

## GRAND PORTAGE<sup>1</sup>

I have not words to tell you how deeply I appreciate the honor you have conferred upon me in asking me to speak to you on this historic occasion. I am sure I express the feelings of every Canadian here today when I say that we deem it a privilege to be permitted to join with you in commemorating the two-hundredth anniversary of the discovery of Grand Portage and of all that grew out of that discovery. For it must not be forgotten that when La Vérendrye landed on these shores two centuries ago and sent his nephew and his son forward to Rainy Lake, he set in motion forces that have profoundly influenced these two neighboring countries. In the years that followed he and his gallant sons made their way into the West, to the Lake of the Woods, Lake Winnipeg, Red River, the Assiniboine, the Missouri, and the Saskatchewan, blazing a path to those vast interior plains of North America that today help so materially to feed the nations of the world. Incidentally it is an odd fact that the first attempt by white men to raise grain west of the Great Lakes was made nearly two hundred years ago; the farmer was La Vérendrye, and the place that curiously isolated bit of Minnesota on the west side of the Lake of the Woods.

But I am to talk to you about Grand Portage, and if I hesitate to embark upon that subject, and if you find what I have to say to you this afternoon neither informative nor diverting, please bear in mind that Dr. Buck has already told the story of Grand Portage so completely and entertainingly that

<sup>1</sup> An address presented at Grand Portage on August 22, 1931, at the celebration sponsored by the Cook County Historical Society in coöperation with the Minnesota Historical Society, of the two-hundredth anniversary of the landing of the French explorer, La Vérendrye, at Grand Portage. This meeting formed the final session of the tenth state historical convention. *Ed.*

those of us who follow must be content to pick up the unregarded crumbs that fell from his study table.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the period of the fur trade — French, British, and American — portages were to the trader what ports of call are to the sailor or filling stations to the automobilist. As the sailor goes ashore at a port of call, or the driver of a car gets out at a filling station to stretch his legs and swap news with others of his kind, while the business of his particular vehicle is being attended to, so the trader and his *voyageurs* looked forward to each portage because it broke the monotony of the day's paddling and gave opportunity for a smoke, and also because there was always the chance that they might meet friends or acquaintances journeying the other way.

The portages of North America were keys to the most extraordinary system of water communication on the face of the earth. Not only is it theoretically true, but time and again it has been demonstrated in practice, that men could travel in a canoe from such a central point as this, east to the Atlantic, west to the Pacific, north to the Arctic or Hudson Bay, or south to the Gulf of Mexico, with nothing more than an occasional portage.

The St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes, through their tributary rivers, were connected by numerous portages, on the one side with rivers flowing into the Atlantic or the Mississippi, and on the other with streams emptying into Hudson Bay; in the first case to the Hudson, Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin rivers, to mention but a few, and in the other to the Albany, Moose, Nottaway, and Rupert. The names of scores of portages on the Ottawa, that once renowned thoroughfare to the West, are found in narratives of the fur trade. Farther west, portages connected the Red and the Mississippi, the Saskatch-

<sup>2</sup> *The Story of the Grand Portage* is the title of a pamphlet (16 p.) by Solon J. Buck, published by the Cook County Historical Society in connection with the La Vérendrye celebration at Grand Portage (Minneapolis, 1931). This is a revision of Dr. Buck's article of the same title, *ante*, 5: 14-27. *Ed.*

ewan and the Missouri. Frog Portage, leading north from the Saskatchewan to the Churchill, was well known to the pioneer fur-traders of Canada; and the beautiful Methye Portage, from the upper waters of the Churchill to the Clearwater, a tributary of the Athabaska, was even more famous. Giscome Portage took the trader from one of the remote sources of the Mackenzie to that tumultuous river, the Fraser, linking streams named in honor of two Scottish-Canadians who were even more famous as explorers than as fur-traders. But none of these paths around waterfalls or rapids, or connecting the waters of different river systems, with their abiding memories of human endeavor, their heroic associations, their tragedies, and their comedies, is more deservedly famous than this one the bicentenary of which we are gathered here to commemorate — the Grand Portage and the explorers and fur-traders whose names are associated with it.

As is so often the case, it is no longer possible to say with absolute certainty who among white men first discovered and used this jumping-off place from the Great Lakes to the western plains and the Indian country. The French explorer, Radisson, may have passed this way in 1662. So may Daniel Greysolon, sieur du Lhut in 1679; and Zacharie Robutel de la Noue in 1717. We know, for instance, that on some old maps Pigeon River appears as Groseillier, which means currant or gooseberry, but which is also the name by which Medard Chouart, Radisson's brother-in-law and companion on his western explorations, was known. And we also know that in 1722 an officer named Pachot, who was associated with La Noue, wrote that the route that was then thought the most favorable for penetrating the West was by way of a small river named Nantokouagane — and that was the Indian name for Pigeon River. Nevertheless, we have no certain knowledge that any of these French explorers ever saw the Pigeon River or stood on the ground where we stand today. On the other hand, we do know that in 1731 — two hundred years

ago — one of the most gallant and determined and unselfish of western explorers, Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de la Vérendrye, stood upon this spot, and to him therefore rightly belongs the honor of discovering the Grand Portage.

The evidence, while conclusive, is meager. It would have been interesting to have a comprehensive account from La Vérendrye of the circumstances attending his arrival here, but the explorer unfortunately did not realize that two centuries after his visit a notable group of people, speaking an alien tongue, would be gathered on this spot merely to commemorate that occasion. If he could have foreseen it, perhaps he would have put more life into his story, and perhaps not.

In a memoir sent to the French governor, Beauharnois, in 1730, LaVérendrye says that an Indian named Auchagah, whom he had selected as guide on his projected expedition toward the Western Sea, had drawn for him a map showing three separate routes leading from Lake Superior to the West. One of these rivers was called Fond du Lac, the second was known as Nantouagan, and the third was the Kaministiquia. This map was sent to the governor, and it has been repeatedly reproduced. It is interesting to find, even at this early date, so clear a knowledge of the three portage routes between Lake Superior and Rainy Lake.

La Vérendrye writes, referring to the Grand Portage and the Kaministiquia :

The two latter are those on which everything is marked with exactness on the map, lakes, rapids, portages, the side on which the portage must be made, and the heights of land; all this is represented or indicated. Comparing these two routes, the river Nantouagan, which is two days' journey from the river Kaministikwia going towards the extremity of the lake, is, it seems to me, the one to be preferred. It has, it is true, forty-two portages, while the Kaministikwia has only twenty-two; but, on the other hand, it has no rapids, while the other has twelve, two of which are long and very shallow. Besides, the road is straight and one third shorter. The height of land for this route is not over fifty leagues

distant, and after seventy leagues at most there is a steady descent. Finally, in spite of all the portages, the savage assures me that, with easy travelling, we shall get from Lake Superior to Lake Tecamamiouen in twenty days at the most, and from there in four days to the Lake of the Woods, and in ten to Lake Winnipeg.

There is no evidence here that any white man had yet crossed the Grand Portage and followed that route to Rainy Lake. The information seems to come entirely from Indian sources.

Unfortunately the letter to Beauharnois in which La Vérendrye described his journey of 1731 has not survived. All that we have is the governor's report to Maurepas, minister of the colonies under Louis XV, describing what he had learned from the explorer and from a missionary who had accompanied him, and La Vérendrye's brief reference to this journey in a report written thirteen years afterwards.

Beauharnois writes in a letter of October, 1732:

I have received letters from the Sieur de la Vérendrye, who is in charge of the expedition for the discovery of the Western Sea, and from the Reverend Father Mesaiger, who inform me that, the men engaged being discouraged by the length of the portage of Nantaouagan, which is three and a quarter leagues long, they were obliged to stop at Kaministikwia and winter there, the season being too far advanced to risk going further and possibly coming to countries where they would have lacked provisions; that nevertheless the Sieur de la Vérendrye had despatched the Sieur de la Jemeraye with three medium-sized canoes, and that he himself had gone with three others that followed him to the outlet of Lake Tecamamiouen at the entrance of the river which flows into the Lake of the Woods, where he wintered in a fort which he caused to be constructed and which is in latitude 47° 15'.

In La Vérendrye's report for 1744 he says:

I left Montreal on the 8th of June, 1731, intending to mark my perfect attachment to the service to which I confine all my ambition.

I associated several persons with myself in order the more easily to provide for the expenses which the enterprise might involve, and in passing Michilimackinac I took the Reverend Father Mesaiger, Jesuit, with me as our missionary.

We arrived on the twenty-sixth of August at the Grand Portage of Lake Superior, which is fifteen leagues south-southwest of Kaministikwia. . . .

On the twenty-seventh all our people, in dismay at the length of the portage, three leagues, mutinied and loudly demanded that I should turn back, but with the aid of our Missionary Father I was able to induce one man out of the number of those I had hired to go with my nephew La Jemeraye (who was my second in command), and my son, to establish the post of Rainy lake. I had enough to equip four medium-sized canoes. I had the portage made at once and gave them a good guide.

I was afterwards obliged to winter at Kaministikwia, which was a great loss to me as regards both the payment of the hired men and the goods that I had on my hands, without any hope of recovering any portion of the expense, which was considerable.

On the twenty-ninth of May following, on the arrival of the canoes which I had sent inland, I sent my eldest son to convey to Michilimackinac the small amount of peltries that had come to me and bring back the goods which were to come to me from Montreal.

On the eighth of June we left, the Missionary Father, my nephew and two of my sons, with seven canoes, to proceed with my discovery. I took great care to improve all the portages by which we had to pass, and we finally arrived on the fourteenth of July at fort St. Pierre at the outlet of Rainy lake, which our Frenchmen had built the previous autumn. More than fifty canoes of savages accompanied us and conducted us to fort St. Charles.

La Vérendrye and his sons continued to use the Grand Portage route, so far as we know, until they finally withdrew from the West. It is probable that the father saw this place for the last time on his way down to Quebec in 1745, and the sons, two years later. Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, who was sent west to continue the explorations of La Vérendrye, was at the Grand Portage in 1750, and La Corne was there three years later. This is the last we hear of the Grand Portage up to the close of the period of French rule in Canada.

There is a passage in Alexander Mackenzie's *General History of the Fur Trade*, written about 1801, which is somewhat puzzling. After pointing out that it was not until 1766 that

British fur-traders made their way farther west than Michilimackinac, he goes on to say:

The first who attempted it were satisfied to go the length of the river Camenistiquia, about thirty miles to the Eastward of the Grande Portage, where the French had a principal establishment, and was the line of their communication with the interior country. It was once destroyed by fire. Here they went and returned successful in the following spring to Michilimakinac. Their success induced them to renew their journey, and incited others to follow their example. Some of them remained at Camenistiquia, while others proceeded to and beyond the Grande Portage, which, since that time has become the principal entrepot of that trade.

Now does Mackenzie mean that it was at Kaminstiquia or at Grand Portage that the French had their principal establishment, and that that was the line of their communication with the interior country? His language might be taken to refer to either. We know that the French had a post at Kaminstiquia, and there is, so far as I am aware, no reference elsewhere to a post at Grand Portage, though there might very well have been one, as this was an important point on the way to the West. On the other hand, the principal line of French communication would appear to have been the Grand Portage route. It would be interesting to discover some conclusive evidence as to the existence of a trading post here during the French period.

Jonathan Carver, in his *Travels*, says that he arrived at Grand Portage the end of July, 1767. He writes:

Here those who go to the north-west trade, to the Lakes De Pluye [*Rainy Lake*], Dubois [*Lake of the Woods*], &c., carry over their canoes and baggage about nine miles. . . .

At the Grand Portage is a small bay, before the entrance of which lies an island that intercepts the dreary and uninterrupted view over the Lake, which otherwise would have presented itself, and makes the bay serene and pleasant. Here I met a large party of the Killistnoe [*Cree*] and Assinipoil [*Assiniboin*] Indians, with their respective kings and their families. They were come

to this place in order to meet the traders from Michillimackinac, who make this their road to the north-west.

It was while Carver was at Grand Portage that he was given an example of Indian magic that completely mystified him. According to his story, a medicine man, having been rolled up like a mummy in an elk skin and tied securely with strong thongs, went into a trance, and then suddenly sprang to his feet, bursting his bonds asunder — all of which sounds rather like Houdini. What was more remarkable, however, was that the medicine man had been asked if he could ascertain when certain traders, who were then overdue, would reach Grand Portage. When he came out of his trance he said: "The Great Spirit . . . has not, indeed, told me when the persons we expect, will be here; but tomorrow, soon after the sun has reached his highest point in the heavens, a canoe will arrive, and the people in that will inform us when the traders will come." Carver continues:

The next day the sun shone bright, and long before noon all the Indians were gathered together on the eminence that overlooked the lake. The old king came to me and asked me, whether I had so much confidence in what the priest had foretold, as to join his people on the hill, and wait for the completion of it? I told him I was at a loss what opinion to form of the prediction, but that I would readily attend him. On this we walked together to the place where the others were assembled. Every eye was again fixed by turns on me and on the lake; when just as the sun had reached his zenith, agreeable to what the priest had foretold, a canoe came round a point of land about a league distant. The Indians no sooner beheld it, than they set up an universal shout, and by their looks seemed to triumph in the interest their priest thus evidently had with the Great Spirit.

In less than an hour the canoe reached the shore, when I attended the king and chiefs to receive those who were on board. As soon as the men were landed, we walked all together to the king's tent, when according to their invariable custom, we began to smoke; and this we did, notwithstanding our impatience to know the tidings they brought, without asking any questions; for the Indians are the most deliberate people in the world. However, after some trivial conversation, the king enquired of them,



whether they had seen anything of the traders? The men replied, that they had parted from them a few days before, and that they proposed being here the second day from the present. They accordingly arrived at that time greatly to our satisfaction, but more particularly so to that of the Indians, who found by this event the importance both of their priests and of their nation, greatly augmented in the sight of a stranger.

From 1767 onwards the importance of Grand Portage grew steadily, and for a quarter of a century or more it was regarded as the western headquarters of the fur trade. Unfortunately fur-traders were not as a rule given to the keeping of diaries or journals, and we get only such occasional glimpses of the life at Grand Portage as the comment of Alexander Henry, the elder, who wrote in 1775: "At the Grand Portage I found the traders in a state of extreme reciprocal hostility, each pursuing his interests in such a manner as might most injure his neighbor." Modern commerce has in some respects grown away from that primitive idea of neighborliness, but it may be questioned if even today we have not still some way to travel before we live up to the spirit of the Golden Rule.

Roderick McKenzie, a cousin of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, who had gone out from Scotland in 1784 and joined the staff of Gregory McLeod and Company in Montreal, reached Grand Portage the following summer. Roderick, it will be remembered, spent several years collecting material for a history of the fur trade, but apparently the labor of gathering the information exhausted his enthusiasm. At any rate the work was never published, though some of the journals were afterwards printed by Louis R. Masson in his *Bourgeois de la compagnie du nord-ouest*.

Peter Pangman, in 1785 a member of the firm of Gregory McLeod and Company, and afterwards a partner of the Northwest Company, went out from Grand Portage to meet the west-bound brigade. "He accompanied us," says Roderick McKenzie, "to his new establishment, which consisted of one *hangard* or store warmly put together, and sufficiently spacious

for the purpose of the season." Masson adds that it stood on the north side of Pigeon River and "opposite the 'old fort' occupied by their opponents" of the Northwest Company.

A few days after McKenzie reached Grand Portage John Gregory, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, and James Finlay arrived from Michilimackinac. "Now," says Roderick, "all the members of the new concern were assembled at their Head Quarters." Gregory, Pangman, John Ross, and Alexander Mackenzie were partners; Duncan Pollock and Laurent Leroux were clerks; and James Finlay and Roderick McKenzie, apprentice clerks. Pangman retired from the fur trade in 1793 and purchased the seigneurie of Mascouche in Quebec. Leroux was afterwards associated with Alexander Mackenzie and David Thompson in western exploration; he built Fort Providence on Great Slave Lake in 1790, became a member of the legislative assembly of Quebec forty years later, and died at the age of ninety-seven — not an unusual example of longevity in the fur trade.

Roderick McKenzie gives us interesting glimpses of the life at Grand Portage in 1785. He was only a youngster, fresh from the very different life of the Old World, but he seems to have fitted himself very quickly and efficiently into the ways of the western fur trade. He notes in his reminiscences that "Pollock and Leroux did not seem to like doing the ordinary drudgery attending the generous *rendez-vous* [at Grand Portage] and were seldom called upon to do it, so that I, who could yet claim no privilege, necessarily became the fag of the whole." Being a shrewd young Scot he did not grumble, though often enough he slept on his desk in the countinghouse. While his cousin Alexander, Pangman, Ross, and Pollock made up their outfits and set out for the interior posts, Roderick remained for the winter at Grand Portage under Pierre L'Anniau, who was in charge. It is amusing to speculate whether L'Anniau may not have been one of La Vérendrye's men. McKenzie says that he was put in charge of Grand Portage because he

“ had been for many years in that country.” L’Anniau might even have been that one loyal *voyageur* who went on with La Jémeraye when all the others refused to make the portage. Who knows?

The Northwest Company’s post at Grand Portage was in 1785 in charge of a very respectable old man named Cloutier. With his assistant, Givins, who had been brought up at Detroit, McKenzie seems to have got on very well indeed, for he writes: “ He and I, though in opposition, were always together and separated, in the Spring, good friends.” That sounds better than the “ extreme mutual hostility ” of the days of Alexander Henry. Givins afterwards became superintendent of Indian affairs in Upper Canada. McKenzie also got on very well with the Indians, though on one occasion he threw out of the fort a native who had attacked L’Anniau with a knife. “ When the leaves grow large in the Portage,” cried the Indian, “ I will remember you.” That evening there was a drinking match in the native camp; “ such a dreadful racket,” says McKenzie, “ that one might believe that all the Furies of Hell were let loose.” In the morning one of the young men he had befriended came and told him that five Indians were dead. “ One of them I killed,” he said; “ he was your enemy and meant to kill you on the first opportunity.”

In the spring of 1786 Robert Grant and William McGillivray arrived at Grand Portage from the interior. They were both Northwest Company men. The former built Fort Espérance on the Qu’Appelle River in 1787; the latter, a nephew of Simon McTavish, the dominating spirit of the company, became a partner in 1790. Fort William was named for him. McKenzie called upon them when they arrived at Grand Portage, and was well pleased with his reception. A short time later he left for the English River with Alexander Mackenzie. Roderick McKenzie and William McGillivray had charge of rival posts that winter at Lac des Serpents, and they got along very well together. In the spring the two traders with their

men set out for Grand Portage and arrived there side by side, the crews singing in chorus, to the no small amazement of the more sophisticated folk at this metropolis of the fur trade. That year the rival interests were united in the Northwest Company.

In 1790 Alexander Mackenzie went down to Grand Portage from the Far West for the annual meeting of the partners. In the previous year he had made his famous expedition down the Mackenzie River to the Arctic. He writes to Roderick from Grand Portage on July 16 somewhat bitterly: "My expedition was hardly spoken of, but that is what I expected." The indifference of the partners to anything that did not further the interests of the fur trade did not, however, discourage the explorer from planning and carrying through to a successful conclusion in 1793 his even more notable expedition to the Pacific — the final culmination of that search for the Western Sea to which La Vérendrye had devoted his life.

Another Scotsman in the western fur trade who is casually met with at Grand Portage is John McDonald of Garth, known to the *voyageurs* as *Bras Croche* because he had a deformed arm. Notwithstanding this and the further handicap that he was small in stature, *Bras Croche* had all the pride and fiery temper of a Highlander. In the preface to his "Autobiographical Notes" he reminds us that the McDonalds date back to Noah, had a boat of their own on Loch Lomond, and were therefore independent of the ark. On the way over from Scotland this pugnacious boy of seventeen challenged a fellow-Scot to a duel because of some fancied slight. Through the influence of his granduncle, General Small, he had been given a clerkship in the Northwest Company; and in June, 1791, he started out from Lachine with the annual brigade. Simon McTavish was in the party. McDonald records:

There were great rejoicings at Grand Portage on Mr. McTavish's arrival: several Partners were there from the interior, as well as the Agents from Montreal. . . . During a stay of per-

haps a fortnight here I had a quarrel with a clerk, a large Englishman of the name of Harrison. He threw a loaf of bread at me, and I called him out — with my pocket pistols again. — He took a rope and said: “this is my pistol.” He was afterwards under my command, and a very good fellow, but no trader.

Two years later McDonald is back at Grand Portage with the east-bound brigade. “The men, on arrival at Grand Portage,” he writes, “were always regaled with plenty, and feasted on bread and pork — an unusual diet — and a *coup* to make them merry. There were usually about six to eight hundred men on the ground.”

In January, 1794, Alexander Mackenzie writes to his cousin from Fort Chipewyan, on Lake Athabaska:

I wish we could contrive matters so that we could both go to the Portage. The *Premier* [*a name applied in derision to Simon McTavish because of his haughty manner*] having arrived from England, we may expect him at the Grand Portage, where it will be right that all the interested should meet him.

I am fully bent upon going down, for I think it unpardonable for any body to remain in this country who can leave it.”

Three years later Roderick McKenzie was again at Grand Portage, after a considerable absence. On his way inland to Rainy Lake he met a family of Indians at the height of land “from whom” he says “I accidentally learned the existence of a water communication a little way behind and parallel to this, extending from Lake Superior to Lake *La Pluie*, which is navigable for large canoes and, if adopted, would avoid the Grand Portage.” He continues:

This was excellent information; of course I immediately engaged one of the Indians to meet me at a certain point in *Lac La Croix*, to show me this new route, but on my arrival, as appointed, the Indian was not there. However, being acquainted with the entrance of the route, I proceeded without him and reached a post of the Company where I procured a guide who accompanied me to Caministiquia on Lake Superior, from whence I soon reached Grand Portage, being the first who reached there from *Lac La Pluie* direct by water communication.

This apparently new route, being at the door of Grand Portage, and formerly used by the French, it is most astonishing that the North-West Company were not acquainted with it sooner.

It was as a result of this rediscovery of the Kaministiquia route that the Northwest Company decided to remove its headquarters from Grand Portage to the mouth of the Kaministiquia, where Fort William was built.

The year 1797 is notable in that it probably brought together at Grand Portage the three men who were preëminently the explorers of western Canada during the early part of the period of British rule. We know in any event that Sir Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, and Simon Fraser were all at Grand Portage in that year, and it is altogether probable that they were there at the same time. Mackenzie, who was then agent of the Northwest Company, attended the annual meetings at Grand Portage. David Thompson arrived there on July 22, 1797, having left the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and joined the Northwest Company's forces. Simon Fraser was in charge of the post at Grand Portage. It would be interesting to know what each thought of the others. They were, of course, in different official grades at that time, for Mackenzie was a magnate of the fur trade, Fraser was in charge of a post, and Thompson had just joined the company, though in a special capacity. All three are, however, listed as *bourgeois* or partners in 1804.

In 1798 David Thompson met Alexander Mackenzie again at Sault Ste. Marie, and the former was instructed to continue the survey he had already made of the south shore of Lake Superior around the north shore to Grand Portage. He completed it in six days, and that was quick work because Thompson never made a perfunctory survey; what he did was done thoroughly. In his manuscript journal for this year, which has not been published, he gives, according to J. B. Tyrrell, "a very interesting account of the men who were almost daily arriving [*at Grand Portage*] from, and departing for, many widely separated posts throughout the west."

The following year Thompson again went down to Grand Portage, taking with him this time his young bride of not quite fourteen, daughter of Patrick Small, the fur-trader. He left for the West with John McDonald of Garth. By the way, the Thompsons ultimately had what today — outside of Quebec — would be regarded as a fairly large family, seven sons and six daughters. Roderick McKenzie was also at Grand Portage in 1799, that year “so critical in the history of the N. W. Co. when the rivalry between Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Simon McTavish culminated in the withdrawal of the former, amidst angry dissensions at G. P. between the wintering bourgeois and the agents of the company.”

Alexander Mackenzie, in his *General History of the Fur Trade*, describes Grand Portage and the life there as they were in 1801. He writes :

The bottom of the bay, which forms an amphitheatre, is cleared of wood and inclosed; and on the left corner of it, beneath an hill, three or four hundred feet in height, and crowned by others of a still greater altitude, is the fort, picketed in with cedar pallisadoes, and inclosing houses built with wood and covered with shingles. They are calculated for every convenience of trade, as well as to accommodate the proprietors and clerks during their short residence there. The north men live under tents: but the more frugal pork-eater lodges beneath his canoe.

Mackenzie then proceeds to describe the arrival of a brigade from Montreal.

When they are arrived at the Grande Portage, which is near nine miles over, each of them has to carry eight packages of such goods and provisions as are necessary for the interior country. This is a labour which cattle cannot conveniently perform in summer, as both horses and oxen were tried by the company without success. They are only useful for light, bulky articles; or for transporting upon sledges, during the winter, whatever goods may remain there, especially provision, of which it is usual to have a year's stock on hand.

Having finished this toilsome part of their duty, if more goods are necessary to be transported, they are allowed a Spanish dollar for each package: and so inured are they to this kind of labour, that I have known some of them set off with two packages of

ninety pounds each, and return with two others of the same weight, in the course of six hours, being a distance of eighteen miles over hills and mountains. This necessary part of the business being over, if the season be early they have some respite, but this depends upon the time the North men begin to arrive from their winter quarters, which they commonly do early in July. At this period, it is necessary to select from the pork-eaters, a number of men, among whom are the recruits, or winterers, sufficient to man the North canoes necessary to carry, to the river of the rainy lake, the goods and provisions requisite for the Athabasca country; as the people of that country (owing to the shortness of the season and length of the road, can come no further) are equipped there, and exchange ladings with the people of whom we are speaking, and both return from whence they came. This voyage is performed in the course of a month, and they are allowed proportionable wages for their services.

This was the mode of living at Grand Portage, as described by Mackenzie :

The proprietors, clerks, guides, and interpreters, mess together, to the number of sometimes an hundred, at several tables, in one large hall, the provision consisting of bread, salt pork, beef, hams, fish, and venison, butter, peas, Indian corn, potatoes, tea, spirits, wine, &c., and plenty of milk, for which purpose several milch cows are constantly kept. The mechanics have rations of such provision, but the canoe-men, both from the North and Montreal, have no other allowance here, or in the voyage, than Indian corn and melted fat. The corn for this purpose is prepared before it leaves Detroit, by boiling it in a strong alkali, which takes off the outer husk; it is then well washed, and carefully dried upon stages, when it is fit for use. One quart of this is boiled for two hours, over a moderate fire, in a gallon of water; to which, when it has boiled a small time, are added two ounces of melted suet; this causes the corn to split, and in the time mentioned makes a pretty thick pudding. If to this is added a little salt, (but not before it is boiled, as it would interrupt the operation) it makes a wholesome, palatable food, and easy of digestion. This quantity is fully sufficient for a man's subsistence during twenty-four hours; though it is not sufficiently heartening to sustain the strength necessary for a state of active labour. The Americans call this dish *hominee*.

Mackenzie then tells us something about the brigade from the West.



The North men being arrived at the Grande Portage, are regaled with bread, pork, butter, liquor and tobacco, and such as have not entered into agreements during the winter, which is customary, are contracted with, to return and perform the voyage for one, two, or three years: their accounts are also settled, and such as choose to send any of their earnings to Canada, receive drafts to transmit to their relations or friends: and as soon as they can be got ready, which requires no more than a fortnight, they are again despatched to their respective departments. It is, indeed, very creditable to them as servants, that though they are sometimes assembled to the number of twelve hundred men, indulging themselves in the free use of liquor, and quarrelling with each other, they always show the greatest respect to their employers, who are comparatively but few in number, and beyond the aid of any legal power to enforce due obedience. In short, a degree of subordination can only be maintained by the good opinion these men entertain of their employers, which has been uniformly the case, since the trade has been formed and conducted on a regular system.

In the narrative of Alexander Henry, the younger, one finds a more vivacious account of the east-bound brigade:

Everything went over the portages at one trip. Canoes and all at full trot; embarked all hands helter-skelter, pushed off, and all paddled as if chased by an enemy. The Lake Winipic canoe was a dull vessel; threw her away at Lac du Bonnet and embarked her men in the five others. Arrived at Lac la Pluie early. . . . We had been stopped by the wind in Lac des Bois. . . . I procured a guide to take our brigade by the Kaministiquia road. . . . In Lac la Croix, at Pointe du Mai we struck away from the Grand Portage route, steering an E. course to the left just when we had overtaken an X Y brigade steering on the old track to the Grand Portage, where they continue to hold their general rendezvous. . . . Met at Prairie portage J. M. Bouché, who has built a hut and an oven to bake bread to sell to the winterers en passant for dressed leather, buffalo robes, etc. He had a great stock of provisions and other articles for sale. He dunned us with news from Canada, all of which we knew better than himself, having met our dispatches from Montreal, etc., at Lac la Pluie. These petty traders are really a nuisance on the route. At Portage des Chênes we found another one, but he was not so loquacious as Bouché. We therefore soon got rid of him by taking wherewith to treat our men of liquor and provisions.

. . . In the afternoon we arrived at our new establishment of

Kaministiquia. The first objects that struck us were two vessels lying with their sides against the bank, the Invincible and the Otter, which were unloading their cargoes.

As the sloop "Otter" was plying on Lake Superior as early as 1798 she must have used the old dock at Grand Portage. It may be noted that Henry is writing in 1803, after the Northwest Company had removed its headquarters to Fort William. It is a curious fact, however, that the 1802 agreement of the Northwest Company, which was to govern its operations for a period of years, was not only signed at Grand Portage on July 5, but provides among other things that the annual meeting of the company be held as heretofore in June or July at Grand Portage, that the accounts be forwarded there, and that members of the firm of McTavish, Frobisher, and Company make an annual visit "for the purpose of conducting managing and carrying on the business of the concern on the communication to and at the Grand Portage as heretofore practiced by the agents of the North-West Company." The decision to remove the headquarters to Fort William must have been decidedly sudden. With that removal we may conveniently bring to a close this rambling account of Grand Portage. It continued to be used as a trading post but, as Washington Irving said later of Fort William when it too declined from its high estate, "the glory of the lords of the lakes and the forest has passed away."

May I say in conclusion how deeply conscious I am of the importance to ourselves and to our respective nations of such a meeting as this? Here Canadians and Americans come together not as strangers but as neighbors to commemorate an event that is one of the many links in a chain of circumstance that binds together these commonwealths in a union that is none the less real because it does not affect even remotely the national sovereignty of either. The international boundary that lies so near Grand Portage, while it marks the frontiers of two distinct governments, and might in other parts of the

world represent mutual distrust and dislike, is here in a very real sense the invisible band that unites two peoples who politically, socially, and intellectually look at the problems of the modern world from much the same point of view. May Canada and the United States stand shoulder to shoulder in every movement that has for its purpose the welfare of this same rather troubled and bewildered modern world.

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INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION

OTTAWA, CANADA



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