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TOWARD A TRAIT LIST FOR THE NORTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

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Introduction

In 1776 the building of Sturgeon Fort near present-day Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, by Peter Pond, an independent trader, initiated continuous direct contact between Indian and non-Indian cultures on the North Saskatchewan River. This juxtaposition of cultures suggests the possibility of acculturation studies at many levels. For such studies to be successfully realized, a well defined cultural continuum must be established for the area.

To date, such a continuum is lacking where historical records are non-existent and/or where contact sites have been excavated but cannot be assigned to a rather specific period of time or a specific group of inhabitants. This applies to the trading posts, the major contact sites, as well as to smaller outposts or Indian encampments.

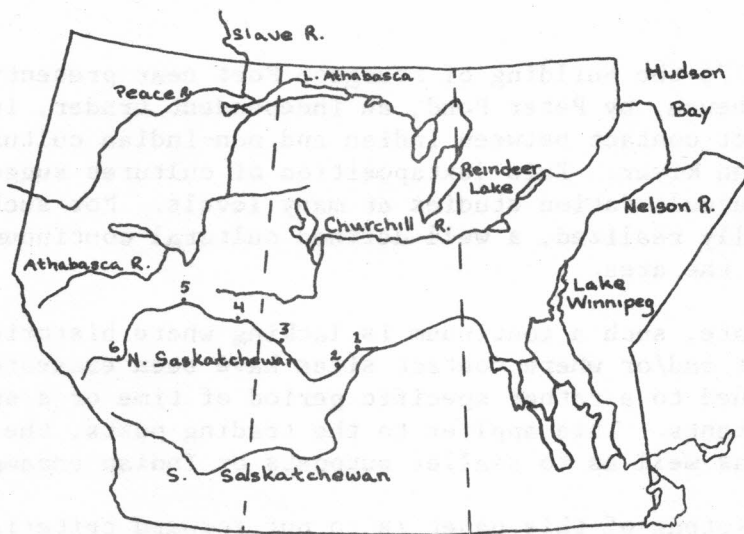
The intent of this paper is to put forward criteria which will aid in assigning some items of material culture, and therefore sites, to a particular period of time (1786-1813). Only the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company are discussed, as there is little documentary or archaeological evidence relating to the few other, much smaller, companies who briefly fought for a share of the Saskatchewan trade during the period of time being considered. The development of regional trait lists is a mundane chore, but insofar as it enables us to gain a more complete cultural history of an area, it makes possible the more dynamic acculturation studies.

The North Saskatchewan in the Fur Trade

All of the posts along the North Saskatchewan served an important function in addition to being trading establishments. Situated as they were in the parkland, a narrow zone between boreal forest and open plains, they had access to the resources of all three regions. A. S. Morton, in his introduction to Duncan McGillivray's Journal (1929), has pointed out the special role of the North West Company establishments on the North Saskatchewan, the Forts des Prairies, as provisioning depots for the more northerly posts in the fur-rich boreal forest. A major difficulty for the northern brigades was the time required for them to journey to and from the Grand Portage each summer. These journeys could just be fitted in between break-up and freeze-up, with no time for hunting or fishing expeditions along the

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Figure 1



FUR TRADE SITES ON THE NORTH
SASKATCHEWAN MENTIONED IN TEXT

1. Pond's Fort Sturgeon (Independent). 1776-1780.
2. Carlton House (HBCo.). 1810-1885.
3. Pine Island Fort (NWCo.). 1786-1794.
4. Fort George (NWCo.). 1792-1800.
Buckingham House (HBCo.). 1792-1800.
5. Edmonton House III (HBCo.). 1810-1813.
Terre Blanche (NWCo.). 1810-1813.
6. Rocky Mountain House (NWCo.). 1799-1821.
Acton House (HBCo.). 1799-1821.
Rocky Mountain House (HBCo.). 1821-1874.

NOTE: Sites at ¹/₂ and 6 cannot be specifically
located from documentary sources.

way. Thus, the Saskatchewan posts, in their favorable position, had to provide not only for their own sustenance, but also for the journeys of the northerners. An important part of the trade of a Saskatchewan post was with Indians from the plains who brought dry provisions, primarily beat meat and fat, from which the staple travelling diet of pemmican was made. This became true for the Hudson's Bay Company posts as well as those of the Nor'westers.

The Sites

The traits are derived from studies of five excavated sites which are positively identified from documentary sources. Archaeological data from all five sites were available to the author at the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta during the winters of 1968-69 and 1969-70.

The earliest sample is from Pine Island Fort, excavated by A. J. Ranere for the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources in 1966. This post was built by Peter Pangman for the short-lived Gregory-McLeod concern in 1786, and from 1787 to 1794 was operated by the North West Company. It is on an island in the river, near present-day Edam, Saskatchewan. Materials from this site are now deposited with the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources.

A second North West Company sample comes from Fort George, a post operated from 1792-1800 on the north bank of the river near Elk Point, Alberta. R. S. Kidd excavated here in the summers of 1965, 1966 and 1967 for the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta. Buckingham House, of the Hudson's Bay Company, the rival and neighbor of Fort George, was excavated in 1966 by Kidd for the same institution. It, too, was occupied from 1792-1800 and constitutes the third sample in the study.

The fourth and fifth samples come from Edmonton House III, of the Hudson's Bay Company, and Terre Blanche, of the North West Company, which are located near Smoky Lake, Alberta. Edmonton House III was excavated in 1966 and 1968 by Kidd and J. S. Nicks, respectively, for the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta. Terre Blanche was excavated by Nicks in 1969. These posts operated from within a common stockade between 1810 and 1813. Excavations of the latter site are not yet fully analyzed.

The author served as assistant archaeologist in the Buckingham and Edmonton House III/Terre Blanche projects.

Time and Space

Assuming the fur trade to have effectively ended by 1870, when the Hudson's Bay Company sold Rupert's Land to Canada, it is obvious that the present samples, ranging from 1786 to 1813, relate only to the early fur trade on the North Saskatchewan.

Occupations of individual posts are noticeably short. Removal to new sites was undertaken for several reasons: over-exploitation of furs in regions near a post; as a method of over-extending the resources in goods and personnel of smaller competitors and thus forcing them out of the trade; or to avert the dangers of having Indian groups hostile to each other meeting at the same post. If the Saskatchewan posts were fortunately situated for trade coming in from boreal forest and plains, they were unfortunate in that the inhabitants of these regions had no particular love for each other and, on occasion, showed little love for the traders whom they considered to be aiding their enemies. The traders' problems are the archaeologists' gain--short occupations provide tightly dated assemblages from which "horizon markers" can be isolated.

In terms of space, these sites cover about half of the length of the river. Since they overlap in time with more distant posts (for example, Buckingham House and Edmonton House III overlap with the Rocky Mountain and Acton Houses at the extreme west end of the river), conclusions can probably be extended, within the specified time range, over the whole river. One might note, in support of this statement, that each company's posts were yearly supplied by a fall brigade of canoes carrying goods procured at an eastern source which were distributed to various posts as they passed westward.

A Preliminary List

Artifacts which proved, or promise to be, indicative of a particular period of time or company are discussed below. Because the samples used cover a rather short time span, twenty-seven years, attention was directed toward those artifact types for which there is documented evidence for change in style or availability through time. This approach leads not only to consideration of developments in manufacturing technology, but also of chronologies developed for other regions where archaeological and historical research has been undertaken.

Glass Trade Beads. Because of their common occurrence, much time and effort has been expended in attempts to force glass trade beads to give up chronological information. A summary of bead types found is presented in Figure 2 (see page 39). The samples demonstrate considerable uniformity in bead types for the time and region. Notable is the preponderance of small beads of drawn tubing, often called embroidery beads, or classed, according to diameter, as pony, intermediate or seed beads. The predominance of blue and white beads suggests that these were colors preferred by the Indian customers.

Other types of beads are too poorly represented to allow extensive or conclusive comparisons. Although "wampum" beads were found only at Fort George, one cannot safely assume that only the North West Company offered these beads for trade. A reference in the 1798 post journals of Edmonton House I indicates that the Hudson's Bay Company very likely brought shell beads to the Saskatchewan as well (HBRs, 1967:

FIGURE 2

Glass Trade Beads	Pine Island (1786-1794)	Fort George (1792-1800)	Buckingham House (1792-1800)	Edmonton House III (1810-1813)	Terre Blanche (1810-1813)
1. Total Sample	923	20,719	602	706	40.1
2. % of small beads of drawn tubing in total sample	96.2%	99.2%	98.6%	98.7%	94.7
3. % of (2) which are translucent medium blue	47.9%	28.3%	35.7%	55.3%	47.38
4. % of (2) which are white (with or without cores)	35.8%	59.0%	43.4%	28.6%	23.9
5. Other colors of small drawn tubing beads listed in order of prevalence. Opaque and translucent beads of the same color are lumped.	Yellow, Cornaline d'Alleppe, Green, Grey-blue, Wine, Dark blue, Blue covered with brick red enamel or patina, red	Cornaline d'Alleppe, Red, Blue covered with brick red enamel or patina, Green, Wine, Yellow, Black, Translucent, White with blue or blue and red stripes, Dark blue, Brown	Blue-grey, Green, Wine, Cornaline d'Alleppe, Yellow, Red, Dark blue, Blue covered with brick red enamel or patina, Black, Translucent	Red, Black, Wine, Green, Blue covered with brick red enamel or patina, Yellow, Cornaline d'Alleppe, Translucent, Dark blue	Red, Green, Dark blue, Blue covered with brick red enamel or patina, Yellow, Cornaline d'Alleppe
6. Shell (Wampum)	--	33	--	--	--
7. "Bugle" beads (long beads of drawn tubing)	24	41	1	3	--
8. Mandrel Wound Beads:					
Monochrome	11	72	5	3	10
Decorated	1	6	1	1	8
9. Chevron or star beads	--	--	1	1	--
10. Small Spherical Beads:					
Monochrome	--	6	1	3	1
Decorated ("Kitty Fisher's Eyes")	1	3	--	--	1
11. Faceted Beads	--	--	--	--	10

114). The greater numbers of mandrel wound beads, particularly the decorated varieties, at North West Company sites may have some significance but may also reflect amount and location of excavations.

The samples of small beads of drawn tubing were sized for Pine Island, Buckingham House and Edmonton House III in an attempt to evaluate Conn's (n.d.) redefinition of the "pony bead period". Briefly, he suggests that rather than being a time when the smallest varieties of beads were simply not available on the Plains and Plateau, the pony bead period, from the introduction of embroidery beads until the mid-nineteenth century, represents a time during which the Indians lacked appropriate tools to utilize the very small sizes. Using Conn's system, in which beads 2 mm. and less in diameter are "seed" beads, those between 2 and 3 mm. are "intermediate" beads, and 3 mm. or over are "pony" beads, the following distribution results:

	<u>Pine Island</u>		<u>Buckingham</u>		<u>Edmonton House III</u>	
Seed	2	0.2%	4	0.7%	2	0.3%
Intermediate	174	20.0%	80	13.4%	63	9.1%
Pony	697	79.8%	511	85.9%	625	90.6%

The distribution reflects the continuous variation of sizes that is to be expected, given the method by which the beads were manufactured. Visual inspection of the Fort George and Terre Blanche samples suggests a similar range. The infrequency of the smaller sizes may reflect, as Conn suggests, taste and technology of the Indian customers. Very small beads would be difficult to use in embroidered decoration before needles and thread had widely replaced awl and sinew.

Glass Bottles. Liquor bottle fragments found at all sites have the double string rim indicative of such bottles made in the eighteenth century or later (Cotter, 1968:33-35; Quimby, 1966:74). These bottles had round, square or octagonal cross-sections.

Fragments of patent medicine bottles with round or rectangular cross-sections, short necks and flaring lips were found at all sites. Brands recognized are Turlington's Balsam of Life and Essence of Peppermint.

Metal Buttons. Buttons were rather common artifacts, except at Pine Island. The samples were compared with Olsen's chronology (1963) in an attempt to ascertain the usefulness of his scheme for Saskatchewan sites. The results do not recommend the method. Many types of buttons found had no counterparts on Olsen's chart and those types that were comparable were common in Olsen's area earlier than the date of occupation of the Saskatchewan sites. None of Olsen's types represented at Edmonton House III, for instance, were common in his area after 1800. Thus, one might be tempted, from this evidence alone, to date the site too early.

There are two types of buttons which are clearly indicative of the Hudson's Bay Company. These are illustrated in Figure 3 (a and

Discussion

The present paper has suggested criteria which have proven of potential use in dating or assigning contact sites on the North Saskatchewan in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the North West or Hudson's Bay Company.

The possibility of acculturation studies alluded to in the introduction can be illustrated from the five sites studied. In all the assemblages, native tools and/or techniques are represented. Bone fleshers were found at all sites. At Pine Island, a broken bone snowshoe needle was found and a well battered grooved maul was located near the anvil block in the blacksmith's shop. At Terre Blanche, one porcelain sherd, about the size of a thumbnail scraper, was found with unifacial steep flaking along one edge.

These findings suggest that the traders were benefitting in business and everyday activities from the Indians' culture--a point perhaps not often enough made.* It would be interesting to study this aspect of the trader-Indian relationship further. Archaeological samples which could be dated and assigned to English or Canadian traders would be a great aid.

The limitations of the present trait list deserve mention. In the first place, the method by which the traits were derived is backward. Rather than working from archaeological samples, it would be preferable to use a more direct approach to find out when a given company was sending out particular types of goods. This is not practical, in part because company records are not always easily accessible and in part because such records are not always specific enough for meaningful comparisons. Beads, for instance, were usually ordered by code numbers, not full descriptions.

With the method used, the problems of sample size and comparability due to extent of excavation arise. The portability of some artifacts, such as buttons (a beaver button was found at Fort

*The Indian wives and families of Hudson's Bay Company traders, for instance, were seldom mentioned in the post journals, probably at least in part in deference to religious feelings concerning "marriages of the country" in head office in London. One letter to the Governor and Committee did defend the wives by enumerating the tasks they performed at the posts: "... they clean and put into a state of preservation all Beaver and Otter skins brought by the Indians undried and in bad Condition. They prepare Line for Snowshoes and knit them also without which your Honors servants could not give efficient opposition to the Canadian traders they make Leather shoes for the men who are obliged to travel about in search of Indians and furs and are usefull in a variety of other instances, in short they are Virtually your Honors Servants and as such we hope you will consider them (HBSR, 1967:xcix-c).

George) or silver trinkets (a brooch with a Montreal silversmith's stamp was found at Edmonton House III), presents complications. Many of the types are very durable and so cause confusion when trying to establish an occupation date. Relative traits, such as increasing amounts of pottery through time, are admittedly difficult to apply to single sites.

For all these reasons, the trait list must be considered tentative and it must be checked against data as they become available from other sites on the Saskatchewan or further archival research. Hopefully, the list will be extended in time and its applicability in terms of space defined.