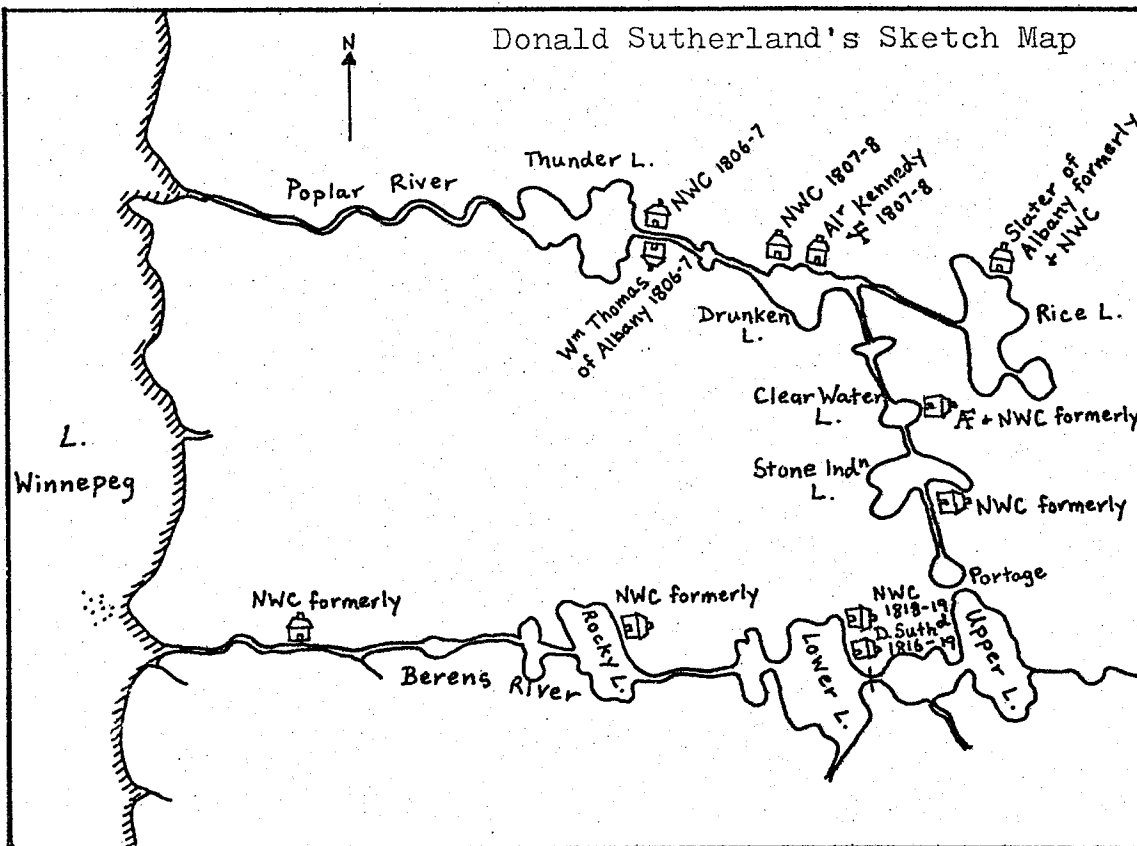
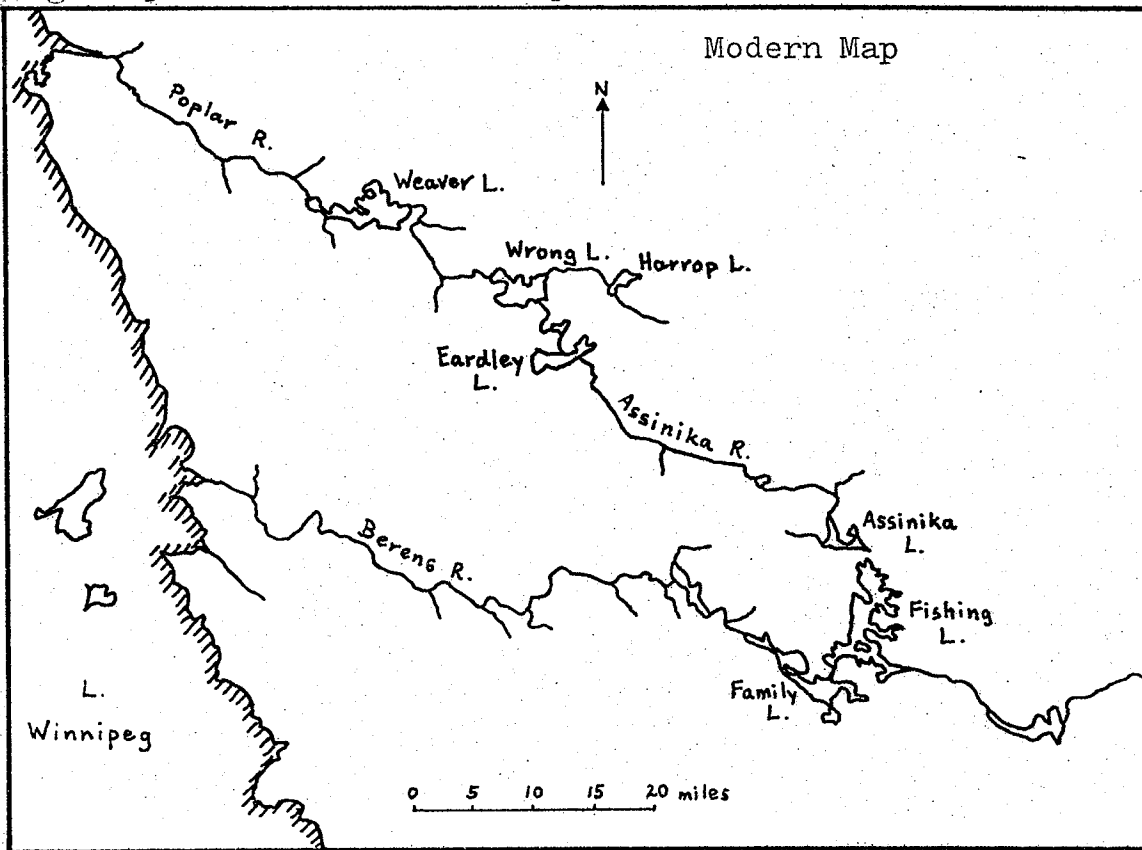
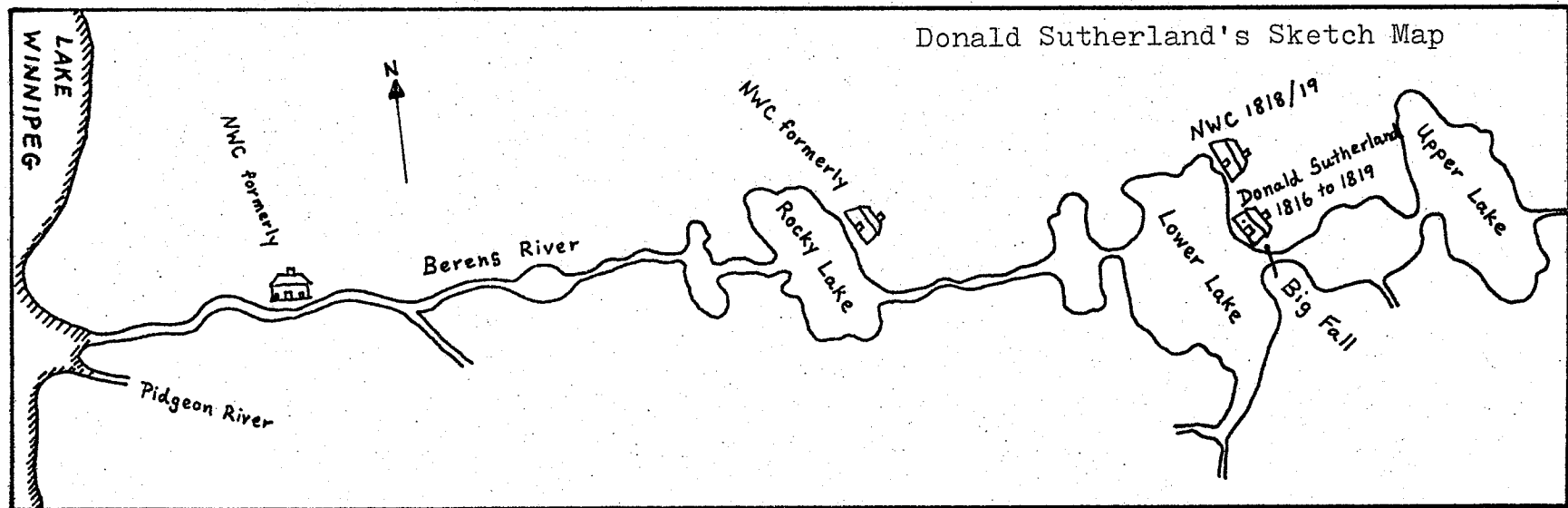
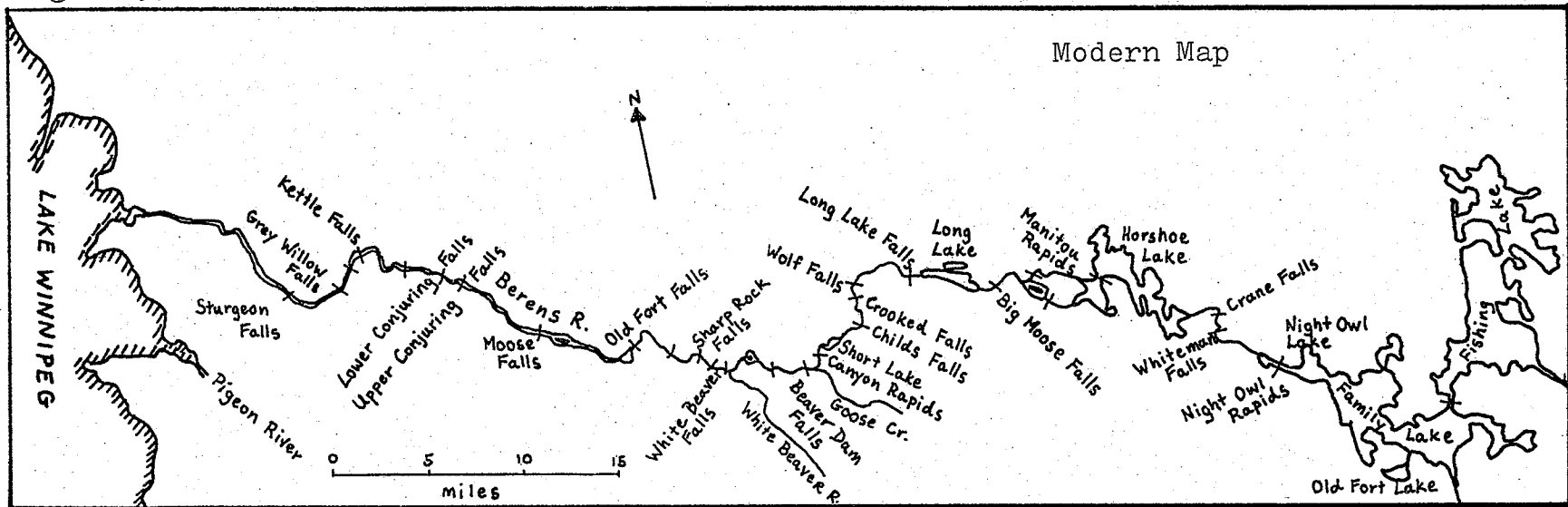


Figure 39: Detail of Berens River.



Lakes Creeks and Swamps.<sup>45</sup>

Like James Sutherland's 1815 report on the East Winnipeg Country, Donald Sutherland's 1819 report noted the remarkable decline in the beaver population. He wrote that this region:

. . . was once famous for harbing Beaver and Otters formerly-but-at present thos Anomals is nearly exterminated being long hunted by Different Traders--the only skins that may be hunted thereabouts now is the Martins Cats and a few Otters--Rabbits is also very plenty.<sup>46</sup>

This pattern of resource depletion is shown graphically in Figure 40 and numerically in Table 5. By comparing the earlier Albany fur returns from East Winnipeg with those of York's returns from roughly the same area, one can easily see the rapid decline in the quantity of beaver pelts being trapped in the region and the declining value of that skin in the total returns of the trading district.

On the Albany front, Slater returned to Red Lake in 1818-19 but the Nor'Westers under Harris pressed beyond him once again to settle at Bad Lake. Slater was unable to follow them and remarked that Harris and his men would not only hurt his trade but also that of York's Big Fall House, a circumstance that did take place.

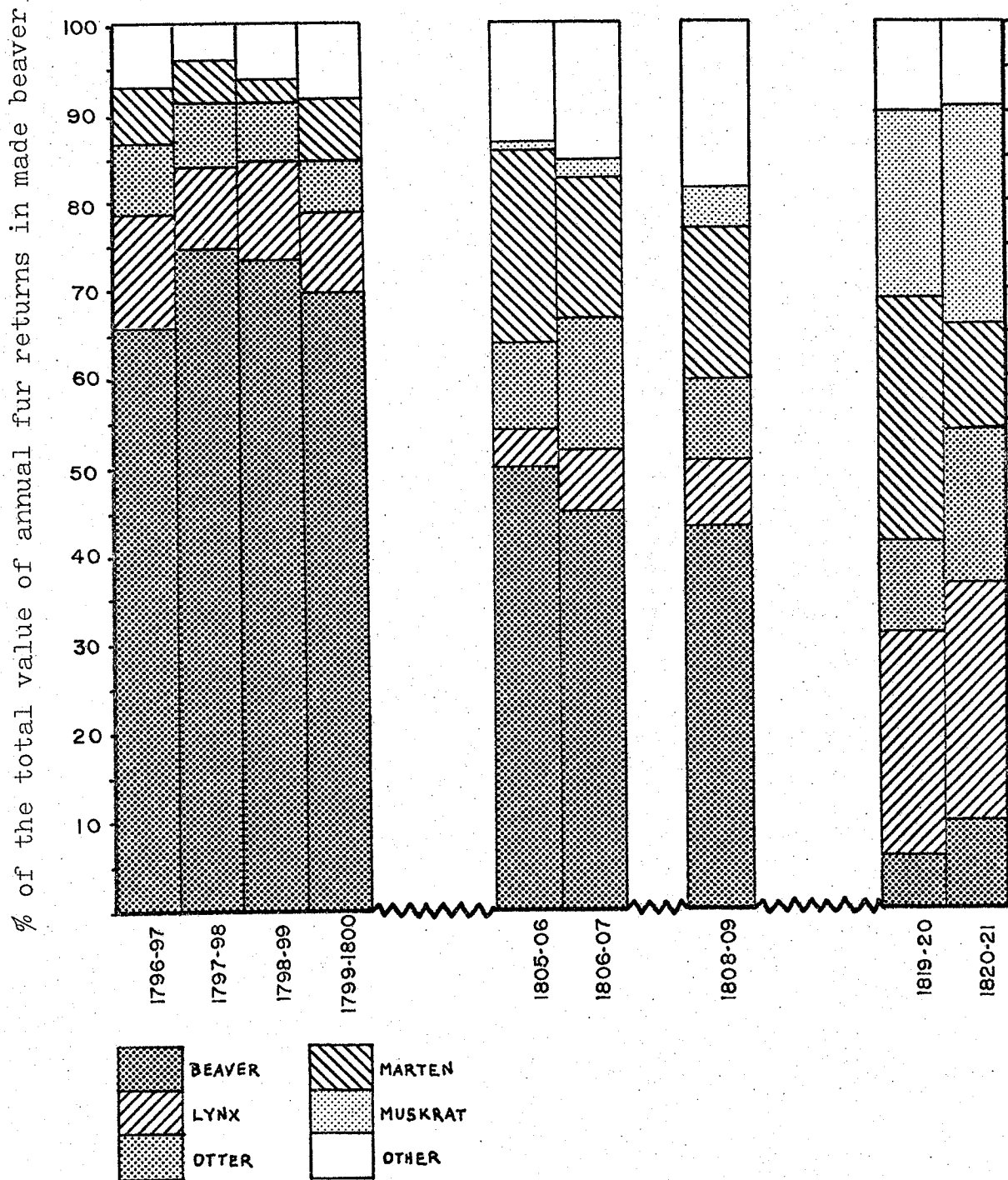
Donald Sutherland was intent on extending the York trade in East Winnipeg and returned from Norway House in the fall of 1819 with an increased outfit in order to settle two outposts. James Robertson was

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<sup>45</sup> Donald Sutherland, "Berens River Report, 1818-19", B.16/e/2, fo. 1d.

<sup>46</sup> Loc. cit.

Figure 40: Changing Value of Selected Fur Species in the Annual Returns of Hudson's Bay Company Trading Posts in the East Winnipeg Country



selected to take a party of four men and goods in a large canoe to settle Bad Lake on the Bloodvein River. The York men knew virtually nothing about Bad Lake, save for its general location near the headwaters of the Bloodvein, and the fact that Canadians and Albany men had formerly wintered there. Robertson's journey up the Bloodvein River was slow and hazardous, just as John Best had discovered in 1794. The trip required over seventy portages and Robertson described the country as: ". . . swamps and High Mountains of Rocks, there is small Lakes, in with in, throw the country."<sup>47</sup>

The second outpost was established on the upper reaches of the Berens River at Sandy Point Lake (Goose Lake). Robert Sutherland, a younger brother of Donald, was placed in charge of this outfit, which consisted of three men and a small canoe. Donald Sutherland had been informed that the Albany traders knew the track to Sandy Point Lake very well, and had been long settled in that quarter. The track had been described to him by Indians as follows:

from Great Rapid House to Sandy Point Lake there is fourteen portages throw rivers and the following Lakes  
1st Long Lake 2nd Eagle Lake 3rd Black Bear Lake 4th  
Sandy Narrow Lake and then Sandy Point Lake up toward  
the height of Land.<sup>48</sup>

The country about the Berens River at its headwaters was described by Robert Sutherland in much the same terms that had been applied to the headwaters of the Bloodvein: ". . . it is all a Mountainous Rockie

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<sup>47</sup> Donald Sutherland, "Report of Berens River District, 1819-20", B.16/e/3, fo. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., fo. 1d.

Country, with small Lakes hear and there."<sup>49</sup>

The York men under Robertson at Bad Lake competed with the North West Company post under Harris that was outfitted from Red Lake. Both posts had a poor season as a large part of the Indians in that area were killed by disease. This disease, called the distemper, carried off many of the "King Fisher" tribe who hunted in the vicinity of Bad Lake and consequently little was traded at either post. The York men at Sandy Point Lake were slightly more successful in trade, being unopposed that winter, but the death of many Indians in that region also limited their returns. The trade in furs likewise dropped considerably at the Big Fall House and Donald Sutherland observed that: "... the Dreadful Death among the Indian over the whole of this part of the country is the occasion of it."<sup>50</sup>

The Albany men encountered similar effects from the "Dreadful Death" in their Red Lake District. Slater occupied the principal post at Escabeechevan (Escabitchewan) while outposts were settled at Red Lake and Big Lake (possibly Trout Lake). Among the casualties of the distemper was Thomas Sanderson who was at Red Lake that season.

Thomas Sanderson having departed this life on the 11th of October [1819] after a few day illness . . . a great many Indians are cut off from this world by a disease that is raging amonst them.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., fo. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Donald Sutherland, "Berens River District Journal, 1819-20", B.16/e/3, p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> William McKay, "Osnaburgh House Journal, 1819-20", B.155/a/32, fo. 18. James Slater requested that, "in regard of the deceased Thomas Sanderson's family you must endeavour to find them a livelihood throughout the winter until Spring when they will be brought to O.H. [Osnaburgh House]." in B.64/a/8, fo. 10.



The Big Fall House was rebuilt during the summer of 1820 making it "more shour and comodius".<sup>52</sup> Sutherland took pride in its development from a small winter outpost to that of a substantial year-round trading establishment that "can have little dread from any opposition for a year or two at least".<sup>53</sup> The gardens were becoming productive, yielding eighty bushels of potatoes and four bushels of barley during the 1819 season and Sutherland had hopes of doubling that total in 1820. His men had gained valuable experience and firsthand knowledge about the East Winnipeg Country and Sutherland rated their abilities as being much superior to the Nor'Westers who had only occasionally sent men to trade there. He wrote:

Another great advantage we have the servants knows the Indians and the country all round, and I may safely say that it was the eableness and the active-ness of the men that prevented the N.W.C. from sending back to Berens River again this year as well as last.<sup>54</sup>

The York men had established their dominance over the Nor'Westers in the East Winnipeg Country, but this had been done in reality with very little effort expended by the latter since their general withdrawal in 1808. Indeed, there were few furs left to be fought over and the area could at best support two or three trading posts. The Hudson's Bay Company had finally found an effective approach to trading in the East Winnipeg Country by supplying their men from Norway House and transporting them by canoes to their winter stations upriver from the east coast

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<sup>52</sup> Donald Sutherland, Op. cit., fo. 3d.

<sup>53</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Loc. cit.

of Lake Winnipeg. Although beaver had all but disappeared from the region, other species could still be procured in sufficient numbers to make the trade profitable.

In the fall of 1820, Sutherland dispatched the Sandy Point Lake outfit and they arrived at that lake in five days. Meanwhile, a party of men under James Robertson came from Norway House and settled Sandy Bar House at the mouth of the Berens River. Sutherland had earlier indicated that Robertson's outfit should settle at the mouth of the Bloodvein, and the report of his own people building at Sandy Bar prompted him to remark:

. . . it is a laughable storie to have two houses  
now fore the same Indians that hath traded hear the  
four last years.<sup>55</sup>

He learned later that Robertson had acted on the orders of the District Chief James Sutherland, and that another outfit was to be deployed from Sandy Bar to the Jack Head during the winter in an attempt to drive the Nor'Westers from that quarter. This foray against the Nor'Westers did not materialize and the Sandy Bar House proved to be a poor location for a trading post.

The Sandy Point Lake area, despite the earlier devastations by disease among the Indians, produced substantial returns of "good furs". The York men of that post were indirectly opposed by Nor'Westers from the Nipigon Department who wintered at Iron Island. The Nipigon men had never withdrawn from the Severn headwaters and Island Lake region, and the post at Iron Island was a westward extension of that trade. The

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<sup>55</sup> Donald Sutherland, "Berens River Journal, 1820-21", B.16/a/4, fo. 12.

exact location of the post or island is unclear, but remarks in the Big Fall post journal indicate that Deer Lake was a day's journey beyond Iron Island. A probable location is thus an island in Favourable Lake, thirty miles southwest of Deer Lake and an area that is well known today for its iron deposits.

On June 5, 1821, Sutherland and seven men embarked in two large canoes with the season's trade that totalled twenty-eight packs of furs (roughly 2,900 made beaver). Ten days later, while paddling along the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg between the Poplar and Mukutawa Rivers, they were passed by a large North West Company canoe manned by eleven men who informed the York men of the merger of the North West Company with the Hudson's Bay Company. Thus, while the Canadians sped past them on their way to Norway House, Sutherland and his men paddled on with the last cargo of furs from the East Winnipeg Country traded during the era of competition between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company.

The union of the two companies in 1821 issued in a new period of virtual monopolized fur trading by the Hudson's Bay Company. Under these circumstances, the fur trade in East Winnipeg was continued on a small scale as it had been done for the previous five years. Norway House continued to be the depot for this trade and canoes regularly plied the trade from one or several posts in East Winnipeg.

The geography of East Winnipeg, especially the area comprising eastern headwaters, continued to be very poorly known after 1821. In the first meeting of the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company after the union, it was resolved to delineate the boundary between the Northern and Southern Departments along the watershed of the

Albany River. The Company realized that formerly there had been much confusion respecting this boundary about the Albany and Severn headwaters. The Committee recommended that:

it will be necessary for the Councils to concert such arrangements as will prevent any misunderstanding in the future. It may moreover be found that some modification of the boundary will be convenient and beneficial, and we wish enquiry to be made into this matter . . .<sup>56</sup>

By this time, however, the trade had been greatly reduced and the boundary between the two departments in this still largely unknown headwater region was no longer as significant as it had been in the heyday of the beaver and of the competition with the Nor'Westers.

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<sup>56</sup> Letter from the Governor and Committee to Simpson, London, Feb. 27, 1822, in R.H. Fleming (ed.), Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-31, 1940, p. 301.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent from the foregoing that the fur trade that developed in the Little North and that culminated in the exploitation and settlement of the East Winnipeg Country was much more extensive and of much greater significance than has hitherto been acknowledged in the literature of the fur trade. It is also apparent that it was a later, but nonetheless integral, part of the overall fur trade conducted in the Northwest prior to the termination of the competition between Hudson's Bay Company and St. Lawrence traders in 1821. The manner in which this trade developed and the different phases of fur exploitation that characterized it to the time of the cessation of competitive trade in 1821 are summarized below.

Although the first European settlement in the East Winnipeg Country did not occur until 1792, the advent of fur posts to the region was the outgrowth and ultimate conclusion of a longstanding European fur trade in the Little North that was most likely begun by French traders in the second half of the seventeenth century. This trade in the Little North was itself preceded by a commerce conducted and controlled by the Indians of the region. Prior to the penetration of European settlement toward the East Winnipeg Country, there was a traffic in furs from most of the Little North that was conducted by Indian trap-

pers and middlemen and directed toward the European settlements on the shores of Lake Superior and Hudson and James Bays. There is strong evidence to suggest that Indians from East Winnipeg, and especially those of the eastern headwater region, traded regularly at Severn House on Hudson Bay and with Albany Fort on James Bay. Likewise, Indians from East Winnipeg and surrounding areas most probably had trading connections with the early French trading establishments on Lake Superior such as Kaministikwia and Nipigon. As French traders penetrated westward and northward into the Little North and established trading posts closer to the wintering grounds of the East Winnipeg Indians, the long spring voyages to the Bayside and Lake Superior became increasingly unnecessary. French traders from Nipigon, whose settlements eventually reached well into the upper basin of the Albany River, became especially effective in curtailing the flow of Indians and their furs from East Winnipeg to Albany Fort.

While the traders were pushing into the Albany hinterland, those from Kaministikwia rapidly advanced westward to Lake Winnipeg and, from this hub lake, succeeded in tapping the fur resources of the eastern plains and the lower Saskatchewan. With the fall of the French régime in 1763, the French were replaced in both the Great North and the Little North by British-financed traders from Montreal. The advance of the French and subsequently the pedlars into the Great North precipitated the first direct trading encounters between the Europeans and the Indians of East Winnipeg.

Shortly after the first explorations of the French in the Lake Winnipeg area it is highly probable that they occasionally, and perhaps regularly, traded with Indians on the eastern and southern shores of

Lake Winnipeg. This definitely occurred following the advent of the pedlars, for river-mouth trading on the east coast was observed by William Tomison in 1767, and again by George Sutherland in 1777. This appears to have been a well-established practice among the Indians of the region and likely represented a continuation of a trade that took place during the French régime at these river mouth rendezvous. These exchanges were incidental to the expanding trade of the Great North and were not accompanied by the establishment of trading posts in East Winnipeg.

Thus, the settlement of fur trade posts in East Winnipeg did not eventuate from the incidental commerce that emerged along the Lake Winnipeg trunk line, a route that was forged to exploit the fur resources of the Great North. Rather, it evolved from commercial developments in the Little North and was the result of what was in effect a second wave in the westward advance of the fur trade that followed in the wake of that which pioneered the trade of the Great North. On a continental scale, this movement of fur trade settlement filled in the region east of Lake Winnipeg that had been by-passed by the movement toward the Great North, and was begun from bases on Lake Nipigon and James Bay.

Although French inland traders had reached well into the upper basin of the Albany River, not until the pedlars from Montreal expanded along these same canoe routes were the English on James Bay finally forced to settle inland and to compete for the furs at their sources in the forested interior. This inland expansion of the Hudson's Bay Company began in the late 1770's, but its rate of advance into the fur forest was impeded by several factors. The most important of these was the inability of the Albany men to live and trade over long distances in the demanding and unfamiliar environment of the Canadian Shield.

Inland penetration from Albany was also made difficult by vigorous opposition from the experienced Canadian traders who, by this time, were largely directed by the shrewd and enterprising Ezekiel Solomon. By the early 1780's, Solomon had become the master pedlar of the Little North and his trading posts stretched from Lake Nipigon westward to the East Winnipeg drainage divide and northward to the Severn headwaters. Thus, in the early years of the trade following the demise of the French, the pedlars virtually monopolized the trade of the Little North and, until Solomon's retirement in 1784, settlement from Albany had not expanded beyond Henley and Gloucester Houses and the margins of the fur forest.

Following Solomon's departure, the Nipigon commerce was taken over by the increasingly powerful North West Company. The Nor'Westers quickly established a trade with the Indians of the Little North and, by engaging some of Solomon's officers and men, the takeover was effected smoothly and efficiently. At the same time, the Albany men took advantage of Solomon's retirement to establish a foothold in the fur forest of the interior. In 1786, they built Osnaburgh House on Lake St. Joseph, which lay astride the pedlars' path to Albany's headwaters. Henceforth, the two companies would compete in similar environments and along essentially the same transport routes, but only in this context was there a parallelism in the development of the two trading systems.

The Nor'Westers from Nipigon initially held several advantages over their Hudson's Bay Company counterparts in the competition for the fur resources in the complex headwater region that lay between Lake St. Joseph and Lake Winnipeg. The former were mainly experienced inland fur traders well-versed in the arts of wilderness living and trading with the Indians. They were accustomed to long journeys in boisterous white-



water rivers with their difficult rocky portages. Their passage through this rugged terrain with their winter supplies and trade goods was facilitated by the use of large birch bark canoes that were purchased from Indians residing in the birch forests of the Great Lakes basin. The Hudson's Bay Company's inland movement, on the other hand, struggled up the Albany River in cumbersome craft that were poorly suited to navigating the smaller rivers of the headwater region. They were also manned by men who were largely ill-prepared for the rigours of the journey and for the long winter season in the interior forest. The Albany men did not have access to the large canoes and instead experimented with boats of different sizes and shapes. The best design proved to be shallow, flat-bottomed batteaux. These craft, however, were not adequately refined until years after the first inland settlement had been built. They nonetheless comprised the most important innovation of purely Company origin to further their endeavours to compete on an equal footing against the Nor'Westers.

By 1791, both companies had expanded to the eastern margins of the East Winnipeg Country. The Albany penetration followed in the wake of the Nor'Westers from Nipigon, but each additional year of inland trading saw the men from Albany become more capable of keeping pace with and competing against their seasoned rivals. To close this gap, the Albany officers were encouraged to hire experienced Canadians for their service and, following 1791, a number of Canadian clerks and labourers were engaged and greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the Hudson's Bay Company's trade. In addition, small numbers of large canoes became available to the Albany traders shortly after 1791 and became a significant factor in their push toward East Winnipeg.

Following the initial European settlement of East Winnipeg along the Bloodvein River in 1792, the trade expanded quickly along the southern and eastern margins of the region. In response to this development, the Nor'Westers by 1796 had created a separate department to administer its trade in the environs of Lake Winnipeg. In contrast to the earliest penetration, which had been conducted from Lake Nipigon, the Lac Ouinique Nor'Westers were outfitted more efficiently from Grand Portage. The storage depot built at Pointe au Foutre near the mouth of the Winnipeg River in 1792 greatly facilitated this trade, which the Nor'Westers exploited with large trading parties that at times numbered over eighty men. The Albany traders were no match for this strong competition at the southern end of Lake Winnipeg. Their outfits were small, and they faced a long and demanding journey to their wintering posts from Albany Fort, and later from Martin's Fall. A trade in East Winnipeg was also attempted by York Factory men and, although they faced a much shorter journey to Lake Winnipeg, they had little success against the Nor'Westers who by this time had entrenched themselves along the entire eastern coast.

With the exception of the earlier expansion along the Bloodvein, the settlement of East Winnipeg's headwaters did not follow immediately after 1792. Instead, both companies concentrated their efforts from the adjacent Albany headwaters to tap the head of Severn drainage. The fur resource, and especially the beaver resource, of the Upper Severn was initially plentiful and its exploitation deflected the trade from East Winnipeg, explaining in part the slow penetration of this region from the vantage of Albany's basin. The confusing topography and drainage of the headwater region also inhibited expansion into East Winnipeg from

this direction. In addition, it is apparent that the Nor'Westers from Nipigon were restricted by administrative boundaries from venturing into East Winnipeg and their presence along the Severn headwaters for a time distracted the Albany men from expanding westward toward Lake Winnipeg. For the Hudson's Bay Company, however, this distraction led to the rediscovery of the Berens River route which ultimately proved to be the only avenue of ingress in this direction amenable to batteaux navigation.

By 1800 the fur trade in East Winnipeg was largely controlled by the North West Company. The Albany and York traders, who had launched small-scale ventures into the region from the Lake's inflow and outflow respectively, had withdrawn completely, and the Hudson's Bay Company's presence in East Winnipeg was preserved and expanded only in the eastern headwaters of the Berens River. The Nor'Westers rose to meet this competition from their settlements on the eastern coast of Lake Winnipeg and trading posts from both concerns were built along the boundary between the Lake Winnipeg Lowlands and the Interior Uplands. The division between these two regions was clearly marked on the Berens River at the Great Fall between Family and Fishing Lakes and it was along this line of contact that the competitive trade for the furs of East Winnipeg was most vigorously contested.

The X.Y. Company, which had been formed in Montreal in 1799, also reached into the East Winnipeg Country in the early years of the nineteenth century and further fueled the competition, especially along the middle reaches of the Berens and Poplar Rivers in the heart of the region. It was at this time that the East Winnipeg fur trade achieved its climax and this was not without consequence to subsequent European settlement in the region. By the time the X.Y. Company merged with the

North West Company in 1805, the fur resources of the region had been drastically depleted and the beaver had been all but exterminated. The Indian population had been reduced by disease and many of the survivors had migrated elsewhere as the fur and subsistence resources dwindled. In the face of this decline, the North West Company effected a major reorganization of its trade in the region which severely reduced the number of settlements in East Winnipeg. At the same time, the Hudson's Bay Company was embroiled in a jurisdictional struggle between York Factory and Albany Fort traders for control of the region. This anomalous circumstance was owing in large part to the uninformed directives sent out by the London Committee, and especially to their ignorance of the extent of earlier trading in the region and its deleterious effects upon the fur resources.

In 1810, the Hudson's Bay Company completed a reorganization of its trade in Ruperts Land. Unlike the Nor'Westers, who viewed the East Winnipeg Country, and indeed much of the Little North, as unprofitable, the Hudson's Bay Company made plans to extend the trade and gave York Factory jurisdiction over East Winnipeg. A major concern of the Company at this time was to check the increasingly militant Nor'Westers and to protect the newly established Red River Colony by settling beside the North West Company's supply depots along their main trunk lines from Lake Superior. This plan, however, failed to materialize and the East Winnipeg Country for a few years was almost devoid of European settlement.

The York Factory traders revitalized the trade in 1814 with the building of Norway House at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg, which in the years to follow acted as a forward supply depot for York's fur brig-

ades. Settlements along Lake Winnipeg's eastern coast could be easily supplied from Norway House and, with large canoes, traders soon penetrated eastward to the edge of the Lake's lowland region. The men from York slowly developed a profitable trade in furs other than beaver, which accommodated Indians from a substantial area around the former Albany post at the Great Fall. The Nor'Westers, who had for the most part given up the trade in East Winnipeg, made a few small-scale attempts to settle posts within the region. These, however, were half-hearted ventures which, although harrasing, had no serious effect upon the Hudson's Bay Company's trade at Big Fall. In 1821 the North West Company united with the Hudson's Bay Company thereby ending this last phase of competitive fur trading in the East Winnipeg Country.

Throughout its development, the fur trade in the Little North and the expansion of the trade into the East Winnipeg Country was shaped by a complex mix of factors. Fundamentally, its evolution was shaped by the physical character of the land which, to a large degree, dictated the mode and spatial pattern of trading activities. Within this context, however, the expansion of the trade into the East Winnipeg Country was determined by the individuals who conducted the trade on the ground, and by the institutional frameworks within which they operated.

The fur trade of the Little North was physically differentiated from that of the Great North by broad geographical differences between the two regions, and by the nature of the transport routes which provided access to them. Like the physical patterns within the region that have been shown to have influenced the trade of the Little North, those of a more continental nature also had a major impact upon its development. The East Winnipeg Country, although geographically part of the

Little North, also had transport connections with the trade that was carried to the Great North through Lake Winnipeg. For this reason, the East Winnipeg Country, from the time of the initial river mouth trade along the east coast until the union of the two companies in 1821, was always to some extent exploited from this vantage. However, it was initially explored and settled from the transport and trading systems of the Little North of which it was a part. The pioneer settlement of East Winnipeg from the Great North's transport hub of Lake Winnipeg did not occur at this time because of the overriding desire of traders from York Factory and Grand Portage to reach the more distant but relatively more virgin and profitable fur forests of the Great North. The fur trade east of Lake Winnipeg was thus left to be exploited by traders from the Little North. Since the trade of the Little North was developed from the east from Lake Nipigon and James Bay, the East Winnipeg Country was thus the last region of the Little North to be settled. By this time the fur frontier in the Great North had also been pushed to its profitable western limits and traders who had previously passed through Lake Winnipeg turned their interests eastward. At this juncture, East Winnipeg experienced a brief period of extremely intensive fur trade competition from all directions until the fur resource had been drastically reduced and the trade had been permanently re-oriented toward the Great North traders from Lake Winnipeg.

The period of competitive trade in East Winnipeg was dominated by the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company, and the differences between the two have been noted many times in this study. In conclusion, it can be said that the two companies were initially very dissimilar in both their personnel and management. The Nor'Westers proved to be

better equipped in both categories for the fur trade that expanded toward East Winnipeg, and the Hudson's Bay Company followed in their wake adapting the Nor'Westers' skills to their own inland movement. The Hudson's Bay Company was eventually able to match the Nor'Westers in experience at the ground level by recruiting experienced Nor'Westers and by developing their own experienced inland servants. These men often provided the Company with the service of their own native-born sons who were intimately familiar with the land and the people of the Little North and East Winnipeg.

The organizational structure of the Hudson's Bay Company, however, proved inferior to that of the North West Company and their inland officers were often powerless to compete against their rivals because of insufficient planning and ineffective management of the trade. In contrast to the Nor'Westers, who carefully planned each year's departmental arrangements at meetings held in the spring at Grand Portage, the Hudson's Bay Company had no such mechanism to effectively coordinate their inland trade, and the Chiefs of the bayside forts were often ill-informed as to each other's activities and the extent of their respective trading districts. This situation was particularly acute in the East Winnipeg Country which became a region of overlapping trade for both companies. The Nor'Westers were able to quickly reorganize their plans for East Winnipeg to execute the trade from the most profitable avenue of supply, while the Hudson's Bay Company was slow to realize the proper geographic orientation of its trade in East Winnipeg and made administrative decisions based upon relatively limited knowledge of the region's geography and resource potential. Finally, when the fur resources had become depleted, the Nor'Westers were well-informed of the situation and largely

withdrew from East Winnipeg. The Hudson's Bay Company, on the other hand, lagged behind in their decision-making and even conducted efforts to enlarge the trade in the region prior to the end of competition in 1821.



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- a. Post Journals
- b. Correspondence Books
- c. Correspondence Inward
- d. Account Books
- e. Reports on Districts
- f. Lists of Servants
- z. Miscellaneous Items

Archival material pertinent to this study was also found in Sections A and E. The former contains material relating to the London headquarters and the latter is a miscellaneous category including Peter Fidler's Notebooks.

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