

## NORMAN W. KITTSON, A FUR-TRADER AT PEMBINA<sup>1</sup>

In the list of worthy pioneers who laid the foundations of this commonwealth of Minnesota so broadly and securely the name of Norman W. Kittson must assuredly be placed. As fur-trader and protector of American interests on the northern frontier, as territorial legislator, as mayor of St. Paul, as "commodore" of a line of steamboats on the Red River of the North, and as railroad promoter in association with James J. Hill he touched the life of the state in his activities at many vital points.

Norman Wolfred Kittson, the son of George Kittson and Nancy Tucker Kittson, was born in 1814 at Chambly, a military center near Sorel in Lower Canada.<sup>2</sup> To watch the British regulars at drill was one of his youthful delights. His education he received at the Sorel Grammar School. He came of good middle-class stock. His grandfather, John George Kittson, an officer in the British army, served under Wolfe at Quebec but fell an untimely victim to ship fever. His grandmother seems to have remained in Canada. In later years she married Alexander Henry, the great explorer. Norman W. Kittson was but ten when his illustrious step-grandfather died but probably he came in contact with the old pathfinder sufficiently to have his interest in the great West quickened. A more potent influence, however, came from William Morrison, a retired fur-trader who had served

<sup>1</sup> This paper in less extended form was read on January 14, 1924, at the seventy-fifth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> The writer is indebted to the Reverend Henry Kittson of Berthier-en-Haut, Quebec, for particulars of his father's boyhood. Norman Wolfred Kittson was named for Doctor Wolfred Nelson, a familiar figure in the Kittson household, who distinguished himself in the French-Canadian rebellion of 1837. Kittson's father held the office of "king's auctioneer" and did not share, we can safely assume, the political views of his family physician.

in turn the Northwest Company and the American Fur Company.<sup>3</sup> Fired by tales of prowess and adventure and influenced no doubt by the lack of suitable openings for ambitious young men in Lower Canada, Norman, then only sixteen, and his brother John became apprenticed for three years to the American Fur Company.<sup>4</sup> In 1830 they started with a band of Canadian *voyageurs* to the West.

At Mackinac, then the great center of the American fur trade in the North, Norman Kittson came in touch with Henry Hastings Sibley, a young man three years his senior who was in the employ of the American Fur Company at that point as upper clerk. "I was struck with the sprightliness and intelligence of young Kittson," wrote Sibley in later years, "and during his detention of several weeks we became quite well acquainted with each other." For a few years the two drifted apart. Kittson represented the American Fur Company at various posts in what are now the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa, his brother John meanwhile serving the company in the Green Bay region.<sup>5</sup> After his term of service was completed Kittson turned to other pursuits. For four years he was sutler's clerk at Fort Snelling. He visited his relatives in Canada for a winter, going thither by a circuitous route — the Mississippi to New Orleans and thence north through the eastern states. In 1839 he started a small business as a fur-trader and general supply merchant at Cold Springs near Fort Snelling, and for a time prior to 1843 he was in partnership with Franklin Steele in a similar venture at the mouth of the St. Peter's or Minnesota River.

<sup>3</sup> Warren Upham, in *Minnesota in Three Centuries*, 1:316 (New York, 1908). A county in Minnesota is named for William Morrison and another in the northwest corner of the state for Norman W. Kittson. It is erroneous, however, to suppose that Norman County was also named for the latter.

<sup>4</sup> The American Fur Company engaged many of its *voyageurs* and some clerks at Montreal.

<sup>5</sup> After separating at Mackinac the brothers apparently saw nothing of each other for many years until Norman hastened to his brother's deathbed. John succumbed to injuries resulting from a forest fire.

Meanwhile his friend Sibley had become chief agent of the American Fur Company with headquarters at St. Peter's (later Mendota).<sup>6</sup> Kittson was anxious for larger undertakings and in 1843 Sibley, following the custom of his company, admitted him as a special partner in the fur trade and allotted him the valleys of the upper Minnesota River and the Red River of the North — a broad strip of territory running north and south astride the present western line of the state of Minnesota and extending to the boundary of the British possessions.

The agreement between Kittson and Sibley became operative on July 1, 1843.<sup>7</sup> The partners were to conduct jointly under the name of "Kittson's Outfit" an enterprise for trading with the Sioux Indians. Kittson had full charge of the outfit. Sibley supplied the goods necessary for trading purposes on terms of ten per cent advance on cost. After the winter's trading Kittson was to collect the furs from the various posts and deliver the packs at Mendota in the early summer, taking back with him the goods for the ensuing year's operations. The profits or losses were to be shared by the partners equally. From his headquarters at Big Stone Lake Kittson was required to superintend other posts at Lac qui Parle and the Cheyenne River and a new post to be established at or near the Talle de Chêne on the James River.

But another field of operations was already in view. The frontier of the fur trade was gradually receding before the approach of settlement and the best areas for the trade were now in the North. Between Kittson's posts and the boundary of the British possessions there lay a great field for profitable

<sup>6</sup> The American Fur Company, organized strongly by John Jacob Astor after the War of 1812, passed the heyday of its prosperity in the thirties and was compelled to assign in 1842. The following year Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company of St. Louis took over the business, but the company was popularly known by the old name for many years. William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1:163 (St. Paul, 1921).

<sup>7</sup> See the articles of agreement, dated May 22, 1843, in the Sibley Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

exploitation from which the Hudson's Bay Company, a foreign corporation, drew annually large supplies of American furs. Kittson now proposed to stop this interloping by establishing a permanent post at the small half-breed settlement of Pembina on the Red River just south of the international boundary. The location was strategic. The encroachments of the great company could be combated and trade could certainly be drawn from the British side of the line. A group of private traders at the Red River settlement, moreover, were seeking to break the iron monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company, which threw all possible difficulties in their way.<sup>8</sup> These men, already familiar with the advantages of the American market, would warmly welcome a means of getting supplies from St. Paul instead of from England by the slow, difficult, and circuitous route by Hudson Bay and the Nelson River.

In the fall of 1843 Kittson made a trip to the Red River settlement and was favorably impressed with the possibilities. A year later he prepared to begin business there but found an unexpected obstacle in his path. Some half-breeds from the Red River settlement, having gone toward the Missouri to hunt buffalo, as was their wont, had fallen upon a party of Sisseton from Kittson's vicinity at Big Stone Lake and had slain several of them.<sup>9</sup> If Kittson now paid the *bois brûlés* of Red River the compliment of establishing a trading post at the point on American soil nearest to their community he would be likely to incur the inveterate enmity of the aggrieved redskins. He invited the Indians of his district to a feast

<sup>8</sup> John P. Pritchett, "Some Red River Fur-trade Activities," *ante*, 5:412; H. G. Gunn, "The Fight for Free Trade in Rupert's Land," and Chester Martin, "The Hudson's Bay Company's Monopoly of the Fur Trade at the Red River Settlement, 1821-1850," in Mississippi Valley Historical Association, *Proceedings*, 4:78-80; 7:259 (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1912, 1914).

<sup>9</sup> McLeod to Sibley, July 30, 1844; Kittson to Sibley, August 22, 1844, Sibley Papers. The half-breeds mistook the Sisseton for a band of Missouri Indians to whom they attributed the murder of one of their party.

and laid before them the project of his northern trading venture. At first they absolutely refused to let him proceed northward with his supplies. But finally, as the result of much discussion and doubtless the giving of many presents, he gained their reluctant consent. For several years thereafter when he was taking his supplies north he apprehended trouble from Sioux marauders, but though threats were made and his friends sometimes trembled for his safety he never suffered any injury.<sup>10</sup>

In the fall of 1844 Kittson carried out his project of the Pembina post. He had made arrangements to supply goods to James Sinclair, a Red River merchant and fur-trader of some influence who had hitherto got his supplies from the Hudson's Bay Company, and he evidently had some expectation of getting Sinclair to come to Pembina and manage his new post for him. But the lateness of his arrival at Pembina precluded the carrying out of this arrangement. No one in the Red River settlement, however, was a better friend to Kittson than Sinclair and the two had extensive and mutually beneficial business dealings in succeeding years.<sup>11</sup>

The main lines of Kittson's project now unfolded rapidly. By coming to Pembina he was issuing a direct challenge to that ancient corporation, the "Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into the Hudson's Bay," and if his outfit were to be a paying venture he would need to put forth his best efforts. Henceforth Pembina, instead of Big Stone Lake, became his headquarters. In fact as his interests

<sup>10</sup> Kittson to Sibley, August 22, 1844; August 7, 1846; February 1, 1848; James Sinclair to W. H. Forbes, September 8, 1852; Kittson to Frederick B. Sibley, October 11, 1852, Sibley Papers. In the fall of 1847 the half-breed hunters told Kittson of threats made by the Sisseton to plunder his train of carts the next summer on the way to St. Peter's. Kittson considered this an empty boast but advised Sibley, nevertheless, to warn the Indians at Lake Traverse of the grave consequences of so rash a venture.

<sup>11</sup> Kittson to Sibley, July 16, August 28, 1844; January 17, 1850, Sibley Papers.

widened in the North he relinquished his southern posts in the Sioux country, such as Lac qui Parle and its dependencies, which were taken over by other partners of Sibley.<sup>12</sup> Kittson's policy was to establish a line of small posts at strategic points not far removed from the boundary and in some places not many miles from the Hudson's Bay Company centers. Thus he was better able to compete with his great adversary not only by preventing peltries taken on American territory from following the accustomed channels to the North, but by attracting furs to his own posts from the British side of the line.

Westward from Pembina was the post of Turtle Mountain and beyond it on the plains a smaller post on the Mouse (Souris) River. From these Kittson secured his supply of buffalo robes, pemmican, and the characteristic furs of the prairie. Eastward in the wooded country was Lake Roseau from whence came the finest and most valuable furs, such as fisher, martin, and lynx, and to which point Kittson sent a large proportion of his trading supplies. In 1848 he was maintaining a post at the Lake of the Woods so as to get his share of business from the Indians who went there annually to fish. By 1850 he had extended his northeastern frontier to Rainy Lake. In that year he applied to Governor Alexander Ramsey for licenses to trade with the half-breeds and the Chippewa at four places besides Pembina — Rush Lake and Turtle Mountain on the west and Red Lake and Rainy Lake on the east. The name of Joseph Rolette, Jr., headed the list of four clerks. Ten *voyageurs* were specified. The capital to be employed was estimated at twelve thousand dollars. Kittson further extended his activities by providing his most reliable half-breed and Indian hunters with small quantities of merchantable goods on credit so that they could play the part of petty traders as they made their rounds and conse-

<sup>12</sup> See the indorsation of July 15, 1846, on the original articles of agreement of May 22, 1843, and the memorandum of agreement, dated September 6, 1847, of Sibley and the three partners: Martin McLeod, Joseph Laframboise, and Alexander Faribault, in the Sibley Papers.

quently bring in larger returns when spring opened.<sup>13</sup> Thus it will be seen that Kittson's trading interests covered a large oblong area of wilderness stretching from Mouse River on the west some three hundred miles to Rainy Lake on the east.

Pembina, situated at the confluence of the Pembina River and the Red River of the North, was rich in historic associations. There Alexander Henry, the younger, established in 1801 a well-equipped depot of the Northwest Company, and he made that place his headquarters for seven years in superintending the trade of the Red River Valley.<sup>14</sup> During the War of 1812 the English traders apparently withdrew for a time. Hardly had the Northwest Company reoccupied its fort, however, when the rival Hudson's Bay Company destroyed it. Pembina continued to be the home of a band of half-breeds, nevertheless, who found it a convenient base for their buffalo hunting expeditions to the plains. Between 1812 and 1820 bands of the ill-fated Selkirk colonists from the Red River settlement, who were driven from their homes by famine, flood, or violence, took refuge with the not unfriendly half-breeds.<sup>15</sup> Prior to Kittson's advent Pembina was more of a rendezvous than a settlement. There were indeed a few cabins dotting the wooded banks of the confluent rivers, but the chief importance of the place was as a gathering center for the half-breed hunters from the Red River colony. These people regularly made two trips to the American plains each year, in the summer and in the fall. The intervening weeks in August and September saw the marshy plain at Pembina

<sup>13</sup> Kittson to Sibley, September 16, 1848; Kittson to F. B. Sibley, October 8, 1850, Sibley Papers; Kittson to Ramsey, July 31, 1850, Sibley Letter Books. In 1848 Kittson's interests in the Rainy Lake region threatened to impinge on those of Henry M. Rice, who also was in partnership with Sibley. Kittson agreed not to interfere with Rice's post at Vermilion Lake and Rice promised to give Kittson a free hand on the northern border. See Kittson to Sibley, July 28, 1848, Sibley Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Elliott Coues, ed., *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest*, 1: 185-446 (New York, 1897).

<sup>15</sup> Pembina, of course, was much nearer the country where the buffalo ranged than was the Red River settlement.

crowded with the lodges, carts, horses, and oxen of the half-breed and Indian families.<sup>16</sup>

The coming of Kittson to Pembina in 1844 saved the decaying settlement from oblivion and soon made of it a relatively important center of the fur trade, though not large or populous. Kittson erected his trading post on the site of the Northwest Company's fort built by Henry in 1801.<sup>17</sup> As business developed he added to his possessions so that his group of buildings presented an imposing appearance. "The houses are built around an open space," runs a description written in 1851, "and the square courtyard (so to speak) is filled with a miscellaneous crowd of half-breeds, Indians, of all sizes, with their lodges of bark and skins, together with horses, cattle, carts, dogs, etc., in great variety and numbers. The houses are built of logs, filled with mud and straw; the roofs thatched with the latter, and some covered over with bark. Around the angles of the yard are various warehouses, an icehouse, blacksmith-shop, and the trading-house, or store, which is covered completely over with large squares of bark, and looked like an entire barkhouse. In front, toward the river, are barns and stables, haystacks, etc., with numerous horses and cattle feeding, and a general appearance of thrift, comfort, and industry, pervades the scene."<sup>18</sup>

That the powerful Hudson's Bay Company would resolutely oppose Kittson's competitive venture was obvious. Having enjoyed exclusive trading rights in Rupert's Land for nearly two centuries and embracing in its far-flung operations the whole northern part of the continent, the company was en-

<sup>16</sup> Kittson to Sibley, December 8, 1850, Sibley Papers; Belcourt to the bishop of Dubuque, February 16, 1850, in *Rapport sur les missions du diocèse de Québec*, 1851, no. 9, p. 106 (Québec, 1851).

<sup>17</sup> O. G. Libby, "North Dakota's State Park System," in *North Dakota Historical Collections*, 6:215. It is interesting to note that Alexander Henry, the younger, was a nephew of the great explorer of the same name who, as explained above, became the second husband of Kittson's paternal grandmother.

<sup>18</sup> J. Wesley Bond, *Minnesota and Its Resources*, 275 (Chicago 1853).

gaged at that very time in the final struggle with the Red River settlers to maintain unimpaired its complete monopoly of the fur trade in that most vital region.<sup>19</sup> Kittson's post at Pembina immediately became the cynosure of all eyes and the center of not a little clandestine trade on the part of the Red River settlers. Two miles to the northward and just beyond the international boundary was a small Hudson's Bay post. Its clerk made it his chief business to checkmate Kittson. The latter declared to his opponent his intention of confining his operations to American territory and only welcoming such British trade as came to his doors.<sup>20</sup>

But greater forces were at work to undermine Kittson than he realized. His trading venture, in fact, had infringed a secret agreement of long standing between the Hudson's Bay Company and the American Fur Company.<sup>21</sup> This arrangement was unknown to himself and, if suspected by Sibley, was not by him considered binding on a subsidiary trader of Kittson's semi-independent status. The American Fur Com-

<sup>19</sup> Pritchett, *ante*, 5: 414. In 1849 the exclusive monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company at the Red River settlement was finally overthrown by pressure of the free traders and to this movement Kittson certainly gave his counsel and covert support.

<sup>20</sup> Kittson to Sibley, April 20, 1847, Sibley Papers. Bond, who visited Pembina with Governor Ramsey's party in 1851, in his *Minnesota*, 277, describes the British post as follows: "The buildings are built of logs and mud, one story high, and thatched with straw, are very warm and comfortable, and built around an open square." On Kittson's arrival, however, the post was much less pretentious.

<sup>21</sup> Sir George Simpson to William A. Aitken, September 8, 1836 (enclosure in Simpson to Ramsay Crooks, September 15, 1836); July 10, 1837; Simpson to Crooks, January 25, 1837; April 9, 1840; May 14, 1844; William Smith to Crooks, November 19, 1841, American Fur Company Papers. A calendar of this collection, which is in the possession of the New York Historical in New York City, is owned by the Minnesota Historical Society and has been used by the present writer. An agreement somewhat similar to that between the American Fur and Hudson's Bay companies, but with the line of demarcation drawn farther south, had been made in 1806 between the Michilimackinac and Northwest companies to limit their respective fields of operations in the upper Mississippi Valley. Grace Lee Nute, "New Light on Red River Valley History," *ante*, 5: 563.

pany, be it remembered, was not so closely articulated and highly centralized as the "Gentlemen Adventurers." It frequently admitted trading partners who had great latitude in making arrangements with their supporters. The company, having recently passed into insolvency, had been controlled since 1843 by Pierre Chouteau, Jr., and Company of St. Louis, but Ramsay Crooks of New York, the former president, was still influential. The *raison d'être* of the old agreement was the ruinous competition in which the rival companies found themselves in the Lake Superior and Rainy Lake regions. As early as 1833 and perhaps earlier the heads of the firms, Sir George Simpson and Crooks, arranged a *modus operandi*. In return for an annual subsidy of three hundred pounds the American Fur Company ceased competition with the English company along the international boundary from the Grand Portage on Lake Superior to the Red River settlement. The rivals agreed furthermore to cooperate in crushing any independent traders who entered the territory.<sup>22</sup>

Simpson seems to have regarded Kittson as an independent trader rather than as an agent of the American Fur Company. Writing from London on March 25, 1845, he advised Crooks of a plan to oust the Pembina opposition by purchasing furs for hard cash on American soil.<sup>23</sup> Three and a half months later he was again at the heart of his trading empire and was planning more vigorous measures. Writing to Dr. Charles W. W. Borup, a prominent trader of the American Fur Company in the region south of Lake Superior, he asked him to use his good offices to obtain from the Indian agent an American trader's license for one Fisher, then in the Hudson's Bay Company's employ.<sup>24</sup> Borup evidently cooperated obligingly to this end and Simpson duly notified Crooks of the arrangement.

<sup>22</sup> Hattie Listenfelt, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Red River Trade," in *North Dakota Historical Collections*, 4: 271.

<sup>23</sup> American Fur Company Papers.

<sup>24</sup> July 10, 1845, American Fur Company Papers.

In the spring of 1846 when Kittson was busily engaged in receiving the returns of the season's operations at Pembina he was startled to find Fisher with a gang of men constructing a building for trading purposes almost at his door. His chagrin may well be imagined when Fisher produced an American trader's license. That this had been obtained fraudulently was fairly evident, as Fisher, he well knew, had been a Hudson's Bay man for years. The intruder moreover was obtaining all his supplies from north of the line. Kittson immediately rushed word of these developments to Sibley. He complained also that the Hudson's Bay Company was introducing liquor into American territory, thereby demoralizing the Indians and interfering with his trade. The government, he maintained, should take prompt action to protect its subjects from "rascality and fraud." But the strong arm of government was far removed. Kittson complained in vain and Fisher doubtless made a large collection of furs before withdrawing. The Hudson's Bay Company saw, however, that the reciprocal agreement had outlasted its usefulness and did not renew it the following year.<sup>25</sup>

The trade war between Kittson and the Hudson's Bay Company now waged more fiercely than ever. Kittson claimed that hitherto he had avoided trading operations on British soil, but after the Fisher episode he determined to fight fire with fire and to procure his peltries wherever he could drive a profitable bargain. This practice was soon challenged. Chief Factor Alexander Christie in the spring of 1847 brought suit against him in the Red River court for trading in furs within the company's territory. "From this gentleman," wrote Kittson hotly to Sibley, "I have received nothing but insults since our establishing of a post at this place and now he has added persecution." Had Sir George Simpson been present in the settlement, Kittson's numerous

<sup>25</sup> Kittson to Sibley, March 2, 1846, Sibley Papers; Simpson to Crooks, September 26, 1847, American Fur Company Papers. It is hardly necessary to point out that Kittson had become an American citizen since leaving Lower Canada in 1830.

Red River friends assured him, such extreme action would hardly have been taken. What transpired in court is not clear, but in the fall of that year Kittson reported that the difficulty had been settled amicably and that the company, including Christie, was showing him every mark of attention.<sup>26</sup>

For several months relations were less strained and in the spring of 1848 Kittson made a proposition to Christie which seems to have contemplated making the international boundary a real line of demarcation between the rival trading interests. It might have been well for Kittson if he had continued to hold out the olive branch, but, on second thought, he appears to have doubted his own judgment in the matter. In the autumn he called at Fort Garry to confer with Christie according to promise, but he rather rejoiced at finding the old factor absent. "It is however impossible for me to carry out the proposed arrangement with them," he informs Sibley significantly, "as I have made arrangements with several hunters which will draw many furs from their territory."<sup>27</sup> That the trade war was renewed soon afterwards with redoubled zest consequently was due not to the aggressions of the "Gentlemen Adventurers" alone.

Not since the days of bitter and sanguinary rivalry between the Hudson's Bay and Northwest companies had there been such keen competition for peltries in that region as prevailed

<sup>26</sup> Kittson to Sibley, April 20, October 3, December 4, 1847, Sibley Papers. However eager Sir George was to ruin Kittson's trade, he was keenly anxious to maintain cordial relations with Sibley at Mendota. Not infrequently some of the company's officials traveled to or from Rupert's Land via St. Paul, and Simpson or his representatives at Lachine or Fort Garry found it a convenience to have Sibley supply them with guides, provisions, and the facilities of banking. See Christie to Sibley, September 10, 1846; Finlayson to Sibley, June 22, 1847, Sibley Papers. A detachment of five hundred imperial troops at Red River from 1846 to 1848, doubtless sent there because of the Oregon boundary dispute, overawed the disaffected elements and strengthened the company's authority. The independent traders being thus held in subjection, Kittson's presence at Pembina was less menacing.

<sup>27</sup> Kittson to Sibley, August 16, 1848, Sibley Papers.

during the decade when Kittson was at Pembina. The strategy of the American trader needed to be of the best, as mistakes and omissions were ruinously expensive. In providing suitable supplies, in stationing his traders to advantage, and in having on hand sufficient hard cash to pay for furs which otherwise could not be obtained, it was necessary for him to act promptly and with discretion. In the fall of 1846 his clerks were a month late in reaching the posts at Roseau and the Lake of the Woods and the consequences were dire to his interests. Fifty or sixty families of the Rainy Lake tribe who had waited at the latter place to get their supply of ammunition decided finally that his representative was not coming at all and went north to the Hudson's Bay post. The clerk there was keenly alive to his opportunities and willingly satisfied their need, but only on condition that they would hunt north of Rainy Lake where they would be safely beyond the allurements of "the Yankee trader." The following year, however, Kittson turned the tables and drew much trade from the Hudson's Bay Company's territory. "Rainy Lake post will not take out more than one half the usual quantity of furs," he informs Sibley on April 6, 1848. "Our little post of Lac des Roseau," he adds gleefully, "has played the devil with their trade this year." That fall he noticed that the Hudson's Bay Company placed a new man in charge at Rainy Lake and at the same time substituted a factor for a clerk at the post near Pembina with a view, he supposed, to a more effective opposition. "We have to be on our guard this year," he wrote Sibley, "as I am informed that the Hudson's Bay Compy. are to do their utmost to drive us out of the Count[r]y . . . if we can oppose them successfully this year of which I have not the least doubt, I think they will come to terms next spring." In October, 1848, a supply of rum was brought up the Red River to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Pembina, much to Kittson's disgust. "It is to be regretted that this making use of spirits amongst the Indians cannot be stopped," he laments; "we will no doubt be deluged

with the rascally stuff." Kittson and his near-by competitor at Pembina avoided recrimination, however. At times, indeed, their relations were breezy and affable. The Hudson's Bay man admitted candidly that the American was a more formidable opponent than at first he had supposed, while Kittson, on his part, characterized his rival as "a very fine man so far" with whom he had "no doubt of getting along . . . without quarreling."<sup>28</sup>

But the cup of Kittson's annoyances was not yet full. In the winter of 1849-50 he was exasperated to find competing with him in the Pembina trade two petty unlicensed traders from the Red River settlement. One of these, Charles Grant, was a half-breed, the son of a magistrate in the Selkirk settlement. Kittson suspected Grant — and doubtless not without reason — of being in collusion with the Hudson's Bay Company, as the interloper obtained his supplies from that source. The appointment of an American customs collector at Pembina, Kittson considered indispensable. Writing to Governor Ramsey, who was superintendent of Indian affairs for the territory, he appealed for official assistance against the intruders. "We certainly are carrying on the trade here under sufficient disadvantages in having the Hudson Bay Compy<sup>s</sup> wealthy and powerful influence to compete against," he wrote, "without such men as above to assist them."<sup>29</sup> The governor promptly sent Kittson a commission as justice of the peace. Unfortunately there was no American citizen then in the Pembina country who could provide the appointee's security as required by law, so that he was unable to translate his just resentment against the petty traders into official ac-

<sup>28</sup> Kittson to Sibley, February 11, April 20, 1847; August 24, September 16, October 14, November 11, 1848, Sibley Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Kittson to Sibley, January 17, 1850, Sibley Papers; Kittson to Ramsey, January 3, 21, 1850 (enclosures in Ramsey to O. Brown, February 28, 1850), Indian Office, Letters Received, M 735. Photostatic copies of the Indian office letters cited in this article are in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. A customs collector by hindering the importation of British goods could discourage indirectly the exportation of American furs.

tion.<sup>30</sup> He urged upon the governor the necessity of a military garrison at Pembina to uphold the authority of the United States and to prevent the incursions of the Red River half-breeds who came twice yearly to hunt buffalo on the American plains. Ramsey was sympathetic, but he could do little. He submitted this problem of the northern frontier to the commissioner of Indian affairs at Washington and requested Sibley, who was territorial delegate in Congress, to interview that official.<sup>31</sup> The essential facts seem to have been placed before President Taylor. But in view of the slavery controversy of 1850 and other pressing interests, official Washington paid scant heed to the needs of the northern frontier. Nothing was done beyond the appointment of a customs collector for Pembina in 1850.

In his correspondence with Sibley, Kittson gives many a vivid picture of the wretched life of the Indians in their losing struggle, and he reveals thereby the decline of the fur trade. His operations after the first few years were almost entirely among the Chippewa. In the winter of 1844-45, when he was getting established in the North, he found the Indians in the Pembina district almost destitute. The prairie had been burned in all directions and the buffalo consequently driven far from the settlement. "The poor devils are so badly provided," he reports, "that it is wonderful how it is possible for them to kill anything; they have not a single trap, most of them [are] without ammunition, and probably one out of twenty may have an axe, and thus they have to spend the winter, their sole dependence being fish for their subsistence." The years 1849 and 1850 were particularly trying to the Indians in the wooded country between Pembina and the Lake of the Woods. The corn and wild rice crops failed and an epidemic decimated the rabbits and the lynx. To keep the red men and their families from starvation in 1849 Kittson had to give them provisions, "not only as a duty to humani-

<sup>30</sup> Kittson to Charles W. W. Borup, March 27, 1850, Sibley Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Ramsey to Sibley, February 28, 1850, Sibley Papers.

ty," he observes, "but as the only means by which I could secure the debts due us." The following year the situation was still more critical and he feared that in spite of further generous assistance many would perish. Fur-bearing animals had again become plentiful, but the Indians were too enfeebled to hunt.<sup>32</sup> Conditions of life among the Indians of the wooded country appear to have improved, however, during the years 1851 to 1853.

One of the most damning counts against the whites in their western march in America was the use of ardent spirits in the Indian trade. The control of the liquor traffic, supported as it was then and is still by the most sordid and mercenary interests, has always been difficult. On the Minnesota frontier it was doubly so. The American Fur Company seems on the whole to have respected the act of 1834 forbidding the introduction of liquor into the Indian territory, but unscrupulous individual traders of the company who felt secure in their isolation did not. The country abounded, moreover, in independent traders who smuggled kegs of fire water past the officials at Fort Snelling and Mendota and debauched the Indians of the hinterland. On the northern frontier the problem was international. The Hudson's Bay Company frequently used spirits to attract Indians from south of the line and to compete more strongly with American rivals.<sup>33</sup> The story of the Indian liquor trade is yet to be written. In this article can be presented only a few inconclusive although highly significant pieces of evidence. To the credit of Kittson and his partner, Sibley, be it said that they hated the baneful traffic and resolutely set their faces against it.

Not the least of Kittson's difficulties were his contacts with illicit whisky peddlers. In the fall of 1847 he made a long trip to the vast prairie region west of Pembina in order to

<sup>32</sup> Kittson to Sibley, February 6, 1845; April 28, 1849; January 17, December 8, 1850; Kittson to W. H. Forbes, January 2, 1850; Kittson to Borup, March 27, 1850, Sibley Papers; Kittson to Ramsey, January 21, 1850, Indian Office, Letters Received, M 735.

<sup>33</sup> Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 165.

establish a post on the Mouse River and to investigate the opportunities for more extended trade. The prospects were not inviting. Petty traders from the Red River settlement with whisky as their chief stock in trade were busily at work buying up the buffalo robes and peltries. The liquor they had procured not from the Hudson's Bay Company as might have been supposed, but from St. Peter's. Kittson was strongly critical of the American Indian agent at that point. He estimated that no fewer than twenty barrels had been smuggled north that summer.<sup>84</sup> During his ten years at Pembina he was chagrined many a time by somewhat similar experiences with petty traders.

But Kittson's chief difficulties in this respect were with the powerful corporation which operated north of him. The Hudson's Bay Company was accustomed to give regales of diluted liquor to Indians visiting their posts and at times they doubtless used spirits also as an article of trade, particularly when American competition was keen. More of the fiery liquid appears to have been used on the Pembina frontier during this decade than elsewhere in Rupert's Land and sometimes it was traded surreptitiously on American soil.<sup>85</sup> Kittson frequently urged his partner, who was in Congress, to invoke the aid of the American government in this matter. On December 8, 1849, Sibley did, indeed, make protest to the secretary of state. A friendly remonstrance was forthwith sent by that official to the British foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, who referred the matter to Sir John Pelly, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. Sir John, as a resident

<sup>84</sup> Kittson to Sibley, December 4, 1847, Sibley Papers.

<sup>85</sup> Kittson to Sibley, March 2, 1846; October 14, 1848; February 4, 1851; Forbes to Sibley, March 12, 1850, Sibley Papers; *Report from the Select Committee on the Hudson's Bay Company; Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, 146, 274 (*British Parliamentary Papers*, Commons, 1857, 2 session, vol. 15); Samuel Woods, *Report of Major Wood[s], Relative to His Expedition to Pembina Settlement, and the Condition of Affairs on the North-Western Frontier of the Territory of Minnesota*, 7, 8, 25 (31 Congress, 1 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 51 — serial 577).

of London, evidently did not know all that the "Gentlemen Adventurers" were doing in their far-flung territories. To Sibley's charges he gave "the most unqualified denial," declaring that the illicit traffic was due to independent traders at Red River and at Pembina. The stringent regulations of the American government, he maintained with some reason, were evaded. Nevertheless his company was ready to cooperate in any measures which the two countries might agree upon "as best adapted to repress the evil in question."<sup>36</sup> Thus a coat of diplomatic whitewash was spread over this international incident, so trivial to those in the seats of the mighty, so fraught with anxiety for a struggling Minnesota trader. The use of spirits was not discontinued. "I am now in a state of open hostility with the H. B. Compy," Kittson reports a year later, "caused by my seizing a small quantity of goods and a small keg of rum, belonging to them, for a violation of our indian laws. They are, I am told furious about it, there has been some correspondence between us on the subject, but as yet nothing serious, it may however become so, as I certainly shall not fail to let them know my candid opinion about them and their course along our lines, should they call for it."<sup>37</sup> Thus the trade war raged between Kittson and his vigorous opponents, sometimes covert, sometimes brazenly open, but never quiescent.<sup>38</sup>

The half-breed population of Pembina is of some interest to us in this sketch. These improvident and care-free people presented a picturesque appearance. "Their dress is half-

<sup>36</sup> Sibley to Clayton, December 8, 1849; Abbott Lawrence to Lord Palmerton, February 12, 1850; Sir John Pelly to Earl Grey, March 9, 1850, in *Report from the Select Committee on the Hudson's Bay Company*, 369, 370.

<sup>37</sup> Kittson to F. B. Sibley, March 19, 1851, Sibley Papers. After H. Sibley's election as territorial delegate he found it increasingly difficult to maintain his usual close contact with his fur-trading interests. His brother Frederick B. Sibley accordingly took charge of the post at Mendota.

<sup>38</sup> The full story of this rivalry obviously can not be told until the archives of the Hudson's Bay Company are opened.

way between that of the whites and Indians," runs a contemporary description. "They wear wild-looking fur caps, blanket coats, pants secured around the waist by a belt, and deer-skin moccasins. Their complexion is swarthy, their hair and eyes black. Their language is an impure French, though all probably talk Indian, besides."<sup>39</sup> Most of these people had been born on British soil. They were exceedingly critical of the benevolent despotism of the Hudson's Bay Company, however, and the prospect of sharing in treaty money when the United States purchased the Red River Valley from its aboriginal owners caused them to throw up their hats with enthusiasm for American government. With a view to creating an appearance of corporate unity and thus pressing their claims more strongly upon the government, they elected in 1849 a council representative of the varied half-breed interests. This body attempted to legislate for their primitive needs but without conspicuous success.<sup>40</sup> In spite of the diligent labors of the Roman Catholic missionary, the Reverend Georges A. Belcourt, to induce these people to abandon their nomadic life and adopt the ways of civilization, comparatively few built houses and took up permanent residence at or near Pembina.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Minnesota Pioneer* (St. Paul), January 23, 1850.

<sup>40</sup> Belcourt to Sibley, September 25, 1849; Kittson to F. B. Sibley, January 2, 1851, Sibley Papers; Belcourt to Ramsey, January 9, 1850 (enclosure in Ramsey to Brown, February 28, 1850), Indian Office, Letters Received, M 735; John Pope, *Report of an Exploration of the Territory of Minnesota*, 32 (31 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 42 — serial 558).

<sup>41</sup> Belcourt (1803-74) was a French-Canadian Roman Catholic missionary who labored in what is now southern Manitoba in the thirties and forties. After being banished, in effect, by Sir George Simpson for promoting a petition against the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly in 1847, he transferred to the diocese of Dubuque and worked among the half-breeds and Indians of the Pembina country until 1859. His house and chapel were on the banks of the Red River a mile north of Kittson's establishment. His violent bias against the Hudson's Bay Company finds an echo in Captain Pope's *Report*, 27-33. A caustic but necessary corrective is given in Alexander Ross, *The Red River Settlement*, 403-406 (London, 1856). The various issues of *Rapport sur les Missions du*

For most of the year they were wanderers, devoting themselves to the interests of trapping and the chase and living in tents or lodges like those of the aborigines.

Kittson found the Pembina half-breeds of little help in his trading operations except for supplying him with large quantities of pemmican. They invariably expected a year's credit on their purchases and not infrequently avoided payment. In 1850 he stopped giving them credit. Regarded hitherto as "the best fellow in the world," he soon became the very opposite in their estimation. "The more I become acquainted with the character of the Halfbreeds," he wrote to F. B. Sibley, "the less esteem I have for them, there is [*sic*] a few that we might depend upon under any circumstances, but they are very few, the most of them want stability, and many of them common honesty."<sup>42</sup>

The year 1851 saw the negotiation of three important Indian treaties in Minnesota. The Pembina treaty with the Chippewa is of special interest here because of Kittson's connection with it. On September 11, 1851, Governor Ramsey, who was commissioned to represent the United States government, arrived at Pembina with his party and an escort of dragoons. Kittson placed his house at the disposal of the distinguished visitors, supplied them with provisions, and cooperated with them in every way.<sup>43</sup> The dragoons encamped on the prairie a quarter of a mile distant. In the treaty settlement the half-breed community ardently hoped to share. "We have no other talk here but about the treaty," wrote Kittson as early as March 19, 1851, "they are all building 'castles in the air' on the strength of it." In his opinion the people of mixed blood, because of their British birth, had little

*diocèse de Québec* during the years of Belcourt's activity throw much light on his life. Although Kittson did not like Belcourt, he was friendly and coöperated with him.

<sup>42</sup> October 8, 1850, Sibley Papers. Kittson's account book for the Pembina post, covering the period from September, 1851, to June, 1853, is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>43</sup> Bond, *Minnesota*, 274-276.

claim upon the government. Their expectations, he felt sure, had been raised unduly by Belcourt. The conclusion of the treaty obviously was of great moment to the traders, as it usually resulted in the liquidation of Indian and half-breed debts of long standing. "Make the best terms you can for your Indians," advised Sibley, "annuities in cash & no goods, and go in for an allowance to the halfbreeds."<sup>44</sup>

On September 15 the negotiations began. Governor Ramsey, attended by the gentlemen who had accompanied him from St. Paul, took his place at a table in front of Kittson's house. In a semicircle sat the chiefs and headmen of the Indians, while a crowd of half-breeds, Indian braves, squaws, and papooses crowded close behind.<sup>45</sup> On September 20 "after the usual squabbling and manouvering" — to quote Kittson's words — the treaty of session was signed. The settlement included a *douceur* of thirty thousand dollars for the half-breeds. "It has been to me a scourse of great annoyance, situated as I am between so many conflicting interests," wrote the anxious trader to his partner on September 23, "petty and worthless ambitions to allay, ignorant and unprincipled characters to contend with & above all the defeat of long and many expectations."<sup>46</sup> Unquestionably Kittson's influence was a strong factor in persuading the Indians to accept the governor's offer. But all was in vain. The senate refused to ratify. Kittson's disappointment was keen, as the failure of the trapping in the wooded country for several years and the inevitable extension of credits when the Indians were destitute left him with large amounts outstanding.

With his Pembina headquarters removed more than four hundred miles from his base of supply at Mendota, Kittson had a formidable problem in transportation. Upwards of two months of the year, in fact, were wholly devoted to this

<sup>44</sup> Kittson to Sibley, February 4, March 19, 1851, Sibley Papers; Sibley to Kittson, August 17, 1851, Sibley Letter Books.

<sup>45</sup> Bond, *Minnesota*, 281.

<sup>46</sup> Sibley Papers.

work. The customary means of conveyance was the two-wheeled Red River cart, pulled by a single ox and capable of carrying a load approaching one thousand pounds. These queer vehicles, constructed wholly without iron, were made in great numbers by the half-breeds for use in their buffalo hunting expeditions. Kittson possessed many of his own and probably rented others. When the trails became passable in the spring, trains of carts were sent out from Pembina to the various posts to bring in the furs and robes of the previous winter's trading. These required to be sorted and packed with greatest care to avoid deterioration in transit and to facilitate marketing. About the middle of June the trip to Mendota began. This usually took a month each way. As the trail was well beaten and the carts followed in single file, it was possible for one half-breed driver to manage about four carts.

The trail most favored by Kittson in going south from Pembina followed for many miles the high ground about twenty miles west of the Red River so that the tributary streams could be crossed near their sources where fording was easy. After passing out of the valley of the Red River, the trail proceeded southeastward to the valley of the Minnesota and ran roughly parallel with that stream to Traverse des Sioux.<sup>47</sup> Streams too deep and swift to be forded, such as the Cheyenne, were crossed by means of a raft or by a rude log bridge.<sup>48</sup> Marshy ground abounded, especially in rainy seasons, on certain stretches of the route so that both carts and oxen frequently became mired. Brush and saplings were

<sup>47</sup> This route is designated as the "west plains trail" on the map of the Red River trails, *post*, p. 278. In 1850 Kittson tried the "east plains trail" to Sauk Rapids (St. Cloud), from which place there was communication by water with St. Anthony and thence overland to St. Paul, but the heavier expenses of transportation that way disgusted him with the route. Nevertheless he tried the trail again in 1851. See F. B. Sibley to H. H. Sibley, August 2, 1850; Kittson to F. B. Sibley, December 31, 1850; July 25, 1851, Sibley Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Woods, *Report*, 16; Bond, *Minnesota*, 264.

often used to give a footing in such places. When danger threatened from prowling Sioux extra precautions were taken in pitching camp, the carts being ranged in a circle for better protection. The long weary journey ended at Traverse des Sioux, as there was good communication by steamer between that point and Sibley's headquarters at Mendota.<sup>49</sup> Kittson, moreover, wanted to keep his *engagés* and the private persons who invariably accompanied his train away from the growing town of St. Paul. Thus they would not establish troublesome connections with business firms in that center but would continue their dependence on him in matters of trade.

Then followed a time of feverish activity. While the *engagés* were busily discharging the packs and reloading the carts with the bales of goods for the ensuing year's trade, Kittson hurried to Mendota to submit his annual returns, discuss business prospects, — which all too frequently were far from bright, — and formulate plans for the coming year. It was a great pleasure for him to find his friend and partner at Mendota, for Sibley's legislative duties kept him away from Minnesota for months at a time. The two held each other in high esteem and their friendship was one which grew stronger with the years. With F. B. Sibley, Kittson, as was to be expected, was less intimate, but the two became good friends and worked well together. Finally all business was completed and a time was set for the departure from Traverse des Sioux. The half-breeds lashed their clumsy oxen into motion. The long train of carts, crawling like a huge snake along the winding trail, proceeded slowly northward, the wooden hubs and axles creaking and groaning with a sound which could be heard for miles. With good trails and no unusual delays they reached Pembina towards the end of August, but more often September was well advanced before Kittson's flagpole and group of buildings came into view. There was need of haste. Kittson had to intercept the Pembina half-

<sup>49</sup> The general character of Kittson's supplies for the trade is revealed in the bills of lading of these river steamers in the Sibley Papers.

breeds and the Red River hunters as they came from the plains and procure his supply of pemmican before they went northward to the Hudson's Bay posts. The Indians, moreover, were impatient to begin the fall hunts and if his arrival were delayed they, too, got their supplies in the North.<sup>50</sup>

During the last three years of Kittson's decade at Pembina there were some changes of consequence which must here be noted. In 1852 he established a new post called St. Joseph at Pembina Mountain, thirty miles west of Pembina. This move was occasioned by a series of disastrous floods which for several years in the spring and early summer had inundated the low marshy plain. In 1851 his buildings were in water two or three feet deep so that for a month he had to remove to higher ground.<sup>51</sup> In 1853 he made St. Joseph his headquarters and placed his capable assistant, Joseph Rolette, Jr., in charge at Pembina. Rolette invested what money he had in the enterprise and enjoyed a semi-independent status under the benevolent supervision of Kittson.<sup>52</sup> In 1850 the government appointed Kittson postmaster at Pembina. In thanking Sibley for procuring this position for him he remarked facetiously that as yet no mail had been received or letters sent.<sup>53</sup> Frontiersmen, it may be observed, are not as a rule ardent correspondents. In the fall of 1851 the Pembina district got its first taste of territorial politics. At Sibley's

<sup>50</sup> Kittson to F. B. Sibley, October 19, 1852, Sibley Papers. Kittson sometimes hastened ahead to Pembina, leaving his cart train to follow.

<sup>51</sup> Kittson to F. B. Sibley, October 19, 1852, Sibley Papers; Bond, *Minnesota*, 274, 276. In this new settlement to which some of the Pembina half-breeds moved, Belcourt was much interested. One of Kittson's warehouses of oak logs constructed in 1852 was reërected in the Old Settlers Park at Walhalla, North Dakota, some years ago. C. W. Andrews, "The Old Settlers Park at Walhalla," in *North Dakota Historical Collections*, 3: 99.

<sup>52</sup> The arrangement was not altogether voluntary on Kittson's part, however, as Rolette showed an inclination to become a rival trader. F. B. Sibley to H. H. Sibley, February 27, 1853; Kittson to F. B. Sibley, March 29, 1853; Rolette to F. B. Sibley, September 20, 1853, Sibley Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Kittson to Sibley, December 8, 1850, Sibley Papers.

strong solicitation, but very much against his own wishes, Kittson ran for membership in the Minnesota territorial Council and was elected. How well in hand was the situation among his clientele is shown by the fact that he received all but one of the thirty-three votes polled. As members of the House Joseph Rolette, Jr., and Antoine Gingras were elected.<sup>54</sup> As the legislature met in the middle of winter it was necessary for the three Pembina legislators to drive to St. Paul by dog train — a long and arduous journey over bad roads and usually in severe weather. Kittson served in the Council during four sessions, from 1852 to 1855 inclusive. Thrice he made the difficult trip by dog train. By 1855 he had become a resident of St. Paul.

Kittson had now been competing with the Hudson's Bay Company long enough to realize that he was engaged in a desperately difficult, if not indeed a losing struggle. He learned what many another has learned — that it is hopeless for an enterprise with limited capital to compete successfully with a large, powerful, and well-established corporation. The Hudson's Bay Company was determined to keep the American trader from prospering, cost what it might. Some of the methods used to undermine him have already been considered. He in turn was not overscrupulous. He traded furs on British territory especially during the later years and snapped his fingers at the just resentment of the great company. A favorite method used by the Hudson's Bay management to place him at a disadvantage was to pay very high prices for furs, sometimes even in cash at the border posts.<sup>55</sup> This attracted American peltries to the British side of the line — a detriment certainly to Kittson, but a very expensive practice for the company. Indians from the interior of Rupert's Land, moreover, flocked to the American border where furs were at

<sup>54</sup> Kittson to F. B. Sibley, October 15, 1851, Sibley Papers.

<sup>55</sup> Kittson to F. B. Sibley, March 29, 1853; Kittson to H. H. Sibley, February 20, March 13, May 29, 1854, Sibley Papers; *Report from the Select Committee on the Hudson's Bay Company*, 82.

a premium and thus the business of the company's inland posts was seriously curtailed.<sup>56</sup> All things considered it is quite probable that the Hudson's Bay Company operated its border posts at a loss.<sup>57</sup> In order to compete at all successfully, Kittson was obliged also to pay high prices in hard cash, thus sacrificing the chance of reasonably good financial returns on his investment. Furthermore, cash sales at Pembina did not insure him the sale of merchandise in return. The goods most highly esteemed in the Indian trade were largely of English manufacture. As the Hudson's Bay Company had no very large import duty to pay, it could lay down the most desirable trading supplies more cheaply than its American rival. Kittson admitted himself that he could not compete on even terms. For a time he toyed with the hope that the company would buy him out. But this expectation was vain. It soon became apparent that Pembina was destined permanently to be a trading center and that if Kittson were induced to retire somebody else would inevitably take his place.<sup>58</sup>

The fur trade in Minnesota was obviously on the decline; the day of the settler was fast approaching. In 1852 H. H. Sibley confessed to his friend Senator Dodge of Iowa that after seventeen years in the Sioux trade he was thirty or forty thousand dollars worse off than when he began. Kittson by nature was optimistic, yet at times he alternated between hope and despair. "There are so many changes in this rascally fur business," he wrote on December 31, 1850, "that no dependence can be placed on the best of prospects." At this time he contemplated selling his St. Paul real estate so as

<sup>56</sup> Kittson to Sibley, April 28, 1849, Sibley Papers. In Kittson's opinion three-quarters of the furs obtained by his rivals during the winter of 1848-49 came from the interior.

<sup>57</sup> This was the opinion of the Right Honorable E. Ellice, M. P., in giving evidence on June 23, 1857. *Report from the Select Committee on the Hudson's Bay Company*, 327.

<sup>58</sup> Kittson to Sibley, December 8, 1850; February 4, 1851, Sibley Papers.

to liquidate his debts.<sup>59</sup> The Chouteaus at St. Louis were pressing Sibley and his partner strongly. They chafed at the size of Kittson's invoices, complained of the amounts of his credits, and questioned the advisability of continuing the Pembina business. Sibley's reply to the house was most significant. He apprehended little if any loss from Kittson's outfit and declared that if the other outfits under his management had been conducted with the same judgment the general outlook would be different.<sup>60</sup> Fortunately for Kittson conditions improved somewhat during his last two years in the business. But after his ten years of effort he had not obtained returns at all commensurate with his investment and the basis of his future fortune appears to have been the increment of his St. Paul real estate. In 1853 Sibley and Kittson decided to withdraw from the Pembina country and this arrangement was carried out in 1854. Joseph Rolette, Jr., took charge of the business, although Kittson appears to have retained a financial interest in it for some years.

To deal with Norman W. Kittson's career after he gave up fur-trading in the North is not the purpose of this paper, but a brief general sketch is not out of place. After taking up his residence in St. Paul, he was engaged from 1854 to 1858 in a general supply business for the Indian trade in partnership with William H. Forbes. In 1851 his St. Paul property had been surveyed and put upon the market as "Kittson's Addition," and its increment, as stated above, became in time the basis of a large fortune. In 1858 he was elected on the Democratic ticket as mayor of St. Paul. Keenly alive to the need of improved transportation between St. Paul and the lower Red River Valley, he established in the sixties a line of steamers and barges on the Red River of the North. This developed later into the Red River Transportation Company. It was in this connection that Kittson became known popularly as

<sup>59</sup> Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 291; Kittson to F. B. Sibley, December 31, 1850, Sibley Papers.

<sup>60</sup> August 23, 1851, Sibley Letter Books.

“commodore.” The improved means of communication between Breckenridge and Fort Garry soon displaced the trains of Red River carts with which Kittson’s name in an earlier decade had been associated. The Hudson’s Bay Company, in fact, used the new route increasingly and finally appointed Kittson its general purchasing and forwarding agent at St. Paul. After the years of strenuous trade rivalry on the border this action of the company was no small tribute to his integrity and sterling worth. But what really made him one of the magnates of the West was his well-known association with James J. Hill in railroad enterprises from 1879 to 1885. His investments finally ran into the millions. On the imposing site on Summit Avenue in St. Paul now occupied by the Roman Catholic Cathedral, he erected a palatial residence.

During the later years of his life Kittson was not in vigorous health. On retiring from active business he devoted himself to the raising of fine horses. His stables in Midway Park, St. Paul, and at Erdenheim near Philadelphia housed some of the finest racing stock and made him one of the large horse fanciers of the country. When returning to St. Paul from the East in 1888 he died suddenly. In disposition he was quiet and retiring, a fact due not a little to his long years as a fur-trader when he seldom had a chance to consort with equals. It is recorded of him that he gave willingly but not ostentatiously to worthy causes, St. Paul’s Church on the Hill (Protestant Episcopal) in St. Paul being a monument largely to his generosity. A contemporary describes him as he was in the fifties — a “sprightly, fine-looking man; cleanly and really elegantly dressed; hair just turning gray; eyes bright, with a quiet, pleasant voice; genial in nature and a man of excellent characteristics.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> T. M. Newson, *Pen Pictures of St. Paul*, 431 (St. Paul, 1886).



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