INTERNATIONAL boundaries traditionally have been drawn along natural features rather than latitudinal and longitudinal lines. However, a major exception to this pattern is that portion of the boundary between Canada and the contiguous United States which follows the forty-ninth parallel of north latitude from Lake of the Woods in northern Minnesota to the Strait of Georgia north of Puget Sound, a distance of nearly 1,300 miles.

Although the Revolutionary War peace settlement in Paris in 1783 made no reference to the forty-ninth parallel, it did point future boundary considerations in that direction. The American and British negotiators considered boundary possibilities ranging from Benjamin Franklin’s suggestion that Great Britain simply relinquish Canada to the British preference for an Ohio River line. Throughout the negotiations serious attention was given to the forty-fifth parallel westward from the Connecticut River, because that had been the southern boundary of the province of Quebec, a boundary established by Parliament at the end of the Seven Years’ War. The legal precedent of the Quebec boundary tempted American diplomats to suggest that the forty-fifth parallel serve as the dividing line from the Connecticut River to the Mississippi.

Soon, however, the disadvantages of this easy solution were evident. Such a line, running through St. Regis, New York, to present Minneapolis, would have cut across the St. Lawrence River and Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, leaving southern Ontario to the United States and portions of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota to Canada. By dividing the natural river and lakes route, the boundary would have been an immediate nuisance to fur traders and would conceivably have caused great harm to future commerce. While the boundary beyond the

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AMERICAN SIGNERS of the preliminary peace in Paris on November 30, 1782, were pictured by Benjamin West in this unfinished painting. The British commissioners refused to pose, so the artist left the right side blank.

Shown left to right: John Jay, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Laurens, and William Temple Franklin, Franklin's son who served as secretary to the delegation. Although the plenipotentiaries secured important concessions from the British, their ignorance of the source of the Mississippi River at the time contributed to future difficulties with the northwest boundary in the Lake of the Woods area. — Courtesy of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum.

Mississippi River did not concern the negotiators at this time, the legal precedent of the forty-fifth parallel east of the Mississippi quite possibly would have resulted in its ultimate extension to the Pacific.

No doubt prompted by British concern about the inconvenience to the fur traders of a parallel line, the Americans offered an alternative. The northern boundary, they suggested, should proceed westward by middle of lake and stream, from the point where the forty-fifth struck the St. Lawrence to the northwest corner of Lake of the Woods. Once the commissioners had agreed upon the Mississippi as America's western boundary, they had only to close the gap between the natural boundaries to the north and west. Consulting the 1755 map of British cartographer John Mitchell, they concurred that the northern boundary could be closed simply by drawing a line due west from the northwest corner of Lake of the Woods to the Mississippi, which appeared to rise in Canada well to the west and north of Lake of the Woods.  

The American negotiators had every reason to be pleased with the liberal boundaries. John Jay, who had championed American expansion throughout the talks, and fellow plenipotentiaries Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Henry Laurens noted soon after the preliminary treaty had been signed in 1782 that the boundaries "appear to leave us little to complain of and not much to desire." The peace terms gained by the United States prompted the French foreign minister, the Count de Vergennes, who preferred a French and Spanish resurgence in North America instead of American territorial gains, to write to his lieutenant, Joseph Bayeval:

"You will notice that the English buy the peace more than they make it. Their concessions, in fact, as much as to the boundaries as to the fisheries and the loyalists, exceed all that I should have thought possible. What can be the motive, that could have brought terms so easy, that they could have been interpreted as a kind of surrender?"

In all probability neither the French nor the Americans fully understood British peace motives. Prime Minister Lord Shelburne, the architect of Great Britain's settlement, chose to believe it wiser to be generous to a future ally rather than quarrelsome with a past enemy.

4 Adams, Franklin, Jay, and Laurens to Livingston, December 14, 1782, in Wharton, Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:132.
5 Vergennes to Bayeval, December 4, 1782, in Wharton, Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence, 6:107.
This view, along with British war-wearyness, the fear of French revival in North America, and the inclination to regard the wilderness as a costly liability, worked to the benefit of the United States. American negotiators, in fact, could hardly have labored under more advantageous circumstances.

The treaty, however, was flawed, particularly in the northern boundary provision, and litigation was inevitable. The very forces that dictated the hurried negotiations would have made it impossible for the commissioners to study the geography of the boundary country even if they had been so inclined. Instead, the treaty makers, without expert geographical advice and up-to-date information, relied upon the highly reputed Mitchell map, first issued twenty-eight years before their deliberations.

THIS MAP, which has been aptly called “the most important and the most famous map in American history,” was the handiwork of Dr. John Mitchell, who practiced medicine in his native Virginia after attending the University of Edinburgh. A man of many talents, Mitchell even as a young man in Virginia was recognized as one of the foremost botanists of his day, and he ultimately wrote prolifically on a wide range of scientific and medical subjects.

Seeking a salubrious climate Mitchell moved to London in 1746, where he was well received by leading British scientists and elected to the Royal Society in 1748. With a facility for making friends with prominent men, Mitchell was able to bring his long-standing interest in North American cartography to the attention of the Board of Trade. Subsequently, the board commissioned him to produce a map of North America for the purpose of graphically portraying the French encroachment on British holdings. After drafting a preliminary map in 1750, Mitchell intensified his research, using maps and records of the Board of Trade and consulting with travelers, historians, and geographers. His finished “Map of the British and French Dominions in North America” was a true copy of the northwestern portion of John Mitchell’s famous map that was used by Revolutionary War peace signers and led to future boundary troubles.
America with the Roads, Distances, Limits and Extent of the Settlement" was published in London in February, 1755.7

Mitchell carried the western boundary of the map beyond the Mississippi, apparently to portray the colonial sea-to-sea charter claims, but the supposed headwaters of the Mississippi River were obscured by an inset map of Hudson Bay and Labrador in the upper left corner. To account for the Mississippi which so mysteriously flowed from under the inset Mitchell inscribed: "The Head of the Mississippi [sic] is not yet known: It is supposed to arise about the 50th degree of Latitude, and Western Bounds of this Map." 8 The reputation of Mitchell’s map was such that, by the time of the Paris negotiations in 1782, it had been published in four English editions, seven French editions, two Dutch editions, and a plagiarized edition printed in Venice.9

The popularity of the map helps to explain its uncritical use at Paris, but, like other early maps, it was nothing more than a pictorial representation of geographical facts as the cartographer knew them. Mitchell and all cartographers of his time labored with North American data that were oftentimes incomplete and unreliable because much of the area they portrayed was essentially unexplored.10

Thus Mitchell not only erred with regard to the source of the Mississippi but also misrepresented the watershed of the Great Lakes. His basic error lay in the relationship of Lake Superior and Lake of the Woods. The latter lake was shown as outflowing southeastward to Lake Superior through a large unidentified river whose estuary was designated “Long Lake.” Anyone relying on Mitchell’s map could only conclude that Lake of the Woods, rather than lying within the Hudson Bay watershed, was the head of the St. Lawrence drainage system and could be easily reached by an all-water route.11

Mitchell’s nonexistent “Long Lake” was in reality the Pigeon River on the present Minnesota-Ontario boundary and was almost immediately so identified by Canadian fur traders, who bitterly resented the northern boundary provision.12 This information could have been known at the time of the treaty-making, but the fur traders, considered a greedy special interest group by British diplomats, had been summarily brushed aside.13 Soon after the war, however, as Great Britain and the United States became enmeshed in the polemics of the restoration of Loyalist property and the continuing British refusal to surrender military posts in the Northwest, British diplomats took a new hard look at the boundary agreement.14

Almost a decade after the Paris treaty, George Hammond, the young British minister to the United States, received a map from Montreal which showed the source of the Mississippi well to the south of Lake of the

7For definitive treatment of Mitchell, see Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, Dr. John Mitchell: The Man Who Made the Map of North America (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1974). The most extensive study of the various editions of the Mitchell map is in Miller, Treaties, 3:328–56. Miller’s coverage was based on “Mitchell’s Map, An Account of the Origin and Uses of the Most Important Map in American History,” a manuscript written during the 1925–33 period by Colonel Lawrence Martin, chief of the Division of Maps, Library of Congress. Unfortunately, Martin’s study was never published, and efforts by staff members of the Library of Congress to locate the manuscript since his death on February 12, 1953, have been unsuccessful. (Letter from Richard W. Stephenson, head of the Reference and Bibliography Section, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, to William E. Lass, November 19, 1971.)


9Facsimile reproduction of northwest portion of Mitchell map in International Boundary Commission, Joint Report upon the Survey and Demarcation of the Boundary between the United States and Canada from the Northwesternmost Point of Lake of the Woods to Lake Superior, 208 (Washington, D.C., 1931).


12Benjamin Froshisher to Adam Mahane, April 19, 1784, p. 63, in Report on Canadian Archives, 1885 (Ottawa, 1889).


American statesmen intermittently for the next twenty-six years.15

Hammond and his superiors had far more in mind than merely rectifying the boundary from Lake of the Woods to the Mississippi. Grenville later suggested to John Jay that the boundary should go through Lake Superior to the estuary of the St. Louis River (present-day Duluth) and from there run due west to the Mississippi in order to give Great Britain access to that river.16 Jay successfully resisted British efforts to adjust the boundary and in the end agreed only to surveys of the Upper Mississippi and the troublesome St. Croix River area in New England.17

The survey of the Upper Mississippi was never conducted. Great Britain and the United States gave priority to the organization of the joint commissions called for in Jay’s Treaty of 1794 to deal with the problems of Revolutionary War debts and the northeastern boundary. By the time the way was clear to establish the Upper Mississippi survey commission, further information about the area precluded any need for so doing, because the relative locations of Lake of the Woods and the Mississippi River had been determined by David Thompson.

In 1797 the twenty-seven year old Thompson, a self-trained astronomer and surveyor, left the Hudson’s Bay Company to join the rival North West Fur Company. His new employers, William McGillivray and Alexander Mackenzie, immediately sent Thompson into the interior to map the location of the company’s various posts and to determine the latitude and longitude of both Lake of the Woods and the most northern source of the Mississippi River.18 There is good reason to believe, in light of the men and posts that the North West Fur Company had in the interior, that McGillivray and Mackenzie already knew that the Mississippi did not extend north of Lake of the Woods, so Thompson’s assignment was probably not to discover this fact as much as it was to prove it cartographically.

Thompson surveyed several points, including the outlet of Lake of the Woods, and in the spring of 1798 claimed to have discovered the source of the Mississippi at Turtle Lake, near present-day Bemidji, Minnesota. Although Thompson, in actuality, had located only the northern source of the river, he proved Mackenzie’s point.19 Thompson’s calculations were well publicized. In 1801 in the preface of Alexander Mackenzie’s accounts of his transcontinental expeditions to the Arctic and Pacific oceans, the explorer-author triumphantly reported that “Mr. Thomson [sic] astronomer to the North-West Company” had proved that a boundary from the northwest part of Lake of the Woods due west to the Mississippi could never be, because Turtle Lake lay nearly two degrees south of Lake of the Woods.20 Mackenzie’s interest in the boundary was far from academic. He realized that Thompson’s determinations necessitated a boundary rectification and hoped that it would result in a southward shift of the line. As one possibility he suggested, as Grenville had earlier, a line from the mouth of the St. Louis River to the Mississippi. Mackenzie’s eyes were also on the future fur trade of the Columbia River basin. He thus preferred an extension of the St. Louis River-Mississippi line all the way to the Pacific and, naturally, south of the Columbia.21 American statesmen, though accepting the results of Thompson’s survey without question, thought in terms of a far less radical boundary closure.

In the wake of Mackenzie’s revelations the northwest boundary question was soon caught up in plans for resolving the contentious northeastern boundary, where a survey conducted under Jay’s Treaty had solved one problem only to uncover two others. At the instigation of Secretary of State James Madison, Rufus King, American minister to Great Britain, and Lord Hawkesbury, British secretary of state for foreign affairs, negotiated the boundary convention of 1803. Article V of this convention provided that the northwest boundary gap was to be closed through the simple expedient of drawing a direct line from the northwest point of Lake of the

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16Grenville to John Jay, August 30, 1794, ASP, FR, 1:488.

17Miller, Treaties, 2:246, 248–49.


19Thompson, “Journal,” entries of August 23, 24, 1797, and April 27, 1798; Thompson, “Record of Distances and Observations, 1798,” entries of April 26, 27, 1798, photostatic copy in manuscripts division, Minnesota Historical Society (original in Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives.)

20Alexander Mackenzie, Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1789 and 1793, with an Account of the Rise and State of the Fur Trade, 1:xcv (New York, 1903). Mackenzie’s Voyages was first published in London in 1801. According to Gordon Charles Davidson (North West Company, p. 67), it is believed by some that the prelatory history of the fur trade was actually written by Roderick Mackenzie, a cousin of the famed explorer. On this point, see also, W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, 33 (Cambridge, England, 1970). This work also includes well-annotated versions of the Voyages.

21Mackenzie, Voyages, 1:xcvi, 2:444.
Woods to the nearest source of the Mississippi. King had barely signed the agreement when he learned to his surprise that less than two weeks earlier the United States and France had completed the Louisiana Purchase Treaty in Paris.

IT TOOK little time for President Thomas Jefferson and fellow expansionists to realize that the future northern boundary of Louisiana might be detrimentally affected by Article V of the King-Hawkesbury Convention. Jefferson, with ample time to contemplate the possible conflict between the French and British treaties, since Congress was recessed when both were concluded, gave preference to the Louisiana Purchase Treaty by submitting it to the Senate first when Congress reconvened in October, 1803. Despite political opposition and some constitutional misgivings on the part of Jefferson himself, the Louisiana treaty was rushed through the Senate and approved on October 20, only three days after it had been submitted. Ratifications were promptly exchanged with France the very next day.

Only after the Louisiana treaty was incontestable did Jefferson on Monday, October 24, submit the King-Hawkesbury treaty to the Senate, where the delimiting fifth article was quickly detected as a threat to Louisiana's northern extent. Amidst some sentiment to delete the fifth article and even some feeling that the entire

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Miller, Treaties, 2:498.

Jefferson to the Senate, October 24, 1803, ASP, FR, 2:584.

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**THIS MAP** shows latitudinal and longitudinal lines in the border area of northern Minnesota and southern Canada, part of the forty-ninth parallel boundary, and the King-Hawkesbury line from Lake of the Woods to the nearest source of the Mississippi.
convention should be voided, the agreement on November 15 was referred to a select Senate committee of three — John Quincy Adams, Wilson C. Nicholas, and Robert Wright — for further study. Although Adams believed that Secretary of State Madison did not approve the deletion of the fifth article, subsequent events indicate that the administration actually wanted to see the fifth article sabotaged but also wanted the executive branch to be blameless in order to make the treaty more palatable to the British, who might better accept a Senate rather than a presidentially inspired alteration.

Throughout the Louisiana Purchase negotiations the United States had been unable to get the French foreign minister Talleyrand to state the territory’s extent with any specificity, so Jefferson was free to define the area. During the legislative lull in the summer of 1803, Jefferson had seemingly reconciled himself to a northern boundary of Louisiana that would follow a direct line from the northwest corner of Lake of the Woods to the nearest source of the Mississippi and then run west on a natural line encompassing the watersheds of the Mississippi and the Missouri. Continued research of Louisiana’s boundaries, however, caused Jefferson to recognize the danger of the Lake of the Woods-Mississippi River closure line, and by the time Congress reconvened the northern boundary in Jefferson’s view should merely run "round the heads of the Missouri & Missipi & their waters.

But the president was still not satisfied and continued searching for a more desirable boundary even after the King-Hawkesbury agreement had been submitted to the Senate. Within several months, Jefferson concluded that Louisiana under France had in fact had a northern boundary of the forty-ninth parallel. This line of latitude, wrote Jefferson, had been established by commissioners appointed under the provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht negotiated nearly a century earlier — in 1713 at the conclusion of Queen Anne’s War. The authorities for Jefferson’s finding were American geographer Thomas Hutchins’s Topographical Description of Louisiana and John Mitchell’s famous map of North America. Jefferson’s brief memoir soon became the basis for the government’s position on the question of Louisiana’s northern boundary even though the obviously secondary sources seemed inadequate. Attempting to buttress the administration’s position, Secretary of State Madison instructed Robert R. Livingston and James Monroe, ministers to France and Great Britain respectively, to obtain the reports and correspondence of the boundary commissioners appointed after the Utrecht treaty.

Meanwhile the King-Hawkesbury agreement died quietly. The Senate approved it with the deletion of Article V, and the British government, which was moving into a hard-line posture on the impressment issue, chose to be offended by this and never moved to accept the document. It was not until 1806 that the Jefferson administration was able to return to the boundary negotiations which by that time were complicated by the more urgent matters of impressment, freedom of the seas, and the coastal fisheries.

When he resumed boundary negotiations, Monroe once again advanced the forty-ninth parallel as a suitable boundary. When he failed to locate the reports of the Anglo-French boundary commissioners, Monroe, in a letter to Madison, shrugged off his lack of evidence, saying that the British surely possessed the reports, and, if they were not satisfied with his contention, it was in their power to challenge it.

There was, in fact, grounds for the British to challenge the adoption of the forty-ninth parallel because Monroe was passing on not fact but an intriguing myth that had somehow gained popular acceptance. The original proposal to use the forty-ninth parallel to divide

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29Monroe to Madison, September 17, 1804, U.S.-Canadian Relations, 1:567.
32Adams, Memoirs, 1:294. In his John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy, 125–26 (New York, 1949), Samuel Flagg Bemis emphasizes the role of Adams in causing the convention to be modified. This is an overstatement of the significance of his subject and completely ignores Jefferson’s influence. Likewise, there is no evidence, as Bemis implies, that Madison disapproved of deleting the fifth article at the time of the Senate’s final action on February 9, 1804.
British and French claims grew out of the desires of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1714 to limit French access from the Great Lakes to the interior streams of the far north. The Treaty of Utrecht did not specify a boundary, but it did include a provision in Article X that Commissioners from the two countries would meet within a year to fix the dividing line. During the subsequent boundary discussions the Hudson's Bay Company's preference for the forty-ninth parallel was seriously discussed, but because of French recalcitrance the negotiations were broken off in 1720 and never resumed.

Nonetheless, a number of historians and cartographers, including Thomas Salmon, William Douglass, and John Mitchell, duly reported that the forty-ninth parallel had been established as the dividing line, an error of no particular consequence until it fell into Jefferson's hands. Douglass' conclusion was graphically illustrated by a 1755 map by Ellis Huske which was "Published for the Present State of North America, etc." and sold by R. & J. Dodsley of London. The Huske map, which later became one of the principal proofs used by James Monroe, showed the forty-ninth parallel as "The Southern Boundary of the Hudson's Bay Company's Territories Settled in consequence of the Treaty of Utrecht." The boundary line on the map appears north of western Lake Superior from under an inset in the upper left corner of the map and then runs due east to a point north of eastern Lake Ontario, where it angles off north-eastward at about forty-five degrees to the map's margin.

Huske, in showing the forty-ninth parallel as the boundary, had actually been preceded by other cartographers. In a 1749 map, William Morris inscribed that "'By the Treaty of Utrecht, the lines between the English and French were thus adjusted: Beginning on the North Atlantic Ocean, in north latitude 58° 30'; thence running south-west to Lake Mistassin; and thence continuing south-west till the line touched 49°, north latitude; and thence west indefinitely.'" Likewise, "Sr. Robert" on his 1750 map showed the forty-ninth as a boundary, and Bolton on his 1752 map stated that the forty-ninth parallel was the boundary from Lake Abitibi south of Hudson Bay to the "Northwest Ocean."

In early 1807, when boundary rectifications were discussed intensively, Monroe, special envoy William Pinkney, and the British negotiators, Lords Holland and Auckland, agreed on certain principles with little difficulty. To begin with, rather than rehash the King-Hawkesbury Convention per se, they would write a new treaty. In it, they would adopt with virtually no change the articles pertaining to the northeastern boundary, but with respect to the controversial boundary closure in the northwest they would forsake the Lake of the Woods-Mississippi River line and recognize American claims to the area west of Lake of the Woods. However, wording

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Ellis Huske, A New and Accurate Map of North America: Wherein the Errors of All Preceding [sic] British, French and Dutch Maps, respecting the rights of Great Britain, France, & Spain, & the Limits of each of its Majesty's provinces, are corrected, in "North America" file. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

Statutes, Documents and Papers on Boundary of Ontario, 136r (Morris) and 136r (Robert); Charles O. Paullin, "The Early Choice of the Forty-ninth Parallel as a Boundary Line," in Canadian Historical Review, 4:129 (June, 1923).
the provision about the boundary west of that lake caused some differences. In their draft, Holland and Auckland proposed that the boundary be drawn due west from Lake of the Woods along the forty-ninth parallel as far as American territories extended in that area. Monroe and Pinkney raised two objections to this. First, they insisted that the boundary should be drawn from the "most northwestern point" of Lake of the Woods "due north or south until it shall intersect the parallel of forty-nine degrees, and from the point of such intersection due west along and with that parallel." In this contention the American diplomats presumed the later legal interpretation that the peace treaty of 1783 had fixed the northwest point of Lake of the Woods — a requirement that could not casually be changed by merely running a line through Lake of the Woods until it struck the forty-ninth parallel, as the British had suggested. Secondly, they opposed the wording, "as far as the territories of the United States extend in that quarter," because they saw in it a possible British effort to limit American claims to the area west of Lake of the Woods.41

Monroe and Pinkney had good cause to be concerned. They knew that the northern boundary, even as suggested by the British commissioners, would face opposition in Parliament. In particular, they were disturbed by the stance of Lord Selkirk, then a member of the House of Lords and a colonizer of eastern Canada, who had shown an interest in the Red River Valley.42 It was Selkirk's belief that the area should be divided according to occupancy, and he especially emphasized the British right to the upper Missouri country.43

After several months the American and British negotiators agreed to extend any boundary from the northwest corner of Lake of the Woods, but they never completely reconciled their views on the extension of the forty-ninth parallel westward where the Americans preferred a specific reference to the Rocky Mountains and the British wanted a more vague reference to respective claims. Given time, it would have been possible for them to have reached an agreement, but the proposed boundary convention was dropped because of the failure to reach an agreement on impressment and the crisis of 1807 caused by the British damaging the American frigate "Chesapeake" and taking seamen from it.44

EVEN THOUGH the boundary convention of 1807 was abandoned, it was significant because it helped reinforce the premise of the forty-ninth parallel boundary. The very fact that Anglo-American commissioners had agreed on this boundary principle made it much easier to return to that point in later negotiations. Why did Holland and Auckland, without apparent reluctance, agree to the forty-ninth parallel boundary? Did they have no quarrel with the American contention that such a boundary had been set by commissioners named under Article X of the Treaty of Utrecht? Monroe's position on the evidential value of his sources was clear. If the British had better sources they could produce them.

Holland and Auckland were curious enough about the forty-ninth parallel tradition to confer with officials of the Hudson's Bay Company, whose response indicated that the company, officially at least, believed that its southern limits had been set at the forty-ninth by commissioners appointed under the Treaty of Utrecht. The company reported, however, that "after a diligent search" it could find "no traces" of the report of the Utrecht boundary commissioners.45

The British negotiators and the Hudson's Bay Company may have had private misgivings about the American proposal, but the willingness of Holland and Auckland to agree to the forty-ninth parallel without positive evidence of its previous establishment suggests that they were not greatly concerned about evidence and assumed that this line of latitude would be a reasonable boundary. After all, what other possibilities existed? The peace treaty had delineated a boundary to the northwest point of Lake of the Woods, which then had to become the starting point for a boundary extension. Further, the American rejection of the direct Lake of the Woods-Mississippi River closure line in the convention of 1803 must surely have indicated to the British diplomats the futility of even attempting to revive that provision. If the diplomats accepted the idea, then, that the boundary should be determined west of Lake of the Woods, what were the alternatives? A wavering line respecting the watersheds of the Hudson Bay and Gulf of Mexico drainage systems? A line due west from the northwest point of Lake of the Woods? Or a line along the forty-ninth parallel for which there appeared to be some legal precedent? It may have been within the power of the British, as Monroe suspected, to shatter the Utrecht boundary claim, but what purpose would this have served other

41 Monroe and Pinkney to Madison, April 25, 1807, ASP, FR, 3:162-64.
RICHARD RUSH, United States
minister to London

than to throw the question completely open and leave the boundary to be decided in the future on some other basis, with the risk that another agreement could work to the further detriment of Great Britain?

After the abortive negotiations of 1807, Anglo-American relations worsened, and outstanding issues were not discussed until the end of the War of 1812. At peace talks at Ghent, Belgium, after that war, Great Britain suggested, but did not insist on, a southward adjustment of the boundary. The Treaty of Ghent (1814) finally called for only a systematic survey of the boundary as it had been established by the Treaty of Paris in 1783. The boundary west of Lake of the Woods was deferred to the general London convention of 1818. On the latter occasion the United States minister in London, Richard Rush, reiterated the forty-ninth parallel claim based on the alleged Utrecht settlement, and without great difficulty the countries agreed to what basically had been the American position in 1807 — the boundary was to be extended on a due course from the northwest corner of Lake of the Woods to the forty-ninth parallel and from thence to the continental divide. During the conference Rush and Albert Gallatin, who had been sent to assist him, suggested an extension of the parallel to the Pacific, but the British preference for a Columbia River boundary negated this, and the convention stipulated that the country west of the Rocky Mountains was to “be free and open” to the nationals of both countries for ten years.

In 1826 when Gallatin unsuccessfully discussed the Oregon boundary with British Foreign Secretary George Canning he again suggested the extension of the forty-ninth to the Pacific, using the by then familiar contention that such a line had been established as a result of the Treaty of Utrecht. Before the Oregon boundary was finally agreed upon in 1846, American expansionists had repudiated the Jefferson belief in a Utrecht boundary settlement. In 1840, Robert Greenhow, a state department interpreter and publicist of American expansion, exposed the Utrecht


boundary myth in an effort to justify United States claims in Oregon north of the forty-ninth. In referring to the selection of the forty-ninth parallel by the convention of 1818, Greenhow wrote: "This parallel was chosen chiefly in consequence of a supposition entirely without


The map on page 211 is from John Bassett Moore, History and Digest of the International Arbitrations to Which the United States has been a Party, in 53 Congress, 2 session, House Miscellaneous Documents, no. 212, 1:180–81 (serial 3257); the portrait on page 218 is from J. H. Powell, Richard Rush: Republican Diplomat, frontispiece (Philadelphia, 1942); the map on page 214 was adapted by Alan Ominsky from the author's original; the photographs on pages 218–19 are by the author. Mr. Lass's research on Minnesota's international boundary has been supported by grants from the Minnesota Historical Society and the Faculty Research Council of Mankato State College.


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A MARKER in Lake of the Woods, body of water often mentioned in boundary negotiations, is this one on Rose Island.