Wherever a window or a door is required, posts are erected, into which the ends of the timbers are introduced, instead of the main posts, and thus the required hole is made in the wall.

A post is placed at the center of each end of the building which is continued above the beam as high as the top of the roof is intended to be. A stick of timber is then laid on the top of these posts reaching from one end of the building to the other, and forms the ridge pole. The roof is then formed by laying one end of timbers on this ridge pole and the other on the plate till the whole is covered. These timbers answer the purpose of boards on the roof of English buildings. For shingling cedar barks are used. These barks are taken from the white cedar which is plenty in this part of the country, in the early part of the summer. A single piece about 4 or 5 feet in length is peeled from each tree which is left standing. It is a smooth bark, not thick, rather stringy, and not brittle when dry. These barks are put upon the timbers of the roof in the manner of shingles, and are secured by narrow strips of board which are laid across them and spiked to the timbers. A roof of this kind will last several years.

The cracks between the timbers in the walls are plastered with a hard clay which abounds in the country and are then covered with cedar bark in the manner of the roof, if the building is intended for a house. We have now completed the body of our building without the use of boards.

Windows are made of the same materials and in the same manner here as in England, that is, a sash and glass makes a window, except occasionally a dried deer skin is used in the stead thereof. Sashes are made here; glass, nails and all other foreign materials for building are imported as other foreign goods are. To this post they are brought more than 50 miles of the way on men's backs.
We come now to the inside of our building where boards are at least convenient. These are all made by hand. The log is cut and hewed on two opposite sides to the thickness of 9 inches or a foot. It is then raised to the height of 6 or 7 feet from the ground and rests upon timbers. Lines are then traced as near to each other as the thickness of the board requires, which the saw is made to follow. And one man stands upon the sticks to be sawed, and manages one end of a saw 5 or six feet in length, and made for this kind of business; while a second stands under it and manages the other. The saw operates nearly in the same manner as that of a common saw mill. It is not however confined in a frame like it. The timber is cut only with the downward stroke which both the men contribute to produce. Two men will saw from a dozen to 20 of these boards per day, which are usually 10 or 12 feet in length.

After our boards are made, floors, partitions, doors etc can be made in this country as well as any other. For purposes of plastering, cementing etc. clay is used instead of lime, none of which is found about Lake Superior. Chimneys are made of stones and clay, the art of brick making not having travelled so high up yet. The manner I cannot now describe. It is not however like the Yankee manner of building stone chimneys.¹

Marius Barbeau, writing in The Beaver, states that the fur traders did not build in the Scandinavian-Delaware Bay style of log cabin, rather they used the French type of construction, poteaux sur sole, or "posts in a sill," and pieux en terre, or

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¹ Sherman Hall to Aaron Hall, Jr., Lac du Flambeau, Sept. 30, 1832, Sherman Hall Papers, 1831-1875, Minnesota Historical Society.
"piles in the ground." Of the two, posts-on-sill was the more common:

It consisted of horizontal logs, usually squared, slid in grooves into position between squared uprights, which were planted by means of mortices into heavy squared logs forming a frame or sill for a foundation. This type ... went back to the colombage style of construction used in northern France. ... The only difference between colombage and poteaux sur sole is that the empty spaces between the uprights were filled, in France, with stone, clay, and straw, whereas in Canada wood - everywhere abundant.

He wrote that poteaux sur sole originated in the French Canadian colonies, and that in parts of the Ottawa Valley carpenters were still erecting buildings of this type as late as 1945. He concluded: "The houses at the posts of the North
West Company, and later of the Hudson's Bay Company, throughout the northern and western wilderness, were all patterned after the same model."

Although the fur traders used this style of posts-on-sill widely and for a great many years, they were not unmindful of its shortcomings. Donald Ross wrote at Norway House in 1832:

The greatest evil . . . attending wooden buildings in this country - is the necessity of using green and unseasoned Timber - which shrinks to such a degree that the proper bearings of every part of the building very soon gets disordered however well laid at first. - this is more particularly the case with such as have upright posts in the walls, which tho' the general mode in this country is assuredly not the best - as in a very short time the whole weight and pressure from above rests entirely on these posts alone - as for walls or filling up logs they soon part company with the upper frame or wall plates and leave it to support the burden the best way it can.3

Construction in Detail

Timber Preparation

York Factory, 1714. Cutting and squaring timber.

Moose Factory, 1743. Difficult to find timber large enough for foundation. Most of the fort's timbers were 10-12 inches through. Lined a flanker with timber 6½ feet high and 7 inches thick as a defensive measure. Cut weather boarding and 1-inch plank.


3. Smythe, p. 49.
Brunswick House, 1779. Planing boards.

Cumberland House, 1785-97. Hewing timber to be cut into 3-inch planks for gates. Sawing 200 boards at the saw pit. Made treenails from ash billets. Some squared timber became so warped during the summer that it had to be hewed again. Planed weather boards.

Timiscaminque, 1803-05. Squared 8 beams each 38 feet long, for a canoe shed. Squared 9 logs, each 24 feet long, 8 inches broad, and 6 inches thick. Two men in one day sawed 14 boards each 25½ feet long and 7 inches broad. Squared 13 logs, 2 of them 18 feet long, and 11 of them 12 feet long. Made a raft of all the squared timber and floated it to construction site. The raft contained:

- 4 logs 62 feet long
- 6 logs 12 feet long
- 6 logs 12 feet long
- 2 " 15 " "
- 22 " 10 " "
- 14 " 13 " "
- 18 " 8 " "

White Earth House, 1810. Men smoothed all the planks for a house. Planks were 20 and 12 feet long.

Upper Fort Garry, 1814. Had on hand 700 roofing sticks, 12½ and 15 feet long. Squared 50 logs, each 14½ feet long, for flooring.

Stuart Lake, 1840. Employed Indian women to square logs: 3 of 22 feet, 8 of 10 feet, and one of 22 feet, and 8 beams of 30 feet.

The labor of cutting logs, hewing so as to "square" them, sawing when boards or planks were required, and planing or smoothing when being used for interior finish was almost universal. Although the North West Company had a sawmill erected at Sault Ste. Marie early enough to benefit Fort William, its structures at Grand Portage probably were built of hewn and pit-sawed timbers. The photographs in this report show that the workmanship varied, the results ranging from crude efforts to solid, sound structures. When contrasted with the photographic and written evidence, the
recent Great Hall at Grand Portage was too well finished. It had the appearance of being machine-built, rather than the hand labor so evident throughout the fur trade.4

Foundations

York Factory, 1757. Digging foundation for new master's house. Laid lime under the foundation of the northwest curtain to help keep it dry.

Cumberland House, 1791. Laid the sleepers of the new house.

Lac La Pluie, 1795. Rafted cedar logs to be used as the foundation logs for a new house.

Neither the illustrations nor the accounts are especially detailed concerning foundations. No references to stone foundations at other posts have been found. However, the archeological evidence at Grand Portage clearly indicates that the Great Hall had a stone foundation. The Great Hall at Fort William was raised about five feet because of the wet ground. The Selkirk sketches would suggest that timbers were used as this foundation rather than stone.5


Walls

York Factory, 1745. Walls were of white fir, 8 or 9 inches square, laid one upon another.

Cumberland House, 1793-1807. Several references to weather boards and weather boarding.

Upper Fort Garry, 1814-24. Filled up the cracks in the walls. Weather-boarded the governor's house. "Covered the House about 2/3 with sods, and as they were so heavy, and the wall plates being poplar, and hewn to a small, the whole roof fell in that was covered and even tore out the posts of the walls to the very foundation."

Fort Chippewan, 1800. "The gables of the hangards of this place are covered with bark, through which any thief . . . may thrust either his hands or his head."

Fort Vancouver, 1820s-40s. The grooved uprights were from 6 to 10 feet apart. The horizontal timbers were about 6 inches thick and might have been either sawn or hewn. Walls probably not weather boarded until 1841.

Fort Yukon, 1847. Walls made of 8-inch squared pine logs.

Fort Nisqually. The original granary, 1843, and Big House still stand, but not on their original sites, at Tacoma, Wash. The granary walls are posts-on-sill; the walls of the Big House are today covered with boards, but possibly are posts-on-sill underneath.

Fort Victoria. A photograph of a stack of horizontal timbers taken from a building that had once been at Fort Victoria, shows large squared logs with tongues cut on their ends. There is nothing in the photograph that gives a scale, but these logs appear to be over 6 inches square and less than 12 inches square.

The illustrations in this report give many good examples of posts-on-sill type walls. Spacing of the posts, the inclusion of door and window posts, chinking of the horizontal timbers are all depicted. The evidence is clear that the horizontal logs were sturdy. Specific measurements found vary from six to eight inches.
It would be a mistake to rebuild with boards of the same thinness as in the late reconstruction. Hall's account at the beginning of this chapter is the only one found that gives dimensions for the tongues and grooves.6

Rooftops

La Corne's Post, Saskatchewan River, 1755. Roof was made of birch bark fastened together with willow thongs.

York Factory, 1759-1848. "Calking that part of the Roof which is laid." Buildings in 1821 had flat roofs, covered with lead. The large warehouse had flat roofs in 1848; the 3-story section had a tin roof; the 2-story sections had lead roofs.

Cumberland House, 1791-1807. Planed boards for the roof. Put a double roof on the house, and fitted battens in between the two roofs. Then caulked the roof. But had to take off "weather boards" in order to stop an old leak.

Lac La Pluie, 1795. Collected hay for the roof. Plastered the roof.

Carleton House, 1795. Mudded the roof.

Norway House, 1796. Covered the roof with sticks, then put grass and earth on it. Finished by mudding it.

Fort Alexander, 1797. Thatched the roof. In 1822, covered the roof with earth.

Upper Fort Garry, 1814. Covered the house with sod, which was tighter and warmer than bark. However, one such sod roof caved in, being too heavy for the plates and posts. In 1822, still had earth and hay on the roofs; but, in 1825, the men were putting elm bark on the "leaky" houses.

Timiscaminque, 1803. "We squared a roof log 60 feet long."
The roof of the canoe shed had 293 mortises, 293 tenons, 293 pins,
and 60 notches. It was covered with "one double of boards."

White Earth House, 1810. "Men finished raising 1,150 pine
bark pieces." "Men finished covering the house with mud, earth,
and pine bark; not a drop of water penetrated."

Point Meuron, 1819. When the birchbark roof became leaky,
the men replaced it with "Cedar bark."

Michipicoten, 1859. "Olsen shingling roof of new men's
house."

Fort Vancouver, 1820s-50s. Plates placed on tops of uprights
and rafters raised on them. Down to the early 1840s, the roofs
were covered with sawed boards, 1 foot wide, 1 inch thick. These
boards were grooved on their edges and were placed "up and down"
to shed water. Shingles replaced these boards in the 1840s.
Before the 1840s, all the roofs were simple gable in design; after
that the main buildings had hip roofs.

The above notes illustrate the wide variety of materials
used for roofing throughout the Northwest. In general, the
traders used the best material that each locality offered. In
the case of Grand Portage and Fort William, wooden shingles
covered the roofs of most of the buildings. One witness said
that these shingles were cedar and spruce. An apparent surviving
shingle was found during the archeological work at Grand Portage
in 1937. The reconstructed roof should be of shingle. No evidence
exists as to the shape of the roof on the Great Hall. Its
replacement at Fort William had a hip roof, typical of the larger
structures throughout the fur trade as shown in the illustrations.
A hip roof would be logical for Grand Portage.
Whether dormer windows graced the Great Hall is unknown. Apparently, three dormer windows were built along the front of the Great Hall at Fort William (Irvine sketch). However there is no written evidence concerning usage of the upper floor. A reasonable conclusion is that the upstairs at Fort William was a simple, unfinished loft running the length of the building. It would not be too far-fetched to have some dormer windows in the hip roof of the conjectural Great Hall at Grand Portage.7

Floors

York Factory, 1759. Laying girders for ground floor; cutting joists; and laying the lower and upper floors.

Cumberland House, 1790. Took up the floor of the warehouse and put in new joists. 1793, "plaining & edgeing Plank for flooring."

Lac La Pluie, 1793-95. Laying sleepers and "splitting wood" for floors.

Fort Alexander, 1795. Hewing boards for flooring.

Upper Fort Garry, 1814. Squaring 50 logs, 14½ feet long, for boards for a new floor. Late, "one man laying the Floor over the Captains room and Grooving the Boards."

Timiscaminque, 1805. "Joined and grooved one end of the floor of my Wintering house."

Fort Vancouver, ca. 1840s. Most floors were rough boards, but in the office and in the manager's residence, the floors were planed.

Fort Qu' Appelle, 1867. All rooms floored with white poplar, tongued and grooved, planed plank and board. All hand work.

The Selkirk sketch of the interior of the Great Hall at Fort William shows a wooden floor. Details are not too clear in the sketch, but the floor appears to have been well made. As the above notes suggest, wooden floors were widespread throughout the Northwest and tongue-and-groove was widely used. The floor at the Great Hall at Grand Portage was probably planed, tongued and grooved, and well-made.8

Chimneys, Fireplaces, Stoves

York Factory, 1757-59. Although the post journal referred to "stove," a close reading shows that the term meant a fireplace. "Repairing the Stove in the Mens House." "Making a Girth for the Chimney of the Masters house." "Pulling down the Stove in the Mens House in order to rebuild." "Bricklayers rebuilding the Stove in the Mens House." "Taking off the top of the Chimney belonging to the new House and carrying the same higher." "Bricklayer and one Man making Mortar to be ready to begin to build the Chimney in the Masters apartment."

Cumberland House, 1787-88. "Mudding the Chimneys." "Repairing the Masters fire place." "Gathering stone for a

Sent the People to work to Build a Double fire Place Temporary as there is none that understands the Building a Proper one." "I find that the Chimney's have been superficially built of clay and Grass which smoaks very much, has induced me to have two of them taken down and rebuilt with Stones and mortar, which will render them far more secure."

The 1807 post journal contained crude plans for two double fireplaces:

Lac La Pluie, 1793-95. "Boating home stones for the Chimney." "The Chimneys generally take fire before the Winter's over occasioned by the great quantity of wood we Build in them to support the Clay and grass when wet. But I have taken a new method of building these temporary Chimneys. I place the 4 uprites 2 foot farther from one another. Then I really mean to Build the Chimney. Then I tie the cross bars as in other Chimneys of this kind only stronger to support the Clay which is a foot on every square from the uprites. Then when the Clay is dry which becomes as hard as stones I take away the uprites from the Chimney and if I chose may hawl out the crossbars, then the chimney stands without a bit of wood in her - and when those holes are filled up with well worked clay, that is occasioned by taking away the crossbars; and the Chimney was /Illeg/ with clean clay, about as thick as water /Illeg/, it will have all the appearance of a stone chimney well plastered."

Fort Alexander, 1795. "Men fetching stones for a chimney."

Timiscamique, 1805. Went "for a load of flat Stones for hearths and pavement for the boutick /?/." 

Point Meuron, 1818. "Preparing Earth so as to make a chimney."

Upper Fort Garry, 1823. "Leduc casing the eastern chimneys of the dwelling houses with boards."
Fort Victoria, 1850. In the mess room was "a large open fireplace at one end, and large pieces of cordwood burning therein."

Fort Vancouver, 1820s-60s. Most of the chimneys were brick; some were stone.

Rocky Mountain House. This report contains a 1949 photograph of the fireplaces and chimneys. Both were built with undressed stone, possibly of the rounded boulders one finds in a streambed.

The base of one fireplace at Grand Portage was accidentally discovered in 1937. The Irvine sketch suggests two fireplaces in the Great Hall at Fort William. The first reconstruction of the Great Hall had two fireplaces, one at each end of the hall. The forthcoming archeological work at Grand Portage may present additional information on the number of fireplaces and their locations in the Great Hall.

Should no additional information come to light, the concept of two large fireplaces seems reasonable and justifiable. However, these conjectural reconstructions should not have the same degree of elegance present in the existing reconstructed fireplaces. The stone work should not be so perfectly dressed. Also, since the great hall should be ceiled, the visitor will not see the dramatic sweep of stone from the hearth to the ridgepole that he could in the late reconstruction.

The Selkirk sketch shows one of the small bedrooms being heated by a stove. This same treatment would be well suited to the four
bedrooms at Grand Portage's Great Hall. 9

Windows


Upper Fort Garry, 1814. Men grooving window posts.


York Factory, 1841. Each bachelor's bedroom had a window, 3 by 2½ feet. In winter, double windows were added.

Fort Qu'Appelle, 1867. Only the master's house and the interpreter's house had glass windows, "which consisted each of an upper and lower sash, with six panes of eight and one-half by seven and one-half inch glass, all the other windows in the establishment being of buffalo parchment."

The Selkirk sketch of Fort William gives excellent detail of a double sash window in the Great Hall. An inventory stated that the glass on hand at Fort William measured 7½ by 8½ inches and 8½ by 9½ inches. Recommend that Grand Portage's Great Hall have similar styled windows; and that there be the same number

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across the front as is shown on the Irvine sketch. Also recommend a shutter design similar to that in the Selkirk sketch. The main purpose of a shutter at Grand Portage would have been to give privacy. Shutters were not required for defense as at some other posts.10

Doors

Lac La Pluie, 1795. "Finished the outside door of the new house."

Fort Pelly, 1797. "Set up the Door posts."

Leech Lake, 1806. Doors were musket proof.

Cumberland House, 1807. "Began to saw stuff for Pannell Doors."

Fort Vancouver, 1820s-60s. Doors were hung with metal hinges.

Fort Qu' Appelle, 1867. Some doors were parchment stretched on wooden frames. The interpreter's door and the workshop door were wood and had big iron latches and locks. The others had only long, heavy wooden latches opened by a thong through a hole in the door.

Five or six of the photographs in this report illustrate panel doors at a variety of posts. Also, and most importantly the Selkirk sketch shows a panel door with its brass knob and lock in the Great Hall at Fort William. Unfortunately, this

sketch does not show the hinges on the door. Suggest that
the Selkirk door be a general guide in designing doors for the
Great Hall. 11

Floor Plans and Dimensions

La Corne's Post, 1755. The fort or house was 26 feet long,
12 feet wide, and 9 feet high to the ridge. It had three rooms:
trading, storing, and living. This represented a fur trade
post reduced to its bare essentials.

Cumberland House, 1786. A log house, 36 by 20 feet, with
walls 7 feet high. The ridge pole was 12 feet above the ground,
giving to each side of the roof a 5-foot slope. Three rooms:
a 12 by 20-foot room for goods, furs, and provisions; a ten-foot
hall for business and trading, which also served as a bedroom
for the master and the clerk; and a 14 by 20-foot "guard room"
for the men.

Lac La Pluie, 1794. The NWCo. post was 36 by 18 feet. The
HBC post was only 25 by 20 feet; it had two chimneys and a
good cellar.

Upper Fort Garry, 1799. "Finished the house, 32 foot long
by 17 Broad."

Leech Lake, 1806. Main house was 60 by 25 feet and stood
1½ stories high. Within it was an 18-foot square hall, a
bedroom, kitchen, office, trading shop (12½ feet square), a second
bedroom (12½ feet square), a store (25 by 20 feet), a cellar
under the store for ice, other cellars, and a loft over the whole
building.

Point Meuron, 1820. House, 30 by 14 feet. Had two rooms
and a kitchen. Was well glazed, floored, lofted, and with a
small cellar at one end. The storeroom was 50 by 21 feet, covered
with cedar bark, floored and lofted, with a shop in one end.
There were other small buildings.

11. Post Journals for Cumberland House, Lac La Pluie, Fort
Pelly, Hudson's Bay Company Records, microfilm, Public Archives,
Ottawa; Jackson, 1, 185; Hussey, p. 163; Cowie, p. 212.
Norway House, 1828. The hall in the master's house was 40 by 50 feet. Here the annual HBC general council met.

Fort Yukon, 1847. Main house was 46 by 26 feet and had 5 rooms: a hall in the center; an office, sitting room, and a bedroom in one end; and the assistants' room and a kitchen in the other end.

Fort Edmonton, 1847. The mess hall was 50 by 25 feet.

Fort Victoria, 1850. The mess room was 30 by 20 feet.

Fort William, 1816. The mess room in the Great Hall was depicted as being 50 by 40 feet. (See plans for this building).

The structures at the early posts were quite small, especially when compared to those built in later years. Although it dates from the early British days, the Great Hall at Grand Portage was a very substantial building, perhaps the largest yet in the trade. The 1937 archeological project showed it to be 95 by 30 feet. If the bedrooms were about 15 feet square (Fort William's bedrooms were about 15 by 18 feet), then the hall's dimensions would have been about 65 by 30 feet.12

Interiors, Partitions, Etc.

York Factory, 1758-59. "Fitting up some Cabins in the Mens House." "Taking down the lining of the old House and some of the Partitions." "Putting up the Wainscotting of the upper Floor."

Cumberland House, 1794-97. "People hauled across the Boards of the Old Cabins to Put the Best of them about their Bed Places."

12. Post Journals for Lac La Pluie, Upper Fort Garry, Fort William, and Norway House, Hudson's Bay Company Records, Public Archives, Ottawa; Burpee, 1, 134; Glover, p. 40; Jackson, 1, 184; Wilson, "Founding Fort Yukon," The Beaver (June 1947), p. 41; Begg, p. 216.
"At work on the Mens Cabins Puting up the Framing." "Finished the Partitioning in the Mens End of the House." "Carpenter making a Hatch way for the upper Floor in the new house." "Carpenter making Stairs for the new Trading Room." "Carpenter putting up the wainscoating in the Cabbin."

Carleton House, 1795-96. "Putting up partitions." "Lining a room (with boards)." "Making a Cupboard."

Norway House, 1796. "People . . . putting up their Cabbins & partitions."

Timiscaminque, 1805. "Worked all day at lining our house with boards."

Fort Edmonton, 1840s. The walls and ceilings were boarded. Plaster was not used because limestone was not available in area.

Fort Qu'Appelle, 1867. All the walls of the Big House were lined with white poplar. The walls of the men's quarters were plastered with clay and whitewashed.

Fort William, 1816. Again, the Selkirk sketch gives a clear concept of the board linings of the Great Hall.

Recommend that the partitioning and the interior treatment of the walls, including the wainscoating, at the Great Hall generally follow that shown for Fort William.13

Ceilings

York Factory, 1759-60. "Preparing stuff for the Ceiling of the new House." Getting "Cedar to make Laths in order to Lath & Plaister the Ceiling of the lower Floor of the new House before and over the Stove in order to prevent any accident by Fire." "Plaining Boards for Ceilings for some of the Rooms in the new House."

Brunswick House, 1779. "Boarding the Ceiling."

Timiscaminque, 1805. "We began tightening the ceiling of our Wintering house."

Fort Vancouver, 1840s. Most of the dwellings and some other important buildings were ceiled with tongued and grooved dressed boards.

Fort Qu' Appelle, 1867. Ceilings in the Big House were made from white poplar. In the men's quarters the beams were open and covered with poles, on which rested buffalo parchment of rawhide to form a ceiling.

The Selkirk sketch of the Great Hall at Fort William shows a boarded ceiling. A similar treatment would be suitable for Grand Portage.

Cellars.

Cumberland House, 1785-98. "Emptying the cellars of water." Repaired a cellar under the trading room, "the wood being rotten it all tumbled in." "Making a ladder to Cellar." "Took up part of the lower floor in the New House to make a Cellar."

White Barth House, 1810. "Hauled in logs for the cellar - say 60 of 15 feet and 30 of 12 feet."

A fort usually had several cellars for storing ice and for preserving perishables. The 1937 archeological project did not disclose any cellars under the Great Hall or on the site of the kitchen. The further investigations scheduled for this year

will allow a definitive statement to be made concerning any cellars in the Great Hall.  

### Nails, Fasteners, Etc.

York Factory, 1757. "Making some very large spikes for the Foundation of the Masters new house."

Cumberland House, 1793. "Brock up about half of the upper Roof of the old House to get the old nails for the use of the New House."

Point Meuron, 1818. "Making Hinges for the new Store." "We are deficient of Iron works for the Buildings, etc. Although there is a Forge & ... Iron we have no Smith."

Fort Vancouver. Down to at least 1841, no iron or nails were used to join the timbers in the walls.

Fort William. The inventories in Chapter 2 show that iron and nails were plentiful.

Archeological investigations at Grand Portage have turned up nails, iron hinges, etc. Continuing investigations will disclose more objects. Where feasible, reproductions of these items could be made and used for the reconstruction of the Great Hall.

### Paint, Whitewash, Plaster, Etc.

York Factory, 1758-59. "Plaistering" and "whitewashing" the

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15. Post Journals for Cumberland House, Hudson's Bay Company Records, microfilm, Public Archives, Ottawa; Coues, 2, 622.

Men's house. "Setting the Lime kiln." "Calking the inside of the new House."

Cumberland House, 1784-98. "Picked oakum to put in the seams of the House." "Caulking the Ware House." "Mudding the House." "White washing the House." "One man went for white earth - to white wash with."

Carleton House, 1796. "Fetching white earth." "Plaistering the House."

Norway House, 1818. "Mudding the House."

Upper Fort Garry, 1820. "Cleaning and white washing inside the House."

Fort Alexander, 1800. "The Houses well built, plastered inside & out & washed over with white Earth, which is plentiful hereabouts and answers nearly as well for whitewashing as Lime."

Rocky Mountain House, 1810. "This is the spot where we get the clay to whitewash our houses, the best I have seen in the country."

York Factory, 1841. Whitewashed houses with green trim. The walls in Bachelor's Hall were painted white, but were dirty.

Fort Edmonton, 1847. Ceiling of the mess hall had fantastic gilt scrolls. The walls were brightly painted.

Michipicoten Post, 1859. "Quite a gay appearance" was caused by putting red ochre in the whitewash.

Fort William, 1857. The ruins of a lime kiln were said to have been identified at Fort William that year (post still active). The inventories in Chapter 2 indicated a variety of paints at Fort William. Photographic evidence indicates that most of the buildings at this post were white.

Except for a few esoteric touches such as the red ochre at Michipicoten, most of the main buildings throughout the trade were whitewashed inside and out. By the 1840s, an increasing amount of paint was coming into use, such as the green trim at York
Factory. Grand Portage's trim was Spanish brown, according to an account. This color contrasted well with white walls and should have presented a pleasing appearance to the winterers.

In view of the variety of colors of paint at Fort William, the interior trim of the Great Hall at Grand Portage could present a bright, attractive background (again, with white walls) for the annual meeting and the banquets.  

Chapter 4

Furnishing Great Halls

The partners of the North West Company were men of power and wealth. McTavish, the McGillivrays, and the others knew how to survive in the wilderness with meager resources. They also knew how to live like nobility amid the splendid trappings they accumulated at their estates in Montreal and its suburbs. All the evidence points to the concept that these merchant-princes lived well at the annual meetings at Grand Portage and Fort William. The revelry in the Great Hall for that brief time of the rendezvous each summer flashed like a comet sweeping through dull northwest skies.

Knowledge of the furnishings and ornaments at Grand Portage is as limited as the information concerning the structures themselves. But through the records of Fort William and other posts, a clear, if conjectural, image emerges of the Great Hall in its time of high living. Furnishing the Great Hall will be a matter of choosing from many ideas, rather than striving to think of what could possibly be in the structure.

Grand Portage

Once again, the researcher must note that descriptions of furnishings at Grand Portage remain rare. Such notes as do exist may be quickly summarized.
Food. The partners, agents, clerks, interpreters, and guides ate well at the annual meetings. At least the following appeared on the tables in the Great Hall: beef, salt pork, hams, fish, venison, sausage, mutton, bread, biscuits, butter, peas, Indian corn, potatoes, sugar, tea, fresh milk, wine, and spirits. Crops, such as potatoes, grew at the post. Milk cows as well as beef cattle, sheep, and hogs were to be found there. The gentlemen drank rum, port, brandy, high wines, and shrub. 1

Furniture. Wakefield, in her secondary account, mentioned the "first table" in the Great Hall. Alexander Mackenzie said that there were "several" tables in the hall and that they could seat up to 100. The XY Company's inventory of 1801 listed at its fort 10 bedsteads, 24 chairs, and 3 japanned candlesticks. William McGillivray gave a hint of the bedroom furniture when he mentioned a large trunk in his room. And, at the ball attended by David Harmon in 1800, a bagpipe, violin, and flute provided the music. 2

1. Mackenzie, pp. xl-xlIII; "Scheme for the N.W. Outfit, 1794," in N.W. Company, Correspondence, 1791-99, Hudson's Bay Company Records, microfilm, Public Archives, Ottawa; Macdonald, "Autobiographical Notes;" Innis, p. 231; William McGillivray, letters, to Captain Maxwell, Aug. 26, 1800, and to Henry Munro, Jan. 10, 1800, in NW Company Letter Book, 1798-1802; and Wakefield, p. 345. Although not mentioned, coffee must have been available. It was at Fort William.

Assuming that the Great Hall consisted of a central hall and two bedrooms at each end for the leading members present, with a kitchen and servants' quarters in a small building at the back, the building's furnishings and decorations would be such to allow for business meetings and meals in the daytime, conversation and drinking in the evenings, and balls and, finally, sleeping at night. The history of other forts illustrates these concepts.

Fort William

As with accounts of the structures, descriptions of the furnishings at Fort William are richer than of Grand Portage. Since many of the contents of Grand Portage's Great Hall undoubtedly moved up to Fort William in 1802, those items found at the latter are important to the study.

Gabriel Franchère described the interior of the Great Hall as being "decorated with several paintings and with pastel portraits of many of the partners." The Thwaites version of Franchère's account omits the word "pastel" in describing the portraits. Ross Cox, in 1817, also found the art impressive: "A finely executed bust of the late Simon M'Tavish is placed in it, with portraits of various proprietors. A full-length likeness of Nelson, together with a splendid painting of the battle of the Nile, also decorate the walls, and were presented by the Hon. William M'Gillivray to the Company." Washington
Irving noted that the walls of the Great Hall were "decorated with Indian arms and accoutrements, and the trophies of the fur trade."3

The two large paintings that Cox saw are today at the Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, Manitoba. After the Hudson's Bay Company took over Fort William, John George McTavish transported the oils to York Factory, about 1821. There they remained stored for many years, but eventually were again displayed. In 1928, the Company moved them to Winnipeg, then to London for restorative treatment, and, in 1938, back to Winnipeg. William McGillivray is thought to have commissioned the works from a Montreal artist named Dulongpre. The life-sized painting of Lord Nelson was copied from a painting by L. F. Abbott, which W. Barnard reproduced as an engraving in 1798. M. A. MacLeod has studied the second painting and has shown that it is not the Battle of the Nile, but the Battle of Trafalgar. A full Union Jack and a Spanish ship and flag are depicted in the scene, neither possible at the Nile.

When McGillivray had these paintings commissioned or when he brought them to the head of Lake Superior is not known. Since the Battle of Trafalgar occurred in 1805, it is not possible

that this oil first hung at Grand Portage. (Ironically, the Battle of the Nile occurred in 1798; thus, had Cox been right, the picture could have been at Grand Portage.) Most likely, McGillivray had both paintings done after 1805 and neither graced Grand Portage's walls. No date can be ascribed to the bust of Simon McTavish. Except for one last visit in 1801, McTawish had ceased attending the annual meetings in 1791, when he moved to London. The possibility exists that William McGillivray, as the Montreal agent during that last decade, brought the bust first to Grand Portage.4

Irving's notice of Indian and fur trade artifacts being displayed are wholly probably for Grand Portage too. The traders had easy access to the finest examples of Indian crafts throughout the Northwest. Later, accounts will show that such articles were commonly displayed. Note should be made that by 1802, the North West Company had not yet tapped the Pacific Coast. Except for Alexander Mackenzie's magnificent trip to the sea, the Company had not yet moved into the Oregon Country or the fiords and rivers of today's British Columbia. Thus, the art work of the Coastal Indians probably was not represented at Grand Portage. But every other western group, from the Eskimos

at the mouth of the Mackenzie River to the Mandans on the Missouri River, may well have been represented.

Portraits of the various partners likewise were available for display at Grand Portage. Today, with few exceptions, the many partners' likenesses are in the possession of a number of museums and galleries in Canada and elsewhere. The largest collection, probably, is to be found at the McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal.

David Thompson contributed an important item to the walls of the Great Hall when he donated an original copy of his huge map of the Northwest, that accurately depicted (much of it for the first time) 1,700,000 square miles of western Canada and the United States. This map, today, hangs at the Department of Public Records and Archives of Ontario, Toronto. Unfortunately, Thompson did not prepare this masterpiece until well after Grand Portage had been abandoned. Nevertheless, he attended several rendezvous at Grand Portage during the time he was engaged in surveying. Also, other explorers, such as Peter Pond and Alexander Mackenzie, were at Grand Portage over the years. It is quite probable that maps of the Northwest adorned Grand Portage's Great Hall. One may imagine the partners examining it to plot their future course in their rivalry with the Hudson's Bay Company, or their arguing about terrain features depicted, or young clerks eagerly studying
the geography of their future homes.\textsuperscript{5}

The principals at the annual meetings at Fort William also sat at several tables, according to rank. Franchèrè wrote: "It is in this salon that the agents, \textit{partners,} clerks, \textit{guides,} and interpreters of the company eat their meals - at different tables." John Bigsby, as late as 1823, said: "We were placed a good deal according to rank, the seniors and leaders at the head of the table, and the clerks and guides etc. of respectable but humbler grade, ranged down the table in due order."

Cox, too late for the annual meeting, merely noted that the hall could accommodate 200 persons, and that he himself enjoyed his breakfast there on the day he arrived; "Over a bowl of coffee, fresh eggs, excellent hot cakes, and prime cold venison \textit{we} quickly forgot our late privations." Like Grand Portage, the fort was partly self-sufficient: "The kitchen-garden is well stocked, and there are extensive fields of Indian corn and potatoes. There are also several head of cattle, with sheep, hogs, poultry, etc., and a few horses for domestic use."\textsuperscript{6}

Irving, in his secondary but important account, wrote that the Montreal agents "carried up with them cooks and bakers, together with delicacies of every kind, and abundance of choice

\textsuperscript{5} Cox, p. 332.
\textsuperscript{6} Franchèrè, p. 161; Cox, p. 330; Bigsby, 2, 231.
wines for the banquets." He too mentioned the Indian and fur trade artifacts on the walls, probably getting his information from Cox. He said that the "grave and weighty councils were alternated by huge feasts and revels, like some of the old feasts described in Highland castles. The tables in the great banqueting room groaned under the weight of game of all kinds; of venison from the woods, and fish from the lakes, with hunters' delicacies, such as buffaloes' tongues /pickled?, and beavers' tails, and various luxuries from Montreal, and served up by experienced cooks brought for the purpose."7

The furnishings apparently began to disappear rather quickly after the union of the two companies. Lieutenant Keating, in 1823, commented that the post, "which had been embellished with many of the luxuries of civilized countries," was about to fall in ruin. He did not describe the "luxuries." John Bigsby, that same year, described the "plainly-furnished" hall.8

Lord Selkirk's 1816 sketch of one of the end rooms in the Great Hall shows a few items of furniture. In the foreground stands a plain wooden table; under the window a long narrow table contains three drawers with knobs - this table appears to be of competent workmanship. An iron woodstove heats the room; its

8. Keating, 2, 174; Bigsby, 2, 231.
pipe leads to the rear of the room, toward the partition that separates this room from the other small room at the end of the building. On a wall is a small metal hook-like object and possibly part of a second one (for sconces?). Selkirk commandeered two rooms while he occupied Fort William. This possibly is one of them. On the floor plan of the building, also said to have been drawn by Selkirk, this room was identified as formerly being William McGillivray's room, but "now the mess room." Apparently, Selkirk did not enjoy banquets.

This floor plan presents a good picture of the building's uses at that particular time. The Great Hall had the additional functions of dining and ball room. The two rooms at the west end of the building were said to be McLeod's and McDonald's, the latter room being 18 by 15 feet. McLeod has not been identified; McDonald was probably John McDonald, a partner of the North West Company who was taken prisoner by Selkirk. The rooms at the east end belonged to William McGillivray, as noted above, and Alexander McKenzie, another partner taken prisoner. The small room at the rear of the building, near the doorway that led to the separate kitchen, was shown to have been "Hunter's." This may not have been a proper name, but, rather, "the hunter," an important member of many post staffs, whose job it was to provide fresh game for the messes.
This room arrangement was supported by Franchère: "At each end of the salon are located two small rooms for the partners. The rear contains a kitchen and some bedrooms for the domestics." The Thwaites edition of this account translated this section somewhat differently: "Two of these end rooms are destined for the two principal agents; the other two to the steward and his department."

The conclusion drawn from the plan and from the descriptions is that the principal members of the Company, under ordinary circumstances, occupied the four end rooms as bedrooms during the annual meetings.⁹

Fort William - Inventories

In the various inventories of Fort William's supplies taken between 1816 and 1821, a number of furnishings appears. As in a preceding chapter, these inventories are consolidated into a common list.

Furniture and Miscellaneous Objects

| Large oval gilt looking glasses | Snuff boxes |
| Leather trunks                  | Fort flags (both NWCo and HBC) |
| Hair trunks                     | Tin lantlorns |
| Locks for trunks                | "Artificial flour" |
| Table bell                      | Snowshoes |

⁹ Franchère, p. 162; Thwaites, p. 387; Five Selkirk Documents, Hudson's Bay Company, Package 21, No. 126, Provincial Archives, Toronto.
oil stove - in office building
one large stove and one small stove
moved to Fort William from Point Meuron, 1821.

Books (Spellings as given)

A 20-volume encyclopedia
James Dispensary
Allston's Lectures
Holmes Experiments
Johnsons Essays
Wallons Essays
Beddois & Watt
Twelfers Pharmacopia
Douglas on Muscels
Pharmoca. London
Collins Practure
Chemical Nomenclature
Rush on Fevers

Dickens Essays
Nisbitts Medicines
Munro on Health
Duncan Lectures
Ferdenand Lebes
Analomcal Dialogues
Allen's Synopsis Medicine
Bell's Surgery
Bell's Treatise
Bell's on Ulcers, Etc.
Bell's on Hydraulicks, Etc.
Skinner on Poisons
Wotherby's Dictionary

/Note: Fort William had a separate hospital building and the surgeon (Dr. John McLoughlin) lived in his own house. The medical books, above, may have been in these structures rather than in the Great Hall. /

Personal Stems

tooth brushes playing cards
clothes brushes clay pipes
shoe brushes flints
combs: horn, ivory plug tobacco
soap: yellow, iron, Windsor snuff.

Clothing

capotes: blanket, blue, gray
trousers: cloths, duck, ratine, fustian, nankeen
jacket, cloth
shirts: cotton, calico, woolen netting
stockings: woolen, cotton, black, white
handkerchiefs: black, blue, red, bandana
buttons, gilt
shoes: beef, fine English
waistcoats, yellow
hats, beaver

Personal Armament

rifles, American
muskets: American, English
Northwest guns
pistols: fine, common, brass barrelled
pistol flints
bayonets: American, English
cutlasses
swords
sabres, fine
cartridge boxes, English
belts, English
haversacks
cannisters, battle powder, \( \frac{1}{2} \) lb. each
powder horns, white
military drums

Dishes, Kitchen Utensils, Etc.

kettles: tin, copper, covered, tea
basins, pint pewter
trays, wooden
buckets, water
carvers, pair
forks, large
knife, large
knives and forks
spoons: table, soup
plates, earthenware
plates, Queensware
bowls, Queensware
mugs: japanned, quart, pint, half-pint, gill

Food, Condiments, Liquors, Etc.

flour
sugar
leaf sugar
moist sugar
maple sugar
salt beef

fresh beef
hams
pork
pemmican
brown sugar
Indian corn
white peas   French brandy   Madeira wine
barley        sausages      Tiner wine
French beans  veal mutton  shrub
Indian rice   fresh fish
bread, loaves  salad oil
biscuits, brown ketchup
fresh butter  anchovies
salt butter   mustard
coffee, "Mocco"  nutmeg
tea, Hyson    salt, "minot"
tea, green    black pepper
double "Gloster" cheese  cinnamon
American cheese  cloves
dry raisins    dried lemon peel
chocolate      vinegar
port

Office Supplies. The clerks had a separate office building or
counting house at Fort William. The items below are from an
inventory of that building. However, some of this material might
well have been in the Great Hall - if not in the mess itself, then
in the bedrooms of the principal partners:

blank memo books   ink stands:  tin, glass, pewter
notebooks          fine quills
abstract books     pencils
folio paper, ruled and plain ivory pounce boxes
foolscap paper, ruled "cassettes"
quarto paper, plain ivory paper folders
blotting paper, plain rulers
Royal paper, plain one silver seal, NWCo.
Imperial paper, plain one wafer seal
drawing paper      one box of wafers
ink powder, red and black sticks of sealing wax, red and
black

An interesting footnote appears in the Fort William Account
book for 1818-20:

Butler's wages f50.-
Butler's equipment 6.6
Cook's wages 40.-
Cook's equipment 7.-
Asst. Cook's wages 6.5 10

Other Posts

Cumberland House, HBC, 1784-1802

Samuel Hearne, a distinguished explorer, founded Cumberland House in 1774, the first of the Hudson's Bay Company posts in the interior. Construction lasted until 1779, and the post became a substantial establishment. The Company relocated the fort about 1794 - approximately one mile. It continues to be an active establishment today. The following references to furnishings come from the post journals:

Nov. 5, 1784. "Two men making candles."
Nov. 22. "Men sawing stuff for a Carpenter's bench."
Oct. 15, 1789. "One man ... fixing a desk for Mr. Turnor."
Oct. 10, 1797. "Carpenter making a cupboard."
Jan. 10, 1798. "Cut down Poplar Trees to burn for the ashes, to make soap with."
Mar. 2. "Carpenter making a writing table."
May 7. "Repairing the stoves." (Probably, fireplaces)
Oct. 8. "Pulled up all the cabbage & hang them up in the new house."
Feb. 26, 1802. "Ballander finished making the chair."11

10. "Inventory of Goods, etc at Fort William ... 18th September 1816"; Inventory of Merchandise at Point Meuron, Oct. 29, 1817; Inventory of Fort William, 1820; "Inventory of Goods ... sent from Point Meuron to Fort William, 12th July 1821"; and Inventory of Fort William, 1821. Public Archives, Ottawa.

Fort Edmonton, HBC, 1847

Christmas, 1847: "No table-cloth shed its snowy whiteness over the board; no silver candelabra or gaudy china interfered with its simple magnificence. The bright tin plates and dishes reflected jolly faces, and burnished gold can give no truer zest to a feast." 12

Upper Fort Garry, HBC, 1821-61

The first Hudson's Bay post on Red River was not an impressive establishment. When Nicholas Garry visited it in 1821, his principal comment was that the main house was in "a very dirty state." Food was scarce, so Garry and eight other gentlemen dined on catfish. Alexander Ross was little more impressed in 1825. He expressed his disappointment by saying that the governor's residence was nothing more "in its outward appearance than the cottage of a humble farmer, who might be able to spend fifty pounds a year." 13

Construction began on a new fort in 1835. This fort and its furnishings represented a vast improvement over the earlier post. An employee described the new combination office-Bachelors' Hall. By day its furnishings were "two large desks and several

very tall stools, besides sundry ink-bottles, rulers, books, and sheets of blotting-paper." But at night the clerks gathered there around a huge fireplace. Their bedrooms, "with doors always open, gave on this room, and lent a background of colour with scarlet sashes, bright hued raiment and gay shot-belts hanging on nails driven into the walls."14

A description by Douglas McKay of the mess room at Garry about 1850 gives a good picture of a large, busy post:

A mess room disordered but somehow comfortably masculine. . . . On the walls are sporting prints of the day - a foam-laced horse with incredibly thin legs dashes across a finishing line with a gentleman rider waving his whip. In another print a florid gentleman in a top hat gazes sadly out and leans on a flintlock with some brilliant and very dead pheasants drooping gracefully from one hand. Old and battered copies of Blackwood's Magazine and the Edinburgh Review are strewn about and the one bookshelf has the best of Walter Scott (Too late for Grand Portage). On the other walls of the mess room hang guns, game bags rich with Indian beading, powder-horns and shot-bags brilliantly embroidered in dyed quills.

McKay also mentioned the "candelabra glow, and silver profuse on the table."15

When Joseph James Hargrave visited Fort Garry in 1861, he looked in on Bachelors' Hall, possibly the same one that had

15. McKay, "In Old Fort Garry," The Beaver (Dec 1938), p. 28.
also served as an office in an earlier account: "A table covered with newspapers and long broad plugs of cavendish stood in a corner, while chairs and a low rude sofa were scattered in disorder up and down the apartment." He continued:

The general mass of men certainly confine themselves ... to the practical and useful, but, from time to time, a gentleman of independent taste turns up ... Masks of the faces of men and animals are displayed on the walls in juxta-position with neatly finished, brightly burnished rifles, shot flasks, powder horns and fire bags. Objects of Indian art in bark, porcupine quill and bead work lend an air of barbaric splendour to the room, while in bold contrast appear pictured representations, set in rude frames, of doings on the British turf, highways and waters.

Hargrave mentioned noticing, besides the horse race scenes and coaches descending dangerous hills, an 18-inch portrait of "Britannia the Pride of the Ocean." He recorded too that not many individuals owned books but that, by then, the Company often supplied good libraries: "Reading men find abundant leisure to pursue their occupation during the long nights of winter."16

Fort Laird (Simpson), HBC, 1876-82

Charles Camsell was born at Fort Laird (also called Fort Simpson), British Columbia, in 1876. Although this is a quite

late date, his memories are of interest. Alongside the flagstaff in the court stood "the customary sun dial, the face of which was made from the lead lining of tea chests." In the upstairs of one of the storehouses was "a museum of stuffed animals and birds." In the two-story Big House of 20 rooms, which housed all the senior officers and their families, a wanderer could find: the great dining hall, also used for dances and receptions; two kitchens at the back, one with a wood-burning range, the other with a fireplace; a billiard room; a recreation room in which the inhabitants played cards, chess, and checkers; a library; and the "ivory room," which had a collection of fossil tusks, bones, and mammoth teeth.

The library consisted of several hundred volumes of philosophical, classical, biographical, and a few light works. A lack of billiard balls on one occasion was only partly solved by attempting to carve some from ivory tusks on a lathe. Indians and whites both attended the dances. Two fiddlers supplied the music for the square dances: the Reel of Eight, Reel of Four, Red River jig, Drops of Brandy, and the Rabbit Dance. The participants wound up affairs with a midnight supper.17

Fort Qu' Appelle, HBC, 1867

Isaac Cowie arrived at Fort Qu' Appelle in the Assiniboine country in 1867. There he saw "the first coal lamp which had recently found its way into these regions, where candles made of buffalo tallow had been, and were . . . the illuminating medium." The furniture was "all made on the spot out of white poplar, which is a fine wood for inside work." He reported that the Company made very small paint allowances, thus most of the interiors were "left in the unadorned beauty of the native wood." By then, if not earlier, the officers of the posts had stoves for heating their apartments. He saw three at Qu' Appelle: a sheet-iron stove that had been made at Fort Pelly, a small Carron stove, and an American cooking stove that the factor's wife used. Immense open fireplaces were also still to be found. Besides a garden, the factor cultivated a ten-acre field of potatoes and barley.\textsuperscript{18}

Fort Vancouver, HBC, 1825 on

John Dunn described the Bachelors' Hall at Fort Vancouver, the headquarters of the Columbia area, as being a public sitting room as well as a cross between an armory and a museum. On display

\textsuperscript{18} Cowie, pp. 202 and 211-14.
were "all sorts of weapons, and dresses, and curiosities of civilized and savage life, and of the various implements for the prosecution of the trade." Begg, writing much later, also said that this hall served as "a museum of Indian relics and other curiosities." Even for as elaborate an establishment as Vancouver, Begg reported that "The interior of the dwellings exhibited, as a rule, an unpainted board panel, with bunks for bedsteads, and a few other simple pieces of furniture." Yet, a number of fine pieces of furniture that belonged to Chief Factor Dr. John McLoughlin are today in his former house at Oregon City. According to tradition, McLoughlin had at least some of them, especially "a magnificent set of table and chairs," when he was in charge of Fort Vancouver. Hussey has found references to the following items as being in the apothecary's hall in 1833: a fireplace of stone and lime but without a grate, bedsteads, a large chest, a small medicine shelf, other shelving, and a small heater.

Fort Victoria, HBC, ca. 1850

Begg also quoted from an 1850 description of Fort Victoria, the Hudson's Bay Company's successor to Fort Vancouver on

the Pacific Slope. Like Fort William's Great Hall, the Bachelors' Hall at Victoria had two small rooms at each end of the central hall. Officers of the Company occupied some of these rooms; but one served as the "surgery" - and as a temporary bedroom for Begg's narrator. One of the residents of the hall had a coffee-pot on the stove. . . . The stove was a square, made of sheet iron, bent in all directions by the heat. It had a cast iron door and was fed with large billets of wood, of which plenty existed in the "Hall." The stove looked mean and dilapidated, but it was found capital for roasting native oysters upon.

The "surgery" was consigned to me as my room. . . . In it there was a "cot" slung to the ceiling, which I was to use as a "hammock." The room was unique. It contained a gun case and a few shelves, with drugs in bottles or in paper in every direction. The tin lining of a "packing case" served for a counter.

* * * * *

The mess room /different from the Bachelors' Hall, above7 was more than thirty feet long by, say, twenty wide; a large open fireplace at one end, and large pieces of cordwood burning therein; a clock on the wall; a long table in the middle, covered with a spotless linen; the knives and forks clean; decanters bright, containing wine and so forth; the chairs of wood (Windsor), but everything European.

The diners sat according to rank and partook of soup, salmon, venison, duck, and pies. After the meal, they toasted the Queen. The narrator concluded: "All had to go to church
every Sunday, the mess-room serving every purpose - baptisms, marriages, funerals, councils, dances, theatricals, or other amusements - and did not seem any the worse for it."21

York Factory, HBC, 1830s-60s

York Factory, established in 1697, underwent many drastic changes in appearance and style. The Hudson's Bay Company built the present post in the 1830s, its buildings more or less resembling those found throughout the Northwest, but retaining an aura of England about them. Also, British wives appeared on the scene early in the present fort's history, making their influence felt in its furnishings and way of life. Their presence was in contrast to Grand Portage, where Indian wives composed the distaff.

The talk of the establishment in the early 1830s was an argand lamp that Alexander Christie had bought, and which the Hudson's Bay Company purchased from him for lighting the gentlemen's winter mess. Named for its Swiss inventor, this famous lamp had a circular wick and was a great advancement over candles and the light of open fireplaces.22

Ballantyne arrived at York in 1841 and took up quarters in the Bachelors' Hall. From his account, one learns that the walls

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22. Letitia Hargrave, pp. xlii and xliin.
had been painted white, but had become dirty from smoke. Exactly in the middle of the hall stood a large, oblong iron box on four crooked legs, that served the stove. A "funnel" that ran through the roof served as its pipe and chimney. A woodbox stood in a corner of the room. The rest of the furniture consisted of two small kitchen tables, without tablecloths, five good chairs, and one broken one. Several guns and fishing rods stood in the corners. Heaps of tobacco, pipes, two or three books, a pair of broken foils, a battered fencing mask, several surgical instruments, and a huge mortar and pestle lay scattered on the two tables. (The surgeon was a resident of the hall.) All in all, it was a shabby but comfortable room, a recreation area for a group of lively young men who lived in the building the year round.

Ballantyne also described the various bedrooms. The postmaster's room had a bed, a table, and a chest. Strewn on the table were: a number of saws, files, bits of ivory and wood, a number of Indian account books, and an ink stand. A small vice, with the head of a cane clamped into it, held onto a corner of the table. The skipper of the fort's sloop slept in another of the rooms. Almost too realistically, Ballantyne found here a quadrant case, sea chest, and, hanging on the wall, an oilcloth coat and a sou' wester. The doctor's room contained still more of his instruments; while the accountant's apartment was well-neat. None of the bedrooms was graced with chair or carpet.
Their occupants sat on trunks or boxes. Ballantyne noticed too that none of them had curtains around the beds. He found that by standing on his toes he could touch the ceiling, and that each bedroom had a 3 by 2½-foot window.

Everywhere, in the hall and in the apartments, he saw a scattering of greatcoats, leather capotes, fur caps, worsted sashes (the voyageurs' ceintures fléchées?), guns, rifles, shot butts, snowshoes, and powder horns, "with which the walls were profusely decorated." This interior decoration, as far as Ballantyne was concerned, made the house and rooms seem warm and snug.

He next turned his attention to the winter mess, which was in the same building as the factor's apartment. He described the Christmas dinner in the "snug and highly decorated" room: a mahogany table surrounded by homemade chairs, a bare floor, large engravings that were framed by bird's-eye maple, painted walls, a stove polished by black lead, the argand blazing away, and a snow-white table cloth. The main courses at that dinner consisted of a plump goose, a huge roast of beef, a large slice of pork, and a dozen white "partridges." Very much in evidence also were two large decanters of port and two smaller ones of Madeira. The assembled company raised tumblers and glasses in toasts to absent friends and absent ladies.
After the feast, the bachelors made their way back to their hall where they had a Christmas ball. Indian ladies arrived and the dancing commenced. Ballantyne noted the changes that had been made in the room. A number of tallow candles, stuck in tin sconces around the walls, gave light. The men sat on chairs and on a few benches, all dressed in their Sunday jackets or capotes. The ladies gathered around the stove, which had been pushed into a corner. In another corner sat an Indian fiddler and a boy with a kettledrum.

At midnight, the two kitchen tables were pushed together "and spread with several towels; thus forming a pretty respectable supper table, which would have been perfect, had not the one been three inches higher than the other. On it was placed a huge dish of cold venison, and a monstrous iron kettle of tea. This, with sugar, bread, and a lump of salt butter, completed the entertainment."\(^{23}\)

Twenty-five years later, Isaac Cowie saw York's Bachelors' Hall and, later still, penned his somewhat snobbish impressions:

The rooms were bare and the furniture plain and scanty, for the quarters were only temporary "camping ground" for wayfarers. They may have seemed still more uninviting than they really were from the contrast afforded by the blaze of barbaric decorations on the walls of the rooms of the clerks in "Bachelors'

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Hall." These consisted of Indian silk and bead and wool work of every hue, which adorned the attire of these "veterans" from head to foot, also their gun-coats, shot pouches, firebags and snowshoes, all of which were hung up round the room, alongside of colored prints of prize fighters, race horses, hunting scenes, ships and yachts, and photographs of all kinds.

Cowie also gave a brief description of the mess hall - possibly the larger summer mess rather than the winter one. His repast consisted of fish, duck, goose, venison, rhubarb, lettuce, radish, and milk. He observed that beer or stout was available for lunch, but that port or sherry could be enjoyed at dinner. He said, however, that the sherry was restricted to making toasts and to making the sauce for plum pudding. Lord Nelson, long since transported to York Factory, was not on display; instead, there hung a life-sized oil of Sir George Simpson, "the famous Governor-in-Chief of Rupert's Land." However, that "very large one of the battle of the Nile" was still in evidence.24

Although not appropriate for Grand Portage, a quick glance might be made at the letters of Letitia Hargrave, written at York Factory in 1840. Her apartment was in the same building that contained the winter mess hall. Among her servants was Margaret, probably an Indian or a Métis, but certainly a good seamstress.

Margaret made curtains for the beds, "carpets" for the windows, and a hassock stuffed with feathers and covered with a carpet.

Mrs. Hargrave had her French wardrobe painted green, with black feet and a broad stripe of palest yellow. This color combination she called "the uniform of the house." Other items of furniture that she mentioned included: his and hers chests of drawers, Hargrave's wardrobe, two book cases, two large mirrors, a night table, and a screen for holding towels or drying clothes. All these wore the "uniform of the house" as well. At variance with the color scheme were her basin stands and bed, which were brown. Her pride and joy was her piano, "the handsomest I ever saw. The wood is beautiful and Mr. Finlayson is croaking for one the same." "The hinge of the lid, and the lock have created a sensation among the geniuses here from the unusual elegance of their contrivance and mechanism. There was not a scratch upon it nor a note out of tune. The form of the pedal is magnificent and the wood beautifully marked." She added that another member of the post complement had a "barrel organ in which are a drum and some other instruments." Finally, her pride of acquisition disclosed itself when she rummaged through the post's stores and found curtain pins "which look like so many sun flowers magnified." 25

25. Letitia Hargrave, Letters, letter to Mrs. Dugald Mackintosh Sept. and Dec. 1, 1840. Her husband later identified the piano as "a square mahogany piano of 6 1/3 Octaves, made in Vienna."
Conclusion

Omitting such late developments as photographs and a woman's touch, the preceding descriptions of the various halls suggest, hopefully, a number of concepts for planning the furnishings of a reconstructed Great Hall at Grand Portage.

Prints showing such scenes as British ships, horses, and such should be bountiful. Portraits of the partners are plentiful and copies could be made at no great expense. Rarely has such a wide range of Indian artwork been so appropriate as it is at Grand Portage. The Battle of Trafalgar is not appropriate; but, if deemed desirable, other British patriotic paintings exist. Probably the most popular subject before Nelson would have been the capture of Quebec by General Wolfe, and the deaths of both Wolfe and Montcalm on that fateful day. Even the real Battle of the Nile would have been appropriate for the last three or four years of Grand Portage's existence. Battle scenes of the American Revolution are not recommended, even though timely. Their inclusion would be a little bit like playing "We Fired Our Guns And the British Started Running," as was done during a recent royal visit in a part of the United States.

It will have been noticed from the accounts that much of the furniture of the fur trade was handmade on the spot. This condition was probably true at Grand Portage, although such does
not preclude good workmanship. Also, the character of McTavish would temper crudity. His and his associates' tastes for luxury and magnificence would reflect in all aspects of the Great Hall, from bedroom furnishings to the wine coolers, and from silverware to clothing.

Even lacking specific evidence, one senses that the Great Hall was a colorful setting, half barbaric, half esthetic, all of it possessing an exuberant life.

Fort Union Trading Post NHS, North Dakota, a principal post of the American Fur Company, 1829-1867, may seem a long way from Grand Portage. Yet, it is suggested that a review is appropriate of Part 2, "The Things of Life," in the report, "Fort Union Trading Post, Historic Structures Report, Part II, Historical Data Section," dated September 30, 1968. The reasons for this recommendation are several: 1. John Jacob Astor, the founder of the American Fur Company, conceived many of his ideas of his great inland trade after studying the organization and techniques of the Northwest Company in Montreal. 2. Astor's relations with the North West Company remained strong throughout the years, even during the War of 1812. 3. Many of Astor's men, including Kenneth McKenzie (the founder and builder of Fort Union), were ex-employees of the North West Company, and doubtless carried many of its habits and customs onto the American Great Plains. 4. The sources of supplies for the fur trade were often the same for both the
British and American companies: American tobacco, Italian beads, English edged weapons, Madeira wine, Indian pemmican, and so forth. 5. Both Fort Union and Grand Portage were supplied by vessels of considerable tonnage: steamboats on the Missouri after 1832, schooners on the Great Lakes. 6. The leaders of both outfits had the appetites of princes and the means whereby to indulge their tastes. Still, in the end, Fort Union was not Grand Portage, only a distant relation and one of a different character and purpose.
This is a shorter bibliography than I had planned to use for this study. Students of the fur trade will note omissions that might strike them as glaring. Sufficient time to do all that I had planned did not exist, to my great disappointment. Hopefully, the list contains most of the best materials.

The Journals of about 12 posts were selected from the Hudson's Bay Company's Records on microfilm at the Public Archives, Ottawa, Canada. Many more dozens of posts could have been selected, and perhaps should have. But at my rate of microfilm reading and note-taking (machine copies are not allowed), it would take me at least 1 year and 11 months to go through the 1,817 rolls of film already on hand.
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2. Published Material


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McLeod /sic/, Margaret Arnett, "The Company in Winnipeg," The Beaver (Sept 1940), 6-11.


Ready, W. B., "Norway House," The Beaver (March 1949), pp. 30-34.


Tobin, Brian, "Hudson's Bay House," The Beaver (March 1944), pp. 28-35.


Tyrrell, J. B., ed., David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812, Toronto, the Champlain Society, 1916.


Illustrations
1. Samples of iron hinges and iron pintles found in the archeological excavations at Grand Portage, 1936-37.
Building hardware. Hinges, pintles, and a hook.
2. Samples of nails, staples, etc., found during the archeological excavations at Grand Portage, 1936-37.
Building hardware and fastening devices.
Nails, screws and rivets.
3. Fireplace ruins (not in the Great Hall) during archeological excavations at Grand Portage, 1936-37.
4. Sketch of structural site no. 6 (not the Great Hall) uncovered at Grand Portage during the archeological excavations in 1936-37. The areas designated fireplaces appear to be similar to the preceding illustration.
5. Stone foundation, Great Hall site, Grand Portage, uncovered during the archeological project of 1937.
6. Archeological drawing of the Great Hall site, Grand Portage, based on the discoveries of 1937. The stone foundation indicated that the building was 95 by 30 feet. The lines down the center mark an exploratory trench.
THE GLASS HALL
STRUCTURE No. 5

SCALE: 1" = 20'
7. Map of the stockade area, Grand Portage, based on the archeological discoveries of 1936-37. Structure No. 5 represents the Great Hall. Structure No. 12, not completely excavated, possibly marks the kitchen.
8. Another map of the stockade area, Grand Portage, indicating the trenching, etc., made during the archeological work of 1936-37. Trench No. 14 represents the center of the Great Hall.
EXCAVATIONS, 1937
NORTHWEST COMPANY POST
GRAND PORTAGE, MINNESOTA
SCALE: 1" = 50'

INDICATES EXCAVATION
BY OKIO

Map 8
9. Fort Kaministiquia (William), 1805. Artist unknown. Earliest known depiction of Fort William. Location of the original illustration is unknown today. This engraving appeared in 1870 in Fr. Aeneas McDonell Dawson's *Our Strength and Their Strength*.

Although the proportions of the features are not exact, the artist gives a reasonably accurate picture of the new fort, which was renamed Fort William that year. The Great Hall is not identifiable among the roofs. It was directly behind the main gate, but some distance back. The roofs appear to be a mixture of simple gable and hip. The large vessel in front of the gate is probably the 75-ton Otter.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa No. C 24733
10. Fort William, 1811 or 1812. Watercolor by Robert Irvine, schooner captain, North West Company.

This is by far the best illustration of the early post. Many of the structures shown here may be identified on the 1816 Selkirk plan that is in this report.

The Great Hall is the large white building beyond the gate. One may identify the railed porch along the front, 8 windows, one door, hip roof, 3 dormer windows (?), and 2 chimneys (?). On either side of it stood quarters for the visiting wintering partners and clerks.

To the far left stand the ribs for a new schooner. To the far right is a watch tower, from which lookouts searched Lake Superior for the arrival of the Montreal brigades and the company vessels.

Mr. Stephen A. Heward, Toronto, Ont., holds a copyright to this printing.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa No. C 1464
Small room in the Great Hall, Fort William, 1816.

The sketch is said to have been done by Lord Selkirk when he captured and occupied Fort William in 1816. Beyond the window one may see the main gate; from the perspective the artist was standing in the southeast room of the Great Hall. At the time Selkirk was there, this small room served as a dining room. Otherwise, it was a bedroom for the Montreal agents of the North West Company.

The details in this sketch are of value in visualizing the interiors of the trading posts, especially this Great Hall which was the immediate successor to Grand Portage's.

This sketch is not to be reproduced without the consent of the Department of Public Records and Archives, Province of Ontario, Toronto.

Courtesy, Ontario Archives, Toronto
Selkirk Papers, Pkg. 21, #126
12. Fort William, 1816.

Lord Selkirk is said to have done this sketch also during the winter of 1816-17. The view is from the Great Hall toward the main gate. The building on the extreme left is identified as a provisions storehouse; the two raised, posts-on-sill buildings, with steps leading up to doors, are described as commissaries; the warehouse on the extreme right is said to have stored liquor. Nearer the gate and to the right of it stands a residence.

This sketch is not to be reproduced without the consent of the Department of Public Records and Archives, Province of Ontario, Toronto.

Courtesy, Ontario Archives, Toronto
Selkirk Papers, Pkg. 21, No. 126.

No longer a great rendezvous, Fort William still functioned as a small trading post - with a lot of large buildings - and as a stopover for expresses between Montreal and Red River. Probably none of the buildings shown here was the former Great Hall.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa No. C 11743
14. Fort William, 1870 or 1873.

Close to its last days, Fort William still presented a memory of its former greatness. But not its Great Hall. The low shed-like structure between the two residences is all that is left of the structure. By this time one of its uses was for canoe storage.

The peaked roof behind with a chimney probably was the former kitchen building of the Great Hall.

Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
No. C 20871
15. Fort William (1866?), watercolor by William Armstrong.

The stockade has long since disappeared. None of the buildings shown is the Great Hall. The handsome canoe in the foreground was Governor Sir George Simpson's. (The flag staff belongs to the post, not to the canoe.)

Copyrighted by The Beaver, Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, Man.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
No. C 23566
16. Fort William, Stone Warehouse, date unknown.

This is the last structure to remain standing at the site of Fort William. Only two stone buildings were built at the post - the powder magazine and a stone warehouse. The number of openings suggest strongly that this is the stone warehouse, no. 23 on Selkirk's 1816 plan.

The sketch is not to be reproduced without the consent of the Department of Public Records and Archives, Province of Ontario, Toronto.

Courtesy, Ontario Archives, Toronto
No. S 4990
17. Fort William, 1816.
Copied from a ground plan said to have been drawn by Lord Selkirk, 1816.

Courtesy, Ontario Archives, Toronto
Selkirk Papers.

**Key to Structures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Court</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Counting House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Great Hall</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Prison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Quarters</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Committee? House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Quarters (Soldiers)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Not identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pack Stores</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Provisions, etc.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Blacksmith &amp; Tinsmith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Com.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Armourer &amp; Tailor</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Com.) Commissary?</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Cooper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Liquor, etc.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dry Goods</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>canoe building Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Stores</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Quarters</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>canoe yard</td>
</tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Tait's House</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Guides' House</td>
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<td>Vessel on Stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Cooperage &amp; Guides' House</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Shed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Observation or Lookout</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Powder Magazine</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Cottage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Indian Shop</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mc/Loughlin's House</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Gate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Scott Allen's House</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Fireproof Stone Store</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Counting House</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Shed Barn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Barn (where the arms were found concealed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Committee? House</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Stable and Cow House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Not identified</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Cattle &amp; Sheep House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Not identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Blacksmith &amp; Tinsmith</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Back Gate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Armourer &amp; Tailor</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Bouche's House</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No.'s 10 and 11 possibly should read as one entry: "Dry Goods Stores".
17. **Fort William**

*Copied from a plan, Ontario Provincial Archives*

*Said to have been drawn by Lord Selkirk*

*Who captured the post in 1816*

*(No scale given)*
18. Key to Selkirk's Plan of Great Hall, Fort William:

I. Great Hall Dining Room & Ball Room  
II. McLeod's Room  
III. ? McDonald's, 18 x 25  
IV. Hunter's  
V. Alex. McKenzie's  
VI. McGillivray's room, now the mess room

Courtesy, Ontario Archives, Toronto Selkirk Papers.
18. GREAT HALL
FORT WILLIAM
FROM SELKIRK'S 1816 PLAN
(NOT TO SCALE, BUT COPIED AS IS)
19. Fort William.

Conjectural reconstruction of Fort William based upon the historical documentation.

Courtesy, National Heritage Ltd.
London, Ont.
Fort William

Circa 1816

20. Fort William.

Conjectural reconstruction of Fort William based upon the historical documentation.

Courtesy, National Heritage Ltd.
London, Ont.
PLAN
OF
FORT WILLIAM
OF THE NORTHWEST COMPANY
ON THE KAMINISTIKWIA RIVER, LAKE SUPERIOR, ONTARIO
CIRCA 1816

Conjectural reconstruction based upon drawings, sketches and descriptions contemporary with Fort William.
Drawing prepared by National Heritage Ltd.
London, Ontario
21. Chauvin's "Maison de Plaisance."

This reconstruction of a 1600 building, located near the Hotel Tadoussac, Quebec, represents the oldest illustrated in this report. The logs were taken from two old posts-on-sill buildings in villages on the north shore of the St. Lawrence.

This posts-on-sill structure preceded Grand Portage under the North West Company by about 175 years.

Courtesy, Hudson's Bay Company
Winnipeg, Man.

Picture taken by the British North America Boundary Commission.

In the background on the left side stands the master's house, with its hiproof. Of interest are the small-paned windows and the massive stone fireplace and chimneys. All the walls are posts-on-sill. The gables of some of the smaller structures appear to be boarded. The small building with the fireplace possibly is the kitchen for the master's house.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa. No. C 19132
23. Du Brochet Post, N. Reindeer Lake, 1892.

This log building (posts-on-sill?) is covered diagonally with laths, then mudded or plastered. Although this structure was probably not built until late in the 19th century, it has a thatch roof and lacks chimneys.

Courtesy, Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa. No. 1665
24. Fort Edmonton, the Big House, ca. 1871.

This posts-on-sill Big House was 3 stories high. The exterior is a good example of this kind of construction at its best. The whitewashed wall is typical of the fur trade posts; however, in the 1840s, the walls at Fort Edmonton were brown, the paint having been made by mixing red earth and oil.

This structure dates from about 1830, when Fort Edmonton (III) was the principal post on the upper Saskatchewan. Paul Kane was quite taken with the large, gaudy mess hall within this building when he visited in 1847.

The dog carriole was a favorite hobby as well as a practical means of transportation among fur traders of both western Canada and the western United States.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
No. C 7474
25. Fort Edmonton, date unknown.

Hip roofs appear on the larger structures. The absence of chimneys on the long, 2-story, posts-on-sill building suggests that it was a storehouse. The brick chimneys on the residences (?) in the foreground mark them as being late-comers.

The bell tower was found at almost every post. It regulated the hours of waking and eating.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
No. PA 31760
26. Fairfield House, date unknown.

Said to be an HBC post established in 1856 on Lake Manitoba's Portage Bay.

Note the deliberate placement of the posts so as to provide openings for doors and windows.

   Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
   No. PA 38143
27. Lower Fort Garry, the Big House, Watercolor by Harold Lawes, date unknown.

This stone building was erected soon after Lower Fort Garry was established in 1831.

Several features bear a close resemblance to the Great Hall at Fort William: The hip roof, eight windows and one door across the front, and a railed porch.

There are several distinct differences, too: stone walls, absence of dormer windows, porch running around the building instead of along the front only.

Designed to be HBC's principal depot in North America, Lower Fort Garry gave way to Upper Fort Garry in the 1840s. However, it continued as an active post, operating a farm among other activities. This structure still stands. The site is a National Historic Park.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
No. C 1584
28. Upper Fort Garry, Men's Barracks, Watercolor by George Seaton, ca. 1858.

Construction at the new Upper Fort Garry began during the second half of the 1830s. The post served in the important role of administrative headquarters of the HBC in Canada. Today, Winnipeg occupies the site.

Many in the Company considered this as one of the very best built forts in the country.

The small, hinged windows are somewhat similar to those found in the large depot building at York Factory.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa No. C 1066
29. Upper Fort Garry, Bachelor's Hall, date unknown.

The white structure in the center is Bachelor's Hall, Upper Fort Garry, then the administrative headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company in North America.

It is difficult to identify which one of the buildings on either side of Bachelor's Hall is the quarters in the preceding illustration, No. 28.

Courtesy, Hudson's Bay Company
Winnipeg, Man.
30. Grand Rapids, Saskatchewan River, 1890.

Located at the west end of one of the few portages on the Saskatchewan River. The HBC built this structure probably about 1877, when it built a boat tramway over the portage.

Although of a later period than Grand Portage, and no doubt reflecting its own time, this building is a classic example of posts-on-sill construction, with its hip roof, dormer windows, chinking, whitewash, and (clay?) chimneys.

Courtesy, Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa
No. 1326

Believed to be a small, independent trading post, this establishment had at least three types of construction:

On the left, stands a typical posts-on-sill building, having a thatched roof and a need for some supports.

The family stands in front of square-timbered walls, which are interlocked at their corners, and which have no posts.

In the background stands a typical Scandinavian "log cabin," having a flat, sod roof.

Courtesy, Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa. No. 1166

An independent establishment located near Upper Fort Garry. This range of 1½-story buildings graphically illustrates posts-on-sill construction.

The viewer may readily conceive how a handful of men, none of them too well skilled as carpenters, could build a new post in a few days or weeks, as was so often the case - and why these same men would soon be found replacing their original buildings.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
No. C 20245
33. Fort McLeod, McLeod Lake, 1879.

Excellent detail of posts-on-sill construction, showing the adding of posts of various lengths to make door and window openings.

Note the two types of roof covering. The windows may be covered with parchment. The name over the door is strictly unofficial.

While the full depth of the squared timber is nowhere visible, the gaps in the chinking indicate that these were substantial logs.

Courtesy, Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa
34. Moose Factory, James Bay, (1860s?)

Post journals for Moose Factory go back to 1743. In its earliest days it was a fortified post, designed to offer defense against French attacks by sea. By the time of the photograph, it was a well-built, wooden post.

Note the massive chimneys.

This photograph is not to be reproduced without the consent of the Department of Public Records and Archives, Province of Ontario, Toronto.

Courtesy, Ontario Archives, Toronto
No. S 2009
35. Norway House, 1878-80.

The second Norway House was established in 1826, but substantial construction did not get underway until the 1830s. It played a role somewhat similar to Grand Portage and Fort William in that the HBC held its annual Council of the Northern Department.

As this and the following illustrations show, it was a handsome, well built post. It is still an active establishment, although only a building or two remains from the 1830s.

Of interest: hip roofs, dormers, chimneys, exterior shutters, a porch. The swampy ground gave reason to the raised, wooden walks.

Courtesy, Geological Survey of Canada No. 91876
36. Norway House, 1890.

Those buildings having chimneys were probably residences, those without were warehouses. Traders everywhere feared fire destroying their furs or trade goods. Note that almost every structure is whitewashed and trimmed with paint.

No. 1354
37. Norway House, 1890.

The building to the left may be the Archway Warehouse that is still standing.

Note the weather vane on this structure. Such ornaments were to be found at the larger posts. The HBC coat of arms is flying from the flag staff. Usually, the flag was the red ensign, the Union Jack in the upper left and the initials HBC in the lower right.

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa
PA 38697
Fort Pelly, Assiniboine River, 1887-88.

Built in 1856, this second Fort Pelly had this handsome Big House which one visitor said looked more like a shooting lodge in the highlands of Scotland than a fur trading post.

Yet the marks of fur trade construction are here: posts-on-sill, hip roof, large chimneys, whitewashed square logs.

Courtesy, Geological Survey of Canada No. 953
39. Portage la Prairie, 1890.

This old post on the Assiniboine River had been abandoned by the HBC twenty years when this photograph was taken. The squared logs of the walls show the vicissitudes of old age.

The dates of these two posts-on-sill structures is not known. The post was first established by the Montreal traders in 1767. Several of Grand Portage's witnesses, such as Alexander Henry, Jr., and Daniel Harmon, were stationed here. The HBC took over the post at the time of union in 1821.

The building to the rear has older windows than the nearer one.

Courtesy, Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa
NO. 1324
40. Rocky Mountain House, Saskatchewan River, 1886.

An important HBC post involved in trade with the Blackfoot Indians, Rocky Mountain House (the Third) was active from 1866 to 1875. It was an imposing place in its brief heyday.

Photographs of stone fireplaces and chimneys are rare, thus one wishes the photographer (J. B. Tyrell) had taken at least one close-up picture before deterioration had set in.

Courtesy, Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa No. 789
More than 60 years later than Tyrell's photograph, this much remained of the chimneys at Rocky Mountain House. The lintels are missing and the chimneys are but a fraction of their former height. Nevertheless they are excellent demonstrations of the kind of massive stone fireplaces that probably existed at Grand Portage.

This photograph is not to be reproduced without permission from the Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg, Man.

Courtesy, Hudson's Bay Company
Winnipeg, Man.
42. Fort St. James, 1891.

A pack-train at Fort St. James ready to set out over the first brigade trail for Fort McLeod.

This photograph is one of the best, most detailed illustrations of posts-on-sill construction yet found. It needs little comment. Note the pointed shingles of the starter course.

Courtesy, Hudson's Bay Company.
Winnipeg, Man.
43. Fort Vancouver, Manager's Residence, 1860-61.

Besides the chief factor's apartment, this building also contained the dining hall for the gentlemen of the post and their guests.

Originally posts-on-sill, the exterior walls here are covered with boards. The elaborate stairs to the porch are unique among the forts. Note the exterior shutters—Fort William's shutters were on the inside. One central chimney suggests the use of stoves for heating the various parts of the building.

At the time of the photograph, Fort Vancouver was in decline. The HBC had long since moved its headquarters to Fort Victoria. This probably accounts for the shabby appearance of the building and for the caption in the corner: "No. 3 Mess House."

Courtesy, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa No. C 25715
44. **York Factory, 1878-80.**

York Factory was the HBC's great depot on Hudson Bay. The large building is the principal warehouse; its 3-story section is the oldest part, having been built in the early 1830s.

The two-story wings have tin roofs. The 3-story portion was at one time covered with a lead roof.

York Factory did not close until 1957. The depot is the one historic structure still standing.
45. Christmas Dance in Bachelors' Hall.

From R. M. Ballantyne's Hudson Bay. Along with the Selkirk sketch of Fort William, this engraving is one of the few illustrations of the interiors of Great Halls and Bachelor's Halls.

Ballantyne described a Christmas dance in his book. While this engraving more or less follows his description, it may not be entirely accurate. However, it seems to have satisfied Ballantyne himself.

Courtesy, Hudson's Bay Company
Winnipeg, Man.
46. "Governor Dallas receiving band of Salteux Indians in Fort Douglas."

Note the interior detail and furnishings.

This photograph is not to be reproduced without permission from the Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg, Man.

Courtesy, Hudson's Bay Company
Winnipeg, Man.
GRAND PORTAGE NATIONAL MONUMENT

GREAT HALL

HISTORIC STRUCTURES REPORT

HISTORY DATA SECTION

MAY 1970
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Cover: Impression of North West Company seal. Courtesy McLoughlin Memorial Association, Oregon City, Oregon.
Foreword

Last year the reconstructed Great Hall at Grand Portage burned to the ground. Students of fur trading posts already had recognized ways in which that reconstruction could have been more accurately done. Although the fire was by no means welcome - it destroyed many artifacts along with a useful building - one result of it was a fresh opportunity to rebuild the Great Hall in a more authentic manner.

Little is known about the appearance of the structures at Grand Portage. Consequently, the decision was made to do a comparative study of other fur trading posts, particularly of Fort William, Grand Portage's successor. From the comparisons, sound conclusions could then be drawn in designing and constructing a conjectural Great Hall. This report is the historical section of that study, as called for by Historical Resource Study Proposal, Grand Portage-H-2, "Historical Reconstruction Research for the Great Hall."

Later, the decision was made to include a furnishing study in this report. Unfortunately, it was not possible to add more time toward its preparation.
Acknowledgements

As in the past, many persons in the National Park Service contributed their knowledge and time when called upon for help: Frances Nugent and Glenn Gallison, Midwest Region, Omaha; John A. Hussey, A. Lewis Koue, and Merrill J. Mattes, Western Service Center, San Francisco; Supt. Richard S. Tousley and his entire staff, Grand Portage NM, Minn.; and my supervisors and associates who helped me bear the heat when that was turned on.

Once again I had the pleasure of meeting the friendly and capable people at the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul: Director Russell W. Fridley, Archivist Lucile M. Kane, and Archeologist Alan R. Woolworth, and their assistants.

The Hudson's Bay Company has been most generous in helping this report reach its objectives. My thanks go to Mr. R. A. Reynolds, Secretary, Beaver House, London, for permission to consult the microfilm copies of the Company's archives in the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa; and to Mrs. Shirlee A. Smith, Librarian, and Miss G. Mars, of the Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, Manitoba, who made available a number of excellent illustrations.

Appreciation is extended to Mr. Maxwell Sutherland, Senior Historian, Research Division, National Historic Sites Service, Ottawa, Canada. Mr. Sutherland gave freely of his time and knowledge and made available a copy of Historian Terence B. Smythe's extremely valuable report, "Thematic Study of the Fur Trade in the Canadian West, 1670-1870." Mr. Smythe's study was used many times as a source of facts concerning the forts of the Northwest and as a guide to selecting forts for study in this project. Students of the fur trade may rejoice that Mr. Smythe's work will be published by the Canadian Government.

Thanks go also to Mr. W. I. Smith, Acting Dominion Archivist, and his staff at the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa. The friendliness and efficiency of the Manuscripts and Picture Divisions make research there a positive delight. Also, my thanks are extended to Director Y. O. Fortier, Geological Survey of Canada, and Mr. D. C. Beckstead and Mrs. Doreen M. Sutherland of his staff. The photograph albums of the 19th century Surveys in Western Canada were made available, and several happy results are to be seen among the illustrations herein.

At Toronto, Mr. K. R. Macpherson, Archivist, Department of Public Records and Archives of Ontario, and his staff made available the treasures, including the important Selkirk
documents, of these fine Archives. My thanks too to the staff of the public library and to Mr. and Mrs. G. B. Macgillivray, whose hospitality was a warm happening on a cold day, at Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Two persons to whom special thanks go are old Grand Portage hands: Eliot Davis, now Superintendent of Fort Vancouver NHS, Washington, who is always willing to share his interest in the history of the fur trade; and Dr. Grace Lee Nute, St. Paul, Minnesota, a great historian of the fur trade and of the Lake Superior region.

Miss Liliane Lykes receives my thanks for her careful typing and for being able to read my handwriting.

Again, and as always, even this wealth of assistance was not able to keep me from making the errors that will be found within. They are my responsibility.

Erwin N. Thompson
Chapter 1

Great Hall - What Is It?

Great Hall, A Definition

Not until very recent times, perhaps the past thirty years or so, may one find the term "Great Hall" being applied to the particular structure being proposed for reconstruction at Grand Portage. The men who stayed, played, and ate there called it by several other names. John Macdonell, in 1793, called it the "Mess House"; while David Thompson, five years later, was satisfied with the label "the House." Daniel Harmon, writing in 1800, described it as the "Dining Room." However, the next year, Sir Alexander Mackenzie wrote his famous book and came closest to the present name when he mentioned the "one large hall" at Grand Portage.¹

Nonetheless, the term Great Hall is wholly appropriate for this building, which in its lifetime played an unique role in the fur trade. Before discussing the role of the structure, mention should be made of the names applied to the somewhat similar buildings at other forts in the Northwest in the 18th and 19th centuries.

¹. John Macdonell, "Lake Athabasca et les Chipweans," unsigned manuscript, McGill University, also edited by Charles M. Gates, Five Fur Traders of the Northwest (University of Minnesota Press, 1933), pp. 92-97; David Thompson, Journals, 3, Book 5, "1797, Journey to Grand Portage," and "Journey from the Grand Portage Banks of Lake Superior to Swan River, 1797," Ontario Provincial Archives, Toronto; Daniel Williams Harmon, "A Journal of Travels...
Many, if not all, posts that later became large, important centers in the fur trade originated as humble establishments. For their first few years they usually consisted of a storehouse (the first structure built), a stockade, and a single building that housed the bourgeois or master and his complement of from five to ten men. This building was called simply "the House." Its interior differed from fort to fort, but generally it was divided into the bourgeois' room or apartment, the men's room(s), and a common hall that often doubled as trade room, Indian reception room, and sitting. The men sometimes referred to this last as "the big room." In addition to calling this building "the House," fur traders (especially the British) sometimes used that term to designate the whole establishment, e.g., Carleton House, Cumberland House, or Edmonton House. As these many forts developed, the men would eventually construct their own sets of quarters, while the bourgeois would eventually acquire his own residence, often called "the Big House," or variations of that term.


2. For examples, see Public Archives, Ottawa, Hudson's Bay Company Records microfilm: Fort Alexander, Post Journal, 1795-96; Carleton House, Post Journal, 1795-96; and Lac la Pluie, Post Journal, 1793-94.

By the 1830s, the descriptions and functions of the principal residences at the major posts had become somewhat complicated. To simplify the matter, most of these posts had two major residences: the factor's (Hudson's Bay Company term meaning much the same as bourgeois in the North West Company) house and the bachelors' hall. The factor's residence might actually have two or more apartments for the leading officers of the post and the common mess room for all the "gentlemen" of the fort. Bachelors' Hall nearly always had a large central hall or sitting-room and a number of bedrooms leading off from it for the junior officers of the post. Transients might be housed in either of these two buildings, depending on the fort.  

"Bourgeois' houses" at Ft. Chippewean; Hudson's Bay Company Records microfilm, Cumberland House, Post Journal, 1791, "Master's house"; George Nelson, Diary, Provincial Archives, Toronto, wherein he refers to the "Big House" at Tete au Brochet.

4. Ft. Edmonton, 1847: A 3-story building containing the gentlemen's mess room, a ballroom, and bedrooms.

Upper Ft. Garry, 1830s: A governor's residence; the residence of the officer-in-charge, which had the gentlemen's mess room; and a 2-story Bachelors' Hall, with a large public room and bedrooms.

Fort Vancouver, ca.1844: A "governor's" (manager's) residence, with a common dining room and a public sitting room; and a Bachelors' Hall with a sitting room.

Fort Victoria, 1850: A building containing the "governor's" apartment and a common mess room; and a Bachelors' Hall having a common sitting room and bedrooms.

York Factory: A manager's residence; a summer mess room; a winter mess room (greatly reduced number of people); guest house; and a Bachelors' Hall with a common room and bedrooms.

The Great Hall at Grand Portage served most of these functions, and more. It and its successor, the Great Hall at Fort William, became famous, for within them the partners of the North West Company held their annual meetings when that company was the most dynamic and powerful of all the fur trading concerns of North America. From the unknown time that the Great Hall at Grand Portage was built, through the abandonment of that post in 1802, and on to the end of the North West Company's independent existence in 1821, these two Great Halls witnessed days of power and nights of merriment. On their floors danced mighty men - explorers, traders, and financiers.

Role of the Great Hall

To adequately discuss the role of the Great Hall at Grand Portage, attention must first be given to the character of the North West Company itself. Beginning in 1775, individual traders, coming out of Montreal and passing over the Grand Portage enroute to the Northwest, began uniting as partners in the pursuit of beaver. Also joining these "winterers" were several mercantile houses in Montreal, most of them formed by ex-winterers themselves. Quietly, this nucleus grew into the North West Company, which came to dominate the fur trade west from Grand Portage, up the Saskatchewan and Red Rivers, into the Athabasca region, onto the Arctic and the Pacific Slope - despite growing rivalry from the formerly slow-moving Hudson's Bay Company and other opposition. The North West Company, through expansion and the absorption of some of its rivals, grew from a handful of partners in the late 1770s to more than forty active share-holders in the early 1800s.

In contrast to the rigid organization and sense of propriety of the Hudson's Bay Company, with its orders coming down from London through the resident governor in Rupert's Land, the North West Company was filled with independently-minded partners who worked together under a succession of short-term agreements. E. E. Rich writes "it was never a company in the strict legal sense which would have made it a corporate unit in the eyes of the law"; rather "it was a copartnership . . . wherein individual partners
took action for the common interest." This manner of operation when combined with the strong personalities of the members had an extraordinary effect on the appearance and character of the Great Hall.

For eleven months of the year, Grand Portage and its Great Hall were enshrouded in quiet while the permanent staff, numbering up to fifty toward the end of the Company's activities there, went about its normal duties. Under the ever-watchful eye of the bourgeois and his clerks, the men visited local bands of Indians in connection with the trade, chopped fire wood, hunted fresh meat, fished through the winter's ice, planted crops and made hay, sawed, hewed, and planed lumber for repairs and new construction, repaired and built canoes, sorted out and inventoried the sometimes considerable amounts of trade goods on hand, shoveled snow, and did the thousand and one things necessary to keep the fort together. Then, as July approached, increased activity and a sense of excitement prevailed. Time had rolled round once again for the great annual rendezvous.

Down the waterways of the great Northwest, wintering partners, clerks, who were coming out on well-earned leave or at the end of their engagements, and the brigades of fur-laden North canoes raced toward Grand Portage as soon as the ice broke up in the

rivers and lakes. From Lachine, the Montreal canoes, each of four-ton burden, carrying trade goods, new or returning clerks, wintering partners fresh from a visit to Scotland, and the merchant princes of the Montreal firms or their agents, pushed up toward the rendezvous. Across the Great Lakes, from Detroit, Michilimackinac, and Sault Ste. Marie, schooners carrying food and other supplies set sail for the west. From the Northwest and from the East came some of British North America's wealthiest, most powerful, and sometimes eccentric personalities.

Among the Montreal merchants were the brothers, Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher, and the princely Simon McTavish. Until the death of Benjamin in 1786, all three ordinarily attended the annual meeting. The Frobisher brothers were old Northmen themselves but had lately returned to Montreal to merchant the Company's furs in England and to acquire European trade goods for the continuing business. Simon McTavish, who had lived in the southern colonies until the Revolution, was similarly engaged through his McTavish and Company.

With Benjamin's death, Joseph Frobisher and Simon McTavish joined to form the dynamic firm of McTavish and Frobisher. Despite the copartnership agreements, this Montreal firm, continually increasing its shares in the North West Company, became its most powerful unit. Also in 1786, McTavish and Frobisher agreed that only one of them need attend the annual meeting and that they
would alternate on these time-consuming expeditions. Then, in 1790, these two gentlemen ceased attending the rendezvous as a regular habit and sent agents in their places.

Of all the members, Simon McTavish was the most dominant personality. Looking more like a king than the kings of England, being the richest man in Canada, possessing a ruthless business mind, having a love for luxury, insisting on living like the prince he wanted to be, McTavish set the tone for the style and manner of the Great Hall meetings and its society. Although said to possess a sense of humor and to be an engaging conversationalist, he gained the enmity of his associates for his arrogance. Some of the wintering partners sarcastically called him "the Premier" and "the Marquis" behind his back. But he was not all bad; he liked good wine, good oysters, and pretty girls.5

Leaving behind their elegant homes, McTavish and his associates traveled to Grand Portage in style. Washington Irving, who never attended an annual meeting of the Northwest Company but who was later a close student of those who did, wrote: "The partners from Montreal...ascended the rivers in great state, like sovereigns making a progress...They carried up with them

cooks and bakers, together with delicacies of every kind, and abundance of choice wines for the banquets."  

From two to four weeks, then, McTavish, the Frobishers, and the others fresh from the city held forth at Grand Portage, engaging in hard-nosed business, throwing great feasts, and dancing with the belles of the area far into the nights.

The wintering partners were an equally hardy breed, masters of lonely outposts, each of whom, wrote Irving, "felt like a chieftain of a Highland clan, and was almost as important in the eyes of his dependants as of himself. To him a visit to the grand conference was a most important event, and he repaired there as to a meeting of parliament."  

To call the roll of wintering partners and their clerks at the Grand Portage rendezvous is to review the great names in the exploration and opening of the Northwest:

Alexander Henry, Sr. One of the first Britishers (lately from the Southern Colonies) to penetrate beyond the Grand Portage and one of the first partners in the embryonic combine that would become the North West Company.

James McGill. His property in Montreal, a stone's throw from McTavish's mansion, would eventually become a great university named for him.

Peter Pond. American-born, explorer extraordinary, and man of a fiery temper whose name would be linked with the violent deaths of two men. He opened the rich Athabasca country.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Explorer of the Mackenzie River down to the Arctic Ocean. First explorer to cross the broad northern portion of the continent to the Pacific. Arrogant in his own right and possessor of a strong dislike for Simon McTavish.

Roderic McKenzie. History-minded and collector of journals and reminiscences as well as an astute trader. Rediscoverer of the Kaministiquia route that led to the establishment of Fort William.

David Thompson. Scientist and the greatest map-maker in North American history, who saw for himself that which he drew.

The list could go on: Alexander Norman McLeod, Peter Pangman, John Macdonald of Garth, John Macdonell, Simon Fraser, Duncan McGillivray, Dr. John Munro, Dr. John McLoughlin, Alexander Henry, Jr., and a hundred more. Most of them were young, well-educated Scotsmen, having all the traditions of loyalty to the clan, or to a cause, that marks these people. By the time of Grand Portage’s abandonment, the North West Company had over thirty partners, upward of 100 clerks, an unknown number of interpreters and guides, and enough engages to make a grand total of over 1,000 people. 9

Not all these people were ever at Grand Portage at one time. But enough were in any one summer to give authenticity to the

9. North West Company Partners’ Trust-Deeds and Agreements, 1799-1820, Hudson’s Bay Company Records, microfilm, Public Archives, Ottawa; Masson, 1, 61. The total number of personnel in the North West Company up to 1800 is given in various figures, none exceeding 2,000. See, for example, Isaac Weld, Jr., Travels Through the States of North America and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada . . . 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London, 1800), pp. 229 and 234.
romantic image that has survived. These Northwesterners, having passed a long winter in isolation and boredom, having survived the rigors of another season, arrived at Grand Portage in a mood to celebrate, to renew acquaintances, to plan the future, and to indulge in dandyism and good living, before returning to another winter. Parliament was in session.

One other individual needs to be mentioned - William McGillivray. Simon McTavish, a Scot to the core, placed several of his nephews in the Company as clerks. Among the nephews were three McGillivray brothers: William, Duncan, and Simon. All three rose in the hierarchy, eventually becoming partners. But William's rise was meteoric. In 1793, he became a member of McTavish, Frobisher & Company and was that company's agent at the annual meetings at Grand Portage. Upon McTavish's death in 1804, William became the principal director. Like his uncle, he made a firm impression upon the character of the concern. Under his direction, Fort William (named in his honor in 1805) thrived as did the North West Company. Proud of his Scottish heritage and of his uncle, he insured that the Great Hall at Fort William commemorated both.

Accounts of Activities at Grand Portage and Fort William

Grand Portage.

Just as there is a great dearth of information concerning the structural aspects of the Great Hall, so there is but scant information of the annual meetings. In 1778, General Haldimand,
the new colonial governor of Quebec, quoted an anonymous source when writing that "for about a month in the summer season, they have a general rendezvous at the Portage, and for the refreshing and comforting those who are employed in the more distant voyages the Traders from hence have built tolerable Houses." John Macdonald of Garth gave a hint of the assemblage when he first saw the Grand Portage, in the company of Simon McTavish himself, in 1791: "At Grand Portage there were great rejoicings on Mr. McTavish's arrival. Several Partners were there from the interior as well as the Agents from Montreal. . . . The total ensemble seemed huge to me."

The next summer, Macdonald returned to Grand Portage from his first year in the Northwest for "about a couple weeks refreshing & refitting & meeting the Montreal Agents." Still another year later, 1793, he recalled: "Made our way to Grand Portage in full spirits & health to head Quarters, where as in all future cases we met the gentlemen from Montreal in good fellowship after a twelve months absence."

Priscilla Wakefield, in her historical novel, Excursions in North America, described the Portage on the basis of reading and

perhaps interviewing men who had been there. The houses, she wrote, "are for the accommodation of the merchants and their clerks, during their short stay there." She had her literary hero say: "We mess at the first table, with the merchants, clerks, guides, and interpreters . . . on fresh meat, salt pork, fish, and venison."12

Daniel Harmon, writing as a green clerk in 1800, tells a little more about the annual get-together: "As this is the Headquarters or General Rendezvous for all who commerce in this part of the world, therefore every Summer the Proprietors and many of the Clerks who Winter in the Interior come here with the Furs." On July 4 (not a Canadian holiday), he wrote in his diary:

In the daytime the Natives were allowed to Dance in the Fort, and to whom the Coy. made a present of thirty six Gallons of Shrub—a drink made with orange or lemon juice, sugar, and rum, etc. and this evening the Gentlemen of the place dressed & we had a famous Ball in the Dining Room, and for musick we had the Bag-Pipe the violin, the Flute & the Fife, which enabled us to spend the evening agreeably - at the Ball there were a number of this Countries Ladies, whom I was surprised to find could behave themselves so well, and who danced not amiss.13


Sir Alexander Mackenzie, in his celebrated account of the fur trade, further illuminated the summer scene: "The proprietors, clerks, guides, and interpreters, mess together, to the number of sometimes an hundred, at several tables, in one huge hall." He also described the menu: bread, salt pork, beef, hams, fish, venison, butter, peas, Indian corn, potatoes, tea, spirits, wine, and fresh milk.¹⁴

A member of the XY Company, in opposition to the North West Company at Grand Portage, wrote in 1802 (the last summer of the latter's annual meeting at Grand Portage): "Gambling, feasting, dancing, drinking & fighting. After a couple of weeks of rest, for the Winterers to give in their returns & accounts, & to make up their outfits, they began to return again" to the Northwest.¹⁵

No descriptions have come down concerning the business meetings in the Great Hall. Compared to the dinners and dances, these were small affairs, only the partners and agents participating.


¹⁴. Mackenzie, pp. xl-xlvi. A few scholars have made the suggestion that Sir Alexander's cousin, Roderic McKenzie, wrote this long, detailed preface.

They reached new agreements or modified the existing ones. They elected proven clerks to the rank of partner. They discussed the opposition, expansion plans, new posts, assignments, the European market, and the like.

Fort William

The history of Fort William is important to an understanding of Grand Portage. Built and occupied by the same people who left Grand Portage in 1802-03, intended to be Grand Portage's successor, and being the only other fort to play exactly the same role as Grand Portage, Fort William is better documented, both in written records and in illustrations.

The annual meetings began at Fort William in 1803. Daniel Harmon recorded two years later that "here we find a number of Gentlemen, some this Summer from Montreal and others from the different parts of the Country," just like Grand Portage days.16

In 1814, Gabriel Franchère, an employee of John Jacob Astor, passing through Fort William, noted that "it is in this salon [Great Hall] that the agents, clerks, and interpreters of the company eat their meals - at different tables."17

Two years later, an angered Earl of Selkirk, Hudson's Bay Company, captured and occupied Fort William - one of the more startling events in the history of rivalry between the two companies. Simon McGillivray, North West Company, quoted from a diary of that time that the first thing his Lordship did was to make for the Great Hall. Selkirk "made his appearance with his body-guard, and immediately entered the Hall in the Messhouse. Mr. McGillivray handed to the Earl . . . a Protest, which he read. An armed force (of the 37th regiment, or Swiss mercenaries who had lately fought with the British in the War of 1812) was stationed both within and without doors."

Lord Selkirk took up residence in two of the smaller rooms of the Great Hall, remaining at the post until the following spring. Meanwhile, the diary keeper noted: "The Mess-house being now cleared of all our Gentlemen, I went in, found a person by the name of Lorimier, one Chatelain, and the well-known Williamson, all three Agents to his Lordship, regaling themselves in the larder." He noted also that "two soldiers, with fixed bayonets, are stationed in the hall when we take our meals." The event was a bitter pill to the men of the North West Company who regarded the Great Hall as the focal point of their social life.18

There are several discrepancies between the two editions; they will be noted here when important. In general, it is felt that Hoyt Franchère's translation is the more accurate except that Thwaites showed a clearer understanding of western geography and the fur traders' methods of operation.

Late the next summer, after the North West Company had regained control of Fort William, Ross Cox arrived from the Columbia at the unusual hour of 8 a.m.: "As the welcome sound of the breakfast-bell was summoning . . . we . . . repaired to the salle a manger, and over a bowl of coffee, fresh eggs, excellent hot cakes, and prime cold venison, quickly forgot our late privations." Unfortunately, "we arrived too late to see Fort William in its prime. A great portion of the interior aristocracy had departed for their winter destinations; and most of those outward-bound had set off."

In 1821, the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company amalgamated, and Fort William's flag staff thereafter flew the latter's flag. The post's role changed immediately from the great meeting place to just another fur trade establishment. Its deterioration was rapid. However, Maj. Stephen Long, U.S.A., was impressed by the Great Hall when he stayed as a curious visitor in 1823:

In the large mess-room, where we were handsomely and kindly entertained by the superintendent, Roderick Mackenzie, Esq. much mirth and hilarity formerly prevailed, but from the immense size and deserted appearance of this elegant apartment it had acquired a gloomy character. We regretted to find that this establishment which cost
a great deal of money, and which had
been embellished with many of the
luxuries of civilized countries, is
about to be suffered to fall to ruin.19

That same year, David Thompson, by then retired from the
fur trade, returned to Fort William as a member of the British
international boundary commission. With him was John Bigsby, who
felt about the Great Hall as did the American officers:

We all took our meals together in
a plainly-furnished, low-roofed hall,
capable of seating a hundred persons. We
were placed a good deal according to
rank, the seniors and leaders at the head
of the table, and the clerks and guides
etc. of respectable but humbler grade,
ranged down the table in due order.20

Lady Frances, wife of Hudson's Bay Governor Sir George Simpson,
stayed at Fort William in 1830. She noted that "the buildings are
fast going to decay, and it is now of very little importance to
what it was then /before 1821/."21

Earlier, the study noted Washington Irving's Astoria, in
which he captured the flavor of the annual councils. He further

19. William H. Keating, Narrative of An Expedition to the
Source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnipeek, Lake of the Woods, etc.
...1823 ... under the Command of Stephen H. Long, Major, U.S.T.E.,
2 (Philadelphia, 1824), 174.
20. John J. Bigsby, The Shoe and Canoe, or Pictures of Travel
21. Grace Lee Nute, "Journey for Frances," The Beaver (March
1954), p. 15. A similar statement, for 1833, may be found in
W. S. Wallace, editor, John McLean's Notes of a Twenty-Five Year's
captured the fort's time of greatness by writing:

To behold the Northwest [sic]
Company in all its state and grandeur, however, it was necessary to witness an annual gathering.... Here two or three of the leading partners from Montreal proceeded once a year to meet the partners from the various trading posts of the wilderness.

* * * * *

These grave and weighty councils were alternated by huge feasts and revels, like some of the old feasts described in Highland castles. The tables in the great banqueting room groaned under the weight of game of all kinds; of venison from the woods, and fish from the lakes, with hunters' delicacies, such as buffaloes' tongues, and beavers' tails, and various luxuries from Montreal, all served up by experienced cooks brought for the purpose. There was no stint of generous wine... a hard-drinking period, a time of loyal toasts, and bacchanalian songs, and brimming bumpers.22

Long before Fort William finally closed, in 1878, the Great Hall fell upon evil times. An observer in 1841 reported that the building, "in which so many hardy traders used to tell of their exploits, is now a shed of canoes half in ruin."23 The flow of generous wine had ceased.

Events and "Halls" at Other Major Posts.

One could quote almost endlessly from the vast fur trade literature about the parties, balls, receptions, and dinners at the posts throughout the Northwest. With the danger of diminishing returns, a few such accounts concerning the larger posts are presented here. They do not present "hard facts" about construction techniques, but they may contribute to the reader's capturing the mood or the "style" of these halls, thus assisting in making decisions when hard facts are not available.

Fort Vancouver. Headquarters for the Hudson's Bay Company in the Columbia Basin, early 1840s. The mood here is one of permanency rather than the free-swinging atmosphere of Grand Portage:

In the center stands the governor's residence, which is two stories high - the dining hall, and the public sitting room. All the clerks and officers, including the chaplain and physician, dine together in the hall, the governor presiding. The dinner is the most substantial kind, consisting of several courses. Wine is frequently allowed but no spirituous liquors. After grace has been said, the company break up. Then most of the party retire to the public-sitting room, called a "Bachelor's Hall," or the smoking-room, to amuse themselves as they please, either in smoking, reading, or telling and listening to stories. . . . Sometimes there is a great influx of company, consisting of the chief traders from the outposts, who arrive at the fort on business, and the commanders of vessels. These are gala times after dinner . . . regulated by the strictest propriety. 24

Fort Victoria. Successor to Fort Vancouver, 1850:

There were a good many people in "Bachelor's Hall" - all young men. After awhile Captain Grant Began "to entertain the company." He showed how to use the sword. He stuck a candle on the back of a chair, to snuff it with a sweep of the sword; but I am bound to confess, he took off a good piece of the candle with it, and down it went.

After awhile, the captain introduced the game, "To escort Her Majesty to Windsor Castle." All were to be cavalry; so down everybody went kangaroo fashion. Grant, being in command, took the lead; and so we hopped around the room, and made considerable of a racket, in the midst of which some naughty school-girl overhead poured some water through a crack in the ceiling, right down upon the cavalry.\footnote{Begg, p. 218.}

York Factory. On Hudson's Bay, chief port of entry for the Hudson's Bay Company, 1841:

The persons assembled there were the accountant, some clerks, the post-master, and one or two others. Some of them were smoking, and some talking, and a pretty considerable noise they made too. Bachelor's Hall, indeed, was worthy of its name, being a place that would have killed any woman, so full was it of smoke, noise, and confusion.

\footnote{Christmas,} The room was lit up by means of a number of tallow candles, stuck in tin sconces round the walls. On several benches and chairs sat all the Orkneymen.
and Canadian half-breeds . . . in their Sunday jackets and capotes. . . . But round the stove - which had been removed to one side . . . the strangest group was collected. Squatting down on the floor, in every ungraceful attitude imaginable, sat about a dozen Indian women, dressed in calico gowns . . . at least half a dozen infants stood bolt upright in their tight-laced cradles. On a chair near the stove sat a young good-looking Indian, with a fiddle of his own making . . . beside him sat an Indian boy with a kettle drum, on which he tapped occasionally as if anxious that the ball should begin.

* * * *

We each chose partners, the fiddle struck up, and the ball began. Scotch reels were the only dances known by the majority of the guests, so we confined ourselves entirely to them.26

The sleeping rooms, the large mess room, the business meetings, the dances, the banquets, and the drinking parties gave the Great Hall its purpose for being and set its character. These purposes also influenced its design and construction.

Chapter 2

Great Hall - Its Appearance

A battalion of researchers have studied the appearance of the Great Hall at Grand Portage the past several decades. The sum total of these efforts is not great. That a structure so vital to such a historic setting has escaped the written word so thoroughly is remarkable indeed. In recent years the records of the Hudson’s Bay Company have been made available on microfilm in North America. At the outset of this study, hope arose that here, possibly, some new information might be found. A too-brief encounter with these records quickly dashed that hope. However, these records do contain a wealth of material on the construction of other forts, material that may be applied to the time and place involved. To be remembered, of all these posts only Fort William had a similarly-used Great Hall.

Grand Portage - The Historical Record

The traders who were to become known as the North West Company began combining their operations as early as 1775. The record is clear that these men had established a fort at Grand Portage by 1778.1 If Grand Portage was like other establishments, these first structures were quite primitive and small in size.

But, if like other places, the Company probably began reconstructing and enlarging its establishment immediately.

One might estimate that the Great Hall was in existence by 1778, the year that the Frobishers, McTavish, McGill, and others agreed to make a common effort. In that year, Governor Sir Guy Carleton at Quebec received a memorandum saying that the traders "have a general rendezvous at the Portage, and for the refreshing and comforting those who are employed in the more distant voyages the Traders from hence have built tolerable Houses."\(^2\)

The North West Company possessed the ability to transport fairly large objects to Grand Portage, even before it launched schooners on Lake Superior. A Montreal canoe could transport four tons, including the weight of its crew and their provisions. It had a length of up to 40 feet and a beam of considerable width (up to 70 inches). Such a vessel could have easily transported panel doors, paint, glass, furniture, and even pieces of hardwood planks if such had been desired. Once schooners began plying Lake Superior - apparently by 1785 - items of considerable size as well as cargoes of lumber could be transported to Grand Portage.\(^3\)

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 32.
\(^3\) By 1778, the Company had two small, decked vessels on Lake Superior, the Mackinac and the DePeyster. By 1790, two vessels in use (the same ones?) were reported to be of 12 and 15 tons. In 1793, the 75-ton Otter enter on service on Lake Superior. Grace Lee Nute, Lake Superior (New York, 1944), pp. 117-18; H.A. Innis, The Fur Trade In Canada, An Introduction to Canadian Economic History (Toronto, 1962), pp. 219-22.
A new clerk, John Macdonell, recorded the earliest description of the Grand Portage structures that has yet come to light. He arrived at the post in 1793, perhaps twenty years after the fort was first built. He counted sixteen buildings within the stockades. Six were storehouses; the other ten were "dwelling houses shops compting and Mess House." The term "dwelling houses" is easily accounted for. The permanent engages would have had a range of one-room dwellings. The permanent bourgeois and even the clerk would have had their own houses, or some sort of permanent abode that accommodated their prestige. In addition, comfortable dwellings undoubtedly existed for the partners and clerks who arrived annually for the general meeting. As for the Great Hall, the permanent cadre may have eaten in it during the long, quiet winter months, although there would have been the difficulty of heating it sufficiently during Grand Portage's cold winters. (At York Factory, Hudson's Bay Company, the gentlemen ate in a large summer mess, but in a smaller one during the winter.) Macdonell's punctuation is not as explicit as it might be; one is not sure if he meant "compting and Mess House" to refer to but one building or two. It would not have been improbable that the various clerks at the rendezvous did their record keeping in a portion of the Great Hall, even while the partners were holding their annual meetings. It should be noted though that at Fort William separate buildings housed the Great Hall and the compting house.
Macdonell described the walls of the buildings as being "made with cedar and White spruce fir split with whip saws after being squared." Such a description is compatible with the concept of posts-on-sill (poteaux sur sole) construction, by far the most widely-used technique in the Northwest. He said that the roofs of the buildings were "covered with Shingles of Cedar and Spruce." Again, the more substantial buildings throughout the trade had shingled roofs - but never shingled walls. (At smaller posts and on smaller buildings, roofs were variously made of poles, boards, thatch, sod, and even mud. Magazines and fireproof warehouses usually had tin roofs. At one post, on Hudson Bay, some of the roofs were covered with lead.) Macdonell carefully mentioned that the posts, doors, and windows were painted Spanish brown, a color to be found later at Fort William also. He did not comment whether or not the walls, interior and exterior, were whitewashed or painted white - a widely practiced, but not universal, custom in the Northwest. Still, it would seem strange that the posts, located every few feet along the walls, were painted brown and the walls between left their natural wood color.

Priscilla Wakefield's fictional character described the buildings as "houses built with wood and covered with shingles." She also

implied that several residences existed for "the merchants and
their clerks." Daniel Harmon, in 1800, was not quite as impressed
with the structures at Grand Portage as most visitors. He said
that "within the Fort there are a number of Dwelling Houses,
Shops, & Stores etc. all of which appear to be Temporary buildings,
just to serve for this moment." To speculate on the reasons
for Harmon's low opinion of the buildings would be perhaps an
idle exercise.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie had a better opinion of the buildings.
He described the wooden houses as "covered with shingles" and being
"calculated for every convenience of trade, as well as to accommodate
the proprietors and clerks during their short residence there." Also disagreeing with Harmon was George Nelson of the XY Company.
When he saw the North West post for the first time in 1802, he
described it as "nothing superfluous or unnecessary, but of an
extent to prove at once the great trade they carried on, their

5. Wakefield, p. 345.
6. Harmon, "Journal of Travels." It should be noted at this
point that James H. Baker, "History of Transportation in Minnesota,"
Minnesota Historical Collections, 2 (1928), 9-10, quotes an
anonymous journal describing the same dance that Harmon attended
this year. Baker's source, which otherwise appears that it
might have been Harmon, says that the dining room in the Great Hall
had a 60-foot long puncheon floor. Although one might wish to
jump at these rare specifics, the writer remains skeptical of
them. Certainly, Harmon's journal does not contain this information.
judgement & taste in the regularity & position of their numerous buildings. The neatness and order of things was not least part of it.\textsuperscript{8}

That the North West Company was still building at Grand Portage almost up to the eve of its departure is shown in an 1800 letter by William McGillivray. Writing to the bourgeois, he said that the Otter would bring up the "plank and boards" needed to complete two houses, apparently then under construction. This lumber undoubtedly came from a new sawmill that the North West Company had recently set up at Sault Ste. Marie. He also instructed the bourgeois to place some important papers in the "large Trunk in my room in which I have left the Key." One cannot be certain where McGillivray slept while at Grand Portage. But, if Fort William is an example, a sleeping room in the Great Hall was probably set aside for the agent.\textsuperscript{9}

The rival XY Company next gave some insight to the structure at Grand Portage. Although it was referring to its own buildings, which were less substantial than the North West Company's, one may be certain that whatever the XY Company had, the North West Company had more and better. In an 1801 inventory, the XY clerk

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{8} Barton and Nute, pp. 142-43.
\end{itemize}
listed the carpenter's tools as including: gouges, chisels, hammers, adzes, spike gimlets, handsaws, cooper's saws, crosscut saws, pit saws, planes, drawing knives, compasses, nippers, rasps, files, an iron square, and a two-foot rule. The blacksmith had: bellows, vice, anvil, shears, scales, grindstone, and all the tools of his trade. Two years later, in 1803, the XY Company made another important footnote when it listed as having at Grand Portage: 23 panel doors, 30 window sashes, 1/3 box of window glass, 10 bedsteads, 24 chairs, and 3 japanned candlesticks.10

Grand Portage - The Archeological Record

Archeologist Ralph D. Brown, Minnesota Historical Society, assisted by a crew of local men, excavated and examined the stone foundations believed to have been those of the Great Hall in the fall of 1937. He had neither the time nor the funds to completely excavate the site of the structure and the area surrounding it. He wrote a short report of the findings of this dig in 1938.

Twenty-five years later, Archeologist Alan Woolworth, Minnesota Historical Society, recreated a more detailed study

10. Baby Collection, Register of XY Company, containing an Inventory of the XY Company at Grand Portage, Universite de Montreal, Quebec.
based on the by then incomplete notes, maps, and photographs of Brown. From the evidence, Woolworth has concluded that the coursed stone foundations found represented a structure of a more permanent nature or intended for a special use. While there was no evidence as the wooden superstructure, he thinks it highly probable "that the Great Hall was built in the French Canadian method of notched upright timbers and hewn or sawed horizontal timbers which were set into these mortised slots," i.e., posts-on-sill or poteaux sur sole.

In Woolworth's study, the Great Hall is designated as Structure No. 5. Under that heading he described Brown's work. On September 11, 1937, Brown, working alone on a Saturday, discovered a ten-foot section of the stone foundation. Three days later, his crew had uncovered 80 feet to the wall and had located the northwest corner. This foundation lay parallel to and 17 feet south of a palisade, marked on the archeological map as the palisade between corners D and G. By the time he finished the excavation, Brown learned that the structure was oriented on an east-west axis, and measured 95 by 30 feet:

The complete northern and western walls of this building were found. Only a portion of the southern wall was discovered. The northwest, southwest, and northeast building corners were found. The course of a portion of the southern wall was uncovered, but the southeastern corner and the eastern wall were missing. They were projected onto a map from the existing walls.
The northern wall was in the best condition. It was composed of rather carefully laid courses of roughly squared slate from the vicinity of Mount Rose. In some spots, the walls were five or six courses in height; in others, only one or two courses could be found. Brown excavated alongside the walls and found that most of them appeared to lay on undisturbed sand. No data on the width of the foundation walls is available, but a measurement from a map would indicate a width of two or two and a half feet for them.

Brown failed to discover evidence of fireplaces in 1937. One year later, when reconstruction of the Great Hall got underway, workmen came across a footing made of slabs of slate, 7 by 9 feet. Woolworth thinks that this footing, situated near the east center of the site, "probably served as a fireplace footing." Unexplained was a cluster of burned boulders and ash found near the center of the eastern end of the building, and no record was kept of its location.

Brown reported excavating cross-trenches in the interior of the site, but his map shows only one, a five-foot wide trench which ran 91 feet east and west through the center of the structure. Little was recovered. Woolworth concludes: "In actuality, not much of the interior of this building was excavated."

Great Halls and mess halls often had a kitchen and servants' quarters behind them, as well as a privy. Two other structures near the foundations are therefore of interest. Brown found a well 22 feet west of the northeast corner and 11 feet north of the
northern wall of the hall. When excavated, this well proved
to be D-shaped, with a diameter of from 19\(\frac{3}{4}\) to 27 inches, and 11 feet
deep. The D-shape was formed by a lining of vertical, hand-hewn
boards extending to a depth of 8 feet. Beyond that, a wooden barrel
without top or bottom formed the lining. Two other barrels stood on
top of this bottom one, but inside the lower part of the wood
lining. The three barrels rose to a height of 7 feet 9 inches.
Among the debris in the well were a square timber and a part of a
wooden bucket, both covered with red or brown paint, possibly the
"Spanish brown" found at the fort. Also of interest was a wooden,
shake shingle, on which the weathered portion was 4\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches in
length.

The second structure, only partly excavated, was located
directly north of the east end of the Great Hall, and therefore
east of the well. The portion excavated measured 12 by 16 feet.
Brown suggested that this building may have been the kitchen.
Willoughby Babcock, also with the Minnesota Historical Society,
wrote later that a quantity of bottle glass, crockery, and kitchen
hardware was found north of the Great Hall. Additional excavation
may disclose the length of this building and whether it was simply
a kitchen or a combination of kitchen and sleeping quarters for
household servants, cooks, and bakers.

The archeologists have classified a number of artifacts recovered
at the fort as "building hardware." This hardware included hinges
some of which were of a size suitable for doors and shutters. The larger door-type hinges were handmade of wrought iron. One complete specimen measured 1\(\frac{1}{4}\) inches wide and 17 inches long, with a fishtail finial. Smaller hinges, suitable for shutters or cupboards, measured 2 by 3 inches. These hinges still had "Rosehead" nails in them.

A variety of pintles was recovered, most of them being L-shaped with one arm longer than the other. The long, horizontal arms measured from 3 to 3\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches; the shorter, vertical arms measured about 1\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches long. Also found were door hooks, hook eyes, door handles, latch bar keepers, shutter fasteners, locks, and keys. Thin, irregular window glass was discovered, supporting the XY Company's 1803 inventory that glass windows were installed at Grand Portage.

The most common artifact recovered was nails. The report states: "The rosehead nail with a faceted head, square or rectangular shank, and either sharply pointed or chisel pointed ends is abundant. This type of nail ranges in size from small tacks of \(\frac{1}{2}\)" to spikes of 6" in length." Other objects in this general area included staples and screws.

Among the tools found were axes, files, rasps, saws (crosscut, buck), wood chisel, cold chisel, forging hammer, and plane bits.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{11}\) Alan R. Woolworth, "Archeological Excavations at the Northwest Company's Fur Trade Post, Grand Portage, Minnesota, In
Fort William - The Historical Record

The first known visitor to describe Fort William (still called Kaministiquia) was Alexander Henry, Jr., in 1803. The first annual meeting at this new post was held that year. He said that the mess room (Great Hall) and the apartments for the agents (probably meaning the end rooms in the Great Hall) had already been built, but that the kitchen was yet "a temporary building adjoining" the Great Hall. The residence for partners and clerks, to flank the Great Hall on either side, had not yet been constructed. Henry mentioned that new kilns "were turning out many bricks" for construction purposes. (There is no written evidence that the Company had had brick kilns at Grand Portage.)

Two years later, Daniel Harmon attended the meeting and recorded that 1,500 "labouring men" were present. While Harmon may have meant only that this large number of voyageurs from both inland and Montreal were present, some historians have concluded that he meant that 1,500 men were working at the post's construction. This seems to be a rather large number of laborers to be working

1936-1937, By the Minnesota Historical Society"; Minnesota Historical Society, "Revised Report of Archeological Work on the Site of the Northwest Company Post, 1936-7," Jan. 15, 1938, microfilm, Midwest Region, NPS. Although the foundations' dimensions were 95 by 30 feet, the reconstructed Great Hall was about 100 by 35 feet, since plans for those dimensions had already been drawn.
on the buildings at any one time. Gabriel Franchère, who visited in 1814, explained the system by which the North West Company built this new fort:

In order to clear its land and improve its property, the company has taken care to obligate all those employed as canoemen each to give it a certain number of days of forced labor. In this way the company has cleared the land and made permanent the environs of Fort William. But when an employee has worked the stipulated number of days, he is thereafter always exempt, even when he remains twenty or thirty years in the wilderness and comes down to the Fort every summer.12

It is reasonable to assume that the same practice was carried out at Grand Portage. Of course, this custom would not have precluded the employment of certain skilled craftsmen, such as carpenters or masons, to be in direct charge of construction.

An unknown artist painted Fort William in 1805. A woodcut from this picture appeared in print in 1870; however, the original painting has disappeared. A much more detailed watercolor was

12. Elliott Coues, editor, New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry . . . and of David Thompson . . . 1799-1814 (2 volumes, Minneapolis, 1965), 1, 222; Franchère, pp. 163-64. Fort William was begun in 1801 or 1802, and more or less completed by 1805. Its name was changed from Fort Kaministiquia to Fort William on July 20, 1807. See Meeting of Shareholders, July 20, 1807, in North West Company Minute Book, 1807-1814, Hudson's Bay Company Records, microfilm, Public Archives, Ottawa.
done by a Company schooner captain, Robert Irvine, in 1811 or 1812. This picture shows the Great Hall in considerable detail. From it one may determine that the front of the building had a central doorway that was flanked on either side by four windows. Three dark spots on the roof may have been meant to be dormer windows; however, the documentary evidence supports only a single-story building. It is possible that an unfinished attic extended the length of the building above the ceilinged rooms. The painting also suggests two chimneys, and shows clearly a railed porch across the front, a hip roof, and a white wall.

The earliest, detailed written description, by Gabriel Franchère in 1814, agrees with the detail in Irvine's sketch. Franchère wrote:

In the middle of a spacious square a large wooden structure rises in which the middle door is raised about five feet from the ground. Fort William was located on damp ground, and around which a long balcony extends. An 1816 floor plan shows a balcony along the front only. See note 13 below.

In the center of this building is a salon sixty feet long and thirty feet wide. . . . It is in this salon that the agents, clerks, and interpreters of the company eat their meals - at different tables. At each end of the salon are located two small rooms for the partners. The rear contains a kitchen and some bedrooms for the domestics.

Franchère went on to describe the rest of the fort, noting quarters for the partners and clerks visiting for the annual
meeting, quarters for the permanent staff, warehouses, shops, counting house, prison, and so on. All the structures were of wood with shingled roofs except two: a stone powder magazine and one stone warehouse (out of about eight), both having tin roofs.13

In 1816, Lord Selkirk captured Fort William. As was noted earlier, he eventually commandeered two rooms - the principal agents' rooms? - for his own use and had armed soldiers stand guard in the Great Hall at mealtime.14 Two sketches of this period have survived; these are said to have been done by Selkirk himself. One of them (see illustrations) shows the interior of what must be the southeast end room of the Great Hall. Shown are such details as the wooden floors, wall coverings, chair rail and wainscoating, and ceiling; a window, showing its sashes, frame, panes, and shutters; a panel door and its lock and knob. The

13. Franchère, Adventure at Astoria, pp. 161-63. The Thwaites edition of Franchère is slightly different in wording in describing the Great Hall: "In the middle of a spacious square rises a large building elegantly constructed, through out of wood, with a long piazza or portico, raised about five feet from the ground, and surmounted by a balcony, extending along the whole front." Thwaites included "partners" and "guides" among those eating in the dining room, but did not include "small" when describing the end rooms. Instead of saying that the partners slept in these end rooms, Thwaites' version says that "two of these are destined for the two principal agents from Montreal; the other two to the steward and his department." Also, Thwaites differs in the kitchen's location, saying that "the kitchen and servants' rooms are in the basement."

14. McGillivray, pp. 73-75 and 86.
other illustration gives a clear indication that the warehouses across the parade were built in the posts-on-sill style.

At this same time Selkirk prepared, or had prepared, a floor plan of the Great Hall, which gives the dimensions of the mess room itself as being 50 by 40 feet, and a ground plan of the fort. In general, his floor plan agrees with Franchère's description of two years earlier, the principal difference being the dimensions of the hall.

Ross Cox visited the post the next summer, 1817, after the North West Company had regained possession of it. Although the annual meeting was already over, he was nonetheless impressed with the Great Hall, where he ate his meals: "The dining-hall is a noble apartment, and sufficiently capacious to entertain two hundred." A few lines later he mentioned again this "large house, in which the dining-hall is situated, and in which the gentleman in charge resides." 15

In 1821, the North West Company amalgamated with the Hudson's Bay Company, which from then on operated Fort William. Because the Hudson's Bay Company's main transatlantic route terminated at York Factory on Hudson Bay, Fort William no longer was the scene of the annual meetings. It was now just another post, trading

with the local Indians, fishing in Lake Superior, and occasionally a stopping-place for express canoes traveling from Montreal to the Red River forts and settlements. Future visitors were to note with increasing dismay the rapid deterioration of the post.

William H. Keating, with Maj. Stephen Long's party in 1823, commented on the "gloomy character" of the Great Hall. John Bigsby, the same year, noted the "comparative neglect" of the fort, including the "plainly-furnished, low-roofed hall." A report by the post factor in 1824 assured the Hudson's Bay Company that "as regards the present state of Fort William in its buildings . . . no extra expenses have been incurred . . . with the exception of putting in repair the Winter house for the person in charge of that place. The other buildings are still in good repair and will be allowed to remain as the materials composing them would be of no use."16

The post journals of these years contain a fascinating body of information concerning daily life at Fort William; contacts and rivalry with the American Fur Company that had set up a fishing station at Grand Portage; and repairs of the structures, the stockade, and the fences at the post. However, these records are barren of any reference to the Great Hall. Occasionally,

Governor Simpson stopped by enroute from Montreal to Red River. Almost every summer other important visitors, such as bishops and government officials, would stay over a night or two. During these brief moments, the Great Hall would again resound with talk and laughter. In 1837, the post factor noted a new use for the building:

The Indians were assembled in the Mess House Singing Pslams [Sic] and saying their Prayers. Mr. Cotte, the person in charge of Grand Portage for the American Fur Company have been instructing them with his wife a great part of the winter in the principle of Religion according to the Catholic ritual.17

The deterioration of the Great Hall accelerated after 1840. In 1841, it was reported that "the old mess House, sixty feet long, in which so many hardy traders used to tell their exploits, is now a shed of canoes half a ruin."18 A photograph, dated about 1870, shows a low, shed-like structure standing where the Great Hall once reigned. If it was the same structure, its appearance had changed so greatly that it was no longer recognizable as the Great Hall. The last post journals kept at Fort William until it closed, in 1878, do not even mention the hall. By the early 1880s, the Canadian Pacific Railroad had begun to divert the area to the

great maze of tracks that mark its terminal at the head of Great Lakes shipping.19

Fort William - Inventories

Between 1816 and 1821, a number of inventories were made of goods, supplies, and tools at Fort William. Most of the items, such as Indian trade goods, had no relation to the Great Hall. Some of the items, however, are of interest in that they show tools available to the carpenters, and building supplies, such as paint and lumber. To avoid duplication, the various inventories are herein extracted from and compiled into one list.

Lord Selkirk had the earliest of these inventories made shortly after he seized the fort in 1816. In both 1820 and 1821, the North West Company inventoried supplies on hand, the latter occasion being just before turning the post over to the management of the Hudson's Bay Company. More information was recorded in 1821 when the Hudson's

19. Note must be made of the recollections of Mrs. Louisa (C.H.) Kirkup which were published in the Detroit News in 1932 and republished in the Jubilee issue of the Daily Times-Journal, Fort William, Ont. Mrs. Kirkup was the daughter of Thomas Richards, the last factor at Fort William. She recalled that her father did not close the post until 1881 and that her family lived in the Great Hall during part of those last years: "We kept five stoves and a fireplace going, yet we could not heat that huge room." "So we moved out of that great dining hall into a smaller and more comfortable house." I am unable to bridge the gap between these recollections and the evidence that the Great Hall had greatly deteriorated by 1841, and certainly by 1870. The newspaper article was located in the form of a clipping, "Late Mrs. Kirkup Recalled Closing Historic Old Post," in the Public Library, Thunder Bay, Ont.
Bay people closed their nearby small post at Point Meuron and moved its goods to Fort William. Finally, the new management listed the supplies on hand in 1822. Although this last date is twenty years after the close of Grand Portage, the time span is relatively short. In general, these things which were at Fort William could well have been at Grand Portage:

### Nails

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<tr>
<td>7½ M</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>30d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 M</td>
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### Paint, etc.

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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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### Tools

chisels: flat, hollow, paring, mortice, socket, assorted lathe, turning
blacksmith tools, complete sets
irons for sawmill
saws: mill, pit, crosscut, iron frame, hand, tenon, dovetail, sash, keyhole, basket, mounted webb, garden.
axes: large felling, half, small, square headed, carpenter's English broad, small broad, hand, American, adze, shingling.
adzes: common, carpenter, cooper, scooping
augers: screw, shell
rules, 2-foot
anvils
vices: bench, large and small, wooden, 35 lbs., 38 lbs.
hammers: sledge, anvil, bench, claw, Kent, 8 lbs., 14 1/4 lbs.,
25 3/4 lbs.
nippers, forge
pincers: square, round, assorted
screw plates: large, "midg," polished
files and rasps
drawing knives
drill and brace, complete
brace and 25 bits
compasses: iron, wooden
screw drivers
iron squares, large and small
wooden squares
planes: rabbit, O.G., reversed O.G., hollow and round, matchins,
architraves, double iron rabbit, grooving, single jack,
double jack, single hand, double hand, trying, jointers,
figured, panel, round, folding, iron smoothing.
gimlets, spike
awls
bellows
grindstones
foot rule with slide
chalk lines
shears, spoke
marble and knife (Painter's loft)
"fire engine"
bell
jack screws
picks

Hardware

2 large hinges (also butt hinges)
22 lbs. iron wire (also, 3 coils of iron wire)
stoves, large and small, with pipes
locks: desk, stock assorted, pad, basket.

Materials
sheets of tin
pig lead
45 lbs. solder
14,013 lbs. bar iron
322 lbs. square iron
253 lbs. bolt iron
13 lbs. "sheet" iron
236 lbs. German steel
116 lbs. blister steel
\( \frac{1}{2} \) bbl. tar
138 lbs. putty
window glass, 50 feet of 8\( \frac{1}{2} \) X 9\( \frac{1}{2} \), 100 feet of 7\( \frac{1}{2} \) X 8\( \frac{1}{2} \)
oil cloths
painted oil cloths
24 maple planks
9 walnut "
10 " boards
3 cherry planks
11 room doors ) - apparently in storage
7 large windows

Other Forts - Descriptions of Bachelors' Halls, Mess Halls, Etc.

Fort Colville, HBC, ca. 1859

By 1859, Fort Colville, always an outpost, had greatly reduced its activities as a fur trade post. An English visitor at that time described the factor's humble house. A photograph from the same period is included in this report:

The trader's house is quadrangular in shape, and built of heavy trees squared and piled one upon another. * * * The visitor, on entering the somewhat ponderous portals of this primitive mansion, finds himself in a large room dimly lighted by two small

windows, the furniture of which, designed more for use than ornament, consists of a few rough chairs and a large deal table, the latter occupying the centre of the room. Looking beneath this table one cannot fail to notice an immense padlock, which evidently fastens a trap-door which led to a basement where rum was stored. ** An immense hearth-fire, both warms and lights this dreary sitting-room.21

Fort Edmonton, HBC, 1847

Paul Kane, destined for fame as an artist of western scenes, spent Christmas 1847 at Fort Edmonton, then headquarters for the Saskatchewan District, Rupert's Land. The dimensions of the three-story, squared-timber "Big House" were about 70 by 60 feet:

The dining-hall in which we assembled was the largest room in the fort, probably about fifty by twenty-five feet, well warmed by large fires, which are scarcely ever allowed to go out. The walls and ceilings are boarded, as plastering is not used, there being no limestone within reach; but these boards are painted in a style of the most startling barbaric gaudiness, and the ceiling filled with centre-pieces of fantastic gilt scrolls, making altogether a saloon which no white man would enter for the first time without a start, and which the Indians always looked upon with awe and wonder.22

Hudson's Bay Post, Red River, 1822-25

The Hudson's Bay Company established its first post on Red

River in the vicinity of today's Winnipeg about 1797. Apparently this establishment had no proper name. Later, the fine post of Upper Fort Garry would stand here. The buildings of the first post were very primitive affairs until, in 1822, the factor began constructing new buildings. His journals suggest that these new buildings were erected on the site of the former North West Company's fort, the two companies having amalgamated in 1821. The following extracts are from the post journals for 1822 and 1823:

Sept. 11, 1822. "The buildings in the old Fort of H.B.Co. are in a decayed and ruinous condition. The dwelling house can furnish accommodations for only two gentlemen."

Sept. 18. Hired a carpenter "to work at a new dwelling House which is erecting in the N.W. Fort."


Oct. 10. "Men employed building the chimneys. Carpenter employed preparing wood for the new house. Took down the old store at this place to make use of the Timber for building a kitchen."

Oct. 25. "Finished the Kitchen Chimney, and began plaistering the roof with mud."

Oct. 28. "Carpenter finished the roof of boards of the new house. Three men employed in covering the kitchen with earth and hay, one making sashes."

Nov. 18. "The carpenters began the ceiling of the lower rooms today."

Dec. 11. "Carpenters working at the partitions of the new house."
Dec. 16. "Carpenters working night and day in the new House, laying the upper floor, and preparing wood for the partition and Doors of the rooms."

Dec. 31. "Preparing the new House for the festivities with which the new year is generally welcomed in this country."

The lower floor of the house was occupied in January 1823, but not until April did the carpenter make sashes for the windows in the second floor.23

Leech Lake, NWCo., 1806

In 1806, Zebulon Pike inspected the North West Company's post at Leech Lake, located in American territory in today's Minnesota:

The main building in the rear, fronting the lake, is 60 feet by 25, 1½ story high; the W. end of which is occupied by the director of the Fond du Lac department. He has a hall 18 feet square, bed-room and kitchen, with an office. The center is a trading shop of 12½ feet square, with a bed-room in the rear of the same dimension. The E. end is a large store 25 feet by 20, under which is an ice-house well filled. The loft extends over the whole building. . .. Besides the ice-house there are cellars under all the other parts of the building. The doors and window-shutters are musket-proof.24

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Moose Factory, HBC, 1757-60

When the French still possessed Quebec, the Hudson's Bay Company had factories on Hudson Bay. Fearful of French attack, the Company fortified these factories, including Moose. From 1757 to 1760, the chief factor at Moose had a new house constructed for himself. His journals, in which he called the establishment "Moose Fort," give an insight to the problems of construction at that early time on the bleak shores of Hudson Bay:

Sept. 9, 1757. "Went up the River ... to see for some large Timber in order to lay the Foundation of a new Flanker which I intend for the Masters house, but could not meet with any where we went big enough."

Oct. 15. "Arm r making some very large spikes for the Foundation of the Masters new house."


Dec. 24. "I shall be under a necessity of sending up the South Bluff which is 12 miles from hence to see for some very large Timber for Girders."

Mar. 2, 1758. "Cutt down some very large Timbers for Girders ... but could find no more than 2."


Construction of the new house was delayed because of the factor's desire to improve the general fortifications and because of very busy summer seasons when ships arrived from Britain.
Mar. 12, 1759. "Making Sash frames for the new House."


Mar. 27. "Fitting up some Cabbins in the Mens House for the Master and his Officers, and the People in his House to lye in while the new House is building."

Mar. 28. "Taking down the lining of the old House and some of its Partitions."

Mar. 30. "Taking the lead off the old House and getting up part of the Roof & Floors of the new house."

Apr. 2. "Pulling down the old House."

Apr. 9. "Laying the girders for the ground Floor."

Apr. 12. "2 Men gone to the Woods to cutt down some large Poles for 2 Triangles to raise the Girders up to the first Floor."

Apr. 30. "Cutting joysts."

May 7. "Laying the upper Girders."

May 12. "Calking the inside of the new House."

May 14. "Laying on part of the Roof."

May 21. "Calking that part of the Roof which is laid."
"Siding of timber and cutting joists."

June 7. "Bricklayer repairing the Stove often he used "stove" for "fireplace" Chimney in the new house."

June 8. "Carpenter getting the head up and laying it upon the new House."

June 11. "Laying the remainder of the Lead on the Roof."
June 13. "Laying the lower Floor."

June 16. "Laying the upper Floor." "Taking off the top of the Chimney belonging to the new House and carrying the same higher."

July 2. "Putting up the Wainscotting of the upper Floor."

July 6. "Bricklayer & one Man making Mortar to be ready to begin to build the Chimney in the Masters apartment in the new House."


Oct. 23. Men have "gone to get some Cedar to make Laths in order to Lath & Plaister the Ceiling of the lower Floor of the new House before and over the Stove in order to prevent any accident by Fire."

Nov. 10. "Preparing some stuff for Ceiling the dining Room in the Master's new House."

Feb. 11, 1760. "Plaining Boards for Ceilings for some of the rooms in the Master's new House."

June 16. "Bricklayer notching the Outside of the house in order to plaster the same."


Fort Qu'Appelle, HBC, 1867

Isaac Cowie, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, arrived at Fort Qu'Appelle in 1867. The post that he saw was then only

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three years old:

So Mango led me to the door of the "big house," which faced the gate from the back of the square. In the Indian reception hall and office, on which the front door opened, the lady of Qu'Appelle lakes gave me kindly welcome.

The master's house, 40 by 30 feet, one story, with light high loft above, built just like the stockade, but with squared logs instead of slabs, and thickly thatched with beautiful straw - the best roof to keep heat in as well as to keep it out that I have ever lived under. This and the interpreter's house were the only buildings in the place which had glass windows, which consisted each of an upper and lower sash, with six panes of eight and one-half by seven and one-half inch glass, all the other windows in the establishment being of buffalo parchment.

The west end of this building was used as the office and hall for the reception of Indians transacting business and making speeches. My bedroom opened off this. The east end contained the messroom and the master's apartments. Behind and connected by a short passageway with "the big house" was another building, divided by log partitions into a kitchen and cook's bedroom, and into a nursery for Mr. McDonald's children and their nurse.

The rooms were all floored, lined and ceiled with white poplar, tongued and grooved and planed plank and boards - all hand work. The furniture was also all made on the spot out of white poplar, which is a fine wood for inside work, and makes beautifully white flooring.26

Fort Victoria, HBC, 1850.

From the reminiscences of an anonymous person at Fort Victoria in 1850, one learns that Bachelors' Hall "was a portion of a large story-and-a-half building, having a common room in the center, and two rooms on each side, with a door opening into each. One of these rooms was occupied as the 'surgery,' the other two rooms by officers of the Company. The remainder of the building . . . belonged to the chaplain and lady . . . who kept a boarding-school for young ladies therein."

As for the buildings in general, there were "about a dozen large, story-and-a-half buildings, say 60 X 40, roofed with long and wide strips of cedar bark. The buildings were for the storage of goods, Indian trading-shop, and a large shop for general trade." The mess room, in the chief factor's house, "was more than thirty feet long by, say, twenty wide; a large open fireplace at one end, and large pieces of cordwood burning therein." 27

White Earth House, NWCo., Saskatchewan River, 1810

Alexander Henry, Jr., built White Earth House in 1810 for the North West Company. Because of the threat of Indian hostilities, it and the Hudson's Bay post of the same name shared a common stockade, the two establishments remaining separate by means of

27. Begg, pp. 213-16.
a common interior fence. Although it was not a large post, Henry's comments on it are noted because of his penchant for recording the number of working days required for various tasks and for giving various dimensions:

June 8, 1810. "Sent women for gum to daub the covering of the house, and men to collect stones for the chimneys."

June 15. "I sent for white clay, of which there is plenty near a small lake about two miles from here. Sent men sawing boards to finish covering the house."

June 28. "Men finished raising 1,150 pine bark pieces, of which 250 were raised some time ago."

July 20. "Men finished covering the house with mud, earth, and pine bark; not a drop of water penetrated. **The men have finished the Indian house, excepting the upper flooring, for which we have no plank. The house, 70 by 20 feet, has been exactly one month in building, since the wood was all upon the spot; five men have worked continually."

July 31. "Men began the kitchen and W. wing off the house."

Aug. 4. "Beauregard is making the chimney in the big house; others are covering the kitchen and small house."

Aug. 8. "Men finished the chimneys and covered the kitchen. I had my house uncovered, fresh muddled, and new bark put on."

Aug. 25. "The five chimneys finished - a job for three weeks for three men. Men finished smoothing all the planks for the house, 20 and 12 feet long."
Aug. 29. "Desnoyers hauled in logs for the cellar - say 60 by 15 feet, and 30 of 12 feet."


Sept. 1. "This is the twenty-eighth day that Faille has been making mortar for the big house; he has just finished. Chimneys and plastering being completed for the present, two men began to whitewash with the clay of this place, which is as white as lime."

Sept. 3. "Two laying the upper flooring in the big house, two plowing plank." 28

York Factory, HBC, 1840s

York Factory was the principal port of entry for the Hudson's Bay Company. Ships from England landed their cargoes of personnel and supplies each summer and took on board the furs destined for world markets. The fort occupied several sites and went through several phases of construction and reconstruction. The descriptions here concern the final fort, one that still has buildings standing, although the post is now inactive. All the houses at this post were wooden. The house in which Factor Hargrave and his wife lived in the early 1840s, and in which the winter mess was located, is described by Mrs. Hargrave's editor:

This house was a one-storied square building with centre door and hall. To the right on entering was the drawing-room, with the adjoining "pale blue bedroom" which the Finlaysons occupied during their stay. Off the hall on the left was the dining-room, used as the gentlemen's mess in winter. It was a big room lighted at night by an argand lamp. * * * A door at the back of the hall opened into a sitting room, with a bedroom off it which the Hargraves occupied until the Finlayson's left in September.

Mrs. Hargrave herself wrote in 1840:

I was much surprised at the "great swell" the Factory is. It looks beautiful. The houses are painted pale yellow. The windows and some particular parts white. Some have green gauze mosquito curtains outside and altogether the effect is very good. Our house is a good size, 1 bedroom off each sitting room and men servants rooms off the kitchen a very large closet off the dining-room.

Ballantyne described Bachelors' Hall at York Factory, wherein he lived in 1841. He said that the hall proper took up most of the one-story building. The sleeping apartments of the clerks, which led off from the hall, were small. Although the walls had once been white, a smoky stove had long since turned them a dingy yellow. The floor was simply bare wood both in the hall and in the bedrooms. He noted too that at the advent of winter, double doors and double windows "were fitted in." Although the hall was by no means luxurious, Ballantyne considered it comfortably "snug."

Dr. John A. Hussey, in his *History of Fort Vancouver and Its Physical Structure*, has done a thorough job of analyzing the style of construction and the appearance of the manager's residence, which included the mess hall. In that Hussey's book is readily available to all concerned with the project, no effort is made here to reproduce the details, except to summarize briefly the general comments on construction.

Most of the structures were built in the "Canadian" style, or posts-on-sill. The sills had no permanent underpinning, but rested on wooden blocks. As some sills were very close to the ground, workmen found it difficult to repair inner ones. The grooved uprights of the walls, that stood on the sills, were from 6 to 10 feet apart. The horizontal timbers that fitted into the grooves were about 6 inches thick. (This measurement compares favorably with a photograph of the timbers used at Fort Victoria.) These timbers were either sawn or hewn. No nails were used to join them until at least 1841. (Fort Vancouver was founded in 1825.)

Roof plates lay on the tops of the uprights, and the rafters rose from them. Until the early 1840s, sawed boards, one foot wide and one inch thick covered the roofs. These boards were grooved on the edges and were laid "up and down" so as to shed water. In the 1840s shingles replaced these boards. Hussey records that before the 1840s all the roofs were apparently single gable, but after that the main buildings acquired hip roofs.
A few of the major buildings, such as the manager's residence, were weatherboarded and some of them painted white. The interiors were "unpretending." He described the apothecary's hall, in 1833, as having its roof about 20 feet from the floor, supported by two rafters and two transverse beams. It had one door and one large window on the front, and a door and a window, with a fireplace between them, on the back wall. The fireplace was built of stone and lime and had no grate.

Only the manager's residence attempted elegance. Probably before 1849 it was painted and papered. Most of the dwellings were ceiled with tongue and grooved dressed boards. While most of the floors were made of rough boards, the manager's residence and office had planed floors. Windows were small-paned, their frames being made at the post. While most chimneys were brick, a few were stone. Doors were hung with metal hinges.

Thus were the structures of the fur traders. The record of Grand Portage's buildings is scanty indeed. From Fort William's records we got a better concept of the Great Hall and of construction at that early time. The additional post descriptions, covering a great extent of time and geography, indicate that construction methods, while adapted to local conditions, were much the same everywhere throughout the fur trade in the Northwest.
Chapter 3

Fur Trade Construction

The preceding chapter demonstrated the lack of specific information concerning Grand Portage's Great Hall. Despite the scarcity of facts, a reconstruction requires making decisions by planners and managers. To assist in conjecturing and deciding, this chapter discusses construction of fur trading posts, first in a general way, then the parts of the structures in more detail—walls, roof, floors, windows, and so forth.

The information below comes from both published and unpublished accounts, the latter particularly from the records of the Hudson's Bay Company. To document each particular fact would result in impossibly long footnotes, of little value. Instead, one footnote will follow each section.

Construction In General

For the most part, the British fur trade posts incorporated the style of construction called Canadian, Red River frame, posts-on-sill, poteaux sur sole, and so forth, that had its origin in France and reached the New World through French colonists. Even the Hudson's Bay Company, after a brief period of building military-type forts on the edges of Hudson Bay, early adopted this type of construction. After the merger of that Company with the North West Company in 1821, which resulted in the absorption of a large number of French Canadian employees, posts-on-sill construction became even more widespread.
An engaging account of this construction technique appeared in 1832, when a seacoast Yankee missionary wrote home from the wilds of present Wisconsin. Because the manner of building by the American Fur Company was so different from what he knew back home, he explained in detail what he saw:

The timbered houses are... built by those who come to this country Lac du Flambeau for trade. You are... aware that we have no mills of any kind for sawing timber or grinding grain. All timber for building must be prepared by hand. A few buildings are reared nearly in the old Yankee manner of building log houses, that is, or round timbers locked together at the ends. The most common method however, is to build with hewed timber. There is a great abundance of good building timber almost everywhere in this country. When a building is to be put up, the timber for the sills, beams & posts is cut and squared into suitable sticks, usually with a common axe, for a hewing broad axe is seldom seen here, and no body knows how to use it.

The sills & beams are generally locked or halfed together at the corners of the building, for few can frame them with tenant tenon and mortice. A mortice is made in the sill for a post wherever it is needed & another in the beam. A groove is made in each post from top to bottom about 2 inches in width, and three or four inches deep. Timbers are then hewed six or seven inches thick and the ends cut till they are fitted to the groove in the post, and of sufficient length to reach from one post to another. They are then introduced one after another till the walls of the building are completed. These timbers answer every purpose answered by studs, braces, and boarding in the English mode of building.