

The Political Economy of Indian Health and Disease in the Canadian Northwest

By James W. Daschuk

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History
University of Manitoba
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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Abstract

The dissertation identifies the origins of the present disparity of health conditions between Indian communities and mainstream society in western Canada. It examines the relationship between economics and health of Indian populations in the Canadian northwest from the early eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. It documents the development of the fur trade in relation to changes in the geographical distribution of aboriginal societies resulting from the differential impact of introduced European diseases. For a period of one hundred and fifty years, infections that came as a consequence of trade were the primary source of mortality due to illness among First Nations. In addition, social pathologies resulting from European trade strategies affected the well being of communities in the northwest. Climate and environment contributed to the differential success of many groups integrated into the global economy through the fur trade.

Canada's acquisition of the northwest changed this pattern. Its commitment to the terms of Treaties opened the west for agricultural development and settlement. The Dominion's development strategy, the National Policy, coincided with the extinction of the bison, undermining the ability of plains Indians to compel the government to deliver on their Treaty commitments. To facilitate the implementation of its economic and political order, the Dominion used its famine relief strategy as a means to subjugate them. By the early 1880s, tuberculosis emerged as a full blown epidemic among the Indians of the plains. The spread of tuberculosis through the Indian population of the plains was the result of the protracted period of malnutrition. Punitive measures imposed after the brief armed resistance to Dominion hegemony further weakened the population already largely infected with the disease. Severe mortality

weakened the population already largely infected with the disease. Severe mortality resulted from the spread of acute infectious disease among the compromised population. Within fifteen years of signing Treaties many plains populations declined to their demographic nadir.

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Terminology

The use of terminology to designate the identity of First Nations people remains a contentious issue. Where possible, the study has identified individuals by their names or more commonly by their band or ethnic affiliation. The term "Indian" is used as an umbrella designation to encompass members of various groups of individual First Nations. Because the term "aboriginal" comprises groups such as the Métis and the Inuit, it is not used as a synonym for First Nations in the text. Ethnic designations appear in the document as they were used in the sources. Many of the terms used in the study are not what the groups would use to identify themselves. Although the terminology used in the text may frustrate some readers, ethnic designation within First Nations communities themselves is not static.

Quotations have been transcribed from the sources as exactly as possible. Because of this, many spelling and punctuation errors appear uncorrected in the text.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Canadians can be justly proud of the yearly pronouncements by the United Nations world human development index that they consistently rank among the top three countries in the world with regard to their quality of life. A startling exception to this record are the dismal health and economic conditions within Canada's First Nations population. As mainstream Canadians have come to expect some of the highest standards of health care in the world as a right of citizenship, the experience of First Nations communities is closer to that of third world populations than to those of the rest of Canada. Matthew Coon Come, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, stated that if the criteria used by in the United Nations index were applied to First Nations communities, they would rank as low as sixty-fourth in the world.¹ The gap between the health of mainstream Canadians and members of First Nations communities is such that members of the latter have a life expectancy of between eight and ten years shorter than the general Canadian population. The present study argues that the root of the imbalance in health conditions between the two populations can be found in the alienation of First Nations from their land and resource base.

The displacement of indigenous peoples from their traditional and adopted economic niches occurred at different times among the various First Nations of the Canadian Northwest. By the end of the nineteenth century, populations of the plains and of the western subarctic were, either as a consequence of forced or chosen economic specialization in the fur trade economy, in a precarious environmental and social situation. In the marginal lands of the far northwest, the territorial displacement of Athapaskan populations into ecological regions that could not provide a reliable

¹Speech by Chief Matthew Coon Come in Fort McMurray, October 26, 2000. (Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations, 2000), press release.

subsistence base, was the product of the protracted period of unrestrained extraction known as the fur trade competition era. There, game depletion and cyclical patterns of starvation stressed the aboriginal inhabitants to the breaking point by the beginning of the nineteenth century. On the plains, economic focus on the bison hunt, which served to feed the northern fur trade, provided First Nations with almost a century of affluence before their precipitous decline in the last quarter of the century.

Though the extinction of the bison was a major factor in the hardship of the plains inhabitants, their suffering was exacerbated by efforts of the Dominion government to control and manipulate them to suit the nation's development programme based on agriculture and European settlement. For the aboriginal populations of the prairies, state-sponsored exclusion from the new economic paradigm contributed not only to a regional famine but to the emergence of tuberculosis as the primary cause of morbidity and mortality by the 1880s. By the 1890s, infection rates were so high among reserve populations of the plains that government officials and medical practitioners came to the false conclusion that Indian people were racially susceptible to tuberculosis and that the disease was hereditary in nature. From that time, First Nations communities continued to suffer higher rates of disease, a consequence of the poverty resulting from their exclusion from the mainstream economy. For the vast majority of both urban and reserve populations, conditions of poverty and economic marginalisation remain to the present.

Recent studies in the medical history of First Nations people have focussed on racism as the primary factor in the decline of Indian populations in western Canada after the acquisition of the territory by the Dominion. Maureen Lux, in her investigation of health trends among the indigenous people of the plains from 1880 to 1940,

stressed that racism, and the development of policies by the Canadian government that developed from that position were the primary causes of the precipitous decline of health among reserve populations.² Mary-Ellen Kelm used race as the basis of declining health conditions among First Nations people in British Columbia in the early twentieth century.³ Racism on the part of Canadian authorities during the early decades of their stewardship of the populations that entered into treaties with the Dominion government undoubtedly contributed to the decline of health conditions among reserve populations. However, the alienation of First Nations communities from a viable economic base had a more direct link to their decline of health. This study focusses on the interaction of health conditions among the Indian population of the Canadian Northwest and their participation in the increasingly global trade from the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, when First Nations on the plains were essentially barred from participating in the development of agrarian capitalism through state-sanctioned intervention.⁴

Prior to their economic marginalisation, which occurred at various times throughout the nineteenth century, the epidemiology of First Nations communities in the Canadian northwest roughly corresponded to the model established by Alfred Crosby. The Crosby model claims that introduced Old World pathogens were the primary

²Maureen Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 4.

³Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1998), xix.

⁴The most succinct discussion of the role of the Canadian state in subverting First Nations' adoption of commercial agriculture was provided by Sarah Carter in *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

determinants of the demographic history of the indigenous populations of the Americas for as long as one hundred and fifty years after their full exposure to them.⁵ The scale of the demographic impact of introduced diseases, particularly of "Virgin Soil Epidemics," when diseases spread among previously unexposed populations contributed to the collapse of large scale societies in the New World, remains a contentious, if not the primary, debate in the early history of the encounter between people of the Old World and the New.

Although some studies have attempted to reconstruct the demographic collapse of First Nations in the territory that became western Canada,⁶ the paucity of accurate records and the comparatively light population densities of the band societies in the northwest in comparison to the large-scale societies to the south have conspired to undermine any serious attempts to reconstruct the size of indigenous populations at the time of their first exposure to the most lethal of Old World pathogens, smallpox. In western Canada, even the occurrence of the "Virgin Soil" outbreak of smallpox in the northwest is not well understood. Although the early 1780s is widely accepted as the time of the first outbreak of the disease on the northern plains, this study identifies an epidemic of the disease across the prairies in the 1730s, more than a generation earlier.

⁵Alfred Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation of America." in *Germs, Seeds & Animals: Studies in Ecological History*. (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), 99.

⁶Jody Decker, "*We Shall Never Again Be the Same People*," *The Diffusion and Cumulative Impact of Acute Infectious Diseases Affecting the Natives on the Northern Plains of the Western Interior of Canada* (Ph. D. diss. York University, 1989).

Scope of the Study

The Political Economy of Indian Health and Disease in the Canadian Northwest considers the interaction of disease and the spread of the fur trade economy through the interior of western Canada from the Red River area west to the Rocky Mountains and north to the edge of the tundra. The region roughly corresponds to the area encompassed by the Northern Department of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Mackenzie watershed known as the Athabasca country. The southern extremity of the study is the Missouri River, the territory once controlled by the sedentary horticultural societies of the Mandan, Hidatsa and the Arikara, from which the vast majority of epidemic disease, particularly smallpox, spread northward into what became Canadian territory.

Due to the size of the geographical area under consideration and the longitudinal nature of the study, it is based to a significant extent on published and unpublished secondary literature. It is intended to be a large-scale general history of health and disease in relation to economic conditions among the First Nations of the northwest. It answers the call by Theodore Binnema in, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* for studies that have a wider focus than the history of a particular ethnicity and what he called the "culturalist preoccupations" of most twentieth century scholarship on the tribal peoples of North America.⁷

Because the present study focusses on the inextricable link between economics and health over a vast geographical area and is not intended to outline the specific

⁷Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the North American Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), xiii.

histories of each of the numerous First Nations who inhabit, or once inhabited, the northwest. One goal of the study is to illustrate that the linkage between economic factors and biology was often the primary force in the shaping of the ethnic map of the Canadian west. The two related historical forces serve to explain why some groups expanded, as was the case with the Plains Cree, and why others declined to the point of near oblivion, as was the case with the Assiniboine-Nakota and the Gros Ventre-Atsina.

The expansion of some First Nations at the expense of others was largely the outcome of disease during the fur trade era, often the result of differential integration of societies into the global economy. Although they were not the sole source of infection, trade networks served to a very large extent as vectors of disease during the period of introduced infectious pathogens. The demographic result of the interaction of biological and economic variables was that many of the First Nations that entered into treaties with the Dominion on the prairies were the inheritors of the area, rather than the indigenous and longstanding owners of the territory.

Another aim of the study is to demonstrate the motivation on the part of the Plains Cree who forced the inclusion of medical and food relief into the terms of Treaty 6, signed at Forts Carlton and Pitt in 1876. The terrible suffering of the group, and of other First Nations on the western plains during the smallpox epidemic of 1869-70 that killed as many as 3,500 people, prompted demands on the part of the Cree for the delivery of medical care from the Dominion which assumed responsibility for them. The inclusion of the clause that guaranteed food assistance in times of crisis was also a conscious strategy on the part of Cree negotiators to mitigate the effect of the inevitable disappearance of the bison. Though Canada accepted the legal

responsibility of these terms with the signing of the Treaty, the study will show that the Dominion ignored its commitments, particularly with regard to famine relief. The government provided limited assistance to First Nations in the aftermath of the extinction of the bison, but the motivation of the state was control of the Indian population rather than the alleviation of a humanitarian crisis and the fulfilment of their treaty responsibility. Resistance on the part of the reserve population to what they considered to be the failure of the government to deliver on its treaty commitments met with harsh punishment, especially after the return of the Conservative government under John A. Macdonald in 1879. The failure of the government to adequately deal with the regional food crisis, and draconian measures imposed after the brief and limited armed resistance in the spring of 1885, resulted not only in a decade long famine for many First Nations on the prairies but also in the emergence of tuberculosis among the malnourished and immune compromised population.

Methodology

The medical history of First Nations people in the northwest is inextricably linked to the economic and political development of the region. The political economy approach offers the most explanatory power in uncovering the long-term changes in health conditions among the First Nations in the west. It explains the differential success of specific ethnic groups through the fur trade period and the general decline of plains populations following Canada's acquisition of the northwest.

The political economy approach to the history of health and disease in the Canadian northwest presented here is a response to writers James Waldram, Ann Herring, and Kue Young's call for such a study in their 1995 publication, *Aboriginal*

Health in Canada: Historical, Cultural, and Epidemiological Perspectives.⁸ In their conclusion, the authors stressed that, "the political economy of health seems most appropriate, given the status of the Aboriginal peoples as indigenous, colonized minorities in their homeland."⁹

The investigation of social and economic forces in relation to health has been applied effectively in the context of other colonial societies. The Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen, in his pioneering work on the economics of famine in south Asia, stressed that regional hunger had more to do with the politics of food distribution than the simple scarcity of food.¹⁰ In the mid-1980s, Meredith Thursen challenged the notion that chronic malnutrition among the populations of Africa and the myriad of health problems resulting from it was simply the result of environmental crises such as the Sahel drought.¹¹ Rather, she stressed that poverty in Africa was not "an innate or inherent problem but a product of colonial history, present dependence, and changed social relations of production."¹² She critiqued colonial medicine that espoused a "natural history of disease" in which African people declined in health because of poor hygiene and their lack of immunity to introduced diseases and poor diet. In doing so,

⁸James Waldram, Ann Herring, and Kue Young, *Aboriginal Health in Canada: Historical, Cultural, and Epidemiological Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 270.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 1; and "Food, Economics, and Entitlements." in *The Political Economy of Hunger: Selected Essays*, eds. Jean Dreze, Amartya Sen, and Athar Hussain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 50-68.

¹¹*The Political Ecology of Disease in Tanzania* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984), xii.

¹²*Ibid.*, 5.

she developed the concept of the "unnatural history of disease" through the investigation of the economic, social, and political roots of disease.¹³ In a study of tuberculosis among African miners in South Africa, Randall Packard came to essentially the same conclusion, noting that the emergence of the disease was the product of the particularly pathological intersection of political, economic and biological forces.¹⁴

In the late 1980s, Gregory Campbell applied the same technique to the deterioration of health conditions among the Cheyenne of Montana.¹⁵ Campbell used the concept of the "unnatural history of disease" to show that social, political and economic forces were inseparable from health conditions, and that the emergence of new diseases such as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), substance abuse, and Type II Diabetes Mellitus were often the result of enforced social change in the years following the Second World War.¹⁶ In an article entitled, "Health Patterns and Underdevelopment on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation," Campbell again stressed that physical decline was the "direct result of the political and economic control held by the Indian office," which deprived the group of its primary means of subsistence and access to the resources required for good health.¹⁷

¹³Ibid., 10.

¹⁴*White Plague-Black Labor: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 19.

¹⁵*The Political Economy of Ill-Health: Changing Northern Cheyenne Health Patterns and Economic Underdevelopment* (Ph. D. diss, University of Oklahoma, 1987).

¹⁶"The Changing Dimension of Native American Health: A Critical Understanding of Contemporary Native American Health Issues," in *Native American Resurgence and Renewal: A Reader and Bibliography*, ed. Robert N. Wells (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 97-106.

¹⁷"Health Patterns and Economic Underdevelopment on the Cheyenne Reservation," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians*, ed. John H. Moore

Although the utility of the political economy model to the understanding of social and economic conditions among aboriginal peoples in Canada is widely acknowledged by the medical community and social scientists,¹⁸ the approach has been under utilized within the historical community. Early archival studies such as Charles Bishop's *The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade: An Historical and Ecological Study* made specific reference to the development of economic dependency on the global trade in furs.¹⁹ Since the 1980s, investigations grounded in economic relationships, such as the study presented here, have become increasingly rare as the field known as ethnohistory has become the predominant methodology in the history of First Nations in western Canada. Rather than focussing on the economic and social relationships between aboriginal people and the expanding sphere of Europeans, practitioners of ethnohistoric method have tended to concentrate their efforts on the motivations and actions of small groups, either at the band level or at the level of specific ethnicities. While this approach has been successful in casting aboriginal groups as active agents in their dealings and the survival of their cultural identities, the method has largely avoided the issue of the general decline of First Nations communities that resulted from the imposition of Canadian hegemony. While the persistence of cultural traits despite the long assault on them by the state is a testament to the resilience of First Nations

(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 63.

¹⁸In their sociological study of First Nations conditions, Vic Satzewich and Terry Wotherspoon noted that "a political economy analysis of Canada's aboriginal people must be grounded in the consideration of native peoples' struggles for subsistence and survival under changing material circumstances." *First Nations: Race, Class, and Gender Relations* (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1993), 13.

¹⁹*The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade: An Historical and Ecological Study, Culture and Communities: A Series of Monographs* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Canada, 1974), 196.

people, it is not the focus of the study presented here. Rather, it considers epidemiological changes in relation to the development of the fur trade and the decline of health conditions for those who entered treaties with Canada in the 1870s. In considering the changes in epidemiology from the fur trade through the Canadian period, the study identifies the regional trends in the health of First Nations populations through the Canadian northwest.

In the aboriginal historiography of Western Canada, the rift between scholars with an economic focus and those who concentrate on cultural traits has been most evident on the crucial question of whether Algonkian-speaking peoples expanded into western Canada, a consequence of their integration into the global economy. Those who have stressed the importance of economic relations have generally accepted the view that eastern people moved west during the fur trade era. Studies that centre on ethnicity and the persistence of cultural traits have largely opposed this view, arguing that Algonkians were well-ensconced in the west prior to the expansion of the capitalist economy into the region.

The controversy over the westward expansion of Algonkian-speakers into the northwest is voluminous, but can be summarized as follows. The expansionist approach, pioneered by anthropologist David Mandelbaum in the 1940s²⁰ and developed by scholars such as Arthur Ray and Charles Bishop,²¹ argues that groups that acquired European trade goods, particularly fire arms, expanded into areas

²⁰*The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1979).

²¹*Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson's Bay, 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Charles Bishop *The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade: An Historical and Ecological Study* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1974).

inhabited by other groups, causing territorial and cultural dislocation of many aboriginal societies. Those who favour the idea of the "in-situ" development of Algonkians in the west, including Dale Russell²² and the late James G.E. Smith,²³ oppose the view that the Cree expanded as a result of their association with Europeans, claiming that they lived as far west as north central Alberta prior to their involvement in the global exchange of furs. The key issues in the debate are the nature of the trade relations between Indians and Europeans, and the extent to which aboriginal groups were dependent on trade items, especially firearms and imported food.

The notion of dependency was first popularized by the Marxist historian André Gunder Frank in his book, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, published in 1967.²⁴ Frank traced third world poverty in the twentieth century to the development of capitalism and the unequal economic relations between "core" colonial powers and "peripheral" colonized countries. According to Frank, trade relations had to be considered in relation to the growth of capitalism on a world scale.²⁵ One of his conclusions was that no part of Latin America had been left untouched by market relations.²⁶ Underdevelopment in satellite or peripheral states was the result of surplus

²²Dale Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, Archaeological Survey of Canada, Mercury Series (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991).

²³James G.E. Smith, "The Western Woods Cree: Anthropological Myth and Historical Reality," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987): 434-448.

²⁴André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967).

²⁵Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (London: Routledge, 1980), 159.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 161.

accumulation in the metropolis or core state. In the periphery, economic specialization through manipulation by the core eventually led to the dependence of the periphery on the core. In the context of the aboriginal history of western Canada, the economic specialization of groups such as the Cree and the Ojibwa in fur trade relations, has led scholars to interpret their economic history as one of growing dependence on European trade goods and, by extension, on the global capitalist system in order to survive. The debate in Canada over the dependency of Indians on the fur trade has polarized scholars who consider economic relations and those who focus on the cultural integrity of indigenous populations. Scholars with an economic orientation, such as Ray and Bishop, have stressed that eastern groups were first to be integrated into the world system through their direct contact with Europeans and their acquisition of goods such as firearms. As agents in the field for the accumulation of capital in the metropolis, the middlemen's access to European technology served to give them an economic and military advantage over more isolated groups. Because groups such as the Cree and Ojibwa were active participants in the growing capitalist world system through their procurement of furs for foreign consumption, they became increasingly reliant on the maintenance of core-periphery economic relations for their success and eventually for their very survival.

The other side of the debate tends to consider the cultural component of the groups under consideration. Predominantly anthropological in orientation, scholars disputing both dependency and the westward expansion of middlemen in the early fur trade have focussed on the ways specific groups have worked to maintain their independence from European traders. Because of their focus on the persistence of traditions, beliefs and practices, anthropologists have often tended to describe

aboriginal societies until as late as the mid 1940s as "traditional, unchanging and stable."²⁷ Their economic analysis has tended to focus on behaviour at the band or tribal level rather than on the exchange relationships of groups on a larger scale. Because advocates of this approach have dominated recent scholarship, critical inquiry into the origin of social problems among contemporary aboriginal people has suffered. In their descriptions of the specific choices made by particular First Nations populations and their manipulation of European institutions for their own ends, ethnohistorians have tended to stress the autonomy of particular populations while failing to consider larger trends in relations between natives and newcomers. In a sense, the focus on the persistence of cultural traits among aboriginal populations sheds light on the anthropological tree at the expense of the historical forest.

One problem with the ethnohistoric critique of "dependency" pointed out by Tough is that the term has been used incorrectly by those who would seek to undermine the approach. Laura Peers' study of the Saulteaux at Fort Pelly in the early nineteenth-century stressed the ability of the Indians to make decisions regarding their subsistence and resource use and that "[a]bsolute dependency and loss of autonomy occur when a group runs out of choices."²⁸ Tough's rebuttal is that there is no such thing as a society that is absolutely dependent, "and thus a nonsensical category has been created in place of assessing historical trends."²⁹

²⁷Frank Tough *'As Their Natural Resources Fail: Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1780-1930* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), 299.

²⁸Ibid., 301.

²⁹Ibid. Charles Roland has shown that even the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto were able to develop resistance strategies to cope with their apparently hopeless situation. *Courage Under Siege: Starvation, Disease and Death in the Warsaw Ghetto*

Another issue to be considered in differing approaches are the temporal limits of studies in ethnohistory. Many of the studies undertaken by those who oppose dependency as an interpretive framework, end prior to the establishment of large scale European settlement. In the Canadian context, the bulk of the literature in ethnohistory deals with events only up to the sale of Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada in 1869-70.³⁰ Because the studies end before the period of state intervention, they do not address the substance of many of the current political and legal conflicts between First Nations and the Canadian government.

In 1992, David Smyth argued that ethnohistoric studies challenging the westward migration of the Cree "have virtually destroyed the credibility of this position" rendering the debate over migration and economic dependency "historiographically out-of date."³¹ One of the key studies that led to Smyth's conclusion was Dale Russell's *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*.³² Although Russell's study is considered the essential source for the location of various First Nations during the eighteenth-century, he noted that "little is known" about Cree groups that occupied the northern margins of the plains along the Saskatchewan River prior to their

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 196-197.

³⁰See Paul Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1986); John Milloy *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790-1870*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988); and Laura Peers *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994).

³¹David Smyth, "Missed Opportunity: John Milloy's *The Plains Cree*," *Prairie Forum* 17(1992): 338. For an opposing view, one that stresses the validity of the dependency model, see Frank Tough, "The Northern Fur Trade: A Review of Conceptual and Methodological Issues," *Musk Ox* 36 (1988): 66-79.

³²Dale Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*.

disappearance after the smallpox epidemic of 1781-1782.³³ What Russell failed to recognized was the possibility, or as the present study argues, the probability of a virgin soil outbreak of smallpox in the late 1730s. Because much of his argument is based on the reconnaissance journeys of employees of the Hudson's Bay Company in the 1750s and 1760s, the demography of the region would have already been fundamentally changed by the initial outbreak of smallpox, usually considered the most serious single demographic event in the history of a population.

In addition to arguing for the re-interpretation of the virgin soil epidemic of smallpox in the Canadian west, the study shows that the westward movement of groups was primarily westward. The economically driven migrations of the Plains Cree, the Saulteaux, and the Iroquois, are examples of this general trend. Arthur Ray noted that economic motivations were but a part of the impetus for the westward expansion of eastern groups. He identified disease as another. The thesis contends that disease was probably the primary force in the spatial dynamism in western Canada. It shows that expansion was often into the territory of groups that had undergone severe losses to disease. The decline of the Assiniboine-Nakota and the Gros Ventres-Atsina are two examples of this process.

As differential survival of infections allowed certain groups to claim the country inherited by their dead or dying neighbours, the expanding groups adapted their economies and technologies to feed the European demand for fur and food. The growing economic specialization was a conscious strategy on the part of those who took on the new challenges of the fur trade. The most successful of these groups, the Plains Cree, experienced almost a century of fluorescence as provisioners of the

³³Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 5.

European trade before the extinction of the bison and the coercion of the Dominion brought their communities to the brink of disaster by the 1880s.

Although many in the ethnohistorical community consider the issue to be dead, Arthur Ray has stated that the conflict between the opposing sides of the dependency debate will probably never be fully resolved.³⁴ The study contends that economic specialization within the fur trade economy on the part of First Nations populations created conditions for dependency as described by Gunder Frank in the Latin American context. The most prolific of current writers on the economic history of aboriginal peoples in the northwest, Frank Tough recently decried the state of historical research in the north by declaring that, "[d]iscussion of political economy of the subarctic has essentially been shut down by ethnohistory."³⁵ Another goal of the thesis is the reintegration of the political economy method into mainstream history of First Nations in western Canada.

Structure of the Thesis

The study contends that changes in the epidemiological history of First Nations in the Canadian northwest are inextricably linked to the development of the global economy. To illustrate the essentially symbiotic relationship of disease and economics, the text considered the relationship of the two forces from the early eighteenth-century

³⁴Ray, "Some Thoughts About the Reasons for Spatial Dynamism in the Early Fur Trade," in *Three Hundred Prairie Years*, ed. Henry Epp (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1993), 122.

³⁵Tough, 'As *Their Natural Resources Fail*,' 300. For an ethnohistoric critique of dependency, see Eleanor Blain, "Dependency: Charles Bishop and the Northern Ojibwa," in *Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects*, eds. K. Abel and J. Friesen (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1991): 93-106.

to the end of the nineteenth. Chapter 2 considers the role of disease in the early fur trade and its impact on the territorial dislocation of people from New France to the western plains. It considers the effect of the virgin soil outbreak of smallpox on the populations of the west during the late 1730s. Because the Ojibwa had been exposed to the disease as early as the 1670s, they were able to survive in greater numbers than did their western partners and antagonists. As a result, they increased the size of their territory at the expense of the Assiniboine, Monsoni, and the Dakota. The outbreak also precipitated the long decline of the sedentary societies along the Missouri and the severity of the infection among the Shoshoni forced their retreat from Southern Alberta, opening the country to members of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

The third chapter considers the impact of the invigoration of the Montreal trade in the aftermath of the Seven Years War on the introduction of acute infectious diseases among the First Nations of the west. The invasion of traders increased the incidence of outbreaks by the early 1770s. The penetration of the Athabasca country, beyond the territory set aside for the Hudson's Bay Company, not only opened a vast area for economic exploitation, but removed what had probably been a barrier to disease. The spread of the smallpox epidemic that originated in Mexico in 1779 spread to the northern forest occupied by the Dene. The level of death brought by the epidemic and the arrival of large numbers of Europeans into the western interior brought unprecedented changes to the people and economy of the region. The development of the society known as the Plains Cree and the westward movement of the Saulteaux in relation to both the economic opportunities afforded by the increased trade and the demographic collapse of groups that occupied the plains and parklands were but two of the results.

Chapter four focuses on the period known as the "fur trade wars." During this time, the influx of Europeans into the northwest brought unprecedented changes to the people and environment of the region. Four decades of unrestrained harvesting denuded much of the area of large game and fur bearers. The intensification of the trade, often carried out by aboriginal economic migrants in the employ of the various Canadian-based ventures, resulted in the territorial dislocation of many groups from their territory. In the Mackenzie watershed, the displacement of many small Athapaskan groups to land that could not sustain them was nothing less than a disaster. Cyclical starvation, disease, and even infanticide were the result. Throughout the northwest, the primarily Canadian trade in alcohol introduced the first serious social pathologies to First Nations. The chapter also illustrates the different trading strategies of the Canadian and English companies in their pursuit of furs.

Chapter Five considers the effect of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) monopoly on the northern fur trade from the early 1820s to the end of the century. The Company's control of the trade and its strict enforcement of policies aimed at making the trade as economically efficient as possible resulted in the continuation of the hardship experienced by fur procurers. As the regular cycles of famine continued in the north, the increasing reliance of the HBC on native-born labour spread infection through the region along its supply routes.

Chapter Six discusses the social, economic, and epidemiological changes in the plains during the monopoly period. There, the monopoly and the relative isolation of First Nations were increasingly threatened by the expansion of the settlement frontier. As transportation to Rupert's Land improved and as the flow of settlers increased, infectious diseases came with ever greater frequency. The most severe of these was

the smallpox outbreak of 1837 which, though managed by HBC officials, severely undermined the Assiniboine-Nakota Nation and led to the collapse of the horticultural societies of the Missouri. The increased demand for food among the population at Red River led to heightened competition for the bison. By the time of the sale of the country to the Dominion of Canada, First Nations in the west faced an uncertain economic and political future.

Chapter Seven deals with the period from the acquisition of the territory to the signing of Treaty 6 in 1876. Although events on the western plains have been overshadowed by the Métis insurrection at Red River, the smallpox epidemic that occurred during the troubled early days of Canadian involvement in the northwest killed thousands of people. The outbreak was the last of the large-scale manifestation of the disease in the west. The terrible mortality that resulted from its, and the precipitous decline of the bison herds led the Plains Cree who negotiated the Carlton Treaty to demand both medical care and famine relief as part of their land surrender.

Chapter Eight considers the immediate impact of the extinction of the bison on the First Nations of the west and the response of the Dominion government to the crisis. It argues that the state response was shaped by the emphasis on economy rather than the relief of the hungry. As their economy collapsed, First Nations leaders hoped that the Dominion would accept its responsibility regarding food relief to the destitute. The Dominion relief effort, which kept many from perishing from starvation, resulted in a protracted period of malnutrition for the majority of the people who had relied on the bison for their well-being. Within a very few years of the disappearance of the herds, officials reported that tuberculosis was becoming an epidemic among the population of the reserves.

Chapter Nine deals with the increasingly coercive measures undertaken by the government in its management of the famine in relation to the development strategy based on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. In the years leading up to 1885, food was used as a weapon to control the movement and actions of First Nations. Implementation of the relief programme was guided by increasingly strict rules resulting in numerous instances where food rotted in government storehouses while the population starved. The level of control over First Nations during this time was such that even the lowest government officials essentially had the power of life or death over the people they were charged to oversee. Numerous abuses of departmental authority occurred during this time. The study argues that the killing of employees of the Indian Affairs Department in the spring of 1885 was largely the result of their unsanctioned abuse of departmental power.

The final chapter deals with the aftermath of the violence of 1885 and its relationship to the decline of First Nations to their population nadir, which occurred in southern Saskatchewan in the early 1890s. Retribution from the state was harsh and widespread. Bands that were deemed disloyal were summarily cut off the rations lists. For First Nations, every aspect of their social and economic lives on reserves was strictly controlled by Canadian officials. Many sought refuge in the United States. Those who could, relinquished their status as Indians and accepted Métis scrip. In many areas, the official population of people classified as Indians declined by more than one half through abandonment and mortality.

In response to complaints of newly-arrived settlers, the nascent agricultural economy on reserves was bureaucratically undermined to the point of ruin. As First Nations were marginalised by the establishment of the new agricultural economy, and

famine continued, infectious diseases took an ever greater toll on the largely tubercularised population. The influenza pandemic that spread from Europe in 1890 hit the weakened population of the reserves particularly hard. In many communities across the west, mortality resulting from the outbreak contributed to their demographic nadir. By this time, rates of tuberculosis infection were so high among the general First Nations population that medical practitioners and Canadian officials considered the disease to be a hereditary affliction.

Chapter 2: The Early Fur Trade: Territorial Dislocation and Disease

A strange idea prevails among these Natives, and also of all the Indians to the Rocky Mountains, though unknown to each other: that when they were numerous, before they were destroyed by the small pox, all of the animals of every species were also very numerous and more so in comparison of the number of natives than at present; and this was confirmed to me by old Scotchmen in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, and by the Canadians from Canada. The knowledge of the latter extended over all the interior countries. Yet no disorder was known among the animals; the fact was certain, and nothing they knew of could account for it; it might justly be supposed the destruction of mankind would allow the animals to increase, even to become formidable to the few natives who survived, but neither the bison, the deer, nor the carnivorous animals increased, and as I have already remarked, are no more than sufficient for the subsistence of the natives and the traders." David Thompson 1787¹

The relationship between human health and the condition of their prey that so mystified the young David Thompson during his first year on the western plains presents the historian with an interesting challenge. To Saukamappe, Thompson's teacher, and to apparently just about everyone else with knowledge of the northwest, both human and animal populations had been in decline in the decades preceding the arrival of the young Hudson's Bay Company employee among the Peigan in the late 1780s. To Thompson, a well-educated Englishman who would become a hero of European exploration in Northwestern North America, the absence of a pathogen to explain the decline of game could not be reconciled with the commonly held belief among the inhabitants of the west that game had indeed become less plentiful by the end of the eighteenth century. There is another way to consider Thompson's conundrum. Although the young trader could not identify any "disorder" to account for the drop in game, there was a connection between the decline of both animal and human populations in the territory. The decline in animal populations was probably the result

¹David Thompson, *Travels in North America, 1784-1812*, ed. Victor G. Hopwood (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1971), 122-123.

of the fur trade which had been in operation in the northwest a century before the arrival of Thompson to Blackfoot country. A generation before Thompson's arrival in the west, William Pink, a Hudson's Bay Company trader on the north Saskatchewan River reported on diminished fur supplies.²

That there was a relationship between the introduction of smallpox and the decline of indigenous human populations in the Americas is a truism. Even before the physical arrival of Europeans in the interior of North America, their economic and biological presence was felt. Aboriginal societies expanded upon pre-existing trade networks for the procurement of resources for export to another continent, in the case of western North America, furs for Europe. In addition to the trade goods brought inland as part of the "fur" trade, items such as metal pots, spear points and later guns, germs came as unintended participants in the exchange between the Old World and the New. Scholars who do not consider the role of microorganisms in the interaction of diverse populations, particularly in the case of such different peoples as aboriginal people and Europeans, fail to recognize what might be its most significant characteristic.

While historians have been slow to balance the microscopic with the geopolitical, a growing number of writers have attempted to do just that in the past few decades. Writers of "world history," as the area has come to be known, have blazed new trails for historians through the integration of scientific knowledge and the historical theatre. Modern reconstructions of the eighteenth century French climate, for example, has shown that the weather was an, "ineluctable element of chance [which] must be

²Paul Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1986), 63-64.

taken into account in any attempt to analyse the causes of the French Revolution".³

Advocates of "world history" have been ambitious in their pursuits. One of the pioneers of the field, Alfred Crosby, considered both the biological and cultural impact of the integration of the Old World and the New in *The Columbian Exchange*.⁴ In addition to diseases such as smallpox, the New World received the staple crops that were the foundation of western civilization, rice, wheat, barley and oats. Domesticated animals previously unknown in the Americas, chickens, cattle, horses, sheep and goats, contributed to a monumental change in the balance of nature in the century after the arrival of Columbus, which according to Crosby, could not be repeated unless there was an exchange of life forms between planets (p.113). The global population explosion of the past few centuries was largely the result of the dissemination of New World crops such as maize and the potato, to new fields of cultivation (p.202). Crosby developed this global paradigm in his study of the ascendancy of Europe in the last millennium in *Ecological Imperialism*.⁵ In it, he traced developments leading to the creation of "Neo-Europes" around the globe (p.295). Anyone who has pulled a dandelion from their lawn or who has seen the "patchwork quilt" effect of the prairies from the air has experienced this phenomenon.

As Crosby was considering the implications of the integration of the planet's biota, William McNeill was unifying the history of the world from the perspective of

³Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 209.

⁴Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972).

⁵Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

disease in *Plagues and Peoples*.⁶ In looking at the sweep of human history from the neolithic to the present, McNeill stressed that infectious disease, "will surely remain, as it has been hitherto, one of the fundamental parameters and determinants of human history" (p.257). The author considered the evolution of "disease pools," areas of endemic diseases, as a biological consequence of the rise of Asian civilizations. Simply put, a number of infectious diseases evolved along with the societies on which they fed, creating a balance between the humans and microbes. Diseases such as plague were a constant in the civilizations of Asia, but their effect was mitigated by immunity gained over centuries of human coexistence with the pathogen. When more "traditional" historical forces such as the expansion of the Mongol Empire from inner Eurasia to China, the Indian sub-continent and the eastern frontier of Europe from 1200 to 1500, the ecological balance between humans and pathogens was disrupted. The introduction of plague, the Black Death, to Europe in the 14th century changed the trajectory of western history.

The recent publication of Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*⁷ expanded upon the work of McNeill and Crosby. His task, an attempt "to provide a short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years" (p.9) was nothing less than monumental. In his search for what he called "ultimate explanations" for the differential development of human societies around the world, Diamond considered the environmental, biological and social factors that led to the disproportionately great influence of Eurasian societies in recent centuries. Smallpox

⁶William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, N.Y. Anchor Press, 1976).

⁷Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).

among humans, for example, developed as a consequence of the domestication of cattle and subsequent interaction of humans and their herds. Diamond discussed not only the animal origins of human diseases that "lie behind the broadest pattern of human history" (p.197) but also the biological preconditions necessary for the domestication of animals in the first place.

While the process of "the Unification of the Globe by Disease"⁸ described by Crosby, MacNeill and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie was taking place, the world was also being unified on the economic level." Immanuel Wallerstein stressed the need for the consideration of any social system as a "totality" leading to the creation of what he termed "the Modern-World System."⁹ His work is at once enlightening and frustrating. His voluminous study of the rise of the modern or capitalist world system was nearly as ambitious as the works of Crosby, McNeill, or Diamond, being in a sense the economic history of everything for the past five hundred years. Because of his fixation on relations of labour and capital, the traditional focus of Marxist investigation, he overlooked the role of biological factors in his analysis.

The gap between traditional Marxist economic analysis and the proponents of biological history has recently been bridged. Sheldon Watts' *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism*¹⁰ dealt specifically with the creation of disease

⁸Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "A Concept: The Unification of the Globe by Disease (Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries)," in *The Mind and Method of the Historian* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), 28-84.

⁹Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World Economy, 1730-1840s* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1989).

¹⁰Sheldon Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

networks "among the unintended consequences of Development" (p.xiv). He analysed the creation of disease "constructs", the creation of stereotypic images of sufferers such as lepers in the context of social relations (p.xv). Watts considered the role of a number of diseases including plague, smallpox, syphilis, cholera and malaria in the expansion and maintenance of various empires from the middle ages to the twentieth century. As with other studies in world history, his temporal and geographical parameters were considerable. This allowed the reader to consider a variety of case studies in the history of disease as a contributing factor in the relationship between the dominator and the dominated. Unfortunately, this broad consideration of important historical forces precluded complex explanations of the effects of disease in affecting the power relationships within and between specific communities. In his survey of smallpox on both sides of the Atlantic, Watts was forced to simplify his discussion almost to the point of creating more of the cultural "constructs" that he had set out to critique. An example of his rather facile approach can be seen in his brief treatment of the role of disease in the relations between the Ojibwa of the Great Lakes and the Europeans who traded among them in the wake of the smallpox epidemic of 1781-82:

After smallpox slashed Ojibway population numbers and population recovery faltered, tribal organization fell apart. Now for the first time, dependent on the white man's bounty (rather than the other way around), the Ojibway were eager customers for alcohol, iron wares and trinkets. Craft skills were forgotten and they came to resemble the despondent, lazy Indians the white man's stereotype held them to be.¹¹

There have been successful attempts to consider the role of pathogens within the context of power relations of immigrant and indigenous populations, particularly in

¹¹Watts, *Epidemics and History*, 101.

the Third World. Meredith Thursen's *The Political Ecology of Disease in Tanzania*¹² and Randall Parkard's *White Plague, Black Labor: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa*¹³ have demonstrated the interaction of economics, politics and disease in the shaping of African societies. In America, Gregory Campbell used the same approach in his study of changing health patterns among the Cheyenne of Montana.¹⁴

In the field of Anthropology, and its historic stepchild Ethnohistory, a burgeoning literature has emerged in the wake of the assertion by Henry Dobyns in the mid 1960s that the pre-contact population of the Americas was as much as one hundred million people.¹⁵ The trend of recent scholarship has been to see Dobyn's demographic reconstructions as exaggerated.¹⁶ The extent of the biological calamity brought on by the introduction of new diseases to previously unexposed populations has come under

¹²Meredith Thursen, *The Political Ecology of Disease in Tanzania* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984).

¹³Randall Parkard, *White Plague, Black Labor: Tuberculosis and the Political Economy of Health and Disease in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁴Gregory Campbell, *The Political Economy of Ill-Health: Changing Northern Cheyenne Health Patterns and Economic Underdevelopment* (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1987).

¹⁵Henry Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal American Population: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemisphere Estimate," *Current Anthropology* 7 (1966) : 395-416. See also, Alfred W. Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation of America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 33 (1976) : 298-299.

¹⁶While critiques of Dobyn's high estimates are numerous, see David Henige, *Numbers from Nowhere: The American Indian Contact Population Debate* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

close scrutiny in the past decade.¹⁷ While the debate over the quantitative impact of disease on aboriginal populations is likely to continue, the concept of the "virgin soil" epidemic is essential to understanding the early history of Europeans and indigenous peoples. As the name implies, a "virgin soil population" is a community that has yet to experience an outbreak of a particular pathogen. Because the population has not acquired an immunity to the disease, through having been exposed and survived a previous episode, all members of the society are faced with an equal risk of infection. Added to the indiscriminate nature of the infection, famine often ensues as those who survive are usually too ill to provide food or care for their kin.¹⁸ Another characteristic of virgin soil epidemics is that they often predate the physical arrival of Europeans in a given area, discussed in Ramenovsky's study of the destruction of the mound building societies of the Mississippi Valley prior to the arrival of Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century.¹⁹ The remnant population then serves as the demographic and cultural benchmark in the relations between natives and newcomers.

While much of the literature concerning virgin soils epidemics has focussed on the effects of Spanish incursions into the New World, a number of factors contributed to the heightened interest of Northern Europeans in the territory that would eventually

¹⁷See for example Ann F. Ramenovsky, *Vectors of Death: The Archaeology of European Contact* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987) and Daniel T. Reff, *Disease, Depopulation and Culture Change in Northwestern New Spain, 1518-1764* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991). For a comprehensive review of the literature dealing with the Dobyn's debate, see Paul Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness': *The Diffusion of Directly Transmitted, Acute Infectious Diseases in the Petit Nord, 1670-1846* (Ph. D. diss., University of Manitoba, 1999), 28-46.

¹⁸Susan Johnston, "Epidemics, The Forgotten Factor in Seventeenth Century Native Warfare in the St. Lawrence Region," in *Native People Native Lands: Canadian Indians, Inuit and Métis*, ed. Bruce Cox (Ottawa: Carlton University Press, 1987), 14-31.

¹⁹Ramenovsky, *Vectors of Death*.

become Canada. Early in the fourteenth century, the global climate began to cool. In the three centuries between 1550 and 1850, the world experienced a protracted extremely cold period known as the Little Ice Age.²⁰ During this period, the demand for furs in Europe increased as the climate worsened and other materials for clothing such as textiles and wool became increasingly difficult to produce. Fur bearers in the forests of Europe were hunted to the point of extinction and rural populations kept sheep, goats, cats and dogs specifically for their furs and skins. By the mid 1500s, Russia, Europe's main supplier of furs, had depleted the fur resources of its western forest and began to expand east of the Ural Mountains, into territory controlled by the Mongol Empire. For two centuries Russian fur traders pushed their way labouriously to Siberia's eastern plateaus reaching the Pacific before the mid-eighteenth century.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, European demand for furs led French and Dutch entrepreneurs to seek furs in eastern North America. European fish stocks had dwindled in the two centuries of gradual cooling prior to the Little Ice Age and by 1500, the Basques, French and others were travelling as far as the Grand Banks off Newfoundland in their search for fish. It was in this quest for fish, as well as a passage to the orient, that brought Jacques Cartier to the St. Lawrence between 1534 and 1541.²¹ Although a number of attempts were made to trade furs prior to 1600, the fur trade in Canada began in earnest with the establishment of the colony of New France in 1608.

²⁰For a discussion of the period, see Jean M. Grove, *The Little Ice Age* (London: Methuen, 1988).

²¹Marcel Trudel, *The Beginnings of New France, 1524-1663* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 18; Ramsay Cook, ed., *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

In eastern North America, the timing of the first large scale epidemics coincided with the establishment of European settlement along the Atlantic coast as early as 1611.²² Prior to this, the limited nature of contact among the almost exclusively adult populations of ships whose transatlantic journeys lasted an average of six weeks, restricted the introduction of Acute Crowd Infections (ACIs) into the northeastern part of the continent.²³ Although serious and often lethal, the ecology of ACIs made it difficult for any single pathogen to become entrenched in aboriginal American populations. In his recent study of ACIs in the central boreal forest, Paul Hackett noted that the temporary nature of the infections coupled with low population densities made a constant supply of susceptible humans necessary for the survival of the disease.²⁴ Without a large urban population to act as an endemic pool for infections to sustain themselves, pathogens would themselves die out. According to Hackett, the population density of European settlements was not sufficient to maintain American ACIs endemically until the late eighteenth century, almost one hundred and fifty years after their introduction to the continent.²⁵

In Canada, the slow pace of settlement in the St. Lawrence stalled the delivery of epidemic diseases for almost a generation after the initial outbreaks in the English

²²Conrad Heidenreich, "The Great Lakes Basin, 1600-1653," in *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 1: From the Beginning to 1800*, ed. R. Cole Harris (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Plate 35.

²³Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 60. The author defines acute crowd infections as infectious communicable diseases of short duration, spread through human to human contact caused by specific agents, largely but not exclusively, viruses, 10.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 61.

and Dutch colonies to the southeast.²⁶ With the exception of a small number of missionaries, few people left the relative safety of the French colony to engage in trade. Instead, the Huron Nation and its allies controlled the shipment of furs to the St. Lawrence and trade goods inland. The Huron were farmers and produced corn, squash, beans and tobacco for trade with both the settlers on the coast and fur producing groups in the interior. The fluorescence of Huron society was brief. By the 1630s imported strains of measles, influenza and smallpox had swept through the First Nations adjacent to the French colony.²⁷ Bruce Trigger estimated that Huron and other aboriginal societies in the eastern subarctic declined by as much as 50% in the years between 1634 and 1640.²⁸ In his investigation of the disease on the early fur trade, Arthur Ray noted that while populations involved in the trade suffered many casualties, the trade itself did not decline by the same proportion. In fact, the effect of mortality served to expand the nature of the trade, according to Ray, "[s]ubstantial increases in returns were not possible without the territorial expansion of trading networks. This brought new parties into the system. This also means that epidemics likely acted as

²⁶Although the effect of large-scale epidemics in the French colony probably came after outbreaks in the English colonies to the south, the effects of European diseases were felt among the inhabitants of Stadacona as early as 1535 when "more than fifty deaths" were reported by Cartier. Cook, ed., *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, xxxvi-xxxvii.

²⁷Heidenreich, "The Great Lakes Basin, 1600-1653," in *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 1: From the Beginning to 1800*, Plate 35. In 1634-35 measles spread through both the Indian and settler communities, as did the influenza-like outbreak the following year. From 1639-41 smallpox spread overland from New England causing "an extraordinary number of deaths" by affecting only a few French.

²⁸Arthur Ray, "Some Thoughts About the Reasons for Spatial Dynamism in the Early Fur Trade, 1500-1800," *Three Hundred Prairie Years: Henry Kelsey's "Inland Country of Good Report,"* ed. Henry Epp (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1993), 118.

catalysts for expansion."²⁹ By the early 1650s, the combination of warfare and smallpox led to the defeat and dispersal of a number of First Nations allied with the French including the Hurons, the Neutrals, the Petuns, and the Nipissings. Hackett noted the significance of Iroquois supremacy in the control of trade and the delivery of infectious diseases as far as James Bay after the fall of Huronia.³⁰

The defeat of the Huron at the hands of the Iroquois led to new economic strategies for the procurement of furs for the European market. Faced with the loss of their economic hinterland through the decline of the Indian middleman trade, the first French brigade of voyageurs went inland in the spring of 1653.³¹ A year later, traders and missionaries from the colony travelled as far west as the western shore of Lake Michigan in an attempt to re-establish trade.³² As Olive Dickason observed, "Montreal picked up where Huronia left off."³³ The first voyageurs were not professional woodsmen but rather farmers, craftsmen and soldiers who undertook journeys inland to supplement their incomes and to escape the tedium of life in the authoritarian colony of the St. Lawrence. The direct participation of Europeans in the procurement of furs in the interior soon led to the expansion of the "coureur de bois" tradition among the young men of New France. It was this movement that brought Radisson, Groseillier

²⁹Ibid., 118.

³⁰Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 69-70.

³¹Trudel, *The Beginnings of New France, 1500-1800*, 225.

³²Heidenreich, "Re-Establishment of Trade, 1654-1666," in *Historical Atlas of Canada. Volume 1*, ed. R. Cole Harris. Plate 37. The French move west was in response to a request from their Ottawa and Wyandot allies who had been forced west by the conflict with the Iroquois.

³³Olive Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from the Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 135.

and their Indian guides to the area north of Lake Superior in the 1650s. The Iroquois, though, continued to harass French traders until a force of 1,200 soldiers burned the four principal villages of the Mohawk, and forced a peace on the Iroquois confederacy in 1666.³⁴ With the pacification of the Iroquois, French penetration of the interior intensified. In 1672, the number of illegal traders in the hinterland was 400 according to the deputy to Intendant Jean Talon.³⁵ This number may seem insignificant but the total immigrant population of New France in the mid 1660s was only three thousand. The French trade network was sufficient to act as a conduit for a smallpox outbreak at Sault Ste. Marie in 1670.³⁶

Before considering the impact of the 1670 outbreak at the Sault, a brief description of the disease itself is in order. During the first two hundred years of Indian-European interaction, the most important pathogen in the northwest by far, was smallpox. Until its effects were mitigated through large scale vaccination programmes, beginning with the 1830s, the disease spread like wild fire through Indian communities, occasionally killing so many that entire societies would collapse. Its effects could be so overwhelming that territorial boundaries between First Nations were redrawn in the

³⁴Heidenreich, "Iroquois Disruptions, 1660-1666," in *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 1*. ed. R.C. Harris, Plate 37. For the terms of the treaty, see Cornelius Jaenen, ed., *The French Regime in the Upper Country of Canada during the Seventeenth Century* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1996), 59-65. The power of the Iroquois was undermined by their loss of a thousand people during a smallpox epidemic in 1662. Bruce Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People*, Volume 2 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), 826.

³⁵Helen Hornbeck Tanner, "The Career of Joseph La France, Coureur de Bois in the Great Lakes," in *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. J.S.H. Brown, W.J. Eccles, and Donald P. Feldman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 182.

³⁶Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 93.

wake of epidemics. Survivors would rebuild only to be hit a generation or so later, when the number of potential new hosts for the virus had risen and ecological conditions for the spread of the disease were reestablished. A number of factors contributed to the importance of the virus in shaping the history of the Canadian northwest.

In addition to its particularly lethal nature, smallpox is extremely variable. In 1996, the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta had 450 strains of the pathogen in its collection. Although only a small number of those strains were varieties of "variola major," the most deadly variant of the pathogen, "most forms in this wide spectrum were genetically equipped to transmute into something else, depending on the availability of appropriate ecological niches."³⁷ Part of the variability of the pathogen may be attributed to its long period of interactions with humans and their livestock. Jared Diamond has written that the evolution of the disease among humans is the result of our 9,000 years of coexistence with cattle.³⁸

The means by which the virus was spread influenced the demographic history of aboriginal America. The disease can only be transmitted through contact between humans; there is no reservoir of the infection among animals as is the case of diseases such as malaria or plague. This means that for the disease to spread efficiently in an area where the pathogen is not endemic, someone susceptible to the disease must

³⁷Watts, *Epidemics and History*, 86.

³⁸Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, 206-207. In addition to smallpox, the evolution of measles and tuberculosis can be traced to the domestication of cattle. Influenza and pertussis are linked to our coexistence with pigs, dogs and birds. Diamond's thesis is that the simultaneous development of animal domestication and the interaction of humans with the pathogens of their livestock in the Old World were key factors in the expansions of the societies that derived from them.

contract it in a region where the disease is found and then travel to the smallpox free region.³⁹ Prior to the eradication of the disease in the late 1970s, James Frauenthal has noted that individuals who are infected and contagious usually remain asymptomatic for a period of about five days, "so with jet travel, an infected individual can reach any point in the world before becoming aware of the disease."⁴⁰ Other scholars have noted that the incubation period of the disease can be as long as twelve days or even longer.⁴¹ The airborne droplet spread of saliva and respiratory secretions between individuals, the means of transmission of the virus, is a characteristic shared by other highly infectious diseases.⁴² While the airborne nature of the transmission is highly efficient, another quality of the pathogen increases its threat to susceptible populations. The virus is stable in a dried form. Researchers have found that the disease can remain viable on clothing in a wooden box for as long as 66 days and up to 18 months in bottles, making inanimate objects a potential source of the contagion.⁴³ This characteristic of the virus heightened its menace to the residents of the interior of North America. Victims did not have to have face to face contact with someone who was contagious; the dead or their possessions could serve to transmit the disease.

Hackett attributed the origin of the smallpox outbreak at Sault Ste. Marie in 1670

³⁹James C. Frauenthal, *Smallpox: When Should Routine Vaccination Be Discontinued?* (Boston: Birkhauser, 1981), 4.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

⁴¹Jody Decker, "Depopulation of Northern Plains Natives," *Social Science and Medicine* 33 (1991), 382.

⁴²Abram S. Benenson "Smallpox," in *Viral Infections of Humans: Epidemiology and Control*, 2nd ed., ed. Alfred S. Evans (New York: Plenum Medical Book Company, 1982), 552.

⁴³*Ibid.* One form of variola minor, *alastrim*, has remained viable for 13 years.

to infected French ships that arrived in New France in the fall of 1669.⁴⁴ By the end of the 1660s, the introduction of diseases through transatlantic crossings was so common that the absence of disease associated with the arrival of the ships was considered an event worth noting.⁴⁵ One aspect of the 1670 outbreak that differed from previous ones in New France was the presence of the English on James Bay. The Hudson's Bay Company's trading posts on the coast drew northern Indians to the Bay and away from the epidemic.⁴⁶ The HBC presence at the Bay was minimal and the trade small. Interaction between the traders and the Indians was so limited that Hackett concluded that the company had almost no role in the introduction of diseases into the interior for at least sixty years after they established the Bay trade.⁴⁷ The long ocean voyage served as a barrier to the introduction of diseases to the trading hinterland of the HBC. In the early eighteenth century, the average travel time from the Orkney Islands, the home of the majority of HBC personnel, to Hudson's Bay was over seven weeks.⁴⁸ In the first century of trade, those who actually travelled to the Bay were almost exclusively adult males. By the mid seventeenth century, many of the diseases that posed the greatest threat to New World populations were endemic in England. This means that smallpox, rubella, measles, and whooping cough (*pertussis*) were already childhood diseases. Traders would have been exposed to them at an early age and,

⁴⁴Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 93.

⁴⁵For an analysis of the spread of the epidemic see *Ibid.*, 93-106.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 81.

because they survived, acquired immunity to the disorders.⁴⁹

Rather than being a biological threat to the inhabitants of the interior, the health of the traders themselves was at risk in the early years of the trade. Scurvy was a particular problem. Early explorations of the Bay were undermined by the lack of vitamin C.⁵⁰ In 1611, Henry Hudson's ship, the *Discovery*, had been the stage for a mutiny; probably the result of scurvy and a myriad of other hardships brought on by a winter in the subarctic.⁵¹ The disease probably forced the abandonment of Thomas Button's "Great Ship" at Nelson River in 1612.⁵² Scurvy continued to be a problem among Europeans in the north. In the eighteenth century, the disease was responsible for nine deaths at York Factory, making it the most common killer at the establishment after drowning.⁵³ The disease was worse at York Factory than at other HBC establishments. Michael Payne attributed the persistence of the malady at York until the 1820s to a failure to adequately exploit the available fish stocks.⁵⁴ In addition to

⁴⁹Ibid., 83.

⁵⁰Michael Payne, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory: Every Day Life in the Hudson's Bay Company Service York Factory, 1788 to 1870* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites, Parks Canada Service, Environment Canada, 1989), 100-101. Although vitamin C was not isolated until 1932, Francis Bacon had recognized the positive effect of oranges on scurvy as early as 1627. Scurvy threatened the well-being of Europeans from their first journeys inland. For a discussion of the disease among Cartier's people at Stadacona in the mid 1530s, see Cook, ed., *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, xxxvi.

⁵¹Peter C. Newman, *The Company of Adventurers* (Markham: Penguin Books Canada, 1986), 48.

⁵²Dale Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours* (Archaeological Survey of Canada, Mercury Series Paper 143 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1991), 64.

⁵³Payne, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory*, 100.

⁵⁴Ibid.

scurvy, HBC men suffered from a variety of chronic ailments, including tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), but the limited nature of their interaction with First Nations served to control the spread of those diseases for decades. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, venereal disease was common among the Indians who traded at the Bay.⁵⁵

While the physical presence of Europeans was limited to a small number of enclaves along Hudson and James Bays for almost a century, their impact was felt far into the interior soon after the trade was initiated. Aboriginal middlemen undertook trading expeditions of between 1200 and 3600 kilometres in length, taking as long as five months to complete.⁵⁶ The first Chipewyans to come to trade took two years to get to York Factory.⁵⁷ According to Arthur Ray, the control of the trade led to the ascendancy of the groups such as the Cree and later the Chipewyan whose expanding and competing spheres of influence triggered the first waves of population dislocations in the western interior.⁵⁸ The initial territorial expansion during the middleman period was not the result of resource depletion, and was likely to have been accompanied by little violence by expansion into areas inhabited by people of similar cultural traditions, such as the Cree in Northern Saskatchewan.⁵⁹ That view is not without its critics, in fact, the issue of the expansion of Algonkian speaking eastern Indians into the west

⁵⁵The presence of venereal disease at the Bay was noted by Governor John Nixon as early as 1682. Hackett, *'A very Remarkable Sickness,'* 78.

⁵⁶Ray, "Some Thoughts About the Reasons for Spatial Dynamism in the Early Fur Trade, 1500-1800," 118.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 119

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 122.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 122.

resulting from the fur trade is one of the most contentious issues in Canadian aboriginal history.

Ray identified additional factors that contributed to territorial changes of aboriginal groups in the west as early as the turn of the eighteenth century, "It is likely that the driving forces (for spatial dynamism in the early fur trade) were the coat beaver orientation of the early industry, the socioeconomic organization of subarctic native people, the economic behaviour, and the impacts that diseases and warfare had on their population."⁶⁰ Ray's statement is a concise description of the primary factors that shaped the early fur trade in the west. Prior to 1700, the bulk of the pelts traded were those that had been handled by fur producers for long periods before they were suitable for export to Europe. Coat, or greasy, beaver, as the early product was known, were furs that had been sewn into clothing and worn for an average of three years after which time the stiff guard hairs had been worn off, leaving only the soft under wool of the beaver pelt. Each coat was made up of five to eight skins. Coat beaver pelts were most desired by the Europeans because, until the turn of the eighteenth century, European processors lacked the technology to remove the unwanted guard hairs. Coat beaver did not, however, have much value to the people who had worn them for several years. To their owners, they were old clothes, and largely useless to the people who had worn them. The European preference for used skins was, as Ray pointed out, "a godsend to the aboriginal people, by affording them the use and exchange value for their beaver pelt."⁶¹ Trade for the product had two effects. First, the Indians were well compensated for the sale of their cast-off clothing and, second,

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., 116.

native middlemen had to reach well beyond their home territories to collect a supply of the worn pelts "that Europeans sought so avariciously." Because of the peculiar nature of the coat beaver economy, Indian middlemen, such as the Cree and Ojibwa, had to expand their trade and influence further into the interior even before their home territories were depleted of fur bearers. Victor Lytwyn has shown that even in the producing areas close to the Bay, game depletion was not a serious issue until the 1780s. After that time, the scarcity of resources led to another wave of interregional migrations.⁶²

The organization of aboriginal societies also served to shape the nature of the early fur trade. The English trade was, for at least a century, entirely dependent on the actions of Indian trappers and middlemen. One summation of the early trade was that it was "almost entirely an Indian creation."⁶³ Aboriginal people controlled the procurement, processing and transportation of pelts to the outposts at the Bay. In the early days, the scarcity of people in the interior was a limiting factor to the trade. According to Ray, "[n]ative population density in the subarctic probably played a greater role in determining fur output than did local beaver stocks."⁶⁴

In the boreal forest, the physical environment placed stern limitations on the behaviour of its inhabitants, even before times of serious game depletion. In 1767, Alexander Henry, described the environmental constraints of the Canadian Shield:

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Rupert's Land Research Centre (hereafter RLRC), *An Historical Overview of Aboriginal Lifestyles: The Churchill-Nelson River Drainage Basin* (Winnipeg: unpublished report, Rupert's Land Research Centre, 1992), 95.

⁶⁴Ray, "Some Thoughts About the Reasons for Spatial Dynamism in the Early Fur Trade 1500-1800," 121.

Such is the inhospitality of the country over which they wander, that only a single family can live together in the winter season; and this sometimes seeks sustenance in vain, on an area of five hundred square miles. They can stay in one place till they have destroyed all the hares; and when these fail, they have no resource but in the leaves and shoots of trees, or in defect of these, in cannibalism.⁶⁵

With regard to the disease ecology of the inhabitants of the interior, low population density determined by the limited food supply dampened the impact of infections. Pathogens found few potential victims as face to face contact between small widely dispersed groups was limited by the requirements of subsistence production. This was especially the case in winter when family sized groups often travelled into the forest in search of solitary game animals such as moose. In summer, many groups were able to gather together to intensively exploit food resources. Large scale fisheries, particularly for whitefish and sturgeon, and the bison hunt provided opportunities for gatherings in the thousands.⁶⁶ Those gatherings also served to spread contagion. The smallpox outbreak at Sault Ste. Marie in the summer of 1670 occurred during a gathering for the annual fishery.⁶⁷

Another factor contributing to the spatial dynamism of First Nations in the early years of the fur trade was the economic behaviour of different populations involved in the trade. Groups that served as middlemen between fur producers and Europeans

⁶⁵Alexander Henry, *Travels and Adventures In Canada and the Indians Territory Between the Years 1760 and 1776*, ed. James Bain (Rutland: C.E. Tuttle, 1969), 208-209.

⁶⁶For a discussion of the importance of the fishery to prairie life, see F. Mervyn Atton, "Fish Resources and the Fisheries Industry of the Canadian Plains," *Prairie Forum* (n.a.): 315-325, and F. Melvin Atton, "The Life: Fish and Water," in *Three Hundred Prairie Years: Henry Kelsey's "Inland Country of Good Report"* ed. Henry Epp, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1993), 17-26.

⁶⁷Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 100.

quickly developed specialized economic strategies to maximize their profit from the trade. The profit was not achieved without risk. Trade expeditions carried out by middlemen groups were long and arduous. Only the strongest men and women undertook the journey to and from the coast, the young, old and infirm often being left in the group's home territory to exploit summer resources such as the fishery. In his study of the early history of the Cree, Dale Russell pointed to one of the primary dangers posed by long distance water travel, "the journals of the inland winterers show that almost all groups underwent near starvation during the trip."⁶⁸

In addition to the known dangers, the tenuous connection of the posts at the Bay to their European headquarters occasionally led to great hardship among trading groups. During the period of French control of the Bay trade between 1680 and 1713, no supplies arrived for four years in succession, causing severe hardship among the Cree who had travelled long distances to participate in the trade.⁶⁹ The British trade network was scarcely more reliable. When the supply ship failed to reach York Factory in 1716, the middleman traders were put into mortal danger.⁷⁰ In June of that year, James Knight noted that 50 canoes of Mountain and Askee Cree Indians were on their

⁶⁸Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 127; Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman, *'Give Us Good Measure': An Economic Analysis of Relations Between The Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 45-49.

⁶⁹Marshall Hurlich, "Historical and Recent Demography of the Algonkians in Northern Ontario," in *Boreal Forest Adaptations: The Northern Algonkians* ed. Theodore Steegman (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 148.

⁷⁰Peter Newman dates the failure of the Company ship to arrive as 1715, at which time "more than a thousand angry, starving Indians camped along a hundred miles of riverbank up from York. *A Company of Adventurers*, 286.

way to the Bay from their home in the parklands.⁷¹ The middlemen were not only unable to get supplies for the trade but were infected with an illness that became epidemic. The combination of starvation and disease led to much loss of life among the trading Indians.⁷² The following summer, their privation was recognized when the Hudson's Bay Company gave a gift to "ye Capt of ye Askee or Plain Indians yt suffered so much last fall in getting to his own country."⁷³ Clearly, middleman groups would not have undergone such privation prior to the game depletion if it was not to their economic advantage.

Another cause of territorial dislocation listed by Ray was intergroup warfare. Military conflict over the control of the fur trade led to the collapse of the Huron nation in the mid seventeenth century. With the establishment of English posts along the Bay, a half century of continuous warfare between the Algonkian speaking Cree and the Athapascan Chipewyan was ignited. Only when the HBC established Fort Prince of Wales at the mouth of the Churchill River in 1717, were the northern Chipewyans able to acquire guns in sufficient numbers to break the Cree monopoly of the Bay trade.⁷⁴

Even before the construction of the fort at Churchill, Governor James Knight

⁷¹Ibid., 133.

⁷²Ibid., 135-136, Irma Ekert, "The Early Fur Trade at York and Churchill: Implications for the Native People of the North Central Subarctic," in *Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985*, eds. B. Trigger, T. Morantz and Louise Dechene (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 232.

⁷³Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 133.

⁷⁴RLRC, *An Historical Overview of Aboriginal Lifestyles: The Churchill-Nelson River Drainage Basin*, 91; E.E. Rich, "Trade Habits and Economic Motivation among Indians of North America," in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 160-164.

attempted to negotiate an end to the hostilities between "the gun bearing Cree and the Chipewyan and inland Athabasca groups as far west as Lake Athabasca" who had been at war since at least the 1690s.⁷⁵ In June 1715, a large contingent of homeguard Cree, guided by the famous Chipewyan woman Thanadelthur and accompanied by the HBC's William Stuart, headed inland from York in search of the Chipewyan.⁷⁶ Almost a year later, Stuart brought back news that peace between the two groups had been struck. Their success was not without its cost. On their way north in the summer of 1715, sickness broke out among the Cree as they reached Churchill. When they reached the barrens in the late fall, the bulk of the group had to retreat because of starvation. One of the two small groups of men who continued the journey actually killed many of the Chipewyan men when the Cree finally encountered their rivals for negotiations. Stuart returned with peace but was himself a broken man. He died in 1719, a "lunatic."⁷⁷ The tenacity with which the Cree maintained their hold on access to the Bay is further evidence of the value of the European connection to Aboriginal groups.

The final factor associated with spatial dynamism in the early fur trade is disease. Unseen microbes acted symbiotically with the trade. Middleman groups were exposed to European pathogens earlier than more isolated communities in the interior. The initial harm brought on by direct contact eventually became a biological advantage to the middlemen as those who survived infections largely immune to further outbreaks

⁷⁵J.C. Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade, 1680-1860* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 21.

⁷⁶The expedition may have included up to 150 Cree men, women and children. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 80.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 63.

of the same disease. The experience of the Huron in the French trade was different from that of the middlemen of the west. Because of their proximity to New France, contagion spread among them more often and more efficiently, the result being the staccato like attacks for two decades beginning in the 1630s. Under pressure from disease, coupled with the military onslaught from their Iroquois rivals, Huron society buckled. In the west, similar ecological conditions were not present until Europeans successfully penetrated the plains themselves well into the eighteenth century. Another hundred years would pass before Europeans arrived in sufficient numbers to maintain pathogens endemically.

As stated earlier, the first century of English activity at the Bay was characterized by, if anything, inaction. In the words of Joseph Robson, a critic of the HBC, the Company for a century "slept at the edge of the frozen sea."⁷⁸ The only true reconnaissance of the HBC's hinterland was made by Henry Kelsey in the early 1690s.⁷⁹ In his popular history of the HBC, Peter C. Newman called Kelsey the first travelling salesman in the west; his journey was undertaken to stimulate interest in the fur trade among widely dispersed inland groups⁸⁰. After their initial forays inland in the wake of the fall of Huronia and the diversion of the middleman trade to the Bay after 1670, French traders continued to move westward slowly until the last decade of the seventeenth century. By 1673, French explorers Marquette and Joliette had struck as

⁷⁸David Thompson, *Travels in Western North America: 1784-1812*, ed. Victor Hopwood, 81.

⁷⁹For an entire volume discussing various aspects of Kelsey's journey, see Henry Epp, ed., *Three Hundred Prairie Years: Henry Kelsey's "Inland Country of Good Report."* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1993).

⁸⁰Newman, *A Company of Adventurers*, 281.

far west as the Missouri River.⁸¹ While the trade remained small, the overland trade network leading to New France was much more labour intensive than that of the English. In 1680, about 500 unlicensed coureurs de bois were engaged in the Lake Superior fur trade, competing directly and successfully with the middlemen affiliated with the French trade.⁸² Although the trade was small, the colonial society that supported it was itself minuscule. The population of New France in 1700 was only 15,000.⁸³ Dale Miquelon estimated that about 18% of Canadian males born in the colony between the years 1680 and 1719 who survived beyond 15 years of age made fur journeys west.⁸⁴

Although access to the interior was directly managed by French authorities, the reality in the interior was anything but one of central control. In 1692, Jean Bochart de Champigny noted with disapproval, "the inclination of Canadian youth to live in the forest like Indians for two or three years at a time," usually operating in groups of about twenty, and seasonally dispersed singly or in partners."⁸⁵ A typical example were the eighteen Frenchmen reported wintering at Keweenaw Bay on the south shore of Lake

⁸¹A.P. Nasatir, "Introduction," in *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785-1804*, ed. A.P. Nasatir (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 3.

⁸²Tom Wien, "Coureur de Bois," in *The 1997 Canadian Encyclopedia Plus* [CD-ROM] (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996)

⁸³Hornbeck Tanner, "The Career of Joseph La France, Coureur de Bois in the Upper Great Lakes," 182.

⁸⁴Dale Miquelon, *New France 1701-1744: A Supplement to Empire* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 156. By the 1730s and 1740s, when the trade was reinvigorated, the level of participation in the trade rose to between 20 and 25%.

⁸⁵Hornbeck Tanner, "The Career of Joseph La France, Coureur de Bois in the Upper Great Lakes," 182.

Superior in 1683.⁸⁶ As the unsanctioned French traders moved inland, the official French hold on them became even more tenuous.

The legitimate French fur trade was closed by Royal decree on April of 1697 because of a glut in the beaver market in Europe. Four months later, a French military force under the direction of La Potherie overran York Factory.⁸⁷ The French would control the Bay trade until 1713. The illegal trade conducted at western Great Lakes settlements such as Detroit, Michilimakinac and Frontenac continued to expand.⁸⁸ It was under these conditions that an identifiable Métis identity emerged.⁸⁹ During the two decades when the west was officially closed, unlicensed French fur traders consolidated their presence, settling down and beginning families with the daughters of their Indian allies. The official trade remained closed until 1715 and there was little incentive for French expansion further west.⁹⁰

The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 ended the hostilities in Europe and renewed interest in the interior. In the negotiations, control of the Hudson Bay coast and access to Rupert's Land which had been usurped by the French was returned to the HBC. The area surrounding the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley were declared open to free trade.⁹¹

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 76.

⁸⁸Miquelon, *New France 1701-1744: A Supplement to Empire*, 147.

⁸⁹Jacqueline Peterson, "Many Roads to Red River: Métis Genesis in the Great Lakes Region. 1680-1815," in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, Manitoba Studies in Native History, eds. J.S.H. Brown and J. Peterson (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press 1985), 37-72.

⁹⁰Miquelon, *New France 1701-1744: A Supplement to Empire*, 147.

⁹¹Conrad Heidenreich and Francoise Noel, "Trade and Empire, 1697-1739," in *Historical Atlas of Canada Volume 1*, ed. R.C. Harris. Plate 39.

The French response to the opening of the interior was to focus on the renewal of their own inland trade. This action quickly cut into the HBC trade at the Bay.⁹² In this climate of upheaval, Governor James Knight took over York Factory from its French occupiers in 1714.⁹³ Under his watchful eye, the HBC focussed its attention on stabilizing aboriginal relations in the interior and acquiring for the company the lucrative and untapped supply of furs from the Athapaskan speakers of the far northwest. Governor Knight also tried to secure the inhabitants of the plains for the British trade. In the summer of 1716, a peace party was sent to the Crow, located as far west as southern Alberta, but the plan failed when the emissaries died of starvation on their way inland.⁹⁴

In the first years of the Chipewyan trade, success was qualified at best. In 1719, two Chipewyan boys and a girl were sent inland to stir up interest in the trade and to establish the size of the potential for fur production. Returning with poor results, they were publically reprimanded, but the new Governor Staunton, privately noted the poverty of "those miserably and lazy wretches, not also gett provisions for their family's nor goods to propogate a trade for their own security and benefitt."⁹⁵ Furs were not the only goods that the HBC sought in this period. A party of Yellowknife Indians was persuaded by Staunton to explore the copper deposits of the interior. On their return the following year, starvation forced the group to the coast north of Churchill where the

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 78.

⁹⁴Ibid., 211. The group may have also succumbed to the disease that was epidemic among the Indians trading at York Factory that summer, 133.

⁹⁵Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade, 1680-1860*, 27.

Inuit killed several of the Yellowknives.⁹⁶ In 1720, a limited outbreak of smallpox occurred at York. Though the contagion did not spread, it may have been the first outbreak of the disease among the homeguard Cree at the post.⁹⁷ By the middle of the 1720s, the fledgling trade with the Chipewyans was impeded by their resumption of war with the Cree.⁹⁸ While the Churchill hinterland was rich in furs, the HBC continued to pursue the potentially lucrative northern trade only with difficulty.

While the English trade stumbled at the Bay, the French made slow inroads west of the Great Lakes after the reopening of the trade in 1715. Before the closing of the interior, prior to the turn of the century, French operatives had travelled almost to the edge of the prairies. As early as 1680, French trader Jacques de Noyon was at Lake of the Woods and was invited by the Assiniboine to join a war party to the Spanish settlements, possibly on the Mississippi River.⁹⁹ When Pierre Gaultier, the Sieur de la Vérendrye, was appointed the commandant of the northern posts in 1727, the three main trading locations in the northwest were Michipicoten on the eastern shore of Lake Superior, Kamanistikwia near the present site of Thunder Bay, and Lake Nipigon to the North of Superior.¹⁰⁰ The arrival of La Vérendrye signalled a new period

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Hackett, 'A very Remarkable Sickness,' 118; Ekert, "The Early Fur Trade at York and Churchill: Implications for the Native People of the North Central Subarctic," 232.

⁹⁸Ekert, "The Early Fur Trade at York and Churchill: Implications for the Native People of the North Central Subarctic," 232.

⁹⁹Irene Moore, *Valiant La Vérendrye* (Quebec: L.A. Proulx, 1927), 138-139.

¹⁰⁰G. Hubert Smith, *The Explorations of the La Vérendryes in the Northern Plains 1738-43*, ed. W. Raymond Wood (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1980), 15.

of expansion of the French hinterland. He opened the route that became known as the Grand Portage, a fourteen kilometre trail around the rapids of the Pigeon River.¹⁰¹ The portage had long been used by the natives, but the opening for commercial traffic by the French laid the foundation for the Canadian based fur trade for decades to come. With the establishment of Grand Portage, a significant barrier to disease in the northwest was also removed.¹⁰² The portage, however, was a difficult one. In August 1731, La Vérendrye's crew mutinied, "tout le monde, épouvanté par la longueur du portage, qui est de trois lieues, se mutina, et tous me demandèrent avec de grande instance a relacher..."¹⁰³ The explorer retreated to Kaministiquia on Lake Superior where he spent the winter.

La Vérendrye's luck changed the spring of 1732 when he crossed the portage and was able to travel upstream to meet an advance party under the command of his son Jean-Baptiste and his nephew La Jemmeraye.¹⁰⁴ Late the previous summer, they had built a post, Fort St. Pierre, where the Rainy River drains into Rainy Lake, at the present site of Fort Frances. In 1732, the French pushed further inland, establishing Fort St. Charles on the west shore of Lake of the Woods. From there, the French could reach the Winnipeg River and beyond. Even before the completion of the Fort, the

¹⁰¹James Marsh, "Grand Portage," in *The 1997 Canadian Encyclopedia Plus* [CD Rom].

¹⁰²Even after the portage route was inherited by English Canadians, the crossing remained difficult. Andrew Graham noted in 1772 that ten days were required to move goods across it. Antoine Champagne, *Les La Vérendrye et les postes de l'ouest* (Quebec: Presse de L'Université Laval, 1968), 122.

¹⁰³Champagne, *Les La Vérendrye et les postes de l'ouest*, 122. On the difficulty of this portage see also, Eric W. Morse, *Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada, Then and Now* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1971), 75-77.

¹⁰⁴Champagne, *Les La Vérendrye et les postes de l'ouest*, 123.

English trade at the Bay was being siphoned off. In August 1732, Governor Macklish reported from York that only sixteen of the sixty canoes that he expected in from the vicinity of Lake Winnipeg had come to the Bay, "the rest went to the French at the first of this summer, not for their being more kindly Used by the French but intirely (sic) out of Fear."¹⁰⁵ A.S. Morton wrote that wood-runners, "doubtless from Fort St. Pierre," had travelled as far as the territory of the Sturgeon Indians near the site of what became Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River and had almost completely diverted the trade away from York Factory.¹⁰⁶ Although the British complained about the coercive trade practices of the French with regard to the decline in the Bay trade, Dale Russell noted that the presence of French traders in their midst "meant that there was little need for them to go to the Bay on a regular basis or in sizeable numbers."¹⁰⁷

Although the French incursions had a deep impact on the English trade, the number of traders at the newly established French posts remained small. In 1733-34, Fort. St. Charles on Lake of the Woods, was occupied by 20 Europeans and about 23 Cree families.¹⁰⁸ The influence of the French outposts was felt far beyond their numbers as staging areas for Crees, the Monsonis (Crees) and Assiniboine allies in their war against the Sioux and the Saukteaux. In 1733, almost a thousand warriors

¹⁰⁵A.S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 178.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 129.

¹⁰⁸Ft. St. Pierre on Rainy River had only a dozen Europeans and "Grassy River" was manned by about 20 Frenchmen. Moore, *Valiant La Vérendrye*, 160-161.

gathered at the Fort to prepare for battle.¹⁰⁹ The next year, three hundred Cree from Fort St. Pierre on Rainy Lake were convinced by La Vérendrye to postpone their attack on the Dakota. La Vérendrye's overtures for peace were not entirely altruistic. As early as 1700, French traders in the Mississippi traded guns and other goods with the Dakota who in turn traded with their western brethren the Lakota.¹¹⁰ The Dakota in the vicinity of Lake of the Woods were anything but passive allies of the French. In 1736, nineteen French voyageurs were killed on what came to be known as Massacre Island in Lake of the Woods. In a macabre protest against the state of French fur trade alliances, the Dakota and southern Ojibwa placed the severed heads of the French on beaver skins.¹¹¹

As the French were attempting to broker peace between their duelling allies, they were petitioned by the Chiefs of Lake Winnipeg for a formal alliance. The Assiniboiné and Cree leaders represented substantial populations, their "nation" was said to be made up of seven villages some as big as 900 cabins, the smallest not fewer than 100 dwellings.¹¹² The French built Fort Rouge along the Red and Fort Maurepas

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 154-156. That expedition failed when the war party was ambushed by the Dakota and forced their retreat.

¹¹⁰Kathleen Pickering, "Articulation of the Lakota Mode of Production and the Euro-American Fur Trade," in *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. J.S.H. Brown, W.J. Eccles, and D.P. Feldman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 60.

¹¹¹Moore, *Valiant La Vérendrye*, 237.

¹¹²Ibid., 164. Susan Sharrock noted that while the reference to the possibility of a mixed population of Cree and Assiniboiné may have been "misinterpretation of social organization on La Vérendrye's part and verbal misinterpretation on the part of Moore, this reference by itself is of questionable value as documentation of polyethnic coresidence," though it underscores the nature of the alliance between the two groups. "Crees, Cree-Assiniboines, and Assiniboines: Interethnic Social Organization on the far Northern Plains," *Ethnohistory* 21 (1974), 108.

near the south shore of Lake Winnipeg in response to the request. Soon, Fort La Reine on the Assiniboine River was established to intercept the trade from the plains directed to the Bay.¹¹³ Dale Miquelon noted that the war over the control of the boundary waters region reached its peak in 1736 with the attack on the French at Massacre Island.¹¹⁴

It was into this atmosphere of expanding competition in the fur trade and aboriginal diplomacy and warfare on the forest-plains frontier, that the first documented smallpox outbreak in the Canadian west occurred. Because of the paucity of primary records of the epidemic, even the year of the outbreak is unclear.¹¹⁵ The most lucid description of the epidemic has been presented by Paul Hackett. He attributed the initial delivery of the infection to Boston in 1729 from a ship originating in Ireland.¹¹⁶ From there, the disease spread to New York and Philadelphia in 1731. The virus then spread from the English realm to the French to the Indian-operated clandestine trade between Montreal and Albany.¹¹⁷ The death toll in New France was high: 900 in the city of Montreal and a total of 2000 dead in the colony.¹¹⁸ The disease travelled along the inland trade network to the Great Lakes. By the winter of 1733-34, the epidemic

¹¹³The site was near the present Portage La Prairie. The location was chosen because of the proximity of the River with Lake Manitoba which in turn provided an efficient route to the Bay trade through Grand Rapids at the Mouth of the Saskatchewan River.

¹¹⁴Miquelon, *New France, 1701-1744*, 183.

¹¹⁵For a discussion of the confusion of the timing of the outbreak, see Hackett, *'A very Remarkable Sickness'*, 125-126.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 136-137.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 137.

had reached the south Shore of Lake Michigan. Although he could not locate the means of transmission, Hackett stated that the impact of the disease was soon felt beyond the Mississippi.¹¹⁹ The presence of smallpox has been recorded on the Lower Mississippi, near the confluence of the Missouri River, in 1734.¹²⁰

From this point of entry, the virus probably moved up the Missouri River and infected the Dakota the same year. This event was noted in the "Winter Count" for 1734-35, recorded by Battiste Good, a resident of the Rosebud Agency, Dakota, prior to 1880.¹²¹ Good's pictograph for that year is entitled "Used-then-up-with-belly-ache-winter" which depicted the deaths of about fifty people "of an eruptive disease which was accompanied by pains in the bowels."¹²²

¹¹⁹Ibid., 138 fn.20. A.S. Morton's narrative is also unclear about the spread of the virus west from the Great Lakes, stating that the disease "passed westward of the Miamis and Potawatamis about Lake Michigan, and may have been given to the Sioux and by them to the Assiniboines and the Snakes." *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 17.

¹²⁰Hornbeck Tanner, "The Career of Joseph La France, Coureur de Bois in the Upper Great Lakes," 175.

¹²¹"Winter Counts" are pictographic records representing the most important events of each year. The Battiste Good winter count presents a yearly record of life among the Dakota from 1700. Before that date, pictograph cycles represent most lengthy time periods. Garrick Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians*, Vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 300. For an extended discussion on the value of winter counts for the study of historical disease episodes, see Linea Sundstrom, "Smallpox Used them Up: References to Epidemic Disease in Northern Great Plains Winter Counts, 1714-1920," *Ethnohistory* 44 (1997): 305-329.

¹²²Garrick Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians*, Vol. 1, 300.

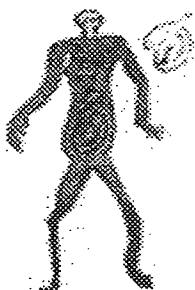


Fig. 291.

Fig. 291, 1734-'35,—"Used them up with belly-ache winter." About fifty of the people died of an eruptive disease which was accompanied by pains in the bowels. The eruption is shown on the man in the figure. This was probably the first experience by the Dakotas of the smallpox, which has been so great a factor in the destruction of the Indians.

Fig. 1. The Battiste Good Winter Count, 1734 - 35. Source: Garrick Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians*, Vol. 1, 300.

The outbreak among the Siouan people, may have been a factor in their being driven from the forest and rice lakes in the late 1730s.¹²³ Dale Miquelon noted the relationship between the advance of the French and the decades of intertribal warfare and political realignments that resulted in the territorial displacement of the Dakota.¹²⁴

The Dakota were not the only people along the Missouri to be affected by the epidemic. The virus continued upriver to the village dwelling horticulturalists, the Arikara. The Arikara were part of the burgeoning plains trade in horses with the Spanish colonies to the south and west. J.B. Truteau, who lived among them and was

¹²³In her history of the western Ojibwa, Laura Peers noted that Dakota custodians of oral tradition emphatically deny that their retreat from the forests of Minnesota was the result of military defeat, though she does not mention the possibility of disease or the 1730s outbreak at all. Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 7.

¹²⁴Miquelon, *New France 1701-1740*, 183. The author makes no mention of the outbreak or its possible effect on the "whole warlike effervescence" of the late 1730s.

their most important early chronicler,¹²⁵ wrote in the 1790s:

In ancient times the Ricara nation was very large; it counted thirty-two populous villages, now depopulated and almost entirely destroyed by the smallpox, which broke out among them at three different times. A few families only, from each of the villages, escaped; these united and formed the two villages now here...¹²⁶

Using Truteau's narrative and archaeological evidence, James Deetz concluded that "the period 1720 to 1750 was the period of maximum stress for the Arikara."¹²⁷ The social organization of the Arikara and other plains horticultural groups, such as the Mandan, may have contributed to their decline. As important players in the horse trade, they were subjected to increasing levels of direct contact with a number of aboriginal and European groups early on in the trade. In addition, the Arikara and their relatives were sedentary village dwellers, living in relatively high densities behind defensive palisades.¹²⁸ The spread of disease to such densely populated communities would have ensured high infection rates. The plains village dwellers were also under increasing military pressure from groups such as the Dakota, who had been ousted from their environment to the northeast.¹²⁹ Michael Trimble stated that the movement

¹²⁵ J.B. Truteau, "Remarks on the Manners of the Indians Living High Up the Missouri," *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785-1804*, ed. A.P. Nasatir, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 257-311.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹²⁷ James Deetz, *The Dynamics of Stylistic Change in Arikara Ceramics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 101.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* On the relationship between settlement patterns and epidemiology among the Arikara, Mandan and Hidatsa, see Michael Trimble, "Chronology of Epidemics among Plains Village Horticulturalists 1738-1838," *Southwestern Lore* 54 (1988), 25-26.

¹²⁹ For an analysis of Dakota-Mandan rivalry see, Angelica Mikulencak, *Mandan-Hidatsa and Sioux Cultural Dynamics: The Competitive Exclusion Principle on the Northern Plains* (M.A. thesis, University of Arlington, 1995).

of the Arikana to the Missouri in the seventeenth century and the decline of all the plains horticulturalists after 1700 was largely the result of epidemic disease.¹³⁰ Using archaeological data to reconstruct plains village demographic patterns, Ann Ramenovsky asserted that the abandonment of what is now South Dakota was due to the spread of infection as early as 1612, almost a century prior to the arrival of Europeans.¹³¹

The contagion did not stop with the attack of the Arikana. Its effects were felt beyond the headwaters of the Missouri River, in what is now the Province of Alberta. The epidemic may have been a significant if not determining factor in the outcome of the hostilities between the Blackfoot and the Shoshone or "Snake" Nation, their equestrian rivals to the south. The Blackfoot turned to the Cree middlemen in the fur trade for assistance in their war against the Shoshone. According to John Milloy, "[t]heir relationship was an alliance founded on the coincidence of Cree economic and Blackfoot military interests."¹³² The Blackfoot needed guns and military support from their allies, the Cree sought the fur bearers in the land occupied by the Shoshone. The conflict over control of southern Alberta took place prior to the arrival of Europeans in the area; over two decades would pass before the first European, Anthony Henday

¹³⁰Trimble, "Chronology of Epidemics among Plains Village Horticulturalists, 1738-1838," 26.

¹³¹Ramenovsky, *Vectors of Death*, 123-124.

¹³²Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 6. Milloy's assertion the Cree and Blackfoot were participants in an alliance prior to the 1790s is not without its critics. David Smyth remarked, "[f]rom their sharing of a foe, a sometime trading relationship, and very little else, Milloy affirms the existence of a Blackfoot-Cree military alliance ... the Snake Indians were apparently the enemies of both the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree-Assiniboine alliance through most of the eighteenth century." David Smyth, "Missed Opportunity: John Milloy's *The Plains Cree*," *Prairie Forum* 17 (1992), 345.

(also spelled Hendry), would make his way to Blackfoot country.¹³³ While Europeans did not witness the events on the western plains, David Thompson documented an extensive oral account of the conflict provided by his teacher among the Peigan, Saukamappee. Thompson's teacher, though long a resident among the Peigan, was originally a "Nahathaway (Cree) of the Pasquia River," which joined the Saskatchewan about fifty miles below Cumberland House.¹³⁴ According to Saukamappee, he travelled with his father and a group of 20 other warriors to assist the frontier group of the Blackfoot confederacy, the Peigan in their struggle with the Shoshone.¹³⁵ The fact that the Shoshone were mounted on horseback accounts for their initial success. The arrival of the eastern allies who were armed with English guns and metal points gave the Blackfoot new hope in their struggle against the Snakes.¹³⁶ Armed with their new technology, the Peigan advanced toward the Red Deer River to confront the enemy when, according to Saukamappee:

... death came over us all, and swept more than half of us by the smallpox, of which we knew nothing until it brought death among us. We caught it from the Snake Indians. ... We attacked the tents... but our war whoop instantly stopped; our eyes were appalled with terror; there was no one to fight with but the dead and the dying, each a mass of corruption.

We did not touch them but left the tents, and held

¹³³Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-1871*, 119.

¹³⁴V.G. Hopwood, "New Light on David Thompson," *The Beaver* 288 (1957), 30.

¹³⁵Thompson, *Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, 82. The two joint military battles between the Cree and Blackfoot against the Snakes during the 1730s are, according to David Smyth, the "only concrete examples" of combined military encounters against the Shoshone. "Missed Opportunity: John Milloy's *The Plains Cree*," 344.

¹³⁶Saukamappee's account of his enemy noted that the mis-stu-tim (big dogs), "alarmed us, for we had no idea of horses and could not make out what they were." Thompson, *Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, 193.

a council on what was to be done. We all thought the bad spirit had made himself master of the camp and destroyed them. It was agreed to take some of the best of the tents, and any other plunder that was clean and good and we did, and also took away the few horses they had and returned to our camp.

The second day after this, this dreadful disease broke out in our camp, and spread from one tent to the other as if the bad spirit carried it. We had no belief that one man could give it to another, any more than a wounded man could give his wound to another. We did not suffer so much as those that were near the river, into which they rushed out and died. We had only a little brook, and about one third of us died, but in some of the other camps there were tents in which everyone died. ... Our hearts were low and dejected, and we shall never be again the same people. To hunt for our families was the sole occupation and [to] kill beavers, wolves and foxes to trade [for] our necessities; and we thought of war no more, and perhaps would have made peace with them [the enemy], for they had suffered dreadfully as well as us, and had left all this fine country of the Bow River to us.¹³⁷

The spread of the virus through the northwestern plains had a profound impact on the societies that resided there. The plains village horticulturalists continued to decline until another outbreak of the disease a century later, led to their destruction. The disease caused major territorial shifts in the region bordering the eastern Rocky Mountains. The Kutenai disappeared from the plains; the Shoshone were, for a time, forced to retreat to the south, opening southern Alberta to the Blackfoot Confederacy

¹³⁷Ibid., 199. This passage has been the source of much confusion among contemporary scholars. According to Hopwood, the narrative that included the description of the smallpox outbreak was presented "as nearly as possible as Thompson wrote it, mainly to give the reader a sample of Thompson's unedited prose, but also because there are errors in the transcription of the chapter in the second Champlain Society edition [Glover's]..." 82. Part of the problem stems from an inept editorial comment on the part of J.B. Tyrrell in 1916. Tyrrell unknowingly merged descriptions of two disease episodes that were actually forty-five years apart into a single event. See David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative 1784-1812*, ed. Richard Glover, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1962), 252, fn.1. A discussion of the thirty pages of the Thompson narrative which was missing from the Tyrrell version can be found in Hopwood, "New Light on David Thompson," 26-31.

and to the European fur trade. The impact of the epidemic was not limited to the western plains. The occupants of the territory along the plains-forest frontier a thousand miles east also felt the wrath of the virus.

Although the epidemic had a single origin on the eastern seaboard, it probably travelled along more than one route into the distant interior. Because of his focus on the effects of disease on the "petit nord," the area to the northeast of Lake Winnipeg, Hackett did not consider the epidemic on the western plains. He did, however, provide a superb analysis of its eastern manifestation which may have occurred as much as three years after the outbreak in the west.¹³⁸ Hackett proposed that the disease was introduced to the area around Red River in the early spring of 1737 from the Teton Sioux. According to Hackett, the disease may have precipitated the slaughter of Father Aulneau and the French voyageurs at Massacre Island in Lake of the Woods.¹³⁹ Basing his argument on the oral testimony of an Ojibwa Chief, Jim Eliud, Hackett stressed that the murder of the French Priest and his companions at Massacre Island were not committed by the Sioux alone.¹⁴⁰ If, as Hackett claimed, the attack was retribution for the smallpox suffered by the southwestern Ojibwa sometime between October 1735 and June 1736, it follows that Ojibwa warriors may well have been in the attacking party.¹⁴¹

The first documentary evidence for the outbreak in the French sphere of

¹³⁸For an explanation of the delay between the two outbreaks, see Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 139, fn. 22.

¹³⁹Ibid., 140.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 141-142.

influence is a reference by La Vérendrye while at Ft. St. Charles on Lake of the Woods dated May 26th, 1737. He stated:

[S]ixty Barrier Cree arrived and told me that the Winnipeg Cree whom I had left at Fort Maurepas had all died of the small-pox, which had been brought to them by those who had gone to trade with the English. I did not tell them that the master of life had punished them for not coming to Fort St. Charles as they had promised.¹⁴²

Hackett refuted the notion presented by earlier writers that the Indians had contracted the disease from the English at the Bay. Two days after his initial comment on the outbreak, the explorer recounted the experience of his son, Louis-Joseph:

Those who escaped made a stop and threw into the river, according to their custom, all the beaver, pichoux [lynx], marten, etc., belonging to the dead as well as their own, so that the shore was lined with them and the portages full, all of which was a loss, as no one among the savages ventured to touch them. In the ten lodges that were with my son there was not one death; this was due to the remedies he gave them and took care of them, which augmented their friendship for him and the French as well as their confidence in them; but they stopped like the others to succour the rest of the afflicted families. Only eighteen men came with him to join the warriors.¹⁴³

Louis-Joseph was probably at the northern end of lake Winnipeg at the time, according to Hackett, searching for a location to establish a post that would further outflank the English trade. According to Dale Miquelon, while the smallpox thwarted Louis-Joseph's initial efforts, Fort Bourbon near Grand Rapids was in operation by 1741. Two years later the French hold on the Saskatchewan was tightened with the establishment of Fort Paskoya, at the juncture of the river and Cedar Lake.¹⁴⁴

The epidemic continued through the summer of 1738. A large military force

¹⁴²Ibid., 126.

¹⁴³Ibid., 128.

¹⁴⁴Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701-1740*, 184.

consisting of 300 Monsoni Cree, 250 other Cree and 800 Assiniboines had amassed for an attack on the Sioux when they were hit by an unseen enemy. Smallpox turned the expedition into a fiasco; "[t]hrough deaths, weakness and fear, the embattled bowmen were demoralized and their fury wasted away into a tame willingness to creep back to their homes."¹⁴⁵ While the military campaign ended in chaos, large scale military incursions into enemy territory had become almost yearly occurrences in the Boundary waters. In 1733, at least 500 Cree and possibly another 300 Assiniboines were ambushed by the Sioux. The following May, La Vérendrye tried unsuccessfully to stop a campaign comprised of "1100 or 1200 men in their war party."¹⁴⁶

The effect of an outbreak of smallpox on such large gatherings, or among the villages of Lake Winnipeg described above would have been catastrophic. The sheer number of people involved, coupled with their high population density, would have assured hundreds if not thousands of fatalities. The demographic collapse along the borders of the eastern plains may have had important territorial repercussions. The villages along the shores of Lake Winnipeg, whose leaders met with La Vérendrye to establish trade in 1734, may have been severely reduced. The epidemic struck during the summer when large gatherings of Cree and Assiniboine were taking place. Had the outbreak occurred during the winter when the majority of the population that converged on Lake Winnipeg in summer were in the bush, the effects would have been

¹⁴⁵Moore, *Valiant La Vérendrye*, 251-252. It is probably from this source that the biographer of the missionary George McDougall noted the first outbreak of smallpox on the plains "working havoc among 800 Assiniboines and 550 Crees.." John MacLean, *McDougall of Alberta: A Life of Rev. John McDougall D.D., Pathfinder of Empire and prophet of the Plains* (Toronto: F.C. Stephenson, 1927), 38; Nellis M. Crouse, *La Vérendrye: Fur Trade and Explorer* (Toronto: Ryerson Press 1956), 131.

¹⁴⁶Moore, *Valiant La Vérendrye*, 154-156, 177.

mitigated.¹⁴⁷ Though groups dispersed for the winter to hunt in the forest, the bush from Lake Winnipeg to Lake of the Woods was still densely populated. On his trip from Fort St. Charles to Fort Maurepas at the bottom of Lake Winnipeg in the winter of 1737, La Vérendrye remarked that he encountered Indians nearly every day.¹⁴⁸ Because of their preference for community living, the Assiniboine were particularly at risk. Prior to his arrival in the area, La Vérendrye had been told by the Cree that the Assiniboine were very numerous, "never staying in any fixed place, but carrying their dwellings [cabannes] with them continually, and always camping together to form a village."¹⁴⁹ The intersection of their residence patterns and the epidemiology of smallpox may have been a primary factor in the constriction of the territory controlled by the Assiniboine, particularly in the eastern part of their domain.

Details surrounding the early history of the Assiniboine are sketchy. What is known is that sometime around 1640, the group which came to be known as the Assiniboine split from their relatives, the Yanktonai Sioux. The split may have occurred just before the former became known to the French.¹⁵⁰ Oral histories of the Assiniboine are not precise on the origin of the split that led to the departure for the north of as many as a thousand lodges to seek an alliance with the Cree.¹⁵¹ An alternative

¹⁴⁷For a discussion of the seasonal economic cycle of the Assiniboine of this period, see Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 37.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴⁹Smith, *The Explorations of the La Vérendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738-43*, 18.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵¹Dan Kennedy, *Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief, Dan Kennedy (Ochankugahe)*, ed. James Stevens (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 8-9. The impact of an early disease episode contributing to the fissioning of Dakota society, such

explanation for the emergence of the Assiniboine is that they have been a distinct population since as early as 900 A.D. They were seen as the manufacturers of the distinctive Blackduck style of ceramics found from southern Manitoba to as far east as the Pic River on the northeast shore of Lake Superior.¹⁵²

The Assiniboine were present at Rainy Lake in 1688 and served as guides to Jacques de Noyon in his reconnaissance of Lake of the Woods.¹⁵³ Lake of the Woods itself was known as "Lac des Assiniboiles" until well into the eighteenth century, though the designation has been disputed by recent writers.¹⁵⁴ Charles Bishop stated that as late as 1736, 150 Assiniboine lived near Lake Nipigon.¹⁵⁵ It was group of Assiniboine or Stone people who guided Henry Kelsey through the prairie to the edge of the Rockies before 1700.¹⁵⁶ They summered at the fishery at Dering's Point, probably the

as the one described by Ramenovsky in the Middle Missouri Region in the seventeenth century, cannot be discounted. *Vectors of Death*, 133-134.

¹⁵²C.A. Bishop and M.E. Smith, "Early Historic Populations in Northwestern Ontario: Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Interpretations," *American Antiquity* 40 (1975), 58-61.

¹⁵³Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 49-50; Moore, *Valiant La Vérendrye*, 127-128.

¹⁵⁴A.S. Morton accepted "Lac des Assiniboins" as synonymous with Lake of the Woods in the period prior to the arrival of La Vérendrye in the 1730s. *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 164-165. Dale Russell disputed this notion though he accepted the idea that Lac des Assenipole was Lake Winnipeg, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 50, 54.

¹⁵⁵Bishop and Smith, "Early Historic Populations in Northwestern Ontario: Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Interpretations," 57. A caveat to this interpretation was presented by Adolph Greenberg and James Morrison who states that the presence of the group in the area for the trade did not imply that this was in fact, their territory. "Group Identities in the Boreal Forest: The Origin of the Northern Ojibwa," *Ethnohistory* 29 (1982), 95, fn. 4.

¹⁵⁶Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 39.

present site of The Pas that, according to Arthur Ray was "one of the best fishing locations on the lower Saskatchewan River."¹⁵⁷

Soon after the turn of the eighteenth century, pressure on the Assiniboiné increased, particularly from the east. By the 1720s, intergroup conflict turned the Rainy River into essentially a no man's land.¹⁵⁸ In the mid 1730s, Father Aulneau, one of the victims at Massacre Island, stated the Territory of the Assiniboiné as "all of the land to the south" of Lake Winnipeg.¹⁵⁹ Military conflict coupled with smallpox led to the departure of the Assiniboin from the country east of the Red River. Dale Russell provided this account of the territory of the group, written by La Vérendrye at Fort La Reine in 1741:

The south side of the [Assiniboin] River belongs to the Assiniboin, who also claim the Red River. They are said to number 14 or 15 villages, of which the smallest have 20 to 30 lodges, while several have 100, 200 and 300. They all speak the same Assiniboin language. They occupy about 300 to 400 leagues of country, all of it prairie.¹⁶⁰

The Monsoni allies of the Assiniboiné also appear to have been hard hit by the outbreak of 1737. At the time of the epidemic, they controlled the territory between Rainy Lake and Lake of the Woods. Their origin is unclear, leading one writer to assert that they were "related, in some now obscure manner" to the Cree.¹⁶¹ In their

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸Ray and Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure*, 44.

¹⁵⁹Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 37.

¹⁶⁰Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 57.

¹⁶¹Smith, *The Explorations of La Vérendrye in the Northern Plains*, 6-7. The obscurity of the group has lead to their being designated as Ojibwa. Hornbeck Tanner, "The Career of Joseph La France," 186, fn. 28.

discussion of the early territorial groupings of northern Ontario, Bishop and Smith located the Monsoni on the Moose and Albany River systems, on the Hudson Bay Lowlands in the early seventeenth century.¹⁶² When the HBC established its first posts in James Bay, it was the Monsoni they traded with. At the same time, representatives of the Monsoni were forging an alliance with the French in the south. They were present at the French ceremony annexing the Western Great Lakes held at Sault Ste. Marie in June 1671.¹⁶³ Although A.S. Morton called the Monsoni and their Cree allies the "par excellence trappers of those days,"¹⁶⁴ it was no doubt that their role as middlemen led to their presence as far west as the Red River.¹⁶⁵ Their position in the fur trade would also explain the tenacity of Monsoni hostilities toward their enemies, the Sioux and the Ojibwa. Their animosity was such that La Vérendrye's attempt to establish a post on Lake of the Woods in the early 1730s was frustrated because he was unable to secure a guide at Fort St. Pierre because all the men had gone to war.¹⁶⁶

When La Vérendrye did reach the Lake of the Woods, he was accompanied by

¹⁶²Charles Bishop and Estelle Smith, "Early Historic Populations in Northwestern Ontario: Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Interpretations," 55, Figure 1.

¹⁶³Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 74. Greenberg and Morrison state that before this they had traded at Montreal. "Group Identities in the Boreal Forest: The Origin of the Northern Ojibwa," 77.

¹⁶⁴Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 174.

¹⁶⁵The Cree probably inhabited the boreal forest north and west of the Manitoba Lakes prior to the advent of the trade, but the extent of their occupation has yet to be determined beyond dispute.

¹⁶⁶Champagne, *Les La Vérendrye et les postes de l'ouest*, 125. It is possible that the Monsonis were slow to find guides for the French in order to protect their position in the trade.

fifty canoes of Monsonis.¹⁶⁷ In June 1733, 300 Monsonis as well as 500 Crees gathered at Ft. St. Charles in preparation for battle. In December of that year, a council held at the new post, which included two Monsoni Chiefs from Rainy Lake, were informed that 300 Monsoni warriors were on their way west to attack the Sioux. Six months later 400 Monsonis from Ft. St. Pierre were reported to again be on their way to fight.¹⁶⁸

The killing of the French party in June of 1736 further inflamed tensions in the Boundary Waters region. The Monsoni, Cree and Assiniboine allies struck at the Sioux that summer and prepared for war the following spring. Because of a cold winter and late spring, the warriors could not muster at Ft. St. Charles until the end of May. By the 28th of May, the Monsoni Chief, La Colle, had 300 men at the Fort, thirty of whom were from as far east as Lake Nipigon.¹⁶⁹ It was into this large gathering of combatants that word came from Ft. Maurepas that smallpox had broken out there and that the sixty Barrier Cree who were left at the post were all dead.¹⁷⁰ When La Vérendrye's son arrived from Lake Winnipeg, he was accompanied by only eighteen fighters. The horrors of the outbreak were not fully reported as the elder La Vérendrye departed for New France on June 6th, before the incubation period of the disease was complete if the infection had been brought from Maurepas by the younger La Vérendrye and his

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 129.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 143-148.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 204-205. Greenberg and Morrison opposed this notion stating that there was confusion between antiquated orthography of Lakes Nipigon (Nepigon) and Winnipeg (Ounipigon). "Group Identities in the Boreal Forest: The Origin of the Northern Ojibwa," 95, fn. 4.

¹⁷⁰Champagne, *Les La Vérendrye et les postes de l'ouest* 204.

companions. The elder La Vérendrye did not return to the post at Lake of the Woods until August of 1738.¹⁷¹ That spring, another expedition against the Sioux was organized. In May, 800 Assiniboiné were assembled as well as a force of Monsoni and Cree, when their attack was foiled by a second appearance of the disease. According to Antoine Champagne, "la petite verole s'était déclarée parmi eux et qu' ils s'étaient vus obligés de revenir après avoir perdu une partie considérable de leurs gens."¹⁷²

Paul Hackett noted that the epidemic had "a significant impact" on the fate of the Monsoni, resulting in their disappearance as a distinct population later in the eighteenth century.¹⁷³ Comparing population estimates from 1734 (400 warriors) and the early 1740s (140 warriors at Rainy Lake), he concluded that the Monsoni were reduced from about 1600 to 560 in less than a decade.¹⁷⁴ The Monsoni Chief, La Colle, continued his war with the Sioux into the early 1740s, commanding an army comprised mainly of Cree and Assiniboin warriors.¹⁷⁵ The spoils of war had also changed for La Colle. Rather than killing the Sioux as he had done for years, the Monsoni Chief brought back many of his enemies as slaves. So large was the number of prisoners that, according to Champagne, "le nombre des esclaves étaient si grand que, suivant le rapport des sauvages, ils occupaient dans leur marche un terrain de quatre arpent."¹⁷⁶ Hackett postulated that because the gathering of slave had not been

¹⁷¹Ibid., 205-206.

¹⁷²Ibid., 242.

¹⁷³Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 130-134.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 131. The estimate is based on a ratio of 4 people per warrior.

¹⁷⁵Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 43.

¹⁷⁶*Les La Vérendrye et les postes de l'ouest*, 277.

a feature of previous Monsoni warfare that the new strategy of the Monsoni was to recoup population losses in the wake of the epidemic.¹⁷⁷ La Colle's plan was not altogether successful. They would never again control the Rainy River corridor as they had before 1738. Many of the survivors were integrated into other groups, and post-epidemic descriptions of the Monsoni usually mention them in association with other groups. When Joseph La France travelled through the area in the spring of 1740, he spent ten days fishing with a group of Monsoni and later spent a month with a mixed group of Monsoni and their Ojibwa allies, the Sturgeon, on Lake of the Woods.¹⁷⁸ La Vérendrye's memorandum of 1741 mentions the Monsoni only in association with the Barriere Cree on the lower Winnipeg River.¹⁷⁹

The Monsoni were eventually absorbed into other ethnic groups and disappeared from the historic record. The extent of the inter-ethnic homogenization was reported by the North West Company trader, Duncan Cameron, at Nipigon in 1805:

Every old man with whom I conversed, and from who I made some enquiry on this subject, told me that his father or his grand father was from either of these two places [Lake Superior-Ojibwa and Hudson Bay-Cree]... began to meet one another in the interior and to intermarry by which they, at length, became one people.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷Hackett, *A Very Remarkable Sickness*, 132. The author notes that this technique was also used by such widely separated groups as the Iroquois and the Peigan.

¹⁷⁸Hornbeck Tanner, "The Career of Joseph La France," 179.

¹⁷⁹Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 56.

¹⁸⁰Morrison and Greenberg, "Group Identities in the Boreal Forest: The Origin of the Northern Ojibwa," 97-98, fn. 24. The authors also provide a list of aboriginal groups written by La Vérendrye which states that the Monsoni in the Rainy Lake area were "Sauteux" speakers. Appendix A, 93.

The epidemic probably contributed to the withdrawal of the Sioux from the Boundary Waters region, the country for which they had fought since at least 1670. The Dakota had been the early allies of the French who soon backed away from the partnership to a position of neutrality as the Europeans tried to gain favour with the Assiniboiné and Cree.¹⁸¹ During the many decades of hostilities, the Sioux had pushed as far east as Kaministiquia on Lake Superior. Prior to 1720, the Sioux controlled the prized Rainy Lake-Lake of the Woods corridor.¹⁸² In the late 1720s, joint French-Sioux raiding parties drove the Assiniboinés as far west as the head of the Churchill River, seriously impeding the trade at York.¹⁸³ Raids on the Cree continued long after the Sioux were ousted from the eastern edge of the prairie. Peter Douglas Elias traced several Sioux incursions into the bush of Northern Saskatchewan prior to the construction of Cumberland House in 1774.¹⁸⁴ Just prior to the outbreak in 1737, it was estimated that the Sioux could raise an army of 2000 warriors, so they may have had a numerical advantage over the Cree, Assiniboiné, Monsoni and Ojibwa alliance.¹⁸⁵ Harold Hickerson wrote that the shift in allegiance of the Ojibwa in 1736 made the Dakota occupation of the rice lakes and fur ground of northern Minnesota untenable.¹⁸⁶ Even thirty years after the dislocation of the Sioux from their land, Hickerson noted that

¹⁸¹Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 232.

¹⁸²Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 14.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁸⁴*The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest: Lessons for Survival*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), 6.

¹⁸⁵Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 11.

¹⁸⁶*The Chippewa and their Neighbours: A Study in Ethnohistory*, Studies in Anthropological Method (Prospect Heights: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988), 71.

"most of northwestern Minnesota is shown to be devoid of tribal occupancy."¹⁸⁷

While military conflict was certainly an underlying factor in the reshaping of the ethnic map south and east of Lake of the Woods, the smallpox virus may well have played a role that has been largely overlooked. The winners of this round of diplomatic and biological roulette were the Ojibwa. After serving as the middlemen to the western French trade in the years between 1650 and 1670, they were ousted from their position by the arrival of French traders at the Sault and further west in the latter part of the seventeenth century.¹⁸⁸ Finding an economic niche as middlemen to the Sioux, they were able to control the trade in the area to the south of the canoe route to Lake of the Woods from their base at Chequamegon Bay on the southwest shore of Lake Superior. North of Lake Superior, the northern Ojibwa made slow progress in their struggle against the Cree trading at the Bay. By the 1720s, Charles Bishop reported they were "threatening to kill the inland Cree should they carry their furs to the Hudson's Bay Company posts on James Bay."¹⁸⁹ These Ojibwa intrusions into the Cree trade at the Bay were probably no more than raids before the 1730s, as few of the southern Indians remained north of Superior year round, preferring to return to their homeland at the Sault in summer for the fishery and for trade.¹⁹⁰

Within years of switching allegiance, and in the wake of the epidemic, Ojibwa territory increased dramatically. Hackett noted that the Northern Ojibwa, or Bungee,

¹⁸⁷Hickerson, *The Chippewa and their Neighbours*, 72.

¹⁸⁸Ray and Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure*, 42.

¹⁸⁹Charles Bishop, "The Emergence of the Northern Ojibwa: Social and Economic Consequences," *American Ethnologist* 3 (1974), 44.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 44.

appear in the HBC record only after 1741, and after that date, they were frequent visitors to the Bay.¹⁹¹ The high levels of mortality among the Cree in northwestern Ontario and in the hinterland of York Factory as far west as the Saskatchewan River, essentially opened up the country for Ojibwa expansion.¹⁹² In the disputed country to the south, the demise of the Monsoni and the retreat of the Assiniboine to the area west of Lake Winnipeg created a demographic vacuum that the Ojibwa were quick to fill. Emöke Szathmary and Franklin Auger found genetic evidence for the expansion of the Ojibwa. Their analysis noted:

The apparent restriction of the gene to Ojibwa suggests recent mutation; its geographic distribution suggest population movement by the descendants of a group in which the mutation first occurred. This scenario fits the ethnohistoric model, which states that Ojibwa resided in the northern Lake Huron-eastern Lake Superior region prior to their westward expansion 300 years ago.¹⁹³

Even before the middle of the eighteenth century, the political and cultural character of what became the Canadian west had been significantly altered by the inextricably combined forces of biology and economics. Prior to the physical arrival of Europeans, aboriginal societies were shaken by the arrival of trade items of European origin. The differential introduction of horses and guns led to large scale changes in indigenous balances of power as alliances were forged at the margins of European economic periphery. As new groups were brought into the expanding spheres of European economic interest through the middleman trade, they came under increasing

¹⁹¹Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 129, fn. 5.

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³Emöke Szathmary and Franklin Auger, "Biological Distances and Genetic Relationships within Algonkians," *Boreal Forest Adaptations: The Northern Algonkians*, ed. Theodore Steegmann (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 311-312.

threat from Old World pathogens. As European interest in the economic potential of the northwest increased, so would the effect of introduced diseases on an ever expanding disease frontier. The period of fur trade competition ending in 1821 would extend both the economic and biological reach of Europeans to the ends of the continent.

Chapter 3: "As my Debtors are all Dead"¹: The Early Competition Era and The Extension of Trade and Disease, 1740-1782.

The shock of the smallpox epidemic of the 1730s was felt from the European colonies on the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains. The disease played a significant if not decisive role in inter-ethnic conflicts among First Nations from Lake Superior to the edge of the western plains and beyond. The expansion of the fur trade in the second half of the eighteenth century resulted in even greater territorial and demographic change. The rivalry for control of the western interior between the coastal and the overland trades would, in the words of a leading fur trade scholar, escalate into a full-blown "fur trade war."² During the half-century of conflict between the HBC and a variety of Anglo-Montreal enterprises, competition intensified to the point where little if any consideration was given to the future of game supplies or to the well-being of the aboriginal groups charged with securing furs. In addition, the extension and intensification of the trade served as a conduit for pathogens for groups far into the interior. This chapter will consider the interrelationship between the expansion of the duelling trade networks and the extension of the frontier of European disease pools across the western and northern portions of the continent. The establishment of trade networks, even in the early years of the fur trade rivalry, served to deliver diseases to previously sheltered groups, often with catastrophic results. In addition to the biological threat of imported pathogens, competition for furs became "severe and even

¹William Tomison, Cumberland House, Feb. 1782, *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals*, Second Series, ed. E.E. Rich (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1952), 238.

²J.M. Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars: The Founding of Western Canada* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1999).

homicidal,"³ leading to the violent displacement of many interior bands into areas that could not be depended upon for survival. The combination of a worsening climate and the forced disruption of seasonal food procurement cycles made starvation and death not uncommon occurrences in the far northwest.

The overland trade from Montreal was invigorated by the replacement of the French civil servants with Anglo-Celtic privateers in the wake of the British victory of the Seven Years War. The seeds of the conflict, though, were sown in the decades before the Conquest. The westward movement of the French trade served not only to agitate English traders but also had an important role in the political alignment of the various aboriginal societies in the west. In the aftermath of the turmoil delivered by the smallpox virus on the inhabitants of the forest-plains margins, the French continued to expand westward onto the plains. By the end of the 1730s, La Vérendrye, accompanied by several hundred Assiniboine, reached the large horticultural villages occupied by the Mandan. Contact with the Mandan had been an obsession with the French explorer since his arrival in the western Great Lakes a decade before. His middleman allies told him that the Mandan were not only light skinned and lived in towns, but that they controlled a passage to the western sea⁴. The Mandan villages were impressive. John Milloy noted the trading centre they shared with the Hidatsa, "must represent a high point in plains social organization."⁵ The plains village dwellers

³Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 71.

⁴Wood, *The Explorations of the La Vérendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738-43*, 19.

⁵Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 41. The Mandan had earlier established trade relations with the Spanish to the southwest. See also, Wood, *The Explorations of the La Vérendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738-43*, 99-100.

may have been the remnant population of an even greater agrarian society which had flourished across the west prior to the dessication of what is now the prairies, the result of the long decline of the climate from 1200 A.D.⁶ The settlements served as a staging area for the exploration of La Vérendye's sons, who reached the Big Horn Mountain Range in 1743.⁷ French officials had less lofty goals than did the La Vérendryes. The patriarch was removed from his position as commandant of the French interior by his superior, Jean-Frederic Maurepas, for his pursuit of exploration at the expense of the trade. Dale Miquelon lamented the removal of the elder La Vérendrye from his post, "after him there was no one at all. The Canadian presence in the west after 1744 was a fur-trade presence only."⁸

The French fur trade presence was not inconsequential. By mid-century, the French had consolidated their occupation of the interior, establishing Fort Pasquia, at the present site of The Pas, and Fort à la Corne at the forks of the Saskatchewan River.⁹ The outbreak of military conflict in the east in 1754, which culminated in the loss of New France, made the St. Lawrence-based trade moribund during its final years.¹⁰ The last gasp of French expansion on the plains had reverberations beyond the immediate vicinity of their own posts. In response to the threat posed by the French

⁶For a description of a wider aboriginal agrarian social and economic order prior to the arrival of Europeans and its demise resulting from a protracted period of climatic decline, see Reid Bryson and Thomas Murray, *Climates of Hunger* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977).

⁷Moore, *Valiant La Vérendrye*, 333.

⁸*New France, 1701-1744: A Supplement to Empire*, 185.

⁹Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 61.

¹⁰For a discussion of the withering of the French fur trade in its final years, see A.P. Nasatir, ed., *Before Lewis and Clark*, 55.

along the Saskatchewan and faced with political trouble in England, the HBC was forced to change its decades long policy of not sending its employees inland.¹¹

Between 1754 and the early 1770s, fifty-six separate journeys were made by HBC employees into the interior.¹²

Ethnohistorians have used the surviving records of those HBC sponsored journeys to establish something of an "ethnographic baseline" for the prairies. Dale Russell, for example, used those journals as key evidence for his critique of dependency and the westward expansion thesis of aboriginal middlemen in the eighteenth century. The report of Joseph Smith on the Touchwood Hills, according to Russell, showed that the Assiniboines there were fully adapted to the plains bison hunt and did not participate in the yearly trade cycle to Hudson Bay, as proof of their long residence in the parklands.¹³ The journal of Anthony Henday (Hendry) showed that the Cree and Assiniboine were present "in sizeable numbers" as far west as Edmonton by the mid 1750s.¹⁴ Russell's "in situ" view of the Cree and Assiniboine on the plains is problematic however. He did not, for example, consider the possibility of territorial change over several decades as a result of the middleman trade to the bay and to the

¹¹The HBC was faced with a challenge to its charter in mid century, led by a disgruntled former employee, Joseph Robson. The critique of the company's inaction led to a formal inquiry in the late 1740s. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 91.

¹²*Ibid.*, 91-92.

¹³*Ibid.*, 112-113.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 94. The first of the interior missions, conducted by Anthony Henday mentioned the presence of the Cree and Assiniboine at Edmonton. A.S. Morton used the journal of Mathew Cocking, written twenty years later to show that the Atsina, a nation allied with the Blackfoot, had occupied the northeastern prairie as far as Nipawin but had been driven west to the Alberta border, "by the terrible weapons of the Crees." *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 285.

French in the east. He did not consider the demographic and social impact of the 1730s smallpox outbreak. In his zeal to affirm Cree occupancy of the plains independent of the fur trade, Russell may have overlooked important evidence regarding aboriginal control of land and resources in the mid-eighteenth century. The Cree and Assiniboiné controlled the flow of goods to and from the plains and were spread across the region. They may not have actually controlled portions of the territory over which they travelled. While bison hunting with his Cree and Assiniboiné guides, Henday was told that taking game for food was acceptable but that the commercial killing of beaver would not only have undermined their own middleman status, but to their being killed by the Archinithues¹⁵ in order to protect the latter's ownership of the fur resource.¹⁶ The Cree and Assiniboiné, who were allowed to take animals for food and clothing, deferred to the Blackfoot on the issue of commercial extraction of the fur resource. This supports the notion that the area to the south of Edmonton was acknowledged as Blackfoot territory.¹⁷ This was the situation described

¹⁵At the time of Henday's journey the designation "Achinitue" was applied to all groups of western Indians who were not Cree or Assiniboiné. On the plains the term could apply to any or all of the Blackfoot, Peigan, Blood, Sarcee or Gros Ventre. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 94. For a similar discussion of the ambiguity of the term, see Thomas F. Schilz, "The Gros Ventres and the Canadian Fur Trade, 1754-1831," *American Indian Quarterly* 12 (1988), 44. Hendry's editor noted the difficulty surrounding the designation of "Archinithue" in early accounts identified both the Blackfoot and the enemies of that nation. Anthony Hendry, "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country: The Journal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-1755," ed. Lawrence J. Burpee, *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* (1907), 316, 339.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 344-345.

¹⁷In his journal, Hendry noted that the area from near the present location of Saskatoon to the Elbow of the north Saskatchewan River was "Archinuthue" territory, either Blackfoot or Gros Ventre, depending on the interpretation of the term. *Ibid.*, 328-330.

by Saukamappee in his discussion of Blackfoot-Shoshone warfare at the time of the 1734 smallpox outbreak. It also demonstrates that Cree and Assiniboine middlemen managed the fur trade beyond the frontiers of their own territory.

While the HBC pursued their reconnaissance of the plains, they were frustrated in their attempts to augment the boreal forest trade from the Bay. After a decade of relatively good health,¹⁸ the period from 1748 to 1756 the Bay trade was plagued with almost yearly outbreaks of serious diseases. Starvation compounded the situation. The increased incidence of starvation in the bush may have been an early indication of the deepening of the climatic period known as the Little Ice Age. According to one history of Northern Manitoba:

As temperatures dropped, food supply declined. Men had to spend more time hunting for subsistence and less time trapping... Fewer animals, less food, fewer furs for the trade, and severe and unpredictable climatic conditions led to significant changes. Even though trapping was reduced, the number of animals being taken was detrimental to population balances because deteriorating climate had reduced the thresholds.¹⁹

The global climate worsened through the second half of the eighteenth century. The weather became an increasingly significant and malevolent historical force, particularly on the northern frontier of the fur trade where margins of survival were thin at the best of times.

The combination of sickness and hunger was so severe at Churchill during 1748-49 that the Chief Factor, Joseph Isbister, reported the loss of several Chipewyan Indian hunters and their families. Their southern adversaries, the Cree, were, according to Isbister "all Verry badly gooded & Complain that they were starv'd that a

¹⁸Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 147.

¹⁹RLRC, *An Historical Overview of Aboriginal Lifestyles: The Churchill-Nelson River Drainage Basin*, 102-103.

great Mortality has been amongst them."²⁰ Afraid that the sick and hungry Indians would linger at the post, Isbister issued gratuities to the travellers to facilitate their journey inland. The following year, some type of "flux," probably dysentery, was reported at Churchill, York and among "many of the western Indians, causing many deaths."²¹

Conditions at Churchill continued to deteriorate. In 1751 measles or rubella broke out along the coast.²² The trade returns for 1751-52 were particularly low. At Churchill, Isbister accounted for the loss of the Cree trade:

There are three things, which I contribute ye Smallness of our Trade to, first, ye Sickness amongst the Natives, Secondly ye advance made by ye French, Since June & lastly ye Indians going to ware with ye Strange Indians that Never Trades with ye English, out of revenge for those they have lost-by ye sickness.²³

Yerbury noted that the trade with the Northern Indians was not affected by these events and that the Chipewyan provided a modicum of stability at the Fort during the period when the Cree were at war.²⁴

The climatic decline continued to put pressure on the HBC Forts. The winter of 1753-54 was especially harsh. Along the coast, the Cree Homeguard Indians, the provisioners for the company, were starving. Because game was more abundant inland, seventy Chipewyans were hired as hunters whose "services were indispensable

²⁰Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 39.

²¹Eckert, "The Early Fur Trade at York and Churchill: Implications for the Native People of the North Central Subarctic," 232.

²²Ibid., 233. In his discussion of the outbreak at York Factory, Paul Hackett identified the pathogen as rubella. 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 152-153. Both note that the outbreaks were the first of their kind along the coast.

²³Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 39.

²⁴Ibid., 40.

to the maintenance of Churchill."²⁵ Three years later, "violent fevers and inward pains" killed many North River (Churchill) Indians.²⁶ Later in the decade, severe winter temperatures were reported, even at the HBC's southern establishments. The winter of 1756-57 was, according to the Factor at Moose, "the hardest winter and most fatal among the Indians as has been known for these many years."²⁷

It was in the context of this worsening climate that the middleman trade expanded from Churchill into the far northwest. The Slavey, Dogrib and Hare people were displaced by Chipewyan and Yellowknife and especially Cree traders, from their pre-contact habitat in the mixed wood forest to the northwestern transition forest in the years between 1759 to 1764.²⁸

Yerbury identified the implications of this forced shift in habitat:

The environmental poverty of this zone [northwestern transition forest] led to deprivation and starvation which was intensified by disease for those who were displaced into it, and eventually Indians to depend increasingly upon the trading post and the increased use of female infanticide to maintain a stable balance between population and food resources are indications that old subsistence

²⁵Ibid., 40-41.

²⁶Eckert, "The Early Fur Trade at York and Churchill: Implications for the Native People of the North Central Subarctic," 233.

²⁷Carole Judd, "Sakie, Esquawenoe, and the Foundation of the Dual-Native Tradition at Moose Factory," in *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations*, ed. Shepard Krech (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press), 93. Fatalities that winter included the death by starvation of three goose hunters, the captain of the goose hunters, "several of the homeguard Indians and their families." Although starvation along the coast was reported as early as the 1675, the frequency of famine increased in the second half of the eighteenth century. For a consideration of hunger during the early trade, see, Marshall Hurlich, "Historical and Recent Demography of the Algonkians of Northern Ontario," in *Boreal Forest Adaptations: The Northern Algonkians*, ed. Shepard Krech (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 147-148.

²⁸Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 129. The transitional forest zone described as similar to the Hudson Bay Lowlands, the large muskeg area that rings the south coast of James and Hudson Bay.

patterns and sociocultural arrangements changed dramatically.²⁹

Arthur Ray pointed to the territory between Reindeer Lake and Lake Athabasca as the key region of Cree expansion at this time. In 1760, a peace treaty between the Cree, the Beaver, and Slave Indians pushed the frontier of Cree influence even further.³⁰ By mid 1760s, the struggle for control of the northern middleman trade broke out into open warfare between the Cree and Chipewyan.³¹ The conflict extended far into the western hinterland. In 1767, the HBC's William Pink recorded from Turtle Lake, on a tributary of the North Saskatchewan River near the present Alberta-Saskatchewan border, that his Beaver Cree guides planned to go to war "with the Other Natives Called Ye.artch,a,thyne,a Wock and Kill as Maney as they Can of them."³² The victims of this attack were tentatively identified by Dale Russell as Athapaskan Beaver Indians who could be reached from the parkland through the war trail to Lesser Slave Lake and the Upper Peace River.³³ Pink stated that the motive for the attack was revenge for the death of one of their companions but the Cree probably went to war for a more important reason. The supply of beaver, according to Pink, was becoming increasingly scarce, "Some Yeares a Gow heare was a great maney Beaver in this River [the

²⁹Ibid., 129. The view is not without its critics, the most vociferous of whom is John W. Ives, *A Theory of Northern Athapascan Prehistory* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990) 130-133.

³⁰Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 22.

³¹Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 163.

³²Ibid., 197.

³³Ibid.; Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans In the Years 1789 and 1793* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1971), 139-140.

Saskatchewan], But now Verry few being hunted so often."³⁴ Pink's observation of game depletion on the prairie was made two decades before Thompson's puzzled statement regarding the decline of game in the late 1780s. It was this increasing scarcity of fur resources on the plains that provided the motivation for the decades of often cutthroat competition between Canadian and English interests for furs, particularly in the country centred by Lake Athabasca.

Added to the worsening climate, inter-ethnic hostilities over control of the middlemen trade and the beginning of a game shortage on the prairies, the HBC trade was presented with a more tangible and immediate threat. Early attempts by Montreal based traders were foiled by Indian trouble during the Seven Years War.³⁵ In his journal, Alexander Henry wrote that Indian hostility was directed "exclusively against the English" in the Great Lakes.³⁶ Alexander Mackenzie's memoir traced the beginnings of the renewed trade from Michilimakinac "so late as the year 1766" when Montreal trader Thomas Curry succeeded in getting four canoes as far west as Fort Bourbon at the Mouth of the Saskatchewan River.³⁷ By the late 1760s, the Montreal based fur trade

³⁴Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, 63-64. The following year, the HBC sent Louis Primo to the "famous... Beaver River" on the warpath to the north as far as the Churchill to investigate the area's rich fur potential. He is acknowledged to be the first European to have visited the southern tributary of the Churchill. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 275.

³⁵Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 125. For a graphic depiction of the difficulty encountered by the early post conquest Montreal trade, see Alexander Henry, *Travels and Adventures In Canada and in the Indian Territory Between the Years 1760 and 1776*, 103.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 34.

³⁷Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans In the Years 1789 and 1793* viii. The historical introduction of Mackenzie's *Voyages* has been attributed to the

was reopened and traders poured into the interior.³⁸ The legal restriction on the trade imposed in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 was rescinded in 1768 but Montreal based traders set up shop along the Saskatchewan as far upstream as Nipawin at least a year before the regulations were lifted.³⁹ In 1767, Montreal traders operating in southern Manitoba syphoned off so much of the HBC trade that William Tomison was sent as far inland as the Manitoba escarpment to salvage the remainder of his business.⁴⁰ In addition to the economic threat posed by the renewed overland trade to the trade of the HBC, residents of the interior were again faced with a biological threat to their well-being.

In his detailed analysis of the epidemiology of the Northern Ontario fur trade, Paul Hackett observed that the period coinciding with the prohibition on the Montreal trade was marked by an anomalous absence of acute crowd infections.⁴¹ The scarcity of Canadian records from the period preclude the direct connection between the spread of pathogens to the interior and the arrival of the overland traders but Hackett showed that there was a temporal correlation between the two events.⁴² His position is

explorer's cousin, Roderick Mackenzie. The account of his journey's to the north and west may have been ghost-written by a popular author of the time, William Combe. For a discussion, see Roy Daniels, *Alexander Mackenzie and the North West* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 30.

³⁸Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 269-272.

³⁹Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 125.

⁴⁰Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 114. For a discussion of Tomison's travels, see Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 281-282.

⁴¹Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 179. The author described the effect of the access to the interior being denied as an "inadvertent quarantine," 162.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 165, 176-177.

supported by evidence from the northern trade. Colin Yerbury stated, "[e]pidemic or contagious diseases probably had not reached the Canadian Athapaskan populations before about 1767-69."⁴³ Though the specific disease vectors cannot be identified, the sickness endured by the Indians at Churchill in the late 1760s may well have originated with the Montreal traders.

By 1768, a combination of deteriorating climate, starvation, and disease posed a serious threat to Chipewyans trading at Churchill.⁴⁴ In October, the Chief known as the "Idosliazer", and twenty-five members of his band perished.⁴⁵ By January, another thirty Chipewyans were dead. Starving Indians travelled as far as two hundred miles to the Fort in search of food. In April, the Company was supporting almost a hundred Indians.⁴⁶ The hardship, which drove a group of Chipewyans to loot the provision house near the Fort, continued through the summer of 1769.⁴⁷ In October, forty Northern Indians arrived at Churchill to trade, "Tolerably well gooded, but some very Sickley."⁴⁸ Yerbury noted that the HBC, confronted with adversity, curtailed its plan to extend trade to the Dogrib and Yellowknife.⁴⁹ In an attempt to invigorate trade and to

⁴³Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 147; Shepard Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39 (1983), 126.

⁴⁴The outbreak was not confined to Churchill. At Severn, Andrew Graham noted the "Great Sickness" among some of the upland Indians to the south of the coast in the winter of 1768-69. Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 173.

⁴⁵Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 46.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

explore the potential of the distant interior, Samuel Hearne was charged with his journey across the barrens.⁵⁰ The combination of hunger and disease frustrated Hearne's first two attempts inland, in October 1769 and in February 1770.⁵¹

The record of Hearne's expedition to the barren grounds and the Arctic coast is indispensable to historians of the far northwest. With the exception of William Stewart's troubled journey inland before 1720, it provided the earliest first hand account of conditions of the interior north of the tree line. While Hearne was the first European to travel through much of this route, the effect of the middleman trade, dominated by the Chipewyan and the Cree, had already had a profound impact on the societies of the northern interior. The young Englishman recognized the burden of the fur trade on the Northern Indians. In his journal of March 1771, Hearne wrote:

But I must at the same time confess, that such conduct [the procurement of furs] is by no means for the real benefit of the poor Indians; it being well known that those who have the least intercourse with the Factories, are by far the happiest. As their aim is to procure a comfortable subsistence, they always take the most prudent methods to accomplish it; and by following the lead of the deer, are seldom exposed to the gripping hand of famine, so frequently felt by those who are called annual traders. ... the hardships and dangers which most of them experienced on those occasions, have left such a lasting impression on their minds, that nothing can induce them to repeat their visits.⁵²

Later in his journal, Hearne restated the precariousness livelihood of both the Chipewyan traders and of subsistence hunters. In describing the game resources available to the Chipewyan north of the sixtieth parallel, he noted that deer, fish,

⁵⁰The HBC had difficulty staging Hearne's expedition. The original choice for his guide, the Idosliazer, was dead, and his first two attempts to reach the interior were undermined by the ill-health of his Indian companions. Ibid., 46-47.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Samuel Hearne, *A Journey From Prince of Wales Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1971), 83; Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 131-132.

"Alpine" hares, musk-oxen and other species were "very numerous in many parts of the country" but that:

With all those seeming sources of plenty, however, one half on the inhabitants, and perhaps the other half also, are frequently in danger of being starved to death, owing partly to their want of oeconomy; and most of these scenes of distress happen during their journeys to and from Prince of Wales Fort, the only place at which they trade.⁵³

In addition to the threat of starvation, Hearne's Chipewyan guides were dogged by the effects of malnutrition. The author noted the presence of a "scorbutic disorder" (scurvy) among his companions while crossing the barrens.⁵⁴ While on the barrens, travellers had a limited margin of safety, they had to remain within reach of the caribou herds or starve. Hearne lamented the abandonment of a sick Chipewyan women who was unable to maintain the pace of both the caribou and her own people.⁵⁵ Clearly, an economic pattern on the tundra that did not adhere to the migration cycle of the caribou herds, as would have been required by middlemen traders, was a precarious one at best.

Despite the hardships of trade, the middlemen yielded unprecedented influence over their interior neighbours. At times, the relationship between middlemen and groups who actually procured furs could be best described as extortion.⁵⁶ In his journal, Hearne recounted the theft of furs belonging to the Copper Indians by Chipewyan

⁵³Hearne, *A Journey From Prince of Wales Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*, 331.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 336-337. To treat the ailment, the Chipewyan consumed the contents of caribou stomachs which contained partially digested lichen, a source of vitamin C.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 202.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 178.

leader Keelshies and "his execrable gang."⁵⁷ Several attempts to induce the Copper and "Dog-ribbed" Indians to come to trade at Churchill had, according to Hearne, been undermined by the Chipewyans who "always plundered them of the whole [presents for their countrymen] soon after they left the Fort."⁵⁸ Those Copper, or Yellowknife Indians, who travelled to the coast unscathed acted "in the capacity of servants to the Northern Indians."⁵⁹ To Hearne, the rational for Chipewyan aggression toward their fur producers was clear, "it is a political scheme of our Northern traders to prevent such an intercourse, as it would greatly lessen their consequence and emolument."⁶⁰ The Chipewyans were not unrivalled in their domination of the interior.

Their longstanding enemy, the Cree, controlled the boreal forest west of the barrens as far north as Great Slave or, as Hearne called it, Athapuscow Lake.⁶¹ The Cree matched their Chipewyan foes in their ruthlessness toward the interior groups in their area of influence. Colin Yerbury stated that the Cree had been expanding their territory from the Lower Churchill River northwest to the Peace and Mackenzie Rivers

⁵⁷Ibid., 181, 273. In the spring of 1772, Hearne's companions not only robbed a group of "strange Northern Indians" but "dragged several of their young women to a little distance from their tents, where they not only ravished them, but otherwise mistreated them, and that in so barbarous a manner, as to endanger the lives of one or two of them." 285-286.

⁵⁸Ibid., 179.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 180.

⁶¹Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 298. The author locates the "the limit of Cree depredations northward" as Anaw'd or Enemy Lake, to the north of Great Slave Lake. See also Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 55. For a discussion of the difficulty arising from Hearne's designation, see Beryl Gillespie, "Territorial Groups Before 1821: Athapaskans of the Shield and the Mackenzie Drainage," *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 6: Subarctic*, ed. June Helm (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 166.

since they first acquired firearms in the 1680s.⁶² Hearne recorded the murder by the Cree of almost an entire Dogrib band and the enslavement of the small group of young women whose lives they spared.⁶³ The Southern Indians controlled the majority of the interior beaver trade. The state of war with the Cree undermined Chipewyan access to beaver, "deer-skins, and such furs as they could extort from the Copper and Dogribbed Indians, composed the whole of their trade."⁶⁴ In her critique of the westward expansion thesis, Beryl Gillespie stressed the difference between raiding and outright invasion, stating that the aggressors did not necessarily want to take over land but rather to control the middleman trade.⁶⁵ Domination of the middleman trade could just as easily have been a rationale for the expansion of Cree and Chipewyan groups as the outright invasion of land. By the time David Thompson journeyed inland in the early 1790s, many groups subjugated by Cree middlemen had already adopted many of the customs of their former tormentors. At Finlay's House, the Chipewyan, especially men, had taken on numerous cultural traits "from their former enemies, the Kristeneaux."⁶⁶ Mackenzie also noted the adoption of Cree lifestyles by the Athapaskan speaking

⁶²Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 55. This interpretation is not without its critics. Beryl Gillespie stated that this version was an "overinterpretation." "Territorial Groups before 1821: Athapaskans of the Shield and the Mackenzie Drainage," 163. See also J.G.E. Smith, "The Western Woods Cree: Anthropological Myth and Historical Reality," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987): 434-448.

⁶³Hearne, *A Journey From Prince of Wales Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*, 265-267.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 177-178.

⁶⁵ Gillespie, "Territorial Groups Before 1821: Athapaskans of the Shield and the Mackenzie Drainage," 164.

⁶⁶Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans In the Years 1789 and 1793*, 126.

Beaver Indians.⁶⁷

Although the HBC's plan to gain direct access to fur producers was undermined by Cree and Chipewyan middleman traders, Hearne's journey served to invigorate the trade at Churchill. Over four hundred Northern Indians and 116 canoes of Cree travelled to the Bay the summer of 1772, supplying the Fort with its largest returns in over thirty years.⁶⁸ The augmented trade was short-lived, however. Incursions into the hinterland by Montreal traders posed a serious threat to the coastal trade.⁶⁹ As Hearne was returning from the barrens, Matthew Cocking was despatched to the plains to determine the extent of "French" penetration and to secure the loyalty of fur producing Indians in the interior.⁷⁰ He was also charged with investigating the possibility that middlemen were securing even greater profits from fur producers than the HBC itself had been able to secure.⁷¹

In addition to the valuable observations on the state of Canadian trade, inter-tribal alliances and hostilities, and the feast and famine nature of the food quest on the plains, Cocking's journal provided an insight into the spread of infectious diseases into the interior. Paul Hackett has shown that the 1770s were characterized by the spread of numerous acute respiratory disorders (ARDs), and that the increased incidence of illness was connected to the encroachment of Canadian traders overland or to the

⁶⁷Ibid., 145-146.

⁶⁸Over 20,000 MB were delivered that summer. Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 48-49.

⁶⁹Ibid., 55.

⁷⁰Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 284-287.

⁷¹Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 105.

introduction of diseases to the Bay by HBC ships.⁷² The *Seahorse* landed near York in late August 1771; "[t]hereafter, violent colds began to break out among the men and Indians, continuing until the following May."⁷³ Cocking's journey inland began on June 27, 1772. The following journal excerpts describe the spread inland of the contagion among his Cree entourage:

June 27, 1772...took departure from York Fort...The Indians were unwilling to proceed, being such bad weather; and two of them becoming sickly...
July 3... Several Indians overtook us, they have left a few sick people behind...
July 10...the sick people retarding our proceeding
July 11 This morning we discovered a poor Native seemingly at the point of death; his neighbours had left him behind, & we also did...
July 14 Two of our company very sickly, lying helpless in the canoes: One canoe overtook us, they inform'd us that four Indians are dead; One of them the leader: others obliged to be left on the road.
July 15 ...several Assinipoet Natives came up with us, who confirm the Accounts received yesterday.
July 16 ... several of my company sick.
July 17 Did not proceed: The disorders of the Natives are pains in the breast and Bowels, attended with a cough, & while spitting ill-coloured phlegm.
July 20 Indians in a sickly helpless state, which causes the labour to lie heavy on the few healthful people amongst us...
July 21 I am wearied with eating fish, scarcely anything else.
July 24 Busy killing sturgeon: We are now recovering our spirits. The Natives inform me we will soon be where food of many kinds are plenty.
July 25 In the evening Lewis Primo ⁷⁴ with 4 canoes came here: he informs me his leader died on the road.

⁷²Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 167.

⁷³Ibid., 168.

⁷⁴Also spelled Primow, Primot and Primeau.

July 27 & 28 Primow with his company proceeded but we did not: The sick recovering & food plenty.

August 12 The Natives rejoice that the journey from the Fort is ended; Indeed we have forty-five days in performing what they used to be only twenty days, other years, when healthful. ⁷⁵

Table 1. Extract of Matthew Cocking's Diary, 1722. Source: Matthew Cocking, "Matthew Cocking's Journal, 1772-1773," ed. J.L. Burpee *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Section 2*, (1908), 96-99, 100.

Cocking's journal also described the extent of Canadian incursions into the York trade. In early August, Cocking and his party met with "a York Fort Leader who had not been down this summer. He denied having traded with the pedlars; but the Canadian goods that were in their possession contradicted his Assertion."⁷⁶ Cocking was sceptical of what he considered to be the empty promises of the Indians to trade at the Fort rather than with the Canadians. He did, however, recognize the implications of his journey, "I find they consider an Englishmen's going with them as a person sent to collect Furs; & not as an encouragement to them to trap furs & come down to the settlements."⁷⁷ Even with favourable trading conditions, winter on the plains brought hardship for Cocking and his companions. Food was scarce. By February 1773, he recorded the deaths of a woman and an elderly man, in addition to "several horses for want of food; which they say is the case at this season of the year."⁷⁸

⁷⁵Matthew Cocking, "Matthew Cocking's Journal, 1772-1773," ed. J.L. Burpee *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Section 2*, (1908), 96-99, 100. Entries from late September indicate that the Indians were again "sickly" though the outbreak is not linked to the earlier influenza, 106-107.

⁷⁶Ibid., 100.

⁷⁷Ibid., 103.

⁷⁸Ibid., 114.

While Cocking was conducting his reconnaissance, Canadians were striking further into the interior. Finlay's Fort located at "Nipawi", was staffed by at least twenty French Canadians who were providing "adulterated" rum to fur producers as incentives to trade.⁷⁹ The pedlar, François, called off his trade with the natives because, according to Cocking, "He hath no goods left..."⁸⁰ Even Cocking's HBC colleague, Louis Primo, was lured to the side of the Canadians prior to his return to the Bay.⁸¹

Primo's defection was a sign of the pedlar's ever increasing dominance in the interior. The summer of 1773 was marked, according to A.S. Morton, by a "great invasion of Pedlars."⁸² The HBC trade to York was checked by a Canadian post at Playgreen Lake, near the site of what became Norway House.⁸³ The winter of 1773-1774, Thomas Frobisher and the newly engaged privateer, Primo, opened a post on Namew Lake, a strategic location between the Saskatchewan and Churchill Rivers, which served to essentially cut off the Athabasca middlemen from the coast.⁸⁴ Their meeting with the Northern Indians at Portage du Traite, as it became known, provided Frobisher with "as many furs as his canoes could carry."⁸⁵ The presence of Montreal traders, in addition to an increasing number of HBC men inland, may have served to

⁷⁹Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 286.

⁸⁰Cocking, "Matthew Cocking's Journal, 1772-1773," 118.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 119.

⁸²Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 287.

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴Harry Duckworth, ed., *The English River Book: A Northwest Company Journal and Account Book of 1786* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1990), xiii-xiv.

⁸⁵Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 290.

spread disease to the interior. In his study, Paul Hackett noted the "suspicious mortality" among the Indians in the York Factory hinterland during the winter of 1773-74, although he was unable to locate the identities of those who were infected.⁸⁶ The absence of direct evidence for the spread of diseases to the Indians from Canadians probably has more to do with the lack of records than any other factor.

To address the economic threat posed by the Canadians, and to preserve their charter⁸⁷, the HBC again ordered Samuel Hearne inland, this time to establish their own trading centre in the York hinterland.⁸⁸ The establishment of Cumberland House marked a shift in HBC-Cree relations. By physically moving the location of the trade with producers to the interior, the HBC was effectively cutting out their Cree middlemen. The Cree rightly interpreted the move as a direct threat to their dominant position in the transportation of goods to and from the coast. Before the end of their first decade inland, many HBC servants were procuring their furs from trapping rather than by barter.⁸⁹ The Cree did not acquiesce at the prospect of their diminished role in the fur trade. In their opposition to the construction of the post, they withheld their expertise

⁸⁶Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 174. It is possible that the mortality was caused by the same pathogen that dogged Cocking and his guides the previous winter. Cocking's Journal entry for April 5, 1773 noted that many of the Indians east of the Birch Hills were "sickly." Cocking, "Matthew Cocking's Journal, 1772-1773," 117.

⁸⁷Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 301.

⁸⁸For a discussion of the aboriginal importance of the area surrounding the location chosen for Cumberland House. See, David Meyer and Paul Thistle, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity in a Cree Social Geography," *Ethnohistory* 42 (1995), 403-444.

⁸⁹E.E. Rich, ed., "Cumberland House Journal," *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals, 1775-82. First Series* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1951), 217.

and labour, set prairie fires, and generally harassed their former partners.⁹⁰ Matthew Cocking and Isaac Batt, sent with goods to supply Hearne's new post, were forced by their guides to winter at Manito (also called Devil's or Spirit) Lake in the Upper Assiniboine country.⁹¹ Again, Cocking's companion was induced to join the competition over the winter.⁹² While wintering with his Cree "hosts" Cocking mentioned that among them were a number of Pegogamaw from the area between the branches of the Saskatchewan and at least one Beaver Cree from the area of the Alberta-Saskatchewan border who were in the eastern parklands to avoid an unspecified epidemic.⁹³ In the spring, Cocking retreated to York and later made his way to his intended posting at Cumberland.

While the Canadians dominated the initial period of competition, all of the Europeans in the interior struggled merely to survive. The winter of 1774-75 was a difficult one at Cumberland House. Hunger was only alleviated by the arrival of a group

⁹⁰RLRC, *An Historical Overview of Aboriginal Lifestyles: The Churchill-Nelson River Drainage Basin*, 99-101.

⁹¹Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 304; Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 116.

⁹²Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 304.

⁹³Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 116. The territory of the Beaver Cree was the Beaver River, a southern tributary of the Upper Churchill River and flows within 60 Km of the North Saskatchewan. Their territory extended to Edmonton and possibly as far west as the mountains, 138. This epidemic may have been the influenza described by Cocking among the Blackfoot two years earlier. It was not uncommon to find ethnically diverse encampments on the plains, for a consideration on the overemphasis of specific tribal identities, see Susan Sharrock, "Crees, Cree-Assiniboines, and Assiniboines: Interethnic Social Organization on the Far Northern Plains," *Ethnohistory* 21 (1974): 95-122.

of Indians on February 10th with a large supply of moose meat.⁹⁴ The Canadians wintering to the north at Frog Portage on the Churchill were not so fortunate. According to Harry Duckworth, one or possibly two Canadians died of starvation that winter. Another was shot for cannibalism.⁹⁵ Five others were sent to more dependably stocked posts on the plains. The following summer, the Canadians moved their post south to Amisk Lake, where food supplies were more secure.⁹⁶ On their way to the new site, Canadian traders were forced to pay for safe passage through Cree territory on the Lower Saskatchewan. Alexander Henry and the Frobisher brothers were forced to hand over guns, ammunition, tobacco and liquor to Chatique, the chief of the Basquia Cree.⁹⁷ After passing through the Basquia gauntlet, the Canadians received even more troubling news. At Cumberland, Matthew Cocking informed them that six of their men had been killed "below the Sea [Winnipeg] Lake" by Natives, and that at least one other had drowned.⁹⁸

Most of the difficulty experienced by English and Canadian traders at this time was predominantly in the muskrat country in the parkland-boreal forest transition zone

⁹⁴Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 309. Even in summer, food could be scarce. In 1777, HBC employees at Gloucester House, inland from Fort Albany, were reduced to eating bark when the Indians hired to hunt for them were unsuccessful. Edith Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1997), 163.

⁹⁵Duckworth, ed., *The English River Book: A Northwest Company Account Book of 1786*, xiv.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷Henry, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories between the Years 1760 and 1776*, 259-261. See also Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 312.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

along the border between the present provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan.⁹⁹ The trouble in this region was the result of a number of factors including, the high number of Europeans in the area, the aboriginal response to the threat to the middleman trade and even the beginnings of game depletion. Further west, in the territory bordering on the beaver rich country of the Athabasca, the Canadians were making progress in their quest for furs.¹⁰⁰ Ile-à-la-Crosse, on the Upper Churchill River, was established by Thomas Frobisher in 1776. The post was blessed with not only a strategic economic location, far above the HBC post at Cumberland, but also provided the traders with a reliable fish supply.¹⁰¹ The survival of the community for over two centuries stands as a testament to the quality of its location.

As Canadians penetrated the northern interior, they worked to consolidate their control of the northern plains. In January 1776, Alexander Henry, travelled to the Fort of the Prairies, just below the forks of the Saskatchewan, and then to encampments of as many as two hundred tents of Assiniboines on the Manitoba escarpment.¹⁰² Henry's description of the Assiniboine economy foreshadowed the dominant economic strategy on the plains for the next century. He noted that the "Osinipoilles" were not reliant in the trade of pelts. Rather, they provided the traders with bison meat required

⁹⁹Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 120.

¹⁰⁰Russell noted that the muskrat country posts tended to be operated for a shorter period of time than those in the beaver lands to the west. Also, he attributed internal rivalries within the HBC as the main cause of the company's failure to penetrate the Athabasca until the 1790s. *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁰¹Duckworth, ed., *The English River Book: A Northwest Company Account Book of 1786*, xiv-xv; Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 119.

¹⁰²Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 315. The location of the Assiniboine was probably along the Carrot River, which flows into Lake Dauphin, 281.

for forays further into the northern bush, "[t]he wild ox alone supplies them with everything which they are accustomed to want."¹⁰³ Henry contrasted the Assiniboiné economy with a group of Cree fur traders they encountered from the Beaver River to the northwest, "With them, the principal purchases are of necessities."¹⁰⁴ The Assiniboiné emphasis on the bison economy may have been the result of a decline in limited fur resources on the plains by the mid 1760s. As junior partners to the Cree in the middleman trade,¹⁰⁵ the Assiniboiné may have pulled back from the bay trade as a result of increased tension with the arrival of Canadian traders. Whatever the reason, Dale Russell has shown that the Assiniboiné ceased coming to the Bay by the 1770s.¹⁰⁶

Troubled though it was, the early success of Canadian traders in the west led to the saturation of the southern market as, "the number of traders on the Saskatchewan had increased to the point that the amount of goods available to buy furs far outweighed the supply."¹⁰⁷ Trade goods were not the only things spread by Europeans in the 1770s. Records from the summer of 1777 at Cumberland House indicate that at least three of the servants there, Robert Davey, Magnus Sclate and John Draver, were

¹⁰³Henry, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories between the Years 1760 and 1776*, 317. Russell stated that the adoption of the practice of buffalo pounding by the Assiniboiné and the Cree was in response to the increased demand for meat by the traders on the plains. *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 117.

¹⁰⁴These Cree were the Beaver Cree, described by William Pink in 1767. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 186. The disappearance of eleven canoes of Assiniboiné traders in 1763, possibly due to starvation, is evidence of the difficulty of the journey, 183.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 125; Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 133.

¹⁰⁷Duckworth, ed., *The English River Book: A Northwest Company Account Book of 1786*, xv.

all suffering from venereal disease.¹⁰⁸ Draver was sent to York because he was deemed unfit for his duties and “[had] been so for some time.”¹⁰⁹ The record remains mute on the impact of the disease among their aboriginal sexual partners. Canadian traders were at least as likely to spread sexually transmitted diseases to the aboriginal population as their English competitors. Though no Canadian records exist on the issue, one of the master traders at Beaver Lake, Captain Tuite, was reported in the *Cumberland Journal* as “being bad with the Veneral disorder” and was provided with medicine by the HBC in recognition for the assistance provided the company the previous year.¹¹⁰

The glut in the prairie fur market led a number of Canadian privateers to pool their stock into a common concern in an attempt to reach the fabled Athabasca country.¹¹¹ Peter Pond was the man charged with the success of the mission. Though he was later implicated in the murder of at least two of his associates, Pond’s tenacity was probably challenged in the completion of his mission. In May, 1778, he passed Cumberland House on his way up the Churchill River. A year later, he returned, almost starved and with half of his canoes destroyed, but with news the Athabasca country was extremely rich in furs. Having traded 140 packets of furs, Pond was forced to cache most of them because he could not transport such an enormous quantity with

¹⁰⁸Rich, ed., *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals. First Series*, 143-144, 176, 196-197.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 217.

¹¹¹Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans In the Years 1789 and 1793*, xii-xiii.

only three boats.¹¹²

Pond's success had enormous implications for the history of the northwest. His crossing of the twenty kilometre stretch overland from Lac La Loche at the source of the Churchill, over the height of land to the Clearwater River in the Mackenzie watershed was more than a herculean physical accomplishment. Crossing over the portage opened the entire Mackenzie Basin to the European traders. The Mackenzie watershed was outside the land set aside in the HBC Charter and was legally open for exploitation by anyone with the ability to successfully trade there. The arrival of Europeans in the Athabasca also quickly undermined the Chipewyan middleman trade.¹¹³ The traversing of Methy Portage did more than bring the residents of the Mackenzie basin into the economic sphere of the Canadians. The bridging of the gap between the two watersheds broke down an important barrier to disease. Just as the opening of the Grande Portage by the French had fifty years earlier, the path between the Mackenzie and Hudson's Bay watersheds soon served as a conduit for the spread of epidemic disease.¹¹⁴ The smallpox pandemic of 1779-82 cut a swath from the Valley of Mexico to the Canadian barren lands, using trade networks as a vehicle of infection, often with catastrophic results.

While the biological significance of the spanning of the Portage would be felt

¹¹²Duckworth, ed., *The English River Book: A Northwest Company Account Book of 1786*, xv.

¹¹³W.A. Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca Country and the Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1816," *Canadian Historical Review* (hereafter *CHR*) 60 (1979), 281.

¹¹⁴While no record of the pathogen specifically travelling through the portage exists, the intensification of the trade resulting from the opening of Methy portage dramatically increased the area affected by the outbreak.

within a very few years, traders with aspirations of extracting furs from the far north were faced with an immediate problem. Arthur Ray wrote that while the Athabasca was the richest fur territory in the western part of the continent, the exploitation of the region required a change in the "whole ecological situation of the trade."¹¹⁵ Food resources from the forest were no longer sufficient to supply traders along the increasingly long trade networks. To meet the demand, both the HBC and the Canadians were forced to establish food supply lines from the plains to the northern forest.¹¹⁶ The primary resource for this trade was bison meat.¹¹⁷ The pemmican trade soon became the dominant economy on the plains until the arrival of agricultural settlers from the east, almost a century later. The change in economic orientation from the middleman trade in furs to the supply of food led, in the waning years of the 18th century, to the emergence of a distinct cultural manifestation, the Plains Cree.¹¹⁸ The establishment of Hudson House as a provisioning post for the HBC northern trade in 1779 provided the Assiniboine of the Lower North Saskatchewan River with a renewed influence over the Europeans who had usurped their century-old middleman trade.¹¹⁹

As the bison trade began in earnest, the harsh treatment of producers by the Canadians often led to retribution and bloodshed as aboriginal producers recognized the strength of their role in the burgeoning new economy. J.G. MacGregor

¹¹⁵Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 126.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 126.

¹¹⁸Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 29.

¹¹⁹Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 133. See also Arthur Ray, "The Great Northern Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade, 1774-1885," *Prairie Forum* 9 (1984), 265.

characterised the aboriginal inhabitants of the North Saskatchewan plains in the late 1770s as both "turbulent" and "truculent."¹²⁰ During the winter of 1776, four pedlars were killed on the Assiniboine River.¹²¹ Later that year, the supplies of pedlars on the Swan River were plundered.¹²² The following year, three Canadians were killed at Sturgeon River Fort on the North Saskatchewan.¹²³ In 1779, the poisoning of an intoxicated and troublesome Atsina (Gros Ventre) by the traders at Cole's Post in the Eagle Hills led to the killing of several Canadians.¹²⁴ Even the more diplomatic employees of the HBC were not immune to the turmoil. In the winter of 1781, Robert Longmoor at Hudson House was attacked. Although the trader defused the situation, the prairie around the Post was later set ablaze.¹²⁵ The summer of 1781 was also marked by an increase in inter-ethnic hostilities among Indian groups. An allied force of Cree, Assiniboine, Peigan, Blood and Atsina warriors struck their common enemy, the

¹²⁰J.G. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 8.

¹²¹Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 324.

¹²²*Ibid.*

¹²³MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 8. Sturgeon River Post was burned by hostile Indians in the summer of 1780. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 331.

¹²⁴Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans In the Years 1789 and 1793*, xiii-xiv. In his introduction to the HBC records of the Saskatchewan, E.E. Rich stated that the attack on the post took place in 1779 rather than 1780 and that only two Canadian pedlars were killed in retaliation for the poisoning and the "avariciously exorbitant prices" charged by the Canadians. "Introduction," in *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals. First Series*, xlvii.

¹²⁵Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 331-332. Arthur Ray noted that burning the prairie to disperse bison herds to maintain Indian supremacy in the bison trade was common in the parklands. "The Great Northern Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade, 1774-1885," 265.

Shoshone, at the Red Deer River. It was from an attack on the Shoshone that smallpox was passed to the Indians of the western Canadian Plains.¹²⁶

Several studies have considered the diffusion of the disease from its initial outbreak in Mexico City in 1779.¹²⁷ One aspect of the spread of the disease northward across the American plains is that the disease was spread through the indigenous horse trade network exclusively through inter tribal contact.¹²⁸ Paul Hackett noted that with the spread of the pathogen from the equestrian economic system of the Mississippi watershed to the canoe dependent fur trade economy in the north, the velocity of the epidemic was reduced as it moved northward.¹²⁹ The disease spread outward from the point of the initial infection on the Red Deer River. Matthew Cocking,

¹²⁶There has been considerable confusion over David Thompson's rendering of Saukamappe's account of the spread of the disease within the context of Peigan-Shoshone warfare. Scholars who have relied on the early editions of the Thompson narrative have been misled by the comment by his original editor, J.B. Tyrrell. He overlooked the spread of the disease in the 1730s when Thompson's collaborator was a young man. Victor Hopwood's edition of the narrative rectifies this issue.

¹²⁷For an analysis of the outbreak using the principles of epidemiology, see Jody Decker, "Tracing Historical Diffusion Patterns: The Case of the 1780-82 Smallpox Epidemic among the Indians of Western Canada," *Native Studies Review* 4 (1988): 1-24. Paul Hackett provided an expanded view of the outbreak with an emphasis on its effect on the Petit Nord in his dissertation, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 181-242.

¹²⁸John F. Taylor, "Sociocultural Effects of Epidemics on the Northern Plains: 1734-1850," *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 7 (1977), 59. The absence of Europeans on the upper Missouri also explains the absence of contemporary accounts of the outbreak. Michael Trimble, "Chronology of Epidemics among Plains Village Horticulturalist: 1738-1838," *Southwestern Lore* 54 (1988), 7. Linea Sundstrom argued that winter counts from the Missouri provide evidence for the spread of the epidemic. Linea Sundstrom, "Smallpox Used Them Up: References to Epidemic Disease in the Northern Plains Winter Counts, 1714-1920," *Ethnohistory* 44 (1995), 309.

¹²⁹Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 193. The author noted that the disease spread along Indian lines from Santa Fe to the Upper Missouri "in the space of, at most, a few months" while the disease lingered in the northern forest for as long as two years or more.

then the master of York, reported that among the various tribes, "... almost all of them died on their return, what few reached their own Country communicated the disorder to their Friends and it spread through the whole country..."¹³⁰ Among the Blackfoot, the first group to be infected with the disease on the Canadian prairies, mortality was estimated to be between thirty and fifty percent.¹³¹ While the Blackfoot must have suffered horribly from the disease, their enemies fared even worse. According to Saukamappe, the Snakes were reduced to the point that Blackfoot territory expanded southward from the limit of the Bow River to the Missouri.¹³² Although hostilities resumed between the Shoshone and the Blackfoot in later years, the differential impact of the disease gave the northern nation the upper hand.

The first Europeans to encounter the effects of the disease were a small group of HBC servants who had been sent upriver to the Eagle Hills from Hudson House. Mitchell Oman witnessed the carnage:

[To] our surprise they had the marks of the small pox; were weak and just recovering, and I could not help saying, thank heaven we shall now get relief [from hostile Indians]. For none of us had the slightest idea of the desolation of this dreadful disease had done until we went up the bank to camp and looked into the tents, in many of which they were all dead, and the stench was horrid ... From what we could learn three-fifths had died under the disease ... They informed us that as far as they knew all the Indians were in the same dreadful state, as themselves ... the Indians of the forest had beaver robes in their tents some of which they spread over the dead bodies, which we might take and replace them by a new blanket and that by going to the tents we would render a service to those that were living by furnishing them with tobacco, ammunition.

¹³⁰Ibid., 192-193.

¹³¹Colin Calloway, "Snake Frontier: Western Shoshones in the Eighteenth Century," *Annals of Wyoming* 63 (1991), 88. Jody Decker stated that Blackfoot mortality was at least fifty percent and that their population continued to wane for thirty years after the epidemic. Jody Decker, "Depopulation of the Northern Plains Natives," *Social Science and Medicine* 33 (1991), 388.

¹³²David Thompson, *Travels in North America, 1784-1812*, 191.

And a few other necessities and thus the former part of the winter was employed. The bodies lately dead, and not destroyed by the Wolves and Dogs, for both devoured them, we laid logs over them to prevent these animals.¹³³

The scene probably described the situation among the Assiniboine. By December, William Walker at Hudson House wrote to Tomison at Cumberland, "as for the Stone Indians they are very few, if any left alive... the Indians lying dead about the Barren Ground like rotten sheep, their tents left standing and the Wild Beasts devouring them."¹³⁴ Those who were not infected fled from contact with the traders. The dispersal of a group of Assiniboines from the Touchwood Hills, to the south of Hudson House, led to the misconception that "the whole gang was dead."¹³⁵ Although William Walker overstated the destruction wrought by the disease, the epidemic marked a turning point in the history of that nation. Though the numbers are debated, their population fell from between an estimated eighteen to twenty-eight thousand to a mere seven thousand in the half century after the disaster.¹³⁶ Dale Russell noted with puzzlement that the Assiniboine, "the most numerous group on the northeastern plains

¹³³Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 332.

¹³⁴Walker to Tomison, Dec. 4, 1781, *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1775-1782. Second Series*, 270.

¹³⁵Jody Decker, "We Should Never Be Again the Same People" *The Diffusion and Cumulative Impact of Acute Infectious Diseases Affecting the Natives on the Northern plains of the Western Interior of Canada, 1774-1839* (Toronto Ph. D. diss. York University, 1989), 75.

¹³⁶Dan Kennedy, *Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief: Dan Kennedy*, 16-18. That estimate of population loss is probably high. Jody Decker stated that after the epidemic the Assiniboine population stagnated until after the turn of the 19th century. "Depopulation of the Northern Plains Natives," 385. Using estimates from the two Alexander Henry's, Arthur Ray concluded that the population actually quadrupled between 1776 and 1809. *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 106. The wide divergence in population estimates in this case is probably evidence for the poor quality of early estimates rather than questionable contemporary scholarship.

and parklands in the eighteenth century" are largely absent from discussions after the 1780s.¹³⁷ Their disappearance was probably more than a simple demographic collapse in the wake of the disease and the starvation that inevitably followed, the surviving Assiniboine may have fused with other remnant populations, particularly the Cree.¹³⁸

The Assiniboine would never recover their political and demographic position on the Canadian plains. Their rivals, the Atsina or Gros Ventres suffered a similar fate. Prior to the epidemic, they occupied the area from the South Saskatchewan River to the Missouri and traded as far west as the Eagle Hills and Edmonton.¹³⁹ Almost half of the population died during the outbreak.¹⁴⁰ When a more localized outbreak of smallpox hit the already reduced Gros Ventres in 1800, the surviving population retreated across the Cypress Hills to the United States where they remain.¹⁴¹

To the north, the fury of the epidemic was such that the lower Saskatchewan valley was largely depopulated. The disease reached Cumberland House region in

¹³⁷Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*, 172.

¹³⁸There is a debate about the origins of the "Plains Cree," a group who emerged to dominate most of the Canadian prairie in the 19th century. John Milloy noted that the group emerged in the aftermath of the smallpox outbreak, filling the spacial vacuum caused by the disease and successfully adapting to an equestrian based bison economy. *The Plains Cree*, 29-30. Dale Russell opposed the concept of "plains" Cree altogether, stressing that they had been prehistoric occupants of the parklands and were culturally equipped to exploit the plains without a new geographic designation. *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 218.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁴⁰Decker, "Depopulation of the Northern Plains Natives," 388.

¹⁴¹By the turn of the 19th century, Atsina antagonism to the expanding fur trade made them enemies with practically all other plains groups as well as European traders. J MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 58. A more sympathetic version of Atsina history can be found in Schilz, "The Gros Ventres and the Canadian Fur Trade," 41-56.

December, 1781.¹⁴² The Basquia Cree, who extorted tribute from Canadians such as Alexander Henry, ceased to exist as a distinct cultural entity. The magnitude of their depopulation was such that William Tomison wrote that they were all dead.¹⁴³ The virtual extinction of the Basquia opened the Lower Saskatchewan to immigrant groups closely attached to the fur trade, the Muskego Cree from the East and the Ojibwa from the south east.¹⁴⁴ The Ojibwa also occupied large portions of the escarpment-parklands along the Upper Assiniboine, filling the vacuum created by the retraction of the Assiniboine who had controlled the area prior to the epidemic. The Pegogamaw Cree were hit in their territory between the branches of the Saskatchewan. They suffered horribly from the outbreak leading William Tomison to report that among the Pegogomaw and Assinipoet of the Saskatchewan River that "not one in fifty have survived."¹⁴⁵ Dale Russell noted that they too disappeared from the historic record after 1782.¹⁴⁶

As the contagion spread to the eastern edge of the plains. The precise path of the epidemic in the east remains unclear though a number of explanations have been

¹⁴²Jody Decker proposed that the infection came overland from the south. "Tracing Historical Diffusion Patterns: The Case of the 1780-82 Smallpox Epidemic among the Indians of Western Canada," 15-18.

¹⁴³See Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations on the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, 62-63. See also David Meyer and Paul Thistle, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity in a Cree Social Geography," 421.

¹⁴⁴Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations on the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, 65, 69.

¹⁴⁵*Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1779-1782. Second Series*, 298.

¹⁴⁶Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 144.

forwarded. One theory posits the source of the outbreak to the attack of a force of Cree, Assiniboiné and Ojibwa on a village of Gros Ventres on the Missouri River.¹⁴⁷ David Thompson believed that the source of the outbreak among the Ojibways was from the Sioux who had attacked some infected Europeans.¹⁴⁸ The notion that the disease was brought by the Canadian pedlars seems to have been widely held by contemporary writers. In June 1782, while the disease still raged, Matthew Cocking stated he was told that Canadians had spread the disease among the Indians to the south of Lake Winnipeg, which had precipitated a battle between the Canadians and the Indians near Red River the previous autumn.¹⁴⁹

Cocking was describing the attack on Fort des Trembles, a Canadian post under construction not far from the present location of Portage la Prairie. The incident involved the attack on the Canadian post, occupied by twenty three men, by over one hundred Assiniboiné and the Cree and Ojibwa from the area of the Forks, called "Les Sauvages du bas de la rivière."¹⁵⁰ The battle resulted in the deaths of three Canadians and another thirty of their attackers.¹⁵¹ The Canadians retreated to a more secure location near the Forks. A.S. Morton attributed the violence to the mistreatment of the

¹⁴⁷Trimble, "Chronology of Epidemics among Plains Village Horticulturalists," 7.

¹⁴⁸David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812*, ed. Richard Glover (Toronto: The Champlain Society 1962), 236.

¹⁴⁹Decker, "We Should Never Again be the Same People," 60.

¹⁵⁰L.R. Masson, "Introduction," in *Les Bourgeois de la compagnie du nord-ouest. Volume 1* (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), 17. In his account of the destruction of the Fort, A.S. Morton stated that another Canadian outpost on the Assiniboiné was attacked at roughly the same time, but that no record of the event survived. *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 329.

¹⁵¹Masson, *Les Bourgeois de la compagnie du nord-ouest. Volume 1*, 18.

Indians by the leader of the pedlars at the post, Mr. Bruce.¹⁵² The attack may also have been in retaliation for the infection of the Indians on the Lower Assiniboine River by the Canadians. The Fort was infected. Bruce and his assistant, Mr. Tute, were among the few Europeans who succumbed to the disease.¹⁵³ The disease may have been spread to the Red River by the retreating Canadians. Paul Hackett suggested that the virus was spread to the Red River by the Indians themselves, after an attack on the Gros Ventres by the Cree, Assiniboine and Ojibwa occupants of the Red River.¹⁵⁴ Whether the disease was brought to the Forks by Europeans or by Indians is less significant than the impact of the infection on the population of Red River. A large settlement at Netley Creek, north of the Forks, was almost entirely depopulated; leading to its renaming, the "Death River."¹⁵⁵ The mortality was so high among the residents of the Red River region, that the Ojibwa were invited by the survivors of the epidemic to fill the demographic void left by the plague.¹⁵⁶ Hackett quoted the journal

¹⁵²Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 329.

¹⁵³Mr. Tute was no doubt the Mr. Tuite who received medication from the HBC at Cumberland for venereal disease. *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals*, 1777-1782, 217.

¹⁵⁴His interpretation is borrowed from Warren's *History of the Ojibway*. Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 203-211.

¹⁵⁵The origin of the Dead River is the subject of numerous historical considerations. Both Hackett and Laura Peers use the Warren history of the Ojibwa as their source of the designation. See Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 206-211 and Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 19. A similar treatment of the story is presented by Chief Albert Edward Thompson, *Chief Peguis and His Descendants* (Winnipeg: Peguis Publishers, 1973), 2-3. An alternative explanation, that of the killing of a large group of Cree, elders, women and children, temporarily abandoned by their relatives to trade at the Bay is proposed by Dale Russell. *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 177.

¹⁵⁶Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 18-21.

of Alexander Henry the younger on the condition of the site almost a generation later.

While camping there, Henry and his companions were:

[T]roubled by swarms of water-snakes, which even come into our tents at midday... They appear to lurk and breed in the old graves, of which there are many, this spot having been a place of great resort for the natives in 1781-82; and at the time the smallpox made such havoc many hundreds of men, women, and children were buried there.¹⁵⁷

From Red River, the disease spread along Canadian and British trade routes eastward. Hackett has compiled an exhaustive account of the spread of the disease in northern Ontario.¹⁵⁸ Along the Canadian controlled Rainy River corridor, the extent of depopulation was such that it was remarked upon more than a decade later.¹⁵⁹ The disease hit York Factory in July 1782, brought by a group of Bungee hunters from the south.¹⁶⁰ After some initial success with a quarantine, Matthew Cocking's efforts to control the spread of the disease along the coast was scuttled by the occupation and destruction York and Churchill by French under the command of La Perouse.¹⁶¹ The disease raged in northern Ontario for another year before halting its advance at Fort

¹⁵⁷Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 208.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 216-235.

¹⁵⁹By the time of Mackenzie's memoir, the area between Lake of the Woods and Lake Superior had not only been denuded of humans but also of game. Roderick Mackenzie, "Introduction," in Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans In the Years 1789 and 1793*, lvii. The spread of the disease along the Canadian transportation routes is considered by Hackett, *A Very Remarkable Sickness*, 211-216.

¹⁶⁰Cocking noted that almost everyone of the Bungee afflicted with the disease died from it. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 19, fn.66.

¹⁶¹Hackett, 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 195-196.

Severn in the spring of 1783.¹⁶²

The disease spread its wrath beyond the plains to the boreal forest in the east and spread infection to the Churchill basin. At the headwaters of the Churchill, the Beaver Cree on the River of the same name were hit by the disease but their relative isolation probably saved them from cultural extinction. When the group did meet the traders, they conducted their business without delay.¹⁶³ Dale Russell noted that the Beaver Cree, who occupied the area from the North Saskatchewan to the Churchill were the only group who survived the outbreak in the region.¹⁶⁴ While the Beaver Cree survived the epidemic in much greater numbers than their neighbours, they were not immune to the territorial expansion of immigrant groups closely tied to the fur trade. When Peter Fidler travelled up the Beaver River on his way to Lac La Biche in the late 1790s, the country was largely occupied by Bungee or Ojibwa trappers.¹⁶⁵

The Athapuscow Cree, who controlled the middleman trade on the upper portion of the Churchill River north to Lake Athabasca, may have been literally decimated by the outbreak. Cree mortality resulting from the epidemic was considered the primary cause for the end of aggression into the Athabaskan speaking Beaver country around Lesser Slave Lake.¹⁶⁶ By the end of the decade, Alexander Mackenzie listed only forty

¹⁶²To the south the disease did not spread east of the Lakehead, *Ibid.*, 197, 216.

¹⁶³William Walker, Hudson House Journal, April 9, 1782, *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals. Second Series*, 285.

¹⁶⁴Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 150-151.

¹⁶⁵MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 111-117.

¹⁶⁶G. Nicks, "Native Responses to the Early Fur Trade at Lesser Slave Lake," in *Le castor fait tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. B. Trigger, Toby Morantz, and Louise Dechene (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical

Cree families on the lower Beaver, the upper Churchill, and the lower Athabasca Rivers.¹⁶⁷ The Cree in the area were so severely weakened by the disease that the very designation "Athabasca Indian" shifted from the Cree to their former subordinates, the Chipewyan speaking Beaver Indians.¹⁶⁸

The epidemic was devastating to the Cree of the Athabasca, forcing their retreat from the country. The outbreak may have been even more damaging to the neighbouring Chipewyan traders. In 1795, Samuel Hearne wrote:

[T]he Northern Indians, by annually visiting their Southern friends, the Athapuscow Indians, have contracted the smallpox, which has carried off nine-tenths of them, and particularly those people who composed the trade at Churchill Factory. The few survivors follow the example of their Southern neighbours, and all trade with the Canadians, who are settled in the Athapuscow country.¹⁶⁹

William Sloan noted that the disease finished what the arrival of Europeans into the Mackenzie watershed had begun, the end of the Chipewyan middleman trade at Churchill.¹⁷⁰ Hearne lamented the loss of the trade from the Chipewyan and

Society, 1987), 285-286. In 1782, the North West Company persuaded the Cree and the Athapaskan speaking Beavers to a treaty which made the Peace River their boundary. The epidemic and the incursions by other Cree groups diminished the treaty's effect. Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 288.

¹⁶⁷Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 167.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁶⁹Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 147-148. The figure of nine-tenths mortality is considered to have been an exaggeration by some as the group expanded its territory after the epidemic. James G.E. Smith, "Local Band Organization of the Caribou Eater Chipewyan in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 6 (1976), 77.

¹⁷⁰Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 282.

Athapuscow Cree, as theirs "for more than ten years past, [provided] at least 7/8 of the whole trade."¹⁷¹ In addition to the havoc caused by the smallpox, the fur trade at the Bay was undermined by the temporary occupation of the HBC forts by the French military. Trade relations were not re-established between the HBC and the Chipewyan from Athabasca until at least 1787, though incursions into the country by Canadians made the trade tenuous at best.¹⁷²

As was the case on the prairie, the disease spread most thoroughly among populations with the most contact with the traders.¹⁷³ Many of the fur procuring groups, particularly in the newly opened country in the Mackenzie watershed in the far northwest appear to have been spared the full force of the virus. Beryl Gillespie noted that the northern Dene groups tried to avoid the middleman Cree and Chipewyan because of their pillaging even before the epidemic so that news of the contagion would have acted to deter contact even further.¹⁷⁴ On his journey up the river that bears his name in 1789, Alexander Mackenzie did not record any evidence among the Athapaskan groups that he encountered, namely the Yellowknife, Dogrib and Slavey, though he recognised the devastation resulting from the disease across the northwest

¹⁷¹Ibid., 282, fn.3.

¹⁷²Ibid., 283.

¹⁷³Beryl C. Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives: A Northern Athapaskan Tribe," in *Contributions to Anthropology*, 1975, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper 31, ed. David Brez Carlisle (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1975), 208.

¹⁷⁴The avoidance of the epidemic led to the temporary ascendancy of the Yellowknives over their former dominators in the trade, the Cree and Chipewyan. Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives: A Northern Athapaskan Tribe," 208.

as far away as Lake Superior.¹⁷⁵ The arrival of Canadians en masse into the Mackenzie in the decades after the epidemic would end the isolation and relative stability of the Athapaskans of the far northwest.

Further east on the Churchill River, the disease spread north to the Chipewyan from Peter Pond's post at Lac La Ronge.¹⁷⁶ The Missinipi Cree, who probably infected the Chipewyan at La Ronge were, according to David Thompson, reduced by fifty percent.¹⁷⁷ Losses suffered in the epidemic led to the retreat of the Cree from their northern boundary at Reindeer Lake.¹⁷⁸

The spread of smallpox from Mexico to the barrens brought death and destruction to untold numbers of indigenous people in North America. The demographic and cultural makeup of the Canadian west was shaken as it never had been before. Entire cultural entities, such as the Basquia and Pegogamaw of the Saskatchewan valley, ceased to exist.¹⁷⁹ Other groups, such as the Assiniboine and the Atsina, recoiled from the attack by constricting their territory. New groups moved into the northwest to fill the demographic and economic vacuum caused by the wholesale loss of life. The Ottawa, the Iroquois and particularly the Muskego Cree and

¹⁷⁵Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the Years 1789 and 1793*, liii.

¹⁷⁶Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives: A Northern Athapaskan Tribe," 207.

¹⁷⁷Thompson, *David Thompson: Travels through Western North America*, 122.

¹⁷⁸Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 217.

¹⁷⁹Matthew Cocking stated that among the "Assinnee Poet Pegogamew and others bordering on the Saskachiwan River he [Tomison] really believed that not one in fifty have survived." *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals. Second Series*, 298.

Ojibwa came west as part of the ever intensifying fur trade which continued to grow despite the temporary turmoil brought on by the loss of such a large portion of the indigenous workforce. In the case of the Hudson's Bay Company, the loss of suppliers was exacerbated by the occupation and destruction of their entrepôts at Churchill and York by the French. As the disease ravaged entire cultural entities, traders did their utmost to keep the flow of furs moving toward the markets of Europe.

The English as well as most of the Canadians in the west had been exposed to smallpox, chicken pox or cowpox in childhood and were largely immune to the virus which proved so deadly to their aboriginal suppliers.¹⁸⁰ While traders did not understand the reason for their survival while so many around them perished, many recognized their good fortune in the face of the catastrophe. Surrounded by the epidemic, William Tomison wrote, "there is something very malignant that we are not sensible of, either in the constitution of the Natives, or in the disorder, those that die before the smallpox breaks out tormented with great pains and many of them die within 48 hours."¹⁸¹

No records remain concerning Canadian trading during the outbreak. The men of the HBC did what little they could to comfort the sick and the dying at their posts.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰The European immunity was not total. The Canadian Master Bruce and Captain Lute on the Lower Assiniboine succumbed to the virus and a number of traders who were hit by the disease were reported to have starved. Decker, *"We Should Never Again be the Same People,"* 60.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁸²The epidemic took place almost a generation before the disease was partially under human control with the popularization of Jenner's cowpox vaccine in 1799. At the posts, contaminated goods were fumigated with "Flour of Sulphur" to prevent the further spread of infection. Cumberland House Journal, Dec. 18, 1781, *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals. Second Series.* 226.

Cumberland and Hudson Houses provided food and shelter to stricken Indians and traders stretched their own resources to bury the dead.¹⁸³ Their correspondence indicates a genuine concern for the suffering. In November, 1781, William Walker wrote from Hudson House, "It is very shocking to see the poor creatures in such a deplorable condition, it does not lay in our Power to help them..."¹⁸⁴ Matthew Cocking attempted to establish a quarantine at York Factory, only to have it broken by the French attack.¹⁸⁵ Inland, those who were not infected were segregated from the sick.¹⁸⁶

Still, the trade continued. From the Europeans' first contact with the disease in the Eagle Hills in October 1781, traders travelled to the camps of the dead to procure their furs for export.¹⁸⁷ Throughout the winter, servants from Cumberland were sent to camps of the dying and the dead to secure the debt still owed to the HBC in death.¹⁸⁸ Rather than illustrating the pure mercenary nature of the trade, the missions to the tents of the dead and the dying probably indicate the value of the resource to the Europeans. Although they were not themselves susceptible to the virus, the traders,

¹⁸³Tomison to Walker, Feb. 19, 1782, *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, Appendix. Supplementary Documents, 298.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁸⁷Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 332. Many of the references to this macabre practice indicate that the skins that were used to cloak the dead were replaced by blankets. Food and ammunition were also provided to the sick.

¹⁸⁸See *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals. Second Series*, Jan. 16, 1782 (p.231), Jan. 22, 1782 (p.232), Jan. 31, 1782 (p.234), Feb. 5, 1782 (p.234-235), Feb. 7, 1782 (p.235), Feb. 14, 1782 (p.236), Feb. 20, 1782 (p.239), Feb. 25, 1782 (p.240), Mar. 11, 1782 (p.240), , Mar. 27, 1782 (p.244), Walker to Tomison, May, 1782 (p.254).

particularly those inland, were engaged in a dangerous business. Starvation and even murder were never a distant threat. The sheer number of dead probably instilled a fatalism among the traders with regard to their Indian providers. On Christmas Day, 1781, William Tomison at Cumberland reported on a group of infected southern Indians, "[i]n the Evening Traded with the Indians & made them presents as Usual, but never expect to see them again."¹⁸⁹ In the winter of 1782, the trader at Hudson House remarked that his hunters were infected, "One of the men intend to send a hunting to morrow; When these die, I have nobody to kill a Beast for Us..."¹⁹⁰ The Company's view of the epidemic was probably best summarised by Matthew Cocking in his report from York Factory in August, 1782:

I believe never a Letter in Hudson's Bay conveyed more doleful Tidings than this. Much of the greatest part of the Indians whose Furrs have formerly & hitherto brought to this place are now no more, having been carried off by that cruel disorder the Small Pox.

The trade at this place is 6761 3/10 Made Beaver, including 154 ½ After Package last year. This great fall is owing to our loss of Indians but what is worse, several of the Indians who brought the little we have got are since dead.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 227-228.

¹⁹⁰Feb. 18, 1782, Ibid., 283.

¹⁹¹Ibid., Appendix: Supplementary Documents, 297.

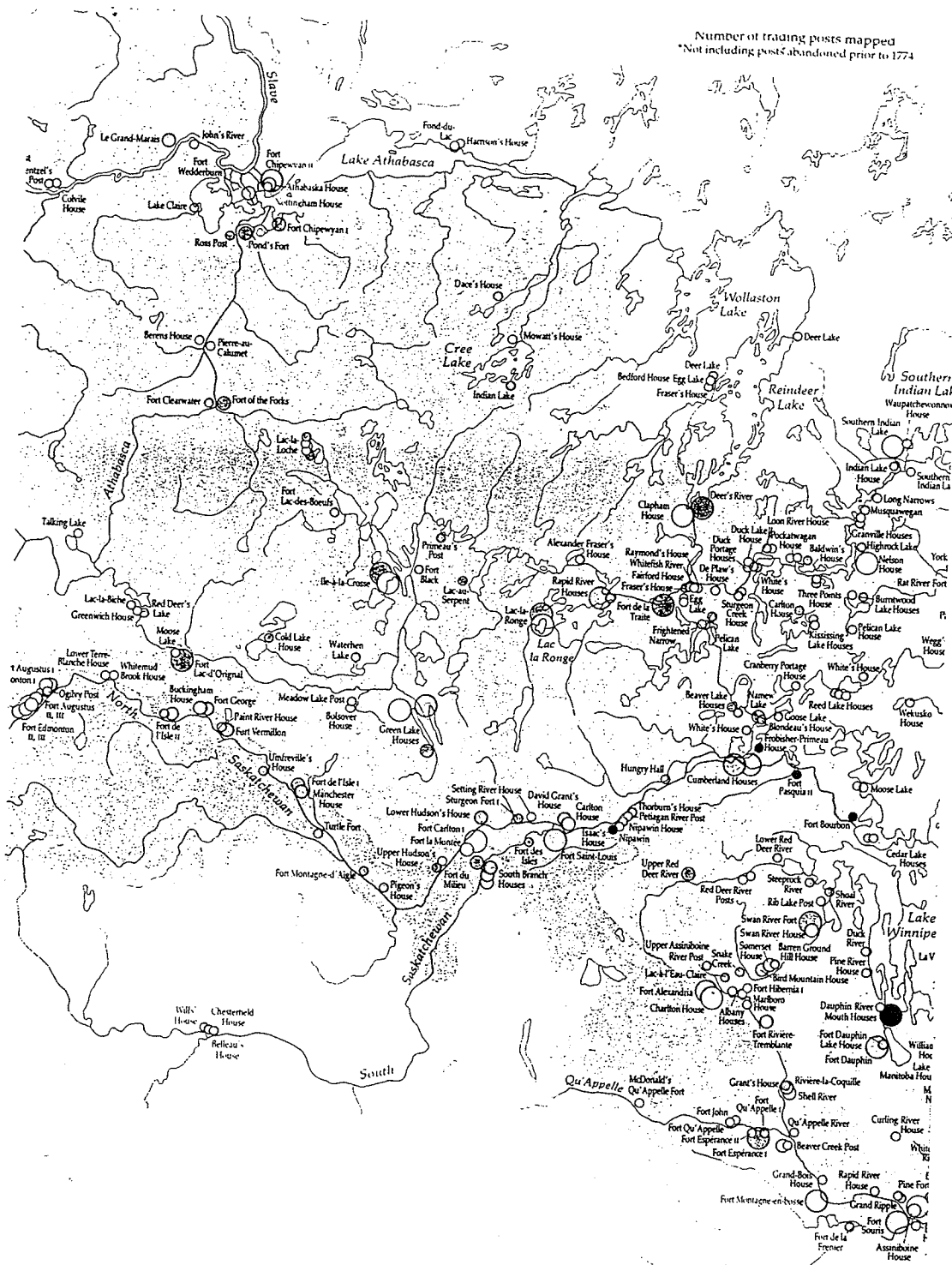


Fig. 2. Trading Posts, 1774-1821. Source: D. Wayne Moodie, Victor P. Lytwyn, Barry Kaye, "Trading Posts, 1774-1821," in *Historical Atlas of Canada Vol. 1. From the Beginning to 1800* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987, Plate 62.

Chapter 4: "We would do as we thought proper"¹ Despair and Death during the Fur Trade Wars, 1783-1821.

"[I]t should be observed that almost everywhere the connexion of the Indians with Europeans has tended to break their spirit, to weaken or give a wrong direction to their industry, and in consequence to diminish the sources of subsistence."

Thomas Malthus, 1803²

The smallpox epidemic of 1780-1782 changed the trajectory of western Canadian history. The mortality from the disease itself and the famine that came in its wake³ was a historical and cultural watershed, and led to wholesale changes in the ethnic composition of the west. Entire cultural entities, such as the Basquiau and Pegogamow Cree who occupied the Saskatchewan River, ceased to exist.⁴ The balance of power among numerous competing ethnic groups was permanently altered. This was the case in the Athabasca country where the Cree were forced from their

¹James McKenzie, May 18, 1799. "Athabasca Journal, 1799-1800, Athabasca District," in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest, Volume 2*, Ed. L.R. Masson, (New York: Antiquarian Press 1960), 388.

²T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of its past and Present Effect on Human Happiness: With an Inquiry into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, ed. Patricia James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

³An example of the post epidemic famine was the cannibalism of four Canadians by starving Indians north of Lake Superior in 1783. *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, Volume 1*, 13. The famine that followed the smallpox was exacerbated by a decline in temperatures resulting from the volcanic eruption of Mount Laki in southern Iceland. See Charles A. Wood, "Climatic Effects of the 1783 Laki Eruption," in *The Year Without a Summer? World Climate in 1816*, ed. C.R. Harington (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Nature, 1992), 58-77.

⁴See David Meyer and Paul Thistle, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity in a Cree Social Geography," 421. See also, Matthew Cocking, York Fort, August 1783. *Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals, 1775-82. Second Series, 1779-82*, 298.

position of dominance by the Athapaskan speaking Beaver Indians.⁵ To the east, the Chipewyan returned south to the Churchill River as the Cree withdrew from the region. New ethnic groups migrated to the west to fill the demographic void left by the epidemic. The Muskego Cree expanded westward into the boreal forest north of the plains.⁶ The Saulteaux occupied the parkland from their territory east of Lake of the Woods and, in close association with the expanding fur trade, moved west into Athabasca and beyond.⁷ Other groups, such as the Ottawa and the Iroquois, also migrated west as participants in the trade.⁸ The intersection of ecological and economic factors lead to the emergence of new identities such as the Plains Cree⁹ and the

⁵Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 161. On the treaty ending the hostilities between the Cree and the Beaver, see Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin," 288.

⁶Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 216. See also Chris Hanks, "The Swampy Cree and the Hudson's Bay Company at Oxford House," *Ethnohistory* 29 (1982), 103-115.

⁷Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 216. See also Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 14-21.

⁸On the westward expansion of the Iroquois, see Jack Frisch, "Some Ethnological and Ethnohistorical Notes of the Iroquois in Alberta," *Man in the Northeast* 7 (1976), 51-64; Gertrude Nicks, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade in Western Canada," in *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, Eds. C.M. Judd and A.J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 85-101. According to Nicks, the long range migrations of eastern fur trade specialists from the east, represent the most obvious changes in aboriginal populations resulting from the spread of the fur trade.

⁹Milloy, *The Plains Cree*.

western Ojibwa,¹⁰ and to the florescence of the Métis culture.¹¹

The enormous cultural changes in the northwest took place within the context of the expanding commercial rivalry between the Hudson's Bay Company and a succession of Canadian-based ventures. J.M. Bumsted's recent *The Fur Trade Wars*¹² focussed almost exclusively on the conflict between the HBC and the amalgamated North West Company over the establishment of the agricultural colony at Red River. More important to the aboriginal inhabitants of the interior were periods of intense if not frenzied rivalry between competing Canadian interests prior to the final merger in 1805. Until 1810, the HBC was but a small presence in the trade outside of the area between the coast of Hudson Bay and Cumberland House, known as the muskrat country. One text estimated that the English company controlled only two fourteenths of the entire trade prior to the restructuring of the HBC in 1810.¹³ Peter Fidler described the position of the HBC in the trade, "while we nibble at a sprat they may catch whales unmolested in the north."¹⁴ Most of the changes in the three decades of competition leading to the well-documented struggle over the Red River colony, and the ultimate control of the fur trade, took place during a succession of inter-Canadian rivalries. As the different

¹⁰Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*.

¹¹Jacqueline Peterson and J.S.H. Brown, eds., *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985).

¹²J.M. Bumsted, *The Fur Trade Wars: The Founding of Western Canada* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1997).

¹³J.L. Findlay and D.N. Sprague, *The Structure of Canadian History*, 2d ed. (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 104.

¹⁴Daniel Francis, *Battle for the West: Fur Traders and the Birth of Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1982), 114.

Canadian-based enterprises battled over the trade, they introduced the first serious social pathologies to the Indians of western Canada. In some areas during the years leading to the final merger of the Northwest Company after 1800, the alcoholism and violence that accompanied the competitive fur trade may have accounted for more misery and death among aboriginal people than biological pathogens.

Compounding the social problems brought by the competing commercial interests was an increasingly serious environmental crisis. The forest of Northern Canada experienced a period of extreme climatic variability in the years leading to 1800 and an especially cold period from 1809 to 1820, reducing wildlife and threatening the human populations that relied on them.¹⁵ In addition to the cold, the plains underwent a severe and lengthy drought through the 1790s, resulting in serious repercussions for both game and human populations. Epidemic illness among fur bearers resulting from declining water levels during the drought exacerbated the problem of declining fur supplies from overhunting. During the war for the trade, large portions of the plains and the forest were denuded of game. The intersection of territorial and sociological disruptions, resource depletion and the climatic nadir brought many groups to the brink of disaster. New diseases in humans arrived in the west, adding to the turmoil. A number of widespread epidemics; the most serious of which were whooping cough in 1806-07 and a concurrent outbreak of whooping cough and measles in 1819-20,

¹⁵For a discussion of the climatic variability during this period, see T.F. Ball, "Historical and Instrumental Evidence of Climate: Western Hudson's Bay, Canada, 1714-1850," in *Climate Since A.D. 1500*, eds. Raymond S. Bradley and Philip D. Jones (London: Routledge, 1995), 40-73, and Tim F. Ball, "The Year Without a Summer: Its Impact on the Fur Trade and History of Western Canada," in *The Year Without a Summer/ World Climate in 1816*, ed. C.R. Harington (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Nature, 1992) 199-201.

brought suffering and death from the Red River to the Mackenzie Delta.

Although the smallpox epidemic of 1780-82 had catastrophic effects for the Indians of the west, the outbreak was a blessing to the European fur traders who were immune from it. Contemporary accounts note that the smallpox dealt literally a death blow to an incipient uprising against Canadian traders.¹⁶ John McDonnell's early chronicle of the Red River trade noted that, in addition to killing three fourths of the Indians who attacked Fort des Trembles, the disease "compelled them to lay aside the intention of cutting off all the white men in the interior country."¹⁷ A.S. Morton stated that the traders believed "that the Indians were unified in a conspiracy to drive them out of the country. In their view they were saved from this disaster by the terrible smallpox epidemic..."¹⁸

Canadian traders were doubly fortunate in the wake of the epidemic. In addition to the disease eliminating the threat of armed resistance by the natives, the French navy made its final coup in Hudson Bay when it occupied and destroyed HBC forts in

¹⁶Elliot Coues, ed., *New Light on the History of the Old Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799-1814, Volume 1, The Red River of the North* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1965), 292-293. See also Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans*, xiv.

¹⁷John McDonnell, "The Red River by John McDonnell of the North West Company (About 1797)," in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, Volume 1*, ed. L.R. Masson (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), 270-271. On the role of the disease in diminishing hostilities between prairie Indians on the north Saskatchewan and the HBC, see Alice M. Johnson, ed., *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1967), xvii, fn.1.

¹⁸Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 329.

1782.¹⁹ The English company was further frustrated by the late arrival of supplies after it re-established its presence in 1783, leading to what Colin Yerbury called a "state of inertia" in the English trade which lasted for several years.²⁰ The Canadians, unopposed for the moment by the English or hostile Indians, were quick to capitalize on their advantage.

Within a year of the epidemic, a number of the Canadian privateers banded together to monopolize the inland trade under the auspices of the Northwest Company.²¹ The merger provided the traders with the capital required to pursue the trade into and beyond the Athabasca country. The cooperation between the Canadians was short-lived. By the fall of 1785, Peter Pond, trading for the Northwest Company, was in competition with John Ross of the "New Concern" on Lake Athabasca.²² Because they managed the only two posts north of Methy Portage, Pond and Ross initially had more trouble keeping the peace among their Cree, Chipewyan

¹⁹Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume 2*, 83-89.

²⁰Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 64.

²¹Duckworth, ed., *The English River Book: A Northwest Company Journal and Account Book of 1786*, xvi. See also, Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 335. J.M. Bumsted traced the origin of the company to 1779 when Canadians first pooled their resources to assist Peter Pond's venture into the Athabasca. *The Fur Trade Wars: The Founding of Western Canada*, 24.

²²*The English River Book: A Northwest Company Journal and Account Book of 1786*, xvii. While posts on Athabasca Lake were an innovation, the trade itself was well established. Kerry Abel asserts that Métis traders were present in the far northwest "at least a generation before Peter Pond Visited the region" but does not pursue this intriguing issue. *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 76.

and Beaver fur suppliers than from competition with each other.²³ With the combined goal of minimizing inter-ethnic hostilities among their fur producers and the expansion of the total trade, the Northwest Company established a number of outposts in the home territories of Indian trappers in the Athabasca. Inadequate food supplies forced the company to soon abandon many of them.²⁴

During the winter of 1786-87, Pond eliminated the competition when his men murdered his rival, Ross.²⁵ The two explanations forwarded for the killing foreshadow many of the features of the trade over the decades of competition that followed. One posits that he was killed when he tried to stop his furs being pilfered by Pond's men "in open day."²⁶ The other states that:

the dispute was about some Chepawyans as they were coming to the Houses to trade P Pond and his men being more numerous than Mr Rosses they were taking the Indians by force which Mr Ross opposed and in the dispute was

²³The hinterland of the posts was vast, encompassing the entire Peace and Mackenzie River systems, as well as to the Chipewyan territory to the east. *The English River Book: A Northwest Company Journal and Account Book of 1786*, xix-xx.

²⁴Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basins, 1770-1814," 283-284. The N.W. Co. also established a post on Great Slave Lake to develop the trade among the untapped fur resources of the Dogrib, Hare and Slavey. Shepard Krech, "The Trade of the Slavey and Dogrib at Fort Simpson in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations*, ed. S. Krech (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1984), 105, and Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 58-59.

²⁵*The English River Book: A Northwest Company Journal and Account Book of 1786*, xxiii. Kerry Abel noted that during the early years of competition in the Athabasca, there was a higher degree of conflict between traders than between native and newcomers. *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History*, 75.

²⁶*The English River Book: A Northwest Company Journal and Account Book of 1786*, xxiii.

shot.²⁷

Although the Canadian trade relied increasingly on theft and coercion in the years to come, the killing of Ross brought some temporary restraint to the trade. In the spring after the murder, both the Northwest Company and the New Concern decided to amalgamate "for their common welfare."²⁸ The merger secured a "virtual monopoly" in the Athabasca for over a decade.²⁹ Although the HBC attempted to counter the Canadian advances in the far west with its own plan for the expansion of trade in the English (Churchill) River, the company floundered in its northern ventures for years to come.³⁰ With their hold on the Athabasca country secure, the Northwest Company established Fort Chipewyan as its entrepot in the far northwest in 1788.³¹ From the new depot, the Canadians were poised to penetrate westward into the Peace River, the barren lands to the north and east, and the River that flowed to the Arctic Ocean which briefly was known as the River of Disappointment.³²

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid. See also Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 341. The author stated that with the amalgamation "the full-fledged North West Company came into existence."

²⁹Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 59.

³⁰Donald Freeman and Frances Dungle, "A Spatial Duopoly: Competition in the Western Interior of Canada, 1770-1835," *Journal of Historical Geography* 7 (1981), 264.

³¹James Parker, *Emporium of the North: Fort Chipewyan and the Fur Trade to 1835* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1987).

³²The river would soon be known as the Mackenzie, in honour of its first European explorer.

Although the local food supply at Fort Chipewyan was secure,³³ the greatest obstacle to the success of the Canadian trade was the development of a reliable provisioning system for the shipment of goods between Athabasca and Montreal. The staple food for the canoe brigades along the trade route that spanned the continent was, of course, pemmican.³⁴ As the trade to the far northwest developed, Canadian traders in particular grew increasingly reliant on food supplies from the plain that were delivered to the brigades at three major locations in the northwest; Red River, Cumberland House and Ile-à-la-Crosse. The plains bison hunt filled the burgeoning need for food in the north and within years became the foundation of a new plains economy. According to John Milloy, it also led to the emergence of an entirely new cultural entity, the Plains Cree.³⁵

Milloy stressed that the shift from fur to bison hunting was largely complete on the Saskatchewan River by the 1790s.³⁶ He emphasized that the transition to the new bison economy was a conscious strategy of the Cree made prior to the depletion of fur stocks on the plains.³⁷ The economic potential of the bison economy far exceeded the constraints of the plains fur trade and made for a wise choice for those who

³³Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basins, 1770-1814," 285.

³⁴For a discussion of the bison economy, see Ray, "The Northern Great Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade, 1774-1885," 263-280.

³⁵Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 29. The view that the Cree emerged onto the plains at the end of the eighteenth century is disputed by Dale Russell who asserts the Cree were well ensconced on the plains before the advent of the new economy. *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and their Neighbours*, 218.

³⁶Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 27. The author admitted that the shift was partially the result of the demise of the Cree middleman role in the trade, 20.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 27, 29.

abandoned the pursuit of furs in the late eighteenth century.³⁸ John Nick's micro-economic study of the fur trade rivalry between 1786 and 1794 on the north Saskatchewan provide a detailed analysis of the shift from the fur trade to the provision trade.³⁹ A key element in the competition between the assorted rivals prior to 1795 was the proliferation of the traffic in alcohol to secure trade with plains bison hunters.⁴⁰ From the onset of competition, Canadian traders in particular used liquor as a means to establish and maintain relations. Even before the chaos of the early 1780s, A.S. Morton noted, "the corner-stone of their trade was rum."⁴¹ HBC traders, frustrated by the company's chronic supply problems grew increasingly alarmed as the Canadians increased both their fur returns and the flow of alcohol to local suppliers of fur and later food.⁴²

While the use of alcohol had been a feature of both the English and Canadian

³⁸As early as 1788 the HBC devalued wolf pelts by fifty percent in an attempt to cut the production of what was the main item of the plains fur trade. John Nicks, *The Pine Island Posts, 1786-1794: A Study of Competition in the Fur Trade* (M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1975), 62; J. Nicks, "The Diary of a Young Fur Trader: The 1789-90 Journal of Thomas Staynor," in *Essays in Western Canadian History*, ed. L.H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), 25.

³⁹A similar account of the shift to the plains economy is presented by Lynda Gullason, "No less than 7 different nations': Ethnicity and Culture Contact at Fort George-Buckingham House," in *The Fur Trade Revisited: Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1991*, eds. J.S.H. Brown, W. Eccles, and D. Heldman (East Lansing: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 117-142.

⁴⁰The use of alcohol was nothing new to the trade. A.S. Morton called the rum "the corner-stone of their (the Canadian) trade." *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 306-308. Morton's conclusion was supported by Kerry Abel. *Drum Songs*, 77.

⁴¹*A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 306. Alcohol was especially important to the provision trade, possibly a measure of the affluence of those who relied on the bison economy.

⁴²Nicks, *The Pine Island Posts, 1786-1794: A Study of Competition in the Fur Trade*, 124, fns. 124-125.

trade practices with fur producers for decades, the sheer volume of alcohol brought to the northwest during the various manifestations of competition changed the role of liquor from a ceremonial one to an addiction problem among many.⁴³ During his service with the HBC in the 1770s, Edward Umfreville recognized that the role of alcohol went beyond formality. His description of a trade ceremony included "intoxication, bordering on madness, for two or three days" and violence "and fifty to one but someone is killed before the morning."⁴⁴ As competition increased, so too did the flow of alcohol into the interior. William Tomison and George Hudson of the HBC wrote to colonial authorities in 1786 in an attempt to curb the flow of Canadian liquor which was:

Debauching the natives into a state of insensibility and takes from them by force what they cannot obtain with goods. This I call Robbery. ... it grieves us to see a body of Indians destroyed by a set of men, merely for self interest, doing in all their Power to Destroy Posterity, so we hope that your excellency will make such regulations as will preserve Posterity, and not to be Destroyed by fiery double Distilled Rum from Canada.⁴⁵

⁴³The ceremonial role of liquor in the development and maintenance of trade relations is well documented. For a discussion of the social functions of alcohol distribution by traders see Jack O. Waddell, "Malhiot's Journal: An Ethnohistoric Assessment of Chippewa Alcohol Behaviour in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Ethnohistory* 32 (1985): 246-268. See also, Bruce M. White, "A Skilled Game of Exchange: Ojibwa Fur Trade Protocol," *Minnesota History* 50 (1987), 235-236. For a discussion of the use of rum prior to the formation of the Northwest Company, see Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 306-307. The disruptive role of alcohol in the early trade is considered by Marshall G. Hurlich, "Historical and Recent Demography of the Algonkians of Northern Ontario," 176-178.

⁴⁴It should be acknowledged that Umfreville was an opponent of the HBC. Edward Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, ed. W.S. Wallace (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1954), 30. A HBC critique of Umfreville's condemnation of the company can be found in E.E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1760-1870, Volume 2*, 124.

⁴⁵Nicks, *The Pine Island Posts, 1786-1794*, 122-123; Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1760-1870. Volume 2*, 227-228.

The HBC officers were less than altruistic in their request. The company was faced with a severe decline in its market share, a result of its inability to provide adequate supplies, especially liquor, to the interior.⁴⁶ When a distillery was established at York Factory in 1791, Tomison was swift to use the new technology. In the words of John Nicks, "Tomison was as excited as a child with a new toy."⁴⁷ The distillation of liquor by the HBC was a sign that the commodity had become essential to the trade. Without liquor, traders could find no business.⁴⁸ The alcohol trade may have been seen by those who pursued the new bison economy as a luxury item, the result of their new found affluence⁴⁹ but the amount of spirits used in the exchange soon led to a myriad of social pathologies.

The expanding liquor trade was not the only factor that affected the condition of aboriginal communities during the shift to the bison economy. The new focus on the prairie by the Cree brought them into conflict with their former ally, the Blackfoot.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁶In addition to the scarcity of supplies, the HBC liquor trade was hindered further by British laws controlling the strength of alcohol. Canadian "double distilled" liquor was twice as strong as that brought to America by the HBC. The Canadian liquor was usually diluted with water when provided to the Indians. The reduction in volume required for the Canadians provided another advantage over their English opponents. Nicks, *The Pine Island Posts, 1786-1794*, 106-107.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 211.

⁴⁸Alcohol was especially important in the provision trade. White, "A Skilled Game of Exchange: Ojibwa Fur Trade Protocol," 235.

⁴⁹Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 29. Another example of the luxury nature of the plains trade was recorded by Peter Fidler. During the winter of 1800, servants made a five hundred mile round trip from Chesterfield to Edmonton for trade goods, most important of which were forty-one ostrich feathers. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 132.

⁵⁰Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 31-37. David Smyth contended that Milloy overstated his case regarding the close relationship of the Cree and the Blackfoot prior to the late eighteenth century. David Smyth, "Missed Opportunity: John Milloy's *Plains Cree*,"

end of the alliance, which dated back a century to the early years of the Cree middleman trade, was the result of the competition over the bison, an increasingly coveted resource. With the Cree at war with the Blackfoot, the nations allied with each of the new antagonists, as well as with European traders who were brought into the fray. According to Milloy, by 1792, two distinct trading and military blocks had emerged on the western plains. Those tied to the fur trade in the north, the Cree, Assiniboine, Stone and Sarcee, cooperated in their opposition to the Blackfoot, Peigan and Gros Ventres, who were northern partners in the horse trading network centred on the Missouri River.⁵¹ The division remained essentially intact until the flood of European settlement brought the pacification of the plains nations in the late nineteenth century.

Violence spread through the west as both sides took advantage of their numerical superiority to exterminate smaller bands of enemies. While the numbers of killings that took place between the warring aboriginal alliances is too great to catalogue, attacks of trading posts by members of the southern alliance are both limited and well-documented. The perpetrators of most of the attacks on European posts were the Gros Ventres and Blackfoot who had been under increasing territorial pressure since the arrival of Europeans half a century earlier.⁵² Their land, which had once stretched as far to the northeast as Nipawin on the Lower Saskatchewan, was by the

Prairie Forum 17 (1992), 343-345.

⁵¹Nicks, *The Pine Islands Posts 1786-1794*, 198. On the relationship of the Gros Ventres to the Missouri equestrian economy, see Loretta Fowler, *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778-1984* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁵²David Smyth stressed that the Gros Ventres were assisted by the Blackfoot in their attacks on the European posts. "Missed Opportunity: John Milloy's *Plains Cree*," 343.

late eighteenth century constricted to an area between the north and south branches of the Saskatchewan.⁵³ As their rivals expanded their territory in support of the Canadian (and to a lesser extent the British) trade, the Gros Ventres were increasingly marginalised from traders. In their diminished territory, they had access only to low value furs, primarily wolf pelts.⁵⁴ As their alienation grew, so did their antagonism to the Europeans who supplied their enemies with weapons and other goods. The frustration of the Missouri people in the face of encroachment from those affiliated with the fur trade in the north is summarized in the statement made to the Canadian trader, Charles Mackenzie, by a Mandan Chief:

What is the use of the beaver? Do they make gun-powder of them? Do they preserve them from sickness. Do they serve them beyond the grave? ... The white people came, they brought with them some good, but they brought the small pox, and they brought evil liquors; the Indians since diminish and they are no longer happy.⁵⁵

In an attempt to secure arms for their struggle, the Gros Ventres, assisted by the Blackfoot, attacked and looted Manchester House in 1793 and pillaged South

⁵³Alexander Henry considered the Gros Ventres of the north to have been of a different nation than those on the Missouri. *New Light on the History of the Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799-1814*, Volume 2, ed. Elliot Coues (Chicago: Ross & Haines, 1965), 530. See also, *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814, Volume 1*, ed. B. Gough (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1988), 215, fn.212. Henry's editor noted that the Northern Gros Ventres were the Atsina, members of the Algonkian language family. Their namesakes on the Missouri were the Hidatsa, speakers of a Siouan language.

⁵⁴Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 33. The decline in the value of wolf pelts was dictated by the London fur market. Smyth, "Missed Opportunity: John Milloy's *Plains Cree*," 343. Smyth also noted that the Blackfoot trade was also based on wolf skins and their alienation from the traders was similar to that of the Gros Ventres.

⁵⁵Charles Mackenzie, "The Missouri Indians: A Narrative of Four Trading Expeditions to the Missouri, 1804, 1805, 1806 for the North West Company, First Expedition," in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest Volume 1*, ed. L.R. Masson (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), 331-332.

Branch House the following year killing its inhabitants.⁵⁶ By the mid 1790s, tensions between traders and potentially hostile Indians, made worse by the combination of alcohol related violence and the depletion of game stocks, led to the abandonment of a number of trading posts in disputed territory, particularly at Pine Island on the North Saskatchewan and on the south branch of the Saskatchewan.⁵⁷ An attempt to re-establish the fur trade in the territory in 1802 led to the killings of a dozen Iroquois trappers and two Canadians by the Gros Ventres near Chesterfield House.⁵⁸ The killing of the Iroquois on their way to the Cypress Hills and other locations represent probably the last gasp of Gros Ventres resistance in the territory north of the forty-ninth parallel.⁵⁹ In 1801-02, a localized smallpox outbreak spread through the communities along the Missouri, further weakening the group and forcing their eventual move to the temporary

⁵⁶The events surrounding the attacks on European posts are well documented. It should be noted that they usually occurred in response to violence initiated by the Cree who were closely allied with the traders. See Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 456-459; Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company. Volume 2*, 172; Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 31-36, and MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 57-58, 98-99. On the role of the Blackfoot in the violence, see Smyth, "Opportunity Missed: John Milloy's *Plains Cree*," 343.

⁵⁷A.S. Morton described the movement of the Canadian's Fort des Prairies "to which the brigades were bound, reced[ing] westward, from denuded beaver country to untapped regions above." *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 455.

⁵⁸John Foster, "Wintering, The Outsider Adult Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Métis," *Prairie Forum* 19 (1994), 7. The anxiety of the traders was such that both companies sought protection behind a single stockade. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 130.

⁵⁹On Gros Ventres murders of Iroquois trappers, see *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence: Edmonton House 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, 266, 311-316. On the withdrawal of the Gros Ventres from Canada, see also MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 140-141.

safety of American territory.⁶⁰ Inter-ethnic tension between northern and southern groups continued for generations, until the treaty period when all plains groups were brought under the control of the Canadian state.

As traders lost their producers to the bison hunt and warfare that accompanied their shift to the plains, new groups came west to fill the demand for furs. The most important of the new economic migrants originated in the boreal forest of Ontario. They emerged as the western Ojibwa or Saulteaux by the 1790s.⁶¹ The new commercial opportunity suited the skills of the Saulteaux. They had long been part of the fur trade and were quick to capitalize on the need for commercial trappers and left their own game-depleted territory in large numbers.⁶² Daniel Harmon's often quoted remark on the dependence of his fur producers in the Swan River Department at the turn of the century, "[t]he Indians in this quarter have so long been accustomed to the use of European goods, that it would be with difficulty that they could now obtain a livelihood

⁶⁰Trimble, "Chronology of Epidemics among Plains Village Horticulturalists, 1738-1838," 13; Garrick Mallory, *Picture Writing of the American Indian*, 273, 313. On the effects of the outbreak on the Gros Ventres, see Loretta Fowler, *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778-1984*, 43-46. The disease affected the young almost exclusively. For a discussion, see Jody Decker, "We Should Never Be Again the Same People" *The Diffusion and Cumulative Impact of Acute Infectious Disease Affecting Natives on the Northern Plains of the Interior of Western Canada, 1778-1839*, 86-89.

⁶¹In her anthropological study, Laura Peers stated that the relationship between the expansion of the Ojibwa and their connection to the fur trade has been overstated because of scholars' reliance on fur trade documents. *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 27.

⁶²By the 1790s there was a serious game shortage from Lake Superior to Lake of the Woods, especially beaver and large game, Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 17. For a discussion of the recent immigration of the Ojibwa or Chippewa to the Red River region in the late 1790s, see Harold Hickerson, "Journal of Charles Jean Baptiste Chaboillez, 1797-1798," *Ethnohistory* 6 (1959), 270.

without them,⁶³ was probably directed to the recent migrants from the east.

The Ojibwa, and the other economic migrants such as the Ottawa and the Iroquois, brought with them more than simply their expertise. Technological innovations introduced by the Canadian trade included the use of castoreum, a secretion from the groin of the beaver used as an extremely effective bait,⁶⁴ and the introduction of efficient steel traps used "in an attempt to offset the costs of competition."⁶⁵ The use of the new technologies, combined with a powerful profit motive among the migrant groups, soon led to serious declines in fur-bearer populations. Laura Peers noted approvingly that the Ojibwa "quickly became known as consistently productive trappers of beaver."⁶⁶ Many contemporary accounts condemned their hunting practices. David Thompson was critical of the new commercial trappers:

The Nipissings, Algonquins and Iroquois Indians, having exhausted their own countries, now spread themselves over these countries, and as they destroyed the beaver moved toward the northward and the westward. The natives, the Nahathaways [Crees], did not in the least molest them; the Chippewas and other tribes made use of traps of steel and of the castoreum. For several years

⁶³Daniel Harmon, Bird Mountain, November 11, 1802. *Sixteen Years in Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Harmon*, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 64.

⁶⁴According to one chronicler of the Canadian fur trade, "...when smeared on even a primitive Indians trap, (castoreum) attracted the beaver as surely as dogs are attracted to a bitch in heat." Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, *The North West Company* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), 104. For the connection of castoreum used and over hunting, see also V. Hopwood, "Introduction," David Thompson, *Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, 33-34, 160-161. For further discussion of castoreum, see Robert Brightmann, "Conservation and Resource Depletion: The Case of the Boreal Forest Algonquians," *The Question of the Commons: The Culture and Ecology of Communal Resources*, eds. B. McCay and J. Acheson (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1897), 133; and S. Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 177, 189-190.

⁶⁵Wilkins Campbell, *The Northwest Company*, 104.

⁶⁶Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 32.

all these Indians were very rich... The canoes of the fur traders were loaded with packs of beaver, the abundance of the article lowered the London prices. Every intelligent man saw the poverty that would follow the destruction of the beaver, but there were no chiefs to control it... Four years after [1797], almost the whole of these extensive countries were denuded of beaver, the natives became poor, and with difficulty procured the first necessities of life, and in this state they remain, probably forever. A worn out field may be manured and again made fertile, but the beaver, once destroyed, cannot be replaced; they were the gold coin of the country, with which the necessities of life were purchased...⁶⁷

Another group of economic migrants accused of overhunting were the Iroquois.

Angus Shaw, an experienced HBC trader, compared them to the "Locusts of Egypt bring (ing) Devestation (sic) & Ruin along with them wherever they Winter."⁶⁸ Though not as numerous as the Ojibwa, the Iroquois were important suppliers of furs in the Athabasca and later in the Columbia trade.⁶⁹ In 1801, over three hundred "Eroquees or Mohawk Indians" passed through Cumberland House, employed by the rival Canadian companies on three year contracts.⁷⁰ Two years later, the majority of the North West

⁶⁷Thompson, *Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, 161.

⁶⁸Angus Shaw to Joseph Colen, Fort Augustus, May 10, 1797. *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, xxxii-xxxiii.

⁶⁹While active fur producers, John Foster noted that the greater contribution of the Iroquois was as voyageurs. John Foster, "The Origins of the Mixed Bloods in the Canadian West," in *Essays in Western History*, ed. L.G. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), 79.

⁷⁰A.M. Johnson, "Introduction," in *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, xci. Nicks noted that the greatest concentration of the Iroquois occurred between 1800 and 1804, during the period of overexpansion by both concerns. The XY company was the first to fall into bankruptcy although he questioned the notion that the Ojibwa and the Iroquois were under contract with the Canadians. "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of Western Canada," 87-89. The idea is repeated in Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 15. Although the author acknowledged at least two instances where the Ojibwa were brought west by traders themselves, she made the distinction between the formal arrangements between the Iroquois and the companies and what the author perceived as some sort of self-motivation on the part of the Ojibwa. The lack of documentation

Company's workforce north of Methy Portage was reported to be Iroquois.⁷¹ According to A.M. Johnson, they would "complete the destruction of the beaver which had already been started several years back by the 'many Bungee Tawau Mischelemacana [and] Eroquee Indians' who had followed in the wake of the Canadians."⁷² Some of the three hundred were probably among those killed in the vicinity of Chesterfield House by the Gros Ventres.⁷³ While the response to the arrival of the Iroquois in the northwest was usually not as violent as that of the Gros Ventres, writers have shown that they were generally disliked by other groups because of their single minded hunting practices which, according to Gertrude Nicks, gave the North West Company the edge in the trade until the merger in 1821.⁷⁴ The author explained that the advantage of the

for the Ojibwa may be attributable to the fact they were already at the frontier of the west and did not require the assistance of the companies to travel to fur producing regions. Peter Fidler's biographer stated that the Bungee were invited west by the North West Company in 1797. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 238-239.

⁷¹Of the 195 men reported to be working for the NWC, 76 were French Canadian and 110 were Iroquois. Most of the latter trapped in the Peace River country. In 1800, the HBC had 18 servants north of Methy Portage, the "Old Company" and the XY Company had 195 and 83 respectively. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 156.

⁷²*Saskatchewan River Journals and Correspondence: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, xcii. See also Thistle, *Indian European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan Region to 1840*, 73. According to Gertrude Nicks, the first record of the Iroquois in the northwest was 1794. "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of Western Canada," 85.

⁷³G. Nicks, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of Western Canada," 93; MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 138-139. There were a number of other Gros Ventres attacks on the Iroquois. Twenty five of the easterners were killed after a gambling party turned violent. Frisch, "Some Ethnological and Ethnohistoric Notes on the Iroquois of Alberta," 53.

⁷⁴Nicks, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of Western Canada," 91-92; Frisch, "Some Ethnological and Ethnohistoric Notes on the Iroquois of Alberta," 52-53.

Iroquois trappers was that they were willing to "pioneer a bearer-rich, if often game poor area."⁷⁵ Their occupation of thinly populated areas away from populations of local groups undoubtedly served to mitigate violent confrontations.⁷⁶ The Iroquois trappers were also highly mobile. In northern Alberta, François Heron to the HBC described the advantage that the Iroquois provided to his competition, "having a task force of trappers to be despatched wherever there are beavers to be found."⁷⁷ The mobility of the Iroquois was, at least partially, a product of their overhunting. As the group denuded fur regions, they travelled to new areas and, by 1810, were over the Rockies participating in the Oregon trade.⁷⁸ Even in the Pacific hinterland, the Iroquois made enemies. In 1818, an Iroquois family was killed by a group of Carrier Indians. Daniel Harmon, an employee of the NWC, explained the rationale for the murders:

The Natives of the country, consider them [the Iroquois] as intruders. As they are rovers, they do not feel the same interest, as those who permanently reside here, in keeping the stock of animals good, and therefore they make great havock among the game, destroying alike the animals which are young and

⁷⁵Gertrude Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975* (Ph. D. diss. University of Alberta, 1980), 56.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 33, 94. According to the author, the Iroquois often moved to what were considered "otherwise under utilized regions." The movement of the Iroquois in accordance with the needs of the fur trade continued after the merger of 1821. Both the Iroquois and the Saulteaux were brought to the Bow River by the North West Company in 1800. David Thompson, *Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, 223-224.

⁷⁷Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 56.

⁷⁸MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 105; *New Light on the History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799-1814*, 647. The Iroquois were instrumental in opening the Athabasca Pass, the gateway to the Columbia district. T.J. Karamanski, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of the Far West," *The Beaver* 312 (1982), 9.

old.⁷⁹

Until the end of the competition period, the Iroquois continued to trap under the direction of the Canadian company. The defection of the large numbers of Iroquois to the HBC in 1818 was a significant factor in the collapse of the Canadian enterprise.⁸⁰

In addition to unrestricted human predation, beaver populations were seriously jeopardized by disease.⁸¹ Across the northwest in the late 1790s, the scarcity of the animal was a "universal complaint."⁸² At Edmonton House in 1796, George Sutherland noted that the plains Indians had few furs as "there has been a great distemper among the beaver of which great numbers have died as they are daily seen floating on the water since the breaking up of the ice."⁸³ What was probably the same disease was described by the Indian captive turned author John Tanner in his narrative of the winter of 1802-03. On remarking on the poor beaver hunt that winter, Tanner reported:

At last I found that some kind of distemper was prevailing among these animals which destroyed them in vast numbers. I found them dead and dying in the

⁷⁹Daniel Harmon, Journal entry, October 13, 1818. *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816*, 193.

⁸⁰Karamanski, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of the Far Northwest," 7.

⁸¹Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, 187.

⁸²James Bird, Carleton House, Nov.28, 1796. *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, 76. Peter Fidler remarked that while the disease killed off most of the beaver from the Hudson Bay to the Rockies, the pathogen remained south of the Athabasca. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 240. Calvin Martin discussed the outbreak in his controversial study, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1978), 135-136. Martin noted that the beaver remained scarce for three years.

⁸³May 3, 1797. *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, 92. That spring 12,500 made beaver were taken from Edmonton to the coast, according to Johnson "a figure which might have been higher but for a sickness among the beavers." *Ibid.*, xl.

water, on the ice, and on land Many of them which I opened, were red and bloody about the heart. Those in large river and running water suffered less. Almost all of those that lived in ponds and stagnant water, died. Since that year the beaver have never been so plentiful in the country of Red River and Hudson's Bay. Those animals which died of this sickness we were afraid to eat, but their skins were good.⁸⁴

The sudden drop in beaver stocks was so severe that one producer in the Swan River told David Thompson that the plague was brought to the area by the creator as a punishment for the overhunting produced by the combination of new hunters, castoreum and steel traps.⁸⁵ Peter Fidler described the disease as "occasioned by the Change in the Air or Some other unknown cause suddenly reduced them to the very few that is now [1820] to be found."⁸⁶ The source of the disease may have been the bacteria *F. Tularensis*, a creature well-adapted to stagnant water and mud and infectious to humans as well as fur bearers.⁸⁷ The outbreak may well have been associated with low water levels resulting from a protracted drought on the plains which probably lasted from 1792 to 1804.⁸⁸ Calvin Martin used an outbreak of the disease

⁸⁴John Tanner, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner during Thirty Years Residence Among the Indians in the Interior of North America*, ed. Edwin James (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1956), 88-89.

⁸⁵Brightman, "Conservation and Resource Depletion: The Case of the Boreal Forest Algonquians," 133.

⁸⁶Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 119.

⁸⁷Martin, *Keepers of the Game*, 138-139. For a discussion of the impact of tularaemia on muskrat populations in relation to dry climatic periods, see Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur trade*, 135.

⁸⁸Further evidence for the drought is based on climate reconstructions based on the thickness of tree rings undertaken by researchers at the Prairie Adaptation Research Collaborative (PARC) at the University of Regina. David Sauchyn and Walter Skinner, "A Proxy Record of Drought Severity for the Southwestern Canadian Plains," *Canadian Water Resources Journal* 26 (2001), 253-272.

among John Tanner's band to illustrate the effects of tularaemia among humans.⁸⁹

According to Tanner:

While we were engaged in collecting and preparing the grain (wild rice), many of us were seized with a violent sickness. It commenced with a cough and hoarseness, and sometimes bleeding from the mouth or nose. In a short time many died, and none were able to hunt. ... We were wholly unable to walk ... we coughed so loudly and incessantly that we could never have approached near enough to any game to kill it by still hunting .. In the middle of the night, I was waked by a dreadful pain in my ears. It appeared to me that something was eating into my ears... the pain became more and more excruciating for two days, and the end of with time I became insensible. When my consciousness returned after two days, which was, as I learned afterwards, at the end of two days, I found myself sitting outside the lodge. ... Then I immediately became insensible for two days and remained so for some days, as I was unconscious of everything that passed ... My hearing was gone for abscesses had formed and discharged in each ear, and I could now hear but very indifferently ... I found that my cunning and my success had deserted me Under the influence of these painful feelings I resolved to destroy myself ... Finding myself balled in the attempt to take my own life... It is probable that in my insane ravings, I had talked of my intention to destroy myself, and on this occasion they had been careful to deprive me of the most ordinary and direct means of affecting my purpose. ... Though my health soon became good, I did not recover my hearing, and it was several months before I could hunt as well as I had been able to do previous to my sickness, but I was not among those who suffered most severely by this terrible complaint. Of the Indians who survived, some were permanently deaf, others injured in their intellects, and some, in the fury occasioned by the disease, dashed themselves against trees and rocks, breaking their arms or otherwise maiming themselves. Most of those who survived had copious discharges from the ears, or in the earlier stages had bled profusely from the nose. This disease was entirely new to the Indians, and they attempted to use few or no remedies for it.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Martin, *Keepers of the Game*, 139.

⁹⁰Tanner, *A Narrative of Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner during Thirty Years Residence Among the Indians in the Interior of North America*, 95-98. Calvin Martin concluded that Tanner's symptoms point to the typhoidal variety of tularaemia. *Keepers of the Game*, 140-141. At roughly the same time as the disease infected Tanner's people, Peter Fidler recalled "Fleas in many places are now become very numerous, they appear to have been first introduced into this country about the year 1802..." MacGregor, *Peter Fidler. Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 241. The fleas may have been related to an infestation of mice that plagued Alexander Henry in November 1800, "We are plagued by great numbers of mice, which destroy everything but metals. ... At night, we see them running in droved over the floor; they are not shy in the least. They often wake us up by scampering over our faces and playing on our beds." Over

While those who were infected were temporarily removed from the commercial trade, the decline in game supplies through disease and predation, coupled with the dizzying escalation in fur trade competition gave healthy trappers a temporary advantage in the trade.⁹¹

The response of fur producers was to maximize their returns for their effort, even at the expense of alliances that they had forged with various traders. Even before the loss of beaver stocks to disease, the Ojibwa often played competing traders against each other to maximize their profit. In 1793, as competition escalated on the Assiniboine River, a trader at Brandon House considered them "the most Rascals in the Country."⁹² The Ojibwa, and other groups, used the ever increasing competition to their advantage, a rational response to a competitive market economy.

As the Ojibwa expanded their territory, they displaced local groups, often with a combination of psychological and physical intimidation. Peers characterized the local response to Ojibwa expansion a largely peaceful one, "[they] made no objection to their presence."⁹³ Spiritual and physical harassment of local populations by the Ojibwa was

the fall and winter, Henry reported that "most of the people" sick with symptoms that included an "ugly cough" sore limbs, convulsions occurring "twice or thrice a day." In January, Henry noted that in addition to the death of Charlo, his guide, his wife, two daughters and two sons had died since August. *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 1*, ed., (mice), 135, 153, 161, 161. The following summer, a disease identified by Henry's editor as pulmonary consumption was "the most common fatal disease among them." *Ibid.*, 203.

⁹¹Laura Peers noted that the impact of the outbreak among the beaver was mitigated for the Ojibwa by the increased fur trade competition. *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 39.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 38. See also, *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814*, 452.

⁹³Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 45.

portrayed by Peers as a means to "maintain a boundary between the Ojibwa and other ethnic groups, and therefore it played a role in maintaining Ojibwa identity and heritage in their new territories."⁹⁴ Anthropological motivations aside, Ojibwa expansionism struck genuine fear in others, even among their allies.⁹⁵ In his attempt to establish a HBC presence in the region of the Beaver River, Peter Fidler was frustrated by his inability to secure the assistance of local groups as "all of the Indians of this quarter are frightened of the Bungees, so that we shall have both to hunt and grope our way there."⁹⁶ At Lac La Biche, he noted that the Ottawas and the Bungees, in the service of the Canadians, were "the only Indians about this place."⁹⁷ The intrusion of the Ojibwa into the country from the Beaver River to Lac La Biche was marked by violence as the Athapaskan speaking Beaver Indians from the north defended their territory. Many people on both sides perished.⁹⁸ Kerry Abel noted, the "NWC was not opposed to encouraging "wars" between the bands as part of its trading policy, unlike the HBC,

⁹⁴Ibid., 46.

⁹⁵On the Lower Saskatchewan, Alexander Henry recognized the cultural isolation of the Ojibwa "they seldom if ever intermix, as the Mashquegons are afraid of the Saulteurs." *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814*, 477.

⁹⁶Bungee or Bungi was the term often used by the HBC to designate the Ojibwa. Peter Fidler, 8 September 1799. *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, 213.

⁹⁷Peter Fidler, 17 October 1799. *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, 216. Fidler's biographer noted that the Bungee had built a talisman on the portage from the Beaver River to Lac La Biche, "being intruders, they set up this image in the Beaver River for what protection it might give them." MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 116.

⁹⁸Ibid., 121-122.

which had always preferred to promote peace.⁹⁹ The violence associated with the territorial expansion of the Ojibwa was not confined to the far northwest.

In the region west of Lake of the Woods, the push of the Ojibwa toward the plains in conjunction with the Canadian fur trade brought them into a renewed conflict with the Dakota. Hostilities between the Ojibwa and the Dakota developed in the 1730s when their alliance broke down and the former joined the coalition of the French, Assiniboiné and Cree against their former allies.¹⁰⁰ During the 1790s, the area along the Red River was largely unoccupied and essentially a war zone.¹⁰¹ Although provisions were secured from transient Saulteaux at Red River often in exchange for liquor,¹⁰² the area around the forks had, according to A.S. Morton, "no charm for the Northwesters."¹⁰³ In 1800, Alexander Henry noted that the Saulteurs awaited his arrival north of the forks at a site formerly inhabited by the Cree and Assiniboiné.¹⁰⁴ By the fall

⁹⁹Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁰As part of the displacement of the Dakota westward, early accounts noted that the Cheyenne, a neutral group between the Ojibwa and the Dakota, were nearly exterminated and driven onto the plains where Alexander Henry described them as "a wandering tribe" affiliated with the Missouri equestrian economy. *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 1*, 144-145.

¹⁰¹Records of the period note that the "Dead River" discussed in the previous chapter in the context of the smallpox epidemic of the early 1780s, was named for the massacre of a large interethnic camp of Assiniboiné, Cree and Saulteux by the Naudawesis Sioux. Writing in the late 1790s, John McDonnell stated that the banks of the Red were little occupied except by the war parties. "The Red River by John McDonnell of the North West Company (About 1797)," 268-269.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 268.

¹⁰³Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 431.

¹⁰⁴The site was Dead River the "Rivière aux Morts." *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814, Volume 1*, 41-44.

of 1803, the Assiniboine "requested... to leave a person to summer with them, as they did not like to go to the Saulteur fort [Pembina]."¹⁰⁵ By the time of the Selkirk treaty, the Cree who had once controlled the area occupied by the fledgling colony, agreed to cede the land east of Portage la Prairie to the Ojibwa.¹⁰⁶

As the Saulteaux secured their hold on the Red River, the trade in provisions escalated to support the ever increasing numbers of Europeans in the interior. Most of the food supplied to Canadian traders was brought to the mouth of the Winnipeg River from the Assiniboine River as far west as the Qu'Appelle Valley.¹⁰⁷ While food supplies from the plains were provided by the Assiniboine and the Cree, highly mobile bands of Ojibwa trappers supplemented the fur returns from the Red River hinterland.¹⁰⁸

A number of factors contributed to the spiralling competition in the country west of Red River in the mid 1790s. The plains were rich in bison and the parkland still had abundant beaver stocks. The HBC who had, according to a senior trader, "carried on this trade as if it was drawn by a dead horse,"¹⁰⁹ began to pose a serious threat to Canadian traders on the Assiniboine. E.E. Rich noted that the HBC expansion "cut to

¹⁰⁵Alexander Henry, Journal entry, March 1, 1804, in *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 1*, 239.

¹⁰⁶Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM) MG 2 A 1, Selkirk Papers, W. Coltman to Selkirk, Red River, July 17, 1817, 3814.

¹⁰⁷The pemmican trade from Fort L'Esperance near the mouth of the Qu'Appelle was well ensconced by the late 1780s. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 432.

¹⁰⁸McDonnell, "The Red River by John McDonnell of the North West Company (About 1797)," 272-275.

¹⁰⁹William Tomison to James Bird, Edmonton House, Dec. 12 1795, quoted in A.M. Johnson, "Introduction," *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, xxvi.

the heart of the Northwesters' system" and the threat to the pemmican supply "was accepted as a menace all out of proportion to the furs which he might trade."¹¹⁰

Although the HBC trade into the Churchill River was still undermined by interdepartmental rivalry between York and Churchill, the HBC's success on the Assiniboine move was driven from both York and Albany.¹¹¹ Complicating matters on the Assiniboine was the "invasion" of independent traders led by Peter and David Grant, known as the 'South Men' because of their exploits in what became American territory.¹¹² The region came under more pressure with the signing of Jay's treaty in 1794.¹¹³ The result was an explosion in the number of trading establishments on the Assiniboine. Between 1793-94 and 1795, the number of posts on the river grew from nine to twenty-one.¹¹⁴

As had been the case with the shift to the bison economy on the northwestern plains, the use of alcohol corresponded with the rise in competition which grew to what

¹¹⁰Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870, Volume 2*, 180.

¹¹¹John McDonnell, "The Red River by John McDonnell of the North West Company (About 1797)," 275. See also Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 433.

¹¹²Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume 2*, 180.

¹¹³The signing of the treaty placed Grande Portage into American territory and led to the construction of Fort William and to the eventual rise of the American Fur Company under John Jacob Astor. Wilkins Campbell, *The North-West Company*, 108-111.

¹¹⁴Peers noted that nine posts were in operation in 1793-94., 40. The larger number is presented by A.J. Ray in his discussion of the burgeoning bison trade. *The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 130. A.S. Morton noted that the N.W.C. strategy was to build numerous posts to drain the resources of areas of competition. *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 434-435.

can only be termed absurd levels.¹¹⁵ As J.M. Bumsted stated, there were limits to the trade in material goods and Europeans were often tempted to "move into non-material addictive consumer goods, particularly alcohol and tobacco."¹¹⁶ Motivation for the Indian participation in the trade was characterised by Duncan M'Gillivray of the NWC:

The love of Rum is their first inducement to industry; they undergo every hardship and fatigue to procure a Skinful of this delicious beverage, and when a Nation becomes addicted to drinking, it affords a strong presumption that they will soon become excellent hunters.¹¹⁷

Competition grew increasingly ruthless after the establishment of the so-called XY or New North West Company after the breakdown of the main Canadian company's negotiations for a renewal of its charter in 1795. It was during the period of unrestrained rivalry, from 1795-1805, that social pathologies, particularly alcoholism and violence, reached their peak. By the spring of 1796, William Tomison on the Saskatchewan complained that his trade had dwindled to nothing as his rival "sent out a number of men with rum to meet the Indians and debauch them from paying my credits."¹¹⁸ Records from the period competition are marked by the high levels of alcohol used to establish trade relations and as a trade item itself. At Pembina, the fur trader's journal for 1797-1798 indicated that rum was a part of every transaction, if not

¹¹⁵John McDonnell, "The Red River by John McDonnell of the North West Company (About 1797)," 284-287.

¹¹⁶Bumsted, *The Fur Trade Wars: The Founding of Western Canada*, 37.

¹¹⁷Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 459.

¹¹⁸William Tomison to James Swain, 26 April 1796, *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, 57.

every encounter, with Indians.¹¹⁹ When the Pembina post was closed after the amalgamation of the rival Canadian companies, Alexander Henry, who had chronicled the previous eight years trade in the area,¹²⁰ despaired the effect of the "boisson." When a Coutre Oreille man was stabbed fifteen times in the stomach and chest and ten days later a woman "put the muzzle of his [her husband's] gun in his mouth and blew the back part of his head away," Henry lamented, "Murders among these people are so frequent that we pay little attention to them. Their only excuse for such outrages is that they are drunk."¹²¹ Later in his account, Henry acknowledged the role of competition in the undermining of Saulteux society:

I sincerely believe that the competitive trade among the Saulteurs is the greatest slavery a person of any feeling can undergo. A common dramshop in a civilized country is a paradise compared to the Indian trade, where two or more different interests are striving to obtain the greater share of the Indians' hunts ... Love of liquor is their ruling passion, and when intoxicated they will commit any crime to obtain more drink.¹²²

The combination of inter-ethnic warfare, pressure from competing traders, and alcohol may have simply been too much for individuals to bare. Suicides, according to John

¹¹⁹Hickerson, "The Journal of Charles Jean Baptiste Chaboillez, 1797-1798," 276-293.

¹²⁰Henry had actually been in the trade since 1792, seven years before the beginning of his journal. *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 2*, 452, fn. 4.

¹²¹*New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 1*, 429.

¹²²*New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 2*, 452.

Tanner, were "not very unfrequent" among Indians.¹²³ In his history of the HBC, E.E. Rich recognized the destructive role of alcohol during the competitive period of the trade. According to the author, the use of rum, particularly by the Canadians who "like so many ravenous wolves seeking whom they may devour" toppled aboriginal suppliers from their dominant position in the trade "as the Indian became an eager buyer instead of a reluctant seller."¹²⁴ Even before the establishment of the British distillery at York in the early 1790s, the value of rum rose four times in relation to its value in furs.¹²⁵ A decade later, at the height of the battle between the XY and North West Companies, the amount of rum imported from Canada doubled to over 20,000 gallons of double strength rum.¹²⁶

Because "Spiritous Liquors [were] the Chief Article of the Canadian Trade,"¹²⁷ traders learned to use the substance to their maximum advantage whenever possible. After the amalgamation of the rival Canadian companies, Alexander Henry reported that Canadian double-distilled spirits were diluted according to levels that the traders could get away with. Among the Blackfoot, Henry wrote:

We do not mix our liquor so strong as we do for tribes who are more accustomed to use it. To make a nine-gallon keg of liquor we generally put in four or five quarts of high wine and fill them up with water. For the Crees and Assiniboines we put in six quarts of high wine, and for the Saulteurs eight or

¹²³Tanner, *A Narrative of Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner during Thirty Years Residence Among the Indians in the Interior of North America*, 98.

¹²⁴Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870*. Vol. 2, 228.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 229.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 476-477.

nine quarts.¹²⁸

He stated that access to traders and their alcohol determined the strength of the mix aboriginal groups could haggle for. Henry described the situation among the emergent Plains Cree:

They are fully as much addicted to spiritous liquors as the Saulteurs, but generally have no means of obtaining it. Those only who frequent the strong wood country can purchase liquor and tobacco. Those who inhabit the plains are a useless set of lazy fellows... Buffalo is their only object. Although passionately fond of liquor and tobacco, they still will not resort to the woods where they could procure furs to purchase those articles.¹²⁹

In addition to the ever increasing problem of alcohol abuse among aboriginal communities, contagious diseases came west with increasing frequency. Along the Albany River, an important route from the Bay to Lake Winnipeg at this time, "a great and Uncommon Mortality" was delivered to the Cree in the spring of 1795 by a disease which was unknown to the surgeon at Albany.¹³⁰ The western posts of the HBC were afflicted by an outbreak of another disease over the winter of 1795-96. This disease, characterised by "rheumatic pains" struck traders and Indians alike and underscored the weakness of the HBC supply network as medical supplies were woefully inadequate.¹³¹ Outbreaks of the contagious disease came with an increasing frequency

¹²⁸Alexander Henry, Journal entry, Sept. 15, 1809, in *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814, Volume 2*, 542.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 512-513.

¹³⁰Paul Hackett notes that the symptoms, which included the swelling of the tongue and throat, may indicate that the outbreak was either diphtheria or scarlet fever. Europeans were immune to the disease. 'A Very Remarkable Sickness,' 257.

¹³¹During the winter, the medical supplies at Edmonton, described as "a little worthless medicine-box" were exhausted by traders and Indians who came to the posts to trade for medicines which were often unavailable because "medicines of late years has been very much curtailed and I do not know for what reason." The yearly trade for

during this period, striking down both traders and Indians alike.¹³²

By the turn of the century, sexually transmitted diseases were common among plains communities. Edward Umfreville's memoir, published in 1790, noted that venereal disease was "very common" among the natives of Hudson's Bay.¹³³ The journal of Alexander Mackenzie, published a decade later, stated that *lues venerea* (syphilis) among the Cree was "a common complaint, but cured by the application of simples, with whose virtues they appear to be well acquainted."¹³⁴ In his discussion of the native people frequenting Fort Vermillion, Alexander Henry considered that among the Cree venereal disease was "common, and appears to be the principle cause of death, as they do not possess the knowledge of roots and other remedies which the

medicines was estimated to be about 100 made beaver, "but this year there will be none." William Tomison, Fort Edmonton Journal, Jan. 12, 1796. *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, 24-25. For references to the disease among the traders, see *Ibid.*, 17-25.

¹³²The HBC Saskatchewan Journals indicate that in addition to the outbreak of 1795-96, episodes of what might have been influenza occurred through the summer and fall of 1797, the spring of 1799, when half of the men at Edmonton were off duty from a disorder in the head and the breast." *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, 128, 161-167. The Journal of Alexander Henry made numerous references to coughs and colds and even to the possibility of tuberculosis between 1800 and 1803. On the TB outbreak, Henry noted "they linger for a long time, get very lean, and seldom recover. This ... is the most common fatal disease among them." The author stated that the disease hit all ages and sexes equally. *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 1*, 225.

¹³³Umfreville, *The Present State of Hudson's Bay*, 19. Syphilis was reported among the Mandan on the Missouri by David Thompson in 1787. Saskatchewan Archives Board (hereafter SAB), R.G. Ferguson Papers, reel 2.391, "Epidemic of Tuberculosis among the Plains Indians," 3.

¹³⁴Simples are medicinal plants. Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen Ocean in 1789 and 1793*, xcv.

Saulteurs use."¹³⁵ East of the Rocky Mountains, Daniel Harmon reported that while "The Indians in general, are subject to few diseases. The venereal complaint is common to all tribes in the north."¹³⁶ The presence of venereal disease among the inhabitants of the Missouri led the members of an American expedition under the command of Lewis and Clark to conclude that the illness was of aboriginal origin.¹³⁷ While the spread of sexually transmitted diseases was a common feature in native-newcomer encounters, the fur trade practice of sending servants to overwinter with aboriginal groups to lessen the pressure on provisions at trading locations undoubtedly eased the spread of the illness.¹³⁸ The trading strategy known as "en derouine," where servants travelled to Indian communities to exchange goods was no doubt another means by which sexually transmitted diseases were spread.

In his history of the HBC, E.E. Rich characterised Canadian traders as "not always over-scrupulous in their trade; at their best and fairest they relied upon the large

¹³⁵*New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814, Volume 2*, 516. The disease was common among the Assiniboiné who had no remedies for it. Henry later discussed the proliferation of the disease among the people of the Pacific northwest by American traders after 1810, 836.

¹³⁶Daniel Harmon, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816*, 200. In her study which focussed on the positive side of relationships between traders and Indians, Sylvia Van Kirk concluded that while venereal disease was a problem in Indian country, that "[i]ts extent, however should not be exaggerated." Silvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties" Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), 27.

¹³⁷The American explorers failed to realize the extent of fur trade relations, economic and otherwise, in the region. SAB, Ferguson Papers, microfilm 2.391.

¹³⁸At Fort Chipewyan, this practice continued until 1812. Parker, *Emporium of the North: Fort Chipewyan and the Fur Trade to 1835*, 47. See also A.M. Johnson, "Introduction," in *Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence, 1795-1802: Edmonton House, 1795-1800, Chesterfield House, 1800-1802*, , xxvii.

quantities of spirits, at their worst they debauched, bullied and robbed."¹³⁹ In the case of the Athabasca trade, particularly during the battle between Northwest Company and the breakaway XY Company, this was an understatement. The conduct of Canadians in the region prior to the creation of a monopoly in the trade in 1821, led to one of the most repugnant chapters in the history of native-newcomer relations in Canada. The cycle of abuse began within years of the arrival of Montreal traders in the area. In 1786, a Canadian trader recorded the beating of a Chipewyan with the flat of a sword, "Mr. Pond told him that the Country and the Indians belonged to him & he would do with them as he pleased & no other person should meddle with them."¹⁴⁰ In his study of the Athabasca trade, W.A. Sloan identified the violence inflicted on the Chipewyan a consequence of their sobriety; what traders could not gain from chemical dependency, they secured with assault, murder and kidnapping.¹⁴¹ The ecological rationale for the Chipewyan reluctance to enter the trade was founded on the notion that commerce jeopardized their traditional economic cycle in a precarious environment. As Kerry Abel summarized, "the costs were simply too high."¹⁴² Canadian traders soon found ways to overcome the Chipewyan aversion to commercial trapping.

By the early 1790s, women who were taken from their families to ensure

¹³⁹Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870, Volume 2*, 196.

¹⁴⁰Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trades into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 291.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.* On the sobriety of the Chipewyans, see Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans*, lxxxii. In his journey inland in 1772, Samuel Hearne noted that "[f]ew of the Northern Indians are fond of spirits, especially those who keep a distance from the Fort." A *Journey From Prince of Wales Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1971), 272.

¹⁴²Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History*, 78.

payment of debts were being sold to servants for between five hundred to two thousand Livres and, "if the father or Husband or any of them resist the only satisfaction they get is a beating and they are frequently not satisfied with taking the Woman but their Gun and Tent likewise."¹⁴³ The Canadian management of the trade, unfettered by legality or morality, met initially with great success. Canadian posts were established on the Mackenzie River by 1795. The Chief Canadian trader in the Mackenzie, Duncan Livingstone, was highly regarded by his peers, "[u]nder his management these people were modelled anew and brought under an implicit obedience to the White's authority."¹⁴⁴ According to James Parker, that authority included in the Athabasca, "what can only be termed a slave traffic in women."¹⁴⁵ In the Fort Chipewyan journal for the spring of 1800, James McKenzie described the reaction of traders to the killing of one of their own during the liberation of a Montagner woman:

... if any d-and rascal of them deserted this summer with any of the Frenchmen's women, he and she would both lose their heads, were we to give 200 skins as a reward to such as would choose to search for them and cut off their head. They desired that we should trade no more women, on any account. I told them that we would do as we thought proper, for it was not their business to prescribe rules to us...¹⁴⁶

A few days earlier, the trader detailed the circumstances leading to the sale of one of

¹⁴³Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trades into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 291.

¹⁴⁴W.F. Wentzel to Roderick Mackenzie, Forks Mackenzie River, March 27, 1807. Letter No.1, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest*, Volume 1, 95.

¹⁴⁵James Parker, "Fort Chipewyan and the Early Fur Trade," *Proceedings of the Fort Chipewyan and Fort Vermillion Bicentennial Conference*, eds. P. McCormack and R.G. Ironside (Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1990), 42.

¹⁴⁶The editor chose to end the entry here though the text indicates that the passage continues. James McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, April 18, 1800, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 2, 387-388.

the hostages of the trade. Saurarda, a trapper arrived at the post with his daughter, "who had deserted in the course of the winter from Morin at Slave Lake in order to be returned to her husband (Morin)." Mckenzie was directed by the jilted trader to "sell her to the highest bidder and debit Morin for the amount." Mackenzie reported:

Two advantages may be reaped from this affair; the first is that it will assist to discharge the debts of a man unable to do so by any other means...; the second is that it may be the means of thickling some lecherous miser to part with some of his hoard. I therefore kept the woman to be disposed of in the season when the Peace River bucks look out for women, in the month of May....¹⁴⁷

Morin's "wife" was not completely without options, when the trader offered her:

first to Etier, then to Dusalon, and then to old Marcil, she refused them all three ...she said that, as it was her fate to be bound to a *Benchulaigh-slini*, she should as soon have her former *Benchulaigh-Slini*, Morin as any other. She has a young *Ojijauke* on board her frigate on its way to the world, but how far advanced in the voyage, I have not enquired.¹⁴⁸

The sale of Saurarda's unnamed daughter took place as the trade in the Athabasca descended into what W.A. Sloan described as "profligate" competition following the entry of the XY Company into the region in 1799 and by the arrival of the HBC in 1802.¹⁴⁹ In the years between 1800 and 1806, when the Canadian rivals merged, fur

¹⁴⁷Again the passage which continues was abbreviated by the editor. James McKenzie, Fort Chipewyan Journal, April 9, 1800, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 2, 385.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.* In her study that considered native-newcomer relations in a positive light, Sylvia Van Kirk remarked on this episode that "In the fur-trade wars Indian wives were used as pawns by rivals sometimes so desperate as to debauch and intimidate each other's women." *"Many Tender Ties" Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870*, 89.

¹⁴⁹Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trades into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 293.

returns from the north plummeted.¹⁵⁰ Liquor imports increased from an average of 9,600 gallons in the 1790s to over 21,000 gallons in 1803.¹⁵¹ Willard Wentzel concluded that the decline of the trade was the result of competition between the two Canadian concerns and, "partly, by the death of many Natives."¹⁵² Wentzel added that, by 1807, the trade had "almost totally abolishe[d] every humane sentiment in both Christian and Indian breast."¹⁵³

Aboriginal populations responded as best they could to the frenzy of competition and violence. The Chipewyan quit the trade in large numbers from 1799 to 1806, turning to the quest for food instead of furs.¹⁵⁴ The Beaver in the Peace River country were able to resist the increasingly coercive nature of the trade and barred XY

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. NWC fur returns from Athabasca dropped from 648 packs in 1799 to only 182 in 1803.

¹⁵¹ The second number is a combined total of 16,299 for the NWC and 5,000 for the XY Company. After the merger of the two competitors, the level of alcohol was reduced to an annual average of 9,700 gallons. Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 69; MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 148.

¹⁵² Wentzel to Roderick McKenzie, Forks Mackenzie River, March 27, 1807. Letter No. 1, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 1, 95-96.

¹⁵³ Ibid. In addition to violence, disease was afflicting the northern Indians accompanied with great mortality.

¹⁵⁴ Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trades into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 293. Withdrawal from the trade was not an uncommon practice among aboriginal producers. After the merger of 1821, large numbers of Chipewyans turned again to the quest for food. These people became known as the "Caribou Eater Chipewyan" whose territory ranged to the north of Reindeer Lake. On the origins of this group, see James G.E. Smith, "Economic Uncertainty in an 'Original Affluent Society': Caribou and Caribou Eater Chipewyan Adaptive Strategies," *Arctic Anthropology* 15 (1978), 68-88, and Smith, "Local Band Organization of the Caribou Eater Chipewyan in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 6 (1976), 72-90.

Company traders from their territory for three years.¹⁵⁵ The competition served to ignite a number of inter-tribal hostilities. In addition to the Beaver attacks on the Saulteaux in the Peace country, the former began a campaign of expansion northward down the Mackenzie River into the territory of smaller Athapaskan speaking nations.¹⁵⁶ As the frenzy for furs extended to the marginal areas of the north, local populations were not only threatened by both European and aboriginal aggression, but were displaced into an unreliable physical environment. The results were famine, disease and other "grim consequences."¹⁵⁷ Colin Yerbury recognized the connection between territorial displacement and illness, "morbidity was the consequence of the effects of disease upon nutritionally weakened Indians who had been displaced or migrated to a less than life-sustaining biotic zone."¹⁵⁸ Starvation, disease and violence characterized life on the northern margins of the trade especially after 1800.¹⁵⁹

Epidemic disease came with increasing frequency in the north during the first decade of the nineteenth century and combined with hunger on such a scale as to

¹⁵⁵Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trades into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 292. By this time large numbers of Iroquois trappers were exploiting the resources of the Peace River for the North West Company.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 149.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹Shepard Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade among on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39 (1983), 126. See also, Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 148-150. The climate underwent a severe cooling period after the turn of the century. See T.F. Ball, "Historical and Instrumental Evidence of Climate: Western Hudson Bay, Canada, 1714-1850," 70-71.

have caused significant depopulation of the area by 1811.¹⁶⁰ In 1802, the year the HBC established posts in the district, ten Beaver people died of a "disorder" near Lake Athabasca, causing many of the survivors to flee southward to Ile-à-la-Crosse.¹⁶¹ The following winter was so severe and game in such short supply that the HBC abandoned its outpost on the Peace River after an outbreak of disease exhausted the company's meagre food reserves.¹⁶² Adding to the turmoil, Iroquois trappers brought to the Peace River by the North West Company continued to procure large quantities of food and furs for the Canadians. The success of the Iroquois on the Peace ousted the Beaver from their command of the area and led to the expansion of the latter northward into territory occupied by less powerful groups.¹⁶³

The combination of "severe and even homicidal rivalry" for the trade,¹⁶⁴ the shortage of food and the spread of infectious disease was not confined to the Peace River. In the summer of 1803, Peter Fidler remarked that thirty-seven of the Chipewyan from across Lake Athabasca had died and that those who survived were not expected

¹⁶⁰Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 138.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 74, 149.

¹⁶²Ibid. The disease on the Peace was characterised by "a burning pain in the mouth and the upper part of the stomach which prevents them from taking any nourishment and they linger to death.

¹⁶³The XY Company was barred from the Peace at this time by the Beaver. The pressure placed on the resources of the Beaver by the immigrant Iroquois and their patrons, the North West Company, led to their encroachment into the territory of less prominent groups in the north and to the hostilities with the Saulteux at Lesser Slave Lake. Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trades into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 292.

¹⁶⁴Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 71.

to supply his post with furs.¹⁶⁵ The increased incidence of disease may have been related to greater population density around the entrepot of the district, Fort Chipewyan. In the early years of the century, James Macdonnell reported over four hundred souls at the Post.¹⁶⁶ Disease was not the only threat to the English trade. In October 1803, the HBC servants at Chiswick House on Great Slave Lake were able to lure only three of the twenty-eight Chipewyan canoes that passed by as they had been threatened with death by the Northwesters if they traded with the English.¹⁶⁷ Compounding the problem of harassment by the Canadians, Chiswick had to import food from the south as they had been forced to "the necessity of Eating Parchment Skins this winter several times."¹⁶⁸ Yerbury attributed the paucity of Swain's returns at the HBC post to the combination of starvation, large scale mortality among the Indian fur producers and the abandonment of the trade by survivors.¹⁶⁹

As the trade descended into a cycle of violence and despair, rival traders turned

¹⁶⁵Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trades into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 295.

¹⁶⁶Gillespie, "The Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives," 209.

¹⁶⁷Chiswick was established by Thomas Swain after the abandonment of the Peace River. Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 73-74. The HBC men were outnumbered by a margin of five to one by the Canadians at this time, 71. See also MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 152-153.

¹⁶⁸Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 73. Through the period of competition, the English in particular were plagued by inadequate food supplies. After the famine of 1810-11, the company regularly imported provisions. Ann Carlos, "The Birth and Death of Predatory Competition in the North American Fur Trade: 1810-1821," *Explorations in Economic History* 19 (1982), 163. When the HBC invaded the Athabasca in large numbers in 1815, twenty people associated with the company perished of starvation. F.W. Wentzel to George Keith, Fort Chipewyan, May 28, 1816. Letter No. 7, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest Volume 1*, 117.

¹⁶⁹Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 73-74.

on each other with increasing frequency. The best documented case of such violence was the murder of the "North West bully James King" in a dispute with a young XY clerk, Lamothe, as the latter defended his furs.¹⁷⁰ Daniel Harmon, a Norwester, and devout Christian, described the intensity of the conflict between the competing Canadian interests:

In a word the North West Co. look upon their opponents the X.Y. Co. as encroachers on their territories... if the truth must be told, as they are weaker, that they have not been in this country long enough to gain much footing, we should wish to crush them at once [emphasis Harmon's]... here a murderer escapes the Gallows, as there are no human laws that can reach or have any effect on the People of this country. However I understand they are, in England about passing laws which will equally affect the People of this country as those in the Canadas or in any other part of the British Dominion-as it is high time it should be so, or most of us soon should have cut one another's throats!¹⁷¹

The killing of King forced a response from the colonial authorities. The *Canada Jurisdiction Act*, though a flawed piece of legislation, was the first attempt to impose legal authority in the far northwest.¹⁷² The passage of the Act was an acknowledgement by British authorities that the competition for the trade had gotten out of control. The aboriginal inhabitants in the interior had, by this time, come to the same conclusion. In the summer of 1804, the Chipewyan, long considered docile in their dealing with traders, killed at least ten Canadians in two incidents near Fort Chipewyan before

¹⁷⁰Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume 2*, 229.

¹⁷¹Daniel Harmon, Swan River Department, October 16, 1803, in *Sixteen Years in Indian Country*, 69-70.

¹⁷²According to E.E. Rich, the Act made it possible "for rivals to arrest each other without warrant and to take them down to Montreal, out of the way of the Indians, for a year or two." Rich acknowledged that it was the first "serious effort to mitigate the known evil results" of competition. *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume 2*, 230.

abandoning the Canadian trade completely for two years.¹⁷³ The combination of Imperial law and Indian reprisals, prompted the Canadian antagonists to come to an arrangement in the trade.¹⁷⁴ In November, 1804, a formal merger amalgamated the rivals into a single entity.¹⁷⁵ In the words of Alexander Henry at Pembina:

It certainly was high time for a change on this River. The country being almost destitute of beaver, and other furs, and the Indians increasing daily from the Red Lake and the Fond du Lac country ... by our obstinate proceedings, we had spoiled the Indians ... Our servants of every grade were getting extravagant in their demands, indolent, disaffected toward their employees... I am confident that another year could not have passed without bloodshed between ourselves and the Saulteurs.¹⁷⁶

Although she stressed the depletion of fur stocks as the cause, Laura Peers recognized that, by 1805, the entire western fur trade was in crisis.¹⁷⁷ Aboriginal hostility toward the traders was manifest in conflicts throughout the country. On the

¹⁷³Many of the Chipewyan reverted to the old strategy of travelling to Churchill to trade. Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trades into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 295-296. Others shifted temporarily to the HBC post at Great Slave Lake. See Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 74. On being informed of the killings, Peter Fidler of the HBC remarked, "should it be true it is what the Canadians had richly deserved-they are very severe with them." MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 157.

¹⁷⁴Another factor in the peace was the death of one of the key personalities in the North West Company, Simon McTavish, "with his dominating personality removed the way lay open for conciliation." Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume 2*, 230.

¹⁷⁵Heather Devine, "Mile Macdonnell and the Decline of the Northwest Company," in *New Faces of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. J. Fiske, Susan Sleeper-Smith, and William Wicken (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 255.

¹⁷⁶The reference to the Indians leaving the Red Lake and Fond du Lac country is evidence of resource depletion in those territories. Pembina River Post, January 1, 1805, in *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 1*, 256-257.

¹⁷⁷Peers, *he Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 63-63.

Assiniboine, Daniel Harmon reported that the post at Montagne à la Basse had closed its gates when surrounded by "about eighty lodges of Crees and Assiniboine encamped about the Fort, who threatened to kill all the White People who were in it."¹⁷⁸

If there was any respite for the inhabitants of the Northwest as a consequence of the amalgamation of the Canadian trade, it was short-lived. Posts belonging to the HBC, considered little more than a nuisance during the murderous competition between the Canadian concerns, soon became targets of the united Canadian enterprise. In 1806, the HBC was forced to withdraw from the Peace River.¹⁷⁹ The same season, their post at Green Lake on the route from the Saskatchewan to the Churchill was destroyed by Canadians.¹⁸⁰ What E.E. Rich called the "process of terrorism," Canadian intimidation of HBC servants, continued for at least a decade after the merger of the Canadian ventures.¹⁸¹ As hostilities continued in the north, W.A. Sloan noted that fur

¹⁷⁸Daniel Harmon, Swan River Journal, April 10, 1805, in *Sixteen Years in Indian Country*, 87. By the end of 1805, the combination of increased competition from Americans, increased hostility with the Indians and diminishing returns lead the amalgamated company to permanently abandon the Missouri trade permanently. See Masson, "Introduction," in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest, Volume 1*, 85-87; And T.F. Schiltz, "Brandy and Beaver Pelts: Assiniboine-European Trading Patterns, 1695-1805," 101. To the north, in the Assiniboine valley, widespread hunger was reported when the buffalo hunt failed. Alexander Henry Journal, July 12, 1806, in *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814 Volume 1*, 302.

¹⁷⁹MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 149. W.A. Sloan indicated that the HBC decided to abandon the Peace River in 1805. "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 295.

¹⁸⁰MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 172.

¹⁸¹The killing of Nor'wester, Aeneas Macdonnell, at Eagle Lake in 1809 is presented at length to illustrate Rich's point. He was killed while attempting to forcibly seize Indian furs bound for the HBC "with pistols and drawn sabre." His killer, John Mowat of the HBC, was eventually seized by the NWC and, after a winter in irons, was taken to Montreal to trial under the auspices of the *Canada Jurisdiction Act*, a tactic

returns for the Athabasca went "into a long and gradual decline" after 1806, the result of exploitation, intimidation and disease.¹⁸² The cycle of illness continued as it had prior to the merger. In the far north, outbreaks occurred yearly from 1804 to 1807 and resulted in numerous deaths.¹⁸³

In addition to mortality resulting from illness, a macabre practice appeared among the smaller Athapaskan nations dislocated by the turmoil of the trade; the killing of female infants.¹⁸⁴ The first specific reference to female infanticide in European journals occurred in 1807, when F.W. Wentzel attributed the relative scarcity of women among the Slavey on the Mackenzie River to:

which "completely neutralize the post under the pretence of legal formalities." The case was outstanding according to Rich, only for the fact that it produced a murder and a trial in the east, "[e]lsewhere the process of intimidation was repeated with details which varied according to circumstances and personalities." *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume 2*, 274.

¹⁸²"The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 297.

¹⁸³For a discussion, see Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 107.

¹⁸⁴In the anthropological literature, female infanticide was considered to have been a traditional response to periods of extraordinary stress. Records of the earliest Europeans in the far northwest, those of Samuel Hearne and Alexander Mackenzie, make no reference to the practice. David Thompson's narrative indicates that infanticide was practised among the Chipewyan, "[t]he hardships the women suffer induces them too often to let the female infants die as soon as born." The passage is not dated. *Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, 132. References to infanticide also appear in Thomas Malthus' important study of the principle of population first published in 1803. See T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of its past and Present Effect on Human Happiness: With an Inquiry into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 32-33. While infanticide was practised prior to the introduction of the trade, it became increasingly frequent after the turn of the nineteenth century. For a discussion, see June Helm, "Female Infanticide, European Diseases, and Population Levels among Mackenzie Dene," *American Ethnologist* 7 (1980), 259-285 and Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Lowland Dene, 1800-1850," 123-146.

[T]he custom they have of often destroying the female children when just born. The only reason they give for this barbarous custom, is that it is a great deal of trouble to bring up girls, and that women are only an incumbrance, useless in time of war and exceedingly voracious in time of want. This cruel practice is however wearing away.¹⁸⁵

Rather than disappearing however, the practice continued well into the nineteenth century and led to significant disparity between numbers of men and women in the far north.¹⁸⁶ The killing of children was, according to Yerbury, an:

[A]daptive response among postcontact Athapaskans to maintain their population in a stable balance with their food resources. Given that they were displaced into an area where they experienced cyclical reductions in resources, it is likely that migrant groups of Athapaskans could not permit too many extra mouths. Infanticide and especially female infanticide became the primary means of keeping population down.¹⁸⁷

The Slavey who practised the unfortunate "custom" noted by Wentzel, were under terrible pressure at this time. In addition to years of unrelenting disease among humans, Wentzel reported that, "[a] Distemper prevails among the animals of which they dye in great numbers-No less than three were found altogether in one spot-The Dogs who feasted upon them died also."¹⁸⁸ The Slavey were dislocated by the

¹⁸⁵Infanticide was also noted among the Slavey up the Laird River. Wentzel to Roderick Mackenzie, Forks of the Mackenzie, Mar. 27, 1807. Letter No. 1, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 1, 86, 92.

¹⁸⁶A census undertaken at Fort Liard during 1823-24 recorded a total male population of 154 while the total of females was only 133. The disparity, according to the trader Edward Smith was "owing to the barbarous custome of the women destroying the female children..." Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 102.

¹⁸⁷For a discussion of infanticide in the context of territorial dislocation, see *Ibid.*, 156-159. The author stressed that infanticide was predominantly a historic adaptation to the commercial fur trade, "For the prehistoric Canadian Athapaskans, it seems probable that there was not a significant imbalance between population size and food supply which made infanticide unnecessary," 164, endnote 6. See also Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 135-137.

¹⁸⁸Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 150.

Chipewyan who moved into their beaver hunting territory.¹⁸⁹ The Beaver Indians, who had earlier been ousted from the Peace River by the Cree and the Iroquois agents of the Northwest Company, displaced the Nahanne from their territory on the Upper Liard River.¹⁹⁰ The expansion of the Beaver territory was violent, they attacked the Nahanne "and 22 of the latter, including men, women and children were barbarously slaughtered."¹⁹¹ Disease spread as inter-tribal violence raged, resulting in considerably diminished trade.¹⁹² The sickness in the north during 1806-07 may have been the northern manifestation of a whooping cough epidemic that had spread from Red River to the Columbia. This, according to Paul Hackett, "signalled a new era in the disease history of the Petit Nord during which whooping cough appeared repeatedly following progressively shorter inter-epidemic intervals."¹⁹³

Hunger was a constant threat to all inhabitants of the far north. In the spring of

¹⁸⁹S. Krech, "The Trade of the Slavey and Dogrib at Fort Simpson in the Early Nineteenth Century," 107.

¹⁹⁰George Keith to Roderick Mackenzie, Jan.7, 1807, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 2, 68.

¹⁹¹Keith to Mackenzie, Dec. 1, 1808, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 2, 79.

¹⁹²*Ibid.*

¹⁹³"A Very Remarkable Sickness," 268. When the disease broke out among the Mandan on the Missouri, in 1806, the disease was reported to have killed one hundred and thirty people "old and young" in less than a month. "The bodies remaining there unburied until the stench became so great that the survivors were compelled to remove them." Charles Mackenzie, "The Missouri Indians: A Narrative of Four Trading Expeditions to the Missouri 1804-1805-1806. Fourth Expedition 1806," in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 1, 371-372. During his tour among the Mandan in 1806, Alexander Henry noted that the disease "a kind of whooping-cough" killed primarily the old, the young and the infirm on a daily basis. *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799-1814* Volume 1, 343.

1809, Daniel Harmon reported that a number of Canadians at Great Bear Lake starved to death and among those who pulled through the ordeal, "some ... ate their dead companions."¹⁹⁴ Two years later, the failure of the rabbit population and extreme cold led to widespread starvation across the region.¹⁹⁵ The periodic starvation resulting from the cyclical decline of the rabbit population in the north underlined the poverty of the environment for human subsistence. When combined with the various effects of the fur trade, the "coincidence of extremes"¹⁹⁶ often proved deadly.

The winter of 1810-11 was particularly horrible. At the Mackenzie River Post, "of four Christians who were left at the post last Fall," F.W. Wentzel was the only survivor.¹⁹⁷ Even the Cree were reduced to the most drastic measures to survive. According to one HBC account, "a southern woman (Cree), who was in such extreme want, that she dug up one of her own relatives, who had been sometime buried, and

¹⁹⁴Most of the dead were free traders and were unable to secure adequate food supplies. Harmon's narrative continued, "...It is not unfrequently the case, that the surviving part of a band of the Natives, subsist upon the flesh of their dead companions, when compelled to do it for want of other food, sufficient to sustain life. I know a woman who, it is said ate of no less than fourteen of her friends and relations, during one winter." Harmon, *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country*, 120.

¹⁹⁵Wentzel to Mackenzie, April 30, 1811. Letter No. 4, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest, Volume 1*, 106-107. For a discussion of the cyclical nature of animal populations, particularly the ten year cycle of hare and muskrat populations, see Lloyd Keith, *Wildlife's Ten Year Cycle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963).

¹⁹⁶S. Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 137.

¹⁹⁷From January 12th to March 11th the traders "lived upon nothing else but dried beaver skins." Over the winter the occupants of the post ate over three hundred beaver skins. Wentzel to Mackenzie, April 30, 1811. Letter No. 4, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest, Volume 1*, 106-107.

fed for several days on this shocking repast."¹⁹⁸ In the Nelson River District of the HBC, at least nine cases of famine related cannibalism were recorded between 1811 and 1815.¹⁹⁹

The situation in the aftermath of the famine of 1810-11 could best be described as chaos. The continued scarcity of hares and fish reduced fur returns to a trickle as traders "have much ado to make sufficiency of provisions for the winter."²⁰⁰ The outbreak of war between the United States and England reduced the supply of trade goods to the Canadians leaving them in an "almost unsupportable situation."²⁰¹ During the winter of 1812, northern Athapaskans (either Slavey or Dogrib) destroyed Fort Nelson on the Upper Liard River, killing five traders and their families.²⁰² George Keith of the North West Company, was surprised by the attack::

[N]o one ever entertained the most distant prospect of such an atrocious catastrophe, particularly in that quarter... if acting and entirely influenced by the motive of self existence or preservation, as they have subsequently loudly proclaimed, their most heinous crime is, according to their ideas, at least, in

¹⁹⁸SAB, R.G. Ferguson Papers, microfilm reel R 2.391.

¹⁹⁹The deaths were the result of the overhunting of both large game and fur bearers. As large game disappeared, inhabitants of the north were forced to shift to unreliable foods such as rabbits and fish. Robert Brightman, "Conservation and Resource Depletion: The Case of the Boreal Forest Algonkians," 124-125.

²⁰⁰George Keith to Roderick Mackenzie, Bear Lake, Jan. 5, 1812, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 2, 97.

²⁰¹Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 81. The outbreak of war caused considerable anxiety to the Canadians whose transportation corridor brought them close to the front. See George Keith to Roderick Mackenzie, Bear Lake, Nov. 8, 1812, 98, and John McDonald of Garth, Autobiographical Notes, 42, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 2. In 1814, Sault Ste. Marie was burned as part of the hostilities and the Canadians were forced to provide armed escorts for their ever diminishing returns, 54-55.

²⁰²Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 134.

some degree palliated.²⁰³

By January 1814, Keith reported that, "Athabasca itself is dwindling down to nothing."

The district had been trapped out, the result of Iroquois overhunting, and the inhabitants of the district could take no more.²⁰⁴ F.W. Wentzel stated:

[T]hey formed a conspiracy last Spring to massacre all the Whites of Fort Chipewyan and Big Island, in the Peace River, as well as Moose Deer Island Establishment at Slave Lake... In this quarter, about the same time the Loucheux were near creating an uproar at Fort Good Hope on account of a deficiency of beads at the Fort.²⁰⁵

According to W.A. Sloan, "[f]ur stocks indeed were depleted but the deciding factor was the Indian intransigence."²⁰⁶ In 1815, the North West Company temporarily withdrew from the Mackenzie Basin, leaving what remained of the trade to Indian middlemen, particularly the Yellowknives, who briefly expanded their territory at the expense of the Slavey and the Dogrib.²⁰⁷ As the Canadians retreated from the Mackenzie, the hostility of the inhabitants of the region was such that their retreat was described as made, "with great hazard to our lives ... [as the Indians] had formed the design of destroying us on

²⁰³George Keith to Roderick Mackenzie, Forks Mackenzie's River, Jan. 15, 1814, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest, Volume 2*, 125-126.

²⁰⁴Regarding the plan to expel the Iroquois from the Athabasca, see Karamanski, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of the Far Northwest," 7.

²⁰⁵Wentzel to Mackenzie, Great Bear Lake, Feb. 28, 1814. Letter No. 5, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest, Volume 1*, 109-110. See also Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 81. At Reindeer Lake, rumours circulated that the Chipewyan were plotting to destroy both the Canadian and HBC posts there. Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History*, 81.

²⁰⁶Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814, 297.

²⁰⁷The Dogrib and Slavey turned the tide of their oppressors, Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives: A Northern Athapaskan Tribe," 214-215.

our way out."²⁰⁸

In addition to the threat of hostile Indians, the Canadians were seriously challenged on the plains. Pemmican supplies, vital to the support of the Northwest brigades, were commandeered to support the recent arrivals to the agricultural colony at Red River.²⁰⁹ The scheme to establish an agrarian settlement of the plains had been part of a larger attempt for the HBC to revitalize its moribund trade after 1810.²¹⁰ The "retrenchement" of the HBC led to the establishment of a small agricultural community to buttress its tenuous hold on the Royal Charter granted a century and a half earlier.²¹¹ Although the reorganization of the English trade proved successful in the long term, the emphasis on economy and efficiency in the trade led to a serious, if temporary, labour

²⁰⁸Theodore J. Karamanski, *Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1983), 19.

²⁰⁹This was the ill-fated "Pemmican Proclamation" issued by Mile Macdonnell of the HBC on January 8, 1814. The escalation of violence that ensued from the seizure of the Canadian provisions is well-documented. See Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars: The Founding of Western Canada*, 93-257. In the north, the HBC move was countered by a NWC decree that ended cooperation between the companies during times of starvation. Ann M. Carlos and Elizabeth Hoffman, "The North American Fur Trade: Bargaining to a Joint Profit Maximum under Incomplete Information, 1804-1821," *Journal of Economic History* 46 (1986), 980-981.

²¹⁰In 1810, the HBC almost conceded the entire trade to their Canadian opponent. D. Francis, *Battle For the West: The Birth of Western Canada*, 115. For more on the crisis prior to the reorganization of the HBC, see Carlos and Hoffman, "The North American Fur Trade: Bargaining to a Joint Profit Maximum under Incomplete Information, 1804-1821," 975-976.

²¹¹In addition to the establishment of the Red River settlement, the organization of the HBC's finances in 1810 prepared the concern for a new thrust into the northwestern fur trade and in 1821, to its acquisition of the assets of the North West Company. Ann Carlos, "The Birth and Death Predatory Competition in the North American Fur Trade, 1810-1821," 160-163.

crisis.²¹² At Brandon House, the servants mutinied.²¹³ In addition to the reorganization of the HBC, the position of the Canadians was further undermined by the defection of one of their own, Colin Robertson, to the English. Robertson, who quit the Canadians over their poor treatment of the Indians, became a leader in the HBC's battle against the North West Company.²¹⁴

By 1814, the HBC was ready to use force in their opposition to the Canadians. According to the London Committee, "it is evident that no success can be expected until you are enabled to expel them by force."²¹⁵ In 1815, the company committed itself to the invasion of the Athabasca as the "decisive issue" in the battle for the trade.²¹⁶ At Fort Chipewyan, Ferdinand Wentzel boasted that, for almost a year, he was able to repel an assault "by upwards of 100 men, 10 clerks and a superintendent bringing in 14

²¹²Many of the large numbers of servants who were laid off were integrated into aboriginal communities and no doubt contributed to the expansion of the Métis population at the time. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 66.

²¹³Edith Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 225-232.

²¹⁴For a discussion of Robertson's defection, see Shirley Ann Smith, "Crossed Swords: Colin Robertson and the Athabasca Campaign," *Proceedings of the Fort Chipewyan and Fort Vermillion Bicentennial Conference*, eds. Patricia McCormack and R. Geoffrey Ironsides (Edmonton: Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1990), 69-74. By 1810, a number of HBC personnel had come to the conclusion that force was the only way to win the fur trade war. In the spring of 1809 William Auld reported, "nothing short of armed men and these more numerous than the Canadians can bring or will produce an increase in our returns." MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 173.

²¹⁵Carlos, "The Birth and Death of Predatory Competition in the North American Fur Trade: 1810-1821," 164. fn. 25.

²¹⁶Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company Volume 2*, 316. Even as the HBC prepared for the invasion of the far northwest, they offered their Canadian rivals the right of transit from York Factory to Lake Winnipeg, a major gesture of conciliation. Carlos and Hoffman, "The North American Fur Trade: Bargaining to a Joint Profit Maximum under Incomplete Information, 1804-1821," 981-982.

loaded canoes full of merchandise."²¹⁷

The success of the Canadian trader was the result of more than business acumen or even coercion. Half a world away, the massive volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora in April 1815 filled the atmosphere with so much debris that weather patterns were affected around the globe. 1816 became known as the "year with no summer" and was, according to Tim Ball, one of the worst years in the historic record.²¹⁸ The event brought widespread starvation and death to the subarctic.²¹⁹ In the Athabasca, almost one fifth of the HBC contingent which had "invaded" the district perished from hunger in the winter of 1815-16.²²⁰ Survivors were forced to abandon their new depot, Fort Wedderburn, and a number of outposts in an attempt to ward off starvation.²²¹ Daniel Harmon of the North West Company estimated that the HBC lost, "in fight and by starvation", sixty eight men in the aftermath of the Indonesian eruption.²²² Included in Harmon's estimate were those killed in the confrontation at Seven Oaks. Although the connection between the eruption of Mount Tambora and the violence at the Red

²¹⁷W.F. Wentzel to George Keith, Fort Chipewyan, May 28, 1816, Letter No. 7, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 1, 117.

²¹⁸Tim Ball, "The Year Without a Summer: Its Impact on the Fur Trade and History of Western Canada," 196.

²¹⁹Roger Stuffling and Ron Fritz, "The Ecology of a Famine: Northwestern Ontario in 1815-17," in *The Year Without a Summer? World Climate in 1816*, ed. C.R. Harington (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Nature, 1992), 203-217.

²²⁰According to Wentzel, "[n]o less than 15 men, 1 clerk with a woman and child died of starvation on the Peace River..." Wentzel to Keith, Fort Chipewyan, May 28, 1816, Letter No. 7. in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*, Volume 1, 117.

²²¹Part of the hardship among the English may have been due to the influence of the Canadians in keeping the local inhabitants from trading food with the HBC. Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company*, 87.

²²²Harmon, November 23, 1816, in *Sixteen Years in Indian Country*, 189.

River in the spring of 1816 has yet to be integrated into mainstream accounts of the event,²²³ scholars such as Ball have argued the climatic crisis may well have sparked the confrontation.²²⁴

The weather stayed extremely unpredictable until the end of the decade. On the plains, a three year drought accompanied by cold temperatures seriously affected food and fur resources. Migration patterns of large game such as the bison were altered.²²⁵ Many perished from starvation.²²⁶ Competition for unreliable resources in the wake of the volcano undoubtedly triggered several violent outbreaks among aboriginal groups. In December 1815, the Sioux attacked a group of thirty-four Bungees south of Red River, only three survived.²²⁷ The environmental crisis on the plains corresponded with a number of military campaigns carried out by the Plains Cree. By 1817, they were at war against their former ally, the Mandan.²²⁸ At Carlton, the hostilities between the Cree and the Blackfoot continued as they had since 1811.²²⁹

²²³See for example Bumsted, "The Battle of Seven Oaks," in *Fur Trade Wars: The Founding of Western Canada*, 133-152.

²²⁴Ball, "The Year Without a Summer: Its Impact on the Fur Trade and History of Western Canada," 200-201.

²²⁵Fortunately for the colonists at Red River, the bison stayed close by, as crops failed because of the drought, the herds served as a ready alternative food supply. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 72.

²²⁶*Ibid.*, 65.

²²⁷Two years earlier the Sioux attacked another group of Bungees and French Canadians. In the spring of 1816, a group of Assiniboine was attacked near Brandon. MacGregor, *Peter Fidler: Canada's Forgotten Surveyor*, 208.

²²⁸The long-standing alliance between the Cree and the Assiniboine broke down between 1817 and 1821. Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 62.

²²⁹The war came to an abrupt end in 1819 when a simultaneous outbreak of measles and whooping cough attacked the combatants. Decker, "Depopulation of the

Compounding the violence, smallpox broke out among plains communities and resulted in many deaths.²³⁰

As war and disease raged on the plains, the scarcity of resources in the north led to numerous confrontations. North of Great Slave Lake, a dozen Hare were killed by Dogribs in 1815.²³¹ War raged between the Beaver and the Cree in the country around the Peace River and Lesser Slave Lake.²³² In September 1817, Daniel Harmon reported an armed standoff at Fort Chipewyan involving about one hundred Chipewyan by then considered, "a savage people; and they have I believe, killed more white men, than any other tribe in the North West country."²³³ The following year, the Chipewyan actually joined the HBC in the assault on the Canadians on Lake Athabasca.²³⁴

Although the winter of 1815-16 was probably the worst in its history, the HBC was able to mount another assault on the Athabasca the following year. The North West Company rallied to meet the challenge by re-establishing its posts on the Mackenzie but by this time, the damage had been done. According to W.A. Sloan, the aboriginal producers in the far north abandoned their Canadian tormentors in large

Northern Plains Natives," 386.

²³⁰Abel Watetch, *Payepot and His People* (Regina: Saskatchewan History and Folklore Society, 1959), 10-12. As was the case with other outbreaks of the disease, the Missouri River served as the conduit. Trimble, "Chronology of Epidemics among Plains Village Horticulturalists, 1738-1838," 18.

²³¹Krech, "The Influence of Disease on the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 133.

²³²Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 89.

²³³Harmon, September 1, 1817, in *Sixteen Years in Indian Country*, 191.

²³⁴Wentzel to Roderick Mackenzie, Great Slave Lake, April 5, 1819. Letter No. 9, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest, Volume 1*, 122.

numbers, preferring the "less tyrannical" trade practices of the HBC.²³⁵ While the shift of the Athabasca Indians to the English was an influencing factor in the outcome of the fur trade war, the entire northwest was rocked by a final catastrophe before the merger of the fur trade rivals in 1821.

During the years 1818-19, a simultaneous outbreak of whooping cough and measles across the northwest brought levels of mortality to communities that had not been seen since the smallpox epidemic of the 1780s.²³⁶ Ferdinand Wentzel reported that, "one fifth of the population of the country is said to have been destroyed all the way from Lac la Pluie to Athabasca..."²³⁷

Arthur Ray noted that mortality among plains communities may have been as high as forty percent; 2400 Assiniboine perished in the Brandon District alone.²³⁸ The measles infection was particularly lethal to aboriginal populations. The infection had not been seen inland for seventy years, so that the effect of the pathogen would have been that of a "virgin soil" epidemic, where all ages were equally susceptible to the virus.²³⁹ A second factor in the deadly nature of the outbreak is that the effects of the

²³⁵Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 299.

²³⁶Paul Hackett noted that the disease episode marked the first multiple compound epidemic in the north. The effect of the measles outbreak, the first in seventy years, was particularly severe. "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 274-275.

²³⁷Wentzel, May 23, 1820, Mountain Island, Great Slave Lake, Letter No. 10, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest*, Volume 1, 130.

²³⁸*The Indians in the Fur Trade*, 108. Paul Hackett's investigation showed that in certain communities the death rate was as high as two-thirds of the entire population. "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 275-276.

²³⁹*Ibid.*, 275.

disease are severely augmented in populations suffering from malnutrition.²⁴⁰ The years of environmental and military turmoil in the wake of the Tambora eruption would surely have served to increase both morbidity and mortality from the disease.²⁴¹

Paul Hackett postulated that the disease may have spread to the northwest along two separate pathways. The first is along the Canadian trade route from the Canadas through Lake Superior and west to Red River and beyond. The first evidence of the disease along this route appears, according to Hackett, in the summer of 1818.²⁴² The spread of disease along the Canadian route by the brigades was, by this time, not uncommon and the diseases of 1818-20 were undoubtedly passed along trade routes by sick canoemen.²⁴³ The second vector for the epidemic was the Missouri River, possibly the main pathway for the spread of infection into the interior.²⁴⁴ The disease probably reached the Mandan on the Missouri early in 1819.²⁴⁵ By spring

²⁴⁰ For a discussion of the disease, see J.A.H. Brinker, "A Historical, Epidemiological and Aetiological Study of Measles (Morbilli; Rubeola)," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 31(1938), 807-828. On the relationship between hunger and the severity of measles, see D.C. Morley, "Nutrition and Infectious Disease," in *Disease and Urbanization: Symposia of the Society for the Study of Human Biology*, Volume 20, eds. E.J. Clegg and J.P. Garlick (London: Taylor & Francis, 1980), 37-38.

²⁴¹ Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 65-66.

²⁴² "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 276-285.

²⁴³ The brigades often continued to travel with infected voyageurs, spreading disease quickly into the isolated posts in the interior. July 28, 1804, *The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry*, 247-248. On the role of the brigades in the spread of the 1818-20 epidemics, see Decker, "We Should Never Be Again the Same People", 100.

²⁴⁴ The Missouri was the route for the spread of infection of the Canadian northwest for at least four major smallpox outbreaks which occurred in the 1730s, the 1780s, the 1830s, and 1869-70. Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 277.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 286. It should be noted that many of the communities on the Missouri were still recovering from the limited smallpox epidemic of 1816. Trimble, "Chronology of Epidemics among Plains Village Horticulturalists, 1738-1838," 18.

the disease spread to Brandon House then downstream to the struggling colony at Red River by June 1819.²⁴⁶ As the disease spread to the northwestern plains, the infection led to a temporary truce in the war between the Cree and the Blackfoot, as one third of the latter were reported to have succumbed to the disease.²⁴⁷

By fall, the epidemic reached the Athabasca, leading Ferdinand Wentzel to conclude that the disease had been spread by the newly arrived German settlers at Red River.²⁴⁸ Peter Fidler of the HBC attributed the outbreak to the Norwesters.²⁴⁹ In keeping with the acrimony surrounding the dying days of the fur trade war, the forty deaths at Lac La Biche and Lesser Slave Lake were attributed by the Canadians to a plan by the HBC to intentionally spread the disease. Gertrude Nicks described the rumour as an act of desperation among the Canadians, "as a means of commanding loyalty through fear."²⁵⁰

Hunger compounded the direct effect of the pathogens. On the Peace River, the HBC surgeon William Todd reported that those who were not debilitated by the dual outbreak were frustrated in the search for food by their symptoms, "the whole of their

²⁴⁶Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 287.

²⁴⁷Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 87.

²⁴⁸Wentzel to Roderick Mackenzie, May 23, 1820, Mountain Island, Great Slave Lake, Letter No. 10, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest, Volume 1*, 130. In her analysis, Jody Decker stated that the Canadian trader was not completely wrong. Many of the settlers were forced to disburse because of a locust infestation. They may have eased the spread of infection. "We Should Never Be Again the Same People", 91.

²⁴⁹Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 277.

²⁵⁰Gertrude Nicks stated that while the Canadians capitalized on the outbreak to control the allegiance of their producers, "it seems strange that they would be willing to endanger the lives of their hunters and also lose their fur returns." *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 50.

caution in approaching an animal being rendered abortive by a single cough."²⁵¹ Food procurement was hindered in other ways. Some, such as the Swampy Cree at Cumberland House, were "totally incapacitated from hunting by sickness."²⁵² Others quit hunting out of custom, the result of the prohibition on hunting as a mourning practice.²⁵³ At Fort Resolution, the fishery failed in December 1819, worsening the effect of the measles and diminishing what returns remained.²⁵⁴ While some survived "on bits of skin and offal, which remained about their encampment," others were not so fortunate. The journal of Dr. John Richardson, a member of the ill-fated Franklin overland expedition to the Arctic coast, reported that one woman was "reduced to feed upon the bodies of her own family to prevent actual starvation," while another, "had been the principal agent in the destruction of several persons, amongst the number her husband and nearest relatives, in order to support her life."²⁵⁵

George Simpson noted that among the Chipewyan in the Athabasca, the diseases "carried away whole bands, and they are now dispersing in all directions, hoping that a change of residence may arrest the progress of the contagion."²⁵⁶ The

²⁵¹Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 87-88.

²⁵²SAB, R.G. Ferguson Papers, microfilm reel 2.391.

²⁵³Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 88.

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 89. The following year the fishery at Great Slave Lake failed, leaving the HBC trader, Mr. McVicar, "under very serious apprehensions of the miseries of famine." George Simpson, December 1820, in *Journal of Occurrences in the Athabasca Department by George Simpson, 1820 and 1821, and Report ed. E.E. Rich* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1938), 200.

²⁵⁵SAB, R.G. Ferguson Papers, reel 2.391.

²⁵⁶The editor, E.E. Rich, wrongly attributed the cause of the mortality to smallpox. George Simpson, Athabasca Journal, October 13, 1820, in *Journal of Occurrences in the Athabasca Department by George Simpson, 1820 and 1821, and*

pattern of dispersal also occurred among the eastern Chipewyan. At Reindeer Lake, Hugh Leslie, the HBC factor recorded the avoidance strategy of a group hunting near the Cree territory to the south, "having heard of the Sickness that was among the later [Cree] altho none of them caught the infection it frightened them so much they went in the winter too great a distance to the northward to kill anything but Deer."²⁵⁷ The Beaver people on the Peace River suffered "great mortality" for two consecutive years.²⁵⁸ F.W. Wentzel's report from Great Slave Lake in the spring of 1820 placed the turmoil in context, "the Natives are so much disorganized in the Athabasca, that if they are in the same train of living in other parts of the North-West, it will be not too much to say that the fur trade is ruined for some years to come."²⁵⁹

Even as disease, starvation and the well-documented paramilitary conflict between the rival firms and their aboriginal agents continued in the hinterland, negotiations toward an end to the fur trade were underway.²⁶⁰ The machinations of the antagonists in the interior, though undoubtedly significant to the outcome of the struggle, may have been overstated. In their focus on the European combatants, studies such as Bumsted's *Fur Trade Wars* have ignored the environmental and

Report, 81.

²⁵⁷The dispersal of the Chipewyan to avoid contagion may have contributed to the development of the distinct group known after 1821 as the Caribou Eater Chipewyan. James G.E. Smith, "Local Band Organization of the Caribou Eater Chipewyan in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 6 (1976), 80.

²⁵⁸Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 150.

²⁵⁹Wentzel to Roderick McKenzie, May 23, 1820. Letter No. 10, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest Volume 1*, 127.

²⁶⁰Carlos, "The Birth and Death of Predatory Competition in the North American Fur Trade: 1810-1821," 181.

biological forces that led to the monopoly in the trade. By 1821, when the final agreement was completed, the Canadian northwest was in social, demographic and environmental crisis. For decades the Canadians in particular, carried out a scorched earth policy with regard to animal resources.²⁶¹ The climatic disaster resulting from the eruption of Mount Tambora, and a catastrophic outbreak of disease, created the conditions where the environment and people of the northwest simply could not support the level of exploitation resulting from the competitive trade. The downsizing of the trade in the years after the merger was more than simply the miserly policy of a newfound monopoly. Both the inhabitants of the interior and the environment that they depended upon had been pushed to the brink of a disaster.

In the years following the merger, the HBC worked to replenish denuded fur supplies and attempted to manage the movement of people and resources in its domain. It curtailed, and eventually prohibited, the flow of alcohol into large portions of the interior.²⁶² In the decades prior to the acquisition of the northwest by the Dominion of Canada, the HBC attempted to control the spread of disease among the people of the northwest. The eventual success of the colony at Red River, part of the wider phenomenon of the westward expansion of European settlement, lead to qualitative changes in the aboriginal societies of the northwest.

²⁶¹ According to A.J. Ray, "whole territories had been laid waste and the resource base of the fur trade, and the food supplies of the Indians had been seriously undermined in many sections." A.J. Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 181-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," *Journal of Historical Geography* 1 (1975), 50.

²⁶² *Minutes of Council, Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-1831*, ed. R. Harvey Fleming, ed. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1940), 229.

Chapter 5: "Ruled with an Iron Rod"¹: Hunger, Disease, and the Northern Fur Trade during the Hudson's Bay Company Monopoly, 1821-1869.

The consolidation of the rival companies in 1821 ushered in a new phase in the history of the Canadian northwest. In the words of A.S. Morton, the tempest that had raged, "dwindled to a calm" with the union of 1821.² With its charter renewed and, temporarily, without serious opposition for control of the trade, the HBC served as the de facto government of the territory that became western Canada.³ Although its monopoly was gradually eroded, the result of population pressure, the westward expansion of the settlement frontier and a combination of internal and external criticism, the Company ruled the territory for half a century, until it was annexed by the new Dominion of Canada.

For the inhabitants of the northwest, the end of the fur trade war came not a moment too soon. Decades of violence, substance abuse and epidemic illness combined with severe game depletion to bring many communities to the point of disaster. During the dual outbreak of whooping cough and measles in the years 1819-20, the death toll was estimated to be from twenty to twenty-five percent of the entire aboriginal population "from Lac La Pluie to the Athabasca."⁴ In his survey of epidemic

¹W.F. Wentzel, Report for Mackenzie's River, March 1, 1824, Letter No.14, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest Volume 1*, 150.

²*A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 690.

³For a discussion of the Company's legal basis for governing, see Frank Tough, "Aboriginal Rights Versus the Deed of Surrender: The Legal Rights of the Native Peoples and Canada's Acquisition of the Hudson's Bay Company Territory," *Prairie Forum* 17 (1992), 225-250.

⁴F.W. Wentzel to R. McKenzie, May 23, 1820, Great Slave Lake, Letter No. 10, in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest, Volume 1*, 130. The higher estimate of mortality is for plains populations. Decker, "Depopulation of the Northern Plains Natives," 391. Both Europeans and "Freemen" (usually mixed bloods) shared at least partial immunity to the measles epidemic. Though some of the latter caught the

illness in the fur trade, Paul Hackett noted that the level of mortality of 1819-20 rivalled that of the 1780-82 smallpox epidemic and other unchecked virgin soil epidemics.⁵

Animal populations, too, had been severely depleted during the years of fur trade rivalry. In its dying years, the Canadian fur trade had become essentially a "scorched earth" policy as producers were pressured to trap every possible pelt, without regard for the long term consequences for the survival of game supplies or the well-being of the hunters who procured them.⁶ As the Nor'westers and their producers denuded wildlife populations for fur and food in an increasingly desperate attempt to remain commercially afloat, species were hunted to near extinction in many areas of the northwest. When the Hudson's Bay Company met fire with fire in the waning years of the struggle, conducting a military and commercial offensive against their long-time tormentors, the Canadian enterprise buckled.

The victory of the HBC was hastened by chance events half a world away. The eruption of Mount Tambora spread so much ash through the atmosphere that it precipitated a global climatic disaster in 1816, "the year with no summer."⁷ In the north, the climatic crisis triggered by the fallout from the volcano brought widespread famine to the land and people already weakened by several decades of deteriorating

disease at Lesser Slave Lake, none died, a stark contrast to the many Indians in the area who perished. Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 60.

⁵Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 275.

⁶Among the first of the conservation measures imposed by the monopoly HBC were, the prohibition in the trade of summer beaver pelts and the control of castoreum and steel traps. See Rich, *A History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870*. Volume 2, 471.

⁷For an extensive discussion of the global nature of the phenomenon, see C.R. Harington, ed., *The Year Without a Summer? World Climate in 1816*.

climate and environmental degradation. While Tambora's effect probably led to the deaths of fifteen employees of the English concern through famine,⁸ it was a significant, if not decisive, factor in the crippling of the complex yet vulnerable supply network required to support the army of Canadians operating in the interior.⁹ The compound epidemic of measles and whooping cough, in addition to the hardship wrought by the global environmental crisis triggered by Tambora, spread hunger and death from Lake Superior to the Mackenzie delta and may well have broken the back of the Canadian Fur Trade.

The country that the HBC inherited in 1821 was in social and environmental ruin. Fur bearers were hunted to near extinction across the once disputed territory. Arthur Ray described the environmental conditions at the time of the merger, "whole territories had been laid waste and the resource base of the fur trade, and the food supplies of the Indians had been seriously undermined in many sections."¹⁰ In the Athabasca, the beaver had been largely exterminated by Iroquois hunters in the employ of the North West Company and, by the 1820s, large game such as moose, caribou and bison were also rare.¹¹ On his inspection tour in 1823, George Simpson was

⁸Burley, *Servants of the Honorable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 87.

⁹The estimated workforce of the North West Company in 1818-1819 was over 900 employees, the vast majority of whom were French Canadian. The number of HBC employees at the time was over 800. D.W. Moodie, B. Kaye, V. Lytwyn and A.J. Ray, "Peoples of the Boreal Forest and Parkland," in *Historical Atlas of Canada. Volume 1*, ed. R.C. Harris (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Plate 65.

¹⁰Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," 50.

¹¹Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 132-133. For a discussion of the decline of wood bison in the Athabasca, see Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 133-134. The

"appalled" at the condition of the Nelson and Lower Churchill Districts as "he did not see a solitary vestige of beaver and he could see no remedy save to forbid beaver-hunting there entirely for the next five years."¹²

While the state of game supplies across the country brought the HBC to impose what many in the territory perceived to be draconian prohibitions on the fur harvest, the Company was strategic in its selection of conservation areas. Only where fur production could be realistically curtailed and the monopoly secure, were controls placed on the depleted resource.¹³ In the relatively isolated but game depleted country surrounding Lesser Slave Lake, producers were coerced into leaving as traders, "threw out [the] visiting Beaver without even the common courtesy of providing them with a gift of tobacco."¹⁴ In other areas where the monopoly "rang hollow," such as the plains and parklands, the Company was faced with competition from free traders and American interests. In those areas, aboriginal producers were encouraged to trap areas out, leaving a fur-denuded buffer along the margins of HBC territory.¹⁵ When a quota

shortage of macrofauna continued in the Athabasca for decades. In the spring of 1839, traders at Fort Dunvegan dispersed the starving hunters who had gathered there "to seek small game since they cannot get access to large..." G. Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 51.

¹²The area would soon be rehabilitated for the trade as a major source of low value muskrat fur. Rich, *A History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Volume 2*, 471-472.

¹³Ray, "Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1930," in *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations*, ed. Shepard Krech, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press), 6.

¹⁴In 1836, the Cree trappers at Dunvegan were turned away from the post and sent to Lesser Slave to reduce interethnic tension in the area and to avoid the overpopulation of the district. G. Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 31.

¹⁵Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 103.

system was introduced by the HBC in 1826 to manage the beaver harvest throughout the country, border areas such as Rainy River, Red River and the Saskatchewan were exempted from the plan.¹⁶ In the southwest, Peter Skene Ogden's expedition to the Snake River was ordered, "to hunt as bare as possible all the Country South of the Columbia and West of the Mountains."¹⁷

Areas faced with competition, particularly from the growing number of American traders along the southern frontier of British territory, were also exempted from another HBC edict that had important implications for aboriginal communities, the prohibition of the trade in liquor. The HBC curtailed the flow of alcohol to the interior soon after the merger.¹⁸ In 1822, the Northern Department Council directed that the flow of alcohol to the interior be reduced by fifty percent.¹⁹ In isolated areas, it imposed a strict ban.²⁰ In 1826, the Company prohibited the trade in alcohol in the Districts of Athabasca, Mackenzie and English River, eliminating the sanctioned flow of alcohol to fur

¹⁶To support the "nursing" of the fur resource back to health, Simpson sought to increase the trade in Districts such as the Saskatchewan where many of the furs in the trade originated in American territory. Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," 55-57.

¹⁷Barry Cooper, *Alexander Kennedy Isbister: A Respectable Critic of the Honourable Company* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1988), 72. Skene's directives were described as "a sort of a 'scorched stream' policy designed to denude the country and render it unprofitable and hence unattractive to the Americans." Glyndwr Williams, "Introduction," in *Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Country Journals 1827-28 and 1828-29* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1971), xiv.

¹⁸Stipulations "for gradually diminishing or ultimately preventing the sale or distribution of liquors to the Indians and promoting their moral and religious improvement" were included in the HBC's charter renewal. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 640.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Rich, *A History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Volume 2*, 477-478.

producers and company servants beyond Cumberland House.²¹

Not all of the changes to societies in the northwest after the merger were the result of company decree. The depletion of macro fauna across the boreal forest by the 1820s was such that wholesale changes in subsistence strategies were adopted by northern hunters.²² For many, fish and hares became necessary, if precarious, food staples.²³ Hares were an unreliable food source because of the extreme fluctuation in their population cycle. Even in times of plenty, the paucity body fat in hare meat for most of the year led to a common belief among northerners that an individual could

²¹Ibid. In 1824-25, Chief Factor James Leith at Cumberland attributed the decline in his returns to restrictions the Company had placed on the trade in alcohol. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 102. Paul Thistle's study of the Cumberland trade notes that producers continued to demand alcohol though its distribution was officially banned. *Indian-White Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, 91-92.

²²The severity of game depletion by the early 19th century was such that "an unquestioned assumption of environmental severity" developed among some scholars who adopted the view that even the pre-contact environment was "inherently severe." For a discussion and critique of this view, see Krech, "Disease, Starvation, and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," *American Ethnologist* 5 (1978), 711. The depletion of large game was not limited to the northwest. In the boreal forest of northern Ontario, one trader described environmental conditions after the merger as "iterly distitud for animals and sole depend on fish and Rabbits (sic), and an Indian in this quarter must depend on his Hook or his Snare..." E.S. Rogers, "Cultural Adaptations: The Northern Ojibwa of the Boreal Forest 1670-1980," in *Boreal Forest Adaptations*, ed. Theodore J. Steegman (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 109 fn. 295.

²³The shift from large game to fish and hares was a phenomenon common across the subarctic in this period. See Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 144; Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 165-166 and Rogers, "Cultural Adaptations: The Northern Ojibwa of the Boreal Forest 1670-1980," 109-111. See also, E.S. Rogers and Mary B. Black, "Subsistence Strategy in the Fish and Hare Period, Northern Ontario: The Weagamow Ojibwa, 1880-1920," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 32 (1976): 1-43. For a discussion of hare population cycles see Lloyd B. Keith, *Wildlife's Ten Year Cycle*.

"starve to death on rabbits."²⁴ For those forced to rely on the fluctuating populations of small game with questionable nutritional value, famine was a constant threat. Shepard Krech described the circumstances which resulted in the precarious lifestyle of those dependent of rabbits, "prior to the onslaught of epidemic diseases, famines may not have prevailed and starvation may have remained a hypothetical specter, not the recurrent rule."²⁵ The advent of epidemic illness, game depletion, and cycles of recurring famine were, according to Krech, essentially post-contact phenomena. In the far northwest, the cyclical nature of scarcity and plenty brought hunger and death to populations at regular intervals when rodent populations collapsed.²⁶ J.C. Yerbury has written that hunters in the far northwest suffered from starvation in the late winter and early spring on a yearly basis until the 1840s.²⁷ The cruel handmaid of starvation was disease, which, in the case of the far northwest, has been directly correlated with hunger.²⁸

²⁴E.S. Rogers and James G.E. Smith, "Environment and Culture in the Shield and Mackenzie Borderlands," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 6, Subarctic* ed. June Helm (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 135.

²⁵Krech, "Disease, Starvation and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," 718. For a critique of this view, see John W. Ives, *A Theory of Athapaskan Prehistory* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 144.

²⁶In far northwestern districts such as the Mackenzie and the Yukon, starvation resulting from the collapse of hare populations appears to have occurred in the first year or two of every decade of the nineteenth century. The down cycle of available food supplies correspond with an increased incidence of disease and famine induced starvation and even cannibalism until the end of the 19th Century. Joel S. Savishinsky and Hiroko Sue Hara, "Hare," 322.

²⁷Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 138. The same observation is made by Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 135.

²⁸Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 103-104.

In addition to changes in the food supply, the commercial fur harvest changed in many areas after the merger. In the country east of Cumberland, the commercial economy shifted to a less valuable, but under exploited resource, muskrat pelts. While supplies of muskrats had not been over-harvested during the decades of competition, they proved to be an undependable foundation for commerce. What soon developed in the region was a feast and famine economy, dependent on the vagaries of the fluctuating muskrat population.²⁹ The uncertainty of the resource revealed itself within years of the merger as low water levels in the Cumberland District halved the returns from 150,000 in 1823 to 75,000 a year later.³⁰ After a few years of plenty during the late 1820s, the muskrat population plummeted in the parklands and forced many hunters to augment their debt burden.³¹ Paul Thistle's analysis of Western Cree-trader relations concluded that the inhabitants of the Cumberland region refused to focus on commercial trapping during the monopoly period in order to avoid the reliance on HBC supplies, particularly food, that came with the commercial hunt.³² In her study of the

²⁹Ray, "Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1930," 6-7. See also, Moodie, Kaye and Lytwyn, "The Fur Trade Northwest to 1870: Fur Production, Northern Department," in *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 2, The Land Transformed*, ed. R.L. Gentilecore (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), Plate 17.

³⁰The cause of death among the muskrat population was disease. Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problem of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," 54-55.

³¹Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 108-109. The author noted that the importance of the fur trade diminished for the Ojibwa generally after the merger.

³²Although the author disputed the notion of dependency with regard to the Cree inhabitants of the Cumberland country, he acknowledged the dilemma for the group, essentially to hunt for food or for fur. Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, 80-94. In her discussion of the impact of the fur trade on the aboriginal economies of northern Alberta, Gertrude Nicks also noted that hunters were frequently faced with the choice of hunting for food or for

western Ojibwa, Laura Peers noted that the collapse of the muskrat population in 1829 was a "watershed" for the group, "[i]n essence, the plains-oriented bands chose to switch from fur trapping to the provision and wolf-pelt trade, from a forest-parkland to a parkland-grassland cycle."³³ As the Ojibwa withdrew from fur production and focussed their attention on the plains, they became increasingly important participants in the cycle of warfare as allies of the Cree in opposition to the southern nations such as the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Mandan along the Missouri.³⁴

In monopoly, the HBC served, with varied degrees of success, as the government of its chartered territory. Soon after the merger, George Simpson, the London clerk who came to be known as the "Little Emperor", responded decisively to the social and environmental crises which had festered during the years of unrelenting competition. The guiding principle of his tenure as governor of the territory was "OEconomy," the Company was to maximize returns with the minimum of investment.³⁵ The corporate restructuring of the fur trade, under the direction of Simpson, marked a shift in the economy of the northwest as part of a wider change in the global economy

fur. *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1985*, 166.

³³Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 112-113.

³⁴See Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 65. On the fusion of the Ojibwa and Cree groups on the western plains, see Hugh Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984), 12-15. For an analogous fusion of the Cree and the Assiniboine in this period, see Susan Sharrock, "Crees, Cree-Assiniboines, and Assiniboines: Interethnic Social Organization on the far Northern Plains," 111-115.

³⁵Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 92. Simpson's emphasis on "OEconomy" was also the reason for the establishment of agriculture on the west coast, to support the trade with a minimum of expense to the company. See James R. Gibson, *Farming the Frontier: The Agricultural Opening of the Oregon Country, 1786-1846* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 9-27.

of the nineteenth century. According to Heather Devine:

The maturation of the fur trade into a modern commercial enterprise was not an anomaly. It reflected the beginnings of a worldwide shift toward an industrialized economy where family-centred, patriarchal relations were obsolete, and where corporate loyalty took precedence.³⁶

Simpson closed many of the competing posts which had littered the landscape during the decades of desperate harvesting. Many districts were rationalized, as single centrally located posts were developed to replace a number of less profitable ones.³⁷ The combined total of sixty-eight HBC posts and fifty-seven Canadian posts prior to the union was slashed to slightly over fifty after the merger.³⁸ Many districts which had been over exploited were closed, alienating producers from European goods or forcing them to migrate to areas which were to remain in production as decreed by the Company. A recent study of the Peace River trade summarized the Company's role in the constriction of the trade in the early 1820s with regard to their surplus producers:

This pattern tells the story of how European commercial interests exploited a regional economy to the verge of collapse, with few concerns either for

³⁶Heather Devine, "Ambition versus Loyalty: Miles McDonnell and the Decline of the North West Company," in *New Faces in the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. Jo-Anne Fiske, Susan Sleeper-Smith, and William Wicken (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 270.

³⁷An example of this form of restructuring can be seen in the parklands as Fort Pelly was built in 1824 to replace establishments at Brandon, Swan River and Dauphin and other smaller posts. The goal of the HBC was to shift producers toward the new post, allowing game stocks to recover. According to Ray, animal populations rebounded within a very few years. "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," 53.

³⁸Burley, *Servants of the Honorable Company: Work, Discipline and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 6. See also, D.B. Freeman and F.L. Dungey, "A Spatial Duopoly: Competition in Western Canadian Fur Trade, 1770-1835," 268-270.

conservation or for its impact on indigenous peoples.³⁹

Even contemporary accounts of the company's rationalization program recognized that the HBC's corporate strategy was to the detriment of aboriginal producers. George Simpson acknowledged that the closing of Fort St. John's "reduced the whole population of the upper Peace to the utmost distress, "and led to the deaths of many from famine."⁴⁰

The conclusion that the HBC disregarded the well-being of fur suppliers and the furs they procured for the sake of corporate profit and the inability of aboriginal producers to respond is, perhaps, too facile. Aboriginal producers did not simply acquiesce at the closure of the trading establishments, even in areas suffering from acute game depletion.⁴¹ The Beaver (Dunne-za) of the Peace River responded to the news of the closure of Fort St. John's as part of a district restructuring by turning on the traders in the fall of 1823, killing five of them.⁴² While the murders were, according

³⁹David V. Burley, J. Scott Hamilton, and Knut Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: The Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), 130.

⁴⁰R. Ridington, "Changes of Mind: Dunne-za Resistance to Empire," *B.C. Studies* 43 (1979), 68. Starvation was a threat even at economically viable posts. At Vermillion, the trader Colin Campbell noted in the Journal of 1822-1823 that post hunters were subject to starving. G. Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 51.

⁴¹The same authors who criticized the HBC for their insensitivity with regard to conservation or the condition of Indian groups in the management strategy of the HBC, report that the analysis of food data excavated from one of the posts eliminated in the post-merger period, Fort St. Johns, showed a significant reliance on hares, a "starvation" resource. Burley, Hamilton and Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: The Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823*, 134-136.

⁴²The events surrounding the killings have become known as the "Fort St. John's Massacre" in the popular literature. For a discussion, see Knud Fladmark, "Early Fur-Trade Forts of the Peace River Area of British Columbia," *B.C. Studies* 65 (1985), 51-52 and Burley, Hamilton and Fladmark, who stated that the actual killer may not have

to a recent account, "barely comprehensible,"⁴³ a number of motives for the bloodshed have been proposed.

One contemporary account stated that the attack was in retaliation for "wife lifting" by the man formerly in charge of the post, "a Mr. Black."⁴⁴ The killings have also been attributed to aboriginal retribution for what they considered to have been sorcery on the part of a trader in the death of a young Dunne-za trapper.⁴⁵ The prevailing interpretation was that the violence was a symbol of resistance to the despotic management practices of the HBC.⁴⁶ There is no question that resentment toward the traders was at its peak because of the immanent closure of the post when the murders occurred in the fall of 1823. What has been overlooked, particularly in the recent

been a Beaver but rather a Sekani adopted into the Beaver. *Prophecy of the Swan: The Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823*, 129. Shepard Krech has also studied the attack on the post. See S. Krech, "The Banditte of St. John's," *The Beaver* 313 (1982): 36-41 and S. Krech, "The Beaver Indians and the Hostilities at Fort St. John's," *Arctic Anthropology* 20 (1983): 35-45.

⁴³Burley, Hamilton, and Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: The Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823*, 126.

⁴⁴*Peace River: A Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to Pacific by Sir George Simpson, Journal of the Late Chief Factor, Archibald McDonald... who Accompanied Him*, ed. Malcolm McLeod, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971), 85, fn. 54. The reference is probably to Samuel Black, a former Nor'wester, described by A.S. Morton as "a young man without a shadow of self-respect in his make-up." *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 519.

⁴⁵The first trader killed, Guy Hughes, was reported to have touched a young and healthy Beaver trapper on the shoulder just hours before the latter's death. The next day, the HBC clerk was killed for "throwing bad medicine." Krech, "The Banditte of St John's," 38.

⁴⁶Both of these interpretations are discussed by Krech. "The Banditte of St John's," 36-41.

Prophecy of the Swan,⁴⁷ was the crisis in the relations between traders and producers resulting from a deadly epidemic which swept through the area at the time of the killings.⁴⁸ In his discussion of diseases on the Peace River in the early 1820s, J.C. Yerbury noted at least two severe outbreaks of disease in the year leading up to the murders. In May 1823, five months prior to the violence, a trader at Dunvegan remarked that a "malignant contagion which has carried off upwards of one fourth of the Natives of this post."⁴⁹ Downstream from St. John's and Dunvegan, the Beaver Indians at Vermillion were "much diminished within a few years past-they seem to have been carried off by a consumption a disease very prevalent amongst them."⁵⁰ Although Shepard Krech noted that disease was a contributing factor to the stress and deprivation leading to the violence,⁵¹ the sheer level of mortality would have led the suppliers of St. John's to extremes.⁵² What may be more "incomprehensible" is that there was not a greater degree of violence across the far northwest during this period. Although further attacks in the region were limited, tension remained high in the

⁴⁷Burley, Hamilton and Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: The Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823*.

⁴⁸Violence, or the threat of violence, against Europeans was used as a means to retaliate against those responsible for the introduction of disease among northern communities. The notion that disease could be spread through the practice of sorcery was shared by the Kutchin and other northern Athapaskan groups and was the root of many conflicts. Krech, "Disease, Starvation, and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," 715-716.

⁴⁹Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 152.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Krech, "The Beaver Indians and the Hostilities at Fort St. John's," 42.

⁵²According to John Franklin, the epidemic of 1820 killed one third of the Beaver Indians. Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 151.

Athabasca until the end of the decade.⁵³

The incident at Fort St. John's was not the only violent episode in the wake of the merger, described as a period of "profound quiet" by A.S. Morton.⁵⁴ In 1823, an alliance of Dogrib, Slavey and Hare, revolted against their oppressors, the Yellowknives.⁵⁵ Thirty-four members of that group under the leadership of Akaitcho were killed in the battle and others perished from hunger during their retreat.⁵⁶ The Yellowknives never regained their dominance in the region after the revolt.⁵⁷ A decade later, their situation had been so diminished by venereal disease and other pathogens

⁵³Burley, Hamilton and Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: The Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823*, 136. George Simpson remarked on the closure of the district, "I think it will be a favorable opportunity of giving Peace River a few years respite by withdrawing the Establishments which will be attended with important benefits to the and effectually punish the Beaver Indians for their Late atrocities." George Simpson's Journal, April 22, 1825, in *Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal* ed. Frederick Merck (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1968), 142.

⁵⁴A *History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 624.

⁵⁵For an analysis of the Dogrib oral history of the turmoil during the 1820s, see June Helm and Beryl Gillespie, "Dogrib Oral Tradition as History: War and Peace in the 1820s," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37 (1981), 8-27. The Yellowknives shifted their economic focus away from the "indolent... living on the swarms of caribou which inhabit their country..." to the fur trade with the encouragement of the HBC. Yerbury, "The Post-Contact Chipewyan: Trade Rivalries and Changing Territorial Boundaries," *Ethnohistory* 23 (1976), 249.

⁵⁶Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 104-105. The population of Yellowknives was reduced from 192 to 158, most of the victims were women and girls. Helm and Gillespie, "Dogrib Oral Tradition as History: War and Peace in the 1820s," 15.

⁵⁷With the establishment of new HBC posts in the far north after the merger, the Yellowknives, in close affiliation with the Chipewyan, experienced a brief cultural fluorescence as provision hunters to the traders. The violence accorded their Dene neighbours during this momentary ascendancy led to their defeat by the mid 1820s. Gillespie, "An Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives: A Northern Athapaskan Tribe," 193, 220. Disease, specifically an influenza epidemic in the 1830s, is considered to have "broke[n] the aggressive spirit of the Yellowknives." Helm and Gillespie, "Dogrib Oral Tradition as History: War and Peace in the 1820s," 14.

that Richard King, a Royal Navy surgeon attached to a Franklin rescue mission, remarked:

It has of late so extensively spread itself among them [Yellowknife], that there was scarcely an Indian family which I met with during my progress through that vast territory that was not more or less affected with it; and to such a deplorable condition are the Copper Indians reduced by that scourge that in a few years, if some aid be not afforded them, they will cease to exist.⁵⁸

The group continued its decline through the nineteenth century. By the outbreak of the First World War, the Yellowknives disappeared as a distinct entity, their remnant population merging with the Dogrib, identified simply as Chipewyan.⁵⁹ The war that began the slide of the Yellowknife people into oblivion resulted from competition over trapping areas and access to caribou herds, the principal food source in the country between Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes.⁶⁰ Starvation and disease, particularly dysentery and influenza, severely weakened northern populations by the beginning of the monopoly period and undoubtedly exacerbated tension between rival ethnic groups.⁶¹

⁵⁸Richard King, *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Arctic Ocean in 1833, 1834, and 1835, Volume 2* (London: Richard Bentley, 1836), 54. Venereal disease was, by the 1820s, a serious problem in the Pacific trade and known by the traders as "Chinook love fever." James R. Gibson, *The Lifeline of the Oregon Country: The Fraser-Columbia Brigade System, 1811-47* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), 45.

⁵⁹Gillespie, "Yellowknife," *Handbook of North American Indians. Volume 6. Subarctic*, ed. June Helm (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 285-290.

⁶⁰Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 104.

⁶¹Dysentery was noted among the Hare between the Peace River and Great Slave Lake by members of the Franklin expedition in 1820-21. Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 151-152. For a discussion of "almost continual disease" among the Kutchin and other bands in the Mackenzie during the post merger period, see S. Krech, "On the Aboriginal Population of the Kutchin," *Arctic Anthropology* 15 (1978), 92-93.

Suffering and death from disease were all too common among the communities of the far northwest after the merger. As Shepard Krech noted, "[t]he two decades beginning in 1820 were characterized by almost constant sickness, disease, and mortality, affecting all bands trading at Good Hope."⁶² In 1825, the Mackenzie was hit by "a contagious distemper," which killed large game, particularly moose, as well as the Dene who hunted them in an epidemic that raged for three years.⁶³ The pathogen that hit both humans and animals with such severity has been tentatively identified as *tularaemia*.⁶⁴ As that outbreak subsided, whooping cough spread to the Mackenzie and other parts of the north from Red River in 1827, attacking children in particular and resulting in widespread mortality across the territory.⁶⁵

⁶²Krech, "Disease, Starvation, and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," 713. The author expanded his statement later, noting that through "the nineteenth-century Kutchin suffered constantly the effects of epidemic diseases," 724.

⁶³In addition, the dead moose, "whose flesh caused dogs which consumed it to swell and die." Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 108, 152.

⁶⁴Yerbury did not speculate on the identity of the "moose disease." Ibid., 146. Shepard Krech, however, proposed that the disease was *tularaemia* which may have originated in rabbits whose population peak, according to the author, coincided with the outbreak of the "distemper." *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, 88-89. See also Krech, "On the Aboriginal Population of the Kutchin," 92. *Tularaemia* remains a common infection in rabbits to the present. Irma Rombauer and Marion Rombauer Becker, *Joy of Cooking* (New York: Plume, 1997), 513. The disease, caused by the bacteria *Francisella tularensis*, is transmitted to humans "by the bite of an infected tick or other blood sucking insect; by direct contact with infected animals; by eating inadequately prepared meat or by drinking water that contains the organism." *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, 16th Ed., ed. Clayton L. Thomas (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1989), 1921.

⁶⁵For a discussion of the diffusion of the whooping cough epidemic, see Paul Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 352-353. Although children were the main victims of the outbreak, adults were also susceptible to the disease in areas that had not been hit in the outbreak of 1819-20 such as Fort Liard. Krech, "The Trade of the Slavey and Dogrib at Ft. Simpson in the Early 19th Century," 135-137. The epidemic is also discussed by Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 111, 152-153.

The misery continued into the 1830s as the population cycle of hares fell to its low ebb, resulting in what was by then the usual cycle of hunger, famine and death among the hunters of the far northwest and their families.⁶⁶ Richard King reported that between forty and fifty bodies littered a single encampment and that his passing through the carnage was made only with difficulty, "without stumbling against a frozen corpse."⁶⁷ The HBC trader, Edward Smith, summarized the general despair in the country:

Here closes the Journal of Ft. Simpson for the season [31 May 1832] and since its commencement until its close I seldom have witnessed for a Whole season such a continued stress for provisions for immediate consumption ... the sufferings of the surrounding indians has been unparalled in the History of the Forks of the Mackenzie.⁶⁸

In the first decade after the merger, the estimated population of Beaver (Dunne-za) and numerous Chipewyan groups declined by at least a quarter and possibly by a third, the result of measles, influenza and dysentery, their cumulative impact undoubtedly worsened by an almost constant scarcity of food.⁶⁹ From 1833 to 1838, another one hundred and forty people died along the Upper Peace River.⁷⁰ Sadly, for the inhabitants of the far northwest, the cycle of famine and disease and death continued for decades if not generations.

⁶⁶An example of the widespread famine was the starvation of forty members of a single party of Chipewyans starved near Ft. Liard. *Ibid.*, 113-116.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 153.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁹Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 129.

⁷⁰Ives, *A Theory of Athapaskan Prehistory*, 142.

Nature, to borrow a common cliché, did not simply “take its course” in the depopulation of northwestern communities amid the famine and disease of the monopoly period. While pathogens and hunger contributed to a terrible cycle of suffering and death, the inhabitants of the depleted and marginal lands were stressed to the point that infant girls were sacrificed in an often vain attempt to improve the chances of survival of hunting bands. The extent of this desperate practice is evident even in the earliest demographic data gathered by the HBC soon after the merger. In his census of the Indians trading at Fort Liard, Edward Lake found eighty-eight males above the age of ten and eighty-six under ten while female numbers were seventy-six and fifty-seven respectively. In his report, the trader explained the disparity in sex ratios as “owing to the barbarous custome of the women destroying some of the female Children-so far no argument has been able to intirely to make them do away unnatural customs.”⁷¹ Edward Smith’s “Abstract of Indian Population” for the Mackenzie District recorded in the late 1820s indicates that the practice of female infanticide was not an isolated phenomenon:

Location	Men	Women	Boys	Girls	Children Under 10	Total
Ft. Liard	97	66	84	95		342
Ft. Simpson	273	188			387	848
Ft. Norman	120	70	57	54		301
Ft. Good Hope	120	70	57	54		301
Total	610	394	198	203	387	1,792

Table 2: Edward Smith’s Abstract of Indian Population for the Mackenzie District.
Source: Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 109.

⁷¹Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 102.

The population report for the Mackenzie District that accompanied the outfit of 1829 included 890 adult males but only 513 women out of a total population of 2,773.⁷² The killing of girls continued until well after mid-century. The HBC census 1858 recorded widespread imbalances in the male to female ratio in several populations in the Mackenzie District.⁷³ Clearly, only the most terrible of hardships could have led to this almost absurd demographic situation. By 1860, the onslaught of famine and disease had, according to Shepard Krech, reduced the population of the Kutchin by eighty percent from its estimated total at first contact.⁷⁴

Corporate policies of the HBC played a role in pushing populations of the far northwest to their limits. In the 1830s, the precarious food supply for northern fur producers was further undermined by economy measures imposed by the Company.⁷⁵ In an attempt to cut the burden of supplying the District posts, the importation of flour

⁷²The number of boys was 572, the number of girls 434, and the number of undifferentiated children of Both sexes, 230. Ibid., 115. For a discussion of the imbalance in the sex ratio of the Hare of Fort Good Hope in the 1829 census, see Savishinsky and Sue Hara, "Hare," 322.

⁷³Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 127. Cornelius Osgood used the same source to reproduce the male to female ratios among three Kutchin populations: Peel River and La Pierre's House, 185 to 152; Yukon, six tribes, 474 to 368; Fort Good Hope, 58 to 37. Cornelius Osgood, *Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 15.

⁷⁴"Disease, Starvation, and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," 718. Krech disputed the notion that female infanticide played an important role in the gender imbalance in population other than the Loucheux Kutchin, noting that male children were simply better cared for than their sisters during times of hardship. "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 131.

⁷⁵The changes included a decrease in the price paid for furs and an increase in the cost of trade goods; the end of corporate recognition of trading post chiefs; and the introduction of the "ready barter" system of trade. For a discussion of the impact of the new HBC policies on the trade, see Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 116-120.

into the Mackenzie was stopped in 1834.⁷⁶ While gardens were sown at a number of posts to supplement game procured for food, the effect of the ban was to further expose northern people to fluctuations of hare population cycles.⁷⁷ As was too often the case, the hardship on those forced to increase their reliance on precarious country foods was accompanied by an outbreak of contagious disease.

Between 1834 and 1838, several influenza epidemics swept through the bush from Fort William to the Mackenzie Delta. As was the case with the vast majority of outbreaks during this period, the virus was spread by company brigades whose tight schedules precluded sick canoemen from taking any respite.⁷⁸ As the sick departed with their brigades, the disease was spread to the furthest reaches of the HBC territory.⁷⁹ Both Indians and traders were hit by the virus but the curtailment of provisions to producers undoubtedly worsened the effects of the disease among

⁷⁶T.J. Karamanski, *Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 193. A year earlier, the Northern Department Council ordered the Peace River District to cultivate its own food. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 639. From the corporate perspective, the cuts to the Northern Department were justified according to one study, until the mid 1830s, "the Company was so short of trade goods in the lower Mackenzie that they were in debt to the Indians." Cooper, *Alexander Kennedy Isbister: A Respectable Critic of the Honourable Company*, 13.

⁷⁷Karamanski, *Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852*, 195. Traders in the field also suffered from the cuts in food supplies. Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 119.

⁷⁸For an analysis of the role of the brigades in the diffusion of the influenza epidemic of 1835, see Patricia McCormack, "The Athabasca Influenza Epidemic of 1835," in *Issues In the North*, eds. Jill Oakes and Rick Riewe (Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute, 1996), 34-37.

⁷⁹During the monopoly period, influenza outbreaks became regular occurrences in the Northern Department. In addition to 1835, the virus struck in 1837, 1843, 1845, 1847, and 1850. Ray, "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 142-144.

aboriginal communities.⁸⁰ In the Mackenzie District, as many as two hundred and fifty people perished from the disease and its complications.⁸¹ The weakness resulting from influenza infection often made hunters unable to pursue their prey. During the round of influenza epidemics of the 1830s, starvation and cannibalism were reported among the Kutchin, a group recognized for their relative independence from European food supplies.⁸² Sickness and hunger were undoubtedly factors contributing to the outbreak of hostilities between the Kutchin and their neighbours, the Hare, between 1836 and 1838.⁸³ At Fort Good Hope, forty Nahanny Indians perished during the winter of 1836-1837.⁸⁴ In the Athabasca, the Beaver trading at Fort Vermillion were reported to have suffered a mortality rate of thirty percent from the combined effects of disease and famine.⁸⁵ At Fort Chipewyan, Factor Smith reported, "the present distressing situation

⁸⁰In some areas, such as northern Ontario, whooping cough accompanied the influenza outbreak. Hackett, *"A Very Remarkable Sickness"*, 358-362.

⁸¹Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 128.

⁸²Until the influenza outbreak of the mid 1830s, the trade with the Kutchin had been almost exclusively based on beads, which were used for currency by the group. The shift in the trading patterns from luxury items to essentials such as dry goods and cooking utensils illustrated the severity of the epidemic among the Kutchin. S. Krech, "The Early Fur Trade in the Northwestern Arctic: The Kutchin and the Trade in Beads," in *Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. Bruce Trigger, T. Morantz, and Louise Dechene (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 250-259.

⁸³Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 154.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 138.

⁸⁵Barbara Angel, "Fur Trade Relations with Native People at Fort Vermillion, 1821-1846," in *Proceedings of the Fort Chipewyan and Fort Vermillion Bicentennial Conference*, eds. Patricia McCormack and R. Geooffrey Ironside (Edmonton: University of Alberta, Boreal Institute for Northern Studies, 1990), 90. At Fort Chipewyan, the estimated mortality was 19 percent. Patricia McCormack, "The Athabasca Influenza Epidemic of 1835," 40.

of the Indians is without parallel during my thirty-six years residence among them."⁸⁶

The virulence of the strain⁸⁷ was such that even the Caribou Eater Chipewyan who had little contact with traders were infected from the outbreak at Fort Chipewyan.⁸⁸

In the spring of 1837, a new strain of influenza was unwittingly delivered by the brigades to the far northwest.⁸⁹ Arthur Ray stated that the influenza of 1837 was less

⁸⁶Ray, "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 150, fn. 32; McCormack, "The Athabasca Influenza Epidemic of 1835," 40.

⁸⁷Identified by Decker as type A. "We Should Never Be Again the Same People", 112; Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 361. Alfred Crosby noted that the genetic instability of the influenza A virus, "probably makes permanent immunity to the disease impossible, no matter how many times it is contracted. This, plus its short incubation period of 1 to 2 days and the ease with which it passes from person to person, enables the disease to swing around the globe in pandemics..." Alfred Crosby, "Influenza," in *Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, ed. Kenneth Kiple (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 808.

⁸⁸Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 154-155. The "Caribou-Eater" Chipewyan provides an interesting contrast to the downward spiral of famine, disease and dependency experienced elsewhere in the northwestern subarctic. They largely withdrew from the fur trade in the 1820s and followed the migrating caribou herds, avoiding the periodic starvation of those groups who were forced to rely on small game and fish to survive. Krech, "Disease, Starvation and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," 723. The independence of the Caribou Eaters led to their recognition among anthropologists as an "original 'affluent society.'" See particularly James G.E. Smith, "Chipewyan and Fur Trader's Views of Rupert's Land," in *Rupert's Land: A Cultural Tapestry*, ed. R. Davies (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988) 133; and James G.E. Smith, "Local Band Organization of the Caribou Eater Chipewyan in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 6 (1976), 79-80, who attributed the retreat of the group from the trade to their avoidance strategy in coping with the 1819-1820 whooping cough and measles epidemics. Another source of the infection among the Caribou Eaters was reported to be Ile-à-la-Crosse. Ray, "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 145. At least seventy people perished from the influenza epidemic at Fort Chipewyan. For a list of the dead, see Patricia McCormack, "The Athabasca Influenza Epidemic of 1835," Table 2: "Obituary: Fort Chipewyan Indians Winter 1835-36," 39.

⁸⁹The origin of the outbreak was traced to a Canadian epidemic in 1836-1837. Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 367.

virulent than outbreaks of the previous years⁹⁰ but the epidemic was deadly to many in the Mackenzie District. At Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake, eleven members of a single band perished.⁹¹ Over the winter of 1837-38, only one member of a band of thirty-three Nahanne hunters attached to Fort Norman, near Great Bear Lake, survived.⁹² As with the earlier outbreaks of influenza, famine in the aftermath of the disease drove many to the most horrible of actions. At Fort Good Hope on the Lower Mackenzie, John Bell recounted the desperation of a Kutchin man who, "ate no less than 6 individuals including his own sister whom he killed. The others died a natural Death and of starvation. When questioned on the Subject he candidly Confessed."⁹³

Despite the economy measures the company had imposed to limit the use of provisions and other goods by fur suppliers, the HBC supplied relief to those in dire need of assistance. George Simpson acknowledged the responsibility of the Company to the well-being of its trappers. In 1836, he noted the use of HBC resources in "administering to the sick and the infirm, every Trading Establishment being in fact an Indian Hospital, where those who are unable to follow the Chase during the Winter months, are fed, clothed, and maintained throughout that inclement season with the

⁹⁰Ray, "The Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 147-150. The author reported that within the boundaries of his study, the only deaths resulting from the influenza outbreak of 1837 were in the Upper Peace River and connected to malnutrition in the area. Although he did not consider the deaths in the country to the north of the Peace, there was undoubtedly a relationship between the paucity of food supplies and the severity of the infection. On the decline of game animals in the far northwest in the late 1830s and early 1840s, see Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," 62.

⁹¹Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade," 128.

⁹²Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 139.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 138.

most tender solitude..."⁹⁴ Another trader, Dr. John Rae was later asked to comment on the Governor's statement. He replied:

Wherever we act as medical men our services are given gratuitously. We go to a distance if the Indian is at a distance, and have taken him to a fort, and he is fed and clothed there. And it is no uncommon thing to hear the old Indians, when unfit for hunting, say, 'We are unfit for work; we will go and reside at a fort.' That is the ordinary feeling which prevailed in the country.⁹⁵

At Fort Chipewyan, Thomas Simpson reported on the company's role in mitigating the effects of the deadly epidemic:

... of an influenza-scarcely less dreadful than the cholera-that carried off two hundred of the distant Chipewyans. I say *distant*, because all who were within reach of the establishments were sent for and carried thither, where every care was taken of them; warm clothing and lodgings were provided; medicines administered; the traders and servants fed them, parting with their own slender stock of luxuries for their nourishment; till even the cold heart of the red man warmed into gratitude; and his lips uttered the unwonted accents of thanks.⁹⁶

In providing assistance to the sick, the company may have been motivated by more than a sense of altruism toward its hunters. Traders offered assistance to women and the elderly so that the able-bodied men could continue the commercial hunt. The trader at Dunvegan reported on the economic rationale for medical assistance:

Late arrived Pouce Coupe and three women, they bring Tranquille's sick wife with them with the intention she should remain at the fort her husband not being

⁹⁴Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 447-448. For a summary of the Hudson's Bay Company's role in the delivery of aid to its suppliers, see Ray, "Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1930," 1-20.

⁹⁵Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 821. An extended quotation of Dr. Rae's testimony is provided in John E. Foster, ed., "Rupert's Land and the Red River Settlement, 1820-70," in *The Prairie West to 1905: A Canadian Sourcebook*, gen. ed. Lewis G. Thomas (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), 26-27.

⁹⁶Thomas Simpson, *Narrative of the Discoveries on the North Coast of America. Second Edition. Volume 1.* (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1970), 67-68.

able to hunt and drag her about.⁹⁷

Paul Hackett stated that the rise of HBC paternalism with regard to medical aid in this period was related to the increased incidence of infectious diseases in the country controlled by the Company.⁹⁸ The distribution of food to fur producers was used to defend the monopoly during a parliamentary inquiry into the renewal of the HBC charter in 1837.⁹⁹ The country-wide vaccination campaign against smallpox conducted in 1838 was, according to Yerbury, evidence of "a growing concern for a declining and weakened Indian population ... Influenza and other diseases however, continued to rage among them."¹⁰⁰ While the utility of the vaccination campaign was limited because diseases other than smallpox continued their assault on Indian populations across the northwest, the project was the first systematic attempt to prevent the spread of contagious disease in the HBC domain.¹⁰¹

Sadly, corporate benevolence in the form of food aid and medicines such as the smallpox vaccine, were no match for the vagaries of the subarctic ecosystem which,

⁹⁷Earlier, during the competition period, medical aid was supplied to ensure allegiance to the HBC. At Fort St. Mary's in 1821, the best medical care possible was provided to a sick Saulteaux hunter whose brother promised to abandon the NWC in favor of the HBC. G. Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 53.

⁹⁸"A Very Remarkable Sickness", 448.

⁹⁹Although the Company supplied the Indians of the Cumberland District with food, the value according to Paul Thistle, was more symbolic than substantive, "The demanding character of Cree requests for food reflected their perception of the social nature of trade ties rather than dependence." *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, 83.

¹⁰⁰*The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 156.

¹⁰¹For a discussion of the extent of the vaccination campaign of 1838, see Hackett, Appendix 3: "Distribution of Smallpox Vaccine in 1838," in "A Very Remarkable Sickness", 508-509.

during the 1840s, was especially unpredictable.¹⁰² The bust in hare populations in the early 1840s renewed the cycle of famine, disease and death among northern Athapaskans.¹⁰³ The suffering resulting from the absence of rabbits was worsened by very unpredictable weather which plagued the northland for most of the 1840s.¹⁰⁴

Among the Hare, it was reported that ninety people were eaten, many killed by their own relatives:

[S]ome mothers whose children died of starvation, seized their little bodies, and lifted them above their heads in terrifying shouts, and a hideous despairing laughter more heart rendering than tears, and then roasted them, dismembered them, and shared them with those who were not so near death as to be unable to eat.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²The shifting climate of the 1840s was responsible for more than cold weather in the far north. Across the Atlantic, the warm and humid conditions in Ireland were perfect for the explosion of the potato blight fungus, the cause of the Irish potato famine. H.H. Lamb, *Climate, History and the Modern World* (London: Methuen, 1982), 242. During the mid 1840s, the ships *Erebus* and *Terror*, belonging to the ill-fated Franklin Expedition, were frozen in the ice and their crews perished from starvation and exposure. For a full discussion of the difficult climatic period in the far north, see Renée Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled: Inuit of the Central Arctic, 1550-1940*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 149.

¹⁰³The hare population was particularly slow to recover from its nadir in the early 1840s, the animals were scarce in many areas until 1844. The interrelationship between the trade, food availability and the need for supplements of European supplies has led to the conclusion among scholars that by the 1840s, the inhabitants of the Mackenzie were "completely dependent" on the post, not only for trade goods but for their very survival in times of need. The situation remained essentially unchanged for the remainder of the 19th century. Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 124-126. For a discussion of an 1840s account connecting the fur trade and starvation among the Hare, see Cooper, *Alexander Kennedy Isbister: A Respectable Critic of the Honourable Company*, 36.

¹⁰⁴During the decade, many Chipewyan from the Upper Churchill and the Lesser Slave Lake region moved south to avoid starvation. See Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," 61-62.

¹⁰⁵P. Duchaussois, *Mid Snow and Ice: The Apostles of the Northwest* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1923), 279. The account of the suffering goes on to

As the famine continued, HBC supplies were depleted to the point where, at Fort Good Hope, over fifty men, women and children:

[H]ad fallen victims and perished of the famine all within 200 yards of the Fort and that the survivors of them were living on the carcasses of their Relatives, these Indians, Men & Women Kept always their axe in hand for self preservation & if any was found sleeping were instantly Knocked on the head & as soon devoured by their best relatives..."¹⁰⁶

Conditions were so severe at Good Hope that "several" of the HBC's own servants died of hunger.¹⁰⁷ The following winter, twenty-five people died from starvation at Fort Norman while hunters at other posts survived only with provisions supplied by the company.¹⁰⁸ As the inhabitants of the north fell victim to the famine or avoided it through the most gruesome of measures,¹⁰⁹ some witnesses took solace in the greater meaning of the despair surrounding them. The Imperial explorer John Henry Lefroy recounted the famine induced cannibalism among the Hare Indians trading at Fort Simpson in the spring of 1844. Summarizing conditions "almost too horrible to be related" during the nadir of the hare population cycle, Lefroy confided to his brother:

No doubt they are failing but it is exceedingly difficult to get any accurate data for computing at what rate they are diminishing. There is something not a little interesting in my opinion in the fact that any race of men should present an

describe the murder and consumption of two HBC servants by a pair of starving Hare women.

¹⁰⁶ Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 138.

¹⁰⁷ Krech, "Disease, Starvation and Northern Athapaskan Social Organization," 716.

¹⁰⁸ Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene," 136.

¹⁰⁹ According to a witness to the suffering, A.K. Isbister, when faced with the terrible choice of starvation or cannibalism, many preferred suicide. Cooper, *Alexander Kennedy Isbister: A Respectable Critic of the Honourable Company*, 36.

exception to the great law and design of nature in this respect, the deaths in successive generations outnumbering the births; and nothing conveys to me a stronger impression of Divine purposes within and superintendence in the distribution and progress of our race.¹¹⁰

Governor Simpson disputed the claim later made by Lefroy that the indigenous population of the north was on the decline, stating that while the southern Indians were declining as a result of warfare and smallpox, that northerners were actually increasing their numbers.¹¹¹ The dispute between Simpson of the Company and Lefroy of the Admiralty was not an isolated incident. Royal Navy parties searching for the Franklin expedition later in the decade were critical of the HBC's relationship with its producers.¹¹² Dr. John Rae's rebuke of their critique of corporate policy illustrated the complexity of the situation:

These selfsufficient donkeys come into this country see the Indians sometimes miserably clad and half starved, the causes which they never think of inquiring into, but place all the credit of the Company quite forgetting that 10 times as much misery occurred in Ireland during the last few years, at the very door of the most civilized countries in the world, than has happened in the Hudsons Bay Cos Territories during the past 1/4 century.¹¹³

While there can be no question that the famine of the early 1840s was horrific, the result of the terrible coincidence of climatic conditions and the nadir of the small

¹¹⁰J.H. Lefroy to Anna (Lefroy), Fort Simpson, March 29, 1844, in *John Henry Lefroy, In Search of the Magnetic North: A Soldier-Surveyor's Letters from the North-West 1843-1844*, ed. G.F.G. Stanley (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), 110-111. (cannibalism quote, Lefroy to Sabine, Fort Simpson, March 27, 1844, 99).

¹¹¹Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 821.

¹¹²An exception to the criticism from the Admiralty came from Sir George Back who stated the Indians, "must have starved without the aid of the Hudson's Bay Company." Ibid.

¹¹³Karamanski, *Fur trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852*, 257-258.

game cycle, the disaster may have well been compounded by corporate decree. Investigations of the far northwest have noted the dependent relationship of northern hunters on posts for goods and food by this time.¹¹⁴ The assistance provided to Indian fur producers during the influenza years of the 1830s illustrated the company's role of assisting its workforce in times of need. The low ebb of the hare cycle, and the resulting famine, coincided with the imposition of a prohibition on beaver harvesting in the Northern Department in 1841.¹¹⁵ In the southern portions of the Athabasca Department, many Chipewyans from Lesser Slave Lake and the upper Churchill River abandoned their hunting territory in the face of the dual hardships of famine and corporate cutbacks and headed south to the Saskatchewan.¹¹⁶ Members of smaller and less powerful ethnic groups in the northern regions could not indulge in the luxury of territorial abandonment. While residents of the Mackenzie opposed the curtailment of the trade in high value furs, they were powerless with regard to the drop in the demand for beaver pelts which resulted from the shift in hat styles in Europe and the urbanized east.¹¹⁷

As the Company cut its trade in much of the Mackenzie District, it opened a number of posts on the northern and western margins of the region to tap what it

¹¹⁴Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 124-125.

¹¹⁵Ray, "Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1850: Some Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade," 64-65.

¹¹⁶In addition to the prohibition on the trade of certain pelts, the company attempted, though largely in vain, to control the movement of its Indian producers. Though causing hardship among humans, game populations rebounded in many of the areas under the trapping ban. *Ibid.*, 62-64.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 67.

considered to be under utilized fur bearer stocks.¹¹⁸ These new establishments included Peel River and Fort Yukon and were intended to bring the trade directly to groups that had previously been only peripheral to the fur harvest.¹¹⁹ Kenneth Coates noted that HBC expansion was based on a view that the region was "somewhat wistfully believed to be a 'New Athabasca.'"¹²⁰ With trade, came disease and frequent food shortages to both aboriginal producers and European traders.¹²¹ Influenza spread to the new outposts soon after their establishment. In 1843, the Kutchin on the Peel River on the Mackenzie delta and elsewhere in the Mackenzie District were hit with the outbreak. Children were especially susceptible.¹²² The effect of the influenza was not

¹¹⁸For a complete discussion of the expansion of the HBC into the Yukon and Alaska, see Karamanski, *Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852* and Clifford Wilson, *Campbell of the Yukon* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970). After overcoming the logistical problems involved in supplying its stations of the west coast, the HBC also expanded its operations there after the mid 1820s. Gibson, *The Lifeline of the Oregon Country: The Fraser-Columbia Brigade System, 1811-47*, 148. For another investigation of the Yukon trade, see Kenneth Coates, "Furs Along the Yukon: Hudson's Bay Company-Native Trade in the Yukon River Basin, 1830-1893," *B.C. Studies* 55 (1982), 50-78.

¹¹⁹Krech, "The Early Fur Trade in the Northwestern Subarctic: The Kutchin and the Trade in Beads," 246.

¹²⁰Coates, "Furs Along the Yukon: Hudson's Bay Company-Native Trade in the Yukon River Basin, 1830-1893," 58.

¹²¹The expansion of the HBC into the Yukon was fraught with difficulties for all involved. During the famine years of the 1840s, three hundred people died on the Lower Mackenzie, resulting in an uprising at Fort Good Hope and the withdrawal of the Liard Indians from the trade. Karamanski, *Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest, 1821-1852*, 219-220. It is a paradox that during this period of extreme hardship, many of the posts were quite successful. In its first year of trade, the post at Peel River returned over fourteen hundred beaver skins, "those valuable but persecuted animals" and a thousand marten pelts." Cooper, *Alexander Kennedy Isbister: A Respectable Critic of the Honourable Company*, 18.

¹²²The fact that children were the hardest hit by the outbreak indicates that the disease had passed through the country previously. On the 1843 outbreak among the Kutchin of the Peel River and the Mackenzie, see Krech, "The Early Fur Trade in the

confined to newly opened areas. The disease was reported to have been rampant throughout the northwest and as far east as the Great Lakes.¹²³ Complicating the widespread nature of disease episodes in this period was the increased incidence of associated outbreaks of other pathogens.¹²⁴ Writing from Norway House in 1843, Alexander Ross reported on the bleak outlook for the health of the county, "[t]his has been a very sickly season in the interior, Hooping cough, Influenza, Scarlet Fever and a very troublesome complaint resembling common cholera, are raging with less or more violence amongst us."¹²⁵ Donald Ross, also at Norway House, described the situation with regard to the health of the community, "every breeze... blows some foul disease."¹²⁶ By the mid 1840s, diseases came with such frequency and variety that Paul Hackett concluded that an epidemic transition had taken place, the result of improved communications coupled with greater populations in centres such as Red

Northwestern Subarctic: The Kutchin and the Trade in Beads," 264, and Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 56. In contrast, the 1835 outbreak of Influenza appeared to affect all segments of the population with equal severity. Of the seventy people who died at Fort Chipewyan in 1835-36, eighteen were men, twenty-nine women and twenty-three children. McCormack, "The Athabasca Influenza Epidemic of 1835," 39.

¹²³Accounts of the 1843 influenza are numerous. See Ray, "The Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 148-149; Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 382; and Krech, "The Influence of Disease and the Fur trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene," 129.

¹²⁴While compound epidemics grew more frequent as the nineteenth century progressed, they were not new in the 1840s. The combined outbreaks of measles and whooping cough was a factor in the ending of the fur trade war a generation earlier.

¹²⁵The disease described by Ross as cholera was probably dysentery. Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 382.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 308.

River and other urban areas.¹²⁷ In fact, Hackett concluded his study during this period because the epidemiology of the country became too complex to consider the effects of specific outbreaks of acute crowd infections.¹²⁸

Among the Indians, the epidemic year of 1846 appears to have been a watershed in their perception of disease. At Norway House, traders reported the end of a mourning practice recognized by Europeans since the time of La Verendrye, the abandonment of furs and belongings of the dead and those of their relatives.¹²⁹ While the shift in mourning practices was welcomed by the HBC because furs would no longer be wasted, Paul Hackett concluded that the change, "...suggests that something might be altered in their relationship with the dead... It may be that changes such as these, although they may appear minor of themselves, actually hint at more fundamental transformations to belief structures."¹³⁰

Beyond the increasingly complex epidemiological situation or perhaps because of it, the 1840s saw the introduction of the first large scale missionary work outside the confines of the Red River settlement.¹³¹ Although Governor Simpson had no particular

¹²⁷Ibid., 400.

¹²⁸In the conclusion of his study, Hackett noted that by 1846, the year of numerous and distinct but interrelated epidemics, northern Ontario became a "near" region rather than "peripheral" as it had been during the earlier fur trade. Hackett used the paradigm of the global process of disease homogenization introduced in William McNeill's *Plagues and Peoples*. "A very Remarkable Sickness", 481.

¹²⁹The abandonment of infected or potentially infected goods, though normally considered in the spiritual context, may well have been a sound strategy to diminish the chances of contagion among groups without sophisticated medical practices.

¹³⁰Ibid., 441-442.

¹³¹Missions, both Catholic and Protestant, had been established in the colony prior to the conclusion of the fur trade war but serious efforts beyond the colony were negligible until 1840 when the Wesleyan Methodists began their efforts at Norway

affection for the work of missionaries, deteriorating conditions in the 1830s led him to accept their expansion.¹³² Among the factors leading to Simpson's change of heart were the exhaustion of fur lands, the uncontrolled migration of displaced or unemployed Indians to the settlement at Red River and the decline of the beaver market resulting from the growing popularity of silk hats in Europe.¹³³ Cutbacks in the trade resulted in increased hardship and dependence of Indian producers on the Company's stores. Missionaries, whatever their faith, provided the HBC with an economical means to deliver assistance to surplus fur procurers in the hinterland. In doing so, the missions also served to anchor communities to territory that otherwise would have been abandoned. By the early 1830s, the number of Swampy Cree heading south to the colony at Red River was sufficient to tax the supplies of the St. Peter's mission established earlier among the Saulteaux.¹³⁴ The missionary charged with the care of the northern migrants, William Cockran, considered that land within the

House and other fur trade establishments. See Moodie, Kaye and Lytwyn, "The Fur Trade Northwest to 1870," *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 2*, Plate 17.

¹³²Reverend William Cockran was working at Grand Rapids as early as 1830. Of the four Methodist preachers invited into the territory in 1839, only one remained a decade later. Much of the trouble experienced by missionaries in the early years of their work stemmed from their inability to fit into the structure of fur trade society rather than from a conflict between Christianity and commerce. See Fritz Pannekoek, "The Reverend James Evans and the Social Antagonisms of the Fur Trade Society, 1840-1846," in *Religion and Society and the Prairie West*, ed. Richard Allen (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1974): 1-16.

¹³³Fritz Pannekoek, "The Reverend James Evans and the Social Antagonisms of Fur Trade Society, 1840-1846," 2-3. For discussions of the downturn in the beaver economy resulting from the shift to silk hats, see Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 696-697, and Gibson, *The Lifeline of the Oregon Trade: The Fraser-Columbia Brigade System, 1811-47*, 204-205.

¹³⁴John E. Foster, "Missionaries, Mixed-Bloods and the Fur Trade: Four Letters of the Rev. William Cockran, Red River Settlement, 1830-1831," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 3 (1972), 107.

colony itself was too valuable for a new Indian settlement but he stressed the need for establishment of a community at Netley Creek:

Placing an ignorant Savage upon a piece of land which has been allowed by all parties to be his own, is a desirable object in iron {sic?} (comment Foster's) times, when little money can be obtained to make a purchase for him. Seizing and preserving his rights while they are acknowledged by all parties to be inviolable, is another valuable point; and to make room for the weather beaten wanderer of the North to drift in and find a retreat when he can weather the storms of his native woods no more, is an object of too much importance for even the philanthropic mind to lose sight of.¹³⁵

Providing surplus suppliers with a community to anchor them to their territory was also the rationale for the establishment of the Roman Catholic mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1846. The Chief Factor of the District, Roderick McKenzie, invited Father Thibault to the District with a view to halt the movement of Cree hunters southward toward economic security of the plains bison hunt.¹³⁶ Other missions, such as the Lac Caribou mission at Reindeer Lake, was situated to draw the Caribou Eater Chipewyan to the south from their independent life of caribou hunting on the barrens to the northern margins of the fur trade.¹³⁷ While the presence of missions, particularly the agrarian settlements established by Protestants, aided the material well-being of northern Indian groups, the arrival of Christian groups in the north proved a mixed blessing.

As Fathers Taché and Laflèche were on their way to their postings in the interior in the summer of 1846, they held a mass at Frog Portage where the routes north to

¹³⁵Ibid., 108.

¹³⁶Martha McCarthy, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Historic Resources, 1990), 133.

¹³⁷In the case of the Reindeer Lake mission, the Caribou Eaters were drawn to the mission but could not be convinced to trap commercially. Ibid., 134-140.

Reindeer and west to Ile-à-la-Crosse intersect. The service had fatal consequences. It spread a deadly epidemic of measles to those who had congregated for the ceremony. As many as eighteen people died from the infection.¹³⁸ The following year, twenty-nine converts at the newly established Anglican mission at Lac La Ronge also succumbed to measles.¹³⁹ From the start of their work, many of the inhabitants of the bush blamed the missionaries for the spread of infection and death.¹⁴⁰ The murders of the Roman Catholic missionary to the Pas and his assistant in June of 1844 were in retribution for what was considered to have been their role in the spread of a scarlet fever epidemic the previous winter.¹⁴¹ The rapid acceptance of Catholic missionaries among the

¹³⁸The number of deaths was derived from the quick baptisms in the wake of the outbreak as those in mortal danger commonly underwent the ritual without instruction in the faith. *Ibid.*, 113. It should be noted that the priests were traveling with the HBC brigade, the most common disease vector in the interior.

¹³⁹SAB, R-E2033, Edward Ahenakew Papers, "Stanley Mission," 2. In 1846, measles swept across the west from Lake Winnipeg to Great Slave Lake and over the mountains to British Columbia. The infection was carried to Hawaii aboard an American warship. Hackett, *"A Very Remarkable Sickness,"* 415.

¹⁴⁰Aboriginal communities often made the connection between the missionaries and epidemic illness. During a scarlet fever epidemic in 1865 in which almost eight hundred inhabitants of the Mackenzie perished, many "voyant" Indians claimed that the missionary Faraut, "made them die [and accused] missionaries of spreading the disease among them and the Loucheux Kutchin destroyed the property of the Christians in their territory." Martha McCarthy, *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995), 197.

¹⁴¹The killers were probably Bungee and the violence jeopardized all of the missions in the vicinity of Lake Winnipeg. Faced with aboriginal resistance and overpowered by the success of the Church Missionary Society's (hereafter CMS) mission at Devon, the Catholics at the Pas soon abandoned their work in favour of the less dangerous missions to the Chipewyan. McCarthy, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870*, 117-118.

struggling populations in isolated regions of the north¹⁴² was in sharp contrast to the resistance of plains people to the efforts of Christians among them.¹⁴³

While the expansion of Christian Missions was often rightfully attributed to be the source of infection in the north, the most important conduit of disease through the entire monopoly period were the canoe brigades of the HBC. Martha McCarthy showed that from the late 1850s to the end of the monopoly period, epidemics were spread to the Dene on almost a yearly basis by infected boatmen.¹⁴⁴

The most serious of the infections carried by the brigades was the combined

¹⁴²At the Roman Catholic mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1856, only 46 "payans" (pagans) remained of 419 Chipewyans listed although one hundred of the Cree who frequented the post still resisted conversion. Robert Jarvenpa, "The Hudson's Bay Company, The Roman Catholic Church and the Chipewyan in the Late Fur Trade Period," in *Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference*, eds. B. Trigger, T. Morantz, and L. Dechene (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 491-492.

¹⁴³The exception to this essentially north-south dichotomy was in the area close to Red River where surplus aboriginal fur trade workers drifted to the settlement in the hope of securing wage labour, something strongly discouraged by the company. Ray, "Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1930," 10.

¹⁴⁴At this time the general health of the brigades was poor. While Bishop Grandin traveled with them, all were stricken "with a heavy cold, high fever and chills. Many deaths were reported at Fort Providence, Fort Liard and Fort Rae. At Great Bear Lake forty four people died of the epidemic. Martha McCarthy, Appendix B. "Sickness and Medicine," in *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth*, 196. In 1864, typhus was brought to the Red River from Hudson's Bay via York boat crews. Edith Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 107; Ruth Matheson Buck, *The Doctor Rode Side-Saddle* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 16. At the Nativity Mission, the Peace River boats spread the disease "causing high fevers, congestion, cough, sore neck, ears, head and eyes. Twelve died, two went blind." Death was common across the north. At Fort Rae, the population of twelve hundred in 1859 was reduced to 788 in 1864. McCarthy, Appendix B: "Sickness and Medicine," in *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth*, 196-197.

epidemic of scarlet fever and measles brought from Red River during 1865.¹⁴⁵ The infection spread as far as the Arctic Ocean, where the Peel River Inuit dogged William Bompas, the Anglican Bishop of the Mackenzie, for three years because they held him responsible for the deadly outbreak.¹⁴⁶ The disease was responsible for the annihilation of the Birch Creek (Tennuth) Kutchin.¹⁴⁷ Shepard Krech estimated mortality levels of up to thirty percent among other eastern Kutchin groups.¹⁴⁸ In the Mackenzie, Emile Petitot estimated that almost eight hundred people of a total population of four thousand died in a four week period, prompting a serious backlash against the Catholic missionaries working among them.¹⁴⁹ To the east, at the St. Pierre mission at Reindeer Lake, the combined epidemics killed forty-six hunters in addition to many children and hindered the development of the mission among the Caribou Eater Chipewyan for

¹⁴⁵An early writer on the epidemic, Mary Weekes, posited that half of the people in the Mackenzie died during the outbreak. Mary Weekes, *Trader King: The Thrilling Story of Forty Years' in the North-West Territories, Related by One of the Last Old Time Wintering Partners of the Hudson's Bay Company* (Regina: School Aids and Textbook Company, 1949), 88.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁴⁷By the time of his fieldwork in the 1930s, Cornelius Osgood reported that the Kutcha Kutchin located at Yukon Flats declined from a population of "several hundred" in the 1840s to a single family. *Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin*, 14-15.

¹⁴⁸"The Early Fur Trade in the Northwestern Subarctic: The Kutchin and the Trade in Beads," 265-266. Elsewhere, Krech reported that "at the time of nadir, there was only one Kutchin for every six who had been alive prior to white contact." "On the Aboriginal Population of the Kutchin," 93. Among the Slave people of Fort Nelson, John Honigmann estimated that the population declined from 397 to 200 by 1912. After a serious influenza epidemic in the late 1920s, the population dropped to 102. John Honigman, *Ethnography and Acculturation of the Fort Nelson Slave* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 26.

¹⁴⁹McCarthy, *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921*, 122 and Appendix B, "Sickness and Medicine," 197.

years to come.¹⁵⁰ Among the infected populations, the levels of mortality spawned a number of prophetic movements in an attempt to cope with the sheer proportion of the disaster.¹⁵¹ William Hardisty of the HBC described the situation among the Hare:

The fact is, they were frightened out of their senses, and gave themselves up to despair, fancied the end of the world was come, and that they were all going to die, which prevented them from taking the necessary precautions during the crisis of fever.¹⁵²

To the south, the epidemic devastated the Beaver frequenting Fort St. John on the Peace River. According to one missionary account, one thousand of a pre-epidemic population of eighteen hundred perished, the starving survivors "were only skin and bone, having been reduced to live on wild fruits, of which there was no abundance. Their bodies were covered in ulcers, giving out an infectious odour of death."¹⁵³

The sickness continued through the spring of 1867, where at Fort Rae, "[p]eople were dying by the dozen."¹⁵⁴ At Fort Simpson, over seventy perished,¹⁵⁵ at Good Hope,

¹⁵⁰The number of baptisms, which more than doubled from forty-one in 1864 to ninety-eight in 1865, is evidence of the severity of the epidemic. McCarthy, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870*, 159-160.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 197. Because of the severity of their experience, "crisis cults" were numerous among northern Athapaskan populations. See Robert R. Janes, "Observations on Crisis Cult Activities in the Mackenzie Basin," in *Problems in the Prehistory of the North American Subarctic: The Athapaskan Question*, eds. J.W. Helmer, S. Van Dyke and F.J. Kense (Calgary: University of Calgary, 1977), 153-164.

¹⁵²Hiroko Sue Hara, *The Hare Indians and Their World*, Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service Paper 63, (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1980), 36.

¹⁵³SAB, Ferguson Papers, Reel R-2.391, "Scarcity of Food in Northern Indians."

¹⁵⁴McCarthy, Appendix B. "Sickness and Medicine," in *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene* 198.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*

thirty-six, "most of them in their prime and good hunters."¹⁵⁶ At Resolution, ninety-two succumbed to illness over a period of fifteen months.¹⁵⁷ Another two hundred and fifty were reported to have died in the Mackenzie during 1867 and 1868.¹⁵⁸ Still, the suffering persisted. In 1869, Faraud reported to Bishop Taché that "Sickness among Indians [is] still terrible."¹⁵⁹

Ken Coates remarked that the scarlet fever epidemic of the mid 1860s was the most severe until the end of the 19th century, less virulent and more localized epidemics continued to afflict the population of the Yukon River.¹⁶⁰ He added that despite the ravages of contagious diseases which led to the demise of many bands that, "[s]urprisingly, the Hudson's Bay Company was not financially harmed as a result of the epidemics."¹⁶¹ Part of the Company's continued financial success may be attributed to the introduction of steam powered boats on the Mackenzie by the mid 1880s.¹⁶² Martha McCarthy has shown that the cycle of contagion and hunger, the latter corresponding to the rise and fall of the hare populations, continued until well into the

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Coates, "Furs Along the Yukon: Hudson's Bay Company-Native Trade in the Yukon River Basin, 1830-1893," 70.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Michael Asch, "Some Effects of the Late Nineteenth Century Modernization of the Fur Trade on the Economy of the Slavey Indians," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 6 (1976), 9. The introduction of steam vessels continued to deliver diseases on a regular basis. In June 1928, the HBC steamer, Distributor, infected the Mackenzie with influenza. Six hundred people died. Gillespie, "Ethnohistory of the Yellowknives," 234.

twentieth century.¹⁶³ The experience of the Athapaskan peoples of the far northwest was an unstable one from the beginning of their incorporation into the fur trade economy. Even before the arrival of European traders in their territory, Chipewyan middlemen trading with Europeans at Hudson Bay exploited the smaller nations of the Mackenzie watershed often with brutal force. Their territorial dislocation, resulting from the arrival of Montreal traders into the Athabasca, forced many into ecological regions where they could not reliably sustain both themselves and the commercial trade. Even before the turn of the nineteenth century, access to caribou herds and other large game was limited by the expansion of more powerful groups from the south and east, forcing many to depend on the cyclically fluctuating population of rabbits. The decadal pattern of famine resulting from the decline in small game populations which continued for a century, exacerbated the effects of introduced infectious diseases. In a critique of ethnohistorical method, Frank Tough stated that "dependence is a process towards structural inequality."¹⁶⁴ In the case of the Athapaskans of the western subarctic, that process began early and with a vengeance.

¹⁶³McCarthy, Appendix B. "Sickness and Medicine," *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth*, 197-209.

¹⁶⁴Frank Tough, "The Northern Fur Trade: A Review of Conceptual and Methodological Problems," *Musk Ox* 36 (1988), 75.

Chapter 6: The Expansion of the Settlement Frontier and the Erosion of Health in the Plains, 1821-1869.

As the Athapaskan societies of the far northwest slid into demographic and, in some cases, cultural oblivion during the period of the HBC monopoly, a different economic and epidemiological dynamic was at work among the inhabitants of the plains and parkland.¹ The southern region had been hit hard by the combined measles and whooping cough epidemic of 1819-20. Jody Decker noted that plains groups generally began a "steady negative population pattern" from which only the Cree and the Blackfoot recovered.² A death toll of almost one third of the Blackfoot trading at Fort Edmonton brought a temporary truce to their longstanding conflict with the Cree and their allies.³ The epidemic killed approximately one fifth of the Plains Cree.⁴ The Assiniboine lost, according to Jody Decker, twenty-five percent of their total

¹In her study of the demographic history of northern Alberta, Gertrude Nicks noted that "the history of contact in the subarctic region indicates much more disruption of aboriginal populations than appears to have been the case for northern plains groups." *Demographic Anthropology of Native populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 172. Along the Pacific coast, yet another epidemiological dynamic was at work. According to James Gibson's recent investigation of the Oregon fur trade, malaria accounted for as high as seventy-five percent mortality among the inhabitants of the lower Columbia River after the floods of 1830. *The Lifeline of the Oregon Country: The Fraser-Columbia Brigade System, 1811-47*, 145-147. Gibson concluded that by the 1840s, the native population of the HBC's Columbia Department may have been reduced by fifty percent, the result of malaria and smallpox, 203. See also James R. Gibson, "Smallpox on the Northwest Coast, 1835-1838," *BC Studies* 56 (1982-83): 61-81, and Caroline D. Carley, "Historical and Archaeological Evidence of 19th Century Fever Epidemics and Medicine at Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vancouver," *Historical Archaeology* 15 (1981): 19-35.

²Decker, "Depopulation of Northern Plains Natives," 390.

³The Blackfoot quest for peace was probably matched by Cree avoidance of infected enemy camps. Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 87.

⁴Decker, "Depopulation of Northern Plains Natives," 386.

population,⁵ and began a precipitous decline leading to an estimated depopulation ratio between the years 1819 and 1838 of 3.8 to 1.⁶ Although the western Ojibwa fared better than their neighbours, the epidemic contributed to their withdrawal from the fur trade in pursuit of other subsistence strategies in the parklands, particularly bison hunting.⁷

While plains populations were still reeling from the epidemics of 1819-20, news spread from the south that smallpox was raging along the Missouri River. At Red River, the HBC vaccinated large numbers of people against the dreaded virus, halting the spread of the disease to the colony.⁸ Populations beyond the confines of the settlement were not so fortunate. The Cree and Assiniboiné who occupied the Qu'Appelle Valley, were, according to one early writer, "almost entirely destroyed."⁹

⁵Among the Assiniboiné trading at Brandon House, Arthur Ray estimated the loss in population to be at least as high as forty percent. *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 108.

⁶Decker, "Depopulation of Northern Plains Natives," 385-386.

⁷Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 95. The withdrawal of the Ojibwa from the fur trade for the plains was a widespread phenomenon during the decade after the merger. The Chippewa trade in America was by 1830, "only a shadow of what it had been twenty-five years earlier." Gregory S. Camp, "The Chippewa Fur Trade in the Red River Valley of the North, 1790-1830," in *The Fur Trade In North Dakota*, ed. Virginia L. Heidenreich (Bismark: North Dakota Historical Society, 1990), 45.

⁸Further work is required on the effect of the HBC smallpox vaccinations during the 1820 smallpox outbreak. If the company's actions halted the spread of the disease from the south, the campaign represents the first successful disease prevention campaign in the northwest, an accomplishment usually ascribed to the Company's role in preventing the spread of the disease in 1837. On the 1820 vaccinations at Red River, see Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 341.

⁹The chronicle added that the Sioux, Gros Ventres and Flatheads south of the border were all attacked by the epidemic. MacLean, *McDougall of Alberta: A Life of Rev. John McDougall D.D., Pathfinder of Empire and Prophet of the Plains*, 38. Other groups in the south suffered catastrophic losses during the 1820s. Along the Columbia River, an unidentified fever killed four-fifths of the population. Alfred Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America," *William and Mary*

Some fortunate groups, however, escaped the infection. The Blackfoot, antagonists to the afflicted inhabitants of the Qu'Appelle Valley, although ravaged by measles and whooping cough, were spared from the smallpox epidemic. In fact, the Blackfoot population underwent something of an explosion after 1820, increasing by thirty percent in just ten years.¹⁰ The Plains Cree, the main adversary of the Blackfoot, also quickly recovered from their losses through the 1820s, largely the result of migration from the parkland and boreal forest fur trade to the bison economy on the prairie.¹¹

As the inhabitants of the plains coped with the effects of the epidemics and renewed warfare in the 1820s, the agricultural colony at Red River took root. The eventual success of the settlement was not achieved without great effort and considerable frustration. During the first decade of the HBC monopoly, the settlers endured a series of ecological disasters which included shortages in bison meat, a large prairie fire, poor crops, a major flood and, in the spring of 1827, another epidemic of whooping cough.¹² The worst of the crises was undoubtedly the flood of 1826 which led to the departure of many of European settlers from the colony.¹³

Quarterly 33 (1976), 290-291.

¹⁰Decker, "Depopulation of Northern Plains Natives," 388.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 390.

¹²Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 130. For a summary of crop failures at Red River to the end of the monopoly period, see G. Herman Sprenger, "The Métis Nation: Buffalo Hunting vs. Agriculture in the Red River Settlement. Circa 1810-1870," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 3 (1972), 167. On the progress of agriculture at Red River see also, Grant MacEwan, "How are the Crops?" in *Cornerstone Colony: Selkirk's Contributions to the Canadian West* (Saskatoon: Western Producer prairie Books, 1977), How are the Crops?: 205-213.

¹³Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 127. For a discussion of the flood, see J.M. Bumsted, *Floods of the Centuries: A History of Flood Disasters in the Red River Valley*,

Despite the hardships, the population of Red River continued to grow through the 1820s. Part of the population increase was the result of the reorganization of the trade in the wake of the merger. The downsizing of the trade and the rationalizing of the Company's transportation system led to significant cuts in the fur trade workforce.¹⁴ The lay-offs were so severe that they precipitated the first serious labour crisis in the west.¹⁵ As the unemployed drifted toward the colony at Red River, they supplemented the trickle of agricultural migrants from the east and from Europe.¹⁶ The establishment of agrarian missions, such as St. Peters under the tutelage of John West in the early 1820s were undertaken in an attempt to make the displaced Indian employees of the trade self-sufficient.¹⁷ The number of economic migrants from the northwest who chose to settle in the colony was considered to be a problem. By the mid 1820s, the Company stopped granting its retirees land in the colony to control what it considered

1776-1997 (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1997), 15-20.

¹⁴Among the innovations to the transportation system was the replacement of canoes in the Athabasca with York boats which required significantly smaller brigades. G. Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 45.

¹⁵At least 250 workers were laid off immediately after the merger. Carol Judd, "Native Labour and Social Stratification in the Hudson's Bay Northern Department, 1770-1870," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 17 (1980), 307. See also Glen Makahonuk, "Wage Labour in the Economy of the Northwest Fur Economy, 1760-1849," *Saskatchewan History* 41 (1988), 7-8, and Ron Bourgeault, "The Indian, the Métis and the Fur Trade: Class, Sexism and Racism in the Transition from "Communism" to Capitalism," *Studies in Political Economy* 12 (1983), 64.

¹⁶European immigration to Red River took decades to grow into significant numbers. In 1824, four fifths of the population of the colony was comprised of former traders, Indians or mixed-bloods. John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 48.

¹⁷On the necessity of moving those dispossessed from the fur trade to Red River, see H.A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 288.

the wrong kind of growth, those who depended on corporate assistance or who would not commit themselves to a fully agrarian lifestyle.¹⁸

Other changes made in the corporate strategy of the Hudson's Bay Company during the 1820s had important consequences for the inhabitants north and west of Red River. While flow of alcohol to the country beyond Cumberland House was halted by Company decree by the mid 1820s,¹⁹ along the southern and western boundaries of the HBC domain the official liquor trade continued as free traders and others undermined the jurisdictional realities of the charter.²⁰ The illicit sale of alcohol by American traders on the southern margin of the country prompted a shift of many producers in the south, diminishing the supply of furs to the Company.²¹

Aboriginal producers responded in a number of ways to the strictures imposed

¹⁸By 1834, the Company forced its retirees to purchase a minimum of fifty acres to settle at Red River. In 1843, the HBC banned its retired servants from the colony altogether. Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 55-56.

¹⁹Rich, *A History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Volume 2*, 477-478.

²⁰In 1836, the Northern Department Council resolved "that the use of Liquors be gradually be discontinued in the few districts in which it is still indispensable." By 1839, the Company tried to halt the flow of liquor even to such contested areas as Rainy River but renewed the practice after producers turned to American suppliers for their supply of intoxicants. By 1850 American authorities complained that the HBC was undermining its own restrictions on the liquor traffic. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 640, 703, 817. In the disputed Oregon country, alcoholism continued to be a problem among both Indians and traders. See Gibson, *The Lifeline of the Oregon Country: The Fraser-Columbia Brigade System, 1811-47*, 45. The Company managed to negotiate an agreement with the Russian American Company in 1842 whereby both concerns prohibited the use of alcohol in the competitive trade. Frederick Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal Entitled Remarks Connected with the Fur Trade in the Course of a Voyage from York Factory to Fort George and back to York Factory, 1824-25* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1968), 110 fn.163.

²¹Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 101-102.

by the HBC on the commercial harvest of furs. When controls were imposed in the Athabasca region, Ojibwa commercial trappers, who had invaded the area a generation earlier, abandoned the country around Lesser Slave Lake and shifted to the mixed economy of the parklands in the south. Other Ojibwa bands joined the Cree in their protracted struggle for control of the bison hunt against the Blackfoot Confederacy.²² Scholars have noted the general decline of the position of fur suppliers in the fur trade equation during the monopoly period.²³ The withdrawal, or at least the retreat, of many Ojibwa groups from the diminished commercial harvest served, according to Laura Peers, to conserve their independence from the despotic rule of the HBC.²⁴ Rather than withdrawing from the economic relationship with Europeans altogether, the Ojibwa responded to new market conditions, focussing on new commercial opportunities afforded by the unsanctioned free trade and the bison hunt.

Indian producers isolated from the borders of the HBC territory, particularly the inhabitants of the boreal forest and the marginal lands bordering on the tundra, did not

²²Ibid., 105-107. Big Bear, who rose to prominence during the trouble of 1885, was born into just such a mixed Cree-Ojibwa Band at Jackfish Lake during the warfare of the 1820s. Hugh Dempsey, *Big Bear: The Loss of Freedom* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984), 11.

²³Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 106. On the general decline of aboriginal influence of the fur trade after the merger, see Carol Judd, "Native Labour and Social Stratification of the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department, 1770-1870," 307. On the decline of "Freemen" after the union, see G. Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 59-60.

²⁴Laura Peers, "Changing Resource-Use Patterns of Saulteaux Trading at Fort Pelly, 1821-1870," 107-118. Peers used the diversity of the Ojibwa economy of this period to counter the notion of aboriginal dependency at this time. Part of the Ojibwa independence may have been the result of geography rather than a wider phenomenon. The parkland establishment of the HBC were within a short distance of the American frontier, a source of almost constant attack on the monopoly. For a critique of Peers's interpretation, see Frank Tough, "As Their Natural Resources Fail": *Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930*, 301-302.

fare so well. In the wake of the merger, the Company moved to have Indians trade at only a single post, with authorization required from the Factor for a transfer to a different region.²⁵ The introduction of population records of aboriginal groups by the HBC was part of a corporate conservation strategy as quotas for production were often set in accordance with the size of post populations.²⁶ The migration of Indians from areas of constricted trade to non-producing areas such as Red River was strongly discouraged by corporate authorities. To keep the Indian population in the game-depleted hinterland, the Company used a number of measures including the distribution of gratuities and the extension of credit as a means to counter the out-migration of people to southern areas.²⁷ Seasonal employment on York boat brigades was also used as an inducement for those who chose to stay and trap during the winter in the depleted fur country north of Norway House.²⁸ In the York District, bonuses were paid to trappers who did not hunt depleted species.²⁹

²⁵Rogers, "Cultural Adaptations: The Northern Ojibwa of the Boreal Forest 1670-1980," 108. In areas such as the Albany River, management of the fur resource replenished fur bearers by the 1870s. Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, 192-193.

²⁶Hurlich, "Historical and Recent Demography of the Algonkians of Northern Ontario," 170.

²⁷Ray, "Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1930," 10.

²⁸Judd, "Native Labour and Social Stratification in the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department, 1770-1870," 307.

²⁹Trappers also were encouraged to harvest species such as muskrat and marten to lessen the pressure on beaver populations. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 698. The measures introduced to diversify the fur trade of the Nelson were required because as early as 1814, beavers on the Nelson River were reported to be "nearly exhausted." Brightman, "Conservation and Resource Depletion: The Case of the Boreal Forest Algonkians," 137.

Although the Company made a concerted effort to control the movement of the inhabitants of its domain, the policy was largely a failure. In areas where conservation measures were imposed, and where local harvesters were convinced to abide by hunting restrictions, game was often hunted illegally by Indians who had "trespassed" from other districts.³⁰ Around Cumberland House, the Cree simply ignored the HBC's appeals for conservation.³¹ The refusal of the Cumberland Cree to comply with the corporate directive was undoubtedly related to the presence of freemen unattached to the Company who had congregated at the Pas, Cedar Lake and Grand Rapids after the merger.³² In their quest to control the entire economy of the northwest, the HBC attempted to bar freemen from the hinterland, with a view to their return to the east or at least to the settlement at Red River.³³

The expanding settlement at Red River led to significant changes to both the economy and the epidemiology of Rupert's Land. With regard to the fur trade, the colony served as a pool of available labour required for the seasonal labour required by the vast transportation network of the monopoly organization. With a surplus of native-born workers, the HBC was no longer required to import its labour force from the British

³⁰Ibid., 135.

³¹Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, 194; Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*, 88.

³²On the antagonism between Simpson and one of the freemen, John Constant, see Martha McCarthy, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870*, 51.

³³Ibid. In the Athabasca, freemen lost the preferential treatment they had grown accustomed to prior to the merger. In addition to prices being doubled for the group, the HBC closed the Lesser Slave Lake post in 1827 because freemen trappers refused to abide by corporate restrictions on the harvest of furs. G. Nicks, *Demographic Anthropology of Native Populations in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 59-60.

Isles. During the monopoly period, the workforce of the fur trade came increasingly from the emerging class of the children of men from Great Britain and their aboriginal spouses, known as "half-breeds."³⁴ By 1860, the majority of the fur trade workforce was country-born, which, according to Edith Burley, made for increasing tension within the trade:

The company had come to rely on the services of a population that its own efforts had created in the hope of its providing a regular supply of cheap labour, but whom George Simpson had condemned for their untrustworthiness and the officers considered unmanageable and unruly.³⁵

The growth of the colony brought an increase in the demand for meat which was met by a burgeoning Métis controlled hunting economy that had developed during the competition era to supply the Northwest Company brigades. According to Alexander Ross, the number of carts used in the Métis trade rose from 540 in 1820 to 820 a decade later.³⁶ Aboriginal societies grew increasingly reliant on the commercial hunt during the monopoly period. With their expanded participation in the provision trade, came renewed inter-ethnic conflict for control of the resource.³⁷ The increasing

³⁴In the 1830s, 20 percent of the HBC's servants were half-breeds, by the 1850s, one half of the Companies servants were from that ethnic group. Bourgeault, "The Indian, the Métis, and the Fur Trade: Class, Sexism and Racism in the Transition from "Communism" to Capitalism," 65.

³⁵Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 102, 107-108.

³⁶Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780-1870*, 104.

³⁷Even before the supply of bison was severely depleted, the herds were not always dependable. The winters of 1824-25 and 1825-26 were extremely difficult because bison were not found in their usual areas. The starving hunters were forced to eat their horses, dogs and even their leather clothing to survive. The hardship was such that it led to the agitation among catholic Clerics for the adoption of agriculture by the Métis. McCarthy, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870*, 51.

specialization of the Ojibwa on the bison hunt soon led to conflict with Métis hunters.³⁸

The burgeoning trade rekindled the antagonism of the Dakota toward the Red River hunters.³⁹ By the 1840s, the Dakota were reported to be "in a state of war" with the

Métis.⁴⁰ As pressure on the herds grew, tension between the meat suppliers for the colony and the Plains Cree escalated into open hostility and violence by the 1850s.⁴¹

Alexander Ross remarked on the bison herds at mid-century, "[t]hey are now like a ball between two players."⁴² Food was not the only motivation for the bison hunt.

Technological changes led to the growth in the robe market which, by 1865, amounted to 200,000 hides delivered annually to St. Louis. The trade in hides served, according to A.J. Ray, "to accelerate the slaughter beyond sustainable levels."⁴³ As early as 1850, bison herds were increasingly scarce on the eastern margins on the plains.⁴⁴ The Métis

³⁸Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 104.

³⁹Hostilities broke out between the Dakota and the Métis suppliers of the colony over the resource. A prairie fire set by the Dakota led to a famine in the colony in 1844. Even at this date, as many as two-thirds of the inhabitants of Red River depended on bison meat for their subsistence through the winter. McCarthy, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870*, 16.

⁴⁰Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 111.

⁴¹The conflict over the increasingly scarce bison resource from 1850 to 1870 was considered to be "the final military epoch of the Plains Cree." Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 99. On the deepening of tension between the Cree and Assiniboine and their Blackfoot enemies as a consequence of resource depletion, see Ray, "Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1930," 5.

⁴²Frank G. Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 396.

⁴³According to the author, one half of the total probably originated in Rupert's Land. For a discussion of the bison economy, see Ray, "The Northern Great Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade, 1774-1885," 263-279.

⁴⁴Through the monopoly period, the HBC was forced to move its pemmican gathering stations west because of game depletion. In 1830, Fort Ellice succeeded

were forced to adopt new strategies in pursuit of their diminishing prey. Winter encampments known as "hivernant" sites were established on the western plains because the herds were so far west of Red River that hunters could no longer travel back to the colony after the hunt.⁴⁵

In addition to the heightened tensions arising from the increased predation of the diminishing herds, other changes in fur trade society undermined the well-being of populations in the west. The consolidation of the monopoly trade, and the reduced manpower required for the maintenance of the trade led to the abandonment of the Company's policy of importing workers from abroad. The shift from a European to a largely aboriginal workforce also brought significant changes to the disease ecology of the northwest. Paul Hackett has shown that European traders had been exposed to many endemic diseases in their countries of origin. Having suffered many diseases that were serious if not deadly to the aboriginal inhabitants in childhood, European traders were often immune from the suffering and death which beset their country-born fur suppliers. Because they were born in the country and had not been exposed to endemic crowd infections in childhood, the aboriginal workforce of the company was, as a group, considerably more susceptible to introduced infections than had been the workers of the trade prior to the merger.⁴⁶ Reflecting the new demographic and

Brandon House as the chief source of supply. By mid century, Fort Ellice was considered too far east and the Company opened outposts closer to the dwindling herds. Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 105.

⁴⁵For a discussion of the emergence of the hivernant economic strategy, see John E. Foster, "Wintering, the Outsider Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Métis," 1-13.

⁴⁶Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 306. In her analysis of the historical demography of northern Alberta, Gertrude Nicks noted that mixed blooded freemen shared European resistance to many contagious diseases that infected the Indian

epidemiological reality, country-born employees of the monopoly spread, with increasing frequency, a growing number of contagious diseases along the transportation routes of the interior. The burgeoning population of Red River served to maintain infections within the rather insulated clusters of communities which made up the colony for extended periods, often insuring the spread of pathogens to the hinterland as the brigades left for the bush every spring.⁴⁷

The coincidence of heightened demand on food resources and an increase in the incidence of pathogens came as a consequence of the westward expansion of the settlement frontier. Although the northwest, with the end of the fur trade war, ceased to be a hinterland of Canada,⁴⁸ the expansion of the American frontier of settlement soon brought the country back under the economic and ecological influence of eastern North America. The completion of the Erie Canal in the mid 1820s turned the trickle of immigrants to the American mid-west into a flood. In 1826, as many as twelve hundred people a day passed through Buffalo on their way to new homes in the west.⁴⁹ The introduction of steam powered vessels during this period served to bring greater numbers of people with greater speed to the frontier.⁵⁰ The burgeoning transportation routes served as efficient vectors of disease to the plains.

groups. In fact, she concluded her study by stating, "under the impact of disease and starvation there is considerable evidence that the Métis suffered less mortality from both epidemic and endemic disease during the nineteenth century." *Demographic Anthropology of Native Population in Western Canada, 1800-1975*, 169.

⁴⁷Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 306. See also Ray, "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1330-1850," 139-156.

⁴⁸Sprague and Finlay, *The Structure of Canadian History*, 2nd ed., 108.

⁴⁹Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 314-315.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 318.

Along the Missouri, the expanding American trade and the flow of pathogens that came with it destroyed the sedentary horticultural societies of the northern plains. By 1830, the American Fur Company had established a number of "strong forts" along the Missouri. The pull of the new American establishments was such that they syphoned off a significant portion of beaver returns from the HBC territory by the late 1820s.⁵¹ The arrival of American traders along the Missouri almost immediately knocked the Mandan from their control of the northern plains horse trade.⁵² By the beginning of the 1830s, the Mandan were increasingly isolated with only the Hidatsa and the Crow as their allies and were under attack by the Cree, the Saulteaux and the Assiniboine from Rupert's Land.⁵³

In 1832, representatives from the nations of the upper Missouri travelled to Washington to negotiate a treaty with the American government. An oral account of their voyage illustrates their predicament. One of the Chiefs, "In the Light," counted the

⁵¹Among the fortified trading establishments in American territory were Fort Clark, built in 1825-26), Fort Union (1829) and Fort Mackenzie (1834). The posts were supplied by steam powered vessels from population centres on the Mississippi, and had, according to Paul Hackett, an analogous impact on the epidemiology of the region to the introduction of horses a century earlier. *Ibid.*, 327-329. In the mid-1830s, the HBC attempted to halt growing unsanctioned traffic to Minnesota by paying an annual subsidy to the American Fur Company for closing its border posts. The policy failed and the Americans reopened Pembina by 1840 to accommodate the ever burgeoning trade. Jacqueline Peterson, "Gathering at the River: The Métis Peopling of the Northern Plains," in *The Fur Trade in North Dakota*, ed. Virginia Heidenreich (Bismark: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1990), 57.

⁵²Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 65.

⁵³*Ibid.* The pull of American territory was such that the HBC opened Fort Ellice in the Swan River District in 1831 to counter its recent losses to Americans trading from the Missouri. Margaret Complin, "Calling Valley of the Crees and the Buffalo," *The Beaver* 265 (1935), 21. Many of the Saulteaux on this military campaign had just withdrawn from the muskrat hunt along the parkland-forest margin. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 112-113.

number of buildings belonging to settlers by notching a pipe stem and later a long pole to keep an accurate count. According to the story, "[w]hen the Makinaw boat reached the bustling city of St. Louis, population 15,000, they threw their notched poles into the river and abandoned the idea."⁵⁴

In addition to the economic threat posed by settlement, the societies of the Missouri were increasingly jeopardized by disease. In 1831, a smallpox epidemic swept across the central American plains, killing one half of the Pawnee nation.⁵⁵ In response to an effective lobbying campaign led by Reverend John McCoy, the United States government implemented a smallpox prevention program that conferred immunity to the disease to over three thousand Indians on the lower Missouri.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, for the inhabitants of the upper reaches of the River, the physicians who carried out the procedure could not complete their work during the summer of 1832. Although they requested to be sent to the unvaccinated region the following year, they were unsuccessful.⁵⁷ The partial success of the American vaccination campaign shaped the differential outcomes of the smallpox epidemic of 1837-38 which in turn had important consequences for the development of the American plains for decades to come.

⁵⁴Dan Kennedy, *Recollection of an Assiniboine Chief: Dan Kennedy (Ochankugahe)*, 19-20.

⁵⁵Michael K. Trimble, "The 1832 Inoculation Program on the Missouri River," in *Disease and Demography in the Americas*, eds. John W. Verano and Douglas Ubelaker (Washington Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 260.

⁵⁶Those inoculated included; the Iowa, Otoe, Yankton, Omaha, Teton, Yanktonai, Grand Pawnee, Republican Pawnee and Loup Pawnee. Trimble, "Ibid.", 263.

⁵⁷The Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Assiniboine, Cree and Blackfeet were not vaccinated at this time. Ibid., 263.

In the summer of 1837, the disease erupted along the upper Missouri. It killed an estimated seventeen thousand people and turned the Missouri Valley into "one great graveyard."⁵⁸ According to an early account, the outbreak was spread up the Missouri on the steamboat, the St. Peters, whose crew carried the infection. The disease was passed to the Mandan, when one of their Chiefs took an infected blanket from a watchmen on the boat who was dying of the illness.⁵⁹ Arthur Ray stated that the epidemic spread to the group because they ignored the warnings of American traders to stay away from Fort Union where the disease had already broken out.⁶⁰ The epidemic precipitated the "death of the Mandan nation."⁶¹ The final blow for the group came when they were attacked by the Dakota in January of 1839. The end was witnessed by Francis Chardon, a trader at Fort Clark:

... I beheld the Mandan village all in flames, the Lodges being all made of dry

⁵⁸Ibid., 257. The epidemic of 1837 is probably the best documented disease episode on the plains in the 19th century. In the American context, see for examples, Milo M. Quaife, ed., "The Smallpox Epidemic on the Upper Missouri," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 17 (1930-31): 278-299; Clyde D. Dollar, "The High Plains Smallpox Epidemic of 1837-38," *The Western Historical Quarterly* (1977), 15-38; Michael K. Trimble, "The 1837-1838 Smallpox Epidemic on the Upper Missouri," *Skeletal Biology in the Great Plains: Migration, Warfare, Health, and Subsistence*, eds. Douglas Owsley and Richard Jantz (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994): 81-89; and K.C. Tessendorf, "Red Death on the Missouri," *American West* 14 (1977):48-53.

⁵⁹Leslie M. Scott, "Indian Diseases as Aids to Pacific Northwest Settlement," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 29 (1928),146.

⁶⁰Ray, "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 155-156.

⁶¹Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 65. At Fort Union, traders tried unsuccessfully to inoculate the local Indians "according to Dr. Thomas' medical book." Unfortunately, most of those who submitted to the procedure died, "About 15 days afterward there was such a stench in the fort that it could be smelt at a distance of 300 yards." Elliot Coues, ed., *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri, The Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833-1872. Volume 1.* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1962), 132-133.

Wood, and all on fire at the same time, Made a splendid sight, the Night being dark-this must be an end to What was once called the Mandan Village, upwards of one hundred years it had been standing, the Small Pox last years, very nearly annihilated the Whole tribe, and the Sioux has finished the Work of destruction by burning the Village-the rest of the Tribe are scattered...⁶²

The disease also ravaged the Assiniboine and the Blackfoot. John Rowand at Edmonton estimated the mortality among the two groups to have been seventy-five percent.⁶³ As he passed through the plains almost a decade after the epidemic, Paul Kane described its effect on one band, "[t]he bones of a whole camp of Indians, who were carried off by that fatal scourge of their race, the small-pox, were bleaching on the plains..."⁶⁴ Henry Schoolcraft described the misery shared by the two groups:

Language, however forcible, can convey but a faint idea of the scene of desolation which the country now presents. In whatever direction you turn, nothing but sad wrecks of mortality meet the eye; lodges standing on every hills, but not a streak of smoke rising from them. Not a sound can be heard to break the awful stillness, save the ominous croak of ravens, and the mournful howl of wolves fattening on the human carcasses that lie strewed around.⁶⁵

While the epidemic was clearly catastrophic to the populations along the Missouri and the southern fringes of HBC territory, the actions of Dr. William Todd, the Chief Factor of the Swan River District, spared the vast majority of the Indians in the

⁶²Francis Chardon, Journal Entry for January 9, 1839, in *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834-1839*, ed. Annie H. Abel (Freeport, N.Y.:Books for Libraries, 1970), 181.

⁶³Laurel Schenstead-Smith, "Disease Pattern and Factors Relating to the Transmission of Disease among the Residents of the Onion Lake Agency," 1; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 193, fn. 11.

⁶⁴Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America, From Canada to Vancouver's Island and Oregon through the Hudson's Bay Territory and Back Again* (Edmonton Hurtig, 1968), 90.

⁶⁵Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 96.

Company's domain.⁶⁶ The work of Dr. Todd, known in the trade as "Picotte" because of his own disfigurement from smallpox,⁶⁷ stopped the epidemic in its tracks. His work in controlling the epidemic had important consequences for the demographic future of the Canadian plains. Laura Peers noted an increase in multi-ethnic groupings among Cree, Saulteaux and Assiniboine communities affected by the outbreak.⁶⁸ Another important consequence of the differential impact of the disease brought on by the partial HBC vaccinations was the territorial expansion of groups who had undergone the procedure.⁶⁹ The Plains Cree and Ojibwa, who were vaccinated in large numbers,

⁶⁶The work of Dr. Todd in halting the spread of the smallpox has been well documented, especially by A.J. Ray. See "Smallpox: The Epidemic of 1837-38," *The Beaver* 306 (1975), 8-13; A.J. Ray, "William Todd: Doctor and Trade, For the Hudson's Bay Company, 1816-1851," *Prairie Forum* 9 (1984):13-26. For a discussion of Todd's theory of disease causation, see Jody Decker, "Country Distempers: Deciphering Disease and Illness in Rupert's Land Before 1870," in *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, eds. J.S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Viber (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996), 172.

⁶⁷National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC) Robert Bell Papers, MG 29, B 15, vol. 61, F.34, Anonymous, "Reminiscences of One of the Last Descendants of a Bourgeois of the Northwest Company," (N.D.), 29.

⁶⁸Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 142. Multi-ethnic communities were not new to the plains. Sharrock, "Crees, Cree-Assiniboines, and Assiniboines: Interethnic Social Organization on the Far Northern Plains," 95-122. In fact, the group that may have been responsible for spreading the disease to Rupert's Land, The Young Dogs, a group comprised of Crees and Assiniboines who spoke both languages "but neither correctly." Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 29-30. Another inter-ethnic group hit by the epidemic was the mixed Cree-Saulteaux band that the young Big Bear was a member of. The future leader of the Plains Cree was infected with the disease and recovered. According to at least one biographer, the infection of his band during the 1830s was the beginning of his resentment toward European encroachment. Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 18.

⁶⁹The shift westward corresponded with the constriction of the bison herds. But it should be emphasized that the expansion of Cree and Assiniboine was into territory once controlled by the Blackfoot. Laura Peers noted the shift at Fort Pitt, as the Plains Cree and Ojibwa took over from the retreating Blackfoot who had once dominated the area. *The Ojibwa Of Western Canada*, 142.

expanded their territory after 1837-38.⁷⁰ The opposite was true with the Assiniboine and Blackfoot, who either did not have the opportunity or the inclination to submit to the process and suffered very high mortality.⁷¹ George Simpson reported in 1841 that the Blackfoot "have been reduced by one half of late years by Small Pox and other causes."⁷² The Sarcee were particularly hard hit. According to Simpson, the group was reduced from a population of 1800 to a mere 250.⁷³ Among the Assiniboine, tribal historians have noted the role of the epidemic in their decline. According to Chief Dan Kennedy, the group was "literally wiped out."⁷⁴ Even early chroniclers of the west

⁷⁰After the epidemic, the steady migration of the Woodland Cree to the parklands and plains partially accounted for the increases in the population of the Plains Cree. Decker, "Depopulation of Northern Plains Natives," 388. Arthur Ray noted that the disease spread as far to the northwest as the Cree along the north Saskatchewan between Edmonton and Pitt but did not discuss the severity of the outbreak among them. "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 156.

⁷¹The epidemic was a decisive moment for the Assiniboine. Dan Kennedy, a Chief and oral historian noted the impact of the disease on their once powerful nations, [it] "diminished the Assiniboines to the vanishing point. The survivors fled in all directions to escape the mystic shadow of death." *The Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief: Dan Kennedy (Ochankugahe)*, 72-73. The contrast in demographic patterns between the Cree and Assiniboine in the aftermath of the epidemic is discussed at length by Ray. *Indians in the Fur Trade*, 187-188.

⁷²Hugh A. Dempsey, ed., "Simpson's Essay on the Blackfoot," *Alberta History* 38 (1990), 3.

⁷³One of Simpson's sources for the report on the Blackfoot was the experienced Edmonton trader, John Rowand whose contribution provided Simpson's work with a "relatively high degree of accuracy." *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁷⁴Kennedy stated that the Assiniboine population in 1947 was a mere three thousand, one tenth of what had been estimated at the beginning of the nineteenth century. According to Kennedy, "We [Assiniboine] fought for survival for a whole century and the future is still precariously in the balance-but what a price to pay for civilization.-The story of this tragic drama should be written and publicized." SAB Mary Weekes Papers, R-100, vol. 3, fo. 40, Dan Kennedy to Mary Weekes, December 9, 1947.

recognized that the Assiniboine were especially vulnerable to smallpox. In 1860, Dr. James Hector stated:

[I]t seemed to single them out for more severe visitation than any of the other tribes, till at length they were almost extirpated, the northern part of their country being occupied by the less mischievous Crees.⁷⁵

Some of the Assiniboine fled to the west through enemy territory to the foothills of the Rockies, where their descendants today occupy the reserve at Morley, Alberta.⁷⁶ In addition to the protection afforded by vaccinations, numerous groups used the time tested avoidance strategy of heading into the bush or the plains to diminish the chances of contagion.⁷⁷

The inoculations performed by Dr. Todd, other HBC servants and even Indians who were instructed in the procedure,⁷⁸ were the most significant example of the HBC's medical assistance to aboriginal groups in the monopoly period. While the disease was perhaps the most virulent pathogen at the time, its prevention through the use of

⁷⁵James Hector and W.S.W. Vaux, "Notice of the Indians Seen by the Exploring Expedition Under the Command of Captain Palliser," *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 1 (1860), 251.

⁷⁶Kennedy, *The Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief: Dan Kennedy (Ochankugahe)*, 72-73.

⁷⁷On the use of the strategy by the Indians at Cumberland House, see Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 334, fn. 37. References to similar avoidance strategies in the historic record are plentiful. During the combined outbreaks of 1819-20, the Chipewyan, it was reported by George Simpson, "are now dispersing in all directions, hoping that a change in residence may arrest the progress of the contagion." *Journal of Occurrences in the Athabasca Department by George Simpson, 1820 and 1821 and Report*, 80-81.

⁷⁸According to one report, Todd taught an Indian who then "vaccinated his own family and about 20 of his own connections." Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 71.

cowpox vaccine was relatively simple.⁷⁹ Within years of the development of an effective vaccine in England, the Lewis and Clark expedition to the northwest was provided with it for the vaccination of western Indians by Thomas Jefferson.⁸⁰ In Rupert's Land, acknowledged value of immunization was such that, in 1811, Lord Selkirk suggested a vaccination campaign for the aboriginal inhabitants of Red River prior to the establishment of the agricultural colony.⁸¹ Two years later, vaccinations were performed at York Factory with serum supplied by the Company.⁸² During the measles and whooping cough outbreaks of 1820, the HBC vaccinated large numbers of people at Red River in response to a rumour circulating that smallpox was spreading northward toward the colony.⁸³ In the mid 1820s, the procedure was performed at Cumberland, Norway House and along the Albany River.⁸⁴ What can truly be called a vaccination policy though was not implemented by the Company until after the smallpox outbreak of 1837.⁸⁵

In his biography of Todd, A.J. Ray noted that orders had been sent to HBC

⁷⁹Before the turn of the nineteenth century Edward Jenner had developed the cowpox vaccine, based on a less harmful pathogen that conferred immunity to the lethal virus.

⁸⁰At the turn of the century, the Indians of the Missouri were attacked by the disease in a localized outbreak. Unfortunately, the vaccine provided to the American explorers by the President may have been spoiled. E. Wagner Stearn and Allen E. Stearn, *The Effect of Smallpox on the Destiny of the Amerindian* (Boston: Bruce Humphries Publishers, 1945), 56-57.

⁸¹Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 340-341.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 341.

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 341-342.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 342.

posts to conduct a vaccination program six months prior to the outbreak of the Missouri but that the directive had not been obeyed.⁸⁶ When the crisis was over, the company conducted a territory-wide vaccination program, the first large scale public health campaign undertaken in the northwest.⁸⁷ It is a sad irony, though, that as the HBC sought to end the ravages of smallpox, the most virulent disease of the time, its employees regularly infected communities with influenza and other infectious diseases.⁸⁸

In addition to supplying the sick with food and what medical care was available, the HBC, particularly in the period of its dominion over the northwest, worked with varying degrees of success in the area of disease prevention. Within years of the merger, the London Committee urged George Simpson to implement sanitation regulations at York Factory to combat the chronic health problems at the Fort.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Ray, "William Todd: Doctor and Trade of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1816-51," 23.

⁸⁷For an extended discussion of the HBC vaccination campaign, see Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 343-344. and Appendix 3: "Distribution of Smallpox Vaccine in 1838," 508-509.

⁸⁸Records indicate that the smallpox vaccine was distributed as far to the northwest as the Mackenzie River. The absence of the disease in the far northwest is indicative of the success of the program, although deaths from other diseases, particularly from influenza, maintained high mortality rates. For a list of locations which received the vaccine in 1838, see *Ibid.*, 508. For a discussion of the role of HBC brigades in the spread of influenza, see Ray, "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 142-150.

⁸⁹York factory was plagued with health problems through much of its existence. For a discussion, see Michael Payne, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory: Everyday Life in the Hudson's Bay Service, 1788 to 1870*, 93-105. A particular problem to the officers at York in the 1830s and to medical historians in the present is the condition known as the "York Factory Complaint" which struck in the late winter and early spring with symptoms that included stomach pain, pain in the arms and "nervous weakness." The condition resulted in occasional deaths among the officer class. See Ray, "William Todd: Doctor and Trade, for the Hudson's Bay Company, 1816-51," 15-

Surgeons were posted by the Company to a number of locations and, by 1830, two physicians were practising at Red River.⁹⁰ Quarantine techniques were also used to halt the spread of pathogens. In 1844, the use of isolation measures may have stopped the spread of scarlet fever from Red River to the population north of Lake Winnipeg.⁹¹ As Arthur Ray noted, the rise in the Company's concern for the health of the population in their domain was prompted by humanitarian concerns and the

16. The origin of the complaint was probably the long hours spent in overheated offices, the result of corporate cutbacks of the 1820s and 1830s. See Payne, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory: Everyday Life in the Hudson's Bay Service, 1788 to 1870*, 99-100. Scurvy was also a serious health problem at York. For a discussion, see Jody Decker, "Scurvy at York: Affliction Lingered at the Bay," *The Beaver* 69 (1989): 42-48; and W.B. Ewart, "Causes of Mortality in a Subarctic Settlement (York Factory, Man.), 1714-1946," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 129 (1983): 571-574.

⁹⁰Michael Payne noted that during the monopoly period many of the HBC surgeons signed on for only brief tours of duty, usually only two or three years, "making most essentially, well-paid sojourners." *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory*, 104. William Todd was the exception to the rule. Although his work in mitigating the effects of the smallpox epidemic may have had as important an impact as anyone on the future condition of Rupert's Land, his contribution to the health of the country went largely unrecognized by Simpson or the members of the corporate hierarchy. Todd died in 1851, "addicted to opium eating." On the antagonism between Todd and Simpson, see Ray, "William Todd: Doctor and Trade, for the Hudson's Bay Company, 1816-51," 18-23. Governor Simpson did not appear to have much confidence in the medical practitioners at Red River. In 1830, he wrote of Dr Hamlyn, "[he] is a superficial silly fellow in which we have little confidence and [Dr.] Bunn is like a prophet who is not respected in his views. *Ibid.*, 14. For further discussion on the HBC's medical practitioners in this period see, Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 636, and Ross Mitchell, "Early Doctors of Red River and Manitoba," *Papers Read before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba. Series 3*, eds. W.L. Morton and J.A. Jackson (Winnipeg: Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, 1948): 37-47.

⁹¹Unfortunately, isolation measures were not always implemented, the arrival of 500 British troops at York Factory in 1846 stressed resources of the fort to such an extent that normal isolation procedures were overridden, the result being the spread of contagion to the interior. Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 379, 432-434. Arthur Ray noted that the scarlet fever outbreak was the first occurrence of the disease in the west for a generation. "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 151.

protection of its enterprise in the face of an increasingly complicated environment of disease and trade.⁹²

A major factor in this increasing complexity was the growth of the agricultural colony at Red River, stimulated by its growing trade with the burgeoning economy of the Minnesota Territory. Jacqueline Peterson described the changing situation for the colony in the decades after the merger, "once a remote bastion of European civilization imposed on a native landscape, now met the western edge of a rapidly expanding American frontier."⁹³ In the 1840s, American traders such as Norman Kittson conducted a lucrative trade to the colony, bringing in both goods and, inadvertently, pathogens from the south.⁹⁴ The link between Red River to the American frontier was further developed by Métis Free Traders who, by the mid 1840s, were agitating for the legal right to an open trade.⁹⁵ A petition attacking the monopoly, signed by almost a thousand residents of the colony, was quickly taken up by opponents of HBC rule in

⁹²*Indians in the Fur Trade*, 189.

⁹³Peterson, "Gathering at the River: The Métis Peopling of the Northern Plains," 58. For a discussion of the opening of the trails between the British colony and St. Paul, see Rhoda Gilman, Carolyn Gilman and Deborah Stultz, *The Red River Trails: Oxcart Routes Between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement, 1820-1870* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1979).

⁹⁴Though the definitive source of the infection is unknown, Paul Hackett noted that influenza may have been spread to Red River from Kittson's post at Pembina. "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 400.

⁹⁵The right to free trade which signified the end of the HBC monopoly on the southern plains was not sanctioned until the decision in the trial of Guillaume Sayer in 1849. For a discussion of the implications of the decision, see Galbraith, *The HBC as an Imperial Factor*, 64-69. For a discussion of the rise of a private entrepreneurial class in Rupert's Land, see Irene Spry, "The 'Private Adventurers' of Rupert's Land," in *The Developing West*, ed. John Foster (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press), 57. See also Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 810.

England.⁹⁶

The most vocal of the English critics of the corporate monopoly was actually a native of the northwest with experience in the far northwestern trade, Alexander Kennedy Isbister, who submitted his critique of the HBC monopoly in February 1847.⁹⁷ The document attacked the monopoly charter on a number of points. First was that the HBC had "to the utter impoverishment, if not ruin, of the natives" acquired "a princely revenue" through their monopoly.⁹⁸ Second, the Company was accused of undermining aboriginal societies through the trade in liquor, a "deadly and demoralizing poison."⁹⁹ The third avenue of criticism dealt directly with the connection of the fur trade and hunger among "the larger part" of producers who "can no longer find the means of supporting life from the produce of the chase, or the natural productions of the soul."¹⁰⁰ The submission also lashed out against the trading monopoly imposed by the HBC, described as "gross aggressions on the rights and liberties of the natives."¹⁰¹

Central to Isbister's critique was the connection between the fur trade and difficulty in the food quest. In an article on the Chipewyan Indians, submitted to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1847, Isbister noted that the

⁹⁶Attacks on the corporate monopoly of the HBC from the mid 1840s are well documented. See John S. Galbraith, "The Hudson's Bay Company Under Fire, 1847-62," *Canadian Historical Review* 30 (1949): 322-335, and especially Barry Cooper, *Alexander Kennedy Isbister: A Respectable Critic of the Honourable Company*.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 107.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 108.

⁹⁹The report lambasted the HBC for curtailing the flow of liquor prior to the renewal of its licence and then quietly reopening the trade. *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 110.

Hare were:

In the most intimate connection with the Hudson's Bay Company of all the Chipewyan tribes, and they show the effects of that connection. Their condition is the most wretched and deplorable that can be imagined. Cannibalism, almost justified by the extreme necessity of the case, exists to a frightful extent ... Instances have been known of parents destroying their own families and afterwards themselves in order to avoid this fatal alternative ... they [Hares] are a puny and stunted race, and are rapidly decreasing in numbers, and soon must disappear altogether. Yet it is from this wretched tribe that the Hudson's Bay Company draws nearly all the profits of their trade in this quarter.¹⁰²

Although Isbister's criticism of the HBC monopoly was eloquent and just, it failed to persuade Parliament to revoke the charter until the late 1850s, when the reality of the northwest's integration to the world economy was too strong to ignore.

While Rupert's Land was by the 1840s, increasingly exposed to pathogens delivered overland from the expanding American frontier, it was not the sole source of infection in the HBC domain. From the north, the developing trade corridor from York Factory to the colony served as an increasingly important disease vector.¹⁰³ In 1846, the passage of an entire English Regiment along the route from York to Red River served to spread infection through the entire region and "was to have dire consequences for many of the people living to the north, northeast and west of Lake Winnipeg."¹⁰⁴ Although the British soldiers were sent to protect the colony against the

¹⁰²Ibid., 36.

¹⁰³After the merger, York increased in importance as overseas trade "all but eliminated the use of the St. Lawrence-Ottawa River Route to the Northwest, a transport thoroughfare that had served as a corridor for disease diffusion for over a century." Hackett, *"A Very Remarkable Sickness,"* 305.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 434. A.S. Morton stated that the number of British troops sent to Red River was five hundred. *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, 809.

threat of the Americans, the result of the escalating crisis over the Oregon Territory,¹⁰⁵ they inadvertently jeopardized the health of the community through infection.

According to Paul Hackett, the HBC was forced to abandon its usual protocol in preventing the spread of disease in transporting the large number of troops, something which greatly exacerbated the compound epidemics of influenza, measles and dysentery.¹⁰⁶

Another source of disease that terrible year may have been the little used route from the Lakehead to Red River. The influenza epidemic spread from northern Ontario, where Charles Mackenzie reported that as many as one hundred people had gathered at Lac Seul. The post, according to the trader was, "more a hospital than a kitchen,"¹⁰⁷ The disease spread as far the northwest as the Yukon.¹⁰⁸ As influenza spread through the country, measles infected populations west from the eastern

¹⁰⁵J.S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869*, 313-316; and especially Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). Although Americans, particularly John Jacob Astor and his American Fur Company, had a hand in the early development of the territory, they were for a time ousted from the west coast. According to Merk, "Astoria had been sold to the North West Company virtually under the guns of the navy." Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, xiv.

¹⁰⁶The soldiers were moved from York soon after their arrival as the fort could not support such a large number of people. "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 434. In his study of the trouble of 1846, Arthur Ray stressed the impact of the measles outbreak, noting that, "the coughing and respiratory troubles reported as influenza may well have been complications associated with the measles. "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 154.

¹⁰⁷Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 390-391.

¹⁰⁸Krech, "The Early Fur Trade in the Northwestern Subarctic: The Kutchin and the Trade in Beads," 264-265.

seaboard, possibly along the Oregon Trail and then north into HBC territory.¹⁰⁹

Dysentery then added to the deadly mix during the summer of 1846. At Red River, George Simpson estimated that within a span of four weeks, three hundred out of a population of five thousand inhabitants of the colony perished.¹¹⁰ Simpson, who had witnessed the misery of the combined epidemics of 1819-20, reported that the outbreaks of 1846 "led to a greater mortality than at any former period within my recollection."¹¹¹ Alexander Ross, the first historian of Red River, described the suffering in 1846 as:

...this pest, for we can give it no milder name, the colony was overwhelmed with terror... In no other country, either in Europe or America, in modern times-not under the severest visitation of cholera-has there been so great a mortality as in Red River on the present occasion...From the 18th of June to the 2nd of August, the deaths averaged seven a day, or 321 in all; being one out of sixteen of our population. Of these one-sixth were Indians, two-thirds half-breeds, and the remainder whites. On one occasion, thirteen burials were proceeding at once.¹¹²

In the late 1840s, developments, both political and economic, further undermined the monopoly of the HBC and the relative isolation of the inhabitants of Rupert's Land. The settlement of the Oregon question and the subsequent partition of the west coast between American and British interests led to the first large scale influx

¹⁰⁹Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 405-406. Ray traced the spread of the disease as far to the northwest as Great Slave Lake. "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 151-154.

¹¹⁰Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness," 424-426.

¹¹¹Ibid., 424.

¹¹²Alexander Ross, *The Red River Settlement: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State. With Some Account of the Native Races and its general History, to the Present Day* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972), 362-363.

of agricultural immigrants to the far west in American territory.¹¹³ The intensification of interaction between Europeans and Indians in the American west led to almost yearly epidemics of one sort or another.¹¹⁴ The resolution of the Sayer trial in 1848 both opened the unsanctioned trade to the Minnesota frontier and provided a judicial acknowledgement that the HBC had a monopoly in title only.¹¹⁵ Before the end of the decade, gold was found in California.¹¹⁶ Amid the frenzy resulting from the discovery, the HBC was forced to allow many of its servant leaves of absence for up to six months "or Simpson feared, there would have been a general desertion."¹¹⁷

By 1850, the Company's hold on the country was eroding at an ever quickening pace. From within, labour strife threatened the complex, if precarious transportation

¹¹³In 1841, a small contingent of Red River Métis abandoned the colony and trekked overland to Oregon. See J.S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869*, 211. Although American settlers flooded the territory following 1846, the west coast had been tilled for decades prior to the settlement. See Gibson, *Farming the Frontier: The Agricultural Opening of the Oregon Country, 1786-1846*.

¹¹⁴Taylor, "Sociocultural Effects of Epidemics on the Northern Plains: 1734-1850," 56.

¹¹⁵The connection between Red River and Minnesota was such that the former was the object of an annexationist movement, particularly after the end of the American Civil War. See Alvin Gluek, *Minnesota and the Manifest Destiny of the Canadian Northwest: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), ix.

¹¹⁶While outside the area of study, it should be noted that the influx of gold seekers to California had a significant impact on the health of aboriginal communities on the south west coast. In 1853, a trading vessel originating from San Francisco spread smallpox to the Washington coast, killing forty percent of the population. Robert T. Boyd, "Demographic History, 1774-1874," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 7, Northwest Coast*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 141.

¹¹⁷Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 155.

system to its isolated districts in the interior. According to Carol Judd, the "Natives who ran the transport system began to flex their collective muscle."¹¹⁸ Agricultural settlers, "mostly Orkney halfbreeds," left the Red River heading west adding to the largely unsanctioned mixed economy in the Qu'Appelle Valley which had begun a generation earlier.¹¹⁹

South of the 49th Parallel, the ill-fated Turtle Mountain Treaty between the American government and the Ojibwa, negotiated in 1851 but never ratified, sparked a land rush along the border. The derailing of the process dispossessed the Turtle Mountain people and according to Laura Peers, foreshadowed things to come, "[t]he fate of the Turtle Mountain people would inform rumour, fuel anxiety, and serve of what was to come for the entire Northwest."¹²⁰ Across the plains, tension mounted as the

¹¹⁸Judd, "Native Labour and Social Stratification in the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department, 1770-1870," 311. The labour troubles of the HBC are well documented. See especially, Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 100-102. In the far north, the Company's difficult with its largely Métis workforce made the Mackenzie the most dependant of its districts on casual brigades. Chief Trader E.G. Anderson reported in 1853, "one half of my crews are Indians..." Philip Goldring, "Labour Records of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1870," *Archivaria* 11 (1980), 84.

¹¹⁹On the establishment of Métis communities in Assiniboia in the late 1820s, see Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869*, 61-62. An early chronicler of the west noted that the HBC assisted surplus mixed-blooded farmers out of the colony as "they did not want them to spy out the land and settle near the posts. William S. Gladstone, *The Gladstone Diary: Travels in the Early West*, ed. Bruce Haig (Lethbridge: Historic Trails Society of Alberta, 1985), 43. The expansion of the open economy in the wake of the Sayer decision provided a temporary boom in the parklands of the Pelly district. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 176-179.

¹²⁰*The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 179. The Dakota also signed a treaty in 1851, their dispossession led to the Uprising of 1862, and the arrival of large numbers of refugees to what would become Canadian Territory. See Elias, "Negotiated Admission: Flight to security in Canada, 1862 and 1863," in *The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest: Lessons for Survival*, Manitoba Studies in Native History (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press 1988), 19-36.

bison supply dwindled and the anticipation of European settlement loomed ever larger.

In addition to an escalation of inter-ethnic violence over bison herds in the west, aboriginal groups began to resist the encroachment of European interlopers. The Ojibwa of Lake of the Woods refused to cooperate with the Hind Expedition in 1857.

One of their Chiefs told the explorer:

The reason why we stop you is because we think you do not tell us why you want to go that way and what you want to do with those paths... Remember, if the white man comes to the Indian's house, he must walk through the door, and not steal in by the window... They have no right to pass that way... We do not want the white man; when the white man comes, he brings disease and sickness, and our people perish; we do not wish to die. Many white people would bring death to us, and our people would pass away... Tell these men this, and the talk is finished.¹²¹

As Hind explored the eastern plains, Chief Peguis petitioned the Aborigines Protection Society in London for assistance in the completion of a treaty as his people feared the hardships that would follow the imminent European invasion.¹²² While on the plains, Hind met with a Council of plains Cree, led by the highly-esteemed Mis-tick-oos. The Council was firm in its resolve to resist the encroachment of both Europeans and Métis bison hunters, "[t]hey had no objection to trade with them [Métis] or with white people, but they insisted that all strangers should purchase dried meat or pemmican, and not hunt for themselves."¹²³ In addition, Hind was told that the Council had earlier agreed:

¹²¹Henry Youle Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Expedition of 1858, Volume 1* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971), 99-100.

¹²²RLRC, *An Historical Overview of Aboriginal Lifestyles: The Churchill-Nelson River Drainage Basin*, 133. Within the colony, Peguis pushed his claim ownership over his land acknowledged in the Selkirk Treaty by forcing settlers to request permission or payment for cutting hay. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 198.

¹²³Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Expedition of 1858, Volume 1*, 361. In 1863, a Saulteaux Chief who "was very saucy, and told them (White Horse Plains Brigade) they

[T]hat in consequence of promises often made and broken by the white men and the half-breeds, and the rapid destruction by them of the buffalo they fed on, they would not permit either the white men or the half-breeds to hunt in their country or travel through it, except for the purpose of trading for their dried meat, pemican, skins and robes... They wished to establish some sort of toll of tobacco and tea for permission to pass through their country, threatening that if it were not given they would... stop us by force.¹²⁴

John Milloy noted that the Cree Council blamed Europeans and their tools for the declining herds and that "[t]his was a radical departure from the previous perception of Indian-European partnership of interests. The traders were in effect placed in the same category as others who threatened the Cree..."¹²⁵ In addition to the threat to the bison economy, pathogens brought by Europeans bombarded the nations of the plains. As Henry Hind reported:

The condition of the Indians is now very different to what it used to be half a century since. Not only have European diseases greatly diminished their numbers, but game of different kinds has become so scarce that during some seasons starvation is no fiction.¹²⁶

James Hector, the physician attached to the Palliser Expedition, reported that the

must not go on his hunting ground-that he was master of the plains, the buffalo were his cattle, and the halfbreeds must not kill them" was killed in a fight with J. Swain, a member of the brigade. "Return of the Hunters," *The Nor' Wester*, 23 October 1863.

¹²⁴Irene Spry, "The Great Transformation: The Disappearance of the Commons in Western Canada," in *Man and Nature on the Prairies*, Canadian Plains Studies 6, ed. Richard Allen (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1976), 27. In 1861 Piapot's Cree-Assiniboine band responded to the threat of the Métis who had recently moved to the Qu'Appelle by "not allow[ing] them to kill the buffalo for food, without levying a heavy fine for every buffalo they kill." *Ibid.*, 27. For further discussion on the rising animosity between the Cree and the Métis, see Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 107.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶Henry Hind, "Of Some of the Superstitions and Customs Common among the Indians in the Valley of the Assiniboines and the Saskatchewan," *The Canadian Journal. New Series*. 22 (1859), 262. The same passage can also be found in Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Expedition of 1858*, Volume 2, 143.

population of the Plains Cree was 12,500 but, "[t]hey are, however, rapidly on the decrease, as the small pox and other disease annually sweep them off in great numbers."¹²⁷

Diseases attacked plains populations through the 1850s. Early in the decade, influenza spread across Rupert's Land from York¹²⁸ Although Arthur Ray noted that the autumn outbreak of the disease mitigated its diffusion,¹²⁹ the outbreak appears to have spread at least as far west as Vermillion where it was reported that, "as many as 50 souls including 24 of our best hunters having been carried off by influenza."¹³⁰ In 1856-57, smallpox again spread sickness and death along the Missouri hinterland.¹³¹ The disease spread northward where "again the Qu'Appelle Crees were smitten, so that, added to their incessant strife with the Blackfeet for possession of the buffalo hunting

¹²⁷Hector and Vaux, "Notice of the Indians Seen by the Exploring Expedition Under the Command of Captain Palliser," 251. Jody Decker estimated the total aboriginal population of the plains to be 25,000. She also noted that between 1780 and 1901, the depopulation ratio of plains natives was 1.7 to 1. "Depopulation of the Northern Plains Natives," 381.

¹²⁸The outbreak of influenza late in 1850 was reported to be the sixth in twenty years at York. Ray, "Diffusion of Diseases in the Western Interior of Canada, 1830-1850," 150.

¹²⁹*Ibid.* The author reported that the outbreak was confined to York, Norway House and contiguous districts.

¹³⁰Yerbury, *The Subarctic Indians and the Fur Trade*, 156. Shepard Krech noted that the disease spread to the far northwest. In addition to influenza, the Marten Lake Dogrib suffered a "great many" deaths from dysentery and starvation. "The Influence of Disease and the Fur Trade on Arctic Drainage Lowlands Dene, 1800-1850," 129.

¹³¹Hurlich, "Historical and Recent Demography of the Algonkian of Northern Ontario," 161. The disease may have been checked at Red River by a vaccination campaign conducted by Dr. William Cowan in 1852. NAC, Robert Bell Papers, MG 29, E 8, Diary of William Cowan, Surgeon to Enrolled Army Pensioners at Fort Garry, 22.

grounds and for horses, the tribe was nearly wiped out."¹³²

Across the aboriginal no man's land centred on the elbow of the South Saskatchewan,¹³³ the Blackfoot were hit by an outbreak of scarlet fever.¹³⁴ Dr. James Hector, described the situation:

The Blackfoot tribe have never yet suffered much from the small-pox, which has been the scourge to the other Indians; but at present there is a very obscure form of disease, which commits great ravages among them. It commences with a state of collapse, which attacks the Indian, generally young persons, suddenly, and if not fatal within a few hours, they sink into a low typhoidal state, from which they seldom recover.¹³⁵

In the week that Hector spent in the camp of the Bloods, he estimated that between twenty and thirty members of the group perished of the disease, a sign, according to Doctor, of their inevitable extermination.¹³⁶ On July 25, 1859, Captain Palliser reported

¹³²McLean, *McDougall of Alberta*, 38. In his memoir, Isaac Cowie recognized the combined effects of the disease and game depletion in the high death toll among the Qu'Appelle Crees. Isaac Cowie. *A Company of Adventurers: A Narrative of Seven Years in the Service of the Hudson's Bay Company during 1867-1874* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 403. In his report, Henry Hind estimated that smallpox had ravaged the Plains Cree population, "Twenty-five years ago the tribe numbered 4000, in 500 tents; at the present day they do not exceed 120 tents, which represent a population of 960 or 1000 souls." *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Expedition of 1858*, Volume 2, 162.

¹³³Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 105.

¹³⁴Katherine Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Blackrobe Voyageur* (New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1911), 71-72. Because the epidemic struck in winter, ten to fifteen bodies were gathered in skin lodges and covered with stones and snow.

¹³⁵Hector and Vaux, "Notice of the Indians seen by the Exploring Expedition under the Command of Captain Palliser," 258.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 259. Among the Sarcee, Hector reported "that 'goitre,' so rare among other Indians is almost universal among them." He also noted that the thyroid affliction was also common among the half-breed residents of the Company forts, "who are influenced by depressing causes that enfeeble the constitution without actually producing disease, 256. In her survey of illness in Rupert's Land, Jody Decker wrote that goitre was common at Rocky Mountain House because of the low iodine level in

in his journal, "[t]his night one of their young men died of sickness in the Indian camp. I could not but feel a little uneasy for fear the idea of the sickness being coupled with our presence should enter their imaginations."¹³⁷

The already tense situation on the plains was further complicated during the summer of 1858 when gold was discovered on the Fraser River, prompting large numbers of Americans and eastern Canadians to cross Rupert's Land on their way west.¹³⁸ In addition to undermining the food supply at Edmonton, the miners virtually ignored the authority the Company had grown accustomed to over the years. In the words of HBC servant William Gladstone, "[a]nd so with the opening up of the country, the Chief factors began to find that they were not the little kings they used to be in a land that was all their own."¹³⁹ By the end of the decade, the Company was stripped of even its titular monopoly.¹⁴⁰

Over the mountains, the tide of gold seekers flooding into Vancouver Island and the mainland prompted Imperial authorities to grant the district colonial status to deal with the myriad of problems which arose from the arrival of as many as thirty thousand

the water. "Country Distempers: Deciphering Disease and Illness in Rupert's land Before 1870," 158.

¹³⁷Irene Spry, ed., *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition, 1857-1860* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1968), 418-419.

¹³⁸Richard T. Wright, *Overlanders: The Epic Cross-Canada Treks for Gold* (Williams Lake B.C.: Winter Quarters Press, 2000).

¹³⁹Gladstone reported that the HBC stopped the sale of supplies to the Americans "because the Company would keep everyone out of the country if they could." *The Gladstone Diary: Travels in the Early West*, 53-55.

¹⁴⁰Galbraith, "The Hudson's Bay Company Under Fire, 1847-62," 333-335.

people.¹⁴¹ The invasion of so many of what James Douglas termed "rowdies"¹⁴² was no less than a catastrophe for many aboriginal populations in British Columbia. Among the disasters resulting from the gold rush were the massacre of an unarmed band near Okanagan Lake by miners and other "indiscriminate killings," starvation resulting from the destruction of fish habitats and in 1862-63, a smallpox outbreak which killed large numbers of Indians.¹⁴³ Among the dead were "no fewer than 500" Tsimshian at Fort Simpson.¹⁴⁴ In the Caribou, the British adventurer, Walter Cheadle, reported that three hundred people had died.¹⁴⁵

On the eastern margins of the plains, the shift from the fur trade to agriculture became an inevitability.¹⁴⁶ Minnesota was granted statehood in 1858, and with it came a population explosion, railway development and, as was so often the case in the

¹⁴¹For a discussion of the gold rush and the establishment of the colony, see Margaret A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Vancouver: Macmillan of Canada, 1958), 134-163, and Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977), 95-118.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 115-116.

¹⁴⁴In addition to the high mortality, aboriginal groups suffered the indignity of being banned from Victoria and removed to their homelands because Europeans feared infection. Boyd, "Demographic History, 1774-1874," 142. The epidemic escalated tension in the interior which erupted in the "Chilcotin Uprising" in 1864. Edward Sleight Hewlett, "The Chilcotin Uprising of 1864," *B.C. Studies* 19 (1973), 63.

¹⁴⁵W.A. Cheadle, *Cheadle's Journal of A Trip Across Canada, 1862-63* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971), 222.

¹⁴⁶For decades, scholars have acknowledged that by the late 1850s, the change in economic paradigms was inevitable. See Galbraith, "The Hudson's Bay Company Under Fire, 1847-62," 335. See also Doug Owsram, *The Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 38-58.

American context, an "Indian war."¹⁴⁷ The violence that erupted in the new state led to the deaths of five hundred settlers, the subjugation of the Dakota nation and the arrival of four hundred and fifty refugees at Red River in 1862.¹⁴⁸ In addition to their recent participation in an uprising against the settlers, the Dakota had a reputation of violence which had developed from their incessant struggle with the Ojibwa and later with the Métis. The arrival of the Dakota caused a panic in the colony.¹⁴⁹

The violence in Minnesota, for a time, slowed the expansion of a development that had important implications for both the economy and the disease ecology of the developing community at Red River. Although the first steamboat arrived at the colony before 1860, catching the inhabitants and especially the Company off guard, it was a decade later before the connection had a major effect on both the economy and the disease ecology of Canadian territory.¹⁵⁰ While the full impact of steam powered transportation would not be felt for some time to come, change loomed ever larger for all of the inhabitants of the northwest. The unsanctioned and unregulated flow of

¹⁴⁷Minnesota's population shot from 6,077 in 1850 to over 172,000 a decade later. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869*, 336.

¹⁴⁸Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 199.

¹⁴⁹Ibid. In the spring of 1863, two thousand Sioux were reported to have come to Fort Garry to procure ammunition to continue the fight, further heightening the sense of crisis. See Cheadle, *Cheadle's Journal of Trip Across Canada, 1862-1863*, 121.

¹⁵⁰Although steam powered travel had begun in 1859, hostilities served to temporarily sever the lines of communication between the American and British territories. According to Theodore Barris, "For eight years [1862-1870] the Red carried no steamship trade." Theodore Barris, *Fire Canoe: Prairie Steamboat Days Revisited* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 19-25. In 1861, Dr. John Rae reported on the rise in the American controlled trade to the colony, "...which had formerly been carried on by the [Red River] settlers themselves in boats and carts, was now done by steamer and wagons from St. Paul's, to which place, the money went in, instead of being retained in the colony." Irene Spry, "The 'Private Adventurers' of Rupert's Land," 59.

alcohol to the Indians in the colony was recognized as a serious problem and calls were made for the authorities to deal with the issue.¹⁵¹ By 1862, the bison herds had disappeared from Red River altogether, and the hunters had to travel further west onto the plains to find them.¹⁵² The HBC, which had used pemmican as the staple of its supply network for decades, was contemplating "the immediate establishment of extensive farms in the Saskatchewan district."¹⁵³ Even on the western plains, the bison were growing scarce, increasing the demand on the limited crops grown in the territory.¹⁵⁴ Through the decade, food shortages were common in the colony and on the plains.¹⁵⁵ In 1863, the future of the west was probably sealed with the sale of the Hudson's Bay Company itself to the International Financial Society.¹⁵⁶ The following year, when the Canadian government announced that the plains were both fertile and capable of sustaining a large agrarian population, Douglas Owram noted that "the

¹⁵¹See for example, "The Liquor Nuisance," *The Nor' Wester*, 14 August 1860.

¹⁵²Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 105.

¹⁵³James M. MacGregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies, 1849-1889* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), 68-69.

¹⁵⁴At Fort Carlton, a drought in 1863 ruined the crop. Further west, at Fort Pitt, an encampment of five hundred tents of Crees in search of the herds cleared the fields of grain and potatoes within two or three days. *Ibid.*, 69. At the Lacombe mission, the missionary was frustrated by the digging up and eating of potatoes by the Cree. Gladstone, *The Gladstone Diary: Travels in the Early West*, 65-66.

¹⁵⁵In January 1863, the scarcity of food at Red River forced many of the inhabitants to disperse in search of food. McCarthy, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870*, 222.

¹⁵⁶Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial factor, 1821-1869*, 387-390.

comment was so commonplace as to be almost a cliché."¹⁵⁷

In addition to the ever heightening interest in the agricultural potential of the plains, the stability of the fur trade was further eroded by the development of placer gold deposits near Fort Edmonton in the early 1860s.¹⁵⁸ While the deposits proved to be ephemeral, the number of gold seekers, perhaps as many as one hundred, doubled the white population of what became Alberta.¹⁵⁹ William Gladstone, the errant servant of the HBC, noted in his journal that both Governor McTavish of the Company, and the aboriginal inhabitants of the plains opposed the development of the gold fields. On his return from Edmonton, Gladstone reported that at Jackfish Lake, "...we found a large camp of Crees and 'Sotas, about 300 lodges in all... and some of the Indians at the camp had been mixed up in it and now wanted to pick a quarrel with us..."¹⁶⁰ Americans from Fort Benton came north in ever increasing numbers to work the gold in British territory. Among them were unemployed fur traders, and according to Gladstone, at least seventy-five miners ordered out of Fort Benton because "they were too friendly with the Plummer gang and told to go."¹⁶¹ Before the end of the Civil War,

¹⁵⁷Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900*, 69.

¹⁵⁸James MacGregor noted that prior to the arrival of the "Overlanders" of 1858, "Alberta had seen no lay white men who were not associated in some way with the Hudson's Bay Company. As late as 1859 no independent fur traders had worked that far west along the Saskatchewan River." A group of Americans found gold "in what they considered to be paying quantities" at Rocky Mountain House in 1860. James MacGregor, *A History of Alberta* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972) 79.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁶⁰Gladstone, *The Gladstone Diary: Travels in the Early West*, 68-69. The disease spread to the furthest reaches of the northwestern fur trade.

¹⁶¹The author noted that twenty-six members of the Plummer gang had been "strung up at one time." *Ibid.*, 70-72.

gold was found in Montana and the territory was granted statehood in the fall of 1864. By the end of the war, Benton had a population of 1,500, including the infamous James brothers and was described by Gladstone as "hell on earth for a time."¹⁶² Adding to the turmoil, hostilities flared between the Blackfoot and the Cree-Assiniboine alliance.¹⁶³

As was so often the case, disease compounded the already tense situation on the plains. Scarlet fever killed eleven hundred members of the Blackfoot Confederacy in the spring of 1865.¹⁶⁴ At Rocky Mountain House, the trader reported to the district Headquarters at Edmonton that, "The Indians were then "very hard to deal with & threatening the whites very much, blame us for the sickness, and threatened to Kill (sic)

¹⁶²Adding to the chaos at Fort Benton was what Gladstone considered to be the open secret that the Indian agent "made over \$150,000 rake-off for himself" from a four hundred thousand dollar payment to the Indians. Ibid., 75-81. Further complicating matters were the tensions between northerners and large numbers of "galvanized" Confederate soldiers "captured by the federals and sent west for lack of prison room." At Fort Fetterman, the "galvanized" soldiers pleaded for onions and potatoes stating "that they would all die of scurvy if they did not get some vegetables soon." John S. Collins, *Across the Plains in '64: Incidents of Early Days West of the Missouri River-Two Thousand Miles in an Open Boat from Fort Benton to Omaha-Reminiscences of the Pioneer Period of Galena, General Grant's Old Home* (Omaha: National Printing Company, 1904), 21-23. Even during the Civil War, the situation along the Missouri was not totally out of control. The report of Captain James Fiske of the Federal Army's expedition from Fort Abercrombie to Fort Benton noted that Dr. J.R.C. Clark had been sent by the government to vaccinate the Indians along the Missouri. According to Fiske, "He has won the respect of these Indians by the course of his conduct, and persuaded many of them to submit to vaccination, against a prevailing prejudice among them." The surgeon attached to Fiske's mission, Dr. W.D. Dibb, noted that while they saw few Indians on their route, the many of the Gros Ventres on the Milk River were suffering from "gonorrhoeal ophthalmia" and "very severe" cases of syphilis. James Fisk, "Expedition from Fort Abercrombie to Fort Benton," United States House of Representatives. 37th Congress, 1863, 22, 29.

¹⁶³Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 114.

¹⁶⁴Ibid. An early account of the outbreak wrongly attributed the deaths to smallpox. See McLean, *McDougall of Alberta*, 39. Another early work stated that typhoid broke out among the Blackfoot in 1865. See Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Blackrobe Voyageur*, 107.

whites, an outbreak very much apprehended, Indians desperate, assistance in men and arms requested."¹⁶⁵ On the Missouri, the Blackfoot killed eleven American miners.¹⁶⁶

As the death toll from epidemic disease mounted throughout the northwest, the inhabitants of Red River faced another problem during the summer of 1868. Starvation loomed as the colony was invaded by grasshoppers. Governor McTavish estimated that as many as 2,346 people "were in dire need of assistance."¹⁶⁷ The possibility of famine in the colony provided the new Dominion Government with the means to annex the west, "rather than giving money or food directly to the settlement," it began construction on the Dawson Road.¹⁶⁸ The Canadian rationale for the project was clear:

[W]hile furnishing the inhabitants of Red River with the means of earning money, [it] would at the same time be establishing a public work in their vicinity of admitted necessity to the Dominion in view of its future acquisition of the North-West Territory.¹⁶⁹

As the era of monopoly came to an end, the plains and the communities who occupied them were on the precipice of a new economic and social paradigm. George Simpson, the "Little Emperor," who ruled the entire Northwest as a despot, had died in 1860. Chief Peguis, among the most influential aboriginal leaders of the early nineteenth century, and signatory to the Selkirk Treaty, died in 1864. The bison economy had all but run its course. The new Dominion of Canada was about to annex the west and make the plains its own agricultural hinterland. The shift in economic

¹⁶⁵Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 114.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷McCarthy, *To Evangelize the Nations: Roman Catholic Missions in Manitoba, 1818-1870*, 204.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*

paradigms over the first generation after Canada's dominion over the west brought unparalleled changes to the aboriginal inhabitants of the plains. Forty years before Canada's acquisition of the northwest, Peguis articulated the predicament of his people confronted with agrarian settlement to the Anglican missionary, William Cockran:

Before you whites came to trouble the ground, our rivers were full of fish and our woods full of deer; our creeks abounded in beavers, and our plains were covered with buffaloes. But now we are brought to poverty. Our beavers are gone forever, our buffaloes are fled to the lands of our enemies, the number of our fish is diminished, our cats our rats are few in number, the geese are afraid to pass over the smoke of your chimneys, and we are left to starve. While you whites are growing rich upon the very dust of our fathers, troubling the plains with the plough, covering them with cows in the summer, and in winter feeding your cattle with hay from the very swamps whence our beavers have been driven!¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰Sarah Tucker, *The Rainbow in the North, A Short Account of the First Establishment of Christianity in Rupert's Land by the Church Missionary Society* (London: J. Nisbet and Company, 1851), 87-88.

Chapter 7: Canada, the Northwest and the Treaty Period, 1869-1876.

"I shake hands with you and bid you welcome; we heard our lands were sold and we did not like it; and we don't want to sell our lands; it is our property and no one has the right to sell them. Our country is being ruined of fur bearing animals, hitherto our sole support, and we are now poor-we want you to pity us. We want cattle, tools, agricultural implements, and assistance in everything when we want to settle; our country is no longer able to support us. Make provisions against years of starvation, we have had a great starvation last winter, and the smallpox took away many of our people, the old, young and children." Sweet Grass to Lieutenant Governor Archibald, 1871.¹

The acquisition of the west by the fledgling Dominion of Canada in December 1869 brought unheralded changes to the inhabitants of the plains. Within a decade, First Nations, who had depended on the bison for their livelihood for a century or more, were marginalized by political and environmental change from the new economic paradigm which was stamped on the west.² In the years that followed Canada's annexation of Rupert's Land, the destruction of the bison herds, coupled with immanent agricultural settlement of the plains by European immigrants, forced the original inhabitants of the region into an increasingly desperate situation. The numbered Treaties between the aboriginal nations of the west and the Crown, negotiated between 1871 and 1877, represent the outcome of the clash between the two mutually exclusive economic systems which confronted each other during the 1870s. The inhabitants of the plains recognized that the bison economy, which had sustained them for so long, was on the wane and that the arrival of large numbers of agrarian settlers was inevitable.

Conditions surrounding the Treaties, for both the Dominion and the aboriginal nations

¹Alexander Morris, Edmonton, April 13, 1871, in *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1991), 170-171.

²For a full consideration of the failure of First Nations to adapt to the new agricultural economy, see Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*.

who found themselves under Canadian rule were not monolithic. In fact, each of the seven Treaties signed in the 1870s represent specific outcomes of particular economic and political situations that varied considerably across the west.³ From the perspective of the Dominion, Treaties were a means to facilitate regional economic and political development. To First Nations, they were a means to secure their well-being in the face of an unsure future.⁴

Even before completion of the first of the post-Confederation Treaties, the west was faced with its first armed standoff between the Canadian government, which attempted to exert its authority over its newly acquired territory, and the aboriginal people who refused to acquiesce to the imposition of a new and threatening model of government and economics over their territory.⁵ The events surrounding Canada's purchase of Rupert's Land and the resistance of the Métis inhabitants of the Red River and the Northwest to the imposition of Canadian hegemony are among the most thoroughly considered in the historiography of western Canada and need not be considered at length here.⁶

³For a survey of the conditions surrounding many of the treaties, see Arthur Ray, Jim Miller and Frank Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

⁴For a discussion of the numbered treaties on the plains, see Jean Friesen, "Magnificent Gifts: The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of the Northwest, 1869-76," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Series 5, Volume 1* (1986): 41-51.

⁵For a discussion of the legal implications of the transfer, see Tough, "Aboriginal Rights Versus the Deed of Surrender: The Legal Rights of Native People and Canada's Acquisition of the Hudson's Bay Territory," 225-250. See also Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Indian Treaties*, 45-57.

⁶The events surrounding the Red River insurrection are among the most well documented and widely debated in the historiography of the Canadian west. For a discussion of the debate, see D.N. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press 1988), 1-18.

Almost as a consequence of historians' fixation on the events leading to the entry of Manitoba as a province in the new Dominion, events on the western plains that were coterminous with the Red River insurrection have been largely ignored by scholars. The end of the Hudson's Bay Company's charter-based stewardship of Rupert's Land, which came with the purchase of the northwest by the Canadian government, led to what can only be described as a jurisdictional vacuum on the western plains. Into the void came an invasion of large numbers of essentially lawless bison and wolf hide traders supplied from Fort Benton on the Missouri River.⁷ In addition to the alcoholism and violence associated with the establishment of the brief but terrible period known as the "Whoop Up" trade,⁸ the last of the large scale smallpox outbreaks on the plains spread suffering and death from the Missouri north to the western Canadian plains. The epidemic killed over thirty-five hundred people, mostly Blackfoot, Cree and Métis, in the territory now covered by Alberta and western Saskatchewan.⁹ The deaths of so many, particularly among the Plains Cree along the

⁷Phillip Goldring described the trade centred around the Cypress Hills as taking place "in conditions of complete anarchy." Philip Goldring, "The Cypress Hills Massacre-A Century's Retrospect," *Saskatchewan History* 26 (1973), 102. The historian of the Blackfeet, John C. Ewers, noted that Americans only began to cross the "medicine line" during the winter of 1869. *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 255. The rush of free traders was partially the result of the publication of the story in the *Daily Herald* in Helena of a \$50,000 profit shared by two traders on the frontier in a six month period. Paul Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 38-39. The influx of free traders into the Montana territory was largely the result of the collapse of the American Fur Company in 1864.

⁸Margaret A. Kennedy, *The Whiskey Trade of the Northwestern Plains: A Multidisciplinary Study* (New York: P. Lang, 1997).

⁹"Report of the Board of Health, April 27, 1871," in James Ernest Nix, *Mission among the Buffalo: The Labours of the Reverend George M. and John C. McDougall in the Canadian Northwest, 1860-1876* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1960), 67.

North Saskatchewan River, led to the inclusion in the text of Treaty 6 of a clause which provided a "medicine chest" to each of the bands. The meaning of that amendment to the original document remains disputed to the present.¹⁰

As had been the case with all of the major outbreaks of smallpox over the previous century and a half, the disease spread northward from the major transportation artery of the American northwest, the Missouri River. The ease of communication up the Missouri, provided by an increasingly large fleet of steam-powered vessels and the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1869¹¹ added to the level of tension in the Montana country. As early as 1863, the Blackfoot were engaged in a sporadic guerilla war against the American population in "Whoop-Up Country," the frontier between British and American territory on the western plains.¹² Paul Sharp, the pre-eminent historian of the Montana-Alberta frontier, noted that by the late 1860s, "the area north of Fort Benton became one of the most lawless areas on the frontier, a rendezvous for tough and lawless men from every part of North America

¹⁰The connection between the severity of the smallpox epidemic and the inclusion of the Medicine Chest Clause is also made by Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: The History of the Saskatchewan Treaties*, 130. For a history of the litigation surrounding the clause, see Peter A. Barwell, "The Medicine Chest Clause in Treaty Six," *Canadian Native Law Review* 4 (1981): 1- 21.

¹¹Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country*, 104.

¹²*Ibid.*, 145. The notion of the Guerilla warfare conducted by plains Indians is further developed by David D. Smits who noted that the American Army conducted operations against "an enemy that had no home base, no lines of operation or defence, no strategic points to defend and no important storage facilities for ammunition or provisions." David Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (1994), 317. John Ewers stated that the so-called "Blackfoot War" against Americans "was a sporadic, disorganized affair" lasting from 1865 to 1870. *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*, 243-244.

and Europe."¹³

The Blackfoot met the expanding and essentially anarchic incursions of the whiskey traders with increasingly violent resistance. In 1869, fifty-six Europeans were reported to have been killed by Indians, and more than one thousand horses were said to have been stolen.¹⁴ The killing of Malcolm Clark, a Helena area rancher, led to an attack by the American Army under the command of Colonel Eugene Baker on a group of friendly Peigans infected with smallpox on the Marias River, just south of the international boundary in January, 1870.¹⁵ The raid, intended to strike the band under Mountain Chief, the suspects in Clark's murder, was mistakenly directed against the peaceful band led by Heavy Runner and resulted in one hundred and seventy-three deaths, including many women and children.¹⁶ The massacre and its coverup led to an uproar in the eastern press and seriously undermined President Grant's Indian Peace Policy. The killings also had the effect of immediately pacifying the Blackfoot Confederacy in American Territory.¹⁷

Tensions were such that when the disease broke out among the Blackfoot in the

¹³Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country*, 39.

¹⁴Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*, 246-247.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 246-253.

¹⁶One discussion of the incident reported that one hundred and twenty men were killed along with fifty-three women and children. Robert M. Utley, *Bluecoats and Redskins: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (London: Cassell, 1973), 191.

¹⁷The events surrounding the Marias River massacre are well documented, for discussions, see Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*, 246-253. See also Robert M. Utley, *Bluecoats and Redskins: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891*, 188-218, and J.P. Dunn, *Massacres of the Mountains: A History of the Indian wars of the far West, 1815-1875* (London: Eyer & Spottiswoode, 1963), 448-455.

spring of 1869,¹⁸ the group attributed the infection to:

[T]he evil genius of an American trader who swore revenge for the loss of his horses to a raiding party. He allegedly purchased several bales of infected blankets in St. Louis and placed them on the banks of the Missouri River where innocent Indians filched them. Indians always denounced the reappearance of disease as a deliberate act of wicked white men.¹⁹

In his report on the epidemic, William Butler accepted the view that the disease was spread by Missouri traders "with a view to the accumulation of robes; and this opinion, monstrous through it may appear, has been somewhat verified by the western press when treating the epidemic last year."²⁰ The belief that the disease was spread purposefully was in common currency during the early settlement period. L.V. Kelly's *The Range Men: The Story of Ranchers and Indians in Alberta*, originally published in 1913, expanded the idea that the epidemic was the result of malfeasance on the part of a Montana trader:

Never was a more terrible revenge carried out by any man than that of a whiskey trader named Evans, who mourning the loss of his partner while trading with Indians in the Cypress Hills swore to enact an awful payment. The bible says the Old Testament price was a life for a life, but Evans wanted the repayment ten thousand fold, and few men would have thought of the scheme he carried to success. Some time in the late sixties Evans and a partner were trading among the Blackfoot and other Indians in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan when they were attacked and the partner was slain, while the horses belonging to the white men were stolen. Upon making his escape Evans swore revenge, and, hastening to St. Louis, he is said to have purchased bales of blankets that were infected with the most virulent form of smallpox, which had been raging there. Carefully wrapping these bales, he shipped them up the Missouri, and when in the heart of the Indian country left them on the banks for

¹⁸An early chronicler of the epidemic, noted that the outbreak arrived in the spring of 1869, on the heels of a famine in the western plains caused by hunters inability to locate the diminished buffalo herds. Maclean, *McDougall of Alberta: A Life of Rev. John McDougall D.D. Pathfinder of Empire and Prophet of the Plains*, 37.

¹⁹Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country*, 27.

²⁰William Butler, *The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure in the Northwest of America* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1968), 360.

the first passer-by to take. Of course the red man seized upon this treasure-trove with natural avidity, and the smallpox raged through the tribes, sweeping thousand, probably tens of thousands, of natives in the Blackfoot, Blood, Assiniboiné, Cree, Stoney and Sarcee villages into the happy hunting grounds.²¹

The "Evans" responsible for the outbreak in Kelly narrative was undoubtedly John H. Evans, the notorious whiskey trader and right-hand man to the infamous Thomas Hardwick. Both were members of the Spitzee Cavalry, the wolfers responsible not only for the Cypress Hills massacre of 1873, but also for the lesser known incident, the Sweet Grass Hills massacre which took place just south of the 49th parallel a year earlier.²² While the notion that the epidemic could have been the result of human intention might be difficult for the modern reader to accept, even recent works on the whiskey trade attribute at least partial blame for the epidemic to the actions of a vengeful whiskey trader. In her study of the trade, Margaret Kennedy noted that :

One band of Blackfeet were thought to have contracted the pox from a man who set out to revenge himself for some grievance the former had caused on him. Infected himself, he collected all the scabs from his body, rubbed his shirt in them and left the shirt on a trail used by the Peigan on the Highwood Creek.²³

²¹L.V. Kelly, *The Range Men: The Story of Ranchers and Indians in Alberta* (Toronto: Coles, 1980), 85.

²²The formation of the Spitzee Cavalry was a thinly veiled attempt by the I.G. Baker Company of Fort Benton to oust its main rival, the T.C. Power Company, from the lucrative Whoop Up trade. See Sharp, *Whoop Up Country*, 51-52. For a discussion of the role of Evans in the Sweet Grass Hills massacre of 1872, see Hugh Dempsey, "The Sweet Grass Hills Massacre," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 7 (1957): 12-18. On Evan's role in the Cypress Hills massacre, see Philip Goldring, *Whisky, Horses and Death: The Cypress Hills Massacre and its Sequel* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, Canadian Historic Sites 21, 1973). After his release from the temporary custody of the NWMP, Evans received a commission to fight in the Nez Perce War.

²³*The Whiskey Trade of the Northwestern Plains: A Multidisciplinary Study*, 32. Still another source of the infection was believed to be the American whiskey itself. At Rocky Mountain House, Jim Gibbons, a Montana trader noted that the Indians there accused Americans of being "responsible for the smallpox...[and] ordered us out of the country and threatened to kill us if we did not go... I treated all round and finally the Indians took a drink... They waited to see whether they would get smallpox and when

Although the outbreak in Montana was probably part of a larger epidemic which swept across the American plains,²⁴ Kennedy attributed the specific source of the infection on the Missouri to an outbreak aboard the steamboat *Utah*.²⁵ In her account, the Gros Ventre disinterred a man from the boat who had perished from the disease and took the blanket "in which his body was wrapped, and in doing so contracted the disease."²⁶ Whatever its source, the outbreak proved catastrophic to the Blackfoot and other inhabitants of the western Canadian plains. According to the report of the Board of Health appointed by Dominion authorities to deal with the epidemic in their new territory, the death toll was horrendous.

they did not they opened the trade with us. I got 108 buffalo robes and nine horses for that keg of rum." W.A. Greibach, "The Narrative of James Gibson," Part 2. *Alberta History* 6 (1958), 10.

²⁴Stearn and Stearn, *The Effect of Smallpox on the Destiny of the Amerindian*, 101-103, who attributed the source of the epidemic to the construction of the Pacific Railroad. Vancouver Island was also hit by the disease, in 1868, eighty-eight people died at Victoria. G. Graham-Cumming, "Health of the Original Canadians, 1867-1967," *Medical Services Journal* 3 (1967), 15. As smallpox swept across the American plains, the last of the major epidemics of the disease spread through Europe, killing an estimated five hundred thousand people. See Michael Bliss, *Plague: A Story of Smallpox in Montreal* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1991), 49-50.

²⁵*The Whiskey Trade of the Northwestern Plains*, 32. In 1868, thirty-five steamers were reported to have unloaded freight at Fort Benton. Frank B. Harper, *Fort Union and Its Neighbours on the Upper Missouri: A Chronological Record of Events* (St. Paul: Great Northern Railway, 1925), 34.

²⁶Within a year, 750 of a total population of 1,900 Gros Ventres succumbed to smallpox. *The Whiskey Trade of the Northwestern Plains*, 32.

Group		Death Toll of Individuals
Blackfeet		675
Bloods		630
Peigans		1,080
Sarcees		200
Crees	Ft. Pitt	100
	Edmonton	30
	Victoria	55
	Whitefish Lk.	15
	St. Paul's	150
	Carlton	78
Métis	St. Albert's	335
	St. Ann's	40
Mountain Stoneys		123
Total		3,512

Table 3: Mortality from the smallpox epidemic of 1869-70 by ethnic group. Source: James E. Nix, *Mission among the Buffalo*, 67.

Among the Blackfoot, the disease did more than simply kill a significant segment of the population. The leadership of the Confederacy was shaken by the high death toll among its Chiefs and elders. As was the case with the wider population, they perished from infection or from the famine that came in its wake. The Fish Eaters, the Blackfoot Band eventually led by Red Crow, lost two Chiefs to the epidemic.²⁷ Seen from afar,

²⁷Hugh Dempsey, *Red Crow: Warrior Chief* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980), 69.

the Chief of the Bloods also died, as did many other Chiefs among the Blackfoot.²⁸

Mortality among the Sarcee may have been much greater than the official report indicated. One estimate of the decline of the group is from several thousand prior to the epidemic to between three and four hundred in its aftermath.²⁹

The terrible toll wrought by the epidemic among the Blackfoot Confederacy, twenty-five hundred dead, was not the only disaster faced by the group during the early 1870s. As noted above, the Confederacy lost several of its leaders to the epidemic,³⁰ its military power was crushed by the American Army, the result of the massacre on the Marias River, and the unrestrained flow of alcohol from Benton eroded the cohesion of the group to the point of anarchy. Within months of their victory over the Cree-led alliance at Belly River, the Blackfoot were suffering terribly at the hands of American traders. According to a "close observer" who spent two months in the vicinity over Christmas 1870, "[n]o language can describe these drunken orgies; more than sixty

²⁸Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter and Dorothy First Rider, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1996), 30. Another Blackfoot Chief who perished during the outbreak was Natos, "who had instigated the murder of the notable Cree Chief Maskepetoon." The later was killed while trying to achieve a peace between the warring Nations. MacLean, *McDougall of Alberta*, 42, 47. George McDougall described the scene of "Na-doo's" death, "surrounded by numbers of his dead warriors, his body was left to be devoured by wolves. From a pole projecting at the top of the tent floated a Union Jack, and the warrior's coat mounted with ermine. George McDougall, "Letter from Victoria Mission, December 2, 1870," in *George Millward McDougall, The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, ed. John McDougall (Toronto: William Briggs, 1888), 161.

²⁹Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State. Second Edition*, 757, fn.159.

³⁰After the death of Big Swan in 1872, Crowfoot and the elderly Old Sun were the only experienced chiefs remaining among the Siksika. Treaty 7 Elders, Tribal Council, Hildebrandt, Carter and First Rider, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*, 30. Crowfoot's own ascendancy was due to the death of Chief Three Suns during the epidemic. Hugh Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 60.

Blackfeet have been murdered; and if there can be a transcript of hell on earth, it is here exhibited."³¹ In 1872, Colonel P. Robertson-Ross of the Canadian Militia was sent to assess the situation on the southern plains. He noted that of the 221 deaths were reported among the Blackfoot during the previous year, only 133 were from disease.³² He attributed the remaining fatalities to the Montana trade, "[t]he demoralization of the Indians and injury to the country from this illicit traffic [liquor] is very great. It is state on good authority that last year eighty-eight Blackfeet Indians were murdered in drunken brawls among themselves..."³³ During the winter of 1873-74, the Methodist Missionary, John McDougall, reported that over forty able-bodied northern Blackfoot men died, "all slain in drunken rows." He continued:

Some terrible scenes occurred when the whole camps when on a spree, as was frequently the case, shooting, stabbing, killing, freezing. Thus these atrocious debauches were continuing all that winter not far from us. Mothers lost their children. These were frozen to death or devoured by the myriad of dogs of the camp.³⁴

Predations against the Blackfoot and other western nations are well documented in the

³¹George McDougall, April 1, 1871, in *George Millward McDougall: The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 175.

³²Among the Bloods, another forty-six deaths were attributed to alcohol. Dempsey, *Red Crow: Warrior Chief*, 81, fn.2.

³³Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*, 258, fn.10.

³⁴John McDougall, *On Western Trails in the Early Seventies* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1911), 129. John Ewers furthered the notion of the breakdown of Blackfoot social structures, "[s]ometimes the Indians played a macabre practical joke on the traders by propping up the frozen body of the dead comrade against the fort so that when the whites opened it in the morning, the stiffened corpse would fall on them." *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*, 258. The despair of the Blackfoot in the period from 1870 to 1874, when the Northwest Mounted Police arrived, invokes comparisons to the dislocation described in Anastasia M. Shkilnyk's compelling study of Grassy Narrows, Ontario in, *A Poison Stronger than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

years prior to the establishment of Canadian law in the west in 1874. The grizzly murder of the Blood Chief, Calf Shirt,³⁵ and the massacres of Assiniboines at the Sweet Grass³⁶ and later Cypress Hills³⁷ are bloody examples.

Although the decline of the Blackfoot during the early 1870s was precipitous, the group experienced a single and important victory in its ongoing and increasingly desperate war with the Cree-led alliance over access to the dwindling bison herds. In the fall of 1870, the Blackfoot camped on the banks of the Belly (Oldman) River near the present site of Lethbridge and repelled an attack of six hundred to eight hundred Cree, Saulteaux and Assiniboine warriors in what has been called the "Last Great Indian Battle" on the Canadian plains.³⁸ The Cree alliance chose to attack precisely because of the high death toll suffered by their enemies during the epidemic.³⁹ The

³⁵Hugh Dempsey, *The Amazing Death of Calf Shirt and other Blackfoot Stories: Three Hundred Years of Blackfoot History* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1994), 47-59; Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*, 259-260.

³⁶Although peaceful Assiniboines were actually attacked, the perpetrators of the violence claimed that they had intended to fight a group of Bloods. Hugh Dempsey, "The Sweet Grass Hills Massacre," 16-17.

³⁷See Philip Goldring, "The Cypress Hills Massacre-A Century's Retrospect," 81-102, and *Whiskey, Horses and Death: The Cypress Hills Massacre and Its Sequel*, 43-70.

³⁸Carlton R. Stewart, *The Last Great (Inter-Tribal) Indian Battle* (Lethbridge: Lethbridge Historical Society, 1997).

³⁹Unbeknownst to the Cree alliance, the Blackfoot camp had been augmented by the survivors of the American Army attack on the Marias River who had fled north and by some northern Blackfoot who were attached to the camp when the attack occurred on October 25th. Alex Johnston, "The Last Great Indian Battle," *The Last Great (Inter-Tribal) Indian Battle*, 8. The victory of the Blackfoot at Belly River was also at least partially the result of the superior weaponry acquired from the Montana trade. Their repeating rifles far out-powered the flintlocks and bows and arrows of the HBC supplied northern alliance. Adolf Hungry Wolf, *The Blood People: A Division of the Blackfoot Confederacy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 255. See also Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*, 260-261. Aside from being outgunned

severity of the Cree defeat, and the recognition that the era of plains warfare were at an end, led to the peace treaty agreed to by the long-time antagonists in 1872.⁴⁰

The loss of between two and three hundred warriors among the northern alliance at Belly River, though an important military defeat, paled in comparison to another outcome of their long standing conflict with the Blackfoot Confederacy. During one of the many raids on Blackfoot camps in the spring of 1870, the Cree contracted smallpox from their enemy.⁴¹ Over the next few months, more than a thousand Cree perished from the disease. The coincidence of the outbreak with the political crisis in Red River undermined the Hudson's Bay Company's ability to counter the spread of the disease. The HBC's Chief officer in the infected country, W.J. Christie, requested the immediate delivery of vaccines to the infected country in August, 1869.⁴² None came until April of 1870.⁴³ Even the trouble at Red River remained only a rumour until travel

and having underestimated the numerical strength of their enemy, the Cree alliance was split over the timing of the attack.

⁴⁰At a gathering at the Sand Hill in 1873, the peace was sealed when Poundmaker, the future Cree leader was adopted by Crowfoot the Chief of the Blackfoot. See Treaty Seven Elders et al., *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*, 9.

⁴¹Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 368.

⁴² Hugh Dempsey, ed., "Smallpox Epidemic of 1869-70," *Alberta History* 11 (1963), 17.

⁴³For a discussion of the relief effort, organized after the spring breakup, see E.R. Young, *By Canoe and Dog Train: Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1890), 197-205. Regarding Young's organization of a relief brigade made up of "twenty boats loaded with supplies", it is unclear whether the effort was undertaken under the auspices of the Company. Archival records show no official correspondence. According to an unsigned document in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (hereafter HBCA) entitled, "Remarks on Statements Made By The Rev. E.R. Young," "It is extremely doubtful if Stewart, or whoever was in charge of Norway House could have authorised relief on the scale stated by the Rev. E.R. Young. Chief Factor D.A. Smith, President of the Northern Department, would have had to have been

was facilitated with the breakup in the spring.⁴⁴

While the Company's efforts to counter the spread of the virus were frustrated for at least eight months, some groups were successfully vaccinated. The isolated successes played a decisive role in limiting the spread of the epidemic to the east and illustrate the effectiveness of the procedure in checking the disease. Isaac Cowie's narrative recounts the "providential visit" of the Métis leader Pascal Breland and his newly vaccinated grandchild to Fort Qu'Appelle in the fall of 1869.⁴⁵ Cowie, whose father was a medical practitioner in Scotland,:

secured, on bits of window glass, enough vaccine to protect everyone requiring it in the fort, from whom the supply was increased sufficiently to vaccinate all the people about the lakes and the Indians visiting them that fall ...those who had been vaccinated at the fort took it out to the plains and spread it so thoroughly there among the Qu'Appelle and Touchwood Hills Indians that not a single case of smallpox was ever heard among them...⁴⁶

His work prevented the spread of the disease to the urban population at Red River.⁴⁷

consulted first, even for only the loan of the York boats, and his correspondence does not show that any such request was made to him. Only medicine was requested in August 1870." See HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1870," 46.

⁴⁴John McDougall, *John McDougall. In the Days of the Red River Rebellion*, ed. Susan Jackel (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983), 117. Peter Erasmus recounted that word of both the Manitoba insurrection and of the outbreak only reached his settlement at Goodfish lake, "around the first of April 1870." Peter Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1999), 200.

⁴⁵Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers: A Narrative of Seven Years in the Service of the Hudson's Bay Company During 1867-1874*, 382.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.* The epidemic appears to have struck on the Upper Assiniboine River even though Chief Factor Campbell noted in his memoir that he and his wife vaccinated more than one hundred people there. He stated that the disease did not break out there because of their pre-emptive vaccinations. Clifford Wilson, *Campbell of the Yukon*, 169-170. William Butler reported that half of the people attached to Fort Pelly died during the outbreak. *The Great Lone Land*, 227-228. On the spread of the

To the north of Cowie and his vaccinated clients in the Qu'Appelle, immunity was conferred to some of the inhabitants of the lower North Saskatchewan. At the Prince Albert Mission, James Nisbet used his own supply of serum to vaccinate over one hundred and fifty people.⁴⁸ The success of the procedure, and the order to abandon the mission and disperse into small groups, served to halt the spread of the disease east of the forks along the Saskatchewan.⁴⁹ A vaccination campaign conducted later by Dr. Norman (William Morrison) McKay of the HBC's Mackenzie River Department over the winter of 1870-71 in the English River and the Saskatchewan Districts shielded, with the assistance of Church Missionary Society clerics, the inhabitants of the Churchill River from the dreaded outbreak.⁵⁰

disease to the Swan River district, see HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1870," Extract 10, W.J. Christie to W.G. Smith, Edmonton, 11 October 1870.

⁴⁸W.D. Smiley, "The Most Good to the Indians': The Reverend James Nisbet and the Prince Albert Mission," *Saskatchewan History* 46 (1994), 42. According to one account, Nisbet used a similar technique to that used by Cowie in the south. Having acquired two smallpox scabs, "using a needle he scratched the skin and rubbed the patch with these scabs" and was credited with the vaccination of between two and three hundred people in the Price Albert and Carlton areas. Macgregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies, 1849-1889*, 74, fn.22.

⁴⁹Smiley, "The Most Good to the Indians': The Reverend James Nisbet and the Prince Albert Mission," 42. Downriver at the Devon mission, Henry Budd thanked God, "that we have been preserved & delivered from the Small Pox." Church Missionary Society (hereafter CMS) microfilm, reel-A-80, Budd to the Secretary, CMS, Devon, 19 August 1871, 254. Missionaries used vaccines successfully to counter other diseases in this period. Budd, used the procedure to mitigate the effects of *erysipelas*, also known as St. Anthony's fire, at the Devon Mission on the lower Saskatchewan after its initial outbreak in 1868 in which "most of the old people were killed." See Katherine Pettipas, "Introduction," in *The Diary of the Reverend Henry Budd, 1870-1875* (Winnipeg: Hignell Printing, 1974), xxxviii.

⁵⁰Saskatchewan Archives Board (hereafter SAB), Innes Papers, A-113, McKay Papers, F.1, Diary 1870-1884. Archdeacon McKay, 8 February 1871; HBCA, Search File: Smallpox Epidemic, 1870 Extract 25, D.A. Smith to W. Armit, Fort Garry, 5 March 1871. Another reference to the northern HBC Doctor as William Morrison McKay. Clifford Wilson, "Private Letters from the Fur Trade," *Papers Read Before the Historical*

The communities of the disputed territory west of the forks of the Saskatchewan suffered the full force of the epidemic. The hostilities on the western plains, coupled with the breakdown of communications to the west from Red River resulting from the Manitoba insurrection, exacerbated the effects of the deadly virus.⁵¹ Along the length of the North Saskatchewan, famine,⁵² disease, and inter-ethnic violence contributed to an ever deepening crisis.

As stated above, the infection spread to the northwestern plains by a Cree horse raiding party who attacked an infected camp in April 1870.⁵³ Ignoring warnings not to enter the disease-ridden country controlled by the Blackfoot, a group of seventeen Cree headed south with the coming of good weather:

[A]nd coming to a deserted camp of their enemies in which a tent was still standing, then proceeded to ransack it... The tent contained the dead bodies of some of the Blackfeet... and though these bodies presented a revolting

and *Scientific Society of Manitoba, Series 3* (Winnipeg: Historic and Scientific Society of Manitoba, 1950), 42, and MacGregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies*, 79. William Morrison Mackay is also the name listed in the HBCA Biography Files, see HBCA B.239/k/3 p.375/405, 431 and B.239/g/109-111.

⁵¹During the trouble in Manitoba, the European inhabitants of the west received no word from Red River for eight months. The disruption of the HBC based transportation system certainly contributed to the fatal delay between William Christie's request for the vaccine in September 1869 and its eventual delivery the following April. See W.J. Christie, "Smallpox Report," in *The Manitoban*, 16 September 1871, in "Smallpox Epidemic of 1869-70," 17.

⁵²Bison herds were reported to have been scarce in an arc from Blackfoot country to Carlton and Prince Albert during the epidemic. Starvation was reported at Prince Albert during the summer of 1869 although the harvest that year was "remarkably good." Smiley, "The Most Good to the Indians": The Reverend James Nisbet and the Price Albert Mission," 40-41. One report of the epidemic noted that "[s]o great is the scarcity of buffalo in the plains, that from Edmonton to Carlton, not a buffalo is to be seen." *The Manitoban*, 21 January 1871, in "Smallpox Epidemic of 1869-70," 14.

⁵³Predations during the hostilities usually subsided during the winter and resumed when travel was facilitated by the arrival of spring.

spectacle, being in an advanced state of decomposition, they were nevertheless subjected to the usual process of mutilation, the scalps and clothing being carried away. For this act the Cree paid a terrible penalty. Scarcely had they reached their own country before the disease appeared among them in a most virulent and infectious form.⁵⁴

All of the seventeen Cree who participated in the raid were infected. Of those, only two survived. From the ill-fated raiders, the virus spread to a Cree encampment "assembled together from different directions in large numbers." By July, infection had spread across the entire country "from Rocky Mountain House to Carlton."⁵⁵ That the Cree ignored the warnings of traders in the spring of 1870 should come as no surprise. In fact, the whole trade was in disarray in the wake of the transfer and the trouble at Red River.⁵⁶ The malaise over the future of the west under Canadian rule quickly turned into open hostility and even violence toward Europeans with the outbreak of the epidemic. The Methodist Mission at Victoria was attacked by a group of desperate and infected Blackfoot who, according to George McDougall:

⁵⁴Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 368. Another account of the infection to the Cree from the raiding party was recorded by the anthropologist, David Mandelbaum in 1943. Deanna Christiensen, *Ahtahkakoop: The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Chief, His People, and their Struggle for Survival, 1816-1896* (Shell Lake, Sk.: Ahtahkakoop Publishing, 2000), 137, fn.36.

⁵⁵Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 368-369.

⁵⁶Even before the end of the 1860s, the HBC's authority over its employees was undermined by American free traders who traded liquor for goods intended for the trade. See Burley, *Servants of the Honourable Company: Work, Discipline, and Conflict in the Hudson's Bay Company, 1770-1879*, 152-153, 214. Just prior to the outbreak of the disease among the Cree, traders Watt and Traill were posted to Fort Pitt with a view to enforce discipline "among the numerous employees and Indians, who have been allowed by the laxity of native officers to have everything their own way previously." Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 383. Traill was almost killed when he was attacked by a disgruntled Métis while at Pitt and was transferred to Carlton prior to the outbreak of disease. See MacGregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies*, 69. See also Canada, *Sessional Papers 1871*, No. 20, D.A. Smith to Lt. Governor Archibald, Fort Garry, 9 September 1870, 59-61.

[H]ave sought to propitiate their deities by murder and robbery. They have stolen our horses and killed our cattle; articles of clothing and human hair, infected with smallpox, have been left in our village; and so reckless of life were these wretched men, that of a war party numbering eleven, who made a raid on Victoria, ten died. Some of the bodies were found by our people.⁵⁷

Relations were no better between Europeans and the Cree attached to the mission.

According to John McDougall, they were "very sullen, and at times very insolent; they went about armed to the teeth, and were ready for any excuse to commit violence.

This was a white man's disease, and they hated the whites. We were living all the time on the thin crust of a volcano."⁵⁸ At Edmonton, Chief Factor Christie echoed the McDougall's view of Indian hostility toward the Europeans generally for their role in the spread of the disease. He reported that a party of Indians travelled to Fort Pitt with the specific intention of murdering traders Watt and Traill in retaliation for bringing the disease among them.⁵⁹

As the epidemic spread, aboriginal hostility directed toward the traders who were largely immune from the horror of the disease,⁶⁰ was manifest in the most grizzly

⁵⁷MacGregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies*, 75-76. Another raid on Victoria was reported to have been halted when the raiders learned that smallpox had infected the mission itself. The wife and two daughters of George McDougall died during the epidemic. Young, *By Canoe and Dog Train: Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians*, 198.

⁵⁸McDougall, *John McDougall. In the Days of the Red River Rebellion*, 127; MacGregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies*, 76.

⁵⁹ HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 6. W.J. Christie to D.A. Smith, Carlton House, 6 September 1870.

⁶⁰Although several Europeans were reported to have been infected, only four succumbed to the disease during the outbreak. See MacGregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies*, 78-79. Although the vast majority of the aboriginal population was susceptible to the infection, those who had been infected in earlier outbreaks were immune. The Métis catechist, Peter Erasmus was assisted during the epidemic by a Stony elder, Pan-eza Sa-win, who "was not afraid of the sickness as he had got over it several years

of manners. At Fort Pitt, where the epidemic broke out in early summer, the situation descended into a terrible anarchy. Although a supply of vaccines was sent up the Saskatchewan in April 1870,⁶¹ the trader, James Sinclair, soon ran out supplies for the two camps of infected Cree who had descended on the post.⁶² The Cree believed that only Europeans could cure the disease that they had introduced to the country and that their own medicine men were powerless in confronting the plague.⁶³ According to Lieutenant Butler, the Cree then turned to more fatalistic measures:

[T]hey appear to have endeavoured to convey the infection into the fort, in the belief that by doing so they would cease to suffer from it themselves. The dead bodies were left unburied close to the stockades, and frequently Indians in the worst stage of the disease might be seen trying to force an entrance into the houses, or rubbing portions of the infectious matter from their persons against the door-handles and window-frames of the dwellings.⁶⁴

earlier." Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights*, 211-212.

⁶¹Soon after breakup, the Methodist Missionary E.R. Young organized a brigade comprised of twenty boats and one hundred and sixty volunteers under the charge of Samuel Papanekis to provide relief to the stricken country. Papanekis died soon after his return from the two and a half month journey. Young, *By Canoe and Dog Train: Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians*, 202-205.

⁶²Sinclair is reported to have even attempted to have made his own serum for use at Pitt. The lymph was taken from a Saulteaux who had been vaccinated at the Prince Albert Mission. Unfortunately for the surrounding Cree, the trader appears to have been unsuccessful. MacGregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies*, 74. The arrival of large numbers of Cree in the summer was not unusual as the Pitt was considered to be the best provision post on the Saskatchewan with good access to bison herds. SAB, W. Traill Papers, A-104, 4.

⁶³Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 250.

⁶⁴Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 250-251, 369. Butler went on to note that the inhabitants of the Fort were previously immunized by Sinclair who had acquired vaccine matter from a Saulteaux vaccinated by Nisbet at Prince Albert. On the Cree intention to spread the disease to the traders at Pitt, see also, Chief Factor W.J. Christie, Smallpox Report, *The Manitoban*, 16 September 1871, in "Smallpox: The Epidemic of 1869-70," 16-17, and HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 6. W.J. Christie to D.A. Smith, Carlton House, 6 September 1870.

The Cree persisted in their "macabre picketing" until only weeks before the arrival of the British Officer at Pitt in mid-November.⁶⁵ When Butler reached the embattled Fort, he reported that over one hundred people died in the immediate vicinity of the stockade.⁶⁶ The scene was horrific even at a distance from Pitt. According to Butler, "The unburied laid for days by the road-side, till the wolves, growing bold with the impunity which death among the hunters ever gives to the hunted, approached and fought over the decaying bodies."⁶⁷ Amid the chaos, the Chief Factor at Edmonton requested a force of eighty armed men to reinforce the Company's tenuous hold on its posts on the North Saskatchewan.⁶⁸

Although the situation was less gory than at Pitt, the epidemic struck hard at Carlton. Two of the Company's servants were infected. Donald McDonald, a European clerk at the post died on August 19th. Peter Ballandine, the mixed-blood postmaster recovered only after a long convalescence.⁶⁹ William Traill, who had been

⁶⁵Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 251.

⁶⁶W.J. Christie had earlier estimated the number of deaths at Pitt to have been two hundred. HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870, Extract. 6. Christie to D.A. Smith, Carlton House, 6 September 1870. On the precarious situation of the HBC during the crisis, Christie reported, "We can no longer remain in this district if we have no protection. I won't get an officer to remain and I would not myself."

⁶⁷*The Great Lone Land*, 250. A similar account is provided by MacLean, *McDougall of Alberta*, 44.

⁶⁸HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 6. W.J. Christie to D.A. Smith, Carlton House, 6 September 1870. Fifteen men were requested for Pitt and Carlton and fifty for Edmonton which had almost come under attack by a large group of Blackfoot in April. See MacGregor, *Senator Hardisty's Prairies*, 72-74 and James G. MacGregor, *Father Lacombe* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1975), 201-202. See also Canada, *Sessional Papers 1871*, No. 20, D.A. Smith to Archibald, Fort Garry, 9 September 1870, 61.

⁶⁹In addition, three un-named women "and a good many children" perished in the Fort. HBCA Search File: Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870, Extract 6. W.J. Christie to

transferred to Carlton from Pitt after a near fatal attack from a disgruntled Métis, was forced "to act as officer in Charge, Clerk, Interpreter, Doctor, Nurse and Sexton"⁷⁰ when the disease debilitated the entire staff at the post. Despite his "undoubtedly heroic" effort, thirty-two of the seventy residents of the post were infected. Of those twenty-eight died.⁷¹ Carlton's strategic location in the overland trade served to spread the disease to smaller posts in the interior. Of the cart brigade sent to the post from Lac La Biche, eight of fourteen drivers died on their return or soon after their arrival in the northern community.⁷²

Traill was not completely on his own during the epidemic. For a time, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Lac La Biche, Vital Grandin, assisted him in caring for the sick, the dying, and the dead.⁷³ While at Carlton, Grandin walked from tent to tent among the dispersed infected and those who had escaped the disease:

[D]oing what he could to make the sick more comfortable. He had not medicine to fight the disease. It simply had to run its terrible and often deadly course. He heard confessions of those who were dying, putting his head close to theirs to hear the final weak whispers of sorrow and repentance. Many asked him to

D.A. Smith, Carlton House, 6 September 1870.

⁷⁰SAB, W. Traill Papers, A-104, 5.

⁷¹Butler. *The Great Lone Land*, 369.

⁷²W.J. Christie, Smallpox Report, *The Manitoban*, 16 September 1871, in "Smallpox Epidemic of 1869-70," 16. Although the death toll at Lac la Biche was comparatively small, the sister of missionary Pierre Lacombe wrote a desperate letter to her brother from there stating that, "[y]our Indians are dying like flies; and, running away from the sickness, they die along the trail." Katherine Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Blackrobe Voyageur* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920), 182.

⁷³Frank J. Dolphin, *Indian Bishop of the West: Vital Justin Grandin, 1829-1902* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1986), 121-124. Among his duties was performing baptisms to the hopeless.

baptize them before they died.⁷⁴

Grandin's biographer noted that while at Carlton, the Bishop counselled one of the infected servants even though he was a Protestant because, "[h]is Minister has not come."⁷⁵ The Protestant Minister was James Nisbet who, according to his biographer, did not travel to the infested Fort for fear that he would take the disease back to Prince Albert. Nisbet was said to have been "deeply grieved that he could not visit his friends at Fort Carlton when they were in danger."⁷⁶

Grandin's actions while at Carlton and Nisbet's refusal to travel there, illustrate the different strategies adopted by Catholic and Protestant missionaries in dealing with the epidemic. The differences are critical to the understanding of the wide variances in infection and mortality in the communities ministered by the two groups. Although the Cree, who were largely cared for by Methodists and Anglicans, suffered terrible casualties during the outbreak, the effects of the disease were much worse in areas under the ministry of the Catholics. At the Protestant missions, orders to disperse were often given as soon as word of the epidemic arrived. References to such orders are numerous in contemporary accounts.⁷⁷ Henry Steinhauer, the missionary at Whitefish

⁷⁴Ibid., 122. When warned not to touch the sick clerk, the Bishop was said to have replied, "If he offers his hand so I might console him, then I will touch him." The Journal of the St. Paul Mission in Alberta recorded two thousand baptisms on the plains that terrible summer. Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Blackrobe Voyageur*, 187.

⁷⁵Dolphin, *Indian Bishop of the West*, 121.

⁷⁶Smiley, "'The Most Good to the Indians': The Reverend James Nisbet and the Price Albert Mission," 42. For another account of the dilemma faced by Protestant clerics during the epidemic. Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights*, 210-211.

⁷⁷These included John McDougall's order for his flock at Victoria to scatter in September, 1870. See Nix, *Mission among the Buffalo*, 64 and Young, *By Canoe and Dog Train*, 198. Further west, Peter Campbell secluded his people at Pigeon Lake. MacLean, *McDougall of the Alberta*, 44. Peter Erasmus noted his memoir that

Lake, led his people north into the bush "and became so isolated that nothing was heard from them for a long time."⁷⁸ To avoid contagion, many of the Cree travelled as far north as the Peace River where the Anglican Minister, W.C. Bompas, reported from Dunvegan that, "there are now about 150 Cree Indians having arrived there this summer from the plains, having left their own country on the Saskatchewan through fear I think of the ravages of smallpox there..."⁷⁹ In other districts, territory was probably abandoned temporarily to avoid the dreaded illness. While travelling through the Touchwood Hills, Butler reported, "all is silent and deserted-the Indian and the buffalo gone."⁸⁰ At Pomass Lake, not far from the Touchwood Hills, oral histories indicate that as many as one hundred Saukteaux died during the epidemic.⁸¹

"[c]omplete isolation was the only preventative, as there was no known cure." *Buffalo Days and Nights*, 209. Henry Budd arrived at the Nepowewin Mission in September 1870 and found that the inhabitants had abandoned the site. Entry of 6 September 1870, in *The Diary of Henry Budd, 1870-1875*, 39.

⁷⁸MacLean, *McDougall of Alberta*, 44.

⁷⁹CMS, microfilm, reel A-80, 149-153, 279. Numerous other families were reported at other posts on the Peace, a district which was spared the ravages of the outbreak. W.C. Bompas to the Secretary, Peace River, 27 September 1871. See also, Bompas to the Secretary, Fort Vermillion, November 13, 1871.

⁸⁰While the reference does not mention the specific abandonment of the country, the author noted that his party encountered the grave of a recent victim of smallpox "a few hours out of Portage la Prairie." Edward McCourt, *Remember Butler: The Story of William Butler* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 60-64. David Meyer and Robert Hutton noted that "about 1870" a new social entity emerged in the Basquia Hills south east of Cumberland following the fusion of the Red Earth and the Shoal Lake Crees, "[i]n short, these peoples had taken up full time residence in a region which previously had been their wintering ground." Meyer and Hutton, "Pasquatinow and the Red Earth Crees," 103. Though they did not determine the reason for the retreat of the two formerly distinct bands to the relative isolation of the hills, the avoidance of smallpox cannot be discounted as an impetus for the move.

⁸¹SAB, microfilm, reel 2.75 *School Histories of 35 Indian Reserves*, 1955. "Nut Lake Indians, 1905-1955," The servants within Fort Pelly were not infected but Starving Bull, a Cree from the Post, told Butler that from "a garrison of some sixty souls no fewer

In contrast to the dispersal of their jeopardized charges by the Protestants, the Catholics dealt with the misery of the epidemic without attempting to scatter their communities. The Métis communities which had developed around the Catholic missions in Alberta suffered extremely high mortality after their initial infection in the summer of 1870.⁸² While infection was limited to a very few cases within the confines of Fort Edmonton because of quick and effective measures taken by the HBC authorities,⁸³ the disease devastated the Métis communities around the Fort. At St. Albert, only eight miles from Edmonton, two thirds of the population of nine hundred were infected. Of those, three hundred and twenty died.⁸⁴ George McDougall, whose mission at Victoria suffered over fifty deaths and whose survivors were ordered to disperse, vehemently denounced the role of the Catholics during the epidemic:

Never was the arrogance and bigotry of the Popery more manifest. Having taught their deluded followers to look upon them as to a god, when the scourge first appeared they collected their people into large camps: the bodies of the dead, the infected, and the well, were all collected in the church. The spiritual

than thirty-two had perished! Four only had recovered of the thirty-six who had taken the terrible infection." *The Great Lone Land*, 227-228. Unfortunately, no records of Fort Pelly for 1870 exist in the HBCA collection.

⁸²The Métis were reported to have been infected following a peace meeting with the infected Blackfoot. The former gained access to the increasingly fleeting bison herds but "[i]ronically, this symbolic act of friendship did more to debilitate the St. Albert Métis than any previous acts of war or sabotage by the Blackfoot." St. Albert Historical Society, *The Black Robe's Vision: A History of the St. Albert District* (St. Albert: St. Albert Historical Society, 1985), 58.

⁸³On 14 October 1870, the first case was reported within the fort, families and children were cleared out at once. Two months later, John Coutts became ill with the disease and was "placed in a House by himself & a careful cleanly man (an American) who has had small pox put to attend him." HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 4. Edmonton House Journal.

⁸⁴James G. MacGregor, *Edmonton: A History* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1975), 79.

power of the priest proclaimed the grand specific, but all has failed⁸⁵

McDougall's son John, who was himself infected during the outbreak,⁸⁶ elaborated on the different strategies in coping with the crisis in the context of religious competition. According to the younger McDougall, the Catholics used the isolation measures taken by the Protestants as a sign of cowardice:

...they used our action in the matter as an argument against us. They said, "You now see who your friends are; as soon as calamity comes, the Protestant missionary drives you from him, while we say come to us;" the consequences were that many of the Indians and half-breeds gathered together, and died like rotten sheep.⁸⁷

According to one history of the Catholic missions in the west, the bravery of the missionaries resulted in the infection of Fathers Leduc and Bourguin during the outbreak.⁸⁸ The high death toll among the people under the care of the Catholics may have been the result of more than simply their failure to disperse. According to the

⁸⁵George McDougall, Victoria, 21 October 1871, in *George Millward McDougall, The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 159.

⁸⁶The younger McDougall caught the disease while caring for his charges at Victoria but was successful in treating himself although three members of his family succumbed to the virus. Nix, *Mission among the Buffalo*, 65. On his infection, John McDougall cleared his room of furniture and "[b]y means of a hot bath, a double dose of Dover's powders, profuse perspiration was induced, and within two days he was well again." The missionary later suffered a relapse and was reported to have suffered from the effects of the disease for three years. MacLean, *McDougall of Alberta*, 40-41.

⁸⁷*George Millward McDougall, The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 155. While the younger McDougall did not cite his quotation, the visceral nature of the conflict between the two groups is evident in the comment.

⁸⁸A.G. Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada from Lake Superior to the Pacific (1659-1895)* (Toronto: Musson Book Company, 1910), 85. Lacombe's behaviour in treating the victims of the outbreak was similar to that of Grandin at Carlton. MacGregor, *Father Lacombe*, 204-205. Father Dupin was reported to be "dangerously ill" with the disease near Lac La Biche in mid July. See Canada, *Sessional Papers 1871*, No. 20, Extract of a letter from the Reverend Father Lacombe to His Lordship Bishop Tache, Mission of St. Paul, 12 September 1870, 70.

Butler report, vaccine bought at Benton and dispensed at the height of the epidemic at St. Albert was "of a spurious description."⁸⁹

The epidemic brought suffering and death west to the foothills of the Rockies. Father Leduc was reported to have travelled to Jasper to minister the fifteen infected families there and to "dispense among them the consolations of religion."⁹⁰ A Stoney witness described Banff as "a graveyard, and the crying went up both night and day."⁹¹ Northeast of Edmonton and the infected Catholic missions, the disease may have depopulated the small trading post community of Moose Lake on the headwaters of the Beaver River.⁹² According to one account, the "whole settlement was carried off, leaving as sole survivor a little boy among the unburied dead, who scampered in the bush, and with great difficulty was caught and saved."⁹³ Near Sounding Lake, Dr. A.E.

⁸⁹Butler contrasted the bad vaccine in Alberta with that used by Nisbett which he described as being "of a genuine description." For a discussion of the timing and effectiveness of the vaccines used to counter the epidemic, see Butler, *The Great Lone Land*, 369-370. Butler also noted that the calamity at St. Albert may have been worsened by the possibility of the virus being introduced, "from two different sources almost at the same period" in addition to many cases of exposure resulting from disease induced delirium. To compound the crisis a large prairie fire destroyed the homes, carts and tents of many of the infected Métis who brought the disease back to St. Albert.

⁹⁰Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada from Lake Superior to the Pacific (1659-1895)*, 86.

⁹¹MacLean, *McDougall of Alberta*, 41. George McDougall noted that no less than 140 members of the Stoney group were "cut off." *George Millward McDougall: The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 176.

⁹²Moose Lake, better known as Lac L'Original, was the first of the Northwest Company Posts established in the territory that became Alberta. See MacGregor, *A History of Alberta*, 39.

⁹³On the depopulation of the community, see MacLean, *McDougall of Alberta*, 41. The child, Antoine Gibeault, was nine years old at the time. A local history recounted that "[t]he boy was found throwing stones on the ice. All that kept him from freezing to death at night was his two dogs, a little old blanket covered part of his

Porter, attached to the treaty party that travelled through the "Ghost Woods" on their way to meet Big Bear in 1878, reported that, "[m]any of the tent poles were still standing and the bones of many victims lay bleaching in the sun."⁹⁴

Canadian authorities did what little they could to cope with the crisis in their newly acquired hinterland. The Hudson's Bay Company, which had acted as the de facto government of Rupert's Land for the previous half century, used its own supplies and transportation network to check the spread of the epidemic within its establishments.⁹⁵ That the Dominion was unprepared for the scale of the crisis on the western plains is an understatement. Only in October 1870, when the epidemic had all but run its course, was a Board of Health appointed to manage the situation in the Northwest Territories.⁹⁶ The jurisdictional vacuum of the plains was such that the legislation that empowering the Board, the *Temporary Government Act (1870)*, was described by one writer as "extralegal."⁹⁷ Lieutenant Governor Archibald was pressured

naked body, a string, or sakanapi was tied around his waist and his moccasins were getting worn out." J.E. Dion, "A Short History of Moose Lake in 1907," in *Echoes of the Past: History of Bonnyville and District*, ed. Real Girard (Bonnyville: Bonnyville Historical Society, 1984), 13-14.

⁹⁴SAB, A-M455, R.A. Mayson Papers 4, Dr. Andrew Everett Porter, 2.

⁹⁵After the negotiation of Treaty 6, Alexander Morris reported that the prompt action of the Company during the epidemic "saved the Indians from entire destruction." Stephen Sliwa, *Standing the Test of Time: A History of the Beards/Okemasis Reserve, 1876-1951* (M.A. thesis, Trent University, 1993), 52.

⁹⁶The Board was made up of the following; W.J. Christie, the Chairman, Richard Hardisty and John Bunn of the HBC, Protestant clerics, George McDougall, his son John, Peter Campbell and Henry Steinhauer, and Catholic priests Leduc, Lacombe, André, and Furmond. "Smallpox Epidemic of 1869-70," 18.

⁹⁷James Mochoruk, *The Political Economy of Northern Development: Governments and Capital along Manitoba's Resource Frontier, 1870-1930* (Ph.D. diss. University of Manitoba, 1992), 19-20. The author noted that the Board was successful in dealing with the outbreak but that it functioned on questionable legal ground "simply

to respond to the epidemic without the benefit of consulting the documents that empowered him to govern the plains. He appointed the Board without the permission of the Dominion government on October 22, almost a week before his papers arrived at Red River.⁹⁸ To his horror, Archibald's orders indicated that his appointment of the Board of Health was beyond his authority but he rationalized the action because "the validity of these is taken for granted."⁹⁹

Two weeks earlier, Archibald had ordered William Butler, a British officer attached to the Red River Expeditionary Force who had arrived in August, to undertake a reconnaissance of the plains to determine the extent of the epidemic.¹⁰⁰ Although the services of a physician could not be secured,¹⁰¹ Butler was provided with medicines to

because the Dominion refused to cope with such matters legally." He noted that until the appointment of a council in 1872, the Lieutenant Governor, Adams Archibald, administered the Northwest Territories without assistance.

⁹⁸Archibald later wrote to the Prime Minister, that, under pressure from the council of Manitoba to act, and finding no copy of the legislation regarding the governance of the Territory in the new capital and "being in grave doubts whether I was right, I took care that no Gazette, or other public notice of the appointments were made. All that has been made public is the legislation on the Small pox and spirituous liquors and the officers to enforce it." SAB, Archibald-Macdonald Correspondence. Archibald to Macdonald, December 6, 1870. Part of the ordinance included the quarantining of goods originating in the stricken country for a period of six months. See Canada, *Sessional Papers 1871* No. 20, 72.

⁹⁹Archibald noted, "Six days afterwards my books arrived and on inspecting the Act of 1869, I found to my horror that the proceedings were all wrong." SAB, John A. Macdonald Papers, A-70, Archibald to Macdonald, 6 December 1870.

¹⁰⁰For a full description of Butler's orders, see *The Great Lone Land*, 353-355 and Canada, *Sessional Papers 1871*, No. 20, George Hill to Butler, Fort Garry, 10 October 1870, 62-63.

¹⁰¹As Butler was being despatched from Red River, Donald A. Smith despaired of Archibald's impotence with respect to the situation: "the Commandant of the Volunteer Militia having declined to give leave of absence to a medical officer who volunteered for the duty, while the only civilian in the settlement who was willing to undertake the task demanded remuneration so exorbitant ... that his offer could not be

relieve the stricken country. Unfortunately for those infected or still at risk, his cargo was not properly prepared for the rigours of an early winter trip across the plains. According to his biographer, "[t]hey had been carelessly packed in uninsulated wooden crates; jars were broken, liquids frozen. Butler could do little more as a precaution against future epidemics than leave his pamphlets of printed instructions with the persons least likely to burn them."¹⁰² At Carlton, Butler salvaged what medicine he could, enough according to the young officer, "to poison a very large extent of the territory."¹⁰³ Because of the damage to his medication, the bulk of Butler's assistance to the stricken communities on the plains was the distribution of a few patent medicines and a leaflet entitled "The Small-pox in Three Stages" described by the young officer as a "lively bit of literature."¹⁰⁴

entertained." HBCA Search File: Smallpox Epidemic, 1870, Extract 12. D.A. Smith to G.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 19 October 1870. The medical contingent attached to the Canadian force was comprised of at least eight men, at least four of whom had the rank of surgeon or assistant surgeon. See R.M. Gorsline, "The Medical Services of the Red River Expeditions, 1870-71," *Medical Services Journal, Canada* 23 (1967), 169. On the refusal of the Commandant of the Militia to release Dr. McDonald see also Canada, *Sessional Papers 1871*, No. 20, Adams Archibald, Fort Garry, 13 October 1870, 58-59; and Archibald to Joseph Howe, Fort Garry, 24 October 1870, 66-67.

¹⁰² McCourt, *Remembering Butler*, 66. See also, *The Great Lone Land*, 238-239.

¹⁰³ Butler described his salvaged medication as a "small leather medicine-chest in which the glass stoppered bottles had kept intact." *The Great Lone Land*, 239.

¹⁰⁴ *The Great Lone Land*, 208. Directives for the treatment of the disease were written by Dr. A Codd of the 1st Ontario Rifles, see Canada, *Sessional Papers 1871*, No. 20, 67-68 (see Figure 3).

SMALL-POX:

Its description and appropriate treatment.

FIRST STAGE.

This stage is characterized by chills, which, after a time, are followed by feverishness—viz.: heated skin, quick and generally full pulse—white-coated tongue, and often vomiting; and in this stage of this particular disease there is generally a severe pain in the back. Sometimes there is a severe pain in the head, and delirium; and, in children, convulsions are of common occurrence.

Treatment.—The treatment of this stage is simple. A purgative may first be given, of (say) two compound colocynth pills; or, six (6) grains of calomel and twenty (20) grains of jalap. A mixture, then, of spirits of nitre and ether, four (4) drachms; spirits of camphor, one (1) drachm; and eight (8) ounces of cold water. Of this give a table spoonful every three or four hours. The peculiar eruption generally begins to show itself about the third day of the fever.

SECOND STAGE.

The appearance of the eruption denotes the second stage. It first appears on the face and neck; then the arms and body, and lastly on the extremities. In slight cases, only a few pustules may be found on the body or legs. When the pustules are distinct and separate from each other, it is called simple small-pox; but when they run into one another, and are very numerous, it is called confluent small-pox. These pustules grow larger and larger, and become fully formed about the seventh or eighth day.

Treatment.—During this stage, continue the mixture as a general rule, but don't push, unless it is absolutely necessary; and, even then, use something mild, as castor oil. If the patient be very weak, give some beef-tea, and, if delirious, a little wine may be necessary. An opiate at bedtime is often of great benefit in this stage, if there is much restlessness during the night;—for this, give ten (10) grains of pulverized ipecacoea (Dover's powder). The pustules remain thus for often three or four days, and then begin to dry and fall off.

THIRD STAGE.

The drying up and falling away of the pustules denotes the third stage.

Treatment.—During the early part of this stage, considerable judgment has to be exercised. Support the system with broth or beef-tea, and perhaps a little wine; but, be careful; as, in a day or two what is termed the

SECONDARY FEVER

appears. This takes place, as a rule, about the eleventh day of the disease, and the eighth or ninth of the eruption. Stop all cooling mixtures now, and continue beef-tea, and wine, if necessary. Keep the bowels rather open, but use the cathart, rather than purgatives by the mouth. For an enema, use one quart of warm castor-oil, and one ounce of castor-oil. If there be much irritation of the skin, and redness, give five grains of Dover's powder every four or five hours; repeat, according to the circumstances of the case.

During the period of the swelling of the face and irritation of the skin, a liniment composed of equal parts of olive-oil and lime-water may be used with a feather.

A. Conn, M.D.,

1st Ontario Rifles.

Fig. 3. Directions for the Treatment of Smallpox. Source: Canada, *Sessional Papers* 1871, No. 20, 67-68.

Travel to the interior from Winnipeg was also banned. E.R. Young reported, "[n]ot a single cart or traveller was permitted to go on the trail. This meant a good deal of suffering and many privations for the isolated Missionaries and traders..."¹⁰⁵ The supply of local food stocks, usually procured by the infected Métis, also stopped during the epidemic.¹⁰⁶ The Chief Factor at Edmonton reported in October that, with no trade and no provisions, "[t]he prospect of the coming winter is dark in the extreme...our sole dependence will be on our Fisheries and Crops."¹⁰⁷ Although the harvest proved bountiful, the fishery was reduced by two thirds, the result of the forty deaths at Ste. Anne and bad weather,¹⁰⁸ "entail[ed] an amount of starvation to many."¹⁰⁹ The famine was such that George McDougall wrote from Victoria that "multitudes who recovered

¹⁰⁵Young, *By Canoe and Dog-Train*, 200.

¹⁰⁶HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 4. Edmonton House Journal, 6 October 1870. The situation among the Métis was so desperate that the Company was compelled to assist its main provisioners with food.

¹⁰⁷Christie commented that the outbreak at Ste. Anne, "where we make our Fisheries, and if our Fishermen are attacked at present (the commencement of our Fisheries) our Fisheries will be lost and our case a hopeless one." He described the situation among the Indians "who blame the Whites for the distemper, and they are too well disposed-they are setting fire to the Plains every where, whether accidentally or not, is hard to say, but I doubt it is intentional to drive off the buffalo. We dread a famine among the plains Indians in consequence, who will fall back on us and the Settlements, and eat us up and kill our cattle." HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 10. Christie to W.G. Smith, Edmonton House, 11 October 1870.

¹⁰⁸The diminished fishery at Ste. Anne was augmented by the establishment of one at Pigeon Lake and was reported to have been "doing very well." HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 20. W.J. Christie to the Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Northern Department, Edmonton House, 5 January 1871.

¹⁰⁹W.J. Christie, "Smallpox Report," in *The Manitoban*, 6 September 1871, in "Smallpox: The Epidemic of 1869-70," 15.

from the disease have perished from destitution.”¹¹⁰ The situation was no better on the eastern plains. Isaac Cowie reported on the famine in his district during the summer and fall of 1871.¹¹¹ At Fort à La Corne, near the forks of the Saskatchewan, the epidemic led to the failure of the provision trade, “a great loss, which we will feel all throughout the (Cumberland) District.”¹¹² It was in this chaotic atmosphere of disease and famine that the ill-fated attack on the Blackfoot at Belly River took place.¹¹³

In the waning days of 1870, the authorities in Winnipeg were finally able to secure the services of a medical doctor to supplement Lieutenant Butler’s hobbled effort on the plains. Captain McDonald of the Ontario Volunteers stationed at Fort Garry, who “had great experience in the treatment of Small pox” was reported to have arrived at Edmonton on the 29th of December.¹¹⁴ Dr. McDonald, however, did not live

¹¹⁰George McDougall, 21 October 1870, in *George Millward McDougall: The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 165.

¹¹¹Even the HBC boatmen fell ill to the “summer complaint” as a result of their poor nutrition. Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 425.

¹¹²For fear of contagion to the “Thickwood” Indians, the trader at La Corne, Mr. Turner, was ordered not to trade with the plains Indians. HBCA Search File: “Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870,” Extract 19. Horace Boulanger, Clerk in Charge of Cumberland House to the Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Cumberland House, 5 January 1870.

¹¹³John Milloy characterized the assault as a “nation-wide undertaking” when “the Cree were strong enough to turn to thoughts of war.” The warriors, who numbered between six and eight hundred, included followers of Piapot, Big Bear, Little Mountain and Little Pine. *The Plains Cree*, 116. The severity of the famine on the northern plains undoubtedly contributed to a level of desperation among the Cree that Milloy’s account did not acknowledge.

¹¹⁴McDonald had orders to spend the winter “for the benefit of the community in general.” HBCA Search File: “Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870,” Extract 20. W.J. Christie to the Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Northern Department, Edmonton House, 5 January 1871. McDonald was expected to arrived at Edmonton between the 1st and the 10th of December. D.A. Smith to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 28 December 1870.

up to the expectations of those who had lobbied for his services. On January 22, 1871, Donald A. Smith noted:

Doctor McDonald has not yet reached Edmonton up to the date of our latest advances. It appears that the Doctor had in his possession a rather large quantity of wine & spirits of which he has made a most injudicious use...¹¹⁵

Two weeks later, Donald Smith wrote to William Traill, the clerk who had performed so admirably during the epidemic, requesting information on a report from Lawrence Clarke "that Doctor McDonald's conduct while at Carlton was most reprehensible..."¹¹⁶

As the doctor appointed by the Dominion drank his way across the plains¹¹⁷ and as Butler distributed his pamphlet, the HBC physician, Dr. McKay, made an extensive and successful vaccination tour down from the Mackenzie, through parts of the Athabasca, English River and Saskatchewan Districts.¹¹⁸ The Mackenzie watershed was further protected by a vaccination campaign undertaken by the Catholics Petitot and Sequin which conferred immunity on seventeen hundred people.¹¹⁹ Isaac Cowie's

¹¹⁵HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 21. D.A. Smith to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 22 January 1871.

¹¹⁶HBCA Search File: "Battleford," D.A. Smith to Traill, Fort Garry, 6 February 1871.

¹¹⁷To be fair, McDonald performed at least some medical services. George McDougall noted on the physician's return to the east in the spring of 1871, that "[t]here have been few cases of small-pox since the doctor's arrival." *George Millward McDougall: The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 167-168.

¹¹⁸SAB, Campbell Innes Papers, A-113, Vol. 5, Archdeacon MacKay Papers, Diary 1870-1884. Entry of 8 February 1871.

¹¹⁹McCarthy, *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921*, 126 fn. 39. The vaccinations in the far north may have been related to an isolated outbreak of "Smallpox or something similar" which caused the deaths of five people at Fort McPherson on the Peel River. *Ibid.*, 199. By 1870, all of the missionaries operating in the far north were supplying, or attempting to secure, medicines for their charges. CMS, Microfilm, Reel A-80 Rev. Day to the Secretaries, Ft. Simpson, November 1870. Another factor contributing to insulation of

memoir noted the presence of a French physician from Red River, a Dr. Covenant, in his territory.¹²⁰ According to Cowie, Covenant's motives were less than altruistic:

[F]ondly anticipating an extensive and profitable practice amongst a people whom he hoped would be suffering from the epidemic of smallpox... Doctor Covenant cynically professed great indignation at me for having disappointed him of his practice, by introducing vaccination among our Indians.¹²¹

Although Covenant's grand scheme for the epidemic was foiled by the trader's initiative, he was reported to have undertaken vaccinations among the Métis of the South Saskatchewan.¹²²

The most significant response of the authorities to the crisis was the prohibition of fur exports from the northwest. Even furs from the far north were quarantined as they passed through the infected depot at Carlton on their way to Red River.¹²³ Orders were sent to traders on the plains "to trade nothing" which might infect the isolated

the Mackenzie watershed from disease was the terrible condition of Portage la Loche. Without improvement or replacement William Hardisty wrote that it is "hopeless to attempt to carry on the business much longer unless some better & cheaper road be discovered for bringing in our supplies..." William Hardisty to Wm. McMurray, Fort Chipewyan, 12 January 1870, in Wilson, "Private Letters from the Fur Trade," 45.

¹²⁰Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 418.

¹²¹Cowie then noted "[b]ut he forgave me sufficiently to become a rather frequent visitor..." Ibid.

¹²²Smiley, "'The Most Good to the Indians': The Reverend James Nisbet and the Prince Albert Mission," 43, fn.36. Despite Covenant's vaccinations, the disease appears to have spread to the Métis near the forks. The Fort à la Corne Journal reported that on Christmas Eve, 1870, two of Batoche's sons were ill with the disease. HBCA Search File: "Prince Albert," Fort à la Corne Journal, 24 December 1870, 7.

¹²³Smith noted that American authorities also prohibited the entry of HBC furs from infected areas. HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 9. D.A. Smith to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 10 October 1870.

populations to the north.¹²⁴ At Edmonton, W.J. Christie reported to the officers of the Northern Department that, "I need hardly say that there will be no Returns from the Saskatchewan this Year, and it has yet to be decided whether it would be politic (emphasis Christie's) to send out the few furs we have."¹²⁵

The question of what to do with pelts gathered from infected areas, often from destitute producers, remained until the spring of 1871.¹²⁶ On April 24th, the Board of Health convened at Edmonton House and passed a resolution prohibiting the export of furs from the Saskatchewan District "for the current season."¹²⁷ In his report, Christie commented that the enforcement of the quarantine was one of the most difficult responsibilities of the Board.¹²⁸ Although the Chief Factor was referring to the control of native movement during the epidemic, Company servants worked to get their furs to Red River, thus undermining the quarantine. An account of the Company breaking the quarantine was presented by Isaac Cowie who acknowledged his complicity in the matter. On arriving at Portage La Prairie with a load of furs from Fort Ellice, he recounted:

By that time the fear of the civil war in Red River had been replaced by the fear

¹²⁴HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 19. Horace Belanger to the Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Northern Department, Cumberland House, 5 January 1871.

¹²⁵HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 20. Christie to the Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Northern Department, Edmonton, 5 January 1871.

¹²⁶George McDougall to Dr. Wood, Victoria Mission, 1 March 1871, in George Millward McDougall: *The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 168.

¹²⁷For a full account of the resolutions, see John Bunn, "Minutes of a Meeting of the Saskatchewan District Board of Health," in *The Manitoban*, 16 September 1871, in "Smallpox: The Epidemic of 1869-70," 18-19.

¹²⁸Chief Factor W.J. Christie, "Smallpox Report," *Ibid.*, 17.

of the invasion of Manitoba by smallpox from the Saskatchewan. A Board of Health had been formed to enforce a quarantine on all corners from the west, and here was the Hudson's Bay Company, in defiance of the law, trying to evade it by sneaking down the Assiniboine with buffalo robes which must (emphasis Cowie's) have come from the infected district.¹²⁹

When his furs were confiscated and placed in quarantine by a provincial constable, the trader travelled to Winnipeg to "clear the foul aspersions against our cargo."¹³⁰ On his way up the Assiniboine to gather affidavits from Fort Ellice to support his claim, Cowie was told that the confiscated furs has almost produced a riot as, "people were so alarmed that they had been hardly restrained from burning the building in which the robes were stored."¹³¹ While it appears that Cowie's cargo eventually passed though the quarantine without further mishap, Butler's report on the epidemic noted that the placement of the cordon at Rat Creek near Portage La Prairie, was too close to the populated part of the country to be truly effective.¹³²

Butler submitted his report in March 1871, when the fear of the spread of the epidemic to Manitoba was still present. He stressed:

It must not be forgotten that with the disappearance of the snow from the plains a quantity of infected matter-clothing, robes, and portions of skeletons-will again become exposed to the atmosphere, and also that the skins of wolves, &c., collected during the present winter will be very liable to contain infection of the most virulent description.¹³³

He recommended the establishment of a new quarantine station at Fort Ellice, the only

¹²⁹Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 428.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 428-429.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 430.

¹³²At the start of his trip, Butler described the grave of the first victim of the plague he encountered at Rat Creek, the boundary of Manitoba. *The Great Lone Land*, 205.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 373.

settlement between Carlton and Portage.¹³⁴ He advocated the compulsory vaccination of the half-breed population who would otherwise, "be slow to avail themselves to it."¹³⁵

Butler's fears for the renewal of the epidemic with the coming of spring did not materialize. By June 1871 the disease was reported to have "entirely disappeared" from the Saskatchewan.¹³⁶ A month later, the pemmican trade was back on track, as "several hundred bags of Pemican having already been brought into Carlton."¹³⁷ In August, the flow of buffalo robes to Montreal via St. Paul resumed.¹³⁸

What remained among plains communities was the deep resentment toward Europeans for the introduction of disease and for the general state of turmoil that had come in the wake of the transfer of Rupert's Land to Canadian control. According to John McDougall, there was even talk among the Indians of "a war of extermination among the whites. They laid the blame of all their calamity upon these."¹³⁹ While there was no race war, authorities recognized the "bitter feeling of Jealousy on the part of the Indians & Halfbreeds, that the Companys Servants in the Forts escaped as they did."¹⁴⁰ At the general court of the HBC in London, Sir Stafford Northcote reported on

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 26. J.H. McTavish to W. Armit, Fort Garry, 14 June 1871.

¹³⁷Ibid., Extract 27. J.H. McTavish to W. Armit, Fort Garry, 29 July 1871. In September, Norway House received word of "abundance of buffalo all over the Saskatchewan." Ibid. Extract 29. Norway House Journal, 2 September 1871.

¹³⁸Ibid., Extract 28. J.H. McTavish to W. Armit, Fort Garry, 7 August 1871.

¹³⁹George Millward McDougall: *The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 172.

¹⁴⁰HBCA Search File: "Smallpox Epidemic, 1869-1870," Extract 20. W.J. Christie to the Chief Factors and Chief Traders, Northern Department, Edmonton, 5

the poor returns for the year, the result of the epidemic but also:

[F]or the impression that had got amongst the Indians was that the smallpox had been communicated to them by officers of the company, and when they found out that it was committing great ravages they were in a state of excitement, which at one time caused serious uneasiness and alarm lest they should take revenge for their sufferings by attacking our posts.¹⁴¹

Added to the resentment of the aboriginal population was a growing anxiety over the future of their land under Canadian sovereignty. Even before the nominal transfer of Rupert's Land in 1869, George McDougall petitioned Dominion authorities on behalf of the Indians of the western plains for the prompt completion of a Treaty to formalize relations between the Crown and the inhabitants of the west.¹⁴² Although the crisis triggered by the epidemic temporarily overshadowed the longer term question of treaties, the Butler report stressed the need for a judicious settlement of the issue.¹⁴³ In January 1871, a petition was circulated among the Indians requesting government

January 1871.

¹⁴¹Ibid., Extract 30. "Report of the General Court of the HBC," 21 November 1871. The failure of the trade after the epidemic was the harbinger of a general economic downturn in the west which lasted until 1877. Gerald Friesen, "Imports and Exports in the Manitoba Economy 1870-1890," *Manitoba History* 16 (1988), 34.

¹⁴²The Missionary cautioned, "[l]et it not be forgotten that in the upper Saskatchewan there are at least 20,000 natives who by a wise and just policy can be made the friends of the Government. Let this once be accomplished and the country will speedily be settled... but the best friends of the country must discourage immigration until the Indians are treated with." The Importance of an Immediate Settlement with the Plain Indians." *George Millward McDougall: The Pioneer, Patriot and Missionary*, 150-152.

¹⁴³Butler recommended the establishment of civil authority, the creation of a police force, the negotiation for peace among the warring Indian nations and the "extinguishment of the Indian title, within certain limits." "General Report," in *The Great Lone Land* 380-386.

action to resolve the uncertainty in the west.¹⁴⁴ The Cree Chief, Sweet Grass, who had recently converted to Catholicism, according to one account, in gratitude for the assistance rendered by the Missionaries during the epidemic,¹⁴⁵ requested a treaty in April of 1871.¹⁴⁶ (see epigram) Through William Christie, Sweet Grass emphasized Cree ownership of the territory, "it is our property and no one has the right to sell them (their lands)."¹⁴⁷ Christie's report on the meeting with Sweet Grass and the other Cree Chiefs was unambiguous:

The object of their visit was to ascertain whether their lands had been sold or not, and what was the intention of the Canadian Government in relation to them. The referred to the epidemic that had raged throughout the past summer, and the subsequent starvation, the poverty of their country, the visible diminution of the buffalo, their sole support, ending requesting certain presents at once (emphasis Christie's), and that I should lay their case before Her Majesty's representative at Fort Garry.¹⁴⁸

A common theme of recent writing regarding the early Treaty-making process is the adamance of First Nations' claim to the ownership of the territory that they occupied.¹⁴⁹ Even before the negotiation of the first of the Treaties in the west, Indian

¹⁴⁴Among the signatories was Peter Erasmus. *Buffalo Days and Nights*, 215, fn.3.

¹⁴⁵MacGregor, *Father Lacombe*, 210.

¹⁴⁶The request by Sweet Grass for a Treaty was dated 13 April 1871. It was forwarded by W.J. Christie to Archibald. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 169-171.

¹⁴⁷"Message from the Cree Chiefs of the Plains, Saskatchewan to His Excellency Governor Archibald, Edmonton, 13 April 1871," in *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁴⁸Christie then stated to Archibald that if he had not complied with the demands of the Indians in forwarding their request, "I have no doubt that they would have proceeded to acts of violence, and at once commenced, there would have been the beginning of an Indian war, which is difficult to say when it would have ended.." Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 170.

¹⁴⁹J. Friesen, "Magnificent Gifts: The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of the Northwest 1869-76," 43, 46. See also Frank Tough, "As *Their Natural Resources Fail*":

groups demanded recognition of their ownership of the land. As the smallpox raged across the western plains in September 1870, Archibald reported to his superior regarding "a large body of Indians (Saulteaux) who are assembled in the neighbourhood of the mouth of Red River":

Henry Prince, the Chief, has written to press an early fulfilment of the promises. I learn from the people of that neighbourhood that until the interview is over the Indians will not disperse, and that it would be better at once to see them... The Indians in this neighbourhood are in a state of considerable excitement. They are very much demoralized by the transactions of the last few months. They do not seem to see why they should not have some share of the of the property which they know to be in the possession of people who are not its owners. It will be necessary to make arrangements with these Tribes to put their relations with us on a satisfactory footing...¹⁵⁰

The need for treaties further west was recognized by Dominion officials. Wemyss Simpson, the Indian Commissioner, on the advice of Christie, wrote to Joseph Howe on this issue on November 3rd, 1871. He stated that the negotiation of, or at least the promise of, a treaty in the Saskatchewan was "essential to the peace, if not the actual retention of the country."¹⁵¹ The native Missionary, James Settee, echoed the anxiety of his charges to his superior in London:

The Indian family in general were always under the impression that the

Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930, 79-81, and Tough, "Aboriginal Rights Versus the Deed of Surrender: The Legal Rights of Native Peoples and Canada's Acquisition of the Hudson's Bay Company Territory," 230.

¹⁵⁰Peter Naylor, "Index to Aboriginal Issues Found in the Records of the North West Mounted Police RG 18, National Archives of Canada" (Saskatoon: Office of the Treaty Commissioner 1994, typewritten) Extract 593. Archibald to the Secretary of State (Joseph Howe), 10 September 1870, 218. A week later, Archibald noted that he promised to meet with them in the spring "and conclude a Treaty with them of some kind." Ibid., Extract 594, 219. For a discussion of the conditions leading to the negotiation of Treaty 1, see D.J. Hall, "'A Serene Atmosphere'? Treaty 1 Revisited," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 4 (1987): 321-358.

¹⁵¹Simpson to the Secretary of State for the Provinces, 3 November 1871, in Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 168.

foreigners were usurpers and destroyers of their race and country that this country belonged to them exclusively and that they had sole claim to the rocks, the ground the timber, the fish and its waters, that all these things were created for them only: with these feelings they opposed every stranger and everybody that did not belong to their tribe...¹⁵²

The concern among aboriginal communities was justified. By the spring of 1871, provincial authorities in Manitoba were overwhelmed by the flood of Ontario immigrants. According to Allen Ronaghan, [a]n embarrassed provincial government found itself without immigrant sheds, without a Commissioner of Lands and with no surrendered lands for the emigrants to settle on."¹⁵³ The arrival of immigrants precipitated a crisis in the resolution of the Treaty question in Manitoba and illustrated the authorities' approach to the issue. According to Frank Tough, the government was only willing to negotiate Treaties according to its own timetable based on external and often short-term needs rather than out of concern for the long-term well-being of the Indians.¹⁵⁴

With no immediate development agenda pressing the need for a Treaty on the western plains, Dominion authorities did not act. Joseph Howe, the Secretary of State for the Provinces told Archibald in March, 1872 that, "when the time comes they will be fairly dealt with. If the discovery of gold turns out to be a fact, some person of business

¹⁵²CMS, Microfilm, reel A-80, James Settee to Rev. Fenn, Scanterbury, 24 November 1870, 254.

¹⁵³Allen Ronaghan, "Charles Mair and the North-West Emigration Aid Society," *Manitoba History* 14 (1987), 14. The author noted that the arrival of so many Ontarians forced the hand of the Province and that only the strong confidence of the Métis in Archibald prevented a massacre of immigrants from taking place.

¹⁵⁴Frank Tough, "Economic Aspects of Aboriginal Title in Northern Manitoba: Treaty 5 Adhesions and Métis Scrip," *Manitoba History* 15 (1988), 7. Tough's echoed J.L. Taylor's view of the shortsightedness of Dominion policy regarding the completion of Treaties. "Two Views on the Meaning of Treaties Six and Seven," in *The Spirit of the Alberta Indian Treaties*, ed. Richard Price (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy and Indian Association of Alberta, 1980), 15-16.

habit and cool judgement should be sent to the spot..."¹⁵⁵ In June, 1872, the Prime Minister was informed of increasing tensions on the plains resulting from government inaction. Gilbert McMicken wrote:

The Crees (Bush Crees, Stonies and Plain Crees) are in expectation of a Treaty being made with them this season and in their view are meeting for talks in this subject. They begin to show manifestations of great jealousy at the settlement of Whites taking up their land and utter threatenings if a Treaty is not soon made with them. The Bush Crees and Stonies are peaceably disposed generally but the Plain Crees are wild and could easily be stured up into hostility. They say too much of their lands are being taken up and they are getting nothing for them and if they permit this... they will soon loose all, and they must make a stand against it... They have been told by some that there is no probability of a treaty this year. The principal Chief of the Plains Crees, "Sweet Grass" was here a day or two ago-he says he "does not like it & he knows his people "will not like it" and speaks quietly but very harshly-The Whites are really apprehensive of a massacre if no treaty is made."¹⁵⁶

The increasingly ominous threat of European immigration was not the only issue contributing to the Indian demands for Treaties. The early 1870s saw significant changes to the fur trade economy which for decades had been dominated by the HBC. In 1872 a reorganization of the Company trade eliminated all credit to Indian suppliers in order to cut costs.¹⁵⁷ The withdrawal of credit signalled a fundamental shift in the relationships between the HBC and aboriginal producers, described in a recent study

¹⁵⁵Naylor, *Index to Aboriginal Issues Found in the Records of the North West Mounted Police RG 18, National Archives of Canada*, Extract 590. Adams Archibald to Joseph Howe, Fort Garry, 6 March 1872, 215. By the spring of 1871, gold was expected to be found on the eastern slope of the Rockies "any day." W.J. Christie, Edmonton House, 13 April 1871, in Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 170.

¹⁵⁶NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, Microfilm, reel C-1670, 110702, McMicken to Macdonald, Winnipeg, 22 June 1872.

¹⁵⁷The order imposed from London was strongly opposed to traders such as Cowie who recognized the value of credit in maintaining business allegiances. Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 441, 445; and Frank Tough, "Indian Economic Behaviour, Exchange and Profits in Northern Manitoba during the Decline of Monopoly, 1870-1930," *Journal of Historical Geography* 16 (1990), 390.

as including a "social safety net."¹⁵⁸ The introduction of steam-powered travel in Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan River severely curtailed wage employment options for fur procurers who could not subsist from trapping alone.¹⁵⁹ On the plains, the scarcity of bison and the vagaries of weather contributed to the hardship in the winter of 1872-73. In January, rain made travel impossible, killing many from a combination of hunger and sickness.¹⁶⁰

The end of the old economy was underscored in the summer of 1872, when the transcontinental railway expedition under the command of Sanford Fleming arrived in the west.¹⁶¹ In addition to signalling what has been called the "dawning of a new

¹⁵⁸For two centuries, the social safety net provided by the Company included the "practice of liberal credit to the able-bodied and aid to the elderly, sick, and destitute." Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 139, 146.

¹⁵⁹For a discussion of cuts to the fur trade and the emerging demand for Treaty, see Tough, "Economic Aspects of Aboriginal Title in Northern Manitoba: Treaty 5 Adhesions and Métis Scrip," 4. On the connection between the development of steam transportation and the need for Treaty 5, see Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 123-129. On the development of steam-powered vessels in the interior, see Bruce Peel, *Steamboats on the Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1972). With the improvement in steam navigation the long-used route to York Factory was dropped in favour of a rail route through St. Paul. G. Friesen, "Imports and Exports in the Manitoba Economy 1870-1890," 37. In his memoir, The Anglican missionary, John Hines, who arrived in the west in 1874, noted that his charges had suffered a decline in their standard of living since the arrival of steam-powered vessels on the Saskatchewan. John Hines, *The Red Indians of the Plains: Thirty Years Missionary Experience in the Saskatchewan* (London: Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, 1915), 230.

¹⁶⁰NAC, Robert Bell Papers, MG 29, A 6, Hudson's Bay Company, Northern Department, "Journal of a Voyage from Fort Garry to Fort Simpson, Mackenzie River, by Land and Water, and of its Return by Dog Train to Carlton Performed on a Tour of Inspection of Posts from 22nd August, 1872, to 28th January, 1873 by Hon. William Joseph Christie, Inspecting Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company," Entry for 26 January 1873.

¹⁶¹For an account of the expedition, see George M. Grant, *Ocean to Ocean: Sanford Fleming's Expedition through Canada in 1872* (Toronto: Coles Publishing Company, 1973).

industrial economy"¹⁶² on the plains, the chronicler of the journey, George M. Grant, articulated what became a common view of the fate of aboriginal communities in the west, "[i]t may be said that, do what we like, the Indians as a race, must eventually die out. It is not unlikely. Almost all of the Indians of the North-west are scrofulous."¹⁶³ The main cause of the Indian's decline, according to Grant, was not only "scrofula and epidemics" but also the invasion of southern traders whose chief commodity was "rum in name, but in reality a compound of tobacco, vitriol, bluestone and water."¹⁶⁴ The author's fatalistic assertions regarding the future of the plains Indians were based on the erosion of Blackfoot society at the hands of the Montana traders. Grant's gruesome prediction may well have come true were it not for the arrival of the North West Mounted Police in the southwest in the fall of 1874.¹⁶⁵

While tension mounted on the plains resulting from the absence of Treaties and the looming flood of immigrants, some authorities attempted to downplay the situation. McMicken wrote to the Prime Minister in April 1873 remarking that, "[t]here has been a gross exaggeration in regard to Indian trouble. [I] am perfectly satisfied if a Treaty is

¹⁶²Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 130.

¹⁶³Grant, *Ocean to Ocean: Sandford Fleming's Expedition through Canada in 1872*, 96. The author later stated, "with the exception of the few scattered round each of the Company's posts, who as a rule are invalids or idlers, we had not seen an Indian since leaving the Assiniboine, except the small camp near Moose Creek and the Crees at Victoria." *Ibid.*, 190. During the early 1870s, scrofula was still rare among the Indians.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁶⁵Several passages in the text refer to the Indians' wanting a Treaty. *Ibid.*, 97-99, 133. According to John Webster Grant, George M. Grant thought that the Indians' desire for Treaties was misplaced and "that in agreeing to them the Indians were signing their own death warrants." John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 155.

made with the Crees this summer and small holdings of lands granted the Sioux there will be no difficulty."¹⁶⁶ Sanford Fleming, the head of the railway expedition, dismissed the concerns of Mennonite leaders regarding the safety of the plains.¹⁶⁷

The western Indians received no Treaty and hostilities grew. In October 1873, Robert Bell of the Geological Survey of Canada reported to Alexander Morris, who had succeeded Archibald as Lieutenant Governor the previous December, that the Indians about the South Saskatchewan were:

[F]ull of anxiety & uneasiness respecting the intentions of the "English" and Canadians towards them. In their interviews with me they talked of nothing else... On several occasions these Indians threaten to steal our horses and outfit and even to kill us all and finally ordered us to turn back-saying at the same time that we might thank God if we got home safely.¹⁶⁸

Bell also noted that mistrust of the "English" was so high among the Indians of the area that they believed the massacre that had occurred at the Cypress Hills a few months earlier "was committed by people belonging to the English side" and that the Assiniboines "were bent on revenging it upon any English people" who were in the

¹⁶⁶NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, Microfilm, reel C-1670, 110809. McMicken to Macdonald, Fort Garry, 18 April 1873. The "Wood Mountain Sioux" contacted the Chief Trader at Fort Ellice, William McKay in June 1872 regarding a proposed trip to Red River to secure a reserve. Mark Diedrich, *The Odyssey of Chief Standing Buffalo and the Northern Sisseton Sioux* (Minneapolis: Coyote Books, 1988), 92.

¹⁶⁷According to Paul Sharp, Fleming was reported to have responded to the question of safety by "claiming that the only weapon he had carried was a small pocketknife with a blade at one end and a corkscrew at the other. He only regret, he said, was that he had use only one end of this insignificant weapon, and that not often enough!" *Whoop Up Country*, 79.

¹⁶⁸Bell noted that, on one occasion, a Native Church of England Missionary saved his life during a confrontation with hostile Indians west of Qu'Appelle. NAC, Robert Bell Papers, MG 29, B 15, vol.27, f.103, "Confidential Report to Alexander Morris from Robert Bell, Fort Garry," 14 October 1873.

country.¹⁶⁹ East of Qu'Appelle, the Saulteaux at Fort Ellice petitioned the Lieutenant Governor to halt the survey being conducted by A.H. Whitcher until their territorial claims were dealt with.¹⁷⁰ Morris then requested that the government reconsider their position not to enter into a Treaty in order to facilitate the entry of strangers into the country.¹⁷¹ The situation was diffused in the summer of 1874 with the arrival of the Police and the conclusion of the Qu'Appelle Treaty in September.¹⁷² Even at the ceremony, Dominion officials were lambasted for allowing surveys without the surrender of aboriginal title.¹⁷³ Pasqua articulated the frustration of the Indians succinctly. Pointing to the HBC's Mr. McDonald, the Chief was reported to have said, "You told me you had sold the land for so much money- £300,000. We want that

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., Enclosure No. 2. The land claimed by the petitioning Saulteaux stretched from Shoal Lake westward to ten miles beyond Fort Ellice and according to the claimants they "cannot therefore understand why this land should be surveyed." Signatories to the document included Wah-wa-shi-cabon, Kicak-ka-zick (Day Star), Kanniskaquinin (George Gordon) and Sha-puy-witrink. 5 November 1873. For a discussion of the Saulteaux claim, see Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*, 55.

¹⁷¹NAC, Robert Bell Papers, MG 29, B 15, vol. 27, f.103, Alexander Morris to the Minister of the Interior, Fort Garry, 23 October 1873.

¹⁷²During the negotiations, the Indians repeated their complaint that surveys had been made without their consent. The Saulteaux Chief, Côté, refused to sign and another, The Gambler, stated that the HBC had no right to sell the land to Canada. Complin, "Calling Valley of the Crees and the Buffalo," 23; Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 56. For a discussion of the antagonisms surrounding the negotiations of Treaty 4. See Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 107-111.

¹⁷³The acrimony of the Indians gathered at Qu'Appelle was also demonstrated by their refusal to conduct the pipe ceremony and other rituals that had marked the earlier negotiations. According to Ray, Miller, and Tough, "Morris was not slow to notice the absence of ceremony and what the omission signified." *Bounty and Benevolence*, 156.

money.”¹⁷⁴

Hunger also played a role in the completion of Treaty 4, an event witnessed by three thousand Indians who converged at Fort Qu'Appelle in September of 1874.¹⁷⁵ Joseph Reader, the CMS missionary who had arrived in the Touchwood Hills a year earlier, reported that one of his dogs had been eaten by starving Indians.¹⁷⁶ To Reader, the hunger that compelled the Saulteaux to eat their horses and his own pet compelled the Indians to learn “a lesson not easily forgotten”:

One thing is certain & that is if they do not (emphasis Reader's) cultivate the land, they will become extinct as a people, for while they are hunting on the plain & trading with the Company their numbers are fast decreasing. But I hope that they may be preserved as they are a noble race.¹⁷⁷

Dominion officials began to advocate the introduction of agriculture as “the best means to break them of their roving habits, to elevate and assure their position...”¹⁷⁸ The need for a new economic strategy among the Saulteaux was underlined by Reader's report on George Gordon's band in January 1875:

I learnt that they had nothing for their supper, and that they could often only catch sufficient fish for their breakfast. Gave them some of my pemmican and

¹⁷⁴Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 106.

¹⁷⁵Abel Watetch, *Payepot and His People*, 16. Some had come as far as four hundred miles for the ceremony. Nan Shipley, “Printing Press at Oonikup,” *The Beaver* 290 (1960), 49.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 48. In addition to simple hunger, the plains Indians were reported to be “greatly demoralized.” Added to the increasing use of alcohol and the “debauchery” which came from it, there was a problem emerging from the mixture of painkillers, tea “& anything else that will make the mixture ‘strong’.” CMS, Microfilm, reel A-81, 275. J.A. Mackay to the Secretaries, Stanley, 20 August 1873.

¹⁷⁷CMS, Microfilm, reel A-80, 221. Joseph Reader to Rev. Fenn, Touchwood Hills, 29 July 1874.

¹⁷⁸D. Aidan McQuillan, “Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1885,” *The Geographical Review* 70 (1980), 389, fn.29.

tea. They, in fact, nearly the whole band, are wretchedly poor. Their houses are miserable huts. Some of them are so low that, if one attempts to stand erect, you get a blow on the head. It is no wonder that, living in such houses, many of them are weak and sickly in the chest. Such clothing (sent by Mrs. Smith, Hampstead) is a great help to us, for the Indians are the poorest of the poor.¹⁷⁹

Even communities that had already begun the conversion to agriculture underwent severe hardship at this time. In Manitoba, the St. Peter's Band, which had two thousand acres under cultivation,¹⁸⁰ suffered a crop failure in the summer of 1875. Compounding the situation was a decline in the fall fishery which placed all of the Indians in the area covered by Treaty 1 in jeopardy. According to J.A.N. Provencher, "only the assistance of the Government prevented great sufferings at St. Peter's, the Portage and Roseau River."¹⁸¹ The shortage of food among the Saulteaux contributed to the severity of a measles outbreak that "embraced the whole population" at Fort Alexander in 1875.¹⁸² The disease, which initially affected the children and then spread to "a greater number than usual of adult Indians" confounded both the Indian

¹⁷⁹CMS, Microfilm, reel A-81, 442, Rev. J. Reader, "Report of Touchwood Hills Mission," 20 January 1875. Gordon's people may have been suffering from a whooping cough epidemic which was responsible for deaths from Grand Rapids to the Athabasca. Measles was also prevalent in Manitoba. At St. Andrews, a dozen funerals took place during January and February 1875. CMS, Microfilm, reel A-81. Abraham Crowley to the Rev. H. Wright, Manitoba, 24 February 1875. Further west, at St. Albert, "a widespread occurrence of whooping cough, and erysipelas" was reported in 1874. St. Albert Historical Society, *The Black Robe's Vision: A History of the St. Albert District*, 79.

¹⁸⁰SAB, Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel R-2.391, 39.

¹⁸¹SAB, Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel R-2.391, 36. Extract of Acting Indian Superintendent Provencher's Annual Report, Department of Indian Affairs (hereafter DIA) 1877.

¹⁸²SAB, Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel R-2.391, 38. Extract of J.A.N. Provencher, Report of the Manitoba Indian Commissioner's Office, Winnipeg, 30 October 1875. On the link between the severity of measles and malnutrition, see Morley, "Nutrition and Infectious Disease," 37.

Commissioner and the doctors sent to investigate the outbreak. According to

Provencher, the widespread sickness:

[S]omewhat strangely, had its origins in the introduction of measles. So far as I have been able to ascertain, by inquiries made by myself and the medical men sent about them at the time, the breaking out of the epidemic was spontaneous, no cases being known at the time among the White and Half-breed population within a distance of forty miles, and there had not been a case of measles among the Indians themselves, or in the neighbourhood for twelve years, thus rendering the whole child population liable to contact.¹⁸³

Within a few weeks of the doctor's arrival, the epidemic subsided. The main factors in its termination were "their adoption of a few rational practices in the method of diet and nursing."¹⁸⁴ The success of using rations as a means to mitigate the measles outbreak and the isolation of the disease to hungry communities of Treaty 1 underscores the connection of the epidemic with food scarcity.

The privation suffered in Manitoba and in the eastern parklands were not isolated occurrences. In fact, the plains experienced a general famine through 1874. In February, the HBC post at Battle River reported little trade, the result of their being "no Buffalo."¹⁸⁵ The Indian trade at Carlton declined to the point that the HBC abandoned its Cree producers in favour of the Métis.¹⁸⁶ In May, Charles Napier Bell

¹⁸³SAB, Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel R-2.391, 37. Extract of J.A.N. Provencher, Report of the Manitoba Indian Commissioner's Office, Winnipeg, 30 October 1875.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵HBCA Search File: "Battleford," Lawrence Clarke to James Graham, Carlton House, 24 June 1874; Arlean MacPherson, *The Battlefords: A History* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1967), 66.

¹⁸⁶Lawrence Clarke noted that the withdrawal of credit and the decline of the bison supply contributed to starvation among the Cree. In addition, the Company abandoned the Indians in the area as their suppliers of meat in favour of the Métis Sliwa, *Standing the Test of Time*, 28-29.

wrote to David Laird, the Liberal Minister of the Interior, on the worsening conditions of the plains Indians resulting from the scarcity of bison:

The Crees are very troublesome at Carleton, Pitt, Victoria and Edmonton. I saw some at Victoria, last spring, who came in from the plains starving, and demanded provisions from the settler & the H.B. Co. There were no buffalo on the plains all winter, and they suffered frightfully. They told us that many Indians had eaten their horses, dogs, buffalo skins and in some cases their snowshoe laces & moccasins and then died. How much worse will it be in a year hence?¹⁸⁷

Bell then warned Laird that without the promise of a Treaty in the coming summer that "there will certainly be trouble... Pitt, Victoria and Edmonton are very unprotected if any trouble should arise this spring."¹⁸⁸ Even non-Indians advocated the quick resolution of Treaties in the west. The residents of Prince Albert, "principally English Halfbreeds" requested the resolution of the issue "as until this done, there must always be danger."¹⁸⁹ Presents were distributed by the newly-arrived police force at Carlton to facilitate the construction of a telegraph line in 1874. The following summer, progress on the line was halted by the Cree who objected to the presence of the workers without their consultation. Again, presents were distributed to those who would accept them.¹⁹⁰ By October 1875, the authorities were informed that the temporary measures taken over the previous two summers to facilitate development in the Saskatchewan country were no longer sufficient. George McDougall emphasized the discontent among the

¹⁸⁷NAC, MG 27 ID.10 David Laird Papers, Indian Affairs, N.W.T., David Laird Letterbook, 1874-75, 18. Copy of Letter from C.N. Bell, Winnipeg, 23 March 1874.

¹⁸⁸Bell recommended that the game remaining on the plains be reserved for the Indians. Ibid.

¹⁸⁹NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, Microfilm, reel C-1523, 41,896. Laird to the Minister of the Interior, Ft. Garry, 9 June 1874.

¹⁹⁰Jim Wallace, *A Double Duty: The Decisive First Decade of the North-West Mounted Police* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1997), 123-124.

Cree and the Plains Assiniboine on the issue:

Though they deplored the necessity of resorting to extreme measures, yet they were unanimous in their determination to oppose the running of lines, or the making of roads through their country, until a settlement between the Government and them had been effected.¹⁹¹

Although McDougall stressed the consensus of the Chiefs with regard to their desire for a treaty, he noted that there were dissenters. Big Bear was adamant in his scepticism to the treaty process, "[w]e want none of the Queen's presents; when we set a fox-trap we scatter pieces of meat all round; but when the fox gets into the trap we knock him on the head; we want not bait, let your Chiefs come like men and talk to us."¹⁹² Even bands that were sympathetic to the idea of a Treaty with the Crown were weary of its implications. Peter Erasmus reported on the anxiety among the members of Seenum's Cree Band at White Fish Lake:

It was rumoured that the Indians would be asked to give up their rights to the land. None of them could understand why they should give up what had been their right to enjoy since the earliest memory of the oldest story of their tribe.¹⁹³

The Cree Chief, Mistawassiss, who became one of the main proponents of accepting Treaty 6, was ambivalent about the process. In a letter to Morris in January 1875, the Chief stated, "[i]n sending this letter I do not wish it to be understood that I and my people are anxious that the Governor should come and make a Treaty, but if he is

¹⁹¹McDougall to Morris, Morleyville, Bow River, 23 October 1875, in Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 173. The Morleyville Mission was established by John McDougall in 1873 in an attempt to counter the influence of the Benton based traders. Sharp, *Whoop Up Country*, 138-139.

¹⁹²McDougall to Morris, Morleyville, Bow River, October 23, 1875, in Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 174.

¹⁹³*Buffalo Days and Nights*, 228.

coming, we do not say to him not to come."¹⁹⁴

It was into an atmosphere increasingly marked by privation, resignation and dread, that the Dominion treaty party encountered the Plains Cree in the summer of 1876. Alexander Morris, the Commissioner, described the attitude of the Cree:

I had ascertained that the Indian was oppressed with vague fears; they dreaded the treaty; they had been made to believe that they would be compelled to live on the reserves wholly, and abandon their hunting ... I accordingly shaped my address, so as to give them confidence in the intentions of the Government, and to quiet their apprehensions I impressed strongly upon them the necessity of changing their present mode of life, and to make homes and gardens for themselves, so as to be prepared for the diminution of the buffalo and other large animals, which is going on so rapidly. ... They saw the buffalo, the only means of their support, passing away. They were anxious to learn to support themselves by agriculture, but felt too ignorant to do so, and they dreaded that during the transition period they would be swept off by disease or famine—already they have suffered terribly from the ravages of measles, scarlet fever and smallpox.¹⁹⁵

The recognition by the Cree that the bison economy was all but over, and that a shift to a new economic paradigm would be a difficult, if not deadly, undertaking marked Treaty 6 from the previous treaties.¹⁹⁶ Another factor that shaped the negotiations was the relative power of the Plains Cree in 1876.¹⁹⁷ Five years earlier, William Butler noted that the Plains Cree were exceptional in that they "were perhaps the only tribe of prairie Indians who have yet suffered no injustice at the hands of the white man."¹⁹⁸ The Cree

¹⁹⁴Noel E. Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885* (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1970), 85, en. 33.

¹⁹⁵Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 183, 185.

¹⁹⁶Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 130.

¹⁹⁷According to Mochoruk, the Treaty 5 Indians were forced "to take whatever they could get." *The Political Economy of Northern Development: Governments and Capital Along Manitoba's Resource Frontier, 1870-1930*, 46-47.

¹⁹⁸*The Great Lone Land*, 242.

still posed a serious threat to the small number of Europeans who had ventured onto the western prairie.¹⁹⁹ A recent study of Treaty 6 acknowledged that the threat of armed conflict, along with pressure for economic development, were the main motivations for Dominion negotiators.²⁰⁰ The potential for violence was underscored by the military victory of the Sioux under Sitting Bull over the American Army at the battle of the Little Big Horn, which had taken place only two months before the negotiations began.

Although the possibility of war was real, the majority of the Cree who attended the Treaty talks recognized the futility of armed resistance to the new authority that was making its way across the plains. Mistawassis stressed this point to Poundmaker and The Badger, two opponents to the Treaty:

We speak of glory and our memories are all that is left to feed the widows and orphans of those who died in its attainment. We are few in numbers compared to former times, by wars and the terrible ravages of smallpox. Our people have vanished too. Even if it were possible to gather all the tribes together, to throw away the hand that is offered to help us, we would be too weak to make our demands heard.²⁰¹

Atakakoop echoed the sentiments of Mistawasis,:

The great sickness took half our lodges and the dreaded disease fell as heavily on our enemies. We are weak and my brother Mista-wa-sis I think is right that the buffalo will be gone before many snows. What then will be left us with which to bargain?"²⁰²

¹⁹⁹The presence of the police during the negotiation was intended as a military show of force and may have thwarted a plan to block the passage of the Dominion treaty party. Walter Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1994), 37.

²⁰⁰Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 146.

²⁰¹Mistawasis then described the misery of those who had resisted the "Long Knives" in the United States. Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights*, 248-249.

²⁰²*Ibid.*, 249.

To the majority of the leaders, the successful negotiation of a treaty represented their best hope for survival in the new economic order which was about to be stamped on the plains. The collapse of the bison herds and the hunger resulting for the inability of the HBC to cope with the hunters' increasing reliance on food assistance contributed to the urgency of the Treaty for the Cree.²⁰³ A recent study concluded that the protection of his people from starvation was the "paramount objective" of Sweet Grass.²⁰⁴

Through the negotiations, the inclusion of a clause in the Treaty to buffer the population from famine proved to be the major source of disagreement between the two sides.²⁰⁵ To Morris, a guarantee of food aid during the transitional period was too extravagant and would result in idleness among the adherents to the Treaty.²⁰⁶ In his introduction to the Treaty negotiations, Morris noted that "[t]he food question, was disposed of by a promise, that in the event of a National (emphasis Morris') famine or pestilence such aid as the Crown saw fit would be extended to them..."²⁰⁷ Difficulties that might arise from "hard winters or the hardships of single bands,"²⁰⁸ would not be covered by the Treaty. Morris told Chief Beardy, who remained a holdout at Carlton that, "[i]n a national famine or general sickness, not what happens in everyday life, but

²⁰³Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 146.

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 136.

²⁰⁵Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 178, 184-185, 186, 188, 210-211, 216, 228, 241.

²⁰⁶David Mills also opposed the famine clause on the grounds that it would "predispose them to idleness." Chief John Snow, *These Mountains are our Sacred Places: The Story of the Stony Indians* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, 1977), 30.

²⁰⁷Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 178.

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 241.

blow comes on the Indians, they would not be allowed to die like dogs."²⁰⁹

The Cree stressed that they did not seek a steady supply of free food from the Dominion but rather assistance in times of hardship. Peter Erasmus recounted The Badger's interpretation of the famine clause, "[w]e think of our children. We do not want to be greedy but when we commence to settle on the reserves we select, it is then we want aid and when we can't help ourselves in case of trouble."²¹⁰ Morris acknowledged The Badger's concern and described the assistance provided to the Manitoba bands during the crop failure and the measles epidemic, "although it was not promised in the treaty."²¹¹ During the fourth day of negotiations, Tee-Tee-Quay-Say requested "[t]hat we be supplied with medicines free of cost."²¹² Later Morris responded that "[a] medicine chest will be kept at the house of each Indian Agent, in case of sickness amongst you."²¹³

The Cree successfully negotiated the inclusion of three innovations to the text of Treaty 6. According to Walter Hildebrandt, the "astute" provisions negotiated by the Cree, extra assistance in their conversion to agriculture, protection from famine and pestilence, and the inclusion of the "medicine chest" were obtained to buffer the group

²⁰⁹A.G. Jackes, M.D. Narrative of Proceedings, August 27, 1876, in *Ibid.*, 228.

²¹⁰*Buffalo Days and Nights*, 251. Dr. Jackes official version of the Badger's statement differs only in its conclusion, "... when we cannot help ourselves and in case of troubles seen and unforeseen in the future." *The Treaties of Canada*, 211.

²¹¹*Ibid.*

²¹²*Ibid.*, 215. Other leaders, including Sakamoos repeated the Badgers request.

²¹³*Ibid.*, 218.

in their conversion to a new economic paradigm.²¹⁴ According to Ray, Miller and Tough, the concessions strove to maintain "two-hundred-years-old traditions of Native-White relations as established by the HBC. Having obtained these crucial concessions, the chiefs signed the treaty."²¹⁵ The Cree recognized that the adoption of a new way of life would be a difficult undertaking. They knew that the buffalo that served as the foundation of their economy for almost a century earlier were all but extinct. They accepted agriculture as a solution and negotiated for assistance during the years of transition to the new economy. Their experience of smallpox a few years earlier, and their recognition that the imminent flood of Europeans would increase sickness among them, prompted the Cree to obtain the promise of medical care in the terms of the Treaty. What they failed to plan for was the miserly interpretation of the Treaty in the years following the extinction of the bison and their marginalization from the agricultural economy that was established on the plains. The experience of the Plains Indians in the years after treaty negotiations was later described by retired whiskey trader, James W. Shultz:

I make no excuse for the whiskey trade. It was wrong, all wrong, and none realized it better than we when we were dispensing the stuff. It caused untold suffering, many deaths, great demoralization among these people of the plains. There was one redeeming feature about it: The trade was at a time when it did not deprive them of the necessities of life; there was always more meat, more fur to be had for the killing of it. In comparison with various Government officials and rings, who robbed and starved the Indians to death on their reservations after the buffalo disappeared, we were saints.²¹⁶

²¹⁴Hidebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*, 16-17.

²¹⁵*Bounty and Benevolence*, 143.

²¹⁶Kennedy, *The Whiskey Trade of the Northwestern Plains: A Multidisciplinary Study*, 145.

Chapter 8: "They Would not be Allowed to Die Like Dogs,"¹ Treaties, Famine and Epidemic Transition on the Plains, 1876-1882.

"[N]o race of men can suddenly be turned from one set of pursuits to another set of a wholly different nature without great attendant distress." Nicholas Flood Davin, 1879²

The decade following the completion of the numbered treaties was a period of unprecedented change for the people and the environment of the Canadian plains.³ The bison, the "bedrock" of plains life,⁴ were virtually exterminated from the region by the early 1880s.⁵ The disappearance of the herds and the establishment of Canadian rule dealt a combined blow to plains societies from which they would never recover. To those charged with the successful transition of the plains to agrarian capitalism, the elimination of the species was considered a precondition for large scale European settlement of the west.⁶ The effect of this wholesale shift of economic paradigms was

¹Alexander Morris, assuring Cree chiefs at Fort Carlton that the Dominion government would provide assistance in times of "national famine or general sickness." August 26, 1876, in Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 228.

²John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1896* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 32.

³For an eloquent treatment of the economic and cultural revolution in the years after the treaties, see Irene Spry, "The Great Transformation: The Disappearance of the Commons in Western Canada," 21-45.

⁴Alan M. Klein, "Political Economy of the Buffalo Hide Trade: Race and Class on the Plains," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians*, ed. John H. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1993), 139.

⁵The literature on the extermination of the bison from the plains is voluminous. While a full discussion of the subject is beyond the scope of this study, see F.G. Roe's classic, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State*, and A.I. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: A Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) for detailed considerations of the disappearance of the species.

⁶In the American context, the destruction of the bison herds as a means to open the country to settlement and to eliminate the threat posed by plains Indians was of such significance that the task was undertaken by the United States Army whose "well calculated policy of destroying the buffalo in order to conquer the Plains Indians proved

catastrophic for the plains societies that for almost a century, had focussed almost exclusively on the bison hunt.⁷ With the passing of the herds, the inhabitants of the plains lost, not only their position in a long-standing economic equation, but also their freedom⁸ and, in thousands of cases, their lives to hunger and famine-induced disease.⁹ It was in this context of economic and social disaster that accompanied the extermination of the bison from the plains, that tuberculosis emerged as a full-blown epidemic among the Indian communities of the west.¹⁰ The explosion of tuberculosis was more than simply the outcome of the environmental catastrophe resulting from the mass extinction of the dominant food resource of the country. The failure of Dominion authorities to deliver on their treaty obligations was a significant, if not an integral, factor in the precipitous decline in the health of Indian communities when the herds disappeared.

more effective than any other weapon in its arsenal." David D. Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883," 338. Smits' view is not without its critics however, see, William A. Dobak, "The Army and the Buffalo: A Demur, A Response to David D. Smits' "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo, 1865-1883," *Western Historical Quarterly* 26 (1995):197-202.

⁷Though some studies, such as F. Melvyn Atton's "Fish Resources and the Fisheries Industry of the Canadian Plains," *Prairie Forum* 9 (1984): 315-325, stressed the value of fish as a resource to the people of the plains, the bison were vastly more important to both the economy and the diet of the prairie Indians.

⁸John L Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): 212-240.

⁹In most cases of famine, deaths directly attributable to hunger are rare, rather, "malnutrition alters the resistance of the host to potentially fatal infection and infectious disease in turn aggravates existing malnutrition." John D. Post, "Famine, Mortality, and Epidemic Disease in the Process of Modernization," *Economic History Review, Second Series* 29 (1976), 26-27.

¹⁰In his study of the interaction of economics and disease, John D. Post noted that tuberculosis was particularly fostered by malnutrition. *Ibid.*, 27.

The Cree who negotiated Treaty 6 anticipated the changes that were about to befall their country with the end of the bison economy.¹¹ During the negotiations, Chief Ahtahkakoop stated that the buffalo "will be gone forever before many snows."¹² The relative strength of the Plains Cree at the time of the negotiations led to the inclusion of important additions to the document signed at Carlton and Pitt. The intention of the famine and pestilence clauses, in addition to the "medicine chest" and agricultural assistance clauses, was to mitigate the difficult transition of the inhabitants of the northwestern plains to the new agrarian economy which was about to be established in the Canadian west.¹³

Dominion officials who accepted the expanded obligations of the Carlton Treaty did not simply acquiesce to the new terms of the agreement. They were forced to accept them after repeated demands for their inclusion by Cree negotiators.¹⁴ At Fort Carlton, Alexander Morris, though reticent to accept what he considered extravagant demands for regular food assistance, acknowledged that the Dominion government would provide relief in case of a "national famine."¹⁵ He repeated his assurance to the Chiefs that, "in a national famine or general sickness, not what happens in every day

¹¹Jill St. Germain characterised the Plains Cree as the "most prepared" of all the Indians that Morris confronted as Treaty Commissioner. Jill St. Germain, *Indian Treaty Making in the United States and Canada, 1867-1877* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 124.

¹²Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights*, 249.

¹³The notion of the Treaty innovations as a buffer to ease the shift to the new economic order is considered by Hilderbrandt in *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*, 16-17. See also Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties*, 130-131.

¹⁴Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 185, 212, 215, 216, 218, 228.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 178.

life, but if a great blow comes to the Indians, they would not be allowed to die like dogs."¹⁶ Within a very few years after the promise that Morris made to the Cree at Carlton, the disappearance of the bison coupled with the failure of Canadian authorities to provide adequate relief to the hungry, contributed not only to the deaths of many thousands from hunger and subsequent medical complications, but to the emergence of a tuberculosis epidemic which persisted until the widespread use of antibiotic drugs to counter the disease in the 1940s.

By the early 1880s, tuberculosis, a disease which had been remarkable on the plains for its relative infrequency prior to the treaty period, was reported to be the main killer of reserve Indians.¹⁷ Although the disease was present in American populations prior to the arrival of Columbus,¹⁸ the emergence of tuberculosis as the primary pathogen within aboriginal communities is widely acknowledged to be the result of the upheaval of the early reserve period.¹⁹ Stated simply, the organism responsible for the disease, *mycobacterium tuberculosis*, was present on the plains long before the disease became a significant contributor to morbidity and mortality in the last quarter of

¹⁶A.G. Jackes, M.D. Narrative of Proceedings, August 27, 1876, in Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 228.

¹⁷Laurie Meijer Drees, "Reserve Hospitals in Southern Alberta, 1890 to 1930," *Native Studies Review* 9 (1993-1994), 93.

¹⁸For a discussion of the disease in America prior to contact, see Jane Buisktra, ed., *Prehistoric Tuberculosis in the Americas* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Archaeological Program, 1981).

¹⁹George A. Clark, Marc Kelley, John M. Grange and M. Cassandra Hill, "The Evolution of Mycobacterial Disease in Human Populations," *Current Anthropology* 28 (1987), 45, 46, 48, 51.

the nineteenth century.²⁰ Investigators have shown that the bacteria itself is a necessary, but not an exclusive, precondition for the onset of illness.²¹ The number of contributing factors related to tuberculosis infection led W.D. Johnston to conclude that, "[p]erhaps no other disease better illustrates the principle of multifactorial causation."

Two of the primary environmental factors in the development of tuberculosis are overcrowding and malnutrition.²² Dr. R.G. Ferguson, a pioneer in the battle against tuberculosis in Canada, stated emphatically that among plains Indians, the disease "was not the major cause of death until after they settled on reserves in the 1880's."²³

Ferguson described the sudden appearance of the disease among them:

With few exceptions all these plains Indians were reported to be free of anything that would even approach an epidemic up to at least 1882. Between 1882 and 1885 for some reason there was a tremendous increase in the frequency of the disease, and at a later date, on practically all the reserves on the plains, the disease had taken the proportions of an epidemic.²⁴

The years of hunger and despair that coincided with the extermination of the bison and the occupation of reserves, exacerbated by inadequate, though promised, food aid

²⁰The presence of tuberculosis prior to the reserve period and its subsequent development into the primary cause of ill-health within aboriginal communities was acknowledged even by early investigators. See Dr. Peter H. Bryce, "The History of the American Indians in Relation to Health," *Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records* 12 (1914), 137-139.

²¹William D. Johnston, "Tuberculosis," in *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, ed. Kenneth F. Kiple (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1059. The interrelationship between malnutrition and infection has been described as "synergistic." See Nevin Scrimshaw, Carl Taylor and John Gordon, *Interactions of Nutrition and Infection* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1968), 16.

²²Johnston, "Tuberculosis," 1061.

²³R.G. Ferguson, *Studies in Tuberculosis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), 6.

²⁴SAB, R.G. Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel R 2.391, vi-vii.

from the Dominion government, created the ecological conditions that led to the unprecedented explosion of tuberculosis in the aboriginal population of the plains.²⁵ Just as the political and economic marginalization of Indians in the post-treaty period had been widely discussed, most notably by J.L. Tobias²⁶ and Sarah Carter,²⁷ the terrible cycle of starvation and tubercularisation of plains Indians is stark evidence of their physical decline resulting from the imposition of Canadian hegemony. The half-hearted relief measures during the famine of 1878-1880 and after, which kept plains Indians in a "constant state of hunger," not only undermined the government's own half-baked self-sufficiency initiative but also illustrated the moral and legal failure of the Crown's commitment to provide assistance in the case of a widespread famine on the plains.²⁸

Though observers in the west were reported to have been stunned by the "suddenness and finality" of the collapse of the Canadian bison hunt in 1878,²⁹ the end

²⁵For a discussion of the effect of malnutrition in reducing resistance to disease, and tuberculosis in particular, see Scrimshaw, Taylor and Gordon, *Interactions of Nutrition and Infection*, 61-64. See also, Ancel Keys, et al., *The Biology of Human Starvation, Volume 2* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950), 1015-1939, and Charles Roland, *Courage Under Siege: Starvation, Disease and Death in the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: Oxford University Press 1992), 154-174.

²⁶Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," *Canadian Historical Review* 64 (1983): 520-548.

²⁷Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*.

²⁸For an analysis of the failure of the Dominion aid policy during the early treaty period, see Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 27. Even recent studies have forwarded the notion that, at treaty talks, the Blackfoot "did not recognize the precarious state of the buffalo as inevitable and sought only ways to restore that resource." St. Germain, *Indian Treaty Making in the United States and Canada, 1867-1877*, 70.

of the herds as the basis of a viable economy had been predicted for years if not decades prior to the actual disappearance of the species from the country. As early as the 1850s, the herds were in decline. Pressure from the Cree and Assiniboine from the east and the Blackfoot from the west, made the buffalo, according to Alexander Ross, "like a ball between two players."³⁰ By the 1870s, periodic bouts of hunger were all too frequent as dwindling bison populations were hunted in greater numbers for food and for the use of their hides in the industries of the urbanized east.³¹ During the winter of 1873-74, the Cree of Victoria Mission near the present Alberta-Saskatchewan border were reduced to eating "their horses, dogs, buffalo robes and in some cases their snow shoes and moccasins and then died."³² The situation was similar in the parklands of the Touchwood Hills. Joseph Reader, of the Church Missionary Society, reported that during the winter, hunger had driven the local Indians to eat not only their horses, but the missionary's own pet dog.³³ The following year, Reader elaborated on

³⁰Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State*, 396. In 1859, Henry Hind was invited to a council among the Cree of the Qu'Appelle where the disappearance of the herds were contributing an increasingly serious economic and environmental situation. Milloy, *The Plains Cree*, 108."

³¹In the early 1870s, developments in tanning technology allowed bison hides to be used in the manufacture of industrial belts for the burgeoning economy of the American east. According to Isenberg, this "spasm of industrial expansion was the primary cause of the bison's near extinction." *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920*, 130-131. For a discussion in the Canadian context, see Ray, "The Northern Great Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade," 277-278. Roe's classic study of the buffalo noted that, by the seventies, the robe trade had overtaken the pemmican trade as the primary motivation for the commercial hunt. *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State*, 473.

³²McQuillan, "Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies 1870-1885," 383, fn.11.

³³CMS, Microfilm, reel A-80, Joseph Reader to Rev. Fenn, 29 July 1874, 221. See also Shipley, "Printing Press at Oonikup," 48-49.

the decline of Gordon's Band:

I learnt that they had nothing for their supper, and that they could not often catch sufficient fish for their breakfast. Gave them some of my pemmican and tea. In fact, nearly the whole band are wretchedly poor. Their houses are miserable huts. Some of them are so low that, if one attempts to stand erect, you get a blow on the head. It is no wonder that, living in such houses, many of them are sickly in the chest.³⁴

Reader was not the only observer in the early 1870s to note a relationship between privation and disease among the plains Indians. During the fabled "march west" of the North West Mounted Police, Dr. John Kittson, made the same connection on encountering a small group of Teton Sioux near Old Wive's Lake in south central Saskatchewan during the summer of 1874. Among the sick were "two cases of confirmed dyspepsia (a digestive disorder) and three cases of phthisis" (pulmonary tuberculosis). Kittson observed, "[t]hat such diseases as Consumption and Dyspepsia should be common among the Indian women did not surprise me, two diseases which, PAR EXCELLENCE [emphasis Kittson's], follow in the wake of want, hardship and exposure."³⁵ Although he did not encounter a large number of Indians on his

³⁴The missionary went on to thank Mrs Smith of Hamstead for her donation of clothing which "is a great help to us, for the Indians are among the poorest of the poor." CMS, Microfilm, reel A-81 Joseph Reader Touchwood Hills Mission Report, 20 January 1875, 442.

³⁵Report of Surgeon John Kittson, Swan River, 19 December 1875, in *A Chronicle of the West: North-West Mounted Police Reports for 1875*, ed. S.W. Horral, (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1975), 23. Dr. Nevitt's subordinate on the march west, Dr. R.B. Nevitt, though busy ministering to the ills of the police, suffering primarily from influenza, bronchitis and dysentery, made only a brief note of a sick Indian child during his winter at Fort Macleod. Although the child had "a large lump on her head just behind the ear," [a possible symptom of scrofula] the patient was probably exhibiting signs of goitre, a common malady among the Blackfoot, the result of an iodine deficiency in mountain water. See, Hugh Dempsey, ed., *R.B. Nevitt: A Winter at Fort Macleod* (Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West, 1974), 47-48. On the problem of goitre among the Blackfoot, see Decker, "Country Distempers: Deciphering Disease and Illness in Rupert's Land Before 1870," 158.

reconnaissance of the Yellowhead route in 1872, George M. Grant surmised that "[a]lmost all of the Indians of the North-West are scrofulous."³⁶ A popular medical text of the day, *The People's Common Sense Medical Adviser*, noted that scrofula, glandular tuberculosis that is often a precursor to pulmonary consumption, "may be the consequence of insufficient nourishment, resulting from subsisting upon poor food, or too exclusively a vegetable diet, with little or no animal food."³⁷ Clearly, the connection between malnutrition and disease, particularly in the case of tuberculosis, was common knowledge as Canadians established their authority in the west.

Even before the completion of the western treaties, officials recognized the precipitous decline of the bison and its potential impact on the inhabitants of the west. In 1874, the Deputy Minister of the Interior reported to his superior that, because of the increased bison kill by white and half-breed hunters:

[T]he buffaloes have in the last few years been rapidly diminishing in numbers, and there seems every reason to expect under the existing state of things they will be within the next decade of years be entirely exterminated. To the Indians extermination of the buffalo means starvation and death...³⁸

³⁶Grant, *Ocean to Ocean*, 96. Though an antiquated term, "scrofula" is the infection of the lymphatic system with tuberculosis. The condition is characterised by the swelling and later the discharge from the glands of the neck, armpit or groin. The swelling of the glands was a common symptom during the early stages of infection with tuberculosis. Ferguson, *Studies in Tuberculosis*, 8. Scrofula was recognised as having a tendency of developing into "pulmonary phthisis" [pulmonary tuberculosis]. Schenstead-Smith, "Disease Patterns and Factors Relating to the Transmission of Disease among the Residents of the Onion Lake Agency," 4.

³⁷R.V. Pierce M.D., *The People's Common Sense Medical Adviser*, Sixty-First Edition. (Buffalo: N.A. 1895), (First published 1875), 447. In addition to nutritional deficiency, the lack of exercise and uncleanness, "ill-assorted marriages" were also reported to be "prolific source[s] of scrofula."

³⁸Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 21. The author noted that the letter was probably written in the spring of 1874.

In his report for 1875, the Indian Commissioner, J.A.N. Provencher, remarked, "[i]t is a well known fact that the hunt is rapidly decreasing every year, and is now profitable only to those who travel a great distance and who sever themselves entirely from the settlements."³⁹

To Canadian officials, the immanent shift of the plains Indians to agriculture was seen as both a necessity and as a progressive adaptation among the people who had depended on the bison for so long. In his annual report for the Department of the Interior, David Mills described the surprise of Alexander Morris with regard to "the willingness on the part of the Indians to cultivate the soil, and so great a desire to have their children educated."⁴⁰ While Mills was encouraged by the Lieutenant Governor's characterization of the plains Indians as "tractable and docile," the Minister qualified his enthusiasm over the changes in the west. According to Mills:

There is however, it must be admitted, another side of the picture. There is one question at least which for some years past has sorely disquieted the mind of the Indian of the Saskatchewan, and which causes him to look forward with increasing anxiety to the future. The question is this: How shall he find subsistence when the buffalo is destroyed? Until within the last two years the buffalo, which roamed over the prairie in apparently exhaustless herds, furnished the Indians with a supply of food practically unlimited. For the last ten years the numbers of buffalo have greatly diminished, and in another decade of years, unless prompt measures be taken in the meantime to prevent the catastrophe, the buffalo as a source of supply of food will be extinct.⁴¹

Observers in the west recognized the severity of the crisis that was about to befall the inhabitants of the plains. In the spring of 1876, Father Lacombe was reported to have

³⁹Canada. *Sessional Papers 1876*, No. 9. Indian Commissioner's Office, Winnipeg, 30 October 1875, 33.

⁴⁰Canada, *Sessional Papers 1877*, No. 11. David Mills, Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year Ended 30th June, 1876, xii.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

"pleaded" with Dominion officials for a law to protect the dwindling herds.⁴² As federal bureaucrats pondered their jurisdictional authority over the remaining stocks,⁴³ the bison remaining in Canadian territory came under increased pressure. In 1876, the "great annihilation" of the species in the northern United States began when the Northern Pacific Railway reached Bismark, North Dakota.⁴⁴ The bison kill north of the border was intensified by the arrival of between 6,000 and 8,000 Sioux refugees in the spring of 1877.⁴⁵

As the herds came under heightened predation from both commercial and subsistence hunters, even nature seemed to conspire against the bison that managed to elude the ever worsening slaughter. Mange broke-out among both Indian horses and bison populations along the northern fringe of the prairie and possibly further

⁴²McQuillan, "Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies 1870-1885," 383. Preservation of the bison became a key feature of the talks leading to the completion of Treaty 7 the following year. According to St. Germain, David Laird the new Treaty Commissioner told those gathered "what they wanted to hear" on the issue. *Indian Treaty Making in the United States and Canada, 1867-1877*, 66.

⁴³Through the mid 1870s, half-hearted attempts were made to introduce legislation to protect the dwindling bison supply. By 1877, the Dominion government passed the issue down to the Territorial Council, where ordinances were passed in a futile attempt to save the remnant population from destruction. Noel Dyck was harsh in his critique of Dominion officials who, "had clearly abdicated responsibility for preservation of the buffalo by referring the problem to the North-West Territorial Council." *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 25. On the failure of the ordinances, see also Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 476.

⁴⁴William T. Hornaday, *The Extinction of the American Bison with a Sketch of its Discovery and Life History* (Washington: Government Printing Bureau, 1889), 505-506.

⁴⁵Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 22, and A.J. Looy, "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson," *Saskatchewan History* 32 (1979), 111. According to Paul Sharp, the entire American plains frontier was "afire in a general Indian war" by 1876. *Whoop Up Country*, 154.

south, augmenting the hardship.⁴⁶ The vagaries of weather brought the remaining herds to the brink of collapse. Because of the dearth of snow accumulation, 1877 was known as the year of the "black winter."⁴⁷ The prairie fires that resulted from the winter drought spread over much of the southwestern plains and destroyed large tracts of

⁴⁶The Missionary John Hines reported that the brother of Ahtahkakoop lost all of his ten horses to the disease during the winter of 1877-78. The disease continued as the famine worsened. Hines noted that he witnessed "my Indians take their ponies, dying from the effects of the mange, kill them and boil their bones to get a little fat, with which to grease the wheat, when roasting, in order to make it more digestible." Hines, *The Red Indians of the Plains: Thirty Years Missionary Experience in the Saskatchewan*, 146. Other writers have proposed the role of other diseases as agents in the destruction of the herds. In the 1930s, H.B. MacDonald quoted A.E. Bruce, a federal government pathologist, who proposed that a significant factor in the decline of the bison was *hemorrhagic septicaemia*. H.B. MacDonald, "The Killing of the Buffalo," *The Beaver* 266 (1935), 20. Another pathologist suggested that the introduction of domestic cattle to the northern plains may have infected remnant herds of bison in the early 1880s with Texas "tick fever" or possibly *brucellosis*, a bacterial disease that causes spontaneous abortions in stricken animals. Rudolph W. Koucky, "The Buffalo Disaster of 1882," *North Dakota History* 50 (1983):23-30; Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Buffalo: An Environmental History, 1750-1920*, 140-143. On his way to Blackfoot country in the summer of 1877, David Laird lamented, "that very few calves of this season were to be seen. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 252; Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 380-831. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, the role of disease in the disappearance of the bison cannot be ignored.

⁴⁷SAB, Innes Papers, A-113, Volume 3, Canadian Northwest Historical Society Papers, Subject File 12, Ruth Matheson notes, n.d., The drought affected area spread at least as far north as Cumberland House where trader George Duck remarked that because of the remarkably warm winter and the ground being nearly bare, "that we have not had a mouthful of venison this winter. Great distress prevails among the Indians and they make this one of their thousand excuses for hanging around the fort." "Letters from the West," *The Beaver* 282 (1951), 24. Hunters in the north suffered from a widespread famine, during the winter of 1877-78, Rev. P. Duchausois reported, "No caribou came. The hunters sent out to a distance found none and never returned." *Mid Snow and Ice: The Apostles of the North West*, 172-172. Roderick MacFarlane of the HBC reported that the starvation experienced during the winter made it, "[t]he hardest ever before experienced by the Company's people & Natives in both Athabasca and Mackenzie River." G.F.G. Stanley, "The Fur Trade Party. Part 1. Storm Warnings," *The Beaver* 284 (1953), 38.

pasturage.⁴⁸ Noel Dyck noted that the fires forced the remaining herds to winter between the branches of the Saskatchewan where hunting by the Blackfoot, Cree, Assiniboiné and the newly arrived Sioux placed the constrained bison under "tremendous pressure."⁴⁹ During the spring of 1878, the herds broke through the "ever tightening circle" of hunters and headed southwest to Montana.⁵⁰ The combined pressure from the United States military,⁵¹ American Indians, and the increasingly desperate Canadian-based Indian hunters forced the remaining bison south of the border until their final extermination in the early 1880s.

As the food shortage on the west plains grew to a crisis, the Indians on the

⁴⁸Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 26. For a discussion of drought cycles on the plains, see Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920*, 17-18. The effect of the fires, was widespread on the plains in the late 1870s. In 1878, a prairie fire destroyed the community of Trail Creek, near the present site of Stetler, where "only 40 unmarked graves remain as a reminder of the times when a thousand people might gather ... before going out on the plains to hunt." J.D. Gillespie, "The Bears that Killed the Buffalo," *The Beaver* 293 (1962), 45.

⁴⁹Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 26.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 477-479. For a discussion of the role of the American military in the deliberate destruction of the buffalo in order to starve hostile Indians into submission, see Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883," 334-338. The role of the army in the extermination of the herds remains disputed in the American literature, see for example, William A. Dobak, "The Army and the Buffalo: A Demur, A Response to David D. Smits' 'The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo, 1865-1883,'" 197-202. Canadian scholars recognized the extermination of the buffalo as military policy early on. C.M. McInnes commented "It seems rather unjust, to put it mildly, that because the Americans had failed to handle their own Indians successfully, Canadian Indians were therefore to be afflicted with famine." H.B. MacDonald, "The Killing of the Buffalo," 23. Evidence of the American interference with the herds also appears in the Prime Ministerial Correspondence. NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, Microfilm, reel C-1673, p. 114,313, Alexander Morris to Macdonald, Toronto, 6 July 1879; and reel C-1590, p. 81,299, A. Campbell to Macdonald, Ottawa, 10 August 1879.

eastern margins of the newly ceded country were about to experience another consequence of large-scale European settlement. In the late summer of 1876, a group of one thousand Icelandic immigrants arrived on the shores of Lake Winnipeg.⁵² As the settlers occupied their new colony on land, either requested or already occupied by Treaty 5 Indians,⁵³ smallpox broke-out among them. Through the fall and winter, between 100 and 200 of the colonists succumbed to the disease.⁵⁴ A large but unspecified number of Indians along the shores of Lake Winnipeg also perished during the outbreak.⁵⁵

The epidemic was contained within the immediate vicinity of Lake Winnipeg by the spring of 1877. The response of authorities to the medical emergency in the largely unorganized territory of Keewatin was mired in controversy over the financial

⁵²Gudjon Arngrimsson, *Nyja Island: Saga of the Journey to New Iceland* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1997), 152-153.

⁵³ Before Treaty 5 was ratified, a request by Norway House Indians for a reserve on land that became New Iceland was refused on the grounds that it had been set aside for an Icelandic colony. Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 144, 148-153. In addition, the new settlers established themselves on land that was already occupied by the Saulteaux on the shore of the White Mud River. An example of the Icelandic occupation of Indian farms is that of John Ramsay. See Winona Stevenson, *Icelanders and Indians in the Interlake: John Ramsay and the White Mud River* (University of Winnipeg, 1986, typewritten). For a contemporary account of the Ramsay case, see NAC, RG 10, vol. 3646, file 8064, Report of Dr. Lynch on Indians of Lake Winnipeg, 12 April 1877.

⁵⁴Nelson Gerrard, *The Icelandic River Saga* (Arborg: Saga Publications, 1985), 37. The severity of the outbreak among the immigrants sets this outbreak apart from other smallpox epidemics in the west. The high mortality among the Icelanders, particularly among the young, drew heated criticism of health authorities back in Iceland for their failure to provide adequate protection to the population through vaccination.

⁵⁵One source estimated that two hundred Indians died at the community of Sandy River alone. E.L.M. Thorpe, *Culture, Evolution and Disease*, Anthropology Paper 30 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1989), 49.

responsibility of the relief effort.⁵⁶ In his economic history of Northern Manitoba, James Mochoruk characterized the Dominion government's refusal to cover the cost of fighting the epidemic as, a "pathetic attempt" to escape financial responsibility and "pass it on to a government which it knew was on the brink of disaster."⁵⁷ As the epidemic raged along the shore of Lake Winnipeg, Alexander Morris was refused Dominion money to establish a quarantine to protect the population of Red River. In a coded message, the Prime Minister's office sent a terse order to Morris, "People themselves must avoid contagion-decline expenditure for that quarantine."⁵⁸

As Lieutenant Governor of Keewatin, Morris was ultimately responsible for the medical response to the epidemic and he paid the political price for his unsanctioned actions during the outbreak. He was accused by the *Winnipeg Free Press* of being the mastermind behind "the Quarantine Ring, [and] that the entire business was a swindle from the word 'go.'"⁵⁹ He soon fell from grace with the Liberal government and returned

⁵⁶Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), Alexander Morris Papers, Ketcheson Collection, MG 12, Telegram Book 3, no. 23, R.W. Scott to Alexander Morris, 29 November, 1876. The governing body of the territory, the Council of Keewatin, was appointed specifically to deal with the epidemic and was considered to be a temporary measure only. Although the cost of medical aid was an issue through the epidemic, the most serious conflict between provincial and federal authorities was over responsibility for the quarantine established to guard Manitoba and the fur trade from disease.

⁵⁷Mochoruk, *The Political Economy of Northern Development: Governments and Capital along Manitoba's Resource Frontier, 1870-1930*, 54.

⁵⁸PAM, Alexander Morris Papers, Ketcheson Collection, MG 12, Telegram Book 3, No. 10, attachment of a message from Morris to Mackenzie, 24 November 1876. As was the case with the catastrophic outbreak of smallpox in 1869-70, the HBC was left to ensure the safety of its own cargo, and that of its competitors, through the epidemic. PAM, MG 12, B 3, box 1, no. 257, Morris to Mills, 29 May 1877.

⁵⁹NAC John A. Macdonald Papers, Microfilm, reel C-1673, p.114, 262, C. Allen, to Macdonald, 8 March 1878.

to the east.⁶⁰ His political downfall was, according to Mochoruk, "because he had allowed his conscience, rather than financial concerns, to dictate his actions during the epidemic."⁶¹ The end of Morris' career in the west was part of a political bloodletting which came in the wake of the epidemic.⁶² The partisan nature of the Liberal inquiry into the management of Indian Affairs in the west and its fallout set the pattern for Indian administration for decades to come.⁶³ The political nature of appointments in the Indian Department during this period was not an isolated phenomenon. Jeffrey Simpson noted that the entire civil service was the "motherlode" of political patronage during the Victorian period.⁶⁴

There was at least one positive outcome of the Liberal purge of the frontier civil service. In response to the threat of smallpox in the west, the Minister of the Interior,

⁶⁰Though Morris, a Conservative, was the scapegoat for the Liberal government's charges of excessive spending during the outbreak, a recent study focussed on the cordial relations between the Lieutenant Governor and his political masters in Ottawa. See St. Germain, *Indian Treaty Making in the United States and Canada, 1867-1877*, 52.

⁶¹Mochoruk, *The Political Economy of Northern Development: Governments and Capital along Manitoba's Resource Frontier, 1870-1930*, 55.

⁶²The Liberal government organized an inquiry into the management of Indian Affairs under Ebenezer McColl. See Frances McColl, *Ebenezer McColl: "Friend to the Indians"* (Winnipeg: Self-Published, 1989). At least one of the victims of the purge, J.A.N. Provencher, was guilty of improprieties while attached to the Indian Department. Brian Titley, "Unsteady Debut: J.A.N. Provencher and the Beginnings of Indian Administration in Manitoba," *Prairie Forum* 22 (1997): 21-46.

⁶³On his appointment to the inquiry, McColl was warned by David Mills to "be very careful not to express yourself very freely except amongst any of our known friends and those you know are attached to the government..." University of Western Ontario (hereafter UWO) D.B. Weldon Library Regional Collection, David Mills Letterbooks 1876-1878, Microfilm, reel 2, no. 311, Mills to McColl, 2 November 1877.

⁶⁴Jeffrey Simpson, *Spoils of Power: The Politics of Patronage* (Toronto: Collins, 1988), 79.

David Mills, hired a crony from London, Dr. Daniel Hagarty, as Medical Superintendent of the Northwest Territories.⁶⁵ Between 1877 and the spring of 1880, when he was dismissed because the rejuvenated Conservative administration deemed his services "no longer necessary,"⁶⁶ the vaccination campaign undertaken by Hagarty and physicians attached to the Mounted Police in the southwestern prairies,⁶⁷ virtually eliminated smallpox as a major cause of mortality among majority of plains Indians.⁶⁸ The success of Hagarty and his colleagues in dealing with the once dreaded disease, serves as an example of the utility of preventative medicine even at this early date. Unfortunately, the medical victory in the battle against smallpox was a solitary one. Hagarty's dismissal reflects the cynicism of Indian administration during the Department's management by the Prime Minister.⁶⁹ Indian Affairs dispensed with its

⁶⁵NAC, RG 10, Microfilm, reel C-10113, vol. 3648, file 8138, David Mills, Department of the Interior Memorandum, 14 May 1877. Hagarty's appointment was the subject of partisan attacks, particularly from the Conservatives *Toronto Mail* and the *Hamilton Spectator*, something "which was expected from those quarters." UWO, David Mills Letterbooks 1876-1878, Microfilm, reel 1, no. 772, Mills to Hagarty, 13 June 1877.

⁶⁶NAC, RG 10, Microfilm, reel C-10113, vol. 3648, file 8138, S.D. Cote to John A. Macdonald, 14 June 1880.

⁶⁷Among the Mounted police physicians who undertook vaccinations was R.B. Nevitt who responded to an outbreak of the disease south of the border by securing the vaccine and administering the procedure to "as many of the Indians as I could." NAC, RG 10, vol. 3643, File 7708, Extract From Report of Surgeon B. Nevitt of the North West Mounted Police, Fort Macleod, 2 January 1877.

⁶⁸Although smallpox was not completely eradicated by the vaccination campaign of the late 1870s, outbreaks were limited in their frequency, severity, and geographical distribution. For a discussion of the reduced nature of smallpox in the post-treaty period, see Schenstead-Smith, "Disease Pattern and Factors Relating to the Transmission of Disease among the Residents of the Onion Lake Agency," 1-2, and Table 1: "Disease Chronology 1869-1920," 9-10.

⁶⁹According to R. MacGregor Dawson, the use of patronage entered its most shameless stage after the return of the MacDonald government to power in 1878. R. MacGregor Dawson, "The Gerrymander of 1882," *Canadian Journal of Economics and*

own physician in favour of medical services performed by police doctors and local practitioners as, "best for the Indians and the most economical for the government,"⁷⁰ precisely at the time when the Indians in the west were experiencing the effects of widespread and protracted famine. The abandonment of a clear medical policy precisely when the Indian population of the west was most in need of medical care stands as a testament to Dominion indifference to the plight of a population in crisis.

Within a year of the completion of the Carlton treaty, the seeds of a large-scale famine were taking root. By 1877, the critical shortage of bison on the plains prompted the movement of almost 3,600 Treaty Indians to the Cypress Hills, the last range of the herds in Canadian territory.⁷¹ A substantial number of others who had yet to enter into treaty had also converged in the Hills.⁷² The concentration of people in the area was exacerbated in the spring of 1877, when Sitting Bull and his 5,000 followers arrived in search of both sanctuary and sustenance.⁷³

During the summer of 1877, Treaty 7 was hurriedly negotiated to defuse the

Political Science 1 (1935), 215.

⁷⁰NAC, RG 10, Microfilm, reel C-10113, vol. 3648, file 8138, S.D. Cote to John A. Macdonald, 14 June 14 1880.

⁷¹Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," 215.

⁷²Of the 1,500 or so Cree who gathered at Pitt for treaty negotiations in the fall of 1876, only 317 accepted annuity payments. Prior to these large scale refusals, "all others had signed and had been happy to do so. Among those who sought refuge in the high country of the Cypress Hills were the followers of Big Bear, Little Pine, Piapot and Cowesses, "along with numerous stragglers," including almost all of the Canadian Assiniboine. "SAB R-E1883, Frederick Tarr and Larry Peterson, "The Coming of the Queen," in *Little Pine/Lucky Man Band #116*, n.p. (n.d. typewritten).

⁷³Grant MacEwan, *Sitting Bull: The Years in Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1973), 90-91.

increasingly tense situation on the southwestern plains.⁷⁴ Confusion persists over the precise meaning of the Treaty which, according to a witness, included David Laird's cryptic commitment to those gathered at Blackfoot Crossing that, "[t]he Queen wishes to offer you the same as was accepted by the Crees. I do not mean exactly the same terms, but equivalent terms, that will cost the Queen the same amount of money."⁷⁵ In what must have been one of the most hollow of government promises during the treaty period, the Blackfoot were assured that the bison would survive for another ten years.⁷⁶ There was reason for the hasty formalization of relations between the Dominion and the inhabitants of southern Alberta. That spring, the American Army had begun its campaign against the Nez Perce and rumours circulated about the possibility of Chief Joseph and his people joining forces with Sitting Bull and his people at Cypress.⁷⁷

⁷⁴In his foreword to a recent study of the meaning of Treaty 7, Gregg C. Smith, stressed that the Blackfoot Treaty "was first and foremost a peace treaty; they [the Elders] do not remember ever being told that the Treaty 7 First Nations had agreed to a land surrender." Treaty 7 Elders et al., *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*, viii.

⁷⁵David Chalmers, *Laird of the West* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1981), 99. The confusion over the meaning of Treaty 7 has been considered at length. See Treaty 7 Elders et al., *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*. See also Taylor, "Two Views on the Meaning of Treaties Six and Seven," *The Spirit of the Alberta Indian Treaties* ed. Richard Price, ed. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1999): 9-46.

⁷⁶Hugh Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 110.

⁷⁷John Snow, *These Mountains are our Sacred Places: The Story of the Stoney Indians*, 31. For a discussion of the international events contributing to the making of Treaty 7, including the arrival of two Hundred of the Nez Perce who managed to join Sitting Bull and his people at Wood Mountain, see Treaty 7 Elders et al., *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*, 224-229. On the American Army's offensive against the bison as a means to starve Sitting Bull into submission, see Smits, "The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883," 334. Adding to the turmoil south of the line was a smallpox epidemic that spread from Salt Lake City to Helena, Montana during the winter of 1876-77. NAC, RG 10, vol. 3643, file 7708, Extract From Report of Surgeon B. Nevitt of the North West Mounted Police dated at Fort Macleod N.W. Territories, 2 January 1877.

Rumours circulated of an impending Indian-settler war in the interior of British Columbia.⁷⁸ The military nature of the Canadian presence in the southwestern plains was underscored by the fact that, until after 1879, the Mounted Police were responsible for the administration of Indian Affairs in the region covered by Treaty 7.⁷⁹

Although the anxiety over the possibility of bloodshed spilling into Canadian territory was high in 1877, the Blackfoot had yet to undergo a decline in their health status because of the depletion of the herds. Early in the year, the police surgeon, R. B. Nevitt, reported from Fort Macleod:

I have attended to about 300 Indians, including of course women and children. The presence of phthisic disease [pulmonary tuberculosis] is not marked to the extent that I had anticipated, but it is a difficult thing to get at the truth of such things through an interpreter.⁸⁰

In 1876, the missionary Constantine Scollen reported to Lieutenant Governor Morris that, although the Blackfoot were in "awful dread of the future," their condition had rebounded since the dark days prior to the arrival of the police as that "they have bought two thousand horses to replace those they had given for whiskey."⁸¹ Hunger

⁷⁸Snow, *These Mountains are our Sacred Places: The Story of the Stoney Indians*, 31. At least one hundred Mounted Police were requested to reinforce detachments in B.C., a situation which would have "seriously weaken[ed] the divisions of the North West Territories." In 1877, the total strength of the N.W.M.P. in the west was between 329 and 335. E.C. Morgan, "Strength and Distribution of Officers and Men at Principal Posts and Sub-Posts, 1875-1883," in *The North West Mounted Police, 1873-1883* (M.A. thesis, University of Regina, 1970), 93.

⁷⁹A.J. Looy, *The Indian Agent and His Role in the Administration of the Northwest Superintendency, 1876-1893* (Ph. D. diss. Queen's University, 1977), 61.

⁸⁰NAC, RG 10, vol. 3643, file 7708, Extract From Report of Surgeon B. Nevitt of the North West Mounted Police dated at Fort Macleod N.W. Territories, 2 January 1877.

⁸¹Scollen to the Lieutenant Governor, Fort Pitt, 8 September 1876, in Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 248-249. Earlier police reports remarked on the affluence of some of the Blackfoot Confederacy. A police report to the Department of Justice,

does not appear to have been a factor in the negotiations. Crowfoot refused government food until his concerns with the treaty were addressed.⁸²

The extremely mild conditions through the "black" winter of 1877-78 seriously undermined subsistence conditions in the southwest.⁸³ The drought made the grasslands a tinderbox and the fires that ensued contributed to a food crisis among the plains hunters. The Commissioner of the NWMP, James Macleod, remarked in his report for 1877, "the state of affairs existing during the early part of the year 1878, in the southwesterly districts of the North-West Territories were entirely different from any we experienced since the arrival of the force in the country."⁸⁴ Macleod continued, "[h]ungry men are dangerous whether they be Indians or Whites, and I think it is a

dated 25 August 1875, described the Peigan as, "a very wealthy tribe, in the camp there lay at the head of the mountain 200 Lodges, say 600 men, there were 5,000 horses the tribe possessein all 8,000..." Report to the Department of Justice, 25 August 1875, in Naylor, *Index to Aboriginal issues Found in the Records of the North West Mounted Police RG 18, National Archives of Canada*, Extract 203, 66.

⁸²Some of the Stonies and "a minor Blood Chief" did request rations. Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 96; Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 256. An early account of the Treaty stated that some the Blackfoot who were presented with government cattle at treaty time took the meat to their villages "for their dogs to eat, for there still were many buffalo and hence no need of white man's beef." Kelly, *The Range Men: The Story of the Ranchers and Indians of Alberta*, 119. The truth of the statement is unknown.

⁸³The biographer of the Blackfoot Chief, Crowfoot, noted the extremely mild winter was known as the *Itsa-estoyi*. It was during that winter that the famine among the Blackfoot began. Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 108-109. As the famine in the west began in earnest, Gerald Friesen boasted that 1878 marked the beginning of "a new economic era" of the prairies, the result of rail and steam powered water transport that opened the west to colonization. "Imports and Exports in the Manitoba Economy, 1870-1890," 32-34.

⁸⁴James Macleod, "Report of James Macleod, Commissioner, 1877," in Commissioners of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, *Opening the West: Official Reports of the Royal North-West Mounted Police* (Toronto: Coles Canadiana Collection, 1973), 20.

wonderful thing how well the Indian has behaved under all the circumstances of the case.”⁸⁵ Near Fort Qu’Appelle, a group of starving Indians was hit by an unspecified disease prior to the spring thaw. The dead were left in the flood plain of the Qu’Appelle River for the ice to sweep the bodies downstream.⁸⁶ In April 1878, Indian Agent Dickieson reported to his superior, Lawrence Vankoughnet, that over the winter, “the Indians were very poorly off, starving in fact...”⁸⁷ Dickieson then stressed, “we are on the eve of an Indian outbreak which will be caused principally by starvation, it does not do to scan the lines of the treaty too closely.”⁸⁸ He estimated the entire Indian and Métis population of the northwest to be about 26,500. He then calculated that to “provide food for this number of people would require at least 132,500 lbs of meat, or about 350 animals daily, over 10,000 annually.”⁸⁹

In May 1878, Lieutenant Governor Laird warned the Minister of the Interior, David Mills, that conditions dictated that the government must respond to the famine in one of three ways, “to help the Indians to farm and raise stock, to feed them, or to fight them.”⁹⁰ Laird expressed his frustration with Ottawa’s parsimony regarding the

⁸⁵Ibid., 22.

⁸⁶Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*, 71-72.

⁸⁷Maureen Lux, *Beyond Biology: Disease and its Impact on the Canadian Plains Native People 1880-1930* (Ph. D. diss. Simon Fraser University, 1996), 40.

⁸⁸Lux, *Beyond Biology: Disease and its Impact on the Canadian Plains Native People 1880-1930*, 40.

⁸⁹Looy, “Saskatchewan’s First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson,” 113.

⁹⁰Lux, *Beyond Biology: Disease and its Impact on the Canadian Plains Native People 1880-1930*, 30. The notion that it was “cheaper to feed [Indians] than to fight them” was echoed by Dr. Duncan McEachran, a prominent early rancher and Chief veterinary Inspector in the early 1880s. David Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and*

deepening food crisis:

In the face of the difficulties, therefore, with which I have to contend with this winter, and still the great difficulties which I see looming in the future, it is very discouraging to have my moderate request for two or three thousand dollars to help the Indians at a time when it would seem to do the most good, met by the objection that there is no provision therefore in the estimates.⁹¹

Though the Dominion response to the hardship did not assuage Laird's frustration, Agent Dickieson was sent to Montana in April on what became a regular mission to secure cattle for the starving population.⁹²

By the spring of 1878, the herds were even scarce in their range in the Cypress Hills. The Métis trader, Norbert Welsh, who travelled through the area in the spring of 1878, noted, "we didn't see a buffalo, an Indian, or anything. Everything was bare."⁹³ The Blackfoot, and their former adversaries under Sitting Bull, moved to the Great Sand Hills, north of Cypress.⁹⁴ Big Bear and other Cree leaders led their people north to Sounding Lake to discuss the crisis among themselves and to confer with Dominion officials. Treaty Indians received their annuity payments. Big Bear again discussed the possibility of entering Treaty.⁹⁵ Among the Canadians who met with him at Sounding

the Ranching Frontier, 1874-1924 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 15.

⁹¹SAB, Microfilm, reel 2.563, Alphonse Little Poplar, *Miscellaneous Documents Relating to the Sweet Grass Reserve* (1974 typewritten).

⁹²Looy, "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson," 111.

⁹³Welsh did not encounter any Indians until he met with Starblanket and his people who were camped on the Milk River. Mary Weekes, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1945), 173-187.

⁹⁴Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 108-109. The congregation of the old antagonists in search of food was reported to have "raised a storm of indignation among the young [Blackfoot] warriors."

⁹⁵For a discussion of the events at Sounding Lake, see Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 81-89.

Lake was the newly appointed Medical Superintendent to the Indians of the territory, Dr. Hagarty. In his report, the physician remarked, "I think a good deal of Big Bear ... if I had management of the Indians of the North West that I would like every Chief think and act like Big Bear."⁹⁶ He then recorded the Cree Chief's statement on the predicament of his followers that difficult summer:

I am willing to take my treaty on the same grounds on which I make my living; but they ask me to Fort Pitt, a distance of 300 miles to receive my treaty. They have the welfare of others at heart and not mine nor that of my people. Do they think my men can travel 300 miles to receive \$5 per man? Do they think it would pay? How would the women and children go who have no horses? The thing is utterly impossible. There is no use in discussion the fact the Buffalo are rapidly passing away, and that a substitute should be created before the exhaustion comes about, which can be done by placing the plain (sic) Indians on Reservations, giving them domesticated cattle, and skilled assistance for a short time. Costly though it may be, you will find it cheaper than feeding them which must be done...⁹⁷

As Big bear tried in vain to improve the terms of the treaty, the hungry were gathering at the existing European settlements seeking respite from the famine. The total failure of the hunt at Carlton and other provision posts forced the newly arrived Sioux to proceed to Prince Albert where, by November, eighty-nine tents of them were reported to "already be begging from door to door."⁹⁸ At Battleford, the Indian department office was under daily pressure from Indians in from the plains, some of whom "had been forced to eat their dogs to keep them from starving."⁹⁹ The food crisis at the new Territorial capital led to the construction of a stockade, "for fear that starving

⁹⁶NAC, RG 10, Microfilm, reel C-10119, vol. 3678, file 11683, Report of Dr. Hagarty, Battleford, 20 February 1879.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸HBCA Search File, "Prince Albert," Lawrence Clarke to Commissioner James Graham, Carlton House, 26 November 1878, 32.

⁹⁹Looy, "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson," 113.

Natives might attack the fort where supplies were held."¹⁰⁰ In a sad irony, food was provided as payment for the Indian labour that built the fortification intended to keep the hungry away from the Dominion ration house.¹⁰¹ By the end of the year, the suffering at Battleford was so pervasive as to become banal. Under the heading "Lost and Found," the *Saskatchewan Herald* ran the following item on December 16, 1878:

FOUND Where the Indians starved to death, about the 1st of October, a white mare. The owner can have the same by proving property and paying expenses. Apply to Antoine Morin, Battleford.¹⁰²

As famine and an epidemic of scarlet fever¹⁰³ spread across the plains during the fall of 1878, Indian communities were confronted with a new threat to their already precarious situation. In October, the Conservative party, under John A. Macdonald, returned to power. Management of the increasingly serious food situation, and of Indian Affairs generally, shifted from a position of "relative ignorance" under the

¹⁰⁰Hilderbrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*, 42.

¹⁰¹Col. James Walker, "Incidents of Indian Events," in *The Sands of Time*, ed. Ross Innes (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Publications, 1986), 124. Walker noted that he was reprimanded during the construction because, "my action was not approved and that I must not incur any expense chargeable to the department."

¹⁰²*Saskatchewan Herald*, 16 December 1878, 3.

¹⁰³On 21 October 1878, the *Saskatchewan Herald* noted that the disease was "prevalent ... especially among the younger people." On February 10th the paper reported that the disease had broken out at Lac La Biche and that several deaths had occurred. Two weeks later, the *Herald* reported that Dr. E.A. Porter, newly arrived at Prince Albert, had returned from a trip north to Sturgeon Lake to treat a Cree band "in pitiful condition, most of them sick with scarlet fever and starving." Dr. Porter's own memoir recounts that the disease spread to Prince Albert shortly after his trip to Sounding Lake, "There existed no means of isolating these cases. Many of the Indians died of it as it was carried from point to point in their migratory trips. It became apparent that the advent and the ways of the white population were introducing new medical problems when there followed another epidemic, influenza. SAB, R.A. Mayson Papers, A.M- 455, 4, 3.

Liberals¹⁰⁴ to one of outright malevolence during the Macdonald regime.¹⁰⁵ The pacification, or as John Tobias stated, "the subjugation," of the plains Indians was an integral, if not always explicit, component of the Tory government's development programme known as the "National Policy."¹⁰⁶ The importance that the new administration ascribed to the Indian question was underscored by Macdonald's dual role of Prime Minister and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs from the time he returned to office until the end of 1887.¹⁰⁷ In light of the trouble that would plague the management of Indian Affairs for decades, if not generations, M.G. Dickieson's statement of frustration to his new political superiors, written in a month after the Tories took office, was prophetic; "[w]hen the Government has to spend \$1,000.00 to perform what \$10.00 would at present, they may wake up to the fact that they have been sleeping on a volcano."¹⁰⁸

The winter of 1878-79 was difficult for the Indians of the western plains. When David Laird met with the Chief of the Eagle Hills Cree during the first week of February, the *Herald* reported that the Indians, "say that they have never been so near starvation.

¹⁰⁴Governmental correspondence from the summer of 1878, according to Looy, "clearly reveals that the Department was singularly uninformed about the circumstances of the Indians or even their whereabouts." "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson," 110.

¹⁰⁵Tobias, *Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885*, 212-239.

¹⁰⁶The connection between the completion of the centrepiece of the National Policy, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the subjugation of the Métis has been noted by D.N. Sprague. See *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885*, 157-177.

¹⁰⁷Canada. Privy Council Office, *Guide to Canadian Ministries Since Confederation, July 1, 1867-February 1, 1982* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, Privy Council Office, Public Archives of Canada, 1982), 13.

¹⁰⁸Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 78, 80.

Their tone is peaceful but resolute..."¹⁰⁹ By spring, the situation had deteriorated to the point of crisis. On the second of April, Father Constantine Scollen told Major Irvine of the police that some Indians had been reduced to eating poisoned wolf carcasses.¹¹⁰

The priest reported that conditions among the Blackfeet were without precedent:

The sufferings of the Indians have been something unparalleled heretofore in this section of the country... Some have lived on dogs, and I have known others to live several days on nothing else but old bones which they have gathered and broke, wherewith to make a kind of soup... In my opinion give us another winter like the past and we are done for.¹¹¹

At Calgary, a delegation of Blackfoot Chiefs petitioned Sub-Inspector Denny for help, "[o]ur people are starving; do help us for some of us have nothing to eat, and many of us could find none anywhere..."¹¹² On his arrival in the west, Edgar Dewdney provided many of the hungry Blackfoot with rations enough to take them south of the border, a move that saved the Dominion at least \$100,000 over 1879 and 1880.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹*Saskatchewan Herald*, 24 March 1879, 2.

¹¹⁰McQuillan, "Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies 1870-1885," 384. The Blackfoot under Crowfoot were forced to turn to new foods during the spring of 1879. These included, rabbits, gophers, mice, moles, porcupines, and badgers, "anything with meat on its bones was eaten, no matter how rank." Hugh Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfoot*, 111-112.

¹¹¹Looy, *The Indian Agent and His Role in the Administration of the Northwest Superintendency, 1876-1893*, 51. F.G. Roe noted that the commercial hide trade in southern Alberta dropped by 50% between 1878 and 1879. *The North American Buffalo*, 475. Arlean MacPherson used the *Saskatchewan Herald* to track the decline of the trade in bison robes from Fort Macleod. In 1877, over 30,000 robes were traded for a total value of \$60,000. In 1878, the number of robes traded plummeted to 12,797 robes and a total value of \$25,594. By 1879, the trade shrank to a mere 5,764 robes and a value of \$11, 528. *The Battlefords: A History*, 67.

¹¹²*Saskatchewan Herald*, 7 May 1879, 2.

¹¹³Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 45. For a discussion of the Blackfoot experience in the United States, see Hugh Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 115-130.

At the beginning of May 1879, two hundred destitute Cree had converged on the territorial capital of Battleford. Three weeks later, their number swelled to almost seven hundred and fifty¹¹⁴. According to a local historian, "all were hungry."¹¹⁵ Between January and June 1879, 75,000 lbs. of flour were shipped to the settlement.¹¹⁶ On May 19th, P.G. Laurie reported in the *Herald* that the settlement had, "[n]o bacon, no beef, no pemmican, no fish, no game, no potatoes, and until Monday (May) 12th, no flour to be had..."¹¹⁷ In her discussion of the hardship at Battleford, Maureen Lux stated that Dickieson requisitioned at least 20,000 lbs. of bacon, 300,000 lbs. of flour and 100,000 pounds of beef to mitigate the famine.¹¹⁸

In July 1879, David Laird reported that there had been no game in the vicinity for the past two months and that, because supplies were running out, the police post at Battleford should be reinforced in case of trouble.¹¹⁹ James McKay, the Anglican cleric and interpreter of the Treaty 6 negotiations, chronicled the deteriorating situation at Battleford:

May 24th: Serious news from the plains. The buffalo have disappeared-all migrating south of the line and there is general starvation. Nearly two hundred tents have come in...

¹¹⁴SAB, A.E. Forget Papers, R-39, Vol. 6, File 7, Henriette A. Forget, "Reminiscences of Fort Battleford," 2. See also *Saskatchewan Herald*, 2 June 1879, 2.

¹¹⁵McPherson, *The Battlefords: A History*, 67.

¹¹⁶*Saskatchewan Herald*, 30 June 1879, 1.

¹¹⁷McPherson, *The Battlefords: A History*, 60.

¹¹⁸Lux, *Beyond Biology: Disease and its Impact on the Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1930*, 43. The author did not discuss whether the requisitioned aid was ever delivered.

¹¹⁹SAB R-E1883, Frederick Tarr and Larry Peterson, *Little Pine/Lucky Man #116*, Laird to Macdonald, 30 June 1879, n.p.

May 31st: The Indians generally listen to what I have to say... but often with a good deal of indifference. They are starving and their chief thoughts are of food. They got some assistance from the govt. but many of the most needy are often overlooked. We of course have constant applications for food and we cannot withhold help... even though we have nothing that we can really offer to share.

July 5th: There are not so many Indians here now as there were when I left and the government has the distribution of food among them better organized. A good many of them have been put to work on a farm a few miles towards the Eagle Hills. Most of the Blackfeet have left having been supplied with provisions for the journey southward.

Aug 1st: Still a large number of Indians here, they are mostly Crees and Assiniboines. Nearly all the Blackfeet & other southern tribes have left. There is still the same story of starvation in the plains & the Indians are staying for govt. relief.¹²⁰

The Blackfeet travelled north seeking assistance, as "many of them were dying because they could not subsist on a diet of roots."¹²¹ Dickieson, who was Acting Indian Superintendent, provided them with food on the understanding that they would return to their territory and resume the hunt for the illusive herds to the south.¹²² Even the unsympathetic editor of the *Herald*, P.G. Laurie, was moved by the plight of the hungry, "[t]he condition of these Indians is deplorable in the extreme. Accustomed all their lives to a diet consisting largely of animal food, the rations of flour and tea they receive here

¹²⁰SAB, Innes Papers, A-113, volume 5, McKay Papers, F.1, Diary 1870-1884.

¹²¹Looy, "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson," 109. The *Saskatchewan Herald* noted that without the use of "generally despised weeds, "wild turnips and wild rhubarb, that the sufferings of these people would have been greatly intensified. 30 June 1879, 2.

¹²²Looy, "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson," 109. During the spring of 1879, the authorities provided food to some Blackfoot and Sarcee, "enough to take them back to their country." High water on the South Saskatchewan forced some of them to return to the capital. SAB, A.E. Forget Papers, R-39, Vol. 6, File 7, Henriette A. Forget, "Reminiscences of Fort Battleford, 1879," 3. By the summer of 1879, Hugh Dempsey noted that the majority of the Blood and Peigan people had crossed the border into Montana. *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 112.

leave them but one remove from starvation."¹²³ Laurie noted that Dickieson, Laird's temporary replacement, "has to deal singlehanded with a thousand starving Indians," with no meat, or any means of requisitioning it from his superiors "other than the semi-occasional mail with which we are favoured."¹²⁴ Dickieson, who was a Liberal appointee, left the frontier service in September 1879.¹²⁵ The editor of the *Herald* noted that Bobtail, a spokesman for the Cree Chiefs, was "sorry that Dickieson is leaving, (sic) always did the best he could to keep them from starving."¹²⁶

The despair witnessed at Battleford was part of the country-wide famine that descended on the plains nations during the terrible summer of 1879. In August, the Prime Minister was informed that, "some 14,000 including men, women and children of the Indian tribes west of Fort Ellis are said to be on the point of starvation."¹²⁷ The *Herald* recounted the hardship experienced by the family of Koo-qua-a-witt who arrived at Victoria Mission that summer with his starving children. One son, who was unconscious, died five days after the family's arrival. Another, whose bleeding nose

¹²³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 30 June 30 1879, 2.

¹²⁴*Ibid.* The telegraph line to Battleford was reopened by the end of summer. Although Dickieson had been notified as early as February, 1879, that he would be assisted by two additional Indian Agents, they would not arrive by spring seeding, "thus leaving Dickieson as the only Departmental official in a crucial season." Looy, "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson," 108-109.

¹²⁵Dickieson exchanged positions with Walter Orde of the Department of Finance. *Ibid.*, 113. Orde was replaced by Hayter Reed in the spring of 1881. Looy, *The Indian Agent and His Role in the Administration of the Northwest Superintendency, 1876-1893*, 75-77.

¹²⁶*Saskatchewan Herald*, 25 August 1879, 2.

¹²⁷NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, Microfilm, reel C-1590, p.81,299. Campbell to Macdonald, Ottawa, 10 August 1879. At the time, the Prime Minister was on a journey to London to lobby support for the Pacific Railway. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885*, 142.

could not be stopped, perished nine days after his younger brother. The distraught father, described as "skin & bones from caring for his sick children," then left for the plains where he too was reported to have succumbed to hunger.¹²⁸ At Edmonton, the Indian Agent, James Stewart, reported on the crisis :

The unusual destitution of the Indians, all over this Agency, obliged us to assist them to a large extent; indeed, as large as it may appear, it was by no means what it looks at first sight. If you divide the amount distributed by the number of recipients, you will find it but a small portion to each sufferer. I may well call them sufferers, for I have never seen anything like it since my long residence in this country. It was not only the want of buffalo, but everything else seemed to have deserted the country; even fish were scarce. Fur bearing animals... were not to be had. In some cases some hunting might have been done, but the poor people were naked, and the cold was intense, and remained so during the whole winter; under these circumstances they behaved well, and no raids were made on anything here. They ate many of their horses, and all the dogs were destroyed for food; in fact everything was tried and failed. In our assistance the strictest economy was practised, and unless the Indians had been allowed to die, or to help themselves to the settlers' cattle (neither of which ways would have brought much credit to anybody concerned), we could not have got through with less.¹²⁹

At Blackfoot Crossing, Edgar Dewdney, the newly-arrived Indian Commissioner, "found about 1,300 Indians in a very destitute condition, and many on the verge of starvation."¹³⁰ Dewdney recorded in his diary that, "[s]trong young men were now so weak that some of them could hardly walk."¹³¹ While most relied on charity if they could

¹²⁸ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 14 July 1879, 2.

¹²⁹ Canada, *Sessional Papers* (hereafter CSP), 1881, Report to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Edmonton, 21 August 1880, 102. Stewart resigned soon after his report and was replaced as the Indian Agent for Edmonton by Molineux St. John. Jean Larmour, *Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, 1879-1888* (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus, 1969), 43 and Looy, *The Indian Agent and His Role in the Administration of the Northwest Superintendency, 1876-1893*, 63.

¹³⁰ CSP 1880, Report of the Indian Commissioner, Ottawa, 2 January 1880, 78.

¹³¹ Hugh Dempsey, ed., "The Starvation Year: Edgar Dewdney's Diary for 1879, Part 1," *Alberta History* 31(1983), 9. Entries for 17 and 19 July 1879. The desperation

procure it, many of the wealthy Blackfoot were reduced to exchanging their horses for a few cups of flour. A "Mr. French," acquired approximately sixty horses for flour.

According to Dewdney:

[H]is excuse for giving so small an amount was, that he had been obliged to give away more than he had traded, being led to believe by Father Scollen that if he did not let them have it, they would have helped themselves. They had also pawned their rifles, and after eating almost all their dogs, were reduced to eating gophers and mice¹³²

Laurie reported that so many horses had been traded for flour at Battleford that, "the market is so completely glutted that no more can be disposed of."¹³³ At Calgary, the Blackfoot, Stonies, and Métis, "were starving and even resorting to eating grass, Inspector Denny took it upon himself to purchase and issue beef at the rate of 2,000 pounds a day."¹³⁴ In his memoir, the Canadian botanist, John Macoun, described his encounter with a group of Blackfoot women near the Hand Hills who offered to wash the crew's dishes. The astonished scientist remarked, "before they washed the plates, they actually licked them clean."¹³⁵ Apparently oblivious to the suffering around him, Macoun was berated by Father "Scallen" who asked, "Do you know that the people here are dying of starvation? ... There are two lying dead in their tents now who have

among the Indians was such that one woman threatened to hang herself if she was not given some food for her two children. Dewdney did not report on her fate.

¹³²CSP 1880, Report of the Indian Commissioner, Ottawa, 2 January 1880, 78.

¹³³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 30 June 1879, 2. The trading of Indian horses for flour also took place in 1881. Hilderbrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*, 42.

¹³⁴Wallace, *A Double Duty: The Decisive First Decade of the North West Mounted Police*, 210.

¹³⁵John Macoun, *Autobiography of John Macoun, M.A.: Canadian Explorer and Naturalist, 1831-1920* (Ottawa: Ottawa Field-Naturalists Club, 1922), 149.

just died of starvation."¹³⁶

Amid the desperation, the Indian Commissioner maintained his focus on fiscal restraint. After a "long & rather warm"¹³⁷ discussion" on the situation with Col. Macleod, Dewdney remarked:

I refused to take the responsibility for giving Carte Blanche [emphasis Dewdney's] to all the posts to ration all the Indians. We agreed that the greatest care should be taken so as not to lead the Indians to believe that they would be fed on a regular rations, whether they worked or not. I arranged with the Col. that he should do as had been done heretofore-food be issued when it was found that the Indians were really starving, to those who would work & to the sick & infirm who had no friends & who could not work.¹³⁸

In December 1879, the *Saskatchewan Herald* reported that over twenty-five Blackfoot "had died of actual starvation."¹³⁹ In his medical report for Fort Macleod, the Surgeon George F. Kennedy noted that women were especially vulnerable:

Quite a number of Indians, chiefly Bloods, Blackfeet and North Peigans, have been under my treatment during the year. The diseases prevalent among them were for the most part opthalmia [severe eye inflammation], phthisis and other chest infections, and venereal; phthisis and chest infections were found to be especially common among the females, and it was rare to find a woman over thirty years old with sound lungs.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶Ibid., 149-150. The following day, Macoun reported that the band had been saved by the sudden appearance of a small herd of bison.

¹³⁷Later, he described the bullet holes at old Fort Whoop Up as showing, "that at times they had warm work." Clearly, Dewdney and Macleod strongly disagreed on the proper course of action during the famine. Dempsey, ed., "The Starvation Year: Edgar Dewdney's Diary for 1879, Part 1," 13.

¹³⁸Ibid., 11. Entry of 24 July, 1879. For a discussion of Dewdney's conflict with Macleod over the supply of rations to the hungry, see Larmour, *Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, 1879-1888*, 19-20.

¹³⁹*Saskatchewan Herald*, 1 December 1879.

¹⁴⁰*CSP 1879*, Part 3. North-West Mounted Police Force, Commissioner's Report, 1879, Report of Surgeon Kennedy, Fort Macleod, 30 November 1879, 34. Kennedy's observation is supported by recent research. W.D. Johnston noted, "more

Compounding the misery in the southwest, a disease known as mountain fever¹⁴¹ was a recurrent problem in the high country of the Cypress Hills and Wood Mountain.¹⁴² The fever attacked all communities in the region, including the police.¹⁴³ During the winter of 1878-79, nine Half-breeds and "some Sioux" succumbed to the fever at Wood Mountain. Surgeon Kittson remarked that the infection though lethal, was localised, "I did not hear of its existence in any other part of the western District."¹⁴⁴ Although the disease is caused from contact with infected ticks,¹⁴⁵ accounts of the epidemic attributed the source of the infection to the rotting carcasses of cattle and

females die from tuberculosis than do males in populations where tuberculosis epidemics are just beginning..." Johnston, "Tuberculosis," 1060.

¹⁴¹Mountain fever is spread from contact with ticks infected with the mite *Rickitsia*. A recent discussion reported that between 20 and 25% of untreated victims die, although mortality from an outbreak was reported to be as high as 75% during an outbreak in the Bitterroot Valley of Western Montana. Victoria A. Harden, "Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and the Spotted Fever Group Diseases," in *Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, ed. Kenneth Kiple (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 982, 984.

¹⁴²As bad as the problem was in southern Alberta, Surgeon Kittson noted that the problem was more severe south of the international boundary where "mountain fever" annually ravaged U.S. Military posts and forced the abandonment of many mining camps. *CSP 1880*, Part 3. North-West Mounted Police Force, Commissioner's Report, 1879, Report of Surgeon Kittson, Fort Macleod, 30 January 1880, 28.

¹⁴³The recurrence of the fever was, at least in part, the rationale for the abandonment of Fort Walsh. As early as 1879, Superintendent Crozier "suggeste[ed] the necessity of removing the post to a more healthy locality." Report of Superintendent Crozier, Fort Walsh, 29 December 1879, in *Opening the West: Official Reports of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, 1874-1881*, 19.

¹⁴⁴Report of Surgeon Kittson, Fort Macleod, 30 January 1880, in *Opening the West: Official Reports of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, 1874-1881*, 28-29.

¹⁴⁵Harden, "Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and the Spotted Fever Group Diseases," 982.

bison that polluted the streams used for drinking water.¹⁴⁶

While epidemics and famine plagued the people of the southwest, the food situation was no less desperate on the eastern plains. In April 1879, Archibald McDonald wrote to Robert Bell from Fort Ellice that, "the Indians has suffered considerable last winter from starvation and a good many of them made beef of the cattle supplied them by the government." He then predicted the failure of the new administration's Indian policy:

But as the wise men at Ottawa know more of Indians and Indian matters than those who have passed a lifetime among them, it is of little use saying anything on the subject. Master Indian is going to cost the country a trifle more than they fancy.¹⁴⁷

Official reports of starvation came from Fort Qu'Appelle, Touchwood Hills, Fort Ellice and Moose Mountain.¹⁴⁸ At Moose, Dickieson noted that "the Indians were in a deplorable condition, and it is reported that several died from exposure and want of food."¹⁴⁹ In August 1879, Dr. Hagarty reported on decline of White Bear's Band since his arrival in the west:

¹⁴⁶Kelly, *The Range Men: The Ranchers and Indians of Alberta*, 125. The doctor believed the source of infection was water contaminated by the rotting carcasses, "of horses and buffalo strewn along the upper valley where, under favourable circumstances of heat and moisture, it was possible for the typhoid poison to develop and find its way into the stream." *CSP 1880*, North-West Mounted Police Force, Commissioner's Report, 1879, Report of Surgeon Kittson, Fort Macleod, 30 January 1880, 29.

¹⁴⁷NAC, Robert Bell Papers, MG 29, B 15, vol. 24, fo.88, Archibald McDonald to Bell, 16 April 1879.

¹⁴⁸*CSP 1880*, Report of Lawrence Vankoughnet, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 31 December 1879, 12.

¹⁴⁹*CSP 1880*, Report of the Acting Superintendent, Battleford, 21 July 1879, 105. In the same paragraph, Dickieson reported that "Very little provisions have been given out in Treaty No. 4. This led to a demand, accompanied by a show of force, being made on the Hudson's Bay Company at Qu'Appelle."

The Indians at this place are very much emaciated. Hunger has shown its terrible effects on them and scrofula and other kindred diseases are becoming deeply rooted. In 1877, when I passed through here I was struck with the healthy appearance of the Indians and the freedom from disease, the general lightheartedness and the happiness and contentment which prevailed but today presents an entirely different picture. Scrofulous disease of the eyes, caused by poverty, smoke and filth is, I think, on the increase: though at each place I attend to their and leave some preparations in the hands of the Chiefs to be used when required and according to directions.¹⁵⁰

At Touchwood, Hagarty noted "about the same condition of things ... disease, hunger and lassitude."¹⁵¹ Although the physician provided the hungry with "the usual ration," the food, intended for an entire day, was consumed in a single meal. The next day, a deputation of the starving pleaded, "we have not eaten enough for the last two months, and what you gave us yesterday only made us one meal."¹⁵² At Yellow Quill's reserve, he reported that two oxen and some flour had been stolen three days before the band was to be provided with rations. The Chief, who refused to participate in the theft, was provided with extra provisions by the physician who, "complimented him on his devotedness to the laws of the Great White Mother, for which he thanked me, expressed his attachment to the Queen and was very proud of his conduct."¹⁵³ At Qu'Appelle, where Poorman's Band had broken into the store house in June,¹⁵⁴ Hagarty was shocked to find another aspect of the worsening situation on the plains,

¹⁵⁰NAC, RG 10 vol. 3678, file 11683. Report of Indians of White Bear's Band, 5-6 August 1879. Hagarty stated that he left medicine chests and instructions on the use of their contents with the Chiefs at their request.

¹⁵¹Ibid., Report on the Indians of Day Star's Band. 15 August 1879.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ibid., Report on the Indians of Yellow Quill's Band. 15 August 1879.

¹⁵⁴Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 42.

the outbreak of venereal disease, "on expressing my astonishment at finding it in the Territory for the first time, was given to understand that the Indians so affected had come from near the International line and the Cypress Hills."¹⁵⁵

In addition to the mounting health crisis on the eastern plains, Hagarty's account described the growing tension between the hungry Indians and officials of the Indian department. The incident at Yellow Quill's reserve, and the other cases of trouble over Indian access to government supplies, underscore the fact that, while the Indians were starving, in many cases to death, the situation was exacerbated by the inadequate distribution of supplies that were available. The famine on the plains was more than the simple Malthusian equation of too many Indians and too few bison.¹⁵⁶ Even the essentially Victorian account of the famine provided by G.F.G. Stanley remarked on the "parsimony" of the Dominion ration policy rather than on the absence of food on the plains.¹⁵⁷

The notion that the starvation experienced on the plains was not merely caused by the absence of food is supported by the literature focussing on famine in the global

¹⁵⁵Ibid., Report on the Indians of Loud Voice's Band, 29 August 1879. On his return to Portage La Prairie, he found venereal disease emerging there, "I was never called to treat Indians for venereal disease in the Territory except those instances that I now relate." Report of Indians of Chicock's Band, 30 August 1879.

¹⁵⁶See Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population. Volume 1*, ed. Patricia James (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11. During Edgar Dewdney's tour of the west in the late summer of 1879, he noted that the freight for the police included, "too much bran & corn meal which will have to be left at Prince Albert." Hugh Dempsey, ed., "The Starvation Year, Edgar Dewdney's Diary for 1879. Part 2," *Alberta History* 31 (1983), 7.

¹⁵⁷George F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 270-271. Though maligned for his antiquarian interpretation of events, Stanley noted of government action that, "such a niggardly policy was shortsighted." 274.

context. The Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, began his pioneering study into the economics of famine with the following statement:

Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having [emphasis Sen's] enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat. While the later can be the cause of the former, it is but one of many causes.¹⁵⁸

Sen's study was grounded on the notion that starvation must be analysed from a population's, "relationship [emphasis Sen's] to the commodity ... starvation statements translate readily into statements of ownership of food by persons... In order to understand starvation, it is therefore, necessary to go into the structure of ownership."¹⁵⁹ Sen described the relations of ownership of commodities as types of "entitlement" relations. The understanding of the entitlement relations are, according to the author, required for the analysis of poverty in general but specifically to the study of famines and starvation.¹⁶⁰

Under the supervision of Prime Minister Macdonald in Ottawa and under the direct control of Edgar Dewdney as Indian Commissioner in the Northwest, the renewed Conservative regime established its own set of "entitlement relations" to deal with the famine during the waning months of the 1879. As the Indians of the plains starved, in many cases to death, the cattle industry was being established on the land

¹⁵⁸Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 1.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.* The notion of entitlement relations in the context of food is developed further in Sen's essay, "Food, Economics, and Entitlements," in *The Political Economy of Hunger: Selected Essays*, eds. Jean Dreze, Amartya Sen and Athar Hussain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 50-68.

that had served as pasturage for the bison only a short time before.¹⁶¹ The historical literature is replete with accounts of tensions flaring over Indian predation, or rumour of it, of newly established cattle stock on the western plains.¹⁶² Paul Sharpe's *Whoop-Up Country* focussed on the issue of Indian cattle rustling rather than on the famine itself:

The greatest trials [to the ranchers] came with the starvation of 1879. With the disappearance of the buffalo, the Indians lost their food supply and turned to range cattle for sustenance. Sternly, the Mounties restrained the ranchers from reprisals while patiently they sought to prevent the Indians from continuing their depredations. They were so successful that many a proud warrior hunted gophers to prevent his family from starving. Meanwhile, with desperate warnings the police urged Ottawa to increase the appropriations for rations to feed the starving Indians. The crisis was finally passed without a general Indian war, but it was close.¹⁶³

Rather than discounting the misery endured by the Indians during the famine, Sharpe's account accurately portrayed the Dominion's priorities through the crisis. Earlier accounts of the establishment of the ranching industry also stressed the hardship on pioneer ranchers resulting from Indian predation during the famine. L.V. Kelley's *The Range Men*, originally published in 1913, stated:

The year 1879 was one of the most unsatisfactory from the settlers' point of view that had yet been known. The buffalo were gone, never to return; the natives were literally starving to death. Gophers, mice, snakes, any living thing proved food to them, and it was not an uncommon thing to see some great warrior lying patiently beside a gopher-hole hoping for the chance to snare the little animal so he could have food. Everywhere throughout the prairie of the south the red men suffered, and the ranchers who lost cattle at their hands were large minded enough not to lay blame at all on the poor natives.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹For a full account of the establishment of the western Canadian ranching industry, see Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, 1874-1924*.

¹⁶²For an account of the famine from the ranching perspective, see *Ibid.*, 10-15.

¹⁶³Sharp, *Whoop Up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885*, 96-97.

¹⁶⁴Kelly, *The Range Men: The Story of the Ranchers and the Indians of Alberta*, 124.

The rise in cattle predation, or rumour of it, by the famine-stricken Indians in the southwest led Laurie to conclude that, "[a] collision between the ranchmen and the Indians may be expected at any moment."¹⁶⁵ Though isolated incidents of Indians poaching cattle were reported, Col. Macleod noted in his annual report, "under the circumstances, I think it a matter of congratulation that the Indians throughout the country have behaved so well."¹⁶⁶ Walter Hilderbrandt has shown that the increase in arrests among Indians were correlated with the starvation of 1879-1880.¹⁶⁷ The reality of Indian cattle predation was limited, however. Even official reports of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) stressed:

The patience and endurance displayed by the Indians of the North West Territories, under the circumstances they are placed, are beyond all praise, and their refraining from helping themselves at the expense of the white inhabitants of the country, even when pressed with hunger, and pained by the sight of some of their friends dying around them, and others greatly reduced in strength, entitles them to every consideration at the hands of the public.¹⁶⁸

The overwhelming majority of the hungry did what they could to secure food within the

¹⁶⁵ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 1 December 1879, 1.

¹⁶⁶ Commissioners of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, *Opening Up the Great West: Being the Official Reports of the Royal North-West Mounted Police Force from 1874 to 1881*, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Hildebrandt, *Views From Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*, 98. Many of the crimes reported were obviously hunger induced. As hundreds of hungry Sioux "begg[ed] from door to door" in Prince Albert, Lawrence Clarke reported from Carlton that someone had broken into the warehouse and had stolen a pair of blankets and a ham. Clarke continued to his superior, "the thief has not yet been discovered." HBCA, Search File: "Prince Albert," Clarke to James Graham, Carlton House, 26 November 1878. A local history of Prince Albert stated that the arrival of the starving Sioux from Wyoming during the winter of 1878 marked the beginning of tensions between Indians and settlers. Gary Abrams, *Prince Albert: The First Century, 1866-1966* (saskatoon: Modern Press), 26-27.

¹⁶⁸ CSP 1880, Lawrence Vankoughnet, Report of the Deputy Superintendent-General, Ottawa, 31 December 1879, 13.

rule of Canadian law. The *Herald* reported on an encounter between Father Lestanc and a number of bands near Fort Pitt who were:

[A]ll emaciated and starved like. Two of the bands were so importunate in their appeals for help that Mr. Beaupre gave each of them an ox, as they were in a state of greatest destitution. The Indians promised to pay for the oxen out of their annuity moneys if the Government does not assume the debt. ... Lestanc thinks that the Government should pay especially as the understanding is so widespread among the Indians that they are to be fed in times of distress.¹⁶⁹

Though most were grateful for what meagre assistance that they could secure from authorities, some groups appealed for help on the basis of their recently acquired Treaty right to assistance in times of crisis. Chief Beardy, of the Willow Cree, was adamant in his demand that the government fulfill its promises of aid negotiated at Carlton in the summer of 1876.¹⁷⁰ As early as 1877, the police reported on an "indignation meeting held at Duck Lake... condemning the government for their treatment of the Indians and Halfbreeds in the country."¹⁷¹ Beardy refused his annuity payment for 1878 on the grounds that he was dissatisfied with the Dominion's delivery of its Treaty promises.¹⁷² During the winter of 1879, a standoff occurred at Duck Lake

¹⁶⁹*Saskatchewan Herald*, 28 July 1879, 2.

¹⁷⁰The Chief's demands were both numerous and well-grounded. Stephen Sliwa's study of the Beardy Reserve noted that friction between the band and the authorities began within a year of signing the Treaty. Among his complaints were inadequate farming equipment and poor quality of food supplies. *Standing the Test of Time: A History of the Beardy's/Okemasis Reserve, 1876-1951*, 54-56.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 55, 57. In April, 1878, Kitowaypaw of Carlton complained to the authorities of non-fulfilment of treaty obligations. NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, Microfilm, reel C-1523, p. 9780, Laird to Mills, 18 April 1878.

¹⁷²Though Beardy refused payment, almost forty of his followers broke ranks and accepted their money. SAB, RCE-1120 Indians of North America, Clippings File, Yesteryears, no. 22 "Disquieting News from Duck Lake," 2 May 1938 [reprint of *Saskatchewan Herald*, 14 January 1879].

when the Chief and a group of his followers threatened to pillage the local warehouse. They claimed that the goods were owed to the people as part of the Dominion's Treaty obligation to the Willow Cree.¹⁷³ Beardy's refusal to quietly accept government neglect, and the perceived threat of the American Sioux who had recently come to Prince Albert, led to the formation of a local "militia."¹⁷⁴ In 1880, Beardy was temporarily deposed as Chief on the charge that he was a cattle thief.¹⁷⁵ According to Stephen Sliwa, the adversity the band endured in the early years of treaty, "galvanized the community, uniting them together with a sense of purpose."¹⁷⁶ The agitations of Carlton Indians were not without reason. Early in 1880, Lawrence Clarke, an HBC oldtimer, described the increasingly bleak situation among them:

¹⁷³The confrontation at Duck Lake is well documented. See for example, Sliwa, *Standing the Test of Time: A History of the Beardy's/Okemasis Reserve, 1876-1951*, 58-59. For contemporary accounts, see Superintendent James Walker, Report, Battleford, 19 December 1879, in *Opening the West: Official Reports of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, 1874-1881*, 21, and the *Saskatchewan Herald*, 27 January 1879, 1.

¹⁷⁴Although Canadian authorities sanctioned the mobilization of a militia in the fall of 1879, "a few of the settlers took matters into their own hands," after rumours of Indian cattle rustling began to circulate. The situation took on "a ludicrous air" when the police found that the reports were false. Abrams, *Prince Albert: The First Century, 1866-1966*, 26-27.

¹⁷⁵*Saskatchewan Herald*, 16 August 1880, 1. Beardy and the other accused were later acquitted of the charges. Lawrence Clarke reported on the charges and of Laurie's description of the events, "there is not a word of truth in the whole article." HBCA Search File: "Prince Albert," Clarke to James Graham, Ft. Carlton, 22 November 1880.

¹⁷⁶*Standing the Test of Time: A History of the Beardy's/Okemasis Reserve, 1876-1951*, 61-62. The trouble at Beardy's reserve also prompted the former Lieutenant Governor, Alexander Morris, to publish his record of the Indian Treaties as a book. According to the negotiator turned author, "had Dewdney had it [the book], he could have easily disposed of the Carlton Cree Indians, by showing them exactly what I said, & they said." NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, Microfilm reel C-1673, p.114334, Morris to Macdonald, 23 October 1879.

Those Reserve Indians are in a deplorable state of destitution, they receive from the Indian Department just enough food to keep soul and body together, they are all but naked, many of them barefooted... Should sickness break out among them in their present weakly state, the fatality will be dreadful.¹⁷⁷

After 1880, Indian protests against their ill-treatment by government officials became increasingly frequent.¹⁷⁸ Thunderchild warned officials that he would "retain a first-class lawyer" to secure what he considered Indian money that was paid to the HBC at the time of transfer.¹⁷⁹ In a comment that would remain relevant for over a century, the *Herald* reported on Thunderchild's threat of legal action, "[t]hey will make a pretty good thing out of it, as he will give half the amount to any one recovering it; and it will be singular if they do not secure a good share of the other half-there are so many expenses with the law with which the Indians are unacquainted."¹⁸⁰

Rather than Canadian officials supplying the famine-stricken populations as a consequence of Commissioner Morris' promise of aid "in a national famine,"¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷HBCA Search File: "Prince Albert," Clarke to Graham, 3 March 1880.

¹⁷⁸During the summer of 1880, Battleford was the site of a large-scale protest by over 1,100 people who remained at the capital until their grievances were heard by Indian Commissioner Dewdney. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 19 July 1880. Bands who expressed their disaffection with the Dominion included those of Poundmaker, Strike Him of the Back, Samson, Ermine Skin, and Bob Tail. *Ibid.*, 5 July 1880, 2-3.

¹⁷⁹*Saskatchewan Herald*, 16 August 1880, 2.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁸¹Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 186, 228. The term "general" famine was also used during the negotiations. *Ibid.*, 188, 216. In his concluding remarks during the negotiations of Treaty 6, Morris reiterated the most conservative interpretation of the "famine" clause, "if Providence should send a great famine or pestilence upon the whole Indian people included in the treaty. We only looked at something unforeseen and not at hard winters or the hardship of single bands, and this, both you and I, fully understood." *Ibid.*, 241. Although Morris' characterisation of a "national" or "general" famine is not precise, the hunger among the plains people was both longstanding and widespread.

researchers such as Noel Dyck and John Tobias have shown that rations were used as a means of coercing Indians into submitting to treaty.¹⁸² Malcolm D., a Liberal M.P. who gained brief notoriety as a critic of Indian Affairs under Macdonald, stated that the Indian department was driven by "a policy of submission shaped by a policy of starvation."¹⁸³ In 1879, a number of bands traded their independence for food. In the Battleford Agency, Mosquito, Moosomin, Thunderchild, and Little Pine all accepted treaty in exchange for rations.¹⁸⁴ Though rations were provided to some who had yet to enter into Treaty, Dewdney's response to those who resisted Canadian authority was simple, if inhumane. When Strike Him on the Back refused to accept a survey of his reserve, the Indian Commissioner "took his cattle for the Sioux."¹⁸⁵ He was reported to have turned down an offer from ranchers who, fearing predation of their herds by hungry Indians, "to sell their own animals at cost, and wait until conditions were more favourable."¹⁸⁶ Dewdney's indifference to the gesture may well have stemmed from his financial association with the Montana-based firm of I.G. Baker and Company. In his discussion of the international beef trade, Paul Sharp remarked that, "Dewdney used

¹⁸²Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Aid in the North-West Territories, 1879-1885* and Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885."

¹⁸³Looy, *The Indian Agent and His Role in the Administration of the Northwest Superintendency, 1876-1893*, 112.

¹⁸⁴John Tobias noted that more than a thousand Cree entered treaty in 1879 under the leadership of Little Pine, Thunderchild and Lucky Man. "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree," (in *Sweet Promises*) 235, fn.30.

¹⁸⁵Dempsey, ed., "The Starvation Year: Edgar Dewdney's Diary for 1879. Part 2," 8. Less than two years later, the Dominion's own surveyor refused to delineate the reserve set aside for Strike Him on the Back because of the poor quality of the land. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 June 1881, 1.

¹⁸⁶Kelly, *The Range Men*, 128.

his power on behalf of the Baker firm to secure Canadian contracts and favors. In return, he earned handsome investments in Benton enterprises."¹⁸⁷

The government was slow to respond to the food crisis in the west. Noel Dyck noted that the Throne Speech, read on May 1, 1879, "demonstrated the bewilderment" of the new administration in the face of the famine.¹⁸⁸ When it was implemented, the Dominion relief effort was guided by "a joint sense of obligation and fear."¹⁸⁹ To meet the immediate demands of the famine during the summer of 1879, the Prime Minister directed a council be organized to assess the extent of the crisis at Battleford in late August, 1879.¹⁹⁰ To underscore the dual mandate of the conference to deal with the food crisis itself and to counter the threat posed by thousands of desperate Indians on the tiny settler population, two findings of the Council were preordained:

[W]ill no doubt think of measures of defence for the settlers and of relieving starvation amongst the Indians... My idea is, it is so clear that the result of the deliberations of the Council or commissioners will be in these two directions-the one to supply of food to the Indians and the other the increasing of the means of defence amongst the settlers-that I think we had better try to expedite action

¹⁸⁷Sharp continued, "On one occasion, the Canadian official received fifty shares in the Benton National Bank "to get a deposit by it of \$100,000 or \$200,000 from the Canadian government." *Whoop Up Country*, 221. Baker and Company supplied not only the Indian Department but also the Mounted Police during this period.

¹⁸⁸The author stated that while the government was vague on its commitment to agricultural development, it acknowledged that dealing with the hunger would be an expensive proposition. The spearhead of the administration's effort in the field was the appointment of Edgar Dewdney to supervise relief. *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 30-31.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.* Although supplies were secured through the latter part of 1879, the government also increased its police presence in the Northwest from 329 in December, 1878, to 362 a year later. See Morgan, "Strength and Distribution of Officers and Men at Principal Posts and Sub-Posts, 1875-1883," in *The North-West Mounted Police, 1873-1883*, 93.

¹⁹⁰NAC, Macdonald Papers, Microfilm, reel C-1590, p. 81299, Campbell to Macdonald, Ottawa, 10 August 1879.

in both directions by taking the responsibility of forwarding cattle in considerable numbers at once so they might reach the outlying posts before the winter comes on, and of facilitating or fostering the creation of the militia companies where it is possible.¹⁹¹

The immediate pressure on the Famine Council was partially diminished, even before the gathering at Battleford. Two weeks prior to the meeting, the Prime Minister was told that a large herd of bison, "had gone north (&) had in fact outflanked Gen. Miles and his army. This will afford relief to a very considerable body of Indians."¹⁹² With the local crisis temporarily reduced, Campbell reported to his superior, "we may restrict our action to fostering of the organization of militia forces to the extent of three or four troops at the remote settlements such as Prince Albert, from which place we have offers of a troop or troops of Mounted. You may count on our going carefully."¹⁹³ As Canada armed its settlers against the threat of an Indian uprising, thousands of plains Indians were abandoning the country.

Many of the hungry had already forsaken their territory and had gone south in search of the few remaining herds.¹⁹⁴ Crowfoot and other Blackfoot leaders took their

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²Ibid., pp. 81309-81310, Campbell to Macdonald, Ottawa, 12 August 1879.

¹⁹³Ibid., p. 81312. Campbell to Macdonald, Ottawa, 12 August 1879. In October, a settler reported that to protect the community from American Indians, "we have formed three rifle companies here having receiving the arms from Winnipeg." Duck, "Letters from the West," 24. Col. Osborne Smith had earlier delivered one hundred and fifty Snyder Enfield rifles and ammunition to the settlement as a precaution against the 1,500 Teton Sioux who had gathered at Prince Albert. SAB, Innes Papers, A-113, Vol. 2, manuscripts folio 3, "Lives of the Early Pioneers," 15 April 1920, 31.

¹⁹⁴In 1882, the estimated number of Canadian Indians in the United States was 3,533. Seven hundred were at Fort Walsh and another 2,770 were in the Cypress Hills. McQuillan, "Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1885," 385. Maureen Lux estimated that 7,000 Blackfoot and 3,000 Cree spent nearly eighteen months in Montana. *Beyond Biology*, 48.

people to Montana, giving the authorities a temporary reprieve.¹⁹⁵ Big Bear, who also headed south to hunt, lost almost half of his followers to the leadership of Lucky Man and Thunderchild when the Cree were informed after the Battleford conference that only Treaty Indians were eligible for assistance.¹⁹⁶ Some of those who accepted treaty in return for food attempted new strategies to maintain at least partial autonomy. Tobias noted the ill-fated plan of Piapot, Little Pine, and Big Bear to establish a concentration of reserves in the Cypress Hills in 1880-1881.¹⁹⁷

The Home Farm program, "hastily contrived" during the fall and winter of 1878-79 was as close as the government came to developing a legitimate plan for the economic reorientation of reserves.¹⁹⁸ Described by Walter Hilderbrandt as an "abysmal failure,"¹⁹⁹ the Home Farms were doomed from their inception. The scheme was concocted when 5,000 people, probably 20 percent of the total Indian population of the plains, were out of the country searching for the remaining herds in American

¹⁹⁵By the summer of 1879, most of the Bloods and Peigans had left for Montana. Crowfoot and his people in the fall of 1879. Even after travelling south of the boundary brought the Blackfoot little relief. A number of huge prairie fires, deliberately set by hide hunters of the American military, scorched the country along the frontier. Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 112-114.

¹⁹⁶As part of the process, the authorities recognised individuals as chiefs if they could persuade one hundred or more people to accept treaty. Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," 216-217.

¹⁹⁷According to the author the plan was doomed to fail after a food riot broke out at Fort Walsh demonstrated the potential for trouble of a concentrated Indian population. Ibid., 217-221.

¹⁹⁸Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 79.

¹⁹⁹Hildebrandt, *Views From Fort Battleford*, 40.

Territory.²⁰⁰ In addition to the plan being insufficient to meet the magnitude of the famine, the specifics of the program were sketchy at best. Sarah Carter noted that a plan to establish farms was discussed prior to the fall of the Liberal government but the specifics of the policy were not worked out until 1879.²⁰¹ When the farm instructors finally took up their positions in August of 1879, many were shown to be either incapable or simply incompetent in the face of the monumental task.²⁰² Even the Prime Minister had misgivings about the feasibility of reserve agriculture but in the absence of an alternative, he "found it expedient to promote the plan in parliament."²⁰³

One of the most cynical aspects of the Dominion's relief scheme, the so-called work for rations policy, was introduced during the Liberal administration.²⁰⁴ Although the Conservative government was reported to have temporarily suspended the

²⁰⁰SAB, Tarr and Peterson, *Little Pine/Lucky Man Band #116*, n.p.. The total Indian and Métis population on the plains was estimated to be 26,500. Looy, "Saskatchewan's First Indian Agent: M.G. Dickieson," 112.

²⁰¹The plan was proposed in the waning days of the Mackenzie administration but according to Carter was only implemented after Dewdney's appointment in May, 1879. The famine was the impetus for the program rather than "the benevolent concern that the Indians be aided in their transition to an agricultural way of life." *Lost Harvests*, 81-82.

²⁰²Many of the Conservative appointees soon gained reputations as "camp followers" and "carpetbaggers." Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 85-86. For an discussion of D.I.A. personnel during this period, see A.J. Looy, *The Indian Agent and His Role in the Administration of the Northwest Superintendency, 1876-1893*, 87-132. See also, Brian Titley, *The Frontier World of Edgar Dewdney* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 45.

²⁰³Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 37.

²⁰⁴The provision of relief conditional on work was common in Victorian England. Dreze and Sen, "Introduction," in *The Political Economy of Hunger*, 6.

condition of work in exchange for food after the famine conference at Battleford,²⁰⁵

Lawrence Vankoughnet stated that during the famine:

Strict instructions have been given to the agents to require labor from able-bodied Indians for supplies given them. This principle was laid down for the sake of the moral effect that it would have on the Indians in shewing that they must give something in return for what they receive, and also for the purpose of preventing them from hereafter expecting gratuitous assistance from the Government.²⁰⁶

Although he strictly enforced the policy, Dewdney recognized, "the impracticality of consistently applying this rule... Until the Indians were settled on reserves, there was, in effect, no work that they could do. In the meantime, the starving condition of the Indians rendered the operation of such a proviso impossible."²⁰⁷ Although Finance Minister Sir Leonard Tilley proposed the use of Indian labour as a means to offset the high cost of aid to the northwest,²⁰⁸ no concerted attempt was made by the authorities to provide the plains Indians with gainful employment other than the cutting of fire wood.²⁰⁹ The Indian Commissioner noted that the Indians, "showed, on the whole, a

²⁰⁵The restriction on rations was reimposed the following spring when, according to Noel Dyck, the threat of an Indian uprising had diminished. *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the North-West Territories, 1879-1885*, 34-35.

²⁰⁶Vankoughnet continued, "The agents have been instructed to forward, at the end of each month, a return shewing the supplies distributed and the work done in return for the same, also stating that in the case of the sick, aged and those unable to work, the circumstances under which supplies were given." *CSP 1880*, Report of the Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 31 December 1879, 12.

²⁰⁷*The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the North-West Territories, 1879-1885*, 34.

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰⁹It appears that with the exception of a few small contracts for railway ties, aboriginal labour was ignored during the construction of the CPR. It is probable that by the time that labour was required for the prairie sections of the railway, the Indians would have been too sick to undertake the task if they had been considered. Hugh Dempsey's discussion of the relationship between the Indians of the Plains and the

good disposition to work at anything that could be found for them to do."²¹⁰ By the new year of 1880, Dewdney was worried that so many were willing to work for rations, "that we will not be in a position to keep them all going."²¹¹

Although rations kept many from starving, no provision was made to assist the destitute with clothing.²¹² Dewdney noted the want of clothing and a "winter [that] was the severest that has been felt for many years," prevented many along the Saskatchewan from undertaking winter hunting.²¹³ Lawrence Vankoughnet acknowledged the need for clothing among the destitute:

It is to be regretted that no provision has been made for clothing for these Indians, whereof many of them are deficient; and as the Commissioner justly remarks, they cannot be expected to work unless they are properly clad. A plan might be adopted to meet this want by providing clothing to be supplied to the Indians for work done by them.²¹⁴

CPR makes no mention of Indian employment on the railway at all. Hugh Dempsey, "The Fearsome Fire Wagons," in *The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation*, ed. Hugh Dempsey (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984): 55-70. For further discussion of work projects undertaken for rations, see, Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 99-102.

²¹⁰CSP 1881, Report to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 31 December 1880, 93.

²¹¹Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 47.

²¹²The dearth of animal skins accounted not only for a severe decline in clothing but also forced the abandonment of skin tents during the early 1880s. SAB, R.G. Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel 2.391, Appendix: "Housing," 1.

²¹³CSP 1881, James Smart. Report to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Edmonton, 21 August 1880, 102. During the winter of 1879-80, Indians were prevented from even attempting to hunt because "the poor people were naked." The harsh winter of 1879-80 was discussed by Brian Titley, "The Fate of the Sharphead Stonies," *Alberta History* 39 (1991), 2. Heavy blizzards in the eastern parklands were reported to have caused the final extermination of a remnant bison herd in the Camsack area of eastern Saskatchewan. Macdonald, "The Killing of the Buffalo," 22.

²¹⁴CSP 1880, Report of the Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 31 December 1879, 13.

Although his superiors recognized the problem, the farm instructor at Touchwood Hills was forced to provide his labourers, "with a few blankets and moose skins" without departmental authorization.²¹⁵ During the winter of 1879-80, the Carlton Indians were described as, "all but naked, many of them barefooted."²¹⁶ At Fort Walsh, the Indian Agent noted that the 2,500 hundred Blackfoot who were drawing rations were "almost without clothing of any description."²¹⁷ The clothing shortage remained critical. In January 1881, Chief White Bear requested "something to cover their women and children." The agent informed the Chief that supplies would be issued to the absolutely destitute but, "[t]hose who had blankets and clothing must expect nothing."²¹⁸ Cecil Denny requested that Blackfoot women be given clothing "and bales of common print for the women to make dresses, it would help them greatly as the women suffer most, literally in rags. The women fight over old cotton flour sacks, of which they make dresses."²¹⁹ Among the Blackfoot, meat contractors kept the hides, heads and entrails of "government" cattle in order to make private deals with those who could afford the extra cost.²²⁰

Although official reports noted that the condition of the people near Qu'Appelle

²¹⁵Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 89. At Edmonton, women were reported to be using beef hides as a substitute for bison. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 23 February 1880, 3.

²¹⁶HBCA Search File: "Prince Albert," Clarke to Graham, 3 March 1880, 3.

²¹⁷CSP 1881, Report to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Fort Walsh, 30 September 1880, 106.

²¹⁸CSP 1881, Report of the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Extract of Fort Ellice Report, 25 January 1881, xxxi.

²¹⁹CSP 1883, Report of C.E. Denny, Indian Agent, Fort Macleod, 10 November 1882, 176.

²²⁰Hugh Dempsey, "The Bull Elk Affair," *Alberta History* 40 (1992): 2-9.

were "not so severe... as their brethren in the south west,"²²¹ twenty members of the Okanese band, starved to death over the bitterly cold Christmas of 1879.²²² By spring 1880, hunger among the Sioux at the tiny police post at Wood Mountain forced many to consume the flesh of horses that had died of "scurvy" the previous fall and winter.²²³

Major Walsh was moved by the fate of those who endured the famine:

Following this want of food and the eating of diseased horses, an epidemic appeared, which marked its results by the many graves now seen in Wood Mountain. The conduct of those starving and destitute people, their patient endurance, their sympathy, and the extent to which they assisted each other, their strict observance of law and order, would reflect upon the most civilized community.²²⁴

Hunger and disease also plagued the Indians in the Cypress Hills. Superintendent Crozier noted that the Indians were fortunate in being supplied with food from the police, "otherwise hundreds certainly would have starved to death."²²⁵ In September, Surgeon Kennedy reported that a large number of Assiniboines were "prostrated" from sickness west of Fort Walsh. Diarrhea and dysentery broke out among an "entire" camp of fifteen hundred Cree, "and quite a number, principally children, died. As an instance of how common it was, I [Dr. Kennedy] may mention that I visited and treated

²²¹CSP 1880, Lawrence Vankoughnet, Report of the Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 31 December 1879, 13.

²²²Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 48.

²²³Report of Major Walsh, Brockville, 31 December 1880, in *Opening the West: Official Reports of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, 1874-1881*, 26.

²²⁴*Ibid.*

²²⁵The Indian exodus from the Milk River resulted in the congregation of "as many as five thousand people" at Walsh. Report of Superintendent L.N.F. Crozier, Wood Mountain, December 1880, in *Opening the West: Official Reports of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, 1874-1881*, 30-31.

one hundred and fifty cases in one day."²²⁶

In his report for 1880, Dewdney acknowledged that the bison were all but extinct in Canada, "[t]hose of our Indians who remained in the Territories received almost continuous assistance from us during the winter."²²⁷ So great was the need that, "it is found impossible to provide it ... consequently some other work must be provided before we are enabled to enforce what must be admitted by all as imperative, viz. work for food."²²⁸ The Commissioner described the deteriorating health conditions among those who depended on government assistance for their survival:

The mortality of the Indians this year has been greater than usual, the Indians attributing it to the white man's food; and I have no doubt the sudden change from unlimited meat to the scanty fare they received from the Government has to some extent brought it about.²²⁹

The quality of government food was also questionable. In January 1880, James Scott, the farm instructor at Touchwood Hills, described the Indian Department pork that he distributed as "both musty and rusty [emphasis Scott's] and totally unfit for use- although we are giving it out to the Indians, in the absence of anything better, but we cannot use it ourselves [emphasis Scott's]".²³⁰ The same month, the *Herald* reported

²²⁶Kennedy reported a scarlet fever epidemic in October. Of an estimated 150-200 cases, fifteen to twenty died. The physician noted, "It is very difficult to obtain correct statistics from Indians." Report of Surgeon George A. Kennedy, Fort Walsh, 23 December 1880, in *Opening the West: Official Reports of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, 1874-1881*, 47.

²²⁷CSP 1881, Report to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 31 December 1880, 91, 93.

²²⁸Dewdney speculated that the imminent arrival of the Pacific railway would provide work for the hungry population. *Ibid.*, 91.

²²⁹*Ibid.*, 92.

²³⁰Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 89. In February, T.P. Wadsworth, the Inspector of Indian Agencies, passed the message on to Lawrence Vankoughnet. *Ibid.*, 99.

on the "soup kitchen" established by Mr. Loucks for the Sioux at Prince Albert, "it is claimed for him that he has discovered the secret of feeding fifty Indians on two pounds of pork a day."²³¹ Laurie stated that the relief effort was both inadequate and wasteful:

If the Dominion Government intends to carry out a starvation policy with the Indians, then we will not be better than our cousins across the line, whom we condemn so lustily for their "extermination" policy. We cannot allow our Indians to starve in our midst,... beef can be delivered from Battleford at eight cents and a half a pound. Is it not better to give some of that meat to the Indians than to buy kegs at fourteen dollars a piece and salt at twenty-five cents a pound to salt it down with, as is now being done? ... It is easier and cheaper to feed them than to fight them.²³²

Even supplies that were in good condition had harmful effects on the malnourished population. When the members of Mosquito's band moved to their reserve in the Eagle Hills in the spring of 1880, "they had been subsisting on bulrushes, roots and grass; and when the [salt] pork and flour were distributed, many who ate it were so weak that they became seriously ill in consequence of the sudden change."²³³

During the summer of 1880, the dearth of food contributed to a number of violent incidents. At Fort Walsh, a riot broke out when farm instructors attempted to withhold food from the hungry and diseased Cree who had gathered around the

²³¹*Saskatchewan Herald*, 12 January 1880, 1. Soup kitchens were established at other settlements. In 1881, the Indian Agent at Edmonton, W. Anderson, noted that after some initial resistance, the kitchen was "greatly appreciated and proved a most economical method of furnishing relief." Anderson directed that soup kitchens also be set up at Peace Hills and Riviere qui Barre. *CSP 1882*, W. Anderson, Edmonton, 13 December 1881, 84.

²³²*Saskatchewan Herald*, 9 February 1880, 2.

²³³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 July 1880, 1. The population of the "wretched" community was 164 individuals. A year earlier, M.G. Dickieson reported that Mosquito's Stoney band, "have shown that when pressed for hunger, they can and will work." *CSP 1880*, Report of Battleford Agency, 21 July 1879, 104.

post.²³⁴ The show of force by the Cree was presented by John Tobias as a key factor in the decision to disburse many bands from their chosen refuge in the Cypress Hills.²³⁵ Some responded to their poverty by returning to traditional means of acquiring wealth.²³⁶ Dewdney reported that, "[a]lmost every tribe have had what they call war parties out, which means horse stealing expeditions."²³⁷ Pasqua, who mounted a horse stealing party, was earlier refused rations by the police during the summer of 1880.²³⁸ His theft of a small number of horses in American territory precipitated an attack on Ocean Man's Assiniboine band by American Indians.²³⁹ Because their horses had been stolen, the survivors were forced to abandon their possessions and walk for three weeks to the sanctuary of Fort Ellice. At least four people "died from exposure and

²³⁴Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree," 528.

²³⁵*Ibid.*

²³⁶In his study of the plains tradition of horse theft, Brian Hubner noted that the practice was "the most prominent manifestation of continuing, albeit feeble, Native independence..." Brian Hubner, "Horse Stealing and the Borderline: The NWMP and the Control of Indian Movement," *Prairie Forum* 20 (1995), 296. Pasqua's motivation for the foray into the States may have been to acquire wealth in the form of horses through traditional means.

²³⁷*CSP 1881*, Report to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 31 December 1880, 92.

²³⁸Bruce Peel, "The Last Battle," *The Beaver* 297 (1966), 12. Steele and troops were transferred from Wood Mountain to Fort Qu'Appelle after the return of large numbers of Sioux to the U.S. in the spring of 1880. The goal of the transfer was to turn Qu'Appelle "into a full-scale fort." Robert Stewart, *Sam Steele: Lion of the Frontier* (Regina: Centax Books, 1999), 92-934. Dominion officials also refused to provide Pasqua with assistance for the establishment of agriculture. See Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 76-77.

²³⁹Peel, "The Last Battle," 12-14.

want" during the miserable journey.²⁴⁰ Conditions in the southeast deteriorated to the point that moose were denuded from the mountain that bore the species' name.²⁴¹

With ever increasing regularity among the Indian population of the plains, disease accompanied hunger. In March 1880, Lawrence Clarke warned that the desperate condition of the Carlton Indians made them particularly susceptible, "should sickness break out among them in their present state the fatality would be dreadful."²⁴² The threat of disease among the people of the eastern plains was exacerbated by the termination of Dr. Hagarty's position in the spring of 1880.²⁴³ While employed by the Indian Department, his vaccination campaign in Saskatchewan and western Manitoba achieved the goal of protecting the Indians from infection, "from the large immigration that will pour into there during the coming spring and summer."²⁴⁴ Those who submitted to the procedure, according to the doctor, "could now with impunity sleep with a smallpox corpse."²⁴⁵ His dismissal as the inhabitants of the parklands and the plains were experiencing the often fatal effects of the famine is evidence of the limited nature

²⁴⁰CSP 1881, Edgar Dewdney, Report of the Indian Commissioner, 31 December 1880, 92.

²⁴¹Nettie McLennan, "Starting Out With the Indians," In *Early History of Saskatchewan Churches*, ed. Meredith B. Banting (Regina: Banting Publishers, 1975), 176.

²⁴²HBCA Search File: Prince Albert, Clarke to James Graham, Carlton, 3 March 1880, 3.

²⁴³Hagarty was officially dismissed on 14 June 1880. NAC, RG 10, vol. 3648, file 8138, J. Cote, Report of a Committee of the Privy Council, 14 June 1880.

²⁴⁴*Ibid.*, n.d. (Spring 1880).

²⁴⁵*Ibid.*

of the Dominion's concern for their Treaty partners.²⁴⁶

As the people continued to eke out what living they could from government rations, measles and other diseases broke out in the southwest. Malnutrition among the stricken population worsened the effect of the disease. Scarlet fever "of a very virulent type," erupted among the 2,500 destitute who had gathered at Fort Walsh, killing as many as thirty during September of 1880.²⁴⁷ In October, simultaneous outbreaks of scarlet fever and measles occurred out among large numbers of Blackfoot, Peigan and Cree south of the international boundary. In one of the stricken camps, over one hundred people died.²⁴⁸ Disease prevailed well into the spring of 1881, as starving and infected bands of Blackfoot made the desperate journey back to Canadian territory on foot.²⁴⁹ The measles epidemic spread as far to the northeast as

²⁴⁶As the Indian Department was dispensing with the services of its own physician, the services of other practitioners were valued at a high premium. Dr. E.A. Porter travelled from Prince Albert to Battleford for a fee of seventy-five dollars to treat J.H. Price, a sick member of the police. According to Price's commander, James Walker, the cost was "moderate compared with medical charges in this country." MacPherson, *The Battlefords: A History*, 60. The same year, Dr. Hagarty was paid five hundred dollars plus expenses. NAC, RG 10, vol. 3678, file 11683, Robert Sinclair (Accountant) to Vankoughnet, 7 August 1879.

²⁴⁷*CSP, 1881*, Report of Edwin Allen, Indian Agent, Fort Walsh, 30 September 1880, 106. Maureen Lux noted that in addition to being malnourished, the Blackfoot were also living in overcrowded tents because of the shortage of hides. The combination of these circumstances led to greater infection and "supramortality." *Beyond Biology*, 49.

²⁴⁸*CSP, 1881*. Edgar Dewdney, Report of the Indian Commissioner, Ottawa, 31 December 1880, 92. For a discussion of the Montana outbreak, and a subsequent epidemic of mumps, see Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 48-49. Mortality of the combined outbreak was greatest among the children. *CSP 1882*, John A. MacDonald, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Extract, Fort Macleod, 30 May 1881, xxiv.

²⁴⁹Crowfoot petitioned Dominion officials for permission to return home during 1880. The Indian Commissioner told the Chief to remain south of the border and continue the hunt for the illusive herds. Dempsey, *Chief of the Blackfeet*, 131-138. Noel Dyck noted that the absence of the Indians saved the Dominion \$100,000 a year.

Fort à la Corne where at least nine people of the James Smith band perished.²⁵⁰

Even before the return of thousands of destitute Blackfeet that exacerbated the crisis in southern Alberta, Indian Agent Norman Macleod reported his frustration in coping with the emergency:

The supply of food is a serious question, and one which I cannot presume to meddle with, depending as it does upon the policy of the Government, but until the Indians become self-supporting they will require the assistance which will, at the shortest period, be two years from next harvest. There is absolutely no game in the country by which they can subsist, or even partly assist in feeding themselves, and unless fairly supplied with food to prevent them from feeling hunger they will become discontented and have recourse to the committing of depredations upon the settlers and their cattle... The want of medical advice is much felt amongst the Indians, as it is only in the neighborhood of the police posts that they can obtain any assistance, and now being settled on their reservations they cannot even have this. There are many serious cases which might be cured, or greatly alleviated, if advice was at hand to which they could have recourse. Pulmonary complaints and affections of the bowels are prevalent; and from their filthy habits of living, there is always sickness among them.²⁵¹

The crisis deepened as the hungry straggled back to their reserves in southern Alberta through 1881. Edgar Dewdney reported on the situation as over five thousand Treaty 7 people were added to the ration list, otherwise, "they will die of hunger, there being no game on the Plains..."²⁵² Dominion relief was limited. On their return to Canada, Crowfoot's people were issued a pound of beef and a half pound of flour a day, both

The Administration of Federal Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885, 45.

²⁵⁰CSP 1882, Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, Extract of Report, Carlton, 23 March 1881, x.

²⁵¹Earlier in his report, Macleod recognized the need for building houses on the reserves "as their lodges are completely worn out." CSP 1880, Report of the Indian Agent, Treaty No. 7, Fort Macleod, N.W.T., 29 December 1880, 98, 100.

²⁵²Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 50-51.

were of dubious quality.²⁵³ Under their contract with the Indian Department, meat contractors kept not only the heads and hides of slaughtered animals but also the offal which was sold separately to the hungry population.²⁵⁴ When Crowfoot requested additional aid for his people during the fall of 1881, he was branded a troublemaker and reprimanded by Agent Macleod.²⁵⁵ By November, rumours circulated that the government was intentionally starving them to death.²⁵⁶ On January 2, 1882, a side deal over a beef head and some offal turned sour and led to an armed standoff known as the "Bull Elk Affair," described by Hugh Dempsey as the event which ended good relations between the Blackfoot and the police who they had once regarded as their saviours.²⁵⁷

Elsewhere on the plains, the cycle of hunger and disease continued to spiral almost out of control. At Qu'Appelle, smallpox broke out in January 1881.²⁵⁸ Although the spread of the disease was checked by prompt measures undertaken by a Board of

²⁵³Dempsey, "The Bull Elk Affair," 4. Inspector T.P. Wadsworth's description of the four was "not quite unfit for food. Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 135. For further discussion of the conditions at Fort Walsh during the fall of 1881, see Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 51-52.

²⁵⁴Dempsey, "The Bull Elk Affair," 4. As cattle contractors were allowed to keep the hides of their slaughtered livestock, the consumers of the rations were experiencing a crisis over the shortage of leather for both clothing and tents.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 4-5.

²⁵⁷While the case ended the good relations between the police and the Indians in southern Alberta, some meagre improvements were made to the ration system. These included the distribution of cattle heads and offal gratis to the Indian population and the maintenance of an adequate supply of beef and flour on hand to allay any fears of imposed starvation. *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁵⁸Stewart, *Sam Steele: Lion of the Frontier*, 96; Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 52-53.

Health, The *Herald* reported:

There is a strong scrofulous taint amongst many bands of Plain Indians, and where the disease broke out in this case, the afflicted ones had been eating the flesh of horses that had died of the scab or mange, and it is almost impossible that they could do so without taking into their systems the germs of the disease. ... we hope to hear very soon that all danger has passed away, and that the illness was only the outbreak of an impure condition of blood aggravated by impure diet.²⁵⁹

The inhabitants of the plains were forced to adopt their "impure" diet from sheer desperation. At Fort Ellice, three people were reported to have starved to death in January.²⁶⁰ The *Herald* later commented on the four deaths at Strike Him on the Back's Reserve during April, "thus the Red Man is surely and steadily passing away."²⁶¹ In May, the Sioux of Moose Woods were reported to be "destitute of clothing and provisions; some three or four died actually skeletons."²⁶² By summer, conditions worsened to the point that Laurie penned the following gruesome passage:

The natives of this land are fully up to the buzzards of the south. Few deceased animals escape their rapacious maws. A horse died a few nights ago on the street opposite to our office, and at early dawn we beheld a posse of native beauties cutting up the dead animal a la buffalo mode of past days, and conveying it to camp, where a grand gorge was being prepared. We did not attend the pow-wow.²⁶³

²⁵⁹*Saskatchewan Herald*, 11 April 1881, 1.

²⁶⁰Lux noted that White Bear's band was being supplied with twelve ounces of flour and four ounces of bacon per day. *Beyond Biology*, 57-58.

²⁶¹*Saskatchewan Herald*, 25 April 1881, 1.

²⁶²*CSP 1882*, Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, Extract of Report, Humboldt, 18 November 1881, xiii.

²⁶³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 4 July 1881, 1. The hunger that drove the Indians to consume the flesh of diseased animals continued for at least another two years. On July 21, 1883, the *Herald* reported that a horse infected with glanders that had been shot by the police to prevent the spread of disease, "was not altogether lost, for in ten minutes after death it was converted into choice grass-fed beef."

By 1881, a disease which had killed large numbers of horses, spread to the weakened reserve population:

An eruption similar to mange, such as obtained amongst native ponies in the Territories last winter, is now attacking Indians on the adjacent reserves. Something should be done to prevent all intercourse with such districts, for whether the disease be infectious or not, the unhappy subjects are not fit associates for others not so

distressed.²⁶⁴

The Dominion did not increase its expenditures to counter the growing crisis. In fact, the government responded to Liberal criticism that aid to the Indians was a waste of public expenses by cutting assistance to the hungry.²⁶⁵ Sir Leonard Tilley, the Finance Minister, stated the policy directive succinctly, "they must work or starve."²⁶⁶ During the winter of 1881, Dewdney, who had no real interest in Indian administration,²⁶⁷ passed on the management of Indian Affairs in the west to Hayter Reed.²⁶⁸ Reed, a Brigade

²⁶⁴*Saskatchewan Herald*, 31 December 1881, 1. The human variant of mange, a mite borne disease, is scabies. Clayton L. Thomas, ed., *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, 16th ed., 1079. The mange epidemic among the remaining Indian horses continued until at least the summer of 1882, when the Cree leader, Mistawassiss, implored the Governor General for help because their horses had been traded for food or had died of disease. MacPherson, *The Battlefords: A History*, 68.

²⁶⁵For a summary of the Liberal criticism of Tory overspending during the famine in the House of Commons, see Larmour, *Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, 1879-1888*, 35-37.

²⁶⁶Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 42.

²⁶⁷For a discussion of Dewdney's disinterest in his position as Indian Commissioner, see Titley, *The Frontier World of Edgar Dewdney*, 47-49, and Larmour, *Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, 1879-1888*, 31-32.

²⁶⁸Reed was initially appointed Indian Agent for Battleford but was soon promoted to the rank of Assistant Commissioner. Robert Nestor, *Hayter Reed, Severality, and the Subdivision of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies* (M.A. thesis, University of Regina, 1997), 33.

Major and Adjutant of the Canadian military in the west, was provided with specific instructions on the management of Indian Affairs. Dewdney told the newly appointed agent for Battleford to be "as economical as possible" and that the latter was to be allowed to use his discretion with regard to the issue of rations to the hungry.²⁶⁹ Reed stressed the need to be firm in the management of relief:

One of my main endeavors (sic) will be to curtail the issue of flour and bacon, but of course this is a difficult task. I have informed all within my power that no relief, except under special circumstances, will be granted except on the reserve to which an Indian belongs. ... I have further warned all those within my power that none will be paid except at the places appointed for their respective heads.²⁷⁰

Food would only be provided if the hungry were on their reserves, a move intended to undermine the growing resistance of the Indians.²⁷¹ Farm Instructor, D.L. Clink, who applied the work for rations policy "with unmitigated zeal"²⁷² was threatened with a knife during a dispute with members of the Thunderchild and Moosomin bands.²⁷³ Reed's superior responded to the increased tension with a temporary softening of the

²⁶⁹Ibid. Dewdney stressed economy but he acknowledged the need for the use of rations in the establishment of a viable farming program. T.P. Wadsworth, the Inspector of Farming Agencies concurred, the "Department, the Government, and the country [must] bravely "face the music"-to make their minds to the expenditure and prepare for it..." Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 42.

²⁷⁰CSP 1882, Report of the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Hayter Reed, Battleford, 9 July 1881, xviii.

²⁷¹During the spring of 1881, Reed used the condition to stop a Thirst Dance that was to be held at Battleford. Ibid. Later, he was confronted with a strike by an Indian construction crew who demanded cash for their work. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 1 August 1881, 1-2.

²⁷²Inspector McGibbon of the Indian Department wrote that he had "slight misgivings regarding Clink's strictness." Looy, *The Indian Agent and his Role in the Administration of the Northwest Superintendency, 1876-1893*, 94.

²⁷³MacPherson, *The Battlefords: A History*, 71.

rule that only Treaty Indians were eligible for assistance.²⁷⁴

By the summer of 1881, Dominion refusal to assist Sitting Bull led to his return to the United States.²⁷⁵ By this time, both Canadian and American officials were able to command the relocation of Indian bands to locations that best suited their management as essentially subjugated peoples. The most significant of the relocations was the forced removal of bands from their chosen reserves in the Cypress Hills following the selection of the southern route of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).²⁷⁶ On New Year's day, 1882, the Cree Chief Poundmaker acknowledged that the advancing railway sealed their fate, "[n]ext summer, or latest next fall, the railway will be close to us, the whites will fill our country and they will dictate to us as we please."²⁷⁷ Within months, Poundmaker's prediction became government policy. On March 24, 1882, the Prime Minister announced to the House of Commons that all the Indians in the territory of Assiniboia would be removed, by force if necessary, from the land south of the proposed railway.²⁷⁸ Over the next year, 5,000 people were forced from the Cypress

²⁷⁴Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," 528-529.

²⁷⁵For a recent popular account of the events leading to Sitting Bull's capitulation, see Ian Anderson, *Sitting Bull's Boss: Above the Medicine Line with James Morrow Walsh* (Surrey: Heritage House, 2000), 208-211. The entire Sitting Bull affair was a thorn in the side of the Macdonald administration. Police support for the refugee Sioux, particularly that of James Walsh, led to the superintendent's "scapegoating" and forced resignation. For a discussion, see R.D. Macleod, *The North West Mounted Police, 1873-1905: Law Enforcement and the Social Order in the Canadian Northwest* (Ph. D. diss. Duke University, 1972), 58-60.

²⁷⁶For a discussion regarding the selection of the southern route, see W.A. Waiser, "A Willing Scapegoat: John Macoun and the Route of the CPR," *Prairie Forum* 10 (1985): 65-82.

²⁷⁷MacPherson, *The Battlefords: A History*, 69.

²⁷⁸McQuillan, "Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1885," 385.

Hills. With its usual unsympathetic tone, the *Herald* described the relocations from the south west as "Marching Northward toward the Government Grubpile."²⁷⁹ Dominion officials grew increasingly merciless in their use of aid as a method to control the Indian population after the decision to use the southern route for the CPR. A month after the announcement of the relocations, the Prime Minister described the government's position on relief, "we cannot allow them to die for want of food... we are doing all we can, by refusing food until the Indians are on the verge of starvation, to reduce the expense."²⁸⁰

Bands were driven from their chosen reserves in the high country of the Cypress Hills to meet the related goals of opening the country close to the railway for European settlement and to minimize the potential threat of a concentrated Indian population to the planned establishment of an agricultural economy.²⁸¹ By the end of 1882, Big Bear, the most prominent of the Indian dissidents, adhered to Treaty in exchange for rations for his starving band. For almost a year after his return from Montana in 1881, his people endured terrible hardship in the Cypress Hills.²⁸² By fall 1882, the police physician, Augustus Jukes, reported to Dewdney, "[i]t would indeed be difficult to exaggerate their extreme wretchedness and need, or the urgent necessity which exists from some prompt and sufficient provision being made for them by the

²⁷⁹ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 27 May 1882, 2, and 24 June 1882, 1.

²⁸⁰ Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 55.

²⁸¹ By June 1882, 6 million acres in central Saskatchewan had been set aside for colonization. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885*, 148.

²⁸² For a description of the plight of Big Bear and his followers, see Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 106-119.

Government."²⁸³ Rations were deliberately withheld until the Chief capitulated on December 8, 1882.²⁸⁴

By the time Big Bear signed treaty, almost all of the Cree with the exception of the small band under Foremost Man,²⁸⁵ had taken up their reserves. By January 1883, the construction crews of the CPR were approaching the Cypress Hills. Later in the year, the railway reached Medicine Hat, opening eastern markets to ranchers of the west.²⁸⁶ The success of the relocation scheme was ensured by the closure of Fort Walsh. Until the arrival of the railway, the post served as the seat of Canadian authority in the southwest and the primary point for the distribution of relief during the famine in the southwest. With the exception of the brief armed resistance by some of the Cree during the spring of 1885, the Indians of the plains were pacified, if not subjugated, by the beginning of 1883. Hayter Reed continued to curb the flow of food and other types of assistance to the reserve populations of the plains. The effects of his single minded focus on economy were reflected in the report of the Edmonton Agency for 1883:

The majority of deaths during the year have been from consumption, which appears prevalent amongst them. This is owing, in a great extent, to their want

²⁸³Jukes earlier noted that the cotton tents of the Cree were "in the most rotten and dilapidated condition," their clothing "scarcely rags" and "of food they possessed little or none." Ibid., 109. Lux noted the conflicting perspectives of the police and Indian Department officials during Big Bear's last months of freedom. *Beyond Biology*, 60-61.

²⁸⁴Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 109-111.

²⁸⁵The band secured a reserve in the Cypress Hills thirty years later. David Lee, "Foremost Man, and His Band," *Saskatchewan History* 36 (1983), 100.

²⁸⁶Paul Sharp noted that while the arrival of the railhead signalled the end of freedom for the Indians and the Métis, it was "ironic" that they waited until after the completion of the railway to attempt an armed resistance. , *Whoop Up Country*, 238, 242.

of clothing, which is really lamentable, many of the children going naked and some adults being barefooted in the dead of winter. All this is caused by the disappearance of the buffalo and other game from which they formerly obtained their covering and lodges. The latter are now made of very thin cotton, and are utterly inadequate to protect them from the severe winter climate.²⁸⁷

By the early 1880s, tuberculosis was the primary pathogen among the Indian inhabitants of the plains. For years, the population suffered from malnutrition if not outright starvation. At the negotiations leading to Treaty 6, the Cree recognised the implications of the extermination of the bison on the well-being of their communities. Cree negotiators succeeded with the inclusion of famine relief in the text of the Carlton Treaty. Canadian officials, who accepted the responsibility to feed the hungry in times of crisis, either ignored their commitment or used food as an instrument to suppress the population who, less than a decade earlier, had controlled the plains. The management of the famine by the Dominion resulted in more than simply subjugating the people of the plains. The collateral effect of the inadequate Canadian response to the humanitarian crisis was to provide tuberculosis with an immune-suppressed population across the prairies. Infection from the disease, precipitated by the famine, was so complete that physicians in later years assumed that the Indians were somehow racially susceptible to the disease.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷CSP, 1884 Report of Agent W. Anderson, Edmonton, 20 July 1883, 78.

²⁸⁸Ferguson, *Studies in Tuberculosis*, 6-7.

Chapter 9: "Beggars should not be choosers."¹ Control, Resistance and Subjugation, 1883-1885.

"If we are to be mastered by the whites... and to receive only the crumbs from their tables, it is better for us to be killed by bullets than to starve ignominiously."²

"Let them Suffer." Lawrence Vankoughnet, Superintendent General D.I.A., 1883³

By the spring of 1883, freedom for the Indian inhabitants of the plains was all but a thing of the past. The bison herds were gone forever. Though First Nations signed Treaties less than a decade earlier as partners with the Dominion, many came to feel as though they were prisoners on their reserves.⁴ The first residential school was opened, initiating a period of forced assimilation and suffering for the children of First Nations which would last until the second half of the twentieth century.⁵ The railway reached the Cypress Hills and most of the people who had sought refuge from hunger in the high country of the southwestern plains were expelled for the last time.⁶

¹Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1885, vol. 4, John A. Macdonald, 13 July 1885, 3319.

²Statement by unnamed Blackfoot Chief, in Hugh Dempsey, *Charcoal's World* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1987), 74.

³Titely, *The Frontier World of Edgar Dewdney*, 54.

⁴Sliwa, *Standing the Test of Time: A History of Beatty's/Okemasis Reserve, 1876-1951*, 78-79.

⁵Although the consideration of the role of the residential school system is beyond the scope of this study, several recent works have dealt with the issue. See John Milloy's *"A National Crime": The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, 51-157. For a less critical, but voluminous, account of the schools, see J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

⁶Among those coerced to move that spring were Big Bear, Piapot, Little Pine, and Lucky Man. Hubner, "Horse Stealing and the Borderline: The NWMP and the Control of Indian Movement," 291.

Fort Walsh, where so many had gathered during the previous years for what food aid they could get from the police, was demolished in 1883 and replaced by a new detachment along the CPR at Maple Creek. In addition to the physical displacement of the last holdouts, the Dominion government took steps to further consolidate their control over First Nations. Responsibility for the North West Mounted Police was transferred from the Department of the interior to the Department of Indian Affairs.⁷ Changes to the *Indian Act* gave the Indian Department the power to unseat Chiefs at will.⁸ In 1884, officials began to punish Indians caught off reserves without consent.⁹ The Indian farm program was severely curtailed.¹⁰ Expenses for provisions to the destitute were reduced by \$80,000 per year between 1882 and 1885.¹¹ While writers have attributed the slashing of government expenses for Indian assistance on the

⁷Jim Wallace called transfer of the police to the Indian Department "a retrograde step." *A Double Duty: The Decisive First Decade of the North West Mounted Police*, 244.

⁸Among the Chiefs deposed were Cut Nose, Beardy and Okemasis. Stephen Sliwa, *Standing the Test of Time*, 82-83. The Battleford Chief, Strike-him-on-the-back, was deposed in 1884. Campbell Innes, ed., *The Cree Rebellion of 1884*, 68. [Reprinted as Ross Innes, ed., *The Sands of Time* (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick, 1986)].

⁹Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," 224. By the spring of 1884, rations were withheld as punishment from bands who left their reserves without permission of Dominion authorities in the Battleford area. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 31 May 1884, 3, and 14 June 1884, 1.

¹⁰Both Home farms and European-manned supply farms, the basis of the government's self-sufficiency initiative, were cancelled though farm instructors remained on reserves. Titley, *The Frontier World of Edgar Dewdney*, 53.

¹¹Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 57; and Appendix A #2 "Government Expenditures on Provisions for Destitute Indians in Treaties Four, Six and Seven, 1880-1889," x. Hugh Dempsey noted that Vankoughnet slashed \$140,000 from the funds destined for the west on his return to Ottawa. *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 121.

economic downturn in the east, the Indian Department cuts were much more severe than other branches of the Dominion government.¹²

Lawrence Vankoughnet, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, personally oversaw the budget slashing after his tour of the west during September of 1883.¹³ In addition to what he considered excessive spending by his officers in the field, Vankoughnet reported that the Indian administration in the west was rife with corruption and recommended the termination of several employees.¹⁴ Troubled by the irregularities described in the document, the Prime Minister wrote to Dewdney, stating that Vankoughnet's memorandum was:

(A)n uncomfortable one. Please return it when read with your remarks. He showed me a padlock-- as a specimen furnished by Baker & Co. which is a mere fraud. If there has been any connivance by any of our agents--or carelessness in receiving inferior articles, they should be dismissed without mercy.¹⁵

The recommendations brought the Deputy Superintendent into direct conflict with the

¹²G.F.G. Stanley first attributed the cause of the cuts to the severe economic downturn in the east. In *The Birth of Western Canada*, 269-270. Dyck echoed Stanley's view, "the depression which began in 1882 spelled the final failure of the program, for in the following year massive reductions were made in Indian expenditures in the North-West." *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 57, 69 and 81. Even recent studies have considered the cuts "as a part of a general government retrenchment in the face of recession." Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 63. Carl Beal, an economist at Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, however, asserts that cuts began a year before the recession began (personal communication November 27, 2001).

¹³Larmour, *Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, 1879-1888*, 60-61.

¹⁴The Indian Agent for Treaty Four, Allan MacDonald, was ordered to dismiss most of his staff. On the terminations, see *Ibid.*, 60-62, and Titley, *The Frontier World of Edgar Dewdney*, 53-54.

¹⁵SAB, R-70, John A. Macdonald Papers, Macdonald to Dewdney, 28 November 1883, 51.

Indian Commissioner, whose response to the Prime Minister was that Vankoughnet had come to "hasty conclusions."¹⁶ The report was prepared without Dewdney and focussed on the "belief that there was manipulation and connivance between Indian Agents and the I.G. Baker Co."¹⁷ Dewdney's dismissal of the report may well have been motivated by his own commercial interest in the Montana company rather than the substance of the charges.¹⁸ The Prime Minister's official report for the year did not reflect the internal dissension or the possibility of corruption within government ranks. Rather, Macdonald noted that his deputy found, "the progress of the Indians is generally very satisfactory, that on many of these reserves great interest appears to be taken by them in the work of cultivating the soil and raising crops; and the important result has been obtained the department has been able to reduce considerably the rations of flour issued to them on several of the reserves..."¹⁹ The department may have cut rations, but not as a result of widespread progress in agriculture.

Many of the First Nation's communities had more pressing issues to contend

¹⁶Larmour, *Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, 1879-1888*, 61. Part of Dewdney's defence of his men was that they were sober, married men of integrity. Looy, *The Indian Agent and His Role in the Administration of the Northwest Superintendency, 1876-1893*, 104.

¹⁷Larmour, *Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, 1879-1888*, 60-61.

¹⁸For a discussion of the commercial relationship between the I.G. Baker Company and Dewdney, see Sharp, *Whoop Up Country*, 221. A liberal newspaper, the *Stratford Beacon*, noted with suspicion Dewdney's financial success during his time in the west, "Mr. Dewdney went out west as poor as a church mouse... and now he is reputed to be worth half a million. He is certainly a very wealthy man. He did not save this out of his salary. How did he get it?" Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 117. Dewdney was also reported to have been given \$10,000 in stocks of the Bell Farming Company in Indian Head. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 719.

¹⁹SAB, R.G. Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel R. 2.391.

with than the honesty of their overseers or even the cuts in appropriations for their welfare, described by Dewdney as a policy whose aim was to "[l]et them Suffer."²⁰ Years of malnutrition, depravation and disease associated with the early reserve period,²¹ pushed many communities to the brink of disaster. During 1883, the Assiniboine bands under Mosquito, Bears Head and Lean Man in the Battleford Agency suffered seventy-seven deaths from a combined population of only three hundred.²² The *Saskatchewan Herald* reported most of the deaths resulted from consumption, but added "(t)he survivors, however, say that it is from starvation, as according to their belief, no one ever dies except from want of food."²³ Diseases associated with the famine were not the only source of mortality among the population that had taken up their reserves.

The deep cuts in the appropriations for food forced department officials to withhold food that was already in government warehouses. Many of the hungry were killed from eating rations that had spoiled as a result of being stored for extended periods. In the fall of 1883, Dr. Girard reported that between 35 to 40 people died on

²⁰Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 64.

²¹At Edmonton, Agent Anderson noted that consumption was the primary cause of death during the previous year owing, "in a great extent, to their want of clothing, which is really lamentable, many of the children going naked and some adults being barefooted in the dead of winter." CSP, 1884, Report of W. Anderson, Edmonton, 20 July 1883, 78.

²²Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 62. The bands continued their precipitous declines from a peak population of 445 in 1882 to only 69 in 1905, the result of "hunger, disease, poor living conditions and the flight of many to the United States." Kenneth J. Tyler, *Interim Report: The History of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, and Bean Man Bands, 1878-1920* (n.p., 1974, typewritten), 26.

²³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 31 March 1883, 1.

the Blackfoot and Sarcee Reserves from eating putrefied I.G. Baker flour.²⁴ Account of the poisonings are numerous in the oral history the people of Treaty 7.²⁵ Among the Peigan, Tom Yellowhorn reported a yellow chemical was added to the ration flour:

...So many died so fast they did not have time to bury them; they just left bodies on top of the ground. Today this place is known as Ghost Coulee... The Indians always used "The time the flour burned" for a counting date...²⁶

Alan Pard stated that the chemical in the food was sulphur, adding, "there was also lye in the meat, also bluestone in the meat."²⁷ The Agent responsible for the distribution of the poisoned food, Cecil Denny, was ousted from the Indian Department.²⁸ Ironically,

²⁴Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 54; Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 50. A.W. Oglivie, whose company had milled the flour, was adamant that his product was sound at the time of its transport to the west. The problem stemmed from its exposure to the elements in inadequate storehouses where excessive humidity corrupted the product. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, Mr. Patterson, 15 April 1886, 736.

²⁵Maureen Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 59-60.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 59. According to an early written account, "more than a quarter of the Peigan tribe of the Blackfeet, which then numbered about twenty-five or twenty-six hundred, died from starvation" during the winter of 1883-84. George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 289. Reports of contaminated flour persisted until the end of the decade. In 1888, the *Herald* noted the controversy surrounding the addition of aluminium and lime in baking powder. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 2 June 1888, 4.

²⁷According to Lux, "Bluestone, or Blue vitriol, is a salt chiefly used as an insecticide or fungicide." The author noted that "oral history tends to a view it [the poisonings] as a deliberate act." *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 59-60.

²⁸Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 54-55. Though the author noted that the deaths forced the end of Denny's career, he had earlier been accused of using Indian Department labourers on his own ranch and of squandering funds, "his early actions constituted mere petty fraud" compared to deaths of so many in 1883. Denny's replacement in the Indian Department, Mr Pocklington, was employed by I.G. Baker & Co., "as an agent to prove that the flour which spread disease and death among the Indians of the North-West was pure." Canada, House of Commons, *Debates 1886*. Mr. Patterson, 15 April 1886,

the dismissed Indian Agent later accused some of those who had eaten the spoiled food of fraud, "I found that a great deal of cheating had been going on in rations-3,000 had been drawing rations, when there where only thought to have been 2,200."²⁹ Dr. C.F. Ferguson, a Conservative M.P. and land speculator, who witnessed the deaths at the Blood reserve reported that rations were not the cause of the mortality. He suggested that the Bloods perished as a result of their own unsanitary habits which made them susceptible to "autumn fever or mountain fever."³⁰ He claimed that the chronic dyspepsia in their community was "as a result of too much food and not enough exercise."³¹ The use of spoiled, if not poisonous, rations was not isolated to the Blackfoot.

In November 1883, the Inspector of Indian Agencies, T.P. Wadsworth, reported to Dewdney that large quantities of bacon at farm 17 near Edmonton³² were

735. On Denny's dismissal, see also, F. Laurie Barron, "Indian Agents and the North-West Rebellion," in *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, eds. F. Laurie Barron and James Waldram, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1985), 143-144. A more sympathetic view of Denny is presented by Hugh Dempsey, who noted that the agent "was so disgusted by these shortsighted economy moves that he resigned from the government." *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 162.

²⁹Canada, House of Commons, *Debates* vol. 4. M.C. Cameron, 13 July 1885, 3319; NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, MG 26, Microfilm reel C-1523, p. 42237, Extract of Cameron's Speech to the House of Commons.

³⁰An outbreak of typhoid fever killed a large number of the Blackfoot during the fall of 1883. *CSP*, 1884, John A. Macdonald, Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1 January 1884, liii.

³¹Canada, House of Commons, *Debates* C.F. Ferguson, 15 April 1886, 739-740. According to Lux, Ferguson's "characterization of aboriginal people as filthy and lazy and as unfit parents marked a significant retreat from the paternalistic optimism of treaty commissioners such as Alexander Morris. *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 141-142.

³²Farm 17, located at Riviere Qui Barre near Edmonton, was under the direction of W.J. O'Donnell. *CSP*, 1883, Part 1: "Farming Agencies and Indian Reservations,"

deteriorating, "doubtless by being kept for so long." The departmental obsession with economy forced Agent Anderson to deal with the problem of spoiled salt pork:

... although of good appearance had not kept well owing he fancied to some fault in curing, that later on the Agent reported that he was obliged to re-cure the bacon in hot weather ... Mr. Anderson in a recent letter stated that previous to re-curing the bacon that he sent a few sides to the farms which he believed to be a little rusty but nothing to speak of that he (Anderson) further stated in another report regarding the bacon that after it was re-cured, it kept in fine condition, that respecting the flour the Agent reported that it was a little musty... Mr. Anderson had been most economical in the management of food issues to Indians and in cases where it had been absolutely necessary to issue flour & bacon, he had refrained from doing so although at times to his personal detriment & thereby carried supplies over.³³

In his report for 1883, he reported the prevalence of consumption among his charges. Acknowledging that Dominion parsimony continued even after the deaths of his charges, he noted "much bitter feeling and complaints" at his refusal to provide coffins "which, in the absence of authority, I have been unable to do."³⁴

The worst incident resulting from the consumption of poisoned food occurred near Indian Head in the fall of 1883. The experience of Piapot, the leader of the local bands, in dealing with Dominion authorities was marked by hardship and frustration. In 1882, Piapot and his 470 followers were forced from the Cypress Hills and endured a journey on foot of over 350 miles with a daily ration of "one half pound of flour and a

198.

³³NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, MG 26, Microfilm, reel C-1523, p. 42228, Extract of a speech by M.C. Cameron to the House of Commons. In 1884, members of the nearby Alexis Band were reported to "be in a very destitute condition and almost naked." Canada, House of Commons, *Debates* M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 744.

³⁴CSP, 1884, Report of W. Anderson, Edmonton, 20 July 1883, 78. Father Scollen commented that because the people could not afford to bury their dead that "I know of one corpse to have been eaten by dogs and wolves not a quarter of a mile from Edmonton. Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 49.

small amount of pemmican per person.”³⁵ The Agent at Indian Head noted their “discontent and expression of unwillingness to go to their reserve” but he ensured them that both Treaty terms and other promises made at Fort Walsh would be honoured. Agent MacDonald assured the band, “I would certainly give them or resign.”³⁶ On his arrival in the Agency, the Chief was “incensed” by the starvation of those who had taken to their reserves near Qu’Appelle.³⁷ Within months, Piapot, Long Lodge, as well as the northern plains leaders, Lucky Man, Big Bear and Little Pine, along with over two thousand followers abandoned their reserves and returned to Cypress to take their chances in the high country near Fort Walsh.³⁸ Because the departures were not sanctioned by the authorities, they received no assistance.³⁹ Once at Cypress, the holdouts were fed but at minimum levels. Agent MacDonald explained to Dewdney

³⁵Ibid., 38. In June 1882, Agent McDonald reported from Qu’Appelle on the arrival of 453 Indians evicted from Cypress other than Piapot. Among those was the small band under Ka-Ki-Wis-Ta-Haw (33 people) who were “picked up on their way in from Wood Mountain in a starving condition ... it was fortunate that they fell in with English’s party.” NAC, RG 10, vol. 3744, file 29507-2, Report of A. MacDonald, Qu’Appelle, 20 June 1882.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 39. The official position of the DIA was that Piapot, “made such unusual demands that they could not be entertained without occasioning discontent among the other bands. They were consequently refused.” CSP, 1883, Report of John A. Macdonald, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, 31 December 1882, xiii.

³⁸Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 39; David Lee, “Piapot: Man and Myth,” *Prairie Forum* 17 (1992), 257. For a regional perspective on the returns to Cypress, see Tobias, “Canada’s Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885,” 219-220.

³⁹CSP, 1884, DIA Annual Report for 1883, T.P. Wadsworth, Inspector of Indian Agencies Report, Edmonton, 9 October 1883, 117.

they "were not getting enough flour but I like to punish them a little."⁴⁰

When Fort Walsh was finally closed by direct order from Ottawa in the spring of 1883, Piapot and the other holdouts again headed to their appointed reserves in the east and the north.⁴¹ Their journeys from what had been their sanctuary in the Hills were wrought with difficulty. The Cree band under Little Pine returned to Cypress too late to receive rations from the decommissioned police post and were reduced to trading their horses for food.⁴² Piapot was provided with passage east though several of his people were injured when their train derailed soon after their departure from Maple Creek.⁴³ In August, Piapot's plan to hold a council of Treaty 4 Chiefs to discuss their conditions was thwarted by the Indian Department's refusal to supply the gathering with rations.⁴⁴ His band then took up their allotted reserve near Indian Head. The *Regina Leader* assured its readers that Piapot's acceptance of a reserve and the rations that came with it, would mean no more trouble, "(t)he Government is bound to

⁴⁰Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 40. Agent Macdonald continued to withhold rations to control his charges. In 1883, he noted that he held back food to the Saulteaux bands under Way-way-se-Cappo and Gambler because, "a little starvation will do them good." Canada, House of Commons, *Debates* 1886, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 729.

⁴¹Piapot's acceptance of a reserve adjacent to Assiniboine reserve effected a concentration of more than 2000 Indians and the Chief intended the mass of people to serve as a power base from which to negotiate revisions to Treaty 4. Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree," 220.

⁴²The *Saskatchewan Herald* reported, "soon [they] will be so reduced that they'll be glad to fulfill their promises." 4 August 1884, 1.

⁴³Lee, "Piapot: Man and Myth," 256. With its usual sarcasm, the *Herald*, noted, "No lives were lost, but the Indians got it into their heads that they had been boxed up for the purpose of being killed off, thus forever settling the vexed question of 'Indian difficulties.'" 26 May 1883, 2.

⁴⁴*Regina Leader*, 16 August 1883, 2.

feed the Indians, so as they are fed, the poor creatures are no more likely to give trouble than a kennel of dogs fed at regular intervals..."⁴⁵ As winter approached, the *Leader* reported that all was quiet on the reserves east of Regina, "(t)he feeling of dread that the Government intended to starve them has disappeared."⁴⁶ As for Piapot, "(t)he Agent now reports he has no more contented Indians in his agency."⁴⁷

The reality on the Indian Head reserves during the fall and winter of 1883-84 was anything but the picture of serenity presented by the *Leader*.⁴⁸ According to Assiniboine historian Abel Watetch, members of the band who had been cutting cordwood were given rancid bacon for their work.⁴⁹ W.W. Gibson, whose family settled the land adjacent to Piapot's reserve, described the outcome:

(L)ate in the fall of 1883 a deadly epidemic⁵⁰ broke out in Chief Piapot's camp. Ere the snows of Winter disappeared, one hundred and thirty of his band perished of the malady. Many a time when herding my father's flock on the reservation I passed the aspen groves where dozens of platforms lashed to poplar trees with rawhide thongs, sepulchres that bore mute evidence of that tragic winter. Chief Piapot placed the blame of the epidemic squarely on the shoulders of the Canadian government. He said that the government had lured his people away from the Cypress Hills with the promise of fresh rations of meat during the winter months, but the only rations they received was that of rancid bacon, which the

⁴⁵Ibid., 23 August 1883, 2.

⁴⁶Ibid., 22 November 1883, 4.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸The editorial policy of the paper was to gloss over any trouble with Indians as it "w(ould) prejudicially affect the settlement of the country." (Statement regarding the food riot at the Sakimay Reserve), Ibid., 28 February 1884, 4.

⁴⁹SAB, microfilm 2.75 *School Histories of Thirty-Five Indian Reserves*, Abel Watetch, "History of Piapot Reserve," 5; Watetch, *Payepot and His People*, 17.

⁵⁰Official accounts stated that the high mortality of the Indian Head Bands was from measles and diphtheria. CSP, 1884, John A. MacDonald, Annual Report, 1 January 1884, xi-xii.

Indians had never been accustomed to eat.⁵¹

On February 7, 1884, Dr. O.C. Edwards reported, "the mortality of these Indians has been very great and that in his opinion the death rate was accelerated if death was not immediately caused scant Supply of food served out to the Indians."⁵² Though "prompt remedial measures" were called for by Edwards, there was no response until six weeks later when the Indian Department suggested, "a moderate quantity of beef might be sent to the Indian head reserves occasionally for the sick, as well as tea and sugar."⁵³

Though the Conservative *Regina Leader* did not comment on the event, the *Moose Jaws News* printed a scathing indictment of the government for its role in the affair:

The sufferings of the Indians on the Assiniboia Reserves during the past year are a burning shame to us, a lasting reproach to our government. What should be thought of us in England, or in any other Christian country were it clearly understood for weeks large bands of Indians, the wards of the Nation, poor, wretched creature, whose primitive source of supply has been cut off by our invasion, and whom we were bound by solemn treaty, as well as by every consideration of justice and humanity to care for, were dying by the scores, partly from semi-starvation and partly from the bad quality of the food supplied by the Agents! ... Where there not high officials whose first duty it was to know the facts? If it should prove that the want of knowledge, or the fearful ravages of scurvy were due in any degree to a petty economy which dispensed with the

⁵¹W.W. Gibson, *Silver Cloud: Condensed from "The Last Buffalo,"* (n.a. self-published n.d. approx. 1940), 2-3. Official reports of the mortality were lower but still horrendous. In May, 1884, Dr. O.C. Edwards reported that the death toll was "42 Crees and 33 Assiniboines. This you will see out of 873 souls is a vary large proportion and the number will increase unless a radical change is made in the matter of food." NAC, RG 10, vol. 3745, file 29506-4, Part 1. Edwards to Col. Macdonald, 13 May 1883. M.C. Cameron, the Liberal M.P., asserted that ten percent of the Indians at the Indian Head reserves died in the span of six months during the winter of 1883-84. Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 724. Katherine Pettipas estimated the death toll to be one out of three. *Severing the Ties that Band: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies*, 13.

⁵²NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, MG 26, Microfilm, reel C-1523, p. 42224, file 11175, handwritten note, 19 March 1884, "Action Taken by Department on Matters Complained of."

⁵³*Ibid.*

services of a competent medical inspector⁵⁴ in order to save his fees, this would be the aggravation of the guilt of those responsible for it.⁵⁵

In the House of Commons, the Prime Minister provided a simple, if chilling, defence of the charges against his administration:

The hon. Gentleman (Cameron) says there is a fraud on the Indians because the food is imperfect. It cannot be considered a fraud on the Indians, because they have no right to that food. They are simply living on the benevolence and the charity of the Canadian Parliament, and, as the old adage says, beggars should not be choosers.⁵⁶

By the end of May, the situation for Piapot and Long Lodge had become unbearable. The fresh meat and clothing which had been authorized by the Indian Department had still not been delivered to those in need.⁵⁷ Assistant Commissioner Reed, and the Commissioner of the NWMP, A.G. Irvine, met with the exasperated Chiefs to keep them from leaving their reserves. Long Lodge told the officials there was no game or potable water on his reserve and that, "his people were all dying, and that if they

⁵⁴The reference is probably to Dr. Edwards who did not have his 1882 contract renewed and was forced "to compete with numerous other physicians for fee-for-service work for the department. That Edwards was a Liberal in the Conservative west did not help his chances." Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 167.

⁵⁵NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, MG 26, Microfilm, reel C-1523, p.42224, Re. Sickness of Piapot Reserve. Dewdney was accused of being an accessory to the distribution of the rotten pork. Later, Cameron stated in the House, "He (Long Lodge) was fed at that time on what was well-known to as rotten pork. A contract was made for 45 tons of rotten pork. It is reported that pork was bought in Chicago for 1 ½ cents a lb, and sold to this Government for 19 cents; also that the Governor shared in the profits from the contract..." Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 745.

⁵⁶Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, vol. 4., John A. Macdonald, 13 July 1885, 3319.

⁵⁷NAC, RG 10, vol. 3745, file 29506-4, Part 1. Commissioner A.G. Irvine to Fred White, Regina, 27 May 1884.

continued to remain there they would all die.”⁵⁸ In addition to his usual grievances, Irvine reported that Piapot, “could not endure the stench that emanated from the dead bodies of unburied Indians then lying on the ground.”⁵⁹

A week before the meeting, Edwards reported on the deteriorating situations on the Indian Head reserves. Among “Jack’s people” (Man who Took the Coat), “suppurating and enlarged glands on the neck [have] now spread generally... and effects men, women and children alike. In February, I saw no cases among Piapot’s people, now I find it very general.”⁶⁰ In addition, the doctor reported, “bronchial trouble are numerous ending as many of these cases do in spitting of blood, quick consumption and death.”⁶¹ Long Lodge refused the physician’s offer of medicine, pointing to the real source of their misery, “I want no Government Medicine. What I want is medicine that walks. Send 3 oxen to be killed and give fresh meat to my people and they will get better.”⁶²

Government officials considered the abandonment of the reserves a security threat. Irvine was sent to intercept Piapot’s band with more than half the total police

⁵⁸Ibid., Commissioner A.G. Irvine to Fred White, Regina, 18 May 1884.

⁵⁹The corpses had been lashed to trees in accord with traditional burial practices but Irvine reported that a fire which caused the “bodies to drop on the ground where they remained.” Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., Edwards to Col. MacDonald, Indian Head, 13 May 1884. Maureen Lux noted that Edward’s designation of the ailment as “land scurvy” was probably a misdiagnosis of scrofula. *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 43.

⁶¹NAC, RG 10, vol.3745, file 29506-4, Part 1. Edwards to Col. Macdonald, Indian Head, 13 May 1884.

⁶²Ibid. See also, Maureen Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940*, 4.

contingent from the newly established depot at Regina and an artillery piece.⁶³ The arrival of the police caused a panic among the Indians who were "under the impression that they were going to be attacked."⁶⁴ Bloodshed was averted as the Commissioner negotiated a temporary return of the band to Indian Head. By the end of summer, Piapot's band took up their new home in the Qu'Appelle Valley where fresh water and game were available.⁶⁵ Long Lodge, who led his band south to the United States, was dead by the end of the year.⁶⁶

While the confrontation between Piapot's band and the authorities ended without violence, Indian resentment escalated as conditions worsened throughout the northwest. Near Carlton, the One Arrow reserve experienced a death rate of 141 per

⁶³NAC, RG 10, vol. 3745, file 29506-4, Part 1. Irvine to White, Regina, 18 May 1884. Irvine's column consisted of fifty men. The entire contingent of police in Regina at the time was ninety-six. W.A. Waiser, *La Police a Cheval du Nord-Ouest, de 1874 a 1889: étude statistique*, Bulletin de Recherche 117 (Ottawa: Parcs Canada, 1979), 13.

⁶⁴NAC, RG 10, vol. 3745, file 29506-4, Part 1. Irvine to White, Regina, 18 May 1884. Tobias offered a different view, "Irvine and the police entered the camp at 2 A.M., hoping to arrest Piapot before his band was aware of what happened. However, when they entered the camp, the police found themselves surrounded by armed warriors." "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," 222.

⁶⁵In addition to the suffering that motivated Piapot to lead his people from the scene where so many had died, there was also a strong aversion to living in a location associated with death. Although this was not considered in the Dominion response to the Indian Head situation, Edgar Dewdney recognized the strength of the belief in the aftermath of the violence of 1885 when he reported to the Prime Minister that, "Any Indians sentenced to be hanged should be executed where (emphasis Dewdney's) tried. Object to hanging on reserves. Might lead to desertion of reserves. Indians very superstitious." SAB, R-70, John A. Macdonald Papers, Dewdney to Macdonald, 3 September 1885 [deciphered telegram], 371.

⁶⁶Many members of his band then merged with the Man of Took the Coat. Zachary Hamilton and Marie Albina Hamilton, *These are the Prairies* (Regina: School Aids and textbook Publishers, 1955), 4.

1000 during the winter of 1883-84.⁶⁷ At File Hills, where seven children in a single family were said to have died of hunger within two months, it was reported that the sick were being allowed to die, "there is no use in trying to make him well, they have not sufficient nourishing food and they must let them die."⁶⁸ In February, Chief Sakimay (Yellow Calf) and a number of his followers were driven by hunger to seize the contents of the Agency store house at gun point.⁶⁹ Sixty bags of flour and twelve of bacon were taken from the newly appointed farm instructor, Hilton Keith, who, for the previous month, had "followed Reed's instructions on rationing to the letter."⁷⁰ The HBC trader, Nathaniel Mackenzie, had warned Keith that his intransigence would lead to trouble:

"Keith, for God's sake, do not reduce their rations any lower, or their will certainly be trouble." He carried out the Assistant Commissioner's instructions. A few of the Indians died. The others came time and again asked for more grub which they were denied. Finally they broke into the Government storehouse, threw out as much flour and bacon as they wanted, and threw Keith out on top of it.⁷¹

Reed recorded Chief O'Soup's rational for the action:

(F)irst, they or some or them were starving; secondly, when their request for rations had been refused by the officers in charge acting under regulations, they had no choice but to help themselves; thirdly, they understood that they were taking nothing but what rightfully belonged to them, and did not know they were doing wrong in taking rations when they were starving, since, "If ... the

⁶⁷Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 51.

⁶⁸Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 724-725.

⁶⁹The action was precipitated by the dismissal of the farm instructor, James Setter, for being too lenient in the implementation of government policy, particularly in the distribution of rations. For a detailed account of the event, see Isabel Andrews, "Indian Protest Against Starvation: The Yellow Calf Incident of 1884," *Saskatchewan History* 28 (1975): 41-51.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 43.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 47.

provisions were not intended to be eaten by the Indians why were they stored on their reserve?"⁷²

Reed agreed that four representatives of the group, including Sakimay, stand trial for larceny.⁷³ The charges against the Chief were dropped and the others were discharged after pleading guilty.⁷⁴ The Assistant Commissioner acknowledged that "justice has been tempered with mercy" as Sakimay "had acted in the interests of humanity, from first, to last."⁷⁵ Similar events were reported from the nearby File Hills reserves⁷⁶ as tension mounted across the west over the Indian department's strict management of food supplies.

On the western plains, members of the Blackfoot Confederacy demanded fresh meat instead of the government bacon which had killed so many the previous year.⁷⁷ Reed knew there was a problem with the food distributed by the department. He admitted to the Prime Minister that rations were both inadequate and probably indigestible.⁷⁸ Although the people of Treaty 7 were spared the worst of the cuts to

⁷²Ibid., 46.

⁷³Ibid. The police were unwilling to prosecute all of those involved.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., 46-47.

⁷⁶Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 43.

⁷⁷NAC, John A. Macdonald Papers, MG 26, Microfilm, reel C-1523, file 4624, p. 4225. Crowfoot also complained of inadequate flour rations. file 15040, p. 41873, 14 August 1884. The estimated death toll among the Blackfoot between 1883 and 1886 was six hundred. Tom McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo*, (New York: Knopf, 1972), 286.

⁷⁸Regarding the deaths at Piapot and the reports of starvation by Dr. Edwards, Reed defended his ration policy by noting that "(w)hile the Doctor speaks of starvation the same does not mean that the quantition issued were not sufficient but that the Indians were unable to eat the bacon," NAC, RG 10, vol. 3745, file 29506-4, Part 1. Reed to Macdonald, Regina, 20 May 20, 1884. Also quoted in Lux, *Medicine that*

Indian appropriations in order to avert trouble until the construction of the railway was complete and the ranching industry was well established,⁷⁹ their daily ration during the summer of 1884 was less than five ounces of flour.⁸⁰

At Battleford, where the northern reserves were concentrated, Farm Instructor Craig's refusal to provide food to Ka-Wi-Cet-Way-Mot⁸¹ almost precipitated a confrontation between a large body of police and local volunteers and over two thousand Cree at Poundmaker's Reserve. Robert Jefferson, a witness to the standoff noted the dispute "arose over a few pounds of flour or bacon."⁸² Before the incident at Poundmaker, P.G. Laurie pointed to a growing rift between the Indian Department and the judiciary over food allotments. The *Herald* reported that confrontation was growing

Walks, 44.

⁷⁹Between 1883 and 1887, Treaty Seven people received 50%-70% of departmental expenditures for supplies and rations while their population never exceeded 35% of the total population. Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 117.

⁸⁰Dyck, *The Administration of Federal Indian Aid in the Northwest Territories, 1879-1885*, 74.

⁸¹Craig was beaten for his refusal, though accounts of the incidents differ. One stated that the perpetrator was seeking food for his sick child. SAB, R-E1883, Tarr and Peterson, "The Reserve Agriculture Program," in *Little Pine/Lucky Man Band #116*, n.p. Lux's account of the assault did not mention a child but noted that both Kaweechatwaymat and his brother The Clothes "had been ill and were hungry." *Medicine that Walks*, 52. William McKay, who was present during the standoff, noted that one of the offenders, Man-that-speaks-our-language, had begged Craig for food because we was ill. William McKay, "Incidents of the Rebellions," in *The Sands of Time*, ed. Ross Innes (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Publications, 1986), 104. Craig's testimony, reported in the *Herald*, acknowledged that the man was sick, but that the farm instructor was bound to providing only food to "the old and the sick and to no others unless they work. I am not allowed to deviate from these orders in the remotest degree."

⁸²Robert Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan* (Battleford: Canadian Northwest Historical Society, 1929), 120. Major Crozier noted that "a little discretion would have saved a very great deal of trouble at a most inopportune moment." *Saskatchewan Herald*, 12 July 1884, 4.

because the Indians, "think that the formal appearance before a magistrate will be an easy way of procuring a large increase in their rations."⁸³ The *Herald* assured its readers, "[t]he noble red men may try to intimidate an odd storehouse keeper, and in an emergency capture a bag of flour or a side of bacon; but as for a general uprising, he has strong reasons for letting that job out."⁸⁴ Although the "Cree Rebellion of 1884"⁸⁵ was diffused without a bloodbath, conditions at the Battleford reserves had deteriorated over the previous years to the breaking point. During the winter of 1883-84, Father Cauchin, described the condition of the children at the mission school:

Famine was felt among amongst the Indians, in spite of their allowances which were distributed weekly by their farm instructor. After the disappearance of the buffalo, the bacon and the cakes made with some bad flour did not satisfy the appetite of the Indians. I saw the gaunt children dying of hunger, coming to my place to be instructed. Although it was thirty to forty degrees below zero their bodies were scarcely covered with torn rags. These poor children came to catechism and to school. It was a pity to see them. The hope of having a little morsel of cry cake⁸⁶ was the incentive which drove them to this cruel exposure

⁸³Ibid., 19 April 1884, 1. In a speech to Edgar Dewdney, Poundmaker echoed O'Soup's assertion that "the contents of Department stores are the property of the Indians and that the duty of the officers was merely to deal them out as they were required. Ibid., May 31, 1884, 3. Before his home was burned during the trouble of 1885, Judge C.B. Rouleau admonished Dewdney to provide the Indians with food and clothing for the good of "the Government and the Country." Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1997), 61.

⁸⁴The article noted the shortage of provisions and horses as well as "an absence of unanimity among the bands such as is necessary to insure success in case of a conflict with whites" as reasons against the threat of a general Indian revolt. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 3 May 1884, in *Battleford Beleaguered: 1885, The Story of the Riel Uprising from the Columns of the Saskatchewan Herald*, ed. W.L. Clink (Willowdale self-published, 1984), 6.

⁸⁵Innes, *The Cree Rebellion of '84*, 31-43.

⁸⁶In the June of 1884, the Anglican missionary, John Hines recorded in his journal that "(t)he Govt. farmer came down yesterday to count the school aged children... he says the Govt. is going to supply the children with a biscuit each for their dinner." CMS, Microfilm, reel A-112. John Hines Journal, 9 June 1884.

each day, more, no doubt, than the desire of educating themselves. The privation made many die.⁸⁷

Robert Jefferson stressed that the Battleford Indians accepted agriculture to escape, "dire poverty...In this hope, they had borne hunger, disease and want for several years and they were no nearer their goal. It looked as they might die off before they reached it-that is, if it existed."⁸⁸ He asserted that the hardship of the bands was the result of Dominion policy administered by Reed who:

(H)ad calculated to a nicety how much work a yoke of oxen and a plow were capable of performing in a given time and the Indian fell a good deal short of this. He figured out how little food it was possible to get along with and the Indian was always hungry. The Indian was lazy, therefore he must have short rations; if he felt sick, there was a doctor who could give him pills but no food.⁸⁹

John Craig's assessment of the agriculture program was particularly troubling to Jefferson, "Craig had a fixed idea that it was not intended that the Indian should become self-supporting. He was only to be kept quiet till the country filled up when his ill will could be ignored."⁹⁰

The failure of the Dominion's agricultural policy prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1885 is underscored by the fact that only six Treaty bands in the entire Northwest

⁸⁷Louis Cauchin, *Reminiscences, A Veteran Missionary of Cree Indians and a Prisoner in Poundmaker's Camp* (Battleford: Battleford Historical Society, 1927), 26.

⁸⁸Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*, 125.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 126.

⁹⁰*Ibid.* Although Sarah Carter's *Lost Harvests* did not use Craig's cynical, if succinct, description of the Dominion agricultural policy, it came to essentially the same conclusion.

were self-sustaining.⁹¹ According to Aidan McQuillan, "(t)he best claim that the Department of Indian Affairs could make in 1884 was that only 770 of a total of 20,230 Indians in the Territories were not reliant on government relief supplies."⁹² The Indian Department took steps to further undermine commercial farming by discouraging the use of machinery, forcing reserve farmers "to rely upon the implements they will have to use when they set up for themselves."⁹³

Bands who succeeded in growing crops went hungry under the supervision of the Indian Department. In March 1884, John Hines, the missionary at Assissippi told his superior, "I am certain our Indians would have been better off to-day if the government had not taken them under their charge."⁹⁴ Over 2000 bushels of grain had been "thrashed" by the Indians but, "(t)here is a great deal of sickness among the Indians just now, brought on we believe principally by starvation."⁹⁵ Almost two months elapsed between the time the grain was cut and the completion of threshing. Hines continued:

⁹¹Macdonald did not report on whether the six bands were supplementing their produce by hunting and fishing. McQuillan, "Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1885," 392. The successful reserves may well have been in the parklands where a mixed economy was still feasible. Yellow Quill's band, on the northern margins of Treaty four, were able to purchase blankets, clothing and a "considerable quantity of flour" with their ample harvest of "beaver, mink and other fine furs." CSP, 1884, A. MacDonald, Report of Qu'Appelle Agency, Treaty 4, 6 July 1883, 73. Deanna Christensen wrote that positive reports on the bands under Ahtakakooop and Mistawasis for 1883-84, "minimize(d) the hardship, to the point of being dishonest." *Ahtahkakoop*, 460.

⁹²McQuillan, "Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1885," 392.

⁹³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 31 May 1884, 3.

⁹⁴CMS, Microfilm, reel A-112, John Hines, Assissippi Journal, 9 March 1884.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

(T)he men started off on the 200 mile trip (to the mill at Prince Albert), leaving nothing behind for their families but unground wheat... The poor starving creatures, in the meantime are suffering much, especially those who are too ill to eat wheat. No one but ourselves, knows what amount of food we are called upon to give away. To-day we gave dinner to 15 people, principally old women. Sometimes reports reach you that the Indians are well cared for by the government & that they are contented and doing well on their farms. These reports must be from people who really know nothing of the true state of the poor Indians but who have taken a delight in praising those in authority whether they are deserving of praise or not. These comments may seem out of place in a journal of this kind, but we are living among the Indians & feel keenly their sufferings & therefore feel bound to write facts related to our work.⁹⁶

Officials knew that the scarcity of equipment undermined the work of Indian farmers who, "can do little more to ameliorate their condition until greater facility for milling grain is offered to them.... They feel discouraged by this, and it is feared that their progress will be affected by this feeling... Nothing prevents all of our Indians from being settled on their reserves, except for our incapacity to furnish enough material for agriculture."⁹⁷

Bad weather during 1884 brought the entire northwest to the verge of famine.⁹⁸

James Settee reported, "(t)he mission of the Great Plains will hereafter be hard to manage for want of food, even the whites find it difficult to get along... we had frost early in the summer in Saskatchewan, consequently all the farms are lost, which is a

⁹⁶Ibid. See also Christensen, *Ahttahkakoop*, 441-464.

⁹⁷CSP, 1885, J.A. Macrae, Report of Carlton Agency, 11 August 1884, 79-80. At Prince Albert, the scarcity of processing equipment was compounded by the destruction of two mills from fires in 1884. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 6 April 1884, 1, and 14 June 1884, 3. The events at Assissippi were not isolated. On Poundmaker's Reserve in 1882, people were reported to be starving beside ample supplies of grain because there was no mill to turn the wheat into food. Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 99.

⁹⁸Crops were stunted by a drought in the early summer and frost killed many of the crops before harvest.

very severe trial to the immigrants and to the natives."⁹⁹ The situation was so serious that he proposed the resettlement of "Plains Indians who will perish from hunger" to the shores of Lake Winnipeg where fish could still be found in large numbers.¹⁰⁰ The government, which at the time was nurturing the commercial fish harvest in Manitoba, rejected the offer.¹⁰¹

Settee's plan was predicated on the shift to fish as a subsistence base, a resource that was under threat elsewhere in the northwest. The depletion of fish stocks across the prairies was exacerbated by the arrival of settlers. In the Carlton Agency, Agent Macrae reported on the increasing scarcity, "through the wholesale destruction of fish during the spawning season. Two remedies are suggested: declaring a closed season or preserving certain waters for the exclusive use of Indians."¹⁰² At Pitt, where disease undermined the ability of the Chipewyan to secure country food, the fish were, "failing fast, owing to outside parties fishing on a very large scale, and robbing the Indians of every fish they catch, and I have no power to prevent this."¹⁰³ Agent Anderson reported the deterioration of the Lac Ste. Anne fishery would, "be a serious

⁹⁹CMS, Microfilm, reel A-112, James Settee to Rev. Fenn, 22 November 1884.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., Settee to Fenn, 8 December 1884. Settee's relocation scheme to the Interlake scheme is discussed in Tough, *'As their Natural Resources Fail' Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930*, 220.

¹⁰¹Frank Tough, "The Establishment of a Commercial Fishing Industry and the Demise of Native Fisheries in Northern Manitoba," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 4 (1984): 303-319.

¹⁰²CSP 1885, J.A. Macrae, Report of Carlton Agency, 11 August 1884, 83.

¹⁰³CSP 1885, Thomas Quinn, Acting Sub-Indian Agent, Report for Fort Pitt, 21 July 1884, 86.

loss to the native and white population which is so rapidly filling up the country."¹⁰⁴

Jackfish Lake, near Battleford, continued to be a reliable source of food. Inspector Wadsworth reported that a number of Treaty holdouts were living there in relative affluence and, "that if Big Bear and his followers will not work, they can subsist by devoting their whole time to hunting and fishing."¹⁰⁵ After the rebellion, the Indians were blamed for the scarcity of fish. In June 1887, the *Herald* commented that "if the strong arm of the law is not laid on them soon, they will have our lakes as destitute of life as the prairies..."¹⁰⁶ Government intervention undermined subsistence fishing even

¹⁰⁴Anderson reported that the Ste. Ann fishery had declined from as much as forty or fifty thousand pounds of fish per winter during the HBC period to less than eight thousand pounds. The agent also noted that the depletion of the fish was a regional phenomenon, as the drop would "apply with equal force to White Fish Lake, Lac La Biche, Saddle Lake, Pigeon Lake, Whale Lake, and others." CSP 1885, W. Anderson, Indian Agent, Report for Edmonton, 26 August 1884, 137. By 1887, fish exports to the United States from the northwest amounted to one and a half million pounds. SAB, R.G. Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel R.391, Appendix 3: "Food," 53. A year later, the estimated catch for the commercial fishing on Lake Winnipeg was two million pounds, described by Mochoruk as a "wholesale slaughter of fish." *The Political Economy of Northern Development: Governments and Capital Along Manitoba's Resource Frontier, 1870-1930*, 135-136.

¹⁰⁵CSP, 1885, T.P. Wadsworth, Battleford, 25 October 1884, 150. The *Saskatchewan Herald* also remarked on the relative affluence of those who remained outside of Treaty at Jackfish and Turtle Lakes, noting that the large number of traders in their midst gave the holdouts an advantage in the trade. 26 January 1884, 1. By the turn of the century, Jackfish was so depleted that people abandoned the lake, going to Meadow Lake and Big River in search of stocks. Meota History Book Committee, *Footsteps in Time* (Meota, Sk.: Meota History Book Committee 1980), 95.

¹⁰⁶*Saskatchewan Herald*, 4 June 1887, 2. Laurie's comment is in sharp contrast with the view of Ebenezer McColl, who described the commercial fishery in Lake Winnipeg "wanton destruction of other varieties of fish (other than whitefish) which are caught in large numbers along with the others in the nets and dumped into huge piles on the shores in the vicinities of the fisheries and left there to putrify (sic) and contaminate the atmosphere for miles around with their offensive affluvia." CSP 1889, Report on the Manitoba Superintendency, E. McColl, Winnipeg, 14 November 1888, 160.

in areas with reliable stocks.¹⁰⁷

By the summer of 1884, the Indian population was in crisis. Bad climate, the depletion of fish and small game,¹⁰⁸ and departmental indifference to the miserable conditions on reserves, forced Cree leaders to renew their demands for better treatment. Cree leaders met with government officials at Duck Lake and Carlton.¹⁰⁹ Although a recent account of events noted that the Dominion's senior officials at the meetings, Dewdney and Reed, "shared concerns about Vankoughnet's new hard-line approach to Indian rationing," they did not yield to the demands of the united Chiefs.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷Official were reported to be interfering with the fishery among the northern bands of Treaty Six by the early 1890s. Joan Champ, "Difficult to Make Hay: Early Attempts at Agriculture on the Montreal Lake Reserve," *Saskatchewan History* 47 (1995), 33. Oral history reflects the unanimity of the northern Cree in their belief that their right to hunt and fish would be protected by Treaty. Philip Ballantyne et al., *Aski-Puko-The Land Alone: A Report on the Expected Effects of the Proposed Hydro-Electric Installation at Wintego Rapids upon the Cree of the Peter Ballantyne and Lac La Ronge Bands* (n.p., 1976, typewritten), 55-83. For a discussion of competition over fish stocks in succeeding years, see Anthony Gulig, "Sizing Up the Catch: Native-Newcomer Resource Competition and the Early Years of Saskatchewan's Northern Commercial Fishery," *Saskatchewan History* 47 (1995): 3-11.

¹⁰⁸Although small game depletion became a serious problem after the elimination of the bison, and many bands relied on muskrats for their survival, the rebounding of the rabbit cycle on the plains may have partially mitigated the famine. The *Saskatchewan Herald* reported that the species was "in unlimited numbers in all the wooded parts of the country and are being snared by the Indians at the rate of thousands a day." 26 December 1884, 1.

¹⁰⁹Stonechild and Waiser stated that the council was Part of the long-standing diplomatic effort to persuade Dominion officials to provide more liberal assistance to the suffering Indian population. While the meeting attracted long-standing critics of Indian administration such as Big Bear and Beardy, the presence of cooperative Chiefs like Ahtahkakoop and Mistawassis illustrated the unanimity of Cree grievances. *Loyal till Death*, 59-60.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 61. Although the authors noted the concerns of Reed and Dewdney, the latter dismissed the Cree grievances in a letter to the Prime Minister as "the same old story-more cattle, more implements, more grub, more clothing & fact more everything." SAB, R-70 John A. Macdonald Papers, Dewdney to Macdonald, 5 September 1884. In the same letter, Dewdney discounted reports of deaths from

Instead, the Indian Commissioner pursued a policy of "sheer compulsion" to counter Cree resistance to Dominion authority.¹¹¹ By the end of November, Dewdney reported to the Prime Minister that:

I have cut their requisitions down to what I think to be a very liberal allowance & if we call for tenders for staples in the country, AS WE REQUIRE THEM [emphasis Dewdney's], that they may still be cut down as chances are we will have better crops and more of them another year."¹¹²

Although things appeared quiet on the western reserves at the beginning of 1885, tension seethed. Days before the outbreak of violence, *The Herald* castigated the government for its misguided ration policy:

Everyone here knows that almost all of the Indians in the district suffer from scrofula and dyspepsia. These complaints are no doubt largely caused by the continuous use of salt meat. We often here it is asked why not give the rations of half beef and half bacon. Beef is a great deal cheaper than bacon, and by using it saving would be effected (sic) to the Department and a more wholesome diet provided for the Indians. But suppose beef was as expensive did cost as much as the bacon it would still be more economical, as it would save the Department at least one-half of the Doctor's annual bill... Men who are in a position to suggest and carry out practical measures are not listened to. Eventually the Department could save many thousands of dollars, and the Indians be more comfortable and less exposed to the ravages of disease... Their policy seems to be comprised in these six words: feed one day, starve the next¹¹³

starvation, stating that "there is nothing in it," he acknowledged that "(t)hey nearly all died of the same disease, scrofula and consumption and nine tenths of them go off between the age of 6 and 12-those who died about the time of the payments had been wasting away for months and bringing up quantities of blood. All we can do for them is to give them cod liver oil." *The Herald* echoed Dewdney's sentiments in an editorial under the heading "Indian Starvation," which derided eastern philanthropy by stating, "Starvation from an Indian standpoint means simply inability to get all he can without working for it, and according to their notion no one ever dies from any cause except for want of food." *Saskatchewan Herald*, 20 September 1884, 2.

¹¹¹Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885," 222.

¹¹²SAB, R-70, John A. Macdonald Papers, Dewdney to Macdonald, 30 November 1884.

¹¹³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 20 March 1885, 2.

Laurie's editorial decried another aspect of Indian administration. Agents, who were responsible for the management of the reserves, not only had no discretion with regard to the distribution of rations, they had no control over the appointment or removal of their subordinates, the farm instructors."¹¹⁴ The political nature of appointments to the bureaucracy and the Dominion indifference to the success of its own agricultural initiative, made the position of farm instructor a repository for the worst of candidates. Because the Indian Department controlled almost every aspect of daily life on reserves, even the lowest ranks had considerable power in relations with the Indians. Commenting on the frequency of physical assaults committed by the instructors, Lawrence Clarke reported they were "universally known to be brutal wretches."¹¹⁵

Stonechild and Waiser argued that the violence committed by the Cree in the spring of 1885 was not an open rebellion but rather a series of "isolated and sporadic" events.¹¹⁶ During those incidents, it was directed against instructors and Agents who had taken a particular zeal in carrying out the niggardly directives of their superiors. The employees of the Indian Department who were killed acted beyond the authority granted even by the draconian measures instituted by the Dominion.

The abuse of Departmental power was a key factor in the events leading to the deaths of ten Europeans at Frog Lake on April 2, 1885.¹¹⁷ Confrontations between

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Canada. House of Commons, *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 720.

¹¹⁶Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 4.

¹¹⁷Although most accounts list nine deaths, Allen Ronaghan argued that a tenth murder has gone unrecognized. Allen Ronaghan, "Who was the 'Fine Young Man'? The Frog Lake 'Massacre' Revisited," *Saskatchewan History* 43 (1995), 18.

hungry and frustrated Indians and officials over access to food were not uncommon occurrences.¹¹⁸ In addition to the murders, Frog Lake was exceptional in that the Métis had begun their armed insurrection in the country to the east and that the Indian Agent, Thomas Quinn, refused to acquiesce to the Cree demand for food. The daughter of one of the killers, Imases, later remarked, "all he ... had to do was consent to move away to the Main Camp and let my people help themselves."¹¹⁹ In their treatment of the incident, Stonechild and Waiser described the Agent as, "a means spirited, petty little man completely lacking in compassion."¹²⁰ In the fall of 1884, Little Poplar told Quinn that his reputation for intransigence was widespread, "I heard of you away over the other side of the Missouri River. I started to come this way and the farther I came the more I heard. *You're* [emphasis Little Poplar] the man the government sent up here to say *"No!"* To everything the Indians asked you!"¹²¹ Resentment against Quinn was the result of more than his carrying out Departmental directives to the letter. Numerous accounts indicate that his parsimony was matched by his cruelty. His summoning of the people to the ration house, a call which essentially began a stampede among the emaciated population, only to inform them that it was an April Fool's Day prank and

¹¹⁸Samikay's assault on the Crooked Lakes storehouse and the John Craig incident at Little Pine reserve are but two examples.

¹¹⁹Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 117.

¹²⁰Ibid., 108. In their discussion of the events of 1885, Bob Beal and Rod Macleod described Quinn, a trainee of Hayter Reed as, "the most stubborn and obnoxious of the Indian Department's employees." Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1984), 79.

¹²¹William B. Cameron, *The War Trail of Big Bear*, (London: Duckworth, 1927), 19.

they would get nothing, is well documented.¹²² With understatement, the mother of Cree historian Joseph Dion noted, "we made a great laugh for the whites; but we failed to see the humour in it."¹²³ Quinn's sadism would certainly have contributed to the tension at the settlement, but his murder, and those of the others once the violence began,¹²⁴ may well have been precipitated by other events.

Twenty-six years after the killings, the fur trader turned missionary, Jack Matheson, provided a more sinister motivation for the violence:

I'll not say anything about the living actors in the calamity, nor mention the names of the dead; but every man living hereabouts knows that one of the Government Agents at Frog Lake at that time was a Sioux half-breed brute (Quinn), and the other a debauched Irish blackguard. (I am sorry to insert here the H.B.C. officers and other Government agents corroborate in every detail this version of facts.) "An Indian girl more or less didn't matter; and I've seen rations held back six months till girls of thirteen were handed across as wives for that Sioux brute (Quinn); and if your statement is disputed, I'll gladly go to court and prove it. Perhaps you remember he (Wandering Spirit) was shot be a so-called 'rebel.' He should have been court-martialed and shot four years before he was. The other Government man was a strapping big Irishman six feet tall, an utterly reckless blackguard. As I was passing West a few years before the rebellion, I saw little Wandering Spirit, who was nothing but a slip of a boy, thrash that brute with a dog whip till his trousers and coat were ribbons. What the little fellow thrashed him for, I need not tell you. I stood by to see that the little fellow got fair play till the big white bully was on his knees yelling for mercy. The

¹²²Jean Goodwill and Norma Sluman's account of the event noted that the agents calling of the people to the ration house, induced the hungry population to, "literally stampede from their camps to the agency, half-dragging, half-carrying two crippled and deformed women with them. Behind them came Amahoose, a man who had lost a foot, crawling as fast as he could on hands and knees, fearful that he might miss out on his share." Jean Goodwill and Norma Sluman, *John Tootoosis* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1984), 54-55. See also, Joseph Dion, *My Tribe, The Crees* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979), 92.

¹²³Ibid. For another discussion of "big lie day," see Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 152-153. Even the Catholic priest was reported to have subjected a handicapped Blood Indian in the community "to all kinds of ridicule...because of his simplicity." Goodwill and Sluman, *John Tootoosis*, 54.

¹²⁴Stonechild and Waiser wrote that Quinn's murder "touched off a murderous rampage" by a group of Cree who had been drinking heavily. *Loyal till Death*, 117.

Indians have a trick of rubbing dead leaves in the palm of the hand as if for tobacco—it is the Indian's threat of utter destruction to an enemy. 'All right,' says Wandering Spirit, 'I leave you alone now; but if you ever come near my teepee, I do to you like—*that*,' and he switched his two hands together.

I went on to the mountains. When I came back the next year, what do you think I found? That blackguard waited till I left; and as I was the only witness for the Indian boy. Then, he saddled his horse and rode for the Mounted Police and had Wandering Spirit sentenced to eighteen months in the 'pen' for assault and battery; and when Wandering Spirit went to prison, the blackguard took his girl wife. Do you wonder that Indian became a rebel? Do you wonder when the discontent seethed up to rebellion, that it was Wandering Spirit who poured the blackguard full of shot?¹²⁵

Another Anglican, Rev. Edward Ahenakew, was more reticent, "I have been told of many private incidents in the days and months before that bloodshed, am I am not surprised that ill-feeling against some of the men who were killed should have come to a head..."¹²⁶ A survivor of the incident, William Cameron, also pointed to indiscretions, "[t]hat weakness—for a tawny oval face—was a failing of too many of the white men whom the government employed to show the ignorant red man how to live."¹²⁷

Although Laurie Barron stated that contemporary charges of sexual immorality against Agents were "pure sensationalism"¹²⁸ recent studies support the allegations of

¹²⁵Agnes C. Laut, "Reverend 'Jack' Matheson: The Sky Pilot of the Crees," *Toronto Saturday Night* (Christmas Number 1911), 29.

¹²⁶Edward Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree*, ed. Ruth M. Buck (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 104. Also quoted in Goodwill and Sluman, *John Tootoosis*, 53-54. The authors noted that it was "definitely possible that some of the 'private incidents' could have involved the sexual exploitation of some of the Indian girls and women by the townsmen. Ahenakew's reticence to discuss the motivation for the killings was further illustrated in his comment, "I need not mention at this late date. It is enough to say that there was some slight reason for trouble at this particular point." Edward Ahenakew, "An Opinion of the Frog Lake Massacre," *Alberta Historical Review* 8 (1960), 14.

¹²⁷Goodwill and Sluman, *John Tootoosis*, 54.

¹²⁸The author was making particular reference to Cameron's reference to the "western harem." He noted that after 1882 Agents tended to live in central locations rather than on reserves, the homes of instructors. He admitted, "[w]hat is not known is

sexual misconduct of the Indian Department officials at Frog Lake. Stonechild and Waiser stated that the most serious Cree grievance against the instructor was that he, "interpreted 'Indian Affairs' quite literally" having paid Sand Fly twenty dollars after being confronted about repeatedly sleeping with his wife.¹²⁹ Delaney had earlier pressed a charge of assault on Sand Fly which failed but the instructor succeeded in having the wronged husband sentenced to prison for two and a half years for theft.¹³⁰ Assistant Commissioner Reed reported to his superior, "Mr. Delaney had the man arrested in order to accomplish his designs" and spent the winter living with Sand Fly's wife.¹³¹ Reed recommended that Delaney not be sacked because "the ill effects have in great measure been forgotten" and that he could only be replaced with difficulty.¹³² Maureen Lux noted that the Irishman "was roundly hated for his relationships with very young women of the reserve, and for his casual humiliations of the hungry people."¹³³ Newspaper accounts of the character of the slain officials are contradictory. In Delaney's obituary, the *Herald* stated, "[t]hat they killed their best friends first shows them to be utterly depraved and not to be trusted in anything."¹³⁴ In the east, the

the extent of the problem." Barron, "Indian Agents and the North-West Rebellion," 145.

¹²⁹Having been paid for the transgression, the couple was "encouraged" to leave the Makao reserve. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 108.

¹³⁰Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 117.

¹³¹*Ibid.*

¹³²Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 108. In 1883, an inventory of the farm implements uncovered evidence that sub-standard equipment had been substituted for goods required by the department contract. Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 118.

¹³³Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 54.

¹³⁴*Saskatchewan Herald*, 23 April 1885, in *Battleford Beleaguered*, 19.

Stratford Beacon reported that Quinn was among the department officials who, "prostituted their authority to the debauchery of Indian women."¹³⁵ Quinn's own wife may have had ambivalent feelings toward him. Although Owl Sitting¹³⁶ tried to protect her husband during his confrontation with Wandering Spirit,¹³⁷ she refused to identify Imases and Lucky Man as participants in the killings a decade later.¹³⁸ The Indian Commissioner, A.E. Forget, expressed his astonishment, "By Gad!... I might have known. These are her people and it was only her husband that they murdered."¹³⁹

The persistent allegations of sexual predation against both of the Indian Department employees at Frog Lake indicate that such practices were not solitary occurrences. In his discussion of the killings, Archbishop Taché stated that the Dominion's Indian wards were, "left a prey to the seductions of men revoltingly immoral, and when this was pointed out the friends of humanity had another regret to register."¹⁴⁰ James Robertson, a Presbyterian Minister, attributed "the troubles to the

¹³⁵Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 117.

¹³⁶She was also know as Jane Quinn after her marriage. Sarah Carter, "Introduction," in Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear: The Life and Adventures of Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1999), xviii.

¹³⁷Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion*, 195.

¹³⁸The suspects were arrested by Canadian authorities on their expulsion from the United States. Verne Dusenbury, *The Montana Cree: A Study in Religious Persistence* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 39.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 729. A recent reconsideration of the killings noted that the Catholic hierarchy had good knowledge of the mission prior to the murders and that Bishop Grandin "did all that he could to find out exactly what happened on that April morning." Ronaghan, "Who Was The 'Fine Young Man'? The Frog Lake "Massacre" Reconsidered," 18.

immoralities and dishonesty of the officials connected with them."¹⁴¹

William Pearce addressed Robertson's charges to the Minister of the Interior, "He is, I think greatly mistaken."¹⁴² In the Commons, M.C. Cameron charged that the sexual exploitation of Indian women was so pervasive that 45% "of one class of officials in the North-west were under medical treatment for a particular kind of disease in one year...an extraordinary showing for a class of men paid by the people of this country to control, manage and set an example to the Indians of the North-West Territories."¹⁴³

The M.P. quoted an interview with the Methodist missionary, John McDougall, published in the *Toronto Mail* (January 30, 1886) where the clergyman called on the government to:

(P)ut a stop to white men living with the Indian women unless they are lawfully

¹⁴¹SAB, John A. Macdonald Papers, R-70, Wm. Pearce (Calgary) to A.M. Burgess, 5 August 1885, 378-379.

¹⁴²Ibid. Pearce continued, "Around every town in the country a number of Indians are always to be found; the female portion devote their attention almost wholly to prostitution & the male live chiefly from the proceeds from that & doing odd jobs. If they were to be kept on their reserves it would be better for the Indians and also for the white portion of the community."

¹⁴³Cameron then quoted "official documents submitted by this Government to this Parliament" in stating that, "(a)t one station it points pout that there were fifty-eight cases in one year; at another station there were forty-seven cases under medical treatment in ten months; at a third station there were in eleven months seventy-four cases under medical treatment; at a fourth station in 1884 there were sixty cases under medical treatment." Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 721. Venereal disease was a problem among members of the police. In 1882, pay was reduced to members who were being treated for the affliction to cover the cost of their treatment. In 1884 the disease was reported to have significantly increased among the police. By 1889, the Senior Surgeon of the force, Augustus Jukes, protested the punitive nature of the pay cuts to infected members, noting that "Unless the punitive policy ceased, he proposed to have every man in the force examined once a month in order to prevent the spread of disease. W. Beahen and S. Horral, *Red Coats on the Prairies: The Northwest Mounted Police, 1886-1900*, (Regina: Centax Books, 1999), 193. See also, Stan Horral, "The (Royal) Northwest Mounted Police and Prostitution on the Canadian Prairies," *Prairie Forum* 10 (1985): 105-128.

married to them. Where are the young girls of 13 to 16 that have been partly taught in our schools; and others before them? Sold to white men for from \$10 to \$20!¹⁴⁴ Where are their children? Running around the reserves wearing rags! Where are the women themselves? They are prostitutes hanging around the towns. Stop the sale of Indian girls to white men and another great step is taken.¹⁴⁵

By the 1880s, the inadequate rations provided by the Indian Department had probably driven many women to prostitution in order to mitigate the suffering in their families. As early as 1883, W. Pocklington, the Sub-Agent for the Blackfoot, noted that prostitution was a problem as the reserves were, "too close to Calgary, and take every possible opportunity of going there, more particularly the women, who I am sorry to say, go on the worst possible errands."¹⁴⁶ In her study of prairie Indian women, P.M. White noted that by 1886, the *Indian Act* was amended to make Indian prostitutes subject to prosecution, "but there existed within the department a long standing view that Indian

¹⁴⁴To refute the charges of officials buying women, Hector Langevin quoted The *Saskatchewan Herald's* statement that, "the story of the traffic in girls arose from the fact that according to Indian ideas marriage is simply a bargain and sale, that the parents of a young woman are always on the alert to find a buyer for her... Now and then some degraded white man buys a wife in this way, but the *Herald* says it is a rare occurrence." Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, Hector Langevin, 15 April 1886, 731. Whatever the veracity of Langevin's statement, tradition beliefs in "bride price" would have been eroded by the horrendous conditions the people were submitted to.

¹⁴⁵Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 721.

¹⁴⁶*CSP* 1883, W. Pocklington, Blackfoot Crossing, 20 July 1883, 86. The same year, the Cree Chiefs at Edmonton petitioned the Prime Minister "their young women were now reduced by starvation and prostitution, a thing unheard of among their people before." Carter also noted the women camped at Regina and Qu'Appelle in 1886 "were dependent upon prostitution for a living." Sarah Carter, "First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Reserve Years, the 1870s to the 1920s: A Preliminary Inquiry," in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom and Strength*, Manitoba Studies in Native History, eds. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 69.

women were unwilling partners in this activity."¹⁴⁷ Many officials may well have come to this conclusion from personal experience. The dismissal of John Norrish from his position as farm instructor at the Blackfoot reserve for exchanging food for sexual favours¹⁴⁸ indicates that the women did not have to go to the cities to undergo the humiliation of sexual submission. While Norrish was trading flour for sex, the farm instructor at the Morley reserve¹⁴⁹ was reported to have kept two Indian wives during his tenure at the Stoney reserve. Cameron described his circumstances in the House:

A young Englishman, unfit to do anything in his native country, was shipped off to Canada, consigned to the care of the First Minister of the Dominion. He was provided for in the Indian service of the North-West Territories, and he has been living there for three or four years revelling in the sensual enjoyments of a western harem, plentifully supplied with select cullings from the western prairie flowers.¹⁵⁰

James Grier, another instructor with the Department stated, "I know that many of the officials have one squaw or two. This is a matter of public notoriety."¹⁵¹ Hector Langevin defended the department, if not its employees, from the charges:

¹⁴⁷White quoted a passage from the notorious Duncan Campbell Scott, "For years, the women were sacrificed to the licence of the white men... often with the connivance of the native males." Pamela M. White, *Restructuring the Domestic Sphere—Prairie Indian Women on Reserves: Image, Ideology and State Policy, 1880-1930* (Ph. D diss, McGill University, 1987), 119.

¹⁴⁸The woman's family was provided with a ration ticket for seven though there were only four in her family. Carter, "First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Years, the 1870s to the 1920s: A Preliminary Inquiry," 70. Carter noted that, in 1893, similar complaints against DIA staff were raised by Chief Thunderchild and "a major DIA investigation... (at).. the Hobbema agency (into charges) that the Indian agent indecently assaulted a number of women." For another discussion of the scandal, Barron, "Indian Agents and the North-West Rebellion," 152, fn. 36.

¹⁴⁹Though the instructor was not named, J.W. Molson was the instructor at Morley at the time of the reported incident. *CSP* 1883, 200.

¹⁵⁰Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, M.C. Cameron, 15 April 1886, 720.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 721.

That soldier or that official, if he misbehaves himself as a private individual, must be personally held responsible for that; we have nothing to do with his personal conduct so long as it does not interfere with his official duties.¹⁵²

Lawrence Vankoughnet privately admitted that sexual impropriety was a problem among his staff, "owing to the material from which we had to select our Employees."¹⁵³ Sexual contact between Indian department officials and Indian women may not have been limited to the lower levels of the service. Hayter Reed, who advanced an ordinance in the Territorial Council "to compel men to support their illegitimate offspring" in the fall of 1886, was accused of sexual misconduct.¹⁵⁴ William Donovan, wrote to Vankoughnet charging that Reed had a "girl that is a squaw from Touchwood Hills, she was his mistress at Regina, and has a child she says is his she followed him to Battleford and he induced her to go away again."¹⁵⁵ Donovan then claimed, "[i]f it is well known in Battleford that he debauched Mrs. Quinn, another Squaw, and if Quinn had lived there would have been lots of trouble it-he is a libertine and has not respect for the virtue of women."¹⁵⁶ Nothing came of the charges against the Assistant Commissioner.

The murder of others at the hands of the Cree may have been the settling of personal scores. Europeans such as William Cameron, the HBC trader at Frog Lake,

¹⁵²Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, Hector Langevin, 15 April 1886, 732.

¹⁵³Barron, "Indian Agents and the North-West Rebellion," 145.

¹⁵⁴NAC RG 10, Microfilm, reel C-10136, vol. 3772, file 34938, William Donovan to Vankoughnet, 30 October 1886.

¹⁵⁵The woman was reported to be the sister of Henry Pratt, Reed's servant and interpreter. Pratt stated that the charges against his master were "pure fabrications." *Ibid.*, Statement of Henry Pratt, Regina, 28 December 1886.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, William Donovan to Vankoughnet, 30 October 1886.

and the police at Pitt, were spared in recognition of their humanity.¹⁵⁷ Hildebrandt noted that instructors who merely followed their orders, such as instructors Craig and McKay, safely passed through groups of rebels during their flight to Battleford.¹⁵⁸ The latter was even assisted in crossing the Battle River by the Stonies who had killed James Payne.¹⁵⁹

Barney Tremont, the Battleford man killed by Man Without Blood, had been an Indian fighter in the United States.¹⁶⁰ Beal and Macleod remarked that Tremont, "hated Indians and would threaten them whenever they came near his ranch."¹⁶¹ Evidence of the rancher's loathing of the local population was presented by Walter Hildebrandt:

On one occasion, a young Indian lost his way in a blizzard, when he saw the light in Tremont's house. He knocked on the door and sought shelter. When Tremont saw that he was an Indian, he shut the door in his face and the Indian had his feet frozen. There is little doubt that the friends and the relatives of this unfortunate young man also took advantage of the turmoil to avenge

¹⁵⁷On 14 April 1885, prior to the taking of Pitt, Big Bear dictated a message to Sgt. Martin, "since I met you long ago we have always been good friends... so please try to get off from Pitt as soon as you can. And tell your Captain that I remember him well, for since the Canadian Government had left me to starve in this country he sometimes gave me food, and I don't forget the blankets he gave me, and that is the reason I want you all to get off without bloodshed." *Saskatchewan Herald*, in *Battleford Beleaguered*, 29. See also Walter Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*, 73. Robert Jefferson, a participant in the events of 1885, noted that at Frog Lake, "(t)he employees of the Hudson's Bay Company were the only men they spared, a fact which speaks volumes." *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*, 155.

¹⁵⁸Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 85.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰In reporting Tremont's death, the *Herald* noted that "(h)e had a brother shot at his side in an Indian fight in the States. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 23 April 1885, in *Battleford Beleaguered: 1885*, 19.

¹⁶¹Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, 183.

themselves upon the rancher.¹⁶²

Another victim at Battleford, Farm Instructor James Payne, was considered to be particularly cruel. Stonechild and Waiser stated that he was killed by Itka in retribution for the beating death of his tubercularised daughter.¹⁶³ At his trial, the accused testified that he killed Payne in a fight over rations which had been withheld from the killer's family for ten days.¹⁶⁴ Another motivation for his murder was presented by Hilderbrandt:

He [Payne] had a common-law wife and several children. Returning one night from Battleford under the influence of liquor, he drove his wife and children out of doors during a snow storm. Before they succeeded in reaching an Indian shelter, the poor woman, who had used her own garments to protect the children from biting frost, had both her breasts frozen and never quite recovered from the effects of that dreadful night. When the rebellion broke out, her Indian relatives sought revenge against the farm instructor and shot him to death.¹⁶⁵

In his obituary, the *Herald* noted that Payne had married the daughter of Chief Bear's Head the previous summer and that his widow gave birth to a son the day after his death.¹⁶⁶ Two weeks later, the *Herald* pointed to the fact that the instructor may not have been alone when he died as the murder scene included , "[t]he body of a woman apparently about twenty years of age, shot through the cheek, and of a one year old

¹⁶²Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 85.

¹⁶³Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 98. See also, K.J. Tyler, *Interim Report: The History of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, and Lean Man Bands. 1878-1920*, 4. In her discussion of the Battleford trials, Sandra Bingaman reported that Itka had gotten into a serious confrontation with Payne "over an extra bag of flour." Sandra Bingaman, *The North-West Rebellion Trials, 1885* (M.A. thesis, University of Regina, 1971), 123. Itka's request was for his family because he intended to go hunting. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 1 June 1885, in *Battleford Beleaguered*, 42.

¹⁶⁴*Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 October 1885.

¹⁶⁵Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford*, 84.

¹⁶⁶*Saskatchewan Herald*, 23 April 1885.

child with a fractured skull, were found near Mr. Payne's body. There is nothing to show why they were killed."¹⁶⁷ The *Herald* made no further reference to the unnamed mother and child or to the fate of their bodies. While the killing of Europeans was widely publicized in the contemporary press, and remains a fixation of historians of the 1885 uprising,¹⁶⁸ the murders of Indians during the conflict have received scant attention. In June, the *Herald* reported, "a sepulchral teepee was found in the Eagle Hills in which there were nine dead Stonies, and nearby was another resting in a tree. All had died of gun shot wounds, but whether they proved fatal on the battlefield or on the reserves is not known; nor is it material."¹⁶⁹

The *Herald's* solitary reference to the murder of Payne's companion and child, and its dismissal of the shootings of the nine Stonies as irrelevant, suggests that other murders may have gone unreported during the uprising. Fear of retribution may have driven many to abandon the country altogether. Even before the mass execution the Indian killers at Battleford, many left the Stoney Reserves. Chief Grizzly Bear's Head, sixty of his followers and another "forty dissidents from other bands," fled to the United States where they spent years of hardship, "managing to escape American authorities,

¹⁶⁷ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 4 May 1885, 2.

¹⁶⁸ Recent examples include, Carter's reconsideration of Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock's Memoir, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*, and Alan Ronaghan's, "Who Was The 'Fine Young Man'? The Frog Lake "Massacre" Reconsidered," and Allan Ronagan, "Father Fafard and the Fort Pitt Mission," *Alberta History* 46 (1998): 13-18, Walter Hildebrandt's critique of rebellion historiography noted "(t)he episodic portrayal of these events has always focussed on battles and killings, not on the long term factors of starvation and the sense of frustration felt by the Cree. *Views from Fort Battleford*, 79.

¹⁶⁹ *Saskatchewan Herald*, June 1885.

who wished to send them back to Canada."¹⁷⁰ The decision of the Stoney, and other bands¹⁷¹ to abandon their reserves could not have been taken lightly. In addition to the official retribution that would be later meted out to the large number of bands deemed disloyal, the fear of personal attack may have been widespread.

During the conflict, members of bands being hunted by Dominion authorities chose to take their own lives rather than allow themselves to be taken prisoner. While pursuing Big Bear near Loon Lake, Lewis Redman Ord came upon the corpse of a woman who had recently hanged herself, "she had been left behind and hearing of our approach had committed suicide in preference to falling into our hands."¹⁷² The woman's fear of capture may have been nurtured earlier when, at Frenchman's Butte, a rebel attempting to surrender was blown to pieces while waving, "a flag of truce when the brilliant youth in Command of the gun made a target of him."¹⁷³ Jack Matheson recounted another incident at Frenchman's Butte:

(W)here a very well known officer, indeed was camped. We had sent an Indian

¹⁷⁰The band never returned to their reserve. Tyler, *Interim Report: The History of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, and Lean man Bands. 1878-1920*, 5-6.

¹⁷¹Another of the exiled bands was that of Little bear, Imases, who were not provided with a reserve in the United States until after their union with the Ojibwa band under Rocky Boy in 1913. Dusenbury, *The Montana Cree: A Study in Religious Persistence*, 30-47. See also, James Dempsey, "Little Bear's Band: Canadian or American Indians?" *Alberta History* 41 (1993): 2-9, and Hans Peterson, "Imases and His Band: Canadian Refugees after the North West Rebellion," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 7 (1978): 21-37.

¹⁷²Lewis Redman Ord, "Reminiscences of a Bungle by one Of the Bunglers," in *Reminiscences of a Bungle by one Of the Bunglers and Two Other Stories of the Rebellion*, ed. R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983), 76. Ord was a member of Sam Steele's scouts.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 65. The officer in Command of the artillery was the son of General Strange. For a particularly retrograde account of the incident, see Stewart, *Sam Steele: Lion of the Frontier*, 152.

Chief¹⁷⁴ with a British Flag to attest this tribe's loyalty. Colonel Blank had foolishly issued orders "to shoot everything with long hair" [emphasis Matheson's] and he himself met this Indian coming in. The Colonel could not speak a word of Cree. The Chief could not speak a word of English. Without a word on either side, the officer drew his revolver and shot that Indian dead. Then he went back to his tent. That display of brutality was enough to inflame Jack S____, the Montana outlaw Scout. He roped the dead Indian's body to the pommel of his saddle, and galloped all over the prairie with it till the corpse was pounded to jelly. When Middleton heard of it, he was so furious he was going to hold a court martial, but S____ threatened he would tell the whole story and appeal to the United States Government and he got off with a reprimand. Oh there are two sides to every story of Indian outrage; and I wasn't a missionary in those days; and I didn't see things with the eyes of a missionary.¹⁷⁵

Stonechild and Waiser stated that the mutilation was probably revenge for the

desecration of Constable Cowan's body at Fort Pitt.¹⁷⁶ Matheson had a different view:

Many of Strange's scouts were Montana outlaws. These men skinned a dead Indian here in '85. Here, at Onion Lake, we had just buried a young girl of a good Cree family-Christian burial, under the sod; and of course, the corpse was wrapped in beautifully garnished buckskin. Jack S____ of Strange's Scouts came along. He and his fellows pretended they thought some murdered settler had been buried in that grave.¹⁷⁷ They opened the grave with their bayonets.

¹⁷⁴The Chief was Maymenook, whose body according to the HBC trader, Angus McKay, "was stripped of all clothing with the rope (cut short to one yard in length) still around his neck, which had cut into his jaw... The scout who had captured his mount ... had galloped around the prairie with the rope attached to a pommel, trailing the body in the grass in circles, the trails of which were still visible. He had thus been exposed for several days before being buried; and his body, from intense heat, was huge in size when I saw him. I requested the authorities to have him buried." Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*, 215, fn. 7.

¹⁷⁵Laut, "Reverend 'Jack' Matheson: The Sky Pilot of the Crees," 30. Beal and Macleod stated that Cut Arm, a Woods Cree Chief, was "killed instantly at Frenchman's Butte" but did not discuss the events described by Matheson. *Prairie Fire*, 287. Even the particularly backward account of Robert Stewart noted that the Saddle Lake Indian was "a gentle soul who had helped and protected the Crees' white captives when Wandering Spirit wanted to kill them." Stewart added, "(h)e measured 6 feet, 4 ½ inches minus his scalp, which was taken by one of the scouts." *Sam Steele: Lion of the Frontier*, 150.

¹⁷⁶Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 183.

¹⁷⁷General Middleton ordered the exhumation of graves near the narrows of Loon Lake, "in case they contained the bodies of the captive whites. They did not, of

They stripped the body of its fine attire-then, they tossed the body back and forward on their bayonets and played ball with it. Do you wonder our Indians were ready to rise? The body was literally hacked to pieces. Do you wonder the Indians tore the hearts out of the dead Mounted Police at Fort Pitt?¹⁷⁸

The Cree bands who, according to one trooper, were "'hunted to death and starving,"¹⁷⁹ were punished severely after their surrender. The judge at the Battleford trials, C.B. Rouleau, who had expressed his sympathy for the plight of the Cree in 1884,¹⁸⁰ turned against them after the destruction of his home and the humiliation of his flight from Battleford for which he was accused of cowardice.¹⁸¹ He told Dewdney, "I think that General Middleton was altogether too kind to them. My impression that a milk and water policy [emphasis Rouleau's] is a very wrong one."¹⁸² Sandra Bingaman noted the "striking... lack of formality" of the Battleford trials where the accused were provided with little if any legal council.¹⁸³ The executions at Battleford, the largest in Canadian history, were designed not only to ensure swift retribution for those who had taken European lives, but also to intimidate the remaining population. The *Herald* expressed the opinion of many in the Northwest:

course, but by digging them up, it was discovered that Cut Arm, a prominent Woods Cree Chief, was among the casualties." Stewart, *Sam Steele: Lion of the Frontier*, 161.

¹⁷⁸Laut, "Reverend 'Jack' Matheson: The Sky Pilot of the Crees," 30-31.

¹⁷⁹Harold Panryn Rusden, "Suppression of the Northwest Insurrection," in *Reminiscences of a Bungle by One of the Bunglers and Two Other Stories of the Rebellion*, ed. R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983), 308.

¹⁸⁰Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 61.

¹⁸¹For a discussion of the criticism of Rouleau's actions during the rebellion, see Bingaman, *The North-West Rebellion Trial, 1885*, 113-114. Stonechild and Waiser described the judge's flight as "running for his life." *Loyal till Death*, 90.

¹⁸²Bingaman, *The Northwest Rebellion Trials, 1885*, 115.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 129-131.

It is devoutly to be hoped that the Indians at large will be duly impressed with the certainty with which punishment has overtaken their deluded fellows, and recognizing the power of the law, settle down and make the most of their opportunities to improve their condition and raise themselves above being instigated to evil by men who do not care for their welfare, but only want to use them for the furtherance of their own wicked ends.¹⁸⁴

Dewdney requested "that the hangings be a public spectacle."¹⁸⁵ Reed recommended that the local Indian population be brought to witness the executions "to cause them to meditate for many a day" from the "ocular demonstration" of the "sound thrashing" meted out by the Dominion.¹⁸⁶ The political nature of the executions was revealed by Prime Minister who wrote that they, "ought to convince the Red Man that the White Man governs."¹⁸⁷ To reinforce the point, a large but unspecified number¹⁸⁸ of the surrounding Indian population, including the students from the Battleford Industrial school,¹⁸⁹ were brought to witness the proceedings:

A large number of Indians from the neighbouring reserves were present, and seated themselves on the ground in front of the gallows and preserved a most stolid demeanor from the time they entered their barrack yard until the bodies were put in their coffins, when the crowd moved away.¹⁹⁰

The bands who witnessed the executions must certainly have had the Dominion's

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 129.

¹⁸⁵Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 221.

¹⁸⁶E. Brian Titley, "Hayter Reed and Indian Administration in the West," in *Swords and Ploughshares: War and Agriculture in Western Canada*, ed. R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1993), 117.

¹⁸⁷Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal til Death*, 221.

¹⁸⁸Although he could not number of Indians gathered to witness the executions, Major Charles Boulton noted, "(c)amp-fires light up the prairies." Charles A. Boulton, *I Fought Riel: A Military Memoir*, ed. Heather Robertson (Toronto: Lorimer, 1985), 224.

¹⁸⁹Goodwill and Sluman, *John Tootosis*, 77.

¹⁹⁰*Saskatchewan Herald*, 30 November 1885, in *Battleford Beleaguered*, 71.

intended message driven home. According to the *Herald*, the executed were not removed from the gallows for fifteen minutes.¹⁹¹ Robert Jefferson described the disposal of the bodies:

Disposal of the bodies was let by contract but, when it came to the matter of placing the bodies in coffins or boxes, the contractor objected to handling them. This, of course, was to prove his conformity to the prevailing antagonism to "rebels". (sic) The conflict between duty and inclination was compromised by his placing the boxes below the scaffold, so that when he cut the ropes by which they were suspended the dead Indians dropped into their respective "caskets". (sic) Then they were hauled to the bank of the river and buried in the sand.¹⁹²

The executions at Battleford marked the end of Cree resistance to the increasingly draconian measures instituted by the Dominion government. Deprived of their leaders and their freedom, the subjugation of the Cree was complete.¹⁹³ Even before the uprising, officials of the Indian Department controlled almost every aspect of their lives. The abuses committed by employees of the government, though unsanctioned, were evidence of their power over the reserve population. The completion of the transcontinental railway signalled the transition of the prairies to a new economic paradigm from which the vast majority of plains Indians were excluded. In the wake of these changes, the aboriginal population would, within a decade, decline to its nadir.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan*, 153.

¹⁹³Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree," 232.

Chapter 10: The Nadir of Indian Health, 1886-1891.

The fallout from the Indian uprising in Saskatchewan had a severe impact on the reserve population of the plains. By the beginning of 1886, the Indian population was in crisis. In addition to the hundreds who were dying of malnutrition and related diseases, many of the leaders were imprisoned or were dead. Long Lodge, whose band had suffered terrible mortality alongside Piapot at the Indian Head reserves, died in the United States on Christmas eve 1884.¹ Little Pine, who endured bouts of blindness prior to the outbreak of hostilities, died of disease during the uprising. Red Pheasant, a Cree Chief from Battleford, was dead.² Big Bear and Poundmaker, voices of restraint during the fighting, were imprisoned. Both would soon be dead. Poundmaker's obituary noted that he "had an attack of bleeding of the lungs about three years ago and came near dying."³ He perished from tuberculosis in July 1886. On July 12th, the *Herald* reported, "(h)is death practically settles the Indian question in the north on the side of peace, there being no one clever or influential enough to take up the banner he has just left down."⁴

Punishment meted out by the authorities was swift and effective. The confiscation of horses and guns, whose purpose was to check the possibility of further

¹Hamilton and Hamilton, *These are the Prairies*, 3.

²Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, 132. In February 1885, Isaac Taylor of the CMS, noted that the Chief "is of fine physique though now suffering more or less from chronic disease." CMS, Microfilm, reel A-112, Isaac Taylor, "An Account of Two Visits to the Cree Indians of the Saskatchewan... into the Reserves on the Eagle Hills near Battleford, N.W.T.," 23 February 1885, 2.

³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 12 July 1885, in *Battleford Beleaguered*, 75.

⁴*Ibid.* As Poundmaker visited his adopted father, Crowfoot, he choked, "blood gushed from his mouth and in a few moments he was dead." Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 200.

trouble, hobbled efforts to acquire wild game.⁵ The pass system, considered by historians of the police to have been "perhaps the most onerous regulation placed on the Indians after the rebellion,"⁶ was implemented through the entire plains, keeping Indians out of European communities and further undermining their access to game.⁷ Although the police protested the legislation as a breach of trust⁸ with the Indian population, they carried out their orders. Hayter Reed was the architect of the new measures. He stated:

(T)hat the Indians be disarmed either by persuasion or the withholding of ammunition; that the tribal system of government be broken up; that the work for rations policy be strictly adhered to; that the pass system be used to confine the Indians to their reserves; that rebels be denied their annuities until such time as the cost of the damage they had caused be recouped by the government and until they had displayed remorse for their actions; that the horses of rebels be confiscated and cattle substituted for them; that Big Bear's band be broken up and dispersed among others; that loyal Indians be conspicuously rewarded as an object lesson to those who had been in arms.⁹

The Dominion's new approach to Indian administration had a profound impact on the

⁵Joyce Sowby, *Macdonald the Administrator: Department of the Interior and Indian Affairs, 1878-1887* (M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1984), 185.

⁶Beahen and Horral, *Red Coats on the Prairies: The Northwest Mounted Police, 1886-1900*, 57.

⁷The effects of the pass system are well documented. See Laurie Barron, "The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West, 1882-1935," *Prairie Forum* 13 (1988): 25-42, and Sarah Carter, "Controlling Indian Movement: The Pass System," *NeWest Review* 10 (1985): 8-9.

⁸Police opposition to the enforcement of the act was such that by 1892, the Commissioner Herchmer of the NWMP sought legal advice on the issue and circulated an order to his staff not to prosecute Indians without legal justification. Barron, "The Indian Pass System in the West, 1882-1935," 36. According to Hubner, "The Northwest Mounted Police, the Department of Indian Affairs, and the federal government all knew the 'pass law' had no legal basis and violated the promises of Treaty #7." "Horse Stealing and the Borderline: The NWMP and the Control of Indian Movement," 295.

⁹Titley, "Hayter Reed and Indian Administration in the West," 117-118.

people of the west. According to Maureen Lux, the reserve population which peaked in 1884, declined for at least a decade, the result of malnutrition, overcrowding, exposure, poor sanitation and oppressive government policies.¹⁰ In that period, the population of the Crooked Lakes reserves declined by 41 percent.¹¹ At File Hills, by 46 percent.¹² Between 1885 and 1889, one third of the inhabitants of the Edmonton reserves either left or died.¹³ The pre-rebellion population of the Battleford reserves was halved by 1889.¹⁴

Not all of the losses were the result of disease. Hundreds of people, including as many as one hundred members of the Battleford Stoney bands¹⁵ and the followers of Little Bear, fled to the United States.¹⁶ Little Poplar also took refuge south of the border where they endured terrible hardship until 1887, when American authorities

¹⁰Lux, *Beyond Biology*, 69.

¹¹Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 45.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴*Ibid.* The death rate for the reserves was four times higher than the birth rate during the period.

¹⁵Grizzly Bear's Head left Canada with over one hundred followers. K. Tyler, *Interim Report: The History of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, and Lean Man Bands, 1878-1920*, 5. The annual report of the Indian Department noted that the remaining Stoney bands "have more houses than they can occupy at present, owing to so many of them having, after the troubles, fled to the United States." CSP, 1887, John A. Macdonald, Report of the Superintendent General, 1 January 1887, xlviii.

¹⁶On 30 December 1885, the *Benton River Press* reported that 137 Crees under Little Bear (Imases) had been apprehended and taken to Fort Assiniboine. James Dempsey, "Little Bear's Band: Canadian or American Indians?," 3; Dusenbury, *The Montana Cree: A Study in Religious Persistence*, 32, 37. In 1896, 192 Cree were expelled from the United States. Four members of the group died prior to reaching Canadian soil.

agreed to provide relief.¹⁷ Lux reported the number of those who abandoned the Battleford Agency in the year after the rebellion to be three hundred.¹⁸ A decade later, when an amnesty was offered by the Dominion five hundred "Indian refugees from the trouble in 1885"¹⁹ returned from Montana.²⁰

Abandonment was only one factor contributing to the startling decline of the Indian population. Those who could, responded to the new Departmental measures by renouncing their legal status as Indians.²¹ At Lac la Biche, as many as 470 people withdrew from treaty in 1886.²² Over half of the 1159 certificates granted during 1886 in

¹⁷A large number of the band were starving near the south fork of the Sun River and were "forced from place to place during the summer, and are now in such dire extremes that the United States authorities are giving them relief." *Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 February 1887, 1. Later in the year, the *Herald* reported that fugitive Canadian Indians were taking refuge in the mountains rather than obey an American military directive ordering them back to Canada. *Ibid.*, 12 November 1887, 3.

¹⁸The total population of the Agency at the beginning of the period was 1,952. Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 58.

¹⁹ Reed noted "they have been scattered throughout the country and not kept in one body." SAB, Ferguson Papers, Microfilm, reel R-3.391, 185.

²⁰The five hundred does not include the band under Grizzly Bear's Head, who according to K.J. Tyler, "apparently never returned to his reserve." *Interim Report: The History of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, and Lean Man Bands. 1878-1920*, 5. According to Titley, between 10 and 15 percent of the rebels "were restored to department favour" in 1888. "Hayter Reed and Indian Administration in the West," 120.

²¹Dewdney noted that those who could opt out of the system were provided with scrip, which "for them, would have constituted a considerable sum of ready cash." CSP 1887, Report of Commissioner Dewdney, 17 November 1886, 111.

²²The population of the Pecaysees band fell from 992 to 521. CSP 1887, Report of the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, 1 January 1887, li. So many took scrip among Passpassche's band that the remainder were merged with Enoch's band in 1887. CSP 1888, Edgar Dewdney, Report of the Indian Commissioner, 23 December 1887, 192.

western Saskatchewan and Alberta were for people opting out of treaty.²³ By spring 1888, the *Herald* reported that three quarters of the population of Slave Lake were half-breeds.²⁴ On the lower Saskatchewan, the "Indian" population declined by one third during 1886.²⁵ The population of the newly established Agency at Onion Lake Agency declined by more than one half.²⁶ At Battleford, more than ten percent of the Indians withdrew from Treaty in 1887.²⁷

That so many chose to flee the country or abandon their status as Indians in the wake of the trouble is not surprising. The most immediate punishment doled out by Dominion authorities in the aftermath of the violence was the slashing of food rations, particularly to the many bands deemed disloyal. The mortality rates for rebel bands for the two years after 1885, calculated by Maureen Lux, are striking. Among the Assiniboine Bands the death rates were estimated at: 178 per thousand at Mosquito, 306.4 per thousand at Grizzly Bear's Head, 117.6 per thousand at Lean Man, and 123.7 per thousand at Red Pheasant.²⁸ Among the Cree at Thunderchild, the mortality

²³Ken Hatt, "The North-West Rebellion Scrip Commissions, 1885-1889," in *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, eds. F.L. Barron and James Waldram (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1985), 197. In the Edmonton Agency, one hundred and fifty took scrip, leaving an official population of 843. CSP 1887, John A. Macdonald, Report of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1 January 1887, lii.

²⁴*Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 March 1888, 4.

²⁵Five hundred people withdrew from treaty. CSP 1887, John A. Macdonald, Report of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1 January 1887, xlvi.

²⁶The Agency population fell from 814 to 386. CSP 1887, John A. Macdonald, Report of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1 January 1887, xlix-l.

²⁷CSP 1888, John A. Macdonald, Report of the Superintendent General, 3 January 1888, lii.

²⁸Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 58.

was estimated at 233.5 per thousand and at Sweet Grass, 185 per thousand.²⁹ The death rate for the Agency exceeded the birth rate by a ration of four to one.³⁰ The incredibly high death rate calculations, particularly for the Stoney bands, are problematic. They appear to be based exclusively on annuity payments which list only the members of bands who were paid and would not have accounted for those who willingly left treaty, either by moving or by taking scrip. John A. Macdonald's Annual Report for 1887 referred to the withdrawal from Treaty of 117 Battleford Indians.³¹ Though Lux noted the territorial abandonment as a factor in the decline of the Battleford reserves, her discussion does not address the acceptance of scrip as a factor in the drop in official records. Her data would not have included the sixty people of Grizzly Bear's Head and "the other forty dissidents" who abandoned the Agency in October 1885.³²

Aside from the methodological issues associated with the use of Indian department data, the late 1880s were years of serious decline for the bands of the Northwest. Some, such as the Sharphead Stoney, in east central Alberta, underwent such hardship that they ceased to exist as a discrete population.³³ Although

²⁹Ibid. Lux then provided the mortality rates of 31.6 per thousand for Montreal and 20 per thousand for Paris and London.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Before the withdrawals reported in 1887, the population was reported to be 983. CSP 1888, Report of the Superintendent General, 3 January 1887, lii.

³²Tyler, *Interim Report: The History of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, and Lean Man Bands. 1878-1920*, 5.

³³The surviving members of the band were integrated with that of Ironhead in 1895 "and the Sharphead band ceased to exist." Titley, "The Fate of the Sharphead Stoney," 8.

tuberculosis was the primary cause of death for Indians by the 1880s,³⁴ two serious epidemics of infectious disease in the second half of the decade greatly heightened the death toll.

In the aftermath of the violence of 1885, the Indian Department severely curtailed all of its ration allotments and cut off bands deemed "rebellious" altogether. The cuts, estimated to be worth over \$21,000, amounted to almost one fifth of the Department's annual expenditure for the Northwest Superintendency.³⁵ The Prime Minister acknowledged that the cuts would cause "genuine suffering" but he warned Dewdney that, "[y]ou will have to take hold of this subject with a good deal of your vigour and with a view to prevent imposition on the treasury."³⁶ Reed reported on the immediate food measures undertaken and of their effects during the summer of 1885:

... the only tea &c which the Indians receive is through their own work for Civilians-Of course this rule can but be enforced for a limited period, say till the beginning of next spring's work for Civilians, then only in very limited quantities

³⁴Discussion of tuberculosis as the primary cause of death are numerous. The Annual Reports of the Indian Department for 1886, for example, make specific reference to tuberculosis as the principal pathogen: Touchwood Hills Agency, Day Star (p.117), Gordon's (along with syphilis and scrofula)(p.117); Crooked Lake (p.125); Prince Albert (p.126), Edmonton (p.134), Sarcee (p.135) *CSP*, 1887. The disease was also reported to have been the primary pathogen among Indians in the United States. Washington Mathews, "Consumption among the Indians," *Transactions of the American Climatological Association* (1886), 235.

³⁵ At Battleford, the cuts amounted to \$8,825, at Pitt \$6,785 and at Prince Albert \$3,625. MacPherson, *The Battlefords: A History*, 105.

³⁶SAB, John A. Macdonald Papers, R-70, Macdonald to Dewdney, 5 July 1885, n.p.

and not in the lavish manner I seen was done here after its receipt-I find on close inspection there are the following absent from the different reserves—

Nipahase's band	9 families	24 souls
Thudner Child "	13 "	31 "
Little Pine "	2 "	3 "
Pound Maker "	14 "	34 "
Sweet Grass "	<u>30 "</u>	<u>32 "</u>
	68 "	124 "

Most of these are on the plains or heading for the West; the balance are scattered about this place as Half-Breeds and a few working.³⁷

Even bands who did not suffer the wrath of Dominion revenge for their disloyalty underwent enormous hardship and loss to disease resulting from malnutrition. The photograph of Crowfoot and his children, taken in 1884, presented in his biography by Hugh Dempsey, illustrates the depth of suffering within a single family. All eight of the children whose images were captured in the photograph died within two years.³⁸



Fig. 4. Crowfoot and His Children, 1884. Source: Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 181.

³⁷SAB Sir John A. Macdonald Papers, R-70, Reed to Dewdney, 31 August 1885, 366.

³⁸Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 181.

Although 'loyal' bands were not to be punished under the directives, many underwent severe privation in the aftermath of the fighting. At Assissippi, Hines reported, "[o]ur people are literally starving all the Govt. officials are off to Regina in connection with the trials & appear to have forgotten about food for the loyal Indians.³⁹ As many endured famine, rations imported for the militia, including "large quantities of bacon and other food ...[were] piled up and spoiling."⁴⁰

The misery was compounded during the summer of 1886, when measles and whooping cough broke out among the weakened Indian population of the plains.⁴¹ The disease was first reported in the Victoria Agency where nine people perished.⁴² At Edmonton, Agent Anderson reported that the disease resulted in "a good many deaths this year, most of them from the after affects of a bad type of measles; in many cases,

³⁹CMS, Microfilm, reel A-113, Assissippi Journal, 3 August 1885 and 23 August 1885, 2-3.

⁴⁰SAB, Macdonald Papers, R-70, Macdonald to Dewdney, telegram, 24 August 1884, 363; Dewdney to Macdonald, deciphered telegram, 25 August 1885, 365. Dewdney suggested that the surplus food could be used for the relief of Indians and the destitute of Batoche.

⁴¹The connection between malnutrition and the severity of measles is well documented. David C. Morley reported that measles, "as seen in Africa and other areas where malnutrition exists may have a mortality rate four hundred times as measles in a well-developed countries." The author added that in developing countries, the disease is a particular threat to children under the age of three years, "a period when the child is particularly at nutritional risk." David C. Morley, "Nutrition and Infectious Disease," in *Disease and Urbanization: Symposia for the Study of Human Biology*, Volume 20, eds. E.J. Clegg and J.P. Garlick (London: Taylor and Francis, 1980), 37. See also Morley, "Severe Measles," in *Changing Disease Patterns and Human Behaviour*, eds. N.F. Stanley and R.A. Joske (London: Academic Press 1980), 124-125. The measles epidemic persisted to 1889, was reported to have taken a large toll in both Canada and the United States. Stearn and Stearn, *The Effect of Smallpox on the Destiny of the Amerindian*, 107.

⁴²CSP 1887, Report of the Indian Commissioner, 17 November 17, 1886, 109.

they caught a cold in their lungs."⁴³

The disease was severe in the north. In Athabasca, one hundred and fifty people perished, "at Slave Lake alone from measles and whooping cough."⁴⁴ John Hines at the Assissippi mission, reported that the epidemic, "swept the country north of us, and attacked my Indians at Stony Lake, and about one fourth of them died of the effects, and its victims were mostly men."⁴⁵ Though the people of the mission itself were spared the brunt of the combined epidemic, their mortality rose dramatically through 1886 and 1887 (See Graph 1-over⁴⁶). Although causes of death are not reported for the CMS mission on Lac la Ronge, mortality was more than five times higher than normal for 1887 (see Graph 2-over).⁴⁷

⁴³CSP 1888, W. Anderson, Report of the Edmonton Agency, n.d. 1887, 104.

⁴⁴*Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 March 1888, 4.

⁴⁵Hines, *Red Indians of the Plains*, 216-217. See also, *Saskatchewan Herald*, 12 February 1887, 1. Measles and scarlet fever were reported as prevailing among the young at Star Blanket (Ahtahkakoop), in addition to "considerable sickness among the grown-up portion of the Indians.

⁴⁶SAB, Anglican Diocese of Saskatchewan, Parish Register of Burials Assissippi Mission.

⁴⁷SAB, Anglican Diocese of Saskatchewan, Parish Registers of Burials, Stanley Mission. Graph 2 illustrates that with the exception of the measles epidemic, northern populations underwent no significant changes to their health conditions through the second half of the nineteenth century, and supports Helen Buckley's statement that, "In the northern forests lands which nobody wanted, it was not even required that they take up their residence on reserves. The people continued to trap and fish and trade their furs, and with the addition of treaty money and the annual ceremony at which it was dispensed, life went on as it had until after Word War II." Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 37. Maureen Lux also noted the wide disparity in death rates between northern Indians and their southern counterparts, noting that those who had the least contact with the Indian Department were the most healthy. *Medicine that Walks*, 147-148. Although a comprehensive history of northern Saskatchewan remains unwritten, recent studies have begun to address the problem. See Joan Champ, "'Difficult to make Hay': Early Attempts at Agriculture on the Montreal Lake

Deaths recorded in Sandy Lake area, 1875-1894, by age

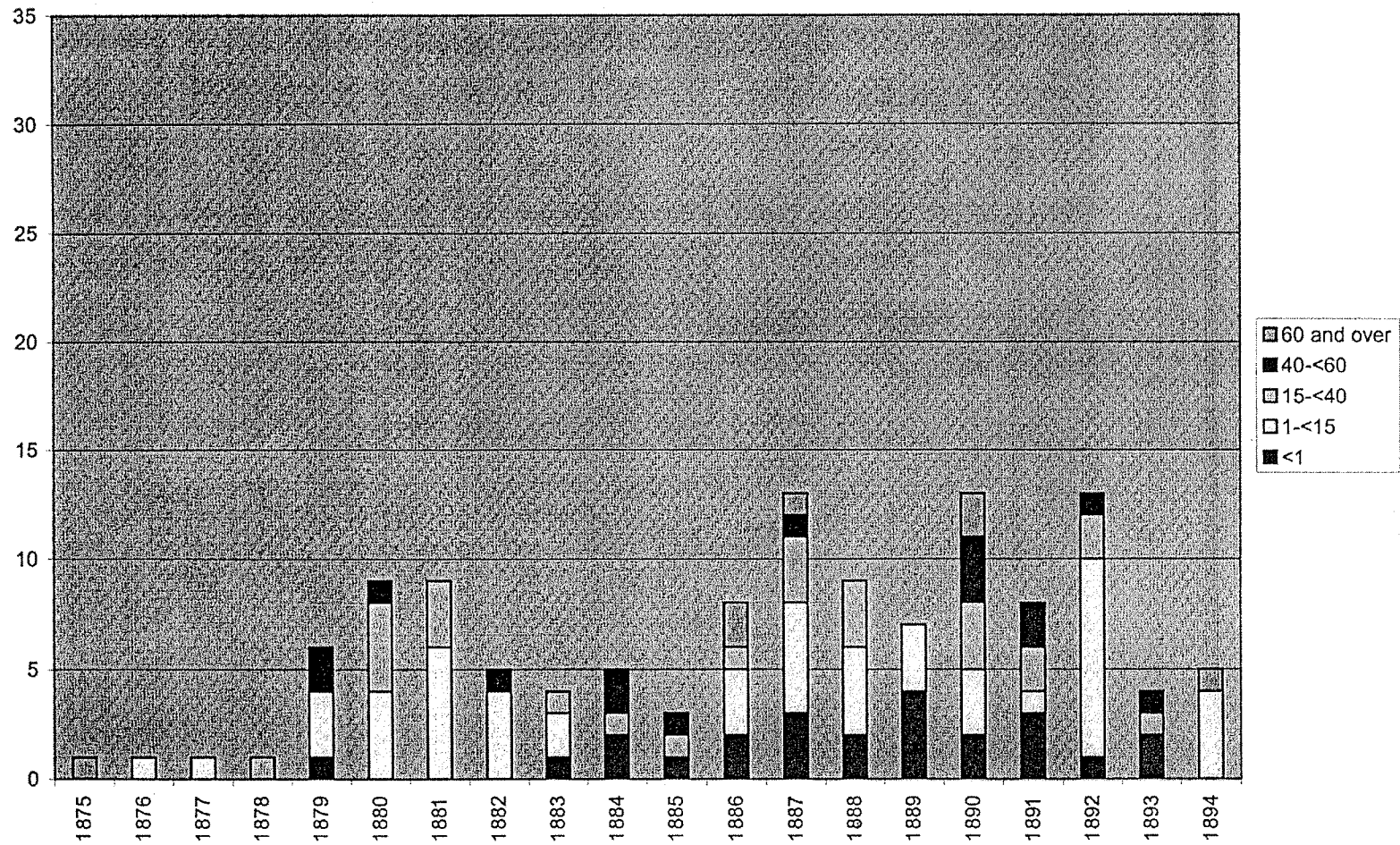


Fig. 5. Deaths recorded at Sandy Lake, Assissippi Indian Mission, 1875 – 1894, by Age. Source: Saskatchewan Archives Board, Microfilm reel 1.124, Anglican Synod of Saskatchewan, "Register of Burials, Assissippi Indian Mission, Church Missionary Society, St. Mark's Church."

Deaths recorded in La Ronge area, 1850-1889, by age

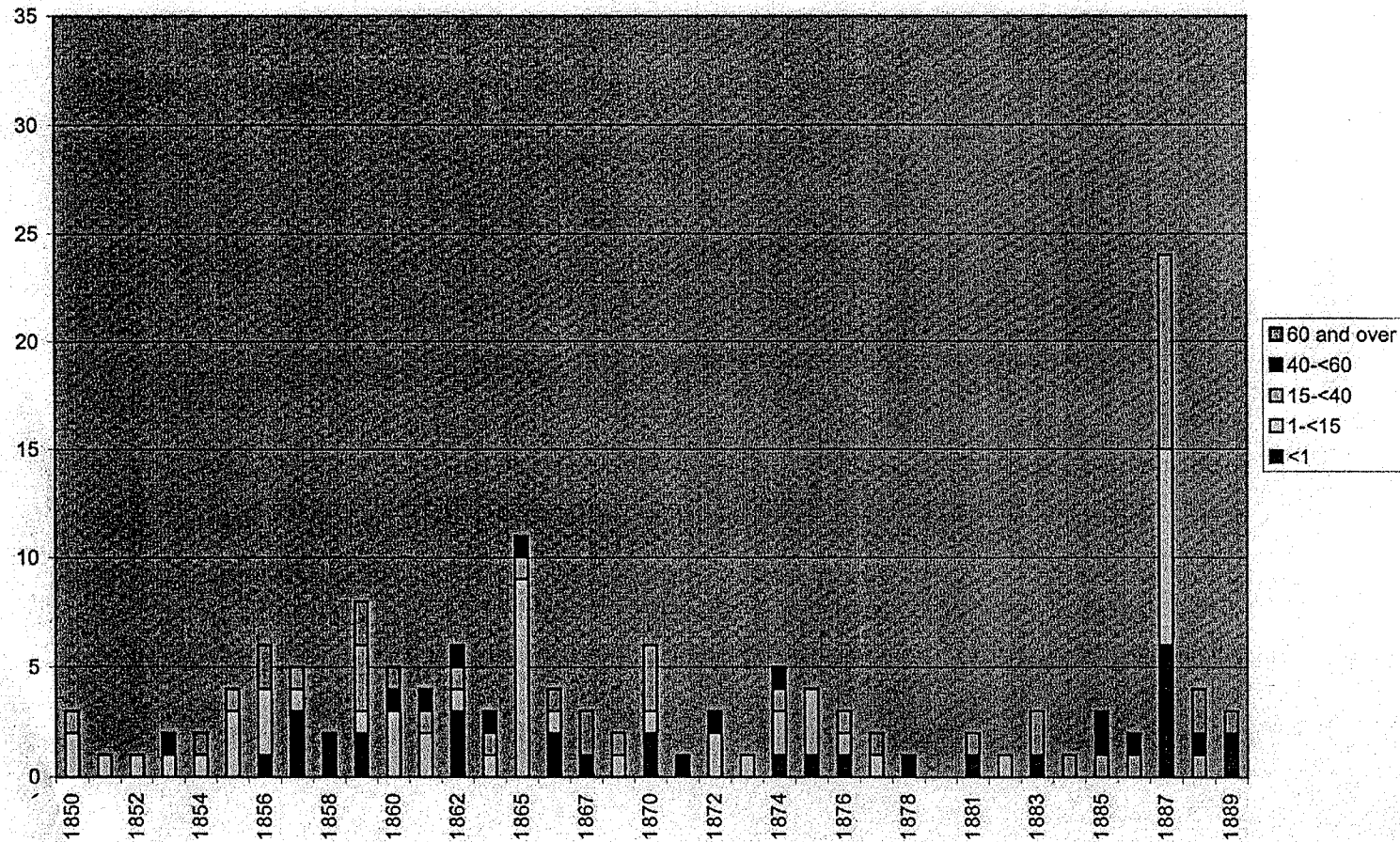


Fig. 6. Deaths recorded in La Ronge area, 1856-1889, by Age. Source: Saskatchewan Archives Board, Microfilm reel 1.124, Anglican Synod of Saskatchewan, "Register of Burials, English River District, Church Missionary Society."

The disease ravaged the Stoney population on the plains. Among the Chapoostiquan's people, deaths were reported in almost every family.⁴⁸ Some bands buckled under the strain of the outbreak. In October 1886, the disease broke out among the Sharphead Stoney, within a year, one third of the band was dead.⁴⁹ The community never recovered and the survivors were amalgamated into the band under Ironhead.⁵⁰ The epidemic swept through southern Alberta during the winter of 1886-87, killing an estimated three percent of the Stoney population.⁵¹ An Agent among them commented of their particular susceptibility, "It has been observed that the Stonies have always seemed to have less power of resistance to attacks of sickness of every kind... although no satisfactory explanation of this unfortunate peculiarity has been discovered."⁵² Lux reported that measles spread to the Blackfoot at the same time as their rations were being reduced, the severity of the disease among the children prompted Magnus Begg to report, "of course it [ration cuts] has nothing to with children having measles, but the Indians do not look at it in that

Reserve," 27-35, and Anthony Gulig, "Sizing Up the Catch: Native-Newcomer Competition and the Early Years of Saskatchewan's Northern Commercial Fishery," 3-10. See also Anthony Gulig, *In Whose Interest?: Government-Indian Relations in Northern Saskatchewan and Wisconsin, 1900-1940* (Ph. D. diss. University of Saskatchewan, 1997).

⁴⁸CSP 1888, T.P. Wadsworth, Inspector of Indian Agencies, Battleford, 20 October 1887, 144.

⁴⁹Titley reported that 47 of the dead were boys and girls under the age of fifteen. "The Fate of the Sharphead Stoney," 6.

⁵⁰Ibid., 7.

⁵¹Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 64.

⁵²Ibid.

light."⁵³ The infection persisted until the end of the decade where at Onion Lake, the disease took twenty-nine lives.⁵⁴ By the end of the decade, the mortality associated with the measles was overshadowed by an even more deadly outbreak.

During 1889-90, the entire northwest was hit by influenza. The outbreak was part of global pandemic, "the first to move with the speed of trains and steamships" which killed a quarter of a million people in Europe.⁵⁵ In his report for 1889, Edgar Dewdney described the magnitude of the outbreak:

The epidemic of influenza, popularly known as *la grippe*, prevailed very generally among the Indians last winter and spring. Almost every band from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and as far north as the Department has had reports from, was attacked, to a greater or a lesser degree, by this disease; and in the case of many old persons, and those who were suffering from diseases of a pulmonary or other chronic character, or who were otherwise of a delicate constitution, the end was precipitated owing to the complications caused by catarrhal infection. A decrease in the population of many Bands, even in the older Provinces, has resulted from the fatality which in so many instances followed from attacks of the disease.⁵⁶

⁵³Ibid., 65.

⁵⁴Whooping cough also contributed to the mortality and may have been an early manifestation of the influenza epidemic of 1889-90. Seventeen of the dead were aged younger than six, five were between the ages of six and eighteen and four were among adults. The author also noted that infection with measles reduced resistance to tuberculosis. Schenstead-Smith, "Disease Patterns and Factors Relating to the Transmission of Disease among the Residents of the Onion Lake Agency," 3-4. Whooping cough was also reported to have been the main reason for the 5 percent mortality at the Edmonton reserves during the winter of 1888, "two thirds of these being children." CSP 1889, Report for Edmonton Agency, Wm. Carnegie de Balinhard, Edmonton, 30 June 1888, 89. Measles was also reported at File Hills. CSP 1891, Report of H.L. Reynolds, File Hills, 1 July 1890, 44.

⁵⁵Arlo Karlen, *Man and Microbes: Disease and Plagues in History and Modern Times* (New York: Putnam 1995), 144. Lux noted that the outbreak, "was a worldwide epidemic that foreshadowed the even deadlier 1918-19 epidemic." *Medicine that Walks*, 86.

⁵⁶CSP 1890, Edgar Dewdney, Report of the Superintendent General, 13 January 1890, xi. Catarrhal infection's refer to infections of the mucous membranes accompanied by discharges from the mouth or throat. Lesley Brown, ed., *The New*

A year later, the epidemic had still not abated among the Indians. Hayter Reed noted that the tuberculosis worsened the effects of the influenza, "because the tendency to pulmonary complaints among the Indians and the impossibility of inducing them to exercise the necessary care—more disastrous(sic) to them than to white people."⁵⁷ Mortality from the influenza itself, and the impact of the infection on those already stricken with tuberculosis, was widely recognized in the Annual Reports of the Indian Department.⁵⁸ By the beginning of February 1889, the influenza outbreak, described in its early stages as whooping cough,⁵⁹ spread to the Chipewyans at Cold Lake.⁶⁰ Six

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 351.

⁵⁷CSP 1891, Report of the Indian Commissioner, Regina, October 1890, 136. For a discussion of differential outcomes of infections related to economic conditions, see Maureen Lux, "Prairie Indians and the 1918 Influenza Epidemic," *Native Studies Review* 8 (1992), 24-26.

⁵⁸At Touchwood, Agent Keith noted, that influenza, "carried off many of the consumptive people." CSP 1891, 30 August 1890, 38. J.A. Markle, at Birtle, Manitoba, reported that, "a number afflicted with scrofula, and they, like almost all of the others, suffered with the prevailing complaints of last winter 'la grippe.' A number died from these two complaints, and a number yet feel their effects." 18 August 1890, 42. At Muscowpetung, J.B. Lash remarked that the flu killed "a number of people suffering from lung complaints." 1 September 1890, 41. In Manitoba, the agent reported, "(a)t one time, I am sure that five hundred people were laid up with it, and in many cases have not yet recovered from the effects yet, and I notice an increase in consumption and scrofula as a result." CSP 1891, A.M. Muckle, Clandeboyne Manitoba, 30 August 1890, 32. Lux noted that the most common cause of death associated with the epidemic was bacterial pneumonia. *Medicine that Walks*, 87.

⁵⁹Among the early reports of the influenza epidemic in the west, there was confusion over the specific pathogen that spread though the Indian and European population alike. The *Saskatchewan Herald* noted, "But Whether the plague be scarlet fever, small pox, or any other contagious disease, it is serious enough to call for prompt action on the part of the authorities." "The Indian Epidemic," February 6, 1889, 2. Two weeks earlier, the paper reported that whooping cough had spread to "nearly every house in town." 23 January 1889, 1.

⁶⁰Thirty had died along with another six on the day of the arrival of Agent Mann and Stg. Hall, who were despatched to the investigate the outbreak of disease.

people died in a single day. The severity of the infection among the affluent Chipewyan had important implications for the weakened plains population according to the *Herald*:

Where it is so fatal amongst the Chipewyans, noted for their cleanliness, it would not fail to be fatal to an appalling extent if it were to get in amongst those bands who are not noted for the virtue said to be akin to godliness, and who are constitutionally much weaker than their brethren of the north side.⁶¹

The symptoms of the influenza were reported in the same issue:

The Indians on the Battle River reserves are suffering greatly from an infection of the throat and neck that prevents them from swallowing food. All the muscles of the neck swell, accompanied with much pain in the swollen parts and a soreness in the throat; and in addition to the soreness there is a general feeling of sickness. The only food they can take is boiled rice and other soft articles of diet.⁶²

The inadequate diet provided by the Indian Department contributed to the mortality. Piapot, who lost twenty-six people to influenza, pleaded with Dewdney for "beef for my sick."⁶³ Instructor O'Donnell, at Edmonton was criticized by his superiors in January 1890 for exceeding the allotted daily ration issue to alleviate the suffering of the infected population.⁶⁴ In March, rations were withheld from members of the

Saskatchewan Herald, 6 February 1889, 2.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 1. Lux reported that symptoms of the influenza were "sore throat, cough, chills and fever." *Medicine that Walks*, 86.

⁶³Ibid., 87.

⁶⁴Ibid. In November 1888, Father André, of the Calgary Mission, requested that the enforcement of the pass system be relaxed for some of his parishioners, noting "sending them back to the Reserve I don't see how that will help those poor Indians—there the agents will refuse to feed them as they have done already." Father Andre to Col. Herchmer, Assistant Commissioner, 5 November 1888, File 000, in Peter Naylor, *Index to Aboriginal Issues Found in the Records of the Northwest Mounted Police, RG 18, National Archives of Canada*.

Thunderchild and Sweet Grass reserves when they refused to send their children to school.⁶⁵ Although a large proportion of the population was incapacitated by the disease, the Indian Department reported that it reduced the supply of rations while the epidemic raged.⁶⁶

Other Departmental initiatives contributed to the crisis. During the epidemic, the Indian department instituted its now infamous "peasant farming policy" to erode the perceived threat of Indian agriculture to white farmers.⁶⁷ Described by Helen Buckley as "so daft a plan" the policy forces Indian farmers to "step aside and function in isolation from the rest of western Canadian society."⁶⁸ A protracted drought cycle, lasting from 1887 to 1896, further undermined both Indian and European farming. Poor crops contributed to a growing concern among the settlers of unfair competition from Indian farms leading to further restrictions on commercial agriculture on reserves.⁶⁹ The extent of the drought was such that an estimated twenty thousand families were

⁶⁵*Lux, Medicine that Walks*, 87.

⁶⁶CSP 1890, Report of the Superintendent General, Edgar Dewdney, 13 January 13, 1890, xxviii.

⁶⁷Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 193-236, and Sarah Carter, "Two Acres and a Cow: 'Peasant' Farming for the Indians of the Northwest, 1889-1897," in *Sweet Promises: A Reader in Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): 353-377. Robert Nestor argued that the "severality policy" initiated by Reed in 1887, led to the surrender of large portions of Indian reserve land for a decade. *Hayter Reed, Severality, and the Subdivision of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies*.

⁶⁸Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Canadian Prairies*, 52-53.

⁶⁹Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 181-190.

reported to be on the verge of starvation in Dakota.⁷⁰ Its effects were felt from "the foothills to Fort MacMurray," where low water levels contributed to the deaths of thousands of beavers, seriously eroding the already precarious economy of northern Alberta.⁷¹

The susceptibility of the elders to infection contributed to a crisis in leadership in many stricken communities. Chief Beardy was only one of "several deaths" on his reserve during the epidemic.⁷² Mosquito, the Stoney Chief, died in February 1890.⁷³ Crowfoot, the Chief of the Blackfoot Confederacy, also died during the epidemic.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Conditions were so severe that the settlers were reported to be burning weeds for fuel and that wood was "allowed to be taken from the reservation to alleviate suffering." *Saskatchewan Herald*, 13 November 1889, 1. In the new year, the number of destitute farmers in northern Dakota was estimated at four thousand. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 5 February 1890, 3.

⁷¹*Saskatchewan Herald*, 18 August 1888, 3-4; 8 September 1888, 2. The dead beaver were reported to have died fat and had "diseased" hearts, invoking a comparison to the beaver die-off associated with the drought cycle of the 1790s. (See Chapter 3) The subsistence economy of northern Alberta was seriously undermined by the extermination of the remaining northern bison herd led to a famine and the rise in hunger related disease. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 20 March 1889, 4. William Hornaday remarked of the winter of 1886-87, "destitution and actual starvation prevailed to an alarming extent among certain Indians in the Northwest Territory who once lived bountifully on the buffalo. A terrible tale of suffering in the Athabasca and Peace River country..." Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State*, 484.

⁷²Sliwa, *Standing the Test of Time: A History of the Beardy's/Okemasis Reserve, 1876-1951*, 93. The relationship between the death of Beardy and the loss of leadership in his community is underscored by the fact that the band had no Chief until 1936, over forty years later. SAB, Reel 2.75 *School Histories of 35 Indian Reserves*, "Beardy's Reserve," 20.

⁷³*Saskatchewan Herald*, 12 February 1890, 1.

⁷⁴Crowfoot may have died from complications of the influenza to a preexisting case of tuberculosis. Hugh Dempsey noted that the Chief, "By the winter of 1887-88,... was almost continuously sick, and even though he continued to work for his people's rights, he knew he was losing the battle for his own life." *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet*, 208. Prior to his death, Crowfoot was bedridden for almost a year, suffered

Leadership passed to his foster brother, Three Bulls, who "without the guidance of his leader, proved to be incapable of handling the responsibilities of high office. In the passing years other head Chiefs took his place including a grandson of Crowfoot, but none was able to replace him in effective leadership."⁷⁵

Infected and demoralized communities did what they could to cope with the stresses resulting from the increasing onslaught of disease in their midst.⁷⁶ Ebenezer McColl reported a resurgence of Ojibwa spirituality on Lake Winnipeg:

Since the advent of the white man into this country many diseases unknown before to the red man made their appearance and baffled the greatest skill of their medicine men to grapple with them, and in despair they abandoned their usual remedies and resorted to incantations to endeavour to break the evil spell which troubled them...⁷⁷

The frequency of other religious ceremonies rose during the late 1880s. At Ahtahkakoop's reserve a number of ceremonies including the Sun Dance and the Give Away Dance (matahitowin), "a sacred dance held for pahkahkos, the spirit of famine were conducted."⁷⁸ A Sun Dance was held at Fort Macleod in 1889, prompting an

from declining vision and near the end, slipped into a coma. Ibid., 209-213.

⁷⁵Ibid., 215-216.

⁷⁶Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 83-84.

⁷⁷CSP 1889, Report of the Manitoba Superintendency, E. McColl, Winnipeg, 14 November 1888, 160. The Midewiwin was also reported as far west as Onion Lake during this period. Chief Band Hand, at Island Lake, a "Mediwiwin priest," refused the overtures of Anglican missionaries but allowed Dr. Elizabeth Matheson to practice medicine among his people. Ruth Matheson Buck, *The Doctor Rode Side-Saddle* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 56-57. The Mediwiwin ceremony had probably been an ongoing phenomenon in the northern parklands of Saskatchewan. In 1884, John Hines reported that "the heathen Indians are congregating around Pelican Lake for their annual "Metahawin," it is at this festival that they practice all their superstitious ceremonies." CMS, Microfilm, reel A-112, Assissippi Journal, 6 June 1884.

⁷⁸Pahkahkos was also known as Bony Spectre who was believed to have "sacrificed itself so that others may live," and associated with starvation. Pettipas,

official to remark, "it makes them unsettled and anxious to emulate the deeds of their forefathers."⁷⁹ Health concerns were the primary motivation for the sponsorship of Sun Dances. According to Katherine Pettipas, the persistence of the ceremony, "stemmed from the fact that its ideology of world and personal renewal and regeneration continued to have relevance."⁸⁰

The most widespread of the Indian revitalization movements of the influenza period, the Ghost Dance, swept through the western United States from its origin in Paiute territory in the Mason Valley of Nevada.⁸¹ The founder of the movement, Wovoka, obtained his vision on the day of a solar eclipse, when he "was very ill with a fever."⁸² His teaching stressed a gospel of peace and right living,⁸³ based on the notion that "dead Indians would return to life and prosperous aboriginal conditions if the Ghost Dance rituals were performed."⁸⁴ By performing the ceremony, adherents would be

Severing the Ties that Bind, 55; Christensen, *Ahtahkakoop*, 649, 651. According to the author, Chief Ahtahkakoop requested that the Give Away Dance be suppressed on his reserve in 1892 because of its increasing popularity among his ostensibly Christian community.

⁷⁹Hubner, "Horse Stealing and the Borderline The NWMP and the Control of Indian Movement," 285; Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind*, 99.

⁸⁰For a discussion of the curative aspect of the ceremony, and of its suppression by Canadian authorities see Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind*, 183-185.

⁸¹Alice B. Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization*, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989), 4-5. See also Ronald Niezen, *Spirit Wars: Native North American Religion in the Age of Nation Building* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 130-136.

⁸²Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization*, 5.

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴The phenomenon "was a response to a group trauma resulting from the Pai's demoralizing contact with Anglo-Americans." Henry Dobyns and Robert Euler, *The*

"forever free from death, disease and misery."⁸⁵ Although the movement took numerous forms, James Mooney noted that they all shared the belief "that devout attendance on the dance conduces to ward off disease and restore the sick to health, this applying not only to the actual participants, but also to their children and friends."⁸⁶ Those who accepted the new religion were undergoing severe privation. In their study of the Ghost Dance among the Pai of Arizona, Dobyns and Euler quoted a newspaper account of the movement which reported that "a number of deaths occurred from lack of food" among the movement's adherents.⁸⁷ When the ideology spread to the neighbouring Havasupai, a leading evangelist "preached fervently that the recent deaths from influenza were due to the Havasupai having "laughed too much, gone hunting and visiting the white men's camps when they ought to have been dancing."⁸⁸

The most widely documented and tragic manifestation of the movement occurred among the Dakota of the Standing Rock Agency in 1890. James Mooney, the first serious investigator of the Ghost Dance, described the conditions among the Dakota prior to the fluorescence of the movement:

In 1888 their cattle had been diminished by disease. In 1889 their crops were a failure, owing to the fact that the Indians had been called into the agency in the

Ghost Dance of 1889 among the Pai Indians of Northwestern Arizona (Prescott, Az.: Prescott College Press, 1967), 1-2.

⁸⁵James Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 777.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 786.

⁸⁷*Mohave Country Miner*, 17 August 1889, in Dobyns and Euler, *The Ghost Dance of 1889 among the Pai Indians of Northwestern Arizona*, 8. In a report on a Ghost Dance held at Cora Springs a little more than a year later, the *Miner* noted that "eleven Indians died from exhaustion." 29 November 1890, in *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 28.

middle of farming season ... going back to afterward to find their fields trampled and torn up by stock during their absence. Then followed epidemics of measles, grippe and whooping cough, in rapid succession and with terrible results.... "The people said their children were all dying from the face of the earth, and they might as well all be killed at once." Then came another entire failure of crops in 1890, and an unexpected reduction of rations, and the Indians were brought face to face with starvation.⁸⁹

Mooney described the particular nature of the movement at Standing Rock, "among the powerful and warlike Sioux of the Dakotas, already restless under both old and recent grievances, and more lately brought to the edge of starvation by a reduction of rations, the doctrine speedily assumed a hostile meaning."⁹⁰ The doctrine that marked the Ghost Dance among the Dakota was the annihilation of the white men and the return to Indian supremacy.⁹¹ Although the militancy among the Dakota was anathema to Wovoka's original pacifist doctrine, the combined pressure of American policy,⁹² the drought, and the influenza epidemic, along with the myriad of other diseases associated with malnutrition, created conditions similar to those discussed by Norman Cohn in his classic study of millenarian movements in Middle Ages Europe.⁹³ In

⁸⁹Earlier, Mooney noted that aridity was such that "the white farmers in that and the adjoining state of Nebraska have several times been obliged to call for state or federal assistance on account of failure of crops." *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 826-827.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 787.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²According to Mooney, rations had been cut for the estimated 10,000 people at the Pine Ridge and Standing Rock reservations from 8,125,000 pounds of beef in 1886 to 4,000,000 in 1889. When further cuts were ordered during the summer of 1890, the Indians "made their first actual demonstration by refusing to accept the deficient issue and making threats against the agent." Unable to remedy the situation, Agent Gallagher resigned. *Ibid.*, 845-846.

⁹³Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

Disaster and the Millennium, Michael Barkun noted that the apparent contradiction with the Ghost Dance were "a set of tribal variations upon Wovoka's message" and "very much a case of movements within a movement."⁹⁴ Fear of the Dakota prophecy was such that Sitting Bull, the leader of Standing Rock, was killed in a botched arrest attempt on December 15, 1890.⁹⁵ Two weeks later, an attempt by the army to disarm a large group of Dakota at Wounded Knee prior to their removal from the area resulted in the killing of over two hundred men, women and children.⁹⁶ Mooney's interpretation of the events leading to the killings is generally sympathetic to the military but his account acknowledges that atrocities were committed by the military :

There can be no question that the pursuit was simply a massacre, where fleeing women, with infants on their arms, were shot down after resistance had ceased and when almost every warrior was stretched dead or dying on the ground. On this point such a careful writer as Herbert Welsh says: "From the fact that so many bodies were found far from the scene of action, as though they were shot

⁹⁴Michael Barkun, *Disaster and the Millennium* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 15. For a discussion of the Ghost Dance in the context of other nineteenth century anti-colonial movements see, Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 184-185. In her discussion of the Ghost Dance, Alice Kehoe, remarked that Wovoka's "creed was distorted among the Lakota, becoming a millenarian movement yearning for utopia instead of the Paiute prophet's sensible guide to life. Distorted, the Ghost Dance seemed to fail the Lakotas." *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization*, 39.

⁹⁵Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 857. A different account of Sitting Bull's death appears in Dee Brown, *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 441.

⁹⁶Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 869. Dee Brown's account of the attack noted, "(w)hen the madness ended, Big Foot and more than half of his people were dead or seriously wounded; 153 were know dead, but many of the wounded crawled away to die afterward. One estimate placed the final total of dead at nearly three hundred of the original 350 men, women and children. The soldiers lost twenty-five dead and thirty-nine wounded, most of them struck by their own bullets or shrapnel." *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*, 417-418.

down while flying, it would look as though a blind rage were at work."⁹⁷

Although the tragedy at Wounded Knee abruptly ended the militant form of the Ghost Dance, its benign form persisted in secret in both Canada and the United States until the 1970s.⁹⁸ The killings at Wounded Knee are widely acknowledged to be the low-ebb of Indian conditions in the American context. In a consideration of the demographic aspects of the Ghost Dance phenomenon, Russell Thornton noted that the movement:

(C)oincided almost exactly with the total American Indian population nadir, further, actual participants in both movements (1870 and 1890) tended to live in subareas with the greatest population losses. This all suggests a very close linkage between American Indian losses and the social occurrence of the Ghost Dance movements.⁹⁹

Thornton even argued that the movement succeeded in, "strengthening tribal identity and distinctions between American Indian and European populations. These in turn served to strengthen tribal boundaries, which restricted migrations out of the tribe during population growth."¹⁰⁰

While the violence was limited to Standing Rock, reverberations of the incident shocked the entire continent. Edgar Dewdney's opening statement of his report as

⁹⁷Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 869-870. A contributing factor in the attack was that the leader of the Dakota, Big Foot, was bedridden with pneumonia before the attack. He was killed "around his tent, where he lay sick."

⁹⁸The dance continued in a revamped form among the Kiowas until 1917, and into the 1960s and 1970s among the Caddo and Wichita of Oklahoma and the Dakota of Saskatchewan. Raymond J. DeMallie, "Introduction," in Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, xxv, fn.1. For a discussion of the Canadian manifestation, New Tidings, see Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization*, 41-50.

⁹⁹Russell Thornton, *We Shall Live Again: the 1870 and 1890 Ghost Dance Movements as Demographic Revitalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 46.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 45.

Superintendent General of Indian Affairs for 1891 acknowledged the significance of the events in Dakota to the people under his charge:

The "Messiah Craze," which affected so many of the Indian tribes in the United States, occasioned little or no excitement among our Indians: and the "Ghost Dances," which were so freely indulged in by the Indians in the former country, were not celebrated by any of the Indians of Canada, so far as the Department has heard; nor was this because their sympathy was not sought by their relatives and acquaintances on the other side of the line. On the contrary, there is sufficient cause for believing that runners or messengers were sent from the disaffected Indians of the United States to some of our Indians, in the hope that they might be induced to lend their aid to the movement, but their overtures were rejected and met with no purpose.¹⁰¹

Although the Ghost Dance did not spread north of the border to a significant degree,¹⁰² the fear of the spread of the movement provided the authorities with the further motivation for the suppression of indigenous religious practices.¹⁰³ Katherine Pettipas's study of Canada's legislative attack on Indian religious practices noted that after the uprising of 1885, popular opinion shifted of plains Indian societies from "nuisances, "vagrants," and "members of a dying race" to "a threat to the property and lives of White settlers."¹⁰⁴ Because there was no law forbidding religious ceremonies on the plains until the extension of Section 14 of the *Indian Act* in 1895, government officials

¹⁰¹CSP, 1892, Report of the Superintendent General, Edgar Dewdney, January 1892, x.

¹⁰² The Lakota members of Sitting Bull's band residing at Wood Mountain were reported to be practising the dance in 1895. Sometime during the late 1890s, the Saskatchewan Dakota gave up the actual dance but incorporated the belief system into existing religious practices, creating the New Tidings movement which persisted until the 1960s on the Wahpeton reserve near Prince Albert. Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalization*, 44-46, 129-134.

¹⁰³Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind*, 101-102; Ronald Niezen, *Spirit Wars: Native North American Religions in the Age of Nation Building*, 136-140.

¹⁰⁴Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind*, 102.

strictly enforced the pass system to limit the number of people attending dances.¹⁰⁵

During the turmoil of 1890, border patrols were increased and Indian purchases of ammunition were closely monitored.¹⁰⁶ Police officers were ordered to "disarm all American Indians coming in and collect duty on their ponies, or turn them back."¹⁰⁷ In November, Superintendent Antrobus noted that the Battleford reserves were effectively sealed off from outside influences as the Indians, "seldom leave their reserves, unless on pass. Their success is in great measure, if not altogether, due to the ability of the Indian Agents and Farm Instructors, whose exertions are highly commendable."¹⁰⁸ On December 19, 1890, Inspector G.E. Sander reported that over 20,000 people were "on the large Sioux Reservation in southern Montana where the trouble was most likely to be." He warned of the possibility of trouble spreading north of the border, "[s]hould a rupture occur between the troop and the Indians there is no doubt that great numbers of the latter will make for British Territories in fact a small band was reported to have started and been stopped by the troops..."¹⁰⁹ Three days later, "Indians travelling in

¹⁰⁵Christensen, *Ahthakakoop*, 650.

¹⁰⁶Beahen and Horral, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 60.

¹⁰⁷Telegram from L.W. Herchmer to Superintendent Steele, 7 December 1890, in Naylor, *Index to Aboriginal Issues Found in the Records of the North West Mounted Police*, RG 18, National Archives of Canada, no. 152.

¹⁰⁸SAB, Reel R-2.563, Alphonse Little Poplar, *Miscellaneous Indian Policy Documents Relating to the Sweet Grass Reserve*, 4. For a further discussion of confinement to mitigate the spread of the Ghost Dance and other outside religious movements, see F. Laurie Barron, "The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West, 1892-1935," 31.

¹⁰⁹NAC, RG 18, volume 46, file 15 Report of G.E. Sander, Inspector, to E.W. Jarvis, Superintendent, 19 December 1890, in Naylor, *Index to Aboriginal Issues Found in the Records of the North West Mounted Police*, , RG 18, National Archives of Canada, no. 151.

armed bodies towards the reserves west of Qu'Appelle" were apprehended and brought under escort to Indian Head."¹¹⁰ When reports circulated that the Indians of Turtle Mountain, North Dakota, were holding war dances in January 1891, police were despatched to Deloraine to prevent the spread of trouble to Canada.¹¹¹ Further west, reports of runners meeting with the Bloods in anticipation of an uprising south of the border, was an "excuse for panic" among Dominion authorities.¹¹²

The control of Indian movement served not only to diminish the spread of insurrection. The strict enforcement of the pass system was also a response to the protests of ranchers who claimed that Indians who were away from their reserves to hunt were killing cattle. A Calgary newspaper admonished the Indian department for being too liberal in doling out passes for Indians to hunt, "as the only surviving game was cattle."¹¹³ Confinement to reserves was further used to control the spread of alcohol when liquor laws were eased in the Territories causing, "an increase in anti-Indian hysteria among the settlers."¹¹⁴ By 1892, the police acknowledged that the enforcement of the pass law to control Indian movement was "on very insecure

¹¹⁰Letter from L.W. Herchmer, Commissioner, 22 December 1890, in Naylor, *Index to Aboriginal Issues Found in the Records of the North West Mounted Police*, RG 18, National Archives of Canada, no. 155.

¹¹¹Beahen and Horral, *Red Coats on the Prairies*, 60.

¹¹²F. Laurie Barron, "The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West," 34.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁴John Jennings, "The North West Mounted Police and Indian Policy after the Rebellion," in *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, eds. F.L. Barron and James Waldram (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1985), 230. See also Barron, "The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West," 32-33.

ground.”¹¹⁵ Further strictures on the Indian population were imposed by the Dominion in 1892, when legislation was introduced to ban the trade between those on reserve and white communities without the consent of departmental officials.

There was, of course, no great uprising of Canadian plains people in the aftermath of the incident at Wounded Knee. The horrible conditions drove the Dakota the millenarian form of the Ghost Dance were similar to those experienced by the Canadian Indian population in 1890. Although R.G. Ferguson’s study of the tuberculosis was tainted by eugenics and flawed by his singular focus on tuberculosis as the sole cause of Indian mortality during the late nineteenth century,¹¹⁶ his description of overall mortality remains useful (see graph 3-over).¹¹⁷ As was in the case with American Indian populations considered by Thornton,¹¹⁸ mortality peaked, for the vast majority of Canadian Indians in 1890. There were exceptions to this trend. Among the Blackfoot the nadir of the population did not occur until after the turn of the century.¹¹⁹ There, the peak in mortality resulted from the synergy of a severe measles epidemic and rampant infection with tuberculosis. Agent J.A. Markle noted the

¹¹⁵SAB, Reel R-2.563, Alphonse Little Poplar, *Miscellaneous Indian Policy Documents Relating to the Sweet Grass Reserve*, 4-5. See also, Barron, “The Indian Pass System in the Canadian West, 1882-1935,” 36.

¹¹⁶The author made no mention of acute infectious diseases as a factor contributing to mortality. Ferguson, *Studies in Tuberculosis*, 6.

¹¹⁷R.G. Ferguson, *Tuberculosis among the Indians of the Great Canadian Plains* (London: Adlard & Son, 1929), 10.

¹¹⁸Thornton, *We Shall Live Again: The 1870 and 1890 Ghost Dance Movements as Demographic Revitalization*, 46.

¹¹⁹Ferguson noted that while the rise in the general death rate began about the same time as other population on the plains, the rise “was more gradual and attained its maximum about 1902, a decade later.” *Tuberculosis among the Indians of the Great Canadian Plains*, 12.

GENERAL DEATH-RATE ASSOCIATED WITH TUBERCULOSIS EPIDEMIC AMONG PLAINS INDIANS.

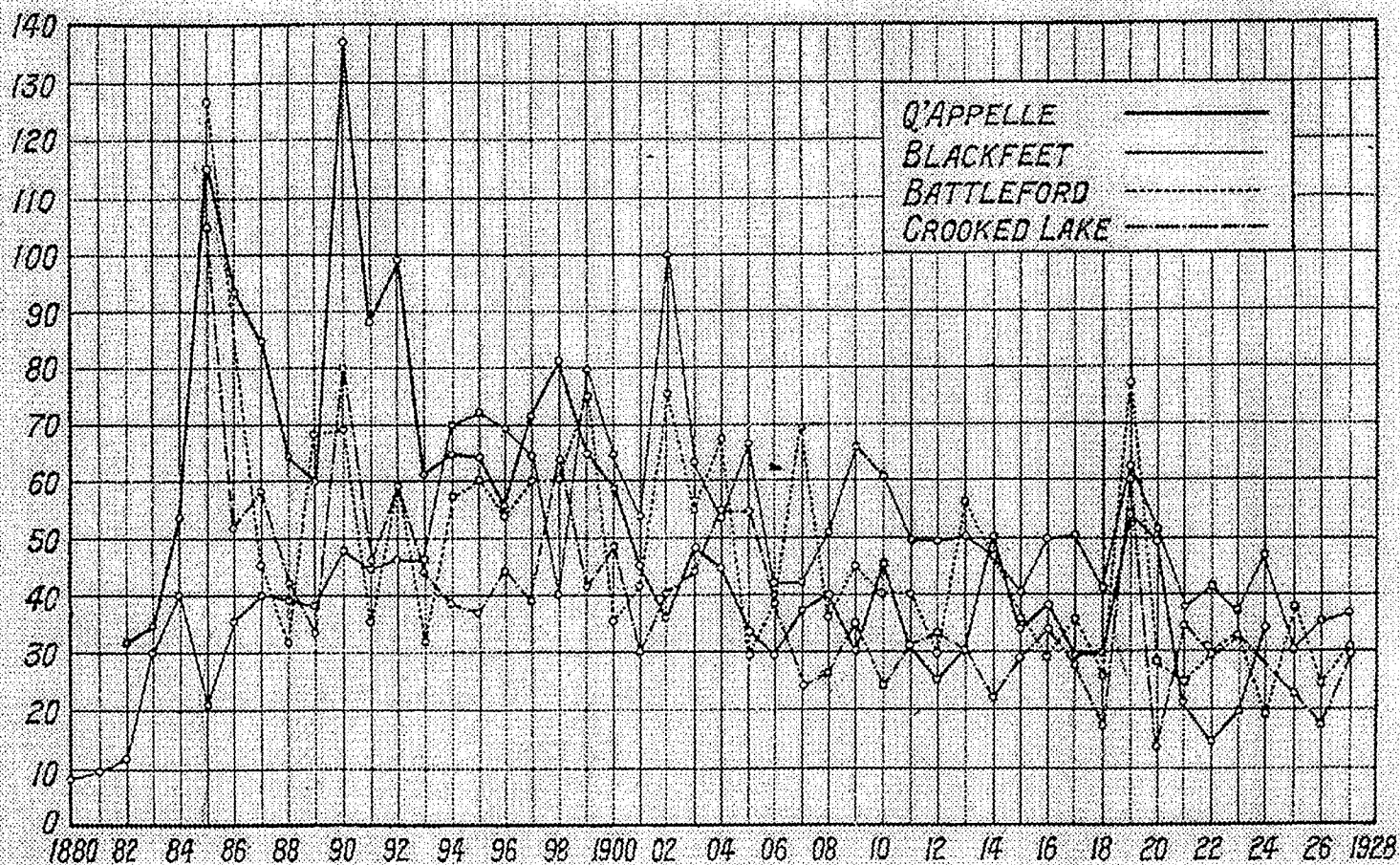


Fig. 7. General Death Rate Associated with Tuberculosis Epidemic Among Plains Indians. Source: R. G. Ferguson, Tuberculosis Among the Indians of the Great Canadian Plains (London: Adlard & Son, 1929), 10.

phenomenon in his annual report:

There were a number of deaths, and while measles may truthfully be assigned as the direct cause, there is in my opinion an indirect reason for many of the fatalities. Scrofula is lurking in the system of nearly every adult member of the band, and when parents are afflicted with this insidious disease, it goes without saying that the constitution of the children is weakened, and if attacked by almost any of the ailments that children are heir to, the results are more likely to be fatal than with children of strong constitutions.¹²⁰

The measles outbreak was also reported to have been "very malignant" at Battleford where "it carried off a large number of children."¹²¹ Though occurring more than a decade later than the nadir of the Qu'Appelle people, the cause of the peak mortality among the Blackfoot was acute infection coupled with tuberculosis.

The death toll among children rose in relation to the expansion of the of the Indian residential school system.¹²² Once infected with tuberculosis, children died with greater speed than adults.¹²³ The death toll at the schools was enormous. In 1892, Father Hugonnard noted, with five deaths of an enrolment of less than one hundred and seventy that "the general health of the children has been good... We had to record five deaths."¹²⁴ Included in the principal's report was a list of the children who had died

¹²⁰CSP 1903, Blackfoot Agency, Gleichen, 7 August 1902, 124.

¹²¹CSP 1903, J.P.G. Day, Battleford Agency, 20 August 1902, 118. The severity of the mortality resulting from the outbreak is illustrated in Chart 3.

¹²²For a full discussion of health conditions at the Schools, see Milloy, "A National Crime": *The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, 77-108.

¹²³William D. Johnston noted that the younger the individual, the more likely that primary infection will become active disease and result in death."William D. Johnston, "Tuberculosis," in *The Cambridge World History of Human Diseases*, ed. Kenneth Kiple (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1060.

¹²⁴Four were from consumption and one resulted from pleurisy. CSP 1892, J. Hugonnard, Principal, Qu'Appelle Industrial School, Qu'Appelle, 1 October 1890, 202.

Pupils who have died since commencement of the schools.

Boys.		Girls.	
No.	Name.	No.	Name.
1	Joseph Poiroux.	67	Mary.
2	Moses.	68	Susan.
3	August.	69	Louise Amelia.
10	Philip.	70	Seraphine Belgarde.
20	Clement.	71	Mary Emily.
21	J. B. Turner.	72	Emily Jane.
22	Louis.	73	Elizabeth.
23	Arthur.	74	Agatha.
24	John.	75	Agatha Clara.
45	Isidore Trottier.	76	Agatha.
50	Francis Albey.	77	Harriet.
52	Frederick.	78	M. A. Allary.
54	Michael.	79	Cecilia.
55	Timothy.	80	Adèle.
70	Joseph Poiroux.	81	Eugenia.
71	Charley Jones.	82	Mary Helen.
82	Harriet.	83	Paula.
83	Samuel.	84	Augusta.
84	Nichol.	85	Celine.
85	Jim.	86	Eugenia.
105	François.	87	Reina Irena.
110	Hugh.	88	Cecilia.
111	Damian.	89	Eulalie.
112	Benjamin.	90	Victorina.
113	William.	91	Marguerite.
124	Benedict.	92	Cecilia Noel.
125	William.		

Fig. 8. Students who Died at the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School, 1884-1892.
Source: CSP 1884, J. Hugonnard, Qu'Appelle Industrial School, 22 August 1893, 206.

at the school since its establishment in 1884. John Milloy's account stressed that Hugonnard considered his work to have been a success, as only 153 of a total of 795 children died under his care between 1884 and 1905.¹²⁵ In reporting on the twelve deaths at the school in 1893, the Principal remarked that consumption was, "hereditary

¹²⁵Milloy, "A National Crime": *The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, 92.

in the families of the deceased and the germs were brought from home."¹²⁶

Hugonnard was not the first official to comment on the hereditary nature of the disease among the Indians. In 1886, Edgar Dewdney stated that increased mortality on the reserves was a result of inheritance and improved accounting:

...directly due to hereditary disease, which had its origin at a time prior to that which our responsibility began. In considering the death rate, it must be further borne in mind that the far more complete arrangements which now exist for the observation and record of the deaths which occur, result in giving publicity to numbers, which, in former times, would have gone unnoticed.¹²⁷

Discussions of the hereditary nature of tuberculosis appeared with increased frequency toward the end of the 1890s.¹²⁸ Medical practitioners also began to utilize inheritance as a factor in the reporting of tuberculosis among children. In his report documenting the inadequate facilities at Indian schools, Dr. Martin Benson wrote, "without adequate provision for the admission of fresh air and it is scarcely any wonder that our Indian pupils have an hereditary tendency to phthisis, should develop alarming symptoms after a short residence in our schools..."¹²⁹ By the turn of the century, bands that were comparatively healthy, such as the community at the Pas Mountain, were reported to

¹²⁶CSP 1884, J. Hugonnard, Qu'Appelle Industrial School, 22 August 1893, 88. The following year, he reported that consumption had claimed the lives of most of the children who had died at the institution "though in nearly every case it has clearly been hereditary." He added that "(p)ure blooded children appear to be more affected by it than those with white blood, and they rally much better after any sickness." CSP 1894, J. Hugonnard, Qu'Appelle Industrial School, 4 August 1894, 344.

¹²⁷CSP 1887, Report of the Indian Commissioner, 17 November 1886, 110.

¹²⁸See for example the report of John Carruthers for Touchwood in 1897 which reported that scrofula and tuberculosis were "the bane of the Indians, are the diseases which play on the adults—the latter is caused chiefly by their want of care in keeping their clothes dry, and the former is hereditary." CSP 1898, Thomas Carruthers, Touchwood Hills, 20 July 1897, 176.

¹²⁹Milloy, *"A National Crime": The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, 86.

be "almost entirely free of any hereditary diseases."¹³⁰

By the beginning of the First World War, physicians who opposed the notion of the hereditary nature of tuberculosis, were in the minority. Dr. P.H. Bryce, emphatically opposed the notion of heredity with regard to the disease in 1914:

The statistics illustrate a clinical fact which perhaps will not fully appeal to those who are not physicians, viz.: That while every male death was, I believe, caused by tuberculosis contracted as a child at school, the fact of the remarkable immunity of the children owing, undoubtedly, to the fact that only two mothers having died, and one of these certainly not from tuberculosis, will in future be regarded as classical proof of what we now know to be true, that tuberculosis is not hereditary (emphasis Bryce's), and that born of a healthy mother the child has a first-class guarantee with good environment of growing into a strong man or woman.¹³¹

Despite Bryce's assertions to the otherwise, the belief in the hereditary nature of the disease persisted. In a 1922 report to the government by the Anti-Tuberculosis Commission, the authors stated as their first principle that "Tuberculosis is now to be considered hereditary."¹³²

One of the authors of the report, Dr. R.G. Ferguson, became the authority on the treatment of tuberculosis among Canadian Indians.¹³³ Using mortality data

¹³⁰Meyer, *The Red Earth Crees, 1860-1960*, 89.

¹³¹P.H. Bryce, "The History of the American Indians in Relation to Health," 141.

¹³²A.B. Cook, R.G. Ferguson, and J.F. Cairns, *Report to the Government of Saskatchewan by the Anti-Tuberculosis Commission* (Regina: Saskatchewan Anti-tuberculosis Commission, 1922), 15. For a further discussion of the belief in the racial susceptibility of Indians to tuberculosis, see Maureen Lux, "Perfect Subjects: Race, Tuberculosis, and the Qu'Appelle BCG Trial," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 15 (1998): 277-295, and Lux, *Medicine that Walks*, 5-9.

¹³³Ferguson, *Tuberculosis among the Indians of the Great Canadian Plains and Studies in Tuberculosis*. For accounts of his work see Lux, "Perfect Subjects: Race, Tuberculosis, and the Qu'Appelle BCG Trial," 277-295 and C. Stuart Houston, *R.G. Ferguson: Crusader against Tuberculosis* (Toronto: Hannah Institute and Dundurn Press, 1991), 91-100.

gathered from annuity lists,¹³⁴ he estimated that the death rate among Qu'Appelle Indians, "rose from 40 per 1,000 in 1881 to 127 per 1,000 in 1886, an increase of 87 per 1,000 in only five years."¹³⁵ The rise in the general death rate was attributed, "almost entirely to the increase in the tuberculosis death rate."¹³⁶ He noted the relative absence of the disease prior to the reserve period.¹³⁷ Because he was unable to find comparable death rates in European populations,¹³⁸ he concluded:

(T)his study of the prolonged tuberculosis epidemic among the Indians of the Qu'Appelle Valley from 1874 to 1926 demonstrates the difference in the level of susceptibility between primitive recently exposed and the white race exposed for centuries.¹³⁹

¹³⁴Although the paylists used by Ferguson are not available at this time, Annual Reports for Treaty 4 make no reference to abandonment of the country or the taking of scrip, a phenomenon that was widely noted in reports of more northerly districts and are probably more reliable as a source of true mortality information.

¹³⁵Ferguson, *Studies in Tuberculosis*, 6.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*

¹³⁷Ferguson, *Tuberculosis among the Indians of the Great Canadian Plains*, 4-8.

¹³⁸Between 1893 and 1904, the maximum death rate from tuberculosis in European prisons was 1,910 per 100,000. In 1887, the maximum rate for asylums was 2,300 per 100,000. Ferguson added, "Even the tuberculosis death rate of 1,400 per 100,000 during the first world war ... did not approximate that of the Indian tuberculosis epidemic." After four years imprisonment, the Apache at Mount Vernon experienced a death rate of 142.8 per 1,000, almost half of the deaths were attributed to tuberculosis. Ferguson, *Studies in Tuberculosis*, 7-8.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 6-9. The notion of racial susceptibility was accepted by Ferguson. For an extensive discussion, see Lux, "Perfect Subjects: Race, Tuberculosis, and the Qu'Appelle BCG Vaccine Trial," 277-295. There were dissenting opinions even in the 1920s. A report to the American Tuberculosis association noted, "[i]n the light of our knowledge, gained by the foregoing historical review, there is no reason for assuming that the red man is peculiarly predisposed to this disease." Committee of the National Tuberculosis Association, *Tuberculosis Among the North American Indians: Report of a Committee of the National Tuberculosis Association Appointed on October 28, 1921* (Washington: Government printing Bureau, 1923), 16. For a further discussion of the construction of the belief in racial predisposition to tuberculosis, see Michael Worboys, "Tuberculosis and Race in Britain and Its Empire, 1900-50," in *Race, Science, and*

Ferguson's erroneous conclusion regarding the racial susceptibility of Indians¹⁴⁰ may well have stemmed from the fact that his discussion was based on work published before 1930.¹⁴¹ If his estimate of the peak mortality at Qu'Appelle of 137 per 1,000 is correct, a comparable rate of 142.3 per thousand would not be experienced by a European population until 1942, when the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto experienced a mortality rate from disease of 142.3 per 1,000.¹⁴²

In 1929, Ferguson reported that the Indians of Qu'Appelle were "universally tuberculized" and that mortality from the disease was twenty times greater than in the surrounding white population.¹⁴³ The sheer magnitude of infection led Ferguson to his

Medicine, 1700-1960, eds. Waltraud Ernst and Bernard Harris (London: Routledge, 1999): 144-167.

¹⁴⁰Recent studies have shown that the rise in Indian tuberculosis was not because of their genetic weakness but, "the result of enforced changes in ecological factors rather than exposure to a new, introduced infectious disease." T.K. Young, *The Health of Native Americans: Toward a Biocultural Epidemiology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 59. The author based his statement on a study which concluded that the belief in 'innate' resistance to disease "overlook the important ecological and environmental factors influencing transmission and immunity... they divert attention from the broader issues of social and biological stress in the management of mycobacterial disease in a community." G.A. Clark, Mark Kelly, John Grange, and Cassandra Hill, "The Evolution of Mycobacterial Disease in Human Populations," *Current Anthropology* 28 (1987), 51.

¹⁴¹Ferguson, *Tuberculosis Among Indians of the Great Canadian Plains: Preliminary Report of an Investigation Being Carried Out by the National Research Council of Canada* (1929), originally published in *Transactions of the Fourteenth Annual Conference of the National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis* (1928).

¹⁴²The estimated mortality in the Warsaw ghetto in April 1942 of 11 per one thousand, if extended to a year, provides an annual mortality rate of 143.2 per one thousand. Charles Roland, "Mortality Among Warsaw Jewry: Selected Months," in *Courage Under Siege: Starvation, Disease, and Death in the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 225.

¹⁴³Ferguson, *Tuberculosis Among Indians of the Great Canadian Plains: Preliminary Report of an Investigation Being Carried Out by the National Research*

misguided conclusion that Indians were inherently susceptible to disease.¹⁴⁴

In his discussion of Indian policy in the post-rebellion period, Walter Hildebrandt used the tragic story of Almighty Voice to illustrate the predicament of the plains people toward the turn of the century.¹⁴⁵ The Cree from One Arrow who was killed in an artillery barrage for initially killing a government cow without the consent of the Indian Agent. Perhaps a more fitting metaphor of their plight is the case of the Blood, Charcoal, who "became the most wanted man on Canada's western frontier "for killing his unfaithful wife's lover and the police officer who attempted to arrest him."¹⁴⁶

Council of Canada, 45.

¹⁴⁴The experience of Indians in Canada leading to the construction of a belief in the racial susceptibility of tribal people was mirrored in South Africa. See Randall Packard, *White Plague, Black Labor: The Political Economy of Health and Disease South Africa*, 10-31.

¹⁴⁵During his two year flight, Almighty Voice killed five police men while trying to remain free. Hildebrandt, *Views From Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*, 100-102.

¹⁴⁶Charcoal was convicted of Sergeant Wilde's death but not on the initial charge as there was not enough evidence to prove his guilt. Adolph Hungry Wolf, *The Blood People: A Division of the Blackfoot Confederacy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 281.

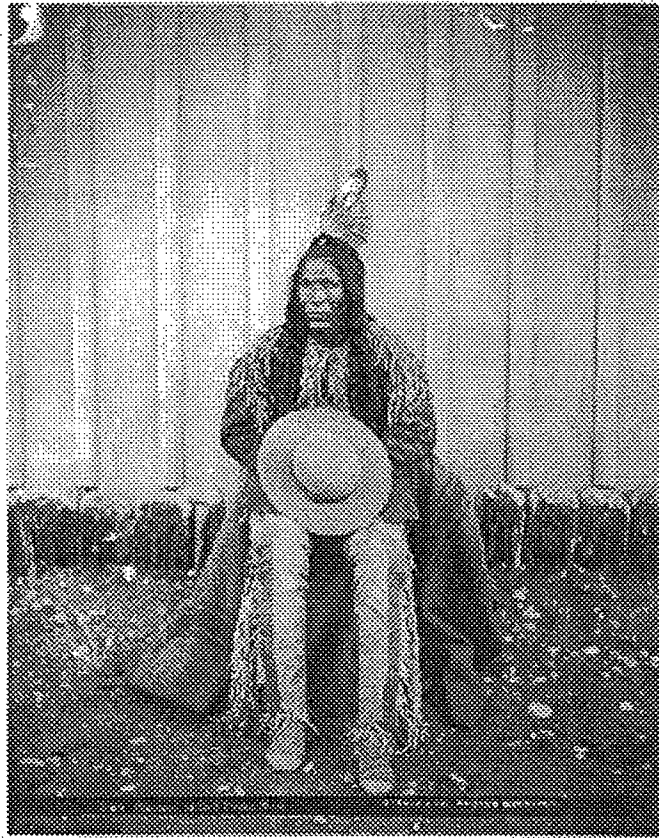


Fig. 9. Charcoal in Detention. Charcoal is pictured sitting because he could not stand on his own. Source: Brock Silversides, *The Face Pullers: Photographing Native Canadians 1871-1939* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1994), 77.

Although the accused was riddled with tuberculosis, he managed to elude the authorities for a year before his capture. When his sentence was carried out, Charcoal was probably on the verge of death from disease. Hugh Dempsey described his execution:

Unable to walk, the Indian was loaded onto a wagon, driven to the scaffold, and carried up the last few steps to eternity. His body, having no will of its own, was not even capable of standing, so a chair was placed over the trapdoor, a white

cloth draped over his head, and the noose placed around his neck.¹⁴⁷

With the execution of a man who could no longer walk, Canadian justice was done. The notion that Indians underwent severe hardship under the increasingly harsh measures imposed by the Canadian government after the uprising of 1885 is widely accepted. The population, already infected with tuberculosis resulting from a decade of malnutrition, suffered a terrible burden of infectious disease which contributed to the nadir of their health in the aftermath of the influenza epidemic of 1889-1890. The interaction of Dominion policy and disease that came in its wake meant that Indians in the post rebellion period were not only punished, but in many cases, they were punished to death.

¹⁴⁷Dempsey, *Charcoal's World* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), 155.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

The study has examined the interaction of economics and disease from the arrival of Europeans in the northwest to the end of the nineteenth century. In doing so, it has bridged the gap between scholarship centred on the fur trade and studies focussed on relations between First Nations and the Canadian state after 1870. As a result, it has considered the effects of introduced infectious disease as a primary factor in the territorial distribution of indigenous people throughout the Canadian west, supporting Alfred Crosby's claim that Old World pathogens were the chief determinants in the demographic history of tribal people for up to one hundred and fifty years after their full exposure to them.¹ It has shown that the emergence of tuberculosis coincided with the protracted famine that resulted from the extermination of the bison and the Dominion government's relief effort which was used as a tool of subjugation rather than a response to a humanitarian crisis. This supports the conclusion of Clark and his colleagues who stressed that social and economic dislocation are central to the understanding of the spread of tuberculosis in communities.² In addition to tuberculosis, the decade of malnutrition experienced by the vast majority of plains Indians during the early reserve period made them particularly susceptible to the onslaught of measles and influenza, resulting in their demographic nadir by the early 1890s. By that time, the foundation of current economic, social and health inequalities in Canadian society were well established. The study has shown that the decline of First Nations health in the late nineteenth century was largely the result of their economic and physical dislocation resulting from the establishment of Canadian rule

¹Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation of America," in *Germs, Seeds & Animals* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 99.

²G.A. Clark, Mark Kelly, John Grange, and Cassandra Hill, "The Evolution of Mycobacterial Disease in Human Populations," 51.

and agrarian capitalism.

Even before the middle of the eighteenth century, the interrelationship of biology and economics had a profound impact on the aboriginal people of the northwest. The first recorded epidemic of smallpox, during the 1730s, affected regional groups from the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains, altering innumerable balances of power among people who had yet to directly encounter Europeans. To some, such as the Shoshone and the plains Kutenai, the effect was catastrophic. The epidemic marked the beginning of the long decline for some groups which, to that time, had been almost empires. The Assiniboine, whose presence was reported as far east as Lake Nipigon before 1700, today account for a mere handful of reserves spread across Saskatchewan and Alberta. The sedentary societies of the Missouri were obliterated within a century of the outbreak described by the La Vérendryes through the inextricable combination of disease and economic competition. Other groups, particularly the Ojibwa who inherited the middleman trade from the Huron, benefited from the immunity conferred by their previous experience with the disease to expand both their territory and their economic influence. By the time Europeans began to physically arrive on the western plains in the mid-eighteenth century, the societies they encountered had been altered demographically and geographically by a pathogen that had spread a generation earlier.

Paul Hackett has shown that the English presence on Hudson's Bay had little impact on the health of the people who endured the long journey to the coast through the period of the middleman fur trade.³ During this period, the groups that procured

³Hackett, "A Very Remarkable Sickness": *The Diffusion of Directly Transmitted, Acute Infectious Diseases in the Petit Nord, 1670-1846*, 99.

furs from distant people who produced the resource underwent severe, at times fatal, hardship in order to conduct their business with Europeans, an undertaking for which they profited greatly. The ongoing conflict between the Cree and the Chipewyan over control of the bay trade is evidence of the lucrative nature of the endeavour. Among the societies that actually procured the furs for the middleman trade, particularly those in the far north whose lives hinged on their ability to follow the caribou, their economic dependence on the trade, as well as their oppression by middlemen, came early. Samuel Hearne's journey west from Churchill in the early 1770s merely provided the first written account of the economic order resulting from the establishment of the fur trade.⁴

The renewal of the Montreal trade after the Seven Years' War brought changes to both the epidemiology and economics to societies in the western hinterland. By the mid 1770s, the prairie fur trade was saturated by Canadian-based privateers, forcing them into the untapped markets to the boreal forest of the Athabasca and beyond. To counter the ever increasing threat to their own trade, the Hudson's Bay Company was forced to abandon its century long strategy of waiting for furs to be delivered to the coast and established its own posts in the interior. The biological impact of the expanded trade was felt within years of Peter Pond's initial foray across Methy portage which, to that time, had been a barrier to both trade and disease to the Mackenzie basin. The smallpox epidemic that swept from Mexico to the Arctic between 1779 and 1783, changed the trajectory of western Canadian history. Entire cultural entities, such as the Pegogamaw and Basquia Cree, ceased to exist. Others, such as the Atsina,

⁴Hearne, *A Journey From Prince of Wales Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*, 181, 273.

Assiniboine and Mandan, suffered terrible losses and resulted in their diminished influence and loss of territory.

What was catastrophic for some, provided new opportunities for others. The Cree took advantage of the demographic losses on the plains and the new economic opportunity afforded by the expanded northern fur trade to supply provisions to those who pursued the quest for furs. Their occupation of this economic niche led to a century long florescence that ended only with the extinction of the bison and the imposition of Canadian hegemony in the late nineteenth century. Other groups, particularly the Ojibwa and to a lesser extent the Ottawa and the Iroquois, came west as economic migrants who engaged in commercial trapping for their Canadian masters. Although financially successful, their arrival in the west destabilized existing relationships as the immigrants came into direct competition with local groups for resources. The century old alliance between the Cree and the Blackfoot broke down, initiating a century-long struggle over control of the bison economy. The arrival of eastern commercial trappers into hunting grounds that were already occupied dislocated many smaller groups from their territory. In addition to the many instances of armed conflict, particularly in the Athabasca and the Mackenzie, the territorial displacement of smaller Athapaskan nations forced many into environments that could not sustain them. The paucity of their new territory, coupled with the deterioration of climate in the early nineteenth century, forced many of those dislocated in the far north to the most extreme of measures to merely survive. Compounding the environmental pressure, the brutality of the Canadian trade brought unprecedented hardship to the people of the northwest. Pond's statement that both the country and the Indians

belonged to him⁵ provides an insight into the management of the Canadian trade.

During the four decades of the fur trade war, large areas of the northwest were denuded of game, resulting in famine, conflict, and exacerbating the effect of contagious diseases.

When the Canadian enterprise buckled under the combined forces of climate, game depletion, warfare, and disease, the country was in ruin. The HBC in monopoly acted as a de facto government to stabilize the trade and the people who conducted it. While its motives were self-serving, the Company introduced measures to conserve animal populations and introduced a limited prohibition of the trade in alcohol. The monopoly provided the northwest with an extended period of relative stability, though the expansion of Red River augmented the frequency of contagious diseases spreading through its trade network to the interior. To counter the threat of disease, the HBC provided their clients with medicine as part of its "social safety net" that the population came to count on in times of hardship.⁶ The effectiveness of the Company in treating disease was underscored by William Todd's vaccination program that halted the deadly spread of smallpox from the Missouri in 1837-38. In the north, the combination of epidemic disease and the Company's focus on economy served to perpetuate the cycle of hunger and despair that fluctuated with the rabbit population.

Within a decade of Canada's acquisition of the northwest, the balance of power between First Nations and Europeans was abruptly and permanently altered. The Plains Cree, who had suffered great losses during the smallpox epidemic that coincided

⁵Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Trade into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," 291.

⁶Ray, Miller and Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence*, 143.

with the Métis resistance at Red River, were still a force to be reckoned with when they negotiated Treaty 6. The inclusion of clauses dealing with their transition to agriculture, the guarantee of their material support in the case of famine and medical relief came only after protracted bargaining with Canadian officials. Negotiators for the Dominion accepted the new terms of the Treaty because the Cree, though dependent on an economy that had all but run its course, were still in a position of power. The extermination of the bison, the result of over hunting for subsistence, commerce and an outright attack by the American military, changed that. The disappearance of the bison coincided with the implementation of the National Policy, the development plan that sought to populate the west with Europeans and establish agrarian capitalism. The Indian population, who formalized relations with the state on a promise that they would be assisted in times of crisis, were considered by the government to be a hindrance to the successful development of the region.

The establishment of Canadian authority had immediate and profound implications for the aboriginal people of the west. The state virtually eliminated the threat of smallpox to the vast majority by 1880 but the success was a solitary one. Rather than dealing with the widespread famine as a humanitarian disaster, the Dominion government used food as a means of coercion to control a population that was considered to be a vestige of a bygone era. Before the Treaties were signed, tuberculosis was rare within Indian communities. Within a decade, it was the primary cause of morbidity and mortality in the reserve population. The emergence of tuberculosis was not the result of the introduction of the disease, as had so often been the case during the fur trade era. Its explosion came as a consequence of a decade of malnutrition overseen by officials of the Canadian government.

The single focus of the Indian department on economy at the expense of all other considerations, meant that, in many cases, rations rotted in government storehouses while people starved. The consumption of rotten supplies among the Blackfoot and the bands at Indian Head, the numerous reports of the hungry eating animals which had died of disease, in addition to the reports of outright death by starvation, provide ample evidence of the suffering that First Nations people endured in the years after treaty. The frustration experienced by those who experienced the official intransigence of Indian Department employees was augmented by the personal relish some took in their role. The reports of sexual predation of Indian women by employees of the Dominion government are evidence of the power that even the lowest officials had over their charges.

The severity of the Dominion response to the uprising of 1885 worsened a situation that was already a crisis. The population, weakened by years of hunger and widely infected with tuberculosis, suffered terrible mortality from epidemics of contagious diseases in the years after 1885. The combination of government sanctioned malnutrition and repeated outbreaks of infectious disease contributed to the demographic nadir of many plains communities in the early 1890s.

By that time, tuberculosis was so pervasive in reserve communities that it was considered a hereditary characteristic of First Nations people. With the construction of the belief, their marginalization from Canadian society was complete. Canadians could accept tuberculosis infection rates among Indians as much as twenty times higher than their European neighbours⁷ because Indians were considered to be inherently

⁷Ferguson, *Tuberculosis among Indians of the Great Canadian Plains: Preliminary Report of an Investigation Being Carried Out by the National Research Council of Canada*, 45.

susceptible to the disease. Control of the tuberculosis epidemic among Indians was not the result of improvement in their economic conditions, but the application of antibiotic drugs after the Second World War. Gregory Campbell has shown that the pharmaceutical victory over the disease was soon followed by the emergence of new "unnatural" pathogens, resulting from the hegemony of European contact.⁸ Aids, diabetes, and suicides have all emerged from the social conditions that First Nations communities continue to experience to the present.

The decline in the health status of Indian people was the direct result of their economic and cultural suppression. The effects of the state sponsored attack on Indian communities that began in the 1880s continue to haunt us. In a recent speech, Matthew Coon Come stated, "[w]hat we have is a medical emergency that is sweeping across First Nations...There is a direct link between the onslaught of diabetes in the aboriginal communities and the sudden and forced elimination of our traditional means of subsistence."⁹ The Cree negotiators at Treaty 6 recognized the need of their people to adapt to a new economic paradigm and accepted the fact that the change would be a difficult one. What they failed to plan for was the active intervention of the Canadian government in preventing them from doing so.

⁸Campbell, "The Changing Dimension of Native American Health: A Critical Understanding of Contemporary Native American Health Issues," 97.

⁹Matthew Coon Come. Speech to a National Health Conference, *First Nations Health: Our Voice, Our Decisions, Our Responsibility*, Ottawa February 25, 2001. (Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations, 2001), press release.

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