

# Introduction to the 1998 edition

## REFLECTIONS ON INDIANS IN THE FUR TRADE

Every book has a story. The story of this book begins with a question posed by my graduate supervisor, Andrew H. Clark (1911–75). In the mid-1960s he asked, ‘Why not study the Métis of Western Canada?’ It started me down a path that led to *Indians in the Fur Trade*.

Andrew Clark’s historical geography graduate research seminar at the University of Wisconsin at Madison was legendary. Each year the class tackled a different theme; in 1964–5 it was ethnic groups on the frontier. For my part I chose to explore the subject of people of mixed Aboriginal, African, and European ancestry living in the Appalachian region of the Eastern United States. Clark, who had grown up in southern Manitoba and remained deeply interested in the history of that region, suggested that the Métis would make an attractive alternative prospect. The Wisconsin State Historical Society Library, which is located on the campus, had excellent documentary holdings on the pre-Confederation Canadian West. Following his suggestion, and my initial seminar research into the economic life of the Métis at Red River between 1821 and 1870, I decided to make them the subject of my doctoral thesis. To obtain the necessary background, I had to learn a lot more about the roles the Aboriginal ancestors and relatives of the Métis played in the Canadian fur trade. Quickly, this fascinating quest became the primary focus of my research and kindled my abiding interest in the history of the Aboriginal people of Canada.

As a novice historical geographer I was particularly interested in dis-

covering how Native peoples' participation in the fur trade altered their relationships with the land. At the time, the definitive studies were those of economic historian Harold Innis,<sup>1</sup> ethnographers Marcel Giraud and David Mandelbaum,<sup>2</sup> and historians Arthur S. Morton and E.E. Rich.<sup>3</sup> Of this group, only Giraud and Mandelbaum focused on Aboriginal people. Innis, Morton, and Rich emphasized European and Canadian colonial expansion and development, which meant they considered Aboriginal people primarily in terms of the ways they contributed to, or hindered, imperial schemes. Necessarily, all of these scholars addressed geographic issues, but none of them adopted an explicitly historical-cultural geographic perspective.

Several theoretical and methodological interests current among cultural-historical geographers and anthropologists in the late 1960s shaped my particular geographic focus. Clark conceived historical geography as being primarily the study of the geography of change. Similar to many other cultural geographers who had studied under Carol Sauer at the University of California – Berkeley, Clark was particularly interested in exploring through archival research and fieldwork the ways in which European expansion had altered the landscapes of various parts of the previously colonized world. This approach was appealing: it both emphasized the dynamic aspects of culture history and provided a fresh way of looking at colonial expansion into the central and western portions of Aboriginal Canada after the mid-seventeenth century.

While anthropology had long been interested in the culture history of the Native people of this region, as late as the 1960s anthropologists commonly used the culture area approach.<sup>4</sup> Typically this involved selecting a specific group, such as the Plains or Woodland Assiniboine or Cree, to represent a given culture area.<sup>5</sup> In their studies of Native–EuroAmerican interaction, anthropologists tended to cast Aboriginal people in reflexive roles and the newcomers as the primary catalyst for culture change.

The anthropological literature pertaining to the northern Plains region emphasized themes that were common to the culture area approach: acculturation, diffusion of cultural traits, and population migration. Research into the role of population movement in cultural development in the northern Plains region arose from ethnographic fieldwork which had revealed, largely from Aboriginal oral traditions and documentary records, that the ancestors of some of the Plains Algonquian speakers originated from the bordering forests. Before the 1970s, ethnographers mostly speculated about the factors that had stimulated migrations before and after the arrival of Europeans, emphasizing the impact of the diffusion of key traits

such as firearms and horses.<sup>6</sup> Less attention was paid to the processes that facilitated the migration of Aboriginal people across major ecological boundaries, which interested me and would become the focus of my work. Also neglected was the nature of traditional Native economic behaviour and the ways it might have influenced and, in turn, been altered by economic interchange with Europeans in the fur trade. Indeed, in the 1960s, and even today, specialists in Native studies seldom acknowledge Aboriginal people as economic actors. This too would become a focus of my research.

My graduate studies in cultural geography and economic anthropology in the late 1960s led me to the literature of cross-cultural trade and the writings in economic history of Karl Polanyi and his students.<sup>7</sup> Like many students of my generation, I was fascinated, at least initially, with Polanyi's notions of 'non-market' exchange, particularly gift trade. In 1960, the historian of the Hudson's Bay Company, E.E. Rich, published a seminal article concerning Native economic behaviour in the northern fur trade, arguing that Aboriginal people did not respond to market forces. This work suggested to me that Polanyi's perspectives could provide new insights into this dimension of culture contact and the diffusion process associated with it.

The pioneering work of an archaeologist at Madison, David Baerreis, one of my doctoral supervisors, indicated that archivally based fur trade research could offer other valuable insights into the processes of material culture change after European contact. In a rarely cited methodological paper regarding the application of the direct historical approach to archaeology, published in 1961, Baerreis argued that fur traders' account books could serve as the basis for detailed quantitative analyses of changing Native economic systems.<sup>8</sup> He demonstrated the utility of the method by showing that the Delaware, Miami, and Potawatomi, who traded at Fort Wayne in the early nineteenth century, had distinctive spending patterns that reflected their changing economic-ecological orientations. His finding encouraged me to apply this method to Western Canada using the records of the Hudson's Bay Company. I would document how Aboriginal people's involvement in the fur trade and their migration to new ecological settings affected their ways of life and material cultures.

In this robust intellectual climate of divergent interests, questions, and methodologies, my study of Indians in the fur trade emerged as an exercise in historical-cultural-ecological geography. I consciously departed from traditional historical and anthropological approaches to the study of North American Native groups in several key respects. For one thing, I expressly

abandoned the frontier perspective that had been widely used by historians ever since Frederick Jackson Turner had popularized this concept at the University of Wisconsin at the beginning of the twentieth century. For me, European expansion was only one of many catalysts for change among western Canadian Native groups. For another, I focused my attention on the ecotone between the Plains and Subarctic culture areas – the Parkland zone. And, rather than selecting a specific group as my research focus, I chose to look at the succession of Aboriginal nations who used this transition zone from the eve of contact until the late nineteenth century.

The concepts current in the literature of cultural ecology, particular those developed by Julian Steward and Fredrik Barth, provided the broad conceptual framework. Steward's model emphasized the economic aspect of culture-environment relationships.<sup>9</sup> This perspective was attractive for its compatibility with the Clark-Sauer school of historical-cultural geography, an intellectual approach that emphasized the study of human interaction with the local landscape. Barth's work was equally appealing, because it indicated the extent to which the spatial distribution of ethnic groups and their interaction with one another could be influenced by the ecological niches exploited by those groups.<sup>10</sup> Barth thus offered a useful way of looking at an area where the cultural-ecological context of the various Native groups fluctuated through population migration, the acquisition of new technology, and the introduction of epidemic diseases.

Initially, Andrew Clark doubted that the documentary record would yield enough information about Aboriginal people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to answer my questions. Clark's scepticism was justified at the time because the extent and nature of the Hudson's Bay Company archives were all but unknown. Only Giraud, Morton, and Rich had drawn heavily on these sources, and only Giraud had included citations to the unpublished materials he had consulted.<sup>11</sup> To my joy, the Hudson's Bay Company record proved to be ideally suited for my purposes. The voluminous post journals, correspondence books, and district reports abound in information about population movement, demographic trends, and the nature of local Aboriginal economies. Complementing these qualitative sources is a massive accounting record. At the time, the primitive state of data-collecting technology was, by today's standards, the primary obstacle standing in the way of fully exploiting this aspect of the company's archive. Photocopying was not allowed, and the absence of portable computers, or even affordable pocket calculators, meant that the extensive lists of goods the company sold at its posts had to be copied in longhand or by mechanical typewriter. This was a time-consuming process that limited me to mak-

ing only a sample to highlight the changing trade at posts situated in different ecological settings.

I consider myself fortunate to have taken up a position in geography at York University in 1970, before finishing my thesis. It was a time when the field of Native studies in Canada was just beginning to undergo substantial changes as a consequence of the development of the field of ethnohistory. This was an interdisciplinary approach to the history of Aboriginal people pioneered by archaeologists who turned to documentary sources, particularly fur trade and missionary records, to supplement and interpret data they had obtained through their excavations.<sup>12</sup> The St Lawrence River valley and southern Ontario comprised one of the regions of Canada where the utility of this new approach was first demonstrated. This area had been the focus of intensive archaeological research since the late nineteenth century. In the late 1960s archaeologists and historical geographers began to draw on this work as well as the Jesuit *Relations* and other documents from colonial New France to develop richly detailed histories of the Huron and their Aboriginal neighbours. These pioneering studies moved the Native history of this part of Canada from the periphery, where it had been treated merely as an aspect of French and English colonial history, to centre stage. Conrad Heidenreich, my colleague in geography at York University, is a prime example of these practitioners. His prize-winning book, *Huronnia: A History and Geography of the Huron Indians, 1600–1650* (1971), ushered in the beginning of this new multi-source-based interdisciplinary history. Meanwhile, at McGill University the anthropologist Bruce Trigger was completing what would become a classic work, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (1976).<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1970s the struggle of Canada's First Nations for their rights also played a major role in the development of Native history. This was largely the consequence of the Supreme Court of Canada's 1973 ruling (known as the *Calder* decision) on the Nishg'a comprehensive claim and the federal government's reaction to that ruling. In *Calder* the court acknowledged the existence of Aboriginal rights at the time of initial European contact, and that these rights might not have been extinguished in many parts of Canada. There followed a federal procedure for addressing a wide range of outstanding Native claims. Historical research would become central to the process. In this major way *Calder* provided a further impetus to the field of Native history by giving it an applied dimension.

The increasing accessibility of the Hudson's Bay Company archives assisted in revolutionizing the study of Native history in Canada. Although the original records remained in London, England, a microfilm copy of

the company's pre-1870 records became available to researchers at the National Archives in Ottawa in the late 1960s.<sup>14</sup> This saved scholars from having to make a costly trip to London to use these sources. Perhaps of even greater importance, the National Archives of Canada quickly became a gathering place where researchers made and renewed acquaintances. When I began my doctoral research in Ottawa during the summer of 1968, I met Harold Hickerson, then an academic at the State University of New York at Buffalo, who was one of the first anthropologists to encourage his students to use the Hudson's Bay Company archives to supplement data they collected through interviews.<sup>15</sup> Hickerson was deeply interested in cultural ecology and the impact that the fur trade as an aspect of colonialism had had on Aboriginal people. He introduced me to one of his doctoral students, Charles A. Bishop, whose innovative doctoral research was published as *The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade*, which appeared in 1974, the same year as *Indians in the Fur Trade*.

After 1970, when the Hudson's Bay Company agreed to transfer its archives from London to the Provincial Archives of Manitoba in Winnipeg, that city became another important gathering place for scholars of Native history. The company's archivist, Shirlee Anne Smith, took a lively interest in researchers' projects; she provided us with inestimable advice and assistance and made certain that visiting researchers got to know one another. My semi-annual trips to the company's archives during the 1970s and early 1980s connected me to a host of scholars of Native, northern, and western Canadian history, including Hart Bowsfield, Jennifer Brown, John Foster, Beryl Gillespie, Shepard Krech III, Wayne Moodie, Trudy Nicks, Keith Ralston, Eric Ross, Ed Rogers, Mary Black Rogers, Toby Morantz, Dale Russell, James G.E. Smith, Irene Spry, and Sylvia Van Kirk. In both Ottawa and Winnipeg we shared the excitement of discovery and engaged in lengthy discussions and debates about a broad range of methodological and theoretical issues. In this important way, the relocation of the company archives to Canada played a major role in promoting the field of Native history in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Rapid technological advances in data gathering and processing have made the accounting records of the Hudson's Bay Company ever more accessible and have broadened the range of enquiry that is possible. For example, the pocket calculator, sense-mark cards and card readers, Fortran coding sheets, and mainframe computing facilitated the analyses that Don Freeman and I introduced in '*Give Us Good Measure*': *An Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763* (1978). The development of desktop computers at the beginning of the

1980s and, most importantly, the appearance of portable computers in the mid-1980s – along with a growing array of software, especially spreadsheet and graphics programs – have extended the process. Most of the HBC records are now microfilmed and available on interlibrary loan. The finding aid became accessible on the World Wide Web in the spring of 1997. Today it is comparatively easy to undertake quantitative analyses of all aspects of Native peoples' behaviour as consumers and producers – although at the expense of the scholarly interaction that once took place at the archives.

Many of the issues raised in *Indians in the Fur Trade* continue to be explored. Important among them is that of pre- and post-contact Aboriginal economic behaviour. Initially I intended to test Polanyi's ideas about non-market trade. In 1960 Rich had suggested that the Hudson's Bay Company's records indicated that political concerns, not economic motivations, were the primary driving force behind Aboriginal people's participation in the fur trade. University of Toronto political economist Abraham Rotstein expanded on Rich's ideas and placed them in Polanyi's theoretical context.<sup>16</sup> Rotstein postulated that, before contact, Aboriginal people lived in a land wracked with tribal warfare, where groups engaged in intertribal exchange primarily to cement alliances in the hope of securing peace, a notion reminiscent of nineteenth-century cultural evolutionary models. In Rotstein's view, the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade was a classic example of what Polanyi called administered or treaty trade.

I too had largely accepted Rich's interpretation, but I was uneasy about it. My research caused me to question his explanation of the company's eighteenth-century accounting system, an interpretation that I found confusing and possibly in error. I particularly doubted his statement that exchange rates were rigid and that the overplus, which represented the gains traders made by shortchanging their Native customers, provided a fund to underwrite gift-giving expenses. Eventually I was able to undertake the lengthy analysis of the accounts that would demonstrate that Rich's interpretation of the relationship between overplus and gift-giving costs was based on a misunderstanding of the workings of the accounting system.<sup>17</sup> An examination of the post account books showed that the overplus was not used to underwrite gift giving. Rather, it was a form of profit that company traders returned to London every year as part of the value of their fur returns. This means that overplus data can be used to track the variability in exchange rates at the company's posts, which is what Don Freeman and I did in *'Give Us Good Measure'*. We also tracked the company's gift-giving costs. With these two yardsticks it was possible for us to

show that the early fur trade was a complex business, one that integrated gift- and market-oriented trades and demonstrated that Aboriginal participants were adaptable and shrewd clients who encouraged competitive fur buying.

Admittedly, Polanyi's administered model of trade continues to be promoted in the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> Why? There appear to be several reasons. It offers the prospect of defining the Aboriginal people in terms that are sharply at variance with the profit-driven and market-oriented character ascribed to the EuroCanadian newcomers. This approach also emphasizes the continuity of Aboriginal cultural traditions and identities and downplays changes that resulted from interaction with Europeans. All of this resonates with a view of Native culture that is a continuing legacy of salvage ethnology, which dominated northern research during the first half of the twentieth century. It was predicated on the so-called space-time equivalency hypothesis, which saw retreating into the bush as equivalent to moving back in time. From this emerged a temporal chronology that divides post-contact subarctic Native history into three periods: early contact, contact-traditional, and modern. According to this scheme, no fundamental changes took place in Aboriginal society until the modern (post-Second World War) era. The devastation wrought by disease and by the deadlier nature of warfare following the introduction of firearms is seen to be the most consequential development of the earlier periods.<sup>19</sup> This conceptual framework downplays the economic impact of the fur trade on northern Aboriginal culture.

Bruce Trigger has cautioned that static portrayals of Native cultures, which are very popular with those scholars he terms 'modern idealists,' risk negating the rationality of Aboriginal peoples.<sup>20</sup> Pointing the way out of this difficulty are historical anthropologists, most notably Marshal Sahlins, who consider how and why the decisions and actions of certain members of a society bring about transformations of traditional institutions and practices.<sup>21</sup> This avenue of inquiry recognizes that traditions predispose individuals to behave in certain ways, but it also acknowledges that there is scope for individual initiative.

The historical geographer Frank Tough suggests another alternative approach to the examination of changing Aboriginal-EuroCanadian trading relationships. He recommends adopting Polanyi's notion of 'market pattern' to deal with the complex reality of the fur trade and thereby move beyond the impasse that has developed in the long-standing debate about the nature of Aboriginal economic behaviour. Tough favours the market pattern idea because it allows for the presence of some of the elements of a

market economy, such as competition and Native sensitivity to spatial variations in barter rates, but it does not regard exchange as being entirely self-regulated by market prices. Tough also reminds us that the nature of European economic life, as manifest in the fur trade, changed over time from a mercantile to an industrial form of capitalism. He challenges us to redirect future research on the economic dimension of contact toward analysing the implications of changing capitalism for Aboriginal people.<sup>22</sup>

In *Indians in the Fur Trade* and subsequent articles, I have noted that Native people rapidly integrated European trade goods into their economies; and, similar to Baerreis's findings for groups from the American Midwest, distinctive regional variations in patterns of consumption reflected changing local cultural and environmental circumstances. Inevitably this work raised questions about the rate and degree to which Aboriginal groups became dependent, or rather, interdependent, with their European trading partners. Earlier generations of scholars had approached this topic from the perspective of acculturation and concluded that Aboriginal people quickly became dependent on European technology for hunting, trapping, and fishing weapons and gear. In *Indians in the Fur Trade* I too supported this judgment with respect to those groups that were heavily involved in the fur trade, but with reservations. Clearly, the adoption of European technologies had to be considered in terms of the local cultural-ecological setting; it was not necessarily a one-way process. Groups moving from the Woodlands into the Parklands to adopt the lifestyles of the equestrian buffalo-hunters, for instance, reduced their reliance on trading posts. In later studies of Natives as consumers in the eighteenth century, I also found that Aboriginal people could not rely on imported technologies until European manufacturers' custom-produced goods proved reliable for Native consumers.<sup>23</sup>

The desire in recent years to place even greater stress on Native agency than I did in *Indians in the Fur Trade* has led some scholars to downplay the impact that early interaction with Europeans had on Aboriginal economies and societies. Some carry this idea to extremes, claiming that the suggestion that Native people quickly embraced European technology in preference to their own is tantamount to saying that they suffered 'cultural amnesia' as a consequence of contact.<sup>24</sup> This view implies that it would have been irrational for Aboriginal people, or at least disloyal to their cultural traditions, to abandon their indigenous technologies for imported ones. Such arguments prejudice the outcome of contact, as the older acculturation perspective did, instead of exploring how the process unfolded on a case-by-case basis.

This ongoing debate has raised other methodological issues. Shepard Krech III has pointed out that scholars have not come to any general agreement about how (inter)dependency is to be measured.<sup>25</sup> Is it to be determined solely in terms of the extent to which Native people relied on exotic subsistence technologies, or should we perhaps also measure it in terms of ceremonial and lifestyle goods that were not essential to their physical survival? For example, the incorporation of Brazil tobacco and alcohol into the social and ceremonial spheres of life provided important bonds between European traders and their Aboriginal clientele. *Indians in the Fur Trade* and 'Give Us Good Measure' demonstrated that the lure of these two commodities was a primary factor in drawing Natives to York Factory from very distant places.<sup>26</sup>

These issues point to the need for more quantitative analyses of Aboriginal consumer spending patterns. Until recently only a handful of scholars have complemented their research in the narrative records with statistical analyses of trading company sales.<sup>27</sup> Sales data offer an important cross-check on the statements that traders and others made about the changing importance of various kinds of articles in European–Aboriginal exchange. The papers of the Sixth Fur Trade Conference, which was held at Mackinac Island in 1991, indicate that this line of inquiry is beginning to receive the attention it warrants. Key among the methodological challenges is the essential first step of devising meaningful categories of trading goods from the perspective of Aboriginal consumers.<sup>28</sup> Without this step, insightful generalizations about the spending habits of Aboriginal consumers that address the questions of interdependency are not possible.

Whatever the future outcome of this research, the discussion and analyses of interdependency cannot continue to be restricted to the trading post level. We know, for instance, that most trading posts relied on Aboriginal people for a variety of foodstuffs and other 'country produce.' Many of us have noted, however, that this did not mean that Aboriginal people held either an upper, or even an equal, hand in their larger economic partnership with EuroCanadians. There is no question that over time Aboriginal people increasingly relied on imported subsistence technologies. These eventually displaced most of the traditional ones. Furthermore, as I have noted elsewhere, Native people increasingly depended on traders to help them avoid starvation due to cyclical food shortages and chronic ones that resulted from resource depletion.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, Europeans ultimately depended on local Aboriginal people only for profits – a point Aboriginal people made provocatively in the 1972 film *The Other Side of the Ledger: An Indian View of the Hudson's Bay Company*.<sup>30</sup> If their Native clientele were

unable or unwilling to provide furs, country produce, and labour at rates the newcomers profited from, the latter could, and did, move elsewhere or quit the business altogether.

A more productive approach to the interdependency question will involve looking at the ways in which Aboriginal economies became intermeshed with the expanding and changing Western commercial economy or world system. Tough has advanced work in this area by developing a model for examining the way the commercial and subsistence sectors of Aboriginal economies expanded and contracted in response to local and external factors.<sup>31</sup> Others have approached this issue by considering how the Aboriginal domestic mode of production, particularly the labour of women, was incorporated into the Western market economy.<sup>32</sup> In *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* I considered how industrial capitalism undermined the social safety net for Aboriginal people that was an integral part of the mercantile system.

A second persistent theme of the field is population migration, one that figured prominently in *Indians in the Fur Trade*. There is overwhelming evidence in the documentary record to support my conclusion that significant population relocations took place before the early nineteenth century. In his classic *The Fur Trade in Canada*, Innis argued that resource depletion was the primary driving force for population dislocations and the spatial expansion of the industry. We need to reconsider his explanation. To me, it is more likely that the desire of Native middlemen to expand their trading networks was the primary catalyst for spatial dynamism in the pre-1700 fur trade, which focused on beaver-coat pelts. This was because output was a function of production rather than carrying capacity.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, others challenge the idea that significant migration ever took place.<sup>34</sup> The migration debate raises some interesting historical and methodological issues. Since the late 1960s, for example, archaeology has provided convincing evidence that the Cree lived well to the west of the present Manitoba–Saskatchewan boundary long before indirect trading contact began. Yet, this hardly provides sufficient reason to discount all of the early historical accounts that indicate significant warfare and movement took place in this region during the early fur trade.<sup>35</sup> If we privilege current northern Saskatchewan Cree oral narratives on the subject, which discount significant movement, it is at the risk of rejecting the discourses of other groups, such as the Sekani, who regard the Cree as ancient enemies because they invaded their territory in the early post-contact era. Likewise, fur traders' accounts of migrations were based partly on oral histories pro-

vided to them by Aboriginal people. In light of archaeological research to date and what we now know about Native involvement in the early fur trade, it seems likely that more than one wave of Cree migration took place in Western Canada. Undoubtedly they moved into the region long before contact. Additional movement took place shortly afterward. Probably the eastern relatives of the Western Cree were those who moved after contact to expand their trading networks peacefully where possible and through warfare when necessary. New conceptual approaches and further research into this aspect of Cree history are needed. In particular, we need to abandon the older simplistic notion that population movement took place in a wave-like fashion.

Until the late 1960s, Native history emphasized the culturalist perspective of Aboriginal–EuroCanadian relations, reflecting that it was rooted predominantly in cultural anthropology and geography. By the mid-1970s, however, the increasing popularity of women’s and social history led scholars to consider the social dimension of Native history, which had received little attention at the time I was preparing *Indians in the Fur Trade*. Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk published two books in 1980 that explored the gender and family aspects of Aboriginal–EuroCanadian relations and analysed the hybrid fur trade society that emerged from unions between Native women and European men. Drawing on European male fur traders’ journals, letters, and wills, they discussed the social and economic aspirations that led Native women to seek European fur traders as marriage partners *à la façon du pays* and considered the economic roles women played at the trading establishments. Brown also studied the implications that the contrasting labour and social structures of the Hudson’s Bay Company and North West Company trading systems had for the Native families of the men who were employed in them.<sup>36</sup> The extent to which Brown and Van Kirk’s Red River–centred view of fur trade society is applicable elsewhere needs further consideration.<sup>37</sup> Also, we need to know more about the roles that women played in the spread and development of the commercial economy in the hinterlands far removed from the social orbit of the trading posts. Kerry Abel’s study of Dene history is an important example of the kinds of insights this research can provide.<sup>38</sup> She establishes that Dene women took the lead in making contact with the Hudson’s Bay Company in the early eighteenth century because they wanted access to the household goods that already were easing the domestic lives of neighbouring Cree women.<sup>39</sup>

Other aspects of the gender dimension of Native economic history warrant further exploration. One concerns the gendering of Aboriginal con-

sumption. The objective here would be to undertake quantitative analyses of trade goods sales data of the Hudson's Bay Company to expand on Abel's work and consider the changing impact that the acquisition of European goods had on the daily lives of Native men and women. To date, research on Native consumption remains based largely upon an examination of the narrative records. I have found that, for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the nature of the accounting record precludes looking at individual Native consumers, because only aggregate data are provided.<sup>40</sup> For the nineteenth century the consumption habits of individual men and women can be undertaken for a limited number of posts, by extracting statistics from surviving Hudson's Bay Company Indian debt books. These documents provide information about individuals on a transaction-by-transaction basis. They also include information about marital and kinship connections. The changing gender roles in Aboriginal commercial and subsistence production is another topic that needs to be examined. In the central subarctic, for example, fishing and catching small furs were primarily the domains of Native women at the time of contact. By the nineteenth century, the depletion of beaver and large game throughout much of the area of northern Ontario increasingly led men to move into this sector.<sup>41</sup> We still know little about how such economic developments affected Aboriginal societies.<sup>42</sup>

In recent years the economic dimension of Native–EuroCanadian contact has become of great practical importance to First Nations as they assert their Aboriginal and treaty rights. Ever since the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling on the *Calder* case in 1973, Aboriginal claims-oriented research has been an increasingly important catalyst for Native history research. My involvement in this applied dimension of fur trade history led me into new territory: the Pacific slope. In 1981 I joined the University of British Columbia Department of History, and shortly thereafter the Gitksan–Wet'suet'en Tribal council of north-central British Columbia asked me to undertake research related to their comprehensive claim. They asked me to search the Hudson's Bay Company archives and others pertaining to fur trading for evidence about the nature of their regional economy at the time of initial European contact, and to look for information about the changes that resulted from the penetration of the fur trade into their homelands. The Gitksan and Wet'suet'en were particularly interested in finding out what, if anything, the documentary record said about their land tenure system and resource management practices. These are questions that have been of interest to scholars studying subarctic groups of Central and Eastern Canada since the early twentieth century, and they

were ones I had addressed in *Indians in the Fur Trade* and subsequent publications.<sup>43</sup>

The Hudson's Bay Company archives, and particularly the records kept by Chief Trader William Brown, who established the company's operations in the upper Skeena River basin in 1822, provided rich details about this aspect of Gitksan and Wet'suet'en society. Based on Brown's narratives I was able to draw a detailed picture of a regional economy controlled by hereditary lineage chiefs, or heads of houses, who regulated access to the resources of their house territories and dominated external trade.<sup>44</sup> These societies, much to Brown's surprise, were very different from those of the subarctic, where he had learned his skills as a trader. Indeed, having done all of my previous research in the region where Brown apprenticed, I was particularly aware of the sense of discovery that his journals, letters, and reports convey. This perspective cries for more comparative work on the regional fur trades to further our understanding of the colonization process in the very different cultural and environmental contexts in which it unfolded in Canada.

As the mercantile fur trade drew to a close, the Aboriginal people of the western interior of Canada negotiated a series of treaties with the dominion government. Today historians and Native groups are focusing increasing attention on these agreements in order to determine what Aboriginal people originally intended to accomplish by signing them.<sup>45</sup> For Canada's First Nations it is a crucial question that has a bearing on the pursuit of treaty rights issues. One perspective is that the accords should be seen primarily as peace agreements through which Aboriginal nations agreed to share their lands with newcomers.<sup>46</sup>

I closed *Indians in the Fur Trade* with the observation that the Aboriginal people of the prairie West sought to adapt through treaty negotiations to the radical economic developments that were taking place in Western Canada in the late nineteenth century. In other words, I emphasized the economic dimension. Since the late nineteenth century, many disputes have arisen concerning the economic rights the treaties actually secured for the Indians. One contentious area concerns whether treaties granted Native people the right to harvest fish and game for commercial purposes. A credible answer to this question requires a good understanding of the economic context in which negotiations took place. This is because the Robinson Treaties of 1850 and the numbered treaties that followed (excepting Treaties 1 and 2) explicitly granted Aboriginal people the right to continue their 'usual' avocations (or vocations) on undeveloped Crown land.

Determining the range of Aboriginal vocations at the time treaties were

signed means providing the court with a cross-sectional view of a regional Aboriginal economy at a particular instant and an explanation of the processes that produced the features described. In many respects this is the same challenge I faced in *Indians in the Fur Trade*, where I provided three snapshots of what I considered to be meaningful turning points in the culture history of the region – initial contact, 1821, and the 1860s. In the late 1980s and 1990s the issues of culture change and economic integration or interdependency resurfaced in court. A central question asked of me was, Had Aboriginal and European economies become so intermeshed through exchange that commercial production of a wide range of fish, fur, and game products, and other so-called ‘country produce,’ was a central fact of life for a given Native group when they signed a treaty?<sup>47</sup> A related question is, Did Aboriginal People seek through treaties to obtain a socio-economic ‘safety-net’ from Canada that was equivalent to the kinds of protection that the mercantile fur trade had provided for them through gift giving, credit, and sick-and-destitute-relief schemes? In this respect my involvement in claims-oriented research has brought me full circle.

#### NOTES

*The Select Bibliography starting on page xxviii supplements the short references in the notes.*

- 1 Harold Adams Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962)
- 2 Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West*, and David Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (1940; reprint, Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1979)
- 3 A.S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870–1871*, second edition, edited by Lewis G. Thomas (1939; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), and E.E. Rich, *Hudson’s Bay Company, 1670–1870*, 3 vols. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1958–60)
- 4 Ethnographer John C. Ewers, a pioneer student of Blackfoot history, suggested considering the northwestern Plains as a sub-region of the Plains culture area. See John C. Ewers, ‘Was There a Northwestern Plains Sub-culture?: An Ethnographical Appraisal,’ *Plains Anthropologist*, 12, no. 36 (1924), 167–74.
- 5 Among the classic studies, in addition to that of Mandelbaum cited above, was that of Robert Lowie, ‘The Assiniboine,’ *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, 4 (1909), 1–270.
- 6 Most of the trait-oriented studies focused on these two items. Undoubtedly the classic study of this type was John C. Ewers, ‘The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Cul-

- ture, with Comparative Material from other Western Tribes,' Bureau of American Ethnology, *Bulletin* 159 (1959).
- 7 Most notably, George Dalton, 'Economic Theory and Primitive Society,' *American Anthropologist*, 63 (1961), 1–25; Dalton, ed., *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polanyi*; Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*; and Rotstein, 'Fur Trade and Empire: An Institutional Analysis'
  - 8 Baerreis, 'The Ethnohistoric Approach and Archaeology'
  - 9 Steward, *Theory of Cultural Change*
  - 10 Barth, 'Ecological Relationships of Ethnic Groups in Swat, North Pakistan'
  - 11 In the 1973 edition, editor Lewis G. Thomas added the citations. It should be noted here that although Harold Innis did not visit the archives, he wrote the company and obtained historical data that he used in his statistical analysis of the fur trade published in 1927 as *The Fur Trade of Canada*.
  - 12 For an insightful perspective on this field, see James Axtell, 'Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint.' This essay originally appeared in the October 1977 issue of *Ethnohistory*.
  - 13 Subsequently Trigger published a revised edition of this work as *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's 'Heroic Age' Reconsidered* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1985).
  - 14 Then known as the Public Archives of Canada
  - 15 Hickerson did pioneering work on the ethnohistory of the Ojibwa. See Hickerson, *The Southwestern Chippewa: An Ethnohistorical Study*. Bishop and Hickerson posited that the fur trade had an atomizing impact on Ojibwa society.
  - 16 Rotstein, 'Fur Trade and Empire,' and 'Karl Polanyi's Concept of Non-Market Trade'
  - 17 Ray, 'The Early Hudson's Bay Company Account Books as Sources for Historical Research: An Analysis and Assessment'
  - 18 See, for example, Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada, 1780–1870*, 208. The data Peers presents reveal the Ojibwa to be very sensitive to prices and interested in personal gain.
  - 19 This chronology is used, for example, as the organizing framework for the subarctic volume of the Smithsonian Institution's series of handbooks on North American Indians. For a discussion of this framework, see June Helm, Edward S. Rogers, and James G.E. Smith, 'Intercultural Relations and Cultural Change in the Shield and Mackenzie Borderlands.'
  - 20 Washburn and Trigger, 'Native Peoples in Euro-American Historiography'
  - 21 For a good discussion of this approach to Pacific history, see Aletta Biersack, 'Introduction: History and Theory in Anthropology.'
  - 22 Tough, 'Indian Economic Behaviour, Exchange, and Profits in Northern Mani-

- toba during the Decline of Monopoly, 1870–1930.’ My work on the decline of paternalism in the industrial fur trade and its replacement with government-operated assistance programs and Tough’s study of the Native economy of northern Manitoba after 1870 lead me to support his challenge. Ray, ‘Periodic Shortages, Native Welfare, and the Hudson’s Bay Company, 1670–1930,’ ‘The Decline of Paternalism in the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Fur Trade, 1870–1945,’ and *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age*; and Tough, ‘*As Their Resources Fail*’: *Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870–1930*
- 23 Ray, ‘Fur Trade History as an Aspect of Native History,’ and ‘Indians as Consumers in the Eighteenth Century’
- 24 Paul Thistle, *Indian–European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840*
- 25 Ray, ‘Native Economic Dependency: Searching for the Evidence,’ and Krech, ‘The Hudson’s Bay Company and Dependence among Subarctic Tribes’
- 26 Peers also demonstrated that status-affirming goods could be crucial to regional trades. Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 59
- 27 See Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600–1870*; Robert Jarvenpa and Hetty Jo Brumbach, ‘The Microeconomics of Southern Chipewyan Fur Trade History’; and Shepard Krech III, ‘The Trade of the Slavey and Dogrib at Fort Simpson in the Early Nineteenth Century.’
- 28 See, for example, Dean L. Anderson, ‘The Flow of European Trade Goods into the Western Great Lakes Region, 1715–1760.’ In the same volume, see also Lynda Gullason, ‘“No Less than Seven Different Nations”: Ethnicity and Culture Contact at Fort George–Buckingham House.’
- 29 Ray, ‘Periodic Shortages’
- 30 Narrated by George Manuel. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1972. Re-issued in 1993
- 31 Tough, ‘*As Their Resources Fail*,’ 1–43
- 32 Kathleen Pickering, ‘Articulation of the Lakota Mode of Production and the Euro-American Fur Trade’
- 33 Ray, ‘Some Thoughts about the Reasons for Spatial Dynamism in the Early Fur Trade, 1580–1800’
- 34 See Dale R. Russell, *Eighteenth-Century Western Cree and Their Neighbours*.
- 35 Kerry Abel’s analysis of the early documentary record and Dene oral histories also led her to conclude that extensive warfare took place. See Kerry Abel, *Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History*, 46–8.
- 36 Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, and Van Kirk, ‘*Many Tender Ties*’. Others have followed Brown’s lead. See Philip Goldring, *Papers on the Labour System of the Hudson’s Bay*

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- Company, 1821–1900*; Carol Judd, “‘Mixt Bands of Many Nations’: 1821–1830,” and ‘Native Labour and Social Stratification in the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Northern Department, 1770–1870’; and Trudy Nicks, ‘The Iroquois and the Fur Trade in Western Canada.’
- 37 I raised this issue in ‘Reflections on Fur Trade Social History and Metis History in Canada.’
- 38 Abel, *Drum Songs*, 1994. In *Indians in the Fur Trade* I discussed these people mostly in terms of their relationship to the Western Cree during the early expansion of the western fur trade. I refer to them as Chipewyan, which was the term in common usage in the 1970s.
- 39 Even though Abel accepts the notion that the fur trade strongly influenced the daily economic lives of the Dene, she suggests that it did not affect their larger culture in any fundamental way. This old romantic idea holds that when defining the Aboriginal Other, the economic dimensions of life are somehow less central than other aspects of culture, such as religion or social organization.
- 40 Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*
- 41 This was a major theme in Bishop, *Northern Ojibwa*. I discuss this in “‘Ould Betsy and Her Daughter’: Fur Trade Fisheries in Northern Ontario.’
- 42 The work of Kathleen Pickering cited above suggests one promising approach to this topic.
- 43 The impact of the fur trade on subarctic land tenure systems has been the subject of a long-running debate. I considered an aspect of the issue in *Indians in the Fur Trade* and expanded on these ideas in ‘Some Conservation Schemes of the Hudson’s Bay Company, 1821–1850: An Examination of the Problems of Resource Management in the Fur Trade.’
- 44 Ray, ‘Fur Trade History and the Gitksan–Wet’suwet’en Comprehensive Claim: Men of Property and the Exercise of Title’
- 45 The pioneering work is Rene Fumoleau, *As Long as This Land Shall Last*. See also Richard Price, ed., *The Spirit and Terms of Alberta Indian Treaties*.
- 46 This perspective is emphasized in Walter Hildebrandt, Dorothy First Rider, and Sarah Carter, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*.
- 47 In *Horseman v. R.* concerning Treaty 8, I argued in the affirmative on this issue. Ray, ‘Commentary on the Economic History of the Treaty 8 Area.’

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