

The Hudson's Bay Company Trading System - Patrick Young, Todd Paquin and Darren Préfontaine

Module Objective: In this module, the students will be introduced to the early history of the Hudson's Bay Company Trading system.

Traditionally, it has been maintained by historians, archaeologists and social scientists that the Métis were a mere by product of the great continental fur trade, which led to the birth of European Canada. The Métis were said to have been the result of liaisons, often illicit, between willing Indian maidens and female-starved European adventurers. Of course, while the Métis emerged as a people largely as a result of the fur trade, they did, nevertheless, develop their own group cohesion, which often proved contradictory to the aspirations of their fur trade superiors or their First Nations relatives. Most early Métis worked in the fur trade – some were also independent farmers, hunters or fisher people and because of this fact, a great deal has been made of the Métis' role as fur trade facilitators and agents of the fur trading companies' interests. The central role of the fur trade to Métis development must not be forgotten, however, a balance should be sought when some argue that the Métis developed as a consequence of one central event in Canada's history. Other factors must be considered, including the emergence of Métis populations in Atlantic and Pacific Canada due specifically to the fishing industry. Also, it should be remembered that people have a will of their own and despite close ties, family or work-related, between the Métis and the fur trade companies, the historic Métis had their own agenda.

Métis people played perhaps the most important role in the fur trade because they were the human links between First Nations and Europeans. The Métis were employed in every facet of the fur trade and this fact alone ensured that they would remain tied to the fortunes of a trade, which was outside their

control. The skills which they had inherited from their First Nations, Canadien (French Canadian), Scots and Orcadian (from the Orkney Islands) ancestors made them highly valued, but all too often under-appreciated employees of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. Also, it should be noted that, while Métis society was consensual and more democratic than British or British-Canadian society during the fur trade era, the Hudson's Bay Company was an oligarchic body which had little interest in including its lower rung employees in the decision making process.

I) The Early History of the Fur Trade in Hudson's Bay

In 1668, the historic ship *Nonsuch* set sail from England to Hudson Bay. The voyage, which was sponsored by a small group of individuals with close ties to the court of King Charles II, was considered a huge success. As a result, a Royal Charter was granted to the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) on May 2, 1670. Eighteen individuals were identified as the founders of the Company — among them was the King's cousin, Prince Rupert. The terms of the charter served to establish them as "Lordes and Proprietors" over a vast and extensive area of northern North America. Named after the Prince, this particular area was immediately claimed as "Rupert's Land". Today it is the huge drainage basin of Hudson Bay.

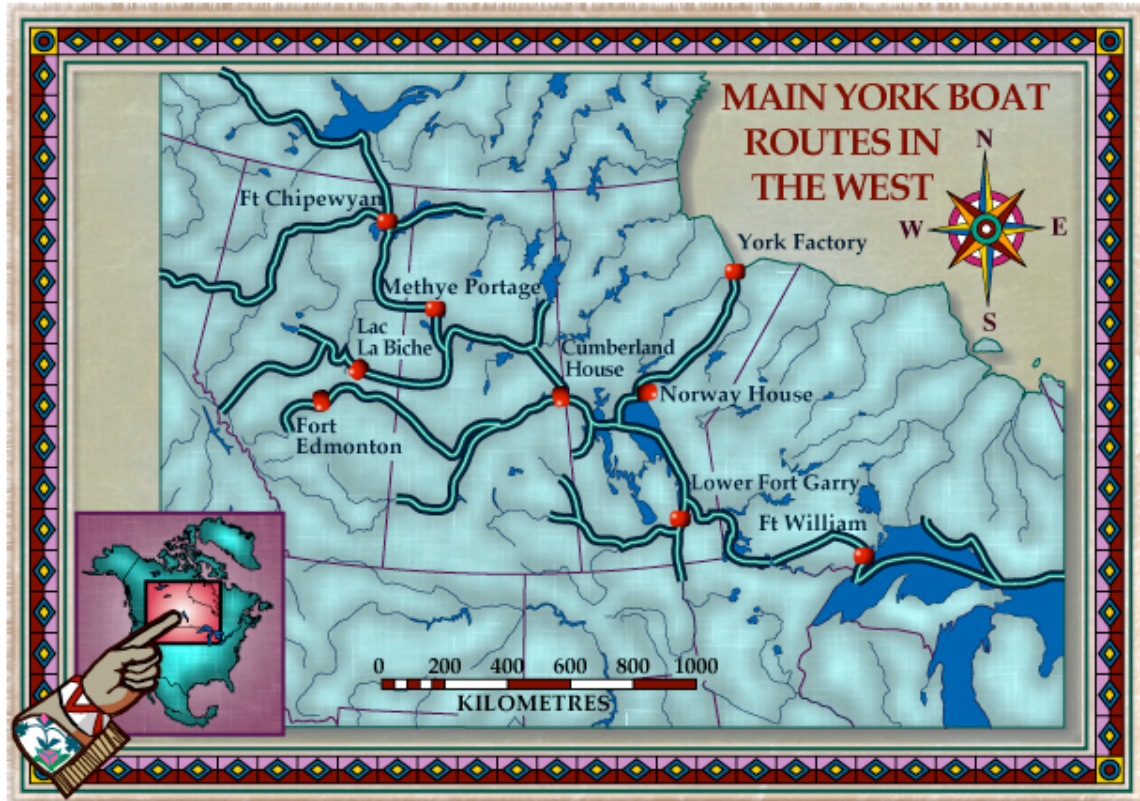
The objectives of the newly formed company were threefold. Its primary goal was to discover a new passage to the south-seas. The second goal was to establish trade for furs, minerals and other commodities. The third goal was to colonize the territories of Rupert's Land. Thus, the fur trade was neither the singular, nor the most important objective set forth by the newly formed company. Yet it is from fur trade accounts, journals and correspondence that the

early history of Western Canada is best understood. It is also important to note that all the business that was carried out in Rupert's Land by HBC employees, was under the direction of the Company's "London Committee".

The Cree were the Indigenous occupants of much of the area surrounding Hudson Bay long before European traders arrived. Indeed, the Cree are known to have occupied both the lower Churchill River as well as the Hudson Bay Lowlands throughout the seventeenth century. HBC employees referred to those Cree who lived in the immediate area of the Bay as the "Home Guard First Nations", while the Cree and Assiniboine who lived inland from the Bay were called the "Upland First Nations". As a matter of fact, the Cree and Assiniboine had become well acquainted with the fur trade long before the HBC moved into the Bay. Through trade with Aboriginal "middlemen" from what is now Central Canada, they had successfully obtained trade goods for furs. Therefore, when the HBC first arrived at the Bay, First Nations tribes were eager to establish trade relations with Company officers.

II) How the early fur trade was conducted

How were trade relations practiced during the early fur trade years in Rupert's Land? The HBC chose to set up a line of trade posts along the shores of Hudson Bay. Each post was strategically located at a point where a river drained into the Bay. It was along these waterways that HBC traders waited for Aboriginal middlemen to bring packs of furs down to the Bay. Once furs were collected, they were bundled for shipment to European markets. One of the most important posts on the Bay was York Factory. It served as an administrative centre for the HBC from 1684 - 1957 — quite a lengthy tenure!



Let's consider for a moment the role of Aboriginal middlemen in the fur trade. How did they become involved with the HBC in the first place? The Company needed to set up some type of trading system to ensure that highly valued furs were brought to their forts at the Bay. However, when they began trading with Aboriginal middlemen, they entered into an existing First Nations trade network. This network had its own rules of conduct as well as firmly established alliances. The difference in the approach taken by the HBC, however, was for Company traders to "single out" one individual with whom negotiations could be carried out. This individual was not necessarily one who was already a considered a middleman in existing Aboriginal trading networks. By offering gifts and conferring honour/special status upon these individuals, the HBC hoped to secure access to the best furs available. As a result, a network of Cree and Assiniboine "middlemen" was quickly established.



Aboriginal middlemen did not trap the furs. Rather, they were responsible for collecting furs from trappers to the west. In turn, they transported the furs they collected down to the Bay each spring. When they arrived at the Bay, furs were exchanged for a variety of trade goods. The medium of exchange in the fur trade was the beaver. A single beaver pelt of good quality was equal to one **Made Beaver**. All trade goods were measured against the quality and quantity of Made Beaver. However, the trade and exchange of furs and trade goods was not a simple matter — the Trading Ceremony was a highly formalized undertaking.

Over time, the Trading Ceremony became a blend of First Nations and European traditions. Following Aboriginal protocols, the ceremony took place within a social context of formal exchange and reciprocity. The smoking of a pipe by the Chief Factor and the Aboriginal Trading Captain followed the Aboriginal way of

smoking. Similarly, gift giving, the sharing of food and drink, and speechmaking also became important components of the Trading Ceremony. Following highly structured European protocols, the formal acknowledgment of those arriving to trade was often marked with the firing of arms. A specific manner of dress was also required — the Aboriginal Trading Captain was provided with formal trading attire at the expense of the HBC. In this manner, the combination of protocols served to reinforce the social and political positions of those involved in trade.

Yet from the very beginning, trade at the Bay was not without problems. The first thing the HBC had to come to terms with was the difference in worldviews between British and First Nations people. The long traveling distance to the Bay was not always perceived by middlemen as worthwhile. Nor were the European ideas of profit and personal economic gain of great concern to the First Nations. This meant that the HBC could not rely on the lure of trade goods to keep Aboriginal middlemen interested in trading at the Bay. In addition, the Cree were known to keep other groups, like the Chipewyan (Dene), from trading at York Factory. In other words, the HBC was really at the mercy of First Nations middlemen.

As early as the 1680s, the London Committee realized its predicament. How did they try to remedy this situation? In 1690, they sent Henry Kelsey inland to seek out the Assiniboine. His task was to encourage them to come down to the Bay to trade. Kelsey and his party of "Assinae Poets" (Assiniboine), who served as guides for the journey, traveled through vast regions of boreal forest, grasslands and prairie in what is now Western Canada. As a matter of fact,

Henry Kelsey is credited as the first European to see both the Saskatchewan River and the enormous buffalo herds that roamed the northern plains.

While Henry Kelsey's journey was of considerable importance to the Company, upon his return to the Bay, he was given little recognition for his efforts. The reason for this remains a mystery. The Company did, however, record the fact that Kelsey not only returned to the Bay with his First Nations wife, but also insisted that she be allowed to enter the fort. This was considered a brazen act of defiance since Company employees were forbidden at the time from taking Aboriginal wives.

Kelsey realized that in order to survive in the wilderness, he was entirely dependent on the skills of the Aboriginal guides who accompanied him. Aboriginal men could build and repair canoes as well as navigate treacherous waterways. The services rendered by Aboriginal women also proved invaluable on such a journey — women pitched camp, dried meat, collected berries, repaired clothing, netted snowshoes and often provided wise counsel on the ways of inland groups. In some cases, it meant that needless confrontation with Aboriginal middlemen could be avoided, if a trader had this type of support system at hand. However, it would be years before the London Committee accepted the necessity of adapting to the languages, transportation technologies, clothing customs, kinship systems, and trading practices of First Nations people. In contrast, the French traders operating out of Montréal had long known the benefits of Aboriginal-trader marriages — a fact that was soon to give them an advantage in the Canadian fur trade.

It was also not long after Kelsey returned to the Bay that the Company began to face relentless competition from the French traders. In contrast to the trading strategies of the HBC, these traders traveled inland to First Nations territory along the waterways that passed through the Great Lakes and into the west. As a result, their costs to transport furs back to Montreal and finally to European markets, were substantially higher than those realized by the HBC. The French traders saw the benefits of being situated on Hudson Bay. They realized that if they had control of the Bay, their costs to ship furs back to Europe would be greatly reduced.

So, the French not only attacked HBC posts on the Bay, they successfully gained control of several English forts in the early eighteenth century. However, the Treaty of Utrecht returned control of these posts to the British in 1713. However, it was not long before another startling discovery was made by the HBC. It occurred in 1754, when Anthony Henday was sent inland to encourage the Blackfoot to come to the Bay for trade. Along the way, he observed that the independent traders from Montréal (or "Pedlars", as they had become known) had set up trading posts along several river systems in the interior. This meant the Pedlars had the ability to intercept Aboriginal traders destined for the Bay. In other words, these traders were, literally, cutting the HBC "off at the pass". And even though Henday encouraged the HBC to build a post inland from the Bay, the Company continued its trading policy of "waiting at the Bay" for another twenty years.

While the increased competition for furs created problems for the HBC, it proved to be extremely beneficial to Aboriginal middlemen. Realizing that more than one interested party was competing for furs, First Nations middlemen set

their own prices and traded with whomever they chose. In addition, as the Pedlars moved further inland, they required more food supplies to sustain them. This meant that First Nations groups were no longer trading only furs, they were also trading food provisions. So from more than one perspective, First Nations middlemen had both the HBC and the Pedlars at their mercy during the middle to late eighteenth century.

Finally, the HBC realized they could no longer ignore the increased competition for furs. In 1774, the HBC therefore established a fur trade post in the interior of Rupert's Land at Cumberland House.

The HBC had some serious problems to solve. They needed better survival skills to keep from starving in the interior. They needed to divert Aboriginal traders from the dealing with the Pedlars. They also had to re-affirm trade alliances with inland groups, as well as make new trading partnerships. This required HBC traders to travel inland and build more trading posts. Obviously, the Company faced many new challenges! How did the HBC rise to the occasion? They turned to the First Nations and Métis for assistance. As a matter of fact, the HBC became completely reliant on these people to help them achieve their goals. In doing so, they opened the doors toward establishing a new and unique society — namely, fur trade society.

III) The Beginnings of the Métis with the HBC Trade

By the middle of the eighteenth century, a good number of HBC trader-First Nations marriages were known to exist. How did this change in attitude come about when earlier Company policy clearly forbade such unions? It was partly in

response to observations regarding inland survival, which had been made by Company servants such as Henry Kelsey, Anthony Henday and Samuel Hearne. Each of these individuals had traveled inland on different occasions. They were successful in their endeavours only when First Nations accompanied them. Without the knowledge and skills of their First Nations companions, they would never have survived in the wilderness. Although a good number of Company servants approved of First Nations-trader marriages, others did not. Similarly, while some high-ranking officers married more than one woman, many of their colleagues disapproved of such arrangements. The highly structured HBC tried to keep their lower ranking servants from entering into marriage with Aboriginal women, but were not successful.

By the mid-eighteenth century, First Nations-trader marriages were increasingly commonplace. Marriage to a First Nations woman occurred *à la façon du pays* (after the custom of the country). Just like the Trading Ceremony, this marriage rite combined both First Nations and European marriage customs.

A First Nations wife had the potential to contribute substantially to the fur trade. She familiarized her trader husband with the customs and languages of her tribe. In addition, by marrying into fur trade society, she acted as a cultural liaison between her family and the Company. In this manner, there were benefits for everyone. A trader husband benefited from a direct trading alliance with her family. Her family had access to a trading post, and potentially, to a variety of trade goods. She also brought a suite of invaluable "country skills" to her marriage. These skills ranged from moccasin and snowshoe manufacture to food provision and preservation. These skills proved invaluable to the HBC once they moved their trading concerns inland. These were the same skills that First

Nations mothers taught their Métis daughters. As a matter of fact, by the time Cumberland House was built, an entire generation of Métis children from Hudson Bay had become young adults. Indeed, many of the early Company factors at Cumberland House were married to either First Nations or Métis women.

IV) The Role of the Métis in the Fur Trade

a) Métis Women

As previously mentioned, the earliest documents to mention the children born from marriages *à la façon du pays* refer to the sons and daughters of Company officers and their First Nations wives. It is quite likely that numerous "country marriages" were entered into prior to that time as well. The main difference was that they were not recorded in Company records. Nor were the children resulting from these unions differentiated from First Nations children living in the area of Hudson Bay. When their English or Scottish fathers returned to live in Europe, most of these children were absorbed back into First Nations' society. Historians now refer to the First Nations wives of these traders as a "fur trade widows". In cases where the mother's tribe lived extremely far away, the First Nations "widow" and her children stayed and worked at one of the posts on Hudson Bay.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the HBC reported that the number of children resulting from marriages at the Bay "were quite numerous". As time passed, some Company officers became concerned about the future of their children. As a result, they made plans for their sons and daughters — plans to ensure they maintained a place in fur trade society. However, not all Company

sons and daughters had the same advantages. Métis children were absorbed into fur trade society in a variety of ways, depending on who their father was, depending on their gender, and sometimes depending on their willingness to abide by their parents wishes. Some Métis children chose to follow an Aboriginal lifeway, rather than try to follow in their mother or fathers footsteps in fur trade society.

Some Company officers made arrangements to send their sons to England for schooling. They hoped an education would provide their sons with an opportunity to apprentice with the HBC. Indeed, by the early nineteenth century, the London Committee agreed to establish schools at some of its major posts, in order to provide apprenticeships for young Métis men. As a result, some sons of HBC officers were hired as apprentices and clerks, and in later years, as Company factors. Other Métis sons hunted, trapped, built canoes, and worked as guides, navigators, interpreters, labourers and boatsteers for the canoe brigades. When flat-bottomed wooden boats, known as York boats were introduced into the area in the-mid 1820s, the Métis continued to work in much the same capacity as before.

The experience of a Métis daughter was quite different from that of her brothers. Because of her dual heritage, she understood the languages and customs of two cultures. She also possessed a suite of "country skills" learned from her mother — skills, which were crucial for the survival of Company traders. A number of astute Company fathers quickly realized the unique economic potential of their daughters. If a marriage was arranged between a Métis daughter and another Company employee, she would maintain a valuable position in fur trade society. Such a position would prove very useful to all her

trader relatives — both Aboriginal and European. A Métis wife had the potential to provide useful connections for her trader husband. In turn, her family had direct ties to a trading post, complete with provisions and trade goods. Hence, it was not long before a Métis wife became the "vogue" in fur trade society, supplanting the First Nations wife.

What exactly were the "country skills" that a Métis woman brought with her to a trading post? Let's begin by taking a look at the importance of moccasin and snowshoe manufacture. Moccasins were considered the most suitable footwear for the Canadian wilderness. This meant each trader required a steady supply of moccasins — both Métis and First Nations women had the technology to produce this footwear. Just as important was a reliable supply of snowshoes, which were necessary for any type of mobility during the harsh winter months.

In terms of food provision and preservation, a Métis woman was unequalled at her craft. Like her mother, she was an adept fisherwoman who could mend and set nets, as well as any of her male contemporaries. She snared and trapped small game animals for food, as well as collected the local plant foods, which were used to supplement the fur trade diet. When a hunter arrived at a post with a buffalo, moose or deer, a woman skinned the animal and made use of the hide, meat and bones in a variety of ways. The hide was used for clothing. Animal skin was used to make *parflèches* (skin bags) in which pemmican was stored.

What is pemmican? The word pemmican is derived from two Cree words — *pimmi* meaning fat and *konn* meaning meat. Pemmican was highly valued as a food item by First Nations, Métis and fur traders. It was very nutritional, it

preserved well and it was easily transportable. The production of pemmican was an important country skill passed on from mother to daughter. Furthermore, many Métis women taught numerous Company servants how to make this highly coveted foodstuff. Pemmican was not only prepared for Company servants living at the trading posts, it was an important food item for people working on the boat brigades.

The production of pemmican was labour intensive. To begin with, all the meat had to be removed from the animal bones. Then the meat was cut into strips for drying. While the meat dried, the animal bones were broken open in order to remove the bone marrow. Bone marrow was an important ingredient for pemmican because it is very rich in fat. Many of the bones were then smashed into tiny pieces and placed in water to boil. The boiling process removed all the grease from the bones. When the water-cooled, the grease was skimmed off the top of the water. The marrow and the grease were then mixed together with the dried meat. A final ingredient was added to this mixture — the berries, which had been collected by Métis and First Nations women, and their children. When the pemmican was finally made, it was packed into a *parflèche*. Each *parflèche* bundle, or *taureau*, weighed approximately 90 pounds (41 kilograms).

Pemmican was one of the most important items of the "provisioning trade". Once Company traders began to travel the river systems into First Nations territory, the HBC realized how expensive it was to supply them with European provisions. Pemmican was a sensible alternative to European foodstuffs for a number of reasons. A 90-pound/41 kilogram *parflèche* could feed a number of individuals for an extended period of time. Pemmican was also highly nutritional — it contained protein and fat as well as vitamins and minerals from the berries.

It made a good supplement to any wild foods gathered along the way. It also preserved well, which was an important consideration for traders travelling long distances at a time.

The increased demand for pemmican carried important implications for the fur trade. Traders were no longer interested in trading for furs alone. They also traded heavily for the pemmican needed to supply their boat brigades. Many Métis and many First Nations began to trade pemmican to both the HBC and the Pedlars, as the demand increased. Another direct consequence associated with the construction of inland-posts, was that Aboriginal middlemen were often bypassed in the trade. Aboriginal trappers could now travel directly to the posts for trade, without the intervention of middlemen. As the fur trade moved further and further inland, the demand for pemmican soon matched the demand for furs. As a result, the trading practices of the fur trade were forever changed.

Besides the "country skills" already discussed, Métis women were also directly involved in the day-to-day fur trade operations. They were skilled at dressing furs to make them ready for shipment to European markets. Métis women also made canoe sails, sewed canoe seams with finely processed tree roots, and caulked the seams with the spruce gums which they had also collected. In addition, they prepared "repair kits" consisting of bark, tree root sinews and tree gums, for the outgoing canoe brigades. Additionally, just like some Métis men, some Métis women were skilled at paddling canoes, as well as acting as guides, interpreters and diplomatic agents for the traders.

b) Fur Trade Labourers

The fur trade economy of the nineteenth century required a variety of support workers, both skilled and unskilled. Most of the labourers for this system were Métis and First Nations. Since what is now Western and Northern Canada was isolated from the manufacturing centres of Britain and the Eastern United States, much of the manufactures and transportation and storage infrastructure needed for the fur trade had to be constructed locally. In the 1821-1880 period, most tradesmen, including blacksmiths, carpenters, boat builders, tinsmiths, masons, and millers were from Upper or Lower Canada and Scotland. However, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) hired many Métis craftsmen to build Red River Carts, York boats or to fabricate metal, primarily because their labour costs were lower than that of Europeans.

Most of the skilled labourers, about 10% of all fur trade workers, however, were not Aboriginal. This dichotomy of labour between Aboriginal labourers and non-Aboriginal tradesmen and clerks was endemic to the fur trade. While it is true that some English-Scots Métis managed fur trade posts or were high-ranking clerks with the Company, a racial hierarchy blocked their advancement within the HBC. Métis men could apprentice as tradesmen, which would provide them with a better wage and enhanced status. Occasionally, these labourers advanced into administrative positions such as postmaster, clerk or factor if they showed knowledge, commitment to service, and were respected by their superiors and co-workers. Many HBC employees did a number of tasks outside of their official job description. The Company revised its employee contracts and created a ranking system to pay various skilled and semi-skilled employees wages based on their varying activities.

After its 1821 merger with the Northwest Company, the HBC had a fur trade monopoly in all of British North America. This ensured that the Company dictated the employment terms to its employees. As a result, fur trade posts closed, wages and benefits dropped and long-term contracts became increasingly rare. The Métis formed a large temporary workforce for the HBC in Red River after the 1821 merger. This was to the Company's benefit because it did not have to feed and lodge temporary workers. By 1821, the HBC only had fifteen permanent employees in the Red River district. In 1865, those who received a yearly contract could expect to start at £20 per annum and if experienced could be paid over £30.

A range of wages paid to tradesmen working in the 1865 financial year for the Hudson's Bay Company in Lower Fort Garry is as follows:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Minimum Wage (£)</u>	<u>Maximum Wage (£)</u>
Tinsmith	25	50
Boatbuilder	35	40
Blacksmith	25	45
Cooper	35	35
Carpenter	23	40
Miller	40	40
Saddlemaker	35	35

Temporary workers did various jobs on a monthly, weekly, daily, or per job basis. At Fort Garry, in 1868-69, this included making oars, ox harnesses, stove pipes, tin pans, butchering, milling, shingling, general carpentry, skiff building, sawing, assisting blacksmith, cutting wood, night watching, whitewashing, hauling water, meat and wood, packing furs and loading steamers. The HBC also relied on the foods it acquired from Métis farmers, gardeners, and provisioners to feed its employees. Métis men, women and children also were paid temporary wages for provisioning wild rice, baking, pemmican, buffalo and other game and fowl,

growing and harvesting vegetables and cereal and fodder crops, raising dairy cattle and other livestock. Women also washed, sewed and mended clothing at the posts. Of all these activities, carpenters were paid the highest daily wage at 3 or more shillings compared to 1-2 shillings for more menial tasks such as chopping wood or hauling water. A Métis carpenter charged £2 sterling to build a Red River cart. He needed only to build 10 Red River carts a year to make the salary of an unskilled labourer.

Some of the work that tradesmen performed at Lower Fort Garry was paid on a per piece, per job or per day basis. This is because not all tradesmen were hired on a permanent basis. It was less expensive for the Hudson's Bay Company to recruit a temporary workforce in regions where they were ensured of a reliable labour pool. A list of these jobs and their worth in 1868-69 is as follows:

Job Description	per X	Payment
Making oars	1 oar	6 pence
Making ox harness	1 set	8 shillings
Making stovepipe	1 length	6 pence
Making tin pan for water	1 pan	5 shillings
Butchering	day	2 shillings 6 pence
Skiff building	day	3 shillings 6 pence to 4 shillings
Boat repair/carpentry	day	" " " "
Carpentry at mill	day	3 shillings 6 pence
Work at mill	day	" " " "
Shingling	day	" " " "
Carpentry	day	2 shillings 6 pence to 3 shillings 6 pence
Sawing at Mill	day	3 shillings
Whipsawing	day	" " "
Assisting Blacksmith	day	" " "

In 1830, the Northern Department Council officially decided to hire healthy Métis sons of 14 years of age as apprentices to tradesmen. Some of the apprentice labourer positions created in the period 1830-1875 included apprentice labourers/middlement, blacksmiths, boat builders, tinsmiths,

carpenters, coopers, interpreters and postmasters. For a seven years apprenticeship, they would receive £75. Once the Company took them on as a apprentice, they could not be sent to their fathers' districts or their families' districts. The sons' separation from their families was to, possibly, promote their attachment to the HBC so they would not be lured into free trading or otherwise become troublesome. The position of apprentice postmaster was created with Métis sons of serving employees in mind. However, it became a position to direct the promising young (and, sometimes, European) sons of commissioned officers towards the higher ranks of Company service.

c) Postmasters

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) employed men to deal with correspondence to and from England as well as within the new territory. The position of postmaster was more of an administrative job as opposed to the physical labour tasks, which so many Métis men undertook with the freighting brigades. Between 1830 and 1880, Métis men held approximately three-quarters of these positions with the HBC.

In 1830, the Northern Department Council decided to hire healthy Métis sons of 14 years of age as apprentices to tradesmen. Many Métis sons became apprentice postmasters through this program. For a seven years apprenticeship, they would receive £75. Once they had completed their training, they were employed with the Company, but not in their fathers' or families' districts. The apprenticeships aided Métis sons in gaining an equal footing in the service of the Company with the young clerks sent over from England. The position of apprentice postmaster was created with Métis sons of serving employees in mind. However, it became a position to direct the promising young (and,

sometimes, European) sons of commissioned officers towards the higher ranks of Company service. The postmaster position was, often, a rung on a ladder, which labourers and tradesmen could use to gain entrance to higher level, more administrative positions.

Many times the promotion had very little to do with the post office; rather, it helped to establish a person's status as being competent and capable. As a result of achieving or displaying these characteristics, the person might have been allowed to take charge of a post somewhere in the service. It acted in many instances, then, as a stepping stone position.

In some instances, the postmaster position was a job, which was commonly filled by a class of men who were seen as not sufficiently educated or able to become clerks but whose trading skills were valued above those of an interpreter. For some, then, it was a position, which represented their last promotion within the Company's service and for others, it was merely a stepping stone to better positions. A postmaster in the 1865 financial year could expect to make a minimum of £40 and a maximum of £75. Not including positions of commissioned officers and supervisory positions, this was one of the highest paying jobs with the service.

d) Voyageurs and Boat Brigaders

With his long toque, sash (*ceinture fléchée*) and clay pipe, the hardy, diminutive voyageur was indispensable to the fur trade. Although some Métis were voyageurs, most were *Canadiens* (French Canadians) and to a lesser extent, Mohawk and Algonquin "Freemen" from Lower Canada (Québec) employed with

the North West Company or with various successors to the French fur trading system after 1763. By contrast, the *Coueurs de bois*, a name often used interchangeably with *voyageur*, were unlicensed fur traders in the French regime in Canada (1534-1760). The *Canadien voyageurs* and the *Coueurs de bois* married First Nations women *à la façon du pays* (according to the custom of the country) in the Great Lakes region and in the Northwest. They are the ancestors of most Métis in Western and Northern Canada.

Voyagers manned fur trade canoes leaving Montréal for Fort William (present-day Thunder Bay, Ontario) and from Fort William to the interior of the Northwest or the Mississippi-Missouri trading system. Canoes leaving Montréal for Fort William, the *canot de maître* or "Master's Canoe", were 11 to 13 metres long, carried ten people plus cargo and weighed about 275 kilograms. At 8 metres and 135 kilograms, the "North Canoe" or *canot du nord*, used along the northern, rockier routes, were smaller and did not carry many provisions. Voyagers often paddled sixteen to eighteen hours a day in birch bark or freight canoes from 2:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. when they would stop for supper and a few hours of sleep. Their travails were complicated by voracious black flies, mosquitoes, and arduous portages, which forced them to carry hundreds of kilograms of goods overland from one river to the next.

With the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company fur trading systems in 1821, the world of the *Canadien voyageur* ended. After this time, the Métis carried on the legacy of their voyageur fathers by manning York boats, loading and unloading provisions and hauling furs along such river systems as the Mackenzie, Saskatchewan, and Red Rivers. Yorkboats, with their larger, more rugged frame, proved more durable than canoes on often-

tempestuous northern waterways and could carry heavier loads. The Métis soon became very adapt at using this odd looking water-craft.

The most skilled members of York boat crews were known as bowsmen and steersman or *boutes*, the French term for the ends of the boat. As leaders of the brigades, these Métis men required experience on the waterways, technical skill in boating, and acceptance by their superiors and fellow boat brigaders. Bowsmen sat at the head of the boat, fended off rocks with a large pole and guided the boat through fast water. A bowman became a steersman only after gaining several years of experience as a bowman. The steersman was the most important member of the boat crew.

Métis men often worked as boatmen for the Hudson's Bay Company in order to rid themselves of debt incurred while trapping or hunting. From 1831 until 1871, salaries ranged from £21 to £16 for steersmen, £18 to £14 for bowsmen and £12 to £16 for midmen. Deflation of salaries led to many of these workers becoming perpetually in debt to the "Company". Since many of these Métis boatmen were indentured labourers, they had a tradition of resistance when they felt their wages were too low or if their missions were too dangerous. Various "strikes" and other work stoppages occurred quite frequently in the forty years previous to the Red River Resistance in 1869-70. Not surprisingly, the Métis boatmen were the main group, which supported the Provisional Government during this Métis-led resistance.

Today, the Métis still honour the spirit of their Voyager and boat brigader ancestors. Some of the more popular events for such celebrations as "Back to Batoche" are Métis "Strong Men" or "Voyager" games.

e) Packing

The goods that were transported throughout the trading territories were carried to and from watercraft and over portages between waterways manually. The Métis and First Nations were extensively employed in the fur-trade packing industry. People loaded packs, generally of 40 kilograms each, on their backs and shoulders when they were loading or unloading boats. When covering a portage, it was desirable to do it in only one, or a minimum of trips. If people could carry several packs at once, they could get their canoes or York boats into the water quicker. What is astonishing is that they did not just carry one pack at a time. Rather, it was commonplace to carry a minimum of two packs when walking (80 kilograms). And, while two packs was a common packing weight, some men carried in excess of 170 kilograms at a time! This was a very labour-intensive job.

This was accomplished by tying a strap across a person's forehead and around a pack, which was slung across the back. One or more packs could then be placed upon this pack, across the person's shoulders. These packers had to have strong necks and backs to be able to support this weight, and there are accounts that people have broken their backs and necks while carrying very heavy loads. The pace with which packers were expected to traverse portages with a load was astounding. They were expected to cover half a mile (.804 kilometres) in ten minutes, with a short rest between marches. Bent over, carrying hundreds of pounds (or a hundred or more kilograms) across their backs and shoulders, the packers would quickly shuffle single file over the portages. The portage trails were not even, flat paths either. Many of them had dips and sharp rises and were often rocky or crossed with tree roots.

Men were not the only ones who packed freight. Women, too, were adept at hauling heavy loads. It was not an unusual sight to see husbands and wives working side-by-side packing freight over portages or from a post to a boat. The women could carry a significant amount of weight themselves, frequently shouldering two packs using the same head-strap technique as the men.

Some people earned a portion of their living by packing goods over certain portages. The Portage La Loche brigade, which brought goods from the Hudson Bay drainage system (York Factory) to the Arctic Ocean drainage system (the Mackenzie River district) had a 12 mile (19.31 kilometre) portage in present-day northwestern Saskatchewan. This was an incredibly tedious portage when the men operated canoes, but after the introduction of York boats there simply was no way to carry the craft across.

Therefore, goods were brought to the Hudson Bay drainage side of the portage by York boats while furs and other country produce was brought to the Arctic Ocean drainage side of the portage by other York boats or canoes. Men in the area, by the 1830s, were hired by the Red River tripmen to portage only the goods across, while the watercraft remained in the rivers. Because of the increasing amount of freight moving across the portage by 1848, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) hired Antoine Desjarlais, a Métis freeman from the Lesser Slave Lake district, to manage a band of horses to transport the goods. The horses proved too undependable and, by 1855, a group of oxen were used in packing the goods. With the amount of traffic over the portage and the amount of goods to be transported, these animals were actually stabled in the area.

Prior to the 1821 merger of the HBC and the North West Company, the companies were required to outfit and supply their employees. However, after the merger the employees had to supply their own outfits, food and clothing while at the post or on trips because the HBC was now a monopoly, unthreatened by competition. Wages, too, dropped. Packing, therefore, became less well paying because the onus for paying expenses fell on the employees, not the employer.

Packing, as an extension of the water-based freighting system, was an occupation and way of life for many Métis people for many decades. With the introduction of more efficient overland transportation methods, human packers have become obsolete. Snowmobiles, the railroad and airplanes can carry more freight in a shorter amount of time with fewer employees.

f) Traders, Guides, Provisioners and Scouts

During the nineteenth century fur trade – in what's now the Prairie Provinces, the Northwest Territories, northern Ontario, and the northern plains states – the Métis were best known as traders, guides, provisioners, interpreters, and scouts. They were the fur trade's transportation and communications infrastructure – a role they continued to play until the Prairie West was incorporated into the Dominion of Canada in the 1870s. Those Métis who continued to ply these trades after 1885 did so in more northern and remote areas. Their prominent role in opening the country for trade abruptly ended when Euro-Canadian and European settlers and their support infrastructure – federal nation building policies, railways, mounted police and responsible governments – took control of

prairie lands, reducing many Métis to live on road allowances or in the northern bush.

Historically, the Métis resisted outside coercion. They called themselves “gens du libre”, or “Otipemisiwak” – “Free People” or “those who owned themselves”. In 1816, for example, the Métis resisted a Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) proclamation, which forbade them to provide pemmican for the fur trade. The aftermath of the so-called “Pemmican Proclamation” and other HBC actions was the first instance of Métis nationalism – the Battle of Seven Oaks in what’s now Winnipeg, Manitoba. From that moment, most Métis were passionate free traders. The Métis were among Canada's first free traders. They practiced free trade with the Americans, at Pembina in the Dakota Territory shortly after 1821 and then in St. Paul, Minnesota, long before any Canadian government¹. Soon this trickle became a flood as hundreds of Red River carts went to the Dakotas and to Minnesota to trade with the Americans.

With the 1821 merger of the two fur-trade giants, the HBC and the North West Company, the reformulated HBC was determined to break the spirit of the independent Métis traders because it had a trade monopoly for Rupert's Land. While some Métis worked for the amalgamated company, most resisted the trading monopoly. The Métis felt that their Aboriginal heritage entitled them to trade however they wanted. The HBC, the sole European governing agency in Rupert's Land from 1821 until 1869, resented the Métis’ independence. Through the HBC-appointed Council of Assiniboia, the Company had arresting authority, and could interpret criminal law. Not surprisingly, the HBC resorted to

¹ The British North American colonies had Reciprocity or free trade in agricultural products and some manufactured goods during the American Civil War. However, this deal expired and Canada would not

arbitrary measures in order to preserve its monopoly. For instance, starting in the 1820s, the Company made trading and exchanging of furs for gifts among Aboriginal people illegal, and the Company gave its employees the power to search residents without warrants to see if furs were being used to contravene the monopoly, and if so these were confiscated. However, it did not have the manpower to engage in operations necessary to stop the much more numerous and powerful Métis. It could call upon 300 hundred British regulars and the local militia, made up of Selkirk Settlers and Upper-Canadians.

Of course, the Métis free traders resented these arbitrary measures. In 1845, the Métis community enlisted the support of Alexander Isbister – a Scottish mixed-blood, who was educated in Scotland – in order to plead the Métis' case before the Colonial Secretary in London. Isbister argued against the illiberal tactics of the Company, and was backed by a petition signed by 977 Red River residents. However, the Imperial government sided with the Company and its monopoly. Despite this setback, the Métis continued to trade with the Americans. On May 17, 1849², the Company decided to make a stand against the Métis free traders by arresting Guillaume Sayer, a known free trader. Sayer was tried for contravening the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly. Before the trial, several hundred armed Métis heard an impassioned speech by Louis Riel, *le père*, in favour of free trade. After which, everybody went to the trial to hear the proceedings. The magistrates, fearful of angering the Métis, found Sayer guilty, but granted him mercy. In jubilation, a free Sayer exclaimed to the gathered crowds "*Vive la liberté! Le commerce est libre!*" This was a key moment in the

have free trade with its large and economically powerful neighbour until 1989, despite attempts in the 1870s, 1891, 1911 and 1945.

² Incidentally, also in 1849, the Anglophone bourgeoisie in Montréal signed and circulated a petition calling for the immediate annexation of Canada to the United States after Britain⁷ repealed the Corn Laws or free trade with the colonies. In their anger, the Molsons' and McGills' and the rest of the bourgeoisie burned down the parliament buildings in Montréal.

development of Métis nationalism. It was also a testament to the historic Métis' ability to resist coercive authority. The HBC and the Métis eventually reached an understanding by 1857, for they had a common enemy: the Province and later Dominion of Canada.

As traders, the Métis operated over vast expanses of territory via Red River carts, canoes, York boats, horses, snowshoes and foot in order to intercept trappers on their way to trade their furs at a post. Both independent and Company traders traveled to First Nations or Métis trappers to exchange goods for furs, which was more efficient for the trappers than going to the fur trade posts. In addition, the free traders usually offered the trappers a better price for goods than the trading posts. Furthermore, an independent trader not only had more freedom in conducting business, but he also made more money on his own than for a salary or a commission for a fur trading company.

Some Métis worked as traders for the HBC. For instance, an early and influential Métis trader was Charles Price Isham. He traveled to Cumberland House in 1775 from Hudson Bay, within one year of the post being constructed, to conduct trade with the First Nations there. His knowledge of the Métis and First Nations peoples, the country, and languages made him welcome to the people and he came to operate a large trading territory because of it. Unlike the HBC's European employees, who had very little intimate contact with the groups they were trading with, Isham was able to adapt to and operate in Métis and Indian groups very effectively and increase trade.

Earlier in the nineteenth century, the Métis traded primarily for beaver pelts, but by mid-century, they traded largely for buffalo robes with American

merchants in the Dakota Territory and in Minnesota. An insatiable demand for bison robes was occurring in the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing eastern and central United States. As a result, in the early 1850s to the 1870s, hundreds of Red River carts traversed the Canadian Prairies and American Plains trading for buffalo robes. At times, this was a risky venture, but it also proved highly lucrative. For instance, in the late 19th century, a trader exchanged 30¢ worth of tea and sugar for a good buffalo robe worth about \$1.25. The 95¢ gross earnings the trader made on this transaction paid his expenses and his wage.

Feeding fur trade workers was also an ongoing throughout the fur trade era. The staple of the fur trade diet was pemmican – ground bison meat supplemented with fat and berries. The HBC's constant need for this staple provided the only steady market for Métis bison hunters and pemmican provisioners. Between 1839 and 1841, the HBC spent £5,000 sterling on provisions supplied by the Métis hunting parties – more money than all the farmers in the Red River Settlement made from the sale of their produce. Provisioning, then, was a very lucrative economic activity. As a result, the Métis buffalo hunts became huge logistical undertakings. For example, the Métis writer Alexander Ross described how, in one bison hunt, over 2500 animals were killed, which when processed equaled 375 bags of pemmican and 240 bales of dried meat after the hunting group was fed. The carts pulled into Red River with enough meat to provide each person in the settlement with 200 pounds of meat. However, by the mid-1870s, very few Métis lived off the hunt, which resulted in a sharp increase in pemmican prices.

The HBC bought a specified quantity of this for provisions. From 1839-1841, the Company spent £5000 on provisions. The amount of money made by these

provisioners in one year during this period exceeded all the money the agriculturalists made from the sale of their produce. The Hudson's Bay Company's demands for provisions ensured a market for the spoils of the bison hunt, the only steady market in the Red River settlement for many decades. In Saskatchewan, few people lived off the avails of the hunt after 1875. The disappearing animals forced people to move farther afoot to find herds to hunt. This lack of resources pushed up the price of pemmican when it was sold. For instance, the price per pound was 14¢ in 1878 but it rose to 25¢ per pound in 1880.

The Métis have also acted as guides and scouts for centuries. Their linguistic abilities, knowledge of the landscape, and their proficiency in bridging the cultural gap between European and First Nations gave them an advantage in negotiating their physical and cultural environment. Famous Métis guides and scouts included James McKay and Jerry Potts. McKay was renowned for his interpreting and guiding skills. John Palliser, of the British-sponsored Palliser Expedition, hired McKay to guide him during his 1857-58 journey across the Prairies to determine the suitability of the land for cereal agriculture. Similarly, the newly formed Northwest Mounted Police hired Métis scouts and guides such as Jerry Potts to assist in their efforts to police the Prairies. Jerry Potts (1840-1896), a well-known Métis guide and scout helped to break up the illicit whiskey trade on the plains which had plagued the First Nations and Métis for decades. Métis men also worked as scouts, guides, interpreters and provisioners for the 1872-1876 Canadian Boundary Commission when surveyors were establishing the border between Canada and the United States. Today, many Métis carry on the guiding tradition of their forbears by working as guides with outfitting companies for hunters and fishers among Canada's abundant rivers and lakes.

The Métis who are knowledgeable about an area's resources can safely guide the fishers and hunters to the most productive fishing and hunting spots.

Within the fur trade system and extending into the Treaty and Settlement era (1870-1920), the Métis were also hired as interpreters. For instance, Pierre Ladouceur, an interpreter Lac La Biche post 1889, received \$35.00 per month on contract with rations and stables and hay for his horse. He was also entitled to 100 pounds (45.36 Kilograms) of sugar as part of his annual allowance. His weekly rations included 14 pounds (6.35 kilograms) of flour, a value of 84¢, 7 pounds (3.18 kilograms) of bacon, a value of \$1.05, 1/2 pound (227 grams) of tea, a value of 14¢, and 2 pounds (907 grams). of sugar, a value of 30¢, for a total of \$2.33 per week. In total, he was given about \$122.00 worth of rations for the year 1888.

V) Historical Timeline: The Métis and the Fur Trade

Origins of the Fur Trade

1500s-1600s: Europeans enter the Americas

The sixteenth century was a time of European exploration and expansion in search of natural resources, land and wealth. Spanish and Portuguese explorers were the first visitors to encounter First Nations people in America. Christopher Columbus and others soon entered the New World in search of spices, riches and the northwest passage to India.

1534 French explorer Jacques Cartier moved down the St. Lawrence River valley. Cartier immediately recognized the future importance of the St. Lawrence River as a transport system and highway into the interior of the continent. During his visits he made contact with Micmac, Montagnais, and Iroquoian peoples. Further down the St. Lawrence he met Algonkian-speaking people.

1541-42 French explorer Jacques Cartier was convinced that the colonization of the Indian people for trade and conversion to Christianity was a workable and profitable plan. France had just suffered a population decline due to the Black Death and did not want to send French colonists as they were needed to repopulate France. The French government knew that in order to secure a claim on New France they must populate the colonies with Indian French loyalists.

1545 In the sixteenth century various felt hats became popular in Europe, thus, increasing the demand for the fur trade in the New World. North-American beaver pelts made high quality felt for these fashions.

1584 English traders begin to establish colonies on the present-day east coast of the United States. The English style of trade was to build palisaded forts and have the First Nations come to them to trade versus the French tactics of going to the Indian people to trade.

1602 The French explorer Samuel de Champlain, known as the "Father of Canada", was sent by the King of France and Navarre, Henri IV, to establish a fur trade company in northeastern North America.

1605 Port Royal in what is now Nova Scotia was established by French explorer Samuel de Champlain in order to establish a French presence in the new world.

1608 Samuel de Champlain founded Ville de Québec and began a program of settlement and trade. The French combined trade with religion and missionary activity to encourage the gradual transformation of First Nations into French colonists.

Mid 1600s The Great Lakes fur-trading system developed as French fur traders moving into the Great Lakes region or "*le pays d'en haut*" marry First Nations women "*à la façon du pays*" (according to the custom of the country) in order to secure trade alliances and gain kinship ties.

1620s The French wanted to populate New France with loyal servants by encouraging intermarriage between Indian women and French traders. Samuel de Champlain: "Our young men will marry your daughters, and we shall be one people."

1670 The English were informed by French adventures Radisson and Groseilliers about the rich fur-bearing lands to the north of the Hudson Bay. The English Crown under Charles II charters the Hudson's Bay Company with the help of wealthy investors. This led to the immediate construction of Moose Factory, Albany and Rupert's House.

1680 In 1680 approximately 800 young French men (Courier de bois) a total of 1/5 of the male population fled Ville Marie (Montréal) and went into the interior of the upper great lakes to participate in the fur trade.

1698 The French traders concentrated their efforts on expanding into the interior and Hudson Bay region in order to compete with the English traders. The French under Lemoyne even conquer all the Hudson's Bay Company posts along Hudson Bay. Mixed blood children emerged during this time and often identified with the Mothers tribe or became involved in the fur trade often as middlemen.

1700s The French encouraged intermarriage and wanted the Montagnais (Innu) and Huron First Nations on the St. Lawrence to form colonies, to farm, and to intermarry with the French and the *Canadiens* to provide a new source of Christian French citizens.

1701 The French decided that they could eliminate Indian middlemen by going farther into the Great Lakes region themselves.

1750 Many early Great Lakes trading posts had self-contained Métis communities. During the French period of the Great Lakes trade Métis endogamy and marriage between Métis and First Nations appear significant.

1763 The British Conquer Canada and defeat the French. Scottish pedlars, using French-Canadian voyageurs as muscle, dominated the St. Lawrence trade system. However, many Métis remained in the trade system despite the change.

1764 French and French-Canadian couriers de bois had formed extensive networks of relationship with the First Nations as far west as the Prairies, establishing the genesis of the Métis Nation.

1766 An early account of a Métis person in the Great Lakes is described as wearing blue trousers, capote, leggings, finger woven sash, moccasins, hair feathers and tattoos. These Métis often had French-Canadian lieutenants for fathers. These Métis often were distinct from Indian and European and combined both cultures. These Métis monopolized certain roles in the Great Lakes fur trade system.

1774 The Hudson Bay Company decided to move inland and formed Cumberland House to compete with the North West Company. This resulted in posts from both companies in the same communities, which gave First Nations and Métis trappers an opportunity to choose the best prices.

1783 The North West Company (NWC) was formed by Scottish pedlars and Montréal merchants. Many Métis were hired by the NWC as middlemen to barter for the company. Fort William, in what is now present-day Thunder Bay, Ontario, was a central meeting place where furs from the West were collected before sent to Montréal.

Late 1700s early 1800s Freeman or independent hunters and trappers moved into the western interior. Freeman were usually French with some mixed-First Nations ancestry (Iroquois). In the West they intermarried with First Nations women and formed mixed-ancestry communities such as present-day Grande Cache, Alberta. The Hudson's Bay Company relied on mixed ancestry country born children as labourers, portagers and operators of York boats. On the plains, Métis populations supplied the Company with buffalo meat in the form of pemmican. The mixed ancestry populations also worked for the Company at posts.

1811 The HBC began to allow its retired employees to stay in the country. Lord Selkirk established a colony of Scottish peasants. The condition was that the new settlement provide the Company with foods and allow retired employees to settle with in. The Red River Colony became the centre of both agriculture and pemmican trade. The colony had many mixed-ancestry families. Some of the retired workers began to engage in the trade in pemmican and buffalo hides.

1820s It is estimated by author Jacqueline Peterson that by the late 1820s that there was a Métis population of ten to fifteen thousand residents in communities south and west of Lakes Superior and Huron.

1821-1869 The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) maintains a fur trading monopoly, which ensured that many Métis would lose employment within the Company and that many would therefore have to become independent traders – thus defying the HBC's monopoly.

1850s Move of Great Lakes Métis from the region to points west due to capitalist expansion on Métis lands, collapse of the fur trade, shift to agriculture and the threat of American and Canadian expansion.

Late 1800s and early 1900s A host of Métis intermarriages in the Great Lakes region linked many Great Lakes communities. Intermarriage with distant hunting bands also saw the establishment and expansion of Métis trading hamlets. Great Lakes fur trade communities whose members intermarried were usually related to more than a dozen tribes of Algonkian, Siouan and Iroquoian speakers. This made it difficult for a strong Métis identity to develop in the Great Lakes trade system.

Questions and Activities:

Fast Facts:

1. Fur trade companies often hired Métis people to build birch bark canoes and York boats. Of course, Métis labourers and other artisans would have assisted these boat builders.
2. Métis Middlemen worked long distances and traded with other Métis and First Nations trappers for the large fur trade companies such as the Hudson's Bay Company and John Jacob Astor's Fur Trade Company of America. By contrast, Métis free traders traded independently from the larger fur-trading companies, usually offering better prices for the furs than the large monopolies.
3. Traders charged trappers much more for made beaver pelts in order to recoup their costs and to make a profit.
4. In any given year, a Métis buffalo hunter who sold his meat to the Hudson's Bay Company made much more money than a Métis farmer ever could. This and a desire to practice their Aboriginal culture when hunting and away from outside control, particularly state, religious and Hudson's Bay Company authorities, ensured that the Métis often preferred hunting buffalo to farming.
5. Many Métis scouts and guides worked on the Dominion of Canada's Boundary Commission. The Métis had known this region better than probably anybody had since they had crossed into the United States frequently for trading purposes. In fact, many Métis settlements such as those in the Red River area and in the Cypress Hills, Willow Bunch and Wood Mountain regions in what is now Saskatchewan were mere kilometres from the 49th Parallel.
6. A temporary worker at Lower Fort Garry, using a whip saw for boat construction made 3 shillings per day in 1868-69.

7. The Métis traditionally were hired by fur trade companies to grow food at or near various fur trade posts and eventually farming communities emerged. It is believed that these settlements and not just fur trade communities were also some of the first Métis settlements.
8. In the fur trade, beaver pelts became the standard currency of the trade. Goods were traded to Métis trappers based on the worth of each item to the worth of one Made Beaver. For instance, a muzzle-loading gun was worth 25 Made Beaver in the early 1880s.
9. From 1764-1883, 5 out of 17 commanders of the Timiskaming District (northwest of Montréal) of fur trade posts were Métis. This was an extraordinary granting of responsibility since this was the Hudson's Bay Company's busiest fur trade district in eastern Canada.
10. The fur trade provided very little upward mobility for ambitious Métis fur trade employees. The North West Company did allow some Canadien-Métis to rise through its ranks, however, all upper management positions were reserved for an Anglo-Celtic elite. The Hudson's Bay Company very rarely had Métis officers, clerks or factors. Some Métis managed to be hired on into these positions due largely to merit but also because of family ties – these Métis had influential European fathers in the company.
11. The Hudson's Bay Company developed apprenticeship programs, in part, to instill loyalty to its young Métis charges: the Company provided for and trained the boys for upwards of seven years. The Company wanted to ensure that the apprentices would remain loyal to the Company and not be lured towards free trading for furs.
12. Hudson Bay Company Daily Ration
Issued to Joseph Kenny, Half-breed
Ile a la Crosse, Saskatchewan
15 September, 1909

Bacon: 1/2 pound (226 grams) or 1-pound (454 grams) Beef
Flour: 1-pound (454 grams)
Rice: 1 ounce (28.35 grams)
Tea: 1/4 ounce (7.01 grams)
Sugar: 2 ounces (56.7 grams)
Oatmeal: 2 ounces (56.7 grams)
Salt: 1 small sack say 1 pound (454 grams) weekly
Coal oil and Fuel a little may be supplied if absolutely necessary.
Source: HBCA. B.89/b/24
13. During the early 1900s the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) provided relief to destitute Métis people during times of resource scarcity in the Ile a la Crosse (Saskatchewan) region. The Provincial government helped fund these relief programs by paying money to the HBC for goods and services provided in the North.

1) What were some of the skilled trades people who worked at a typical fur trade post? Do you think that very many Métis were hired on for these positions, why or why not?

- 2) Compare the wages paid to a skilled trades person in the fur trade and compare these with wages from labourers in the fur trade. What positions were the most valued, if salaries can be used as an indication? Compare the wages paid to a trades person with each individual task completed. If you have trouble counting British money, consult an encyclopaedia or online source to understand how the British monetary system functioned in the nineteenth century.
- 3) What were some of the duties of a typical Métis postman? Why were they such valued employees? Was there any chance of advancement for Métis employees past this position? If not what factors would have prevented their advancement?
- 4) What was significant about the role of Postmasters in the fur trade hierarchy?
- 5) Was the Hudson's Bay Company's apprenticeship program successful? Why was this program implemented? What was the typical age at which a young Métis boy would have been apprenticed?
- 6) What were the tasks performed by a Métis labourer? What was another name for labourer in fur trade terminology? How did the wages of a Métis labourer compare with those of a Métis trades person? What sort of contracts did labourers sign with the Hudson's Bay Company, why would this be so? What qualities led to a labourer's advancement in the fur trade hierarchy? Were some labourers paid more than others?
- 7) Why were so many Métis hired on by the fur trade companies as temporary workers? Do these Métis temporary workers resemble today's part-time worker? Do you think a union movement among the Métis fur-trade labourers would have led to better working conditions and better pay? What happened to most of these positions after the 1821 merger between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company? Are there modern parallels between this commercial merger and ones today when many people lose their jobs?
- 8) What were some of the tasks completed by a temporary worker for a fur trade company?
- 9) What was the role of Métis women in the fur trade? What tasks did they perform?
- 10) What were some of the reasons that restricted certain types of employment and advancement to the Métis in the fur trade? Was racism a factor in the granting of upper-management positions in the fur trade? Does the "colour barrier" still play a role in the Métis' failure to become a profession-oriented people?
- 11) With your classmates, conduct a role-playing game around the idea of working in a fur trade post. The fur trade post should have trappers, traders, factors, First Nations and Métis women, labourers and voyageurs. What sort of trading ceremony could you develop at the fur trading post? What sort of ethnicity/status/employment hierarchy should be established? Conduct a few sample trades among Aboriginal middlemen and a factor or trader. What were

some of the trading techniques employed by the fur traders and Aboriginal middle men?

12) How important were the Métis free traders to the fur trade? Could they as a group ever rival the monolithic Hudson's Bay Company (HBC)? What advantages and disadvantages would these trades have over those working with the HBC?

13) What were the most expensive and therefore desirable kinds of beaver fur available to a Métis fur trader?

14) Do you think that Métis fur traders would have faced discrimination from their Euro-Canadian colleagues or superiors? From their First Nations customers? Or do you think hatred directed to Métis traders and factors from First Nations trappers was a result of the Métis higher position in the social hierarchy?

15) What importance did the annual Métis buffalo hunts mean to the Hudson's Bay Company and to society in general in Rupert's Land? Why was pemmican such a vital resource to the fur trade in the nineteenth century? What importance did the provisioning industry become to the Métis?

16) What other animals did the Métis provisioners sell and to whom? Is it fair to say that the Métis provisioners played a key role in integrating immigrants to the Prairies? How did the Hudson's Bay Company keep the Métis provisioners tied to the company?

17) Name some important Métis guides and scouts. Two that come to mind are James MacKay and Jerry Potts. Go to the library or to the Internet and study the exploits of these men or others like them. Write a list of the qualities that these men exhibited. Then write a list of reasons why those who were not that familiar with the Northwest would hire individuals such as these. What advantages would a Métis scout or guide possess which his First Nations colleague may not? Why was the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian state so interested in employing them? Do some Métis continue to make a living as scouts and guides? Is this really a means of preserving their Indigenous culture or is it merely a means to accommodate the needs of Euro-North American hunters and sports people, while making a living? What social cost does the hunting of scarce animal resources by outsiders cause to Aboriginal families and communities?

18) Why were the Métis uniquely suited to be interpreters? Why did their varied backgrounds make the Métis so sought after as employees at various fur trade company posts?

19) What were some of the main First Nations languages which the Métis used and why was this so? What are the largest First Nations linguistic groups in Canada? Are most of Canada's Métis descended from this group? What was the role of Métis interpreters during the treaty process?

20) Using items on hand such as cardboard, ice cream treat sticks, construction paper, paint, construct a diorama or a model of a fur trade post. Visit a Parks Canada website of a fur trade post for an image to base your model/diorama on.

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