RESEARCH NOTES

RESEARCH ON FUR TRADE AND NATIVE ECONOMIES IN THE POST-1870 PERIOD: AN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY APPROACH TO THE DAILY JOURNALS OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

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In the post-1870 period, treaties and modifications to the fur trade represent important developments in the Native economy. Although it is an important period of change, this era in Native history has not attracted a great deal of academic attention. The daily journals of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) posts provide information on the fur trade economy because frequent entries noted the labour activities of Company servants, the subsistence and commercial activities of Indians and the routines associated with the transportation of trade goods, food and furs. An historical geography approach to the daily journals begins by abstracting information on resource activities, seasonal patterns of employment and Indian interactions with the post. Generally, the daily journals have been used to establish a chronology of important events. Historical geography methods can be used to summarize the labour activities of Company employees and Indians and to present the resource base of the fur trade economy at a particular point in time. A procedure has been developed which combines data collection with an initial classification of data. This form of "note-taking" allows the information to be visualized in cartographic terms. A cartographic presentation of daily journals not only provides detailed summaries of economic activities, but makes it convenient to compare post economies situated in different environments.

A variety of diagrams have been developed to show the seasonal ecology of various Indians associated with the fur trade. The cartographic approaches used here have incorporated concepts from the existing literature.[1]

A circular diagram was used by Ruggles to show the annual round of activities of HBC posts in the eighteenth century.[2] The autumn freeze-up and spring break-up were incorporated into this seasonal cycle diagram and thus revealed the climatic restrictions on economic activities. Ruggles' circular diagram generalized about post activities, such as boating, hunting, trading, making trade goods, fishing, collecting firewood and timber. However, Ruggles also presented daily activities for a two-year period in the style of a bar graph, thus establishing a more detailed picture about post-employment needs. Ruggle's use of a circular diagram showing the annual round meant that the usual lengthy discussion of activities could be avoided.[3] Thus a detailed image of daily life was conveniently presented.

Ray diagrammed the yearly cycle of the bison as a basis for understanding the seasonal activities of the western Cree and Assiniboine.[4] The bison's habit of using the grasslands in the summer and the parklands in the winter was an important facet of the seasonal ecological strategies of both the Cree and Assiniboine. Ray's seasonal cycle diagram of the western Cree and Assiniboine is represented by interlocking circles depicting a shared exploitation of the parkland in the winter. This particular interpretation of Cree/Assiniboine seasonal cycles was based on ecological considerations, such as resource availability and early historical observations of trapping, trading, food gathering, hunting water fowl, fishing, bison pounding and travel to Hudson Bay or Missouri River. Consequently, much of Ray's discussion about changing Indian roles in

the fur trade is relative to his interpretation of the protohistoric[5] seasonal cycle.

One of the advantages of seasonal cycle diagrams is that economic activities at different scales can be presented. Jarvenpa used a circular diagram to show the annual economic cycle of the English River band.[6] Jarvenpa's field research in the early 1970s provided information for diagramming the seasonal economy of a single band. This diagram clearly showed the spatial and economic patterns for those engaged in commercial fishing, trapping and subsistence hunting and fishing. Jarvenpa's diagram broke the annual cycle into specific economic and ecological seasons and this allowed him to explain the modern Native economy in precise terms. Thus changes in group sizes and spatial patterns were examined for each of these seasons. Although Jarvenpa was mainly interested in describing the English River band at a particular point in time, he was able to indicate change through time. When explaining particular resource exploitation patterns of the annual cycle, references were made to economic practices in the past. For example, Jarvenpa compared the differences in mobility between the dog sled and the snowmobile. This diagram made a number of important contributions to the concept of seasonal cycle diagrams. He included: the division of economic activities into either primarily subsistence or primarily commercial activities, the movement of population in and out of the community and the identification of specific species exploitation patterns (for example, the spring muskrat hunt). One spatial aspect of the English River band shown by Jarvenpa was the movement of children out of the community to attend residential schools. Their absence reduced the demand for food.

These examples of annual cycles indicate potential methods for presenting an interpretation of seasonal economic activities. One advantage of using a circular diagram to summarize the annual round is that information from different sources (e.g. daily journals, descriptive observations, field research) can be presented in a similar and comparable format. The use of daily journals to understand the post-1870 fur trade and Native economies was partly influenced by concepts and methods developed by Ruggles, Ray and Jarvenpa; however, the peculiarities of this fur trade era and the desire to provide more spatial and resource information necessitated special steps in data collection and more elaborate techniques for cartographic presentation.

An actual entry from a Norway House daily journal (November 28, 1873) will illustrate the type of information available from HBC post records.

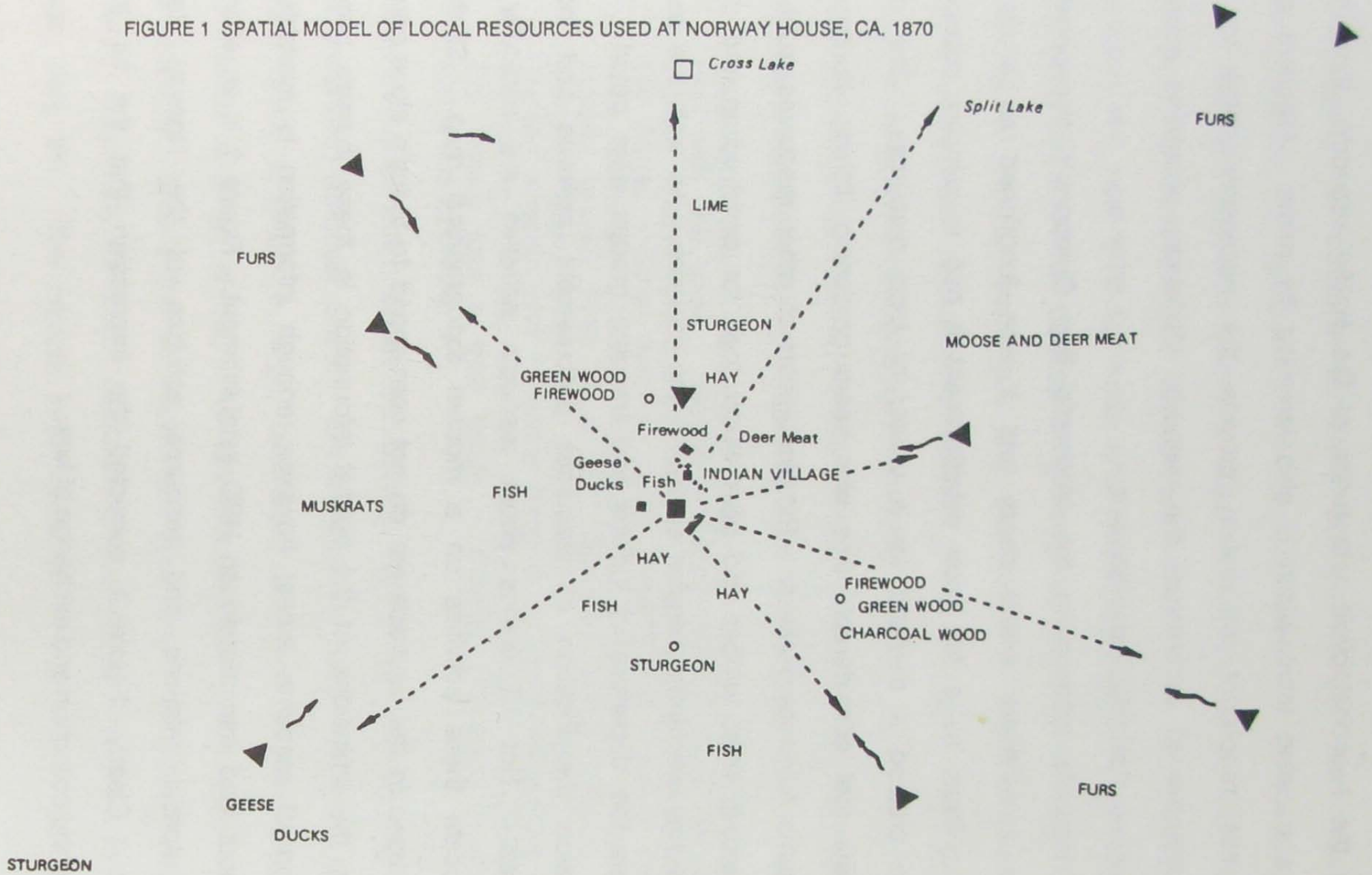
> Clear cold day. wind N.W. Glass -23--Johnstone and McLean hauling hay with the oxen. Robertson accompanied them for the first trip. Garson finished the sleigh for Mr. Ruttan. Hourston unwell. Miller in the Forge. Other men as usual, hauling fish, sawing boatwood, and boat building. Hector Morrison mending nets. This evening two Indians arrived from Revd. Mr. Settee's station beyond Cross Lake, bringing letters from him and others. The mission party is about starved already; and I believe there is to be a retrograde movement in the Spring. A few furs are now sent by them for provisions -- Their Fall fishery was a total failure -- Charles Eakeesas & brother arrived with a fine lot of furs.[7]

Perhaps the observation about the Church Missionary Society's difficulties is the most important "historical event." On an ongoing basis, however, the references to hay, oxen, a sleigh, a forge, boatwood, nets and the arrival of a trapping team indicate a range of economic activities and the day to day complexity of a post economy. Clearly the fur trade was more than a simple exchange of goods for furs. Moreover, fur trade establishments required a variety of resources to sustain daily life. The climate information on this particular day is of no real

interest however, records on freeze-up and break-up would be of concern when reconstructing the seasonal cycle. In terms of the Native economy, there is a reference to a trapping team which is also identified by name. Frequent daily entries with this range of information provide the necessary detail for an historical geographer to reconstruct the resource demands, economic activities and spatial relations of an HBC establishment.

Norway House's location in the Hudson's Bay Company's transportation system made it a major inland depot and it also functioned as a district headquarters. Thus, as a fur trade establishment it had a complex economy, which in turn created a demand for a variety of local resources. The daily journals indicate that considerable time was spent gardening, fishing, hunting or tripping for game killed by Natives. The acquisition of other resources, such as wood for charcoal, lime, lumber and boat wood, logs for construction and oars, firewood, and hay warranted regular entries in the journals. As well, the arrival and sometimes the departure of Indians and trapping groups were noted. The journals mention the location of resources procurement activities and Indian trapping areas. Not all entries about resource activities are particular to specifically locate these activities on a modern topographical map. Similarly, place names used in the fur trade era do not correspond to today's place names. Consequently, the limitations of the spatial information in these journals prevent exact mapping of resource areas; however, enough information is available to generalize about land use around an HBC establishment. Figure 1 is an effort to simplify the spatial relations and resource activities of the Norway House establishment. Clearly, Figure 1 corrected the impression that the fur trade simply entailed the collection and exchange of furs.

FIGURE 1 SPATIAL MODEL OF LOCAL RESOURCES USED AT NORWAY HOUSE, CA. 1870



The simple modeling of fur trade land use assists in developing a perspective on the seasonal economy, because it indicates the importance of local transportation and it suggests the types of demands created by a transportation system based on dogs, oxen and boats. However, because a single land use map presents activities for an entire year it does not provide the separate seasonal aspects of post activities.

Very general seasonal cycles can be constructed without a great deal of effort if certain activities are ignored and if a generalized time scale is used. Regrettably, a precise seasonal cycle diagram not only requires a careful reading of the journal, but also has tediously detailed notes needed to identify the duration of specific economic activities. Figure 2 is a portion of a coding form which is a method of recording and classifying labour and post activities.[8] The time scale across the top of the form provides an adequate reference to plot activities recorded in the journal. Instead of making notes on foolscap, say for example to keep track of every day that the Company's men fished, the coding form could be used to record the information. The bar representing "Fishing: attending nets," could be shaded so that the duration of the activity and the timing of the activity correspond to the time scale across the top of the coding form (Figure 2). There is room on the bottom of the coding form to make specific notes. The use of such a coding form reduces the amount of time required for taking notes about repetitious activities. Therefore, more places or time periods can be represented by seasonal cycle diagrams for the same amount of research time. The main advantage of this type of coding form is that it simultaneously records information and classifies the information in a graphical form. Additionally, completed coding forms with data from different posts at the

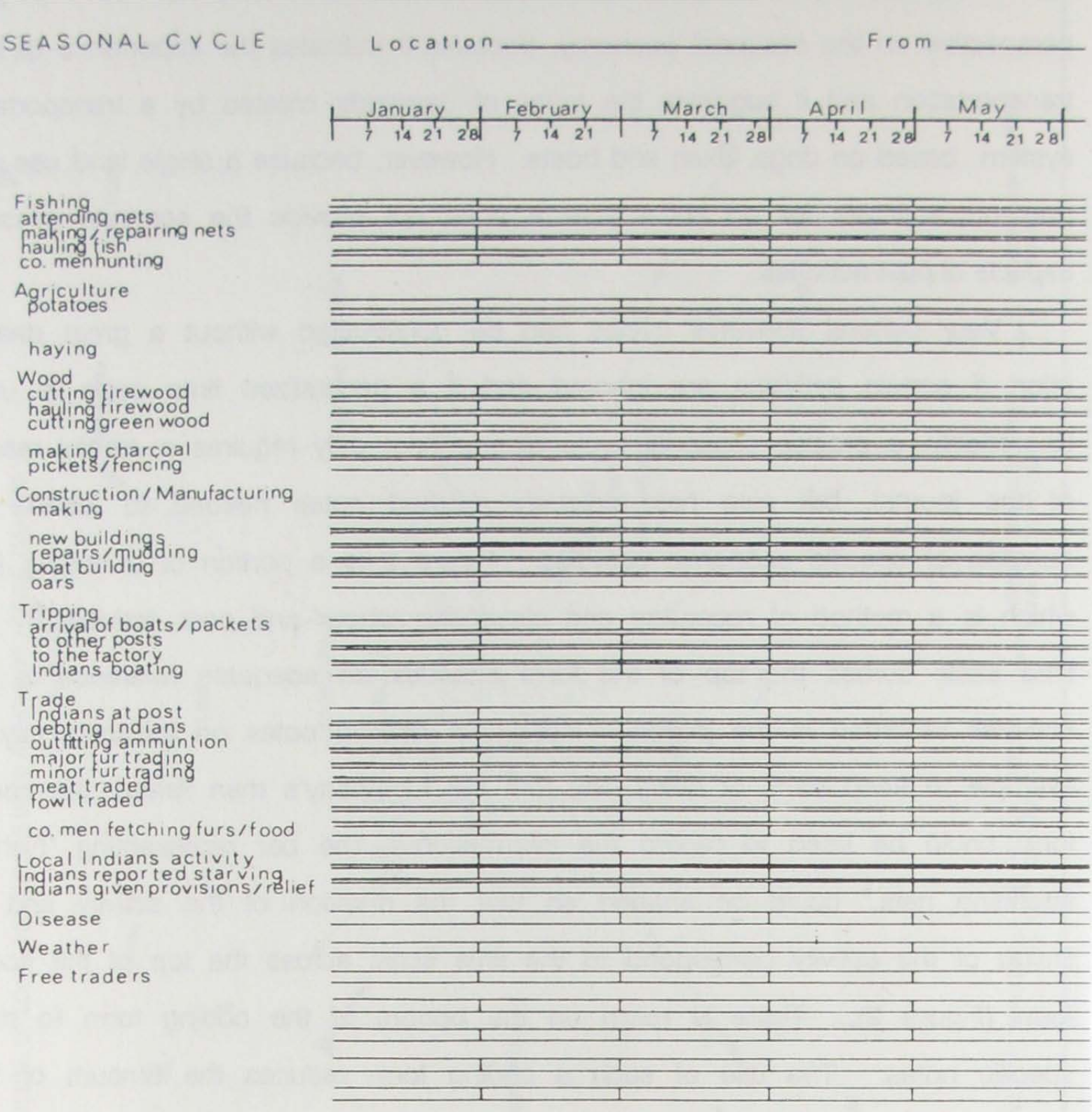


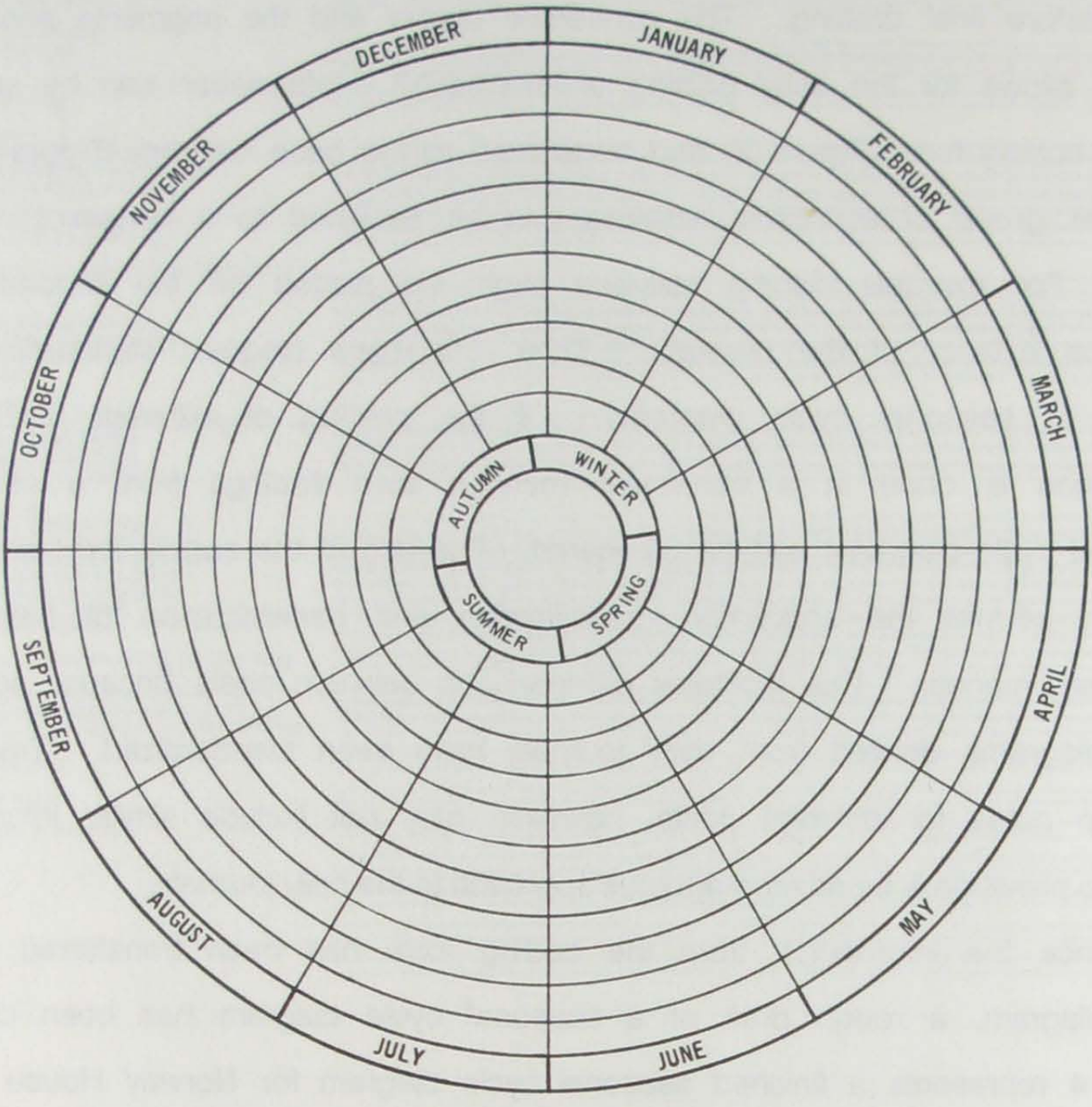
FIGURE 2 PORTION OF CODING FORM USED TO SUMMARIZE INFORMATION FOUND IN DAILY JOURNALS

same time period have classified information in a manner that is readily comparable. Standard notes on foolscap do not allow for graphical comparison of seasonal economics from different times or from different locations.

The coding form does not constitute a seasonal cycle diagram. Figure 3 is a base diagram used to transfer the data from the coding form to a preparation stage before final drafting. The concentric circles and the segments separating months allows for the easy plotting of information. Information can be selected from a coding form (Figure 2) and transferred to the base diagram (Figure 3). A particular group of economic activities can be assigned to a certain concentric circle. For example, fishing activities might be plotted on the second circle from the exterior of the diagram. Thus, this base diagram standardizes the design of seasonal cycle diagrams. If the plotting of different classes of information is done in a consistent manner, then findings from a series of seasonal cycle diagrams can be compared. The use of the coding form and base diagram permits the acquisition, classification and generalization of data in a consistent manner. This facilitates comparisons between posts because seasonal cycle diagrams derived from daily journals have been standardized. Traditional foolscap notes for different posts, however, may not include similar information since no provision is made for a rigorous approach to the daily journals.

Once the information from the coding form has been transferred to the base diagram, a rough draft of a seasonal cycle diagram has been created. Figure 4 represents a finished seasonal cycle diagram for Norway House. This type of seasonal cycle diagram shows both the seasons and the months as a time reference. The seasonal aspects of the economy are further clarified because "freeze-up" and "break-up" are indicated. Population movements and the type of

FIGURE 3 BASE DIAGRAM FOR CONSTRUCTING SEASONAL CYCLES



SOURCE:

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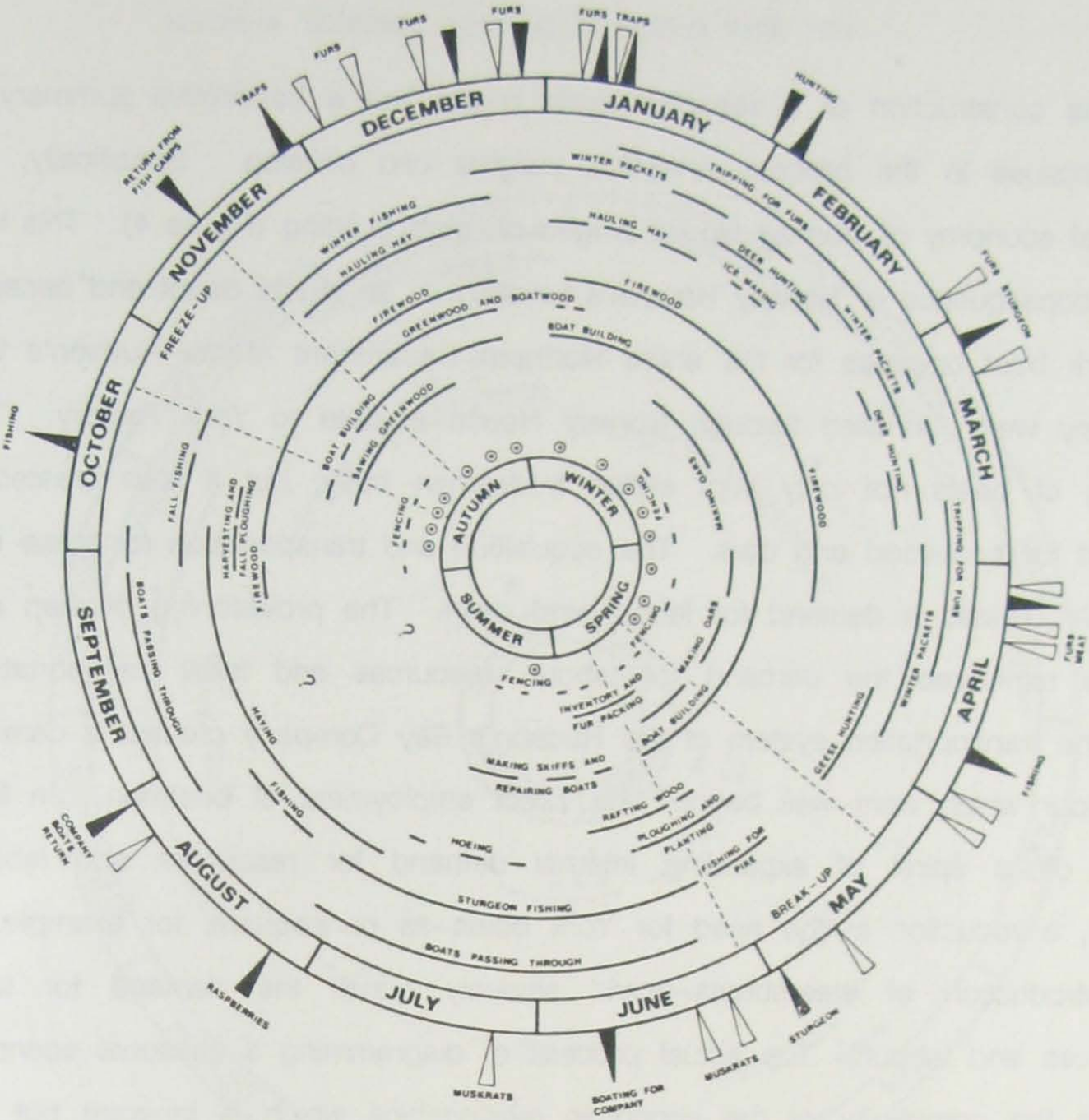
FIGURE 4 SEASONAL ECONOMY OF NORWAY HOUSE, 1873-1875



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

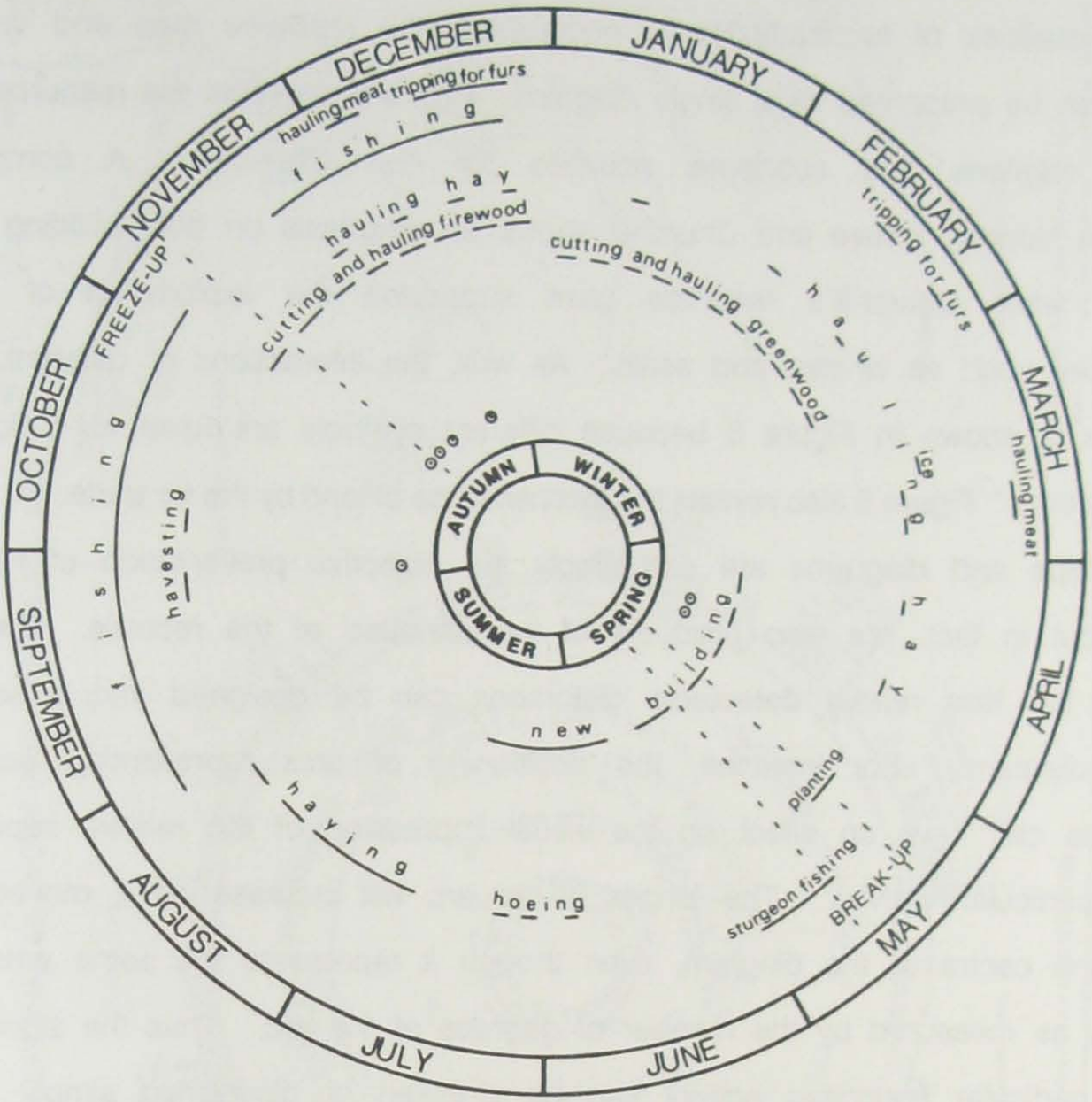
SOURCE : P.A.M., H.B.C.A., B. 154/a/70-71

interactions with the post can be shown on the periphery of the diagram. Solid lines indicate the duration of an activity, while dashed lines signify intermediate activity.

The construction of a seasonal cycle is not just a descriptive summary of data because in the process analytical insights can develop. Specifically, the seasonal economy of Norway House hinged on boat building (Figure 4). This is a logical consequence of Norway Houses's function as an inland depot and because the York boat brigades for the entire Northern Department of the Hudson's Bay Company were funnelled through Norway House enroute to York Factory. The building of boats not only kept skilled tradesmen busy, but it also created a demand for boatwood and oars. The acquisition and transportation for these raw materials created a demand for labour and oxen. The provisioning of men and animals reinforced the demand for labour, resources and local transportation. Thus the transportation system of the Hudson's Bay Company created a demand for labour which went well beyond the direct employment of boatmen. In fact, it set off a spiral of expanding internal demand for resources and labour. Clearly, a reduction in the need for York boats--as consequent, for example, of the introduction of steamboats--would severely curtail the demand for local resources and labour. The actual process of diagramming a seasonal economy clarifies the complexity of the economic relationships which is inherent but not obvious in the daily journals.

In contrast to Norway House, a much simpler economy existed at Berens River (Figure 5). Seasonal cycle diagrams clearly convey an impression about the diversity and duration of economic activities. The post economy at Berens River focussed on fur collection and this post did not share with Norway House

FIGURE 5 SEASONAL ECONOMY OF BERENS RIVER, 1874



● Tradesmen at work.

SOURCE: HBCA, B. 16/a/7

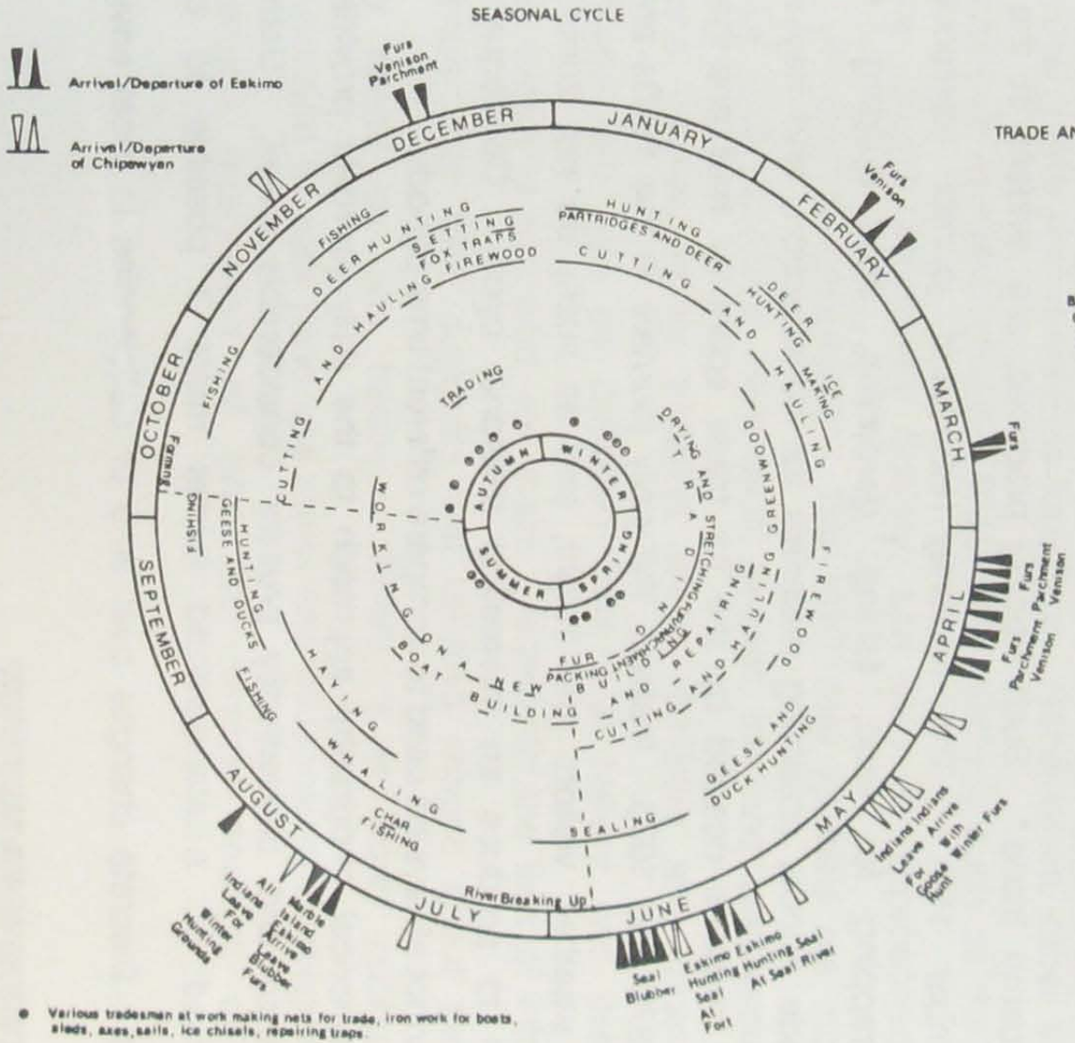
11'87

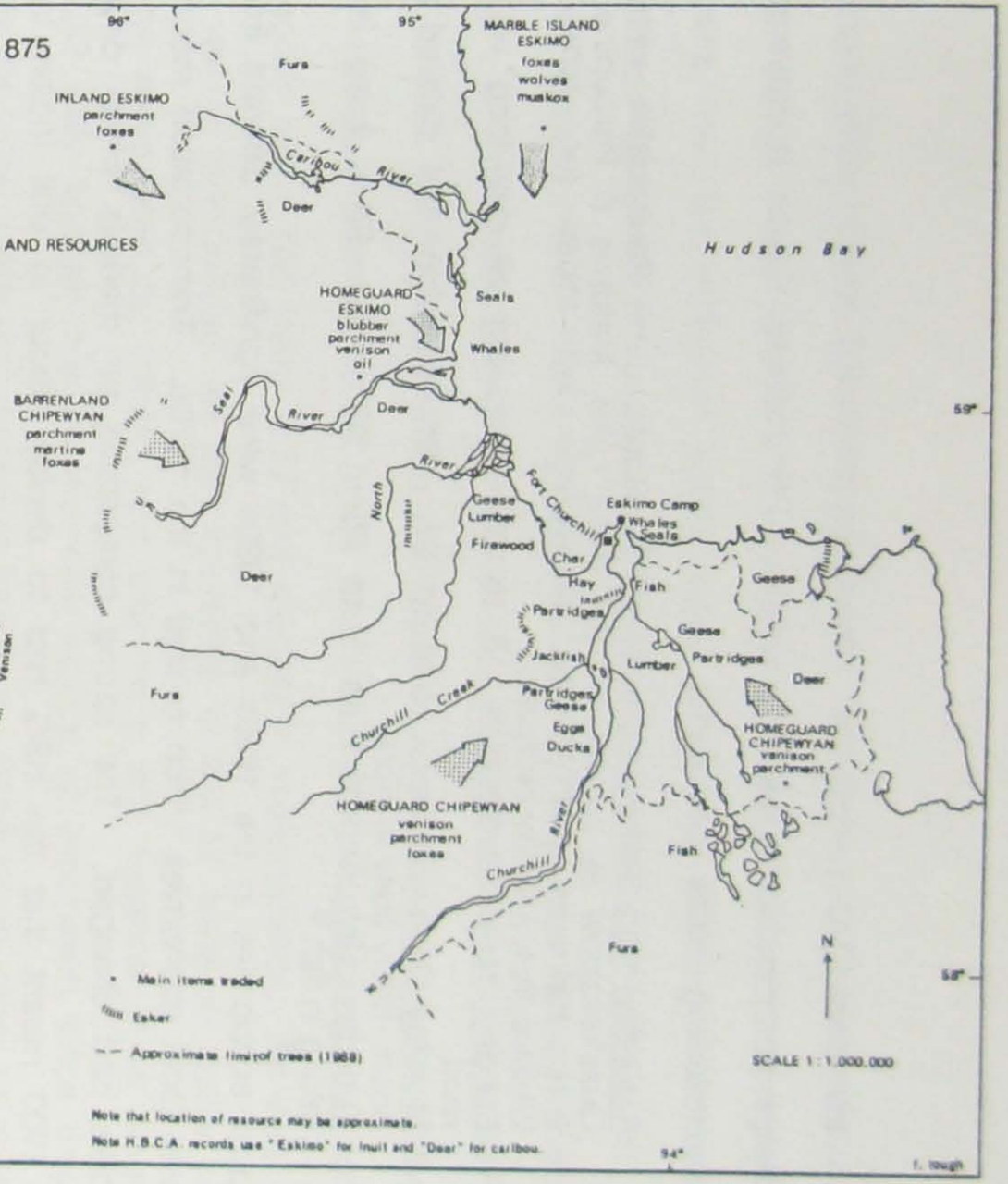
economic functions such as boat building, depoting, and administration of a district. The use of seasonal cycle diagrams modifies the notion that all fur trade posts were similar.

Resource/land use maps and seasonal cycle diagrams are products of an historical geographical approach to archival data. In attempt to emphasize the spatial qualities of fur trade/Native economies, the resource map and seasonal cycle can be presented as a single diagram. Figure 6 presents the resource base, spatial relations and economic activities for Fort Churchill. A comparison between Norway House and Churchill shows an emphasis on boat building at the former, while Churchill's resource base supported the exploitation of marine resources such as whales and seals. As well, the interactions of different Native peoples is shown in Figure 6 because different symbols are used for Chipewyan and "Eskimo." Figure 6 also reveals the extensive use of land by the fur trade.

Maps and diagrams are not simply the objective presentation of historical data, but in fact, are also products of interpretation of the records. As such, simple but less readily detectable distortions can be designed into a seasonal cycle diagram. For instance, the positioning of arcs representing economic activities can have an effect on the visual impression of the relative importance of a particular activity. The length of an arc will increase as it moves away from the centre of the diagram, even though it represents the same amount of activity as measured by the number of degrees of the arc. Thus the significance of a particular economic activity can be stressed or diminished simply by the decision about where to locate the arc in the diagram. The visual impression of a "large" arc plotted away from the centre of the diagram will convey the sense that it is a more important activity plotted closer to the centre of the diagram.

FIGURE 6 CHURCHILL, SEASONAL ECONOMY AND RESOURCES, 1875





SOURCE: P.A.M., H.B.C.A., B. 42/e/192.; B. 42/b/62; P.A.C., C.M.S., A–99.

In the post-1870 period the information recorded in the daily journals is not always comparable to earlier journals. For Norway House in November of 1929, the following entries were made:

> Saturday 15th Temperature 21 to 30 Hoole, John Paupauakis, with Isaac Queskekapow as runner left the Price Lake, Mattawa & Porcupine Lake. G.H. Kirkness, with Amos as runner left today for John Bulls, Whiskeyjack and Shunk River.
> Sunday 16th Temperature 16 to 26. Snowing all day long with east wind.
> Monday 17th Temperature 6 to 27. Still snowing, but cleared up at noon. Fairly busy in store.
> Tuesday 18th Temperature 5 to 25. Still mild. Fairly busy in store taking in fish.[9]

The post economies in the 1920s and 1930s were significantly different from the complex local economies which existed in the 1870s. Transportation modes and networks had changed. The strong competitive fur markets which developed after 1900 meant that the HBC had to deploy labour to visit Indian trapping areas to "camp trade." Such trading practices, are evident in the journal entry for September 15th. The relatively infrequent journal references to goose hunting, trapping for food, fishing, gardening, boat building, repairing and making trade goods, collecting materials for construction, and haying implies that the labour routines needed by the fur trade economy had changed significantly between 1870 and 1930. Instead, the daily journals in the 1930s are preoccupied with mail, weather, visitors and freight, and as such, do not contain the sort of information to produce an interesting seasonal cycle. Consequently, the daily journals cannot always be used to compare different time periods.

An historical geography approach to the daily journals provides the means to summarize and conveniently present considerable detail. Detailed seasonal cycles based on a standardized format make it possible to compare post economies. Discrete changes over time or deficiencies in local environments can

be discerned from seasonal cycle diagrams of fur trade establishments. For example, district headquarters, such as Norway House, had more complex post economies than fur collection posts, such as Berens River. This economic specialization of fur trade posts has implications for Native peoples. At posts such as Berens River, Native peoples' economic role was largely limited to trapping. In contrast, the demand for local resources, directly and indirectly related to boat building, resulted in considerable wage labour work for Natives at Norway House. Clearly, the fur trade was more than the exchange of furs for trade goods and it had many local and specialized characteristics. As well, some of the varying perspectives on the importance of the fur trade to Native history could be reevaluated by utilizing land use maps and seasonal cycle diagrams. The HBC daily journals are an extensive source of information since they are available for many years and numerous locations. Nonetheless, other sources can be used to construct seasonal cycles. Missionary records, such as the letters and journals of the Church Missionary Society, can also be approached from the point of view of historical geography. The HBC daily journals are incomplete in terms of spatial and locational information needed for land use/resource maps. Aboriginal place names, family trapping areas, fisheries and other sites for resource activities can also be obtained from oral history and presented as seasonal cycle diagrams and land use maps. Moreover, the lack of information in the HBC journals after 1900 suggests that detailed images about the seasonal cycle will be based on oral history. Finally, it is worth noting that the graphical presentation of data (land use maps and seasonal cycle diagrams) allows for a meaningful integration of oral and written sources of historical information.

NOTES

[1]An innovative approach to seasonal cycles can be found in Conrad Heidenreich's plate, "Settlements and Missionaries, 1615-1650." In this plate, Heidenreich contrasts the seasonal cycles at Iroquoian and Algonquian tribes in both economic and spatial terms. See Historical Atlas of Canada: Volume 1: From the Beginning to 1800, R. Cole Harris ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), Plate 34.

[2]See Richard Ruggles, "The West of Canada in 1783: Imagination and Reality," The Canadian Geographer, 15, No. 3 (Winter 1971) 235-261.

[3]For a contrast, see W.L. Morton, "Introduction," Eden Colville's Letters 1849-52, (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1956) pp. xi-xlix.

[4]See Arthur J. Ray, Indian in the Fur Trade, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) pp. 32-48.

[5]I use the term protohistoric to refer to a period of time when a middleman trade system brought change, but prior to any ongoing written observations. The protohistoric is a period of time between pre contact/prehistory and the historic period.

[6]Robert Jarvenpa, "Spatial and Ecological Factors in the Annual Economic Cycle of the English River Band of Chipewyan," Arctic Anthropology, 13, (1976) pp. 43-69.

[7]Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, B. 154/a/70 (November 28, 1873). (Hereafter HBCA).

[8]The actual coding form used was reproduced on 11 inch by 17 inch paper.

[9]HBCA, B.154/a/91, fo. 33.