CHAPTER THREE

Traders, Horses, and Bison, 1730–1870

In 1730 the tribes of the northern plains were starting to learn the possibilities inherent in horse culture. The cumulative effect was to put groups in touch with each other more regularly, for travel in the dog days had been slower. The arrival of the horse also acted to increase hunting, trade and war opportunities, and to expand or shift traditional residential ranges, often in an overlapping pattern.[1] Areas of natural abundance played an important role in this period of expanded awareness and simultaneously became important as resource centres for more people. For centuries, plant and tree succession had helped keep water levels high in the Beaver Hills. Culturally induced prairie fires at the peripheries were less frequent with the result that spruce extended further south, and the hills themselves were less prairie-like. They were a refuge for wildlife, with good hunting and fishing opportunities, a place to find berry crops, and shelter for settlements, particularly in the harsh winters.

The northern plains were becoming a more fluid place in terms of social arrangements after 1730. This tendency was reinforced by the unseen presence of Europeans who had introduced exotic

trade items into the equation. The horse, the gun, disease and trade goods all served to mix peoples in ways which were unfamiliar and by no means perfectly understood today.[2] It was as though the heat was being slowly turned up under the pot of prairie society. By the 1870s it had come to a boil and the lid lifted. Almost simultaneously, the pot ran dry, as the great fuel, the bison, vanished. This chapter provides glimpses of how forces of change were at work and of how they imparted a distinctive character to the Beaver Hills by the particular circumstances of local land and life.

Henry Kelsey had a glimpse of the prairies in 1690–92, but only in the 1730s did French traders begin to gain a systematic insight into the character of Canada's western interior. This view was gained more in the hope of finding a route to the elusive "*Mer d' l'Ouest*"– the way to the western sea and the orient.[3] The river the Bay men had earlier called the "Keskachewan" appears as *Rivière Poskaiao* on La Vérendrye's 1750 map, and *Rivière Poskoiac* on another. It is the *R. de Poskoyac* on Philippe Buache's map of 1754. The Montreal-based trader Alexander Henry the Elder stated in 1775: "We gained the mouth of the River de Bourbon, Pasquayah, or Saskatchiwanine." The general significance of the name, James Bain tells us, was Cree, for "swift-flowing and "derived from *Paskquaw*, a prairie or desert, as its course is through the great plain to the east of the Rocky Mountains."[4]

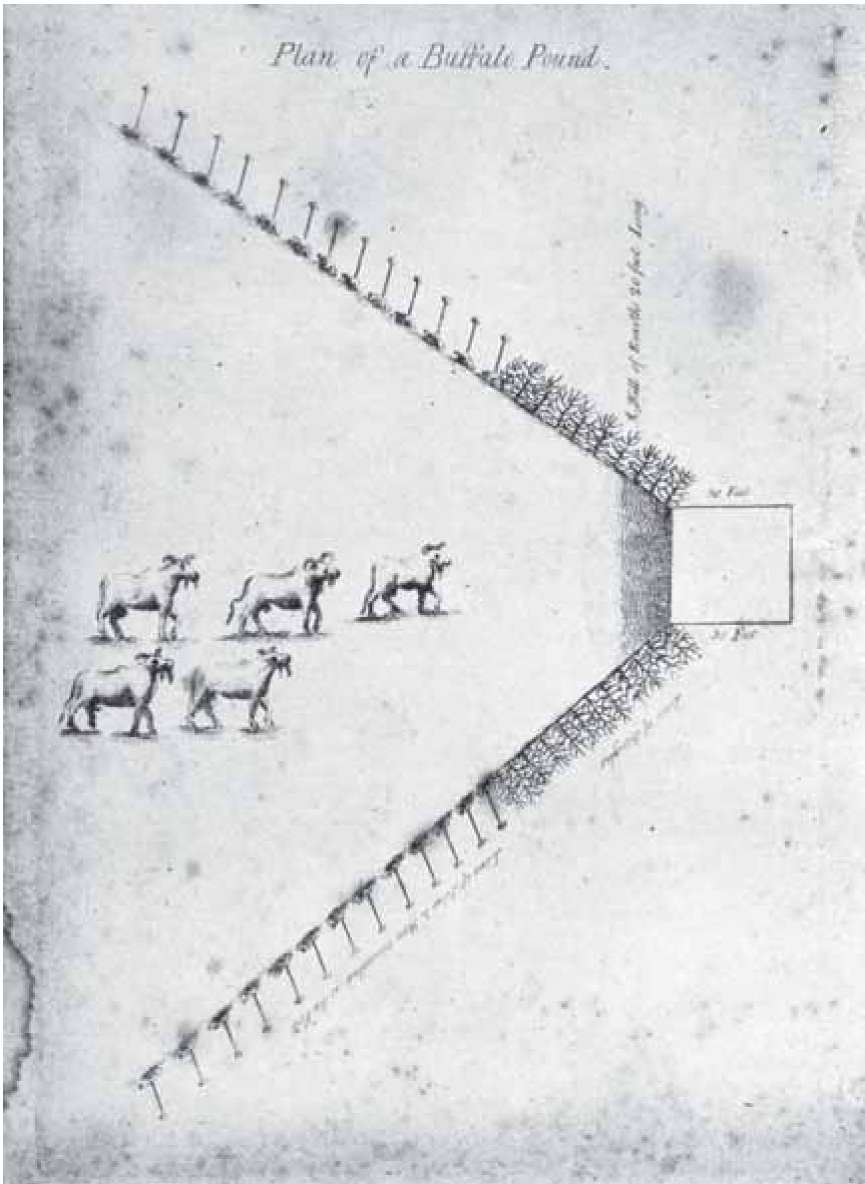
In early 1755 another trader, Anthony Henday, journeyed onto the plains from York Factory via the Saskatchewan. He travelled the length of the Battle River valley, during which time he reported on presumed Blackfoot peoples at *Earchithinue Sokohegan* (Blackfoot Lake) northeast of present day Leduc. Henday appears to have explored the area and hunted in the Beaver Hills. In his time, then, the Blackfoot were frequenting lands well north of the Battle River The sketchy nature of his memoirs has been a frustration to later chroniclers. For the next twenty years the English traders on the prairies were represented only by their Cree middlemen, who undertook the main tasks associated with extending the fur trade to their Blackfoot allies, bringing them into the Hudson's Bay

Company trade ring. Fur traders from the English bay-side posts established permanent footholds along the Saskatchewan River only in the years after 1774.[5]

In the same years that the bay-side traders were gaining a sketchy view of the interior plains, there were also French Canadian trade interests trying to bring the central prairies into perspective. The Sieur de La Vérendrye's parties had not penetrated as far as the upper Saskatchewan country when the imperial crisis between France and England came to a head in the mid 1750s. The result was that the fur trade initiative from old Quebec rapidly declined, despite many achievements. The French Canadian traders had established posts as far west as Fort St. Louis (Fort à la Corne) some distance below the forks of the North and South Saskatchewan. The great game was up however, and control now shifted to English and Scottish traders from Montreal.

The focus of the fur trade soon became the distant Athabasca country, far to the north of the Saskatchewan River, and it was there that the HBC and the newly forming, if shifting, alliances of "Nor'westers" pressed each other hard, sometimes violently. The Saskatchewan River Valley was by no means neglected and through the journals and accounts of the competing traders of this quarter, new views of the plains and parkland became available. William Pink made four trips into the country between 1766 and 1770, his accounts being notable for leaving the first good account of the workings of a bison pound. In his trip of 1768–9 he appears to have wintered somewhere between modern Vegreville and the Beaver Hills.[6]

At York Factory, the brevity of the reports received from the traders sent inland, such as Pink, proved something of a frustration to Chief Factor Andrew Graham. His solution was to send young Matthew Cocking to the prairies in 1772, with results that were not disappointing. While Cocking does not appear to have wintered further west than the Eagle and Bear Hills near Saskatoon, his Journal gives new insights into the activities of the so-called Beaver



Buffalo Pound In his book *The Present State of Hudson Bay* (1790) fur trader Edward Umfreville included a diagram to illustrate the principles of the working of a "Buffalo Pound."

Indians of the upper Saskatchewan River, and this would have included those resident in the Beaver Hills area.[7]

The upshot of Cocking's report was "to thoroughly awaken the Hudson's Bay Company from the dream of a peaceful and comfortable monopoly of the fur trade." Action inland was required, for while the French had been cast out of the western fur trade, they were being replaced by others.[8] The response by the HBC was the establishment of Cumberland House in 1774. That very same year had marked the arrival on the Saskatchewan of a large number of free-trading "pedlars" from Quebec, including Alexander Henry the Elder. From that time on, the competing interests built fur posts in a matching pattern as they rushed ever further west, each seeking to give close rivalry to the other. The "pedlars" were quick to take the lead, but so disruptive were their tactics in certain quarters that the entire conditions of the trade were threatened by 1780. Some of the posts on the Saskatchewan and Assiniboine River systems were spared from destruction only by the coincidental outbreak of the great smallpox epidemic of 1781–82.[9]

One of the earliest notices of the Native residents of the Beaver Hills area was contained in a reference to this great tragedy of plains life. The Cumberland House Journals of William Tomison and William Walker provide insights into the terrible effects of the plague.[10] Historian Frank G. Roe has referred to the desperate nature of life in the hills at that time when, contrary to traditional dietary and social customs, the Beaver Hills Cree were driven to eat their dogs and horses out of sheer need.[11] The effects of such deprivation were then compounded by the conquest in 1782 of the English posts on the Bay by the French commander La Pérouse. The effect was to disrupt trade in both directions and to cut off the inward flow of much-needed supplies of all kinds.[12] By the mid-1780s the fur trade had recovered.

The Hudson's Bay Company had, in the interim, founded Manchester House on an island in the North Saskatchewan near contemporary Maidstone. In 1786 James Gaddy took the young

David Thompson with him on a trip to winter with the Peigan of the plains, a journey that led them south-west through the Battle River watershed.[13] By 1792 the Nor'Westers had built Fort George and the HBC erected Buckingham House in the vicinity of Elk Point on the North Saskatchewan. A year later, Peter Fidler and his associates found themselves busy surveying the prospects for a new HBC post even further up the river. They selected the site of the first post in the Edmonton area at the mouth of the Sturgeon River near today's Fort Saskatchewan. Fidler was not entirely sold on the virtues of the site: "The Sturgeon or Tea River is the end of our Journey, but not a proper place to build at owing to the small woods that are here." A post appears to have come about nonetheless, for he later reported that "in the year 1795 Edmonton House was built which was about one mile higher up the Saskatchewan river than the mouth of this river." A tradition developed among the local tribes in which the new post was referred to as "Beaver Hills House" and this tradition persisted in some quarters down to the 1860s.[14]

Down river, Duncan McGillivray, clerk at the North West Company's Fort George, followed reports of this initiative with the usual keen interest. About the vicinity of the proposed new post he noted in his diary: "This is described to be a rich and plentiful country abounding with all kinds of animals, especially Beaver and Otters, which are said to be so numerous that the Women and Children kill them with sticks and hatchets." The Nor'Westers naturally responded with great haste, establishing Fort Augustus in the same vicinity. Duncan McGillivray left us a glimpse of one of the Cree Chiefs of that quarter:[15]

> "The Grand Sateau" a Cree Chief, arrived from the Beaver Hills. His nation amused themselves by driving buffalo into a pound–a very unfavourable circumstance for our returns. Gave him a few articles to the value of fifteen beaver which will be charged to him in case he gives his spring hunt to the English which we think he intends.

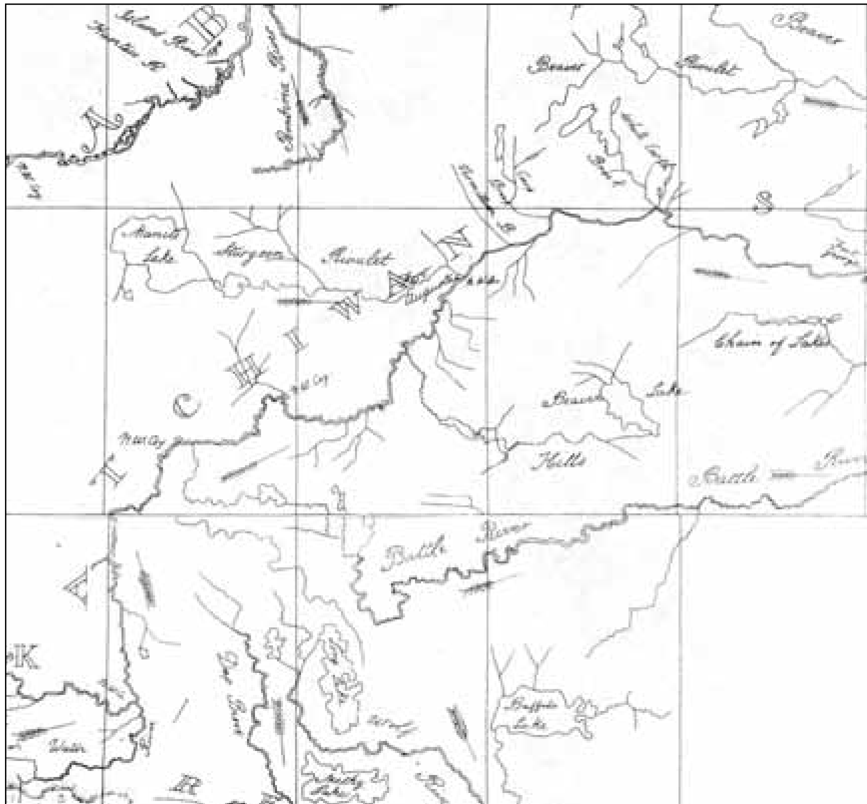
Fort Edmonton, or "Beaver Hills House," c. 1900

McGillivray had further dealings with trappers in 1795:[16]

> Goweke and three young men arrived from Beaver Hills with about two hundred beavers which they traded for rum, ammunition and tobacco. The extraordinary amount of snow prevents the natives from pouring in upon as at this time which is the usual custom.

These first years of trading appear to have been productive but activity had dropped off significantly by 1800. The fur trade records for the Edmonton district posts between 1800 and 1806 have not survived, but it appears that during that interval, decisions were taken by both companies to relocate their forts to the vicinity of modern Edmonton. In time the vestiges of the old Sturgeon Creek posts deteriorated and then were eventually burned by the local Natives.[17]

Other impressions of the local peoples can be learned from Fidler's Journal. For January 27 of 1793, he wrote: "Several more tents of our Indians moved toward the Bad river. The 12 tents of



David Thompson's 1814 map of western Canada shows Beaver Lake [Beaverhills Lake] in proximity to the North Saskatchewan River.

Sessewa [i.e. Sarcee, or Tsuu'Tina] also pitched away for the upper Beaver hills in the vicinity of the Saskatchewan River."[18] The following month he saw "what these Indians call the South Eastern most end of the Beaver Hills, in the vicinity of the Saskatchewan River."[19] An entry in the Edmonton House Journals for 1797 reported that eight men finally had arrived at Buckingham House after having been lost "in the little Beaver Hills" for two days.[20]

As mentioned, the coming of the horse had dramatically extended the traditional tribal ranges. There was no absolute fixity

of place for the prairie tribes, although there were undoubtedly heartlands of some duration. The extending ranges are revealed in the social makeup of the various tribes trading at Edmonton House. A description from 1799 includes a reference to "a small band of Fall Indians" (presumably the Gros Ventre) on March 21. These "brought nothing but provisions, which they traded and went off again and a few Sussew Indians arrived, also three Assinepoiet Indians. The following day, other Sussew and Stone Indians traded and went away, the former brought seven skins and the latter twenty-four made beavers; also several Indians arrived from the Beaver Hills, brought a few beaver and martens." In 1811, Alexander Henry the Younger commented on the differences between the Sarcee and the Assiniboines, although both groups were resident in the vicinity: "The environs of the Beaver Hills is generally their station."[21]

Clearly, the hills were being frequented by a number of different Native groups in these years. In light of the heavy fur returns in the last years of the eighteenth century, the hills were undoubtedly rich in wildlife and water bodies supporting the beaver. The capacity for traders to get lost in them suggests that they also represented something of a *terra incognita*. A decade or so later, the hills were still very productive of beaver. In July 1810, Alexander Henry the Younger reported on returns taken from French Métis trappers: "Letendre and family arrived from Beaver Hills on south side, bringing upwards to a hundred beaver skins" but he had "seen no Indians." A week later he recorded that "La Boucone arrived, and his Indian, a hunter from Beaver Hills, where he and Marion are working on the beaver."[22]

About this time, relations between the Blackfoot and the other main residents of the hills began to change. Mention of the normal residency of the Blackfoot starts to disappear, replaced steadily by reports of hostilities. Earlier, the Blackfoot and Sarcee traditional home range lay well into the Aspen Parkland belt and extended north of the Saskatchewan River, betraying perhaps their earlier

connection with the woodlands. This had not been exclusively their territory however, as Cree, Assiniboine and Saulteux peoples also frequented the lands north and south of the river, and continued to do so as the eighteenth century unfolded.[23] Despite nineteenth- and twentieth-century reports concerning long-standing traditional Blackfoot-Cree hostility, later writers suggest that this hostile tradition was in fact rather a post-1810 development, issuing out of altered ecological and economic conditions and shifting alliances.[24] With the perfection of horse-riding skills, the Blackfoot Confederacy came into being, and the various components of this loose federation opted increasingly for a life on the open prairie and along the southern foothills. As a response to this shift in lifeways, the Cree and their allies came to gradually dominate the Beaver Hills. Place names associated with this shift started to come into use around 1800.

Population numbers for the hills remain impressionistic, but a report for Edmonton House for 1822–23 indicates that the Beaver Hills Cree consisted of thirty tents or about 120 fighting men. This does not clarify the larger regional relationships, or say anything about the ways in which groups may have come together and then dissolved on a seasonal basis. For example, Palliser in the late 1850s plotted on one of his expedition maps some three hundred tents of Cree along the southern edge of the hills. Indeed, Palliser described the Prairie Cree of his time as favouring camps "of two to four hundred tents." As geographer Robert Scace observed, these large camp concentrations undoubtedly reflected the benefits of the hills, offering seasonal advantages for the bison hunt from the Aspen Parkland edge and access to the thicker wooded centre of the hills. In the mid-1850s, fur trader Henry Moberly reported that the hills people still provided a great deal of meat to Fort Edmonton.[25] Up to 1860, then, there was a strong continuity between contemporary and older populations in terms of economy; but there was also a defensive aspect, implied by the mounting concentration of people in the hills.

Beaver Hills Society and the Coming of the Missions

Settlements in the northwest in the years after 1790 took other forms besides fur trade posts and Native camps. Métis settlements and mission stations were grafted on to older centres or defined a more stable presence at customary gathering places. In the 1790s a distinctive Métis settlement started to form around Lac La Biche, the gateway to the Athabasca country. Two factors helped foster later Métis settlements in the Saskatchewan River Valley: the first was the Red River Hunt, the annual quest which took large groups of Métis hunters and their families far out onto the plains, west from Fort Garry, in search of bison.[26] Over time, some of the participants in these hunts never returned, but stayed in settlements of their own at favourable locations. The second element came about as the long-term effect of the first great "downsizing" operation in Canadian history. In the aftermath of the amalgamation of the Hudson's Bay Company with the North West Company in 1821, many in the traditional labour force lost their jobs. By 1838 a considerable number of Métis had settled around Fort Edmonton and elsewhere, in the hope of making a new life. The attendant growth in demand for social institutions complicated the work routines of the local Chief Factor, John Rowand.[27]

Religious and educational needs were foremost. There were pressures within the Church of England to respond to this need from the Methodists. The latter were particularly anxious to cater not just to the needs of settled fur trade communities but also to the Native populations. The Protestants were the first on the ground in the Fort Edmonton area. Hudson's Bay Company Governor George Simpson had his reasons for preferring missionaries from the Wesleyan Methodists instead of from the Anglican Church Missionary Society. Simpson was not much interested in educational extension activities to the Native peoples or in preachers who wanted to conduct most of their work from the forts. He felt the latter practice was inclined to attract Indians in off the land, thereby encouraging only "idleness." As a man who

The Rev. Robert Rundle and Mrs. Rundle, following their marriage in 1854

wanted to visit the camps, Robert Rundle was Simpson's ideal candidate, although Simpson later had some concerns.[28] Rundle, a product of the evangelical Wesleyan tradition, arrived at Fort Edmonton in 1840. He impressed the Roman Catholic Chief Factor with the fact that he was a good man although perhaps, thought John Rowand, he was "too young" for his job. Rowand was inclined to view missionaries as busybodies, but the two men got on well enough over the next eight years. Rundle's Journal is full of expressions of gratitude for the assistance given to him by the veteran fur trader.[29]

From a landscape-perception point of view, Rundle's Journal provides us with some excellent pen pictures of the Beaver Hills, an area he visited regularly with a view to making converts. He described the satisfactory game provisioning qualities of the hills during one trip. Having set out from Fort Edmonton at seven in the evening in a dog cariole driven by one John Cunningham, in order "to pay a visit to the Hunter's Camp near Beaver Lake" they stopped at a camp at about one o'clock in the morning, where they were hosted by two men from the fort. Afterwards "we proceeded until abt. sunrise when we again halted on the Beaver Hills."

> The Beaver Hills extend for a long distance & are generally covered with trees & bushes, interspersed with small lakes. The scenery in summer must be very splendid but I saw only the rude ravages of winter in the woods & ice covered the lakes & snow mantled the ground. In the afternoon a herd of buffalo appeared on a small lake, but partially covered with snow, which rendered travelling over it very difficult. The consequence was that one of the buffalo, a cow, fell on the ice & was soon dispatched by one of the party.[30]

Rundle noted the effects of the prevailing cold on the butchering of game. The "carcass was at once cut up & lodged under the snow against our return" but the "cold was so severe" that "the blood froze about the instrument employed in cutting up the animal."

The hunter using it "was obliged to soak it 2 or 3 times in the warm blood lodged in the carcass."[31] Two days later we find Rundle visiting a "Buffalo Pond" [i.e. pound] which was close to the camp. This was one of the great traps long employed by prairie peoples to herd bison into an enclosure for the take. "The pond was strewn with half-devoured carcasses" and these fragments "afforded a fine feast for the wolves which came during the night seasons & gorged themselves at their pleasure." The missionary had "hoped to witness the capture of buffaloes by the method of decoying them" but "was doomed to be disappointed" for while two or three herds "were driven near the entrance" they all "escaped by rushing off in a contrary direction to that of the mouth of the pond."[32] Through this account, we come to understand that bison pounding work was time consuming, labour intensive and not always successful.

Rundle's attempt to capture Native souls was not so successful on this occasion either. Having "Addressed them in the morning on Jesus Christ" he frankly admitted that "attendance bad, several of the Souteaux Indians left in the morning to hunt buffaloes because I had preached the previous evening against their idolatries."[33] The missionary was back in the Beaver Hills in August of 1842, at which time he contacted a sizable camp of Cree and Assiniboine Indians of "45 tents" and where he "held service that evening in the open air."[34] He then rode to Battle River where he thought a Mission station would have been useful, but concluded that "the country here is in too unsettled a state to permit anything of the kind being established," a reference no doubt to the tense conditions then existing between Blackfoot, Cree and Assiniboine.[35] By 1844 Rundle had yet made some progress in establishing church relations in the Beaver Hills. We find him in February of that year staying at Kisenak's tent near the buffalo pound and that "services were well attended & I was encouraged."[36]

Rundle's tenure at Fort Edmonton coincided with the climax years of what climatologists often call the "little ice age." This may have been the coldest extended period of reduced annual temperatures since the retreat of the glaciers.[37] There is much in the

missionary's notes to confirm that winters were of unusual severity. In early 1841, when he accompanied Rowand and Peter Ogden to the hills, his record for January 14th states that it was "so dreadfully cold that I could scarcely get any rest" and that "Mr Ogden informed me that the cold at this time was as intense as ever he knew it in the country."[38] The missionary tended to be sickly for much of his tenure, and the cold was often a matter of comment. In April, 1843 he complained: "What a terrible winter we have just gone thro' & how cheering is the approach of spring. The Ther. was 39 degrees below zero one morning at the Beaver Hills."[39]

In 1848, a tired and physically run down Robert Rundle returned for good to his native Cornwall in the British Isles. By that time the Methodist missions had taken root, particularly at Pigeon Lake to the south-west at the headwaters of the Battle River. The arrival of an assistant from Norway House, Benjamin Sinclair, helped ensure that Christian influence continued to grow among the Cree and Stoney of that quarter over the next two decades.

In the same years that Rundle had been getting to know the tribes of the Edmonton region, the Roman Catholic Church was also mounting a response to requests from the faithful. Rowand, among others, was anxious for priests to "leap the 600 mile gap from Le Pas to Fort Edmonton" on behalf of the many adherents in the fur trade and in Métis communities.[40] Rowand appealed to the Bishop of St. Boniface, at Red River. Bishop Provencher did not ignore his request, nor a letter written by Alexis Piché, the Quebec-born guide who had escorted Rundle on some of his earliest proselytizing tours. In response, the Bishop sent Father J.B. Thibault to Fort Edmonton in 1842. He founded a mission station at Lac Ste. Anne shortly thereafter. Subsequently, Roman Catholic influence along the North Saskatchewan increased steadily.[41]

In the wake of Rundle's departure, his Methodist successors, first under the Rev. George McDougall's leadership in Red River, continued to make progress along the North Saskatchewan, starting at Victoria (Pakan) directly north of the Beaver Hills. The new mission, built in 1863, was close to where the Hudson's Bay Company

established a post a year later, in an effort to counter the appearance of numbers of free traders along the Saskatchewan. The "probable reason for building at this spot was that it intersected a trail leading to the old Smoking Lake mission to the north and a trail to the south paralleling Egg Creek onto the parkland plains."[42]

It was into this scene of nascent missionary activity that Peter Erasmus (1833–1931) appeared, becoming one of the great witnesses to western Canadian events in the last half of the nineteenth century. He was born at Red River of a Danish father (alleged to be a veteran of the Battle of Waterloo) and a mixed-blood mother, related to Matthew Cocking. Peter Erasmus Sr. had come to Rupert's Land to enter service with the Hudson's Bay Company, following which he turned to river-lot farming. Peter Jr. leaned much Native lore and tradition at his mother's knee but as a young man showed little inclination to follow in his father's agricultural footsteps. In 1851 he was sent to The Pas to work with his uncle, Henry Budd, a Church of England catechist working with the Rev. Robert Hunter at Christ Church Mission. Here he commenced a study of classical and Native languages that would later place him in constant demand by persons associated with prairie exploration and political life. His systematic training in Native tongues started with his assistance to Budd in the translation of the Bible and portions of the Prayer Book into Cree. In 1854, he departed for Fort à la Corne on the Saskatchewan River, but then returned to Red River for further studies at St. John's School, apparently intending to join the ministry. His interests altered, however, and he accepted an offer from the HBC to go to the upper Saskatchewan and work for a Methodist, the Rev. Thomas Woolsey. His job was to act as "hunter, guide, interpreter and general assistant." The two men met for the first time at Fort Pitt in September, 1856, from which they departed for Fort Edmonton. Their course took them through the northern reaches of the Beaver Hills. "The old trail passed through what was later called Hairy Hill, Whitford, Andrew, Star, Bruderheim, and thence to Fort Saskatchewan, where there was a good crossing."[43] In 1858, Dr. James Hector observed that

"Mr. Woolsey's mission station is properly out at Pigeon Lake... where the Thickwood Crees and Stoneys have made a few attempts at agriculture."[44]

The Great Land Appraisal: The Palliser Expedition and the Beaver Hills

The 1850s were years of marked anxiety for the proprietors of the ancient fur company which had for so long held sway in its great commercial fiefdom of Rupert's Land. The only control that seemed to apply to the Hudson's Bay company was that every so often its licence came up for renewal. Now, however, the worm of international politics had very much turned. The pace of American settlement south of the 49th parallel, criticism of the company monopoly at home and abroad, and the difficulties of controlling pressures from free traders, all signalled the coming of the end. In 1857, the tabling in the British House of Commons of a voluminous select committee report into the actions of the company marked the beginning of a political process which ended with the transfer of Rupert's Land to the new Dominion of Canada in 1869.[45]

Political hints favouring limitations on HBC control of the subarctic and western lands of British North America were already quite noticeable in 1857. These included survey projects broadly appraising land and resources and investigating the practicalities of transportation routes across the mountains. James Hector's presence at Fort Edmonton was owing to his participation in John Palliser's exploration of western British North America. Palliser's party assembled at Lower Fort Garry in July, 1857 and then worked its way across the plains, arriving in early 1858 at Fort Edmonton. Little escaped James Hector's eye. In February he wrote that "Some Indians arrived to-day from the Beaver Hills, where they have killed six moose-deer within 10 to 20 miles from the fort. At one time they were very common in this district, and formed a sure source of food for the traders, but for many years they have almost disappeared."[46]

Before the expedition's advance on the mountain country, guides and packers had to be retained. On March 7, 1858 Hector recorded: "This morning I started with a guide and Peter Erasmus, the Rev. Mr. Woolsey's interpreter, to endeavour to engage men for the Expedition from among the band of 'freemen' that are at present travelling in from the plains to Lake St. Ann's settlement." Searching them out became the occasion for some exploration of the country east of Fort Edmonton. "After crossing the Saskatchewan River on the ice, our course was at first easterly over the Beaver Hills. After ten miles we turned to the south-east, and commenced to traverse very inviting country...hitherto we had passed over swampy ground, but now the surface was dry and undulating, and in the hollows are lakes, some of which are of good size." Then in the afternoon "we got into some open country, and travelling briskly reached the tents of the freemen's camp about an hour after dark, having travelled forty miles from the fort. The tents were pitched beside Hay Lake which is a few miles in extent and within four hours ride of Battle River." It seems that only "half of the party had got thus far on their return, as they were heavily loaded with the proceeds of their hunt, but the rest were expected to pass this place next day, so we resolved to wait before beginning negotiations."[47]

The following day at about 11 o'clock "the rest of the band arrived, forming a motley troop with loaded horses and dogs, and travelling in a style hardly different from Indians." The day "was spent in winning the good will of their old chief Gabriel Dumont who has repeatedly crossed the Rocky Mountains, and can also talk Blackfoot." Hector was relieved for "when I succeeded in getting him to consent to act as guide for the Expedition, I had no difficulty in filling up my complement from among the young men."[48]

The final reports of the Palliser Expedition reveal that the members took a keen interest in trying to assess the population and distribution of the Native peoples they encountered. The last recorded summary listed the peoples of the Beaver Hills at that

time as being mainly of the Plains Cree according to the following chart which accounted for them by lodges:[49]

Plains Cree Bands	No. of Lodges
Moose Mountain	100
Moose Jaw	120
Coteau de Prairie	400
Eagle Hills	200
Moose Woods	200
Jackfish Lake	200
Vermilion River	300
Snake River/Lac La Biche	100
Beaver Hills	300

Palliser's map of 1860

Rev. George McDougall (1821–1876) In 1863, McDougall returned to Pakan to found the Methodist Mission (Victoria) on the North Saskatchewan River. He founded several other missions in the foothills country of Alberta.

Elizabeth Chantler McDougall (1823–1904) At her husband's missions, Elizabeth had a busy life of child rearing, nursing and teaching. Eight of her children survived, including John, who followed in his father's footsteps.

Victoria Mission Also known as Pakan in recognition of the name of leader of the local Cree, this community on the North Saskatchewan River became the economic and spiritual focus of the area north of the Beaver Hills after 1862.

The Beaver Hills group was clearly one of the larger concentrations of Plains Cree at the time of the expedition, and the hills, with their reputation as a source of beaver, would have long been a significant source of the local fur trade.

Personalities remain obscure in the historical record, but the efforts of the churchmen had clearly borne fruit. Hugh Dempsey noted that "Lapotac, a leading Chief of the Beaver Hills Cree until his death in 1861, had become a convert to Methodism, as had one of the lesser Chiefs, Broken Arm, or Maskepetoon." It was part of the context into which the Methodist, George McDougall, introduced himself in 1862 in order to found the Victoria Settlement some 50 miles east of Fort Edmonton. The mission was initiated with a view to softening the inevitable effects which departure of the HBC would have on Native populations. The location, shared with the Hudson's Bay Company, had some advantages over the mission station at Smoky Lake, some miles to the north, which it now replaced.[50] According to John Maclean, the Victoria Mission house was the setting for the advent of European-style education west of Red River with the training of nine students in 1863.[51] The Indians themselves had thus become involved in mission field politics. Similarly, near Buffalo Lake "the warlike Chief Bobtail supported the Oblates," perhaps because his father, Alexis Piché, "had been instrumental in bringing the first Catholic Clergy to the region twenty years earlier."[52]

In the early 1920s such events were still within memory's reach. Tofield's Mayor, A.J. McCauley, recalled: "Mr William Rowland...told me stories of the buffalo hunting days." During the sixties, he was "a chief trader for the Hudson's Bay Company" and "The Chief Factor sent him out periodically to trade with the Indians at Beaver Hill Lake." According to this reminiscence, a wide zone of tension and conflict between the Blackfoot, Stoney and Cree Indians lay along the Battle River for about 20 miles between today's Ponoka and Wainwright. The Blackfeet, with their Sarcee allies, were proving very troublesome to the Cree of this quarter and had "commenced to make raids around the south end

of Beaver Hills Lake" between 1860 and 1862. In order not to lose this great hunting ground the Crees "persuaded Chief Ketchamoot" of the Fort Pitt area to "come up with 400 braves." This he did and over several days his "small army" was joined by others in the Beaver Hills. They made up provisions and then headed south-west to meet the Blackfeet in battle south of Wetaskiwin where the victory fell to the Cree. Ketchamoot spent his remaining years in the hills and is commemorated by the name "Ketchmoot Creek," which empties into Beaverhills Lake.[53] According to Erasmus's biographer, Henry Thompson, this battle "under the leadership of Ketchamoot, won the Crees an initial victory" but was also the "means of rendering the whole area unsafe for any Cree for a number of years afterward."[54] This view of a prevailing general turmoil is supported by the writings of a Fort Edmonton fur trader and in the Journal of John Sellar, one of the "Overlanders" who arrived at Fort Pitt in 1862.[55] By the following year relations between the Cree and Blackfoot had improved somewhat, according to the account of those observant tourist-adventurers, Milton and Cheadle, who were at Fort Pitt in the spring of 1863. They contended that a peace treaty, albeit of somewhat uncertain substance, had been concluded between the warring tribes.[56] It is of interest that after interviews with the Dumont family in 1925, the veteran naturalist of the Beaver Hills, Frank Farley, maintained that Meeting Creek in the Battle River Valley was something of a traditional border line between the Cree and Blackfoot, a place where they would meet for joint bison hunts.[57]

Shortly after, Milton and Cheadle departed for Fort Edmonton. Having crossed to the south side of the Saskatchewan River near Egg Lake, they eventually skirted the northern edge of the Beaver Hills. Guided by a veteran Métis of the plains, Louis Battenotte, (known as "The Assiniboine") the party arrived just in time to experience one of the great spring fires. "When we gained the level plain above, dense clouds of smoke on every hand told that the prairie was on fire, and we soon reached the blackened ground

which the fires had passed over. The only pasture we found for our horses was a large marsh, where we encamped for the night."[58]

Fort Edmonton was the administrative centre for the upper Saskatchewan region during the Hudson's Bay Company's declining years of authority between 1850 and 1870. The name "Edmonton House" can be linked to some of the old fur trade families who lingered on in the Beaver Hills long after the HBC relinquished its monopoly position in Rupert's Land in 1869. They helped preserve memories of the passing order and also represented the first transitional generation attracted by the possibilities of settlement. One of these families was that of John Peter Pruden.

Pruden was born in England in a district of the great city of London known as Edmonton. After joining the "Great Company" in 1791, he had worked his way to the position of Chief Trader by the time of the amalgamation of 1821. Much of his time after 1795 was spent in helping develop a post north of the Beaver Hills on the Saskatchewan River. Following its abandonment and burning, he helped William Tomison establish the new "Edmonton" post, erected near the present Provincial Legislative grounds. One tradition is

John Peter Pruden (1778–1868) An experienced fur trader with the Hudson's Bay Company, Pruden was at Fort Edmonton in its earliest days. Buried at Red River, many of his descendants remained in the Edmonton area, including his son, James, who was buried in a pioneer cemetery near Tofield.

that Tomison suggested the name for "Edmonton House" in honour of Hudson's Bay Company official William Lake. It is coincidental that this district appears also to have been the home of Pruden. The name certainly was in use by 1795.[59]

Pruden was active at a number of other posts during the 1820s and 1830s, including Carlton House. It was his mixed blessing to receive notice in Governor George Simpson's notorious "Character Book" of 1832. While Simpson found Pruden to be "a man of good conduct and character" he also considered him "weak minded vain & silly." He was "Over fond of good living" although he "Speaks Cree, and is a tolerable 'Plain Indian' trader." Furthermore, Pruden was "by no means bright" and was "attached to old customs, an Enemy to all innovations" and "ought to consider himself fortunate in having obtained his present situation."[60] Pruden must have had some commendable diplomatic and business skills nonetheless, since a year before he retired in 1837, he had risen yet higher in the organization, to Chief Factor.[61] Upon retiring to the Red River Settlement he served on the Council of Assiniboia, and on a number of other civic bodies. He died there in 1868.

Peter Pruden had a large family by Nancy, whom he married *à la façon du pays* (according to the custom of the country). Nancy's identity remains obscure. She died prematurely and was buried at Red River in 1839. Pruden then remarried an English school governess, Ann Armstrong.[62] One of Pruden's sons, James, participated in the great 1854 expedition from Red River to the Oregon country led by James Sinclair. He later returned to the Beaver Hills and took up land in the Tofield area, being one of the earliest settlers of that quarter in the 1880s. He was buried in 1902 in one of the hidden historic places in the hills, the small pioneer cemetery at Logan, west of Beaver Hills Lake.[63]

Another of the local fur trade veterans was William Rowland (1826–1910). According to Albert Tate, he was born at Cumberland House and during his early years worked the northern routes from Churchill to Fort Chipewyan. Between 1860 and 1875 he held not only "the important post of special trader and interpreter to the

great, war-like tribe of Blackfeet" but also attempted to mediate between the Cree and Blackfoot "to see that there was no open rupture between these enemies, at least within the horizon of the H.B. Co."[64] During his travels of the early 1870s, the Earl of Southesk encountered Rowland and his father, the latter whom he described as "an Orkney man of forty years service with the Company, and celebrated for breeding fine horses." About the son, William, he said he was "considered about the best light weight rider in the district."[65]

One of Rowland's neighbours, Robert Logan (c. 1844–1909), had served with the HBC at Edmonton House and also at Pakan between 1864 and 1874. He eventually took out land on the west side of Beaver Hills Lake in 1886 where he ran a small trading operation.[66] His place took on sufficient identity that on an 1894 survey map the community of "Logan" appears.[67] His landholdings were considerable and became the basis of the Trent Ranch after 1910.[68] In 1886, his property also became the setting of the pioneer cemetery mentioned above, for which he donated the land. Families such as these represented the last vestiges of a plains way of life which had been undergoing adjustments for several decades.

Outside the control of the fur companies, in addition to the Natives living on the land, were the holdings of small Métis communities that had formed across the prairies and in the parkland from the 1840s.[69] They were an outgrowth of the traditions of the Red River Hunt initiated in the 1820s by which English, Scottish and French mixed-blood buffalo hunters seasonally moved west out of the Red River Valley in pursuit of the herds.[70] In time, the price of bison robes rose, and with it, the numbers taking part in the hunt. Some chose to remain permanently in various enclaves in Saskatchewan and Alberta rather than return to Red River. When ramblers Milton and Cheadle arrived at Fort Edmonton in 1863, they remarked on this process with reference to the St. Alban's community of "freemen" and the even "more ancient colony" of St. Ann's "of similar character but with more numerous inhabitants."[71] *The Nor'Wester*, Red River's early newspaper, reported

in 1864 that twenty-five French Métis families were departing for Lac La Biche.[72] Some Métis sank roots at other more obscure enclaves from which they farmed and pursued the last remnants of the great bison herds. Their presence also reflects the fact that establishments such as Edmonton House had, by mid-century, long ceased to be mere emporiums of trade.[73] Even in the early years of the century, however, the Saskatchewan forts had played a role in provisioning the more northerly posts, an important aspect of that function being the coordination of the taking and preparation of bison meat. By 1870, with the great herds disappearing, much of the regular basis of organized life in the west also disappeared. Those already on the land, of whatever background, had to consider the prospects of change brought on by this crisis. Over the next 30 years the Beaver Hills, as a place of common and communal refuge, changed radically under conditions of pioneer settlement and animal domestication.