



Free Trade in the Red River Region: Opposing Forces Collide

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Introduction:

In 1845, the Métis at Red River sent a petition to the Hudson's Bay Company Governor outlining a series of questions they wanted the Company to answer concerning their economic and legal rights. At the time, the HBC held a trade monopoly over Rupert's Land, awarded to them by the British Crown. The company believed that they had the right to control trade in the region and that the Métis men who traded with other companies were in violation of their monopoly. Among the signatories on this petition were two prominent free traders who contested the Company's monopoly, Peter Garrioch and James Sinclair. These men, both free traders but, from different economic backgrounds, united in the 1840's to fight for the rights of their people by challenging this monopoly. This project sought to understand how power is exercised by the Metis and the HBC, oppositional forces with competing claims over a region's economy. To do this, I looked at how Sinclair and Garrioch coped with constant economic pressure from the Company, shedding light on the larger struggles faced by the Métis people at the time.

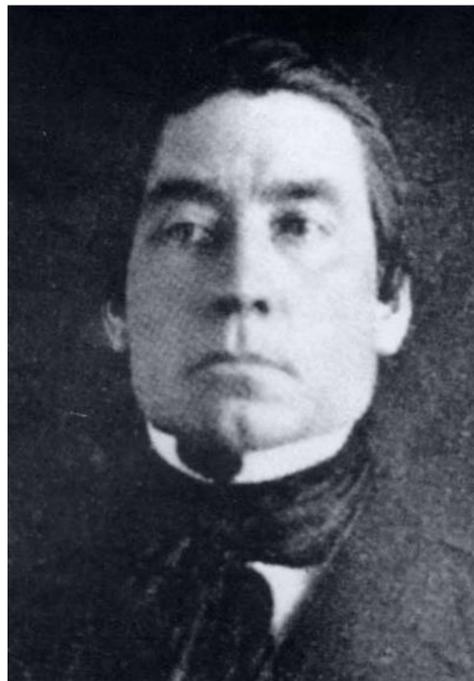


Figure 1:

Photograph of James Sinclair

Source: "West of The Mountains: James Sinclair and the Hudson's Bay Company"
By: D. Geneva Lent

Methodology:

This project was inspired by a 19th century petition signed by James Sinclair and Peter Garrioch and was shaped by the personal journal of Peter Garrioch, both primary sources. I conducted research of primary source documentation from the HBC archives at Library and Archives Canada in order to find the exact documents signed by both men. I also used secondary sources, mainly books, written about this time period and general internet searches, using the individuals name followed by "Metis", "Red River", or "Fur Trade" to find biographical information on both men.

I would rather "rot in jail" than pay duties!

-Peter Garrioch protesting import duties on American goods (Gibson, 2015)

Different Backgrounds:

Peter Garrioch:

- Educated in the United Kingdom, Garrioch was a teacher until the early 1840's.
- In 1843, he left Red River to work for the Missouri Fur Company.
- Operating a post along the Souris River, Garrioch traded with First Nations and Metis traders. Many of the references he makes in his journals indicate that he was just getting by. At the end of his journal, he decides that he would start a farm in order to make more money.
- Threatened multiple times by the Governor of Red River and Cuthbert Grant, Warden of the Prairies, that his goods would be seized for not paying duties when crossing the border. This would have had a large impact as Garrioch did not have the means to recover from a seizure.

James Sinclair:

- Educated in Scotland before returning to Rupert's Land in 1826. He then joined forces with a rich trader at Red River named Andrew McDermot and became wealthy and influential.
- Freight goods for the HBC before his contracts were cancelled in 1843. After, he provided goods for other traders, including Garrioch.
- Created a trade network to the Pembina trading post on the American side of the border.
- Acted as a guide for the HBC, leading a large contingent of Metis to the Oregon Territory for resettlement.
- Carried a petition to the government of the United Kingdom demanding that the HBC and its agents stop harassing Metis traders.

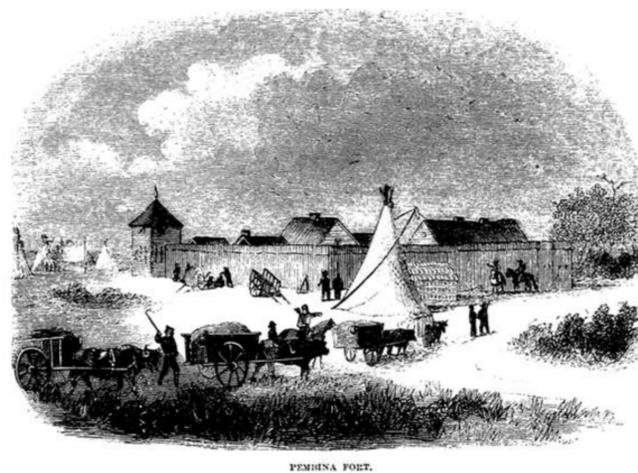


Figure 2: Pembina Fort, location where Garrioch and Sinclair traded.

Source: Harper's New Monthly Magazine, vol. 21, August 1860

Fighting for the same cause:

- Both men signed the 1845 petition asking the rights of the Metis people in regards to the perceived HBC monopoly.
- Both men continued to trade goods across the border, working together despite multiple warnings from the Company to cease their operations.
- Led the group of Metis, calling themselves the "delegates of the people", at the trial of Guillaume Sayer. (Gibson 2015)
- Both openly opposed the authority of Cuthbert Grant, Warden of the Prairies, by refusing to pay duties on goods that they had brought across the border.

1. Has a half-breed, a settler the right to hunt furs in this country?
 2. Has a native of this country (not an Indian) a right to hunt furs?
 3. If a half-breed has the right to hunt furs, can he hire other half-breeds for the purpose of hunting furs?
 4. Can a half-breed sell his furs to any person he pleases?
 5. Is a half-breed obliged to sell his furs to the Hudson's Bay Company at whatever price the company may think proper to give him?
 6. Can a half-breed receive any furs as a present from an Indian, a relative of his?
 7. Can a half-breed hire any of his Indian relatives to hunt furs for him?
 8. Can a half-breed trade furs from another half-breed, in or out of the settlement?
 9. Can a half-breed trade furs from an Indian, in or out of the settlement?
 10. With regard to trading, or hunting furs, have the half-breeds, or natives of European origin, any rights or privileges over Europeans?
 11. A settler having purchased lands from Lord Selkirk, or even from the Hudson's Bay Company, without any conditions attached to them, or without having signed any bond, deed, or instrument whatever whereby he might have willed away his right to trade furs, can he be prevented from trading furs in the settlement with settlers, or even out of the settlement?
 12. Are the limits of the settlement defined by the municipal law, Selkirk grant, or Indian sale?
 13. If a person cannot trade furs, either in or out of the settlement, can he purchase them for his own and family use, and in what quantity?
 14. Having never seen any official statements, nor known, but by report, that the Hudson's Bay Company has peculiar privileges over British subjects, natives, and half-breeds, resident in the settlement, we would wish to know what those privileges are, and the penalties attached to the infringement of the same?
 We remain your humble servants,

JAMES SINCLAIR, BAPTIST LA ROQUE, THOMAS LOGAN, JOHN DEASE, ALEXIS GAULAT, LOUIS LETENDRE DE BATOCHÉ, WILLIAM McMILLAN, ANTOINE MORRAN, BAT. WILKIE, JOHN VINCENT,	WILLIAM BRID, PETER GARROCH, HENRY COOK, JOHN SPENCE, JOHN ANDERSON, THOMAS McDERMOT, ADALL TROTTER, CHARLES HOLE, JOSEPH MONKMAN, BAPTIST FARMAN.
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To ALEXANDER CHRISTIE, Esq.,
Governor of Red River Settlement.

Conclusion:

By looking into the lives of Peter Garrioch and James Sinclair, this research was able to highlight how these men became community leaders at Red River. It also shows how everyday citizens fought for their rights as Metis people against the HBC. This project is important as it depicts how the struggle for Metis rights has been ongoing for almost 200 years, with much work still to be done.

References:

Gibson, Dale. *Law, Life, and Government at Red River*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.
Garrioch, Peter. *Journal of Peter Garrioch, Red River, 1843-47*.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Professor Brenda Macdougall and Émilie Pigeon for all their support and guidance through this project. I would also like to thank UROP for providing the funding for this research. Contact: ksmit185@uottawa.ca