

THE FUR TRADE OF THE WESTERN GREAT LAKES REGION

IN 1685 THE BARON DE LAHONTAN wrote that "*Canada* subsists only upon the Trade of Skins or Furrs, three fourths of which come from the People that live round the great Lakes."¹ Long before the little French colony on the St. Lawrence outgrew its swaddling clothes the savage tribesmen came in their canoes, bringing with them the wealth of the western forests. In the Ohio Valley the British fur trade rested upon the efficacy of the pack horse; by the use of canoes on the lakes and river systems of the West, the red men delivered to New France furs from a country unknown to the French. At first the furs were brought to Quebec; then Montreal was founded, and each summer a great fair was held there by order of the king over the water. Great flotillas of western Indians arrived to trade with the Europeans. A similar fair was held at Three Rivers for the northern Algonquian tribes. The inhabitants of Canada constantly were forming new settlements on the river above Montreal, says Parkman,

. . . in order to intercept the Indians on their way down, drench them with brandy, and get their furs from them at low rates in advance of the fair. Such settlements were forbidden, but not prevented. The audacious "squatter" defied edict and ordinance and the fury of drunken savages, and boldly planted himself in the path of the descending trade. Nor is this a matter of surprise; for he was usually the secret agent of some high colonial officer.²

Upon arrival in Montreal, all furs were sold to the company or group of men holding the monopoly of the fur trade from the king of France. This system of monopoly was characteristic of the French fur trade. Companies

¹ *New Voyages to North-America*, 1: 53 (London, 1703).

² Francis Parkman, *The Old Régime in Canada*, 304 (Boston, 1874).

might fail and be succeeded by others, but the system was never abandoned.

Early in the history of New France the French officials there became curious about the country from which the furs came. As early as 1618 Etienne Brulé reported to Samuel de Champlain that he had made a journey to the northern shore of what is now called Lake Huron, along which he had coasted for ten days. Champlain was annoyed because Brulé had not continued his westward voyage. Champlain thirsted for knowledge of the Great Lakes. He sent Jean Nicolet to live among the Algonquian Indians dwelling near Lake Nipissing. There Nicolet remained for eight or nine years. When the tribe went to trade with the French in summer, Nicolet would accompany them and report to the governor of New France what he had learned of the distant lake country.³

In 1634 Champlain sent Nicolet on a journey to see if the route to the Orient lay through the Great Lakes. He instructed the explorer to bring the savages into alliance with the French—in the interest of “future trade and discovery.” Nicolet reached what came to be known as Michilimackinac and proceeded as far as Green Bay, subsequently known to the French as La Baye des Puants. He received a welcome from the Winnebago and allied tribes. Interior chiefs came and great feasts of friendship and alliance were held, at one of which “at least sixscore beavers” were served. Nicolet returned to Canada with the Indian flotilla of 1635. Champlain’s death, however, ended an era of western exploration. The colony on the St. Lawrence turned to local affairs and Nicolet had no successor for twenty years. Wisconsin and the western Great Lakes

³William L. Grant, *Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, 1604-1618*, 354-359 (New York, 1907). See also an article translated by Grace Clark from the French of Henri Jouan, entitled “Jean Nicolet, Interpreter and Voyageur in Canada. 1618-1642,” in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 11: 1-25 (1888).

remained "an unknown region, the home of barbarous savages and the haunt of the beasts of the forests."⁴

As a result of the destruction of the Huron settlements by the Iroquois in 1650, no furs reached Montreal until after the victory of the western Indians over the confederacy. The Ottawa, who aspired to be middlemen, gathered furs from the western lake region and took them to Canada in 1654. When the Ottawa fleet returned to the West, Jean de Lauson, the governor, sent two French traders with them to enter into trading alliances with the western tribes. There was no flotilla in 1655, but when the two traders returned to Montreal with the flotilla of August, 1656, they reported an enormous number of savage nations in the West and revealed the possibilities of the trade. The identity of the two Frenchmen has long been controverted. It has been supposed that they were Médart Chouart, sieur de Groseilliers, and his brother-in-law, Pierre Esprit Radisson, but it was probably Groseilliers and someone other than Radisson. In 1656-57 Radisson probably made a journey to what is now Sault Ste. Marie, and subsequently he and Groseilliers made a trip to the upper lakes. They entered the Lake Superior region and built a log hut at Chequamegon Bay. The two explorers were entertained by the Ottawa and may have visited the important Sioux village on Mille Lacs in Minnesota. Upon their return to Montreal in 1660 they brought furs to the estimated value of sixty thousand dollars. Since the journey was unauthorized, the governor confiscated the furs; in disgust and anger the explorers left New France and offered their services to the British.⁵ In the West Radisson and Groseilliers had attempted to break the Ot-

⁴ Louise P. Kellogg, *The French Régime in Wisconsin and the Northwest*, 78-83 (Madison, 1925).

⁵ Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 42: 219-223 (Cleveland, 1899); Louise P. Kellogg, "The First Traders in Wisconsin," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 5: 351 (June, 1922); *Voyages of Peter Esprit Radisson*, 132 (Boston, 1885).

tawa's monopoly as middlemen, but failed. The Ottawa frightened the other nations by "tales of Iroquois atrocities" and retained the profitable trade for themselves and their "associate Hurons."

The explorations of Radisson and Groseilliers encouraged other French adventurers. Each time an Indian flotilla started west from Montreal, a few Frenchmen (Jesuits and traders) accompanied them, to remain until the next fleet went east. They spent cheerless winters on the shores of Lake Superior, living meagerly on fish and wild rice. Sometimes several years elapsed before the absence of warfare permitted the Indians to go to Montreal. The group returning in 1663 did not bring enough furs to pay for the expedition, but they did report the existence of copper deposits in the region of Lake Superior and brought with them a large ingot prepared by their savage hosts.⁶

Nicolas Perrot and Toussaint Baudry, who went out with the flotilla of 1667, visited several Wisconsin tribes and broke the Ottawa's monopoly as middlemen. The Potawatomi sent a fleet to Montreal in 1668 and thereafter undertook to act as middlemen for the neighboring tribes. They sent word to the Fox, Miami, Illinois, Kickapoo, and Mascouten tribes that they would no longer have to go to the Ottawa at Chequamegon Bay, for they could obtain French trade goods at La Baye.⁷

Upon Perrot's return from the lake region in 1670 with reports of the friendliness of the tribes, Jean Talon, intendant of New France, determined upon annexation. Accordingly he dispatched Perrot and a young noble named François Daumont de St. Lusson to carry out the ceremony. The envoys started west in October, 1670, and spent the

⁶ Kellogg, *French Régime*, 114-117; M. Benjamin Sulte, ed., "Pierre Boucher et son livre," in Royal Society of Canada, *Proceedings and Transactions*, 1896, section 1, p. 167.

⁷ Nicholas Perrot, "Memoir," in Emma H. Blair, ed., *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, 1: 25-272 (Cleveland, 1911).

winter at Georgian Bay. In the spring Perrot summoned the Wisconsin tribes to meet at the Sault. Fifteen tribes were represented at the ceremonies on June 14, 1671, according to St. Luson's official report.⁸

The annexation pageant was as colorful as the French could conceive, in a manner calculated to impress the savage heart. From the gateway of the Jesuit mission came the French procession, led by the black-robed fathers, holding high their crucifixes and singing an appropriate Latin hymn. The traders followed, "in motley array of hunting shirts, bright sashes, gay *capots*, and embroidered moccasins," with Perrot among them. At the end marched in solitary glory the delegate of King Louis XIV, in the brilliant garb of an officer of the French army, with sword unsheathed and the royal fleur-de-lis glistening upon his helmet. On the bank of the Sault, the envoys of the nations awaited, bedecked in all the finery which the occasion required. The Frenchmen blessed the cross, and held it aloft during the chanting of the "Vexilla regis." The royal arms were erected and, after a Jesuit priest had prayed for the king, St. Luson, sword in hand, proclaimed in a loud voice that he took possession of the country "in the name of the Most High, Most Mighty and Most Redoubtable Monarch Louis, . . . Most Christian King of France and Navarre." Gifts were exchanged: the savages received knives, mirrors, hats, coats, cloth, blankets, and other articles, and in return they heaped furs at the feet of St. Luson. Perrot informed the chiefs that they had become the subjects of the great French king across the ocean. The Jesuit father, Claude Allouez, discoursed on the greatness of the French and their king. He spoke of Onontio (the Indian term for the governor of New France), whose very name was "the terror of the Iroquois."

⁸ Pierre Margry, ed., *Découvertes et établissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale (1614-1754)*, 1:96-99 (Paris, 1876).

In France, he said, were ten thousand Onontios, each but a soldier of the king. What remains today, says Parkman, "of the sovereignty thus pompously proclaimed? Now and then, the accents of France on the lips of some straggling boatmen or vagabond half-breed;—this, and nothing more."⁹ But in 1671 this proclamation of sovereignty was no light matter. No one then could perceive the sweep and destiny of history— St. Luson's proclamation was an event of great importance in the development of France's stake in the wilderness, the trade by which Canada lived.

In 1674 Robert Cavelier de la Salle obtained from Louis XIV a grant of Fort Frontenac, on the site of Kingston, Ontario, as a seigniory, with a monopoly of the fur trade there. Subsequently he obtained permission to explore the western country and to trade in all furs except beaver, a restriction which he regularly disregarded. He established a shipyard at Niagara in 1678 and built a vessel, the "Griffon." Men had already been sent forward to collect furs in the vicinity of Detroit, Michilimackinac, and La Baye, and these furs the "Griffon" collected. The vessel was lost on the return voyage. La Salle, who continued his career in Louisiana, was never really interested in the fur trade, save as a means of financing his explorations. He reported that the western tribes, able to obtain fire arms and trade goods only from the French, took better care of them "than of their own children."¹⁰

Daniel Greysolon, sieur du Lhut, whose surname has been honored with innumerable orthographic variations, wished to discover a route to the western ocean. In 1678–79 he wintered with the Chippewa near the Sault de Ste. Marie. The Chippewa and Sioux were at war and the hostilities had broken up the fur trade. In the spring of 1679 Du

⁹ Kellogg, *French Régime*, 186–189; Parkman, *The Discovery of the Great West*, 42 (Boston, 1869).

¹⁰ La Salle's letters and journals are printed in Margry, ed., *Découvertes*. See especially volume 2, p. 284 (Paris, 1877).

Lhut went west to seek the Sioux. He made peace between the two nations and was escorted to the Sioux village on Mille Lacs. There, on July 2, 1679, he erected the arms of Louis XIV, in whose name he took possession of the Sioux country. Du Lhut was told that some of the Sioux had reached a large salt lake twenty days' journey to the west, probably Great Salt Lake. Some of Du Lhut's men journeyed west from Mille Lacs, probably as far as Big Stone Lake. In 1680, hearing that three Frenchmen were Sioux captives, Du Lhut dropped plans for further explorations and, after obtaining their release, returned to New France. The captives were Father Louis Hennepin and his two companions.¹¹ Gradually French knowledge of the western lake region grew and maps became more nearly approximated to the facts.

Early in the history of the Indian trade of New France, there developed a group called *coureurs de bois*, or bush rangers. These were persons who went into the western forests to trade and live among the savages. They were hated by the king of France, who desired to increase the population of Canada. On one occasion the intendant even issued an order forbidding bachelors to engage in the fur trade. The official plan demanded that all trading be done in Canada proper. The chief resort of the bush rangers was Michilimackinac. Here they mated with Indian women in such numbers that by the close of the French regime it is stated that most of the white inhabitants of western Canada were related to the savages by birth, marriage, or other ties. Concubinage was a recognized institution, the obligations of which were enforced "sometimes even by the local jurisprudence, and at all times by . . . public opinion." From Michilimackinac the *coureurs de bois* "would set out, two or three together, to roam for hundreds of miles through the endless meshwork of interlocking lakes and

¹¹ Du Lhut's letters appear in Margry, ed., *Découvertes*, volume 6 (Paris, 1886).

rivers which seams the northern wilderness." Edict after edict was directed against them, but without avail. Penalties were severe: whipping and branding for the first offense, death or the galleys for life for second offenders. Unable to enforce these pronouncements, the government attempted regulation by a system of licenses. This did not work because the number of licenses issued annually was usually limited to twenty-five, and there were literally hundreds of *coureurs*. Then too the governors of New France invariably engaged in the fur trade illegally and protected those *coureurs* who shared their profits with the executive. On one occasion in 1682 a governor, Antoine Lefebvre, sieur de la Barre, requested the Iroquois to plunder the canoes of all *coureurs* not in partnership with himself. The Iroquois were glad to oblige.¹²

The custom arose of granting amnesty to the *coureurs*, in the hope that in the future they would be more obedient to the gentleman in Versailles. They never were. In time the *coureurs* came to expect such decrees of amnesty and if at any time they found themselves proscribed they merely stayed in the woods until the next amnesty was announced. Father Etienne de Carheil, Jesuit priest stationed at Michilimackinac, claimed that the very agents of the king sent to distant posts to notify the *coureurs* of amnesty carried trade goods to sell to them so the outlaws could continue their illicit trade. When Du Lhut returned to Montreal from the West he found that the intendant of New France had proclaimed him a leader of the *coureurs de bois*. Frontenac, who approved of Du Lhut's explorations, had to keep him under nominal arrest to placate the intendant. Subsequently Du Lhut took advantage of the amnesty of 1681.¹³

¹² E. O. Brown, *Two Missionary Priests at Mackinac*, 40 (1889); Parkman, *Old Régime*, 305-313; Parkman, *Count Frontenac and New France under Louis XIV*, 83 (Boston, 1877).

¹³ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 65:215 (1900); *Édits, ordonnances royales, déclarations et arrêts du Conseil d'état du roi concernant le Canada*, 1: 86, 249 (Quebec, 1854).

Like the British, the French had their disputes over the sale of liquor to the Indians. The Jesuits were always opposed to the custom and their motives were frequently questioned. Frontenac asserted that they were more interested in beaver skins than souls and that they exaggerated the evils of brandy because they "have long wished to have the fur trade entirely to themselves, and to keep out of sight the trade which they have always carried on in the woods, and which they are carrying on there now." The king repeatedly forbade the Jesuits to engage in the Indian trade and on one occasion, in 1677, threatened severe measures if they should remain disobedient. The brandy question became acute in 1675 and Louis XIV, who stood in perplexity between Père la Chaise, Jesuit confessor, and Colbert, secular advisor, referred the problem to the University of Paris. The good fathers of the Sorbonne, "after solemn discussion, pronounced the selling of brandy to Indians a mortal sin." In Canada an assembly of merchants and chief subjects decided in favor of brandy. The question was never really settled. Decrees prohibiting the sale of liquor to the savages were often issued, and as frequently revoked. Each decree of prohibition would result in a growing *crescendo* of protest from the merchants, traders, and officials in the New World. The usual argument that won a revocation was that if brandy was withheld the British would engross the peltry trade. In addition, individual commandants would advance local reasons. At Michilimackinac in 1695 Antoine de la Mothe de Cadillac solemnly pronounced that brandy was necessary there on sanitary grounds. Since the chief diet there consisted of fish and smoked meat, Cadillac opined that "a little brandy after the meal . . . seems necessary to cook the bilious meats and the crudities they leave in the stomach."¹⁴

¹⁴ Parkman, *Old Régime*, 328-330; *A Half-Century of Conflict*, 1: 18 (Boston, 1892).

Louis XIV was never a soulful prohibitionist. In April, 1691, the monarch wrote to Saint-Vallier, Bishop of Quebec, that the brandy trade was useful to France and should be regulated but not prevented. He did not desire to have the consciences of his subjects disturbed by ecclesiastical denunciations of the liquor traffic as a sin. The good bishop was admonished to "take care that the zeal of the ecclesiastics is not excited by personal interests and passions."¹⁵

During the early period the French had a clear field in the western lake region, but during the regime of Thomas Dongan as governor of New York the British began to encroach upon French preserves. Captain Johannes Rooseboom of Albany made two or more trips into the lake region and on one occasion was captured and pillaged; the French gave the trade goods to the savages. Another expedition sent by Dongan and commanded by Major Patrick McGregorie was captured. The advent of the British and the supine policy of the Barre government in dealing with the Iroquois in the East were undermining the prestige of the French in the West. In 1686 Du Lhut built a fort at the site of Detroit which was maintained for a few months. The situation of the French was genuinely desperate. La Barre's successor, the Marquis Denonville, reported home in 1687 that "it is certain that, if the English had not been stopped and pillaged, the Hurons and Ottawa would have revolted and cut the throats of all our Frenchmen." For several years the French were hard put to prevent an outright triple alliance of the British, the lake tribes, and the Iroquois.¹⁶

Denonville was enraged at the British inroads in the West and wrote home in November, 1686, that "I have a mind to go straight to Albany, storm their fort, and burn every-

¹⁵ Parkman, *Old Régime*, 327.

¹⁶ Helen Broshar, "The First Push Westward of the Albany Traders," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 7: 228 (December, 1920).

thing." His feelings occasioned an exchange of letters with Dongan that delight the soul of the reader even to this day. Informed of Denonville's heartburnings, the redoubtable Irishman promptly wrote to Onontio in 1687 that "I assure you Sir, if my master gives leave I will be as soon at Quebeck as you shall be att Albany." Dongan thought it "a very hard thing that all the Countryes a Frenchman walks over in America must belong to Canada." He could not understand how Onontio could be so unreasonable, but opined that "the air of Canada has strange effects on all the Governors boddys." He proceeded to deal summarily with all French territorial claims: the right of discovery he could not recognize, since the French explorers were just "a few loose fellowes rambling amongst Indians to keep themselves from starving." He professed amazement that Denonville claimed lands because the rivers thereon flowed into the Great Lakes or the St. Lawrence: "O just God! what new farr-fetched and unheard of pretence is this for a title to a country, the French King may have as good a pretence to all those Countrys [that] drink clarett and Brandy." As for the Jesuit missions in the Indian country, Dongan wondered why the French did not claim China, since the emperor of that nation was said to have two Jesuits in attendance.¹⁷

The close of the 1680's brought a revolution and a new king to Britain. The pro-French policy of King James II, which had resulted in Dongan's recall, was discarded, and the new monarch reoriented British foreign policy. In America, King William's War was waged with savage fury. The Iroquois invaded and devastated much of Canada in 1689, and many were killed and tortured. Upon Frontenac's arrival for a second term as governor, he found New France in dire straits. He determined on an offensive, not against the Iroquois, "who seemed invulner-

¹⁷ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York*, 3: 472-474, 514, 528, 529 (Albany, 1853).

able as ghosts," but against the British. He dispatched three war parties of soldiers, *coureurs de bois*, and Indian allies—two against New England and the third against New York. The New York group burned Schenectady and killed many of the inhabitants. In the same year, 1690, Frontenac successfully beat off a Massachusetts expedition against Quebec under Sir William Phipps.

Even during the hostilities in the East, Frontenac did not forget Michilimackinac. He well knew that should the dam of French control break in the West, New France itself would be swept away by "an engulfing flood" of renegade savages. When Olivier Morel de la Durantaye, commandant at Michilimackinac, sent word that the lake tribes were on the point of revolt, Frontenac did not hesitate. Although he could ill afford to spare troops, he dispatched Captain Louis de la Porte de Louvigny to the West with 143 men in the spring of 1690. Knowing that Iroquois influence was behind the trouble, Frontenac sent word to the western tribes that the Iroquois were to be regarded "as five cabins of muskrats in a marsh which the French would soon drain off, and then burn them there."¹⁸

In 1693 Frontenac sent Pierre Charles Le Sueur to the West to pacify the tribes. Le Sueur had been a trader among the Sioux and on his new mission he was active in the western Lake Superior and upper Mississippi region. As a result of his activities, in 1695 an important Sioux chief made the long journey to Montreal to make an alliance with France, the first of his tribe to visit New France. At the time of Le Sueur's mission, no furs had been received from the West for three years. Frontenac sent word in 1693 that the furs were to be shipped at any hazard. When the precious cargoes arrived all New France celebrated.¹⁹

¹⁸ Claude C. L. Bacqueville de la Potherie, *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale*, 2: 231-247 (Paris, 1722).

¹⁹ Kellogg, *French Régime*, 251; Parkman, *Count Frontenac*, 315.

In 1696 Frontenac attempted direct action against the Iroquois. Upon the arrival of the French troops in the Onondaga country, they found the inhabitants gone. The invaders burned the maize fields and destroyed the caches of food. Similar measures were taken in the Oneida country and a number of chiefs were made hostages. The expedition was not wholly successful, since the governor of New York sent provisions to the Oneida and Onondaga. Throughout the war the French sought to make peace impossible between the Iroquois and the French Indian allies. At Montreal the great Onontio himself invited his Indian allies to roast an Iroquois prisoner and at Michilimackinac the French urged the Ottawa to "drink the broth of an Iroquois." In the West Perrot urged war parties of Indians to set out for the East. Beset from all quarters, the Iroquois are generally conceded to have lost half of their warriors in King William's War.

Peace between the French, their Indian allies, and the Iroquois did follow directly the treaty of Ryswick in 1697. It was delayed by the time it took to deliver prisoners, which were scattered over half a continent and adopted into the various tribes. A general conference began in Montreal on July 25, 1701, with the Iroquois and western tribes present. The Iroquois brought no prisoners for exchange and this well-nigh broke up the conference. Kondiaronk (The Rat), celebrated chief from Michilimackinac, harangued the conference for two hours from a chair (he was ill from a fever), accusing the Iroquois of treachery. It was a tense situation, since Kondiaronk had an influence far beyond his own tribe. That night the Huron chief died and his death was a blessing for the French. The governor gave the chief a gorgeous funeral. Sixty Iroquois marched in solemn procession and a Seneca chief spoke at the bier, declaring that the sun hid his face "in grief for the loss of the great Huron." The French In-

dian allies were pleased by all this ceremony, and a general peace was consummated. The power of the Iroquois was definitely broken, and never again after the peace of 1701 were they really formidable to the French.²⁰

While still at Michilimackinac, Cadillac realized the importance of establishing a permanent fort at Detroit, with a view to intercepting the activities of the Iroquois as middlemen in the fur trade. He went to Versailles and laid his proposal before the Count de Pontchartrain, minister of marine and colonies. In due course the king approved, and Cadillac received orders to establish the fort. After returning to the New World, Cadillac reached Detroit on July 24, 1701, erected a wooden stockade, and within it built huts of white oak logs thatched with grass. The post was named Fort Pontchartrain.

Detroit was barely founded when Cadillac resumed the disputes with the Jesuits that had begun in Michilimackinac, where the quarrel had been so bitter that Cadillac asserted he could not get the Jesuits to absolve him from his sins. With these quarrels in mind, the minister at Versailles had ordered Cadillac to be a friend to the Jesuits at Detroit and "to have no trouble with them." This order pained Cadillac a great deal. "After much reflection," he wrote to Pontchartrain in 1703, "I have found only three ways in which this can be accomplished: the first is, to let them do as they please; the second, to do whatever they desire; and the third, to say nothing of what they do."²¹ Any one of the three would have been too abhorrent to be practiced by a highhanded person like Cadillac. He blithely proceeded to quarrel not only with the Jesuits, but with the governors and intendants of New France and the directors of the trading company having the monopoly of the Detroit fur trade, whose relatives he accused of malversation. In 1704

²⁰ Bacqueville de la Potherie, *L'Amérique Septentrionale*, 4: 193-266.

²¹ Electra M. Sheldon, *The Early History of Michigan, from the First Settlement to 1815*, 102 (New York, 1856).

his enemies combined to have him tried before the governor and intendant on a variety of charges, including that of being a petty tyrant. He was acquitted in 1705.

Throughout all his troubles Cadillac worked for the development of Detroit and wrote enthusiastic reports of incredible length. Overwhelmed by the never-ending stream of exuberant letters from beyond the seas, the poor minister at Versailles declared that he was glad to be assured that Detroit would become the Paris of New France. What he desired, however, was a concise, exact, circumstantial, and complete account of the region, "but not in the style of a romance . . . lest the King should deem it unworthy of serious attention." No other official in America dared to address a minister of Louis XIV in so nonchalant a manner as Cadillac. It was his plan to persuade the Indians to settle around Detroit. This would enable the French to control both savages and trade and make Detroit the entrepot for a vast region. In June, 1704, a royal memorial ordered the authorities in New France not to appoint a new commandant at Michilimackinac so that the Indians there would have to go to Detroit. Cadillac boasted that so many Indians would leave Michilimackinac for Detroit that Carheil, the "obstinate vicar" there, would not have "a parish[i]oner to bury him." The garrison was withdrawn, however, and the Jesuits abandoned their Michilimackinac mission. The post was left to the *coureurs de bois*. In a few years six thousand Indians lived and traded in the Detroit area.²² This plan of concentrating Indians did not work any too well. The hunting grounds were not sufficiently extensive and it was hard to keep such an aggregation of savages at peace.

On May 21, 1696, Louis XIV issued a declaration at Versailles revoking all licenses for the trade in furs and

²² Canadian Archives, *Reports*, 1899, supplement, 207, 361, 390; "Cadillac Papers," in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 33: 139, 162 (1904).

ordering the *coureurs* to cease carrying trade goods into the Indian country. Violators were to be sent to the galleys.²³ The only exception was La Salle's old post in the Illinois country, from which his successors were permitted to send out two canoes annually. The French government desired to restore the earlier plan of having the savages transport furs to Montreal. The decree did not provide for the immediate closing of the many French posts in the West, but officials in Canada were agreed that the posts could not exist without the fur trade. The decree owed its immediate origin to economic causes. Du Lhut, Perrot, and Le Sueur had succeeded much too well in opening the West to French trade. The fur trade monopoly reported that enough furs were on hand for an entire decade to come.

The deeper origin lay in the constant struggle between the imperialists of New France — the governor, merchants, traders, army men, and explorers — and the anti-imperialists — the intendant, Jesuits, and farmers. Now the anti-imperialists, through Père la Chaise and Madame de Maintenon, Louis' religious wife, had got the ear of the king; they represented to him the great evils of the fur trade and the ruin of Canadian youth in "scandalous excesses" in the wilderness of the New World. When Frontenac protested, he was reminded that the war with the Iroquois arose from the direct trade of the French with the distant Indian tribes of the West. On April 21, 1697, however, the king agreed to retain Fort Frontenac, Michilimackinac, and the post on the St. Joseph River in what is now Michigan on condition that the soldiers and officers refrain from engaging in the fur trade under any pretext whatever. Frontenac was annoyed by this restriction, but his protests were of no avail. As it turned out, he might have saved himself exertion, since the restriction was regularly hon-

²³ *Collection de manuscrits contenant lettres, mémoires, et autre documents historiques relatifs à la Nouvelle-France*, 2: 219-221 (Quebec, 1884).

ored in the breach. On August 30, 1702, Father Carheil addressed a forty-five page letter to Jean Baptiste Champigny, intendant, dealing with abuses at Michilimackinac. The four occupations of the soldiers were, he reported: to keep public taverns for the sale of brandy to the savages, to carry goods and brandy under orders of the commandant, who shared the profits, to gamble day and night, and to live in sin with the Indian girls swarming about the post. "If occupations of This kind can be called the king's service," wrote Carheil, "I admit that they have always actually rendered him one of Those four services. But I have observed none other."²⁴ The conditions here described and Jesuit antagonism characterized not only Michilimackinac, but most of the French posts in the West. There was, in fact, a chronic dispute between Jesuits and officers at the forest outposts.

In July, 1715, the king of France authorized the restoration of the system of licenses, the officials in Canada having represented that the British would win control of the trade if restrictions were not lifted. The traders were ordered not to carry goods to the Indian villages; trading was to be done only at Michilimackinac, Detroit, and the Illinois post. A corollary of the restoration of licenses was the re-establishment of the western posts. Michilimackinac was regarrisoned in 1715 and a new fort was built on the south side of the straits; the ancient fort had been on the north side. The fort in the Illinois was re-established and a new post was founded among the Miami on the St. Joseph River at the site of Niles, Michigan. In 1717 a fort was built at La Baye and the post at Kaministiquia, on the north shore of Lake Superior, was reopened. In the following year, Chequamegon Bay was reoccupied. Soon

²⁴ *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York*, 9: 678 (Albany, 1855); Camille de Rochemonteix, *Les Jesuits et la Nouvelle-France au XVII^e siècle*, 3: 505 (Paris, 1896); Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 65: 189-253.

traders of all varieties, legal and illegal, were active throughout the West.²⁵

Although the Iroquois were not a menace after 1701 and could no longer send war parties to the West, they were still able to influence western tribes. This was especially true of the Fox Indians, who were persistently hostile to the French for several decades in the eighteenth century. During Queen Anne's War, they virtually besieged Detroit in 1712. The French claimed that the British had sent gifts and messages to the Foxes, urging them to kill French traders and destroy Fort Pontchartrain at Detroit. "This is not unlikely," says Parkman, "though the evidence on the point is far from conclusive." Kiala, Fox chief, attempted to form an Indian confederacy for military action against the French. For a time he succeeded, but, in 1733, after the French had repeatedly decimated his warriors, he surrendered. His captors sent him to the West Indies, where hard labor and the tropical heat soon put an end to his sufferings. The Fox wars were damaging not only to the French trade, but to the prestige of the French in the West. The victors were never able totally to destroy the Foxes, even after publicly announcing their intention of doing so. The nadir of French prestige was reached in 1736 with the Chickasaw triumph in the South and the massacre of Frenchmen by the Sioux, resulting in the withdrawal of Fort Beauharnois, the French post on the upper Mississippi.²⁶

The fur trade depended upon peace, which was threatened at all times. It was the constant aim of New France to keep the savages of the West from waging intertribal warfare. In October, 1719, Vaudreuil reported to the Conseil de Marine that the difficulty of doing this was "in-

²⁵ Canadian Archives, *Reports*, 1899, supplement, 119; Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The French Regime in Wisconsin*, 1: 251-391 (*Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 16 — 1902).

²⁶ Parkman, *Half-Century of Conflict*, 1: 268, 326; Kellogg, *French Régime*, 316, 335.

conceivable." Peace was never secure. The Kickapoo and Mascoutens would attack the Illinois Indians and the Saginaw would raid the Miami; a general war was imminent at all times. The French had just brought about a general peace among the tribes in 1742, when King George's War broke out in America. In order that Frederick the Great might "rob a neighbour whom he had promised to defend," asserts Macaulay, "black men fought on the coast of Coromandel, and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America."²⁷ These Indian wars in the West brought New France to the verge of ruin by the frequent cessation of the fur trade.

By the decree of April 20, 1742, the French introduced an innovation in the fur trade: the licenses were withdrawn and all posts were to be auctioned off to the highest bidder—the bid being the annual rental to be paid to the government for the monopoly. La Baye, the most lucrative of the posts, was the first to be auctioned. It included not only the post itself, but the rich hinterland to the west as far as the Mississippi River. A Montreal firm purchased the lease for 8,100 livres. Because of the interruption of the fur trade by King George's War and the scarcity of trade goods, no one wished to purchase La Baye when the lease expired in 1746. The system of licenses was renewed in 1749, but the lease plan was not entirely given up. Certain posts were granted to favorites by the governor of New France, with the consent of the court at Versailles, in return for an annual rental. In 1752 the Marquis Duquesne obtained the grant of La Baye for Pierre Rigaud de Vaudreuil. The grant was several times renewed and given for life in 1759 to Vaudreuil and his wife. It is said that the post yielded 312,000 livres in three years. In ad-

²⁷ See Macaulay's review of Thomas Campbell's *Frederic the Great and His Times*, in the *Edinburgh Review*, 75: 232 (April, 1842). The review is reprinted in Macaulay's *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 4: 184–257 (New York, 1879).

dition to La Baye, the principal posts granted as monopolies were La Mer d'Ouest (Sea of the West) — the region west of Lake Superior — and Sault Ste. Marie. Detroit and Michilimackinac were free posts, where the trade was presumed to be carried on by licensed traders.²⁸

The French system of grants gave rise to a curious situation after the downfall of Canada. William Grant, a British merchant who had allied himself by marriage with the nobility of New France, bought the La Baye lease from the Vaudreuil family. He then proceeded to offer the annual rental to the British government, on the ground that the terms of peace guaranteed the private property of the French and that a lease was property. The board of trade disallowed the claim and the Marquise de Vaudreuil, through her British friends, sought recompense from the court of St. James. In July, 1769, the British monarch granted her an annuity of three hundred pounds.²⁹

A curious feature of the fur trade under both the French and British regimes was the use of Indian slaves. Many colonists at Detroit and other forest posts had slaves. They were called "panis" because the earlier ones had been Pawnee, and were captives taken in war by the French Indian allies and sold to the French at low prices. "Their market value," according to Parkman, "was much impaired by their propensity to run off." As late as 1801 a "Pawney Man" belonging to a Mr. Barth of Sandwich, Ontario, was hailed before a magistrate for assaulting and beating a citizen of the town.³⁰

A few months after the conquest of Canada, British traders appeared in the upper lake country. As early as

²⁸ Thwaites, ed., *French Regime*, 2:409, 435 (*Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. 17 — 1906); "Memoir of Bougainville," in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 18:167-195 (1908).

²⁹ Marjorie G. [Reid] Jackson, "The Beginnings of British Trade at Michilimackinac," *ante*, 11:245-247.

³⁰ Parkman, *Old Régime*, 388; Milo M. Quaife, ed., *The John Askin Papers*, 2:357 (Detroit, 1931).

1761 Henry Bostwick and Alexander Henry were at Michilimackinac. They did not lack for competition. By the articles of capitulation of September 8, 1760, for the surrender of Montreal, it was agreed that private property was inviolate, including the furs at the distant posts, and the inhabitants and merchants, if they chose to remain, were to "enjoy all the privileges of trade, under the same favours and conditions granted to the subjects of his Britannic Majesty."³¹ Most of the traders in the West remained and outnumbered the British traders for years afterward.

In a report dated March 20, 1762, General Gage opposed the French system of monopoly at the posts and the trade in the Indian villages. He recommended that the minor French posts be abandoned. Under the regulations of Sir William Johnson, the trade was confined to Detroit and Michilimackinac. The system of regulation adopted by Johnson under the authority of the military commander in chief did not work well. Authority at the posts was divided between the commandant, with military power, and the commissary who had charge of trade. The latter was appointed by Johnson. The traders intrigued with any officials who seemed favorable to their own ends. At Michilimackinac bitter quarrels ensued between the infamous Major Robert Rogers, commandant, and Lieutenant Benjamin Roberts, commissary. Rogers tried in vain to persuade the British government to erect Michilimackinac and its dependencies into a separate civil government with full control over the fur trade and Indian affairs.³²

The Canadian merchants and traders presented memo-

³¹ Adam Shortt and A. G. Doughty, eds., *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759-1791*, 8-29 (Ottawa, 1907).

³² Shortt and Doughty, eds., *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada*, 69-72; William L. Clements, ed., "Rogers's Michilimackinac Journal," in American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings*, 1918, p. 224-273.

rials to Sir Guy Carleton in 1766 and 1767, and employed an English barrister, Fowler Walker, to represent them in Great Britain in opposing restriction of trade to the posts. The burden of the memorials was that the fur trade would languish, that the savages had become dependent upon the white factors who dwelt among them, and that the "extension of credit to the Indians was an act of kindness, not of extortion."³³ Reluctantly in 1767 Johnson relaxed his regulations for the northern trade and the following year Canada obtained full control of the trade in the lake country and many of the old French posts were reoccupied—La Baye, Prairie du Chien, Grand Portage, and that at the entrance to Lake Superior.

From the first day the British took over Canada and the Canadian West, Louisiana was a source of discomfort and competition. Even when France controlled both Canada and Louisiana, the latter region had caused Canada much pain, for traders in New France would obtain goods on credit in Montreal, proceed to the Indian country for the trade, then drop down the Mississippi to New Orleans to dispose of their furs in a country where no questions were asked of newly arrived colonists. In 1763 France ceded Louisiana to Spain and the French and Spanish traders operating from the region competed vigorously with the British traders on British soil. After the Pontiac revolt of 1763 the Detroit traders asserted that while they were forbidden to trade in Indian villages for fear of renewing hostilities, the French and Spanish traders came within sixty miles of Detroit and "carried off furs for which they had already advanced goods the year before." In his reports General Gage occasionally noticed the activities of the traders from the west side of the Mississippi, who came "within a certain Distance" of British forts and sold goods more

³³ Marjorie G. Reid, "The Quebec Fur-traders and Western Policy, 1763-1774," in *Canadian Historical Review*, 6: 15-32 (March, 1925).

cheaply than British traders.³⁴ They were enabled to do this by the high price of furs at New Orleans.

A strange feature of the situation was the fact that British traders from Michilimackinac supplied the Louisiana traders with trade goods. These northern traders brought their goods to the French villages of Illinois by way of the Illinois River and the Chicago portage. Arrived at Cahokia and Kaskaskia, they sold their goods to French and Spanish traders, who crossed the Mississippi from St. Louis and St. Genevieve. Nearly all their goods were sold in this manner instead of to the Indians directly. They were paid in furs, which they carried to Michilimackinac. It is said that a hundred traders of St. Louis and St. Genevieve used British trade goods and that the whole of the Mississippi, from Natchez to its source, was supplied with trade goods by Canadian merchants.³⁵ Some Spanish traders even journeyed to Michilimackinac in person to obtain it.

An interesting example of the exchange of trade goods is afforded in the story of the journey of a Michilimackinac merchant named Marchesseaux. His party passed St. Louis at night, "fearing confiscation," and arrived at Cahokia on August 11, 1783. There Marchesseaux sold his goods to Auguste Chouteau, St. Louis merchant, at an advance of 137½ per cent in price, payable in furs. The party remained at Cahokia during the fall and winter. In mid-April, 1784, the packs from the Missouri arrived and Marchesseaux was paid for his goods. On May 4 the group left Cahokia en route to Michilimackinac. The high prices paid at the Spanish fur market at New Orleans were very attractive to the British traders in the Illinois country,

³⁴ Canadian Institute, *Transactions*, 3: 266 (Toronto, 1893); Clarence E. Carter, *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State*, 1: 114, 231 (New Haven, 1931).

³⁵ Clarence W. Alvord, ed., *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, 411 (*Illinois Historical Collections*, vol. 5 — Springfield, 1909); E. G. Swem, ed., "A Letter on the Illinois Country to Alexander Hamilton, 1792," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 8: 264-266 (December, 1921).

and some of them sent their furs down the Mississippi. The British authorities did not approve of this, but were told by the traders, very gravely, that the furs were being shipped to England via New Orleans. Few cargoes, however, ever reached Britain by that route.³⁶

If the British had cause to complain of Spanish and French competition, they certainly obtained full compensation. The traders of Michilimackinac proceeded to range over northern Louisiana, doing a good trade. Their rendezvous for this trade was Prairie du Chien, whence they would seek the mouths of the Des Moines and St. Peter's, or Minnesota, rivers. Ascending these streams they would penetrate deeply into Spanish territory, some of them even reaching the headwaters of the Missouri. Peter Pond, Connecticut Yankee, fur trader, and explorer of western Canada, who engaged in the trade at Detroit and Michilimackinac, in 1774-75 ascended the St. Peter's River and entered the plains region east of the Missouri, where he did a good trade.³⁷

From the beginning of Spanish control, the authorities sought to bar British traders from Louisiana, but without success. In 1770 the ranking official at St. Louis reported to Bernardo de Galvez, governor of Louisiana, at New Orleans, that the Spanish fort at the mouth of the Missouri was insufficient for this purpose; he recommended that a new one be built at the mouth of the Des Moines River. Galvez replied that the Spanish crown could not afford to do this. In the end, the Spanish turned to pillage. Andrew Todd, Michilimackinac trader, was seized in the Missouri country and his goods confiscated. When Lord

³⁶ John S. Fox, ed., Jean Baptiste Perrault, "Narrative," in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 37:514-518 (1910); Wayne E. Stevens, *The Northwest Fur Trade, 1763-1800*, 26 (University of Illinois, *Studies in the Social Sciences*, vol. 14, no. 3 — Urbana, 1926).

³⁷ Stevens, *Northwest Fur Trade*, 113; Peter Pond, "Journal," in *Connecticut Magazine*, 10:239-259 (April, May, June, 1906). The latter is reprinted in the *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 18:314-354.

Dorchester (earlier Sir Guy Carleton) protested to the Baron de Carondelet, governor of Louisiana, that gentleman invited Dorchester's attention "to the illegal character of the trade which British merchants had long been carrying on within Spanish territory." Carondelet decided to fight fire with fire—in 1794 he gave Todd a monopoly of the fur trade in upper Louisiana in return for a tax of six per cent in the hope that Todd would drive the Michilimackinac traders from Spanish soil. Todd obtained trade goods from New Orleans in exchange for the furs which he forwarded. Carondelet's scheme might have worked if Todd had not inconsiderately died of yellow fever in 1796.³⁸

The American Revolution injured the fur trade of Detroit more than that of Michilimackinac, but at both places there was a scarcity of trade goods that could be traced in part to the American occupation of Montreal. Transportation was difficult during the war; on the Great Lakes only king's vessels were allowed. John Askin, who was engaged in the trade both at Michilimackinac and Detroit, complained repeatedly of the lack of goods and transportation. After George Rogers Clark's expedition to the Illinois country, the British were afraid that their trade goods would fall into American hands. The British threatened to cut off the trade if the western Indians had intercourse with Clark's Americans. From the viewpoint of the fur trade, Clark's expedition may have harmed the cause, since it broke up the British trade there without supplying a substitute, as the Americans had few trade goods. This caused some of the western tribes to be anti-American after the Revolution and contributed to the British commercial monopoly. Oddly enough, most of the few trade goods that the Americans possessed came from the British. George Morgan, Ameri-

³⁸ Jacob Van der Zee, "Fur Trade Operations in the Eastern Iowa Country from 1800 to 1833," in *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 12: 479-567 (July, 1914); Stevens, *Northwest Fur Trade*, 114.

can Indian agent, succeeded in purchasing goods from the British traders at Sandusky. The French traders also were helpful in supplying goods.³⁹

In 1777 there began a great rush of Canadian traders to the upper lakes, when it was found that the trade was not affected by the war as much as had been feared. The British authorities had qualms concerning the loyalty of the entrepreneurs, and in 1779 Captain Patrick Sinclair, commandant at Michilimackinac, evolved the custom of administering an oath to all traders entering the Indian country. Each trader was compelled to take the following solemn oath:

That I will disclose & make known without delay, all such matters as may come within my knowledge touching His Majesty's Sacred Person & Government . . . & that I will from my detestation & abhorrence of the present unnatural & horrid Rebellion and of the insidious intervention of Foreign Power called unto its aid — Manifest by my words & actions a becoming zeal and affection for the Sacred Person & Government of our said Sovereign.⁴⁰

Not only the Continentals in the West, but the French and the Spanish made raids upon British posts. In 1780 Colonel Mottin de la Balme raised a company of volunteers, most of whom came from Vincennes, and captured the British post on the Maumee. The invaders were subsequently killed. Another French expedition of sixteen men captured a British post and seized fifty bales of trade goods. They were pursued by British traders and militiamen, killed, and the trade goods retaken. In February, 1781, a Spanish expedition from St. Louis captured and plundered the British post on the St. Joseph River. The raid was suggested by two Milwaukee Indian chiefs, intent upon plunder, but it was subsequently used by the Spanish diplomats in the peace

³⁹ Quaife, ed., *Askin Papers*, 1:67-164; Stevens, *Northwest Fur Trade*, 57; Louise P. Kellogg, *The British Régime in Wisconsin and the Northwest*, 138 (Madison, 1935).

⁴⁰ "The Haldimand Papers," in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 9: 526 (1886).

negotiations in claiming territory east of the Mississippi River.⁴¹

By the terms of peace the line of the Great Lakes became the northern boundary of the United States. When the preliminary articles of peace of November, 1782, were laid before Parliament on February 17, 1783, a storm broke. The Earl of Carlisle cried out:

All Canada is in fact lost to Great-Britain. All the country, from the Alegany mountains to the Mississippi lost. All the forts, settlements, carrying places, towns, inhabitants upon the lakes, lost. The peltry and fur trade lost. Twenty-five nations of Indians made over to the United States, together with three principal forts of Niagara, Michillimackinac, and Detroit.

Lord Walsingham called attention to the fact that Michilimackinac was the rendezvous for the fur trade of the Canadian West, a trade which henceforth would be "at the mercy of the United States." The provisional peace was "the most ignominious" ever made by Britain. In their defense of the peace both the Earl of Shelburne, prime minister, and Thomas Townshend, secretary of state, minimized the value and importance of the fur trade. "With regard to the fur trade," Townshend asserted, "interested individuals might at first raise a clamour, but, in great national transactions, the public good must be the predominant object." Lord Shelburne asked: "Suppose the entire fur trade sunk into the sea, where is the detriment to this country? . . . A few Canadian merchants might complain; for merchants would always love monopoly. . . . Our generosity is not much, but little as it is, let us give it with a good grace." The only alternative, the prime minister added, was to continue the war, since the American negotiators were adamant.⁴² As subsequent events indicate, the debators might have saved their breath, since Britain not

⁴¹ Lawrence Kinnaird, "The Spanish Expedition against Fort St. Joseph in 1781, A New Interpretation," in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 19: 173-191 (September, 1932).

⁴² *Parliamentary Register*, 9: 261, 11: 34, 39, 67-70 (London, 1783).

only retained the western posts until 1796, in violation of the treaty, but engrossed the fur trade until after the War of 1812.

In 1783 Joseph Brant asked Governor Frederick Haldimand for an explanation of the treaty. Haldimand answered softly, but sent Sir John Johnson to Niagara to reconcile the Iroquois to the change of sovereignty. Johnson told the Indians there that the monarch's American subjects were sorry and had sought royal pardon, and that King George III had decided to forgive the rebels. A Seneca chief retorted that "they believed the King told a lie, and that he was going to forgive the Americans because he could not help himself." The incident was a plain indication of the state of mind of the savages. Haldimand, who had a vivid memory of the horrors of the Pontiac revolt of 1763, feared that surrender of the posts would bring on an Indian rebellion. Be that as it may, the British, having decided to retain the posts, advanced a number of reasons for doing so, including the debts and the ill-treatment of Loyalists in the United States. Americans have always contended that Britain's real motive was the fur trade. It can now be stated positively that "the British archives contain reams of documents which provide fine ammunition for the American charge."⁴³

During the period following the Revolution, the British discouraged the entry of American traders into the lake country. William Burnett of New Jersey tried to engage in the trade in the valley of the St. Joseph. In 1791 he built a warehouse at the mouth of the river, near the site of La Salle's old fort and the present St. Joseph, Michigan. The British forced him to take a Michilimackinac firm into partnership and later arrested him on a charge of being in communication with the United States military authorities.

⁴³ Kellogg, *British Régime*, 191; A. L. Burt, "A New Approach to the Problem of the Western Posts," in *Canadian Historical Association, Reports*, 1931, p. 70.

Upon his release, Burnett married Kakima, daughter of a Potawatomi chief, after which the British did not disturb him for fear of antagonizing the Potawatomi. He sold furs at Detroit and Michilimackinac. His account books, covering the years from 1791 to 1802, show that he traded at Sault Ste. Marie, Michilimackinac, Grand River, and Chicago. Gradually other Americans began to trade in southern Michigan.⁴⁴ John Kinzie, fur trader on the Maumee and St. Joseph rivers, settled at Fort Dearborn, on the site of Chicago, in 1804, though he had traded there earlier. Another early trader there was Thomas Forsyth.

The decade of the 1780's was a boom era in the fur trade. The consummation of peace in Europe and America stabilized the market and stimulated the trade. In 1784 it is said that the trade of Detroit had an annual value of £40,800, and that of Michilimackinac, £60,400. It was not only an era of prosperity, but also of organization. Companies began to supplant the individual trader, more so at Michilimackinac than at Detroit. As early as 1779 a general store was formed at Michilimackinac. Each trader placed his goods in the store and by vote the traders chose those who were to winter among the savages. A second general store, called the General Company of Lake Superior and the South, was formed in 1785. The European market was glutted with furs and the company aimed to regulate the flow of trade goods into the Indian country. Similar conditions led to the formation by Detroit merchants of the Miami Company, probably in 1786.⁴⁵

During the winter of 1783-84 a sixteen-share firm was founded at Montreal—the great Northwest Company. Most of the company's posts were on the Canadian side of the evanescent boundary of 1783, but the company also traded on American soil and it obtained its provisions from John Askin at Detroit. In 1795 the XY Company was

⁴⁴ Ida A. Johnson, *The Michigan Fur Trade*, 99-101 (Lansing, 1919).

⁴⁵ Stevens, *Northwest Fur Trade*, 106, 134-138.

formed at Montreal by partners of the Northwest Company who had withdrawn from the parent company. After its reorganization in 1798, the XY Company inaugurated a brief period of intense, bitter rivalry, which ended only when it merged with the Northwest Company in 1804.⁴⁶ Two years later a new firm entered the trade, the Michilimackinac Company. It forestalled strife, however, by entering into an agreement with the Northwest Company by which the latter firm abandoned most of the trade within the limits of the United States.

During the years following the American military occupation of the lake posts in 1796, the British traders found themselves operating under difficulties. In 1799 Michilimackinac was made a port of entry to which all British trade goods entering the United States in that region were supposed to be transported. The United States government established factories for the fur trade at Fort Dearborn and Michilimackinac. American troops fired on boats of the Michilimackinac Company on the lakes. As a result of all these events, on October 20, 1808, the merchants of Montreal tendered to the governor of Canada a memorial declaring:

That the Indian trade within the American Limits must speedily be abandoned by British subjects, if not protected against interruptions of free navigation of the Lakes, fiscal extortions and various other vexations: that if once abandoned, it can never be regained and with its abandonment, will finish British influence with the Indian Nations residing within the limits of Canada: that British Traders have materially aided in preserving that influence hitherto,

⁴⁶ W. Stewart Wallace, ed., *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 1-36 (Toronto, 1934); Gordon C. Davidson, *The North West Company*, 1-31, 69-91 (University of California, *Publications in History*, vol. 7 — Berkeley, 1918). The beginnings of the Northwest Company are somewhat nebulous. As early as the 1770's there was an organization operating in Montreal under that name. In 1778 John Askin wrote letters to the "Gentlemen of the N. W. Co. at Montreal," and in the following year a definite sixteen-share company was formed. This firm vanished, and a new sixteen-share company was founded in the winter of 1783-84, with the elimination of the small traders.

the conviction of which is the strong motive with the American Government for wishing, by every means they can devise, to exclude such traders.⁴⁷

The first American company to enter the scene at Michilimackinac was John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, which was chartered by the New York legislature in April, 1808. At first Astor's company made no attempt to trade in the lake region under its own name. In 1810 the Michilimackinac Company dissolved and two of its constituent firms formed the Montreal-Michilimackinac Company. The latter joined Astor in erecting the South West Fur Company in 1811. The new company was to operate in the United States, using trade goods supplied in equal portions by Astor from New York and the Montreal-Michilimackinac Company from Montreal. The two Montreal firms which were also shareholders of the Northwest Company, brought about an agreement by which the latter abandoned all trade in the United States. The articles of agreement establishing the South West Fur Company provided that if the United States government closed its factories, Astor was to have two-thirds instead of half of the business, which would seem to indicate that the government factors were doing a good trade.⁴⁸

One of the objects in forming the South West Fur Company was to circumvent American regulations. It was a very sad occasion when Astor and his British associates subsequently discovered that the nonintercourse acts applied to their activities. They managed to carry on some trade in spite of all difficulties and it was Astor's genius alone that enabled him to import furs after the outbreak of hostilities.

⁴⁷ "Colonial Office Records," in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 25: 256 (1896).

⁴⁸ New York, *Private Laws*, 1808, p. 160-168; Wayne E. Stevens, "Fur Trading Companies in the Northwest, 1760-1816," in Mississippi Valley Historical Association, *Proceedings*, 1916-1917, p. 282-291; Hugh McLellan, ed., "John Jacob Astor Correspondence: Fur Trade with Lower Canada, 1790-1817," in *Moorsfield Antiquarian*, 1: 7-26, 111-124, 191-205, 270-283 (May, 1937-February, 1938).

Some of the furs went directly to New York from Michilimackinac. Others were taken to New York via Canada. The difficulties which Astor surmounted are simply incredible.⁴⁹ As the war progressed, however, the firm found it necessary to suspend activities.

The relations of the British to the Indians from 1783 to the War of 1812 have been much controverted. In April, 1786, Lord Sydney stated that the Indians were not to receive "open encouragement" in their hostilities with the Americans, but at the same time it would be an injustice to leave the poor savages at the "mercy of the Americans." Such a policy did not preclude the innocent pastime of giving the Indians arms and ammunition. A year later Sydney, after mentioning that Indian aid would be desirable if the United States attacked the western posts, opined to Lord Dorchester that "To afford them active assistance would be a measure extremely imprudent, but at the same time it would not become us to refuse them such supplies of ammunition as might enable them to defend themselves." According to Duncan McGillivray, even the plains Indians of the upper Missouri received "presents of Rum, arms and ammunition . . . at stated periods." In return the Indians would "kill Buffaloe & Deer and prepare the flesh and tallow" for the servants of the Northwest Company. American officials in the Northwest repeatedly accused the British of inciting the Indians, and the American press made similar charges. It was strange that a number of the British held American commissions as justices of the peace, obtained from William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory. Two of the best-known traders receiving such commissions were Robert Dickson of Michilimackinac in 1802, and Charles Reaume of La Baye in 1803.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Kenneth W. Porter, *John Jacob Astor, Business Man*, 1:249-290 (Cambridge, 1931).

⁵⁰ Samuel F. Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy*, 15-17 (New York, 1923); Canadian Archives, *Reports*, 1928, p.

The question of the intrigues was handled somewhat gently by the diplomats at first. When Jefferson, as secretary of state, spoke to the British minister, George Hammond, about "the blood and treasure" caused by the British retention of the posts, that gentleman replied that, "I cannot easily conjecture the motives in which this declaration has originated." He was unwilling, he said, to think Jefferson meant to intimate any unneutral action on the part of the British. A year later, in 1794, the question was not dealt with so suavely and a distinctly acrimonious correspondence ensued between Hammond and Edmund Randolph, secretary of state.⁵¹

The whole question is succinctly stated in Randolph's instructions to John Jay, May 6, 1794:

One of the consequences of holding the posts has been much bloodshed on our frontiers by the Indians, and much expense. The British Government having denied their abetting of the Indians, we must of course acquit them. But we have satisfactory proofs, (some of which, however, cannot . . . be well used in public) that British agents are guilty of stirring up, and assisting with arms, ammunition, and warlike implements, the different tribes of Indians against us. It is incumbent upon that Government to restrain those agents.⁵²

No such restraint occurred and the intrigues continued for two decades more, until after the War of 1812. On February 2, 1811, Nicholas Boilvin, United States Indian agent at Prairie du Chien, wrote as follows to William Eustis, American secretary of war:

Great danger, both to individuals and to the Government, is to be apprehended from the Canadian traders; they endeavor to incite the Indians against us; partly to monopolize their trade and partly to secure friendship in case a war should break out between us and England. They are constantly making large presents to the Indians, which the latter consider as a sign of approaching war, and under

69; Indiana Territory, "Executive Journal, 1800-1816," in Indiana Historical Society, *Publications*, 3:97, 110, 122 (1900).

⁵¹ *State Papers and Public Documents of the United States*, 315 (Boston, 1815). See also the second edition of this work, 2:57 (Boston, 1817).

⁵² *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, 1:473.

this impression frequently apply to me for advice on the subject. Hitherto I have been able to keep them friendly.⁵³

It was not an accident that when war did come Robert Dickson, British trader of Michilimackinac, who operated in Wisconsin and Minnesota, led a force of Sioux, Menominee, and Winnebago at the capture of that post in July, 1812. What contributed so largely to the continuance of the intrigues by traders was the state of mind of Canadian high officials. John G. Simcoe, lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, for one, "could never be persuaded that the United States was not a crafty, scheming enemy led by unscrupulous and cunning men who were watching for a chance to pounce on the poorly-defended province of Quebec."⁵⁴

When at long last the American government did take over the fur trade of the lakes and its supervision, they were confronted with a problem that had baffled both French and British: the liquor question. And in dealing with it, the United States authorities made an original contribution. By the licenses issued to traders it was stipulated that if liquor was furnished to the savages, the denizens of the forests were authorized to confiscate both trade goods and liquor. William Burnett relates that on one occasion an entire cargo of liquor was unloaded from a vessel at St. Joseph, Michigan. After the barrels had been piled on the lake shore, some Potawatomi, who had been silent spectators, dutifully confiscated the liquor.⁵⁵

Another curious feature of the trade under the American regime was the use of women traders. Williams Brothers in Michigan employed a few women to collect furs and a

⁵³ E. B. Washburne, ed., *The Edwards Papers*, 61 (*Chicago Historical Collections*, vol. 3 — Chicago, 1884).

⁵⁴ Louis A. Tohill, "Robert Dickson, British Fur Trader on the Upper Mississippi," in *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, 3: 5-49, 83-128, 182-203 (October, 1928, January, April, 1929); Bemis, *Jay's Treaty*, 124.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Michigan Fur Trade*, 151.

few women entrepreneurs are mentioned in the ledgers of John Askin. In the Grand River Valley the widow of Joseph Laframboise was agent of the American Fur Company for some years prior to her removal to Michilimackinac in 1821. G. S. Hubbard, Astor's superintendent in Illinois, said Madame Laframboise was a person "of extraordinary ability."⁵⁶

After the War of 1812 the Northwest Company re-established its posts on the American side, and apparently the British expected to engross the trade as they had before the war. They were soon disillusioned. The American law of 1816 provided that no foreigner should receive a license to engage in the trade on American soil except "by the express direction of the President." It is usually asserted that Astor caused the enactment of this measure, but of this there is no direct evidence. He tried to get some blank exception forms signed by the president, so he could fill them in and give them to his Canadian associates, but the executive declined. Astor, however, subsequently obtained a few permits. The result was to place the entire British fur trade within the limits of the United States in Astor's hands. In utter disgust, William H. Puthuff, United States Indian agent at Michilimackinac, wrote to Governor Lewis Cass, on June 20, 1816: "I wish to god the President knew this man Astor as well as he is known here. Licenses would not be placed at his discretion to be distributed among British subjects, Agents or Pensioners."⁵⁷

In 1817 Astor bought out his Canadian partners in the South West Fur Company and thereafter he did business under the name of the American Fur Company. He continued to use British employees in spite of all regulations to the contrary. In 1818 he got a ruling that while foreign

⁵⁶ Rebecca L. Richmond, "The Fur Traders of the Grand River Valley," in Historical Society of Grand Rapids, *Publications*, 1: 35-47 (1907).

⁵⁷ Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, 2: 696.

traders could not operate on American soil, American traders could hire foreign boatmen and interpreters — and these proceeded to act as clerks and traders when once out in the bush. The American Fur Company established posts in many of the river valleys of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, and in northern Illinois. The re-establishment of world peace in 1815 inaugurated the second great era of the trade in the lake country. In the summer of 1821 alone it was estimated that the value of the trade at Detroit was more than \$300,000.00, and the trade of Michilimackinac was even larger. As late as 1830, when the trade was declining, Michilimackinac did an annual business of from \$250,000.00 to \$300,000.00, of which the American Fur Company engrossed ninety-five per cent. In 1822 Astor, a genius at eliminating rivals, procured the abolition of the government factories. He did this by working through Thomas Hart Benton, United States senator from Missouri, who was also attorney for the American Fur Company.⁵⁸

Frederick J. Turner once wrote that "it is a characteristic of the fur trade that it continually recedes from the original center." As early as 1827 the trade had receded to such a low point at Detroit that Astor wished to withdraw. Ramsay Crooks advised keeping an agent there to hold "the enemy" in check. He thought that withdrawal from Detroit would mean new competition at Chicago. Astor accepted the advice, though for several years he continued to talk of selling out the Detroit branch.⁵⁹ At Michilimackinac the trade continued longer, but there was constant recession. The important fur trade era may be said to have ended throughout the lake country by 1834,

⁵⁸ *Detroit Gazette*, January 4, 1822; Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, 2: 714, 1206.

⁵⁹ Frederick J. Turner, "The Character and Influence of the Indian Trade in Wisconsin," in Johns Hopkins University, *Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 9: 555 (Baltimore, 1891); Johnson, *Michigan Fur Trade*, 152.

when Astor sold his interest in the American Fur Company. New government land offices were opening and eager settlers arrived. The American Fur Company stationed at Michilimackinac continued to do a small trade until it was closed in 1854, but the important trade had ceased two decades earlier.

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