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**From Pacific to Atlantic: The Last Voyageurs<sup>1</sup>**

I have a picture on my desk at home showing the beach at Toffino, on the west coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia B.C. . The photograph which I took in 2004, followed by a more recent visit to Portland Oregon and Fort Vancouver, Washington, reminded me of the importance of the west coast to North American history. Men stepped off onto the shore here, discovering albeit reluctantly that other human beings inhabited the place, and in so doing set in motion puissant social and economic developments.

As Canadians or Americans we usually view our history from east to west. In the Canadian narrative, genesis consists of successive proddings beginning with Cartier in 1534, Champlain in 1608 and all the way up to La Verendrye, who first beheld the majestic Rockies (the Little Big Horns) in 1742-43. After the prodding came the settlement aligned discontinuously as an enfilade of islands from Atlantic to Pacific. Over the ensuing three centuries settlement discontinuity fashioned a distinctive historical-geographic experience. The frontier never closed down in Canada, the bush was always somewhere nearby around the bend. Our country, says Cole Harris, is defined, paradoxically by this ongoing engagement with difference that has produced our fractured polity.<sup>2</sup> Returning to the traditional scenario, the ties that bind are

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<sup>1</sup> In March of 2008 I presented a paper at the annual meeting of the NCPH in Portland, Oregon. While there I took an interesting NCPH field trip and later spent time in the collections of the Oregon Historical Society and as well at the library and archives of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. I spent more time at Fort Vancouver than expected. The site, staff, and material were engaging. I determined to write this piece, a preliminary version of which first appeared in *Cap aux Diamants* (no. 103), as an expression of my enthusiasm for a terrific geo-historical theme. *C'est l'aviron qui nous mène*, goes the old voyageur song: très haut et très loin, indeed.

<sup>2</sup> R. Cole Harris, "The Spaces of Early Canada", in *Canadian Historical Review*, 91,4 (December 2010), p. 758.

spun from east to west. Yet our history has also been shaped by the west. The influence of events originating or transpiring in the Pacific realm upon our history, is nowhere more evident than in the extension of fur trade economy and society to the Columbia River basin (an area encompassing parts of modern-day B.C. in Canada and the states of Oregon and Washington in the U.S.) during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Here the voyageur economy came, conquered but then stumbled or backfired. The fall of the fur trade was significant and not just for the west but because it severed a historical link to a way of life that was about a century and a half old or more, one that for a time represented the *raison d'être* of economy and society throughout most of the continent.

### **The French and the Fur Trade**

The French invested heavily in the fur trade in North America beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They created a special breed of worker, the voyageur, who was assigned many of the labouring tasks associated with the trade, such as canoeing, trading-post maintenance, food procurement. The voyageurs loved to sing; so much so that that times they scared the game off, much to the chagrin of the natives. Shared melodies and fellowship checked the sense of ennui as brigades traversed the continent and imparted rhythm to the work of the crew guided by the two *bouttes*, the men *devant* (in front) and *derrière* (in the stern). The resulting culture with its revelry, toponymic conventions, and knowledge of the terrain spread itself over the land stroke by stroke, like an ambient cultural veneer. <sup>3</sup>

The voyageur canoe routes, states Carolyn Podruchny, became the organizing principle of territory throughout the upper country.<sup>4</sup> As paddlers and *portageurs* they had to know and

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<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the voyageur world : travelers and traders in the North American fur trade*, Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 2006. 414P.

<sup>4</sup> Carolyn Podruchny, "Writing, Ritual and Folklore: Imagining the Cultural Geography of Voyageurs", p. 107.

remember where they were. So they created traditions, assigned stories to this landmark (tall tree, rock outcropping) or that burial site of a deceased fellow worker. The knowledge was important practically and culturally, for it made of sun, wave, wilderness, and craft a cohesive world. Rituals were created and repeated generation after generation. A young man, perhaps on one of his first journeys away from his home parish along the St. Lawrence became a voyageur when he was baptized by his fellow mates along the Ottawa River at a place since known as Pointe aux Baptêmes. Not yet of exalted status this kind of voyageur was contemptuously described as a *mangeur du lard*; a pork eater and brand of worker employed to paddle laden canoes back and forth from the Great Lake upper country on a seasonal basis. If the same man crossed the divide west of Lake Superior where the waters flowed west or northwest, he became *homme du nord*; a voyageur who would spend the entire year in the country, living off wild game, not pork. The supreme distinction of Athabasca man, was awarded to those who worked north and west of Portage La Loche (nowaday Saskatchewan). They were expected to be the toughest of the tough. It is not clear to me how the voyageurs paddling through the Pacific North West, ranked in all of this. Certainly there was no belittling the dangerous nature of their work.

The imprint of voyageur tradition and geographical knowledge was shared with if not obtained from the native civilizations who taught the voyageurs much about the environment. The natives provided them with daughters and sisters to marry, who in turn taught the Jean-Baptiste's a good deal more. By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a huge swath of the continental interior, from Lake Winnipeg and south down either side of the Mississippi Valley and encompassing the Great Lakes had become the home turf of the voyageurs. This *société métisée*, sometimes referred to as a middle country, was different from its counterpart along the banks of the Saint Lawrence. Yet its development was invariably tied to the heartland whence came the orders for furs, the merchandise – kettles, pipes, tools that were sometimes thrown overboard en route - the pay, the ammunition and ultimately the geopolitical power. The middle country was a contingent creation ultimately subservient to the French empire says

Gilles Havard.<sup>5</sup> As it turned out, the middle country was a form of society that was permeable to outside influence and susceptible to change over time.

### **The British and the Fur Trade**

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, following the conquest, the fur trade experienced remarkable growth. The number of voyageurs increased from 500 in 1784 to as many as 2000 circa 1816.<sup>6</sup> More and more seasonal workers were involved in the trade. The economy also supported growing numbers of voyageurs spending much if not all of their work lives in the Upper country.

According to Heather Devine, these were known as freemen.<sup>7</sup> Hearth and home was wherever their work took them in the Upper Country. Taking advantage of the pleasures of this life – rum, women, socializing - was a no-holds barred affair, with, at times, narry a priest in sight. As long as the fur trade remained a competitive business with two or more substantial corporate players the voyageurs could leverage their labour and achieve some independence.

The growth of the fur trade was a matter of geography as well as work-force numbers. Large Montreal based fur companies pushed north toward the MacKenzie valley, west to the foothills of the Rockies and eventually through the mountains and down the Pacific slope. American firms and entrepreneurs pushed west and south from Saint Louis. The Hudson Bay Company finally emerged from its shell beginning in the 1770s and especially during the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pushing its agents inland, and mapping much of the territory as it moved along.<sup>8</sup> By virtue of the merger with the North West Company in 1821 the HBC inherited

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<sup>5</sup> Gilles Havard, *Empire et Métissages. Indiens et Français dans le Pays d'en Haut, 1660-1715*, Sillery, Québec : Septentrion, 2003 : p. 15 ff. Regarding the subaquatic search for fur-trade artifacts in the area west of Lake Superior, see : Robert Wheeler et al., *Voices from the Rapids. An Underwater Search for Fur Trade Artifacts, 1960-1973*, St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*: p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Heather Devine, *The People who own Themselves. Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1660-1900*, Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2004. Chapter 5: "Migration and Retrenchment, 1821-1869": p. 111 ff, 197 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Richard I. Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting. The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping 1670-1870*, Montréal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991: p. 6-7.

networks of trade that spanned the continent from east to west in addition to the extant system articulating to Hudson Bay. The company started mapping this new territory as well.

From the voyageur point of view the merger of the Hudson Bay and North West companies provided continuity for those willing to continue in the employment of the remaining fur companies. It should be remembered that the monopoly of the HBC was not complete. American fur interests continued to operate in the west, and actively recruit in communities along the St. Lawrence, in Lower Canada, during the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>9</sup> Further west a métis off-shoot of the native-voyageur socio-economy emerged south and west of Lake Winnipeg. For a generation or two, toward and beyond the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century it established a way of life predicated on part-time agriculture and buffalo hunting, dependent upon but by no means entirely controlled by the fur monopoly of the HBC.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile the fur frontier, ever on the move, expanded west. Following the merger with the North West Company the HBC became interested in the territory of the Columbia. The Columbia River, the source of which lies well to the north of the Canadian-American border today, offered the safest route to the west coast and was within portage and trekking distance of the network of posts pointing toward Montreal that commenced east of the Rockies, near the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River. It was a salient of the traditional east-west Laurentian thrust. As well it became a conductor of developments within the Pacific rim.

### **The Columbia Department**

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<sup>9</sup> *Oregon Historical Society MSS 1103 Gabriel Franchère Papers: 1828-1861*, File 3: Letters of P. Chouteau Maffit Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis: i.e. R. Crooks to his cher cousin, 4 February 1832, Crooks to Chouteau 16 March 1832, Franchère to Coutheau 13 June 1832, Crosos to Pratte 13 June 1832.

<sup>10</sup> H. Devine, *The People who own Themselves*: Chapter 5 Chapter 5: "Migration and Retrenchment, 1821-1869.

The Northwest Company first “explored” the Columbia circa 1811. That same year the Pacific Fur Company, owned by a New-York based American entrepreneur, established Astoria a post at the mouth of the Columbia. The two companies competed for control of the mouth of the river. Knowledge of the new terrain was obtained gradually through a process of trial and error. An expedition leaving Astoria to travel upriver in the summer of 1812, consisted of three proprietors, nine clerks, 20 Sandwich Islanders and 55 Canadians. They made their first encampment on the shore of Tongue Point, only to be soaked because they were too close to the river.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the men were ignorant of the tide or the unruly waters of the lower Columbia? Fortified by drink upon leaving Astoria, three miles out (at Tongue Point) they were perhaps still in a mood to be careless.

The better part of the crew consisted of Canadians or voyageurs. Voyageurs were *les incontournables* of all expeditions sent to traverse the Rockies and develop the fur trade in new districts. There were hired onto Lewis and Clarke’s expedition toward the North-West in 1806-08. They worked for Astor’s American Fur Company as it expanded into the Columbia in 1811-1812.<sup>12</sup> During his 1808 expedition from Fort George (Prince George B.C.), on the northern reaches of the Fraser River, destined downstream for the Pacific, Simon Fraser encountered rough if not next-to-impossible portages, steep hillsides and life-threatening rapids – one thirty yard stretch of the Fraser, near the Chilcotin river, was “turbulent, noisy and awful to behold”. He was accompanied by Jules Quesnel, experienced voyageur and at least 19 other canoemen. The places they named - the Bourbonneur River, the Descharge (Décharge) de la Montagne, Portage du Baril, attest to the French-speaking origins of much of the equipage.<sup>13</sup> David Thompson, in his inaugural voyage down the Columbia in July of 1811 counted 2 Iroquois

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<sup>11</sup> Ross Cox, *Adventures on the Columbia River: Including a Narrative of a Residence of Six Years on the Western Side of the Rocky Mountains Among Various Tribes of Indians Hitherto Unknown: Together with a Journey Across the American Continent*. Volume 1, 1831: p. 117 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Richard S. MacKie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains. The British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793-1843*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 1997 : p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> W. Kaye Lamb (ed.) *The Letters and Journals of Simon Fraser, 1806-1808*, Toronto, MacMillan of Canada, 1960 : p. 61ff; the quote is from page 73: Journal entry for 5 June 1808.

(named Charles and Ignace) as well as Pierre Pareil, Joseph Côté, Michel Boulard, Michel Bourdeaux and François Grégoire. Some of these French Canadians were translators, others freemen, all were no doubt experienced with paddle and portage.<sup>14</sup>

Also present in the 1812 expedition up the Columbia were a group of Sandwich Islanders. They were brought to the west Coast by ships that rounded the Horn, stopped in Hawaii and thence sailed for the Pacific North West. The Hawaiians were part of a larger Pacific theatre of trade and exploration that included a thriving commerce in sea otter skins. Russian fur companies harvested these furs up and down the Alaska coast for export to the orient. British and American ships obtained their supply of skins from the natives of Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island. They were traded on the Chinese market and earned fabulous profits. The otter trade eventually declined, threatening the native portion of the trade with collapse.<sup>15</sup> For the whites, the interest in Pacific connexions would remain as would the Sandwich Islanders.

The first encounters of European explorers with the peoples of the Pacific, were either tentative or sporadic, although in Bougainville and Cook's case they were highly publicized. By the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century contact was becoming more regular and routine as each side (Europeans and natives) avidly coveted the possessions and collectibles of the other.<sup>16</sup> Trading and whaling vessels entered and traversed much of the Pacific world. Native Islanders

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<sup>14</sup> Jacke Nisbet, *Mapmaker's Eye. David Thompson on the Columbian Plateau*, Pullman, Washington, Washington State University Press, 2005: p. 103 ff.

<sup>15</sup> Anya Zilberstein, « Objects of Distant Exchange : The Northwest Coast, Early America and the Global Imagination », in *William and Mary Quarterly* 64, 3 (July 2007). See also, R. Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land. Society, Space and Environment in Canada Before Confederation*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2008. Chapter 11 "British Columbia": p. 420 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *Islanders. The Pacific in the Age of Empire*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010: "Introduction", p. 1-28. See also D. Newell "Irresistible Objects: Collecting in the Pacific and Australia in the Reign of George III", in Kim Sloan, *Enlightenment. Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Books, 2003: p. 246-257. For a discussion of the European encounter with China in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, See: Timothy Brooks: *Vermeer's Hat. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century and the Dawn of the Global World*, Toronto, Viking Canada, 2008.

especially the Polynesians, travelled the ocean aboard these ships. Meanwhile commodities and labour were traded back and forth across the Pacific. Sea otter furs were shipped to China, beads were acquired in China and then used for the Pacific North West fur trade.<sup>17</sup>

The land of the Pacific North West was roped into the scramble for commerce and influence which came on the heels of Vancouver's coastline explorations (1792-94) for the admiralty and the American expeditions of Lewis and Clark (1804-06). A potential contest between British and American interests was emerging but in 1818 the two agreed to share the Columbia district. Five years later, in 1824, the Hudson Bay Company built Fort Vancouver. The fort situated on the north bank of the Columbia along a stretch of river accessible to ocean ships, provided access to the lowland area of the Willamette valley, to the south, and the Cowlitz valley north toward Puget Sound. The fort served as a regional headquarters. Furs trapped inland were sent out and trade merchandise and imports were brought in via Fort Vancouver. A commercial entrepôt, the fort also functioned like a plantation focusing labour and an increasingly diverse array of production. Livestock was bred and fed in pasture areas surrounding the fort – circa 1845 there were in excess of 6000 cattle, sheep, hogs and horses. The fort was surrounded by crop fields, hay meadows and orchards. The purpose was to substitute locally produced foodstuffs for more expensive imports thereby increasing the profitability of the operation. Perhaps as well the intention was to sell these foodstuffs elsewhere in the West. An ancillary function of the Fort Vancouver gardens was to provide a pleasant venue for a stroll to members of the Fort's elite, an oasis of manicured country charm with a dramatic view of Mount Hood toward the east.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Exploring Fort Vancouver*, University of Washington Press, 2011: p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 102. For general context also see: Donald Meinig, *The shaping of America : a geographical perspective on 500 years of history*, Volume 2: "Continental America 1800-1867", New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986: Chapter 6: "Assertion and division : Oregon and the Northern boundary"p. 103-129.

The economic reach of the fort was substantial. Merchandise and foodstuffs were dispensed by teams of voyageurs travelling back and forth from satellite branches throughout the Department. The work was dangerous: three voyageurs lost their lives when the express boat traveling between Okinagan Dalles (falls) and Fort Colville, in the upper Columbia area, got caught in a whirlpool in October of 1830. One of them was an experienced hand named Jean Mongle. His widow domiciled in Maskingé along the St. Lawrenche would have to wait nearly two years to learn the bad news.<sup>19</sup> The Hudson Bay Company sent vessels further afield, laden with saltbeef and wheat to the trading posts of the Russian American (fur) Company up the Pacific coast. Horses were purchased from dealers belonging to the Walla Walla and Nez Percé tribes located hundreds of kilometres in the interior. Each summer brigades of fur trappers, the expeditions could consist of as many as 120-160 people, left the fort and headed south to California and north to the Caledonia district (B.C. ). One such brigade, consisted of 46 men, 34 women, 60 children and 23 natives. The native Indians likely consisted of male and female slaves.<sup>20</sup> The women were expected to dress the beaver furs. The brigade was a veritable village at work and on the move. By virtue of its polyglot nature it was very much in keeping with the overall character of Fort Vancouver.

### **Two Worlds, One Fort**

Upon travelling to Fort Vancouver circa 1846, Paul Kane observed that the mixture of English, French, Iroquois, Sandwich Islanders, Cree and Chinook, formed, “quite a babble of languages”.<sup>21</sup> The community was an pluriethnic pot-pourri. A bastardized jargon, part native,

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<sup>19</sup> Judith Beattie and Helen M. Buss, *Undelivered letters to Hudson's Bay Company men on the Northwest Coast of America, 1830-57*, Vancouver : UBC Press, 2003: p. 295-297.

<sup>20</sup> Bryn Thomas et al, *Kanaka Village Vancouver Barracks Washington, 1980-81*, volume 1: “Report of Investigations of Excavations at Kanaka Village”, Washington State Department of Transportation, 1984: p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> *Paul Kane's Frontier : including Wanderings of an artist among the Indians of North America / by Paul Kane.* Edited with a biographical introduction and a catalogue raisonné by J. Russell Harper. As noted in Fort Vancouver: Hussey Collection, Notecards box 2: file 48: village. (The note refers to Harper Wanderings: p. 117.)

called Chinook became a common language. Objects imported from Britain, or the U.S. might appear in the village acquiring a significance and status much altered from their original purpose.<sup>22</sup> The power the arrangement between social groups was neither spontaneously nor democratically derived. There was a firm pecking order. The first divide separated the men from the officers. The officers, also known as bourgeois, including chief factor John McLoughlin, lived inside the fort, the men outside. This was unlike Company practise elsewhere. The officers kept company books and in their spare time wrote letters home. Most of the men by contrast were illiterate, although some might pen letters in French of rudimentary grammar and syntax. If the officers behaved themselves they were invited to McLoughlin's dining table, lavishly furnished with cutlery and dinner ware. The men were not invited.

McLoughlin governed with an iron fist. His men were supposed to ask his permission to marry. On one occasion McLoughlin withheld permission. The would-be groom, a ship's captain, determined to go ahead with his plans and approached the local (Anglican) priest without telling his boss. (It did not help that the Reverend Beaver and McLoughlin were at loggerheads with one another.) The marriage bans were published on a Sunday, that afternoon during a public tea in the mess hall, McLoughlin raised the issue and ordered the man out of the room. The man refused to leave, McLoughlin dragged his disobedient employee by the collar from the room and confined him to bachelor's quarters for a week. The issue was not whom the man intended to marry, a woman of mixed blood. The problem is that he was disobeying company orders.<sup>23</sup> The power of the Company masters was not absolute. In another instance, in 1837, a ship's crew refused to report for duty. McLoughlin exercised all the authority he could and eventually prevailed, but observed afterward that one could only go so far with the men, because were they let go, there would be no one to replace them.

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<sup>22</sup> *Exploring Fort Vancouver: p. 45.* See also Unpublished background document prepared by staff of Fort Vancouver Historic Site: "The Village: References for Historical Interpretation".

<sup>23</sup> Fort Vancouver Hussey Collection, Box 2, Folder 46: J. Hussey, « The Women of Fort Vancouver », unpublished typescript: p. 33-34

McLoughlin was married to a woman who was part Ojibwa, but by virtue of her husband's status was exceptionally allowed to live inside the fort. His assistant and eventual successor, James Douglas lived with Amelia Connolly, the issue of a full-blooded Cree woman, and a chief factor of the HBC, William Connolly. For the men and officers of Fort Vancouver there was no better road to happiness than to take a country wife.<sup>24</sup> Letters were sent from back home in Scotland pleading with them not to marry a native: William Cirrigall of Feolquoy in the Orkney's wrote thus to his brother in law James Dickson at Fort Vancouver: "I Advise you and tak my advise and don't take a wife in that Cuntry for they are plenty hom...".<sup>25</sup> And it is likely that a similar degree of hostility to mixed marriages prevailed in parishes along the St. Lawrence. But there was no bucking the overall trend. Outside the fort as inside couples were wedded, without church blessing, à la façon du pays. The first Catholic missionaries to arrive on the scene in 1838 could do little more than condemn a well-entrenched practise. A Roman Catholic church was eventually built on the north-west side of the fort. It is yet not clear whether or not this had an effect on marriage patterns. While it is clear that Catholicism was the religion of choice for much of the population, archaeology has turned up few crucifixes, rosaries and religious medallions: these were either rare or especially precious.<sup>26</sup>

The institution of taking on a country wife, was central to general operation of the fur trade in North America, as in the Columbia Department. It cemented socially and culturally as well as economically ties between native and European societies and, argues Van Kirk, offered a scope of activity – an ability to do things and wield influence predicated inter alia upon their pivotal role as go-between – for native and métis women.<sup>27</sup> Prospective husbands especially sought

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<sup>24</sup> J. Hussey, « The Women of Fort Vancouver », unpublished typescript:

<sup>25</sup> J. Beattie, *Undelivered Letters*: p. 320. Letter dated 6 June 1843.

<sup>26</sup> *Exploring Fort Vancouver*: p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties. Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870*, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1980: p. 4-8.

out daughters of mixed unions who were brought up by their native mothers and were therefore familiar with west-coast foodways and food sources. Women at Fort Vancouver harvested potatoes, processed salmon; they made and mended clothes and did laundry for fort officers. Women served as a vital commercial conduit with natives and fort-dwellers. The native or métis wives of Sandwich men exchanged European goods with the natives in exchange for furs and foodstuffs.<sup>28</sup> The furs were then traded back to the HBC post. Other activities developed on the margins of the village. Village *Madames* would sell the bodies of native slaves to incoming ships down by the river bank. Exceptionally McLoughlin reported in 1837 that one native man was in the habit of dressing himself up as a woman, and going out to visit the sailors upon the boats, but the sort of individual initiative was exceptional; the cross-dresser was emasculated for his troubles.<sup>29</sup> As a rule the bodies of women, not men, were peddled.

There were roughly 600 dwellers in the village and fort, depending on the season, in winter the number present could be higher. To this total we could add the (unknown) number of people residing in two native communities not far from the agglomeration although their numbers were likely much diminished by a series of epidemics during the 1830s. These numbers were in turn swelled by the annual visit of native tribes to the opposite bank of the river, near Portland International Airport today. These visits might make the local natives, Chinooks, nervous or jealous, for it challenged their position as privileged go-betweens arbitring trade between the HBC and natives of the North West, but such was the magnetism of Fort Vancouver that they could not be avoided. The native presence was significant and resonated throughout the community and the overall economy. Native artifacts such as pipes, made their way into white

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<sup>28</sup> Bryn Thomas et al, *Kanaka Village Vancouver Barracks Washington, 1980-81*, volume 1: "Report of Investigations of Excavations at Kanaka Village", Washington State Department of Transportation, 1984: p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> *The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee. First Series 1825-1838*, Toronto, Champlain Society for the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1941 : p. 186: 17 January 1837.

and métis households inside and outside Fort Vancouver.<sup>30</sup> Natives sold fish and grew potatoes for the HBC and its posts. They piloted vessels up and down the Columbia, carried letters hither and thither. They worked the fields outside Fort Vancouver and they did much of the dirty work. In its adherence to the basic precept of merchant capital - buy cheap and sell dear - the HBC was more than willing to integrate native inputs into its commercial strategy.

In terms numerical, in 1828, if we are to believe the statistics on company servants, inside the village the main working contingent consisted of French-Canadian voyageurs, a total of 117 out of 191 workers. Fifteen years later the single largest ethnic contingent of workers was Hawaiian in origin, totalling 78. There were only 54 French Canadians.<sup>31</sup> How to explain this decline?

Perhaps one contributing factor consisted of the decision of retired French-Canadian servants to settle 50 kilometres away in the Willamette Valley. There were as many as 600 French-Canadians and their families in the Willamette Valley by 1844.<sup>32</sup> Although at variance with formal Company policy, the practice was tolerated by the ranking local official, McLoughlin, for fear of causing a wave of dissatisfaction amongst the voyageurs. Champoeg or *Campement de Sable*, south of modern-day Portland was known to the voyageurs of the North West Company by the 1810s. For many of their HBC counterparts, there was no question of returning to Canada or giving up their wives and family. They had come out West to stay. When the first waves of American Oregon trailblazers arrived in and after 1843, they would receive assistance from these voyageurs-cum settlers of French Prairie. The likes of Longtain, Laframboise,

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<sup>30</sup> Exploring Fort Vancouver : p. 60. J. Hussey, « The Women of Fort Vancouver », unpublished typescript: p. 42-3; Thomas et al, *Kanaka Village Vancouver Barracks: p. 44*. See also Richard S. Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*: chapter 12 « The Native Foundation of Trade and Labour » p. 283-310.

<sup>31</sup> Bryn Thomas et al, *Kanaka Village Vancouver Barracks Washington, 1980-81*, Volume 2: Appendice B, R. Towner, "Demographics of Kanaka Village".

<sup>32</sup> R.S. Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*: p. 318.

Gervais and Lucier had already built the rudiments of a community not without a lot of help from their native wives and or slaves; some log cabins and a (French) Catholic chapel. By the 1850s Edouard Dupuis operated a store and stage line in the vicinity and near Champoeg. The main street of Champoeg village was called Napoléon, a common French-Canadian name in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. In short the *Canadien* footprint was unmistakable, although like the village itself, it was washed away in the great flood of 1861.<sup>33</sup>

The increase in Hawaiian workers at Fort Vancouver was likely a reflection of new hiring practices and corporate strategies. Hawaiians had worked for the Astorians and the North West Company in the mouth of the Columbia in 1812. The Hudson Bay Company actively recruited in Hawaii; a Company agency was opened at Oahu in 1833. Some Hawaiians were hired as crew members aboard HBC ships. On land, company officials in the Columbia Department complained of desertions and medical problems, but did state that they had a marked preference for experienced hands. McLoughlin wrote to his HBC contact in Hawaii circa 1834: “you will please send by the vessel for (?) fifteen able bodied smart Owhyees and we prefer the able hands who have been here before...”.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that Hawaiians could sojourn on repeated occasions on the west coast. The arrival of Hawaiians created ripples throughout the village at Fort Vancouver. McLoughlin brought in a Hawaiian teacher, priest and translator, Kanaka Billy in order to exercise some control over them. Members of the 1840 contingent of Hawaiians were promised wages of 17 pounds a year, but these were cut to 10 following protest by Canadian and British servants, voyageurs were usually paid from 17 to 22 pounds per year<sup>35</sup>. The Hawaiians worked for the company at the sawmills and in the fields. They did not take

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<sup>33</sup> Lou Ann Speulda, “Champoeg: A Perspective on a Frontier community in Oregon, 1830-1861”, Oregon State University, Department of Anthropology, 1988. 139 P. (Archaeology). Regarding the native presence among French-Canadian households in French Prairie, See R.S. Mackie *Trading Beyond the Mountains*: p. 307.

<sup>34</sup> Fort Vancouver, Hussey Collection, box 3, file 53 Hawaiians: Corres Ft Vancouver 1834-5, McLoughlin (at Ft Van) to G. Pelly (Hawaii?),

<sup>35</sup> Bryn Thomas, *Kanaka Village Vancouver Barracks* p. 34.

canoe-jobs from the voyageurs. Rather they helped the company branch out into a broader spectrum of commercial and industrial activity.

New opportunities were emerging in the Pacific sphere and, as Richard MacKie argues, the HBC was deadest on taking advantage of them.<sup>36</sup> During the 1840s thousands of American settlers crossed the Rockies on the Oregon trail. They came out of the mountains at Les Dalles, down the Columbia and eventually into the Willamette valley. They moved alongside and with French-Canadian voyageurs departing Fort Vancouver. These were trying times for the HBC whose traditional authority and economy seemed to be falling apart at the seams. “We are all in an uproar, in the midst of war and bloodshed”, wrote Richard Lane from Fort Vancouver to his brother William stationed at Norway House on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, in March of 1846; both Lane brothers were HBC employees. Past practice of selling musket balls and gun flints, i.e. ammunition, to Company employees and to settlers may not have helped the situation.<sup>37</sup> By June, much to the chagrin of Hudson Bay Company officials in the North West, the British and Americans had negotiated a formal treaty which saw the entire Oregon territory (both sides of the Columbia River) pass into American hands. In 1847 the Cayuse Indians attacked the Protestant mission of Walla Walla, up the Columbia River. U.S. army troops were sent to Fort Vancouver. The army rented houses and buildings from the Hudson Bay Company. This was now U.S. territory.

On the heels of the military takeover came the California gold rush of 1849 which stimulated grain production in the Willamette Valley. Sawmills on Puget Sound began producing for the booming California market. Meanwhile the Hudson Bay Company was shifting its center of gravity in the west from Fort Vancouver to Victoria. The HBC, in British Columbia, became more

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<sup>36</sup> R.S. MacKie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, especially the Conclusion: p. 311 ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Exploring Fort Vancouver*: p. 77.

involved in salmon production and resource extraction for the Pacific market, including California. Of particular importance were the Vancouver Island coalfields which the company took the trouble of mapping so carefully.<sup>38</sup> These would serve the Pacific economy for decades especially during the late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> century era of coal-powered steam navigation. The Cariboo goldrush on the mainland, in 1858, would further anchor British Columbia to the rest of the Pacific world. It would encourage British investment first in the mainland colony of British Columbia, north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel and later on Vancouver Island. A unit of Royal Engineers was brought in to build roads, bridges, public buildings and towns. They chose the site of New Westminster, on the Fraser River, part of the today's metropolitan region of Vancouver as the capital.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile the eastern or Canadian connection would not make itself felt again, until the 1880s following the arrival of the CPR the first Canadian transcontinental railway.

In July of 1853 Joseph McKay wrote from the Nanaimo Coal Mines, on Vancouver Island, to London England about a family inheritance. McKay felt that his deceased brother's widow (Catherine MacKay) was entitled to part of the settlement and advised his London correspondent to send her portion addressed to Catherine McKay, whereabouts unknown in the southern departments, somewhere east of Lake Superior. How could one expect the message to reach her. Was she living in or near James Bay or further to the south? Certainly the Columbia Department, so important to the Hudson Bay Company, was no more. The voyageurs were dying, retired gone, melted away into the landscape. An era had come and gone; this in a relatively short amount of time. With the conquest of the Pacific North West the transcontinental fur trade had risen to unprecedented heights only to implode upon itself, a casualty of geopolitical forces and Pacific economic development. The demise signalled the collapse of the entire trade closer to the center of the continent, in Manitoba and Saskatchewan by the 1870s and 1880s. This trend was actually initiated on the Pacific coast. Our history can be thus be read from west to east.

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<sup>38</sup> R.I. Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting* : p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West, A History of British Columbia*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press (Revised Edition) 1996: p. 70-71.