

## Review Essay

### Missed Opportunity: John Milloy's *The Plains Cree*

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This essay reviews John S. Milloy's *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870*, Volume IV in the Manitoba Studies in Native History series.<sup>1</sup> Published in 1988, it is largely a reworking of Milloy's 1972 master's thesis.<sup>2</sup> The publication has been widely praised, with few reservations.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, close scrutiny reveals a book with critical flaws in a number of areas, including the neglect of recent literature in the field, problems of analysis, inadequate primary research and a general carelessness.

Milloy presents "a macro-historical approach to the Plains Cree in pre-reserve days in terms of their external relations," (p. xvii) bringing a fresh perspective to his reexamination of fur-trade sources. He attempts to trace the external forces, and internal processes and thinking, that transformed the forest-dwelling and canoe-using Cree — who, he claims, remained in that habitat until the early eighteenth century — into the parkland-plains Cree who hunted buffalo on horseback in the nineteenth century.

Milloy focusses on the external relations, trade and military alliances of the Plains Cree, and on factors affecting these many long- and short-term arrangements. Despite the dates given in the title, his study actually begins in the late 1600s and devotes a good deal of space to an analysis of Cree-Blackfoot relations in the eighteenth century. The two centuries covered by his book are divided into three segments:

Within this period there are three distinct eras, each characterized by a paramount motive for war — the wars of migration and territory which set the western economic and military stage upon which the emerging Plains Cree nation would play out its existence, the horse wars covering the "golden years" of plains Indian life, and the buffalo wars which mark the sorrowful trail to the reserves. Intimately related to each era is a particular trade pattern supported by a parallel military system that linked the Cree with other plains tribes and with non-natives. These three eras and their distinctive trade and military patterns provide the structure for this work. (p. xv)

The first era ends in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the era of "the horse wars" extends from about 1810 to 1850, and "the buffalo wars" era lasts from 1850 to 1870.

One reviewer noted, "The Milloy volume is really a military history of the Plains Cree and/or of the plains."<sup>4</sup> To a large extent the book is a history of Cree military and trade relations with the Blackfoot tribes and their allies. A considerable portion of the book is devoted to the Plains Cree involvement with the Mandan-Hidatsa trade system, centred on the Missouri River. However, the bulk of the work deals with Cree relations with their western, not their southern, neighbours. It is in this area that Milloy has done the most research and makes his most controversial and questionable assertions.

### Critical Acclaim

Reviewers have lauded Milloy's "exhaustive" and "painstaking" research and have declared the book to be "solid scholarship." One reviewer placed the author in the vanguard of the "revolution" of recent years "in the writing of native history."

Much of the praise which this book has received stems from its supposed prominent place in the new Native history. Like many of his colleagues in the field in recent years, Milloy helps to destroy the myth that, after contact with Europeans, Indians were the passive, uncomprehending dupes of forces and systems beyond their understanding and power. As one reviewer succinctly put it,

[Milloy] certainly gives the lie to older notions that the Cree were victimized by the fur trade, manipulated by rival European trading companies and incapable of rapid adjustment to the changes in their world. On the contrary, according to Milloy, the Cree of both the Saskatchewan River and the Assiniboine-Red Rivers area were innovative and masterful in their response to challenges and opportunities from the era of intense fur-trade competition to the making of the numbered treaties on the prairies in the 1870s.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his excellent intentions, however, the final product is disappointing.

What is remarkable is the almost universal acclaim which this book has received in the academic community. Of the ten reviews cited above, nine concluded that it was a wonderful contribution to the field. Of these nine, just three had slight reservations, but not enough to alter their overall glowing assessments.<sup>6</sup> Only one reviewer seriously challenged the book,<sup>7</sup> in part over the need for this comparatively short volume in advance of the upcoming "full tribal history" (p. xii) promised by Milloy.

### Historiographically Out-of-Date

With respect to the westward migration of the Cree, Milloy repeats in 1988 what was accepted in the early 1970s. He writes, "This migration began with the fur trade. In the early seventeenth century, Woodland Cree were located in an area stretching from the Eastmain River to the Winnipeg River." (p. 5) Accepting the position put forward by Mandelbaum in 1940 and in the early work of Ray,<sup>8</sup> he ignores the debate initiated by James G.E. Smith in 1975. Smith challenged the generally accepted view of the time which postulated a westward migration of the Cree from the late seventeenth century. This migration was attributed to various consequences of the fur trade, including the introduction of the gun, the depletion of the beaver and a drastic reduction in the population of big game animals.<sup>9</sup> Through archaeological and linguistic research, and through a reassessment of the documentary record, however, Smith, David Meyer and Dale Russell have virtually destroyed the credibility of this position. They have confirmed the presence of Cree as far west as the woodlands of Alberta and in the parklands of the Saskatchewan River in the pre-contact period.<sup>10</sup>

Milloy does not cite Smith, Meyer or Russell, three of the most significant contributors in the last decade to research the western Cree in pre-contact

and early historic times. His assumptions are therefore outdated with respect to the literature on the location through time of the western Cree. He also assumes a drastic cultural disjuncture as the Cree would have made a rapid shift from the woods to the plains. Milloy never provides a cultural description of the ancestors of the Plains Cree who inhabited the woodlands between Hudson Bay and Lake Winnipeg, nor does he give much of a picture of their altered lifestyle after adopting the plains-parkland way of life. Despite its importance to his analysis, he does not explain this transformation, though he refers to it throughout. Yet the work of Meyer and Russell in particular confirms the ongoing occupation of the parkland of the Saskatchewan River long before any contact with Europeans. Undoubtedly these inhabitants of the Saskatchewan parkland seasonally hunted on the Plains in pre- and early historic times, making their transition to a full-fledged plains culture a much longer and less disruptive process than that which Milloy asserts occurred comparatively rapidly and almost directly from the woodlands to the plains.

## Problems of Analysis

### *The Danger of Working Backward Through Time*

Milloy's book exhibits many serious problems of analysis, besides that noted immediately above. One of these is his failure to distinguish between Cree band-tribal relations in the past with perceived present-day conditions. As one reviewer observed, Milloy "tends to oversimplify the role of bands," and writes about "the Plains Cree nation" in terms acceptable to, and used by, the Cree themselves today.<sup>11</sup> Yet in the period described by Milloy there was a great deal less homogeneity than one could find even among today's far from homogeneous Plains Cree. By the mid-nineteenth century the Plains Cree could be found from the Red River to the South Saskatchewan River. Individual Cree bands then, and earlier, were almost certainly much more autonomous than bands in most other Indian tribes living on the Plains, including those of the three Blackfoot tribes. Tefft attributed the Crees' lack of central authority and tribal integration, and thus the concomitant independence of individual bands, to a lack of unifying tribal-wide social and religious gatherings.<sup>12</sup> Ewers and Mandelbaum confirmed the distinct differences in tribal organization. The Blackfoot held a tribal Sun Dance, and their societies, which operated only during the summer tribal gathering, were made up of members of all bands. The Plains Cree, on the other hand, held no such dance, and their societies functioned separately within each band.<sup>13</sup> As Mandelbaum stated, "The Plains Cree were divided into several loosely organized bands."<sup>14</sup> Yet Milloy most often treats them as a cohesive, coordinated and single-minded unit with shared external relations and concerns. Milloy could more usefully have examined the evidence for signs of Cree transition from band autonomy towards more centralized authority.

### *"The Naywattame-Gros Ventre"*

Until direct European trade was established with the Blackfoot tribes and the Gros Ventre in the early 1780s, the documentary record of these peoples is extremely limited and open to debate. Milloy does cite the principal sources, which include Henry Kelsey's 1691 journal, Legardeur de Saint-Pierre's 1750-52 summary journal, Anthony Henday's 1754-55 journal, and Matthew Cocking's 1772-73 journal. However, he offers some highly questionable readings of these journals and often ignores information offered in them and in other documents which contradicts his theory.

Nowhere is his interpretation of documents more questionable than in his identification of the Naywattame Poets as the Gros Ventre. During an inland journey of 1691, the Hudson's Bay Company employee, Henry Kelsey, encountered an Indian group which he simply identified as the Naywattame Poets. At this time they were the enemies of the allied Cree and Assiniboine. No one has shown with certainty just who the Naywattame Poets were.<sup>15</sup> Milloy, however, states (p. 7) that the Naywattame Poets were indisputably the Gros Ventre. He puts his case for this identification in an endnote: "The Naywattame Poets are undoubtedly the Atsina or Gros Ventre and are so identified by journalists at a relatively early date." (p. 133) As supporting evidence he cites a single page reference in the published journal of Legardeur de Saint-Pierre. This passage states that the Cree were then at war "against Hyactéjlini, the Brochets and the Gros Ventres."<sup>16</sup> Nowhere, however, is the term Naywattame Poets used by Legardeur de Saint-Pierre or, for that matter, by any fur trader other than Kelsey.

Having somehow thus equated the Naywattame Poets with the Gros Ventre, Milloy then asserts that after 1692 "the state of warfare between the Cree-Assiniboine and the Gros Ventre (Naywattame Poets) continued. Cree relations with the Blackfoot remained friendly." (p. 7) These statements compound the problem. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the names Gros Ventre and Blackfoot were never used, and Kelsey's is the only recorded visit to any group which may have been one or the other of these tribes, or their allies.

To make matters even more mystifying, Milloy, when discussing Legardeur de Saint-Pierre's journal, writes, "It is impossible to determine who the Hyactjlini and Brochet (Jackfish?) Indians were or even to be sure that these Gros Ventre were Fall or Rapid Indians." (p. 10) In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Gros Ventre were most often referred to by fur traders as the Fall Indians. However, on the Missouri River another unrelated Indian tribe, the Hidatsa, was also known as the Gros Ventre. Within four pages, therefore, Milloy asserts that Legardeur de Saint-Pierre's journal proves that the Naywattame Poets are the Gros Ventre/Fall Indians (Atsina) and that this same passage does not even confirm that these particular Gros Ventre are the Atsina. Based solely on his reading of Kelsey and Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, Milloy then coins a new term which he uses throughout the early part of the book, the Naywattame-Gros Ventre.

*Twinned Untenable Theories: Unbroken Cree-Gros Ventre Enmity, and a Cree-Blackfoot Military Alliance, Throughout the Eighteenth Century*

Milloy opens the book by presenting a radical new theory of Blackfoot-Cree relations in the eighteenth century, a period for which there are few documentary records. Rather than the generally accepted picture of ongoing hostility between these two tribes and their respective allies broken by intermittent periods of peace, he states that the Cree and Blackfoot were economic and military allies throughout most of this century, with the brief periods of violence after 1770 being aberrations. He supports this assertion with virtually no evidence, and likewise dismisses any meaningful links between the Gros Ventre Indians (Atsina) and the three Blackfoot tribes — the Peigan, Blood and Blackfoot proper. Milloy draws an eighteenth-century picture of unbroken Gros Ventre hostility towards the Cree and their perennial allies the Assiniboine, and presents a parallel scene of a virtually uninterrupted economic and military alliance of the Blackfoot tribes with the Cree and Assiniboine. He substantiates neither portrayal, but, if one were to accept them, they do offer the later dramatic situation of the Blackfoot being forced to choose, according to Milloy, between their longtime allies — the Cree and Assiniboine — and the horse-rich Gros Ventre. Milloy presents these interconnected dual theories through a series of questionable tribal identifications, by means of dubious interpretation of some documents, and by ignoring information contained in others.

Milloy's analysis of the inland journals of two Hudson's Bay Company men, Anthony Henday and Matthew Cocking, exemplifies the flimsiness of his case. Henday made a one-year trip from York Factory onto the Canadian Prairies in 1754-55, in the company of a party of Cree. He encountered a large number of Indians whom he merely identified as "Archithinue." This is derivative of a Cree word which can mean either stranger or enemy. At this time Henday's "Archithinue" were enjoying peaceful trading relations with the Cree and Assiniboine. Milloy asserts that these "Archithinue" were Blackfoot, stating that Henday "met the Archithinue (Blackfoot) Indians." (p. 10) Others, however, debate the identity of this Native group. One key work cited by Milloy in other contexts claims that the Gros Ventre were definitely Henday's "Archithinue."<sup>17</sup> Yet in his journal Henday clearly used "Archithinue" as a generic term referring not to a single tribe but to a number of different groups, some of whom were at war with each other. Henday wrote, "They have other Natives Horseman as well as Foot, who are their Enemies: they are also called the Archithinue Indians; & by what I can learn talk the same language, & hath the same customs."<sup>18</sup> Surely the reader has a right to know that there is some ambiguity over the identity of the people to whom Henday was speaking, and with whom the Cree and Assiniboine were trading.

The confusion is compounded when Milloy discusses Cocking's 1772-73 journal of yet another trip undertaken to meet the Archithinue. He writes of the wish of Cocking and his Cree and Assiniboine companions to encounter "the Blackfoot nation" — presumably the Blackfoot, Blood and Peigan

tribes. However, Milloy does not point out that Cocking never used the term "Blackfoot," but only Archithinue, or some variant thereof, to describe the Indians whom he eventually met, nor that the particular Archithinue met were actually the Gros Ventre (see Milloy, pp. 11-12).

Here, as elsewhere, Milloy relies on the published version of a document, rather than going back to the original.<sup>19</sup> Cocking's published journal identifies by tribe the five allied "Archithinue friends." However, the journal which Cocking originally sent back from York Factory to London in 1773 contains far more information than the version edited and abridged by Andrew Graham; it identifies four "Yeachithinnee" ("Archithinue") enemies. Cocking clearly describes tribal alliances which lasted into at least the 1850s and which apparently were in place by 1772, and perhaps much earlier. This alliance structure consisted of the three Blackfoot tribes — the Peigan, Blood and Blackfoot — and the Gros Ventre and Sarcee. So closely allied were these five tribes over such an extended period that the upper Saskatchewan River traders used terms to refer to them which encompassed all five, either the term "the Plains tribes" or "the Slave tribes," the latter originally a term of denigration assigned them by the Cree. The 1773 copy of Cocking's journal identifies the four "Yeachithinnee" ("Archithinue") enemies of these five allied "Yeachithinnee Friends" — the Snake, Sioux, Kootenay and Flathead Indians. Perhaps this was the same "Archithinue" alignment of friends and enemies referred to by Henday. Cocking's unedited journal entry reads as follows:

Our Yeachithinnee Friends came to us and pitched on one side of the Buffalo Pound; twenty-one Tents of them, the other seven are gone another way. One of the Leaders is thoroughly acquainted with the Assinnee Poet Indian tongue, so that we shall be able to understand each other, my Leader being also acquainted with that tongue. These Natives are called Powestick Athinneewock or Water-fall Indians. The People I am with inform me there are four Nations more which go under the name of Yeachithinnee Indians with whom they are in friendship. Viz<sup>1</sup> Mithcoo Athinneewock or Blood Indians: Koskiketew Wathussituck or black foot Indians; Pigonew Athinneewock or muddy Water Indians and Sussewuck or Woody Country Indians. Their Enemies also go under the general name of Yeachithinnee Indians, four Nations. Kanapick Athinneewock or Snake Indians; Wah-tee or Sault Indians; Kuttunnayewuck [Kootenay Indians]; and Nah-puck Ustiguanack or flat Head Indians so called they tell me from their foreheads being very flat.<sup>20</sup>

Whichever version of the journal is consulted, it is clear that Cocking was talking with a "Water-fall" or Fall Indian, a Gros Ventre, not a Blackfoot Indian, and that the Cree and Assiniboine were then on amicable trading terms with the Gros Ventre. Milloy fails to tell the reader any of this, though it is stated plainly in the version of the journal which he cites. Despite the contrary evidence, he persists in postulating the separation of the Gros Ventre and the Blackfoot tribes until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in seeing unceasing hostility between the Gros Ventre and the Cree.

However, peaceful trade between the Blackfoot tribes and the Gros Ventre with the Cree and Assiniboine was not the norm. In the early 1790s relations between the Gros Ventre and the Cree and Assiniboine, and the

Gros Ventre and the various Saskatchewan traders, deteriorated into a round of violence the likes of which the white traders had never before experienced. Milloy devotes almost three pages of text (pp. 32-34), out of a total of only 121 pages, to these incidents of 1793-94. They included a series of assaults by the Gros Ventre on the North West and Hudson's Bay companies, culminating in the successful 1794 attack on the latter company's South Branch House and the killing of its few summer inhabitants. Milloy then adds, "The Blackfoot had not remained entirely aloof from these battles among the Cree, the traders and the Gros Ventre." He overlooks the following facts: there were Blackfoot with the Gros Ventre participating in the autumn attacks on Pine Island post, Manchester House and on a third rival post;<sup>21</sup> Blackfoot and Blood Indians fired upon North West Company men at Fort George in January 1794;<sup>22</sup> a combined party of Gros Ventre and Blackfoot made an abortive attempt to plunder Pine Island post in late January or early February 1794;<sup>23</sup> and it was a joint Gros Ventre-Blackfoot party that sacked South Branch House in June 1794.<sup>24</sup>

Milloy attributes this unprecedented behaviour of the Gros Ventre to more intensified attacks from the late 1780s by the Cree and Assiniboine, and to the Gros Ventres' trading of wolf pelts to the virtual exclusion of any other items. Less in demand than beaver, wolf pelts did not offer the purchasing power at the posts which the Cree and Assiniboine enjoyed by their trade in beaver pelts. The latter tribes could thus acquire a superiority in European firearms, which they used against the Gros Ventre. The Gros Ventre, Milloy argues, took out their frustration on the white traders, whom they viewed not only as suppliers to their enemies but also as suitable targets for attack, which would not only bring vengeance but also an increased supply of plundered arms. Colin Calloway, however, has argued that the timing of the outbreak was the result of a sudden drop in value of wolf skins on the London market, a factor not considered by Milloy.<sup>25</sup> Also overlooked by Milloy is the fact that at this time wolf pelts were likewise the principal item of trade of the Blackfoot tribes, whose purchasing power and firepower would have been just as limited as that of the Gros Ventre.

Milloy persists in his assertion that from "the 1690s all through the eighteenth century, the Naywattame-Gros Ventre were excluded by the Cree, who hunted and attacked them seemingly at every opportunity." (pp. 16 and 32) All versions of Cocking's journal contradict this interpretation. Milloy also tries to make a case for a Cree-Blackfoot military alliance until the early 1800s, when the Blackfoot tribes opted instead to ally with the Gros Ventre and broke their ties with the Cree. He argues that by that time the Blackfoot no longer needed the Cree as middlemen to obtain European goods, but did need the Gros Ventre trade links to their horse-rich relatives, the Arapaho. The Cree were therefore forced to go to war against the Blackfoot to acquire horses.

This argument would have appeared more sound if Milloy had been able to establish that any such military alliance had ever existed between the Cree and the Blackfoot. The only eighteenth-century examples of Cree or

Assiniboine actually assisting the Blackfoot in battles with mutual enemies were given by David Thompson in his autobiographical *Narrative*. Thompson's aged informant's "account of former times went back to about 1730"<sup>26</sup> and described two battles against the Snake Indians with the Peigan, assisted by a total of apparently seven Assiniboine and about twenty-three Cree. Though Thompson's *Narrative* is the only known source of information concerning these two joint military endeavours and his dating is no more specific than "about 1730," Milloy precisely dates the battles to 1723 and 1732. He provides no source except the Tyrrell edition of Thompson's *Narrative*, which offers no clue to such specific years.

These two battles are the only concrete examples which Milloy offers to substantiate his theory of an eighteenth-century Blackfoot-Cree military alliance. Furthermore, he has overlooked one source which makes the opposite case, for ongoing Archithinue warfare with the Cree. Glyndwr Williams has drawn attention to a 1738 letter from Richard Norton at Churchill which described "the Atchue-thinnies" as "a people bordering near the Western Ocean who are great enemies to our inland trading Indians."<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the state of affairs in Henday's time (the 1750s), Milloy states, "Although no mention is made of battles or even of the Snake, the cordial trading relations between the Cree-Assiniboine and Blackfoot were a probable indication that their military alliance was still operative." (p. 10) Yet the Cree told Henday that the Archithinue (all Blackfoot, according to Milloy) would kill any Cree caught trapping on Archithinue lands, and Archithinue captives and scalps were later brought in to Henday's camp and displayed and traded among his Cree companions.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Milloy asserts that relations between the Blackfoot and Cree continued to be friendly and suggests "probable" and then "possible" direct front-line involvement by the Cree to assist the Blackfoot. Milloy even asserts (p. 11) that during Cocking's visit to the Archithinue they sought Cree assistance in a war against the Snake. However, the journal written in Cocking's hand clearly refutes this assertion; the request was for Gros Ventre assistance by another unidentified Archithinue tribe.<sup>29</sup>

Though certainly not emphasizing the constraints of unclear or absent documentation for the pre-1780s period, Milloy does to some extent acknowledge this problem, but is nevertheless undeterred. For instance, he states, "While it is difficult to assess the frequency of front-line participation of the Cree in the Blackfoot drive to the mountains, there is little doubt that the major part played by the Cree in those military events was in supplying the Blackfoot with firearms." (p. 16) The reason that it is so hard to assess this "frequency" is that no one has documented such participation by the Cree, other than in the two battles noted by Thompson. Milloy attempts to give the impression of active Cree involvement in support of Blackfoot military action but sustains his theory of an eighteenth century Cree-Blackfoot military alliance on the basis of an extremely liberal definition of the word alliance: "The term *alliance* has been used to designate not only formal agreements and coordinated action by two or more parties against another, but also what



might be termed *coincidental* activity by two parties, who may not have been formally allied, who took parallel action against a third." (p. xvii) Certainly the existing documentary record indicates that during much of the eighteenth century the Blackfoot tribes, the Gros Ventre, the Cree and the Assiniboine were all the avowed enemies of the Snake Indians. From their sharing of a foe, a sometime trading relationship, and very little else, Milloy affirms the existence of a Blackfoot-Cree military alliance. Logically, a Gros Ventre-Cree military alliance could then be argued as well, for the Snake were their mutual enemies, and Cocking clearly demonstrated an established trading pattern of Cree and Assiniboine with the Gros Ventre. In short, this definition of an alliance is too broad. Certainly one would not argue that merely having a common enemy constitutes an alliance in any real sense of the word. The Snake Indians were apparently the enemies of both the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree-Assiniboine alliance throughout most of the eighteenth century. Yet this mutuality of foes does not necessarily speak to any relationship between the Blackfoot and Cree. In fact, Milloy cites (p. 65) an 1833 example of three-sided warfare, involving the Cree-Assiniboine, the Blackfoot tribes and the Mandan. Apart from the two Thompson-noted incidents, involving only some thirty Cree and Assiniboine, Milloy has no more justification to argue a Cree-Blackfoot military alliance than one would have to argue a similar Cree-Gros Ventre arrangement. Surviving eighteenth-century documents show that at different times the Cree and Assiniboine were involved in direct trade with both the Blackfoot tribes and the Gros Ventre, and then at war with these same peoples.

Milloy offers more proof of such a military alliance in the early 1830s, during one of several brief intervals of peace between the Cree and Blackfoot who, as he rightly argues, were generally on hostile terms with each other through the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. He writes that a Hudson's Bay Company officer "was informed by the Cree that 'a great many of the Beaver Hill Crees are going to join the Blackfeet for the purpose of going to war with them on the Crow mountain Indians'." (p. 91) The joint military endeavour apparently failed before it got underway, destroyed "by a series of disputes over horses" between the Cree and the perennial allies of the Blackfoot, the Sarcee. Shortly thereafter, open warfare between Cree and Blackfoot again erupted. However, during this same brief period of peace between the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree-Assiniboine, the latter tribes traded so many of their guns to the Blackfoot for horses that the Hudson's Bay Company was unable to immediately resupply all the sought-after replacement weapons.<sup>30</sup> A carefully chosen selection of nineteenth-century references drawn from the short-lived periods of peace between Cree and Blackfoot could just as easily be presented to portray an ongoing nineteenth-century trade and/or military alliance, a state of affairs which was far from the case.

To summarize, the eighteenth-century documentary record concerning Cree-Blackfoot relations, at least until the mid-1780s, is fragmentary. However, the available evidence disputes Milloy's dual thesis of a continuous Cree-Blackfoot military alliance and unbroken Cree-Gros Ventre

enmity. In fact, before the arrival, in large numbers, of European fur traders on the North Saskatchewan and lower South Saskatchewan rivers in the early 1780s, the specific state of Cree and Assiniboine relations with the Gros Ventre and the three Blackfoot tribes is difficult, if not impossible, to determine over time. Both groups benefited from their periods of trade, the Blackfoot-Gros Ventre side obtaining firearms and other European goods while the Cree-Assiniboine received horses, and cheap furs for retrade to the Europeans. The Blackfoot alliance could probably tolerate the pressure at its eastern borders when it used the weapons that it received from the Cree-Assiniboine against the Snake, Flathead and Kootenay in its push to the foothills of the Rockies and to the headwaters of the Missouri. Once the North West Company, Hudson's Bay Company and the smaller rival concerns began direct trade with the Blackfoot tribes in the 1780s, the Cree and Assiniboine lost most, if not all, of the value that they once had as middlemen. Though Milloy's careful selection of cited material does not show it to be the case, there are far more references in surviving fur-trade records of the 1780s and 1790s to periods of tension or open hostilities between these two rival Native groups than to periods of congenial relations. The texture of Blackfoot-Cree relations in these two decades is indistinguishable from that of almost any period in the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century.

This part of the book contains many other unsubstantiated claims and misstatements. Milloy states that the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company "leap-frogged each other in the construction of posts along the length of the Saskatchewan." (p. 13) Later (p. 18) he implies a Hudson's Bay Company superiority on the Saskatchewan. Neither scenario is correct. The North West Company, better equipped and better manned, led the way throughout the expansion up the North Saskatchewan, with the less able English company forced to follow to preserve its trade. He states that the first recorded outbreak of violence, "and this was only temporary," (p. 31) in his eighteenth-century military alliance occurred in June 1787, when Cree attacked Blood near Manchester House. However, more than a year earlier, William Tomison, the Hudson's Bay Company officer in charge on the Saskatchewan, reported a Peigan assault against some Cree. "One southern [Cree] Indian has been killed and another wounded by the Pee, Kin now [Peigan], tribe, which is likely to turn out to a civil War."<sup>31</sup>

Milloy also makes a radical statement about the geographic origins of the Blackfoot. By the 1780s, he states, "The Blackfoot advance had taken them back to their original homeland — the Bow River country." (p. 12) His assertion flies in the face of the generally accepted, and well substantiated, position that the Blackfoot originated in the parkland of present-day Saskatchewan, eventually pushing westward onto the Plains, displacing their most western inhabitants, the Kootenay, Flathead and Snake. Milloy offers no proof to back up his theory of Blackfoot origins.

Two other points in Milloy's Cree-Blackfoot military alliance argument warrant remark: the first concerns his handling of a somewhat confusing

Daniel Harmon journal entry, and the other his dating of the establishment of a particular Blackfoot trade relationship. Milloy uses an 1806 Harmon reference to a battle, instigated by differences over a horse, to argue his case that the breakdown of the Cree-Blackfoot alliance was largely precipitated by the growing difficulty of the Cree in obtaining horses through trade. Milloy quotes the published Lamb edition of Harmon's journal:

Six Assiniboines arrived and inform us that about Eighty Lodges of Crees and Assiniboins with about as many Blackfoot were on their way to wage war on the Rapid [Gros Ventre] Indians but the ... tribes fell out on the way respecting a horse which they both claimed, and which neither could relinquish and fought a battle among themselves. (p. 35)

Milloy's selective editing of this journal entry removes both its ambiguities and some information. The falling out was probably between the Blackfoot and the Cree and Assiniboine, but could also have occurred between the latter two. The battle which ensued resulted in Blackfoot and Assiniboine being killed. The square bracketed emendations below are provided in the Lamb edition:

Six Assiniboins, arrived and inform us that about Eighty Lodges of Crees & Assiniboins with about as many of the Black feet Indians, were on their way to wage war on the Rapid Indians, their common enemy, but the two former Tribes fell out on the way and fought a Battle among themselves, in which twenty five of the Black feet Indians and three of the Assiniboins fall, which put an end to their Wars for this Season. [The printed text states that the quarrel between the tribes was "respecting a horse, which they both claimed, and which neither would relinquish."<sup>32</sup>

The unusual tensions which then briefly existed between the Blackfoot tribes and the Gros Ventre could have prompted the contemplation of such action by the Blackfoot. The Gros Ventre, ever more directly pressed by the Cree and Assiniboine, were becoming more threatening to the Saskatchewan traders, to the expressed displeasure of the three Blackfoot tribes. There is no record of implemented military action by any of these three against the Gros Ventre, but Milloy later correctly points out the strain put on the Blackfoot-Gros Ventre alliance by Gros Ventre threats towards the Saskatchewan fur-trade posts. The Blackfoot tribes warned the Gros Ventre that they would mete out retribution for any such hostile actions against their suppliers. There may well have been a planned Blackfoot-Cree-Assiniboine foray against the Gros Ventre in 1806, but the cause of its demise, according to the source cited by Milloy, may have been a dispute between the Cree and Assiniboine, a possible interpretation which Milloy deletes from his version of the Harmon journal entry.

Milloy argues that the deciding factor in the breakdown of the Cree-Blackfoot military alliance was access to horses. The Blackfoot, he says, opted for the Gros Ventre link to a steady horse supply, and ended their alliance with the Cree. For their part, the Cree, unable to gain amicable access to Gros Ventre horses, were forced to extend their horse raiding to the three Blackfoot tribes to acquire a sufficiency. This all supposedly came to a head in 1806, when the "alliance was ended by the Blackfoot." (p. 36) This is a reference to the battle cited by Harmon and also described by

James Bird (p. 35) on his way to, and again after his arrival at, Edmonton House.<sup>33</sup> Milloy stresses 1806 as marking the end of the century-long military alliance which he has hypothesized. He then emphasizes a presumed event in the following year as demonstrating the Blackfoot response to this drastic alteration in tribal alignments. He states, "By 1807 a connection had been made between the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Blackfoot through which the latter began to receive horses." (p. 35) He cites a single source for this claim, Thwaites's 1904 edition of John Bradbury's 1809-11 "Travels." Unfortunately, Bradbury does not mention the Blackfoot, nor does the lengthy footnote by the editor, who states, "The Arapaho occupied the central mountainous region, roaming through Wyoming and Southern Idaho. They traded with the Spaniards, and supplied their kindred the Cheyenne with Spanish horses."<sup>34</sup> Thwaites's footnote does not mention the Gros Ventre or any trade whatsoever between the Arapaho and/or Cheyenne with the Blackfoot, nor at any point does it give a specific date for any occurrence discussed. By 1807 the Blackfoot were almost certainly enjoying the benefits of the Gros Ventre-Arapaho connection in their acquisition of horses, but they probably had been doing so for years, if not decades. Milloy offers no real evidence that would give any significance to the year 1807 in Blackfoot trading relationships.

### **Inadequate Primary Research: The Nineteenth-Century Chronology**

While Milloy's case for an eighteenth-century Blackfoot-Cree military alliance is questionable, the last two parts of his thesis — the examination of ongoing nineteenth-century Cree trade and military alliances in terms of "the horse wars" and then, with the diminishing size and range of the bison herds, "the buffalo wars" — are on much firmer ground. Though his argument may be sound here, however, his research is deficient. To those not familiar with the resources of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA) in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Milloy's bibliography and endnotes could seem impressive and his research exhaustive. Milloy has indeed done considerable research in this magnificent collection and offers material from this repository which has never before been published. However, vast sections of this collection which contain tremendous amounts of information directly pertaining to the subject of his book were not utilized.

The strength of Milloy's research is in the numerous post journals which he has examined, one of four principal sources of information in the HBCA relevant to a study of the Plains Cree. Besides the post journals, the three best sources of information in the HBCA concerning events in the Company's North American domains are the reports of the overseas governors to headquarters in London, the correspondence between the overseas governors and the officers running the individual posts or administrative districts, and the correspondence of these officers with each other. For some forty years, to 1860, Governor George Simpson ran the Company's operations in the region in which the Cree and their allies, and most of their enemies, lived. Simpson's voluminous correspondence has

largely survived. Milloy has used Simpson's official reports to London as one of his sources of information, but cut off his research in 1843; the last seventeen years were inexplicably left untapped. Milloy completely overlooked the third and fourth key sources, personal and business correspondence among the Company's officers, and to and from Simpson, his predecessors and successors. Often letters from on-site officers are the only source of information from a given region. Frequently they expand on brief journal references to events. Copies can be found in the HBCA in the individual post's records, in the governors' records (especially Simpson's), in London headquarters' records and in the correspondence books of York Factory.

From the time of the 1821 merger of the North West and Hudson's Bay companies, post and district officers were required to make written mid-winter reports on the state of affairs in the company operation and the geographic region under their charge. An amazingly high percentage of these annual reports has survived, along with huge quantities of correspondence written at other times of the year or for other reasons. For instance, for the Saskatchewan District, the mid-season reports, along with much other correspondence, have survived for virtually every year from the 1820s to the 1860s, whereas there is a break from 1834 to 1854 in the post journals of Edmonton House, the headquarters of the district. Milloy has not looked at any of this correspondence.

The inadequate research in the HBCA refutes Milloy's declaration that this book was written "with as much precision as possible." (p. xvii) Other prime sources of information for the period have also been disregarded, including published and unpublished missionary records and two extensive collections in the National Archives of Canada (NAC), the Hargrave Papers and the Selkirk Papers. These last two omissions are surprising, since every unpublished primary document cited by Milloy is held by the NAC, including microfilm copies of the HBCA material.

These gaps in Milloy's research have led him to make many questionable statements and to overlook key events, which are then omitted from his nineteenth-century military chronology. For example, Milloy cites an unbroken litany of violent exchanges between the Blackfoot alliance and the Cree-Assiniboine alliance in the 1840s, with the Cree manifesting "a singlemindedness of purpose and method." (pp. 98-99) Yet the published journals of the missionary Robert Terrill Rundle and the HBCA-held correspondence of Chief Factor John Rowand with Simpson, contain information about successful Cree peace overtures to the Blackfoot tribes in 1841<sup>35</sup> and of another period of peace, apparently arranged by Rowand, commencing in the winter of 1846-47.<sup>36</sup>

In the fall of 1857, shortly after the fatal termination of yet another such peace agreement, one more in this long series of short-lived peaces was arranged, due largely, as Milloy points out, to the influence of the famed Cree leader, Maskepetoon. Milloy then states that the "ensuing peace lasted, undisturbed, until 1860." (p. 111) However, in a source cited by

Milloy, Captain Palliser reported in June 1858 that the Cree had caused a brief rupture in the peace.<sup>37</sup> The peace was shattered in the winter of 1859-60, months before the fall 1860 date given by Milloy.<sup>38</sup>

### Carelessness

There is carelessness in this book which turns up with disturbing frequency. Some of it may be attributed to the author, and some to the series editors. Much of it is merely annoying or irritating, while a good deal is of a more problematic nature.

For example, and as a follow-up to the point discussed immediately above, Milloy (p. 111) "quotes" from the Edmonton House journal of 27 October 1857 concerning Maskepetoon's triumphant arrival at that post after arranging the peace. However, neither that particular entry nor any other in the journal contain any such quotation. In fact, the 27 October 1857 entry makes no mention whatsoever of Maskepetoon or of any Blackfoot-Cree peace arrangements.<sup>39</sup> The fall 1860 killing of a Blackfoot chief by Cree at Edmonton House did not occur in October, as Milloy states on this same page, but on 25 September.<sup>40</sup> It was this incident, he claims, which "shattered" the unbroken three-year peace.

Examples abound. In the endnotes and bibliography Milloy misspells the name of W. Kaye Lamb, the editor of Harmon's journal and longtime dominion archivist. The American Fur Company's Fort McKenzie is sometimes spelled correctly in the text (p. 95) but sometimes not (p. 93), and is misspelled on the accompanying map (p. xi). The date in the caption (p. 2) accompanying a photo of the Cree leader, Piapot, not only predates his birth but also the invention of photography. Of a more serious nature, Milloy has Americans trading repeating rifles on the Missouri River in the early 1830s (p. xvii), some three decades before these weapons were even manufactured.

Milloy frequently uses quite specific dates for emphasis. Unfortunately, their accuracy is often lacking. For example, in describing developments within the Blackfoot alliance in the early 1830s he quotes an Edmonton House post journal entry prediction of 8 December "1833" and immediately writes, "Nine days later, on 17 December, that assessment was proven correct." (p. 95) He then quotes from a 17 December 1833 Peigan Post (Bow Fort) journal entry. However, the second entry was actually one year and nine days later, for the first quotation is from a journal entry written in December 1832, not 1833.<sup>41</sup>

Many of Milloy's citations are both incomplete and inappropriate, a responsibility which both he and his editors must share. The Fort Pitt journals in the HBCA appear in his endnotes, but not in his bibliography. Books noted in his preface are missing from the bibliography. Milloy's HBCA citations are inappropriate; he cites entire microfilm reels, with dates, but not specific pieces, dates and folios, as the material is arranged and identified in the HBCA. The bibliography does not identify the provenance of the

"Hudson's Bay Company Records," either the originals in the HBCA or the microfilm copies in the NAC, nor does it identify this latter institution as the holder of all of his listed "Fur Trade Manuscripts."

## Conclusions

However good his intentions, Milloy wrote a badly flawed book. The core of his analysis of eighteenth-century tribal arrangements is contradicted by the weight of the evidence. He oversimplifies, if not disregarding altogether, the problem of tribal identification in the pre- and early contact periods. Milloy's neglect of recent publications and current research in his field also seriously damages the final product. The nineteenth-century military and trade chronology which he presents contains many errors and omissions, caused by inadequate primary research. There is not a single unpublished primary document cited in the 1988 bibliography which was not already noted in Milloy's 1972 thesis, a surprising revelation considering the extent of critically important material which should have been examined. While *The Plains Cree* does contain a great deal of valuable data, the book is so full of errors that one almost has to go back to the original source of each citation to verify the validity or accuracy of the material presented.

The lack of publicly expressed criticism of this book is disturbing. Milloy's unsubstantiated theory of eighteenth-century tribal alignments, especially his Blackfoot-Cree military alliance, should long ago have been challenged. Unfortunately, this unfounded Milloy contention was too soon accepted as valid. His published 1988 hypothesis became a premise of Gary Doige's otherwise sound 1989 master's thesis, "Warfare Patterns of the Assiniboine to 1809," in which Doige expresses a debt of gratitude to Milloy's analysis and readily accepts the existence of this supposed military alliance.<sup>42</sup> Doige offers no more proof of its existence than does Milloy, but he does differ in the reasons for, and the timing of, its demise. He attributes its end to the construction in Blackfoot territory of European trading posts in the 1780s, which eliminated the middleman role of the Cree. One can hope that Milloy's unsubstantiated, if not disproved, theory of an eighteenth-century Blackfoot-Cree military alliance does not permeate writing in this field any further.

In many ways Milloy was in the vanguard of his field when he wrote his master's thesis in 1972. His research and analysis were then as flawed, inadequate and incomplete as in his 1988 book, but the overall object of his work was both laudable and, at that time, ground-breaking. He attempted to document that the Cree were not the unthinking, powerless puppets of wilier Europeans. Despite its many deficiencies, his book definitely does demonstrate that the Cree were quite aware of the ever-changing world around them and, not only that they were quite adaptable to these changing conditions and times, but that they could directly influence events as well. Milloy never claimed to be writing "a full tribal history" (p. xiii) of the Plains Cree, and so he did not attempt to address many of the issues which an ethnohistorian of today would have to consider in undertaking such a task. However, even within the limited parameters which he set out for his study

11. James Dempsey, *Great Plains Quarterly*.
12. S.K. Tefft, "From Band to Tribe on the Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* (1965): 166-70.
13. Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 111 and 183, and John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 105 and 175-76. Surprisingly, nowhere in his notes or bibliography does Milloy cite this work by Ewers, the standard book on the subject since its first publication in 1958.
14. Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 9.
15. K.G. Davies, "Henry Kelsey," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume 2, 1701 to 1740* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 310.
16. Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, "Journal of Jacques Repentigny Legardeur St. Pierre of His Expedition for the Discovery of the Western Sea, 1750-1752," in *Report On Canadian Archives* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1887), cxi.
17. Glyndwr Williams, ed., *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), 202n.
18. Lawrence J. Burpee, ed., "York Factory to the Blackfeet Country: The Journal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-55," in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Third Series, Vol. 1, Section 2* (1907) (hereafter Burpee, "Hendry"), 15 October 1754 journal entry, 339. The original Hendry version has not survived. Four later manuscript copies of greater or lesser similarity to each other, edited at York Factory by Andrew Graham, are all that now remain. The version cited by Milloy is virtually identical to the published version cited above, except for minor changes in punctuation and capitalization. See National Archives of Canada (NAC), MG18, D5, Andrew Graham Papers, Hendry Journal, 30-2.
19. Lawrence J. Burpee, ed., "An Adventurer from Hudson Bay: Journal of Matthew Cocking, From York Factory to the Blackfeet Country, 1772-73," in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Third Series, Vol. 2, Section 2* (1908), 1 December 1772, 110-11. See also NAC, MG18, D5, Andrew Graham Papers, Cocking Journal, 96-97.
20. Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (HBCA), B.239/a/69, York Factory post journal, 1 December 1772. This is not actually the original journal kept by Cocking in the field in 1772-73; it is too neat and clean. However, it is the closest thing to the original that still exists, a copy made by Cocking himself in the summer of 1773 after his return to York Factory. Irene Spry, Cocking's biographer, assures that this journal, B.239/a/69, is in Cocking's own handwriting, and the HBCA confirms by the outfit stamps on the journal that it was sent back to London on the fall ship of 1773. Spry's testimony is contained in endnote nine of the unpublished notes to Irene Spry, "Matthew Cocking," in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume 4, 1771 to 1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 156-58. The notes were kindly supplied to this author by Professor Spry. Judith Beattie, the keeper of the HBCA, confirmed the journal's shipment date in a telephone conversation of 14 December 1990.
21. HBCA, B.49/a/25a, Cumberland House post journal, 27 January 1794, William Tomison letter written at Buckingham House, fo. 39.
22. HBCA, B.24/a/2, Buckingham House post journal, 18 January 1794.
23. *Ibid.*, 5 February 1794, and HBCA, F.3/1, North West Company records, 26 July 1794, Grand Portage, Duncan McGillivray to Simon McTavish, fo. 172.
24. HBCA, A.11/117, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, John Cornelius Van Driel description, dated 24 June 1794, of destruction of South Branch House, fos. 163-6d., and HBCA, F.3/1, 18 September 1794, York Factory, Van Driel to John Fish, fos. 195-5d.
25. Colin G. Calloway, "The Inter-tribal Balance of Power on the Great Plains, 1760-1850," *Journal of American Studies* 16, no. 1 (April 1982): 36.



11. James Dempsey, *Great Plains Quarterly*.
12. S.K. Tefft, "From Band to Tribe on the Plains," *Plains Anthropologist* (1965): 166-70.
13. Mandelbaum, *Plains Cree*, 111 and 183, and John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 105 and 175-76. Surprisingly, nowhere in his notes or bibliography does Milloy cite this work by Ewers, the standard book on the subject since its first publication in 1958.
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16. Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, "Journal of Jacques Repentigny Legardeur St. Pierre of His Expedition for the Discovery of the Western Sea, 1750-1752," in *Report On Canadian Archives* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1887), cxi.
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23. *Ibid.*, 5 February 1794, and HBCA, F.3/1, North West Company records, 26 July 1794, Grand Portage, Duncan McGillivray to Simon McTavish, fo. 172.
24. HBCA, A.11/117, London Inward Correspondence from York Factory, John Cornelius Van Driel description, dated 24 June 1794, of destruction of South Branch House, fos. 163-6d., and HBCA, F.3/1, 18 September 1794, York Factory, Van Driel to John Fish, fos. 195-5d.
25. Colin G. Calloway, "The Inter-tribal Balance of Power on the Great Plains, 1760-1850," *Journal of American Studies* 16, no. 1 (April 1982): 36.

26. Joseph Burr Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), 328.
27. Glyndwr Williams, "The Puzzle of Anthony Henday's Journal, 1754-55," *The Beaver* 309, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 43.
28. Burpee, "Hendry," 26 and 27 December 1754 and 11 to 27 February 1755, 344 and 347.
29. HBCA, B.239/a/69, 16 December 1772.
30. HBCA, B.22/a/23, Brandon House post journal, 8 November 1829.
31. HBCA, B.87/a/8, Lower Hudson House post journal, 5 May 1786.
32. W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1957), 8 August 1806, South Branch House post journal, 100.
33. HBCA, B.60/a/6, Edmonton House post journal, 25 August, 22 September and 31 December 1806. The 31 December entry contains a copy of a 23 December 1806 Bird letter to John McNab, in which he describes the incident.
34. Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., "Bradbury's Travels in the Interior of America, 1809-1811," in *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, Vol. 5 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1904), 225n.
35. Hugh A. Dempsey, ed., *The Rundle Journals, 1840-1848* (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1977), 26 February 1841, 56.
36. HBCA, D.5/19, Governor George Simpson's Inward Correspondence, 25 February 1847, Edmonton House, Rowand to Simpson, fo. 291.
37. Irene M. Spry, ed., *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1968), 230-31.
38. In his January 1860 report Chief Factor William J. Christie wrote from Edmonton House, "War has been declared between the Blackfeet and Cree Indians." He described numerous incidents of horse stealing on both sides and several skirmishes resulting in both Blackfoot and Cree deaths. He went on to report, "The Blackfeet Chiefs have sent me intimation, that they will not trouble our Forts or Kill any of our people, but caution me against employing Cree Indians to go out hunting with our people in the plains, as they are determined to Kill them where ever they meet them." See HBCA, D.5/51, 2 January 1860, Edmonton House, Christie to governor, chief factors and chief traders of the Northern Department, fols. 27d.-8.
39. HBCA, B.60/a/29b, 27 October 1857.
40. HBCA, B.60/a/31, 25 September 1860.
41. HBCA, B.60/a/27, 8 December 1832, and B.21/a/1, Piegan Post/Bow Fort post journal, 17 December 1833.
42. Gary Blake Doige, "Warfare Patterns of the Assiniboine to 1809." (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1989).