

# A Selkirk Settlement Sourcebook

Selected, Transcribed and Annotated  
By Chris Willmore

## Table of Contents

“I give this warning to my countrymen” (July, 1811) .....	4
A brief historical sketch (September, 1889) .....	6
“Suffered much from sickness” (November, 1813) .....	8
“The entire dispersion of the Colony” (October, 1815) .....	8
“Disagreeable reports” (September, 1816) .....	9
“Lord Selkirk and the North West Company” (December, 1816) .....	9
“Massacred with savage ferocity” (December, 1816) .....	11
The affair as seen by “friends of Lord Selkirk” (August, 1817) .....	12
“Some counter statements” (August, 1817) .....	15
“All sides have more or less erred” (August, 1817) .....	18
“Losing confidence in his present title” (November, 1817) .....	21
Early obstacles to settlement (September, 1889) .....	22
“Queries and answers” (July, 1819) .....	22
An account of early settlement (1878) .....	27
“Death of the Earl of Selkirk” (April, 1820) .....	32
“Arrangements are nearly completed” (April, 1821) .....	33
“A singular circumstance” (March, 1822) .....	33
“I feel rather weary” (November, 1824) .....	33
“The whites must have been the aggressors” (November, 1824) .....	34
“Completely inundated” (1878) .....	34
“The settlers seem very comfortable and happy” (June, 1827) .....	34
“The only people who did thus observe their duty” (March, 1829) .....	35
“I never see a face without a smile on it” (November, 1828) .....	35
“Comfort and happiness” (December, 1829) .....	36
A brief account (January, 1833) .....	37
Flax farmers wanted (April, 1833) .....	37
“The first sheep in Davenport” (August, 1868) .....	37
“One great principle of that Company” (November, 1845) .....	38
It “will yet be a great colony” (July, 1847) .....	40
“Trading companies have never colonized well” (August, 1848) .....	41
“Countless herds of buffalo” (October, 1848) .....	41
Recalling the garrison (September, 1848) .....	42
“Law there is none.” (October, 1849) .....	42
“Their subsistence will depend upon their skill” (May, 1849) .....	43
“Well, here they are” (August, 1849) .....	44
The Articles of the Trade (August, 1863) .....	44
“The Red River traders” (August, 1849) .....	45
“The real motive of the Company” (March, 1850) .....	46
By snow shoes and dog train (March, 1851) .....	48
“About 7,000 souls” (August, 1851) .....	48
Trade and the Colony (August, 1851) .....	50
“A general destruction of the farms” (August, 1852) .....	50
“As melancholy as it is novel” (September, 1852) .....	51
“A caravan of 133 carts” (August, 1853) .....	51
“A terrible conflagration” (December, 1853) .....	52
“Beset with numerous difficulties” (January, 1857) .....	52
Mr. Ellice defends the Company (July, 1857) .....	55
“In an extreme state of depression” (September, 1857) .....	58
“We cannot obtain deeds” (January, 1858) .....	60
“Invalid and unconstitutional” (May, 1858) .....	63

“Making for itself a new route” (August, 1863) .....	65
The “first trip of the Anson Northrup” (July, 1859) .....	66
“Moral and religious worth” (January, 1860) .....	67
“They pay in furs and coin” (July, 1862) .....	68
“A band of Sioux had visited” (January, 1863) .....	68
The Sioux leave the settlement (January, 1864) .....	69
“Powder and lead have been furnished liberally” (May, 1865) .....	69
Travel by Red River cart (April, 1894) .....	69
“Destroyed by the grasshoppers” (September, 1868) .....	72
“The poor people of this settlement” (September, 1868) .....	72
Relief from St. Paul (September, 1868) .....	73
Informative advertising (November, 1868) .....	73
A “new route to Red River” (May, 1869) .....	74
“The transfer of the Hudson’s Bay territory” (March, 1869) .....	75
“The new northwest” (June, 1869) .....	79
“A curious state of affairs” (November, 1869) .....	80
“A little rebellion and revolution” (December, 1869) .....	81
“The difficulty at the Red River” (December, 1869) .....	82
“The Red River people and their leaders” (January, 1870) .....	84
By an officer of the expeditionary force (1870) .....	85
An interview with President Riel (July, 1870) .....	101
The meaning of Manitoba (May, 1870) .....	103
“Now we have ‘Manitoba’” (August, 1873) .....	105
“Scrip and reserves” (June, 1876) .....	107
“The most valuable tract of land in the Northwest” (April, 1876) .....	108
A Change in Transportation (June, 1882) .....	108
“Nothing left” (August, 1882) .....	109
“They were here, and they are gone.” (April, 1886) .....	110
“What will become of them?” (April, 1890) .....	111
The story of scrip (January, 1911) .....	112
Appendix: Memoir of the Selkirk Settlement (1858) .....	118

VICTORIA, B.C.  
OCTOBER 2020

This work is licensed under a  
[Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).



## “I give this warning to my countrymen”<sup>1</sup> (July, 1811)

The Earl of Selkirk<sup>2</sup>, who, from time to time has obtained grants of Land from the Crown, in several of the British American Colonies and formed small Settlements<sup>3</sup> upon them, has lately formed the project of *erecting a Nation* in the Wilds of the Northwest Region of America. To this end he has entered into an agreement with the Hudson’s Bay Company, for a Tract of Land, containing about *sixty or seventy thousand superficial miles*, on that part of the territory, which was granted to them in the Reign of Charles II, for the purpose of trading with the Savages who inhabit it, for Skins and Peltry<sup>4</sup>.

The only consideration stipulated for, with the Noble Earl, is, that he should furnish two hundred men annually, to be employed in the service of the Company, at liberal wages to be paid by the Company, and at the expiration of that period, his Agents are to try the experiment of farming them into a Colony on the Lands above mentioned. He has already enlisted a vast many recruits for this service, who are at this moment about to be shipped from the general rendezvous in Scotland, for the nearest port to the place of destination. To induce these people to migrate, his Agents must have persuaded them that it would, at least, *better their condition*; and from the present character of one of them, I am satisfied that he must have believed what he represented. – A more intimate knowledge of the subject, however, drawn from unquestionable sources, during a residence of many years in Canada, enables me to say unreservedly – that the people who engage with an *ultimate intention of residing in that Country*, have no chance of seeing such an expectation fulfilled; *that it is a scheme wholly without profit or advantage to them; and exposes them to certain misery and probable destruction at the hands of the Savages.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Henry, J. (1811, July 19). To the Proprietor of the Freeman’s Journal. *The Freeman’s Journal*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Douglas (1771 – 1820), fifth Earl of Selkirk.

<sup>3</sup> On Prince Edward Island in 1803 and in Ontario, just across Lake St. Clair from Detroit, in 1804. The intended scale of these projects raised some concerns. “The Earl of Selkirk has a great project on his hands. He has actually engaged many hundreds or thousands of Scots farmers to go to America, where he will purchase lands for them in Canada, or the Western territories of the United States. He intends to convey thither a great number of Scots families every year. Such an alarm has, in consequence, arisen in Scotland, that Government have thought proper to interfere. All Ministers have yet done is to prevent the emigration of artificers.” LONDON. (1803, February 19). *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> “The Hudson’s Bay Company established a Trade for Furs in North America in the Reign of King Charles II. anno 1681. which is extremely profitable. The French have also had Settlements in this Bay for carrying on the same Trade; when becoming jealous of the Neighbourhood of the English, they opposed them with all their Power; [...] the Dispute was at last determined in Favour of the English by the Peace of Utrecht; by which we obtained the sole Possession of a Country of vast Extent, [...] and the Hudson’s Bay Company erected the Factories or Forts, called Churchill, Hayes, York, New Savern, Albany and Rupert. [...] The native Inhabitants receive in exchange for their Furs, Arms, Ammunition, Kettles, Iron Utensils, coarse woollen Cloths, and strong Liquors.” Of Hudson’s-Bay. (1755, October 18). *The Caledonian Mercury*, p. 2.

I shall endeavour to place the reasons upon which this inference is founded, in so clear a light, that the public may have an opportunity of exercising upon them their own judgment, as well as of receiving the benefit of mine.

I have seen the Copy of the Agreement into which Lord Selkirk proposed to enter with the Hudson's Bay Company, and state as one fact, that no other consideration is expressed for the immense territory already mentioned, than an annual supply for ten years of two hundred men, whose wages the Company agree to pay – so that his Lordship has the whole property in fee for doing the business of a Recruiting Officer, without any expense to himself other than that which it may incidentally cost in collecting the men. Since this may be considered as no consideration of a valuable nature, it is fair to conclude, that the party who made the grant, either set no value upon the Land, or knew that it could not be cultivated by ordinary means, and without such peril and inconvenience to the settlers, as to make it next to impossible that the most ignorant man should hazard an experiment. If neither of these will account for such a concession on the part of the Company; it is possible that they were unwilling to incur (with the knowledge they have of the state of the country) the moral responsibility for the evils which must inevitably befall those who attempt to cultivate the hunting ground of the Savages.

The territory which Lord Selkirk is attempting to people from Ireland, is many thousand miles from any civilized state of society; is cold beyond any thing which an Irish peasant can possibly imagine; is out of the reach of all the blessings that humanity can bestow; wholly unfit for agriculture; generally covered with snow eight months in the year; and during the small portion of time, that might relatively be called summer, the soil is so cold, sterile and unproductive, as to be incapable of producing and maturing many of the common vegetables, which in a new settlement, are necessary to the support of life.

Were there no other objections, these are quite sufficient to prove the fallacy of the hopes of those who engage with his Lordship's agents, to remove from their homes, with the intention of becoming farmers in the new colony of Selkirk, (if that be the name of it,) but these are not all that ought to be urged against a project so full of difficulty and danger. The savages who hunt their prey on this territory, are fully aware, that as *civilization increases, hunting diminishes*; and as their hunting ground is, at least by themselves, regarded as exclusively their *property*, and the occasional trespassers upon it, the source of perpetual wars between the various tribes, the least appearance of an attempt by strangers to exercise an act of ownership, would be resented with the tomahawk and scalping knife, and incur a general massacre of the intruders. It may be said, that this objection may be removed by purchasing the land from the savages. Some few, in a fit of intoxication, might consent to sell their right; and others might do it deliberately, for the sake of the tin and blankets which would be presented to them. This, in theory, is plausible enough, but will be found impracticable, when it is considered, that two great Companies have established throughout the whole of the North-west country, trading posts; and that on this *very tract, the rival institution of the Hudson's Bay Company has twenty posts and the entire control of all the savages*. That they will regard this arrangement

between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Noble Earl, as one which has a direct tendency to lessen their trade and influence, I am well assured; and it is not the character of commerce, to surrender quietly, those profits<sup>5</sup>, which may be held by resistance. They have, as I before said, the control of the savages – whether any of their servants, to prove his zeal, may be inclined to exercise that control, I leave to conjecture.

As to the difficulties of reaching the territories in question, I make but little of them, compared with those already mentioned. I am aware, that Irishmen may soon accustom themselves to traverse wilds, covered with snow, with the aid of snow shoes<sup>6</sup>; to sleep in the open air; carry or drag in small sleds some salted provisions, and trust to a gun and fish-hook for the rest; but I doubt whether any considerable number could rationally promise themselves a supply from so uncertain and precarious a source. It is very certain, that the savages, with all their superior skill and dexterity in the chase, often perish of hunger.

In this statement, I hold myself responsible for the truth of all it contains. I solemnly declare, that I have no interest whatever, directly or indirectly, nor any concern with any of the parties, who may derive either benefit or injury from the scheme. I give this warning to my countrymen, from motives of humanity alone; and am ready to meet any responsibility I may incur by so doing.

### A brief historical sketch<sup>7</sup> (September, 1889)

Though the history of Lord Selkirk's colony is familiar, a short sketch of it will not be out of place. [...] The colonization project was first put forward by Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, about the year 1811. At that time Red river was the headquarters of the inland trading district, perfectly isolated from the rest of the world, and one of the principal scenes of contention between the Hudson's Bay Company's agents and those of the two rival Canadian companies, the North West and the X. Y.

In the year mentioned, Earl Selkirk purchased from the H. B. Co. the proprietary ownership of a vast tract of land, a small part of which lay along the Red river northward from Lake Winnipeg. About this time a compulsory exodus of the inhabitants of the mountain region in the County of Sutherland, Scotland, was in

---

<sup>5</sup> "It is a well-known fact, that, notwithstanding the many disadvantages under which this trade is at present carried on, the North-West Company have succeeded in driving the Hudson's Bay Company out of the market, and that three-fourths of the furs, which used to be taken by the latter from Fort Churchill and their lesser establishments in the Bay, have been diverted to the former, through the Ottawaw. [sic.] This is imputed to two causes – one, the enormous expence of the establishments in the Bay, [...] the other, the successful competition of the North-West Company, and the *proximity of its factories to the tribes whence the Hudson's Bay Company was usually supplied.*" A CITIZEN OF NEW-YORK. (1807, February 23). LETTER I. *The New-York Evening Post*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> A thing shaped like a small boat, which is fasted under the feet, and covers so large a surface, that the food does not sink in the snow. -J.H.

<sup>7</sup> From LADY SELKIRK. (1889, September 25). *The Vancouver Daily World*, p. 4.

progress, and a great number of the tenantry from the estates of the Duchess of Sutherland<sup>8</sup>, whose ancestors had lived there for years, went forth to all parts of the world. It is probable, however, that few of the wanderers found so remote and sequestered a home as did those of their number whom the Earl of Selkirk took under his protection and forwarded to settle on the estate he had purchased in Red river. Few, also, it is to be hoped, met with more serious obstacles to be surmounted in their dealings with nature and with war than the same hapless party. It must, however, be stated that they left of their own free will, Lord Selkirk having visited their parish of Kildonan and laid such inducements before them as led them to close with his terms, nor was it till the last of them had departed that the forcible expulsions were commenced.

They arrived on the Hudson's Bay coast in the autumn of 1811, and spent the winter of that year amid cold of Arctic intensity and many privations at Churchill, on the western shore of Hudson's Bay. On the outbreak of spring in 1812 they advanced inland, crossed Lake Winnipeg, ascended Red river, and at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red rivers, about forty miles from the lake, they found themselves, metaphorically speaking, at home.

They were in the centre of the American continent, fifteen or sixteen hundred miles in direct distance from the nearest city residence of civilized man in America and separated from the country whence they came by an impassible barrier. There being no possibility of retreat, it remained only to make the best of their position in the land of their adoption. But they immediately met with opposition from the Canadian fur companies, who regarded them as invaders whose presence were detrimental to their interests. The Indians also objected to the cultivation of their hunting grounds, and were instigated to hostile proceedings against the new comers.

The year 1812 passed without any satisfactory progress being made by the unfortunate people who spent the following winter in great misery at Pembina, whither they were driven by compulsion by the Indians. By the following spring, however, they had found means to mollify their opponents to such an extent as permitted their return to build log houses and cultivate the lands on the border of Red river.

---

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Leveson-Gower (1765 – 1839), Duchess of Sutherland. Her estate was notable for its part in the 'Highland clearances' saw mass eviction and emigration of Scottish tenant farmers from 1750 to 1850. Noble landowners saw the clearances as necessary for the improvement of farming. A typical argument follows: "[E]very operation is ill performed, *and not one fifth part of the capability of the soil* is brought into action, and the country cannot possibly contain a population exceeding what an ill-conducted agriculture and an unskilful fishery can furnish with food. [...] In some particular cases, the hefty steps of a proprietor towards the better management of his lands, by expelling a number of poor ignorant tenants, to make way for a few, who, having fewer mouths to fill, can of course afford a higher rent, have led to the same necessity of emigration. But I fear the public mind is prejudiced against Highland proprietors in general. This is very unfair, for they have, with *very few exceptions*, made a generous sacrifice of immediate interest in hitherto preserving a numerous body of ignorant tenantry, which has arisen partly from humanity, and chiefly, I trust, from enlarged conceptions of future benefit to their country and themselves." A MAN OF ROSS. (1802, August 25). EMIGRATION. *The Edinburgh Weekly Journal*, p. 3.

After having been left to enjoy a term of peace which lasted about a year, the colonists were again attacked by their persevering enemies, who, professing their determination to exterminate the society, reduced the huts they had built to cinders, killing some of the inhabitants in the process. Reinforced by a company of additional immigrants from Scotland, the settlers returned to the spots whence they had been driven and recommenced their labors in defiance of all the discouragement they had encountered. Such hostilities were maintained until June, 1816, when the adherents of the two parties met under such circumstances that a skirmish occurred, in which about twenty men lost their lives at a place now called Seven Oaks in the heart of the colony.

### **“Suffered much from sickness”<sup>9</sup> (November, 1813)**

The people on board the ship Prince of Wales, destined for the settlement on Red River, had suffered much from sickness. It appears that one of the passengers, received on board at Stromness<sup>10</sup>, had been infected with a contagious fever, which shewed itself on the fourth day after the fleet sailed. The disorder spread so rapidly, that in the course of the voyage, two-thirds of the colonists had felt its effects. It is however much to the credit of the medical arrangements, which had been adopted, that out of sixty passengers who were attacked with the disorder, only five died. Some of the seamen also suffered; and it is melancholy to add, that among the sufferers was the principal medical man on board, a young gentleman of a most amiable disposition and promising talents.

### **“The entire dispersion of the Colony”<sup>11</sup> (October, 1815)**

Intelligence has been received by late arrivals from Canada, of the entire dispersion of the Colony founded by Lord Selkirk in conjunction with the Hudson’s Bay Company, on the River Assiniboia, in the interior of the North-west Continent of America. Disputes with the Metiffs<sup>12</sup> of the country, a race of people between Canadian and Indians, inflamed the natural jealousy which the latter have always felt relative to agricultural encroachments on their hunting grounds in the interior, and, we understand, compelled his Lordship’s Governor to abandon the establishment which had been made.

About 140 settlers were conveyed by the Canadian traders to Lake Superior, on their way to Canada, and the remainder are supposed to have gone to Hudson’s Bay, with a view of finding a passage to Great Britain.

---

<sup>9</sup> The Cossack. (1813, November 8). *The Caledonian Mercury*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> A town in Orkney, Scotland.

<sup>11</sup> From Intelligence has been received. (1815, October 11). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Métis



### **“Disagreeable reports”<sup>13</sup> (September, 1816)**

On Thursday last<sup>14</sup>, a gentleman arrived in this city<sup>15</sup> from Sault Ste. Marie, with very disagreeable reports from the Red River Settlement, of which so much has been said and written for awhile past. It is said, that a dispute had arisen between the Indians and some of the Hudson’s Bay Company officers, about an escort of provisions; that the parties came to blows, and that, in the contest, 21 of the Hudson’s Bay people were killed, including the Governor, Mr. Semple<sup>16</sup>.

As this melancholy report is given variously, we forbear saying any thing farther on the subject, until we get intelligence in an unquestionable shape and from a pure source. There is also another gloomy report, of a party of Hudson’s Bay traders, 20 in number, having gone last winter to Aratheyascow Lake<sup>17</sup>, when 17 of them, it is said, perished for want of provisions: the other three were saved by getting to one of the posts of the North West Company. It is reported, too, that Mr. Duncan Cameron<sup>18</sup>, one of the North West Company’s agents, has been made a prisoner by one of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s officers, and carried to York factory. Such are the disagreeable rumours now in circulation.

### **“Lord Selkirk and the North West Company”<sup>19</sup> (December, 1816)**

The Montreal papers are filled with the controversy between the Earl of Selkirk and the partners of the North West Company. It may be interesting to the reader in this country to know something of so important a quarrel, the scene of which is on our own borders. We therefore undertake to give a brief account of the dispute, as we can collect it from these papers, and other information in our reach.

In the year 1784, a company was formed solely for the purpose of carrying on the fur trade, called the North West Company, which company ever since its establishment has carried on an extensive trade, annually sending their agents through an immense tract of country<sup>20</sup>, to the western extremity of the continent. The

---

<sup>13</sup> From AMERICAN PAPERS. (1816, September 30). *The London Times*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> August 15, 1816.

<sup>15</sup> Montreal

<sup>16</sup> Robert Semple (1777 – 1816) was a noted traveler and author. “This Day is published [...] CHARLES ELLIS; or, The Friends: a Novel. Comprising the Incidents and Observations occurring on a Voyage to the Brazils and West Indies, actually performed by the Writer, ROBERT SEMPLE, Author of ‘Walks and Sketches at the Cape of Good Hope’. [...] The language of this Work is correct; the style plain and perspicuous; the characters are well drawn, and ably sustained; the incidents are natural, and the sentiments, principles, and morals are good. – Anti-Jacobin Rev. for Nov. 1806.” CHARLES ELLIS [Advertisement]. (1807, January 23). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Possibly Lake Athabasca.

<sup>18</sup> Duncan Cameron (1764 – 1848).

<sup>19</sup> From Lord Selkirk and the North West Company. (1816, December 9). *The Vermont Journal*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> The company was known for its explorers as early as 1804: “[A] Mr. Thomson, astronomer to the North West Canada Company of Traders, has been at the head of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and ascertained their latitudes and longitudes by astronomical observations.” B. (1804, March 19). From the Same. *The Charleston Daily Courier*, p. 2.

head-quarters of the company were at Fort William, on Thunder Bay, near the North Western extremity of Lake Superior, and a principal settlement at Red River near the North Western angle of the United States' territories, and 3000 miles westward from Montreal, where most of the partners of the company reside.

The Hudson's Bay company, which had carried on its trading operations from York Factory, on Hudson's Bay, has frequently had collisions with this company. This latter company is of a much longer standing, and holds existence under a charter from the king of Great Britain, granted about 200 years ago. This company claims a territorial jurisdiction, and a monopoly of the trade over an immense tract of country, in which the North West companies have their principal settlements.

The Earl of Selkirk, who was a proprietor of this company, has recently obtained from the company a grant of more than 116,000 square miles of land, including the country in which the Red River settlement is situated. Over this country his Lordship appointed Mr. Robert Semple, governor-general. Mr. Semple arrived at York Factory, from England, Aug. 28, 1815, but did not enter upon his government until winter. A party, however, of the Hudson's Bay people, took possession of the Red River settlement in the autumn. During the winter, it is complained by one party, that the Hudson's Bay company were making constant depredations upon the settlements and property of the other company; and by the other party that the North West company were making preparations for a hostile invasion, upon their rivals.

No event of a very important nature is related until the 9th of June, when the following bloody transaction took place. [...] We quote an account of it from [...] a friend of the North West company.

"Mr. Semple, still believing the ball at his foot, threatened destruction all around; and erecting batteries at the seat of government, meant to obstruct the navigation, and thereby to prevent the North West Company from passing with their property. The remaining North West proprietor in that quarter finding the difficulties which he had to surmount, directed his course with his charge by another route. As the passage by this route would be attended with loss of time and much trouble, and would cause much disappointment to the parties concerned, who might be waiting at the usual depot, and in want; the proprietor thought prudent to despatch two cart loads of provision in the usual direction, but through the plains, with an escort or guard of fifty men, who had positive instructions to pass on quietly, and as far behind the settlement as possible, in hopes of gaining the place appointed, unmolested.

"The advance of the escort, consisting of twenty or twenty-two men, passed on with their charge without being perceived, and meeting a man from the settlement, they brought him with them part of the way to prevent discovery. The rear guard, who were riding carelessly along the edge of the morass about 4 miles distant from the settlement; were observed by the Governor General from his room, which was in an upper story. The Governor, in a tone of surprise, exclaimed 'There they are,' and immediately sallied forth at the head of 30 of his best warriors, completely armed with muskets, fixed bayonets, &c. The escort, seeing this party pressing forward & gaining ground, halted & despatched one of the party, a Canadian who spoke English, to inquire into the object of the pursuit. The Canadian, with the best intentions,

advanced and was surprised when Mr. Semple seized the bridle of his horse and laid hold of him as a prisoner. The Canadian desired Mr. Semple to desist, otherwise he would not answer for the safety of his party. Mr. Semple, feeling indignant, called out to his men to blow out his brains! His men exclaimed, 'Good God, Sir! If we fire, we are all dead.' 'Fire, you cowards,' enjoined he, 'this is no time for reflection.' At this severe reprimand a shot was fired at the Canadian, but missed him – mean time an Indian seeing the struggle left the escort waving his hand and calling aloud 'Peace! Peace! Do not quarrel, friends!' Mistaking, perhaps, his intention, a shot was fired at him – the ball passed through his blanket – he returned the fire with effect – then a volley was poured upon the escort which killed one and wounded another of the party.

“The escort, no longer in doubt of the hostile views of Governor Semple, prepared for action, took their distance, and formed themselves into an extensive line describing a half moon – and opened a dreadful fire, which in an instant brought Mr. Semple and most of the party to the ground. A reinforcement from the settlement appeared in the rear with a piece of ordnance which burnt priming several times. The escort resisted this party also, and drove it with precipitation back into the settlement. This having cleared the field the escort joined their friends, who by this time had come to their assistance, and all returned to their destination accompanied by two of Mr. Semple’s party, whose lives were saved by the intrepidity of two Canadians who were present. Such is a short but true account of the battle fought four miles below the settlement of Red River on the 19th of June last, between two parties of equal numbers. Mr. Semple and 21 of his party were killed – and there were several wounded; the escort had one killed and one wounded.”

### **“Massacred with savage ferocity”<sup>21</sup> (December, 1816)**

A fort at the Red River settlement, towards the north-west extremity of Lake Superior, had been long in possession of the Canadian North-West company; till some time in 1815, it was seized by the servants of the Hudson’s Bay Company, as appertaining to their jurisdiction. Last winter the North West company collected a large force, by requisitions from the different establishments, and in May commenced war upon their antagonists wherever they met them. After seizing several small parties, they proceeded to the fort on the Red River, where they massacred, with savage ferocity, Governor Semple and all his force, except five men. Four of them fled, and the other owed his life to the recognition of a friend among the assailants.

At this time, Lord Selkirk, a principal in the Hudson’s Bay company, was proceeding from Montreal with a party of 180 men to succor his colony at Red River. Having heard of the massacre on the way, he had the precaution to land on an island, a short distance from the settlement, from whence he sent two officers in disguise to arrest Mr. McGillevray<sup>22</sup>, one of the principals. They succeeded; and two others, who

---

<sup>21</sup> From The Boston Repertory. (1816, December 31). *The Buffalo Gazette*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> William McGillivray (1764 – 1825).

came to offer themselves as his bail, were also arrested. In fine, although there were 400 men at the post, Lord Selkirk succeeded in taking possession of it, and held it.

Eight of the partners of the N. W. Company were embarked under a military escort. Mr. M'Kenzie and eight other persons were drowned by the upsetting of a canoe. The others have arrived at Montreal, where they have been bound over to take their trial for treason.

### **The affair as seen by “friends of Lord Selkirk”<sup>23</sup> (August, 1817)**

At the close of the last year, in noting the intelligence of the melancholy fate of Mr. Semple, we observed, that till better accounts arrived, we could not imagine that a Gentleman of his character for good sense and humanity would have acted in the foolish and barbarous manner described, viz. that of making an unprovoked attack on a body of Indians, as the Agents of the North West Company had asserted.

Other accounts have now arrived. Both sides have published their statements, which we shall notice in due course, beginning with the details furnished by the friends of Lord Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company – then noticing those put forth by their rivals in trade, the North West Company – and finally venturing upon a few observations on the subject, which, as coming from a quarter wholly unconnected with either of the disputing parties, may possibly on that account, if no other, be entitled to some consideration.

The Earl of Selkirk, in 1811, obtained from the Hudson's Bay Company the grant of a large tract of land, in North America, possessed by them in virtue of their charter, and immediately began his plan of colonizing it. A situation on the banks of the Red River, about 40 or 50 miles from its entrance into Lake Winipic<sup>24</sup>, was chosen for a settlement; and Lord Selkirk appointed Mr. Miles Macdonell to superintend the colony. That gentleman had also been made Governor of the district of Ossiniboia (in which the Red River was situated) by the Hudson's Bay Company.

In the autumn of 1812, Mr. M. Macdonell went with a small party to erect houses and prepare everything for the settlers who were to follow. There were several additions to their number, and in September 1814, the settlers and labourers, chiefly from Scotland, altogether amounted to 200. From the commencement of the colony to the spring of 1815, nothing of importance occurred to interrupt the progress of the infant colony, the difficulties, unavoidable at the commencement of such an establishment, were got over. The land was very fertile, and, though there was plenty of wood near, it did not, like most of the land in North America, require clearing. The rivers abounded with fish, the plains with buffaloe, and the woods with elk, deer and game. The neighbouring Indians (the Sioux) were friendly from the first. Some attempts had indeed been made in the spring of 1813, by the clerks and interpreters of the fur traders of Montreal (the North West Company) to instigate the natives against the settlers, by telling them they would be deprived of their hunting grounds,

---

<sup>23</sup> From LORD SELKIRK'S SETTLEMENT. (1817, August 17). *The Examiner*, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Lake Winnipeg

and that if the colony was once firmly established, they would be made slaves of by the settlers. Mr. Miles Macdonell, however, did away the unfavorable impressions that had been made, and obtained the continuance of their friendship. After that, the settlers appeared confident of their safety and contented with their situation. At the commencement of the settlement (named Kildonan), some light field pieces had been sent up by Lord Selkirk, and in the summer of 1814, a quantity of arms and ammunition was received, which had been furnished by the Government for the defence of the colony.

The North West Company, a powerful body of traders at Montreal, had regarded the colonists from the commencement as interfering with their trading interests, and they directly denied the right both of Lord Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company to the land granted. This dispute gave rise to the hostilities which afterwards took place. Mr. Duncan Cameron, one of the acting partners of the North West Company, arrived at the end of August, 1814, at a trading post belonging to the Company, situated at the Forks, about half a mile from Red River settlement. He began by ingratiating himself with the settlers, and in order to persuade them to desert, promised them a free passage to Canada, lands, &c.; and continually alarmed them with reports that the Indians were coming to attack them. These means were effectual. Several settlers joined him during the winter, and even some labourers and contracted servants were persuaded to quit the settlement before the expiration of their contracts. The Halfbreed<sup>25</sup>, a race of men, the illegitimate progeny of the Canadians by Indian women, were instigated to harass the settlers by driving the buffaloe from the plains, and in every other way possible. In the absence of Mr. Miles Macdonell, Mr. Cameron sent to seize the field-pieces, on account, as he said, of their having been employed to disturb the peace of his Majesty's subjects. After this seizure, more of the settlers deserted, taking with them their arms, implements of agriculture, &c.; and on the return of Mr. Miles Macdonell, a warrant, which had some time before been issued against him by Mr. Norman McLeod, one of the North West Company, was attempted to be carried into execution; and, after some time, Mr. Miles Macdonell, to put an end to the hostilities then going on between the two parties, surrendered himself, and was carried down to Montreal to be tried; but no trial took place, as the charges against him were found to be illegal. After his departure, frequent skirmishes took place, until the remaining settlers, about 60, embraced an offer of the Sautoux<sup>26</sup> Indians, and were conducted by them down the River to Lake Winipic, where they remained at a trading post, called Jack River House<sup>27</sup>. The day subsequent to their leaving it, all the buildings at the settlement were burnt down by the agents of the North West Company, and it was thus destroyed for the first time.

The old settlers remained a short time at Jack River House, and were then joined by Mr. Colin Robertson, an agent of the Hudson's Bay Company, who, together with some emigrants chiefly from the Highlands of Scotland, making about 200 in all,

---

<sup>25</sup> Pejorative.

<sup>26</sup> The Saulteaux First Nation.

<sup>27</sup> Norway House was later built on the same site.

conducted them to the River Pembina in the winter; but the next spring removed them to their former situation on the Red River. Mr. Cameron beginning to molest them directly they came back, Mr. Colin Robertson seized his fort or trading post and recovered two field pieces and 30 stands of arms, which had been taken away from the Red River Settlers the year before; but on Mr. Cameron's promising to behave peaceably, gave it up to him again.

Mr. Semple, who had been appointed Governor of all their trading posts by the Hudson's Bay Company, arrived at the Red River in March 1816. In April, he sent Mr. Pambrun<sup>28</sup> to the River Qui Appelle, who found a number of the Halfbreeds collected there; and as he was proceeding down the river with twenty-five men, in five boats, laden with a quantity of furs and 600 bags of dried provision, he was attacked by a body of Canadians and Half-breeds, under the orders of Cuthbert Grant, Thomas McKay, Roderick McKenzie, and P. Bostonois, clerks and interpreters of the North West Company, and were all made prisoners. About the end of May, the whole party, with Mr. Alexander McDonnell, a North West Partner, went down the river in their boats, and part of them, with Cuthbert Grant, took one of the Hudson's Bay Company's forts, called Brandon House, and after distributing the furs and provisions in it among the Canadians and Halfbreeds, about 70 of them, on horseback, and armed, proceeded towards the Red River. On the 19th June, they were observed by Governor Semple and his people approaching the settlement. Governor Semple, ordering 20 men to follow him, advanced toward them. A Canadian, of the name of Boucher, advancing, and using insulting language to the Governor, his horse's bridle was laid hold of by Mr. Semple. Boucher jumped from his horse, and a shot was instantly fired by one of Grant's people, which killed Mr. Holt, and then another, which wounded Mr. Semple. He cried out to his men to take care of themselves; but instead of that, they pressed round him to ascertain what happened. While this collected, the Halfbreeds fired a volley among them, and then rushing forward, butchered Mr. Semple and most of his followers. The remaining settlers at Kildonan, naturally alarmed at these horrid proceedings, surrendered the fort and all their property, on condition of being allowed to go down the river. On the second day from their embarkation, they met a strong party of boats, commanded Mr. Normal McLeod, who ordered them all on shore to take their examinations; and after detaining some by warrants, and some by subpoenas, the rest were suffered to proceed toward Hudson's Bay. Thus was the colony broken up a second time.

Before these latter proceedings reached the ears of Lord Selkirk, he had collected a body of men to reinforce the settlers; composed of the unemployed soldiers of the disbanded regiments of De Meuron, Watteville, and the Glengary Fencibles, amounting to upwards of 100 persons. On reaching the Falls of St. Mary, between Lakes Huron and Superior, Lord Selkirk learnt the fate of his settlement, and the tragic death of Mr. Semple; and finding also that several of his settlers had been carried prisoners to Fort William, he immediately changed his route, resolving to go to that place and demand their release. On his reaching the fort, some of his people were directly liberated, but they had all been kept in a rigorous confinement. The

---

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Crysologue Pambrun (1792 – 1841), a former soldier.

information which they gave his Lordship with respect to the occurrences at the colony, induced him, in his capacity of Magistrate, to arrest Mr. McGillivray, the partner and principal agent of the North West Company in Canada, and several others. Some resistance being made on serving the warrants, Lord Selkirk's followers forced their way into the fort, took possession of it, apprehended the agents of the Company, secured the papers, &c. and then sent the parties off to Montreal for trial.

These particulars are taken from a pamphlet recently published, under the title of "Statement respecting the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement upon the Red River,"<sup>29</sup> &c. Since its publication, we learn by accounts from Canada, that Lord Selkirk has again proceeded to re-establish his colony, but with what success we know not.

In our next we shall notice the statements put forth by the North West Company, in defence and justification of their conduct.

### **"Some counter statements"<sup>30</sup> (August, 1817)**

In our last we gave Lord Selkirk's account of the proceedings which caused the destruction of the Settlement on the Red River. We now present our readers with some counter Statements, extracted from "A Narrative of Occurrences in the Indian Countries of North America, connected with the Earl of Selkirk, the Hudson's Bay, and the North West Companies:" – and shall conclude, next week, with a few observations, as well on the conduct of the parties immediately interested, as on that of the Government, by whose shameful neglect of duty so much mischief has ensued.

Lord Selkirk had been engaged in various speculations in North America, before the year 1806, in the prosecutions of which he visited Canada. While at Montreal, he was treated with the greatest hospitality by the inhabitants, and particularly by the partners of the North West Company. His Lordship made many enquiries, first in Canada, and afterwards in England, respecting the nature and extent of the Fur Trade; and easily saw the superior advantages possessed by the Hudson's Bay Company over their rivals in point of situation and proximity to the countries where the furs are procured. He purchased, in conjunction with a gentleman in England, considerable portions of the Hudson's Bay Company's Stock, which was then very low; but afterwards the parties disagreeing, Lord Selkirk obtained the greatest part of the joint stock, and extended his purchases to the amount of forty thousand pounds. Several of the Committee made way for his relatives and friends, and at a general Court of the Proprietors convened in May 1811, he obtained a grant of land, although the Proprietors present, except the Committee, signed and delivered a protest against it to the Court. The grant was of about 116,000 square miles, which exceeds in extent the Kingdom of England, on condition of the establishment of a colony within the territory granted.

---

<sup>29</sup> Halkett, J. (1817). *Statement respecting the Earl of Selkirk's Settlement of Kildonan, upon the Red River, in North America; its destruction in the years 1815 and 1816; and the massacre of Governor Semple and his party*. London: J. Brettell.

<sup>30</sup> From LORD SELKIRK'S SETTLEMENT. (1817, August 24). *The Examiner*, p. 11.

The distance between the place fixed upon for the Settlement, and the York Factory, on Hudson's Bay, is 725 miles; and the navigation is open for small boats or canoes from June to October. The voyage is performed in thirty days, for the whole of which time provisions must be provided, as none can be procured on the route. The climate is healthy, although very cold in winter, being about three degrees north of Quebec. The neighbouring country consists of extensive plains: and the soil, excepting partially on the banks of rivers, is light and unproductive. The plains produce only a coarse benty-grass<sup>31</sup>, the food of innumerable kinds of buffaloes. Different tribes of Indians are scattered over the country, who procure provisions for the Traders of both Companies, whose posts are maintained there chiefly for that purpose.

To the North West Company this establishment was peculiarly objectionable; and they denied the right, both of the grantors and Lord Selkirk, to *any* part of the land granted, which they and their predecessors had occupied for at least a century. They knew that it was intended to enforce against them the penalties provided by the Charter, of seizure of their persons, and confiscation of their property, as interlopers on the Territories absurdly claimed by the Company; but they were determined to resist all attempts to seize their persons or property, or to dispossess them of their trade.

In order to form his establishment, Lord Selkirk addressed himself to the spirit of Emigration, which prevailed in parts of Scotland and Ireland. Agents were employed to circulate advertisements, holding out the most fallacious prospects to settlers in his intended Colony. The climate and soil were represented as superior to any in British North America; and all the temptations of a Land of Promise were painted in the most glowing colours to induce wretched people to emigrate. In the winter of 1810 and 11, a number of poor Englishmen and Scotchmen, with some respectable families, under the command of Mr. Miles Macdonnell, proceeded to Hudson's Bay. On their arrival at York Fort, it was too late to attempt a journey that season; and consequently, they were obliged to wait until the next spring. During the winter they suffered the greatest miseries, and afterwards proceeded to their destination at the Red River, where they arrived in the autumn of 1812. Not being able to provide for all of them against the approaching winter, they were distributed; some in the Company's forts, some in the huts of the free Canadians or Indians; and those who remained in the houses with the Governor could not have survived the winter, if the North West Traders had not often relieved them from actual famine. Early in the spring of 1813, when he had, by the assistance of the North West Traders, overcome the difficulties of his situation, Mr. Macdonnell, in his capacity as Governor, and representative of Lord Selkirk, told the Indians they must take to him alone their provisions or peltries, as the produce of Lord Selkirk's property. The Indians ridiculed the idea, but it alarmed the North West Traders, whose existence in a great part of the country depended on the provisions procured within Lord Selkirk's Grant.

In the early part of the winter of 1813, another body of settlers arrived, which formed a great addition to the Colony; encouraged by this, and by the successes of the Americans, by which there was a great probability that the communication with

---

<sup>31</sup> Agrostis, or bentgrass.



Canada would be interrupted, Mr. Macdonell commenced his operations against the Canadian Traders. Under pretence that all the provisions raised in the country were wanted for the maintenance of the Colony, parties of Settlers were sent to intercept the convoys of the Traders on their way to the ports; their boats and canoes were fired at, brought to, and searched, and whenever they were attempted to be concealed, warrants were issued to apprehend the servants of the North West Company on frivolous and vexatious pretences; but the object of all their examinations was to discover where the provisions were. A proclamation was also issued by Mr. Macdonell, ordering that all provisions raised in the country should be taken for the use of the Colony, and paid for by British bills; and that if any one attempted to take them out of the territory, that person should be seized and the provisions forfeited. Evidently with a view of enforcing the threats in the proclamation, the Governor regularly trained his people to the use of musketry and artillery, the latter of which was supplied by Government on pretence of the defence of the Colony against the Americans. A supply of provisions had been accumulated at a post called Riviere la Sourie, by the North West Partner at the Red River. The Governor, a few days after the proclamation had been issued, sent there a person, named John Spencer, whom he had appointed Sheriff for Lord Selkirk's Territory, who seized 600 packages of dried meat and fat, and took them to the Settlement. Some time after this robbery, the partners of the North West Company met at Fort William, on Lake Superior, the general rendezvous, and came to a determination of resisting the further violences of their opponents. In consequence of this, Mr. Cameron, one of the partners, being provided with warrants against Mr. Macdonell and Mr. Spencer, went to the Red River in order to execute them. On the arrival of Mr. Cameron, the conduct of Mr. Miles Macdonell became more violent than ever, both towards his opponents and his own settlers, a great many of whom applied to Mr. Cameron for assistance to go to Canada in the spring; but in consequence of this application, they were often put in irons and imprisoned by the Governor. On the approach of spring, however, many of them took refuge in the North West fort, and alarmed lest Macdonell should blockade the rivers with his artillery and prevent their leaving the country, they took away and delivered to Mr. Cameron all the cannon and ammunition. About this time Mr. Macdonell quarreled with the Free Canadians and Halfbreeds, and the consequence was, a number of little scuffles between them. At length, on the arrival of an Agent of the North West Company at the Red River, Mr. Macdonell surrendered himself, and was taken down to Fort William, together with Mr. Spencer, who had been arrested early in the winter. The Settlers then made earnest application to be taken to Canada; and about two-thirds went in the North West Company's boats to York, in Upper Canada, and one-third proceeded towards Hudson's Bay.

In the winter of 1814-15, Mr. Colin Robertson, an Agent of Lord Selkirk, was employed in Canada to raise an expedition for the upper country, called the Athabasca district. When he had completed his preparations, he went up from Montreal, but not liking the journey, sent a Mr. Clark with 100 men instead, and joining the Red River Settlers, whom he found at lake Winnipic, proceeded towards the old settlement. On their way they met Mr. Semple with a body of emigrants, and

all together re-established the Colony in September, 1815. In October, Mr. Cameron was seized by an armed party, but soon after unconditionally released. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of the next March, however, Fort Gibraltar (the North West Company's post on the Red River) was taken in the night, and Mr. Cameron and his people made prisoners. In the same month, another post on the river Pembina was captured; at both places, arms, ammunition, letters, &c., with about fifty packs of furs, were seized and confiscated; and some time after, they were both razed to the ground. A force was sent to surprize Mr. Alexander Macondell at the Riviere Qui Appêlé, but found them too well prepared. On the 19th May, some persons in the employment of the North West Company, without authority from any partner or agent, seized thirty packs of furs, found in a bateaux of the Hudson's Bay Company. The North West Company, anxious to prevent a contest between their canoe men, and the people under Governor Semple's orders, who blocked up the river, dispatched about fifty Indians and Halfbreeds to open a land-passage. They passed the Settlement at the distance of about four miles, and detained some of the Settlers to prevent their march being known. But Governor Semple, seeing them from the Fort with a telescope, marched out with twenty-eight men and officers, with great parade, to stop their progress. A Canadian, of the name of Bouchè, advanced; some words were exchanged; the Governor seized the bridle of Bouchè's horse, and disarmed him; he attempted to escape, when some of Mr. Semple's party obeyed his orders to fire, and one of the shots passed through the blanket of an Indian, who was advancing in a friendly manner; her returned the fire; his party followed his example; and the consequence was that Mr. Semple and about 20 people on that side, and one Halfbreed and one Indian on the other, lost their lives. The fort was then plundered of every thing it contained, and the Colonists, to the number of about 180 people, embarked for Hudson's Bay, and were met on their way to that place in June.

It is not necessary to give any account here of Lord Selkirk's expedition to Fort William, as it differs from that in our last only inasmuch as it goes more into detail, and is described with such difference of language as might be expected from an opposite party.

### **“All sides have more or less erred”<sup>32</sup> (August, 1817)**

Pope Alexander VI.<sup>33</sup>, a man infamous for almost every crime which disgraces humanity, assumed to himself the right of giving away immense regions in America, to which he had no sort of title, and of whose very situation, indeed, he scarcely knew anything. This he did, it appears, as “lord of the world,” an authority which he held in right of succession from a fisherman named Peter, who most likely never possessed a single acre of ground in his life. The Spaniards, however, were sufficiently satisfied of the right of the Sovereign Pontiff to make such grants, and they forthwith

---

<sup>32</sup> From LORD SELKIRK'S SETTLEMENT. (1817, August 31). *The Examiner*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Rodrigo de Borja, *a.k.a.* Rodrigo Borgia (1431 – 1503). After Columbus's voyages, he issued papal bulls granting Spain rights to land on the American continent.

proceeded to commit all sorts of enormities, robbery and murder inclusive, under the pretence of propagating the faith promulgated by the God of Justice and Mercy.

Our Charles II, a potentate almost as profligate, and doubtless equally pious, in imitation of such a modest example, thought fit to grant to a body of Merchants, called the Hudson's Bay Company, a Charter, in virtue of which piece of parchment they at once became the Sovereigns of an immense tract of country in North America, which they had never even explored, and which in fact they could neither cultivate nor use nor defend. But the Monarch did not confine his generosity to the given away lands which never belonged to him or his ancestors; he also gave this said Company a right of "exclusive trade for ever," of his own sole authority – proceedings, as it appears to us, highly unjust, and which, we have little doubt, will turn out to be equally illegal.

Lord Selkirk, however, believing that the company had full right to dispose of the land in question, purchased of them for 10,000*ls.* a tract, containing, it is said, five millions of acres, with the view of colonizing the country, which he proceeded to do, as stated in our last. The North West Company of Fur Traders considered this plan of colonization as very injurious to their interests, in a country which their people had traversed for years, and in some portions of which they had long possessed permanent posts for the furtherance of their mercantile pursuits. On Lord Selkirk's giving notice, therefore, that the soil was his, and that the agents of the Company must quit the territory so occupied by him, that Company disputed the assumed right, and announced their intention to resist all attempts to dispossess them of what they deemed *their* rights. Besides this, they applied to the British Government at home, earnestly begging its interference to prevent the mischiefs which would certainly arise from the collision of opposite interests. This was in March 1815; and similar applications were subsequently made on both sides; but all in vain, as Ministers, it is understood, would not allow a question which touched the Royal Prerogative to be agitated in a Court of Law!

Believing, as we do, that if the extensive claims of the Hudson's Bay Company, and Lord Selkirk's assumed rights, were properly investigated, they would not be deemed valid, still we are far from approving the course adopted by the agents of the North West Company. Lord Selkirk, or any other person, in our judgment, had full right to establish a colony on the Red River or on any other spot of ground not inhabited and cultivated by others, particularly if the neighbouring people were not unfriendly to the proceeding. But the North West traders avowed from the beginning their dislike to the new Settlement, as injurious to their trading interests; and it is quite clear to us, that they took every means in their power to render the plan abortive. We indeed see no reason to doubt that both the first and second breaking up of the Colony were occasioned by their management, and, if the accounts, verified on oath, be not altogether a heap of outrageous falsehoods, and Lord Selkirk himself "a liar of the first magnitude," by the employment of the most illegal violence, of which the following is a fearful specimen:-

Mr. Owen Keveney, in the Hudson's Bay Company's service, was apprehended on a charge of having ill-treated some persons under his orders, who had deserted to

the North West Traders. On his way to Fort William as a prisoner, he was placed, by the order of Mr. McLellan (a Partner of the North West Company) in the hands of Serjeant Reinhard (formerly in the English service), an Indian, and a Halfbreed named Mainville. McLellan then said to Reinhard, "Make the prisoner believe that he is going to Lac la Pluie. He must not be put to death here among the Indians. We will go on further and wait for you; and when you find a favorable spot, you know what you have to do." – Mr. McLellan having thus issued his secret orders, set out in his own canoe, leaving on shore Mr. Keveney, Reinhard, the Indian, and Mainville. In less than an hour they embarked to follow him. Having proceeded about a quarter of a league, Mr. Keveney expressed a wish to be set on shore for a short time; and on his being landed, Reinhard said to Mainville, that as they were now far enough from the Indians, he might shoot the prisoner. Upon Mr. Keveney's returning to the beach to re-embark, and being close to the canoe, Mainville levelled his piece and shot him through the neck. Keveney fell forward upon the canoe, when Reinhard, seeing he was not dead, and that he wanted to speak, drew his sword, and plunging it twice into his back, ran him through the back and put an end to his misery! Having stripped the body, they left it in the adjoining woods, and then joined Mr. McLellan and his party, to whom they related what had taken place. A distribution of the bloody clothes of Keveney, and of his other effects was then made; and McLellan having opened the boxes and writing desk of the deceased, he spent a great part of the night in reading and destroying the letters they contained. When this was done, he told the Bois-Brulés (halfbreeds) that it was very fortunate they had prevented Keveney from getting to Fort William, where he might have ruined them all. [...]

Upon the whole, then, as far as we are at present enabled to judge from the conflicting statements of interested and irritated parties, we are of the opinion that all sides have more or less erred; that the Hudson's Bay Company have sold lands which they had no right to sell, and that consequently Earl Selkirk possesses no territorial rights; that the Agents of the North West Company have committed many scandalous outrages in the furtherance of their trading interests: and that, above all, Ministers have much to answer for, in not promptly putting a stop to such illegal acts. Their interference had been most urgently sought for on both sides, but instead of affording it at once, they have allowed years to elapse, during which the interests of many respectable persons have been endangered, the bad passions have been excited, British subjects have been armed against each other, and valuable blood has been shed. It is true, they have *at last* sent two Commissioners from Canada into the disputed country, and it is hoped these Gentlemen may have arrived in time to prevent further violence; but as the hostile parties were on the alert, and in considerable force, it is feared that blows may have again been exchanged, and that more lives may have fallen in this disgraceful and unnecessary quarrel.

## “Losing confidence in his present title”<sup>34</sup> (November, 1817)

It is now reported, that Lord Selkirk losing confidence in his present title to his North Western Territory, and with the determination of persevering in his plans of colonization, has succeeded in a negotiation with the Saulteaux Indians of Lac la Pluie, for the sale of their rights to 200 leagues<sup>35</sup> of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s grant, *in consideration for an annual present of 200lbs. of Tobacco*. It happens that this country is so near the Boundary Line between Canada and the United States, that it is not certain to which it may belong, and as it is inhabited by the Saulteaux, only in common with the Crees, Assiniboins, and other tribes of Indians and half-breeds having equal rights, the result of this negotiation may be an Indian war, in which his Lordship may find the Hudson’s Bay Charter gives him as ample power to interfere, as it did to eject the Canadians by force from the posts they occupied within the boundaries of his grant. About 70 miserable people had again arrived at the Red River, from the Bay, as colonists, without provisions or the means of procuring them, and the traders even were so badly off in this respect, that they had not a week’s provisions for themselves.

But it is really too bad, leaving entirely out of the question the disputes of the traders, that so many beings should be placed in jeopardy, by such infatuated and impracticable projects, and it is fully time, after the loss of fifty or sixty lives, that Government should come to some determination with respect to this Colony. Lord Selkirk’s rights are those of any other British subject, and no unprejudiced person can regard the grant from the Hudson’s Bay Company, as of more value than the parchment on which it is written, till it has passed the ordeal of the Courts of Law here, before which the question will now probably come; and his purchase from the Indians, for the purposes of agriculture (supposing their rights unquestionable), of land in a British Colony, is in contravention of the King’s Proclamation of October, 1763<sup>36</sup>; if in the American Territory, is void and illegal, without an Act of the

---

<sup>34</sup> From It is now reported. (1817, November 3). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> This figure was not arrived at without resistance. “A great concourse of Indians had taken place at the Red River, and a Council was held, at which his Lordship at first made an unsuccessful application for a confirmation of his grant of 117,000 square miles of land from the Hudson’s Bay Company. His demand was then reduced to two square leagues round his establishment at Fort Douglas, but this was equally denied, and the Indians gave notice that they would permit no agricultural settlement to be made for the present in their hunting grounds.” PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE. (1817, October 2). *The Caledonian Mercury*, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> “And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to Our Interests and the Security of Our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians, with whom We are connected, and who live under Our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of our Dominions and Territories as not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them or any of them as their Hunting Grounds, We do therefore, with the Advice of our Privy Council, declare it to be Our Royal Will and Pleasure, that no Governor or Commander in Chief in any of Our Colonies of Quebec, East-Florida, or West-Florida, do presume, under any Pretence whatever, to grant Warrants of Survey, or pass any Patents for Lands beyond the Bounds of their respective Governments, as described in their Commissions; as also that no Governor or Commander in Chief in any of Our other Colonies or Plantations in America, do presume for the present, and until Our further

Legislature of the State in which it is situated, to confirm it. If the Colony is, therefore, to be re-established, the jurisdiction must be first sound, and if his Majesty's Ministers conceive the object in a national point of view, with the protection which is requisite to ensure the lives and safety of the people engaged in it, in God's name let the experiment be tried, and sufficient measures taken to prevent a recurrence of the evils which have hitherto attended the undertaking, and the new dangers which now appear to threaten it. If, as we believe, his Majesty's Government coincide in opinion with the rest of the world, that the ultimate success of the undertaking is as hopeless as the original project was wild and impracticable, let their countenance be at once withdrawn from it, and an intimation given to the Noble Lord, that until he has established his rights to the property he claims, in a British Court of Law, he must defer his plans of occupying and cultivating it.

### **Early obstacles to settlement<sup>37</sup> (September, 1889)**

In 1817 the settlers suffered from famine owing to the failure of the crops; and in 1818 the locusts appeared, and in one night cleared off every vestige of verdure from the fields, leaving the people in a worse plight than ever. The locusts left their eggs in the ground, and the number of young insects the next year rendered agriculture impossible. While the settlers took refuge at Pembina, Lord Selkirk, at an expense of £1,000, imported 250 bushels of seed grain from the United States, and this, which was sown in the spring of 1820, produced a bountiful crop in the autumn of that year.

### **“Queries and answers”<sup>38</sup> (July, 1819)**

So much having been lately said of this settlement, it may not, perhaps, be uninteresting to our readers, to state the nature of it, and to describe the superior inducements which [are] held out over the Canadas, either Upper or Lower, to a more extended population. The original inhabitants were Highlanders, conveyed thither at the expence of Lord Selkirk, from his own estate, and from the neighbourhood thereof, in Scotland. These were soon joined by others. The advantages of the situation were peculiarly attractive, and the princely liberality and philanthropic feelings of the Noble Lord afforded to the settlers the greatest encouragement.

The foundation of the infant colony was laid on the banks of the Red River, which discharges its waters into Lake Winipic [sic.], and which is navigable for upwards of three hundred miles above the settlement. This spot is situated about six

---

Pleasure be known, to grant Warrants of Survey, or pass Patents for any Lands beyond the Heads or Sources of any of the Rivers which fall into the Atlantic Ocean from the West and North-West, or upon any Lands whatever, which not having been ceded to or purchased by Us as aforesaid, are served to the said Indians, or any of them.” George R. (1763, October 14). A PROCLAMATION. *The Derby Mercury*, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> From LADY SELKIRK. (1889, September 25). *The Vancouver Daily World*, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> From EMIGRATION. (1819, July 13). *The Hull Packet; and East Riding Times*, p. 4.

hundred miles from Hudson's Bay, and was selected from the almost unexampled facilities which it affords for agricultural pursuits. The country around consists of immense plains, or prairies, intersected with woods, forests, and clumps of the finest timber, including pine, cedar, white oak, ash, elm, bass, poplar, aspin [sic.], and other trees, as well useful as ornamental. These woods and forests are mingled with underwood or hazle, bearing nuts of different sorts, bush cranberry, vines, gooseberry, and currant trees, plum trees, a species of tree bearing a berry in the form of a pear, but small, and of exquisite flavor – raspberries, the alpine strawberry, and other fruits not known in this country, but all excellent of their sorts. While the near neighbourhood of these woods are desirable, the great advantage to the farmer, however, is that he has nothing to do but to set his plow to work on natural meadows of an unlimited extent, in which he has neither the impediment of a stump or a stone to encounter. The soil is of the richest quality, consisting of a light black earth, upon a substance not unlike marle<sup>39</sup>, beneath which is a fine lime-stone. From the experience of the settlers it appears that the produce of the soil on a wheat crop is equal to sixty bushels of wheat for one of seed; and such is the rapidity of vegetation, that wheat sown in May, has been harvested and eaten as bread in the August following. Every other seed yields in the same proportion.

The scenery is beautifully picturesque. The country is intersected with small rivers, which occasionally expand into lakes, and present a happy contrast to the surrounding foliage. The bosom of the earth is frequently swoln into gentle ascents, but the hills are by no means high, except here and there, where a point presents itself of a considerable altitude, crowned to its summit with the finest timber; among which the sugar maple is most abundant. The country also abounds with salt springs of the best description, and is fortunately exempt from those swamps which are to be found in situations not equally desirable. In all the low grounds, whitlow nettle, which is the finest of hemp, is found in great quantities, and upon the more elevated spots wild flax grows luxuriantly.

While the surface of the earth is thus attractive, the soil itself furnishes, spontaneously, various nutritious roots; the most common of which is called "the turnip of the plain;" and this forms a principal article of food with the Indians, and is much liked by the Europeans. It is a tap root, about the thickness of a man's wrist, and is very sweet. Hops grow so luxuriantly in the woods as almost to become a nuisance. The minerals are iron, copper, and lead; but Captain Rogers, who went out in the spring of 1816, for the purpose of making some researches on the subject, before he had made many experiments fell a sacrifice to the attack made by the North West Company's servants.

The winter sets in with a hard frost at the latter end of November, when the rivers are frozen over, and it breaks up, upon the average, about the 18th of April. During the intervening months there is a continued frost, without rain or mist. The atmosphere is clear and wholesome. Colds, rheumatisms, and agues, are unknown. The snow seldom exceeds eight inches in depth, so that the husbandry labourers continue employed the whole of the winter in repairing and making fences, drawing

---

<sup>39</sup> Crumbly mixed earth.

wood, thrashing, and performing other useful labours; and what is more desirable during this period, the plains furnish ample food for the horses. Stacks of hay cut from the natural meadows, however, are preserved for the cows, sheep, and other cattle, which may not be able to cater for themselves.

With regard to the wild animals which are to be met with in these regions, they are of different descriptions. Among the more prominent are buffaloes, which traverse the plains in vast herds. Deer [are present] of all descriptions, from the moose deer to a smaller description, called the capri, somewhat like an antelope. Hares, foxes, and a variety of other quadrupeds [abound]. These are, of course, all "fair game," and form a great portion of the animal food of the country. The rivers and lakes too, abound with fish, which are taken in winter as well as in summer, in prodigious quantities, and of the finest quality. Among other descriptions enumerated are sturgeon cat-fish, the celebrated American white fish, bass, black and white, pike, and a long list of other sorts of the finny tribe. Horses are purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company for three pounds a piece, but they may frequently be had of the native Indians for a bottle of rum. And here it is not a little singular to remark, that many of the horses which have been so purchased are of the Andalusian breed, and bear the Spanish marks, from whence it is conjectured that they are passed from tribe to tribe, either as a source of traffic or plunder from New Mexico, towards which there seems to run an extensive line of plains, with occasional interruptions: the same sort of plains extend to the Mississippi.

The feathered tribe are not less numerous or less substantially useful than the beasts of the field, and the inhabitants of the water. They consist of every description of water fowl, from a swan to the smallest teal, together with partridges, grouse, plover, pigeons, quail, curlews, and a great variety of the eagle tribe. No man who can use a gun, or a fishing net, need be without an abundant bill of fare for his table. Great pains have been taken to excite an apprehension of the inroads of the Indians; but this appears to be altogether groundless, for these poor people, so far from holding enmity or feeling a jealousy towards the Europeans, live with them upon terms of the greatest amity, and are always prompt in doing acts of kindness. They were the most friendly towards the new settlers, because they had recourse to none of those harsh measures to which the traders had too often resorted.

For emigrants going from Europe, the best course to pursue would be to sail for Hudson's Bay, from whence, by means of land and water-carriage, they would reach the Red River with trifling inconvenience. There is, however, another course, but this would be more circuitous. We allude to a passage up the Missouri, upon which steam-boats are now plying. This river is navigable to an Indian village called Mandan, situated in a direct line South of the settlement, at a distance of about two hundred miles, over a level plain, which has repeatedly been travelled by the fur traders. Near this spot, an American fort is to be erected. There are, however, other rivers which are tributary to the Red River, and which come in a direction from the Missouri, especially one called "*Riviere a la Sourie*." This falls into the Red River at Brandon-House, one hundred and twenty miles above the settlement. It is a fine navigable stream. From hence it is inferred that a water conveyance may easily be



obtained, and thus every facility will be afforded for transmitting heavy goods, such as hides, tallow, and other commodities down the Missouri into the Mississippi, and to New Orleans.

At present the prospect held out for settlers, independent of the abundance of almost every necessary of life which they would enjoy, is extremely flattering; for it is calculated that for many years their agricultural produce and stock would not be more than sufficient for the fur traders on the lakes, who are at present obliged to bring their supplies from a distance, and who, in exchange for provisions, would be happy to bring colonial produce; but this can always be obtained in sufficient quantities from the Hudson's Bay Company, to whom it would become a valuable source of traffic.

The following queries were submitted to a gentleman now in London, who resided at Lord Selkirk's settlement for some time, and who has lived in North America upwards of sixteen years: to each question he has submitted the answer subjoined.

#### QUERIES AND ANSWERS RESPECTING RED RIVER SETTLEMENT

What is the present state of the colony? The nature of its Government? The description of its society? The numbers of men, women and children? Its religion? Its schools, if any?

Letters dated in September last, say, that the colony was then in a flourishing state. The Hudson's Bay Company, by virtue of their royal charter, are invested with judicial authority over their territory. The society is general composed of such as may be called the lower order of farmers. There are, however, some gentlemen who have retired from the Hudson's Bay Company's service, who, with the officers of the establishment, are men of good information and respectable connections. The settlers amounted, last September, to about 300 men, women, and children, the major part of whom are Scotch Highlanders, and the others English, Irish, Canadians, and Germans. The Canadians are Catholics, and have with them two Priests, who are instructed by their Bishop to establish schools, for the education of the male and female children. The Highlanders have an Elder of their church, who officiates for them, and there is every reason to believe that they also now have a school. It is proposed to send out a regular Protestant clergyman next season.

What trades are carried on at the settlement, and what tradesmen would be best to send out?

Mechanics of various descriptions reside in the settlement. The most useful artisans to send out would be a few flax-dressers, weavers, tanners, curriers, and shoe-makers. In new countries blacksmiths and carpenters will readily find employment.

Has the mill, destroyed in consequence of the quarrel with the North West Company, been re-erected?

A mill-wright was sent out for that purpose last summer, and it is supposed the mill is now re-established.

In what manner are the houses constructed?

The houses are built of wood, generally with oak, which at the Red River is of a very superior quality. No stone or brick houses have as of yet been erected. Materials for making bricks and pottery are abundant in the neighbourhood of the settlement. Stone, of a fine quality, may be brought down the river, from a short distance. Brick-makers and a potter have recently been sent to the country.

Provisions – how obtained, and of what description?

The soil produces wheat, barley, peas, Indian corn, and other grains in abundance. The plains afford plenty of buffalo, venison, and game. The springs yield salt, the rivers are well stocked with excellent fish, and the lakes abound with wild fowl. When the settlers do not hunt themselves, they employ Indians or free Canadians to kill the buffalo for them. The price of a buffalo (large as an English ox), including his hide, is 15s. in money; but by barter for goods may be bought from the Indians at a cheaper rate.

Building materials – of what sort? Houses – at present, how many?

In September last, there were fifty-seven settlers' houses in the settlement, exclusive of the public buildings. It is expected that there will be an addition of at least one hundred and fifty persons at the colony in the course of this summer. Sixty or seventy have gone out this season from England, and a considerable number of Canadians have also gone up.

In what manner is the superabundant produce of the colony disposed of, and how paid for?

Owing to the disturbed state of the country, arising from the quarrels with the North West Company, the settlers have not yet had any superabundant produce to dispose of, but now that the country is in a state of tranquility, they will naturally have more produce than they can consume. Lake Winnipic will be the first market, to which, during the infant state of the colony, the settlers will have recourse. To the fur traders of the Hudson's Bay Company, to the North West Company, or any other traders from Canada, they may dispose of all their superabundant produce for years to come. Nor can there be any doubt but that, in the course of time, the produce will in a great measure be shipped for England.

What is the extent of the allotments of land made to settlers, and how secured to them?

Each family has an allotment of 50 or 100 acres of land, or any quantity that may be agreed upon, secured to him by a deed from the Earl of Selkirk, of which a regular form has been prepared.

By what means are settlers to be conveyed from this country to York Factory, in Hudson's Bay; and from thence to the settlement?

Settlers may be conveyed annually in the Hudson's Bay Company's ships to York Factory, and from thence in boats of from 24 to 32 feet keel. The whole distance in which any difficult navigation occurs does not exceed thirty miles. There is about 350 miles of smooth rivers and small lakes of easy navigation, and 300 miles of Lake Winnipic.

What domestic cattle [are] on the spot? Do hogs thrive?

The domestic cattle, which were sent from England, have been destroyed by the North West Company; but I believe there are eight or ten head now at the settlement, which were brought last summer from York Fort. At Albany and Moose Factories (in Hudson's Bay) there are more than sixty head of cattle, which it would not be very difficult to send to Red River. Hogs would certainly thrive exceedingly well, as the country produces great quantities of acorns and nuts, as well as Jerusalem artichokes, and other roots in abundance. But the breed of these animals has never been properly attended to.

How are agricultural tools, seed, &c. procured?

Implements of agriculture are made at the settlement, from the most approved models sent from Europe. The country is capable of raising its own seeds: notwithstanding, to prevent disappointment, Lord Selkirk sends an annual supply of garden seeds from the United States of America, from Canada, and also from England.

What success has there been with sheep?

Some Merino sheep, sent out by Lord Selkirk, promised to do well, but had been ill attended to. They were all afterwards killed by the North West Company's servants, a few days after the death of Governor Semple and his people.

The latitude of the settlement is 50 deg. North, longitude 97 deg. West of London; and the new line which divides the territories of the United States from those of Great Britain is situated about eighty miles to the Southward. The only rational objection to the establishment of the colony seems to have been an apprehension that it would interfere with the fur trade; but this appears to be altogether fallacious, for the district in which it is situated has long since been exhausted of valuable furs, and now affords a prospect of happiness and prosperity to civilized society alone.

### **An account of early settlement<sup>40</sup> (1878)**

The exhaustion of material forces by the Napoleonic wars, which at their close at Waterloo had enfeebled almost to the last gasp all the powers that had been engaged in them, had effects equally powerful upon the social conditions of Europe. In this last phase, indeed, the most deplorable results are seen. The populations which had been reduced by losses in battle and by disease were disheartened, disorganized, impoverished. Successful business enterprises, public and private, which alone can restore confidence and happiness in such a conjuncture, were impossible and unattempted. Manufacturing industries at first languished, then ceased to exist. To crown all these miseries, the untimely and excessive rains in the summer of 1816 had so damaged the crops that a general famine was apprehended. The expense and difficulty of transportation enhanced the costs of all necessaries of life. The price of grain rose to an unprecedented height, and the poorer classes suffered for the want of bread. In Switzerland the distress was greater than in any

---

<sup>40</sup> From Cheltnain, A. L. (1878). The Red River Colony. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, LVIII(343), pp. 47-55. Written by Augustus Louis Cheltnain (1824 – 1914), best known for serving as a Union general in the United States Civil War.

other part of Central Europe, and the people, wearied of struggles which resulted in their own impoverishment, listened eagerly to the story of a peaceful and more prosperous country beyond the sea.

A few years earlier Thomas [Douglas], Earl of Selkirk, a distinguished Scottish nobleman of great wealth, had purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company a large tract of land in British America, extending from the Lake of the Woods and the Winnipeg River westward for nearly 200 miles, and from Lakes Winnipeg and Manitoba to the United States boundary, part of which is now embraced in the province of Manitoba, and in which are the fertile lands bordering on the Red and Assiniboine rivers.

It formed a part of "Rupert's Land," named in honor of Prince Rupert, or Robert, of Bavaria, a cousin of King Charles II. of England, and one of the founders and chief managers of the Hudson's Bay Company. Rupert's Land was somewhat indefinite in extent, embracing all that portion of British America that poured its waters into Hudson's Bay, and was drained chiefly by the Great Whale, Rupert, Abbitippe, Albany, Severn, Winnipeg, Red, Assiniboine, Saskatchewan, and Churchill rivers. In extent it was almost equal to the United States prior to its accessions after the close of the Mexican war.

It was the original purpose of Lord Selkirk to settle these lands with colonists from Scotland. In 1811 he had succeeded in planting a large colony of Presbyterians from the north of Scotland on the Red River, near its junction with the Assiniboine. This was followed, four years later, by another but smaller colony from the same section of Scotland. In consequence of the stubborn competition and the bitter discussions between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company of Montreal, these colonists were compelled to abandon their new homes, nearly all of them removing to Lower Canada, where they believed they could live in greater peace and security.

Lord Selkirk entertained great admiration for the character of the Swiss, and having failed in his emigration schemes with his own countrymen, turned his attention to Switzerland. He prepared and caused to be published in the French and German languages a pamphlet giving a full, but somewhat exaggerated, description of the new country, its climate, soil, and productions, and offered to all heads of families, or those who were unmarried and over twenty-one years of age, land free of cost, with seeds, cattle, and farming implements, all on a credit of three years. It was the policy of the British government to favor these emigration schemes, the statesmen of that day believing that the region in question could successfully be colonized and settled by way of the north route, viz., Hudson's Bay, Nelson River, and Lake Winnipeg.

The pamphlet alluded to was freely distributed by Lord Selkirk's agents in the French-speaking cantons of Neuchâtel, Vaud, and Geneva, and in the German-speaking canton of Berne. Many young and middle-aged men in those cantons, having become weary of the condition of affairs at home, decided to emigrate to British America, under the auspices of Lord Selkirk, and formed a colony for that purpose. It was agreed to set out for America in the spring of 1821. The colony numbered over

200 persons, nearly three-fourths of whom were of French origin and speaking that language. They were Protestants in faith, and belonged to the Reformed Lutheran Church. Some of the families were descendants of the Huguenots of Eastern France; all were healthy, robust, and well fitted for the labor and privations incident to a life in a new country; most of them were liberally educated and possessed of considerable means. Among the more prominent heads of families were Monier and Rindesbacher (the seniors of the colony in age, and men of culture and influence in their respective localities), Dr. Ostertag, Chetlain, and Descombes; and of the unmarried, Schirmer (afterwards for a score of years the leading jeweler at Galena, Illinois), Quinche, and Langet. In the families there were, as it happened, but few children under twelve years of age, except infants in arms.

In the month of May, 1821, the preliminaries having been completed, the colonists assembled at a small village on the Rhine near Basle. Why they did not rendezvous at Basle – a city of considerable commercial importance – seems a little strange. The impression afterward prevailed among the colonists that the managers feared to take them to a large city, lest some unfavorable facts connected with the country to which they were going might come to light, especially the important circumstance that Lord Selkirk had failed to settle the country with his own countrymen. Be this as it may, two large flat-boats or barges were provided for their use at the rendezvous, and in these they floated down the Rhine, with its numerous cities and villages and its vine-clad hills and ruined castles on either hand. But with hearts elate with hope, and their imaginations filled with visions of a distant land, it may be doubted if the storied scenes of that beautiful river received from these hardy adventurers more than a passing thought. At the end of ten days they reached a small village near Rotterdam, where a staunch ship, the *Lord Wellington*, was in readiness to take them to the new world.

After setting sail their course lay north of Great Britain and just south of Greenland to Hudson's Strait. Soon after their departure from Holland it was found that the quality of the food issued was greatly inferior to that promised them before their departure from Switzerland, and complaint was made to the captain of the ship – a stern but kind-hearted old seaman, who acknowledged the wrong, but claimed that he was not responsible for it, which was no doubt true. The water also was bad, and issued in insufficient quantities. Arriving at Hudson Strait, latitude 62° north, the *Lord Wellington* overtook two English ships bound for Fort York, or York Factory, situated at the mouth of the Nelson River, laden with Indian goods and supplies for the garrisons at Forts York and Douglas, and for the employés of the Hudson's Bay Company. The strait was filled with floes and bergs of ice, and the ships were thereby detained over three weeks. One of the supply ships was seriously damaged and nearly lost by collision with an iceberg.

Finally, with much difficulty and no little peril, Hudson's Bay was entered, and after a long and tedious voyage of nearly four months they landed at Fort York. The colonists were at once embarked in bateaux, and commenced the ascent of the Nelson River. Propelling their heavy-laden boats by rowing, often against a strong current, at the end of twenty days Lake Winnipeg was reached, and here new troubles awaited

them. The season was advanced, the fall storms had set in, and their progress along the west shore of the lake, 260 miles in length, was slow and laborious. After a day's hard rowing, often against head-winds, the little fleet of boats would put into some sheltered spot, where the weary voyageurs, perhaps drenched with rain or benumbed with cold, would kindle fires, and all be made as comfortable as possible for the night.

In addition to these discouragements and discomforts, their supply of provisions gave out, and the few fish they were able to catch were barely sufficient to keep them from starving. At the end of three weeks, much time having been lost by reason of high winds and storms, they arrived, half famished, at the mouth of the Red River, where to their dismay they learned that the locusts or grasshoppers had passed through the country the summer before, literally destroying all the crops. With heavy hearts they proceeded up the river some thirty-five miles to Fort Douglas, situated on the west bank of the river, near the site of the present Fort Garry, then the principal trading post and head-quarters of the Hudson's Bay Company. Governor Alexander M'Dowell<sup>41</sup> and the other officers of the company, by their cordial welcome and earnest efforts to supply their wants and make them comfortable, not only gladdened their hearts, but did much to make them forget the hardships of their voyage.

It is worthy of note, in passing, that a few months before their arrival the Hudson's Bay Company and Northwest Company had settled their long-standing difficulties amicably, and merged their interests in a new corporation, retaining the name of the former company. Governor M'Dowell could not promise the colonists sufficient provisions to carry them through the approaching winter, for it was evident that the supplies received from England would be inadequate for the wants of all. After a full deliberation upon a question scarcely less momentous than that of life or death, it was resolved to send some seventy-five of the younger and more hardy of the colonists to Pembina, up the river, near the United States boundary, sixty miles distant, where it was believed the buffalo, elk, and deer were more abundant, and where jerked buffalo meat and pemmican could be obtained from the Indians of that locality. Just as the winter closed in, the party arrived at Pembina, and at once set about constructing huts and procuring fuel for the winter.

The succeeding winter was long and intensely cold, the thermometer often falling to forty-five degrees below zero, and the snow unusually deep. The colonists wintering at Pembina fared badly enough. With the advance of winter the scanty supplies of provisions brought from Fort Douglas diminished rapidly, and, when exhausted, the fish, obtained with difficulty from the river through holes in the ice,

---

<sup>41</sup> Alexander McDonnell, a sheriff under Governor Semple, was later named Governor. "Captain Mc.Dowell was appointed at Red River under the title of "Governor," and in 1814, he issued a proclamation, and seized some of the supplies of the 'North West Company's' agents [...] Lord Selkirk died an exile in France [in 1820] and his death was the signal for a new plague. His deputy, the Governor of the settlement, a fellow named M'Dowell, was as great a pest as the grasshoppers. In the wilds of Red River he kept baronial house. [...] From the time the stores of rum arrived till the puncheons were empty, the Governor was never wholly sober. [...] This fellow plundered the colonists shamefully." Tramp, J. C. (1866). *Prairie and Rocky Mountain Adventures*. United States: Gilmore & Segner.

with what buffalo meat could be bought from the Indians, was scarcely sufficient to prevent starvation. Sometimes an Indian dog was killed and eaten, and relished by most of them. The parties who occasionally ventured out with dogs and sledges obtained from the Indians to hunt for the buffalo, met with indifferent success, owing to the scarcity of the animals that winter, and lack of experience. Several of them were maimed for life by the freezing of their hands and feet. In the spring, after the snow had disappeared, the women would gather acorns and the seed-balls of the wild-rose bush that grew rank on the margin of the river, which, when cooked with a little buffalo fat, made nutritious if not palatable food, and served to relieve the hardship and monotony of the almost exclusively fish diet of the preceding winter.

Five years prior to the advent of the Swiss colony the employés of the Northwest Company, in their bitter opposition to Lord Selkirk's scheme to colonize that country with Europeans, openly resisted the settlers, and went so far as to make an armed attack on a settlement of Scotchmen near Fort Douglas, killing some twenty of them, including Governor Robert Semple, who had received his appointment as Governor of Hudson's Bay Company five years previous. Lord Selkirk, on learning of the massacre, left England at once for Canada. There he obtained from the authorities a hundred or more soldiers from the "Régiment des Meurons," and a few volunteers. Placing himself at their head<sup>42</sup>, he proceeded to the Red River Settlement, where, after seizing several of their trading posts, he restored peace and tranquility.

Two years after, the troops brought from Canada were discharged, and the greater part of them were induced by Lord Selkirk to settle in that country. Land was donated them near Fort Douglas, and cattle and other supplies furnished them on a long credit. Fortune favored these settlers, and at the time of the arrival of the Swiss colony they were generally well-to-do farmers; and had it not been for the ravages of the grasshoppers the summer before, the crops of these farmers would have furnished ample food for the new-comers during their first year's stay. These Canadian settlers, or "meurons," as they were called, were all unmarried, except a few who had taken Indian or half-breed wives. Among the colonists were several families in which were marriageable daughters, and it was natural that offers of marriage should be made by the bachelor farmers. During the winter, several such marriages were consummated. The colonists, although disappointed and almost starving, were nevertheless cheerful, and disposed to make the most of the unfortunate circumstances in which they found themselves. It was deemed necessary to celebrate the nuptials in a becoming manner, and to do honor to the occasion a party would be given, to which the relatives and friends were bidden. Wedding cake was made of coarse flour obtained from wheat ground in the ordinary rotary coffee-mill, to which were added a little buffalo fat and salt. There was also the music of the violin, and the feet of the dancers kept time to the airs of Switzerland.

---

<sup>42</sup> "His Lordship during the last Spring hired or enlisted at Montreal about one hundred and fifty disbanded foreign soldiers of De Meuron's Regiment, whom he equipped with arms and uniform as if going on regular military service; and also induced several of their Officers (also disbanded) to accompany him to his new Colony on the Red River." LONDON. (1816, October 30). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 2.

The health of all the colonists that winter was good, despite the severity of the winter and the insufficiency of food. The opening of spring found them ready to enter on the lands allotted them at “La Fourche,” at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, and soon after the 1st of May the entire colony was again united. Lord Selkirk had died at Pau, France, the autumn before their departure from Switzerland, but the fact had been withheld from them until after their arrival at Fort Douglas. Consequently no provision had been made to supply them with seeds and farming implements, as promised them before their departure from the Old World. They were therefore compelled, with few exceptions, to use the ordinary hoe and spade in turning over the sod and in preparing the soil for planting and sowing the seeds obtained in limited quantities from the Canadian farmers. However, as the result of a hard summer’s work, the women assisting the men, and the soil being remarkably productive, the crops raised, with what they obtained from the older settlers, carried them through the succeeding winter comfortably.

Early in the fall of 1821 a herd of cattle, mostly cows, arrived from the State of Missouri, in charge of a party of armed drovers, and were distributed in the spring of 1822 among the Swiss settlers. This distribution of cattle, which had been contracted for by Lord Selkirk before his death, was all that had been done for the colonists in fulfillment of the pledges made them before their departure from Europe. As a consequence dissatisfaction became general, and a determination was made by a large part of the colonists to depart, the first practicable moment, for the United States – a country of which they had learned much since their arrival at the Red River. On the return of the drovers in the autumn of 1821, five families begged permission to accompany them, which was granted. In the month of November the party arrived in safety at Fort St. Anthony (subsequently Fort Snelling), situated at the junction of the Mississippi and St. Peter’s rivers, then in process of construction, and garrisoned by United States troops in command of Colonel Josiah Snelling of the Fifth United States Infantry. With the consent of the commanding officer, the party of emigrants remained at the fort during the succeeding winter. The next spring they settled on the military reservation near the fort, cultivated land, and sold the products to the garrison. In the spring of 1823 thirteen more of the colonists, with their families, decided to go to the United States, with the intention of settling in the State of Missouri, of which section of the Union they had heard glowing descriptions from the party of drovers two years before.

### **“Death of the Earl of Selkirk”<sup>43</sup> (April, 1820)**

It is our painful duty to announce to the public the death of the Right. Hon. Thomas, Earl of Selkirk, Lord Lieutenant of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, in the 49th year of his age. [...]

The latter years of the life of this lamented nobleman were employed in the establishment of an extensive colony in the western parts of British America. [...] He

---

<sup>43</sup> From DEATH OF THE EARL OF SELKIRK. (1820, April 28). *The Glasgow Herald*, p. 1.



had the satisfaction to know that he had finally succeeded in founding an industrious and thriving community. It has now struck deep root in the soil, and is competent, from its own internal resources, to perpetuate itself, and to extend the blessings of civilization to those remote and boundless regions.

**“Arrangements are nearly completed”<sup>44</sup> (April, 1821)**

It affords us much pleasure to inform you, that arrangements are nearly completed for the Hudson Bay and North West Companies being united under the general name of the Hudson’s Bay Company. This event will, in the highest degree, be gratifying to all who feel interested in the welfare and happiness of the Canadas.

**“A singular circumstance”<sup>45</sup> (March, 1822)**

A singular circumstance occurred at the Auction Mart, on Friday, in the sale of some Stock of the Hudson’s Bay Company. The whole amount to be sold was somewhat exceeding 7800*l.*, which was put up in lots of 100*l.* each. The first lot was knocked down at 103*l.*, but a gradual advance took place on all those which succeeded it, so that the last lot but one was purchased at 255*l.* The last lot, which was for 107*l.* stock, was knocked down at 261*l.*, and would probably have produced more, but it was supposed to be an even 100*l.* in stock, as the rest of the lots were. The present interest paid on the stock is only 4 per cent., but the advantages expected to accrue from the union with the North West Company are believed to have given to it the increased value above-mentioned.

**“I feel rather weary”<sup>46</sup> (November, 1824)**

I shall now talk to you of the Red River, although I must say, it is a topic on which I feel rather weary from the noise it has made, and the doubts that still hang round it. At the present day, however, it is very certain the views of the Company are most humane. In Red River the climate is healthy – the soil productive – the plains abound with Buffaloes – the waters with excellent fish. Domestic animals are increasing fast, and the price of labour is on the decline. Petty merchants are encouraged; they receive their outfits from the Bay, at cost and charges. Besides, we have a general store, suitable to all demands, at a much lower rate than known, perhaps, in Canada. Men of skill are employed ameliorating the communications from the factory. No costs are spared, no address is wanting to ensure the friendship and good will of the surrounding tribes; and there is a tacit understanding with the American commanders to keep the Sioux Tribes within their boundaries. A paper

---

<sup>44</sup> Important. (1821, April 23). *The Philadelphia National Gazette*, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> From LONDON, WEDNESDAY, FEB. 27. (1822, March 2). *The Bristol Mercury*, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> From From the Montreal Herald. (1824, November 25). *The Maryland Gazette*, p. 3. From a letter dated August 27, 1824, from the Red River Settlement.

currency is put in operation for the facility of traffic; and, hitherto, 7s. 6d. sterling has been the price allowed by the Company for a bushel of grain.

**“The whites must have been the aggressors”<sup>47</sup> (November, 1824)**

It appears by the Montreal papers of the 10th inst. That the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Indians in the interior were involved in hostilities. Information had lately been received that a general coalition of the tribes in the North West territories to the amount of some thousands, had taken place; that they attacked the whites in the settlement at Red River; that the assailed made a desperate resistance and defended themselves with great bravery, but in the contest the settlers sustained some loss. They succeeded however in preserving their ground, & keeping the savages at a respectable distance. It was the general opinion that the whites must have been the aggressors, as the Indians in that quarter were known to be the most inoffensive and harmless of any of the tribes.

**“Completely inundated”<sup>48</sup> (1878)**

The spring of 1826 was noted for the great rise of water in the Mississippi and its tributaries, and in the Red and Assiniboine rivers, caused by the unusual deep snow of the preceding winter, which had melted with warm and heavy rains. The Red and Assiniboine rivers rose so high that the lands at La Fourche were completely inundated, and the settlers compelled to seek safety by flight to higher ground several miles distant, taking with them their cattle and household effects. The losses sustained by the flood were very great, and no efforts were made to repair them.

Nearly all the Swiss settlers remaining at La Fourche, including a part of the Canadian settlers, having become thoroughly discouraged, decided to leave at once for the United States. Abandoning their lands, and selling their cattle and farming implements for what they could, they hired carts to transport their effects and provisions, and started in a body for Fort St. Anthony. [...] Governor M’Dowell and the other officers of the Hudson’s Bay Company deeply regretted their departure, and generously supplied them with provisions for the journey free of cost, an interpreter, and an armed escort of forty-five men.

**“The settlers seem very comfortable and happy”<sup>49</sup> (June, 1827)**

The Hudson’s Bay Company posts in the interior, by last accounts, were tranquil, with the exception of petty disturbances with the numerous tribes along the Sashatchewan [sic.] river, which is considered as nothing unusual. Their prospects in

---

<sup>47</sup> From It appears. (1824, November 25). *The Maryland Gazette*, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> From Cheltain, A. L. (1878). The Red River Colony. *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, LVIII(343), pp. 47-55. Written by Augustus Louis Cheltain (1824 – 1914).

<sup>49</sup> From From the Montreal Herald. (1827, June 21). *The Charleston Courier*, p. 3.

regard to trade are favourable. A regulation prohibiting the introduction of spiritous liquor into a certain portion of the Company's territory, (viz. from lat. 54 to the Frozen Ocean,) and that was tried merely as an experiment, which, if successful, would be extended to the rest of their possessions, has succeeded beyond the most sanguine expectation. Since the passing of the regulation, not one drop of any description, has been imported for either the natives or the officers and servants of the Company, and the good effects of the regulation are beginning to appear on the morals, comfort, and happiness of all parties. From a private letter dated Red River Settlement, of the 30th January last, we are enabled to give the following extract. "The settlers seem very comfortable and happy, and are much better housed than before the great inundation which happened last spring. Nothing, I believe, less than a calamity such as this, could have induced them to leave their former miserable hovels. Such of them as had not a sufficient quantity of food from the produce of their farms, have taken to the neighbouring lakes and plains for subsistence; but those are principally Canadian Voyageurs, and half breeds, who, as yet, prefer that precarious life to the more certain but laborious one of a farmer. The higher order of settlers are in the midst of abundance, and in the utmost harmony and good will with each other."

**"The only people who did thus observe their duty"<sup>50</sup> (March, 1829)**

One of our Indians came home from the fishery to day (Dec. 7, 1827), having heard that his children at the Mission School were afflicted with the prevailing hooping-cough. He told me that he and his partner had always observed the Sabbath while at the fishery, although, at a great expense to themselves; for, on the Saturday Evening when they took up their nets, the Canadians (who, even when at the Settlement, never observe the Day of Rest) would take possession of their ground: and thus they were driven, every week, from place to place; and had, besides the labour of removing their hut, to seek a new place to cast their nets, which is by no means easy to be obtained when so many crowd on the spot: still they persevered. And it is worthy of observation, that, so far as I could learn from this Indian and others, they were the only people who did thus observe their duty to God, although there were no less than three hundred people on the banks of the Lake, all of them either Canadians or Europeans!

**"I never see a face without a smile on it"<sup>51</sup> (November, 1828)**

This settlement, which was formed in the year 1810, by the Earl of Selkirk, now contains from 1,600 to 2,000 persons. A letter received from a gentleman who lately joined the colony, dated the 1st of August last, mentions the situation as most healthful, and all the necessaries of life exceedingly cheap. "The society," he says, "is not extensive, but it is agreeable, and I never see a face without a smile on it. We have

---

<sup>50</sup> From RED RIVER SETTLEMENT. (1829, March 20). *The Vermont Chronicle*, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> From RED RIVER SETTLEMENT. (1828, November 10). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 4.

two amiable Protestant Ministers, who do every thing in their power to advance the temporal and eternal interests of the people. Two schools have also been established, at which a very useful education can be obtained. If the crops be safely got off the fields, there will be more corn this harvest than the men and beasts can consume in three years. The present prices are:- Wheat 6s. per bushel, barley 3s. per ditto, flour 16s. per cwt., beef 3d. per lb., punican<sup>52</sup> [sic.] 4d. per ditto, butter 1s. per ditto, cheese 6d. per ditto, fowls 1s. each, eggs 1s. per dozen, pork 4d. per lb., fish 5s. per cwt., potatoes 9d. per bushel, and other vegetables of all kinds very cheap.”

### “Comfort and happiness”<sup>53</sup> (December, 1829)

*Extract from a letter, dated the 10th of August last, written by a gentleman residing at the colony established by the late Earl of Selkirk, on the banks of the Red River, to his friend in Scotland:-*

I had not the pleasure of hearing from you last fall or this spring. I, nevertheless, cannot let pass the only opportunity that occurs during the year without dropping you a few lines; as I know that you will be glad to hear of the prosperous condition of the settlement, and because, from the kindness and attention I have met with from you, I feel convinced that you will be glad to hear of my own welfare.

Every one here has a very great share of comfort and happiness. We have food in abundance; we are all well clothed, and we have no rents, no taxes, and no tithes to pay. We can make our malt, our ale, and our leather, without any dread of a visit from the exciseman. No one is allowed to make whisky. This prohibition is not easily submitted to by Scotsmen. It is, however, the only way by which those fearful scenes of drunkenness among the Indians can be prevented, and the company sell from their stores a small quantity of rum to each settler at a moderate price.

The farmers here had excellent crops last year, and we got them off the fields in fine condition. We have now abundance of beef, pork, poultry, butter, and cheese, not only for the use of our families, but for sale; and the quantities of these articles consumed are very considerable, for the colony numbers about three thousand souls. Some of the Canadians still seek a precarious subsistence by hunting. Last year they were amazingly successful in their deer hunts. The musk rats swarmed in every pond, and some industrious fellows procured, during the season, so many of the skins of these little animals as sold at the Company’s stores for L.30 and L.40 sterling. Owing to the cheap rates at which the Hudson’s Bay Company now sell their goods at Red River, L.10 or L.12 of this money was sufficient to clothe the hunter’s family, and the balance went to our farmers for flour and beef. Not a few of the Scottish agriculturalists in this way realized L.50 and L.60 in cash by the sale of the productions of their little farms.

This year we expect to have greater crops than have been seen before at Red River. The barley is already all cut down and stacked, and in about a fortnight our

---

<sup>52</sup> Pemmican, a long-lasting food made of powdered buffalo meat, fat and other ingredients.

<sup>53</sup> From RED RIVER SETTLEMENT. (1829, December 3). *The Caledonian Mercury*, p. 4.

wheat will be ready for the sickle. Very fine lint has been raised this year, and there are some Scottish weavers coming out in the ship, who will convert it into cloth for us.

I am still infirm in health. I am, however, thank God, much stouter than I was the last year I spent in Europe. The change for the better I ascribe to the salubrity of this climate, and to the exercise I take on my farm, and in my garden. If I had you here I would treat you with productions out of the latter, which, I believe, in Scotland, you must still seek for in the hot-house. I have the finest melons, pumpkins, and cucumbers, growing in the open air. Indeed, I have every vegetable that is to be found in any kitchen garden; but I have no apple and pear trees; and the last circumstance I regret the more, from feeling convinced that they would thrive here.

### **A brief account<sup>54</sup> (January, 1833)**

By accounts from Lord Selkirk's Red River settlement, at the sources of the St. Lawrence, we learn that by a census taken in 1831, the population amounted to 2427. There are 4028 acres of land under cultivation, excluding the grass prairies where the settlers cut their hay. The climate is very healthy; goods are purchased as cheap as at Montreal; the necessaries of life are much cheaper, choice beef being 1½d per lb., and flour £1, the barrel, and labourers may be obtained on very reasonable terms.

### **Flax farmers wanted<sup>55</sup> (April, 1833)**

WANTED, FOR THE SERVICE OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY, A YOUNG MAN, capable of taking charge of a FARM, and who understands the Cultivation and Preparation of FLAX for Market, to proceed to Red River Settlement, in the Territory of the Hudson's Bay Company, in a Company's Ship from London in the end of May. He would be required to engage for 3 years certain. Salary about £30 per Annum, and his Board. A free Passage out, and also home, if he wishes to return at the expiration of his service. Apply to ANDREW MULHOLLAND. YORK-STREET, 23d April, 1833.

### **"The first sheep in Davenport"<sup>56</sup> (August, 1868)**

The wool trade and woollen manufacturing which has become no small item of commerce, had a rather queer beginning in this locality<sup>57</sup>. It seems that about thirty-three or four years ago<sup>58</sup> – that primitive date when about the only habitation on

---

<sup>54</sup> From MONTREAL PAPERS. (1833, January 11). *The Belfast News-Letter*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> From Mulholland, A. (1833, April 26). Emigration to British North America [Advertisement]. *The Belfast News-Letter*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> From The First Sheep in Davenport. (1868, August 26). *The Quad-City Times*, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Davenport, Iowa.

<sup>58</sup> "In the fall of A. D. 1832, after the termination of the 'Black Hawk' war, Gen'l Scott held a council with the chiefs of the 'Sauke and Musquake' tribes of Indians, who then occupied this territory. There was then many malignant cases of Asiatic cholera amongst the troops at Ft. Armstrong, Rock Island,

Davenport<sup>59</sup> soil was the residence of Antoine LeClaire<sup>60</sup>, a certain Lord Somebody, whose name we have forgotten, but who had considerable sheep on the brain, conceived the idea of taking a flock of sheep from the Canadas away up into the Selkirk settlement, some four or five hundred miles north of St. Paul, for the benefit of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company.

The flock – over fifteen hundred in number – crossed the Mississippi at this point on Mr. LeClaire's flat-boat about the middle of June. The weather had become too hot, and the fleeces too heavy to admit proceeding farther before shearing. The proprietor called the attention of Mr. LeClaire to this fact and proposed that if he would turn in and help him shear, he should have the entire clip. Mr. LeClaire assented to the arrangement, and the flock was shorn, and it moved on.

The fleeces were laying thick all over Davenport wherever they happened to be taken off, and soon began to emit an unpleasant smell. This was something Mr. LeClaire had not calculated upon. The wool was of no use to him – it being a long journey to any market – so he directed his men to rake it up into piles, and having done that, he set the pile of two or three tons weight on fire, and that's what became of the first wool crop of this locality.

### **“One great principle of that Company”<sup>61</sup> (November, 1845)**

The Hudson's Bay Company is at present master of all the regions that it can hope ever to possess. There is no Mogul, no Carnatic<sup>62</sup>, no centre of power or source of wealth. There are no treasures to seize, no rich valleys to possess. The only source

---

in consequence of which, instead of occupying the council chamber on the Island, the Gn'l had a large canvas tent erected on or near the ground now occupied by the railroad engine shope in this city. Antoine Le Claire had been for some years and was then U. S. Indian interpreter. He and his good wife evidently had the confidence and good will of the Indians and their Chiefs. At this treaty, the Chiefs made a stipulation. That the section of land (640 acres) on which this treaty was held should be patented to Mrs. Marguerete Le Claire who was a relative of Mr. Morris Blondeau. Said Morris Blondeau was then Government Interpreter and by far the most influential man then living with the said Indians, and was instrumental in procuring the situation and popularity for the said A. Le Claire. The Chiefs stipulated that Mr. LeClaire should build a house and make a home, *on the spot* occupied by the said tent. They stipulated that the U. S. Government should patent to A. LeClaire, a section (640 acres) of land, at the *head* of the Rapids, where the city of LeClaire is now situated. The government official made *both* patents, to Antoine LeClaire.” M. (1870, June 11). THE CATHOLIC SQUARE. *The Daily Davenport Democrat*, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Davenport, Iowa.

<sup>60</sup> “The city of Davenport contains [...] four hotels, the largest of which, the LeClaire house, is 128 feet by 150, four stories high. [...] This house is owned by Antoine LeClaire, a half-breed, of 384 pounds. I am informed his father is a Frenchman and his mother a Pottowatamie squaw. [...] He says that he is the first white man that ever crossed the Mississippi. He was Indian interpreter in the country, and had quite an influence among the Indians, so that after the Government made a treaty for the Indian lands through Mr. LeClaire, [...] they gave him two sections of land, one of which he situated in LeClaire Co., the other here, on which Davenport is situated..” Sylvester, S. (1851, January 17). Western Correspondence. *The Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> From Although we cannot consider. (1845, November 27). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> A region of southern India, currently the site of the states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

of wealth is the skin of the beaver or the bear. A million of dollars form the annual proceeds of this mighty company, which fills the government of Washington with terror and with envy. A European population could alone be formidable neighbours in such regions. But the Hudson's Bay Company, instead of creating and fostering the European population, actually bars and prevents the possibility of its growth. The company has the monopoly of hunting and of fur trading. It has, in reality, a monopoly of provisions and of the means of life. It excludes all Europeans, not its servants, from the Oregon, and these servants it employs [...] in such occupations solely as are incompatible with settlement, and which leads the men to quit the country after a time, and retire either to England, or, as is often the case, to the United States. [...]

One great principle of that company [...] is humane treatment of the native races. To employ them, even in preference to Europeans, to reclaim and humanize them, to communicate to them all the comforts and knowledge of which they are capable, and, still more important, to deny them European luxuries, such as spirits, which demoralize and destroy the savage – such has been the constant care of the Hudson's Bay Company. They have proceeded farthest, and most successfully, with the philanthropy [...] of providing for the permanent survival of the native race. The Americans – who on their part have never treated the Indians but as the beasts which perish, and, to use their own phrase, “the worse the better” – look with annoyance and suspicion on the mode in which the Hudson's Bay Company treats the Indians, and with dread at the influence thereby acquired. [...]

“In the treatment of the aborigines of the countries under its control, the Hudson's Bay Company appears to have admirably combined and reconciled policy with humanity. The prohibition to supply these people with ardent spirits appears to be rigidly enforced. Schools for the instruction of native children are established at all the principal trading posts, each of which also contains an hospital for sick Indians<sup>63</sup>, and offers employment for those who are disposed to work whilst hunting cannot be carried on. Missionaries of various sects are encouraged to endeavour to convert them to Christianity, and to induce them to adopt the usages of civilized life, so far as may be consistent with the nature of the labours required for their support; and attempts are made, at great expense, to collect the Indians in villages, on tracts where the climate and soil are most favourable for agriculture. Particular care is extended to the education of half-bred children, the offspring of the marriage, or concubinage, of the traders with Indian women, who are retained and bred as far as possible amongst the white people, and are employed, wherever they are found capable, in the service of the company. As there are few or no white women in their territories, except in the Red River settlements, it may be easily seen that the half-breeds must, in a short time, form a large and important portion of the native

---

<sup>63</sup> “Dr. Rae certainly went the whole figure when he took upon himself to say that the Hudson's Bay Company had hospitals in the country at which infirm Indians were nursed, clothed and fed. There are those of us at this meeting who have been in every part of the Hudson's Bay Company's so-called territory, but we have yet to learn where these receptacles are at which there is the exhibition of the benevolence of which he speaks.” THE HUDSON'S BAY QUESTION. (1857, July 29). *The London Morning Post*, p. 5.

population. The conduct of the Hudson's Bay Company is, in these respects, worthy of commendation. Their conduct towards American citizens, west of the Rocky mountains, has been equally exceptional, and yet equally politic."

This is the account of an official American, Mr. Greenhow<sup>64</sup>, who goes on to state the kindness of the company to Americans. [...] Mr. Greenhow says, that wherever an American attempted to hunt or trade in furs, there also appeared a Company's agent, with specie or merchandise, offering a better price for the skins, and driving the American traders from the field. [...] [He] explains how the English traders can afford to give a better price than the Americans for skins:

"The British traders, receiving their goods in the Columbia by sea from London, free from duty, can always undersell the Americans, who must transport their merchandize two thousand miles overland, from the frontier of the United States, where the articles best adapted for the trade have *previously been subjected to an import duty.*"

### It "will yet be a great colony"<sup>65</sup> (July, 1847)

The Red River settlement [...] will yet be a great colony; the soil is very fertile (one of the most important elements of colonization), its early tillage producing forty returns of wheat; and, even after twenty years of tillage, without manure, fallow, or green crop, yielding from fifteen to twenty-five bushels an acre. The wheat is plump and heavy, and, besides, there are large quantities of other grain, with beef, mutton, pork, butter, cheese, and wool in abundance. This would be the true country for emigration from our impoverished islands, and will, of course, be crowded when conveyances shall become more manageable. [...]

The settlement, however, meets in its turn the common chances of an American climate. In winter the cold is intense. The summer is short, and the rivers sometimes overflow and drown the crops. Still, what are these things to the population, where food is plenty, the air healthy, and the ground cheap, fertile, and untaxed? [...] Food is the great requisite; when that is found, everything follows.

In addition to agriculture, or in place of it, the settlers, more particularly those of mixed origin, devote the summer, the autumn, and sometimes the winter also, to the hunting of the buffalo, bringing home vast quantities of pemmican, dried meat, grease, tongues &c., for which the company and voyaging business affords the best market.

---

<sup>64</sup> Probably "Robert Greenhow, translator and librarian to the Department of State of the United States, &c." and author of "*The History of Oregon and California, and the other territories of the Northwest Coast of North America, &c.*" THE OREGON QUESTION. (1845, January 25). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> From Simpson, G. (1847, July 17). MISCELLANEOUS. *The Washington Union*, p. 2. By George Simpson, governor-in-chief of the Hudson's Bay Company. Originally published in Blackwood's Magazine as part of a *Narrative of an Overland Journey Round the World*.



## “Trading companies have never colonized well”<sup>66</sup> (August, 1848)

Trading companies have never colonized well: *this* company will never colonize at all. A fur-trading corporation, simply because it is a fur-trading corporation, is intrinsically anti-colonizing, in all its interests and ideas. [...] Precisely in proportion as land becomes peopled, and cultivated, and civilized, does it become unfit for the fur-trader’s uses. [...] The history of the Hudson’s Bay Company completely bears us out in this. It is just what we might expect *would* be the history of an association deriving immense profits from a well-protected traffic in the skins of wild animals. During the century and a half, or thereabouts, that these traders have held a virtually-uncontrolled sway over a territory as large as the whole of Europe, they have never founded a colony.

The only seeming exception is the Red River Settlement, with its population of five thousand – English, Indians, and half-breeds. Strictly speaking, however, the Red River settlement was not founded by the Company at all, but by an enterprising nobleman (Lord Selkirk) who had bought an over-ruling proprietary influence in the company, at a time when its stock was at an unusually low price, and who had, consequently, a dominating voice in its councils. It was founded in direct opposition to the protest of all the independent shareholders, who memorialized the Government of the day (in 1811) to the effect, that “it has been found that *colonization is at all times unfavourable to the interests of the fur trade.*” This Red River settlement has, in fact, ever been an object of the Company’s jealousy and dislike; and, at this moment, there are gentlemen in England, entrusted by the settlers with a petition to the Queen, signed by about a thousand names – nearly the whole adult population of the place – in which the Company are accused of gross and systematic suppression – fiscal, commercial, and judicial. Why, the very tenure on which these unhappy Red River settlers hold their lands – every grant including, as it does, a covenant to submit, under pain of forfeiture, to all the exclusive trading privileges of the Company, and to all its rules, regulations, and *taxes*, both *in esse* and *in posse*<sup>67</sup> – is enough to show us what sort of colonies and colonization may be looked for.

## “Countless herds of buffalo”<sup>68</sup> (October, 1848)

The agricultural population of the Red River settlements amounts at present, we learn, to more than 5,000 inhabitants, of whom 2,000 are householders, owning 100 acres of land each. Ten thousand acres are under cultivation, yielding the richest crops from a smaller amount of labour, than the same portions of earth demands in any other part of the world.

We cannot doubt its becoming, at some future day, the focus of a large and important population. Endless commons, in nature of prairie land, invite the plough,

---

<sup>66</sup> Notwithstanding. (1848, August 22). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Both currently existing (*in esse*) and having the potential to exist (*in posse*). Legal Latin.

<sup>68</sup> From THE SELKIRK SETTLEMENT. (1848, October 5). *The Potosi Republican*, p. 1.

which for many hundreds of miles may trace its furrow without encountering an obstacle. Countless herds of buffalo and game of all kinds abound; and in addition to all these resources, fish might be taken from the lakes and rivers, [providing] for six months, entire subsistence of the settlement annually. The temperature and climate are the same as in [Montreal]. People, we are informed, rarely die in those quarters; and disease is at such a discount that a single medical practitioner, to a population of 5,000, has a hard battle to make a living out of his medicinal calling. In no part of the world is a laboring population, of the same description, in a greater degree of comfort.

### **Recalling the garrison<sup>69</sup> (September, 1848)**

The garrison of 400 men who were posted [at the Red River settlement] at the time of the dispute<sup>70</sup> with the United States were under recall. The English, it is observed, regretted this from the fact that, just as they are withdrawn, the American Government posts a military garrison at Pembina, only 50 miles distant from the British settlement. The policy of withdrawing troops before the advancing forts of a foreign power was questioned by the English settlers.

### **“Law there is none.”<sup>71</sup> (October, 1849)**

The Red River colony, which was founded by Lord Selkirk, and which passed from his hands into those of the Hudson’s Bay Company, constitutes the only agricultural or permanent settlement within the vast territories held by that body in North America. It is situated close to the United States boundary, and commands the direct line of communication between the great lakes which form the western frontier of Canada, and the lately ascertained possessions of the British Crown on the shores of the Pacific.

The inhabitants of this settlement – to which, as may easily be seen, its position gives a great and increasing importance – have been for some time past exceedingly discontented; and they have endeavoured, by every means in their power, to draw the attention of the British Government and Parliament to the relation in which they stand to the Hudson’s Bay Company, and to the wrongs which, as they allege, they are suffering from the nature of that relation. [...]

It appears that the Government, or that which assumes the name of Government at the Red River, is simply a *régime* of brute force. Law there is none. The Council appointed by the Hudson’s Bay Company tax and punish the people as long as they are strong enough, and as long as the people will bear to be taxed and punished; but when the latter happen to be sufficiently powerful and irritated to

---

<sup>69</sup> From MONEY MARKET AND CITY NEWS. (1848, September 1). *The London Morning Post*, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Presumably the Oregon Boundary dispute, settled through the Oregon Treaty signed between Britain and the United States in 1846.

<sup>71</sup> From It may be necessary. (1849, October 3). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 4.

resist, the Council give way, and make all sorts of concessions. Presently they recover their lost ground, and then the Governor and Company in London veto the concessions. But all this is done without a shadow of *right*, legally speaking, on either side; affairs are managed according to “the good old rule, the simple plan, / that they should take who have the power, / and they should keep who can.”<sup>72</sup> Even the apologists of the Company do not venture to allege that the powers assumed by that body over British colonists – still less those which they assume over the aborigines – have any other foundation than a certain amount of prescription and convenience.

Some governing authority, say they, there must be; and they further contend that, in default of any other organization – local or imperial – that authority naturally falls into the hands of the mercantile company which alone possesses the necessary machinery and resources. It is not surprising, however, that the colonists should be very far from satisfied with such reasoning. It does not require any high political aspirations to render men disaffected to the arbitrary rule of an irresponsible corporation; and the settlers strenuously deny that the wisdom and beneficence of that rule have atoned for its defective legality.

### **“Their subsistence will depend upon their skill”<sup>73</sup> (May, 1849)**

Within the limits of the territories of the Hudson’s Bay Company, there resides a class of men, who, ground down by the tyranny of that huge monopoly, seek to place themselves under the protection of the United States. These men are usually known as the Red River half-breeds. They are, generally speaking, of mixed Indian and English, or Scotch, or French blood. Brought up from earliest youth to feel that their subsistence will depend upon their skill as horsemen and hunters, they accustom themselves to every exercise and privation which can tend to harden their muscles, and prepare them for their vocation. As a matter of course, the whole body of these hunters are capital horsemen, and amazingly expert in the use of fire-arms. Depending entirely upon the Hudson’s Bay Company for ammunition and arms, they must submit to any and all the arbitrary rules imposed upon them, and they are heartily tired of these exactions.

Twice each year, these hunters, four or five hundred in number, start for the American Territories, after the buffalo, with from a thousand to twelve hundred carts, drawn by horses or oxen, which are driven by the women and children. The men are governed by fixed rules while at the hunt, which must not be infringed under severe penalties. They all leave the camp together with the exception of a few who are left as a guard, and when a *cerne* or surround of buffalo has taken place, the women and children are sent for to assist in butchering and drying the meat of the slain animals. Each cart will contain the pemican (or dried meat, pounded, and melted tallow poured over it) of ten buffaloes, so that the slaughter of these animals may be estimated at

---

<sup>72</sup> Adapted from William Wordsworth’s poem, *Rob Roy’s Grave*: “For why? – because the good old rule / Sufficeth them, the simple plan, / That they should take who have the power, / And they should keep who can.”

<sup>73</sup> From Red river of the North Settlement. (1849, May 7). *The New Orleans Weekly Delta*, p. 1.

upward of twenty thousand annually. The meat thus prepared is purchased at a small price by the Hudson's Bay Company, and is used to provision the inland trading posts.

### **“Well, here they are”<sup>74</sup> (August, 1849)**

Well, here<sup>75</sup> they are – the Selkirkers we mean – the traders and Half Breeds from Red River, with their wooden, high-wheeled carts, without any iron in their manufacture, and with buffalo hide tires, and stout oxen, harnessed like horses, singly between the shafts, and with which they have come a journey of over 600 miles to procure supplies in St. Paul, in exchange for some of their own commodities – furs, moccasins, buffalo hides, etc. Our merchants here, of course, will do the fair thing, and send them on their way home rejoicing.

By their arrival we have intelligence of a revolt<sup>76</sup> against the Hudson's Bay Company's agent, at the lower settlement on Red River. The populace mobbed (just think of a mob away down toward Hudson's Bay – isn't civilization travelling?) and surrounded the Court, threatening Mr. Hugh Polesin, a government officer, and gave another officer, Mr. Thorn, notice to quit the country as soon as convenient, if not sooner. The difficulty arose from the arrest of some Half Breeds for violating the law prohibiting trading with the Indians for their furs. The Hudson's Bay Company claim a monopoly of this business, we suppose. The populace, however, seemed resolved to “make the fur fly” – if not in one way, at least in another. Let her rip – it's all oak.

### **The Articles of the Trade<sup>77</sup> (August, 1863)**

The carts generally bring down furs, and in such quantities that \$100,00 worth have been received here in [St. Paul in] a single year. They take back loads of such merchandize as they most need in their settlement. Among these we note groceries, such as teas, coffee, sugar, spices, liquors, and tobacco. Dry goods – mostly cloths, blankets, and ready made clothing, hats, boots, and shoes. Tin, wooden and hollow ware, stoves and other household articles are largely purchased. Powder and lead, guns, and tools are also staples with them, while drugs to some extent, leather, nails, and glass complete the list. In farm and garden implements, the trade is large. Ploughs, hoes, spades, forks, scythes, and every other agricultural tool is bought. Since about 1856 a number of reaping and threshing machines have been taken to Red river and, more latterly, *sewing machines* are observed to figure.

---

<sup>74</sup> From FROM SELKIRK'S COLONY. (1849, August 23). *The New Orleans Crescent*, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> St. Paul, Minnesota, on July 27th, 1849.

<sup>76</sup> “The inhabitants of the settlement, as all the world knows, rose up in a body last spring, and, by an overwhelming force, terrified the company, for the moment at least, into a concession of their ordinary rights as British subjects – the liberty of trading with England, and the right of being represented as well as taxed by the local government.” OBSERVER. (1850, March 28). THE RED RIVER. *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> From NORTH-WESTERN FUR TRADE. (1863, August 19). *The Portage County Democrat*, p. 1.

## “The Red River traders”<sup>78</sup> (August, 1849)

The Minnesota Register, of the 11th August, notices the departure from St. Paul’s, for their northern homes, of the Red River traders, who had been with them a fortnight, and speaks also of some British usurpations in that quarter, and says:

As we write, a group of them before our door are surrounding some half dozen of their ironless carts, laden with stoves, hollow-ware, dry goods and groceries, purchased of our St. Paul tradesmen, while others are driving their singly harnessed oxen up the hill, dragging huge loads of the same commodities, procured below and just landed by the Senator and Highland Mary. The caravan will set out in a day or two on their journey of 600 to 800 miles across a savage wilderness. There, amid their ice-bound fastnesses and cheerless plains of snow, these hardy hunters will renew the capture of the buffalo, the elk, the moose and the lynx, until spring again invites them on their journey hither, where a sure reward will await them for all their toil.

Singular people! More singular [the] country that nurtures upon its bosom so many strange varieties of children; for be it remembered, a large portion of these stalwart northmen are our fellow-citizens, living within the borders of Minnesota, and under the protecting wings of the American eagle. Yet are not the manners and customs of the inhabitants of the greatest extremes on earth more striking than are the tastes and habits of these people, when compared to those who dwell in the “old settlements” of the United States.

We have not space to enter into a history of that monster corporation, the Hudson’s Bay Company – second only as an engine of British oppression and cruelty to the East India Company<sup>79</sup> in its palmiest days – but will merely refer to what it is now doing on the northern frontier of our territory. The town of Pembina, situated on Red River, a short distance this side of the British line, contains 636 inhabitants. Of these, 294 are males, and 342 females. The men follow the chase and engage in the pursuits of grazing and agriculture, and the women, besides attending to the usual domestic avocations, manufacture most of the woolen and linen fabrics necessary to clothe their families. They are a hardy, brave, industrious and moral frontier people. But how are they treated by their assumed lords and masters on the other side of the line? Let any of them engage in the traffic of furs with the Indians, and they are dragged before Judge Thom<sup>80</sup> and fined £1,000! Their minions do not stop to search for the 49th parallel, when on the track of some poor trader, who has bought of an Indian a fox or lynx skin. No difference to them whether he is on British or American ground. Thanks to Mr. Kittson<sup>81</sup>, the “Yankee Trader,” as the Bay Company’s agents

---

<sup>78</sup> From THE RED RIVER TRADE. (1849, August 31). *The Baltimore Sun*, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> A British trading monopoly notorious for its involvement in the slave trade, opium trafficking and the colonial conquest of India. The Company was nationalized in 1858 and dissolved in 1873.

<sup>80</sup> Judge Thom is Mr. Adam Thom, who was editor of the *Montreal Herald*, during the troubles of 1837, and became a favorite with Lord Durham. His censures of the poor Canadians were exceedingly harsh. – *Ed. Tribune*.

<sup>81</sup> “It was in 1844, two to three years before the settlement of St. Paul, that the first trading trip was between these points. It was undertaken by [...] Norman W. Kittson, Esq., who established a trading post at Pembina, on the edge of the company’s jurisdiction but within the international boundary line.

call him, he has fully established *his* claim at Pembina, and the rich packages of furs he brought in this season abundantly proves that he is fully able to maintain it.

We have a narrative drawn up by one of our suffering citizens, which states that in the Spring of 1844 he was engaged in business in the Red River Colony, and was one day sent for by the Governor, Alexander Christy<sup>82</sup>, on a charge of trading in furs. On repairing to the Governor's official seat – Fort Garry – the accusation was stated by that dignitary, and a fine of £1,000 imposed upon him instanter, without the aid of Judge, Jury or witnesses! Upon his refusing to sign a bond for the amount, the door was fastened, and he was informed that a compliance with the demand was the only way to escape imprisonment. Having no other resource, he was forced to yield.

### **“The real motive of the Company”<sup>83</sup> (March, 1850)**

A report has reached me that the Hudson's Bay Company have applied to the Government for a fresh body of pensioners to be sent out to their colony on the Red River next spring.

As the real object of this application may not be generally understood, I trust you will allow me having, after a residence of five years, recently returned from that settlement) to state a few facts which came under my personal observation while there, the perusal of which may tend to throw some light on the real character of this transaction, and prevent much disappointment to many deserving families, who, under the inducements held out to them, might be tempted to close with the Company's offers.

Nearly two years ago a body of sixty pensioners were sent out to the Red River colony<sup>84</sup>, under the auspices of the Company. They were to be provided, on their arrival, with dwellings, and receive a certain quantity of land, “fit for cultivation,”

---

The first three or four annual trips were made at a positive loss, but attention was thereby called to the advantages of the new route, and it soon drew quite a large travel over it.” NORTH-WESTERN FUR TRADE. (1863, August 19). *The Portage County Democrat*, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander Christie (1783 – 1872), Chief Factor for Red River from 1844 to 1850, and Governor of Assiniboia from 1844 to 1848.

<sup>83</sup> From M'Laughlin, J. (1850, March 28). HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY. *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 3. Probably written by John McLoughlin (1784 – 1857). He was a partner of the North West Company prior to the merger of 1821, and Chief Factor of the Columbia department of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1824 to 1845.

<sup>84</sup> “[I]n 1846 disturbances arose between the Hudson's Bay Company and certain parties [...] and it was found necessary to detach from Canada a considerable body of the 6th Regiment of Foot. Those troops were kept there for nearly two years, and it was found to be so isolated a position for troops in her Majesty's service, without communication with other regiments or from home, that it was thought necessary to provide for the protection of those territories in another way, and it was resolved to send out, under the command of an officer, a body of pensioners who would be there in the enjoyment of their pensions, and receive from the Hudson's Bay Company certain advantages in lodgings, land and money (hear, hear). It was arranged that they would be required to go out twelve days in the year for drill, and be prepared to turn out for the protection of the public peace when called upon by the authorities of the place.” IMPERIAL PARLIAMENT. (1850, June 12). *The Morning Chronicle*, p. 3.

with such general assistance as would enable them to settle comfortably on their farms. I leave you, sir, to conceive of the disappointment of these poor veterans at finding, on their arrival, neither land nor dwelling of any kind prepared for them. For a whole winter they had, consequently, to be huddled together – men, women, and children – in one of the Company's forts. To live with any degree of comfort in such a place was out of the question; and accordingly, such as could afford the means, hired houses at their own expense from the settlers; others went into servitude, and all discontented, would gladly have returned home, but this, unfortunately, was no longer in their power.

At last, after repeated complaints, an allotment of 30 acres (I believe) was made to each of the privates; but, as if to render the grant utterly valueless – instead of the usual method, so many chains broad along the river, their frontage was not wider than an ordinary road, and ran back Heaven knows how far into the prairies; besides, although distinctly mentioned in the contract, that this land was to be within a certain distance of Fort Garry, they compelled them to receive it far beyond the limits. Added to which, it was so unfit for cultivation, from the stumps and underwood with which it was covered, that those whose circumstances permitted, were glad to get rid of it for a trifle, and purchase other farms for themselves from the settlers. As for the houses, the Company utterly repudiated that part of their engagement, and so were these poor pensioners, as the reward of a lifetime spent in their country's service, left thousands of miles away from their native land, at the mercy of a grasping and avaricious corporation of fur traffickers.

The real motive of the company in getting them out to Red River, soon became apparent. They never intended them to become settlers in the proper sense of the term and be independent of themselves. Their object went no further than to make use of them as a cheap species of police for the purpose of overawing the settlement into an acquiescence in all the arbitrary measures they found necessary for the protection of their monopoly of trade.

This is not all. To the astonishment of the natives of the country – Indians, Halfbreeds, and Europeans – these unfortunate pensioners, such of them, that is, as were unable to emancipate themselves from the thralldom of the Company – were, in return for their maintenance at the Fort, employed more like beasts of burden than human beings. I state distinctly, without fear of contradiction (and if you will publish this letter I have no doubt their friends in this country will be able to substantiate what I say), that I have seen them engaged in labour never performed in that settlement even by animals – that is, dragging heavy rafts against the stream like canal horses in this country – others, again, harnessed like oxen to huge logs, which they were dragging to the Company's establishment. "They are making slaves of us," was the pitiable exclamation of a party of these veterans whom I witnessed one day employed like a gang of convicts at this degrading labour.

You will not be surprised that under such treatment the pensioners have been more than once on the point of open mutiny, nor that the Company have found them altogether ineffectual for repressing that general rising of the inhabitants against their rule, which, long apprehended, has, as you are aware, at last broken out. It is

in order to place them in a position once more to coerce the settlers into obedience, that the Company are issuing their present proposals for a fresh recruit of pensioners. As a British tax-payer I protest against the veterans of our army being made the instruments of propping up the monopoly and despotism of this Company, who are unable or unwilling to pay for the protection of their own trade. – I am, sir, your most obedient servant,

JOHN M'LAUGHLIN.  
4, Donegall-street, Belfast.

### **By snow shoes and dog train<sup>85</sup> (March, 1851)**

James McGuy and Adam Klyn, Red River half-breeds, have arrived at St. Paul, Minnesota, with a dog-train, bringing the mail from the Selkirk Settlement, from which place they started on the 12th of January, making the trip, a distance of six hundred miles, in twenty-four days. Six days of that time they were unable to travel, in consequence of heavy snow storms. At one time they were overtaken on a prairie, about forty miles this side of Pembina, by a very severe snow storm, and for protection took shelter under a bank of snow, where they remained without food for thirty hours. They traveled the whole distance from Selkirk to Swan river, about a hundred miles north of St. Paul, on snow shoes, the dog train carrying their provisions and the mail.

They report the health of the Red River settlement as good. The crops of the last season were abundant, and the people are in a flourishing condition. They are turning their attention more than formerly to farming, and the comforts and conveniences of improved civilization. An extensive grist mill, driven by water, has lately been erected on Sturgeon creek, near Fort Garry. A great many new farms in that vicinity have lately been opened.

They raise extensively, wheat, barley, oats, corn, potatoes, turnips, and all kinds of garden vegetables, sheep and hogs. They manufacture their wool, which is said to be of excellent quality, into blankets, cloths, stockings, etc. The inhabitants of that distant region are paying great attention to the cause of education. Lord Bishop<sup>86</sup>, from England, is devoting his time, talents and money to the education of the people on the British side of the line.

### **“About 7,000 souls”<sup>87</sup> (August, 1851)**

The attention of our traders and merchants is at this time turned, with a good deal of interest, towards the Northwest,, more particularly the Red River or Selkirk settlement, and to Pembina, which is now merely a small trading post within the

---

<sup>85</sup> From MAIL FROM THE SELKIRK SETTLEMENT OF THE RED RIVER OF THE NORTH. (1851, March 13). *The New Orleans Daily Delta*, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Possibly the Right Rev. David Anderson, Lord Bishop of Rupert's Land from 1849 to 1864. Shortly after his consecration in England, he left for Rupert's Land “accompanied by clergymen, schoolmasters, and catechists.” THE CHURCH. (1849, June 6). *The Derby Mercury*, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> From The Red River Country. (1851, August 9). *The Muscatine Journal*, p. 1.



American line. Before the running of the line of division between the American and English territory, on the 49th parallel of latitude, Pembina was the head quarters of the Selkirk settlement. Since that time it has steadily declined, until within a year or two. [...] We have taken pains to make many inquiries relative to several interesting particulars, of William Ross, Esq., a prominent citizen of Red River, now in this city<sup>88</sup>, and to whom we acknowledge ourselves largely indebted.

The Red River settlement was originally projected by Lord Selkirk, a Scottish nobleman, largely interested in the Hudson's Bay Co. They held a vast extent of lands by charter from the British crown. Of the Company he made an extensive purchase, and brought over his first colonists in 1813 [sic.], and remained with them twelve months. Another accession was made in 1823; and they now number, in Europeans, French Canadians and Half Breeds, about 7,000 souls.

One half of the population are hunters, and the other half farmers. The main settlement, known as Red River, is about 60 miles north of Pembina, or down the River, and on an extensive plain, which extends, somewhat broken and interspersed with timber, east to Lake Winnipeg, to the west, a vast unbroken plain to the Rocky Mountains.

The hunters, mostly half-breeds, do nothing but hunt buffalo. They make two grand excursions each year – one commencing on the 20th of June, and lasting two months, and the other on the 20th September, and [that one] lasts till the 10th of November. They live wholly on buffalo meat, and are engaged only in preparing pemmican meat and fat – the one used only for food, and the other for light. The regular price of it is four cents a pound, both fat and lean. The tongues and hides of the buffalo are saved. The regular retail price of a tongue, dried, is 25 cents, and a good robe is two dollars. They lead a free, happy, wild, romantic life, and are represented as being, when in the settlement, temperate and well-behaved.

The farmers raise wheat, oats, potatoes, barley, cattle and sheep. Oxen are worth from \$50 to \$60 a yoke, cows from \$12 to \$15 – a good cart horse, \$40 to \$50, and a horse trained to hunt buffalo will bring \$125, and sometimes more.

Their wheat is equal to any in the world, weighing from 65 to 70 pounds to the bushel. Barley and oats are also heavy; and potatoes and all kinds of garden vegetables grow luxuriously. The land is never manured. From three and a half to four feet of snow falls in the winter, and rain is unknown from November to April. Corn is raised, but it is not relied on as a sure crop. The Hudson's Bay Company pays regularly only, however, for what they wish to consume, except in seasons of scarcity, 87 cents for wheat, 50 for oats and barley, and 25 for potatoes. There is no export trade.

They receive their supplies of dry goods, woolen cloths and liquors from York Factory, a store of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Hudson's Bay, 700 miles from Red River. It requires two months to make the journey, and there are thirty-six portages to be made in going that distance.

The title of the settlement is 'The Red River Colony,' and it is ruled by a Governor appointed by the Queen. The magistrates, counsellors and officers receive

---

<sup>88</sup> Dubuque, Iowa.

their commissions from the Committee of the Hudson's Bay Co. The jurisdiction of the Governor extends a hundred miles in all directions from Fort Gary, except over the American line. Seventy pensioners at Fort Gary, is all the military force, and they are under the command of Major Caldwell, the Governor, who is also a pensioner.

The flour is ground by wind mills, of which there are eighteen, and two water mills. There are no saw mills – all the deals used being cut by whip saws. No fulling mills, or manufactures of any kind.

### **Trade and the Colony<sup>89</sup> (August, 1851)**

The only tax the colonists of Red River pay is four per cent. on all the goods they import, whether from England or elsewhere, and the Hudson's Bay Company pay the same on all imports they sell or consume, within the limits of the Red River colony. The Company imports goods and merchandize from England, and charge the consumer in the colony 75 per cent. advance on the London invoice prices, for freight, insurance, duty, land carriage and profit. They sell bar and sheet iron for 12 cents a pound; sugar, London crushed, 24 cents; tea from 50 cents to \$2, and other articles in proportion. The imports for the last five years have averaged \$100,000, from all sources, and the \$4,000 revenue is devoted to schools, bridges and internal improvements; all salaries being paid by the Company. The colonists export comparatively nothing – the only article that will pay being furs, (not including buffalo robes,) on which the Hudson's Bay Company have a monopoly, over which they watch with a jealous eye.

Since the route has been opened and travelled from Pembina to St. Paul, they have commenced to bring forward merchandize. But we learn that the late train from Selkirk, of more than a hundred carts<sup>90</sup>, has been met by a U.S. custom officer, above St. Paul, and 20 per cent duty demanded of the Selkirkers on buffalo robes, and 30 per cent on their moccasins. The [...] Red River gentlemen express the assurance that they can never pay that tax, and that hereafter they will be obliged to avail themselves of the boats and ships of the Company. [...]

### **“A general destruction of the farms”<sup>91</sup> (August, 1852)**

The heavy snows of the latter part of the winter, when thawed about the close of March, flooded Red River and all the northern streams, causing a general destruction of the farms on Red River, and great distress in the Selkirk settlement.

---

<sup>89</sup> From The Selkirk Settlement. (1851, August 9). *The Muscatine Journal*, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> “The annual caravans from the [Selkirk] settlement arrived at St. Paul, Minnesota, about the 20th of July, consisting of 102 carts, for the most part drawn each by one ox, and laden with buffalo skins, moccasins, buffalo tongues, pemmican, &c., which they exchange for merchandise suited to their wants. The train left Selkirk on the 4th of June, and usually occupies about three months in the entire trip.” THE SELKIRK SETTLEMENT. (1851, August 13). *The Republican Banner*, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> From News from the Far North. (1852, August 11). *The Times-Picayune*, p. 1.

The freshet still continued till June, and prevented the seasonable planting of crops<sup>92</sup>, as all the settled lands were subject to the inundation<sup>93</sup>. As a consequence, great suffering for want of food is anticipated in the Selkirk settlement during the next winter. The people of Selkirk are now compelled to depend upon the chase for subsistence, which is rendered precarious at this time in consequence of a war waged against their half-breed hunters by the Yankton Sioux Indians<sup>94</sup>, who are assembled in large numbers in the buffalo country to assail them on their approach.

### **“As melancholy as it is novel”<sup>95</sup> (September, 1852)**

The Selkirk settlement was visited on the 2nd of May with a flood as great and sweeping as one that fell twenty-six years ago. It lasted this time from the 2nd of May to the 26th, when it began to recede. A letter received but a few days since at St. Paul’s, Minnesota, describes the spectacle which was there witnessed:- “Twenty-two miles in length of the colony are now under water. For a distance of four miles the water has spread over the plain for six miles on each side of the river, and in all that distance not a house has escaped. Loaded boats may be seen sailing on far beyond the habitations. The sight is as melancholy as it is novel. Of the population, 3,500 have had to fly before the torrent and abandon all. The loss of property is already estimated at £150,000 sterling. Horses, cattle, houses, barns, crops, all were comparatively swept off, and the colony is almost ruined. The labour of twenty-six years is all gone.”

### **“A caravan of 133 carts”<sup>96</sup> (August, 1853)**

A caravan of 133 carts, (32 of which belong to the Selkirk settlement, on the British side of the line) arrived at St. Paul, Minnesota, on the 19th ult., in thirty-two days from Grand Cote, on the Red River. The traders and hunters at Red River have been unusually successful during the past season. The caravan brings some six hundred bales of furs and skins, and were obliged to leave a large quantity behind.

---

<sup>92</sup> “The farmers raise wheat, oats, potatoes, barley, cattle and sheep. Oxen are worth from \$50 to \$60 a yoke, cows from \$12 to \$15 – a good cart horse, \$40 to 50, and a horse trained to hunt buffalo will bring \$125, and sometimes more. Their wheat is equal to any in the world, weighing from 65 to 70 pounds to the bushel. Barley and oats are also heavy; and potatoes and all kinds of garden vegetables grow luxuriantly. The land is never manured. [...] Corn is raised, but it is not relied on as a sure crop. The Hudson’s Bay Company pay regularly only, however, for what they wish to consume, except in seasons of scarcity, 87 cents for wheat, 50 for oats and barley, and 25 for potatoes. There is no export trade.” *The Red River Country*. (1851, August 9). *The Muscatine Journal*, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> “Many houses, and barns full of grain, had been swept away. [By the] 1st of June [the] water was [...] rapidly subsiding, and the inhabitants, who had moved off with their cattle to the higher grounds, and had been living in tents, were preparing to return. It was feared that many of the half-breed population would be obliged to quit the colony for a season, and encamp in situations where they could maintain themselves by fishing and hunting.” DESTRUCTIVE FLOOD IN NORTH AMERICA. (1852, August 27). *The Essex County Standard*, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> The Ihanktonwan Nation, also known as the Yankton Sioux tribe of South Dakota.

<sup>95</sup> From UNITED STATES. (1852, September 8). *The London Guardian*, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> From ARRIVAL OF A CARAVAN FROM RED RIVER. (1853, August 2). *The Baltimore Sun*, p. 1.

### **“A terrible conflagration”<sup>97</sup> (December, 1853)**

A terrible conflagration has occurred at the Selkirk settlement, at the Red River of the North. The fire commenced at Fidler’s Point on the Assineboin, on the 30th October, and spread rapidly owing to the weather having been dry for several weeks. A strong south wind drove the flames behind the settlement. At Oak Hammock, several citizens were severely or fatally burned; several thousand tons of hay were burned, and an immense number of horses were killed. A year ago from last summer, the settlement suffered a great loss of property from an inundation of the River.

### **“Beset with numerous difficulties”<sup>98</sup> (January, 1857)**

The Red River Settlement is a small tract of country, situated upon both the banks of Red River, and extends from Pembina on the United States boundary line, to Lake Winnipeg, a distance of about 70 miles. The houses and farms are altogether confined to the banks of the river. The eastern side of the river is for the most part bush, and the western side prairie, consequently the farms are nearly all on the west side.

Fort Garry, the residence of the Governor, stands on the West side of the Red River, at its junction with the Assineboin. On the east bank of Red River, and nearly opposite to the Fort, is the French Cathedral, and the residence of the Roman Catholic Bishop, also a large establishment belonging to Les Soeurs de Charité. There are also two other Roman Catholic churches a few miles up the Assineboin River. The Church of England has also two churches on the banks of the Assineboin. About a mile below the Fort and on the west bank of Red River, stands the English Cathedral, and the residence of the Bishop of Rupert’s Land. Two miles below this is the Presbyterian Church. Lower down the river at a suitable distance apart, are three other churches belonging to the Church of England. The Fort and the two cathedrals are as near as can be in the centre of the settlement. The Protestant settlers occupy the lower or northern part, in the direction of Lake Winnipeg, and the Catholics have the upper or northern part, in the direction of Pembina.

The settlement is well provided with schools. The Hudson’s Bay Company have for many years past supported two good schools, one for boys and another for girls. To these schools the children of their officers, from all parts of the Territory, are sent for education. There is a collegiate school in connection with the English Cathedral. The other schools are, for the most part, supported by the English Church Missionary Society.

---

<sup>97</sup> From A terrible conflagration. (1853, December 16). *The Democratic Banner*, p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> From RED RIVER SETTLEMENT. (1857, January 19). *The Montreal Gazette*, p. 2.

The Hudson's Bay Company pay £300, sterling, per annum, to their resident chaplain. The Company also pay in part the salary of the Roman Catholic Bishop. The population of the colony consists of about 5,000 Catholics, and 4,000 Protestants.

The civil government is administered by the Governor in Council, whose duties are both executive and legislative. The Governor is appointed by the Crown, on the nomination of the Hudson's Bay Company. The members of the Council, usually about twelve in number, are appointed by Commission of the Company. The Recorder, who is ex-officio as a member of the Council, its legal adviser, and Chief Justice of the Colony, is also appointed by the Hudson's Bay Company. Orders passed by the Governor in Council, have the full force of legal enactments in the colony. There is in the Council about an equal number of Catholics and Protestants, who have hitherto acted together very amicably. The Governor, supported by three or four members of Council, sits with the Recorder at the Assizes, which are held every three months, but there is generally very little business. The Justices of the Peace, in petit session held once a month, dispose of most cases requiring magisterial interference. The clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, are mostly, however, the persons through whose arbitration most disputes are settled. With the exception of the Recorder, there is not a member of the legal profession in the settlement.

The Hudson's Bay Company pay the Governor and Recorder. The other expenses of Government, and the making and repairing of roads, are all paid by a duty of 4 per cent on imported goods. This is the only tax levied in the colony, and is usually more than sufficient for the purposes mentioned. Any overplus that may remain, is appropriated to the schools, in which Catholics and Protestants get equal shares. Members of Council are paid nothing; the office is altogether honorary.

The soil and climate of Red River district, differ very little from Minnesota. The whole district is, in fact, only the northern part of the same extensive prairie tract, of which Minnesota is mainly composed. The settlement of Red River differs only from the settlements of Minnesota, inasmuch as it is further away from the navigable waters of the Mississippi, and from the United States railways. It is consequently further from available markets. This disadvantage time will remove. The parallel of 49° North latitude will not arrest the tide of emigration from flowing northward.

The whole of Red River district [is] as capable of agricultural improvement, as the Territory of Minnesota. [...] The greatest disadvantage is, that in many places there is no timber, but only one vast plain of grass, with not a tree to be seen. [...] Spring wheat answers well in ordinary years, and the produce is from 35 to 40 bushels per acre. It is sown in the last week of May. Oats and peas are sown from the 10th to the 15th of May. Potatoes are planted from the 15th to the 20th, and Barely is sown during the last ten days of May. Turnips are sown during the last ten days of June. [...] Barely cutting commences from the 6th to the 13th of August. Oats from the 10th to the 15th. Wheat from the 15th to the 20th. Potatoes are taken up the last week of September, and Turnips in the first week of October. Timothy grass stands the winter, but clover will not. [...] Most of the Red River farmers cut their wheat out in the plains, without the trouble of sowing grass seed on their farms. [...]

The isolated situation of Red River, and the great difficulty of getting at it, without great sacrifice of time and money, is the main obstacle in the way of its extensive settlement. There are three routes by which it may be reached. One from Lake Superior, by rivers connected with Ramy Lake, Lake of the Woods, and Lake Winnipeg. This route is only practicable for bark canoes, as the rivers are full of rapids and waterfalls, there being near one hundred portages from Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg. This can never be used to any extent for commercial purposes. Any attempt at connecting Red River with Lake Superior by railway, would in the present state of things be attended with insuperable difficulties, were the line to be taken over British territory. From Fort William on Lake Superior to the north-west extremity of the Lake of the Woods, a distance of nearly 300 miles, the country is hilly and of little value for agricultural purposes. From the Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry, a distance of 200 miles, the land is something better, but still very far inferior to the prairie region west of Red River.

The way to Red River settlement through Hudson's Bay is also beset with numerous difficulties. The ships are sometimes three weeks in getting through Hudson's Straits, being fastened in the floating ice, and in danger of being run down with icebergs. When I set out in 1839, we were ten days passing the Straits, viz: from July 23d to August 3d. On one occasion, we were for 30 hours fast packed in by floating ice, only moving in a wrong direction along with the current towards the Atlantic. Hudson's Straits are only passable about 7 weeks out of the year. When all the obstacles of the sea voyage are overcome, and York Fort on Hudson's Bay is reached, there is still a voyage of 800 miles by lake and river to the settlement. This voyage being against stream, with numerous portages in the way, it takes 30 days to go from York Fort to red River.

The freight paid by both the Company and the settlers on goods taken up is £1 pound sterling per 100 lbs. Some parties blame the Hudson's Bay Company for an unwillingness to purchase and export the agricultural produce of the colony. With such charges for freight, every one must see the utter impossibility of exporting anything that will pay, except such light and valuable articles as furs.

The third route is across the prairies of Minnesota to the navigable waters of the Mississippi. The distance is 700 miles and the only mode of transit at present is carts, either drawn by one horse or an ox. Each cart will take about 7 cwt., and there is usually one person to two carts. The time occupied in making this journey is usually from 25 to 35 days. it depends upon the weather and the height of the water in rivers which have to be crossed either by fording or on rafts. The party I went with in 1851 were 32 days. That mode of doing business, will clearly never pay.

## Mr. Ellice defends the Company<sup>99</sup> (July, 1857)

LONDON, 26th June, 1857. The Hudson's Bay Committee of the House of Commons sat again upon Tuesday last [...]; the examination of Mr. Ellice<sup>100</sup>, who entered into a defence of the Company, taking up the greatest portion of the day. [...]

Mr. Ellice [...] stated in substance as follows:- In 1803 he had engaged in the fur trade, at a period when everybody in Canada was connected with the same trade. He was first a partner of the X. Y. Company, then of the North West Company and afterwards of the Hudson's Bay Company. The state of the North-west country was, in 1803, very bad, and the trade was conducted with great extravagance until 1811, when Lord Selkirk joined the Hudson's Bay Company, which (up to that time being rather slower in its movements than the Canadian fur companies) then became more active.

Lord Selkirk having obtained a free grant from the Hudson's Bay Company upon the Red River, proceeded to colonize it, when competition and scenes of violence and bloodshed became more frequent between the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies, and things continued in this state (under which the trade of the companies languished) until 1816, when the Government of England and the Government of Canada interfered by the appointment of Mr. Coltman as Commissioner to inquire into the state of the country and the differences of the two companies, and that this gentleman in his report recommended a union of these bodies as the only means of restoring peace to the country. Lord Bathurst thereupon sent for Mr. Ellice to negotiate a union of the Companies, which he succeeded in accomplishing, since which peace and contentment have reigned throughout the territory from one end of it to the other.

The North West Company having been formed by Canadians and having become amalgamated with the Hudson's Bay Company, he regarded the latter as more a *Canadian* than an English Company. At the union the nominal stock of the united Company was £400,000, which has been increased to £500,000 by payments in cash or profits carried to the capital. For the last seventeen years *profits* of the Company have averaged £65,000 annually, of which £39,000 have been appropriated to the Company at home, and £26,000 to the senior officers in the territory. The general profits of the company average 12 per cent on the capital, with an occasional bonus of 5 per cent. But the company employ more than £500,000 capital, that amount only representing their fur transactions. They employ moneys in their hands in investmetns, deposits of all their officers, &c., and they are, in fact, bankers as well as fur traders.

The chief factors and chief traders are paid entirely by shares. The former receive about £617 per annum upon the one share allotted to each; the latter, who have only half a share, receive half that amount. There is a council in the interior of the territory composed of chief factors, and presided over by the Governor, who meet

---

<sup>99</sup> From HUDSON'S BAY QUESTION. – HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMITTEE. (1857, July 10). *The Montreal Gazette*, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Edward "Bear" Ellice (1783 – 1863).

once a year to inspect and audit accounts, and order goods, station servants, recommend filling up vacancies, and conduct all affairs within the territory so far as the trade is concerned, subject to the control of the board of directors at home, nothing being confirmed except by the latter. He was very happy to say that no serious differences of opinion had ever occurred between the members of this council, or between the council and the board at home. Everything had worked harmoniously.

Administration of the government in such a country must necessarily be of a rough description, but they send out the best men that can be obtained: sometimes the sons of country clergymen, and a short time ago he sent out the son of his forester (game-keeper) in Scotland, who happened to be a smart lad. He disapproved of employing men of the country: half-breeds especially were objectionable. These people he considered would be dangerous to the peace of the country. The Co.'s system was a most moral one, and when any of the company's officers formed improper connections with the Indian women he was instantly removed. While the Indians have decreased everywhere else, he believed that they have increased throughout the territory, though the effect of the monopoly of trade enabled the company to give what prices they pleased to the Indians. Every complaint against the Company to the Colonial Office had been explained to the satisfaction of that office; yet one or two instances may have occurred, as they do elsewhere, of improper acts having been committed by the company's servants. In no colony had so few complaints of mal-administration been made to the Colonial Office.

The supply of peltry in the world had diminished by about one-half. The most valuable fur districts in the territory were in the North, in the direction of the Mackenzie. No part of the fur trade on the American frontier was of the least value. Civilization and population had made no progress in that direction, and the people of the United States covet no portion of the British territory. They have no garrison or settlement near it. No settlement will be attempted within the territory by the people of the United States, or by any one else, within the life-time of the youngest man now alive.

He believed the proprietary rights of the Company could not be disputed. He meant the right of possessing the soil. The Company was the last proprietary government in existence. The right of self-government was given by the charter, and the country was well governed. In respect to the boundary of Canada, of which Mr. Chief Justice Draper had sent in a paper, the words of the charter must be taken until some decision of a court of law be obtained; but he considered the question of boundary not to be of the slightest importance – for if Canada required any portion of the territory fit for settlement, it should not be kept from her. The Hudson's Bay Company would be willing to give up such portions of it, upon condition that Canada would be at the expense of governing the territory, and of maintaining an efficient force to prevent any competition with the Company in the fur trade.

In the event of the Charter being declared illegal by a Court of Law, he considered that 200 years' possession would give the Company a sufficient claim to the territory, and to compensation in the event of their monopoly being abolished. He would much sooner enter into some compromise with Canada upon the basis he had



laid down, than go to law about the legality of the Charter, which would involve heavy expenses. As to the claim of the latter to any portion of the territory, it could not be maintained; because, previous to the cession of the Province to England, nobody knew anything of the country to the west of Canada. The Act of 1774 said that Canada was to be bounded to the westward by the Mississippi. Although willing to give to the Province, upon certain conditions, lands fit for settlement, it would be extremely difficult for Canada to govern Red River, from the impracticability of making any communication between the two, and from the vicinity of the latter to Minnesota, which was the natural way.

He believed there was no land fit for settlement to the east of the Rocky Mountains. There was a little alluvial soil along the banks of the rivers, but further back the prairies were nothing but swamp, and unfit for cultivation. He had never been in the territory, and only spoke from hearsay. He would give no power to any people to prevent colonization, where colonization was possible.

If Canada were to obtain Red River, he believed she would in a year or two solicit the Company to take it off her hands, and he believed that the settlement and territory could not be better governed than through the Company. The English never extinguished the Indian title in Canada, but took the lands from the Indians without purchase, as they required them. [...] [He] was very glad that the Provincial Parliament had voted £5,000 to open out a communication with Red River, and Canada would have every assistance from the Hudson's Bay Co. in the undertaking; but £5,000 would go a very little way to improve the route, which would take £100,000.

The Crown had no power to interfere with the Hudson's Bay territories proper. [The Company had] obtained exclusive license of trade in the North-West territory, not to prevent Canadian competition, but principally to prevent American. Renewal of the license of trade was of little consequence; for, should any attempt be made to deprive the Company's officers of their present means of livelihood, the latter would themselves carry on the trade, and defy all competition from Canada, by forming *a connection with the United States*. [...]

In consequence of *parties from Canada going into the territory to trade*, which might lead to results similar to those which happened by the competition of the North-West Company; and from some apprehension of difficulties with the Half-Breeds, who are dangerous characters, and also of the Indian war in Minnesota spreading into the territory, the Hudson's Bay Company had applied to Her Majesty's Government for a body of troops to garrison Red River, to keep all these different bodies in check, which application had been complied with, the Company agreeing to convey the troops at their own expense, and to feed them while there.

## “In an extreme state of depression”<sup>101</sup> (September, 1857)

I arrived in the Canadian settlement of Red River on the 25th of February, and found the people there in a high state of expectation, [...] on account [...] of their finding that overtures were being made them on the part of Canada for a share of their trade. In feeling they were certainly ripe for entertaining such propositions as were made for them. Means, however, were so far wanting, that what they did possess they were bound by engagement to apply to the purposes of the Hudson’s Bay Company. All their arrangements, too, for the business of the coming year, had been previously made.

Trade, in so far as it is pursued by the settlers themselves, as might well be supposed, I found in an extreme state of depression. Agricultural pursuits were carried on only to the extent of supplying their own wants, and the only other mode of procuring such other necessities as their soil did not produce, was to engage in the fur trade; in which, however, they invariably found themselves at a disadvantage from having such powerful and unscrupulous opponents as the Hudson’s Bay Company to compete with, who, having the power alone of forming the laws of the country, have ever taken good care that they shall be the best for protecting their own interests, and, being irresponsible to any party, may break through any of them with impunity, whilst unprotected settlers can be and often have been for doing the same, dealt with *à la code* Hudson’s Bay Company. Here is an instance – a law in the colony prohibits the sale or brewing of strong drink. The law is in general respected by the colonists, but in the eyes of the Hudson’s Bay Company is as so much waste paper, and the result is a never-failing supply either of spirits or beer<sup>102</sup>.

They have in this a means of procuring what gold and silver cannot buy. This was exactly my case when endeavouring to procure a supply of pemmican for my voyage out. Though there was every abundance of this just brought in from the plains about the time of my leaving Red River, I could not procure a morsel for money, and could only get it at last indirectly through the company.

Many of the settlers were engaged to a small extent in the fur trade, of course in all cases hotly pursued by the superior numbers of the Hudson’s Bay men. These procure their supplies from St. Paul, to which they repair with ox-carts in caravans, sometimes numbering as high as 300. Some half dozen of the settlers are more extensively engaged in trade, and obtain their goods through the company from England, by way of York Factory, conveying them to Red River in their own boats.

---

<sup>101</sup> From Kennedy, W. (1857, September 8). THE RED RIVER COLONY. *The London Daily News*, p. 5. Written by Captain William Kennedy.

<sup>102</sup> “It is a duty on our part to contradict, in most unqualified terms, the statements respecting the use of spiritous liquors in this country. So far from its ever having been withheld as an article of trade, not only have many of us, when in the service of the company, obtained furs in barter for it, but even a settler among us has had his stock of this article taken from him, and the same was afterwards used by the Hudson’s Bay Company as an article of trade. The entire valley of the Saskatchewan is so flooded with this fruitful source of mischief to the Red man that it is almost the exclusive commodity with which the Hudson’s Bay Company procures the large stock of provisions obtained from the Saskatchewan.” THE HUDSON’S BAY QUESTION. (1857, July 29). *The London Morning Post*, p. 5.

The most extensive traders of this class may import goods to the amount of 1,200*l.* sterling, whilst the smaller may import to the amount of 600*l.* They take comparatively little from the United States, though it is supposed that they contemplate drawing more largely from the American market in future.

The Hudson's Bay Company are said to introduce annually into Red River goods to the amount of 12,000*l.* sterling. This they dispose of at an advance of from one to four hundred per cent. Each spring they invariably run out of goods, and, before doing so, advance their prices very materially. Whether they restrict their supplies from supposing that their gains will be greater by confining themselves to a small supply, in order that they can better advance prices at a season of the year when there is no remedy, or that they find it more convenient to restrict supply on the ground that it is not politic for monopolists to give a full supply of requisites to a people struggling for commercial freedom, there is no means of ascertaining. [...]

The Red River trade gives employment to 36 boats, each capable of carrying 75 pieces of goods of 90lbs. each. These leave Red River for York Factory soon after the navigation opens, and return with their first cargoes about mid-summer. Landing this, they return for a second, and are back to Red River generally about the middle of October. Averaging each boat to carry 3½ tons, we have an approximate estimate of the amount of importation, which does not exceed 250 tons as the entire supply for a year to Red River. The company have never made any improvement on their original means of transport, though it is quite certain that if they had done so they could have greatly increased their trade and promoted colonization; neither have they increased the number of their ships, as a solitary vessel of some 500 tons supplies the entire northern department, whilst one of still smaller burthen does the work for the southern; but if they have made slow progress in these respects, they have made much slower in regard to what usually counts under the denomination of public works. Even the portages on their greatest highway – that between York Factory and Red River – has, as the freighters themselves have told me, had to be kept in repair by themselves. [...]

To what has been said so frequently respecting the fertility of soil both on the Red River and Saskatchewan, I believe I need add little beyond using the words of the settlers themselves in one of their resolutions<sup>103</sup>, namely, that they are ready to challenge the world both for fertility of soil and the ease with which it is cultivated. Forty, fifty, and even sixty returns of wheat have been obtained with only a little extra cultivation, and even more of barley, oats, and potatoes. There has been such a thing obtained in Red River as three crops of barley in one season. It was sown on the 1st of May, reaped 27th July; a second crop sprung up from self-sown seed, and grain good enough for seed was reaped in September. A third growth might have made fodder, but was let out to pasture. [...] Mr. Thom, the first recorder of Red River,

---

<sup>103</sup> “We believe that few countries in the world required so little labour to yield such an abundance and to spare, both for man and beast, as this. As evidence of this we but invite impartial witnesses to the colony that has sprung up here, notwithstanding the many discouragements and restrictions that a body of monopolists could throw in our way.” THE HUDSON'S BAY QUESTION. (1857, July 29). *The London Morning Post*, p. 5.

though no friend to progress, once told a jury there that six miles square of such a soil as Red River, and yielding as it does, would create a greater revenue than all the fur trade put together, supposing each bushel of wheat to be sold at 3s. 6d. sterling per bushel. [...]

The colonists of Red River have, during the past winter, petitioned the imperial and Canadian governments for “annexation to Canada,” hoping that under its government they would, in common with other British subjects, enjoy the blessings of liberty and freedom; but, so far, the only answer has been what is expressed by one of the colonists themselves:

“All winter we have been fighting freedom’s battle, petitioning for annexation to Canada, and the rights of British subjects. Britain decrees that we shall have soldiers, rifles, and bullets, and Canada furnishes the material. Is this what our devoted loyalty to our Queen, and fraternal feeling to the people of Canada, deserve?”

To have these troops sent among them, the Red River people will have to dispense with one-half their usual amount of supplies, as the Hudson’s Bay Company have not provided any additional means of transport for the conveyance of these troops from York Factory to Red River, beyond what they had last year simply for the demands of the settlement.

### “We cannot obtain deeds”<sup>104</sup> (January, 1858)

PETITION. – To the Honorable the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada, in Parliament assembled, – *The Petition of the undersigned Inhabitants and Natives of the Settlement situated on the Red River, in the Assiniboine County, British North America, humbly sheweth, –*

That many years ago a body of British emigrants were induced to settle in this country, under very flattering promises made to them by the late Earl Selkirk, and under certain contracts. All these promises and contracts, which had led them to hope that protected by British laws, they would enjoy the fruits of their labor, have been evaded.

On the coalition of the rival companies, many of us, Europeans and Canadians, settled with our families around this nucleus of civilization in the wilderness in full expectation that none would interrupt our enjoyment of those privileges which we believe to be ours by birthright, and which are secured to all Her Majesty’s subjects in any other British Colony.

We have paid large sums of money to the Hudson’s Bay Company for land, yet we cannot obtain deeds for the same. The Company’s agents have made several attempts to force upon us deeds which would reduce ourselves and our posterity to the most abject slavery under that body. [...]

Under what we believe to be a fictitious Charter, but which the Company’s agents have maintained to be the fundamental law of “Rupert’s land,” we have been prevented the receiving in exchange the peltries of our country for any of the products

---

<sup>104</sup> From RED RIVER COLONY. (1858, January 30). *The Montreal Gazette*, p. 2.

of our labor, and have been forbidden giving peltries in exchange for any of the imported necessaries of life, under the penalty of being imprisoned, and of having our property confiscated; we have been forbidden to take peltries in exchange even for food supplied to famishing Indians.

The Hudson's Bay Company's clerks, with an armed police, have entered into settlers' houses in quest of Furs, and confiscated all they found. One poor settler, after having his goods seized, and his house burnt to the ground, [...] afterwards was conveyed prisoner to York Factory.

The Company's first legal adviser in this Colony has declared our navigating the Lakes and Rivers between this Colony and Hudson's Bay with any articles of our produce to be illegal. The same authority has declared our selling of English goods, in this Colony, to be illegal.

On our annual commercial journeys into Minnesota, we have been pursued like felons, by armed constables, who searched our property, even breaking open our trunks; all furs found were confiscated. This interference with those of aboriginal descent had been carried to such extent, as to endanger the peace of the settlement.

Thus we, the inhabitants of this land, have been and are constrained to behold the valuable commercial productions of our country, exported for the exclusive profit of a company of traders, who are strangers to ourselves and to our country.

We are by necessity compelled to use many articles of their importation, for which we pay from one hundred to four hundred per cent., on prime cost, while we are prohibited exporting those productions of our own country and industry which we could exchange for the necessaries of life.

The country is governed and legislated for by two distinct Legislative Councils, in the constituting of which we have no voice; the members of the highest holding their office of Councillors by virtue of rank in the company's service. This body passes laws affecting our interest, as for instance in 1845 it decreed that 20 per cent. duty would be levied on the imports of all who were suspected in trading in furs, this duty to be paid at York Factory. Again in 1854 the same body passed a resolution imposing 12½ per cent. on all the goods landed for the colony at York Factory.

The local legislature consists of the Governor, who is also the Judge, and who holds his appointment from the Company. They are appointed by the same body, and are with one or two exceptions, to a greater or lesser extent, dependent on that body. This council imposes taxes, creates offences, and punishes the same by fines and imprisonments – *i.e.* the Governor and Council make the laws, judge the laws, and execute their own sentence. We have no voice in their selection, neither have we any constitutional means of controlling their action.

Our lands are fertile and easily cultivated, but the exclusive system of the Hudson's Bay Company effectually prohibits the tiller of the soil as well as the adventurer in any other industrial pursuit, from devoting their energies to those labors which, while producing to the individual prosperity and wealth, contribute to the general advantage of the settlement at large<sup>105</sup>.

---

<sup>105</sup> "Nothing can be further from the truth than the statement that the Hudson's Bay Company have been in the habit of taking our surplus produce, for of 35 out of over 40 years that this colony has been

Under this system our energies are paralyzed, and discontent is increasing to such a degree that events fatal to British interest, and particularly to the interest of Canada, and even to civilization and humanity, may soon take place.

Our country is bordering on Minnesota Territory – a trade for some years has been carried on between us. We are there met by very high duties on all articles which we import into that territory, the benefits of the Reciprocity Treaty not being extended to us. Notwithstanding this, the trade has gone on increasing, and will continue to do so. We have already great cause to envy those laws and those commercial advantages which we see enjoyed by our neighbors, and which wherever they exist are productive of prosperity and wealth.

As British subjects we desire that the same liberty and freedom of commerce, as well as the security of property may be granted to us, as is enjoyed in all other possessions of the British Crown, which liberty is become essentially necessary to our prosperity and to the tranquility of this colony.

We believe that the colony in which we live is a portion of that territory which became attached to the Crown of England by the Treaty of 1763, and that the dominion heretofore exercised by the Hudson's Bay Company is an usurpation antagonistic to civilization and to the best interests of the Canadian people, whose laws being extended to us, will guarantee the enjoyment of those rights and liberties, which would leave us nothing to envy in the institutions of the neighboring territory.

When we contemplate the mighty tide of emigration which has flowed towards the North these six years past, and has already filled the valley of the Red River, is there no danger of being carried away by that flood, and that we may thereby lose our nationality? We love the British name! We are proud of that glorious fabric, the British Constitution, raised by the wisdom, cemented and hallowed by the blood of our fore-fathers.

We have represented our grievances to the Imperial Government, but through the chicanery of the Company and its false representation, we have not been heard, and much less have our grievances been redressed. It would seem, therefore, that we have no other choice than the Canadian Plough and Printing Press, or the American Rifle and Fugitive Slave Law.

We, therefore, as dutiful and loyal subjects of the British Crown, humbly pray that your Honourable House will take into your immediate consideration the subject of this our petition, and that such measures may be devised and adopted as will extend to us the protection of the Canadian Government, laws and institutions, and make us equal participators in those rights and liberties enjoyed by British subjects in whatever part of the world they reside.

---

forming, they have not taken even a tenth of what we could have supplied them. It is equally untrue that for the last seven years they have been obliged to import grain from the United States in order to supply their own wants. As to our wheat crops being uncertain, we can state that during the last 10 years we have not known a total failure of crops from any cause whatever." THE HUDSON'S BAY QUESTION. (1857, July 29). *The London Morning Post*, p. 5.

## “Invalid and unconstitutional”<sup>106</sup> (May, 1858)

The following are Resolutions of much importance to be moved by Mr. Dawson for an Address to Her Majesty, on the subject of the North Western parts of this Province, the Indian Territories and the Hudson’s Bay Company. I believe Mr. Dawson has made this question one of his particular studies, a fact which renders his resolutions interesting. He proposed to move that it be Resolved:-

1. That Canada or New France as originally known and recognized by European Nations, had no limit towards the North, except the Frozen Sea, and no limit towards the West, except the Pacific Ocean.

2. That a Charter was granted by King Charles the Second, of England, in 1670, to certain parties as “The Merchants, Adventurers of England, Trading to Hudson’s Bay,” which – although neither the Grantor, nor the British people, knew anything, at that time, of the Interior of the Country about Hudson’s Bay – nevertheless, precluded the Company from entering upon the Possessions of France; the Charter thus bearing upon its face a doubt of the extent, or indeed the existence of the title it professed to convey, and a knowledge of the fact that the right to the Country even on the shores of Hudson’s Bay (which was only then known to England) was in whole or in part, vested in France.

3. That from the first moment the intrusion of the Hudson’s Bay Company became known to France, or to the Canadian authorities of that day, it was forcibly, and for the most part successfully resisted, though in a time of peace between Great Britain and France.

4. That by the Treaty of Peace concluded at Ryswick, in 1697, between Great Britain and France, most of the places situate on Hudson’s Bay were recognized as belonging to France, while the claims of the two Nations to the remaining places were to be determined by Commissioners respectively appointed for that purpose, who, however, never met for the object contemplated.

5. That by the Treaty of Peace concluded at Utrecht, in 1713, the whole of Hudson’s Bay (saving the rights of French occupants down to that period) were ceded by France to Great Britain, but without defined limits, which were also to be determined by Commissioners, who, however, in like manner, never met for the purpose.

6. That the extent of the actual possession by each of the two Nations affords, therefore, for the next fifty years, the true basis of their respective rights; unaffected by the various propositions, not based upon the Treaty, but conventionally made or rejected by the one or the other.

7. That during said period the possessions of Great Britain, through the medium of the Hudson’s Bay Company, were confined to the shores of Hudson’s Bay, or extended a very short distance inland, while France was in possession of the interior countries to the South and West, including the Red River, Lake Winnipeg, the Saskatchewan, &c.

---

<sup>106</sup> From NOTES FROM THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT. (1858, May 31). *The Montreal Gazette*, p. 2.

8. That by the Treaty of Paris, in 1763, Canada was ceded by France, *as then possessed by her*, to Great Britain, reserving to the French inhabitants all the rights and privileges of British subjects, - a provision made specially applicable to the Western Territories (then the great seat of the Fur Trade) by the Capitulation of Montreal.

9. That Canadians, alike of British and French origin, continued the Fur Trade on a large and increasing scale, from 1763 to 1821, by the Ottawa, Lake Superior, the Saskatchewan, &c., West to the Pacific Ocean, and by the McKenzie River North to the North Sea.

10. That, in 1774, the Hudson's Bay Company, exercising the undoubted right of British subjects, also entered upon the Saskatchewan and other parts of the Canadian Territory, ceded by the Treaty of Paris, and carried on the Fur Trade there, though on a lesser scale than the North West Company of Canada.

11. That, about the year 1812, the Hudson's Bay Company, under the auspices of the Earl of Selkirk, set up the pretence that the Countries on the Red River, the Saskatchewan, &c., and the jurisdiction thereof, belonged to them in virtue of their Charter, of 1670, and attempted practically to enforce this view by the expulsion of the North West Company, which, however, they failed to effect, and in the attempt to do which the decisions of the Imperial and Canadian authorities were uniformly adverse to their pretensions.

12. That after a protracted struggle between the two Companies, they united, in 1821, and obtained a joint Lease from the Imperial Government of the "Indian Territories."

13. That under this Lease the two Companies - uniting upon the policy of the Hudson's Bay Company - have since carried their trade through Hudson's Bay, allowing the cheaper and more advantageous route by the St. Lawrence to fall into disuse, to the serious detriment of the resources of Canada, to which the Fur Trade had always been a source of great wealth.

14. That the said "Indian Territories" being without any specific territorial designation, the Company have taken advantage to disseminate such views as were most suitable to their own objects, - publishing Maps and creating territorial divisions, *upon paper*, alike inconsistent with all authority, contrary to historical facts, adverse to geographical association, and even in direct contradiction to the terms of the Statute under which their Lease is held; and by these means they have succeeded imposing upon the people of Canada so as to exclude them from a lucrative Trade which, in fact, there is no Lease, Charter or Law to prevent them from prosecuting.

15. That, therefore, the Hudson's Bay Company under their Charter (in itself held by eminent Jurists to be invalid and unconstitutional - void, also, as this House believes it to be, on the ground that the Countries it professes to grant belonged, at that period, to France-) cannot, by virtue thereof, in any event, claim the interior Countries on Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan; and under their Lease of the Indian Territories can claim the exclusive trade of such Countries only as they may prove to be no part of Canada.



16. That his House maintains the right of the People of this Province, to enter upon and freely to trade in that part of Canada, or Nouvelle France as originally known, on Hudson's Bay, ceded by France to Great Britain, in 1713; and, independently of the ownership thereof having been in France previous to 1670, denies the existence of any Constitutional restriction to preclude them from enjoying the rights of British Subjects in that or in any other British Territory.

17. That, by the Treaty of Paris, the Mississippi necessarily became the westerly boundary of the then Southerly part of Canada (now part of the United States), because France retained the West bank of that River from its source downwards; but the Territory lying North of the source of the Mississippi – thence West, forming the Northerly boundary of Louisiana – previously possessed by France, and so ceded by the said Treaty, this House claims (save in so far as it has been relinquished to the United States) as an integral part of Canada, without any westerly limit except the Pacific Ocean.

18. That a joint Address of the two Houses of Parliament be presented to Her Majesty, founded upon the above Resolutions, and praying that in consideration of the injurious consequences to the Trade and general interests of this Province resulting from the indefinable nature of the "Indian Territories," under cover of which the Lessees have been enabled to create a monopoly in localities not legally affected by their Lease of the said Territories, Her Majesty may be graciously pleased to refuse any renewal of such Lease to the Hudson's Bay Company: and further, that Her Majesty may be pleased to sanction no Act by which the existing Territorial Rights or Jurisdiction of this Province would be affected.

### **"Making for itself a new route"<sup>107</sup> (August, 1863)**

The [Hudson's Bay Company's] license of exclusive trade expired on the first of June, 1859. A powerful movement originating in the local disaffection of the Colony, was formed in Canada in 1856-'57, to prevent the extension of their license. This naturally called the attention of the people of Canada and the United States to the subject. It was even broached in England. A parliamentary investigation was ordered, and the reading world was astonished to find that a region as large as both the Canadas, and equaling them in resources, was locked up in the temperate zone, the secret of a monopolizing company of fur-traders. The Frazer<sup>108</sup> river gold excitement still farther called attention to this region. The Hudson's Bay Company's exclusive license was not renewed, and a change of ministry only prevented the formation of a chain of Colonies to reach from Canada to the Pacific. [...]

An effort was made in 1859 by the Canadians to reopen the old thoroughfare between Canada and Prince Rupert's Land (which had been used by the old voyagers,) through Rainy Lake river and the great Lakes. The route presented such natural

---

<sup>107</sup> From NORTH-WESTERN FUR TRADE. (1863, August 19). *The Portage County Democrat*, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> The Fraser River gold rush, in what would soon be British Columbia, kicked off in early 1858.

obstructions that it has been virtually abandoned, except as a mail route, and the Minnesota route is generally used by them.

Long before this, however, the trade of the Red River colony had been making for itself a new route, which was found to obviate the difficulties of both the Hudson's Bay and Rainy Lake Route. This was up the Red River, and down the Mississippi Valley, to St. Paul.

In the Summer of 1859, a small steamboat called the "Pioneer," 60 tons burthen, was placed on Red River by the energy of a few Minnesotans, and made several trips. From the first arrival of this boat at the settlements, may be dated the beginning of a new era for that region. American Enterprise seemed to have taken hold of the colony. A new demand for American goods sprang up. Two steam saw mills were erected. A newspaper was established, and the schools, churches and other means of self-improvement were doubled in power. The people, so long shut out from the world, seemed to have awakened to a knowledge of their state and their wants.

The Hudson's Bay Company, too, altered their exclusive policy, and while not entirely abandoning their annual ship voyage to and from England, made a step towards adopting the shorter and more economical route through Minnesota, by making a contract with Burbank & Co. for the transportation of from 250 to 500 tons annually, from St. Paul to Fort Garry, for a term of years. The further development of steam navigation on the Red River, Lake Winnipeg, and its tributaries, will draw the whole trade of that region into the new route hitherward.

### **The "first trip of the Anson Northrup"<sup>109</sup> (July, 1859)**

We had the pleasure of conversing yesterday<sup>110</sup> with Mr. James Ross<sup>111</sup>, a merchant of Red River Settlement – some fifty or sixty miles north of Pembina, in the British Possessions – who was a passenger on the "Ans. Northrup," on her return from Fort Garry week before last. He says the trip down was eminently successful, and created great excitement among the inhabitants, who had never seen a steamboat before.

She started from Breckinridge for Fort Garry on the 6th, and reached there on the 10th, thus taking but four days. As it was the first trip, and as they had made no arrangements for the wood supplies along the way, they had to cut all the wood they required. Nor did they travel by night, lest through inexperience of the river they might endanger the boat. Both circumstances being taken into account, we may safely say that, had they had a sufficiency of wood ready for use by the way, and had they traveled by night as well as by day, they would have reached Red River Settlement in thirty-six hours. This is something new for the country through which the Red river flows, and something which the friends of progress and civilization will rejoice.

She started on her return trip from Fort Garry on Friday the 17th of June, and reached Fort Abercrombie, where she now lies, June 25, having made the trip in eight

---

<sup>109</sup> From First Trip of the Anson Northrup. (1859, July 9). *The Chicago Tribune*, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> July 6, 1859

<sup>111</sup> James Ross (1835 – 1871), best known as Louis Riel's Chief Justice during the 1870 rebellion.

days, running only by daylight, and having again to stop to cut her own wood along shore. There were about twenty-five passengers in all on board, mostly merchants, from the settlements in that region, coming to this city<sup>112</sup> to purchase goods.

On arriving at the Selkirk settlement, Captain Northrup was most enthusiastically welcomed. The Commander of the British force at Fort Garry ordered the firing of cannon in honour of the event. The British Flag was hoisted up to greet its sister of the “stars and stripes” waving at the head of the “Anson Northrup.” The great bells of the Catholic Cathedral chimed merrily, and the vast throngs of people that pressed all around cheered and waved caps most energetically. The officers of the Hudson’s Bay Company were also very cordial in welcoming the pioneer of progress and prosperity. [...]

The Ans. Northrup is a staunch, neatly built steamer of ninety feet in length by twenty-two wide, and has engines of one hundred horse power.

The Ans. Northrup will return in a few days, and will have quite a full freight of goods for the settlements along the Red River, including goods for the Hudson’s Bay Company which arrived a few days since – as well as a good list of passengers.

### **“Moral and religious worth”<sup>113</sup> (January, 1860)**

The population along the Red River, Lake Winnipeg and Sketchewan [sic.], number some thirty thousand, composed of the retired employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company and their families. The Selkirk settlement being the most important, a description of the settlers there will suffice.

We have no hesitancy in declaring that no settlement of the same extent, anywhere west of the Mississippi river, can boast of so much real wealth, intelligence, moral and religious worth. Numbering among them some of the finest scholars in Oxford and Cambridge ever produced, the past and present policy of the Hudson’s Bay Company precluded the appointment of any agents, commissioners or managers but such as were well recommended by their educational qualifications. Thus an elevated tone has always characterized these employees.

Not only were they encouraged to go to this supposed inhospitable clime by liberal salaries, but large bonuses were freely given to foster honesty and trustworthiness. This liberal profusion enabled them to retire to private life in a few years, with wealth. Most of them have settled at Selkirk, where the society is select, in the enjoyment of liberally endowed institutions of education, and in the midst of the most fruitful country on the American Continent.

This may appear an extravagant expression, but the facts will bear me out in using it. The soil is a rich loam, from three to ten feet in thickness, of a fertility unparalleled. Forty bushels of wheat is the ordinary yield to the acre, and fifty bushels not uncommon. All other cereals grow equally luxuriant. Grasses produce well, and any amount of hay can be secured. The first thing that attracts the eye of

---

<sup>112</sup> St. Paul, Minnesota

<sup>113</sup> From *Settlements on the Red River*. (1860, January 25). *The Racine Advocate*, p. 1.

the visitor is the immense herds of domestic cattle and horses, roaming at pleasure over the broad extended plains. The rich, juicy pastures yield a fatness that cannot be rivaled by persevering feeding of grain.

### **“They pay in furs and coin”<sup>114</sup> (July, 1862)**

The settlement now numbers some 10,000 people, and their trade with Minnesota already amounts to about two millions annually. They pay in furs and coin. The goods thus purchased are consumed by traders, trappers and Indians, who make long journeys to the Rocky Mountains and the far North, to enjoy the excitement of the chase. Furs were higher this year, owing to the competition of dealers from the United States with the Hudson’s Bay Company. The story that the supply is short is a mistake.

The journey from St. Paul to Fort Gary is now made in splendid coaches, some 250 miles, to Georgetown on the Red River, and thence by steamer to the Fort, occupying in all from seven to nine days. Stations with comfortable accommodations are found at the end of each day’s journey. The trip to Lake Winnipeg is now easy and comfortably made, thanks to the intelligent enterprise of Messrs. Burbank & Co.<sup>115</sup>, of St. Paul. The trade with this section of the Northwest is speedily increasing, and it must in a very few years assume gigantic proportions.

### **“A band of Sioux had visited”<sup>116</sup> (January, 1863)**

The St. Cloud *Union* learns from a gentleman who has just returned from the Selkirk Settlement that a band of Sioux had visited the Governor at the settlement, and desired to exchange horses and oxen plundered from the whites, for guns and ammunition. The Governor declined to make the desired exchange, whereupon the Indians informed him that they should remain in the neighborhood through the winter. One trader had a large quantity of ammunition, and it was feared an attempt would be made by the Sioux to take it by force, as it is the only chance they have of obtaining it at present. There is a rumor that the British Governor has asked permission to pass troops through our territory to protect Selkirk Settlement against Indian depredations.

---

<sup>114</sup> From From the Red River Country. (1862, July 10). *The Chicago Tribune*, p. 4.

<sup>115</sup> “Messrs. Burbank & Co. have purchased the ‘Anson Northup,’ the pioneer steamer, now on the Red River of the North; and intend running it from Shayenne to Fort Garey in connection with a line of stages between St. Cloud and Red River.” *The Northern Route*. (1859, July 21). *The St. Cloud Democrat*, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> From New of Our Own State. (1863, January 22). *The Winona Daily Republican*, p. 2.

## **The Sioux leave the settlement<sup>117</sup> (January, 1864)**

Gen Sibley has received a dispatch from Pembina, stating that the British authorities have succeeded in inducing the Sioux Indians to leave Selkirk settlement. They have supplied them with food and sent them to Turtle Mount. They were on the prairie during the terrible cold snap, and a large number of them must have perished.

## **“Powder and lead have been furnished liberally”<sup>118</sup> (May, 1865)**

All the information yet obtained, show that the hostile savages are armed and provided with munitions almost entirely from the half breed British settlements on the Red or Saskatchewan River. Powder and lead have been furnished liberally, and the Indians urged to hostilities by the nest of cutthroat traders now located in the Selkirk Settlements. The main body of the Winnebagoes and Sioux, who have persistently been hostile to us, were allowed last fall to cross the lines into the Hudson’s Bay Territory, and have been harbored all winter. They are now encouraged to make that territory a base for aggression, while those traders use every exertion to inflame and arouse the spirit of hostility against us.

## **Travel by Red River cart<sup>119</sup> (April, 1894)**

Two Red river ponies, who disdained oats, and had never eaten of aught save prairie grass, dry or green, - ‘Blackie’ and ‘Beeshaw,’ – both good types of their hardy class, short barrels, sturdy legs, long manes, and tails which touched their fetlocks; differing in position, however, Blackie having a bad eye and uncertain temper, with a disposition to smash things with his hind legs, which would have been fatal to a buggy, but was energy thrown away on a cart, when one knew how helpless he was with a clove hitch around the root of his tail with one end of a short piece of shaganappi, the other end of which was tied to the front cross-bar of the cart, the eight or ten inches’ distance between the attached ends affording but little scope for the exercise of powers such as Blackie undoubtedly possessed. This peculiarity was not the only one of Blackie’s, which would have placed him second to Beeshaw in this narrative, had he not some qualities useful indeed in time of trouble. He had a practice of trying to bolt when his harness was loosened, to escape the inevitable hobble without which Blackie, whose leadership Beeshaw, the tractable and gentle, always followed, would have left us on the prairie to our own devices more than once; and even with these shaganappi obstructions to his rapid locomotion he made time

---

<sup>117</sup> From Interesting Items. (1864, January 21). *The Hartford Courant*, p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> From MINNESOTA LETTER. (1865, May 22). *The Chicago Tribune*, p. 2.

<sup>119</sup> From Schultz, J. C. [sic.] (1894, April 6). THE CROW WING TAIL. *Manitoba Morning Free Press*, p. 5. Written by Sir John Christian Schultz (1840 – 1896), Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba from 1888 to 1895. The anecdote is probably from the early 1860s. Schultz was publisher of the *Nor’Wester* from 1864 to 1868.

fast enough to make his capture till his stomach was full, a very difficult matter. Though bad in these respects, he was good in others, for the swamp must be deep that he could not pull a cart through, and the bank of a stream just forded must have been steep indeed that Blackie's unshodden feet could not scramble up. Beeshaw the patient would do his best, and failing, would lie down in the one or slide back to the bottom of the other. So that as we are apt, after many years, to remember the good and forget the bad, I have given the first place in this, I fear, rambling narrative to Blackie; though I acknowledge gratefully that it was on Beeshaw the obedient's back that I explored the bog or essayed the river, crossing when the one was likely to be bad or the other deep. So much for the horses.

The saddle was simply a tree, strapped on over a blanket, which was easier on the horses than the Indian saddle; and the cart harness the dressed buffalo skin of the time, with the collar and hames in one piece, short traces to iron pins in the shafts, to which also were attached the hold-backs, which were the broadest and heaviest part of the harness. Shaganappi<sup>120</sup> reins and a bridle with no blinkers than completed this simple but efficient equipment.

Items Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 being now described, I come to an important one, No. 5, the cart, the popular impression of which now is that it was a ramshackle squeaky affair with wheels five feet high, each one of which dished outwardly so that the felloes looked as though about to part company with the spokes and hub; and those who have seen them as curiosities at an exhibition wonder if the wood had shrunk which left a loose opening where the felloe joined felloe in the queerly dished wheel, or whether indeed the fellow who made these joints had been quite himself when he completed this wooden monstrosity, which had not a scrap of iron on or around it. Queer looking they undoubtedly were, as compared with the present trim buggy, though the squeak is a libel as applied to a lightly loaded travelling cart which has been fairly treated by the application of the scrapings from the frying pan to its axle; yet no vehicle, I verily believe, which has been used before or since was so suited for the traversing of a country where in one day it might have to travel over, with its three-inches-wide wooden tire, a shaking bog, a miry creek, a sandy shore, or a boulder strewn path up steep hills.

At a cost of £2 sterling, in the old days, one became the possessor of a vehicle, the high wheels of which made it easy to draw, the great dish of the wheels made it hard to upset, while the loose jointed felloes saved the wheel from wreck by closing and yielding when a rock was struck in a deep river crossing, or the hidden stump in a newly cut trail was encountered. A very haven of rest wert thou, O cart, on the prairie when the long day of travel ended, a large square of canvas thrown over you made a tent before the camp fire better than any other, and an ark of safety when the swollen river was too deep to ford; thy wheels off and under the box with the same square of canvas about all, thou wast a boat made in ten minutes, in which two travelers with their belongings might paddle or pole from shore to shore in safety, leading the swimming horses behind.

---

<sup>120</sup> A Cree word (shâkanâpiy) meaning a strip of rawhide.

My excuse for thus apostrophising my Red River cart as a sentient being is that, like Blackie, it had tricks of its own which puzzled the uninitiated. Attempt to ride it in any way that one is wont to do in a civilized vehicle, and it soon rattled (if I may use a modern expression) its occupant, who found himself, to a musical accompaniment of frying pan and tin kettles, trying alternately to preserve himself from being pitched onto the pony, having his right or left ribs cracked against the side rail, or turning a somersault over the tail-board of the cart. No, there is one way to ride in a cart with ease and pleasure, and that is seated in front on its floor, with your legs hanging down near the horse's tail. If you are luxurious, tie a broad piece of shaganappi from rail to rail to support your back, put an extra folded blanket under you, sway your body slightly with Blackie or Beeshaw's fox-trot, and you need not envy the occupants of a coach and four. N.W., better known as "Commodore" Kittson, appreciated this fact, and never would in any of his later trips, ride in any other way or in any other vehicle.

As there is only one way to ride in a cart, so there is only one way of stowing its accessories; the most important of which is your half-sized axe. Put into the cart by a green hand, this useful implement becomes an engine of destruction; it cuts into your packages of tea, etc., ruins your blankets and jolts about till its long handle reaches far over the tailboard, and an extra jump tumbles it on to the trail, to delight the heart of the first Indian who passes, but to cause you to be extremely sorrowful, when you have to make camp with a jack-knife, or replace an old axle. No, the axe should take no risks, and must have a leather socket for its head and a strap for its handle, and both outside the cart on one of the side-boards. The gun is the next in importance; and for that, too, there is only one way, if you are not to risk shooting yourself or your companion. The butt must rest near your seat on the left side, the barrels in a loop to the top rail at an angle of 45 degrees, this arrangement, while making its carriage quite safe, enabling you to seize it quickly while yet the prairie chicken or duck is passing.

Not so dangerous as the two former, but infinitely more difficult to manage is the frying-pan, with its long handle, and the copper and tin kettles; to put the one loose in the cart was to blacken and smear all its contents, while the kettles, after a preliminary row-de-row would speedily part company with their bales and lids, batter themselves into uselessness against the sides, and then jump out bodily on to the track. No, having tried many ways with kettles, I have come to the conclusion that only when inside of one another and lashed securely below the centre of the axle where they may jingle in peace are they to be circumvented. As for the frying-pan, having been so often entirely beaten in the attempt to muzzle one, I have long ago given up any thought of rendering innocuous that jingling, banging, crooked, perverse but indispensable adjunct of prairie travel.

The cart cover I have incidentally mentioned; this must be large and light, so as to completely envelope the cart, either as a tent or boat, and is preferable to a tent for light travelling, as it saves the carriage of pins and poles, may be used by the tired traveller much sooner at night, and may be folded in the grey dawn by the still half-asleep voyageur without tripping over pegs or ropes.

### **“Destroyed by the grasshoppers”<sup>121</sup> (September, 1868)**

Everything is destroyed by the grasshoppers; neither grain nor vegetable of any kind are to be found in our gardens or fields. Moreover, the “buffalo hunters,” instead of furnishing their large share of provisions and leather, arrived starving from their usual hunting grounds. Many, during their long excursion through the plains, were reduced to eating their yoke of oxen, or even their horses, and they are now in our midst without a morsel of food. Their friends, the farmers, Scotch, English or French, having no harvest, are unable to assist them; so we have the dreadful prospect of thousands being reduced to famine.

Many, and many times the Red river settlement has been visited by different calamities, and we have often witnessed a great deal of suffering; but the “old settlers” all agree to consider the combined plagues of this year as the worst yet experienced as far as food is concerned. The stock of various provisions is, I may say, completely exhausted in every quarter, and with the best will, it is impossible to meet the wants of the population. No seed of any description for most of the farmers next year, and there is none to be got in the country.

### **“The poor people of this settlement”<sup>122</sup> (September, 1868)**

Sir, – Will you be so kind as to print in the columns of your paper the state of the poor people of this settlement, numbering about 11,000, forming a part of the Hudson’s Bay Territory? By so doing you will make known to the good and generous people of Great Britain the great calamity which surrounds them at the present time.

The grasshoppers came in swarms of countless millions from the north-west on last harvest and destroyed a great portion of the grain and nearly the whole of the vegetable crops, and deposited their eggs in the ground an inch and a half deep, so that if you were to dig to that depth you would see the earth covered with their eggs. There never were seen finer crops in England or Scotland than were here last harvest, and this year they appeared equally good up to June, and the season continues beautiful up to this time. The grasshoppers began to hatch about the end of May and to begin their work of destruction in June, and so complete was it, they would begin on a field of wheat, barley, oats, or potatoes, and leave it as though it were newly ploughed and harrowed, scarcely a weed being left or a particle of anything for the use of mankind. Such is the state of the settlement at this time.

The men who go out to the plains in the spring, and again in the autumn to hunt the buffalo, and who usually bring large supplies into the settlement of dried buffalo and pemmican, met with a failure last autumn, as they scarcely brought any;

---

<sup>121</sup> From A Call for Relief from the Settlers in Selkirk Colony. (1868, September 7). *The Louisville Daily Courier*, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> From Power, M. (1868, September 10). THE RED RIVER SETTLEMENT. *The London Times*, p. 5.



and this spring the hunters came in without a single buffalo, and now, August, some are nearly starving.

The grasshoppers have been leaving all last month, July, when the wind blew direct from north to south, and then between you and the sun you would see a cloud of them going direct south. When the wind changes to any other point they alight and hover round, like a ship at sea waiting for a favourable wind to blow her to her destined port. They have been seen by the men returning from the States about 250 miles from Fort Garry. They are nearly all gone now, thank God!

The most beautiful part of our settlement is from Fort Garry to the White Horse Plains, and from there to the Portage, a distance of about 60 miles, runs the deep flowing Assiniboine, with small farm-houses all along its banks, and with large woods and plains all the way, and in all that distance there is not a fruit or a kernel or a particle of anything left for the use of mankind. [...] The people are hard set to get flour with money in their hands to pay for it, and what will it be when the winter sets in, with 500 miles between them and St. Cloud, the railway terminus at present, and 200 miles of that without an inhabitant or a track, where the winter is from December to the end of March? As Minnesota almost joins our settlement, with a bountiful harvest and millions of bushels of wheat for export, a supply from there could be got if assistance comes before the winter sets in, so that they could go with their carts for it, as it takes about two months to make the trip to and from. The good Bishop of St. Boniface has drained himself to get 1,200 barrels of flour, which he has contracted for in the States, and the town itself, with its resources, may furnish a few hundred more: this makes the total. A few thousand bushels of wheat would be sufficient for food and seed for the next season and make many hearts glad through the coming winter. May Great Britain support her outposts under their great trial, and let not the country go back!

### **Relief from St. Paul<sup>123</sup> (September, 1868)**

The City Council of St. Paul, Minn., has appropriated \$12,000 to relieve the wants of the inhabitants of Selkirk settlement. It is thought sufficient funds have been raised to supply their wants.

### **Informative advertising<sup>124</sup> (November, 1868)**

One of the curiosities of the Northwest is the carts without screw, or bolt, or rivet, or tire, or any other bit of iron. Hundreds of them travel hundreds, some even thousands of miles in an eastern direction to reach the western edge of our advancing civilization. They come from the Selkirk Settlement and all parts of British America,

---

<sup>123</sup> From *The First Frost – Relief for the Selkirk Settlement*. (1868, September 22). *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> From Fleming, W. (1868, November 30). Ironless Carts [Advertisement]. *The Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, p. 8.

under the rule of the Hudson's Bay Company – from the headquarters of the Saskatchewan; from the far shores of Lake Winnipeg, and are drawn by Indian ponies, by single oxen working in shafts and harness made of raw hide. They are driven by half-breed Indians, and sometimes by full-blooded natives of the forest, and one man often takes charge of several carts. They come in caravans, attended by horses, ponies and oxen, to take the place of any that may fall; with cows to supply milk and animals to slaughter. The breaking of the wheels of sixty or a hundred of these vehicles in motion, and the shouting of the drivers can be heard a mile across the prairies; and the arrival of a train in a frontier town creates quite an excitement.

The length of their trips is being gradually curtailed, and in a few years they will no more cross the line into Uncle Sam's dominions, for they cannot compete with iron roads and iron horses. The creaking wooden cart always came laden with furs, but soon must lie and moulder on its grassy way, while the shrieking locomotive thunders past on its iron track. In those days, when the forests will be cleared and all the wilderness blossom as the rose, where are we to get furs? Coats of skin must give place to some manufactured fabric, and muffs and Tibbets must be scarce and dear, or, perhaps, go altogether out of fashion.

When one thinks of it, and how "cold and raw the north winds blow bleak in the morning early," one feels some desire to postpone the good time a-coming, or to lay in a supply of Hudson's Bay and Mink Sable against future need. Those who feel inclined to the latter course will find sympathy and cooperation by calling on Wm. Fleming, No. 139 Wood street, who has more furs, better furs, furs of better quality and greater variety, furs more neatly manufactured, and all sold at from 15 to 25 per cent. less than any other dealer in the Iron City.

### A "new route to Red River"<sup>125</sup> (May, 1869)

The Algoma on her late trip to Sault St. Marie carried nineteen passengers *en route* for the Red River Settlement. They were transshipped into an American steamer by the Sault, by which vessel they are to be conveyed to Superior City, at the head of the Lake. Being provided with their own wagons and horses or oxen, they design to travel over the common road of the country to St. Cloud, and from thence, by the tracks of the Red River carts, to Fort Garry or its neighborhood. One man had a family of nine with him. We have no doubt that this is, at present, the cheapest route to the Selkirk Settlement, and, if generally adopted, it may be for the interest of one or other of the Canadian boats to run to Superior City until our own route<sup>126</sup> is opened. The deck fare from Collingwood to Superior City is about \$12 for an adult, and for each horse and wagon about the same. After landing at Superior City the only question is the cost of traveling by a common road so many hundred miles.

---

<sup>125</sup> From NEW ROUTE TO RED RIVER. (1869, May 27). *The St. Cloud Journal*, p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> That is, a Canadian route.

## “The transfer of the Hudson’s Bay territory”<sup>127</sup> (March, 1869)

On Wednesday Lord Granville’s<sup>128</sup> proposal for the transfer of the Hudson’s Bay territory to the Dominion of Canada will be submitted to the Proprietors of the Company. The question to them is a money question, but it is not one which can be decided by the ordinary calculations of merchants. The power of the Company to make or refuse terms depends in a great degree upon the worth or worthlessness of its ancient title, and upon the present necessities of Colonial and Imperial policy.

In the middle of the 17th Century certain British noblemen and gentlemen, with Prince Rupert<sup>129</sup> at their head, started an expedition to the North-West of America, in the hope of discovering a new passage into the South Sea, and of establishing a trade in furs and minerals. On the strength of this trading adventure, which seems to have been deemed highly patriotic, the promoters applied to the Crown for a monopoly and also for a grant of the whole territory draining into Hudson’s Bay “not already occupied by the subjects of a Christian Prince,” amounting altogether to about one-third of the American Continent. This modest request was at once granted. His Gracious Majesty King Charles II. gave to the applicants a Charter of Incorporation, whereby he constituted the Hudson’s Bay territory a Royal Plantation, under the name of Rupert’s Land, and granted to the Company the fee simple of the soil, together with a monopoly of the trade, and the right to deport to England all intruders, and to make laws and regulations for the government of the Plantation.

For a long period the Charter worked well enough, being then not unsuited to the wants of the country. The sole trade was the fur trade, the existence of gold-bearing strata was not suspected, there were no colonists, no rival traders, no neighbours. The native Indians gave but little trouble; though kept in a state of almost childish dependency, they were as a rule humanely treated, and many of them became officers of the Company – that is, gamekeepers and watchers of their vast preserves. The chief anxiety arose from the armed predatory expeditions of the French, then in possession of Canada. From other quarters and to peaceable colonists the territory was unapproachable, and was generally believed to be a sterile and inhospitable region, good only for martens, beavers, and other fur-bearing animals. But in the skins of these creatures the Company drove a flourishing trade, and from 1690 to 1800 the annual dividends upon their originally subscribed stock amounted to no less than 60 to 70 per cent.

The troubles of the Company commenced with the present century. Their first difficulty was from competition. Canadian capitalists at Montreal started a rival trading association, which not only systematically poached upon the Company’s preserves, but waged a sanguinary war against its officers. After 20 years of this warfare, which for a period brought the dividends of the Company down to zero, peace was effected by the amalgamation of the rival powers. The Hudson’s Bay Company

---

<sup>127</sup> From On Wednesday. (1869, March 22). *The London Times*, p. 8.

<sup>128</sup> Granville Leveson-Gower (1815 – 1891), second Earl Granville.

<sup>129</sup> Prince Rupert of the Rhine (1619 – 1682), Duke of Cumberland and cousin of Charles II.

on an enlarged basis resumed its monopoly, and ever since its proprietors have received a dividend from their shares, though comparatively of a very moderate amount.

Within the last 30 years, however, there has arisen a new difficulty far more serious than that of competition, and one which tends more and more to make the position of the Company untenable – the difficulty consequent upon the spread of colonization. The territory is no longer so inaccessible; settlers in Canada, on one side, and the United States, on the other, continually creeping nearer and nearer. It has, also, been more explored, and found to be by no means so uniformly barren as it had been represented. In its southern part lies a vast tract fit for settlement – prairie land similar in quality to that from which the Ohio and Mississippi spring, and forest land well supplied with water. This is what is called the Fertile Belt; it comprises about two hundred million acres, and stretches from the United States' boundary on the South to the Saskatchewan on the North, and from the Rocky Mountains on the West to Lake Winnipeg on the East. Already it contains an agricultural colony, the Red River Settlement, which was originally a military post, founded by Lord Selkirk in 1812, but which now possesses a population of about 15,000 persons.

On this Fertile Belt neighbouring Canada has cast jealous eyes. Its Government avow that “they look forward with interest to the day when the valley of the Saskatchewan will become the back country of Canada, and the land of hope for the hardy youth of the Province when they seek new homes in the forest.” For prudential reasons the Canadians are willing to treat with the Company, but otherwise they scout as a monstrous pretension the exclusive claims of the Company, whether to trade or territory. The Charter, they say, is a bit of waste paper – any lawyer can pick a hundred holes in it; and, title-deed or no title-deed, it is preposterous that a trading Company should close a continent to colonization in order to preserve it for a hunting-ground. In short, what the claims of the Red Indians in the 17th century were to the Hudson's Bay Company, that and no more, in the 19th, is the claim of the Company in the eyes of the Canadian people.

Equal dangers beset the Company from the South. A report to the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States made in 1866 announces that since the discoveries of gold<sup>130</sup> and silver close to the international border, “rumours of gulches and ledges in the Saskatchewan district yielding even greater prizes to the prospector are already rife, and will soon precipitate a strong, active, and enterprising people into the spacious void. What is called the Americanization of the Red River Settlement has been slow, although sure, since the era of steam navigation, but this Americanization of the Saskatchewan will rush suddenly and soon from the camp of treasure-seekers in Montana.” At present these Montana settlers have remained within the United States' territory, but as they advance they drive before them the

---

<sup>130</sup> “The report concerning the finding of gold on the Saskatchewan River is confirmed by the arrival at St. Cloud, Minnesota, of the express from the Selkirk settlement, Hudson's Bay territory. A small party had arrived at Fort Garry with 1,200 dols. in gold dust, which they dug on the Saskatchewan about one thousand miles from the confluence with Lake Winnipeg.” GOLD IN THE RED RIVER SETTLEMENT. (1861, October 5). *The London Daily News*, p. 7.

native Indians northwards into the domains of the Company, there to work mischief and confusion. Sometimes, again, these Indians commit depredations on the American settlers, and then fly across the border for refuge; and in that case, either the American troops are tempted to follow in pursuit, or the American civil authorities insist upon their rights under the Extradition Treaty. The Company is equally unable to defend the national boundary and to discharge an international obligation. This of itself is a matter of serious concern to the Imperial Government. But, besides this, the Dominion of Canada has been recently constituted by the Confederation of the several Provinces, and it was part of this scheme, as declared by statute, that Rupert's Land should be incorporated, so that the two sides of British North America might no longer be separated by an intermediate proprietary jurisdiction.

The Company, to do it justice, has not been blind to its altered position. In 1863, with a view to its enlarged requirements, it was reconstructed and its capital increased from one million to two. At the same time it made a formal representation to the Colonial Office that "the authority executive and judicial over the Red River Settlement and the south-western portion of Rupert's Land should be vested in officers deriving such authority directly from the Crown and exercising it in the name of Her Majesty." But the Crown declined to undertake this responsibility so long as the soil of the Territory should remain vested in the Company, and the Company itself has done nothing towards colonization, and for reasons which, from its own point of view, were sufficient. As Mr. Roebuck said long ago, "The Hudson's Bay Company is a fur company, and a fur company is in its nature opposed to colonization." Nor does it possess the means to meet the first expenses of colonization. Its capital is quite inadequate even to make its territory accessible. Indeed, last year the inhabitants of the Red River Settlement would have perished of famine if the Canadian Government had not forwarded provisions to them.

The obvious expedient under the circumstances was that the territory of the Company, or at least such part of it as is fit for colonization, should be annexed to Canada; and to this end negotiations between the parties have been carried on during the last six years, through the medium of our successive Colonial Ministers. Hitherto, however, all these negotiations have been in vain; for, though both Canada and the Company are sincerely desirous to strike a bargain, they cannot agree to terms.

An *ultimatum* is offered by Lord Granville. The substance of his proposal is – first, that the Company, in consideration of 300,000*l.* to be paid immediately, and of the right to claim at any time in the course of the next 50 years a gratuitous grant of one-twentieth of the Fertile Belt, shall surrender all its territorial rights to the Dominion of Canada; and, secondly, that the Company shall renounce its monopoly, but shall be permitted to carry on its trade free from any exceptional tax, and for this purpose shall be entitled at once to 50,000 acres in blocks adjoining its present stations. These terms are submitted to both parties for their acceptance. The answer of the Canadian Government is not yet known. The Proprietors of the Hudson's Bay Company are to debate the question on Wednesday, and it is from their point of view that we wish now to consider it.

What, then, is the present sacrifice which the Company is called upon to make? Nothing, as it seems to us, except its trade monopoly. Its territory brings in no revenue, and as a possession is worthless, except as the basis of an exclusive trade. What the difference of value may be between a common right to trade and an exclusive right, it is difficult to say. A monopoly might seem to be important, both because it is intended to bring into the territory colonists who may set up as rivals to the Company, and because the fur trade requires to be placed under regulations in order to enforce a sort of Maine Liquor Law among the Indians, and to protect the breed of wild animals from reckless extermination. But, on the other hand, it will be for the interest of the Canadian Government to protect the fur trade wherever it does not interfere with permanent colonization, and the vastness of the territory and the diversity of climate make it quite possible that the two should be carried on independently. Still, it is from this quarter, if from any, that loss is to be apprehended.

On the other hand, what would be the present gain to the Company? The transaction would at once relieve the shareholders of what is now a considerable charge – the expense of governing the Territory, and give them besides a lump sum of 300,000*l.*, or a permanent addition, say, of 15,000*l.* per annum to their present revenue. This may seem a small price for a vast continent. It does not amount, we believe, to so much as one halfpenny per acre on the whole territory, and in the course of previous negotiations the sum usually named was a million sterling. But this million, it must be remembered, was only a possible maximum, and had, moreover, to be discounted, the extent of its realization being declared contingent upon the receipts for 50 years from land sales and mining royalties, which for some time would probably yield nothing at all. It is not so very long ago that the Company took a lease for ten years of the whole of Vancouver's Island for an annual rent of 5*s.*, and at the end of the term were glad to be quit of the burden. Further, while exempted from all the expense, hazard, and responsibility of a colonizing speculation, the Company would share in the profit, if any profit be made. It will be entitled to claim one-twentieth of the two hundred million acres which constitute the Fertile Belt. Ten million acres, one might think, should suffice for any Company.

Shareholders should also bear in mind that, after all, Canada is the only market for their territory. A sale to the United States is out of the question; so is a sale to private purchasers. Great Britain will certainly not constitute Rupert's Land a separate Crown Colony, and with their own resources alone the Company cannot hope to carry on the work of settlement on any large scale.

Lastly, and this is perhaps the strongest point, the *status quo* cannot be maintained. The Company is not to be let alone. Lord Granville has given notice that in the event of his proposal being rejected by either party, he will have the rights of the Company under its Charter tested by a reference to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, whose decision will serve as a basis for future legislation. For the Company to provoke so doubtful an issue, in the face of such an offer, would, in our opinion, be a suicidal policy.

## “The new northwest”<sup>131</sup> (June, 1869)

Canada will not take possession of Central British America in June. The chariot of the Dominion lingers. The McTavish<sup>132</sup>, with all his royalties as Chief of the Fur Trade and Governor of Assiniboia, has returned to Fort Garry, and will await, with his accustomed patience, the appointment and arrival of a Canadian successor. [...] As factor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, in command of the great centre of distribution to fifty remote posts, his duties are sufficiently arduous; but, in addition, since the settlement of Minnesota, he has found his function of civil magistrate greatly complicated by the advent of a considerable migration from Canada and the United States. The only government, legislative and judicial, was by appointment of the company, a circumstance fruitful of jealousy and turmoil; and the wonder is that the public peace has been so well preserved. The McTavish administration has been eminently wise and conciliatory, but its authority will be gladly surrendered to Canadian Commissioners. [...]

The Canadian Parliament has been in session for a month, but we hear of no measures at Ottawa, accepting the terms of the compact recently executed in London with the Hudson’s Bay Company. “What is the matter?” begins to be asked by observers of the Northwest question. [...] With the concurrence of Canada will cease all further controversy – itself a fact of great commercial value. Then Canada is to pay the company \$1,500,000 for the possession of the territory with the corresponding obligation to occupy, improve and govern it; the company retaining all their trading posts and land enclosing them not exceeding an aggregate of 50,000 acres, and also retaining one-twentieth of the “Fertile Belt”. [...] The landed estate of the company, thus re-conveyed by an unquestionable title, will be 10,000,000 acres, representing a marketable value of as many dollars, with the establishment of a provincial government. [...]

Meanwhile great excitement prevails in the Selkirk Settlement. That community of 12,000 souls, founded half a century ago in a wilderness, is now reached by the American frontier of population. Steamers, built and owned in Minnesota, navigate the Red River of the North, and, before the close of 1870, will receive and discharge at a station of the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad. All communications, commercial and postal, are at present through Minnesota. In the face of these facts and tendencies, the Dominion of Canada assumes jurisdiction in Selkirk and Saskatchewan. The noble ambition of securing a Great West – a theatre ample for the migration of the Eastern Provinces and the relief of English want – is announced and justified as indispensable to the existence and prosperity of Canadian nationality. [...]

I have good reason for the opinion that the Hudson’s Bay Company – now that “all the clouds that low’red upon their house are in the deep ocean buried”<sup>133</sup> – will second most heartily all forward movements. Their ten million acre reserve,

---

<sup>131</sup> From THE NEW NORTHWEST. (1869, June 1). *The Chicago Tribune*, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> William Mactavish (1815 – 1870) was Governor of Rupert’s Land.

<sup>133</sup> A quote from Shakespeare’s *Richard III*.

distributed by regular allotment over the region capable of supporting a dense agricultural population, is now merely a hunting range, incapable of any statement of commercial value; but with responsible and strong government, with the survey of lands, with a Homestead act, with steamboat navigation on the magnificent water-courses of the country, and with ample provision by grants of land and government subsidies for a Canada Pacific Railroad – surely “the adventurers trading into Hudson’s Bay” may be pardoned for sanguine views of their future success as land speculators.

### “A curious state of affairs”<sup>134</sup> (November, 1869)

The telegram from Canada announces a curious state of affairs at the Red River Settlement. The French inhabitants, we are told, have armed and banded themselves together to resist the cession of their territory to Canada; and they have, it seems, forcibly compelled the Governor elect, Mr. M’Dougall<sup>135</sup>, to cross over into the American state of Dakotah, where, it is said, he awaits armed assistance or instructions from the Canadian Government. Moreover, we are informed that these insurgents “demand separate territorial Government and an Elective Legislature.”

It must be confessed that this outbreak is of a very strange and very unexpected character. If there was one part of British North America more than another that seemed to benefit from the transfer of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s territories – in which it is situated – it is the Red River Settlement. This colony is at the eastern extremity of the “Fertile Belt” which Canada is so anxious to open up, and the first step towards this consummation would naturally be to connect the Red River with Lake Superior by a good communication that would dispel the isolation in which the Settlement has existed since founded. Indeed, so anxious has Canada been in this respect that, even in anticipation of the transfer to it of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s territories, it has been vigorously engaged in constructing a road to the Red River Settlement.

Hitherto the accounts that have reached us from this colony have represented the inhabitants as delighted with the prospect of the rapid development to ensue on annexation to Canada, and as watching the progress of the new communication with great interest and satisfaction. The election, too, of Mr. M’Dougall – one of the most energetic and able of Canadian statesmen – as the future Governor of the North-west Territory appeared to have been highly approved of, and great results have been expected from his administration. The outbreak, then, was one wholly unlooked for, and if not inexplicable, at all events it seems quite indefensible.

Who and what are these objectors to the utilization and development of the vast tract of magnificent land to the north-west of Canada now lying idle and waste? They are, apparently, the descendants of the French colonists who occupied a great portion of the country held by the French before the cession to England a hundred

---

<sup>134</sup> From The telegram from Canada. (1869, November 19). *The London Morning Post*, p. 4.

<sup>135</sup> William McDougall (1822 – 1905). His death was due to complications from falling out of a moving train.



years ago. Having lived for so long a time under the mild and almost powerless sway of the Hudson's Bay Company, and so remote from the civilized world, these inhabitants of the Red River district may have dreaded the more vigorous Government of Canada as likely to disturb the simplicity and independence of their existence. But whatever may have been their sentiments on the subject, it is difficult to say whether the action they have taken is very ridiculous or very improper. For one section of a weak community actually to take up arms in opposition to a policy approved by the other section, and a policy comporting entirely with the recognized circumstances and necessities of the case, is to act foolishly and futilely, and to incur ridicule as well as punishment.

The policy to which these people have taken exception is one long foreseen and suggested by the Imperial Government. In 1864 Mr. Cardwell, in writing to Lord Monck<sup>136</sup>, observed that if the proposed cession of the Hudson's Bay Company's territories to Canada should take place, it would be necessary "to make provision for the government of the Red River Settlement," as well as prospectively of such parts of the territory as might from time to time become settled and occupied. A Committee of the House of Commons, also, in reporting upon the state of the British possessions in North America in 1857, stated that the Red River and the Saskatchewan districts were those that appeared most likely to be desired for early occupation, and that as it was of great importance that their peace and good order should be effectually secured, they trusted that arrangements might be made between the Imperial Government and the Hudson's Bay Company, by which those districts should be ceded to Canada, the authority of the company entirely ceasing. In accordance, then, with these views, arrangements have been made, and are all but completed, for the assumption by Canada of the government of the country in question so soon as the transfer of the territory has been formally completed. [...]

The Settlement is still actually under the rule of the Hudson's Bay Company, although virtually transferred to Canada through the Crown. If, then, the Hudson's Bay Company makes over all its rights and powers to the Crown, and the Crown bestows these on Canada, the Red River Settlement passes legally and absolutely under the sway of Canada, and for any portion of the inhabitants to oppose the new authority set up must be an act of rebellion, and as such must – if grave enough to be taken seriously – be treated.

### **"A little rebellion and revolution"<sup>137</sup> (December, 1869)**

There is a little rebellion and revolution going on in this out-of-the-way corner of Queen Victoria's dominions. Governor McDougall, who was recently appointed to rule over the few people there settled, has been repudiated by them, and is quietly lying his oars waiting to see what will turn up. He has no military force with which to assert and maintain his authority, so the revolution is quite bloodless. [...]

---

<sup>136</sup> Charles Stanley Monck (1819 – 1894), first Governor-General of Canada.

<sup>137</sup> From THE RED RIVER COUNTRY. (1869, December 4). *The Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, p. 2.

The Selkirk Settlement is cut off from the other British dominions, but it has a direct and easy road to St. Anthony and St. Paul, and there the people do pretty much all their trading. They have now a provisional government, and are deliberating in a quiet way about annexing themselves to the United States, and the affair is very likely to end in that.

### **“The difficulty at the Red River”<sup>138</sup> (December, 1869)**

We wonder how many members of the British public, interested in ordinary political intelligence, have attained any definite ideas of the circumstances, or the scene, of that singular little insurrection against the authority of her Majesty which is, or was a few weeks ago, in vigour on the Red River Settlement. [...] The settlers are described as reveling in rude abundance; their only drawback the absolute impossibility hitherto of exporting their overplus or importing the commodities of civilized life except through the distant waters of Hudson’s Bay, open only two or three months in the year.

On this secluded island in the wilderness dwell some twelve or fifteen thousand British subjects – farmers, hunters, fishermen. They have been very mildly governed for some fifty years past by the Hudson’s Bay Company; they have a bishop and clergy, a recorder, a governor, with all appliances found for them at very trifling expense to themselves. And so long as the late Mr. Ellice, popularly termed the Bear, lived, they had in England a kind of pope, or head lama, whom they venerated at a distance, and who was ever active and vigilant in protecting them against the dreaded invasion of foreigners, British or American. For the truth is that the Hudson’s Bay Company petted and encouraged these simple folks for good reasons of its own. Its rulers were excessively anxious to prevent interlopers from meddling with their fur trade to the North, and they were always ready to point to this “thriving agricultural community” as a proof that they had a soul for greater things than the pursuit of fur-bearing animals – that they were, in truth, enlightened patrons of colonization.

It might have been thought that a community so secluded and so cared for would at least be at peace within itself. But, alas for the imperfection of human nature! Nothing could be farther from the fact. Ever since its foundation by Lord Selkirk sixty years ago the settlement has been a scene of permanent intestine division. It has two persuasions – Anglican and Roman Catholic; two languages – English and French; with numbers nearly equal, with a considerable dose of the savage Indian element at the service of either party when required. Its foundations were laid in strife. Lord Selkirk brought there a stock of hardy Highlanders from Sutherland and established them under the protection of the Hudson’s Bay Company. But the North West Company of Montreal strove with the former for their vast monopoly, or a share of it. They surrounded the infant colony with a cordon of “half-breeds” – offspring of Canadians and Indian women, popularly termed “Les Bois Brulés;” and ultimately actual war broke out between them.

---

<sup>138</sup> From THE DIFFICULTY AT THE RED RIVER. (1869, December 14). *The Pall Mall Gazette*, p. 1.

The Scots were for a time outnumbered by their wild enemies. Governor Semple, a brave and righteous man, was killed in a skirmish in 1816. Then the authorities on both sides got frightened, and peace was made. The companies coalesced. And the little settlement – like infant Rome – was made to admit within one ring fence its Romans and Sabines – British settlers and half-breeds on the one side, Canadian half-breeds on the other – to live together on as good terms as they might. This the colonists accomplished judiciously by settling apart at the opposite ends of the occupied ground. Since that time a kind of hollow peace has prevailed between them, but not without interruptions.

In 1836 “a person styling himself General Dickson, of the Indian Liberating Army – one of those premature filibusters whom America has so often sent forth – came from Washington and made an effort to seduce the servants of the company with the pretended object of uniting all the Indians in one nation, of which he was to be the chief, under the title of Montezuma, the Second.” He, his brigadier, aides-de-camp, and officers, “dressed in grand uniforms,” were overtaken by winter, and reached Red River in sorry plight – poor Montezuma with the loss of his toes – where the company, from the very necessity of the case, were compelled to feed and warm their enemies until they could be sent home in the summer.

About 1847 a gentleman named Isbister<sup>139</sup>, who had, we think, been in the service of the company, aimed at effecting the liberation of the settlers from its government, arousing a considerable spirit of opposition to it in this country, and somewhat dangerous disaffection – so its servants complained – among the people themselves. But the danger passed away, and little more was heard of “Assiniboia,” except its new and ambitious name, until it was sold, with other territories, by the Hudson’s Bay Company to the Home Government on behalf of Canada, and Canada was finally placed in possession.

We now receive information that this transfer has been the signal for disaffection and revolt. The governor sent from Canada, Mr. MacDougal, making his

---

<sup>139</sup> A letter from Mr. Isbister, dated March 22, 1848, was read in the British parliament in 1849. It reads, in part: “The chief evil arising out of the present system of administration, [...] is the anti-colonizing spirit manifested by the Hudson’s Bay Company. Were their monopoly simply confined, as it should be, to the fur trade, and were they themselves the active agents in procuring the commodities they bring to market, it injurious operation would be less felt. Not satisfied, however, with this important and lucrative privilege, they lay claim equally to all the productions of the country, exercise a species of property in the natives, and an absolute right in the soil, of which they will neither make any beneficial use themselves nor suffer others. For a period of nearly two centuries, [...] an immense territory [...] has been suffered to remain in the condition of a wilderness, and its capabilities and resources been studiously concealed or misrepresented, for the selfish purpose of retaining it as an immense park for wild beasts, equally unprofitable to the nation and to its own inhabitants. [...] Not an European emigrant, scarcely even a visitor, has been permitted to approach the [Red River] colony; the settlers have found themselves subjected to the same jealous and illiberal policy which characterizes the operations of the fur trade; their energies paralysed by inquisitorial and vexatious restrictions, and they themselves cut off from all communication with their fellow subjects of Great Britain, and exposed to the contamination of the worst class of the citizens of a neighbouring state, those who, everywhere infesting the outskirts of civilization, are emancipated from all law and restraint themselves, and are the bane of all public order and tranquility among those with whom they come in contact.” IMPERIAL PARLIAMENT. (1849, June 20). *The London Morning Chronicle*, p. 2.

way to his post through the United States, there being, in fact, no other road, has been stopped on the frontier by armed men, and remains at Pembina, in Minnesota, issuing mild proclamations to his obstinate subjects. But there is one feature in the case which, with our present information, we are quite unable to explain. It is this: that the malcontents are represented as belonging, not to the British, but to the Canadian section of the people; it is the “Bois Brulés,” the French-speaking half-breeds, who are “barring out” their Canadian governor, and pronouncing in this angry way against union with a dominion largely inhabited by their own original fellow-countrymen. The British section, full and half breeds, are said, on the other hand, to be favourable to the change, or to acquiesce in it. These things require explanation.

### **“The Red River people and their leaders”<sup>140</sup> (January, 1870)**

From the letter of a Canadian correspondent at the scene of the action:

Unfortunately for Canadians coming to this country, they are impressed with the idea that half-breeds are a sort of half-and-half specimen of humanity. This idea of the people of the country is not only unfortunate, but uncalled for. The word half-breed merely signifies where there is a tinge more or less of Indian blood. Whoever started the term breed ought to have been choked before he had time to apply it to human beings. There are very few of us nowadays who have not a mixture of composition – our mother, perhaps, being an English woman, and our father a Scotchman or Irishman – therefore the term is as much applicable to us as to those who have Indian blood in their veins; and for this reason I would advise strangers to attach no erroneous idea to it, for I have seen as good half-breeds as I have seen white men. Some of the finest ladies in the settlement have Indian blood in their veins, and more lady-like, courteous and pleasant gentlewomen I never met in my life.

Louis Riel<sup>141</sup>, the Commander-in-Chief of the insurgents, is a Scotch half-breed. He is a farmer and was special constable under the Government of the Hudson’s Bay Company. He is intelligent and of good standing in his community. Mr. Donohue, who, with the President and Secretary, form the rebel Executive Committee of three, and who is also a member of the Council, is a young man of extensive education, and a polished, genial gentleman. He is twenty-eight years of age, of tall figure, light hair and complexion. He was born in the United States, and it is said that his Irish courage and activity [are a] valuable assistance to the patriot cause in Rupert’s Land. [...]

Governor McDougall’s neck seems too stiff for this climate. It is generally conceded that he is a splendid stump speaker, and that he was giving, as agitator, so much trouble to the ministerial party in Canada, that, immediately after the transfer of the Hudson’s Bay territory, he was called to England and bought over, and in order to get him out of the way they appointed him Governor for the Selkirk settlement. Nevertheless, it is also said that Mr. McDougall is respected for his quiet firmness.

---

<sup>140</sup> From *The Red River People and their Leaders*. (1870, January 6). *The Burlington Free Press*, p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Spelled ‘Reil’ in the original.

## By an officer of the expeditionary force<sup>142</sup> (1870)

Whilst two great powers were preparing for that fearful war which is now devastating the provinces of France, a small military expedition was being organized on the shores of Lake Superior for an advance into the Red River Territory. The writer of this article has just returned from Fort Garry, having taken an active part in the many wild adventures by flood and field encountered during the recent march there, participating in the excessive toil and constant exposure entailed upon all ranks during that curiously interesting operation. It had been determined upon in the spring, and the circumstances which necessitated it may be briefly described as follows.

After many years of fruitless negotiation between Canada and the Hudson's Bay Company, in which England acted as a sort of go-between or mutual friend, it was arranged, in 1869, that the undefined country officially known as Rupert's Land, together with all the territorial rights appertaining to the Company in North America, should be transferred to the recently-established Dominion of Canada for the sum of £300,000. That was practically the arrangement; but there was a three-cornered ceremony to be gone through first, in accordance which, those vast outlying portions of the empire were to be legally transferred on paper to England, and then made over by royal proclamation to the Dominion.

The country had long been in the possession of the Hudson's Bay Company, who had received a charter in 1670 from Charles II., granting them sovereign rights over a large portion of the North American continent. In the days of that gallant monarch our geographical knowledge of the western hemisphere was but small, and consequently the description of the limits given over to their jurisdiction, as recorded in the charter, was very vague. It may be fairly assumed that this uncertainty of title was one of the chief causes why the Company had never been desirous of having its claims inquired into before the courts of law.

In 1783 a rival trading company – the “North-Western” – was started; and in 1812 Lord Selkirk attempted to form a colony of Sutherlandshire Highlanders on the Red River, but the attempt was little better than a failure. These two companies – the Hudson's Bay and the North-Western – having contended with one another for the valuable fur-trade of the country to their mutual injury, and until both were nearly ruined, united in the year 1822, both being since then merged in one under the ancient title of the Hudson's Bay Company.

In order to carry on commercial operations, it was essential to have a certain number of white men at each of their numerous posts scattered over the continent from its western shores to where Canadian civilization, advancing from the Atlantic, was met with. Each of these posts soon became the nucleus of a small community. European women were scarce, and communication with England was both difficult

---

<sup>142</sup> AN OFFICER OF THE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE. (1870). Narrative of the Red River Expedition. *Blackwood's Magazine*, CVIII(DCLXII), 704-718.

and tedious; so men were obliged to content themselves with Indian wives, and a half-breed population was the result. For inland navigation along the many lakes and rivers that form such a network over a large proportion of our North American possessions, there is no better man than the French Canadian voyageur. A large number of them have always been in the Hudson's Bay service, which accounts for the fact of the French and English languages being spoken by about equal numbers on the banks of the Red River. The language of the voyageur class, no matter from what race he may have sprung, has long been French; and the officers of the Company, speaking both languages, have always found it simpler to speak French than to take any trouble to teach their servants English.

French Canadian priests and Jesuit missionaries from France soon established themselves everywhere under the protection of the Company, and, with their usual zeal, quickly built up for their Church a considerable following amongst the families of a mixed origin. People conversant with the ways of priestcraft in other countries will easily understand the influence they obtained amongst a rural and scattered population, in such an isolated place as Red River. Although the Hudson's Bay Company officers were the rulers *de jure*, the priests were so *de facto*.

At first sight it may appear strange that this could take place in a settlement where the Protestants and Romanists were about equal in numbers; but when it is remembered that the former consisted of several nationalities, and of still more numerous sects without any one recognized ruler, and with many divergent interests, it can readily be understood how the smaller half, acting and voting as a unit under the direction of a clever wily bishop, backed up by a well-disciplined staff of obedient priests, maintained an unquestioned supremacy. So much was this the case, that the legal rulers were only too glad to govern through their influence.

Two great influences were at work preventing the occupation of these prairies. First, the Hudson's Bay Company; and secondly, the Roman Catholic priesthood.

To have opened them out for colonization would have been suicidal to a Company enjoying the monopoly of the Indian trade. It would also have seriously affected the supply of fur, as the number of wild animals decreases in a geometrical ratio, whilst population goes on increasing only in an arithmetical one. Its governing body has therefore for years back endeavoured in a quiet way to keep the country as unknown and as much to themselves as possible, and to deter emigrants from going there by depreciating its value in the eyes of the world; so much so, that many believed it to be a desert, where grasshoppers ruled in summer, and an almost life-destroying cold in winter.

As for the Roman Catholic priesthood, they were desirous of gradually building up there another French province, where the language, religion, and laws of Lower Canada might be perpetuated, and which in times to come might, in conjunction with it, be some counterpoise to the steadily-increasing, and by them much dreaded, preponderance of Ontario. They hoped to mould the Red River into what they would have described as a peaceable, orderly, and contented people, but which, in the exact and cold-blooded language of Protestantism, meant an ignorant and superstitious peasantry, recognizing only as law that which was denounced from their altars;

destitute of education, except such as their priestly teachers thought fit to give them; taught only the *patois* which passes current there for French, so that they should be unable to read English papers; and only just sufficiently well off in that fertile land to enable them to lead a lazy, idle life. In fine, both Company and priesthood were determined to oppose an emigration which would be destructive to the trading monopoly of the one, and to the unquestioned authority of the other. Both combined in describing the country as unfit for settlement; and quite recently a Roman Catholic bishop, who has long resided in the north-west, published an interesting work upon that country, but full of startling statements as to the fearful severity of its climate, and of its general unsuitability for farming purposes. He endeavoured as far as possible to depreciate its value politically, so as to have deterred the Government of Canada from taking steps towards opening out communication with it.

Canada, a thickly-wooded country, only affords a home to settlers after years of toil spent in clearing the land. The western province, now known as Ontario, has long been the go-ahead portion of British North America, whilst that to the east, now called Quebec, was always lethargic, progress being neither known nor desired there. The former is Protestant, and traditionally loyal to the English Crown; whilst the latter is as priest-ridden as Spain, and peopled by a race of French origin, whose loyalty is only comparative, and as it were a choice between two evils – that is, between English and American rule. The priestly party know well that under the latter neither their religion, their language, nor their vast Church property would be protected as it is by us; indeed it is doubtful if even their language and customs would be tolerated; so that there is much more of resignation than of cordiality in their adherence to our sway.

The inhabitants of these two provinces lying side by side – not even divided by any natural boundary, as England is from France – have always maintained their original national characteristics. Those of Quebec evince a contentedness with their lot in life, and a dislike to change of all sorts, not only as regards their manners and customs, but even their place of residence; whilst those of Ontario, descended from British ancestors, retain that love of adventure and that spirit of enterprise for which our countrymen are so generally celebrated.

The men of Ontario have always suspected the truth of the statements made regarding the great prairie country which every one knew lay between the Red River and the Rocky Mountains. For years back their gaze has been fixed upon that territory, longing for the privilege of planting it with grain, and of establishing themselves in a country where rumour said that luxuriant crops were obtainable without either the labour of clearing it from timber or the cost of manuring it.

The distance from Canada was so great, and the intervening difficulties were of such magnitude, that it was practically out of the power of farmers or of the ordinary class of emigrants to make a journey there. Unless, therefore, Government stepped in, and, by opening out roads and improving the almost continuous line of water communication existing between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods, enabled the working class to reach Fort Garry at a reasonable cost, the Red River country never could be settled by British subjects.

A few disinterested travelers, such as English officers on leave, bent on buffalo-hunting, now and then penetrated into this much-aspered land, and came back telling of its boundless plains and unparalleled fertility; but as it is the English fashion to pooh-pooh information coming from such sources, their reports received but little attention.

The secret was tolerably well kept for many years; but at last so much pressure was put upon the Canadian Government that an exploring expedition was despatched by it in 1858, with orders to report fully upon the resources of the North-West Territory. The results of these explorations were published the following year, and the people of Canada learnt, on official authority, that it was fertile beyond the most sanguine expectations. A few settlers from Ontario soon after established themselves in the neighbourhood of Fort Garry, and so gave birth to a party whose policy was progress, and whose constant repeated demand was – “Open out communication between us and Canada; let us have plenty of emigrants: all we require is population and facilities for carrying our produce to a market.” It was soon known as the “Canadian Party;” and its feeling was disseminated throughout the neighbouring provinces through the columns of a newspaper established under its auspices at the village of Winnipeg in the neighbourhood of Fort Garry.

As may easily be understood, this party of progress soon came into collision with those already described as bent upon keeping back the country, giving birth to very angry feelings between the two sections into which public opinion thus became divided. As all Canadians who had settled there, backed up by the press of Ontario, were on one side, and the great mass of the French-speaking people on the other, the difference of opinion coincided with difference of origin, the parties quickly assumed a national aspect, and the priests endeavoured to give it a religious one also.

The Hudson’s Bay Company being governed by a Board of Directors in London, who were aloof from the direct influence of local feeling, was first of the two divisions comprising the reactionary party to perceive that the time had arrived when they must choose between withdrawing from their hitherto obstructive policy with profit to themselves, or seeing their power to obstruct taken forcibly from them. A disposition on their part to treat for the voluntary surrender of their undefined and disputed rights soon resulted in a bargain being arranged in 1869, by which they were to receive the sum already stated, retaining possession of all their forts and posts, together with a large acreage of land in their vicinity.

The Ministry of Canada, backed up by public opinion throughout the country, at once had a Bill passed for the establishment of a government in this newly-acquired province. We are warned by a French proverb, that the first step in all transactions is a most important one; and that taken by the Dominion Government towards establishing their authority was no exception to the rule. Their first direct step was to send forward surveyors to plot out the country into townships; and this was the actual circumstance that gave rise to the first overt act of rebellion on the part of the French people there. The men employed upon this service, as well as their assistants and followers, were all either from England or from Ontario, and therefore seem to have thought themselves entitled to look down with a sort of patronizing pity



upon the half-breed race already occupying, or as many thought encumbering, the soil there. Around these surveyors, as round a centre, were collected a small band of Canadians, who had followed in their wake, hoping to obtain large grants of land and make fortunes when the new Government was established.

The people of the country were thoroughly discontented at the cavalier way in which they had been treated, as their will had never been consulted by any of the three parties who had arranged the terms of transfer. A feeling of irritation was abroad, which the bearing of the surveyors and other Canadians towards them served to increase beyond measure. Many of the latter began to stake out farms for themselves, which they openly declared they meant to claim as soon as the new Governor had arrived.

The Hudson's Bay Company officials residing in the territory were loud-spoken in denouncing the bargain entered into by their Directors in London; they said it injured them materially, without providing any compensation for the loss they were about to sustain; that they, the working bees of the hive, were to receive nothing, whilst the drones of stockholders in England were to get all the honey in the shape of the £300,000.

The English-speaking farmers, although thoroughly loyal, and anxious for annexation to Canada, so as to be delivered from what many called the "thralldom of the Hudson's Bay Company," regarded the terms of the transfer in no favourable light. They thought they should have been consulted; and the injudicious silence of the Canadian Ministry with reference to the form of government to be established, caused many divisions amongst this party. Although they would have scorned to take part in any actual resistance against the establishment of the new order of things, yet they were by no means sorry to see the Ottawa Ministry in difficulties. They considered themselves slighted, and were sulky in consequence. They had no intention of giving themselves any trouble to aid a Government that had not only failed to consult or consider their interests, but had ignored their existence altogether.

With the exception, therefore, of the small handful of Canadian adventurers already alluded to, no one residing in the settlement in 1869 was pleased with the arrangement, and many were loud-spoken in denouncing it. Where such active elements of discontent existed, it may easily be imagined how simple it was to fan the smouldering embers into the flame of active rebellion.

The previous political history of the country was curious, from the fact of there never having been any active government whatever. There was nominally a Governor and a Council, in whom resided all sovereign powers. A lawyer's clerk had been converted into a judge by the Hudson's Bay Company, and consequently there was an impression abroad, be it true or untrue, that no one could look for impartial justice being done in any case in which that corporation was interested. There was a code of laws, but there was no police, so the rulers had to depend upon a few special constables sworn in from time to time as required, for the execution of the law's decree.

Upon several occasions the law had been forcibly resisted with success: men condemned to imprisonment in suits in which the Company was interested had been released from their cells under the walls of Fort Garry by a crowd of sympathizing friends, who had assembled for that purpose. Not many years ago four men had combined together and proclaimed a republic. One was named president, and two others appointed the principal ministers of this Lilliputian government. Among the first acts of this self-constituted trinity was a decree condemning the fourth conspirator to death. This fourth man was a German tailor, and as he constituted in his own person the whole of the population recognizing the authority of these *soi-distant* rulers, there was no one to carry the sentence into execution. Whether it was owing to the discredit which this powerlessness to enforce their decrees brought upon them, or from the general loyalty of the people to British institutions, we know not; but this republic was as short-lived as a butterfly, and its appearance and disappearance caused as little excitement and had as little influence upon the Red River world as would the advent or departure of such an insect.

This trifling incident is merely related to convey an idea of the state of society which existed there up to 1868. The people lived in peace and harmony with one another. They paid no taxes, and were so little accustomed to the machinery of a government, or the responsibilities of having to make laws or administer them themselves, that when these few adventurers tried to impress upon their minds the glories resulting from the exercise of the noble right of self-government, following up their lessons by proclaiming a republic, the inhabitants of the Red River Territory merely laughed.

The only politics which existed – and they were of recent growth – consisted in being for or against the Hudson's Bay Company. A monopoly must always be obnoxious to the majority, and never even in feudal times has there been a more rigid one than that established formerly throughout the great North-West by that corporate body. No one else could import anything into the country, or send any furs out of it; and it may be said that no one could either buy or sell except from the Hudson's Bay officials. Even at this moment the whole of the inland communications are in its hands, and no banking arrangements can be made except through its agents. Notwithstanding the heavy expenses entailed by the conveyance of goods over the great distances that separate the country from civilization, yet it will always be to many a subject for wonder how it was that the Company generally was not tenfold richer. Even since the monopoly of trade was abolished, the Company still practically received a percentage in some way or another upon every business transaction that took place.

The only export from the country was fur: an Indian comes to sell skins; after some bargaining he agrees to take so much money for them. He is paid in powder, shot, or other goods, which are sold to him at a great profit, whilst the purchased articles are exported to Europe, and again sold at a great profit. In this way a double advantage is obtained; and consequently it is very strange that the affairs of the Company have not been for some years back in as flourishing a condition as they

might have been. There is only one solution to be arrived at, which is, that it has long been very badly served and administered abroad.

The enemies of the Company were numerous in Canada, and had made themselves felt even within its own territory of Rupert's Land. Every year added to their numbers. Those born there said their poverty was owing to the country being cut off from all outside trade and emigration by the direct action the Company took to keep things *in status quo*. All Canadians or others who penetrated into the country and settled there joined this discontented party, which had assumed such importance previous to the arrangements being made for the transfer of the country, that had the Company refused to comply with it and persisted in its former policy of seclusion, it would soon doubtless have had all power forcibly wrested from it by the Canadian party within its own territories.

Unfortunately the arrangement entered into had an air of purchase about it, and a cry resounded throughout the North-West that its inhabitants were being bought and sold like so many cattle. With such a text the most commonplace of democrats could preach for hours; and poor indeed must have been their clap-trap eloquence if an ignorant and impressionable people such as those at Red River had not been aroused by it.

The surveyors were at work all through the autumn of 1869, and in prosecuting their operations frequently ran chain-lines across the farms of men whose language they could not speak, and with whom they had no feelings in common. A report soon got abroad that the Canadian Government intended possessing themselves of all the land for the purpose of allotting it among the host of emigrants who, rumour said, were to follow the establishment of the new order of things. A large proportion of the farmers could produce no title-deeds to the lands they claimed; many could not even assert what is generally recognized as the outward visible symbol of possession in such matters, namely, the fact of their being fenced in. The country had never been regularly laid off for settlement; but according as each successive settler occupied land, he had followed the example of those who had done so before him – that is, he nominally “took up” 100 acres, abutting with a narrow frontage on the river, but fenced in only the few acres nearest the water, on which he built his house, and which alone he placed under cultivation. In rear of this undefined plot of land extended the prairie, over which, to a depth of two miles with a breadth equal to the river frontage, the farmer exercised by custom a right of cutting hay. There was no market for produce: as the nearest railway station was about 600 miles distant in the United States, the export of grain was practically impossible; and there was no internal demand for it, as every settler grew enough corn for his own consumption. The consequence was, that not more than a few acres of each farm, as has been already stated, was ever cultivated or fenced in, the remainder of the 100 acres being allowed to remain in its primeval condition.

A few restless spirits, such as are ever to be found in all countries, saw in the state of affairs which we have endeavoured to describe an opportunity for action. They went round in the autumn of 1869 among the French-speaking population of the community, preaching resistance to the Canadian Government. Every feeling that

stirs mankind was appealed to. They were called upon to be men, and by their courage to save themselves from having their lands taken from them and distributed amongst others, and their altars from being desecrated. They were told over and over again that Canada intended to destroy their religion, and to overrun their country with a heretical population, who regarded them as an inferior race and who would ignore their rights. Their priesthood encouraged this feeling, and aided the movement in that underhand manner for which it is celebrated.

At the head of this rising was a man named Louis Riel. He was born of French Canadian parents, who had emigrated to the Red River; and although he had not a drop of Indian blood in his veins, he had a large number of half-breed relations and connections; and in order to identify himself as much as possible with the people, he invariably spoke of himself as a half-breed. He had been educated at a Roman Catholic school in Canada, and at one time it was hoped he would have entered the Church. Instead of doing so, however, he became a clerk in a shop at St. Paul's, Minnesota, where he resided for a few years, but was eventually dismissed for dishonesty. His prospects being thus under a cloud, he returned to the neighbourhood of Fort Garry, and lived in the greatest poverty with his mother. So indigent were their circumstances that, finding himself succeeding in his *rôle* of demagogue, and considering it necessary to be the possessor of a black cloth coat, he was obliged to sell his mother's only cow to procure the money required for that purpose. He is a man of considerable moral determination, although all who know him say that he is wanting in physical courage. His command of language is great, and his power over his audience immense. He speaks English intelligently, and his proclamations denote considerable talent and power of thought.

The first overt act of resistance was in October 1869, when Riel, followed by a few half-breeds, warned a surveying party to desist from their work, and insisted on their moving their camp out of the district where they were employed. Meetings were then called in the various parishes where the French predominated, at which Riel and others made inflammatory speeches. The people were thoroughly aroused; and even the priests, who generally kept as much as possible in the background, preached resistance to the Canadian Government from their altars.

A Mr. William M'Dougall had been selected by the Dominion Ministry to be the Lieutenant-Governor of the newly-acquired province. It was a most injudicious appointment, as everyone who knew that gentleman was perfectly aware at the time<sup>143</sup>. He had been for many years back in political life, having been previously well

---

<sup>143</sup> "He [Governor M'Dougall] is well known to be in favor of Canadian annexation to the United States, although he does not publicly advance such ideas, annexation being with him something to be attained only after a long, careful and patient struggle. When he first arrived at St. Paul he talked very freely of his plans and stated that among the first public works which he should inaugurate would be a telegraph and railroad from Fort Garry to connect with those in Minnesota. He evidently looked forward to the early annexation of the Red River country to the Union, and from the fact that his relations with American public men have given him in Canada the *sobriquet* of 'the Washington fox,' it is reasonably suspect that he, as Governor of the Northwest Territory, would direct affairs towards the consummation of his political wishes, and perhaps bring about annexation himself." THE NEW NATION. (1870, January 15). *The New York Daily Herald*, p. 4.

known as an able newspaper writer. Indeed, like a large number of men who have held high positions in Canada and the United States, he may be said to have attained power through his connection with the press. He was celebrated for being an essentially cold-blooded man, entirely wanting in that cordiality which is an indispensable quality with those who have to lead or even to act with others in the direction of affairs. He had some political supporters, but he never had a friend. There was nothing genial about him, and his manner was said at times to be so unsympathetic that many left his presence accusing him of rudeness. We shall not attempt to enter upon Canadian politics – that most uninteresting and least edifying of topics – in order to trace the progress of events which led up to this strange appointment; suffice it to say that the Ministry which then and still rules at Ottawa was and is a coalition one, the Conservative element being, however, the strongest. The intended Lieutenant-Governor was in it Minister of Public Works, having been brought over from the Opposition upon certain terms when the coalition was formed. The Tory element being in the ascendant, and many changes having recently occurred in the Ministry, vacant places in it were filled up by the adherents of that party, thereby destroying the proportion or balance between the several parties which it was alleged by Mr. M'Dougall's clique had been agreed upon when the Ministry was first formed. This gave rise to dissensions, which the far-sighted policy adopted regarding the Intercolonial Railway afforded many opportunities for widening into such a breach, that it became at last a necessity that Mr. M'Dougall should cease to be a Minister. To have dismissed him would have been fatal, so it was necessary to provide for him. The annexation of Rupert's Land just at that time was most opportune, for sending him there as Lieutenant-Governor was an easy solution of the difficulty. What mattered it whether he was fitted for the post or not, as long as he was got rid of without any scandal? Who cared whether he might or might not be agreeable to the people he was to rule over, and what could it matter whether the wretched half-breed population were pleased or not?

Party politics in Canada must first be attended to; they were of all-absorbing importance; and the North-West and its new Lieutenant-Governor must settle their affairs between themselves.

No attempt was made to conciliate their newly-acquired subjects. The Governor appointed by the Hudson's Bay Company, who was to exercise authority until Mr. M'Dougall reached Fort Garry, was never even communicated with. One would have thought that common civility, if not political tact, would have caused them to have informed him in writing of Mr. M'Dougall's appointment, and of the date at which he might expect him: his co-operation and assistance in establishing the new order of things might, with advantage, have been solicited at the same time. No explanations were made as to what was to be the policy of Canada in its dealings with Rupert's Land. In fact the people of that country were so thoroughly ignored, they were easily led to believe that their material interests would be so also, in favour of the emigrants that rumour and the Canadian surveyors said might shortly be expected to arrive at Red River.

A little judicious management at first would have secured an amicable settlement, and have frustrated the clerical party, which was desirous of fomenting resistance. A clear statement of what they intended doing, and a declaration stating that they meant to respect the rights of property; that all those in *bona fide* occupation of land should retain it without rent, and receive a regular legal title for it; that all religions would be respected, and every one allowed to worship as he liked, – this would most certainly have cut the ground from under the feet of all the political agitators there.

During a crisis such as that which occurred in the settlement in 1869, when rebellion hangs in the balance, every moment is of such importance that, when once the scale has gone down on the side of revolution, days or months afterwards cannot compensate for the loss.

Men who to-day shudder at the idea of resistance to the laws, or at the word disloyalty, will to-morrow take office under a revolutionary government, and exercise their functions with placidity once the first overt act of rebellion has been committed, and they have accustomed their minds to the fact of its existence. When we see around us the machinery of a government at work without any opposition, we are prone to accept its decrees unhesitatingly, not so much from the tendency of mankind to follow with the herd, as from that love of order, and that respect for those whom we see exercising governing functions, which is inherent in us.

Mr. M'Dougall was told to go to Fort Garry, and that, shortly after his arrival, the Queen's proclamation transferring the territory to the Dominion would be published. He travelled through the United States to Pembina, which is a wretched little village on the frontier dividing the British and American territories, but situated within the latter. He there learnt that a number of French half-breeds had announced their intention of preventing him from entering the country, and that a party of them had erected a barricade on the road leading from Pembina to Fort Garry, which they intended to defend by force of arms.

It is unnecessary to describe the little rebellion any further, or to dilate upon the cruelties, the robberies, and the imprisonments, which were inflicted upon subjects of her Majesty by this wretched man Louis Riel, aided and abetted by the French priesthood, of which Père Richot and Père Lestane were the most prominent members. Is not a description of all these violent deeds written in numerous Blue-books?

Louis Riel had, with the assistance of the priestly party, declared himself "President of the Republic of the North-West," and had nominated a Ministry from amongst his followers. Without attempting to follow the doings of this ridiculous Government, suffice it to say, that Riel thought it necessary to take a man's life in order to prove that he was in earnest, and to strike terror into the English-speaking portion of the community, which, although not actively opposed to him, was still, he knew, inimical to his sway. From amongst the many Canadians whom he kept ironed in his prison, he selected as his victim a man named Scott, on account of his being the most objectionable to him personally, and because he had been most loud-spoken in his expressions of loyalty to the Queen, and in denouncing Riel and his gang as rebels.

Scott could not speak French; but he was arraigned before a mock court-martial composed of some half-breeds, having a man named Lapine as president, the French language only being used. A frivolous charge of breach of parole (which was not true) was alleged against him, and he was condemned to be shot. The execution was carried out within a few hours by some intoxicated half-breeds, commanded by a United States citizen who had been in the Northern army. This murder is said to have been carried out in a cruel and atrocious manner. Those who perpetrated it by Riel's order were at the time addressed by a French priest on the ground where it was committed, and told they were about to perform a righteous act.

Mr. Scott's murder caused a cry of execration to resound throughout the English districts of Canada. The press, which everywhere in the province of Ontario had all through these affairs called for active measures, now preached up a crusade, and with such effect, that it is almost beyond doubt that had the priestly party in Canada succeeded, through their mouthpieces Messrs. Cartier, Langevin & Co., in preventing an armed expedition being sent to the Red River, there would have arisen in Ontario an organization for sending up an armed body of emigrants there, sworn to avenge the foul murder which had been perpetrated. Mr. Scott was an Orangeman, a volunteer, and an Upper Canadian, and he had been murdered by those whom the people of Ontario looked down upon as the inferior race of French Canadians, having been, it was believed, instigated thereto by the priesthood.

The event was pregnant with every element capable of calling forth the most violent feelings. The national antipathy between the English and French races, stronger in Canada than it has ever been at home, and the intense hatred which Orangemen, Low Churchmen, Presbyterians, and sectarians generally, entertain for Popery, were acted upon. Had 10,000 soldiers been required, they might have been enlisted with ease in Ontario. On the other hand, amongst the French Canadians, popular sympathy was entirely with Riel; so much so, that when subsequently it was determined to despatch two battalions of militia to put down the rebellion, and to raise them in the two old provinces of Canada, one in each, it was found impossible to obtain more than 80 French Canadian recruits. The priesthood throughout the country had preached against the expedition, warning their flocks not to take part in an undertaking planned to injure their compatriots in the North-West, who spoke their language, were descended from the same ancestors, and who belonged to their faith. Over and over again they were told from the altar that the Protestants were anxious to send forth this expedition for the purpose of overturning the Catholic Church in that territory. Riel was painted in the most glowing colours as a patriot and a hero, struggling and prepared to fight for the rights of his race and the maintenance of the true faith.

With such antagonistic feelings abroad in the country, the ministry felt themselves in a most difficult position. All were agreed that the despatch of an armed force to the Red River was a political necessity if they wished to preserve their newly-bargained-for territory; but a special vote of money would be required for that purpose, and the French-speaking members of Parliament had announced their intention of opposing any such appropriation, if coercive measures were to be resorted

to. It would have been next to impossible to have carried the measure in the face of their opposition, so it became necessary to soothe their alarm by fair promises: no coercion was to be attempted, and the troops, when in Manitoba, were only to be used for the protection of property and the maintenance of law and order; in fact, they were going there more in the capacity of police than of soldiers.

Mr. Riel had previously been invited to send delegates to Ottawa to explain to the Government what the rebel demands really were. Two of the three he sent were obnoxious to the loyal Canadians. One, Père Richot, a French Canadian priest, had throughout the disturbances taken a most active part on the rebel side, and had been amongst the first to preach resistance. He was known to be a most intimate friend of Riel's, and was generally believed to be one of the chief pillars of the rebellion. The other was a young man of drunken habits and of no education. He was a shopboy by trade, and was what is known in America as an Irish Yankee – a race that is despised in the United States as the lowest of the low. Having nothing to lose and everything to gain, he had gladly joined the rebel side.

As soon as it was known in Ontario that these men were on their way to Ottawa by invitation of the Ministry, the whole country was indignant. "What!" it was said, "treat directly with two men who are alleged to have taken part in Scott's murder?" So violent was this feeling, that it was considered necessary to send a police magistrate to meet them in the States for the purpose of taking them to Ottawa secretly, by a roundabout way, so as to avoid passing through any of the large cities. When at last they had reached Ottawa they would be safe from popular violence, as the French element is strong there. When it was announced that these men had arrived, indignation meetings were assembled all over the western province, at which resolutions were made deprecating in the strongest language their reception by the Governor-General. The brother of the murdered Scott had them arrested on a charge of being privy to a crime. They attempted to assume to themselves the importance and position of ambassadors sent by one sovereign state to another, and pleaded their immunity from imprisonment upon those grounds. The French party was entirely in their favour, and regarded the treatment they had met with as an outrage. This circumstance complicated matters greatly, and was most embarrassing for the Ministry; they could not override the law, and for some days it was doubtful whether a "true bill" might not be found against them. Fortunately for all parties, the case fell through from want of evidence.

These proceedings, however, added fuel to the flames of popular excitement, and served to embitter the feelings between the French and English parties. After long conferences between the delegates and the Ministers, a bill was framed for the establishment of a government at Fort Garry, the terms of which were so favourable to the rebels that the French-speaking members withdrew their threatened opposition. 1,400,000 acres were to be reserved for distribution amongst the half-breeds, ostensibly "to extinguish the Indian claims to land," but in reality for the purpose of enriching the Roman Church<sup>144</sup>.

---

<sup>144</sup> "The best way of meeting this most extraordinary statement is by citing the text of the clause of the Manitoba Act relating to the reservation. It is as follows:- 'And whereas it is expedient towards the



As previously mentioned, the half-breeds in the Red River settlement were already possessed of considerable farms, a very small part of which only they cultivated, if such a term may be applied to the trifling labour they bestow upon their land. Still, although they already owned more land than they knew what to do with, it was considered necessary to appropriate this vast acreage for their exclusive use, as by doing so the priests were satisfied, and when they were contented the whole French party was so also. All opposition having thus been removed, the money required for the Expedition was voted in the house when the Manitoba Bill was introduced. [...]

The reservation of land provided for in the Bill is calculated to injure the true interests of Manitoba by retarding emigration. Suppose that the number of acres are reserved in the immediate vicinity of the existing settlement on the Red River, all new-comers seeking for farms will have to go much further back. There are several other clauses in the Bill referring to the creation of a legislature and to the rights of franchise, which tend to give a monopoly of political power to the French-speaking people for some years to come. From what has already been stated regarding their views and aspirations, it may be inferred that a love for progress is not included in their political belief, so their political ascendancy promises no good for the country.

Although the Manitoba Bill passed through both Houses of Parliament with but little opposition, still the Government policy as expressed by it, was denounced by all the leading and all the independent English newspapers in Canada as altogether in the interests of the French rebel party.

The £300,000 was paid to the Hudson's Bay Company; and the Queen's proclamation transferring the whole North-Western territories to the Dominion was shortly to be issued.

The Imperial Government consented to co-operate in the military expedition to the Red River; and the strength of the force was, after a lengthened telegraphic correspondence, fixed at one weak battalion of regular infantry, two battalions of Canadian militia, and a small detachment of Royal Artillerymen and of Royal Engineers; about one-fourth of the total expense was to be defrayed from the home treasury, the remainder to be paid by the Dominion. Colonel Wolseley, then on the staff in Canada, was appointed to command it, and its organization and equipment were rapidly pushed forward. [...]

---

extinguishment of the Indian title to the lands to the extent of 1,400,000 acres thereof for the benefit of the families of the half-breed residents, it is hereby enacted that [...] the Lieutenant-Governor shall select such lots or tracts in such part of the Province as he may deem expedient to the extent aforesaid, and divide the same among the half-breed heads of families residing in the Province at the time of the said transfer to Canada; and the same shall be granted to the said children respectively in such mode and on such conditions as to settlement and otherwise as the Governor-General may from time to time determine.' I believe that there will be a general concurrence of opinion as to the effect of the foregoing clause. It can give nothing whatever to the 'Roman Church,' and I may add that the majority of the heads of families are of British origin and of the Protestant religion." A CANADIAN POLITICIAN. (1871, January 20). THE RED RIVER EXPEDITION. *The London Times*, p. 8.

[I went with this expedition, and we reached the vicinity of Fort Garry on August 24th, 1870.]<sup>145</sup> As we passed the village [of Winnipeg] we could see the guns in the embrasures bearing in our direction. Some people in buggies were descried going off from the Fort westerly, but were brought to a halt by our skirmishers. They proved to be some of Riel's counsellors; but nothing could be learned from them. The atmosphere was so thick that it was difficult to make out, even with our glasses, whether men were or were not standing to the guns which we saw. We expected every moment to see a puff of smoke from an embrasure, to be followed by the whizz of a round-shot past our heads. Every moment increased the excitement: the skirmishers quickened their paces as they neared the place, as if in dread lest others should enter it before them. Everything remaining silent, some staff officers were sent galloping round to see if the southern gate was open, and what was going on in rear of the Fort. They soon returned, bringing word that it was evacuated, and the gates left open.

This was at first a sad disappointment to the soldiers, who, having gone through so much toil in order to put down the rebellion, longed to be avenged upon its authors. Our victory, although bloodless, was complete. We dragged out some of the rebel guns, and fired a royal salute as the union-jack was run up the flagstaff, from which had floated, for so many months, the rebel banner that had been worked for Riel by the nuns in the convent attached to Bishop Taché's cathedral. The scene inside the Fort was most depressing: the square in front of the principal house was under water, and there was mud and filth everywhere. Riel and some of his friends had remained in the Fort up to the last possible moment, and had only left when they saw our skirmishers. Their breakfast was still on the table, and their clothes and arms lay scattered about through the numerous houses they had occupied, in a manner denoting the suddenness of their departure. [...]

Notwithstanding the badness of the weather on the day that we took possession of Fort Garry, numbers of the loyal inhabitants came in to see their deliverers. All were most anxious that immediate vengeance should be taken upon the rebel leaders, and many volunteered to capture Riel and others of his gang, who were stated to be still within easy reach. The officer commanding the troops had no civil authority conferred upon him by the Canadian Government, so it was not in his power to issue warrants for their arrest. The Ottawa Ministry had intended that the civil Lieutenant-Governor whom they had appointed for the province of Manitoba should have arrived at Fort Garry either with or immediately after us. We reached that place on the morning of the 24th August, but he did not get there until the evening of the 2d September, no arrangement having been made by Canadian Ministry for the government of the province during the interregnum. Colonel Wolseley found himself in a difficult position. The most influential people, longing for some form of government that would be strong enough to afford the community protection, begged him to assume the position of provisional Lieutenant-Governor. To have done so would have been illegal; for the Hudson's Bay Company, represented by its officers, were *de jure* the rulers of the country, until an official communication had

---

<sup>145</sup> Everything after this point is taken from the conclusion to the three-part narrative, published in the February, 1871 issue of Blackwood's magazine. The quoted passage begins on page 177.

been received announcing its transfer to the Dominion of Canada. As the rebels had bolted without firing a shot, to have proclaimed martial law would have been unwarrantable. He therefore insisted upon the senior officer of the Company then present being recognized as the governor of the province, as if there had never been any rebellion whatever, and as if the rule of the Company had continued without any break, until the newly-appointed Lieutenant-Governor arrived.

Few, except those who have had revolutionary experience, can form a just idea of the condition of affairs on the Red River for some days after our arrival. There were no police to maintain order; all those who had during the past winter suffered in body or in property from Riel's tyranny, considered they were justified in avenging themselves upon those who had any connection with rebel affairs. The reaction from the state of fear and trembling in which all had lived for the preceding ten months was too great for many, and there was some little trouble in keeping them in proper restraint. The rebel leaders had disappeared, but many of their adherents had merely gone home, hoping to be forgotten through the insignificance of their position. Those who had remained loyal were loud in expressing their discontent at these rebels being allowed to live at large.

Every precaution was taken by the military to prevent any serious disturbance. Armed parties patrolled about the Fort and through the village each night until everything was quiet, and a few special constables were sworn in as policemen to assist in preserving order in town. Unfortunately, whisky was to be had in every shop in the village; and the Indians who had served with us as voyageurs added to the excitement by their noisy drunkenness. The Lieutenant-Governor was hourly expected; but as day after day passed without his being heard of, a good deal of nice management was required to keep things quiet, and prevent any collision between the loyalists and those who had recently been in arms against her Majesty. If military rule had been resorted to, quiet and peace could have easily been maintained; but it was considered essential for political reasons to keep the military element in the background as much as possible, and to make it appear that law and order were maintained there in the same manner as in the other Canadian provinces. The difficulty of doing so may be partially appreciated when it is remembered that all the former machinery of government had disappeared, and even the few magistrates who remained were afraid or disinclined to act. There was no law officer of any description; so that in reality order was kept by the moral effect produced by the presence of the troops, and by the consciousness that they would be used at any moment if necessary for the suppression of disturbance. There were occasionally rumours of armed bodies of rebels collecting on the frontier, or in the plains to the west; but as soon as the people generally perceived that no arrests were being made by the military, and that even the few leading rebels who had been captured by our skirmishers in their advance upon the Fort had been released without any trial whatever, public confidence revived. Even the poor ignorant French half-breeds, who had been misled by their priests for political objects, accepted the position, and settled down to their ordinary occupations. In such sparsely-populated countries, revolutionary movements hold within themselves the germ of dissolution. It is difficult to collect the

men together for action; and if collected, it is difficult to obtain food, or funds to buy it for them. Riel got over this difficulty by seizing upon the Hudson's Bay Company's stores of provisions as a preliminary step in his rebellion<sup>146</sup>. He was thus able to feed, clothe, and pay his soldiers at the Company's expense. If at the outset of his revolutionary career Fort Garry had been set on fire, and all its stores of food, money, clothing, ammunition, &c., &c., thus burnt, the rebellion would have been smothered and buried in the smoke and ashes.

Riel in his fall experienced the fickleness of Dame Fortune. On 23d August he was the despotic potentate issuing orders like a dictator, there being none to gainsay him. Early in the forenoon he might have been seen accompanied only by one follower, both on stolen horses, galloping through the rain and mud, their backs towards the scene of their villainy. Let us hope that as he passed in his flight the spot where the poor Canadian volunteer had been murdered by his orders, he repented of his crime. These two worthies, the master and the man, having crossed to the right bank of the Red River, fled south, thinking they were safer from pursuit on that side of it than if they followed the regular road to Pembina, which runs on the western or left bank of that stream. Night having set in, they bivouacked on the plain, and upon waking the following morning discovered that their horses had disappeared. They were without food, but their pocket were well lined with stolen money. Having lost their horses, and that side of the river being little inhabited, it was necessary for them to cross to the other bank. There was no boat, so they set to work pulling down a fence to make a raft. They could not find enough rope or cord to fasten it together, so Riel's follower – his late "Secretary of State" – took off his trousers and used them for that purpose. Upon landing on the other side they were assailed by the farmer, who had seen them pulling down his fence, and were forced to disgorge some of their plunder as compensation for the damage. Two days afterwards they reached Pembina – Riel with bare feet, swollen and sore from the journey. He found that he was not at all well received by the Americans there, who had taken umbrage at his having imprisoned their consul; so he went to St. Joseph's, a village about fifty miles to the west, and within a few miles of our frontier. He had previously sent a large proportion of his plunder to that place; and, according to the latest received accounts, he is still there, living comfortably in the enjoyment of his stolen property.

The first detachment of the regular troops started from Fort Garry on their return-journey to Canada on the 29th of August, and all of them had left on the 3d of September. The two militia regiments had been quartered, one in the Lower or Stone Fort, the other in Fort Garry. The regulars had all crossed the height of land near Lake Superior on their return-journey before the 1st of October, and were in their

---

<sup>146</sup> "The latest advices from Fort Garry are to the effect that the new provisional government was quietly settling into working order, and had taken possession of the safe of the Hudson's Bay Company and appropriated its contents for public use. One statement is that the money was feloniously taken, while another report is that the provisional government effected a loan of the Hudson [sic.] Bay Company, which the latter endeavor publicly to repudiate as such, in order not to give offence to the Dominion government." THE NEW NATION. (1870, January 15). *The New York Daily Herald*, p. 4.

barracks at Quebec and Montreal before the autumn had closed in. So ended the Red River expedition.

### **An interview with President Riel<sup>147</sup> (July, 1870)**

After several visits to President Riel without an opportunity presenting itself for a lengthy and uninterrupted conversation, the Herald correspondent finally obtained the desired interview, and freely discussed with the Provisional President the events of the past year in Red River. The President was quite frank in his discussion of the situation, and manifested no concern whatever regarding his own future prospects. As some points elucidated by the interview are quite new and interesting, it will be best to give the principal conversation as nearly as possible in the form in which it occurred.

CORRESPONDENT – I should like, Mr. President, to hear your version of the events which led to the establishment of the provisional government.

RIEL – I presume that all the principal causes of this difficulty are well understood already, although I perceive that some interested parties in Canada still persist in falsehoods about the origin and progress of our “insurrection,” as it is called. We have no apologies to offer for resisting Governor McDougal, nor any regret that we defied the Canadian policy as enunciated at that period. It seems strange that the Canadians themselves should have been surprised at our attitude when the circumstances of our movement came to be generally understood.

Any one of the numerous objectionable acts committed by Canada and her agents upon the Red River people, if similarly perpetrated in Canada, would arouse the whole Dominion to arms in a moment. When the bargain between the Hudson’s Bay Company and Canada was at first hinted at as possible, Canadian adventurers and speculators commenced flocking out here like vultures. In 1868, long before the proposition of transfer had assumed any definite shape, and while the Northwest Territory was as independent of Canada as any other British possessions, Mr. Snow and his party appeared and commenced building a road from here to Lake of the Woods, without consulting the authorities or the people of this country. It is true that Canada pretended to open the road as an act of benevolence to Red River, but such benevolence generally has its own reward in view. Next came Colonel Dennis and his surveyors, who commenced marking out the country into farms and town lots. Apart from the fact that the Snow and Dennis expeditions were premature and unwarrantable, there were many aggravating circumstances connected with the operations of both. Members of Snow’s party negotiated with the Indians for certain tracts of country, to the prejudice of half-breed settlers, and of claims of previous occupation and settlement. Colonel Dennis’ party, after surveying certain districts directly adjoining old settlements, posted up thereon the names of unknown outsiders as occupants. This summary disposition of the lands and hemming in of the settlements by parties having no right whatever to interfere with Red River matters

---

<sup>147</sup> From RED RIVER. (1870, July 22). *The New York Herald*, p. 8.

alarmed the people and satisfied them that they were to be completely ignored and subject to the caprice of Canada and the cupidity of speculators.

When the negotiation for the transfer of the territories was effected the 16,000 people of Red River were ignored as completely as if they were cattle. Canada never consulted our people nor our authorities, and did not even have the common decency to acquaint our people with the transfer; but without even forwarding any official communication whatever to the Red River authorities, McDougal was sent with a retinue of satraps to take possession of us bodily, without the slightest explanation or indication of his purposes. When we did learn the programme of Canada, we found that we were to be deprived of our franchises, that we were to have outsiders foisted upon us as councilors, and that a great fancy scheme for the development of this country was to become the machinery of adventurers, speculators and Canadian politicians for robbing and oppressing the settlers. Just at the very time when Canada might have best secured the confidence and friendship of everybody out here, her agents were carrying things [out] with a high hand, and our people realizing that they had but two alternatives, resistance then or revolution and civil war by and by, called a meeting, appointed a representative council, established a provisional government and sent delegates to Canada to secure a recognition of our rights preparatory to our admission into the Dominion confederation. The Manitoba act is the result of that resistance to Canadian aggression, and the Red River people having secured a guarantee of protection in their rights are now ready to welcome Governor Archibald and the Dominion authority.

CORRESPONDENT – Then you think that had the Red River people admitted Governor McDougal last fall and a provisional government had been established, events would have culminated in a revolution and civil war?

RIEL – Undoubtedly. Not only had the confidence of the people in Canada been destroyed, but the conduct of the officials and other Canadians who came out here was of the most irritating character. The officials assumed a supercilious, haughty air that had a most injurious effect, and treated the settlers as being utterly beneath their respect or consideration. They wrote letters to the Canadian press depreciating and slandering the people of the settlements, referring to our ancestry in terms of contumely, and holding up our mothers and sisters to ridicule. The influx of such a class into this country, with its insolent demeanor, its sneers and ridicule, would itself have brought trouble in less than a year, without requiring additional incentive of oppression and land seizures. [...]

CORRESPONDENT – Do you think that the Indians would side with the Canadians in the event of war?

RIEL – A few would. Some of those living between here and Lake Superior, who do nothing but fish and beg, would for the sake of Canadian presents and pensions give assistance to the Dominion troops, but most of those tribes, and all the Indians north and west of us, are opposed to the union of this territory with the confederation. The Indians want all the hunting grounds they have got, and now obtain from the fur traders, in exchange for their skins, all the arms, ammunition, blankets and trinkets that they need. The present condition of the Northwest

Territory, with its abundance of game, its buffalo, its unsettled prairies and the scattered posts of the fur traders, just suit the Indian, and he believes that the establishment of Canadian authority here, and the opening of roads, will be the commencement of encroachments like those which have caused so much suffering to the Indians in the United States. The Indians have heard all about the explorations of the Saskatchewan, and the inducements held out to immigrants to settle that country, and while they may receive presents from Canada, if war were to be inaugurated between the whites, the Indians would scarcely side with the party whose success must lead to the destruction of their already reduced hunting grounds. Our missionaries have not labored for nearly 200 years among the Northwest Indians without securing their confidence and understanding their wishes, and we have never apprehended the slightest danger of the Indians attacking us. Our people among the Indians, report that they are treated with the greatest friendship, and several chiefs have sent us word that they should have nothing to do with the Canadian expedition. Only a few days ago a Sioux delegation<sup>148</sup> called here and presented me with a beautifully ornamented peace pipe. [...]

CORRESPONDENT – Do you regard the Manitoba act as a full and complete guarantee of the rights of the Red River people?

RIEL – Taken in connection with the official utterances of members of the Dominion government, and the semi-official assurances given by the Dominion authorities, we regard the Manitoba act as satisfactory evidence that our rights will be respected, and that nothing like the policy which McDougal and his hangers on would have inaugurated will prevail. We are ready to become members of the confederation, and shall give Governor Archibald a hearty welcome; but not any more cordial than would have been extended to Governor McDougal had justice and common courtesy been observed by the Canadians towards us at the commencement.

I see that some of the Canadian papers single me out for the direst punishment, and a Toronto paper advised the offering of \$5,000 for my head. After the somewhat prominent part which I have performed in the progress of affairs here, it is not surprising that some individuals should have complaints to make against me, and that some zealous Canadians should cry out for vengeance upon me. I do not trouble myself, however, about the future. I feel, as I believe is the case with every member of the Provisional government, that we have but simply done our duty as citizens of Red River, and we ask no stronger vindication than the charter of rights which the Provisional government has obtained and accepted for the people.

### **The meaning of Manitoba<sup>149</sup> (May, 1870)**

Near the middle of one of the larger lakes to the north-west of Lake Superior, is a small island which the Indians shun as haunted ground. On no condition will

---

<sup>148</sup> "There are several hundred Sioux warriors in the Red River country, who were concerned in the general Minnesota massacre of 1862". THE NEW NATION. (1870, January 15). *The New York Daily Herald*, p. 4.

<sup>149</sup> From MANITOBA. (1870, May 21). *The New York Tribune*, p. 1.

they approach it, much less land on it, for it is the home of *Manitoba* – “the Speaking God” – whose voice they hear nightly as they camp by the lake or guide their fishing boats over its surface. The “voice” is no myth. It assails not the Indian’s ear alone, but the white man’s as well. Whence comes it? The superstitious Ojibway hears and keeps away, piously pronouncing the name of God. The Englishman hears and examines. Not the inquisitive investigator, but the divinity of the place perishes by the invasion. Touched by the wand of science, the mystery of the place is resolved into a simple natural phenomenon – the beating of the waves on a peculiarly sonorous shingle. Along the northern shore of the island runs a low cliff of compact, fine-grained limestone, which clinks like steel under the stroke of a hammer. When the wind blows from the north, the waves, beating at the foot of the cliff, dash the fragments of stone against each other, causing them to give forth a sound which resembles the ringing of distant church bells. So strong is this resemblance that the explorer Dawson, who spent several days and nights on the island, was more than once awakened with the impression that he was listening to chimes. When the breeze subsides and the waves play gently on the shore, low wailing sounds – spirit voices to the awe-stricken Ojibway – come up from the beach. And as the explorer lay on his bed of moss-covered rock at night and experienced their “peculiarly impressive” effect, he found it very easy, he says, to understand why the credulous natives should avoid the place.

Naturally this island home of Manitoba became known to the whites as “Manitoba Island.” The island gave its name to the lake, then to the nearest trading post of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and now the Canadian Parliament proposes it as the “euphonious appellation” of the combined British settlements immediately south and east of the lake. Whether the name and the government that is intended to go with it will be accepted by the settlers, with or without a war, remains to be seen. [...]

As it now stands, Manitoba contains some 13,000 square miles. It includes all the settlements along the Red River and up the Assiniboine as far as Portage la Prairie. At first the latter settlement was not included in the proposed Province, from the belief on the part of the Government that the settlers were averse to being connected with the people of the Red River country. Two years ago the settlers at the Portage set up a little republic of their own, calling it Manitoba. They appointed a Provisional Government, and refused to be connected in any way with the authorities of Fort Garry, the capital of the Red River Settlement. The disposition of the Canadian Government to favor the people of the Portage gave way, however, to the opposition which was manifested by the Protestants of Canada against the formation of a new Province preponderatingly Roman Catholic; so the boundary line was carried one degree west, to bring this Protestant settlement into the Province.

Though but of relatively small area, Manitoba is destined soon to become a very important State, inasmuch as it commands the navigable rivers and the more important lakes of the entire British possessions in the interior of the great North-West. [...] The vast territory, of which Lake Winnipeg may be regarded as the center, is comparable to the Valley of the Mississippi, both as regards the fertility of its soil and the great extent and gentle slope of its plains. From the Lake of the Woods the Fertile Belt stretches a thousand miles in a north-westerly direction, comprising one



of the richest and most beautiful regions in the world, in which there are 60,000 square miles of land of the finest quality clear and ready for the plow. [...]

The settlers are chiefly French Canadian traders and *voyageurs* and their half-Indian descendants, Scotch, and English, with a sprinkling of the omnipresent Yankee. [...] The English, Scotch and American settlers are not unlike the same class of frontiersmen everywhere. They are in the minority, however, and generally oppose the rebellion, which is almost entirely the work of the half-breeds.

It is curious and amusing to compare the character now ascribed to these rebellious half-breeds by Canadian writers with that which investigators gave them before the disturbance began. They seem to have been fearfully demoralized by their resistance to Canadian usurpation, unless the Canadian writers have themselves been the sufferers. Mr. Dawson, for example, in his report of the Red River Exploring Expedition, describes the half-breeds as a hardy, vigorous, and active race of men, superior in physical appearance to either of the races to which they are allied. Among the *habitants* of Lower Canada, he says, they would look like a race of giants, and they are much more robust and muscular than the neighboring Indians. He attributes this superiority largely to their leading a life peculiarly favorable to the development of the human frame, to the nutritious food which they use, and to the extreme salubrity of the climate. Other unprejudiced observers, before the rebellion, unite in describing the half-breeds as superior in every respect, both mentally and physically, to the races from which they are derived. Now they are described in the Canadian papers as a worthless, improvident race of savages, not fit to live alone; nothing will answer for them but the faithful supervision of the pure-blooded English Canadians. Indeed, these writers assure us, the Hudson's Bay Company have always been compelled to keep them in a state of tutelage to prevent their starving outright; it being the custom of those generous traders to buy up all they could induce the half-breeds to sell at harvest time, and resell it to them for furs and peltries in the Winter, when their supplies were exhausted.

### **“Now we have ‘Manitoba’”<sup>150</sup> (August, 1873)**

It is now thirteen years since I spent ten days in this settlement. It had then changed its general designation several times. We knew it as “Fort Garry,” “The Red River Settlement,” and “The Selkirk Settlement,” but it was just then aspiring to be called a crown colony, and had adopted the name of “Assiniboia” after the Assiniboin Indians, whose blood is rather freely mingled with that of the white race in many of the settlers. Assiniboia gave way presently to “Winnipeg,” and now we have “Manitoba.” Thus the settlement not only makes itself big, but makes itself many.

I went down on the second or third trip ever made by a steamboat. We had traveled five days in stages from St. Paul, four of them through an almost unbroken wilderness, to reach the Red River of the North at Georgetown, not far from the point

---

<sup>150</sup> From Eggleston, E. (1873, August 28). Something about Manitoba. *The Netawaka Chief*, p. 1. Written by Edward Eggleston (1837 – 1902).

at which the Northern Pacific crosses the river now. For two days we had traveled down stream toward Lake Winnipeg without seeing a house except at Pembina. On the morning of the third day we began to come into the settlement. The houses are mostly hewn logs fitted into frames, whitewashed and thatched. The farms are from eight to twelve chains wide on the river front, running back two miles. So that there is for thirty miles one continuous row of snowy white log houses with straw roofs, and with little white terrapin-like ovens in the door-yards of many of them. This settlement was made here more than half a century ago, and the races are sadly mixed. The children that stood on the banks staring at our boat were of every hue, from sandiest Scotch to darkest Cree Indian.

At the Fort and at other places in the settlement there are a higher order of houses. The social distinction of Manitoba divides all the world into two classes: the "Shingle-roofs" and the "Thatch." There are many people of refinement and culture. Archdeacon Hunter, Mr. Black, the minister of the kirk, and other gentlemen I found to be well-informed and excellent. The best educated and most refined lady that I saw was a half-breed educated in the settlement. She was the daughter of a distinguished Scotch explorer, whose wife was a full Indian and unable even in her old age to speak English. The daughter was cultivated and devout, the wife of a minister, and it seemed to me in every way an admirable lady. When I was there Governor Mactavish reigned over the settlement. He was a forceful man and a fine illustration of Scotch sturdiness and of Scotch stiffness.

The population is of the most motley sort: English, French, Highland Scotch, Lowland Scotch, Orkney Islemen, Chippewas, Crees, Assiniboins, English-Cree half-breeds, French-Cree half-breeds, Scotch-Cree half-breeds, French-Chippewa half-breeds, English-Chippewa half-breeds, Scotch-Chippewa half-breeds, Scotch-Assiniboin half-breeds, English-Assiniboin half-breeds, French-Assiniboin half-breeds, Orkney Isle Assiniboin half-breeds, and so on through every possible permutation of the series of white and red races.

The people in the settlement are like Bryant's description of Nature – they "speak a various language." English, French, Gaelic, Cree, Chippewa and Assiniboin are the principal languages. If a boy's father is Scotch and his mother Cree, he will learn Gaelic from his father and Cree from his mother and English from others. Some children prattle innocently in five languages, I believe. The English of the lower classes is called "Red River English," and is a strange jargon. For instance, the name for a woman is wife. A young woman is a young wife; a little woman a little wife. They are frank enough thus to show you that they think a woman born to marry. A woman is always a wife on Red River.

I feel bound to say that the Selkirkers (or Assiniboians, or Manitobans, or Winnipeggers, or whatever they now call themselves) have no reason to like Americans. The worst part of the settlement, when I was there, was that inhabited by the most heaven-forsaken race of Yankees the sun ever shone upon. Their principal business in that day was the manufacture and sale of what was technically known as American whisky, and the keeping of the lowest houses of ill-fame. The whisky was made upon a peculiar recipe which I was at pains to procure, and which,

for the sake of any enterprising young man wishing to embark in a dishonorable and lucrative calling, I shall give as nearly as I can remember: Two gallons of alcohol, two gallons of molasses, two pounds of tobacco, and two drams of strychnine. This as a basis for a barrel of whisky. The rest water. The ingredients, except the water, were hauled over the plains on ox-carts. The half-breeds were very fond of this delicious stuff. It made "drunk come quick," But after a while the clergy tired of burying the dead ones, and Bishop Tache of the Roman Catholic Church, Archdeacon Hunter of the English Church, and Mr. Black of the Scotch Church, combined to hold temperance meetings; and when I was there eight hundred half-breeds had signed the temperance pledge, so that our poor countrymen in the Selkirk settlement were suffering from this foul conspiracy to destroy their business.

### **"Scrip and reserves"<sup>151</sup> (June, 1876)**

To many the matter of Half-breed scrip and reserves, the former of which is now being distributed to the grantees from the Dominion Lands Office, is still quite a conundrum and much confusion is apt to arise with reference to them when sought for investment.

The Half-breed reserves consist of tracts of land, 1,400,000 acres, lying mostly within an average of thirty miles radius of the City of Winnipeg, bounded by a red line on the map, and were granted by the Dominion Government to the children of the Half-breed natives of the Province by the Dominion to extinguish their Indian title. By The census then taken, for the purpose, a division of this grant was made which produced 190 acres for each person entitled; and maps have been prepared of the whole reserve on which each allotment is numbered, and now only awaits distribution by lottery, as the law defines, to be patented to the individuals. Until this is done the reserves are the property of the parishes, or Half-breeds collectively, and cannot be finally alienated before the issue of the individual patents.

It is greatly to be desired, for the general good, that this immense area of land, most contiguous to the city now entirely closed to settlement and cultivation, be soon distributed so that it may be occupied either by the grantees or purchasers from them.

The Half-breed scrip is a right to 160 acres of land conceded to each Half-breed head of family, and is, like those of the volunteers, liquidated by the issue to them of a scrip, but, differing in this respect: it is in eight bills or scrips, of \$20 each, receivable for purchase of any Dominion Lands *open for sale, and is good to [the] bearer*. This grant covers an acreage of about 200,000 acres and is now being distributed at the Land Office to the grantees, or their properly constituted attorneys, of the Parish of St. Andrews; and we are glad to learn that the scrip for other parishes is on the way here, and that the whole will be issued within a month or so.

About half, it is estimated, by those who should know, will be placed on the market for sale, and in the presence of the present scarcity of funds will not rule as high as it otherwise would. At present while so little of it is available and some has

---

<sup>151</sup> From HALF-BREED SCRIP AND RESERVES. (1876, June 30). *The Manitoba Free Press*, p. 2.

been purchased for locations that would not keep, as high as \$50 has been paid for the eight scrip or 160 acres. The present slight demand will soon be supplied, and prices probably rule lower unless hidden or distant hoards are drawn upon for this speculation.

### **“The most valuable tract of land in the Northwest”<sup>152</sup> (April, 1876)**

It is likely, according to the announcement of the Dominion Parliament, that during the early summer of 1876, the half-breed reserves in Manitoba, some fifty-four Townships (1,400,000 acres) will be patented to the grantees.

These plots of 190 acres each, lying near the Red and Assiniboine Rivers to Poplar Point westward; beyond Selkirk on the north, and nearly as far as Emerson to the south – [make] in all the most valuable tract of land in the Northwest. The allotment of scrip, 160 acres each (about 200,000 acres,) to the heads of families and old settlers, locatable anywhere in Government land, will also, it is promised, be distributed to them on the close of the present Session of Parliament. The greater part of this immense acreage, both Scrip and Patent, will then be thrown upon a market unable from its limited capacity, to absorb it, and consequently be sold at absurdly low prices. It is almost certain that these lands may then be purchased at from twenty-five to fifty cents per acre, or at all events less than one dollar.

A. W. Burrows, Winnipeg, Manitoba, will undertake for intending investors, the purchase of these lands, after Patents and Scrips issue, and guarantee satisfaction. He possesses unusual advantages for this commission, in his universal acquaintance with the settlers and half-breeds, through his former connection with the Dominion Land Office, at a time when the original census of the inhabitants was revised, by personal attendance of the claimants, for the basis of these grants. He is also fully aware of the value and quality of all the lands referred to.

City lots in Winnipeg, and other town plots, also river front and quarter section, farms for sale on favorable terms. Address

A. W. BURROWS  
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

### **A Change in Transportation<sup>153</sup> (June, 1882)**

Who can withstand a journey to Winnipeg – to Pembina – to the Selkirk settlement? The history of the Selkirk settlement, established by Lord Selkirk, a Scotch nobleman, somewhere about 1812, will ever be a romantic chapter in the occupation of this great northwest. What a fascination attached twenty-five years and thirty years ago to the story of those long processions of carts, each drawn by a single ox – numbering a thousand in a train that came from Pembina – the Red River

---

<sup>152</sup> From Burrows, A. W. (1876, April 29). HALF-BREED LANDS IN MANITOBA [Advertisement]. *The Ottawa Daily Citizen*, p. 3. Written by Alfred William Burrows (d. before 1946).

<sup>153</sup> From E.D.H. (1882, June 28). MANITOBA. *The Weekly Wisconsin*, p. 6.

settlement – the Selkirk settlement – all of which terms amounting to about the same thing. These carts were laden with buffalo skins and other peltries, the dried tongues of the buffaloes, perhaps some of the grains of that now-noted country to which such vast numbers of people are pushing their way.

No longer come these ox-carts upon their long and tedious journey of four hundred miles from their home at the British boundary to St. Paul. In their stead sweep along two railroad tracks – owned by the same company, called the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway. These roads are distant from each other, running in nearly parallel lines, from twenty to forty miles. [...]

The journey which took these patient and hard-working Scotch carters four and six weeks to perform, is now made in twenty-four hours. Along these thoroughfares have been pressing, for the last two years especially, thousands upon thousands of people seeking homes upon the virgin fields of this immeasurable northwest, embracing such a vast stretch, not only of American, but of British territory. The immigration to the latter country has of late been very conspicuous, taxing all the railroad facilities to their utmost for the transportation of persons and property.

### “Nothing left”<sup>154</sup> (August, 1882)

There were from 1,000 to 1,500 people at Selkirk, in 1820. Territorial conflicts arose between the Hudson’s Bay Co. and Lord Selkirk, and the latter, about 1825, returned to England, financially ruined and broken-hearted. His people scattered, some returning home with him and others drifting away into the far-off Saskatchewan river, upon both sides, but this point was the center. There is now *nothing left* but an old dismantled stone fort four miles up the river, and a few log-houses, built in 1811. The population is principally Scotch-Cree half-breeds, with a few rustic whites. The business of the place is almost nothing. [...]

At the present time, only the smallest tugs can ply between Winnipeg and Selkirk, and Edmonton is beyond reach. *The crews* of the river and lake steamboats in this country are composed of half-breeds and Indians, with white officers. The men of the crew receive from \$35 to \$50 per month and board. Large number of dusky fellows are employed in handling freights at Selkirk and lake ports, receiving twenty-five cents per hour. Labor is very hard to get, even of the aboriginal character. The Indians and “breeds” work well, but insist on long and frequent holidays, and despite the fact that life in a tepee must necessarily be inexpensive, they manage to remain completely poverty-stricken, with their good wages, and do not understand the use of the family stocking, either as foot-gear or savings bank. [...]

Railroad-men, who are well posted, assert that this very Selkirk settlement, now only a relic, with some old log houses and a ruined fort, and a lovely situation on the river bank and beautiful islands in the river – that Selkirk, where you can now buy land for \$8 per acre, is to be the future metropolis of Manitoba.

---

<sup>154</sup> From R.G.T. (1882, August 30). THE SELKIRK SETTLEMENT. *Wisconsin State Journal*, p. 1.

**“They were here, and they are gone.”<sup>155</sup> (April, 1886)**

The Red river valley is still so new that it can hardly be said to have a “history” as yet, but its early settlements were made, perhaps, under such circumstances and at such times that they may not be altogether devoid of interest. The first settlements were made in Pembina county in 1811 by a few stragglers from the Selkirk settlement at Fort Garry, now Winnipeg. This settlement was composed of evicted tenants of the Duchy of Sutherland, and, under the patronage of Thomas Douglass, Earl of Selkirk, had come into this new wilderness to subjugate its wildness and win from its bounty choicer gifts from nature than their stony and craggy mountain homes in the mother country could ever give them. The greater number of these emigrants located at Fort Garry, but some few, perhaps more enterprising, struck off through the new country to the south and found homes on the banks of the Pembina river, sheltered and protected by its *wide belt of timber*.

In 1816 a sort of internecine war occurred between the traders of the Hudson’s Bay company and the Northwest Fur company, and in the course of the trouble Gov. Robert Semple, the Hudson’s Bay company’s governor, was killed. This naturally increased the trouble and ended in the flight of most of the settlers to the Pembina district. In 1817 Earl Selkirk appeared on the scene with a small force of British troops and soon restored quiet. As soon as it was safe to do so the refugees returned to their homes, leaving the original “Selkirkers” still enjoying their homes in the Pembina timber. In 1819 the boundary line known as the “old line” was surveyed, and when the Pembina settlers found themselves upon the territory of the United States, their loyalty to the king, whose subjects they had been, outweighed the value of the new homes they had made in a foreign land and, leaving everything behind them, they hastened to place themselves again under the protection of the flag they loved, and to regain their citizenship with the brothers they had unwittingly deserted. This was the end of the Selkirk settlements in Dakota. They never returned, and they left but few traces behind them.

A little way from the present site of the village of Pembina is the ruin of an old dam which must have been built either by them or *by beavers*, but there is nothing to indicate which is which. No remains of a man mark the spot as human work, and yet it is of course probable that if they built it, it was done in 1818 or 1819, and the discovery that they were upon the wrong side of the boundary came before the mill was conceived. There have been found here and there ruins of what were homes of some of them. In one or two places small cellars are found, and in one case the crumbling remains of a fireplace can still be distinctly seen. They, however, were citizens, were never in any way identified with the country, and never did anything to aid in its development. They were merely sojourners, and their loss cannot be seriously mourned, nor can the dearth of traces which they left behind them be felt with that reverential sense of loss which would impress us had they borne the hardships and privations of pioneer life to lay the foundations for the civilization

---

<sup>155</sup> From THE RED RIVER VALLEY. (1886, April 17). *The St. Paul Daily Globe*, p. 11.

which we are now enjoying. They were here, and they are gone. That is all that can be said of them. That is the history of the Selkirk settlers on the Pembina river.

### **“What will become of them?”<sup>156</sup> (April, 1890)**

In September last, Deputy-Minister Burgess paid a visit to the settlements on the Saskatchewan river and availed himself of every opportunity to enquire into the condition and prospects of the half-breed population. At that period of the year a large number of the half-breeds were engaged in freighting between the railway and the centres of trade and population on the north Saskatchewan, and in this way he met and travelled with a great many of them along the trails, besides which he obtained much valuable information from the missionaries of all denominations and from leading merchants and farmers in the Territories. [...] He learned that while in some cases the half-breeds have made successful efforts to gain a livelihood by the cultivation of the soil, the great majority (especially those of French origin), although claiming tracts of land as homesteads in various parts of the Territories by virtue of actual occupation, continue to live a more or less roaming life, and look to trading and freighting as their chief means of support. Those who have devoted themselves solely to farming are at present, and are likely to continue to be in the future, self-supporting; but those who only cultivate small patches of land and with their families are absent from their holdings during the greater part of the year trading and freighting were merely earning a bare living, with the prospect that during the winter many of them would be in straightened circumstances. The soil had been rather unskillfully prepared for the little crop which they had put in the ground, and in many instances, owing to the abnormal drought of the summer, they received no return whatever, while the average crop all over was poor, especially potatoes. A great majority of the half-breeds were then, as already stated, engaged in freighting, which furnished only a mere sustenance for the summer, leaving nothing laid by for the winter.

#### **WHAT WILL BECOME OF THEM?**

Mr. Burgess continues:- [...] “Before next winter a line of railway will have been completed and running from Regina to Prince Albert – another of the few remaining sources of making a living will have been taken away from the half-breed population and there will thereafter be left to them in this line of business only the freighting from Saskatoon to Battleford, from Calgary to Edmonton, and from Edmonton, Battleford, and Prince Albert to the northern country. [...] When there was no longer any considerable amount of freighting to be done, [...] a large number of them will turn to farming; but in this occupation it is to be feared, judging from their history and training, that those who have been brought up as freighters or traders would not, during the present generation at least, be very successful. Neither would the existing generation, as a rule, make satisfactory laborers or domestic servants. They are not accustomed to the subjection and control to which they would

---

<sup>156</sup> From NORTHWEST HALF-BREEDS. (1890, April 2). *The Montreal Gazette*, p. 7.

have to submit in those capacities, and experience has proved that they do not take kindly to such employment.

### THE SCRIP QUESTION

“Among the half-breeds themselves, and the majority of the white people, there is an almost unanimous opinion that the Government should come to their relief by granting scrip, as recommended by the Northwest Legislative assembly, to all the half-breed children born in the country between 1870, the date of the transfer, and 1885, when the Government commenced to enquire into and deal with the claims of the half-breeds as a special class of the community. It may be desirable in this relation to state that the half-breeds of Manitoba and the half-breeds of the Northwest territories have had their claims, as the descendants of the Indians, dealt with on precisely the same basis – that is to say, all heads of families living at the time of the transfer have received \$160 in scrip, and all the half-breed children born and living at the same date either 240 acres of land or \$240 in scrip.

“Except the Rev. Father Fourmond, the Roman Catholic priest in charge of the mission at St. Laurent, I found the missionaries of all churches unanimously opposed to this proposition. The half-breeds, as a class, they say, have no adequate conception of the real value of money. Any sum given them in hand would be sure to be dissipated in a short time for not very economical, and in some cases even harmful purposes; and it would appear that the temporary possession of a large amount of cash, or what can readily be converted into cash, has a tendency to make them more discontented with their condition and more unwilling than ever to settle down to hard work. The scrip distributed as the result of the work of the commission of 1885-6-7, while in many cases effective in assisting industrious and economical half-breeds to buy stock and implements, left the great majority of the recipients poorer than before. In a few months the scrip had passed into other hands, and little or nothing remained to show for it. I am informed that the half-breeds are largely indebted to the white traders, and if this be the case it would doubtless account to a very considerable extent for the unanimity of the white people in demanding a new distribution of scrip; for the half-breeds as a class are disposed to meet their obligations when they have the means.”

### The story of scrip<sup>157</sup> (January, 1911)

“Now, Sandy, listen to me. You know you promised me that scrip-“

“Promised nothing! You make me tired! You know, Sandy, that that promise isn’t worth the paper it’s written on. It’s money that’s talking now.”

“But, Sandy, don’t listen to him for a minute. Last spring that scrip was worth two hundred dollars only; you know a lot of them sold at that. But this year they’re worth more, and although you promised to let us have it for two hundred, we’re not holding you to that – we’re giving you four hundred-“

---

<sup>157</sup> From Stead, H. (1911, January 20). The Story of Half-Breed Scrip. *Raymond Rustler*, p. 11. Written by Hay Strafford Stead (1871 – 1924).



“He’s lying, Sandy. The truth isn’t in him. You know as well as I do that if I wasn’t here bidding against him, you’d have got just two hundred and not a cent more. He came up here last year and made himself out a big man and said he was going to see that you got your scrip and that his influence would fix it for you and you couldn’t get it without him. I tell you he hadn’t anything more to do with getting your scrip for you than I had; and if you sell it to him for any less than I’ll give you for it, you’re a fool and he’s a scoundrel. If he wants your scrip, let him bid for it, same as I’m doing; and let the highest bidder take it. Come on, now. He says four hundred. I’ll give you four-fifty to start it. Now, Mister, if you want his scrip, raise me.”

For nearly a couple of hours the altercation went on. One would have thought Sandy had no say in the matter at all, he was so seldom consulted as to his wishes. And yet Sandy had in his own right, and by right of being head of his family, the disposal of three half-breed scrip certificates – his own, his wife’s, and his sister’s. Each certificate entitled the owner to locate and file on two hundred and forty acres of the best land they could find in the homestead and pre-emption area of Western Canada, to become the owners of it by virtue of a Crown grant, absolutely free and without price or penalty and without any settlement duties to perform. Such land sells, every day in the week, over the counters of the land companies and in the land departments of the railways, for as high as twelve and fifteen dollars an acre.

Sandy’s was a typical case. He had applied for scrip the year before. The buyer who had been on the spot at the time had assisted him in the matter of obtaining birth certificates and other red tape details necessary for establishing his claim to the satisfaction of the department of the government which has such matters in hand. Sandy, grateful for the assistance so generously rendered, had without hesitation promised to turn over to his friend in need at the then current price, \$250. Two hundred and fifty dollars looked like a big sum to Sandy. He had probably never seen so much money at once in his life. Besides, his friend was willing to advance him a few dollars to help him through the winter, and Sandy was not blessed with overmuch of this world’s goods; indeed, he was probably on the books of “The Company” for goods already advanced, and his line of credit would thus be naturally somewhat impaired.

So Sandy had promised; he had even gone so far as to put that promise in writing, although, Sandy being an honest man, that was quite unnecessary. Everything had occurred according to schedule. He had received one hundred dollars or so from the buyer, on the strengths of his prospects. He had passed the winter in comfort, and was correspondingly grateful. The commissioner had that day handed him his scrip, and to his wife and sister also one certificate each.

And then the trouble had begun. Another buyer was on the scene, telling him how little the first man had really done for him, and how he was being cheated out of much wealth in carrying out his bargain to sell for such a small sum. The new buyer was prepared to pay more – much more; how much Sandy could not exactly tell, but certainly there was to be much more money for Sandy if he sold to the new man.

Sandy, in his dilemma, did as all his forbears had done before him – he went to The Company. He gathered the two buyers together and marched them into the

Hudson's Bay Company's office at the Fort, and laid the matter before the factor. So did the scrip buyers. They argued it pro and con, and the argument got warmer and warmer as it proceeded. It finally resolved itself into an auction duel, and the price of scrip that evening went up three hundred per cent. At nine hundred and fifty dollars the bidding lagged somewhat, and the factor said:

"I was just t'ink, me," Sandy replied, "de oder feller – mabbe she give me some more money."

He did. Sandy and his family went to bed that night with the satisfied feeling natural to any half-breed that has just seen three thousand dollars in bankbills paid over to the Hudson's Bay Company to be placed to the credit of his account, and locked up in the Company's safe in the office before his eyes.

The issuing of half-breed scrip is a comparatively recent development. In 1870, when the country now comprised of the three prairie provinces was taken over by the Government of Canada from the Hudson's Bay Company, it became necessary to make some arrangements to purchase the rights of the Indians resident in the country. This was done by means of a series of treaties, with the various bands which occupied the territory covered by each session.

But at that time there was a considerable proportion of half-breed population. Some of these lived like white men, engaged in business, or in farming. Others, on the conclusion of the treaty with their relatives, chose to do as they had always done, and live with the Indians as Indians, accepting treaty and residing on the reserve. But there was a large section of half-breeds, who, while not allying themselves completely with their darker brethren, still lived by hunting and trapping, and did not adopt the white man's life. These had just as much at stake in the country as the Indians themselves, and considered that they should have been dealt with just as generously by the Government. But no provision for them was made by treaty or in any other way; and the dissatisfaction of the half-breeds at the neglect of the Government to deal with their claims in this regard led directly to the half-breed rebellion of 1885.

After the rebellion was quelled, the question of allaying in some manner the discontent rife among the half-breeds was taken up by the Government. It was impossible to deal with them as the Indians had been dealt with. Unlike the Indians – whose cohesion in comparatively large bands made negotiations easy, and whose mode of living invited terms totally unsuited to the half-breeds – the latter were scattered all over the country, each for himself, and owning no master but their own sweet wills.

It was finally decided that a grant of land to each individual half-breed would meet the case, and the grant was fixed at the generous allowance of two hundred and forty acres; which was considered a sufficiently large farm to support a man and his family in comfort.

To each half-breed, then, who applied and proved his right to participate in the issue, a certificate was given entitling him to two hundred and forty acres of land, which he was allowed to select from all the available homestead land in the possession of the Dominion Government, and for which a deed would be issued to him on

presenting his certificate, or scrip, at the office of the Dominion Lands for the district in which his selected land was situated.

Few of the half-breeds took advantage of the opportunity afforded them to become farmers. Farming was the last thing to which the average half-breed would turn his thoughts. They were hunters and trappers, rovers by nature; and their scrip certificates were to them merely an asset, to be disposed of for what they would fetch. Land was cheap. Hundreds of thousands of acres could be purchased by anyone who had a mind for that kind of foolishness for a dollar an acre and less. No half-breed with any sense would take the trouble to locate and take a deed for unsaleable land which he couldn't farm (and wouldn't if he could), when he could get cash, or some equally desirable article, for his piece of paper with the writing on it, without any trouble or difficulty.

Thus the half-breeds fell into the hands of the speculators. Scrip was sold for ten dollars, five dollars, for a blanket, a bottle of whisky or a keg of beer; for any old thing, in fact, which the speculators had come to offer and which the half-breed, for the moment, wanted – or thought he wanted. Fortunes have been made, time without number, by the purchase of half-breed scrip. There are to-day in Winnipeg, and elsewhere in the West, men who are in the millionaire and near-millionaire classes, who laid the foundations of their fortunes, and made the bulk of them, by their dealings in scrip.

And by no means would all of these transactions bear close scrutiny. Measured under the standard of commercial integrity, it would be found that wholesale fraud was practiced, and that large numbers of half-breeds were cheated out of what even they considered their due – and little enough it was. One method, easily accomplished, and adopted only too frequently on account of its ease of accomplishment, was to ply the half-breed with liquor until he was in a sufficiently besotted state to transfer his scrip for a mere trifle – usually another bottle. That method ran its course, and died out as the half-breeds grew wiser as to the value of their holding. Another favorite method of the scrip dealer was to look up the record of a half-breed, secretly; and on obtaining the necessary evidence that he was entitled to scrip, to take him aside, and whisper gently to him that his benefactor was in a position to get him a certain sum of money. All the half-breed had to do was to sign certain papers, and the machinery would be put in motion. The half-breed argued that he had nothing to lose, and there was a chance of gain. He usually signed – and when it was all over, he got his money, and the dealer got his scrip.

In all these fraudulent dealings, there was one danger to the dealer on which he had to take a chance, which he had no scruples in doing. In locating half-breed scrip, it is necessary for the half-breed whose name is on the certificate to appear at the land office for the district where the land is located, and to file his claim in person. But in the old days this was rarely done. It was an expensive matter to transport whole families of half-breeds to distant points to hand in their certificates, even if the circumstances under which those certificates were obtained from them were such as to make them willing to perform such a service. So here again fraud was introduced. One half-breed would impersonate scores of men whom he had probably never heard

of before, swearing to a different name in each office he visited. It would probably be not far from the truth to say that less than 50 per cent. of the half-breed claims for which deeds have been granted in Western Canada have been located in person, as the law demands, by the half-breeds to whom the scrip was issued.

Even to this day it would seem that this species of fraud is being practiced. Only last year the charge was openly made by one dealer, that another had been guilty of this very practice. With this exception, however, the days of open fraud in scrip purchase are past for ever. To-day, the half-breed has a much better knowledge of the value of his certificate, and a much wider appreciation of the ability of the law to protect him in his business transactions.

Yet, even now, the half-breed does not by any means get the full value of his scrip. Within the past two years, scrip has been purchased at the point of issue for from two hundred to four hundred dollars, while worth at the time in Winnipeg from eighteen hundred to two thousand dollars – the value of a certificate for two hundred and forty acres at \$7.50 to \$8.50 per acre. The price asked in Winnipeg for scrip to-day is \$9.50 per acre.

There are three kinds of scrip issued by the Dominion Government. The first is comparatively rare, and unimportant. It is an undertaking on the part of the Government to accept at its face value the certificate, which is given out, for services rendered, by Government surveyors and other employees of the Dominion in remote places where [illegible] cash scrip, and is issued in varying amounts to suit the service for which it is remuneration.

The second, and by far the most desirable of all scrip, is that which is called “red-back.” This is a land scrip, similar to the ordinary half-breed scrip, for two hundred and forty acres; but it differs from the other and most prevalent form in that it does not require personal application on the part of the person to whom the scrip is issued. The possession of this kind of scrip thus does away with the trouble and expense of transporting the original owner to the spot where the entry for the land is to be made. Red-back scrip is the scrip which was issued to the half-breeds who were proved to be entitled to its issue, but who had left the country – usually for the United States – and for whom it would have entailed some hardship to have been compelled to make the long journey back to Western Canada to enter in person for their land.

The third kind of scrip, in which there is most traffic, is that issued to half-breeds resident in the country, with the condition that personal entry must be made when the land is located.

The half-breeds who are entitled to scrip are not yet all settled with by any means. Every new treaty made by the Dominion Government with the Indians of a hitherto unceded portion of the Dominion, finds some few half-breeds resident in that particular territory, with whom settlement must be made on the same terms as those granted their brethren in the older portions of the West. These treaties are being made annually; and every summer Inspector Semmens, who as the senior officer of the Indian Department in the West holds the appointment of Commissioner to conclude treaty with the Indians, adds a hundred thousand or so square miles to the

area in which the Indians have been brought by treaty under the care of the Indian department.

Half-breeds born in the ceded territory, and half-breeds resident therein who have not previously been settled with, make their applications before the Commissioner. Their parentage is traced back, the record of their residence in the country since birth to the present time is recorded, birth certificates or baptismal certificates are obtained, and the application, with its evidence of the half-breed's claim on the face of it, is forwarded to Ottawa. There the evidence is carefully scrutinized, and the statements of the applicant are compared with the records in the department. If the application is found to be satisfactory, a certificate is forwarded to Winnipeg in due course, and delivered to the applicant in person by the Commissioner.

Frequently the applicant has only the vaguest notion of the information upon which the form of application insists. An applicant will tell his age promptly, and without any hesitation. When the question arises as to where he has lived since his birth, he begins to flounder. By the time he has summed up the term of his residence at various points, it will frequently appear that he has overlapped somewhere – that the addition of these various terms makes him several years older – or younger – than the age he has already given. Then the Commissioner, the applicant, the applicant's relatives, and any other Indians or half-breeds who happen to be handy (there is always an interested audience at these sessions) dig in and endeavor to create order out of the chaos of years and events. If the applicant is, or has been, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, it is a simple matter to obtain the necessary evidence; for the company keeps a full and complete record of the service of all its employees, with dates and place of residence, nature of employment, age, and character.

Another snag is the requirement of a baptismal certificate. Just what value is to be derived by the department from the production of a baptismal certificate is difficult to tell. In many cases, particularly among the old half-breeds, no baptism has ever been performed. In many other cases, although baptized, no record of the fact is to be found in the registers; which at the remoter places in the north, have often been grossly neglected by the native missionaries in charge, themselves often able to read little and write less. Again, baptism may have taken place at birth, or it may have been performed at any age from birth to second childhood. In many of the older registers, the age is absent from the record; or the applicant for admission to the church has been labelled "infant" or "adult." But whatever the value to the department, this is one of the conditions of application; and it forms the most frequent stumbling block to the seeker after scrip.

It sometimes happens that a man of undoubted and well authenticated half-breed lineage will refuse to take scrip, and will insist on taking treaty with the band he lives with. He is absolutely ignorant of the value of scrip, and totally indifferent to the arguments of the scrip buyers who endeavor to show him the error of his ways. One such half-breed refused scrip last year, and took treaty with the rest of the Indians. This man had a family of four children. His record was well-known, and his claim was perfect. It was put to him by the scrip buyers that by taking scrip he would

come into possession of a large sum of money. He got up at treaty time and made a little speech in which he said that he had lived all his life with the Indians. They were his people. If he took scrip, he and his children would have to live like the white man, away from the [illegible] live and die with his people.

That man could have had for the asking five scrip certificates. These at the current prices in the north, were worth a thousand dollars each. They could have been sold in Winnipeg for ten thousand dollars for the five. The income of that at six per cent. would have brought him in fifty dollars a month in perpetuity. He had probably never earned a hundred dollars a year at any time in his life. Yet he put fortune aside with a wave of the hand and sat back, content with five dollars per annum for himself and each of his children, rather than leave the life he had been brought up to.

With childlike simplicity like that the lot of the scrip buyer must be a happy one – providing he is unhampered by competition. To detach scrip certificates from such specimens of unsophisticated guilelessness must be like taking candy from a baby. And if the half-breed himself takes no thought for the morrow, such is far from being the case with the scrip buyer.

This year treaty has been concluded at York Factory and Churchill. All last winter, scrip buyers were on the ground, searching out likely applicants, and persuading the backward ones to apply; making advances in cash or supplies where they would do the most good; hunting up evidence that would probably have been available anyway; and generally making themselves officiously useful – and in spite of the fact that any sale of scrip before it is delivered to the owner is absolutely illegal, doubtless wheedling out of the expectant beneficiaries a promise to deliver up the scrip, when it is obtained, to the good Samaritan who has taken all the trouble and been so kind and helpful.

### **Appendix: Memoir of the Selkirk Settlement<sup>158</sup> (1858)**

Simultaneously with the movement in this city and in different parts of the State, for the establishment of an Emigrant route through Minnesota and the British Possessions to the new field of adventure on Fraser River, the opportune arrival of some six hundred carts from the Red River, laden with the furs of that region, had the effect of directing public attention more immediately to the growing importance of our commercial relations with these remarkable settlements, while it furnished at the same time a multitude of witnesses not only to the advantages of the proposed route, but to the richness of the resources which such a route would develop, and to the beauty and fertility of the region tributary to the valley of the Mississippi, which it would open to colonization.

The novel appearance of the visitors themselves, the odd uniformity of their costume of coarse blue cloth, with its barbaric opulence of brass buttons and fanciful

---

<sup>158</sup> From Wheelock, J. A. (1858). *Memoir of the Selkirk Settlement upon the Red River of the North, with notices of the manners and life of the settlers*. In *Legislature of Minnesota. Report from a Select Committee of the House of Representatives on the overland emigration route from Minnesota to British Oregon*. Saint Paul: Earle S. Goodrich.

ostentation of red belts; the strange mixture of complexions which they presented, all the way down from the fair skin, and light, soft curls of the Celt to the dingy color and straight black hair of the Indian, with every intermediate shade which the amalgamation of races could produce; their language as various as their origin – a curious medley of Chippewa, Cree, French, English, and Gaelic; their rude wooden carts, guiltless of iron, even to the venial peccadillo of a nail, drawn for the most part by oxen harnessed singly in shafts, with gearing made of strips of raw hide, and filing in long procession through the streets of the city, with the disciplined sequence of an Asiatic caravan – it is not surprising that these incidents of a social life, removed at once from barbarism and civilization, should have excited some interest in the history of a people who, with the marks of a European extraction, emerge from the depths of the wilderness with the characteristics of the savage.

Nomadic as to one half of his origin, pastoral and agricultural as to the other; a hunter by his Indian blood, a citizen from his European instincts; thrifty, indolent, staid, mercurial, as father or mother predominates in his nature – the Red River half-breed has a story as curious as any which while away the winter nights in the chimney corner of his ancestral Highland home. When emigration had scarcely ventured to pass the Alleghanies, a colony of Scotchmen had penetrated beyond the waters which flow into Lake Superior and settled at the mouth of the Assineboin. [...] This strange isolation of a European people in the profound abysses of a region almost unknown to the geographer, surrounds them with the charm of romance, and the dramatic situation prepares us for their strange, eventful history. [...]

In 1805, Lord Selkirk, a benevolent but impracticable Scotchman, and a member of the Hudson's Bay Company, who had penetrated into this region, was so struck with its beauty and fertility, and the mildness of its climate, that he conceived the project of planting colonies here whose growth should compensate the British Crown for the recent loss of the United Colonies, and he wrote several tracts, urging the superiority of this region for the British emigrant, over any portion of the United States. In 1811, he succeeded in obtaining for colonization, a grant of land on the Red River, from the Hudson's Bay Company, which was at the same time, aroused by his representations, to the necessity of extending their jurisdiction over a country so rich in furs and of securing its trade to themselves.

In the Autumn of the following year, a small detachment of emigrants, whom Lord Selkirk had collected from the highlands of Scotland, after a long and toilsome journey – which must have been terrible in the vast solitudes through which it led them and to which it led – arrived on the banks of the Red River, near its confluence with the Assineboin. There they commenced building houses, when their work was stopped by a party of men in the service of the North-West Company – who, disguised in Indian costume, ordered them to desist. Frightened by their menaces, they were induced to take refuge at Pembina. Their guides, as savage in disposition as in their assumed dress, tyrannized without mercy over the affrighted colonists, robbing them of whatever they most prized, and found a cruel sport in the alarm they caused the mothers by pretending to run off with their children. Several of the more delicate died under the shock of this inhuman treatment. The winter having been passed in tents

at Pembina, they were permitted to return to their settlements in the Spring. Their labors were about to be rewarded with abundant harvest, when it was destroyed by birds. The next winter was again passed at Pembina, and when they returned to their settlements in the Spring, they were in a condition of abject poverty.

“By the month of September, 1815,” says Mr. Neill, “the number of settlers was about two hundred, and the colony was called Kildonan, after the old parish in Scotland, in which many were born. With increased numbers, all seemed auspicious. Houses were built a mill erected, and imported cattle and sheep began to graze on the undulating plains.”

But avarice and jealousy followed them even to these solitudes. The Northwest Company never looked with favor on the growth of the settlement, which was regarded as a scheme of their rivals of the Hudson’s Bay Company, to dispossess them of a lucrative post which they occupied in the neighborhood; and in the summer of 1814, Duncan Cameron and Alex. McDonnell were appointed at a meeting of the partners of the Company to concert measures to stop the progress of the colony. In pursuance of this design, Cameron, who spoke Gaelic with fluency, artfully insinuated himself into the confidence of the Highlanders, and without evincing direct hostility to the plans of Selkirk, gradually sowed the seeds of dissatisfaction in the settlement, which, in the Spring of 1815, culminated in the desertion of a number of the colonists to the quarters of the Northwestern Company, whose employees in the meanwhile had broken open the storehouse of the colony and carried away their field pieces. Endeavors were also made with partial success to excite the minds of the Indians against the settlers.

A murderous attack was made by the Northwest party on the Governor’s house, who was seized and carried off to Montreal by Cameron. McDonnell followed up on this outrage with a series of aggressions on the settlers. Persecuted to extremity, they were again forced to abandon their homes. About this time, says Mr. Neill, toward the latter part of the pleasant month of June, two Ojibwa Chiefs arrived with forty braves, and offered to escort the persecuted settlers with their property to Lake Winnipeg. Guarded by the grim children of the forest from the assaults of their foes, they, like the Acadian peasants in “Evangeline,” were “friendless, homeless, hopeless.” The mournful picture of the Acadian expatriation was mournfully fulfilled, even in the sad sight of their dwellings wrapped in the flames which the incendiary’s torch had lighted.

In the following Spring the fugitives returned to their colony, under the protection of an officer of the Hudson’s Bay Company, who arrested Cameron and sent him to England for trial.

In the meantime, the Earl of Selkirk, learning of the distress of the colonists, sailed for America. He arrived at New York in the fall of 1815, where rumors of their defection reached him, and in the following spring he set out for the colony with a military escort, which he had organized from some disbanded military companies. At Sault St. Marie, tidings of new disasters reached him. Semple, the Governor of the territory of the Hudson’s Bay Company, who had but just taken possession of his new quarters on Red River, was attacked by a party of the employees of the Northwestern



Company, and killed with a number of his men, in the affray. The settlers were again expelled from their homes by the victorious marauders, and were already on their way to the sea coast, when they were recalled by the welcome news of Selkirk's approach. A reinforcement of emigrants sent to the colony under his direction, had preceded him. Incensed at the atrocities which had been perpetrated by the agents of the Northwestern Company, he had proceeded with his force to the head quarters of that Company, at Fort William, on Lake Superior, and having apprehended the principal parties, sent them to Montreal for trial.

His arrival at Red River soon retrieved the affairs of the colony, and he left it the following year in a flourishing condition.

Owing, however, to the scarcity of seed, which was the natural consequence of the difficulties already stated, the harvest of 1817, though the yield was prolific, was insufficient to supply the wants of the increasing population, and hunting was again resorted to for subsistence. They set out in December across the plains to join a distant camp of Pembina half-breed hunters and Indians. They reached it after a journey of terrible suffering, to find the Buffalo scarce and the camp subsisting upon scanty fare. Spring renewed their hopes. The summer was propitious. The harvest was already ripe for the sickle, when a new and terrible calamity befell them.

It was at this epoch, in the summer of 1818, that the grasshoppers, which for the past and present years have again devastated those settlements and extended their depredations over a considerable part of Minnesota, made their first recorded appearance in that region. The vast armies of these insects darkened the air, and passed over the land like a consuming fire, licking up every green thing. The next year (1819), the havoc was even worse.

"They were produced," says Ross, "in masses, two, three, four inches in depth. The water was infected with them. Along the river they were to be found in heaps like seaweed and might be shoveled with a spade. Every vegetable substance was either eaten up or stripped to the bare stalk. The bark of trees shared the same fate. Even fires, if kindled out of doors, were immediately extinguished by them."

The hunter's life alone seemed left to the despairing colonists, but one more effort was made to retrieve their condition. During the winter of 1819-20, a deputation of settlers traveled a thousand miles on snow-shoes across Minnesota to Prairie du Chien, for seed. The details of the return trip in the Spring of 1820, are highly interesting. Three Mackinac boats laden with wheat, oats, and peas, started on the 15th of April from Prairie du Chine for the Selkirk settlements on Red River. "On the third day of May the boats passed through Lake Pepin. The voyage was continued up the Minnesota River to Big Stone Lake, from which a portage was made into Lac Traverse, a mile and a half distant, the boats being moved across on rollers." On the third day of June the party arrived at Pembina, where on opposite sides of the stream of that name, the Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies had rival trading posts, which still exist. This eventful voyage is one of the most striking incidents in the chronicles of the settlement, and as remarked by Gov. Sibley in an address delivered by him, "is worthy of note, as it is the only instance of heavy articles being

transported the entire distance from Prairie du Chien to the Red River by water, with the exception of the narrow portage between Big Stone Lake and Lake Traverse.”

The next two years of continued prosperity repaired the disasters which had heretofore assailed the colony. In 1821, the two great rival Trading Companies, tired of useless bloodshed and expensive strife, consolidated under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company, and their union seemed to secure the future peace and safety of their settlement.

In the same year, a number of Swiss arrived in the colony. Clockmakers in profession, the new pursuits to which they were called were not congenial to them. Like the Swiss soldiers of Napoleon, they grew homesick, and pined for their native mountain homes.

The settlement was not done with calamity. Misfortune, which had pursued it in every form, in each successive visit took shapes more appalling than the last. The winter and spring of 1825-6 brought a fresh train of disasters. In the month of December a furious storm overtook a large party of buffalo hunters in the northern plains of Minnesota, and drove the buffalo out of their reach. Relying solely on the flesh of this animal for subsistence, cut off by the wide waste of deep snows from the nearest settlement at Pembina, nearly 200 miles distant, they had no resource in this emergency. Starvation stared them in the face. Fuel was as inaccessible as food. Imprisoned in the deep snows, overwhelmed with cold and hunger, numbers perished in the camp, or in a vain attempt to reach Pembina, before rumors of their situation reached the colony.

The calamities of the settlers reached their climax in the ensuing spring, when the melting snows poured their torrents into the streams. The year 1826 is memorable in their calendar, as the year of the flood. On the 2d of May the Red River rose nine feet in twenty-four hours, and by the 5th the level plains were submerged. The waters continued to rise till the 21st, when the houses and barns were swept off in the deluge. The settlers fled to the distant hills, whence the waters swept over the wide plains as far as the eye could see. The flood abated in June, “and such,” says Mr. Neill, “is the surprising quickness with which vegetation matures five degrees of latitude north of St. Paul, that wheat planted on the 22nd of June came to maturity.”

The discontented Swiss, driven from their homes by the flood, did not return to the settlement, but departed for the United States and settled at different points on the banks of the Mississippi. It is a curious historical fact, that the first emigrants to Minnesota, were the Swiss refugees from Red River in 1826, who opened farms on the present site of St. Paul, and near Fort Snelling; and, according to our historian, should be recognized as the first actual settlers of the State.

Since this destructive inundation, no event has occurred in the history of the settlement to interrupt the calm course of its prosperity, until the year 1852 brought another recurrence of the deluge which had swept over the plains twenty-six years before. The waters in that year rose a foot higher than in 1826. In consequence of the exposure of the settlement at Pembina to these ruinous casualties, a new site was selected for the Catholic Mission at that place near Mount Pembina, forty miles distant, at a place called St. Joseph.

And during the last two or three years the Red River valley has been re-visited by the mysterious army of grasshoppers, whose advance guard paused last year, in their blasting flight, in the northwestern counties of Minnesota.

A visit of Col. Sumner, of the U. S. A., to Pembina in 1844 to stop the encroachments of the British Half breeds on the Buffalo ranges of Minnesota, and of Gov. Ramsey, in 1851, to make a treaty with the Upper Chippewas; an occasional battle with the Yankton Sioux; the arrival of a new missionary, or the visit of an explorer; the success or failure of a season's hunt, and the yearly expeditions from the settlement to the new cities which have arisen during the last ten years on the head waters of the Mississippi; the excitement of their return, freighted with curious wares to gratify the fancy of the delighted women and children, are all the incidents which have occurred in the interval to vary the quiet uniformity of their lives, until the prospect of emancipation from the control of the Hudson's Bay Company, gave a new impetus and an intelligent direction to the discontents which have long been brewing in the colony.

Imprisoned in the depths of the vast solitudes which surround them, cut off for half a century from human sympathy by the universal ignorance of their situation, they suddenly find themselves the object of the concern of the civilized world, and all eyes fixed upon the isolated spot they occupy as the theatre of the most stupendous enterprise of the age, and destined in its realization to change the face of the continent.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION

THE GENS LIBRES. – Long before the Scotch settlement was formed at the mouth of the Assineboin, the traffic in furs had attracted a class of roving adventurers from Canada, attached to the numerous trading posts which the French, and after then the Northwest Company, had established throughout this region. Fascinated with the wild romantic life of the *coureur des bois* – severed from a society which no longer had any charms for them, their restless temperaments found a congenial employment in the pursuit of this adventurous and erratic life, while the pleasures of the song and dance and pipe, and the caress of an Indian maid compensated them for all their toils and dangers.

The formation of a permanent settlement by the Scotch colonists, with the nucleus of a civilization, had the effect of giving an organized social state to the *gens libres*, as they called themselves, and their half-breed children. The establishment of missions recalled them to some of the duties of civilized life, and they have become gradually incorporated without becoming assimilated with the settlement.

ENUMERATION AND SOCIAL DIVISION. – The population of the Red River Valley, of white and mixed blood, which in 1812 amounted to only a few hundreds in all, has expanded in the course of forty-six years, to over eight thousand souls, partly by the natural laws of growth, but mainly by direct accessions of emigrants from different sources at different periods, principally of Scotch, Swiss and English in 1813, 1817 and 1823, with a constant influx of Canadians.

Broad differences of nationality, of religion, and of modes of life, divide this heterogenous population into two classes, nearly equal in numbers. One half are

farmers, the other half hunters. Those of European extraction, principally Scotch, are generally engaged in agriculture, and the fixed avocations of civilized life. They are mainly Protestants, of which the larger proportion is Presbyterian, the rest Episcopalians and Methodists. The Canadians and the *Bois-brules*, descendants of the *Gens libres*, and the prolific product of more recent intermarriages with the surrounding savages, usually follow the chase for subsistence, and are generally Catholics. The traditions of the former connect them with the early struggles of the Hudson's Bay Company, of the latter, with its Northwestern rival.

**THE SETTLEMENT – THE FARMER.** – Commencing about sixty miles below the American boundary, this population is distributed over a settlement of perhaps seventy miles in length, stretching from the mouth of the Assineboin westward along that river and northward along the Red River. The plain, tessellated with farms and dotted with neat white houses of logs or frame set in snug enclosures, and surrounded with luxuriant gardens, while the wide champaign is covered in the distance with herds of browsing cattle and horses, presents an aspect of rural cultivation which recalls the features of a Belgian landscape.

The numerous windmills, of which there are eighteen in the settlement, mark their isolation from the progress of the age. The principal village is at Fort Garry, at the confluence of the Red and Assineboin Rivers – the Kildonan of the early settlers – where a Catholic cathedral, built of stone, and several steepled Churches of different Protestant denominations, evince the attention paid to religion, and a number of schools dispense the rudiments of education. Here the Governor of the colony, appointed by the Queen, has his seat. His jurisdiction extends over a circle of a hundred miles from this centre, which he governs by the aid of a Council composed of officers of the Company, with a sway despotic and perhaps illegal in prerogative, but generally mild and just in its exercise, except in the arbitrary restraints which their commercial monopoly imposes upon the freedom of traffic.

The prices of goods sold by the Company, are fixed by a tariff of 75 per cent. above the invoice prices, which, after paying all the charges of transit, yields enormous profit to the stockholders, who are some two or three hundred in number. The agriculturalists, with no market for their products but the employees of the Company, obliged to sell at prices fixed by them, have little inducement to vigorous industry. This oppressive policy, which closes all the avenues of wealth against them, has driven many of them to hunting for a subsistence, and others to a defiant competition with the Company in the fur trade. In other respects, the life of the agriculturalist is that of the peaceful and orderly monotony of a Scotch hamlet, whose widest extremes are the kirk and the farm, between which their lives alternate in quiet religious contentment.

**THE HUNTERS – THEIR MANNERS.** – The half-breed hunters are the social antipodes of this simple peasantry, with whom they have nothing in common but their common home. These nomadic people unite in their temperaments the characteristics of the races which mingle in their blood. Inured to hardships and danger from their earliest youth, no exposure and no difficulties can conquer their capacity for physical endurance. Their habits betray the indolence and improvidence

of their Indian mothers, and the spirit of adventure which animates their European fathers.

Their existence is a perpetual romance, crowded with dramatic contrasts and abrupt transitions from one extreme to another; now sunk in a sloth that seems habitual, now plunging into wild excitements that seem necessary to their existence.

In the intervals of their periodical hunts, their lives are passed in indolence and gaiety at the settlement, where, living in log huts, they subsist upon the products of their latest excursion. The fiddle, the pipe, gambling, drinking, and the pursuit of women, amuse these months of Capuan idleness. Their pleasures, however, are seldom marked by disorders or excesses.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE CHASE. – The careless *abandon* of these periods of repose is exchanged for enthusiastic activity at the approach of the hunting seasons, of which there are two, one commencing in the middle of June, and lasting for two months, and the other on the first of September, and lasting one month. At the first opening of the spring the settlement resounds with preparations for the approaching campaign, and as all are taught the rude use of tools, all are busy together making and repairing carts, harnesses, and tents of Buffalo skins, for the long voyage across the plains. The cart is a rude but light vehicle, with shafts, in which a single ox, harnessed in gearing made of strips of raw hide, performs the labor of transportation. The wives and children of the hunters accompany them in these expeditions, to perform the menial services of the camp, to pitch the tent and cook the evening meal.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE TRAINS. – Over a thousand carts are frequently assembled for the journey. And as they emerge from the settlements, mutely following each other in single file, and the vast procession winds away across the plains and over the distant hills, and slowly sinks with the setting sun into the vast wilderness beyond, the intelligent spectator instinctively recalls the caravans which fill with pictures of romance and poetry the desert plains of Asia.

THE CAMP. – A thorough organization ensures the order of the camp – which is divided into brigades under the command of captains elected by the hunters, while a chief officer controls the whole body. Rules are adopted by the captains in council for the government of the camp, which are generally implicitly obeyed. A flag hoisted in the morning is their *reveille* – and when lowered at night it is a signal for a halt. The formation of their night encampments is conducted with the discipline of an army in the presence of an enemy, and their preparations indeed look to the possibility of attack from the savage foes who often hover on their trail. “The carts are arranged in the form of a circle with the shafts projecting outward; the tents are pitched at one end and the animals tethered at the other.” Sentinels relieved at regular intervals patrol the camp, and not unfrequently the cry of alarm startles the hunters from their mid-night slumbers to repel the treacherous attack of their stealthy Yankton enemies. The Sabbath day is observed by abstinence from hunting. Theft is rigorously punished.

THE HUNT. – Regulating their journey by these rules, the buffalo is sought in his favorite ranges on the Shayenne or the more distant plains of the Saskatchewan,

where thousands are often found in a single herd. Scouts announce their presence; a permanent encampment is formed. Mounted on trained horses, the hunters advance in a regular cavalcade under the orders of their leader, towards the herd, taking advantage of all the inequalities of the surface to conceal their approach. The cautious advance gives place to a swift gallop, as they burst in among the frightened herd and pour a volley into their flanks. The flight of the herd and the hunter's pursuit is a scene of fierce excitement, which has no parallel except upon the field of battle. The tramp of the retreating army of buffaloes is described as like the shock of an earthquake. Often thousands of these noble animals in a single day will bite the dust under the practiced aim of the hunters. As they dash forward at full gallop in the swift pursuit, their mouths full of bullets which they drop from their teeth, without wadding, into the muzzle of their guns, while the hasty charge is beat into the barrel, by concussion upon the pommel of the saddle, they load and fire in a few seconds, never stopping for an instant in the headlong race.

The carts follow the hunters to bring in the spoils. A busy scene ensues; the carcasses are stripped of their skins, the tongues cut out; such of the meat as can be used is carried into camp; a part is dried, the rest is converted into pemmican – a preparation of boiled tallow, mixed with shreds of meat, and poured into sacks of raw hide – and when the skins are dressed and the tongues cured, the labors of the expedition are ended; – and the hunters return to their homes to subsist till the Fall hunt, on the results of their adventure. They live mostly on pemmican and buffalo meats. The former is the *sine qua non* of the voyageur, and sells at the settlements for four cents per pound. The tongues and hides are reserved for barter. A dried tongue sells usually for twenty-five cents, and a buffalo skin for two or three dollars.

#### HISTORY OF THE FUR TRADE OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY

For two hundred years the traffic in furs with the Indian tribes who inhabit the basin of Lake Winnipeg has been prosecuted on the shores of Hudson's Bay.

Obliged by the conditions of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714, to surrender the traffic on these shores to the exclusive possession of the Hudson's Bay Company, the French confined their attention to the new channel of trade which the Great Lakes opened out to them, and pushing their enterprises through the streams which flow from the West into Lake Superior, emerged upon the magnificent plains which are watered by the affluents of Lake Winnipeg, and established trading posts on the Lake of the Woods, the Assineboin, and even among the distant tribes who inhabited the sources of the Saskatchewan. In 1763, by the terms of the treaty of Versailles, the French relinquished their North American possessions to England, and three years afterward, British subjects from Canada following the routes pursued by the old French traders, began to avail themselves of the profitable traffic which the French had established, and penetrating as far westward as their predecessors, began to occupy the posts which the latter had deserted along the great rivers that flow into Lake Winnipeg. They even stretched northward, and engaged in direct competition with the Hudson's Bay Company for the traffic which they at this time carried on along the rivers which debouch into Hudson's Bay. These adventures, however, were

individual enterprises, and their prosecution often brought them into collision with the servants of that company.

Uniting against their common enemy, the principal of these traders formed, in 1783, a powerful organization under the name of the Northwest Company. This was not a chartered company, but as successors to the old French traders, they pursued a very lucrative traffic via the lakes, penetrating to regions which the French had not reached, even to the shores of the Pacific. Their fleets of canoes laden with goods for the Indians or furs for Montreal, traversed the continent in every direction through the connected chain of rivers and lakes from Montreal to Puget's Sound. It was not till 1811 that the Hudson's Bay Company, at the instigation of the Earl of Selkirk, set up a claim of extensive jurisdiction under their charter, over this immense region, and in 1812, with the arrival of the first instalment of Selkirk colonists, they established a fort and factory on the Red River. The savage contest followed with the Northwest Company, [...] in which the colony was ruinously involved, and which, after years of murderous strife, terminating with the mutual exhaustion of both parties, was at length concluded by the coalition of the rival companies in 1821. Some idea of the extent to which energy and activity of private enterprise had carried the fur trade in the region west of Lake Superior, principally along the valleys of the Red River and Saskatchewan, may be obtained from the fact that in 1815 the Northwest Company had sixty trading posts in this region.

Thus the history of the fur trade of the Red River Valley may be divided into three periods, of nearly equal duration: the period of the French occupancy, from 1714 to 1763, when the trade of the region had its outlet through Rainy Lake River into Lake Superior – the period of over fifty years following, from 1766 to 1821, when the trade was principally in the hands of the Northwest Company, and followed the old water courses which the French had pursued – and the remaining period, from 1821 to the present time, during which it has been nearly monopolized by the Hudson's Bay Company, and forced by them through the difficult channel of Nelson's River, which connects their interior trade with their ancient posts on the shores of Hudson's Bay.

The vast country watered by the majestic rivers which interlock in Lake Winnipeg, extending from Hudson's Bay and Lake Superior to the Rocky Mountains, is one of four principal divisions of the Company's Territories, and such is the withering effect of commercial monopoly, that the numerous trading posts which the Company found established at every eligible point along the streams, have dwindled to thirty-three in number.

The furs collected at these posts, which extend westward, from Red River to the Rocky Mountains, and from two or three hundred miles apart are transmitted in barges and canoes down the Saskatchewan and other streams, to Lake Winnipeg, whence they have three different outlets, to wit: through Nelson's River to Hudson's Bay; through Red and Rainy Lake Rivers to Lake Superior; and latterly by carts overland, from the Red River Settlement to St. Paul. The expense and difficulty of travel through the two former canoe routes, interrupted by innumerable portages, has had the effect, during the last decade, to turn this trade in the direction of its

geographical affinities, which furnish in the smooth adjacent plains of the Red River and Mississippi, its easiest and cheapest avenues to market. The land route to St. Paul has increased in favor since the completion of Railroads to the Mississippi, has brought us into direct communication with the seaboard, and the Hudson's Bay Company itself ceasing to struggle against the inevitable tendency of things, has itself acknowledged the superiority of the route it ignored, by sending, this year, over sixty passages of its goods by this channel.

The adoption of this new avenue marks a new era in the history of the trade, and it will be interesting to inform ourselves of the value of that trade which is shortly to be emancipated from the arbitrary restraints of a commercial monopoly – to follow its legitimate impulses – and then to show by statistics the progress of the commercial intercourse which has sprung up in obedience to its natural tendencies – and its prospects of future expansion in the development of the varied resources of the immense region which is drained by this channel.

According to an English document before us, the gross value of the furs and skins exported to England from the possessions of the Hudson's Bay Company, varies from \$1,000,000 to \$2,500,000. At the half yearly sale at London, in April of last year, the proceeds were \$1,150,000.

The average of annual exports of furs &c., from the Company's possessions will be about \$1,800,000 – about five times the value of the imports sent in exchange, which amount to about three hundred thousand dollars in all. The proportion of these imports which go to the district under consideration, will afford a reliable measure of the value of the exports therefrom, which are shown to be as five to one. The imports of the Company's goods into the Red River Settlement alone, have averaged for a number of years past about \$100,000 per year. It is fair to presume that at least an equal amount (a very low estimate) has been distributed among the numerous posts along the Saskatchewan and its tributaries. The proportion, then, of the whole export of furs from the basin of the Winnipeg may be safely estimated at more than one half of the whole trade of the Company, or at least \$1,000,000.

#### THE FUR TRADE OF ST. PAUL WITH THE RED RIVER VALLEY

It is to Norman W. Kittson, Esq., the present Mayor of the City of St. Paul, that we are indebted for the very first establishment of a regular trade between the Red River Valley, and the navigable waters of the Mississippi. Mr. Kittson went to Pembina in 1843. This advantageous point, at the mouth of the Pembina River and immediately on the international boundary, which had formerly been occupied by the old Northwest Company as a trading post, he found deserted.

But perceiving the eligibility of this situation for tapping the rich fur trade of the Red River Valley, with an entire exemption from the jurisdiction of the oppressive monopoly on the other side of the line, he made arrangements for establishing a post here in connection with the Outfit of the American Fur Company at Mendota, at the junction of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, and in the following year, 1844, arrived at Pembina with the first American outfit ever established in the Red River.

The first recorded journey from Red River to the Mississippi undertaken with a commercial object, was in 1820, when the exigencies of the Red River settlement



obliged them to procure supplies of seed at Prairie du Chien. The details of the voyage homeward, accomplished in Mackinac boats, through the Minnesota and Red Rivers, all the way by water except the narrow portage of a mile and a half between Lake Traverse and Big Stone Lake, have already been given. And the citizens of St. Paul are familiar with the venerable form of Peter Hayden, who has until recently annually visited St. Paul, and who long before Mr. Kittson established his post at Pembina, was in the habit of making occasional excursions from the Selkirk Settlement to Mendota, with droves of cattle and cargoes of moccasins.

In connection with the earlier exploits in this trade may be mentioned, also, the trip made by Alexis Bailly, Esq., now a citizen of Wabashaw, in company with Francois Labothe, now a citizen of Nicollet county. Mr. Bailly took a herd of cattle and horses to Red River, which were in great demand at the colony at the time, and commanded high prices. He had several escapes from Indian war parties, who stole all the horses. Mr. Bailly sold milch cows at the colony for \$100 and \$135 each, and other cattle in proportion.

But the staple of the country – furs – formed no part of these erratic ventures.. In these commodities, the Hudson's Bay Company rigidly preserved their monopoly, the least infringement of which was rigorously punished. But from the time of the establishment of Mr. Kittson's trading post in 1844, on the very edge of their territory, yet shielded from their animosity by the inviolability of American soil and American citizenship, they were compelled to witness a constant encroachment on their monopoly, without the possibility of preventing it. The British half-breeds roamed unrestricted over American Territory, gathering thousands of robes annually, on the Shayenne and the Missouri, to enrich the Hudson's Bay Company. International justice certainly did not suffer, although the Company might, if furs procured on the Saskatchewan and Assineboin found their way gradually to the intrusive American post, on the frontier. The Company did what they could to break up the new establishment. They even had Mr. Kittson at one time arrested for a violation of their charter, but discreetly failed to bring any suit against him, which might have tested its validity.

But partly in consequence of the repressive measures adopted by them, and still more from the natural difficulty of attracting trade from its established channels, the first years of this single handed competition with a corporation which, in a history of two hundred years, had worsted all its rivals, gave little promise of the success which has at a later period attended its prosecution.

The amount of capital invested in the first venture, in 1844, was only about \$2000, and the gross proceeds of the furs collected in return, scarcely exceeded \$1400. The next two years' operations involved a similar loss, the proceeds of furs collected in 1845 being only some \$3000, against an investment in merchandize, &c., of \$4000 – and of furs in 1846, of \$5000, against a capital invested of \$6000. From this time, however, the stream of trade began to turn in the direction of the Mississippi, and to break over the artificial barriers interposed by the Company. Mr. Kittson's post grew in favor with the half-breed settlers, who deserted in numbers from the service of the Company, to receive their supplies from the American trader. In 1850 the trade had

increased so as to involve a consumption of goods to the extent of \$10,000, and it is possible that the proceeds in furs were at least \$15,000. Five years later (in 1855), the Pembina outfit engaged an expenditure of \$24,000, with a return in furs of nearly \$40,000.

The importance of the trade at this time seemed to demand a special depot at St. Paul, and accordingly in this year, the firm of Forbes & Kittson was organized, principally on this basis, and Mr. Kittson, abandoning the subordinate outfit to younger traders, took up his residence in this city – and the enterprising firm of Culver & Farrington soon after established an agency in the same lucrative district.

In 1856, the total furs received at St. Paul from this source, amounted to nearly \$75,000, being nearly four-fifths of the whole fur trade of St. Paul.

From statistics published in the St. Paul Advertiser of December 21, 1857, we learn that the total value of the furs which passed through St. Paul houses that year for exportation below amounted to \$180,000 – of which at least two-thirds, or \$120,000, was the product of the Red River Valley. This year, owing to the partial failure of the Buffalo – the most important crop of furs – the receipts are lighter, and will not perhaps exceed \$100,000. But the carts which are laden with furs form but a small part of the immense caravans which now annually set out from the Red River Colony to St. Paul. The loaded carts, of the five hundred which recently arrived at St. Paul, did not exceed one-fourth of the whole number. The rest arrived empty, and returned to the settlement laden with merchandise, purchased – not by exchange of furs – but by direct *outlays of money*.

From the number of empty carts which did not depend upon exchanges of furs to fill them, in proportion to the loaded ones, it is a low estimate to presume that the amount of money brought to St. Paul from the Selkirk Settlement by the arrivals of this season was at least equal in value to the fur product – or about \$100,000.

These carts, like the marine tonnage in a particular trade, afford a valuable measure of the growth of the trade. In 1844 the carts which accompanied Mr. Kittson to Mendota to convey the results of his first season's business at Pembina, were only six in number.

In 1858 the aggregate arrivals are currently stated at six hundred. Of these, it is interesting to note that over four hundred came from the British Territory. The owners of these, instead of furs which they are prohibited by the "Company" from exporting, except through their hands, bring the money which they have obtained in exchange for their peltries.

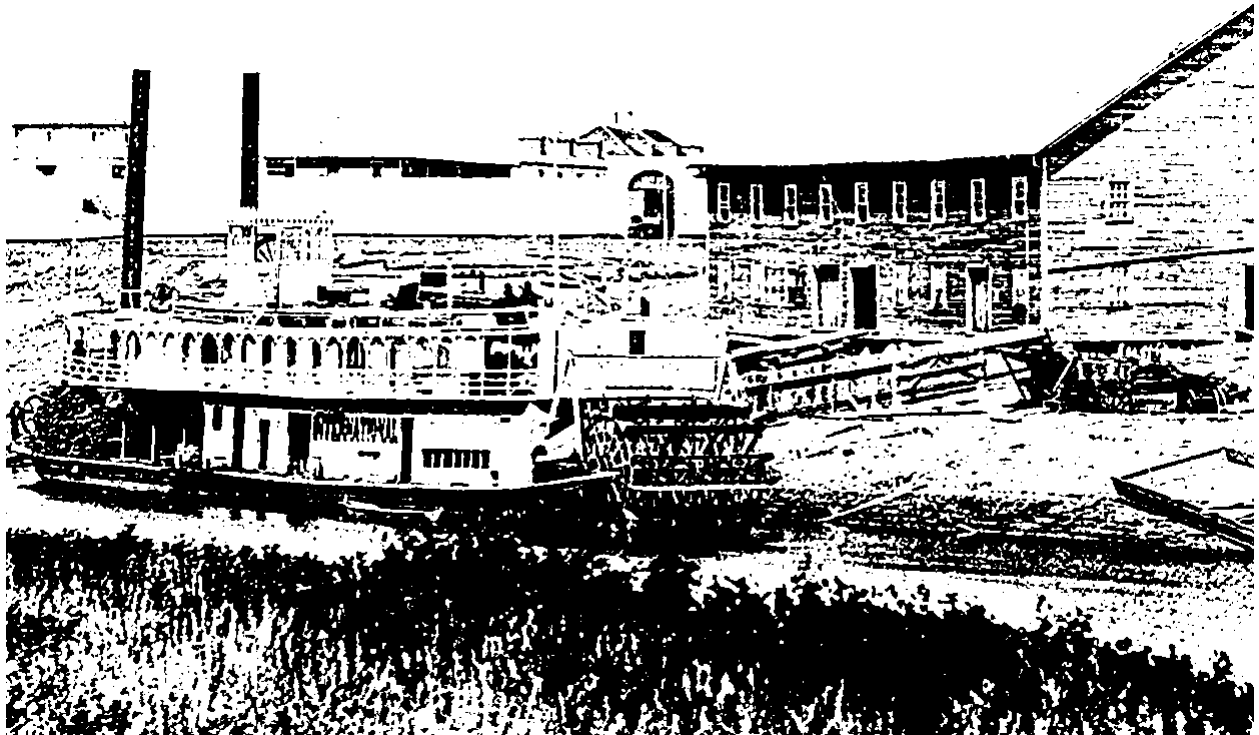
The monopoly in the course of the last five years has hung very loosely round the shoulders of the "Company." The competition in the fur trade, which, before that was put down by the most rigorous measures, now proves too formidable and is backed by too powerful a public opinion in Canada to be suppressed by the usual policy of restriction.

In addition to the American posts on this side of the line, there are some hundred independent traders in the Territories of the Company itself, of which there are at least seventy in the Selkirk Settlement alone. Though rigidly prohibited from

dealing in the contraband articles of furs and rum; both branches of trade are prosecuted to considerable extent and the product smuggled across the border.

It cannot be doubted that if the enormous duty of 12½ per cent now levied on importations of British furs across the boundary were abolished, that with the termination of the sway of the Hudson's Bay Company, the whole of the trade now forced through the difficult channel of Nelson's River, would seek its more natural and congenial outlet in this direction.

---



Steamboat at the H.B.C. warehouse at Upper Fort Garry, 1872. (From a photograph.)