

The Woman Who Married a Beaver: Trade Patterns and Gender Roles in the Ojibwa Fur Trade



Bruce M. White

Ethnohistory, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter, 1999), 109-147.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0014-1801%28199924%2946%3A1%3C109%3ATWWMAB%3E2.0.CO%3B2-1>

Ethnohistory is currently published by Duke University Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/duke.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Woman Who Married a Beaver: Trade Patterns and Gender Roles in the Ojibwa Fur Trade

Bruce M. White, *University of Minnesota*

Abstract. The Southwestern Ojibwa (Anishinaabeg) participated in the fur trade from the seventeenth century until recent times, trading animal skins and other items to obtain a variety of European goods that they valued. Many descriptions of the fur trade suggest that it consisted of fur-merchandise exchanges between European men and native men, with women playing a largely subsidiary role. In fact, trade among the Ojibwa was never exclusively a trade of furs for merchandise, nor was direct trade the only form of transaction between the Ojibwa and fur traders. Men were the major participants in trade ceremonies and were recipients of credit from traders—the means through which most furs were exchanged. Given the flexibility of Ojibwa gender roles, women sometimes participated in these trade transactions. However, the major role of women in the trade was as suppliers of food and supplies, commodities that were exchanged in barter transactions. These other commodities provided women with many opportunities to participate in the trade. Women also exerted control over the trade as marriage partners for traders. All these roles for women in the trade were reflective of Ojibwa belief that women's roles were ultimately shaped by spiritual power rather than any gender category based solely on a rigid division of labor.

In 1904, Kagige Pinasi (John Pinesi), an Ojibwa (Anishinaabe)-French man living at Fort William on the north shore of Lake Superior, told the anthropologist William Jones a story about a young woman who married a beaver. With blackened face she went to fast for a long time during a vision quest. She saw a person in human form who spoke to her. He asked her to come live with him. She did and eventually agreed to marry him. She was well provided with food and clothing and soon gave birth to four children.¹

She soon noticed something very odd that led her to realize for the first time that she had married a beaver. From time to time the woman's husband or children would leave with a human being who appeared outside their house. "And back home would they always return again. All sorts of things would they fetch—kettles and bowls, knives, tobacco, and all the things that are used when a beaver is eaten; such was what they brought. Continually they were adding to their great wealth." They would go to where the person lived and the person would kill the beavers. Yet the beavers were never really killed. They would come back home again with the clothes and tobacco that people gave them. The beavers were very fond of the people and would visit them often. The woman herself was forbidden to go by her husband, but this is what she heard.

Eventually the woman's husband died and she returned to live with human beings. She lived a long time after that and often told the story of what happened while she lived with the beavers. She always told people that they should never speak ill of a beaver or they would never be able to kill any: "If any one regards a beaver with too much contempt, speaking ill of it, one simply [will] not [be able to] kill it. Just the same as the feelings of one who is disliked, so is the feeling of the beaver. And he who never speaks ill of a beaver is very much loved by it; in the same way as people often love one another, so is one held in the mind of the beaver, particularly lucky then is one at killing beavers."

Referring to stories like this one, the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard wrote that such accounts are a succinct record of the beliefs of the societies in which they are told. "What is transmitted through these narratives," Lyotard wrote, "is the set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond." He noted that such stories "recount what could be called positive or negative apprenticeships." They tell of the success or failure of a hero, whose adventures define a society's "criteria of competence" and delineate a range of possible actions for members of the society.²

A primary purpose of such accounts is educational. Ojibwa elders told stories like this, usually in winter, to teach young people about the world while entertaining them.³ As such, these narratives are also a useful way for outsiders to learn about the people's worldview and understand their view of their history.⁴ Kagige Pinasi may have had a variety of reasons for wishing to instruct the anthropologist William Jones by telling him this story. Jones's biographer, Henry M. Rideout, spoke of the informant as "an old chief" and an experienced trapper who made Jones examples of animal traps. He also told Jones a number of odd experiences he had had hunting and trapping with his sons. He also recounted, for Jones's transcription, more than fifty stories, which Jones praised for their artistry.

Jones wrote that the man developed a fondness for him—the anthropologist was of Fox and British-American ancestry—and tried to convince him to “come and live here, take to myself a wife, and be one of the people.” Telling Jones this story of a kind of intermarriage may have been a form of subtle encouragement.⁵

Beyond Kagige Pinasi’s own personal motives, this story is, like all Ojibwa stories, interesting on many levels. It instructs young people, especially girls, on the importance of the vision quest, the means through which an Ojibwa person obtained a relationship with powerful beings who would be helpful to her and could chart a unique course for her life. Further, it is a basic description of and commentary on the cooperative arrangements that many Ojibwa people believed existed between different kinds of beings in the world. Ojibwa people who hunted, fished, or gathered plants had to be aware of their reciprocal obligations with the natural world and give back something to the animals, fish, or plants from which they harvested. In taking small plants in the woods, or bark from the trees, people often left a gift of tobacco. After a bear was killed, they held an elaborate ceremony of thanks and gave presents to the bear. The beaver story shows that reciprocity was necessary to keep the system operating. Without gifts and respect, animals would not be so helpful to humans. They would hold themselves back and not allow themselves to be used by people. Without gifts and respect, the system would cease to function.⁶

Ojibwa people also applied the principle of reciprocity to their dealings with people, including non-Indians. In their earliest interactions with the French and the British, the Ojibwa made use of the same gifts, ceremonies, and words that they used in dealing with animals, plants, and other beings.⁷ The logic of approaching Europeans in this way was solid; interaction with Europeans was important because of the valuable technology Europeans brought with them. Reciprocity was necessary to keep the system operating. Without gifts and respect, Europeans would not be so helpful to Indian people. They would withhold their technology from Indian people. Without gifts and respect, the system would cease to function.

Dealing with animals differed, of course, from dealing with Europeans. The Ojibwa quickly worked out a variety of strategies that were specific to the newcomers. For example, they gave different things. The story of the woman who married the beaver describes a reverse fur trade. In the European fur trade, Indian people gave furs in return for tools, kettles, and tobacco, but this story tells of a relationship in which people gave tools, kettles, and tobacco to beavers in return for the animals’ furs.

There is yet another striking feature of the story: it delineates an inter-

mediary role for women in the interaction between people and animals, suggesting a role for women in the interaction between the Ojibwa and Europeans. This story is not an origin tale.⁸ It does not describe the beginnings of the reciprocal arrangement between people and animals. For the people in the story, the relationship was a well-established, functioning system. Yet the story explains the system and how it works through the experiences of a woman. If the story was intended to teach, in Lyotard's words, "positive or negative apprenticeships," there was clearly a special message in it for young women about what was possible. Women, it would appear, have power to cross boundaries, explaining one world to another, in this case through a marriage relationship. This power had implications for the workings of the fur trade.

Gender and Fur Trade Historiography

Many accounts of the fur trade imply that trade took place mainly between native and European men, with women playing an adjunct role. Until recent years, few studies of the fur trade mentioned women specifically. Harold A. Innis, in his major economic study, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, seldom spoke of gender. Although he noted that "the personal relationship of the trader to the Indian" was essential under "conditions of competition," he did not discuss the role that intermarriage played between male traders and native women in the trade.⁹ Historian Arthur J. Ray, in several major studies, explored the coming together of native people and Europeans in the fur trade. In one book he analyzed "the set of institutions which developed as a compromise between the customs and norms of traditional Indian exchange and those of European market trade." However, he failed to consider in his detailed work any differing impact that men and women may have had upon this composite trade.¹⁰

More recently, the historian Richard White has examined the accommodation between native people and Europeans in a complex set of relationships that took place in what he called a cultural, social, and political "middle ground" of the Great Lakes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. White argued that the "fur trade proper is merely an arbitrary selection from a fuller and quite coherent spectrum of exchange that was embedded in particular social relations."¹¹ White wrote mostly of the role of diplomacy in native-European interactions—diplomacy in which women apparently had a smaller role than men—and emphasized the role of men as speechmakers, negotiators, and warriors. Nonetheless, White referred at many points in his study to the role of women in trade. For example, in describing a speech by a Potawatomi man in Montreal, White noted

that the man was representing, in part, the women in his community who “by implication, were a major force in exchange.” Similarly, White wrote that much of the “petty trading” of French traders in native villages was “probably with women.” But neither point was developed in detail.¹²

The major work on the differing roles of men and women in the fur trade has come, not surprisingly, from the research of women historians and anthropologists. Anthropologist Jennifer Brown, in her 1980 study *Strangers in Blood*, examined the dynamics of Canadian fur-trade societies established within the institutional frameworks of the North West and Hudson Bay Companies. She showed the joint effect of native and European cultures on the available roles for men and women and the formation of trade cultures and institutions.¹³

Feminist historian Sylvia Van Kirk, in *Many Tender Ties*, also emphasized the Canadian fur trade in her look at the role of women in fur-trade society. She stated that her study “supports the claims of theorists in women’s history that sex roles should constitute a category of historical investigation” because the experience of women “has differed substantially from that of their male counterparts.” She suggested that “the lives of both sexes must be examined if we are to fully understand the dynamics of social change.”¹⁴ Van Kirk emphasized the role of native women as “women-in-between,” a situation “which could be manipulated to advantage.” She stated that native women in general may have had a vested interest in promoting cordial relations with the whites and that “if the traders were driven from the country, the Indian women would lose the source of European goods which had revolutionized their lives.” She argued that native women sometimes received better treatment and had more influence at the trading post than in native villages. She suggested that they had a more sedentary life and had more help in doing their work when married to a trader. All of these facts may have led some women to choose new roles from among those available to them.¹⁵

Jacqueline Peterson’s influential 1981 dissertation, “The People in Between,” took another look at men and women in the fur trade. She examined Indian-white marriages and the formation of a mixed-blood people in the Great Lakes between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Peterson viewed the culture of the Great Lakes fur-trade communities as a “unique lifeway—an occupational subculture” that gave birth to a people who would later be called the Métis. In particular, Peterson explored the key role played by native women in these communities, as social, economic, and cultural intermediaries between Europeans and native societies.¹⁶

Despite these broad examinations of the role of women in the fur trade, detailed and focused studies of gender relations in the Ojibwa fur

trade have yet to be done. Discussion of the role of Ojibwa men and women in the fur trade has come largely in the context of ethnographic and historical studies of Ojibwa women. In such work, the differing roles of men and women in relation to the fur trade have been interpreted in light of theories about the autonomy and power of Ojibwa women—the control of women over their own activities and the power they exerted in the society as a whole.¹⁷

Pioneering work was done by the anthropologist Ruth Landes in her book *The Ojibwa Woman*, a classic study based on fieldwork in northwestern Ontario in the 1930s. Although often interpreted as a contemporary description of the roles of Ojibwa women, the work was to a large extent historical. It contained stories of women's lives—told to her by her informant Maggie Wilson—dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, a period during which the fur trade continued to be a major influence on Ojibwa society.¹⁸ In this study, Landes provided a rich view of Ojibwa women's lives, including examples of women who had significant roles as hunters, warriors, and healers. Landes, however, appeared to believe that these women were exceptions to the rule that women and their accomplishments were devalued or simply ignored in modern Ojibwa society. She noted, for example, that men's work was considered "infinitely more interesting and honorable" than women's work and spoke of "men's supremacy" in Ojibwa society.¹⁹ In a brief discussion of the fur trade, Landes suggested that women had little role in trading either in the 1930s or earlier. She noted that Ojibwa men had learned to barter furs and meat "which they had secured in hunting," since they, "rather than the women, possessed the material desired by the Whites."²⁰

Landes's comments on Ojibwa gender roles, if not the examples she gave, seemed to imply that a devaluation of women was ingrained in Ojibwa society and would have been present during the fur-trade era and perhaps even earlier. Anthropologist Eleanor Leacock took issue with at least one aspect of this implication in a 1978 article. Writing about the Ojibwa and other "egalitarian band societies," Leacock stated that nothing in the structure of such societies "necessitated special deference to men." Leacock took particular issue with Landes's conclusions about the Ojibwa, asserting that Landes exhibited a "lack of a critical and historical orientation toward her material" as well as a "downgrading of women that is built into unexamined and ethnocentric phraseology." In keeping with a Marxist approach to the topic, Leacock suggested that the situation of women in egalitarian societies often changed when the products of labor began to be treated as commodities in trade with Europeans. Women became dependent on men only when the trade made men's products more "commercially relevant" than their own.²¹

More recent studies have echoed such views. In her analysis of the responses of Great Lake native women to Christian missionaries and to the fur trade, Carol Devens wrote that before contact with Europeans, Ojibwa society had a gender balance upon which the communities depended. This balance was disrupted by European missions and trade. The trade, in particular, acted as a "catalyst for modification in social structures throughout native bands." Devens argued that the trade favored "intensive production in order to accumulate and then exchange surplus goods." Disruption of native gender roles occurred because "French traders wanted the furs obtained by men rather than the small game, tools, utensils, or clothing procured or produced by women." She suggested that "most of the items given in exchange by the French were tools and weapons intended to facilitate trapping." This caused "daily and seasonal life" of native communities to "revolve around the trade." Women became "auxiliaries to the trapping process" rather than "producers in their own right." Devens wrote that the fur trade led to a decrease in women's "direct contribution to the community welfare."²²

The basic argument advanced in slightly different ways by Landes, Leacock, and Devens is that women had little direct role in the fur trade. Leacock and Devens argued that this lack of participation and authority in making decisions about an increasingly important economic endeavor led to a devaluation of women in Ojibwa society. The basis of this change, they suggested, was that men were the primary traders because the product of women's labor was not in great demand in the trade.

In fact, this theory has yet to be thoroughly demonstrated using the records of the fur trade. A major problem with doing so is simply that the sources used to describe the trade are marred by misconceptions about the roles of women in native societies. This point was made by Priscilla K. Buffalohead in a 1983 study of the roles available to Ojibwa women during the fur-trade era. Buffalohead noted that the common view in earlier sources on the Ojibwa was that native men were lazy and native women were overworked "drudges." Buffalohead pointed out that many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources on the Ojibwa viewed men's and women's roles from the point of view of European beliefs about the desirable roles for men and women. These beliefs made it difficult to accurately gauge Ojibwa peoples' own beliefs about the autonomy of women and the value placed upon them in the society. The derogatory statements by European men about native women are sometimes wrongly seen as descriptive of Ojibwa beliefs or social structures, providing unwarranted support for a belief that the fur trade led to a devaluation of Ojibwa women.²³

Buffalohead's work dealt with the explicit beliefs about those who reported on Ojibwa women and their role in society. Just as problematic

was the frequent lack of mention of women in the narratives of European interaction with the Ojibwa. Based on the evidence of many written sources, one might assume that the Ojibwa were a people entirely without women. Thomas Vennum Jr., in his study of the use of wild rice among the Ojibwa, provided an example of this problem. He quoted a 1804–5 journal of François Victoire Malhiot, a North West Company trader at Lac du Flambeau (Wisconsin). In a translation of the original French, Malhiot stated that on 10 September 1804, a leader named L'Outarde, or Goose, “started yesterday with his young men to gather wild rice at [Trout Lake], where his village is.”²⁴

Without other evidence, this passage might be interpreted to suggest that gathering wild rice was a band activity, led by a male leader and carried out by his “young men,” or followers. Vennum noted, however, that such a statement “should be taken to mean that the band went to establish its rice camps, and not that the men were the harvesters.” Vennum based his conclusions on more recent ethnographic and historical evidence, the preponderance of which suggests that women, rather than men, managed and did most of the wild-rice harvesting until the twentieth century. While the wild-rice harvest was under way, Vennum noted, men were more generally involved in fishing and hunting geese.²⁵

Using ethnographic materials in this way is a technique that has been called “upstreaming.” The term was initially used by the anthropologist William Fenton. In an influential 1952 essay on the training of “historical ethnologists,” Fenton argued that “major patterns of culture tend to be stable over long periods of time,” so that it was possible to proceed “from the known to the unknown, concentrating on recent sources first because they contain familiar things, and thence going to earlier sources.” Fenton noted, however, that it was important to show “a preference for those sources in which the descriptions of the society ring true at both ends of the time scale.”²⁶

As Fenton went on to state, ethnographic sources from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and earlier accounts were all historical sources. They were all the product of points of view and perspectives, which must be considered in evaluating the information they contain. In arguing in favor of upstreaming, Fenton was reacting against those who assumed “acculturation,” or inevitable change of native cultures in the face of European cultural conquest. Although the concept of acculturation has become less accepted, a related view—which should perhaps be called “downstreaming”—persists. This is the belief that lacking detailed written documentation, the cultural attributes of native people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be assumed to have existed earlier.²⁷

The assertion that seventeenth-century native people shared cultural values, gender relations, or social organization with nineteenth-century native people simply because they shared languages or tribal names is one that sometimes needs to be demonstrated, given the many social, economic, and political changes that took place in the Great Lakes in those two hundred years. On the other hand, to presume that there was no similarity in culture between such groups is equally problematic. In fact, many aspects of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ojibwa history may be totally inexplicable without the guidance from later ethnographic sources.²⁸ To insist too strictly on the primacy of early French or British documents is to suggest that native people of more recent times have nothing useful to say about their own past. It can also lead to ignoring, as the earlier documents often do, the role of native women, simply because they are not mentioned in documents written by European men, who recorded only interaction with native men.

Ethnographic sources can and should be used to pose questions about earlier events and patterns, to investigate what is said, and often more important, what is not said in earlier historical documents. The rich works of Johann Georg Kohl, Frances Densmore, M. Inez Hilger, and Ruth Landes herself, all of which are cited in this article, describe the lives, skills, and beliefs of Ojibwa women in more detail, providing some alternative explanations that avoid the value judgments inherent in many historical sources. Perhaps more than anything, such ethnographic work suggests the need to acknowledge individual experience and motives in the interpretation of historical documents. When interacting with Europeans, Ojibwa men and women were presented with new situations, ones that involved the application and alteration of culturally received ideas. In many ways these new situations provided more rather than fewer opportunities for men and women. Evidence from the fur trade illuminated with the knowledge gained from later ethnographic work demonstrates that Ojibwa men and women had many ways to participate in the fur trade. As I argue, the nature of the possibilities available to both Ojibwa men and women calls into question the belief that the trade provided a mechanism for transforming an earlier egalitarian society into one in which men dominated women.

Gendered Patterns of Trade

Pierre Radisson and his brother-in-law Medard Chouart des Groseilliers spent the winter of 1659–60 in the region south of Lake Superior, living among a mixed group of Huron, Ottawa, Ojibwa, and later, Dakota. For a period of time they lived at an unnamed village by a lake. The cultural

identity of the inhabitants is not altogether clear from the narrative, though they may have been Ojibwa speakers. Radisson stated on his arrival: “We destinated [presented] three presents, one for the men, one for the women, and the other for the children—to the end that they should remember that journey, that we should be spoaken [*sic*] of a hundred years after, if other Europeans should not come in those quarters and be liberal to them, which will hardly come to passe [*sic*].” Each present was in fact a group of presents:

The first [for the men] was a kettle, two hattchets [tomahawks], and six knives, and a blade for a sword. The kettle was to call all nations that weare their friends to the feast which is made for the remembrance of the death; that is, they make it once in seven years; it’s a renewing of friendship. . . . The hattchets were to encourage the yong people to strengthen themselves in all places, to preserve their wives, and show themselves men by knocking the heads of their ennemyes with said hattchets. The knives were to show that the French were great and mighty, and their confederats and friends. The sword was to signifie that we would be masters both of peace and of wars, being willing to help and relieve them and to destroy our ennemyes with our arms.

The second gift [for the women] was 2 and 20 awls, 50 needles, 2 gratters [scrapers] of castors, 2 ivory combs and 2 wooden ones, with red painte [vermilion], 6 looking-glasses of tin. The awls signifieth to take good courage that we should keepe their lives and that they with their husbands should come down to the French when time and season should permit. The needles for to make them robes of castor because the French loved them. The two gratters [scrapers] were to dress the skins; the combs [and] the paint to make themselves beautifull; the looking-glasses to admire themselves.

The third gift [for the children] was of brasse rings, of small bells, and rasades [beads] of divers colours, and given in this manner. We sent a man to make all the children come together. When they were there we throw these things over their heads. You would admire what a beat was among them, everyone striving to have the best. This was done upon this consideration, that they should be always under our protection, giving them wherewithal to make them merry and remember us when they should be men.²⁹

Radisson and Groseilliers were seeking to encourage native demand for European goods and to encourage participation in the fur trade. Their gifts communicated what they sought to accomplish, as well as their under-

standing of native culture. Clearly, not all of their gifts were to the point. The gift of the tools of adornment to the women, for example, ignored the fact that many later sources suggest that Ojibwa men were as much concerned with such things as Ojibwa women.³⁰ Similarly, though the kettle may have been intended to symbolize the feast of the dead in which men may have been instrumental, kettles came to be used more often by women in cooking, making maple sugar, and parching wild rice.³¹

On the other hand, as indicated by the gifts of hatchets, usually called tomahawks, to the men and awls and scrapers to the women, the Frenchmen clearly understood some aspects of the gendered division of labor among the Ojibwa. On the simplest level, as recorded in a variety of later sources, men hunted, trapped, and went to war, and women gathered rice, made maple sugar, gardened, fished, processed a variety of foods, built bark houses, and wove mats. In doing these things, both men and women, as Buffalohead put it, "clearly managed and directed their own activities." Even in cooperative work, there was a division of labor. For example in the making of birch-bark canoes, men shaped ribs and thwarts, while women sewed the panels of bark to the framework.³²

The tools used to perform these tasks symbolized, for the Ojibwa, the gendered nature of the activities.³³ Frances Densmore wrote of the Ojibwa custom of burying with people who died a variety of tools that would be useful to them on the journey of death: "A pipe and tobacco pouch, with flint, steel, and punk were buried with a man and, if he were a good hunter, his gun might be placed beside him. A woman's favorite ax or pack strap might be buried with her."³⁴ Similarly, writing in 1836, the French ethnographer Joseph N. Nicollet stated that tools like this were a means of teaching children about gender. When a male child was born, men in the village would sing and dance around the family's house, firing shots. Then they would enter the house and give the child a small rifle carved out of wood, a leader saying: "I found your rifle. It seems you did not take good care of it. We bring it back to you. Here it is. Indeed, you must hunt to survive and you must defend yourself when the enemy strikes. Keep it safely." Similarly when a female child was born, women in the village would dance, each one with a hatchet, "singing and dancing around the lodge and making gestures of women busy chopping wood." Then they would give the child a little wooden hatchet, saying: "We found your hatchet. It appears you did not take good care of it. We bring it back to you. Here it is. Indeed, you must chop wood to stay warm, and chop more wood to fortify your lodge should the enemy attack."³⁵

In many ways, this picture of the gendered nature of Ojibwa labor and the manner in which traders like Radisson and Groseilliers accommodated

it accords with the views of Leacock and Devens. The gift of awls and scrapers could be seen as bearing out Devens's suggestion that French gifts were intended to encourage trapping. The only outstanding question would appear to be whether or not this encouragement actually made changes in Ojibwa gender and subsistence patterns as all labor became geared to the production of furs.³⁶

The problem with this view of Ojibwa participation in the fur trade, however, is that it is simplistic, revealing nothing of the complex nature of the fur trade, a trade that provided varied opportunities for direct participation by both men and women. Gifts such as these were not representative of the entire relationship between Ojibwa and European traders, either in 1659 or for the next 250 years. From the seventeenth century on, the fur trade was important to the Ojibwa, who had a continuing, though variable, interest in obtaining European merchandise to use in their daily lives, in hunting, cooking, and religious ceremonies.³⁷ Trade goods offered material benefits, increased status, and much more. But from the beginning, traders accommodated Ojibwa demand by bringing a rich assortment of goods, including cloth, blankets, utensils, tools, silver jewelry, thread, and beads. In return, traders needed more from the Ojibwa than furs. They also needed a rich variety of products that only women could provide. All these factors meant that both Ojibwa men and women had a variety of roles to play and methods of exerting power and influence over the trade process.

The major role of women in the fur trade was not evident in the earliest years of French-Ojibwa interaction, when canoe-loads of people from the western Great Lakes went east to Montreal to trade their furs with the French. It may be that women were involved in these expeditions, although most accounts suggest that the participants were mainly men.³⁸ Later, however, when the location of trade shifted to native villages, at the time of Radisson and Groseilliers, women became crucial to the trade.

In the context of the trading post and the village, Ojibwa men and women had distinct and often different relationships with traders. The fur trade was never simply an exchange of furs for trade goods. It included a variety of other kinds of transactions. Traders needed to get food from native people; without it, they could not survive the winter in the western Great Lakes. They simply could not bring in or collect enough food to feed themselves, while at the same time carrying on the fur business. At the same time, as described later in more detail, traders needed a variety of native-manufactured supplies. The multifaceted nature of this trade meant that native people interacted with traders in many ways.

The varied interactions of Ojibwa men and women with traders were

manifested in the complex set of trade patterns that made up a complete trading year. In the eighteenth century, a trading year in a Southwestern Ojibwa community would begin with the arrival in the fall of the trader with a new supply of goods. Once established in a fort or trading house, he gathered members of the community and gave and received ceremonial gifts. Goods such as clothing and utensils designed to help the Ojibwa survive the winter were then given out on credit, and customers went on their fall and winter hunts. The trader often purchased supplies of wild rice for his own survival and in some cases hired a hunter and his family to provide him with meat during the winter. Later, the trader or his men might visit native families to collect the furs they produced. Similarly, native people might revisit the trading post bringing in furs. In such circumstances, there could be further gifts and further credit. At the end of the trading year in the spring, before the trader's departure, certain goods were traded in direct exchanges and there might be concluding gifts and ceremonies.³⁹

Gift, barter, and credit transactions were differentiated in a variety of ways. One means of differentiation was simply the way in which both parties spoke about them. Both traders and customers gave speeches in which they explained what they expected of their relationship as a whole and what they expected of any particular transaction. The temporal and seasonal context was also important. Gifts began the trading year, cemented other exchanges, and ended the year.⁴⁰ Credit was largely given in the fall. Direct exchanges of furs for merchandise took place in late winter or in the spring.

Another means of differentiating these various transactions was in the trade goods and native products. Evidence suggests the existence of spheres of exchange, or categories of trade goods subject to different rules and procedures.⁴¹ For example, cloth goods and alcohol were defined and treated in strikingly different ways in the trade context. Alcohol, whether brandy, high wines, or rum, had some obvious culturally defined characteristics in the fur trade as well as native-European diplomacy.⁴² Among traders in the Lake Superior region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, alcohol in the form of rum or brandy was chiefly given to native people in two kinds of transactions: as gifts and in exchange for food. The trading ceremonies at the beginning and end of the year, and on the repayment of debts, usually featured gifts of alcohol. The food on which the trader depended, such as wild rice, game, and maple sugar, was often obtained with liquor.⁴³ By contrast, cloth, clothing, and blankets were mainly exchanged in the context of credit/debt transactions or in direct exchange for furs and possibly for supplies. Thus, contrary to the usual picture of the fur trade, the bulk of furs received by traders were not

actually obtained in barter. Rather, they were received as repayment for credit granted in the fall, in the form of cloth, tools, and utensils.

Trade transactions were not only differentiated by time and type of trade merchandise, but also by gender. The full extent of men's and women's participation in the trade among the Ojibwa is difficult to document. No complete sets of account books have been found that fully record all aspects of any trader's business. If account books existed in which each type of trade transaction was noted, as well as the gender of the person who participated, it would be possible to determine what percentage of each transaction was carried on by men and women. Unfortunately, this is not possible. The historian must rely on trade narratives that are incomplete, leaving out important pieces of information. Some traders say almost nothing about women. Others mention them in passing, referring to them in generic fashion, using terms such as "a widow" or simply "a woman," or by their relationship to male Ojibwa. Because of this, scholars may assume that, without contrary evidence, all named persons in traders' narratives are men. This may not always be a safe assumption.⁴⁴ Nor is it safe to assume that because a particular trader never mentions women, he never had dealings with them.

Despite these problems, some conclusions can be drawn about the role of women in the trade. Men appear to have been the most frequent participants in trade ceremonies, as they were in other kinds of non-trade-related diplomacy. Leading men in the community gave speeches and sometimes, especially at the beginning of the trading year, presented gifts of furs or food. In return, they were given gifts of liquor, which they appear to have shared with men and women alike. It was also on such occasions that leading men were presented with chief's coats and other symbols of their role in the trade and in the community. Sometimes they were "made chiefs," that is, given status by the trader that they did not actually have in the community. It should be noted that the skillful leader—one who understood the need of leaders to give things away in order to increase their own status in the community—often gave away the clothing and other symbols of power given them by traders.⁴⁵ Such gifts may have gone to women as well as men. In any case, trade ceremonies also involved more general gifts to men and women in the community. Alexander Henry, the younger, a North West Company trader on the Red River in 1800, made this clear in his account of the transactions that took place on his arrival in the region of trade. On 21 August of that year, he presented several male community leaders with scarlet laced coats, laced hats, red feathers, white linen shirts, leggings, breech cloths and flags, as well as tobacco and alcohol. A few weeks later, in addition to unspecified goods on credit to

the amount of twenty skins' worth each to a number of individuals, he also gave "an assortment of small articles gratis, such as one Scalper, two Folders, and four Flints [apiece to the men], [and to the] Women, two awls, three needles, one seine of net Thread, one fi[r]e steel, a little Vermilion, and a half f[atho]m of Tobacco."⁴⁶

It is usually asserted that men were the primary traders of furs. This is hard to document, given the fact that few furs were actually traded directly. Instead, as noted, they were exchanged in credit/debt transactions. Traders seldom listed the goods they gave out on credit or even to whom credit was given, though usually traders recorded debts in the names of men.⁴⁷ It is impossible to know whether women or men chose the goods given out in this fashion. It could be argued that even if the credit was granted to the hunters or trappers who were expected to produce the furs, this does not preclude the possibility that women were involved in the choice of goods or that men discussed with their wives what the wives or children needed for the winter. Given the documented concern of Ojibwa people for their families, it is hard to picture Ojibwa men who acted like mythical "economic men" in the theoretical sense, maximizing their own self-interest at the expense of their families.⁴⁸ This would, perhaps, have been productive for them in the short run, but would have lowered their status in the community.⁴⁹

As for the repayment of the debts during the winter, a variety of people could be involved, including the hunter or trapper, his children, and his wives or female relations. Often the trader would be notified that a particular group of trappers had produced some furs.⁵⁰ He would then send off his men to pick them up. Subsequently, the hunter or other members of the family would be given a gift of alcohol in some form, which would, again, be shared among men and women.⁵¹ It should also be noted that there were occasions when women traded furs directly.⁵² While men were the primary hunters and trappers in Ojibwa communities, women processed the furs, a fact that would have given them greater authority in deciding what would happen to the furs, as well as the opportunity to trade them.

The occasional role of women in bartering furs was part of a larger role in bartering. Food was an important part of women's trade. They supplied wild rice and maple sugar, both of which were mainstays for the trader. As noted, the characteristic return for such items of food was liquor. However, there were exceptions to this pattern. For example, food was sometimes traded for a variety of trade goods other than liquor, especially in times of scarcity. Michel Curot, a young clerk trading along the St. Croix River in 1803-4, for example, stated that because food supplies

were scarce during the winter, traders were paying blankets for wild rice. In other years, this was an unusual transaction and after paying a two-and-a-half-point blanket to one woman in late February 1804, Curot felt obligated to explain: "I resolved to give the blanket, having only a single fawn of rice for provisions." Normally such a blanket was worth three beaverskins or more. He went on to describe the failure of his men to obtain fish to feed them.⁵³

Wild rice was important not only as a trade item to be consumed by traders while living in an Ojibwa village near the Great Lakes, but also as an important way to feed brigades traveling further west. One account of large-scale trading of wild rice suggests something of women's power in the trade and in the Ojibwa community. The British trader Alexander Henry, the elder, went west of Lake Superior for the first time in 1775. When he reached Lake of the Woods, he and his men received a warm welcome:

From this village we received ceremonious presents. The mode with the Indians is, first to collect all the provisions they can spare, and place them in a heap; after which they send for the trader, and address him in a formal speech. They tell him, that the Indians are happy in seeing him return into their country; that they have been long in expectation of his arrival; that their wives have deprived themselves of their provisions, in order to afford him a supply; that they are in great want, being destitute of every thing, and particularly of ammunition and clothing; and what they most long for, is a taste of his rum, which they uniformly denominate *milk*.

The present, in return, consisted in one keg of gunpowder, of sixty pounds weight; a bag of shot, and another of powder, of eighty pounds each; a few smaller articles, and a keg of rum. The last appeared to be the chief treasure, though on the former depended the greater part of their winter's subsistence.

In a short time, the men began to drink, while the women brought me a further and very valuable present, of twenty bags of rice. This I returned with goods and rum, and at the same time offered more, for an additional quantity of rice. A trade was opened, the women bartering rice, while the men were drinking. Before morning, I had purchased a hundred bags, of nearly a bushel measure each. Without a large quantity of rice, the voyage could not have been prosecuted to its completion. The canoes, as I have already observed, are not large enough to carry provisions.⁵⁴

There was a great deal more going on in this encounter than is evident in Henry's description. In this trading encounter, men played their usual

ceremonial role, describing what it was they sought from the traders. Their words, along with their “ceremonious presents,” suggest that their aim was to establish a continuing relationship, one that would ensure them of a supply of merchandise, not just a one-time interaction. Unfortunately, Henry was only passing through. The ceremony did not initiate a full year’s worth of credit, debt, trade, and gift.⁵⁵ Instead, the only native product to be traded was wild rice, a product largely harvested by women and, for trading purposes, under their control. Given the limited nature of the encounter and the need, and the pressing schedule of the trader, these women had the power to obtain not just alcohol, but, apparently, a full range of goods. This interaction differs strikingly from the picture of women made powerless by a trade that had no need for what they controlled, the picture suggested by Ruth Landes in her study done 160 years later in the very same region.⁵⁶

Women’s role in the trade was evident in relation to other resources. Canoes—the product of both men’s and women’s labor—were often traded by women and were a useful way to obtain a full range of trade goods. In one case, a woman at Fond du Lac traded Curot a small canoe in return for two capots, a two-and-a-half-point blanket, and two pots of mixed rum. Together this was worth more than ten beaverskins.⁵⁷ Supplies for maintaining canoes were also produced by women. In early April 1804, Curot and his men left their Yellow River wintering post to camp out on the St. Croix River. Curot’s canoes were badly in need of repair and the trader sent off one of his men with rum and cloth “to hire the women to make gum that I absolutely need, since we cannot make use of any of our canoes without it filling immediately.” It was not until 1 May that Curot was able to purchase gum from a woman named La Petite Rivière, or Little River, in return for a three-point blanket, generally worth three or four beaverskins. Curot obtained birch bark and *wadab*, the spruce roots used for tying panels of bark, from an unidentified person—possibly from Little River—in return for some jewelry, and the next day his men were able to repair the canoes. They finally set off for Grand Portage the following day.⁵⁸ Little River, who was unusual in being identified by her own name, also tanned three deerskins in return for two pairs of wool leggings, which together were worth four beaverskins.⁵⁹

Considering their role in trading a wide variety of food and supplies, it may be that women were more often involved in direct trade than men. Curot’s journal provides some statistical evidence on this point. As suggested by the examples given here, Curot not only used his journal as a way of recording a narrative of trade activities, but also for recording specific trade transactions. While he was generally vague about the quantity of goods given on credit—usually recording only the name of the per-

son given credit—he was more specific about direct trade. Throughout the pages of the journal, Curot recorded sixty-four separate transactions that were clearly examples of direct trade. Of these, nineteen involved men and twenty-two involved women. In addition, there were twenty-three transactions in which the gender of the person trading was not evident. Given the frequency with which Curot named the male Ojibwa with whom he traded, and the fact that most of the men had received credit from him, it is very likely that most of the anonymous trade transactions were also examples of trade with women. This suggests that the vast majority of Curot's direct trade transactions were with women.⁶⁰

Beyond these opportunities for women to trade their own products for a wide range of goods, some women took part in the ceremonial trading roles of giving and receiving gifts and getting credit, the more typical role of men. A prime example was Netnokwa, the Ottawa mother of the adopted white captive, John Tanner, who lived with her family among Ojibwa west of the Red River around 1800. On the occasion of trading with one trader, according to Tanner, Netnokwa “took ten fine beaver skins, and presented them to the trader. In return for this accustomed present, she was in the habit of receiving every year a chief's dress and ornaments, and a ten gallon keg of spirits.”⁶¹ Around the time described in the narrative, Charles Chaboillez, a North West Company trader, stated that on arriving in the region of the Red River, he exchanged presents with and gave credit to the “Old Courte Oreille [Ottawa] & Two Sons.” This was clearly a reference to Netnokwa, Tanner, and Tanner's adopted brother. Later, Chaboillez stated that he gave her a present of rum and tobacco, “to encourage her to return” with furs and other products, a suggestion of her primary role in trading.⁶² How typical Netnokwa was of other women in the community in which she lived is not clear. Laura Peers pointed out that “while Netnokwa was an exceptionally strong and charismatic woman . . . her influence was presumably neither unprecedented nor unparalleled.”⁶³

There were various explanations for Netnokwa's participation in trade rituals more frequently undertaken by men. For one thing, when she and her family were coming west several years before, Netnokwa's husband had died. Death or illness of a husband and other emergencies appear to have been important reasons for women to undertake activities that were normally the work of men, as it would have been for men to undertake the work of women on occasion. Ruth Landes argued that women were “reserve material” capable of doing men's work when necessary for survival. In fact, though Landes gave many examples of women who hunted, traded, and went to war when they had to, she could only provide one example of a woman who resisted doing men's work when left alone by the death of her husband.⁶⁴

In the case of Netnokwa, however, her transcendence of usual gender roles was evident even before her husband's death. As an older woman who had been married to a younger husband with two other wives, Netnokwa was, according to Tanner, considered to be the head of the household, even before his adopted father's death. Tanner stated that Netnokwa was seventeen years older than her husband, was an accomplished trader, and was owner of most of the family's wealth. Tanner said, perhaps exaggerating, that she was "notwithstanding her sex, . . . regarded as principal chief of the Ottawwaws," and that "whenever she came to Mackinac, she was saluted by a gun from the fort." Perhaps most significant of all—in terms of Ojibwa and Ottawa culture—Netnokwa was, as described by Tanner, a person of strong spirituality, and she used her power to aid her sons in hunting.⁶⁵

Dreams and visions were often cited as providing authorization for Ojibwa men and women to transcend the gendered division of labor. Despite the tendency of scholars to analyze gender roles based on material factors, including participation in the fur trade, power in an Ojibwa community was never purely material, and even material power was usually seen as having a nonmaterial basis. Gwen Morris, in a remarkable recent study of women in Ojibwa society, notes that women, on the beginning of menstruation, were seen as having a unique source of power, made clear by its perceived danger to men.⁶⁶ Beyond that, as recounted in the story of the woman who married the beaver, girls fasted at puberty, seeking to gain a continuing relationship with a being who could help them in their lives. Having this relationship—especially when it was renewed from time to time through ceremony and further visions and dreams—helped men in important activities like hunting and war. For women, such a relationship might aid them in activities usually described as women's work.⁶⁷ Similarly, as Morris notes, such dreams and visions could help define a particular and unique course for their lives that transcended their own gender. This may have been the case with Netnokwa, whose spirituality was evident in her actions, though her own puberty visions were never recorded.⁶⁸

Thus, despite the existence of a well-understood division of labor, described as rigid in many generalized descriptions of the Ojibwa, the more recent ethnographic evidence suggests that the Ojibwa gave cultural acceptance to those who violated the usual gender roles, and who demonstrated competence brought about by spiritual aid.⁶⁹ Such cultural acceptance suggests that for many Ojibwa, creative, dynamic women forging a unique course were seen as having a beneficial effect on their communities. This is also evident in a major aspect of the role of women in the fur trade, their role as the wives of traders. As I show, this unique role—one that Ojibwa men could not fill—had a major social and economic impact on the trade.

Fur-Trade Marriages

Claude-Charles Le Roy, *dit* Bacqueville de La Potherie, stated that in the late seventeenth century the Dakota, residing in what is now north-central Minnesota, made an alliance with the Ojibwa, then living mainly at the eastern end of Lake Superior, based on a desire for European trade goods. Because they “could obtain French merchandise only through the agency of the Sauteurs,” they made “a treaty of peace with the latter by which they were mutually bound to give their daughters in marriage on both sides. That was a strong bond for the maintenance of entire harmony.”⁷⁰ The agreement appears to have been encouraged by the French diplomat Daniel Greysolon, *Sieur* du Lhut, who, in mid-September 1679, convened a meeting of representatives from various “nations of the north,” including Dakota, Assiniboine, and probably Ojibwa, at Fond du Lac, the present site of Duluth. He later wrote: “I was able to gain their esteem and friendship. In order to make sure that the peace was more durable among them, I found that the best way to cement it was by bringing about reciprocal marriages. I was not able to do this without a great deal of expense. During the following winter, I brought them together again in the woods where I was, so that they could hunt together, feast, and by this means, create a closer friendship.”⁷¹

Among the Ojibwa, marriage was defined by the decision of two parties, sometimes through the intercession of parents or other relations, to sleep, live, and carry on their day-to-day lives together. Although the event was not marked by the ceremonies with which Europeans were familiar, it could involve ceremonial exchanges of gifts.⁷² From the point of view of the native community, marriages between traders and native women could help achieve the important aim of ensuring a steady supply of merchandise. Ties of affection could increase the likelihood that a trader would return to the community in future years and that he might be more generous with gifts and in the rates exacted for direct exchange.

Historian Jacqueline Peterson wrote that “tribal people, throughout the fur trading era, saw intermarriage as a means of entangling strangers in a series of kinship obligations. Relatives by marriage were expected not only to deal fairly, but to provide protection, hospitality, and sustenance in time of famine.” Peterson stated that “in addition to assuming positions of economic and political leverage, traders’ wives used to advantage their symbolic status as links between two societies by serving as spies, interpreters, guides, or diplomatic emissaries.”⁷³

Early accounts of encounters between Ojibwa women and traders did not always clarify the political, social, or economic implications of what

took place, making it difficult to interpret the behavior described. Pierre Radisson, in his description of what preceded the gift-giving ceremony south of Lake Superior in 1659, noted: "The women throw themselves backwards upon the ground, thinking to give us tokens of friendship and of wellcome."⁷⁴ What actually happened is not clear. Radisson may have exaggerated to impress and amuse his English patrons, as is the case with many portions of his narrative. Assuming there was a kernel of truth in the description, however, Radisson was obviously not convinced of the validity of this gesture. He may have thought it a little odd. The point of view of the native people involved is not recorded, yet the desire of people in a society to use sexual relations as a means of establishing long-term relationships between themselves and people of another society who had something to offer was a rational strategy, one that has been described in many parts of the world.⁷⁵

Similarly, in the aforementioned account of trading rice with women at Lake of the Woods, Alexander Henry stated: "When morning arrived, all the village was inebriated; and the danger of misunderstanding was increased by the facility with which the women abandoned themselves to my Canadians. In consequence, I lost no time in leaving the place." Apparently, for Henry the sexual overtures of the women were a potential cause of jealousy and complication, due to his fear that the behavior of these women would result in violence on the part of Ojibwa men. Henry does not make clear who these women were or even whether they were married. However, it is possible that their overtures were not, from the Ojibwa point of view, dangerous in that sense, but were rather actions sanctioned by the community for the purpose of establishing long-term trade. In fact, it may have been that long-term entanglement, not sexual jealousy, was what Henry feared, since he hoped to travel much further west.

Whether or not the strategy succeeded in the case of the people described by Henry or Radisson is not known. However, there were many cases of marriage between Ojibwa women that did accomplish this purpose and enabled long and peaceful trade. Benjamin G. Armstrong, a trader among the Ojibwa in the 1840s who was married to a daughter of Chief Buffalo of La Pointe, stated that when a trader came into an Ojibwa community to trade, people would at first have nothing to do with him, except in a small way, so that they could gauge his honesty. "If satisfied on these points, the chiefs would together take their marriageable girls to his trading house and he was given his choice of the lot." If the trader made a choice, trade would begin right away. If not, he was compelled to move on his way and trade elsewhere, because the band would not trade with him "unless he took one of their women for his wife." As Peterson stated, this

description “seems overly rationalistic.” However, she stated that in such cases Indian wives “served as the cement between a band and a trader with long-range expectations.”⁷⁶

For fur traders, their wives or the wives of their employees could prove to be useful socially and economically. The evidence suggests that leading traders often married the daughters of Ojibwa leaders, although it is sometimes hard to say which came first.⁷⁷ In marrying a leader’s daughter, a trader gained a powerful ally among his Indian customers. Since the authority of a leader was in part the result of extended kin ties, the trader may have formed ties with a large number of people. The leader’s influence over kin and nonkin alike depended also on his persuasive oratory.⁷⁸ Thus, through marriage, the trader gained an alliance with a man of demonstrated ability to influence his fellows. The father-in-law could become, in a sense, an economic agent for the trader, useful in persuading the people to be friends and clients.

Simon Chaurette, a head trader for the North West, XY, and American Fur Companies, mostly at Lac du Flambeau, between 1795 and the early 1820s, was married to the daughter of Keeshkemun (Sharpened Stone or La Pierre à Affiler), an important leader who was a member of the Crane clan. According to François Victoire Malhiot, a rival trader in the region in 1804–5, Keeshkemun was allied in trade terms with Chaurette, although this alliance did not lessen the trader’s obligation to give gifts and fulfill other native expectations of him. As for Keeshkemun’s daughter, little has been written about her. Mostly she is identified in trade documents by the name of her husband or father. However, American Fur Company documents show that a woman named Keenistinoquay (or Cree Woman), identified as Chaurette’s wife, was so important to the company’s operation at Lac du Flambeau that she was employed as a trader there from 1819–21, receiving an average of more than \$200 per year, around half of her husband’s yearly salary.⁷⁹

Another trader who benefited from a connection to a prominent native family was Charles Oakes Ermatinger, who, from a base at Sault Ste. Marie, shipped goods to trading posts south and west of Lake Superior from 1800 to the mid-1820s. Ermatinger married Charlotte, the daughter of Kadowaubeda, or Broken Tooth, a member of the Loon clan and a civil leader described by Henry R. Schoolcraft, an Indian agent and a noted writer on Ojibwa culture, as “patriarch” of the region around Sandy Lake and the upper Mississippi, the area of Ermatinger’s trade. After her husband’s retirement in the 1820s, Charlotte went to live with him and her children in Montreal, where she spent the rest of her life.⁸⁰

Important traders like Chaurette and Ermatinger were not the only

members of their companies married to native women. It is apparent from accounts of stable trading posts south of Lake Superior in Wisconsin and Minnesota that some fur company outfits were linked to the Indian community from top to bottom of the trade hierarchy, meaning that fur companies had access to an extensive kinship network.⁸¹ Because traders were unsystematic in recording genealogical information on themselves and their employees, it is not always possible to pin down the parameters of these networks. However, the unofficial and supposedly noneconomic network that existed around each trading post was probably as important to companies as was the network of suppliers and shippers through which they obtained their supplies of trade goods. As Jennifer Brown suggested in her study of Hudson Bay Company and North West Company social life, women associated with the trading post could provide a more certain food supply.⁸² When the North West Company wintering partner John Sayer was stationed on the St. Croix River, his Ojibwa wife went to the sugar bush in 1803 and 1804 to process maple sugar for their food supply.⁸³ When food was scarce at the trading post, traders were sometimes fed by their wives' families. On 17 March 1804, George Nelson wrote: "Brunet with my permission goes with his family to his father in law's lodge, as we have nothing here to eat. I give him a little ammunition & a few silver-works to trade provisions—for we have now nothing else to trade. We subsiste [*sic*] upon indian Charity."⁸⁴

Beyond providing food, native women and the trade kinship networks served as a source of information for traders as much as for Indian people. In 1804, Michel Curot learned that one Ojibwa family did not want to give their furs to the opposition North West trader because the man was out of rum. Curot said he had heard it from the wife of his man Savoyard, who had in turn heard it from the wife of the North West trader's clerk.⁸⁵

Some fur companies had economic reasons for encouraging such marriages. If the employee himself was responsible for the expense of a wife, he would take more of his wages in goods purchased from his employer, thus effectively discounting the company's wage burden. In August 1799, Alexander Mackenzie wrote to John Sayer, the head of the Fond du Lac department, giving him a reading on the financial health of Sayer's outfit: "Were it not that Men Spend their Wages and the extraordinarily high price of Bears and Beaver, it would be to us a losing business. With these advantages there will be very little profit this last year."⁸⁶

A few years later, after leaving the North West Company to head the rival XY Company, Mackenzie took a different point of view, at least according to George Nelson. Nelson told in his journal and reminiscences of an incident that occurred in the fall of 1803 when he was a young man,

working as Simon Chaurette's clerk for the XY Company in northern Wisconsin. Assigned to act as Nelson's guide was an Indian the traders called "le Commis" (the clerk) because "formerly traders would give him about a 9 gallon keg of rum & other things and send him trading among or with the other Indians. He was always sure to make good returns." The Commis had a teenage daughter. Very early in the fall the man decided that eighteen-year-old Nelson should marry her. Nelson suspected that Chaurette—or as he spells the man's name, Chorette—was behind it. "This old fellow either took a fancy for me, or Chorette took a fancy for my little wages. I believe both to be the case."⁸⁷

Chaurette was not working on a salary for the XY. Instead, he had a three-year agreement with the company that stated that he would be furnished goods at $37\frac{1}{3}$ percent above Montreal prices. In addition, he would be furnished with whatever number of men he needed to carry on the trade. Also, it appears that Chaurette was liable for the men's wages. This meant that it would be to his own advantage to pay wages in goods valued above what he paid for them, since this would reduce the monetary cost of the wages. Nelson recalled later that Chaurette told him to give the men "what they might ask for, as it was for his own interest that they should take up their wages & even more in goods, liquor, tobacco, or any other such articles as we had on board our canoe."⁸⁸

Nelson's suspicions increased when Chaurette kept encouraging him to marry, saying that "it would not require much money to cloath [*sic*] only a woman." For many days Nelson resisted, in part because he expected that the head of the XY Company, Alexander Mackenzie, would not approve—though he later recalled that he himself, "to tell the truth, was far from averse to it." Finally, after he and the Commis had separated from Chaurette and were on their way to their wintering grounds, the Indian made Nelson an offer he could not refuse. He told Nelson that if the young man would not marry his daughter, he, the Commis, would let Nelson find his way by himself. Although there were several company employees with Nelson, the Commis was the only person who knew how to get where they were going. Nelson and his men depended "entirely upon what the old man and his friends whom he kept with him, could procure us." So Nelson agreed. Later he recalled: "I think I still see the satisfaction, the pleasure the poor old man felt. He gave me his daughter! He thought no doubt that it would be the means of rendering him happy & comfortable in his old days."⁸⁹

This account demonstrates the various material expectations that the people involved brought to such marriages. Chaurette hoped it would simply mean more debts against Nelson's wages. The Commis thought a

connection with a fur-trade clerk would help provide support for himself and his family. Nelson married so that he could get to his wintering ground and perform his duty, in addition to what he admitted was “above all the secret satisfaction at being *compelled* . . . to marry for my safety.” As Nelson expected, Mackenzie disapproved of the marriage. He withdrew Nelson from the district the following summer and sent him to the Lake Winnipeg area. Nelson’s wife left him at Grand Portage that summer to live with another company employee, an interpreter.⁹⁰

Whether Mackenzie’s disapproval was based on moral grounds or not, there were, even from the point of view of the administrator, good reasons for opposing marriages between Indian women and company employees. For example, if the company was in any way responsible for feeding a trader and his family, the cost could perhaps outweigh the benefits of this extra expenditure of wages. Michel Curot stated that in the XY Company’s St. Croix River valley outfit in 1803–4, married men received double the customary ration of one pint corn or wild rice to each man per day.⁹¹

Furthermore, what if the employee’s expenditure of his wages far outweighed what was coming to him for years to come? This factor became especially important after the coalition of the XY and North West Companies in 1805, when a surplus of men were working at wages driven higher by competition. How could one dismiss an employee who had a large debt? It may have been for this reason that the North West Company at its annual meeting at Fort William in July 1806 announced a new policy about the marriages of its employees: “It was suggested that the number of women and Children in the Country was a heavy burthen to the Concern & that some remedy ought to be applied to check so great an evil, at least if nothing effectual could be done to suppress it entirely—It was therefore resolved that every practicable means should be used throughout the Country to reduce by degrees the number of women maintained by the Company.” It was decided that henceforth no partner, clerk, or engagé be allowed to marry any Indian woman or at least take her “to live with him within the Company’s Houses or Forts & be maintained at the Expences of the Concern.” The company did, however, allow traders to marry the daughters of other traders.⁹²

The implication of some accounts of marriages arranged by traders and the parents of native women is that women were passive objects like the furs, food, and merchandise exchanged in the fur trade. This does not appear to have been the case of Nelson’s wife, who dissolved the relationship easily, and it is open to question whether this was the case with most such marriages. To be effective in achieving the purposes native communities might envision for such marriages, women could not be passive.

They had to exert influence and be active communicators of information. Further, there is evidence that marriages were not simply arranged by male and female elders in communities. Rather they were embraced by many women themselves as a way of achieving useful purposes for themselves and for the communities in which they lived.

Marriages between traders and native women were based on a variety of factors, not just material motives. Jacqueline Peterson, in her study of Great Lakes Métis society, suggested that marriages with fur traders took exceptional women, people with unusual ambitions, influenced by dreams and visions—like the women who became hunters, traders, healers, and warriors in Ruth Landes's account of Ojibwa women. One example Peterson gave was Oshahgushkodanaqua, a woman from the western end of Lake Superior who married the Sault Ste. Marie trader John Johnston in the 1790s.⁹³ Oshahgushkodanaqua was the granddaughter of Mamongeseda (Big Foot or Big Feet), a La Pointe leader noted for his prowess in war and diplomacy. One of Mamongeseda's daughters—one source suggests her name was Obemaunoqua—was the wife of John Sayer, who was in charge of the entire Lake Superior area for the General Company of Lake Superior and the South in the 1780s and the North West Company from 1794 to 1805. One of Mamongeseda's sons, Waubojeeg (White Fisher), also based at La Pointe, was as renowned in war and diplomacy as his father. Waubojeeg was the father of Oshahgushkodanaqua.⁹⁴

Oshahgushkodanaqua's marriage was preceded by a dream during the vision quest she undertook at puberty. She told the story many years later, after her husband's death, to a visiting British writer named Anna Jameson. The story of the dream has some interesting parallels to the story of the woman who married the beaver.

According to Jameson, Oshahgushkodanaqua fasted "according to the universal Indian custom, *for a guardian spirit*." She went to a high hill and built a lodge of cedar boughs, painted herself black, and then began to fast:

She dreamed continually of a white man, who approached her with a cup in his hand, saying, "Poor thing! why are you punishing yourself? why do you fast? here is food for you!" He was always accompanied by a dog, which looked up in her face as though he knew her. Also she dreamed of being on a high hill, which was surrounded by water, and from which she beheld many canoes full of Indians, coming to her and paying her homage; after this, she felt as if she were carried up into the heavens, and as she looked down upon the earth, she perceived it was on fire, and said to herself, "All my relations will be burned!" but a voice answered and said, "No, they will not be de-

stroyed, they will be saved"; and she *knew it was a spirit*, because the voice was not human. She fasted for ten days, during which time her grandmother brought her at intervals some water. When satisfied that she had obtained a guardian spirit in the white stranger who haunted her dreams, she returned to her father's lodge.⁹⁵

Some time after this dream, John Johnston appeared at her parents' home at Chequamegon to trade for furs. He asked the woman's father, Waubojeeg, for her hand in marriage. Her father at first was scornful of Johnston because he did not believe the trader was seeking a long-term relationship. He told Johnston to return to Montreal in the spring and if he still wished to marry her, he could come back to Lake Superior and marry her, "according to the law of the white man *till death*." Johnston returned to Lake Superior and the marriage was arranged.

The young woman, however, was not keen on the idea and took some persuasion to stay with her husband. Given the possibilities for dissolving marriage among the Ojibwa, this fear may have been due in part to Johnston's insistence on marriage until death. Once she consented, however, the couple remained married for thirty-six years.⁹⁶ All evidence suggests that she served an important and influential role in relations between her people and her husband, who was an important trader in the Lake Superior region from the 1790s to the 1820s. According to Jameson, Oshahgushkodanaqua throughout her life carried on a variety of subsistence activities characteristic of Ojibwa women—activities that would have been advantageous for her husband's business. She sugared every year and fished. In addition, Jameson noted, in words that could have appeared in one of Ruth Landes's accounts of remarkable women, that "in her youth she hunted, and was accounted the surest eye and fleetest foot among the women of her tribe."⁹⁷

Later in her life, Oshahgushkodanaqua also taught Ojibwa and Ojibwa culture to her children and to visitors to the region, including her son-in-law, Henry R. Schoolcraft. Her career transcended the fur trade, lasting into an era when Ojibwa people had need for intermediaries who would help them in dealings with the U.S. government. All in all, Oshahgushkodanaqua actively made use of the situation in which she found herself.⁹⁸

It should be said that Oshahgushkodanaqua's interpretation of the experience may have evolved over the years. It may have been colored by the death of her husband. It may have been shaped by her Christian conversion, as suggested by some of the imagery and wording in the story. On the other hand, her experience bears the clear imprint of Ojibwa culture. The vision quest, though an apparently solitary endeavor pursued

by young people, was shaped in part by the Ojibwa educational process, including the telling of stories, some of which, in Oshahgushkodanaqua's case, may have resembled the story of the woman who married the beaver. The process of seeking a vision was also usually supervised by adults, who encouraged certain desirable results.⁹⁹

It may be that in this way, Oshahgushkodanaqua's experience was shaped by community needs. Her story contains the suggestion that a marriage with an outsider could be of benefit to the woman's relations, that there was some social purpose in undertaking the marriage with such a person who could provide something useful to the community. She felt some fear about the risks involved to herself and her community, but in the long run, the marriage was a good one. In her life she achieved a great deal.

All of these elements were found, too, of course, in the story of the woman who married the beaver, a story which tells a great deal about how the Ojibwa community did honor to women who followed unique destinies. The nature of the message communicated by the story can be seen by comparing it to another of Kagige Pinasi's stories, a humorous tale about a young man named *Clothed-in-Fur*, a trickster-like figure, who marries, in turn, a wolf, a raven, a porcupine, a Canada Jay, a beaver, and finally a bear. Most of the marriages are unsuccessful, due to drawbacks *Clothed-in-Fur* finds in the various wives: the wolf could not carry heavy loads, and the raven was a bad cook and a poor housekeeper, for example. But in the course of the story, *Clothed-in-Fur* learns valuable lessons on how to treat with respect the bones of animals he kills so that the animals will come back to life. There was another version of this same story, collected by Schoolcraft. In this version, the young man marries a nighthawk, a marten, a beaver, and a bear. The story ends with the man's bear-wife giving herself up to a hunter to be killed. The man spoke to the hunter and gave him important instructions about the proper way to treat bears: "You must . . . never cut the flesh in taking off the skin, nor hang up the feet with the flesh when drying it. But you must take the head and feet, and decorate them handsomely, and place tobacco on the head, for these animals are very fond of this article, and on the *fourth day* they come to life again."¹⁰⁰

Both of these versions have a humorous tone, as the hapless hero discovers the identity and drawbacks of each marriage partner and her faults. The serious portion of the story is in its instructions about the treatment of animals, comparable in some ways to the injunctions given in the story of the woman who married the beaver. In telling the latter story, however, Kagige Pinasi had something more in mind than entertaining and instructing about the proper treatment of animals. There was an impor-

tant message about women. In particular, this is revealed in a description of the woman's discovery by the trappers who found her in the beaver lodge many years after her marriage. Hearing her voice calling to them, they broke open the beaver lodge, one of them reached in his hand and touched her, "whereupon he found by the feel of her that she was a human being; all over did he try feeling her—on her head; and her ears, having on numerous ear-rings, he felt. And when he had forced a wide opening, out came the woman; very white was her head. And beautiful was the whole mystic cloth that she had for a skirt; worked all over with beads was her cloak; and her moccasins too were very pretty; and her ear-rings she also had on; she was very handsomely arrayed."¹⁰¹

This key description captures something of the awe with which the woman was viewed, in the story and by the storyteller. Her white hair, beaded clothing, and earrings were all symbols of power, spiritual and material, and the honor she would have in an Ojibwa community. Unlike the man who married the beaver, the birds, the bear, and the other animals, the woman who married a beaver is an object of respect and reverence.¹⁰²

This story, together with the other accounts given here, can serve as a guide to interpreting experiences and events, suggesting other ways of looking at them and providing Ojibwa alternatives to scholarly scenarios. Far from being beasts of burden, subsidiary to interactions with outsiders, Ojibwa women were central to the process, honored for the role they played. The way in which these and other women used their relationships with outsiders for their own benefit, the benefit of the communities, or of their husbands—and in the process influenced the patterns of interaction with outsiders—must be evaluated based on all the available details, on a case-by-case basis. It would be wrong to see in any of the women described here a single set of motives or a single path for Ojibwa women.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, it is only by considering all the available Ojibwa models of women's roles as warriors, shamans, wives, suppliers of food, traders, intermediaries, brokers, and teachers, that one can hope to understand the role of Ojibwa women in the fur trade.

Conclusion

The fur trade is sometimes seen simply as an exchange that took place between men of European and native cultures. However, an examination of the trade among the Ojibwa of Lake Superior shows that women and men both participated in the trade. They also had different opportunities, different expectations, and different roles to play. As acknowledged by traders in their gift giving and trade, men and women sought a different

assortment of trade goods. Women also played an important role in providing the resources that were their responsibility in native life: wild rice, maple sugar, and a variety of vital supplies necessary for the function of trade. While most women did not usually participate in trade ceremonies or receive credit from traders, they were able to trade the products of their labor for goods they needed. Finally, women also could serve as a vital link between their communities and European traders by marrying traders. Such marriages could ensure a steady supply of merchandise for a community by providing an incentive for traders to return to the communities from which their wives came and, possibly, by increasing their generosity toward their wives' relations. Although such marriages were encouraged and often arranged by men, women were not mere objects to be exchanged. The value of such marriages to a native community could only be achieved if women exercised influence on the trader and served to increase the flow of information and merchandise in both directions.

The challenge of examining the differing roles of Ojibwa men and women in the fur trade means using both early documents and later ethnographies in an ongoing creative process. This process may not always provide a satisfying narrative of exactly what occurred in the past, but it does reveal a catalog of possible roles for men and women, roles that they may have assumed at various times in the past.

The multiple nature of the fur trade and of Ojibwa women's roles in relation to that trade suggests that the theories of Landes, Leacock, and Devens need revision. The fur trade provided more than a few opportunities for Ojibwa women. While the fur trade was important to native communities, both men and women had distinct and powerful roles to play in relation to a trade that was never simply one of furs for merchandise. Women had many opportunities to trade food, supplies, and on occasion, furs, to obtain what they needed and wanted from traders.

This does not deny the possibility that there may have been particular situations in which women had fewer opportunities to trade the products of their work for the things that they needed. With the improvement of transportation methods and the growth of white population centers in the Great Lakes, traders may have been able to bring better supplies of food, allowing them to trade for furs more exclusively. It should be noted, however, that while later fur traders may have had less use for Ojibwa women's food and supplies, there was a contemporaneous growing market for maple sugar, wild rice, and berries among lumbermen, settlers, and city people, which may well have provided greater opportunities for women than before. This was certainly the case along the Minnesota frontier in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁴

The extent to which Ojibwa women's power and status in their own communities may have changed since contact with Europeans remains to be demonstrated. A major problem with describing the course of changes in Ojibwa society in the last four hundred years is the difficulty of reconstructing Ojibwa gender relations in the era prior to European contact using only documents that result from that contact. Analysis of the changes in Ojibwa society in the era of the fur trade also requires care, especially if it is based on documents that interpret Ojibwa gender from a European point of view of how men and women should live their lives. Scholars must take into account some of the Ojibwa beliefs about women's spiritual power and the accounts of individual women's lives and dreams discussed here. Though the Ojibwa did have a distinct division of labor, one that may have changed at various times in response to interaction with Europeans, women could make a distinct course for themselves through their spiritual power.

One way or another, however, care should be taken in attributing the condition of Ojibwa society and culture in the late twentieth century to the effects of the fur trade. To do so is to ignore the effects of treaties, a declining land base, limitation of opportunities to use natural resources, pervasive mass media, urbanization, and poverty, all of which have occurred in the years since the decline of the fur trade.

Further work is needed on the gendered patterns of the fur trade among the Ojibwa. It is important to take a fresh look at all primary sources to consider the gender dimensions of every transaction involving traders and native people, reading between the lines when necessary. Whether or not such an examination will suggest alterations in existing theories about gender and about other aspects of the impact of the fur trade on the Ojibwa, it will provide a richer view of the fur trade itself.

Notes

The inspiring work and teaching of Janet D. Spector influenced the approach taken in this article. I would like to thank the participants in the 1994 "Crucibles of Cultures"—a conference in New Orleans sponsored by the Institute of Early American History and Culture—for their comments and suggestions, in particular Christine Heyrman, Lucy E. Murphy, Neal Salisbury, Fredrika Teute, and Richard White. Subsequently, I received many helpful comments and encouragement from Jennifer Brown, Priscilla K. Buffalohead, Sharon Doherty, Laura Peers, and several anonymous reviewers. Peggy Hadid provided much appreciated help in searching for published literature on this topic. Finally, I am especially grateful to Gwen Morris for her detailed and generous critique of the essay, and for the provocative and suggestive nature of her own work on women in Ojibwa society.

- 1 William Jones, *Ojibwa Texts*, Truman Michelson, ed., Publications of the American Ethnological Society, vol. 7, part 2 (New York, 1919), 251–57. For further information on Kagige Pinasi (Forever-Bird) or John Pinesi, see Jones, *Ojibwa Texts*, vol. 7, part 1 (Leiden, 1917), xvii; and Henry M. Rideout, *William Jones: Indian, Cowboy, American Scholar, and Anthropologist in the Field* (New York, 1912), 98, 110–11. The story of the woman who married a beaver is reprinted in Thomas W. Overholt and J. Baird Callicott, *Clothed-in-Fur and Other Tales: An Introduction to an Ojibwa World View* (Washington, DC, 1982), 74–75.
- 2 Jean-François Lyotard wrote of what he called “popular stories.” Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN, 1984), 20, 21.
- 3 Overholt and Callicott, *Clothed-in-Fur*, 26.
- 4 Overholt and Callicott use the stories to help explain Ojibwa worldview in *ibid.*, 24–29.
- 5 Rideout, *William Jones*, 98, 109–11. Notes entitled “Penessi goes hunting” are found in the William Jones Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.
- 6 For a discussion of these beliefs and their bearing on the fur trade, see Bruce M. White, “‘Give Us a Little Milk’: The Social and Cultural Meaning of Gift Giving in the Lake Superior Fur Trade,” in *Rendezvous: Selected Papers of the Fourth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1981*, Thomas C. Buckley, ed. (St. Paul, MN, 1984), 187–88.
- 7 Bruce M. White, “Encounters with Spirits: Ojibwa and Dakota Theories about the French and Their Merchandise,” *Ethnohistory* 41 (summer 1994): 376–81; B. White, “‘Give Us a Little Milk,’” 189–92; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991), 95, 112–14.
- 8 On Native American origin tales, see Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (1946; reprint, Berkeley, CA, and Los Angeles, 1977), 303.
- 9 Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (1930; revised ed., Toronto, 1956), 40.
- 10 Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, “Give Us Good Measure”: *An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson’s Bay Company* (Toronto, 1978), xv. See also Arthur J. Ray, *The Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660–1870* (Toronto, 1974), which also lacks a detailed discussion of the role of gender.
- 11 R. White, *Middle Ground*, 94, 105.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 74, 130. R. White’s primary discussion of women in the book concerns sexual and marriage relations between Frenchmen and Indian women, 60–75.
- 13 Jennifer Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver, BC, 1980).
- 14 Sylvia Van Kirk, “Many Tender Ties”: *Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (1980; first American edition, Norman, OK, 1983), 5.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 75–77, 80. See also Sylvia Van Kirk, “Toward a Feminist Perspective in Native History,” in *Papers of the Eighteenth Algonquian Conference*, William Cowan, ed. (Ottawa, ON, 1987), 377–89.
- 16 Jacqueline Peterson, “The People in Between: Indian-White Marriage and the

- Genesis of a Métis Society and Culture in the Great Lakes Region, 1680-1830" (Ph.d. diss., University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, 1981), 2. An important chapter of Peterson's dissertation, from the point of view of trade patterns, was published as "Women Dreaming: The Religiopsychology of Indian-White Marriages and the Rise of a Métis Culture," in *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, Lillian Schlissel, Vicki L. Ruiz, and Janice Monk, eds. (Albuquerque, NM, 1988), 49-68.
- 17 For a discussion of the varying themes covered in the study of gender among Native American groups, see Patricia Albers, "From Illusion to Illumination: Anthropological Studies of American Indian Women," in *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching*, Sandra Morgen, ed. (Washington, DC, 1989), 132-48.
 - 18 The stories in Ruth Landes's book refer to Ojibwa people going to war against the Sioux or Dakota, suggesting this was a part of people's lives at the time, though Landes acknowledged that war between the two groups had not existed in at least fifty years. Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman* (1938; reprint ed., New York, 1971), 4, 17, 132, 133, 141, 143, 149, 162, 163, 171. Maggie Wilson (see vii) was of Cree descent but spoke Ojibwa, had married an Ojibwa man, and had lived all her life among the Ojibwa.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 131, 137. On the range of roles available to women, see 135-71.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, 134. Landes noted, however, that "today when rice and berries and maple sugar are commanding some white attention, the women also are learning to function as dealers."
 - 21 Eleanor Leacock, "Women's Status in Egalitarian Society: Implications for Social Evolution," *Current Anthropology* 19 (June 1978): 249-52, 254, 255. Another useful critique of Landes's work appears in Sally Cole, "Women's Stories and Boasian Texts: The Ojibwa Ethnography of Ruth Landes and Maggie Wilson," *Anthropologica* 37 (1995): 3-25, especially 13, 17, 21. Harold Hickerson, who largely ignored gender in his influential work on the Ojibwa, appears to have agreed with the theory that the fur trade devalued women's roles. In one of his last published works, a study of "fur trade colonialism," he argued that among the Huron, the fur trade inevitably led to a decline in women's roles and importance. He suggested that men naturally assumed the major role in dealing with traders. Hickerson, "Fur Trade Colonialism and the North American Indians," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 1 (summer 1973): 15-44.
 - 22 Carol Devens, *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* (Berkeley, CA, 1992), 13, 14, 15-16, 17, 18.
 - 23 Priscilla K. Buffalohead, "Farmers, Warriors, Traders: A Fresh Look at Ojibway Women," *Minnesota History* 48 (summer 1983): 237. One nineteenth-century example is Peter Grant, "The Sauteux Indians about 1904," in *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord Ouest*, Louis F. R. Masson, ed. (1890; reprint ed., New York, 1960), 2: 321. Grant stated that Ojibwa women, "for all their work and devotion, are regarded by the men little better than slaves to their will, or mere beasts of burden for their convenience."
 - 24 Thomas Vennum Jr., *Wild Rice and the Ojibway People* (St. Paul, MN, 1988), 108, 109. The translation is from R. G. Thwaites, ed., "A Wisconsin Fur-Trader's Journal, 1804-5," *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* 19 (1910): 197.
 - 25 Vennum, *Wild Rice*, 108, 109. It should also be noted, in addition, that Fran-

- çois Victoire Malhiot in his original journal used the term “gens” to refer to L’Outarde’s followers, a word that could be translated as “people” or even “band.” Even this translation, however, may imply a more important role for men in riceing than is warranted. See Malhiot journal, 15 (10 September 1804), McGill University Libraries, Rare Books and Special Collections.
- 26 William Fenton, “The Training of Historical Ethnologists in America,” *American Anthropologist* 54 (3): 333, 335.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 333. R. White, at the beginning of *The Middle Ground*, wrote that “the technique of using ethnologies of present-day or nineteenth-century Indian groups to interpret Indian societies of the past” had a “bias toward continuity” that he tried to avoid. R. White, *Middle Ground*, xiv. Skepticism toward continuity in the analysis of Native American history is sometimes allied with the application of globalizing theories, as in Carol I. Mason, “Indians, Maple Sugaring, and the Spread of Market Economies,” in *The Woodland Tradition in the Western Great Lakes: Papers Presented to Elden Johnson* (Minneapolis, MN, 1990), 37–43.
- 28 Even scholars who argue for radical change in Native American cultures due to contact with Europeans often make use of later ethnographic works as evidence for their understanding of aboriginal culture. See, for example, Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley, CA 1978), 72, a work that relies heavily on the twentieth-century ethnography of A. Irving Hallowell.
- 29 Quotations, with modernized orthography and paragraph breaks added, are from Pierre Radisson, *Voyages of Pierre Esprit Radisson* (Boston, 1885), 199–200. Grace Lee Nute convincingly dates these events to 1659–60. See Nute, *Caesars of the Wilderness: Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers and Pierre Esprit Radisson, 1618–1710* (1943; reprint ed., St. Paul, MN, 1978), 58, 62. The term *destinated* is a borrowing by Radisson of the French verb *destiner*, meaning “to intend something for someone or for some use,” though in this context, “present” may be a better translation. Such borrowings from French were typical of Radisson’s narrative.
- 30 On Ojibwa facial adornment in the nineteenth century, see Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami: Life Among the Lake Superior Ojibwa* (1860; reprint ed., St. Paul, MN, 1985), 18.
- 31 Among Eastern groups, kettles clearly had an important symbolism in the feast of the dead, which may explain Radisson’s reference here. See Laurier Turgeon, “The Tale of the Kettle: Odyssey of an Intercultural Object,” *Ethnohistory* 44 (winter): 11. Harold Hickerson gives an analysis of the Algonquian feast of the dead, with occasional reference to the roles of men and women, in Hickerson, “The Feast of the Dead among the Seventeenth-Century Algonkians of the Upper Great Lakes,” *American Anthropologist* 62 (1960): 90. The uses of kettles in various activities among the Ojibwa are described in Vennum, *Wild Rice*, 118–19; Alexander Henry, the elder, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories* (1809; reprint ed., New York, 1976), 149.
- 32 Buffalohead, “Farmers, Warriors, Traders,” 238. Landes, *Ojibwa Woman*, 125, noted that there was a similar division of labor in the manufacture of cradleboards.
- 33 Ivan Illich, in an illuminating definition, wrote in *Gender* (New York and Toronto, 1982), 99, that “gender not only tells who is who, but it also defines

- who is when, where, and with which tools and words; it divides space, time, and technique." The gendered nature of material culture is of special interest to some archaeologists. For a discussion that focuses in particular on Dakota women's use of awls and other tools of native and European manufacture, see Janet D. Spector, *What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village* (St. Paul, MN, 1993), including 30–39. See also Spector, "Male/Female Task Differentiation among the Hidatsa: Toward the Development of an Archeological Approach to the Study of Gender," in *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, eds. (Lanham, MD, and London, 1983), 77–99.
- 34 Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Customs* (1929; reprint ed., St. Paul, MN, 1979), 74.
- 35 Joseph N. Nicollet, *The Journals of Joseph N. Nicollet: A Scientist on the Mississippi Headwaters*, Martha Coleman Bray, ed. (St. Paul, MN, 1970), 181–82.
- 36 It should be noted, however, that each item on the list would clearly be useful for other activities aside from preparing furs for trade. In fact, preparation of furs for use as clothing probably involved more scraping than preparing furs for trade, especially once traders no longer put a premium on beaver pelts that had been worn as beaver robes. See M. Inez Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life* (1951; reprint ed., St. Paul, MN, 1992), 129–33; Densmore, *Chippewa Customs*, 31, 163–65; Clayton, "The American Fur Company: The Final Years" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1964), 96, 101, 108, 109; Ray, *Give Us Good Measure*, 159.
- 37 The argument here is in favor of a desire for and an interest in European merchandise, not necessarily a complete dependence upon it. For a longer discussion of the multiple nature of this interest in merchandise, see B. White, "Encounters with Spirits," 376–81. For one trader's account of Ojibwa interest in merchandise, see Henry, *Travels and Adventures*, 196. For a discussion of "dependency" in relation to Great Lakes Indian groups, see R. White, *Middle Ground*, 482–86.
- 38 For accounts of expeditions to Montreal, see Nicolas Perrot's account in *Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, Emma H. Blair, ed. (Cleveland, OH, 1911), 1: 175, 210–20. In an earlier period, around 1609, Algonquin men and women from the upper Ottawa River, perhaps related to Great Lakes Algonquin peoples, did travel together to trade with the French in Montreal. See Bruce G. Trigger, *The Children of Aetaentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (1976; reprint ed., Montreal, 1987), 249. See also a nineteenth-century account of a seventeenth-century Ojibwa husband and wife traveling east to discover the French, cited in B. White "Encounters with Spirits," 373.
- 39 Bruce M. White, "A Skilled Game of Exchange: Ojibway Fur Trade Protocol," *Minnesota History* 50: 229–40.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 231–34.
- 41 On the concept of spheres of exchange, see Frederick Barth, *The Role of the Entrepreneur in Social Change in Northern Norway* (Bergen, Norway, 1963), 10; Paul Bohannan and George Dalton, eds., *Markets in Africa* ([Evanston IL], 1962), 3.
- 42 B. White, "'Give Us a Little Milk,'" 191–92.
- 43 B. White, "A Skilled Game of Exchange," 235.

- 44 Ojibwa women's names often, though not always, have the suffix *-ikwe* at the end, which is the Ojibwa word for woman. See John D. Nichols and Earl Nyholm, *A Concise Dictionary of Minnesota Ojibwe* (Minneapolis, MN, and London, 1995), 64. English or French translations of such names may not always have included this portion of the name. On Ojibwa naming practices, see Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life*, 35-39.
- 45 On the generosity of Ojibwa leaders, see Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, 66.
- 46 *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger, 1799-1814*, Barry M. Gough, ed., (Toronto, 1988), 1: 26, 53. These entries correspond to 48, 111, in the original journal transcript in Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, ON.
- 47 Traders mentioned credit books or ledgers in their narrative journals, but none have been found for this period. Even credit books, however, do not make clear the role of the hunter's family in choosing the goods received on credit. For an analysis of a credit book from a later period, one kept using pictographic symbols, see George Fulford, "The Pictographic Account Book of an Ojibwa Fur Trader," *Papers of the Twenty-third Algonquian Conference*, (Ottawa, ON, 1992), 190-217.
- 48 Illich, *Gender*, 9-11; Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (1931; reprint ed., London, 1952), 94-99.
- 49 On Ojibwa attitudes toward generosity, see Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, 66.
- 50 For examples of women notifying the trader of available furs and other items, see Michel Curot's journal, 8 (22 September 1803), 19 (13 November 1803).
- 51 Curot journal, 10 (13 October 1803), (14 October 1803), 13 (24 October 1803), original in Masson Collection, Public Archives of Canada. A garbled translation of this narrative was published as "A Wisconsin Fur-Trader's Journal, 1803-4," *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* 20 (1911): 396-471.
- 52 Some examples of direct trade of furs by women in Curot's journal include 23 (2 December 1803), 32 (9 February 1804).
- 53 *Ibid.*, 3 (17 and 18 August 1803), 6 (12 September 1803), 9 (4 and 5 October 1803), 13 (24 October 1803), 18 (10 November 1803), 21 (22 and 23 November 1803), 23 (2 December 1803), 28 (17 December 1803), 29 (December 23 1803), 32 (9 February 1804), 33 (20 February 1804), 41 (18 March 1804), 47 (15 and 16 April 1804).
- 54 Henry, *Travels and Adventures*, 243-44.
- 55 There are many examples in trade literature of food gifts to initiate the trading year. See B. White, "Give Us a Little Milk," 187, 193.
- 56 As quoted earlier, Landes did acknowledge that women learned how to trade when their food was in demand outside their communities. Landes, *Ojibwa Woman*, 134.
- 57 Curot journal, 3 (17 August 1803). The estimate of the value of these goods is based on values found in accounts kept by Malhiot, originals in Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries.
- 58 Curot did some trading and collecting furs during the period when he was camped on the St. Croix River. Curot journal, 46 (7 April 1804), 47 (15 April 1804), 50 (8-10 May 1804). See also 5 (5 September 1803), in which it is noted that David can go nowhere because of a lack of gum for his canoe. On *wadab*, see Nichols and Nyholm, *Concise Dictionary*, 113; Densmore, *Chippewa Customs*, 150.

- 59 Curot journal, 47 (15 April 1804).
- 60 Figures on trade transactions were compiled from the Curot journal by the author.
- 61 John Tanner, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner* (1830, reprint ed., New York, 1975), 64, 69, 70, 75, 78, 101-2.
- 62 Harold Hickerson, ed., "Journal of Charles Jean Baptiste Chaboillez," *Ethnohistory* 6 (1959): 275, 299, 374.
- 63 Laura Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada* (St. Paul, MN, 1994), 56-57. For other examples of powerful Ottawa woman involved in trading, see David Lavendar, *The Fist in the Wilderness* (1964; reprint ed., Albuquerque, NM, 1979), 264-65.
- 64 Landes, *Ojibwa Woman*, 162-63, 169, 173, 176, 177. Men also may have occasionally performed duties assigned to women, in the absence of their wives. See Tanner, *Narrative*, 56.
- 65 Tanner, *Narrative*, 36, 37, 39, 40. Tanner demonstrates Netnokwa's ability as a trader in the transaction through which she obtained him from his original captors. On her dreams used to help her sons in hunting, see 52, 72.
- 66 Gwen Morris, "Gifted Woman Light Around You: Ojibwa Women and Their Stories" (Ph.d. diss., University of Minnesota, 1992), 50-58.
- 67 Landes, *Ojibwa Woman*, 20; Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, 126-28.
- 68 Such visions or dreams were not usually discussed casually. See Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, 203.
- 69 Landes *Ojibwa Woman*, 156-62, 165; Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, 125, 126, 128.
- 70 Blair, *Indian Tribes* 1: 277. On Ojibwa-Dakota intermarriage in the region of the St. Croix River, see William Warren, *History of the Ojibwa People* (1885; reprint ed., St. Paul, MN, 1984), 164.
- 71 Author's translation from Pierre Margry, *Découvertes et établissements des français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amerique septentrionale* (1879-88; reprint ed., New York, 1974), 6: 32.
- 72 For descriptions of marriage customs, see Densmore, *Chippewa Customs*, 72-73; Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life*, 158-60; Grant, "The Sauteux Indians," 320.
- 73 Peterson, "The People in Between," 71, 88.
- 74 Radisson, *Voyages*, 199.
- 75 Marriage as a means of preserving or gaining power was, of course, a long tradition among European nobility.
- 76 Benjamin G. Armstrong, *Early Life among the Indians: Reminiscences from the Life of Benjamin G. Armstrong* (Ashland, OR, 1892), 101-2; Peterson, "The People in Between," 89.
- 77 It is sometimes unclear whether the extensive influence of the Ojibwa leader made the trader successful, or whether traders backed with large capital helped increase the renown of Ojibwa leaders. This is an area that needs further research.
- 78 For a discussion of oratory and other leadership qualities, see James G. E. Smith, *Leadership among the Southwestern Ojibwa* (Ottawa, ON, 1973), 17.
- 79 Malhiot journal, 6 (5 August 1804), 27 (4 February 1805); 27 (4 February 1805); George Nelson journal, 16 (7, 8, and 14 November 1803-4), original in Metropolitan Toronto Public Library; Warren, *History of the Ojibwa People*, 48, 192, 318, 325, 372-77; Bruce M. White, *The Fur Trade in Minnesota: An Introductory Guide to Manuscript Sources* (St. Paul, MN, 1977), 38, 45, 375.

- Even more distant Indian-trader kinship was still useful. According to Warren, 302, trader Michel Cadot, at Lac du Flambeau in the 1780s, derived benefits from the intercession of his wife's uncle. Warren does not give the name of this man, but it may be Keeshkemun.
- 80 B. White, *Fur Trade in Minnesota*, 41; Lawrence Taliaferro journal, 8 (9 October 1827): 92, Minnesota Historical Society; Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall, *The Indian Tribes of North America*, Frederick Webb Hodge and David I. Bushnell Jr., 2: 316-19 (Edinburgh, 1934); Kohl, *Kitchi-Gami*, 147-48; Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs of a Residence of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers* (Philadelphia: 1851), 293. Information on Charlotte, sometimes listed as Charlotte Kattawabide, after her father, is found in Montreal Protestant church registers, compiled in MG19, A2, series 4, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, ON. Charlotte died on 9 July 1850 at the age of 75. See also the Ermatinger family history in MG25, G38, Public Archives of Canada.
- 81 For examples, see Malhiot journal, 32 (12 April 1805), 33 (26 April 1805), 34 (18 May 1805); Curot journal, 2 (14 August 1804), 16 (4 November 1804), 17 (6 November 1804); Nelson journal, 25 (13 March 1804).
- 82 Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, 81.
- 83 On Sayer's wife making sugar, see Curot journal, 39 (8 March 1804); John Sayer journal, erroneously printed as that of Thomas Connor in Charles M. Gates, ed., *Five Fur Traders of the Northwest* (1933; reprint ed., St. Paul, MN, 1965), 270 (1 March 1805); Nelson journal, 25. See also Douglas A. Birk, ed., *John Sayer's Journal, 1804-5* (Minneapolis, MN, 1989), 49.
- 84 Nelson journal, 25.
- 85 Curot journal, 51 (15 May 1804).
- 86 W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie* (Cambridge, 1970), 495.
- 87 Nelson journal, 3.
- 88 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 89 *Ibid.*, 7, 8; George Nelson reminiscences, 36, also in the Metropolitan Toronto Public Library.
- 90 Nelson journal, 33-34; Nelson reminiscences, 36.
- 91 Curot journal, 2 (14 August 1804), 21 (22 November 1803).
- 92 W. Stewart Wallace, *Documents Relating to the North West Company* (Toronto, 1934), 210-11.
- 93 The Ojibwa name Oshahgushkodanaqua, spelled in various ways, was translated by the woman's son-in-law, Henry R. Schoolcraft, as "Woman of the Green Valley." See Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs of a Residence of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers* (Philadelphia, 1851), 431, 662, 676. It may be that the name is a garbled misspelling of some combination of the Ojibwe words for green (*ozhawaawashko-*, the lexical prefix for green or blue, occurring on verbs and on some nouns and participles), prairie or plain (*mashkode*) and woman (*ikwe*). See Nichols and Nyholm, *Concise Dictionary*, xii, 64, 78, 111.
- 94 Charles H. Chapman, "The Historic Johnston Family of the 'Soo'," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* 32: (1903) 305-43. On 341, in letter six of a series of autobiographical letters written by John Johnston, there is reference to Mamongeseda's daughter as being "a Mrs. Jayer." However, an examina-

- tion of the original letter (filed with the first letter of the series, 14 January 1828) in the Henry R. Schoolcraft Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, suggests that the name should really be read as Sayer. On John Sayer, see Douglas A. Birk, "John Sayer and the Fond du Lac Trade: The North West Company in Minnesota and Wisconsin," Buckley, ed., "Rendezvous," 51–61. For the name of Sayer's wife, see Thomas L. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes* (1827; reprint ed., Minneapolis, MN, 1959), 485.
- 95 Anna Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (London, 1838), 3: 211–14.
- 96 Jameson, *Winter Studies*, 210–11; Chapman, "The Historic Johnston Family," 308, 313.
- 97 Jameson, *Winter Studies*, 217.
- 98 Chapman, "The Historic Johnston Family," 308, 313; Philip Mason, ed., *The Literary Voyager or Muzzeniegun* ([Lansing, MI], 1963), xxv, xxiii.
- 99 On the cultural nature of dreams experienced during vision quests, see Radin, "Some Aspects of Puberty Fasting Among the Ojibwa," *Museum Bulletin* 2: 69–78; "Ojibwa and Ottawa Puberty Dreams," *Essays in Anthropology Presented to Alfred Kroeber* (Berkeley, CA, 1936), 233–64. Landes, *Ojibwa Woman*, 9–10.
- 100 Jones, *Ojibwa Texts*, vol. 7, part 2, 207–41; Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Schoolcraft's Indian Legends* (1956; reprint ed., Westport, CT, 1974), 87–91.
- 101 Jones, *Ojibwa Texts*, vol. 7, part 2, 256.
- 102 The word used by Kigage Pinasi for "mystic cloth" was *manidowagin*, sometimes translated as "spirit skin," a term sometimes used to refer to the woolen cloth brought initially by French traders. Similarly, his word for beads was *manidōmināsa* or "spirit seeds." See Jones, *Ojibwa Texts*, vol. 7, part 2, 256. Both terms reflect the early wonder of the Ojibwa at European technology. For a discussion of these words and the beliefs behind them, see B. White, "Encounters with Spirits," 397 fn. 11, 398 fn. 12. Landes's informant described a woman with strong ability as a "sucking doctor" in similar fashion: "She dressed in red, green, blue, yellow, black, and wore beads of all colors and different kind of ribbons in her hair, and a feather sticking on her head, and earrings, and beaded moccasins, and her face was painted." See Landes, *Ojibwa Woman*, 158.
- 103 As Ruth Landes noted in writing of women who tested the flexible boundaries of Ojibwa gender roles: "It cannot be assumed that one woman's motivations are similar to those of other women," Landes, *Ojibwa Woman*, 148. On 140, Landes also noted, "The important factor is that a girl grows up seeing these unconventional possibilities about her, and sees them easily accepted."
- 104 Maude Kegg, growing up around 1900 near Mille Lacs Lake, Minnesota, stated: "That's the way they made their living, selling berries and buying lard, flour, sugar, whatever they needed." See Kegg, *Portage Lake: Memories of an Ojibwa Childhood* (Edmonton, AB, 1991), 47. Early examples of Indian people selling game, wild rice, and maple sugar in early Minnesota communities are described in Marjorie Kreidberg, *Food on the Frontier: Minnesota Cooking from 1850–1900* (St. Paul, MN, 1975), 15–16, 18, 199.