

CHANGES TO THE NATIVE ECONOMY OF NORTHERN MANITOBA IN THE POST-TREATY PERIOD: 1870-1900

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INTRODUCTION

The period immediately following the signing of treaties between the government of Canada and the Indians is a distinct period of Native history. It is generally assumed that the treaty period was an illogical and sudden shock to Indian society. A corollary of this view is that Indians were tricked into signing away their aboriginal homelands.¹ Similarly, it is not uncommon to hear that Indians were incapable of understanding the significance of their land and were unable to make the economic adjustments that a life based on a reservation required.

This paper will examine the major historical processes for the region representing the Interlake and Northern Manitoba from 1870 to 1900. It is apparent that the period reflected the efforts of Native Peoples to adjust to the declining mercantile fur trade. In contrast, the period after the signing of treaties is generally seen as a period when Indians were suddenly confined to reservations. In fact, the development of the reservation at particular locations for distinct Indian bands was a continuation of a settlement process, influenced by fur trade posts and missionaries, originating before the signing of the treaties. This paper will argue that the adjustments made from 1870 to 1900 were a spatial and economic transformation of the Native economy, which had been largely dependent upon the fur trade, to a more diversified and a more commercialized economy.

MAJOR CHANGES TO THE NATIVE ECONOMY PRIOR TO 1870

The dominant view on Native history is that the Indians of the Subarctic changed very little in the 200 years after contact. It is generally felt that Indians remained 'traditional' until the sudden and dramatic changes that occurred after the Second World War. It has been argued that after 1945, that is the so-called 'Modern Period,' government officials and missionaries made a concerted effort to change Native cultures.² For example, fewer Indians made a living as hunters and trappers. In fact, the period prior to 1870 witnessed a fundamental transformation of self-reliant, subsistence-based band society into a group of people whose economic activities revolve around commodity production for a large mercantile company.³ During the first 200 years of the fur trade, Indians became increasingly committed to commodity production and the self-reliant character of the band society was worn down and replaced with dependency relations. Major changes during this period which typify dependency relations include: the replacement of local production for European commodities; demographic alterations (tribal migrations, epidemics, depopulation and the development of the Métis); a narrowing of the resource base with the depletion of game and fur animals; the commercialization of social relationships

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within band societies and a reduction in the size of bands.⁴ All these changes are a consequence of a shift from production for localized use-value to production for exchange-value for an external market.

TREATIES

Between 1871 and 1875, five treaties were signed between the Indians of the Northwest and the Dominion Government (see Map 1). These treaties can be considered a process of land alienation which occurred within a short time frame. Treaties Number One, Two, and Five are most relevant to the study area but Treaties Three and Four are historical events which help to provide an understanding of the reasoning behind the government's motivation and the Indians' acceptance of the treaties.

Essentially, the treaties extinguished tribal property rights to large areas, and transferred the ownership of this land to the Dominion Government in exchange for Government support to the Indians in times of need, for assistance in making a transition from hunting and trapping to an agricultural economy, for help in educating children and for annuities. As well Morris stated: "... that the amelioration of their present condition is one of the objects of Her Majesty in making these treaties."⁵

Clearly, the Canadian Government's main interest in treating with Indians was to clear aboriginal title to land which could be used for agricultural settlement. This reason does not explain the complexity of motivations for the Dominion Government's signing of Treaty Five and it should be noted that much of the land in Treaties One and Two was not prime agricultural land. Lieutenant Governor Archibald described other reasons for the alienation of aboriginal title:

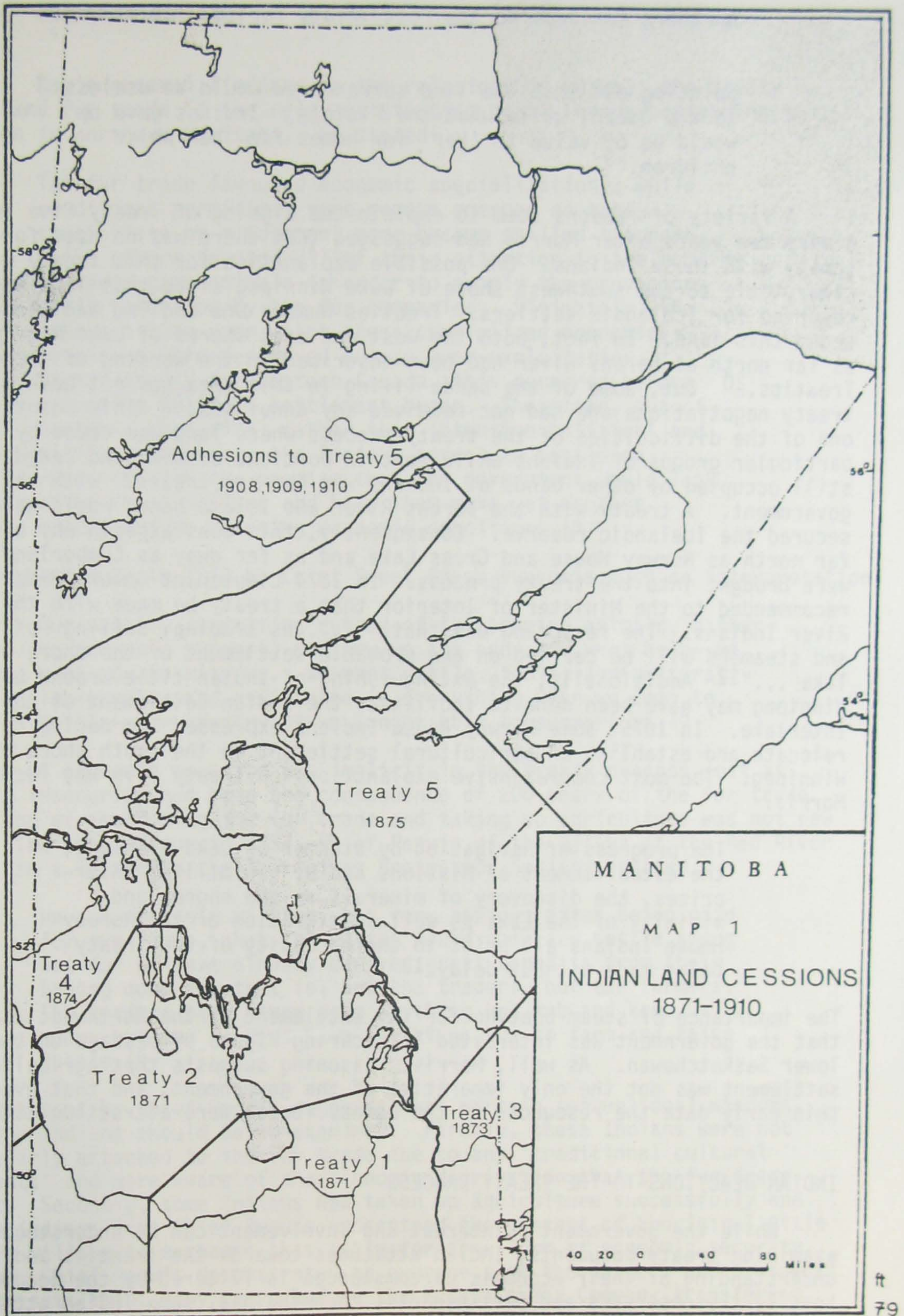
We were all of opinion that it would be desirable to procure the extinction of the Indian title, not only to the lands within the Province, but also to so much of the timber grounds to the east and north of the Province...⁶

Consequently, Archibald recommended: "We therefore propose to open negotiations at the Lower Fort with Indians of the Province, and certain adjacent Timber Districts..."⁷ One of the government's reasons for treating with the Indians was to offer in exchange for land support, annuities and an economic strategy which involved taking up agricultural pursuits. This was not the dominant concern. As Lieutenant Governor Morris noted in 1873,

... the country lying adjacent to Norway House is not adapted for agriculture purposes and ... there is therefore no present necessity for the negotiation of any treaty with the Indians.⁸

Indeed, when the government negotiated the terms of the Treaty with the Indians in Treaty Five it argued that the land was not valuable. T. Howard, Indian Commissioner stated:

... but I at last made them understand the difference between their position and the Plain[s] Indians, by



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pointing out that the land surrendered would be useless to the Queen, while what the Plain[s] Indians gave up would be of value to 'Her' for homes for "her white children."⁹

A variety of reasons seem to explain the signing of Treaty Five in 1875, a mere two years after Morris had suggested that there was no need for a treaty with these Indians. One possible explanation for this treaty was to clear title to the southwest shore of Lake Winnipeg since this land had been reserved for Icelandic settlers. Treaties Number One and Two had already ceded this land. In fact, both the west and east shores of Lake Winnipeg as far north as Berens River had been described in the wording of these Treaties.¹⁰ But, some of the bands living in this area had not been at the treaty negotiations and had not received any annuities.¹¹ This points to one of the difficulties of the treaty process where land was ceded by particular groups of Indians while certain portions of the land ceded were still occupied by other bands of Indians who had not treated with the government. A treaty with the Berens River and Island bands would have secured the Icelandic reserve. Consequently, this does explain why bands as far north as Norway House and Cross Lake and as far away as Cumberland House were brought into the treaty process. In 1874 Lieutenant Governor Morris had recommended to the Minister of Interior that a treaty be made with the Berens River Indians. The reasoning was that: "... as trading, sailing of vessels and steamers will be carried on and probable settlement of the shore of the lake ..."¹² Additionally, the extinguishing of Indian title around Lake Winnipeg may have been done to facilitate the Indian settlement of the Interlake. In 1875, some Norway House Indians expressed the desire to relocate and establish an agricultural settlement on the south shore of Lake Winnipeg. The most comprehensive explanation for Treaty Five was recorded by Morris:

The progress of navigation by steamer on Lake Winnipeg, the establishment of Missions and of saw milling enterprises, the discovery of minerals on the shores and vicinity of the Lake as well as migration of the Norway House Indians all point to the necessity of the Treaty being made without delay.¹³

The importance of steam boating for the settlement of the Northwest meant that the government was interested in securing rights of passage on the lower Saskatchewan. As well, Morris' reasoning suggests that agricultural settlement was not the only imperative of the government, and that even at this early date the resources of the boreal forest were attracting attention.

INDIAN REACTIONS TO THE TREATY PROCESS

While the government's interest and involvement can be understood by examining treaty documents, Indian attitudes towards the treaties and their understanding of their economic circumstances is filtered by the documents kept by the observers and participants. Nonetheless, some Indian attitudes towards their participation in the treaty process can be discerned from these

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records. Ray's general findings on the relationship between the treaty process and fur trade is the relevant starting point for understanding the situation in northern Manitoba. He stated:

The fur trade favoured economic specialization. While conditions permitted, some groups emerged as trade specialists or middlemen, some became skilled trappers, while others devoted all of their attention to the hunting of large game animals in order to supply the provisions needs generated by the fur companies. Ultimately, the resource base upon which these specialized economies developed were destroyed due to over-exploitation. Significantly for Western Canada, this occurred before extensive European settlement began. Therefore, out of economic necessity, rather than intensive political and military pressure, the Indians agreed to settle on reserves with the promise that the government would look after their welfare and help them make yet another adjustment to changing economic conditions.¹⁴

The statement made in 1872 by Chief Sweet Grass supports such an interpretation:

Our country is getting ruined of fur bearing animals, hitherto our sole support, and now we are poor and want help--we want you to pity us. We want cattle, tools, agricultural implements, and assistance in everything when we come to settle--our country is no longer able to support us.¹⁵

The idea of economic security was implicit in the treaty process just as economic insecurity had been the consequence of 200 years of the fur trade. The notion of abandoning the fur trade and taking up agriculture was not new to some Indians. Prior to 1857, Chief Peguis of the Ojibwa of the Red River Valley, in a letter to the Aborigines Protection Society, stated:

We are not only willing, but very anxious after being paid for our lands, that the whites would come and settle among us, for we have already derived great benefits from their having done so, that is, not the traders, but the farmers. The traders have never done anything but rob and keep us poor, but the farmers have taught us how to farm and raise cattle.¹⁶

This statement by Chief Peguis suggests that certain conventional wisdoms about the Indians should be re-examined. Firstly, these Indians were not particularly attached to the fur trade due to any 'traditional cultural sentiments' and were aware of the economic deprivation that the fur trade brought. Secondly, some Indians had taken up agriculture successfully and finally Indians like Chief Peguis understood the concept of aboriginal title and were willing to exchange this title for some form of economic security. Moreover, Chief Peguis demonstrated an awareness of the dangers and prospects of white settlement many years before the Hudson's Bay Company transferred the land to the Dominion Government. He suggested that "before whites will

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be again permitted to take possession of our lands, we wish a fair and mutually advantageous treaty be entered into with my tribe for their lands..."¹⁷

When the actual treaty process began, Indian leaders demonstrated an understanding of aboriginal title and, depending upon their economic circumstances, a willingness to treat with the government. Not long after Lieutenant Governor Archibald arrived in Manitoba, Indians indicated an interest in a treaty and put pressure on the administration to meet with them by preventing settlers from cutting wood which the Indians understood to be their property.¹⁸ Lieutenant Governor Morris, after several unsuccessful efforts to negotiate Treaty Three, was finally able to report that "The negotiation was a very difficult and trying one..."¹⁹ One Indian told Morris that "we think where we are is our property."²⁰ During Treaty Four, Indians complained that certain parcels of land, due to the terms of the transfer to the Dominion Government, had been preempted by the Hudson's Bay Company. One Indian known as 'The Gambler' stated: "The Company have stolen our land" and that "The Company have no right to this earth..."²¹ Similarly, Pis-qua confronted a Hudson's Bay Company servant during negotiations stating "You told me you had sold your land for so much money, £300,000. We want that money."²² Additionally, tribal concepts of aboriginal title existed. The Cree had inhabited the Red River valley but were replaced by the Ojibwa when the Cree migrated to the west. The Ojibwa had migrated into the Red River valley some seventy years prior to Treaties One and Two. Nonetheless, the reaction to Treaty One by Cree in the Saskatchewan area was recorded by Archibald:

The Crees consider the Red River Country theirs, and could not understand what rights the Indians here [Red River] except such of them as were Crees, had to treat with for it.²³

Clearly, the concept of aboriginal title existed at the time of treaties.

Indians were prepared to give up aboriginal title under the duress created by decades of the mercantile fur trade. In 1873, in the case of Treaty Three it was reported that:

The Rainy River Indians were careless about the treaty, because they could get plenty of money for cutting wood for the boats, but the northern and eastern bands were anxious for one.²⁴

Indians in the northern and eastern parts were still dependent upon the fur trade. A similar situation existed in the Interlake and Northern Manitoba and the only alternative to the fur trade was subsistence agriculture. This required capital and legal title to land that could not be encroached upon by settlement. The Christian Indians of Norway House wrote to Lieutenant Governor Morris requesting a treaty in June, 1874.²⁵ With the development of steam power on Lake Winnipeg and the reorganization of the York boat brigades, it was anticipated that some 200 Norway House Indians would be unemployed. These Indians had expressed a desire to move to the south end of Lake Winnipeg and take up an agricultural way of life. Morris acknowledged that this was one of the reasons for Treaty Five. As well, in 1876 Indians from the Little Grand Rapids band expressed a desire to become part of the treaty.²⁶ Indian Commissioner J.S. Reid reported in 1876:

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Whilst at Norway House I was waited upon by a Chief and four Councillors from the vicinity of Oxford House, who were anxious to know if the same boundaries would be extended to them as were being extended to their brethern of Norway House and Cross Lake, and also whether they could obtain a reserve on Lake Winnipeg, as the country in which they were living was totally unfit for cultivation, and that they had the greatest difficulty in procuring a livelihood.²⁷

This was the first in a series of requests by the Indians of Northeastern Manitoba for a treaty. The Dominion Government did not seek the amelioration of their conditions and a treaty was not signed until 1908-1910, when the prospects of the Hudson Bay Railroad required the end of aboriginal title.

While Indians understood the concept of aboriginal title and treaties, there was a difference of opinion about the notion of reservations. Morris stated:

Furthermore, the Indians seem to have a false idea of the meaning of a reserve. They have been led to suppose that large tracts of ground were to be set aside for them as hunting grounds including timber lands, of which they might sell the wood as if they were proprietors of the soil.²⁸

In fact, Morris noted that the Indians "... were wishing to have two-thirds of the Province as a reserve."²⁹ The Indians of Fairford indicated prior to the treaty that they wanted fishing rights and an area which included most of the Interlake.³⁰ While it is generally recognized that treaties had little latitude for negotiations, Taylor has suggested that the treaty at Lower Fort Garry went beyond the original Ottawa draft and that additions were proposed by Indians which included schools, animals, implements and supplies.³¹ Again with respect to Treaties One and Two, misunderstandings arose concerning certain verbal promises that were not included in the wording of the Treaties at the time of signing. A number of these promises, referred to as the 'Outside Promises' included farm animals and equipment. The Outside Promises eventually became part of the treaties, but more importantly, these changes demonstrated that Indians saw the treaties as a means to make an economic adjustment.

In summary, the notion that the treaties were an injustice perpetrated by 'white culture' on an unsuspecting aboriginal peoples is a simplification. Such a position ignores the political economy of the Native Peoples and implies a certain inability on the part of Indian leaders. The transfer of the Northwest to Canada was an indication that the fur trade would become marginalized. Since the treaties were a consequence of a declining fur trade and the decision to change the economic function of the Northwest, the unjust character of the treaty process stems from an economic history which, by 1870, had suggested to Indian people very few alternatives to the terms of the treaties. The remaining question concerns how Native Peoples responded to the marginalization of the fur trade in the post-treaty period.

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LOCATION OF RESERVATIONS

Of importance to a geographical study of the Native economy is the location of Indian reservations, the settlement process and the resources associated with the reserves. The size of the reserves was "... to allow one hundred and sixty acres to each family of five persons, or in like portion as the family might be greater or less than five."³² Each band was to get its own reserve. Adjustments were made when it was realized that certain bands were in fact distinct. Most disputes concerning the status of a band did not centre on the department's reluctance to grant a separate reserve, but whether or not a band should have its own chief.

In most instances Indians were given their choice about where they wanted to locate their reserves. Grand Rapids was one exception. These Indians wanted both sides of the river and had established a village with buildings and gardens on the north side of the Saskatchewan River. They were paid to move and settle on the south side of the river because the portage route was on the north side.³³ As well, a number of Norway House Indians had hoped to settle at Grassey Narrows, but this had become part of the Icelandic settlement. They agreed to settle at Fisher River. Another group, the Island Band, had wanted to settle at Grassey Narrows but were turned down for the same reason.

While bands may have received the general sites they requested, they did not always receive the exact parcel of land they wanted. In 1879, dissatisfaction was recorded at Norway House because the surveyor refused to include some hay land on the Pine River.³⁴ The annual reports and the manuscript records of the Department of Indian Affairs indicate that, when changes were requested by Indians, the Department frequently had the reserves resurveyed and parcels of land were added and others removed.³⁵ When bands requested sites for strategic purposes, they were often turned down such as in the case of St. Martin band's desire to have a reserve on both shores of a narrows of an important fishery. In fact, other Indians were concerned about the possible consequences of this band's control over this resource.

Many Indians selected reservations near fisheries. Such locations reflected the increasing importance of fish for subsistence as game animals became scarce. Indian Commissioner J.A.N. Provencher noted that, in 1873, "All these Reserves appear to have been selected with much care, and all the reports demonstrate that they possess all the requisite advantages in a triple respect, of agriculture, the chase and fishing."³⁶ The location of some reservations--St. Peters, Lake Manitoba, Fort Alexander, Fairford, The Pas, and Norway House--were selected where existing Indian bands had settled, built cabins and had gardens. Other reservations, such as Cross Lake, Berens River, Chemawawin, and Moose Lake were located near Hudson's Bay Company posts or outposts. With the exception of Fisher River, to which a portion of the Norway House Indians moved in order to secure an improved agricultural situation, the sites of reservations were locations familiar to the Indian bands. All reservations reflected some resource potential, such as good hay lands or a location near a fishery. And after the flooding of reservations during the high water of the early 1880s, changes were made to reservation boundaries to incorporate higher land with agricultural potential.³⁷

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In summary, the location of reservations was influenced by a number of considerations. Existing fur trade posts and missions influenced the location of Indian villages prior to treaties and reservations were selected at these sites. Many of these locations had been seasonal sites for decades.

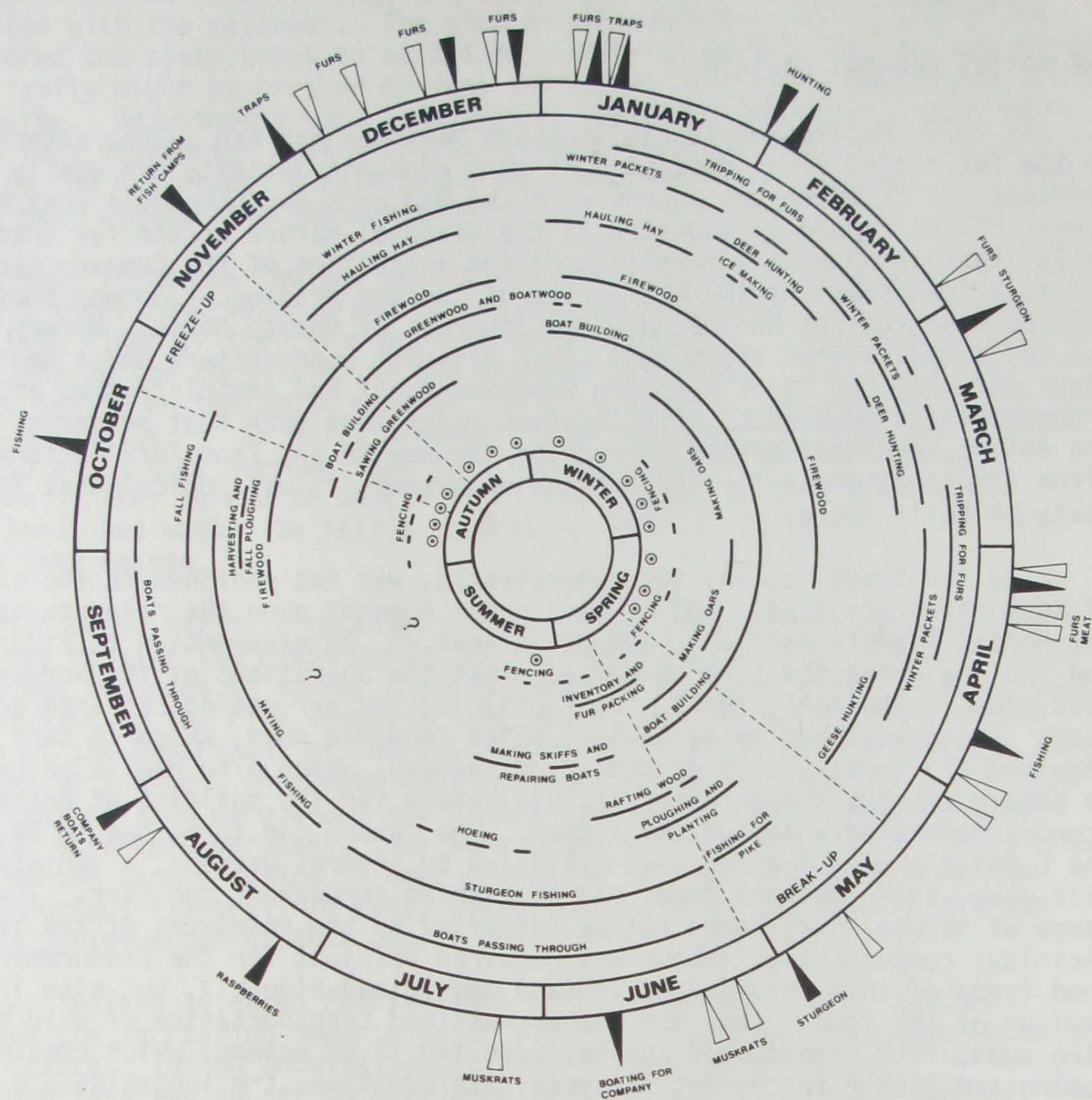
THE NATIVE ECONOMY CA 1870

By 1870, Native Peoples in northern Manitoba had had a long attachment to the fur trade. The complexity of this economic activity can easily be overlooked. Based on the journals of the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Norway House, Figure 1 reconstructs the seasonal nature of the fur trade. Daily journals provide information on the activities of the Company servants, and to a lesser extent the activities of Indians trading at Norway House, as well as observations on the "village Indians" of Norway House. Norway House was not a typical fur trade post. As a District Headquarters and a meeting place for the Council of Northern Department, it had administrative and transportation functions. Its location meant that York boat brigades from the entire Northwest passed through on the way to and from York Factory. Given its location in the transportation system, it was logical that York boats be built there.

The fur trade, as Ray has demonstrated, was not confined to the exchange of furs for trade goods, and it made great demands upon the resource base of the boreal forest, parkland, and grasslands.³⁸ An examination of Figures One and Two indicates the sort of demands that the operations of the Norway House Post made in the early 1870s. Boat building and oar making required green wood. Green wood had to be hauled, which required oxen, which in turn required hay (mostly wild grasses from swamps), which also had to be hauled. To obtain and move these resources, ultimately for the building of boats, the economy generated a demand for labour. The labour, in turn, had to be fed. The Company's need for food was satisfied by several gardens, a variety of wild game, some imported food, and by fishing throughout the year. The food needs of Norway House could not be satisfied by the resources of the immediate vicinity; consequently, labour was required not just for the procurement of food (some of this provided by Indians and 'mixed-bloods'), but also in the hauling of the food. Thus the procurement and transportation of wild game, fire wood, fish, green wood and hay resulted in an economy which created a demand for labour throughout the year. In addition, the long-distance transportation of trade goods and furs generated a demand for Indian labour during the summer. Apparently, the Norway House Indians were not known as 'trappers,' and Company records reported that "... many of the Indians seldom or never hunt furs but depend on summer labour, Treaty supplies, their gardens and fishing for their wants."³⁹ The economy of Norway House involved the transportation of trade goods and furs, the building of boats which also required considerable skilled labour and the procurement of a variety of resources to support the many demands of fur trade activities. Norway House's location and function in the fur trade generated a strong internal demand.

Norway House, however, was not representative of most fur trade posts, and many functioned simply as points of exchange and temporary depots for trade goods and furs. Through the long run of the nineteenth century, the

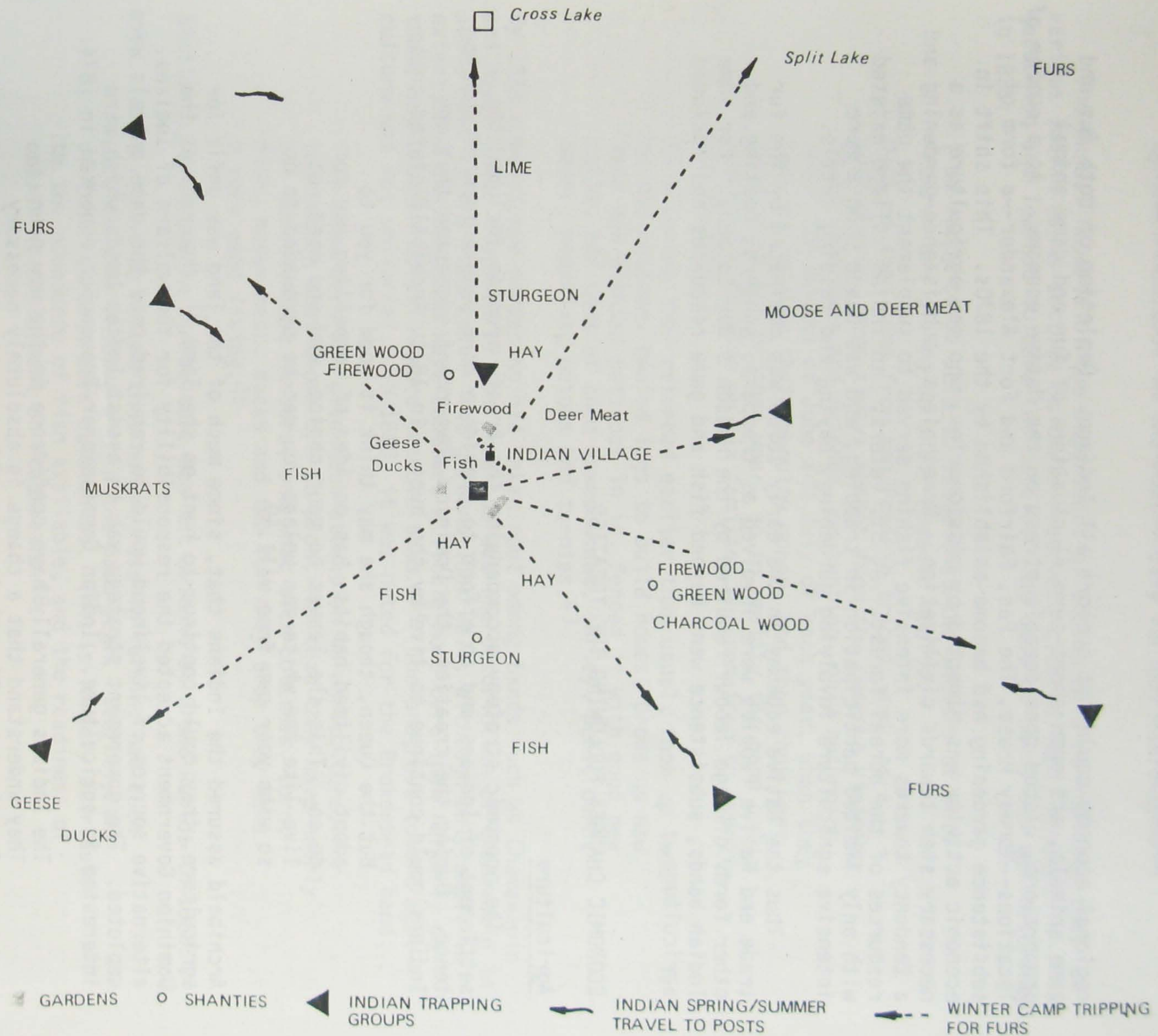
Figure 1 THE SEASONAL ECONOMY OF NORWAY HOUSE, 1873-1875



- △ Arrival of "Wood Indians" and other non-resident Indians at Norway House
- ▽ Return of "Village Indians" - those Indians resident in the vicinity of Norway House
- ▲ Departure of Norway House Indians
- ⊙ Various tradesmen at work, such as making packing crates, axes, ice chisels, sledges, soap and candles, and repairing guns and traps
- ? Records incomplete

SOURCE : P.A.M., H.B.C.A., B. 154/a/70-71

FIGURE 2 SPATIAL MODEL OF LOCAL RESOURCES USED AT NORWAY HOUSE ca. 1870's



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regional economy could not support all Indians. Depletion of both fur and game animals, and even short-term fluctuations of fur and game animal proportions, placed considerable stress on the Native economy. At a number of locations--Norway House, The Pas, Fairford and Fort Alexander--a form of subsistence gardening had become established by the 1870s. This shift in economic activity was directed by missionaries, who saw agriculture as a necessary step towards civilization. Nonetheless, subsistence gardening and a tendency towards more intensive fishing served to supplement the game resources of the boreal forest. At St. Peters, an Indian village existed with only limited participation in trapping, and was based upon a more intensive agriculture involving gardening, haying and raising cattle.

Thus the Native economy in the early 1870s was dominated by the fur trade and Native Peoples were involved as trappers, hunters, boating and other forms of wage labour required by the Hudson's Bay Company. For some Indian bands, subsistence went beyond fish and game resources and included agriculture.

ECONOMIC CHANGES FOLLOWING THE TREATIES

Agriculture

The economic strategy accompanying the treaty process included the settlement of Indians and an effort to provide a more secure form of subsistence. During the treaties, the Dominion Government suggested that the Indians could continue to live by the hunt. In 1871, Archibald stated that:

But the Queen, though she may think it good for you to adopt civilized habits, has no idea of compelling you to do so. This she leaves to your choice, and you need not live like the white man unless you can be persuaded to do so with your own free will.⁴⁰

Archibald assured the Indians that, since much of the land was unfit for agriculture, they could continue to hunt on the land.⁴¹ However, as the Dominion Government accepted the responsibility for the welfare of Indians, alternative sources of livelihood would be required once the game animals were depleted. The government strategy was to assist Indian bands which were interested in agriculture. Indian Commissioner Provencher reported in 1874:

The Indians generally have confidence in the new plan. They understand that a change is absolutely necessary for them, to alter their mode of existence. The chase and the arrow no longer bring them the advantages of former times... and if they do not hasten to seize the conditions offered to them, they run the risk of seeing their children obliged to leave the country or dying of hunger.⁴²

Once the Dominion Government had accepted responsibility for the welfare of Treaty Indians, it could no longer maintain the position, as it had implied at the time of the treaties, that change would not occur.

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The Annual Reports of the Department of Indian Affairs indicate that various Indian bands settled on their reserves, cleared land, engaged in gardening and learned to care for cattle. The case of Sandy Bay was described in 1885:

I am happy to be able to state that the Indians of this reserve are giving up their nomadic habits.

Most of them come from the Prairie tribes, and, as a consequence, were always absent from the reserve visiting their relatives and friends, or hunting, only returning about the months of June and July of each year, when they came to receive their annuity money, and then they went away again for another year, so in reality the band only numbered some five or six families who remained to improve the reserve.

This spring they returned earlier than usual, took up land on the reserve, hauled logs to build homes, broke up new land and planted potatoes in it, fenced it with good new rails, and some of them sowed wheat, barley, peas, corn, beans, pumpkins, onions and turnips.⁴³

By 1885, subsistence gardening had taken root among bands such as Chemawawin and Moose Lake. Typical of the progress was the description of Chemawawin in 1885, when it was reported: "The gardens look well, although only small in extent, but they seem to have bestowed a little more care than formerly on them, and promise to still more improve them."⁴⁴ The progress toward agriculture was not universal. In 1889, it was noted for the Brokenhead band:

This band does not give much attention to agriculture, for the reason that moose are so plentiful that they have nearly all turned moose hunters, and what with potatoes, corn, fish, moose meat, ducks and the fur they trap they make a very good living.⁴⁵

Similarly, progress in agriculture was not evident at Grand Rapids in 1882:

I regret to report that no progress in farming had been made on this reserve within the past year. Scarcely any of their gardens were cultivated. This is largely attributed to the abundance of fish available, and the readiness of obtaining employment on steamboats.⁴⁶

Although much progress was made in Indian agriculture in the post-treaty period, Indians were frequently distracted from the soil when other sources of income appeared more advantageous.

Commercial Fishing

Throughout the Interlake and northern Manitoba a variety of fish species was exploited by Indians, fur traders and white settlers under a common-property relationship. The initial commercialization of this resource

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occurred in the early 1880s when a strong demand resulted in an export-oriented industry. From the start, Indians reacted to the increasing scale of the commercial fishing operations. In 1884, the Indian agent at Beren's River recorded:

They resent that their fisheries are encroached upon by parties from Winnipeg, who, if allowed to continue the destruction of the whitefish and sturgeon at the present rate, will eventually exhaust the supply and deprive them of their principal source of subsistence.⁴⁷

As well, many Indian agents recorded declining fish yields for Indians. In 1889 it was reported that "whitefish are numerous north of Berens River but southward there are very few taken."⁴⁸ Again in 1890, poor results were obtained for the lake south of Berens River and for the Interlake reservations of Lake St. Martin, Fairford and the Little Saskatchewan River.⁴⁹ Evidence of the selective commercial fishing pressure on whitefish is that the average weight of the whitefish declined and yet other species were abundant.⁵⁰

In spite of the prospect that commercial fishing, as practiced in the 1880s, would deplete fisheries and threaten yet another source of subsistence, Native Peoples participated in this new industry. In 1887, the two largest firms on Lake Winnipeg employed "80 white men, 40 'half-breeds', and 185 Indians."⁵¹ The motives for participating in this industry, which jeopardized future food supplies, included a wage-income or trade goods and the realization that, with or without Native labour, commercial fishing would continue. In fact, commercial fishing spread north through Lakes Winnipegosis and Winnipeg into the Saskatchewan and Nelson Rivers. By 1900 Norway House Indians were heavily involved in commercial fishing. For 1899, it was estimated that Captain Robinson, the leading resource and transportation capitalist, had paid out 40,000 dollars to the Indians of Lake Winnipeg.⁵² It was noted in the same year that "Messrs. Ewing and Fryer also employed a number of Indians at their fisheries, and gave them a large amount of money and substantial goods for their labours."⁵³

In 1890, a chief at the Little Saskatchewan River recorded his opposition to commercial fishing, pointing out that "Some young Indians want to work for freezer men to get money and spend it . . .," but added that both the fall and winter fish catches had dropped; consequently, commercialization meant that "old Indians, squaws and children get no good, no work, no fish."⁵⁴ Apparently, the commercialization of this resource had an uneven effect. For some Indians it meant wage labour while for others it resulted in a deprivation of a subsistence resource.

The early practices of commercial fishing firms, such as the netting of fish at the approaches to major spawning grounds, raised considerable opposition to commercial fishing. Along with the fear of depletion, the fact that the fish were almost exclusively exported to the American market, and that the industry was owned by American capital, added to the opposition. Consequently, the federal Department of Fisheries held an investigation into the industry in 1890. The investigation found "... a gradual but steady depletion of the whitefish product of Lake Winnipeg going on, from the effects of the present system of fishing in certain parts of the lake."⁵⁵ Fundamentally,

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the investigation was attempting to harmonize the interests of the various parties and it was not within the parameters of the investigation to consider a ban on commercial fishing. With respect to a suggestion that Indians be provided with more capital to fish commercially, the investigation reported that the Indians should not be provided with the means to compete with the commercial firms.⁵⁶ In spite of the limitations of this investigation, it established that the "improvident system of commercial fishing" represented a threat to the fish stocks and it did result in a more regulated industry.⁵⁷ Thus, the conventional view of Indian opposition to conservation regulations does not hold in this instance because it was pressure from Indians that resulted in the investigation of 1890.

Lumbering

One of the major changes to the Native economy began in the 1880s when Indians participated in the lumbering industry. It seems that the demand for lumber in the 1880s was strong enough to support an industry. The forests on the southeastern shore of Lake Winnipeg were the first in the region to be commercially exploited and subsequent development spread northward. In 1880 it was reported that, at Fort Alexander, "There are now two saw mills on the reserve... so that any of the Indians who wish to work can easily obtain employment at very good wages..."⁵⁸ The next year two saw mills were reported near the Black River reserve "... both of which afford considerable employment to members of the band."⁵⁹ A saw mill was established at Fisher River in 1882.⁶⁰ A similar form of employment existed for the Indians of Grand Rapids, where "The North-West Transportation Company alone paid them twelve hundred dollars last winter, for chopping as many cords of wood."⁶¹ Income from lumbering seemed to have attracted Indians to the industry, so much so that those Indians from the Hollow Water reserve employed at a nearby lumber mill refused their annuities "... stating that the amount received was not worth the time lost in going after it."⁶²

Lumbering also resulted in employment for Indians not directly involved in bush work. In 1883 the wage economy of St. Peters was described:

A greater number of the young men in this band get work at good wages on the steamboats, loading barges and cars with lumber and cord wood; and as they get a more ready and larger return for their work than by farming, I fear it will be hard to induce them to settle ..."⁶³

Cutting railroad ties created a demand for the labour of the Indians of Brokenhead and Fort Alexander.⁶⁴ The returns from this industry were not simply wages from bush work and transportation activities. In 1888, the lumbering activities of Fisher River were described in the following terms:

The success of the band is, however, in a measure due to their having three lumbering mills in the vicinity of their reserve, where they are able to work as lumbermen, sawyers, etc., at which, I am told, they are very good, and if required of them, they could run the mills themselves without the aid of whitemen. These lumbering companies have rendered great

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assistance to the band, they pay them good wages, sell them lumber and goods cheap, and often teach and aid them with their gardens. The majority of men are able to do carpenter work, such as building houses and boats, making furniture, etc.⁶⁵

Many of these saw mills were portable and consequently their movement often resulted in the unemployment problems of particular bands. In the case of the Hollow Water band in 1886, it was reported that these Indians:

... were making a comfortable living as long as they obtained employment at Dick Banning's saw mill, but since lumbering has been abandoned on the reserve by that firm, the Indians are compelled to resort largely to their former occupations of fishing and hunting for their subsistence...⁶⁶

Similarly in 1890 it was recorded for Fisher River that: "As the saw mill on the reserve has been shut down[,] the Indians cannot get so much work to do as formerly, and have to go a considerable distance to find employment."⁶⁷ In spite of the instability of this industry there are indications that employment in lumbering and commercial fishing was not confined to a small number of Indians. As early as 1885, Indian Agent A. Mackay reported:

The majority of the Indians of Fisher River, Loon Straits, Hollow Water and Black River reserves, gain their livelihood during the winter by working at different saw mills in their neighbourhood, and by selling fish to traders.⁶⁸

In summary, wherever lumbering interests were established and a labour market created, Indians participated.

CHANGES TO THE FUR TRADE ECONOMY

The treaties and the continued commercialization of the region's resources altered the fur trade economy. While the Hudson's Bay Company benefited by the expanded trade made possible by treaty payments, it ceased to be the exclusive commercial operation in much of the area ceded by the treaties. The records of the Hudson's Bay Company indicated that a considerable portion of the annuity money was obtained by the Hudson's Bay Company, often to pay 'Treaty Debts.' In 1891, for example, all but 235 or the 5,313 dollars paid out to The Pas Agency Indians was obtained by the Hudson's Bay Company.⁶⁹ The annual report for 1891 recorded that:

It was satisfactory to be able to report that the Company have been again successful in securing nearly the whole of the Dominion Annuity Moneys recently paid to the Treaty Indians of the Pas [sic] Agency.⁷⁰

While treaty payments resulted in the monetarization of the regional economy, the fact that the money was quickly exchanged for trade goods resulted in a limited circulation of money.

Consideration must be given to the notion that Indian agents may have

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greatly exaggerated the progress of Indians in order to satisfy superiors in Ottawa. The records of the Hudson's Bay Company are not only the most important source of data on the fur trade in this period, but can be used to verify or refute some of the information found in the accounts of Indian agents. The Hudson's Bay Company records indicate that Indians were not 'tradition bound' with respect to trapping because they participated in lumbering and commercial fishing activities. As the Annual Report on Trade for 1891 indicated, the Indians of Manitoba House were not particularly attached to the fur trade.

The Indian hunt at this place is not much at its best as the greater part of the furs are caught by half-breeds; the Indians are getting lazy and indolent, in fact those on the Reserve are useless; there are only one or two families that follow the old style of hunting, that is camping out and moving from one place to another.⁷¹

Clearly, some of the changes to the Native economy did not reflect the needs of the Hudson's Bay Company. The report for Grand Rapids documented the effect of employment upon trapping in 1891:

A great demand for Indian labour in putting up unprecedentedly large quantities of ice and firewood for the three fishery companies and their steamers which now annually in Summer carry on very extensive operations at and near Grand Rapids, furnish such constant employment to the able-bodied population that it was difficult to pay attention to trapping.⁷²

Although at this time only summer fishing occurred at Grand Rapids, the need for ice and firewood conflicted with winter trapping.

The Hudson's Bay Company records comment on the conditions of the Indians as a consequence of the diversification of the regional economy and the economic reasons for a movement of Indian labour out of the fur trade. The Inspection Report for 1889 on Fisher River confirms the accounts made by the Indian agents when it commented on the condition of the Indians:

Appear to be well off. Many obtain employment lumbering in the woods during the winter, and at the sawmills in the summer. Very few devote the whole winter to fur hunting.⁷³

Similarly, for Berens River the Inspection Reports in 1889 recorded the conditions of the Indians.

Appear to be comparatively well off. Many of them are employed by the Fishing Cos. on Swampy Island and other points in the neighborhood. Are lazy as hunters.⁷⁴

This condition seems to be fairly general since the Inspection Report for 1887 noted that the Indians on Lake Winnipeg appear "... to be well off; in addition to hunting, there being employment at the Lumber Camps[,] Saw mills

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and at Fishing."⁷⁵ Comments such as 'lazy' and 'indolent' may reflect the extent of Indian commitment to trapping and to the Hudson's Bay Company. The Inspection Report for Grand Rapids in 1889 indicated the reasons for the movement of Indian labour out of the fur trade. Repeating earlier observations, Inspector McDougall stated:

During the last two or three years, since the Fishing Industry was begun in that neighbourhood, very few Indians devote their time to fur hunting as they obtain employment during the winter, chopping cord wood, putting up ice &,[and] at \$1.50 per day wages which is much more advantageous than the precarious occupation of hunting animals which it was stated have become very scarce.⁷⁶

These records of the Hudson's Bay Company support the observations of Indian agents concerning Indian involvement in lumbering and commercial fishing. Additionally, Indians were attracted by the economic security of these industries relative to the fur trade and were not particularly restrained by so-called aboriginal or traditional identities which required Indians to trap animals.

The reduction in the supply of furs, because Indian labour was redirected, was not the only impact of expanded commercialization upon the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trade. Prior to treaties, some small-scale traders competed with the Hudson's Bay Company; however, the arrival of lumbering and fishing companies resulted in some petty sideline trading in furs by these companies. Competition to the Hudson's Bay Company upset the Company's system of debt bondage. With the expansion of commercial fishing operations in the Norway House area, the officer in charge of the district "... received instructions to curtail the advances for the present outfit ..."⁷⁷ Understandably, the annual report for 1899-1900 for the Norway House District stated that: "The strong competition of fishing companies and numerous small traders throughout the Lake region debars any very profitable business there now ..."⁷⁸ Such competition had an impact on profits, while those areas which had not attracted new resource industries remain profitable. For example, at Nelson House in 1889 a fair profit margin was created because of low fur prices and high goods prices.⁷⁹ In 1896, the annual report for Lake Winnipeg noted that "The only Post at which pure fur-trading is carried on is Little Grand Rapids, and this is still [a] profitable place..."⁸⁰

Fundamentally, the post-treaty period witnessed the demise of the Hudson's Bay Company's control over the regional economy. For some of the Interlake posts, the company engaged in the fish trade and this activity was one of the more profitable concerns at these posts.⁸¹ However, this was small scale relative to the Lake Winnipeg industry which was controlled by American capital. Indian incomes earned in other industries often resulted in some sales for the Hudson's Bay Company. However, when saw mills were shut down, as in the case of Fort Alexander in 1889, the Metis were unable to repay their debts to the Company.⁸²

In summary, the activities of lumbering and fishing companies, competition for the Indian's furs, and the involvement of Native labour outside of the fur trade, all indicate that the Hudson's Bay Company was no longer the

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dominant economic organization in the Interlake and parts of Northern Manitoba. Generally, those areas north of Treaty Five were not affected by these new resource activities and there the Hudson's Bay Company maintained its dominance.

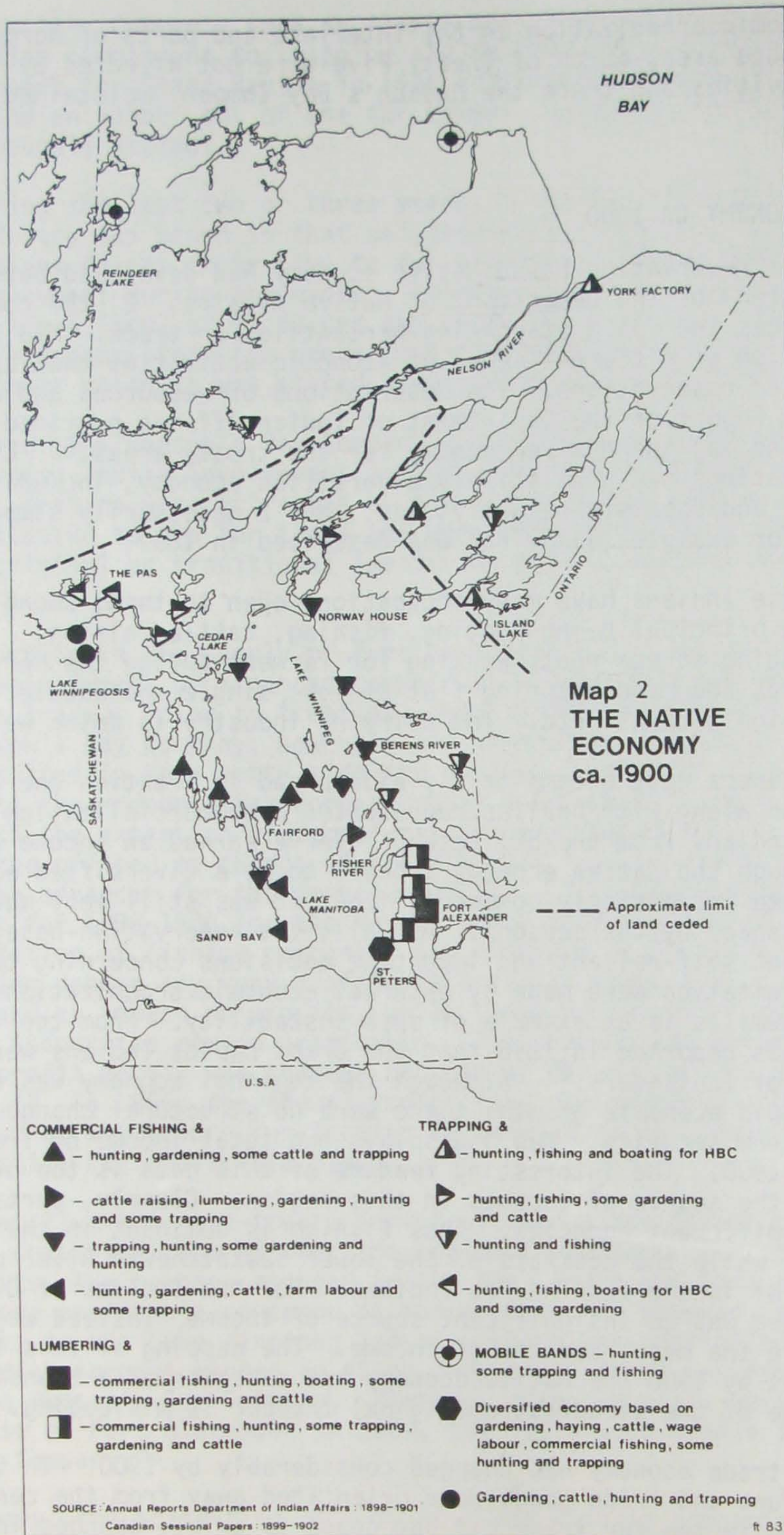
THE NATIVE ECONOMY CA 1900

By 1900 a reservation-based Native economy had developed out of 1) the economic strategy of the Department of Native Affairs, 2) the commercialization of new resources and 3) a stagnating mercantile fur trade. Map 2 presents a classification of different types of economic activities that are associated with particular reservations. The descriptions of resources and occupations by the Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs provided the basis to classify and map the Native economy for the treaty areas.⁸³ Clearly, many of the reservations had a relatively diversified economy, including a mixture of commercial and subsistence activities. Map 2 necessarily simplifies that diversity. For example, Sandy Bay was described in 1899:

These Indians have many occupations open to them, among the principal being hunting, fishing, cattle-raising, digging seneca-root, working for farmers during the harvest time, and manufacturing flat sleighs, single and double sleighs, carts, etc. The dairying industry is doing well ...⁸⁴

Digging for seneca root became fairly widespread in Treaties One and Two in the 1890s, and along with berries, represented a commercialization of gathering.⁸⁵ A number of Indians from the St. Peters reserve earned an income by selling hay.⁸⁶ Although the Native economy appears to be a diversified economy and one that became increasingly commercialized, it was still very much a natural economy influenced by the seasons. As well, the reservation-based Native economy was not self-reliant and important decisions concerning the rate of resource exploitation were made by external economic organizations. The closing of sawmills is an example of such instability. From the fishing industry it was reported in 1896 that the Grand Rapids Indians were replaced by an influx of Icelanders.⁸⁷ Although the regional economy was experiencing relatively rapid economic growth, there were no structural changes that would ensure long-term security. Map 3 displays the total income of Treaty Indians by agency in 1900. The interesting feature of this data is the overall diversity in the source of incomes in this region. Clearly, certain activities dominate the different agencies. Thus fishing is dominant in the Berens River Agency, while the muskrats of the lower Saskatchewan River provide the major source of income for The Pas Indians. For the Indians of Clandeboyne Agency, hunting was an insignificant source of income. Instead wage and farm categories are the major sources of income. The mapping of this income data indicates that by 1900 the Native economy had experienced a transition and that the image of the steadfast aboriginal trapper is misleading.

The fur trade economy had changed considerably by 1900. In this period the flow of furs and trade goods were orientated away from the centuries-old Bay route. While the fur trade did not cease to exist, changes in transportation seemed to have the effect of reducing internal demand. Clearly once York Boats ceased to be built--and very few were built at Norway House by



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1900--many of the economic activities in Figure 1 would no longer be required.⁸⁸ Thus the demand for boatmen would be diminished with the reduction of boat brigades. As well, skilled labour in the trades and the labour needed to acquire and have resources and food would be reduced as one result of a process of contracting internal demand initiated by changes to the transportation system.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented empirical data to outline the spatial and economic transformation of the Native economy between 1870 and 1900. The treaty process was more or less a logical outcome of the mercantile fur trade and the commercial interests of central Canada. The deprivation caused by the fur trade left the Indians in a situation in which it would be difficult to oppose the treaties. As in the fur trade, the Indians attempted to make the best of a bad deal by using treaty terms to develop a subsistence agriculture component to the Native economy. Similarly, the first three decades of the reservation-based Native economy seem to suggest an improvement in the economic conditions of the Indians. In part, this is because Indians were able to move out of the fur trade and engage in lumbering and commercial fishing.

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NOTES

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² See J. Helm, E.S. Rogers and J.G.E. Smith, "Intercultural Relations and Cultural Change in the Shield and Mackenzie Borderlands," Subarctic, vol. 6, vol. ed. J. Helm, Handbook of North American Indians, general editor W.C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1981), pp. 146-157.

³ Russel Rothney, "Mercantile Capital and the Livelihood of the Residents of the Hudson Bay Basin," (Masters Thesis; University of Manitoba, 1975).

⁴ A.J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 1974), and C.A. Bishop, The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade (Toronto; Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1974).

⁵ Canada, Sessional Papers, 1872, Report of the Indian Branch, No. 22, p. 31 (hereafter C.S.P. 1872, Indian Branch, No. 22, p. 31).

⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Public Archives of Manitoba, Morris Correspondence, Fort Garry, August 22, 1873, MG 12 B1, Reel 5, No. 53 (hereafter P.A.M. Morris Correspondence, Fort Garry, August 22, 1873, MG 12 B1, Reel 5, No. 53).

⁹ Canada Sessional Papers, 1877, Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, No. 11, p. xlviii (hereafter C.S.P., 1877, Indian Affairs, No. 11, p. xlviii).

¹⁰ Alexander Morris, The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories (1880, reprinted, Toronto; Coles Publishing, 1979), pp. 314-315, 317-318.

¹¹ Such bands as Berens River, Dog Head, Bloodvein, Big Island Band, Jack Fish Head, generally lived in an area described by Treaty Two but did not receive annuities. The Sandy Bar band who lived in the area described by Treaties One and Two, and lived in close proximity to the above bands, were considered to be part of the St. Peters Band and received annuities.

¹² P.A.M. Morris to the Minister of the Interior, April 6, 1874, MG 12 B2, Reel 7, No. 108.

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- 13 P.A.M. Morris to the Minister of the Interior, MG 12 B1, Reel 5, No. 258.
- 14 Ray, p. 228.
- 15 C.S.P., 1872, Indian Branch, No. 22, p. 32.
- 16 Great Britain, Report From the Select Committee On the Hudson's Bay Company, 1857, p. 445. (A letter from Peguis Chief of the Saulteaux Tribe at Red River Settlement, to the Aborigines Protection Society, London.)
- 17 Ibid., pp. 445-446.
- 18 P.A.M., George Adams Archibald correspondence, Reel 2, No. 332.
- 19 Morris, p. 51.
- 20 Ibid., p. 59.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 101, 104.
- 22 Ibid., p. 106.
- 23 P.A.M., Archibald Interview with Kas-ish-eway, Fort Garry, January 5,, 1872, Reel 2, No. 783.
- 24 Morris, p. 65.
- 25 P.A.M., Christian Indians at Rossville to Morris, June 25, 1874, MG 12 B1, Reel 2, No. 783.
- 26 P.A.M., Morris to the Minister of the Interior, July 12, 1876, MG 12 B1, Reel 5, No. 355.
- 27 Morris, p. 167.
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- 30 P.A.M., Correspondence from Fairford Indians to Archibald, Reel 1, No. 164.

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- 37 P.A.C., RG 10, Central Registry, C-12, 059, Vol. 7775, File 27127-12.
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- 39 Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Public Archives of Manitoba, D. 25/6, folio 253 (hereafter H.B.C.A., P.A.M., D. 25/6 #253).
- 40 C.S.P., 1872, Indian Branch, No. 22, p. 16.
- 41 Ibid., p. 17.
- 42 C.S.P., 1874, Indian Affairs, No. 8, p. 57.
- 43 C.S.P., 1885, Indian Affairs, No. 4, p. 49.
- 44 Ibid., p. 134.
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- 46 C.S.P., 1883, Indian Affairs, No. 5, p. 144.
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68 C.S.P., 1886, Indian Affairs, No. 4, p. 68.

69 C.S.P., H.B.C.A., P.A.M., A. 74/1 #58.

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73 H.B.C.A., P.A.M., D. 25/6 #141.

74 Ibid., #173.

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80 H.B.C.A., P.A.M., A. 74/5 #31.

81 H.B.C.A., P.A.M., A. 74/1 #144.

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