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## *The Cadottes: Five Generations of Fur Traders on Lake Superior*

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**B**etween 1686 and 1840 five generations of the Cadotte family were active in the Lake Superior fur trade. At one time or another they were involved in almost every aspect of this lucrative commerce: as voyageurs, clerks, traders, interpreters, and even as financiers. Some sought to make a fortune, others pursued adventure; many more were born to the fur trade and knew no other life.

Although Mathurin Cadot<sup>1</sup> had made his first voyage to Sault Ste. Marie with Nicolas Perrot and Daumont de Saint-Lusson in 1670 and was probably a *coureur de bois* for many years, it was not until 1686 that he received his first *cong * to trade among the "*sauvages esloignez*"—distant nations.<sup>2</sup> Forming a partnership with several friends, he continued his activities among the Ottawa at least until 1690, when he hired his wife's half-brother to take his place. About to become a father for the first time, he retired to the quiet life of a *habitant* at B cancour, near Trois Rivi res, and later, in Batiscan.

Memories of the fur trade were kept alive in the Cadot family, and in 1717 Mathurin's eldest son, Jean-Fran ois, made his only recorded voyage to Michilimackinac. Two other sons, Ren  and Charles, followed, each making several trips here between 1722 and 1733.<sup>3</sup> Upon their return, these young men used their earnings to establish themselves by purchasing cleared land, and were thus able to marry and begin families. Hence the fur trade, while it did not bring great wealth to the voyageurs, brought at least some access to security.

It was not until the third generation that a permanent commitment to this new country was made. Inspired by his grandfather's tales of adventure, as well as by those of his father and his uncles, Jean-Baptiste—the eldest son of Jean-Fran ois Cadot—entered the fur trade at the age of 18. On 23 June 1742 he contracted with Jean-Baptiste-Nicolas Roch de Ramezay to go to the post of Nipigon with the first canoes to leave that year. He agreed to hunt, fish—in a word, to do all that was commanded him for a period of three years, during which time he could engage in no private trade. At the completion of his term, on his return to Montreal, he would be paid the sum of 700 *livres*.<sup>4</sup>

But the young Jean-Baptiste did not return to Montreal. For him the family farm in Batiscan held no attraction, even though his father's death in 1743 had

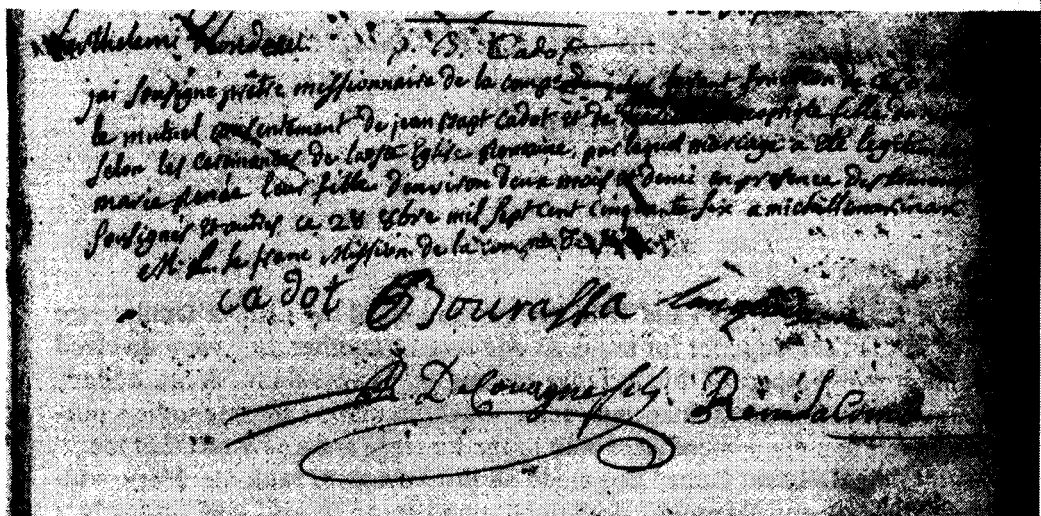


Figure 1. Record of marriage of Jean-Baptiste Cadot, Ste. Anne's Register. Courtesy of Ste. Anne's Church, Mackinac Island, Michigan.

left him to manage the estate. Here, in the *"pays d'en haut,"*—upper country—he would live out his life and found a new family. By the mid-eighteenth century, Sault Ste. Marie was important not only as the gateway to Lake Superior but also as a summer rendezvous for Indians and voyageurs alike. The French, realizing its strategic value in controlling the fur trade, decided to establish a fort there to intercept Indians bringing their furs to trade with the British. When Louis Legardeur de Repentigny arrived in the fall of 1750 to take charge of this new *seigneurie*, he found a Frenchman living there married to a Native woman, and hired them to clear the land and prepare it for planting.<sup>5</sup> The Frenchman, later revealed to be Jean-Baptiste Cadot,<sup>6</sup> stayed on to become interpreter at the fort and an effective mediator with the Indians. The fact that his wife was related to several of the local chiefs, including Madjekewiss, must have helped considerably.

When the British trader Alexander Henry the elder, reached the Sault on 19 May 1762, at the end of the Seven Years War, he found that the French had already left, and "the only family was that of M. Cadotte, the interpreter, whose wife was a Chipeway."<sup>7</sup> Realizing the importance of learning the Native language in order to establish himself in the Indian trade, Henry resolved to spend the winter with the family, where Chippewa was the only language spoken. Later that summer, a small detachment of British soldiers arrived under Lt. John

Jamet. Cadot stayed on as interpreter, and was perhaps effective in averting a catastrophe. The new commanding officer, "unable to believe that his troops would have need to live on fish during the winter," intended to trade liquor to the Indians in return for a regular supply of venison and other food.<sup>8</sup> On the night of 22 December, a fire destroyed all the houses at the fort except Cadot's, and all the soldiers were obliged to return to Fort Michilimackinac, except Lt. Jamet, who had been badly burned. At the end of February, after a winter of ice-fishing, the lieutenant was ready to join his command at Michilimackinac, and Cadot was only too glad to accompany him.

With the departure of the British garrison, Cadot, the illiterate voyageur who could barely sign his name, was once more in charge. It was he who restrained the warriors of the Sault from participating in the Indians' attack on Fort Michilimackinac in 1763. Again the following year he was influential in keeping the Natives from going south to attack Detroit.<sup>9</sup> By 1765 the British were letting him represent them in Indian affairs at the Sault. When Cadot visited Fort Michilimackinac that spring, Captain William Howard sent him back to the Sault with a wampum belt "to shew all the Indians that should come to St. Mary's, to acquaint them of the news of the peace" which had recently been negotiated with the Shawnee and the Delaware.<sup>10</sup> It was hoped that Cadot would influence the Chippewa, too, toward peace.

The Indians were willing to accept the peace, but they also wanted to resume the trade which had been suspended two years earlier after the massacre at the fort. In June 1765 Cadot was back in Michilimackinac with eighty canoes of Indians from Lake Superior. Captain Howard wrote to Sir William Johnson that

they represented to me the miserable situation they had been in for want of trade, and begged I would send some Trader to them, and asked for Mr. Caddot ... I propose to let Mr. Caddot go to Lapoint in Lake Superior, and to let a few English merchants go to other Places, as Mr. Caddot will be near the Center, am Convinced that all the Indians will remain in our Interest.<sup>11</sup>

Alexander Henry, ever anxious to convey his own importance, put it differently: "The exclusive trade of Lake Superior was given to myself. . . I took into partnership M. Cadotte."<sup>12</sup>

Jean-Baptiste Cadot remained an important figure in the Lake Superior area for the next twenty years, often serving as ambassador to the Indians on behalf of the British and helping to maintain good relations between the fur traders and the Natives. "A man who was much esteemed by Sir William Johnson," wrote Patrick Sinclair, Lt. Governor of Michilimackinac, "He has great influence with the Indians and is considered by them as a great Village Orator."<sup>13</sup> In one of his last missions on behalf of the British, Cadot accompanied Madjekewiss to Chequamegon Bay in an effort to bring about peace among the warring factions of Chippewa (Ojibwa), Sioux and Fox.<sup>14</sup>

While he was very much involved in Indian affairs, Cadot did not neglect the fur trade, the principal source of his income. He continued his association with

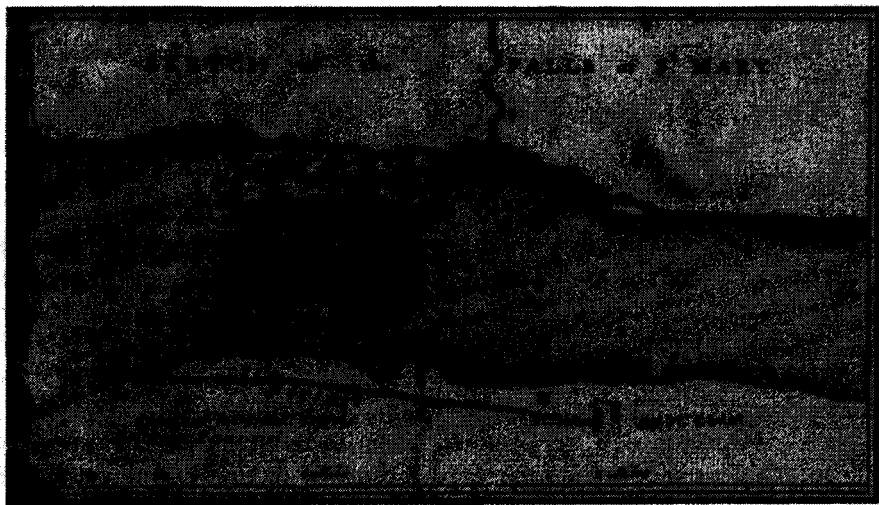


Figure 2. Inset on *Sketch of Lake Huron, 1788*, by Gother Mann, which shows the Cadot post next to that of Jean-Baptiste Nolin. National Archives of Canada, NMC 18557.

Alexander Henry, who often stood security for him in the difficult business of acquiring a license. In 1767, the first year for which we have a record of Cadot's trade, he took out two canoes to Sault Ste. Marie with goods worth £1200.<sup>15</sup> Six years later François Cazeau, his Montreal supplier, was sending him merchandise valued at 9335 *livres*.<sup>16</sup> By then his wife and three surviving children were living in Montreal where he had sent them, in the care of Cazeau, to provide for their education. His records show that he had expanded his trade, acquiring the post at l'Anse, and was now supplying at least one other trader in the area.<sup>17</sup>

In 1775 Cadot accompanied Henry and a group of merchants to Saskatchewan to open up trade with the North. Taking four canoes, he wintered at Fort des Prairies, and returned to the Sault late in the spring of 1776. There he learned that his Native wife had died in Montreal on 18 May, leaving his two sons, Jean-Baptiste, age thirteen, and Michel, age eleven, in the care of their older sister, Marie-Renée, who was then twenty. Soon after, François Cazeau, who had not only supplied Cadot's merchandise and marketed his furs, but also managed the family's affairs in Montreal, was arrested for having sold goods to the Americans during their invasion of Quebec in 1775. It is no wonder that the records are silent on the Cadot enterprise in the year 1776.

Cadot's trade at the Sault had suffered considerably during his absence, and in 1777 he was able to collect furs worth only 593 *livres* to take with him to Montreal.<sup>18</sup> There he made arrangements with Maurice Blondeau to manage

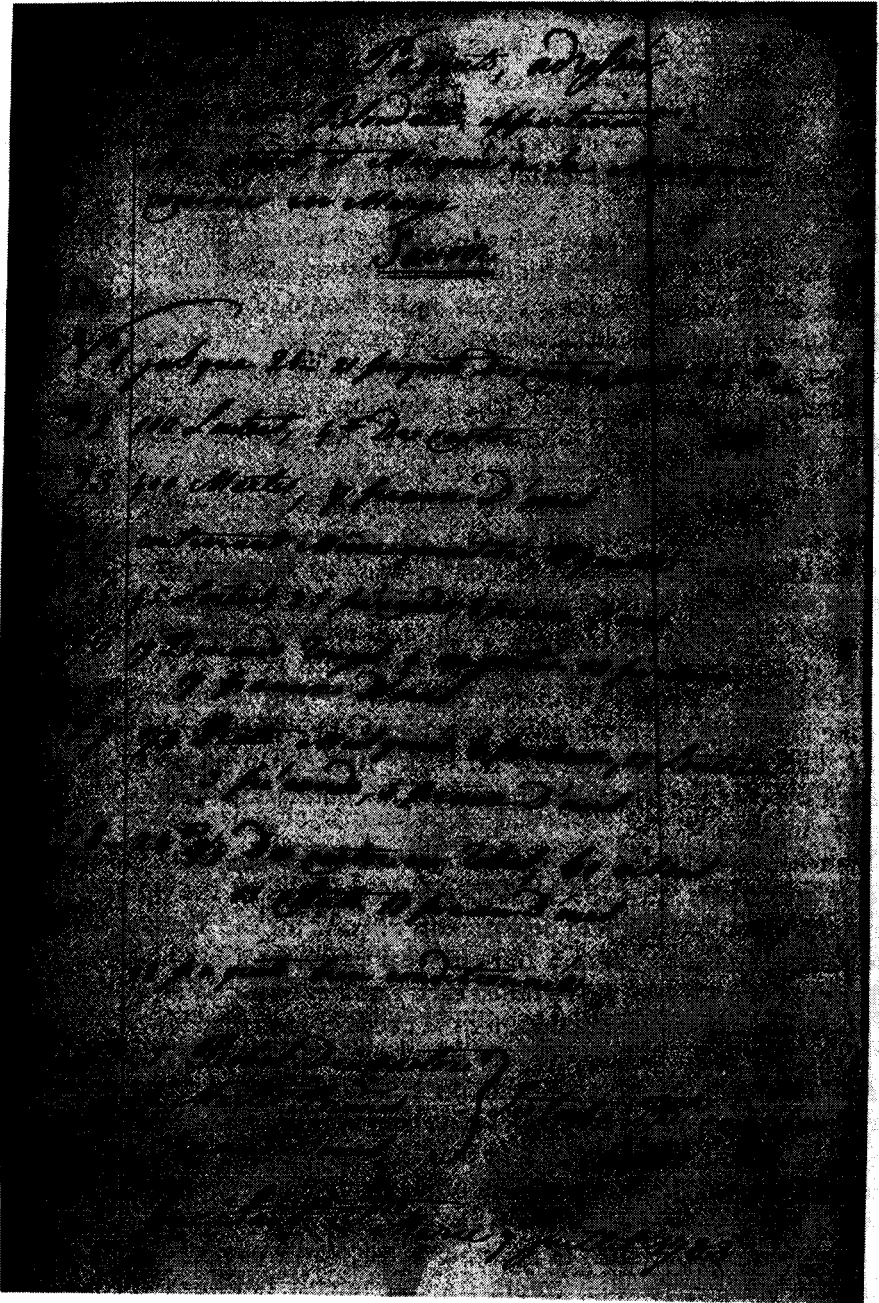


Figure 3. Page from Cadot Ledger showing 28 packs of fur sent in 1783 and the 29th pack belonging to Jean-Baptiste Cadot, Jr. Courtesy of the University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

his affairs in Montreal while his three children boarded with Blondeau's parents on the rue Nôtre-Dame near their respective schools. Cadot took only one canoe that year and returned to the Sault.

The following year Cadot entered into partnership with Jean-Baptiste Barthe, newly arrived at the Sault, and for the next five years their business prospered. Cadot's only dependency at this time was still l'Anse, managed by L'Étang until 1778, and thereafter by Cazelet. The values of furs traded averaged about 30,000 *livres* per year.<sup>19</sup>

In 1782 Cadot's two sons returned to the Sault, while their sister stayed behind in Montreal to assist with the family business. That winter Jean-Baptiste, Jr., sent out to one of the distant posts in the Fond du Lac district at the head of Lake Superior, brought in by himself one entire pack of furs: beaver, marten, and bear. His proud father listed it separately among the twenty-nine packs sent to Blondeau on 7 July 1783.<sup>20</sup> The following year he put his eldest son in charge of the new post at Folle Avoine near the upper St. Croix River in present-day Wisconsin.

The importance of Cadot's role in the Lake Superior fur trade was recognized by his fellow traders when, on 6 July 1784, he was one of eight men selected to govern Michigan's first Board of Trade.<sup>21</sup> In 1785 fifty-one packs of furs were sent to Montreal, bringing in a total of 36,279 *livres*.<sup>22</sup> This was the peak year of the Cadot fur trade. By 1786 the family had formed a new partnership, Mssrs Cadot et Compagnie. Trade was extensive, with posts at Folle Avoine, Lac Courtes Oreilles, L'Aile au Corbeau, and l'Anse.<sup>23</sup> But fur returns had begun to decline and, with the death of his daughter in Montreal during the summer of 1786, Cadot withdrew from the fur trade. Henceforth his accounts would be turned over to the Société Générale de Michillimackinac, which would also employ his sons.<sup>24</sup>

Jean-Baptiste Cadotte, Jr., meanwhile, was developing his skills as an interpreter and trader. In 1789 he and other members of the Société Générale arranged to occupy different departments of Fond du Lac. Cadotte was assigned Lac Rouge, and thus began a thirteen year career as a fur trader in northern Minnesota and Canada. He returned each summer to the Sault, bringing his furs to Michillimackinac and looking after the needs of his father.

Invited by John Gregory to join the North West Company for three years, Jean-Baptiste, Jr. signed a contract on 2 September 1795 for £3600 annually. Included in the contract was a provision guaranteeing wheat and corn at Detroit prices for his father and his father's second family at Sault Ste. Marie. After only one year, the North West Company offered him another contract for five years, making him a trader and assigning him Red Lake and its dependencies.<sup>25</sup>

Jean-Baptiste continued as a partner in the North West Company until 1803, when he was expelled for conduct found "highly improper and inconsistent with his duty. . . he having indulged himself in drunkenness and riot to the great loss and injury of the said concern."<sup>26</sup> He finished out his days as an interpreter in the Indian Department in Lower Canada.

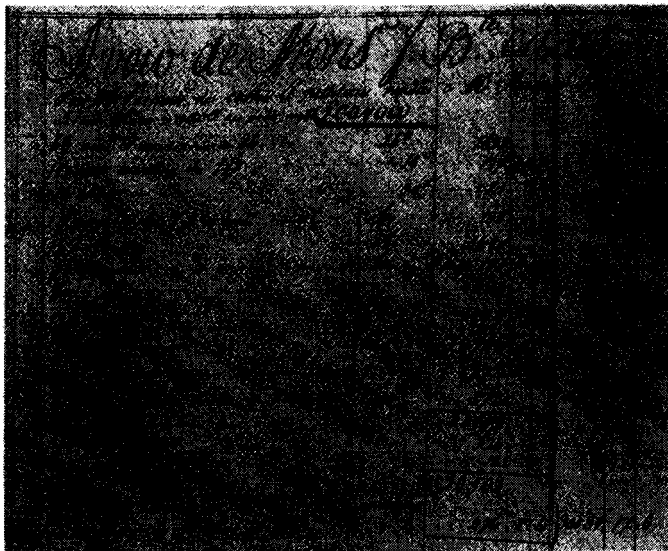


Figure 4. Detail from a page in the Blondeau Account Book showing sale of Cadot fur in 1783. Maurice Blondeau's fur trade account book, plate 91, M13027, Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal.

Like his older brother, Michel Cadotte worked for his father after his return from Montreal in 1782, and later for the Société Générale in the region south of Chequamegon Bay. He eventually settled on Michael's Island, afterwards called Madeline Island in honor of his Ojibwa wife. From his post there he developed an extensive trade extending from Lac du Flambeau to Folle Avoine and all along the upper Chippewa River. In 1799 he was listed as a partner of the North West Company in the South of Lake Superior.<sup>27</sup> Four years later the company offered him a contract for the trade of Point Chequamegon, the Chippewa River, and Lac Courtes Oreilles for a period of three years. According to the terms of the agreement, Cadotte and the North West Company would share equally in profit and loss; Cadotte would purchase all his merchandise from the company at a fixed percentage over Montreal prices, and he would sell his furs to the company at agreed prices. Furthermore, he would not interfere with other traders of the same company, but he would do his best to harm the trade of opposing companies. The contract was renewed for another three years on 5 July 1805, and then assumed by the Michilimackinac Company in 1806 when the North West Company relinquished its trade on the south shore of Lake Superior to the Americans.<sup>28</sup>

In 1807, Cadotte's business suffered irreparable damage when his Lac Courtes Oreilles trading post was burned, with all the winter's furs, during an uprising fomented by the message of the Shawnee Prophet. The value of his destroyed property was later placed at \$5000.<sup>29</sup> However, in spite of his loss, Cadotte did

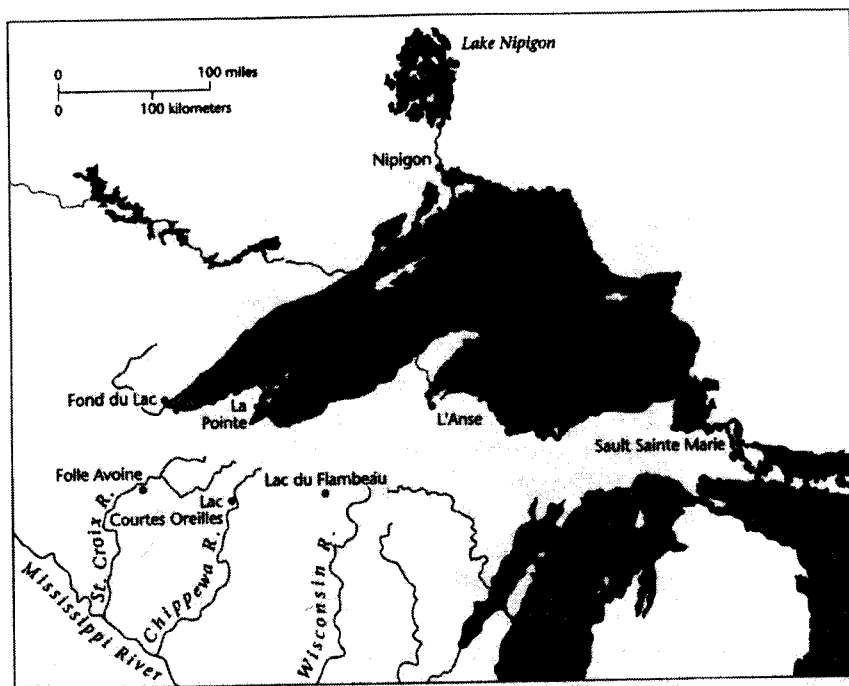


Figure 5. Map of the Lake Superior region showing the location of many of the Cadot fur-trading posts.

not abandon the fur trade. In 1809 he had eight men employed at Lac Courtes Oreilles and La Pointe. The following year he had only four men at Folle Avoine.<sup>30</sup> Fur trade returns had already begun to decline.

In 1811, the Michilimackinac Company and John Jacob Astor agreed to form a new company, the South West Fur Company. Thereafter, and throughout the War of 1812, records are sparse, but it is likely that Cadotte, like most of the Lake Superior traders, continued to send his furs to Canada whenever possible. Astor, meanwhile, was working for passage of a law which would exclude non-citizens from the fur trade within the United States. The law was passed in 1816.

Although Cadotte tried to continue doing business on the Canadian side of the Sault,<sup>31</sup> American traders made it almost impossible for him to collect furs in what had once been his territory. On 2 August 1819 Ramsay Crooks wrote to Cadotte asking him to cooperate with the company traders and not go beyond the places he usually visited.<sup>32</sup> With this warning in mind, Cadotte arrived at the American Fur Company offices in Mackinac the following summer with furs valued at \$1151.28.<sup>33</sup> Three weeks later he purchased American citizenship for \$5.<sup>34</sup>

In 1821 Cadotte's two sons, Michel, Jr. and Augustin, began to work for the American Fur Company's Lac du Flambeau outfit as interpreters, although their



father continued to trade independently from his post at La Pointe. In July 1822 he was able to send only \$793.69 in furs to Mackinac, and returned with sundry goods valued at \$731.89.<sup>35</sup> The next year he did better, bringing in furs worth \$1227.22, mostly muskrat.<sup>36</sup>

In 1822 the Lac du Flambeau outfit was purchased by two brothers from New York, Lyman and Truman Warren,<sup>37</sup> who later married daughters of Michel Cadotte and took over much of his trade. After 1826 the American Fur Company records show that all of Cadotte's trade was carried on within Lyman Warren's outfit, which now included Lac Courtes Oreilles, Lac du Flambeau, and Folle Avoine. By 1827 Warren had taken over the La Pointe post, and was one of the partners of the Lake Superior outfit. Michel Cadotte had effectively retired from the fur trade.

All the sons of Michel Cadotte were active in the fur trade for as long as it lasted at La Pointe. Michel, Jr., Augustin, and Antoine maintained accounts with the American Fur Company in Mackinac at least until 1834, as did some of their Canadian cousins. After this date, as the amount of furs had already declined drastically, the company turned to developing a fishing industry. The Cadottes, all of whom had married Ojibwa women, stayed with their people. They are still there today—at Lac Courtes Oreilles, L'Anse, Red Cliff, Bad River, and Bay Mills—for unlike the white fur traders, they were not there to exploit the Native people, but to share their life.

#### NOTES

1. The spelling "Cadotte" was initiated by the English after 1780 and never used by the first three generations.
2. *Congé* dated 14 June 1686, Archives Nationales du Québec, Montreal.
3. *Etude Adhémar*, 8 May 1717; *Etude David*, 4 May 1722; *Etude Adhémar*, 28 April 1724; *Etude Adhémar*, 1 May 1724; *Etude Adhémar*, 28 May 1732; *Etude Porlier*, 26 May 1733, Archives Nationales du Québec, Montreal.
4. *Etude Blanzly*, 23 June 1742, Archives Nationales du Québec, Montreal.
5. M. de La Jonquière to Minister of the Colonies, 17 September 1751, MG 1, France, Archives des Colonies, Serie C11A, vol. 95, 104-7. Correspondance Générale, Canada. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
6. Testimony of Francis X. Biron, *The United States vs. De Repentigny et al.*, *United States Supreme Court, Transcript of Records* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1866), 5: 70-71.
7. Alexander Henry, *Travels and Adventures in Canada* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 58.
8. *Ibid.*, 63.
9. *Ibid.*, 164-65.
10. William Howard to William Johnson, 17 May 1765, in *Sir William Johnson Papers*, 14 vols. ed., James Sullivan (Albany: State University New York Press, 1921-1965), 11: 739. Hereafter the *Sir William Johnson Papers* cited as SWJP.
11. *Idem.*, 24 June 1765, 11: 805.
12. Henry, *Travels and Adventures in Canada*, 193.

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13. Patrick Sinclair to Dietrich Brehm, 29 October 1779, Haldimand Papers, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 40 vols. (Lansing, 1874-1929), 10: 530. Hereafter the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections cited as *MPHC*.
14. Daniel Robertson to Daniel Claus, 7 September 1783, Haldimand Papers, *MPHC*, 11: 383.
15. Fur Trade Returns 1767, Colonial Office Papers, London, *Canadian Historical Review* 3 (1922): 352.
16. 11 May 1773, Cadotte Account Book, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Ind.
17. 18 July 1773 and 1 August 1773, Cadotte Account Book.
18. 26 September 1777, Blondeau Account Book, McCord Museum, Montreal.
19. *Ibid.*, 1778-1786.
20. 7 July 1783, Cadotte Account Book.
21. Bond Papers, 6 July 1784, *MPHC* 37: 424.
22. 1 September 1785, Cadotte Account Book; 30 September 1785, Blondeau Account Book, McCord Museum, Montreal.
23. Cadotte Account Book, 1785-1786.
24. Cadotte Account Book, 1787.
25. Jean-Baptiste Cadotte Papers, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
26. W.S. Wallace, ed., *Documents Relating to the North West Company* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1935), 172.
27. "Arrangements of the Proprietors, Clerks, Interpreters, etc. of the North-West Company in the Indian Departments 1799," in L. R. Masson, *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest*, 2 vols. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), 1:65.
28. Wallace, *Documents*, 76-78, 224-26.
29. 4 September 1841, Indian Affairs, Records of the La Pointe Sub-Agency, Roll 388, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
30. Notarial Records of the Michillimackinac Company, Abbott Account Book, Bayless Public Library, Sault Ste. Marie.
31. John Johnston Waste Book, 14 July 1817 and 20 September 1821, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft Papers, Reel 68, Library of Congress.
32. Mackinac Letter Book, 8 July 1819 - 30 December 1819, American Fur Company Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
33. American Fur Company Account Book, 24 July 1820, National Archives of Canada, Reel 1.
34. *Ibid.*, 15 August 1820.
35. *Ibid.*, 18 July 1822.
36. *Ibid.*, 8 July 1823.
37. *Ibid.*, Reel 2, 22 July 1823.