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A Winter in the St. Croix Valley, 1802-03

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RECORDS OF fur-trading posts in the Minnesota country are all too few. Most of those known to be in existence have been published in one form or another. When it was learned, about two years ago, that the "diary" of an early fur trader of the St. Croix Valley has been discovered in the Toronto Public Libraries, the Minnesota Historical Society secured a film copy.¹ It proved to be not a diary, but a trader's reminiscences, written down many years after the events he describes. The author's name was George Nelson, and he was a native of a little hamlet near Montreal. In 1802, at the age of sixteen, he became an apprentice clerk for the Parker, Gerrard and Ogilvy Company of Montreal. The firm was a leading member of the so-called X Y Company, an offshoot and rival of the North West Company during the last years of the eighteenth century and until 1804. In that year the companies reunited as the North West Company.

After witnessing the events of the winter 1802-03 described in the document printed below, Nelson spent many years in the Far West of Canada and at the Pic post on the North Shore of Lake Superior. From 1804 to 1806 and from 1809 to 1812 he was a clerk for the North West Company on the Red River and Lake Winnipeg, working in an area that included the post at Bas de la Rivière mentioned early in his manuscript. He was in the Pic department after the autumn of 1812 for an undetermined period, and he was in Montreal in 1816. During the winter of 1818-19 he was on the west side

¹ Some extracts from the manuscript were edited by Alice E. Smith, curator of manuscripts for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, as "A Fur Trader at Yellow Lake," in the *Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin*, 9:15-18 (July, 1944).

of Lake Winnipeg. In 1819 he took charge of the fort at Moose Lake in the Cumberland House department. By 1823 he was at Lac la Ronge in the English River district. He seems to have been back in Lower Canada by 1832.

Thus he was in the thick of the strife among the rival organizations, the North West, X Y, and Hudson's Bay companies, from the turn of the century until 1821. Scattered through his reminiscences are many references to the events and methods of trading in those turbulent days. He even attributes the burning of his diary of 1802-03 to fear of having it and his later records captured by the opposition. Apparently all his diaries kept between 1802 and 1812 were thus destroyed. Another reminiscent manuscript among his papers in the Toronto Public Libraries is entitled "Tales of happenings among Indians and traders in the district around Lake Winnipeg in 1810, 1811, and 1812." Besides these documents there are four other volumes: a diary kept at Tête-au-Brochet from May 1 to June 8, 1819, and a "Journal from Bas de la Rivière to Cumberland House," dating from August 16 to September 15, 1819; a diary kept at Moose Lake and other places in 1821 and 1822; a description of the religious beliefs of the Indians of the English River district written in 1823; and a volume on the Papineau rebellion of 1837, in which Nelson's brother, Dr. Wolfred Nelson, was involved.

The St. Croix Valley manuscript opens with several pages of philosophical rambling, which are not believed of sufficient importance to be printed here. Then begins at once the story of the burning of Nelson's early diaries, followed by recollections of a trip to Grand Portage from Montreal, and a winter on the Yellow River near Yellow Lake in modern Burnett County, Wisconsin. The lake is now a tourist mecca, situated as it is near the upper St. Croix River and in a region famous for its fishing grounds. Nelson was alert to scenic beauty, as several sentences in his manuscript reveal; and he was deeply interested in the Indians. Yet he apparently overlooked completely the evidences of very early culture about him at Yellow Lake, that is, the mounds for which the area is famous.

The lake seems to have been a natural center for Indian life. Villages near it have been known since Radisson's time. Other

traders' diaries kept on its shores or near by have been preserved and published, notably that of Michel Curot, an X Y trader, for the winter of 1803-04.² Yellow Lake was, apparently, the earliest site of a mission in the valley. The manuscript diary of Jedediah Stevens for 1829-30, now owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, tells much of the natives of the generation after Nelson's sojourn. Still later, in the 1830's, an important mission of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was located there. Even to this day one sees dusky faces peering from log houses that overlook the "beautiful island" which Nelson describes at the junction of the St. Croix and the Yellow rivers. It is still an area capable of arousing loyalty in both Indian residents and summer tourists. The light thrown on its appearance and life nearly a century and a half ago by the recollections of this trader discloses an even more romantic past than any heretofore known.

A FUR TRADER'S REMINISCENCES

George Nelson

THE FOLLOWING PAGES are a Journal of many years. I begin at the year 1802, but, until 1812, my yearly journals for those 10 years, which I had left in my trunk at "Bas de la Riviere" when I was ordered to the "Pic" department, were burnt by my good friend Crebassa to prevent their falling into the hands of Lord Selkirk's people who were at *that* time "paying us up for *old Scores*."³ Of these ten years I shall relate the events year by year, most of them being still fresh in my memory.

But it is proper I should state that I do not write with the view of publishing it; nor is it for the use of my relatives for these plain

² See "A Wisconsin Fur-Trader's Journal, 1803-04," translated and edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 20:396-471. It is full of references to the same traders and Indians who appear in Nelson's reminiscences. Even Nelson's own name occurs frequently.

³ A revealing biography of Lord Selkirk, which describes his efforts at colonizing the Winnipeg area from 1811 to 1820, as well as his deep financial interest in the Hudson's Bay Company, is included in John Perry Pritchett's *The Red River Valley, 1811-1849: A Regional Study* (New Haven, 1942). See page 6 for another reference by Nelson to Henry Crebassa, an X Y Company employee.

reasons. First: there is a strange feature in our character, perhaps vanity, peculiar I believe to us, that none of us thinks the other fit or able to write or do anything else worthy the trouble of writing or reading. It is a species of presumption, as if, "How durst thou pretend to write thou who canst not even speak the commonest language but in vulgar phrases; & what hast thou seen or done so wonderful—away with thy presumption!" This is not *said*, but looks as it were implied. Secondly, none of my brothers or Sisters, nor Alfrey's children, Henry, perhaps, only excepted, would be at the *pains*. Reading, to them, is an awful task—time & labor lost. Of Wolfred's children, Horace has not the leisure, Alfred & Walter are far too high for such low stuff. Arthur I know but little of, & Charles is yet very young. Eugene, Robert's son, has strange peculiarities, but he is fond of reading & has a good understanding; he might find something worthy his attention in some of these pages, but he is yet young; & I do not write for publication.

Why then do I write? First, it is to while away some moments & dissipate some thoughts of melancholy that frequently oppress me. Secondly: To retrace at leisure my past & chequered life: to recall as many of its incidents as I can: to thank & bless God for his affectionate care of me through some particularly, of the Scenes: to lament, bewail, & be ashamed from my heart & Soul, of those numerous Sallies of—folly—? aye, more than follies; not crimes of blood indeed, thank God, though too often very near it, but of bitter pangs I so often caused, particularly to two who deserved very different treatment at my hands. But one is gone! and I sincerely & fervently hope, & trust, the Almighty has received & comforted her lacerated Spirit. The other fell to another's lot: where she is I know not. Thirdly, as I intend to "try" to have this preserved, so that some one, I hope of my relatives, years to come, may fall upon it & from sheer curiosity may turn over the leaves & see how people fared, & what they had to contend with "in those days." It will then be an *old thing*, and old things like old people possess some oddities. My chief, indeed, my sole design, is to preserve a few traits of Indian character that deserve a more conspicuous place: Things I have known & seen personally & which may be relied on as rigid truth;

but what I have been *told*, the stories, fables, and things of that sort, relating to Indian mythology must be taken for what they are worth: I merely *relate*, I do not *endorse*. I merely write "off hand" without any regard to elegance of language or "purity of Style" and all that sort of paraphernalia of which I know nothing. *It is not to charm, but to inform that I write, this, my*

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War, about this period, was raging with unwonted fury over the whole of Europe & carried to many other parts of the Globe, the exertions the nations had to make caused money to circulate abundantly & with a rapidity never, perhaps known before. This induced many to form into companies for trade or other purposes. The Fur Trade, was in its zenith. It had been carried on for nearly two centuries in a very lame & bungling way, by individuals, who would sometimes join stock, or rather unite for a year & two, but with so little method that no benefit ensued. They Seemed rather as men amusing themselves in "expectation of better times." But sometime between the years 1780 & 90, Messrs Joseph & Benj. Frobisher, originally "wool combers" from Yorkshire, & M^r Simon M^cTavish, the Son of a poor farmer of the "Highlands," joined their Stocks, & put the trade upon a regular footing;⁴ & it soon became so perfectly organized that large fortunes were rapidly made, & almost as rapidly wasted. They gave liberal Salaries which they paid the moment Due with a punctuality & generosity that surprised & dazzled all.

In May each year we would see numbers of young men, each one with his bag, containing a few of the most necessary articles of clothing, on his back, with a paddle & "setting pole" in his hand, bidding "farewell" (alas! how many for ever!) to relations & friends, embarking in their bark Canoes, with tears in their eyes & singing as if going to a banquet! In the months of September & October *others* would return. These were easily distinguished by their gay & lofty mien and jaunty air, as men who had faced dangers & con-

⁴ Nelson here is describing the origin of the North West Company, with headquarters in Montreal. The only history of the company yet to be written in any detail is Gordon C. Davidson, *The North West Company* (University of California, *Publications in History*, vol. 7 — Berkeley, 1918).

quered difficulties they only were capable of. The free & thoughtless way in which they squandered their money was not the least of the wonders to those who were unacquainted with influence of example & the habit of thoughtlessness so natural to a roving life. In the country parts it was the universal theme of conversation: "How can people roughing so many hardships & privations & encountering so many serious, some appalling, dangers, so uselessly waste their money?" The example was infectious, the Stories thrilling, and I was in that period of life remarkable for thoughtlessness & anxious to be engaged in busy life. I was seized with the delirium.

Having occasion to go to Montreal, I accidentally went to the office of Parker, Gerrard & Ogilvy with one of the Voyageurs, & upon their enquiring of the numbers "engaged" for them, I asked, since you "hire so many men for that country, do you not require some clerks." So that in February 1802, old Henry Crebassa passed my "indentures," as an *apprentice* clerk, for five years, Salary fifteen pounds a year, with the "*promise* of a Share in the Company, at the expiration of the indentures, or one hundred pounds a year!"

On the 27th April 1802, my father came to the ferry to see us safe over, my poor, *good* & worthy mother accompanied me to Montreal, with Alfrey.

On the 3^d May, I walked by the lower road to Lachine. There I found a number of people in all the hurly-burly of business. Six large Bark Canoes were fitted up with their lading for the "Grand Portage," ten men each & two "Guides," & so deeply loaded that the least movement made them swing, requiring no little care and management in the old experienced hands to steady them—often I thought we should *upset*. There were a M^r—— White the Company had engaged to command a Schooner they were building on Lake Superior, a M^r Samuel Black, a young Scotchman, M^r William Morrison, of Berthier, & myself, as clerks.⁵ Our Guides Jaques Lar-

⁵ This clue to a Lake Superior vessel owned by the X Y Company, as well as the last name of its first master, is deeply appreciated by students of Great Lakes shipping history. Previously it has been merely suspected that the "Invincible," known heretofore only as a North West Company schooner, was first an X Y vessel. A history of early vessels on Lake Superior is given in Grace Lee Nute's *Lake Superior*, 113-121 (Indianapolis, 1944). Samuel Black, who became a well-known Nor'Wester, is given a biographical sketch in W. S. Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*,

ence, a very decent man, and Joseph Frequette Pellant, of Berthier, a Bully.

While the ladings were giving out, I happened to enter the Tavern. Capt. White called for some Spirits: I took a little, but O! for the *first* time, my situation glanced thro' my mind like a flash of lightning—"alone! no father to guide or restrain; no *mother* to comfort me! alone, & amongst strangers, no one caring for me but in so far only as suited his own purposes,—each one for himself." It was as a profound stab to my little heart, "alone!" "alone"! for a few minutes, I could scarcely refrain from weeping.

We *encamped* at night, in a bend of the river near the "Pointe Clere" [*Claire*] Church. I assisted in putting up the Tent & spreading our oil cloth, which was our flooring, our beds, consisting of 4 excellent blankets sewed up in sheeting, like a mattress, & 2 to cover us, all rolled in a piece of oil cloth, served us for seats. But we had to sit cross-leg, tailor fashion, round our dish, when at meals. We kindled a fire *out-doors* & boiled our Tea Kettle, & the men hung their Tea Kettles on the "tripied" to make their Soupe. Our Kitchen furniture was a Tea Kettle, a tin Kettle to cook in, a frying pan; tinned plates, pewter basins of about a pint for tea, Knives, forks, spoons &c all put in a very convenient travelling Basket, a liquor case containing Six flagons of Jamaica, Shrub & wine, besides other small Kegs of two Gallons each. Our provisions, tea, Sugar, pork & biscuit of excellent quality & in plenty. With a little management we would have been well. But it is not easy to keep the Canadians from pilfering.

At night again,—Had to *make* my own bed, on a wet beach, only a *linen tent* to cover me, my heart filled again. "My father, my *mother!* my brothers & Sisters! when shall I see them again?" Old campaigners, men inured to this way of life; children who have been reared in the streets, will never heed such things; but one who has had anything in the shape of a home, cannot but feel his loneliness; & if he has any thing of affection in him, especially if young,

426 (Champlain Society, *Publications*, vol. 22 — Toronto, 1934). For William Morrison, a claimant for the honor of being the first white man to discover and identify the source of the Mississippi River, see Warren Upham, *Minnesota Biographies*, 527 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 14 — St. Paul, 1912).

& has never left home,—that heart will often fill at night, when in bed. I said *my* prayers, the prayers I had been *taught*. But at *that* time I knew but little,—of the benefit, purport, or “comfort of prayer.” I done it as a duty, a mere routine. But Sophists, Sceptics & Cynics may “talk themselves hoarse, [”] *I say there is a principle in man that induces him to look to a Supreme Being for aid, council & comfort.* He who denies it is either a hypocrite or a madman, or *misfortune* has always kept him out of danger & want.

The next day, we reached S^t Ann’s, thirty miles from Montreal. Here we passed the day in repairing the Canoes. I went with others to see the Church & was persuaded to “promise a Mass,” to “beseech Gods blessing.”⁶ I did, and put a shilling in the box of the Roman Church in Montreal, when I returned in 1816 for I had no money then.

By this time I began to *accustom* myself to the ways. That heaviness of heart peculiar to youth when they leave home for the first time began to wear away, and finding myself a free, an *irresponsible* agent, entirely master of my own will & actions, I soon began to “run riot.” I ran into all the excesses of foolish language; freed from the shackles of a Strict parent; & no one out of compassion or justice to say “Hold.” I gave into all the foolish & vulgar language of the lowest of our crew, most fortunately my propensities never led me further.

We soon reached “Long Sault.”⁷ At that time there were but two houses there, one at each end. One evening here, some indians came to see us, & beg tobacco of us. One of them drew a very pointed knife out of his *leggings* to cut his tobacco. I cannot describe my consternation & horror, my whole frame shuddered! Gracious God! thought I; who, in the name of goodness can ever be sufficiently upon his guard with such people! Who but a Savage, a Barbarian, a Murderer would ever think of putting a Knife in such a place; & such a knife too! so sharp, so pointed! and am I to live amongst

⁶ St. Anne’s church was the chapel of the voyageurs. It was located at the western extremity of the island of Montreal. See Charles M. Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest*, 29, 68 (Minneapolis, 1933).

⁷ The Long Sault portage on the Ottawa River enabled the voyageurs to get above the rapids of the same name. See Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders*, 71, 72.

such people? My heart quaked. I became quite faint. But the people comforted me by saying he was a good indian, & would do no harm! How many Knives have I seen since! flourishing over my head & whisking in the violence of rage & madness of intoxication on every side of me; but the alarm I experienced at this place took away, completely *eradicated*, that chapter of fears. This was the doing of Providence, which I so little understood.

Some days after, we reached the Chaudiere, having passed old Foxes house, the only one between the Long Sault & the chaudières, where there was a little wretched Saw mill, & a wretched Hovel called a house, built by old M^r Wright who came to settle here a year or two before.⁸

At "portage des Chenes," now "Aylmer," the people saw a Red Deer swimming over the West Side, they pursued, overtook & Killed it. This was the first time I ever saw a deer.

In due time we got to the "Grand Calumet," a portage to avoid a Succession of great rapids, rushing thro' a narrow channel with an impetuosity as awful as it is grand. It is a noted place in the "legends of the Voyageurs."⁹ It seems that some few years near the time of the Conquest (1759) a Canoe of Voyageurs returning from "Upper Countries," whether from Mackinac or the Grand Portage, were in the act of carrying their furs & baggage to the lower end, they met a large party of Iroquois going to war; they immediately set up their frightful War yell & pursued. The Canadians ran, leaped into their Canoe & paddled off for the *opposite* side, but getting into current were carried down those awful rapids, expecting every instant to be engulfed: every one, most naturally put up his prayers, & vowed masses for their deliverance. They were carried over safely—they did not even ship any water. The next Portage being only a few hundred yards off, they escaped & drove to Mont-

⁸ Chaudière Falls were famous for their beauty. Here in 1800 Philemon Wright began the modern city of Hull. See Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders*, 73, n. 14. The translation of *chaudière* into English has produced innumerable Kettle Falls in Canada and the United States, for the voyageurs were prone to name any "boiling" falls by the term.

⁹ The Grand Calumet was the longest portage on the Ottawa. It was the scene of Cadieux' death in the legend which gave rise to a famous voyageur song, "Petit Rocher." It is Cadieux whose death Nelson describes at the end of the paragraph. For the song and its origin, see Grace Lee Nute, *The Voyageur*, 147-150 (New York, 1931).

real with the utmost expedition. The Iroquois ran too to the lower end & saw them arriving at the Portage; "but observing a tall woman in white robes standing in the bow of the Canoe, immediately perceived they were under the protection of a divinity; of course pursuit would be as fruitless as impious;" they each continued their respective routes. This was certainly a miraculous escape. It was indeed in the summer & the waters low, yet *no* bark Canoe even at very low water can withstand the furious commotions. The crew said, (& it is generally believed by the Romans) that they saw a woman, they believed to be the Virgin Mary, conducting the canoe. One unfortunate creature being very lame [from] a bruised heel (*une foulure*) could not reach the Canoe in time. He hid himself in the bushes. Ten days after, a party returned from Montreal to see after him. After much research they found him dead, "in a hole he had himself dug out with paddle"! He died from hunger disease & fright. Some say the body was not yet quite cold.

There was an old Small bark Canoe at this place. I got in to play about on the water; but Larance made me return: half a minute more & I should have perished! My pride was mortified, but when the imminence of the danger was pointed out to me, my whole frame shook with terror. I was more cautious after; but was I thankful.

We, in due time passed the "Chats" & "Fort Coulonge,"¹⁰ and in the last days of May we reached "Sault St Mary," the outlet, or estuary of Lake Superior. All "safe & Sound," without any sickness or accident. We were detained by the wind in some islands at the upper [end] of Lake Huron, & were a couple of days without anything to eat, & some of the men did make a beautiful racket; but Larance persevered & the few provisions we had, as cargo, were not touched.

This far, every thing was new & strange to me; wild, romantic & wonderful. No "falls," but at the Rideau¹¹ & Chaudiere, but many

¹⁰ This is the Lac des Chats, "where a branch of the Ottawa issues to the southward and joins the River . . . making thus an Island of the *Grand Calumet* Portage," according to John Macdonell's diary of 1793. See Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders*, 77, 78, both for the quotation and for a mention of Fort Coulonge, about a league beyond Lac des Chats.

¹¹ Rideau Falls are the Curtain Falls of Ottawa, Ontario.

rapids, at several of which many a poor Canadian found his watery grave. Portages over rocks, hills & Swamps, mostly covered with dense forests. Not a few of them the theme of legends, stories & tales of adventures, accidents & miracles &c. &c. At one of these places, "Mattawan," one of the "M^r Lafreboise's, trading to Mackinac, on his return to Montreal, all of a sudden, & without any cause known fled into woods—the people went after him, & tried every argument of persuasion & menace. He would allow them to come so near as almost to touch him & immediately bound off like a deer into the woods.¹² After long & fruitless trials they had to leave him." It was with great reluctance; they had completely lost him. But as there were many other canoes coming behind they hoped that some one might pick him up. They tied a letter to a long pole giving an account of this Sad affair, recommended him to the mercy of God and the Saints, pushed off. But what was their astonishment the next day, to see him walking leisurely about at one of the old encampments—when he discovered them, he seemed quite wild, exhibiting every mark of uneasiness, alarm & dread. He sculked off to the woods: they followed, but to no purpose! In the afternoon they again saw him, in another place, & far distant. He exhibited the same alarm,—they endeavored again, but to no avail. They immediately concluded, of course there must be something Supernatural in this; for it was utterly impossible that any human being by his own mere exertions or powers could possibly travel such immense distances so rapidly, "without aid!" They concluded "it *must* be the evil Spirit who thus transported him." They decided upon a plan, if ever they should see him again. "The next day they discovered him in a bend of the river. They went a shore with the utmost caution, surrounded him, and as they went so stealthily, he did not observe them; till they were upon him. He showed all the signs of horror & anxiety upon being *seized*: they secured & carried him *on board*, he looked quite wild & dejected, & his clothes were all in rags!" It is certain,

¹² The Mattawa River, rather than the Ottawa, became the voyageur's route when its junction with the larger river was reached. The Mattawa flows into the Ottawa from the west. It is impossible to say which of the numerous fur traders named Laframboise formed the subject of this voyageur legend. Such legends were legion clear across the continent, the will-of-the-wisp character of strayed companions in the vast wilderness having a special appeal to voyageur minds.

however, that one of these brothers did lose his reason, & he did exhibit not a few fantastic tricks, often seen in these unfortunates, & which ignorance & superstition always magnify.

In the "french river," is a beautiful spot called "L'Enfant perdu." The indians called it the "crying child," from the cries of a child heard *in the ground*.¹⁸ After much Search they decided upon digging *in* the earth. The excavation is still distinctly visible, several hundred feet long, & as they approached the hill it is *very* deep. They gave up in despair, after digging many days and hearing the cries of a child in distress, they ceased from fatigue & I dare say fear too. They had to leave the place for the cries still continued, & sometimes so near the Surface they fancied to see it. There was a considerable of them, but *none* of their children were *missing*. I have thought that it might have been a trick of some ventriloquist.

There were several of the fortifications yet visible on the bank of this river (Riviere des Français) made by the Iroquois where they laid securely in ambush waiting till their enemies might pass. They are merely a "breast work." I was surprised on passing there again in 1818 to see the thickness of moss that had grown on those Stones. It is that flat curly leaf moss peculiar to stone.

Sir Alexander M^cKenzie here came up with us in his "light Canoe." M^r Thain was with him. He had lately left the North West C^o on some point of honor between him & the M^cGillivrays and he was one of those wise men who know how to avail themselves of circumstances & turn them to his own advantage.¹⁴ He made other arrangements in our little society: he took Black & myself in his canoe. Here, also, indian corn was served out to the men for their rations and also for the voyage to the "Grand portage," a change by no means relished by the people, as this was *all* they had except some "grease," tallow, to season it with.

¹⁸ French River drains Lake Nipissing into Georgian Bay. Like Nelson, Macdonell, Daniel Harmon, and many other travelers tell the legend of *L'Enfant Perdu*, or the "Lost Child," at a "fine encampment" about "fourteen leagues from Lake Nipissing," to quote Macdonell's diary. See Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders*, 83, 84.

¹⁴ It was Mackenzie, not Thain, as the text seems to state, who had just left the North West Company. Brief but authoritative sketches of Mackenzie, the numerous McTavishes, the several McGillivrays, and Thomas Thain, who was first an X Y trader and later a partner of the great fur-trading house of McTavish, McGillivray and Com-

We had a furious storm here of 36 hours. It is here, too, (on the 4th of June 1802,) I completed my sixteenth year.

I do not remember the date we left this place, but we had a great deal of wind, & frequent cold rains & some dense fogs. I was much surprised, & gazed with delight & amazement, at the immense expanse of water to the West,—the horizon only bounding our view. On the land side, if rocks can be named land, immense high rocks resembling more enormous blocks of cast iron. But the country seemed well wooded. The water, at a little distance from shore was beautifully green & clear. I remember one day having a little baffling wind, sometimes from one quarter & then for another, the men (14 in number) all wishing "a sail." Jos: Labrie begin *his* conjuring: he dropped a penny piece, a bit of tobacco, flint steel; Spunk, &c. &c. into the Lake, Un sacrifice a la vielle (mere des vents), for a fair wind. The Knight (for M^c Kenzie was thus designated) was much displeased & rebuked him for his nonsense. However, the wind settled in the proper quarter at last, & we had a Sail indeed. The weather became overcast & drizzly. It was awful to behold the immense size of the waves. They were so large that when on their top we seemed as if going into an abyss, & we would drive down as from the top of a high hill & wanted to run through the one before us; & when in the bottom the canoe was laboring as if struggling ineffectually to regain its summit on one of these just at the instant we [*began*] to descend, Langevin, our *Steersman*, reached forward to take a handful of corn, the wave Splashed in the stern, giving a sort of tilt, he fell with his head in bailing place (bar D'áponge) upsetting the Kettle with its contents. The two men near him fortunately put out their paddles & "steadied" the canoe. It was sometime however before he could regain his Seat. It was a very critical moment, but I could not refrain laughing.

We stopped at Kamanihticgouya, i.e. The inland channel where the N. West Co. were building a new Establishment, the Grand Portage being south of '45 was of course American territory, &

pany of the North West Company, are to be found in Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company*, 1-36, 474, 475, 501, 502.

British Subjects would of course be obliged to leave it.¹⁵ It is a dead Swampy flat, & the water in the ground at every step covered our feet. But the Company at a vast expense indeed, made a splendid place of it.

[*To be continued.*]

¹⁵ By Kaministikwia, Nelson refers to Fort William on the site of the modern Canadian city. He means "south of the boundary line," rather than "south of '45" in the latter part of the sentence. Grand Portage was the great inland headquarters of the North West Company from its inception during the American Revolution. This description of the actual moving of headquarters adds to the knowledge of the fur-trading era, for there has long been a question as to the actual date of the transfer from Grand Portage on the Pigeon River to Fort William on the Kaministikwia. For the best account of the several forts at Grand Portage and their relations to Fort William, see Solon J. Buck, "The Story of Grand Portage," *ante*, 5:14-27, and a revised version issued in pamphlet form (Minneapolis, 1931).



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