

# Report of the Annual Meeting

## Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

# The Business Methods and the Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company

A. S. Morton

Volume 17, Number 1, 1938

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300178ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/300178ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0317-0594 (print)

1712-9095 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Morton, A. S. (1938). The Business Methods and the Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 17(1), 134–144. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300178ar>

All rights reserved © The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada, 1938

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**é**rudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

## THE BUSINESS METHODS AND THE ARCHIVES OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY<sup>1</sup>

By A. S. MORTON

Archives may be defined as the mass of documents produced by a corporation or a state in the course of the transaction of its business, which have become, as the archivists put it, inactive with the passage of time. It follows that there is an intimate relation between the business methods, or shall we say the business machine, of the corporation and its archives. From this archivists argue that this relationship must be preserved in the classification of the documents. There must be no breaking up of the series to arrange the individual items according to subjects, or in keeping with any artificial scheme—this notwithstanding the demands of a certain type of student.

The classification of the archives of the Hudson's Bay Company is in accordance with these principles as laid down by recognized authorities, for example by Sir Hilary Jenkinson of the Public Record Office in London. The present objective, which is all but attained, is to put in order the documents up to 1870, when the company's charter was surrendered to the Crown. Not long since a very intelligent young lawyer from an American university was in London preparing a monograph on company law before it became statute law, when it was, in fact, common law. He obtained access to the archives of the ancient companies and finally said that there were only two companies in London taking anything like proper care of their archives—the Bank of England and the Hudson's Bay Company.

We must, then, begin by getting some idea of the business methods, more precisely of the business machine, of the company. For this we must at the outset go to the charter granted by Charles II on May 2, 1670, by all odds the most important single document in the archives. This charter gave the company two precious privileges—the monopoly of the trade into Hudson Bay, and possession of the soil and of the natural resources of the country which they might reach through the strait—this trade and these resources to enable them to found a colony, as the charter puts it, to be "reckoned and reputed as one of our plantations or colonies in America called 'Rupert's Land' ". That the company was aware of the value of this document is evidenced by resolutions ordering it to be kept by Prince Rupert himself, its governor, and later, by Sir Robert Cleyton, lord mayor of London and treasurer of the company. Finally, it was ordered that an iron chest with a great lock and two small ones be secured for its safe keeping; that the deputy-governor should hold the great key and that the two small keys be held as the committee should order;<sup>2</sup> and that the precious document should only be taken out on the order of the committee. It was taken out to be produced in court in connection with certain cases involving interlopers who had penetrated into Hudson Bay. On one occasion it was placed before the Lord Chamberlain to confirm the company's claims as he was preparing a proclamation warning the people of New England that it was unlawful for them to carry on a trade in the bay.

<sup>1</sup>Quotations from, and references to, the documents in the archives of the company are by the kind permission of the governor and committee.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of committee, May 4, 1680; transcript in the Public Archives of Canada.

It may be presumed that the existence of that iron chest led the committee to place other precious documents in it. At any rate, on July 25, 1683, when the charter patent was being returned to the iron trunk, three bundles of papers were deposited with it.

Up to the time of the surrender under the Treaty of Utrecht, 1713, of such rights as the French claimed to have to the bay, only the most important volumes were preserved. Apparently, by 1714, the committee had got into the habit of preserving most of its documents, for from that time to the beginning of the nineteenth century the material is wonderfully complete. From 1800 or thereabouts there are great gaps up to 1821. I have wondered whether some of the loss here may not have been due to Lord Selkirk's brother-in-law, Andrew Colvile, who appears to have been the most active member of the committee from 1810 until the troubles usually associated with the name of Lord Selkirk ended with the union of 1821. Documents may have been taken over to his office and not returned.

To return to the business machine of the company—the charter provides for a company of stockholders. Each £100 of stock entitled its holder to a vote in the meetings of the stockholders, the General Court, as it was called. Naturally, the list of stockholders would come after the charter. This may have been kept at first in some loose form; so also the accounts. Be that as it may, soon a big *Ledger Book* was secured and the accounts with the stockholders entered, and in the back part of the volume the accounts with the servants. That this *Ledger Book* was written up several years after the company was formed is proved by the fact that Lord Ashley, the most distinguished member of the famous Cabal, who had an interest in the ventures before the charter was granted, has his account under the name of Lord Shaftesbury, he having only become such in 1672. Moreover, George Monk, who effected the restoration and became first Duke of Albemarle, does not figure in the accounts, though he was in the early ventures. He died a few months before the charter was given, and his interest is entered under the name of his son Christopher, the second Duke of Albemarle. As the accounts of the stockholders begin with the year 1667, it is possible to get a knowledge of the men who took part in the ventures which led up to the grant of the charter. Take the account of Prince Rupert. In the spring of 1668 he paid to John Portman, the treasurer, £100; and on July 9, a second £100. These payments would be for the equipment of the ketch *Nonsuch*, which sailed in that year. The ship did not return until the autumn of 1669. But Prince Rupert made another two payments in the spring of 1669—on March 10, £30; on May 13, £20. As the *Ledger Book* shows that there were two expeditions and not, as has hitherto been thought, but one, the second being in the *Wivenhoe*, a ship owned privately by Charles II, it may be taken that these last two sums were for the equipment of the second expedition. This is testimony that the first two ventures were managed on lines conventional with the "adventurers" from of old. Some threw into the pool such money as they cared to venture. For example, Prince Rupert's £200 provided for the *Nonsuch* in 1668, and £70 for the *Wivenhoe*. Others, for example, the first Duke of Albemarle, threw in goods, and when the company was formed was credited "by his proportion of ye remains of the former cargo".

In the section dealing with the general accounts of the company are

items dealing with the voyage of the *Wivenhoe* in 1669, the second of the voyages before the charter was granted. There are also items dealing with the servants of the company, from which one can gather the approximate date at which individuals, in whom one may be interested, entered the service. For example, the account of James Knight under date 1676 in the second *Ledger Book* (p. 58) seems to indicate his return from his first period of service; he probably was with the company from the beginning. Especially interesting from the point of view of the history of geography are the accounts of men whose names are with us still on the map of Hudson Bay. *Ledger Book no. 2* (1775, p. 40) has an account of expenditures on Prince Attash, the Indian chief on whose hunting ground Charles Fort stood when he was taken to London to see the sights. The company spent £86: 18s: 11d. on the Prince. Captain Tatnam seems to have taken him round for a time at the cost of three pounds, and Mrs. Tatnam received as part payment "for his Dyet" five pounds. It would be from this captain that Cape Tatnam which figures on a map prepared by the company about 1709<sup>3</sup> got its name. Strutton Island and Titherley (Tidderley) Island which occur on the map are called after servants of the company who must have had to do with them in some way. One is very much interested in the name given on this map of 1709 to Canuse River, the first river north of Rupert River. It figures as "Hudson's or Canuse River". A hasty search through the *Accounts* did not reveal any servant by the name of Hudson. As one interpretation of Prickett's account of Henry Hudson's voyage is that the wintering-place was on the east shore of Rupert Bay, one is inclined to take it that the Indians had pointed out the Canuse to the servants of the company at Charles Fort, as the point at which Hudson had berthed his ship for the winter.

From 1676 the accounts began to be kept in separate books entitled *Journals*, and from the beginning of 1683 dealings in stock are recorded in what are called *Stock Books*. Stock was not sold in the open market. Transfers had to receive the consent of the governors and committee. In the course of time books were prepared consisting of forms in which the transfers were recorded, with the price paid and the signatures of the parties concerned. One was interested to get some insight into the circumstances in which Lord Selkirk received from the company the grant of 116,000 square miles for a colony on Red River—all the more because the North West Company asserted in that piece of infamous propaganda *A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America* (Montreal, 1818, pp. 3-5) that when stock of the Hudson's Bay Company had dropped from £250 to between £50 and £60, Selkirk began to buy until he had £40,000 out of the total of £100,000, and that he then forced the grant upon the company—upon an unwilling company—in virtue of the enormous voting power which his stock gave him. A search through the pertinent *Stock Book* showed that stock held by his lordship at the time of the grant was but £4087: 10s. The minutes of the general court which gave the grant show that that was all the stock held by his lordship. His brother-in-law Andrew Wedderburn, later Andrew Colvile, held £4454: 3s.: 4d. of stock, so that the total stock held by the Selkirk connec-

<sup>3</sup>The map has been reproduced in the volume of maps prepared for the Canadian argument before the privy council on the Labrador boundary question. The original is in the company's archives.

tion which voted was but £8561:13s.:4d.<sup>4</sup> out of £103,950.<sup>5</sup> The truth is that the colony was devised to give the company provisions, cheap because grown in the country, and cheap labour in the form of the half-breed children of the servants of the company, efficient because habituated from childhood to the customs of the trade and familiar with the Indian tongues. This confirmed the writer's previous conclusion that the colony had a real place in the plans of 1810 for reorganizing the company to enable it to keep on its feet in the struggle with the North West Company.<sup>6</sup>

The organs of business of the company in London as determined by the charter, were the general court, the meeting of the stockholders, which elected the governor and framed the general policy, and the governor, deputy-governor, and the committee, the executive board. Overseas in the colony of Rupert's Land there were the governors and the governors with their councils. The most important records produced by the organs in London are the *Minute Books* of the general court; and of the governor and committee, and their correspondence copied in a long series of *Letter Books*.

The *Minute Books* are not like our minutes in the sense that they do not record the discussions. The minutes of the governor and committee in particular are restricted to the decisions, as is indicated by the name sometimes given them, the "Order Books". None the less, they are of the greatest importance in that most of the business of the company was initiated here. At the beginning the minutes of the general court were entered in with the minutes of the board at the proper date. The first volume contains the minutes from November, 1671, that is almost from the very beginning, to June, 1674. The only gaps are from "May, 1670, to October, 1671; July, 1674, to November, 1679; January, 1778, to April, 1778; January, 1789, to October, 1792. In some cases the fair copies of the minute books are missing, but, with the exception of the brief periods above alluded to, the deficiency is supplied in all cases by the 'Foule' minute books. These are rough copies of the minute books, but in many instances they appear to be almost as scrupulously kept. There are in addition two volumes of minutes of the sub-committee from 1717-1737. These were subsequently embodied in the minute book proper."<sup>7</sup>

Practically a complete view of the history of the administration of the company can be got from these *Minute Books*. It would be out of place to try to give an idea here of all that can be gathered from these volumes. It will be enough to indicate the character of the company as it impresses itself upon one. The concern was very conservative and cautious in its business methods; its stockholders were for the most part rich men, and one would judge that they regarded the money put into the concern as an investment; they were not of those who seek to amass a fortune quickly, but men who were satisfied with a return satisfactory and steady. The *Minute Books* enable us to trace the dividends as paid. The company was formed in 1670. Its first dividend was paid thirteen years later on

<sup>4</sup>Minutes of the General Court, May 30, 1811.

<sup>5</sup>Report from the committee on the Hudson's Bay Company, 1749, 256.

<sup>6</sup>See *Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1929, 103, "The Place of the Red River Settlement in the Plans of the Hudson's Bay Company".

<sup>7</sup>R. G. Leveson Gower, archivist of the company, in *The Beaver*, outfit 265, no. 1, June 1934, 19.

its 1682 venture, the year in which it might be thought that Radisson's raid at Port Nelson and the loss of the ship *Prince Rupert* had done the company vast damage. It was a 50 per cent dividend. It would appear that during the first twelve years of the company any profits which were made were being put back into the business in the form of ships and an increased stock of goods; and that the stockholders were content that thus the value of their investment was being added to, though they were getting no dividends. This comes as a surprise, for all the books, I may say, except the volume on *The Fur Trade* by Professor Innis for whose scholarship I have long had profound respect,—all the books suggest that the dividends in these years were enormous. The next dividend came in 1688 and was 50 per cent in spite of the capture of the forts on James Bay in 1686 by De Troyes and Iberville. The third dividend was paid in the following year and was 25 per cent. In 1690 the stock of the company was trebled. It was explained to the committee that the goods in the warehouse in London were "above the value of their first original Stock"; that their ships and goods sent out that year were "more than the value of their first Stock again"; and that the returns of the current outfit were "modestly expected to be worth £20,000". Accordingly, the original stock of £10,500 was declared to be £31,500.<sup>8</sup> On this a dividend of 25 per cent, that is 75 per cent on the original stock, was paid. Writers have assumed from this trebling of the stock that the annual dividends in the years before must have been enormous, but when it is known that in the first twenty years of the company's existence but four dividends were paid a different complexion is seen in the matter. The stockholders, all rich men, were not greatly concerned if no dividends were being paid, provided the value of their investment was being increased all the while.

In the twenty-eight years after this trebling of the stock no dividends were paid. The period was marked by fourteen years of a bitter struggle with the French for the possession of the bay during the greater part of which the company held but one fort, Albany Fort, and suffered great losses by sea and on land. It was so far in difficulties that when Radisson won a suit in the courts against them, they were not able to produce the money due him, but paid him in a series of instalments. Then came the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) by which the English secured complete possession of the lands on the rivers flowing into Hudson Bay, and in the following year the French surrendered the posts to the company. Even then the company paid no dividends but put the profits back into the business. There is in the archives a letter written to the committee by a modest stockholder to the effect that he had not received a dividend during twenty-eight years, and he thought the time had come for him to see something of the kind. On August 29, 1720, a general court did what the committee had done in 1690; it trebled the stock and for similar reasons, namely that the trebled stock would represent no more than the actual value of their goods and property. The amount of the stock thus became £94,500.<sup>9</sup>

The proposal adopted by the same general court to enlarge the stock to £378,000 calls for some comment. The additional £283,500 stock was only to be issued as the stockholders paid for it in hard cash in instalments.

<sup>8</sup>Report from the committee on the Hudson's Bay Company, 1749, 256.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 256.

In June of the year before (1719) James Knight had sailed away with an expedition of two ships to find the North-West Passage; and to reach the river, our Coppermine River, in which, as the Indians reported, nuggets of copper could be picked up in its sand banks; and possibly to come to a river farther west in which similarly nuggets of gold could be found. The additional hard cash raised by this issue of stock was to put the company in a position to meet the demands of this new field of exploitation. In the issue Knight's expedition came by a tragic fate, but before this was known or even surmised the South Sea Bubble burst, and the money market was stricken with panic. Only a few stockholders were able to produce any money at all. To these stock was issued in return to the value of three times the money paid in. This indicates the financial difficulties faced by the company in raising money during the panic when the Bubble burst.

This episode enables one to gauge the accuracy of Joseph Robson's charge in his *Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay*<sup>10</sup> that the company refused to take up Knight's proposal, and only consented when he threatened to appeal from it to the Crown. The fact that the company undertook to raise large capital to exploit the new field which Knight seemed to be opening up to them, seems to show that it was caught by the lure of copper and gold no less than Knight himself, and that Robson's charge that the company showed no spirit of enterprise was born, like many of his accusations, out of his own poisoned imagination. But this brings one to one of the disappointing features in the minutes of the committee. As they are essentially books of the orders issued by the committee, they are silent about the proceedings up to the point of decision. They had no place for the discussions with Knight leading up to the final determination. Similarly, one looks in vain in the minutes for the discussions culminating in the union of 1821. The final issue is all that is recorded.

From time to time as appeared convenient, the governor and committee segregated in separate volumes copies of their correspondence of some special nature. For example, there are two volumes of *Memorials* to the government complaining of the depredations of the French, chiefly when the struggle was on for the possession of Hudson Bay. It is in one of these memorials that the company claims that Radisson was no Frenchman, but was born at Avignon, which at that time was beyond the boundaries of France. I believe that this has been recently verified; that he was born in a village near Avignon.

From the time of the troubles with the North West Company over Selkirk's colony, the correspondence with the government was copied into a separate series of volumes.

Lastly, various bodies of loose documents, which might be described as *membra disjecta* have been gathered in individual folders. For example, documents dealing, directly or indirectly, with the union of 1821. A very interesting folder contains documents bearing on early negotiations with the North West Company. Those dealing with the negotiations in which Duncan M'Gillivray participated have a special interest. To assert the right of transit for its goods through Hudson Bay in order to enter into the trade of the Pacific slope, the North West Company sent an expedition

<sup>10</sup>London, 1752, appendix, p. 36.

into Hudson Bay (1803). The monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company in the use of the route was thus directly challenged. The governor and committee asked a group of lawyers whether they could successfully prosecute the North West Company in the English courts. The answer was, so far as the monopoly was concerned, No—this due to a resolution of the House of Commons in the time of William and Mary to the effect that parliament alone could grant a monopoly restricting the right of the citizens at large. But it was opined that the company could prosecute for trespass, for it was within the prerogative of the Crown to grant its lands as in the charter. This was regarded as good law by the Colonial Office down to the middle of the nineteenth century. In keeping with this opinion of the lawyers the servants of the company overseas were subsequently instructed to use no violence against intruding Northwesters, but to touch them on the body as if repelling them and to warn them that they were trespassing. It may well be that this opinion of the lawyers contributed to the willingness of the company six years later to give Lord Selkirk the grant of the land for his colony, for it was an open proclamation that it owned the soil. To all appearance, the company henceforth laid more stress on its possession of the soil than on its monopoly. It got its reward when the charter was surrendered, for one of the terms agreed upon was that the company should have one-twentieth of the fertile belt, certain lands about its posts, and the sum of \$1,640,000.

We come now to the long and unbroken line of correspondence volumes—the *Letter Books*. At first the English as well as the overseas correspondence was copied in a volume, but afterwards the two were kept in separate books. Let us confine our attention to the overseas correspondence. It is impossible to do more than to indicate the impression it gives of the character of the company—a serious sober-minded cautious group of men, not unconscious of the commercial value of honesty, of good conduct, and even of religion. This is particularly clear after the union of 1821, when the governor, J. H. Pelly, gave attention to such schools as the company helped, and when Benjamin Harrison, of the group of evangelicals known as the Clapham Sect, was the means of placing a chaplain at Red River and brought the Church Missionary Society into the country. It comes as something of a surprise to find this attention to religion there at the very beginning. In the first paragraph of the instructions to Governor Nixon which constitute the first letter overseas which has survived, there is a complaint that though the proper books had been sent out, the previous governor, Charles Bayly, had never had prayers. The explanation is that he was a Quaker. Nixon and the Factors under him are strictly enjoined to have prayers read at least on Sunday: "that wee may more reasonably expect the blessing of God to attend your endeavours and to prosper ye interest of ye Company". It may be said in general that the company were sincere believers in the type of religion dear to the Hebrew—pay attention to your prayers, treat the Indians with justice and "civility", keep the servants away from the Indian women, and sober, and the Almighty will personally see to it that the dividends will be satisfactory. This business man's religion, coupled with the fact that the stockholders were rich men and looked on the money put into the company rather as an investment and were satisfied with a reasonable return and a steady one, goes far to explain the fairness with which the Indian was treated and the hold which the company got on the savages—a hold which



they were able to keep all through the wild struggle with the North West Company. Occasional injustices were rather the acts of individual servants—as when the Indians put in the plea that when the white man was measuring out powder to them he should keep his fingers out of the measure.

The political scientist is able to work out from the correspondence the system of government overseas inaugurated by the company. In the early days when the company's posts were confined to James Bay, the ships came to Charlton Island out in the bay, for it afforded an easy approach, and being out in the open, the ships could make a late clearance free of ice. Sloops brought the furs out to the depot on the island. With them came the masters of the individual posts, and the governor. These all, along with the captains of the ships, constituted the council. This system came to a sudden end when the French captured the posts on James Bay in 1686. When the Treaty of Utrecht acknowledged the indefeasible right of the English to the bay, an attempt was made to preserve the appearance of a centralized system by having James Knight and after him Henry Kelsey function as governor-in-chief. These men held commissions, not only from the company, but from the Crown. But there were no vital relations between York Fort, where they functioned, on the bay and Albany Fort on James Bay. Hence the system was changed. There was a governor at each depot, and each had his council composed of the resident surgeon and the accountant and the captains of the ships in port. In 1803 the imperial parliament passed the Canada Jurisdiction Act giving the Canadian courts power to try crimes between British subjects committed wherever there was no civil jurisdiction. The establishment of Selkirk's colony raised the issue whether crimes committed in it would have to be tried in Canada. The company attempted to resolve the issue by establishing courts for it and for Rupert's Land. Robert Semple was made governor-in-chief, and his council was formally named, with power to try cases. Sheriffs were appointed. In the colony, Assiniboia by name, there was also a governor and council and a sheriff.<sup>11</sup> This system was no more than one on paper before the union of 1821. Following that great event, we have the councils of the northern and southern departments at first each with its governor. In 1829 George Simpson, governor of the northern department became acting governor of the southern. In 1839 he was formally commissioned governor-in-chief, and head of the two councils. When present at the council of Assiniboia, the local governor gave place to him. Thus the whole of Rupert's Land had one governor, with councils functioning in the well-defined areas.

The company's wide business machine is reflected at every stage in the archives of the company. Until the time of the union, all communication with the servants overseas was by ship through Hudson Strait. The ships left Gravesend in the Thames in the last days of May or the first of June. The commissions to the captains, to any governors going out, the instructions to governors, the letters of the governor and committee to the councils, all carefully copied in the London letter book, were delivered to the ships. The vessels sailed from York Fort or Albany Fort in the last days of August or the first days of September. They brought the replies of the governor and council, either signed or initialled by the councillors;

<sup>11</sup>Minutes of the General Court of May 19, 1815; printed in E. H. Oliver, *The Canadian North-West, Its . . . Legislative Records*, I, 193. Also minutes of May 29, 1822; *ibid.*, 219.

the private report of the governor; and any letters from individual servants. These came in loose form, but they are now bound in volumes, the York Factory or the Albany Factory or the Moose Factory correspondence. In addition, there were the daily journals of the forts and those of any posts under the depot, and the journals of any individual who had been sent out on any special mission. These journals were really diaries with daily entries, in bound volumes provided for the purpose, the paper being a very fine rag paper. They constitute a very large part of the archives. But that is not all. The servants were required either to engross letters, sent or received, in their journals, or to enter them in small volumes sent out for the correspondence of each year.

I shall now suggest the method of one's research in this area, by offering an example. I could not understand why the company put a large sum of money, expended over a period of a whole generation, into Fort Prince of Wales at the mouth of Churchill River, and placed a battery over against it on the south side, and yet there never were enough men at the fort to man these, not even as many men as there were cannon. The fort was begun in the 1730's, when there was fear of a war with France, but it was placed at the farthest northerly limit of the company's business. What was the strategic idea behind it? I hoped to find it in the minutes of the committee for these would not be open to the public. The whole story of the building was there but no suggestion of the strategy envisaged. With very little hope, I went through the letters out to Prince of Wales's Fort. Nothing. Still more hopelessly I searched the letters in from Churchill, and even the little volumes containing the correspondence between Churchill and the other posts. Some garrulous factor might have let the secret out, I thought. Not a word. As a last resort, I turned to the instructions to the ships' captains. At last I came on one which probably reveals the secret. The ships for James Bay and for York Fort usually separated at the entrance to the bay for their divergent journeys to their several destinations. This year, when war with France was on, they were instructed to sail in consort to the latitude of the Churchill River. I judged from this that the fort was not built to protect the territory, but to defend the ships. It stands on the only harbour within the area of the company's operations which could be entered at any tide. The gunners of the ships would man the cannon, and teach others to handle them, and the crews would give adequate support.

Of the different types of documents produced on this side of the water the journals are the most important, though the reports of the governors sometimes enlarge on the information to be found in them. The journals, however, give the date at which an occurrence takes place or at which the news is received and from whom. Let me close by giving two cases in which our history must be revised in the light of the information to be found in these journals.

La Vérendrye's memoirs and reports are silent about any Frenchmen having penetrated into the basin of Lake Winnipeg before him. The word of the route to the river of the west which he reports himself as having received is represented as coming to him from Indians. He is an enterprising officer penetrating into an unknown country, and anxious to gather information as to the route to the western sea. What light have the Hudson's Bay Company's journals to throw on this La Vérendrye dear to the heart of our school children? We know that the *Sieur de la Noue*

established the post at the mouth of the Kaministikwia, where Fort William now stands, in 1717, and that he was to build also on Rainy Lake, but I know of no French document that says that he so did. But in the York Fort journal of June 12, 1719, Henry Kelsey reports a discussion with the upland Indians about "the french being Settled In a certain Lake Theummaumewan [the Indian name for Rainy Lake] & that he who is their Chief the Indians call Moosoo; there is about 40 of them there". The York Fort journals make no further reference to the French until the year before La Vérendrye was appointed to the Postes du Nord of which Kaministikwia was one. On August 8, 1727, Governor Macklish reported to the governor and committee in London, that the French had a settlement "not above four Days paddling from the Great Lake [Winnipeg]". The wood-runners there would, of course, be from La Noue's fort on the Kaministikwia. Their post may have been the "very old French fort" mentioned in David Thompson's survey of 1797 on the Winnipeg River seven miles above its tributary the English River, concerning which we have no other word. On August 17, 1732, Governor Macklish reported that in the summer of 1731, that would be when La Vérendrye was on the way up to the Great Lakes bent on penetrating into the supposedly unknown west, (but he did not go in till the following year), "3 Canoes of the French Wood Runners after their return from Canady went into the great Lake to the most noted Places where the Indians Resorts" and threatened to launch the Assiniboines on the war-path against them. This rather supports the writer's thesis presented ten years ago in the *Canadian Historical Review*<sup>12</sup> that as the French government had prohibited the establishment of new posts, Beauharnois and La Vérendrye presented the expedition of the latter in the guise of a search for the western sea conducted through an unknown country in order to win approval for it from the home government, while in fact the intention was to annex the great fur region of the North-West and keep the stream of furs, the life's blood of La Nouvelle France, flowing in full strength.

A final illustration. We have been taught that the fur-traders from Montreal were far more enterprising than the men of the Hudson's Bay Company; that they entered a North-West unexplored and covered themselves with the glory of exploration. In keeping with this, we have taken Anthony Henday's expedition of 1754-55 and Matthew Cocking's of 1772-73 as lone and exceptional enterprises on the part of the English company. The York Fort journals tell a far different story. They show that between Henday's journey of 1754 and the establishment of Cumberland House in the interior in 1774 something like sixty such journeys were made. According to one version of Henday's journal, on December 24, 1754, from a hill he bade good-bye to the prairies and the region of the Assinae-wachee, as the Indians called the Rocky Mountains. Hitherto, the company's system had been to rely on bands of "trading-Indians" who took goods into the interior in the autumn and traded for furs. These bands would hunt the fur animals in the wooded north during the most of the winter. They would then move south to the prairies to secure pemmican for the return journey to York Fort where they would arrive in June. When the La Vérendryes and La Corne were building a line of posts from Rainy Lake almost to the forks of the Saskatchewan, this system began to break down. Henday was sent in with one such band,

<sup>12</sup>Vol. IX, no. 4, Dec., 1928, 284.

which got its furs within sight of the Rockies, to view the country and to bring the savages safely past the French posts. He returned into the interior in 1759 to the same region, and we may presume trapped again within sight of the Rocky Mountains. Two years later, Henry Pressick was sent in presumably to the same region, for thereafter an occasional band of bloods took furs to the factory. In some years no fewer than six servants were sent in, each with a different band of trading-Indians, and for the most part to a separate part of the country.

Consider the geographical area covered by such of these men as can be followed in their reports and journals which survive. In 1767 William Tomison<sup>13</sup> reached Winnipeg Lake the year after Forrest Oakes the first Englishman from Montreal came to those parts—to Red River. Two years later, he passed through Manitoba Lake trapping, and out to the prairies for pemmican, returning by Lake Dauphin homewards. He was on the Assiniboine in the trading season when the first English from Montreal were quartered there. In 1756, Joseph Smith<sup>14</sup> had wintered in the valley of Swan River and secured his pemmican on the prairies of the upper Assiniboine. In the following trading season he passed through the Lake Dauphin region to the prairies of the Assiniboine, some eleven years before the men of Montreal. He passed up the valley of the river and built his canoes again on Swan River. Isaac Batt left no journals behind him, but his early wintering was at Basquia (The Pas) and in its hinterland, on the upper Red Deer and the Carrot River. In the season 1763-64 Joseph Smith spent a winter trapping and gathering pemmican in the region east of the south Saskatchewan; and thereafter in the season, 1766-67, William Pink in the parts west of that great stream. During the next season, 1767-68, Pink placed to the credit of the company a most spectacular journey.<sup>15</sup> He canoed to the site of Fort La Corne where he abandoned his craft; thence he travelled with his Indians overland to Beaver River, coming very near to its source close to Lac la Biche and the height of land beyond which flowed Athabaska River. In 1768-69 on another great journey he travelled south of the north Saskatchewan to the upper reaches of Battle River in Alberta. His journals of these two trips keep constantly reporting news of his fellow servants to the east and to the west of him. In the spring they and their several bands met on the river to pursue their homeward journey in consort. When they came to Nipawi they came on James Finlay, the first of the Northwesters on the Saskatchewan, he having arrived the autumn before after they had passed westward. He was trading in a post along with the mysterious François. Manifestly, the country was well-known to the men of the English company. The difference between them and the men from Montreal was one of system. They travelled through the country with the bands of trading-Indians. The pedlars from Montreal built posts.

The list of the prices fetched by furs before the middle of the century convinces one that the pedlars would have had but little success in those times. With beaver fetching but 4s. 6d., the trade could not have borne the cost of transportation from its outlet on the St. Lawrence. With beaver fetching 10s. 6d. and even 15s. it could. Without derogating from the enterprise of the Northwesters, it is safe to say that the price of furs does more to explain their success than anything else.

<sup>13</sup>Tomison's reports are in the correspondence of Severn Fort.

<sup>14</sup>Smith's journals are among the papers of York Fort.

<sup>15</sup>William Pink's journals are among the papers of York Fort.