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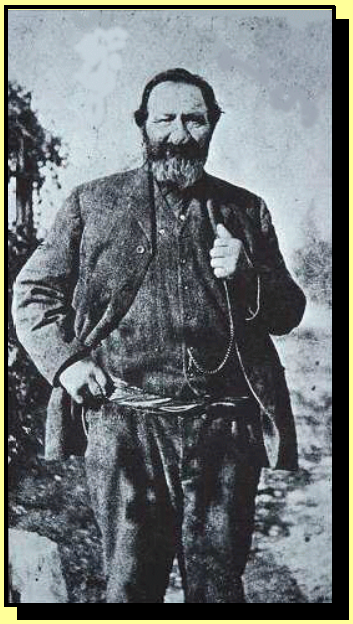
# A History of Translation in Alberta



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# SUMMARY

Interwoven with the history of the political, economic and sociocultural development of Alberta is another history: that of communication between peoples of different languages and cultures. From the initial contact between the white man and the prairie Indian tribes on Canada's western frontier, through many years of missionary work, immigration and settlement, right up to the present era of national unrest and international exchange, the need for interlingual communication has made itself felt in Alberta. Translators and interpreters are the media through which such communication has taken place, and it is hard to imagine how the prairies, including Alberta, could have been settled and developed without these language specialists.

It was not until the late 1970s, however, that the first steps were taken to organize translation and interpretation activities at a professional level. A centralized translation office was established to serve the departments and agencies of the provincial government, and a professional association, the Alberta Translators and Interpreters Association, was formed and accepted as a member of the Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council.

Now, in the 1990s, as international exchanges multiply, and as Alberta enters a new phase of its political and economic history, particularly through its special relations with provinces in three Asian countries, it seems inevitable that an increasing number of people will come to realize the importance of professional translation and interpretation to the success of their endeavours.

# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AIIC | Association internationale des interprètes de conférence |
| AITC | Association of Interpreters and Translators of Canada |
| ATIA | Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta |
| ATIO | Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario |
| AUPE | Alberta Union of Public Employees |
| AVC | Alberta Vocational College |
| CTIC | Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council |
| CTINB | Corporation of Translators and Interpreters of New Brunswick |
| CPR | Canadian Pacific Railway |
| FIGA | Department of Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs (Alberta) |
| FIT | Fédération internationale des traducteurs |
| HBC | Hudson's Bay Company |
| NWC | North West Company |
| NWMP | North West Mounted Police |
| PWSS | Department of Public Works, Supply and Services (Alberta) |
| RMH | Rocky Mountain House |
| ROCRD | Regional Officer, Community Resources Development |
| SI | Simultaneous interpretation |
| STEP | Summer Temporary Employment Program |
| STIC | Société des traducteurs et interprètes du Canada |
| STQ | Société des traducteurs du Québec |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| WMS | Wesleyan Missionary Society |

# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is threefold. It is, firstly, to demonstrate that interpreters and translators played an important role in the exploration, settlement and development of the province of Alberta and continue to perform an important function in both the public and private sectors of Alberta society today. This will be shown through specific examples drawn from the three major periods of Alberta's history: the fur trade era, from 1754 to the middle of the 19th century; the years of missionary work, settlement and mass immigration, from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th; and the modern or technological era, covering roughly the past fifty years. In order to bring the point home, the subjects of interpretation and translation are considered in the light of the economic and sociopolitical circumstances of each of the periods studied. While special emphasis is placed on the historical coexistence of French and English within the Canadian context, particularly in the final chapter, the changing needs for interpretation and translation from and into other languages (e.g. Native, European and Oriental languages) are also taken into account.

Secondly, this work is intended to help fill an obvious gap in the documented history of the province. To date, it seems, no comprehensive record of the role played by interpreters and translators in Alberta has been written. This may have been due to a lack of interest in the topic, or to the difficulty in locating and correlating information on the subject itself or on the individuals involved, such information being fragmented and sketchy at best, and contradictory at worst. Only rarely have any of these many individuals written about their own lives or their interpreting or translating activities and, with few exceptions, others have apparently not considered them, or at least this aspect of their lives, worth writing about. As will be evident from the bibliography, many of the documents consulted for this work are secondary, rather than primary, sources, the scholarly efforts of historians with no apparent interest in interpretation or translation per se, but with enviable access to the invaluable records kept by several individuals or organizations that figured prominently in the history of Alberta (e.g. the Hudson Bay Company, the North-West Company, various missionary societies, and the NWMP). Quite a number of these records contain information

that is directly or indirectly relevant to the subject at hand.

In view of the fact that effective communication between people whose languages are mutually unintelligible is impossible in the absence of an intermediary who understands the language and culture of each of the parties involved, the activities and sometimes even the very presence of interpreters or translators have been glossed over in the documented history with surprising frequency. Given the vast number of documents that would need to be consulted, and the painstaking labour that would be required to assemble and organize the widely scattered bits of information required to properly fill the existing gap, this work does not pretend to represent the comprehensive record that deserves to be written. While much lengthier than originally anticipated, this work should be regarded simply as an overview and, perhaps, as an incentive for further study. Two areas not covered here, for example, are translation, for the print and electronic media, and literary translation.

Lastly, this work is meant to show that users or potential users of interpreters and translators in Alberta today face many of the same difficulties their predecessors did, a principal one being the difficulty of recruiting competent people. In this sense, interpretation and translation have perhaps not made as much progress as many practitioners would like to believe. In some cases, the interpreters or translators are to blame, because deficiencies in their linguistic knowledge, education, experience or character prevent them from providing the level of service those who employ them have a right to expect. In other cases, however, it is the users who are at fault, with the root of the problem often being an outdated view of interpretation and translation that fails to take into account the many changes that have occurred over the 230-odd years of Alberta's recorded history, affecting these occupations like many others. Early in Alberta's history, when interpreters were in much greater demand than translators, any ability to understand and *speak* more than one language was considered sufficient qualification for a person to act as an interpreter for the fur trade. Subsequently, with the advent of the missionaries, the NWMP and territorial government, and the resultant growth in the number of written documents, any ability to *write* in more than one language was considered sufficient qualification for a person to act as a translator. Furthermore, a person who had any ability to *speak and write* in more than one language was deemed qualified to serve as both

interpreter and translator. This overly simplistic view of the abilities required to perform in these capacities, while no longer in keeping with today's reality, to a large extent still prevails in Alberta.

## Chapter 1

# THE FUR TRADE ERA

## A. CONTEXT

### 1. *Political*

By 1754, when the first white man entered the territory that a century and a half later would become the province of Alberta, the French regime in North America was almost at an end. Although the French had been the first to settle along the St. Lawrence River and had claimed sovereignty over all land north and west of the St. Lawrence River system, regarding it as their own fur preserve, the issuance of a trading licence by Charles II of England in 1670 to "The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay" (afterwards known as the Hudson's Bay Company) had signaled England's refusal to recognize the French claims. Subsequently, by the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), Great Britain had been awarded clear title to the northern area being exploited by that Company.

Feeling threatened by the British presence on Hudson Bay to the north and in the colonies south of the St. Lawrence, the French attempted to strengthen their hold. Despite some success, their efforts were ultimately fruitless. The conflict between France and Great Britain resumed in mid-century, with the result that Quebec fell to the British in 1759, and Montreal surrendered in 1760. These events were followed by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, which gave Great Britain all North America east of the Mississippi and effectively expelled France from the North American continent, leaving it only the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon.

During the period under study, France and Great Britain were not the only political powers with an interest in the northern regions of the North American continent. On the western shores of the continent, by the late 1780s, Russia had progressed beyond the Aleutians and established a large number of fur trading posts extending southward along the Alaska coast. At the same time, Spain had sailed northward along the Pacific coast as

far as Nootka Sound, and had laid claim to the entire coast. However, by the Nootka Convention, Spain gave up its claims and in 1795 left Nootka Sound, withdrawing to California and leaving the northwest coast to become part of the joint U. S.-British possession known as the Oregon Country, a sliver of which lay within modern Alberta. Until 1846, when the U.S. and Canada agreed on the present boundary, both American and British citizens were free to trade and settle in the Oregon territory. (See Map 1, following page.)

The American Revolution (1775-1783), the Napoleonic Wars (1801-1815) and the War of 1812 (1812-1814) were other significant political events during the period under study that would affect the pattern of trade and, ultimately, of settlement in Canada. The War of 1812, for example, was due in part to U. S. disagreement with British efforts to stem the flow of white settlers into the Indian country across the border between the U. S. and Canada. As will become evident, Britain was concerned about increased settlement not only for jurisdictional but also for economic reasons.

## 2. *Economic*

### a) *Trade and Commerce*

From the outset, there were two predominant reasons for communicating with the natives of the New World, both essentially economic in nature, although with political overtones. Firstly, European explorers of the mid-sixteenth century were seeking, on behalf of those who financed their voyages, a faster, safer, and more economical maritime trade route to the Orient than that of rounding Cape Horn. The North American Indians, because of their nomadic lifestyle, could provide these explorers with much valuable information about the land, its topography and its resources. Nonetheless, by the mid-eighteenth century, the fabled Northwest Passage still had not been found.

Secondly, European traders were seeking furs, particularly beaver pelts for the garment industry, and the North American natives were eager to provide these in exchange for commodities from Europe. Furs had become a status symbol among a rising European

bourgeoisie, but the growth in demand had led to the depletion of European sources. Enterprising Europeans, mainly French-speaking and English-speaking, were therefore quick to recognize and begin exploiting the market potential of the rich pelts of the indigenous fur-bearing animals of North America.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, until their eventual merger in 1821, two fur trading companies (the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company) using, at least in the beginning, fundamentally different trading techniques, waged a fierce battle for commercial control in the virgin territories of modern Canada that were known collectively as "the North-West". The territory that was to become Alberta was claimed by both, and one of the two main battlegrounds was the Athabaska district, principally because it was, as Colin Robertson wrote in 1810, "the richest in Furs that has as yet been discovered."[1] Its strategic location was a further attraction. The other main battlefield was the North Saskatchewan River, the north branch of the Saskatchewan River, whose wide course and fast current made it an ideal highway along which to send the fur brigades, transporting large quantities of trading goods, pelts and provisions, and large numbers of men. As well, its many tributaries allowed smaller parties comparatively easy access to the lucrative Athabaska and Columbia districts, among others. The intense, and sometimes deadly, commercial rivalry between the two companies accounts in large part for the exploration and development of much of present-day western Canada. It led to the establishment of clusters of trading posts strung out across the continent, many of which would become the nuclei of later settlements. (For the distribution of trading posts in Alberta during the period under study, see Map 2 on following page.)

By its charter, whose legal validity was frequently–although never successfully–challenged, the London-based Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) had obtained a monopoly over all land drained by Hudson Bay. It was firmly established on the Bay with its North American headquarters at York Factory and, from the very beginning, had followed a "stay on the Bay" policy. This meant that the Indians of the North-West who wished to trade

[1] E. E. Rich, *Colin Robertson's Correspondence Book, September 1817, to September 1822* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1939), p. xxx.

their furs for European goods were obliged to make the long, arduous and sometimes life-threatening trek from their inland hunting grounds to the forts on the Bay. For the tribes of the Athabaska region, for example, crossing the immense distance to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Churchill could mean a journey of five or six months' duration.

The North West Company (NWC), on the other hand, was essentially an outgrowth of the licensed French fur trading system that existed up until 1763, the end of the French régime in North America. Under that system, policies were set in France, and agents in Quebec and Montreal were licensed through the king's representatives. Unlike the HBC servants, these early French agents were eager to promote inland trade with the Indians. Not only did they send traders north and west to live and trade with the Indians of the *pays d'en haut*, they also developed a systematic and efficient fur trade organization. The French had also tried several times, with varying degrees of success, to seize control of Hudson Bay and, consequently, of the northern fur trade. In the end, however, they had been thwarted in their efforts. The Treaty of Utrecht had decided the question, at least superficially. With the subsequent fall of Quebec and Montreal, the licensed French fur trading system collapsed.

In mid-century, during the period of hostilities among the French, the British, and the natives of eastern North America, trade was naturally interrupted. The established French canoe routes heading north- and westward from the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes area were temporarily abandoned. Consequently the HBC, having sole control and apparently no competition, saw no need to change from its old "stay on the Bay" policy.

It was not long, however, before the English traders on the Bay faced a new challenge, principally from independent traders and Montreal-based trading groups. According to Alexander Mackenzie, "mercantile adventurers" from Canada again appeared west of Lake Superior after an interval of several years. He attributed this hiatus to "an ignorance of the country in the conquerors, and their want of commercial confidence in the conquered", not to mention discouragements such as "the immense length of the journey to reach the limits beyond which this commerce must begin; the risk of property; the expenses attending such a long transport; and an ignorance of the language of those who, from their experience,

must be necessarily employed as the intermediate agents between them and the natives."[2] By "intermediate agents", in this case, it appears we are to understand those French Canadians who had lived for many years with the Indians of the North-West and become attached to the Indian way of life. Most of the independent traders were either British traders from the southern colonies or French-Canadians who had decided to continue trading on their own account after the fall of New France. The trading groups, on the other hand, were formed largely of Scots who had been discharged from the British army in Canada when the hostilities ceased; some recent immigrants, many of whom were also from Scotland; and numerous French-Canadian voyageurs. As Masson points out, however, irrespective of their nationality, those who eventually made up the NWC were referred to as "the French", which distinguished them from the HBC servants, who were "the English".[3]

After the comparatively brief hiatus following the conquest, many of the old French canoe routes were not only revived, but extended. By 1765, the Montreal " pedlars", as they were disparagingly called by their English competitors, had reached Lake Winnipeg. By 1770, they had trading houses on the Saskatchewan River, from which they travelled into the north country and intercepted Indians on their way to the Bay. Given the substantially reduced returns at its forts on the Bay, the HBC was eventually forced to revise its long-standing policy and send its servants inland, not, as before, to persuade the Indians to deliver their furs to Forts Churchill or York, but rather to establish hinterland trading posts as their rivals had been doing for many years. The establishment by the HBC of Cumberland House (Saskatchewan) at a strategic point on the Saskatchewan River in 1774 marked the end of the old policy and the beginning of a serious head-to-head commercial battle that continued for almost fifty years as the fur trade resolutely advanced westward and northward. While the HBC was the winner on the Saskatchewan, the

[2] Alexander Mackenzie, *voyages from Montreal on the river St. Laurence, through the continent of North America, to the frozen and Pacific Oceans, in the years 1789 and 1793* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1971), p. vii.

[3] Roderick McKenzie, "Reminiscences", in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest*, ed. L. R. Masson (Quebec: Cote, 1889/90), p. 19, note 2.

"pedlars" were the winners in Athabaska, after Peter Pond built the first trading post there in 1778.

There was, however, a growing realization that the competition among the various independents and small groups, and between them and the HBC (not to mention the rivalry within the HBC between Forts Churchill and York), was proving ruinous both to those involved and to the Canadian fur trade as a whole. In addition, there was increasing pressure from the United States to remove British and Canadian traders from the territories south of the Great Lakes. Recognizing the benefits to be gained from a united effort, a number of traders and trading groups combined forces in 1783, forming the first North West Company. A smaller, rival concern by the name of Gregory, McLeod & Company, was formed by traders who were not included in the first organization, but after a few years of mutually disadvantageous competition between them, the two groups amalgamated in 1787, under the name of the larger company. According to Lower, the turn of the century represented the "greatest era of the North West Company".[4] In 1795, the NWC had advanced far enough west that it was building the first Fort Augustus near present-day Edmonton, Alberta, and by 1800 it dominated the Athabaska region which, prior to 1778, was, in the words of Alexander Mackenzie, "unknown but for an Indian report"[5]. Although the year 1800 also saw the creation of a splinter group known as the New North West Company or the "X Y Company", the split was short-lived, and four years later this group had rejoined the older company.

While the language of the Montreal-based trade remained French, largely because of the preponderance of French-Canadians and French Métis in the ranks, economic control quickly passed into British or, more precisely, Scottish hands. An indication of the astuteness and obvious business acumen of these Scottish *Bourgeois*, as their mainly French-speaking employees referred to them, was their decision to continue the highly successful inland trading techniques that had been used by the French traders they had

[4] J. Arthur Lower, *Western Canada: An Outline History* (Toronto: Douglas & Mclntyre, 1983), p. 37.

[5] Alexander Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

displaced.

### b) *Settlement and Agriculture*

For several reasons, some of which were political and were later validated, Canada and the HBC came to regard a certain amount of settlement in the North-West as desirable. This was evident from, for example, the Selkirk Grant in 1811. The NWC, on the other hand, remained bitterly opposed to any settlement and, in fact, accused the HBC of being "a Company to whom the Indian Trade is a secondary object"[6]. The NWC consistently refused to recognize the jurisdictional claims of either the HBC, under that company's charter, or Canada, under the Canada Jurisdiction Act (43, Geo. Ill, c. 138). Its opposition was not lessened by the fact that the Selkirk Grant cut right across its transportation and supply routes, threatening to disrupt its whole organization.

In the territory that would later be known as Alberta, as was the case in much of western Canada, the first settlements grew up around the fur-trading posts. However, as traders and explorers only began penetrating this territory in the latter half of the eighteenth century, no real settlement would take place until the late 1800s, over a hundred years later.

Strange as it may seem in the absence of any true settlement, small-scale farming operations, which might more suitably be considered agricultural experiments, were nevertheless under way in this territory before the end of the century. Such experiments were in fact common along the major trade routes, being carried out usually at establishments that were occupied year-round and served as main depots. The crops included potatoes, cabbage, turnips, carrots, parsnips, beets and barley. The produce raised during the short summer season provided not only valuable information regarding the productivity of the soil and the suitability of various crops, but also a welcome relief from the ubiquitous dried provisions of the inland fur trade. It also helped lessen the risk of starvation, especially in the winter months, when animals and fish could be in very short supply. A number of traders and explorers commented in their journals on the kitchen gardens at posts in the North-West. Alexander Mackenzie, for one, wrote that when he first

[6] E. E. Rich, *op. cit.*, p. liii.

arrived at Athabaska, in the fall of 1787, Peter Pond had formed "as fine a kitchen garden as I ever saw in Canada".[7] While such agricultural pursuits may have been considered a necessary adjunct of the fur trade by those in charge of both the principal companies, it is hard to imagine that they were met with much enthusiasm by the employees at the trading posts, many of whom had entered the trade precisely to escape from the hard labour of farm life back home.

## 3. *Linguistic*

### a) *French and English*

The French language was the language of diplomacy at this point in world history and had enjoyed international prominence for some time. French was also the universally accepted language of the fur trade, up until the middle of the nineteenth century.

While not everyone who spoke French also spoke English, and not everyone who spoke English also knew French, the major linguistic concern in the northern regions of the New World was not so much communication between the French-speaking and English-speaking peoples, who had been in contact for centuries, as it was communication between these two races and the Indian tribes they encountered as civilization gradually moved northward and westward across the vast territory now known as Canada.

### b) *Indian Languages*

At the outset, communication with the Indians was, of necessity, oral: firstly, because a written language is a sign of a more advanced stage of civilization than the North American natives had reached when the white man arrived among them; and, secondly, because the first white men into new areas were themselves, for the most part, relatively uneducated, or even completely illiterate. This held true not only for the initial European-Indian contact

[7] Alexander Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 129.

in North America, but also for the initial contact between whites and Indians in the territory under study. As a result, this chapter is concerned more with the oral form of interlingual communication, or interpretation, than with the written form, or translation proper, which became necessary in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but did not really come into its own in Alberta until the latter part of the present century. This is not to say that no translation at all was done during the early days of trade and exploration in the territory now known as Alberta, but rather that the instances of translation we know of were extremely rare, inspired by purely personal interests, and performed as a pastime rather than for political, administrative, or economic reasons. From the records studied, it seems the only individual with an apparent interest in translation was Alexander Mackenzie's cousin, Roderick McKenzie, who established a small library at Fort Chipewyan on Athabaska Lake during his eight years in that district and earned for that post the cognomen "Athens of the North". He is known, for example, to have asked the seasoned trader George Keith to provide him with English translations of Indian tales and songs, a request the latter complied with to the extent his abilities allowed.[8]

## *Method of acquiring Indian languages*

The first Europeans to reach North America faced much more daunting cultural and linguistic obstacles than did the first white men into the Indian lands later to be known as Alberta. For one thing, the latter already had an accumulated body of knowledge they could call upon in regard to Indian customs and traditions, thanks to their predecessors', and often their own, experiences doing business or living with the Indians of various eastern tribes. Furthermore, many of the Indian tribes in the North-West were from the same linguistic stocks as the eastern tribes on whom the traders relied, which greatly simplified the process of communication.

In addition, some of the eastern missionaries and a few literate eastern traders had written down rudimentary vocabularies of the Indian languages, although it would be

[8] L. R. Masson, ed., *op. cit.*, vol. 11, pp. 65ff.

difficult to say how many of the traders or explorers entering the North-West had actually studied, or were even acquainted with, such works. No doubt very few, as most lacked the necessary reading skills. Since those who had prepared such vocabularies had basically just transcribed the pronunciation of words according to their perception of the sounds, and in terms of their respective mother tongues, there being no Indian alphabet or established rules to follow, it is unlikely that such works contributed significantly to the improvement of communication between the Indians and the white traders. Nevertheless, of those who could and did write, many traders and explorers, either of their own volition or because they were instructed to do so, continued the practice of taking down lists of Indian words as they proceeded northward and westward from the Great Lakes.

In the light of the biographical information available to us on the traders of the North-West, and considering their general lack of formal education, it appears that the principal method of acquiring the native languages was through direct contact with the Indians themselves and with other, more experienced, traders. It would be safe to say that, allowing for individual limitations, the more frequent and more intimate the contact, the greater the skill of the trader in speaking the Indian languages. The obvious ease with which the traders who had wintered with certain Indian tribes in order to learn their languages and customs could successfully communicate and transact business with those and, sometimes, related tribes bears eloquent testimony to the truth of this statement. A notable example in the Alberta context is David Thompson who, by his own assessment at least, "always conversed with the Natives as one Indian with another".[9]

### *Distribution of Indian languages and difficulty of acquisition*

To a large extent, the distribution of Indians within the territory now known as Alberta may be correlated with the natural features of the province: dense forests, tapering off in the direction of the tundra to the north; vast plains further south; and the foothills and eastern

[9] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916), p. 203.

slopes of the Rocky Mountains to the west. Possibly the best source of information regarding the distribution of the Indian population is Diamond Jenness who, in *The Indians of Canada*, provides a map showing the approximate distribution of the plains' tribes in 1725. (See Map 3, following page.) Jenness suggests that four broad linguistic stocks of Indians lived within Alberta's present borders just before the white men arrived; namely, *Athapaskan, Algonkian*, *Kootenayan* and some *Siouan* stock.

Although, at that time, the forested part of the territory (i.e. the country north of the North Saskatchewan River) was populated mainly by the people of *Athapaskan* linguistic stock, which included the Chipewyans, the Beaver Indians, the Slaves and the Sekani, these people were gradually pushed even further north towards the tundra as the better-armed and war-like Crees from the east moved in and took over much of that area. One branch of this family, the Sarcee, however, left its native woods for the open prairies of the south, allying itself with the fearsome Blackfoot Confederacy, although retaining its distinctive language. This last point is worth emphasizing here for two reasons, the first being the frequent references by traders to the similarities between the Chipewyan and Sarcee languages, despite the geographical distance separating the two tribes. Alexander Henry, for example, observed that the Sarcees had "an entirely different language from any other of the plains", adding: "Their language greatly resembles that of the Chepewyans, many words being exactly the same."[10] The second reason is the potential problem it consequently presented for traders from the point of view of communication in the otherwise linguistically homogeneous prairie regions.

The Athapaskan languages, such as Sarcee and Chipewyan, were generally not considered easy languages to learn. If Tliompson's report is correct, this view was held by other Indians as well as the whites, for Thompson comments that Sarcee was one of several distinctive languages that were "so rough and difficult to articulate that the neighbouring people rarely attempted to learn them"[11]. He later reiterates the same idea, describing the

[10] Elliot Coues, ed., *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry* ... (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897), p. 532.

[11] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 304

language as "a very gutteral tongue which no one attempts to learn"[12]. Henry, too, considered Sarcee "difficult to acquire, from the many gutteral sounds it contains"[13] and noted that most of the Sarcees had "a smattering of the Cree language", adding: "Their own language is so difficult to acquire that none of our people have ever learned it".[14]

It is curious that, in Chapter VII ("Chepawyans") of his *Narrative*, David Thompson says nothing of the Chipewyan language. He does, however, later compare it to the German language, probably in recognition of its gutteral quality (see *infra*). In Alexander Mackenzie's view, the Chipewyans spoke "a copious language, which is very difficult to be attained, and furnishes dialects to the various emigrant tribes[15]. Peter Pond's opinion of the Chipewyan language is given in a memoir, written in French, that accompanied his map of 1785. It reads as follows: "un langage extraordinaire, que [sic] consiste dans un bruit de gosier qu'il est impossible d'apprendre".[16] It would seem, however, that this was an overly pessimistic view, as Peter Fidler spent the winter of 1791-92 with a band of Chipewyans and in the spring felt he had learned enough of their language to "transact any business with them."[17] According to Thompson, these people were known as "Chepawyans" to the Cree, "Dinnae" in their own language, and "Northern Indians" to the HBC servants.

The Crees, also called "Southern Indians" or "Home Indians" by the HBC servants, were of the same *Algonkian* stock as the Bloods, Piegans and Blackfoot, which were the main prairie tribes, and as the Gros Ventres (or Big Bellies) present in the extreme southeast of the province. When Henday set out from York Factory in 1754 for a first

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[12] Ibid., p. 327.

[13] Elliot Coues, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 531

[14] Ibid., p. 737.

[15] Alexander Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. cxvi.

[16] H. A. Innis, *Peter Pond, Fur Trader and Adventurer* (Toronto: Irwin & Gordon, Ltd., 1930), p. 119.

[17] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1934), p. 555.

encounter with the Blackfoot chiefs of the prairies, to try to convince them to bring furs to the Bay, it would therefore appear logical that he went with a party of Crees. Yet it seems the relationship between the Cree and prairie Indian languages was not a particularly close one, as Alexander Mackenzie reported the following: "The Picaneaux [Piegans], Black-Feet, and Blood-Indians, are a distinct people, speak a language of their own...: nor have I heard of any Indians with whose language, that which they speak has any affinity [18]. Many traders and explorers noted the similarity of the three main prairie Indian languages in their journals. Henry, indeed, states matter-of-factly in regard to the Blood, Piegan and Blackfoot languages: "The language is the same among the three tribes."[19] As for the Cree language, Thompson wrote: "It is easy of pronunciation, and is readily acquired by the white people for the purposes of trade, and common conversation."[20] He further described it as being like the language of the Assiniboine (Siouan stock), insofar as both languages were "soft and easy to learn and speak".[21]

By the time white traders and explorers reached the people of *Kootenayan* stock, in 1792, these natives had been pushed westward from the plains into the mountains, mainly because of wars with the Piegans, against whose weapons they could offer little resistance. They still made brief excursions into their former lands, however, in order to hunt the buffalo. According to Coues, they were "so different from all other Indians in their speech that the earliest traders among them took note of it."[22] Of the traders and explorers under study here, only Fidler and Thompson appear to have encountered them. The latter recognized that the "Kootanae Indians" were of a distinct linguistic stock, and included their language in the group he described as "rough and difficult to articulate" and spoken by few, if any, outside the tribe.

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[18] Alexander Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. lxxi.

[19] Elliot Coues, ed. *op. cit.*, p. 524.

[20] J. B. Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 79.

[21] Ibid., p. 307.

[22] Elliot Coues, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 550, note 8.

The Assiniboines (also called Stone Indians, or Stoneys) were the sole representatives of the *Siouan* stock in the territory. According to Jenness, they began encroaching on the lower Battle River valley (south central Alberta) as they were pushed back to the western side of the prairies from Saskatchewan by more powerful migrating eastern tribes. Thompson described the Assiniboine as speaking "a dialect differing little from the Sioux tongue, the softest and most pleasing to the ear of all the indian languages"[23] and "so agreeable to the ear, it may be called the Italian Language of North America".[24] In this connection, and to assist the modern reader to appreciate the respective auditory qualities of the Indian languages in question, it is perhaps appropriate to quote here, in full, the comparison made by Thompson between those languages and some European languages.

> The Languages of this continent on the east and north sides of the Mountains as compared with those of Europe may be classed as resembling in utterance. The Sioux and Stone Indian to the Italian. The Nahathaway [Cree] and Chipaway [Chippewa] with their dialects to the French. The Peeagan with their allies, the Blood and Black feet Indians to the English, and the northern people, the Dinnae or Chepawyans to the German.[25]

Perhaps the best overall summary of the situation along the major east-west axis of the fur trade shortly before Henday's arrival in Alberta is found in the following excerpt from Tyrrell's preface to *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor*:

> ... the traveller was all the time among Algonkian or Cree Indians who spoke the same language, dialectically different in different places it is true, but mutually intelligible. In fact, the traveller from Montreal up the Ottawa river to the Great Lakes, and thence [...] to the Nelson and Saskatchewan rivers, was all the time among Algonkian Indians, who spoke languages akin to that of the

[23] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 326.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 307.

[25] *Ibid*., p. 361.

> Crees, and most of the members of any of the tribes encountered knew enough of the related languages of the others to communicate freely and easily with them. On this account, the white fur-traders followed these water routes with a reasonable amount of confidence, knowing that when they had learned to converse with the Indians first met in the east, they would be able to make themselves understood by, and to establish friendly relations with, the tribes in the more remote western countries.[26]

The limits of this range were, of course, found by later traders and explorers when they reached what is now Alberta and journeyed north to the Arctic, south to the Missouri, and west through the Rocky Mountains. In fact a second main east-west axis, this one involving the Athapaskan languages, was discovered to exist in the north, running from Hudson Bay (Churchill) almost to the Pacific coast. It was described by Mackenzie on his return from that coast in 1793.

When oral communication proved impossible, as it did from time to time, the natives quickly resorted to the use of sign language, at which they were quite adept, not just to communicate with their white visitors, but to carry on occasionally lengthy exchanges with members of other tribes. Several traders and explorers remarked on the ease with which the Indians, those of the plains in particular, were able to communicate with each other, sometimes for several consecutive hours, without a single word being spoken. Although sign language would seldom have been necessary within the boundaries of the future province of Alberta, given the prevalence of Cree and the other Algonkian languages, Thompson does relate one instance of sign language communication. It occurred when a few Iroquois who had migrated from the east ventured southward from Fort Augustus to hunt, contrary to the advice of western veterans at the fort, and met up with a small camp of Piegan Indians. As neither group understood the other's language, they communicated by means of signs, at which, Thompson notes, they were "tolerably experts".[27]

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[26] J.B. Tyrrell, ed., *Journals of Samuel Hearne*, pp. xii-xiii.

[27] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 314.

## *Subjects of conversation*

A general matter worth mentioning in regard to early communication between the white traders and explorers and the Indians they encountered in Alberta is the relative simplicity of the concepts that were usually discussed. As a rule, at least where matters of trade were concerned, there was no need for complex terminology or explanations. The system of bartering was well known to the Indians. Basically what the traders wanted was *furs*, in exchange for the manufactured goods they brought with them, upon which the Indians had come to depend through habitual use, and which they were eager to have. The main subjects of conversation were therefore drawn from the everyday physical and natural environment of the Indians. This was, indeed, clearly reflected in the vocabularies written down by those among the white visitors to Indian lands who had the time, inclination and ability to make such records. For example, see the–in editor Coues' words– " short and quite untechnical lists" of Indian words included by Henry in the journal of his Saskatchewan River travels and, incidentally, prefaced with this remark:

> A person thoroughly acquainted with the following short Vocabulary of the four principal languages used in the interior of the North West, E. of the Rocky mountains, is seldom at a loss to make himself understood by the other different tribes, who in general have a smattering of one or another of the following tongues.[28]

A copy of the Vocabulary referred to is included on the pages that follow.

The case of explorers was somewhat different. Not only because, in general, they were comparatively well-educated and literate, but also because what they wanted primarily was *information*. The information they were seeking was often of a geographic or ethnographic nature, which the natives were sometimes unable to provide, or simply unwilling to share. In many cases, their inability to answer the questions addressed to them could be attributed to their own lack of knowledge or to inherent deficiencies in their language. Sometimes, not wishing to displease or disappoint their visitors, the natives

[28] Elliot Coues, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 533.

would resort to what one Alberta historian calls "their familiar game of telling the white man what they thought he wanted them to say"[29] or they might simply invent a story, in keeping with their oral tradition. Needless to say, these habits did not endear them to white men who were ignorant of the underlying linguistic or cultural reasons for such behaviour.

Similarly, complications might arise if the explorer was obliged to depend on an interpreter who was less educated than himself, as Thompson found during a two-week visit to the Mandans on the Missouri, south of what is now Alberta, in the winter of 1797-98. In spite of the fact he was accompanied by René Jussaume, a Canadian interpreter and long-time resident among the Mandans, as well as a Mr. McCrachen, who had spent considerable time in the Mandan villages, the outcome of his interviews with the Indians was less than satisfactory. The following personal account of his disappointment allows for both situations just described.

> My curiosity was excited... and I hoped to obtain much curious information of the past times of these people; and for this purpose and to get a ready knowledge of their manners and customs Messrs Jussome and McCrachen accompanied me to every Village but the information I obtained fell far short of what I had expected; both of those who accompanied me, were illiterate, without any education, and either did not understand my questions, or the Natives had no answer to give.[30]

While not directly relevant to the Alberta context, this story deserves telling since, despite such apparently ineffective intercourse with the natives, Thompson was nevertheless able, during his brief stay, to write down a vocabulary of the Mandan language containing about three hundred and seventy-five words.[31] This was not a negligible achievement under the circumstances, especially by a man who is principally remembered for his talent as a surveyor.

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[29] Charles Malcolm MacInnes, *In the Shadow of the Rockies* (London: Rivingtons, 1930), p. 18.

[30] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 226.

[31] Ibid., p. lxxv.

## B. TRADERS AND EXPLORERS

In the mid-eighteenth century, ships from various countries were travelling regularly to and from the eastern shores of North America, and the Russians and Spanish were sailing along the Pacific coast. Neither true exploration of the west coast nor the maritime (sea-otter) fur trade with the Orient had yet begun, although they were only a few decades away. As well, the extent and features of the essentially unexplored wilderness between the Great Lakes and the Pacific Ocean were yet to be determined. Roughly thirty years later, the part of the map of the world in Cook's *Third Voyage* showing this territory was still woefully deficient. (See Map 4 on following page.)

Using the extensive network of waterways that were their highways under the French régime, French traders from Montreal were early arrivals in the North-West, venturing first as far as Kaministiquia on the north shore of Lake Superior, and then beyond. For many years, long before the HBC considered sending expeditions inland from the Bay, the French had been penetrating the wilderness of the North-West, as Indian wars, British rivalry, over-harvesting and increased settlement in the east caused the supply of high-quality pelts to dwindle. They had begun intercepting the lndians headed for the Bay and persuading them to part with their furs. Often this was not difficult to do, because of the family ties that had been established through French-Indian marriages, the Indians' fear of starvation or attack by enemy tribes while en route to the Bay, and the lndians' predilection for the brandy the French had to offer in exchange for their furs. The intimate knowledge of Indian languages, customs and traditions that the French had acquired was also a major contributor to their mercantile success. During two brief stopovers at French trading houses on the Saskatchewan River, while on his return trip from the Blackfoot country to York Factory in May 1755, Henday made a number of entries in his journal concerning the success of the French traders. For example, on May 25 he noted: "It is surprising to observe what an influence the French have over the Natives", and on May 30: "The French talk Several Languages to perfection: they have the advantage of us in every shape; and if they had Brazile tobacco, which they have not, would entirely cut off our trade."

There is no doubt that the traders, whether French or British, were aggressive in

their pursuit of ever-greater returns, and it was the profit motive that drove them, sometimes pell-mell, into previously unexplored and, at times, dangerous country. In the words of one historian, the traders "followed on the heels of the explorers or even pushed on ahead of them".[32]

Were it not for the comparatively few literate adventurers (most born in Scotland, England or the southern British colonies) who led trading or exploration parties and took the time to write of their experiences, we would have even fewer examples than we do of how such men from farther east reacted to and coped with the variety of new situations they faced as they travelled into the formidable expanses of the Greater North-West. Many, as a result of their previous experience and the relationships among the Indian languages already noted, were able to communicate directly with a number of the Indian tribes encountered. Still, it was impossible for them to be prepared for every eventuality. As simple a thing as a change in the direction of travel could mean that such direct communication was no longer possible and that an intermediary, often a native from the area, would have to be called upon to facilitate further travel or exchanges. The nomadic lifestyle and unpredictable behaviour of the Indians, in conjunction with the lack of a dependable food supply and the absence of sufficient, reliable information about the country to be traversed, also lent a high degree of uncertainty to the undertakings of white men in new areas.

In the pages that follow are assembled a few excerpts from the journals of such men, revealing feelings and insights recorded by them as they travelled through the then-uncivilized areas that would later be known as the province of Alberta. With the exception of Henday who, if we can judge from his written account, seems to have remained remarkably indifferent to the whole exercise, the traders and explorers exhibit annoyance and, particularly, frustration, on those occasions when they were forced, by their own ignorance of the native language, to rely on an interpreter. Evident, too, in certain cases, is a distrust of the interpreter, a suspicion–sometimes warranted–that the message was

[32] Walter Sheppe, ed., *First Man West: Alexander Mackenzie's Journal of His Voyage to the Pacific Coast of Canada in 1793* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 7.

being distorted and that the interpreter was not always a disinterested party. It is interesting to note that, while these men were able to meet the most demanding physical challenges, some occasionally found themselves totally dependent on an otherwise–in their eyes– insignificant or even contemptible Indian or Métis to help them communicate, and sometimes even completely stymied in their need to understand and be understood.

## 1. *Anthony Henday* (b. possibly c. 1724; d. ? )

Anthony Henday (or Hendry), born in the Isle of Wight, outlawed for smuggling in 1748, and engaged by the HBC in 1750, is generally recognized as the first white man to have set foot in what is now the province of Alberta. Lawrence J. Burpee, editor of Henday's journal for 1754-55, *York Factory to the Blackfeet Country*, asserts that, despite the widespread impression given by other authors that the first British traders who reached the Saskatchewan River came from Montreal, Henday, who set out from York Factory on Hudson Bay, was "the first British trader upon the waters of that great highway of the west".[33] Henday's description of the south branch of the Saskatchewan River is, in Burpee's view, "the first unquestionably authentic description of the river, as well as of the great plain lying between the North and South Saskatchewan".[34] (See Map 5 on the following page for an indication of the probable route taken.) Burpee also points out that the manuscript from which he was working included some notes made by Andrew Graham, then writer at York Fort and afterward factor at York, indicating not only that Henday "voluntarily offered his service to go inland with the natives and explore the country, and to endeavour to draw down the different tribes to the Factory", but also that he was the first of the servants at the HBC factories to venture to winter with the natives[35]. With no white companion, and as a complete newcomer to this vast, uncharted territory, Henday was

[33] Lawrence J. Burpee, *ed., York Factory to the Blackfeet Country; The Hournal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-55* (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1907), p. 314.

[34] Ibid. p. 308.

[35] *Ibid.*

completely at their mercy; hence, as historian J. G. MacGregor puts it, "...his explorations consisted of going where the natives led hid".[36] Nevertheless, there is little, if any, evidence in Henday's journal to show that he was at all fazed by his situation.

The natives in question were a band of Crees or, in HBC jargon, "Home Indians", and the guide that "had the charge of" Henday, to use the trader's own words, was Attickashish, or Little Deer. Attickashish is identified by MacGregor as "a Cree merchant who dealt with the Blackfoot".[37] While this Indian is not specifically identified as Henday's interpreter, there can be little doubt that, as the leading Indian and an experienced intermediary, he would have been the one most likely to provide the necessary interpretation during the latter's first meetings with the "Archithinue Natives", or Blackfoot, in October 1754, in what is now southern Alberta.

Before proceeding to those meetings, however, it may be worth mentioning that, earlier in the year, on July 31, the party met up with two tents of "Asinepoet Indians" [Assiniboines] and Henday recorded the following in his journal: "I smoaked with them, and talked with them to go down with me to York Fort in the summer". There is no mention of an interpreter in this case, although it would perhaps be presumptuous to assume from this that Henday was familiar enough with the Assiniboine language that he did not require one. There are several possibilities here: he may indeed have known enough Assiniboine to carry on such a conversation, although the journal contains no proof of this, and his brief time in the HBC's service, probably spent only on the Bay, would seem to argue against it; he may have meant that he talked with them through an interpreter, without actually saying that such was the case; or, as was fairly common in the Indian trade of the North-West, he and the Assiniboines may have known sufficient Cree to understand each other. Given the circumstances in which Henday found himself, the second and third possibilities seem the most likely.

On the other hand, in three of the meetings between Henday and the Blackfoot in October 1754, interpretation was clearly necessary. In only one case, however, is it clear

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[36] James Grierson MacGregor, *A History of Alberta* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972), p. 26.

[37] *Ibid.*

that Attickashish acted as interpreter. The entry in Henday's journal for October 1, when his first meeting with the Blackfoot took place, begins: "Came to us 7 tents of Architinue Indians...." Following a mention of the observance of the usual formalities of the Indian trade (the presentation of gifts, the smoking of a pipe, and so on), it continues: "By my interpreter he [the Blackfoot leader] said that he would inform their Great Leader of my coming & so left us." There is no further information given as to the interpreter in question here. The journal entry for the next meeting, however, this time with the "Great Leader" of the Blackfoot, on October 14, makes it clear that Attickashish the guide was also the interpreter. The entry reads in part:

> Attickasish my Guide, informed him I was sent by the Great Leader who lives down at the great waters, to invite his young men down to see him and to bring with them Beaver skins, & Wolves skins [...] Then they entered upon indifferent subjects until we were ordered to depart to our tents ....

The October 15 entry begins: "About 10 o'clock A.M. I was invited to the Archithinue Leader's tent: when by an interpreter I told him what I was sent for...." The curious thing here is Henday's use of the indefinite article "an" before the word "interpreter", which would seem to indicate that he did not know the person who was acting in that capacity. Or perhaps he simply did not care. In this connection, an entry made by Henday while the party was still on its way to the Blackfoot country, may be relevant. The September 22, 1754 entry reads: "The Natives behave very kind to me, except my Guide Attickashish, who is a little out of humour because I would not lend him my gun: but I take no notice, neither do I value him." This last remark is especially intriguing when contrasted with Andrew Graham's subsequent assessment of the same individual as "a valuable leading Indian".[38]

On October 16, after first going on a hunting trip, Henday was again invited to parley with the Blackfoot leader. A portion of his entry for that date reads: "When 1 came home I was invited to the Leader's tent again where were all the Assinepoet Leaders, etc. I thought it very curious as there were four different languages among us." Although not

[38] Lawrence J. Burpee, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 326, note 1.

explicitly identified, the logical assumption from the journal's contents is that the languages were Cree, Assiniboine, Blackfoot and English. Unfortunately, instead of expanding on this subject and explaining how communication was effected under those circumstances, Henday suddenly veers off onto another path, merely relating that the Blackfoot leader instructed the trader and his party of Crees to go in a different direction from the one he would be taking, and stated that he would see them again in the spring, when his people came down after the buffalo. The record of the spring meeting contains nothing of relevance to the subject of interpretation, as Henday entered only a brief mention of the substance of the conversation, with no indication at all of how it was conducted.

## 2. *David Thompson* (b. 1770; d. 1857)

The next envoy sent inland by the HBC to the plains Indians, just over thirty years later, was David Thompson. He was a marked contrast to Henday in many ways. His *Narrative*, unlike Henday's journal, is a rich source of information on many subjects, not the least of which are the Indian languages and communication between the whites and the Indians of the North-West.

Thompson was born and educated until the age of fourteen in England, then apprenticed to the HBC in 1784. That Thompson questioned the company's custom of sending to England for educated boys to become apprentice clerks is clear from the following observation:

> It had been the custom for many years, when the governors of the factory required a clerk, to send to the school in which I was educated to procure a Scholar who had a mathematical education to send out as a Clerk, and, to save expenses, he was bound apprentice to them for seven years. To learn what; for all I had seen in their service neither writing nor reading was required...[39]

In fact, as we learn from the *Narrative*, during his first winter in North America (1784-85), which was spent at Churchill Factory under the veteran trader and explorer Samuel Hearne,

[39] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 27.

he expressed the fear that he would lose his writing skills "for want of practice", and felt the want of learning so keenly that he arranged to borrow books from the officers of the factory. It seems Thompson wasted no time acquiring the predominant Indian language as well, for lie apparently had little difficulty communicating with the two young Crees placed in charge of him for a trip from Churchill to York. Much later on, Thompson would refer to the Cree Indians, or Nahathaway as he called them in their own language, as "my old friends".

In October 1787, at the age of 17, he was sent inland to the great western plains, together with six others, to gain the friendship of the Piegan Indians and to secure their trade. Thompson's own account of the object of this journey inland reads as follows: ... to find the 'Peeagan Indians' and winter with them: to induce them to hunt for furs, and make dried provisions; to get as many as possible to come to the houses to trade, and to trade the furs of those that would not come.[40]

He spent that winter (1787-88) in a Piegan camp on the Bow River (southern Alberta) and was probably the first white man to see the site of present-day Calgary. While there, he lived with an old chief, Saukamappee, and gained intimate knowledge of the language and ways of the Piegan people, which would prove invaluable to him in the 1800s, when hostilities between the Piegan and Kootenay Indians threatened to prevent continued trade with the natives of the Rocky Mountains. Thompson's attempt to persuade the prairie Indians to deliver furs to the HBC posts, was, however, no more successful than his predecessor's had been, despite the fact that, by then, the Company had established inland posts on the Saskatchewan River.

Ten years after this journey, and following thirteen years in the service of the HBC, Thompson switched allegiance and joined the NWC, which offered him the opportunity he relished to combine surveying and fur trading. The NWC was, as J. B. Tyrrell, editor of the *Narrative*, explains, "anxious to obtain some accurate knowledge of the extent and character of the country in which it was carrying on its business".[41]

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[40] *Ibid*., p. 324.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. x1iii.

It was during the many years spent criss-crossing the territory now within Alberta's boundaries, on behalf of his new employer, that Thompson had occasion to regret using an interpreter to deliver a message. The "interpretation" provided by the latter resulted in personal embarrassment and unforeseen expenses for the trader. The incident began when Thompson, wishing to recognize certain services that an Indian chief whom he knew quite well had performed for him when he was out on the plains, sent the chief "a fine scarlet coat trimmed with orris lace". He sent the present by the interpreter (not identified in the *Narrative*), who was instructed to deliver the straightforward message that the coat was compensation for the services rendered. The interpreter, however, as Thompson later learned, felt the message was too simple and decided to embellish it a little, but in so doing distorted it in such a way as to surprise and offend the intended recipient. This chief therefore sent the coat, along with the oral message, to the chief at the next camp who, in turn, passed them along, and so it went until the coat ended up in the hands of a very old chief, who was not expected to live. The old chief was very grateful and told the messenger to thank the trader for sending him such a fine coat to be buried in. When the misunderstanding was eventually cleared up, the chief who was supposed to have received the coat was, Thompson relates, very angry with the interpreter. The chief was so angry in fact, that he told Thompson not to employ the interpreter among his people, as the man was regarded as "a pompous fool", whose lies would cause his death. (According to the *Narrative*, the chief's prophecy came true two years later.) As a result of his interpreter's irresponsible performance Thompson was, of course, obliged to face the consequences and pay the chief the value of the coat in other goods.[42]

## 3. *Alexander Mackenzie* (b. probably 1764; d. 1820)

Alexander Mackenzie is best known for two voyages of discovery he made from the

[42] *Ibid*., p. 364.

place that served as his headquarters for eight years: Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabaska[43]. The first journey took him north from there to the Arctic Ocean along the river that would later bear his name; the second took him west across the Rockies, via the Peace and Parsnip Rivers, to the Pacific Ocean. They are both recorded in his 1801 publication, *Voyages from Montreal*. In his estimation, these journeys in search of a North-West passage clearly proved "the non-existence of a practicable passage by sea, and the existence of one through the continent".

### a) *First Expedition: Summer 1789*

Although on his first expedition Mackenzie did not find an outlet to the Pacific as he had hoped to do, he did discover the Mackenzie River watershed and thus opened up a vast new trading territory.

When the party left Fort Chipewyan on June 3, 1789, the crew consisted of four Canadians (two of whom were accompanied by their wives), and, curiously, a German, about whom no more is said. Also accompanying Mackenzie were an Indian by the name of English Chief[44], the chief's two wives, and two young Indians of his tribe. The latter were engaged to serve "in the twofold capacity of interpreters and hunters." The farther north the party progressed, however, the less able they were to serve in the former capacity, as the languages encountered became increasingly foreign to them.

They undoubtedly lacked the experience of their leader, who would have seen more of the country and met more of its inhabitants than his young followers, although at times he, too, ran into problems. Being Chipewyan, the Indians accompanying Mackenzie were able to converse with the Slave and Dog-rib Indians, but not with some of the other tribes met along the way. Mackenzie seems to have placed a great deal of confidence in the

[43] The American trader Peter Pond (b. 1740; d. 1807 ?) had built the first trading post in the Athabaska district in 1778. In 1787, Mackenzie was appointed to replace him in that district and made Fort Chipewyan his base.

[44] He had acquired this title because he frequented the HBC posts on the Bay and was very attached to the English interest.

English Chief, until even the Chief, being tired of the journey and anxious to return to Athabaska, became disgruntled and uncooperative.

On one occasion, after having "ordered" his interpreter to "harangue" the natives, and having obtained "little satisfactory intelligence" from them regarding a river to the west, Mackenzie recorded his suspicions that the natives knew more about the country than they were willing to communicate, or than the interpreter was willing to reveal. (About the same time he also allowed in his journal that some natives they had encountered previously had in fact mentioned the river to him, but that he had dismissed their stories as either "a misunderstanding of my interpreter" or "an invention which, with their other lies, might tend to prevent me from proceeding down their river.")[45] Later in the journey, the English Chief became "very unwilling to ask such questions as were dictated to him", and then, to avoid having to go in search of natives along the river banks, refused to comply with Mackenzie's requests altogether. In one case, the Chief suggested Mackenzie send the young men instead, which prompted this entry in the explorer's journal: "I could not trust to them, and at the same time was become rather doubtful of him." The situation eventually deteriorated to such an extent that Mackenzie openly reproached the Chief for his behaviour and, when the latter in turn expressed his displeasure with the reproaches, took the opportunity to, in his words, "make him acquainted with my dissatisfaction for some time past." The Chief, being irritated by Mackenzie's remarks, informed the explorer that he would not accompany him any further. Mackenzie, however, fully cognizant that he "could not well do without" the Chief and his relations, made some conciliatory gestures, including inviting the Chief to eat and have "a dram or two" with him. These gestures proved to be a suitable antidote for the Chief's malaise.

### b) *Second Expedition: Summer 1793*

In October 1792, Mackenzie had left Fort Chipewyan on the first leg of his second expedition with the intention of proceeding up the Peace River as far as the NWC's "most

[45] Alexander Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

distant settlement", which at that time was Fort Forks (at the forks of the Peace and Parsnip rivers), where he would pass the winter trading. No mention is made of an interpreter accompanying him, but this entry for October 13 indicates there was one: "On the 13th at noon we came to the Peace Point; from which, according to the report of my interpreter, the river derives its name; it was the spot where the Knisteneaux [Creel and Beaver Indians settled their dispute".[46]

Although Mackenzie had been in the Athabaska country since 1787, he had not yet seen any Beaver Indians [Athapaskan stock]. He met them for the first time on October 20, and correctly observed that, although they appeared from their own language to be of the same stock as the Chipewyans, they had adopted the manners and customs of their former enemies, the Crees, and spoke the Cree language.[47] Mackenzie's second voyage of discovery actually began, then, from Fort Forks. He started out on May 9, 1793 with "an equipage of ten people", with "two Indians as hunters and interpreters", leaving to take care of the fort during the summer his "winter interpreter" and one other person. As far as Mackenzie's efforts to obtain local guides and communicate with the natives are concerned, the journal for this voyage of discovery contains many echoes of the one four years earlier: the growing dissatisfaction of the hunters and interpreters as they were taken farther and farther away from their families and familiar country; the alarm, apprehension and superstitions of the Indians in the party and those met en route; the methods used to persuade local Indians to accompany the party as guides and to introduce Mackenzie to the neighbouring tribes; and the explorer's frequent suspicion that information necessary for the continuation of the voyage was being withheld by his interpreters.

While the travellers remained within the belt of Athapaskan languages stretching from east to west across the northern territories, Mackenzie's interpreters could easily converse with other tribes. Even Mackenzie was able to understand a few words. This is evident from an occurrence at a camp of Sekani [Athapaskan stock], where one of the tribe was in conversation with the interpreters at the fire in the evening. Mackenzie reports as follows:

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[46] Ibid., p. 123

[47] Ibid., pp. 125-126.

" I understood enough of his language to know that he mentioned something about a great river, at the same time pointing significantly up that which was before us."[48]

Once across the mountains and southbound, however, communication became more difficult. Increasingly frequent in the record of the journey are such comments as the following: "my interpreters... performed this part of their duty with great reluctance", "my interpreters ... added to our perplexity by their conduct" or even, in one case, " my interpreters ... were so agitated with fear as to have lost the power of utterance". Eventually, where the languages of the interpreters and those of the new tribes encountered were, by Mackenzie's account, "mutually unintelligible", verbal communication of any kind became impossible. Nearing the farthest point of his journey, he was obliged to resort to the use of signs, rather than speech, to communicate with the Bella Coolas of the west coast. Despite the fact that the party was well treated by these natives, the disappointment and frustration Mackenzie must have felt is clear from the following journal entry: "The communication, however, between us was awkward and inconvenient, for it was carried on entirely by signs, as there was not a person with me who was qualified for the office of an interpreter."[49]

### *4. Alexander Henry (the Younger)* (b. ? ; d. 1814)

Since Alexander Henry was already an experienced fur trader by the time he entered the territory now known as Alberta via the Saskatchewan River, he had acquired some knowledge of the Indian languages further east, which stood him in good stead in the North-West. While wintering at Fort Vermilion (Alberta) in 1808, he made the following entry in his journal: "I expect to be visited by numerous tribes from the S.–Blackfeet, Sarcees, Fall Indians, Blood Indians, and Assiniboines–and on the N. by about 100 tents of Crees." Absent from the list of southern Indians are the Piegans, who traded at Fort Augustus, which was closer to their lands near the Rocky Mountains.

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 328.

His lack of knowledge of the Piegan language and the unavailability of an interpreter later created an awkward obstacle for this trader, however, as we learn from his journal entries of October 1810, concerning the Columbia supply brigade. The brigade having been stopped at Rocky Mountain House by the Piegans, who were at odds with the Flat Heads [Salishan stock] and wished to prevent supplies going across the mountains to them, Henry and his fellow trader, Mr. Bethune, conspired to find some way to outwit the Piegans and send the canoes on their way. Since Henry was concerned about the situation, "having told so many falsehoods to the Indians concerning those canoes", as he put it, he would have liked to learn more about the Piegans' view of the situation. This was not possible, however, for want of an interpreter. Henry's journal entry reads in part as follows: "The lndians appear suspicious of our motions, and talk secretly among themselves; unfortunately, I have no person who understands their language well enough to learn their ideas about the business."[50]

Having, of necessity, decided on a plan for dispatching the canoes, Henry found himself faced with a further complication: fearing the possible consequences of taking the supplies to the Piegans' enemies, the men would not set out without either Henry or Bethune leading them. At the same time, Bethune, who also feared possible retaliation by the Piegans, did not want to remain at the post. Henry therefore agreed to stay behind, and described his predicament in this way:

> I therefore proposed that he should go along with them, and 1 would remain here alone, although I had scarcely ever seen a Piegan before, did not understand a word of their language, and had no interpreter who understood Saulteur–Cree being the only tongue in vogue here, of which I understand a little.[51]

In short, as he wrote a week later, he found himself "unpleasantly situated for want of an interpreter for the Piegans."

While in this unpleasant situation, his inability to communicate directly with the

[50] Elliot Coues, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 644.

[51] *Ibid*., p. 648.

Piegans may have evoked some memory of his earlier travels southward to the Missouri country, complete lack of familiarity with the tribes he encountered there (Mandans, Pawnees, Cheyennes, and so on) posed numerous problems. It is not difficult to imagine, for example, how powerless he must have felt dealing with the Cheyennes, when he would have been little more than a bystander under the conditions he describes this way:

> It is a very hard task to deal with them; all must go by signs, unless one understands the Assiniboine language, and then he must get a Sioux to interpret. But some of them understand the Pawnee tongue, and as some of our party spoke that language, their conversation between one and her was principally by means of an interpreter.[52]

## C. INTERPRETERS

It is axiomatic that the need for interpretation is directly dependent on the extent to which an individual is familiar with the languages spoken in the country or area to be visited. When the earliest French traders and explorers arrived at Hochelaga (now Montreal) and Stadacona (now Quebec City), all the languages of the native inhabitants of the country were completely foreign to them. They were thus obliged to rely heavily on interpreters, or "truchements", as they were then known in New France. The very first interpreters in Canada were two Indians who, in 1534, were unceremoniously "recruited" by Jacques Cartier, taken to France and taught the French language, then brought back to Canada on a subsequent voyage to serve as interpreters. A different approach, that of using "resident interpreters", was introduced by Champlain in the early seventeenth century. These were young Frenchmen who were encouraged, if not compelled, to live with the Indians and adopt their way of life. Their job was "to defend the interests of the traders and

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 383.

administrators of the nascent colony".[53]

As these French intermediaries became assimilated into the Indian culture, took Indian wives through conventional marriages or marriages *à la façon du nord*, and adopted the nomadic lifestyle of their new relations, the motives for westward travel from the early colonies were no longer just politico-economic (the search for a North-West passage and for furs), but also personal. Many Métis, the offspring of such French-Indian marriages, were to become indispensable to trading parties advancing into the territories of the North-West. Because of their intimate knowledge of French and Indian ways, the French and Indian languages, and the country, they were often employed by fur-trading companies as hunters, guides or interpreters. Despite the frequently acknowledged need for their services in those capacities, however, they were generally not highly regarded by their employers, as has already been seen from the journals studied and will become still more obvious in the pages that follow. Eventually, with the merger of the NWC and the HBC in 1821, and the consequent consolidation and English monopoly, they would be replaced by British clerks of the HBC, who were encouraged to learn the Indian languages to enhance their prospects of promotion.

To assume that the interpreters did nothing but interpret would be to assume too much. In actual fact, it would seem that interpreting often represented only a small proportion of their duties at trading establishments or as members of trading or exploration parties. It is important to bear in mind in this connection that the native populations were very sparse in relation to the vast territories they occupied. Similarly, the number of trading houses in those territories, even at the height of the competitive era, was small in relation to the areas served. As a result, the occasions on which an interpreter was actually required to interpret were comparatively few and of short duration. In addition, trapping was initially a winter occupation only, and most opportunities for exchange between traders and Indians occurred in fall, when the trade goods arrived from the east, and in spring, when the furs were collected for the eastbound brigades. For explorers, the situation was

[53] For an account of the "recruitment" of Dom Agaya and Taignoagny, and an account of the resident interpreters, see Jean Delisle, *Au Coeur du trialogue canadien/Bridging the Language Solitudes* (Ottawa: Secretary of State. 1984), p.2 and Jean Delisle, *La Traduction au Canada, 1534-1984* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), p. 51.

reversed, as most journeys of exploration took place in summer, once trading was complete and the waterways were free of ice.

Since interpreters were required usually only when Indians came to the establishments to trade or when traders or explorers went out to meet the Indians, they were expected to earn their keep by performing additional services, the nature of which was dictated to a large extent not only by their terms of employment, but also by the location and circumstances in which they found themselves. As a general rule, however, the other duties an interpreter might be expected to perform included hunting and fishing to provide sustenance for the fort or party; guiding traders and explorers through unfamiliar territory; serving as an envoy or messenger; informing the employer of the opposition's activities; or assuming temporary charge of a trading party or post. Frequently, however, the latter duty exceeded the interpreter's abilities, as Alexander Henry learned when, having trusted the storehouse to the care of his interpreter Desmarais during his absence, he returned to find everything "in the greatest confusion". In performing their varied tasks, interpreters were also not exempt from the risk of losing their lives, a risk faced by anyone venturing among uncivilized and warring nations. "Michel Bourdeaux", an interpreter who had accompanied David Thompson westward across the Rockies, and "Michel Kinville who also spoke the language" were sent by Thompson to accompany a hunting party of Salish Indians eastbound into Piegan country. Both these men were shot dead in the battle that ensued and were "deeply regretted" by Thompson, who described them in his *Narrative* as "brave faithful and intelligent" men.

As a rule, interpreters were uneducated, illiterate, and were ranked as "men" rather than "gentlemen", occupying a position lower than that enjoyed by clerks but higher than that of the common canoeman. When circumstances required the use of an interpreter, the immediate availability of someone who could (or who claimed to) understand the lndian language in question was often a more important consideration than that person's level of intelligence, education, character or social standing. It is no doubt precisely their lack of social standing that accounts for the general anonymity of interpreters in the early journals of the North-West fur trade. Countless times, the word interpreter is preceded in these journals by "an", "they', "my", or "our", with no information provided as to the identity of

the individual involved. Often, only a Christian name or surname is given, and very seldom a title, the use of titles being usually restricted to those of the higher classes. Coues, writing of "the difficulty experienced in sifting fur-trade annals for the identification of personal names", in his notes to Henry's journals, explains the situation as follows: " persons of the grade of clerk and upward were 'gentlemen', generally 'mistered' in speaking and writing, all the others being men', to whom no form of address or title was applicable, as a rule."[54] He later adds: "...interpreters are not usually given any title."[55]

The interpreters that the traders and explorers relied on were, not surprisingly, almost exclusively male. Among the notable exceptions was the Indian wife of the Canadian half-breed Paul Bouche, or Boucher (usually called Lamallice). Governor Simpson of the HBC, writing at Fort Wedderburne, his Athabaska headquarters in the winter of 1820-1821, referred to the latter as a "useless drone", and to the former as a "thrifty Amazon" who, in his opinion, was "the best Interpreter about the Fort"[56]. Another exception worth noting was Mr. Andries' Indian wife, who was engaged by the HBC as an interpreter to replace Mr. Andries' assistant, the Canadian interpreter François Mandeville, who died at Fort Wedderburne on 17 October 1820[57]. Two letters written by Governor Simpson in late 1820, one dated November 14 and the other November 30, show that he was willing to make a number of concessions in order to keep this "useful woman", on whom he admitted the Company depended "in a great measure as an Interpreter."[58]

In general, interpreters may be classified into three broad groups in the context of the North-West fur trade: native Indians, NWC " engagés" and HBC servants.

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[54] Elliot Coues, ed., *op. cit.*, v. 1, p. 222

[55] *Ibid*., v. II, p. 544.

[56] There was a second man by the name of Bouche at the Fort during this time, Wakan (or Waccan) Bouche, a Canadian half-breed engaged as an interpreter. For more information on this individual, and on other fort personnel, see Appendix B (Biographical) to E. E. Rich, ed., *Journal of Occurrences in the Athabasca Department by George Simpson, 1820 and 1821, and Report* (London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1938).

[57] E. E. Rich, *Journal of Occurrences*, p. 113.

[58] Ibid., pp. 109 and 136.

## 1. *Indians*

Just like the first interpreters in Canada, the first interpreters in the territory now known as Alberta were Indians. Indeed, the earliest record of interpretation in this territory would appear to be Anthony Henday's journal of his travels to the Blackfoot country in the winter of 1754, and the first Indian-to-English interpreter, his guide Attickashish. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the languages that an interpreter might be required to speak in the area now defined by Alberta's boundaries depended largely on the direction in which the party he accompanied was headed. The language of his employer was, naturally, also a consideration. In Henday's case, the employer (the HBC) was English-speaking, his leading Indian's native language was Cree, and the Indians they set out to meet were the Blackfoot, who roamed the prairies east of the Rockies. While French may rightly be considered the universal language of the fur trade from a European perspective, a strong argument could be made for regarding Cree as the native *lingua franca* of the trade, particularly where Alberta is concerned. The ability to speak Cree was generally considered a valuable asset. Traders in the northern areas, however, particularly in the Athabaska region, needed interpreters familiar with the Athapaskan languages, primarily Chipewyan.

During the period under study, the Indians of the far North-West had not yet been exposed to the white man's civilization and its contingent religious and educational institutions. Having no written language, they enjoyed a society characterized by an age-old oral tradition. Their primitive lifestyle resulted in an intimate acquaintance with the land, its features and resources, while their wanderings brought them in contact with other tribes. They served the white man as interpreters in two different ways. Some, through repeated contact with English-speaking or French-speaking traders, gained a working knowledge of one or both of the two main European languages and could thus interpret between that language (or those languages) and their own. At the same time, however, many could also speak the languages of other tribes. In some cases, this was the result of having been captured in intertribal wars; in others, it stemmed from a desire for distinction. According to Thompson, some Indians became interpreters, albeit he does not actually use

that word, as a means of distinguishing themselves in some way from the rest of their tribe. What he wrote on this subject was the following:

> That equality among the Natives however strictly held, does not prevent a great part from wishing to distinguish themselves, in some manner and as there cannot be many remarkable Warriors and Hunters, a few mix with other tribes and learn their languages, and become acquainted with their countries and mode of hunting.[59]

It was perhaps in part a recognition of this desire for distinction that ostensibly led the NWC to employ the designation "interpreter" not as an accurate reflection of the individual's abilities or of the duties he was expected to perform, but as a form of incentive to retain the services of Indians who had grown dissatisfied with the conditions of their employment. This accusation was leveled at the opposition in October 1820 by Governor George Simpson of the HBC in the following terms: "Our opponents finding that the Indians were about to desert them this year have adopted a new plan, by engaging nearly all their best Hunters in the capacity of Interpreters, and giving them a full equipment in addition to their usual Credits."[60]

Indian guides and interpreters, especially in the most remote areas, were generally recruited as necessary from local encampments, occasionally in much the same manner as the services of Cartier's Indians had been secured over two centuries earlier. The white man's presents (knives, kettles, axes, beads or other trinkets), it seems, were not always sufficient inducement for the Indians to leave their homes and families, or to keep them from deserting when they were so inclined. Alexander Mackenzie, for example, having attempted in vain, at the expense of valuable travelling time, to convince a "new recruit" to accompany his party, made the following oblique reference in his journal to the use of physical persuasion: "...we may be said, after the delay of a hour, to have compelled him

[59] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 366.

[60] E. E. Rich, ed., *Journal of Occurrences*, p. 76.

to embark."[61]

While the French were generally very much at ease with the Indians, for the reasons elaborated earlier in this chapter, the English, on the whole, lacked any such tradition of intimacy with the natives, tended to regard them with suspicion, and consequently adopted a different philosophy in their treatment of them. One area in which the NWC and the HBC seem to have agreed, however, was the form in which Indians were to be compensated for the services they rendered. Whether performing services for the French or the English, and regardless of the nature of the services, Indians engaged in the North-West appear to have received no wages, their sole compensation being in the form of trade goods which, from all accounts, were not of the best quality. Around 1820, however, a time when manpower was in high demand, Iroquois guides, interpreters and canoemen working for the HBC in Athabaska, for one example, did receive wages and sometimes even, when circumstances warranted, "a trifling advance" on already-high wages to induce them to renew their contracts.[62]

Although for normal purposes of the trade Indian interpreters were equal to the task they were required to perform, a problem could develop where high numbers or the concepts of space, distance and time were involved. Thompson summarized the difficulty as follows: "The Natives do not understand high numbers, but they readily comprehend space, though they cannot define it by miles and acres; and their Clock is the path of the Sun."[63]

Without Indians, however, the white traders and explorers had little chance of survival, let alone of success in trading. This was true particularly in remote areas, where the latter depended on the natives to show them the way, supply them with food, and convince neighbouring tribes that they came in peace. Some were honest enough to admit their dependency, if only to those near to them. One example is Alexander Mackenzie who,

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[61] Alexander Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[62] E. E. Rich, ed., *Journal of Occurrences*, p. 186.

[63] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 101.

while expressing in a letter to his cousin Roderick little confidence that his two Indians knew much more about the country than he did, allowed that without lndians he had "little hopes of success"(May 8, 1793 letter).

## 2. *NWC "engagés"*

The need for the British to employ Canadians to assist them in strengthening their claim to Rupert's Land was quickly recognized by some, although discounted by others. In 1768, in a letter addressed to Lord Shelburne, Sir Guy Carleton suggested the sending of military men inland as explorers, and the extension of explorations to the Pacific Coast. While he did not foresee any difficulty finding officers and men who would be willing and able to perform such a service for their King, he placed a great deal of emphasis on the need to "join with them some Canadians to serve as guides and interpreters", attempting to persuade Lord Shelburne as follows:

> Your Lordship will readily perceive the advantages of such discoveries, and how difficult attempts to explore unknown parts must prove to the English, unless we avail ourselves of the knowledge of the Canadians, who are well acquainted with the country, the language and manners of the natives.[64]

His arguments fell on deaf ears. The NWC, however, shared his views. (The names of some of its interpreters are found on the general list of partners, clerks and interpreters attached to this work as Appendix C.)

Most of the NWC's hired men were in fact French-Canadians and Métis. Interpreters belonged in the category of hired men, and their place in the overall structure of the NWC is evident from this description of a typical NWC trading party:

> A typical trading party might consist of a partner or *bourgeois*, a clerk, an interpreter, a guide, an several dozen canoemen, the voyageurs. The partners and clerks usually were British, with a high proportion of Scots. This was a time of economic hardship in Scotland and many of her young men left to seek

[64] Alexander Begg, *History of the North-West* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1894), v. 1, p. -89.

> better fortune in the colonies. The lower ranks were filled mostly by the French or Métis–men of mixed European and Indian blood. [65]

While it would be reasonable to say that the vast majority of the Canadians and Métis were uneducated and illiterate, there were, as always, exceptions. For example, one notable Métis who was employed for a time as an interpreter by the NWC was Jean-Baptiste Cadotte, whom David Thompson was delighted to meet while in the Red River/Assiniboia region, and of whom he wrote:

> Mr. Baptiste Cadotte was the son of a french gentleman by a native woman, and married to a very handsome native woman, also the daughter of a Frenchman: He had been well educated in Lower Canada, and spoke fluently native Language, with Latin, French and English.[66]

The fact that Cadotte's father was a "french gentleman" is undoubtedly significant, and it would be logical to surmise that a Métis' level of education would depend to a large extent on the place of residence and social status of the father, and the importance ascribed by the latter to a formal education. Also, it would be wrong to suppose from this one incident that Thompson was, on the whole, favourably disposed toward French Canadians or Métis. In fact, while–unlike many of his fellow traders–he was obviously sympathetic toward the native Indian population, his attitude to the Canadians or Métis was not noticeably different from that of most of his British and British-American contemporaries. In brief, it may be said that these races, like the Indians, were generally regarded as something of a necessary evil for the successful conduct of the trade in the North West. While the specific talents or innate intelligence of certain individuals were often openly acknowledged and even rewarded, the pervasive sentiment seems to have been one of disdain. A good example of this paradoxical attitude is found in Thompson's *Narrative*. After referring, appreciatively, to a group of seven Canadians as "a fine, hardy, good-humoured sett of Men", Thompson proceeds to condemn them in these terms: "They are all extremely ignorant, and without

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[65] Walter Sheppe, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[66] J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *Davidson Thompson's Narrative*, p. 252.

the least education, and appear to set no value on it."[67] Another good example is found in one of Henry's journals where, having first disparagingly described his interpreter Desmarais as a "careless, indolent fellow" for having failed to keep the storehouse in order, the trader grudgingly pays him a compliment with the following remark: "Like most of his countrymen, he is much more interested for himself than for his employer, though he has a good salary for his abilities, which are not extraordinary, further than as interpreter." [68]

In the late 1790s, according to Alexander Mackenzie, the NWC had in its employ 50 clerks, 71 interpreters and clerks, 1,120 canoe men, and 35 guides[69]. Some of these were hired for the summer, leaving Montreal on May 1 for Grand Portage, and returning to Montreal at the end of September. For the interior, however, separate personnel was required. Since interpreters were needed mainly in remote areas, they would normally belong to the group Mackenzie describes as being hired "by the year, and some times for three years"[70]. Clerks and apprentice clerks, by comparison, were generally engaged for five or seven years. At about this time, just prior to 1800, the aggressive competition in the North-West meant that men were asking higher wages, and signing for shorter periods. The two largest companies could naturally offer the best terms, thus leaving few good men available for a small concern just starting out. In his "Reminiscences", Roderick McKenzie commented as follows with regard to the personnel of the new and short-lived concern in which his uncle, Alexander Mackenzie, was a principal player: "The guides, commis-men and interpreters were few in number and not of the first quality.[71]

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[67] *Ibid*., p. 209.

[68] Elliot Coues, ed., *op. cit*., p. 100.

[69] Alexander Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii. During 1802, all nine of the North West Company's posts and outposts along the Saskatchewan had a total staff of 98, made up of 2 partners, 16 interpreters and clerks and 80 common men. At the same time, the three neighboring posts in the upper Athabasca District were manned by 2 partners, 4 interpreters and 44 common men. This is reported by J. G. MacGregor in *John Rowand, Czar of the Prairies* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), p. 11.

[70] *Ibid*.

[71] Roderick McKenzie, *op. cit*., p. 11.

Remuneration was traditionally in the form of wages and an equipment, which consisted of clothing and provisions. Unlike the wages of the clerks or apprentice clerks, which were calculated in pounds sterling, the wages of the Canadian and Métis interpreters were calculated on the basis of the *livre*, the old French (or Montreal) currency[72] In actual fact, however, as a result of the system of advances and credits offered by the Company, and the excesses so prevalent in the uncivilized areas, their wages were most often paid in the form of goods from the Company's stores, for which they were frequently charged inflated prices. Many of the men incurred such heavy debts that they had little hope of ever paying them off.

Furthermore, it would appear from Mackenzie's report and other sources that the designation"interpreter" was quite flexible and was frequently used in combination with that of "clerk" or "guide". The wages varied proportionally. Mackenzie outl ined the situation of NWC interpreters at the turn of the century as follows:

> Those who acted in the two-fold capacity of clerk and interpreter, or were so denominated, had no other expectation than the payment of wages to the amount of from one thousand to four thousand livres per annum, with clothing and provisions. The guides, who are a very useful set of men, acted also in the additional capacity of interpreters, and had a stated quantity of goods, considered as sufficient for their wants, their wages being from one to three thousand livres.[73]

It also becomes clear, from Mackenzie's account and others, that despite their low rank, the NWC interpreters were still much better off than the men who paddled the canoes, the *voyageurs*. Sheppe reports that the latter subsisted on "hominy, boiled with fat".[74]

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[72] According to a 1799 calculation that equates "Equipment & necessaries for 9 clerks at £20" with 2,160 *livres*, it appears that £1 was equivalent to 12 *livres* at that time. (L. R. Masson, *op. cit.*, P.61.) By 1822, when the maximum wages for HBC interpreters were set at 1000 *livres*, or £50 (see sub-section 3), it would appear that £1 was then equivalent to 20 *livres.*

[73] Alexander Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

[74] Walter Sheppe, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

While the *voyageurs* were clearly excluded from the common mess at the Grand Portage terminus, the interpreters were included, according to this account of the situation in 1801 before the company's field headquarters moved to Kaministiquia (present-day Fort William) a few years later:

> The proprietors, clerks, guides, and interpreters, mess together, to the number of sometimes an hundred, at several tables, in one large hall, the provision consisting of bread, salt pork, beef, hams, fish, and venison, butter, peas, Indian corn, potatoes, tea, spirits, wine, and plenty of milk.[75]

This picture, however, was to change dramatically following amalgamation with the HBC in 1821.

## 3. *HBC servants*

The HBC had traditionally placed a great deal of emphasis–an unwarranted emphasis in the opinion of young David Thompsonon hiring English boys with some education, in mathematics particularly, to become apprentice clerks at its North American posts. It is perhaps worth noting here that also listed among the HBC servants on the Bay in the latter half of the eighteenth century were a few "linguists". The HBC's practice of looking to England to supply personnel contrasted directly with the practice of the NWC, which, as has been noted, was to engage personnel in Canada or, particularly, Montreal. Another notable difference in the hiring practices of the two companies was that, whereas the NWC seemed to favour men with an independent, entrepreneurial spirit, the HBC sought out those who would today be described as "company men".

When these two companies eventually joined forces in 1821, having been more or less compelled to do so, the North-West fur trade was in a very unhealthy, disorganized state: the Indians had been debauched and excessive alcohol consumption generally had become a major problem; the large numbers of Indian women and half-breed children attached to the NWC posts had become a serious financial burden; animals were being

[75] Alexander Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. xlvi.

trapped in summer as well as winter, and formerly lucrative fur areas had been overharvested; wages were extravagant, many more men than necessary were employed in some areas, the men's debts to their employers were excessive, and accounts and inventories were unreliable and confused; corruption was rife, with partiality and favoritism often determining opportunities for advancement at the expense of merit and ability.

Pursuant to the 1821 agreement that joined the NWC and the HBC under the latter name, substantial and desperately needed reorganization took place. The whole of the fur territory was divided into four Departments, with the Northern Department encompassing the vast, uncivilized area between Hudson Bay and the Rockies, and the U.S. border and the Arctic. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the circumstances, the man appointed to manage this troublesome department was neither a trader nor an explorer. George Simpson had been sent by the HBC to take charge of Athabaska in 1820, and although he had no experience in the fur trade, he was an experienced businessman. He listened carefully to his seasoned companions en route to that embattled area, learning a great deal from their stories and advice. Among other things, he had intelligence, leadership ability and business acumen in his favour. In 1821 he was made governor of the Northern Department. By 1826 he was also governor of the Southern Department, and thirteen years later was appointed governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land.

When first made Governor of the Northern Department, Simpson had only one year's experience of the fur trade, but he quickly remedied that deficiency by travelling widely throughout his assigned territory, which included the Athabasca and Saskatchewan River regions of present-day Alberta. He received his instructions from the Committee in London, and the correspondence between Simpson and the Committee (in particular the letters of February 27 and March 8, 1822 from the Governor and Committee, and Simpson's reports of July 16 and 31 replying to these), as well as the Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department for the years 1821 to 1831, provide valuable and detailed information about the initial period of consolidation and reorganization of the fur

trade in the North-West following amalgamation[76]. Some of the major changes that were to be introduced included substantial reductions in personnel, and incentives to encourage as many of the supernumaries and their Indian wives and half-breed children as possible to settle in the Red River area. The new HBC believed it was "both dangerous and expensive to support a numerous population of this description in an uneducated & savage condition" and that it would be "impolitic and inexpedient to encourage and allow them to collect together in different parts of the Country, where they could not be under any proper superintendence" (March 8 letter). The reductions in personnel affected the lower ranks especially, as the Company began "concentrating the business" and replacing most of the traditional, small, lightweight canoes with the heavier but more economical York boats, in order to reduce the excessively high cost of transporting men, goods and furs to and from the regions of the far North-West. For the operation of the boats, Orkneymen were preferred to Canadians, and a large number of the latter were consequently discharged.

Since the object of the new company was "to select the best men for the business" (March 8 letter), stringent selection criteria were to apply to the employment of new personnel as well as to the placement and promotion of existing personnel, especially clerks. At the same time, the company recognized the need to accommodate the many clerks "who have been long in the Country and who are possessed of very considerable merit and ability" and thus could not reasonably be expected to accept the lower terms on which " clerks capable of conducting the business which falls to their management" could be procured under the new circumstances. Taking the circumstances into consideration, the Committee therefore proposed to divide the clerks into four classes and prepared a list of the names of those it believed ought to be in the different classes. The Councils of the four Departments were instructed to perform "a very careful and attentive investigation" of this classification and to submit "a report of the character for general good conduct and ability" of all individuals included in the list (February 27 letter). Apprentices, upon completion of their current engagements, were to be eligible for placement in the third class, but first

[76] The former documents are found in E. E. Rich, *Journal of Occurrences* and the latter in R. Harvey Fleming, ed., *Minutes of Council: Northern Department of Rupert Land, 1821-31* (Toronto: The Champlain Society for the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1940).

a full report as to their conduct and abilities and the opinion of the Council on their merits was to be sent to London. In addition, it was stipulated that "none ought to be admitted into the 3d Class, who are not competent Clerks in writing and Accounts as well as good traders." As well, they were expected to learn "the Indian Language."[77] This latter requirement is significant in the context of interpretation insofar as one planned result of the extensive consideration given to the selection of clerks was the eventual elimination of interpreters. This was spelled out in the February 27 letter from the Governor and Committee in London to Simpson in the following terms:

> This is a class of men whose services may be dispensed with in a few years, if all the young Clerks are required to learn the Indian Language; and in future we shall expect the Clerks to qualify themselves in this respect, and no Apprentice ought to be placed on the 3d list of Clerks, until he is reported qualified to act as Interpreter.

The wages proposed by the Governor and Committee for a few gentlemen "whom it would have been proper to include in the list of Chief Traders if it had been practicable" were deemed by the Northern Council to be more than the state of the trade could afford, and Simpson was obliged to inform his superiors that the Council had decided and the Gentlemen in question had agreed that, although they greatly appreciated the Company's "generous and liberal" offer, which exceeded "their most sanguine expectation", the proposed salary of £175 per annum should be reduced to £150 per annum over a three-year contract. Simpson also informed his superiors that the Council was "humbly of opinion" that the wages for clerks, which the Committee proposed should vary from £50 to £150 per annum according to education and abilities, were also " considerably too high" and should vary instead from £40 to £100 per annum. For the common men, a revised, fixed scale of wages, calculated to be sufficient without equipments, or any allowance for the same" was proposed by the Committee. Lower wages were to be largely offset by a corresponding

[77] The use of the singular form by both the Committee and Simpson in referring to the language question could be seen as supporting the view that only one of the native languages–undoubtedly Cree–was considered essential to the trade.

reduction in the prices charged to the men for purchasing goods at the posts. A moderate price was to be fixed on all articles except spirits which, it was felt, should be kept at "rather a high price" in order to discourage excesses. Despite the HBC's rationale that the best plan was "to fix a fair scale of wages and to allow every man to dispose of his money in the way most agreeable to himself" (February 27 letter), it was not possible to implement these changes immediately. As Simpson explained to the Committee, the European servants, knowing that their services were "absolutely required" for the purpose of navigating the York boats, since the Canadians were not yet accustomed to that mode of transport, were unwilling to accept the proposed terms. In addition, Simpson explained, the custom of giving equipments to the Canadians was "co-eval with the Fur Trade" and it would be not only impracticable but also dangerous to attempt to implement the Committee's proposals in the first year. Such attempts would, Simpson explained, incur "very serious risks of Mutiny which might be attended with alarming consequences".

The HBC also attempted to convince all its men of the advantages of being paid in European rather than Montreal currency. Servants still on Canadian terms when their contracts expired in 1825 were offered inducements to accept the new scale. A resolution was passed at a July 1825 meeting of the Council to the effect that all debts exceeding 1,000 *livres* due by such servants to the Company should be reduced to that amount "on condition of their rehiring for 3 years on the European Scale".

Furthermore, although a fixed scale of wages was proposed, the Company recognized that some allowance would need to be made for the differences in working conditions in the various areas. The fixed rates were to apply to "the Buffalo Countries and those places where the work is easy and the living tolerably good", such as the Saskatchewan River valley, whereas for places such as Athabaska. "where the work is more severe and the people exposed to considerable risk of privations and bad living", higher rates were anticipated.

Interpreters were, obviously, not unaffected by the Company's efforts to streamline its operations. Paragraph 21 of the February 27, 1822 letter from the Governor and Committee specifies that interpreters ought to be paid "in proportion to ability and steadiness" but not in excess of £50 per annum. Apparent from the following excerpt from

Simpson's reply are the previously mentioned decision of the Council not to introduce European terms immediately, and the precariousness of the interpreters' position within the new organization.

> Interpreters are now superfluous in many parts of the Country, they are a Class of men who took shameful advantages during the heat of opposition and as their Engagements expire will be discharged where not required; we think that their Wages should in no case exceed 1000 Livres and a resolution has been passed accordingly. The necessity of being acquainted with the Indian language has been impressed on the Clerks, many of them are proficients in it already and it will in future be considered a necessary qualification to preferment.

The resolution referred to is contained in the Minutes of the Council for July 1822. It granted interpreters, in addition to the 1,000 *livres* in wages, "the Equipment of a Guide."

In July 1824, a new tariff for sales to HBC servants and a new, lower scale of wages were introduced. The maximum wage for interpreters "when absolutely required and not exempt from assisting as Summer men or at other duties when called upon" was not to exceed £25; that is, one-half the rate of two years before. The Minutes for the July 1825 meeting of the Council, which set the scale of wages for all new engagements throughout the Northern Department, show that interpreters were to receive even less, under the same conditions: wages of from £15 to £25, with the actual amount "to be regulated by their age and capacity".

In addition to the fixed rates, as previously mentioned, HBC servants at some posts were entitled to an additional allowance for the privations and hard living they were required to endure. The July 1824 Minutes stipulated, however, that any extra remuneration allowed over and above the contract wages had to be "particularized and satisfactorily accounted for in the statement of annual Wages and balances of the District". Otherwise, such additional expenses to the Company would be charged to the person who had authorized them. This was not an idle threat, as can be seen from the Minutes of the following year. The personal accounts of some officers were charged with the difference resulting from their having engaged too many men or having paid Canadian wages; however, the account of William Connolly, Chief Factor, was spared this penalty, as he had

" assigned satisfactory reasons for engaging Baptiste Bouché dit Waccan as Interpreter at £30 p. Annum Wages instead of £25". Unfortunately, the "satisfactory reasons" remain a mystery.

One more significant change that was introduced during this period, and that created a striking contrast with the picture painted by Mackenzie of the camaraderie characteristic of the Grand Portage terminus just twenty years earlier, is found in the Minutes of a meeting of the Northern Council from July 1822. At that meeting, it was resolved that, after the 1822 season, no guide or interpreter should be permitted to mess at York Factory or inland in the company of Chief Factors, Chief Traders or Clerks in charge of posts. The reason? "In order to draw a line of distinction between Guides and Interpreters and the Gentlemen of the Service". The message was clear: the status of interpreters, most of whom were still of mixed French and Indian blood, would be lowered along with their wages.

By this time, men thirsty for profits, adventure or knowledge, or a combination of all three, had pushed inland from Montreal or Hudson Bay beyond the farthest reaches of civilization. Those whose main interest was the trade in furs had established far-flung posts. some of which would give rise to settlements and eventually evolve into modern towns and cities. At the same time, those such as Thompson and Mackenzie, who had a penchant for exploring and surveying, had added new and vital details to the map of the territory as far west and north as the Pacific and Arctic Oceans. Yet how could any of this have been accomplished without some form of communication between these men and the natives they encountered? These first, and only transient, white immigrants to the territory now known as Alberta, who have received most, if not all, of the credit for what was achieved, would have met with little success in their undertakings had it not been for those who helped them to find their way and, more importantly, to talk to the native residents with whom they wished to traffic; that is, their guides and interpreters. This group of assistants, by allaying the natives' fears, by explaining the white man's presence and his intentions, in short, by acting in a sense as the white man's ambassadors, were indispensable to the achievement of his goals. Yet they were largely taken for granted or even disparaged by their white employers, who were, as is evident from the preceding pages, keenly aware of their dependence, although they seldom acknowledged it to others.

Whether the interpreters were Indians hired on an *ad hoc* basis, NWC " engagés", or HBC servants, they were expected to assume duties other than just interpreting, the job of interpreting being generally regarded as a fairly easy one on its own. Although their language skills were required only irregularly, when the need did present itself, these skills, not to mention the interpreter's knowledge of Indian customs, could mean the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful or, in some cases, even fatal exchange. J. G. MacGregor, describing the situation at Fort Augustus (near future Fort Edmonton) in 1803 summed up the linguistic requirements in this way: "At all times the fort had to have enough interpreters on hand so that no matter which tribe came along someone could speak its language."[78] While this remained the case for many years, especially in the Fort Augustus-Fort Edmonton area, the changes announced by the Northern Council of the HBC in the early 1820s, including those regarding the future status of interpreters, had noticeable repercussions. Increasingly, the interpreting duties that had formerly been performed by those of mixed French and Indian blood were assumed by English-speaking clerks of the HBC who had learned one or more Indian languages, or by those of mixed British and Indian blood. Another evolution, this one concerning the subjects of interpretation, was also on the way.

[78] J. G. MacGregor, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

## Chapter 2

# MISSIONS, SETTLEMENT AND PROVINCEHOOD

## A. CONTEXT

### 1. *Political*

The period comprising the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth was to see many changes, particularly in the nature and distribution of political power. This applied not only to Europe, but also to British North America.

Around the mid-1800s, on the western side of the North American continent, Spain had withdrawn, Russia was in retreat, and Britain and the United States were competing for possession of the Oregon territory (now the states of Washington and Oregon) which, it became clear, Britain would be unable to hold for want of settlers. The Oregon territory, like the other western lands of the United States, was rapidly filling up with American settlers, as the race to populate the North-West got under way in order to support claims to the area.

To the north-east of that territory lay the lands now known as the province of Alberta. By the 1850s, the country north of the North Saskatchewan River and around Fort Edmonton was comparatively well known and well travelled by its still-scarce white inhabitants, who were almost exclusively HBC officers and men. In contrast, southern Alberta, or the Bow River District as it was then called, remained essentially *terra incognita*. One reason this district remained practically untouched was the general belief that the land was of little interest to either the fur trader or the farmer. In 1822, the so-called Bow River Expedition had declared the southern lands unfit for settlement, a view the HBC, concerned for its profits, was reluctant to see changed. Another reason was the sinister reputation of the constantly warring plains lndians, particularly those belonging to the Blackfoot Confederacy.

The general lack of interest in the area that is now Alberta was to change markedly with events in the 1860s and 1870s. The year 1867 saw the creation of the Dominion of

Canada, through the union of the colonies of Upper Canada (Ontario), Lower Canada (Quebec), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. This was followed in 1869 by the transfer of Rupert's Land from the HBC to the government of the new federation, with the exception of some properties retained as HBC reserves, a fact that would later affect the pattern of development in several regions of Alberta. The year 1869 also saw the creation of the North-West Territories, whereby the Dominion government became responsible for finding solutions to the fundamental problems prevalent in these vast, empty and unsurveyed regions.

In 1870, the Manitoba Act was passed, primarily in response to pressure from the citizens of Canada to annex the North-West. Twenty-six years later, on June 23, 1896, the failure of the Conservative government to pass remedial legislation in the Manitoba School Question led to a victory at the polls for the Liberal party under Wilfrid Laurier. Not only did this election have a considerable impact on the future of the western prairies because of the period of growth and prosperity that followed, it also had significant long-term repercussions on education and language rights in the North-West.

In 1871, British Columbia entered the federation and, by the terms under which it did so, the Dominion was committed to the building of a railway to the Pacific Ocean within the next ten years. As the route of the proposed transcontinental railway was to pass through the heart of the prairie land occupied only by lawless American whiskey traders and the free-roaming, uncivilized plains Indians, it was deemed essential for future settlement that the whiskey traders be expelled from the prairies, and the Indians confined to reservations.

For many years the HBC's scattered trading posts, or "forts" as many of them were also known, were the sole line of defence against a potential influx of Americans into British territory, and the only refuge in the event of trouble between the white man and the Indian. They were also the only semblance of any legal authority in the entire North-West until the arrival of the newly created North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) on the

southern plains in 1874.[1]

With the arrival of this semi-military force, whose mandate was essentially to keep the peace in the Territories and retain the country for Canada, the American troublemakers did, in fact, pull back south of the border. With regard to the confinement of the Indians on reservations, several members of the force, including at least one of their interpreters, had roles to play at the signing of Indian Treaty No. 7 (Blackfoot Crossing, 1877). By this treaty, the Blackfoot and their allies surrendered to the Canadian government, in exchange for reserved lands and other considerations, the territory that today is southern Alberta. See the following pages for a map of the Indian reservations (Map 6) and a plan of the Canadian Indian treaties (Map 7).

It was perhaps ironic that, after years of no sustained European presence, the Bow River District, or the southern part of the future province, with Calgary as its main centre, would be the first to experience the rapid growth and expansion that resulted from the arrival of the transcontinental railway. In 1905, however, when the name Alberta was extended from one of four provisional districts of the North-West Territories to include portions of the other three, thus establishing the present province of Alberta, it was not the young commercial centre of Calgary, but rather the older city of Edmonton, the geographic centre of the province, that became the provincial capital.

Several thousands of miles away, Britain and its European neighbors–whose sons were, ironically, endeavouring to convince the plains Indians to stop warring amongst themselves and adopt the white man's ways–continued their customary squabbling. International crises due to complex, ever-changing systems of alliances, as well as social unrest and economic depressions, were commonplace, creating a climate conducive to emigration.

[1] Recruits were required to be able to read and write English or French; they were not required to read, write or speak any of the Indian languages.

## 2. *Economic*

In 1850, the North-West was, on the whole, still generally regarded as an unattractive, unprofitable wilderness, with no immediate prospect of permanent settlement. Finally, however, the British government was convinced of the advisability of finding out more about these wild, unpeopled expanses, and in 1857, after the initial plans were laid by the Royal Geographical Society, the Colonial Office sent an expedition led by John Palliser to perform a kind of economic survey. This survey contributed to a greatly increased awareness of the economic potential of the land west of Lake Superior.

Supporting further exploration, and seeking an end to the exclusive rights of the HBC–the sole employer and dominant economic force in the North West–were commercial interests in Britain, the United States and Canada. Anticipating the expansion of settlement to the frontier regions, they envisaged openly competitive trade and wider markets. Around mid-century, a period during which the glory of the fur trade was "fast dimming", in the words of Dr. H. E. Rawlinson, one of Chief Factor John Rowand's biographers, the HBC had already begun to experience some of the many changes and reorganizations that were, in the space of a few decades, to shift its focus from the fur trade to retail outlets and real estate. The transfer of Rupert's Land to the government of Canada in 1869 signalled the end of the Company's trade monopoly.

These events, together with the demise of the American Fur Trade Company south of the border in 1864, the sudden disappearance of the buffalo from the Canadian prairies in the late 1870s, and the steadily growing numbers of settlers, effectively put an end to the plains lndians' traditional way of life and made the nomadic tribes reluctant participants in the agricultural sector of the white man's economy.

The discovery of gold–on the Fraser River in 1858, in Montana, and decades later in the Klondyke–also had an effect on Alberta's early economic development, as did the discovery of substantial coal deposits. Coal was in great demand to feed the steam-powered machinery, ships and locomotives that were characteristic of this era of mechanization and industrialization. In the settled countries of the world, such equipment was already revolutionizing manufacturing, as well as domestic and international travel,

not to mention giving rise to a new class of wealthy industrialists and financiers, at a time when the vast economic potential of the essentially vacant western prairies was only just being recognized. In the North-West, what was needed to bring in people and provisions, as well as to carry products out to waiting markets, was a suitable mode of transportation. This need was met by the railway.

### a) Palliser Expedition

The explorations of the Palliser expedition were to cover three distinct regions: the country between Lake Superior and Red River; the country between Red River and the Rocky Mountains; and the mountains themselves, with the territory stretching beyond them towards the Pacific Coast. According to Irene Spry, author of The *Palliser Expedition: An Account of John Palliser's British North American Expedition 1857-1860*, the mandate of the expedition was the following: "to map all three regions; to examine possible transport routes to and through them; and to appraise their capabilities for settlement, reporting on their agricultural, mineral, and other resources and keeping careful botanical, zoological, geological, meteorological, and magnetical records."[2] See the following page for a map of the expedition's travels (Map 8).

Although Palliser had hoped to travel alone through the prairies and southern Rockies, he was not a scientist, and since scientists were indispensable for gathering the desired information, the final party included a botanical collector (Eugene Bourgeau), a magnetical observer (Thomas Blakiston), a geologist-naturalist-medical man (James Hector), and an astronomical observer (John W. Sullivan), who also acted as secretary of the expedition.[3]

Spry describes Palliser, the leader of the party, as "an adventurous, cheerful young Irishman" who "spoke French, ltalian, German, and Spanish fluently". She does not

[2] Irene M. Spry, *The Palliser Expedition: An Account of John Palliser's British North American Expedition, 1857-1860* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1963), p. 18.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 10ff.

indicate whether Palliser spoke any of the Indian languages; however, it is worth noting in this connection that, in 1847, Palliser had journeyed "far beyond the farthest limits of settlement" on the American prairies, becoming acquainted with the half-breed and native inhabitants of the Upper Missouri. This experience was excellent preparation for the adventure on which he was to embark ten years later, north of the 49th parallel in British territory. Nevertheless, the expedition's work was cut out for it because, as Spry points out, the knowledge that Indian and Métis alike had of the country they travelled across was "born of personal experience and communicated only by word of mouth, not committed to maps and written records."[4]

The expedition was therefore bound to require interpreters to help it gather the information it sought. Like the earlier explorers of the far west, the expedition members were to find that while some of the half-breed or Indian guides and interpreters were reliable and, indeed, provided invaluable assistance, others could be troublemakers, or simply could not be trusted. An interesting study in contrast in this regard is created by John Ferguson, the expedition's original chief guide and interpreter, who conspired to deter Palliser from his proposed route in August 1857[5], and the highly regarded James McKay (later the Hon. James McKay) who subsequently replaced him (see Section C).

Lieutenant Blakiston, who left the expedition the following summer on an independent trip to survey the Kootenay Pass, was skeptical of this group of assistants. According to Spry, Blakiston "had come to have no great faith in the so-called guides; in his opinion they were seldom worth their pay."[6] Similarly, in the summer of 1859, during the expedition's foray into the Blackfoot country, Palliser grew tired of the constant problems he faced with his two Blackfoot guides, Petope and Amoxapeta.[7] At one point, when these two were being especially troublesome and it began to look as though the

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 210-227

expedition might have to continue without any Blackfoot guides, Palliser appeared to be concerned more about the potential difficulty of locating water than about potential problems of communication.[8] When, eventually, the guides did leave the party, Palliser was, by Spry's report, "rather glad to be rid of them", as they had proved "expensive and useless ".[9]

In the 1850s, before civilization closed in on its empire and the Canadian Pacific Railway changed the face of the western prairies, the HBC still offered–as it had for many years–invaluable information and advice to those who travelled in the North-West. Among those who received its help during those years were wealthy but jaded Europeans seeking adventure; the early missionaries; and, on still rare occasions, men sent on official government business, such as John Palliser. One form of help was the knowledge and expertise of seasoned HBC officers and men such as Mr. Brazeau, who had spent many years in the American Indian fur trade, spoke six Indian languages in addition to Spanish, English and French, and was in charge of Rocky Mountain House when Palliser arrived there in February 1859. Among the voyageurs assigned by Sir George Simpson–still Governor-in-Chief of the Company–to take the Palliser expedition from the Great Lakes to the prairies, was one of his personal servants, a Cree Indian named James Beads. Beads was called upon at least twice to serve as a replacement guide/interpreter: once when Blakiston's original guide defected during the 1858 trip through the Kootenay passes; and again when the normally reliable Peter Erasmus (see Section C) declined to accompany Hector through the Rockies the following summer.

Between 1857 and 1860, the Palliser expedition collected vast amounts of both scientific and general information on the soils, climate, vegetation and minerals of the western prairies, foothills and mountains, as well as on the customs and languages of the native inhabitants. The coal deposits that would, before the end of the century, attract foreign miners and give birth to communities such as Lethbridge were noted; and the richness of the soil in the regions south of Edmonton, later to be the home of farming

[8] *Ibid.*,p. 221.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

communities such as Lacombe, Wetaskiwin and Olds, was duly recorded. In addition, Palliser's official report included short vocabularies for four of the Indian tribes encountered. Perhaps its most significant contribution to future developments on the prairies, however, was the information its members obtained both directly (through firsthand investigation) and indirectly (through Indian reports) about the various passes through the mountains. The question of mountain passes was crucial in determining the route that would eventually be selected for the intercontinental railway.

### b) *Railways*

Although the age of steam came to North America in the 1850s, steam-powered land transportation, in the form of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), did not enter the territory now known as Alberta until the 1880s. Prior to the CPR's arrival in Calgary in 1883, the only access to that country had been along waterways by canoe or boat, or over land by horse and cart, both modes of transportation that had precluded settlement or development on a large scale. Because trains could move large quantities of goods and large numbers of people effectively and efficiently over long distances, rail transportation became a major factor in the settlement and development of Alberta, beginning–somewhat unexpectedly–in the south. Alberta historian MacInnes notes in his book entitled *In the Shadow of the Rockies* that it is nearly impossible to overestimate the importance of the construction of the CPR to the history of southern Alberta. Indeed, he asserts that, as a result of the fulfilment of the Canadian government's commitment to build a railway to the Pacific coast, the area "passed at one stride from an almost useless wilderness to a valuable field of investment and development"[10]. Speculation in land, and the establishment of communities and businesses along main and branch lines accompanied the construction of extensive rail networks, leading to a similar transformation of the central and, subsequently, the northern areas of the soon-to-be province. Coal mining and cattle and horse ranching became the principal economic activities in the south, while

[10] MacInnes, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

grain, dairy and mixed farming were concentrated in the central and northern areas.

### c) *Agriculture, Settlement and Immigration*

In 1852, when Father Albert Lacombe (see Section B) arrived at Fort Edmonton, the population of that fort–the most important trading post west of Hudson Bay–was about 150 souls. The residents were HBC officers and men, including at least one interpreter under contract, and their Indian or Métis families (40 men, 30 women, 80 children). Outside the fort which, historically, would "eclipse utterly the glories of old Fort Chipewyan in the North"[11], there was no settlement. Palliser, who spent the winter of 1858 at Fort Edmonton, reports that little agriculture was carried on, a situation he ascribed partly to "the want of acquaintance with even the leading principles of agriculture", but principally to "the disinclination of both the men and women to work steadily at any agricultural occupation."[12] No doubt the fact that the battleground of warring Indian tribes was often but a short distance from the fort would also have been a discouraging factor.

In 1864–just three years prior to Confederation–Fort Edmonton was still without a single settler. By that time, however, the Methodist and Roman Catholic missionaries in the Saskatchewan country had established a few permanent missions on lakes or rivers in the vicinity of the fort and further afield. With the help of their Indian or mixed-blood converts, who tended to congregate around the mission buildings, they had land under cultivation on a small scale. The most successful mission of this kind was, without any doubt, the Catholic mission at St. Albert, situated about nine miles north of the fort. Under the capable direction of Father Albert Lacombe, it became for a while a kind of tourist attraction for travellers to Edmonton.

Other than missionaries, the first white men to follow the traders and explorers into

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[11] Katherine Hughes, *Father Lacombe, The black-Robe Voyageur* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1920), p. 47.

[12] Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, *James Hector, Explorer* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1983) p. 42.

the wilderness were well-to-do big-game hunters and tourists impelled by curiosity or a sense of adventure, or simply seeking a temporary escape from "the unexciting ease and elaborate conventions of polite ninenteenth-century society".[13] Next came the gold-seekers, the Mounted Police, railwaymen and surveyors, comparatively few of whom stayed in the country.

Several circumstances cleared the way for the arrival of settlers on the prairies from the 1870s on. These were principally the signing of the Indian treaties, the advent of rail travel, the surveying of the western prairies, and the system of land grants and aggressive advertising campaigns introduced around the turn of the century by Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier and his Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton. One early interruption in the otherwise comparatively smooth period of transition was the Indian Rebellion of 1885. Once peace and order were restored, however, the trickle of settlers soon swelled to a flood, with immigration and colonization societies contributing to the influx of people seeking homes, land and work. According to the author of *From the Buffalo to the Cross*, Sifton's dynamic campaign in Europe and the United States brought more than two million settlers to the prairie provinces by the year 1900, 38% of whom were from Britain, 34% from the United States, "principally from the Mid-west states and often first generation Europeans", and 26% from Europe, Germany, Russia and the Ukraine.[14] The arrival of immigrant settlers, besides giving rise to new market opportunities, created an urgent need for schools, hospitals, courts and so on, as well as for people who, besides speaking English, the dominant language of administration, could communicate in the languages of the newcomers. At first, only the pioneer missionaries, nursing and teaching sisters, and the North West Mounted Police–all with limited resources–could provide any kind of response to the needs in these areas. As the territory acceded to provincehood, however, the primary responsibility for meeting such needs passed to government.

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[13] Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, p. 2.

[14] M. B. Venini Byrne, *From the Buffalo to the Cross: A History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary* (Calgary: Calgary Archives and Historical Publishers, 1973), p. 206.

## 3. *Linguistic*

The changing political and economic contexts in the territory now circumscribed by Alberta's boundaries resulted in corresponding changes in the linguistic context. A rather sudden shift occurred in the proportion and distribution of the various populations and, consequently, in the importance of the languages spoken by these populations. Cree, French and English were for all practical purposes the linguistic currency of the fur trade and the early missions; however, with the decline of the trade and its contingent exodus of Cree- and French-speaking HBC servants, the confinement of Indians on reservations, the influx of immigrants whose mother tongue was none of these languages, and the eventual creation of the province of Alberta out of a portion of the North-West Territories, the linguistic profile of this territory was definitively altered.

### a) *Indian Languages*

Most experienced HBC officers and servants knew Cree, which, in the 1850s, was still the most commonly understood Indian language in the North-West. When Father Lacombe arrived at Fort Edmonton in 1852, he found that, although more than half a dozen languages were spoken about the fort–English, French, Gaelic, Blackfoot, Assiniboine and some Beaver–Cree was the common denominator and all traders of two or three years' standing spoke it.[15] Some also picked up other Indian languages useful to the trade in the areas to which they were posted. In the Edmonton area, this meant principally Assiniboine and Blackfoot. Artist Paul Kane**,** who visited Fort Edmonton in the 1840s, wrote: "Seven of the most important and warlike tribes on the continent are in constant communication with the fort, which is situated in the country of the Crees and Assiniboines, and is visited at least twice yearly by the Blackfeet, Sar-Cees, Gros-Vents, Pay-gans and Blood

[15] James G. MacGregor, *Father Lacombe* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1975), p. 80.

Indians."[16] John McDougall, who accompanied his missionary father to Fort Edmonton in 1862, later recorded the following: "Thirteen different peoples, speaking eight distinct languages, made this post their periodic centre"[17] He, however, does not specify the eight languages in question. In some cases, we learn from Spry, Cree was more popular than French among those of mixed Cree/French heritage. She notes that when Dr. Hector of the Palliser expedition arrived at a camp of half-breeds from Lac Ste Anne (near Edmonton), whom he had been trying to find during the 1858 hunting season, "even those of the men who could speak French preferred to speak Cree".

The early missionaries, who initially had minimal, if any, knowledge of the customs or languages of the Indians they came to instruct, were obliged at first to rely on interpreters. Most, however, realizing the value to their work of speaking directly to the natives in the latter's own tongue, endeavoured–with varying degrees of success–to master the native idiom themselves. Two notable exceptions in this regard were the Methodist ministers Thomas Woolsey and George McDougall, who always relied on interpreters to convey their divine messages (see Section B).

The Blackfoot language posed problems in a number of cases, partly because it was a difficult language to learn, but also because it was difficult for those with an inadequate or no knowledge of the language to find a Blackfoot interpreter who was suited to the work at hand, available when needed and, most of all, dependable. This the Rev. Rundle, the Belgian Jesuit priest Father Pierre Jean De Smet, and Captain John Palliser, among others, found out during their travels through Blackfoot country north of the 49th parallel. In this connection, the following excerpt from a May 31, 1841 letter from the Rev. Rundle to James Evans, his superintendent, deserves mention: "You will perceive what a predicament I am in respecting a Blackfoot interpreter. Mr. Bird told me there was no want of interpreters among the Americans. But there is no one in this District properly

[16] Lower, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[17] John McDougall, *Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe: Pioneering on the Saskatchewan in the Sixties* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1896), p. 12.

qualified for the office."[18] There is a certain irony here, as it was precisely the pro-American attitude and "fine promises" of the Bla'ckfoot interpreter James Bird (see Section C), that led both the HBC and the early missionaries to distrust him.

The Kootenay language, too, posed problems for the Palliser expedition, as it had for earlier explorers. Blakiston, still on the east side of the mountains, upon hearing a Kootenay speak the language, found it to be "most guttural, and unpronounceable for a European, every word appearing to be brought up with the utmost difficulty from the Kootenay's extremities".[19] In dealing with the Indian languages, however, the expedition found–as others had before it–that when all else failed "the language of presents" could be clearly intelligible, and sign language could provide a sometimes remarkable degree of communication. Spry describes an encounter on the west side of the mountains between Palliser's party and a Kootenay in these terms:

> A Kootenay Indian, the first human being they had seen on the west side of the mountains, now appeared. Though not one of them could speak a word of his extraordinary, chuckling language, he nevertheless succeeded in informing them that he had seen Lieutenant Blakiston's party; that they had passed five days previous; that no traders had come to the Kootenay Fort yet; that the Colvile Indians had plundered them of their goods; and a wonderful amount of news besides, all by means of certain signs intelligible enough to their Indians and half-breeds.[20]

"Sign talking" was generally not as effective, however, when used by Europeans. For example, one day the following summer, Palliser, being led by two Indians with whom he could communicate only by signs, was unable to persuade his two Indian guides to budge,

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[18] Hugh A. Dempsey, ed., *The Rundle Journals, 1840-1848* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta and Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1977), p. 74.

[19] Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, p. 171.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

with the result that he lost a day's valuable travel time.[21]

Before the missionaries arrived in the North-West, no serious effort had been made to give the Indian languages of the country a written form. This might well have been because, while some Indian tales and so on had been translated into English, at Fort Chipewyan for example (see chapt. 1, sub-section A.3.b), the missionaries were the first to feel the need to translate anything into the aboriginal languages. Their communication needs were different from those of the traders who had preceded them into the country. Since the missionaries were few in number and the natives they wished to reach spent much of their life ranging far and wide throughout the country, the most effective way of ensuring that the Scriptures were a constant presence in the Indians' lives was to provide them with a tangible reminder or, in other words, a written copy from which they could learn even in the absence of their Christian advisers. The great Plains Cree chief Maskepetoon was one of the first to be given a translation of a portion of the Scriptures, which had been done by Rev. Steinhauer and Ben Sinclair (see Section C).

It was in fact the missionaries, with the help of bilingual or multilingual assistants intimately acquainted with the languages in question, who gave the Indians a written language. The written form of the language employed a system of syllabics, which replaced the generally unsatisfactory method of phonetic transcription. The syllabic system was used by several missionaries to prepare dictionaries and grammars as well as to translate scriptural passages, hymns and so on (see Section B). Clearly, however, conveying the Word of God effectively or, to put it in modern terms, "getting the message across" meant not only translating "the Word" from English or French into the languages of those who were to receive it, in a way that would be comprehensible to them, but also teaching the Indians to read it and perhaps even to write it themselves for the benefit of others.

### b) *French/English*

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 265.

In mid-century, the population of the HBC forts was still primarily French-speaking, mainly because the number of French-Canadian and Métis servants was still high. However, with the decline of the fur trade and the subsequent changes in the Company's orientation, many of these people left the Saskatchewan River district and retired to the Saint Boniface area (Manitoba).

In 1876, the chief factor at Fort Edmonton decided it was time for the Catholic mission that had existed on the Company's property for many years to be removed and relocated in the emerging Edmonton townsite. According to E. J. Hart, author of "The Emergence and Role of the Elite in the Franco-Albertan Community to 1914", this decision may be said to have marked "the birth of Alberta's French-speaking community as it exists today".[22] A new church, retaining the name St. Joachim's, was constructed the following year. After 1880, according to Hart, a new class of French-speaking arrivals–craftsmen, builders, merchants and professionals–came to the area "to test their luck in the budding economic life of the new settlement". St. Joachim's provided a nucleus around which these newcomers could establish themselves and "tended to act as a focal point for their religious and social activities". The missionaries' role in the new town thus eventually came to resemble that of a curé in a typical French-Canadian parish.

Given the declining proportion of French-speaking inhabitants in the territory due to the more or less concurrent emigration of fur-trade employees and influx of non-French-speaking, non-Catholic immigrants, and given the increasing predominance of the English language, the French-speaking Catholic missionaries grew concerned about protecting their language and culture, as well as maintaining the Catholic faith. To counteract the effects of the change in population mix, they actively encouraged settlers to come to the prairies from France, Belgium, and Quebec, and even directed their efforts to repatriating French-Canadians from the eastern United States. Many of the new arrivals were encouraged to settle in rural areas, frequently around existing mission stations, thus creating small, homogeneous, agricultural colonies in which the French language and

[22] E. J. Hart, “The Emergence and Role of the Elite in the Franco-Albertan Community to 1914", in *Essays on Western History in Honour of Lewis Gwynne Thomas* (Edmonton: U of Alberta Press, 1976), p. 161.

culture and the Catholic religion could survive. This pattern of settlement can still be seen today in the concentrations of Francophones within the province of Alberta, particularly north of Edmonton. (See Map 9 on following page.) Archbishop A. Taché, Bishop J .-B. Morin and Father Albert Lacombe played significant roles in this context. At the request of the Archbishop, Father Lacombe dutifully, although with great reluctance, left his Indian missions in the far west in 1872 to serve as fund-raiser and coloniser for his Church for a period of almost ten years. Missionaries who encouraged this type of immigration and settlement assumed the role of missionary-colonizers and, in this sense, were acting as agents not only of their Church, but also of the Dominion government.

Nevertheless, with the majority of new immigrants to the prairies either speaking English or wishing to learn English rather than French, the use of the French language in the North-West became a controversial issue within the Catholic church, as well as in the schools and the Legislative Assembly.

Bishop Morin's journal (1890-1897), for example, reveals that the sermons of Catholic priests were sometimes translated into English. Although Latin was ostensibly the common language of the Church for a "sermons were preached alternately in English and French".[23] In 1915, the parish of St. Patrick in Lethbridge, despite its long association with the French-speaking Oblates, appealed to Bishop John T. McNally, the first non-French-speaking Bishop in the west and head of the newly created diocese of Calgary, for an English-speaking, secular priest.[24]

Closely linked with the question of the Catholic church and language were the questions of schools and language, and legislative proceedings and language. Although the responsibility for education had initially been assumed by the missionaries, it subsequently passed to the North-West Legislative Assembly. Thus, when Mr. Frederick Haultain moved, in January 1892, that the proceedings of that Assembly should thereafter be published in the English language only, and not in both French and English as before, the

[23] Alice Trottier et al., eds., *Glimpses of the Franco-Albertan Past* (Edmonton: Le Salon d'histoire de la francophonie albertaine, 1981), p. 85.

[24] Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 235 ff.

repercussions were far-reaching. In effect, as historian Maclnnes points out, adoption of that motion meant that ultimately "the dual language system was eliminated both from Territorial politics and Territorial education", although some leeway was apparently allowed. According to MacInnes, under the school ordinance of 1892, "it was enjoined that all instruction should be conducted in English, but when the trustees in a particular district desired it, primary courses in the French language could also be given."[25]

With respect to the language of current affairs in what is now Alberta, both French- and English-language newspapers were flourishing towards the end of the nineteenth century. The former faced greater difficulties with regard to the speed of publication and distribution, however, as illustrated by an apology in one issue of *L'Union*, which included the following plea: "Consider also that we have to translate..."[26]

### c) *Other Languages*

Although from the time white men arrived there had always been isolated occurrences of languages other than French, English or the Indian tongues in the North-West, it was not until late in the nineteenth century, as foreigners started arriving en masse and western Canadian society became increasingly pluralistic, that the question of other languages began to pose serious problems.

The missionaries were among the first to encounter difficulties. Because of their mixed congregations (mixed in terms of language, culture and education), there was an undeniable need for bilingual or, even better, multilingual preachers. The predominantly French-speaking Catholic Church, in particular, despite the Oblates' efforts to increase the francophone population, was forced to adopt a more universal approach to language.

Law enforcement officers also had a difficult task, especially in southern towns such as Lethbridge, where there were many foreign workers who had been brought in to work

[25] MacInnes, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

[26] Trottier et al., eds., *op. cit.*, p. 118.

the coal mines, as well as many Indians or half-breeds. In regard to the situation there in the 1890s, according to Captain Deane of the NWMP, "it was necessary to publish all public notices in some half-dozen different languages, in order to be sure that they would be understood by all".[27] Further, in 1892, in his official report for that year, Deane included the following scathing remark concerning the difficulty the force had in securing evidence from certain Hungarian and Slavonian miners in court:

> It frequently happens, in trying cases in which these people are concerned, that it is necessary to have two interpreters, one to translate from Hungarian into Slavish, and the other from Slavish into English, and when a witness lays himself out to lie through two interpreters, of whose benevolent neutrality he is assured, he has the game entirely in his own hands.[28]

The language of instruction in schools threatened to become a particularly thorny issue, as the authorities were dealing not only with the question of French and English, but also with the desire of newer minorities to have their children receive instruction in their mother tongue. Indeed, much of the discussion on educational matters centred around considerations of religion and language. To give some idea of the nature and extent of the problem, the following quotation from the 1898 report of the Superintendent of Education for the North-West Territories seems pertinent:

> One of our most serious and pressing educational problems arises from the settlement amongst us of so many foreign nationalities in the block or colony system. There are colonies of Swedes, Finns, Bohemians, Hungarians, Jews, Austrians, Germans, Russians, Icelanders, Muscovites, Galicians and Doukhobors.[29]

Regarding the numbers involved, Maclnnes writes the following: "In 1901, it was estimated that three out of every eleven people in the Territories spoke a language other

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[27] MacInnes, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 281.

than French or English."[30] Although English inevitably came to dominate as the language of instruction, some concessions were made. Ethnic groups desiring instruction in a language other than French or English were to be allowed to have it, "provided they were prepared to impose upon themselves a special assessment for this purpose, engage a competent teacher, refrain from interfering with the regular school routine, and to limit such teaching to composition, grammar and
reading."[31]

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 282.

[31] *Ibid.*

## B. THE EARLY MISSIONARIES AND THE MISSIONARY-COLONIZERS

In a general sense, considering his devoutness and his concern for the moral and spiritual well-being of the natives, which seem to have been extraordinary traits in a white visitor to the uncivilized North-West, David Thompson might reasonably be considered the earliest missionary within Alberta's borders. Although primarily a trader and surveyor, he did, to the extent his own knowledge and resources and the perceived limitations of the native languages permitted, make an attempt to give the Indians some basic religious instruction. No true missionary had ever been among the natives Thompson dealt with in the North-West. While he could see that the natives who lived in villages might benefit from a missionary's work, Thompson identified the nomadic lifestyle of other tribes, who survived by hunting and were rarely more than a few days in one place, as one barrier to their receiving the word of God. These wandering Indians, he wrote, "cannot hope for the labors of a Missionary; the little they can learn must come from the Traders".[32] At the same time, however, he noted on a number of occasions that, while it might be possible for the natives to learn some elements of the Christian faith from the traders, they would not be able to learn morality from them.

Thompson's self-confessed inadequate knowledge of the Indian languages, the still primitive state of those languages, and the unwillingness or inability of the natives to accept certain concepts and beliefs of the Christian faith that were not consistent with their own culture also seriously hampered his missionary-like efforts. This is clear from the following two excerpts from his *Narrative:*

> ... my knowledge of their language has not enabled me to do more than teach the unity of God, and a future state of rewards and punishments; hell fire they do not believe, for they do not think it possible that any thing can resist the continued action of fire: It is doubtful if their language in its present simple

[32] J. B. Tyrrell, *David Thompson's Narrative*, p. 310.

> state can clearly express the doctrines of Christianity in their full force.[33]
>
> The Natives knew of nothing by which the pardon of sins can be obtained and although many of us spoke their language sufficiently fluent for trade and the common business yet we found ourselves very deficient if we attempted to impress on them any doctrine of Christianity beyond the unity of God, his creation and preservation of mankind and of everything else, to all which they readily assented as consonant to truth and their own ideas.[34]

Despite the deterrents just mentioned, and many others besides, not the least of which were the rude living conditions and the risk to their lives, the true missionaries eventually followed the traders and explorers into the North-West. As one admiring author wrote: "The traders were paid to stand up to these conditions; the missionaries endured them for their love of God or their fear of hellfire."[35] To communicate with the natives, the early missionaries depended largely on interpreters who, in general, while adequate for the common fur trade, were ill-suited for mission work. Neither were they always available to interpret when required, owing to other obligations, illness or temperament. Preaching was often impossible and many opportunities were lost "for want of an interpreter", as the earliest resident missionary in the Saskatchewan district was fond of saying.

The early missionaries came to the territory now called Alberta to serve two groups: the HBC officers and men at the Company's forts, and the Indians and mixed-bloods who lived outside the forts. In the 1840s, when the first missionaries arrived, the forts were the only fixed meeting places, but the Indians and Métis seldom visited them in large numbers. It was therefore often necessary to accompany the Indians and Métis on their buffalo hunts, and to travel from camp to camp, sometimes over distances of several hundreds of miles, in order to speak to large groups at a time; and if the weather did not permit large open-air gatherings, it was necessary to go from lodge to lodge in an effort to reach as

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[33] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 309.

[35] MacGregor, *John Rowand*, p. 132.

many people as possible. Much time was spent explaining ideas and answering questions, in an attempt to make Christian concepts comprehensible to the natives within the limits of their language and culture. These were therefore busy periods for the missionaries and their interpreters, especially on Sundays, when, as John McDougall wrote, "the whole day was one continuous series of meetings".[36] Even once permanent mission stations were established, such trips remained an essential part of the missionary effort for many years. Nevertheless, in the view of Peter Erasmus, an interpreter who worked for several years in the mission field (see Section C), the greatest obstacle to christianization of the Indians was not their nomadic lifestyle, as the explorer David Thompson had thought it would be, nor linguistic or cultural barriers, but rather the white man's own denominational prejudices. In his words, "The Catholics taught their way as the only way to salvation. The others were equally free with their criticism of the Catholic. Yet both claimed the same God, much to the confusion of the untutored Indians who were quick to grasp the incongruity of such a situation."[37]

Two churches were primarily responsible for bringing Christianity to this territory during the period under study: the Methodist Church, which opened its first three missions in the North West (Moose Factory, Norway House, and Edmonton House) under a January 22, 1840 agreement between the HBC and the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS); and the Roman Catholic church, specifically the French Oblate order, which was quick to follow.

## 1. *Methodist*

Among the earliest Methodist missionaries in the North West, it is important to mention, in the context of interpretation and translation, two in particular: first, the Rev. James Evans, superintendent, who in 1840 established the headquarters for the western missions at

[36] John McDougall, *Pathfinding on Plain and Prairie: Stirring Scenes of Life in the Canadian North-West* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898), p. 140.

[37] Peter Erasmus, *Buffalo Days and Nights* (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1976), p. 160.

Norway House, alongside the HBC headquarters, and there devised his system of Cree syllabics that would be used to spread the Gospel among the natives; and second, the Rev. Robert Terrill Rundle, who was sent to Edmonton in the same year, thus becoming the first resident missionary of any denomination in the territory now known as Alberta. The latter, while still a novice in the language, began writing Cree in 1841. Once Evans had introduced him to the Cree syllabic system, he used it extensively, especially in copying out the passages of Scripture, hymns, prayers and so on translated by Evans or others. Rundle also used syllabics to make his own translations as time and circumstances permitted, but apparently neither the language nor the system were easy for him to learn. In May 1841, he wrote in a letter to Evans: "It would assist me in deciphering your characters if you would send me one of the translations in English orthography. It is plain to you but not to me. Perhaps you will say it is my stupidity."[38] Two years later he wrote: "I can now stammer a little Cree and can write it very fluently or at least *in my way*, but 1 fear you would scold very much were you to see my characters destitute of the distinguishing marks of long and short sounds and also to see my sentences &c. destitute of Capital letters."[39]

### a) *Robert Terrill Rundle* (b. 1811; d. 1896)

R .T. Rundle was accepted for the Methodist ministry in 1839, and came to the North-West fresh from his native England in 1840, having just joined the British Mission that year. He did not know a word of any Indian language and was completely ignorant of the customs and traditions of the pagan tribes he wished to convert. Nonetheless, bolstered by an ardent faith, he volunteered his services in response to what the Rev. Gerald M. Hutchinson, in his introduction to *The Rundle Journals, 1840-1848*, describes as "an

[38] Dempsey, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 131. Some of the many texts Rundle mentions in his journal as having been translated by himself or others during his years in the Saskatchewan district are the ten commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, the baptismal service and parts of the marriage and burial services.

urgent request from some of the Hudson's Bay Co. officials for a young man to go out as a missionary to the Indians in the far west & to act as a Company chaplain in the same District."[40]

After a few months serving, despite his inexperience, as missionary to the Indians at Norway House, he arrived at Fort Edmonton, where he served from 1840 to 1848. While in the Saskatchewan district, he dutifully fulfilled his obligations as Company chaplain at Edmonton House as best he could, considering the fact that most of the Company's servants during those years were French-Canadians and Métis. An additional obstacle was that the "raw Scotch men", as Chief Factor Rowand called them, who made up a fair percentage of the remainder, would not attend the services. In 1843, Rundle was dismayed to find, after Father Thibault's initial visit to the district, that nearly all the French half-caste population had, in his words, "submitted themselves to the teaching of the Priest"[41]. In a letter to James Evans from Edmonton House dated January 6, 1844, Rundle wrote: "This Fort is a hotbed of popery. No one but the english and one english halfbreed attends the service." At times he found the tensions in the fort, the drinking, dancing, fighting and poor congregations almost unbearable. Small wonder, then, that his clear preference was to minister to the Indians on their terms and on their grounds. Away from the forts and "the abominable rum", his congregations sometimes numbered in the hundreds. Some of Rundle's contemporaries felt he showed "more zeal than judgment" in carrying out his mission to the Indians of the far west.[42] Good judgment was not lacking, however, in one respect: he quickly recognized the necessity of learning the aboriginal languages, and made a determined effort to do just that. His progress was slow, however, and for the most part he was obliged to rely on interpreters. His journals from the time of his arrival at Norway House in June 1840 contain many entries recounting his fortunate and unfortunate experiences. Some early examples follow.

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

[42] MacGregor, *John Rowand*, p. 118.

"June 7th, Sunday: Could not address the Indians for want of an interpreter".

"July 13th, Monday: We had a most interesting service this evening. I was favoured with an excellent interpreter (...) The people appeared quite unwilling to leave the place & so 1 had a long conversation with them after the service."

"August 18: No interpreter now & scarcely anything to do."

"August 23: No interpreter so no Indian service."

"Sept. 6: Could not hold a service for the want of an interpreter."

The helplessness evident in the last three entries, made after the interpreter Thomas Hassell had left Norway House, is in sharp contrast to the effusiveness present in the following entry for July 17, made prior to Hassell's departure:

> I had proceeded as far as the part of the sacred narrative in which the Saviour calls forth Lazarus from the grave, when a memorable scene ensued. "Lazarus, come forth!" said I. Lazarus, *astum on tah!* twice repeated the interpreter, who caught the flame which was kindling in the meeting. Seeing the effect it had produced, and feeling its force in my own soul, I said, "Repeat it again". Lazarus, *astum on tah!* repeated the interpreter with renewed energy. The effect was thrilling. A deep feeling pervaded all present.

Hassell (written "Haswell" by Rundle) was a Chipewyan Indian, the "excellent interpreter" referred to in the July 13 entry. When Superintendent Evans visited Rundle and the forts of the Saskatchewan district late in 1841, Hassell acted as assistant to Evans and interpreted for both Evans and Rundle at Fort Edmonton. Three years later, in September 1844, he was shot and killed by a gun discharging while in Evans' hands.

Upon Rundle's arrival at Fort Edmonton, his services in Cree were, of necessity, conducted through an interpreter and, as at Norway House, if the interpreter was unavailable, then no service could be held. The December 13, 1840 journal entry, for example, states simply, "A dull Sabbath, preached in morning. Mr. Peter's absent so no Cree." There was a similar disappointment on January 24, 1841, when a large party of about 100 Cree arrived at the Fort. This time the interpreter was ill, with the result that Rundle could not address them. By the time his interpreter had recovered sufficiently to assist him, three days later, most of the party had left the fort and only about 10 remained

to hear what he had to say. Eventually, to help compensate for the lack of interpreters, Rundle resorted to somewhat unorthodox measures, such as training Indian or half-breed children to interpret for him. Exasperated at the frequent absences of the fort interpreter, Rundle wrote the following in a letter to Governor Simpson from Edmonton House dated Sept. 16, 1841: "John Cunningham has been absent from the Fort *three* Sundays since my return now nearly *seven* weeks since & I hear he is to winter at the Rocky Mountain Fort. There is a boy here however who will I hope be able to interpret after some time but how long I cannot say." The boy in question is identified in the Rev. Hutchinson's notes to Rundle's journal as William Rowland (b. 1827, son of William Rowland of Carlton House) who, from the winter of that year until Rundle left the country in May of 1848, was "a constant companion, interpreter, and aide". As well, in a May 23, 1843 letter to Evans from Edmonton, Rundle lists under the heading *Subordinate paid agents* the following: "1 interpreter (a lad about 12 or 13 years of age)".

While at the HBC forts, Rundle was generally assisted in his mission among the Indians by the fort interpreters or by experienced traders such as James Edward Harriott (1797-1866), whom Governor Simpson described in the 1830s as "a finished trader" who "speaks Cree like a Native and is a great favourite with the Indians..."[43] and whom the Rev. Hutchinson describes as "a well-informed Protestant churchman who knew the Indian people well, knew their language, and prepared the way for Rundle and later for Ben Sinclair".[44] Harriott worked closely with superintendent Evans preparing Cree translations; indeed, according to Hutchinson, one result of Evans' 1841 visit to Fort Edmonton was the drawing of Harriott into the translating program for years to come.[45] Harriott also often interpreted for Rundle at the Company forts, and the latter used many of his Cree translations in the Indian camps. Although on the whole Rundle regarded Harriott's

[43] *Ibid.*, . 95.

[44] Dempsey, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii. For a Harriott biography, Hutchinson refers the readers of the journals to *Alberta Historical Review*, Spring 1858, p. 10-14.

[45] *Ibid.*, year 1841, note 50.

translations as "excellent", he did occasionally discreetly question his rendering of some words or passages. An example of this is found in the following addendum to Rundle's May 23, 1842 letter to Evans:

> I do not like to say anything to Mr. H. respecting his translations but ought the 7th Commandment to be expressed as Pb<hb˙∩n˙ Should it not be expressed as forbidding adultery? I feel a conscientious scruple respecting it. You will understand my reason. Is all not improving upon that law which is perfect converting the soul?
>
> This is given you in confidence. Also the Gloria Patria is wrongly expressed.

When Rundle left the Company forts to go and visit the Indians in their own camps, however, finding a suitable interpreter–especially for the Blackfoot tribes–became a much more difficult task. On April 1, 1841, for example, Rundle left RMH with two men for his first trip into Blackfoot country. He was pleased with the results he achieved in the Cree and Assiniboine, or Stoney, camps visited along the way. His pleasure and the fact that he was learning Assiniboine as well as Cree are evident from the following journal entry from April 9, 1841:

> They [the Cree] can now sing "Come to Jesus" very well & it is delightful to hear them. 1 have also taught it to the Assni [Assiniboine] & translated it into their language & the 2 tribes now sing it alternately. But the most striking part is when they all join in the chorus, Hallelujah Amen! They make the air ring with their melody.

After such a gratifying experience, it is not hard to imagine how vexing it must have been for Rundle to cope with the refractory Blackfoot interpreter James "Jamey Joc" Bird when he reached Blackfoot country. Bird, after reluctantly consenting to help him with one service of worship, obdurately refused to interpret for him again during his stay in the Blackfoot camp, thus not only humiliating the eager missionary, but also thwarting his plans and disappointing the Indians, who appeared anxious to hear what he had to say. Although he was able to spend "a very pleasant evening" visiting several chiefs' tents and

speaking to them through an Indian identified as “Piet Eagle”[46] he did not see any point in staying in the camp if Bird would not help him speak to the larger group. Rundle's account of the situation reads as follows:

> The Indians assembled for worship & the place was crowded to excess. Passed thro' a most trying scene of my missionary life; my interpreter refused to help me. In vain I sent for him & went to him; he was quite obstinate. At last, after much entreaty, he helped me at one service but no more. (April 20, 1841)
>
> ... I found the Indians were very anxious I sd. remain until the morrow.... However, I said it was no use my staying if my interpreter wd. not help me.... (April 22, 1841)

The details of this incident, Rundle's explanations of its cause, and the depth of his feelings about it, are all revealed in various letters he wrote on the subject to Chief Factor John Rowand, the WMS, and James Evans in May of the same year. (Some of the relevant letters are attached to this work as Appendix A.) These letters also reveal the general difficulty of locating reliable Blackfoot interpreters north of the U. S.-Canada border. The same concern regarding the dearth of Blackfoot interpreters is reiterated in another letter from Rundle to the WMS later in the year, which also indicates that Rowand intended to bring a Cree interpreter with him on his return from Red River. The name of that interpreter is not given. (This letter is included in Appendix A.)

Nevertheless, despite their early differences, there developed between Rundle and Bird, in the Rev. Hutchinson's words, "a complex and unusual friendship"[47]. Indeed, six years later, in the summer of 1847, Bird again served as Rundle's interpreter for prayers and services among the Blackfoot Indians, deep in the Indians' own territory.[48] This time, another well-known HBC man, Hugh Munroe, and his son Felix (see Section C) were also

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[46] In 1845, this Indian was baptized at Fort Edmonton, and in 1846 again interpreted “in his way” for Rundle. See Dempsey, *op. cit.*, year 1845, note 27; and entry for October 20, 1846.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 1iii.

present, and the former shared the interpretation duties with Bird. From Rundle's journal entry for April 27 of the following year, we learn that the reports the missionary received of Bird's interpreting that summer were disturbing. They led Rundle to believe that, rather than interpreting his words, Bird had been speaking for himself. The entry reads as follows:

> Heard about Birds interpreting last summer about things taken what he said, but I shd not say interpreting, for I am sure I never said about "dying soon" or what it was respecting things stolen. [sic][49]

With the help of those who assisted him in overcoming the language barrier, Rundle was able not only to preach the gospel to the Indian tribes of the far west, but also to gain the Indians' confidence, and to teach them to sing, pray and, in some cases, read and write in their own language. His most frequent contacts were with the Wood and Rocky Mountain Cree and Assiniboine, whose camps he often visited. As might be expected, it was with these Indians he had most success.[50] Although he met with the plains Indians too, including tribes of the Blackfoot confederacy, whose language he also attempted to learn, his mission among them was not as successful. This can no doubt be attributed, at least in part, to the infrequency of his contact with them. The lack of contact was, in fact, specifically recognized as a problem by Rundle, as is evident from this excerpt from a letter he sent to the WMS from Edmonton, dated May 24, 1843: "Respecting the Blackfeet and other tribes on the Prairies I fear little will be done amongst them until a missionary be stationed with them and accompany them on their wanderings." He was quick to realize that without the sustained, intimate contact that is essential to the understanding of a people's language and culture, it would be difficult for missionaries even to communicate directly with these tribes on a general level, let alone convince them to abandon their pagan ways and embrace Christianity.

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[49] *Ibid.*, p. 306.

[50] Two Indian interpreters who assisted Rundle with his work among the Assiniboines were known as Master Bow and Little Fish.

### b) *Thomas Woolsey*

For several years after Rundle left Fort Edmonton to return to England, the Saskatchewan district was without a resident Methodist missionary, although layman Ben Sinclair continued the work initiated as well as he could. Rev. Thomas Woolsey, Rundle's official successor in the district, arrived in 1855 and remained until 1864, at which time, the harsh living conditions having taken their toll on his health, he too was obliged to return to England. The following account by John McDougall of the Rev. Woolsey's state of dependency upon his arrival in the far west shows that Rundle's replacement was just as ill prepared as Rundle himself had been:

> Transplanted from the city of London, England, into the wildness and wilderness of the far west; having had no experience or knowledge of the conditions of frontier life in a new country; with no knowledge of the language of the Indians [... ] he was altogether dependent on those around him.[51]

Although Edmonton was really his station, and despite his inexperience, Woolsey, like his predecessor, preferred to live and work among the Indians. He, too, travelled "from camp to camp and from post to post "[52] and kept a journal of his daily activities.[53]

Some excellent insights into Woolsey's relationship and influence with the Indians are provided by Peter Erasmus, who worked as interpreter for the missionary on two separate occasions: in the mid-1850s in the Fort Edmonton and Pigeon Lake areas, and in the early 1860s at Smoking (now Smoky) Lake (see Section C). Erasmus was "pleasantly impressed" with Woolsey at their first meeting, and his admiration for the "kindly and unselfish, but strong-willed and determined" missionary grew as they worked together. Erasmus was particularly struck by Woolsey's ability to adapt his teachings to native

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[51] McDougall, *Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe*, p. 183.

[52] John McDougall, *Forest, Lake and Prairie: Twenty Years of Frontier Life in Western Canada, 1842-1862* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1895?), p. 254.

[53] Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, p. 169.

understanding, despite the fact that he apparently never learned to speak more than a smattering of Cree. The following excerpts from *Buffalo Days and Nights*, an autobiographical account of the first half of Erasmus' life, will serve to illustrate this point:

> He had a gift of adaptation to Indian understanding and an intimate knowledge of Bible passages on which he depended for inspired answers. This often astonished me in that he appeared to anticipate the questions and was ready with the appropriate answer before I properly interpreted the question, though I am positive he never learned the language.[54]
>
> His sermons were easily interpreted; they were adjusted to the understanding of the native people in a language that was stripped of all high-sounding terms and delivered with a sincerity and conviction that kept his audience attentive. The Rev. Mr. Woolsey had a natural understanding of the Indian viewpoint, and his adaptation of scripture to their way of life was natural and easily understood.[55]

The writings of the Rev. John McDougall are another valuable source of first-hand information about this missionary. According to McDougall, who was his self-described "interpreter, guide, and general 'roust-about', his confidante and friend" from late 1862 to 1864 (see Section C), Woolsey understood neither French nor Blackfoot, but did speak "broken Cree". Although he learned to speak only enough Cree "to make himself understood at a pinch", he mastered the syllabic system so that he could read and write in it, and teach its use to others. In this regard, McDougall writes the following: "It was curious to listen to him reading a chapter in the Cree Testament to a group of Indians, himself not understanding ten words in the chapter, while his hearers were intelligently grasping every word."[56]

Frequently, when travelling with the Indian camps, Woolsey did not use an actual

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[54] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[56] McDougall, *Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe*, p. 186.

program of church services, but instead carried on conversations, reading passages from the Bible, explaining the meaning, and answering questions. This loosely structured format meant the interpreter had to be constantly on his toes. He also had to be in constant attendance. Erasmus writes: "I was called upon to sit out long afternoons and evenings interpreting the words between the teacher and his interested listeners."[57] As well, he notes that, although not a severe taskmaster, Rev. Woolsey did not take the matter of interpretation lightly: when the missionary did use a sermon, he insisted that his interpreter be familiar with the text in advance of its delivery. As another who fully appreciated the importance of interpretation in missionary work, John McDougall writes the following: "Like my father, Mr. Woolsey never presumed on a knowledge of the language, never gave the shortest or simplest kind of an address or sermon without an interpreter, never made the too frequent mistake of attempting to speak of sacred and important matters in an unknown tongue."[58]

### c) *Henry Bird Steinhauer* (b. probably c. 1818; d. 1884)

From February 4 to 9, 1846, a church trial was conducted with respect to alleged sexual indiscretions by Superintendent James Evans at Norway House. Evans was found not guilty, but imprudent. The alleged indiscretions involved young native women, and Henry Steinhauer, then chief translator under Evans at Norway House, was the interpreter and recorder at the trial. The Rev. Hutchinson notes that, some months after the trial, Steinhauer prepared his "Interpreter's Confession", "a seven-page summary of his part in the situation and the evidence by which he was forced to the conclusion that Evans was guilty".[59]

Steinhauer was ordained in June 1855 (London, Canada West) and was immediately

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[57] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

[58] McDougall, *Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe*, pp. 186-187.

[59] Dempsey, *op. cit.*, p. x1 and 1ii; year 1846, notes 3 and 21.

posted to Lac La Biche (Alberta) where, after travelling west with Rev. Woolsey, he joined Ben Sinclair, Rundle's former lay assistant. In passing through the Whitefish Lake area, however, Steinhauer was apparently greatly impressed with that location as an ideal place in which to establish a permanent settlement for the migratory lndians he had come to serve. A short time later, Steinhauer and Sinclair moved down to Whitefish Lake, where they lived almost continuously until they died, within a day of each other.[60]

Like other missionaries of the time, Rev. Steinhauer was called upon to fill many roles. John McDougall notes in one of his works that, besides being a preacher, Steinhauer acted as judge, doctor, carpenter, sawyer, timberman, fisherman and hunter.[61] He does not mention the missionary's role as translator. In another volume, however, he writes that Maskepetoon, great chief of the Wood Crees, who learned the syllabic system from James Harriott, became "a student of the New Testament, translated by Steinhauer and Sinclair into a dialect of his mother tongue...."[62]

### d) *John McDougall (b. 1842; d. 1917)*

John Chantler McDougall was the son of the Rev. George McDougall, who, in the opinion of one NWMP officer who knew him in the far west, was "one of the ablest of the missionaries of his church".[63] John sometimes accompanied his father on his travels. Even as a young boy in Ontario, he acted as his father's assistant and interpreter. He relates that, in his ninth year, while his father was in the bush chopping logs, or among the Indians preaching the Gospel and fighting the whiskey traffic, he drove the oxen hauling the

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[60] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

[61] McDougall, *Forest, Lake and Prairie*, p. 151.

[62] McDougall, *Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe*, pp. 202-203. The entry for Steinhauer in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. XI, describes his as a Methodist missionary, school teacher and translator.

[63] Col. S. B. Steele, *Forty Years in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1915), 110.

timber and interpreted for his father "in the home and by the wayside".[64]

Although by birth John McDougall was "a Scotch-and-EnglishCanadian", by nature he was "nine-tenths Indian". Both descriptions are his own and, considering what the reader learns of his early life from his writings, it is hardly surprising that when he attended college he was "looked upon as an Indian". His mother claimed that her son spoke Indian (Ojibway, known in the west as Saulteaux) before he spoke English, and his earliest memories were of the Indians he grew up amongst. In his words: "Bows and arrows, paddles and canoes were my playthings, and the dusky forest children were my playmates."[65]

Having graduated from college, he obtained employment "attending shop" and trading with the Indians of the Muskoka country for a Mr. Thomas Moffatt of Orillia. "Having the language and intimate acquaintance with the life and habits of these people," he writes, "1 was as 'to the manner born', and thus had the advantage over many others."[66] He also knew Latin, which he had learned at college, and French, which he had learned working in a store at Penetanguishene, where most of the customers were French. With regard to learning French from his customers, he writes: "I soon picked up the vernacular, and became quite at home in serving them."[67] Clearly he had a gift for learning languages.

When the family moved to Norway House, John learned Cree, again without much difficulty. About this experience he writes as follows: "The Indians were of the Cree nation, and spoke a dialect of that language, known as the Swampy Cree. As there is a strong affinity between the Ojibway and the Cree, I began very soon to pick it up."[68] Despite his own facility for languages, or perhaps because of it, he was impressed with the

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[64] McDougall, *Forest, Lake and Prairie*, p. 27.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[66] *Ibid*., p. 49.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

ability of John Sinclair, the mission interpreter at Norway House, whose talents he had the opportunity to observe on a brief visit to Jackson Mission with his father. The Rev. George McDougall held a service in the evening, giving his address in English. According to the missionary's son, John Sinclair then gave the address "almost *verbatim* " to those who understood only Cree, an accomplishment the young McDougall considered "a remarkable feat of memory" by the interpreter, "seeing he had not taken other than mental notes".[69]

In 1862, John McDougall accompanied his father on a visit to the missions of the Saskatchewan district (Rev. Steinhauer at Whitefish Lake; Rev. Woolsey at Smoky Lake), which were by then under his father's chairmanship. When his father returned to Norway House from the Saskatchewan district later in the year, a site for a new mission–Victoria (later known as Pakan)–had been chosen, and John stayed behind to act as "a sort of assistant and interpreter" to Rev. Woolsey.[70] Of his early days in the Indian camps, John notes the following: "... as I worked and talked I was taking it all in and adapting language and idiom and thought to my new surroundings".[71] His first winter on the Saskatchewan, besides giving him the opportunity to cover "a large portion of the country" and become acquainted with "a goodly number of the Indian people", also offered him "constant practice in the language", with which he was soon "quite familiar".[72] The process of learning Cree had only just begun; yet, with constant practice and study, he made rapid progress. About a trip two years later to Fort Garry (Manitoba) to bring out supplies for the missions, he writes as follows: " ... as we were speaking Cree all the time, I was constantly improving myself in the language, and learning the idioms and traditions of the people amongst whom it would seem my lot was to be cast".[73] In the light of the explorer

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

[71] McDougall, *Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe*, p. 26.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

David Thompson's comment respecting the limitations of the Cree language, it is particularly interesting to note the following account by the missionary's son: "...we also sang our hymns and held our services, and were ardently studying this new strange life - every day acquiring a better grip of the language and beginning to waken up to the largeness of its vocabulary".[74] In the winter of 1865-66, he went on several "evangelistic and missionary trips", by which time Cree came almost naturally to him. His own assessment of his progress in the language reads as follows: "Even then it was becoming easier for me to speak in Cree than in English. My brain and voice functions were almost in constant use in the former, and but seldom did I require them in the language wherein I was born ".[75] Upon his return, he and his wife visited Whitefish Lake and the Rev. Steinhauer, his father-in-law, under whose tutelage he learned still more of the Cree language and acquired "a clearer insight into the religious experience and life and language of these western people".[76]

Since encounters with the Blackfoot Indians were infrequent, John McDougall's earliest meetings with members of these tribes were disquieting, to say the least. This is obvious from his accounts of two such occurrences. During the first, he and three companions–only one of whom, an Indian named Joseph, understood the Blackfoot language–were surprised one stormy evening by a Blackfoot who came alone into their camp, sang, and made a short speech. Since the Blackfoot seldom travelled alone and their reputation generally inspired dread, McDougall was not at all sure what to expect next. His anxiety, which stemmed in large part from his ignorance of the visitor's language, is clear from the following description of the sensations he experienced: "I could feel my heart-beats, and it seemed as if my hair was lifting under my cap."[77] His fears proved to be unwarranted in this case, however, and after the Blackfoot brave returned with about forty

[74] McDougall, *Pathfinding on Plain and Prairie*, p. 90.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[77] McDougall, *Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe*, p. 247.

companions, setting up camp beside the much smaller party of travellers, McDougall was able to spend some time speaking with his new acquaintances "through" Joseph, the only one who had remained unperturbed by the unexpected visit. Nevertheless, McDougall did pause to wonder why the Blackfoot had been so friendly, for, in his words: "A few months since, and they would have killed us. A few months hence, and they would do the same."[78]

The second occurrence took place during a visit by his father to some Blackfoot camps. As an indication of his earnestness, the Rev. George McDougall complied with a request for his son to live with a young Blackfoot chief while they were in the camp. Communication between the chief and John was limited to signs, with the chief motioning his uneasy guest to follow him or to sit in a certain place, for example. Being unable to communicate verbally with the Blackfoot either directly or through an interpreter, and having had no word from his party for several days, John McDougall experienced not just loneliness, but a form of isolation he describes as complete. As strangers came and went, it seemed to him that he was "on exhibition", and feelings of curiosity alternated with feelings of dread. The natural tendency of even the most open-minded people to think the worst under such circumstances is illustrated by the following passage: "Sometimes they became greatly excited, and as they frequently nodded or pointed to me, I could not but imagine all manner of trouble."[79] Again, however, his fears proved to be unfounded.

When his father later established the mission for the Stoney Indians at Morley, in what is now southwestern Alberta, John McDougall devoted much of his time to the tribes of that nation. After the Rev. George McDougall died in a blizzard near Fort Calgary in the winter of 1875-76, John succeeded to his father's labours at the blorley mission and became chairman for the whole of the North-West. In 1877, at the signing of Treaty No. 7, according to an NWMP officer who was also present, the Rev. John McDougall came in from Morley to act as "interpreter and adviser" to the Stoney Indians, who, the officer also

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 249.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

notes, camped "apart from the Blackfeet, with whom they were not on very good terms".[80]

Still later, during the 1885 Indian rebellion, when the NWMP were heading north from Calgary because the rebels had plundered some HBC stores and missions around Battle River just south of Edmonton, Major General Strange called on what he referred to in a dispatch as the Rev. John McDougall's "large and intimate knowledge of the country"[81] to help the force restore order. McDougall, who was considered by Steele to be "one of the best scouts in the west"[82] went with four Mountain Stoney scouts to Edmonton, where they were joined by the Catholic Fathers Lacombe and Scollen, while another party headed to Battle River.

When the interpreter Peter Erasmus (see Section C) first met the McDougalls in 1862, he was sorely rankled by "the stiff-backed officiousness" of his meeting with the Methodist chairman, but was favorably impressed with John.[83] Perhaps the similarity of their backgrounds and their mutual interest in the native languages and cultures struck a responsive chord. At that time, he reports, John "could speak Swampy Cree and was an eager listener as his father questioned me as to my knowledge of the tribes with whom I had been in contact". Erasmus felt that John, who had "an open mind" and "none of the eastern prejudices" would adjust to the native people and their conditions "with far greater success than his father would or could."[84] Indeed, in this connection, while the Rev. George McDougall was undoubtedly effective in his mission work, his son asserts that he "never attempted to speak in the language of the lndian". This statement raises an obvious question, the answer to which may lie in the following clause that John used to qualify his

[80] Cecil E. Denny, *The Law Marches West,* 2d ed., (Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1972), p. 109.

[81] Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

[83] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

[84] *Ibid.*

assertion: "yet few men knew how to use an interpreter as he did".[85]

Echoing in his writings thoughts expressed years earlier by the Rev. Rundle, John McDougall had a very clear idea of the importance to the mission effort of intimate and sustained contact with the Indians. He knew that such contact was essential to an understanding not just of the mechanics of their language, but also of their way of living and thinking. The following excerpt is a succinct expression of this notion: "For the work I had to do I must acquire an actual knowledge of the country, I must gain the confidence of the people, I must learn their language and mode of life, I must become familiar with their history, their religion, and their idioms of thought ...."[86] Because he himself often acted as an interpreter and served for many years as an intermediary or "bridge" between the vastly different European and western Indian cultures, he was well able to appreciate–in every sense of the word–the efforts of others performing the same roles. In the following passage, for example, he notes that some of the translations existing at the time contributed to the success he and his father enjoyed: "The Indians generally take to singing, and as some of the translations we used were full of the very pith of the gospel message, their hearts were reached..."[87]

## 2. *Catholic*

Among the many Catholic missionaries who served in the North-West during the period under study, the following individuals deserve special mention with respect to interpretation and translation: Father Belcourt of the Pembina mission (Manitoba), who published several works in the Saulteaux language; Father Thibault, who in 1857 published a book of prayers and other religious writings in Cree entitled *Prières, cantiques et catechisme en langue crise;* and, of course, the indomitable Father Albert Lacombe,

[85] McDougall, *Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe*, p. 76.

[86] McDougall, *Pathfinding on Plain and Prairie*, p. 168.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

who studied Saulteaux under Father Belcourt, later using some of this teacher's translations in the territory now known as Alberta. As a result of his work in this territory, Father Lacombe prepared a Cree translation of the New Testament–*Le Nouveau Testament en langue crise, d'après les quatre Évangiles*–as well as a Cree dictionary and grammar, and instructions on the entire Catholic doctrine, not to mention a Blackfoot dictionary begun in 1882. Also deserving of mention are Fathers Constantine Scollen and Émile Legal (later Bishop Legal) who, because of their intimate association with the Blackfoot tribes, were able to assist Father Lacombe in his later translation endeavours. It was in fact Father Scollen who substituted for Father Lacombe as friend and advisor to the Blackfoot tribes at the signing of Treaty No. 7, when the latter was unable to make the trip to the west. To give some idea of the geographical scope of the mission effort essentially spearheaded by Father Lacombe, the following page shows a map of the missions established throughout the territory of Alberta during the years he spent there (Map 10).

In her 1973 work entitled *From the Buffalo to the Cross*, Byrne makes the following observation with respect to the work of the Oblates in Alberta: "Most of their work was and is in the north among the Crees and the Métis and the Esquimaux".[88] She also asserts, however, that, until the diocese of Calgary was formed in 1913, the Catholic mission activity in southern Alberta was entirely the responsibility of the Oblate Order, and that "all the mission work with the Indians and on the reservations has been their work from the beginning in 1873 until the present".[89] Also worthy of mention here is the fact that the Oblates, not unlike many other missionary organizations, emphasized the importance of translating religious works into the language of the indigenous peoples. In fact, Oblate priests were bound by their very membership in the order to do such translations.[90]

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[88] Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[90] Potentially rich sources of information about the translation and interpretation requirements and activities of members of the Oblate order who served in the territory that became Alberta include the journals and other writings of these priests. The Alberta Provincial Archives houses an extensive Oblate Collection, which has not been tapped for the purpose of this work.

## C. INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS

Nearly all those who followed the fur traders and explorers to the territory now known as Alberta required interpreters in the Indian languages and, as circumstances demanded, translators. They included members of official expeditions such as Palliser's, missionaries of several denominations, and, beginning in the 1870s, the NWMP and the federal government. Once the foundations of law, order and government were in place, however, and settlers whose mother tongue was neither English nor French began arriving on the prairies, the need for interpreters and translators in other languages emerged.

There were a number of chronic problems the users of interpreters in the Indian languages had to face in this territory. For example, interpreters were often expected to perform double duty as guides or hunters, a common assumption being that if they knew the language, they also knew the country and were modern-day Nimrods. Rarely was this assumption justified. In other instances, the interpreter a person wanted might not be in the area when needed, and even if there, he might be unwilling to face the risks involved in accompanying his would-be employer through dangerous terrain or enemy lands. It was also difficult to retain an interpreter for an extended period, in part because a more profitable or less hazardous offer of work–not necessarily another interpreting contract–could easily lure him away from his original employer. An invitation to go on a buffalo hunt could have the same effect. Furthermore, if the gap between the employer's or another speaker's level of education and that of the interpreter was too great, it was apt to hamper effective communication.

The users of interpreters in other languages also encountered problems, although these were generally of a different nature and might, in some cases, be attributed to a certain degree of racial discrimination or xenophobia. Because the immigrants from foreign countries were in the minority, many naturally congregated in tight-knit groups within the larger community. In the area of law enforcement, as previously indicated (see sub-section A.3.c), an interpreter's loyalty to the minority group was sometimes perceived, rightly or wrongly, as impeding the administration of justice.

Interpreters and translators came in many shapes and from a number of different

backgrounds. Some were born on the western prairies, while others were recruited from outside the territory. Of those who came from outside, some stayed, while others went back. Two examples of men who came and stayed to become important figures in Alberta's history are Peter Erasmus, interpreter and translator, and Jerry Potts, scout and interpreter for the NWMP. Erasmus was generously built, born in the Red River Settlement, and college-educated. Jerry Potts, on the other hand, was small in stature, born south of the Canada-U. S. border, and had no formal education. Some were Indian, some were of mixed blood, and others were white. Since the Indians and most mixed-bloods in the far west were still uneducated and generally ignorant of the white man's currency, they were normally paid in kind, much as they had been since the white man's arrival. Nearly all those who worked for the Palliser expedition, for example, were paid in horses and orders on one of the HBC stores.[91] A notable exception in regard to the expedition was the interpreter Peter Erasmus, who received payment in pounds sterling for his work, as he did for his work with the Methodist missions. When he became an interpreter for the federal government in their dealings with the Indians, his salary was in Canadian dollars (see sub-section 5).

Those interpreters and translators who, on the basis of information gleaned from written records, appear to have figured most prominently in this eventful period of Alberta's history will be covered in some detail in the following sections; others will be only briefly mentioned. Still others will, regrettably, be omitted altogether, although the names of many should be found in, for example, the employment records of the HBC and the NWMP, or the records kept by official parties, the missionaries, and the Dominion government's Indian Agencies.

## 2. *James "Jamey Jock" Bird* (b. c.1790; d. c.1890)

Perhaps the most infamous of the mixed-blood interpreters of the time, Jamey Jock was the son of an Englishman, James Bird, a chief factor with the HBC who, for a while, was in

[91] Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, p. 263.

charge of the whole Saskatchewan district, and who was also, as Rev. Hutchinson mentions in his introduction to *The Rundle Journals*, a man of "some wealth". For a biography of this controversial figure, the Rev. Hutchinson refers readers of these journals to *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, Vol. 10, 1940, 256-60.[92]

Jamey Jock was brought up at the HBC's fort and was for many years a clerk with the Company. When his father moved away from Edmonton House, Jamey Jock remained in the area. He soon found, however, that he had lost the status he had enjoyed as the chief factor's son and that the other traders treated him as they would any half-breed. He eventually left the Company's service and went to live with the Piegan Indians, connecting himself with them by marriage. Governor Simpson, in reporting to the Governor and Committee in London on relations with the Piegan, many of whom had switched their allegiance from the HBC to the Americans, and on Jamey Jock's role in this regard, explained the situation as follows: "It has likewise been usual with us to keep in pay among them a half breed son of Mr. Bird [...] and being a perfect Indian in nature, [... ] he soon acquired an influence among them, and now ranks as one of their war chiefs."[93] What Jamey Jock acquired among the Company's officers, however, was a reputation for independent action and for breaking a contract whenever it pleased him. According to one historian, Chief Factor John Rowand knew that although he could not trust Jamey Jock, neither could he afford to break off relations with him and thus drive him into the arms of the American traders. The same author asserts that Jamey Jock capitalized on his "nuisance value", and describes him as "capable and fearless at times and sullen and treacherous at others".[94]

In January 1841, in a letter to Governor Simpson, Chief Factor John Rowand included this remark concerning Jamey Jock's linguistic skills: "The man speaks as good

[92] Dempsey, *op. cit.*, year 1841, note 19.

[93] MacGregor, *John Rowand*, p. 92.

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Cree as the Crees themselves and the Blackfoot the same."[95] Rev. Hutchinson notes, however, that although Jamey Jock had "great abilities" as an interpreter, he was not content simply to interpret what others said, but tended to speak as well on his own initiative.[96]

Much was written about Jamey Jock during the 1840s, mostly in a negative vein, and chiefly by those who had reason to complain about his conduct; for example, Chief Factor Rowand, the Rev. Rundle, and Father Pierre Jean de Smet, a Belgian Jesuit who came north from the U. S. in 1845 hoping to meet some Blackfoot Indians. Some examples of correspondence from these individuals concerning Jamey Jock's performance as a guide and interpreter are attached as appendices to this work. (See Appendices A and B.) In this regard, the connection between his reputed hatred of "everything connected with the French or Canadians" and his abandonment of Father desmet when this priest joined up with a Canadian is particularly worth noting. Also worth noting is the fact that Rowand's warning to Father de Smet concerning Jamey Jock ("beware, my good sir, of your interpreter Bird...") arrived too late. It was received by de Smet only once he finally arrived at Fort Augustus. One voice in Jamey Jock's favour, however, was that of the artist Paul Kane, who met him at Rocky Mountain House in 1847. Kane writes as follows: "The missionaries entertained very little respect for him and have spoken very badly of him throughout the whole country; but as far as my intercourse with him went, I always found him trustworthy and hospitable."[97]

With respect to Jamey Jock's income, the HBC credited him with ^100 in wages per annum for the years 1833 through 1840, with the breakdown for the year 1839/40 being as follows: ^43.3 credit for furs and ^56.17 gratuity for sundry services.[98] The "sundry

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[95] Dempsey, *op. cit.*, p. xxiv.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

[97] Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist – Among the Indians of North America* (Toronto: The Radisson Society of Canada Limited, 1925), p. 288.

[98] Dempsey, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii.

services" no doubt included some interpretation. By contrast, the Rev. Rundle's income was ^27 per year plus accommodation.[99] Father de Smet hired Jamey Jock to act as his guide and interpreter at ^6 per month.[100]

Over thirty years later, the name Bird appears again in the context of interpretation. At the signing of Treaty No. 7, the interpreter for the official government party was, in the words of one NWMP officer present at the time, "an old Hudson's Bay Company ex-employee named Bird, who had left the Company many years previously and taken a Blackfoot wife." The same officer adds the following qualified approval of the interpreter's performance: "Aided by the Rev. Father Scollen, he did very well."[101] While it is, in fact, the name and signature of James Bird that appears on Treaty No. 7, which was one of the most important treaties to be signed between the Canadian Government and the Indians, Bird was, by one account at least, not the person who was initially asked to act as interpreter. Rather, according to that account, he was a hurriedly found replacement for the uneducated NWMP scout and interpreter Jerry Potts (see sub-section 9), who reportedly could not understand a word the eloquent David Laird, lieutenant-governor of the Northwest Territories, was saying.[102] The same author also implies that Bird may not have been the best choice either.

## 2. *Hugh Munroe* (b. 1798; d. 1892)

Hugh Munroe was, as Father de Smet referred to him in his correspondence, "a Canadian interpreter". He was a contemporary of Jamey Jock Bird. Although somewhat more dependable than Bird, he could be hard to find, and was, in Chief Factor Rowand's opinion, not especially suited to interpret for missionaries. The same letter Rowand wrote

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[99] *Ibid.*

[100] MacGregor, *John Rowand*, p. 139

[101] Denny, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

[102] B. D. Fardy, *Jerry Potts, Paladin of the Plains* (Langley, B. C.: Mr. Paperback, 1984), p. 101.

to Father de Smet warning him to beware of Jamey Jock (see Appendix B) includes this assessment: "Munroe is not a bad sort of man, but I cannot recommend him as fit to interpret what you have to say to the natives. Munroe does well enough at a trading post and in the shop." Byrne, author of *From the Buffalo to the Cross*, informs her readers that Munroe's Indian name was "Rising Wolf" and that he was the son of Captain Hugh Munroe of the English army, and Amélie de la Roche, a French émigrée.[103] Further, she provides the following biographical details, which show a remarkable degree of similarity to those of Jamey Jock's early life:

> He became an 'engagé' of the fur trade at an early age and in 1815, at the age of 17, was sent by the factor Hardisty of Rocky Mountain House to live among the Piegans. Hardisty's purpose was to have him watch the American traders and to induce the Indians to trade at Rocky Mountain House. He lived under the protection of the Chief Lone Walker, learned the Blackfoot language, and married a Piegan woman and had sons by her.[104]

At the time he was invited to take part in the Bow River expedition of 1822, Munroe had been in the service of the HBC along the Saskatchewan River for ten years. After the expedition, he continued to live on the western prairies and in the foothills until his death.[105] In the summer of 1847, notwithstanding Rowand's view of his unsuitability for the work, Munroe–as well as Jamey Jock and the Indian Piet Eagle, "in his way"–interpreted for the Rev. Rundle during his second, and last, major attempt to spread the Gospel among the prairie Indians, particularly the Blackfoot. It would seem from Rundle's June 12 journal entry, however, that he suspected Munroe of taking the same kind of liberties with his words as Bird. The entry reads, in part, as follows: "The Stones were not called in consequence of what was if said by me or Munroe (ie. what he interpreted or said himself)."

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[103] Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[104] *Ibid.*, note a.

[105] MacGregor, *John Rowand*, p. 47.

## 3. *Felix and William Munroe*

These men were both sons of Hugh Munroe, and their names are linked in a variety of written records with interpretation of the Blackfoot languages.

### a) *Felix Munroe*

In January 1858, Dr. Hector of the Palliser expedition trusted to Mr. Brazeau, who was then in charge of Rocky Mountain House, and to the HBC interpreter, Felix Munroe, to select from among the Indians those who were of good character and could be counted on as guides, or, in his words, "to discriminate the proper persons."[106] Felix himself was a member of the expedition during its trip into Blackfoot country in the summer of 1859. He interpreted for Hector when a sick Blood Indian child the doctor had been asked to treat was snatched out of his hands by a medicine-man. As well, when Palliser complied with a request to come into the Blood camp and pray that the sickness prevalent in the camp might be removed, Felix, in Irene Spry's words, "translated" into Blackfoot after Palliser, who read the General Confession and the Lord's Prayer.[107] Felix also knew French, a fact learned from Palliser's account of events that took place at a camp in Plains Assiniboine country. Some bothersome Blood Indians had followed the party into the Assiniboines' territory and were threatening serious trouble. Olivier Munroe, a brother of Felix, whom, Palliser notes, "we had all looked on previous to this period as a fool", intervened unexpectedly with a very forceful speech in the Bloods' own language. As Olivier spoke, Palliser writes, "Felix translated his brother's words to me in French..."[108] Olivier's speech had the desired effect: the Indians subsequently mounted their horses and galloped off, leaving the expedition in peace.

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[106] Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, p. 107.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 227.

[108] *Ibid.*, pp.é 230-231.

In the opinion of one of the expedition's Cree interpreters, Peter Erasmus, Felix was not only "a valuable man " and "a first class hunter"[109], he was also "invaluable" when it came to quieting the anxiety of the men in the small party who did not like the idea of being in Blackfoot territory. Irene Spry, editor of *Buffalo Days and Nights*, describes Felix as "an able and dependable interpreter."[110] Erasmus also recalled that once, when several Blackfoot chiefs and their followers wished to visit the expedition, Felix's acquaintance with two of the chiefs was of great help in "the early preliminary procedures that usually marked the successful establishment of good relations with these highly temperamental characters."[111]

According to Erasmus, when the factor at Fort Edmonton first asked him whether he would take the position of interpreter with the expedition, he replied that he was "not too familiar with the Blackfoot tongue". The factor's response, according to Erasmus, was as follows: "That will not matter a great deal as I have a man in mind who is quite familiar with the Blackfoot tongue. He lived in the Blackfoot country for a number of years and is part Blackfoot himself, though now living in these northern parts."[112] There can be little doubt that the man the factor had in mind was Felix Munroe.

During his travels with the expedition in the Blackfoot country, Erasmus deliberately cultivated a friendship with Felix and consequently advanced his knowledge of the Blackfoot language. He was also able to observe the Blackfoot interpreter at work. He noted that, while Felix did not alter the basic facts, he used his own discretion when interpreting, adding flattery and making other adjustments as he saw fit. Although not endorsing Felix's methods Erasmus concluded that, under the circumstances, the interpreter exercised good judgment and the liberties he took were justified. He therefore decided not to bring the matter to Palliser's attention. Erasmus' own account of his

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[109] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 315, note 9.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[112] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

observations reads as follows:

> Although Felix had no education, he had a sharp mind and frequently adjusted his interpretations of the captain's words to flatter the ego and arrogance of his Blackfoot listeners. He never added to the basic facts but softened the militant harshness that was natural to Palliser's speech. The man's shrewd judgement of his people was most effective, and the results in my opinion justified his variations of the actual words to be interpreted. Felix and I exchanged talks when I questioned him about the liberties he took with the captain's speech.
>
> He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Is it not my job to keep peace with our camp and the Blackfoot? They are not a people to be treated as children or hired servants. The Blackfoot are proud, independent, and very stubborn in their ways. They have no masters and will acknowledge no authority, only the force of numbers. How long do you think we would last if we aroused their anger?"
>
> I had to admit the truth of his explanation and of course never brought the facts to Palliser's attention. I had no desire to risk my neck, or rather my scalp, in exposing the actual facts of Felix's interpretations which our leader might not appreciates.[113]

### b) *William (Piscan/Piskun/Piskan) Munroe*

When still a young man, Henry John Moberly, HBC factor, lost his composure at the treatment he received in a Sarcee camp and punched an Indian named Running Wolf, thus enraging the other warriors present. Piskun Munroe, his interpreter, who was married to a Blood woman with relatives in the camp, saved his life. Of the "brave seventeen" who had accompanied him into the camp, Moberly writes, his interpreter Piskun alone remained

[113] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

"faithful to his chief".[114]

According to Moberly, Piskun Munroe was "the half-breed interpreter" at Fort Edmonton in the 1850s. More than linguistic skills were needed to be a successful interpreter in that place at that time. Fortunately for his employers, Piskun was well versed in the necessary formalities of the Indian trade; indeed, Moberly gives credit to Piskun for keeping things running smoothly at Fort Edmonton. "Piskun Munroe", he writes, "knew all the prescribed rites of the various chiefs; thus no mistakes were made and no trouble arose."[115] (MOBERLY, 74)

Piskun was one of several mixed-bloods fetched from the Edmonton area and added to the Palliser expedition in the summer of 1859 after a troublesome encounter with some Blackfoot to the south. The extra men were necessary in order to fortify the expedition before it ventured deeper into Blackfoot country.

On hearing of the NWMP's arrival at its prairie destination in 1874, a guide and interpreter, identified in *The Law Marches West* only as "Munro", came south in February, offered his services, and was engaged by the force. This second guide and interpreter, according to the work's author, was a former employee of the HBC at Fort Edmonton, was "thoroughly familiar with the country north ", and stayed with the force for many years.[116] There can be little doubt that the interpreter in question was Piskun. Like Jerry Potts, he was a great help to the new arrivals in their dealings with the Indians, not only by interpreting for them, but also by preventing them from unwittingly making mistakes that could have caused offence and thus had serious consequences. An example of such a case, when officer Denny was offered a fine dressed buffalo robe by the great Blackfoot chief Crowfoot before discussions began, is related by Denny as follows:

I told the interpreter to tell them that I had not come to take presents but to

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[114] Henry John Moberly, *When Fur Was King* (Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Limited, 1929), p. 40. In the early 1850s, Moberly replaced Louis Leblanc at Rocky Mountain House when the latter became disabled. Leblanc had been an interpreter at the ill-fated Piegan Post in 1832-33. (Dempsey, *op. cit.*, p. 57, note 11)

[115] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

[116] Denny, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

> settle the matter in dispute between themselves and the Crees. Munro advised me to take the robe as it was given as a token of their good-will towards us.[117]

Several years later, after the signing of the Indian treaties, Piskun spent the winter of 1882 on the Blood reserve assisting Fathers'Lacombe and Legal in their work on the Blackfoot dictionary that was completed by spring.[118]

## 4. *James McKay* (b. 1828; d. 1879)

According to a description written by Lord Southesk, James McKay was "a Scotsman, though with Indian blood on the mother's side". As was customary, he was named for his father, who had spent some years in the Saskatchewan district before leaving Edmonton House in 1837 on a trip to the Arctic regions and subsequently retiring to Kildonan (Red River Settlement). Young James attended school in Kildonan, and in 1852 was taken by the Anglican Bishop David Anderson to be his helper and cook at Moose Factory.

Having quickly acquired a reputation as a reliable guide, he was the HBC interpreter at Fort Ellice (Saskatchewan) when the Palliser expedition arrived there late in the summer of 1857. At that time, the chief guide and interpreter for the expedition was a Scottish half-breed by the name of John Ferguson who had, incidentally, not been Palliser's first choice.[119] Ferguson, who was alarmed at the idea of penetrating the country of the warlike plains Indians, conspired to get Palliser to change his plans, by feeding him false information. McKay, having discovered the conspiracy instigated by Ferguson, notified Palliser and was consequently asked to join the expedition in Ferguson's place.[120] He gladly accepted the position. McKay was, Spry reports, one of the best men the HBC had on the prairies, and the rare travellers and big-game hunters who visited the prairies all

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[117] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[118] Byrne, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

[119] Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, p. 38.

[120] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

wanted to have him as guide and interpreter.

In 1859, McKay married Margaret, daughter of Chief Factor John Rowand. They built a mansion near Fort Garry (Manitoba) that became, in historian MacGregor's words, "a social centre for the settlement".[121] In the following twenty years, McKay became a prominent political figure in the North-West. As such, he was one of the Lieutenant-Governor's party at the signing of Treaty No. 6 at Fort Carlton in 1876, a treaty that embraced an area of 121,000 square miles. His brother, Rev. John McKay, was one of the two interpreters hired by the government for the treaty negotiations. The story of the friction between the Hon. James McKay and the Indians' interpreter, Peter Erasmus, at the start of the negotiations is told in the following sub-section on Peter Erasmus.

## 5. *Peter Erasmus* (b. 1833; d. 1931)

The book entitled *Buffalo Days and Nights* is Peter Erasmus' own account of the first half of his life, as told at an advanced age to a fellow mixed-blood, Henry Thompson. In the words of the book's editor, Irene Spry, it is told from the viewpoint of "a highly intelligent mixed-blood poised between two cultures and two ways of life".[122]

Unlike most of the mixed-bloods in the Red River settlement at the time, whose fathers were of British or French origin, Peter Erasmus was the son of a Dane and an Indian woman. His family was fairly well off, but when his father died while he was still quite young, he had to leave school. Nevertheless, his education was not neglected. In fact, while he was still in his teens, he was hired to assist his uncle, Henry Budd, at the Anglican mission at "The Pas" (Manitoba). While teaching at the mission there, he also used his spare time to improve his own education, borrowing books and material from the Rev. James Hunter, the Anglican minister.

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[121] MacGregor, *John Rowand*, p. 175.

[122] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

### a) *At The Pas*

It was during his second year of teaching that Erasmus began translating the books of the Bible into the Swampy Cree language. As the Cree syllabic system did not yet exist, he used phonetic transcription, conveying by means of English letters "the Swampy Cree pronunciation of the meaning contained in the word and text".[123] The next year, he was similarly occupied with further "interpretations" of other books in the Bible. In the spring of his fourth year of teaching, his uncle was to be ordained, and he was asked by the Rev. Hunter to interpret the sermon that the Anglican Bishop, David Anderson, would deliver during the ordination service. This was the first time he had been called upon to interpret before a large crowd, and almost all those present were Indian. The following is his own account of the event:

> I was pretty nervous and got stuck in one place, but Bishop Anderson helped me out and from there on I got my nerve back and had no more difficulty. I interpreted hundreds of services after that date but Bishop Anderson's sermon among an almost pure native congregation was one of the finest I ever listened to for co-ordinated, eloquent adaptation of scripture to native understanding.[124]

Both his uncle and the Rev. Hunter had tried to persuade Erasmus to prepare himself to enter the ministry. "The fact that I had made interpretations of several books of the Bible they considered as strong proof of my inclination towards their objectives and my fitness to become a member of their profession", he relates. Their arguments were to no avail, however, as he felt himself "totally unfitted for service with the church."[125] While Bishop Anderson was at The Pas, he and the Rev. Hunter pleaded with Erasmus to reconsider. The Rev. Hunter had in his possession for "reviewing and correcting" Erasmus' work on the scriptures, and the Bishop looked upon these "interpretations" as if they were "a sign from

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[123] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[124] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

heaven" pointing to Erasmus as "a worthy servant of the Lord's will..."[126] Eventually Erasmus agreed, though with serious misgivings, to enter the collegiate at the Red River settlement, determined at least to take advantage of the schooling to advance his education.[127]

Erasmus and his fellow students were well into their third term when he was called to a meeting with the chief factor of the HBC. The chief factor explained that he had received a letter from a man at Fort Edmonton requesting his services in finding a young man to act as guide and interpreter. The salary offered was fifty pounds sterling per year, with board and transportation paid, and the prospective employer was a Methodist minister by the name of Rev. Woolsey.[128] Erasmus was offered the job and was given about half an hour to consider the offer. He accepted. Although he consequently left the school before his course was finished, he consoled himself with this thought: "However, my education would not be lost, and the divinity studies would be useful to me as an interpreter to a minister of the gospel, although of another denomination."[129]

### b) *With the Rev. Woolsey at Fort Edmonton and Pigeon Lake*

Erasmus' first meeting with Rev. Woolsey took place at Fort Pitt. He did not have to interpret at the first evening service among the Indians, however, since the minister, not knowing when to expect Erasmus, had already arranged for a man by the name of Ballenden (there were several in the North-West) to "attend him" at the service.[130]

On the way from Fort Pitt to Fort Edmonton, Rev. Woolsey's station, Erasmus

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[126] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[127] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[128] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[129] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[130] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

received a drenching when his horse stumbled in the river. He was wearing "an elaborately trimmed leather jacket and the best-grade Hudson's Bay pants", which got thoroughly soaked. His Indian companions simply laughed. This incident served as a bitter introduction to the social hierarchy of the far west. The HBC factors and clerks, as well as the missionaries, were accorded the highest status; all others, including interpreters, were looked on as merely paid servants, a role in which, throughout his life, the proud and intelligent Erasmus was reluctant to be cast. The Indians Erasmus comments ruefully, considered his outfit "just a bit too elaborate for a mere interpreter, even if it was for a minister of the gospel."[131]

The first year, Erasmus was required only "to make a good interpretation" of the Rev. Woolsey's sermons, which were confined to the Pigeon Lake Indians and "the fort people".[132] As the missionary did not travel that winter, the stay at Edmonton was spent in "comparative idleness". Erasmus thus spent time hunting to help keep the post supplied with food. When Rev. Woolsey and he moved to Pigeon Lake in the early spring of 1857 to fill the gap left by the departure of Rev. Rundle and layman Ben Sinclair, and found the mission buildings in poor repair, he was again required to apply himself more to the basic physical tasks associated with survival in the wilderness than to the intellectually demanding task of interpretation. In the summer, however, when the Indians went to the prairies to hunt buffalo, and the missionary followed them, the situation was just the opposite. Erasmus relates the following: "Mr. Woolsey was active in visiting and preaching among the travelling bands we met. On those occasions I had to be in constant attendance as his interpreter." The interpreter was also " always on call for Sunday services".[133] The occupation of mission interpreter was far from sedentary. This is evident from the following description by Erasmus of the distances covered that summer: "At one time we must have been almost three hundred miles east of Pigeon Lake and our range

[131] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[132] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[133] *Ibid.*, p. 49-50.

covered possibly one hundred miles south of the North Saskatchewan River. Our stay at one place was about a week, seldom more than twelve to fifteen days, then we moved the camp to some other location."[134]

Erasmus had been with Rev. Woolsey just over one and a half years when the factor at Fort Edmonton summoned him and explained the instructions he had received; namely, to hire men for a geological survey to be made that summer, including "an educated man" to act as interpreter for Indian languages and as foreman to take a crew of men to Fort Pitt, at a salary of seventy-five pounds sterling per year.[135] At that time, Rev. Woolsey's superiors were asking him to lower his interpreter's wages or endeavour to get along without an interpreter. In Woolsey's case, the latter option would have been out of the question. Since the salary being offered by the geological survey party, in other words the Palliser expedition, was much more than Erasmus was even then earning, Woolsey let him go, albeit regretfully, if these words, which Erasmus attributes to him, are any indication: "Without your help as interpreter, we never would have accomplished what we have among the tribes we have contacted on the prairie and here among the Pigeon Lake Indian."[136]

### c) *With the Palliser expedition*

Erasmus met Dr. Hector of the expedition at Edmonton early in 1858 and took an immediate liking to him, partly because the doctor had a "thoroughly pleasing personality", free of the "assumed superiority" and "condescending mannerism '" that Erasmus was, in his words, "beginning to associate with all Englishmen of my narrow acquaintance". When the factor had introduced them, Hector is reported to have laughingly exclaimed: "Well, well! I hardly expected to find a minister's man of that size holding the easy duties of an

[134] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[135] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[136] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

interpreter."[137]

As for Captain Palliser, it was the captain's voice that made a strong impression on his interpreter, whose thoughts are summarized in the following sentences : "He had a pleasantly smooth voice and expressed each word with exact and clear pronunciation. He seldom raised his voice higher than ordinary conversational tone but when he spoke his voice carried further than any other speaking at the same time."[138]

Although the captain held services on Sundays, he did not preach, but simply read a portion of the scriptures and prayed. Erasmus was not called upon to interpret these services, because, with but one exception, "all the men had an understanding of English and talked the language more or less fluently." The exception was a buffalo hunter named Vitalle, who, Erasmus observed, spoke "very bad English" but would have been "deeply offended" at any correction or suggestion that he did not understand every word. As Erasmus put it: "He succeeded in intermixing French, English and Cree to a degree unequalled by any person of my acquaintance."[139] It is interesting to note in this connection that while the "men" were all poorly educated or had no schooling whatsoever, being required only to be proficient with guns and experienced in travel on the prairies, Palliser had, by Erasmus' account, specifically requested an "educated" person to act as interpreter for the expedition.[140]

When Erasmus went to the southern plains with the expedition in the summer of 1859, he knew at least the Cree and Swampy Cree languages, but only a little Blackfoot. Swampy Cree, as he had pointed out to the factor at Fort Edmonton when he was first offered the job as interpreter for the expedition, would be useless on the prairie, as those Cree tribes did not leave the bush.[141] Felix Munroe was the expedition's Blackfoot

[137] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[138] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

[139] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[140] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[141] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

interpreter and, wishing to learn more about the Blackfoot tribes and their language, Erasmus cultivated a friendship with him. In addition, to increase Erasmus' opportunities to learn from Munroe, the doctor and the captain assigned duties that included both interpreters. In this his second year of trying to get "a working grasp of the language" Erasmus was, in his own opinion, soon able to "follow the talk with a good understanding of its contents"; before the summer was half over, he was well able to "check the trend of any Blackfoot or Peigan talks".[142]

Where the Assiniboine language was concerned, Erasmus sometimes needed an interpreter, but at other times was himself the interpreter. For example, when the expedition met up with a camp of Stoney Indians along the foot of the mountains and heard them singing hymns and praying, Erasmus explained to Palliser that they were likely some of Rundle's converts. To make some inquiries regarding their observance of the Sabbath he required the assistance of Nimrod, a Mountain Stoney and renowned hunter who had been hired by the expedition. Yet he could apparently interpret without assistance from Assiniboine to English, for after the captain invited the Indians over for a Sunday service and made a short address on the plan of salvation, their leader, an old man, spoke, and Erasmus, in turn, interpreted the old man's words in English to the members of the expedition.[143]

When the expedition's work on the eastern side of the mountains was completed, Palliser decided it was too late in the season to attempt any work on the western side. Hector, however, wanted to carry out some projects of his own in the mountains and asked Erasmus to accompany him. Erasmus, to Hector's surprise and annoyance, refused. His reason was "the difficulties that would be entailed in such a trip", especially "the condition of the stock, the lateness of the season, and the scarcity of pemmican and dried meat supplies to take along".[144] Palliser, too, was surprised by Erasmus' decision. He reported

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[142] *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

[143] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[144] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

the incident in these terms: "Peter Erasmus, always considered heretofore the Doctor's own man, having been instructed by the latter in the use of those instruments which rendered him very useful as a surveyor's assistant, now, at the last moment, backed out, he, Peter, declaring the journey too desperate to undertake..."[145] Years afterwards, in 1900, Peter Erasmus wrote the following lines in a letter to Hector, by then Sir James Hector: "When I think of the past there is one thing I am ashamed of and which I cannot forgive myself, that is when I left you at the foot of the mountains." Instead of going with Hector, he went gold-mining and made "a snug little sum of money". (The complete text of this letter is given in *Buffalo Days and Nights*, pp. xx - xxi.)

### d) *With the Rev. Woolsey at Smoking Lake*

When he left the Palliser expedition, Erasmus was twenty-six years old. After his brief, profitable experiment with gold mining, he returned to his home in the Red River settlement. While there, he received a letter from Rev. Woolsey again offering him employment as an interpreter, this time for a new mission to be started at a place called Smoking Lake (Smoky Lake, Alberta). He accepted the offer. As before, his secondary duties included arduous physical tasks, such as whipsawing lumber, erecting buildings and cutting roads for the carts used to haul freight. In the winter of 1861-62, however, he found the intellectual task of interpreting no less demanding. Woolsey and he visited "a wide range of camps", in which he was often faced with questions by individual Indians that, by his own admission, were beyond his ability to answer.

Nevertheless, he did not abdicate his responsibility to the missionary, as can be seen from these remarks: "Perhaps I may have been of some help to Woolsey as I gave him a report of these difficult questions. I recognized the trend in the sermons I interpreted for him later."[146]

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[145] Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, p. 232.

[146] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

Early in 1862 Erasmus left Rev. Woolsey and took casual employment with Rev. Steinhauer at Whitefish Lake, where he met Charlotte Jackson, his future wife, the daughter of an HBC factor and a Cree Indian woman. His replacement at Smoking Lake was William Monkman, one of two men he had brought to the Smoking Lake mission from Edmonton at Woolsey's request to act as helpers. Commenting on Monkman's abilities, Erasmus notes that he was "a good interpreter and a capable guide".[147]

### e) *With the Rev. George McDougall*

It was when Erasmus was returning to Edmonton from Fort Garry in the summer of 1862 with freight for the Whitefish and Smoking Lake missions that he first met the Rev. George McDougall and his son John. The Rev. McDougall wanted to establish a new mission in a strategic location that would enable him to contact the largest possible number of Indians. He asked Erasmus to come and work at the mission as an interpreter, guide and buffalo hunter. Somewhat reluctantly, as he was still smarting from the "officiousness" of their first meeting, Erasmus accepted the position, having been advised to do so by the Rev. Steinhauer, who, it seems, recognized just how valuable his exceptional talent as an interpreter was to the mission effort. In the latter's view, Erasmus could be of far greater benefit to the church work "by attending as interpreter and guide to Rev. McDougall" than he could by staying at Whitefish Lake and doing the work others could do. John McDougall, whose own ability as an interpreter made him an authoritative judge of Erasmus' talent, shared the Rev. Steinhauer's view. Writing many years later about that first encounter and their first year together, he had this to say: "Peter was, and is, an 'Al' interpreter".[148] He also described, in the following words, Erasmus' performance when his father addressed a crowd of lndians on the plains:

Peter waxed warm and eloquent in his interpreting. What signified it to him

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[147] *Ibid., p. 157.*

[148] McDougall, *Forest, Lake and Prairie*, p. 141.

> that Mr. Steinhauer and William and even myself were closely watching his rendering of this address to the people. He caught the thought and entered into the spirit and purpose of the speaker, and proved himself to be an earnest friend of this people and a prince of interpreters.[149]

Initially, however, it was not easy for Erasmus to interpret for the Rev. McDougall. This is clear from the following comments by the interpreter himself:

> I had some difficulty in adjusting my interpretation to McDougall's manner of speech. Mr. Woolsey's sermons were always carried into the Indian's own realm of understanding in simple language that made interpretation easy. However, after a few sermons by McDougall, I was able to render a good interpretation of his text. When he became better acquainted with his audience, their customs and beliefs, and their way of thinking, I noticed a great deal more interest and understanding among the people.[150]

While the schedule at the McDougall's Victoria mission was a busy one, it did not preclude occasional fun. In December of one year, for example, Erasmus helped the McDougall family to organize traditional Christmas celebrations for the mission. His duties included interpreting for Santa Claus, played by John. The reaction of the Indians is best described in Erasmus' own words, as follows: "When Santa gave them an address of welcome in the Swampy Cree language, the elders gazed in astonishment. I had to speak to them in Cree and explain that the man could speak in all languages for he visited all countries over the Big Water."[151]

Another amusing anecdote from this period concerns Erasmus' wife, who insisted that he speak to her in English all the time. Although she apparently picked up English quite quickly, Erasmus would tease her "by saying big words to hear her attempt at pronunciation". He soon stopped that game, however, as she demanded to know their exact

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[149] *Ibid.*, p. 197.

[150] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

[151] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

meaning or their Cree equivalents, which, in spite of his own knowledge of the two languages, he found sometimes just a bit hard".[152]

In 1864, Erasmus and the McDougalls parted company as a result of a disagreement over salaries. The Rev. George McDougall had received instructions to reduce costs in every possible way and consequently asked Erasmus to accept a salary amounting to a little more than ^50 a year, which, as editor Spry points out[153], was the salary at which he had started with the Rev. Woolsey nine years earlier. The Rev. McDougall was not, however, prepared to accept a lower salary himself. According to Erasmus, his response to the missionary was the following: "A cut in my salary that does not reduce your own is not appealing to my sense of justice."[154]

### f) *At Treaty No. 6 Negotiations*

After leaving the McDougalls, Erasmus moved to Whitefish Lake, near Rev. Steinhauer's mission, where he was given some land by Chief James Seenum. It was there he made his home for many years. It was there too that, early in March of 1876, he received a letter from Mista-wa-sis (Big Child) and Ah-tuk-a-kup (Star Blanket), whom he knew by reputation to be the two main chiefs of the Prairie Crees, asking him to act as their interpreter for a treaty that was to be negotiated that summer at Carlton (Saskatchewan). By Erasmus' account, their couriers explained that he had been recommended by a man named Clarke as "the best interpreter in the whole Saskatchewan valley".[155] He agreed to take the job, asking only that he be notified when to be at Carlton. Well into August, he had still received no word and, deciding they must have made other arrangements, he went with a large party of Indians on a buffalo hunt. Finally two men, the sons of Big Child and

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[152] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

[153] *Ibid.*, p. 318, note 1.

[154] *Ibid., p. 179.*

[155] *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.

Star Blanket, arrived at the buffalo camp to escort him to Carlton. His elderly friend, John Hunter, decided to go along. When, after five days of "hard riding and long hours", the foursome arrived at the negotiating site, there were over 250 teepees on the Indian section of the grounds, more than even Erasmus had ever seen in one locality before. The very evening of Erasmus' arrival, the chief commissioner, Lieutenant-Governor Morris, sent a messenger to ask the Indian chiefs to meet him at the fort. Big Child asked Erasmus to accompany them. He also explained to Erasmus that the government had apparently hired two other interpreters, but that even if the government did not pay him, the Indians would.[156] The account given by Erasmus of the meetings and negotiations connected with the signing of Treaty No. 6 is of special interest here in that such first-hand accounts of actual instances of interpretation, related by the interpreter involved, are exceedingly rare.[157] For Erasmus' entire account, from the Indians' initial request for his services to the details of the negotiations and his eventual employment as an interpreter by the government, the reader is referred to chapters 13 and 14 of *Buffalo Days and Nights*. The paragraphs that follow present some highlights from those chapters.

The official government delegation comprised the Hon. Alexander Morris, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories; the Hon. James McKay; Lawrence Clarke, the "man named Clarke" who had recommended Erasmus to the Indians; retiring HBC chief factor William Christie; and Dr. A. G. Jackes as Secretary to the Commission.[158] Erasmus was, in his own words, "not too greatly concerned" to learn that the two interpreters who had been engaged by the government were Peter Ballenden and the Rev. John McKay, brother to the Hon. James McKay. He knew both these men, and was of the opinion that their ability as interpreters would be tested to the limit by the kind

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[156] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

[157] A few other known examples are: John Tanner, *A Narrative of the captivity and adventures of John Tanner (U. S. interpreter at the Saut de Ste. Marie) during thirty years residence among the Indians in the interior of North America;* John Long, *Voyages and Travels of an Indian interpreter and trader, describing the manners and customs of the North American Indians;* and Nicolas Perrot *Mémoire sur les moeurs, coustumes et relligion des sauvages de l'Amérique septentrionale.*

[158] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-320, note 4.

of large gathering they would face the next day. Peter Ballenden "had not the education or practice to interpret, and his voice had no carrying quality to make himself heard before all this large assembly", although Erasmus does allow that he was "a good man to interpret personal talks".[159] As for the Rev. McKay, he had learned his Cree among the Swampy and Saulteaux, whom the Prairie Cree considered an inferior race, and "was not sufficiently versed in the Prairie Cree to confine his interpretations to their own language".[160]

Of more concern to Erasmus than his counterparts on the government's side were the formal introductions and the initial meeting between the government officials and their interpreters on the one hand, and the Indian chiefs and himself on the other. Clarke, who was conducting the introductions, paid no attention to his presence, and Erasmus regarded this "conspicuous neglect of a formal introduction" on Clarke's part as an attempt to discredit him with the Lieutenant-Governor.[161] Disagreements followed regarding who should interpret during the next day's proceedings. The Governor informed the Indians, through Ballenden, that in Ballenden and Rev. McKay he had "two of the most efficient interpreters that could be obtained". To this announcement, Big Child responded that the Indians had their own interpreter, Peter Erasmus, who, they had been advised by none other than Clarke, was a good man to interpret the Cree language. Big Child added that, although they knew nothing of Erasmus' "efficiency", all the chiefs were prepared to use his services. A somewhat heated exchange ensued, during which the Governor insisted that it was up to the government to provide the means of communication, that the government was willing to pay for the interpretation, and that there was no need for the Indians to assume the extra expense of having their own interpreter. When Big Child presented his views, Erasmus interpreted them immediately, being unwilling, as he said, to wait for

[159] An entry in Pallier's journal almost 20 years earlier reads in part: "Read the prayers of the Church of England, Ballenden translating the most important one into Cree, also first and second lessons". This Ballenden, likely the same, was considered one of "the most trustworthy men" (Spry, *The Palliser Expedition,* pp. 213 and 216).

[160] *Ibid.*, pp. 327 and 241.

[161] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Ballenden's "hesitant and slow interpretations" or for Ballenden to misinterpret the chief's meaning. The outcome of this exchange was that the Indians were allowed to have their interpreter.[162]

The next day, when the Governor was ready to speak to the assembled Indians, more problems arose, again centering around the matter of interpretation. When the Hon. James McKay called on Erasmus to come forward to interpret the Lieutenant-Governor's speech, Erasmus objected in these terms: "It is my impression that I am not employed by the government but am acting only on behalf of the chiefs assembled here. Therefore, I refuse to interpret the Governor's speech; that I consider is the duty of its paid servants." He then faced the Indians and repeated his words in Cree. When the Hon. James McKay insisted, Erasmus again refused, confiding to Chief Big Child that the Indians should let the government's own men talk first and that then they would understand the reason for his refusal. When Big Child rose to express displeasure at the way things were being handled, causing unrest among his followers, Erasmus was beside him and interpreted "word for word as he spoke".[163] Once the chief finished speaking and order was restored, Governor Morris began his address with the Rev. John McKay interpreting. The object of the address was to explain the purpose of his mission.

Erasmus' report of the Rev. McKay's interpretation reads as follows:

> McKay's interpretations were mixed with Swampy and Saulteaux words. I mentioned this in English to the table, and the Honourable James angrily shouted, 'Stop that, or you will rattle him!'
>
> Mista-wa-sis, after listening for a time, jumped to his feet and said, 'We are not Swampy Crees or Saulteaux Indians. We are Plains Crees and demand to be spoken to in our own language.' McKay understood, was confused, and sat down. The Governor turned to me and asked what the chief had said. I explained the chief's words. The Rev. McKay again tried to continue, got,

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[162] *Ibid.*, pp. 237-238.

[163] *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241.

> mixed up with Saulteaux words and took his seat.[164]

Ballenden was then called up, and did exactly as Erasmus had thought he would.

> He made an excellent interpretation of the Governor's words but in a voice so low that it could not be heard beyond the first ten rows of men seated on the ground. The men in the back rows got to their feet and demanded that he speak in a louder voice; again there was some confusion and the two chiefs beside me got to their feet and ordered the men to be quiet. Ballenden tried to raise his voice, choked, and then sat down.[165]

Exasperated with the interruptions, the Governor offered Erasmus the opportunity to justify the chiefs' confidence in him. Erasmus accepted the offer, determined, as he said, to be fair and impartial and to do his work with credit to his employers and justice to the Governor's talks.[166] His own description of his performance follows:

> I immediately rose to my feet, stepped beside the Governor's table, faced the Crees, and spoke in Cree, reviewing the text of the Governor's speech to them. Then I motioned to the Commissioner to continue his address. I knew my voice had suffered nothing from my heated veins or the exultation that I felt at the complete disposal of the slight so desperately manoeuvered by these men sitting around the table. The Governor spoke for an hour or so explaining the purpose of the treaty and its objectives, and describing in some detail the terms. He especially emphasized the money each person would get. There were no further interruptions.
>
> Once during a pause in the Governor's speech, the Honourable James differed with me over an interpretation of one word. However, his brother supported my interpretation in the matter and no further objections were expressed during

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[164] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

[165] *Ibid.*

[166] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

the whole of the remaining treaty negotiations.[167]

One of several other accounts of the same event is provided by NWMP officer Steele, who describes the interpreter at Treaty No. 6 as "a dignified plainsman named Peter Erasmus".[168] Curiously, Steele's version does not mention the inauspicious start to the day's proceedings. It does, however, give this delightful cameo of a confident and competent interpreter at work:

> The Lieutenant Governor then addressed the Indians, announcing the mission of the commissioners through Peter Erasmus, who stood at the end of the table facing them, his position graceful and dignified, his voice deep, clear and mellow, every word distinctly enunciate.[169]

In the evening of that first day of the negotiations, the Governor asked to see Erasmus. During their meeting, Erasmus reports, the Governor congratulated him for his ability to interpret to such a large audience without making a mistake, and advised him that, beginning that day, he would be on the government's payroll for the balance of the talks.[170]

The following day, after a brief disturbance created by the Indian (later Chief) Poundmaker, the positive consequences of the conciliation effected between the government's representatives and the Indians' interpreter were evident. Erasmus describes the second day's proceedings as follows:

> Morris's speech and explanation were couched in simple terms for the understanding of the Indian people. His manner held a sincerity that was most effective in impressing his audience. Knowing the Indians as I did, I could see that they were receiving the message with a growing understanding of its purpose.
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> Standing at the Governor's table I was able to observe the reactions of some of

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[167] *Ibid.*

[168] Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

[169] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[170] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

> the listeners [... ] I had an increased confidence in my interpretations, my sympathies transferred to the Governor's side, and my early animosity to the party was completely gone. The translations came to my tongue without effort and I seemed inspired to a tension that made my voice heard in the back rows where I had placed Hunter to give me a sign if my voice was not being heard distinctly.[171]

In all, five days were required to conclude the negotiations. The sixth day was reserved for the signing of the treaty and the start of treaty payments. As there were no written copies of the treaty in the Indian languages, it was read (i.e. interpreted) to the Indians in its final form. For the reading, the services of all the interpreters were required. It took a great deal of time, but this time there were "no fireworks in the matter of words used, nor the objection to Ballenden's voice."[172]

With respect to payment for Erasmus' services on the government's behalf at Carlton, and for his services at the upcoming signing of Treaty No. 6 by other tribes at Fort Pitt, the arrangements were made on the evening of the sixth day between Lieutenant-Governor Morris and Erasmus, with some advice from paymaster Christie. Morris first offered Erasmus a salary of five dollars a day, as he had interpreted for the Indians as well as the government. However, on Christie's pointing out that Erasmus had done two men's work and had travelled several hundred miles, the Lieutenant-Governor revised the amount to fifteen dollars a day for four days. The rate agreed on for the Fort Pitt negotiations was five dollars per day for travelling and the same for interpreting.[173] The next day, as he was preparing to leave for Fort Pitt, Erasmus also received payment from the two main Indian chiefs. In this connection, it is worth noting that he received almost four times as much money from the Indians as he did from the government for his work at Carlton ($230,

[171] *Ibid.*, p. 245.

[172] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

[173] *Ibid.*, p. 255.

compared with $60).[174] Evidence of the important role Erasmus played is found in the number of times his name appears on the Treaty No. 6 documents. (See Appendix D.)

### g) *In the Service of the Government*

At the conclusion of all the current business pertaining to Treaty No. 6, the Lieutenant-Governor offered Erasmus a position in the service of the Canadian government, with a recommendation that he be paid a salary of fifty dollars per month. In regard to the question of how much Erasmus actually earned as a government employee, however, it is interesting to note the discrepancy that becomes apparent from his previously mentioned letter to Sir James Hector, written in 1900. In that letter, Erasmus wrote that he had been with the Canadian Government in the Indian Department from 1876 to 1886 "at a Salary of $1000.00 per Annum".[175] Erasmus was to act for the government in the distribution of rations and goods in fulfillment of its part of the treaty terms and would be called upon from time to time to interpret the treaties to those chiefs who had not yet signed. He was to remain at his home at Whitefish Lake "for the purpose of handling matters concerned with Indians of that area and its precincts", although he would be on call for any assignment for which his services might be required.[176]

As it happened, he worked from his home for only a few years before being transferred to Edmonton to assist a new agent who was responsible for several reservations. In 1881, he went to the Cypress Hills "hotspot" as a kind of troubleshooter, to persuade the Indians who were gathering there to go back to their reservations. The following year, at the age of 48, he resigned from service with the Edmonton agency and returned home to Whitefish Lake, where he also began working with the HBC, buying furs and selling HBC goods. This arrangement lasted three years, until the Indian Rebellion of

[174] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

[175] *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

[176] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

1885, during which he was again required to help keep the peace, this time by convincing the Indians to remain loyal to the government. NWMP officer Denny mentions Erasmus among those who rendered "invaluable service as guides, scouts and interpreters to the Government forces engaged in military operations during that year."[177]

In the exercise of his duties for the government Erasmus was apparently not averse to adjusting the tenor of a speech when he deemed it expedient, much as the Blackfoot interpreter Felix Munroe had done when the two interpreters were together during the Palliser expedition. For example, Erasmus admits that, when he accompanied Chief Seenum to Regina in 1884 to assist the chief in presenting a case to obtain more land for the Whitefish band members, the additional land was not "demanded", as the chief said, but rather, through his interpretation, requested ".[178]

## 6. *Alexis Cardinal*

One of the many French mixed-bloods who contributed to the work of the missionaries in Alberta during the period under study, Alexis Cardinal was born about 1830 near Lac La Biche (Alberta), the son of a Métis father and a Cree mother. He entered the service of the HBC in 1848 and, the same year, met Father Lacombe for the first time. Although he was not allowed to become an Oblate, as he wished to do, he served as Father Lacombe's faithful companion for close to twenty years. Dr. Hector of the Palliser Expedition noted that Alexis was one of the best dog-sled runners in the country.[179] Over the years, Alexis also gained a reputation as a builder, in particular achieving the distinction of erecting the first building on the future site of Calgary. Besides helping the early French-speaking missionaries simply to survive the harsh physical conditions of western living, he interpreted for them and furthered their Christian teaching. When Father Lacombe was

[177] Denny, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

[178] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

[179] Spry, *The Palliser Expedition*, p. 189.

called away for several years from his planned mission among the Blackfoot tribes, Alexis settled among them, intending to realize the mission as best he could. Late in 1874, he was with Fathers Scollen and Bonald at the Notre Dame de la Paix mission (Calgary), acting as interpreter and catechist along with Jean L'Heureux and another Métis, Father Scollen's and Father Leduc's "beloved" Louis Dazé, who became lost and died in a blizzard that same winter.[180] A few years later, Father Lacombe's "faithful Alexis", too, was found dead, near the northern mission of Cold Lake, after his mind had apparently become unhinged.

## 7. *Jean L'Heureux*

Jean L'Heureux was born about the same time as Alexis Cardinal, but in Quebec City. Wishing to become a priest, he entered the seminary there, but completed only his first year of religious studies. In 1850, he arrived in the far west, where he applied to be a catechist at Lac Ste-Anne mission, but was rejected by Father Lacombe. Several years later he saved Father Lacombe's life during an outbreak of disease in the Indian camps. Subsequently he became an assistant in the Catholic mission field, despite having been excommunicated from the Church by Bishop Grandin, and having earned the nickname "Robin Hood" among the whites on the prairies because of his penchant for stealing from them and giving the stolen goods to his friends the Indians. L'Heureux lived with the Blackfoot for several decades and often served as an intermediary between their chief, Crowfoot, and representatives of the white man's various institutions.

When NWMP officer Steele retained the services of a "John L'Hereux" near Calgary in 1884, the latter was "the interpreter for the agency". Steele described him as follows:

> The interpreter was a man of great experience and equally great timidity. He had lived in the Blackfoot camp for many years, often sharing Crowfoot's lodge, and advising him when any question came up between him and the whites, and seemed to be much in his confidence during the treaty of 1877 at

[180] Byrne, *op. cit.*, pp. 31 and 37.

> the Blackfoot Crossing.[181]

L'Heureux's name does, in fact, appear among those of the witnesses to Treaty No. 7. (See Appendix D.) Considering this apparently very intimate acquaintance with Chief Crowfoot, the interpreter's reactions during Steele's confrontation with the chief in 1884 seem puzzling, to say the least. L'Heureux was required to accompany Steele to Crowfoot's Sun Dance camp to arrest a Cree half-breed who, allegedly influenced by Louis Riel, was "making mischief" among the Blackfoot. Steele announced his presence, then entered Crowfoot's lodge with his interpreter. His version of what happened next follows:

> I spoke firmly to him but in a friendly way, and told the interpreter to say that I had come to bring the half-breed to Calgary, that he had been making mischief, and had to be tried for his offence and must come with me now. I also told the half-breed that he must come at once. He understood English, and I spoke to him in that language, but he showed no sign of moving.[182]

All this time, according to Steele, L'Heureux " as flas pale as death, with his knees knocking together in fright". Crowfoot then responded "with great vehemence", while the Indians seemed to be expressing approval of what their chief was saying. Steele's account continues in this way:

> I understood him to be speaking in defiance of me, and told the interpreter to tell him I was in earnest and would stand no nonsense. I said to L'Hereux [sic] that he was not telling the truth to Crowfoot, that he was temporizing with the chief, and I would not permit it. He braced up a bit then and told the chief what I said to him.[183]

Despite some threatening motions by the chief, Steele did finally manage to remove the troublemaker. Ironically, when the charge against the half-breed was eventually heard in court, it was dismissed.

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[181] Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

[182] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

[183] *Ibid.*

A particular point of interest in regard to L'Heureux's interpretations is that, although born and educated in Quebec, and bearing a French name, he was frequently, as in the above case, called upon to interpret between the Indian tongues and English. A notable example of this occurred in 1886 when Crowfoot and two other Blackfoot chiefs were invited by the Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, to visit the eastern provinces, as a reward for their loyalty during the Rebellion of the previous year. Both Father Lacombe and Jean L'Heureux accompanied the Blackfoot chiefs. According to one report, Crowfoot's address at a public reception given by the city of Ottawa was delivered "with superb gestures" and was "translated" into English by Jean L'Heureux.[184]

## 8. *Pierre Leveiller*

This Métis interpreter was, according to officer Steele, first employed by the NWMP in 1874 to hunt buffalo near Fort Macleod. However, when Steele and a strong party set out in the winter of 1878-79 to deal with complaints from Cree Indians against the Blackfoot, he was the Cree interpreter for the party, while Jerry Potts (see sub-section 9), who was of an entirely different temperament, was the Blackfoot interpreter. At that time, Leveillée, as Steele refers to him, was "tall and well knit, about 66 years of age, with all the vivacity and politeness of his French ancestors". He was also good natured, and a great favourite with the men. "Leveillée would never fail to bow to the officers or touch his hat gracefully and politely to any who addressed him, no matter who they might be."[185]

When the first group of Indian chiefs signed Treaty No. 6 at Carlton on August 23, 1876, one of the witnesses listed was "Pierre Laviller", who signed with an X; when the Chiefs and head men of the Willow Indians near Fort Carlton signed the treaty on August 28, one of the witnesses was "Pierre Lavailler", who also signed with an X. (See Appendix D.) Furthermore, the adhesion to Treaty No. 6 signed at Fort Walsh three years later, on

[184] Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

[185] Steele, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-136.

July 2, 1879, notes that the treaty was explained to the Indians by Edgar Dewdney, Indian Commissioner, "through the interpreters Edward McKay and P. Leveiller". (See Appendix D.) There can be little doubt that Steele's Leveillée, these witnesses, and this interpreter were all one and the same.

## 9. *Jerry Potts* (b. c.1837; d. 1896)

There are several sources for the life story of this man of remarkable contrasts who has a special place in western Canadian history and is best known in Alberta for his work as a scout and interpreter for the NWMP. For one informal yet detailed account of this colourful character's life, the reader is referred to B. D. Fardy's biography, *Jerry Potts: Paladin of the Plains*. The biographical information in the following paragraphs is taken primarily from that account.

Jerry Potts, or "Bear Child", as he would later be known to the Blackfoot, was born Jeremiah Potts, son of Andrew R. Potts, a Scottish clerk with the American Fur Company at Fort McKenzie (later Fort Benton), Montana, U. S. A., and Namo-pisi, or Crooked Back, a Blackfoot girl of the Black Elks band of the Bloods. Although his father was a learned man from a successful family who had at one time studied medicine, Jerry did not have the opportunity to benefit from such learning, as his father was killed in error at the Fort by a disgruntled Piegan when Jerry was still a young boy. Jerry remained among the traders, moving with the men from post to post until he was unofficially adopted by another Scotsman, Andrew Dawson, whom B. D. Fardy describes as "an educated and gentle man". From Dawson, he received "a semblance of education" and, more importantly, learned the ins and outs of the fur trading business and the ways of the frontier. In his travels with his foster father he also learned to speak several Indian languages which included, besides his native Blackfoot, Cree, Sioux and Crow.[186] Besides giving him an obvious advantage in the interpretation field, Potts' fluency in several Indian languages came in useful in other ways throughout his life. Together with his

[186] Fardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

unprepossessing appearance and exceptional courage and cunning, it often allowed him to pass unchallenged through the camps of hostile tribes and, more than once, to save his own skin as well as the lives of others.

By the year 1850, Potts was just north of the U. S.-Canada border with his mother's people, where he spent several years living and travelling with the Bloods, learning their ways and those of his Piegan and Blackfoot brothers, and developing the shooting and, particularly, tracking skills that would later earn him the respect and trust of his full-blood brothers and his NWMP employers. By moving frequently between the camps of the Bloods and the American Fur Company post at Fort Benton, Potts was soon intimately acquainted with nearly every mile of the Blackfoot domain, which at that time extended as far north as the North Saskatchewan River. Potts' first allegiance was to the Indians, and he would always show a preference for their way of life, with one major exception. Unlike many of his Indian brothers, he respected the white man's concept of private property and the law, which his upbringing among the traders had taught him. This shared ethic may well be one reason he was later such an asset to the NWMP in eliminating Indian raids, whisky smuggling and horse and cattle rustling.

### a) *In the Service of the American Fur Company*

By 1860, in his early twenties, Potts was again south of the border, working for his foster father and the American Fur Company. He was sent for a time to Fort Galpin, an obscure company outpost some miles from Fort Benton where, according to Fardy, "his skills were applied to hunting and interpreting.[187]

The demise of the American Fur Company in 1864, however, led to a shortage of work in the Fort Benton area. Thus when, in 1869, the I. G. Baker Company approached Potts, whose reputation was already well established in the North-West, about acting as hunter and interpreter for their outpost "at the edge of the world" (i.e. Fort Hamilton, a.k.a.

[187] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Fort Whoop-Up), he agreed to go to work for them.[188]

### b) *In the Service of the 1. G. Baker Company in Whoop-Up Country and in Benton, Montana*

That year (1869), Potts headed north for the free traders' haven, the almost virgin and still lawless territory known as "Whoop-Up country", which lay across the Canadian border in the southern part of what would later become Alberta. While working for the whisky traders there, Potts came to realize that the traders' "firewater" was destroying the Blackfoot people. It was after his own mother, Namo-pisi, and her son No Chief were killed by some drunken Blood relatives in 1872 that Potts, once he had avenged their deaths, quit the whisky forts and returned to Montana.

Potts' first wife, Mary, a Crow Indian, had refused to accompany him on his sojourn north, preferring to go back to her own people. Potts had therefore married two Piegan women, and it was to the camps of his wives' people that he went upon his return to Montana. He soon tired of the restrictions of reservation life, however, and in 1874 again went to work for the I.G. Baker trading company, whose trading business with the lndians of Montana was by then, thanks to intervention by the U .S. Army, for legitimate wares.

### c) *In the Service of the NWMP*

It was in late September of 1874 that Lt.-Col. George Atcheson French, Commissioner of the newly formed NWMP, and Col. James Farquharson Macleod, Assistant Commissioner, met Potts for the first time. They had been advised by the mixed-blood guides who were to take them into Whoop-Up country that the only chance of survival would be to head south to the Sweetgrass Hills on the U. S. border. Once they and their men arrived there,

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[188] *Ibid.*, p.34. One visitor to this post a few years later, after Potts had moved on, made the following observations: "The garrison consisted of six men, which included the manager and interpreter. The interpreter was a Negro. I was told that the Negroes master the Indian language more quickly and easily that the white man." Donald Graham, "On the Plains in 1872-73 ", in *The Best From Alberta History*, Hugh Dempsey, ed. (Saskatoon, Sask.: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981), p. 40.

however, their guides refused to go any farther into Blackfoot territory. When the two police officers arrived at the I. G. Baker Company store in Benton to purchase supplies, they were offered a guide who, the storekeeper claimed, "knew the country as well as he knew his own face, was half Blackfoot, and was well known and respected among the Indians".[189] Fardy notes that Potts' manner and appearance probably caused him to be discounted by many.[190] (See photograph on following page.) He sums up the first meeting between Potts and the police officers as follows:

> They were not very impressed with the short, bow-legged, slope-shouldered little man who stepped through the door. He looked almost comical as he stood there holding a Winchester '73 rifle that was nearly as long as he was, and the incongruous little bowler hat he wore just did not belong with the greasy buckskins and moccasins. The fact that Potts did not offer much conversation did not do much to inspire confidence either.[191]

The Canadians, however, were in no position to be critical; thus, albeit somewhat reluctantly, they accepted Potts' services. Although initially not very impressed, by the time Fort Whoop-Up was reached and the situation there found to be exactly as Potts had described, Macleod was convinced that the diminutive guide was worthy of the trust and confidence the trader in Benton had expressed in him. Knowing he needed the skills and knowledge of a man like Potts, he offered Potts a position as interpreter and guide at a wage of $90 a month, an offer Potts accepted. One NWMP officer's version of the arrangement was as follows: Potts was engaged at $90 per month in the capacity of guide, "his duties including also those of interpreter".[192]

Potts' uncanny sense of locality and direction contributed to making him a legend as

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[189] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[190] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[191] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[192] Denny, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

the best scout and guide in the Canadian and American northwest.[193] It is doubtful, however, especially judging by today's standards, whether Potts' performance as an interpreter would warrant the same attention, unless for its deficiencies. He was known among the whites as a laconic, almost taciturn man, and perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in his style of interpreting from the Indian languages into English. Ample illustration is provided by the following two anecdotal examples from the time the NWMP arrived at Fort Whoop-Up.

The Blackfoot were staying away from the area of the police camp because of stories spread among the Indians by the whisky traders, who had hurriedly taken their departure upon hearing of the force's imminent arrival. Potts, having been sent by Macleod to dispel the Indians' fears, travelled to the scattered Blood, Piegan and Blackfoot camps, explaining the presence of the police. Not long after, a small group of Bloods and Piegans arrived at the fort and, naturally, Potts was summoned to interpret the proceedings between Col. Macleod and his Indian visitors. Fardy describes the event as follows:

> The Indians, in their characteristic style, expounded at length. Macleod in his eagerness found their longwindedness almost trying, but he sat in patience and endured their almost endless tirade. Finally the Indians were finished and, with relief and expectation, Macleod turned to Potts and asked him what they had said. Potts, with typical brevity, summed up the whole of the Indians' speech with one phrase: "Dey damn glad you're here."[194]

The second example, when Crowfoot, undisputed leader of the Blackfoot tribe, and his followers entered Fort Macleod on December 1, 1874, is related by Fardy in these terms:

> Coached by Potts, Macleod received Crowfoot with all the decorum demanded by his position. Again there was a lengthy and somewhat impassioned speech which Macleod dutifully endured. During the chief's oratory Macleod recognized a few Blackfoot words he had learned [... ] From the distinguished

[193] See Fardy, *op. cit.*, chapter 7, "The Winter of 1875 ", and published first-hand accounts of the experiences of various members of the NWMP.

[194] Fardy, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

> chief's gestures and expressions Macleod assumed that he was expressing his praise and gratitude to the NWMP. When the chief finished his speech Macleod turned to Potts with a sense of satisfaction and anticipation.[195]

Again, however, Macleod was to be disappointed for, as Fardy tells it, "Potts' translation of Crowfoot's monologue took only moments, and did nothing to sate Macleod's bated breath."[196]

A few days after the initial meeting with Crowfoot, Red Crow of the Bloods and Bull's Head of the Piegans came with the Blackfoot chief into the fort to hold a grand council. Macleod followed to the letter the instructions he had been given by Potts concerning the proper procedure for receiving the chiefs, the chiefs were favorably impressed, and the meeting was a very positive one. Nevertheless, even at that time, Potts' interpretation into English was subject to question, not only for its brevity, but also for the quality of the English. Fardy quotes one Mountie, whom he does not identify, as follows: "The chief difficulty about his interpretations was that, after he had interpreted from the Blackfoot into the English language, you weren't very much farther ahead, for his English was weird."[197] This assessment seems to contradict that provided by Steele, who claims Potts was the most reliable interpreter the force ever had, being "truthful and clear..."[198]

When the target language was Blackfoot, however, there seems to have been little room for doubt or criticism, for then, in Fardy's words, Potts "showed all the verbosity and passion of his Indian blood". Officer Steele's description of Potts' interpretation into Blackfoot during Crowfoot's visit supports this view. He wrote as follows: "When rendering the Blackfeet into English Potts was very laconic; but his interpretation of what Lt.-Col. Macleod said was eloquent, and his eyes gleamed as if his soul were in it, and as

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[195] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[196] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[197] *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

[198] Steele, *op. cit*, p. 277.

if showing that he felt that every word of it was good for the Indians."[199]

On one level, this "paradox of Potts' oratory prowess", as Fardy puts it, may indeed have made him, as that author claims, "the perfect diplomat when dealing with the Blackfoot".[200] However, Potts' limited English language skills made him entirely unsuitable to interpret for well-educated government officials in treaty negotiations, as he and Col. Macleod, later Commissioner Macleod, were to find out to their mutual embarrassment in 1877.

### d) *At the signing of Treaty No. 7*

On September 19, 1877, David Laird, Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest Territories, and Commissioner Macleod of the NWMP arrived at Blackfoot Crossing from Battleford (Saskatchewan), led by Jerry Potts, to negotiate Treaty No. 7 with the Blackfoot Confederacy. Unfortunately, but not really surprisingly–as will become apparent–there do not seem to be any accounts by the interpreters themselves of the interpretation done to and from the Blackfoot language during the two days of preliminary meetings and explanations, or during the actual ceremonies. As is too often the case where interpretation is concerned, the only written versions of the proceedings, other than the official record, are those of a few observers or historians with a personal interest in the details of such events.

Although Potts was reportedly of invaluable assistance in his role of diplomat in the first few days, helping iron out differences between the various tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy and so on, he was completely nonplussed when the time came for the chiefs to meet Laird and Macleod to hear the terms and sign the treaty. Fardy's version of what happened reads as follows:

Standing by as the lieutenant-governor began his speech of praises and

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[199] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

[200] Fardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.

> promises was Potts, who had been asked to act as interpreter. When Laird paused and waited for Potts to translate his words, there was only a long silence. Macleod glanced at Potts anxiously and the gruff little scout shifted uneasily on his feet. Looking at Macleod, Potts blurted out his dilemma in typically brief fashion: Laird's speech was so eloquent and articulate, he said, he simply did not understand a damn word the man was saying.[201]

A replacement interpreter was found almost immediately. As Fardy tells it, an embarrassed Macleod quickly found "an English half-blood named James Bird, whose loquaciousness, if not his vocabulary, was a little more abundant than Potts'."[202] There can be little doubt that this was the now elderly "Jamey Jock", who, twenty or so years earlier, had been a thorn in the flesh of the HBC traders and the early missionaries. Understandably, perhaps, NWMP officer Denny's account of the same events makes no mention of Potts whatsoever. In fact, the only reference Denny makes to interpretation is the brief statement, previously quoted, beginning "The Commissioners' interpreter was an old Hudson's Bay Company ex-employee named Bird..."

In the light of the current unrest regarding native rights, and the longstanding debate as to whether the Indians really understood what Treaty No. 7 meant, it is worth noting here that, as the chiefs and headmen of the Blackfoot nation put their marks to Treaty No. 7, Potts assured Laird and Macleod that the Indians had understood the meaning of the treaty and were sincere in their acceptance of it. He is reported by one source to have said that he had never in his life heard them speak their minds so freely[203], while another source replaces the word "freely" with "fully".[204]

In another connection, it should also be noted that, despite the embarrassment and anger Potts had caused Macleod because of his inability to interpret the Lieutenant-

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[201] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[202] *Ibid.*

[203] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[204] Denny, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

Governor's speech, the Commissioner's faith in Potts' skill and competence as a guide remained unshaken. Not long after the treaty signing, in an early, freak blizzard on the open plain, he again trusted his own life and the lives of his men to Potts' uncanny path-finding instincts. The same year, he assumed command of the new NWMP headquarters at Fort Walsh in the Cypress Hills (Saskatchewan) and asked Potts to go with him. Potts remained outside the territory now known as Alberta until 1880, when the Commissioner retired from the force and was appointed a stipendary magistrate for the Macleod district. Potts, too, returned to Fort Macleod at that time but, finding the town had become too crowded in the few years he had been gone, he rejoined his people on the Piegan reserve in the Porcupine Hills. From there he still made his services available to the NWMP.

A map showing the area Potts knew so well and travelled so extensively throughout much of his life appears on the following page (Map 11).

### e) *In the Early 80s and the Northwest Rebellion of 1885*

In 1881–one might say inexplicably, in view of his previous failure to live up to Macleod's expectations of him as an interpreter for visiting dignitaries–the NWMP hired Potts as official guide and interpreter for the last leg of a tour of the Northwest Territories by the Governor General of Canada, the Marquis of Lorne. The NWMP at Fort Macleod had been assigned escort duty from Blackfoot Crossing to Fort Shaw in Montana.[205]

Four years later, Potts played a crucial role in convincing the Blackfoot tribes to stay out of the Indian Rebellion. "In his dealings with the red men he was a master of finesse", one of his admirers writes.[206] This talent proved to be invaluable as he went with NWMP officers from camp to camp during the early weeks of the rebellion, using diplomacy and tact to defuse a potentially explosive situation. Former Mountie and Indian Agent Cecil Denny, who was reinstated as Indian Agent for the Blackfoot on his own terms because of

[205] Fardy, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[206] Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

the gravity of the situation, also travelled to the Indian camps and–through Potts' interpretations–was able to learn the Indians' fears and complaints first-hand.[207] In Denny's view, Potts ranked high as an interpreter, for the following reason: "Indians are often rambling in their speech in council, saying much that has no bearing on the question at issue. Potts would get to the gist of the matter in a few short terse sentences."[208] Steele echoes this view in these words: "In explaining to the courts and the members of the force he had a clear-cut but terse way of his own, one might say, boiling it down to the finest point needed, and to the Indians the remarks of the white officials were explained so accurately that there could be no shadow of doubt in their minds."[209] While he may have been, as historian MacInnes puts it, "a joy to the hearts of all Police officers", professional lawyers apparently had little liking for him, as he made "a bad medium for cross-examination purposes".[210]

Relevant to the matter of interpretation in the courts of that time is a meeting that took place during the NWMP's years at Fort Walsh. Colonel Macleod and General Terry of the U. S. army and his staff met in council with the great Sioux chief Sitting Bull and his chiefs, all of whom had taken refuge in Canada after their last stand south of the border. The U. S. envoys had come to Fort Macleod to convince the Sioux to return to the U. S. The meeting is described by one of the police officers as follows:

> General Terry then addressed the chiefs, through an interpreter who, it is to be regretted, did not know even his own language and was in no manner to be compared with those who did duty at the great Blackfeet and Cree treaties. Few men of good education had opportunities of learning Sioux, consequently the fine display of oratory of some of the chiefs was cut down to laconic remarks

[207] One reason for Denny's resignation as Indian Agent had been the instructions he received from his superiors farther east to cut down on the agency' expenses by dismissing his clerk and his storekeeper and retaining only his interpreter (MacInnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154).

[208] Denny, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

[209] Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

[210] MacInnes, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

> even coarser than one sometimes heard in the magistrate's court at Fort Macleod.[211].

When Jerry Potts died, he was buried by the NWMP with full military honours in a small Roman Catholic cemetery east of the town of Fort Macleod. His tombstone was inscribed with an epitaph that was, as Fardy notes, no doubt in keeping with the way Potts would have wanted it–laconic. It read as follows:

> In memory of Interpreter Jerry Potts D. Division. Died July 14, 1896.[212]

The story of Jerry Potts is, as will be obvious from the preceding pages, the story of just one of many fascinating men of mixed blood who lived and worked on the prairies during the period under study in this chapter as guides and interpreters. The most valuable were those who, in addition to an intimate knowledge of the native languages and idioms, possessed what might be called a "feeling disposition", and who were masters of finesse in dealing with the native prairie inhabitants, because of their intimate understanding of, and empathy toward, these peoples. In the words of Irene Spry, editor of Peter Erasmus' autobiographical work, the lives of such men it spanned the critical period during which Rupert's Land became western Canada, the period in which the open buffalo plains were transformed into townsites and farmsteads–policed, surveyed, fenced, settled, and threaded with railroads and roads." Spry gives at least partial credit for the fact that this transformation took place without any major Indian war to "the notable mixed-blood guides and interpreters who helped the missionaries, explorers, surveyors, police, and other precursors of the new way of life."[213]

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[211] Steele, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

[212] Fardy, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[213] Erasmus, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

## Chapter 3

# THE MODERN ERA

## A. CONTEXT

Today, less than a decade away from the twenty-first century, the political, economic and linguistic contexts in which translation and interpretation are practised in Alberta are, not surprisingly, much different from those of nearly a century earlier. Many of the changes that occurred during the intervening years stemmed directly or indirectly from certain developments on the international and national scenes and must be considered in the light of those developments.

### 1. *The International Scene*

It is not unreasonable to suggest that the notion of a"shrinking globe" verbalized in the 1960s might actually find its roots in the creation of the League of Nations, an organization for international cooperation established at the end of World War I, and having its headquarters in Geneva. In 1946, at the end of World War II, the League was replaced by the United Nations (UN), which inherited most of its purposes and structures. An indication of the shifting international balance of power was evident in the fact that the United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO), which convened in San Francisco on April 25, 1945 and drafted the Charter of the United Nations, was "the first major international conference for two millenniums not dominated by Europe".[1] The UN began with a total of 51 members, representing all parts of the world, and it would be safe to say that never before had such a large number of nations been represented in one organization, at the same time, to discuss matters of importance to the world at large. Naturally, one of the urgent and essential requirements of such an undertaking was the provision of interpreters and translators. The international Secretariat assumed this

[1] "United Nations ", *Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia*, 15th ed., p. 894.

responsibility, as well as that of distributing documents and speeches daily in the five official languages of the UN (English, French, Spanish, Russian and Chinese). To cope with the problem presented by oral exchanges in any of the five official languages, a system of simultaneous interpretation, a forerunner of that used today in Canada's House of Commons, was implemented
immediately.[2]

In 1957, the European Economic Community, or Common Market as it was also called, an economic association of western European countries, was established by the Treaty of Rome for the following purpose:

> ...to facilitate (1) the removal of barriers to trade among the member nations; (2) the establishment of a single commercial policy toward nonmember countries; (3) the eventual coordination of transportation systems, agricultural policies, and general economic policies; (4) the removal of private and public measures restricting free competition; and (5) the assurance of the mobility of labour, capital, and entrepreneurship.[3]

The birth of this international organization also created a demand for interpreters and translators, as the six original members (France, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Italy and West Germany) sought to act in concert for their mutual economic benefit. It is worth digressing for a moment at this point to note that had Esperanto taken hold, there would have been no such demand. Esperanto was an artificial international language introduced in 1892 and based as far as possible on words common to the chief European languages. One reason for its failure to catch on was unquestionably the close relationship that exists between language and national identity.

Although the establishment of such international bodies as the UN and the EEC was fundamentally significant, the main contributors to the shrinking globe" notion were,

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[2] Aurèle Pilon, a Quebecker, perfected the technique of simultaneous interpretation that had been used for the Nuremberg Trials (1945-1946) and helped make simultaneous interpretation what it is today. Details of his contribution are found in Jean Delisle, *The Language Alchemists* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990), pp. 335-336.

[3] "European Economic Community ", *Encyclopedia Britannica: Micropedia*. 15th ed., p. 1001.

undoubtedly, the telecommunications and aerospace industries. By diminishing the distances separating Earth's inhabitants to an extent never before possible, they forever changed our perception of the world and the universe in which we live.

The growth of these two key industries was one outcome of the expansion of scientific research and development (R & D) that began in earnest after World War II. Technological advances came in rapid succession, and were followed by increasing demands for still more sophisticated products and technologies, which were not without positive economic consequences, particularly as a result of improvements in advertising and marketing techniques. The volume of scientific writings grew, the number of international meetings and exchanges multiplied, and the speed of international communication accelerated, especially through the use of computers and satellites. There was, in fact, a veritable information explosion, creating a need for language specialists of all kinds, naturally including interpreters and translators. At the same time, there emerged entirely new and rapidly evolving specialized vocabularies, a situation which, in the context of interlingual communication, placed unprecedented demands on even the most proficient translators and interpreters. Translators and interpreters were expected to know, not just in their target language but also in the language or languages from which they translated or interpreted, the terms and expressions relating to recently discovered technologies, processes or products, sometimes even before such terms and expressions had entered the public domain. To take just one example of the obstacles they faced, often few specialized dictionaries (either bilingual or unilingual) were available to them when required, as even lexicographers struggled to keep pace. One development occurred, however, that did much to lighten the translator's load, by considerably reducing both the time required to make specialized dictionaries available, and the time required to produce finished translations. This was the invention of computerized word processing systems, a development that has, in fact, together with the creation of computerized terminology banks and translation data bases, caused a definitive revolution in the practice of translation around the world.

Just as representatives from many countries were assembling to discuss political and economic matters, so the intermediaries in the international dialogue (i.e. interpreters and

translators) were coming together to discuss matters relevant to their increasingly demanding occupations. In 1953, the international association of conference interpreters known as AIIC was formed and set exacting standards for individuals wishing to practice conference interpreting. Its headquarters are in Paris. The same year, the international federation of translators known as FIT was founded in Paris with the patronage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), one of the many specialized agencies affiliated with the UN. Unlike AIIC, FIT does not have individual members; it is, as its name indicates, a union of organizations. The national associations of translators and interpreters of six countries (Federal Republic of Germany, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway and Turkey) were its first members. It now has ten times that many member associations, including the Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council (CTIC) (see sub-section 2). In 1977, to overcome the problems inherent in communicating, from its European headquarters, with a membership spread over the American, Asian and African continents, FIT adopted a resolution leading to the creation of regional centres. In 1985, the Regional Centre for North America was formed, incorporating the national translators and interpreters associations of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. In this respect, it can be said that translators and interpreters in North America are a step ahead of the politicians and economists, who are still debating the pros and cons of free trade among these three nations.

## 2. *The Canadian Context*

For many years before the BNA Act brought together the first four provinces of the Canadian federation and established broad guidelines for the official use of the English and French languages in Canada, interpretation and the translation of pragmatic, or non-literary, texts had been facts of life in Canada. For details of the first 450 years of translation and interpretation activities in Canada, and the politico-economic contexts in which they took place, the reader is referred to two unique works produced by Professor Jean Delisle of the School of Translators and Interpreters at the University of Ottawa: *Bridging the Language Solitudes* (1984), a history of the Translation Bureau of the

Government of Canada from 1934-84 published to mark the 50th anniversary of the Bureau, an administrative division of the Department of the Secretary of State; and the monumental *Translation in Canada, 1534-1984* (1987). Some information from those works has been incorporated into the paragraphs that follow, as appropriate.

As the Canadian nation grew and developed, the organizational structure of the administration's translation services changed several times. Centralized services had been in place since 1841. Around 1910, however, the idea of centralization was more or less abandoned. This change was deemed advisable by some in order to meet the needs of a country whose activities had diversified, extending to many specialized fields. Translators who had been generalists felt the need to specialize, in order to be able to provide good-quality translations within acceptable deadlines. Consequently, the number of translators scattered among the various government departments and agencies, and thus specializing in certain spheres of activity, began to increase. Decentralization of the administration's translation services was a controversial issue, however, and, after several stormy debates during which strong arguments were presented both for and against centralization[4], a centralized translation bureau to serve the entire federal government was established by legislation in 1934. Nevertheless, as Delisle points out: "The statutory provisions of an Act are one thing, the terms and conditions of their application are another."[5]

In another connection, as early as 1910, the federal administration's translation divisions were cooperating with other countries in order to meet their own and the other countries' translation needs. In that year, a representative was sent to Belgium and Switzerland "to gather information on the organization of official translation services in those countries."[6] During the war, Canada loaned 18 of its translators to the American Army's Language Bureau "to assist with the translation into French of 500 manuals

[4] Jean Delisle, *Bridging the Language Solitudes/Au coeur du trialogue canadien* (Ottawa: Secretary of State, 1984), pp. 11-13.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

destined for the French Forces in North Africa."[7] In 1953, the Superintendent of the federal Translation Bureau, a man with over 40 years' experience in administrative translation, travelled to UN headquarters in New York to gather information on the organization of that international body's translation services, including its simultaneous interpretation system. From the trip, he brought back two new ideas for implementation within the Bureau: the creation of a central terminology unit to help remedy the acute shortage of dictionaries and reference works in the translation divisions; and the use of a "technological innovation", the dictation machine, as an aid to increase the speed at which finished translations could be produced.[8] The information he brought back concerning the UN's simultaneous interpretation system also enabled the federal Bureau to avoid being caught unprepared when a motion to institute such a system in the House of Commons was passed by the Canadian Parliament in 1958. The system began operation in January 1959.[9]

After World War II, translators and interpreters in Canada's provinces felt the same need to organize as did their counterparts in other countries of the world, as well as the need for a coordinating body that could represent them at the national and international levels. Consequently, in 1956, the Society of Translators and Interpreters of Canada (STIC) was incorporated. In 1970, this organization was succeeded by the Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council (CTIC), a federation of seven provincial associations, two of which, the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO) and the Société des traducteurs du Québec (STQ), were instrumental in its founding. Most, if not all, of the translators and interpreters at that time were, in fact, from Ontario and Quebec, those two provinces being particularly fertile fields for language professionals.

The broad objectives of CTIC, according to its informational pamphlet 9 85 2000, are "to coordinate the activities of member societies and encourage them to work together,

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 21.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 28 and Jean Delisle, *Translation in Canada, 1534-1984/La Traduction au Canada, 1534-1984* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), p. 70.

[9] Delisle, *Bridging the Language Solitudes*, p. 27 and Delisle, *Translation in Canada*, p. 73.

to ensure uniform standards for the practice of the profession, and to maintain ties with national and international associations in the language fields." In accordance with its objective to provide uniform standards and to ensure the competence of the translators it represents, CTIC has held a standard certification examination in translation, administered by the member associations, each year since 1975. In the 15 years since it was introduced, this examination has had a significant impact on the growth of some of the member associations, including Alberta's. (See sub-section D.1, the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta.) Translators and interpreters in Canada have also banded together to form associations that reflect their particular field of interest or specialization. At the national level, these include the Literary Translators' Association, Canadian Association of Schools of Translation, and the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada.

Few of the developments that had occurred or were under way in interpretation and translation at the international and national levels directly affected Alberta until the 1980s. By then, a professional translator and interpreter from Europe had come to the province, been employed as a public servant, and almost single-handedly organized a translation office to serve all departments and agencies of the provincial government, recruited and tested a number of would-be translators and interpreters, and laid the foundations of the present-day Alberta Translators and Interpreters Association (ATIA). (See section B. and sub-section D.1.) There began a gradual awakening to the fact that translation and interpretation were occupations to be taken seriously, something Quebec had known for several centuries and the nations responsible for civilizing the world had known for thousands of years.[10]

## 3. *The Alberta Context*

### a) *Economic*

[10] See Ruth Roland, *Translating World Affairs* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1982), chapter 2 for an account of the role of translators and interpreters in this regard.

Alberta had barely achieved provincehood, and its Peace River region had only just been opened for settlement, when the 1914-18 war began, draining badly needed manpower and funds from the province. In 1939, a scant twenty-one years after peace was restored, Alberta's development was again interrupted by an outbreak of hostilities half a world away. Thus it was not until after the end of World War II that sustained development of Alberta had a chance to get under way.

As the province's economy grew and began diversifying, it attracted the interest of new foreign investors. By the mid-1970s, the province was beginning to devote more of its attention and efforts to promoting itself across the country and, more importantly for the subject under study, around the world. In the 1980s, both the public and private sectors in Alberta were actively seeking international markets for products as diverse as bull semen for cattle breeding purposes in, for example, Mexico and certain South American countries; telecommunications equipment and technology for installations in African countries, some of which (e.g. Algeria) require documentation in French; and oriented-strand board and other forest products for use in the construction industry of Japan. Printed materials, such as *Alberta - A Profile of Canada's Opportunity Province* and *Discovering Alberta*, were also being distributed by the government in European, Pacific Rim and other countries, in the languages of those countries, to stimulate not only trade and investment, but tourism. The tourist industry is considered by Alberta's premier to be "one of the cornerstones of Alberta's diversification".[11]

In promoting itself this way, Alberta was expanding not only its economic horizons, but also its cultural horizons. Not surprisingly, then, among the first government departments to require the services of interpreters and translators were those responsible for intergovernmental and cultural affairs, and economic development and trade. It did not take long for some Alberta government representatives who participated directly in discussions and negotiations with representatives of other countries to realize that a provincial "English only" approach was less than satisfactory when dealing with the

[11] *Remarks* by Horst A. Schmid, Commissioner General for Trade and Tourism, to The Alberta Tourism Outlook Conference, Calgary, November 7, 1990, p. 6.

international community. Others, however, were slower to appreciate the advantages to be gained by soliciting a prospective customer's business in that customer's own language. In this respect, they might be compared with the HBC managers of the late 1700s, who refused to relinquish their "stay on the Bay" approach to trading with the Indians until their competitors, employing a policy of sending men to live with the Indians and learn their languages, gained the upper hand and threatened the Company's profits (see chapt. 1).

### b) *Political*

The Canadian administration's main reason for introducing translation services was a political one; that is, the need to conduct the affairs of the nation in two languages, French and English. Political issues have also played a significant role where translation and interpretation between the two official languages in Alberta are concerned. At present, the ramifications of federal language policies and legislation, such as the policy of bilingualism and biculturalism and the Official Languages Act (1969), Quebec's position with respect to the Constitution, and a number of recent decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada regarding language and minority language education rights in Alberta cannot be ignored. They are felt primarily in the courts and in the education system and have broad implications with respect to translation and interpretation in those areas.

#### *Language of Legislation and Language of the Courts (the Lefebvre Case, the Paquette Case)*

When Alberta achieved provincehood in 1905, it adopted as law in the new province certain NWT ordinances. Many Albertans will undoubtedly be surprised to learn that as recently as 1911 the Alberta government provided French translations of most of the NWT ordinances applicable to the province. This was in contrast to the situation in the neighbouring province of Saskatchewan, even though the proportion of Francophones was higher there than in Alberta. Paul-Emile Lessard, of the Franco-Albertan newspaper *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, wrote to the Attorney General of Saskatchewan on September 29,

1911 describing this situation and stressing the fact that, unlike the francophone settlers in Saskatchewan, those in Alberta had ready access to French versions of ordinances covering important matters of the day such as stray animals, weed control, coal mining, prairie fires and agricultural societies. (A copy of a portion of Lessard's letter, in French, appears on the following page.)

Apparently, however, when Alberta achieved provincehood, it neglected to deal definitively with the question of the use of the French and English languages in the legislative and legal areas. As a result, in the 1980s, it faced a number of legal challenges from francophone citizens of the province who had been accused of a criminal offence and demanded the right to use French in their trial, invoking Section 110 of the North-West Territories Act, 1891. Two such challenges were *R. v. Lefebvre* (1986), 74 A.R. 81 (C.A.) and *R. v. Paquette* (1986), 69 A.R. 87 (Q.B.). The burning question was whether Section 110, which permits evidence to be given and documents to be submitted in French and in English, had been carried over into the law or abrogated when Alberta became a province. The *Paquette* case was particularly significant, as the decisions of the lower courts were appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada, which rendered a short, unanimous, and far-reaching decision in October 1990 to the effect that Section 110 of the North-West Territories Act, 1891, remained in effect in respect of the province of Alberta with regard to "proceedings of a criminal nature or having penal consequences under federal law".[12]

Another significant event of the 1980s was the passage by the Legislative Assembly of Alberta of the province's first language legislation, the Languages Act (S.A. 1988, c. L-7.5). It stipulates that Section 110 of the North-West Territories Act does not apply to Alberta; retroactively validates all statutes, regulations and ordinances previously passed in English only; provides that, henceforth, statutes and regulations may be enacted, printed and published only in English; and provides that any person may use English or French in proceedings in four provincial courts, but only *orall*y.[13]

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[12] Commissioner of Official Languages, *Anual Report 1990*, pp. 73-74.

[13] Commissioner of Official Languages, *Our Two Official Languages Over Time*, p. 36.

Although passed in 1988, the act did not come into force until January 1, 1990. Eighteen days later, in an interview with Alberta's French-language newspaper, *Le Franco*, a spokesperson for the office of the Solicitor General indicated that while francophone or bilingual judges, solicitors and court clerks were ready and waiting to hear oral submissions in French, the absence of qualified simultaneous interpreters in the province posed a problem. This spokesperson stressed the importance of using properly qualified interpreters, because of the serious consequences a simple "translation" error might have with respect to the court's decision to convict or acquit the accused. She also indicated that the Alberta government therefore intended to call upon the services of interpreters from other departments of the provincial government or, if necessary, from the federal Department of Justice. Apart from the director of the provincial Translation Bureau, however, it seems unlikely that any qualified simultaneous interpreters–as defined by professionals in the field–are to be found in a department of the Alberta government. In the light of the October 1990 decision of the Supreme Court in the *Paquette* case, which implicitly grants Alberta citizens the right also to make written submissions and file documents in French in the courts, it remains to be seen whether similar difficulties will arise with respect to the availability of qualified translators and whether satisfactory solutions will be found.

### *Language of Instruction (The Mahé Case)*

Where minority language education rights are concerned, it is important to understand the background to the imposition of an Anglo-Saxon Protestant model in Alberta schools.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, most schools in Alberta were scattered throughout rural areas, the province having only 3 or 4 small cities and few towns to speak of. They were, as one author succinctly describes them, "typically multi-grade, one-room, one-teacher institutions in isolated locations, frequently in non-English-

speaking communities".[14] They were also, the same author notes, "the focal point of controversy and dissatisfaction throughout the period between the two World Wars". Recently, Canada's Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages pointed out that the early decades of this century not only constituted an era of massive migration (see chapt.2) when "group settlements of many ethnic and linguistic origins provoked concern about Canadian identity, especially on the western prairies", they were also years when "loyalty to the British Empire was seen as the bedrock of Canadian patriotism".[15] The rationale behind the approach taken by the provincial government, which was to make English the major language of instruction, may therefore be summarized in this way: "The English language was regarded as an instrument of assimilation or at least as a means of forging a community based on a common language. The public school became the institution which would impose this 'Anglo-conformity'."[16]

With the signing of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, however, the provincial government became vulnerable to legal challenges with respect to minority language education rights. Alberta Francophones have been the most vocal claimants in this regard to date. They began by seeking recognition of the right to have their children educated in French. Invoking section 23 of the Charter, they subsequently also sought recognition of the right to manage and control educational institutions attended by their children, where numbers warrant. The recognition of the latter right formed the substance of the Supreme Court ruling in *Jean-Claude Mahé v. Her Majesty the Queen in right of the Province of Alberta*, (1990) 1 S.C.R. 342.

Since all elementary and secondary schools in the province come under the jurisdiction of Alberta Education, the question of minority language education rights has broad repercussions for the subject currently under study. Curriculum guides, teachers'

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[14] Robert S. Patterson, "Progressive Education: Impetus to Educational Change in Alberta and Saskatchewan", *The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905-1980* (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1980), p. 182.

[15] Commissioner of Official Languages, *Our Two Official Languages Over Time*, p. v.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. vi.

resource manuals and guides to evaluation are just a few of the pedagogical materials that require translation when the language of instruction is a language other than English. In this respect, it should be noted that the Language Services Branch of Alberta Education currently plans, develops and implements language programs involving–besides English as a second language and French as a first or second language–Ukrainian, German, Japanese and some Native languages.

### c) *Linguistic*

There is little question that the ongoing interprovincial and federal-provincial dialogue, in its written form, helps make French the language responsible for the greatest volume of translation in the public sector in Alberta. This has been the case for as long as the province's translation services branch has been in operation. (See Table 2, Appendix E). To the best of this writer's knowledge, no similar data is available on translation or interpretation in the private sector in Alberta, although there are indications that the same situation prevails (e.g. the majority of members in ATIA work from English to French or from French to English).

Where interpretation is concerned, however, at least with respect to the needs of the Alberta government, it should be noted that the picture has changed considerably from a decade ago. Interpretation between French and English is not a major concern. This is partly because, in the 1980s, Alberta was "twinned" with a number of Asian provinces: Hokkaido, Japan (1980); Heilongjiang, China (1981); and Kwangdo, Korea (1982). As these special relationships have developed, and the number of exchanges of all kinds have begun multiplying, the need for interpretation in the Asian languages–for now primarily Japanese–has also grown. There has been a concurrent increase in translation and other language-related services as well. (See Table 3, Appendix E.) One of the main problems faced by both the government and the private sector, however, is the lack of trained interpreters and translators in these languages. As was the case immediately following its creation, the Translation Bureau of the government is, in a sense, serving as a training ground for individuals who show some aptitude in this area.

Be that as it may, as far as the linguistic demography of Alberta is concerned, in 1981 French ranked fourth as a mother tongue in the province after English, German and Ukrainian, in that order.[17] With the recent, changing patterns of immigration, however, later statistics are apt to show an increase in the proportion of those whose mother tongue is an Asian language.

## B. THE ALBERTA GOVERNMENT TRANSLATION BUREAU

In Canada, government–whether at the federal or provincial level–has always played a predominant role in regard to language issues, particularly translation and interpretation, and the Alberta government is no exception. As previously mentioned, it was the realization that the province required professional translation and interpretation services in order to participate and compete satisfactorily in the international marketplace that prompted the creation of a translation office within the provincial government in the late 1970s.

### 1. *The Challenge*

Credit for the establishment of a government translation office in Alberta, and for its continued existence, must go to two individuals in particular: the Hon. Horst Schmid, then Minister of Culture, now Commissioner General for Trade and Tourism; and Heide-Marie Seeholzer, the Bureau's first and, to date, only director. According to Mr. Schmid (interviewed on June 24, 1991), when Alberta first began sending major trade missions overseas in the early 1970s, it received some negative feedback from the countries it had targeted as potential trading partners regarding the quality of its attempts at interlingual communication. The generally "haphazard and unprofessional" translation and interpretation services available to the government of the province at that time were clearly unsatisfactory and inadequate to meet its needs. Having a vision of things to come,

[17] Statistics Canada, *Language in Canada* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1985).

together with the freedom to develop new programs, Mr. Schmid asked Les Usher, then Deputy Minister of Culture, from whom he received "excellent cooperation", to begin laying the groundwork for a central translation office to be instituted within the department. Although initially located within the Cultural Heritage Branch, under Mr. Usher's direction it was soon transferred to the new Special Projects Division, thus allowing it greater possibilities for growth.

It was in 1974, while interpreting at meetings between Albertan and German government representatives in Germany, that Ms Seeholzer was first approached about introducing professional translation and interpretation services into the Alberta government. Born and educated in West Germany, she had studied French, English and Spanish. She had attended universities in Paris (Sorbonne), Manchester and Barcelona (Universidad de Letras y Ciencias) and had graduated from the University of Munich with a B.A. and an M.A. in Translation. Trained as a consecutive and simultaneous interpreter at the Sprachen u. Dolmetscherinstitut Schmid in Munich, she had been granted the appropriate professional seal.[18] In the early 1970s, Ms Seeholzer was working mainly as a freelance interpreter.

Among the many people she has interpreted for on freelance assignments, either before leaving Germany or since, are the Dalai Lama (see photograph on following page), Princess Margaret, then Crown Prince Juan Carlos and Sophia, and the late Princess Grace of Monaco. Were it not for the confidential nature of some other assignments, the names of several prominent political leaders could also be added to this list. The UN and the European Communities have both had occasion to call upon her services as an interpreter.

Between 1976 and 1978, having emigrated from Bavaria to Alberta, she was assigned a variety of duties in the Special Programs Division of Alberta Culture, one of them being to look after translation requests. As anticipated, however, the demand for translation and interpretation services grew, and in the space of two years was sufficient to

[18] The translor's seal is similar to that used by professional engineers in Alberta, in the sense that it imposes on its holder a legal obligation to produce high-quality work. As translators have not yet been accorded the status of professionals in Canada, no such legal obligation exists here.

warrant the creation of a separate office. In 1978, Ms Seeholzer was placed in charge of setting up a translation services branch, and given the daunting responsibility of recruiting people who could respond, in a professional manner, to the increasing demand. Although many people in the province who "knew" or "spoke" more than one language were doing occasional translation and interpretation, the absence of any translators and interpreters with the necessary training or qualifications to make them professionals in those fields, together with the absence of appropriate courses or training programs in the province, made the task of establishing such a branch a formidable one.[19]

Nevertheless, as a result of cooperation between Alberta Culture and a few individuals known to Ms Seeholzer, including a teacher who also worked as a German-English freelance translator for the federal Translation Bureau, and three professors from the University of Alberta in Edmonton who had an academic or personal interest in translation, a very elementary, broadly conceived, eight-month translator training program, the content of which was oriented toward public sector activities in Alberta, was initiated. The trainees were a small number of aspiring translators (about a dozen), selected by the head of the future translation services branch and the course instructors on the basis of certain fundamental criteria pertaining to language competency and level of education. (Some of the trainees are shown in the photograph on the following page.) All the trainees had at least one university degree, and were divided by language group for classes. The languages involved were English, French, German and Spanish, and either the target or source language in each case was to be English. The classes were three hours long, held one evening a week during the 1978-79 academic year, and supplemented with field trips–to the Syncrude plant in Fort McMurray, for example–in order to give the trainees a first-hand acquaintance with, and therefore a better understanding of, some of the specialized areas of government involvement. This was the only year such a program was

[19] A few university courses in translation were available, but these tended to be of a traditional nature, focussing on the translation of excerpts from literary works as one component of a general language and literature program.

offered.[20] Upon completion of the program, the trainees were given a few weeks to complete a final assignment, a translation in a specialized field in which they had some interest, or of which they had some knowledge or experience. The completed assignment was then sent to the federal translation bureau in Ottawa for evaluation, an arrangement that was made possible through the contact established between Ms Seeholzer and the late Philippe LeQuellec, then Assistant Under Secretary of State for Translation. In addition, the trainees were required to write a final exam on the material studied in class. The newly created provincial government translation office was then able to draw, with some degree of confidence, on the talents of the "graduates" of this program, a select few (4) of whom had also received basic training in French-English and English-French consecutive and simultaneous interpretation the year before from Ms Seeholzer and been tested by a representative from the federal translation bureau. Unfortunately, translators and, especially, interpreters seem to have higher-than-average peripatetic tendencies, and within a few years of completion of the program, many of these individuals–including all the interpreters–had left Alberta for another province or country.

The mandate of the provincial Translation Services branch was not established by legislation, as the federal bureau's was, but by the department to which it belonged. The departments and agencies were therefore under no obligation to send their translation or interpretation requests to the new office.

During its first year of existence, the Translation Services branch was one person, Ms Seeholzer. Apart from the dearth of properly trained manpower and a shortage of funds, the principal obstacle faced by the branch–one that is, regrettably, still a factor in Alberta today–was a general lack of understanding and appreciation of the specialized, intellectually demanding nature of translation and interpretation as they are practised professionally in the late twentieth century. Several misconceptions still prevail, especially regarding the applications of technology in these fields. There is a tendency, it seems, to

[20] A modified and abbreviated version was offered the following year in French and English only. One trainee from the city of Red Deer, anxious to receive the benefit of these unique opportunities, made the three-hours return trip to Edmonton each week, weather and circumstances permitting.

discount the human factor or, in other words, to ascribe the innate intelligence of translators or interpreters to the devices they use as the tools of their trade. For example, a few years ago, as this author/translator entered into the word processor the English translation her mind was laboriously composing from the French copy propped nearby, one curious onlooker marvelled at how simple it seemed, falsely assuming that all the translator had to do was type in the French and–presto!–out would come the English. A similar anecdote is drawn from the director's experience. A client called and requested—instead of the usual 2 or 3–one hundred interpreters for a planned conference! After some inquiries, it became clear that it was not interpreters, but rather the receivers, or headsets, for the audience that were required. The caller had the mistaken impression that the receivers produced the interpretation.

In 1979, the position of bilingual (French and English) secretary was added, a principal duty of the position being to keep an accurate record of incoming and outgoing work. At that point, all translation for the branch was still being done on a freelance basis only, using the available human resources, found through personal contacts, in the required language combinations. A year later, however, the province's first full-time staff translator position was created, although not identified as such. Since the "grade description" method of job classification used by the province contained no provisions for translators or interpreters, and since there was just one translator, the decision was made to place translators in what is known as a "best-fit" category; that is, one that best matches a specified set of functional criteria. Consequently, the translators of the provincial government translation bureau were classified as "Regional Officers, Community Resources Development" (ROCRD). The general description of the functions of this position begins as follows: "This is professional work providing advice and assistance on the development and utilization of culture, youth, recreation and heritage resources, to individuals and groups within specific geographic regions."

### a) *Positions*

The first translator position was designated an English-French position, partly in

recognition of a Canadian political reality, but mainly to meet an obvious need within the province. The position was filled by Bernard Brügger, a Swiss-Canadian who had been a participant in both the translator and interpreter training programs and who, just over a year later, moved to Ottawa to work for the federal government as a conference interpreter. His departure presented the manager of the Translation Services branch with the same difficulty she had faced initially, and has faced several times since: the absence of a qualified candidate to fill the English-French position. Fortunately, help was again available through a temporary cooperative arrangement with the federal Translation Bureau. A formal agreement was reached whereby an experienced English-French translator from Ottawa would be loaned to the Alberta government for a period of one year. Of necessity, the loan was in fact extended for another six months.

In 1981, a second permanent position was created, this time for a French-English translator. It, too, was filled by a "graduate" of Alberta Culture's translator training program, the author of this work, who has occupied the position continuously since then. In 1982, arrangements were made for a three-month exchange, whereby Frank Bayerl, a revisor from the federal Translation Bureau, would assume the incumbent's duties in Alberta, while the incumbent was introduced to the process of revision at the federal Translation Bureau (Ottawa/Hull). The federal bureau was just beginning to implement a program to automate its operations, and that year, nearly 150 employees (translators and support staff) were provided with word processors.[21] The incumbent was therefore fortunate enough to receive, besides training in the revision of other translators' work, training on a Micom word processor, a fact that was to have an effect on the future operations of the Alberta bureau.

### b) *Working Conditions (Equipment and Resources):*

Until 1982, the in-house translators produced their translations using IBM Selectric typewriters. As the bureau had only one secretary, there was normally no question of

[21] Delisle, *Bridging the Language Solitudes*, p. 61.

typing a draft and having the finished or revised copy retyped by clerical staff; nor was there any question of using dictation equipment as an aid to speed up the production of translations.

At the same time, however, translators in the provincial bureau enjoyed the comparative luxury of individual offices, unlike their more numerous federal counterparts, for example, whose work stations were arranged according to the open area concept.

With respect to terminological research, the translators worked essentially in isolation, relying, as the need arose, on whatever specialized documentation (reports, brochures, glossaries, dictionaries and so on) they could accumulate individually for the embryonic Translation Services library, or on whatever information they could obtain, usually locally by telephone, from resource persons in the relevant fields. In this connection, two points are particularly noteworthy: first, that the translators were obliged to translate documents from all spheres of government activity and, consequently, were generalists rather than specialists; second, that inconvenient and time-consuming trips away from the office to the legislature, university or municipal library were sometimes the best or, in some cases, the only reasonable way for the translators to find answers to the terminological problems they faced and still meet the client's deadline. Time permitting, terminology finds were recorded by hand on index cards; they often consisted of nothing more than the equivalent terms in the source and target languages, and the page number and title of the reference work or name of the resource person consulted. Each of these secondary activities, the performing of terminological research and the recording of terminological equivalents, while undeniably essential to accuracy and efficiency in translation, took away from the time the translator was able to spend on his or her primary occupation of actually producing a translated text. The translators were therefore regularly obliged to work overtime in order to meet deadlines.

### c) *Production Levels, Salaries and Benefits*

When the first translator position was created, the salary range for the ROCRD classification was from $18,024 to $25,452. The same range also applied to the second

permanent position (May 1981). There were no set levels of production: the translators were simply expected to do the work assigned within the time frame requested or, sometimes, demanded by the client. In addition, they were expected to perform any other duties that might be required to keep the infant branch running smoothly. As public servants, the translators received the benefits and remuneration to which they were entitled under the Master Agreement between the Alberta Union of Public Employees (AUPE) and their employer, the Government of Alberta. These included payment for overtime hours, or time off in lieu of payment. Because of the consistently heavy workload and short deadlines, however, it was frequently impractical for the translators to exercise the second option.

## 2. *The Current Picture*

The Translation Services branch remained part of Alberta Culture, reporting to the director of Finance and Administration, until 1983, at which time it was transferred to Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services (PWSS), the probable rationale being that since the branch provided a service to the government departments and agencies, it should be together with other service-oriented branches such as those responsible for courier, printing and vehicle services. In PWSS, the branch reported to the executive director of the Supply Operations Division.

Three years later, Translation Services was again transferred, this time to Alberta Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs (FIGA), its present department. Initially, it reported to the executive director of the International Division, but shortly after the transfer it was placed instead under the supervision of the director of Finance and Administration.

After a few years, the name of the branch was changed from Translation Services to Translation Bureau, and the manager's title was subsequently changed to director.

The number of transfers and changes may reasonably be seen as a reflection of the lack of understanding within the provincial administration of the true nature of the work performed by the Bureau. It is ironic that attempts to find the most suitable place within the administrative hierarchy for the Bureau, which is an essentially apolitical entity, have

resulted in its placement within what is perhaps the most "political" of all the provincial government departments.

The Translation Bureau's mandate remains unchanged. Since there is no legislation governing its operation, departments and agencies are free to choose to use the Bureau's services or not. A number of them (e.g. Legislative Assembly, Workers' Compensation Board, Education, and even FIGA itself) rely wholly, or in part, on bilingual or multilingual members of their own staff to explain, edit, translate or interpret certain written or spoken communications in various languages as required. For example, the Language Services Branch of Alberta Education, while it frequently calls upon the services of the Translation Bureau, especially for large projects, nevertheless also has several bilingual or multilingual employees who are designated "Editor/Translator", although, to the best of this writer's knowledge, as of April 1, 1991, none had formal training or certification as translators. A number of departments and agencies will, as circumstances demand, also contract work out directly to private sector translators or interpreters inside or outside the province.

### a) *Positions, Salaries and Production Levels*

Fundamentally, the structure of the Translation Bureau of the Alberta government resembles that of the federal translation bureau, insofar as it is a centralized bureau with an inventory of freelancers that it calls upon as necessary. The scale of the provincial bureau's operations of course remains miniscule by comparison to its federal model. On paper, its present staff consists of the director, a bilingual (French-English) secretary, two permanent translator positions (one French-English and one English-French), and one project translator position (French-English). In actual fact, however, the permanent English-French position has been vacant for several years and its future now appears uncertain, partly because of departmental budgetary constraints. It should be noted here that the provincial bureau has encountered numerous obstacles in trying to fill the position with the calibre of translator required. One major obstacle has been the lack of suitably qualified and available candidates within the province. A second has been the apparent reluctance of

francophone translators to move to predominantly English-speaking Edmonton from such centres of translation as the Ottawa/Hull region or Montreal, where they can remain immersed in their French language and culture. Yet another obstacle has been the salary offered by the Alberta government, which tends to be lower than that which a translator working at the same level could expect to receive in eastern Canada. Although the cost of living is lower in the West, the combination of a lower salary and an anticipated sense of cultural isolation seems to act as a disincentive.

In addition to the two permanent positions, other positions-designated as "Project" or "contract" positions–have been created as circumstances demanded or allowed. The senior French-English position, for example, has been supplemented for several years now by a project position. As well, for the past few years, under the provincial government's Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP), a few graduates of the University of Alberta's literary translation program have been able to receive, over the summer months, practical training in translating for the government under the supervision of the senior French-English translator, who revised their work. Worth noting here in regard to the calibre of the Translation Bureau's staff is the fact that the last three incumbents of the French-English project position (2 Albertans and 1 easterner) were graduates in translation from eastern Canadian universities: two hold a B.A. (Ottawa and Laval) and one an M.A. (Montreal) in the field. Of these three, two have returned to eastern Canada (one to Ontario, one to Quebec). The other remained in Edmonton, and currently does freelance French-English translation. The present incumbent, Valerie Henitiuk, holds an M.A. in literary translation from the U of A, and had gained two summers' practical training and experience at the Translation Bureau as a STEP participant before becoming a public employee on April 1, 1991.

Nevertheless, in-house translators, whether occupying permanent or project positions, are still classified as ROCRD, although the permanent positions have been assigned a higher level (ROCRD III instead of ROCRD II), to take into account revision and training/supervisory responsibilities. The salary ranges for the three series in the current classification, as of April 1, 1991, are as follows: ROCRD 1, from $27,552 to $38,472; ROCRD 11, from $34,368 to $43,104; and ROCRD 111, from $37,608 to

$47,148.

There are still no set production levels for the in-house translators. Indeed, it would be difficult either to establish a fair level or to enforce it, for two main reasons. The first is the extremely varied and specialized nature of most texts the translators–who are, of necessity, still generalists–are required to translate. By way of illustration, it may be noted that the objects of French-English translation to date range from legal correspondence or judgments for the Attorney General to documents on the identification and prevention of plant or animal diseases for Alberta Agriculture; from medical reports for the Workers Compensation Board to descriptions of manufacturing processes for the Alberta Research Council; and from texts on substance abuse, constitutional issues, or native affairs to documents concerning the disposal of toxic wastes. The list goes on. In fact, it should be emphasized here that, during its comparatively brief existence, the Bureau has answered translation or interpretation requests from nearly every department and agency of the Alberta government. This is evident from the Bureau's statistical records. For an indication of the Bureau's major clients by the total services provided in budget year 1989-90, compared with those from budget years 1978-79, 1979-80 and 1980-81, the first three years statistics were kept, see Table 4, Appendix E.

In this connection, it seems advisable to point out, for the benefit of uninitiated readers, that translation requires two types of knowledge: the most obvious is a knowledge of the source language (the language one translates from) and the target language (the language one translates into); the other, far less obvious to those who know nothing about the field or believe translation is little more than a word-substitution exercise, is an understanding of the subject under discussion. The latter form of knowledge may already be part of the translator's general knowledge (or "cultural baggage", as it is also called), or it may have to be acquired through timely and conscientious research as the need arises. It is for this reason that translators must be adept in using and deriving maximal benefit from a variety of research tools and human and material resources (e.g. specialized libraries and reference works, subject specialists, and computerized terminology banks). Since, despite the expectations of some clients, translators are not generally "walking encyclopedias", regardless of how much "cultural baggage" they have accumulated, time is required to

peruse related background information and to produce a translation that will read like an original document in the target language and not smack of translation, as so many poor renderings do. Furthermore, not all French-language documents received by Alberta government departments and agencies originate in Quebec, as many of the uninitiated might be inclined to believe. Partly because of Alberta's promotional activities abroad, some of these documents are from France, while the balance arrive from other French-speaking countries such as Belgium, Haiti or Algeria. The linguistic and cultural differences that exist not only between these countries and our own, but also among these countries themselves (e.g. different applications of the same French term, or different administrative structures and procedures) pose additional problems for the translator.

In short, at the provincial bureau, with few exceptions, each incoming text for translation from French into English contains concepts and vocabulary that are unfamiliar to even the most experienced in-house translator. In only rare cases, even if several documents are received over a period of time from one department, will there be much similarity with respect to the specific topic discussed or vocabulary used. In other words, there is little repetitive work. On the positive side, the variety keeps the translators' interest high; on the negative side, it prevents the translators from achieving the optimal combination of accuracy and speed that can develop from continued exposure to a given specialty and its jargon. Logically, the more research a translator is required to do in order to achieve accuracy, the slower the rate of actual translation is likely to be. Under existing circumstances, one of the biggest challenges facing the translators in the provincial bureau is achieving a satisfactory balance between the quality of translation and the rate of production.

The second main factor that would make standardized individual production levels difficult to introduce or enforce is the additional duties the translators still perform on an *ad hoc* basis, to ensure the Bureau functions smoothly and fulfils its mandate. These include answering the telephone when the secretary is away from her station (e.g. to send or receive faxes or make photocopies), responding to telephone inquiries (about educational, training or employment opportunities in translation; official translation

equivalents; or terminology problems), cataloguing library acquisitions, and preparing and conducting periodic information sessions for client departments.

Total production levels, on the other hand, have been calculated–manually–since the Bureau first began operations. The overall volume of in-house translation and revision in all languages for the 1989-90 budget year is shown and compared with that for the 1978-79, 1979-80, and 1980-81 budget years in Table 1, Appendix E.

### b) *Working Conditions (Equipment and Resources)*

*Word Processors*: Not long after the senior French-English translator's return from her three-month stint in the federal translation bureau, in the spring of 1982, steps were taken to introduce word processors into the provincial Translation Services branch. It is noteworthy that a short-term study conducted prior to their introduction concluded that the secretary needed a word processor more than did the translators. The results of the study may have been influenced by a number of factors: the very brief duration of the study; the fact that one translator at the time did not type, but wrote out the translations by hand, for typing by the secretary; and the fact that the secretary was also occasionally obliged to retype some of the freelancers' work once necessary corrections, or adjustments in formatting, had been made. While the last two situations may seem bizarre or unbelievable to translators or managers of translation services who are used to working in a more sophisticated environment, it is important to bear in mind that the provincial bureau at that time was a fledgling operation with minimal resources, whose survival depended to a large degree on "making do", and on maintaining the goodwill of those few individuals who could be relied upon to provide services as required, often on very short notice, and sometimes more as a personal favour to the manager than as a formal business commitment.

The first word processing system installed in the provincial bureau was a Micom 2000 system. This was followed, in turn, by an AES system and the present IBM Displaywriter System, which is slated to be replaced with personal computers this year as the final stage in the computerization of FIGA's Edmonton offices. As a point of interest,

the two other branches of FIGA that remain to be equipped with personal computers, possibly at the same time as the Translation Bureau, are the departmental library and the records management branch. With the new system, it should be possible for the in-house translators to take advantage of recently developed software packages specifically designed to assist translators in their work.

*Translation Bureau Library:* More than once during its early years, the Translation Services branch encountered resistance within the governmental library system to the idea that the branch should have its own specialized library; but, each time, the advisability–if not the absolute necessity–of a separate collection was eventually impressed upon those opposed, and the idea accepted. From the original basic collection of a few general language dictionaries a dozen years ago, the branch's holdings have grown to include many glossaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference works on specialized subjects (public administration, economics, law, medicine, science and technology, forestry, oil and gas, to name but a few). As well, the library has acquired numerous pamphlets, brochures and other documents supplied by client departments, usually at the translators' request, as background information for specific translation assignments. As previously indicated, in addition to performing their regular duties, the branch's various translators themselves have been responsible for accumulating and cataloguing the documentation. The current cataloguing system was set up by a former staff translator and holder of a Master's degree in Library Science, Cinthia Mazur.

While theoretically freelance translators have access to the in-house library, in reality few take advantage of its resources. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, most of the materials are intended for use by French-English and English-French translators and, ideally, most of the requests for these language combinations would be handled in house. Secondly, the resources available in language combinations other than these are extremely limited and, lastly, in some cases the freelancers are located outside the city or even outside the province.

*SVP and TERMIUM III:* To the Alberta translators' advantage, their more experienced colleagues in eastern Canada had, years before, recognized the inefficiency of the traditional methods of manually recording and retrieving information on terminology,

including official titles, abbreviations, and so on. Records were normally kept on index cards by scores of individual translators; thus, the chances of a needless duplication of effort and a lack of standardardized equivalents for terms or titles were high. To improve the efficiency of its operations, the federal translation bureau had therefore introduced two changes that subsequently also facilitated the terminological research activities of the provincial bureau's translators, as well as those of translators across Canada. One of the innovations was a phone-in terminology reference service, known as SVP; the other was a computerized terminology bank. In the early 1980s, a computer terminal was installed in Alberta's Translation Services branch, to give its translators on-line access by modem to the federal terminology bank, which at that point used a second-generation software known as TERMIUM II.[22] The current generation of software is TERMIUM III, and access to the approximately one million terms in the bank has been simplified through CD-ROM (Compact Disk Read-Only Memory) technology, a product of Canadian expertise in terminological research that the provincial translation bureau hopes to acquire soon.

### c) *Freelance Services*

Because the staff translators are salaried public employees, client departments and agencies are not charged for the services they provide. However, if a translation request in the normal in-house language combinations (i.e. French-English and English-French) cannot reasonably be handled in house, it is contracted out to an individual translator or a translation company, and the requesting department is invoiced accordingly. Such situations arise when staff translators are overloaded or when positions are vacant, and provided the requesting department or agency is prepared to assume the cost, which often it is not. With only rare exceptions, texts to be translated in any other language combinations are also contracted out. In all cases, whenever appropriate, translators within the province are used. Otherwise–that is, if the desired quality or expertise cannot be

[22] See Delisle, *Bridging the Language Solitudes*, pp. 42 and 52-53 for a synopsis of the history of the TERMIUM software and its impact on translation in Canada.

obtained–the texts are sent to out-of-province freelancers who are known or reputed to have the necessary skills and knowledge. As there are no interpreters on staff, the director of the Bureau excepted, all interpretation work is also contracted out to in-province or out-of-province freelancers as appropriate.

Obviously, many of the difficulties faced by the in-house translators, in particular those relating to subject areas and degree of specialization of a text, are shared by the translators and interpreters who receive freelance projects from the Bureau. This is one reason the Bureau, as it matured, began refining the procedure used for selecting freelancers. The roster of those who, in the beginning, offered–or were coaxed into offering–their services as translators and interpreters has been maintained, but has been constantly revised as individuals chose to pursue other interests, retired, moved out of the province, and so on. As new prospects appeared on the scene, the list was being not only updated, but also constantly upgraded.

Since, in refining its procedure, it became vulnerable to accusations of subjectivity or elitism from applicants who failed to make the grade, and since it clearly lacked the resources to evaluate the linguistic capabilities of all who wished to offer their services, the Bureau found recourse to an external evaluator was not just desirable, but requisite. This was especially true in regard to individuals who claimed to be able to translate or interpret to and from several languages, or in less common language combinations. In the absence of a suitable gauge, their claims could be neither proved nor disproved.

*Freelance Translators:* As a general rule, applicants for freelance translation work undergo a preliminary, informal screening by the director of the Translation Bureau, focussed mainly on their linguistic knowledge, level of education and work experience. They are then usually required to take a translation examination, which typically consists of short texts, or extracts from longer texts, that are representative of those received by the provincial bureau for translation in the relevant language combination. The candidates generally translate into their mother tongue, are given a set time in which to complete the examination, and are free to consult dictionaries if they wish. The translated texts are then sent to a third party for evaluation. As a rule, the provincial bureau asks the federal translation bureau to provide a written evaluation of examination texts translated by

applicants for freelance work. Alternatively, established freelancers whose competence has been previously attested to or demonstrated may be called upon to act as evaluators. In both cases, such cooperation is feasible mainly because the numbers involved are very small. In the end, few applicants succeed in passing the examination. To date, the most common cause of failure, as for the CTIC exam, has been simply insufficient knowledge of the target or source language.

*Freelance Interpreters*: Interpretation for the government may be sub-divided into two main classes: conference interpretation and social interpretation. Conference interpretation may be further sub-divided into simultaneous interpretation, which requires special equipment and is most appropriate for large gatherings or conferences, and consecutive interpretation, which does not require any equipment and is generally used to facilitate communication at small meetings or formal banquets. The provincial bureau does not have the means to test would-be conference interpreters in any language combination, although if an individual expresses interest in becoming a conference interpreter, he or she may be referred to an appropriate school or training facility. Such facilities are to be found only outside the province and, in the case of some languages (e.g. Chinese or Japanese), only in another country. Similarly, if an applicant is keen and is deemed by the director to show promise as a simultaneous interpreter, and depending on his or her language combinations and other factors, an appointment for testing by the federal translation bureau's interpretation division may be arranged. Simultaneous interpreters who are recognized as such by the federal Translation Bureau, AIIC, the UN or similar organizations are automatically recognized by the provincial bureau.

The most commonly requested type of interpretation in the public sector in Alberta, however, is actually the least prestigious and the least demanding from the technical point of view. Known variously as "social", "escort" or "table" interpretation, it is used to facilitate communication during city tours, dinner receptions, and other social events. While the demand for consecutive and, especially, social interpretation (usually in Japanese) has grown substantially in recent years, the demand for simultaneous interpretation services (usually French and English) has been negligible, in the public sector at least. In this connection, it is in fact unlikely the province will replace the

simultaneous interpretation system it installed for intergovernmental conferences in Government House in the mid-1970s. This system belongs to the first generation of simultaneous interpretation systems; consequently, the electrical components are now badly deteriorated and incompatible with the new generation of equipment. In view of the small number of conferences, the estimated replacement cost is considered too high. To the best of this writer's knowledge, there are no other permanent simultaneous interpretation facilities in the province.

*Freelance Rates*: The rates set by the provincial translation bureau for freelance translation and interpretation are not always in line with the rates charged by translation companies or individual translators or interpreters, especially those that are accustomed to submitting bids for federal government translation or interpretation contracts or negotiating fees for such services with corporate clients in eastern Canada. While some allowance is made to accommodate special cases, the provincial bureau's rates tend to be lower. This is because, generally speaking, a different set of conditions applies where translation and interpretation for the provincial public sector is concerned. For one thing, very few provincial public servants have had any experience dealing with, professional translators or interpreters. As a result, their expectations–in regard to cost and, in the case of translation, turnaround times–tend to be unrealistic. Consequently, when the need for such services does arise, they are often caught unprepared, not having budgeted sufficient time or money.

At present, the provincial bureau's standard rates for freelance translation range from 16¢/word to 23¢/word, depending primarily on the nature of the text to be translated and the turnaround time requested. In the early 1980s, the average rate was 9¢/word. The more specialized the text and the shorter the turnaround time, the more expensive the translation. As for interpretation services, the rates paid to qualified simultaneous interpreters approximate those paid by the federal bureau. The rates paid to social interpreters vary according to the training and experience of the interpreter, and the duration, as well as the degree of difficulty, of the assignment. The daily rate is $180, while the hourly rate ranges from $25 to $30.

In budget year 1979-80, freelance translators supplied to the provincial bureau just

over 660,000 words of translation in a variety of languages. By comparison, in budget year 1989-90, the last year for which complete statistics are available, the volume of freelance translation was somewhat lower, at approximately 574,000 words. (See Table 1, Appendix E.) As most of the freelance translation is done into or from a number of foreign languages, these statistics will fluctuate from year to year, unlike the volume of translation into or from French and English, which tends to show a constant growth. (See Table 2, Appendix E.)

## C. PRIVATE SECTOR TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

In a disturbing number of instances, the relationships between translators and interpreters and those who use their services–be they representatives of a commercial or industrial enterprise, government officials, or individual citizens–are characterized by dissatisfaction. One reason for this may well be the absence of a single, universally accepted definition of the terms translation and interpretation. On the one hand, the uninitiated public tends to have only a general understanding of these terms. As a rule, it considers them to be synonymous. Those pursuing careers as translators or interpreters, on the other hand, make a clear distinction between the two[23] besides subdividing each into specialized categories. Furthermore, the public often does not take into account the distinction between source language and target language. Thus, many people mistakenly believe that anyone who "knows" or "speaks" more than one language is capable not only of translating or interpreting, but also of doing so equally well to or from any of the languages in question, and all of this without regard for the complexity of the subject matter under discussion. Not being able to unlock the mystery of other languages themselves, these individuals appear to ascribe almost supernatural powers to those who have the key and, depending on the extent of their need will pay sometimes exorbitant fees to obtain translation or interpretation services. The fact that, in the absence of regulation, some unscrupulous polyglots take advantage of this situation detracts from the image the true professionals in

[23] Refer to Roland, *op. cit.*, chapter 1.

these fields are trying to present.[24]

In Alberta today, the category of private sector translators and interpreters comprises at least seven broad sub-groups. The first four can be listed here in reverse order of magnitude: translators who are employed full time as such in corporate settings other than translation companies (e.g. Northwest Industries, Edmonton; Family Life Assurance, Calgary; Canadian Airlines International and its in-flight magazine, *Canadian*, Calgary); translators or interpreters who are full-time employees of, or partners or associates in, a translation company (e.g. Syntax Language Services, Calgary); and "self-employed" translators or interpreters who provide services for a fee under a personal contract or on a casual basis to individuals, governments, businesses or translation agencies.

It is more difficult to know the relative sizes of the other three sub-groups. There are students who offer to do translations or interpretation in order to earn extra money. The Department of Romance Languages at the U of A, for one, keeps a list of students who are willing to provide this type of service. In 1988, the list, which offered French to English, English to French, Spanish/English, ltalian/English and Portuguese, was prefaced with this disclaimer by the Chairman:

> The Department of Romance Languages does not officially operate a translation service. However, due to the many inquiries we receive, we do maintain a list of persons (the majority of whom are present or former graduate students in the Department) who have indicated their willingness to carry out translation projects for remuneration. The Department maintains this list solely at the request of persons offering their services, without endorsing their work or assuming responsibility for the arrangements made between parties.

Next, there are bilingual or multilingual employees of various organizations whose employers ask or expect them to provide translation or interpretation services, whether or not their position description requires them to do so. Last, but by no means least, are the bilingual or multilingual individuals who provide their services as translators or

[24] In a recent incident involving City of Edmonton officials, for example, the amount charged for an untrained interpreter was $500/day.

interpreters free of charge to the community.

A salient point in regard to private sector translators and interpreters as a whole is that very little is known about the extent or nature of their activities in the province. It would appear that no comprehensive survey has ever been conducted in order to answer questions such as the following: How many people are translating and interpreting in the private sector in Alberta? In what languages? What is their background, and what training–if any–have they had? For whom are they translating? For what reasons? For how much money? About the only thing that is reasonably certain is that very few of those who provide freelance translation or interpretation services for a fee to the public sector, the private sector, or both, earn a living by doing so. The vast majority appear to be employed full time in another–sometimes unrelated, sometimes marginally related–occupation, while the rest appear to have no other paid occupation, their part-time status being instead a function of the limited demand for their particular language combinations or a limited interest in providing such services.

Because the number of translators and interpreters in Alberta with the necessary background and training to work at the professional level expected by many of their potential clients remains extremely small, especially where foreign languages are concerned, the difficulties users–including the Translation Bureau–have in locating a translator or interpreter who is intellectually and temperamentally suited to the job at hand, and who is available when needed, are reminiscent of those encountered a century or more ago by the early missionaries and representative’s of law and order in western Canada. The translation field in Alberta today still has its share of James Birds and Jerry Pottses. In some ways, the approach that was taken by users in the past–and, unfortunately, is still quite prevalent today–is analogous to the BASS computerized ticket sales system used in Alberta. BASS stands for "best available seat selection". *The best available* seat is rarely the *best* seat, but if a person simply must attend the performance in question, it is usually considered better than no seat at all. Consequently, until such time as translation and interpretation are recognized and regulated as legitimate professions in Canada's provinces, the best advice for prospective users of translators and interpreters remains the traditional *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware).

## 1. *Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act*

To date, in Canada, the legislatures of three provinces have granted translators and related professionals who belong to certain associations reserved title. Firstly, the Act respecting the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO), passed by the Ontario Legislature in early 1989 (private member's bill Pr-36), gave translators, terminologists, conference interpreters and court interpreters certified by the ATIO the reserved title they had been seeking. Later the same year, on November 3, 1989, the Act Respecting Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters of New Brunswick received Royal Assent. It reserves the title "certified" or "agréé", and the initials CT, CI, CCfI and CTerm for certified translators, interpreters, conference intepreters and terminologists who are members of the Corporation of Translators and Interpreters of New Brunswick. Most recently, in June of this year, after a legal struggle that has lasted 25 years, the members of the Quebec association of translators and interpreters, the STQ, were also granted an official title.[25]

So far, Alberta has not made any progress in that direction. In 1985, when Bill 57, entitled Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act was tabled in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta by Solicitor General Dr. Ian Reid and subsequently passed, it was regarded by certain members of the Alberta Association of Translators and Interpreters as an opportunity to take the first steps on the path to legal recognition of translators in this province. Associations that obtain registration under this act are empowered to create and enforce regulations governing their profession or occupation. Under section 8(3) of the act, they also have the right to a designated title, which would be for the exclusive use of the registered association and of members of that association.

[25] See Delisle, *The Language Alchemists*, pp. 251-273 for the complete story of STQ's lengthy battle for professional recognition.

Although ATIA met with a representative of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to discuss registration under the new act, it was not feasible to proceed with an application for registration for several reasons, one being precisely the unanswered question of numbers mentioned previously. Section 7(2) (d) of the act states that, in conducting his investigation of an application for registration, the Registrar may consider, among other things, "the proportion that the members of the association are of the total number of persons in Alberta who engage in the practice of the profession or occupation seeking registration and whether the association represents a significant number of the persons engaged in the practice of a profession or occupation". In the absence of an unambiguous definition of the occupations of translator and interpreter, and an accurate estimate of the number of persons engaged in those occupations, there was little chance such an application would be successful. Other important deficiencies were the lack of a discipline committee and procedures for handling complaints, the lack of a continuing education program for members, and the lack of any academic and experience requirements for admission to the association.

## 2. *Growth in Supply of Private Sector Translation and Interpretation Services*:

The supply of translation and interpretation services in Alberta is, as might be expected, concentrated in the province's two main centres, Edmonton and Calgary. While it is difficult to know exactly how much growth has occurred, a general indication may be found by perusing past volumes of the Yellow Pages for these two cities to determine how many individuals or companies have advertised such services over the years. By the same token, the number of suppliers of simultaneous interpretation equipment that have advertised their services is significant.

Just as there were a number of pioneers in other areas of private sector activity in Alberta, so there were pioneers in the business of translation and interpretation. The earliest entry under a related heading appeared in Edmonton's Yellow Pages in 1955; in other words, at about the same time the province's development was finally getting under way. Perhaps because Edmonton was the seat of government, the first heading was

'Translation Bureaus". This changed to "Translators" in 1962, and to "Translators and interpreters" in 1980. The first entry consisted of nothing more than the name Scandia, with a street address and telephone number.

In Calgary's Yellow Pages, the earliest entry under a related heading appeared in 1957. The classification used in that directory was, and still is, "Translators and Interpreters". The first entry was, somewhat curiously, Ockermueller Insurance Services. This was changed the following year to Ockermueller Translation Service, although it would appear from the records at Alberta's Corporate Registry that the latter was not a separate legal entity, but simply an unofficial division of the insurance company. As odd as this might seem today, it was not the only time an insurance company appeared under this classification. In 1969, a company by the name of Rose's Insurance Agency Ltd. was also listed in this category, again in Calgary.

Several other entries might elicit a smile from the previous generation of translators and interpreters or, conversely, a shudder from their younger, degree-holding successors, who are currently seeking "right to title" legislation, if not full professional recognition, and are concerned about improving the image of their chosen career. Two such entries are: Lo-Cost Translations (Edmonton, 1966) and Barb's Translation Services (Edmonton, 1980). Similarly, as late as 1985, an Edmonton company by the name of Rent A Teacher advertised in this category; and the first listing under the heading 'Translators & Interpreters"in the 1991 Yellow Pages for Edmonton is Alberta Home Tutoring Agency, whose advertising copy reads as follows: "We translate/interpret all languages".

From all appearances, the Alberta company that enjoyed the greatest longevity was the Universal Translation Bureau (Edmonton); it began advertising in the Yellow Pages in 1957, and from 1957 to 1964 was the only listing. It claimed to be "Alberta's first and only specialized translation service". In 1973, the last year its name appeared in the directory, it claimed to have "20 years practice in Edmonton". The record for the shortest lifespan, on the other hand, appears to belong to a Calgary company with the unlikely name "Les Beaux Chapeaux", which was listed in the 1973 Yellow Pages for Calgary. It was registered with Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs on April 17, 1973 and was dissolved on August 16 of the same year.

As for interpretation equipment suppliers, it appears the first company to place an advertisement in the Yellow Pages was an Edmonton-based company, Multitone Conference Communications. In fact, it advertised in the directories of both cities from 1979 to 1989 inclusive. Until 1981 in Calgary and 1982 in Edmonton, it was the only listing. In those years, an eastern Canadian company, CAL International Translation Service (Toronto) also appeared. It was followed two years later (1983 in Calgary, 1984 in Edmonton) by a second eastern Canadian company, International Simultaneous Translation Services (ISTS). Although this company's head office is in Montreal, it also has an Edmonton office and, since 1990, a Calgary office.

While *names* have come and gone, in general a net growth in the *number* of individuals or companies offering translation and interpretation services in the two major cities has been evident, with the greatest growth occurring in Calgary. Altogether, under the heading "Translators & Interpreters", the 1991 edition of Edmonton's Yellow Pages contains 14 listings plus ATIA (including 2 from other provinces, and counting the 3 listings for Berlitz as one), compared with only 1 (Berlitz School of Languages) in 1974. Almost double this number, or 27 listings (including 2 Ontario-based companies and 1 from B.C.), appear under the same heading in the 1990 Yellow Pages for Calgary, compared with only 2 in 1974.[26] (See Tables 5A and 5B, Appendix,E.)

In the past two decades, translators and interpreters in the private sector have received boosts several times from various major international sports events, notably Universiade (Edmonton, late 1970s, the Commonwealth Games (Edmonton, early 1980s) and, most recently, the 1988 Winter Olympics (Calgary). It is possible that the recent flurry of activity in the fields of translation and interpretation in Calgary implied by the changes in the listings in that city's Yellow Pages since 1987 simply represents the crest of a wave of language-related activities that accompanied the Winter Olympics. If this is the case, it seems likely that there will be a net decline over the next few years.

[26] The 1991 edition of the Yellow Pages for Calgary is not available until September.

## D. ASSOCIATIONS OF TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

### 1. *The Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta (ATIA)*

The first association of translators and interpreters in the province, the Alberta Association of Translators (AAT), was essentially an offshoot of the provincial government's training program previously described. Like the provincial translation bureau, the AAT came into being through the dedicated efforts of a few (mostly the same few) individuals. On completion of the training program, in 1979, most of those who had participated became the founding members of the association, which was registered under the Societies Act with Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs in September of that year. The only languages represented in the AAT were the four languages of the training program: English, French, German, and Spanish. In its first year, it had approximately 15 members; the annual membership dues were $45. New members could be admitted without passing an examination.

The year after it was created and registered with Alberta Consumer and Corporate Affairs, the association applied for and was granted membership in the CTIC. It was the fourth member after the Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick associations. (See the outline on the following page for Alberta's place in the organization of the CTIC.) Membership in the CTIC brought with it certain obligations: future applicants for membership in the provincial association would have to pass the CTIC standard examination held once each year across the country.

In September 1984, having by then acquired a conference interpreter or two from outside the province, the association changed its name to Alberta Association of Translators and Interpreters (AATI) to better reflect the nature of its current and anticipated membership. Several years later, it underwent another name change, again to better reflect reality. This time, owing in part to the growing number of Francophones in the association, and a desire for consistency with other member associations of CTIC, the new name was bilingual: Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta/Association des traducteurs et interprètes de l'Alberta (ATIA).

In addition to a pamphlet describing its aims, activities, history, and so forth, ATIA publishes a newsletter, *Transforum*, the first issue of which appeared in the early 1980s. For the past several years, ATIA has also published an annual directory of members.

In 1988, ATIA, in cooperation with the Department of French, Italian and Spanish at the University of Calgary, arranged for a space that would be known as the Translation Centre, to be used jointly by the students of the department's language programs and the members of ATIA for study and research purposes. The Centre includes a small collection of reference works and documents pertaining to translation, as well as a computer link to the federal terminology bank.

ATIA has also held several workshops and seminars over the past twelve years for the benefit of its members and, from time to time, members of the public with an interest in translation. In 1983, for example, arrangements were made for a translator from the Multilingual division of the federal Translation Bureau to conduct a one-day seminar, in both Calgary and Edmonton, the last half of which would be primarily for individuals translating from Spanish or Italian into English. The year 1984 saw ATIA offer two series of French-English and English-French translator training workshops (one in the spring, the other in the fall), and host then-President of CTIC, Jean-Franrois Joly. The year 1988 was especially busy: activities included a presentation entitled "A Career in Translation" to University of Alberta translation students; two presentations (one in Calgary, the other in Edmonton) to the Community Interpreter Training class at Alberta Vocational Centre, now Alberta Vocational College (AVC) (see sub-section E.2); and a colloquium in Calgary on business and translation, co-sponsored by ATIA and the University of Calgary, with then-President of CTIC, Michel Limbos, in attendance. As a result of the growing interest across the country with regard to community and court interpreting, ATIA also held a forum in Edmonton in the fall of 1990, the theme of which was "Community and Court Interpreting: Today and Tomorrow". Representatives from the office of the Attorney General, the Edmonton City Police and the AVC Community Interpreter Training program took part.

ATIA now boasts a total membership of 67, and a wider variety of language combinations, thanks in large part to the CTIC standard examination where certified

members are concerned, and to ATIA's associate-level examination where associate members are concerned. Its membership includes translators and interpreters from both government and the private sector. The membership dues for 1991 are $70 for certified members and $40.00 for associate members.

Until very recently, no Oriental languages were represented in ATIA. Now there are 2 members in this group (1 English-Chinese and 1 Chinese-English) and, considering the potentially important role of Pacific Rim countries in Alberta's economic future, this number is likely to continue growing.

A group of languages that could be considered conspicuous by its absence from ATIA, particularly when the early history of the province is taken into account, is the native languages. In the twentieth century, however, the very survival of native languages in Canada has been seriously threatened; indeed, some have been all but eradicated. Many Natives, especially children, were discouraged from speaking their own language and expected, or even forced, to learn English. The impact of this is seen in the fact that the mother tongue of most native people is no longer a native language. According to a 1985 Statistics Canada report,"English is the mother tongue of 6 out of 10 of Canada's native people. Just 3 in 10 claim a native mother tongue. Of these, Cree is by far the most prevalent. Ojibway and Inuktitut rank a distant second and third."[27] In recent years, however, the Native peoples across Canada have been demonstrating a renewed interest and pride in their heritage, which may eventually be reflected in greater use of the languages associated with their cultures, and a consequent need for more translation and interpretation in those languages. In this regard, an editorial in the March 4, 1990 *Edmonton Journal* (p. A10) pointed out that Canada's most successful native newspaper, the award-winning Edmonton-based *Windspeaker*, founded in 1983, recently translated "a moving letter from Alberta's first Indian AIDS patient into Cree". The same editorial also mentioned another native newspaper, *Kinai News*, a 22-year-old southern Alberta weekly that is the longest-running native newspaper in Canada. The continued existence of both these publications, however, is threatened by cutbacks in federal funding.

[27] Statistics Canada, *Language in Canada*, 1985.

To return to the role the CTIC standard examination played in increasing ATIA's membership, it may be said that the examination proved to be a double-edged sword. Despite the fact that it was intended for translators with some experience working at a professional level, the candidates were often university students, or members of ethnic groups or communities, who had no training in, and limited–if any–exposure to the practice of translation or interpretation at such a level. Their knowledge of the translation needs of government and business was likewise minimal. The CTIC examination was designed to test the individual's ability to translate texts only of a general nature; nevertheless, the majority of those who wrote the exam failed, the main reason for failure being (as it was for the provincial bureau's examination) insufficient knowledge of the source language, the target language, or both. As well, some individuals who had been doing, or even teaching, translation or interpretation in one form or another, refused to take any examination in order to be admitted to ATIA.

One result of these situations was that both the provincial bureau and the association tended to be viewed as being elitist. Another was that a number of the unsuccessful examination candidates banded together with other would-be translators and interpreters to form a second association in the province. When first founded, it was called the Interpreters and Translators Association of Western Canada (ITAWC); it has since changed its name to the Association of Interpreters and Translators of Canada (AITC).

## 2. *Association of Interpreters and Translators of Canada (AITC)*

The history of this association, which was registered under the Alberta Societies Act in January 1983 and is not affiliated with any other provincial, national or international organization of translators and interpreters, was summarized in a draft of the first issue of AITC's publication, *Canadian Polyglot* as follows:

> ...in November, 1982, 57 people active or interested in translation and interpretation got together and decided to form an association. On January 14, 1986 [sic], the Interpreters and Translators Association of Western Canada was incorporated under the Alberta Societies Act. In April 1986, we

> extended our jurisdiction to cover Canada from coast to coast, and changed the Association's name to Association of Interpreters and Translators of Canada. We now have 120 members who between them speak at least 52 languages.

Besides members in Alberta, AITC claims members in British Columbia, New Brunswick and Ontario. Its comparatively large membership and broad linguistic representation, it would be fair to say, are partly due to the fact that it has no examination structure for the admission of members and the fact that its annual membership dues are $10.00. It therefore draws from a much larger pool than an organization such as ATIA.

AITC endeavoured, initially with some degree of success, to cultivate relationships with various departments of the provincial government, in particular Alberta Culture, Alberta Manpower (Settlement Services) and Alberta Advanced Education, all of which granted it financial support for its workshops and seminars in the mid- and late 1980s. In February and March 1985, for example, AITC (then ITAWC) and Alberta Manpower (Settlement Services) co-sponsored "An Educational Conference for Volunteer Interpreters and Translators" in Calgary and Edmonton respectively.

Furthermore, AITC "appointed" some prominent public figures (the Hon. Don R. Getty, Premier of Alberta, and the Hon. Mr. Justice A. Milton Harradence of the Court of Appeal of Alberta) as its patrons and invited them and others (e.g. the Hon. Mr. Justice William R. Sinclair of the Court of Queen's Bench, Edmonton) to speak at their conferences and workshops. Also invited to speak at its "Fall 1986 Cultural Workshop/Training Seminar" (Calgary) and its "Winter 1987 Workshop/Training Seminar" were "language specialists" from the Department of Translation and Languages of the University of Moncton, New Brunswick, and the School of Translators and Interpreters of the University of Ottawa, respectively.

As little has been heard from ATIC over the past three years, the present status of this association and of Canadian *Polyglot* is unclear.

## E. TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS

## 1. *Universities*

Several universities in eastern Canada offer programs in non-literary translation. The earliest to offer such programs were the University of Ottawa (1936), McGill University (1943) and University of Montreal (1944).

In western Canada, however, the picture for those seeking training for a career in translation or interpretation is much bleaker. In fact, Alberta has no translation programs designed to prepare students to enter the modern non-literary translation marketplace, where the majority of translation jobs are to be found. One reason for this is likely the reluctance of the universities to perform a role they seem to have, at least until very recently, considered more properly that of a vocational college. A second reason might well be the lack of experienced translators having the necessary combination of professional skills and academic qualifications to serve as instructors for such programs. Although several courses and a few degree programs in translation are offered by the language departments of various post-secondary institutions in Alberta, these remain oriented primarily toward literary translation, not translation for government, business, the military or industry. The Romance Languages Department at the University of ALberta (Edmonton), for example, offers programs in translation at both the bachelor's and master's level, but only in literary translation.

## 2. *Community Colleges*

### a) *Alberta Vocational College*

Outside the university environment, the educational emphasis seems to be on community interpretation (a form of consecutive interpretation), more than on translation. For example, in 1990, Alberta Vocational College (AVC), formerly Alberta Vocational Centre, offered a program called Community Interpreter Skills Training at its Edmonton campus. The pamphlet describing this program includes the following information: "Hundreds of community interpreters are working in Edmonton in various capacities.

Interpretation is often done by family members, co-workers, or friends. Apart from short workshops or seminars, comprehensive training of community interpreters has not existed until now." With immigrants—many of whom have a mother tongue other than Englishcomposing roughly twenty percent of Edmonton's population, the need for such a program is undeniable. To be a community interpreter in Alberta means primarily helping individuals who speak little or no English to communicate with English-speaking physicians, lawyers, representatives of government agencies and so on, in regard to matters that affect them. Taking this training a step further, AVC also offered a program known as Basic Training Program for Health Interpreters, which is designed, according to the relevant information pamphlet, "to supply community interpreters with specialized training... in order to meet the demands of different health care settings in Edmonton."

The languages of the AVC programs vary in accordance with the changing needs of the community and the students' capabilities. So far, they have included Polish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hindi, Punjabi, Spanish. One difficulty the programs' organizers have encountered, however, is that some of those registering for the programs are themselves recent immigrants, whose English language skills are sometimes still inadequate for the role they will be expected to perform.

A unique aspect of AVC's activities is that, besides offering community interpreter training, it has also offered workshops for users of community interpreters, such as city police forces, the law courts, health care and social workers and so on.

### b) *Grant MacEwan Community College*

In a similar vein, but with an eye to the world community, rather than the local community, Edmonton's Grant MacEwan Community College recently incorporated an information session on the use of interpreters into its International Business Studies program. It did so from a growing recognition of the importance of interpretation to successful business dealings in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

# CONCLUSION

In studying the history of translation and interpretation in Alberta, a number of things quickly become apparent. The old adage "The more things change, the more they stay the same", for example, begins to seem particularly relevant. Among the things that have obviously changed are the circumstances under which interpretation and translation take place. For example, interpreters no longer travel by canoe, boat, horse or dogsled, but by jet and taxi; they face less danger to life and limb than did the interpreters of Indian languages, although this danger has undoubtedly been replaced by greater mental stress; and they have a wide variety of resources, both human and material, to call on for assistance in their work. Translators, too, have left the primitive, isolated Indian camps and mission stations of earlier days. They have moved into adequately furnished and well-equipped office space, with general and specialized dictionaries readily accessible, and numerous colleagues across the country and around the world, who are just a phone call or fax message away. Today's interpreters and translators are much better educated than their predecessors, and an increasing number hold university degrees in their field of specialization. But it is not only the working conditions that have changed; the nature of the work itself has evolved, in the sense that the subjects of discussion have become much more diverse and much more technical.

Some things, however, have not changed. For example, despite the undeniable necessity of translation and interpretation for the initiation and continuation of contact with those of different languages and cultures, practitioners in these fields have, as a group, had difficulty earning the respect of those who request their services. Also, for the most part, they have maintained a consistently low profile. Other recurrent themes in the history of translation in Alberta are the misperceptions many outsiders have of what the job entails and, most significantly, the difficulty in recruiting competent people in these fields. In the first case, public education is called for; in the second, the deficiencies evident in the quality of service provided by some interpreters and translators point to a need for intensive, specialized training to prepare them to meet market demands, and for greater public protection. Unfortunately, no suitable training is available within the province of Alberta. With respect to the needs of government, the provincial Translation

Bureau has, of necessity, to a certain extent taken on the role of educator and trainer.

There are a number of other things that have changed little from the days of the fur trade. For example, translators and interpreters are still of many different stripes, some being knowledgable, trustworthy, loyal and dependable, others being nothing short of charlatans. They are also not always available when and where they are needed, for reasons as diverse as ill health, other occupations, or geographical distance. Since the general public does not distinguish between translation and interpretation, they may be asked to provide either or both types of services. Appropriate remuneration for their services is often a point of contention, and in times of economic constraint, they are among the first to be considered for wage cuts, layoffs or position abolishment.

The situation in Alberta and, indeed, in much of North America today, is neatly summed up by the following quotation:

> Because society is in so much of a hurry and so concerned with practical matters, it makes do with inaccurate translations and unqualified translators. It simply does not make sense. To navigate a freighter up from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Great Lakes, a pilot's licence is required. But when it comes to rendering a thought from one world to another, avoiding linguistic and cultural pitfalls, the first person considered to be even vaguely bilingual will do.[28]

Efforts are being made to change this situation; however, much remains to be done.

The present work has concentrated on interpretation and translation as practised in Alberta since the white man's arrival in that territory. During these 230-odd years, extending from the middle of the eighteenth century to the last decade of the twentieth, the activities of interpretation and translation have clearly played a vital role in the history of the province. Furthermore, given the current sociopolitical and economic circumstances at home and abroad (e.g. Canada's constitutional crisis, its language and immigration policies, the growing democratization of communist régimes, and an increasingly

[28] Words of the late Jean Martucci, former president of the French language council, Conseil de la langue française, quoted in Delisle, *The Language Alchemists*, p. 272.

competitive international marketplace), it is almost inevitable that they will continue to play an important part in Alberta's future, with respect to this province's activities on the provincial, national and international scenes.

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