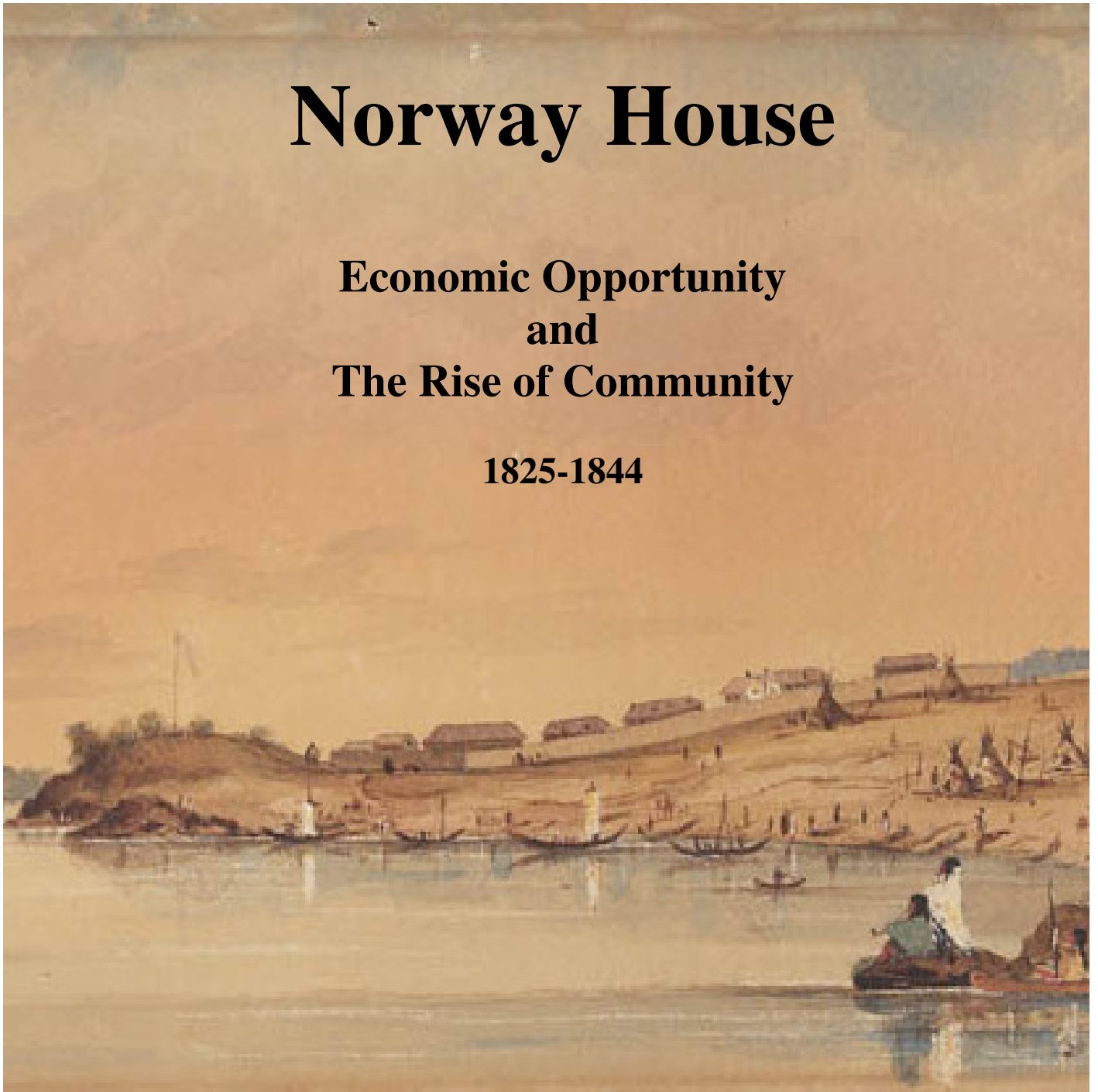


Norway House

**Economic Opportunity
and
The Rise of Community**

1825-1844



James McKillip

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Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the PhD in History

Department of History
Faculty of Arts
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the Hudson's Bay Company depot that was built at Norway House beginning in 1825 created economic opportunities that were sufficiently strong to draw Aboriginal people to the site in such numbers that, within a decade of its establishment, the post was the locus of a thriving community. This was in spite of the lack of any significant trade in furs, in spite of the absence of an existing Aboriginal community on which to expand and in spite of the very small number of Hudson's Bay Company personnel assigned to the post on a permanent basis. Although economic factors were not the only reason for the development of Norway House as a community, these factors were almost certainly *primus inter pares* of the various influences in that development.

This study also offers a new framework for the conception and construction of community based on documenting day-to-day activities that were themselves behavioural reflections of intentionality and choice. Interpretation of these behaviours is possible by combining a variety of approaches and methodologies, some qualitative and some quantitative. By closely counting and analyzing data in archival records that were collected by fur trade agents in the course of their normal duties, it is possible to measure the importance of various activities such as construction, fishing and hunting. With a clear understanding of what people were actually doing, it is possible to interpret their intentions in the absence of explicit documentary evidence.

DEDICATION

As always, this dissertation is dedicated to;

the beautiful Tippawan,
the powerful Edwin,
the creative Chai-Yai
and
the amazing Mitcha.

Between them, they still define what life is all about.

And to my brother Bill,
as only he knows.

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Introduction

In the early evening of 19 July 1828, George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, prepared for the final approach to Norway House. As was his custom, his party was traveling at a blistering pace as he headed to the Columbia district for an inspection visit. It had taken only seven days of upstream paddling to cover the 430 miles between York Factory and Norway House.¹ As his two canoes neared their immediate destination, sails were hoisted and the opportunity was taken to change into clean clothes, "... and new feathers ...,"² for their formal arrival. And formal it was. First announced by the skirl of bagpipes and the call of a bugle, as the canoes made their final approach, the instruments were set aside, "... to give free scope to the vocal organs of about eighteen Canadians (French) to chant one of those voyageur airs peculiar to them, and always so perfectly rendered."³

Anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Governor's party was Chief Trader John MacLeod, accompanied by John Dease, Robert Clouston, other personnel assigned to the post, as well as, "... a whole host of ladies."⁴ Also in attendance was MacLeod's son Malcolm, who described the Norway House of 1828 as a place that was,

... if not romantic, one to please the eye rather than to repel. It rests, snugly under the shelter of a high rock towards the east and north, and in fact under sheltering eminences, not high however, all around, the country about, being, what is called, a "rolling one" instead of a hilly one. In front of the "Fort," – for I must give it some name more intelligible than "house," – and fully twenty feet down the bank,

¹ McLeod, Malcolm, *Peace River: A Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific by George Simpson in 1828, Journal of the Late Chief Factor, Archibald McDonald*, (Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig Ltd., 1971), xv. N.B. Although the spelling of the family name as published in *Peace River*, was "McLeod," Chief Trader John spelled his name "MacLeod," as may be plainly seen in the many HBC documents that he personally signed. The reason for the change in spelling is not known.

² McLeod, *Peace River*, 4.

³ McLeod, *Peace River*, 4.

⁴ McLeod, *Peace River*, 4.

is a small bay, on the right of which (facing northward) is a small rock hill, about eighty feet high, with a spur which narrows the channel to about a couple of hundred yards in width, and where the current (Sea River) seaward, is from three to four miles an hour, at that particular part, and for about 400 yards, the course below that immediately below, becoming lacustrine.

The country around is principally of rock, in knolls, swamp well covered with pine, spruce, and cedar (possibly), and there is considerable dry ground for such latitude and meridian. The trees, chiefly, are pine, good and of different kinds, spruce, and birch, white and red or black ... and are of “fairly large size,” a log “seventeen inches in the “but,” the smaller “but,” being not an impossibility, or rather, was, for it was of the virgin forest, there, I speak.

The staple (food) of the place is fish – sturgeon, royal, of full one hundred pounds now and then, I believe, and “Jacks” (pike), and that “life” of the Laurentide country, the ever delicious, never cloying, and ever cherished, beautiful whitefish of our far northern lakes. Not only the establishment (a couple of hundred mouths on average), but all the brigades, from the Rocky Mountains, McKenzie’s River and Red River and York Factory, on their arrival there, where they had to remain a little while, were fed there on fish, and it sufficed them.⁵



Figure 1. Norway House, 1847.
William Henry Edward Napier.
Peter Winkworth Collection of Canadiana.
Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. R9266-327.

⁵ McLeod, *Peace River*, 50-51.

This visit was particularly important for John MacLeod because he had just finished the important work of rebuilding the Norway House depot. According to the younger McLeod, John was, “... beaming in conscious pride of his work well done, viz., the “Capital” just built – the New Norway House ...”⁶ MacLeod was well aware of the importance of this work, made necessary by the destruction of the previous Norway House establishment by fire in 1824. By the mid-1820s, as a result of changes made following the merger of the Hudson’s Bay and North West Companies, Norway House had already become a crucial element in the transportation arrangements of the Hudson’s Bay Company and getting it back in full operation had been a critical task. The work was begun in 1825 by John Peter Pruden, but the task was handed over to John MacLeod in 1826.

Although they had no idea of this at the time, these two men were establishing a post with a unique set of characteristics of particular historical interest. As it turned out, the Norway House of 1825 to 1844 provides historians with a case-study, or “test,” against which several important ideas that underpin much of the historiography of the fur trade may be measured. Inevitably, related Aboriginal, western-Canada, Colonial/Imperial and American “frontier” historiographies are also influenced by an analysis of the sources available for Norway House.

In the early 1900s, when fur trade, Aboriginal and western-Canadian history was first being studied seriously in Canada, the studies generally took the form of constructionist histories that were attempting to tell either the story of the rise of Canada (the nationalists), the decline of the Aboriginal populations (the ethno-historians), or the emergence of the distinctive people who came to be known as the Métis (the Métis

⁶ McLeod, *Peace River*, 52.

historians). Whatever the subject though, the dominant approach taken in these histories was economic. The great historians E.E. Rich⁷ and Harold Innis⁸ both accepted the pre-eminence of economic factors in what scholars would refer to (now generally pejoratively) as economic determinism. Later, Irene Spry articulated a model of economic development – her “great transformation thesis” – that dominated these studies for another generation.⁹ The work of Gerald Friesen,¹⁰ Gerhard Ens¹¹ and other prominent historians generally accept Spry’s “transformation” model in their studies.

More recently though, the argument that economic factors were the determining, or at least dominant, influence in the historical trajectory of the various peoples of western Canada, the Aboriginal peoples in particular, has come under intense criticism. In its place, the concept of “agency” has been particularly important in more recent work as historians, especially social historians, have worked to give voice to the people marginalized by their absence from the documents that underpin the historical record. A dominant theme in these studies was the effort to demonstrate the relative independence of Aboriginal people from Euro-Canadian influences in rejection of earlier notions of Aboriginal dependence theories popular in works such as Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey’s, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures*.¹² For example, in *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European relations in B.C., 1774-1890*, Robin Fisher argued that

⁷ E.E. Rich, *Hudson’s Bay Company: 1670-1870*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1960), and, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1967).

⁸ Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History*, 1930, reprint, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956).

⁹ Irene Spry, “The Great Transformation: The Disappearance of the Commons in Western Canada,” in, R.A. Allen, ed, *Man and Nature on the Prairies*, (Regina: University of Regina Press, 1976), 21-45.

¹⁰ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

¹¹ Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

¹² Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504 – 1700: A Study In Canadian Civilization*, (Saint John, New Brunswick: Publication of The New Brunswick Museum, 1937).

the fur trade was initially of only incidental importance to east coast people because trade was conducted from ships with the result that interaction between the two groups of peoples was necessarily limited.¹³ In one of the more radical examples of this work Richard White, in *The Middle Ground : Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region*, went so far as to suggest that the fur trade was not even really about trade but was part of a “... fuller and quite coherent spectrum of exchange that was embedded in particular social relations. The fur trade was a constantly changing compromise, and conduit, between two local models of the exchange ... Because of their scarcity, European goods took on a high value [... and], as these goods became more integral to gift-giving rituals, furs took on a higher value, because they were so highly prized by the Europeans. This trade, then, created an interdependent system of obligations.”¹⁴ In this view, the trade did not fundamentally change the way of life of the Aboriginal peoples with whom it interacted and was of no real economic importance to Aboriginal people *per se*. Rather, it was an expression of existing models of diplomacy and culturally-specific ceremony.

Given the complexity of the Aboriginal/Euro-Canadian interaction over time, it is no easy task to measure the relative importance of one factor over another in any analysis of historical cause and effect. As an example, study of the decline, dispersal and marginalization of the Métis has produced a collection of “push and pull” factors that variously argue that the Métis were “pushed” out of the Red River settlement area by local considerations or were “pulled” out of the area by influences originating in the

¹³ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European relations in B.C., 1774-1890*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977).

¹⁴ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 10-23.

Métis hinterland far to the west of Red River.¹⁵ However, because these factors overlap and intertwine, it is very difficult to suggest any sort of hierarchy of effect associated with the causes that they represent. To tackle this problem, a pure scientist would, of course, attempt to isolate the various factors and then, by a process of experimentation, determine the effect of each factor on the historical outcome of the whole. Obviously, this somewhat facetious suggestion of a model of scientific study is undermined by the impossibility of experimentation that is inherent in historical study. Still, under the right circumstances, it is possible to isolate historical factors in an attempt to measure their significance. At Norway House that, for a period of time, it is possible to recognize a degree of isolation of factors such that their influence can be meaningfully assessed.

In 1821, at the time of the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, the Hudson's Bay Company post at Norway House was a place in decline. Over the previous decades of competition with the rival North West Company, the Norway House umland had been denuded of fur-bearing animals such that, in the words of the post's Chief Factor, the trade had declined to "a mere nothing." Additionally, the number of Aboriginal people living in the hunting areas associated with the post had declined markedly. So poor an establishment was it that Colin Robertson, on being appointed Chief Factor of the post in 1821 as his 'reward' for his part in the merger of the two companies, complained that his assignment to Norway House was proof that the North West Company partners had gotten all of the good posts and that he and the other pioneers of the merger were being given short shrift. But Norway House

¹⁵ See, for example, the contrasting views of Douglas Sprague and Thomas Flanagan in, D.N. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis: 1869-1885*, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1989), 184, and Thomas Flanagan, *Riel and the Rebellion*, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983), 51-53, respectively.

was about to experience a renaissance. In the newly reorganized trade monopoly that the Hudson's Bay Company now controlled, Norway House was to be developed as the principal inland depot of the company sitting, as it did, at the intersection of the main north-south and east-west riverine fur trade transportation routes.

In spite of considerable turmoil, and not a little controversy, by late 1824 the post was ready to support the fur trade operations that would begin again in earnest with the next year's spring break-up. It was at this point that a fire broke out and raged out of control, destroying nearly all of the depot's buildings and the supplies that were contained within them. George Simpson immediately put measures into place to try to reduce the effect of the loss of the depot for the 1825 trading season. Even more important though, was getting Norway House back on its feet as quickly as possible.

The location of the Norway House posts (there had already been three of them by this point) had been determined by a number of considerations (which will be fully discussed later). As it turned out, by 1825 almost none of those considerations were of any real importance. With the near total destruction of the existing establishment, Simpson was free to choose a location for the new post, free from any considerations other than those associated with the role of Norway House as a depot.

It was this choice that created the unique circumstances of Norway House, circumstances that were to remain true for the next two decades. As of 1825, Norway House was one of the most important posts in a vast fur trade system. Until 1844, virtually all people and goods involved in the trade had to pass through the site. Nevertheless, in 1825 there was virtually no fur trade conducted there, there was no Aboriginal community at the site and the post's Euro-Canadian population was tiny.

The experience of Norway House during this period challenges, both materially and temporally, many current historical conceptions of the fur trade and the development of Rupert's Land and Western Canada more generally. Although established as a directed element within the fur trade system, Norway House came to be the locus for a diversified and diffuse local economy related to the fur trade but not part of it. Profit generating activities such as freighting, fishing, boat-building and a range of lesser industries grew up around the depot. Finally, all of this occurred well before the onset of the 'great transformation' that attended expanding trade links to the United States.

This thesis argues that the economic opportunities that the depot activities at Norway House generated were sufficiently strong to draw Aboriginal people to the site in such numbers that, within a decade of its relocation, Norway House was the locus of a thriving community, in spite of the lack of any significant trade in furs, in spite of the absence of an existing Aboriginal community on which to expand and in spite of the very small number of Hudson's Bay Company personnel assigned to the post on a permanent basis. Although economic factors were not the only reason for the development of Norway House as a community, these factors were almost certainly the *primus inter pares* of the various influences in that development.

As is almost always the case in micro-historical studies, the research associated with this dissertation revealed phenomena – what I will refer to as 'micro-historical gleanings' – not directly linked to the central line of argumentation that are nevertheless of significant historical interest. Although it is not possible to fully explore these phenomena within the scope of this dissertation, several lines of enquiry for further studies are suggested by evidence gathered for this dissertation.

First of all, it is apparent that there was an informal “great rendezvous” at Norway House each summer and that it represented one of the most important social events in Rupert’s Land. In contrast to the “great (or Rocky Mountain) rendezvous” of the American fur trade, the purpose of which was to hold a trade goods fair, the Norway House “great rendezvous” was more akin to a labour fair where people would gather in search of employment arising from the Hudson’s Bay Company’s business plans for the year. Although incidental to the practical purpose of the rendezvous, as with the American Fur Trade’s “great rendezvous,” the social aspects of this gathering are of significant historical interest in and of themselves, but also insofar as they contrast with historical perceptions of the American “great rendezvous.”

This dissertation will also suggest that there is considerable scope for further study of the nature of the colonial/imperial enterprise as manifest in the behaviour of Norway House’s Euro-Canadian personnel. In particular, interpretation of this behaviour would seem to support David Cannadine in his “ornamentalist” counter-argument to the notion of ‘orientalism’ as offered by Edward Said. Reduced to its essentials, Said’s argument is that Britain created and imposed identities on indigenous people for the purpose of more easily ruling them. Cannadine countered by arguing that the behaviour that Said interprets as a colonizing project is more properly seen as a reflection of British efforts to retain their own identity while serving in lands where they were inevitably immersed in alien, and often highly attractive, cultures.¹⁶

Finally, evidence gathered for this study suggests that there are numerous documentary sources that would support detailed genealogical studies of the Aboriginal

¹⁶ See, Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and, David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

people associated with Norway House. This is of particular historical interest since it is likely that few, if any, of the Aboriginal people who resided in the vicinity of Norway House were originally from there. Since at least some of their movements occurred in the 1820s to 1840s, there are traces of this in the archival records, especially those of the HBC. A close study of these sources would greatly enhance our understanding of the role of Aboriginal people in the fur trade era and as participants in the fur trade itself.

Naturally, a work of this nature would be impossible without the assistance of myriad organizations, institutions and, especially, people. There is of course, some risk in attempting to identify all of those who have provided me with help for this project. For any that I inadvertently fail to recognize or acknowledge, I apologize in advance.

My original interest in history was given focus and direction by a remarkable high school teacher named Paul Quilty. Without his guidance and encouragement, I doubt that any of my later studies would have been possible. My return to full-time academic pursuits came after serving for many years in the Canadian Forces when then-Major General Romeo Dallaire encouraged me to follow my historical interests in a more formal way. Once back at school, I was very fortunate to study under many fine scholars including: Jacques Barbier, Richard Connors, Don Davis, Jeff Keshen, Eda Kranakis, Brian Villa, and Nicole St-Onge. I must also thank Jan Grabowski for sparking my initial interest in this topic during an undergraduate course on the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada.

During this project, I was also exposed to the works and ideas of many other scholars not directly associated with the University of Ottawa, thanks principally to the academic nurturing for which Nicole St-Onge is famous amongst her students. Through

participation in numerous conferences, study groups and workshops I was exposed to the works, ideas and helpful criticism of such scholars as: Keith Carlson, Mike Evans, Cole Harris, Brenda Macdougall, Carolyn Prochny, Arthur “Skip” Ray and Frank Tough. All of these individuals influenced my own thinking to a degree that is impossible to quantify but has been of enormous assistance.

Other scholars, many of them friends and colleagues from school and work, also contributed to this study through discussion and critiques of my ideas and through critical reading of the numerous draft chapters that I burdened them with. Included in this group were: Mark Bourrie, Stephen Harris, Paul Lansey, Robert McKillip, Ian Nicklin, Ken Reynolds and Edward Whitcomb.

The materials used in developing this thesis were drawn from a wide variety of sources. Of particular value were the library and archival holdings of the University of Ottawa, the Archives of St. Paul’s University in Ottawa, des Archives de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, the Directorate of History and Heritage in the Department of National Defence, Library and Archives Canada, the National Archives of the United Kingdom, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba and the truly amazing archives of the Hudson’s Bay Company. The people working in each of these institutions provided tremendous help in finding information and were always ready to offer extra advice and assistance. I am particularly grateful to Anne Morton, Anna Shumilak and Marcia Stentz of the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives for assisting me with numerous questions related to their holdings. Arthur Ray and Frank Tough also generously shared digital records of post journals and fur returns from Norway House and York Factory that they

had produced for other projects. I am also grateful to Warren Sinclair for sharing his study of the Sinclair family with me.

Generous financial support for my studies was provided by the University of Ottawa as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I can only wonder at the degree of patience demonstrated by my supervisor at my day job – Dr. Stephen Harris – there were doubtless many occasions that he must have thought that Norway House was not of particular relevance to the job at hand.

I am extremely grateful for the guidance and assistance provided by my academic supervisors, Professor Nicole St-Onge and Professor Richard Connors. In addition to overseeing this work from its first inception, Professor St-Onge kindly and generously suggested bringing Professor Connors into the project. His participation was key to properly contextualizing this study, especially as the broader implications of its results became clear. He also contributed greatly to the final revision of the manuscript.

Notwithstanding the assistance provided by so many, errors and omissions will inevitably remain, the responsibility for which is entirely mine.

Chapter 1.

Imagining Norway House: approach, historiographies, methodologies and sources.

It has long been acknowledged that historical writing demands considerable interpretive creativity on the part of the writer. The ideas of historical imagination and troping have been explored at considerable length especially insofar as they take form within the debate between “post-modern” or “deconstructionist” historians, and the more traditional historicist/reconstructionist historians and their slightly more contemporary but nevertheless strongly derivative constructionist colleagues. At one extreme end of the continuum of debate, the imagination is the ultimate reality such that the narrative result is really nothing more than elegant historical fiction. In the best works of historical fiction, the image can be so compelling that only an expert can clearly delineate the lines of “truth” between fact and fiction – witness the recreation of Henry VIII in the popular imagination through the medium of television. In the mainstream historical literature Henry was as a man obsessed by dynastic succession but the television version of Henry is of a psychopathic regicide driven principally by lust.¹⁷ Of course the object of historical fiction is to entertain and it is the fictional narrative that is important. The history is mere “setting” for the plot development, and the characters take whatever historical shape that they might have simply as a writer’s matrix in which the fictional characters can be framed.

¹⁷ Another much-debated example of this is Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

However, if the relationship between the history and the fiction in a narrative is reversed – if a fictional account is constructed for the purpose of telling the history – the result is what I will call here “fictional history.” Naturally, the classically trained historian (which almost inevitably means the historicist historian; at least in terms of craft) will rebel reflexively against the notion of too much fiction in his narrative, an earlier acceptance of the concept of historical imagination notwithstanding. It would be simple enough to avoid this reaction by burying the notion of “fictional history” in a cloud of obfuscatory language and suggest that what is going on is bold historical abduction, sophisticated episteme development or a delicately balanced post-modern fusion of form and substance. But this would be neither useful nor true.

The reality is, that given the almost insurmountable obstacles posed by the language of texts and the texts themselves, and the lack of texts - the essential problem with studying any of the intellectual aspects of a pre-literate society - interpretation of any historical document is problematic in the extreme and will ineluctably lead to some degree of narrative fabrication on the part of the writer. This is even more the case when narrative creation relies to any significant degree on previous historical interpretations; the dreaded secondary sources. But if we accept, as Harold Bloom has asserted that, “any strong literary work creatively misreads and therefore misinterprets a precursor text or texts,”¹⁸ then it should be possible to re-embrace one of the central concepts of history writing, that is, that all history builds on what has come before and all historical narratives are but individual, “bricks in the wall” that constitute our historical understanding writ large. This idea has pedigree.

¹⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994), 7.

When Herodotus invented historiography in the fifth century B.C.E. the historian's job was to uncover and recount "true" stories in a narrative form.¹⁹ As Herodotus succinctly put it, history was written, "... in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done ..."²⁰ The truth of the narrative was a function of the degree of verisimilitude between the story as told and the story as lived. There seems to have been little doubt that a true historical narrative was achievable and for two millennia, the past and the history of the past were synonymous.

This absence of doubt ended with the period commonly referred to as the "Enlightenment." At first slowly, then with increasing speed, the basis of western thought was shaken out of its "static concept of totality" and religious cosmology.²¹ For historians, the most important concept that emerged from the period was the idea of modernity or modernism.

Modernism's origins in doubt led, perhaps ironically, to the development of a singular attachment to the notion that all knowledge is attainable and a solution to every problem is possible to the rational, technologically educated and realist mind.²² Truth is knowable. From this basis sprang a whole series of ideas linked to the application of the core concept to the actual task of understanding the world. For the historian, the most important of these ideas were those that offered practical tools to assist in reconstructing and understanding past events. Empiricism, evidential inference and a belief in human

¹⁹ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), ix-x.

²⁰ Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, trans. George Rawlinson, (440 BCE; reprint, London: J.M. Dent, 1912), 1.

²¹ John E. Grumley, *History and Totality: Radical historicism from Hegel to Foucault*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 4-5.

²² For a description of this see, Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 18-20.

intentionality figured large, as did naturalism and pragmatism.²³ Modernism opened the door to the development of a series of all-encompassing explanations for the course of human history. These “meta-narratives” included liberalism, imperialism and Marxism as well as fascism and bourgeois capitalism.²⁴ The aim of all of these was to explain the existing human condition in historical terms and on the basis of scientific enquiry. The discipline of history itself did not evade modernist scrutiny and historicism was the result.²⁵

For the contemporary historian, the influence of historicism is inescapable. Even for those who reject its basic tenets, historicism is still the mark against which other methodological approaches are measured. For all that, historicism remains a vague concept. Although not a definition, a useful explanation of historicism is that it:

... seems to have three related meanings: for most historians it is the primary historical act of perceiving historical periods in their own terms rather than any imposed by the historian; second and relatedly, it means accepting that every historical period had its own standards through which it determined what was trustworthy knowledge and warranted truth; third, that there are inclusive, demonstrable and determining patterns in the process of historical change.²⁶

The writing of history, then, focused not on the narrative per se, but on the establishment of facts that defined the truth. The direct result of this was the development of a reconstructionist approach to historical inquiry, the object of which was to limit the involvement of the historian in the narrative.²⁷ The facts would speak for themselves if the historian did his job properly and kept his opinions and prejudices in

²³ G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History*, (London: Methuen, 1967), 355-56.

²⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

²⁵ Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

²⁶ Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 130.

²⁷ White, *The Content of the Form*, 27.

check. This approach would also avoid the dangers of Whiggery or teleology, the risk that historians would write the past as a function of the present.²⁸

But even as these concepts matured and took concrete form, their philosophical basis was being challenged. Many contemporary writers credit G.W.F. Hegel with moving the debate about the nature of historical enquiry forward in the nineteenth century.²⁹ In particular, his idea of progress through the dialectic of opposing ideas provided an attractive tool for historical analysis, even if his own ultimate conclusions remained suspect.³⁰ Nevertheless, it was the earlier debate between David Hume and Immanuel Kant that drew the line that was the most important for historical method. Simply stated, Hume believed that it was not possible to know anything with certainty.³¹ While recognizing the limits of knowledge, Kant still believed in a real world and demanded something of more use than Hume's pure skepticism.³² Kant's solution was the idea that, although knowledge itself was elusive, humans were possessed of an innate set of reference frames that made it possible to understand the real world. This idea of an *a priori* foundation for knowledge established the basis of the separation of form and content. *A priori* knowledge provided the form for the rendering of experience into experiential content *a posteriori*, after the fact.³³

While modernists embrace Kant, particularly his belief in the power of reason – his epistemology – the historical school known as constructionism does seem to owe

²⁸ Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1931).

²⁹ George Dennis O'Brien, *Hegel on Reason and History: A Contemporary Interpretation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 524-525.

³⁰ Page Smith, *The Historian and History*, (New York: Knopf, 1964), 525.

³¹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, (1748; reprint, London: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1961), 354-57.

³² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans F.Max Müller, (1788; reprint, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), 373.

³³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 374-377.

more than a little to Hegel. Constructionists approach history by conceptualizing evidence within a specific framework. Examples of these frameworks include race, class and gender with Marxism's dialectical materialism being the most obvious example of Hegelian influence.³⁴ Unlike pure empirical modernists though, constructionists acknowledge that the imagination of the historian is at work not only in the construction of the narrative but also in the interpretation of the evidence. Both form and content are constructions. Nevertheless, constructionist historians believe that intellectual rigour and self-conscious skepticism can at least offer a reasonable if not perfect image of the past.³⁵

Much more radical is the post-modern or deconstructionist view of history. As both terms suggest, this approach is a reaction to modernism and to the reconstructionist/constructionist models. At the core of this radical historical method is the belief that language presents an insurmountable obstacle to pure historical truth. Since language itself is cultural and value-laden, and because language is dynamic, changing in time and space, any narrative, and any narrative-based fact, will inevitably be a subjective interpretation. For the most radical post-modernists then, all history is necessarily a form of fiction and the historicist's emphasis on content over form, epistemology over ontology, is turned on its head.³⁶ For the post-modernist historian the form of the narrative is at least as important as the content. This is especially so given that most historical facts are narrative-based thus already a product of the interpretive process. An interpretive narrative built on facts established through narrative

³⁴ Gerald Allan Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 77-78.

³⁵ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

³⁶ Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 4-5.

interpretation is bound to be form-dominated. It comes as no surprise then that historiography is especially important to these post-modern historians.³⁷

The terms post-modern, and especially deconstructionist, seem, at first glance, to be decidedly negative. Particularly distressing to the historian is the potential discrediting of most of the practical methodologies for judging historical evidence in forming a historical argument. But if post-modernism is seen as the logical next step in the process of intellectual and spiritual liberation rooted in the enlightenment, and not just as something inherently anti-historical, there is still hope for the historian. The clear linkage of ideas from modernism to post-modernism suggests a lineage along a continuum. Even the most ardent post-modernists – or deconstructionists if we want to state this in the particular methodological language of historical studies – are confronted with the challenge of how to actually do their work. Inevitably, even the post-modernists must turn to the same tools as any other historian.

There is no shame in this. The contemporary analog for the theoretically vexed but practical historian is the NASA rocket scientist. However much these scientists believe in – or perhaps hope for – the eventual realization of some of the more esoteric ideas related to time and space such as quantum physics as it relates to light, and bold conceptualizations of time travel, they are still daily confronted by things eminently practical. If they want to put a spacecraft into orbit around the earth and have it return without blowing it up and killing the crew onboard, these scientists turn to Newtonian physics – and their slide-rules – for the simple reason that it works. For all quantum theory's elegance, it lacks the practical tools available to the Newtonian. So too the historian with the tools of the historicist.

³⁷ For a discussion of this see, Keith Jenkins, *Postmodern History Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1997).

Ultimately then, the post-post-modernist, or super-modernist,³⁸ should be able to use whatever tools historical methodology, or any methodology, has to offer.³⁹ The careful analysis and contextualization of texts, rigorous internal and external criticism of both the texts and the authors of the texts, and the painstaking contextualization of the Rankean reconstructionist can co-exist with the extreme epistemological doubt of the most radical deconstructionist. Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, can work alongside *long-durée* trend analysis. Quantitative economic theory can parallel the most introspective psychological and psychoanalytic methods. The essence of the super-modernist historian's approach is that whatever can be made useful can be useful, doubt will always remain and narrative content and form are inseparable.

So then, for this study, the form, the narrative, the story, provokes the search for content, methods and analyses, that can help to bring meaning to this particular bit of history. We begin then, with a historical problem and an approach for the research, analysis, interpretation and explanation of it. The problem is the emergence of a community at Norway House where none previously existed.⁴⁰ The overall approach is super-modernist, exploiting various analytical tools as they are found to be useful and appropriate with this work of "fictional history" unabashedly reliant on whatever imaginative leaps are useful in finding at least some historical truth to help answer the "question" of Norway House.⁴¹

³⁸ This term was coined in, Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion*, 130.

³⁹ See for example, E.J. Hobsbawm's defence of Marx's materialist conception of history in, E.J. Hobsbawm, "Marx and History," in *Historians on History*, ed. John Tosh, (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 91-98.

⁴⁰ Note that the scope of this paper does not include activities in either the Southern or Columbia departments of the Hudson's Bay Company but does include transportation activity south from the Red River Colony into the United States.

⁴¹ Curiously, and perhaps ominously, the fur trade has yet to attract post-modern treatments.

Of course the post-modernist emphasis on interpretation, the balancing of form and content, means that particular attention must be paid to what has already been written. For the history of Norway House in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, there are a number of historiographies that are relevant. Inevitably these historiographies overlap and intertwine, but each has particular significance for the study of Norway House. The most obvious relevant historiography is that related to the fur trade and the most obvious point of departure for a review of that literature is the now-famous 1973 historiographical essay by L.G. Thomas.⁴²

When Thomas wrote his essay, there was something of a lull in the field of fur trade history writing, even if the field itself was ever-so loosely defined – Thomas himself used the terms ‘fur trade history’ and ‘history of the Canadian west’ almost interchangeably. But the ‘golden age’ that was marked by the work of Harold Innis, E.E. Rich and A.S. Morton had passed and Thomas’ essay was as much a plea for new studies as it was a summary of what had already been done.⁴³ Near the end of the essay Thomas observed that, “there is still much to be done in the field and no student need lack for useful employment.”⁴⁴

In some respects, Thomas’ essay was more about methodology than it was about historiography. Although he summarized much of the early writing on the history of ‘the west,’ his focus was on differentiating between what should be properly considered as primary versus secondary material. He was particularly interested in the after-the-fact

⁴² L.G.Thomas, “Historiography of the Fur Trade Era,” in, *A Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains*, edited by Richard Allen, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1973), 73-85.

⁴³ For an interesting discussion of relevant French language historiography see, Jan Grabowski, “L’historiographie des Amérindiens au Canada: quelques données et commentaires portant sur les directions de la recherche et sur les travaux en cours,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*, Vol. 53 (4), printemps 2000, p. 552-560.

⁴⁴ Thomas, “Historiography of the Fur Trade Era,” 83.

accounts that constituted the literature of the 19th century, accounts that were written by people who had personal experience with the events being described but were nevertheless writing for a specific purpose. The ‘travelogues’ that were so popular in the 19th century, such as Alexander Mackenzie’s *Voyages* (1801), Alexander Henry’s *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories* (1809) and John West’s *Journal* (1824), were typical of these.⁴⁵ Thomas recognized the limitations inherent in this type of account but was confident that, with sufficient discretion, they could be effectively employed in studies and he stressed that, “... no one should think for a moment that this in any way discounts their value.”⁴⁶

In Thomas’ view, Donald Gunn was the first of the writers of the period to take a genuinely historical approach to his writing. According to Thomas, Gunn, writing in the 1870s, “... saw the function of the historian as primarily the provision for his reader of all of the evidence available, though he was by no means blind to the historians’ duty of critical evaluation.”⁴⁷ This reads almost like a Rankean definition of the historian’s craft. The works of Alexander Begg and George Bryce were similarly treated by Thomas as secondary works with a heavy dollop of primary material included by virtue of the author’s participation in the events described.

Thomas rightly recognized the important, even essential, contribution of the Champlain Society to study of the fur trade, beginning in 1905. With its commitment to, “... undertake the publication of rare books or unpublished materials relating to Canada that the ordinary commercial publisher would not accept,” the Society provided (and continues to provide) scholars, and the public, ready access to a host of otherwise

⁴⁵ All of these works are cited in, Thomas, “Historiography of the Fur Trade Era,” 73.

⁴⁶ Thomas, “Historiography of the Fur Trade Era,” 73.

⁴⁷ Thomas, “Historiography of the Fur Trade Era,” 75.

inaccessible materials. The 1928 decision of the Hudson's Bay Company to begin publishing some of its own materials was arguably one of the most important developments in the study of the fur trade and, when the Company decided to work with the Champlain Society, a "... fruitful collaboration,"⁴⁸ ensued. This was followed by independent publication of materials by the Hudson's Bay Record Society when that group was formed in 1949. A particularly important product of this period was the work of E.E. Rich, beginning with the publication of *Simpson's Athabasca Journal*, edited by Rich and published in 1938.⁴⁹

This period was also defined by the work of A.S. Morton and Harold Innis, who along with J.B. Tyrell, W.S. Wallace and L.J. Burpee, combined to produce a 'golden age' of fur trade historiography.⁵⁰ Of this group, Morton and Innis cast a long shadow on further studies, with Morton's *History of the Canadian West*⁵¹ even being called definitive;⁵² a claim that Thomas was quick to point out would never have been made by Morton. Innis' economic history of the fur trade and his articulation of the Euro-centric 'staple theory,' was another of the key publications during this period.⁵³ This theory posited that production of a key commodity (in this case fur), in the hinterland of the Empire (in this case Rupert's Land), resulted in the establishment of permanent connections with Europe which ultimately defined economic, social and even political systems in the British North-American interior. Innis' argument relied heavily on fur

⁴⁸ Thomas, "Historiography of the Fur Trade Era," 78.

⁴⁹ *Journal of Occurrences in the Athabasca Department, Publications of the Champlain Society. Hudson's Bay Company Series; 1.*, edited by E.E. Rich, (Toronto: The Champlain society, 1938).

⁵⁰ All of these works are cited in, Thomas, "Historiography of the Fur Trade Era," 80.

⁵¹ A.S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1939).

⁵² Thomas, "Historiography of the Fur Trade Era," 78.

⁵³ Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 11.

production and trade statistics; more than a few students are still intimidated by the mass of data that appeared in his volume.

Although there was indeed a lull in fur trade studies, the concern that Thomas expressed for the state of the field was answered in a flurry of new work, work that was neatly captured in the historiographical essay by Michael Payne in 2001.⁵⁴ Payne's essay was particularly timely, as a lot had changed since the publication of Thomas' piece and a new surge of interest in fur trade and related studies was already becoming evident.

Interestingly, Payne's essay began by revisiting the question of what constitutes 'fur trade history,' as distinct from other categorizations for the same grouping of works. Generally speaking, and acknowledging Jennifer Brown's extended metaphor of blind men and an elephant, Payne came to no particular conclusion, only accepting that the field and its appellation were, and remain, wide open.⁵⁵ But Payne also recognized the 'lull' that had followed the 'golden age,' noting W.J. Eccles' observations on the uncritical use of the writings of Innis *et al*, to the point of, "... the establishment of myth as conventional wisdom."⁵⁶ In Payne's view, it was the work of John Foster, Frits Pannekoek, Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer Brown that marked the beginning of a new era of fur trade studies in the 1980s. Their work, focusing as it did on what might generally be characterized as 'social' questions,⁵⁷ unquestionably had a significant effect on fur trade historiography,

⁵⁴ Michael Payne, "Fur Trade Historiography," in, *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, edited by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens and R.C. Macleod, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 3-22.

⁵⁵ Jennifer Brown, "The Blind Men and the Elephant: Fur Trade History Revisited" in, Patricia A. McCormack and R. Geoffrey Ironsides, eds., *The Uncovered Past: Roots of Northern Alberta Societies*, (Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute, University of Alberta, 1993), 15-19, quoted in, Michael Payne, "Fur Trade Historiography," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, 3.

⁵⁶ W.J. Eccles, "A Belated Review of Harold Adams Innis, 'The Fur Trade in Canada,'" *The Canadian Historical Review* 60, no.4 (December 1979), 419-41, quoted in, Michael Payne, "Fur Trade Historiography," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, 5.

⁵⁷ See, John Elgin Foster, "*The Country-born in the Red River Settlement, 1820-1850*," (PhD Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1973); Frits Pannekoek, "*The Churches and the Social Structure in the Red River*

exploring, as a contemporaneous collection of papers noted, “old trails and new directions.”⁵⁸

Noticeably absent from Payne’s historiographical review were the important works by Irene Spry and Gerald Friesen. Although Marcel Giraud had offered the first non-politically focused study of the Canadian west as a by-product of his study of the Métis,⁵⁹ it was Irene Spry who changed the nature of the historiographical debate by establishing a new interpretive framework. Spry concentrated on the region’s economy and, in advancing her theory of a ‘great transformation,’ she posited a dramatically changed economic landscape as the principal factor in the upheavals of the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ In particular, Spry suggested that the opening of the prairies to outside competition after 1844 led to the transformation of the local economy from one of subsistence to an outward-looking market economy. As the economy developed and became more integrated with the international economy, local concepts of property and resources also underwent a fundamental transformation. Old notions of common resources gave way, through a series of intermediate steps, to modern ideas of private property. Eventually, the subsistence homeland of Aboriginal peoples was transformed into an, “... outpost of the industrial market system.”⁶¹

Area, 1818-70,” (PhD Dissertation, Queen’s University, 1973); Sylvia Van Kirk, “*The Role of Women in the Fur Trade Society of the Canadian West, 1700-1850*,” (PhD Dissertation, University of London, 1975) and; Jennifer S.H. Brown, “*Company Men and Native Families: Fur Trade Social and Domestic Relations in Canada’s Old Northwest*,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1976).

⁵⁸ Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray, eds., *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

⁵⁹ Marcel Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West*, 2 vols, (1945; reprint, Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986).

⁶⁰ Spry, “The Great Transformation,” 21-45.

⁶¹ For a full discussion of this see, Irene Spry, *From The Hunt to The Homestead*, (Unpublished, by permission Lib Spry), epilogue 1.

The implications of Spry's thesis were clear, if more than a little deterministic. If the transformation of the prairie economy was an inevitable product of the developing and expanding world economy, then the effects on the region's Aboriginal people were inevitable consequences of that change. Although Spry's sympathy for Aboriginal people was obvious and she used language that seemed to put the blame for their marginalization squarely on Canadian expansionist policies, her thesis actually served to deflect responsibility away from any actors.⁶² The logic of the economic forces that Spry described meant that neither the Aboriginal nor the Canadian immigrant population were responsible for their fates.

At about the same time, Gerald Friesen completed his history of the Canadian prairies. Although the Aboriginal question represented only one aspect of Friesen's work, his place in the historiography is important. First of all, in many respects, Friesen's narrative was a return to the grand or meta-narrative style of Morton. In typical constructionist fashion, the history of the prairies was a subset of the history of Canada. It was also something of a paean to the notion of regionalism, always a topical subject in the Canadian context, and to the virtue of distinctive 'homelands' within a broader national and international community.⁶³

More important, Friesen invoked the economic arguments of Irene Spry, in particular the notion of a fundamental transformation in the prairie economy in the 1840s.⁶⁴ Although he did not directly invoke the primitive versus civilized model that Giraud had used in his discussion of the Métis, he nevertheless stressed the irresistible

⁶² See, for example, Spry, *From The Hunt to The Homestead*, epilogue 2.

⁶³ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 466.

⁶⁴ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 92-93.

nature of the changing economic environment.⁶⁵ Friesen's study was also important because it reintroduced the idea of racial tension in the west without falling back on earlier stereotypes. Rather than explaining events and outcomes in terms of racial characteristics, Friesen discussed the implications of late nineteenth century attitudes to race in the content of contemporaneous documentary evidence.⁶⁶ This was an explicit recognition of the problem of language and temporal separation that was so vexatious to early post-modernists.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Friesen's study was that it served to reaffirm many of the ideas of existing historiographical traditions such as those of Innis and Morton and contributed to the myth-making that Eccles had decried. Coming as it did at the same time as the expanding interest in the Canadian west generally, Friesen's work was likely a significant brake to newer conceptions of the fur trade. In an ironic twist, the high quality of Friesen's narrative style made his efforts especially regressive as his was easily the most readable of the relevant histories.

Payne also recognized the importance of the work of Arthur Ray and Frank Tough, work that is of particular significance for this dissertation. Ray, a contemporary of Foster, Van Kirk, Pannekoek and Brown, was moving in a different direction. No doubt influenced by his background as a historical geographer, Ray was interested in exploring the quantifiable. In some ways, this was a return to the work of earlier historians, Innis in particular, who had studied the fur trade from an economic perspective. Ray's work involved wading into the mass of archival data that was available in the fur trade records themselves rather than relying on narrative accounts that

⁶⁵ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 93.

⁶⁶ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 94-97.

tried to give meaning to that same data without ever actually weighing it comprehensively and critically. Interestingly, Ray's conclusions regarding Aboriginal agency – that Aboriginal people tended to be shrewd and very active participants in the negotiation of the conditions of the fur trade – were, and continue to be, as profound as anything produced by the social historians. It is also true that Ray's work is underutilized by contemporary historians. An example of this is his article on pemmican production that is rarely cited in spite of the centrality of pemmican in the conduct of the fur trade between the beginning of the 19th century and the effective end of human-powered transport in the 1880s.⁶⁷

Perhaps part of the reason for the relative absence of Ray's work as cited material in other historian's papers was captured in the historiographical essay written by Ted Binnema and Susan Neylan in *New Histories for Old*, the 2007 collection of essays written in Ray's honour. Binnema and Neylan muse that, "Ray's central argument was that any new meaningful Indian history necessarily will be concerned with the involvement of the Indian peoples in the fur trade [and that] that argument quickly became so convincing, so common sense, even outside academia, that it soon became difficult to convince students that Ray had ever said anything new."⁶⁸ But Ray had made an important contribution to fur trade historiography in his defence of Innis which, as Binnema and Neylan noted, "... can be seen as a general argument for the continued

⁶⁷ Arthur J. Ray, "The Northern Great Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade, 1774-1885," *Prairie Forum*, Vol.9, No.2 (1984): 269.

⁶⁸ "New Histories for Old: Changing Perspectives on Canada's Native Pasts," Ted Binnema and Susan Neylan, eds., (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 1.

relevance of economically and geographically focused studies based on thorough and detailed archival research – exactly the kind of studies Ray himself preferred.”⁶⁹

The attention to detail that characterized Ray’s work was also evident in the more recent work of Frank Tough. As with Ray, Tough tested narrative-driven historical conclusions by comparing them against well-documented data. Tough’s analysis of the economic history of northern Manitoba in the sixty years straddling the turn of the 20th century is of significance for the fur trade as a whole.⁷⁰ Tough’s theoretical framework was developed from that established by Harold Innis⁷¹ – his Euro-centric staple theory⁷² – which was adapted to reflect the workings of the North American part of the admittedly international fur trade. Tough, anticipating his critics, defended his use of concepts such as labour, capital and commercialization, stating:

I leave it to those conforming to current tenets to point out that this sort of economic history is a Eurocentric meta-narrative and a logocentric misrepresentation of life. While the idea of colonialism still has some standing in present academic discourse, specific empirical consideration of the origins of economic domination is lacking.⁷³

Tough’s point is well taken. While fully acknowledging the limitations of his study he nevertheless highlighted the rather thin bases on which much historical debate rested and continues to rest.⁷⁴ Tough is probably the only writer to have offered a

⁶⁹ “*New Histories for Old*,” Binnema and Neylan, 3.

⁷⁰ Frank Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail: Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), 114.

⁷¹ Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail*, 13.

⁷² Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 396-402.

⁷³ Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail*, 13.

⁷⁴ He also readily acknowledged the lack of Métis voice in his work. Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail*, 13.

reasonably complete representation of the internal workings of local economies within Rupert's Land.⁷⁵

Tough's enduring contribution to fur trade historiography is that his method points the way for further study. By including sundry secondary and tertiary economic activities in his models of the Aboriginal economy of Northern Manitoba, Tough shows what is possible elsewhere. His discussion of the Aboriginal fishing industry is particularly interesting as a component of the overall Aboriginal economy.⁷⁶ Additionally, unlike many narratives, Tough does not take demographic data and economic criteria for granted.⁷⁷

Another historian who is absent from Payne's historiographical summary is Gerhard Ens.⁷⁸ This is surprising because Ens' contributions are important in two respects. First of all, Ens adopted an economic model generated from studies of European industrialization and used it to advance a view of a diverse Métis economy that was itself a sub-set of the broader fur trade economy.⁷⁹ Through the lens of 'proto-industrialization,' the Métis came into focus as a collection of many sub-communities with widely divergent interests and priorities.⁸⁰ Ens advanced a view of a community that was characterized by adaptation to changing economic circumstances. He gave

⁷⁵ See, for example, his analyses of the seasonal economies of the Pas Indians, Moose Lake Post and Berens River, Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail*, 32-34.

⁷⁶ Frank Tough, "The Storehouses of the Good God: Aboriginal Peoples and Freshwater Fisheries in Manitoba," *Manitoba History*, No. 39, Spring/Summer (2000), 2-12.

⁷⁷ There are a few notable exceptions to this. For example, Tough seems to accept Irene Spry's assertion that the universal currency of the fur trade was the 'Made Beaver' exchange unit, in spite of evidence to the contrary. Tough, *As Their Natural Resources Fail*, 15.

⁷⁸ This is all the more surprising considering that Ens was one of the editors of the volume in which Payne's essay was published. Of course it is entirely possible that this is merely a reflection of Ens' admirable humility.

⁷⁹ Ens' point of departure for this model is Irene Spry's transformation theory. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 5.

⁸⁰ Ens method relies, at least in part, on ideas advanced by, Jennifer Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 36-42.

particular emphasis to Métis involvement in the buffalo-robe trade. In his view, this trade offered a new employment opportunity when other activities, the provisioning trade in particular, were in decline.⁸¹

By adopting a methodology that stressed demographic data and patterns as indicators of societal trends, Ens attempted to avoid the chronic problem of the lack of relevant documentary evidence. Although other historians had used essentially the same technique,⁸² Ens unapologetically made interpretation of this quantitative data central to his argument. Despite the fact that some of his interpolations may be debatable,⁸³ his approach resulted in a new and imaginative picture of the community. Ens' picture was of, "... an ethnic identity based on an occupational specialization in the fur trade."⁸⁴ Additionally, Ens' landmark study of the malleable ethnicity of Johnny Grant is likely to provide a model for research on other individuals and on the various families to which they belonged and to which they attached.⁸⁵

Over the last decade, there have also been a series of studies that connect with the groundbreaking work of Foster, Pannekoek, Van Kirk and Brown. Examples of this include: Jan Grabowski and Nicole St-Onge's 2001 study of Iroquois engagés,⁸⁶ Carolyn Podruchny's masterful 2006 study of voyageur culture, *Making the Voyageur World*:

⁸¹ Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 6.

⁸² See, for example, St-Onge, "Métis and Merchant Capital in Red River," 9-15.

⁸³ See, for example, Ens' assertion regarding the status of the fur and pemmican trade in the 1840's. *Homeland to Hinterland*, 75.

⁸⁴ Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 175.

⁸⁵ Gerhard Ens, "Métis Ethnicity, Personal Identity and the Development of Capitalism in the Western Interior: The Case of Johnny Grant," in, *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, edited by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens and R.C. Macleod. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 161-78.

⁸⁶ Jan Grabowski and Nicole St-Onge, "Montreal Engagés in the Western Fur Trade, 1800-1821," in, *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, edited by Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens and R.C. Macleod, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 3.

Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade,⁸⁷ and Brenda Macdougall's recent (2010) study of Métis culture in Saskatchewan, *One of the Family*.⁸⁸ Richard Connors has also made a unique contribution to this literature in his exploration of the legal framework and culture of the fur trade within the broader Imperial framework of the time with his, "In the Mind's Eye: Law and British Colonial Expansion in Rupert's Land in the Age of Empire," published in 2005.⁸⁹

More specific to the subject at hand, one of the more curious lacunas in fur trade history is the paucity of studies of individual districts and posts. Innis hinted at the possibility of studies by district in the organization of *The Fur Trade in Canada*, which deals with the departments of the trade within an overall chronological layout, but the closest thing to a district study is Frank Tough's study of the region of Northern Manitoba, *As Their Natural Resources Fail*, which encompasses a number of Hudson's Bay Company trade districts.

The handful of post studies include James Parker's 1967 study of Fort Chipewyan,⁹⁰ Elaine Mitchell's 1977 analysis of Fort Timiskaming⁹¹ and Richard Enns' study of Norway House, completed in 1988.⁹² Significantly, Enns' brief study was not really a study of the post *per se*, but was more of an ethnographic review of the

Aboriginal people associated with the post and, as his subtitle suggested - *Preliminary*

⁸⁷ Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁸⁸ Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Métis culture in nineteenth century northwestern Saskatchewan*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

⁸⁹ Richard Connors, "In the Mind's Eye: Law and British Colonial Expansion in Rupert's Land in the Age of Empire," in, *Forging Alberta's Constitutional Framework*, Edited by Richard Connors and John M. Law, eds, (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2005), 1-23.

⁹⁰ Parker's study was published in 1987 as, James Parker, *Emporium of the North: Fort Chipewyan and the Fur Trade to 1835*, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1987).

⁹¹ Elaine Allen Mitchell, *Fort Timiskaming and the Fur Trade*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

⁹² Richard A. Enns, "The Fur Trade at Norway House 1796-1875: Preliminary Considerations in the Discussion of Treaty 5," (Master's Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1988).

Considerations in the Discussion of Treaty 5 – it was more concerned with providing context for a discussion of Treaty 5 than it was with anything going on at the post proper. Similarly, a study related to the scandal that rocked the Rossville community in the 1840s, written by Raymond Morris Shirritt-Beaumont in 2001, provided some useful and interesting information regarding the origins of the population near Norway House, but did not in any way constitute a study of the place.⁹³ Significantly, both Enns and Shirritt-Beaumont echoed Morton in that the Aboriginal community at Norway House was either assumed in their narrative or was accepted as having come into being as a consequence of the establishment of the Wesleyan mission. This was surprising in the case of Enns as he took some pains to describe the nature of the community around Norway House up to 1823 but then ignored what happened between that time and the establishment of the mission in 1840. Considering the small number of post studies that have been conducted, it is perhaps even more surprising that Fort Chipewyan was the subject of another study in 2011. This study, by Patricia McCormack, argued that, “... people can and do become modern without relinquishing the beliefs and practices that are important to them.”⁹⁴ In the particular language of the social sciences, the study’s intent was to, “... decentre these dual narratives of modernity and progress, to challenge the hegemony of the paradigm of progress, and to present interpretive alternatives through the lens of the history of Fort Chipewyan ...”⁹⁵

Although not a subject of this present study *per se*, the reality of Norway Houses’ connection to the “vast interconnected world” that already existed in the early 19th

⁹³ Raymond Morris Shirritt-Beaumont, “*The Rossville Scandal, 1846: James Evans, the Cree, and a Mission on Trial*,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg, 2001).

⁹⁴ Patricia A. McCormack, *Fort Chipewyan and the Shaping of Canadian History, 1788 – 1920s*, “*We like to be free in this country*,” (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 11.

⁹⁵ McCormack, *Fort Chipewyan*, 5.

century is recognized.⁹⁶ Inevitably, there are other large bodies of historical literature that have potential relevance for understanding the people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, who lived, worked and played at Norway House. Much of that literature has its roots in British colonial/imperial history but of more immediate concern is the current trend towards extending an understanding of what have generally been national 'fur trade' narratives through an expansion of the space in which they are conceived and understood. Three recent historiographical essays have explored this well.

In 2010, Bethel Saler and Carolyn Podruchny explored the question of how North American fur trade history has been influenced by the national perspective of Canadian and American scholars in, "Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes."⁹⁷ Saler and Podruchny argued that much of the historiography on both sides of the Canada-United States border had been written within a national framework that, though following a different trajectory on either side of the border, nevertheless served the purpose – intended or otherwise – of myth making and state building. Saler and Podruchny characterized American fur trade history as more or less incidental to the principal narrative of state building and expansion that was, in this interpretation, accomplished through agrarian settlement and eventual industrialization. In the United States, the fur trade was relegated to, "... a transient and regional phenomenon," that offered, "... colorful and exceptional stories to the mutually informing main narratives of American agrarian settlement and urban development."⁹⁸ Characteristic of this literature, and of

⁹⁶ P.D. Morgan, quoted in, C.A.Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 7.

⁹⁷ Bethel Saler and Carolyn Podruchny, "Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes," in, *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories*, edited by Benjamin Johnson and Andrew R. Graybill, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010), 275-300.

⁹⁸ Saler and Podruchny, "Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes," 278.

direct relevance to this dissertation, were the works of Washington Irving who, writing in the 1830s, tried to capture, *inter alia*, the fleeting phenomenon of the ‘mountain men’ and the ‘Great Rendezvous.’ Of course the long shadow cast by Frederick Jackson Turner’s ‘frontier thesis’ hangs over Saler and Podruchny’s recounting of American fur trade historiography.⁹⁹ As recently as 1997, Robert Utley is quoted as casting American fur traders as, “... the point men, the advance guard of a nation unfolding westward.”¹⁰⁰

By contrast, Saler and Podruchny described the central position occupied by fur trade history in Canadian narratives, many of which have already been discussed here. In particular, they described how Innis and others told a story of a nation defined, at least for the western and northern part of the country by, “... the main posts of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company [which] became the geographic framework for the ... nation.”¹⁰¹ Effectively capturing the intellectual divide between the two national historical traditions, Saler and Podruchny likened the border between Canada and the United States to a glass curtain which “scholars of the fur trade do not pay any attention to ..., yet they seem to be unable to pass through it.”¹⁰² Arguing against this insularity, Saler and Podruchny offered that fur trade history in North America, “... must be studied as though the creation of the American and Canadian nations and the border between them did not exist – that is, right up until the point when they did come into being.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1998), ix. See also, George Rogers Taylor, ed., *The Turner Thesis: Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History*, (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1972), viii. For a full discussion of the roots of the Turner thesis see, Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), 59-70.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Utley, quoted in, Saler and Podruchny, “Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes,” 281.

¹⁰¹ Saler and Podruchny, “Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes,” 284.

¹⁰² Saler and Podruchny, “Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes,” 288.

¹⁰³ Saler and Podruchny, “Glass Curtains and Storied Landscapes,” 299.

Allan Greer, in his 2010 article, “National, Transnational, and Hypernational Historiographies: New France Meets Early American History,”¹⁰⁴ argued along the same general lines as Saler and Podruchny but with the net cast wider. Greer used a comparison of how Canadian, American and Quebec historians used national frameworks as the basis of their historical analyses of New France to underline the continuing difficulty of shattering Saler and Podruchny’s ‘glass curtain.’ He also cautioned against the notion of simply increasing the scale or scope of any particular study. What was more important was to examine, “... familiar subjects from unfamiliar vantage points,” and to consider, for example, how, “... seventeenth century North America look[ed] from the perspective of a French, Spanish or Dutch Atlantic,” observer. Interestingly, he also posited the notion of taking a viewpoint that, “... faces east, from the lands of the Cree or the Pawnee ...”¹⁰⁵

In, “Territorial Crossings: Histories and Historiographies of the Early Americas,”¹⁰⁶ Eric Hinderaker and Rebecca Horn sketched out a view of national histories from a hemispheric perspective. Their 2010 article shared some of the same concerns as Saler and Podruchny and Greer, but also recognized the resistance to the expansion of perspectives that is the product of sometimes legitimate fears of ‘great nation’ intellectual imperialism. They also recognized that resistance resulted from newer perspectives that run, “... counter to the nation-centered approach characteristic of the modern practice of history.”¹⁰⁷ Still, the potential benefit of a wider and deeper, in

¹⁰⁴ Allan Greer, “National, Transnational, and Hypernational Historiographies: New France Meets Early American History,” in *The Canadian Historical Review*, 91, 4 December 2010, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 695-724.

¹⁰⁵ Greer, “National, Transnational, and Hypernational Historiographies,” 724.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Hinderaker and Rebecca Horn, “Territorial Crossings: Histories and Historiographies of the Early Americas,” in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, Volume LXVII, Number 3, July 2010, 398.

¹⁰⁷ Hinderaker and Horn, “Territorial Crossings,” 398.

this case hemispheric, perspective was encouraged and although, "... presented at a high level of abstraction and generalization, the real power of hemispheric history lies in close analyses of local settings, where the close interplay of ... patterns can be carefully observed.”¹⁰⁸

All of this is a move in the right direction. However, it stands to reason that if a local history can (and should) be interpreted within increasingly greater frames of reference – borderlands, regional, continental, transnational, Atlantic, hypernational and so on – there seems to be a certain inevitability for the requirement to situate even the smallest scale study within a global context. Inspired by such a perception, this dissertation tries so to do, ever recognizing the importance of the local in the general.

The specific methodologies used in this dissertation are straightforward. Secondary source materials have been used to sketch out the general chronology of the study and provide the basis for the background material in chapter two. Primary source material was extensively drawn upon and examined in conventional historicist fashion following the normal rules of internal and external criticism. Once sufficient primary source material was developed, results from this research was used, where possible, to check any evidence drawn from, or relying on, secondary sources. In the event, it was possible to generate a new framework for the conception and construction of community based on documenting day-to-day activities that were themselves behavioural reflections of intentionality and choice.

Quantitative research was done by the laborious, time-consuming and highly effective method of counting. For example, no measurement of the daily population of Norway House was ever taken by the people making the records there, nor did they make

¹⁰⁸ Hinderaker and Horn, "Territorial Crossings," 432.

estimates of the through-put of people at the site. What they did do however, was meticulously record the arrival and departure of every single canoe, boat or sailing vessel and the arrival and departure of each and every officer of the company or distinguished or unusual visitor. Since the size of the boat and canoe crews had long been standardized, it becomes a simple if tedious exercise to track the comings and goings of the boats and to extrapolate the daily population from a running count of the boats. This, added to the running count of the named individuals, provides a very accurate daily population count (an extract from the table developed to track this is included as Annex A).

Likewise, fishing efforts at Norway House were of such import that daily counts were recorded in the post journal. Once again, simply aggregating the numbers gives a good measure of the total fish production. Consumption is also recorded which serves the dual function of establishing the fish holdings at any given time and of helping to confirm the count of people at the site as rations were dispensed on a specific basis. Occasionally, mention was made of the actual number of persons drawing rations, and this was used to confirm numbers established by counting boats or counting rations consumed. Since the daily work assignments of the various people working at the post were recorded in the journal, it is also possible to measure the relative effort made in the various principal activities at the site such as building, fishing, wood-cutting, boat building and repair, gardening etc.

In addition to the general approach already described, analysis of research material was informed by the micro-historical method made famous by Carlo Ginzburg in his landmark study, *The Cheese and the Worms*,¹⁰⁹ and used by Nicole St-Onge in her

¹⁰⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, translated by John and Anne Tedeschi, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). Interestingly, Ginzburg

1990 study of a Manitoba Métis community, *Race, Class, and Marginality*.¹¹⁰ This approach aims to provide answers or suggest approaches to general questions on the basis of very specific and closely analyzed studies. The method naturally demands a high degree of subject matter expertise but has the advantage of keeping the researcher focused on the evidence at hand rather than encouraging a too-hasty interpretation of sampled data through the filter of the historians own bias; a tendency all too common in general studies.

The principal primary sources drawn upon in this study are the records of the Hudson's Bay Company. Most of the records used were microfilm copies of original records made by the Hudson's Bay Company itself and held either at Library and Archives Canada or in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. There are also a considerable number of original and microfilmed documents still held at the Kew National Archives in the United Kingdom. Arthur Ray generously shared digitized versions of some early post journals with me. The same was true of some York Factory records which Frank Tough unselfishly shared with me. In most cases it was necessary to go through the onerous step of transcribing the various records as it was difficult to sort and compare data using only the documents in their original form. An example of transcribed page from a post journal is included at Annex B.

Unfortunately, many records have been lost or have passed into private hands. Occasionally, records held in private collections are sold publicly and this affords an opportunity to examine their contents, if ever so briefly. Some records, especially

stumbled upon the materials for his study while doing unrelated research, just as this historian stumbled onto the anomaly of Norway House while conducting research for a completely separate effort.

¹¹⁰ Nicole St-Onge, "*Race, Class, and Marginality: A Metis Settlement in the Manitoba Interlake, 1850-1914*," (PhD Dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1990).

smaller documents such as private letters, are digitally reproduced *in toto*, to a high quality as part of the effort to sell them. These records are especially interesting because they have not been used for previous historical research and thus constitute ‘new’ sources. Several of these have been used in this study.



Figure 2. This is one of only four extant copies of the HBC record book that contains the minutes of the Northern Council held in July 1824 at York Factory. It was sold privately in 2010 by Donald Heald Original Antique Books, Prints and Maps of New York City for for \$24,000.

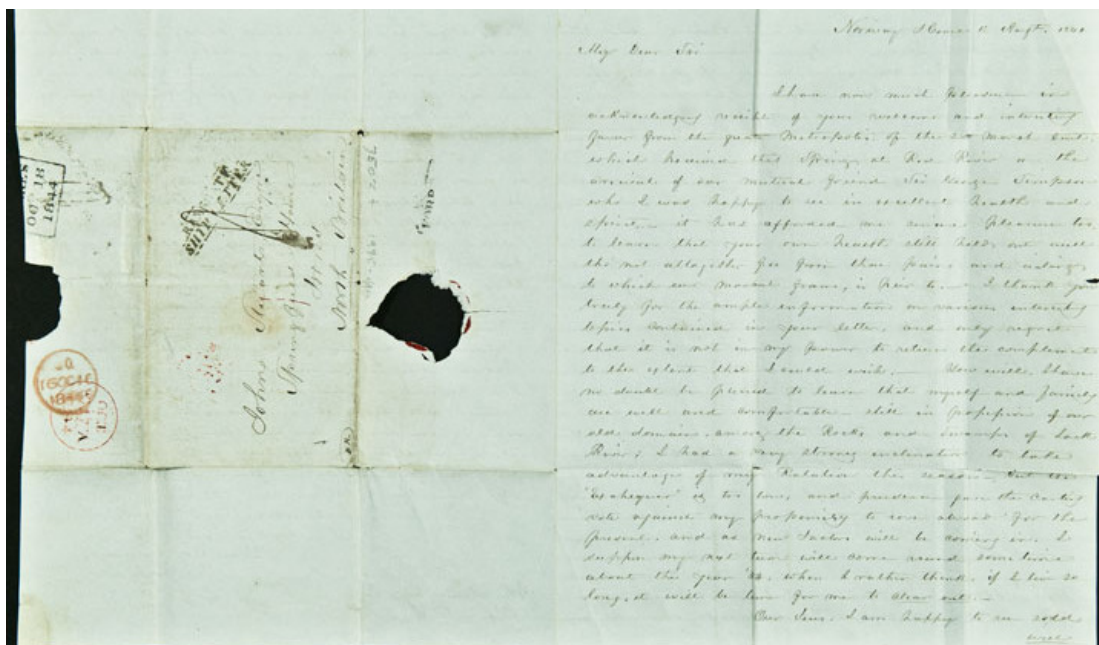


Figure 3. This letter, dated 12 August 1844, was sent to John Stuart by Donald Ross from Norway House. It is typical of the folded-letter style of correspondence that did not use envelopes. This letter included a discussion of the Oregon dispute. It was sold privately in 2010 by Donald Heald Original Antique Books, Prints and Maps of New York City for for \$2,500.

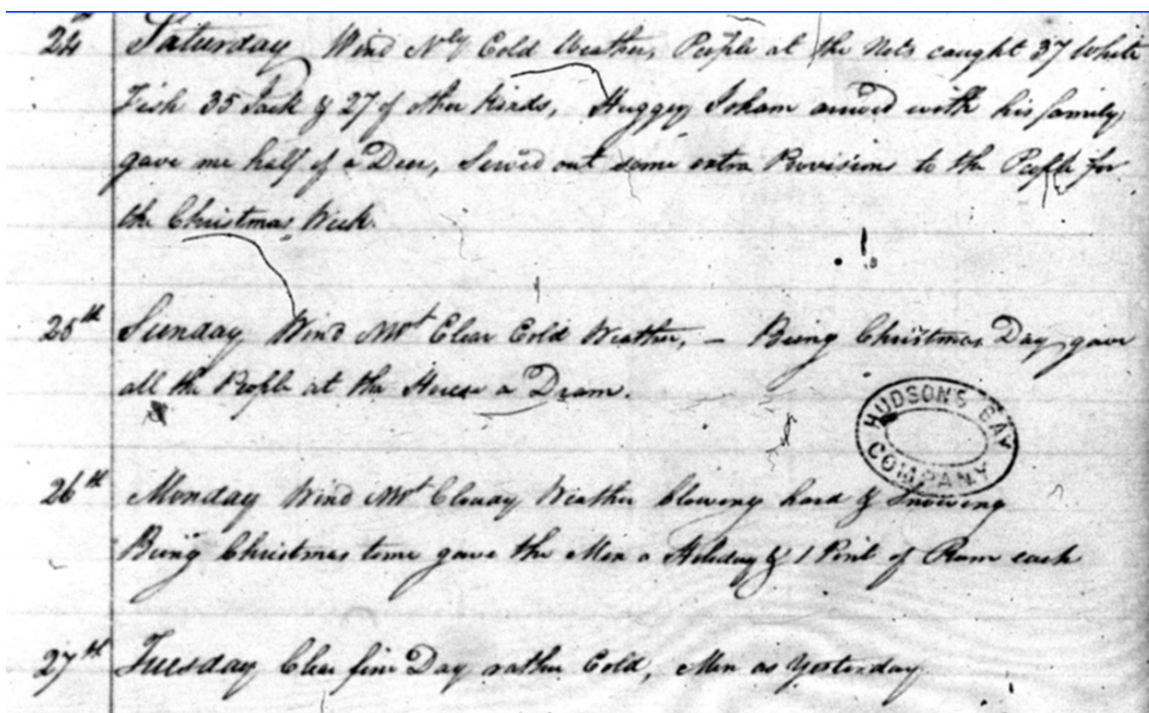


Figure 4. This sample from one of the Norway House post journals is relatively easy to read. The entry for Christmas Day 1825 reads, "Sunday, wind NorthWest Clear Cold Weather, - Being Christmas Day gave all the People at the House a Dram." LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825.

Thursday - 24th Fine Clear warm weather the River is open
in the middle of the stream except a few places
Served out the last of the fall fish today
There are about 100 Remains which are nearly
eatable and in deed what I have been serving
out for some time back was very sad.
Canal opened a door in the Back of the Tongue and
put a leaf to it - Dagenas & Bonavent Cutting
Burch for Coals. Gault & Peter Sawing. Mr. Gault
arrived from the fishing to day to Repair the Boat

Rec'd a Goose from the Badger
to day the first
of the season -

Figure 5. This sample from one of the Norway House post journals is much more challenging though the writing is still entirely legible. The entry for Thursday 24 April 1826 reads in part, “Fine Clear warm weather the River is open in the middle of the stream except a few places. Served out the last of the fall fish today. There are about 100 remaining which are nearly eatable and indeed what I have been serving out for some time back was very sad.” The marginal notes often contain particularly interesting information. In this entry it was recorded, “Rec’d a Goose from the Badger [a hunter] to day the first of the season.” LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1826.

The quality and legibility of the Hudson’s Bay Company records varies greatly.

This is partly a result of difficulties with the condition of the original records but is also sometimes a result of problems caused by the process of copying the materials to microfilm. Some records are illegible. But the records also vary greatly as a result of the skill, penmanship and wit of the original author.

Three sets of documents provided the core material for this study. The “Minutes of the Northern Council,” which effectively laid out the Company’s business plan for the following year, were recorded as a distinct record following the Northern Council meetings that were held, usually in early June at the beginning of the trading season, at York Factory, the Red River Settlement or Norway House.¹¹¹ At the end of each trading

¹¹¹ One notable critic of the company, John McLean, asserted that the council meetings were merely form. When asked for the agenda for an upcoming council meeting McLean says that Simpson’s secretary

year, officers in charge of districts filed a Report on District which summarized the main activities of the previous year. The District Reports, used in conjunction with the Minutes of Council, are particularly useful for comparing intentions against actual results for each year.¹¹² Between these two ‘bookend’ documents are the Post Journals which provide the data for this study. The journals, contain thousands of handwritten pages and are complemented by miscellaneous correspondence, reports, lists and accounts.

Finally, although this study employs evidence in support of a central line of argumentation, at the end of the day, what is created is a story, this one about a place called Norway House. Sometimes, to tell the ‘story’ of the post, it is necessary to stray a little and include material that is not entirely germane to the central argument but is essential for an understanding of the post itself. In recognition of the text as literature, and in opposition to the idea that, “history writing and narrative fiction have come apart, and our sensibilities seem no longer able to accommodate them one to the other,”¹¹³ this has been done consciously and deliberately.

replied, “Bless your heart man! The minutes of Council were all drawn out before we arrived here; I have them in my pocket.” John S. Galbraith, *The Little Emperor: Governor Simpson of the Hudson’s Bay Company*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976), 121. McLean also recorded that, “As to the nominal Council which is yearly invoked for form’s sake, the few individuals who compose it know better than to offer advice where none would be accepted; they know full well that the Governor has already determined on his own measures before one of them appears in his presence.” W.S. Wallace, ed. *John McLean’s Notes of a Twenty-Five Year’s Service in the Hudson’s Bay Territory*, (Toronto, 1932), 334. Quoted in, Galbraith, *The Little Emperor*, 122.

¹¹² See Innis’ comments on the importance of the Minutes in, Harold Innis, “Notes and Documents: Rupert’s Land in 1825,” *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol., 7, Number 4, 302-303.

¹¹³ Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 20-21. That Bloom is entirely unambiguous in his disdain for much of the writing underpinned by recent constructionist and deconstructionist ideas is clear in his comment that, “Originality becomes a literary equivalent of such terms as individual enterprise, self-reliance, and competition, which do not gladden the hearts of Feminists, Afrocentrists, Marxists, Foucault-inspired New Historicists, or Deconstructors – all of whom I have described as members of the School of Resentment.” Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 20.

Chapter 2

Norway House - beginnings to 1825: the destruction of Norway House.

The HBC post of Norway House was originally founded during the period of competition between the HBC and the French traders operating from New France during the mid-18th century.¹¹⁴ In 1756, as part of the HBC's plan to compete directly with the French by establishing inland posts, James Isham, the Chief Factor at York Factory, sent Joseph Smith to explore a route from York Factory to Lake Winnipeg via Cross Lake. Smith's party left York Factory on the 23rd of August and by the 21st of September had arrived at Little Playgreen Lake at the head of Lake Winnipeg. After spending the winter inland, the party set out for the return trip to York Factory in early May of 1757. During the voyage, Smith stopped at an Aboriginal sturgeon fishery at Little Playgreen Lake and was informed by the local people that "Isham had said that he wished to build a fort there."¹¹⁵ However, by the time Smith returned to York Factory, the idea of building a post at Little Playgreen Lake had been abandoned, primarily because the war that was then raging between Britain and France was crippling the French trader's efforts and the HBC traders who had been sent inland had been successful in having the bulk of the fur harvest brought down to Hudson's Bay. As had been the case since the beginning of the HBC's operations, the Company's traders would remain in their posts on the shores of Hudson Bay where they would await the arrival of Aboriginal people bearing their

¹¹⁴ For a brief but concise summary of the competition between the varying interests in the fur trade from the early 17th Century until the merger of 1821, see E.E. Rich's introduction to, *Journal of Occurrences*, i-xxii.

¹¹⁵ Morton, *A History*, 251.

cargoes of fur for trade. For the time being, the old trade practices were seen, by both the Governor at York Factory and by the Committee in London, to be satisfactory.¹¹⁶

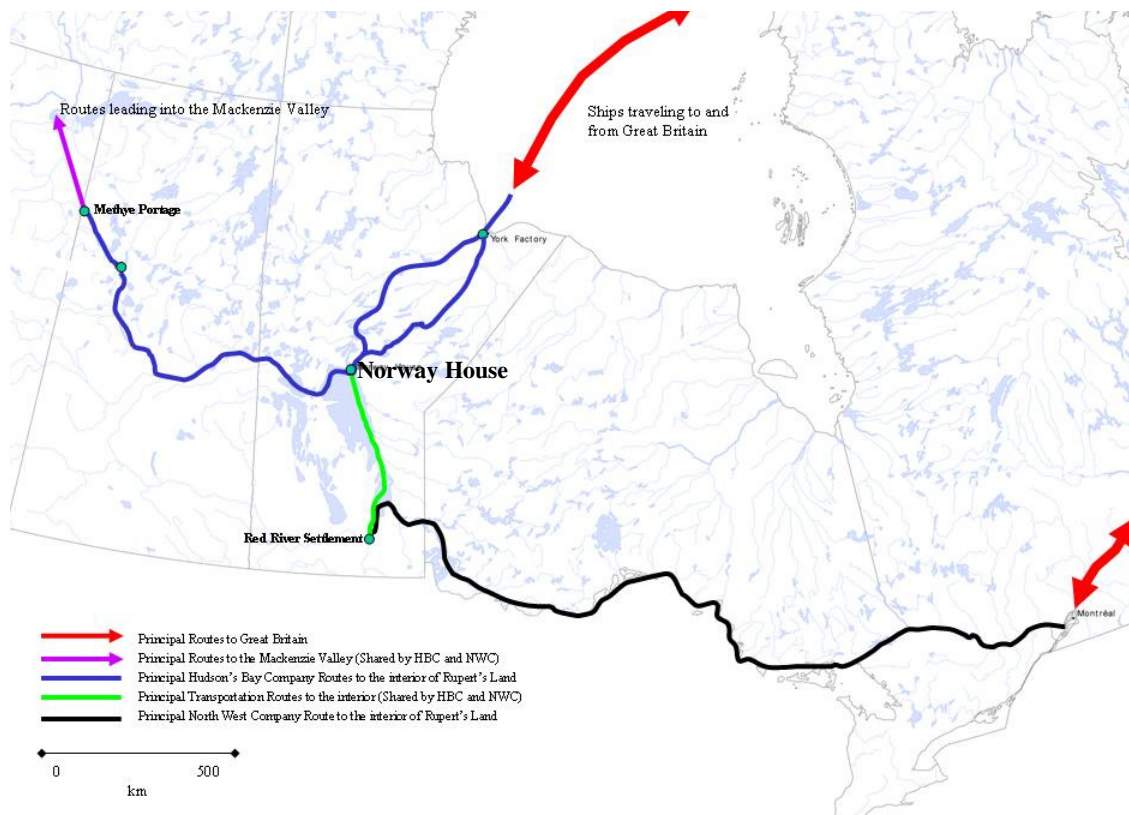


Figure 6. The principal routes into Rupert's Land. The HBC' route travelled south and west from York Factory while the NWC route travelled west from Montreal via the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes route was dropped as a main route in 1821.

Still, the route through Little Playgreen Lake continued to be developed as a result of continued efforts at exploring the interior of Rupert's Land. Some of these expeditions (nine of which were conducted between 1754 and 1762) were sent out in an effort to understand the geography of the HBC's territory, but the majority were for the rather more practical purpose of finding new Aboriginal groups with which to trade.¹¹⁷ Trips to the interior increased in number and duration after the acquisition of New France by Great Britain in 1763. By the time that the first inland HBC post was established at

¹¹⁶ Morton, *A History*, 251.

¹¹⁷ Morton, *A History*, 252.

Cumberland House in 1774, the company had sent forty-four more expeditions inland.¹¹⁸

Although the route via Little Playgreen Lake was not the shortest route to the interior, it had the advantage of passing through regions that possessed good fishing areas and plentiful game. As a result, travelers on this route could carry more cargo for trade since a considerable portion of their food supply could be collected en route rather than carried along as freight. By 1774 this route was well established and, beginning at York Factory, followed the Hayes River up to the Fox River then continued up the south branch of the Leaf River. After a portage to Cross Lake on the Nelson River, the preferred route then followed the meandering East River to Little Playgreen Lake at the head of Lake Winnipeg [Figure 7].¹¹⁹

The 1773-74 trading season turned out to be a watershed period in the fur trade. It was in this year that, coincidental with the failure of the HBC to mount a significant expedition to the interior (which the expedition's leaders blamed on low water levels in the Hayes and Fox Rivers), 'pedlars' from Montreal trading concerns arrived in considerable numbers.¹²⁰ The leader of one of these parties, Bartholemi Blondeau, left two canoes and their goods at the Jack River, in the channel leading to Little Playgreen Lake, in order to trade with the people there.¹²¹ In the succeeding years, the Montreal firms mounted an ever-increasing challenge to the HBC's operations. As Arthur Morton pointed out, the easy days of resting on the Bay awaiting the arrival of Aboriginal parties bearing loads of fur for trade were, "... manifestly done."¹²² Over the next forty years,

¹¹⁸ Morton, *A History*, 272.

¹¹⁹ Morton, *A History*, 272.

¹²⁰ For a discussion of the 'pedlars' and others, see, Frits Pannekoek, "The Fur Trade and Western Canadian Society: 1670-1870," *The Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet No. 43*, (Ottawa, 1987).

¹²¹ Morton, *A History*, 287.

¹²² Morton, *A History*, 286.

competing posts were established throughout Rupert's Land and beyond. The various Montreal traders, eventually coalescing as the North West Company (NWC), had entered a period of intense and ultimately ruinous competition with the HBC.¹²³

In 1796, the HBC established a post at the Jack River on the east side of Little Playgreen Lake, directly opposite the NWC post that had been built there the previous year.¹²⁴ This policy of direct confrontation was continued and expanded such that within a few years the land was dotted with posts, many of which were not economically viable but were maintained as part of the competitive effort of both companies.¹²⁵ The Jack River post generated very little trade and was closed in 1799.



Figure 8. A view of the site of the 1801 Norway House. Unknown.

In 1801, a new Jack River post was opened near the mouth of the Jack River, a few miles removed from the original site. Unfortunately, trade was little improved by the move. The essential problem was that the fur-bearing animals in the region had already

¹²³ For an excellent discussion of this period see, J.M. Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars: The Founding of Western Canada*, (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications, 1999).

¹²⁴ Judith H. Beattie, *Founding of Norway House: Jack River*, Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

¹²⁵ The National Atlas of Canada, Plate 79-80, "Posts of the Fur Trade." Ottawa: Department of Energy Mines and Resources, 1973. Data from HBC Archives.

been hunted to near extinction. As William Sinclair, one of the HBC's interpreters, reported in 1812 in a letter to William Auld, the Superintendent of the Northern Factories, "... few of the Indians has been in ... I believe the Beaver is nearly extirpated in this Quarter."¹²⁶

Although Jack River was largely unsuccessful as a fur trading post, by 1812 other factors were coming into play that increased the importance of the location. The first of these, according to E.E. Rich, was that, after a review of transportation arrangements that followed Miles Macdonnell's 1812 trip from York Factory to Red River, the post was to be reconfigured as the, ... centre of the trading system ...¹²⁷ In Rich's view, it was the problems associated with the transportation of, "... the heavy instruments of agriculture and of settlement ...,"¹²⁸ on Macdonnell's trip that revealed the limitations of canoes and ultimately led to the replacement of canoes by boats throughout the HBC's territory. The construction of the, "... great central emporium ...,"¹²⁹ at Norway House was part of a reorganization driven by the demands of supporting a colony rather than by the demands associated with the fur trade *per se*.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/5 folios 10d-11, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹²⁷ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 211.

¹²⁸ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 211. See also, Colin Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book, September 1817 to September 1822*, (The Champlain Society, E.E. Rich, ed, Toronto, 1939), liv.

¹²⁹ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 211.

¹³⁰ Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, lii.



Figure 9. Thomas, 5th Earl of Selkirk.

Raeburn.

From, "The Romantic Settlement of Lord Selkirk's Colonists," by George Bryce, 1909.

Echoing the view of the importance of the colonial enterprise over the fur trade, Arthur Morton described the development of the Jack River post that was generated by Lord Selkirk's vision for the nascent colony at Red River. Lord Selkirk was keen to establish Red River as an outpost of empire, capable of contributing to the transatlantic economy.¹³¹ His initial plan was to develop Red River as a wool-producing colony that would contribute raw materials to the textile industries of Britain.¹³² Another goal was to grow flax and hemp, once again as raw materials that would support industrial processes

¹³¹ For a comprehensive discussion of Selkirk's vision for the colony see, J.M. Bumsted, *Lord Selkirk: A Life*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008).

¹³² Morton, *A History*, 593.

in Britain.¹³³ Central to all of these expectations was the need to establish effective and economical communications between the colony and the mother country.

Selkirk proposed a series of improvements to the existing communications, but his boldest conception was for the construction of a winter road that would connect the Red River Colony with York Factory. When used in conjunction with the existing water-borne transportation arrangements, the road would allow for year-round communications between the Colony and the outside world. It was, to say the least, an ambitious plan. As described by Governor Thomas,

a chain of posts is to be established within a moderate distance of each other, so that the People employed in the Winter Carriage may have accommodation for themselves, and Provender for their Horses to be employed in conveying Goods etc., ... it is intended to have five principal Posts, with Log Houses at intermediate Places as shelter for the Men and Horses, it is intended to make use of the Ice as a road following the course of the Rivers and Lakes ... and it is expected that each man so employed will convey thrice as much as one Boatman can be reckoned to carry in a summer.¹³⁴

Selkirk was able to convince the HBC of the merits of this plan and suggested that the Company should build the road from York Factory to the head of Lake Winnipeg while he took responsibility for its extension to Red River. A depot linking the two legs of this road was to be built at Mossy Point on the west side of the entrance to Little Playgreen Lake, a little removed from the location of the Jack River post that had been built in 1801.¹³⁵

¹³³ Morton, *A History*, 594.

¹³⁴ HBCA, PAM, E.10/1, B.239/b/85, in, Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹³⁵ Morton, *A History*, 603.

By 1815 the existing post at Jack River had five houses, a kitchen, two storehouses and a trading room, all of which were, according to James Sutherland,¹³⁶ “... scattered promiscuously among the rocks.”¹³⁷ Colin Robertson, visiting the post in 1816, described it as, “... a miserable looking place, they call it a fort, but it is only a couple of huts stuck between two large rocks.”¹³⁸ Despite these rather unflattering descriptions, the Jack River post was already the principal transshipment point for goods arriving from York Factory and destined for either Red River or other inland posts.

In October of 1814, a group of Norwegians,¹³⁹ working under the supervision of a Swedish overseer named Enner Holte,¹⁴⁰ had been sent out to build the new depot at Mossy Point.¹⁴¹ Thanks to the nationality of the work party, the new facility and all of its successors came to be known as Norway House.¹⁴² Various described as ‘convicts’ or ‘prisoners of war,’ the Norwegian workers were actually labourers working on three year contracts and paid at the rate of £20 per year. They had indeed been prisoners of war but with the end of hostilities in Europe in 1815, they had been freed whereupon they were promptly hired by the HBC. In addition to their basic wages, they were promised additional pay if they were able to clear and cultivate land at the building site.¹⁴³ According to Holte, the Norwegians were more than a little difficult to work with.

¹³⁶ James Sutherland was a long-serving officer of the HBC. He entered HBC service in 1797 and by 1815 was in charge of the East and West Winnipeg districts. He lived at the Jack River Post during the winter of 1814-1815. *Journal of Occurrences*, 470.

¹³⁷ HBCA, PAM, B.154/e/1, in, Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹³⁸ HBCA, PAM, E.10/1, 155-156, in, Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹³⁹ The Norwegians were: Peter Dahl, Niels Hansen, Peter Isaacksen, Peter Michaelson, Niels Muller, Ole Oleson Roost, Hans Rasmussen and John Frederick Svendsen. HBCA, PAM, C.1/781; A.30-14 fo.33, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁴⁰ The overseer was Enner Holte, a retired naval officer who was also to act as the interpreter for the group. HBCA, PAM, B.239/b/85 fo.1, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁴¹ Morton, *A History*, 594.

¹⁴² Morton, *A History*, 603.

¹⁴³ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

The party arrived at York Factory in September of 1814 and immediately set out for Mossy Point. During the trip, Holte found the men, "... so stubborn and obstinate, that it was with the greatest Difficulty I and Mr. Kirkness could make them obey our Orders ... I must allow that their behaviour often brought me into a Passion which I could not master."¹⁴⁴ By the 10th of October they had arrived at the Jack River, "... after a long and disagreeable passage ... the men were so intoxicated and their behaviour so dreadful that I resolved they ... have but an inconsiderable quantity of Rum in their Possession."¹⁴⁵ Work finally commenced on the 17th but was immediately interrupted by the need to fish for food – the same problem that confronted all of the early work at Norway House. By the 30th of the month there had been very little progress on the buildings and the men, "... continued to be stubborn and obstinate."¹⁴⁶ By the end of November only a single dwelling house had been completed.

Even with snow falling around them, the men refused orders to collect firewood. Eventually, Holte was able to get the men to gather some wood, but only, "... with the greatest difficulty."¹⁴⁷ When Holte intimated that they men might well not be paid should their work not improve, they replied that, "... they worked as hard as they could upon those Provisions, if I could give them something better they would work better."¹⁴⁸ Apparently the men did not realize how isolated they were. With the arrival of Christmas, the men promised Holte that they would work harder if he gave them a week

¹⁴⁴ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁴⁵ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁴⁶ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁴⁷ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁴⁸ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

off work. Holte decided to give them the break, "... to try how far they would keep their word ..."¹⁴⁹

When the men returned to work in January of 1815, they did do better than previously but still, "... nothing compared to what good axemen will do if they exert themselves."¹⁵⁰ By February, work was still progressing slowly but the perennial problem of provisions remained. By the following month it had become necessary to request that food be sent from the Jack River Post to keep the men working. By April, Holte recorded in his diary that, "... it really grieves me that I now must notice, that I have entirely lost that good opinion which I once entertained of my own men."¹⁵¹ Perhaps he was not reading his own diary since he had been complaining of the men's behaviour almost since their first arrival at York Factory.¹⁵²

In May, the group suffered the loss of one of their number when Hans Rasmussen drowned while on a trip to Jack River for provisions. That same month, Holte was confronted with what was effectively a strike when the men declared, "... we have now tried for a considerable time to work upon Jack Fish and water, and find that we can stand it no longer."¹⁵³ Of course there were no other provisions available so the men eventually were compelled to relent. By the end of the month, the men were only working for an hour or two a day, a situation which Holte could not allow. He informed the men that they would have to work regular hours or not at all. Finally, various threats and promises

¹⁴⁹ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁵⁰ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁵¹ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁵² HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁵³ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

got the men back to work such that a few houses were built and a small parcel of land was cleared for cultivation.¹⁵⁴

Although the post was still not finished, in June of 1817 all of the responsibilities of the Jack River post were transferred to the new site.¹⁵⁵ The project to build the all-season road was pursued with varying degrees of interest and enthusiasm over the next decade and a half, but the Norway House post was the only tangible result of all the effort and the road was never built.¹⁵⁶ Although the company was reluctant to accept the fact, the construction of the road was far too ambitious a project for the company to undertake. The part of the road from Red River to Lake Winnipeg was only completed in 1828.¹⁵⁷



Figure 10. The difficulty of the terrain in the area where the winter road was to be built can be seen in this picture of part of the route planned for a modern road in the same area. John Dobbin, 2011.

¹⁵⁴ HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*. See also, Morton, *A History*, 571.

¹⁵⁵ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 230. See also, HBCA, PAM, B.154/a/6, in Beattie, *Founding of Norway House*.

¹⁵⁶ In 1834, Thomas Simpson, then at Norway House, expressed his frustration with the project noting, “[...] that d----d winter road that has been conceiving for the last seven years, but has as yet brought forth nothing.” Alexander Simpson, *The life and travels of Thomas Simpson, the Arctic discoverer*, (London. 1845), 94, quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 293.

¹⁵⁷ *The Canadian Northwest: Its Early Development and Legislative Records*, Publications of the Canadian Archives, No.9., Vol I, E.H. Oliver, ed., (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1914), 634. See also, Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 212.

As a result of their location astride the principal transport routes in Rupert's Land, the Jack River and Norway House posts played an important part in the events associated with the conflict between the NWC and the HBC that came to a head in 1815-16. After a long series of confrontations between the Red River colonists and the NWC, supported at times by elements of the local Métis population, the colonists were driven from Red River in the summer of 1815.¹⁵⁸ The bulk of the colonists – approximately 130 men, women and children - were embarked in NWC canoes for transportation to Canada via Fort William along the Great Lakes route.¹⁵⁹ Another group of approximately sixty colonists made their way north and established themselves in an encampment opposite the post then under construction at Mossy Point.¹⁶⁰ The Norway House and Jack River posts supported them, thus ensuring their survival and laying the groundwork for a return to Red River.¹⁶¹

All of this coincided with the Athabasca campaign being mounted by the HBC under the leadership of Colin Robertson and organized out of Montreal.¹⁶² Because Robertson wanted to get his crews into the Athabasca as quickly as possible – ahead of the competing NWC crews headed in the same direction – provisions had to be sent ahead of the expedition via York Factory so that they could then be picked up by

¹⁵⁸ The NWC position to the colony was based on competition but also on an understanding of the consequences of settlement on the fur trade more generally. As Simon McGillivray noted, a successful colony would, "[...] strike at the very existence of our Trade." *Journal of Occurrences*, xx.

¹⁵⁹ *Journal of Occurrences*, xxvi.

¹⁶⁰ Morton, *A History*, 571.

¹⁶¹ The first attempt at agriculture at Norway House also occurred at this time. In July of 1815, Robertson ordered a clearing cut for cultivation. When he returned there in June of 1816, there were "two snug fields" of potatoes and barley. Apparently, this was done in opposition to the direction of Bird and Thomas Thomas, although the reasons for their opposition are unclear. Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, lxxxii.

¹⁶² The purpose of this campaign was to get HBC penetration into the rich fur areas of the Athabasca district. For a detailed description of this campaign see, *Journal of Occurrences*, xxx-xxxiii.

Robertson enroute. Having already agreed with Lord Selkirk regarding the eventual requirement for Norway House as a depot on an all-season road and river network, the HBC directed that the Jack River post would act as the depot supporting Colin Robertson's expedition.¹⁶³ Robertson, making his way towards Norway House via Lake of the Woods, met the NWC party conveying the deposed Governor of Red River, Miles Macdonell, towards Montreal and learned of the dispersal of the colony.¹⁶⁴ He continued on to Red River and thence to the encampment of colonists that he referred to as the "Winnipeg Settlement."¹⁶⁵ Robertson immediately set about organizing the return of the colonists to Red River and by 19 August 1815 they were back at the site.¹⁶⁶ The Athabasca brigade, having resupplied from the Jack River stores, continued on its way to the northwest.¹⁶⁷

Confrontations between the two companies continued. After getting the colony on its feet again, Robertson seized Fort Gibraltar, the NWC post in the area of the colony, and ousted the NWC leader, Duncan Cameron, just as another group of colonists, along with a new Governor, Robert Semple, arrived in November to reinforce the colony.¹⁶⁸ However, the NWC was determined to regain control and planned for renewed attacks on the colony in the next year. By the early summer of 1816 tensions had risen to the boiling point. On the 19th of June, at a place known as Seven Oaks, violence erupted and

¹⁶³ Morton, *A History*, 609. Although stores were drawn from Norway House, they were not sufficient to prevent considerable suffering during the expedition for want of food. This was gleefully reported upon by Alexander Macdonell to Duncan Cameron in a letter of 13 March 1816. Quoted in, John Morgan Gray, *Lord Selkirk of Red River*, (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, 1963), 355.

¹⁶⁴ Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, lxiv.

¹⁶⁵ Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, 23. See also, Morton, *A History*, 573.

¹⁶⁶ Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 41.

¹⁶⁷ Over the next five years, the Athabasca was the locus of the most intense conflict in the so-called "fur trade wars," the ultimate result of which was the merger of the rival companies in 1821. For a discussion of this period see, Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 168-70.

¹⁶⁸ Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 42.

twenty one of the colonists, including the Governor, were killed.¹⁶⁹ On the 21st, under the leadership of Alexander Macdonell, the colonists once again fled north to the area opposite Mossy Point where they had encamped the previous summer.¹⁷⁰ Once again, the Jack River and Norway House posts provided sustenance to the badly shaken colonists.



Figure 11. Battle of Seven Oaks, 1816.

Charles W. Jefferys.

Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Hudson's Bay Company Archives, P-378 (N87-8).

The destruction of the Red River Settlement in 1816 occurred in spite of efforts by Lord Selkirk to protect the colony by a variety of measures. Frustrated by his lack of success in convincing the governments in London and the Canadas to actively assist him

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of Seven Oaks that is sympathetic to the Métis see, Margaret Arnett MacLeod, *Cuthbert Grant of Grantown: Warden of the Plains of Red River*, (1963; reprint, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1974), 38-52. See also, W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *Sixteen Years in The Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816*, (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1957), 188-89.

¹⁷⁰ Morton, *A History*, 577.

in defending the colony, Lord Selkirk decided to raise a military force on his own.¹⁷¹ By the spring of 1816, he had assembled a force of approximately 100 men, consisting of retired soldiers from regiments that had participated in the war of 1812 but had since been disbanded or were being reduced in strength.¹⁷² Unfortunately, they were too late to intervene before the Seven Oaks incident. However, beginning with their role in the capture of the NWC post at Fort William on 13 August 1816, they served as the backbone of the force that was used to regain control of the colony in early 1817, culminating with the taking of Fort Douglas on the 10th of January of the new year.¹⁷³ When news of the recapture of Red River reached the colonists at the ‘Winnipeg Settlement’ opposite the Mossy Point post, several of the settlers immediately set out for the colony, “... some farmers came over the ice of Lake Winnipeg to be in time for the sowing [of grain] in the spring.”¹⁷⁴ James Bird, the Chief Factor of the HBC post at Edmonton House, persuaded nine of the colonists to stay on and assist with the construction at Mossy Point.¹⁷⁵ The remainder of the colonists returned later; after the thaw. As in the previous year, the Norway House posts played a key role in supporting the displaced colonists such that an early return to Red River was possible.

Meanwhile, the NWC reacted strongly to the news that the HBC was attempting an expedition to retake Red River. The company immediately set about to capture numerous HBC posts, including those at Lesser Slave Lake, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Reindeer Lake and Green Lake. James Bird, having seen the aggressiveness of the NWC first-

¹⁷¹ *Journal of Occurrences*, xxvii.

¹⁷² Approximately four officers and eighty men of the de Meuron Regiment, twenty soldiers from the De Wattville Regiment and a “few” soldiers from the Glengarry Fencibles made up the force. Morton, *A History*, 581.

¹⁷³ Morton, *A History*, 586.

¹⁷⁴ Morton, *A History*, 589.

¹⁷⁵ *Journal of Occurrences*, 421.

hand, wrote to Alexander Macdonell, Lord Selkirk's representative at Jack River, urging him to fortify the area of Mossy Point where the new post was under construction.¹⁷⁶ In anticipation of an attack by the NWC, Macdonell was told to, "... make all haste in palisading the buildings ... and to put up blockhouses for its protection."¹⁷⁷ Although no attack came, the threat posed by the NWC served to underscore the need to get the new post built as quickly as possible and, the numerous labour troubles notwithstanding, construction was completed in 1817.¹⁷⁸

Although there were no direct attacks on Norway House, the intense competition continued, especially with respect to efforts to harvest the riches of the Athabasca region.¹⁷⁹ As with Colin Robertson's initial attempt on the Athabasca in 1815, his 1818 campaign was mounted out of Norway House.¹⁸⁰ The ability of Norway House to support large-scale operations was made abundantly clear by the size of this undertaking. Robertson's party that year included no less than 186 officers and men, transported in 27 canoes.¹⁸¹

By January of 1820, feverish preparations were already underway for the next foray into the Athabasca. That month, Colin Robertson wrote to the HBC Governor, William Williams, requesting that eighty men be sent via Norway House to work in the Athabasca district. This was in addition to the 120 men to crew the twenty four canoes

¹⁷⁶ Morton, *A History*, 634.

¹⁷⁷ Morton, *A History*, 609.

¹⁷⁸ 1817 was also the year in which Lord Selkirk, in support of his colonizing efforts at Red River, made his way to the struggling settlement in the wake of its destruction the previous year. For a discussion of this episode, including the origins of the Red River Colony, see, Morton, *A History*, 533-600.

¹⁷⁹ Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 168-70.

¹⁸⁰ This mission was intended as the principal assault on the North West Company's operations in the interior. Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 230. Support was also provided to Captain John Franklin's 1819 overland expedition to explore the south shore of the polar sea. This was the first of several instances of scientific expeditions that passed through and drew support from Norway House/Jack River. Morton, *A History*, 671. See also, *Journal of Occurrences*, 5.

¹⁸¹ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 230. See also, Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, 58.

that were required to carry the outfit for that year.¹⁸² Colin Robertson also recommended that new canoes should be sent to the Athabasca and that “sixteen or eighteen” of the old canoes should be brought to Norway House for repair.¹⁸³

That summer, George Simpson, having just arrived from England via Canada, was put in charge of the Athabasca campaign that was being mounted from Norway House.¹⁸⁴ He was accompanied by the clerk Robert Miles, to whom Simpson dictated his journal.¹⁸⁵ Canoes arrived from various posts to join Simpson’s expedition, but it was at Norway House that arrangements were made for the various posts.¹⁸⁶ Simpson noted that there was a lot of work to be done at Norway House, “... as many of the people are still unengaged, and until our complement of men is determined, it is impossible to arrange the Outfits ...”¹⁸⁷ The scale of the effort was impressive as Simpson’s group alone included, “... twelve canoes, navigated by sixty-eight men, containing two hundred and fifty-four pieces.”¹⁸⁸ These “pieces,” were standardized packs of goods or furs that typically weighed ninety pounds. The 250 packs that Simpson’s group was carrying would have weighed well over eleven tons. In the course of Simpson’s 1820 campaign

¹⁸² Robertson, *Colin Robertson’s Correspondence Book*, 266.

¹⁸³ Robertson, *Colin Robertson’s Correspondence Book*, 267.

¹⁸⁴ The first entry in Simpson’s famous *Journal of Occurrences* was made in Norway House on 30 July 1820. HBC Archives, D/1/2/ fo. 26. Simpson had originally been sent out to replace the Northern Department’s Governor, William Williams, in the event that Williams was called out to stand trial. For a discussion of these arrangements see, Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 233-35

¹⁸⁵ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 234.

¹⁸⁶ Provisioning the canoes was also a major task. In 1820, Simpson noted that each canoe was allocated one and a half bags of pemmican as provisions for the trip from NH to Cumberland House. Nine bags of pemmican per canoe were allocated for the whole trip from NH to the Athabasca. He noted, “... I understand that it is little enough ...” and recognized that there would be a need to supplement the pemmican ration such that the quantity of “.... flour generally suffers.” *Journal of Occurrences*, xiv.

¹⁸⁷ *Journal of Occurrences*, 2.

¹⁸⁸ A “piece” was a pack of furs or trade goods. Eventually standardized at 90lbs per piece, the packs varied between 60 and 100 lbs. *Journal of Occurrences*, 5n.

he made numerous arrangements for posts based on the, "... abundant supply of goods ..., "¹⁸⁹ available at Norway House.

By the summer of 1820, it had become clear to both the HBC and the NWC that a prolongation of the competition between them could not be sustained. Both companies were losing money to the point that, as J.M. Bumsted succinctly quipped, "... the winner was likely to be the party with the most dependable line of credit with the bankers."¹⁹⁰

The British government, for a variety of reasons that included a desire for stability, concern over American expansionism and public pressure to extend the rule of law to the limits of British control, was also keen to see an end to the struggles and actively encouraged discussions between the rival concerns.¹⁹¹ That fall and early winter, negotiations between the two companies proceeded and, by January of 1821, the outline of a merger agreement had been worked out.¹⁹² Back at Norway House, guides were being engaged for the next summer's tripping and were to be employed, "... making [boats] and repairs [to boats] while the Brigades are at the depot."¹⁹³

When news of the coalition between the companies arrived in Rupert's Land some, like George Simpson, were quickly reconciled to the new arrangements.¹⁹⁴ There

¹⁸⁹ *Journal of Occurrences*, 62.

¹⁹⁰ Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 227.

¹⁹¹ In 1821 a statute was passed implementing, "An act for regulating the fur trade, and establishing a criminal and civil jurisdiction within certain parts of North America, London : G. Eyre and A. Strahan, 1821. At head of title: Anno primo & secundo Georgii IV. regis. Cap. LXVI. 2d July, 1821,' the two principal objectives of which were the elimination of competition and the implementation of an effective system of law enforcement." Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 239. For a full discussion of these reasons, see, Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 236-38.

¹⁹² Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 231.

¹⁹³ *Journal of Occurrences*, 284.

¹⁹⁴ Simpson was initially outraged by the merger. Returning from his trip inland, he had arrived at Norway House in May, shortly after learning of the merger. Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 235. He strongly believed that the defeat of the NWC was imminent. At Norway House, on 18 June, Simpson recorded his disappointment that, "...instead of a junction our opponents our opponents have not been beaten out of the field." *Journal of Occurrences*, 349. The next day however, on the fifth anniversary of Seven Oaks, Simpson noted in his

were others, however, who sensed that the Hudson's Bay Company had come out of the merger rather poorly. This was certainly the case with Colin Robertson. He believed that, "... it never occurred to the new concern that such men as ... Colin Robertson were in existence ... the N.W.C. have gained a complete victory for the best places ... and were dictating to us the terms of capitulation ..." ¹⁹⁵ He was deeply disappointed to learn that, "... I am to have Norway House." ¹⁹⁶ In a letter to his friend George Moffat, he complained that the HBC had, "... beat out a new district out of an old grog shop belonging to the Canadian expedition, which was designated with the pompous title of 'Norway House District.'" ¹⁹⁷ However poorly Robertson might have viewed the place, it was immediately clear that Norway House was to be an important part of the newly consolidated fur trade apparatus. ¹⁹⁸ This was underscored when the first council of the newly united company was held at Norway House from the 11th to the 13th of August, 1821. ¹⁹⁹

journal that the newly united companies constituted, "... a very advantageous and satisfactory arrangement." *Journal of Occurrences*, xiv.

¹⁹⁵ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 242.

¹⁹⁶ Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 287.

¹⁹⁷ Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, 164.

¹⁹⁸ In spite of the lack of a fur return and Robertson's complaining notwithstanding, the Norway House district still generated considerable profit. As Simpson noted in his Athabasca report of 1821, "Norway House has also some very rich pickings out of this persecuted Department, on an average from £1500 to £2000 per annum ... being the profits on Tobacco and other Goods brought from Canada ... and these handsome profits are monopolized by Norway House for no other reason than that it happens to be the place of rendezvous for the Athabasca Brigades previous to their departure inland." *Journal of Occurrences*, 403. As an example, tobacco was received at Norway House from Canada at a price of 1/8d per pound and sold to the posts at 4/8d per pound. For each pound of tobacco that passed through Norway House, the post accrued a profit of 3/10d, a gain of some 233%! *Journal of Occurrences*, 403.

¹⁹⁹ Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, 177.



Figure 12. Arrival at Norway House on the great Lake Winnipeg.
Peter Rindisbacher, 1821.
Library and Archives Canada. C-001923.

The first order of business was to consolidate and rationalize the various assets and processes of the two merging companies.²⁰⁰ In a manner familiar to modern victims of corporate mergers, company staff were cut from the payroll or reassigned, trading posts were closed or moved, and local trading arrangements were reorganized in numerous locations. Changes were wide-ranging and affected everything from the London offices of the HBC to the staffing of individual trading posts.²⁰¹ Under the leadership of George Simpson, the new Governor of the Northern Department, the new monopoly sought out economies and savings wherever possible.²⁰² Expenses were trimmed, provisions and supplies were scrutinized for excess and the self-sufficiency of

²⁰⁰ There remains some debate as to who absorbed whom in this transaction. For a discussion of the merger arrangements see, Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 217-34.

²⁰¹ Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 283-87.

²⁰² The Northern Department was the most important and largest of the three departments of the HBC operation. The other departments were the Southern and the Montreal. The Northern Department generated more than three times as much profit as the Southern Department and as much as twelve times the profit of the Montreal Department. Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 286.

individual posts was encouraged. Particular attention was paid to identifying redundant trading establishments and closing them.²⁰³ By 1825 the number of posts had been reduced by more than half.²⁰⁴ Over the same period, company personnel had been reduced in number from 1,983 to 827 – almost 60 percent.²⁰⁵ The fur industry was being run on a new set of priorities: until 1821 the logic of the fur trade organization was driven by competition, after 1821 it was driven by economy.

The first and most radical change came in the transportation system. Except as a track for the fast movement of important passengers and mail, the Great Lakes route that had been used by the NWC was immediately dropped, unceremoniously ending its century-and-a-half reign as the main thoroughfare into the western interior.²⁰⁶ The NWC post at Fort William was no longer required as a depot since all supplies were to be routed through the Hudson's Bay factories.²⁰⁷ Virtually all of the requirements of the fur trade – and the nascent Red River Colony – would now pass through Norway House.²⁰⁸

Colin Robertson also received his new instructions as a result of that first Council meeting. Newly installed at Norway House, he was directed to repair and improve the portages on the York Factory to Norway House route and was to, "... appoint Officers

²⁰³ The extent of the overlap in the trade operations of the NWC and the HBC is evident in the number and location of the various trading centers in 1821. *Atlas Historique du Canada: Des origines à 1800*, dir, R.Cole Harris, (Montreal: Les presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1987), Planche 62.

²⁰⁴ *Atlas Historique du Canada*, Planche 62.

²⁰⁵ Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 234.

²⁰⁶ F.Stewart Wallace, ed., *Documents Related to the North West Company*, (Toronto: The Champlain Society XXII, 1934), 328. According to Harold Innis, the advantage of the Hudson's Bay route over the Great Lakes route was a function of distance and the mode of transport, "[...] the effectiveness of the competition of the Hudson's Bay Company was dependent in part on the shorter route from Hudson Bay to the interior and on the use of the York boat. The Northwest Company route from Fort William to Lake Winnipeg dependent on the expensive canoe was abandoned and the York boat was supreme. Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 289. See also, Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 242.

²⁰⁷ The 1821 council at Norway House confirmed the decision to abandon the Montreal-Great Lakes route in favour of the Hudson's Bay route. Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 242.

²⁰⁸ The NWC's William McGillivray lamented that, as a result of the abandonment of the Great Lakes route, "[...] the fur trade is forever lost to Canada." Wallace, ed., *Documents*, 329.

and men ...,” for that purpose.²⁰⁹ Robertson was singularly well positioned to take on this task. Over the previous several years he had made a lengthy survey of the transportation routes, the means of transport and, in particular, the special problem posed by portages.²¹⁰ In his view, some portages - the Methye Portage in particular – were so challenging that they represented a psychological as well as a physical obstacle to the fur trade. The effect on labour resourcing was profound. Noting that, “... our English servants would at once engage for the Athabaska were it not for this formidable obstacle ...,”²¹¹ Robertson and other managers were compelled to look beyond traditional company labour sources to find personnel who were both capable of, and willing to do, this work.

This task was especially important because of another radical change that was being made in the system for transporting goods and people. York Boats, the large rowboats that had been operating on the lower Nelson and Churchill Rivers for many years, were to replace canoes on virtually all of the main routes.²¹² Although others had previously suggested that York Boats could be more widely employed,²¹³ it was Simpson’s 1820-21 tour of the inland posts that convinced him that boats were capable of

²⁰⁹ Robertson, *Colin Robertson’s Correspondence Book*, 177. See also, Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 242.

²¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the effects of portages on the overall transportation system in Rupert’s Land see, Jody F. Decker and Donald B. Freedman, “The Role of Portages in Shaping the Economic Geography of the Western Canadian Fur Trade, 1774-1850,” in, *Geographical Monographs No.22* (North York, Ontario: York University, 1993), 31-67.

²¹¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), Churchill District Report, 1825. B.42/e/4.

²¹² *Journal of Occurrences*, lvi.

²¹³ In 1821, Nicholas Garry wrote in his diary that, “The whole country may now be supplied with boats [...]” Nicholas Garry, “Diary of Nicholas Garry, deputy-governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company from 1822-1835: A detailed narrative of his travels in the Northwest territories of British North America in 1821.” *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*. Second Series. Vol VII, 1900. Quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 289. Measures to improve transportation routes, including improvements to portages and tracking places, as well as the “[...] merits of boats as against canoes [...],” were also discussed at the 1821 Council meeting. Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 242.

operating over most of the company's routes.²¹⁴ This was extremely important because York Boats were superior to canoes in several respects.

First of all, unlike canoes, a York Boat did not need a highly-trained crew.²¹⁵ All that was required was a good steersman and bowman; the remainder of the crew needed no special skills. Second, European carpenters could build the boats, theoretically reducing both the cost of boats and the company's dependence on Aboriginal canoe-builders.²¹⁶ Most important, York Boats with a crew of eight could carry much more cargo than a similarly-manned canoe. Simpson's notebook included a rough calculation that estimated a one-third savings of transport costs wherever York Boats could be used.²¹⁷ As it turned out, the savings were even more than this on most routes.²¹⁸

Although the replacement of canoes with York boats was not universally welcomed - many of the crews hated York Boat work - the efficiencies were irresistible.²¹⁹ Canoes still served some of the smaller and more remote trading posts and they continued to be employed in circumstances where high speed was required.²²⁰ Nevertheless, by 1825, the vast majority of the HBC's inland riverine and lake transport was by York Boat.²²¹ For the next half-century, until the arrival of steamboats, York Boats carried the bulk of the HBC's waterborne trade.

²¹⁴ *Journal of Occurrences*, lvi. In 1821, Nicholas Garry wrote in his diary that, "The whole country may now be supplied with boats [...]" Garry, "Diary of Nicholas Garry," quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 289.

²¹⁵ Edwin Tappan Adney and Howard I. Chappelle, *The Bark Canoes and Skin Boats of North America*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1964), 143.

²¹⁶ *Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert's Land, 1821-31*, R. Harvey Fleming, ed., (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1940), 396.

²¹⁷ Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, 402.

²¹⁸ Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 292.

²¹⁹ Garry, "Diary of Nicholas Garry," quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 289. See also George Simpson's comments on the crews' attitude in, *Minutes of Council*, 422.

²²⁰ Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council*, 350.

²²¹ Garry, "Diary of Nicholas Garry," 151.



Figure 13. Unloading a York Boat at a portage.
Thomas, 1910.
Provincial Archives of Manitoba, AV 79 (N 8153).

The actual work of moving goods by York Boat was straightforward enough. Ships from England arrived at York Factory around the middle of August (normally departing England with the fair weather in June) and delivered trade goods for the following year. This system meant that shipments were always a year in arrears and also ensured that there was a year's supply of goods at York Factory.²²² The inland boats would begin the year in the interior at factories such as Fort Chipewyan, Fort Edmonton and Red River. Furs collected over the winter would be packed into standard ninety pound 'pieces' and loaded into the boats. Depending on the route and the place of origin, the boats then traveled either to York Factory or to the depot at Norway House where the furs could be deposited and trade goods could be collected.²²³ Although normally driven

²²² W.H. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnepeg, Lake of the Woods &c, 1823*. Quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 291.

²²³ Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council*, 342. The work was also dangerous. See for example, *Undelivered Letters to Hudson's Bay Company Men on the Northwest Coast of America, 1830-57*, Judith Hudson Beattie and Helen M. Buss, ed., (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 328.

by the power of the oarsmen, the boats routinely hoisted small sails to take advantage of winds whenever possible. In 1823, York Boats were able to make the trip from Red River to York Factory via Norway House in fifteen to twenty days, bettering the canoe times by from three to six days.²²⁴

The only serious disadvantage to the use of the York Boats was that, because of their size and weight, all of the portages needed significant improvements. The first step was the widening of the path.²²⁵ Although canoes could be portaged along relatively narrow paths by men carrying the canoes in the traditional single file overhead carry, York Boats needed a much wider track.²²⁶ This track had to accommodate both the wider boats and the men that would be variously pushing and pulling the boats.

It was also necessary to improve the surface of the path. The principal improvement was the installation of “rollers” over which the York Boats were to be dragged. The “rollers” consisted of logs, split lengthwise and laid across the path at intervals of about four to six feet.²²⁷ The effect was something like a railroad track without the rails. The logs, with their rounded sides up, provided a smooth surface over which the York Boats could be hauled.²²⁸ All of this work was to be done by labour sourced and then supervised out of Norway House. As it turned out, this represented a considerable employment opportunity for a variety of people.

²²⁴ The upstream trip took 30 to 35 days. W.H. Keating, Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnepeek, Lake of the Woods &c, 1823. Quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 291.

²²⁵ LAC, Acc. No. 1989-400-1.

²²⁶ LAC, Acc. No. 1988-250-21.

²²⁷ “North American Explorations,” *The Living Age*, Vol. 67, No. 859. (17 November, 1860), 434.

²²⁸ “The True North-West Passage,” *The Living Age*, Vol. 89, No. 1143. (28 April, 1866), 227.



Figure 14. Extremely wearisome journeys at the portages.

Peter Rindisbacher, 1821.

In this image, the crews of at least three boats can be seen hauling a York boat over a short portage near Norway House. The roller trail is clearly visible. This brigade includes at least six boats.

Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1988-250-21.

By the fall of 1821, the priorities of work for Norway House were clear and the routine was established. Although minor improvements to the post were still being made, by October Colin Robertson considered the, “... business of the place [as] being closed for the season ...”²²⁹ The following year, Robertson was transferred to Edmonton and Joseph McGillivray was put in charge of Norway House.²³⁰

While Colin Robertson’s private correspondence revealed his disappointment with the Norway House assignment, his successor’s assessment of the post was positively damning. After spending one year at Norway House, Joseph McGillivray used his annual report to roundly condemn virtually all aspects of the operation there. His initial thoughts

²²⁹ Robertson, *Colin Robertson’s Correspondence Book*, 179.

²³⁰ Robertson, *Colin Robertson’s Correspondence Book*, cxvii.

were telling; “the first impression which naturally strikes a stranger who views this part of the country is its barrenness and desolation.”²³¹

As to the merits of the site for trade, McGillivray felt that, “... little can be said in its favour.”²³² He identified two principal obstacles to conducting a profitable trade at Norway House. First of all, as had already been noted by William Sinclair in 1812, “Beaver, which is the primary and staple object of traders, is dwindled to a mere nothing ... and of [other] game there are no great quantities.”²³³ Even worse, from his perspective, was the absence of a local native population. Even if there was game to be had, there was no one to do the hunting because, “... the Indians are too few.”²³⁴ In 1823, the HBC counted only 393 Aboriginal people in the entire district. In the immediate vicinity of the post and at Jack River, there were only a handful of Aboriginal people – a mere 36 men, women and children.²³⁵

Still, McGillivray’s comments reflect his focus on trade over transport, suggesting that he did not fully appreciate the post’s new role. McGillivray rejected the idea of establishing Norway House as a depot. He believed that, “... the idea of a permanent establishment for a depot is contrary to the system of economy which now ought to be introduced and acted upon.”²³⁶ His observation that, “... the district can with great difficulty cover its expenses ...,”²³⁷ seemed to reflect an expectation that all elements within the new company’s structure should be self-supporting. Apparently, he was

²³¹ Library and Archives Canada, *Hudson’s Bay Company Archives* (micro copy), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

²³² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

²³³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

²³⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

²³⁵ The population breakdown was, for the district as a whole, 97 men, 109 women, 106 boys and 81 girls. For Norway House/Jack River, the breakdown was 4 men, 8 women, 14 boys and 10 girls. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

²³⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

²³⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

unable to understand the importance of a depot to the system as a whole and recommended the immediate closure of the site, stating: “I can positively see no benefit which accrues to the Company by keeping up this station any longer.”²³⁸

In fairness to McGillivray, by the summer of 1823 the rationalization of the post’s manning as a function of its new principal role as depot had not yet occurred and he was carrying a very large personnel overhead. At that time, the post was still manned by no less than twenty-three officers and men, including Robert Sutherland, who was assigned as Assistant Trader.²³⁹ There were also six women, twelve boys and eight girls - family of the HBC staff - living at the post. Although he still recommended the complete abandonment of the site, he suggested that, “... if Norway House were reduced to a depot, a Chief Factor or Chief Trader and a couple of clerks could well attend to the summer business ...”²⁴⁰

Colin Robertson, returning to Norway House after a year in Edmonton, expressed quite a different view when he took over the post again that summer. As had McGillivray before him, Robertson recognized both the principal obstacle to trade and its cause, noting that Norway House, “... as regards Indian trade, has fallen off much since 1816. This arose in great measure from the Indians having removed to other districts more abundant in the larger species of animals which enabled them to support their families.”²⁴¹ For both McGillivray and Robertson, it was the absence of local labour that was the essential impediment to any actual trade in fur.

²³⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

²³⁹ Robertson, *Colin Robertson’s Correspondence Book*, 196.

²⁴⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Report on District, 1 June 1823.

²⁴¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/3, n 11. Report on District, 1825.

But Robertson differed from McGillivray in that he seemed to have a much better appreciation of the broader considerations of the trade and the requirements to support it with an effective transportation system. Having completed his pessimistic assessment of the prospects for the trade in fur, and having calculated that he would require a permanent staff of only one clerk and four men to perform all of the post's duties,²⁴² he continued his report stating,

I shall now say a few words respecting Norway House as a depot. This post has undergone a total repair since the Junction [of the HBC and the NWC], the dwelling house, stores and gardens have all been extended and improved. The object of their alterations and improvements was the eligibility of the situation as a depot for Red River and as a depot for our distant posts in the Athabasca, and certainly no spot could have been chosen better adapted for this object.²⁴³

Interestingly, while Robertson seems to have warmed to the place, others still shared his earlier view that Norway House was not a particularly good assignment. In a letter to George Simpson dated 23 July 1823, Donald McKenzie wrote that, "... Robertson has pestered me with a requisition for cattle for Norway House thinking, no doubt, his lease of that insignificant place will be continued [and that] at Norway his brains will simply teem with extraordinary projects, for want of something to do ..."²⁴⁴ Unfortunately for Robertson, his new enthusiasm for the possibilities at Norway House was rendered irrelevant by his assignment to Fort Churchill in the summer of 1824.²⁴⁵

Replacing Robertson that summer was Joseph McGillivray, returning from a year at another post.²⁴⁶ Considering his earlier attitude towards Norway House, it is perhaps surprising that he was chosen to return there. Still, there was much work to do and it

²⁴² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/3, n 11. Report on District, 1825.

²⁴³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/3, n 11. Report on District, 1825.

²⁴⁴ Selkirk Correspondence, cited in, Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, 196.

²⁴⁵ Robertson, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book*, cxxi.

²⁴⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/2, Norway House Report on District, 1824.

would appear that McGillivray set himself to it with admirable vigour. Since his previous posting there, the staff had been dramatically reduced and work was focused on getting the post properly arranged to function as a depot. Once the hectic summer period was over - again there was a great deal of activity as the various brigades assembled at Norway House or transited through the place – attention turned to further expansions, improvements and additions to the existing post infrastructure. By late 1824, the bulk of the work was finished and McGillivray was able to report that the post would be ready to fully support the Company's plans for 1825 and beyond. After nearly eight years of hard work, conducted at considerable expense, and at times under the threat of attack, the building of Norway House was complete.

Then, on the night of 19 November 1824, disaster struck.²⁴⁷ A fire broke out in one of the post's buildings and quickly spread to the other structures. Within a few hours the post was almost completely destroyed and the work of the last eight years was wiped out. Although fingers were initially pointed at Alexander Robertson,²⁴⁸ the clerk working at the post, an investigation concluded that the fire, "... arose entirely through accident and that no blame attaches to Mr. Robertson the Clerk in charge [and that he] be acquitted of all blame in respect of this unfortunate accident."²⁴⁹ McGillivray, never one of Norway House's advocates, was disconsolate and recommended abandoning the post completely.

²⁴⁷ W.B. Ready, "Norway House," *The Beaver* (March, 1949). I am grateful to Anna Shumilak from the Archives of Manitoba for helping me locate this detail.

²⁴⁸ Minutes of a Temporary Council at York Factory, 1 July 1824. Frederick Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal, 1824-1825* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 227.

²⁴⁹ Minutes of Council, Norway House, June 1825, res 6 "Notes and Documents, Rupert's Land," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol 7, No.4., H. A. Innis, ed., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1926), 302-20.

Governor Simpson, who was returning from a year-long inspection of the Columbia District, learned of the fire on 26 April 1825 when he received a letter, "... conveying the distressing information of the total destruction of Norway House, the stores and property therein contained by accidental fire; a loss of about 3 to £4000."²⁵⁰ He immediately determined to hurry to Norway House to do what he could, "... to the end if possible of lightening the evil by timely arrangements."²⁵¹ He left the next day, and by 13 June he was at Norway House.²⁵²

Ironically, the destruction of Norway House presented the HBC with an opportunity. The three previous Jack River and Norway House posts had all been built with various considerations in mind. The first site was established as an immediate response to the competition posed by the NWC and was positioned solely on the requirement to directly oppose the NWC. The second site represented an attempt to actually realize a profit from trade by putting some distance between itself and the competition. As already noted, neither of these posts enjoyed any real profitability. The move to Mossy Point was based on a new priority. Although there was still the hope that the post could conduct a profitable trade in furs, the site was selected primarily on the requirement to support the transportation route that was to be based on the Red River-to-York Factory winter road. At all three locations, there was hope that some cultivation of the soil would be possible.

²⁵⁰ Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 145.

²⁵¹ Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 145.

²⁵² Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 166.

By 1825, all pretense of conducting a profitable fur trade in the area was gone.²⁵³ Not only were there few animals to hunt, there were few people to hunt them - the bulk of the Aboriginal population had long since left the area. The dream of building a winter road was also quickly fading. The road represented an engineering project of enormous proportions that was simply beyond the capabilities of the HBC to actually build. Lord Selkirk had been the main proponent of the road but his death in April of 1820 left it without a champion.²⁵⁴ The destruction of the Mossy Point buildings by fire meant that any new construction need not be tied to old priorities or existing infrastructure.

Governor Simpson, after surveying the site in the late spring of 1825, came to an immediate and instrumental decision. A new Norway House would indeed be built. But this time there would only be one consideration that mattered. What was the best location for a depot that would serve the HBC's inland waterborne transportation system? What was needed was a large piece of high ground adjacent to a good harbour connecting directly to the main river routes.²⁵⁵ As the area was well known, it did not take very long

²⁵³ By this time, measures were already being taken in an effort to allow beaver populations to recover. In the case of Norway House, the quota for beaver was restricted to only 120 skins. This restriction remained in place until 1843. By comparison, the Athabasca district was authorized to accept 5,000 skins while the Saskatchewan's quota was set at 5,500. Only Winnipeg district, with a quota of 50, had a lower limit than Norway House. From Minutes of the Northern Council, held on 3 July 1830 at York Factory, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 641-56.

²⁵⁴ Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 226.

²⁵⁵ Arthur Morton and E.E. Rich each offered explanations for the relocation of the post that, while true in and of themselves, were not the primary reason for the move or the site selection. Morton believed that the post was moved to its final location so that it would be located, "[...] conveniently near the fishery, the main source of its food supply." Morton, *A History*, 692. Rich stated that the move was effected, "[...] owing to a danger of floods [...]." *Journal of Occurrences*, 421. Morton's view repeated Cowie's, explanation from 1913, that the post was relocated because the HBC, "[...] finding it more convenient for the fort to move to the fishery than for the fish - the staple food - to be moved to the fort [...]" the company chose the former. Isaac Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers: A Narrative of Seven Years in the Service of the Hudson's Bay Company During 1867-1874, On the Great Plain*, 1913, reprint, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 132.

to settle on the new location, "... about four miles below the old Fort of Jack River and twenty miles below the late establishment of Norway House."²⁵⁶

With this decision, the conditions were set that established Norway House as a unique location in the fur trade. As of 1825, Norway House was one of the most important posts in a fur trade system that was already global in scope.²⁵⁷ It lay astride the HBC communications network such that almost all people and goods passing into Rupert's Land and the Athabasca had to pass through it. Nevertheless, there was virtually no fur trade conducted there, there was no Aboriginal community at the site and the post's Euro-Canadian population was tiny. These conditions remained true until 1844.

²⁵⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/4. Report on District, 1831. Although both Arthur Morton and E.E. Rich properly identified relevant factors in the selection criteria for the new site, neither of them recognized the primacy of the need to locate the post as a function of the transportation requirements. Morton asserted that the post was moved to its final location so that it would be located, "[...] conveniently near the fishery, the main source of its food supply." Morton, *A History*, 692. Rich stated that the post was moved in 1826, "[...] owing to a danger of floods [...]." *Journal of Occurrences*, 421.

²⁵⁷ In that same year, the first modern economic crisis – the "panic" – shook Great Britain. For an interesting modern analysis of the "panic" see, Michael D. Bordo, "Commentary," *The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review*, May-June 1998, 77-82.

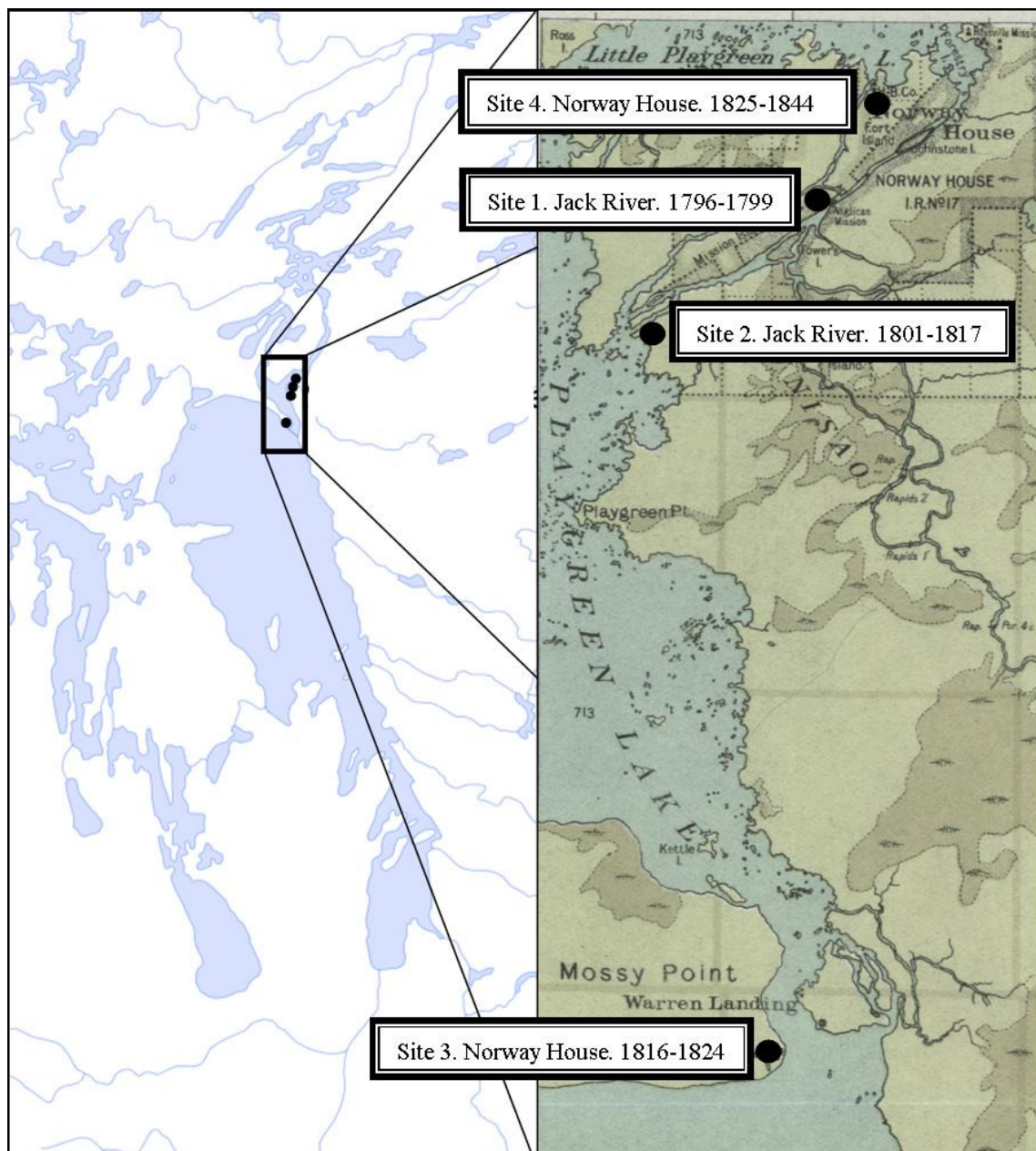


Figure 15. The location of the four Jack River/Norway House posts.

Chapter Three

Rebuilding Norway House, 1825 to 1828: opportunistic labour at the construction site.

By the time Governor Simpson arrived at Norway House in June of 1825, a rhythm had already been established in the life and business of the post. In large measure, this rhythm was defined by the same two factors that dominate so much of Canadian history: geography and weather. Since the principal function of Norway House was to support the transportation arrangements of the fur trade by providing an inland depot at the crossroads of the two main supply routes, the business of the place revolved around the annual shipments to and from the various posts. Cargo destined for the Athabasca was shipped to Norway House where it was held in anticipation of transshipment to its final destination in the following season. Freight for the Saskatchewan posts and from Swan River and Rainy Lake was shipped to and from York Factory via Norway House.²⁵⁸ Either way, the great distances required to travel to the most distant stations meant that cargo had to be on its way from the depots and posts as soon as was practical each year.

In addition to the actual linear distances involved, various factors influenced the time needed to travel from one point to another within the system. The single most important of these was the numerous obstacles that obliged boat crews to portage their boats and cargo. On some routes, the time spent portaging was as much as the time

²⁵⁸ Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 291-92.

actually spent in the boats.²⁵⁹ The direction of travel was another key consideration in travel arrangements. Generally speaking, travelling downstream was more rapid than going upstream. The bodies of water that were to be traversed were also important. Broader rivers generally resulted in easier currents while lakes permitted the use of sails in some areas.²⁶⁰



Figure 16. Red River Portage.
F.A. Hopkins, 1877.
Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1989-400-1.

Just as, if not more, important was the weather. The early freezing and late thaw of virtually all of the inland waterways in the HBC territories of Rupert's Land and the

²⁵⁹ For an extended discussion of the importance of portages see, Jody F. Decker and Donald B. Freeman, "The Role of Portages in Shaping the Economic Geography of the Western Canadian Fur Trade, 1774-1850," *Geographical Monographs No. 22*, (North York: York University, 1993).

²⁶⁰ For a discussion of environmental factors influencing the transport system up to 1821 see, John A. Alwin, "Mode, Pattern, and Pulse: Hudson's Bay Company Transport, 1670 to 1821." Doctoral Dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1978.

Athabasca, combined with very harsh weather in the late spring and early fall, meant that a travel ‘season’ consisted of, at best, only a few months each year. On the day that Governor Simpson reached Norway House in 1825, well into June, he recorded in his journal that, “our passage across the lake was most boisterous ... we parted with the Montreal Express Canoe and two of the Company’s boats in a storm ... [we] saw them in distress and making for a harbour ... we kept ... two men constantly bailing.”²⁶¹ For the system as a whole, the “season” lasted from late May to early October. The vagaries of the weather also meant that there was considerable year-to-year variation in the water levels of the inland waterways. These variations could be so great as to make some of the normal routes impassable in some years. It was the question of the variability of the flow of water in the geographically shorter Nelson River route that led, after considerable debate (and the initial enthusiasm of Governor Simpson), to its rejection as a primary transportation pathway.²⁶²

To meet these exigencies of geographically and meteorologically-determined time and space, it was necessary for boats and crews to assemble at Norway House by the beginning of June each year. Because of the central location of Norway House, it was also very convenient as a location for assembling the officers of the company. Since the orders and instructions for each year’s trade were passed at these assemblies – the

²⁶¹ Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 166.

²⁶² In 1820, Simpson hoped to be able to exploit the Nelson River route as this would have saved, “[...] the enormous expense of forwarding goods to the Rock and Norway House.” *Journal of Occurrences*, 27. In 1822 Simpson, on the direction of the London Committee, investigated the possibility of using a route from York Factory to Norway House via the Nelson River instead of along the Hayes River. Although initially enthusiastic, by 1825 Simpson realized that the Nelson River route was not practical due to the heavy current that made upstream travel extremely difficult and that the “[...] the season of open water was too brief to make the route practicable.” George Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, 26n. The route was abandoned in 1825. Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 245. In 1835 Chief Trader Donald Ross reaffirmed that the, “[...] Nelson River route had been abandoned in favour of the ‘common route to and from the factory.’” George Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, 26.

Meetings of Council – Norway House was well placed as a site for issuing the “business plan” for the upcoming season. As soon as the plan was passed on, the officers from the various posts were able to set to the task of actually organizing the brigades for which they were responsible. Within a few days of the Council meetings, full-time company staff set to the work of preparing their outfits while contractors vied for jobs, and other individuals and crews were hired. Some of the crews were rounded out by newly-hired HBC personnel who were employed as boatmen while deploying to their respective posts.²⁶³ From the arrival of the first boats in the first week of June until the departure of the laden brigades in the second half of the month, Norway House was a very busy place.

Although the fire had effectively destroyed Norway House, Simpson decided to hold the annual council meeting for the 1825 season there anyway.²⁶⁴ Considering the late date at which he had learned of the fire and the difficulties of communicating with the other posts during the winter, he probably had little choice. At the same time that Simpson reached the post, boats were already arriving in anticipation of the busy season ahead. Between the arrival of the first boat on the 4th of June and Simpson’s arrival on the 13th, seventeen boats and seven canoes had already landed there.²⁶⁵ This had the effect of bringing the temporary population up to approximately 197²⁶⁶ people in addition to the six men who constituted the permanent staff.²⁶⁷ On the same day that Simpson landed, another canoe arrived carrying a company officer for the council meeting with

²⁶³ Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 292.

²⁶⁴ A follow-up meeting was held at York Factory once Simpson arrived there at the end of June. Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 167.

²⁶⁵ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826.

²⁶⁶ That is, 17 boats with 8 men each, 7 canoes with 7 men each and 12 company officers.

²⁶⁷ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/e/3, Norway House Report on District, 1825. The previous year’s instructions has called for the reduction of the staff even further, directing that on a clerk and 2 men would man Norway House in the summer of 1825. In the event, the 6 men that were there at the end of the winter remained over the summer. Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 226.

another 6 canoes arriving the following day.²⁶⁸ By the 14th of June, there were at least 217 additional people at Norway House.²⁶⁹ Coinciding with the arrival of people, company correspondence and private letters from London was delivered to the post as had, “... communications from all parts of the country ...”²⁷⁰

As already mentioned, one of Simpson’s first tasks was to decide what to do about the ruined post and it was quickly decided that the new post would be relocated. Orders were then quickly sorted out for the rest of the posts. The job of rebuilding was given to John Peter Pruden, who arrived at Norway House on the 25th of June,²⁷¹ after returning from a year’s leave of absence in England due to, “... ill health.”²⁷² With his work done at Norway House, Simpson departed for York Factory on 22 June.²⁷³

With the Council concluded and instructions for the season issued, Norway House was a beehive of activity. Over the following two weeks, until the departure of the last brigade headed for Lesser Slave Lake, loads were organized, cargo was repacked and loaded, men and boats were hired and formed into brigades, boats were provisioned and, as will be discussed in chapter 6, there was a good deal of socializing.²⁷⁴

During the period that commenced on 4 June 1825 with the arrival of the first seasonal transport canoes, until the departure of the final brigade headed for the Athabasca on the 3rd of July, the average population of Norway House was 133, peaking

²⁶⁸ Thus, 7 canoes with 7 men each and 8 company officers LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826.

²⁶⁹ Chief Factor Stewart had arrived with the Saskatchewan boats on the 12th of June. Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 217.

²⁷⁰ Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 166.

²⁷¹ John Peter Pruden was from Edmonton, Middlesex where he was born in or about 1778. He entered HBC service in 1791. He was CT at NH during 1825-26. He retired to RR in 1837. He died there in 1868. George Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, 461.

²⁷² Minutes of a Temporary Council at York Factory, 1 July 1824. Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 216.

²⁷³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826.

²⁷⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826.

at no less than 256 people from the 17th to the 19th of June (Figure 17). All of this activity was at a site that had only just been selected as the new depot location and, although no new buildings had yet been erected, the post was still expected to support the transport operations for the season as well as hosting the Northern Council session for that year. That this was a major challenge for the handful of permanent Norway House personnel is clear from the Post Journal which noted that the staff were, “... employed as usual but little work can be done whilst so many strangers are at the house.”²⁷⁵ Equally frustrating were attempts by the permanent staff to get help from the people passing through, many of whom flatly refused to assist in such activities as fishing – for several days the visitors were reported as, “... still drinking.”²⁷⁶ This was to be a recurring theme at Norway House.

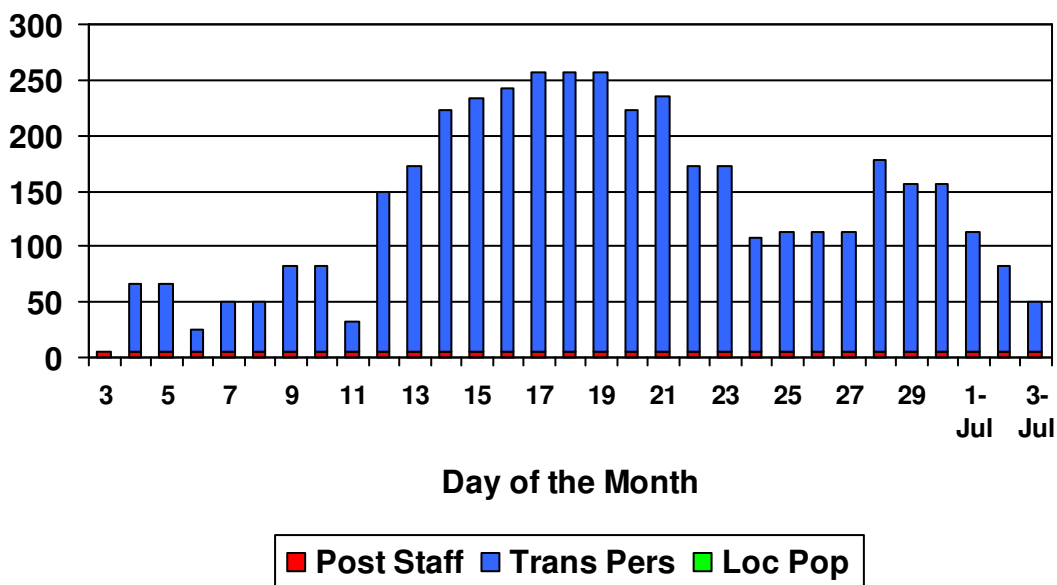


Figure 17. Norway House Population, 3 June - 3 July 1825.

²⁷⁵ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826.

²⁷⁶ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826.

With instructions issued and brigades organized, Norway House's population fell off almost as quickly as it had risen. In the four days from the 20th to the 24th of June, the population declined from 256 to 107. There was a short spike in population on the 28th of June as the Lesser Slave Lake, Bas de La Riviere and Lac La Pluie brigades staged through, but by the 4th of July there were only a handful of people at the post who did not belong to the permanent staff.²⁷⁷ For the remainder of July and until the middle of August, a steady stream of traffic passed through Norway House (Figure 18). By late August the traffic had slowed to a trickle with the last of the York Factory brigades stopping in on the 25th of September.²⁷⁸ A few more boats arrived to deposit merchandise for the next year's trading but by the 4th of October, only local travel was possible. In spite of the limitations of the post, it had been a busy season. That summer, at least thirty eight boats and sixteen canoes had visited Norway House in the peak month of June with another thirty seven boats and eighteen canoes passing through in the three months between the 5th of July and the 4th of October.

After the departure of the brigades, attention was turned to the principal task that was the construction of the new post. At least until the new depot was built, the Northern Council meetings were to be diverted to either Red River or York Factory. When the Council could meet again at Norway House would depend entirely on progress on the building of the new – and final – 'Norway House.' Chief Trader Pruden, arriving on the 25th, had missed the peak of the season but was still in time to see Norway House in its

²⁷⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826.

²⁷⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 25 Sep 1825. By way of comparison with conditions in Europe, it may be noted that just two days after the final York Factory brigade passed through Norway House, the first modern railroad – The Stockton and Darlington Railroad – was completed in England. See, P.J.G. Ransom, *The Victorian Railway and How it Evolved*, (London: Heinemann, 1990).

bustling summer splendor.²⁷⁹ At this point, Colin Robertson was still formally in charge of Norway House until he was briefly replaced by Chief Trader Jervis from York Factory.²⁸⁰ Jervis arrived at the post on the 17th of July and Robertson left two days later.²⁸¹ Pruden spent most of July and August assisting with arrangements being made at Grand Rapids. On the 28th of August, he returned to Norway House and formally took charge of the post.²⁸² Within a few weeks though, Pruden was left to tackle the construction of the new depot with very few hands to assist him; his winter staff was to consist of only four men (James Driver, James Corregal, Peter Pease and Charles Eno *dit* Canada).²⁸³

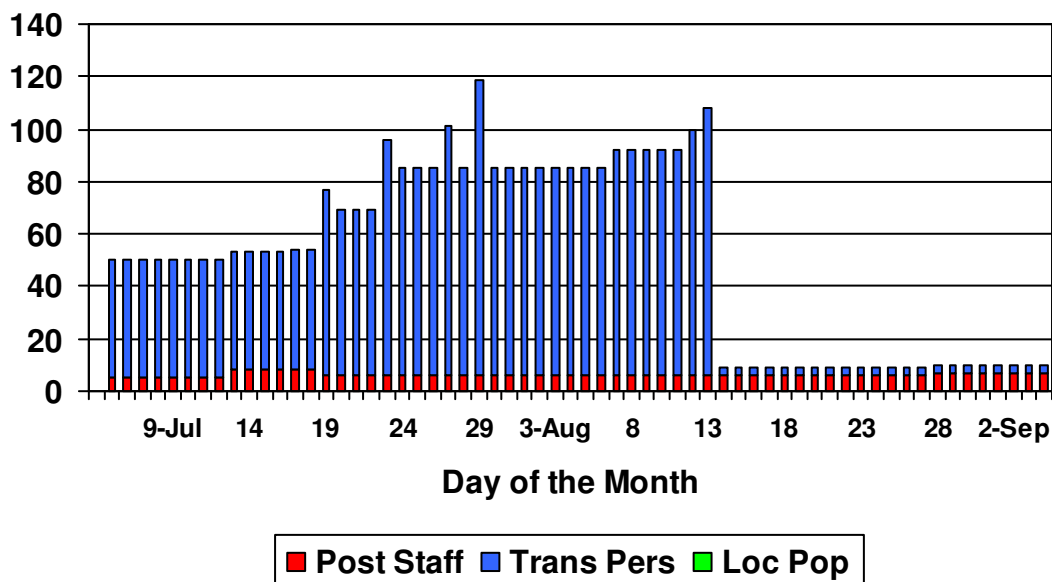


Figure 18. Norway House Population, 5 July – 4 September 1825.

²⁷⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 17-19 Jul 1825.

²⁸⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 17 Jul 1825.

²⁸¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 19 Jul 1825.

²⁸² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 28 Aug 1825.

²⁸³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. The names are spelled here as they appear in the relevant journal entry and vary from entry to entry.

Although some effort had been put into rebuilding the post in the aftermath of the fire, by July of 1825 very little had been done. Pruden found the post, "... in a very bad state not a building that would keep out the rain."²⁸⁴ This was partly the result of the uncertainty over Norway House's future. More important though was the lack of a labour force to do the heavy work that needed to be done. It had taken a dedicated work crew, augmented by the large number of permanent personnel that the previous post boasted, almost eight years to build the original Norway House at Mossy Point. Attempts were made to continue work on the buildings during the hectic June period but, as already noted, not much could be accomplished with everything else that was going on. The main work during this period consisted of clearing up the Mossy Point site and completing the store at the new site.²⁸⁵ The one construction project that was pursued with vigour – and with assistance from personnel from the Bas de la Riviere and Lac La Pluie posts – was the erection of a 'shade' for canoes that were to be left at Norway House by several brigades so that the canoes could be repaired over the winter.²⁸⁶ By the 1st of July the 'canoe shade' was complete, "... tho in a very slight manner ..." ²⁸⁷ Pruden was clearly not impressed with the work.

With Norway House finally clear of visitors, all hands were turned to getting a new dwelling house completed. It would seem that this project proceeded quite quickly as the men were already beginning to apply plaster to the house by the 11th of July.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 28 Aug 1825.

²⁸⁵ i.e., the main storage building. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 1 Jun 1825.

²⁸⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 29 Jun 1825. To support the boat repair work, 50 fathoms of best bottom and side bark for canoes was sent from Rainy Lake to Norway House. Winnipeg district also sent ten sets of cedar canoe timbers and *lisses* and 3 kegs of gum to Norway House. Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 304.

²⁸⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 1 Jul 1825.

²⁸⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 11 Jul 1825.

The post got an unexpected increase in staff on the 13th of July when two ‘lads,’ – Fred Lecayer and John Simpson – were sent from Red River to work there.²⁸⁹ Thus reinforced, it was possible to send out a fishing party and continue work on the house at the same time.²⁹⁰ For most of the next year, the bulk of the work done by the Norway House staff was related to one of those same two priorities: working on the buildings and gathering food. As the year progressed, the tension between these two efforts became palpable.

For the time being, the construction work was concentrated on the new house and on finishing the store. This meant that a lot of the work consisted of tasks such as planing boards, applying bark roofing, plastering and the like. It was also decided that as much material as possible would be salvaged from the Mossy Point site and from the site that had been occupied by the Red River colonists when they had fled during the conflict with the North West Company. On the 21st of July, three men were sent to, “... demolish the dwelling house at the Colony Point [and were tasked with] bringing home the building.”²⁹¹ By the 26th, the house was completely demolished and a considerable quantity of salvaged materials was being brought back to the new site.²⁹²

Efforts to collect enough food for immediate needs and for the coming winter were centered on the fishery but also included the hunting of game and the occasional purchase of meat from Aboriginal people. The daily fishing, mostly by use of seine nets, routinely required two men. Unfortunately, the fishing often failed to deliver sufficient

²⁸⁹ Apparently, the two men had been hired at Red River in the spring but had failed to report to their assigned brigade when it set out for the summer. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 13 Jul 1825.

²⁹⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 14 Jul 1825.

²⁹¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 22 Jul 1825.

²⁹² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 26 Jul 1825.

quantities of food and it was necessary to divert more of the men to the task. In the middle of July for example, the post journal noted with concern that, “Fish begin to fail much ...”²⁹³ So much in fact that by the 17th of the month all of the men of the post were tasked with fishing and, “... did nothing today but procure their livelihood with the seine ...”²⁹⁴ There was a little variety in the diet that month when, “... Nee Ay Coo Way arrived from below with a little moose meat part of which he traded for rum and part for ammunition and tobacco.”²⁹⁵ In these early years of the new post though, there were very few opportunities to trade for game as there were still very few Aboriginal people in the area and there was still precious little game to hunt.²⁹⁶ There had also been some attempts at cultivation, especially the ploughing of some land that had been cleared for the purpose, but after some fitful efforts plagued by the constant breaking of the plows, the effort seems to have been abandoned for the season.²⁹⁷

The first hint that there was anyone other than the HBC staff living or working at Norway House came as a result of another activity that was being pursued in the summer of 1825. On the 16th of July, three of the men were employed, “... cutting birch wood for a charcoal furnace.”²⁹⁸ More significantly though, two days later two of the men were sent in a boat to collect more wood for the charcoal furnace, “... some of it having already been cut by some Indian women.”²⁹⁹ Although it is not clear who these women were, this

²⁹³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 13 Jul 1825.

²⁹⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 17 Jul 1825.

²⁹⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 13 Jul 1825.

²⁹⁶ At least one man was sent, apparently unsuccessfully, to, “hunt ducks.” LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 21 Jul 1825.

²⁹⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 2 Jul 1825.

²⁹⁸ The three men tasked were Simpson, Corregal and Driver. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16 Jul 1825.

²⁹⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 18 Jul 1825. The language in the journal here is interesting as the women are referred to as “some” women. At other points in the journal

is the first known instance of people not directly associated with the post being hired or ‘contracted’ to do work in support of the post; work not directly related to the trade in furs. Apparently, there were at least some other women living at the post. On the same day that the house at Colony Point was being demolished, the Post Journal records, “The women sweeping out the fort.”³⁰⁰

However, it was Norway House’s responsibility for provisioning the transport personnel and for feeding the numerous visitors to the post in the summer that revealed the extent of the post’s Aboriginal population. On the 5th of October, five additional HBC personnel were sent to winter at the post (William Sinclair, August Corriveau, William Isbister, August Benoit and Joe Harper).³⁰¹ Their principal job was to augment the permanent staff such that a full-time fishery could be maintained at the Jack River.³⁰² This fishery was for the express purpose of building up a stock of fish to support the next year’s operations.

The magnitude of this fishing effort was staggering. The fishery was expected to collect thousands of fish and freeze, salt or dry them for storage. On the 18th of November, Pruden lamented that the fishery had, “... only caught 8300 white fish which is not quite half sufficient for the winter’s consumption.”³⁰³ In fact, the target for the Jack River fishing effort that year was no less than thirty thousand fish. Keeping in mind that Norway House also committed a considerable effort to local fishing – at least one man was almost always assigned to fishing duty for immediate consumption – the total

where it is clear that the women that are being talked about are women from the post, they are normally referred to as “the” women.

³⁰⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 21 Jul 1825.

³⁰¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 5 Oct 1825.

³⁰² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 5 Oct 1825.

³⁰³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 18 Nov 1825.

amount of fish being collected seems incredible. However, a calculation of the ration requirement of the summer period makes it clear that, if anything, these numbers were conservative. With a person-day population of 7,130³⁰⁴ personnel between the beginning of June and the 13th of August, and a ration of three fish per day per person,³⁰⁵ the total requirement for fish would have been 21,390.³⁰⁶

It was also clear that the handful of men at Norway House were not capable of collecting and processing this amount of fish. On the 17th of October, three men (James Corregal, William Sinclair and August Benoit) were sent to Jack River to start the winter fishing operation. Accompanying them were seven women and nine children, all of whom were people “of the post.”³⁰⁷ Although it is not known exactly who these women and children were, they were evidently the “country wives,”³⁰⁸ and children of current and/or previous Jack River/Norway House post personnel. Unfortunately, the weather proved too “boisterous” and the party returned to Norway House having been unable to proceed to the fishery. The next day they set out again, this time joined by the only ‘freeman’ living near Norway House, “Huggy Isham and his family.”³⁰⁹

³⁰⁴ That is, the daily population multiplied by the number of days. See Annex A.

³⁰⁵ This was based on three normal sized white fish. If the fish were smaller than normal or of different types, the ration could be adjusted. For example, on the 23rd of March 1827, the ration was raised to five fish per man per day as the fish being caught were generally too small for three or even four to be enough. LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 23 Mar 1827. In 1822-23, the daily ration had been set at two whitefish, ½ a pint of barley and one pound of potatoes per man per day. HBCA B 154/e/2, f. 8d, Norway House – Report 1822-23, quoted in, Enns, “*The Fur Trade at Norway House*”, 23.

³⁰⁶ Clearly, fish alone would not meet the total provisioning requirement for the brigades and the demand for pemmican continued to grow throughout the period of study. For further discussion of the pemmican provisioning see, James McKillip, *A Metis Metier: Transportation in Rupert's Land*, 2005.

³⁰⁷ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 17 Oct 1825.

³⁰⁸ For a discussion of the notion of ‘country wives,’ or ‘marriage a la facon du pays,’ see, Pannekoek, “The Fur Trade and Western Canadian Society,” 14.

³⁰⁹ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 18 Oct 1825.

At the post itself, work on the buildings was not progressing well. As a result of, “... being so backward with work ...,”³¹⁰ Peter Pruden decided to hire an “Indian” to help with finishing the new house. This was becoming steadily more urgent as the weather was worsening and there was, “... every appearance of winter setting in.”³¹¹ Work was further compromised by the fact that the fishery was not providing enough food for the daily consumption such that it was becoming necessary to consume dried provisions. For the remainder of the month, the need to fish was a daily distraction from the construction effort. Still, by the 28th of October, the new house was nearly finished and Pruden was able to record that, “It now only requires grass and earth put on the roof and other little conveniences ...”³¹² With the new house more or less finished, the men of the post were given two days off for, “... arranging their houses.”³¹³

With the fishery still not producing enough food for the post to subsist on, Pruden decided to employ two “Indians,” Cask and Presques Cuckoo, to hunt game in the local area. These two men were hired on the agreement that their families would be fed from the post’s stores and that they would be available for general labour when not otherwise employed. More importantly though, these two men were to be, “... at hand to guide men packeting in the winter.”³¹⁴ This guide work was potentially of considerable value as the pay for guides was among the highest wages then available to Aboriginal people. At that time, a guide could earn as much or more than a steersman, upwards of 70 Made Beaver worth of credit for a season’s effort.³¹⁵

³¹⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 18 Oct 1825.

³¹¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 19 Oct 1825.

³¹² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 28 Oct 1825.

³¹³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 2 Nov 1825.

³¹⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 2 Nov 1825.

³¹⁵ Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 665, quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 308.

By the 8th of November, winter had fully set in at Norway House and the river was completely frozen.³¹⁶ The weather put an end to any serious construction efforts and the focus of the daily work routine shifted from building to cutting and hauling firewood.³¹⁷ The fishing effort continued apace. On the 18th, Pruden sent Cask and Presques Cuckoo to Jack River to find out how things were going at the fishery. It was at this point that Pruden received the news that the fishery had caught less than half of what was required. Peter Pease was sent to Jack River to do another count of the fish and when he returned near the end of the month he brought back the assessment that there were 10,200 fish in storage there.³¹⁸ In addition to the fishing at Jack River, that party was supposed to cut hay for fodder for the post's livestock. Unfortunately, this hay gathering effort was also lagging having cut only 600 bundles. As with the fish, this was less than half of what was considered necessary for the season.³¹⁹

As November gave way to December, the fishing at Norway House was just managing to cover the daily rations, set at thirty four white fish per day.³²⁰ Although the Jack River fishery was not intended as a source of food for the subsistence requirements of Norway House, it proved necessary to draw on the stores of fish there in order to survive. On the 2nd of December, William Sinclair arrived at Norway House with 156 white fish drawn from those stores. On the same day, two young women arrived at the post with some fresh venison for sale. This was an all-too-rare occurrence and was, “...

³¹⁶ Far to the east, the Erie Canal, connecting the Hudson River to Lake Erie, was opened on 26 October 1825, just as winter was settling in at Norway House. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 19 Oct 1825. See also, Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

³¹⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 8 Nov 1825.

³¹⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 28 Nov 1825.

³¹⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 18 Nov 1825.

³²⁰ The five HBC personnel were entitled to three fish each per day with the remainder going to the families of the three Indians employed by CT Pruden and as food for the post's sled dogs. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 29 Nov 1825.

the first animal that has been killed by the Indians in the neighborhood this season.”³²¹

The lack of game continued to plague Norway House.

By the 17th of December, with little improvement in the fishing efforts, Peter Pruden had sent orders for some of the Jack River party to return to Norway House as he felt that there was, “... a better chance of catching near the house.”³²² On the 19th, Sinclair and Benoit arrived from Jack River along with three women and five children. On the 21st, Sinclair and Benoit were sent back to Jack River to bring the remainder of the women and children to Norway House. Accompanying them on the return trip was James Corregal, who reported that there were 10,565 fish in storage at Jack River and that he and the fishing party had consumed another 2,170 fish during the two months and three days that they had been at the fishery.³²³ The last of the Jack River people, Huggy Isham and his family, arrived back at Norway House on Christmas Eve, bringing with them half a deer.³²⁴

For Christmas week, Pruden issued extra provisions to the people of Norway House, by this point numbering in excess of thirty people.³²⁵ This was quite a change from the relative emptiness of the post through the fall and early winter when there had been only a handful of people living there. The relative conviviality of the place can easily be imagined, especially given the fact that, in honour of the occasion, Pruden, “... gave all the people at the house a Dram.”³²⁶ For the next three days, spirits no doubt

³²¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 2 Dec 1825.

³²² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 17 Dec 1825.

³²³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 21 Dec 1825.

³²⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 24 Dec 1825.

³²⁵ Five permanent staff, five Jack River fishery staff, seven women and nine children “of the post,” Cask and Presques Cuckoo and their families and Huggy Isham and his family.

³²⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 25 Dec 1825.

remained high as the men were given, "... a holiday and 1 pint of rum each."³²⁷ On the 28th the men returned to the nets for another attempt at fishing and the next day, a work party made its way to Jack River to bring back more fish and hay from the stores there. Ice was also cut and laid up to keep the ice cellar cool for the next year.³²⁸ Only two Aboriginal people visited Norway House to trade during Christmas week, one of them bringing in four furs, the other with only a single pelt. Significantly, none of the five skins were beaver. Another dram was issued on New Year's Day and the 2nd of January 1826 was celebrated as a holiday, replete with another ration of rum. By the 3rd it was time to get back to work and, in the face of a gale-force north-west wind and blowing snow, the men were back at the chore of cutting firewood and fishing.³²⁹

As 1826 began, there were renewed efforts to make progress on the rebuilding of the post. Three men were assigned the job of squaring 200 pieces of lumber so that they could be sawed into boards.³³⁰ But it was so cold that after three days of work only twenty logs had been squared as, "... their saws do not stand the froze wood."³³¹ Two days later one of the men was compelled to return from the logging site at 'the pines' to repair axes, three of them having been broken in the previous two days.³³² Unfortunately, the local fishery was not providing enough food to provide for the daily rations with the result that food was still being drawn from the Jack River stores. In addition to depleting those stores – the stores intended to support the next summers transport operations – the

³²⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 26 Dec 1825.

³²⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 30 Dec 1825.

³²⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 3 Jan 1826.

³³⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 5 Jan 1826.

³³¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 7 Jan 1826.

³³² The 'pines' was a stand of wood from which large logs were harvested. It stood at a distance of several miles and on the opposite shore from the Norway House. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 10 Jan 1826.

job of fetching the fish and hauling it on sleds back to Norway House kept two men busy; yet another distraction from the construction effort.³³³

The 15th of January dawned clear and cold. Canada had arrived back at Norway House the previous night to repair more axes that had been broken at the pines. On arrival though he found that he had more urgent business at hand as that morning he, “... got an addition to his family of a daughter.”³³⁴ Although the birth of the child did not much interrupt the work at hand – Canada was back at working repairing axes the very next day and returned to the logging site the day after that – the record of the birth of Canada’s daughter is significant in several respects.³³⁵ First of all, this is the first record of a birth to any of the families of the Norway House permanent staff during the period under study. Second, it is plain that at least some of the unidentified women and children at the post were indeed the wives and children of the HBC men. Third, and in spite of HBC rules against establishing families,³³⁶ not only did these families exist, they were clearly sufficiently normative that the post’s master was willing to acknowledge their presence by entering events such as births in the post journal, the formal record of the post.³³⁷

Occasionally, Aboriginal people would visit Norway House. One of the few that lived in the area was a man named Badger (Mistunisk) who lived about ten miles from the post. He had several sons and daughters (at least two of each), and they would visit when they had fresh game or pelts to trade. On the 18th of January, Badger and two of his

³³³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 5 Jan 1826.

³³⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 15 Jan 1826.

³³⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-17 Jan 1826.

³³⁶ See, Pannekoek, “The Fur Trade and Western Canadian Society,” 1987.

³³⁷ This did not last though. Within a few years the recording of births had disappeared from the post journals.

sons brought part of a deer to sell. That same day, Cask and Presque Cuckoo returned from their own hunt having only killed one deer, most of which they had already eaten. Still, the visit was sufficiently notable that Pruden decided that, "... a treat of rum," was in order.³³⁸ After a few days, the visitors departed having got, "... a supply of ammunition ..., "³³⁹ with which to continue their hunt.

By late January, it was time for the Winter Expresses to carry correspondence to the various posts. These mail runs were normally conducted by dog sled. On the 21st, the Express from Red River arrived at Norway House carried by, "... two Canadians."³⁴⁰ The next day, the Express for the interior arrived from York Factory, accompanied by, "... the White Governor and an Indian lad."³⁴¹ After spending the night at Norway House, the party continued on towards Cumberland House with mail from York Factory and with mail delivered by the Red River Express.³⁴² On the 25th, the Red River Express headed back to the Colony having collected the correspondence delivered to Norway House by the York Factory Express.³⁴³ In addition to its role as depot for furs and trade goods, Norway House was also the exchange point for the HBC's mail.

Work at 'the pines' continued to be frustrated by the need to constantly repair axes, "... the wood being so hard frozen our axes will not stand which retards the work much."³⁴⁴ On a more positive note, on the 27th of January, a new seine net was completed. This net, 128 fathoms long (768 feet), with a mouth 284 marshes (paces)

³³⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-17 Jan 1826.

³³⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-20 Jan 1826.

³⁴⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-21 Jan 1826.

³⁴¹ The "White Governor" was the term used to denote the CF at York Factory. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-22 Jan 1826.

³⁴² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-23 Jan 1826.

³⁴³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-25 Jan 1826.

³⁴⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-25 Jan 1826.

wide and fifteen marshes wide at the small end, had taken two weeks to complete.³⁴⁵

This was particularly timely as one of the other main nets had caught no fish at all, in spite of having been left in place for twenty one days.³⁴⁶ On top of this, the men hauling fish from the store at Jack River were unable to make the trip on the 30th of January as it was too cold and, “... their faces being very tender from being frost bitten several times.”³⁴⁷ On the 31st of January, in the face of a strong south wind, three of the men again set out through the heavy drifts of snow to recover fish from the Jack River stores. Two more of the men took up three nets that, “... had been standing 18 days,” but were only able to bring in a total of 27 fish.³⁴⁸

By the beginning of February, the Norway House personnel had become largely dependent on the stores of fish at Jack River. The task of drawing fish from the stores there required the commitment of three men with a round trip taking two days. Typically, between four and five hundred fish were being carried back to Norway House on each trip.³⁴⁹ Of these, roughly one fifth was being consumed by the post personnel and as feed for the sled dogs. This amount of fish represented a further serious drain on the fish stocks that were supposed to be for the use of the transport brigades in the coming season. The diversion of labour was also a serious drag on attempts to make progress on the post’s construction. Still, on the first of February, and in spite of the harsh weather, the three men working in ‘the pines’ were able to haul 200 pieces of squared timber back to the post, “... for sawing into boards and planks.”³⁵⁰

³⁴⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-27 Jan 1826.

³⁴⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-30 Jan 1826.

³⁴⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-30 Jan 1826.

³⁴⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-31 Jan 1826.

³⁴⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-1 Feb 1826.

³⁵⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-1 Feb 1826.

There was a little relief in the diet when, on the 6th of February, the “Indians” that had been hired to hunt returned to the post with, “... 2 rumps and 2 thighs ...”³⁵¹ of venison from three deer and a fawn that had been killed. Although part of the animals had been left behind with the hunters intending to fetch the rest of the meat later, the fact was that most of the game meat was consumed by the hunters themselves. The lack of game close to the post meant that freshly hunted meat would never provide any significant contribution to the overall food supply for Norway House.

By the 10th of February, 8,805 of the 10,565 fish stored at Jack River had been hauled to Norway House.³⁵² The rest of the fish, approaching two thousand of them had, according to Peter Pruden, “... been expended by the men and dogs who had been employed bringing them home.” This somewhat disingenuous statement – clearly the post’s own requirements accounted for much of the fish – nevertheless made clear the inefficiency of the system for accumulating food supplies. Although approximately 9,000 fish for the transport brigades had been brought to Norway House, another 2,000 had been consumed while catching them and another 2,000 had been eaten just to move them from Jack River back to Norway House.³⁵³ If Norway House was going to produce a significant portion of the ration requirements for the transport brigades, a much better system would have to be devised.

With the job of hauling the Jack River fish to Norway House completed, attention turned to preparing lumber for the renewed construction work. On Saturday the 11th of

³⁵¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-6 Feb 1826.

³⁵² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-10 Feb 1826.

³⁵³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 21 Dec 1825.

February, in spite of thick snow and cold temperatures,³⁵⁴ all of the men of the post were employed, "... preparing the saw pits to commence sawing on Monday and arranging sleds for hauling home timber ..."³⁵⁵ After a day of rest on Sunday, with the exception of one man employed hauling firewood, the entire post staff was finally committed to preparatory work for construction.³⁵⁶ With the fishing party now available for general work this meant that significant progress on hauling logs and sawing them into boards was possible. By the end of the week, thirty two logs had been hauled from the forest (by dog sled) back to the post where they were sawn into 150 boards.³⁵⁷

On the 24th of February, work was briefly interrupted when Sickly Head, a Cree man, and his two sons arrived at the post. The three were plainly starving. Sickly Head had left his eldest son with three women and four children, all too ill and weak to travel, and had journeyed for several days to reach Norway House in search of help. Sickly Head asked Pruden for permission to bring the people to the post and for assistance in bringing them in. The next day Pruden sent off, "... 2 Indians with some provisions for the Indians who are on the way to gain the House in a starving state."³⁵⁸ Although Pruden was moved to provide these people with some assistance, he clearly intended their stay at Norway House to be temporary noting that, "... they are altogether 11 in number, and who I shall have to feed for a few days until they recover to do something for

³⁵⁴ On the 10th of February the ice in the river in front of the post was measured at 4½ feet thick. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-10 Feb 1826.

³⁵⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-10 Feb 1826.

³⁵⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-13 Feb 1826.

³⁵⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-15 Feb 1826.

³⁵⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-25 Feb 1826.

themselves.”³⁵⁹ Meanwhile, work on preparing the lumber continued apace with a further 1301 square feet of boards cut by the 26th of February.³⁶⁰

By the beginning of March, the work of cutting, hauling and sawing logs into lumber had settled into a steady routine. By the end of the first week of March, another 1743 square feet of lumber had been prepared,³⁶¹ with another 1485 square feet completed in the following week,³⁶² and 1119 square feet the week after that.³⁶³ The diet continued to be based on fish, a small amount of which as being caught locally each day, with the occasional addition of small amounts of game. The two men who were employed as hunters had managed to kill a few deer which, although they represented only a modest addition to the available fare, seem to have been heartily welcomed. The evening that the deer were brought in Peter Pruden was sufficiently pleased that he, “... gave the Indians a treat of rum.”³⁶⁴

On the 3rd of March, the party of starving people who had come in desperation to Norway House, “... all pitched away from the House except 2 young men who are to remain for a few days yet.”³⁶⁵ Although their ordeal was not yet over, they were sufficiently recovered that they could set up their camp again, although instead of returning to their original location they decided to join the camp of Neekaway, a few miles away from the post.³⁶⁶ At the same time, five of the sons of Badger arrived at

³⁵⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-26 Feb 1826.

³⁶⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-26 Feb 1826.

³⁶¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-4 Mar 1826.

³⁶² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-11 Mar 1826.

³⁶³ Another 797 ft² were prepared in the week ending 25 March. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-18 Mar 1826.

³⁶⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-1 Mar 1826.

³⁶⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-3 Mar 1826.

³⁶⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-13 Mar 1826.

Norway House having traveled the three days journey from their “tent” to deliver the meat of 1½ deer.³⁶⁷

With the middle of March came the first preparations for the upcoming trading season. On the 14th, Peter Pruden and two men (Driver and Harper) took an inventory of the stores held at Norway House.³⁶⁸ Another sign of the impending season was the arrival, on the 15th, of the “White Governor” enroute from Cumberland House with the “express” from the interior.³⁶⁹ He left the next day bound for York Factory.

Construction plans were also now starting to be more specific. Three men were assigned the task of preparing square logs for the “Governor’s House,” the dimensions of which were to be 30 feet by 24 feet. These logs were to be cut and hauled, “... to a convenient place to be boated home when the channel opens.”³⁷⁰ The preparations to make use of boats for moving the logs clearly indicated that, though still a ways off, the end of the winter was near. On the 30th of March the weather was warm and a light rain fell. The next day, with continuing warm weather, Pruden was able to record that, “... a small part of the channel opposite the House is open.”³⁷¹ With the prospect of open water before them, two men were set to mending both the old seine net and an old drag net so that local fishing could be resumed as soon as possible.

As March gave way to April with continued warm weather, the ice around Norway House continued to thaw. Already on the first of the month, nets were set and hauled, yielding a modest but welcome dozen-odd fish. These fish, augmented by twenty

³⁶⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-4 Mar 1826.

³⁶⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-13 Mar 1826.

³⁶⁹ It had taken the “White Governor” nine days to make the trip from Cumberland House to Norway House. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-15 Mar 1826.

³⁷⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-1 6 Mar 1826.

³⁷¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-31 Mar 1826.

pounds of pemmican, were sent straightaway to the men working in the ‘pines,’ who returned to the post at the end of the day having completed preparing, “... all of the wood for the Governor’s House except the gables and sleepers.”³⁷² These, the gables and sleepers for the floor and roof of the house, were to be made from the wood that had been recovered from the old abandoned posts in the autumn.

With all of the men now assembled at Norway House proper, attention once again returned to the post’s buildings. Although the wood for the Governor’s House could not yet be transported from the ‘pines’ to Norway House because of the ice still being in the channel, this did not really matter that much since the ground at the site for the new building was still too frozen to begin actual construction. But there was still plenty of other work to do. Although one of the old houses that had been used as a store for fish had been cleared out, Peter Pruden was still unhappy with the state of the other buildings that he had taken charge of the previous summer. On the 4th of April, the men began the task of demolishing the main stores building so that it could be rebuilt to a more satisfactory standard.³⁷³ By the 7th the building had been completely torn down.³⁷⁴ Any resumption of work on the buildings now depended on the weather. In the meantime, the men were employed at various utility tasks such as cutting firewood, repairing nets and, inevitably, hauling them and bringing in the fish that were now being caught steadily, if still in modest numbers – a dozen or so each day.³⁷⁵

On the 17th of April, in spite of a strong northerly wind and heavy snow falling, Pruden ordered all of the nets to be taken up. The ice all around Norway House was

³⁷² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-1 Apr 1826.

³⁷³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-4 Apr 1826.

³⁷⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-7 Apr 1826.

³⁷⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-12 Apr 1826.

breaking up and it had become too, “... dangerous to travel on.”³⁷⁶ Until the ice cleared and the channels opened, the wood from the ‘pines’ could not be transported to Norway House and no nets could be set for fish. In the meantime, the men continued to prepare materials, (planks, sleepers, couples, etc.), for the buildings in anticipation of a resumption of the construction work.³⁷⁷

On the 23rd of April, for the first time that season, the temperature did not fall below freezing over night and Pruden noted that, “... the greater part of the channel opposite the House is now open ...”³⁷⁸ Another unmistakable sign of the rapidly approaching spring was the sighting of a flock of black ducks in the morning, an event deemed important enough to record in the post’s journal.³⁷⁹ On the 24th an attempt was made to send four men in a boat to the location near the ‘pines’ where the logs had been assembled ready for transport to Norway House. Unfortunately, after making it almost halfway to their destination, the men were obliged to return as the channel was still blocked with ice.³⁸⁰

The continued presence of ice in the channel was not the only obstacle to getting the construction effort going again. Having torn down the old store, it now became apparent that the posts used in that building were rotten and no longer useable. In evident frustration, Pruden noted that, “... I have again to send to the Pines for new posts which will again retard our getting on with our buildings.”³⁸¹ Four men were immediately sent to the ‘pines’ to cut replacement posts. Another hint that Pruden was losing his patience

³⁷⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-17 Apr 1826.

³⁷⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-21 Apr 1826.

³⁷⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-23 Apr 1826.

³⁷⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-23 Apr 1826.

³⁸⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-24 Apr 1826.

³⁸¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-25 Apr 1826.

came when, that same day, he assigned two men to the task of, "... cutting a channel through the ice for the boat ..." ³⁸² This was a task that would have been well-nigh impossible and constituted a pointless diversion of the limited labour resources of the post, especially since the inevitable spring break-up of ice was part of the natural order of things. Unsurprisingly, the effort was almost immediately abandoned. ³⁸³ Instead, the men were put to the prosaic but rather more constructive tasks of straightening old nails and clearing rubbish from the foundation of the old stores building. ³⁸⁴

On Saturday the 29th of April, the waters around Norway House were finally open enough that it was possible to send a boat to collect the lumber and posts that had been prepared at the "pines." Still the work was slow and difficult and it took the work of seven men to bring in the first load of 16 posts, work made even tougher as there was still considerable ice near the shore and the men, "... had to carry the wood a long way upon the ice to the boat." ³⁸⁵ By the 1st of May, all of the men of Norway House were employed either transporting lumber to the post by boat or in further preparing the wood for the buildings by squaring, planing and grooving it as necessary. ³⁸⁶

With warmer weather and the channel clearing, Peter Pruden was finally able to make progress on his principal assigned task – the construction of the new Norway House buildings. The urgency of this was evident. All of the post's permanent staff and the temporary winter staff were turned to the effort. But even this was not enough. Four Aboriginal men that had arrived at the post to sell a few furs were hired as labour to assist

³⁸² LAC, *HBC A*(mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-26 Apr 1826.

³⁸³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-26 Apr 1826.

³⁸⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-28 Apr 1826.

³⁸⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-29 Apr 1826.

³⁸⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-1 May 1826.

in moving lumber.³⁸⁷ Already, and even before any actual construction had begun, the shortage of available manpower was readily apparent. Compounding the problem was the fact that the next trading and transport season was less than a month away and Norway House would once again be the locus for the myriad activities associated with it. This responsibility remained, in spite of the fact that precious little progress had been made in developing the post's infrastructure over the winter.

By the 4th of May, all of the wood necessary for the construction of the new store had been transported back to Norway House.³⁸⁸ It was at this moment that something new and significant occurred. The four men who had been employed in the transport of logs from the 'pines' finished their task on the 3rd and took their departure from the post the same day. But rather than returning to their homes (and it is not clear where they originally came from), the four men - who had initially come to the post simply to trade a few pelts - crossed over to a location on the shore opposite Norway House and set up their tents.³⁸⁹ Plainly, there was something about Norway House that was sufficiently attractive to them such that they chose to remain there rather than return home. Given that these men had not come to Norway House looking for work but had accepted it when offered, and given the fact that there was neither game nor peltry animals in the area in any quantity, it would seem likely that their decision to remain in the vicinity of the post was partly based on the possibility of further employment either at the post itself, or with one of the transport brigades that would be assembling in, or passing through, the area within a matter of weeks.

³⁸⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-2 May 1826.

³⁸⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-4 May 1826.

³⁸⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-3 May 1826.

Although the men of Norway House probably didn't need it, the weather on the 4th of May provided a sharp reminder of just how much depended upon it. A heavy snow had fallen all through the previous night and, although it stopped snowing at around 10 o'clock that morning, a strong wind resulted in, "... drifts of snow inside of the yard the height of the top of the stockades."³⁹⁰ Instead of laying out the frame for the new store, the men were obliged to spend the day clearing away the snow. Finally, on the 5th of May, work began on the new building with the laying of the lower frame. Peter Pruden, clearly not satisfied with the progress of work, noted that the men, "... go on very slowly."³⁹¹ By the 9th of the month work had progressed to the point that the logs forming the main part of the walls were starting to be laid in place. The next morning, the shooting of a duck, "... the first spring game killed this season at the House,"³⁹² was sufficiently noteworthy that it constituted the main journal entry for the day.

By the 16th of May, the post was living exclusively on dried provisions. In an attempt to augment the diet, late in the day five men were pulled off the building effort to haul in the nets. The effort was doubly disappointing as they, "... caught no fish and broke both the nets and seine, there being too much ice."³⁹³ That evening the last of the dried meat was served out. Earlier that day though, a renewed effort at agriculture was made as, "... the women commenced planting potatoes."³⁹⁴ Considering that the post had been buried in a blanket of drifting snow less than two weeks earlier, this early planting of the supply of seed potatoes represented a bold – if wildly optimistic – move.

³⁹⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-4 May 1826.

³⁹¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-5 May 1826.

³⁹² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-4 May 1826.

³⁹³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-16 May 1826.

³⁹⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-16 May 1826.

In spite of all of the difficulties, there was steady progress on the buildings. By the 20th of May work on the store was sufficiently advanced that some of the men were able to start on the Governor's House by laying out the timber for the lower frame and posts of that building. By the 22nd only two men were required to continue work on the store as all that remained was, "... patching the roof and mudding the sides."³⁹⁵ The rest of the men were now committed to the building of the Governor's House. The perennial problem of food remained, however. After repairing the nets broken in the last fishing effort, another attempt was made on the 24th. Unfortunately, the total catch for the day consisted of a single sturgeon. Luckily, a rare deer kill resulted in some fresh meat for the day.³⁹⁶ On the 26th a relatively successful haul of twenty seven fish was made but most of that was given to the dogs of the post, "... they being almost starved to death."³⁹⁷ For the next few days the nets provided a fairly steady supply of fish for the post such that the immediate food crisis passed.³⁹⁸ By the 31st of May the fishery was sufficiently productive that one man, James Corregal, was assigned to fish full time.³⁹⁹

The arrival of June meant that Norway House's busy season was about to begin. To get ready for the arrival of the first boats, Peter Pruden ordered a stock-taking. He also decided to employ several "Indians" as there was, "... more work than we can get through before the Governor and Gentlemen arrive from the interior [and] to endeavour to get the fort put in some little order before the arrival of the craft."⁴⁰⁰ For the first time, "Indians" were being employed directly in the construction effort, two men being tasked

³⁹⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-22 May 1826.

³⁹⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-24 May 1826.

³⁹⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-26 May 1826.

³⁹⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-28 May 1826.

³⁹⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/11b, Norway House – Post Journal 1825-1826. 16-31 May 1826.

⁴⁰⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 5 June 1826.

with mudding the walls of the new store building.⁴⁰¹ At least two other men were employed in carting sand for leveling the interior of the fort.⁴⁰²

Finally, on Sunday the 11th of June, the Saskatchewan brigade arrived at Norway House, one year less a day after its arrival the previous year.⁴⁰³ In 1825, there had been a steady trickle of boats and canoes arriving ahead of the actual transport brigades but this had been in anticipation of the Council Meeting that was to be held there that year. Since the Council Meeting for 1826 had been shifted to York Factory pending the rebuilding of Norway House, the boats and canoes carrying officers to the meeting either passed quickly through the post or did not stop there at all.

The arrival of the Saskatchewan brigades represented the beginning of a new year in the ‘business cycle’ of the HBC’s inland operations.⁴⁰⁴ Surveying the post at this time, Pruden could not have been happy either with the progress made on building the new post nor with his ability to support the transport operations. Since the end of the previous season, at which time there was only a single properly built structure at the site, only two buildings had been completed, the new ‘house’ and the rebuilt store. Work had begun on the new Governor’s House but this was nowhere near ready for the 1826 season. Of course the recovery of materials from the demolished buildings at the old Mossy Point and Colony Point sites had been an important addition to the supply of construction materials, but this had not yet translated into useable space for either people or stores.

The fishery, although not a failure, had not come close to producing enough provisions to support the transport brigades, in spite of having an additional five men

⁴⁰¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 7 Jun 1826.

⁴⁰² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 9 Jun 1826.

⁴⁰³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 11 Jun 1826.

⁴⁰⁴ The overall business cycle of the HBC was still defined in England as corresponding to the calendar year based on the normal fiscal year conventions then in practice. Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 149-65.

specifically assigned to Norway House for the task. Of the roughly 13,000 fish that had been collected, (slightly more than a third of the 30,000 considered necessary), at least 4,000 had been consumed at Norway House just to get through the winter. The remaining supply was barely enough to cover the needs of the brigades that stopped in, or assembled at, Norway House during the summer. As things stood, the Norway House fishery was not capable of provisioning the summer transport operation. The essential problem with both the construction effort and the fishery was the same; there was simply not a large enough labour force to do all the work that was necessary in the time available, especially given the shortness of the season.

For the time being though, Pruden had to deal with the immediate challenges of assembling, organizing and dispatching the brigades and their cargos to and from Norway House. As in 1825, within a few days of the arrival of the first boats, the post was transformed from a quiet little establishment into a bustling commercial and social centre. Although Norway House was, for the time being, relieved of the responsibility of hosting the Council Meeting, the officers attending the meeting still had to make their way to York Factory via Norway House and the vast majority of these individuals spent at least a few days there. Part of Captain John Franklin's overland exploration mission – twenty three men in all – also assembled at Norway House that summer.⁴⁰⁵ There was also a significant addition to the temporary population as several families from the interior (totaling 92 people)⁴⁰⁶ assembled at Norway House awaiting transportation to Montreal.

⁴⁰⁵ For a discussion of this expedition that includes mention of the support provided by the HBC, see, Captain John Franklin, *Narrative of a Second Expedition to the shores of The Polar Sea in the years 1825, 1826 and 1827*, (London: John Murray of Albemarle Street, MCCCCXXVIII).

⁴⁰⁶ The total included 24 men, 42 women and 26 children. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 30 Jul 1826.

As of the 10th of June 1826, the permanent population of Norway House stood at thirty one people consisting of the five permanent staff, the five men temporarily assigned to the fishery and seven women and ten children ‘of the post.’ By the end of the next day, with the arrival of the first transport brigade, the population had jumped to 127! A week later, there were no less than 229 people at the site. In the twenty days from the 11th to the 30th of June there were, on average, 204 people at Norway House with a peak population of 280 reached on the 27th and 28th of the month (Figure 19). This represented a considerable increase over the previous year as the presence of the families bound for Montreal and the members of the Franklin expedition more than compensated for the reduction in numbers that resulted from the diversion of the Council Meeting to York Factory.

July was also a very busy month for the post. On average, there were 188 people at Norway House. The population reached its peak on the 17-18th of the month when fully 220 people were there. It was not until the 30th of the month and the simultaneous departure of the Saskatchewan brigade, part of the Cumberland House brigade and the canoes carrying families to Montreal, that there was a sharp decline in the number of people at the post. By the end of that day the population was a relatively modest forty six.

But even these numbers do not fully convey the degree to which Norway House experienced a summer population explosion. On the 2nd of July, ten canoes of “Indians” arrived at the site from Big Fall with others trickling in and out during the month.⁴⁰⁷ It is not possible to accurately measure the numbers of people that this represented as the actual number of Aboriginal visitors was not recorded and, unlike the transient personnel

⁴⁰⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 2 Jul 1826.

who were part of the transport brigades. Since the post was not responsible for feeding these people, there was no ration count taken.⁴⁰⁸ Still, these visitors would have been present in considerable numbers. For the remainder of the summer, until the last boat passed through Norway House on the 17th of October, there were approximately seventy people living at or near Norway House.⁴⁰⁹

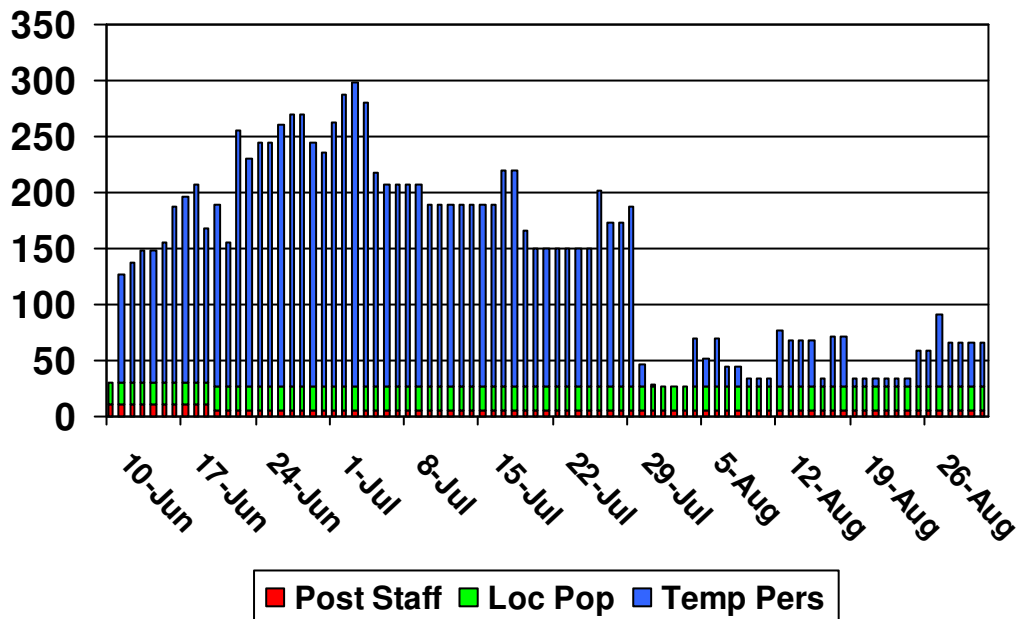


Figure 19. Norway House Population, 10 June - 31 August 1826.

For the staff assigned to the post, any possibility of making progress on the construction of the post had to give way to the immediate requirement to feeding all the people there. As in 1825, this was a serious problem. Although the absolute number of fish being caught during the summer was quite high, the requirement to feed all of the visitors meant that there was a nearly constant shortage of food. For example, in June the fishery produced 2372 fish. In July this increased to 8899 with the number falling off to

⁴⁰⁸ Although there is no way to measure this, the additional people doubtless generated further demands on local food supplies.

⁴⁰⁹ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 17 Oct 1826.

2266 in August. During the same period however, the ration strength (person-day population) of Norway House was 4384 for June, 5824 for July and 2170 for August. With a total fish harvest of 13,537 and a total ration strength of 12,378 for the June to August period, the daily ration for each person consisted of a single fish – only a third of what was considered normal.

On the 26th of July charge of Norway House was handed from Chief Trader Pruden to Chief Trader John MacLeod.⁴¹⁰ Unfortunately for MacLeod, the problem of how to rebuild the post and provide rations for both the post and its many visitors was unresolved. In fact, the Council for that year made no allowance for any additional permanent personnel at the site, calling for a total manning of five, including John MacLeod himself.⁴¹¹

There had been other labour problems as well. On the 21st of June, one of the crew of a boat bound from Red River to York Factory, “... an Halfbreed of the name of Sayer ...,” deserted at Norway House.⁴¹² Not only did this require the assignment of another man to fill the position, the work of Norway House was distracted by the need to take measures, “... to take care of the canoes as the deserter, I have no doubt, will attempt to steal one if in his power to make his escape to Red River.”⁴¹³ On the 27th of July, four boats left Norway House without permission.⁴¹⁴ Brigades were also delayed at Norway

⁴¹⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 26 Jul 1826. Pruden was posted to Carlton House in the Saskatchewan District where he remained until his retirement to the Red River Settlement in 1837. *HBCA Biographical Sheet*, Pruden, John Peter (1778-1868) (fl.1791-1837); CAW 1999/November.

⁴¹¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 26 Jul 1826.

⁴¹² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 21 Jun 1826.

⁴¹³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 21 Jun 1826.

⁴¹⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 27 Jul 1826.

House for lack of suitable guides, “... there being no Indians at the place that will undertake the charge.”⁴¹⁵

As in the previous year, getting visitors to assist with hauling the fishing nets proved to be a challenge, in spite of the fact that this was the source of their food as well. Although a group of “freemen”⁴¹⁶ was convinced to help haul the seine on the 22nd of July,⁴¹⁷ on the 27th, they flatly refused to help.⁴¹⁸ Even when they did help, it was sometimes a mixed blessing. On the 28th of July, having convinced some members of one of the brigades to haul one of the nets that morning, MacLeod was disappointed when they, “... returned soon after without fish having broke the seine and lines.”⁴¹⁹ As early as the end of July, John MacLeod found the problem of supplying the brigades “very disturbing” noting that boats were arriving, “... poorly provided from below [York Factory] and nothing here to give them.”⁴²⁰ On the 25th, three boats arriving at Norway House under the charge of Mr. Joseph Cook had gone three days, “... without tasting any food.”⁴²¹ By mid-August, in an effort to get some work done on the buildings, MacLeod was reduced to trying to get the women and children ‘of the post’ to haul the nets, an expedient that resulted in little success.⁴²² The 18 small fish caught on the 18th of August

⁴¹⁵ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 19 Jul 1826.

⁴¹⁶ “Freemen in the language of the fur trade were ex-servants of the fur companies free in the sense of being no longer under indenture. They were usually worn-out voyageurs, differing from ordinary discharged engagés in that they did not retire to Red River Colony or to Canada, but chose to remain in the Indian country living among the natives. [...] Most of them were French Canadians or half-breeds, but some were Iroquois Indians from Caughnawaga, brought originally to the far west by the fur companies on account of their expertness as canoemen.” Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 20. See also, K.G. Davies summary of different views of ‘freemen’ in, *Peter Skene Ogden’s Snake Country Journal: 1826-27*, K.G. Davies ed., (London: The Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1961), xx.

⁴¹⁷ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 22 Jul 1826.

⁴¹⁸ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 27 Jul 1826.

⁴¹⁹ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 28 Jul 1826.

⁴²⁰ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 29 Jul 1826.

⁴²¹ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 25 Aug 1826.

⁴²² LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 16 Aug 1826.

represented, "... not a mouthful among 70 persons."⁴²³ In the absence of fish, rations of corn – three quarts each – were given to the two permanent staff of the post that were committed to manual labour, Canada and Corregal, "... the rest must go without."⁴²⁴

With so much effort being expended trying to catch fish, there was predictably little progress made on any construction. That summer, what little work had been done was focused on three projects: a store for fish at Jack River; another store for cargo at Norway House; and a powder magazine for separate and safe storage of gunpowder.⁴²⁵ As early as July 26th, MacLeod was compelled to turn to Aboriginal labourers for help.⁴²⁶ On that day, he hired several men to harvest pine bark for use in covering the roof and sides of buildings. On the 28th, they returned with 330 pieces.⁴²⁷

As if there were not enough problems, the high water that was experienced in 1826 interfered with the fishery and threatened Norway House itself. On the 25th of August, five canoes passed through Norway House enroute to Red River. The Aboriginal people in these canoes informed John MacLeod that they were going to Red River as they, "... apprehend there will be no fishery at this place on account of high water."⁴²⁸ Hearing this from the people who were native to the region could not have been very comforting to MacLeod. Following a period of heavy rain on the 20th of August, he noted that, "... the water is nearly at our gates. I am much afraid it will carry away the whole point."⁴²⁹ By the end of August, the tone of John MacLeod's journal entries reflected both frustration with his labour problems and concern for the welfare of his

⁴²³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 18 Aug 1826.

⁴²⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 22 Aug 1826.

⁴²⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 18 Aug 1826.

⁴²⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 26 Jul 1826.

⁴²⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 28 Jul 1826.

⁴²⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 25 Aug 1826.

⁴²⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 20 Aug 1826.

charges noting, “there are many jobs to be done and no hands,”⁴³⁰ and that, “I do not know what to do with these poor creatures about the Fort.”⁴³¹

Early in September, Norway House had again received an augmentation of personnel for the purpose operating a fishery at Jack River. This was critical as John MacLeod continued to lament his shortage of labour, noting on the 4th of September that, “... I would wish to get something done to the building but have no hands to work at them.”⁴³² With the addition of the fishing party, MacLeod had a total available work force of 11 men. Included in this group was Mr. Dease, a junior officer who could be used to provide some much needed supervision for the group operating independently at Jack River.⁴³³ Dease and five men were sent to Jack River with the immediate task of building a store for the fish that were to be gathered there over the winter. They were also expected to begin fishing immediately.

Back at Norway House proper, work was divided between fishing (which included nearly constant repairing of the nets) and trying to advance construction of the store and powder magazine.⁴³⁴ The women and children ‘of the post’ also tried to harvest the potato crop, little of which remained as, “... the water and grubbs having destroyed the greatest part of the garden.”⁴³⁵ At this point, with labour at a premium, MacLeod elected to employ at least four Aboriginal men in local transport work, principally for moving provisions and building materials between Norway House and the Jack River fishery.⁴³⁶ Having decided to employ additional men for this purpose, John MacLeod

⁴³⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 26 Aug 1826.

⁴³¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 31 Aug 1826.

⁴³² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 4 Sep 1826.

⁴³³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 1 Sep 1826.

⁴³⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 8 Sep 1826.

⁴³⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 25 Sep 1826.

⁴³⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 21 Sep 1826.

was clearly more than a little peeved when two of the men who were supposed to be working at Jack River showed up at Norway House, "... for things they could well dispense with."⁴³⁷ Another minor *contretemps* with one of the other men had led MacLeod to note that, "I see that this man requires to know his master."⁴³⁸ Clearly, discipline was becoming an issue.

With October came colder weather and a steady frost. At this late date in the season there was now almost no traffic passing through Norway House, and those who did come were of little help to the post. Two boats under the charge of Mr. Nolin, enroute from York Factory to Red River, stopped at both Norway House and the Jack River fishery where they expected to be fed but, "... would not go and haul the seine."⁴³⁹ MacLeod again turned to the local population, and was by this time employing local people for hauling birch wood with which to make charcoal, and to help in hauling the fishing nets.⁴⁴⁰ But even this source of labour was, at this point, very limited. John MacLeod noted that, "the few Indians that are here are likewise upon the eve of starting for their hunting ground but the boisterous weather prevents them."⁴⁴¹ MacLeod intended to travel to Jack River to see if there were local people who might be employed to move goods between Jack River and the main post.

When John MacLeod arrived at the fishery on the 5th of October he was pleased to note that the fishing there was quite good, certainly better than at Norway House, but was rather less pleased by the state of the store that was supposed to have been completed

⁴³⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 25 Sep 1826.

⁴³⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 5 Sep 1826.

⁴³⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 1 Oct 1826.

⁴⁴⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 2 Oct 1826.

⁴⁴¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 4 Oct 1826.

noting that, “the shell is up but they have come on very slowly.”⁴⁴² He returned again to Jack River on the 10th of October, this time determined to see that the store was finished. Upon arrival he noted that the store still did not have a roof. Over the next few days he remained at Jack River to directly supervise the completion of the building, the roof of which was finally completed on the 13th of October.⁴⁴³ Returning again on the 20th of October, MacLeod was again disappointed to discover that the work had, “... advanced but slowly since I was last here, only the shell of the store up without flooring.”⁴⁴⁴ The dwelling house that was also supposed to be built at Jack River had not even been started. MacLeod sarcastically noted that the timber for the dwelling house, “... is still standing in the woods.”⁴⁴⁵ He immediately set the men to work at felling trees and squaring the timbers.

With a clear focus on getting the Jack River store completed, there was steady progress and by the end of the month, the shape of a building was beginning to emerge. Of course all this effort on the building meant that fewer hands were available for fishing, with the predictable effect that the haul of fish fell off dramatically. MacLeod, in a move that would impress modern labour psychologists, decided to make two separate fishing parties, each led by one of the acknowledged fishermen of the post, James Corregal and Laverdure, “... to try and stir some emulation among them as I am apprehensive we will not be able to catch a sufficiency to pass the winter.”⁴⁴⁶ The two were told to fish wherever they wanted, both of them immediately seeking out places a bit removed from

⁴⁴² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 5 Oct 1826.

⁴⁴³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 13 Oct 1826.

⁴⁴⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 20 Oct 1826.

⁴⁴⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 20 Oct 1826.

⁴⁴⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 28 Oct 1826.

the established fishing site.⁴⁴⁷ The move was almost immediately rewarded with good hauls by both of the fishermen leading MacLeod to note optimistically that, “I trust we shall be able to make something of a fall fishery yet ...”⁴⁴⁸

Even at this time, and in spite of the urgency of getting the dwelling house up, cultural considerations still mattered. On the 1st of November, John MacLeod noted that, “this being All Saints Day, could not force all of the Canadians to work with the ax ...”⁴⁴⁹ Nevertheless, he was determined to see the job finished and decided to remain at Jack River and supervise the work there himself. Perhaps with an eye to who would eventually read his journal – it was still a company document not a personal log – MacLeod commented that, “I am the worst off for lodging of any person here, rather than take the men off work, I have taken up my quarters in Mr. Taylor’s tent [an old abandoned shelter].”⁴⁵⁰ However self-serving this comment may have been, it was also almost certainly true and reflected the degree to which MacLeod was set on seeing progress in the work that was ultimately his responsibility to complete.

The new fishing arrangements were proving spectacularly successful with daily hauls of 600 to 1,000 fish. Work on the dwelling house continued apace. The challenge now was to get the roof on the house before the winter weather set in. On the 9th of November, with snow falling and the weather cold, the roof was finally completed.⁴⁵¹ The next day the temperature was very low and the lake was rapidly freezing over.

⁴⁴⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 28 Oct 1826.

⁴⁴⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 3 Nov 1826.

⁴⁴⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 1 Nov 1826. MacLeod also commented on the relative efficiency of the men noting by the end of December that, “3 Orkney men and 4 Canadians are working at 2 houses since 4th instant and the latter are nothing ahead of the former tho the Canadians are more expert with the ax, the Orkney men’s industry gains ground.” LAC, *HBC Archives* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 21 Dec 1826.

⁴⁵⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 2 Nov 1826.

⁴⁵¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 9 Nov 1826.

MacLeod ordered the nets taken up so as not to damage them with the result that the haul of fish was greatly reduced; down to fewer than 200 for the day. Work on the house continued with putting earth on the roof and mudding the roof and walls, laying the flooring and building the chimney.⁴⁵² The main obstacle to progress at this point was the cold as a, "... great deal of time is lost every morning before the ground is sufficiently thawed by fire to get the mud."⁴⁵³ The cold also interfered with the actual mudding as the mud, "... when put on it freezes immediately and falls down as soon as it warms."⁴⁵⁴

By the end of November, the dwelling house, by virtue of its being the priority of effort, was nearly complete. On the 30th, John MacLeod assigned one man to the task of cutting firewood, noting that this was, "... the first time I employed a man for that purpose since I left Norway House or even since I took charge of the post."⁴⁵⁵ By putting the bulk of his available labour force on the construction job, MacLeod was able to make progress, but this came at the expense of all the other jobs that needed to be done. The fishery had had some good results but suffered an interruption as the ice set on the lakes and rivers. Still, the fishermen were at least meeting the day-to-day requirements of the post. By the 2nd of December, work on the dwelling house was sufficiently advanced that MacLeod decided to have the men make the finishing touches to the building on their own time so that more effort could be shifted to the fishing. It was, he determined, "... better to endure a little cold in buildings than want fish ..."⁴⁵⁶

MacLeod had originally come to Jack River hoping to find some local men to hire as labourers. In this he had been entirely disappointed. The few men that were

⁴⁵² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 13 Nov 1826.

⁴⁵³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 16 Nov 1826.

⁴⁵⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 22 Nov 1826.

⁴⁵⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 30 Nov 1826.

⁴⁵⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 2 Dec 1826.

encountered seemed little interested in any of the work offered. On the 6th of December for example, two men came across to the Jack River site, "... paid the debt they took in the fall, settled and went off."⁴⁵⁷ There was still no immediate solution to John MacLeod's principal problem; the shortage of labour.

As of Christmas Eve 1826, by committing the bulk of his available labour to the effort, MacLeod had managed to get two buildings completed to support the Jack River fishery; the store and the dwelling house. His men, consisting of his five permanent post staff and the six men assigned for the fishery, had all prepared their own huts and were more or less ready for the next year's work.⁴⁵⁸ Badger, the hunter who traded with Norway House on occasion, arrived with a welcome bit of venison to trade, an addition to the diet that MacLeod found, "... very acceptable for I have scarcely tasted any meat this season."⁴⁵⁹ The venison, along with extra rations of flour and grease, was served out to the men in anticipation of Christmas.⁴⁶⁰ On Christmas Day itself, in honour of the season, each of the men received a pint of rum.⁴⁶¹ Presumably, little work was expected of them for the next day. For the New Year's holiday more flour and grease were served out, along with the last of the venison.⁴⁶²

The end of the holiday period and the beginning of a new year also signaled the time for sending along the winter express to keep the mail moving. The York Factory

⁴⁵⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 5 Dec 1826.

⁴⁵⁸ At this point the staff consisted of: Canada, James Corregal, Boucher, Dupuis, Gudraut [sp], Delonai [sp], Cadotte, James, David Sanderson, Laverdure and Sinclair. The additional personnel had been sent to Norway House from York Factory. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 31 Oct 1826. Exceptionally, one of the men was also employed cutting and carrying firewood for MacLeod's use as, "[...] my own woman having performed that duty for me since I took charge [was unavailable]." LAC, *HBC Archives* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 8 Dec 1826.

⁴⁵⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 21 Dec 1826.

⁴⁶⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 24 Dec 1826.

⁴⁶¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 25 Dec 1826.

⁴⁶² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 31 Dec 1826.

packet had arrived before Christmas but, as of the 2nd of January 1827, the express had still not arrived from Red River. Notwithstanding the absence of the packet from Red River, MacLeod was determined to get his express underway, "... so that it may be in full time at Cumberland House appointed by the Council." This commitment to punctuality was perhaps reinforced by the need to get the packet for Captain Franklin's expedition delivered as well. The fact that two men, men who were sorely needed at Norway House, were sent off on this task underscored the importance given to the mail. The two set out with the express that same day.⁴⁶³

Thanks to the productive period of fishing in late October and early November, and the continued ability of the fishermen to provide for the basic requirements of the post, nearly 12,000 fish had been stored by the beginning of January 1827.⁴⁶⁴ In spite of all the problems, this was a considerable improvement over the previous year. But even with the rather successful juggling of the work force that had resulted in the completion of two buildings and the amassing of a substantial supply of fish, it was still clear to MacLeod that he could not continue in this manner. On the 6th of January, he again noted that, "I have so much work to do and as 2 men attend the nets at Norway House, I shall take up those [nets] at this place and set the men at other work."

With the bulk of the men now employed preparing logs and sawing boards for further construction at Norway House proper, a good supply of building materials was being assembled. Working in pairs, the men were able to square a dozen or more logs

⁴⁶³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 2 Jan 1827.

⁴⁶⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 4 Jan 1827.

each day. The best pair, Canada and Boucher, were routinely able to square 20 or more logs each day; a testament to their already recognized skill with the ax (and adze).⁴⁶⁵

However, the singular focus on building and fishing was starting to have other consequences. On the 4th of January, two men arrived back at Norway House from Mossy Point where they had been cutting timber, their return ostensibly for the purpose of repairing axes. MacLeod was clearly incredulous noting that the, "... excuse for not repairing more is the want of coals, but certainly could not have used 8 bushels for 9 axes."⁴⁶⁶ The obvious implication was that the men had been burning charcoal intended for the forge as heating fuel. Since almost no effort had been put into cutting firewood, this was perhaps inevitable. What was also clear was that MacLeod was paying very close attention to what was going on at his post.

On the 11th of January, two sons of Curly Head,⁴⁶⁷ an Aboriginal hunter who had his camp about a dozen miles downstream from Norway House, arrived at the post with a few pelts to sell. The two men, who complained of starvation at their camp, agreed to carry the Red River letters, recently arrived, to Cumberland House.⁴⁶⁸ The need to eat was evidently a powerful motivation to accept the otherwise unattractive employment. The inclusion of "3 half pints of spirits"⁴⁶⁹ in their pay no doubt provided them with further encouragement. For John MacLeod this was a welcome opportunity to complete another of his important tasks without further diminishing his available work force,

⁴⁶⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 12 Jan 1827.

⁴⁶⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 7 Jan 1827.

⁴⁶⁷ Curley Head, also known as Uchegun or Ochegun, appears in York Factory records of 1809 and 1811 and is recorded in the 1838 Census for Norway House. See the discussion of him in chapter six of this dissertation. 1838 Census. Archives of Manitoba, *HBCA* (mc). Norway House, 1838.

⁴⁶⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 11 Jan 1827.

⁴⁶⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 13 Jan 1827.

especially since one of his men, Boucher, had been severely injured when a tree fell on him, nearly breaking his thigh.⁴⁷⁰

By the middle of January, MacLeod had assembled sufficient building materials such that he was able to begin making very specific plans. His intention was to begin preparing a house with dimensions of thirty four by twenty three feet and a large store, with dimensions of fifty five by twenty four feet. In spite of the very cold weather and short days, MacLeod ordered the men to begin squaring the frames for the two buildings immediately.⁴⁷¹ In the previous year Peter Pruden never seemed able to prioritize tasks well enough either to advance the construction work or amass sufficient fish stocks to fully supply the transport brigades. By contrast, it was clear that, by January 1827 at the latest, John MacLeod had decided to concentrate on getting Norway House built. In fairness to Pruden, it may be that MacLeod had received clearer instructions with respect to his responsibilities – this is certainly suggested by his attitude once the job was done – but it is clear that MacLeod was a more focused manager who was not afraid to give very close supervision to his subordinates. The inevitable consequence of MacLeod's focus on building was that all of the other jobs that had to be done would have to be done by someone other than his assigned HBC staff.

Further aggravating the labour shortage was the fact that the heavy work and cold conditions was taking a toll on the men with injuries. In addition to Boucher's accident, Delonai had badly cut his leg with an ax while squaring a log⁴⁷² and Laverdure had put a chisel through one of his hands, an accident that garnered little sympathy from MacLeod, who commented that Laverdure was, "... useless and indeed no great loss its happening to

⁴⁷⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 11 Jan 1827.

⁴⁷¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 15 Jan 1827.

⁴⁷² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 1 Feb 1827.

him.”⁴⁷³ It was so cold that, “... water I [MacLeod] had this morning to wash my face was covered in ice in a few minutes in the middle of the room.”⁴⁷⁴

On the 7th of February, three, “... Indians from below Little Winipic ...,”⁴⁷⁵ arrived at the post. The men were immediately offered work hauling squared logs and other cut lumber from the forest to the post, a distance of approximately two miles.⁴⁷⁶ On the 14th, work started on the new house with the laying of the ground logs.⁴⁷⁷

On the 23rd of February, the two men sent to carry the winter express to Cumberland House arrived back at Norway House. Although their return was no doubt welcome, they brought with them, “... alarming news respecting the provisions from the plains.”⁴⁷⁸ At least since the time of the merger of the HBC and NWC, the transport brigades had become more and more reliant on pemmican for their daily rations.⁴⁷⁹ This pemmican was being produced by Métis hunters who conducted large-scale bison hunts for the purpose.⁴⁸⁰ It was this pemmican that would replace or supplement the supply of fish that was produced at Norway House and elsewhere. If the hunt was not successful – as the news from Cumberland House indicated – there would be additional pressure on MacLeod to put more of his effort into the fishery, a diversion of effort that would

⁴⁷³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 31 Jan 1827. CT McLeod did not hold Laverdure in high regard having already having had at least one run-in with him previously. In December, McLeod had noted, “All hands at work as yesterday except Laverdure who I sent for birch to make a sledge, not that I am in want of it but merely because the fellow said he would not go. I went to him this morning fully prepared had he offered any insolence. He is a blackguard that requires to know his master at the same time an active able man when kept in subjection.” LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 5 Dec 1826.

⁴⁷⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 3 Feb 1827.

⁴⁷⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 7 Feb 1827.

⁴⁷⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 9 Feb 1827.

⁴⁷⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 14 Feb 1827.

⁴⁷⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 23 Feb 1827.

⁴⁷⁹ As early as 1810, the Red River area was already generating, “[...] more than 35 tons of pemmican for the winter brigades of the North West Company. Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, xxiv.

⁴⁸⁰ For a discussion of this, see, McKillip, *A Métis Metier*, 2005.

certainly interfere with the aggressive building schedule that MacLeod had set for himself.

With the arrival of March, it was time to make another mail run, this time to York Factory. John MacLeod assigned this task to one of his men, Cadotte, and the two young Aboriginal men that had been employed hauling lumber for the last month. Mail was also received from the Mackenzie's River District for forwarding to Oxford House but MacLeod was not able to immediately send it on as he had, "... not an Indian to send to Oxford and not a man here knows the way."⁴⁸¹ In the event, James⁴⁸² and David Sanderson were ordered to make an attempt to deliver the mail to Oxford House, departing Norway House on the 9th of March.⁴⁸³ Three days later, the pair returned, reporting that they were not able to find their way but eliciting the comment from MacLeod that, "... I rather suspect they had no inclination to go."⁴⁸⁴ After considerable effort, an Aboriginal man was found who was willing to do the job and, on the 15th, the mail was finally on its way.⁴⁸⁵

Through March and into early April, there was steady progress on the new house and store in spite of the harsh weather, the run of injuries to the men, and the diversions of effort caused by the need to keep the mail moving through the HBC territories. With some improvement in the weather – the 8th of April was reported as being a "fine warm day"⁴⁸⁶ – John MacLeod turned some of his attention to the upcoming summer season.

⁴⁸¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 7 Mar 1827.

⁴⁸² It is not clear from the journal if this was James Corregal or James Driver.

⁴⁸³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 9 Mar 1827.

⁴⁸⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 12 Mar 1827.

⁴⁸⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 15 Mar 1827. At this point there were still very few Aboriginal people living in the area. MacLeod noted on the 18th of March that, "We see but very few Indians [...]." LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 18 Mar 1827.

⁴⁸⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 8 Apr 1827

On the 9th, one man was sent to the old post's site to work the garden there while two men were re-assigned to full-time fishing.⁴⁸⁷ Later that month, MacLeod decided to hire Huggy Isham, the freeman who lived near Norway House with his family, to act as an agent for the post in collecting debts of Aboriginal hunters who were trading in the Norway House District.⁴⁸⁸

A sure sign that the busy summer season was about to begin was the arrival of various people at Norway House ahead of the transport brigades. On the 27th of May, John MacLeod observed that, "The Indians are now gathering about the fort."⁴⁸⁹ Already in 1827, only the second summer at the new Norway House location, the site was attracting large numbers of people incidental to the fur trade. Of course these people were only visiting the site; as of May 1827 the only people known to be actually living at Norway House other than the HBC personnel and the seventeen women and children 'of the post,' were the freeman Huggy Isham and his family and the four men, (almost certainly Cree), who had been hired the previous fall to do various tasks.

The infrastructure that would support the summer activity at Norway House, although still modest, was considerably improved from the last summer when there was only one house and one rebuilt store at the site. In addition to the two small structures put up at the Jack River fishery location, (a dwelling house and a store for fish), the main post now had a new dwelling house and a new store, both of which had two floors and were of good dimensions. MacLeod had also managed to have a separate kitchen building completed during the month of May.⁴⁹⁰ He was clearly pleased that he had been

⁴⁸⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 9 Apr 1827

⁴⁸⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 26 Apr 1827

⁴⁸⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 27 May 1827

⁴⁹⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/12b, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 1 May 1827.

able make progress, noting on the 7th of June that, “I may say that I have been since I came here last fall without a proper place to write or sleep in but shall soon have both.”⁴⁹¹ Of course this progress had come at the expense of the fishing effort. Since January, there had been no increase in the stock of fish gathered to support the summer operations – the total amount on hand was still only 12,000 fish.

On the 10th of June, the first of the season’s boats arrived at Norway House. Mr.’s Finlayson and Hargrave arrived in two boats crewed by a total of six men.⁴⁹² This circumstance illustrates an important part of what was going on at Norway House. The normal crew of a boat was eight. In this case, the two-boat brigade was short by ten men (assuming that neither Finlayson nor Hargrave intended to captain their boats for the whole trip). But the first leg of the trip from Red River to York Factory was across Lake Winnipeg where it would be possible to use the boats’ sail for propulsion. Just as important was the fact that there were no portages to cross before reaching Norway House. The labour-intensive part of any trip either to York Factory or to the interior lay beyond Norway House. What Finlayson and Hargrave were counting on was their ability to hire additional crew at Norway House. And of course at least some of the people assembling at Norway House in anticipation of the arrival of the brigades were there for that express purpose. For people looking for summer employment, Norway House was the obvious destination.

With the arrival of those first boats, the summer activities took on a familiar pattern as Norway House became the locus for the intense activity associated with the assembling of crews and brigades, the loading and cross-loading of stores – some drawn

⁴⁹¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 7 Jun 1827.

⁴⁹² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 10 Jun 1827.

from the Norway House depot and some arriving from other places – the issuing of rations, and the collection of families moving in and out of the HBC's territories. In 1827 Norway House was not as burdened with families as it had been in 1826, but the requirement to attend to the needs of families awaiting transport still represented a considerable drain on the post's limited resources. The depot was also expected to continue to support the efforts of the Arctic Exploration team of Captain Franklin. Although the really intense period of activity started a bit later than was usual – the whole season shifted by about two weeks – the actual number of people and boats moving through the area remained relatively stable, particularly if the special needs of the Franklin expedition is accounted for.

On the 9th of June 1827, there were approximately forty four people living at Norway House proper: the eleven post staff, twenty seven 'people of the post' and freemen, and six people temporarily residing there. Although the number of visitors to the place grew slowly at first, within just over two weeks the population had risen to nearly two hundred. For the period of June following the arrival of the first boat on the 10th, the average population was 101 with a peak of 199 people on the 17th and 18th. This was about 50% of the number of people of the previous year.

As in 1826, July was also busy, with an average daily population of 125 people, peaking at 186 on the 29th day of the month. Although this through-put of people was again less than in 1826 – July's average was about 66% of the previous year – the continued traffic in August brought the total summer's population numbers closer to those of the previous two years. In August, the population of Norway House averaged eight one people, even after MacLeod took the unusual step of shipping many of the

people who had collected around the post to the old Norway House location as a means of reducing the drain on his food stocks. Overall, Norway House had approximately 71% as much traffic as in the previous year.

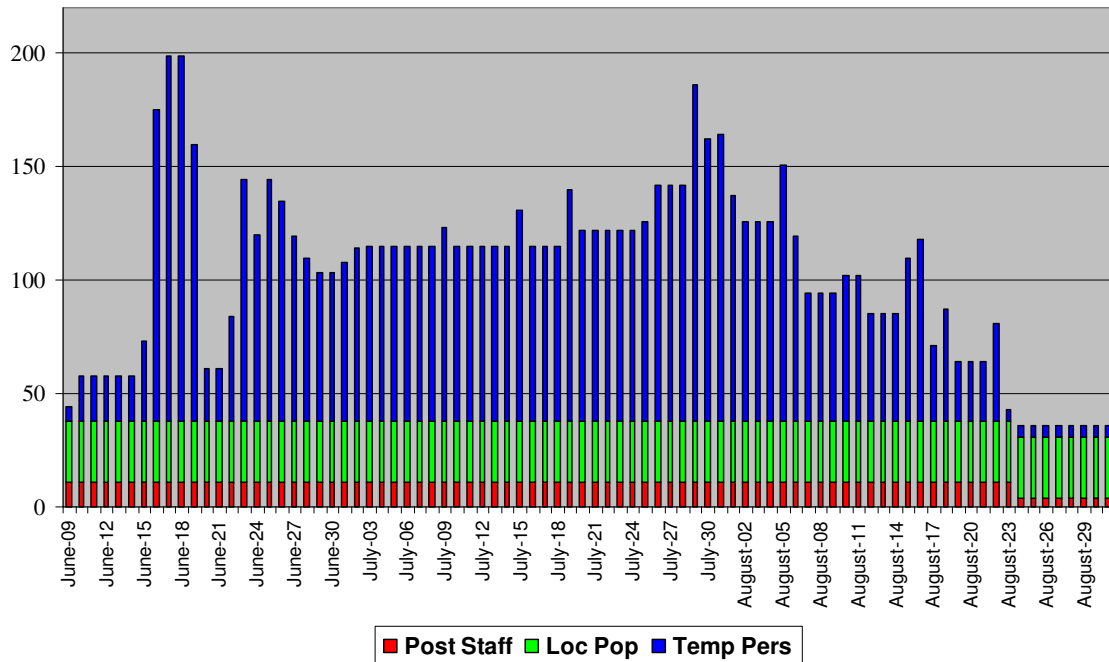


Figure 20. Norway House Population, 9 June - 31 August 1827.

In reality though, the presence of large numbers of family members awaiting transport to Montreal in 1826 had skewed the numbers for that year. In 1826, the ration-strength for the summer at Norway House was 12,378 while the ration-strength for the summer of 1827 was 8740; a difference of 3,638. But if the ninety two family members are removed from the calculations (they were at Norway House for thirty eight days from 22 June to 30 July accounting for 3,496 rations) then the ration strength for 1826 would have been 8,882. Thus adjusted, the person-day population, reflected in the ration-strength, would have been 7,130 for 1825, 8,882 for 1826 and 8,740 for 1827. It is clear from these numbers that the amount of routine traffic through the post was still relatively

steady, but showing an increase from 1825 – significantly, this was also how the man in charge of the site perceived things at the time.

Predictably, with a steadily rising summer population and no permanent augmentation to the staff, virtually no progress was made on either the construction or provisioning efforts. In the busy period of July, John MacLeod lamented that, “I was so much occupied for some days back that I had no time to look after the men at the buildings.”⁴⁹³ The obvious solution was to hire people from those that had assembled at or near the new post to do specific jobs. On the 18th of June, MacLeod noted, “... two Indians hired to fish.”⁴⁹⁴ On the 22nd day of the same month, two more Aboriginal men were hired for the same purpose.⁴⁹⁵ MacLeod also decided to hire men to assist his own staff. On the 6th of July, MacLeod, “... sent off 2 Indians to the fishery with orders to Corregal if not successful where he is to remove with the nets to Play Green Lake [sic].”⁴⁹⁶

This hiring of casual labour was also extended to support the work on the buildings at the post. No doubt part of the attraction of this type of work was that it was for relatively short periods of time and pay was immediate. Early in June, men were engaged for a week to assist with recovering more of the materials from the old Norway House location after which MacLeod, “... paid the Indians who were up at the old fort for their help.”⁴⁹⁷ On the 29th of June, MacLeod, “... employed 7 Indians today to get 2 boat

⁴⁹³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 4 Jul 1827.

⁴⁹⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 18 Jun 1827.

⁴⁹⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 22 Jun 1827.

⁴⁹⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 6 Jul 1827.

⁴⁹⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 7 Jun 1827.

loads of building logs home.”⁴⁹⁸ The next day he, “... got the wood for the building carried to the fort by the Indians”⁴⁹⁹

In addition to Aboriginal people, ‘freemen’ were also being hired for this type of casual labour.⁵⁰⁰ In early July, MacLeod, “Sent off old Carter and 7 Indians for another boat load of stores, sent 2 Indians off to the fishery. Sent off Canada and the freemen for a boat load of building logs.”⁵⁰¹ Freemen were also employed to directly assist with building, “... 4 men (freemen) are covering the new building with bark.”⁵⁰² These ‘freemen’ seem to have been relatively difficult to manage. One group, “... would not go to work today because I [MacLeod] would not serve their families out of the store.”⁵⁰³ After hiring a number of people to assist with the fishing, MacLeod commented wryly that he “Paid the Indians for their help [but] I never saw such a helpless set of freemen as are here now not one fit to mend a net.”⁵⁰⁴

There was also the continuing problem of trying to satisfy the need for food of the various people at the post, many of whom were in serious danger of starving. In July, MacLeod concluded that “I must send the fishermen with the sun up to [old] Norway House to try keep these people about the fort alive.”⁵⁰⁵ On the 16th of July, the daily catch of fish was a mere, “9 Sturgeon which was divided amongst 100 souls.”⁵⁰⁶ In an

⁴⁹⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 29 Jun 1827.

⁴⁹⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 30 Jun 1827.

⁵⁰⁰ Other districts were also employing ‘freemen.’ From Fort Chipewyan, it was reported that, “I mean to send off three boats, [and ...] we must recourse to the hiring, if possible, of some of our half-breeds or free-men in order to get our returns,” as there were not enough servants to man the 1827 brigade. Letter, Alexander Stewart to the Governor and Chief Factors and Chief Traders of the Northern Department, dated 28 December 1827, Fort Chipewyan. Sold to a private collector by Donald Heald Original Antique Books, Prints and Maps of New York City, 2010.

⁵⁰¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 12 Jul 1827.

⁵⁰² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 18 Jul 1827.

⁵⁰³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 9 Jul 1827.

⁵⁰⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 14 Jul 1827.

⁵⁰⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 18 Jul 1827.

⁵⁰⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 16 Jul 1827.

effort to relieve the pressure on Norway House proper, John MacLeod decided to send as many people as possible to the old Norway House site where it was hoped that they would be able to conduct their own fishery for the summer. The offer to send people came with the offer of nets and some assistance, but there was also a latent threat in the move. The group, “Started this morning for old NH with 8 men (all freemen) and as many of the families as the boat could carry at the same time sent off the fishermen with the seine. Those who refuse to go cannot expect much from me, for all that is in the store is little enough to supply the crafts inward bound.”⁵⁰⁷ By late summer, with the requirement to provision both the Franklin expedition and the boats headed for Montreal, the rate of consumption of stores had become critical, the journal noting, “Served out 42 rations today – our little stock of provisions would soon be exhausted at this rate.”⁵⁰⁸

By the end of the summer of 1827, two fundamental conditions had changed at Norway House. First, any idea that the tiny number of staff permanently assigned to the post was sufficient to advance the construction of the new depot and simultaneously operate a fishery that would supply both the large transient summer population and the needs of the brigades for provisions was clearly gone. Even the addition of extra personnel for the winter, ostensibly dedicated to the establishment of a fishery, did not solve the problem. Although there had been some limited hiring of local labour before this, by June 1827 John MacLeod had begun to employ casual labour for various tasks on a routine basis.

The second change that summer was that people other than those who had a long and close association with the site – the so-called ‘people of the post,’ – established

⁵⁰⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 22 Jul 1827.

⁵⁰⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 16 Aug 1827.

themselves at or near Norway House. These people, a mix of Aboriginal people and ‘freemen’ (some of whom were also likely Aboriginal), numbered, by the middle of July, approximately seventy.⁵⁰⁹ Included in this group was Huggy Isham and his family, the four Aboriginal men who had established themselves the previous summer and at least eight freemen and their families.⁵¹⁰ It was from this group that John MacLeod was hiring his casual labourers.⁵¹¹ These were the same people who had gathered around the new post and presented such a pitiful sight to MacLeod. Although there is no indication that he was aware of this at the time, his decision to encourage them to move to the old Norway House site so that they could sustain themselves with their own fishery was to have the ultimate effect of creating a Norway House ‘satellite’ settlement, for the time being located at the old Norway House location at Mossy Point.

As traffic tapered off at the end of August, attention once again turned to the job of building up the infrastructure of Norway House so that the vision of it as the central inland depot for the HBC could be realized. Astonishingly, given all that was expected of the place, the instructions for the year set the manning of Norway House at four people, including MacLeod himself.⁵¹² In addition to these four, there were another thirty three people living at, or in the immediate vicinity, of the post such that the meager fishing results at the time were, “... little enough for the 37 souls which are still depending on the Fort for subsistence.”⁵¹³ Two of the men were put back on construction work, “Canada and Faille squaring logs for a men’s house which will be their job until it

⁵⁰⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 16 Jul 1827.

⁵¹⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 22 Jul 1827.

⁵¹¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 14 Jul 1827.

⁵¹² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 5 Sep 1827. The three men were James Corregal, Tousant Faille, and Canada. Interestingly, Canada was to have been ‘let go’ effective 1 June 1827, a year ahead of his contract date, but for reasons unknown, this did not occur and he was kept on. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 1 Jun 1827.

⁵¹³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 5 Sep 1827.

is finished,”⁵¹⁴ while the third, Corregal, had been returned to his long-standing fishing responsibilities.⁵¹⁵ Inevitably, there was more work than hands to perform it, and MacLeod was again compelled to turn to casual labour for the completion of other tasks.

But even recourse to local help was not always successful. Apparently, by late 1827, some men were no longer willing to man canoes, preferring the work on the York Boats. Why this was so is not entirely clear, but this presented yet another challenge for John MacLeod who recorded, “I am really at a loss how to get down [to York Factory] the furs I have yet on hand. The Indians are not willing to embark in canoes and boats I have none.”⁵¹⁶ The problem resolved itself when a boat from Red River enroute to York Factory stopped in at Norway House and agreed to take on the cargo, but the incident highlighted the increasingly selective nature of potential labourers towards work offered. An effort to augment the food supply of the post by hunting led MacLeod to the expedient of, “... of keeping an Indian hunting ducks which is a very expensive way of living.”⁵¹⁷ Although hunting waterfowl was not a particularly efficient way to gather food through hunting, at least someone could be found to do it.

On the 12th of September, Edward Mowat, one of the ‘freemen’ who had been living at the old Norway House site, arrived back at the main post.⁵¹⁸ He was immediately hired by MacLeod and assigned the job of assisting Corregal with the fishing.⁵¹⁹ This provided some help in meeting the demands for food at the post, the level of which was a cause of continuous concern to MacLeod who complained of the presence

⁵¹⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 14 Sep 1827.

⁵¹⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 10 Sep 1827.

⁵¹⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 17 Aug 1827.

⁵¹⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 11 Sep 1827.

⁵¹⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 12 Sep 1827.

⁵¹⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 14 Sep 1827.

of, "... so many women and children from all quarters left here."⁵²⁰ The additional help with the fishing also allowed the other two men to continue their efforts at the new men's house, the wall plates of which were put on the frame of the building on the 11th of October.⁵²¹ Some additional help came on the 16th of the month when a boat, bound for York Factory from Red River, dropped off one man, Price Isham, who was planning to remain at Norway House for the winter.⁵²² This was a disappointment for John MacLeod as he had been expecting as many as seven men to be assigned to him. In the post journal he recorded his disappointment noting that he was, "... sorry for this as this will derange my fishery."⁵²³ The feared effect on the fishery was immediately realized. On the 20th of October, the catch was only 196 fish. This compared very poorly with the rate in the previous year in which, after daily needs were met, it had only been possible to store 3,500 fish.⁵²⁴ MacLeod noted on the 30th of October that he was, "... much alarmed for last year we used to land about from 700 to 1000 about this time."⁵²⁵

A break in the bad luck with the fishing came with the arrival of November. On the 1st of the month, the nets provided 260 fish.⁵²⁶ The next day, 338 were landed and by the end of the week, almost 700 fish were being caught each day.⁵²⁷ More good news came on the 9th when a boat from Red River delivering pemmican to the depot also

⁵²⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 8 Oct 1827. This problem of discarded wives and children was a recurring theme during the fur trade era. See, for example, Pannekoek, "The Fur Trade and Western Canadian Society," 1987.

⁵²¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 11 Oct 1827.

⁵²² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 16 Oct 1827. In the event, Isham only remained at Norway House until the 25th after which he departed to his own fishery, apparently with 3 or 4 people from his own family that had been at the post. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 25 Oct 1827.

⁵²³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 13 Oct 1827.

⁵²⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 20 Oct 1827.

⁵²⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 30 Oct 1827.

⁵²⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 1 Nov 1827

⁵²⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 7 Nov 1827.

dropped off several men assigned to help with the fishery.⁵²⁸ With this augmentation of personnel, MacLeod was able to project a daily ration requirement of 90 fish per day with a total winter requirement for 17,000 fish, targets which meant that MacLeod felt, “... under the necessity of establishing fisheries elsewhere.”⁵²⁹

Apparently, the mood at Norway House was quite somber at Christmas time in 1827. Certainly the tone of the post journal was subdued compared to previous years. Although there was no work done on Christmas Day itself, the men were being fully employed the day before and the day after the holiday. No spirits were issued, nor was there any mention of additional rations being provided with which to celebrate the occasion.⁵³⁰ There was a ration of rum for New Year’s Day, as well as, “... a share of such eatables as I could afford.”⁵³¹ But the anxiety associated with the tenuous supply of food, perhaps combined with the inability to advance the construction work, seems to have put a serious damper on any festivities as 1827 gave way to 1828.

With the new year came a renewed effort at construction. After a cold snap at the beginning of January, five of the men were turned to the effort.⁵³² For the next few months, these five men were steadily employed, either working on the men’s house that had been started the previous summer or on preparing building materials for the coming season.⁵³³ The other men were generally employed at the various fishing sites, or at any of the numerous small tasks that needed to be done around the post.⁵³⁴

⁵²⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 9 Nov 1827. Included in this group were Laverdure, Boisvert, Dagenai, David Sanderson, Thomas Petit, Brebant and William Flett.

LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 17 Nov 1827.

⁵²⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 5 Dec 1827.

⁵³⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 25 Dec 1827.

⁵³¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 1 Jan 1828.

⁵³² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 14 Jan 1828.

⁵³³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 29 Feb 1828.

⁵³⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 2 Mar 1828.

In March, Norway House had the very good fortune to experience unusually mild weather. This began on the 4th of the month and continued for almost the entire month. By the 11th, the weather was still warm with, "... unusual mild weather at this season of the year thawing all days."⁵³⁵ By the next day, the snow around the post had largely melted and it was recorded that, "... the ground is getting bare."⁵³⁶ The weather finally broke on the 27th with a return to snow and cold until the mild weather, accompanied by rain, returned on the 9th of April.

This month of mild weather resulted in a major windfall for John MacLeod. The warm temperatures and clear skies allowed him to make considerable progress in his effort to amass a stock of building materials in preparation for the rapidly approaching spring building season. In spite of keeping two men at work on the men's house, MacLeod had been able to gather hundreds of logs, at least 200 of which had been sawn into boards, an additional forty five building posts had been squared and 1136 pickets (for the planned palisade) had been sawn, with another 600 squared logs having been prepared for sawing into pickets.⁵³⁷ This was a major accomplishment. In fact so much material had been collected that when the weather did turn cold at the end of March, MacLeod hoped that it would remain so long enough to allow for the logs still in the forest, at least 230 in number,⁵³⁸ to be hauled back to the post on sleds.⁵³⁹ The down side of all this was, of course, that there had been no progress in putting aside fish for the upcoming transport requirements. In an effort to warn the HBC of the problem, on the

⁵³⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 11 Mar 1828.

⁵³⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 12 Mar 1828.

⁵³⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 22 Mar 1828. Two of the men, Tousant Faille and David Sanderson, were singled out for special praise as CT MacLeod formally noted in the post journal that, "I have to remark that there is more work after these two men than any three about the fort." LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 4 Apr 1828.

⁵³⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 17 Mar 1828.

⁵³⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 5 Apr 1828.

13th of April, MacLeod, "... went to some of the Indians in the vicinity here to try and get one to bring intelligence ... of the State of the Depot here respecting provisions but could not find any that would venture to go."⁵⁴⁰

By the end of April, it was apparent that Norway House was experiencing a very early spring. John MacLeod observed that, "... this is really the earliest and finest spring I ever saw in since I came to this country."⁵⁴¹ So mild was the weather that on the 26th one man was assigned the task of digging a ditch around the post for the eventual installation of the pickets that would form the palisade.⁵⁴² The next day, MacLeod recorded that, "... 2 Indians came down the river in a canoe today, the first craft I saw upon water this season."⁵⁴³

With the arrival of May and continued good weather, John MacLeod laid out a very aggressive construction schedule, with the clear intention of making substantial – and visible – progress before the arrival of the transport brigades. This was only possible thanks to the warm weather that had allowed him to assemble so many building materials in March and April. The scheduled work, which was expected to take all of May to complete, included three men assigned to put up the palisade, fully 650 feet in circumference, with another man assisting them for any additional digging required, and two men assigned to complete the new house, "... which is intended for the Gentlemen superintending the general business ...,"⁵⁴⁴ All the while, the fishing was to be pursued,

⁵⁴⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 13 Apr 1828.

⁵⁴¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 24 Apr 1828.

⁵⁴² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 26 Apr 1828.

⁵⁴³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 27 Apr 1828.

⁵⁴⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 1 May 1828.

MacLeod expressing the hope that, "... our fisheries promise to be more productive than they have been."⁵⁴⁵

Astonishingly, by the 24th of May, the men putting up the palisade had completed the work, having installed 1,450 pickets to surround the post with another 600 added to bring the new house inside the wall⁵⁴⁶ With the palisade completed, attention was turned to putting the front gate in place and with the construction of a stone fireplace and chimney in the new house.⁵⁴⁷ MacLeod was clearly proud of what had been accomplished, especially in the last few months and especially considering how bleak things had appeared at the beginning of the year. On the final page of the 1827-1828 post journal, signed off on the 1st of June, MacLeod wrote, "I hope that those Gentlemen superintending the General Business will find that the men here have not been kept idle and that the affairs of the post have been conducted to their satisfaction." With the summer transport season about to open, MacLeod would not have long to wait to find out what his bosses thought of his work.

Apparently, John MacLeod had been hedging his bets with respect to the purpose of the new house that had been built. Although it had been routinely referred to as the 'new men's house' while it was being built, on the 3rd of June it was now somewhat grandiosely styled, "the Governor's House."⁵⁴⁸ Presumably, MacLeod had wanted to ensure that the house was grand enough to merit the new title before it was so designated. Now complete, and sporting a fine stone fireplace and chimney and two internal partitions, MacLeod was probably very pleased to be able to showcase the building to

⁵⁴⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 1 May 1828.

⁵⁴⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 24 May 1828.

⁵⁴⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1827-28. 28 May 1828.

⁵⁴⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 3 Jun 1828.

Governor Simpson, who MacLeod well knew would be visiting again that summer.

MacLeod seems to have had a clear understanding of how the status of his post could be enhanced by associating a building there with the Governor himself.

The arrival of Mr. McTavish in a light canoe from York Factory on the 5th of June marked the opening of the 1828 season.⁵⁴⁹ A few more canoes arrived over the next few days but, with the arrival of the fifteen boats of the Saskatchewan brigade on the 11th of June, Norway House assumed its now-familiar summer aspect of a bustling town.⁵⁵⁰ The much anticipated visit by Governor Simpson finally occurred on the 19 of July as he made his way to the Columbia district for an inspection visit.⁵⁵¹ George Bryce's description of the arrival of Governor Simpson conveyed the grandeur of the moment,

The arrival at Norway House was a fête. Before reaching the Fort the party landed on the shore, and paying much attention to their toilets, put themselves in proper trim. In full career the canoes dashed through the deep rocky gorge leading to the Fort, the Governor's canoe, had on its high prow, conspicuous the French guide, who for the time gave commands. The Governor always took his Highland piper with him, and now there pealed forth from the canoe the strident strains of the bagpipes, while from the second canoe sounded the shrill call of the chief factor's bugle. As the party approached the Fort they saw the Union Jack with its magic letters H.B.C. floating from the tall flag-staff of Norway pine erected on Signal Hill. Bands of Indians from all directions were assembled to meet the great chief or "Kitche Okema," as they called him. Ceasing the pipes and bugle, the voyageurs sang with lively spirit one of their boat songs, to the great delight of their old friends, the Indians.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 5 Jun 1828.

⁵⁵⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 11 Jun 1828. Included in the cargo of the 15 boats were 204 packs of buffalo robes.

⁵⁵¹ Simpson had passed through Norway House on the night of 15-16 June on his way from Red River to York Factory, but he had not had time to look over the new post. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 16 Jun 1828.

⁵⁵² Dr. George Bryce, *The Romantic Settlement of Lork Selkirk's Colonists: The Pioneers of Manitoba*, (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1909), 191.

When he arrived, Simpson was able to inspect an establishment that was considerably more elaborate and impressive than anything that had existed at any of the previous Jack River and Norway House sites. As described by Malcolm MacLeod, son of the post's Chief Trader John MacLeod and grandson of the previous Chief Trader Peter Pruden, Norway House was,

... as large as an ordinary sized village. Built somewhat like a fort, but with only a comparatively slight projection at the ends in the front facing the river, in place of the "bastions" of the regular forts. The inclosing wall was a huge board-looking picket fence, perfectly close, from twelve to fifteen feet high, and formed a square of about a 150 yards on a side, with two gates, one in front, and the other in rear. This enclosure contained two large stores or warehouses, each about sixty feet in length, one on each side on entering, and in the middle of the square, was the main row of buildings over 200 feet in length, and comprising the dwelling of the officer in charge, a large hall forty or fifty feet long, for the great general council, and for the Governor, there was a special house, if I remember aright, there was also a building for clerks, and the kitchen (a large affair) and other buildings, offices, workshop, the whole on the same scale ...⁵⁵³

On the 20th of July 1828, the day after arriving to inspect Chief Trader MacLeod's work at Norway House, Governor Simpson, apparently quite pleased with the progress at the depot, fulsomely replenished his supplies from the post's stores.⁵⁵⁴ On the 21st, Simpson and his party, traveling in two 'light' canoes manned by nine men each, left Norway House and continued on his way to the Pacific coast.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ McLeod, *Peace River*, 50.

⁵⁵⁴ When Simpson's two canoes left York Factory they were only lightly loaded with provisions carrying only 3 bags of pemmican, 1 keg of tinned beef, 1 bag of biscuits and 1 bag of bread (this prepared bread is itself interesting as flour was usually issued to crews). In contrast, the boats were liberally supplied with alcohol including 2 kegs of spirits (i.e., rum) and 2 kegs of porter. At Norway House further provisions were taken on including such delicacies as ham, cheese, mustard, pork, butter and fine biscuits as well as the usual pemmican and flour. More alcohol was also taken on including 5 kegs of port wine, 3 kegs of Madeira and another keg of spirits. The light provisioning demonstrates the degree to which it was possible to count on the depots for replenishment, and goes a long way in explaining how Simpson was able to travel at the great speeds for which he was famous. McLeod, *Peace River*, 4.

⁵⁵⁵ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 21 Jun 1828.

Through June, July and into August, the business of Norway House followed the pattern set over the last three years. As boats and canoes arrived, crews went about their business at the depot and eventually departed, the population fluctuated up and down, with between one and two hundred visitors almost always at the post. In addition to the HBC personnel assigned to the brigades or making their way to and from various posts, there were numerous ‘freemen,’ First Nations people and Métis in this constantly changing group of people.⁵⁵⁶

What had materially changed at Norway House though, was the presence of a group of people who had, since the previous summer, taken up more or less permanent residence at, but not in, the post. These people, “... men and families about the fort 68 in number ...,”⁵⁵⁷ were, in part, the people that had been relocated to old Norway House in the previous year. But with all of the activity around the summer trade and transport season, people had moved back into the vicinity of the main post. At the same time, the Norway House permanent staff was again drastically reduced, for 1828 to only the chief trader and three men.⁵⁵⁸ Two of the men were employed in the main store, “... turning and overhauling the provisions in the depot keeps the two men here almost in constant employment.”⁵⁵⁹ The third man, the fisherman James Corregal, continued to work the fishery.⁵⁶⁰

But there was still plenty of other work to do around the post. Although any further building was temporarily on hold, there was a steady need for people to assist

⁵⁵⁶ On the 23rd of July for example, among the many people at the post were 14 “halfbreeds.” On the same day, numerous “Indians” were present, the two groups being part of canoe brigades associated with some of the HBC posts. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 23 Jun 1828.

⁵⁵⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 1 Jul 1828.

⁵⁵⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 12 Jun 1828.

⁵⁵⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 6 Jul 1828.

⁵⁶⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 9 Jul 1828.

with the fishing and, perhaps even more critical, the handling of freight at the depot. As in the previous summer, it was the ‘freeman’ and Aboriginal population around the post that was providing that labour. On the 8th of July for example, a group of six men who had been employed in the store, completed the cross-loading of the four boats of the ‘White Governor’s’ brigade, having handled, on the final day alone, more than 250 ‘pieces’ of freight. With their work done MacLeod, in part payment, “... gave these Indians 1 gallon spirits and 2 tobacco.”⁵⁶¹ Still more men were hired to continue gathering building materials. On the 12th John MacLeod, “... sent some Indians to raise bark for covering the store.”⁵⁶² When 200 pieces of bark were duly delivered, the men were given, “... 14 pints spirits as part payment for the bark.”⁵⁶³ On the next day, MacLeod, “... paid the Indians for some more bark [but noted that] this is a very expensive covering for it requires to be renewed so often.”⁵⁶⁴

Another man was hired to assist Corregal with the constant chore of fishing.⁵⁶⁵ Others were hired simply to haul the nets from time to time, sometimes assisted by members of passing crews. But it was not always possible to get any work from the passing brigades, sometimes because they refused to do the work but sometimes simply because their time at Norway House was a rare opportunity to rest after a long period of exertion or to gather strength in anticipation of another effort. In June 1828 for example, the Methye Portage crews were not available, “... as the men of this place are upon the eve of starting soon no work can be got of them ...”⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 8 Jul 1828.

⁵⁶² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 12 Jul 1828.

⁵⁶³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 15 Jul 1828.

⁵⁶⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 16 Jul 1828.

⁵⁶⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 10 Jul 1828.

⁵⁶⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 5 Jul 1828.

Of course many of the people had come to, or stayed at, Norway House in search of work on the boats. By the middle of the summer, most of those types of jobs would have been filled. This was so much the case that when, in late July, John MacLeod tried to assemble crews to collect some cargo left by the Swan River brigade at Berens River, he found that he could not, "... muster sufficient numbers to man the boats, as some of them are off in different quarters voyaging."⁵⁶⁷

With the end of the 1828 trading and transport season, Norway House again returned to relative calm. During the season, more than a hundred craft (eighty five boats and twenty four canoes), had passed through the site, generating a daily population that averaged around 150 for June and July and close to 100 for August. These numbers were very close to those of the previous three years, and in fact, would change very little over the next decade. But the character of the work at Norway House had fundamentally shifted.

Since 1825, the post personnel had struggled with the competing – and at times mutually exclusive – tasks of building the new depot and conducting a fishery that would feed not only the permanent staff and visitors to the post, but would also help provision the transport brigades. By 1828, the first task had largely been achieved but the second had been a dismal failure. Not only had the fishery not provided rations for the brigades, there were times when the men in charge of the post wondered if it would be possible to survive the winter.

However, with the completion of the two dwelling houses, the two stores, the kitchen, the blacksmith's shop, the finishing of the 'Governor's House' and the erection of the palisade, the post now had the infrastructure to fulfill its assigned role as the

⁵⁶⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 21 Jul 1828.

principal inland depot for the transport system. Additionally, by 1828 the idea that the Norway House fishery might be able to provision the transport brigades had been effectively shelved. The targets for the fishery had, since 1827, been set based only on the numbers of fish that would be required to sustain the post and feed its many visitors.

Perhaps even more importantly, beginning as early as 1826 but routinely by 1828, the post was hiring casual labour and contracting for 'piece work' from amongst those people who had gathered around the place. In the summer of 1827, these people had been encouraged to relocate to the old Norway House site at Mossy Point so that they could conduct their own fishery, but by the following summer, the bulk of them were once again back at the new Norway House. In the spring and summer of 1828 this source of labour had proved critical in getting the post built and ready for the summer season and in sustaining it over the summer. With the decision to stay on in the fall of 1828, the nucleus of a new community had formed. Significantly, the people who remained at Norway House were not from a single community that had transplanted itself wholesale from another location. Rather, they were mostly individuals and small family groups that had come from a variety of disparate and sometimes distant locations up the Nelson and Hayes rivers and along the shores of Lake Winnipeg. With the construction of the depot more or less complete, and a diminished requirement for fishing, the question remained as to what these people would do for a living at Norway House if they had indeed made the choice to settle there, keeping in mind that there was still neither fur, nor game, nor agriculture in the area.

Chapter Four.

Servicing Norway House, 1828-1836: employment opportunities at the Great Depot.

Compared to the previous three years, when the pressure to get Norway House built and operating as a depot was set against angst over the state of the fishery, the mood in the fall of 1828, as reflected in the post journal, was positively light-hearted. With the building plan more or less complete, the four men assigned to the post carried on with the routine depot work through the fall and into the winter. Additionally, since John MacLeod had set aside the notion of Norway House provisioning the transport brigades with salted or dried fish, there was nothing like the same amount of effort being put into the fisheries. Still, through the fall of 1828 and into the early spring of 1829, the men at Norway House spent the bulk of their time either preparing lumber for further construction in the next year or at the fishery. Although there was steady reporting on the fishing activities, the anxiety that was palpable in the previous years was simply not present.⁵⁶⁸ The contrast with the previous years' journals is striking.

The main issue that elicited detailed and running commentary in the post journal that fall was the poor quality of the new personnel that had been sent to winter at the site to assist with fishing.⁵⁶⁹ On the 13th of October some of the men arrived at Norway House but John MacLeod was convinced that, "... these 6 Orkney men who came in the

⁵⁶⁸ There were however, concerns related to the disease within the local Aboriginal population. In July the Chief Trader recorded that, "I could not get the Indians to start today as so many of their women and children are sick." LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29, 23 Jul 1828.

⁵⁶⁹ The varying quality of personnel was a constant problem for the HBC and, "With poorer men, difficulties arose to the allocation of men between the posts. York Factory chose the best men, Norway House the next best, and the other departments received the remnant of lazy men and cripples." Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 316.

canoe would never have reached this had it not for 2 Indians ... sent to guide them.”⁵⁷⁰
 On the 23rd two more men arrived to join, “... the 8 porkeaters I have here already.”⁵⁷¹
 The “green hands”⁵⁷² seem not to have been particularly valued with two of them, Spence and Wilson, considered, “... not fit for sawery from what I have seen of their work they only spoil wood.”⁵⁷³ By late December, MacLeod had concluded that, “... these young porkeaters are only a burthen upon the place particularly as I have no leather to rigg them out with against the cold.”⁵⁷⁴

Meanwhile, some enterprising local people had set up a fishing weir in the vicinity of Jack River and in late October they reported that they had caught about two thousand fish.⁵⁷⁵ This was potentially very good news. By about the same time, the post’s own fishery had only managed to put away approximately 3,500 fish.⁵⁷⁶
 Unfortunately, when the fish were finally collected from the Jack River entrepreneurs, the 3,000 fish that they had collected were found to be inedible. John MacLeod recorded laconically that, “... they may serve for dogs.”⁵⁷⁷ Still, this independent effort at fishing for the express purpose of supplying the HBC post was of considerable significance for the long-term. Although tripping, hunting and casual labour were providing a steady stream of employment opportunities for local people, the fishery was the first ‘industry’

⁵⁷⁰ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 13 Oct 1828.

⁵⁷¹ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 23 Oct 1828. “Porkeater (from the French *mangeur de larde*) was the mildly pejorative term originally applied to men hired to crew the canoes operating on the Great Lakes route between Montreal and the Grand Portage. Those men who continued beyond Grand Portage, and later only those who had passed the Methye Portage, were respectfully referred to as *homme du nord*. Parker, *Emporium of the North*, 162. According to Cowie, “[...] unless one had made the trip creditably to “the Long Portage” he was not counted and could not without challenge have the right and title to proclaim himself on festive occasions to be a man – ‘Je suis un homme.’” Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 136.

⁵⁷² LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 25 Oct 1828.

⁵⁷³ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 18 Nov 1828.

⁵⁷⁴ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 22 Dec 1828.

⁵⁷⁵ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 21 Oct 1828.

⁵⁷⁶ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 27 Oct 1828.

⁵⁷⁷ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 29 Oct 1828.

that offered the prospect of full-time – if seasonal – employment. The fact that MacLeod chose to accept the almost useless catch from the first year's effort made it clear that he recognized the long-term potential of the independent fishery and was willing to encourage it.

Although the new 'porkeaters' were both a disappointment and a source of frustration to John MacLeod, the same could not be said for the other newcomer to the post in the fall of 1828, the carpenter John Ritch. Ritch had been sent to Norway House to build York Boats, and his arrival marked the beginning of a new and important role assigned to the post. Over the next few years, Norway House was to become an important site for the building and repair of boats of all kinds used in the fur trade.

Ritch was immediately welcomed at the post.⁵⁷⁸ As soon as he arrived he leaned heavily into his task of building boats and was routinely praised by MacLeod for his work. The first boat was completed on the 20th of January 1829 and, although it had taken 66 days to build, MacLeod remarked that, "... it must be observed he had little or no assistance for the most part of the time ... he certainly could not be more constant to his work than he has been ..."⁵⁷⁹ Even when the carpenter did complain about something, MacLeod saw it in a positive light noting that, on the 27th of January, "this is the first day I heard the carpenter complain of the cold however it did not prevent him from going on with his work ..."⁵⁸⁰ By the end of March, the carpenter had completed three boats and was starting on a fourth.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 23 Oct 1828.

⁵⁷⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 21 Jan 1829.

⁵⁸⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 27 Jan 1829.

⁵⁸¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 30 Mar 1829.

MacLeod's praise of Ritch was in sharp contrast to the continuing complaints directed at the 'porkeaters' who, in addition to being perceived as unskilled, were also poorly prepared for the climate into which they had been sent. MacLeod could not employ the men effectively because, "... these poor fellows are so badly off for leather that I cannot send them for the house without the risk of freezing."⁵⁸² Of the ten additional men wintering at Norway House – and consuming rations there – only the carpenter was proving to be of much use.

Other tasks were now providing steady work for people who had established themselves around the recently completed post. As had been the case in the last few years, the job of carrying the winter express was contracted out. Two were hired on the 8th of January to carry the mail and returned to Norway House on the 5th of March, MacLeod noting that, "the two Indians whom I sent off 8th January with the winter express via Cumberland arrived back today after being the length of Carlton."⁵⁸³ There was also work hauling freight by sled between some of the posts. At least six men were hired as "winter road haulers," delivering 167 pieces of freight to Norway House.⁵⁸⁴

More employment opportunities were generated when it was again decided to try to advance the old notion of the winter road. Two men were hired to begin cutting timber and, on the 25th of March, 12 logs were delivered, "... the first of the winter road transport."⁵⁸⁵ Two more men were hired to help lay out the route for the road and measure its length, with the men reporting back, "... of the distance between Black River and the Big Winipic [and] were to try and find a shorter road from the Little Winipic and

⁵⁸² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 15 Jan 1829.

⁵⁸³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 5 Mar 1829.

⁵⁸⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 12 Apr 1829.

⁵⁸⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 25 Mar 1829.

this then the present.”⁵⁸⁶ On the 31st, two more men were hired, “... to mark the road from this to the Black River in Lake Winipic.”⁵⁸⁷

With the approach of spring, the rhythm of Norway House again shifted to preparations for the coming transport season. Stores were organized, loads were assembled and freight was shifted according to the plans for the new year. The typically dry late spring weather once again provided a reminder both of the fragility of the establishment and its recent history. On the 7th of April there was a serious scare when, “... our fort was very near being burnt today, but fortunately I happened to perceive it in time before the fire which emanated from a spark falling on the bark covering the house ...”⁵⁸⁸ The danger of fire was a constant in the life of Norway House.

The spring of 1829 was also witness to a qualitative improvement in the methods of construction employed at the site. All of the post’s buildings, with the exception of the canoe ‘shade,’ had been built of squared logs laid horizontally in typical ‘log-cabin’ fashion. The roofs were covered with tree bark and the exterior walls were mudded to seal them from the weather and to keep in the heat. However, on the 24th of May, “Canada and Dagenai began to cover the Governor’s House with weatherboard.”⁵⁸⁹ This consisted of covering the exterior of the building with overlapping planks, the purpose of which was to produce a much more effective weather seal for the structure. It also had the effect of giving the building an altogether more finished and attractive appearance. This technique was eventually applied to all of the Norway House buildings, giving the post the distinctive appearance that is apparent in all of the early photographs of the post.

⁵⁸⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 27 Mar 1829.

⁵⁸⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 31 Mar 1829.

⁵⁸⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 7 Apr 1829.

⁵⁸⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16a, Norway House – Post Journal 1828-29. 24 May 1829.

The decision to apply weatherboarding to the Governor's House – and eventually to the other buildings – underscored the commitment to steady improvement that was a hallmark of the men assigned to the charge of Norway House.



Figure 21. The technique of applying the weatherboarding and its attendant corner boards is well illustrated by a photograph of corner details on an 1830's building at Norway House.
John A. Hussey. Fort Vancouver Historic Structures Report, Historical Data, Volume 1, June 1972. U.S. Department of the Interior.

With the arrival of the first boats in early June, the pattern of summer activity at the post took on its usual form. The volume of traffic in the summer of 1829 was almost exactly the same as in the previous summer with one important exception. The amount of 'country goods' – goods produced at the Red River settlement – being delivered to the depot was starting to climb significantly. Partly this was a result of the increasing dependence of the transport brigades on pemmican produced by the Red River-based Métis hunting organization. By 1829, the hunts were already producing almost 750,000

pounds of pemmican per year.⁵⁹⁰ Although much of this would have been sold at Red River or consumed by the Métis themselves, a sizeable portion of this was shipped to Norway House for use by the transport brigades. That year, approximately 650 ‘pieces’ of pemmican – weighing some 58,500 lbs – were delivered from Red River to the depot.⁵⁹¹

The increase in the delivery of ‘country goods’ to Norway House was also a result of the efforts by the HBC, efforts that had begun as early as 1824, to support the agricultural development of Red River by purchasing provisions from the colony. The produce was sent to Norway House for use by boat crews and for distribution to other posts. Even at this point the amounts were considerable and included: “200 cwt of kiln dried flour, 13 cwt of hulled barley, 100 bushels of pease [sic], 100 bushels of unhulled barley, 1000 bushels of Indian corn and 20 kegs of butter (60 lbs/keg).” In 1829, the amounts were increased and other items were added to the orders from Red River. In that year the order included: “300 bushels of barley, 500 cwt of flour, 200 bushels of unhulled Indian corn and 600 Liquor kegs filled with flour.”⁵⁹²

Although he did not know it at the time, the winter of 1829 – 30 was to be the last for John MacLeod at Norway House. Inexplicably, MacLeod did not keep a post journal through the summer of 1829, his last entry for the summer being made on the 1st of June when he recorded the arrival of Presque Cookoo with dispatches sent by Governor Simpson.⁵⁹³ When he took up the pen again on the 30th of October, he briefly noted, “...

⁵⁹⁰ McKillip, *A Métis Metier*, Summary Table.

⁵⁹¹ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 239.

⁵⁹² Morton, *A History*, 637.

⁵⁹³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16, Norway House – Post Journal 1829-30. 1 Jun 1829.

this is the first stress I put on a journal since the month of July.”⁵⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the season passed quite uneventfully, the one remarkable thing being the early freeze-up that autumn. MacLeod noted that, “the ice set in this season 20 days earlier than last year and earlier than I have seen since I came to Norway House.”⁵⁹⁵ The main effect of this was that the early ice, “... deprived us of making a fall fishing and consequently will occasion much trouble and expence.”⁵⁹⁶ As in the previous winter, the lack of any ambitious building plans meant that the post’s personnel concentrated on the routine of fishing, logging and increasingly, boat building. During the winter of 1829-30, the carpenter completed another eight boats.⁵⁹⁷

The summer of 1830 passed with no significant changes in the routine of the post. The traffic through the depot continued to inch up with approximately 100 boats and another twenty five canoes staging through Norway House that summer. The summer population also climbed slightly with an average of 175 people at the post each day in June and July and almost 100 in August.⁵⁹⁸ As was now common practice, the numerous boats and canoes were manned from various sources depending on the specific requirements of the season. For example, Norway House was to receive 300 pieces of freight from York Factory for the 1831 outfit. These were to be forwarded from the post in five boats, on or before the 20th of June. Three of the boats were to be manned by people engaged for the trip (eight men each). The other two boats were to be manned by eighteen servants (not including the guide), three of whom were to be added to the staff

⁵⁹⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16, Norway House – Post Journal 1829-30. 30 Oct 1829.

⁵⁹⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16, Norway House – Post Journal 1829-30. 30 Oct 1829.

⁵⁹⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/16, Norway House – Post Journal 1829-30. 30 Oct 1829.

⁵⁹⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1829-30. 10 May 1830f.

⁵⁹⁸ Norway House Report on District, 1831. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/4f.

of the Mackenzie's District.⁵⁹⁹ Another 250 pieces were to be forwarded in four boats to Portage la Loche by piece-work freighters. It was also "hoped" that 200 pieces of freight, shipped to Norway House from York Factory during the summer, could be transported to their final destination at Fort Daer using the winter road. To that end, Norway House was directed to continue to support the winter road building project; once again, provided that it did not impose any serious inconvenience to the regular operations of the depot.⁶⁰⁰ The post was also directed to expedite the winter express, "... by means of Indians or otherwise,"⁶⁰¹ so that any private letters could reach their respective destinations before the spring. The express also served as the means by which corrected accounts for the season could be forwarded to York Factory.

The big change in the summer of 1830 was the departure of John MacLeod on the 30th of August and his replacement by Donald Ross on the 13th of September.⁶⁰² This marked the beginning of an era as Ross was ultimately to remain in charge of the post and its associated district for more than two decades, not taking leave of the post until

⁵⁹⁹ Often, these seasonal freight contracts also presented individuals with opportunities for permanent employment. McKenzie's district was authorized to engage members of the crews as full-time HBC servants, "[...] should the need arise due to the retirement of other personnel." Minutes of the Northern Council, held on 3 July 1830 at York Factory, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 641-56.

⁶⁰⁰ Minutes of the Northern Council, held on 3 July 1830 at York Factory, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 641-56.

⁶⁰¹ Minutes of the Northern Council, held on 3 July 1830 at York Factory, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 641-56.

⁶⁰² LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/19, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. Journal binder notes. John Ballenden, Clerk, was temporarily in charge of the post from 30 August to 13 September. During Ballenden's brief stint as the chief at Norway House he was host to Governor Simpson and his wife as they made their way to Red River from York Factory. Even with a York Boat, Simpson was able to make record time, "[...] Governor Simpson with Mrs. Simpson and servants arrived from York Factory with 40 pieces on board having only been twelve days on the voyage." LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/18, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 8 Sep 1830.

1851. For the remainder of the period covered by this study, it was Donald Ross who was responsible for Norway House.⁶⁰³



Figure 22. Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factor [Donald Ross](#).
From an oil painting by Paul Kane, 1846.

When Ross arrived at Norway House he found, "... Mr. Ballenden in charge and with him the following men belonging to the district vis, Edward Mowatt, John Ritch –

⁶⁰³ Donald Ross was born in the Hebrides, Scotland, around 1797. He joined the HBC in 1816 and acted for a time as secretary to Governor Simpson. After being promoted to the rank of Chief Trader in 1829 he was posted to Norway House. Glynder Williams, ed., *Hudson's Bay Miscellany 1670-1870*, (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1975), 198, n.2., cited in, Warren Sinclair, *The Sinclair Family History Archives*, 1993.

Carpenter, Charles Eno *dit* Canada and James Corrigan – fisherman.”⁶⁰⁴ Although he only had these four men permanently assigned to the post, it was clear that he was also arriving with a specific job to do. The same day that he arrived he noted that, “... most of the few Indians attached to this place I found lingering about the fort. I mean to employ them in assisting the men to haul the boat wood.”⁶⁰⁵ In addition to his other routine duties, Ross was to put considerable emphasis on developing the boat building capacity of Norway House. Almost immediately, this generated new and steady work for local people.⁶⁰⁶

On the 15th of September Ross, “... sent off all the servants connected with the establishment with as many Indians as I could collect to carry the timbers [for the boats] to the river side in order that they may be transported to this place as soon as possible.”⁶⁰⁷ The next day five more men were hired, and under the control of Edward Mowatt, “... a party of Indians got the wood cut down by Ritch and Canada for the last three days hauled out to the water side and brought home a boat load of it.”⁶⁰⁸ These five men were fully employed at this work until the 1st of October.⁶⁰⁹ In addition to its role as a center for building new boats, Norway House retained its responsibility as a repair site for

⁶⁰⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 13 Sep 1830. This represented an increase of one from the original instructions for the year which directed that Norway House would have a staff of three men for the summer and winter. Minutes of the Northern Council, held on 3 July 1830 at York Factory, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 641-56.

⁶⁰⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 13 Sep 1830.

⁶⁰⁶ That same year, posts were encouraged to engage, “strong, healthy half-breed lads not under 14 years of age as apprentices to be employed with those tradesmen [employed at the post], for the purpose of acquiring their business, on a term of not less than 7 years at the following wages which are considered sufficient to provide them with clothes and other personal necessities, viz: the first two years at £8 per annum, the next two years at £10 per annum, the following two years at £12 per annum and the last year at £15 per annum, making for the seven years apprenticeship an allowance of £75 [...]” Although it is not clear that Donald Ross immediately took advantage of this, it certainly represented another long-term employment opportunity. Minutes of the Northern Council, 3 July 1830, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 641-56.

⁶⁰⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/18, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 15 Sep 1830.

⁶⁰⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 16 Sep 1830.

⁶⁰⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 1 Oct 1830.

existing craft. In 1830, the post received a supply of fifty fathoms of, "... best bottom and side bark for canoe repairs."⁶¹⁰ There was other work as well. On the 15th of September, twelve men, "... a party of Indians,"⁶¹¹ had been sent out with two boats to collect firewood for the post. The freeman Huggy Isham, now a permanent fixture at Norway House, was hired, along with his son, to conduct a fishery over the winter.⁶¹²

As in previous years, additional men were sent to the depot for the winter. In the fall of 1830, the group consisted of nine men who were sent to the post, "... to be in readiness for Portage La Loche next spring,"⁶¹³ – the challenge of the Methye Portage was still generating the need for special measures. The new men were put to work building a kiln for making charcoal⁶¹⁴ and, within a few days, were assigned to assist in the construction of a new store.⁶¹⁵ The project to build a new store was typical of the energetic Ross who was forever striving to make improvements to his charge. These constant improvements naturally generated a recurring demand for labour.⁶¹⁶ At the Northern Council meeting held at York Factory that year, Donald Ross was also directed to assist renewed efforts to advance the old winter road project by providing, "... such

⁶¹⁰ Minutes of the Northern Council, 3 July 1830, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 641-56.

⁶¹¹ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 15 Sep 1830.

⁶¹² LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 5 Oct 1830.

⁶¹³ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 2 Oct 1830.

⁶¹⁴ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 6 Oct 1830.

⁶¹⁵ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 9 Oct 1830.

⁶¹⁶ The effect of the rising demand for local labour contrasted sharply with policies that were being put into place in the United States at this time where the Aboriginal populations were seen as an obstacle to settlement. Congressional Documents and Debates. Statutes at Large, 21st Congress, 1st Session, Ch. 148. 1830. An Act to provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river Mississippi. May 28, 1830. A similar sentiment was expressed in Canada when Sir Francis Bond Head, reporting with respect to Upper Canada, noted that, "[...] the greatest kindness we can perform towards these intelligent, simple-minded people, is to remove and fortify them as much as possible from all communications with the whites." Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 253.

facilities ... towards the execution thereof as may subject the business to no material inconvenience.”⁶¹⁷ In the event, no progress was made on the road.

Arrived, House 5th January, 1836

To the Governor
Chief Factors & Chief Traders
Northern Department

Gentlemen

The Periodical packet from York Factory, and Red River having again met here affords me an opportunity of addressing you a few lines which I embrace the chance of importance to communicate.

As far as the Paragraph in Chief Trader Miles's letter (respecting the men intended for Portage La Loche next spring) relates to that to this place, I have only to observe, that there are no steersmen wintering and but very few middlemen, Isham who used to go in the capacity of a Steersman is lame, and as for the Indians hired for that trip last summer, one of them is wintering in MacKenzie's River, another is at Moose Lake, and a third says he will not go again in consequence of ill treatment he received from some of the men of that Brigade last summer particularly from one Laverdure.

Figure 23. This is a portion of a letter sent by John MacLeod to the Governor, Chief Factors & Chief Traders Northern Department on 5 January 1830 and carried by the winter packet. In it, MacLeod refers to the problem of finding men for the Methye Portage (Portage La Loche), “... there are no steersmen wintering and but very few middlemen, Isham who used to go in the capacity of a Steersman is lame, and as for the Indians hired for that trip last Summer, one of them is wintering in MacKenzie's River, another is at Moose Lake, and a third says he will not go again in consequence of ill treatment he received from some of the men of that Brigade last summer particularly from one Laverdure.” Sold privately for \$2,750 by Donald Heald Original Antique Books, Prints and Maps of New York City.

⁶¹⁷ Northern Council, held on 3 July 1830 at York Factory, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 641-56.

Ross also determined to make another attempt at establishing a productive fishing operation to support the post. By the 15th of October, he had, "... two regular fisheries established, one at the old fort of Jack River and the other in the small lake near this place, each of them working 10 nets."⁶¹⁸ Although he was initially somewhat concerned with his ability to feed the post personnel noting, "... I have no less than 40 mouths to feed men, women and children whose daily rations exceed 80 whitefish ...,"⁶¹⁹ it was not long before his fishing arrangements began to bear fruit. Within a few days the nets were bringing in fish at a brisk pace, the two sites combining to generate an average daily haul of some 600-700 fish.⁶²⁰

By Christmas of 1830, Donald Ross could reflect on quite a successful beginning to his new charge. The post was still not generating any significant trade in furs and even the minimal quota of 120 skins that had been in place since 1826 was not being met. But his fishery was outperforming his predecessor's by a considerable margin, his overwintering men were not the burden that the 'porkeaters' had been to John MacLeod, and the boat building was moving forward at a good pace. The target for the 1830-31 period set at eight finished boats and already in October, "Ritch finished the stem and stern posts for [the] 8 boats."⁶²¹ To celebrate the holiday, Ross gave the men a pint of rum each, "... to enjoy themselves."⁶²² This they no doubt did. New Year's Eve was also occasion for "a little rum" and a treat of, "... 2 lbs flour, 1 lb grease, 1 quart rough barley to each of the men as extra allowance for tomorrow."⁶²³

⁶¹⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 15 Oct 1830.

⁶¹⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 17 Oct 1830.

⁶²⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 20 Oct 1830.

⁶²¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 2 Oct 1830.

⁶²² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 25 Dec 1830.

⁶²³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 31 Dec 1830.

In early 1831, the winter routine, including the conduct of the express runs, continued apace.⁶²⁴ By the middle of March, the boat building was advancing very well. On the 16th of the month, Ross was able to record that the carpenter, "... got our fifth boat off the stocks."⁶²⁵ All of this boat work also generated an increased requirement for the various metal fittings needed on a York Boat. By the spring of 1831, this meant that an additional man was assigned to assist the blacksmith Marion at the forge, "... making iron works for the new boats."⁶²⁶ Inevitably, this meant that there would be an increased consumption of charcoal and additional demands for labour both to operate the kilns and to supply the wood to feed them. A new construction plan was also being developed, a sketch of which - drawn by Donald Ross and dated December 1830 - was included in a special report sent to Governor Simpson (Figure 24).⁶²⁷ By the 9th of April work in accordance with this new plan had already begun as men had, "... finished cutting the logs for the stable."⁶²⁸ The problem of storing gunpowder had also been addressed in Ross' plan and by the 13th of May more men were employed, "... preparing wood for the magazine."⁶²⁹ By the 21st of the month the work was complete as, "Canada and his party finished the powder magazine which has occupied them three weeks."⁶³⁰ This crew was immediately assigned to build the stable.⁶³¹

⁶²⁴ Where possible, company personnel on other business would also carry the mail. For example, in 1831, mail was delivered to Norway House by Mr. Erlandson and Mr. Faires who were traveling in the company of Nicol Finlayson and arrived at Norway House on 22 June 1831. *Northern Quebec and Labrador Journals and Correspondence: 1819-35*, K.G. Davies, ed., (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1963), 156.

⁶²⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House - Post Journal 1830-31. 16 Mar 1831. The 'stocks' were the frames used for holding the boat while it was being built. Boats came 'off the stocks' when their basic structure was complete.

⁶²⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House - Post Journal 1830-31. 19 Mar 1831.

⁶²⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), D.4/125, fo. 99. Ross to Simpson, December 1830.

⁶²⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House - Post Journal 1830-31. 9 Apr 1831.

⁶²⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House - Post Journal 1830-31. 13 May 1831.

⁶³⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House - Post Journal 1830-31. 21 May 1831.

⁶³¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House - Post Journal 1830-31. 23 May 1831.

In the middle of May of 1831 there was yet another incident involving fire. Fortunately, although the house in question was destroyed by the blaze, the incident ended without any injuries to personnel, nor was there any general conflagration among the post's buildings as had occurred in 1824. What the report of the incident did highlight though was the extended nature of the community – or communities – that now existed at Norway House. The house, located immediately behind the rear palisade of the 'fort,' was occupied by two of the men who were spending the winter at the post. Although the men were in the house, they were apparently asleep and it was not they who discovered the fire. Rather, "... the greatest part of it was in flames when it was most favorably discovered by two half-breed lads (Charles Isham and Deschamps) about midnight as they were coming home from visiting the Indian tents where they had passed the evening."⁶³²

The house that burned was part of the HBC establishment *per se*, and was occupied by salaried employees of the company. The two 'lads' that discovered the fire were not part of the post's complement of permanent or wintering personnel but were living in the collection of dwellings that now extended up the hill immediately behind the post. By May of 1831, approximately sixty people – freemen, half-breeds and perhaps some Aboriginal people – were living at this location. The 'Indian tents' that the 'lads' were visiting on the evening of the 19th of May were separate from both the post's houses and the dwelling site that had grown up behind the post. Although not far off – at this point they were located within easy walking distance of the post, just to the south – the 'Indian tents' constituted a distinct and separate grouping of dwellings. As of the end of May, there were approximately five extended families, comprising approximately fifty

⁶³² LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/17, Norway House – Post Journal 1830-31. 19 May 1831.

people, living there. The loosely-defined, but by now well-established community associated with, but not part of, Norway House now counted a little over one hundred people.⁶³³

Ross's Report on District for the outfit year ending 31 May 1831, his first annual report since taking charge of the depot, reflected the optimistic tone evident in his journal entries for the year and neatly summarized the post's role. He noted that the, "... recent establishment of Norway House, "... 20 miles below the late abandoned establishment ... has in some respects a very serious advantage over the former by affording a safe and commodious harbour for craft of any size and in all weather. ... Here all the craft to and from York Factory take in provisions for the voyage – all extra loadings of furs, provisions or goods are for a time deposited ..., provisions from Red River are for the most part warehoused at this place and it has become the headquarters for the Athabasca and Mackenzie's River districts."⁶³⁴ Over the winter he had overseen the completion of eight boats, a new store for the Athabasca outfits, a powder magazine, a stable and approximately two thousand posts for the palisade. That same year Governor Simpson also commented that Norway House, "... being situated at the junction of the two principal roads or lines of communication between the Factory and the Interior, is a place of much resort and bustle during the summer [and] it answers all the purposes of depot ...⁶³⁵

⁶³³ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1831. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/4, Norway House – Report on District 1830-31.

⁶³⁴ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1831. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/4, Norway House – Report on District 1830-31.

⁶³⁵ Simpson, quoted in Robert Watson, "The Story of Norway House," *Canadian Geographical Journal*, I (August, 1930), 299-300, cited in, Enns, "*The Fur Trade at Norway House*," 74.

In his report, Ross also addressed questions associated with both the ‘freeman’ and the ‘Indian’ communities that then existed at the post. With regard to the former, the principal problem was that their houses had been set up rather haphazardly over the years and had generated a problem of space, a problem that Ross thought, “... might be entirely remedied by forming a small establishment of dwelling houses with a winter store on a ridge of rising ground ... behind the present establishment.” With respect to the latter, Ross found that, “... the local Indians, such as them as are industrious, make hunts and ... are in other respects found very serviceable in tripping, going with the packets and acting as guides.” At this early point, Ross also identified a problem that was to become more and more serious over time. The local Aboriginal population, which had always been small in number, “... are now reduced to four or five families, they have for some years past been gradually moving off towards Moose Lake, Swan River and Red River.” Since they constituted one of the important sources of labour for the post, Ross observed that, “I do not think it would be to the interests of the service to reduce their number lower than of present.”⁶³⁶

The summer of 1831 passed with the same flurry of activity as had become the norm for Norway House. The traffic through the depot, approximately 100 boats and another 25 canoes, was similar to that of 1830 with the exception that at least five boats manned by ‘freemen’ were now carrying cargo back and forth between Red River and Norway House all summer long.⁶³⁷ Another four boats were hired to carry 400 pieces from Norway House to York Factory and bring 640 pieces back to the depot, “... the

⁶³⁶ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1831. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/4, Norway House – Report on District 1830-31.

⁶³⁷ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1831. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/4, Norway House – Report on District 1830-31.

goods to be transported by 32 Indians ... making two trips in 80 piece boats.”⁶³⁸ The summer transient population remained steady with an average of approximately 175 people at the post each day in June and July and almost 100 in August.⁶³⁹ The one incident of particular (and somewhat amusing) note that summer was that the ‘freeman’ Huggy Isham was hired, along with, “... a party of six Indians to look for the Governor’s Horse, lost on the way to Red River some time ago by the Saskatchewan freemen.”⁶⁴⁰ Sadly, though perhaps not for the horse, the party returned to Norway House empty-handed.

By October, with the transport season finished, activities at Norway House were reoriented to the now-familiar tasks of: collecting and preparing wood for new buildings⁶⁴¹ and improvements to existing structures, as well as for boat building; taking up the produce of the gardens;⁶⁴² and, of course, fishing.⁶⁴³ All of these activities required manpower and, when added to the routine chores of cutting firewood, making charcoal and myriad other minor tasks such as cooking and cleaning, generated considerable employment for the people living around the post.

On the 5th of October, a boat arrived from York Factory carrying nine men. Six of these were York Factory men who, as had been the practice for the last few years, were to overwinter at Norway House, principally to assist with fishing. The assignment

⁶³⁸ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 29 June to 4 July 1831 at York Factory, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 657-72.

⁶³⁹ This did not include the approximately one hundred ‘non-post,’ local people. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 31 May 1832.

⁶⁴⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/18, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 11 Jul 1831.

⁶⁴¹ Twelve Aboriginal men were employed at this task. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/18, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 10 Oct 1831.

⁶⁴² On the 5th of October, the gardens yielded some 84 kegs of potatoes, “a very fair crop.” LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/18, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 5 Oct 1831.

⁶⁴³ By the 19th of October of 1831, the fisheries had produced 20,600 fish. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/18, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 19 Oct 1831.

of the other three men – John Rendall, John Flett and George Flett – signaled a very important escalation in the responsibilities assigned to Norway House. Rendall was a qualified shipwright and the Fletts were both carpenters. With the addition of these men, the post was now expected to build large sailing vessels – of 12 tons burden – for use on Lake Winnipeg. This was in addition to the requirement to manufacture and repair York Boats and other smaller craft.⁶⁴⁴ Through the remainder of the year, the boat builders busied themselves with preparing for the construction of two large boats, the goal being to have them ready for the next summer transport season.

The journal entry for the 25th of December 1831 included the heading “Christmas Day” written in very large and elegant script.⁶⁴⁵ If this was a reflection of a particularly buoyant mood at Norway House that year, it was perhaps understandable. In addition to gaining the new and important task of building large boats, the men of the post had completed several new dwelling houses and a new store. There were also now ten cattle at the post with all that that implied both for the diet of the post personnel and with respect to the possibility of using them as draught animals. (The requirement to cut large quantities of hay for the cattle was to become another important source of casual employment for people at Norway House). Even more important was the fact that the fishery had been highly productive – six men employed for two months had brought in some 75,000 fish – effectively eliminating any fear of a shortage of food. Even the

⁶⁴⁴ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/18, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 5 Oct 1831. Interestingly, Harold Innis repeated an error originally made by E.H. Oliver when he asserted that, “In 1831, two 12-ton decked boats, the *George* and the *Alexandra*, were put into service on Lake Winnipeg, transporting goods between Red River and Norway House.” Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 664, quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 293. The source of the error is probably to be found in the Post Journal copies for Norway House, one of which (B 154/a/20), includes entries for January to April of 1831 that are actually from 1832. It appears that the copy clerk forgot to update the year heading when turning the page on the 31 December 1831 to 1 January 1832 journal.

⁶⁴⁵ LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/a/19, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 25 Dec 1831.

garden had been, "... tolerably productive amounting to 150 bushels [of potatoes as well as] onions, carrots and beet root of good ordinary size and about 10 bushels of turnips."

⁶⁴⁶ Extra rations and some rum were issued for the occasion and, in an unprecedented move, on the 26th of December, Donald Ross, "kept this as Christmas Day – I gave the people a dance in the evening."⁶⁴⁷



Figure 25. Norway House, from 'The Swan River Rock'. Although this photograph is from 1878, with the completion of the 'archway storehouse' in 1831, this is generally how **Norway House would have looked to someone approaching from the south-west in 1832.**

Robert Bell, 1878.

Library and Archives Canada/C-001170

1832 began with a bit of excitement with, "... a report that Canaskee Capper, the half-witted Indian lad, had mentioned his intention of setting fire to the powder magazine."⁶⁴⁸ In the event, nothing happened with respect to the magazine. Still, when it

⁶⁴⁶ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1832. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1831-32.

⁶⁴⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/19, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 26 Dec 1831.

⁶⁴⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 6 Jan 1832.

came time for Ross to make recommendations on improvements for Norway House in the coming year, he noted that, "... for some years past a considerable quantity of gunpowder has necessarily been deposited at this place and altho' our Magazine is as sound and substantial as any wooden building can well be made, it cannot be considered as in a state of perfect safety. I would therefore beg to recommend that a good Stone Magazine should be built here."⁶⁴⁹

Even without authorization to build a new stone magazine, the people of Norway House had plenty of work based on Donald Ross' continuing program of improving, and where necessary replacing, the buildings already at the post. The plan for early 1832 included the complete replacement of one of the 60x24 foot stores and one of the 40x24 foot dwelling houses, work on which began on the 9th of January.⁶⁵⁰ On the same day, the shipwright and carpenters were ready to begin the building of the large boats. By the 13th they were, "... making preparations for laying down the keel of the other [second] decked boat."⁶⁵¹ Three days later they were already, "... putting up the frame of the large craft."⁶⁵² There was a further expansion of the new boatbuilding enterprise on the 11th of February with the arrival of Thomas Cursator from York Factory who had been sent to Norway House, "... to make sails for the large boats."⁶⁵³ By the 20th of the month Cursator had commenced his work, his efforts paralleling those of the boat builders who were proceeding with their task at a brisk pace.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁴⁹ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1832. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1831-32.

⁶⁵⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 9 Jan 1832.

⁶⁵¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 13 Jan 1832.

⁶⁵² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 16 Jan 1832.

⁶⁵³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 11 Feb 1832.

⁶⁵⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 20 Feb 1832.

With the boat and construction efforts well in hand, Ross made it clear that he was not willing to see any of the men sitting idly about. In mildly sarcastic language, Ross recorded in the post journal that, "... the [York Factory] men milling about the houses were exposed to the seine."⁶⁵⁵ If there was nothing else to do, men could easily and advantageously be employed at the fishery. At about the same time, two men were assigned to the job of hauling roofing sticks back to the post from the forest using some of the cattle as oxen, again reflecting the continuing diversification of the labour requirements at Norway House.⁶⁵⁶

On the 21st of April, the shipwright and carpenters, "... launched one of the large boats out upon the ice."⁶⁵⁷ Two days later the second boat was launched. For the next few weeks the shipwright and carpenters were employed, "... making couples for the new store as they cannot get on with their own work until the large boats get afloat."⁶⁵⁸ By the 26th of May the boats were afloat, and the shipwright and carpenters turned to the task of rigging out the boats with masts.⁶⁵⁹ In time for the inclusion in the final entry for the 1831-32 post journal the, "... carpenters brought the large boats round from the bay and anchored them in the river opposite the fort."⁶⁶⁰ Whether or not Donald Ross realized it at the time, the launching of the two sailboats was to have a pronounced effect on the transportation arrangements for the fur trade in general and on the nature of employment opportunities at Norway House more specifically.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 21 Mar 1832.

⁶⁵⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 13 Apr 1832.

⁶⁵⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 21 Apr 1832.

⁶⁵⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 9 May 1832.

⁶⁵⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 26 May 1832.

⁶⁶⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 31 May 1832.

⁶⁶¹ That Ross may not have fully appreciated the importance of this new capability is suggested by the fact that his 1832 district report made no mention of the boats. Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1832. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1831-32. Unsurprisingly, the

What certainly was clear to Ross was the important role that Norway House was filling as the HBC's principal inland depot. He noted that, "... the business of the place as a depot is now increasing to a considerable extent [... and is] a place where business may be transacted to a large extent."⁶⁶² Already in 1832, Ross was speculating on the possibility of having many of the skilled tradesmen from York Factory relocated to Norway House where he expected that their work could be done at a cheaper rate. This would particularly apply in cases such as tinware repairs, where the elimination of the requirement to carry the objects back and forth between Norway House and York Factory would represent, "... a considerable saving of freight."⁶⁶³ He even mulled the idea of setting up a distillery at the post. Although it was obvious that a distillery could be operated more cheaply at Red River, especially since the grain for the process was to come from the settlement there, Ross argued against a Red River distillery on other grounds. He believed that, "... considering the nature of its [Red River's] mixed population we may safely predict that the indiscriminate use of spirituous liquors which such a measure is likely to introduce among the inhabitants, and the nature of the country, would in very few years throw the whole settlement into a state of ruin and confusion and might moreover be productive of great and irreparable evils."⁶⁶⁴ Interestingly, he did not seem to have any such fears for his own community.

boats figure prominently in the report for the following year. Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1833. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1832-33. In an interesting coincidence, on the 29th of May, only three days after the two large boats went into service on Lake Winnipeg, Colonel By officially opened the just-completed Rideau Canal in Canada when he sailed into Bytown.

⁶⁶² Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1832. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1831-32.

⁶⁶³ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1832. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1831-32.

⁶⁶⁴ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1832. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1831-32.

With the opening of navigation in June,⁶⁶⁵ the summer routine at Norway House quickly took on its usual form, the first of the visiting boats arriving on the 7th of the month.⁶⁶⁶ At the post, numerous freemen and Aboriginal people were being employed at various jobs in support of the depot. For example, the post, "... employed four Indians to clear away the stumps of trees from around the fort,"⁶⁶⁷ while two more Aboriginal men were hired to cut firewood⁶⁶⁸ and another five men were employed collecting bark for roofing.⁶⁶⁹ Two more men were hired to assist the boat building and repair operation and were sent to find suitable trees from which to fashion, "... the masts and yards for the Portage boats."⁶⁷⁰ An additional five Aboriginal men spent the summer carrying mail, two on the run to York Factory and three between Norway House and Red River.⁶⁷¹

Although the general routine of the trade remained steady in the summer of 1832, there were some important changes. The most obvious alteration was in the ability to move large amounts of cargo between Red River and Norway House using the two large boats that were put into service on the lake. The boats, which had only been afloat for a few weeks, made their maiden trip – a test run – on the 6th of June. Ross was clearly delighted with the new boats noting, "... we had a sail out through the lake this evening in one of the large boats and found her to go and work remarkably well in every respect."⁶⁷² So pleased was he with the boats that he determined to put them to work immediately. The very next day the boats were sent off, "... for the Grand Rapids for the purpose of

⁶⁶⁵ The breakup was late in 1832. On the 5th of June it was noted that, "the body of the lake is still covered in ice." LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 5 Jun 1832.

⁶⁶⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 7 Jun 1832.

⁶⁶⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 31 May 1832.

⁶⁶⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 1 Jun 1832.

⁶⁶⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 8 Jun 1832.

⁶⁷⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/20, Norway House – Post Journal 1831-32. 31 May 1832.

⁶⁷¹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 21 Jul 1832

⁶⁷² LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 6 Jun 1832.

assisting the Rowand's brigade."⁶⁷³ The boats were crewed by four men each, all men of the post, but assisted by, "old Eggconescum"⁶⁷⁴ who acted as the little flotilla's pilot.

As it turned out, the boats – christened the *George* and *Alexandra* – were put into service with serendipitously good timing. The Saskatchewan brigades had arrived at Grand Rapids but had not been able to cross the lake due to the unsettled nature of the weather. This delay was having repercussions throughout the transport system. Donald Ross expressed his exasperation with the comment that, "the non-arrival of the Saskatchewan brigade is deranging all our operations for the season. Mr. Lewis' brigades, Mr. Cameron's brigade and the York Factory boats have now been here for several days waiting for cargoes and consuming provisions to no purpose."⁶⁷⁵ Fortunately, the new decked boats were able to pick up most of the cargo that was delayed at Grand Rapids and bring it to Norway House to link up with the other brigades. On the 28th of June, the two boats arrived back at Norway House carrying 562 pieces of freight, the entire cargo from eight York Boats.⁶⁷⁶ In August, the boats made their first trip to Red River, carrying approximately 500 pieces of freight to and from the settlement.⁶⁷⁷

The other change that summer, though an incremental one, was also important. The range and volume of 'country goods,' especially flour, being purchased from the Red River settlement was increasing considerably.⁶⁷⁸ The order for 1832 included: 110

⁶⁷³ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 7 Jun 1832.

⁶⁷⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 7 Jun 1832.

⁶⁷⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 28 Jun 1832.

⁶⁷⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 28 Jun 1832.

⁶⁷⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/21, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 4 Aug 1832.

⁶⁷⁸ Supporting the Red River Settlement by purchasing its produce had long been part of the HBC's strategy for defending its monopoly. As early as 1821 Governor Simpson had noted that such support might, "[...] vindicate the Charter; that the personnel of the fur trade could be recruited in the process of colonization; that the trading posts of the Company could be supplied with provisions from the strategic

bushels of barley; 30 kegs of butter; 110 bushels of Indian corn; 16 cwt of cured beef; 1200 cwt of flour; 60 cured pork hams; 10 bushels of white pease [sic]; 60 cwt of cured pork and 250 portage slings.⁶⁷⁹ A large quantity of pemmican was also purchased by the HBC that year with 600 pieces of common pemmican and 50 bags of fine pemmican (45lb bags) delivered from Red River to Norway House at a cost of 2d and 3d per pound respectively.⁶⁸⁰ There was still plenty of work for those who were engaged in freighting goods by the piece.

In fact, although this ‘outsourcing’ of freight to independent carriers had resulted in a steady decline in transportation costs per unit, there was no shortage of men prepared to do the work.⁶⁸¹ Prices over the study period were as follows (shillings per 90lb piece):⁶⁸²

Route	1825	1830	1831	1833	1836	1838	1840
York Factory to Red River	25	20	18	18	18	17	16
York Factory to Norway House		15	14	14	14	13	
Norway House to Red River		5	4	3			

At Norway House, where men were generally being hired on the basis of wages per trip rather than on piece-work, it was reported that, although there had been, “... no increase of Wages, More Work got out of the Men than usual & at this place alone upwards of 50 Indians are employed in Working up goods all Summer at the rate of £4. p.

centre of Rupert’s Land; and that the retiring servants of the Company at Red River would automatically reinforce the authority of the Company.” George Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, xix-xx.

⁶⁷⁹ Morton, *A History*, 637.

⁶⁸⁰ Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 301.

⁶⁸¹ There was considerable grousing from men employed out of Red River, who complained that, “[...] each piece had been increased in weight from 90 to 100 and 105 pounds [thus effectively reducing the rate].” Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 310.

⁶⁸² Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 309.

Man: in the Course of the Summer three Trips is made from the Factory with 80 pieces p. Boat.”⁶⁸³ By the summer of 1832, freighting was generating employment for many people operating out of Norway House. Importantly, the bulk of this work was paid for in cash-value carried on account books.⁶⁸⁴ Although there was little actual cash in circulation, the local economy was already based on £ Sterling.

Principally due to the increasing volume of trade in ‘country goods’ between the settlement and the HBC, the volume of traffic passing through Norway House in the summer of 1832 showed a significant rise from the previous year. Approximately 120 boats and fourteen canoes stopped in at the depot between the opening of navigation in June and the final visit in October. A thousand pieces of cargo were shipped from Red River to Norway House during the season, the bulk of which was carried by ‘freemen’ shuttling back and forth across Lake Winnipeg.⁶⁸⁵ Several other boats, also manned by ‘freemen,’ were contracted to deliver 300 bushels of salt to Norway House from Swan River. As in the previous year, arrangements were made to carry 280 pieces from Norway House to York Factory and to bring 360 pieces back to the depot by making, “... a double trip between Norway House and York Factory with 4 boats manned by 32 Indians and a guide.”⁶⁸⁶ The summer transient population climbed to an average of

⁶⁸³ Letter from William Sinclair to Ermatinger, Norway House, 22 June 1832. Can. Arch., Ermatinger-Tod Papers, p. 273. Quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 309.

⁶⁸⁴ With one exception in the next year, 1831 was the last year that tripping wages to Aboriginal people were quoted at rates based on the ‘Made Beaver’ (MB) standard of trade. Since tripping wages were set in both MB and £ Sterling for that year, it is possible to determine the equivalency between the two. That year steersmen were paid £18 or 70MB, bowsman were paid £16 or 65MB, and middlemen were paid £14 or 60MB. Thus £1 was the equivalent of roughly 4MB. Minutes of the Northern Council, 29 June to 4 July 1831, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 657-72. For the 1832 exception involving, “Indians of the Lake District,” see page 308.

⁶⁸⁵ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1833. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1832-33.

⁶⁸⁶ Minutes of the Northern Council, 29 June to 4 July 1831, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 657-72.

approximately 210 people at the post each day in June and July and almost 120 in August.⁶⁸⁷

As the volume of traffic increased and the freight piece-rate declined, so too did the wages paid to men who hired on as seasonal crew on HBC-operated boats. Until rebounding in 1837, after which the rates remained steady, there was a significant decline in the wages paid. Since the rationalization of the HBC operations in the period 1821 to 1825, the labour situation had steadily improved such that it was possible to drive down wages and piece-work rates.⁶⁸⁸ Over the study period seasonal wages were as follows (paid on account calculated in £ Sterling):

Position		1830	1831	1832	1836	1837 ⁶⁸⁹
Steersman		21	18	16	12	16
Bowsmen		18	16	14	10/10	14
Middlemen		15	14	12	9	12

The Norway House economy was expanded and further diversified in 1832 with the addition of two elements.⁶⁹⁰ First of all, there was yet another flurry of interest in the

⁶⁸⁷ Again, this did not include the more than one hundred ‘non-post,’ local people. Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1833. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/6, Norway House – Report on District 1832-33.

⁶⁸⁸ At the same time, and just as the HBC was successfully driving down wages in North America, liberal forces in Great Britain led to the formal abolition of slavery throughout the empire. United Kingdom. Parliament. House of Lords. Records of the House of Lords: Journal Office: Main Papers. Session 1835: Nos 104-165. 16 March: 112, *Slavery Abolition Act*, orders in Council under, delivered (Lords Journals, lxvii, p40). 28 August 1833. Legal limits on the employment of children in factories were also established at this time. United Kingdom. Parliament. House of Lords. Records of the House of Lords: Public Bill Office: Original Acts. *Public General Act*, 3 & 4 William IV, c. 103. 1833. An Act to regulate the Labour of Children and young persons in the Mills and Factories of the United Kingdom.

⁶⁸⁹ The non-correlation between seasonal wage rates and piece work rates after 1837 was a function of two factors. The increased freight capacity on the lake route between Red River and Norway House, principally as a result of the introduction of the large sailing vessels, drove down the piece rate on that part of the route. But the demand for skilled boat crew, especially steersmen, was continuing to rise for the other parts of the trade network. All of this was occurring concurrent with the drift of more and more people to the settlement at Red River with the result that there were fewer skilled steersman available for hire, resulting in higher wages for those who remained.

old winter road project.⁶⁹¹ Over the previous two years the road had generated some survey work but for 1832, a dedicated crew of “... 20 supernumeraries, under the supervision of CF Lewes of Oxford House, were to be employed on the project from October to April.” In addition to the 20 ‘supernumeraries,’ once the two large boats were laid up for the season, “... the crews are to be occupied during the dead season in opening the winter road.” As in the previous year, Norway House was directed to continue to assist the efforts to build the winter road by providing such facilities as could be afforded “... towards the execution thereof as may not subject the business to material inconvenience.”⁶⁹² Unlike in previous years when the actual amount of work on the road had been minimal, the presence of a work crew of almost 30 men generated a significant demand for logistic support from the depot, especially since the requirement to support the crew would be during what was normally the relatively quiet period in the winter.

1832 was also the year that Norway House took on extra responsibilities related to the business of the Athabasca District. In addition to being designated as the depot for that district, Norway House was required to build, man and operate the store and shop for supplying the HBC personnel assigned to the Athabasca District. The immediate effect of this was that the building to house all of this – already identified in Ross’ 1830 plan – now became a priority construction effort. Although Norway House was allowed to charge a 12½ per cent advance on York Factory or inventory prices on sales to servants of Athabasca District, this was intended to cover the cost of storage, packing and other

⁶⁹⁰ The 1832 Northern Council instructions for Norway House District directed that the post at Berens River would become part of the district as of that summer. Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 9 July to 16 July 1832 at York Factory, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 672-88.

⁶⁹¹ Although Arthur Morton suggested that, “In 1832, Governor Simpson revived the idea of building a winter road from York Factory to Norway House as a means of getting the produce of Red River to market in England,” as has already been shown, this goal was a long standing one dating at least as early as 1821. Morton, *A History*, 642

⁶⁹² Minutes of the Northern Council, 9 July to 16 July 1832, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 672-88.

handling, and little material advantage accrued to Norway House. As always, more tasks meant more work, most of which would still need to be done by local labour since the HBC, in spite of substantially increasing the work load for Norway House, was only prepared to increase the permanent staff by one clerk.⁶⁹³

By the fall of 1832, the routine of Norway House had been firmly established, a routine that was to remain more or less unchanged until 1836. The hectic summers marked the beginning of each trade year and were punctuated by the passage of well over 100 boats and numerous canoes through the site. The daily transient population swelled to upwards of 200 people during the summer with HBC servants, Red River-based freighters, freemen and Aboriginal boat and canoe crews all stopping in as they made their various ways about the fur trade transportation network, the essential crossroads of which was the Norway House post. At the post, the local community – consisting of local freemen and the now-resident Aboriginal population – provided a variety of goods and services to both the people residing at the establishment and to the people passing through. In addition to the depot business handling the HBC's cargo requirements, Norway House was the location of an extensive boat building and repair facility and the center of an extended fishing industry, both of which activities were heavily dependant on local labour.⁶⁹⁴ As had become the norm, local people were also employed casually but year-round on everything from carrying the HBC mail⁶⁹⁵ to cutting firewood and sweeping the floors of the post's buildings and cutting hay for the post's livestock.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ Minutes of the Northern Council, 9 July to 16 July 1832, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 672-88.

⁶⁹⁴ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/22, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 23 Sep 1832.

⁶⁹⁵ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/22, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 27 Dec 1832.

⁶⁹⁶ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/22, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 29 Sep 1832.

In December of 1832, Norway House was even supporting the winter dog sled operations of other posts. On the 18th of the month, Donald Ross “sent off [to Oxford House]⁶⁹⁷ 2 sledges and 10 dogs with their harness, leaving this place with only 4 dogs belonging to the company.”⁶⁹⁸ This was only possible because Ross knew that, unlike at posts like Oxford House, he could count on being able to contract dogs and sledges locally. Additionally, since he was already contracting out the main task dependant on dog sleds – the winter mail – there was little risk associated with reducing his company-owned dog sled capacity to the bare minimum.

1833, 1834 and 1835 were years of constancy for Norway House. The fisheries routinely provided enough fish for the post – the 1832 haul was 17,600 fish – such that Donald Ross was confident of having “... a sufficient quantity for any purpose.”⁶⁹⁹ During the off-seasons, the people at the depot were kept fully employed on the various activities now routinely associated with the place. In April of 1833 for example, Ross, “got the whole of the people to work: 5 men building the new store, 6 sawing, 2 taking bark off sawn logs, 5 building a forge, 5 cutting firewood, 2 cutting stockades, 4 working inside the new house, Cursator [the sail-maker] knitting spunyarn, Morrison attending the cattle, McBeath working in the stores and Buchanan on the sick list – in all 33 men.”⁷⁰⁰ Keeping in mind that the permanent staff of the post totaled only six men, including the chief trader himself, the post was clearly employing a considerable number of people on a routine basis.⁷⁰¹ At the same time, Ross was wary of employing too many Aboriginal workers during the winter as this risked distracting them from hunting. He opined that,

⁶⁹⁷ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/22, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 16 Dec 1832.

⁶⁹⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/22, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 18 Dec 1832.

⁶⁹⁹ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/23, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 11 Jan 1833.

⁷⁰⁰ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/23, Norway House – Post Journal 1832-33. 18 Apr 1833.

⁷⁰¹ Minutes of the Northern Council, 9 July to 16 July 1832, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 672-88.

“... the Indians are the cheapest hands we can employ in summer but certainly the dearest we employ in winter, not from what we pay them but from the loss of their hunts while so employed.”⁷⁰²

Ross’ Report on District for 1834 reflected the steady routine that was now the norm. He reported, *inter alia*, that a new dwelling house had been built, that eight new York Boats had been completed, and that the “... garden produced an excellent crop of potatoes last season, yielding about 360 bushels from a little more than and [sic] acre of ground.”⁷⁰³ The sailing vessels continued to ply Lake Winnipeg, completing three round trips between Norway House and Red River that year. When the boats were laid up at Norway House for the winter, Donald Ross opined that “... they conveyed about one thousand pieces each way, and could have conveyed nearly as many more, were it found necessary, so that even at the present rate of freight, which cannot be considered high for such a distance, they would with full employment pay themselves and every expence attending them in a couple of seasons.”⁷⁰⁴ As a result of this large capacity on the lake, more and more York Boat crews were employed shuttling cargo between Norway House and York Factory. Additionally, since fewer York Boats were required to start from York Factory each season, more and more crew were sourced out of Norway House.⁷⁰⁵

As an example, a four-boat brigade was employed to make two round trips from Norway

⁷⁰² Ross to Christie, 1 December 1833, Donald Ross Papers, Archives of Manitoba, MG1, D 20, file 75, quoted in, Enns, “*The Fur Trade at Norway House*,” 100.

⁷⁰³ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/e/7, Norway House – Report on District 1833-34.

⁷⁰⁴ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/e/7, Norway House – Report on District 1833-34.

⁷⁰⁵ Minutes of the Northern Council, held on 3 June 1835 at Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 708-723.

House to York Factory with the boats manned by "... 32 Indians and a guide. The boats are to carry 80 pieces upwards and 70 pieces downwards each per trip."⁷⁰⁶

Of note in 1834 was the attempt at a 'cattle-drive' from Red River to Norway House. In the spring, twelve oxen were brought overland to the post. Although they arrived in reasonably good condition, it was readily apparent that this was not an efficient way of moving cattle given the nature of the country and its climate. Ross believed that the experiment had been successful and had demonstrated that cattle could, with proper preparation, be moved in this manner. Ever the efficient manager though, his overall conclusion was that "... the expence of getting them off from Red River has been too high to consider this a desirable method of bringing out cattle."⁷⁰⁷

By 1835, the affairs of Norway House were running on such a routine basis that Ross began his district report for that year with the mildly plaintive comment that "I have little that is new or interesting to communicate."⁷⁰⁸ Having stated that there was little of interest to report, he then immediately proceeded to recount the quite interesting story of the Red River freeman brigade that got stuck in the ice as a result of the very early onset of cold weather in the fall of 1834. The brigade of five York Boats had been working the Red River to York Factory freight route during the summer. They were on the return trip from York Factory but had not yet reached Playgreen Lake when the rivers froze. Fortunately, news of the emergency was brought to Norway House from where, "... every assistance was afforded ... to such as were within our reach and I appointed people to

⁷⁰⁶ Minutes of the Northern Council, held on 1 June to 5 June and on 8 June 1833 at Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 689-707.

⁷⁰⁷ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/7, Norway House – Report on District 1833-34.

⁷⁰⁸ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/8, Norway House – Report on District 1834-35.

preserve their prosperity in perfect safety until they had the opportunity of taking it away by open water this spring.”⁷⁰⁹ More ominously, Ross received reports of widespread influenza in a form that was so virulent that, “several of the brigades were stopped by it on their way to the factory and I much fear that the consequences will be very injurious to the trade.”⁷¹⁰ In the event, Ross’ fears were not realized and the overall trade was not markedly affected by the outbreak; the level of activity for the year was much as expected.

A reorganization of some of the districts in 1835 resulted in the Norway House district being renamed ‘Jack River District,’ but still responsible for the Norway House, Berens River and Nelson River posts manned by six, three and four men respectively. By way of comparison, the establishment at York Factory had a complement of six officers and thirty men, almost three times as many as in the entire Jack River district. The consequence of these minimal manning levels was that there were times when some posts were left with no full-time HBC staff in place. The Berens River post for example, in spite of having a complement of only one Postmaster and two servants, was directed to provide three company men to take charge of two boats carrying freight between Norway House and York Factory. The crews were to be made up by engaging ten men from the Aboriginal community at Norway House.⁷¹¹

That year the Chief Trader at Norway House was also given the task of controlling the flow of freight through the system. Until 1835, brigades en route to York

⁷⁰⁹ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/8, Norway House – Report on District 1834-35.

⁷¹⁰ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/8, Norway House – Report on District 1834-35.

⁷¹¹ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 3 June 1835 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 708-723.

Factory via Norway House were only responsible for their own cargoes and were not compelled to rationalize their boat loads based on the needs of the overall system. This was clearly not a recipe for the efficient maximization of transport capacity. Fortunately, the Chief Trader at the depot was in a uniquely favorable position for assessing the HBC's overall transportation requirements. This was due to his ability to maintain good communications with York Factory and by virtue of his control of the cargo that was deposited for storage at the depot. As of 1835 it was directed that "... the loadings of all downgoing craft from Norway House to York Factory be regulated in regard to the description of cargo by the gentleman in charge of Norway House who must prepare correct bills of lading of all such cargoes ... one copy of the bills of lading is to be forwarded with the craft to York Factory and another copy to be retained at Norway House."⁷¹²

Even more than in the previous year, the fishery was very successful, producing fully 35,000 white fish. The garden yielded another 300 bushels of potatoes in spite of being, "... a good deal injured by grubs and summer frosts."⁷¹³ The program of steady improvements to the physical infrastructure of the post continued with the replacement of old buildings by newer ones. A new and contiguous palisade surrounded all of the post's structures (with the exception of the powder magazine), and had reached a point where Donald Ross was prepared to assert that, "after this season I have reason to hope that

⁷¹² Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 3 June 1835 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 708-723.

⁷¹³ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/8, Norway House – Report on District 1834-35.

little more can be desired in regard to commodious storage or accommodation for individuals at Norway House.”⁷¹⁴

The sailing vessels continued to work Lake Winnipeg such that the unit cost of transport between the Red River Settlement and Norway House remained very low, certainly “... at a much cheaper rate by their means than it could be done by open boat.”⁷¹⁵ The only problem with the large boats was that they were wearing out quickly and would need to be replaced. To that end, Ross recommended that the replacement boats be built at Red River, principally because there were few trees left in the Norway House area suitable for the purpose. As a result of the extensive construction program and boat building and repair conducted at the site, by 1835 it was not possible to “... find a tree of any size within a distance of fifteen miles from the fort.”⁷¹⁶ Instead of staying at Norway House, the two large boats were to be laid up at Red River for the winter. This was partly a reflection of the problem of finding wood for their repair but was also because the crews of the boats could be more effectively employed there than at Norway House where, after much fruitless labour, the winter road project was again set aside.⁷¹⁷

When the first boats of the 1836 season arrived at Norway House in early June, nearly twelve years had passed since the destruction of the post at Mossy Point .⁷¹⁸ The previous season had been witness to some serious challenges, especially as a result of disease which, though widespread, had resulted in few deaths. Because of summer frosts

⁷¹⁴ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/8, Norway House – Report on District 1834-35.

⁷¹⁵ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/8, Norway House – Report on District 1834-35.

⁷¹⁶ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/8, Norway House – Report on District 1834-35.

⁷¹⁷ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 3 June 1835 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 708-723.

⁷¹⁸ LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/27, Norway House – Post Journal 1836-37. 6 June 1836.

and a very heavy infestation of grubs, the potato crop was greatly diminished compared to previous years, yielding a meager seventy bushels for the coming winter. Fortunately, the fishery was very abundant and there was no question of a return to the anxiety over the basic food supply that had dogged the Norway House personnel in the early years of the post.⁷¹⁹

Over the previous three years, the summer transport traffic had remained relatively steady with approximately 120 York Boats and another twenty five canoes passing through the site each summer. The two large sailing vessels added to the traffic – and greatly increased the amount of cargo being moved – completing three round trips from the depot to the Red River settlement each season. Each summer the transient population rose to more than 250 people per day on average in the months of June and July and in excess of 100 per day in August. The steady employment opportunities generated by the various and sundry work at, or originating from, Norway House had resulted in a gradual but uninterrupted rise in the population of the local community. This was especially so in the case of the Aboriginal community which, with each year, was taking on more and more permanent character. It was clearly with some satisfaction that Ross was able to report that year that, “the affairs of this district generally are now in such a state that I have nothing to propose within the shape of changes or improvement.”⁷²⁰

There was, however, one more piece of the Norway House puzzle to be put in place. In 1825, as a result of the destruction of the Mossy Point post’s infrastructure, it

⁷¹⁹ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1836. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/10, Norway House – Report on District 1836.

⁷²⁰ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1836. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/10, Norway House – Report on District 1836.

had been decided to move the annual Meetings of Council to either York Factory or Red River. By 1836, with the new site fully functioning and boasting a wide range of facilities, the post was ready to regain its status as the venue of choice for the meetings. Between the 21st and the 24th of June, Norway House hosted its first Northern Council in over a decade.⁷²¹

Instructions given at the 1836 Council reflected Norway House's increased importance.⁷²² First of all, since the depot was now capable of handling all of the administration necessary to support the Athabasca operations, including operation of their store and sales shop, only the Chief Factor from that district was authorized to travel to Norway House. This considerably reduced travel expenses since only a handful of Athabasca personnel were allowed to travel to the depot and none of them were allowed to descend all the way to York Factory, "... as it is no longer necessary to have Athabasca officers travel to York Factory to conduct their business, all transactions being handled at Norway House."⁷²³

⁷²¹ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 21 June to 24 June 1836 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 723-743.

⁷²² Also issued at the 1836 Council was a new set of Rules and Regulations that codified many of the practices of the HBC that had been developed in the decade and a half since the union of the HBC and NWC. As they give a good sense of the nature of the bureaucracy of the time, they are included *in toto* as Annex C. Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 21 June to 24 June 1836 at Norway House, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 723-743.

⁷²³ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 21 June to 24 June 1836 at Norway House, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 723-743. There was also more trouble at the Methye Portage as individuals attempted to hire Aboriginal men to help with the ever-daunting task posed by that passage. In the 1836 instructions it was directed that, "The encouragement afforded by the Athabasca and McKenzies R districts for the assembling of Indians in large bodies at Portage la Loche, being found exceedingly injurious to English R district and likely to become dangerous to the passing brigades, it is resolved that the gentlemen in charge of brigades belonging to those districts, be strictly prohibited from affording any such encouragement in future, either by payment on public account or by private payments on the part of the people for assisting in transporting the outfits or returns on that portage."



Figure. 26. The Council of the Northern Department of Rupert's Land meeting at Norway House, June 21, 1836.
Charles F. Comfort.
HBC Corporate Collection, Hudson's Bay Company Archives.

The post was also acting as the distribution center for the large and increasing volume of 'country goods,' being purchased by the HBC from the Red River colony. For 1836, the list of goods included: "10 cwt of beef,⁷²⁴ 20 cwt of biscuit, 50 Firkins⁷²⁵ of Butter, 3 cwt of cheese, 1000 cwt⁷²⁶ of kiln dried flour, 30 pork hams, 10 cwt pork, 15 assortments of garden seeds and 100 portage straps."⁷²⁷ As an extension of its boat building and repair responsibilities, the post was also to receive twelve new boats from the Saskatchewan District to be distributed as required. The two large boats that had

⁷²⁴ A hundredweight (cwt) was a unit of measure equal to 8 stone thus 112 pounds.

⁷²⁵ A firkin was an old English unit of measure equal to a quarter of a barrel or, in the case of butter, 56 pounds weight.

⁷²⁶ This was double the amount of flour purchased in 1829.

⁷²⁷ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 21 June to 24 June 1836 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 723-743.

spent the previous winter at Red River were to return to Norway House where they would remain and overwinter with the crews being employed as Donald Ross saw fit. The post was also directed to support the efforts of the Dease Arctic Exploration Expedition which was attempting to complete the mapping of the northern coast of the North American mainland.⁷²⁸ Perhaps as a measure to ensure that all of this extra responsibility and prestige did not go to Donald Ross' head, the Council of 1836 administered him a public censure when it debited him £2 each for gratuities that he had paid out to four men.⁷²⁹

Providing for the needs of the 'grantees' during their now extended layovers at Norway House presented yet further opportunities for those already servicing the post. Over the next nine years, Norway House and Red River shared the duties – and the prestige – of hosting the Northern Council. With the completion of the post, the establishment of the freeman and Aboriginal communities and the relocation of the meetings of the Northern Council to Norway House, John MacLeod's vision of the post as the 'capital' of the north was effectively realized.

From the very earliest days of the post, there were recurring labour shortages. As the depot was being built, the reluctance of the HBC to permanently assign an adequate

⁷²⁸ Franklin, *Narrative of a Second Expedition*, 313-14. For a modern discussion of this expedition see, *From Barrow to Boothia: The Arctic Journal of Chief Factor Peter Warren Dease, 1836-1839*, William Barr, ed, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press), 2002. The expedition also provided Norway House with its first precise geographic fix, "Norway House is in latitude 54° N. and longitude 98° 10' W. as determined by the several observations by competent scientific men who have passed there, the gateway or wicket, of the north, and final starting point of some of the Arctic Expeditions." McLeod, *Peace River*, 49.

⁷²⁹ The four men were Thomas Harper, Joseph Laverdure, John Spence and Edward Moody. Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 21 June to 24 June 1836 at Norway House, 723-743. To prevent a recurrence of this sort of overpayment, formal measures were implemented the following year. It was directed that, "the wages of servants acting in the capacity of cook or gentleman's waiting man shall in no case be allowed to exceed £17 per annum, and that the additional gratuity heretofore given to persons acting in that capacity shall in future be allowed only to such servants as on the summer voyage to and from the wintering grounds act in the capacity of cook or waiting man independent of his duty as one of the regular crew of the craft in which he may be employed [...]." Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 27 June to 29 June 1837 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 757-773.

number of company personnel to the site meant that the hiring of local people became essential. Although there were originally very few people in the area, within a few years a small group had coalesced around the post. With the completion of the main building program, it might have been expected that opportunities for work would diminish, but this was not the case. Providing goods and services to the post and to the various people that passed through it, especially during the summer, generated more and more demands for labour; demands that could not be met by the HBC staff alone. By the middle of the 1830s, these continuing demands had contributed to the establishment of a local community that was both sizeable, diverse, and, by all appearances, permanent. But even as Norway House settled comfortably into this role, forces that would profoundly transform the nature of the greater community were already evident.

Chapter 5

Chapter Five. Stasis and change, 1837 to 1844: the pull of the south.

As early as 1831, Donald Ross had recognized the threat to his labour supply posed by the tendency of Aboriginal people to migrate from Norway House to Red River.⁷³⁰ By 1834, Ross was becoming very concerned with the problem. In his Report on District that year, he again highlighted the problem of the migration of the Aboriginal population towards Red River. He was plainly aware of the sensitivity of the subject as he prefaced his commentary on the problem with the note that, “I trust that I shall not be considered as meddling with matters which are beyond my province ...” His reticence notwithstanding, Ross felt the need to, “... point out the necessity of some speedy and effectual measure being adopted to prevent the general migration of Indians from the trading districts to Red River, and in advancing this recommendation, I have the welfare of the Settlement and the Indians themselves in view no less than that of the fur trade.”⁷³¹

By 1836, he was warning that, “... our close vicinity to Red River has of late years rendered it a matter of no small difficulty to prevent the whole native population from emigrating to that settlement, the encouragement held out by the missions is of so very enticing a character that I believe a very few years hence, will find this section of the

⁷³⁰ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1831. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/4, Norway House – Report on District 1830-31. The HBC had tried to control the population by imposing a financial requirement on retiring servants who wanted to remain in the country. They were compelled to purchase at least 50 acres of land from the company if they wanted to settle at Red River. In 1835, the price of land was 7/6 per acre so a minimum plot would cost 18/15/0 or roughly two years wages for the least well paid servants. Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 3 June 1835 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 708-723. There was no such effective control measure for Aboriginal people.

⁷³¹ Norway House Report on District, 31 May 1834. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/7, Norway House – Report on District 1833-34.

country entirely depopulated. It appears to me however, that the policy of our congregating large masses of Indians in Red River is very questionable, both as regards their own moral condition and the interests of the country at large.”⁷³²

The first active measure taken to try to discourage the movement of Aboriginal people to Red River came in 1837 with the proscription of the hiring of Aboriginal freighters or tripmen from the area of the colony. For the movement of goods between the Red River settlement and Norway House, the Chief Factor at Red River was instructed to hire men but, “... no Indians be employed under any circumstances or any consideration as a means of discouraging the migration of Indians to the Settlement which has of late years taken place to a dangerous extent.”⁷³³ By contrast, instructions for the year encouraged the use of Aboriginal freighters for hauling the Athabasca outfit. These measures were intended to make it clear that summer jobs were to be found at Norway House, not at the colony.⁷³⁴

At the depot, work carried on in the manner established over the previous few years. In fact, although there were important structural changes in the Norway House communities over the next seven years, there was little change in the nature, and only

⁷³² Norway House Report on District, 13 July 1836. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/e/10, Norway House – Report on District 1836. There was as yet no hint of a hierarchy of race in the sense later associated with Social Darwinism. In fact, Charles Darwin had only just completed his circumnavigation of the globe in 1836 and his important writings were not published for another two decades. See, Charles Darwin, *Narrative of the surveying voyages of His Majesty's Ships Adventure and Beagle between the years 1826 and 1836, describing their examination of the southern shores of South America, and the Beagle's circumnavigation of the globe: 1832–1836*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1839).

⁷³³ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 27 June to 29 June 1837 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 757-773. Large groups of Aboriginal people were also continuing to assemble at the Methye Portage each summer in search of casual employment hauling freight over the portage. The HBC continued the ban on employing Aboriginal people for this purpose that had been imposed in 1836.

⁷³⁴ In spite of these efforts to control employment, there was a growing commerce between traders operating out of Red River and merchants in Mendota (and later St. Paul) in the United States and Métis freighters were carving out a role for themselves as the ‘teamsters’ of this trade. Rhoda A. Gilman, Carolyn Gilman and Deborah M. Schulz, *The Red River Trails: 1820-1870*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1979), 50-53. See also, Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 254.

incremental change in the volume, of business at the site. Apparently due to the widespread acceptance and usage of the name, the 1835 designation of the district as Jack River District was abandoned and the area was once again formally renamed Norway House.⁷³⁵ Reflecting the HBC's overall commitment to economy, Ross was still only assigned a clerk and five men to run the business of the post.⁷³⁶ Norway House itself served as another mechanism for imposing economy in the system. Although the post was already providing the administrative support for the Athabasca District that resulted in only the Chief Trader being permitted to travel with his brigade – and only as far as Norway House – by 1837 this measure was extended to the Mackenzie's River District. In the following year, the Chief Trader from that district was only permitted to accompany his brigade as far as the Methye Portage, "... other officers to remain inland."⁷³⁷

Country produce continued to be shipped to Norway House from the Red River Settlement in quantities similar to the previous year. By way of example, included in the numerous products of the colony were: 1000 cwt of kiln-dried flour, twenty cwt of biscuits and ten cwt of beef. The post also continued to act as the distribution center for products from other districts. In 1837, Norway House was to receive fourteen new boats and 500 pieces of pemmican from the Saskatchewan District alone while Swan River District was to supply Norway House with fifty bushels of salt. New types of country

⁷³⁵ Some of the confusion over what was going on at Norway House proper was no doubt a result of the changes in nomenclature associated with the sites and the districts. Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 27 June to 29 June 1837 at Norway House, 757-773.

⁷³⁶ At this point, York Factory still had a complement of six officers and thirty men.

⁷³⁷ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 27 June to 29 June 1837 at Norway House, 757-773. As another economy measure, "In order to save the heavy expense incurred by Canadian servants coming out from the district too late to retire to Canada the same season, in future only European servants will be sent to Mackenzie's River. When they retire, they will always reach YF in time to return to England by the ship."

produce were also to be distributed from the depot. In spite of Donald Ross' ruminations on the topic, the Red River colony was directed to erect, "... the necessary buildings for establishing a distillery at the Lower Fort,"⁷³⁸ but it was still expected that the alcohol produced there would be warehoused at Norway House. In the event, no distillery was established during the period under study.

The boat and canoe traffic for the year remained steady at approximately 120 York Boats and twenty five canoes. The two large sailing vessels continued to move additional freight and people on the Lake Winnipeg route.⁷³⁹ As in previous summers, the transient population rose to more than 250 people per day on average in the months of June and July and in excess of 100 per day in August. Boats continued to be manned by a combination of HBC servants, seasonal tripmen, and piece-work contractors. For example, the four boats carrying the Mackenzie's River outfit from Norway House to the Methye Portage were manned by, "... 32 men, including the guide, 22 of whom are RR men hired for the trip and 6 servants under engagements of not less than 3 years to replace retiring servants." Boats moving freight between Norway House and York Factory were to be manned by, "... 2 NH servants assisted by 22 Indians to be engaged at NH ... these outfits to be taken to the different posts by servants of the district assisted by Indians." 140 pieces of freight were to be shipped to Norway House from Lac La Pluie, "... in 2 boats manned by 12 voyaging servants."⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁸ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 27 June to 29 June 1837 at Norway House, 757-773. By 1839, the company was cooling to the idea of the distillery, suggesting that it proceed only, "[...] if distillation in the Settlement be considered an advisable measure by the Council of Assiniboia." Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 6 June to 12 June 1839 at Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 773-790.

⁷³⁹ For the winter of 1837, the two boats were to be laid up at Red River and the crews employed there.

⁷⁴⁰ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 27 June to 29 June 1837 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 757-773

With a certain theatrical irony however, the routine that Norway House had settled into belied powerful forces that were already transforming the essential conditions of the place. In fact, the stasis that characterized the business routine at the post contrasted sharply with changes that were elsewhere more and more evident. The population drain that Donald Ross had already noted was just one manifestation of the consequences of Norway House's place in the world. There may have been times when the HBC men at the depot thought of themselves as alone in the wilderness, but the reality was quite different. From the first establishment of the post, it, and the men in it, was part of an industry that was transoceanic in scope. The era of the fur trade defined by the merger of the HBC and the NWC, and the end of their struggle, coincided with the beginning of another era in British history marked, and partly defined, by the end of the global struggle with Napoleon.⁷⁴¹ With the end of the wars in Europe, the successful defence of British North America in the War of 1812, and the growing domination of international commerce by Great Britain, Norway House was, already in 1825, intimately connected with what the noted historian P.D. Morgan has described as "one vast interconnected world."⁷⁴²

The degree to which Norway House was integrated with this vast interconnected world of the 1830s may be illustrated through the device of an artefact as a trope. HBC

⁷⁴¹ In a fascinating coincidence, the act of parliament that formalized the new arrangements in the fur trade following the merger of the HBC and NWC was gazetted in London on 2 July 1821. News of the death of Napoleon reached Britain and was reported in the *Times* of London three days later on the 5th of July. (The actual merger had taken effect on 26 March and Napoleon had died on 5 May). "Death of Napoleon Buonaparte." *The Times*, Thursday, July 5, 1821, pg 2, Issue 11290, col B., and, An Act for regulating the Fur Trade and establishing a Criminal and Civil Jurisdiction within certain parts of North America, 2 July, 1821. There is another connection between Napoleon and the fur trade. According to John S. Galbraith, "To the officers of the fur trade he [Governor Simpson] became known as the "Little Emperor," an appellation that must have delighted him since he was and admirer of Napoleon and read all that he could about his hero." John S. Galbraith, *The Little Emperor: Governor Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976), 121.

⁷⁴² P.D. Morgan, quoted in, Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 7.

officers in charge of posts routinely ordered personal items that were unavailable to the lower classes of company servants, partly as a result of their high cost and partly due to restrictions imposed by the company on certain types of commodities. A regular item appearing on bills of lading for HBC boats were macaroons, the small cookies made principally from butter, cocoanut and sugar. Apparently, these then-exotic cookies were required fare for hospitality and the entertainment of important persons and every post officer seems to have ensured that he kept a supply of macaroons on hand, along with a few other items such as port Madeira (the company discriminated between common port and port Madeira, which was of finer quality).⁷⁴³

What is particularly revealing about these cookies is their provenance. One of the major producers of macaroons that were suitable for export was the firm of Huntley and Palmers operating then, and still, out of Reading, England. Reading eventually became so famous for these and other confections that the town was nicknamed, 'biscuit town.' By the 1830s, the technology of canning in tin containers that had been invented in 1813 was common, and it made possible the wide distribution of many products that were previously difficult or impossible to export. Brittle and moisture-sensitive fine confections such as macaroons were certainly such a product.

⁷⁴³ This conclusion is drawn from an extensive review of bills of lading and order books of numerous posts done for a separate project.



Figure 27. On the left is an 1830s listing of confections available for sale from Thomas Huntley of Reading, England. On the right is a tin characteristic of those used for packaging biscuits. Although this tin dates from the 1860s, the main difference from earlier tins is that it is printed rather than hand-painted. Victoria and Albert Museum. Museum no. M.190-1983.

Of the principal ingredients in the macaroons themselves, only the butter came from Britain. The cocoanut was imported from the tropics, principally Ceylon. Sugar was also imported, with most of the supply coming from India and the sugar-cane colonies of the West Indies such as Barbados and St. Thomas. The ingredients were gathered together at places like Reading where the macaroons were baked and packed into specially designed tin containers which were decorated by English artisans. Over time the decoration of the containers became very elaborate to the point that the containers themselves were desired commodities, quite apart from their contents. Beginning in the 1820s, tin from Malaya was being extensively used for manufacturing cans.

Based on orders from the various posts, HBC agents in England would purchase the fragile macaroons and have them shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to York Factory in company ships; ships partly built from North American wood. The macaroons were

then packed into wooden crates – cassettes – for transport in HBC boats into the interior and delivery to the officers who had ordered them. Invariably, the boxes of cookies were being delivered to the Company officers with their names clearly identified on the waybills.⁷⁴⁴ The officers paid for the macaroons from their part of the profit generated by the trade in furs, with the payment, in £ Sterling, eventually making its way back to Reading. When an officer of the HBC served a macaroon to a visitor at a place like Norway House in the 1830s, not only was he showing an essential civility that was a manifestation of the Anglicization of the interior, he was serving up evidence of a series of connections – and of tastes – that stretched around the world.⁷⁴⁵

In 1838, in the corner of the world that the HBC controlled, the company conducted a census as a means of taking stock of the essential human resource associated with their industry; the Aboriginal people associated with the various posts (Fig 28). Included in this census was the first comprehensive counting of the people who, by that time, constituted the ‘Indian village’ located to the south-west of Norway House and separate from the post proper and the Freeman community that was located at the back of the depot.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁴ See for example, the status of Cuthbert Grant reflected in the load manifest of Boat No 8 on 8 Jul 1843, “For Cuthbert Grant – Esquire, one snuff, one box macaroons and one keg Madeira wine.” National Archives of Canada, *Hudson’s Bay Company Archives* (micro copy), MG 20, B 239/W/2, p. 454, 8 Jul 1843.

⁷⁴⁵ For a discussion of the notion of “Imperial tastes,” as a symbol of broader notions of empire, see, James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

⁷⁴⁶ Archives of Manitoba. *HBCA*. York Factory Miscellaneous Items. B 239/z/10, Indian Population of Sundry Districts, 1838.



Figure 29. Although this sketch is from 1846, the view from the SE or ‘rear’ of the post gives a good sense of the location of the ‘freeman’ camp.

Lieutenant George E. Finlay, 6th Regiment, 1846-48. Norway House, circa 1846.

Manitoba Pageant, Spring 1969, Volume 12, Number 1.

In the thirteen years that had passed since the establishment of the post in the summer of 1825, the local Aboriginal population had grown from nothing to 192.⁷⁴⁷ This number did not include those individuals that were still part of the ‘freeman’ community nor did they include the women and children ‘of the post,’ numbering perhaps thirty and twenty-one people respectively.⁷⁴⁸ Apart from the now routine business of the post, the principal concern of the HBC in general and Donald Ross in particular, was what to do about the people of the Indian village and indeed about the village itself.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁷ By way of comparison, the same census counted 624 people at Fort Chipewyan, 959 at Fort Simpson and fully 2,641 people in 552 families in the Swan River district.

⁷⁴⁸ In 1843, James Evans estimated that the population of Rossville was approximately 200 people. University of Western Ontario, *Evans Papers*, letter 249, quoted in, Enns, *The Fur Trade at Norway House*, 100. In 1823 there had been six women and 20 children, ‘of the post.’ This had declined to seven women and nine children by 1825. Only the birth of one child was entered in the records of the post for this group bringing the total to seven women and ten children as of 1826. There is no count for these people after 1826 though the number may be inferred from some of the rations. Some of the population of the freeman community were doubtless included in the 1838 count of “Indians.”

⁷⁴⁹ In 1838, Chief Trader George Gladman replaced Donald Ross during his absence on leave. Gladman was born on 23 June 1800 at New Brunswick House, Canada. He was employed by the HBC from 1814 until his retirement to Port Hope in 1846 and again from 1849 to 1853. He died in 1863. Archives of Manitoba. *HBCA*. Biographical Sheets. Gladman, George Junior (1800-1863) (fl.1814-18530; JHB 1992/March; revised KE 1998/July).

There were two issues which required special consideration and attention and, although separate, they were closely related. The first, as already noted, was the issue of securing the necessary labour force for the HBC's operations by encouraging the local Aboriginal population to remain at or near Norway House. The second issue, more local but equally pressing, was the problem of space. Although there was more or less unlimited access to the terrain at Norway House – indeed throughout the territory controlled by the HBC – there was in fact very little useful land in the immediate vicinity of the depot. Most of the area around the post was either too rocky or too marshy either for the building of foundations for buildings or for cultivation. When it was originally sited, the post was only expected to need space for the depot buildings and a small plot of arable land for a garden. But with a population of nearly 200 people, the 'Indian village' had already used all of the suitable area to the south of the post where the community had initially formed. The 'freeman' community filled the small space immediately behind the company establishment.

By 1839, the HBC was convinced of the need to make Norway House more attractive as a permanent settlement for the Aboriginal people who had, for whatever reason, gathered there. Governor Simpson, after discussions with the British Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, submitted a proposal for the establishment of a Methodist Mission in HBC territory. For his part, Donald Ross believed that a Protestant mission would be the most favourably received by the local population noting, "among the Cree and Strong Wood Indians generally, the feeling is most favourable towards the Protestant religion but with the Saulteaux and Plains Tribes the gorgeous and imposing ceremonies

of the Catholic faith are much more likely to find favour.”⁷⁵⁰ Partly on the basis of the recommendations from Governor Simpson but no doubt influenced by the evangelical mood and growing utilitarian outlook of early 19th Century Britain, the London offices gave their approval for the mission in January of 1840.⁷⁵¹ In anticipation of the arrival of the missionaries, the Northern Council, meeting at Norway House in June, praised the missionary effort and laid out a plan for supporting it. The minutes recorded that, “in order to give full effect to the laudable and benevolent views of the Governor and Committee towards the diffusion of Christianity and civilization among the natives of this country [...] every facility be afforded [the missionaries] for successfully conducting their spiritual labours.”⁷⁵² The council went so far as to direct that “the Gentleman in charge of YF is to forward an extra commissioned gentleman’s allowance to NH (and the other two mission posts, Lac La Pluie and Edmonton) for the use of the mission.”⁷⁵³ At this point, the HBC was meeting every expectation with respect to supporting the missionary effort.⁷⁵⁴ Reverend James Evans (who was also responsible for the three missionaries

⁷⁵⁰ Ross to Simpson, 3 August 1840. LAC, HBCA (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁷⁵¹ For a discussion of these ideas see, Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and, Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire, C.1700-1850*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a discussion of the role of missionaries in the Empire more broadly see, Andrew N. Porter, *Religion versus Empire?: British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). This was not the first time that a Protestant preacher had attended at Norway House. The Anglican Reverend John West arrived in Red River in October 1820 and departed Rupert’s Land June of 1823, having, “[...] spent his summers traveling to Norway House and York Factory to minister to the religious needs of the Company’s servants.” Morton, *A History*, 634. See also, John West, *The Substance of a Journal During a Residence at the Red River Colony, British North America : And Frequent Excursions among the North-West American Indians, in the Years 1820, 1821, 1822, 1823*, (London: Printed for L.B. Seelev and Son, 1824).

⁷⁵² Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 18 June to 24 June 1840 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 798-815.

⁷⁵³ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 18 June to 24 June 1840 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 798-815.

⁷⁵⁴ The missionaries were given a variety of privileges normally only associated with high ranking company officer status. For example, “Board and lodging is to be afforded to the different missionaries at the establishments at which they are stationed in like manner as is provided for commissioned gentlemen in the Honourable Company’s service. If single, to eat at the public mess table where the gentleman in charge

who were to serve at other posts), arrived at Norway House in July and immediately began his preaching efforts.⁷⁵⁵

Concurrent with the effort to establish the mission, Donald Ross decided to solve the problem of space by having the entire 'Indian village' relocate to a place better able to accommodate the village's considerable, and potentially growing, population. By the summer of 1840, Ross reported that, "... the Indian village was inconveniently close to the Establishment, it is therefore my intention to effect its removal ... and as I have been preparing the Indians for such a removal, I think we shall have no great trouble effecting it."⁷⁵⁶ The place chosen for the new village was on the point of land located just a few kilometers away, across Little Playgreen Lake to the north-east and, as a reflection of the good terms that Donald Ross and James Evans were initially on, Evans named the new community 'Rossville.'⁷⁵⁷ Robert Ballantyne, visiting the site in 1841, recounted that, "... from the spot where we stood, the body of the village did not appear to much advantage; but the parsonage and church, which stood on a small mound, their white

of the establishment presides, or if a family man, to live apart in a house to be provided specially for the accommodation of the missionary and his family [...] Passage in the Company's craft is to be afforded from one part of the country to another, and when necessary, the Company will provide a "special conveyance," that conveyance to be a half-sized canoe manned by 3 persons. All purchases made by the [...] Missionaries from the Company's shops or stores to be charged at the tariff used for sales to servants." Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 14 June to 16 June 1841 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 815-834.

⁷⁵⁵ Shirritt-Beaumont, *The Rossville Scandal*, 55.

⁷⁵⁶ Ross to Simpson, 3 August 1840. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45. Morton errs here, suggesting that James Evans was the driving force behind the founding of the community. See, Morton, *A History*, 810n., where he states, "Evans gathered an Indian village around him on an island in Little Playgreen Lake, two miles from Norway House." Rich correctly identified the reason for the move but erred on its timing asserting that, "Simpson and the rest of the Council accepted the necessity of developing an agricultural settlement at Norway House in 1843." Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 256.

⁷⁵⁷ Archives of Manitoba, *HBCA*, B 154/a/37, fo. 17.

walls in strong contrast to the background of dark trees, had a fine picturesque effect...

There were about twenty houses in the village, inhabited entirely by Indians ...⁷⁵⁸

Ross, who had lobbied for some sort of action, was both pleased with, and optimistic about, the prospects for the mission and the effect that it would have on helping to stabilize the local community. He noted that, "I am much gratified to find that the Governor and Committee have this season been pleased to sanction and provide for the introduction of Christian Missionaries into the Indian Country and that this place has been considered a favourable situation for the residence of the Chief Missionary whose presence here I reason to hope will be productive of the most beneficial effects among the natives and the members of our establishments."⁷⁵⁹ The same attitude was reflected in a letter sent by Ross to James Hargrave at York Factory later that year. He also confirmed that the principal reason for the mission was, "... that of stopping the tide of emigration from the low country to the settlement."⁷⁶⁰

But Ross also revealed the essential ambivalence that was so much a part of the attitudes of the HBC and its agents towards the Aboriginal population, in a letter that he sent to Governor Simpson in August of 1840. Having repeatedly made the case for finding effective measures to encourage the people around the post to stay put – ultimately as a means of securing his labour force – Ross, in reacting to the plan to establish a Methodist Mission, warned that, "... the greatest caution will be necessary, to

⁷⁵⁸ Robert M. Ballantyne, *Hudson's Bay; or Every-Day Life in the Wilds of North America, during six years residence in the territories of the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons. 1848), 115. Ballantyne also gives good descriptions of the route from York Factory to Norway House for 1841 and 1845. He judged Norway House as, "[...] one of the best posts in the Indian country. The climate is dry and salubrious. Many of the company's posts are but ill provided with the necessaries of life, and entirely destitute of luxuries. Norway House, however, is favoured in this respect." 119.

⁷⁵⁹ Ross to Simpson, 3 August 1840. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁷⁶⁰ Ross to Hargrave, 14 December, 1840. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

prevent too many Indians collecting and establishing themselves around the mission, otherwise the most melancholy consequences may be apprehended.”⁷⁶¹ As it turned out, he might well have followed his instincts.

Work on the new settlement began immediately and, by the following summer, there were already two large dwelling houses in place.⁷⁶² In June of 1841, Peter Jacobs arrived at the settlement where he was to act as the mission schoolmaster.⁷⁶³ He immediately set to work assisting with the construction of more dwelling houses at Rossville, “... labouring hard & with great encouragement, to get the houses built for the Indians.”⁷⁶⁴ By the end of the summer, the people of the community had completed an additional nine log houses. The HBC assisted in the construction effort at Rossville by providing labour and materials and directing that,⁷⁶⁵ “... a place of public worship is to be erected at the Indian village in the vicinity of NH for the Wesleyan Mission, the dimensions of which to be 40 feet in length by 30 feet in width with a school house of 30 ft by 24 and a residence for Mr. Jacobs the Schoolmaster, and that accommodations be provided for the Rev Mr. Evans within the establishment at NH.”⁷⁶⁶ The expense to the company was not inconsiderable. Six extra men and a supplementary supply of provisions for them was ordered from York Factory outside of the normal ordering

⁷⁶¹ Ross to Simpson, 3 August 1840, quoted in, Enns, “*The Fur Trade at Norway House*,” 74.

⁷⁶² Shirritt-Beaumont, *The Rossville Scandal*, 57.

⁷⁶³ Jacobs was also given a gentleman’s allowance by the HBC. Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 14 June to 16 June 1841 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 815-834.

⁷⁶⁴ UWO, Evans, Letters and Papers, Item 259, Diary: 25 August 1841 – 8 April 1842, quoted in, Shirritt-Beaumont, *The Rossville Scandal*, 57.

⁷⁶⁵ Six new ‘hands’ intended for the Mackenzie’s River 1841 outfit were stationed at Norway House for the winter together with any available supernumeraries from York Factory, “[...] for the purpose of erecting the necessary buildings in that place.” Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 18 June to 24 June 1840 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 798-815.

⁷⁶⁶ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 14 June to 16 June 1841 at the Red River Settlement, from Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 815-834. For his part, Ross did not think that Evans should live at the HBC post but, “[...] ought to take up his residence in the Indian village.” Ross to Simpson, 3 August 1840. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

schedule which prompted the ever-frugal Ross to write that, "... this last demand is absolutely necessary in consequence of the extra number of men that are to work here for the purpose of ... erecting the Mission Buildings."⁷⁶⁷ By the following summer Evans was able to report that, "... the Indians have worked hard, our village now presents eleven substantial houses, well framed, all their own labour."⁷⁶⁸



Figure 30. Rossville viewed from Norway House. This image gives a good sense of the general layout of Rossville with the church and school surrounded by a scattering of dwelling houses. James Penrose, ca. 1874-1880. Glenbow Museum Archives Image No: NA-1030-40

Meanwhile, Norway House continued to perform its function as the central inland depot of the HBC. In 1839, the ban on employing Aboriginal freighters on the Red River to Norway House route was confirmed and extended with, "... the arrangement entered

⁷⁶⁷ Ross to Hargrave, 13 August 1841. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁷⁶⁸ James Evans to Ephraim Evans, 30 June 1842, University of Western Ontario, *Evans Papers*, quoted in, Enns, "*The Fur Trade at Norway House*," 100. While Evans' pride in the work of his 'flock' is understandable, the construction of the large buildings was done largely by HBC personnel. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/a/37, Norway House – Post Journal 1842-43. This is also understandable as the HBC did not want to have its transport labour force unduly distracted during the key summer months.

into last year with settlers [at Red River] for the transport of goods [to be continued until at least 1841] with the express condition that no Indians are to be employed.⁷⁶⁹ The requirement to provide additional administrative support to the Mackenzie's River District resulted in orders that, "... an additional store is to be built at NH and six of the recruits coming by ship and intended for Mackenzie's River next year will be stationed at NH during the winter for the purpose of assisting in erecting the building."⁷⁷⁰ This was the first major construction project since the building of the stone powder magazine that had been erected in 1838-39.⁷⁷¹



Figure 31. The remains of the powder magazine built in 1838-39.
Historic Resources Branch, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, 1985.

Once again reflecting Norway House's connection to the wider world, the post was made responsible for collecting the seasoned otter pelts that constituted rent to be

⁷⁶⁹ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 6 June to 12 June 1839 at Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 773-790.

⁷⁷⁰ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 6 June to 12 June 1839 at Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 773-790.

⁷⁷¹ Archives of Manitoba. *HBC(mc)*. B 154/a/37, fo. 17.

paid to the Russian American Company for territory in the far northwest, ceded to HBC control.⁷⁷² The agreement, signed on 6 February 1839, stipulated that 2000 pelts were to be supplied to the Russians, 500 of which were to be forwarded from various posts to Norway House for eventual, "... onward shipment to the Columbia."⁷⁷³

The HBC's pursuit of economy was again highlighted with the implementation of new measures. For example, to slow the prodigious consumption of sugar, "... which is an article now so much in demand as to occupy a considerable portion of the freight from England. The supply of sugar is to be reduced by 25% and the sale price of sugar is to be increased by 25%."⁷⁷⁴ Although it could not possibly have had much of an effect, the company was so committed to economy that it banned the use of envelopes for letters, directing that company personnel were, "... not to use detached covers or envelopes except in cases where such may be absolutely necessary to cover the contents of their letters or other communication."⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷² The boundary between Alaska and the British North American territories had been fixed in 1825 when Russia and Great Britain had signed the 'Convention Between Great Britain and Russia' – commonly referred to as the Treaty of St. Petersburg of 1825. J.W. Shelest, "The Dryad Affair: Corporate Warfare and Anglo-Russian Rivalry for the Alaskan Lisière," *Proceedings of the Yukon Historical and Museums Association Conference on Borders*, 2-4 June 1989.

⁷⁷³ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 6 June to 12 June 1839 at Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 773-790.

⁷⁷⁴ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 6 June to 12 June 1839 at Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 773-790.

⁷⁷⁵ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 6 June to 12 June 1839 at Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 773-790.

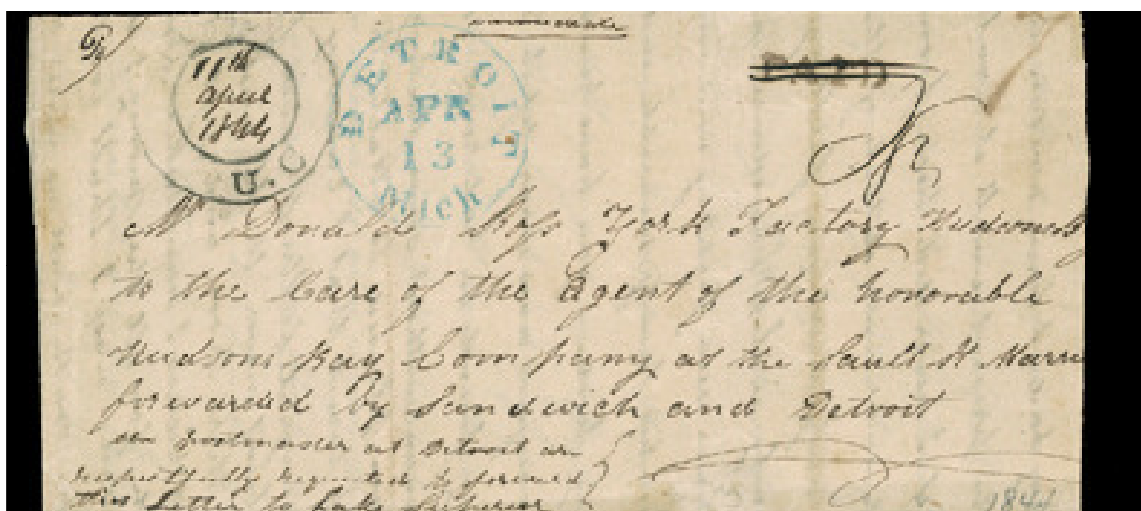


Figure 32. This folded letter dated 12 April 1844, was sent to Donald Ross from George McBeath of Moraviantown and is characteristic of the time with the paper folded such that the address could be written on the back of the letter itself. Already in 1844, letters from Canada were sent via the United States for forwarding to Norway House. This letter is postmarked, "Mosa, U.C./11th April, 1844" with a backstamp, "Windsor, C.W./12 Apr 1844" and a datestamp for U.S. mail, "Detroit, Mich./Apr 13." It was then forwarded to the Hudson's Bay Co. at Sault Ste. Marie and carried by HBC packet to Norway House. This letter was sold at auction for \$1,800 in 2010 by the Spink Shreves Galleries of Dallas Texas.

Norway House's role as the distribution center for 'country produce' continued to expand. In 1839, although the overall volume of goods received from the various posts remained steady, the variety of products continued to increase. The produce from the Red River settlement that year included: barley, corned beef, biscuits, oak boards, butter, cookies, cheese, eggs, flour, hams, dried meat, pemmican, salted pork, potatoes, onions, tracking shoes, oak staves, portage straps, salted suet and an assortment of garden seeds. The Saskatchewan District also provided: newly built York Boats, grease, dried meat, common and fine pemmican, tracking shoes, leather tents and buffalo tongues.⁷⁷⁶ These products were duly distributed to other posts and to support efforts such as Peter Dease and Thomas Simpson's continuing participation in the Arctic Discovery mission.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁶ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 6 June to 12 June 1839 at Red River Settlement, 773-790.

⁷⁷⁷ Thomas Simpson had joined the HBC in 1829 on an apprenticeship that was to last two years. He eventually worked as Governor Simpson's secretary in which capacity he first visited Norway House in 1830. Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 322. See also, "An Account of Arctic Discovery on the Northern Shore of

In 1840, the permanent staff of Norway House was increased to a clerk and seven servants and for the remainder of the study period the population remained steady. This was also true of the transient population. By the summer of 1840 the transient population had more or less stabilized and, with minor variations remained steady until the end of the study period.

There was a change of particular and personal interest to Donald Ross, however. In 1840, he was finally promoted from Chief Trader to Chief Factor, the highest rank available to him.⁷⁷⁸ Ross was also given additional responsibility regarding arrangements for supplying the necessary pelts for the payment of the rent to the Russians. He was directed to provide fully 3000 otter pelts which he was to order from the posts, especially the posts of the Lake Superior District. Governor Simpson's confidence in him was reflected in the instructions which stated that Ross was authorized, "... to make any arrangements he may think requisite for the accomplishment of this object."⁷⁷⁹ He was also directed to, "... take the necessary steps for carrying into effect the Governor and Committee's wishes in regard to the improvement of the roads on the portages and Tracking ground between YF and NH."⁷⁸⁰ Maintenance of the various tracks and paths remained as an important task that required a considerable commitment of labour. Except for the bustle associated with the work at Rossville, the routine for 1841 was largely unchanged from the previous year. The two large sailing vessels, which had spent

America in the Summer of 1838 by Peter Warren Dease and Thomas Simpson." *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*. Vol. 9, (1839), 325-330.

⁷⁷⁸ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 18 June to 24 June 1840 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 798-815.

⁷⁷⁹ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 18 June to 24 June 1840 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 798-815.

⁷⁸⁰ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 18 June to 24 June 1840 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 798-815.

the previous two seasons wintering at Red River, were to remain at Norway House for a thorough overhaul.⁷⁸¹



Figure 33. The ‘Archway Warehouse was originally built in 1841 to support Norway House’s increased responsibilities for the Mackenzie’s River District.
Historic Resources Branch, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, 1985.

For 1842, Ross reported that, “the summer business of [the] season was got through much in the usual way, the Brigades all passed upwards in good time.”⁷⁸² The only significant change to the routine of the post was the addition of another small industry at the post; barrel-making. To support this effort, a cooper was assigned to the post and materials were ordered from the Red River settlement. The cooper was one of two such tradesmen hired in Europe on five year contracts worth 25 to 30 £ Sterling per year.⁷⁸³ The materials ordered from Red River included: “5000 white oak staves for 8 gal kegs, 22in by 3 ½ x ¾ in, 1000 white oak headings for 8 gal kegs 26 in by 4 x ¾ in, 600

⁷⁸¹ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 14 June to 16 June 1841 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 815-834.

⁷⁸² Ross to Governor Simpson, 26 December 1842. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁷⁸³ The two coopers were part of a group of tradesmen that were hired in Europe in 1841 that also included two blacksmiths, three masons, two joiners and six sloopers. Thirty labourers were also hired in Europe and another fifty voyageurs were engaged in Canada. Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 18 June to 24 June 1840 at Norway House, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 798-815.

staves for 34 gal kegs 30 in by 5 ½ x 7/8 in, and 250 headings for 24 gal kegs 20 in by 6 ½ in x 1 in.”⁷⁸⁴ Finding skilled tradesmen locally had been a recurring problem and remained so. In the previous summer, Donald Ross offered a freeman named Laflèche employment for one year as the post’s blacksmith, paid at the highest rate then going for this sort of trade, £30. Laflèche refused the offer leading Ross to opine that, “... without an efficient Blacksmith the work here cannot be accomplished.”⁷⁸⁵

There was still trouble at the Methye Portage. One observer commented that, “the Portage La Loche [Methye] was so difficult that the men hired half-breeds to carry their outfits across the 12 miles, but in doing so, they had to part with their most valuable articles.”⁷⁸⁶ The Council once again felt compelled to outlaw the hiring of casual labourers who assembled at the portage. The finger was being pointed squarely at the, “... gentlemen in charge of brigades belonging to those districts [Athabasca and McKenzies R districts].” Brigades were, “... strictly prohibited from affording any such encouragement in future, either by payment on public account or by private payments on the part of the people for assisting in transporting the outfits or returns on that portage.”⁷⁸⁷

There were also continuing problems with overhunting, especially of beaver. Although this had never been of great concern for Norway House since it was not really expected to conduct much in the way of actual fur trading, the problem for the industry as

⁷⁸⁴ Minutes of the Northern Council, held from 14 June to 16 June 1841 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 815-834. A list of country goods ordered in 1843 for collection at Norway House in 1845 is at Annex D.

⁷⁸⁵ Ross to Hargrave, 1 August, 1841. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁷⁸⁶ John McLean, quoted in, Jody F. Decker and Donald B. Freeman, “The Role of Portages in Shaping the Economic Geography of the Western Canadian Fur Trade, 1774-1850,” *Geographical Monographs No. 22*, (North York: York University, 1993), 43.

⁷⁸⁷ Minutes of the “temporary” Northern Council, held from 21 June to 23 June 1842 at NH, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 836-851.

a whole was becoming acute. In 1841, beaver quotas at twenty-five different posts in seven districts were limited, "... for three years to the half of the 1839 output,"⁷⁸⁸ Company officers were, "... strictly enjoined to discourage the hunting of beaver by every means in their power."⁷⁸⁹ The problem was so serious that the HBC was even prepared to threaten its officers announcing that, "... as a further remedy for this evil, if it be found that gentlemen disregard this instruction as they have done many others issued from time to time for the same object ... the Governors and Committee [will] give notice of retirement from the service to such gentlemen as may not give effect to the spirit and letter of the resolutions now passed for the preservation of beaver."⁷⁹⁰ Aggravating the problem further was the fact that considerable beaver habitat had been destroyed as a result of, "... most destructive fires having completely laid waste the whole country around us during the last two summers."⁷⁹¹

Although largely immune from these problems, Norway House was about to have its own. Donald Ross seemed to have anticipated problems associated with too large a population at Rossville in his comments to Governor Simpson in August of 1840, but he was no doubt surprised that the source of the trouble was the very mission he had worked so hard to promote and that the HBC had taken such pains to support.⁷⁹² The first rumblings of trouble seem to have come in September of 1841 when the Reverend Evans

⁷⁸⁸ Morton, *A History*, 696.

⁷⁸⁹ Minutes of the Northern Council, from 14 June to 16 June 1841 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 815-834.

⁷⁹⁰ Minutes of the Northern Council, from 14 June to 16 June 1841 at the Red River Settlement, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 815-834.

⁷⁹¹ Ross to Governor Simpson, 26 December 1842. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁷⁹² Ross was later to comment that, "the first appearance of the missionaries attracted much of their [the Aboriginal people] curiosity and attention without, as is now evident, making any serious impression on their minds, for generally speaking I fear the Indians are at this moment more firmly wedded to their ancient faith and superstitions than they were five years ago." Ross to Simpson, 18 August 1844. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

declined to travel with the transport brigade that was departing from Norway House for the interior. As the brigade was leaving on a Sunday, Evans chose to wait until the next day, at which time he departed in a half-size canoe, manned by three men. Importantly, the canoe and its crew were being paid for by the HBC.⁷⁹³

By the summer of 1842, Ross was having trouble with tripmen from Rossville who were objecting to the requirement to travel on Sundays. Ross knew full well the source of this objection and, in a letter to Governor Simpson, complained that Evans, "... preaches openly to our Servants, that they are not bound to work for us either on the voyages or otherwise, during the Sabbath days, and that if required to do so it will be meritorious on their part to disobey their orders."⁷⁹⁴ By the following summer the situation had deteriorated further such that Ross was led to report to Governor Simpson that, "... the Indians give us a good deal of trouble and annoyance, for we cannot always depend on their promise to perform any particular service ..."⁷⁹⁵ In private correspondence, Ross, perhaps forgetting for a moment who had been manning his boats for the last decade and a half, complained that, "Indians are much better hunters than voyageurs,"⁷⁹⁶ and are moreover not a little given to grumbling and discontent sometimes when there is not much cause for it."⁷⁹⁷ These comments notwithstanding, Ross recorded

⁷⁹³ Shirritt-Beaumont, *The Rossville Scandal*, 57.

⁷⁹⁴ Ross to Simpson, 15 August 1842, quoted in, Enns, "*The Fur Trade at Norway House*," 86.

⁷⁹⁵ Ross to Simpson, 16 August 1843, quoted in, Enns, "*The Fur Trade at Norway House*," 81.

⁷⁹⁶ This assessment was not shared by everyone. John McLean observed that, "[...] the natives of this quarter [...] are constantly employed as voyageurs between Norway House and York Factory; and none perform the trip more expeditiously, or render their cargoes in better condition than they." John McLean, *Notes of a Twenty-Five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory*, (London: Richard Bentley Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty, 1849), 221.

⁷⁹⁷ Ross to Isbister, 2 August 1843. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45. With respect to Aboriginal people's cultural practices, Ross seemed to be much more circumspect. In a letter to John Isbister, he wrote, "I am sorry to hear that one of your Indians was shot by those of English River for destroying the beaver, but at the same time I cannot say but he deserved it, and in parts of the country where the Indians really value their hunting grounds it is death to those who encroach

that same summer that, “I have just equipped 5 boats, manned entirely by Indians, with the exception of George Kippling, the guide, to make a second trip to York Factory.”⁷⁹⁸ Whatever opinions Ross or others might have had on the suitability of Aboriginal people for the task at hand, the simple reality was that they were the work force.⁷⁹⁹ The labour problems that plagued the HBC in the late 1840s, and eventually redefined the nature of the relationship between the company and peoples that lived in the HBC territories, were already beginning to emerge at Norway House by the summer of 1844.⁸⁰⁰

In that year, two events occurred that transformed the fundamental conditions that had defined Norway House since 1825. First of all, Norman Kittson, the Canadian-born representative of the American Fur Company who was operating in the territory of upper Minnesota, established a trading post at Pembina, just south of the international border, effectively linking Red River with the commerce of the United States.⁸⁰¹ This had the immediate and permanent effect of diverting a considerable volume of trade south, away from the route to Hudson’s Bay via Norway House.⁸⁰² Although trade to the south had

on them from other quarters.” Ross to Isbister, 28 September 1843. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁷⁹⁸ Ross to James Hargrave, 7 April 1843. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁷⁹⁹ Ross did not confine his criticisms of the quality of labourers available to him to just the Aboriginal workers. In the summer of 1843 Ross also reported that, “[...] three of the new hands of last season who wintered at Norway House [to help with construction] are utterly incapable of performing their duties and should be dismissed from the country this season.” Ross to James Hargrave, 5 July 1843. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45.

⁸⁰⁰ The labour problems were not solely the result of the missionaries’ influence on the Aboriginal workforce but this certainly played a role. For a discussion of the problems from a social perspective see, Frits Pannekoek, “The Rev. James Evans and the social antagonisms of the fur trade society, 1840-1846,” *Religion and Society in the Prairie West*, ed., Richard Allen, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1974) 1-18. There was also the question of free trade. Ross, still at Norway House in 1845 commented that, “[...] the interference of the petty traders of Red River with the Indians of the neighboring posts is much to be regretted. Ross to Robert Cummins, 9 April 1845. LAC, *HBCA* (mc), B 154/b/1, Norway House Correspondence Books, 1840-45. For a discussion of the ‘free trade’ issue, see, Morton, *A History*, 802-25.

⁸⁰¹ Morton, *A History*, 806-7.

⁸⁰² Effective American presence in Minnesota began with the dispatch of U.S. Army troops to construct and occupy a fort at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. The fort, completed in 1825, was originally named Fort St. Anthony but in 1824 the name was changed to Fort Snelling in honour of the

been growing for some time, the establishment of Kittson's post marked the turning point in the nature of trade and transport in, and through, the HBC's territories.⁸⁰³



Figure 34. The ruins of Norman Kittson's trading post some time around 1890. State Historical Society of North Dakota (A0093-1).

1844 was also the first year that there had been a serious hunt since the quota for beaver had been lifted the previous summer. Ross had had some difficulty convincing the local Aboriginal population to attempt a hunt, going so far as to decree that, "... no Indian will be employed, by the Company, for the voyages or otherwise, next summer,

Army officer who oversaw its construction. Steamboat traffic as far as Fort Snelling began in 1823. In 1833, the American Fur Company established a post at Mendota, opposite Fort Snelling. This post, run by Henry Sibley, served as the headquarters for expanding trade between Red River and the United States. St. Paul was established just downstream from Mendota in 1840 when settlers were forced to vacate government land adjacent to Fort Snelling. Zapffe, *Minnesota's Chippewa Treaty*, 45-56.

⁸⁰³ Another problem that was looming was the problem of private trade. In 1843, even company officers were no longer permitted to ship private purchases of 'country produce' in company transport free of charge as a result of, "[...] a very improper and irregular practice having been discovered to obtain of commissioned gentlemen and clerks in the service making purchases of flour etc., at RR from private individuals, the same being conveyed from NH to the districts [...]" Minutes of Council, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 851-871.

who do not bring to the Company's trading shop at this place, in the course of the hunting season, furs to the amount of at least, Twenty skins."⁸⁰⁴ When hunters in the Norway District attempted their first serious hunt since the establishment of the post, they were rewarded with a considerable take in beaver. In 1842, only 544 large and 258 small beaver had been collected at Norway House. In the following year the numbers were 662 large, and 289 small, beaver. In 1844 however, Norway House was able to report that fully 3,704 large and 1,659 small beaver had been collected – almost three tons of fur!⁸⁰⁵ No doubt much to everyone's surprise, the beaver population, left alone for a good twenty years, had greatly recovered. For the first time in its existence, by the summer of 1844 Norway House was actually profitably engaged in the fur trade.

⁸⁰⁴ Donald Ross to James Evans, 17 July 1844, University of Western Ontario, *Evans Papers*, quoted in, Enns, "*The Fur Trade at Norway House*." 93.

⁸⁰⁵ "York Factory District Reports – Returns, 1842-69, Norway House." *HBCA B.239/h/2*. Record 07/08/2004 ft. Courtesy F. Tough.

Chapter Six.

Micro-historical Gleanings.

Research for this dissertation has revealed three phenomena that, although beyond the scope of this study by virtue of limitations of time and space, suggest themselves as lines of enquiry for further efforts. The first of these is related to the social aspect of the large gatherings of transient people that occurred each summer at Norway House as a result of the HBC's transport operations. The second is suggested by the behaviour of officers of the HBC that would seem to offer a potentially useful Canadian perspective on the conflicting notions of colonial/Imperial motivations that have been expressed alternately as 'orientalism' and 'ornamentalism.' Finally, research materials gathered for this project points to the possibility that a focused genealogical study could determine with some clarity who, precisely, the people were who moved to Norway House during its formative years (1820s-1840s).

One of the peculiar by-products of American fur-trade studies and their derivative popular literature is the celebration of the myth of the 'mountain man.' Within the 'mountain man' narrative, there is a special place for the trade fairs that were, for a brief period, the mechanism by which furs and trade goods were exchanged in the American interior. Each summer, from 1825 to 1840, suppliers would travel from the settled parts of the United States with trade goods to previously agreed to sites along the Green river in present-day Wyoming. There, they were met by agents of the fur trading companies and independent hunters and trappers who brought their furs and other goods for sale. Unsurprisingly, these gatherings represented a social event of considerable importance

for the participants. Although it is difficult to separate fact and fiction in the popular representation of these assemblies, the received picture of them is of wild gatherings characterized by much singing, eating, drinking, gambling and fighting. Of course, the opportunity to enjoy female companionship is also a core theme in the now-iconic lore of the “Great Rendezvous.” There is no such lore associated with the fur trade in Canada.



Figure 35. The Rendezvous Near Green River.
Alfred Jacob Miller. 1837.

In spite of this, materials in the HBC archives suggests that the gathering of people that occurred each summer at Norway House had a character remarkably similar to that of the “Great Rendezvous” south of the border and at precisely the same time. Although the purpose of the two rendezvous were different – the American version was a

trade fair, whereas the rendezvous north of the border was more in the nature of a labour fair – the social function of the two events was the same.

During the period studied, the first hint that Norway House offered attractions beyond those that were associated with the depot – such as the good harbour and the elevated land – came from George Simpson's journal. In 1824, one of the HBC officers, John Clarke, went missing, apparently absenting himself "... for a few days of diversion at Norway House ...,"⁸⁰⁶ and suffered Simpson's ire as a consequence. With the move of the post to its final location in 1825, it would seem that the HBC perceived an opportunity to reign in whatever festivities had been going on there. That year, Chief Trader Pruden was expressly forbidden to "... keep a general mess or give balls or convivial parties during the summer."⁸⁰⁷ Since the new post had not yet been built and given that Pruden was only just arriving to establish the new depot, the instruction seems distinctly pre-emptive in intent.

Nevertheless, the very next year, the newly arrived John MacLeod was confronted with the reality of the place. He recorded that the arrival of the Saskatchewan brigade resulted in a round of socializing during which "My man Canada got so drunk with Ross' [men] last night that he is not able to work a turn this morning. ... I was obliged to go with a kettle of water and drown the fire that Ross' people made outside being too near the Fort. The Fort must be picketed anew otherwise nothing will be safe either within or without."⁸⁰⁸ Not only was MacLeod concerned with the state of one of his handful of workers, he was clearly mindful of the fate of the previous post and the constant danger of fire, especially the bonfire that would accompany general revelry. Adding to

⁸⁰⁶ George Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, lviii.

⁸⁰⁷ George Simpson, *Journal of Occurrences*, 421.

⁸⁰⁸ LAC, *HBC Archives* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 18 Aug 1826.

MacLeod's irritation with the conduct of the visitors was his realization that, in addition to being uninterested in helping with work at the post, they were also the source of pilfering and loss. At the end of the 1826 season, MacLeod was compelled to hire the freeman Huggy Isham for, "... preparing timbers and bark to repair a big canoe of which the bark and timbers were stolen by the passants."⁸⁰⁹

In June of 1827, with the transport brigades arriving daily, MacLeod found it difficult to keep people focused on assigned work. This extended to the Aboriginal people who had also collected at Norway House and who were being relied upon by MacLeod for casual labour. In his journal he complained that, "I would have sent a boat to Norway House [the old site] today but the Indians who were to be the crew being assembled at a feast will not go for the day."⁸¹⁰ The festivities continued through the month and, in spite of the 1825 proscription on the keeping of a general mess, it was recorded that "... the canteen had been for some days back opening,"⁸¹¹ and the tendency of crews to loiter at Norway House resulted in increased expenses and "much irregularity ..."⁸¹² In response to transactions at the Company Store, the post was directed to refuse to open accounts for visiting persons, "... as this has caused serious inconvenience."⁸¹³ The Company seemed to be reacting to a tendency towards impulse buying and overspending, particularly by those whose accounts were not directly controlled by Norway House. It would seem that, whatever the HBC authorities might try to impose, the all-too-rare opportunity to socialize at Norway House was irresistible.

⁸⁰⁹ LAC, *HBC Archives* (mc), B 154/a/12a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 20 Sep 1826.

⁸¹⁰ LAC, *HBC Archives* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 2 Jun 1827.

⁸¹¹ LAC, *HBC Archives* (mc), B 154/a/14a, Norway House – Post Journal 1826-7. 30 Jun 1827.

⁸¹² Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council*, 112.

⁸¹³ *Minutes of the Northern Council*, from, Oliver, ed., *The Canadian Northwest*, 815-834.

By 1831 the HBC appears to have accepted the reality of Norway House and the limitations of their authority and control. That summer, John McLean, a HBC officer enroute to the Athabasca, commented, “Here the men were liberally supplied, and I found myself at breakfast with a number of chief factors and chief traders, just arrived from their respective districts, and on their way to York Factory with their valuable returns. I passed my time very agreeably, having just enough employment during the day to keep off ennui, and the company of several gentlemen, and, what I thought still better, that of a fair countrywoman in the evening.”⁸¹⁴

As this makes clear, the social attractions of Norway House had extended to the officers of the company. Meanwhile, the general population continued to take advantage of the summer event. In apparent frustration with efforts to get some work done, John Ross complained that, having already been idle for some days, “the Indians continued to enjoy themselves.”⁸¹⁵ By this point he probably should not have expected otherwise. One commentator noted that, “While the grandees were holding solemn enclave in the council hall, and sealing the fate and fortunes of the fur trade and its engages for the year, the voyageurs in the encampments outside the stockades held high festival, fraternized with old long-separated comrades, related and discussed the news of the uttermost parts of the wilderness from which they had here converged, engaged in friendly trials of strength and skill, boat and canoe races, and the great annual fare nearly always ended in a battle between the rival prize-fighters of the different brigades.”⁸¹⁶

⁸¹⁴ W.B. Ready, “Norway House,” *The Beaver*, March 1949, 30-34.

⁸¹⁵ LAC, *HBC Archives* (mc), B 154/a/28, Norway House – Post Journal 1836-7. 24 June 1836.

⁸¹⁶ Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 136.

In 1841, Robert Ballantyne, another young officer of the company, visited Norway House enroute to his post in the interior and recorded his impression of the mood at Norway House in the summer,

Norway House is also an agreeable and interesting place, from its being in a manner the gate to the only route to Hudson's Bay; so that, during the spring and summer months, all the brigades of boats and canoes from every part of the northern department must necessarily pass it on their way to York Factory with furs; and as they all return in the autumn, and some of the gentlemen leave their wives and families for a few weeks till they return to the interior, its is at this sunny season of the year quite a gay and bustling place; and the clerk's house in which I lived was often filled with a strange and noisy collection of human beings, who rested there awhile ... Soon the boats began to arrive...and ere long, as many fires [as there were boats] burned on the green beside the fort, with a merry, careless band of wild-looking Canadian and half-breed voyageurs round each – and a more picturesque set of fellows I never saw ... The Saskatchewan Brigade is the largest and most noisy one that halts at Norway House. It generally numbers from fifteen to twenty boats, which are filled with the wildest men in the service ... all passing onwards to the sea – rending Norway House quite lively for a while, and then leaving it silent. Now, indeed, the corner of the fort in which we lived was avoided by all quite people, as if it were smitten by the plague; while the loud laugh, uproarious song, and sounds of the screeching flute or scraping fiddle, issued from the open doors and windows, frightening away the very mosquitoes, and making roof and rafter sing...Norway House was now indeed in full blow; and many a happy hour did I spend upon one of the clerk's beds, every inch of which was generally occupied, listening to the story or the song.⁸¹⁷

In his description of a life in the Hudson's Bay Company's employ, J. McDonald Oxley recounted, "... the arrival of the Saskatchewan Brigade, the largest and noisiest of all that halted at the fort ... filled with the wildest men in the service ..., with the frequent arrival and departure of brigades with their bands of noisy, merry, reckless voyageurs, and swaggering clerks in charge, ready for song, or dance or story, Norway House, in midsummer, was one of the liveliest places on the continent."⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁷ Ballantyne, *Hudson's Bay*, 121-25.

⁸¹⁸ J. McDonald Oxley, *Fergus MacTavish; or Portage and Prairie. A Story of the Hudsons' Bay Company*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1892), 44-46.

These descriptions suggest that Norway House held a position of centrality in the social calendar of the fur trade during the study period. The unique circumstance of Norway House being the only point in the entire system where people from all parts of the department could and did assemble regularly is probably why this was so. That there is no 'great rendezvous' lore associated with Norway House is intriguing and begs further study, especially with respect to the opportunities for the confirmation, renegotiation and reconfiguration of social relations presented by such a gathering.⁸¹⁹

The second 'gleaning' from this study is related to interpretations of the nature of the colonial/imperial enterprise generally. Of particular relevance to Canadian history is the debate between those historians who, in deference to the notion of the 'linguistic turn' and the importance of literary critique as historical method, have developed the idea of a monolithic British Imperial project that sought to impose created identities on indigenous populations so as to more easily colonize and rule them. This was the essence of that strand of historical critique that came to be known as "orientalism" as a result of Edward Said's groundbreaking work of that name.⁸²⁰ Although this idea met with a decidedly lukewarm welcome when it was first proposed,⁸²¹ it turned out to have considerable

⁸¹⁹ For a discussion of these and related issues within the context of the contemporaneous buffalo hunts see, Elizabeth Vibert, "Real Men Hunt Buffalo: Masculinity, Race and Class in British Fur Traders' Narratives," *Gender and History*, Vol 8, Issue 1, 2007, 4-21.

⁸²⁰ Said. *Orientalism*.

⁸²¹ When the book appeared it was generally dismissed by critics. The British historian Clive Dewey commented that when the book was first published, "[...] historian after historian must have put it down without finishing it, without imagining, for a moment, the influence it would exert. It was, technically, so bad; in every respect, in its use of sources, in its deductions, it lacked rigour and balance." Clive Dewey, "How the Raj Played Kim's Game," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 17, 1998, p. 10.

appeal. Within a decade, Said's approach was established as something of a paradigm in post and anti-colonial studies.⁸²²



Figure 36. The Women of Algiers. Central to the orientalist argument is the notion of a created and imposed culture for the purpose of control such as that implied in this powerful exposition of class. Eugène Delacroix, 1834. The Louvre, Paris.

One of the principal responses to the notion of “orientalism” came in the form of David Cannadine’s conception of “ornamentalism” as presented in his 2002 study.⁸²³ Cannadine rejected “orientalism” as too deterministic, too monolithic and too isolated from the people that it purported to champion.⁸²⁴ Cannadine also criticized Said’s

⁸²² Even amongst those who severely criticize the text, its influence on contemporary colonial studies is acknowledged. For example, see, Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

⁸²³ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*.

⁸²⁴ See Adele Perry’s critique in, “The Historian and the Theorist Revisited,” *Histoire Social – Social History*, Vol. 33, No. 65, Mai-May, 2000, 145-51. Another strong critique of *Orientalism* was offered by Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism*, (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2007).

method as too focused on secondary interpretation of period literature at the expense of the rigorous historical analysis of the contemporary texts that demonstrate how the British actually behaved. For Cannadine, it was in British behaviour - manifest in forms of dress, speech, architecture, displays of rank and culturally specific 'ornamentation' - that the true nature of the British imperial/colonial project was revealed. At the centre of this project was the idea that most of what the British were doing on a day-to-day basis was driven not by the desire to impose a culture on colonial subjects but rather on the desire by the British to remain British while submerged in foreign cultures in far-away lands.

Although there is no Canadian model of 'orientalism' – an 'Aboriginalism' – there should be.⁸²⁵ The same ideas that underpin Said's interpretation of British perceptions of the Middle-eastern "other" have been extended to, and arguably are based on, other colonial populations, those of the Indian sub-continent in particular. If the idea of an 'orientalist' meta-narrative as the driving force behind British notions of empire has merit, it should be possible to see this in their relations with any colonial population. This is especially so with respect to the Aboriginal people of Canada as they, not the already Anglicized settler population, would have been the natural target of 'orientalization.' The development of an 'Aboriginalist' interpretation for Canada is both beyond the scope of this work and incompatible with the disposition of this writer. Still, there are hints at where further study of this might lead.

⁸²⁵ Something approaching the model of orientalism but centered in North America is employed by Sarah Carter in, "The Missionaries' Indian: The Publications of John McDougall, John MacLean and Egerton Ryerson Young," *Prairie Forum* 9, no. 1, 27-44, and by Daniel Francis in, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Popular Culture*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995).

First of all, the very nature of the British North American fur trade militated against an ‘orientalist’ reordering of the Aboriginal communities. This was well understood at the time. John West, a missionary to Red River in 1822, wrote that, “... it was now hinted to me that the interest that I was taking in the education of the Native children had already excited the fears of some of the chief factors and traders to the extent to which it might be carried. Though a few conversed liberally with me on the subject there were others who were apprehensive that the extension of knowledge among the natives and the locating them in agricultural pursuits where practicable would operate as an injury to the fur trade.”⁸²⁶ It was evident that, “... neither Simpson nor the Company accepted attempts to change Indians’ way of life as a general policy, desirable in itself. Weaning the Indians from their nomadic way of life was, on the contrary, to be accepted only when it could not be avoided.”⁸²⁷ Since the Indians were the principal harvesters of fur, this should have come as no surprise to anyone. For the most part, unless there was some direct transgression against the company or non-Aboriginal people, the officers of the HBC were content to let Aboriginal people govern themselves. Interestingly, and perhaps instructively, in 1843, fully a decade after the abolition of ‘sati,’ – the practice of wife-burning in India – was upheld by British authorities, Donald Ross was content to turn a blind eye to the killing of Aboriginal people by other Aboriginal people over the control of hunting grounds.⁸²⁸

⁸²⁶ John West, *Journal*, p. 92. Quoted in, Innis, *The Fur Trade*, 309.

⁸²⁷ Rich, *The Fur Trade*, 255.

⁸²⁸ See chapter 5, note 81. For a discussion of the extension of legal authority in the interior see, Desmond Brown, “Ambiguous Authority: The Development of Criminal Law in the Canadian North West and Alberta,” in, *Forging Alberta’s Constitutional Framework*, Richard Connors and John M. Law, eds., (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2005). See also, H. Foster, “Forgotten Arguments: Aboriginal Title and Sovereignty in Canada Jurisdiction Act Cases,” *Manitoba Law Journal* 21, (1992): 343-45.

The structure and policies of the HBC also seem to support an ‘ornamentalist’ interpretation of British behaviour at Norway House. Within the British staff of the Hudson’s Bay Company, a strict hierarchy was retained and reinforced. This hierarchy also extended to relations with the populations (or populations) that grew up around the post between 1823 and 1840. The principal mechanisms by which this hierarchy was established and maintained were: titles (and the level of authority associated with them), implied responsibilities beyond those directly related to the fur trade, rates of pay and promises of future reward and finally, special privileges.

The strict hierarchy of the fur trade organization is perhaps most easily seen in the titles associated with various responsibilities. Below the level of the Governors of the Districts, the individual posts were controlled by Chief Factors or Factors, depending on the size of post. Directly below the Factors were the Chief Traders and Traders, with the title once again reflecting the span of control required at any given post. Generally speaking, if there was a “chief,” there were subordinates performing the same sort of function but at a lower level. Thus Chief Factors had Factors working directly for them while Chief Traders would have a number of subordinate Traders to control. Within and between these categories, the relative seniority was very clear. Factors were the senior officers of the Company and it was only they who were charged with responsibilities extending beyond the direct requirements of the fur trade. The traders were the most senior of the “working” officers but their jobs were strictly confined to conducting the Company’s business. However, even the lowest ranking Factor at the smallest post was in a position senior to the highest ranking Chief Trader at any of the larger posts. Below

the Traders were Clerks and then Postmasters, a controversial position which lay on the cusp between commissioned and non-commissioned ranks within the company.⁸²⁹

In addition to their place in the HBC hierarchy, the titled positions embodied responsibilities of governance and law enforcement that emanated from the Royal Charter that established the Hudson's Bay Company.⁸³⁰ Only company officers had any authority to administer and execute the law on behalf of the Crown. Later, when the office of Justice of the Peace was created in Britain, it was only company officers that were seen fit to hold this level of discretionary responsibility. In keeping with British expectations of law in the early 19th Century, the Factors were also responsible for control and maintenance of local but external relationships such as with Aboriginal populations, the Clergy and, eventually, with freemen traders and settlers. During the early days at Norway House this was probably simple in the extreme thanks to the absence of any significant local population. As the community associated with the post grew though, this became an important responsibility. Perhaps the most obvious example of the exercise of this responsibility was the allocation of Company controlled land for the establishment of Church buildings near the post.

The hierarchy was also reflected in the rates of pay. Factors were paid considerably more than their subordinates who were also compensated at rates that

⁸²⁹ The rank of Postmaster was established by Governor Simpson in 1831. The rank was higher than that of Interpreter, the highest of the non-commissioned ranks, but below that of clerk, the lowest commissioned rank. Several company officers, including Donald Ross and James Anderson, perceived the rank as a mechanism for ensuring that 'country-born' gentleman could be exploited to run posts but would be permanently excluded from commissioned status. Ross actively, and unsuccessfully, campaigned for the abolition of this rank. For a full discussion of this see, Denise Fuchs, "Embattled Notions: Constructions of Rupert's Land's Native Sons, 1760 to 1860," *Manitoba History, Number 44*, Autumn/Winter, (2002-2003).

⁸³⁰ For a discussion of the relationship between the Crown and the Company that resulted from the Charter, see, Connors., "In the Mind's Eye," 1-24, and, Bumsted, *Fur Trade Wars*, 6-22. Interestingly, there was no mention of the lands controlled by the HBC in Lord Durham's famous report on conditions within Britain's North American territories. *Lord Durham's Report: an abridgement of Report on the affairs of British North America*, G.M. Craig, ed., (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963).

clearly reflected their status. Directly below the Factor in terms of pay was the Trader. Below him were the junior officers such as the clerks and postmasters. Next came the interpreters and the expert craftsmen. These included blacksmiths, carpenters, boat-builders and the like. Below these came the boat crews and labourers. The one clear exception to the direct relationship between station in the company and rate of pay is with respect to contracted workers, some of whom could make substantial amounts of money but only on a temporary basis.

Contractors also had no claim on the long-term rewards that constituted another of the mechanisms for differentiating between the various levels within the company structure. For example, senior officers could, in the event of particularly successful operations, be granted bonuses of both money and other privileges. Officers could also expect the grant of a sizeable piece of land upon retirement. Although other workers were also entitled to land grants, these were never very large and, unlike the grants for officers, were never of sufficient size to allow them to be developed into working farms. This particular measure seems to have been clearly directed at ensuring that retired company officers would maintain their status over retired company workers since newly-arriving settlers were entitled to much larger land grants. Any developing 'landed gentry' was not to be based on retired labourers.

Reflecting Cannadine's views, title, responsibility, pay and benefits all reinforced the essential class distinctions that accompanied personnel arriving from Europe and which remained in place, regardless of their apparent relevance to the North American interior. Perhaps the clearest indication of an enforced hierarchy within company personnel may be seen in the question of privileges. In most cases, these privileges did

not include any additional financial advantage. In some cases, the privileges even cost the recipient money. However, these privileges sharply underlined “who was who” within the company and extended status beyond the strict limits of company authority. Instructions regarding these privileges – and their purpose – were unambiguous. “In order to draw a line of distinction between Guides Interpreters and the Gentlemen in the service no Guide or Interpreter – whether at the factory Depot or inland be permitted to mess with commissioned Gentlemen or Clerks in charge of posts ...”⁸³¹

Robert Ballantyne, visiting Norway House in 1841, “... was gratified to find that there existed here a far greater degree of intimacy between gentlemen of different ranks in the service, than in the Montreal department, where a clerk is considered a mere hireling; here on the contrary, commissioned officer look upon clerks as candidates for the same rank which themselves hold, and treat them accordingly.”⁸³² But contrary to the impression of a more democratic environment that this comment seems to convey, it is actually a reinforcement of the elemental distinction between commissioned and non-commissioned personnel. The clerks were, and always had been, officers of the Company, albeit of junior grade.

Probably the most obvious indicator of status at any site was the type of accommodation assigned. The example of Norway House is striking. Even though there was plenty of space in the numerous buildings constructed at the site, only the senior officers were allowed individual housing. Related to this was the privilege of officers to import personal baggage to their post. Factors were expected to “set the example” at the various sites. As a consequence, they were permitted to import furniture and other

⁸³¹Resolve 103rd of Minutes of a Temporary Council held at York Factory, 1 July 1824. Merk, ed., *Fur Trade and Empire*, 238.

⁸³² Ballantyne, *Hudson's Bay*, 131.

household furnishings far beyond the levels permitted to any of the other employees. Since the only way to import this type of material was on company transport, the company was in a powerful position to support the maintenance of the desired social order. It was not enough simply to have money.⁸³³

Although the company long resisted the keeping of wives and family at company posts – based on the perennial demands for economy within the system – the company was eventually forced to bow to the inevitable. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, the eventual arrival of white women in Rupert's Land was to have a profound effect on attitudes that were already changing as a result of numerous factors.⁸³⁴ Still though, in the early days, only the most senior officers in the company were able to even consider bringing a white wife to live with them.

Another aspect of privilege related to rank and status was the restriction on specific items allowed to be imported into Rupert's Land. There appear to have been a number of items that evolved as the fashionable "must haves" for those persons aspiring to high social status which was at least partly achieved by emulating the trappings of polite society in Britain. In addition to the unsurprising and ubiquitous tea and tea services, macaroons (as already noted) and Madeira seem to have had a special place in the social order at Norway House and indeed throughout Rupert's Land. An ordering of drink that was based on rank rather than race provides yet another potential indicator of the nature of the social order. Port seems to have been the social alcohol of choice for

⁸³³ For a discussion of the same phenomenon in Britain itself, see, David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, (New York: Columbia University press, 1999). For further discussion of British self-perception and portrayal see, Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850*, (London: Random House, 2002,) and, Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007).

⁸³⁴ For a discussion of this see, Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many tender ties: women in fur-trade society in Western Canada, 1670-1870,"* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1980).

upper-crust entertaining with regular, if small, shipments made to even the remotest of sites. Although rum was much cheaper and more plentiful than port or other wines, it would appear that it was considered suitable only for trade with the Aboriginal population or with the lower orders of servants within the company. This was in spite of the fact that, because of its higher alcohol content, rum was a much more efficient means of delivering intoxicating liquor to consumers.

Another item that, with rare exceptions, only commissioned officers of the company were permitted to import, was high-quality sporting firearms. This type of purchase was invariably noted as a “special item” on company waybills and boat cargo manifests. Typically, the name of the individual to whom the firearm was being delivered was included on the waybill.⁸³⁵

At first blush, it would seem that Norway House’s place within the trans-Atlantic commercial enterprise that was the Hudson’s Bay Company contributed to the construction or retention of a social structure that was locally inward looking and globally outward looking. Those company personnel who were stationed at Norway House during the early years after the merger of the Hudson’s Bay Company and the North West Company were not committed to the domination of the surrounding aboriginal population through some process of “othering,” racial or otherwise. Rather,

⁸³⁵ A review of load manifests for HBC boats bringing goods to trade posts reveals both that a variety of guns were available and that their distribution was controlled. For example, Boat No 1, bound for the Severn on 25 Sep 1823 carried one case of “guns” as well as one case of “muskets.” National Archives of Canada, *Hudson’s Bay Company Archives* (micro copy), MG 20, B 239/W/1, p. 489, 25 Sep 1823. On 22 Sep 1835 another boat carried one “Gun of Oman” as a private order. National Archives of Canada, *Hudson’s Bay Company Archives* (micro copy), MG 20, B 239/W/1, p. 571, 22 Sep 1835. Many other examples exist. What is clear is that firearms were divided into at least five different categories: “guns” i.e., for trade with Indians, higher quality “muskets,” “fine guns,” “arms and ammunition for staff” and guns such as the “Gun of Oman” that were special ordered by individuals. James Dunning received a specially ordered gun and gun-case via Boat No 1 out of Churchill on 13 Sep 1822. National Archives of Canada, *Hudson’s Bay Company Archives* (micro copy), MG 20, B 239/W/1, p. 479, 13 Sep 1822. Boat No 15, on 29 Jul 1843, delivered a gun and case to Joseph Primeau. National Archives of Canada, *Hudson’s Bay Company Archives* (micro copy), MG 20, B 239/W/2, p. 439, 29 Jul 1843.

the British (Scots and English) who were posted *in partibus infidelum*, worked diligently and hard to reaffirm their own British identities.⁸³⁶ This was done not only to retain the sense of who they were as individuals but also as a natural effort to construct a familiar order of things. This familiar, constructed (or perhaps reconstructed) order served an eminently practical purpose as it assisted them in executing their various functions; functions which included not only their business activities but also extended to their Royal Charter mandate to act on behalf of the British crown in the administration of law and in representing the government within the territory of Rupert's Land. Although this requires much more study, it would seem that the British at Norway House, *pace* Edward Said, did not structure themselves and their activities so as to better objectify and dominate the local Aboriginal population. Rather, and in the manner explored and articulated by David Cannadine, the social structure of the British community was centred on the effort to replicate the familiar imagined community that was Britain at the time. The effort was about ordering, not othering.

Given the breadth and richness of British colonial and Imperial studies, and the depth and quality of the debate generated by these studies, it is probably not too much to suggest that the stories of Norway House, the Hudson's Bay Company, the fur trade and Canada all need to be reconsidered within the broader context of British colonial and Imperial historical studies and through the lens of contemporary ideas regarding colonialism more generally.⁸³⁷ For example, if there is even a little truth to the

⁸³⁶ Further evidence of this may be found in the libraries of the post and in Donald Ross' personal library. In 1833 alone he ordered: *Logan's Highlands and Highlanders*, *Hood's Comic Annual*, *Friendships Offering*, *Literary Souvenir*, *Olio*, *Mirror*, *Literary Gazette* and an atlas. Glazebrook, *The Hargrave Correspondence*, 129, cited in, Warren Sinclair, *The Sinclair Family History Archives*, 1993.

⁸³⁷ For example, see the work related to disease and state medicine in India in, David Arnold, *Colonizing the body: state medicine and epidemic disease in nineteenth-century India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

perception that the HBC deliberately set about to isolate Aboriginal populations from European influences the better to safeguard the company's principal workforce – the actual harvesters of fur – the HBC might well be seen as an anti-colonial institution.

The last of the 'gleanings' from this study is that there is probably sufficient evidence within HBC records to support a thorough genealogical study of the Aboriginal population associated with Norway House. The 1838 census that the HBC conducted at Norway House would provide a good start point for such a study since working backwards and forwards from such a complete list would permit the establishment of linkages with the records of other posts and with other types of records such as those of the Wesleyan Church – the baptismal records in particular.

One example of this is the case of Uchegun, also known as Ochegun or Curley Head who figures in this narrative of Norway House. He first appears in the historical record at York Factory in 1809 and again in 1811. By 1826, he had moved into the Norway House district and was living approximately twelve miles downstream from the post with his family, including at least two sons. In 1838, he was recorded as living in the Aboriginal community at Norway House as a "head of family," with his wife. Three of his adult sons were also living at Norway House at that time, Kanawethemau Ethinue, Neneeniwapimousis and Tepwatum. Kanawethemau Ethinue took the name Henry Budd and it was this name that he used when he applied for scrip later in life.⁸³⁸ This linkage to a scrip application, in addition to providing more information with which to establish further connections, also speaks to the question of malleable identities that Gerhard Ens has explored. Although the 1838 HBC census identified Uchegun as "Indian," his son

⁸³⁸ Scrip was term for the government issued vouchers that entitled the holder to land or land-value. Métis scrip was issued to individuals who were deemed to have met the requirements of Métis status as defined in the Manitoba Act of 1869. Scrip and legal status as an 'Indian' were mutually exclusive entitlements.

Henry Budd (Kanawethemau Ethinue) described his father as, “halfbreed, son of a French Canadian.”⁸³⁹ There are many other examples of individuals whose genealogy could be traced and it is likely that these could be of considerable use in broadening and deepening our understanding of the activities of Aboriginal people in, and incidental to, the fur trade.⁸⁴⁰

⁸³⁹ LAC. RG- 15, Land Records, Half-Breeds and Original White Settlers (8), Applications of 1886-1901, 1906 made by North West Half-Breeds c,v. 1338, Brecklaw-Budd, Claim 2122, Henry Budd, Norway House 23 August 1887, mf. C-14954. Cited in, Curleyhead (Uchegun), Charles. Researched by Frontier School Division of the Social Studies/Native Studies Department of the Government of Manitoba, 4 April 2008.

⁸⁴⁰ Although the origins of the Aboriginal people are not entirely clear, James Smith has suggested that, “[...] the natives in the Norway House quarter were from coastal regions about York Factory. The remaining natives were from the headwaters of the Severn River.” James G.E. Smith, “Western Woods Cree,” *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 6, Subarctic*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1981), 256. See also, HBCA, B 154/e/1 fo. 5d, cited in, Warren Sinclair, *The Sinclair Family History Archives*, 1993.

Conclusion.

From 1825 to 1844, the circumstances of Norway House were unique. These special circumstances permitted the detailed analysis of the development of the post and its associated community that this thesis represents. By the summer of 1844, conditions had changed. Some conditions had slowly eroded while others ended suddenly and irrevocably. Nevertheless, by 1844 the site no longer presented conditions that were sufficiently discrete that it is possible to reasonably assess cause and effect relationships as they pertain to the broader Norway House community.

In 1825, a new post was built on a piece of empty land. The location had been selected solely on its merits as a location for the great inland depot of the HBC. There was a well protected harbour that could easily accommodate the type and number of water craft that were expected to frequent the establishment (canoes and York Boats and later, twelve ton sailboats). There was enough space for the post buildings that were planned as well as a small plot of arable land for a garden. The place was sufficiently elevated that it provided some protection from the dangers of flooding that resulted from the great range in water level and flow that characterized the waterways of Rupert's Land. Finally, the site lay more or less in the center of the fishing areas that were located at numerous points on and around Playgreen Lake.

When the site for the depot was chosen, there was no Aboriginal population living at or near it. Indeed, there were very few Aboriginal people in the whole Norway House district since, according to HBC observers, they had all left the area in search of better places to hunt, both for subsistence and for trade. Although this is not clearly established,

there is some evidence to suggest that what population there was in 1825 was already a migrant population from the area around York Factory. Significantly, the HBC was well aware of the limited population base but chose to build on the selected site anyway, a clear indication that, in the beginning, the requirement for a relatively large local workforce was not anticipated.

The HBC also knew well that the lack of a significant Aboriginal population in the area meant that no significant fur trade could be expected there. Aboriginal people were the harvesters of the fur – by hunting and trapping – and without them there was no fur industry. But the HBC also knew that the area had long been considered ‘hunted out,’ and thus accepted that fur trading was not going to be a primary activity at Norway House – regardless of how much people such as Joseph McGillivray might want it to be otherwise.

Since the post was not going to conduct much in the way of a trade in furs, its manning was determined only on the basis of the operation of the establishment as a depot. This function required only a handful of personnel with the effect that the post’s strength was reduced from twenty-three in 1823 to six in 1825 to only four in 1826. The reduction in the size of the HBC staff also had the effect of reducing the number of people ‘of the post’ – the women and children associated with the HBC servants – though interestingly this was not proportional, the number falling from twenty-six in 1823 to sixteen in 1825.

In 1825, the HBC had a virtual lock on transportation services in and through Rupert’s Land and the other fur trade territories of the British North American interior. One of the HBC’s great advantages over the NWC during their commercial struggle was

control of the route via Hudson's Bay. Cargo could be delivered to York Factory by ship which resulted in much shorter lines of communication with Britain and other global centers, compared to the Great Lakes route used by the NWC. When the companies united in 1821, the NWC route was effectively abandoned for freight and was only used for the movement of people and mail, and only when they originated in Canada. As a result, virtually all inland traffic – both freight and passenger – had to pass through Norway House.

These were the conditions in the summer of 1825. Almost immediately though, it became clear – at least to the man on the spot, John Peter Pruden – that the number of personnel assigned to the post was woefully inadequate to the tasks at hand. Considering that it had taken a dedicated construction crew, augmented by a much larger permanent staff, several years to build the previous Norway House post at Mossy Point, it seems surprising that the HBC could have seriously expected the tiny staff assigned to the new post to be able to do all of the work that was being assigned to them. Although the evidence here is indirect, there are certainly two recurring themes in HBC corporate behaviour that might help to explain this.

First of all, as was the case with other joint stock companies in this era, the HBC was famously – even notoriously – committed to economy. After the merger with the NWC in 1821, the HBC sought out savings wherever possible. Some measures, such as the proscription on the use of envelopes to enclose letters as a means of reducing freight costs, seem excessive to the point of obsession. In this atmosphere of frugality, it is perhaps understandable that the HBC might make its initial manpower calculations for any task only as a function of the specific requirements of the job. If Norway House was

only going to function as a depot, and if only three men were required to do that job, then any additional manpower needs would have to be established on the basis of experience actually running the newly established post. Although this does not seem like a very sensible approach, especially from a modern perspective, it is at least an understandable one.

It must also be said that some in the HBC, especially at the higher levels and especially among those in London who had never been to Rupert's Land, were capable of imagining projects which, though grand in conception, were utterly unachievable. Perhaps the best example of this is the winter road project. In spite of expending considerable resources on this dream over an extended period, the project made no real progress and was ultimately abandoned. Given the scope and scale of the project, and considering the terrain and weather of the region, the idea was wildly unrealistic from the start. It was this sort of intellectual and conceptual isolation from real conditions that could make it possible to think that four men could be sent to a vacant site, deep in the boreal woodland of North America, where they would then build and concurrently run a depot to handle all of the freight moving in and out of the territory, all the while providing not only for their own subsistence by fishing but also expecting them to amass thousands of fish with which to sustain the next year's transport brigades. It is probably just as well that they were good – and well-connected – money managers.

Already in the fall of 1825, the Chief Trader at Norway House was compelled to seek help wherever he could find it. At first, this consisted of trying to buy meat from local hunters, but there were precious few of those and there was almost no game to be had. Since the post would have to rely on fish for the daily rations, fishing became one of

the two key tasks at the posts, the other task of course being to actually construct the buildings. With the few men available totally inadequate for the job, the 'people of the post,' women and children all, were put to work at the fishery. Eventually, as autumn turned to winter, the HBC relented and sent a few more men to work at the site to support the fishery. This pattern remained the norm throughout the study period. Each year the HBC would assign a very small permanent staff to the post and each year it would be compelled to augment it in the winter to support the fishery. At no point during the study period did Norway House have a large resident population of HBC servants. Except for the few years when crews were assigned to work on the abortive winter road project, the non-Aboriginal population at the post remained very small. In the summer of 1844 there were still only nine men permanently assigned to the post.

After the first year, it was clear that real progress in building the new post could only be achieved with the allocation of additional labour. Since the HBC was not willing to assign extra servants, and since the freighters who frequented the post during the summer were neither willing nor capable of providing any real help, the Chief Trader turned his efforts to finding and recruiting Aboriginal people and freemen. At first, because of the small Aboriginal population in the area, it was very difficult to find people at all, let alone hire them. Eventually though, a few men were hired on a more or less full time basis. The construction work at the site continued and accelerated and more and more people were hired on a casual basis, either to assist directly with construction or, more often, to do the myriad other chores that needed to be done. This had the effect of freeing the permanent staff to concentrate on the building effort and, by the summer of 1828, the post was more or less completed.

As a result of this work, and of opportunities for employment in the summer transport brigades, a community had tentatively established itself adjacent to, but still separate from, the HBC post. But the roots of this community were not deep and there was a steady concern that the work force based on that community might drift away as quickly as it had coalesced around the post during its construction.

As time progressed, the continuing needs of the post and of the various people that passed through the post, provided sufficient opportunities for work and commerce so that, by the time Norway House had regained its central role as the host location for the Northern Council in 1838, the 'Indian village' was quite firmly established. Nevertheless, Donald Ross continued to be worried that the people might suddenly depart *en mass* to Red River as a result of perceived economic, social and religious opportunities there. It was these fears that led Ross to urge the HBC to take measures that would both encourage the community to remain in place and would discourage them from moving to Red River. This led to the establishment of the Wesleyan mission and, when combined with Ross' initiative regarding the relocation of the 'Indian village' as a function of land management, ultimately resulted in the founding of Rossville. Although there is no known record of any of the original Aboriginal people or freemen explaining their reason for relocating to Norway House during the early part of the study period, the application of *reductio ad absurdum* logic and some historical abduction offers compelling reasons and explanations as to why they did.

First of all, they did not come to join with their families or reconnect with existing kin, clan or community relationships; there was no indigenous community at that location at that time. Of course this circumstance changed over time and it may well be that, by

the latter part of the study period, the newly-established community at Norway House was itself a significant draw for further accretions of population.

Nor did they come to hunt game. Game was very scarce in the region throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. So rare were large animals that the successful hunt of one resulted in celebrations and the raising of glasses in cheer. Game birds were also rare with even the most modest of hunts being recorded in the post journal as a special event. In reality, it was the shortage of game that had initially been cited as the reason for the very low Aboriginal population when the post was first established.

People did not come to Norway House to hunt and trade beaver and other furs. Throughout the study period, until 1844, there were no significant fur returns from Norway House. Some of the other posts of the district were more successful, but Norway House was neither intended as, nor capable of, being an important source of fur for the trade. Additionally, since a very restrictive quota had been imposed on the harvesting of beaver from the region – Norway House had one of the lowest quotas in the entire trade – there was little encouragement to hunt furs. This suddenly changed in 1844 when, for the first time, there were good returns of beaver at Norway House following the lifting of the quota the previous year.

It is also almost certainly true that the post's small permanent staff did not constitute an important attraction for those choosing to re-locate to Norway House. Without wanting to put too fine a point on it, the reality is, that with only five HBC men at the site, the opportunity for the establishment of new relationships between men of the post and Aboriginal women was small due to the existing population of 'people of the post;' in 1825 there were still seven women and nine children associated with the post.

Even if each of the HBC servants had established a relationship with a newcomer to the area, this would only have constituted only a very small portion of the population. This remained true throughout the study period as the number of permanent HBC staff assigned to the post never exceeded nine men.

What people clearly did come to Norway House for was the work. First in casual jobs associated with the construction of the new post and then with providing services to the post and to the people who passed through it, Norway House presented a significant and steady source of employment and other profit-making opportunities for a large number of people. Until the establishment of the post at Pembina in 1844 and the subsequent channeling of larger and larger volumes of trade away from the route through Norway House, almost all traffic in and out of Rupert's Land passed through the post. The resulting large summer transient population represented a considerable market for local entrepreneurs selling goods and services. The transport brigades that constituted the main traffic were heavily manned by tripmen hired at Norway House and by independent freighters contracted at the same place. Already in 1831, the labour pool that Norway House represented, and the labour fair that marked the beginning of the summer transport season, had become essential parts of HBC operations and the company was prepared to take serious measures to maintain and protect them.

As is clear from the graph at Figure 37, the modest size and relative stability of the company and company-related population is apparent. When these numbers are compared to the large and steady transient population (Figure 38), the contrast is striking. Still, the story is one of consistency. It is within this context of stability – and the opportunities that the company and company-related activities generated – that a local

population established itself. Although there was initially only a handful of local people at or near the post, by the end of the study period the local population was almost as large as the peak summer transient population (Figure 39).

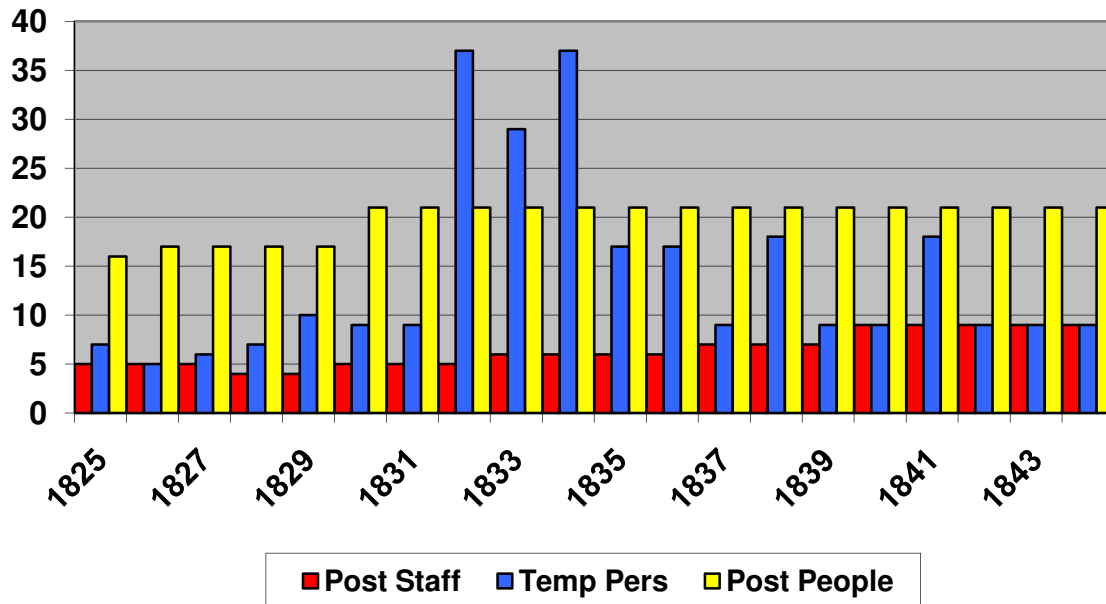


Figure 37. Norway House Population 1825 – 1844. Except for the brief spike in the number of personnel for the winter road project, there was no radical change in the numbers during the study period.

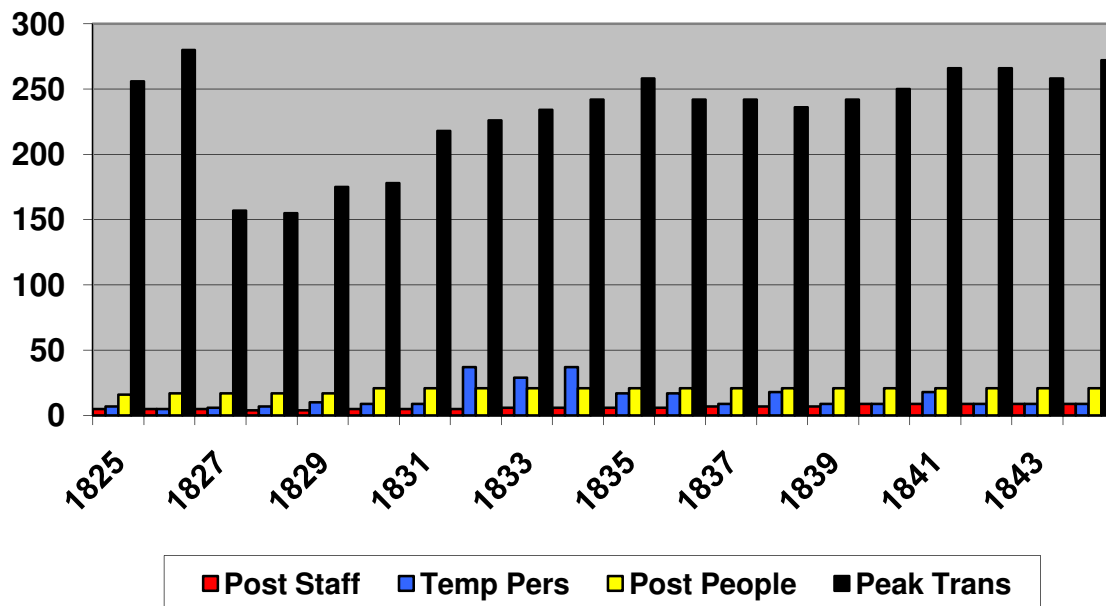


Figure 38. Norway House Population 1825 – 1844. In this view, the small but relatively stable company and company-related population is compared to the large but relatively stable summer peak transient population that resulted from the annual visits of the transport brigades to Norway House.

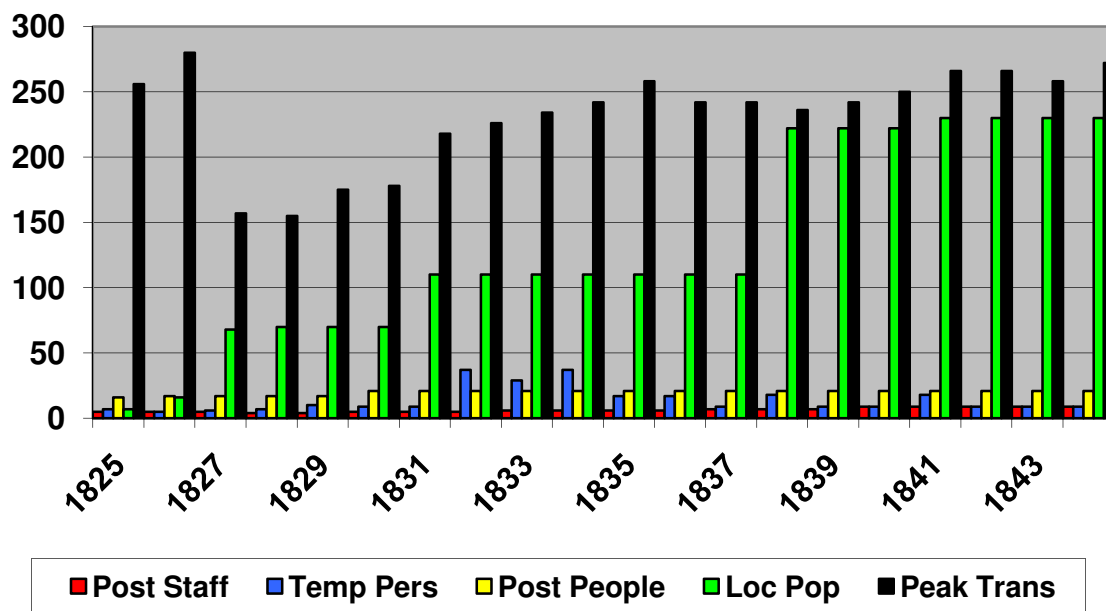


Figure 39. Norway House Population 1825 – 1844. In this view, the relative stability of the company, company-related and transient populations is compared to the steadily growing local community.

Like a town growing up around a mine or a railway station because of the opportunities that the central activity offered by way of direct employment and in the creation of opportunities for entrepreneurs, the larger community of Norway House was a creation of opportunity rather than design. Aboriginal people and freemen chose to move to Norway House and chose to remain there. The historiography of the fur trade began with broad assumptions about the dominance of economic considerations. Over the years, fur trade studies have expanded and deepened and have been greatly enriched. Still, in this new scholarship there has been a tendency to minimize and even marginalize the role of the fur trade economy in the lives of the people associated with it. With a nod to both Occam’s Razor and the earliest of the “fur trade” historians, this dissertation argues that, whatever else might have been going on and whatever other factors might have been weighed while making these choices, economic considerations mattered.

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Appendix A.

Norway House Personnel 9 June – 5 September 1827.

Date	Perm Staff	Temp Staff	Visitors/Transit	Notes	Cumulative Per/Trans/Res
1827					
9 Jun	4	7		Staff/Sutherland family/4 Indians, 17 'people of the post', Isham's family.	11/6/27 + "Indians around the fort."
10 Jun	4	7	Arr of Finlayson and Hargrave with 2 boats crewed by 6 men.	2 boats.	11/20/27
11 Jun	4	7	Arr of Joseph Cook with 2 boats from RR bringing colony produce and pemmican. Dep for YF same day.	2 boats.	11/20/27
15 Jun	4	7	Arr of Donald Ross in canoe from Canada. Arr of Mr's McTavish and Miles in a canoe. Gov Simpson had gone to RR without stopping at NH.	2 "light" canoes (7 pers @).	11/35/27
16 Jun	4	7	Arr of Mr's Stuart, Rowand, Spencer, Douglass, Geo McDougal and Hariot with Sask boats.	Arrival of 12 Saskatchewan boats (8 pers @).	11/137/27
17 Jun	4	7	Arr of Gov Simpson from RR Arr of 2 boats from CH.	1 "light" canoe (7 pers @). 2 boats (8 pers@).	11/161/27
19 Jun	4	7	Dep of 2 boats for McKenzie's R with 22 men.	2 boats.	11/139/27
			Dep of Geo McDougal and 1 boat.	1 boat (8 pers@).	11/130/27
			Dep of Finlayson and Hargrave for YF	2 boats (8 pers@).	11/113/27
			Arr of Alex Ross from RR with provisions.	1 boat (8 pers@).	11/122/27
20 Jun	4	7	Dep of Mr's Stuart, Rowand, and Hariot with Sask boats.	12 boats (8 pers @).	11/23/27
			Dep of Miles, Ross and Ermatinger in a canoe.	1 "light" canoe (7 pers @).	11/13/27
			Arr of Leith with 2 boats from CH.	2 boats (8 pers@).	11/30/27
22 Jun	4	7	Arr of Clarke from Swan R with 1 boat. Arr of Mr Bruce with 2 canoes from Montreal.	1 boat (8 pers@). 2 "light" canoes (7 pers @).	11/54/27
			Dep of Gov Simpson.	1 "light" canoe (7 pers @).	11/46/27
23 Jun	4	7	Dep of 2 canoes for YF.	2 "light" canoes (7 pers @).	11/32/27
			Arr of Nolin with 1 boat, departed immediately. Arrival of Swan R boats.	8 boats (8 pers@).	11/96/27
			Arr of Capt Franklin, Alex Stuart, Robert Mclean in a canoe. Franklin waiting at NH for Doctor Richardson.	1 "light" canoe (7 pers @).	11/106/27
24 Jun	4	7	Dep of 3 Swan R boats.	3 boats (8 pers@).	11/82/27

Appendix B.

Extract of Norway House Post Journal Transcript.

This represents one page from the journal volume for the fall of 1825 from 29 November to 4 December 1825.

Norway House - Post Journal 1825-1826

B.154/a/11

2

Norway House Journal Commencing 1st June 1825
Ending 31st of May 1826

1825

18

November. Peace stowing by the hay he brought yesterday and assisting Canada at times. Driver and Harper attending the nets. Removed one of the nets to another place this morning. Caught today 34 white fish and 6 jack fish. The 34 white fish just gives the rations a day.

30th – Wednesday. Wind Nly clear cold weather. Canada employed as yesterday. Peace and Corriveau working outside of new house to fill up the boards in the middle. Driver and Harper attending nets. Caught today 26 white fish, 5 jack and 1 perch.

December 1st – Thursday. Wind west clear cold weather. Canada repairing fire places, Peace went to Jack River for a load of hay, the rest employed as yesterday. Caught today 25 white fish and 1 jack out of 2 nets. Set 3 nets today and took one up.

2nd – Friday. Wind Nly blowing hard part clear and part cloudy weather. Men employed as yesterday except Canada who is working in the forge. Wm Sinclair arrived from Jack River with 156 white fish on 3 sleds. Peace came a part of the way with him but was obliged to return on account of the strong wind which blew the hay sled round upon the horse. Two young women arrive from Badger's tent carrying 2 thighs and a [illeg] of venison on their backs which their father sent. This is the first animal that has been killed by the Indians in the neighborhood this season. Caught today 26 white fish and 2 methyes.

3rd – Saturday. Wind Nly cloudy weather with light snow falling. Canada employed in getting pine root for the purpose of boxing in sleds to haul fish. Corriveau arranging a small house for stowing fish in. Sinclair making a track at the bank. Driver and Harper attending nets. Caught today 19 white fish, 5 methyes, 1 jack, 1 sucker.

4th – Sunday. Wind NW fell a little snow last night today fine weather. Peace arrived with a load of hay. Has been two days wind [illeg] altho on

End of Page.

Appendix C.

Standing Rules and Regulations. XIII. 1836.

Resolved. That the following be the Tariff for advances throughout the Northern and Southern Departments..

1. Commissioned Gentlemen. The Depot Inventory Tariff for all goods supplied them during the summer, and 25% thereon for all subsequent advances with distinction whether taken at the depot or inland – except Wines and Spirits to be at 100% on the Depot Inventory Tariff, but leather and all other country produce to be at the Depot Inventory Tariff or actual cost throughout the year.
2. Clerks and Servants. Tariff 50% on the Prime Cost of all imported goods and 12½ % on the Depot Cost of all country made articles supplied during the summer at the depot – except Wines and Spirits, to be continued at fixed prices viz, Madeira wine 20/, Port and all other wines 16/, Shrub, Gin and Brandy 16/, spirits reduced to proof strength 12/ per gallon; and all subsequent advances without distinction of articles, whether taken at the depot or inland to be charged 50% on the York or Moose Inventory Tariff, with the exception of wine and spirits to be sold at 50% on the depot summer sale Tariff to servants, and all country produce consisting of dressed and parchment Leather, Buffalo Robes, Provisions, etc., will be sold throughout the year at 50% on Depot Inventory Price. It is however understood that in consideration of the peculiar living and mode of journeying at the Bay side settlement, Wine and Spirits will be allowed to continue at the Depot Summer Sale Tariff throughout the year.
3. That it is however understood that the foregoing Tariffs are intended for the ordinary saleable articles; as to those classed unsaleable or considered as such, it is left discretionary with those superintendants of Districts or Posts to dispose of at a price corresponding with their estimated value.
4. That all Commissioned Gentlemen, Clerks and Servants be charged 10% on the last average nett sales, for any furs supplied from the stores during the current outfit for personal or family use in the country and 20% if supplied for any other purpose.

Appendix D.

Estimated Requisition of Country Produce for Outfit 1845 ordered for Norway House 1843.

Received at Norway House from:				Tot in	Item	Distributed from Norway House to:			Tot out
SD.	SR	RR	LLP			NH	OH	YF	
			10	10	Bark, birch, bottom, rolls	10			10
		3		3	Beans, French			3	3
12				12	Boats, inland, each	10	2		12
		12		12	Beef, corned, cwt	2		10	12
		3		3	Beef, smoked, cwt	1	2		3
		30		30	Barley, rough, bushel	30			30
		50		50	Biscuit, fine, cwt	50			50
		60		60	Boards, Oak, 12½ ft	44		16	60
		10		10	Boards, Oak, 15 ft, for sleds	6		4	10
		70		70	Butter, salt, 56 lb Farkin	33	2	35	70
		10		10	Butter, salt, 28 lb Farkin	10			10
		6		6	Butter, salt, 10 lb, Tinnets or macaroons	6			6
		220		220	Cheese, sweet milk, lbs	70		150	220
		10		10	Corn, Indian, hulled, bushel	10			10
		15		15	Eggs, kegs	10		5	15
		200		200	Flour, 1 st qual, cwt	150		50	200
		550		550	Flour, 1 st and 2 nd qual, cwt	200	50	300	550
3	3			6	Grease, soft, cwt	3		3	6
		50		50	Hams, each	35		15	50
40	20	50		110	Meat, dried, baled	100	5	5	110
100	70	400			Pemmican, common, 90lb	250	70	270	570
50	10			60	Pemmican, fine, 45lb	38	2	20	60
		70		70	Pork, salted, cwt	30		40	70
		8		8	Onions, bushel	2		6	8
	32			32	Salt (Winnipegosis), bushel	30	2		32
2500				2500	Shoes, tracking, pairs	500		2000	2500
		250		250	Straps, portage, each	100	30	120	250

Appendix E.

Images of Norway House – post 1844.

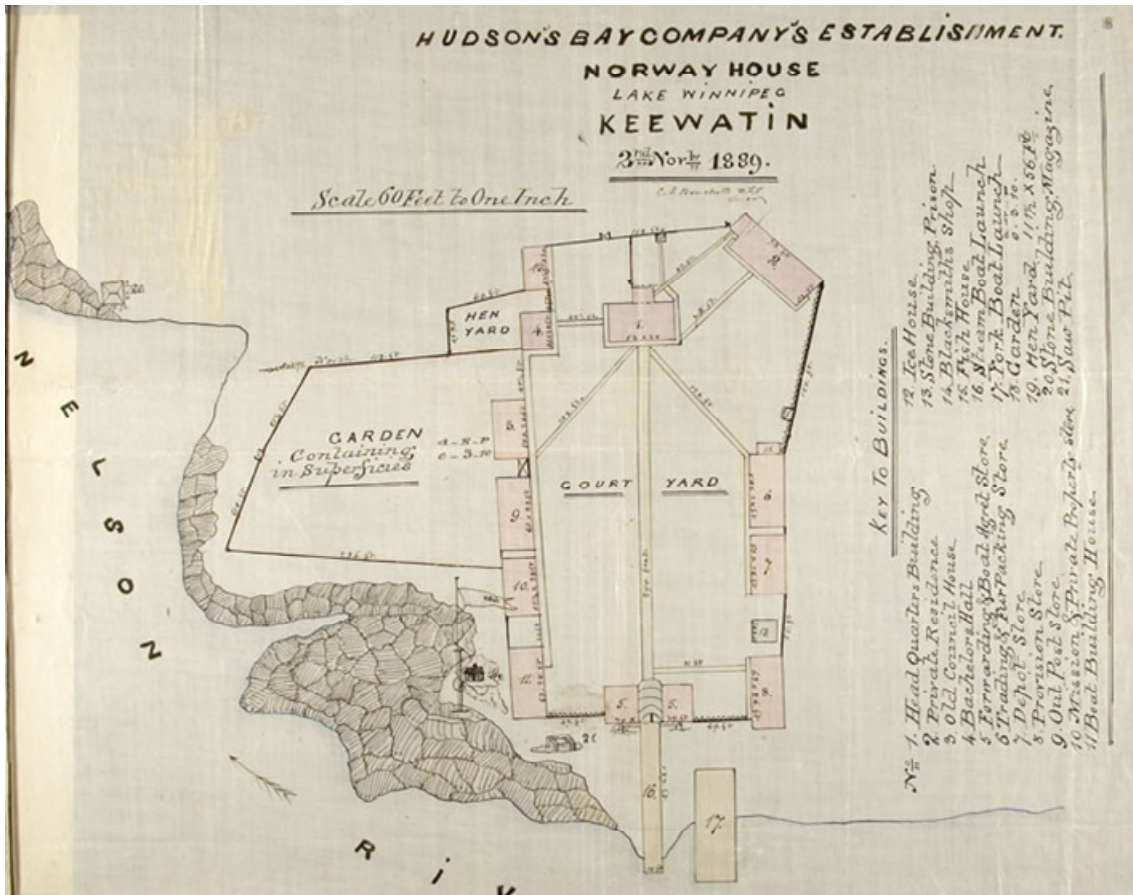


Figure 40. Plan of Norway House as of 1889.

LAC, HBCA, (mc). IM 781. B 154. Norway House Report on District 1889.



Figure 41. Norway House, 1925. Except for the palisade that was removed sometime after 1889 and the two two-story buildings at the rear of the site, this is generally how Norway House would have looked in 1844. Manitoba Pageant, Winter 1968, Volume 13, Number 2.

●



Figure 7. The Main Routes from York Factory to Norway House, showing the principal portages. Inset composite map assembled by Ryan Davidson from original map sheets by Bérard and Werner, Manitoba Conservation, Government of Manitoba, 1974.

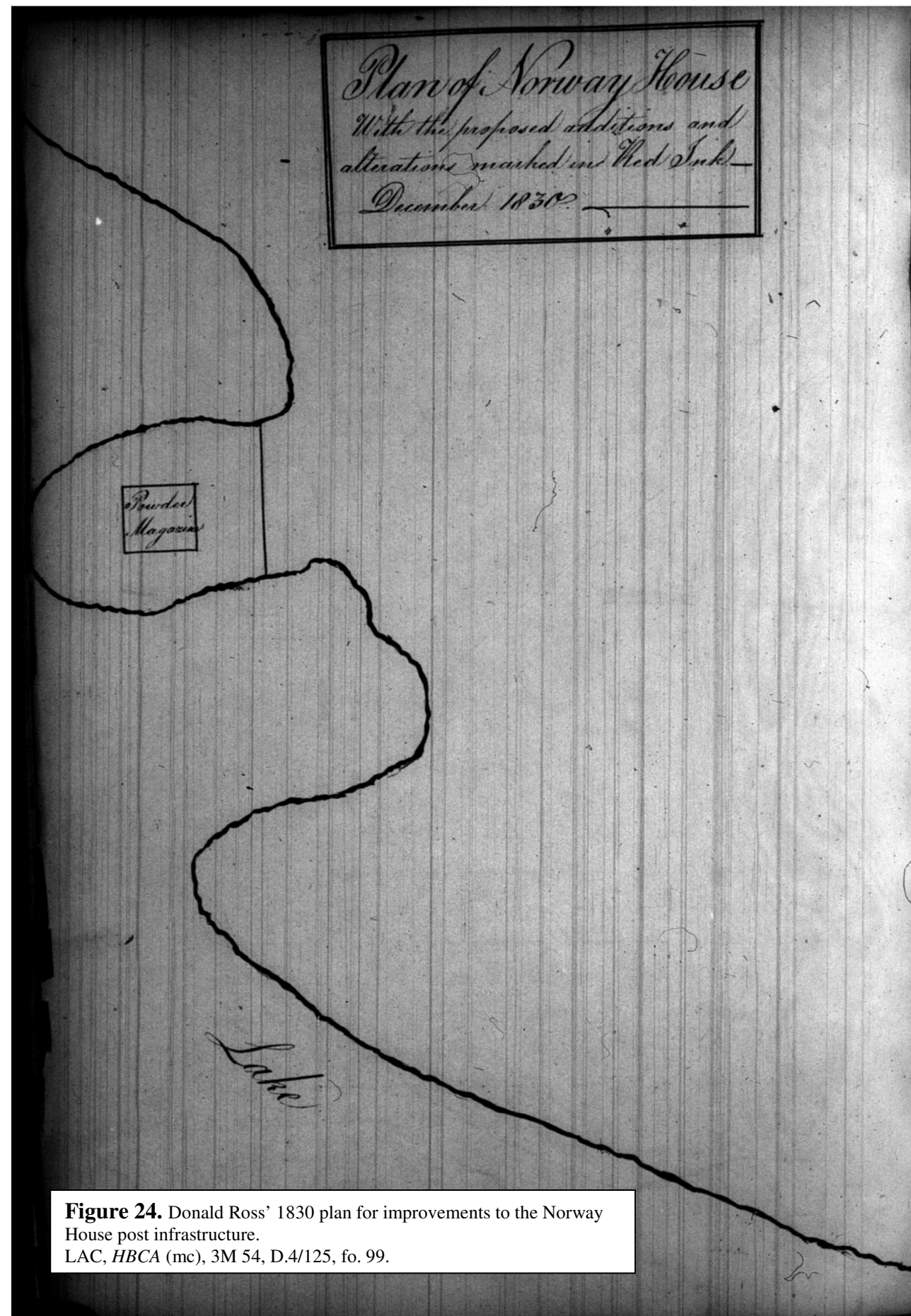
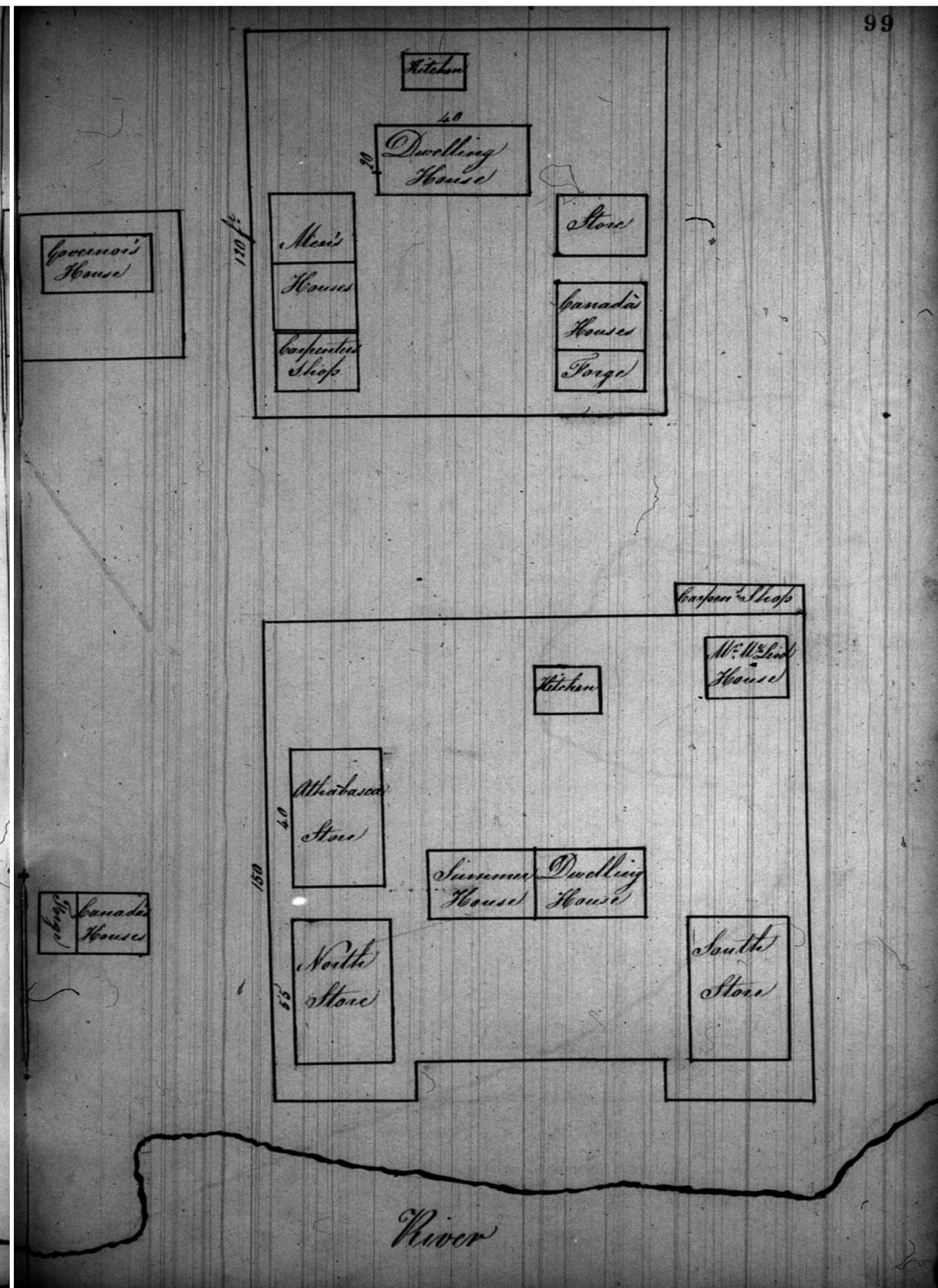


Figure 24. Donald Ross' 1830 plan for improvements to the Norway House post infrastructure.
 LAC, HBCA (mc), 3M 54, D.4/125, fo. 99.



Norway House District

Hunters Names	Relationship Connections	Hunters	Wives	Son	Daughters	Female Relations	Total Population
Norway House							
1 Amekescum	Son of No. 20	1	1	2			4
2 Anganaguas	d. - 7	1					1
3 Brodgun	d. - 25	1	1	1			3
4 Castalag	Head of family	1	1	2		2	6
5 Carly Kiad	d. - d.	1	1				2
6 Caculakeshuc	d. - d.	1	1	2	1		5
7 Cahsasas	d. - d.	1	1	3	11		9
8 Eggescum	d. - d.	1	1	1		8	3
9 Feely	d. - d.	1	2	11	2		9
10 Huggemaunhachack	d. - d.	1					1
11 Kocachuck	d. - d.	1	1	1			3
12 Kanawethernau Ethinuu	Son of No. 5	1					1
13 Kipitchewescum	d. - 26	1	1	1	1		4
14 Kanehappenau	Head of family	1	1	1	1		4
15 Kamisnehah	d. - d.	1					1
16 Kakeckiacappe	d. - d.	1	1	2		2	6
17 Mamenawatum	d. - d.	1	1	4	2		8
18 MucKiacappe	Son of d.	1					1
19 Maskatunecis	d. - No. 8	1	1	1	1		4
20 Maskipessquan	Head of family	1	1	3	2		7
21 Meedy	Son of No. 25	1	1				2
22 Minskeucut	Head of family	1	2	11	3		16
23 Misteagun	Stepson of No. 4	1					1
24 Menninapi mousis	Son of No. 5	1					1
25 Muccaway	Head of family	1	2	3	3		9
26 Muccane	d. - d.	1	3	2	1		7
Forward		20	24	37	21	4	112

Indian Population 85

Hunters Names	Relationship Connections	Hunters	Wives	Son	Daughters	Female Relations	Total Population
Norway House Cont.							
27 Napesis	Son of No. 22	1	1				2
28 Pappapathokis	Head of family	1	1	3	1		6
29 Sasascuscum	Son of No. 35	1	1				2
30 Silape	Head of family	1	1		1		3
31 Silacucapfo	Son of No. 20	1					1
32 Tineshuc	d. - No. 6	1	1				2
33 Pemectaspue	Head of family	1	1	3			5
34 Shawenacappe	d. - d.	1	2	1			4
35 Siuraspin	d. - d.	1	2	2	1		6
36 Suweguniaps	d. - d.	1	2	4	2		9
37 Tepwatum	Son of No. 5	1					1
38 Te'Equan	Head of family	1	1	2			4
39 Telicpeccunip	Son of No. 36	1	1	1			3
40 Nchicpemoy	d. - 28	1					1
41 WhisRegacco	Head of family	1	1	1	3		6
42 Nchenahays Son		1	1				2
43 Wisquash	Stepson of No. 11	1	1			1	3
44 Wiskeneegishuc		1	1	1			3

Widows & Children of the
following deceased Indians

Schaw		1	2	1			4
John Seluc			1	1	2		4
Shasip			1	3	2		6
		44	45	63	35	5	192

Figure 28. 1838 Census.
LAC, HBCA (mc), IM 903. Norway House, 1838.