

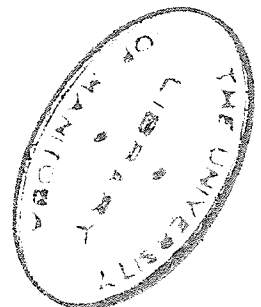
THE STRUGGLE OF THE FUR COMPANIES IN THE
RED RIVER REGION 1811-1821

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George Cameron McMillan

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ABSTRACT OF M.A. THESIS

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Two fur trading firms, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company struggled with each other throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to gain a monopoly of the two essential articles required for a successful prosecution of their trade: the furs themselves, and the pemmican to feed the canoeemen transporting the furs from the interior of the continent to the markets in the East. The Hudson's Bay Company possessed the advantage of a cheap transportation route to England, but lacked the vigorous personnel and the control of the provision trade which the Nor'Westers possessed; both of which were essential for a successful penetration of the country's richest fur bearing region in Athabaska. In 1811, the Hudson's Bay Company reorganized its trading system to overcome these defects by permitting one of its principal shareholders, Lord Selkirk, to establish a colony in Red River which would gather pemmican and raise agricultural products to supply brigades of energetic Canadian servants sent by the Company to Athabaska from Montreal.

The Hudson's Bay Company's Red River colony was located in the midst of the North West Company's main pemmican gathering ground, and a bitter struggle ensued between the two organizations to gain control of the provision trade of that area. The Nor'Westers provoked the quarrel

in Red River in 1813 by attempting to induce settlers to move to Canada with offers of transportation. However, provision difficulties occasioned by the war of 1812 caused the Nor'Westers to cease competing with the Hudson's Bay Company in Red River. In the summer of 1813 they moved their provision post from the Red to the Qu'Appelle River in an effort to live at peace with the colony.

The colony governor, nevertheless, determined to continue the quarrel, attempting, in 1814, to expel the Nor'Westers by placing an embargo on the export of pemmican, prohibiting the running of buffalo on horseback and serving notices to quit on all the Nor'Westers' forts. The success of the pemmican embargo caused the North West Company to retaliate by expelling the colonists from Red River by means of intrigue, bribery and violence in the summer of 1815.

The colony was restored, in the fall of 1815, by the energetic Hudson's Bay Company trader, Colin Robertson, who held the Nor'Westers in check throughout the winter by seizing their two posts in Red River, expelling all their traders and opening their winter express to discover their plans against the colony. These aggressive moves induced another expulsion of the colonists by the Nor'Westers in the summer of 1816 which involved a most unfortunate incident in which twenty-one settlers were massacred.

In 1816-1817 Lord Selkirk, with a group of disbanded soldiers, seized all the North West Company posts between Lake Superior and Red River, and attempted to ruin the trade of his rivals by sending their chief officers prisoner to Montreal, and holding all their furs in storage

at Fort William for one trading season. The Nor'Westers retaliated by attempting to arrest Lord Selkirk in the fall of 1816. When this failed the North West Company sent an expedition westward ^{the} following spring, which recaptured all their forts along the water route between Lake Superior and Lake Winnipeg. In the summer of 1817, a government mission, headed by W.B. Coltman, finally brought peace to the Red River region by restoring all property to its rightful owners and removing the more troublesome people from the territory to Canada for trial.

The trials resulted in a propaganda victory for the Nor'Westers. By this time, however, the North West Company, having lost its control of the provision trade in Red River through Commissioner Coltman's restoration of the colony, and fast losing its Athabaska profits through vigorous competition from Hudson's Bay Company expeditions sent from Montreal, was nearly ruined. In 1821, the Nor'Westers were forced to seek union with their rivals to avoid financial bankruptcy. With the Union of the fur companies the advantages of the Hudson's Bay Company's economical transportation route and the North West Company's more vigorous personnel could be combined, and the western Canadian fur trade was able to enter into the greatest quarter-century of prosperity which it had ever known.

PREFACE

The story of the early 19th century struggle between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company for control of the provision trade of the Red River region is one which has been related at various lengths and with many interpretations by a large number of writers. While the conflict was in progress, each fur company published numerous pamphlets attempting to justify their respective actions. In 1817, the Canadian Government appointed a special commission, headed by W.B. Coltman, to inquire into the disturbances in Red River and which came to the conclusion, in its monumental 200 page Report, that both companies were equally to blame for the fur traders' quarrel. A number of judicial decisions in favour of the North West Company in a series of court trials in Canada which arose out of the Red River disturbances, largely upset the balance of Commissioner Coltman's Report, and throughout the nineteenth century the struggle of the fur companies was viewed by most historians as a quarrel which had been initiated by the Hudson's Bay Company.¹

At the beginning of the present century, the Selkirk family, anxious to vindicate the actions of their ancestor, granted permission to historians to use a large, 20,000 page collection of documents, relating to the quarrel in Red River, which the Fifth Earl of Selkirk had collected over the period 1802-1820. Transcripts of these documents

¹ Cf. A. Ross, The Red River Settlement its Rise Progress and Present State (London, 1856); J.J. Hargrave, Red River (Montreal, 1871); D. Gunn & J.R. Tuttle, History of Manitoba (Ottawa, 1880); A. Begg, History of the North-West (Toronto, 1894).

were deposited in the Public Archives of Canada in 1906. Canadian historians, examining these new documents, as well as various Colonial Office Records relating to the Red River disturbances which were deposited in the Dominion Archives about the same time, now began to revise the interpretation of the controversy in favour of the Hudson's Bay Company.² After the 1914-1918 war, the Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company in London were opened to a few select historians, which resulted in a viewpoint even more favourable to the Hudson's Bay Company.³ The changing interpretation which has been given to the fur traders quarrel is only indicative of the process of historical writing which is, after all, one of constant re-interpretation in the light of new evidence or a more careful examination of already discovered documents.

The works of Chester Martin, J.P. Pritchett and A.S. Morton, based as they are on such important source materials as the Selkirk Papers, the Colonial Office Records and (in the case of A.S. Morton), the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, might be expected to be very authoritative works. They are indeed the most thorough accounts of the fur traders' quarrel in Red River which we have at present. The writings of these historians, however, do tend to favour the Hudson's Bay Company and make little attempt to explain the Nor'Wester's viewpoint in the quarrel. Furthermore, there are many omissions of detail

² Cf. G. Bryce, Life of Lord Selkirk, Colonizer of Western Canada (London, 1912); Chester Martin, Lord Selkirk's Work in Canada (Toronto, 1916).

³ A.S. Morton, History of the Canadian West to 1870-- (Toronto, 1939).

in these accounts which perplexes the serious student of this period of history.

A careful examination of the footnote references of the above authors reveals the reason both for their viewpoint and for the gaps in their narratives. The above books it would appear are based mainly on the first 6,000 pages of the Selkirk Papers, a part of the Papers which is comprised chiefly of letters between Selkirk and various agents and fur traders in western Canada. Letters are important sources of historical evidence. They do have the defect, though, of often being written some time after the events which they describe, when precise details have been forgotten. Furthermore, in a collection such as these of communications between subordinate and superior officers, there is often a tendency for the writer to attempt to falsify his narrative in order to justify his past actions.

A more precise and truthful account of events can often be gained from journals, which, being written day by day, tend to furnish greater details of events which have been happening and do not tend to become biased by afterthoughts of the writer. Save for some slight use of Miles Macdonell's Journal from 1811-1815 by J.P. Pritchett, this source of historical evidence does not appear to have been used by any previous writer on this period.

In the past two years, thanks to some valuable spare-time research work which has been done, independently at the Dominion Archives, by Miss N. Story, head of the Archives Manuscript and Map Division, and at the Public Archives of Manitoba by Mr. W.O. Douglas, an enthusiastic, local

historian of Manitoba's early days, a large number of journals have been discovered in the Selkirk Papers, which, through faulty indexing of the Catalogue, previous historians did not know existed.⁴ The work of these two people has also uncovered a large quantity of valuable evidence seized at Fort William by Lord Selkirk which was not known to be in the Papers before.

From a careful comparison of these new documents with the earlier ones which previous historians have employed, this writer, it is hoped, has been able to explain many of the gaps which have occurred in previous accounts of the struggle in Red River, and, also, to give a more balanced explanation of the actions of both fur companies. Though this thesis is primarily concerned with the quarrel which ensued in Red River, 1811 to 1821, to complete the narrative the writer has also included an introductory Chapter explaining the mode in which the western Canadian fur trade was conducted, and describing the character of the fur traders' earlier struggles 1670-1811; and a concluding chapter detailing the events which brought about the union of the fur companies 1817-1821.

Gracious thanks of the author are extended to all who have assisted him in the task of compiling this thesis. In particular, he would like to thank Professor W.L. Morton, Chairman of the University of Manitoba's History Department, who directed this thesis for the careful guidance, wise counsel and constant encouragement which he has given the writer

⁴ The chief journals which have been found, are those of: Miles Macdonell, 1811-1817; Archibald McDonald, 1814-1815; Peter Fidler, 1814-1815; Sheriff Alexander Macdonell, 1815-1817; Colin Robertson, 1815-1817; John Rodgers, 1815-1816; and John McNabb, 1817. See Public Archives of Canada, Manuscript Division, Preliminary Inventory Manuscript Group 19 Fur Trade and Indians 1763-1867 (Ottawa, 1954), 25-27.

throughout the preparation of this work. To the Committee of Award of the J.S. Ewart Memorial Fund, the author is most grateful for generous financial assistance enabling him to do some very valuable research work at archives and libraries in eastern Canada. To Mr. W.O. Douglas of Winnipeg, special thanks are due for many helpful suggestions in the use of the Selkirk Papers and for permission to quote from the private manuscript in his possession, Winnipeg as it Was in 1860. The author's other main obligations are to the many archivists and librarians who assisted him in his work at the Provincial Archives and Library, and at the University of Manitoba Library in Winnipeg, at the Dominion Archives in Ottawa, at McGill University Library, at the Bibliothèque St Sulpice in Montreal, at the University of Toronto Library and at the Toronto Public Library. In particular, he would like to thank Miss Story, Mr. Ormsby and Miss Bourque, for their time-saving suggestions in the use of the manuscripts and books under their charge at the Dominion Archives in Ottawa.

Cameron McMillan

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AHR: American Historical Review.
- CHR: Canadian Historical Review.
- FJSP: Peter Fidler's Journal, 1814-1815, Public Archives of Manitoba, Selkirk Papers.
- MC: Masson Collection.
- MJSP: Miles Macdonell's Journal, 1811-1817, Public Archives of Manitoba, Selkirk Papers.
- MLB: Miles Macdonell's Letter Book, 1811-1812, Report of the Canadian Archives 1886 (Ottawa, 1887).
- MP: Public Archives of Canada, Miles Macdonell's Papers.
- NW Papers: North West Company Papers Transcribed from the Records of the Montreal Courthouse, Public Archives of Canada, Red River Settlement.
- Récit: Récit des difficultés du nord ouest après la prise de Fort William, Public Archives of Canada, Masson Collection, No. 39.
- G: Public Archives of Canada G Series (Despatches from the Colonial Office to the Governors of Upper and Lower Canada).
- Q: Public Archives of Canada Q Series (Despatches from the Governors of Upper and Lower Canada to the Colonial Office).
- RR Papers: Papers Relating to the Red River Settlement, Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, No. 584).
- SP: Public Archives of Manitoba, Selkirk Papers.
- Vandersluys Journal, Journal of Jasper Vandersluys, S.H. Wilcocke, A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America (Montreal 1818).

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT -

THE FUR COMPANIES OF WESTERN CANADA AND THEIR STRUGGLES PRIOR TO 1811

... The dark months wore slowly on, a band of half famished men gathered about the huge fires of the barn-like hall, moody, sullen and quarrelsome. Discord was here ... in the brown capote of the rival trader. The position of the wretched little colony may well provoke reflection. ... These were the advance guard, the forlorn hope of civilization, messengers of promise to a desert continent. Yet, not content with inevitable woes, they were rent by petty jealousies and miserable feuds; while each of these detached fragments of rival nationalities, scarcely able to maintain its own existence in a few square miles, begrudged to the others the smallest share in a domain which all the nations of Europe could hardly have sufficed to fill. /1

The above quotation from Parkman picturesquely describes the very first fur trade war which Canada was to experience - the seventeenth century struggle between French traders at Quebec and English merchants at Albany for control of the fur resources of Lake Champlain. The same words might equally have been used to describe the last of these great fur contests - the nineteenth century conflict between the North-West Company of Montreal and the Hudson's Bay Company of London, England, for the control of the fur trade of the north-west. In two hundred years the situation had changed but little. The handful of traders had increased to upwards of twelve hundred men, the contested area was now much larger than Europe, but men still fought and killed each other for pos-

¹ Francis S. Parkman, Pioneers of France in the New World (Boston, 1897), 301-302.

session of this prized domain, and, again, a struggling, starving colony, caught in the midst of them, suffered for it.

It seems paradoxical, at first, that so few men should be forced to fight amongst themselves for the possession of so large a territory. When one reflects, however, and considers the objects for which these people were fighting, their struggles become more comprehensible.

1. The Fur Bearing Animals of Canada

It was the fur bearing animals of North America, in general, and the beaver and the buffalo, in particular, which caused these traders to quarrel amongst themselves. Furs were a light but valuable commodity² which could bear the cost of an expensive transport over long distances. They were a natural staple export. On a weight-value ratio, beaver was the most important of the furs.³ It was also in great demand in Europe for the manufacture of the famous beaver hats. Quite early, beaver rose to a position of dominance in the fur trade which it has maintained throughout the period of this study.⁴

² Alexander Henry Jr. stated in 1801 that 2,552 skins could be compressed into 62 bales of 90 pounds weight which had a value of £1,151 Halifax: E. Coues, New Light on the Early History of the Greater North-West (New York, 1897), 198. (Hereafter: Coues, New Light).

³ Henry reported 1801 that 1,369 beaver skins made 20 packs, 1,183 other skins 42 packs: Ibid.

⁴ The 1816 returns of the Northern Department of the Hudson's Bay Company show that beaver were valued at £9,091 in a £22,735 outfit. Its nearest competitors were marten (£4,163), musquash (£3,931), otter (£2,588), bear (£803), wolf (£505), mink (£350): Fur Returns from Northern Department, 1816, Public Archives of Manitoba, Selkirk Papers (Microfilm), 1836-1837. (Hereafter: SP).

The beaver is an amphibious rodent, reddish-brown or black in colour, weighing upwards of thirty pounds. It makes its home chiefly in one of the many sluggish streams or ponds which interlace the forest belt of the Laurentian plateau. Using sticks and mud as materials, the beaver fashions itself a circular lodge of about twenty-five feet in diameter, and builds dams of varying sizes across the streams to maintain the water level around its abode. Because of the large "capital" investment the beaver has made in its dwelling place, it has no tendency to migrate. Beaver are born in litters of three to four, and do not mate until they are two years old, so that upwards of nine beaver, the litter of two seasons, are usually to be found in a beaver lodge. The beaver's sedentary habits and the tendency of families to remain together for long periods meant that the animal could be easily trapped, and in consequence, rapidly exterminated.⁵ There was therefore a constant need for the fur trader to seek out new beaver hunting regions.

Accordingly the fur trader moved westward: from the Richelieu to the Ottawa, to the Great Lakes, to Lake Winnipeg, to the Assiniboine, to the Saskatchewan, to the Churchill and to the Athabasca, and, finally, across the Rockies to the Fraser and to the Columbia. In this manner, a whole continent was discovered, and a fur trade empire which

⁵ For descriptions of the beaver and its habits see: H.A. Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada (New Haven, 1930), 1-4. (Hereafter: Innis, Fur Trade); A.S. Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71 (Toronto n.d.), 9-10; (Hereafter: Morton, History); and E.T. Seton, Life Histories of Northern Animals (New York, 1909), I, 447 FF.

was the first fore-runner of Canadian federation was opened up stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.

Though the Laurentian plateau abounds in fur bearing animals, the value of these creatures lies mainly in their skins. None of them is either large or numerous enough to afford a steady food supply to people travelling through that area. Such a provision, however, was an absolute necessity to the fur trader if he were to trap the beaver of the country's most westerly and northern sections. The solution to the fur traders subsistence problem was found by resorting to the Indian expedient of making pemmican, pounded meat made from the buffalo which swarmed in the plains area to the south of the Laurentian plateau.^{5a}

The buffalo was a large, dark, gaunt and shaggy creature of twelve to eighteen hundred pounds weight which formerly roamed the plains in two vast herds, a western drove which travelled between the two branches of the Saskatchewan River and the Rocky Mountains, and an eastern group which journeyed between the Assiniboine and the Missouri rivers.⁶ Because of its tendency to remain together in large numbers, the buffalo could be readily hunted.⁷ When buffalo meat was cut into thin slices, cooked, pounded into flakes, flavoured with berries and packed into ninety-pound bales, the result was pemmican, a nourishing and easily transportable ration; though it was not apparently very tasty.⁸

^{5a} Pemmican was used chiefly to feed the voyageurs while travelling in the canoes to and from the depot at Fort William. At the trading posts the men would subsist mainly on fish and on agricultural produce.

^{6/} Morton, History, 14.

^{7/} A favourite method was by constructing buffalo pounds, enclosures built in gullies into which the herd would be stampeded and shot.

^{8/} "The only comparison one can make is a taste of dried blood." George B. Elliot, Winnipeg as it was in 1860 (Unpublished Manuscript), 34.

The connection between the beaver and the buffalo in the conduct of the western Canadian fur trade was a natural one. Without the use of pemmican as a provision, the exploitation of the rich beaver hunting grounds of the Athabaska and Mackenzie river basins could scarcely have been attempted. The hunting of pemmican was an important adjunct to the prosecution of the fur trade, and, in due course, a struggle began between the fur companies for the control of this all-important supply.

II. Penetration of the Fur Forest from Hudson Bay

The attack on the fur forest of Western Canada came from two directions - south and west from Hudson Bay, by traders operating from bases in England; north and west from the Great Lakes, by traders working out of Montreal. The trade from the north was directed by the Hudson's Bay Company, an organization of British merchant adventurers incorporated by Royal Charter in 1670. This company was granted an exclusive right to the trade and commerce of "all those seas, straits, bays, rivers, creeks, and sounds which lie within the entrance of Hudson's Straits",⁹ and was made true and absolute lords and proprietors¹⁰ of the same territory.

During the period 1670-1685 the Hudson's Bay Company established a series of trading posts at the mouths of the principal rivers flowing

⁹ Hudson's Bay Company Charter, cited in A. Begg, History of the North-West (Toronto, 1894), appendix, viii-ix.

¹⁰ Ibid.

into Hudson and James Bay.¹¹ Salaried servants hired on short term contracts were sent out to occupy these posts, and an assortment of trading goods: guns, powder, knives, kettles and rum was shipped to the Bay. The Indians close by the fort were told of the post's establishment, and invited to bring in their furs to trade. More distant Indians in due course also heard of the fort's existence and either began coming to the seacoast themselves or bartering their furs with Indian middlemen who had been there.

In this manner, the Hudson's Bay Company built up a lucrative trade with the interior of the continent without actually penetrating that area themselves. The more burdensome cost of transporting furs over the shallow, turbulent inland rivers of Canada, with their many portages, was borne by the Indians, the Company having only the direct sea route to England to contend with.¹² It was indeed a merchant's market. It could last, however, only as long as the Company enjoyed a monopoly of the trade. When rival traders began to enter the Bay territory from the south-west, it was inevitable that the Indians would be able to gain better terms for their furs.

III. The Penetration of the Fur Forest from the Great Lakes

In actuality, furs began to flow from western Canada to Montreal

¹¹ The rivers were the Rupert, Moose, Albany Severn and Nelson: George Bryce, The Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company (Toronto, 1900), 21.

¹² At times this could be hazardous: D. MacKay, The Honourable Company (Toronto, 1949), 80.

some time before they went to Hudson Bay. Fur companies had been established in New France since 1610, and some of the furs received at Montreal during this early period may have been transmitted from the West through various Indian middlemen. In any case, the first brigade of Indian canoes to reach Montreal from the region west of Lake Huron arrived in 1654;¹³ while, in 1654-1663, the famous French adventurers Radisson and Grosseillers conducted a series of trading expeditions to Lake Superior. In 1662 these two explorers made the first advance into the area to the North-West of Lake Superior,¹⁴ eight years before the Hudson's Bay Company became established in that area, and six years before their own first voyage to Hudson Bay.

De Noyon's voyage to Lake of the Woods and Lake Nipigon in 1689 and de la Noue's journey to Rainy Lake in 1717 were two other early expeditions into the western Canadian forest region. It was not until La Vérendrye began his explorations of the Canadian West in 1731, however, that trading posts of any permanence were established there. La Vérendrye set up forts on Rainy Lake, 1731, Lake of the Woods, 1732, Red River, 1734, and the Assiniboine River, 1738, all of which would appear to have lasted until the French and Indian War 1755-1763.

¹³ J.B. Brebner, The Explorers of North America 1492-1806 (London, 1933), 224.

¹⁴ The exact point they reached is a matter of controversy, Brebner, Explorers, 233, says Lake Winnipeg; L.J. Burpee, The Search for the Western Sea (Toronto, 1935), 212-223, contends for Hudson Bay; Nute claims that all they accomplished in the area north of Lake Superior was a voyage up the Pigeon River: Grace Lee Nute, Caesars of the Wilderness (New York, 1943), 65-66; idem, Lake Superior (New York, 1944), 22.

Following the Conquest, trade with the interior was continued from Montreal under the direction of English merchants who moved to that place from Albany. By 1765 traders were back on the Red River, in 1768 the Saskatchewan was reached, in 1776 the Churchill was crossed and by 1778 they had advanced into Athabasca.¹⁵ In 1793 Alexander Mackenzie made the first crossing of the Rocky Mountains, while in 1805 the first trading post in that latter area was established at Macleod Lake.

Hence, although the Hudson's Bay Company was by Royal Charter sovereign lord over most of western Canada, and enjoyed by law an exclusive monopoly of the trade of that area, they had not actually penetrated into the interior to establish posts making good their claim to the land. Interlopers from Montreal, who had preceded them into that district, were challenging their title to the land as well as enjoying a profitable trade with the natives.¹⁶ The Montreal traders, bringing their goods direct to the Indian's hunting ground, offered the natives a service which the Hudson's Bay Company did not provide, and were thus able to take the better furs from them.¹⁷

IV. The Expansion of the Montreal Traders' Method of Organization 1731-1805

The widespread extension of the fur trade from Montreal to the

¹⁵ W.S. Wallace, The Pedlars from Quebec (Toronto, 1954), 4-16.

^{16/} During the French period 500 packs were sent annually from the territory west of Lake Superior to Montreal: Innis, Fur Trade, 103.

^{17/} Ibid., 99.

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interior of western Canada necessitated a corresponding development of fur traders' method of organization. During the French period, when traders began to venture beyond the shores of Lake Superior, it became impossible for them to bring out furs and take in trading goods in one season. The traders soon found it to their advantage to form partnerships with merchants in Montreal, who would carry their supplies as far as Grand Portage on Lake Superior, and take back their furs on the return journey. In addition to ordering trade goods from Europe and shipping the furs there for sale, the Montreal merchant was also responsible for hiring canoe men and carrying provisions of corn from Detroit for use by the trader in the West.¹⁸ As the traders moved up the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan rivers, they began to learn to subsist from the land they were travelling through, using wild rice of Rainy Lake and pemmican gathered at Fort La Jonquière on the Saskatchewan to supplement the corn which was brought from Detroit.¹⁹

When traders began to venture into the Athabasca and Churchill river regions in the 1770's the overhead cost of transport over the long distance became so great,²⁰ and the time required for a return on their investment so long,²¹ that individual traders were no longer able to bear the burden and they began to combine with one another.

¹⁸ Innis, Fur Trade, 116.

¹⁹ Ibid., 115.

²⁰ "Expenses of transport to and from the interior form about half the annual amount of the venture:" Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Voyages From Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans (Toronto, 1903), ci.

²¹ Forty-two months from Athabasca: Ibid., 1.

Beginning with a combination of four Saskatchewan traders in 1775, the organization, which was known as the North-West Company by November, 1776,²² expanded until by 1805 it included virtually all the traders venturing from Montreal to western Canada.²³

The North-West Company was theoretically a partnership between western Canadian fur traders (who were known as the "winterers"), and Montreal merchants (who were called the "agents"). As traders needed goods more than the merchants needed furs, the agents soon became the dominant element in the organization. By 1806, one Montreal merchant house, McTavish Frobisher & Company, became the paramount forwarder of merchandise to the winterers²⁴ and virtual controller of the Company.

The arrangements between agents and winterers were supplemented by similar agreements between Montreal and London forwarding houses whereby each agreed to give the other the whole of its respective business in furs and trading goods.²⁵ By the close of the eighteenth century, an elaborate organization connecting London, Montreal and the interior of the continent had been established.

²² W.S. Wallace, Documents Relating to the North West Company (Toronto, 1934), 5. (Hereafter: Wallace, Documents).

²³ There were 4 shares in 1775, 16 in 1779, 20 in 1789, 46 in 1790, 96 in 1802, 100 in 1805: Ibid., 5-20. Combination was slow because of the steady influx of rival traders from Albany to the north-west as the south-west fur trade declined: H.A. Innis, "The North West Company", CHR, VIII (1927), 308.

²⁴ By the 1790 agreement they shipped all the merchandise (Wallace, Documents, 14-15); by the 1805 Agreement three-quarters of the goods (1805 Agreement of the North West Company, McGill University, Masson Collection, 26). (Hereafter: MC).

²⁵ 1791 Agreement McTavish Frobisher & Co. of Montreal and McTavish Fraser & Co., of London: McGill University, Hennecker Papers.

The expansion into Athabasca also necessitated more elaborate arrangements for obtaining provisions. Detroit, Milwaukee and Michilimacina were important sources of corn, wheat and pork to supply the canoes from Montreal and Grand Portage in the early days, though, after the American Revolution, and the opening up of settlement in Upper Canada, York and the Niagara peninsula also became valuable sources for these commodities.²⁶

In the west, pounded buffalo meat remained the staple ration. Pemican from the wood buffalo of the Peace and Athabasca rivers was cached at Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca to provide the canoes on the journey as far as Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River. Here, additional stocks, obtained from the western buffalo herd, were stored to supply the canoe men out as far as the mouth of the Winnipeg River and back from Cumberland House to Athabasca. At Winnipeg River, there was a third provision depot, supplied from the eastern buffalo herd, which took the canoes out to Lake Superior and back to Cumberland House. The Winnipeg River post was the most important provision depot because it was the only one through which all the North West canoes passed when going to and from their wintering grounds.²⁷ Wild rice from Rainy Lake, and barley, peas, oats and potatoes grown at Fort William, Rainy Lake

²⁶ Detroit supplied 189,000 pounds of flour and 3,983 bushels of corn to the north-west fur trade in 1793; the Niagara district supplied 80,000 pounds of flour in 1794: Innis, Fur Trade, 228-229.

²⁷ In 1814 Winnipeg River was ordered to supply 430 90-pound packs of Pemican, Cumberland House 250 packs: Wallace, Documents, 277-278.

and Winnipeg River were other produce of the land used to supplement the pemmican fare.²⁸

Transport equipment was another item which had to be expanded as the fur trade advanced westward. As the traders moved further inland, greater supplies of trade goods and provisions were needed; and, by 1775,²⁹ schooners were being employed on the Great Lakes to supplement the canoes using the Ottawa River-Georgian Bay Route. Sailing vessels provided cheap transport, however, they could not reach Fort William from Montreal in a single season.³⁰ Hence the boats were used chiefly to transport provision goods from York and Detroit. Trade goods and furs were still shipped by canoe.³¹

V. The Character of the Contest Between Montreal and Hudson Bay 1670-1811

The Hudson's Bay Company did not strenuously oppose the intrusion of these interlopers during the first one hundred and forty years of its existence. For many years, they refused to imitate the Nor'Westers' policy of establishing trading posts inland. When the Company began to feel the effects of North West competition, they would content themselves with sending out a servant to winter with the Indians, who would try to persuade them to follow him back to the Bay next spring

²⁸ Gabriel Franchère, Narrative of a Voyage to the North-West Coast of America 1811-1814 (New York, 1854), 331, 345, 348.

²⁹ Innis, Fur Trade, 224.

³⁰ Mackenzie, Voyages, lxx-lxxi.

³¹ Roderick Mackenzie's Gleanings, MC, 79.

with their furs. When the French adventurers, de Troyes and d'Iberville, destroyed the Company's posts on James Bay in 1686, Henry Kelsey was sent to winter with the natives in the area south and west of the junctions of the Red Deer and Saskatchewan rivers.³² He brought back a large fleet of Indians; however, his efforts were not repeated again until 1754 when the Company, beginning to feel the effects of French competition on the Saskatchewan River, sent Anthony Henday to winter with the Blackfeet Indians in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. He returned with seventy canoes³³ and in the years which followed several other similar expeditions were made.³⁴

By the 1770's, the Montreal traders were gathering such large quantities of furs from their posts on the Saskatchewan River that the Bay Company began to find it very difficult to persuade the inland Indians to come to the coast to trade.³⁵ The Company policy was therefore revised, and, in 1774, the Hudson's Bay people built their first post in the interior of Western Canada at Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River. Throughout the 1780's the Bay Company made their main efforts to meet North West competition on the Saskatchewan, Hayes and Albany rivers; in the 1790's, however, they began to compete with the interlopers elsewhere, establishing their first posts on the Assiniboine River, in 1793, the upper Churchill River, in 1795, and the Athabaska, in 1802.³⁶

³² Morton, History, 109-114.

^{33/} Ibid., 249.

^{34/} Forty-four voyages were made after Henday in the period 1755-1762; seven servants wintered inland in 1766-1767: Ibid., 252, 275. See also R. Glover, Introduction, Cumberland and Hudson House Journals (London, 1951-2).

^{35/} See Mathew Cocking's Journal: June 23, August 23 and September 19, 1772. Cited in Innis, Fur Trade, 155.

^{36/} Morton, History, 426, 448, 516.

Competition between the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies was fairly peaceful while the Bay people confined themselves to the Saskatchewan and Assiniboine rivers.³⁷ In the 1790's, however, when the Bay Company began to penetrate into the richer fur bearing areas of the Churchill and Athabaska rivers conflict became more intense. The fur resources of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan rivers were being rapidly depleted at this period,³⁸ and the Hudson's Bay Company unfortunately chose to attack the richer fur regions at a time when the North West Company was also engaged in a bitter trade war with a newly established Montreal rival, the X Y Company.³⁹ A tradition of violence was established by this latter conflict⁴⁰ and much of it was extended to the Hudson's Bay Company as well. In 1805, the Bay Company's posts at Nottingham and Green lakes in Athabasca were burnt to the ground and the Company's Trader, Peter Fidler, was forced to withdraw from that area. In 1808, a similar measure of violence forced Fidler to remove from Reindeer Lake on the upper Churchill River. In 1808-9

37/ A careful study of Henry's Journal of Red River 1801-1808, Coues, New Light, Vol. I, John Macdonell, Some Account of Red River, MC, and A.S. Morton History, Ch. V (1), show no untoward acts of violence to have taken place.

38/ Henry reports the following decline in Red River packs 1805 - 144 packs, 1806 - 132 packs, 1807 - 77 packs, 1808 - 60 packs: Coues, New Light, 259, 281, 422, 440.

39/ The X Y Company was a combination of two firms forced out of the South-West fur trade by Jay's Treaty: Forsyth, Richardson & Co., of Montreal and Parker Gerard and Ogilvy & Co. of Detroit, and Sir Alexander Mackenzie and his following of disgruntled Nor'Westers: See: Wallace, Documents, p. 7. Innis, "North West Company", CHR, VIII (1927), 315, and W.S. Wallace, "North Westers Quarrel", Beaver, 278 (1947), 8-11.

40/ Fighting grew so bitter that the Canadian government was forced to pass the Canada Jurisdiction Act 1803 for the trial of disputes in the Indian Territory: A.S. Morton, "The Canada Jurisdiction Act and the North West", Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada (Third Series), 1938 II, 121.

fighting extended to the region east of Lake Winnipeg, as the Hudson's Bay Company post at Red Lake was robbed; and the Company's servants at their Eagle Lake post were sent away prisoners to Montreal for the self-defence murder of the North West Company bully, Aeneas Macdonell.⁴¹

Throughout this period, the North West Company was gaining a distinct advantage over its Hudson Bay rival. The Hudson's Bay Company's dividends which had remained steady at eight per cent during the latter part of the eighteenth century, declined to four per cent 1801-1808, while no dividends were paid from 1809-1814.⁴² Returns of the Hudson's Bay Company's fur sales declined from approximately £85,000 in 1789 to £45,000 in 1805.^{42a} During the same period the North West Company fur returns increased from £30,000 in 1784 to £140,000 average for the three years 1805-1807.⁴³ The Hudson's Bay Company had failed completely in its attempt to enter into the rich fur forest of the Athabasca River and was even being driven out of the upper Churchill River. Moreover, the Bay organization was being forced to take the cheaper grades of fur while the Montreal people carried away the more profitable ones.⁴⁴

VI. The Hudson's Bay Company Reorganization of 1810-1811

The causes for the Hudson's Bay Company's failure to compete suc-

⁴¹ Morton, History, 519, 524-526.

⁴²/ Ibid., 531.

^{42a}/ Based on estimates from: Innis, Fur Trade in Canada, 267; Innis, Fur Trade of Canada (Toronto, 1927), 78.

⁴³/ Intervening figures were 1789 - £53,000, 1790-1795 - £72,000 average, 1796-1799 - £98,000 average, 1800-1804 - £107,000 average. Simon McGillivray, Sketch of the Fur Trade 1809, Public Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 19. (Hereafter PAC MG/19).

⁴⁴/ In 1806 Alexander Henry traded 200 wolves, 100 kits, 40 badger and 20 skunks with Mr. Miller H.B. Co. for pemmican: Coues, New Light, 281.

cessfully with the North West Company were various. Though ocean sailing vessels and York boats, on the whole, gave the Bay people a cheaper transport system than their Montreal rival's extended canoe route from Montreal, it took some time for the use of York boats to be extended throughout the Hudson's Bay Company's transportation system because of a lack of skilled boatbuilders.⁴⁵ The lack of co-ordination between the four factories of Churchill, York, Albany and Bottom of the Bay led to much futile competition within the Company itself.⁴⁶ Above all, the Company's personnel lacked that vigorous spirit of competition which the Nor'Westers possessed.^{46a} In part, this was caused by the character of the Orkney men who were engaged as servants.⁴⁷ Company policies, however, such as the lack of an extensive profit-sharing system,^{47a} short term contracts for servants and the Committee's strict orders for the avoidance of all forms of physical violence, were perhaps more to blame.

The lean, dividendless years 1809-1810, finally caused the Company to reorganize and in February 1810, new regulations proposed by Andrew

⁴⁵ Richard Glover, "The Difficulties of the Hudson's Bay Company's Penetration of the West", CHR, XXIX, 248-254 (1948). Glover "York Boats", Beaver, 279: 19-23 (1949).

^{46/} Posts on the Assiniboine River established from York and Albany competed with each other for example.

^{46a/} The efficiency of the North West Company servants must not be over-rated. Many of them were extremely wasteful of supplies, over-stocking their posts with luxury goods. The violent trading tactics employed by the Nor'Westers (which made them unpopular with many of the Indians), and the taxes which the Company was required to pay to the Canadian government were two other factors which handicapped the North West Company in its prosecution of the fur trade: R.Glover, Introduction, Cumberland and Hudson House Journals (London, 1951), I, xxxix ff. (Hereafter: Glover, Saskatchewan Journals).

^{47/} "When an Orkneyman engages in your service it is more from necessity than inclination; he can find employment nowhere else and when he has accomplished his daring object of gathering a few pounds, he bids farewell to a country that affords him no pleasure": Colin Robertson to Hudson's Bay Company Committee, 1810, SP, 167-168.

^{47a/} From 1779 to approximately 1806 commission premiums of 1s. per score of furs were paid to masters of trading posts, 6d to assistants and 3d to labourers: Glover, Saskatchewan Journals, I, xxxvii-xxxviii.

Colville, an enterprising young businessman who had recently been appointed to the directorate, were adopted. Servants, in future, were to be recruited from the western islands of Scotland instead of from the Orkneys. Strict orders were given that aggressions against Company property were to be effectively resisted. The York and Churchill, and the Albany and Bottom of the Bay factories were combined into two separate Departments, an overseas governor being appointed to act as general superintendent in each of them. Traders were permitted to value their furs at any rate or plan which they deemed advisable; while half the profits of the trade of each district were divided amongst the principal servants of that area.⁴⁸ At the same time, it was proposed that an expedition should be made to the Athabasca region, by means of canoes and servants recruited in Montreal. It was decided, however, to withhold the implementation of this latter plan until the effects of the other reforms had been felt.⁴⁹

The directorate also determined as part of its reform programme to make a definite effort to reduce the number of provision goods being sent to the Bay from England, exports which the Company claimed now "amounted to a handsome dividend".⁵⁰ Traders were ordered to cultivate grain, corn and potatoes around their posts; while Chief Factor Auld of York Fort was instructed to lay out lots of land in his district for settlers, and to assign them to such company servants as he felt deserving of the favour.⁵¹ Auld, however, apparently considered that this plan for a colony was impractical, and the Committee decided instead to entrust the project to Lord Selkirk, a philanthropist and prominent⁵² shareholder

⁴⁸ SP, 30-34; Morton, History, 531-532.

⁴⁹ SP, 27.

⁵⁰ Morton, History, 532.

⁵¹ Selkirk, Manuscript Relating to Red River, SP, 12,641-3.

Morton, History, 532.

⁵² Selkirk held £4,000 out of £103,000 total stock of the Company:

Ibid., 533.

in the Company, who had already established colonies with some measure of success in Prince Edward Island and in Upper Canada.

Thomas Douglas, Fifth Earl of Selkirk (1771-1820), was a liberal-minded young Scottish nobleman who took a philanthropic interest in the welfare of the oppressed Scotch and Irish crofters. The Agricultural Revolution in Scotland and the evils of absentee landlords in Ireland were causing the people of these two countries to emigrate, most of them going to the United States of America. While Selkirk felt that emigration was a natural solution to these crofters' difficulties, his university training in liberal economics⁵³ taught him that the country as a whole would benefit more if these people could be persuaded to settle within the British Empire rather than outside of it.

The writing of the Swiss traveller, Count Adreani, whom Selkirk met in 1794, first attracted his attention to the Red River valley as a potential area of settlement;⁵⁴ and, in 1802, he proposed to the British government that a colony of Irish settlers be established there.⁵⁵ The government objected, however, to any interference with the Hudson's Bay Company's trade at this time; and Selkirk was persuaded instead to bring

⁵³ Selkirk was an admirer of Adam Smith and attended his public lectures in London: J.P. Pritchett, The Red River Valley, 1811-1849 (New Haven, 1942), 19, footnote 11. (Hereafter Pritchett, Red River).

^{54/} Selkirk always chose to site his colonies in remote areas. In part this may have been the result of an adventurous and speculative nature, but more probably it arose from this great love of highland customs and his wish that the highlanders should be able to preserve them in their new-found homes. See Selkirk, Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland with a View of the Causes and Possible Consequences of Emigration (London, 1805). 162.

^{55/} Some say that it was Alexander Mackenzie's Voyages first published in 1801. I fail to see this. Mackenzie describes the area between the Red and Assiniboine rivers with the words: "The soil is sand and gravel with a slight intermixture of earth": Mackenzie, Voyages, cii.

out a group of Scottish settlers to Prince Edward Island, in 1803.⁵⁶ In 1804 His Lordship established another remote settlement at Baldoon in the area between Lake Erie and Lake Huron, while, in 1808, he began purchasing stock in the Hudson's Bay Company with an intention of persuading that organization to permit him to establish a colony within their territory.

Selkirk was not a member of the Hudson's Bay Company's Directorate. His brother-in-law, Andrew Colvile, had a seat on that body, however, and he introduced Selkirk's ideas to the Committee. The Company saw the advantage of a colony as a provision supply depot and as a place for the recruitment and retirement of personnel but, they did not wish to infringe on their charter in any way by making land grants, so that the first plan was to have the colony established under the direction of company servants. The indifference and hostility which Auld showed towards the project caused the committee, late in 1810, to invite Lord Selkirk to state the terms under which he would be willing to undertake the colony, and to show how he would propose to safeguard the Company's trade and charter privileges.

Selkirk submitted his terms to the Committee, February 6, 1811. They were discussed by it during the ensuing weeks and presented to a General Court of the Company shareholders which convened May 29. Negotiations were completed by June 12, 1811, and, on this latter date, Selkirk was made owner in fee simple of 116,000 square miles of territory covering virtually the whole of the Red River drainage basin and

⁵⁶ Pritchett, Red River, 28.

stretching as far north as the Winnipeg River and the fifty-fifth parallel of latitude. In return for this grant of land, Selkirk was required to make a token payment of ten shillings, to bring out two hundred servants for the company annually for ten years, to settle one thousand settlers in ten years, to grant two hundred acres of land to any Company officer recommended to him by the committee and to prohibit all his settlers from engaging in the fur trade.⁵⁷

With the implementation of the reforms of 1810-1811 outlined above, the Hudson's Bay Company at last approached its Montreal rival in elaborateness and effectiveness of organization, and was now in a much better position to compete with it on even terms. Armed with authority to cut prices, Hudson's Bay Company traders were at last in a position to commence a vigorous trade war against their rivals. Moreover, now that officers were ensured a share in the profits of their ventures, they had increased incentive to make a determined effort to gather more furs. The directorate's orders that Company property was to be firmly defended meant that North West Company's acts of violence would no longer be met with flabby resistance in the future.

The Colony gave the Hudson's Bay Company a particular advantage over its Montreal rival. Located in the heart of the Company's fur territory, being almost equi-distant from the organization's most easterly and westerly posts on the Eastmain and the Athabaska rivers, the settlement, at an early date, would be able, it was hoped, to provide the Company

⁵⁷ Morton, History, 532-535, Fritchett, Red River, 39.

with many articles of agricultural produce which its rivals had to import long distances from eastern Canada. Eventually, if it were successful, the settlement might even be able to manufacture articles for the Company's trade. Located as it was in the midst of a great buffalo hunting area, the colony could also provide the Hudson's Bay fur traders with that abundant supply of pemmican which they would shortly need for their venture into Athabasca.

The North West Company naturally looked with disfavour on the new reforms of their rivals. The beaver supply was steadily diminishing and their transportation costs were continually rising as the Nor'Westers extended their fur domain across the Rocky Mountains to the mouth of the Columbia River 1805-1812. With their margin of profit shrinking, a strenuous price-cutting trade war would be ruinous to their finances. The colony was particularly vexatious to the Nor'Westers. Not content with competing with them for furs, the Bay people were now going to struggle with them for provisions as well, and in the very midst of their main pemmican supply depot, Red River. If successful, the colony would provide the Hudson's Bay Company with a supply of agricultural produce which the Nor'Westers could not hope to match. If, as the North West Company thought was more likely to happen, agriculture failed, the settlers would be forced to subsist on the buffalo and would thus make inroads into the North West Company's already none too plentiful supplies of that commodity.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ There never appears to have been a surplus of pemmican during this period. Though the buffalo were numerous, skilled hunters were not. A large influx of settlers who were inexperienced at buffalo hunting would need to employ hunters who formerly worked for the North West Company, and in this way the North West Company's pemmican returns would be diminished.

VII. Conclusion

By 1811, two rival organizations, entering the fur trade of western Canada from two different directions were approaching the peak of their efficiency and were about to enter into a period of vigorous competition with each other. The struggle of the trading companies for the fur resources of North-West had been building up slowly for 140 years; however, until now, it had been a fairly one-sided contest. The Montreal concern had so excelled the Bay company in efficiency of organization and personnel that the latter had ~~seldom~~ competed effectively with it. The Hudson's Bay Company had changed its method of trade and had moved into new territories; but whenever the Nor'Westers had raised any serious objections to their action (as with Fidler in Athabaska), the Company would retreat. Thus the contest bore more the aspect of a continuous appeasement than of a struggle.

With the Hudson's Bay Company reorganization of 1810-1811, the Company had repaired most of the defects in its system and was now in a position to compete more effectively with its rival. The character of the contest also showed signs of changing, as, with the establishment of an agricultural colony in the midst of the North West Company's most important buffalo hunting ground, provisions as well as furs became objects of bitter rivalry among traders.

Parkman's drama, of two rival nationalities fighting with one another for the control of the natural resources of a territory which the whole of Europe could not suffice to fill, was about to enter on its final enactment, as the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West

Company set out against each other over the whole of western Canada in 1811. The paradox of a handful of men fighting for such a large area becomes more understandable when one considers the object at stake - a fur trade empire stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean - and the large investment which each had put into its own establishment. It is regrettable, however, that so many innocent people, trapped in a struggling colony in the midst of these traders, should suffer from the conflict of the Titans.

CHAPTER II

THE STRUGGLE FOR SUBSISTENCE 1811-1813

At the Western extremity of Canada, upon the waters of which fall into Lake Winnipeg & uniting in the great River of the Port Nelson discharge themselves into Hudson's Bay, is a country which the Indian traders represent as fertile & of a climate much more temperate than the shores of the Atlantic under the same parallel Here therefore the Colonists may with a moderate exertion of industry be certain of a comfortable subsistence, & may also raise some valuable articles of exportation./1

The land in question possesses important natural advantages over those which now remain unoccupied in Nova Scotia and the adjacent colonies. In the vicinity of the proposed settlement there are immense open plains without wood, fine dry grass land much of it capable of immediate cultivation and well fitted for pasturage particularly sheep. . . . With such advantages the settlers must thrive rapidly./2

It is a very moderate calculation to say that if these regions were occupied by an industrious population they might offer ample means of subsistence to more than thirty millions of British subjects./3

Such were the glowing prospects which Lord Selkirk envisaged for the establishment of an agricultural colony in Red. River. During the summer of 1811, the Scottish Earl made his first effort to achieve this ambitious plan. Agents were sent to the highlands, to Glasgow and to the Orkneys to recruit the two hundred servants and settlers which Selkirk was required to send to Rupert's Land in accordance with the

¹ Observations Supplementary to a Memorial Relative to the Security of Ireland, Cited in J.P. Pritchett, Red River, 27.

² Lord Selkirk's Advertisement and Prospectus of the New Colony, Ibid., 51-52.

³ Lord Selkirk, A Sketch of the British Fur Trade in North America with Observations Relative to the North West Company of Montreal (London, 1816), 123-124.

terms of his grant from the Hudson's Bay Company. Captain Miles Macdonell (1769-1828),⁴ a United Empire Loyalist soldier-settler,⁵ who had favourably impressed Lord Selkirk during the latter's visit to Upper Canada in 1804, was chosen to lead the first expedition to the new colony.⁶

Macdonell was given a commission as Governor of Assiniboia from the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company with full powers to exercise all the rights of the Company's Charter. He was also granted a Commission as Magistrate of the Peace for the Indian Territories, under the Canada Jurisdiction Act of 1803, by the Governor-in-Chief of Canada.

The attempt to recruit servants and settlers for Rupert's Land unfortunately proved disappointing. Instead of the 200 men expected, only 125 awaited Governor Macdonell when he arrived at Stornoway, July 17, 1811, to take command of the expedition, and, by the time the fleet was ready to sail, twenty more had deserted.⁷

⁴ A.G. Morice, "Sidelights on the Career of Miles Macdonell and his Brothers", CHR, X (1929), 309, 325.

⁵ Miles Macdonell's Commission as a Captain in the Canadian Militia dated 1796 is to be found in the Public Archives of Canada, Miles Macdonell Papers, MG/19 E-4, p. 24. (Hereafter: MP). In subsequent years, Selkirk tried to secure him a commission in the British Army. See: Selkirk to Miles Macdonell, Dec. 6, 1809 and Feb. 10, 1810, MP, 84, 88.

⁶ A.G. Morice, "Spanish John a Canadian Pioneer", CHR, X (1929), 212-235, gives additional information on Miles Macdonell's family history based on an original collection of papers in the author's possession. The Macdonells were descended from the original Lords of Skye. They migrated to the United States in 1773 and to Canada in 1782. See also: Morice, "Sidelights on the Career of Miles Macdonell and his Brothers", CHR, X (1929), 313.

⁷ Macdonell to Selkirk Oct. 1, 1811, MLB, cxcii. The 125 immigrants were composed of 14 Irish, 32 Glasgow men, 20 from the Western Islands and 59 from the Orkneys: Macdonell to Selkirk July 25, 1811, Macdonell's Letter Book 1811-1812, Report of the Public Archives of Canada 1886 (Ottawa, 1887), clxxxviii-clxxxix. (Hereafter: MLB).

I. The Efforts of the North West Company to Prevent the Establishment of the Colony 1811-1812

The failure of the agents to secure the required number of settlers and servants was mainly the result of the machination of certain officials of the North West Company who had been employing a variety of methods to thwart Lord Selkirk's plans ever since they had been publicly announced. Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the famous explorer and prominent Nor'Wester, had been purchasing stock in the Hudson's Bay Company since 1809.⁸ When the North West Company heard that their rivals intended to permit Lord Selkirk to establish a colony in the Red River region, John Inglis and Edward Ellice, proprietors in the London Agency of the Company, began purchasing stock as well, until, between the three of them, the Nor'Westers controlled some £2500⁹ of the Hudson's Bay Company's £103,000 of securities.

William Thwaites, Robert Whitehead and John Fish, three independent shareholders who held about £13,000 of stock in the Bay Company, were persuaded to join the North West Company officials in drafting a protest to Selkirk's land grant which they presented at the General Court of Company shareholders which met in May, 1811. They complained that settlement was incompatible with the fur trade, that settlers would become clandestine traders, that the land was much more valuable than the price Selkirk was paying for it and that Selkirk would never be able

⁸ Correspondence, Mackenzie and Selkirk, 1809, SP, 23.

⁹ Manuscript Relating to the Red River Settlement, SP, 12,646. (Hereafter Selkirk MS).

to fulfill his colonization promises.¹⁰ The predictions of the Nor-
Wester's protest all proved to be true; however, they failed to prevent
Lord Selkirk receiving his title to Assiniboia.

After the grant had been approved, personal influence was then
employed by the North West Company to try to dissuade Selkirk from his
schemes. Governor Macdonell was interviewed by Sir Alexander Mackenzie
and warned,

that it was impractical and mad to attempt to establish a colony
at such a distance from the sea and among such a fierce and warlike
tribe as the Assiniboine ... that one person (Selkirk) was trying
to ruin the trade of the North West Company and that he would oppose
the establishment of the colony by every means in his power./11

Selkirk was visited by Edward Ellice and given a long discourse on the
unprincipled conduct of the wintering partners of the North West Company.
He was warned "that they would not scruple at that which was necessary to
effect the wishes of their associates in the concern".¹²

The next, and probably the most successful, of the North West
Company's measures to thwart the establishment of the colony was a prop-
aganda campaign, designed to discourage highlanders from entering Lord
Selkirk's service, which was conducted in the local newspapers by Simon
McGillivray, the principal Agent of the North West Company in England.
The would-be emigrants were warned of the rigours of the climate, of
the eight months of snow and the forty degrees below zero temperatures,
of the isolation of the settlement, 2000 miles from the Bay and 2000

¹⁰ Protest of Proprietors Against Grant to Lord Selkirk, S.H.
Wilcocke, Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Territories (Montreal
1818), Appendix, 1-4.

¹¹ Selkirk, MS, SP, 12, 647.

¹² Ibid., 12, 647-8.

miles from the nearest communities in Canada, of the warlike savages who would either scalp them or subject them to constant alarm and terror and of the impossibility of subsisting on Hudson Bay, where, from the lateness of their sailing, they undoubtedly would be obliged to winter.¹³ Journals containing these articles were given a wide circulation, "Being sent to people who were not in the habit of receiving newspapers and who could not even read them".¹⁴ They had a telling effect; Governor Macdonell later admitted that virtually all the two hundred servants were at one time engaged in Ireland and the Highlands, but that "From the defection of the greater part of them about the time they were to embark, owing to the malicious reports industriously spread round them, fifty-nine Orkney men had to be hired to supply the deficiency".¹⁵

A final effort was made at Stornoway to induce settlers to leave Lord Selkirk's service by two relatives of Sir Alexander Mackenzie: the Collector of Customs, Mr. Reid, and an ostensible recruiting officer, Captain Mackenzie.¹⁶ The recruiting officer actively distributed enlisting money among the men, whilst the Collector of Customs rigidly enforced clauses in the Emigration Act which forbade the departure of a vessel containing people who were not migrating of their own free will. Between the two of them they managed to entice twenty servants to desert before the ships sailed.¹⁷

¹³ Letter to the Inverness Journal from a Highlander, July 21, 1811, SP, 133-139.

¹⁴ Macdonell to Selkirk, July 25, 1811, MLB, cxxxviii-cxcii.

¹⁵ Macdonell to Auld, Dec. 21, 1811, MLB, cxcxix.

¹⁶ Reid was Sir Alexander's uncle, Captain Mackenzie was Reid's son-in-law: Macdonell to Selkirk, Oct. 1, 1811, MLB, cxci.

¹⁷ Macdonell to Selkirk, July 25 and Oct. 1, 1811, MLB, cxxxviii-cxci.

The propaganda campaign was continued in the newspapers throughout the following winter. Simon McGillivray, in a letter to the Wintering Partners, April 9, 1812, requested them to forward additional information concerning the colonists' first winter on Hudson Bay "that I should be able to give the public some further details of the voyage from Stornoway last summer and the manner in which the people were disposed after their arrival at York Factory".¹⁸

The North West Company certainly looked with disfavour on the establishment of an agricultural settlement in Red River. It is to be noted, though, that the means taken to discourage settlement were at this stage persuasive rather than violent ones. Simon McGillivray might state in his letter to the Wintering Partners of April 9, 1812;

It will require some time and cause some expense to us as well as to himself before he is driven to abandon his project. Yet he must be driven to abandon it for its success would strike at the very existence of our trade./¹⁹

Nowhere in this letter, however, does McGillivray suggest that violence should be employed to cause Selkirk to abandon his colonization plans. The means to be used, he infers later one, are more letters to the newspapers to dissuade further Highlanders from entering Lord Selkirk's service. Threats were given that there might be trouble with the Indians and wintering partners, people were warned of the dangers and the follies of settlement in such a remote land, bribes and custom laws were employed to induce men to desert: at this time, though, there were no plans for a violent attack on the colony.

¹⁸ Simon McGillivray to Wintering Partners Apr. 9, 1812, SP, 12,189.

¹⁹ Loc. cit.

II. Winter at Hudson Bay 1811-1812

The shipload of emigrants arrived at York Fort September 24, 1811, after one of the longest crossings of the Atlantic ever known in Company history. It was too late in the season for the colonists to proceed to Red River, and, as there was no room for them in the Fort, they were forced to pass the winter at Seal Island, a point twenty-three miles from the mouth of the Nelson River where caribou usually encamped in the fall. Thirty-six of the 105 servants were assigned to Macdonell's colony,²⁰ the remaining 69 being given to William Hillier, a Company officer who intended to enter the Athabasca fur territory next season. Huts were constructed and the men settled down to an idle and isolated existence, waiting for the river to freeze so that they could cross to York Fort to procure provisions.

The first few months were indeed lean ones. On November 2, 1811, Macdonell reported:

There is scarcely provision now on hand for one month's consumption at the rate of two lbs meat per day per person & at the expiration of that time there is not a probability of a communication being practicable between this & the factory. Our situation here will consequently be most helpless. We have made every possible exertion to get game but hitherto to no purpose. No deer have yet been seen./21

Scanty supplies of fresh and dried meat were secured from the Indians but it was not until April that venison became plentiful.²²

January 9, 1812, the first weekly expedition was made over the ice to obtain provisions. It was not in time, however, to prevent the out-

²⁰ Macdonell to Selkirk, May 31, 1812, MLB, ccxviii.

²¹ Macdonell to Cook, Nov. 2, 1811, Ibid., cxcvii.

²² Macdonell to Selkirk, May 31, 1812, Ibid., ccxxi.

break of the dreaded scurvy which had begun to appear among the men in December. By February, sixteen in Macdonell's party and eighteen in Hillier's group were ill with the disease. At this point, Macdonell issued an order requiring all men to drink a brew made with the juices of the spruce tree as an antiscorbutic. The remedy had the desired effect, for only one man was to die of the scourge.²³ The regulation, though, was to be the cause of much disaffection among the men.

Dissension had been growing amongst the colony servants ever since they had left Stornoway.²⁴ Enforced idleness at Seal Island soon led to bitter quarreling between the Irish and the Orkneymen and on New Year's day the former twice attacked the latter's hut, bruising and maiming five Orkneymen so severely that their lives were endangered for several weeks.²⁵ Two Irishmen were returned to England to stand trial for this offence, but the leader of the uprising, Anthony Macdonell, was only required by Governor Macdonell to pay monetary compensation for damages done.²⁶

William Finlay, an Orkney servant engaged by Macdonell as waterman in September, 1812, was another centre of discontent. In February, he refused to drink the spruce juice and Macdonell placed him in solitary confinement for his disobedience. A party of thirteen of his followers rescued Finlay the first night of his imprisonment, burnt his "gaol",

²³ Macdonell to Selkirk, May 31, 1812, MLB, ccviii. Macdonell to Selkirk, May 31, 1812, Ibid., ccxix.

²⁴/ Macdonell to Selkirk, Oct. 1, 1811, Ibid., cxcii.

²⁵/ Evidence delivered on Oath at Nelson Encampment, Jan. 2-3, 1812, SP, 260 ff.

²⁶/ "Because of his numerous relatives and connections in Ireland, I should like to return him to the interest of our Colony:" Macdonell to Auld, May 4, 1812, MLB, ccxi.

took possession of another hut and set themselves up in defiance of the Governor's authority. Macdonell struck the men off duty, but he still signed orders permitting them to draw rations from York Fort. The lack of pay (while they still had all the food they wanted), did not induce them to submit and the insurgents continued to waste their time in idleness all through the winter. It was only when a group of them became marooned on the York Fort side of the river by the breaking up of the ice in June, and were refused provisions by Chief Factor Auld, that the rebellion was crushed.²⁷

Relations between colony and company officers were none too cordial throughout the winter. Chief Factor Auld at York Factory regarded the colony as somewhat of a nuisance with its constant demands for provisions and antiscorbutics. Macdonell, on the other hand, was highly critical of the inefficiency of the York Factory hands. An open quarrel was avoided at this time; nevertheless, it is clear from their letters to Selkirk that both Auld and Macdonell held each other in contempt.²⁸

On the whole, Auld acquitted himself better than Macdonell during this first winter on the shores of Hudson Bay. The Governor's policy certainly lacked firmness. His refusal to punish the leader of the New Year's Day uprising and his failure to stop the supplies to Finlay and his followers laid the groundwork for a series of disciplinary actions which were to characterize his administration of the Red River colony.

²⁷

Macdonell to Selkirk, June 18, 1812, MLB, ccxxiii.

²⁸/ Macdonell to Selkirk, May 29, 1812, Ibid., ccxvi-ccxvii; Auld to Selkirk, Oct. 1811, SP, 60-63; Auld to Wedderburn, Oct. 3, 1811, Ibid., 65f.

Auld's suggestions to Macdonell, on the other hand, for the site of the encampment and the avoidance of scurvy were most helpful ones.²⁹ The Chief Factor may have felt that the colonists were a nuisance; nevertheless, he certainly did much to assist them. It is to be remembered that it was Auld's firm stand against Finlay's insurgents which crushed their rebellion.

The winter had certainly been a hard one. The starving conditions at York Factory were virtual proof^{of} the North West Company's claim that it was impossible to procure subsistence on the shores of Hudson Bay. Conditions no doubt would have been better if the food problem had not been aggravated by bitter quarrelings among the colony and company servants themselves. All, however, were no doubt thankful to have passed the winter with their lives and to be on their way to try their fortune at earning a subsistence in the Red River valley.

III. Winter at Pembina 1812-1813

Riots and desertions within Macdonell's colonists had reduced their numbers by spring from thirty-six to nineteen. Three more servants and an Indian were hired from the incoming brigades that summer and with this heterogeneous collection of young³⁰ Scottish and Irish labourers, Macdonell left York Fort July 6, 1812. After an uneventful journey, the colonists arrived at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers August 30.³¹

Here the Governor made his first contact with the fur traders of the Red River region, Hugh Heney of Pembina, William Hillier of Netley

²⁹ Vide: Auld to Macdonell, Oct. 16, 1811, SP, 89-100.

³⁰ Their average age was 24: MP, 151.

³¹ Miles Macdonell's Journal, SP, 16,674, 16,742. (Hereafter MJSP).

Creek and John Richards MacKay of Brandon House, all of the Hudson's Bay Company; and John Wills of Fort Gibraltar and Alexander Macdonell of Pembina River, of the North West Company. The last mentioned trader was a cousin and brother-in-law of Miles Macdonell. Relations between the officers of the Colony, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company were quite cordial at this period as they went for rides in the plains together and entertained each other at their respective camps.³² On the whole, the North West Company was more helpful to the colony at this time than the parent Hudson's Bay organization. The latter had failed to provide provisions for the colony as it had been instructed in 1811³³ and the settlers were forced to rely on the Nor'Westers for food supplies.

Both ourselves and the men are entirely out of provision and depend on occasional supplies of catfish from the river and potatoes which Mr. Wills liberally offers me./³⁴

The ceremony of delivery and seizing, whereby the Hudson's Bay Company servants in Red River exchanged their title to Assiniboia with Lord Selkirk's agent, took place on the east side of the Red River near the forks, September 4, 1812, in the presence of Hudson's Bay and North West Company officers, a few half-breeds and Indians. The scarcity of provisions at the forks, however, induced Macdonell to send the bulk of the colonists fifty miles southward to the Pembina River to be near the buffalo hunting grounds as soon as this ceremony was completed.

Macdonell, meanwhile, remained at the forks until September 9, choosing a site for the colony. Selkirk had recommended the present

³² MJSP, 16,741-4.

³³ Macdonell to Selkirk, June 17, 1813, SP, 764.

³⁴ MJSP, 16,745.

St. Andrews Rapids as a possible location for the settlement,³⁵ but Macdonell decided that this place was not eligible. On the recommendation of the old freeman, Peltier, he chose instead Point Douglas, "a point of some extent of burnt wood fit for immediate cultivation which likewise contains some green woods for building &c. a little below the forks".³⁶ Macdonell left five men and a trader there to build a hut for the storage of supplies not needed at Pembina, to sow winter wheat, and to eke out a subsistence by fishing and trading meat with the natives.³⁷

The Governor rode to Pembina September 9, 1812, with his cousin, the North West Company trader Alexander Macdonell, and with the latter's assistance he chose the site for his winter quarters, Fort Daer, on the south-west angle of the junction of the Red and Pembina rivers.³⁸ On October 27, the eighteen labourers at Fort Daer were joined by seventy-one settlers, the second contingent of colonists which had sailed from Sligo, Ireland, the previous June, under the command of Owen Keveny. The coming of this large body of immigrants, so soon after the first group had arrived, created much confusion. It was not until November 21 that the men were housed, and it took until December 27 to complete the officers' quarters.³⁹

The influx of so large a body of people into a territory where previously only a few traders had dwelt, created many problems of sub-

³⁵ "This the first plain going up and dead water from the Lake": Instructions to Miles Macdonell, 1811, SP, 174.

³⁶/ September 7, 1812, MJSP, 16,745.

³⁷/ Macdonell to Selkirk, June 17, 1813, SP, 765.

³⁸/ MJSP, 16,752.

³⁹/ Macdonell to Selkirk, July 17, 1813, SP, 767-769.

sistence. The ration of six pounds of meat per person per day,⁴⁰ meant that the carcass of at least one buffalo was required to feed the people daily. This year, however, there were three organizations competing for provisions at Pembina, the Hudson's Bay Company, the North West Company and the Colony. To make matters worse, fire had ravaged the plains and was keeping the buffalo some 125 miles away in the region of the Turtle Hills.

The shortage of provisions was felt even before the second contingent of settlers arrived. On October 26, 1812, Governor Macdonell recorded in his journal:

I find it troublesome to procure green meat for the number of men and families . . . Send off Franchemontaine and Mr. Isham and son with their families to encamp about the mountain to make pemican for us and to support their own families./⁴¹

By November 8:

We are nearly out of green meat and have no sleds to bring any with horses men or dogs. Borrow 9 sleds from the N W Co./⁴²

November 27. Our entire stock of green meat is issued this morning . . .

December 2. I had nothing to give the people for breakfast this morning until Mr. Holmes arrived. Some meat borrowed from the N W Co.

December 12. Borrow 90 # meat from the N W Co. We can feed only those who continue to work. Those who do not are quite without./⁴³

The famine continued at least until the middle of February.⁴⁴

It was relieved in part, by ordering more men into the plains to subsist

⁴⁰ Selkirk, MS, SP, 12,674-5.

⁴¹/ MJSP, 16,767.

⁴²/ Ibid., 16,770.

⁴³/ Ibid., 16,776, 16,778.

⁴⁴/ "February 14, 1813, We are entirely out of provisions." Ibid., 16,794.

with the hunters,⁴⁵ and also by sending out overseers to supervise the chase and prevent the hunters from keeping all the best meat for themselves.⁴⁶ The colony, nevertheless, failed completely in its attempt to gather a stock of dried meat for the summer. Virtually no pemmican was made at Fort Daer that winter, all the meat that was brought in being used for the colonists' immediate needs. Governor Macdonell was consequently forced to rely on Brandon House to supply him with summer provisions.⁴⁷

The shortage of pemmican was felt at all the Pembina Posts; however, the colony having the largest number of people to feed undoubtedly felt the famine most of all. The Hudson's Bay Company fort was frequently in short supply, but appears by the middle of February to have been in a position where it could lend meat.⁴⁸ The North West Company seems to have fared the best of the three groups competing for pemmican at Pembina, being the only one which was continually able to sell its supplies.⁴⁹ It is to be remembered, though, that the Nor'Westers also stood in greatest need of provisions, being responsible for sending some four hundred bags of pemmican to Winnipeg River to supply the North West canoes on their journey to Fort William and back to Cumberland House.

⁴⁵ Feb. 26, 1813, "There are now 25 men there (in the plains) besides the hunters." Ibid., 16,798.

⁴⁶ "January 10, 1813. Send McRae and a party of six men to plains to live with the hunters and to supervise the hunting and regulate the parties hauling meat. The best of the meat is generally used by the men before it is brought here. The bosses and fat we never see." Ibid., 16,784-5.

⁴⁷ MJSP, 16,821.

⁴⁸ "February 10, 1813, Hillier says they got all the meat they require and would transfer some to us." Ibid., 16,793.

⁴⁹ The Colony borrowed meat from the N W Co. December 2, December 10, December 13, December 15, January 21, and January 28; Ibid., 16,776, 16,778, 16,779, 16,788, 16,790.

The winter at Pembina was even harsher for the colonists than that first grim season at York Factory. It would almost seem to prove the North West Company's contention that it was impossible for both fur traders and colonists to subsist from the buffalo in the Red River region. The North West Company appears to have been the most successful in securing subsistence in Red River that winter. It seemed intolerable to many people, however, that these interlopers should prosper while the colonists who were the rightful owners of the soil should starve.

The dissensions which had existed at Hudson Bay within the colony, and between the colony and the Hudson's Bay Company continued as the settlers moved to Red River. The altercations between Irishmen and Orkneymen appear to have been silenced this winter, but more serious trouble arose in quarrels between the various officers in Macdonell's camp. Edwards, the surgeon grumbled continually about his quarters, and being the last person to be placed in permanent shelter, he undoubtedly had some reason to be dissatisfied.⁵⁰ McRae, the accountant, objected that he was ordered to the plains to supervise the hunting for three months then reprimanded by Macdonell for failing to keep proper accounts at the fort.⁵¹ Both officers complained that Macdonell failed to support them when carrying out orders upon which he had previously agreed. McRae, as a disciplinary measure wished to send a group of indolent hunters, who had returned from the plains without meat, back to the hunting ground, the same day. Macdonell agreed to this, but when the

⁵⁰ Edwards to Wedderburn, July, 1813, SP, 760.

⁵¹ McRae to Auld, August, 1813, SP, 803-5.

servants were about to depart, he suddenly changed his mind and refused to let them go,⁵² so disgracing McRae in front of his men.

Heney, the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Pembina was quite uncooperative. In the fall, he sold potatoes which were supposed to be held for the colony to Hillier, while in the winter, he objected to Macdonell engaging men to hunt provisions, yet refused to supply the colony with pemmican himself.⁵³ Eventually, Heney was dismissed by his superior, William Hillier,⁵⁴ and after this the relations between the Hudson's Bay Company and the colony were considerably improved.

IV. The North West Company's Attempt to Ruin the Colony 1813

The colony's relations with the North West Company, on the other hand, grew steadily worse as the winter advanced. Although Alexander Macdonell, the North West trader at Pembina, was the Governor's cousin, he was, at the same time, an ardent employee of the North West Company. His brother, Aeneas Macdonell, had been killed in a fracas with Hudson's Bay Company employees at Eagle Lake in 1808, a misfortune he felt very deeply.⁵⁵ As a starving colony, competing with him in the procuring of provisions, seriously reduced the amount of pemmican which he would be able to supply the North West Canoes at Winnipeg River that spring, Macdonell began to see the truth in Simon McGillivray's statement that the colony would strike at the very existence of the North West Company's trade. The North West trader undoubtedly decided that it would be in the

⁵² SP, 801. cf. Letter of Edwards to Auld, July, 1813, SP, 756.

⁵³ Macdonell to Selkirk, July 17, 1813, SP, 778-9.

⁵⁴ MJSP, 16,793.

⁵⁵ Morton, History, 525.

best interests of the concern to persuade the colonists to settle elsewhere.

The attack on the colony began at Turtle River, where the North West Company servants, Toussant Voudre and Bonhomie Montour, acting under Alexander Macdonell's instructions, began inflaming the minds of the Indians against the colony. The Nor'Westers warned the natives that if they did not prevent the colonists from settling at Red River they would very soon be made slaves, and suggested that they should "negotiate with the commanders of the colony and the company and, if they would not come to terms, make them suffer for it".⁵⁶

Next, Alexander Macdonell began tampering with the Colony piper, Hector Macdonald. The North West trader suggested to the piper that Canada was a much better place for a labourer than Red River, and advised him that if he was kept one day without provision, he was entitled to break his contract and desert the settlement. When Dugald Cameron, the North West partner at Winnipeg River, arrived at Pembina, February 21, 1813, Macdonald was told that the North West Company did not have enough provisions at present to take him away, but that if, in the summer, twenty colonists would band together and seize a boat from the settlement, the Nor'Westers would guarantee them a safe passage once they reached the mouth of the Winnipeg River.⁵⁷ Similar offers were also made by Dugald Cameron to Donald McMillan and Donald McLean.⁵⁸

In due course the would-be deserters informed Governor Macdonell

⁵⁶ John MacLeod Papers, PAC MG/19 A 23, p.3.

^{57/} Deposition of Hector Macdonald, Mar. 24, 1813, SP, 585-6.

^{58/} Deposition of Donald McMillan, Apr. 21, 1813, Ibid., 600.

of the offers which had been made to them. The Governor was extremely angry at these intrigues, and abruptly broke off all intercourse with the Nor'Westers; April 18, 1813.

Your insidious and treacherous conduct during the winter in endeavouring to swerve my people from their duty is fully known to me as well as that of your colleague Dougal Cameron. I therefore trust that you will not attempt to intrude your visits here where you can no longer be received as a friend by your once sincere Miles Macdonell.⁵⁹

The warning had its desired effect, and no more efforts were made to tamper with the settlers during the remainder of that winter.

On May 4, 1813, the colonists left Fort Daer to settle on their farms at Point Douglas. The winter wheat had been a failure; however, the settlers determined to try their luck again, sowing wheat, potatoes, barley, beans, Indian corn, hemp and lint.⁶⁰ A dike was built, a sheep fold constructed, and 100 acre lots were surveyed for the settlers by Peter Fidler, a Hudson's Bay Company trader in the Brandon House district. Wood was cut, and the settlers began the construction of their first rude dwelling places. At last the settlement began to gain an appearance of permanence. The troublesome officers, Edwards and McRae, left the colony to return to England so that internal dissensions within the colony were ended as well.

One event only marred the summer's peace. John Walsh, a colony servant, absconded May 28, 1813, stole a boat from the settlement and became stranded on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. There he was rescued by North West Company canoes and carried to Fort William. At that place,

⁵⁹ Miles Macdonell to Alexander Macdonell, Apr. 18, 1813, MJSP, 593.
⁶⁰ MJSP, 16,830-16,835.



the North West organization received a strong letter from Governor Macdonell, protesting at the North West Company's tampering with the settlers and requesting that Messers Cameron and Macdonell be removed from their posts. The Company refused to do this; however, it apparently decided to cease further attempts to induce settlers to leave the country. The deserter, Walsh, was returned to Red River on the grounds that he still had a family to support, the provision depot was removed from Pembina to the Qu'Appelle River and no further attempts were made to induce settlers to desert for over a year.

The reason for this sudden volte-face on the part of the North West Company are obscure. It is probable, however, that American naval victories on the Great Lakes in the War of 1812-1814 that summer which caused a serious diminution in the supply of trade goods, which would be necessary to bribe the natives, caused the North Westers to decide to attempt living peaceably with the colonists for the present.⁶¹

V. Conclusion

By the summer of 1813, after passing two very hazardous winters, a group of colonists was finally beginning to gain the means of subsistence

⁶¹ The schooner Nancy was destroyed by the Americans at the mouth of the Nottawasaga River in the summer of 1813 which occasioned considerable loss of supplies: J.W. Pratt, "Fur Trade Strategy and the American left flank in the War of 1812", AHR, XL (1935), 267. "To guard against the misfortune of receiving no supplies this year from Montreal which was probable on account of the war, the general scheme had been reduced one-fourth this year. From the circumstances of the war, no provisions of any kind could be depended upon for the next year and neither tobacco nor high wines. It was therefore proposed and agreed to unanimously that the outfits of the present year should be so curtailed as to have for next year such a quantity of tobacco & high wines as would afford a moderate supply for the country without aid from Canada." Minute of the North West Company, 1813. Wallace, Documents, 274.

on the banks of the Red River, in the midst of the main provisioning ground of the North West fur trading company. Discord, which was rampant among the colonists themselves during the first two years of its existence, had largely disappeared through the departure or dismissal of the settlement's more troublesome elements; though the Governor's vacillatory policy continued as the principal weakness of the colony's administration. Relations between the colony and the Hudson's Bay Company in Red River, though strained to begin with, had at last been healed through the removal of the uncooperative trader Heney. The connection between the colony and York Factory still remained tense, however, as Macdonell and Auld continued to show mutual distrust of each other.

Relations between the Colony and the Company and the North West fur trading organization had gradually worsened during this period as the Nor'Westers, fearful that the colony would interfere with their provision trade, made a desperate effort to prevent its establishment. In England they had successfully induced settlers and servants to desert Lord Selkirk's service by bribes and propaganda, and had made threatening statements to Selkirk and Macdonell. In Red River, they had unsuccessfully attempted to induce settlers to remove to Canada with offers of transportation; and had likewise failed in an attempt to cause the natives to rise against the colony.

The intrigues of the Nor'Westers had been exposed, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company had united against them, while American naval victories in the War of 1812 made their trading situation precarious. In these circumstances, the North West Company had apparently decided to abandon their policy of opposition and determined to

make an attempt to live at peace with the colony. Thus the first stage of the struggle of the fur companies in the Red River region ended in a tactical defeat and withdrawal by the North West Company.

With the departure of the North West Company from Pembina, competition for pemmican in that region ceased and the colony was at last placed in a position where it could subsist from the buffalo in Red River. It was not the comfortable sort of existence envisaged by Lord Selkirk in his prospectus of a prosperous agricultural colony raising suitable objects for export. Agriculture, to begin with, was a failure in Red River and it appeared that for several years pemmican must remain the settlers' staple food. If the situation were handled wisely, however, ~~and the peaceful~~ professions of the Nor'Wester's welcomed, there was every reason to expect that the Selkirk vision of a prosperous colony could eventually be realized and the Parkman drama of a colony embroiled in a fur trade war avoided.

CHAPTER III

THE PEMMICAN WAR 1813-1815

From the insidious line of conduct pursued towards me by the N W Co. I have no further delicacy or hesitation in taking a decisive part against them, & I think that in consideration for the great number of people for whom I have to provide subsistence I should be fully justified in laying an embargo on all provisions within our territory except that which may be necessary to bring out the parties. Should I be able to enforce this matter they may not perhaps be induced to continue their trade here provisions being their chief object in this part. The N W Co. took out of the Red River this summer 3-400 bags pemmican.¹

These were the feelings of Governor Miles Macdonell, July 17, 1813, after having spent one winter in the Red River valley among the fur traders. The aggressive attitude of the colony Governor stood in marked contrast to the amicable demonstrations which were being made by the North West Company at Fort William about the same time. Perhaps Macdonell did not realize the effect his previous objections had made on the rival organization. Certainly, he was unaware of the precarious situation in which the Nor'Westers were placed by the War of 1812. In any case, the Governor could ^{not} attend the North West Company meeting at Fort William, and could not be expected to be acquainted with the decisions his opponents were reaching. As far as Macdonell was cognizant of the facts, the North West Company was an insidious organization of interlopers which had attempted to induce his settlers to desert, and had taken from Red River some three to four hundred bags of pemmican, the property of Lord Selkirk, the lawful landlord of Assiniboia who had the sole right to hunt animals in this region. In

¹ Macdonell to Selkirk, July 17, 1813, SP, 792-793.

the light of these circumstances, the Governor's conclusion that an embargo on the export of provisions from Assiniboia would be desirable is understandable, perhaps even justifiable. It would undoubtedly have been a point of prudence, however, for the Governor to ascertain more fully the true attitude of his opponents before imposing this restriction.

I. The Decision to Establish an Embargo on Provisions taken at York Factory in the Summer of 1813

When Governor Macdonell arrived at York Factory in August, 1813,² **to meet** an expected group of colonists, he found additional justification for restricting the export of provisions from Assiniboia next season. The one hundred new colonists from Sutherlandshire who had been brought out under the leadership of Alexander Macdonald had landed at Churchill that summer, most of them ill with typhus. These people had intended to come direct to Red River in 1813 to prepare land for the rest of their families, who were expected to arrive in Assiniboia the following year. Now, however, the typhus-ridden immigrants, having been forced to winter in Churchill, would probably not reach Red River in time to cultivate the ground for the second contingent. Thus two groups of settlers would be arriving in Assiniboia in 1814 with no provisions ready for either of them.³ In addition, there was also the possibility that Selkirk, himself, might come to Red River next summer with another large

² MJSP, 16,849.

³ Selkirk MS, SP, 12,701; Selkirk to Macdonell, June 13, 1813, SP, 651.

body of migrants. His Lordship had announced his intention of coming with four to five hundred settlers in 1812,⁴ and was expected annually thereafter. Clearly, some measure was necessary to ensure that there would be sufficient provisions for all these people.

Sometime in late August or early September, 1813, Governor Macdonell discussed the matter of an embargo with Chief Factor Auld, who heartily agreed with the idea. It was decided that the restriction should take the form of a proclamation defining the limits of Assiniboia and announcing the authority of Governor Macdonell to promulgate regulations for that territory.⁵ It would appear that the exact timing of the prohibition on exports was left to the discretion of the colony governor, though Auld was under the impression that due notice was to be given before the embargo went into effect.⁶

Although an anticipated shortage of provisions was undoubtedly the primary reason for the decision to institute an embargo on the export of provisions from Assiniboia, the desire to expel the North West Company from that region was never far below the surface of their design, as the two following letters of Macdonell indicate:

I am now determined that the N W Co. shall not take more provisions from here than will carry out their people who winter in Red River. When they see themselves subjected to this they may not perhaps think it an object to continue there./7

⁴ Selkirk to Auld, June 18, 1812, SP, 401.

⁵/ Selkirk MS, SP, 12,703.

⁶/ Auld to Macdonell, May 13, 1814, SP, 977.

⁷/ Macdonell to Selkirk, September 10, 1813, SP, 866.

If we can only be unanimous among ourselves there is no doubt but that we can carry everything before us. I look upon the present as the last struggle of an expiring party and which once fallen they can never trouble us no more [sic]/8

II. Winter at Pembina 1813-1814

Governor Macdonell left York Factory September 10, 1813, taking with him Mr. Spencer and Dr. Holdsworth, two Hudson's Bay Company servants to replace McRae and Edwards as accountant and surgeon respectively in the colony. Arriving at Point Douglas on October 15, the Governor was disappointed to find that the crops had fared poorly. Potatoes were the chief harvest. Turnips were of an enormous size but oats had been ruined by the frost, and wheat, peas, Indian corn and hemp had had no success whatever. The ^{partial} failure of agriculture meant that for another winter the settlers would be forced to subsist at Pembina on a diet of pemmican. Mr. Bourke, who had been engaged as storekeeper at York Factory that summer, was left at the Forks with ten men, and the rest of the settlers moved to Fort Daer to hunt the buffalo in the plains.⁹

Both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had abandoned their posts at Pembina this winter, so that the colonists were able to obtain virtually all the buffalo meat they required. On November 7, 1813, Macdonell reported that: "We have been very fortunate in getting a good supply of meat which will last us until the roads are good."¹⁰ The December 6 entry: "Mr. Warren & the party returned in the

⁸ Macdonell to Auld, April 24, 1814, SP, 987.

⁹ Macdonell to Selkirk, July 25, 1814, SP, 1,183; MJSP, 16,860.

¹⁰ MJSP, 16,863.

afternoon their sleds well-loaded with fine meat,"¹¹ was a typical comment of the Governor on the pemmican supply that winter. There is no mention of starving conditions at Pembina at all this year. By March 30, 1814, Macdonell was able to report: "We have now in store all the meat we expect to get this season. To make this quantity last until we are relieved by fish."¹² The only difficulty appears to have been that because of the light snowfall, the half-breeds were able to hunt the buffalo on horseback all season. This caused the animals to be kept at a great distance from the settlement and necessitated the colonists making six to eight day journeys into the plains to bring in meat. Despite this hardship, there does not appear to have been any shortage of provisions.

The whole attitude of the settlers at Pembina was one of confidence. The officers were a much more congenial set than the ones of last winter, the people, having all the food they wanted, were contented, while the North West Company, being absent from the area, was unable to spread discontent or to cause desertions among the settlers.

III. The Announcement of the Embargo on Provisions January 8, 1814

Miles Macdonell was full of confidence, too, and, as the winter progressed, he began to develop grandiose ideas concerning his powers as Governor and the strength of the position which he now held. The

¹¹ MJSP, 16,867.

¹² Ibid., 16,890.

Governor felt that the actions of the North West Company in failing to oppose him at Pembina and in returning the deserter, Walsh, meant that the rival organization was in a weakened position, an "expiring party" as he was later to term them. In any case, he became convinced that a little more pressure in the form of an embargo on provisions was all that was needed to drive the Nor'Westers permanently out of Assiniboia. Moreover, the Governor felt certain that the colonists had a legal right to all the provisions which were obtained in Red River, and that it was unjust for these interlopers to be carrying away such a large amount of supplies.

These two winters we have been in these parts I have been under the necessity of abandoning all work & removing the people from the place of settlement to Pembina for subsistence, by which we lose all the winter's labour and also a great part of the proper seed time in the spring, not being able ~~for~~ want of provisions to go early to the Forks to carry on the work. The N W Co. supply their distant trading posts with provisions while we to whom the soil belongs are obliged to go to the trouble of importing from Britain a considerable part of the subsistence of our people./13

Greatly confident in the strength of his position, and deeply angered at what he considered to be the illegal carriage of surplus provisions by the North West Company, the Governor decided, on January 8, 1814, to issue an embargo on the export of all food supplies from Assiniboia to take effect immediately. By the terms of the proclamation, the export of any provision, flesh, fish, game or vegetable by water or land carriage was forbidden for one twelve-month; "Except that which may be judged necessary for the trading parties at the present time within the territory to carry them to their respective destinations,

¹³ Macdonell to Auld, April 12, 1814, SP, 998.

& who may on due application to me receive a license for the same".¹⁴
All provisions gathered within Assiniboia were to be given to the colony which would pay for them at the customary rates of exchange. Any person detected attempting to violate the provisions of this proclamation would be arrested and prosecuted, and would forfeit all the goods which he was found carrying from the country.

The imposition of an embargo on the export of provisions at this time was certainly a rash and unjustifiable measure. In view of the plentiful provision supply at Pembina that year, it clearly was not needed. Moreover, by announcing the restriction in the midst of the hunting season, it imposed an undue burden on the fur traders. It did not give them time to procure their provisions elsewhere; yet because of the restriction large quantities of what had already been secured would have to be given to the colony. The regulation bore particularly harshly on the North West Company. With their communications with Canada disrupted by the War of 1812, this organization was more dependent than ever before upon Red River pemmican for its supplies. It was not to be expected that the Nor'Westers would submit quietly to this gross interference with their trade.

IV. The Enforcement of the Embargo in the Spring of 1814

The announcement of the embargo came as a complete surprise to the North West Company. The Nor'Westers had maintained virtually no

¹⁴ Proclamation of January 8, 1814, SP, 914.

contact with the colonists throughout the winter¹⁵ and had no idea that such a measure was being contemplated. The first reaction of the North West traders was to attempt to have the Governor rescind his proclamation by pointing out the undue hardship which it would impose on them. John Wills, the North West Company trader at the Forks of Red River, wrote to Macdonell January 25, 1814:

Restricting the North West trader to the Territory and not allowing him to take the necessary provisions for such of the North West canoes as are coming out from places where provisions cannot be procured would be a piece of inhumanity unheard of ... The difficulty of procuring provisions in Detroit on account of the American war is obvious. They are seized by the government. Our resources are only in this country for the present./¹⁶

The Governor was unmoved by these protestations; and the North West Company decided that it would ignore the embargo and carry out their provisions in defiance of it. The Nor'Westers refused to acknowledge that the Governor had any right to impose regulations over them. Macdonell was equally determined that his authority should not be flouted. With these two attitudes of mind, a collision was bound to ensue.

The war began in May, 1814, as the North West Company, in defiance of the Governor's authority, despatched the first boat-load of pemmican to the Forks of Red River from their provision depot at the junction of

¹⁵ The only time the Governor was in close proximity with the North West Company was in mid-October, 1814, when he passed through the Forks of Red River on his way to Pembina. He makes no mention of speaking with the rival organization in his journal at this time: MJSP, 16,860-61.

¹⁶ John Wills to Miles Macdonell, January 25, 1814, SP, 923-924.

the Assiniboine and Souris rivers. Governor Macdonell, on hearing that a boat load of provisions, for which no export license had been requested, was coming down the Assiniboine, swore in four men as constables on May 19, ^{and} sent them to watch the river. The North West Company countered this move May 20, by establishing a six-man guard of their own on the Assiniboine River. Macdonell responded to this action by sending a barge with two brass field-pieces up the river and beginning to build a fortification.¹⁷ By the end of the day some thirty men were encamped at the Hudson's Bay Company's blockhouse on the Assiniboine, and North West trader Wills, realizing that this lone provision boat could never run the blockade, gave orders that the pemmican coming down the river should be cached and the boat set adrift.¹⁸

When the vessel failed to appear on May 21, Governor Macdonell sent Sheriff Spencer to search for it. Only three men and an empty boat were found. The Sheriff brought these people prisoner to Point Douglas May 24, and, after a day's questioning, they were persuaded to tell where the provisions were hidden. Sheriff Spencer was again despatched to seize the cache, and May 27 he returned in triumph with ninety-six bags of pemmican.

On May 29, the Governor received word from the Hudson's Bay Company traders at Brandon House that provisions from Swan River and Qu'Appelle had been landed at the North West Company's Fort la Souris

¹⁷ MJSP, 16,899.

¹⁸ Wills to Pritchard, May 20, 1814, PAC, N.W.Co. Papers Transcribed from Records of the Montreal Court House, #2. (Hereafter: NW Papers). MJSP, 16,900.

opposite them, and it was obvious that: "The pemmican (was being) put in store until their is a sufficient force collected to prevent its being taken by the colonists".¹⁹ To prevent this, Macdonell sent Sheriff Spencer, with a party of men, on June 7, to seize all the provisions at Fort la Souris except the two bateaux from Swan River, which the Governor was not certain lay within his jurisdiction.²⁰ John Pritchard, the North West Company trader at Souris River at first refused to admit Spencer to his fort, but when pickets were cut, and the Sheriff's contingent forcibly entered the premises and produced a warrant for the surrender of the pemmican, Pritchard meekly submitted. Four Hundred and seventy-nine bags pemmican, 865 pounds dried meat and 95 kegs of grease²¹ in the possession of the North West Company were surrendered and carried across the river to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Brandon House.

The Nor'Westers responded to this act of aggression by capturing Joseph Howse, a Hudson's Bay Company trader who had taken part in the proceedings at Souris River, and carried him prisoner to their fort at the Forks, June 15. Macdonell quickly replied to this move by seizing a boatload of guns which passed up the Red River to the North West fort that same evening.

The situation remained tense. Leaders on both sides, however, were beginning to realize the strength of their opponents' position and the folly of resorting to open warfare in order to maintain their own

¹⁹ MJSP, 16,902.

²⁰ Ibid., 16,903.

²¹ John Pritchard to William McGillivray, 1814, SP, 1,167.

position. The North West traders were starting to gather at the Forks in great numbers as canoes continued to arrive from the wintering grounds on their way to Fort William. Unless an accommodation were achieved soon, the Governor realized that his forces would be outnumbered by those of the Nor'Westers and his colony might be destroyed. The North West Company, on the other hand, had little intention of annihilating the colony. Destruction of the settlement would avail them nothing, for it was pemmican which they primarily required, and this, thanks to Pritchard's surrender, was now all in the hands of the Hudson's Bay Company at Brandon House, 140 miles away from the settlement. There was not time this late in the season to risk an attack on that point. It would serve the Nor'Westers' purpose better if an accommodation could be reached which would give them enough provisions to depart immediately with their furs.

When John Macdonald of Garth arrived at the settlement, June 17, 1814, with the last of the company's brigades from West of the Rocky Mountains, the North West Company offered a compromise.²² If the Governor would permit the Nor'Westers to carry out all the provisions necessary to take their canoes out to Fort William and back to Cumberland House, the North West Company would send ten canoes to Hudson Bay to bring down supplies for the colony. Governor Macdonell agreed to this idea in principle, but insisted, that to carry out the letter of the Proclamation, the North West Company must apply to him for a license

²² MJSP, 16,909.

to export their pemmican, and the Governor must finally determine the exact amount of supplies which might be removed. By the terms of the agreement signed June 18, 1814, the North West Company was permitted to take away 200 bags of pemmican for the immediate provision of its outgoing canoes and to obtain 175 packs later in the season for its incoming brigades. In addition, one bag of pemmican was to be surrendered for every pack of oatmeal or ninety-pound piece which the North West Company brought to the colony from Hudson Bay.²³

Thus ended the first stage of the Pemmican War. It was very much a triumph for the colony. The North West Company had taken away more pemmican than Macdonell originally intended they should have. However, they were not allowed to take away all of their provisions. Two hundred of the 575²⁴ bags pemmican gathered by the North West Company in the Red River region that spring were retained for the use of the colony. Furthermore, the 375 bags they were permitted to take out were 55 bags short of the 430 packs they were ordered to provide by the agreement reached at Fort William the previous summer.²⁵ Moreover, the authority of the Governor had been respected throughout these transactions, as the North West Company, being forced to apply for a license to export its pemmican, had virtually recognized the jurisdiction of the Hudson's Bay Company Charter in the Red River region. It was, however, only the Red River Department of the North West Company which had been defeated,

²³ Agreement of June 18, 1814, SP, 947.

²⁴/ 479 bags seized at Souris River in June; 96 bags from the boat sent down the Assiniboine in May.

²⁵/ Minutes of the N W Co. 1813, Wallace, Documents, 277-278.

The voice of the entire North West Company in assembly at Fort William had yet to be heard.

V. The North West Company Meeting at Fort William July, 1814

When the Agents and Wintering partners of the North West Company met at Fort William for their annual meeting in July, 1814, the attitude of the traders was distinctly hostile. The actions of the wintering partners were disparaged.

The men of Red River and those of Fort Dauphin who had ill behaved themselves last summer were pointed out to the others and disgraced. A full determination was taken to defend the property at all hazards, & all the wintering men being assembled for this purpose the true state of the case was explained to them, & the impression made it is hoped will render it dangerous to any man who may presume to plunder them./26

Definite plans were advanced at this meeting to avenge the insult to the North West Company's honour brought about by the pemmican embargo by expelling the colonists permanently from Red River. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Governor Macdonell and Sheriff Spencer by A.N. McLeod, the North West Company Justice of the Peace for the Indian Territories. Duncan Cameron, a trader who had won renown in opposing the Hudson's Bay Company at Nipigon, was appointed to command of the Red River Department in place of the ailing John Wills. Alexander Macdonell, the North West trader at Qu'Appelle, was also elevated to the rank of a Partner in the Concern. Military commissions in the disbanded Voyageur Corps, which

²⁶ Minutes of the N W Co. 1814, Wallace, Documents, 291-296.

had been obtained by devious means, were issued to Duncan Cameron as Captain, Alexander Macdonell as Lieutenant, and Seraphim Lamar as Ensign so that the North West Company could now claim to have men of equal military rank to Captain Miles Macdonell in Red River. Captain Cameron was equipped with a major's uniform which A.N. McLeod had formerly worn. Instructions were issued to Captain Cameron to induce settlers to desert with offers of transportation to Canada, and extra trade goods were sent to Red River to help him accomplish this purpose.²⁷

The ancient North West spirit had been thoroughly roused by the Fort William meeting. Alexander Macdonell wrote to John Macdonald of Garth August 5, 1814:

You see myself and our mutual friend Cameron so far on our way to commence open hostilities against the enemy in Red River. Much is expected of us by some, too much perhaps. One thing is certain, that we will do our best to defend what we consider our rights in the interior. Something serious will undoubtedly take place. Nothing but the complete downfall of the colony will satisfy some by fair or foul means, a most desirable object if it can be accomplished. So here is at them with all my heart and energy./28

VI. Two Further Provocative Proclamations by Governor Macdonell July-October 1814

Back in Red River, meanwhile, the colonists were doing very well in their third attempt to gain subsistence from the soil of Red River, Seven kegs of barley, 4 of wheat, 5-6 of oats and 300 kegs of potatoes

²⁷ Selkirk, MS, SP, 12,726; John Fritchard's Narrative, SP, 12,316-18; Daniel Mackenzie to Selkirk, September 3, 1816, SP, 12,685-88.
²⁸ Alexander Macdonell to John Macdonald of Garth, SP, 8,791.

were sown in June.²⁹ Fifty-one settlers arrived, after an arduous over-land journey from Churchill, on June 22, and quickly set themselves to work building houses and cultivating the lots of land laid out for them by Peter Fidler. A hive of industrious activity, the colony certainly looked as if it was becoming a permanent part of the Red River scene in the summer of 1814.

Still full of confidence after his victory over the Nor[']Westers with his pemmican embargo that spring, Governor Macdonell, in the course of the summer of 1814, issued two more provactive proclamations which were to anger the Nor[']Westers still further. The first of these was a proclamation forbidding the running of buffalo on horseback, which Macdonell announced July 21, 1814.³⁰ It was undoubtedly a just measure, for many Indians did not possess horses and were placed at a great disadvantage when hunting by those who had them. It greatly angered the freemen and the half-breeds, however, who were accustomed to hunting the buffalo on horseback. At a time when the North West Company was seeking the allegiance of those people to assist in its plans for destroying the colony, the Proclamation gave the rival traders an occasion for propaganda which they were to exploit most fully.

In August, 1814, Governor Macdonell journeyed to York Factory to meet a group of fifteen settlers who were arriving in the ships from England. At the factory, Macdonell received instructions from Lord Selkirk to promulgate a second offensive proclamation, a notice to quit

²⁹ Macdonell to Selkirk, July 25, 1814, SP, 1,198.
³⁰ MJSP, 16,915.

to be served on all North West Company posts within the District of Assiniboia. In August, 1813, Selkirk had instructed Macdonell to serve a notice to quit on all posts within the land grant of Assiniboia where the period of North West Company occupancy was approaching twenty years. These notices were not to be followed by effective removal, but were designed solely to prevent the Nor'Westers acquiring a prescriptive right to the land on which they were squatting.³¹ By the Spring of 1814, his Lordship, having received Governor Macdonell's account of the insidious proceedings of the North West Company during the winter of 1812-1813, had decided that notices to quit should no longer be confined to posts where possession of the interlopers approached twenty years, but should be served on all posts within the district, irrespective of how long they had been established. In a letter to Macdonell April 15, 1814, Selkirk stated:

I have to recollect that I omitted to mention that notice should be given to the partners and servants of the N W Co. at the forks to quit possession in the manner pointed out in Burn's Justice. This should be done in writing and verbally also before enough witnesses at all the other posts of the N W Co. within Ossiniboia [sic] /32

In accordance with these instructions, Governor Macdonell drafted

³¹ Selkirk to Macdonell, June 5, 1813, SP, 637-638.

³² Selkirk to Macdonell, April, 15, 1814, MP, 175. Most historians and Selkirk himself have ignored this document which this writer recently found in Macdonell Correspondence in the Public Archives of Canada. Selkirk in his *apologia* places the blame for the notices to quit served on the North West post at the Forks (which had been established only in 1810), on Macdonell, saying that the Governor exceeded his instructions of 1813, Selkirk MS, SP, 12,725. From the above letter, however, it is clear that Macdonell was merely carrying out his Lordship's instructions of 1814 to the letter.

the following proclamation which he served in the month of October on all the North West Company posts within the Selkirk land grant and some outside it:³³

Take notice that by the authority and on the behalf of your Landlord, the Right Honourable Thomas, Earl of Selkirk, I do hereby warn you and all your associates of the North West Company to quit your post at --- within six calendar months of the date hereof./³⁴

In delivering the above notice, no trouble was taken to inform the Nor'Westers that it was a mere formality which the Governor had no intention of enforcing. Still confident from the success of his Pemman Proclamation, the Governor doubtless hoped that he would be able to cajole the North West Company into leaving the territory permanently by this action. In so thinking, the Governor seriously misjudged the temper of the Nor'Westers. He failed completely to take notice of the changed attitude of the new traders who faced him in Red River that fall. It was a costly blunder.

VII. The Arrest of Sheriff Spencer September, 1814.

While Governor Macdonell was still at Hudson Bay, the North West traders returned from their annual meeting to Red River and made it quite clear that their attitude towards the colony had grown hostile.

On August 30, Duncan Cameron, Alexander Macdonell, Messers Shaw, Kennedy and Siveright arrived in 7 canoes & bateau with flags

³³ Forks of Red River, Winnipeg River, Turtle River, Souris River, Qu'Appelle River, Carlton House and Portage des prairies. The last two posts were outside the Selkirk land grant. Peter Fidler's Journal, SP, 18,457. (Hereafter: FJSP).

³⁴/ Notice to Quit, SP, 1,251.

flying, the 2 former dressed in regimentals. They passed close to our bank though their direct road was on the opposite side. Just after they passed the settlement every man in the canoes fired off his gun./³⁵

The Governor's Proclamation prohibiting the running of the buffalo was torn down from the gate of the North West Company fort, and a new one hung in its place telling the freemen to hunt the buffalo on horseback and that Captain Cameron and not Captain Macdonell was chief of this country.³⁶

On September 5, 1814, John Spencer, the sheriff who had seized the North West Company's pemmican the previous spring, was served with a warrant while riding in the plains and taken prisoner to the North West Fort. The following day he was carried away to Fort William in a canoe. Many settlers wished to stop the boat by force of arms; however, Archibald Macdonald, the officer in charge of the settlement at that time, felt that the warrant was quite legal and could not be interfered with, while Spencer himself begged the colonists not to shoot.³⁷ Thus the Nor'Westers were permitted to win their first victory in the Pemmican War.

VIII. The Intrigues of Duncan Cameron Among the Settlers Winter, 1814-1815

Even greater success was to follow during the winter of 1814-1815 as Duncan Cameron, the North West Trader at the Forks of Red River, began a systematic attempt to induce settlers to leave the settlement with offers of transportation to Canada. The crop that year had a fair amount

³⁵ FJSP, 18,438.

³⁶ Ibid., 18,439.

³⁷ Ibid., 18,440-42.

of success: the Governor felt that he had sufficient provisions in store at Point Douglas to last until May 1.³⁸ Hence Macdonell sent only a small party of men to make pemmican at Pembina that season, the majority of the settlers remaining to winter at the Forks. Such a large number of settlers dwelling in close proximity to the North West fort made a perfect setting for intrigue.

The settlers did not suffer any undue privations during the early part of the winter, although Governor Macdonell appears to have been somewhat reluctant to give them goods from the store.³⁹ Minor privations, however, were soon fanned into gross miseries by the subtle machinations of Duncan Cameron. The North West Trader played the role of the settlers' friendly confidant. Heads of the various families wintering at Point Douglas would be invited to the North West Company fort and treated to liquor, tea, coffee or one of the many other delicacies which the North West trader had brought with him from Fort William. In the course of the conversation, Cameron, talking to the settlers in their native Gaelic, would warn them of the many dangers and hardships they would face trying to farm at Red River. The rigours of the climate and the impossibility of gaining more than a mere subsistence from agriculture in Red River were deplored. The Indians were said to be hostile and alleged to be held in check only by the influence of the North West Company. The evil deeds of Captain Macdonell in starving the Nor'Westers of provisions last spring were elaborated upon. It

³⁸ MJSP, 16,935.

³⁹ January 3, 1815, "Plagued a great deal by settlers coming for articles out of the store which is indeed the case every day." MJSP, 16,944.

was alleged that the Governor was a tyrant at heart who would never permit the colonists to leave the settlement. The difficulties of farming in Red River were contrasted with the pleasure of settling in Upper Canada, a successful, well-established agricultural community where colonists could be assured of a comfortable subsistence. Offers were then made to transport the colonists out of their misery in Red River to the paradise of Upper Canada free of charge. Cameron's letter to Donald Livingstone and Hector McEachern was a typical contrivance:

I am happy to see that the eyes of some of you are getting open at last to the situation you are placed in in this infamous country and that you now see your past follies in obeying the unlawful orders of a plunderer & I may say a highway robber. ... I know all the ill-usage and bad advice you got and the many unjustices that are done to you since you left. ... None but hard-hearted men would abuse their fellow creatures in such a manner. I pity you in your present deplorable situation as I consider you to be in the worst of prisons. I accept your offers and will be very happy to take so many of my fellow coutrymen out of bondage as I know Lord Selkirk will never take you home, whatever promises Miles Macdonell may make to the contrary. ... I do not ask a penny for your passage or provision for you are going to a good country where you may make a decent living for yourself and families. We'll oblige ourselves to get land for you and will leave none of you on the highway as beggars./40

Governor Macdonell appears to have been well aware of the plots of the North West Company; however, he failed to take any decisive action to counteract them.⁴¹ Macdonell's neglect on this point can only be deemed the result of an over-optimistic nature. He could not believe

⁴⁰ Duncan Cameron to Hector McEachern and Donald Livingston, 1815, SP, 8,854.

⁴¹ "December 10, 1814. The piper has been for 2 days & 2 nights at the North West Fort after promising formerly that he would not go there. We learn that several others are on treaty with Mr. Duncan Cameron to leave the country. I send for him. He does not deny that he intends to go at some time or other." MJSP, 16,941.

that the settlers were as discontented as they actually were.

IX. The Rising of the Half-Breeds Winter of 1814-1815

The Indians throughout this period were on most friendly terms with the colony and resisted all efforts of the North West Company to incite them against the colonists. The half-breeds and the freemen, who depended on the North West Company for part-time employment during the freighting season, proved to be more pliable tools, however, and it was these which Duncan Cameron next tried to incite against the colony. The authority of Governor Macdonell to issue his proclamation forbidding the running of the buffalo on horseback was denied, and the half-breeds were urged openly to ⁴²disregard it. Reports were spread that Lord Selkirk was not going to send any more trade goods to the country and that the half-breeds would consequently lose any credit which they gave to the colony. ⁴³Freemen were warned that Macdonell might try to impose on them with his "false laws", and they were advised that if they did not defend their rights to be free in spite of him they were not men. ⁴⁴

Throughout the winter, the freemen and the half-breeds incited by these North West Company arguments, continued to flout Governor Macdonell's authority by running the buffalo on horseback. The animals were consequently driven further away from the settlement, and, by January, 1815, a pemmican shortage began to appear. In the middle of that month the Governor decided to make a personal intervention among the half-breeds at Turtle River, 125 miles west of Pembina, which was the

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FJSP, 18,438.

⁴³/ Duncan Cameron to Charles Hesse, October 3, 1814, SP, 8,849.

⁴⁴/ Cameron to Hesse, January 12, 1815, SP, 8,853.

chief buffalo hunting area for the Red River district of that time, to try to terminate this abuse of his authority. On January 19, 1815, Macdonell left for Pembina ordering all the unmarried colonists at Point Douglas to follow him into the plains to help relieve the food shortage at the settlement.⁴⁵

The Governor's mission to Turtle River was a complete failure. The Nor'Westers had preceded Macdonell into that area and frightened the half-breeds with tales that the Governor would seize their horses and equipment for their defiance of his proclamation. When the Governor sent the Hudson's Bay Company officer John McLeod to the half-breed camp early in February, the trader was held prisoner for six days. The Métis refused to go to Macdonell's headquarters and insisted that the Governor must come to treat with them. Macdonell rightly declined doing this, fearing that he would be made prisoner and transported from the country.⁴⁶

In March, 1815, the half-breed Bostonois was arrested on the complaint of John McLeod for indignities which the latter had suffered during his imprisonment at Turtle River. The North West Company retaliated by seizing the colony officer, Mr. Warren. Prisoners were exchanged on March 31; however, Governor Macdonell was forced to leave Pembina April 4 without achieving any agreement with the half-breeds on the running of the buffalo.

⁴⁵ MJSP, 16,947.

⁴⁶ John McLeod, Narrative of Events at Turtle River, February, 1815, SP, 1,586-1,587; Miles Macdonell, Narrative of Events, Winter 1814-1815, SP, 1,697-1,698.

X. The Seizure of the Settlement Guns April 1815

Meanwhile, the situation at Point Douglas was rapidly becoming desperate as rations dwindled and settlers became increasingly discontented. By February 20, 1815, there were only 36 bags pemmican and 700 kegs of potatoes left to feed 80 people until June. The meat ration was accordingly reduced from twelve to ten pounds per person per week.⁴⁷ The settlers found Archibald Macdonald, the officer left in charge of the colony during the Governor's absence, a hard taskmaster.

H. McLeod who went to get his provisions weighed at the N W fort last day is ordered to get by on $\frac{1}{2}$ allowance & H. Bannerman who gave me the insult of the 13th is to suffer the same fate. ... I went out when they all were assembled & before anything was given to them pointed out to them all that we could not continue to maintain them at this place on such expense & with such a scarce article as pemmican & particularly people that were so disposed that they would not pay their debts./⁴⁸

The lack of provisions and the harsh rule of Archibald Macdonald made the settlers easy targets for the North West Company's propaganda. The latest story which Cameron began circulating was that the Governor would use the settlement's field-pieces to prevent the people from leaving the colony in the spring, and that to avoid this calamity, the settlers should seize the guns and place them in the North West Company fort for safe-keeping.⁴⁹ George Campbell, a discontented settler who had been won over to the Nor'Wester's cause by a bribe of £100,⁵⁰ was

⁴⁷ Archibald Macdonald, Journal 1814-1815, SP, 18,268.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18,266.

⁴⁹ It was fear that the guns would be used to prevent the passage of N W Co. provisions in the spring which was the real motive behind the Nor'Wester's desire to seize the settlement's guns.

⁵⁰ Selkirk, MS, SP, 12,727.

instructed to gather a party of followers to accomplish this object.⁵¹

On April 3, 1815, after the colony store had been opened and all the loyal settlers had received their weekly ration of provisions, Campbell and a group of his partisans stormed the Governor's house and presented Macdonald with a letter from Cameron demanding that the guns be surrendered.

As your field-pieces have already been employed to disturb the peace of His Majesty's loyal subjects in this quarter and to stop up the King's highway, I have authorized the settlers to take possession of them and to bring them here, not with a view of making any hostile use of them but merely to put them out of harm's way./52

Simultaneously with this intrusion, another group of dissentients entered the storehouse and seized the storekeeper Mr. Bourke, forcing him to surrender the settlement's ordnance. Two brass field-pieces, seven swivels, and twenty-five muskets were carried off on sledges. Once they were beyond the colony buildings, the rebels were joined by a party of twenty-eight Nor'Westers who had been standing by in a clump of bushes in case Campbell's party should need any assistance. The deserting settlers then marched in triumph to the North West fort, never to return again to dwell at Point Douglas.⁵³

XI. The Destruction of the Settlement in the Spring of 1815

The seizure of the settlement's guns on April 3, 1815 was the start of a series of retaliatory measures which lasted for nearly three

⁵¹ Selkirk, MS, SP, 12,734.

⁵²/ Cameron to Macdonald, April 3, 1815, SP, 8,859.

⁵³/ Archibald Macdonald, Narrative Respecting the Destruction of the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement in the Year 1815, (London, 1816), 8.

full months as the Pemmican War broke out again in violent fury. April 5, Archibald Macdonald arrested Donald McKenzie, one of the settlers who had taken part in the robbery of the guns. A few hours later, the Governor's Residence was surrounded by a band of angry Nor'Westers armed with muskets, the house broken into and Macdonald, at gunpoint, forced to give up his prisoner.⁵⁴

Governor Macdonell returned to Point Douglas on April 7, 1815, and immediately began preparations for the colony's defence. Loopholes were cut in the colony buildings and the few remaining pieces of ordnance which had not been stolen placed in them. The walls of the houses were lined with fursacks. A blockhouse was built in front of the colony buildings, a regular guard was mounted and a daily parade of all the settlers called.⁵⁵

Menacing gestures were continued by both parties. The North West Company Servant, Shaw, was arrested and temporarily detained by the Governor April 8, while, on April 15, there was a parade by the armed forces of both parties in the plains. April 17, Governor Macdonell was served with a warrant to which he declined to submit: and, on April 30, the colony servant, Michael Macdonell, was arrested and forced to serve a long imprisonment in the North West fort which finally ended in a decision to migrate to Canada. On May 17 there was another parade of the armed might of both Companies in the plains.⁵⁶

Each side was slowly gathering forces. The Hudson's Bay Company

⁵⁴ Archibald Macdonald Journal, SP, 18,310.

⁵⁵ MJSP, 16,984-7.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 16,985, 16,988, 16,990, 16,998, 17,009.

colony was strengthened by the arrival of Mackenzie and three men from Meadow Portage April 11, Bourke and a party of seven from Fort Daer on April 30, Sutherland from Jack River on May 10, and McLeod and his party of traders from Turtle River, May 21.⁵⁷ The North West Company during the same period was reinforced by the approach of ten Cree Indians on May 16, who subsequently refused to serve for them, and by the landing of their canoes from their chief provision post of Qu'Appelle River May 10.⁵⁸ The Nor'Westers would appear to be the chief gainers by these transactions, however, for men were continually deserting the colony to join their friends and relations at the North West fort.⁵⁹

On May 25, 1815, the first shots of warfare were heard in Red River as the colony guards, alarmed at seeing a band of Nor'Westers advancing towards their fort at two o'clock in the morning, fired their field-pieces in defiance. The North West force retired, but returned some six hours later and began pulling down a part of a colony fence. For this aggression the Nor'Westers were subjected to several rounds of grapeshot; to which they replied indifferently with their muskets. After a brief interchange of fire, the North West Company servants retreated to their fort.

This was the last major victory for the Hudson's Bay Company in Red River for some time. On June 1, 1815, most of the Irish servants' contracts expired and eleven of them deserted to the North West camp.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ MJSP, 16,986, 16,987, 17,004, 17,012.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17,008, 17,011.

⁵⁹ "May 1 - Mr. Wallace deserts to the N W fort, also James Smythe & family & Joseph Cokes. May 4 - Alexander McLean deserts. May 22 - McKay's sister runs off to the N W fort to join her lover Mr. Cuthbert Grant." MJSP, 16,998, 17,000, 17,013.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 17,019-20.

On June 7, forty-two settlers, who had deserted in the period April-June, left the North West fort on the first stage of their journey to Canada. That same day, the North West Company established a battery of three field-pieces and twenty-five men on the Red River at Frog Plains, designed to prevent Governor Macdonell escaping from the execution of the Warrant which the Nor'Westers held against him.⁶¹

On the evening of June 10, a party of Nor'Westers returning to their camp at Frog Plains after gathering provisions at the North West Fort appeared to be delaying for some time in a ravine near the colony buildings. Governor Macdonell sent out a party of four men to investigate their movements. The Nor'Westers were challenged, and the colonists receiving no reply but the "war whoop" fired upon them. The North West servants returned the settlers' shots, upon which the colony opened fire with the wall-pieces in the Governor's residence. This heavy barrage caused the Nor'Westers to retire; however, they returned the next morning and concealing themselves in some bushes, began sniping at some colony officers walking among the settlement buildings.⁶² The colonists returned their fire; and, after a three-quarter of an hour duel in which 150 shots were exchanged,⁶³ the North West forces retreated to their fort. This time, however, the settlers suffered casualties. In the colony blockhouse, Duncan McDonell received a flesh wound in the arm and Murgueron a similar bruise in the leg, while Alexander MacLean suffered a badly shattered hand, and Mr.

⁶¹ MJSP, 17,022.

⁶² Ibid., 17,025-7.

⁶³ Coltman Report, Papers Relating to the Red River Settlement (London, 1819), 170.

Warren had his head cut open when an overloaded wall-piece in the Governor's residence exploded.⁶⁴ Warren was to die of his wound, July 19, 1815,⁶⁵ the first victim of the fur traders' struggle in Red River.

The same day, the North West Company let it be known that all they wanted was Macdonell's person, and if the Governor would submit to the warrant which the Nor'Westers held against him all attacks on the colony would cease. The men were very disconcerted by this news, and demands were made that the Governor should surrender. Macdonell doubted very much that the Nor'Westers really desired only his person. He felt certain that the destruction of the whole colony was their ultimate intention, and to prove this to the men he decided to go into hiding in some bushes at a distance from the fort, feigning that he was making an attempt to escape from the settlement. If the Nor'Westers continued to attack the settlement instead of trying to search for the missing Governor, this would prove to the settlers that the colony, and not the Governor, was the object of their attack, and, when the Governor re-appeared to rescue the colonists, the people would rally to the defence of their property.⁶⁶

During the evening of June 11, Macdonell left the settlement to carry out his plan. True to the Governor's predictions, the Nor'Westers continued to attack the settlement, stealing horses and agriculture equipment lying in the fields. On June 13, a letter was sent to the colonists demanding that they deliver up all their goods and leave the

⁶⁴ MJSP, 17,027-8.

⁶⁵ Colin Robertson's Journal 1815-1817, SP, 17,532. (Hereafter RJSP).

⁶⁶ MJSP, 17,030-17,031.

river.⁶⁷ However, these menacing threats instead of making the settlers more determined to defend their property only made them all the more frightened to remain.

The return of the Governor on June 14, brought only a temporary upsurge of courage. When nine prisoners were taken by the North West Company on June 15, a large body of settlers deserted to the North West camp. On June 16, Macdonell reported that only sixteen settlers and an undisclosed number of Hudson's Bay Company servants remained in the Colony.⁶⁸ In this precarious situation, Macdonell's Council insisted that the Governor surrender in return for a guarantee to preserve the settlement. Terms were arranged with the North West Company partner, Hugh McKenzie, later that day, and, on June 17, Macdonell surrendered to his adversaries. On June 22, the crestfallen Governor departed from Red River on his way to Canada to stand trial for his "crimes".⁶⁹

Although the North West Company had agreed that the colony could stay, their half-breed servants were not a party to this arrangement, and the Company now began using these allies to accomplish their designs of expelling the colony. On June 20, Fidler and Macdonald, the two officers in charge of the colony, were told by the half-breed Bostonois that the Métis had resolved that not a single colonist could stay in Red River, though fifteen to twenty Hudson's Bay Company traders could remain if they would distribute twenty pieces of goods annually among

⁶⁷ FJSP, 16,481-2.

⁶⁸ MJSP, 17,035. Actually there were a total of 34 settlers and servants in the colony at the time: FJSP, 18,510.

⁶⁹ MJSP, 17,035-6.

the half-breeds.⁷⁰

To enforce these demands, the Métis attacked the colony for twenty minutes on June 22, setting fire to many of the settlers' houses. Peguis and his band of friendly Indians arrived from Lac du Bonnet on June 24 and offered to make peace for the settlers with their adversaries, but the natives efforts proved unavailing. After holding a brief conference with the half-breeds, the Indians, too, advised the settlers to depart, and offered to escort them in safety to the mouth of the Red River. On June 25, terms were arranged with the half-breeds whereby the colony was to be destroyed and the settlers were to depart from Red River with a guarantee of safe passage. The Hudson's Bay Company traders could remain with 3-4 boats and 15-20 men.⁷¹ On June 27, 1815, the thirty-four remaining colonists left under the command of Archibald Macdonald for Jack River at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg, intending to remain there until further news from Europe was received or better prospects of remaining at Red River were seen.⁷² Thus the embargo on provisions designed to expell the Nor'Westers from Red River had miscarried completely; and at the end of two years it was the colony instead of the company which was expelled from that region.

XII. Conclusion

An embargo on provisions, designed in part to procure supplies for colonists, but in the main to expel unwanted traders from Red River,

⁷⁰ FJSP, 18,491-2.

⁷¹ Ibid., 18,514.

⁷² Ibid., 18,503-5.

had been imposed by a Hudson's Bay Company colony governor on an unsuspecting and peaceable North West Company at a time when the latter could ill-afford to forego its Red River supplies because of the disruption of its communications occasioned by the War of 1812. The partners in Red River had put the obtaining of supplies before the honour of their concern, and had submitted to an accommodation with the Hudson's Bay Company people permitting them to take out most, but not all, of the provisions necessary for their canoes, rather than risk a costly time-consuming war with the Hudson's Bay Company to recover their supplies which were 140 miles away at Brandon House. The Fort William meeting of the North West Company reversed the decision of the Red River partners and determined to avenge the insult to the Company's honour by expelling all colonists from Red River. In the course of the second winter, with a mixture of intrigue, bribery and violence, the whole body of colonists were persuaded or forced to migrate to either Canada or the northern end of Lake Winnipeg.

The Nor'Westers were aided in their task of expelling the colonists by a series of ill-advised policies which the colony Governor attempted to carry out during the winter of 1814-1815. The decision to serve notice to quit on all North West Company posts within Assiniboia, a policy insisted upon by Lord Selkirk himself, strengthened the resolve of the North West Company servants to oppose the colony; while the proclamation forbidding the running of buffalo on horseback and the abortive attempt to enforce it in the winter of 1815 converted the half-breeds to the support of the North West traders. The subtle intrigues of Duncan Cameron, the North West trader at the forks of

Red River, were the main cause of the many desertions within the settlement that winter, but the failure of the Governor to disclaim the Nor'-Westers pretensions, the shortage of provisions in February and March and the harsh treatment of the colonists by Archibald Macdonald during the Governor's absence at Pembina were important contributing factors inducing the settlers to depart.

The attempt of the Colony to incite Nor'-Westers to depart from Red River by an embargo on provisions, a legal notice to quit their posts and a proclamation forbidding their hunters to run the buffalo on horseback was a complete failure. In striving to gain a monopoly over the provision trade of the whole Red River region, the colony had lost the precarious subsistence which it had laboured so hard to achieve in 1811-1813. Parkman's warning of the futility of a few people striving for the control of a huge region seemed to be well borne out by this occurrence.

The North West Company had emerged as the victor of the Pemmican War in the Red River region 1813-1815. Their triumph, however, was not a complete one. The colony had been expelled from Assiniboia, but 15-20 Hudson's Bay Company traders were still permitted to remain. Moreover, the Hudson's Bay Company was still in a strong position in other regions of the north-west as the effects of the re-organization of 1810-1811 began to increase the company's efficiency.

The Nor'-Westers had attempted by their actions in 1814-1815 to restore Red River to the condition it was in before the colonists arrived in 1812. In reality, however, the situation could never be the same. The Nor'-Westers had come to the assistance of their beleaguered

partners in Red River in 1814 and it was logical to assume that the Hudson's Bay Company would do likewise for its defeated colonists. Moreover, Lord Selkirk was far from the end of his financial resources, and, as his action in ordering notices to quit to be sent to all North West posts in Assiniboia points out, he clearly intended to take a decisive stand against the interlopers.

The Hudson's Bay Company with its embargo on provisions had started a war with the North West Company which two years later resulted in the expulsion of their colony from the Red River region. The complete resources of both the companies and of Lord Selkirk were far from exhausted as yet, however; and each organization had become so deeply embroiled and embittered by the fight, that the war was bound to continue until one of them had been completely defeated.

CHAPTER IV

THE MASSACRE OF SEVEN OAKS 1815-1816

The atrocious attack made by the servants of the North West Company upon the infant colony in Red River cannot fail to make the deepest impression on every embarrassed mind. . . . These motives cannot fail to operate in inducing you¹ to pursue with vigour every legal means of increasing our trade, embarrassing our opponents and ultimately, I hope, of expelling them from every part of the Company's territories under your command./1

The success of the depredations of the N W Co. is entirely owing to a want of exertion of the part of their opponents If a stop is not put to them by law or by retaliation, the Company will certainly be driven out of the country When we get among wolves we must howl./2

These were the reactions of two Hudson's Bay Company officers to the aggressive acts of the North West Company of 1814-1815. The first quotation expresses the view of Robert Semple, newly-appointed Governor-in-Chief of Rupert's Land, who, charged with general superintendency over all Hudson's Bay Company affairs in the north-west, had arrived in Hudson Bay in August, 1815, with eighty-four new colonists for the Selkirk Settlement. The second paragraph summarizes the views of Colin Robertson, Recruiting Agent for the Hudson's Bay Company in Montreal, who, in the summer of 1815, was leading a group of Canadian servants to commence a campaign for the Company against the Nor'Westers in Athabaska.

The attitude of these two men certainly was a vigorous one, almost as aggressive, one might say, as the deed which inspired it. There was a difference, however, in the method which these two men would employ

¹ Robert Semple to Governor Vincent, Aug. 30, 1815, SP, 18,553.
² RJSP, 17,413, 17,415, 17,400.

to drive the North West Company out of western Canada. Semple, the cultured businessman,³ had a legal turn of mind, somewhat similar to that of former Governor Macdonell, and would prefer to expel the Nor'Westers by threats of arrest for violence done, notices to quit, etc. Robertson, an experienced western Canadian fur trader who was fully acquainted with the methods which the North West Company employed, felt that force was the only weapon which the Nor'Westers appreciated and he would not hesitate to use violence in opposing them.

In the summer of 1815, both these men were approaching the Red River valley from different directions; Semple from Hudson Bay, Robertson from Montreal. It was evident that aid was at last coming to the stricken colony. However, the differing characters of the two men and the divergent attitudes they took on the method by which the North West Company opposition should be met boded ill for the colony's future. It was the first time that the Hudson's Bay Company in Red River had been faced with such divided counsel in its higher ranks.

I. The Restoration of the Colony by Colin Robertson
July-August 1815

Colin Robertson, a native of the island of Lewis, in the Hebrides, had served as a clerk in the North West Company from 1803-1809.⁴ A

³ Pritchett, Red River, 162.

⁴/ In 1805, Robertson was a clerk in the English River department £200 wages, £1100 debt with the five years to serve on his contract; Roderick McKenzie, Some Account of the North West Company McGill University, M C, V. I, p. 41.

pompous Scotsman with a fiery temper,⁵ he was none the less a good trader who could deal most successfully with the Indians. Lack of opportunities for promotion in the North West Company, which resulted after that organization's union with the X Y Company in 1804, apparently caused Robertson to leave the concern when his contract expired, and, in 1809, he went to England to offer his services to the rival Hudson's Bay Company.⁶

For the next ^{five} years, Robertson strongly pressed the Hudson's Bay Company directors to adopt the tactics of its rivals in order to win trade from them, suggesting, particularly, that the Company should recruit Canadian servants in Montreal for an expedition into the Athabaska fur territory.⁷ When, in 1814, the Hudson's Bay Company decided that it was in a strong enough financial position to risk such a venture, Robertson was given charge of the expedition, and, in the fall of 1814, he arrived in Montreal to make preparations for a campaign in Athabaska the following year.

Soon after his arrival in Montreal, Robertson heard from the former North West Company trader, John Pritchard, that the Nor'Westers were plotting the destruction of the Hudson's Bay Company's colony in Red River the following spring. Robertson quickly advised Lord Selkirk by mail of the Nor'Westers' plans and despatched Pritchard overland, by way of Hudson Bay, to warn the colony of the danger.⁸

⁵ He was known among the fur traders as Mr. Lofty: Holte to Pritchard, Apr. 14, 1816, NW Papers #118.

⁶ E.E. Rich (ed), Colin Robertson's Letter Book (Toronto, 1939), xxiv-xxxi.

⁷ Robertson to H.B.Co. Committee, 1812, SP, 535.

⁸ C. Wilson, "Pritchard and Ladgimonière", Beaver, 279 (1948), 20.

The North West Company harassed Robertson considerably in his preparations for the Athabaska expedition that winter. He managed, nevertheless, to leave Montreal with sixteen canoes and one hundred men late in May, 1815.⁹ On July 5, while crossing Rainy Lake, Robertson learned of the destruction of the colony from a brigade of North West Company canoes which passed him on their way to Fort William.¹⁰ The following day, the Hudson's Bay Company trader met some of the deserting colonists at the North West Company post at Rainy Lake;¹¹ while, on July 8, in the Rainy River, he encountered the defeated Governor.

I intended to have a long conversation with this Gentleman, but when he informed me that there was no provision for the brigade at the bottom of the River it threw such a damper on my spirits that I could hardly speak. But no time was to be lost. I briefly informed him that being aware of the measures adopted by the North West Company to destroy the settlement and to seize his person, I had retained two counsellors at Montreal. I referred him to his son whom I had left at Lac la Pluie. Encamped at 11 P M very harassed in body and mind./12

As he continued his journey to Lake Winnipeg, Robertson met several bands of Indians who gave him further information concerning the colony's destruction and strongly urged him to assist in its restoration.¹³ By the time his brigade reached the mouth of the Winnipeg River, July 12, 1815, his men were quite out of supplies, and Robertson decided to make a visit to Red River to purchase pemmican and to gather additional information on the destruction of the colony.¹⁴

⁹ A.N. McLeod to Proprietors N.W.Co., June 24, 1815, SP, 8,607.

10/ RJSP, 17,338.

11/ Ibid., 17,340.

12/ Ibid., 17,342.

13/ Ibid., 17,344-5.

14/ Ibid., 17,345.

Arriving in Red River on July 14, Robertson found that "a blacksmith shop which was occupied by John McLeod as a store was all that remained of the colony".¹⁵ Nevertheless, McLeod had seven bags of pemmican; and a bottle of rum applied to the supple tongue of the North West trader, Seraphim Lamar, soon gained Robertson a fund of information on the colony's destruction, so that his visit succeeded well in its purpose.¹⁶

Robertson left for Jack River on July 15, to await the arrival of the remainder of his brigade. Reaching that post July 21, he was immediately confronted by a delegation from the thirty-four expelled Colonists who strongly urged him to take them back to Red River. Governor Thomas of York Factory and Chief Factor Bird of the Saskatchewan Department, who were at Jack River at that time, also pressed Robertson to undertake the leadership of the colony. The former North West Company trader was reluctant to do this, at first, as he had urgent business in England to attend to.¹⁷ Under strong pressure from Thomas, Bird and the colonists,¹⁸ however, he finally consented, on August 2, to take charge of the colony until the pleasure of Lord Selkirk was known.¹⁹

Robertson decided to take two officers and twelve men from his Athabaska brigade with him to Red River. Governor Thomas persuaded him

¹⁵ RJSP, 17,345.

¹⁶ Ibid., 17,345-6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 17,354.

¹⁸ The colonists refused to return unless they had an experienced leader; Ibid., 17,348. Bird and Thomas remarked that their connections in this country would never permit them to return to England and that their sole hope lay in the colony: Ibid., 17,357.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17364.

to take Holte and his party of Norwegian axemen, who had been building a supply depot at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg, along with him, as well; and, with these additions to his colony, Robertson left Jack River August 3, 1815.²⁰

On August 19, the colonists arrived at Point Douglas and immediately set themselves busily to work rebuilding the settlement. Logs were squared, buildings started, and, for the first time, the main colony buildings were enclosed with a palisade. On September 5, a party of colonists was sent to Fort Daer to start hunting buffalo to supplement the supply of provisions being delivered to the settlement by the Indians.²¹

The half-breeds who had so vigorously expelled the colonists the previous summer were rather amazed to witness their return. Robertson quickly allayed their fears, however, with presents and promises. A gallon of rum and a twist of tobacco were distributed among the Métis the first day the colonists returned to Red River and Robertson assured them that all the atrocities of the past would be forgotten. The Hudson's Bay Company trader informed the half-breeds that he intended to send some canoes to Athabaska next winter and that he would pay high wages to any of them who would serve with him.²²

Next, Robertson made a systematic attempt to discredit the Nor'-Westers in the eyes of the half-breeds. The useful tool, Seraphim Lamar, was plied with grog and forced to confess, in the presence of the Métis,

²⁰ RJSP, 17,367-8.

²¹ Ibid., 17,383, 17,392.

²² Ibid., 17,381-2.

that it was Dugald Cameron, and not Miles Macdonell, who had formulated the idea of a proclamation prohibiting the running of buffalo on horseback in 1814.²³ The half-breeds were told of the many advantages the colony offered which the North West Company could not provide:

Suppose you had lost an arm or a Leg, would Mr. Cameron have given you a pension or maintained your family for life? No. What was the reason the N W Co. were so anxious to do away with the colony? Because the colonists paid more for the animals you killed and paid you in blankets which obliged them to do the same. Before the colonists came you were paid in rum and clothed in buffalo./24

By the time the North West Company traders Cameron and Macdonell had returned from Fort William September 13, 1815, the half-breeds had become so thoroughly converted to the Hudson's Bay Company cause that when the North West Company called the Métis to their fort to receive their annual present: "the 6 gallons shrub and 4 pounds tobacco excited such discontent that one-half his audience left the room before the harangue was over and came over to my house."²⁵

In one month's time, Colin Robertson had accomplished more to extend the influence of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Red River region than Miles Macdonell had been able to do in four years. The settlement was fast being rebuilt, provisions were being gathered and the half-breeds, for many years the loyal servants of the North West Company, had been won, for the first time, to the support of the Hudson's Bay Company cause. Never had the influence of the Hudson's Bay Company been at such a high peak in Red River; never had Red River encountered such

²³ RJSP, 17,389.

²⁴ Ibid., 17,387-8.

²⁵ Ibid., 17,398.

an energetic Hudson's Bay Company servant as Colin Robertson.^{25a}

II. The Seizure of Fort Gibraltar October 15, 1815

The North West Company traders had not long returned to Red River before they were commencing their former practices of intrigue. On September 22, Robertson's two officers, Pambrun and Nolin, were invited to the North West Company fort where Cameron: "pretended to be intimately acquainted with their relatives and threw out several hints at the severity of [Robertson's] conduct in not allowing them the liberality which gentlemen in their situation had a right to expect".²⁶ On October 4, an Association of the Free Half-breeds of Red River was organized under North West Company auspices. This body announced that it intended to draft a petition to the Government against the "tyrannical measures of Lord Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company".²⁷

A short while later, Robertson heard that the North West trader, Alexander Macdonell, was resorting to violent measures as he advanced up the Assiniboine to his wintering grounds on the Qu'Appelle River. On October 10, the Hudson's Bay Company trader heard that two horses had been stolen by Macdonell's party from the English company's post at Brandon House.²⁸ while, on October 14, word was received that the Hudson's Bay Company's trader at Qu'Appelle, Mr. Mackay, had been threatened by Macdonell with a force of forty to fifty Nor'Westers and ordered to stop building his trading post and to depart from the river.

^{25a} RJSP, 17,381-17,398.

^{26/} Ibid., 17,403.

^{27/} Ibid., 17,413.

^{28/} Ibid., 17,415.

They would give them until that night to prepare for their journey and if they were not off early next morning, he and his countrymen would kill every one of them and sweep the earth with their dead carcasses./29

The next day, when the Hudson's Bay Company trader had not left Qu'Appelle, a field-piece, which had been stolen from the colony the previous spring, was levelled at the English company's post from the open gate of the North West fort across the river. Later that day, Mackay was permitted to retain his establishment by making an insulting promise not to deliver any provisions to the colonists that winter.³⁰

Robertson had decided almost as soon as Cameron had returned to Red River in the fall of 1815, dressed in his regimentals and flying his flags, that: "I will be under the painful necessity of lowering his consequence in order to remove the dread which my men have of him."³¹ News of Macdonell's attacks on Brandon House and Qu'Appelle finally determined Robertson to retaliate.

October 14. Called a council of my officers and told them that I intend to strike a blow at Ft. Gibraltar and to prepare themselves for the event. I showed them Mackay's letter and they informed me that I had only to command them. I have only twenty men here, but if I allow McDonell a footing my men will get dispirited and our new friends will desert us./32

The officers, McLean, Heyden and Bourke, became so enthusiastic for the cause that they seized trader Cameron on October 15, before the actual order to attack had been given. Cameron vociferously complained about the abuse of British justice and British liberty which this action occasioned, but Robertson insisted that Cameron must first restore the guns which he

²⁹ RJSP, Sutherland, Narrative of Events at Qu'Appelle, SP, 1,947-1,948.

^{30/} Ibid., 1930.

^{31/} RJSP, 17,398.

^{32/} Ibid., 17,422.

stole from the colony last spring before he could regain his freedom.³³
 This was readily agreed to; and, later the same day it was decided that the colony officer Alexander McLean and a party of men would be sent to the North West Company fort, ostensibly to remove the ordnance.

By nightfall, however, Robertson had decided on a more ambitious plan. McLean was given secret instructions to take possession of Fort Gibraltar the moment the gates were opened.³⁴ This was accomplished in a masterly manner; and, before Cameron was permitted to regain possession of his fort, October 16, he was forced to promise that he would make no further attempts to induce settlers to desert and that he would order Alexander Macdonell to cease his attacks on the Hudson's Bay Company post at Qu'Appelle.³⁵

The seizure of Fort Gibraltar was certainly a violent and lawless measure. Robertson possessed no powers to enforce the Hudson's Bay Company Charter at that time. His official status was that of a recruiting agent for the English company in Montreal. He held only a temporary appointment as "Chief" of the colony, a commission which had yet to be confirmed by Lord Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company Committee in London, before it would give him power to act as a magistrate. The capture of the fort was a straightforward act of retaliation, the first really illegal one which the Hudson's Bay Company had committed in Red River. The struggle of the fur companies was certainly broadening. Robertson's vigorous action nevertheless did serve its purpose. The

³³ RJSP, 17,422-3.

³⁴ Ibid., 17,423.

³⁵ Ibid., 17,424.

North West Company trader at the forks of Red River was humbled and was not to trouble the colony for several months.

III. Winter at Pembina and Fort Douglas 1815-1816

On November 3, 1815, Governor-in-Chief Semple arrived in Red River with eighty-four new colonists. The settlers were in an impoverished condition, Governor Thomas of York Factory having given them scarcely sufficient supplies at that place to carry them to Jack River.³⁶ Provisions were none too plentiful at Fort Douglas either that winter; hence, on November 7, Robertson decided to send most of the new arrivals to Pembina, under the leadership of John Pritchard, to subsist on the buffalo in that region.³⁷

The winter was a severe one both at Pembina and Fort Douglas. The crop that year had been rather poor. Potatoes, usually the largest harvest, had failed from want of proper hoeing in the summer, while Robertson stated that he was not able to save enough of the grains for seed.³⁸ Although buffalo were plentiful at Pembina that winter, there was considerable competition from the North West Company, and, in addition, the colony suffered from a serious shortage of horses,³⁹ which prevented the settlers from bringing in all the meat which they had killed. The ration of 1 pound meat, 4 ounces fat, $1\frac{1}{2}$ quarts barley and 1 quart wheat was the smallest which the colony had endured since the famine of 1812-1813.⁴⁰

³⁶ RJSP, 17,431.

³⁷ Ibid., 17,433.

³⁸ Ibid., 17,386, 17,446.

³⁹ Ibid., 17,446. Most of the horses had been killed by the Métis the previous spring.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 17,439-40.

Fortunately for the colony, the Nor'Westers had been humbled by Robertson's retaliatory moves of last October and were too frightened to exploit the food shortage by intrigues among the settlers. Thus, for the early part of the winter, peace reigned in Red River.

To begin with, relations between the Hudson's Bay Company officers were harmonious, too. Though Robertson and Semple were of divergent characters, they managed to work quite well together, at first. Semple, being a newcomer to the country, had not formulated many definite opinions of his own, at this time, and was quite willing to rely on his officers for advice. All Robertson's retaliatory actions of October were approved without question by the Governor on his arrival at the settlement in November.⁴¹ Robertson, on the other hand, had great admiration for his chief and the manner in which he bore the petty hardships he was forced to endure.

The Governor is a complete voyageur and bears the little inconveniences of this roving life as if he had passed years in the country. He thinks little of himself but seems extremely anxious for the welfare of those under him./42

Our Chief was not living well but he changed his mode of life so easily and cracked his jokes on the barley steeped in water with such good nature that in place of complaints every man was anxious to please him. When men are sent out to this country by the quality and not the quantity the Company's affairs may be expected to prosper./43

Semple had little occasion to interfere with Robertson's administration of the colony during the early part of the winter; for, on December 17, after he had been in Red River for little over a month, he left on an inspection tour of all Hudson's Bay Company posts in the Red River District

⁴¹ RJSP, 17,445.

⁴² Ibid., 17,438.

⁴³ Ibid., 17,441.

which was to keep him away from Fort Douglas until March 28.⁴⁴

IV. The North West Company Plans the Destruction of the Colony Winter 1815-1816

Almost simultaneously with the departure of the Governor, the North West Company began to regain some of its lost courage and commenced plotting the destruction of the colony. On December 1, 1815, Alexander Macdonell wrote to Duncan Cameron: "The situation of affairs makes it necessary that we should concert measures for our personal safety."⁴⁵ Cameron did not manage to leave Fort Gibraltar for this meeting until February 3, 1816.⁴⁶ When he met with Macdonell at Qu'Appelle later that month, however, definite plans were concerted for the destruction of the colony next spring. The assistance of the North West Company servants and the Métis in all the neighbouring departments was requested. The North West Company's half-breed clerk Cuthbert Grant was ordered to write letters to all Métis leaders in the Red and Saskatchewan river regions. Fraser was sent to arouse the half-breeds at the forks of Red River, Charles Hesse was ordered to accomplish a similar mission at Pembina, while William Shaw went to Churchill River to obtain assistance from that department.⁴⁷ Cameron returned to Fort Gibraltar March 7,⁴⁸ and was soon busy writing a letter urging traders from the Fond du Lac department to send

⁴⁴ RJSP, 17,453.

⁴⁵ Alexander Macdonell to Duncan Cameron, Dec. 1, 1815, SP, 9,056.

⁴⁶ RJSP, 17,475, 17,478.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 17,488; Grant to Fraser, Mar. 13, 1816, SP, 8,896; Pritchard Narrative, SP, 12,326.

⁴⁸ RJSP, 17,487.

assistance as well.⁴⁹ By mid-March plans for the colony's destruction were complete. Cuthbert Grant wrote to the North West Company partner at Sault Ste Marie March 13, 1816:

The half-breeds of Fort des Prairies and English [Churchill] river are all to be here in the spring. It is hoped that we shall come off with flying colours and never see any of them in a colonizing way at Red River. In fact the traders shall pack off with themselves also for having disobeyed our orders of last spring. According to the arrangement all are to remain at the Forks to pass the summer for fear that they should play us the trick of coming back. But they shall receive a warm reception./50

A storm is gathering in the Northward ready to burst upon the rascals who deserve it. Little do they know their situation. Last year was but a joke. The New Nation under their leaders are coming forward to clear their native soil of intruders and assassins./51

V. The Defeat of the North West Company in Red River March 1816

While the half-breeds were in the midst of their preparations for the destruction of the colony, an abortive attempt was made by Governor Semple to recover the guns at Qu'Appelle which had been stolen from the settlement the previous spring. A letter was sent by Governor Semple to Cuthbert Grant, February 2, 1816, demanding the return of the ordnance and threatening "decisive measure for obtaining their recovery"⁵² if this request was not complied with. The Nor'Westers replied to this letter on February 28, stating that they would not return the guns they held unless the cannon seized from the North West Company at Fort Gibraltar last October were surrendered, as well.⁵³ Semple, probably because he did not

⁴⁹ Cameron to J.D. Grant, March, 1816, SP, 8,774.

⁵⁰/ Cuthbert Grant to J.D. Cameron, Mar. 13, 1816, SP, 8,898.

⁵¹/ A. Macdonell to D. Cameron, Mar. 13, 1816, SP, 9,061.

⁵²/ Semple to Grant, Feb. 2, 1816, N W Papers, #6, p.1.

⁵³/ Macdonell to Semple, Feb. 28, 1816, Ibid., p.2.

think his forces were strong enough, did not press the point and withdrew. It was a humiliating defeat for the Hudson's Bay Company.

At Fort Douglas, meanwhile, Robertson anxiously awaited the news of Semple's mission. He had determined as early as February 21, that: "if we have not been successful at Qu'Appelle self preservation says that I must strike a blow here".⁵⁴ On March 5, the news of the Governor's defeat reached Fort Douglas. Robertson was greatly depressed:

This looks bad. Our Chief ought not to have demanded unless he was prepared to take them. The N W Co. will make a fine story of this to keep up the spirits of their men./55

On March 7, 1816, Cameron returned to Fort Gibraltar from Qu'Appelle and, shortly afterwards, began parading in his regimentals and talking in a confident tone. Fraser and four half-breeds from Qu'Appelle arrived in Red River about the same time and Robertson began to sense that trouble was brewing. On March 11 he sent his servant over to the North West fort to play the discontented. The man was promptly offered free passage to Montreal the following night. The servant also reported that Cameron was busy writing letters for Canada, presumably expecting the arrival of the North West Company's winter express.⁵⁶

All these happenings convinced Robertson that a diabolical plan was in contemplation by the Nor'Westers for the destruction of the colony. Governor Semple was informed of these hostile proceedings on March 13.⁵⁷ The impatient Robertson decided, however, that he could not wait for the Governor's reply. "They struck the first blow at Qu'Appelle, they shall

⁵⁴RJSP, 17,479.

⁵⁵/ Ibid., 17,486.

⁵⁶/ Ibid., 17,487-9.

⁵⁷/ Ibid., 17,490.

not be the first at the Forks."⁵⁸

On March 17, while Robertson was visiting the house of the freeman, la Roy, the North West Company servant, Lamar, brought him ^{an}insulting epistle which the Hudson's Bay Company Qu'Appelle River trader, Mackay, had written to the North West Company. The letter angered the Hudson's Bay Company trader greatly, and, as soon as he arrived back at Fort Douglas, Robertson called his officers together and informed them that he intended to attack Fort Gibraltar that very night. With fourteen men he advanced on the Fort at 6:30 P.M. and in five minutes had captured it.⁵⁹

On Cameron's desk lay a half-finished letter to the trader J.D. Grant of Fond du Lac requesting him to send "some pilleurs who are fond of mischief" to take plunder at Red River. The letter confirmed Robertson's suspicions that a plan was in progress to destroy the whole colony and he resolved thereupon to open all the mail in the North West Company's winter express, which was expected almost daily at Fort Gibraltar, to discover their designs. The express was captured on March 19, and the whole sinister plot of the Nor'Westers was laid bare. The letters were retained for the perusal of Governor Semple. The latter thought them so important that he forwarded the entire express to the British government by the first boat to York Factory that spring.⁶⁰

The retaliations of the Hudson's Bay Company continued. On March 15, 1816, Robertson sent a messenger to Fort Daer to warn the people at that place of his suspicions that the North West Company was plotting

⁵⁸ RJSP, 17,491.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 17,491-3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 17,493-7, 17,501.

the destruction of the colony.⁶¹ John Pritchard, the colony leader at Pembina, had already noticed the intrigues of the half-breeds Fraser and Hesse about his place, and when he heard, on March 19 of Robertson's capture of Fort Gibraltar, he decided to effect a similar coup that very day at the North West Company fort at Pembina. The move was equally successful, the Nor'Westers surrendering without resistance.⁶²

The Hudson's Bay Company announced that they would permit the North West Company to carry on their trade at Pembina and Fort Gibraltar under certain restricted conditions. At Pembina, the Nor'Westers must surrender all the arms and ammunition in their store, while, at Fort Gibraltar, the Hudson's Bay Company announced that it was its intention to mount an armed guard within their fort to keep a watchful eye on the Nor'Westers operations.⁶³ The North West Company servants refused to carry on their trade under such humiliating conditions, and by April 10, all the traders except Duncan Cameron, who was still held prisoner by the Hudson's Bay Company, were withdrawn from both these posts and sent to the company's establishments at Winnipeg River and Lake Manitoba.⁶⁴

Thus, by a series of swift and ruthless measures, the North West Company was completely defeated in Red River. The Company's two posts on the river had been seized, the wintering partner held prisoner and the rest of the servants expelled, and evidence of a most incriminating nature captured which revealed the whole of their plans for the ensuing spring. It must be admitted that the methods employed by the Hudson's Bay Company

⁶¹ RJSP, 17,490.

⁶² Pritchard, Narrative, SP, 12,326-7.

⁶³ Ibid., 12,328; RJSP, 17,499, 17,501.

⁶⁴ RJSP, 17,506.

to effect these measures were almost as aggressive as the plot they uncovered and even more ruthless than any action the North West Company had yet taken in Red River that winter. The ejection of the North West Company traders from the Red River Valley may indeed be likened to the North West Company's expulsion of the colonists the previous spring. Both were straightforward acts of retaliation. In a sense the Hudson's Bay Company revenge was even more vindictive than the North West Company retaliations of the spring of 1815, for, while the North West Company in 1815 was avenging a specific previous grievance, the pemmican embargo of 1814, the Hudson's Bay Company was "retaliating" for an anticipated future aggression, the expected expulsion of 1816. The entire action of the Hudson's Bay Company in seizing both Fort Gibraltar and Pembina was based solely on rumour. The North West Company had not as yet captured a single post of the Hudson's Bay Company in Assiniboia which would justify the latter making a similar move. The evidence uncovered by a robbery is not sufficient to justify the robbery itself.

A comparison can also be made between the imprisonment of Duncan Cameron in 1816 and the arrest of Governor Macdonell in 1815. Here, however, the Hudson's Bay Company move was definitely more vindictive than the Nor'Wester's aggression; for, while the North West Company at least gave a pretense of legality to their arrest by having a warrant made out by their Justice of the Peace for the Indian Territories, no such warrant was ever made out by Governor Semple to justify Cameron's capture.⁶⁵ The actions of the Hudson's Bay Company in the spring of 1816 could not

⁶⁵ Berens to Bathurst, Nov. 1, 1817, P.A.C., Colonial Office Despatches Q 146, p.279.

help but provoke the North West Company into thinking that "our annihilation from this river is in contemplation by Robertson".⁶⁶

VI. War Preparations April 1816

Alexander Macdonell, the North West Company trader at Qu'Appelle, was the sole partner of that company in the Red River Department left unscathed by the Hudson's Bay Company aggressions of March 1816. With a mixture of threats and force, the Hudson's Bay Company now tried to induce this ruffian to abandon his plans for an attack on the colony. On March 19, Robertson informed Macdonell that he had seized the North West Company post at the forks of Red River as well as their winter express and that "any molestation given to our people at Qu'Appelle or any other post where the N W are established shall be punished with exemplary severity".⁶⁷ Governor Semple, on April 10, 1816, gave Macdonell a similar warning that "any mischief done by these men so assembled under the protection of the N W Co. shall be considered as done by yourselves, and I shall assuredly avenge it."⁶⁸ Both Robertson and Semple promised, however, that the North West Company provisions would be permitted to pass the forks unmolested, provided that the Hudson's Bay Company brigades were not harmed.

On April 13, Pambrun and ten men were sent from Fort Douglas to reinforce the Hudson's Bay Company brigade at Qu'Appelle with specific instructions to repel or retaliate any aggressive North West Company

⁶⁶ A. Macdonell to Proprietors N.W.Co., Mar. 13, 1816, SP, 9,067.
^{67/} Robertson to Macdonell, Mar. 18, 1816, N W Papers, #6, p.6.
^{68/} Semple to Macdonell, Apr. 10, 1816, Ibid., 12.

moves.⁶⁹ There is some evidence to suggest that this party was given orders to attack the North West Company post at Qu'Appelle.⁷⁰ In any case, the Nor'Westers certainly believed that this was their intention.⁷¹

The threatening attitude of the Hudson's Bay Company did not frighten North West trader Macdonell. Robertson had outmanoeuvred the North West Company by capturing their two Red River posts and seizing their winter express. In view of the fact that the North West Company had not yet attacked any Hudson Bay Company posts in the region, however, Nor'Westers felt that the Hudson Bay people were the aggressors and that they were fully justified in taking effective retaliatory action. The insult to the honour of their "concern" would have to be avenged.

I should be very sorry to deviate from the language of a gentleman, but necessity compells me to inform you that threats and the like will never deter me from doing myself and the concern to which I belong due justice./72

Their seizure of the express shows what their intention is. They intend to seize our pemmican and all the provisions at Red River. Their last proceeding has effectively shut the door against any passive measure I hope that everyone who bears the name of a Nor'Wester will as far as circumstances permit take ample satisfaction at Red River./73

⁶⁹ Semple to [Pambrun], Apr. 12, 1816, Pambrun Narrative, SP, 19, 301.

⁷⁰ "A party of vetrans are lately gone to Qu'Appelle to take Macdonell, if possible. But I fear they will be disappointed. They are under the command of Mr. Lofty's ole of perfection M. Pambraly [Pambrun]": Holte to Pritchard, Apr. 14, 1816, N W Papers, #118.

⁷¹ "Pambrun arrived with a select body of armed men. Their hostile intentions toward us were undisguised," A.G. Macdonell A Narrative of Transactions in the Red River Country from the Commencement of the Operations of the Earl of Selkirk till the summer of 1816 (London, 1819), 59. Hereafter Macdonell Narrative.

⁷² Macdonell to Semple, Mar. 28, 1816, N W Papers, #8.

⁷³ John Macdonell to J.D. Cameron, Mar. 31, 1816, N W Papers, #57.

Macdonell wrote to the North West Company traders at Swan River and Cumberland House informing them of the Hudson's Bay Company aggressions. These people relayed the news to Winnipeg River, Fort des Prairies and the posts on the Upper Saskatchewan and Churchill rivers. By mid-April plans for the attack on the colony were complete. Half-breeds from Cumberland House, Fort des Prairies and the Upper Saskatchewan were to be despatched to Qu'Appelle by the beginning of May, whence, joined by traders and Métis of that post they would proceed down the Assiniboine River and attack the colony from the west. The canoes from the Swan, Saskatchewan, Churchill and Athabaska Rivers, proceeding out by Saskatchewan River, would rendezvous at Winnipeg River, and, advancing up the Red, attack the colony from the north.⁷⁴

Threatening gestures were continued by the Hudson's Bay Company, as well, throughout this period. On March 19, 1816, word was received at Fort Douglas from Lesser Slave Lake of the robbery of the Hudson's Bay Company's Athabaska expedition at Peace River.⁷⁵ Governor Semple, one month later, ordered John Pritchard at Pembina to bring down all doors windows and movable parts of the North West Company's post at Pembina on the grounds that: "They have seized our goods in Peace River and we must try to have a farthing to balance the account."⁷⁶

At the same time, work was rapidly proceeding at Fort Douglas on

⁷⁴ Alexander Macdonell to John Macdonell Mar. 23, 1816, N W Papers, #33; J.D. Campbell to - , April 6, 1816, Coltman Report, R R Papers, 207; Pambrun, Narrative, SP, 13,302; John Macdonell to J.D. Cameron, Mar. 31, 1816, N W Papers, #57; Heurter Narrative, SP, 17,273.

⁷⁵ RJSP, 17,497.

⁷⁶ Semple to Pritchard, April 14, 1816, N W Papers, #37.

the construction of an armed schooner, which, according to her newly appointed commander, Lieutenant Holte, was "to be fitted out man-of-war style and moored at the bottom of the Red River to intercept the N W canoes."⁷⁷ The proud commander boasted that "I will be in my proper glory and will give the N W scoundrels a dabbing if I can".⁷⁸

It was evident that both sides were preparing for war. To begin with, most of the advantages lay with the Hudson's Bay Company. Though their numbers were smaller than those of the Nor'Westers,⁷⁹ the Hudson's Bay people had good fortification to defend and much superior ordnance to hold it with.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the colony possessed a vigorous leader in Colin Robertson, who was certainly the equal of any of the North West Company opposition. Governor Semple, Robertson's immediate chief, had

⁷⁷ Holte to Pritchard, April 14, 1816, N W Papers #118. The vessel named the Cuchillon had a 35 ft keel and 11 ft beam. It was constructed originally as a sail boat at Fort Daer in the winter of 1813-1814. It was heightened with sideboards at Norway House in the summer of 1815 and fitted out with a deck and a piece of artillery in the Seine River opposite Fort Douglas during the winter of 1815-1816. This work was completed June 4, 1816. Miles Macdonell to Selkirk, July 25, 1814, SP, 1187; Sheriff Alexander Macdonell to Selkirk, Sep. 19, 1815, SP, 1698; Sheriff Alexander Macdonell's Journal, SP, 17,974, 18,045, 18,027, 18,037.

⁷⁸/ Holte to Pritchard, Apr. 14, 1816, N W Papers, #118.

⁷⁹/ There were 140 settlers in Fort Douglas (Sheriff Macdonell Journal, SP, 18,068), but at least half of these would be women and children. The N.W.Co. had 120 armed men: Pambrun Narrative, SP, 12,305.

⁸⁰/ The N.W.Co. had 2 swivels at Qu'Appelle and 2 brass field pieces at Winnipeg River. This would leave the colony with eight pieces of ordnance since a total of 12 pieces had been shipped to Red River 1811-1813. Viz: 2 swivels 1811, 2 brass field pieces and 8 smaller pieces of ordnance ordered in 1812 from the British Government for the Colonist's protection and shipped in 1813: Heurter Narrative, SP, 12,270; Pambrun Narrative, SP, 12,303; Macdonell to Selkirk, July 25, 1811, MLB, cxc; Selkirk to Auld, June 18, 1812, SP, 395; Selkirk to Macdonell, June 12, 1813, SP, 667-8.

displayed a certain amount of vacillation in his own actions during the winter at Qu'Appelle. As yet, however, he had accepted Robertson's advice without question and had entirely approved of all actions which the latter had taken.

VII. The Attack on the Colony Begins - The Quarrel Between Robertson and Semple April-June 1816

During the months of April to June, these advantages which the Hudson's Bay Company possessed were rapidly depleted, as the colony's two leaders, Governor Semple and Colin Robertson, began to quarrel over the proper mode of defending the settlement. Semple, on his return to Fort Douglas, March 28, had approved of all Robertson's actions during that winter, including the aggressions of March 17-19. From this time onward, however, the views of these two men began to differ.

Towards the end of April, Robertson came to the conclusion that, for the safety of the colony, Fort Gibraltar should be dismantled and all the settlers placed inside Fort Douglas. The colonists, he felt, should not be given lots of land this year but should live within the fort, cultivating one large field outside it which they would all hold in common. Robertson also thought that either he or the Governor should go to Grand Rapids, at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River, to rescue the Hudson's Bay Company clerks captured in Athabaska that winter; that Duncan Cameron should be shipped immediately to Hudson Bay to prevent his recapture and that a generous policy should be adopted towards the half-breeds to keep them loyal to the Hudson's Bay Company. In this latter regard, he especially recommended that the Métis should be employed hauling goods to

to the colony from York Factory throughout the summer.⁸¹

Governor Semple had objections to all of these policies. The colonists expected to be given their land that spring and would never consent to Robertson's idea of a communal holding. The plan to capture the North West canoes was too risky; besides, not enough people could be spared to carry it out. The suggestions for the employment of the half-breeds were too extravagant while the necessity of destroying the North West fort and sending Cameron to the Bay were not seen.⁸²

Unable to gain his points by argument, Robertson next tried to win them by intrigue. On May 1, 1816, the settlers were summoned to Robertson's headquarters at Fort Gibraltar and the advantages of the communal farm were explained to them. All but one of the settlers agreed to adopt Robertson's plan. Shortly afterwards, however, one of the settlers told the Governor what Robertson had been saying and the colony's second in command was given a severe reprimand:

Robertson, Cameron could not have done more to ruin the colony than you have done this morning. Explain yourself, Sir. You have been exciting fears in the minds of the settlers/⁸³

This veiled accusation of treason was a deep affront to the fiery Scotsman's pride. He decided: "I cannot remain in the colony after this."⁸⁴ During the next several days, Robertson strongly urged the Governor to permit him to depart and attend to the Company's affairs in Athabaska; taking Cameron with him to be sent prisoner to Hudson Bay. On March 15,

⁸¹ RJSP, 17,512.

⁸² Ibid., 17,513-14.

⁸³ Ibid., 17,516.

⁸⁴ Loc.cit.

the Governor finally agreed to this.

The plan was upset, however, the following day, when news arrived from Brandon House that Alexander Macdonell, with fifty-nine North West Company servants and half-breeds, had attacked the Hudson's Bay Company's twenty-two man brigade on May 12, while they were halted at a rapid in the Assiniboine River, effecting repairs to their boats. All but two of the men had been released, but twenty-two packs of furs, 600 bags pemmican and 23 stand of muskets had been captured.⁸⁵ It was a crushing defeat for the Hudson's Bay Company, for both the colony and the Athabaska brigades were depending on that pemmican for their summer's provision. Fifty-one bags of dried meat shipped from Brandon House to Fort Douglas May 17 was the sole pemmican supply which the colony was to receive that spring.⁸⁶

With the news that an attack on the colony was impending, Robertson agreed to stay at the settlement and to assist in its defence. The Hudson's Bay Company trader correctly surmised that the North West Company intended to use the Qu'Appelle River pemmican as a bargaining weapon to secure Cameron's release and the return of Fort Gibraltar. Believing that "every act of aggression should be followed up by some energetic step on our part,"⁸⁷ Robertson sought to foil this North West Company plot by despatching Cameron immediately to Hudson Bay. The Governor agreed to this plan, and May 18 the North West trader was sent to the Bay in the custody of John McLeod.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Pambrun Narrative, SP, 12,303; RJSP, 17,525.

⁸⁶/ RJSP, 17,525.

⁸⁷/ Loc. cit.

⁸⁸/ Ibid., 17,526.

Another retaliatory move which Robertson suggested, at this time, was the despatch of a party of armed men to recapture the seized pemmican. On May 25, Semple was persuaded to adopt this idea and an expedition was prepared. Later that day, however, the Governor changed his mind and decided to postpone the raid until more definite news was received regarding the actual size of the North West Company force.⁸⁹

Robertson's stay at Fort Gibraltar was indeed a severe trial on his naturally impatient temper. Holte and Rodgers, two lazy, ~~drunken~~ officers whom Semple had forced upon him, were a continual source of annoyance to the Scottish trader. ~~Their~~ failure to attend to their watch-keeping duties greatly annoyed punctilious and military-minded Robertson, while their constant complaints to the Governor about the way Robertson was ingratiating himself towards the loathsome half-breeds, embarrassed Robertson in his attempts to keep ~~the~~ Metis loyal to the Hudson's Bay Company.⁹⁰

Robertson's storekeeper, Mr. Bourke, was another point of irritation for him. He was always disobeying orders and persisted in giving potatoes from the North West Company store at Fort Gibraltar to colonists from Fort Douglas who had no right to obtain them.⁹¹ Robertson finally sent the storekeeper back to Fort Douglas for speaking disrespectfully of his chief.⁹²

⁸⁹ RJSP, 17,534-5.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 17,519-21.

⁹¹ Ibid., 17,528.

⁹² Ibid., 17,531.

While the colony was in imminent danger of attack, the Governor, instead of adopting measures which Robertson felt necessary for the settlements immediate defence, was continually plaguing the Hudson's Bay Company trader with trifling communications on how the sturgeon ought to be divided amongst the two forts, or whether or not Mrs. McLean should receive the cow which she had been promised at Jack River last summer.⁹³ Robertson was thoroughly disgusted. "The Governor is being serious about trifles and is trifling with what is serious."⁹⁴

On June 4, Robertson resolved that he would leave the colony. The Hudson's Bay Company trader felt that his presence was only encouraging divisions amongst the settlers and that once he had departed the colonists would rally behind the Governor.⁹⁵ On June 10, John Bourke, the storekeeper, had an argument with Robertson, in the presence of Governor Semple, over the timing of the destruction of Fort Gibraltar, in which Robertson was assaulted by the storekeeper at gunpoint. This proved to be the final breaking point.⁹⁶ The Governor refused to consent to Robertson's demand that Bourke be summarily dismissed from the Company service for this vicious act and Robertson, in anger, left the colony the following day. His final word of advice to Semple was that he should dismantle Fort Gibraltar and unite the two forts into one position at Point Douglas, a plan which the Governor was to adopt shortly afterwards. Encamped

⁹³ RJSP, 17,532, 17,540.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 17,532.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 17,541.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 17,543.

that night on the shore of Lake Winnipeg, Robertson repented his hasty action in leaving Fort Douglas and offered to return on June 12. The Governor replied that his services were not required, and the dejected trader slowly began making his way to York Factory with the intention of proceeding thence to England.⁹⁷

The departure of Robertson was a bitter blow to the colony. His methods were rough, but he was the only Hudson's Bay Company officer in Red River at that time who understood the character of the Nor'Westers and who realized that force was the only weapon which they could be made to understand and respect. Left to his own resources, he might well have been able to win a complete victory over the North West Company in Red River.

Robertson had his defects. His inability to countenance his advice being flouted was a serious weakness in his character which made him a very difficult person to deal with. Robertson's greatest mistake, though, was the way in which he over-estimated the abilities of Governor Semple. Through private conversations with the Governor, Robertson felt certain that Semple was a brave personage, at heart, and that in the hour of crisis, his better qualities would demonstrate themselves and would save the colony. The Hudson's Bay Company trader had seriously misjudged his chief. By the time Robertson had left Red River, however, the situation had deteriorated so seriously that it is doubtful whether even he, with all his experience and cunning, could have saved the colony.

⁹⁷ RJSP, 17,544-7.

VIII. The Massacre of June 19, 1816

While Robertson and Semple quarrelled, Alexander Macdonell and Cuthbert Grant with their band of North West Company servants and half-breed allies were slowly mounting forces for their attack on the forks of Red River. Shortly after the capture of the Qu'Appelle brigade the Nor'Westers were joined by Michael Bourassa and a party of half-breeds from the Saskatchewan. As they moved down the Assiniboine, Macdonell tried to incite Indians to join his party as well:

I address you with bashfulness for not having any tobacco to present to you. It is the English people who are the cause of it, you know who I mean, those who make believe that they are cultivating the land for the good of the Indians. Do not believe them. They are spoiling the lands that belong to you and your relatives the Metis. They are driving away the buffalo and will render the Indians poor and miserable. But the North West Company will drive away the settlers. If the settlers resist the ground shall be drenched with blood. Though we do not need the assistance of the Indians we will be very pleased if some of your young men would join us./98

Only six Indians were persuaded to join the Nor'Westers by this speech. By the time they reached the Souris River, however, the brigade mounted some 126 men.⁹⁹

On June 1, thirty-six men left the half-breed camp at the mouth of the Souris River and crossed the Assiniboine to pillage the Hudson's Bay Company post at Brandon House. It is doubtful that this deed was done under the direct orders of Macdonell.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, much

⁹⁸ Pambrun Narrative, SP, 12,304.

⁹⁹/ Ibid., 12,305.

¹⁰⁰/ "The half-breeds appear to have come completely on their own. Sandy [Macdonell] appears to be a mere cypher among them": Fidler to Semple, June, 1816, SP, 2,315.

valuable property was stolen.¹⁰¹

By the time the group reached Portage on June 16, the party appears to have dwindled to 110 men. Here the group divided, seventy, mostly half-breeds, under the leadership of Cuthbert Grant, were given two carts with twenty bags of pemmican and instructed to proceed on horseback to Frog Plain, to reconnoitre the situation and, if it appeared favourable, to start blockading the colony. The forty remaining Nor'Westers encamped at Portage to await the result of this move.¹⁰²

Late in the afternoon of June 19, the North West Company party arrived at the present Omand's Creek, four miles from the mouth of the Assiniboine River, and proceeded to make a semi-circular sweep North-eastward to Frog Plain, a point four miles north of the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. To begin with, the North West Company party kept as closely as they could to the edge of the creek in an endeavour to avoid detection from Fort Douglas.¹⁰³

At about 6:00 P.M. the Nor'Westers were sighted from the watch-

¹⁰¹ A.G. Macdonell, Narrative, 68; Pambrun Narrative, SP, 12,305; Fidler to Semple, June 1816, SP, 2,315.

^{102/} The evidence that a blockade and not an immediate attack was intended by the North West Company is quite definite from the evidence at hand. See: Depositions of Fraser and Soucisse, Coltman Report, R.R.Papers, 184; Pambrun Narratives, SP, 12,306; Bourke's deposition of conversation between A.N.McLeod and A.Macdonell, Halkett, Statement respecting the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement on the Red River (London, 1817), liv. The 20 bags pemmican were probably being carried as an alibi. If detected, they could claim that they were intending to deliver them to Winnipeg River.

^{103/} S.H. Wilcocks, Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Territories of North America (Montreal 1818), 52. John Bourke's deposition cited in A.Amos, Report of the Trials in the Courts of Canada Relative to the Destruction of the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement on the Red River (London, 1820), 291. (Hereafter Amos, Trials).

tower at the colony fort and it appeared from their line of march that they were heading directly towards the settlers' houses which lay immediately to the southward of Frog Plain. Governor Semple could not judge his opponents numbers, precisely, but he estimated them to be in the neighbourhood of twenty men. Accordingly, he asked for twenty volunteers from the settlement to follow him into the field to see what these people meant by their hostile motions.¹⁰⁴ Five officers and about twenty-six men followed the Governor out of the fort along the road towards the settlers' houses.

When he had advanced about three-quarters of a mile from the fort, the Governor perceived that the North West party was much larger than he had originally estimated. He called a halt and sent back John Bourke to bring up a field-piece and some reinforcements. When these failed to appear; after a short wait, the Governor ordered a cautious advance to be made.

The settlers were approaching a clump of oak trees about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Fort Douglas when the North West party, some of whom were already encamped at Frog Plain, caught sight of this armed band marching towards them. The Nor'Westers quickly mounted their horses and rode back to meet the colonists. Arriving at the clump of oak trees, the North West party took up a semi-circular formation, blocking the colonist's retreat to Fort Douglas.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Pritchard, Narrative, SP, 12,331; Heyden Deposition, SP, 13,824; Bourke Deposition, Halkett Statement, xlix.

¹⁰⁵ Pritchard Narrative, SP, 12,332; Heyden Deposition, SP, 13,825.

A half-breed named Bouché rode up to the Governor and demanded what he wanted.

----- What do you want yourself, the Governor retorted.

----- We want our fort, said Bouché.

----- Then go to your fort, Semple suggested, rather impatiently.

----- But you have destroyed our fort, the half-breed angrily replied.

The Governor enraged at this last remark seized the bridle of Bouché's horse shouting: "Scoundrel, dare you tell me so". Bouché slipped from his saddle and started to run towards the North West line.¹⁰⁶ Thereupon firing broke out almost simultaneously on both sides.¹⁰⁷

The unprotected settlers on foot were no match for the mounted Nor'Westers who could use their horses as shields. On one of the first volleys, the Governor fell, wounded, and a large body of the settlers began to cluster round him, making themselves an excellent target for the Nor'Westers bullets. A large group of colonists were killed in this manner and the remainder, realizing that the contest was unequal, started to race towards the river bank. The North West party took after them on horseback, and running them like buffalo, murdered many more. Only nine colonists managed to escape from this bloody affray. Governor Semple, five of his officers and fifteen men lay slaughtered among the oak trees, after the fighting was over; one man, John Pritchard, was made prisoner. One half-breed killed and one wounded were the sole

¹⁰⁶ Pritchard Narrative, SP, 12,332, Heyden Deposition, SP, 13,825.

¹⁰⁷ Evidence as to who fired the first shot is contradictory. It is probable that the settlers fired first to prevent Bouché escaping. Coltman Report, R R Papers, 188.

casualties which the colonists were able to inflict upon their superior¹⁰⁸ adversaries. After the surviving colonists had fled, the bodies of their comrades in the field were hideously mutilated by the half-breeds.¹⁰⁹

Fritchard, in return for having his life spared, was ordered by Cuthbert Grant to go to Fort Douglas that very night to compel the rest of the settlers to surrender. An immediate attack was threatened if the settlers failed to comply with this demand.¹¹⁰ Sheriff Macdonell, who had been left in charge of Fort Douglas when Semple and his party went out to meet the Nor'Westers, wished, at first, to attempt to withstand the siege. The following day, however, Fritchard began spreading such ghastly tales about the Massacre among the surviving colonists that the settlers began to lose courage. Later that same day, a petition was presented to the Sheriff, signed by all the Company officers, requesting that the fort be surrendered. Macdonell, considering that there were only five days provisions left, decided that capitulation would perhaps be the wisest course to take.¹¹¹

Terms were arranged whereby the settlers were permitted to depart with their personal effects and a guarantee of safe passage in return for the surrender of Fort Douglas and all Hudson's Bay Company property within it. Inventories were made on June 21, and, the following day, 120 colonists, for the second time with a year, began their weary pil-

¹⁰⁸ Fritchard Narrative, SP, 12,333-4; Heyden Deposition, SP, 13,826-7; Sheriff Macdonell Journal, SP, 18,068.

¹⁰⁹ Sheriff Macdonell Journal, SP, 18,053.

¹¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 18,054.

grimage to the northern end of Lake Winnipeg.¹¹²

IX. The Attack on the Colony Planned from Fort William June 1816

While the partners of the North West Company in the interior were evolving their diabolical scheme for the destruction of the colony during the winter of 1815-1816, the Agents of the Company at Montreal were planning a similar move. In March, 1816, William McGillivray, principal director of the North West Company received word of Robertson's attack on Fort Gibraltar in October, 1815.¹¹³ In May, 1816, anticipating further trouble in the interior, McGillivray sent A.N. McLeod, the North West Company's Justice of the Peace for the Indian Territories to Fort William, along with three other Company officers, five clerks, two officers on leave from the Canadian militia and two recently discharged soldiers from the de Meuron mercenary regiment.¹¹⁴

On his arrival at Fort William, May 31, 1816, Judge McLeod heard of the capture of Fort Gibraltar the previous March. He immediately wrote a letter to the North West Company traders at Fond du Lac ordering them to gather up a band of fifteen to one hundred Indians from their department and to advance down the Red River from the southward. They were to meet McLeod and his party from the north at the forks of Red River about June 17. Rewards were promised for all who came.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Sheriff Macdonell Journal, SP, 18,055.

¹¹³/ McGillivray testimony, Amos, Trials, 303-4.

¹¹⁴/ Heurter Narrative, SP, 12,268.

¹¹⁵/ McLeod, Harvey & McLaughlin to Grant, Morrison and Roussin, June 3, 1816, SP, 8,613.

On June 4, McLeod left Fort William with about fifty men to carry out this plan. At Rainy Lake, the North West Company Agent made an unsuccessful attempt to induce some Indians to accompany his party. On June 18, the brigade reached the mouth of the Winnipeg River, where they heard of the winterers' plans for an attack on the colony. McLeod decided that the plans of the winterers and the Montrealers should be consolidated and the following day he moved his brigade to Netley Creek to await the arrival of the canoes from the north.¹¹⁶

McLeod waited at the creek from June 19 to June 23. No brigades appeared to join him, however, and on that later date he decided to push on to the Forks. The brigade had scarcely started to advance up the river on the morning of June 23 when they encountered the departing colonists. The settlers were forced to encamp at Netley Creek while McLeod, in his capacity as Justice of the Peace for the Indian Territories, searched their baggage for evidence concerning the events of the previous winter. Five settlers were arrested and sent prisoner to Fort William, but the remainder of the colonists were permitted to continue their journey to Jack River on June 24.¹¹⁷

After the colonists had departed the North West party proceeded to Fort Douglas where they were joined, shortly afterwards, by the rest of the brigades from the Saskatchewan, Churchill and Athabaska districts. There was much rejoicing in the North West Camp as presents brought from

¹¹⁶ Heurter Narrative, SP, 12, 269-71.

¹¹⁷ Heurter Narrative, SP, 12, 272; Sheriff Macdonell Journal, SP, 18, 056-8. Bourke, Pritchard, McLean, Heyden and Corcorran were the five prisoners taken.

Fort William by McLeod were distributed among the half-breeds, and the Hudson's Bay Company's armed schooner was stripped of its fittings and set on fire.¹¹⁸ The North West Company had again emerged the victor in Red River after one of the most violent contests that region was ever to witness.

X. Conclusion

Thus the attempt by Governor Semple and Colin Robertson to re-establish the Hudson's Bay Company colony in Red River, which had begun so promisingly in the fall of 1815, was, in the end, a failure. For the second time in two years, Lord Selkirk's colonists were forced to withdraw to the Northern end of Lake Winnipeg.

The colony had succeeded well in the fall mainly because of the energetic measures of Colin Robertson, whose careful mixture of intrigue and retaliation struck enough fear into the minds of the North West traders and their half-breed allies to cause them to desist from their aggressive activities for a time. The ancient North West spirit could not be held in check for very long, however; by February, 1816,^{118a} the Nor'Westers had recovered enough of their lost courage to commence plotting the colony's destruction for a second time.

At this point, Robertson aggravated the situation by carrying out a series of aggressions which even the Nor'Westers, despite their own cruel traditions of lawless violence, considered to be in excess of the reasonable limits of retaliation. The Hudson's Bay Company traders

¹¹⁸ Heurter Narrative, SP, 12,273, 12,275, 12,278.

^{118a}/ In February, the various North West Company posts began communicating with each other by means of their winter express. It was therefore a natural time for them to commence plotting the colony's destruction.

seizure of the two North West Company forts on the Red River, the imprisonment of Duncan Cameron, the expulsion of the rest of the North West Company traders and the opening of the Nor'Wester's winter express were acts of vengeance committed without any legal warrant; measures which could be justified only by the anticipated crimes which they uncovered and not by any acts of aggression which the Nor'Westers had already committed. Robertson's moves were too great an insult to the North West Company's honour to be permitted to pass unchallenged. Instead of frightening the North West Company into submission, the Hudson's Bay Company's aggressions only encouraged their rivals to commit even greater deeds of violence. Robertson's policy of revenging North West Company's acts of violence at a different place from where the Nor'Westers had attacked the Hudson's Bay people only caused the **conflict** to spread into more distant areas.

Yet Robertson was correct in his fundamental observation that force was the only weapon which the Nor'Westers understood and respected, and if his policy of retaliation had been carried out consistently throughout this period, it might have succeeded in driving the North West Company out of the country. Governor Semple's vacillatory actions, however, counteracted much of the good work which Robertson had done to humble the Nor'Westers in the fall of 1815. The failure of the Governor to retaliate either the North West Company's refusal to surrender the colony's guns, in February, or the North West attack on the Hudson's Bay Company's Qu'Appelle River brigade, in May, encouraged the Nor'Westers to think that the Hudson's Bay Company was in a weakened position and

strengthened their resolve to destroy the settlement. The loss of the Qu'Appelle River pemmican occasioned by this last aggression was a particularly disastrous blow to the colony, for it deprived them of provisions which were absolutely necessary if it were to withstand a North West Company siege.

In their determination to have revenge on Robertson, the Nor'Westers committed one of the greatest acts of atrocity which the Red River region was ever to witness, the massacre of twenty-one of its settlers. Although the destruction of the colony was planned, the massacre was not, and it could have been avoided. The events at Seven Oaks resulted from acts of rashness on the part of both Companies: rashness of the Governor in proceeding on foot from a relatively safe fortress to meet a superior number of Nor'Westers on horseback; rashness on the part of the Nor'Wester's half-breed allies whose savage instincts temporarily overwhelmed them.

The North West Company had, emerged victorious from its struggle with its Hudson Bay rival for the second time in two years. In the summer of 1816, the Nor'Westers were, indeed, at the apex of their power: the colonists had been expelled from Red River; the Hudson's Bay Company's Athabaskan venture had been thwarted; and the two leaders who had come out to re-establish the Hudson's Bay Company's fortunes in 1815 both had been eliminated; one of them killed by a half-breed bullet, the other headed for England in disgust over his quarrels with his chief.

As with the first expulsion of the colonists in 1815, however, the North West Company triumph was not a complete one. There were still a

few Hudson's Bay Company traders left in Western Canada who could be expected to show continued resistance to the North West Company. Lord Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company Committee in London were still in a strong position and had yet to make their actions felt. The British and Canadian governments were two further bodies who had yet to exert their influence in the struggle of the fur companies. The murder of twenty-one British subjects was a matter of much more serious consequence than the robbery of a few packs of pemmican or the burning of some settler's houses and could be expected to be treated as such by all the above bodies.

With Semple killed, Robertson in retreat from the country, the colony expelled and the Athabaskan Brigade destroyed, the Hudson's Bay Company's organization in western Canada would certainly appear to have been routed. Any efforts which were going to be made to restore that Company's lost fortune would certainly now have to be made by persons and forces dwelling outside of that region.

CHAPTER V

THE COLTMAN PEACE MISSION

The Earl of Selkirk's settlement on the Red River is in imminent danger of being destroyed through the machinations of certain persons who are endeavouring by malicious representations to inflame the minds of the Indians against the colonists . . . I humbly conceive that the only method of obviating the danger is by the presence of military force, and as the Hudson's Bay Company have not the means of affording this protection I trust that a small party of the force now in Canada may be detached to Red River./1 [Berens to Bathurst]

You will make the necessary inquiries as to the grounds of the fears expressed [in the above letter] and, in the event of your considering them well-founded, will furnish such protection as can be afforded without detriment to His Majesty's forces. You will take especial care, whatever measures you may adopt for this purpose, to abstain from any action expressing any opinion which may tend to effect the questions in dispute between the Hudson's Bay and North West companies, the sole object of this present instruction, being to secure the lives and property of His Majesty's subjects on the Red River from the predatory attacks of the Indian nations in the neighbourhood./2 [Bathurst to Drummond]

These were the first communications between the chief officers of three bodies which were to exert a considerable influence on the struggle of the fur companies in the Red River region during 1816 and 1817. Joseph Berens, London Governor and chairman of the Hudson's Bay Committee, Lord Bathurst, Colonial Secretary in the British government, and Sir Gordon Drummond, Governor-in-Chief of Canada, were the respective spokesmen of three different organization which each held varying degrees of interest in Red River affairs. The Hudson's Bay Company Committee, which had granted Assiniboia to Lord Selkirk, issued the commissions of

¹ Berens to Bathurst, Feb. 18, 1815, RR Papers, 1.
² Bathurst to Drummond, Mar. 18, 1815, Ibid.,

Governors Macdonell and Semple and was responsible under its charter for the administration of justice within its land grant, undoubtedly had the greatest concern for the Red River settlement, although the Committee's location in London, so far away from the scene of events in North America, tended to prevent it from doing much constructive work for the colony. The Canadian Government also had legal jurisdiction over Red River through its administration of the Canada Jurisdiction Act of 1803, a statute which provided for the trial in Canada of criminals indicted for offences occurring in any part of North America not belonging to another sovereign state. This government also possessed the advantage of being in closer proximity to Assiniboia than the Hudson's Bay Company Committee and therefore able to exert an influence over affairs in that region much more quickly. The British Government held, theoretically at least, ultimate jurisdiction over both the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian government, being the authority which had granted both the Hudson's Bay Company charter of 1670 and the Canadian Constitution of 1790.

As the struggle in Red River became more violent, and the robbery of pemmican was replaced by the murder of settlers, the concern of all three of these groups for Red River affairs heightened. Moreover, as the strength of one of the groups inside the region, the Hudson's Bay Company, steadily declined, the attitude which these outside bodies took became increasingly important. To a large extent, it would be their views which would decide the ultimate outcome of the struggle of the fur companies in Red River.

I. The Influence of the North West Company over the Governments of Britain and Canada 1815

Unfortunately for the fate of the colony, divergencies quickly became apparent in the views of the Hudson's Bay Company Committee and the British and Canadian governments which were soon to result in a struggle between them, almost as vigorous as the battle which was going on inside Red River itself. From the letters quoted at the opening of this chapter, it can be seen that the Hudson's Bay Company Committee regarded the North West Company as an aggressor which should be punished for the way in which it had incited the Indians, while the British government was interested mainly in preserving the lives of the settlers in Red River and would take no part in the fur traders' quarrels. The affairs of a few hundred colonists dwelling in the wilderness of western Canada were no doubt of little concern to a government which had dependencies scattered all over the globe. The seeming indifference of the British government may also have been caused by a natural reluctance of governments to become involved in a troublesome situation which, if left alone, might solve itself. However, since the North West Company with its long tradition of lawless violence stood to gain the most from the non-interference of the government, there are some grounds for suspecting that the North West Company was exerting considerable influence over the British government through its London agents. Subsequent events were indeed to prove this to be the case.

As the months passed, it became evident that the Canadian govern-

ment was ^{also} strongly under the influence of the North West Company. Governor Drummond, on receipt of the Colonial Secretary's despatch requesting him to consider sending assistance to Red River, wrote to William McGillivray, principal Agent for the North West Company in Montreal, June 14, 1815, advising him of the accusations which had been made against his firm and impl~~y~~^ying that he should make an attempt to clear his organization of suspicion.

I must not conceal from you that some of the servants of the North West Company are suspected of being concerned in this diabolical act. Sir Gordon Drummond, however, feels that he cannot more strongly evince the respect which he entertains for that most respectable body and his confidence in their perfect candour and liberality of sentiment than by applying himself direct to those for the information which they assuredly possess the best means of affording./3

North West Company Agent McGillivray obligingly replied to this request June 24, 1815, denying "in the most solemn manner the allegations whereon this shameful accusation is founded".⁴ The North West Company had provided settlers with food when they were starving in 1813, and, in return, Governor Macdonell had robbed the Nor'Westers of their provisions the following year. The Hudson's Bay Company Governor, Macdonell, and not the North West Company, was the real villain who should be watched.

Governor Drummond conveyed this information to the British government in his despatch of August 16, 1815, concluding:

³ Harvey to McGillivray, June 14, 1815, Colonial Office Records Q Series, 134, II, 380. (Hereafter: Q)

⁴/ McGillivray to Harvey, June 24, 1815, R R Papers, 8-9.

The affording of military protection to Earl Selkirk's settlement is decidedly impractical. The expense would be enormous and would involve us in an Indian war for objects foreign to the British government. I cannot but feel that the most mischievous consequences are likely to arise from the conduct of the individual whom Lord Selkirk has sent out as Agent, and from whose intercourse with the persons in the service of the North West Company it is vain to look for the spirit of moderation and conciliation, which is so desirable among persons situated as these settlers are, cut off from the whole civilized world./5

Thus was the first attempt of the Hudson's Bay Company to procure assistance from the British government for its beleaguered colony defeated by the intrigues of the North West Company.

When the Hudson's Bay Company heard that their colony had been actually expelled from Red River, in December, 1815, they again complained to the Colonial Secretary and asked that troops and armaments be sent to the settlers' assistance. The Under-secretary of State for Colonies, Henry Goulburn, replied that since the settlement had been already dispersed, the sending of guns would serve no purpose, but that he would request the Governor of Canada to recover those which had been seized by the North West Company for the public service.⁶ The instructions were sent to the Canadian Governor, but the latter made no attempt to recover the stolen ordnance.

II. Lord Selkirk's Mission to Canada - His Attempt to Secure Government Intervention Winter 1815-1816

It was now obvious that neither the British nor the Canadian governments were going to assist the Hudson's Bay Company to recover its colony.

⁵ Drummond to Bathurst, August 16, 1815, RR Papers, 5.
⁶ Goulburn to Berens, Dec. 14, 1815, SP, 1,815.

Any efforts to restore the Hudson's Bay Company's lost fortunes would have to be made by the company itself. In the fall of 1815 the Committee sent Lord Selkirk to Canada to make an effort to recoup the company's losses.

Arriving in New York in October, 1815, Lord Selkirk was greeted with the sad news of the first destruction of his colony that summer. His Lordship went immediately to Montreal and wrote to Governor Drummond, asking that a military expedition be sent to Red River next spring to restore law and order to the territory. The request was refused, the government pleading the habitual excuse that troops could not be spared. In December, however, the Governor told Lord Selkirk that he could take "any officer with five or six soldiers who might be found ready to accompany His Lordship on so truly labourious a mission",⁷ as a personal bodyguard, provided that he would pay their expenses.

Unable to secure satisfactory assistance from the government, Lord Selkirk decided that he would enforce a peace settlement in Red River by gathering up a force of his own and invoking the powers of the Hudson's Bay Company Charter. The former Governor of Assiniboia, Miles Macdonell, was found to be in Montreal at this time released on bail from the charge of stealing pemmican in 1814. Still in possession of his commission as Governor, he would be a most useful asset in this plan. Selkirk wrote to Colin Robertson in December, 1815, that the colonists should remain at Jack River until next summer, but that next spring, on

⁷ Drummond to Bathurst, Dec. 6, 1815, R R Papers, 26; Selkirk, MS, SP, 12,604.

the opening of navigation, Governor Macdonell would be sent with a party of men to reinforce the settlers. Invoking his powers as Governor, Macdonell was to commence a campaign of legal violence to force the Nor'Westers out of Assiniboia. The North West Company perpetrators of the expulsion, Messers Cameron and Alexander Macdonell along with their half-breed allies, Lamar, Grant, Shaw and Bostonois, were all to be arrested; the North West Company was to be compelled to quit all their intrusive possessions on Lord Selkirk's land by means of legal warrants backed up by force.⁸

In January, 1816, Lord Selkirk heard from the freeman Ladgimonière that the colony had been restored by Colin Robertson the previous August. This welcome news did not deter Lord Selkirk from his determination to enforce the Hudson's Bay Company Charter and to punish the aggressors, On the first opening of navigation in the spring, Ladgimonière was despatched to Red River to tell the colonists that Lord Selkirk would come to Red River that summer by way of Fond du Lac and that they should make arrangements for the provisioning of his brigade.⁹

Throughout the winter Lord Selkirk continued his efforts to persuade Governor Drummond to permit him to take a military expedition to Red River in the summer of 1816. A large expedition could not be spared; nevertheless, the Governor finally consented, in April, to give Selkirk a personal bodyguard of fifteen soldiers of the Swiss mercenary de Meuron regiment.¹⁰ Even this token assistance was withdrawn one month later

⁸ Selkirk to Robertson, Dec. 8, 1815, SP, 1,895-6

20. ⁹ Clifford Wilson, "Pritchard and Ladgimonière", Beaver, 279 (1948),

¹⁰ Narrative of Dr. Allen, SP, 13,779. (Hereafter Allen Narr.).

when orders were received for the disbanding of the de Meuron regiment.¹¹
 However, Sir John Coape Sherbrooke, who replaced Sir Gordon Drummond as Governor towards the end of May, managed to find a seven man guard from the 37th Regiment stationed on Drummond's Island which he agreed to give Selkirk to replace the disbanded de Meurons.¹²

III. The Hudson's Bay Company Expeditions to Red River
Summer 1816

The token force of a personal bodyguard was totally inadequate to enforce a peaceful settlement of the fur traders quarrels in the Red River region. Unable to secure the kind of assistance he wanted from the government, Selkirk decided to raise an expedition at his own expense to take with him to Red River. The disbanding of the de Meuron regiment offered Selkirk the very opportunity he needed to acquire such a force:

Men with the tried courage of experienced soldiers they were likely to form an effective militia capable of defending themselves and their fellow settlers against any attempt which could be made to disturb their tranquilities by the banditti of the N W Co./¹³

Selkirk offered the de Meurons \$8.00 per month wages to row his boats to Red River and to obey all lawful instructions. On their arrival in Assiniboia, Selkirk promised to give them lots of land equal in size to those offered them by the Canadian government with the option of returning to Canada at his Lordship's expense if they did not choose to remain in Red River.¹⁴

¹¹ Harvey to Selkirk, May 14, 1816, SP, 2,249.

¹² Harvey to Selkirk, May 29, 1816, Ibid., 2,313.

¹³ Selkirk MS, SP, 12,613. The men served on garrison duty in Malta prior to being sent to Upper Canada in 1814: Fauché Narrative, SP, 12,350, 12,351.

¹⁴ Selkirk to Steiger, May 23, 1816, SP, 2,280.

Four officers, Captain Matthey and d'Orsonnens, Lieutenants Fauché and Craffenreid and eighty men of the regiment accepted Lord Selkirk's proposal. They left Montreal June 4, 1816, and, joined by twenty more men from the Watteville Regiment and a few Glengarry Fencibles, at Kingston, they proceeded to Sault Ste Marie by way of York, Lake Simcoe, Lake Huron and Drummond's Island. At this latter point the sergeant's guard which was to accompany Lord Selkirk was added to the brigade. His Lordship who had left Montreal June 18, armed with a commission as Justice of the Peace for the Indian Territories and the Western District of Upper Canada, joined the expedition on Lake Huron and the whole party arrived at Sault Ste Marie towards the middle of July.¹⁵

Meanwhile, Governor Macdonell had left Montreal with his rescue party May 6, 1816, four days after the North West Company Justice of the Peace, A.N. McLeod, had departed with his armed brigade for Red River.¹⁶ The Hudson's Bay people were unable to gain on the Nor'Westers, though, and, by the time they reached Rainy Lake, were seven days behind them. On June 29, at Portage de l'Isle, about one day's journey from the mouth of the Winnipeg River, Macdonell met canoes carrying Lieutenants Missani and Brumbi of McLeod's brigade back to Fort William. The soldiers informed Governor Macdonell that twenty-five colonists had been massacred at Fort Douglas and that the rest of the people had left the place. The story was confirmed later the same day by Indians who had come from Red River.

¹⁵ Allen Narr., SP, 13, 780-81; Fauché Narrative, SP, 12, 348-9.

¹⁶ Miles Macdonell to Lt. Donald McDonell, Sep. 11, 1816, MP, 189; Heurter Narrative, SP, 12, 268.

The Governor, realizing that it would be folly to proceed in these circumstances without reinforcements, decided to turn back and convey the sad news of the second destruction of the colony to Lord Selkirk.¹⁷ It was Macdonell's original intention to travel overland from Rainy Lake to Fond du Lac to meet Lord Selkirk, but, unable to procure either guides or provisions for this route, the Governor decided to proceed to Sault Ste Marie by way of Fort William to try to meet his Lordship there.¹⁸

IV. The seizure of Fort William August 1816

Macdonell arrived at Sault Ste Marie July 25, 1816, just as Lord Selkirk was about to set out for the western end of Lake Superior.¹⁹ His Lordship had heard, three days earlier, of the intentions of the North West Company Justice of the Peace, A.N. McLeod, to destroy the colony and rob the Hudson's Bay Company messenger, Ladgimonière, of his despatches, from the deposition of the native, Katawabeyté, to the Indian Commissioner, Mr. Johnston.²⁰ On hearing from Governor Macdonell that these evil plans had actually been accomplished, Lord Selkirk was greatly enraged and resolved the very next day to proceed direct to Fort William with his armed force of Meuron soldiers, to determine the exact circumstances of the massacre from the Nor'Westers now assembled there at their annual meeting.

I think it probable that by proceeding immediately to Fort William and examining the engagées now assembled most important

¹⁷ MJSP, 18,668-70.

¹⁸ Ibid., 18,672, 18,676.

¹⁹ Miles Macdonell to Lt. Donald McDonell, Sep. 11, 1816, MP, 189.

²⁰ Deposition of Katawabeyté to Indian Commissioner, July 22, 1816, SP, 2,440.

discoveries may be made. I flatter myself that the force by which I am now accompanied is sufficient to put down any audacious resistance to a legal investigation./21

Selkirk realized the impropriety of intervening in a dispute to which he was an interested party and tried to persuade one of the magistrates at Sault Ste Marie to accompany him. Magistrates Askin and Ermatinger, however, had important commitments in their forwarding business which prevented them from leaving Sault Ste Marie in the midst of the shipping season; Mr. Johnston, the Indian Commissioner, did not possess a Commission to act as Magistrate for the Western District of Upper Canada, in which Fort William was located;²² while the only other magistrate in the area, Dr. Mitchell, of Drummond's Island, was a man "whose habits of intemperance were so excessive and notorious", that Selkirk decided "that his presence would have added no weight to the proceedings".²³

Although Selkirk was a graduate of the law school of Edinburgh University, he was not experienced in Canadian legal procedures, and it undoubtedly would have been more prudent for him to have awaited the arrival of a competent Canadian magistrate before proceeding to Fort William, even if he had to send to York for one. If he delayed his departure for Fort William any longer, though, Selkirk realized that many of the perpetrators of the Massacre would have escaped into the interior where it would be almost impossible to capture them. Reduced to the alternative of "allowing an enormous crime to pass unnoticed or of acting

²¹ Selkirk to Askin, July 26, 1816, SP, 2,445.

²²/ Askin to Selkirk, July 27, 1816, SP, 2,447; Selkirk MS, SP, 12,618.

²³/ Selkirk, MS, SP, 12,618.

as a magistrate in a case in which I might be considered as interested",²⁴
 Selkirk chose the latter course. It proved to be an unwise move.

Selkirk left Sault Ste Marie sometime towards the end of July²⁵
 and arrived at Fort William with his troops August 12. Encamping across
 and up the river from the North West Company fort, Selkirk sent Captain
 d'Orsonnens to the post to demand the release of Pritchard, Pambrun and
 Nolin, three settlers who were still held prisoner at that place. The
 men were immediately given their freedom and brought over to Selkirk's
 encampment where they made depositions concerning the massacre and their
 imprisonment at Fort William. On the basis of this evidence, Selkirk
 decided to arrest William McGillivray, the principal Agent of the North
 West Company, on August 13. McGillivray obligingly complied with the
 warrant served against him and took two more North West Company partners,
 Dr. McLaughlin and Kenneth McKenzie, with him to furnish bail. On
 their arrival at Lord Selkirk's camp all three of the Nor'Westers were
 placed under arrest.²⁶

Later the same day, Selkirk decided that the crimes which the
 North West Company servants had committed were so serious that all the
 partners should be arrested, and in the evening, four constables, McNabb,
 McPherson, d'Orsonnens and Dr. Allen, went to enforce a warrant against
 the North West Company officers, supported by two boatloads of de Meuron

²⁴ Selkirk to Sherbrooke, Aug. 21, 1816, SP, 2,569.

²⁵ "He was at S.S. Marie July 29 and will probably be here in a
 few days": K. McKenzie to A. McLellan, Aug. 9, 1816, SP, 18,570.

²⁶ Vandersluys Journal, S.H. Wilcocke, Narrative of Occurrences
 in the Indian Countries of North America (Montreal, 1818), 67. (Hereafter
Vandersluys Journal).

soldiers. The constables attempted, at first, to arrest the partners without the assistance of the troops. As the charge was being read to them, however, the Nor'Westers attempted to close the gate of their fort and the constables found it necessary to sound their bugle to call the soldiers to their assistance. The troops rushed in and secured the two cannon inside the gate of the fort, and the North West Company officers were forcibly removed to Lord Selkirk's camp.²⁷

The partners were allowed to return to their quarters for the night after all papers in their rooms had been sealed.²⁸ The following day, though, when Selkirk arrived at the North West fort to begin taking depositions from the Nor'Westers, it was found that many of the seals on their papers had been broken. A North West Company servant, named Blondeau, informed Selkirk that papers had been burnt in the kitchen fire the previous night, and eighty stand of arms and thirteen kegs gunpowder had been concealed in a hayloft outside the fort.²⁹ It was rumoured that the Nor'Westers intended to incite the Iroquois Indians about the fort to take these arms to recapture the place.³⁰

This manifest display of North West Company hostility caused Selkirk to order the North West Company servants to exchange camps with the de Meuron soldiers, and the partners to be placed in confinement in the

²⁷ Allen Narr., SP, 13,784-5; Fauché Narrative, SP, 12,253; Deposition of Its Missani and Brumbi, R R Papers, 210.

²⁸ Allen Narr., SP, 13,788.

²⁹ Coltman Report, R R Papers, 215; Allen Narr., SP, 13,788-90; Vandersluys Journal, 73-4.

³⁰ Deposition of Josph Sansfaçon, R R Papers, 215.

winterer's house.³¹ Examination of the North West Company officers continued until August 17. The following day, all of them save Daniel MacKenzie, who was too intoxicated to make a coherent statement at the time, were sent prisoners to Montreal.³²

On August 20, Selkirk ordered a search for arms and other papers which might be found in unusual places, the object being to discover the Qu'Appelle River furs which had been stolen by the Nor'Westers the previous spring.³³ These were eventually found as well as some incriminating supplies of habillements intended as rewards to the half-breeds of Red River. The search, nevertheless, caused much disruption to the North West Company's trading operations:

They are searching for furs and papers in suspicious places but they are committing acts which would make a French Couanier blush. They are cutting open bales packed and ready for embarkation and where it is most clearly evident that nothing they are searching for can be concealed. Certainly their warrant does not authorize them to make inventories of the contents, to turn everything upside down and leave in a confused heap what had cost many days labour to get ready and pack up./³⁴

Lord Selkirk's seizure of Fort William certainly succeeded well in its purpose of obtaining evidence on the destruction of the settlement. Much valuable material had been obtained from the depositions taken and papers seized which would enable his Lordship to levy most serious charges against the whole North West Company. Already the weakness of proceeding

31

Allen Narr., SP, 13,789; Fauché Narrative, SP, 12,235.

32/ Allen Narr., SP, 13,791.

33/ Selkirk's search warrant for Fort William, Aug. 20, 1816, NW Papers, #9.

34/ Vandersluys Journal, 88.

without the advice of legal counsel was becoming apparent, though, for in issuing subpoenas on some of the partners, and warrants for the sealing of papers, Selkirk had exceeded the powers of his magistrate's commission.³⁵

V. Selkirk's Attempt to Arbitrate the Dispute Between the Fur Companies August-September, 1816

Having secured all the evidence he required to indict the Nor'-Westers for their crimes against his colony, Selkirk temporarily forgot the propriety of his position as a magistrate and began to act as the Hudson's Bay Company agent which he really was. Taking advantage of the commanding position which he held over the North West Company's fur trade by virtue of his capture of the Company's main western Canadian supply depot, Lord Selkirk now attempted to force the Nor'-Westers to settle their differences with him out of court by threatening to disrupt their whole trading operations. No fur packs were allowed to be shipped to Montreal, nor were trade goods permitted to be sent inland.³⁶ Selkirk refused to return Fort William to the Nor'-Westers unless they would restore all property seized by their servants in the interior and make adequate compensation for all damages done to the Hudson's Bay Company.³⁷

On August 26, 1816, Selkirk proposed an arbitration of the dispute between the fur companies to Messers. McTavish and Vandersluys, the two North West Company clerks left in charge of Fort William after the other partners had been sent prisoner to Montreal. Two gentlemen of

³⁵ Edward Ellice, Communications of Mercator, (Montreal, 1817), 96.

^{36/} Allen Narr., SP, 13, 798.

^{37/} Selkirk to Johnston, Sept. 10, 1816, N W Papers, #74.

business in London, agreed upon by both parties were to be appointed as arbitrers. Lord Selkirk was to be liable for all damages caused by his agents, servants or settlers, the North West Company to be liable, collectively, for all damages brought about by its partners, clerks or servants. Most of the furs now in storage at Fort William were to be consigned to the arbitrers in London who would sell them and retain the profits themselves until the final award had been made. Part of the furs were to be kept by Lord Selkirk as security that the Nor'Westers would carry out this agreement.³⁸

The arrangement, imposing as it did the entire cost of the arbitration on the North West Company, was so manifestly unfair that the Nor'Westers refused to sign it. By forcing the North West Company to give the profits of their year's fur sales to the arbitrers in advance of a decision on the exact award of damages, it was obvious that Selkirk was trying to disrupt the North West Company's trade. Indeed his Lordship later admitted that this was his purpose:

I do not pretend to deny that I was glad to have the agreement so framed as to keep a part of the capital of the North West Company in a state of inactivity until the question between us should be decided, so as to limit in some degree their capacity for carrying on a system of lawless violence against me./39

Though McTavish and Vandersluys refused to become a party to Lord Selkirk's arrangement for the settlement of the fur traders dispute, his Lordship soon found a more useful tool to assist him in the execution of his plan in the person of the North West partner, Daniel Mackenzie. This

³⁸ Arbitration proposed to McTavish and Vandersluys, Aug. 26, 1816, SP, 2,635-7.

³⁹ Selkirk to Sherbrooke, Nov. 12, 1816, SP, 2,920-21.

man, on being brought before Lord Selkirk for his examination on August 20, 1816, after all the other partners had left, was still too intoxicated to make a deposition and was sent to jail for two days to regain his sobriety. During this period, he was visited by Governor Macdonell, Dr. Allen, Captain d'Orsonnens, John Pritchard, Mr. MacPherson and Mr. Spencer, all of whom impressed upon the depraved fur trader the seriousness of the crimes with which he had been charged and suggested to him the advisability of turning King's evidence to escape punishment. On August 22, Mackenzie agreed to do this. He was removed from the jail to more commodious quarters in the partners' house, where, with the assistance of Governor Macdonell and a good supply of liquor, he began to write out his deposition. This document, a lengthy epistle which detailed events as long ago as the North West Company annual meeting of 1814, was presented to Lord Selkirk on September 3.⁴⁰

The deposition was considered to be very valuable by Lord Selkirk, but Mackenzie was not yet given his freedom. He was still confined to the partners' house where he was continually visited by Hudson's Bay Company officials and plied with grog in an effort to gain additional information from him. Eventually it was found that Mackenzie had bought up a large quantity of provisions at Michilimacinac that summer which had not yet been paid for. Mackenzie was evidently worried lest the other

⁴⁰ Mackenzie to Selkirk Sept. 3, 1816, SP, 2,685-91. The story of Mackenzie's imprisonment can be pieced together fairly accurately by a comparison of Dr. Allen's Narrative, SP, 13,791; D. Mackenzie, A Letter to the Earl of Selkirk in Answer to his Pamphlet (Sandwich 1818), 4-5; and Halkett Statement, 198-220.

partners, hearing of his deposition to Lord Selkirk, would repudiate his purchase and force him to pay the cost of the provisions out of his own pocket. He therefore offered, or was induced to offer, to sell these provisions to Lord Selkirk.⁴¹ His Lordship was interested. He tried, however, to persuade Mackenzie to go further, suggesting that "he might dispose of anything in Fort William including the Fort itself".⁴²

The North West Company trader did not sell everything in Fort William. Under continual pressure from Miles Macdonell and other Hudson's Bay Company servants who supplied him liberally with intoxicants,⁴³ however, he was induced to sell all movable property within the fort, to conclude an agreement for the arbitration of the disputes between the companies similar to that offered McTavish and Vandersluys, to write a letter to the Nipigon wintering partner suggesting that he should conclude a similar agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company officers in his district, and to authorize Macdonell to write a general letter to all wintering partners urging them to surrender their property to the Hudson's Bay Company in return for monetary compensation.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Halkett, Statement, 202.

⁴²/ Allen Narr., SP, 13,802.

⁴³/ Mackenzie Deposition, Dec. 2, 1816, N W Papers #16. See especially Miles Macdonell's memo to McKenzie telling him that he has the power to dispose of stores and property in Fort William and McKenzie's reply admitting that he could sell said property.

⁴⁴/ Agreement of Mackenzie and Selkirk, Sept. 19, 1816, SP, 2,812-17; Mackenzie Deposition, Dec. 2, 1816, N W Papers, #16; Macdonell to Winterers, Oct., 1816, SP, 2,780-83. The difference between the Mackenzie agreement and the Vandersluys arrangement was the arbitrers were to be the two Lord Chief Justices of England, Selkirk was to give a £3000 estate as his share of arbitration costs and no extra security was to be retained by Lord Selkirk that the North West Company partners would ratify the agreement.

Once these deeds had been done, Mackenzie's usefulness to Lord Selkirk was completed and the North West trader was given his freedom and permitted to proceed to Montreal. Though Mackenzie undoubtedly had some grievance against the North West Company for its failure to pay him his shares of the profits of previous ventures, which probably induced him to turn traitor against his company; nevertheless, the influence which Lord Selkirk's servants used over the man was most improper. Threatening him with a jail term and plying him with intoxicants until he had signed the papers which they required, the Hudson's Bay Company officers were certainly taking advantage of Mackenzie's depraved condition.

The Hudson's Bay Company triumph, however, was only a temporary one. The agreement for the sale of Fort William property, which Mackenzie had signed on behalf of the whole North West Company, would never be held valid in a court of law.⁴⁵ Mackenzie, once freed from Lord Selkirk's influence, was soon to repent his errors and to make a full confession of the manner in which he had been abused by Lord Selkirk, which was to be used extensively as propaganda by the Nor'Westers to discredit the whole of Lord Selkirk's proceedings at Fort William.⁴⁶

VI. The Attack on the Interior by the Hudson's Bay Company
Winter 1816-1817

During the same period that Lord Selkirk was attempting to discover a peaceful method of arbitrating his differences with the North West Company at Fort William, he was also carrying out a series of aggressive moves designed to eject them completely from the fur trade of western

⁴⁵ Stewart to Selkirk, Jan. 20, 1817, SP, 3,048.

⁴⁶ Mackenzie Deposition, Dec. 2, 1816, NW Papers, #16.

Canada. Shortly after Fort William had been seized an expedition was sent to capture Pic, Fond du Lac and Michipicoten.⁴⁷ In late September, Captain d'Orsonnens and a party of thirty-six de Meurons, with six boats and two three-pounder field-pieces, taken from the North West Company's schooner, Invincible, were despatched up the Kamanistiquia River to recapture Fort Douglas.⁴⁸

Arriving at Rainy Lake, October 4, d'Orsonnens demanded that the North West Company trader, Mr. Dease, surrender his post, threatening that his troops would ransack the fort if he failed to comply with this order. A blockade was established and many threatening moves were made. On October 7, Dease finally submitted and agreed to sell the post and all property within it to the Hudson's Bay Company.⁴⁹

The North West Company traders at Rainy Lake advised Captain d'Orsonnens that the North West post at the mouth of the Winnipeg River was heavily armed. This warning, coupled with the fact that there was danger that the boats might get caught in the ice before they reached Fort Douglas, apparently induced d'Orsonnens to winter at Rainy Lake.⁵⁰ The men set themselves busily to work repairing the fort to prepare for the long winter's sojourn. On November 6, the party was joined by Governor Macdonell, who had been sent to give a measure of legality to the expedition's proceedings, accompanied by sixteen Canadians and four de Meurons.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Coltman Report, R R Papers, 224.

⁴⁸/ Selkirk MS, SP, 12, 742-3.

⁴⁹/ Dease Deposition, NW Papers, #79.

⁵⁰/ Selkirk MS, SP, 12, 756.

⁵¹/ MJSP, 17, 130, 17, 147.

The Governor suggested, shortly after his arrival, that a winter attack should be made on Fort Douglas by means of an expedition by Rainy Lake and the Rousseau River. The idea of a military expedition appealed very greatly to the restless troops, and, December 10, the Governor and Captain d'Orsonnens set out with thirty-eight men and two cannon.⁵² John Tanner, an American who had been captured by the Indians as a child and who had dwelt in the Red River region for some ten years, was their guide.⁵³

The force reached Pembina December 31, 1816, and stormed the two forts at that place, finding that they were occupied by only a few freemen's families.⁵⁴ Learning from the freemen that there were only twelve men in Fort Douglas, Governor Macdonell decided to advance to capture the fort at the forks January 2, 1817. A blinding blizzard held up the de Meuron's progress, but the early hours of January 10, the expedition reached Fort Douglas and stormed the place by escalade, taking McLellen, the wintering partner, and his North West servants completely by surprise.⁵⁵

On January 12, a party of four men was sent to capture the North West Company post at Winnipeg River, which, despite the earlier North West Company warning that the place was heavily armed, was apparently taken without difficulty. On January 31 a party of twelve men was despatched to hold Fort Daer for the Company's interest while on the same

⁵² MJSP, 17,164.

⁵³ / John Tanner, Trente années dans les deserts de l'Amérique du nord (Paris, n.d.), 199, 226-7.

⁵⁴ / MJSP, 17,175.

⁵⁵ / Ibid., 17,183.

day an express was sent to Jack River to advise the expelled settlers that their colony had been recaptured.⁵⁶ On March 5, Sheriff Alexander Macdonell, the leader of the colonists at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg, arrived at Fort Douglas with four colonists and some trading goods.⁵⁷ The rest of the colonists, who spent a bleak winter, subsisting from the fish at Jack River, and building themselves a new gunboat, returned to the colony in July.⁵⁸

Compared with previous winters, the winter of 1816-1817 at Fort Douglas was fairly peaceful. A band of Nor'Westers from Qu'Appelle appeared about the fort twice that winter: at the end of January⁵⁹ and at the beginning of March.⁶⁰ The Nor'Westers had no cannon, however, and few provisions, while the colonists had nine cannon and a plentiful supply of food, so that no attack was made on the fort on either occasion.⁶¹ In the January raid the Nor'Westers contented themselves with taking a keg of spirits and a barrel of gunpowder, which had been secreted in a freeman's house, and temporarily detaining four colonists as prisoners.⁶² In the March attack the North West Company expedition kept a discreet distance away from the fort, presenting written demands that the place be restored to the Nor'Westers and the North West partners held prisoner in it released, all of which were summarily dismissed by Governor Macdonell.⁶³

⁵⁶ MJSP, 17,185, 17,190, 17,193.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 17,191, 17,217.

⁵⁸ Sheriff Macdonell's Journal, SP, 18,117-21,18,167; MJSP,17,195.

⁵⁹ Heurter Narrative, SP, 12,292.

⁶⁰ MJSP, 17,211-12.

⁶¹ Ibid., 17,184.

⁶² Heurter Narrative, SP, 12,292.

⁶³ MJSP, 12,212-15.

By March, 1817, Governor Macdonell had recovered all the confidence which he had displayed in former years and was planning a vigorous campaign against the North West Company:

We will endeavour to maintain unbroken the cordon now formed from Fort Douglas to Bas de la Riviere [Winnipeg River] till joined by Graffenreid's detachment, when I am in hopes we may be able to take the field and act offensively, for we shall be always be subject to annoyance till the enemy be depossessed of the posts at La Sourie and Qu'Appelle. /64

We have two brass three-pounders at Jack River, one of which will I suppose be mounted on the boat, the other can be disposed of as circumstances require. I hope in God we shall be able to meet the great magistrate [A.N. McLeod] at the Grand Rapids [Of the Saskatchewan River] . /65

By the spring of 1817, the fortunes of the Hudson's Bay Company had been completely recovered in Red River by virtue of forces brought into that region by Lord Selkirk from Montreal. The company was indeed in a much stronger position than it had been at the height of Robertson's power in 1816. In addition to the two posts on the Red River which he had held, the Company, in 1817, controlled every North West Company fort in the quadrangle bounded by Fort William, Winnipeg River, Red River and Fond du Lac, while preparations were being made for an attack on the North West Company posts on the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan rivers, as well. The seizures did have a certain semblance of legality, in that posts within Assiniboia were seized by virtue of Governor Macdonell's commission as Governor of that territory, and posts outside it by Lord Selkirk's commission as Magistrate for the Western District of Upper

64 Macdonell to Selkirk, Mar. 6, 1817, SP, 3,250.
65/ Macdonell to Selkirk, Mar. 8, 1817, SP, 3,252.

Canada. Supremacy in the fur trade, however, was still the primary consideration behind this system of legal intimidation.

Less than a year after the Massacre of Seven Oaks the situation of the fur companies in the Red River region had been completely reversed, and it was the Nor'Westers instead of the Hudson's Bay Company which stood in need of assistance from outside the region to restore its lost power. Because of the widespread influence which that company had already displayed over the governments of Britain and Canada, there was little doubt that such assistance would be forthcoming.

VII. North West Company Retaliations Winter 1816-1817

The North West Company partners were furious at the manner in which Lord Selkirk had tricked them at Fort William, with his actions as a Magistrate of the Peace, and were determined to have revenge on him. While still under arrest and proceeding to Montreal as prisoners, the Nor'Westers called on Magistrate Johnston, of the Indian Department at Sault and Ste Marie, and requested him to make an attempt to secure restitution of their Fort. The Magistrate went to Fort William on September 7, and demanded that Selkirk restore the Fort to the North West Company. His Lordship refused to do this, however, insisting that the Nor'Westers must first make adequate compensation for damages done to his colony.⁶⁶

On arrival at Montreal, the North West Company partners were immediately admitted to bail and set about to find a magistrate of their own

⁶⁶ Récit des difficultés du Nord Ouest après la prise de Fort William, PAC, MG 19 c 1#39. (Hereafter: Récit).

with which to wreck some vengeance on Lord Selkirk. At York, a writ of habeas corpus was obtained from Judge Powell for the release of Daniel Mackenzie. At Sandwich, October 19, 1816, on the deposition of Messers McTavish and Vanderluys, a warrant was obtained from Judge Baby for Lord Selkirk's arrest on the charge of stealing fusils to the value of £250. This warrant was to be executed by Under-Sheriff Smith, of the Western District of Upper Canada, whom the North West Company agreed to transport to Fort William.⁶⁷

On October 25, another warrant for Lord Selkirk's arrest was obtained from Dr. Mitchell, of Drummond's Island, on the charge of riotous assembly at Fort William and riotous seizure of six hundred packs of furs and merchandise to the value of £10,000.⁶⁸ This latter warrant was served on Selkirk by William Robinson on November 7, 1816. Lord Selkirk declined to submit to it, giving as his reason:

I observed the warrant to be in several respects irregular, and found it on the recital of the affidavit full of the grossest perjuries. It was signed by Dr. Mitchell of Drummond's Island whose notorious habits of intemperance made it in the highest degree probable that it was obtained surreptitiously. The constable being asked if he had any letters of credentials could produce none which confirmed the idea of his being an imposter.⁶⁹

Selkirk no doubt correctly assumed that the warrant was merely a ruse to remove him from Fort William. His arrest of the North West Partners at the same place might, nevertheless, be similarly construed and no doubt was partly so intended. The North West partners had sub-

⁶⁷ Baby Warrant, Oct. 19, 1816, NW Papers, #73; Agreement between William Smith and Kenneth McKenzie, Oct. 28, 1816, NW Papers, #70.

⁶⁸ Drummond's Warrant, Oct. 25, 1816, NW Papers, #75.

⁶⁹ Selkirk to Gore, Nov. 12, 1816, SP, 2,915.

mitted to the warrants for their arrest while Lord Selkirk had declined the warrants with which he was served. This disrespect for the law which Selkirk evinced gave the Nor'Westers an excellent occasion for propaganda against the Hudson's Bay Company which they were to fully exploit.

Sheriff Smith, arriving at Sault Ste Marie with the second warrant for Selkirk's arrest from Judge Baby, later in November, and hearing of Lord Selkirk's refusal to submit to the first warrant served against him, decided to wait for legal reinforcements. A warrant demanding the restitution of the fort, and an order from the Adjutant-General compelling Lord Selkirk's personal bodyguard from the 37th regiment to assist the Sheriff in the execution of these legal documents, were sent up from York. All three processes were served on Lord Selkirk by Under-Sheriff Smith, March 19, 1817. All were declined by his Lordship and the Sheriff was forced to withdraw from the fort, March 22.⁷⁰

The North West Company, meanwhile, was preparing extra-legal measures of its own to recoup its losses. In the fall of 1816, some Iroquois Indians were engaged to proceed to Fort William to recapture the furs detained there by Lord Selkirk, but owing to the lateness of the season, they were unable to proceed beyond Sault Ste Marie.⁷¹ Another expedition was sent, however, on the first opening of navigation in the spring of 1817, which arrived at Fort William, May 27. There were only a handful of de Meuron soldiers defending the fort at this time, Lord

⁷⁰ Coltman Report, R R Papers, 246-7; Sherbrooke to Selkirk, May 15, 1817, SP, 3,431.

⁷¹ Récit, 1FF.

Selkirk having departed with the bulk of his brigade for Red River. Hence, the Nor'Westers were able to retake their fortress quite easily. During the month of June, the posts at Rainy Lake and Winnipeg River were recaptured in a similar manner.

The North West Company retaliations to the aggressions of Lord Selkirk were certainly as vigorous as those of their rivals. Though their efforts to stop his Lordship's actions by legal means were not as successful as the legal procedure which Lord Selkirk had employed against them, the old weapon of lawless violence proved just as effective as heretofore, and, by the summer of 1817, the Nor'Westers, though they had not recovered all the posts which they had lost to Lord Selkirk the previous winter, at least had their water route between Athabaska and Lake Superior opened. Moreover, Lord Selkirk's disrespect for the law was giving them an excellent opportunity to bring discredit on him in the Canadian press.

VIII. The Appointment of a Government Commission of Inquiry October 1816

The struggle of the fur companies as pursued by forces operating from Montreal was certainly proving to be equally as vigorous as the struggle between the winterers in the interior in previous years. Within nine months the principal forts between Lake Superior and the Red River had all changed hands once, while those along the water route to Lake Winnipeg had changed owners twice. If a stop were not soon put to these retaliatory proceedings, it was quite possible that more blood would be spilled. The two fur companies struggling face to face were evidently not able to reach an agreement. Intervention of some third outside force

would obviously be necessary to bring an end to these disturbances.

When the British government heard of the first expulsion of the colonists, and the North West Company countercharge that the Hudson's Bay Company had been equally aggressive in its seizure of pemmican in 1814, Colonial Secretary Bathurst had sent a despatch, January 3, 1816, ordering the Governor General of Canada

to inculcate upon the servants of both companies the necessity of abstaining from a repetition of these outrages, which have been productive lately of frequent causes of complaint & convey to them the determination of H M Government to punish with the utmost severity any person who may be found to have caused or initiated proceedings so fatal to the tranquillity of possessions in that region.⁷²

In conformity with these instructions, Governor Drummond sent identical notes to both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company requesting them "to abstain from a repetition of these violences".⁷³ On hearing of the Massacre of Seven Oaks, in August, Governor Sherbrooke wrote a similar note calling on both parties "to abstain from such acts of violence in the future".⁷⁴ Neither of these messages apparently had any effect upon the fur companies.

When the North West partners reached Montreal, in the fall of 1816, and complained to Governor Sherbrooke of Lord Selkirk's seizure of Fort William, government action became more vigorous. On the advice of his Executive Council, the Governor decided, in October 1816, to deprive all magistrates in the north-west of their commissions, and "to appoint two persons of influence and impartiality to act as sole magistrates of

⁷² Bathurst to Drummond, Jan. 3, 1816, Colonial Office Records G Series VIII, 2. (Hereafter G).

⁷³ Drummond to Bathurst, Apr. 21, 1816, RR Papers, 54.

⁷⁴ Sherbrooke to Bathurst, Aug. 24, 1816, Ibid.

of that territory, and to proceed forth to exercise their function as Commissioners of Inquiry to mediate between the two companies".⁷⁵

The decision to appoint a commission to inquire into the dispute of the fur companies was, on the surface, a good one. At last the system of legal bluff which had been exploited by both parties would be ended and the companies would be forced to accept a settlement of their disputes. The revocation of all the magistrates commissions, however, would impose a greater hardship on the Hudson's Bay Company than on the Nor'Westers. The Hudson's Bay Company had only one magistrate in the Indian Territory, Lord Selkirk, at Fort William, while the North West Company had several magistrates up in Athabaska. While news of the revocation of the commissions would reach Fort William that autumn, it was unlikely that it could be sent to Athabaska before winter set in. Thus the Hudson's Bay Company would be forced to end its abuses of the privileges of a magistrate's commission before the Nor'Westers would be forced to stop their system of legal intimidation. The manner in which the Canadian government failed to take action when twenty-one settlers were massacred, yet intervened promptly when a North West Company post was seized, clearly indicated that the Nor'Westers were exerting a considerable amount of influence on the Canadian government.

IX. The Actions of the Commissioners Winter 1816-1817

It proved rather difficult for the government to find two impartial

⁷⁵ Sherbrooke to Bathurst, Oct. 23, 1816, RR Papers, 57.

commissioners.⁷⁶ By late October, however, Governor Sherbrooke had apparently found two suitable men in the person of William Batchelor Coltman, a member of the Governor's Executive Council, and John Fletcher, a Quebec police magistrate.⁷⁷ It is possible that the government, unable to find an impartial commission tried to appoint one which would represent both companies. The exact connection between Fletcher and the North West Company is not known, but he was nevertheless quite partial to that organization throughout the period of his commission. Coltman, on the other hand, was an agent for the Hudson's Bay Company at Quebec in 1811.⁷⁸ Coltman, however, did not evince the bias of his colleague, but attempted to follow the instructions of his commission to the letter.

The commissioners attempted to reach Fort William that autumn, but were held up by ice in the Notawasaga River and forced to return to York.⁷⁹ There they spent a considerable part of the winter "in the society of three or four partners of the North West Company, and surrounded by clerks and dependents who were brought before them to make affidavits to show that Selkirk's actions were illegal and improper".⁸⁰ Most of the evidence collected was derogatory of Lord Selkirk. John Pritchard, who had been present at the massacre of Seven Oaks, passed through York but was questioned

⁷⁶ "The extensive influence of the NW Co pervades almost the whole of society here and I find it extremely difficult to select two persons of enough impartiality to be entrusted with such a mission": Sherbrooke to Gore, Oct. 1, 1816, RRPapers, 61. Gore found the same difficulty: Gore to Sherbrooke, Oct. 17, 1816, Ibid., 62.

⁷⁷/ Sherbrooke to Bathurst, Nov. 11, 1816, Ibid., 62.

⁷⁸/ Innis, Fur Trade, 167.

⁷⁹/ Selkirk Memorial to the Duke of Richmond, SP, 12,425. (Hereafter Selkirk Memorial).

⁸⁰/ Ibid., 12,425-6.

by Coltman only on the condition of the rivers.⁸¹ Later that winter, the commissioners returned to Montreal to await the opening of navigation in the spring.

X. Intervention of the British and Canadian Government
Winter 1816-1817

Meanwhile, the British government was making it quite clear where its prejudices lay in the struggle of the fur companies. On hearing of the capture of Fort William, the Colonial Secretary ordered the Governor-in-Chief of Canada, by a despatch of February 6, 1817, to issue a proclamation in the name of the Prince Regent requiring that each company should restore all the property which it held belonging to its rival.⁸²

When the Under Secretary for Colonies, Mr. Goulburn, was informed February 8, 1817, by the North West Company's London Agent, Edward Ellice,^{82a} that Lord Selkirk had refused to comply with a warrant for his arrest,

⁸¹ Selkirk Memorial, 12,426.

^{82/} Bathurst to Sherbrooke, Feb. 6, 1817, G 1, VIII, 42.

^{82a/} Ellice to Goulburn, Feb. 8, 1817, Q147, II, 331-332. It was Edward Ellice who was the real instigator of all the proceedings against the Hudson's Bay Company in England. A principal director of the firm Inglis Ellice & Co., one of the main forwarders of trading goods to the X Y Co. and later to the North West Co., Ellice played an active role in the fur trade from the time he inherited his father's forwarding business in 1805 until his death in 1863. His marriage, in 1809, to the sister of the Whig politician, Earl Grey, brought him into close contact with many government officials and enabled him to exert much influence at the Colonial Office to further the view point of the Canadian merchants. A member of Parliament from 1818 until his death, and a member of the Hudson's Bay Company Committee from 1825 onwards, Ellice played a prominent role, in later years, in the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832, the formation of the Melbourne ministry of 1834 and the parliamentary committee investigating the Hudson's Bay Company in 1857: Dorothy E.T. Long, Edward Ellice (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1942).

the government quickly responded. Three days later, without making any attempt to consult the Hudson's Bay Company to ascertain the reasons for Lord Selkirk's action, Colonial Secretary Bathurst ordered Governor Sherbrooke to take every precaution, using force if necessary, to secure Lord Selkirk's arrest:

In resisting the execution of the warrant against him, Lord Selkirk has rendered himself doubly amenable to the laws, and it is necessary for the sake of general principles as well as for the prevention of future evil that the determination of the government to enforce the law with respect to all and more particularly with respect to Lord Selkirk should be speedily evinced./⁸³

The response of the Canadian government to this latter despatch is not known, though the government's subsequent actions clearly indicated that it was being followed. The other order demanding the restitution of property was given prompt attention. Governor Sherbrooke issued a proclamation in the name of the Prince Regent demanding the restitution of all property by both companies, May 3, 1817, and despatched the North West Company partner, William Shaw into the interior to deliver it. Arriving at Fort William early in June, Shaw found that the fort had already been "restored" to its rightful owners by the North West Company brigade which had preceded him.⁸⁴ In company of Under-Sheriff Smith, the official who had delivered the warrants against Selkirk in March, 1817, Shaw proceeded up the water route to Lake Winnipeg in the North West company brigade and assisted the company in recovering its posts at Rainy Lake and Winnipeg River. At this latter post, Under-Sheriff Smith detained

⁸³ Bathurst to Sherbrooke, Feb. 11, 1817, G1, IX, 64.
⁸⁴/ McNabb Journal, SP, 18, 843.

forty packs of Hudson's Bay Company furs in retaliation for the seizure of North West Company furs at Fort William the previous summer. The news of this latter action soon reached Fort Douglas, and when the Under-Sheriff arrived at Red River to deliver the Prince Regent's proclamation, he was immediately put in jail by Governor Macdonell.⁸⁵

XI. Coltman's Mission to Red River Summer 1817

In May, 1817, Commissioners Coltman and Fletcher prepared to take their departure with a military force from Montreal to carry out their mission in Red River. It was quite evident that the Commissioners had been prejudiced by the depositions they had taken at York that winter against the Hudson's Bay Company. No attempt was made to halt the North West Company brigade which had been sent to recapture Fort William in May and no precaution taken that they be required to keep the peace. When the Hudson's Bay Company brigade carrying Canadian servants for Athabaska and de Meuron soldiers for Red River departed, on the other hand, the canoes were detained for several days at Lachine, the Prince Regent's Proclamation requiring them to keep the peace was read to them and the terms of their engagements were carefully examined.⁸⁶ On their arrival at Sault Ste Marie towards the middle of June, the Hudson's Bay Company canoes were detained several days by Commissioner Fletcher, on the grounds that no canoes with arms should proceed into the interior before him.⁸⁷ This delay was disastrous for the Hudson's Bay Company,

⁸⁵ MJSP, 17,297.

⁸⁶ Selkirk Memorial, SP, 12,439.

⁸⁷ Récit, 17.

for it permitted the Nor'Westers to precede them into Athabaska by more than a month that year.

Fletcher and the major part of the military detachment which accompanied the commission were unable to proceed beyond Fort William that summer because Selkirk had taken most of the canoes from that place to the interior.⁸⁸ Commissioner Coltman, however, pressed on to Red River with a small brigade. On his arrival at Winnipeg River, Coltman found A.N. McLeod, Alexander Macdonell, J.D. Campbell and a large party of armed Nor'Westers on the point of departing to recapture Fort Douglas. The North West Company servants were stopped from their hostile moves, but no attempt was made to arrest or to question the partners, many of whom had played a prominent role in the destruction of the settlement of 1816.⁸⁹

On his arrival at Fort Douglas, July 5, 1817, Commissioner Coltman was most courteously received by Lord Selkirk and offered lodging in the Hudson's Bay Company fort.⁹⁰ The Commissioner apparently revised his opinion of Lord Selkirk after meeting him:

Lord Selkirk agrees to give up all the property at this place. This and the fact that Athabaska canoes with very valuable and unprotected property of the North West Company passed within his reach, and nearly at the same moment that accounts reached his Lordship of many violences committed in the country from whence they came on the persons and property of the H.B.C. people there, this convinces me of his Lordship's peaceable intentions
 [With regard to] Selkirk's refusal to obey the warrant [for his

⁸⁸ Récit, 18.

⁸⁹ Selkirk Memorial, SP, 12,451.

⁹⁰ MJSP, 12,304-6.

arrest] though I have no doubt that his personal apprehensions were not well founded, yet with his Lordship's view of the character and proceedings of his opponents they were not unnatural and must, I think, be allowed considerable weight in extenuation on a future bona fide surrender./91

Although Coltman's meeting with Lord Selkirk may have allayed some of his prejudices against the Hudson's Bay Company, it did not win him over completely to the support of the Hudson's Bay Company cause. From this point onward the Commissioner showed a strong tendency to adhere strictly to the letter of his instructions. Coltman felt that his primary function in Red River was to bring about the restoration of peaceful conditions and freedom of trade, rather than to arrest and punish criminals for past offences:

The cessation of hostility both in Canada and in the Indian territory and the mutual restoration of all property captured during these disputes and the freedom of trade and intercourse with the Indians . . . are the great questions at issue in this Inquiry. The investigation of past offences will consequently stand last in point of time, with the exception of cases where there is a strong presumption that the parties accused or important witnesses may not be met with at a subsequent time./92

Accordingly, before taking depositions, the Commissioner busied himself in an attempt to secure an agreement between the two companies for the mutual restitution of captured property. This proved rather difficult to achieve. The Hudson's Bay Company insisted that restitution should be made of everything which had been lost. Inventories should be drawn up by the aggrieved parties of the goods which they were missing and the other company forced to restore them or make adequate

⁹¹ Coltman to Sherbrooke, July 15, 1817, RR Papers, 105.
⁹² Coltman to Selkirk, July 4, 1817, SP, 3, 657-8.

compensation in kind. Furthermore, all property whose ownership was questioned should be brought before the commissioner for final award.⁹³

The North West Company, on the other hand, favoured restitution only of what was visible at the post in question as belonging to the opposite party; no restitution to be made of property damaged or already consumed. The traders of the two companies at each post should meet together, decide which of their property belonged to the other and mutually restore it. Any property in dispute should be awarded by a representative of the Commissioner who would visit the district.⁹⁴

On July 15, 1817, a compromise was reached which adhered fairly well to the North West Company viewpoint. Traders of the two companies in each district were to meet together and to restore mutually all goods whose ownership could be identified. Disputed property was to be brought before the commissioners if it was in reasonable transportation distance of Red River. Otherwise, an inventory of the disputed property was to be drawn up and sent to the Commissioner, from which a final award would be made.⁹⁵

The decision to restore all seized property was an eminently fair way of bringing an end to the strife between the fur companies, for as long as one of them held goods over which the other claimed ownership, there would always be the danger of retaliation. In Red River, the restitution was quite vigorously carried out, even to the extent of forcing

⁹³ Selkirk to Coltman, July 11, 1817, SP, 3,723.

⁹⁴/ McGillivray to Coltman, July 12, 1817, Ibid., 3,793.

⁹⁵/ Agreement for Restitution of Property, July 15, 1817, SP, 3,793-6.

the Hudson's Bay Company to restore hay cutting privileges around Fort Douglas which the Nor'Westers had formerly enjoyed.⁹⁶ Beyond this area, however, little was done, as both parties continued their practices of lawless violence.

The restitution of property effected, Coltman next turned his attention to gathering affidavits and making arrests. A large number of depositions from freemen, half-breeds, Indians, settlers and traders were presented by both companies, much of the evidence being contradictory. Both sides apparently tutored their representatives on what they should say.⁹⁷ Most of the principals were heard from including: Lord Selkirk, Governor Macdonell, Sheriff Macdonell and Captain d'Orsonnens for the Hudson's Bay Company, McLellan, Lamar and Alexander Macdonell for the North West organization.

Only the murder of Owen Keveny, a Hudson's Bay Company servant from Albany, who had attempted to come to the rescue of the colony, and was captured and killed by Nor'Westers in the Winnipeg River, in July, 1816, was considered to be a serious enough offence to warrant the taking of prisoners; Mainville, McLellan and Lamar being committed as principals and accessories to this crime. All those accused in connection with the massacre of the settlers or the seizure of Fort William were admitted to bail. Persons connected with the Massacre of Seven Oaks received light cautions, but Selkirk and four of his officers were obliged to furnish exorbitant bail ranging from £1,500 to £6,000. Doubtless this was part

⁹⁶ Correspondence, Coltman and Gale, Aug. 22-23, 1817, SP, 3,962-71.
⁹⁷ Récit, 29; Selkirk Memorial, SP, 12,456.

of the Government's instructions to enforce the law more particularly with respect to Lord Selkirk.⁹⁸

Selkirk and Coltman both left Red River early in September.⁹⁹ the former to stand trial for his crimes, the latter to write out the report of his investigations. The Commissioners conclusion was that both sides were equally to blame.

One party appears to have acted on the assumption, in a great measure perhaps sincere, that their opponents were rebels and enemies to government as well as to themselves; while the other party, on a like assumption, that their adversaries had adopted the principle of military plunder and were to be resisted as such. This much it appears to me must be allowed, that after these events, they acted so far under the impulse of irritated feelings that great allowance is to be made for their proceedings./100

Although the actions of Coltman in Red River tended to favour the North West Company, it is doubtful if this was completely intentional. To a large part, it arose from the Commissioner's strict adherence to the letter of his instructions, which placed greater emphasis on the bringing of peace to Red River, than the arrest of the perpetrators of previous crimes. Coltman succeeded very well in carrying out these instructions. Property in Red River was restored to its rightful owners, and depositions taken on all the major disturbances which had occurred in that region. The people who had committed the most serious crimes of the past few years were not punished, at present, but the evidence taken against them, and the arrest of the killers of Owen Keveny,

⁹⁸ Coltman to Sherbrooke, Aug. 8, 1817, RR Papers, 108-10.

⁹⁹/ Récit, 44.

100/ Coltman Report, RR Papers, 117.

the most obvious case of deliberate murder, apparently caused the Nor'-Westers to cease their violent actions.

With the departure of the Coltman Peace Mission the days of violence in Red River were over. Property had been restored, and the more aggressive individuals on both sides had left the territory, either to stand trial for their crimes or to escape punishment. Selkirk and Governor Miles Macdonell, along with the principal officers of the de Meuron regiment, had been sent to trial in Canada. Duncan Cameron, the North West trader at the Forks who had been sent to York Factory in May, 1816, was held up by ice in the bay that winter but was shipped to England for trial in the summer of 1817.¹⁰¹ Alexander Macdonell, the leader of the attack on the colony from Qu'Appelle in 1816, was last seen somewhere in the Rocky Mountains attempting to flee from justice.¹⁰² A.N. McLeod, the leader of the attack upon the colony from Fort William in 1816, left in the fall of 1817 for England.¹⁰³

The North West Company traders who replaced Cameron and Macdonell in Red River in the fall of 1817, Leith at the Forks, and Holden at Qu'Appelle, were new men to the territory whose minds were not prejudiced by the memories of past events. Former Sheriff Macdonell, the new Governor of the colony, was the officer who had surrendered Fort Douglas in 1816, but his intentions were equally peaceable. A windstorm was to destroy a large part of the crop that year, and for many years to come

¹⁰¹ Berens to Bathurst, Nov. 1, 1817, Q 146, 279.

¹⁰² Selkirk Memorial, SP, 12, 453.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 12, 452.

the settlers were to suffer many privations in their efforts to win a precarious subsistence from the soil of Red River. The colonists' difficulties in the future, however, were related more to the land itself than to the people who dwelt on it. After the summer of 1817, the colony became a permanent part of the scene in Red River and was never to be dislodged again by the struggles of rival fur traders.

XII. Conclusion

The years 1816-1817 saw the struggle of the fur companies rise to unprecedented heights as forces sent from Eastern Canada by the Hudson's Bay Company, the North West Company and the Canadian government each intervened in Red River to attempt to bring an end to the violence. Although both the fur companies vied for the assistance of the government in the settlement of its dispute with its rival, the North West Company proved to be the more successful in winning government favours.

The British and Canadian governments refused to give Selkirk more than a bodyguard for the protection of his own person when he ventured into western Canada in the spring of 1816, to recoup the Hudson's Bay Company's lost fortunes, and his Lordship was forced to resort to the more drastic measure of recruiting a military force of one hundred disbanded de Meuron soldiers to assist in the restoration of his colony. The de Meurons served their purpose, though, for by the spring of 1817, the fortunes of the North West Company in the area south of Winnipeg River had been completely routed: the Hudson's Bay Company held every post in that region between Fort William and the Red River; a large

number of the company's partners had been sent to Montreal to stand trial for their previous crimes and the company's profits were held back for one year through Lord Selkirk's retention of their fur bales at Fort William. These actions had all been carried out with a pretense of legality under the Canada Jurisdiction Act of the Hudson's Bay Company Charter. It was quite clear, nevertheless, that trading considerations were uppermost in their minds when exercising these deeds of legal intimidation.

The North West Company tried, at first, to restore their fortunes by legal means, too, but they were not so successful as Lord Selkirk. Warrants were secured both for the arrest of Lord Selkirk and the restitution of the North West Company Fort at Fort William, but the Hudson's Bay Company declined to submit to either of them. Nevertheless, the Nor'Westers were able to open their water route from Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg, by means of an armed expedition despatched from Montreal in the spring of 1817, which managed to recoup the greater part of their losses of the previous summer.

The North West Company, through its extensive influence in the British and Canadian politics, had managed to keep the government from interfering in the fur traders' struggles throughout the early period of their quarrels. Lord Selkirk's vigorous aggressions in the summer and fall of 1816 so nearly wrecked the Nor'Westers' fortunes, though, that the North West Company was at last forced to request the government to intervene on its behalf.

The commission of inquiry and mediation which the Canadian government appointed, in the fall of 1816, did tend to favour the North West

Company to a certain extent. It guaranteed them the restoration of most of their property, without forcing them to pay damages for property of their rivals which they had destroyed or spirited away from the area in which it was originally located. It also made little attempt to punish them for the most serious of their crimes, the Massacre of Seven Oaks; indicting them only for less important offences such as the murder of Owen Keveny. The Commission, nevertheless, did not do everything which the North West Company would have desired. In restoring the status quo ante bellum, the Hudson's Bay Company colony, which the Nor'Westers had been trying so desperately to dislodge, was permitted to remain in Red River.

The primary concern of the Commissioners was to restore peace and normal trading conditions to Red River, and in this they succeeded very well. Property was restored, and the more troublesome elements in both companies were either sent to Canada to stand trial for their crimes or induced to flee the country to escape from justice. The new leaders of the companies and the colony who came to Red River in the fall of 1817 showed little inclination to renew the fur traders quarrel.

Though Peace was brought to Red River by the Coltman mission of 1817, the struggle of the fur companies was not yet ended. There were still trials to be held in Canada on the indictments preferred by Coltman, Selkirk and the North West Company. Furthermore, a troublesome situation was gathering in Athabaska as both companies began to send large expeditions into that rich fur bearing region in an attempt to drive the other out of that territory.

Though intervention in western Canada of forces of the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies sent from Montreal failed to bring an end to the fur traders' quarrel, government intervention, at the request of the North West Company following the Hudson's Bay Company seizure of Fort William, brought peace to the Red River region at least. The struggle of the fur companies for provisions at last was ended. The battle in the law courts of Canada and the fight for furs in Athabaska had yet to be fought, however, before the ultimate victor of the fur company's struggle would be known.

CHAPTER VI

THE UNION OF THE FUR COMPANIES 1817-1821

It appears from the observations of Mr. Mackenzie that to carry on this commerce to the national advantage the privileges and rivalship, the claims and monopolies of great commercial enterprises must be reconciled into one common interest. ... The most practical route to the Northwest is through the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company. By this route from Britain all the navigation from Montreal through the chain of lakes and their immense communication and its consequent carriage would be saved. On the other hand the people of Canada [are] infinitely more capable of the hardships of the Indian life & all the vicissitudes & dangers incident to the trade than Europeans. It is from Canada that the fur companies must draw supplies of men without which it would be impossible to pursue the commerce./¹

The above proposal that the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company should unite and combine the trade route and charter privileges of the English organization with the energetic personnel of the Canadian firm was advanced by Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the famous explorer and prominent North West Company executive, in 1794, some twenty years before the two fur companies began their long and violent struggle in Red River. It was perhaps the most rational solution to the fur traders' quarrel, and, if it had been carried out at the time would undoubtedly have avoided many of the subsequent outrages.

The idea of a union of the fur companies, however, did not appeal to all fur traders at this early period. The view was supported mainly by the North West Company, who, as they pushed their fur trade further

¹ Governor Simcoe to Lords of Plantation, 1794, cited in A.S. Morton, "The North West Company's Columbian Enterprise", CHR, XVII (1936), 272. (Hereafter: Morton, Columbian Enterprise).

westward, started to feel the burden of their long line of communications from the interior to Montreal, and began to see the advantages of lower transportation costs^{1a} which the shorter Hudson Bay route afforded. Not even all the Nor[']Westers were in favour of transporting goods to the interior through Hudson Bay. The Montreal Agents of the North West Company showed little inclination to become a party to an agreement which would reduce the amount of goods which they might forward to the interior by their canoe route through the Great Lakes. The Hudson's Bay Company, on the other hand, as long as it was showing a profit to its shareholders, saw little reason for sharing the advantage which the monopoly of the Hudson Bay transit route gave it over its opponents.

Thus, though Mackenzie's proposal of a union of the fur companies was perhaps the most rational suggestion for an efficient mode of conducting the western Canadian fur trade, his idea was advanced somewhat prematurely. It would take some time for the advantages of fur company union to become clearly discernable to all parties.

I. Early Union Proposals 1799-1815

It was the posts in the area between Lake Superior and James Bay where the effects of Hudson's Bay Company competition was first felt by the Nor[']Westers. The North West Company traders in this region were the earliest to perceive the advantage which the short route through Hudson Bay was offering their rival, and were the first people to make definite proposals for ending the competition in that area. In 1799, the North West Company partner, William McGillivray, suggested to Thomas Thomas,

^{1a} The Nor[']Westers could also escape paying taxes to the Canadian government by using the Hudson Bay route: Innis, Fur Trade, 181.

the Hudson's Bay Company Governor at Moose Fort, that there should be a mutual abandonment of competing posts in the region between Lake Superior and James Bay by both companies. The proposal was accompanied with a threat that if it was not complied with, the Nor'Westers would send a ship of their own to Hudson Bay to supply their posts.

If notwithstanding these our sincere wishes to fix the trade on an amicable and advantageous footing as we conceive it for both parties, it should still be the determination of your company to persist in pushing it so much on our side; we are resolved to send Goods to Moose Fort and the other Posts of the Bay next season, and if from experience we find ourselves under any disadvantage from the long communication through which these goods must pass we must have recourse to a shorter and easier mode of sending the necessary supplies of Merchandise for the Trade to the Bay./²

The request met with only a curt acknowledgement by Governor Thomas, and in 1803, the Nor'Westers actually carried out their threat, sending a ship to James Bay, constructing a depot on Charlton Island and establishing posts in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company at the mouths of the Moose and Rupert rivers. The North West Company had no intention of establishing forts permanently on Hudson Bay. The Nor'Westers 1803 expedition to James Bay was designed solely to frighten the Hudson's Bay Company into granting them transit privileges through the Charter Territory.³

Shortly after the North West Company had established its own depots on James Bay, the organization's Canadian rival, the X Y Company, made a similar effort to secure transit privileges from the Hudson's Bay

² William McGillivray to Governor Thomas, Sept. 1799, cited in G.P. de T. Glazebrook, A History of Transportation in Canada (Toronto, 1938), 55.

³ W.S. Wallace, "Nor'Westers invade the Bay", Beaver, 278 (1947), 33-4.

Company. In 1804, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, at that time one of the principal directors of the X Y Company, opened negotiations with the Hudson's Bay Company Committee to secure permission for his Company to transport furs and trading goods through some port on Hudson Bay.⁴ Almost simultaneously with the commencement of Mackenzie's negotiations with the English Company, the X Y Company's London Agent, Edward Ellice was instructed to make an attempt to purchase some £103,000 of Hudson's Bay Company stock, in an effort to secure enough influence among the shareholders to force that organization to unite with the X Y Company.⁵

Both Mackenzie's negotiations with the Hudson's Bay Company Committee and Ellice's attempt to purchase the English organization's stock were unsuccessful. After the North West and X Y fur companies had united in December, 1804, however, negotiations for transit privileges through Hudson Bay were reopened the following January with the Hudson's Bay Company Committee by Duncan McGillivray, a London agent of the newly united Canadian fur companies. The Nor'Westers offered to withdraw from the posts which they had established in James Bay if the English organization would grant them the right to ship furs and trading goods into the interior of the continent through some port in Rupert's Land. The Hudson's Bay Company declined this North West Company offer, on the grounds that the Nor'Westers offered no guarantee that they would not interfere with the English company's trade.⁶

⁴ Morton, History, 521.

⁵ Dorothy E.T. Long, Edward Ellice (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 1942), 70.

⁶ Morton, History, 523.

At the North West Company's annual meeting at Fort William in the summer of 1805, it was decided to begin expanding the company's trade to the Pacific coast: Simon Fraser was instructed to proceed towards the Rocky Mountains up the Peace River and David Thompson was given similar orders to advance up the Saskatchewan. The increased burden which this extended trade route would impose on the North West Company's costs of transportation made it even more imperative that a right of transit should be secured through Hudson Bay. Accordingly, the Company voted at this meeting to offer the Hudson's Bay Company £2,000 annual rental for the right to ship trading goods and furs through York Factory.⁷

In November, 1805, the North West Company's London Agent, Duncan McGillivray, presented the above offer to the Hudson's Bay Company's directorate, promising, in addition, that the Nor'Westers would withdraw their posts on the shore of James Bay and establish no forts closer to the seacoast than the positions which they now occupied.⁸ The Hudson's Bay Company rejected this offer with the excuse that their charter required them to conduct the whole of their trade through Hudson Bay and that they could not make a contract with a company which would not conduct all its traffic in the same manner.⁹

After this rebuff, the North West Company reverted to Ellice's scheme of attempting to purchase enough stock in the Hudson's Bay Com-

⁷ Minutes of 1805 Annual Meeting, Wallace, Documents, 203.

⁸ McGillivray and Forsyth to H.B.Co. Committee, Nov.27, 1805, cited in Glazebrook, History of Transportation, 56.

⁹ Morton, History, 523.

pany to force that organization's shareholders to unite with the Nor'-Westers. Sir Alexander Mackenzie, now back in the employ of the North West Company, received orders from his Montreal agent, William McGillivray, in 1808, to purchase £30,000 of Hudson's Bay Company stock for this purpose.¹⁰ Mackenzie's efforts to gain control of the Hudson's Bay Company, however, met with little more success than Ellice's similar scheme four years earlier. By 1812, Mackenzie had purchased only £4,700 of Hudson's Bay Company securities, and the effort was abandoned.¹¹

By 1810, the Nor'Westers were preparing for a vigorous campaign against John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company for control of the fur trade of the Columbia River region.¹² Wishing to eliminate as much competition on their northern flank as was possible during this trying period, the North West Company decided, in 1810, to attempt a division of the western Canadian fur territory with the Hudson's Bay Company. In November, 1810, the Nor'Westers proposed that the English organization should retain exclusive trading privileges in all its Charter territory except the area north of the Saskatchewan River, south of the Winnipeg River and in the Dauphin and Swan River departments. The North West Company would hold exclusive rights to these latter regions, and would also have permission from the Hudson's Bay people to keep two posts in

¹⁰ Alexander Mackenzie to Roderick Mackenzie, Apr. 13, 1812, cited in Masson, Les Bourgeois de la compagnie du nord ouest (Quebec, 1889), 153. (Hereafter: Masson, Bourgeois).

¹¹ Ibid. At one time Mackenzie persuaded Lord Selkirk to purchase some Hudson's Bay Company stock for him on a joint account. Selkirk withdrew from this scheme, however, when he realized what Mackenzie's sinister intentions were: Correspondence Mackenzie and Selkirk, SP, 2-7.

¹² Morton, Columbian Enterprise, 284.

the Red River region, to be used exclusively for the gathering of buffalo meat.¹³ The Hudson's Bay Company was willing to accept a division of the territory but insisted that it must have exclusive trading privileges in all of Rupert's Land. The North West Company refused to give up the posts which it now held within the English company's charter territory without compensation, and thereupon the negotiations were terminated.¹⁴

When the War of 1812 threatened to disrupt the North West Company's communication system with the interior of the continent through the Great Lakes, the Montreal firm petitioned the British government for a right of transit through Hudson Bay. The request was referred to the Hudson's Bay Company who stated that they were quite willing to grant a transit privilege to the Nor'Westers for trading goods, but not for furs. The Hudson's Bay Company contended that if the Nor'Westers were permitted to export their furs through Hudson Bay, they would be able to market the goods one year earlier than if they had been shipped through Montreal, and in this manner the North West Company would gain an undue advantage over them. The Hudson's Bay Company demanded a compensation of at least £10,000 before it would grant this transit privilege, and on this point the negotiations failed.¹⁵

By 1815, the Hudson's Bay Company had apparently suffered enough

¹³ N W Co. proposed Boundaries of Delimitation, Nov. 7, 1810, SP, 190. Any furs which were brought to the North West Company's Red River establishments would be sold to the Hudson's Bay Company at the prevailing rates of exchange.

¹⁴/ H.B.Co. to N.W.Co., July 24, 1811, SP, 210; N.W. Co. to H.B. Co., Aug. 6, 1811, SP, 213.

¹⁵/ Berens to Bathurst, Mar. 23, 1814, Q 130, I, 66.

violence from the Nor'Westers to cause them to make another offer for a division of the fur trading territory. In the fall of 1815, when Lord Selkirk went to Canada to strengthen his beleaguered colony, he was authorized by the Hudson's Bay Company Committee to renew the Company's 1811 proposal to relinquish all trading privileges outside of Rupert's Land, and even to dispose of some of the Charter territory itself if the Nor'Westers would guarantee to protect the Hudson's Bay people against intrusion by third parties.¹⁶

On his arrival in Canada, Selkirk opened negotiations with the North West Company's Montreal director, John Richardson. The Nor'Westers, were much more arrogant in their demands than they had been in 1811. They insisted that their organization must keep all its posts in the Saskatchewan, Red, Dauphin and Swan River departments but would relinquish all other posts in Rupert's Land, provided that the Hudson's Bay company would withdraw from all the forts which it held in Athabaska.¹⁷ Lord Selkirk, however, refused to accept anything less than a complete Hudson's Bay Company monopoly in Rupert's Land.

On the failure of this negotiation, North West Company director Richardson suggested that a union of the fur companies might be attempted: one third of the profits to go the Hudson's Bay Company, two-thirds to the Nor'Westers. Lord Selkirk refused this proposal also. The Scottish Earl felt that the differing capital structures of the two trading organizations made such a union impracticable: the Hudson's Bay Company was a limited liability,

¹⁶ H.B.Co. Committee to Selkirk, Aug. 30, 1815, SP, 1,634.

¹⁷ Memo of talk with Richardson, Dec. 10, 1815, SP, 225-226.

joint-stock company, the North West Company was a partnership whose members were liable to the full extent of their private fortunes.¹⁸

The destruction of Lord Selkirk's colony by the Nor'Westers complicated matters, for his Lordship was determined that a satisfactory atonement for that outrage should be made before the negotiations were completed.¹⁹ This proving impossible to attain, meetings were terminated December 27, 1815.²⁰

The years 1799-1815 saw a series of protracted negotiations between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in an effort to bring about an end to their struggle for the furtrade of western Canada. Most of the proposals for a settlement of the fur companies differences had suggested a division of the trading territory between the two companies. Although both companies favoured this idea, they appeared to be hopelessly deadlocked over the exact boundary division: the Hudson's Bay Company insisted that it must maintain a monopoly of the trade throughout its Charter territory, the North West Company contended that it should retain at least the most important posts which it held in Rupert's Land.

The original idea of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, in 1794, and the final proposal of John Richardson, twenty-one years later, was that the two companies should unite their interests, combining the advantages of the economical trade route which the Hudson's Bay Company controlled with the efficient class of trading personnel which the North West Company

¹⁸ Ibid., 227.

¹⁹ Selkirk to Berens, Nov. 18, 1815, SP, 1,940.

²⁰ Memo of talk with Richardson, Dec. 27, 1815, SP, 250.

possessed. In future, the fur companies might be expected to return to this idea. The failure of the 1815 negotiations, however, meant that for the present, the fight between the fur companies must continue until one of them realized the folly of the stand which it had been taking.

II. The Victory of the North West Company in the Law Courts of Canada 1817-1819

The Coltman Peace Mission of 1817 brought an end to the fighting between the fur traders in the Red River Region. The mission, however, did very little to forward a union of the fur companies. It had merely restored both organizations to their former positions, and, by removing the more troublesome people for trial in Canada, lessened the possibility of further violence occurring between them. Had the Commission been able to restore peace throughout western Canada, instead of only in Red River, it might have been possible for the two fur companies to have continued the trade peacefully and separately. The commissioners having failed to restore peace beyond Red River, however, more forceful methods would be required to settle the fur companies' differences in these other regions.

The trials in the courts of Canada, of persons indicted for offences in Red River by Coltman and Selkirk, in 1816-1817, seemed to offset, from a judicial standpoint at least, the balance between the fur companies which Commissioner Coltman had achieved in his peace mission to Red River; and strengthened, somewhat, the bargaining position of the North West Company in its negotiations with its Hudson Bay rival. The legal proceedings in Canada, 1817-1819, resulted in a complete reversal of Coltman's decision that both companies were equally to blame for the

struggle which ensued in Red River. The trials thoroughly vindicated the action of the North West Company in destroying Lord Selkirk's colony, while bringing much discredit upon the actions of the Scottish Earl and his Hudson's Bay Company associates.

The North West Company's legal victory resulted, in no small measure, from the Company's influence in political and legal circles in both Upper and Lower Canada. Throughout the proceedings, prisoners were bailed, indictments quashed, trials initiated and laws changed solely to suit the North West Company's purposes.

Most of the prisoners sent to Montreal by Selkirk and Coltman were admitted to bail shortly after their arrival, and a large number of the ones who were charged with serious crimes took this opportunity to escape from the country. Consequently, when the most serious offences were brought to trial, only people who had played a minor part in the fur companies' struggle were present to face charges or to give testimony, with the result that courts were unable to make convictions for lack of sufficient evidence. This fault was particularly noticeable in the trial at York, in October, 1818, for the most serious of the North West Company's offences, the ~~murder~~ murder of Semple and the twenty settlers. Of the many half-breeds who took part in the massacre of Seven Oaks, only Paul Brown and François Bouché made no attempt to jump bail. It could not be proved that they had massacred any settlers, and both were acquitted of the charge.²¹ The trial of Paul Brown for the robbery of Michael

²¹ Trial of Paul Brown and François Bouché for Murder of Semple, H. Amos, Report of the Trials in the Courts of Canada Relative to the Destruction of the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement on the Red River with Observations (London, 1820), 34 FF. (Hereafter: Amos, Trials).

Heyden of a blanket and a gun also brought no conviction because of a lack of sufficient evidence.²²

Faulty wording of indictments was another legal device which enabled many Nor'Westers to escape punishment for their crimes. The few members of A.N. McLeod's North West Company expedition of 1816 from Montreal to Red River, who did manage to remain in Canada long enough to be tried, were not indicted for assembling with intent to destroy Fort Douglas, which was their obvious plan, but as being accessories to the murder of Robert Semple.²³ It was quite easy for the Nor'Westers to prove that they had no connection with Semple's murder by pointing out that they were some one hundred miles away, at the mouth of the Winnipeg River, when it took place.²⁴ The only trial of the Nor'Westers in which there was enough evidence produced to secure a conviction was the hearing for the murder of Owen Keveny. In this proceeding Charles de Reinhard was sentenced to be hanged.²⁵ A dispute over judicial boundaries, however, arose in this case, and the sentence was never executed.²⁶

²² Trial of Paul Brown for Robbery of Michael Heyden, Amos, Trials, 339 FF.

²³ Trial of John Siveright, Alexander Mackenzie, Hugh McGillis, John McDonald, John McLaughlin, and Simon Fraser as accessories for the Murder of Semple, Amos, Trials, 191 FF.

²⁴ Ibid. On occasion faulty wording of indictments also aided the Hudson's Bay Company. Colin Robertson and several settlers who seized Fort Gibraltar in March, 1816, were indicted for destroying the Fort, an event which took place under Semple's direction some three months later. Trial of Robertson, Heyden, Bourke, Nolin, and Jourdan for Riotously Destroying Fort Gibraltar in the Spring of 1816, Amos, Trials, 3FF.

²⁵ Trial of Charles de Reinhard for Murder, W.S. Simpson, Report at Large of the Trial of Charles de Reinhard for Murder Committed in the Indian Territories at a Court of Oyer and Terminer Held at Quebec in May 1818. (Montreal, 1819), 3 ff.

²⁶ Halkett to Bathurst, Jan. 29, 1819, Q 153, II, 531; Selkirk to Robertson, June 4, 1818, SP, 4,972.

Throughout the legal proceedings in the courts of Canada, many impediments were placed before Lord Selkirk in an attempt to discourage him from continuing his prosecutions against the North West Company. Most of the criminals arrested by Selkirk and Coltman were sent to Montreal for prosecution. The Governor-in-Chief, however, on the advice of his Executive Council, decided to remove several of the trials to York, on the grounds that many of the North West Company's witnesses were located at that place.²⁷ The expense of transporting witnesses for the Crown had to be borne entirely by Lord Selkirk, yet Selkirk's lawyers were not permitted to conduct the prosecution against the Nor'Westers. By Canadian law, the proceedings had to be directed exclusively by the Attorney-General, Mr. John Beverley Robinson, who was one of the chief legal advisers to the North West Company.²⁸

On the whole, Robinson conducted his prosecutions quite fairly. The failure to secure convictions resulted more from a lack of sufficient witnesses than from any neglect on Robinson's part in questioning those them.

At the trials, the judges who continually betrayed their prejudices in favour of the North West Company were much more to blame than the Attorney-General for the judicial farce which ensued. When the trials of the Nor'Westers opened at York, in February, 1818, two of the judges, Ogden and Reid, both of whom had relatives in the employ of the North

²⁷ Sherbrooke to Bathurst, Dec. 17, 1817, Q 145, 72.

²⁸ Robinson to Maitland Gordon and Auld, Nov. 16, 1817, Amos, Trials, xi.

West Company,²⁹ declined to sit on the Bench because of their connections with the Montreal firm and the trials were prevented from starting for several days for lack of a quorum. The Chief Justice, Judge Powell, who directed the court proceedings at York, strongly supported the North West Company's contention that what was taking place in Red River was a private war between two rival forces, similar to the quarrel which occurred between the nobles of England in the Middle Ages. He felt that any evil consequences which resulted from such a fight should be construed as gross trespass rather than murder.

Enough has been shown on either side to prove that the object of each party was to harass the other, and in so doing they were in such bad blood as to be almost exposed to exterminate each other . . . From the private war which existed between the rival traders, the unfortunate loss of life [which ensued] does not even though proved constitute a charge of murder but of riot and contempt./30

The processes instituted by the Nor'Westers against Lord Selkirk displayed a mockery of the law equal to the charges which his Lordship had brought against their firm. The techniques of postponement, removal to another district and excessive bail were constantly employed to frustrate his Lordship's attempts to secure justice.

The first charge against Lord Selkirk, of feloniously stealing

²⁹ Reid was a brother-in-law of William McGillivray, the Principal Agent of the North West Company; Ogden's son was a wintering partner: H.B. Committee to Bathurst, Feb. 4, 1818, SP, 4, 476. Both judges were entertained by N.W.Co. partners at the N.W.Co's social gathering place, the Beaver Club, in March, 1816; Ogden was the guest of Hugh Mackenzie, Reid the guest of John McDonald of Garth: Beaver Club Minutes, Mar. 9, 1816, PAC, MG/19, B 3, 103.

³⁰ Chief Justice Powell's Charge to the Jury, Trial of Bouché and Brown for Murder of Semple, Amos, Trials, 109, 138.

eighty fusils which the Nor'Westers had hidden in a hayloft at Fort William in August, 1816, was summarily dismissed by the magistrate when his Lordship presented himself for trial at Sandwich, in February, 1818. The other indictments against the Scottish Earl, however, were not so easily dispensed with. The trial of Selkirk for resisting the warrant for his arrest served on him at Fort William was first transferred from Sandwich to Montreal, with bail reduced from £6,000 to £50, then transferred back to Sandwich, with bail raised again from £50 to £6,000, before it was finally thrown out by a grand jury. The indictment preferred against Lord Selkirk for false arrest and imprisonment of the North West partners at Fort William, in August, 1816, was also twice transferred, and postponed at regular intervals thereafter, until Lord Selkirk and most of the principal witnesses had left the country. Eventually, the charge was dismissed by the Attorney-General.³¹

Daniel Mackenzie and Under-Sheriff Smith were more successful than the other North West partners in their attempt to gain compensation for their arrest and imprisonment by the Hudson's Bay Company. Mackenzie received £1,500 damage award for his imprisonment by Lord Selkirk at Fort William in August, 1816, while Smith obtained £500 compensation for his detention by Governor Macdonell at Fort Douglas in June, 1817.³²

A final display of legal blundering occurred when both the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company laid charges against each other

³¹ Halkett to Bathurst, Feb. 21, 1818, Q 150, II, 339; Halkett to Bathurst, Jan. 30, 1819, Q 153, II, 507, 514.

³² Wood to Allen, Oct. 1818, SP, 5,432.

of conspiring to destroy the trade of the other. In the hearing of the indictment against the Hudson's Bay Company at Sandwich, in November, 1818, the Attorney-General took the unprecedented step of entering the grand jury room to prompt witnesses in their testimony. Shortly before the proceeding ended, and the jury was about to give a verdict which was expected to favour the Hudson's Bay Company, the Chief Justice suddenly appeared and adjourned the court sine die, without giving any explanation for his action.³³

A few weeks afterwards, a law was passed in the Upper Canadian Legislature extending the jurisdiction of certain courts in Upper Canada. Under this statute, a new charge of conspiring to destroy trade was brought against the Hudson's Bay Company at York, where it was expected to obtain a Grand Jury favourable to the North West Company's cause. The Grand Jury at York apparently sanctioned the indictment against the Hudson's Bay Company, but the trial does not appear to have taken place.³⁴

A charge of conspiring to destroy the trade was brought against the North West Company at Sandwich, in November, 1818. At this trial, however, the Attorney-General made no attempt to interfere with the Grand Jury's proceedings to further the cause of "justice", and the indictment was dismissed.³⁵

³³ Memorial of John Pritchard, June 7, 1819, cited in: James Montgomery, Substance of a Speech Delivered in the House of Commons, June 24, 1819, (London, 1819), 51. (Hereafter: Pritchard, Memorial).

³⁴/ Pritchard claims that the second charge of conspiracy to destroy the trade was preferred solely to prevent the H.B.Co. witnesses from appearing at other trials which were taking place in York at the same time: Pritchard, Memorial, 51-2.

³⁵/ Ibid., 32-3.

The trials of the Red River disturbances which took place in the courts of Canada from 1817-1819 were certainly a victory for the North West Company. Only one of the many charges brought against them, the murder of Owen Keveny, resulted in a conviction, and this was never executed. In the meantime, Lord Selkirk had been harried from courtroom to courtroom, from Montreal to York, to Sandwich, to Quebec, transporting the same bevy of witnesses, and answering the same specious charges and meeting with continual frustration, in a legal battle which was ruinous both to his pocket book and to his health. The Nor'Westers were only able to obtain two convictions against Lord Selkirk: one for the false imprisonment of Daniel Mackenzie at Fort William, another for the detention of Under-Sheriff Smith at Fort Douglas. The propaganda effect of these two convictions, however, and, indeed, of the whole legal proceedings, greatly bolstered the prestige of the North West Company. The horrible crime of the Massacre of Seven Oaks was largely forgotten, and, for many years thereafter, the controversy among the fur companies was viewed, in Canada, as a struggle which had been initiated by Lord Selkirk's colony through the pemmican embargo of 1814.

The trials in the courts of Canada had eliminated Lord Selkirk as a supporter of the Hudson's Bay Company cause. He left Canada, in 1819, an ill and ruined man, and was to die one year later almost insolvent. Selkirk's defeat, nevertheless, did not strengthen the North West Company's position, materially. The Coltman Peace Mission of 1817 had largely settled the future of Lord Selkirk's colony and no legal maneouvings in the courts of Canada could alter the colony's restored position. Moreover,

the Hudson's Bay Company Committee in London was just as strong as heretofore, while the English Company's fur traders in western Canada were becoming ever more competitive with the Nor'Westers as the effects of the Company's re-organization of 1810-1811 began to be felt. Thus the trials in Canada did little to bring about an ultimate settlement of the fur traders' quarrel. Another battleground would have to be found to bring about a final settlement of this dispute.

III. The Victory of the Hudson's Bay Company in Athabaska 1818-1821

It was the Athabaska fur territory which proved to be the last area of fighting between the Hudson's Bay and North West fur trading companies and the region where the outcome of the struggle was ultimately decided. The Hudson's Bay Company had been attempting, ever since 1802, to gain a foothold in this rich fur-bearing region, but, for many years, had met with little success. The Nor'Westers had preceded the Hudson's Bay people into that region by over twenty years, and through the great influence which they possessed over the natives, bolstered on occasion by acts of violence on the part of their own servants, they had been able to keep their Hudson Bay rivals in check for many years.

Peter Fidler, the first Hudson's Bay Company trader to penetrate Athabaska, managed to hold a small post at Nottingham Lake for three years 1802-1805. During this period, however, he obtained very few furs from the Indians, and he was finally forced to withdraw from the territory when a party of North West Company bullies burnt his trading fort.³⁶ In 1813,

³⁶ Morton, History, 516-517, 519-520.

the Hudson's Bay Company planned to send another expedition of one hundred Irish servants, led by William Hillier, into Athabaska; but this force was prevented from advancing beyond York Factory because of a lack of trained steersmen to navigate the boats.³⁷

Only when the Hudson's Bay Company began to adopt the techniques of the Nor'Westers, and started to send expeditions of Canadian servants to Athabaska from Montreal, did they manage to win some success in the fur trade of that region. None the less, their victory took several years to accomplish. The first one hundred man expedition left Montreal for Athabaska in the summer of 1815. Led as far as Jack River by Colin Robertson, and directed thereafter by John Clarke, the English organization's brigade was somewhat larger than the North West Company's force and succeeded in establishing posts on the Athabaska and Peace rivers, Athabaska, Greater Slave and Lesser Slave Lakes. The Nor'Westers, however, had preceded their Hudson's Bay rivals into the Athabaska territory that winter and had succeeded in buying up most of the provisions. Only the Hudson's Bay Company posts on Lake Athabaska and Lesser Slave Lake, which had a fishery and a deer encampment, respectively, nearby, were able to survive intact throughout the winter. Traders at all the other Hudson's Bay Company posts throughout the region were forced to sell their trading goods and furs to the Nor'Westers, and ^{to} promise not to trade in the territory for three years, in order to obtain sufficient food supplies to last them until spring. Despite this assistance, three Hudson's Bay Company servants

³⁷ Hillier to Selkirk, Sept. 2, 1813, SP, 825.

died of starvation that winter.³⁸

Undaunted, the English traders returned to Athabaska in the winter of 1816-1817. The Nor'Westers managed, however, to disrupt their trade completely this year. Five Hudson's Bay Company posts were seized: Athabaska, Lesser Slave, Isle à la Crosse, Meadow and Green Lakes; and the chief Hudson's Bay Company trader in the district, John Clarke, was arrested and carried prisoner up the Peace River to prevent him from directing his company's trading operations the following season.³⁹ Following Clarke's defeat, a small expedition to Lake Athabaska, led by Francois Decoigne, was all that the Hudson's Bay Company could spare for the season 1817-1818.⁴⁰

In the summer of 1818, another, large, hundred man expedition, led by the redoubtable Colin Robertson, was sent to Athabaska to recover the English Company's fortunes. Posts were re-established all the way from Isle à la Crosse to the Peace River, and from Lesser Slave Lake to Greater Slave Lake. For the first time the Hudson's Bay Company was able to compete successfully with its Montreal rival. Although the expedition operated at a financial loss, the English company's fur returns from Athabaska that year were the largest which they had ever taken from that region.⁴¹

In the summer of 1819, Governor Williams of York Factory, assisted by a small force of de Meuron troops and the Red River colony gunboat, blockaded the mouth of the Saskatchewan River at Grand Rapids and arrested

³⁸ Morton, History, 603-606.

^{39/} Ibid., 607-609.

^{40/} Ibid., 609-610.

^{41/} E.E. Rich, (ed.), Colin Robertson's Letter Book 1817-1822 (Toronto, 1939), xci^v - xcviⁱⁱⁱ. (Hereafter: Rich, Robertson's Letters).

the five principal traders of the North West Company in Athabaska: J.D. Campbell, Benjamin Frobisher, J.G. McTavish, Angus Shaw and William McIntosh.⁴² This removal of the North West Company's chief Athabaska traders disorganized the Company's trade for the winter of 1819-1820 completely, and enabled the Hudson's Bay Company to obtain even greater trade returns from Athabaska than in the previous year. The major victory of the Nor'Wester's that year was the capture of their rival's chief trader, Colin Robertson, at Grand Rapids, and his despatch to Montreal to be tried for offences committed against the Canadian company.⁴³

The departure of Robertson, however, did not help the North West Company cause. In the winter of 1820-21, George Simpson, an energetic young businessman who was to dominate western Canadian fur trade history throughout a large part of the nineteenth century, took charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's Athabaskan venture. Simpson possessed all of Robertson's zeal without his extravagance, and under his judicious guidance, the Company's Athabaska brigade was put on a profitable basis for the first time in its history.⁴⁴

During the years 1818-1821, the Hudson's Bay Company, employing the techniques of lawless violence and legal bluff which the Nor'Westers had so successfully used against them on previous occasions, finally

⁴² McTavish and Shaw were sent to England for trial. Campbell was despatched to Montreal for the same purpose, while McIntosh and Frobisher managed to effect an escape. The latter died of exposure in an effort to return to Athabaska: S.H. Wilcocke, *Narrative de Benjamin Frobisher*, McGill University Masson Collection, 10, 28, 41, 42, 53, 67.

⁴³ Rich, *Robertson's Letters*, xcvi.

⁴⁴ Rich, (ed.), *Simpson's Athabaska Journal 1820-1821* (Toronto, 1938), xliii - xlv.

penetrated the Athabaska fur territory; steadily increasing their profits over their Montreal rival, until, by 1821, the Nor'Westers had been completely routed in that region. The loss of Athabaska was a crippling blow to the North West Company. It more than counteracted the hollow victory which the Montreal firm had won in the courts of Canada during the same period. Unless the Nor'Westers retained the rich profits of the fur bearing region in Athabaska, it was virtually impossible for their company to carry on a profitable trade over the extended canoe route to the interior from Montreal. Bound as the partners were to accept losses to the full extent of their private fortunes, it became imperative for them to bring an end to the struggle of the fur companies before they were driven into financial bankruptcy.

IV. The Union of the Fur Companies 1819-1821

It was the great success of Robertson's expedition to Athabaska, in 1818-1819, which first made the Nor'Westers realize the precariousness of their situation. At the annual meeting of the Company at Fort William in the summer of 1819, there was apparently much grumbling by the wintering partners. Many of them had not received their share of the company's profits for several trading seasons, and they were evidently fearful that they would be forced to make large loans to the Montreal agents to compensate for future losses in the company's Athabaska trade.⁴⁵

In the fall of 1819, some of these wintering partners asked the

⁴⁵ Gale to Lady Selkirk, Sept. 20, 1819, SP, 6,493.

Hudson's Bay Company's Montreal representative, Samuel Gale, whether his company would be interested in replacing the Montreal forwarding houses as agents for the wintering fur traders, supplying them with trading goods and taking out their furs through Hudson Bay. Gale forwarded these proposals to his company's London office, for the Committee's consideration. On December 4, 1819, the Hudson's Bay Company director, Andrew Colvile, replied that his company would favour such a proposition, but would agree to it only on condition that the winterers would promise to end all competition with the English fur trading company.

Meanwhile, the London Agents of the North West Company, taking advantage of their company's legal victories in the courts of Canada, were also seeking to come to terms with their Hudson Bay rival. In December, 1819, the London Agent of the Nor'Westers, Edward Ellice, offered to purchase the whole of Selkirk's stock in the Hudson's Bay Company, promising, at the same time, to terminate all legal cases pending against his Lordship in the courts of Canada.⁴⁶ Selkirk refused this proposal, fearing that if the Nor'Westers had control of his Hudson's Bay Company stock, the interests of his colonists would be neglected.⁴⁷

At the 1820 annual meeting of the North West Company at Fort William, the Agents tried to persuade the Winterers to sign a new agreement with them by pretending the negotiations for a union with the Hudson's Bay Company were nearly completed. The Winterers knew, from their own correspondence with the Hudson's Bay Company the previous winter that no such

⁴⁶ Ellice to Colvile, Dec. 2, 1819, SP, 6,622.

^{47/} Selkirk to Colvile, Dec. 11, 1819, SP, 6,628.

agreement was being contemplated at the time and refused to be enticed. Instead, the Wintering Partners decided to send their own representatives, John McLaughlin and Angus Bethune, to England to negotiate with the Hudson's Bay Company on the basis of Colville's proposals of the previous December.⁴⁸

McLaughlin and Bethune met the Hudson's Bay Company Committee in London, in December, 1820, and renewed the proposal that the English Company should replace the Montreal forwarding houses as agents for the Wintering Partners. The Hudson's Bay Company, however, had decided by this time against entering into a contract exclusively with the Winterers. The Committee realized that there was a grave danger that if the Montreal agents were left out of any new fur trading agreement, they might hire new fur traders of their own to compete against the Hudson's Bay Company-North West Wintering Partner alignment. Accordingly the English Company's Directorate insisted that both the North West Company wintering partners and their Montreal agents must become parties of any new fur trading arrangement.⁴⁹

The Montreal Agents proved to be quite willing to^{end} the struggle. Indeed, Major Caldwell, the Lower Canadian Government's Receiver-General and an intimate friend of the North West Company Montreal agent, William McGillivray, had crossed to England on the same boat as McLaughlin and Bethune with an equal intention of trying to arrange a union agreement with the Hudson's Bay Company.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Rich, Robertson's Letters, xclx; Morton, History, 615.

⁴⁹/ Rich, Robertson's Letters, cv.

⁵⁰/ Ibid., 138.

The agreement between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company's agents and wintering partners was signed March 26, 1821. The fur trade was to be carried on jointly by both firms for twenty-one years in the name of the Hudson's Bay Company. Profits were to be divided on the ratio: 45% to the Hudson's Bay Company, 30% to the North West agents and 25% to the North West Company winterers. The directorate of the new organization was to be an Advisory Committee composed of four members of the Hudson's Bay Company: Governor Berens, Deputy-Governor Pelly, Andrew Colvile and Nicholas Garry; and three representatives of the North West Company: William McGillivray, Simon McGillivray and John Fraser. The structure of the new organization was to conform to that of the Hudson's Bay Company with overseas governors, Chief Factors and chief traders each receiving an annual share of the profits of their various departments.⁵¹

In the summer of 1821, the union agreement received final approval at a meeting of the North West Company agents and partners at Fort William, and a Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factors and Traders' Council at Norway House. Competing posts were abandoned and most of the violent and less efficient fur traders in both companies were excluded from membership in the new organization and forced to retire to England, to Canada or to the Red River colony.⁵² Thus the struggle of the two rival

⁵¹ Deed of Covenant executed by the Hudson's Bay Company, McGillivrays and Ellice, 1821: cited in C.G. Davidson, The North West Company, (Berkley, 1919), 305 FF.

⁵² Correspondence between McGillivray and Ellice, June 12, June 29 and July 21, 1821, PAC, Ellice Papers, Bundle 10.

trading companies for the fur resources of western Canada ended, and a united organization combining the advantages of an economical Hudson Bay trade route and a vigorous Canadian personnel was established to prosecute the fur trade in peace.

The struggle of the fur traders in its final stages was very much a triumph for the Hudson's Bay Company. Though the Nor'Westers had defeated Lord Selkirk in the battle in the Law courts of Canada, it was very largely a hollow triumph over an issue which had already been settled, by the Coltman Peace Mission. By this mission the North West Company had lost its monopoly over the provision trade of Red River, while by the success of the Hudson's Bay Company's expeditions to Athabaska, 1818-1821, it lost its monopoly of the trade in western Canada's richest fur bearing region, as well. This two-fold defeat ended the power of the North West Company in western Canada. Without the profits of the furs in Athabaska or the provisions of the buffalo in Red River, it was impossible for the Nor'-Westers to maintain their extended canoe route from Montreal to the Pacific Ocean. The "Lords of the Lake and Forest" were forced to seek union with their rivals to prevent themselves from being driven to financial ruin.

The Nor'Westers were very much the victims of their own policies, for it was their early successes with the combination of legal bluff and lawless violence which forced the Hudson's Bay Company to adopt similar measures to defeat them. With the union of the fur companies, however, the days of violence and intimidation were over. The Montreal traders were forced to accept the English company's form of organization in which individual fur traders were subject to the authority of Company governors and could no longer act each as a law unto himself.

With the achievement of the Union of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, Sir Alexander Mackenzie's vision of a single trading firm prosecuting the fur trade of western Canada from Hudson Bay to the Pacific Ocean, combining the advantages of the Hudson's Bay Company's economical transportation route with the North West Company's vigorous personnel, at last, was realized. Sir Alexander had originally hoped that through his purchases of stock in the Hudson's Bay Company, the Nor'Westers would be able to absorb their English rival. The stamina of the more rigid corporate structure of the Hudson's Bay Company, however, proved to be greater than the strength of the loose federation which composed the North West Company. The English organization was thus able to withstand many setbacks in early years and was able, eventually, to defeat and to absorb its Montreal rival in the struggle's final stages.

Whether the Hudson's Bay Company absorbed the Nor'Westers or the North West Company absorbed the English organization really mattered little. The important consideration was that the two companies should unite and end a futile squabble which had brought profit to none and injury to many

innocent people who had little connection with the actual prosecution of the fur trade. With the union of the fur companies, a 150 year fight between Montreal and Hudson Bay for the control of the fur resources of western Canada ended, and the western Canadian fur trade was able to enter upon the greatest quarter century of prosperity it had ever known.

V. Conclusion

The second decade of the nineteenth century witnessed the climax of a great struggle between two fur companies for control of the fur resources of western Canada. The North West Company, entering the fur bearing region from the Great Lakes, possessed the advantages of a vigorous personnel, long experienced in direct trade relations with the Indians, and addicted for many years to traditions of lawless violence to attain their ends. The Nor'Westers were handicapped, however, by a long inland water transportation route extending from Montreal to the Pacific Ocean which raised the cost of transporting their furs to ruinous heights. The Hudson's Bay Company possessed the advantage of a cheaper transit route through Hudson Bay, but their personnel had been reorganized only recently on lines similar to those used by the Canadians, and it took some time before the English Company approached the Nor'Westers in competitive efficiency. The Nor'Wester's more vigorous spirit enabled them to win many victories over their Hudson Bay rival during the early part of the struggle, from 1811-1816. As the effect the Hudson's Bay Company's reorganization of 1810-1811 began to be felt, the Hudson Bay people rallied, and were able, ultimately, to

defeat and to absorb their rival.

The struggle of the fur companies centred over two commodities, the furs themselves, and the pemmican which was essential to provision the canoemen transporting the furs over the waterways from western Canada to the depots on the St. Lawrence River or on Hudson Bay. The most violent phase of the fighting occurred in the Red River region where the Hudson's Bay Company established a colony, to assist in the gathering of both pemmican and agricultural produce for the provisioning of its Athabaska brigades, which was located in the very midst of the North West Company's most important buffalo hunting area.

The Nor'Westers feared that the Hudson's Bay Company colony would consume a large part of the provisions which the Montreal firm required to supply its brigades travelling between the Great Lakes and the interior of the continent. The Hudson's Bay Company, on the other hand, viewed the Nor'Westers as interlopers who were depriving the colonists of pemmican provisions which were their due right. For four years, 1813-1817, a vigorous battle raged in the Red River region in which twenty-three persons were killed⁵³ and both companies twice expelled each other from their respective forts.⁵⁴ The struggle in Red River was

⁵³ Twenty-one colonists killed at Seven Oaks, 1816, one Nor'Wester died in same battle; Colony Officer John Warren died of wounds sustained when gun exploded 1815.

⁵⁴ The Hudson's Bay Company expelled the Nor'Westers three times if one counts the one-day seizure of Fort Gibraltar by Robertson in Oct., 1815. The other two expulsions of the Nor'Westers were: Robertson's capture of Fort Gibraltar in March, 1816, and Macdonell's seizure of the same place in January, 1817. The colonists were expelled from Point Douglas in June, 1815, and June, 1816.

finally ended only when a government peace mission forced both sides to restore each other's stolen property.

The violence of the struggle in Red River was caused in a large measure by the personalities involved. The North West Company traders Alexander Macdonell, Duncan Cameron and A.N. McLeod, were all aggressive men addicted by long tradition to the employment of violence and intimidation to attain their ends. The colony leaders, Miles Macdonell and Colin Robertson, were equally bellicose in their attitudes towards the North West Company. While Macdonell may have preferred to use legal processes to cloak his aggressive moves, Robertson did not scruple to employ the same techniques of lawless violence, which his opponents used, to defeat them.

The North West Company was the first instigator of the fighting between the fur companies: both in England, through their machinations in attempting to discourage the recruitment of colonists in 1811; and in Assiniboia, through the efforts of Toussant Voudre to inflame the minds of the Indians of Turtle River against the colonists in 1813. The Nor'Westers were also the perpetrators of the greatest deeds of violence in Red River region, the expulsion, through intimidation, of two hundred settlers, in the summer of 1815, and the massacre of twenty-one colonists and the removal of 120 more, in the summer of 1816. These were three outrageous deeds for which the perpetrators never received their just punishment.

Though the North West Company committed the worst atrocities in the Red River region, it is to be remembered none the less, that the

Hudson's Bay Company, in general, and the colonists, in particular, gave the Nor'Westers considerable cause for provocation. The Hudson's Bay Company may not have gone to such violent extremities as the Nor'Westers. The difference in their actions, however, was mainly one of degree. Both companies were equally determined to drive the other out of the Red River region and enjoy a monopoly of the provision trade of that area for themselves.

The North West Company had established trading posts in the Red River region some twenty-five years before the Hudson's Bay Company attempted to send traders into that area, and during this period, must certainly be considered to have acquired some prescriptive rights to the land in that territory. During the time in which they had enjoyed sole occupancy of the Red River region, the Nor'Westers had developed a complex arrangement for gathering pemmican, in that area, upon which their whole system of communications from the Great Lakes to the interior of the continent was vitally dependent. The sudden intrusion of one hundred starving colonists, who, unable to win a subsistence from the soil of Red River, were forced to depend upon the buffalo of that territory for a food supply, certainly did much to disrupt the North West Company's normal pemmican supply arrangements and was quite rightly regarded by them as an interference with their trade.

Governor Macdonell's 1814 proclamation forbidding the export of pemmican, which was imposed at a time when the colonists were not short of provisions but the North West Company, with its communication with Montreal disrupted by the War of 1812, was more dependent than ever on

Red River pemmican for its supplies, was another provoking measure which interfered greatly with the Nor'Westers normal trading operations. Taken into consideration with the proclamation forbidding the running of buffalo on horseback, issued in the summer of 1814, and the Notices to Quit served on the North West Company posts in the fall of the same year, the three proclamations afforded ample proof that the Hudson's Bay Company intended to drive the Nor'Westers out of the Red River region, and undoubtedly gave the Canadian traders some justification for attempting to execute a similar scheme against the Hudson Bay people.

On the basis of the threatening measures which the Nor'Westers had openly demonstrated against the colony, Colin Robertson's two seizures of Fort Gibraltar, in October 1815 and March 1816, were totally unwarranted acts of retaliation, measures which were responsible to a large extent for inciting the Nor'Westers to drive out the colonists in the summer of 1816. Lord Selkirk's seizure of Fort William in 1816, and his capture of the posts occupied by the Nor'Westers between that place and Red River the following winter, were likewise rash and imprudent measures, designed more to disrupt the trade of the North West Company than to secure the execution of justice, and which only served to tempt the Nor'Westers to practise equally vindictive measures against him.

All the above actions indicate that both fur companies were equally aggressive. Each company was, in fact, seeking to obtain a monopoly of the provision trade of the Red River region for itself. Such action, however, could not be justified by either company. The Hudson's Bay Company, through its Charter, undoubtedly possessed the stronger legal

claim to the Red River region. Nevertheless, it cannot be considered to have been entitled to absolute control over all that territory. Through their failure to establish posts on the Red River until the last decade of the eighteenth century, The Hudson's Bay Company had enabled the Nor'Westers, who had preceded them into that area by some twenty-five years, to gain what must have been acknowledged as prescriptive rights over many portions of that region.⁵⁵

Although the primary object of the two fur companies was the acquiring of furs, pemmican was absolutely necessary for the successful operation of the trade. Without pemmican, the furs could not have been transported from the hunting grounds of the interior to the markets in the east; without furs to transport, the need for pemmican would not have been so great. With such valuable articles at stake, it was perhaps inevitable that a fight would ensue between the fur companies for the control of these two vital commodities.

The two companies each possessed complementary advantages: the Hudson's Bay Company controlled the most economical transportation route for reaching the interior of the continent; the North West Company possessed the vigorous type of personnel which could operate the transportation system most effectively. Had the advantage of uniting these two trading systems been recognized earlier, and had each company not been so disposed to destroy its rival to secure a monopoly for itself, the two fur companies might have averted their long and violent struggle.

⁵⁵ Edward Ellice, Communications of Mercator (Montreal, 1817), 9, 17, 25.

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