Trading with the Hudson's Bay Company, a case study of the Nipigon House Post, 1828-1838

Abstract
This thesis critically examines generalizations offered in the fur trade literature regarding the impact of the amalgamation of the Northwest Company and Hudson’s Bay Company upon Aboriginal trade partners. There are essentially two schools of thought. One asserts that Aboriginal trappers had become dependent upon European technology by the time of the 1821 amalgamation, and were forced to continue the trade exchange accepting the changes imposed by the Hudson’s Bay Company during the monopoly period. The second perspective holds that Aboriginal trade partners were not dependent upon European technology and were adaptable, choosing to opt out of the trade exchange, focusing instead upon subsistence hunting and trapping to satisfy finite wants and needs. The focus of this research project is to evaluate these competing ideas about the amalgamation phase of the fur trade, using the records of Nipigon House Post dating between 1828 and 1838. The fur trade is typically characterized by several predominant periods: the early fur trade, the competition phase, and finally the amalgamation phase. As each phase of the trade progressed, Aboriginal trade partners were affected in various ways. It is thought that in the post-amalgamation phase, there was a loss of Aboriginal bargaining power, and an extended time of hardship due to a widespread collapse in the viability of fur and food resources. This thesis examines how the Anishinabe community at Nipigon House Post was affected by the amalgamation. Data derived from the Journals of the Nipigon House are used to explore the Anishinabe community and their trade activities. Contrary to expectations deriving from the conventional fur trade literature that emphasize growing dependence upon the HBC, the Nipigon House data indicate adaptability to the monopoly period. This involved a limited demand for a narrow range of goods in keeping with the modest fur returns generated. Indeed many people focused heavily upon satisfing their subsistence needs, and sharply reduced their efforts at fur trapping. This contributed to a shift of the settlement system, with much more time spent along the lakeshore. These data suggest that the Lake Nipigon Anishinabe were not dependent upon European goods for survival. It can be concluded that reconsideration of generalizations about Aboriginal dependency during the monopoly phase of the fur trade is required.
Other companies also envied the apparent monopoly of Hudson's Bay Company. U.S. traders wanted a share in the fur trade following the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 to 1806. In 1808 Pierre Chouteau, William Clark, and five others established the Missouri Fur Company, and in New York John Jacob Astor, the leading fur dealer in the United States, started the American Fur Company, capitalized at US$300,000, of which he owned all but a few shares. A select committee of the House of the Commons investigated the charges, and with Sir George Simpson as one of the principal witnesses, the charges were dismissed. The company's territory and the North West territories became part of the Canadian Confederation through the British North America Act of 1867. In the middle of the XIX century Hudson's Bay Company, expanding its sphere of influence, not just faced with opposition from the Tlingit Indians. Tlingits, using the benefits of intermediary trade of the European goods, successfully more. In the middle of the XIX century Hudson's Bay Company, expanding its sphere of influence, not just faced with opposition from the Tlingit Indians. Tlingits, using the benefits of intermediary trade of the European goods, successfully blocked the penetration of British merchants. The article deals with unsuccessful attempts of the HBS clerk Rober... The Hudson’s Bay Company abandoned Spokane House and moved to the newly constructed Fort Colvile.